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SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

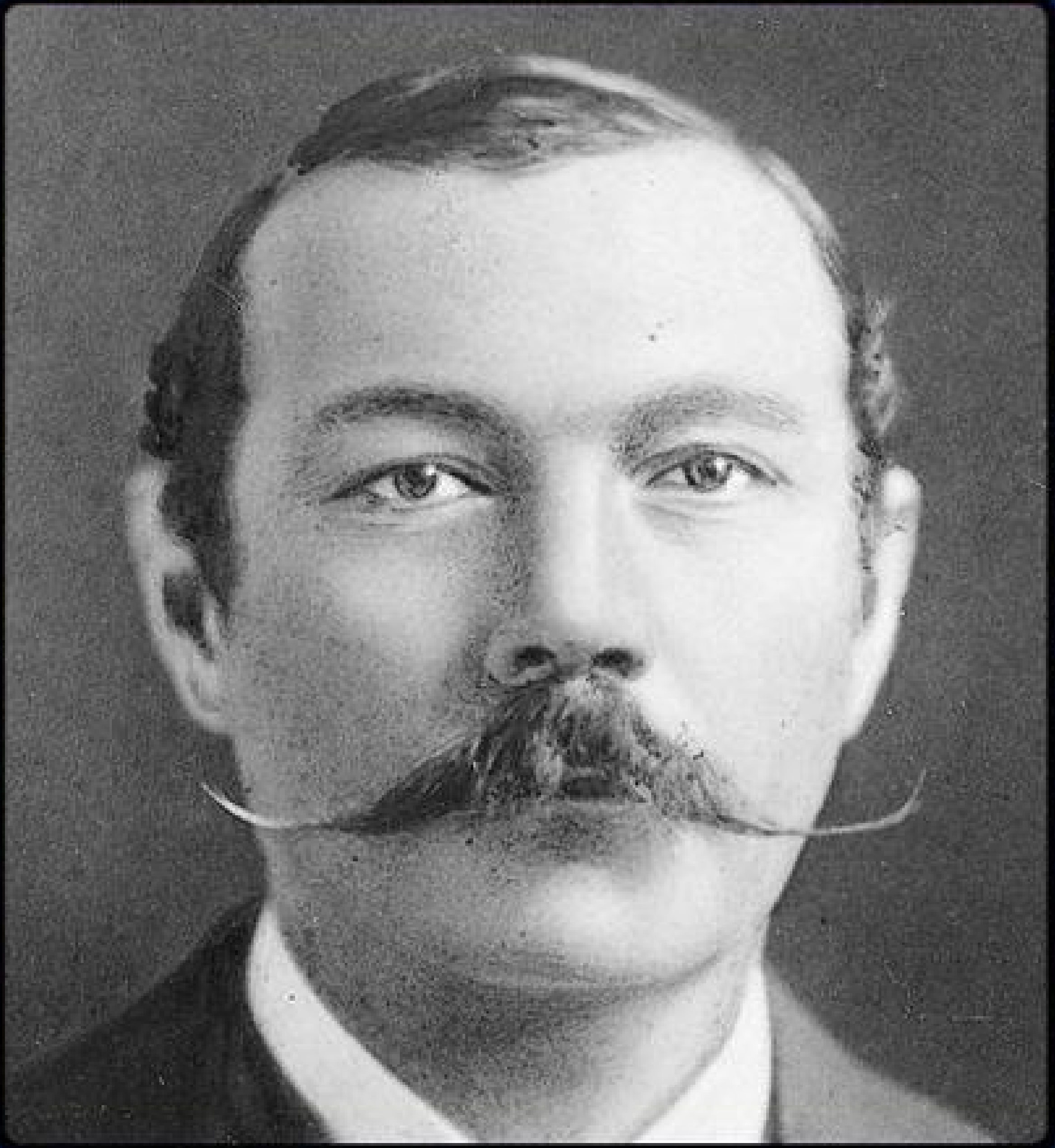

DELPHI CLASSICS

The Complete Works of

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

(1859-1930)

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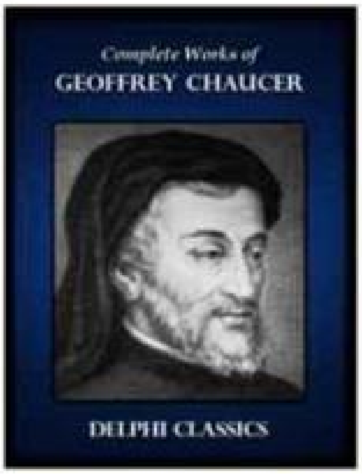
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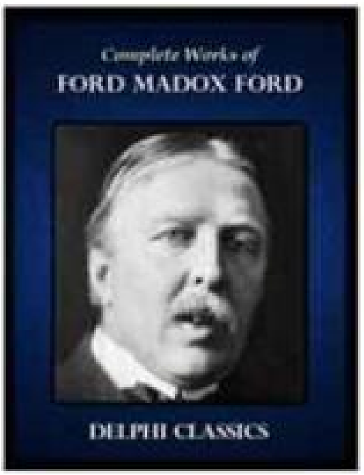
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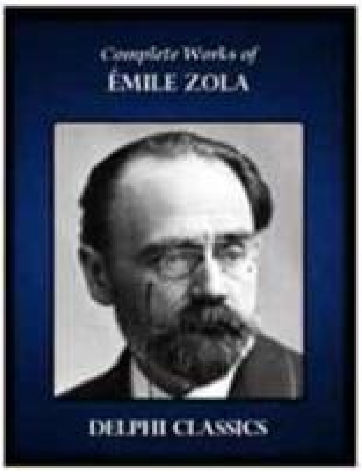
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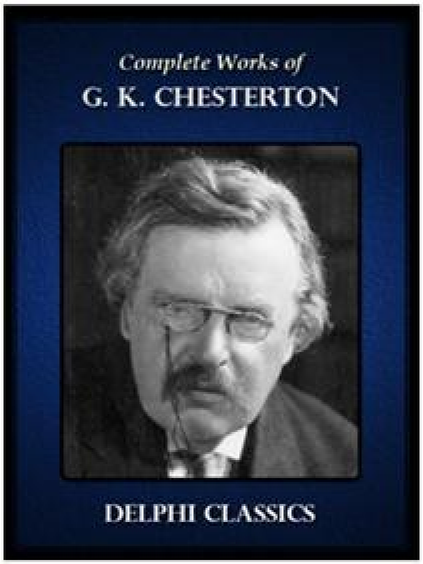
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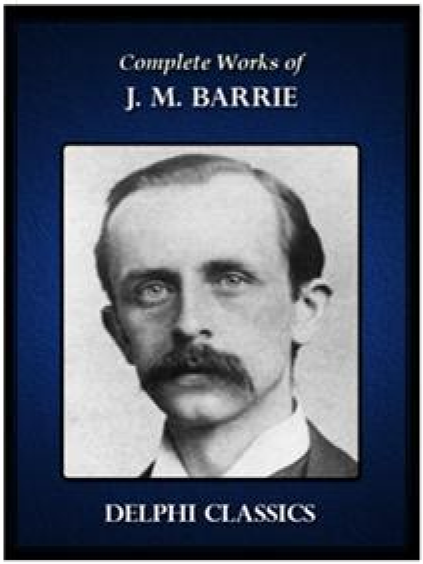
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The Sherlock Holmes Collections

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Statue of Sherlock Holmes, close to Conan Doyle's birthplace in Picardy Place, Edinburgh

SHERLOCK HOLMES: AN INTRODUCTION

One of the most celebrated and beloved characters of English fiction, Sherlock Holmes is a detective that was created by author and physician Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Holmes is portrayed as a London-based “consulting detective”, who is famous for his astute logical reasoning, his ability to adopt almost any disguise and his use of forensic science skills to solve difficult cases. Doyle later explained that the character of Sherlock Holmes was inspired by Dr. Joseph Bell, who the author had worked for as a clerk at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. Like Holmes, Bell was noted for drawing large conclusions from the smallest observations. However, some years later Bell wrote in a letter to Conan Doyle: “you are yourself Sherlock Holmes and well you know it.”

The Holmes stories are often narrated by the detective’s friend Dr. John H. Watson, a former surgeon in the British Army, who was wounded at the Battle of Maiwand and sent back to England to recover. When they first meet, Watson is intrigued by the intelligent detective and finds himself following along in his various adventures and cases.

The character of Holmes first appeared in publication in 1887 in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* and he was featured altogether in four novels and 56 short stories, with the narratives covering a period from around 1880 till 1914.

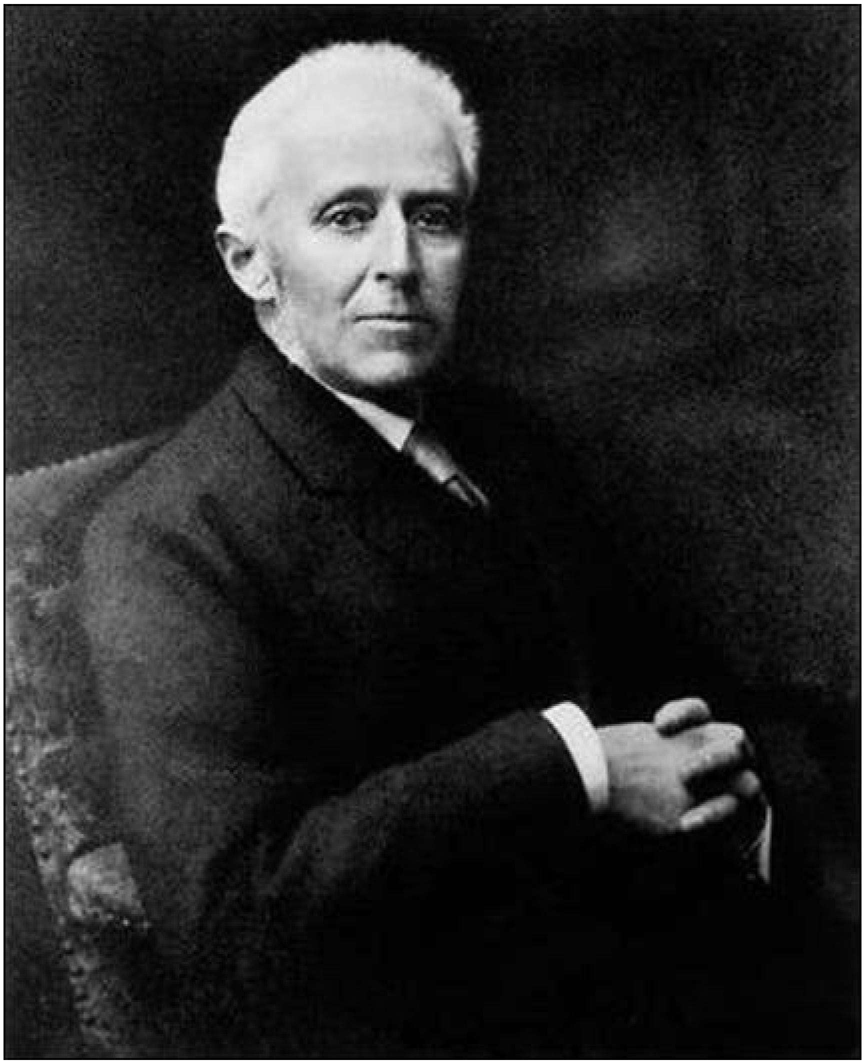

Dr Joseph Bell, the real-life inspiration for Sherlock Holmes

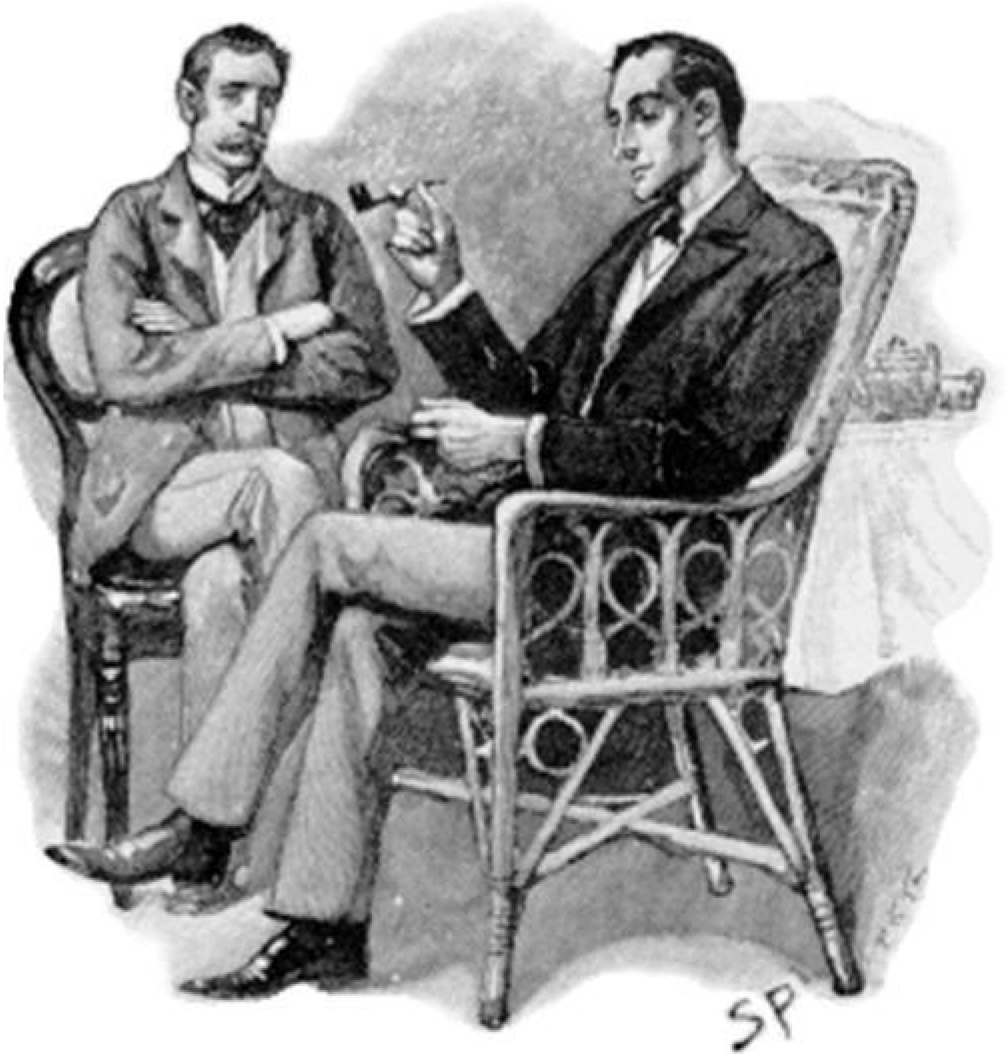

Dr. Watson (left) and Sherlock Holmes in an early illustration by Sidney Paget

A STUDY IN SCARLET

This novel was published in 1887 and is the first Sherlock Holmes story. The novel's title derives from a speech given by Holmes to his companion Doctor Watson on the nature of his work, in which he describes the story's murder investigation as his "study in scarlet". Conan Doyle wrote the novel at the age of 27 in less than three weeks. As a general practice doctor in Southsea, Hampshire, he had already published short stories in magazines, but this was his first attempt at a novel. It was originally titled *A Tangled Skein* and was eventually published in Beeton's Christmas Annual 1887, after many rejections. The author received £25 in return for the full rights and it was illustrated by D. H. Friston. The novel was first published as a book on July 1888 and featured drawings by the author's father, Charles Doyle. The story, and its main character, attracted little interest when it first appeared. Only a handful of copies of Beeton's Christmas Annual 1887 are known to exist now and they ae now highly treasured by literary collectors.

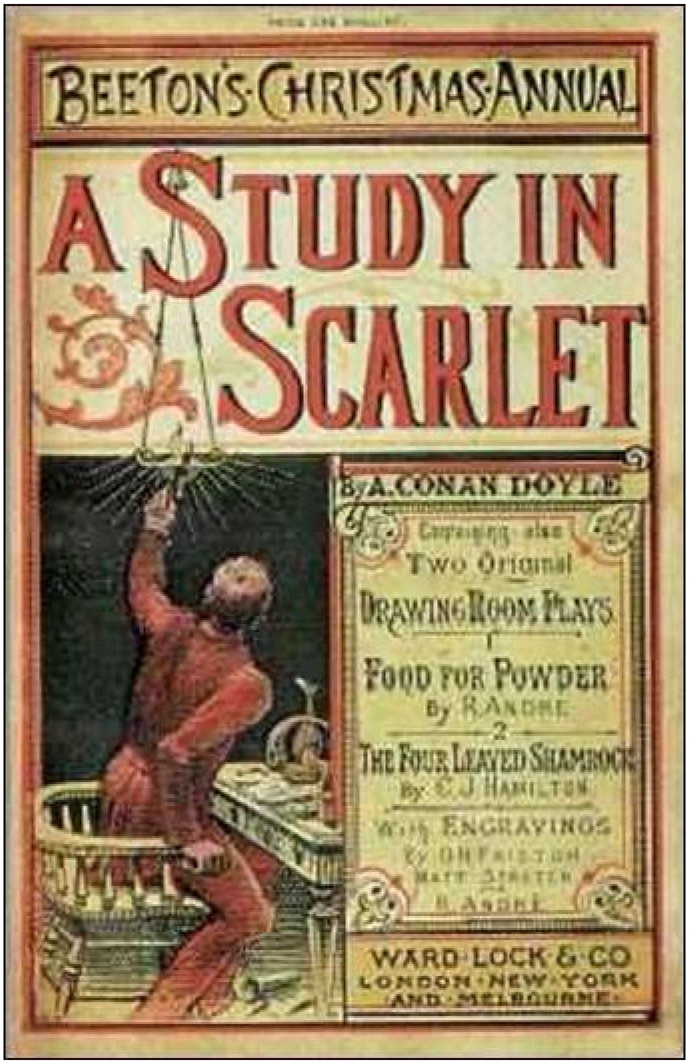
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PART I.

(*Being a reprint from the reminiscences of* JOHN H. WATSON, M.D., *late of the Army Medical Department.*)

CHAPTER I. MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES.

IN the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the army. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as Assistant Surgeon. The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy’s country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties.

The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. I was dispatched, accordingly, in the troopship “Orontes,” and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.

I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air — or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realised that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.

On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when some one tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognised young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts. The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

“Whatever have you been doing with yourself, Watson?” he asked in undisguised wonder, as we rattled through the crowded London streets. “You are as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut.”

I gave him a short sketch of my adventures, and had hardly concluded it by the time that we reached our destination.

“Poor devil!” he said, commiseratingly, after he had listened to my misfortunes. “What are you up to now?”

“Looking for lodgings.” I answered. “Trying to solve the problem as to whether it is possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price.”

“That’s a strange thing,” remarked my companion; “you are the second man to-day that has used that expression to me.”

“And who was the first?” I asked.

“A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get someone to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse.”

“By Jove!” I cried, “if he really wants someone to share the rooms and the expense, I am the very man for him. I should prefer having a partner to being alone.”

Young Stamford looked rather strangely at me over his wine-glass. “You don’t know Sherlock Holmes yet,” he said; “perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion.”

“Why, what is there against him?”

“Oh, I didn’t say there was anything against him. He is a little queer in his ideas — an enthusiast in some branches of science. As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough.”

“A medical student, I suppose?” said I.

“No — I have no idea what he intends to go in for. I believe he is well up in anatomy, and he is a first-class chemist; but, as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. His studies are very desultory and eccentric, but he has amassed a lot of out-of-the way knowledge which would astonish his professors.”

“Did you never ask him what he was going in for?” I asked.

“No; he is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him.”

“I should like to meet him,” I said. “If I am to lodge with anyone, I should prefer a man of studious and quiet habits. I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement. I had enough of both in Afghanistan to last me for the remainder of my natural existence. How could I meet this friend of yours?”

“He is sure to be at the laboratory,” returned my companion. “He either avoids the place for weeks, or else he works there from morning to night. If you like, we shall drive round together after luncheon.”

“Certainly,” I answered, and the conversation drifted away into other channels.

As we made our way to the hospital after leaving the Holborn, Stamford gave me a few more particulars about the gentleman whom I proposed to take as a fellow-lodger.

“You mustn’t blame me if you don’t get on with him,” he said; “I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. You proposed this arrangement, so you must not hold me responsible.”

“If we don’t get on it will be easy to part company,” I answered. “It seems to me, Stamford,” I added, looking hard at my companion, “that you have some reason for washing your hands of the matter. Is this fellow’s temper so formidable, or what is it? Don’t be mealy-mouthed about it.”

“It is not easy to express the inexpressible,” he answered with a laugh. “Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes — it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge.”

“Very right too.”

“Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.”

“Beating the subjects!”

“Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after death. I saw him at it with my own eyes.”

“And yet you say he is not a medical student?”

“No. Heaven knows what the objects of his studies are. But here we are, and you must form your own impressions about him.” As he spoke, we turned down a narrow lane and passed through a small side-door, which opened into a wing of the great hospital. It was familiar ground to me, and I needed no guiding as we ascended the bleak stone staircase and made our way down the long corridor with its vista of whitewashed wall and dun-coloured doors. Near the further end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. “I’ve found it! I’ve found it,” he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. “I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by hoemoglobin, and by nothing else.” Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

“Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said Stamford, introducing us.

“How are you?” he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. “You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.”

“How on earth did you know that?” I asked in astonishment.

“Never mind,” said he, chuckling to himself. “The question now is about hoemoglobin. No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?”

“It is interesting, chemically, no doubt,” I answered, “but practically ——”

“Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. Don’t you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains. Come over here now!” He seized me by the coat-sleeve in his eagerness, and drew me over to the table at which he had been working. “Let us have some fresh blood,” he said, digging a long bodkin into his finger, and drawing off the resulting drop of blood in a chemical pipette. “Now, I add this small quantity of blood to a litre of water. You perceive that the resulting mixture has the appearance of pure water. The proportion of blood cannot be more than one in a million. I have no doubt, however, that we shall be able to obtain the characteristic reaction.” As he spoke, he threw into the vessel a few white crystals, and then added some drops of a transparent fluid. In an instant the contents assumed a dull mahogany colour, and a brownish dust was precipitated to the bottom of the glass jar.

“Ha! ha!” he cried, clapping his hands, and looking as delighted as a child with a new toy. “What do you think of that?”

“It seems to be a very delicate test,” I remarked.

“Beautiful! beautiful! The old Guiacum test was very clumsy and uncertain. So is the microscopic examination for blood corpuscles. The latter is valueless if the stains are a few hours old. Now, this appears to act as well whether the blood is old or new. Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes.”

“Indeed!” I murmured.

“Criminal cases are continually hinging upon that one point. A man is suspected of a crime months perhaps after it has been committed. His linen or clothes are examined, and brownish stains discovered upon them. Are they blood stains, or mud stains, or rust stains, or fruit stains, or what are they? That is a question which has puzzled many an expert, and why?

Because there was no reliable test. Now we have the Sherlock Holmes' test, and there will no longer be any difficulty."

His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination.

"You are to be congratulated," I remarked, considerably surprised at his enthusiasm.

"There was the case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort last year. He would certainly have been hung had this test been in existence. Then there was Mason of Bradford, and the notorious Muller, and Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of new Orleans. I could name a score of cases in which it would have been decisive."

"You seem to be a walking calendar of crime," said Stamford with a laugh. "You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the 'Police News of the Past.'"

"Very interesting reading it might be made, too," remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. "I have to be careful," he continued, turning to me with a smile, "for I dabble with poisons a good deal." He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids.

"We came here on business," said Stamford, sitting down on a high three-legged stool, and pushing another one in my direction with his foot. "My friend here wants to take diggings, and as you were complaining that you could get no one to go halves with you, I thought that I had better bring you together."

Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me. "I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street," he said, "which would suit us down to the ground. You don't mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?"

"I always smoke 'ship's' myself," I answered.

"That's good enough. I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. Would that annoy you?"

"By no means."

"Let me see — what are my other shortcomings. I get in the dumps at times, and don't open my mouth for days on end. You must not think I am sulky when I do that. Just let me alone, and I'll soon be right. What have you to confess now? It’s just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together.”

I laughed at this cross-examination. “I keep a bull pup,” I said, “and I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy. I have another set of vices when I’m well, but those are the principal ones at present.”

“Do you include violin-playing in your category of rows?” he asked, anxiously.

“It depends on the player,” I answered. “A well-played violin is a treat for the gods — a badly-played one — —”

“Oh, that’s all right,” he cried, with a merry laugh. “I think we may consider the thing as settled — that is, if the rooms are agreeable to you.”

“When shall we see them?”

“Call for me here at noon to-morrow, and we’ll go together and settle everything,” he answered.

“All right — noon exactly,” said I, shaking his hand.

We left him working among his chemicals, and we walked together towards my hotel.

“By the way,” I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, “how the deuce did he know that I had come from Afghanistan?”

My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. “That’s just his little peculiarity,” he said. “A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out.”

“Oh! a mystery is it?” I cried, rubbing my hands. “This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. ‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ you know.”

“You must study him, then,” Stamford said, as he bade me good-bye. “You’ll find him a knotty problem, though. I’ll wager he learns more about you than you about him. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” I answered, and strolled on to my hotel, considerably interested in my new acquaintance.

CHAPTER II. THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION.

WE met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bed-rooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

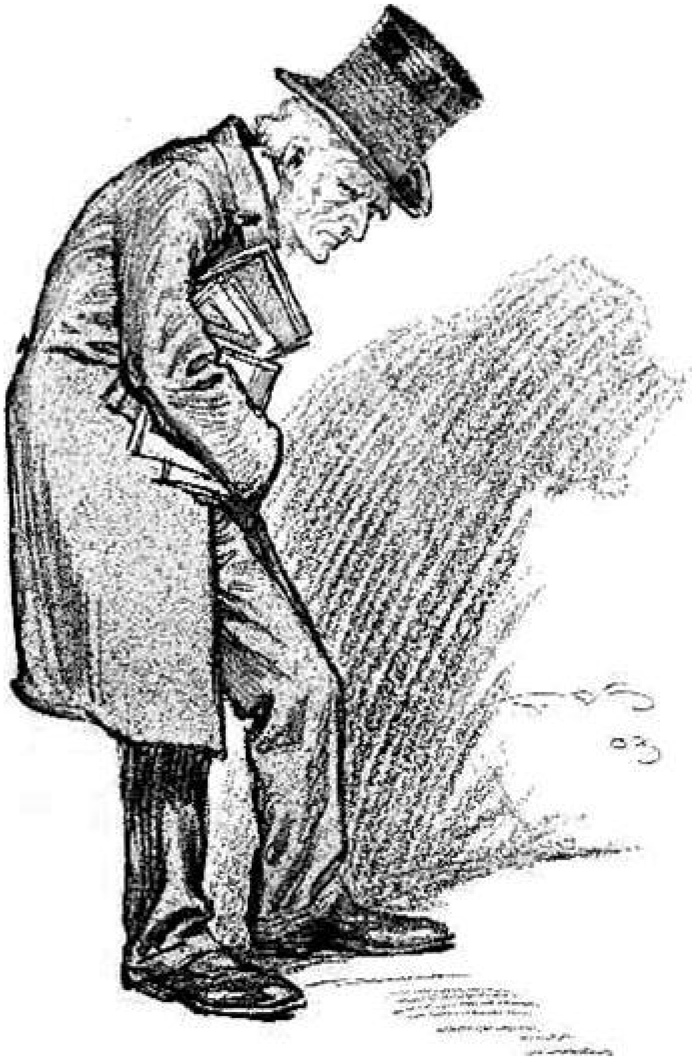

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments.

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

He was not studying medicine. He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford’s opinion upon that point. Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognised portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. Desultory readers are seldom remarkable for the exactness of their learning. No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilised human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realise it.

“You appear to be astonished,” he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. “Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it.”

“To forget it!”

“You see,” he explained, “I consider that a man’s brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones."

"But the Solar System!" I protested.

"What the deuce is it to me?" he interrupted impatiently; "you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work."

I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him. I enumerated in my own mind all the various points upon which he had shown me that he was exceptionally well-informed. I even took a pencil and jotted them down. I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. It ran in this way —

SHERLOCK HOLMES — his limits.
1. Knowledge of Literature. — Nil.
2. Philosophy. — Nil.
3. Astronomy. — Nil.
4. Politics. — Feeble.
5.Botany. — Variable. Well up in belladonna,
opium, and poisons generally.
Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. Geology. — Practical, but limited.
Tells at a glance different soils
from each other. After walks has
shown me splashes upon his trousers,
and told me by their colour and
consistence in what part of London
he had received them.
7. Chemistry. — Profound.
8. Anatomy. — Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Sensational Literature. — Immense. He appears
to know every detail of every horror
perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.

11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

When I had got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. “If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all,” I said to myself, “I may as well give up the attempt at once.”

I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn’s Lieder, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognised air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. There was one little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slip-shod elderly woman. On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. When any of these nondescript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bed-room. He always apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. “I have to use this room as a place of business,” he said, “and these people are my clients.” Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. The landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

Its somewhat ambitious title was “The Book of Life,” and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man’s inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

“From a drop of water,” said the writer, “a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man’s finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs — by each of these things a man’s calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable.”

“What ineffable twaddle!” I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table, “I never read such rubbish in my life.”

“What is it?” asked Sherlock Holmes.

“Why, this article,” I said, pointing at it with my egg spoon as I sat down to my breakfast. “I see that you have read it since you have marked it. I don’t deny that it is smartly written. It irritates me though. It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair lounger who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical. I should like to see him clapped down in a third class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. I would lay a thousand to one against him.”

“You would lose your money,” Sherlock Holmes remarked calmly. “As for the article I wrote it myself.”

“You!”

“Yes, I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical are really extremely practical — so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.”

“And how?” I asked involuntarily.

“Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I’m a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can’t unravel the thousand and first. Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here.”

“And these other people?”

“They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee.”

“But do you mean to say,” I said, “that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?”

“Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes. You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn, are invaluable to me in practical work. Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.”

“You were told, no doubt.”

“Nothing of the sort. I *knew* you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.’ The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.”

“It is simple enough as you explain it,” I said, smiling. “You remind me of Edgar Allen Poe’s Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.”

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. “No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,” he observed. “Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends’ thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour’s silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.”

“Have you read Gaboriau’s works?” I asked. “Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?”

Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. “Lecoq was a miserable bungler,” he said, in an angry voice; “he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.”

I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. “This fellow may be very clever,” I said to myself, “but he is certainly very conceited.”

“There are no crimes and no criminals in these days,” he said, querulously. “What is the use of having brains in our profession. I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. And what is the result? There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villany with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it.”

I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation. I thought it best to change the topic.

“I wonder what that fellow is looking for?” I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

“You mean the retired sergeant of Marines,” said Sherlock Holmes.

“Brag and bounce!” thought I to myself. “He knows that I cannot verify his guess.”

The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stair.

“For Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said, stepping into the room and handing my friend the letter.

Here was an opportunity of taking the conceit out of him. He little thought of this when he made that random shot. “May I ask, my lad,” I said, in the blandest voice, “what your trade may be?”

“Commissionaire, sir,” he said, gruffly. “Uniform away for repairs.”

“And you were?” I asked, with a slightly malicious glance at my companion.

“A sergeant, sir, Royal Marine Light Infantry, sir. No answer? Right, sir.”

He clicked his heels together, raised his hand in a salute, and was gone.

CHAPTER III. THE LAURISTON GARDEN MYSTERY

I CONFESS that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories. My respect for his powers of analysis increased wondrously. There still remained some lurking suspicion in my mind, however, that the whole thing was a pre-arranged episode, intended to dazzle me, though what earthly object he could have in taking me in was past my comprehension. When I looked at him he had finished reading the note, and his eyes had assumed the vacant, lack-lustre expression which showed mental abstraction.

"How in the world did you deduce that?" I asked.

"Deduce what?" said he, petulantly.

"Why, that he was a retired sergeant of Marines."

"I have no time for trifles," he answered, brusquely; then with a smile, "Excuse my rudeness. You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. So you actually were not able to see that that man was a sergeant of Marines?"

"No, indeed."

"It was easier to know it than to explain why I knew it. If you were asked to prove that two and two made four, you might find some difficulty, and yet you are quite sure of the fact. Even across the street I could see a great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand. That smacked of the sea. He had a military carriage, however, and regulation side whiskers. There we have the marine. He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command. You must have observed the way in which he held his head and swung his cane. A steady, respectable, middle-aged man, too, on the face of him — all facts which led me to believe that he had been a sergeant."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

"Commonplace," said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration. "I said just now that there were no criminals. It appears that I am wrong — look at this!" He threw me over the note which the commissionaire had brought.

“Why,” I cried, as I cast my eye over it, “this is terrible!”

“It does seem to be a little out of the common,” he remarked, calmly. “Would you mind reading it to me aloud?”

This is the letter which I read to him ——

“MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES, —

“There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. Our man on the beat saw a light there about two in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. He found the door open, and in the front room, which is bare of furniture, discovered the body of a gentleman, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of ‘Enoch J. Drebber, Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.’ There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. There are marks of blood in the room, but there is no wound upon his person. We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole affair is a puzzler. If you can come round to the house any time before twelve, you will find me there. I have left everything *in statu quo* until I hear from you. If you are unable to come I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would favour me with your opinion. Yours faithfully,

“TOBIAS GREGSON.”

“Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders,” my friend remarked; “he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional — shockingly so. They have their knives into one another, too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent.”

I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. “Surely there is not a moment to be lost,” I cried, “shall I go and order you a cab?”

“I’m not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather — that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times.”

“Why, it is just such a chance as you have been longing for.”

“My dear fellow, what does it matter to me. Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage.”

“But he begs you to help him.”

“Yes. He knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would cut his tongue out before he would own it to any third person.

However, we may as well go and have a look. I shall work it out on my own hook. I may have a laugh at them if I have nothing else. Come on!”

He hustled on his overcoat, and bustled about in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the apathetic one.

“Get your hat,” he said.

“You wish me to come?”

“Yes, if you have nothing better to do.” A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road.

It was a foggy, cloudy morning, and a dun-coloured veil hung over the house-tops, looking like the reflection of the mud-coloured streets beneath. My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati. As for myself, I was silent, for the dull weather and the melancholy business upon which we were engaged, depressed my spirits.

“You don’t seem to give much thought to the matter in hand,” I said at last, interrupting Holmes’ musical disquisition.

“No data yet,” he answered. “It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.”

“You will have your data soon,” I remarked, pointing with my finger; “this is the Brixton Road, and that is the house, if I am not very much mistaken.”

“So it is. Stop, driver, stop!” We were still a hundred yards or so from it, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

Number 3, Lauriston Gardens wore an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a “To Let” card had developed like a cataract upon the bleared panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night. The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon the top, and against this wall was leaning a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers, who craned their necks and strained their eyes in the vain hope of catching some glimpse of the proceedings within.

I had imagined that Sherlock Holmes would at once have hurried into the house and plunged into a study of the mystery. Nothing appeared to be further from his intention. With an air of nonchalance which, under the circumstances, seemed to me to border upon affectation, he lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite houses and the line of railings. Having finished his scrutiny, he proceeded slowly down the path, or rather down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground. Twice he stopped, and once I saw him smile, and heard him utter an exclamation of satisfaction. There were many marks of footsteps upon the wet clayey soil, but since the police had been coming and going over it, I was unable to see how my companion could hope to learn anything from it. Still I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me.

At the door of the house we were met by a tall, white-faced, flaxen-haired man, with a notebook in his hand, who rushed forward and wrung my companion's hand with effusion. "It is indeed kind of you to come," he said, "I have had everything left untouched."

"Except that!" my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. "If a herd of buffaloes had passed along there could not be a greater mess. No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this."

"I have had so much to do inside the house," the detective said evasively. "My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. I had relied upon him to look after this."

Holmes glanced at me and raised his eyebrows sardonically. "With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground, there will not be much for a third party to find out," he said.

Gregson rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied way. "I think we have done all that can be done," he answered; "it's a queer case though, and I knew your taste for such things."

"You did not come here in a cab?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"No, sir."

"Nor Lestrade?"

"No, sir."

"Then let us go and look at the room." With which inconsequent remark he strode on into the house, followed by Gregson, whose features expressed his astonishment.

A short passage, bare planked and dusty, led to the kitchen and offices. Two doors opened out of it to the left and to the right. One of these had obviously been closed for many weeks. The other belonged to the dining-room, which was the apartment in which the mysterious affair had occurred. Holmes walked in, and I followed him with that subdued feeling at my heart which the presence of death inspires.

It was a large square room, looking all the larger from the absence of all furniture. A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew, and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble. On one corner of this was stuck the stump of a red wax candle. The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull grey tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment.

All these details I observed afterwards. At present my attention was centred upon the single grim motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards, with vacant sightless eyes staring up at the discoloured ceiling. It was that of a man about forty-three or forty-four years of age, middle-sized, broad shouldered, with crisp curling black hair, and a short stubbly beard. He was dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat and waistcoat, with light-coloured trousers, and immaculate collar and cuffs. A top hat, well brushed and trim, was placed upon the floor beside him. His hands were clenched and his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked as though his death struggle had been a grievous one. On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London.

Lestrade, lean and ferret-like as ever, was standing by the doorway, and greeted my companion and myself.

"This case will make a stir, sir," he remarked. "It beats anything I have seen, and I am no chicken."

"There is no clue?" said Gregson.

"None at all," chimed in Lestrade.

Sherlock Holmes approached the body, and, kneeling down, examined it intently. "You are sure that there is no wound?" he asked, pointing to numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all round.

"Positive!" cried both detectives.

"Then, of course, this blood belongs to a second individual — presumably the murderer, if murder has been committed. It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. Do you remember the case, Gregson?"

"No, sir."

"Read it up — you really should. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before."

As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon. So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted. Finally, he sniffed the dead man's lips, and then glanced at the soles of his patent leather boots.

"He has not been moved at all?" he asked.

"No more than was necessary for the purposes of our examination."

"You can take him to the mortuary now," he said. "There is nothing more to be learned."

Gregson had a stretcher and four men at hand. At his call they entered the room, and the stranger was lifted and carried out. As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

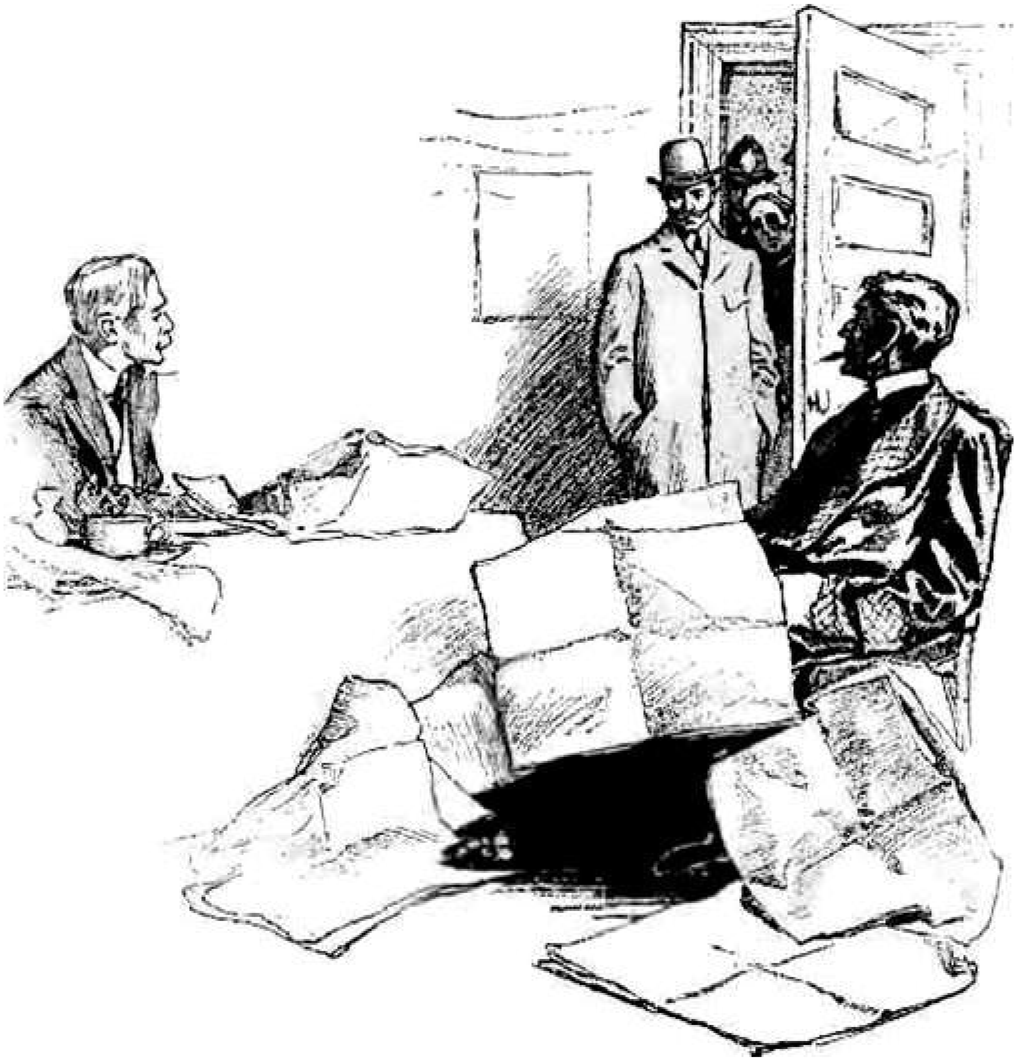

"There's been a woman here," he cried. "It's a woman's wedding-ring."

He held it out, as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. We all gathered round him and gazed at it. There could be no doubt that that circlet of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

"This complicates matters," said Gregson. "Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before."

"You're sure it doesn't simplify them?" observed Holmes. "There's nothing to be learned by staring at it. What did you find in his pockets?"

"We have it all here," said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. "A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with masonic device. Gold pin — bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. Russian leather card-case, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. No purse, but loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen. Pocket edition of Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the fly-leaf. Two letters — one addressed to E. J. Drebber and one to Joseph Stangerson."

"At what address?"

"American Exchange, Strand — to be left till called for. They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York."

"Have you made any inquiries as to this man, Stangerson?"

"I did it at once, sir," said Gregson. "I have had advertisements sent to all the newspapers, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet."

"Have you sent to Cleveland?"

"We telegraphed this morning."

"How did you word your inquiries?"

"We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us."

"You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?"

"I asked about Stangerson."

"Nothing else? Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge? Will you not telegraph again?"

"I have said all I have to say," said Gregson, in an offended voice.

Sherlock Holmes chuckled to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been in the front room while we were holding this conversation in the hall, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner.

"Mr. Gregson," he said, "I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have been overlooked had I not made a careful examination of the walls."

The little man's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague.

"Come here," he said, bustling back into the room, the atmosphere of which felt clearer since the removal of its ghastly inmate. "Now, stand there!"

He struck a match on his boot and held it up against the wall.

"Look at that!" he said, triumphantly.

I have remarked that the paper had fallen away in parts. In this particular corner of the room a large piece had peeled off, leaving a yellow square of coarse plastering. Across this bare space there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word —

RACHE.

“What do you think of that?” cried the detective, with the air of a showman exhibiting his show. “This was overlooked because it was in the darkest corner of the room, and no one thought of looking there. The murderer has written it with his or her own blood. See this smear where it has trickled down the wall! That disposes of the idea of suicide anyhow. Why was that corner chosen to write it on? I will tell you. See that candle on the mantelpiece. It was lit at the time, and if it was lit this corner would be the brightest instead of the darkest portion of the wall.”

“And what does it mean now that you *have* found it?” asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.

“Mean? Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it. It’s all very well for you to laugh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done.”

“I really beg your pardon!” said my companion, who had ruffled the little man’s temper by bursting into an explosion of laughter. “You certainly have the credit of being the first of us to find this out, and, as you say, it bears every mark of having been written by the other participant in last night’s mystery. I have not had time to examine this room yet, but with your permission I shall do so now.”

As he spoke, he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded well-trained foxhound as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. In one place he gathered up very carefully a little pile of grey dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope. Finally, he examined with his glass the word upon the wall, going over every letter of it with the most minute exactness. This done, he appeared to be satisfied, for he replaced his tape and his glass in his pocket.

"They say that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains," he remarked with a smile. "It's a very bad definition, but it does apply to detective work."

Gregson and Lestrade had watched the manoeuvres of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt. They evidently failed to appreciate the fact, which I had begun to realise, that Sherlock Holmes' smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end.

"What do you think of it, sir?" they both asked.

"It would be robbing you of the credit of the case if I was to presume to help you," remarked my friend. "You are doing so well now that it would be a pity for anyone to interfere." There was a world of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke. "If you will let me know how your investigations go," he continued, "I shall be happy to give you any help I can. In the meantime I should like to speak to the constable who found the body. Can you give me his name and address?"

Lestrade glanced at his note-book. "John Rance," he said. "He is off duty now. You will find him at 46, Audley Court, Kennington Park Gate."

Holmes took a note of the address.

"Come along, Doctor," he said; "we shall go and look him up. I'll tell you one thing which may help you in the case," he continued, turning to the two detectives. "There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore leg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. These are only a few indications, but they may assist you."

Lestrade and Gregson glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

“If this man was murdered, how was it done?” asked the former.

“Poison,” said Sherlock Holmes curtly, and strode off. “One other thing, Lestrade,” he added, turning round at the door: “‘Rache,’ is the German for ‘revenge;’ so don’t lose your time looking for Miss Rachel.”

With which Parthian shot he walked away, leaving the two rivals open-mouthed behind him.

CHAPTER IV. WHAT JOHN RANCE HAD TO TELL.

IT was one o’clock when we left No. 3, Lauriston Gardens. Sherlock Holmes led me to the nearest telegraph office, whence he dispatched a long telegram. He then hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to take us to the address given us by Lestrade.

“There is nothing like first hand evidence,” he remarked; “as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned.”

“You amaze me, Holmes,” said I. “Surely you are not as sure as you pretend to be of all those particulars which you gave.”

“There’s no room for a mistake,” he answered. “The very first thing which I observed on arriving there was that a cab had made two ruts with its wheels close to the curb. Now, up to last night, we have had no rain for a week, so that those wheels which left such a deep impression must have been there during the night. There were the marks of the horse’s hoofs, too, the outline of one of which was far more clearly cut than that of the other three, showing that that was a new shoe. Since the cab was there after the rain began, and was not there at any time during the morning — I have Gregson’s word for that — it follows that it must have been there during the night, and, therefore, that it brought those two individuals to the house.”

“That seems simple enough,” said I; “but how about the other man’s height?”

“Why, the height of a man, in nine cases out of ten, can be told from the length of his stride. It is a simple calculation enough, though there is no use my boring you with figures. I had this fellow’s stride both on the clay outside and on the dust within. Then I had a way of checking my calculation. When a man writes on a wall, his instinct leads him to write about the level of his own eyes. Now that writing was just over six feet from the ground. It was child’s play.”

“And his age?” I asked.

“Well, if a man can stride four and a-half feet without the smallest effort, he can’t be quite in the sere and yellow. That was the breadth of a puddle on the garden walk which he had evidently walked across. Patent-leather boots had gone round, and Square-toes had hopped over. There is no mystery about it at all. I am simply applying to ordinary life a few of those precepts of observation and deduction which I advocated in that article. Is there anything else that puzzles you?”

“The finger nails and the Trichinopoly,” I suggested.

“The writing on the wall was done with a man’s forefinger dipped in blood. My glass allowed me to observe that the plaster was slightly scratched in doing it, which would not have been the case if the man’s nail had been trimmed. I gathered up some scattered ash from the floor. It was dark in colour and flakey — such an ash as is only made by a Trichinopoly. I have made a special study of cigar ashes — in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand, either of cigar or of tobacco. It is just in such details that the skilled detective differs from the Gregson and Lestrade type.”

“And the florid face?” I asked.

“Ah, that was a more daring shot, though I have no doubt that I was right. You must not ask me that at the present state of the affair.”

I passed my hand over my brow. “My head is in a whirl,” I remarked; “the more one thinks of it the more mysterious it grows. How came these two men — if there were two men — into an empty house? What has become of the cabman who drove them? How could one man compel another to take poison? Where did the blood come from? What was the object of the murderer, since robbery had no part in it? How came the woman’s ring there? Above all, why should the second man write up the German word RACHE before decamping? I confess that I cannot see any possible way of reconciling all these facts.”

My companion smiled approvingly.

“You sum up the difficulties of the situation succinctly and well,” he said. “There is much that is still obscure, though I have quite made up my mind on the main facts. As to poor Lestrade’s discovery it was simply a blind intended to put the police upon a wrong track, by suggesting Socialism and secret societies. It was not done by a German. The A, if you noticed, was printed somewhat after the German fashion. Now, a real German invariably prints in the Latin character, so that we may safely say that this was not written by one, but by a clumsy imitator who overdid his part. It was simply a ruse to divert inquiry into a wrong channel. I’m not going to tell you much more of the case, Doctor. You know a conjuror gets no credit when once he has explained his trick, and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all.”

“I shall never do that,” I answered; “you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world.”

My companion flushed up with pleasure at my words, and the earnest way in which I uttered them. I had already observed that he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty.

“I’ll tell you one other thing,” he said. “Patent leathers and Square-toes came in the same cab, and they walked down the pathway together as friendly as possible — arm-in-arm, in all probability. When they got inside they walked up and down the room — or rather, Patent-leathers stood still while Square-toes walked up and down. I could read all that in the dust; and I could read that as he walked he grew more and more excited. That is shown by the increased length of his strides. He was talking all the while, and working himself up, no doubt, into a fury. Then the tragedy occurred. I’ve told you all I know myself now, for the rest is mere surmise and conjecture. We have a good working basis, however, on which to start. We must hurry up, for I want to go to Halle’s concert to hear Norman Neruda this afternoon.”

This conversation had occurred while our cab had been threading its way through a long succession of dingy streets and dreary by-ways. In the dingiest and dreariest of them our driver suddenly came to a stand. “That’s Audley Court in there,” he said, pointing to a narrow slit in the line of dead-coloured brick. “You’ll find me here when you come back.”

Audley Court was not an attractive locality. The narrow passage led us into a quadrangle paved with flags and lined by sordid dwellings. We picked our way among groups of dirty children, and through lines of discoloured linen, until we came to Number 46, the door of which was decorated with a small slip of brass on which the name Rance was engraved. On enquiry we found that the constable was in bed, and we were shown into a little front parlour to await his coming.

He appeared presently, looking a little irritable at being disturbed in his slumbers. “I made my report at the office,” he said.

Holmes took a half-sovereign from his pocket and played with it pensively. “We thought that we should like to hear it all from your own lips,” he said.

“I shall be most happy to tell you anything I can,” the constable answered with his eyes upon the little golden disk.

“Just let us hear it all in your own way as it occurred.”

Rance sat down on the horsehair sofa, and knitted his brows as though determined not to omit anything in his narrative.

“I’ll tell it ye from the beginning,” he said. “My time is from ten at night to six in the morning. At eleven there was a fight at the ‘White Hart’; but bar that all was quiet enough on the beat. At one o’clock it began to rain, and I met Harry Murcher — him who has the Holland Grove beat — and we stood together at the corner of Henrietta Street a-talkin’. Presently — maybe about two or a little after — I thought I would take a look round and see that all was right down the Brixton Road. It was precious dirty and lonely. Not a soul did I meet all the way down, though a cab or two went past me. I was a strollin’ down, thinkin’ between ourselves how uncommon handy a four of gin hot would be, when suddenly the glint of a light caught my eye in the window of that same house. Now, I knew that them two houses in Lauriston Gardens was empty on account of him that owns them who won’t have the drains seed to, though the very last tenant what lived in one of them died o’ typhoid fever. I was knocked all in a heap therefore at seeing a light in the window, and I suspected as something was wrong. When I got to the door — —”

“You stopped, and then walked back to the garden gate,” my companion interrupted. “What did you do that for?”

Rance gave a violent jump, and stared at Sherlock Holmes with the utmost amazement upon his features.

“Why, that’s true, sir,” he said; “though how you come to know it, Heaven only knows. Ye see, when I got up to the door it was so still and so lonesome, that I thought I’d be none the worse for some one with me. I ain’t afeared of anything on this side o’ the grave; but I thought that maybe it was him that died o’ the typhoid inspecting the drains what killed him. The thought gave me a kind o’ turn, and I walked back to the gate to see if I could see Murcher’s lantern, but there wasn’t no sign of him nor of anyone else.”

“There was no one in the street?”

"Not a livin' soul, sir, nor as much as a dog. Then I pulled myself together and went back and pushed the door open. All was quiet inside, so I went into the room where the light was a-burnin'. There was a candle flickerin' on the mantelpiece — a red wax one — and by its light I saw — —"

"Yes, I know all that you saw. You walked round the room several times, and you knelt down by the body, and then you walked through and tried the kitchen door, and then — —"

John Rance sprang to his feet with a frightened face and suspicion in his eyes. "Where was you hid to see all that?" he cried. "It seems to me that you knows a deal more than you should."

Holmes laughed and threw his card across the table to the constable. "Don't get arresting me for the murder," he said. "I am one of the hounds and not the wolf; Mr. Gregson or Mr. Lestrade will answer for that. Go on, though. What did you do next?"

Rance resumed his seat, without however losing his mystified expression. "I went back to the gate and sounded my whistle. That brought Murcher and two more to the spot."

"Was the street empty then?"

"Well, it was, as far as anybody that could be of any good goes."

"What do you mean?"

The constable's features broadened into a grin. "I've seen many a drunk chap in my time," he said, "but never anyone so cryin' drunk as that cove. He was at the gate when I came out, a-leanin' up agin the railings, and a-singin' at the pitch o' his lungs about Columbine's New-fangled Banner, or some such stuff. He couldn't stand, far less help."

"What sort of a man was he?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

John Rance appeared to be somewhat irritated at this digression. "He was an uncommon drunk sort o' man," he said. "He'd ha' found hisself in the station if we hadn't been so took up."

"His face — his dress — didn't you notice them?" Holmes broke in impatiently.

"I should think I did notice them, seeing that I had to prop him up — me and Murcher between us. He was a long chap, with a red face, the lower part muffled round — —"

"That will do," cried Holmes. "What became of him?"

“We’d enough to do without lookin’ after him,” the policeman said, in an aggrieved voice. “I’ll wager he found his way home all right.”

“How was he dressed?”

“A brown overcoat.”

“Had he a whip in his hand?”

“A whip — no.”

“He must have left it behind,” muttered my companion. “You didn’t happen to see or hear a cab after that?”

“No.”

“There’s a half-sovereign for you,” my companion said, standing up and taking his hat. “I am afraid, Rance, that you will never rise in the force. That head of yours should be for use as well as ornament. You might have gained your sergeant’s stripes last night. The man whom you held in your hands is the man who holds the clue of this mystery, and whom we are seeking. There is no use of arguing about it now; I tell you that it is so. Come along, Doctor.”

We started off for the cab together, leaving our informant incredulous, but obviously uncomfortable.

“The blundering fool,” Holmes said, bitterly, as we drove back to our lodgings. “Just to think of his having such an incomparable bit of good luck, and not taking advantage of it.”

“I am rather in the dark still. It is true that the description of this man tallies with your idea of the second party in this mystery. But why should he come back to the house after leaving it? That is not the way of criminals.”

“The ring, man, the ring: that was what he came back for. If we have no other way of catching him, we can always bait our line with the ring. I shall have him, Doctor — I’ll lay you two to one that I have him. I must thank you for it all. I might not have gone but for you, and so have missed the finest study I ever came across: a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn’t we use a little art jargon. There’s the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it. And now for lunch, and then for Norman Neruda. Her attack and her bowing are splendid. What’s that little thing of Chopin’s she plays so magnificently: Tra-la-la-lira-lira-lay.”

Leaning back in the cab, this amateur bloodhound carolled away like a lark while I meditated upon the many-sidedness of the human mind.

CHAPTER V. OUR ADVERTISEMENT BRINGS A VISITOR.

OUR morning’s exertions had been too much for my weak health, and I was tired out in the afternoon. After Holmes’ departure for the concert, I lay down upon the sofa and endeavoured to get a couple of hours’ sleep. It was a useless attempt. My mind had been too much excited by all that had occurred, and the strangest fancies and surmises crowded into it. Every time that I closed my eyes I saw before me the distorted baboon-like countenance of the murdered man. So sinister was the impression which that face had produced upon me that I found it difficult to feel anything but gratitude for him who had removed its owner from the world. If ever human features bespoke vice of the most malignant type, they were certainly those of Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland. Still I recognised that justice must be done, and that the depravity of the victim was no condonment in the eyes of the law.

The more I thought of it the more extraordinary did my companion’s hypothesis, that the man had been poisoned, appear. I remembered how he had sniffed his lips, and had no doubt that he had detected something which had given rise to the idea. Then, again, if not poison, what had caused the man’s death, since there was neither wound nor marks of strangulation? But, on the other hand, whose blood was that which lay so thickly upon the floor? There were no signs of a struggle, nor had the victim any weapon with which he might have wounded an antagonist. As long as all these questions were unsolved, I felt that sleep would be no easy matter, either for Holmes or myself. His quiet self-confident manner convinced me that he had already formed a theory which explained all the facts, though what it was I could not for an instant conjecture.

He was very late in returning — so late, that I knew that the concert could not have detained him all the time. Dinner was on the table before he appeared.

“It was magnificent,” he said, as he took his seat. “Do you remember what Darwin says about music? He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood."

"That's rather a broad idea," I remarked.

"One's ideas must be as broad as Nature if they are to interpret Nature," he answered. "What's the matter? You're not looking quite yourself. This Brixton Road affair has upset you."

"To tell the truth, it has," I said. "I ought to be more case-hardened after my Afghan experiences. I saw my own comrades hacked to pieces at Maiwand without losing my nerve."

"I can understand. There is a mystery about this which stimulates the imagination; where there is no imagination there is no horror. Have you seen the evening paper?"

"No."

"It gives a fairly good account of the affair. It does not mention the fact that when the man was raised up, a woman's wedding ring fell upon the floor. It is just as well it does not."

"Why?"

"Look at this advertisement," he answered. "I had one sent to every paper this morning immediately after the affair."

He threw the paper across to me and I glanced at the place indicated. It was the first announcement in the "Found" column. "In Brixton Road, this morning," it ran, "a plain gold wedding ring, found in the roadway between the 'White Hart' Tavern and Holland Grove. Apply Dr. Watson, 221B, Baker Street, between eight and nine this evening."

"Excuse my using your name," he said. "If I used my own some of these dunderheads would recognise it, and want to meddle in the affair."

"That is all right," I answered. "But supposing anyone applies, I have no ring."

"Oh yes, you have," said he, handing me one. "This will do very well. It is almost a facsimile."

"And who do you expect will answer this advertisement."

"Why, the man in the brown coat — our florid friend with the square toes. If he does not come himself he will send an accomplice."

"Would he not consider it as too dangerous?"

"Not at all. If my view of the case is correct, and I have every reason to believe that it is, this man would rather risk anything than lose the ring.

According to my notion he dropped it while stooping over Drebber’s body, and did not miss it at the time. After leaving the house he discovered his loss and hurried back, but found the police already in possession, owing to his own folly in leaving the candle burning. He had to pretend to be drunk in order to allay the suspicions which might have been aroused by his appearance at the gate. Now put yourself in that man’s place. On thinking the matter over, it must have occurred to him that it was possible that he had lost the ring in the road after leaving the house. What would he do, then? He would eagerly look out for the evening papers in the hope of seeing it among the articles found. His eye, of course, would light upon this. He would be overjoyed. Why should he fear a trap? There would be no reason in his eyes why the finding of the ring should be connected with the murder. He would come. He will come. You shall see him within an hour?”

“And then?” I asked.

“Oh, you can leave me to deal with him then. Have you any arms?”

“I have my old service revolver and a few cartridges.”

“You had better clean it and load it. He will be a desperate man, and though I shall take him unawares, it is as well to be ready for anything.”

I went to my bedroom and followed his advice. When I returned with the pistol the table had been cleared, and Holmes was engaged in his favourite occupation of scraping upon his violin.

“The plot thickens,” he said, as I entered; “I have just had an answer to my American telegram. My view of the case is the correct one.”

“And that is?” I asked eagerly.

“My fiddle would be the better for new strings,” he remarked. “Put your pistol in your pocket. When the fellow comes speak to him in an ordinary way. Leave the rest to me. Don’t frighten him by looking at him too hard.”

“It is eight o’clock now,” I said, glancing at my watch.

“Yes. He will probably be here in a few minutes. Open the door slightly. That will do. Now put the key on the inside. Thank you! This is a queer old book I picked up at a stall yesterday—’De Jure inter Gentes’ — published in Latin at Liege in the Lowlands, in 1642. Charles’ head was still firm on his shoulders when this little brown-backed volume was struck off.”

“Who is the printer?”

“Philippe de Croy, whoever he may have been. On the fly-leaf, in very faded ink, is written ‘Ex libris Guliolmi Whyte.’ I wonder who William

Whyte was. Some pragmatical seventeenth century lawyer, I suppose. His writing has a legal twist about it. Here comes our man, I think.”

As he spoke there was a sharp ring at the bell. Sherlock Holmes rose softly and moved his chair in the direction of the door. We heard the servant pass along the hall, and the sharp click of the latch as she opened it.

“Does Dr. Watson live here?” asked a clear but rather harsh voice. We could not hear the servant’s reply, but the door closed, and some one began to ascend the stairs. The footfall was an uncertain and shuffling one. A look of surprise passed over the face of my companion as he listened to it. It came slowly along the passage, and there was a feeble tap at the door.

“Come in,” I cried.

At my summons, instead of the man of violence whom we expected, a very old and wrinkled woman hobbled into the apartment. She appeared to be dazzled by the sudden blaze of light, and after dropping a curtsey, she stood blinking at us with her bleared eyes and fumbling in her pocket with nervous, shaky fingers. I glanced at my companion, and his face had assumed such a disconsolate expression that it was all I could do to keep my countenance.

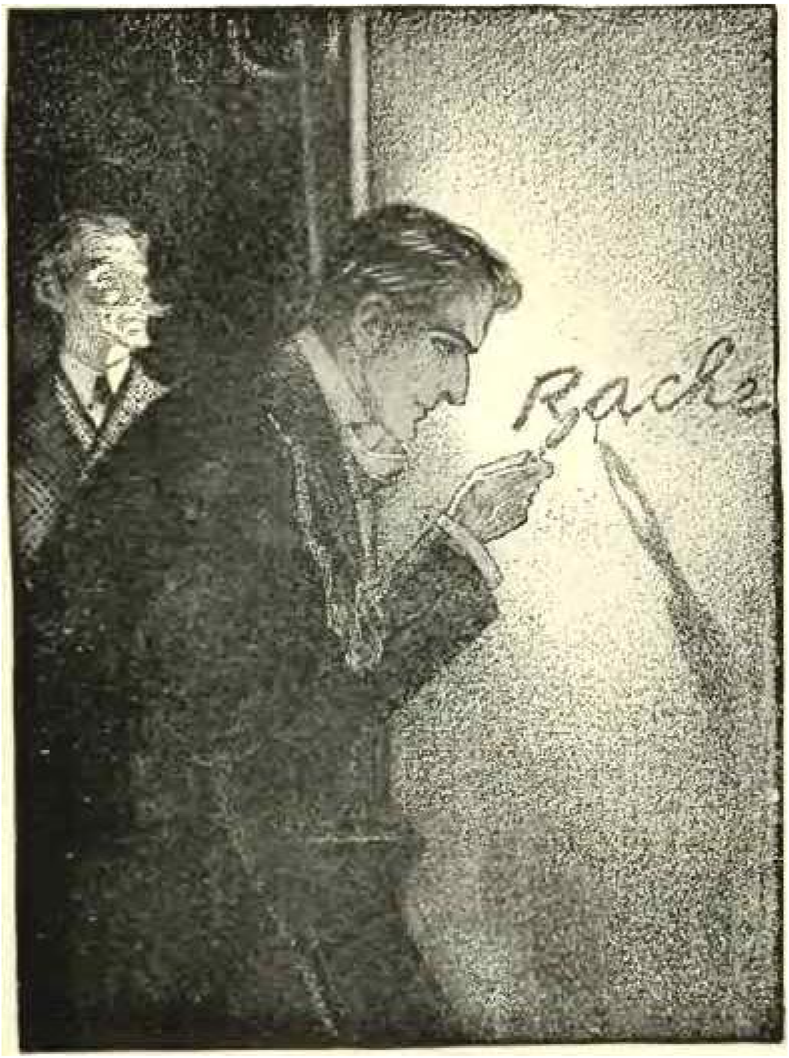

The old crone drew out an evening paper, and pointed at our advertisement. “It’s this as has brought me, good gentlemen,” she said, dropping another curtsey; “a gold wedding ring in the Brixton Road. It belongs to my girl Sally, as was married only this time twelvemonth, which her husband is steward aboard a Union boat, and what he’d say if he come ‘ome and found her without her ring is more than I can think, he being short enough at the best o’ times, but more especially when he has the drink. If it please you, she went to the circus last night along with — —”

“Is that her ring?” I asked.

“The Lord be thanked!” cried the old woman; “Sally will be a glad woman this night. That’s the ring.”

“And what may your address be?” I inquired, taking up a pencil.

“13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch. A weary way from here.”

“The Brixton Road does not lie between any circus and Houndsditch,” said Sherlock Holmes sharply.

The old woman faced round and looked keenly at him from her little red-rimmed eyes. “The gentleman asked me for *my* address,” she said. “Sally lives in lodgings at 3, Mayfield Place, Peckham.”

“And your name is —— ?”

“My name is Sawyer — her’s is Dennis, which Tom Dennis married her — and a smart, clean lad, too, as long as he’s at sea, and no steward in the company more thought of; but when on shore, what with the women and what with liquor shops — —”

“Here is your ring, Mrs. Sawyer,” I interrupted, in obedience to a sign from my companion; “it clearly belongs to your daughter, and I am glad to be able to restore it to the rightful owner.”

With many mumbled blessings and protestations of gratitude the old crone packed it away in her pocket, and shuffled off down the stairs. Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet the moment that she was gone and rushed into his room. He returned in a few seconds enveloped in an ulster and a cravat. “I’ll follow her,” he said, hurriedly; “she must be an accomplice, and will lead me to him. Wait up for me.” The hall door had hardly slammed behind our visitor before Holmes had descended the stair. Looking through the window I could see her walking feebly along the other side, while her pursuer dogged her some little distance behind. “Either his whole theory is incorrect,” I thought to myself, “or else he will be led now to the heart of the mystery.” There was no need for him to ask me to wait up for him, for I felt that sleep was impossible until I heard the result of his adventure.

It was close upon nine when he set out. I had no idea how long he might be, but I sat stolidly puffing at my pipe and skipping over the pages of Henri Murger’s “Vie de Bohème.” Ten o’clock passed, and I heard the footsteps of the maid as they pattered off to bed. Eleven, and the more stately tread of the landlady passed my door, bound for the same destination. It was close upon twelve before I heard the sharp sound of his latch-key. The instant he entered I saw by his face that he had not been successful. Amusement and chagrin seemed to be struggling for the mastery, until the former suddenly carried the day, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

“I wouldn’t have the Scotland Yarders know it for the world,” he cried, dropping into his chair; “I have chaffed them so much that they would never have let me hear the end of it. I can afford to laugh, because I know that I will be even with them in the long run.”

“What is it then?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t mind telling a story against myself. That creature had gone a little way when she began to limp and show every sign of being foot-sore. Presently she came to a halt, and hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. I managed to be close to her so as to hear the address, but I need not have been so anxious, for she sang it out loud enough to be heard at the other side of the street, ‘Drive to 13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch,’ she cried. This begins to look genuine, I thought, and having seen her safely inside, I perched myself behind. That’s an art which every detective should be an expert at. Well, away we rattled, and never drew rein until we reached the street in question. I hopped off before we came to the door, and strolled down the street in an easy, lounging way. I saw the cab pull up. The driver jumped down, and I saw him open the door and stand expectantly. Nothing came out though. When I reached him he was groping about frantically in the empty cab, and giving vent to the finest assorted collection of oaths that ever I listened to. There was no sign or trace of his passenger, and I fear it will be some time before he gets his fare. On inquiring at Number 13 we found that the house belonged to a respectable paperhanger, named Keswick, and that no one of the name either of Sawyer or Dennis had ever been heard of there.”

“You don’t mean to say,” I cried, in amazement, “that that tottering, feeble old woman was able to get out of the cab while it was in motion, without either you or the driver seeing her?”

“Old woman be damned!” said Sherlock Holmes, sharply. “We were the old women to be so taken in. It must have been a young man, and an active one, too, besides being an incomparable actor. The get-up was inimitable. He saw that he was followed, no doubt, and used this means of giving me the slip. It shows that the man we are after is not as lonely as I imagined he was, but has friends who are ready to risk something for him. Now, Doctor, you are looking done-up. Take my advice and turn in.”

I was certainly feeling very weary, so I obeyed his injunction. I left Holmes seated in front of the smouldering fire, and long into the watches of the night I heard the low, melancholy wailings of his violin, and knew that he was still pondering over the strange problem which he had set himself to unravel.

CHAPTER VI. TOBIAS GREGSON SHOWS WHAT HE CAN DO.

THE papers next day were full of the “Brixton Mystery,” as they termed it. Each had a long account of the affair, and some had leaders upon it in addition. There was some information in them which was new to me. I still retain in my scrap-book numerous clippings and extracts bearing upon the case. Here is a condensation of a few of them: —

The *Daily Telegraph* remarked that in the history of crime there had seldom been a tragedy which presented stranger features. The German name of the victim, the absence of all other motive, and the sinister inscription on the wall, all pointed to its perpetration by political refugees and revolutionists. The Socialists had many branches in America, and the deceased had, no doubt, infringed their unwritten laws, and been tracked down by them. After alluding airily to the Vehmgericht, aqua tofana, Carbonari, the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, the Darwinian theory, the principles of Malthus, and the Ratcliff Highway murders, the article concluded by admonishing the Government and advocating a closer watch over foreigners in England.

The *Standard* commented upon the fact that lawless outrages of the sort usually occurred under a Liberal Administration. They arose from the unsettling of the minds of the masses, and the consequent weakening of all authority. The deceased was an American gentleman who had been residing for some weeks in the Metropolis. He had stayed at the boarding-house of Madame Charpentier, in Torquay Terrace, Camberwell. He was accompanied in his travels by his private secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson. The two bade adieu to their landlady upon Tuesday, the 4th inst., and departed to Euston Station with the avowed intention of catching the Liverpool express. They were afterwards seen together upon the platform. Nothing more is known of them until Mr. Drebber’s body was, as recorded, discovered in an empty house in the Brixton Road, many miles from Euston. How he came there, or how he met his fate, are questions which are still involved in mystery. Nothing is known of the whereabouts of Stangerson. We are glad to learn that Mr. Lestrade and Mr. Gregson, of

Scotland Yard, are both engaged upon the case, and it is confidently anticipated that these well-known officers will speedily throw light upon the matter.

The *Daily News* observed that there was no doubt as to the crime being a political one. The despotism and hatred of Liberalism which animated the Continental Governments had had the effect of driving to our shores a number of men who might have made excellent citizens were they not soured by the recollection of all that they had undergone. Among these men there was a stringent code of honour, any infringement of which was punished by death. Every effort should be made to find the secretary, Stangerson, and to ascertain some particulars of the habits of the deceased. A great step had been gained by the discovery of the address of the house at which he had boarded — a result which was entirely due to the acuteness and energy of Mr. Gregson of Scotland Yard.

Sherlock Holmes and I read these notices over together at breakfast, and they appeared to afford him considerable amusement.

"I told you that, whatever happened, Lestrade and Gregson would be sure to score."

"That depends on how it turns out."

"Oh, bless you, it doesn't matter in the least. If the man is caught, it will be *on account* of their exertions; if he escapes, it will be *in spite* of their exertions. It's heads I win and tails you lose. Whatever they do, they will have followers. 'Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot qui l'admire.'"

"What on earth is this?" I cried, for at this moment there came the pattering of many steps in the hall and on the stairs, accompanied by audible expressions of disgust upon the part of our landlady.

"It's the Baker Street division of the detective police force," said my companion, gravely; and as he spoke there rushed into the room half a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs that ever I clapped eyes on.

"'Tention!" cried Holmes, in a sharp tone, and the six dirty little scoundrels stood in a line like so many disreputable statuettes. "In future you shall send up Wiggins alone to report, and the rest of you must wait in the street. Have you found it, Wiggins?"

"No, sir, we hain't," said one of the youths.

"I hardly expected you would. You must keep on until you do. Here are your wages." He handed each of them a shilling.

"Now, off you go, and come back with a better report next time."

He waved his hand, and they scampered away downstairs like so many rats, and we heard their shrill voices next moment in the street.

"There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force," Holmes remarked. "The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. These youngsters, however, go everywhere and hear everything. They are as sharp as needles, too; all they want is organisation."

"Is it on this Brixton case that you are employing them?" I asked.

"Yes; there is a point which I wish to ascertain. It is merely a matter of time. Hullo! we are going to hear some news now with a vengeance! Here is Gregson coming down the road with beatitude written upon every feature of his face. Bound for us, I know. Yes, he is stopping. There he is!"

There was a violent peal at the bell, and in a few seconds the fair-haired detective came up the stairs, three steps at a time, and burst into our sitting-room.

"My dear fellow," he cried, wringing Holmes' unresponsive hand, "congratulate me! I have made the whole thing as clear as day."

A shade of anxiety seemed to me to cross my companion's expressive face.

"Do you mean that you are on the right track?" he asked.

"The right track! Why, sir, we have the man under lock and key."

"And his name is?"

"Arthur Charpentier, sub-lieutenant in Her Majesty's navy," cried Gregson, pompously, rubbing his fat hands and inflating his chest.

Sherlock Holmes gave a sigh of relief, and relaxed into a smile.

"Take a seat, and try one of these cigars," he said. "We are anxious to know how you managed it. Will you have some whiskey and water?"

"I don't mind if I do," the detective answered. "The tremendous exertions which I have gone through during the last day or two have worn me out. Not so much bodily exertion, you understand, as the strain upon the mind. You will appreciate that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for we are both brain-workers."

"You do me too much honour," said Holmes, gravely. "Let us hear how you arrived at this most gratifying result."

The detective seated himself in the arm-chair, and puffed complacently at his cigar. Then suddenly he slapped his thigh in a paroxysm of amusement.

“The fun of it is,” he cried, “that that fool Lestrade, who thinks himself so smart, has gone off upon the wrong track altogether. He is after the secretary Stangerson, who had no more to do with the crime than the babe unborn. I have no doubt that he has caught him by this time.”

The idea tickled Gregson so much that he laughed until he choked.

“And how did you get your clue?”

“Ah, I’ll tell you all about it. Of course, Doctor Watson, this is strictly between ourselves. The first difficulty which we had to contend with was the finding of this American’s antecedents. Some people would have waited until their advertisements were answered, or until parties came forward and volunteered information. That is not Tobias Gregson’s way of going to work. You remember the hat beside the dead man?”

“Yes,” said Holmes; “by John Underwood and Sons, 129, Camberwell Road.”

Gregson looked quite crest-fallen.

“I had no idea that you noticed that,” he said. “Have you been there?”

“No.”

“Ha!” cried Gregson, in a relieved voice; “you should never neglect a chance, however small it may seem.”

“To a great mind, nothing is little,” remarked Holmes, sententiously.

“Well, I went to Underwood, and asked him if he had sold a hat of that size and description. He looked over his books, and came on it at once. He had sent the hat to a Mr. Drebber, residing at Charpentier’s Boarding Establishment, Torquay Terrace. Thus I got at his address.”

“Smart — very smart!” murmured Sherlock Holmes.

“I next called upon Madame Charpentier,” continued the detective. “I found her very pale and distressed. Her daughter was in the room, too — an uncommonly fine girl she is, too; she was looking red about the eyes and her lips trembled as I spoke to her. That didn’t escape my notice. I began to smell a rat. You know the feeling, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, when you come upon the right scent — a kind of thrill in your nerves. ‘Have you heard of the mysterious death of your late boarder Mr. Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland?’ I asked.

“The mother nodded. She didn’t seem able to get out a word. The daughter burst into tears. I felt more than ever that these people knew something of the matter.

"'At what o'clock did Mr. Drebber leave your house for the train?' I asked.

"'At eight o'clock,' she said, gulping in her throat to keep down her agitation. 'His secretary, Mr. Stangerson, said that there were two trains — one at 9.15 and one at 11. He was to catch the first.

"'And was that the last which you saw of him?'

"A terrible change came over the woman's face as I asked the question. Her features turned perfectly livid. It was some seconds before she could get out the single word 'Yes' — and when it did come it was in a husky unnatural tone.

"There was silence for a moment, and then the daughter spoke in a calm clear voice.

"'No good can ever come of falsehood, mother,' she said. 'Let us be frank with this gentleman. We *did* see Mr. Drebber again.'

"'God forgive you!' cried Madame Charpentier, throwing up her hands and sinking back in her chair. 'You have murdered your brother.'

"'Arthur would rather that we spoke the truth,' the girl answered firmly.

"'You had best tell me all about it now,' I said. 'Half-confidences are worse than none. Besides, you do not know how much we know of it.'

"'On your head be it, Alice!' cried her mother; and then, turning to me, 'I will tell you all, sir. Do not imagine that my agitation on behalf of my son arises from any fear lest he should have had a hand in this terrible affair. He is utterly innocent of it. My dread is, however, that in your eyes and in the eyes of others he may appear to be compromised. That however is surely impossible. His high character, his profession, his antecedents would all forbid it.'

"'Your best way is to make a clean breast of the facts,' I answered. 'Depend upon it, if your son is innocent he will be none the worse.'

"'Perhaps, Alice, you had better leave us together,' she said, and her daughter withdrew. 'Now, sir,' she continued, 'I had no intention of telling you all this, but since my poor daughter has disclosed it I have no alternative. Having once decided to speak, I will tell you all without omitting any particular.'

"'It is your wisest course,' said I.

"'Mr. Drebber has been with us nearly three weeks. He and his secretary, Mr. Stangerson, had been travelling on the Continent. I noticed a "Copenhagen" label upon each of their trunks, showing that that had been their last stopping place. Stangerson was a quiet reserved man, but his employer, I am sorry to say, was far otherwise. He was coarse in his habits and brutish in his ways. The very night of his arrival he became very much the worse for drink, and, indeed, after twelve o’clock in the day he could hardly ever be said to be sober. His manners towards the maid-servants were disgustingly free and familiar. Worst of all, he speedily assumed the same attitude towards my daughter, Alice, and spoke to her more than once in a way which, fortunately, she is too innocent to understand. On one occasion he actually seized her in his arms and embraced her — an outrage which caused his own secretary to reproach him for his unmanly conduct.’

“‘But why did you stand all this,’ I asked. ‘I suppose that you can get rid of your boarders when you wish.’

“Mrs. Charpentier blushed at my pertinent question. ‘Would to God that I had given him notice on the very day that he came,’ she said. ‘But it was a sore temptation. They were paying a pound a day each — fourteen pounds a week, and this is the slack season. I am a widow, and my boy in the Navy has cost me much. I grudged to lose the money. I acted for the best. This last was too much, however, and I gave him notice to leave on account of it. That was the reason of his going.’

“‘Well?’

“‘My heart grew light when I saw him drive away. My son is on leave just now, but I did not tell him anything of all this, for his temper is violent, and he is passionately fond of his sister. When I closed the door behind them a load seemed to be lifted from my mind. Alas, in less than an hour there was a ring at the bell, and I learned that Mr. Drebber had returned. He was much excited, and evidently the worse for drink. He forced his way into the room, where I was sitting with my daughter, and made some incoherent remark about having missed his train. He then turned to Alice, and before my very face, proposed to her that she should fly with him. “You are of age,” he said, “and there is no law to stop you. I have money enough and to spare. Never mind the old girl here, but come along with me now straight away. You shall live like a princess.” Poor Alice was so frightened that she shrunk away from him, but he caught her by the wrist and endeavoured to draw her towards the door. I screamed, and at that moment my son Arthur came into the room. What happened then I do not know. I heard oaths and the confused sounds of a scuffle. I was too terrified to raise my head. When I did look up I saw Arthur standing in the doorway laughing, with a stick in his hand. “I don’t think that fine fellow will trouble us again,” he said. “I will just go after him and see what he does with himself.” With those words he took his hat and started off down the street. The next morning we heard of Mr. Drebber’s mysterious death.’

“This statement came from Mrs. Charpentier’s lips with many gasps and pauses. At times she spoke so low that I could hardly catch the words. I made shorthand notes of all that she said, however, so that there should be no possibility of a mistake.”

“It’s quite exciting,” said Sherlock Holmes, with a yawn. “What happened next?”

“When Mrs. Charpentier paused,” the detective continued, “I saw that the whole case hung upon one point. Fixing her with my eye in a way which I always found effective with women, I asked her at what hour her son returned.

“‘I do not know,’ she answered.

“‘Not know?’

“‘No; he has a latch-key, and he let himself in.’

“‘After you went to bed?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘When did you go to bed?’

“‘About eleven.’

“‘So your son was gone at least two hours?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Possibly four or five?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘What was he doing during that time?’

“‘I do not know,’ she answered, turning white to her very lips.

“Of course after that there was nothing more to be done. I found out where Lieutenant Charpentier was, took two officers with me, and arrested him. When I touched him on the shoulder and warned him to come quietly with us, he answered us as bold as brass, ‘I suppose you are arresting me for being concerned in the death of that scoundrel Drebber,’ he said. We had said nothing to him about it, so that his alluding to it had a most suspicious aspect.”

“Very,” said Holmes.

“He still carried the heavy stick which the mother described him as having with him when he followed Drebber. It was a stout oak cudgel.”

“What is your theory, then?”

“Well, my theory is that he followed Drebber as far as the Brixton Road. When there, a fresh altercation arose between them, in the course of which Drebber received a blow from the stick, in the pit of the stomach, perhaps, which killed him without leaving any mark. The night was so wet that no one was about, so Charpentier dragged the body of his victim into the empty house. As to the candle, and the blood, and the writing on the wall, and the ring, they may all be so many tricks to throw the police on to the wrong scent.”

“Well done!” said Holmes in an encouraging voice. “Really, Gregson, you are getting along. We shall make something of you yet.”

“I flatter myself that I have managed it rather neatly,” the detective answered proudly. “The young man volunteered a statement, in which he said that after following Drebber some time, the latter perceived him, and took a cab in order to get away from him. On his way home he met an old shipmate, and took a long walk with him. On being asked where this old shipmate lived, he was unable to give any satisfactory reply. I think the whole case fits together uncommonly well. What amuses me is to think of Lestrade, who had started off upon the wrong scent. I am afraid he won’t make much of Why, by Jove, here’s the very man himself!”

It was indeed Lestrade, who had ascended the stairs while we were talking, and who now entered the room. The assurance and jauntiness which generally marked his demeanour and dress were, however, wanting. His face was disturbed and troubled, while his clothes were disarranged and untidy. He had evidently come with the intention of consulting with Sherlock Holmes, for on perceiving his colleague he appeared to be embarrassed and put out. He stood in the centre of the room, fumbling nervously with his hat and uncertain what to do. “This is a most extraordinary case,” he said at last—”a most incomprehensible affair.”

“Ah, you find it so, Mr. Lestrade!” cried Gregson, triumphantly. “I thought you would come to that conclusion. Have you managed to find the Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson?”

“The Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson,” said Lestrade gravely, “was murdered at Halliday’s Private Hotel about six o’clock this morning.”

CHAPTER VII. LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

THE intelligence with which Lestrade greeted us was so momentous and so unexpected, that we were all three fairly dumfoundered. Gregson sprang out of his chair and upset the remainder of his whiskey and water. I stared in silence at Sherlock Holmes, whose lips were compressed and his brows drawn down over his eyes.

“Stangerson too!” he muttered. “The plot thickens.”

“It was quite thick enough before,” grumbled Lestrade, taking a chair. “I seem to have dropped into a sort of council of war.”

“Are you — are you sure of this piece of intelligence?” stammered Gregson.

“I have just come from his room,” said Lestrade. “I was the first to discover what had occurred.”

“We have been hearing Gregson’s view of the matter,” Holmes observed. “Would you mind letting us know what you have seen and done?”

“I have no objection,” Lestrade answered, seating himself. “I freely confess that I was of the opinion that Stangerson was concerned in the death of Drebber. This fresh development has shown me that I was completely mistaken. Full of the one idea, I set myself to find out what had become of the Secretary. They had been seen together at Euston Station about half-past eight on the evening of the third. At two in the morning Drebber had been found in the Brixton Road. The question which confronted me was to find out how Stangerson had been employed between 8.30 and the time of the crime, and what had become of him afterwards. I telegraphed to Liverpool, giving a description of the man, and warning them to keep a watch upon the American boats. I then set to work calling upon all the hotels and lodging-houses in the vicinity of Euston. You see, I argued that if Drebber and his companion had become separated, the natural course for the latter would be to put up somewhere in the vicinity for the night, and then to hang about the station again next morning.”

“They would be likely to agree on some meeting-place beforehand,” remarked Holmes.

“So it proved. I spent the whole of yesterday evening in making enquiries entirely without avail. This morning I began very early, and at eight o’clock

I reached Halliday’s Private Hotel, in Little George Street. On my enquiry as to whether a Mr. Stangerson was living there, they at once answered me in the affirmative.

“‘No doubt you are the gentleman whom he was expecting,’ they said. ‘He has been waiting for a gentleman for two days.’

“‘Where is he now?’ I asked.

“‘He is upstairs in bed. He wished to be called at nine.’

“‘I will go up and see him at once,’ I said.

“It seemed to me that my sudden appearance might shake his nerves and lead him to say something unguarded. The Boots volunteered to show me the room: it was on the second floor, and there was a small corridor leading up to it. The Boots pointed out the door to me, and was about to go downstairs again when I saw something that made me feel sickish, in spite of my twenty years’ experience. From under the door there curled a little red ribbon of blood, which had meandered across the passage and formed a little pool along the skirting at the other side. I gave a cry, which brought the Boots back. He nearly fainted when he saw it. The door was locked on the inside, but we put our shoulders to it, and knocked it in. The window of the room was open, and beside the window, all huddled up, lay the body of a man in his nightdress. He was quite dead, and had been for some time, for his limbs were rigid and cold. When we turned him over, the Boots recognised him at once as being the same gentleman who had engaged the room under the name of Joseph Stangerson. The cause of death was a deep stab in the left side, which must have penetrated the heart. And now comes the strangest part of the affair. What do you suppose was above the murdered man?”

I felt a creeping of the flesh, and a presentiment of coming horror, even before Sherlock Holmes answered.

“The word RACHE, written in letters of blood,” he said.

“That was it,” said Lestrade, in an awe-struck voice; and we were all silent for a while.

There was something so methodical and so incomprehensible about the deeds of this unknown assassin, that it imparted a fresh ghastliness to his crimes. My nerves, which were steady enough on the field of battle tingled as I thought of it.

“The man was seen,” continued Lestrade. “A milk boy, passing on his way to the dairy, happened to walk down the lane which leads from the mews at the back of the hotel. He noticed that a ladder, which usually lay there, was raised against one of the windows of the second floor, which was wide open. After passing, he looked back and saw a man descend the ladder. He came down so quietly and openly that the boy imagined him to be some carpenter or joiner at work in the hotel. He took no particular notice of him, beyond thinking in his own mind that it was early for him to be at work. He has an impression that the man was tall, had a reddish face, and was dressed in a long, brownish coat. He must have stayed in the room some little time after the murder, for we found blood-stained water in the basin, where he had washed his hands, and marks on the sheets where he had deliberately wiped his knife."

I glanced at Holmes on hearing the description of the murderer, which tallied so exactly with his own. There was, however, no trace of exultation or satisfaction upon his face.

"Did you find nothing in the room which could furnish a clue to the murderer?" he asked.

"Nothing. Stangerson had Drebber's purse in his pocket, but it seems that this was usual, as he did all the paying. There was eighty odd pounds in it, but nothing had been taken. Whatever the motives of these extraordinary crimes, robbery is certainly not one of them. There were no papers or memoranda in the murdered man's pocket, except a single telegram, dated from Cleveland about a month ago, and containing the words, 'J. H. is in Europe.' There was no name appended to this message."

"And there was nothing else?" Holmes asked.

"Nothing of any importance. The man's novel, with which he had read himself to sleep was lying upon the bed, and his pipe was on a chair beside him. There was a glass of water on the table, and on the window-sill a small chip ointment box containing a couple of pills."

Sherlock Holmes sprang from his chair with an exclamation of delight.

"The last link," he cried, exultantly. "My case is complete."

The two detectives stared at him in amazement.

"I have now in my hands," my companion said, confidently, "all the threads which have formed such a tangle. There are, of course, details to be filled in, but I am as certain of all the main facts, from the time that Drebber parted from Stangerson at the station, up to the discovery of the body of the latter, as if I had seen them with my own eyes. I will give you a proof of my knowledge. Could you lay your hand upon those pills?"

“I have them,” said Lestrade, producing a small white box; “I took them and the purse and the telegram, intending to have them put in a place of safety at the Police Station. It was the merest chance my taking these pills, for I am bound to say that I do not attach any importance to them.”

“Give them here,” said Holmes. “Now, Doctor,” turning to me, “are those ordinary pills?”

They certainly were not. They were of a pearly grey colour, small, round, and almost transparent against the light. “From their lightness and transparency, I should imagine that they are soluble in water,” I remarked.

“Precisely so,” answered Holmes. “Now would you mind going down and fetching that poor little devil of a terrier which has been bad so long, and which the landlady wanted you to put out of its pain yesterday.”

I went downstairs and carried the dog upstair in my arms. It’s laboured breathing and glazing eye showed that it was not far from its end. Indeed, its snow-white muzzle proclaimed that it had already exceeded the usual term of canine existence. I placed it upon a cushion on the rug.

“I will now cut one of these pills in two,” said Holmes, and drawing his penknife he suited the action to the word. “One half we return into the box for future purposes. The other half I will place in this wine glass, in which is a teaspoonful of water. You perceive that our friend, the Doctor, is right, and that it readily dissolves.”

“This may be very interesting,” said Lestrade, in the injured tone of one who suspects that he is being laughed at, “I cannot see, however, what it has to do with the death of Mr. Joseph Stangerson.”

“Patience, my friend, patience! You will find in time that it has everything to do with it. I shall now add a little milk to make the mixture palatable, and on presenting it to the dog we find that he laps it up readily enough.”

As he spoke he turned the contents of the wine glass into a saucer and placed it in front of the terrier, who speedily licked it dry. Sherlock Holmes’ earnest demeanour had so far convinced us that we all sat in silence, watching the animal intently, and expecting some startling effect. None such appeared, however. The dog continued to lie stretched upon tho cushion, breathing in a laboured way, but apparently neither the better nor the worse for its draught.

Holmes had taken out his watch, and as minute followed minute without result, an expression of the utmost chagrin and disappointment appeared upon his features. He gnawed his lip, drummed his fingers upon the table, and showed every other symptom of acute impatience. So great was his emotion, that I felt sincerely sorry for him, while the two detectives smiled derisively, by no means displeased at this check which he had met.

"It can't be a coincidence," he cried, at last springing from his chair and pacing wildly up and down the room; "it is impossible that it should be a mere coincidence. The very pills which I suspected in the case of Drebber are actually found after the death of Stangerson. And yet they are inert. What can it mean? Surely my whole chain of reasoning cannot have been false. It is impossible! And yet this wretched dog is none the worse. Ah, I have it! I have it!" With a perfect shriek of delight he rushed to the box, cut the other pill in two, dissolved it, added milk, and presented it to the terrier. The unfortunate creature's tongue seemed hardly to have been moistened in it before it gave a convulsive shiver in every limb, and lay as rigid and lifeless as if it had been struck by lightning.

Sherlock Holmes drew a long breath, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "I should have more faith," he said; "I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears to be opposed to a long train of deductions, it invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation. Of the two pills in that box one was of the most deadly poison, and the other was entirely harmless. I ought to have known that before ever I saw the box at all."

This last statement appeared to me to be so startling, that I could hardly believe that he was in his sober senses. There was the dead dog, however, to prove that his conjecture had been correct. It seemed to me that the mists in my own mind were gradually clearing away, and I began to have a dim, vague perception of the truth.

"All this seems strange to you," continued Holmes, "because you failed at the beginning of the inquiry to grasp the importance of the single real clue which was presented to you. I had the good fortune to seize upon that, and everything which has occurred since then has served to confirm my original supposition, and, indeed, was the logical sequence of it. Hence things which have perplexed you and made the case more obscure, have served to enlighten me and to strengthen my conclusions. It is a mistake to confound strangeness with mystery. The most commonplace crime is often the most mysterious because it presents no new or special features from which deductions may be drawn. This murder would have been infinitely more difficult to unravel had the body of the victim been simply found lying in the roadway without any of those *outré* and sensational accompaniments which have rendered it remarkable. These strange details, far from making the case more difficult, have really had the effect of making it less so.”

Mr. Gregson, who had listened to this address with considerable impatience, could contain himself no longer. “Look here, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said, “we are all ready to acknowledge that you are a smart man, and that you have your own methods of working. We want something more than mere theory and preaching now, though. It is a case of taking the man. I have made my case out, and it seems I was wrong. Young Charpentier could not have been engaged in this second affair. Lestrade went after his man, Stangerson, and it appears that he was wrong too. You have thrown out hints here, and hints there, and seem to know more than we do, but the time has come when we feel that we have a right to ask you straight how much you do know of the business. Can you name the man who did it?”

“I cannot help feeling that Gregson is right, sir,” remarked Lestrade. “We have both tried, and we have both failed. You have remarked more than once since I have been in the room that you had all the evidence which you require. Surely you will not withhold it any longer.”

“Any delay in arresting the assassin,” I observed, “might give him time to perpetrate some fresh atrocity.”

Thus pressed by us all, Holmes showed signs of irresolution. He continued to walk up and down the room with his head sunk on his chest and his brows drawn down, as was his habit when lost in thought.

“There will be no more murders,” he said at last, stopping abruptly and facing us. “You can put that consideration out of the question. You have asked me if I know the name of the assassin. I do. The mere knowing of his name is a small thing, however, compared with the power of laying our hands upon him. This I expect very shortly to do. I have good hopes of managing it through my own arrangements; but it is a thing which needs delicate handling, for we have a shrewd and desperate man to deal with, who is supported, as I have had occasion to prove, by another who is as clever as himself. As long as this man has no idea that anyone can have a clue there is some chance of securing him; but if he had the slightest suspicion, he would change his name, and vanish in an instant among the four million inhabitants of this great city. Without meaning to hurt either of your feelings, I am bound to say that I consider these men to be more than a match for the official force, and that is why I have not asked your assistance. If I fail I shall, of course, incur all the blame due to this omission; but that I am prepared for. At present I am ready to promise that the instant that I can communicate with you without endangering my own combinations, I shall do so."

Gregson and Lestrade seemed to be far from satisfied by this assurance, or by the depreciating allusion to the detective police. The former had flushed up to the roots of his flaxen hair, while the other's beady eyes glistened with curiosity and resentment. Neither of them had time to speak, however, before there was a tap at the door, and the spokesman of the street Arabs, young Wiggins, introduced his insignificant and unsavoury person.

"Please, sir," he said, touching his forelock, "I have the cab downstairs."

"Good boy," said Holmes, blandly. "Why don't you introduce this pattern at Scotland Yard?" he continued, taking a pair of steel handcuffs from a drawer. "See how beautifully the spring works. They fasten in an instant."

"The old pattern is good enough," remarked Lestrade, "if we can only find the man to put them on."

"Very good, very good," said Holmes, smiling. "The cabman may as well help me with my boxes. Just ask him to step up, Wiggins."

I was surprised to find my companion speaking as though he were about to set out on a journey, since he had not said anything to me about it. There was a small portmanteau in the room, and this he pulled out and began to strap. He was busily engaged at it when the cabman entered the room.

"Just give me a help with this buckle, cabman," he said, kneeling over his task, and never turning his head.

The fellow came forward with a somewhat sullen, defiant air, and put down his hands to assist. At that instant there was a sharp click, the jangling of metal, and Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet again.

"Gentlemen," he cried, with flashing eyes, "let me introduce you to Mr. Jefferson Hope, the murderer of Enoch Drebber and of Joseph Stangerson."

The whole thing occurred in a moment — so quickly that I had no time to realise it. I have a vivid recollection of that instant, of Holmes' triumphant expression and the ring of his voice, of the cabman's dazed, savage face, as he glared at the glittering handcuffs, which had appeared as if by magic upon his wrists. For a second or two we might have been a group of statues.

Then, with an inarticulate roar of fury, the prisoner wrenched himself free from Holmes's grasp, and hurled himself through the window. Woodwork and glass gave way before him; but before he got quite through, Gregson, Lestrade, and Holmes sprang upon him like so many staghounds. He was dragged back into the room, and then commenced a terrific conflict. So powerful and so fierce was he, that the four of us were shaken off again and again. He appeared to have the convulsive strength of a man in an epileptic fit. His face and hands were terribly mangled by his passage through the glass, but loss of blood had no effect in diminishing his resistance. It was not until Lestrade succeeded in getting his hand inside his neckcloth and half-strangling him that we made him realise that his struggles were of no avail; and even then we felt no security until we had pinioned his feet as well as his hands. That done, we rose to our feet breathless and panting.

"We have his cab," said Sherlock Holmes. "It will serve to take him to Scotland Yard. And now, gentlemen," he continued, with a pleasant smile, "we have reached the end of our little mystery. You are very welcome to put any questions that you like to me now, and there is no danger that I will refuse to answer them."

PART II.

The Country of the Saints.

CHAPTER I. ON THE GREAT ALKALI PLAIN.

IN the central portion of the great North American Continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert, which for many a long year served as a barrier against the advance of civilisation. From the Sierra Nevada to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado upon the south, is a region of desolation and silence. Nor is Nature always in one mood throughout this grim district. It comprises snow-capped and lofty mountains, and dark and gloomy valleys. There are swift-flowing rivers which dash through jagged cañons; and there are enormous plains, which in winter are white with snow, and in summer are grey with the saline alkali dust. They all preserve, however, the common characteristics of barrenness, inhospitality, and misery.

There are no inhabitants of this land of despair. A band of Pawnees or of Blackfeet may occasionally traverse it in order to reach other hunting-grounds, but the hardiest of the braves are glad to lose sight of those awesome plains, and to find themselves once more upon their prairies. The coyote skulks among the scrub, the buzzard flaps heavily through the air, and the clumsy grizzly bear lumbers through the dark ravines, and picks up such sustenance as it can amongst the rocks. These are the sole dwellers in the wilderness.

In the whole world there can be no more dreary view than that from the northern slope of the Sierra Blanco. As far as the eye can reach stretches the great flat plain-land, all dusted over with patches of alkali, and intersected by clumps of the dwarfish chaparral bushes. On the extreme verge of the horizon lie a long chain of mountain peaks, with their rugged summits flecked with snow. In this great stretch of country there is no sign of life, nor of anything appertaining to life. There is no bird in the steel-blue heaven, no movement upon the dull, grey earth — above all, there is absolute silence. Listen as one may, there is no shadow of a sound in all that mighty wilderness; nothing but silence — complete and heart-subduing silence.

It has been said there is nothing appertaining to life upon the broad plain. That is hardly true. Looking down from the Sierra Blanco, one sees a pathway traced out across the desert, which winds away and is lost in the extreme distance. It is rutted with wheels and trodden down by the feet of many adventurers. Here and there there are scattered white objects which glisten in the sun, and stand out against the dull deposit of alkali. Approach, and examine them! They are bones: some large and coarse, others smaller and more delicate. The former have belonged to oxen, and the latter to men. For fifteen hundred miles one may trace this ghastly caravan route by these scattered remains of those who had fallen by the wayside.

Looking down on this very scene, there stood upon the fourth of May, eighteen hundred and forty-seven, a solitary traveller. His appearance was such that he might have been the very genius or demon of the region. An observer would have found it difficult to say whether he was nearer to forty or to sixty. His face was lean and haggard, and the brown parchment-like skin was drawn tightly over the projecting bones; his long, brown hair and beard were all flecked and dashed with white; his eyes were sunken in his head, and burned with an unnatural lustre; while the hand which grasped his rifle was hardly more fleshy than that of a skeleton. As he stood, he leaned upon his weapon for support, and yet his tall figure and the massive framework of his bones suggested a wiry and vigorous constitution. His gaunt face, however, and his clothes, which hung so baggily over his shrivelled limbs, proclaimed what it was that gave him that senile and decrepit appearance. The man was dying — dying from hunger and from thirst.

He had toiled painfully down the ravine, and on to this little elevation, in the vain hope of seeing some signs of water. Now the great salt plain stretched before his eyes, and the distant belt of savage mountains, without a sign anywhere of plant or tree, which might indicate the presence of moisture. In all that broad landscape there was no gleam of hope. North, and east, and west he looked with wild questioning eyes, and then he realised that his wanderings had come to an end, and that there, on that barren crag, he was about to die. “Why not here, as well as in a feather bed, twenty years hence,” he muttered, as he seated himself in the shelter of a boulder.

Before sitting down, he had deposited upon the ground his useless rifle, and also a large bundle tied up in a grey shawl, which he had carried slung over his right shoulder. It appeared to be somewhat too heavy for his strength, for in lowering it, it came down on the ground with some little violence. Instantly there broke from the grey parcel a little moaning cry, and from it there protruded a small, scared face, with very bright brown eyes, and two little speckled, dimpled fists.

"You've hurt me!" said a childish voice reproachfully.

"Have I though," the man answered penitently, "I didn't go for to do it." As he spoke he unwrapped the grey shawl and extricated a pretty little girl of about five years of age, whose dainty shoes and smart pink frock with its little linen apron all bespoke a mother's care. The child was pale and wan, but her healthy arms and legs showed that she had suffered less than her companion.

"How is it now?" he answered anxiously, for she was still rubbing the towsy golden curls which covered the back of her head.

"Kiss it and make it well," she said, with perfect gravity, shoving the injured part up to him. "That's what mother used to do. Where's mother?"

"Mother's gone. I guess you'll see her before long."

"Gone, eh!" said the little girl. "Funny, she didn't say good-bye; she 'most always did if she was just goin' over to Auntie's for tea, and now she's been away three days. Say, it's awful dry, ain't it? Ain't there no water, nor nothing to eat?"

"No, there ain't nothing, dearie. You'll just need to be patient awhile, and then you'll be all right. Put your head up agin me like that, and then you'll feel bullier. It ain't easy to talk when your lips is like leather, but I guess I'd best let you know how the cards lie. What's that you've got?"

"Pretty things! fine things!" cried the little girl enthusiastically, holding up two glittering fragments of mica. "When we goes back to home I'll give them to brother Bob."

"You'll see prettier things than them soon," said the man confidently. "You just wait a bit. I was going to tell you though — you remember when we left the river?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, we reckoned we'd strike another river soon, d'ye see. But there was somethin' wrong; compasses, or map, or somethin', and it didn't turn up. Water ran out. Just except a little drop for the likes of you and — and ——"

"And you couldn't wash yourself," interrupted his companion gravely, staring up at his grimy visage.

"No, nor drink. And Mr. Bender, he was the fust to go, and then Indian Pete, and then Mrs. McGregor, and then Johnny Hones, and then, dearie, your mother.”

“Then mother’s a deader too,” cried the little girl dropping her face in her pinafore and sobbing bitterly.

“Yes, they all went except you and me. Then I thought there was some chance of water in this direction, so I heaved you over my shoulder and we tramped it together. It don’t seem as though we’ve improved matters. There’s an almighty small chance for us now!”

“Do you mean that we are going to die too?” asked the child, checking her sobs, and raising her tear-stained face.

“I guess that’s about the size of it.”

“Why didn’t you say so before?” she said, laughing gleefully. “You gave me such a fright. Why, of course, now as long as we die we’ll be with mother again.”

“Yes, you will, dearie.”

“And you too. I’ll tell her how awful good you’ve been. I’ll bet she meets us at the door of Heaven with a big pitcher of water, and a lot of buckwheat cakes, hot, and toasted on both sides, like Bob and me was fond of. How long will it be first?”

“I don’t know — not very long.” The man’s eyes were fixed upon the northern horizon. In the blue vault of the heaven there had appeared three little specks which increased in size every moment, so rapidly did they approach. They speedily resolved themselves into three large brown birds, which circled over the heads of the two wanderers, and then settled upon some rocks which overlooked them. They were buzzards, the vultures of the west, whose coming is the forerunner of death.

“Cocks and hens,” cried the little girl gleefully, pointing at their ill-omened forms, and clapping her hands to make them rise. “Say, did God make this country?”

“In course He did,” said her companion, rather startled by this unexpected question.

“He made the country down in Illinois, and He made the Missouri,” the little girl continued. “I guess somebody else made the country in these parts. It’s not nearly so well done. They forgot the water and the trees.”

“What would ye think of offering up prayer?” the man asked diffidently.

“It ain’t night yet,” she answered.

“It don’t matter. It ain’t quite regular, but He won’t mind that, you bet. You say over them ones that you used to say every night in the waggon when we was on the Plains.”

“Why don’t you say some yourself?” the child asked, with wondering eyes.

“I disremember them,” he answered. “I hain’t said none since I was half the height o’ that gun. I guess it’s never too late. You say them out, and I’ll stand by and come in on the choruses.”

“Then you’ll need to kneel down, and me too,” she said, laying the shawl out for that purpose. “You’ve got to put your hands up like this. It makes you feel kind o’ good.”

It was a strange sight had there been anything but the buzzards to see it. Side by side on the narrow shawl knelt the two wanderers, the little prattling child and the reckless, hardened adventurer. Her chubby face, and his haggard, angular visage were both turned up to the cloudless heaven in heartfelt entreaty to that dread being with whom they were face to face, while the two voices — the one thin and clear, the other deep and harsh — united in the entreaty for mercy and forgiveness. The prayer finished, they resumed their seat in the shadow of the boulder until the child fell asleep, nestling upon the broad breast of her protector. He watched over her slumber for some time, but Nature proved to be too strong for him. For three days and three nights he had allowed himself neither rest nor repose. Slowly the eyelids drooped over the tired eyes, and the head sunk lower and lower upon the breast, until the man’s grizzled beard was mixed with the gold tresses of his companion, and both slept the same deep and dreamless slumber.

Had the wanderer remained awake for another half hour a strange sight would have met his eyes. Far away on the extreme verge of the alkali plain there rose up a little spray of dust, very slight at first, and hardly to be distinguished from the mists of the distance, but gradually growing higher and broader until it formed a solid, well-defined cloud. This cloud continued to increase in size until it became evident that it could only be raised by a great multitude of moving creatures. In more fertile spots the observer would have come to the conclusion that one of those great herds of bisons which graze upon the prairie land was approaching him. This was obviously impossible in these arid wilds. As the whirl of dust drew nearer to the solitary bluff upon which the two castaways were reposing, the canvas-covered tilts of waggons and the figures of armed horsemen began to show up through the haze, and the apparition revealed itself as being a great caravan upon its journey for the West. But what a caravan! When the head of it had reached the base of the mountains, the rear was not yet visible on the horizon. Right across the enormous plain stretched the straggling array, waggons and carts, men on horseback, and men on foot. Innumerable women who staggered along under burdens, and children who toddled beside the waggons or peeped out from under the white coverings. This was evidently no ordinary party of immigrants, but rather some nomad people who had been compelled from stress of circumstances to seek themselves a new country. There rose through the clear air a confused clattering and rumbling from this great mass of humanity, with the creaking of wheels and the neighing of horses. Loud as it was, it was not sufficient to rouse the two tired wayfarers above them.

At the head of the column there rode a score or more of grave ironfaced men, clad in sombre homespun garments and armed with rifles. On reaching the base of the bluff they halted, and held a short council among themselves.

“The wells are to the right, my brothers,” said one, a hard-lipped, clean-shaven man with grizzly hair.

“To the right of the Sierra Blanco — so we shall reach the Rio Grande,” said another.

“Fear not for water,” cried a third. “He who could draw it from the rocks will not now abandon His own chosen people.”

“Amen! Amen!” responded the whole party.

They were about to resume their journey when one of the youngest and keenest-eyed uttered an exclamation and pointed up at the rugged crag above them. From its summit there fluttered a little wisp of pink, showing up hard and bright against the grey rocks behind. At the sight there was a general reining up of horses and unslinging of guns, while fresh horsemen came galloping up to reinforce the vanguard. The word ‘Redskins’ was on every lip.

“There can’t be any number of Injuns here,” said the elderly man who appeared to be in command. “We have passed the Pawnees, and there are no other tribes until we cross the great mountains.”

“Shall I go forward and see, Brother Stangerson,” asked one of the band.

“And I,” “and I,” cried a dozen voices.

“Leave your horses below and we will await you here,” the Elder answered. In a moment the young fellows had dismounted, fastened their horses, and were ascending the precipitous slope which led up to the object which had excited their curiosity. They advanced rapidly and noiselessly, with the confidence and dexterity of practised scouts. The watchers from the plain below could see them flit from rock to rock until their figures stood out against the skyline. The young man who had first given the alarm was leading them. Suddenly his followers saw him throw up his hands, as though overcome with astonishment, and on joining him they were affected in the same way by the sight which met their eyes.

On the little plateau which crowned the barren hill there stood a single giant boulder, and against this boulder there lay a tall man, long-bearded and hard-featured, but of an excessive thinness. His placid face and regular breathing showed that he was fast asleep. Beside him lay a little child, with her round white arms encircling his brown sinewy neck, and her golden haired head resting upon the breast of his velveteen tunic. Her rosy lips were parted, showing the regular line of snow-white teeth within, and a playful smile played over her infantile features. Her plump little white legs terminating in white socks and neat shoes with shining buckles, offered a strange contrast to the long shrivelled members of her companion. On the ledge of rock above this strange couple there stood three solemn buzzards, who, at the sight of the new comers uttered raucous screams of disappointment and flapped sullenly away.

The cries of the foul birds awoke the two sleepers who stared about them in bewilderment. The man staggered to his feet and looked down upon the plain which had been so desolate when sleep had overtaken him, and which was now traversed by this enormous body of men and of beasts. His face assumed an expression of incredulity as he gazed, and he passed his boney hand over his eyes. “This is what they call delirium, I guess,” he muttered. The child stood beside him, holding on to the skirt of his coat, and said nothing but looked all round her with the wondering questioning gaze of childhood.

The rescuing party were speedily able to convince the two castaways that their appearance was no delusion. One of them seized the little girl, and hoisted her upon his shoulder, while two others supported her gaunt companion, and assisted him towards the waggons.

“My name is John Ferrier,” the wanderer explained; “me and that little un are all that’s left o’ twenty-one people. The rest is all dead o’ thirst and hunger away down in the south.”

“Is she your child?” asked someone.

“I guess she is now,” the other cried, defiantly; “she’s mine ‘cause I saved her. No man will take her from me. She’s Lucy Ferrier from this day on. Who are you, though?” he continued, glancing with curiosity at his stalwart, sunburned rescuers; “there seems to be a powerful lot of ye.”

“Nigh upon ten thousand,” said one of the young men; “we are the persecuted children of God — the chosen of the Angel Merona.”

“I never heard tell on him,” said the wanderer. “He appears to have chosen a fair crowd of ye.”

“Do not jest at that which is sacred,” said the other sternly. “We are of those who believe in those sacred writings, drawn in Egyptian letters on plates of beaten gold, which were handed unto the holy Joseph Smith at Palmyra. We have come from Nauvoo, in the State of Illinois, where we had founded our temple. We have come to seek a refuge from the violent man and from the godless, even though it be the heart of the desert.”

The name of Nauvoo evidently recalled recollections to John Ferrier. “I see,” he said, “you are the Mormons.”

“We are the Mormons,” answered his companions with one voice.

“And where are you going?”

“We do not know. The hand of God is leading us under the person of our Prophet. You must come before him. He shall say what is to be done with you.”

They had reached the base of the hill by this time, and were surrounded by crowds of the pilgrims — pale-faced meek-looking women, strong laughing children, and anxious earnest-eyed men. Many were the cries of astonishment and of commiseration which arose from them when they perceived the youth of one of the strangers and the destitution of the other. Their escort did not halt, however, but pushed on, followed by a great crowd of Mormons, until they reached a waggon, which was conspicuous for its great size and for the gaudiness and smartness of its appearance. Six horses were yoked to it, whereas the others were furnished with two, or, at most, four a-piece. Beside the driver there sat a man who could not have been more than thirty years of age, but whose massive head and resolute expression marked him as a leader. He was reading a brown-backed volume, but as the crowd approached he laid it aside, and listened attentively to an account of the episode. Then he turned to the two castaways.

“If we take you with us,” he said, in solemn words, “it can only be as believers in our own creed. We shall have no wolves in our fold. Better far that your bones should bleach in this wilderness than that you should prove to be that little speck of decay which in time corrupts the whole fruit. Will you come with us on these terms?”

“Guess I’ll come with you on any terms,” said Ferrier, with such emphasis that the grave Elders could not restrain a smile. The leader alone retained his stern, impressive expression.

“Take him, Brother Stangerson,” he said, “give him food and drink, and the child likewise. Let it be your task also to teach him our holy creed. We have delayed long enough. Forward! On, on to Zion!”

“On, on to Zion!” cried the crowd of Mormons, and the words rippled down the long caravan, passing from mouth to mouth until they died away in a dull murmur in the far distance. With a cracking of whips and a creaking of wheels the great waggons got into motion, and soon the whole caravan was winding along once more. The Elder to whose care the two waifs had been committed, led them to his waggon, where a meal was already awaiting them.

“You shall remain here,” he said. “In a few days you will have recovered from your fatigues. In the meantime, remember that now and for ever you are of our religion. Brigham Young has said it, and he has spoken with the voice of Joseph Smith, which is the voice of God.”

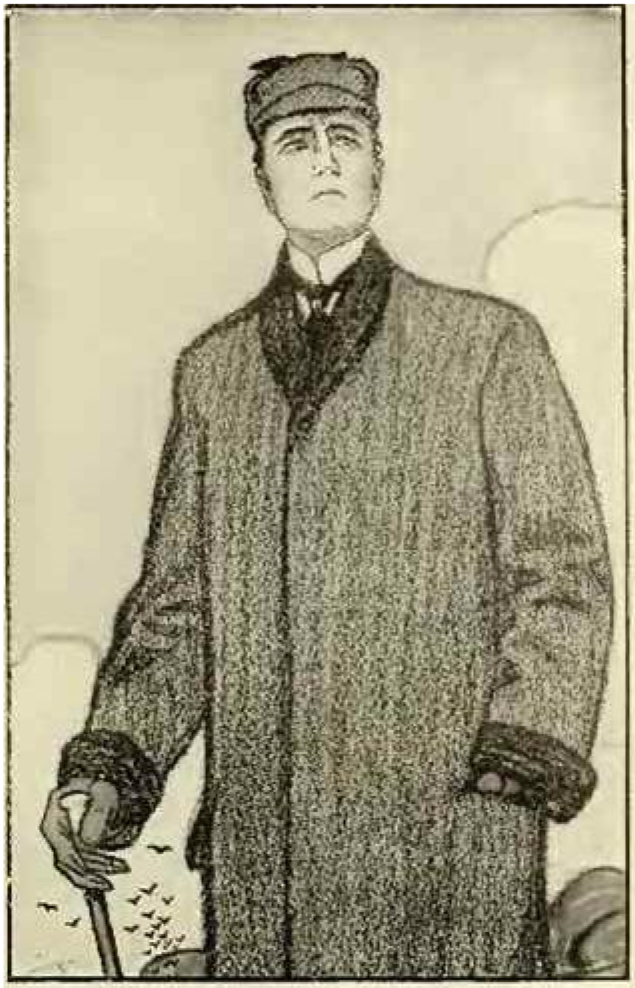

"PLENTY ON MY MIND—PLENTY!"

—*A Study in Scarlet*

CHAPTER II. THE FLOWER OF UTAH.

THIS is not the place to commemorate the trials and privations endured by the immigrant Mormons before they came to their final haven. From the shores of the Mississippi to the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains they had struggled on with a constancy almost unparalleled in history. The savage man, and the savage beast, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disease — every impediment which Nature could place in the way, had all been overcome with Anglo-Saxon tenacity. Yet the long journey and the accumulated terrors had shaken the hearts of the stoutest among them. There was not one who did not sink upon his knees in heartfelt prayer when they saw the broad valley of Utah bathed in the sunlight beneath them, and learned from the lips of their leader that this was the promised land, and that these virgin acres were to be theirs for evermore.

Young speedily proved himself to be a skilful administrator as well as a resolute chief. Maps were drawn and charts prepared, in which the future city was sketched out. All around farms were apportioned and allotted in proportion to the standing of each individual. The tradesman was put to his trade and the artisan to his calling. In the town streets and squares sprang up, as if by magic. In the country there was draining and hedging, planting and clearing, until the next summer saw the whole country golden with the wheat crop. Everything prospered in the strange settlement. Above all, the great temple which they had erected in the centre of the city grew ever taller and larger. From the first blush of dawn until the closing of the twilight, the clatter of the hammer and the rasp of the saw was never absent from the monument which the immigrants erected to Him who had led them safe through many dangers.

The two castaways, John Ferrier and the little girl who had shared his fortunes and had been adopted as his daughter, accompanied the Mormons to the end of their great pilgrimage. Little Lucy Ferrier was borne along pleasantly enough in Elder Stangerson’s waggon, a retreat which she shared with the Mormon’s three wives and with his son, a headstrong forward boy of twelve. Having rallied, with the elasticity of childhood, from the shock caused by her mother’s death, she soon became a pet with the women, and reconciled herself to this new life in her moving canvas-covered home. In the meantime Ferrier having recovered from his privations, distinguished himself as a useful guide and an indefatigable hunter. So rapidly did he gain the esteem of his new companions, that when they reached the end of their wanderings, it was unanimously agreed that he should be provided with as large and as fertile a tract of land as any of the settlers, with the exception of Young himself, and of Stangerson, Kemball, Johnston, and Drebber, who were the four principal Elders.

On the farm thus acquired John Ferrier built himself a substantial log-house, which received so many additions in succeeding years that it grew into a roomy villa. He was a man of a practical turn of mind, keen in his dealings and skilful with his hands. His iron constitution enabled him to work morning and evening at improving and tilling his lands. Hence it came about that his farm and all that belonged to him prospered exceedingly. In three years he was better off than his neighbours, in six he was well-to-do, in nine he was rich, and in twelve there were not half a dozen men in the whole of Salt Lake City who could compare with him. From the great inland sea to the distant Wahsatch Mountains there was no name better known than that of John Ferrier.

There was one way and only one in which he offended the susceptibilities of his co-religionists. No argument or persuasion could ever induce him to set up a female establishment after the manner of his companions. He never gave reasons for this persistent refusal, but contented himself by resolutely and inflexibly adhering to his determination. There were some who accused him of lukewarmness in his adopted religion, and others who put it down to greed of wealth and reluctance to incur expense. Others, again, spoke of some early love affair, and of a fair-haired girl who had pined away on the shores of the Atlantic. Whatever the reason, Ferrier remained strictly celibate. In every other respect he conformed to the religion of the young settlement, and gained the name of being an orthodox and straight-walking man.

Lucy Ferrier grew up within the log-house, and assisted her adopted father in all his undertakings. The keen air of the mountains and the balsamic odour of the pine trees took the place of nurse and mother to the young girl. As year succeeded to year she grew taller and stronger, her cheek more rudy, and her step more elastic. Many a wayfarer upon the high road which ran by Ferrier’s farm felt long-forgotten thoughts revive in their mind as they watched her lithe girlish figure tripping through the wheatfields, or met her mounted upon her father’s mustang, and managing it with all the ease and grace of a true child of the West. So the bud blossomed into a flower, and the year which saw her father the richest of the farmers left her as fair a specimen of American girlhood as could be found in the whole Pacific slope.

It was not the father, however, who first discovered that the child had developed into the woman. It seldom is in such cases. That mysterious change is too subtle and too gradual to be measured by dates. Least of all does the maiden herself know it until the tone of a voice or the touch of a hand sets her heart thrilling within her, and she learns, with a mixture of pride and of fear, that a new and a larger nature has awoken within her. There are few who cannot recall that day and remember the one little incident which heralded the dawn of a new life. In the case of Lucy Ferrier the occasion was serious enough in itself, apart from its future influence on her destiny and that of many besides.

It was a warm June morning, and the Latter Day Saints were as busy as the bees whose hive they have chosen for their emblem. In the fields and in the streets rose the same hum of human industry. Down the dusty high roads defiled long streams of heavily-laden mules, all heading to the west, for the gold fever had broken out in California, and the Overland Route lay through the City of the Elect. There, too, were droves of sheep and bullocks coming in from the outlying pasture lands, and trains of tired immigrants, men and horses equally weary of their interminable journey. Through all this motley assemblage, threading her way with the skill of an accomplished rider, there galloped Lucy Ferrier, her fair face flushed with the exercise and her long chestnut hair floating out behind her. She had a commission from her father in the City, and was dashing in as she had done many a time before, with all the fearlessness of youth, thinking only of her task and how it was to be performed. The travel-stained adventurers gazed after her in astonishment, and even the unemotional Indians, journeying in with their pelties, relaxed their accustomed stoicism as they marvelled at the beauty of the pale-faced maiden.

She had reached the outskirts of the city when she found the road blocked by a great drove of cattle, driven by a half-dozen wild-looking herdsmen from the plains. In her impatience she endeavoured to pass this obstacle by pushing her horse into what appeared to be a gap. Scarcely had she got fairly into it, however, before the beasts closed in behind her, and she found herself completely imbedded in the moving stream of fierce-eyed, long-horned bullocks. Accustomed as she was to deal with cattle, she was not alarmed at her situation, but took advantage of every opportunity to urge her horse on in the hopes of pushing her way through the cavalcade. Unfortunately the horns of one of the creatures, either by accident or design, came in violent contact with the flank of the mustang, and excited it to madness. In an instant it reared up upon its hind legs with a snort of rage, and pranced and tossed in a way that would have unseated any but a most skilful rider. The situation was full of peril. Every plunge of the excited horse brought it against the horns again, and goaded it to fresh madness. It was all that the girl could do to keep herself in the saddle, yet a slip would mean a terrible death under the hoofs of the unwieldy and terrified animals. Unaccustomed to sudden emergencies, her head began to swim, and her grip upon the bridle to relax. Choked by the rising cloud of dust and by the steam from the struggling creatures, she might have abandoned her efforts in despair, but for a kindly voice at her elbow which assured her of assistance. At the same moment a sinewy brown hand caught the frightened horse by the curb, and forcing a way through the drove, soon brought her to the outskirts.

“You’re not hurt, I hope, miss,” said her preserver, respectfully.

She looked up at his dark, fierce face, and laughed saucily. “I’m awful frightened,” she said, naively; “whoever would have thought that Poncho would have been so scared by a lot of cows?”

“Thank God you kept your seat,” the other said earnestly. He was a tall, savage-looking young fellow, mounted on a powerful roan horse, and clad in the rough dress of a hunter, with a long rifle slung over his shoulders. “I guess you are the daughter of John Ferrier,” he remarked, “I saw you ride down from his house. When you see him, ask him if he remembers the Jefferson Hopes of St. Louis. If he’s the same Ferrier, my father and he were pretty thick.”

“Hadn’t you better come and ask yourself?” she asked, demurely.

The young fellow seemed pleased at the suggestion, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure. “I’ll do so,” he said, “we’ve been in the mountains for two months, and are not over and above in visiting condition. He must take us as he finds us.”

“He has a good deal to thank you for, and so have I,” she answered, “he’s awful fond of me. If those cows had jumped on me he’d have never got over it.”

“Neither would I,” said her companion.

“You! Well, I don’t see that it would make much matter to you, anyhow. You ain’t even a friend of ours.”

The young hunter’s dark face grew so gloomy over this remark that Lucy Ferrier laughed aloud.

“There, I didn’t mean that,” she said; “of course, you are a friend now. You must come and see us. Now I must push along, or father won’t trust me with his business any more. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye,” he answered, raising his broad sombrero, and bending over her little hand. She wheeled her mustang round, gave it a cut with her riding-whip, and darted away down the broad road in a rolling cloud of dust.

Young Jefferson Hope rode on with his companions, gloomy and taciturn. He and they had been among the Nevada Mountains prospecting for silver, and were returning to Salt Lake City in the hope of raising capital enough to work some lodes which they had discovered. He had been as keen as any of them upon the business until this sudden incident had drawn his thoughts into another channel. The sight of the fair young girl, as frank and wholesome as the Sierra breezes, had stirred his volcanic, untamed heart to its very depths. When she had vanished from his sight, he realised that a crisis had come in his life, and that neither silver speculations nor any other questions could ever be of such importance to him as this new and all-absorbing one. The love which had sprung up in his heart was not the sudden, changeable fancy of a boy, but rather the wild, fierce passion of a man of strong will and imperious temper. He had been accustomed to succeed in all that he undertook. He swore in his heart that he would not fail in this if human effort and human perseverance could render him successful.

He called on John Ferrier that night, and many times again, until his face was a familiar one at the farm-house. John, cooped up in the valley, and absorbed in his work, had had little chance of learning the news of the outside world during the last twelve years. All this Jefferson Hope was able to tell him, and in a style which interested Lucy as well as her father. He had been a pioneer in California, and could narrate many a strange tale of fortunes made and fortunes lost in those wild, halcyon days. He had been a scout too, and a trapper, a silver explorer, and a ranchman. Wherever stirring adventures were to be had, Jefferson Hope had been there in search of them. He soon became a favourite with the old farmer, who spoke eloquently of his virtues. On such occasions, Lucy was silent, but her blushing cheek and her bright, happy eyes, showed only too clearly that her young heart was no longer her own. Her honest father may not have observed these symptoms, but they were assuredly not thrown away upon the man who had won her affections.

It was a summer evening when he came galloping down the road and pulled up at the gate. She was at the doorway, and came down to meet him. He threw the bridle over the fence and strode up the pathway.

"I am off, Lucy," he said, taking her two hands in his, and gazing tenderly down into her face; "I won't ask you to come with me now, but will you be ready to come when I am here again?"

"And when will that be?" she asked, blushing and laughing.

"A couple of months at the outside. I will come and claim you then, my darling. There's no one who can stand between us."

"And how about father?" she asked.

"He has given his consent, provided we get these mines working all right. I have no fear on that head."

"Oh, well; of course, if you and father have arranged it all, there's no more to be said," she whispered, with her cheek against his broad breast.

"Thank God!" he said, hoarsely, stooping and kissing her. "It is settled, then. The longer I stay, the harder it will be to go. They are waiting for me at the cañon. Good-bye, my own darling — good-bye. In two months you shall see me."

He tore himself from her as he spoke, and, flinging himself upon his horse, galloped furiously away, never even looking round, as though afraid that his resolution might fail him if he took one glance at what he was leaving. She stood at the gate, gazing after him until he vanished from her sight. Then she walked back into the house, the happiest girl in all Utah.

CHAPTER III. JOHN FERRIER TALKS WITH THE PROPHET.

THREE weeks had passed since Jefferson Hope and his comrades had departed from Salt Lake City. John Ferrier's heart was sore within him when he thought of the young man's return, and of the impending loss of his adopted child. Yet her bright and happy face reconciled him to the arrangement more than any argument could have done. He had always determined, deep down in his resolute heart, that nothing would ever induce him to allow his daughter to wed a Mormon. Such a marriage he regarded as no marriage at all, but as a shame and a disgrace. Whatever he might think of the Mormon doctrines, upon that one point he was inflexible. He had to seal his mouth on the subject, however, for to express an unorthodox opinion was a dangerous matter in those days in the Land of the Saints.

Yes, a dangerous matter — so dangerous that even the most saintly dared only whisper their religious opinions with bated breath, lest something which fell from their lips might be misconstrued, and bring down a swift retribution upon them. The victims of persecution had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description. Not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehm-gericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy, were ever able to put a more formidable machinery in motion than that which cast a cloud over the State of Utah.

Its invisibility, and the mystery which was attached to it, made this organization doubly terrible. It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. The man who held out against the Church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. His wife and his children awaited him at home, but no father ever returned to tell them how he had fared at the hands of his secret judges. A rash word or a hasty act was followed by annihilation, and yet none knew what the nature might be of this terrible power which was suspended over them. No wonder that men went about in fear and trembling, and that even in the heart of the wilderness they dared not whisper the doubts which oppressed them.

At first this vague and terrible power was exercised only upon the recalcitrants who, having embraced the Mormon faith, wished afterwards to pervert or to abandon it. Soon, however, it took a wider range. The supply of adult women was running short, and polygamy without a female population on which to draw was a barren doctrine indeed. Strange rumours began to be bandied about — rumours of murdered immigrants and rifled camps in regions where Indians had never been seen. Fresh women appeared in the harems of the Elders — women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror. Belated wanderers upon the mountains spoke of gangs of armed men, masked, stealthy, and noiseless, who flitted by them in the darkness. These tales and rumours took substance and shape, and were corroborated and re-corroborated, until they resolved themselves into a definite name. To this day, in the lonely ranches of the West, the name of the Danite Band, or the Avenging Angels, is a sinister and an ill-omened one.

Fuller knowledge of the organization which produced such terrible results served to increase rather than to lessen the horror which it inspired in the minds of men. None knew who belonged to this ruthless society. The names of the participators in the deeds of blood and violence done under the name of religion were kept profoundly secret. The very friend to whom you communicated your misgivings as to the Prophet and his mission, might be one of those who would come forth at night with fire and sword to exact a terrible reparation. Hence every man feared his neighbour, and none spoke of the things which were nearest his heart.

One fine morning, John Ferrier was about to set out to his wheatfields, when he heard the click of the latch, and, looking through the window, saw a stout, sandy-haired, middle-aged man coming up the pathway. His heart leapt to his mouth, for this was none other than the great Brigham Young himself. Full of trepidation — for he knew that such a visit boded him little good — Ferrier ran to the door to greet the Mormon chief. The latter, however, received his salutations coldly, and followed him with a stern face into the sitting-room.

“Brother Ferrier,” he said, taking a seat, and eyeing the farmer keenly from under his light-coloured eyelashes, “the true believers have been good friends to you. We picked you up when you were starving in the desert, we shared our food with you, led you safe to the Chosen Valley, gave you a goodly share of land, and allowed you to wax rich under our protection. Is not this so?"

"It is so," answered John Ferrier.

"In return for all this we asked but one condition: that was, that you should embrace the true faith, and conform in every way to its usages. This you promised to do, and this, if common report says truly, you have neglected."

"And how have I neglected it?" asked Ferrier, throwing out his hands in expostulation. "Have I not given to the common fund? Have I not attended at the Temple? Have I not —— ?"

"Where are your wives?" asked Young, looking round him. "Call them in, that I may greet them."

"It is true that I have not married," Ferrier answered. "But women were few, and there were many who had better claims than I. I was not a lonely man: I had my daughter to attend to my wants."

"It is of that daughter that I would speak to you," said the leader of the Mormons. "She has grown to be the flower of Utah, and has found favour in the eyes of many who are high in the land."

John Ferrier groaned internally.

"There are stories of her which I would fain disbelieve — stories that she is sealed to some Gentile. This must be the gossip of idle tongues. What is the thirteenth rule in the code of the sainted Joseph Smith? 'Let every maiden of the true faith marry one of the elect; for if she wed a Gentile, she commits a grievous sin.' This being so, it is impossible that you, who profess the holy creed, should suffer your daughter to violate it."

John Ferrier made no answer, but he played nervously with his riding-whip.

"Upon this one point your whole faith shall be tested — so it has been decided in the Sacred Council of Four. The girl is young, and we would not have her wed grey hairs, neither would we deprive her of all choice. We Elders have many heifers, but our children must also be provided. Stangerson has a son, and Drebber has a son, and either of them would gladly welcome your daughter to their house. Let her choose between them. They are young and rich, and of the true faith. What say you to that?"

Ferrier remained silent for some little time with his brows knitted.

"You will give us time," he said at last. "My daughter is very young — she is scarce of an age to marry."

"She shall have a month to choose," said Young, rising from his seat. "At the end of that time she shall give her answer."

He was passing through the door, when he turned, with flushed face and flashing eyes. "It were better for you, John Ferrier," he thundered, "that you and she were now lying blanched skeletons upon the Sierra Blanco, than that you should put your weak wills against the orders of the Holy Four!"

With a threatening gesture of his hand, he turned from the door, and Ferrier heard his heavy step scrunching along the shingly path.

He was still sitting with his elbows upon his knees, considering how he should broach the matter to his daughter when a soft hand was laid upon his, and looking up, he saw her standing beside him. One glance at her pale, frightened face showed him that she had heard what had passed.

"I could not help it," she said, in answer to his look. "His voice rang through the house. Oh, father, father, what shall we do?"

"Don't you scare yourself," he answered, drawing her to him, and passing his broad, rough hand caressingly over her chestnut hair. "We'll fix it up somehow or another. You don't find your fancy kind o' lessening for this chap, do you?"

A sob and a squeeze of his hand was her only answer.

"No; of course not. I shouldn't care to hear you say you did. He's a likely lad, and he's a Christian, which is more than these folk here, in spite o' all their praying and preaching. There's a party starting for Nevada to-morrow, and I'll manage to send him a message letting him know the hole we are in. If I know anything o' that young man, he'll be back here with a speed that would whip electro-telegraphs."

Lucy laughed through her tears at her father's description.

"When he comes, he will advise us for the best. But it is for you that I am frightened, dear. One hears — one hears such dreadful stories about those who oppose the Prophet: something terrible always happens to them."

"But we haven't opposed him yet," her father answered. "It will be time to look out for squalls when we do. We have a clear month before us; at the end of that, I guess we had best shin out of Utah."

"Leave Utah!"

"That's about the size of it."

"But the farm?"

"We will raise as much as we can in money, and let the rest go. To tell the truth, Lucy, it isn't the first time I have thought of doing it. I don't care about knuckling under to any man, as these folk do to their darned prophet. I’m a free-born American, and it’s all new to me. Guess I’m too old to learn. If he comes browsing about this farm, he might chance to run up against a charge of buckshot travelling in the opposite direction.”

“But they won’t let us leave,” his daughter objected.

“Wait till Jefferson comes, and we’ll soon manage that. In the meantime, don’t you fret yourself, my dearie, and don’t get your eyes swelled up, else he’ll be walking into me when he sees you. There’s nothing to be afeared about, and there’s no danger at all.”

John Ferrier uttered these consoling remarks in a very confident tone, but she could not help observing that he paid unusual care to the fastening of the doors that night, and that he carefully cleaned and loaded the rusty old shotgun which hung upon the wall of his bedroom.

CHAPTER IV. A FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

ON the morning which followed his interview with the Mormon Prophet, John Ferrier went in to Salt Lake City, and having found his acquaintance, who was bound for the Nevada Mountains, he entrusted him with his message to Jefferson Hope. In it he told the young man of the imminent danger which threatened them, and how necessary it was that he should return. Having done thus he felt easier in his mind, and returned home with a lighter heart.

As he approached his farm, he was surprised to see a horse hitched to each of the posts of the gate. Still more surprised was he on entering to find two young men in possession of his sitting-room. One, with a long pale face, was leaning back in the rocking-chair, with his feet cocked up upon the stove. The other, a bull-necked youth with coarse bloated features, was standing in front of the window with his hands in his pocket, whistling a popular hymn. Both of them nodded to Ferrier as he entered, and the one in the rocking-chair commenced the conversation.

“Maybe you don’t know us,” he said. “This here is the son of Elder Drebber, and I’m Joseph Stangerson, who travelled with you in the desert when the Lord stretched out His hand and gathered you into the true fold.”

“As He will all the nations in His own good time,” said the other in a nasal voice; “He grindeth slowly but exceeding small.”

John Ferrier bowed coldly. He had guessed who his visitors were.

“We have come,” continued Stangerson, “at the advice of our fathers to solicit the hand of your daughter for whichever of us may seem good to you and to her. As I have but four wives and Brother Drebber here has seven, it appears to me that my claim is the stronger one.”

“Nay, nay, Brother Stangerson,” cried the other; “the question is not how many wives we have, but how many we can keep. My father has now given over his mills to me, and I am the richer man.”

“But my prospects are better,” said the other, warmly. “When the Lord removes my father, I shall have his tanning yard and his leather factory. Then I am your elder, and am higher in the Church.”

“It will be for the maiden to decide,” rejoined young Drebber, smirking at his own reflection in the glass. “We will leave it all to her decision.”

During this dialogue, John Ferrier had stood fuming in the doorway, hardly able to keep his riding-whip from the backs of his two visitors.

"Look here," he said at last, striding up to them, "when my daughter summons you, you can come, but until then I don't want to see your faces again."

The two young Mormons stared at him in amazement. In their eyes this competition between them for the maiden's hand was the highest of honours both to her and her father.

"There are two ways out of the room," cried Ferrier; "there is the door, and there is the window. Which do you care to use?"

His brown face looked so savage, and his gaunt hands so threatening, that his visitors sprang to their feet and beat a hurried retreat. The old farmer followed them to the door.

"Let me know when you have settled which it is to be," he said, sardonically.

"You shall smart for this!" Stangerson cried, white with rage. "You have defied the Prophet and the Council of Four. You shall rue it to the end of your days."

"The hand of the Lord shall be heavy upon you," cried young Drebber; "He will arise and smite you!"

"Then I'll start the smiting," exclaimed Ferrier furiously, and would have rushed upstairs for his gun had not Lucy seized him by the arm and restrained him. Before he could escape from her, the clatter of horses' hoofs told him that they were beyond his reach.

"The young canting rascals!" he exclaimed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; "I would sooner see you in your grave, my girl, than the wife of either of them."

"And so should I, father," she answered, with spirit; "but Jefferson will soon be here."

"Yes. It will not be long before he comes. The sooner the better, for we do not know what their next move may be."

It was, indeed, high time that someone capable of giving advice and help should come to the aid of the sturdy old farmer and his adopted daughter. In the whole history of the settlement there had never been such a case of rank disobedience to the authority of the Elders. If minor errors were punished so sternly, what would be the fate of this arch rebel. Ferrier knew that his wealth and position would be of no avail to him. Others as well known and as rich as himself had been spirited away before now, and their goods given over to the Church. He was a brave man, but he trembled at the vague, shadowy terrors which hung over him. Any known danger he could face with a firm lip, but this suspense was unnerving. He concealed his fears from his daughter, however, and affected to make light of the whole matter, though she, with the keen eye of love, saw plainly that he was ill at ease.

He expected that he would receive some message or remonstrance from Young as to his conduct, and he was not mistaken, though it came in an unlooked-for manner. Upon rising next morning he found, to his surprise, a small square of paper pinned on to the coverlet of his bed just over his chest. On it was printed, in bold straggling letters: —

"Twenty-nine days are given you for amendment, and then — —"

The dash was more fear-inspiring than any threat could have been. How this warning came into his room puzzled John Ferrier sorely, for his servants slept in an outhouse, and the doors and windows had all been secured. He crumpled the paper up and said nothing to his daughter, but the incident struck a chill into his heart. The twenty-nine days were evidently the balance of the month which Young had promised. What strength or courage could avail against an enemy armed with such mysterious powers? The hand which fastened that pin might have struck him to the heart, and he could never have known who had slain him.

Still more shaken was he next morning. They had sat down to their breakfast when Lucy with a cry of surprise pointed upwards. In the centre of the ceiling was scrawled, with a burned stick apparently, the number 28. To his daughter it was unintelligible, and he did not enlighten her. That night he sat up with his gun and kept watch and ward. He saw and he heard nothing, and yet in the morning a great 27 had been painted upon the outside of his door.

Thus day followed day; and as sure as morning came he found that his unseen enemies had kept their register, and had marked up in some conspicuous position how many days were still left to him out of the month of grace. Sometimes the fatal numbers appeared upon the walls, sometimes upon the floors, occasionally they were on small placards stuck upon the garden gate or the railings. With all his vigilance John Ferrier could not discover whence these daily warnings proceeded. A horror which was almost superstitious came upon him at the sight of them. He became haggard and restless, and his eyes had the troubled look of some hunted creature. He had but one hope in life now, and that was for the arrival of the young hunter from Nevada.

Twenty had changed to fifteen and fifteen to ten, but there was no news of the absentee. One by one the numbers dwindled down, and still there came no sign of him. Whenever a horseman clattered down the road, or a driver shouted at his team, the old farmer hurried to the gate thinking that help had arrived at last. At last, when he saw five give way to four and that again to three, he lost heart, and abandoned all hope of escape. Single-handed, and with his limited knowledge of the mountains which surrounded the settlement, he knew that he was powerless. The more-frequented roads were strictly watched and guarded, and none could pass along them without an order from the Council. Turn which way he would, there appeared to be no avoiding the blow which hung over him. Yet the old man never wavered in his resolution to part with life itself before he consented to what he regarded as his daughter's dishonour.

He was sitting alone one evening pondering deeply over his troubles, and searching vainly for some way out of them. That morning had shown the figure 2 upon the wall of his house, and the next day would be the last of the allotted time. What was to happen then? All manner of vague and terrible fancies filled his imagination. And his daughter — what was to become of her after he was gone? Was there no escape from the invisible network which was drawn all round them. He sank his head upon the table and sobbed at the thought of his own impotence.

What was that? In the silence he heard a gentle scratching sound — low, but very distinct in the quiet of the night. It came from the door of the house. Ferrier crept into the hall and listened intently. There was a pause for a few moments, and then the low insidious sound was repeated. Someone was evidently tapping very gently upon one of the panels of the door. Was it some midnight assassin who had come to carry out the murderous orders of the secret tribunal? Or was it some agent who was marking up that the last day of grace had arrived. John Ferrier felt that instant death would be better than the suspense which shook his nerves and chilled his heart. Springing forward he drew the bolt and threw the door open.

Outside all was calm and quiet. The night was fine, and the stars were twinkling brightly overhead. The little front garden lay before the farmer's eyes bounded by the fence and gate, but neither there nor on the road was any human being to be seen. With a sigh of relief, Ferrier looked to right and to left, until happening to glance straight down at his own feet he saw to his astonishment a man lying flat upon his face upon the ground, with arms and legs all asprawl.

So unnerved was he at the sight that he leaned up against the wall with his hand to his throat to stifle his inclination to call out. His first thought was that the prostrate figure was that of some wounded or dying man, but as he watched it he saw it writhe along the ground and into the hall with the rapidity and noiselessness of a serpent. Once within the house the man sprang to his feet, closed the door, and revealed to the astonished farmer the fierce face and resolute expression of Jefferson Hope.

“Good God!” gasped John Ferrier. “How you scared me! Whatever made you come in like that.”

“Give me food,” the other said, hoarsely. “I have had no time for bite or sup for eight-and-forty hours.” He flung himself upon the cold meat and bread which were still lying upon the table from his host’s supper, and devoured it voraciously. “Does Lucy bear up well?” he asked, when he had satisfied his hunger.

“Yes. She does not know the danger,” her father answered.

“That is well. The house is watched on every side. That is why I crawled my way up to it. They may be darned sharp, but they’re not quite sharp enough to catch a Washoe hunter.”

John Ferrier felt a different man now that he realised that he had a devoted ally. He seized the young man’s leathery hand and wrung it cordially. “You’re a man to be proud of,” he said. “There are not many who would come to share our danger and our troubles.”

“You’ve hit it there, pard,” the young hunter answered. “I have a respect for you, but if you were alone in this business I’d think twice before I put my head into such a hornet’s nest. It’s Lucy that brings me here, and before harm comes on her I guess there will be one less o’ the Hope family in Utah.”

“What are we to do?”

“To-morrow is your last day, and unless you act to-night you are lost. I have a mule and two horses waiting in the Eagle Ravine. How much money have you?”

“Two thousand dollars in gold, and five in notes.”

“That will do. I have as much more to add to it. We must push for Carson City through the mountains. You had best wake Lucy. It is as well that the servants do not sleep in the house.”

While Ferrier was absent, preparing his daughter for the approaching journey, Jefferson Hope packed all the eatables that he could find into a small parcel, and filled a stoneware jar with water, for he knew by experience that the mountain wells were few and far between. He had hardly completed his arrangements before the farmer returned with his daughter all dressed and ready for a start. The greeting between the lovers was warm, but brief, for minutes were precious, and there was much to be done.

“We must make our start at once,” said Jefferson Hope, speaking in a low but resolute voice, like one who realises the greatness of the peril, but has steeled his heart to meet it. “The front and back entrances are watched, but with caution we may get away through the side window and across the fields. Once on the road we are only two miles from the Ravine where the horses are waiting. By daybreak we should be half-way through the mountains.”

“What if we are stopped,” asked Ferrier.

Hope slapped the revolver butt which protruded from the front of his tunic. “If they are too many for us we shall take two or three of them with us,” he said with a sinister smile.

The lights inside the house had all been extinguished, and from the darkened window Ferrier peered over the fields which had been his own, and which he was now about to abandon for ever. He had long nerved himself to the sacrifice, however, and the thought of the honour and happiness of his daughter outweighed any regret at his ruined fortunes. All looked so peaceful and happy, the rustling trees and the broad silent stretch of grain-land, that it was difficult to realise that the spirit of murder lurked through it all. Yet the white face and set expression of the young hunter showed that in his approach to the house he had seen enough to satisfy him upon that head.

Ferrier carried the bag of gold and notes, Jefferson Hope had the scanty provisions and water, while Lucy had a small bundle containing a few of her more valued possessions. Opening the window very slowly and carefully, they waited until a dark cloud had somewhat obscured the night, and then one by one passed through into the little garden. With bated breath and crouching figures they stumbled across it, and gained the shelter of the hedge, which they skirted until they came to the gap which opened into the cornfields. They had just reached this point when the young man seized his two companions and dragged them down into the shadow, where they lay silent and trembling.

It was as well that his prairie training had given Jefferson Hope the ears of a lynx. He and his friends had hardly crouched down before the melancholy hooting of a mountain owl was heard within a few yards of them, which was immediately answered by another hoot at a small distance. At the same moment a vague shadowy figure emerged from the gap for which they had been making, and uttered the plaintive signal cry again, on which a second man appeared out of the obscurity.

“To-morrow at midnight,” said the first who appeared to be in authority. “When the Whip-poor-Will calls three times.”

“It is well,” returned the other. “Shall I tell Brother Drebber?”

“Pass it on to him, and from him to the others. Nine to seven!”

“Seven to five!” repeated the other, and the two figures flitted away in different directions. Their concluding words had evidently been some form of sign and countersign. The instant that their footsteps had died away in the distance, Jefferson Hope sprang to his feet, and helping his companions through the gap, led the way across the fields at the top of his speed, supporting and half-carrying the girl when her strength appeared to fail her.

“Hurry on! hurry on!” he gasped from time to time. “We are through the line of sentinels. Everything depends on speed. Hurry on!”

Once on the high road they made rapid progress. Only once did they meet anyone, and then they managed to slip into a field, and so avoid recognition. Before reaching the town the hunter branched away into a rugged and narrow footpath which led to the mountains. Two dark jagged peaks loomed above them through the darkness, and the defile which led between them was the Eagle Cañon in which the horses were awaiting them. With unerring instinct Jefferson Hope picked his way among the great boulders and along the bed of a dried-up watercourse, until he came to the retired corner, screened with rocks, where the faithful animals had been picketed. The girl was placed upon the mule, and old Ferrier upon one of the horses, with his money-bag, while Jefferson Hope led the other along the precipitous and dangerous path.

It was a bewildering route for anyone who was not accustomed to face Nature in her wildest moods. On the one side a great crag towered up a thousand feet or more, black, stern, and menacing, with long basaltic columns upon its rugged surface like the ribs of some petrified monster. On the other hand a wild chaos of boulders and debris made all advance impossible. Between the two ran the irregular track, so narrow in places that they had to travel in Indian file, and so rough that only practised riders could have traversed it at all. Yet in spite of all dangers and difficulties, the hearts of the fugitives were light within them, for every step increased the distance between them and the terrible despotism from which they were flying.

They soon had a proof, however, that they were still within the jurisdiction of the Saints. They had reached the very wildest and most desolate portion of the pass when the girl gave a startled cry, and pointed upwards. On a rock which overlooked the track, showing out dark and plain against the sky, there stood a solitary sentinel. He saw them as soon as they perceived him, and his military challenge of “Who goes there?” rang through the silent ravine.

“Travellers for Nevada,” said Jefferson Hope, with his hand upon the rifle which hung by his saddle.

They could see the lonely watcher fingering his gun, and peering down at them as if dissatisfied at their reply.

“By whose permission?” he asked.

“The Holy Four,” answered Ferrier. His Mormon experiences had taught him that that was the highest authority to which he could refer.

“Nine from seven,” cried the sentinel.

“Seven from five,” returned Jefferson Hope promptly, remembering the countersign which he had heard in the garden.

“Pass, and the Lord go with you,” said the voice from above. Beyond his post the path broadened out, and the horses were able to break into a trot. Looking back, they could see the solitary watcher leaning upon his gun, and knew that they had passed the outlying post of the chosen people, and that freedom lay before them.

CHAPTER V. THE AVENGING ANGELS.

ALL night their course lay through intricate defiles and over irregular and rock-strewn paths. More than once they lost their way, but Hope’s intimate knowledge of the mountains enabled them to regain the track once more. When morning broke, a scene of marvellous though savage beauty lay before them. In every direction the great snow-capped peaks hemmed them in, peeping over each other’s shoulders to the far horizon. So steep were the rocky banks on either side of them, that the larch and the pine seemed to be suspended over their heads, and to need only a gust of wind to come hurtling down upon them. Nor was the fear entirely an illusion, for the barren valley was thickly strewn with trees and boulders which had fallen in a similar manner. Even as they passed, a great rock came thundering down with a hoarse rattle which woke the echoes in the silent gorges, and startled the weary horses into a gallop.

As the sun rose slowly above the eastern horizon, the caps of the great mountains lit up one after the other, like lamps at a festival, until they were all ruddy and glowing. The magnificent spectacle cheered the hearts of the three fugitives and gave them fresh energy. At a wild torrent which swept out of a ravine they called a halt and watered their horses, while they partook of a hasty breakfast. Lucy and her father would fain have rested longer, but Jefferson Hope was inexorable. “They will be upon our track by this time,” he said. “Everything depends upon our speed. Once safe in Carson we may rest for the remainder of our lives.”

During the whole of that day they struggled on through the defiles, and by evening they calculated that they were more than thirty miles from their enemies. At night-time they chose the base of a beetling crag, where the rocks offered some protection from the chill wind, and there huddled together for warmth, they enjoyed a few hours’ sleep. Before daybreak, however, they were up and on their way once more. They had seen no signs of any pursuers, and Jefferson Hope began to think that they were fairly out of the reach of the terrible organization whose enmity they had incurred. He little knew how far that iron grasp could reach, or how soon it was to close upon them and crush them.

About the middle of the second day of their flight their scanty store of provisions began to run out. This gave the hunter little uneasiness, however, for there was game to be had among the mountains, and he had frequently before had to depend upon his rifle for the needs of life. Choosing a sheltered nook, he piled together a few dried branches and made a blazing fire, at which his companions might warm themselves, for they were now nearly five thousand feet above the sea level, and the air was bitter and keen. Having tethered the horses, and bade Lucy adieu, he threw his gun over his shoulder, and set out in search of whatever chance might throw in his way. Looking back he saw the old man and the young girl crouching over the blazing fire, while the three animals stood motionless in the background. Then the intervening rocks hid them from his view.

He walked for a couple of miles through one ravine after another without success, though from the marks upon the bark of the trees, and other indications, he judged that there were numerous bears in the vicinity. At last, after two or three hours' fruitless search, he was thinking of turning back in despair, when casting his eyes upwards he saw a sight which sent a thrill of pleasure through his heart. On the edge of a jutting pinnacle, three or four hundred feet above him, there stood a creature somewhat resembling a sheep in appearance, but armed with a pair of gigantic horns. The big-horn — for so it is called — was acting, probably, as a guardian over a flock which were invisible to the hunter; but fortunately it was heading in the opposite direction, and had not perceived him. Lying on his face, he rested his rifle upon a rock, and took a long and steady aim before drawing the trigger. The animal sprang into the air, tottered for a moment upon the edge of the precipice, and then came crashing down into the valley beneath.

The creature was too unwieldy to lift, so the hunter contented himself with cutting away one haunch and part of the flank. With this trophy over his shoulder, he hastened to retrace his steps, for the evening was already drawing in. He had hardly started, however, before he realised the difficulty which faced him. In his eagerness he had wandered far past the ravines which were known to him, and it was no easy matter to pick out the path which he had taken. The valley in which he found himself divided and subdivided into many gorges, which were so like each other that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. He followed one for a mile or more until he came to a mountain torrent which he was sure that he had never seen before. Convinced that he had taken the wrong turn, he tried another, but with the same result. Night was coming on rapidly, and it was almost dark before he at last found himself in a defile which was familiar to him. Even then it was no easy matter to keep to the right track, for the moon had not yet risen, and the high cliffs on either side made the obscurity more profound. Weighed down with his burden, and weary from his exertions, he stumbled along, keeping up his heart by the reflection that every step brought him nearer to Lucy, and that he carried with him enough to ensure them food for the remainder of their journey.

He had now come to the mouth of the very defile in which he had left them. Even in the darkness he could recognise the outline of the cliffs which bounded it. They must, he reflected, be awaiting him anxiously, for he had been absent nearly five hours. In the gladness of his heart he put his hands to his mouth and made the glen re-echo to a loud halloo as a signal that he was coming. He paused and listened for an answer. None came save his own cry, which clattered up the dreary silent ravines, and was borne back to his ears in countless repetitions. Again he shouted, even louder than before, and again no whisper came back from the friends whom he had left such a short time ago. A vague, nameless dread came over him, and he hurried onwards frantically, dropping the precious food in his agitation.

When he turned the corner, he came full in sight of the spot where the fire had been lit. There was still a glowing pile of wood ashes there, but it had evidently not been tended since his departure. The same dead silence still reigned all round. With his fears all changed to convictions, he hurried on. There was no living creature near the remains of the fire: animals, man, maiden, all were gone. It was only too clear that some sudden and terrible disaster had occurred during his absence — a disaster which had embraced them all, and yet had left no traces behind it.

Bewildered and stunned by this blow, Jefferson Hope felt his head spin round, and had to lean upon his rifle to save himself from falling. He was essentially a man of action, however, and speedily recovered from his temporary impotence. Seizing a half-consumed piece of wood from the smouldering fire, he blew it into a flame, and proceeded with its help to examine the little camp. The ground was all stamped down by the feet of horses, showing that a large party of mounted men had overtaken the fugitives, and the direction of their tracks proved that they had afterwards turned back to Salt Lake City. Had they carried back both of his companions with them? Jefferson Hope had almost persuaded himself that they must have done so, when his eye fell upon an object which made every nerve of his body tingle within him. A little way on one side of the camp was a low-lying heap of reddish soil, which had assuredly not been there before. There was no mistaking it for anything but a newly-dug grave. As the young hunter approached it, he perceived that a stick had been planted on it, with a sheet of paper stuck in the cleft fork of it. The inscription upon the paper was brief, but to the point:

JOHN FERRIER,
FORMERLY OF SALT LAKE CITY,
Died August 4th, 1860.

The sturdy old man, whom he had left so short a time before, was gone, then, and this was all his epitaph. Jefferson Hope looked wildly round to see if there was a second grave, but there was no sign of one. Lucy had been carried back by their terrible pursuers to fulfil her original destiny, by becoming one of the harem of the Elder's son. As the young fellow realised the certainty of her fate, and his own powerlessness to prevent it, he wished that he, too, was lying with the old farmer in his last silent resting-place.

Again, however, his active spirit shook off the lethargy which springs from despair. If there was nothing else left to him, he could at least devote his life to revenge. With indomitable patience and perseverance, Jefferson Hope possessed also a power of sustained vindictiveness, which he may have learned from the Indians amongst whom he had lived. As he stood by the desolate fire, he felt that the only one thing which could assuage his grief would be thorough and complete retribution, brought by his own hand upon his enemies. His strong will and untiring energy should, he determined, be devoted to that one end. With a grim, white face, he retraced his steps to where he had dropped the food, and having stirred up the smouldering fire, he cooked enough to last him for a few days. This he made up into a bundle, and, tired as he was, he set himself to walk back through the mountains upon the track of the avenging angels.

For five days he toiled footsore and weary through the defiles which he had already traversed on horseback. At night he flung himself down among the rocks, and snatched a few hours of sleep; but before daybreak he was always well on his way. On the sixth day, he reached the Eagle Cañon, from which they had commenced their ill-fated flight. Thence he could look down upon the home of the saints. Worn and exhausted, he leaned upon his rifle and shook his gaunt hand fiercely at the silent widespread city beneath him. As he looked at it, he observed that there were flags in some of the principal streets, and other signs of festivity. He was still speculating as to what this might mean when he heard the clatter of horse’s hoofs, and saw a mounted man riding towards him. As he approached, he recognised him as a Mormon named Cowper, to whom he had rendered services at different times. He therefore accosted him when he got up to him, with the object of finding out what Lucy Ferrier’s fate had been.

“I am Jefferson Hope,” he said. “You remember me.”

The Mormon looked at him with undisguised astonishment — indeed, it was difficult to recognise in this tattered, unkempt wanderer, with ghastly white face and fierce, wild eyes, the spruce young hunter of former days. Having, however, at last, satisfied himself as to his identity, the man’s surprise changed to consternation.

“You are mad to come here,” he cried. “It is as much as my own life is worth to be seen talking with you. There is a warrant against you from the Holy Four for assisting the Ferriers away.”

“I don’t fear them, or their warrant,” Hope said, earnestly. “You must know something of this matter, Cowper. I conjure you by everything you hold dear to answer a few questions. We have always been friends. For God’s sake, don’t refuse to answer me.”

“What is it?” the Mormon asked uneasily. “Be quick. The very rocks have ears and the trees eyes.”

“What has become of Lucy Ferrier?”

“She was married yesterday to young Drebber. Hold up, man, hold up, you have no life left in you.”

“Don’t mind me,” said Hope faintly. He was white to the very lips, and had sunk down on the stone against which he had been leaning. “Married, you say?”

“Married yesterday — that’s what those flags are for on the Endowment House. There was some words between young Drebber and young Stangerson as to which was to have her. They’d both been in the party that followed them, and Stangerson had shot her father, which seemed to give him the best claim; but when they argued it out in council, Drebber’s party was the stronger, so the Prophet gave her over to him. No one won’t have her very long though, for I saw death in her face yesterday. She is more like a ghost than a woman. Are you off, then?”

“Yes, I am off,” said Jefferson Hope, who had risen from his seat. His face might have been chiselled out of marble, so hard and set was its expression, while its eyes glowed with a baleful light.

“Where are you going?”

“Never mind,” he answered; and, slinging his weapon over his shoulder, strode off down the gorge and so away into the heart of the mountains to the haunts of the wild beasts. Amongst them all there was none so fierce and so dangerous as himself.

The prediction of the Mormon was only too well fulfilled. Whether it was the terrible death of her father or the effects of the hateful marriage into which she had been forced, poor Lucy never held up her head again, but pined away and died within a month. Her sottish husband, who had married her principally for the sake of John Ferrier’s property, did not affect any great grief at his bereavement; but his other wives mourned over her, and sat up with her the night before the burial, as is the Mormon custom. They were grouped round the bier in the early hours of the morning, when, to their inexpressible fear and astonishment, the door was flung open, and a savage-looking, weather-beaten man in tattered garments strode into the room. Without a glance or a word to the cowering women, he walked up to the white silent figure which had once contained the pure soul of Lucy Ferrier. Stooping over her, he pressed his lips reverently to her cold forehead, and then, snatching up her hand, he took the wedding-ring from her finger. “She shall not be buried in that,” he cried with a fierce snarl, and before an alarm could be raised sprang down the stairs and was gone. So strange and so brief was the episode, that the watchers might have found it hard to believe it themselves or persuade other people of it, had it not been for the undeniable fact that the circlet of gold which marked her as having been a bride had disappeared.

For some months Jefferson Hope lingered among the mountains, leading a strange wild life, and nursing in his heart the fierce desire for vengeance which possessed him. Tales were told in the City of the weird figure which was seen prowling about the suburbs, and which haunted the lonely mountain gorges. Once a bullet whistled through Stangerson’s window and flattened itself upon the wall within a foot of him. On another occasion, as Drebber passed under a cliff a great boulder crashed down on him, and he only escaped a terrible death by throwing himself upon his face. The two young Mormons were not long in discovering the reason of these attempts upon their lives, and led repeated expeditions into the mountains in the hope of capturing or killing their enemy, but always without success. Then they adopted the precaution of never going out alone or after nightfall, and of having their houses guarded. After a time they were able to relax these measures, for nothing was either heard or seen of their opponent, and they hoped that time had cooled his vindictiveness.

Far from doing so, it had, if anything, augmented it. The hunter’s mind was of a hard, unyielding nature, and the predominant idea of revenge had taken such complete possession of it that there was no room for any other emotion. He was, however, above all things practical. He soon realised that even his iron constitution could not stand the incessant strain which he was putting upon it. Exposure and want of wholesome food were wearing him out. If he died like a dog among the mountains, what was to become of his revenge then? And yet such a death was sure to overtake him if he persisted. He felt that that was to play his enemy’s game, so he reluctantly returned to the old Nevada mines, there to recruit his health and to amass money enough to allow him to pursue his object without privation.

His intention had been to be absent a year at the most, but a combination of unforeseen circumstances prevented his leaving the mines for nearly five. At the end of that time, however, his memory of his wrongs and his craving for revenge were quite as keen as on that memorable night when he had stood by John Ferrier’s grave. Disguised, and under an assumed name, he returned to Salt Lake City, careless what became of his own life, as long as he obtained what he knew to be justice. There he found evil tidings awaiting him. There had been a schism among the Chosen People a few months before, some of the younger members of the Church having rebelled against the authority of the Elders, and the result had been the secession of a certain number of the malcontents, who had left Utah and become Gentiles. Among these had been Drebber and Stangerson; and no one knew whither they had gone. Rumour reported that Drebber had managed to convert a large part of his property into money, and that he had departed a wealthy man, while his companion, Stangerson, was comparatively poor. There was no clue at all, however, as to their whereabouts.

Many a man, however vindictive, would have abandoned all thought of revenge in the face of such a difficulty, but Jefferson Hope never faltered for a moment. With the small competence he possessed, eked out by such employment as he could pick up, he travelled from town to town through the United States in quest of his enemies. Year passed into year, his black hair turned grizzled, but still he wandered on, a human bloodhound, with his mind wholly set upon the one object upon which he had devoted his life. At last his perseverance was rewarded. It was but a glance of a face in a window, but that one glance told him that Cleveland in Ohio possessed the men whom he was in pursuit of. He returned to his miserable lodgings with his plan of vengeance all arranged. It chanced, however, that Drebber, looking from his window, had recognised the vagrant in the street, and had read murder in his eyes. He hurried before a justice of the peace, accompanied by Stangerson, who had become his private secretary, and represented to him that they were in danger of their lives from the jealousy and hatred of an old rival. That evening Jefferson Hope was taken into custody, and not being able to find sureties, was detained for some weeks. When at last he was liberated, it was only to find that Drebber's house was deserted, and that he and his secretary had departed for Europe.

Again the avenger had been foiled, and again his concentrated hatred urged him to continue the pursuit. Funds were wanting, however, and for some time he had to return to work, saving every dollar for his approaching journey. At last, having collected enough to keep life in him, he departed for Europe, and tracked his enemies from city to city, working his way in any menial capacity, but never overtaking the fugitives. When he reached St. Petersburg they had departed for Paris; and when he followed them there he learned that they had just set off for Copenhagen. At the Danish capital he was again a few days late, for they had journeyed on to London, where he at last succeeded in running them to earth. As to what occurred there, we cannot do better than quote the old hunter's own account, as duly recorded in Dr. Watson's Journal, to which we are already under such obligations.

CHAPTER VI. A CONTINUATION OF THE REMINISCENCES OF JOHN WATSON, M.D.

OUR prisoner's furious resistance did not apparently indicate any ferocity in his disposition towards ourselves, for on finding himself powerless, he smiled in an affable manner, and expressed his hopes that he had not hurt any of us in the scuffle. "I guess you're going to take me to the police-station," he remarked to Sherlock Holmes. "My cab's at the door. If you'll loose my legs I'll walk down to it. I'm not so light to lift as I used to be."

Gregson and Lestrade exchanged glances as if they thought this proposition rather a bold one; but Holmes at once took the prisoner at his word, and loosened the towel which we had bound round his ancles. He rose and stretched his legs, as though to assure himself that they were free once more. I remember that I thought to myself, as I eyed him, that I had seldom seen a more powerfully built man; and his dark sunburned face bore an expression of determination and energy which was as formidable as his personal strength.

"If there's a vacant place for a chief of the police, I reckon you are the man for it," he said, gazing with undisguised admiration at my fellow-lodger. "The way you kept on my trail was a caution."

"You had better come with me," said Holmes to the two detectives.

"I can drive you," said Lestrade.

"Good! and Gregson can come inside with me. You too, Doctor, you have taken an interest in the case and may as well stick to us."

I assented gladly, and we all descended together. Our prisoner made no attempt at escape, but stepped calmly into the cab which had been his, and we followed him. Lestrade mounted the box, whipped up the horse, and brought us in a very short time to our destination. We were ushered into a small chamber where a police Inspector noted down our prisoner's name and the names of the men with whose murder he had been charged. The official was a white-faced unemotional man, who went through his duties in a dull mechanical way. "The prisoner will be put before the magistrates in the course of the week," he said; "in the mean time, Mr. Jefferson Hope, have you anything that you wish to say? I must warn you that your words will be taken down, and may be used against you."

"I've got a good deal to say," our prisoner said slowly. "I want to tell you gentlemen all about it."

"Hadn't you better reserve that for your trial?" asked the Inspector.

"I may never be tried," he answered. "You needn't look startled. It isn't suicide I am thinking of. Are you a Doctor?" He turned his fierce dark eyes upon me as he asked this last question.

"Yes; I am," I answered.

"Then put your hand here," he said, with a smile, motioning with his manacled wrists towards his chest.

I did so; and became at once conscious of an extraordinary throbbing and commotion which was going on inside. The walls of his chest seemed to thrill and quiver as a frail building would do inside when some powerful engine was at work. In the silence of the room I could hear a dull humming and buzzing noise which proceeded from the same source.

"Why," I cried, "you have an aortic aneurism!"

"That's what they call it," he said, placidly. "I went to a Doctor last week about it, and he told me that it is bound to burst before many days passed. It has been getting worse for years. I got it from over-exposure and under-feeding among the Salt Lake Mountains. I've done my work now, and I don't care how soon I go, but I should like to leave some account of the business behind me. I don't want to be remembered as a common cut-throat."

The Inspector and the two detectives had a hurried discussion as to the advisability of allowing him to tell his story.

"Do you consider, Doctor, that there is immediate danger?" the former asked,

"Most certainly there is," I answered.

"In that case it is clearly our duty, in the interests of justice, to take his statement," said the Inspector. "You are at liberty, sir, to give your account, which I again warn you will be taken down."

"I'll sit down, with your leave," the prisoner said, suiting the action to the word. "This aneurism of mine makes me easily tired, and the tussle we had half an hour ago has not mended matters. I'm on the brink of the grave, and I am not likely to lie to you. Every word I say is the absolute truth, and how you use it is a matter of no consequence to me."

With these words, Jefferson Hope leaned back in his chair and began the following remarkable statement. He spoke in a calm and methodical manner, as though the events which he narrated were commonplace enough. I can vouch for the accuracy of the subjoined account, for I have had access to Lestrade's note-book, in which the prisoner's words were taken down exactly as they were uttered.

"It don't much matter to you why I hated these men," he said; "it's enough that they were guilty of the death of two human beings — a father and a daughter — and that they had, therefore, forfeited their own lives. After the lapse of time that has passed since their crime, it was impossible for me to secure a conviction against them in any court. I knew of their guilt though, and I determined that I should be judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. You'd have done the same, if you have any manhood in you, if you had been in my place.

"That girl that I spoke of was to have married me twenty years ago. She was forced into marrying that same Drebber, and broke her heart over it. I took the marriage ring from her dead finger, and I vowed that his dying eyes should rest upon that very ring, and that his last thoughts should be of the crime for which he was punished. I have carried it about with me, and have followed him and his accomplice over two continents until I caught them. They thought to tire me out, but they could not do it. If I die to-morrow, as is likely enough, I die knowing that my work in this world is done, and well done. They have perished, and by my hand. There is nothing left for me to hope for, or to desire.

"They were rich and I was poor, so that it was no easy matter for me to follow them. When I got to London my pocket was about empty, and I found that I must turn my hand to something for my living. Driving and riding are as natural to me as walking, so I applied at a cabowner's office, and soon got employment. I was to bring a certain sum a week to the owner, and whatever was over that I might keep for myself. There was seldom much over, but I managed to scrape along somehow. The hardest job was to learn my way about, for I reckon that of all the mazes that ever were contrived, this city is the most confusing. I had a map beside me though, and when once I had spotted the principal hotels and stations, I got on pretty well.

"It was some time before I found out where my two gentlemen were living; but I inquired and inquired until at last I dropped across them. They were at a boarding-house at Camberwell, over on the other side of the river. When once I found them out I knew that I had them at my mercy. I had grown my beard, and there was no chance of their recognising me. I would dog them and follow them until I saw my opportunity. I was determined that they should not escape me again.

“They were very near doing it for all that. Go where they would about London, I was always at their heels. Sometimes I followed them on my cab, and sometimes on foot, but the former was the best, for then they could not get away from me. It was only early in the morning or late at night that I could earn anything, so that I began to get behind hand with my employer. I did not mind that, however, as long as I could lay my hand upon the men I wanted.

“They were very cunning, though. They must have thought that there was some chance of their being followed, for they would never go out alone, and never after nightfall. During two weeks I drove behind them every day, and never once saw them separate. Drebber himself was drunk half the time, but Stangerson was not to be caught napping. I watched them late and early, but never saw the ghost of a chance; but I was not discouraged, for something told me that the hour had almost come. My only fear was that this thing in my chest might burst a little too soon and leave my work undone.

“At last, one evening I was driving up and down Torquay Terrace, as the street was called in which they boarded, when I saw a cab drive up to their door. Presently some luggage was brought out, and after a time Drebber and Stangerson followed it, and drove off. I whipped up my horse and kept within sight of them, feeling very ill at ease, for I feared that they were going to shift their quarters. At Euston Station they got out, and I left a boy to hold my horse, and followed them on to the platform. I heard them ask for the Liverpool train, and the guard answer that one had just gone and there would not be another for some hours. Stangerson seemed to be put out at that, but Drebber was rather pleased than otherwise. I got so close to them in the bustle that I could hear every word that passed between them. Drebber said that he had a little business of his own to do, and that if the other would wait for him he would soon rejoin him. His companion remonstrated with him, and reminded him that they had resolved to stick together. Drebber answered that the matter was a delicate one, and that he must go alone. I could not catch what Stangerson said to that, but the other burst out swearing, and reminded him that he was nothing more than his paid servant, and that he must not presume to dictate to him. On that the Secretary gave it up as a bad job, and simply bargained with him that if he missed the last train he should rejoin him at Halliday's Private Hotel; to which Drebber answered that he would be back on the platform before eleven, and made his way out of the station.

"The moment for which I had waited so long had at last come. I had my enemies within my power. Together they could protect each other, but singly they were at my mercy. I did not act, however, with undue precipitation. My plans were already formed. There is no satisfaction in vengeance unless the offender has time to realise who it is that strikes him, and why retribution has come upon him. I had my plans arranged by which I should have the opportunity of making the man who had wronged me understand that his old sin had found him out. It chanced that some days before a gentleman who had been engaged in looking over some houses in the Brixton Road had dropped the key of one of them in my carriage. It was claimed that same evening, and returned; but in the interval I had taken a moulding of it, and had a duplicate constructed. By means of this I had access to at least one spot in this great city where I could rely upon being free from interruption. How to get Drebber to that house was the difficult problem which I had now to solve.

"He walked down the road and went into one or two liquor shops, staying for nearly half-an-hour in the last of them. When he came out he staggered in his walk, and was evidently pretty well on. There was a hansom just in front of me, and he hailed it. I followed it so close that the nose of my horse was within a yard of his driver the whole way. We rattled across Waterloo Bridge and through miles of streets, until, to my astonishment, we found ourselves back in the Terrace in which he had boarded. I could not imagine what his intention was in returning there; but I went on and pulled up my cab a hundred yards or so from the house. He entered it, and his hansom drove away. Give me a glass of water, if you please. My mouth gets dry with the talking."

I handed him the glass, and he drank it down.

"That's better," he said. "Well, I waited for a quarter of an hour, or more, when suddenly there came a noise like people struggling inside the house. Next moment the door was flung open and two men appeared, one of whom was Drebber, and the other was a young chap whom I had never seen before. This fellow had Drebber by the collar, and when they came to the head of the steps he gave him a shove and a kick which sent him half across the road. ‘You hound,’ he cried, shaking his stick at him; ‘I’ll teach you to insult an honest girl!’ He was so hot that I think he would have thrashed Drebber with his cudgel, only that the cur staggered away down the road as fast as his legs would carry him. He ran as far as the corner, and then, seeing my cab, he hailed me and jumped in. ‘Drive me to Halliday’s Private Hotel,’ said he.

“When I had him fairly inside my cab, my heart jumped so with joy that I feared lest at this last moment my aneurism might go wrong. I drove along slowly, weighing in my own mind what it was best to do. I might take him right out into the country, and there in some deserted lane have my last interview with him. I had almost decided upon this, when he solved the problem for me. The craze for drink had seized him again, and he ordered me to pull up outside a gin palace. He went in, leaving word that I should wait for him. There he remained until closing time, and when he came out he was so far gone that I knew the game was in my own hands.

“Don’t imagine that I intended to kill him in cold blood. It would only have been rigid justice if I had done so, but I could not bring myself to do it. I had long determined that he should have a show for his life if he chose to take advantage of it. Among the many billets which I have filled in America during my wandering life, I was once janitor and sweeper out of the laboratory at York College. One day the professor was lecturing on poisions, and he showed his students some alkaloid, as he called it, which he had extracted from some South American arrow poison, and which was so powerful that the least grain meant instant death. I spotted the bottle in which this preparation was kept, and when they were all gone, I helped myself to a little of it. I was a fairly good dispenser, so I worked this alkaloid into small, soluble pills, and each pill I put in a box with a similar pill made without the poison. I determined at the time that when I had my chance, my gentlemen should each have a draw out of one of these boxes, while I ate the pill that remained. It would be quite as deadly, and a good deal less noisy than firing across a handkerchief. From that day I had always my pill boxes about with me, and the time had now come when I was to use them.

“It was nearer one than twelve, and a wild, bleak night, blowing hard and raining in torrents. Dismal as it was outside, I was glad within — so glad that I could have shouted out from pure exultation. If any of you gentlemen have ever pined for a thing, and longed for it during twenty long years, and then suddenly found it within your reach, you would understand my feelings. I lit a cigar, and puffed at it to steady my nerves, but my hands were trembling, and my temples throbbing with excitement. As I drove, I could see old John Ferrier and sweet Lucy looking at me out of the darkness and smiling at me, just as plain as I see you all in this room. All the way they were ahead of me, one on each side of the horse until I pulled up at the house in the Brixton Road.

"There was not a soul to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, except the dripping of the rain. When I looked in at the window, I found Drebber all huddled together in a drunken sleep. I shook him by the arm, 'It's time to get out,' I said.

"'All right, cabby,' said he.

"I suppose he thought we had come to the hotel that he had mentioned, for he got out without another word, and followed me down the garden. I had to walk beside him to keep him steady, for he was still a little top-heavy. When we came to the door, I opened it, and led him into the front room. I give you my word that all the way, the father and the daughter were walking in front of us.

"'It's infernally dark,' said he, stamping about.

"'We'll soon have a light,' I said, striking a match and putting it to a wax candle which I had brought with me. 'Now, Enoch Drebber,' I continued, turning to him, and holding the light to my own face, 'who am I?'

"He gazed at me with bleared, drunken eyes for a moment, and then I saw a horror spring up in them, and convulse his whole features, which showed me that he knew me. He staggered back with a livid face, and I saw the perspiration break out upon his brow, while his teeth chattered in his head. At the sight, I leaned my back against the door and laughed loud and long. I had always known that vengeance would be sweet, but I had never hoped for the contentment of soul which now possessed me.

"'You dog!' I said; 'I have hunted you from Salt Lake City to St. Petersburg, and you have always escaped me. Now, at last your wanderings have come to an end, for either you or I shall never see to-morrow's sun rise.' He shrunk still further away as I spoke, and I could see on his face that he thought I was mad. So I was for the time. The pulses in my temples beat like sledge-hammers, and I believe I would have had a fit of some sort if the blood had not gushed from my nose and relieved me.

"'What do you think of Lucy Ferrier now?' I cried, locking the door, and shaking the key in his face. 'Punishment has been slow in coming, but it has overtaken you at last.' I saw his coward lips tremble as I spoke. He would have begged for his life, but he knew well that it was useless.

"'Would you murder me?' he stammered.

"'There is no murder,' I answered. 'Who talks of murdering a mad dog? What mercy had you upon my poor darling, when you dragged her from her slaughtered father, and bore her away to your accursed and shameless harem.'

"'It was not I who killed her father,' he cried.

"'But it was you who broke her innocent heart,' I shrieked, thrusting the box before him. 'Let the high God judge between us. Choose and eat. There is death in one and life in the other. I shall take what you leave. Let us see if there is justice upon the earth, or if we are ruled by chance.'

"He cowered away with wild cries and prayers for mercy, but I drew my knife and held it to his throat until he had obeyed me. Then I swallowed the other, and we stood facing one another in silence for a minute or more, waiting to see which was to live and which was to die. Shall I ever forget the look which came over his face when the first warning pangs told him that the poison was in his system? I laughed as I saw it, and held Lucy's marriage ring in front of his eyes. It was but for a moment, for the action of the alkaloid is rapid. A spasm of pain contorted his features; he threw his hands out in front of him, staggered, and then, with a hoarse cry, fell heavily upon the floor. I turned him over with my foot, and placed my hand upon his heart. There was no movement. He was dead!

"The blood had been streaming from my nose, but I had taken no notice of it. I don't know what it was that put it into my head to write upon the wall with it. Perhaps it was some mischievous idea of setting the police upon a wrong track, for I felt light-hearted and cheerful. I remembered a German being found in New York with RACHE written up above him, and it was argued at the time in the newspapers that the secret societies must have done it. I guessed that what puzzled the New Yorkers would puzzle the Londoners, so I dipped my finger in my own blood and printed it on a convenient place on the wall. Then I walked down to my cab and found that there was nobody about, and that the night was still very wild. I had driven some distance when I put my hand into the pocket in which I usually kept Lucy’s ring, and found that it was not there. I was thunderstruck at this, for it was the only memento that I had of her. Thinking that I might have dropped it when I stooped over Drebber’s body, I drove back, and leaving my cab in a side street, I went boldly up to the house — for I was ready to dare anything rather than lose the ring. When I arrived there, I walked right into the arms of a police-officer who was coming out, and only managed to disarm his suspicions by pretending to be hopelessly drunk.

“That was how Enoch Drebber came to his end. All I had to do then was to do as much for Stangerson, and so pay off John Ferrier’s debt. I knew that he was staying at Halliday’s Private Hotel, and I hung about all day, but he never came out. I fancy that he suspected something when Drebber failed to put in an appearance. He was cunning, was Stangerson, and always on his guard. If he thought he could keep me off by staying indoors he was very much mistaken. I soon found out which was the window of his bedroom, and early next morning I took advantage of some ladders which were lying in the lane behind the hotel, and so made my way into his room in the grey of the dawn. I woke him up and told him that the hour had come when he was to answer for the life he had taken so long before. I described Drebber’s death to him, and I gave him the same choice of the poisoned pills. Instead of grasping at the chance of safety which that offered him, he sprang from his bed and flew at my throat. In self-defence I stabbed him to the heart. It would have been the same in any case, for Providence would never have allowed his guilty hand to pick out anything but the poison.

“I have little more to say, and it’s as well, for I am about done up. I went on cabbing it for a day or so, intending to keep at it until I could save enough to take me back to America. I was standing in the yard when a ragged youngster asked if there was a cabby there called Jefferson Hope, and said that his cab was wanted by a gentleman at 221B, Baker Street. I went round, suspecting no harm, and the next thing I knew, this young man here had the bracelets on my wrists, and as neatly snackled as ever I saw in my life. That’s the whole of my story, gentlemen. You may consider me to be a murderer; but I hold that I am just as much an officer of justice as you are.”

So thrilling had the man’s narrative been, and his manner was so impressive that we had sat silent and absorbed. Even the professional detectives, *blasé* as they were in every detail of crime, appeared to be keenly interested in the man’s story. When he finished we sat for some minutes in a stillness which was only broken by the scratching of Lestrade’s pencil as he gave the finishing touches to his shorthand account.

“There is only one point on which I should like a little more information,” Sherlock Holmes said at last. “Who was your accomplice who came for the ring which I advertised?”

The prisoner winked at my friend jocosely. “I can tell my own secrets,” he said, “but I don’t get other people into trouble. I saw your advertisement, and I thought it might be a plant, or it might be the ring which I wanted. My friend volunteered to go and see. I think you’ll own he did it smartly.”

“Not a doubt of that,” said Holmes heartily.

“Now, gentlemen,” the Inspector remarked gravely, “the forms of the law must be complied with. On Thursday the prisoner will be brought before the magistrates, and your attendance will be required. Until then I will be responsible for him.” He rang the bell as he spoke, and Jefferson Hope was led off by a couple of warders, while my friend and I made our way out of the Station and took a cab back to Baker Street.

CHAPTER VII. THE CONCLUSION.

WE had all been warned to appear before the magistrates upon the Thursday; but when the Thursday came there was no occasion for our testimony. A higher Judge had taken the matter in hand, and Jefferson Hope had been summoned before a tribunal where strict justice would be meted out to him. On the very night after his capture the aneurism burst, and he was found in the morning stretched upon the floor of the cell, with a placid smile upon his face, as though he had been able in his dying moments to look back upon a useful life, and on work well done.

“Gregson and Lestrade will be wild about his death,” Holmes remarked, as we chatted it over next evening. “Where will their grand advertisement be now?”

“I don’t see that they had very much to do with his capture,” I answered.

“What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence,” returned my companion, bitterly. “The question is, what can you make people believe that you have done. Never mind,” he continued, more brightly, after a pause. “I would not have missed the investigation for anything. There has been no better case within my recollection. Simple as it was, there were several most instructive points about it.”

“Simple!” I ejaculated.

“Well, really, it can hardly be described as otherwise,” said Sherlock Holmes, smiling at my surprise. “The proof of its intrinsic simplicity is, that without any help save a few very ordinary deductions I was able to lay my hand upon the criminal within three days.”

“That is true,” said I.

“I have already explained to you that what is out of the common is usually a guide rather than a hindrance. In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards. That is a very useful accomplishment, and a very easy one, but people do not practise it much. In the every-day affairs of life it is more useful to reason forwards, and so the other comes to be neglected. There are fifty who can reason synthetically for one who can reason analytically.”

“I confess,” said I, “that I do not quite follow you.”

"I hardly expected that you would. Let me see if I can make it clearer. Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically."

"I understand," said I.

"Now this was a case in which you were given the result and had to find everything else for yourself. Now let me endeavour to show you the different steps in my reasoning. To begin at the beginning. I approached the house, as you know, on foot, and with my mind entirely free from all impressions. I naturally began by examining the roadway, and there, as I have already explained to you, I saw clearly the marks of a cab, which, I ascertained by inquiry, must have been there during the night. I satisfied myself that it was a cab and not a private carriage by the narrow gauge of the wheels. The ordinary London growler is considerably less wide than a gentleman's brougham.

"This was the first point gained. I then walked slowly down the garden path, which happened to be composed of a clay soil, peculiarly suitable for taking impressions. No doubt it appeared to you to be a mere trampled line of slush, but to my trained eyes every mark upon its surface had a meaning. There is no branch of detective science which is so important and so much neglected as the art of tracing footsteps. Happily, I have always laid great stress upon it, and much practice has made it second nature to me. I saw the heavy footmarks of the constables, but I saw also the track of the two men who had first passed through the garden. It was easy to tell that they had been before the others, because in places their marks had been entirely obliterated by the others coming upon the top of them. In this way my second link was formed, which told me that the nocturnal visitors were two in number, one remarkable for his height (as I calculated from the length of his stride), and the other fashionably dressed, to judge from the small and elegant impression left by his boots.

"On entering the house this last inference was confirmed. My well-booted man lay before me. The tall one, then, had done the murder, if murder there was. There was no wound upon the dead man's person, but the agitated expression upon his face assured me that he had foreseen his fate before it came upon him. Men who die from heart disease, or any sudden natural cause, never by any chance exhibit agitation upon their features. Having sniffed the dead man’s lips I detected a slightly sour smell, and I came to the conclusion that he had had poison forced upon him. Again, I argued that it had been forced upon him from the hatred and fear expressed upon his face. By the method of exclusion, I had arrived at this result, for no other hypothesis would meet the facts. Do not imagine that it was a very unheard of idea. The forcible administration of poison is by no means a new thing in criminal annals. The cases of Dolsky in Odessa, and of Leturier in Montpellier, will occur at once to any toxicologist.

“And now came the great question as to the reason why. Robbery had not been the object of the murder, for nothing was taken. Was it politics, then, or was it a woman? That was the question which confronted me. I was inclined from the first to the latter supposition. Political assassins are only too glad to do their work and to fly. This murder had, on the contrary, been done most deliberately, and the perpetrator had left his tracks all over the room, showing that he had been there all the time. It must have been a private wrong, and not a political one, which called for such a methodical revenge. When the inscription was discovered upon the wall I was more inclined than ever to my opinion. The thing was too evidently a blind. When the ring was found, however, it settled the question. Clearly the murderer had used it to remind his victim of some dead or absent woman. It was at this point that I asked Gregson whether he had enquired in his telegram to Cleveland as to any particular point in Mr. Drebber’s former career. He answered, you remember, in the negative.

“I then proceeded to make a careful examination of the room, which confirmed me in my opinion as to the murderer’s height, and furnished me with the additional details as to the Trichinopoly cigar and the length of his nails. I had already come to the conclusion, since there were no signs of a struggle, that the blood which covered the floor had burst from the murderer’s nose in his excitement. I could perceive that the track of blood coincided with the track of his feet. It is seldom that any man, unless he is very full-blooded, breaks out in this way through emotion, so I hazarded the opinion that the criminal was probably a robust and ruddy-faced man. Events proved that I had judged correctly.

“Having left the house, I proceeded to do what Gregson had neglected. I telegraphed to the head of the police at Cleveland, limiting my enquiry to the circumstances connected with the marriage of Enoch Drebber. The answer was conclusive. It told me that Drebber had already applied for the protection of the law against an old rival in love, named Jefferson Hope, and that this same Hope was at present in Europe. I knew now that I held the clue to the mystery in my hand, and all that remained was to secure the murderer.

“I had already determined in my own mind that the man who had walked into the house with Drebber, was none other than the man who had driven the cab. The marks in the road showed me that the horse had wandered on in a way which would have been impossible had there been anyone in charge of it. Where, then, could the driver be, unless he were inside the house? Again, it is absurd to suppose that any sane man would carry out a deliberate crime under the very eyes, as it were, of a third person, who was sure to betray him. Lastly, supposing one man wished to dog another through London, what better means could he adopt than to turn cabdriver. All these considerations led me to the irresistible conclusion that Jefferson Hope was to be found among the jarveys of the Metropolis.

“If he had been one there was no reason to believe that he had ceased to be. On the contrary, from his point of view, any sudden change would be likely to draw attention to himself. He would, probably, for a time at least, continue to perform his duties. There was no reason to suppose that he was going under an assumed name. Why should he change his name in a country where no one knew his original one? I therefore organized my Street Arab detective corps, and sent them systematically to every cab proprietor in London until they ferreted out the man that I wanted. How well they succeeded, and how quickly I took advantage of it, are still fresh in your recollection. The murder of Stangerson was an incident which was entirely unexpected, but which could hardly in any case have been prevented. Through it, as you know, I came into possession of the pills, the existence of which I had already surmised. You see the whole thing is a chain of logical sequences without a break or flaw.”

“It is wonderful!” I cried. “Your merits should be publicly recognised. You should publish an account of the case. If you won’t, I will for you.”

“You may do what you like, Doctor,” he answered. “See here!” he continued, handing a paper over to me, “look at this!”

It was the *Echo* for the day, and the paragraph to which he pointed was devoted to the case in question.

"The public," it said, "have lost a sensational treat through the sudden death of the man Hope, who was suspected of the murder of Mr. Enoch Drebber and of Mr. Joseph Stangerson. The details of the case will probably be never known now, though we are informed upon good authority that the crime was the result of an old standing and romantic feud, in which love and Mormonism bore a part. It seems that both the victims belonged, in their younger days, to the Latter Day Saints, and Hope, the deceased prisoner, hails also from Salt Lake City. If the case has had no other effect, it, at least, brings out in the most striking manner the efficiency of our detective police force, and will serve as a lesson to all foreigners that they will do wisely to settle their feuds at home, and not to carry them on to British soil. It is an open secret that the credit of this smart capture belongs entirely to the well-known Scotland Yard officials, Messrs. Lestrade and Gregson. The man was apprehended, it appears, in the rooms of a certain Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who has himself, as an amateur, shown some talent in the detective line, and who, with such instructors, may hope in time to attain to some degree of their skill. It is expected that a testimonial of some sort will be presented to the two officers as a fitting recognition of their services."

"Didn't I tell you so when we started?" cried Sherlock Holmes with a laugh. "That's the result of all our Study in Scarlet: to get them a testimonial!"

"Never mind," I answered, "I have all the facts in my journal, and the public shall know them. In the meantime you must make yourself contented by the consciousness of success, like the Roman miser —

"'Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi simul ac nummos contemplor in arca.'"

THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

The Sign of the Four (1890) is the second novel featuring Sherlock Holmes and is set in 1887. The novel has a complex plot, involving the East India Company, the Indian Rebellion of 1857, a stolen treasure and a secret pact among convicts, the 'four' referred to in the title, and two corrupt prison guards. The novel signifies Conan Doyle's advancement in writing since his first attempt at a novel. Interestingly, the plot presents the detective's drug habit for the first time, adding more personal and hybridic depth to the character.

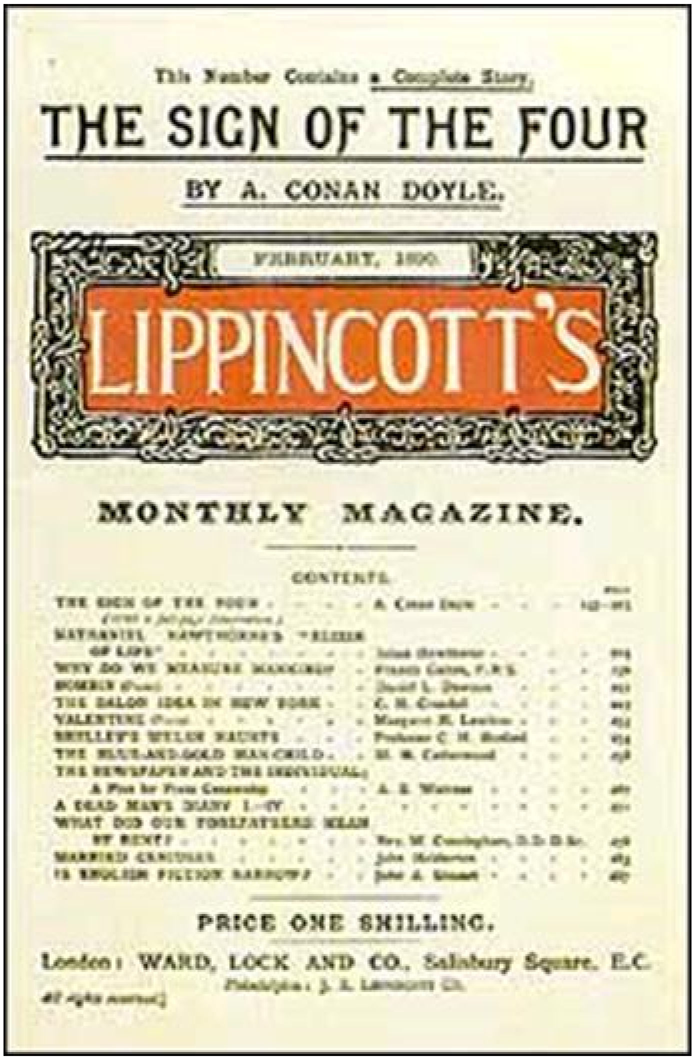

This Number Contains a Complete Story.

THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

FEBRUARY, 1890.

LIPPINCOTT'S

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CHAPTER I

The Science of Deduction

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantel-piece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would care to take anything approaching to a liberty. His great powers, his masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing him.

Yet upon that afternoon, whether it was the Beaune which I had taken with my lunch, or the additional exasperation produced by the extreme deliberation of his manner, I suddenly felt that I could hold out no longer.

“Which is it to-day?” I asked,—”morphine or cocaine?”

He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened. “It is cocaine,” he said,—”a seven-per-cent. solution. Would you care to try it?”

“No, indeed,” I answered, brusquely. “My constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet. I cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it.”

He smiled at my vehemence. “Perhaps you are right, Watson,” he said. “I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment.”

"But consider!" I said, earnestly. "Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable."

He did not seem offended. On the contrary, he put his finger-tips together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who has a relish for conversation.

"My mind," he said, "rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, — or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world."

"The only unofficial detective?" I said, raising my eyebrows.

"The only unofficial consulting detective," he answered. "I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths — which, by the way, is their normal state — the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion. I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward. But you have yourself had some experience of my methods of work in the Jefferson Hope case."

"Yes, indeed," said I, cordially. "I was never so struck by anything in my life. I even embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of 'A Study in Scarlet.'"

He shook his head sadly. "I glanced over it," said he. "Honestly, I cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."

"But the romance was there," I remonstrated. "I could not tamper with the facts."

"Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it."

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of the weather.

"My practice has extended recently to the Continent," said Holmes, after a while, filling up his old brier-root pipe. "I was consulted last week by Francois Le Villard, who, as you probably know, has come rather to the front lately in the French detective service. He has all the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher developments of his art. The case was concerned with a will, and possessed some features of interest. I was able to refer him to two parallel cases, the one at Riga in 1857, and the other at St. Louis in 1871, which have suggested to him the true solution. Here is the letter which I had this morning acknowledging my assistance." He tossed over, as he spoke, a crumpled sheet of foreign notepaper. I glanced my eyes down it, catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray "magnifiques," "coup-de-maitres," and "tours-de-force," all testifying to the ardent admiration of the Frenchman.

"He speaks as a pupil to his master," said I.

"Oh, he rates my assistance too highly," said Sherlock Holmes, lightly. "He has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of the three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge; and that may come in time. He is now translating my small works into French."

"Your works?"

“Oh, didn’t you know?” he cried, laughing. “Yes, I have been guilty of several monographs. They are all upon technical subjects. Here, for example, is one ‘Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccoes.’ In it I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar-, cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with coloured plates illustrating the difference in the ash. It is a point which is continually turning up in criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a clue. If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder has been done by a man who was smoking an Indian lunkah, it obviously narrows your field of search. To the trained eye there is as much difference between the black ash of a Trichinopoly and the white fluff of bird’s-eye as there is between a cabbage and a potato.”

“You have an extraordinary genius for minutiae,” I remarked.

“I appreciate their importance. Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a preserver of impresses. Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the hands of slaters, sailors, corkcutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective, — especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals. But I weary you with my hobby.”

“Not at all,” I answered, earnestly. “It is of the greatest interest to me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing your practical application of it. But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other.”

“Why, hardly,” he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his arm-chair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. “For example, observation shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street Post-Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when there you dispatched a telegram.”

“Right!” said I. “Right on both points! But I confess that I don’t see how you arrived at it. It was a sudden impulse upon my part, and I have mentioned it to no one.”

“It is simplicity itself,” he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,—”so absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep. Just opposite the Seymour Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighbourhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction.”

“How, then, did you deduce the telegram?”

“Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of post-cards. What could you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”

“In this case it certainly is so,” I replied, after a little thought. “The thing, however, is, as you say, of the simplest. Would you think me impertinent if I were to put your theories to a more severe test?”

“On the contrary,” he answered, “it would prevent me from taking a second dose of cocaine. I should be delighted to look into any problem which you might submit to me.”

“I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?”

I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he occasionally assumed. He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. I could hardly keep from smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and handed it back.

“There are hardly any data,” he remarked. “The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts.”

“You are right,” I answered. “It was cleaned before being sent to me.” In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover his failure. What data could he expect from an uncleaned watch?

“Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren,” he observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes. “Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to your elder brother, who inherited it from your father."

"That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?"

"Quite so. The W. suggests your own name. The date of the watch is nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so it was made for the last generation. Jewelry usually descends to the eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father. Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. It has, therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother."

"Right, so far," said I. "Anything else?"

"He was a man of untidy habits, — very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather."

I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with considerable bitterness in my heart.

"This is unworthy of you, Holmes," I said. "I could not have believed that you would have descended to this. You have made inquires into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that you have read all this from his old watch! It is unkind, and, to speak plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it."

"My dear doctor," said he, kindly, "pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch."

"Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? They are absolutely correct in every particular."

"Ah, that is good luck. I could only say what was the balance of probability. I did not at all expect to be so accurate."

"But it was not mere guess-work?"

"No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit, — destructive to the logical faculty. What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend. For example, I began by stating that your brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that watch-case you notice that it is not only dinted in two places, but it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. Surely it is no great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so cavalierly must be a careless man. Neither is it a very far-fetched inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty well provided for in other respects.”

I nodded, to show that I followed his reasoning.

“It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin-point upon the inside of the case. It is more handy than a label, as there is no risk of the number being lost or transposed. There are no less than four such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case. Inference, — that your brother was often at low water. Secondary inference, — that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. Finally, I ask you to look at the inner plate, which contains the key-hole. Look at the thousands of scratches all round the hole, — marks where the key has slipped. What sober man’s key could have scored those grooves? But you will never see a drunkard’s watch without them. He winds it at night, and he leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. Where is the mystery in all this?”

“It is as clear as daylight,” I answered. “I regret the injustice which I did you. I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. May I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?”

“None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth.”

I had opened my mouth to reply to this tirade, when with a crisp knock our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

“A young lady for you, sir,” she said, addressing my companion.

“Miss Mary Morstan,” he read. “Hum! I have no recollection of the name. Ask the young lady to step up, Mrs. Hudson. Don’t go, doctor. I should prefer that you remain.”

CHAPTER II

The Statement of the Case

Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure of manner. She was a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and dressed in the most perfect taste. There was, however, a plainness and simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited means. The dress was a sombre grayish beige, untrimmed and unbraided, and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side. Her face had neither regularity of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature. I could not but observe that as she took the seat which Sherlock Holmes placed for her, her lip trembled, her hand quivered, and she showed every sign of intense inward agitation.

"I have come to you, Mr. Holmes," she said, "because you once enabled my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic complication. She was much impressed by your kindness and skill."

"Mrs. Cecil Forrester," he repeated thoughtfully. "I believe that I was of some slight service to her. The case, however, as I remember it, was a very simple one."

"She did not think so. But at least you cannot say the same of mine. I can hardly imagine anything more strange, more utterly inexplicable, than the situation in which I find myself."

Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. He leaned forward in his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his clear-cut, hawklike features. "State your case," said he, in brisk, business tones.

I felt that my position was an embarrassing one. "You will, I am sure, excuse me," I said, rising from my chair.

To my surprise, the young lady held up her gloved hand to detain me. "If your friend," she said, "would be good enough to stop, he might be of inestimable service to me.”

I relapsed into my chair.

“Briefly,” she continued, “the facts are these. My father was an officer in an Indian regiment who sent me home when I was quite a child. My mother was dead, and I had no relative in England. I was placed, however, in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh, and there I remained until I was seventeen years of age. In the year 1878 my father, who was senior captain of his regiment, obtained twelve months’ leave and came home. He telegraphed to me from London that he had arrived all safe, and directed me to come down at once, giving the Langham Hotel as his address. His message, as I remember, was full of kindness and love. On reaching London I drove to the Langham, and was informed that Captain Morstan was staying there, but that he had gone out the night before and had not yet returned. I waited all day without news of him. That night, on the advice of the manager of the hotel, I communicated with the police, and next morning we advertised in all the papers. Our inquiries led to no result; and from that day to this no word has ever been heard of my unfortunate father. He came home with his heart full of hope, to find some peace, some comfort, and instead—” She put her hand to her throat, and a choking sob cut short the sentence.

“The date?” asked Holmes, opening his note-book.

“He disappeared upon the 3d of December, 1878, — nearly ten years ago.”

“His luggage?”

“Remained at the hotel. There was nothing in it to suggest a clue, — some clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands. He had been one of the officers in charge of the convict-guard there.”

“Had he any friends in town?”

“Only one that we know of, — Major Sholto, of his own regiment, the 34th Bombay Infantry. The major had retired some little time before, and lived at Upper Norwood. We communicated with him, of course, but he did not even know that his brother officer was in England.”

“A singular case,” remarked Holmes.

“I have not yet described to you the most singular part. About six years ago — to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882 — an advertisement appeared in the Times asking for the address of Miss Mary Morstan and stating that it would be to her advantage to come forward. There was no name or address appended. I had at that time just entered the family of Mrs. Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. By her advice I published my address in the advertisement column. The same day there arrived through the post a small card-board box addressed to me, which I found to contain a very large and lustrous pearl. No word of writing was enclosed. Since then every year upon the same date there has always appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as to the sender. They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare variety and of considerable value. You can see for yourselves that they are very handsome." She opened a flat box as she spoke, and showed me six of the finest pearls that I had ever seen.

"Your statement is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. "Has anything else occurred to you?"

"Yes, and no later than to-day. That is why I have come to you. This morning I received this letter, which you will perhaps read for yourself."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "The envelope too, please. Postmark, London, S.W. Date, July 7. Hum! Man's thumb-mark on corner, — probably postman. Best quality paper. Envelopes at sixpence a packet. Particular man in his stationery. No address. 'Be at the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre to-night at seven o'clock. If you are distrustful, bring two friends. You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice. Do not bring police. If you do, all will be in vain. Your unknown friend.' Well, really, this is a very pretty little mystery. What do you intend to do, Miss Morstan?"

"That is exactly what I want to ask you."

"Then we shall most certainly go. You and I and — yes, why, Dr. Watson is the very man. Your correspondent says two friends. He and I have worked together before."

"But would he come?" she asked, with something appealing in her voice and expression.

"I should be proud and happy," said I, fervently, "if I can be of any service."

"You are both very kind," she answered. "I have led a retired life, and have no friends whom I could appeal to. If I am here at six it will do, I suppose?"

“You must not be later,” said Holmes. “There is one other point, however. Is this handwriting the same as that upon the pearl-box addresses?”

“I have them here,” she answered, producing half a dozen pieces of paper.

“You are certainly a model client. You have the correct intuition. Let us see, now.” He spread out the papers upon the table, and gave little darting glances from one to the other. “They are disguised hands, except the letter,” he said, presently, “but there can be no question as to the authorship. See how the irrepressible Greek e will break out, and see the twirl of the final s. They are undoubtedly by the same person. I should not like to suggest false hopes, Miss Morstan, but is there any resemblance between this hand and that of your father?”

“Nothing could be more unlike.”

“I expected to hear you say so. We shall look out for you, then, at six. Pray allow me to keep the papers. I may look into the matter before then. It is only half-past three. Au revoir, then.”

“Au revoir,” said our visitor, and, with a bright, kindly glance from one to the other of us, she replaced her pearl-box in her bosom and hurried away. Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street, until the gray turban and white feather were but a speck in the sombre crowd.

“What a very attractive woman!” I exclaimed, turning to my companion.

He had lit his pipe again, and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. “Is she?” he said, languidly. “I did not observe.”

“You really are an automaton, — a calculating-machine!” I cried. “There is something positively inhuman in you at times.”

He smiled gently. “It is of the first importance,” he said, “not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit, — a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor.”

“In this case, however—”

“I never make exceptions. An exception disproves the rule. Have you ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? What do you make of this fellow’s scribble?”

“It is legible and regular,” I answered. “A man of business habits and some force of character.”

Holmes shook his head. “Look at his long letters,” he said. “They hardly rise above the common herd. That d might be an a, and that l an e. Men of character always differentiate their long letters, however illegibly they may write. There is vacillation in his k’s and self-esteem in his capitals. I am going out now. I have some few references to make. Let me recommend this book, — one of the most remarkable ever penned. It is Winwood Reade’s ‘Martyrdom of Man.’ I shall be back in an hour.”

I sat in the window with the volume in my hand, but my thoughts were far from the daring speculations of the writer. My mind ran upon our late visitor, — her smiles, the deep rich tones of her voice, the strange mystery which overhung her life. If she were seventeen at the time of her father’s disappearance she must be seven-and-twenty now, — a sweet age, when youth has lost its self-consciousness and become a little sobered by experience. So I sat and mused, until such dangerous thoughts came into my head that I hurried away to my desk and plunged furiously into the latest treatise upon pathology. What was I, an army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking-account, that I should dare to think of such things? She was a unit, a factor, — nothing more. If my future were black, it was better surely to face it like a man than to attempt to brighten it by mere will-o’-the-wisps of the imagination.

CHAPTER III

In Quest of a Solution

It was half-past five before Holmes returned. He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits, — a mood which in his case alternated with fits of the blackest depression.

"There is no great mystery in this matter," he said, taking the cup of tea which I had poured out for him. "The facts appear to admit of only one explanation."

"What! you have solved it already?"

"Well, that would be too much to say. I have discovered a suggestive fact, that is all. It is, however, VERY suggestive. The details are still to be added. I have just found, on consulting the back files of the Times, that Major Sholto, of Upper Norword, late of the 34th Bombay Infantry, died upon the 28th of April, 1882."

"I may be very obtuse, Holmes, but I fail to see what this suggests."

"No? You surprise me. Look at it in this way, then. Captain Morstan disappears. The only person in London whom he could have visited is Major Sholto. Major Sholto denies having heard that he was in London. Four years later Sholto dies. WITHIN A WEEK OF HIS DEATH Captain Morstan's daughter receives a valuable present, which is repeated from year to year, and now culminates in a letter which describes her as a wronged woman. What wrong can it refer to except this deprivation of her father? And why should the presents begin immediately after Sholto's death, unless it is that Sholto's heir knows something of the mystery and desires to make compensation? Have you any alternative theory which will meet the facts?"

"But what a strange compensation! And how strangely made! Why, too, should he write a letter now, rather than six years ago? Again, the letter speaks of giving her justice. What justice can she have? It is too much to suppose that her father is still alive. There is no other injustice in her case that you know of."

"There are difficulties; there are certainly difficulties," said Sherlock Holmes, pensively. "But our expedition of to-night will solve them all. Ah, here is a four-wheeler, and Miss Morstan is inside. Are you all ready? Then we had better go down, for it is a little past the hour.”

I picked up my hat and my heaviest stick, but I observed that Holmes took his revolver from his drawer and slipped it into his pocket. It was clear that he thought that our night’s work might be a serious one.

Miss Morstan was muffled in a dark cloak, and her sensitive face was composed, but pale. She must have been more than woman if she did not feel some uneasiness at the strange enterprise upon which we were embarking, yet her self-control was perfect, and she readily answered the few additional questions which Sherlock Holmes put to her.

“Major Sholto was a very particular friend of papa’s,” she said. “His letters were full of allusions to the major. He and papa were in command of the troops at the Andaman Islands, so they were thrown a great deal together. By the way, a curious paper was found in papa’s desk which no one could understand. I don’t suppose that it is of the slightest importance, but I thought you might care to see it, so I brought it with me. It is here.”

Holmes unfolded the paper carefully and smoothed it out upon his knee. He then very methodically examined it all over with his double lens.

“It is paper of native Indian manufacture,” he remarked. “It has at some time been pinned to a board. The diagram upon it appears to be a plan of part of a large building with numerous halls, corridors, and passages. At one point is a small cross done in red ink, and above it is ‘3.37 from left,’ in faded pencil-writing. In the left-hand corner is a curious hieroglyphic like four crosses in a line with their arms touching. Beside it is written, in very rough and coarse characters, ‘The sign of the four, — Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar.’ No, I confess that I do not see how this bears upon the matter. Yet it is evidently a document of importance. It has been kept carefully in a pocket-book; for the one side is as clean as the other.”

“It was in his pocket-book that we found it.”

“Preserve it carefully, then, Miss Morstan, for it may prove to be of use to us. I begin to suspect that this matter may turn out to be much deeper and more subtle than I at first supposed. I must reconsider my ideas.” He leaned back in the cab, and I could see by his drawn brow and his vacant eye that he was thinking intently. Miss Morstan and I chatted in an undertone about our present expedition and its possible outcome, but our companion maintained his impenetrable reserve until the end of our journey.

It was a September evening, and not yet seven o’clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light, — sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all human kind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more. I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed. I could see from Miss Morstan’s manner that she was suffering from the same feeling. Holmes alone could rise superior to petty influences. He held his open note-book upon his knee, and from time to time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light of his pocket-lantern.

At the Lyceum Theatre the crowds were already thick at the side-entrances. In front a continuous stream of hansoms and four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of shirt-fronted men and beshawled, bediamonded women. We had hardly reached the third pillar, which was our rendezvous, before a small, dark, brisk man in the dress of a coachman accosted us.

“Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?” he asked.

“I am Miss Morstan, and these two gentlemen are my friends,” said she.

He bent a pair of wonderfully penetrating and questioning eyes upon us. “You will excuse me, miss,” he said with a certain dogged manner, “but I was to ask you to give me your word that neither of your companions is a police-officer.”

“I give you my word on that,” she answered.

He gave a shrill whistle, on which a street Arab led across a four-wheeler and opened the door. The man who had addressed us mounted to the box, while we took our places inside. We had hardly done so before the driver whipped up his horse, and we plunged away at a furious pace through the foggy streets.

The situation was a curious one. We were driving to an unknown place, on an unknown errand. Yet our invitation was either a complete hoax, —

which was an inconceivable hypothesis, — or else we had good reason to think that important issues might hang upon our journey. Miss Morstan's demeanor was as resolute and collected as ever. I endeavored to cheer and amuse her by reminiscences of my adventures in Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. To this day she declares that I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night, and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

"Rochester Row," said he. "Now Vincent Square. Now we come out on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. We are making for the Surrey side, apparently. Yes, I thought so. Now we are on the bridge. You can catch glimpses of the river."

We did indeed get a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and was soon involved in a labyrinth of streets upon the other side.

"Wordsworth Road," said my companion. "Priory Road. Lark Hall Lane. Stockwell Place. Robert Street. Cold Harbor Lane. Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions."

We had, indeed, reached a questionable and forbidding neighbourhood. Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public houses at the corner. Then came rows of two-storied villas each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new staring brick buildings, — the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. None of the other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark as its neighbours, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window. On our knocking, however, the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash. There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental figure framed in the commonplace door-way of a third-rate suburban dwelling-house.

“The Sahib awaits you,” said he, and even as he spoke there came a high piping voice from some inner room. “Show them in to me, khitmutgar,” it cried. “Show them straight in to me.”

CHAPTER IV

The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill lit and worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw open. A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which shot out from among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. He writhed his hands together as he stood, and his features were in a perpetual jerk, now smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose. Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand over the lower part of his face. In spite of his obtrusive baldness, he gave the impression of youth. In point of fact he had just turned his thirtieth year.

"Your servant, Miss Morstan," he kept repeating, in a thin, high voice. "Your servant, gentlemen. Pray step into my little sanctum. A small place, miss, but furnished to my own liking. An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London."

We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber-and-black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor.

"Mr. Thaddeus Sholto," said the little man, still jerking and smiling. "That is my name. You are Miss Morstan, of course. And these gentlemen —"

“This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and this is Dr. Watson.”

“A doctor, eh?” cried he, much excited. “Have you your stethoscope? Might I ask you — would you have the kindness? I have grave doubts as to my mitral valve, if you would be so very good. The aortic I may rely upon, but I should value your opinion upon the mitral.”

I listened to his heart, as requested, but was unable to find anything amiss, save indeed that he was in an ecstasy of fear, for he shivered from head to foot. “It appears to be normal,” I said. “You have no cause for uneasiness.”

“You will excuse my anxiety, Miss Morstan,” he remarked, airily. “I am a great sufferer, and I have long had suspicions as to that valve. I am delighted to hear that they are unwarranted. Had your father, Miss Morstan, refrained from throwing a strain upon his heart, he might have been alive now.”

I could have struck the man across the face, so hot was I at this callous and off-hand reference to so delicate a matter. Miss Morstan sat down, and her face grew white to the lips. “I knew in my heart that he was dead,” said she.

“I can give you every information,” said he, “and, what is more, I can do you justice; and I will, too, whatever Brother Bartholomew may say. I am so glad to have your friends here, not only as an escort to you, but also as witnesses to what I am about to do and say. The three of us can show a bold front to Brother Bartholomew. But let us have no outsiders, — no police or officials. We can settle everything satisfactorily among ourselves, without any interference. Nothing would annoy Brother Bartholomew more than any publicity.” He sat down upon a low settee and blinked at us inquiringly with his weak, watery blue eyes.

“For my part,” said Holmes, “whatever you may choose to say will go no further.”

I nodded to show my agreement.

“That is well! That is well!” said he. “May I offer you a glass of Chianti, Miss Morstan? Or of Tokay? I keep no other wines. Shall I open a flask? No? Well, then, I trust that you have no objection to tobacco-smoke, to the mild balsamic odor of the Eastern tobacco. I am a little nervous, and I find my hookah an invaluable sedative.” He applied a taper to the great bowl, and the smoke bubbled merrily through the rose-water. We sat all three in a semicircle, with our heads advanced, and our chins upon our hands, while the strange, jerky little fellow, with his high, shining head, puffed uneasily in the centre.

"When I first determined to make this communication to you," said he, "I might have given you my address, but I feared that you might disregard my request and bring unpleasant people with you. I took the liberty, therefore, of making an appointment in such a way that my man Williams might be able to see you first. I have complete confidence in his discretion, and he had orders, if he were dissatisfied, to proceed no further in the matter. You will excuse these precautions, but I am a man of somewhat retiring, and I might even say refined, tastes, and there is nothing more unaesthetic than a policeman. I have a natural shrinking from all forms of rough materialism. I seldom come in contact with the rough crowd. I live, as you see, with some little atmosphere of elegance around me. I may call myself a patron of the arts. It is my weakness. The landscape is a genuine Corot, and, though a connoisseur might perhaps throw a doubt upon that Salvator Rosa, there cannot be the least question about the Bouguereau. I am partial to the modern French school."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Sholto," said Miss Morstan, "but I am here at your request to learn something which you desire to tell me. It is very late, and I should desire the interview to be as short as possible."

"At the best it must take some time," he answered; "for we shall certainly have to go to Norwood and see Brother Bartholomew. We shall all go and try if we can get the better of Brother Bartholomew. He is very angry with me for taking the course which has seemed right to me. I had quite high words with him last night. You cannot imagine what a terrible fellow he is when he is angry."

"If we are to go to Norwood it would perhaps be as well to start at once," I ventured to remark.

He laughed until his ears were quite red. "That would hardly do," he cried. "I don't know what he would say if I brought you in that sudden way. No, I must prepare you by showing you how we all stand to each other. In the first place, I must tell you that there are several points in the story of which I am myself ignorant. I can only lay the facts before you as far as I know them myself.

"My father was, as you may have guessed, Major John Sholto, once of the Indian army. He retired some eleven years ago, and came to live at Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood. He had prospered in India, and brought back with him a considerable sum of money, a large collection of valuable curiosities, and a staff of native servants. With these advantages he bought himself a house, and lived in great luxury. My twin-brother Bartholomew and I were the only children.

“I very well remember the sensation which was caused by the disappearance of Captain Morstan. We read the details in the papers, and, knowing that he had been a friend of our father’s, we discussed the case freely in his presence. He used to join in our speculations as to what could have happened. Never for an instant did we suspect that he had the whole secret hidden in his own breast, — that of all men he alone knew the fate of Arthur Morstan.

“We did know, however, that some mystery — some positive danger — overhung our father. He was very fearful of going out alone, and he always employed two prize-fighters to act as porters at Pondicherry Lodge. Williams, who drove you to-night, was one of them. He was once light-weight champion of England. Our father would never tell us what it was he feared, but he had a most marked aversion to men with wooden legs. On one occasion he actually fired his revolver at a wooden-legged man, who proved to be a harmless tradesman canvassing for orders. We had to pay a large sum to hush the matter up. My brother and I used to think this a mere whim of my father’s, but events have since led us to change our opinion.

“Early in 1882 my father received a letter from India which was a great shock to him. He nearly fainted at the breakfast-table when he opened it, and from that day he sickened to his death. What was in the letter we could never discover, but I could see as he held it that it was short and written in a scrawling hand. He had suffered for years from an enlarged spleen, but he now became rapidly worse, and towards the end of April we were informed that he was beyond all hope, and that he wished to make a last communication to us.

“When we entered his room he was propped up with pillows and breathing heavily. He besought us to lock the door and to come upon either side of the bed. Then, grasping our hands, he made a remarkable statement to us, in a voice which was broken as much by emotion as by pain. I shall try and give it to you in his own very words.

“‘I have only one thing,’ he said, ‘which weighs upon my mind at this supreme moment. It is my treatment of poor Morstan’s orphan. The cursed greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from her the treasure, half at least of which should have been hers. And yet I have made no use of it myself, — so blind and foolish a thing is avarice. The mere feeling of possession has been so dear to me that I could not bear to share it with another. See that chaplet dipped with pearls beside the quinine-bottle. Even that I could not bear to part with, although I had got it out with the design of sending it to her. You, my sons, will give her a fair share of the Agra treasure. But send her nothing — not even the chaplet — until I am gone. After all, men have been as bad as this and have recovered.

"'I will tell you how Morstan died,' he continued. 'He had suffered for years from a weak heart, but he concealed it from every one. I alone knew it. When in India, he and I, through a remarkable chain of circumstances, came into possession of a considerable treasure. I brought it over to England, and on the night of Morstan's arrival he came straight over here to claim his share. He walked over from the station, and was admitted by my faithful Lal Chowdar, who is now dead. Morstan and I had a difference of opinion as to the division of the treasure, and we came to heated words. Morstan had sprung out of his chair in a paroxysm of anger, when he suddenly pressed his hand to his side, his face turned a dusky hue, and he fell backwards, cutting his head against the corner of the treasure-chest. When I stooped over him I found, to my horror, that he was dead.

"'For a long time I sat half distracted, wondering what I should do. My first impulse was, of course, to call for assistance; but I could not but recognise that there was every chance that I would be accused of his murder. His death at the moment of a quarrel, and the gash in his head, would be black against me. Again, an official inquiry could not be made without bringing out some facts about the treasure, which I was particularly anxious to keep secret. He had told me that no soul upon earth knew where he had gone. There seemed to be no necessity why any soul ever should know.

"'I was still pondering over the matter, when, looking up, I saw my servant, Lal Chowdar, in the doorway. He stole in and bolted the door behind him. "Do not fear, Sahib," he said. "No one need know that you have killed him. Let us hide him away, and who is the wiser?" "I did not kill him," said I. Lal Chowdar shook his head and smiled. "I heard it all, Sahib," said he. "I heard you quarrel, and I heard the blow. But my lips are sealed. All are asleep in the house. Let us put him away together." That was enough to decide me. If my own servant could not believe my innocence, how could I hope to make it good before twelve foolish tradesmen in a jury-box? Lal Chowdar and I disposed of the body that night, and within a few days the London papers were full of the mysterious disappearance of Captain Morstan. You will see from what I say that I can hardly be blamed in the matter. My fault lies in the fact that we concealed not only the body, but also the treasure, and that I have clung to Morstan's share as well as to my own. I wish you, therefore, to make restitution. Put your ears down to my mouth. The treasure is hidden in—' At this instant a horrible change came over his expression; his eyes stared wildly, his jaw dropped, and he yelled, in a voice which I can never forget, 'Keep him out! For Christ's sake keep him out!' We both stared round at the window behind us upon which his gaze was fixed. A face was looking in at us out of the darkness. We could see the whitening of the nose where it was pressed against the glass. It was a bearded, hairy face, with wild cruel eyes and an expression of concentrated malevolence. My brother and I rushed towards the window, but the man was gone. When we returned to my father his head had dropped and his pulse had ceased to beat.

"We searched the garden that night, but found no sign of the intruder, save that just under the window a single footmark was visible in the flower-bed. But for that one trace, we might have thought that our imaginations had conjured up that wild, fierce face. We soon, however, had another and a more striking proof that there were secret agencies at work all round us. The window of my father's room was found open in the morning, his cupboards and boxes had been rifled, and upon his chest was fixed a torn piece of paper, with the words 'The sign of the four' scrawled across it. What the phrase meant, or who our secret visitor may have been, we never knew. As far as we can judge, none of my father's property had been actually stolen, though everything had been turned out. My brother and I naturally associated this peculiar incident with the fear which haunted my father during his life; but it is still a complete mystery to us."

The little man stopped to relight his hookah and puffed thoughtfully for a few moments. We had all sat absorbed, listening to his extraordinary narrative. At the short account of her father's death Miss Morstan had turned deadly white, and for a moment I feared that she was about to faint. She rallied however, on drinking a glass of water which I quietly poured out for her from a Venetian carafe upon the side-table. Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair with an abstracted expression and the lids drawn low over his glittering eyes. As I glanced at him I could not but think how on that very day he had complained bitterly of the commonplaceness of life. Here at least was a problem which would tax his sagacity to the utmost. Mr. Thaddeus Sholto looked from one to the other of us with an obvious pride at the effect which his story had produced, and then continued between the puffs of his overgrown pipe.

“My brother and I,” said he, “were, as you may imagine, much excited as to the treasure which my father had spoken of. For weeks and for months we dug and delved in every part of the garden, without discovering its whereabouts. It was maddening to think that the hiding-place was on his very lips at the moment that he died. We could judge the splendor of the missing riches by the chaplet which he had taken out. Over this chaplet my brother Bartholomew and I had some little discussion. The pearls were evidently of great value, and he was averse to part with them, for, between friends, my brother was himself a little inclined to my father’s fault. He thought, too, that if we parted with the chaplet it might give rise to gossip and finally bring us into trouble. It was all that I could do to persuade him to let me find out Miss Morstan’s address and send her a detached pearl at fixed intervals, so that at least she might never feel destitute.”

“It was a kindly thought,” said our companion, earnestly. “It was extremely good of you.”

The little man waved his hand deprecatingly. “We were your trustees,” he said. “That was the view which I took of it, though Brother Bartholomew could not altogether see it in that light. We had plenty of money ourselves. I desired no more. Besides, it would have been such bad taste to have treated a young lady in so scurvy a fashion. ‘Le mauvais gout mene au crime.’ The French have a very neat way of putting these things. Our difference of opinion on this subject went so far that I thought it best to set up rooms for myself: so I left Pondicherry Lodge, taking the old khitmutgar and Williams with me. Yesterday, however, I learn that an event of extreme importance has occurred. The treasure has been discovered. I instantly communicated with Miss Morstan, and it only remains for us to drive out to Norwood and demand our share. I explained my views last night to Brother Bartholomew: so we shall be expected, if not welcome, visitors.”

Mr. Thaddeus Sholto ceased, and sat twitching on his luxurious settee. We all remained silent, with our thoughts upon the new development which the mysterious business had taken. Holmes was the first to spring to his feet.

“You have done well, sir, from first to last,” said he. “It is possible that we may be able to make you some small return by throwing some light upon that which is still dark to you. But, as Miss Morstan remarked just now, it is late, and we had best put the matter through without delay.”

Our new acquaintance very deliberately coiled up the tube of his hookah, and produced from behind a curtain a very long befrogged topcoat with Astrakhan collar and cuffs. This he buttoned tightly up, in spite of the extreme closeness of the night, and finished his attire by putting on a rabbit-skin cap with hanging lappets which covered the ears, so that no part of him was visible save his mobile and peaky face. “My health is somewhat fragile,” he remarked, as he led the way down the passage. “I am compelled to be a valetudinarian.”

Our cab was awaiting us outside, and our programme was evidently prearranged, for the driver started off at once at a rapid pace. Thaddeus Sholto talked incessantly, in a voice which rose high above the rattle of the wheels.

“Bartholomew is a clever fellow,” said he. “How do you think he found out where the treasure was? He had come to the conclusion that it was somewhere indoors: so he worked out all the cubic space of the house, and made measurements everywhere, so that not one inch should be unaccounted for. Among other things, he found that the height of the building was seventy-four feet, but on adding together the heights of all the separate rooms, and making every allowance for the space between, which he ascertained by borings, he could not bring the total to more than seventy feet. There were four feet unaccounted for. These could only be at the top of the building. He knocked a hole, therefore, in the lath-and-plaster ceiling of the highest room, and there, sure enough, he came upon another little garret above it, which had been sealed up and was known to no one. In the centre stood the treasure-chest, resting upon two rafters. He lowered it through the hole, and there it lies. He computes the value of the jewels at not less than half a million sterling.”

At the mention of this gigantic sum we all stared at one another open-eyed. Miss Morstan, could we secure her rights, would change from a needy governess to the richest heiress in England. Surely it was the place of a loyal friend to rejoice at such news; yet I am ashamed to say that selfishness took me by the soul, and that my heart turned as heavy as lead within me. I stammered out some few halting words of congratulation, and then sat downcast, with my head drooped, deaf to the babble of our new acquaintance. He was clearly a confirmed hypochondriac, and I was dreamily conscious that he was pouring forth interminable trains of symptoms, and imploring information as to the composition and action of innumerable quack nostrums, some of which he bore about in a leather case in his pocket. I trust that he may not remember any of the answers which I gave him that night. Holmes declares that he overheard me caution him against the great danger of taking more than two drops of castor oil, while I recommended strychnine in large doses as a sedative. However that may be, I was certainly relieved when our cab pulled up with a jerk and the coachman sprang down to open the door.

“This, Miss Morstan, is Pondicherry Lodge,” said Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, as he handed her out.

CHAPTER V

The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

It was nearly eleven o’clock when we reached this final stage of our night’s adventures. We had left the damp fog of the great city behind us, and the night was fairly fine. A warm wind blew from the westward, and heavy clouds moved slowly across the sky, with half a moon peeping occasionally through the rifts. It was clear enough to see for some distance, but Thaddeus Sholto took down one of the side-lamps from the carriage to give us a better light upon our way.

Pondicherry Lodge stood in its own grounds, and was girt round with a very high stone wall topped with broken glass. A single narrow iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance. On this our guide knocked with a peculiar postman-like rat-tat.

“Who is there?” cried a gruff voice from within.

“It is I, McMurdo. You surely know my knock by this time.”

There was a grumbling sound and a clanking and jarring of keys. The door swung heavily back, and a short, deep-chested man stood in the opening, with the yellow light of the lantern shining upon his protruded face and twinkling distrustful eyes.

“That you, Mr. Thaddeus? But who are the others? I had no orders about them from the master.”

“No, McMurdo? You surprise me! I told my brother last night that I should bring some friends.”

“He ain’t been out o’ his room to-day, Mr. Thaddeus, and I have no orders. You know very well that I must stick to regulations. I can let you in, but your friends must just stop where they are.”

This was an unexpected obstacle. Thaddeus Sholto looked about him in a perplexed and helpless manner. “This is too bad of you, McMurdo!” he said. “If I guarantee them, that is enough for you. There is the young lady, too. She cannot wait on the public road at this hour.”

“Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus,” said the porter, inexorably. “Folk may be friends o’ yours, and yet no friends o’ the master’s. He pays me well to do my duty, and my duty I'll do. I don't know none o' your friends."

"Oh, yes you do, McMurdo," cried Sherlock Holmes, genially. "I don't think you can have forgotten me. Don't you remember the amateur who fought three rounds with you at Alison's rooms on the night of your benefit four years back?"

"Not Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" roared the prize-fighter. "God's truth! how could I have mistook you? If instead o' standin' there so quiet you had just stepped up and given me that cross-hit of yours under the jaw, I'd ha' known you without a question. Ah, you're one that has wasted your gifts, you have! You might have aimed high, if you had joined the fancy."

"You see, Watson, if all else fails me I have still one of the scientific professions open to me," said Holmes, laughing. "Our friend won't keep us out in the cold now, I am sure."

"In you come, sir, in you come, — you and your friends," he answered. "Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus, but orders are very strict. Had to be certain of your friends before I let them in."

Inside, a gravel path wound through desolate grounds to a huge clump of a house, square and prosaic, all plunged in shadow save where a moonbeam struck one corner and glimmered in a garret window. The vast size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a chill to the heart. Even Thaddeus Sholto seemed ill at ease, and the lantern quivered and rattled in his hand.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "There must be some mistake. I distinctly told Bartholomew that we should be here, and yet there is no light in his window. I do not know what to make of it."

"Does he always guard the premises in this way?" asked Holmes.

"Yes; he has followed my father's custom. He was the favorite son, you know, and I sometimes think that my father may have told him more than he ever told me. That is Bartholomew's window up there where the moonshine strikes. It is quite bright, but there is no light from within, I think."

"None," said Holmes. "But I see the glint of a light in that little window beside the door."

"Ah, that is the housekeeper's room. That is where old Mrs. Bernstone sits. She can tell us all about it. But perhaps you would not mind waiting here for a minute or two, for if we all go in together and she has no word of our coming she may be alarmed. But hush! what is that?"

He held up the lantern, and his hand shook until the circles of light flickered and wavered all round us. Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and we all stood with thumping hearts, straining our ears. From the great black house there sounded through the silent night the saddest and most pitiful of sounds, — the shrill, broken whimpering of a frightened woman.

“It is Mrs. Bernstone,” said Sholto. “She is the only woman in the house. Wait here. I shall be back in a moment.” He hurried for the door, and knocked in his peculiar way. We could see a tall old woman admit him, and sway with pleasure at the very sight of him.

“Oh, Mr. Thaddeus, sir, I am so glad you have come! I am so glad you have come, Mr. Thaddeus, sir!” We heard her reiterated rejoicings until the door was closed and her voice died away into a muffled monotone.

Our guide had left us the lantern. Holmes swung it slowly round, and peered keenly at the house, and at the great rubbish-heaps which cumbered the grounds. Miss Morstan and I stood together, and her hand was in mine. A wondrous subtle thing is love, for here were we two who had never seen each other before that day, between whom no word or even look of affection had ever passed, and yet now in an hour of trouble our hands instinctively sought for each other. I have marvelled at it since, but at the time it seemed the most natural thing that I should go out to her so, and, as she has often told me, there was in her also the instinct to turn to me for comfort and protection. So we stood hand in hand, like two children, and there was peace in our hearts for all the dark things that surrounded us.

“What a strange place!” she said, looking round.

“It looks as though all the moles in England had been let loose in it. I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work.”

“And from the same cause,” said Holmes. “These are the traces of the treasure-seekers. You must remember that they were six years looking for it. No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit.”

At that moment the door of the house burst open, and Thaddeus Sholto came running out, with his hands thrown forward and terror in his eyes.

“There is something amiss with Bartholomew!” he cried. “I am frightened! My nerves cannot stand it.” He was, indeed, half blubbering with fear, and his twitching feeble face peeping out from the great Astrakhan collar had the helpless appealing expression of a terrified child.

“Come into the house,” said Holmes, in his crisp, firm way.

“Yes, do!” pleaded Thaddeus Sholto. “I really do not feel equal to giving directions.”

We all followed him into the housekeeper’s room, which stood upon the left-hand side of the passage. The old woman was pacing up and down with a scared look and restless picking fingers, but the sight of Miss Morstan appeared to have a soothing effect upon her.

“God bless your sweet calm face!” she cried, with an hysterical sob. “It does me good to see you. Oh, but I have been sorely tried this day!”

Our companion patted her thin, work-worn hand, and murmured some few words of kindly womanly comfort which brought the colour back into the others bloodless cheeks.

“Master has locked himself in and will not answer me,” she explained. “All day I have waited to hear from him, for he often likes to be alone; but an hour ago I feared that something was amiss, so I went up and peeped through the key-hole. You must go up, Mr. Thaddeus, — you must go up and look for yourself. I have seen Mr. Bartholomew Sholto in joy and in sorrow for ten long years, but I never saw him with such a face on him as that.”

Sherlock Holmes took the lamp and led the way, for Thaddeus Sholto’s teeth were chattering in his head. So shaken was he that I had to pass my hand under his arm as we went up the stairs, for his knees were trembling under him. Twice as we ascended Holmes whipped his lens out of his pocket and carefully examined marks which appeared to me to be mere shapeless smudges of dust upon the cocoa-nut matting which served as a stair-carpet. He walked slowly from step to step, holding the lamp, and shooting keen glances to right and left. Miss Morstan had remained behind with the frightened housekeeper.

The third flight of stairs ended in a straight passage of some length, with a great picture in Indian tapestry upon the right of it and three doors upon the left. Holmes advanced along it in the same slow and methodical way, while we kept close at his heels, with our long black shadows streaming backwards down the corridor. The third door was that which we were seeking. Holmes knocked without receiving any answer, and then tried to turn the handle and force it open. It was locked on the inside, however, and by a broad and powerful bolt, as we could see when we set our lamp up against it. The key being turned, however, the hole was not entirely closed.

Sherlock Holmes bent down to it, and instantly rose again with a sharp intaking of the breath.

“There is something devilish in this, Watson,” said he, more moved than I had ever before seen him. “What do you make of it?”

I stooped to the hole, and recoiled in horror. Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance. Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, for all beneath was in shadow, there hung a face, — the very face of our companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. So like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.

“This is terrible!” I said to Holmes. “What is to be done?”

“The door must come down,” he answered, and, springing against it, he put all his weight upon the lock. It creaked and groaned, but did not yield. Together we flung ourselves upon it once more, and this time it gave way with a sudden snap, and we found ourselves within Bartholomew Sholto’s chamber.

It appeared to have been fitted up as a chemical laboratory. A double line of glass-stoppered bottles was drawn up upon the wall opposite the door, and the table was littered over with Bunsen burners, test-tubes, and retorts. In the corners stood carboys of acid in wicker baskets. One of these appeared to leak or to have been broken, for a stream of dark-coloured liquid had trickled out from it, and the air was heavy with a peculiarly pungent, tar-like odor. A set of steps stood at one side of the room, in the midst of a litter of lath and plaster, and above them there was an opening in the ceiling large enough for a man to pass through. At the foot of the steps a long coil of rope was thrown carelessly together.

By the table, in a wooden arm-chair, the master of the house was seated all in a heap, with his head sunk upon his left shoulder, and that ghastly, inscrutable smile upon his face. He was stiff and cold, and had clearly been dead many hours. It seemed to me that not only his features but all his limbs were twisted and turned in the most fantastic fashion. By his hand upon the table there lay a peculiar instrument, — a brown, close-grained stick, with a stone head like a hammer, rudely lashed on with coarse twine. Beside it was a torn sheet of note-paper with some words scrawled upon it. Holmes glanced at it, and then handed it to me.

“You see,” he said, with a significant raising of the eyebrows.

In the light of the lantern I read, with a thrill of horror, “The sign of the four.”

“In God’s name, what does it all mean?” I asked.

“It means murder,” said he, stooping over the dead man. “Ah, I expected it. Look here!” He pointed to what looked like a long, dark thorn stuck in the skin just above the ear.

“It looks like a thorn,” said I.

“It is a thorn. You may pick it out. But be careful, for it is poisoned.”

I took it up between my finger and thumb. It came away from the skin so readily that hardly any mark was left behind. One tiny speck of blood showed where the puncture had been.

“This is all an insoluble mystery to me,” said I. “It grows darker instead of clearer.”

“On the contrary,” he answered, “it clears every instant. I only require a few missing links to have an entirely connected case.”

We had almost forgotten our companion’s presence since we entered the chamber. He was still standing in the door-way, the very picture of terror, wringing his hands and moaning to himself. Suddenly, however, he broke out into a sharp, querulous cry.

“The treasure is gone!” he said. “They have robbed him of the treasure! There is the hole through which we lowered it. I helped him to do it! I was the last person who saw him! I left him here last night, and I heard him lock the door as I came down-stairs.”

“What time was that?”

“It was ten o’clock. And now he is dead, and the police will be called in, and I shall be suspected of having had a hand in it. Oh, yes, I am sure I shall. But you don’t think so, gentlemen? Surely you don’t think that it was I? Is it likely that I would have brought you here if it were I? Oh, dear! oh, dear! I know that I shall go mad!” He jerked his arms and stamped his feet in a kind of convulsive frenzy.

“You have no reason for fear, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes, kindly, putting his hand upon his shoulder. “Take my advice, and drive down to the station to report this matter to the police. Offer to assist them in every way. We shall wait here until your return.”

The little man obeyed in a half-stupefied fashion, and we heard him stumbling down the stairs in the dark.

CHAPTER VI

Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration

“Now, Watson,” said Holmes, rubbing his hands, “we have half an hour to ourselves. Let us make good use of it. My case is, as I have told you, almost complete; but we must not err on the side of over-confidence. Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying it.”

“Simple!” I ejaculated.

“Surely,” said he, with something of the air of a clinical professor expounding to his class. “Just sit in the corner there, that your footprints may not complicate matters. Now to work! In the first place, how did these folk come, and how did they go? The door has not been opened since last night. How of the window?” He carried the lamp across to it, muttering his observations aloud the while, but addressing them to himself rather than to me. “Window is snibbed on the inner side. Framework is solid. No hinges at the side. Let us open it. No water-pipe near. Roof quite out of reach. Yet a man has mounted by the window. It rained a little last night. Here is the print of a foot in mould upon the sill. And here is a circular muddy mark, and here again upon the floor, and here again by the table. See here, Watson! This is really a very pretty demonstration.”

I looked at the round, well-defined muddy discs. “This is not a footmark,” said I.

“It is something much more valuable to us. It is the impression of a wooden stump. You see here on the sill is the boot-mark, a heavy boot with the broad metal heel, and beside it is the mark of the timber-toe.”

“It is the wooden-legged man.”

“Quite so. But there has been some one else, — a very able and efficient ally. Could you scale that wall, doctor?”

I looked out of the open window. The moon still shone brightly on that angle of the house. We were a good sixty feet from the ground, and, look where I would, I could see no foothold, nor as much as a crevice in the brick-work.

“It is absolutely impossible,” I answered.

“Without aid it is so. But suppose you had a friend up here who lowered you this good stout rope which I see in the corner, securing one end of it to this great hook in the wall. Then, I think, if you were an active man, You might swarm up, wooden leg and all. You would depart, of course, in the same fashion, and your ally would draw up the rope, untie it from the hook, shut the window, snib it on the inside, and get away in the way that he originally came. As a minor point it may be noted,” he continued, fingering the rope, “that our wooden-legged friend, though a fair climber, was not a professional sailor. His hands were far from horny. My lens discloses more than one blood-mark, especially towards the end of the rope, from which I gather that he slipped down with such velocity that he took the skin off his hand.”

“This is all very well,” said I, “but the thing becomes more unintelligible than ever. How about this mysterious ally? How came he into the room?”

“Yes, the ally!” repeated Holmes, pensively. “There are features of interest about this ally. He lifts the case from the regions of the commonplace. I fancy that this ally breaks fresh ground in the annals of crime in this country, — though parallel cases suggest themselves from India, and, if my memory serves me, from Senegambia.”

“How came he, then?” I reiterated. “The door is locked, the window is inaccessible. Was it through the chimney?”

“The grate is much too small,” he answered. “I had already considered that possibility.”

“How then?” I persisted.

“You will not apply my precept,” he said, shaking his head. “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, HOWEVER IMPROBABLE, must be the truth? We know that he did not come through the door, the window, or the chimney. We also know that he could not have been concealed in the room, as there is no concealment possible. Whence, then, did he come?”

“He came through the hole in the roof,” I cried.

“Of course he did. He must have done so. If you will have the kindness to hold the lamp for me, we shall now extend our researches to the room above, — the secret room in which the treasure was found.”

He mounted the steps, and, seizing a rafter with either hand, he swung himself up into the garret. Then, lying on his face, he reached down for the lamp and held it while I followed him.

The chamber in which we found ourselves was about ten feet one way and six the other. The floor was formed by the rafters, with thin lath-and-plaster between, so that in walking one had to step from beam to beam. The roof ran up to an apex, and was evidently the inner shell of the true roof of the house. There was no furniture of any sort, and the accumulated dust of years lay thick upon the floor.

“Here you are, you see,” said Sherlock Holmes, putting his hand against the sloping wall. “This is a trap-door which leads out on to the roof. I can press it back, and here is the roof itself, sloping at a gentle angle. This, then, is the way by which Number One entered. Let us see if we can find any other traces of his individuality.”

He held down the lamp to the floor, and as he did so I saw for the second time that night a startled, surprised look come over his face. For myself, as I followed his gaze my skin was cold under my clothes. The floor was covered thickly with the prints of a naked foot, — clear, well defined, perfectly formed, but scarce half the size of those of an ordinary man.

“Holmes,” I said, in a whisper, “a child has done the horrid thing.”

He had recovered his self-possession in an instant. “I was staggered for the moment,” he said, “but the thing is quite natural. My memory failed me, or I should have been able to foretell it. There is nothing more to be learned here. Let us go down.”

“What is your theory, then, as to those footmarks?” I asked, eagerly, when we had regained the lower room once more.

“My dear Watson, try a little analysis yourself,” said he, with a touch of impatience. “You know my methods. Apply them, and it will be instructive to compare results.”

“I cannot conceive anything which will cover the facts,” I answered.

“It will be clear enough to you soon,” he said, in an off-hand way. “I think that there is nothing else of importance here, but I will look.” He whipped out his lens and a tape measure, and hurried about the room on his knees, measuring, comparing, examining, with his long thin nose only a few inches from the planks, and his beady eyes gleaming and deep-set like those of a bird. So swift, silent, and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained blood-hound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law, instead of exerting them in its defense. As he hunted about, he kept muttering to himself, and finally he broke out into a loud crow of delight.

"We are certainly in luck," said he. "We ought to have very little trouble now. Number One has had the misfortune to tread in the creosote. You can see the outline of the edge of his small foot here at the side of this evil-smelling mess. The carboy has been cracked, You see, and the stuff has leaked out."

"What then?" I asked.

"Why, we have got him, that's all," said he. "I know a dog that would follow that scent to the world's end. If a pack can track a trailed herring across a shire, how far can a specially-trained hound follow so pungent a smell as this? It sounds like a sum in the rule of three. The answer should give us the — But halloo! here are the accredited representatives of the law."

Heavy steps and the clamor of loud voices were audible from below, and the hall door shut with a loud crash.

"Before they come," said Holmes, "just put your hand here on this poor fellow's arm, and here on his leg. What do you feel?"

"The muscles are as hard as a board," I answered.

"Quite so. They are in a state of extreme contraction, far exceeding the usual rigor mortis. Coupled with this distortion of the face, this Hippocratic smile, or 'risus sardonicus,' as the old writers called it, what conclusion would it suggest to your mind?"

"Death from some powerful vegetable alkaloid," I answered,—"some strychnine-like substance which would produce tetanus."

"That was the idea which occurred to me the instant I saw the drawn muscles of the face. On getting into the room I at once looked for the means by which the poison had entered the system. As you saw, I discovered a thorn which had been driven or shot with no great force into the scalp. You observe that the part struck was that which would be turned towards the hole in the ceiling if the man were erect in his chair. Now examine the thorn."

I took it up gingerly and held it in the light of the lantern. It was long, sharp, and black, with a glazed look near the point as though some gummy substance had dried upon it. The blunt end had been trimmed and rounded off with a knife.

"Is that an English thorn?" he asked.

"No, it certainly is not."

"With all these data you should be able to draw some just inference. But here are the regulars: so the auxiliary forces may beat a retreat."

As he spoke, the steps which had been coming nearer sounded loudly on the passage, and a very stout, portly man in a gray suit strode heavily into the room. He was red-faced, burly and plethoric, with a pair of very small twinkling eyes which looked keenly out from between swollen and puffy pouches. He was closely followed by an inspector in uniform, and by the still palpitating Thaddeus Sholto.

"Here's a business!" he cried, in a muffled, husky voice. "Here's a pretty business! But who are all these? Why, the house seems to be as full as a rabbit-warren!"

"I think you must recollect me, Mr. Athelney Jones," said Holmes, quietly.

"Why, of course I do!" he wheezed. "It's Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the theorist. Remember you! I'll never forget how you lectured us all on causes and inferences and effects in the Bishopgate jewel case. It's true you set us on the right track; but you'll own now that it was more by good luck than good guidance."

"It was a piece of very simple reasoning."

"Oh, come, now, come! Never be ashamed to own up. But what is all this? Bad business! Bad business! Stern facts here, — no room for theories. How lucky that I happened to be out at Norwood over another case! I was at the station when the message arrived. What d'you think the man died of?"

"Oh, this is hardly a case for me to theorize over," said Holmes, dryly.

"No, no. Still, we can't deny that you hit the nail on the head sometimes. Dear me! Door locked, I understand. Jewels worth half a million missing. How was the window?"

"Fastened; but there are steps on the sill."

"Well, well, if it was fastened the steps could have nothing to do with the matter. That's common sense. Man might have died in a fit; but then the jewels are missing. Ha! I have a theory. These flashes come upon me at times. — Just step outside, sergeant, and you, Mr. Sholto. Your friend can remain. — What do you think of this, Holmes? Sholto was, on his own confession, with his brother last night. The brother died in a fit, on which Sholto walked off with the treasure. How's that?"

"On which the dead man very considerately got up and locked the door on the inside."

"Hum! There's a flaw there. Let us apply common sense to the matter. This Thaddeus Sholto WAS with his brother; there WAS a quarrel; so much we know. The brother is dead and the jewels are gone. So much also we know. No one saw the brother from the time Thaddeus left him. His bed had not been slept in. Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed state of mind. His appearance is — well, not attractive. You see that I am weaving my web round Thaddeus. The net begins to close upon him."

"You are not quite in possession of the facts yet," said Holmes. "This splinter of wood, which I have every reason to believe to be poisoned, was in the man's scalp where you still see the mark; this card, inscribed as you see it, was on the table; and beside it lay this rather curious stone-headed instrument. How does all that fit into your theory?"

"Confirms it in every respect," said the fat detective, pompously. "House is full of Indian curiosities. Thaddeus brought this up, and if this splinter be poisonous Thaddeus may as well have made murderous use of it as any other man. The card is some hocus-pocus, — a blind, as like as not. The only question is, how did he depart? Ah, of course, here is a hole in the roof." With great activity, considering his bulk, he sprang up the steps and squeezed through into the garret, and immediately afterwards we heard his exulting voice proclaiming that he had found the trap-door.

"He can find something," remarked Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "He has occasional glimmerings of reason. *Il n'y a pas des sots si incommodes que ceux qui ont de l'esprit!*"

"You see!" said Athelney Jones, reappearing down the steps again. "Facts are better than mere theories, after all. My view of the case is confirmed. There is a trap-door communicating with the roof, and it is partly open."

"It was I who opened it."

"Oh, indeed! You did notice it, then?" He seemed a little crestfallen at the discovery. "Well, whoever noticed it, it shows how our gentleman got away. Inspector!"

"Yes, sir," from the passage.

"Ask Mr. Sholto to step this way. — Mr. Sholto, it is my duty to inform you that anything which you may say will be used against you. I arrest you in the queen's name as being concerned in the death of your brother."

“There, now! Didn’t I tell you!” cried the poor little man, throwing out his hands, and looking from one to the other of us.

“Don’t trouble yourself about it, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes. “I think that I can engage to clear you of the charge.”

“Don’t promise too much, Mr. Theorist, — don’t promise too much!” snapped the detective. “You may find it a harder matter than you think.”

“Not only will I clear him, Mr. Jones, but I will make you a free present of the name and description of one of the two people who were in this room last night. His name, I have every reason to believe, is Jonathan Small. He is a poorly-educated man, small, active, with his right leg off, and wearing a wooden stump which is worn away upon the inner side. His left boot has a coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron band round the heel. He is a middle-aged man, much sunburned, and has been a convict. These few indications may be of some assistance to you, coupled with the fact that there is a good deal of skin missing from the palm of his hand. The other man—”

“Ah! the other man — ?” asked Athelney Jones, in a sneering voice, but impressed none the less, as I could easily see, by the precision of the other’s manner.

“Is a rather curious person,” said Sherlock Holmes, turning upon his heel. “I hope before very long to be able to introduce you to the pair of them. — A word with you, Watson.”

He led me out to the head of the stair. “This unexpected occurrence,” he said, “has caused us rather to lose sight of the original purpose of our journey.”

“I have just been thinking so,” I answered. “It is not right that Miss Morstan should remain in this stricken house.”

“No. You must escort her home. She lives with Mrs. Cecil Forrester, in Lower Camberwell: so it is not very far. I will wait for you here if you will drive out again. Or perhaps you are too tired?”

“By no means. I don’t think I could rest until I know more of this fantastic business. I have seen something of the rough side of life, but I give you my word that this quick succession of strange surprises to-night has shaken my nerve completely. I should like, however, to see the matter through with you, now that I have got so far.”

“Your presence will be of great service to me,” he answered. “We shall work the case out independently, and leave this fellow Jones to exult over any mare’s-nest which he may choose to construct. When you have dropped

Miss Morstan I wish you to go on to No. 3 Pinchin Lane, down near the water’s edge at Lambeth. The third house on the right-hand side is a bird-stuffer’s: Sherman is the name. You will see a weasel holding a young rabbit in the window. Knock old Sherman up, and tell him, with my compliments, that I want Toby at once. You will bring Toby back in the cab with you.”

“A dog, I suppose.”

“Yes, — a queer mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent. I would rather have Toby’s help than that of the whole detective force of London.”

“I shall bring him, then,” said I. “It is one now. I ought to be back before three, if I can get a fresh horse.”

“And I,” said Holmes, “shall see what I can learn from Mrs. Bernstone, and from the Indian servant, who, Mr. Thaddeus tell me, sleeps in the next garret. Then I shall study the great Jones’s methods and listen to his not too delicate sarcasms. ‘*Wir sind gewohnt das die Menschen verhoehnen was sie nicht verstehen.*’ Goethe is always pithy.”

CHAPTER VII

The Episode of the Barrel

The police had brought a cab with them, and in this I escorted Miss Morstan back to her home. After the angelic fashion of women, she had borne trouble with a calm face as long as there was some one weaker than herself to support, and I had found her bright and placid by the side of the frightened housekeeper. In the cab, however, she first turned faint, and then burst into a passion of weeping, — so sorely had she been tried by the adventures of the night. She has told me since that she thought me cold and distant upon that journey. She little guessed the struggle within my breast, or the effort of self-restraint which held me back. My sympathies and my love went out to her, even as my hand had in the garden. I felt that years of the conventionalities of life could not teach me to know her sweet, brave nature as had this one day of strange experiences. Yet there were two thoughts which sealed the words of affection upon my lips. She was weak and helpless, shaken in mind and nerve. It was to take her at a disadvantage to obtrude love upon her at such a time. Worse still, she was rich. If Holmes's researches were successful, she would be an heiress. Was it fair, was it honorable, that a half-pay surgeon should take such advantage of an intimacy which chance had brought about? Might she not look upon me as a mere vulgar fortune-seeker? I could not bear to risk that such a thought should cross her mind. This Agra treasure intervened like an impassable barrier between us.

It was nearly two o'clock when we reached Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. The servants had retired hours ago, but Mrs. Forrester had been so interested by the strange message which Miss Morstan had received that she had sat up in the hope of her return. She opened the door herself, a middle-aged, graceful woman, and it gave me joy to see how tenderly her arm stole round the other's waist and how motherly was the voice in which she greeted her. She was clearly no mere paid dependant, but an honored friend. I was introduced, and Mrs. Forrester earnestly begged me to step in and tell her our adventures. I explained, however, the importance of my errand, and promised faithfully to call and report any progress which we might make with the case. As we drove away I stole a glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step, the two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall light shining through stained glass, the barometer, and the bright stair-rods. It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business which had absorbed us.

And the more I thought of what had happened, the wilder and darker it grew. I reviewed the whole extraordinary sequence of events as I rattled on through the silent gas-lit streets. There was the original problem: that at least was pretty clear now. The death of Captain Morstan, the sending of the pearls, the advertisement, the letter, — we had had light upon all those events. They had only led us, however, to a deeper and far more tragic mystery. The Indian treasure, the curious plan found among Morstan's baggage, the strange scene at Major Sholto's death, the rediscovery of the treasure immediately followed by the murder of the discoverer, the very singular accompaniments to the crime, the footsteps, the remarkable weapons, the words upon the card, corresponding with those upon Captain Morstan's chart, — here was indeed a labyrinth in which a man less singularly endowed than my fellow-lodger might well despair of ever finding the clue.

Pinchin Lane was a row of shabby two-storied brick houses in the lower quarter of Lambeth. I had to knock for some time at No. 3 before I could make my impression. At last, however, there was the glint of a candle behind the blind, and a face looked out at the upper window.

"Go on, you drunken vagabone," said the face. "If you kick up any more row I'll open the kennels and let out forty-three dogs upon you."

"If you'll let one out it's just what I have come for," said I.

"Go on!" yelled the voice. "So help me gracious, I have a wiper in the bag, an' I'll drop it on your 'ead if you don't hook it."

"But I want a dog," I cried.

"I won't be argued with!" shouted Mr. Sherman. "Now stand clear, for when I say 'three,' down goes the wiper."

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes—" I began, but the words had a most magical effect, for the window instantly slammed down, and within a minute the door was unbarred and open. Mr. Sherman was a lanky, lean old man, with stooping shoulders, a stringy neck, and blue-tinted glasses.

“A friend of Mr. Sherlock is always welcome,” said he. “Step in, sir. Keep clear of the badger; for he bites. Ah, naughty, naughty, would you take a nip at the gentleman?” This to a stoat which thrust its wicked head and red eyes between the bars of its cage. “Don’t mind that, sir: it’s only a slow-worm. It hain’t got no fangs, so I gives it the run o’ the room, for it keeps the beetles down. You must not mind my bein’ just a little short wi’ you at first, for I’m guyed at by the children, and there’s many a one just comes down this lane to knock me up. What was it that Mr. Sherlock Holmes wanted, sir?”

“He wanted a dog of yours.”

“Ah! that would be Toby.”

“Yes, Toby was the name.”

“Toby lives at No. 7 on the left here.” He moved slowly forward with his candle among the queer animal family which he had gathered round him. In the uncertain, shadowy light I could see dimly that there were glancing, glimmering eyes peeping down at us from every cranny and corner. Even the rafters above our heads were lined by solemn fowls, who lazily shifted their weight from one leg to the other as our voices disturbed their slumbers.

Toby proved to be an ugly, long-haired, lop-eared creature, half spaniel and half lurcher, brown-and-white in colour, with a very clumsy waddling gait. It accepted after some hesitation a lump of sugar which the old naturalist handed to me, and, having thus sealed an alliance, it followed me to the cab, and made no difficulties about accompanying me. It had just struck three on the Palace clock when I found myself back once more at Pondicherry Lodge. The ex-prize-fighter McMurdo had, I found, been arrested as an accessory, and both he and Mr. Sholto had been marched off to the station. Two constables guarded the narrow gate, but they allowed me to pass with the dog on my mentioning the detective’s name.

Holmes was standing on the door-step, with his hands in his pockets, smoking his pipe.

“Ah, you have him there!” said he. “Good dog, then! Atheney Jones has gone. We have had an immense display of energy since you left. He has arrested not only friend Thaddeus, but the gatekeeper, the housekeeper, and the Indian servant. We have the place to ourselves, but for a sergeant up-stairs. Leave the dog here, and come up.”

We tied Toby to the hall table, and reascended the stairs. The room was as he had left it, save that a sheet had been draped over the central figure. A weary-looking police-sergeant reclined in the corner.

"Lend me your bull's-eye, sergeant," said my companion. "Now tie this bit of card round my neck, so as to hang it in front of me. Thank you. Now I must kick off my boots and stockings. — Just you carry them down with you, Watson. I am going to do a little climbing. And dip my handkerchief into the creasote. That will do. Now come up into the garret with me for a moment."

We clambered up through the hole. Holmes turned his light once more upon the footsteps in the dust.

"I wish you particularly to notice these footmarks," he said. "Do you observe anything noteworthy about them?"

"They belong," I said, "to a child or a small woman."

"Apart from their size, though. Is there nothing else?"

"They appear to be much as other footmarks."

"Not at all. Look here! This is the print of a right foot in the dust. Now I make one with my naked foot beside it. What is the chief difference?"

"Your toes are all cramped together. The other print has each toe distinctly divided."

"Quite so. That is the point. Bear that in mind. Now, would you kindly step over to that flap-window and smell the edge of the wood-work? I shall stay here, as I have this handkerchief in my hand."

I did as he directed, and was instantly conscious of a strong tarry smell.

"That is where he put his foot in getting out. If YOU can trace him, I should think that Toby will have no difficulty. Now run down-stairs, loose the dog, and look out for Blondin."

By the time that I got out into the grounds Sherlock Holmes was on the roof, and I could see him like an enormous glow-worm crawling very slowly along the ridge. I lost sight of him behind a stack of chimneys, but he presently reappeared, and then vanished once more upon the opposite side. When I made my way round there I found him seated at one of the corner eaves.

"That you, Watson?" he cried.

"Yes."

"This is the place. What is that black thing down there?"

"A water-barrel."

“Top on it?”

“Yes.”

“No sign of a ladder?”

“No.”

“Confound the fellow! It’s a most break-neck place. I ought to be able to come down where he could climb up. The water-pipe feels pretty firm. Here goes, anyhow.”

There was a scuffling of feet, and the lantern began to come steadily down the side of the wall. Then with a light spring he came on to the barrel, and from there to the earth.

“It was easy to follow him,” he said, drawing on his stockings and boots. “Tiles were loosened the whole way along, and in his hurry he had dropped this. It confirms my diagnosis, as you doctors express it.”

The object which he held up to me was a small pocket or pouch woven out of coloured grasses and with a few tawdry beads strung round it. In shape and size it was not unlike a cigarette-case. Inside were half a dozen spines of dark wood, sharp at one end and rounded at the other, like that which had struck Bartholomew Sholto.

“They are hellish things,” said he. “Look out that you don’t prick yourself. I’m delighted to have them, for the chances are that they are all he has. There is the less fear of you or me finding one in our skin before long. I would sooner face a Martini bullet, myself. Are you game for a six-mile trudge, Watson?”

“Certainly,” I answered.

“Your leg will stand it?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Here you are, doggy! Good old Toby! Smell it, Toby, smell it!” He pushed the creasote handkerchief under the dog’s nose, while the creature stood with its fluffy legs separated, and with a most comical cock to its head, like a connoisseur sniffing the bouquet of a famous vintage. Holmes then threw the handkerchief to a distance, fastened a stout cord to the mongrel’s collar, and led him to the foot of the water-barrel. The creature instantly broke into a succession of high, tremulous yelps, and, with his nose on the ground, and his tail in the air, pattered off upon the trail at a pace which strained his leash and kept us at the top of our speed.

The east had been gradually whitening, and we could now see some distance in the cold gray light. The square, massive house, with its black, empty windows and high, bare walls, towered up, sad and forlorn, behind us. Our course led right across the grounds, in and out among the trenches and pits with which they were scarred and intersected. The whole place, with its scattered dirt-heaps and ill-grown shrubs, had a blighted, ill-omened look which harmonized with the black tragedy which hung over it.

On reaching the boundary wall Toby ran along, whining eagerly, underneath its shadow, and stopped finally in a corner screened by a young beech. Where the two walls joined, several bricks had been loosened, and the crevices left were worn down and rounded upon the lower side, as though they had frequently been used as a ladder. Holmes clambered up, and, taking the dog from me, he dropped it over upon the other side.

"There's the print of wooden-leg's hand," he remarked, as I mounted up beside him. "You see the slight smudge of blood upon the white plaster. What a lucky thing it is that we have had no very heavy rain since yesterday! The scent will lie upon the road in spite of their eight-and-twenty hours' start."

I confess that I had my doubts myself when I reflected upon the great traffic which had passed along the London road in the interval. My fears were soon appeased, however. Toby never hesitated or swerved, but waddled on in his peculiar rolling fashion. Clearly, the pungent smell of the creasote rose high above all other contending scents.

"Do not imagine," said Holmes, "that I depend for my success in this case upon the mere chance of one of these fellows having put his foot in the chemical. I have knowledge now which would enable me to trace them in many different ways. This, however, is the readiest and, since fortune has put it into our hands, I should be culpable if I neglected it. It has, however, prevented the case from becoming the pretty little intellectual problem which it at one time promised to be. There might have been some credit to be gained out of it, but for this too palpable clue."

"There is credit, and to spare," said I. "I assure you, Holmes, that I marvel at the means by which you obtain your results in this case, even more than I did in the Jefferson Hope Murder. The thing seems to me to be deeper and more inexplicable. How, for example, could you describe with such confidence the wooden-legged man?"

"Pshaw, my dear boy! it was simplicity itself. I don't wish to be theatrical. It is all patent and above-board. Two officers who are in command of a convict-guard learn an important secret as to buried treasure.

A map is drawn for them by an Englishman named Jonathan Small. You remember that we saw the name upon the chart in Captain Morstan's possession. He had signed it in behalf of himself and his associates, — the sign of the four, as he somewhat dramatically called it. Aided by this chart, the officers — or one of them — gets the treasure and brings it to England, leaving, we will suppose, some condition under which he received it unfulfilled. Now, then, why did not Jonathan Small get the treasure himself? The answer is obvious. The chart is dated at a time when Morstan was brought into close association with convicts. Jonathan Small did not get the treasure because he and his associates were themselves convicts and could not get away."

"But that is mere speculation," said I.

"It is more than that. It is the only hypothesis which covers the facts. Let us see how it fits in with the sequel. Major Sholto remains at peace for some years, happy in the possession of his treasure. Then he receives a letter from India which gives him a great fright. What was that?"

"A letter to say that the men whom he had wronged had been set free."

"Or had escaped. That is much more likely, for he would have known what their term of imprisonment was. It would not have been a surprise to him. What does he do then? He guards himself against a wooden-legged man, — a white man, mark you, for he mistakes a white tradesman for him, and actually fires a pistol at him. Now, only one white man's name is on the chart. The others are Hindoos or Mohammedans. There is no other white man. Therefore we may say with confidence that the wooden-legged man is identical with Jonathan Small. Does the reasoning strike you as being faulty?"

"No: it is clear and concise."

"Well, now, let us put ourselves in the place of Jonathan Small. Let us look at it from his point of view. He comes to England with the double idea of regaining what he would consider to be his rights and of having his revenge upon the man who had wronged him. He found out where Sholto lived, and very possibly he established communications with some one inside the house. There is this butler, Lal Rao, whom we have not seen. Mrs. Bernstone gives him far from a good character. Small could not find out, however, where the treasure was hid, for no one ever knew, save the major and one faithful servant who had died. Suddenly Small learns that the major is on his death-bed. In a frenzy lest the secret of the treasure die with him, he runs the gauntlet of the guards, makes his way to the dying man's window, and is only deterred from entering by the presence of his two sons. Mad with hate, however, against the dead man, he enters the room that night, searches his private papers in the hope of discovering some memorandum relating to the treasure, and finally leaves a momento of his visit in the short inscription upon the card. He had doubtless planned beforehand that should he slay the major he would leave some such record upon the body as a sign that it was not a common murder, but, from the point of view of the four associates, something in the nature of an act of justice. Whimsical and bizarre conceits of this kind are common enough in the annals of crime, and usually afford valuable indications as to the criminal. Do you follow all this?"

"Very clearly."

"Now, what could Jonathan Small do? He could only continue to keep a secret watch upon the efforts made to find the treasure. Possibly he leaves England and only comes back at intervals. Then comes the discovery of the garret, and he is instantly informed of it. We again trace the presence of some confederate in the household. Jonathan, with his wooden leg, is utterly unable to reach the lofty room of Bartholomew Sholto. He takes with him, however, a rather curious associate, who gets over this difficulty, but dips his naked foot into creasote, whence comes Toby, and a six-mile limp for a half-pay officer with a damaged tendo Achillis."

"But it was the associate, and not Jonathan, who committed the crime."

"Quite so. And rather to Jonathan's disgust, to judge by the way he stamped about when he got into the room. He bore no grudge against Bartholomew Sholto, and would have preferred if he could have been simply bound and gagged. He did not wish to put his head in a halter. There was no help for it, however: the savage instincts of his companion had broken out, and the poison had done its work: so Jonathan Small left his record, lowered the treasure-box to the ground, and followed it himself. That was the train of events as far as I can decipher them. Of course as to his personal appearance he must be middle-aged, and must be sunburned after serving his time in such an oven as the Andamans. His height is readily calculated from the length of his stride, and we know that he was bearded. His hairiness was the one point which impressed itself upon Thaddeus Sholto when he saw him at the window. I don't know that there is anything else."

“The associate?”

“Ah, well, there is no great mystery in that. But you will know all about it soon enough. How sweet the morning air is! See how that one little cloud floats like a pink feather from some gigantic flamingo. Now the red rim of the sun pushes itself over the London cloud-bank. It shines on a good many folk, but on none, I dare bet, who are on a stranger errand than you and I. How small we feel with our petty ambitions and strivings in the presence of the great elemental forces of nature! Are you well up in your Jean Paul?”

“Fairly so. I worked back to him through Carlyle.”

“That was like following the brook to the parent lake. He makes one curious but profound remark. It is that the chief proof of man’s real greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness. It argues, you see, a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a proof of nobility. There is much food for thought in Richter. You have not a pistol, have you?”

“I have my stick.”

“It is just possible that we may need something of the sort if we get to their lair. Jonathan I shall leave to you, but if the other turns nasty I shall shoot him dead.” He took out his revolver as he spoke, and, having loaded two of the chambers, he put it back into the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

We had during this time been following the guidance of Toby down the half-rural villa-lined roads which lead to the metropolis. Now, however, we were beginning to come among continuous streets, where laborers and dockmen were already astir, and slatternly women were taking down shutters and brushing door-steps. At the square-topped corner public houses business was just beginning, and rough-looking men were emerging, rubbing their sleeves across their beards after their morning wet. Strange dogs sauntered up and stared wonderingly at us as we passed, but our inimitable Toby looked neither to the right nor to the left, but trotted onwards with his nose to the ground and an occasional eager whine which spoke of a hot scent.

We had traversed Streatham, Brixton, Camberwell, and now found ourselves in Kennington Lane, having borne away through the side-streets to the east of the Oval. The men whom we pursued seemed to have taken a curiously zigzag road, with the idea probably of escaping observation. They had never kept to the main road if a parallel side-street would serve their turn. At the foot of Kennington Lane they had edged away to the left through Bond Street and Miles Street. Where the latter street turns into Knight’s Place, Toby ceased to advance, but began to run backwards and forwards with one ear cocked and the other drooping, the very picture of canine indecision. Then he waddled round in circles, looking up to us from time to time, as if to ask for sympathy in his embarrassment.

“What the deuce is the matter with the dog?” growled Holmes. “They surely would not take a cab, or go off in a balloon.”

“Perhaps they stood here for some time,” I suggested.

“Ah! it’s all right. He’s off again,” said my companion, in a tone of relief.

He was indeed off, for after sniffing round again he suddenly made up his mind, and darted away with an energy and determination such as he had not yet shown. The scent appeared to be much hotter than before, for he had not even to put his nose on the ground, but tugged at his leash and tried to break into a run. I cold see by the gleam in Holmes’s eyes that he thought we were nearing the end of our journey.

Our course now ran down Nine Elms until we came to Broderick and Nelson’s large timber-yard, just past the White Eagle tavern. Here the dog, frantic with excitement, turned down through the side-gate into the enclosure, where the sawyers were already at work. On the dog raced through sawdust and shavings, down an alley, round a passage, between two wood-piles, and finally, with a triumphant yelp, sprang upon a large barrel which still stood upon the hand-trolley on which it had been brought. With lolling tongue and blinking eyes, Toby stood upon the cask, looking from one to the other of us for some sign of appreciation. The staves of the barrel and the wheels of the trolley were smeared with a dark liquid, and the whole air was heavy with the smell of creasote.

Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

CHAPTER VIII

The Baker Street Irregulars

“What now?” I asked. “Toby has lost his character for infallibility.”

“He acted according to his lights,” said Holmes, lifting him down from the barrel and walking him out of the timber-yard. “If you consider how much creasote is carted about London in one day, it is no great wonder that our trail should have been crossed. It is much used now, especially for the seasoning of wood. Poor Toby is not to blame.”

“We must get on the main scent again, I suppose.”

“Yes. And, fortunately, we have no distance to go. Evidently what puzzled the dog at the corner of Knight’s Place was that there were two different trails running in opposite directions. We took the wrong one. It only remains to follow the other.”

There was no difficulty about this. On leading Toby to the place where he had committed his fault, he cast about in a wide circle and finally dashed off in a fresh direction.

“We must take care that he does not now bring us to the place where the creasote-barrel came from,” I observed.

“I had thought of that. But you notice that he keeps on the pavement, whereas the barrel passed down the roadway. No, we are on the true scent now.”

It tended down towards the river-side, running through Belmont Place and Prince’s Street. At the end of Broad Street it ran right down to the water’s edge, where there was a small wooden wharf. Toby led us to the very edge of this, and there stood whining, looking out on the dark current beyond.

“We are out of luck,” said Holmes. “They have taken to a boat here.” Several small punts and skiffs were lying about in the water and on the edge of the wharf. We took Toby round to each in turn, but, though he sniffed earnestly, he made no sign.

Close to the rude landing-stage was a small brick house, with a wooden placard slung out through the second window. “Mordecai Smith” was printed across it in large letters, and, underneath, “Boats to hire by the hour or day.” A second inscription above the door informed us that a steam launch was kept, — a statement which was confirmed by a great pile of coke upon the jetty. Sherlock Holmes looked slowly round, and his face assumed an ominous expression.

“This looks bad,” said he. “These fellows are sharper than I expected. They seem to have covered their tracks. There has, I fear, been preconcerted management here.”

He was approaching the door of the house, when it opened, and a little, curly-headed lad of six came running out, followed by a stoutish, red-faced woman with a large sponge in her hand.

“You come back and be washed, Jack,” she shouted. “Come back, you young imp; for if your father comes home and finds you like that, he’ll let us hear of it.”

“Dear little chap!” said Holmes, strategically. “What a rosy-cheeked young rascal! Now, Jack, is there anything you would like?”

The youth pondered for a moment. “I’d like a shillin’,” said he.

“Nothing you would like better?”

“I’d like two shillin’ better,” the prodigy answered, after some thought.

“Here you are, then! Catch! — A fine child, Mrs. Smith!”

“Lor’ bless you, sir, he is that, and forward. He gets a’most too much for me to manage, ‘specially when my man is away days at a time.”

“Away, is he?” said Holmes, in a disappointed voice. “I am sorry for that, for I wanted to speak to Mr. Smith.”

“He’s been away since yesterday mornin’, sir, and, truth to tell, I am beginnin’ to feel frightened about him. But if it was about a boat, sir, maybe I could serve as well.”

“I wanted to hire his steam launch.”

“Why, bless you, sir, it is in the steam launch that he has gone. That’s what puzzles me; for I know there ain’t more coals in her than would take her to about Woolwich and back. If he’d been away in the barge I’d ha’ thought nothin’; for many a time a job has taken him as far as Gravesend, and then if there was much doin’ there he might ha’ stayed over. But what good is a steam launch without coals?”

“He might have bought some at a wharf down the river.”

“He might, sir, but it weren’t his way. Many a time I’ve heard him call out at the prices they charge for a few odd bags. Besides, I don’t like that wooden-legged man, wi’ his ugly face and outlandish talk. What did he want always knockin’ about here for?”

“A wooden-legged man?” said Holmes, with bland surprise.

“Yes, sir, a brown, monkey-faced chap that’s called more’n once for my old man. It was him that roused him up yesternight, and, what’s more, my man knew he was comin’, for he had steam up in the launch. I tell you straight, sir, I don’t feel easy in my mind about it.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Smith,” said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders, “You are frightening yourself about nothing. How could you possibly tell that it was the wooden-legged man who came in the night? I don’t quite understand how you can be so sure.”

“His voice, sir. I knew his voice, which is kind o’ thick and foggy. He tapped at the winder, — about three it would be. ‘Show a leg, matey,’ says he: ‘time to turn out guard.’ My old man woke up Jim, — that’s my eldest, — and away they went, without so much as a word to me. I could hear the wooden leg clackin’ on the stones.”

“And was this wooden-legged man alone?”

“Couldn’t say, I am sure, sir. I didn’t hear no one else.”

“I am sorry, Mrs. Smith, for I wanted a steam launch, and I have heard good reports of the — Let me see, what is her name?”

“The Aurora, sir.”

“Ah! She’s not that old green launch with a yellow line, very broad in the beam?”

“No, indeed. She’s as trim a little thing as any on the river. She’s been fresh painted, black with two red streaks.”

“Thanks. I hope that you will hear soon from Mr. Smith. I am going down the river; and if I should see anything of the Aurora I shall let him know that you are uneasy. A black funnel, you say?”

“No, sir. Black with a white band.”

“Ah, of course. It was the sides which were black. Good-morning, Mrs. Smith. — There is a boatman here with a wherry, Watson. We shall take it and cross the river.

“The main thing with people of that sort,” said Holmes, as we sat in the sheets of the wherry, “is never to let them think that their information can be of the slightest importance to you. If you do, they will instantly shut up like an oyster. If you listen to them under protest, as it were, you are very likely to get what you want.”

“Our course now seems pretty clear,” said I.

“What would you do, then?”

“I would engage a launch and go down the river on the track of the Aurora.”

“My dear fellow, it would be a colossal task. She may have touched at any wharf on either side of the stream between here and Greenwich. Below the bridge there is a perfect labyrinth of landing-places for miles. It would take you days and days to exhaust them, if you set about it alone.”

“Employ the police, then.”

“No. I shall probably call Athelney Jones in at the last moment. He is not a bad fellow, and I should not like to do anything which would injure him professionally. But I have a fancy for working it out myself, now that we have gone so far.”

“Could we advertise, then, asking for information from wharfingers?”

“Worse and worse! Our men would know that the chase was hot at their heels, and they would be off out of the country. As it is, they are likely enough to leave, but as long as they think they are perfectly safe they will be in no hurry. Jones’s energy will be of use to us there, for his view of the case is sure to push itself into the daily press, and the runaways will think that every one is off on the wrong scent.”

“What are we to do, then?” I asked, as we landed near Millbank Penitentiary.

“Take this hansom, drive home, have some breakfast, and get an hour’s sleep. It is quite on the cards that we may be afoot to-night again. Stop at a telegraph-office, cabby! We will keep Toby, for he may be of use to us yet.”

We pulled up at the Great Peter Street post-office, and Holmes despatched his wire. “Whom do you think that is to?” he asked, as we resumed our journey.

“I am sure I don’t know.”

“You remember the Baker Street division of the detective police force whom I employed in the Jefferson Hope case?”

“Well,” said I, laughing.

“This is just the case where they might be invaluable. If they fail, I have other resources; but I shall try them first. That wire was to my dirty little lieutenant, Wiggins, and I expect that he and his gang will be with us before we have finished our breakfast.”

It was between eight and nine o’clock now, and I was conscious of a strong reaction after the successive excitements of the night. I was limp and weary, befogged in mind and fatigued in body. I had not the professional enthusiasm which carried my companion on, nor could I look at the matter as a mere abstract intellectual problem. As far as the death of Bartholomew Sholto went, I had heard little good of him, and could feel no intense antipathy to his murderers. The treasure, however, was a different matter. That, or part of it, belonged rightfully to Miss Morstan. While there was a chance of recovering it I was ready to devote my life to the one object. True, if I found it it would probably put her forever beyond my reach. Yet it would be a petty and selfish love which would be influenced by such a thought as that. If Holmes could work to find the criminals, I had a tenfold stronger reason to urge me on to find the treasure.

A bath at Baker Street and a complete change freshened me up wonderfully. When I came down to our room I found the breakfast laid and Homes pouring out the coffee.

“Here it is,” said he, laughing, and pointing to an open newspaper. “The energetic Jones and the ubiquitous reporter have fixed it up between them. But you have had enough of the case. Better have your ham and eggs first.”

I took the paper from him and read the short notice, which was headed “Mysterious Business at Upper Norwood.”

“About twelve o’clock last night,” said the Standard, “Mr. Bartholomew Sholto, of Pondicherry Lodge, Upper Norwood, was found dead in his room under circumstances which point to foul play. As far as we can learn, no actual traces of violence were found upon Mr. Sholto’s person, but a valuable collection of Indian gems which the deceased gentleman had inherited from his father has been carried off. The discovery was first made by Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, who had called at the house with Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, brother of the deceased. By a singular piece of good fortune, Mr. Athelney Jones, the well-known member of the detective police force, happened to be at the Norwood Police Station, and was on the ground within half an hour of the first alarm. His trained and experienced faculties were at once directed towards the detection of the criminals, with the gratifying result that the brother, Thaddeus Sholto, has already been arrested, together with the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, an Indian butler named Lal Rao, and a porter, or gatekeeper, named McMurdo. It is quite certain that the thief or thieves were well acquainted with the house, for Mr.

Jones's well-known technical knowledge and his powers of minute observation have enabled him to prove conclusively that the miscreants could not have entered by the door or by the window, but must have made their way across the roof of the building, and so through a trap-door into a room which communicated with that in which the body was found. This fact, which has been very clearly made out, proves conclusively that it was no mere haphazard burglary. The prompt and energetic action of the officers of the law shows the great advantage of the presence on such occasions of a single vigorous and masterful mind. We cannot but think that it supplies an argument to those who would wish to see our detectives more decentralised, and so brought into closer and more effective touch with the cases which it is their duty to investigate."

"Isn't it gorgeous!" said Holmes, grinning over his coffee-cup. "What do you think of it?"

"I think that we have had a close shave ourselves of being arrested for the crime."

"So do I. I wouldn't answer for our safety now, if he should happen to have another of his attacks of energy."

At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and dismay.

"By heaven, Holmes," I said, half rising, "I believe that they are really after us."

"No, it's not quite so bad as that. It is the unofficial force, — the Baker Street irregulars."

As he spoke, there came a swift pattering of naked feet upon the stairs, a clatter of high voices, and in rushed a dozen dirty and ragged little street-Arabs. There was some show of discipline among them, despite their tumultuous entry, for they instantly drew up in line and stood facing us with expectant faces. One of their number, taller and older than the others, stood forward with an air of lounging superiority which was very funny in such a disreputable little scarecrow.

"Got your message, sir," said he, "and brought 'em on sharp. Three bob and a tanner for tickets."

"Here you are," said Holmes, producing some silver. "In future they can report to you, Wiggins, and you to me. I cannot have the house invaded in this way. However, it is just as well that you should all hear the instructions.

I want to find the whereabouts of a steam launch called the Aurora, owner Mordecai Smith, black with two red streaks, funnel black with a white band. She is down the river somewhere. I want one boy to be at Mordecai Smith's landing-stage opposite Millbank to say if the boat comes back. You must divide it out among yourselves, and do both banks thoroughly. Let me know the moment you have news. Is that all clear?"

"Yes, guv'nor," said Wiggins.

"The old scale of pay, and a guinea to the boy who finds the boat. Here's a day in advance. Now off you go!" He handed them a shilling each, and away they buzzed down the stairs, and I saw them a moment later streaming down the street.

"If the launch is above water they will find her," said Holmes, as he rose from the table and lit his pipe. "They can go everywhere, see everything, overhear every one. I expect to hear before evening that they have spotted her. In the mean while, we can do nothing but await results. We cannot pick up the broken trail until we find either the Aurora or Mr. Mordecai Smith."

"Toby could eat these scraps, I dare say. Are you going to bed, Holmes?"

"No: I am not tired. I have a curious constitution. I never remember feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely. I am going to smoke and to think over this queer business to which my fair client has introduced us. If ever man had an easy task, this of ours ought to be. Wooden-legged men are not so common, but the other man must, I should think, be absolutely unique."

"That other man again!"

"I have no wish to make a mystery of him, — to you, anyway. But you must have formed your own opinion. Now, do consider the data. Diminutive footmarks, toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed wooden mace, great agility, small poisoned darts. What do you make of all this?"

"A savage!" I exclaimed. "Perhaps one of those Indians who were the associates of Jonathan Small."

"Hardly that," said he. "When first I saw signs of strange weapons I was inclined to think so; but the remarkable character of the footmarks caused me to reconsider my views. Some of the inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula are small men, but none could have left such marks as that. The Hindoo proper has long and thin feet. The sandal-wearing Mohammedan has the great toe well separated from the others, because the thong is commonly passed between. These little darts, too, could only be shot in one way. They are from a blow-pipe. Now, then, where are we to find our savage?”

“South American,” I hazarded.

He stretched his hand up, and took down a bulky volume from the shelf. “This is the first volume of a gazetteer which is now being published. It may be looked upon as the very latest authority. What have we here? ‘Andaman Islands, situated 340 miles to the north of Sumatra, in the Bay of Bengal.’ Hum! hum! What’s all this? Moist climate, coral reefs, sharks, Port Blair, convict-barracks, Rutland Island, cottonwoods — Ah, here we are. ‘The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of America, and the Terra del Fuegians. The average height is rather below four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very much smaller than this. They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once been gained.’ Mark that, Watson. Now, then, listen to this. ‘They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast.’ Nice, amiable people, Watson! If this fellow had been left to his own unaided devices this affair might have taken an even more ghastly turn. I fancy that, even as it is, Jonathan Small would give a good deal not to have employed him.”

“But how came he to have so singular a companion?”

“Ah, that is more than I can tell. Since, however, we had already determined that Small had come from the Andamans, it is not so very wonderful that this islander should be with him. No doubt we shall know all about it in time. Look here, Watson; you look regularly done. Lie down there on the sofa, and see if I can put you to sleep.”

He took up his violin from the corner, and as I stretched myself out he began to play some low, dreamy, melodious air, — his own, no doubt, for he had a remarkable gift for improvisation. I have a vague remembrance of his gaunt limbs, his earnest face, and the rise and fall of his bow. Then I seemed to be floated peacefully away upon a soft sea of sound, until I found myself in dream-land, with the sweet face of Mary Morstan looking down upon me.

CHAPTER IX

A Break in the Chain

It was late in the afternoon before I woke, strengthened and refreshed. Sherlock Holmes still sat exactly as I had left him, save that he had laid aside his violin and was deep in a book. He looked across at me, as I stirred, and I noticed that his face was dark and troubled.

“You have slept soundly,” he said. “I feared that our talk would wake you.”

“I heard nothing,” I answered. “Have you had fresh news, then?”

“Unfortunately, no. I confess that I am surprised and disappointed. I expected something definite by this time. Wiggins has just been up to report. He says that no trace can be found of the launch. It is a provoking check, for every hour is of importance.”

“Can I do anything? I am perfectly fresh now, and quite ready for another night’s outing.”

“No, we can do nothing. We can only wait. If we go ourselves, the message might come in our absence, and delay be caused. You can do what you will, but I must remain on guard.”

“Then I shall run over to Camberwell and call upon Mrs. Cecil Forrester. She asked me to, yesterday.”

“On Mrs. Cecil Forrester?” asked Holmes, with the twinkle of a smile in his eyes.

“Well, of course Miss Morstan too. They were anxious to hear what happened.”

“I would not tell them too much,” said Holmes. “Women are never to be entirely trusted, — not the best of them.”

I did not pause to argue over this atrocious sentiment. “I shall be back in an hour or two,” I remarked.

“All right! Good luck! But, I say, if you are crossing the river you may as well return Toby, for I don’t think it is at all likely that we shall have any use for him now.”

I took our mongrel accordingly, and left him, together with a half-sovereign, at the old naturalist's in Pinchin Lane. At Camberwell I found Miss Morstan a little weary after her night's adventures, but very eager to hear the news. Mrs. Forrester, too, was full of curiosity. I told them all that we had done, suppressing, however, the more dreadful parts of the tragedy. Thus, although I spoke of Mr. Sholto's death, I said nothing of the exact manner and method of it. With all my omissions, however, there was enough to startle and amaze them.

"It is a romance!" cried Mrs. Forrester. "An injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian. They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl."

"And two knight-errants to the rescue," added Miss Morstan, with a bright glance at me.

"Why, Mary, your fortune depends upon the issue of this search. I don't think that you are nearly excited enough. Just imagine what it must be to be so rich, and to have the world at your feet!"

It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no sign of elation at the prospect. On the contrary, she gave a toss of her proud head, as though the matter were one in which she took small interest.

"It is for Mr. Thaddeus Sholto that I am anxious," she said. "Nothing else is of any consequence; but I think that he has behaved most kindly and honorably throughout. It is our duty to clear him of this dreadful and unfounded charge."

It was evening before I left Camberwell, and quite dark by the time I reached home. My companion's book and pipe lay by his chair, but he had disappeared. I looked about in the hope of seeing a note, but there was none.

"I suppose that Mr. Sherlock Holmes has gone out," I said to Mrs. Hudson as she came up to lower the blinds.

"No, sir. He has gone to his room, sir. Do you know, sir," sinking her voice into an impressive whisper, "I am afraid for his health?"

"Why so, Mrs. Hudson?"

"Well, he's that strange, sir. After you was gone he walked and he walked, up and down, and up and down, until I was weary of the sound of his footstep. Then I heard him talking to himself and muttering, and every time the bell rang out he came on the stairhead, with 'What is that, Mrs. Hudson?' And now he has slammed off to his room, but I can hear him walking away the same as ever. I hope he’s not going to be ill, sir. I ventured to say something to him about cooling medicine, but he turned on me, sir, with such a look that I don’t know how ever I got out of the room.”

“I don’t think that you have any cause to be uneasy, Mrs. Hudson,” I answered. “I have seen him like this before. He has some small matter upon his mind which makes him restless.” I tried to speak lightly to our worthy landlady, but I was myself somewhat uneasy when through the long night I still from time to time heard the dull sound of his tread, and knew how his keen spirit was chafing against this involuntary inaction.

At breakfast-time he looked worn and haggard, with a little fleck of feverish colour upon either cheek.

“You are knocking yourself up, old man,” I remarked. “I heard you marching about in the night.”

“No, I could not sleep,” he answered. “This infernal problem is consuming me. It is too much to be balked by so petty an obstacle, when all else had been overcome. I know the men, the launch, everything; and yet I can get no news. I have set other agencies at work, and used every means at my disposal. The whole river has been searched on either side, but there is no news, nor has Mrs. Smith heard of her husband. I shall come to the conclusion soon that they have scuttled the craft. But there are objections to that.”

“Or that Mrs. Smith has put us on a wrong scent.”

“No, I think that may be dismissed. I had inquiries made, and there is a launch of that description.”

“Could it have gone up the river?”

“I have considered that possibility too, and there is a search-party who will work up as far as Richmond. If no news comes to-day, I shall start off myself to-morrow, and go for the men rather than the boat. But surely, surely, we shall hear something.”

We did not, however. Not a word came to us either from Wiggins or from the other agencies. There were articles in most of the papers upon the Norwood tragedy. They all appeared to be rather hostile to the unfortunate Thaddeus Sholto. No fresh details were to be found, however, in any of them, save that an inquest was to be held upon the following day. I walked over to Camberwell in the evening to report our ill success to the ladies, and on my return I found Holmes dejected and somewhat morose. He would hardly reply to my questions, and busied himself all evening in an abstruse chemical analysis which involved much heating of retorts and distilling of vapors, ending at last in a smell which fairly drove me out of the apartment. Up to the small hours of the morning I could hear the clinking of his test-tubes which told me that he was still engaged in his malodorous experiment.

In the early dawn I woke with a start, and was surprised to find him standing by my bedside, clad in a rude sailor dress with a pea-jacket, and a coarse red scarf round his neck.

“I am off down the river, Watson,” said he. “I have been turning it over in my mind, and I can see only one way out of it. It is worth trying, at all events.”

“Surely I can come with you, then?” said I.

“No; you can be much more useful if you will remain here as my representative. I am loath to go, for it is quite on the cards that some message may come during the day, though Wiggins was despondent about it last night. I want you to open all notes and telegrams, and to act on your own judgment if any news should come. Can I rely upon you?”

“Most certainly.”

“I am afraid that you will not be able to wire to me, for I can hardly tell yet where I may find myself. If I am in luck, however, I may not be gone so very long. I shall have news of some sort or other before I get back.”

I had heard nothing of him by breakfast-time. On opening the Standard, however, I found that there was a fresh allusion to the business. “With reference to the Upper Norwood tragedy,” it remarked, “we have reason to believe that the matter promises to be even more complex and mysterious than was originally supposed. Fresh evidence has shown that it is quite impossible that Mr. Thaddeus Sholto could have been in any way concerned in the matter. He and the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, were both released yesterday evening. It is believed, however, that the police have a clue as to the real culprits, and that it is being prosecuted by Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard, with all his well-known energy and sagacity. Further arrests may be expected at any moment.”

“That is satisfactory so far as it goes,” thought I. “Friend Sholto is safe, at any rate. I wonder what the fresh clue may be; though it seems to be a stereotyped form whenever the police have made a blunder.”

I tossed the paper down upon the table, but at that moment my eye caught an advertisement in the agony column. It ran in this way:

“Lost. — Whereas Mordecai Smith, boatman, and his son, Jim, left Smith’s Wharf at or about three o’clock last Tuesday morning in the steam launch Aurora, black with two red stripes, funnel black with a white band, the sum of five pounds will be paid to any one who can give information to Mrs. Smith, at Smith’s Wharf, or at 221b Baker Street, as to the whereabouts of the said Mordecai Smith and the launch Aurora.”

This was clearly Holmes’s doing. The Baker Street address was enough to prove that. It struck me as rather ingenious, because it might be read by the fugitives without their seeing in it more than the natural anxiety of a wife for her missing husband.

It was a long day. Every time that a knock came to the door, or a sharp step passed in the street, I imagined that it was either Holmes returning or an answer to his advertisement. I tried to read, but my thoughts would wander off to our strange quest and to the ill-assorted and villainous pair whom we were pursuing. Could there be, I wondered, some radical flaw in my companion’s reasoning. Might he be suffering from some huge self-deception? Was it not possible that his nimble and speculative mind had built up this wild theory upon faulty premises? I had never known him to be wrong; and yet the keenest reasoner may occasionally be deceived. He was likely, I thought, to fall into error through the over-refinement of his logic, — his preference for a subtle and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay ready to his hand. Yet, on the other hand, I had myself seen the evidence, and I had heard the reasons for his deductions. When I looked back on the long chain of curious circumstances, many of them trivial in themselves, but all tending in the same direction, I could not disguise from myself that even if Holmes’s explanation were incorrect the true theory must be equally outre and startling.

At three o’clock in the afternoon there was a loud peal at the bell, an authoritative voice in the hall, and, to my surprise, no less a person than Mr. Athelney Jones was shown up to me. Very different was he, however, from the brusque and masterful professor of common sense who had taken over the case so confidently at Upper Norwood. His expression was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic.

“Good-day, sir; good-day,” said he. “Mr. Sherlock Holmes is out, I understand.”

“Yes, and I cannot be sure when he will be back. But perhaps you would care to wait. Take that chair and try one of these cigars.”

“Thank you; I don’t mind if I do,” said he, mopping his face with a red bandanna handkerchief.

“And a whiskey-and-soda?”

“Well, half a glass. It is very hot for the time of year; and I have had a good deal to worry and try me. You know my theory about this Norwood case?”

“I remember that you expressed one.”

“Well, I have been obliged to reconsider it. I had my net drawn tightly round Mr. Sholto, sir, when pop he went through a hole in the middle of it. He was able to prove an alibi which could not be shaken. From the time that he left his brother’s room he was never out of sight of some one or other. So it could not be he who climbed over roofs and through trap-doors. It’s a very dark case, and my professional credit is at stake. I should be very glad of a little assistance.”

“We all need help sometimes,” said I.

“Your friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes is a wonderful man, sir,” said he, in a husky and confidential voice. “He’s a man who is not to be beat. I have known that young man go into a good many cases, but I never saw the case yet that he could not throw a light upon. He is irregular in his methods, and a little quick perhaps in jumping at theories, but, on the whole, I think he would have made a most promising officer, and I don’t care who knows it. I have had a wire from him this morning, by which I understand that he has got some clue to this Sholto business. Here is the message.”

He took the telegram out of his pocket, and handed it to me. It was dated from Poplar at twelve o’clock. “Go to Baker Street at once,” it said. “If I have not returned, wait for me. I am close on the track of the Sholto gang. You can come with us to-night if you want to be in at the finish.”

“This sounds well. He has evidently picked up the scent again,” said I.

“Ah, then he has been at fault too,” exclaimed Jones, with evident satisfaction. “Even the best of us are thrown off sometimes. Of course this may prove to be a false alarm; but it is my duty as an officer of the law to allow no chance to slip. But there is some one at the door. Perhaps this is he.”

A heavy step was heard ascending the stair, with a great wheezing and rattling as from a man who was sorely put to it for breath. Once or twice he stopped, as though the climb were too much for him, but at last he made his way to our door and entered. His appearance corresponded to the sounds which we had heard. He was an aged man, clad in seafaring garb, with an old pea-jacket buttoned up to his throat. His back was bowed, his knees were shaky, and his breathing was painfully asthmatic. As he leaned upon a thick oaken cudgel his shoulders heaved in the effort to draw the air into his lungs. He had a coloured scarf round his chin, and I could see little of his face save a pair of keen dark eyes, overhung by bushy white brows, and long gray side-whiskers. Altogether he gave me the impression of a respectable master mariner who had fallen into years and poverty.

"What is it, my man?" I asked.

He looked about him in the slow methodical fashion of old age.

"Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?" said he.

"No; but I am acting for him. You can tell me any message you have for him."

"It was to him himself I was to tell it," said he.

"But I tell you that I am acting for him. Was it about Mordecai Smith's boat?"

"Yes. I knows well where it is. An' I knows where the men he is after are. An' I knows where the treasure is. I knows all about it."

"Then tell me, and I shall let him know."

"It was to him I was to tell it," he repeated, with the petulant obstinacy of a very old man.

"Well, you must wait for him."

"No, no; I ain't goin' to lose a whole day to please no one. If Mr. Holmes ain't here, then Mr. Holmes must find it all out for himself. I don't care about the look of either of you, and I won't tell a word."

He shuffled towards the door, but Athelney Jones got in front of him.

"Wait a bit, my friend," said he. "You have important information, and you must not walk off. We shall keep you, whether you like or not, until our friend returns."

The old man made a little run towards the door, but, as Athelney Jones put his broad back up against it, he recognised the uselessness of resistance.

"Pretty sort o' treatment this!" he cried, stamping his stick. "I come here to see a gentleman, and you two, who I never saw in my life, seize me and treat me in this fashion!"

"You will be none the worse," I said. "We shall recompense you for the loss of your time. Sit over here on the sofa, and you will not have long to wait."

He came across sullenly enough, and seated himself with his face resting on his hands. Jones and I resumed our cigars and our talk. Suddenly, however, Holmes's voice broke in upon us.

"I think that you might offer me a cigar too," he said.

We both started in our chairs. There was Holmes sitting close to us with an air of quiet amusement.

"Holmes!" I exclaimed. "You here! But where is the old man?"

"Here is the old man," said he, holding out a heap of white hair. "Here he is, — wig, whiskers, eyebrows, and all. I thought my disguise was pretty good, but I hardly expected that it would stand that test."

"Ah, You rogue!" cried Jones, highly delighted. "You would have made an actor, and a rare one. You had the proper workhouse cough, and those weak legs of yours are worth ten pound a week. I thought I knew the glint of your eye, though. You didn't get away from us so easily, You see."

"I have been working in that get-up all day," said he, lighting his cigar. "You see, a good many of the criminal classes begin to know me, — especially since our friend here took to publishing some of my cases: so I can only go on the war-path under some simple disguise like this. You got my wire?"

"Yes; that was what brought me here."

"How has your case prospered?"

"It has all come to nothing. I have had to release two of my prisoners, and there is no evidence against the other two."

"Never mind. We shall give you two others in the place of them. But you must put yourself under my orders. You are welcome to all the official credit, but you must act on the line that I point out. Is that agreed?"

"Entirely, if you will help me to the men."

"Well, then, in the first place I shall want a fast police-boat — a steam launch — to be at the Westminster Stairs at seven o'clock."

"That is easily managed. There is always one about there; but I can step across the road and telephone to make sure."

"Then I shall want two stanch men, in case of resistance."

"There will be two or three in the boat. What else?"

"When we secure the men we shall get the treasure. I think that it would be a pleasure to my friend here to take the box round to the young lady to whom half of it rightfully belongs. Let her be the first to open it. — Eh, Watson?"

“It would be a great pleasure to me.”

“Rather an irregular proceeding,” said Jones, shaking his head. “However, the whole thing is irregular, and I suppose we must wink at it. The treasure must afterwards be handed over to the authorities until after the official investigation.”

“Certainly. That is easily managed. One other point. I should much like to have a few details about this matter from the lips of Jonathan Small himself. You know I like to work the detail of my cases out. There is no objection to my having an unofficial interview with him, either here in my rooms or elsewhere, as long as he is efficiently guarded?”

“Well, you are master of the situation. I have had no proof yet of the existence of this Jonathan Small. However, if you can catch him I don’t see how I can refuse you an interview with him.”

“That is understood, then?”

“Perfectly. Is there anything else?”

“Only that I insist upon your dining with us. It will be ready in half an hour. I have oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little choice in white wines. — Watson, you have never yet recognised my merits as a housekeeper.”

CHAPTER X

The End of the Islander

Our meal was a merry one. Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he chose, and that night he did choose. He appeared to be in a state of nervous exaltation. I have never known him so brilliant. He spoke on a quick succession of subjects, — on miracle-plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the war-ships of the future, — handling each as though he had made a special study of it. His bright humor marked the reaction from his black depression of the preceding days. Athelney Jones proved to be a sociable soul in his hours of relaxation, and faced his dinner with the air of a bon vivant. For myself, I felt elated at the thought that we were nearing the end of our task, and I caught something of Holmes’s gaiety. None of us alluded during dinner to the cause which had brought us together.

When the cloth was cleared, Holmes glanced at his watch, and filled up three glasses with port. “One bumper,” said he, “to the success of our little expedition. And now it is high time we were off. Have you a pistol, Watson?”

“I have my old service-revolver in my desk.”

“You had best take it, then. It is well to be prepared. I see that the cab is at the door. I ordered it for half-past six.”

It was a little past seven before we reached the Westminster wharf, and found our launch awaiting us. Holmes eyed it critically.

“Is there anything to mark it as a police-boat?”

“Yes, — that green lamp at the side.”

“Then take it off.”

The small change was made, we stepped on board, and the ropes were cast off. Jones, Holmes, and I sat in the stern. There was one man at the rudder, one to tend the engines, and two burly police-inspectors forward.

“Where to?” asked Jones.

“To the Tower. Tell them to stop opposite Jacobson’s Yard.”

Our craft was evidently a very fast one. We shot past the long lines of loaded barges as though they were stationary. Holmes smiled with satisfaction as we overhauled a river steamer and left her behind us.

“We ought to be able to catch anything on the river,” he said.

“Well, hardly that. But there are not many launches to beat us.”

“We shall have to catch the Aurora, and she has a name for being a clipper. I will tell you how the land lies, Watson. You recollect how annoyed I was at being balked by so small a thing?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I gave my mind a thorough rest by plunging into a chemical analysis. One of our greatest statesmen has said that a change of work is the best rest. So it is. When I had succeeded in dissolving the hydrocarbon which I was at work at, I came back to our problem of the Sholtos, and thought the whole matter out again. My boys had been up the river and down the river without result. The launch was not at any landing-stage or wharf, nor had it returned. Yet it could hardly have been scuttled to hide their traces, — though that always remained as a possible hypothesis if all else failed. I knew this man Small had a certain degree of low cunning, but I did not think him capable of anything in the nature of delicate finesse. That is usually a product of higher education. I then reflected that since he had certainly been in London some time — as we had evidence that he maintained a continual watch over Pondicherry Lodge — he could hardly leave at a moment’s notice, but would need some little time, if it were only a day, to arrange his affairs. That was the balance of probability, at any rate.”

“It seems to me to be a little weak,” said I. “It is more probable that he had arranged his affairs before ever he set out upon his expedition.”

“No, I hardly think so. This lair of his would be too valuable a retreat in case of need for him to give it up until he was sure that he could do without it. But a second consideration struck me. Jonathan Small must have felt that the peculiar appearance of his companion, however much he may have top-coated him, would give rise to gossip, and possibly be associated with this Norwood tragedy. He was quite sharp enough to see that. They had started from their head-quarters under cover of darkness, and he would wish to get back before it was broad light. Now, it was past three o’clock, according to Mrs. Smith, when they got the boat. It would be quite bright, and people would be about in an hour or so. Therefore, I argued, they did not go very far. They paid Smith well to hold his tongue, reserved his launch for the final escape, and hurried to their lodgings with the treasure-box. In a couple of nights, when they had time to see what view the papers took, and whether there was any suspicion, they would make their way under cover of darkness to some ship at Gravesend or in the Downs, where no doubt they had already arranged for passages to America or the Colonies."

"But the launch? They could not have taken that to their lodgings."

"Quite so. I argued that the launch must be no great way off, in spite of its invisibility. I then put myself in the place of Small, and looked at it as a man of his capacity would. He would probably consider that to send back the launch or to keep it at a wharf would make pursuit easy if the police did happen to get on his track. How, then, could he conceal the launch and yet have her at hand when wanted? I wondered what I should do myself if I were in his shoes. I could only think of one way of doing it. I might land the launch over to some boat-builder or repairer, with directions to make a trifling change in her. She would then be removed to his shed or yard, and so be effectually concealed, while at the same time I could have her at a few hours' notice."

"That seems simple enough."

"It is just these very simple things which are extremely liable to be overlooked. However, I determined to act on the idea. I started at once in this harmless seaman's rig and inquired at all the yards down the river. I drew blank at fifteen, but at the sixteenth — Jacobson's — I learned that the Aurora had been handed over to them two days ago by a wooden-legged man, with some trivial directions as to her rudder. 'There ain't naught amiss with her rudder,' said the foreman. 'There she lies, with the red streaks.' At that moment who should come down but Mordecai Smith, the missing owner? He was rather the worse for liquor. I should not, of course, have known him, but he bellowed out his name and the name of his launch. 'I want her to-night at eight o'clock,' said he,—'eight o'clock sharp, mind, for I have two gentlemen who won't be kept waiting.' They had evidently paid him well, for he was very flush of money, chucking shillings about to the men. I followed him some distance, but he subsided into an ale-house: so I went back to the yard, and, happening to pick up one of my boys on the way, I stationed him as a sentry over the launch. He is to stand at water's edge and wave his handkerchief to us when they start. We shall be lying off in the stream, and it will be a strange thing if we do not take men, treasure, and all."

"You have planned it all very neatly, whether they are the right men or not," said Jones; "but if the affair were in my hands I should have had a body of police in Jacobson's Yard, and arrested them when they came down."

"Which would have been never. This man Small is a pretty shrewd fellow. He would send a scout on ahead, and if anything made him suspicious lie snug for another week."

"But you might have stuck to Mordecai Smith, and so been led to their hiding-place," said I.

"In that case I should have wasted my day. I think that it is a hundred to one against Smith knowing where they live. As long as he has liquor and good pay, why should he ask questions? They send him messages what to do. No, I thought over every possible course, and this is the best."

While this conversation had been proceeding, we had been shooting the long series of bridges which span the Thames. As we passed the City the last rays of the sun were gilding the cross upon the summit of St. Paul's. It was twilight before we reached the Tower.

"That is Jacobson's Yard," said Holmes, pointing to a bristle of masts and rigging on the Surrey side. "Cruise gently up and down here under cover of this string of lighters." He took a pair of night-glasses from his pocket and gazed some time at the shore. "I see my sentry at his post," he remarked, "but no sign of a handkerchief."

"Suppose we go down-stream a short way and lie in wait for them," said Jones, eagerly. We were all eager by this time, even the policemen and stokers, who had a very vague idea of what was going forward.

"We have no right to take anything for granted," Holmes answered. "It is certainly ten to one that they go down-stream, but we cannot be certain. From this point we can see the entrance of the yard, and they can hardly see us. It will be a clear night and plenty of light. We must stay where we are. See how the folk swarm over yonder in the gaslight."

"They are coming from work in the yard."

"Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose every one has some little immortal spark concealed about him. You would not think it, to look at them. There is no a priori probability about it. A strange enigma is man!"

"Some one calls him a soul concealed in an animal," I suggested.

“Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,” said Holmes. “He remarks that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician. But do I see a handkerchief? Surely there is a white flutter over yonder.”

“Yes, it is your boy,” I cried. “I can see him plainly.”

“And there is the Aurora,” exclaimed Holmes, “and going like the devil! Full speed ahead, engineer. Make after that launch with the yellow light. By heaven, I shall never forgive myself if she proves to have the heels of us!”

She had slipped unseen through the yard-entrance and passed behind two or three small craft, so that she had fairly got her speed up before we saw her. Now she was flying down the stream, near in to the shore, going at a tremendous rate. Jones looked gravely at her and shook his head.

“She is very fast,” he said. “I doubt if we shall catch her.”

“We MUST catch her!” cried Holmes, between his teeth. “Heap it on, stokers! Make her do all she can! If we burn the boat we must have them!”

We were fairly after her now. The furnaces roared, and the powerful engines whizzed and clanked, like a great metallic heart. Her sharp, steep prow cut through the river-water and sent two rolling waves to right and to left of us. With every throb of the engines we sprang and quivered like a living thing. One great yellow lantern in our bows threw a long, flickering funnel of light in front of us. Right ahead a dark blur upon the water showed where the Aurora lay, and the swirl of white foam behind her spoke of the pace at which she was going. We flashed past barges, steamers, merchant-vessels, in and out, behind this one and round the other. Voices hailed us out of the darkness, but still the Aurora thundered on, and still we followed close upon her track.

“Pile it on, men, pile it on!” cried Holmes, looking down into the engine-room, while the fierce glow from below beat upon his eager, aquiline face. “Get every pound of steam you can.”

“I think we gain a little,” said Jones, with his eyes on the Aurora.

“I am sure of it,” said I. “We shall be up with her in a very few minutes.”

At that moment, however, as our evil fate would have it, a tug with three barges in tow blundered in between us. It was only by putting our helm hard down that we avoided a collision, and before we could round them and recover our way the Aurora had gained a good two hundred yards. She was still, however, well in view, and the murky uncertain twilight was setting into a clear starlit night. Our boilers were strained to their utmost, and the frail shell vibrated and creaked with the fierce energy which was driving us along. We had shot through the Pool, past the West India Docks, down the long Deptford Reach, and up again after rounding the Isle of Dogs. The dull blur in front of us resolved itself now clearly enough into the dainty Aurora. Jones turned our search-light upon her, so that we could plainly see the figures upon her deck. One man sat by the stern, with something black between his knees over which he stooped. Beside him lay a dark mass which looked like a Newfoundland dog. The boy held the tiller, while against the red glare of the furnace I could see old Smith, stripped to the waist, and shovelling coals for dear life. They may have had some doubt at first as to whether we were really pursuing them, but now as we followed every winding and turning which they took there could no longer be any question about it. At Greenwich we were about three hundred paces behind them. At Blackwall we could not have been more than two hundred and fifty. I have coursed many creatures in many countries during my checkered career, but never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt down the Thames. Steadily we drew in upon them, yard by yard. In the silence of the night we could hear the panting and clanking of their machinery. The man in the stern still crouched upon the deck, and his arms were moving as though he were busy, while every now and then he would look up and measure with a glance the distance which still separated us. Nearer we came and nearer. Jones yelled to them to stop. We were not more than four boat’s lengths behind them, both boats flying at a tremendous pace. It was a clear reach of the river, with Barking Level upon one side and the melancholy Plumstead Marshes upon the other. At our hail the man in the stern sprang up from the deck and shook his two clinched fists at us, cursing the while in a high, cracked voice. He was a good-sized, powerful man, and as he stood poising himself with legs astride I could see that from the thigh downwards there was but a wooden stump upon the right side. At the sound of his strident, angry cries there was movement in the huddled bundle upon the deck. It straightened itself into a little black man — the smallest I have ever seen — with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. Holmes had already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this savage, distorted creature. He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster or blanket, which left only his face exposed; but that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury.

“Fire if he raises his hand,” said Holmes, quietly. We were within a boat’s-length by this time, and almost within touch of our quarry. I can see the two of them now as they stood, the white man with his legs far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his hideous face, and his strong yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light of our lantern.

It was well that we had so clear a view of him. Even as we looked he plucked out from under his covering a short, round piece of wood, like a school-ruler, and clapped it to his lips. Our pistols rang out together. He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of choking cough fell sideways into the stream. I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. At the same moment the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank, while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. We were round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank. It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of decaying vegetation. The launch with a dull thud ran up upon the mud-bank, with her bow in the air and her stern flush with the water. The fugitive sprang out, but his stump instantly sank its whole length into the sodden soil. In vain he struggled and writhed. Not one step could he possibly take either forwards or backwards. He yelled in impotent rage, and kicked frantically into the mud with his other foot, but his struggles only bored his wooden pin the deeper into the sticky bank. When we brought our launch alongside he was so firmly anchored that it was only by throwing the end of a rope over his shoulders that we were able to haul him out, and to drag him, like some evil fish, over our side. The two Smiths, father and son, sat sullenly in their launch, but came aboard meekly enough when commanded. The Aurora herself we hauled off and made fast to our stern. A solid iron chest of Indian workmanship stood upon the deck. This, there could be no question, was the same that had contained the ill-omened treasure of the Sholtos. There was no key, but it was of considerable weight, so we transferred it carefully to our own little cabin. As we steamed slowly up-stream again, we flashed our search-light in every direction, but there was no sign of the Islander. Somewhere in the dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our shores.

“See here,” said Holmes, pointing to the wooden hatchway. “We were hardly quick enough with our pistols.” There, sure enough, just behind where we had been standing, stuck one of those murderous darts which we knew so well. It must have whizzed between us at the instant that we fired. Holmes smiled at it and shrugged his shoulders in his easy fashion, but I confess that it turned me sick to think of the horrible death which had passed so close to us that night.

CHAPTER XI

The Great Agra Treasure

Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done so much and waited so long to gain. He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a net-work of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with gray. His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. He sat now with his handcuffed hands upon his lap, and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen, twinkling eyes at the box which had been the cause of his ill-doings. It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and contained countenance. Once he looked up at me with a gleam of something like humor in his eyes.

“Well, Jonathan Small,” said Holmes, lighting a cigar, “I am sorry that it has come to this.”

“And so am I, sir,” he answered, frankly. “I don’t believe that I can swing over the job. I give you my word on the book that I never raised hand against Mr. Sholto. It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot one of his cursed darts into him. I had no part in it, sir. I was as grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. I welted the little devil with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not undo it again.”

“Have a cigar,” said Holmes; “and you had best take a pull out of my flask, for you are very wet. How could you expect so small and weak a man as this black fellow to overpower Mr. Sholto and hold him while you were climbing the rope?”

“You seem to know as much about it as if you were there, sir. The truth is that I hoped to find the room clear. I knew the habits of the house pretty well, and it was the time when Mr. Sholto usually went down to his supper. I shall make no secret of the business. The best defence that I can make is just the simple truth. Now, if it had been the old major I would have swung for him with a light heart. I would have thought no more of knifing him than of smoking this cigar. But it's cursed hard that I should be lagged over this young Sholto, with whom I had no quarrel whatever."

"You are under the charge of Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard. He is going to bring you up to my rooms, and I shall ask you for a true account of the matter. You must make a clean breast of it, for if you do I hope that I may be of use to you. I think I can prove that the poison acts so quickly that the man was dead before ever you reached the room."

"That he was, sir. I never got such a turn in my life as when I saw him grinning at me with his head on his shoulder as I climbed through the window. It fairly shook me, sir. I'd have half killed Tonga for it if he had not scrambled off. That was how he came to leave his club, and some of his darts too, as he tells me, which I dare say helped to put you on our track; though how you kept on it is more than I can tell. I don't feel no malice against you for it. But it does seem a queer thing," he added, with a bitter smile, "that I who have a fair claim to nigh upon half a million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend the other half digging drains at Dartmoor. It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life."

At this moment Athelney Jones thrust his broad face and heavy shoulders into the tiny cabin. "Quite a family party," he remarked. "I think I shall have a pull at that flask, Holmes. Well, I think we may all congratulate each other. Pity we didn't take the other alive; but there was no choice. I say, Holmes, you must confess that you cut it rather fine. It was all we could do to overhaul her."

"All is well that ends well," said Holmes. "But I certainly did not know that the Aurora was such a clipper."

"Smith says she is one of the fastest launches on the river, and that if he had had another man to help him with the engines we should never have caught her. He swears he knew nothing of this Norwood business."

"Neither he did," cried our prisoner,—"not a word. I chose his launch because I heard that she was a flier. We told him nothing, but we paid him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our vessel, the Esmeralda, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils."

"Well, if he has done no wrong we shall see that no wrong comes to him. If we are pretty quick in catching our men, we are not so quick in condemning them." It was amusing to notice how the consequential Jones was already beginning to give himself airs on the strength of the capture. From the slight smile which played over Sherlock Holmes's face, I could see that the speech had not been lost upon him.

"We will be at Vauxhall Bridge presently," said Jones, "and shall land you, Dr. Watson, with the treasure-box. I need hardly tell you that I am taking a very grave responsibility upon myself in doing this. It is most irregular; but of course an agreement is an agreement. I must, however, as a matter of duty, send an inspector with you, since you have so valuable a charge. You will drive, no doubt?"

"Yes, I shall drive."

"It is a pity there is no key, that we may make an inventory first. You will have to break it open. Where is the key, my man?"

"At the bottom of the river," said Small, shortly.

"Hum! There was no use your giving this unnecessary trouble. We have had work enough already through you. However, doctor, I need not warn you to be careful. Bring the box back with you to the Baker Street rooms. You will find us there, on our way to the station."

They landed me at Vauxhall, with my heavy iron box, and with a bluff, genial inspector as my companion. A quarter of an hour's drive brought us to Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. The servant seemed surprised at so late a visitor. Mrs. Cecil Forrester was out for the evening, she explained, and likely to be very late. Miss Morstan, however, was in the drawing-room: so to the drawing-room I went, box in hand, leaving the obliging inspector in the cab.

She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white diaphanous material, with a little touch of scarlet at the neck and waist. The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting with a dull, metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. One white arm and hand drooped over the side of the chair, and her whole pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy. At the sound of my foot-fall she sprang to her feet, however, and a bright flush of surprise and of pleasure coloured her pale cheeks.

“I heard a cab drive up,” she said. “I thought that Mrs. Forrester had come back very early, but I never dreamed that it might be you. What news have you brought me?”

“I have brought something better than news,” said I, putting down the box upon the table and speaking jovially and boisterously, though my heart was heavy within me. “I have brought you something which is worth all the news in the world. I have brought you a fortune.”

She glanced at the iron box. “Is that the treasure, then?” she asked, coolly enough.

“Yes, this is the great Agra treasure. Half of it is yours and half is Thaddeus Sholto’s. You will have a couple of hundred thousand each. Think of that! An annuity of ten thousand pounds. There will be few richer young ladies in England. Is it not glorious?”

I think that I must have been rather overacting my delight, and that she detected a hollow ring in my congratulations, for I saw her eyebrows rise a little, and she glanced at me curiously.

“If I have it,” said she, “I owe it to you.”

“No, no,” I answered, “not to me, but to my friend Sherlock Holmes. With all the will in the world, I could never have followed up a clue which has taxed even his analytical genius. As it was, we very nearly lost it at the last moment.”

“Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson,” said she.

I narrated briefly what had occurred since I had seen her last, — Holmes’s new method of search, the discovery of the Aurora, the appearance of Athelney Jones, our expedition in the evening, and the wild chase down the Thames. She listened with parted lips and shining eyes to my recital of our adventures. When I spoke of the dart which had so narrowly missed us, she turned so white that I feared that she was about to faint.

“It is nothing,” she said, as I hastened to pour her out some water. “I am all right again. It was a shock to me to hear that I had placed my friends in such horrible peril.”

“That is all over,” I answered. “It was nothing. I will tell you no more gloomy details. Let us turn to something brighter. There is the treasure. What could be brighter than that? I got leave to bring it with me, thinking that it would interest you to be the first to see it.”

“It would be of the greatest interest to me,” she said. There was no eagerness in her voice, however. It had struck her, doubtless, that it might seem ungracious upon her part to be indifferent to a prize which had cost so much to win.

“What a pretty box!” she said, stooping over it. “This is Indian work, I suppose?”

“Yes; it is Benares metal-work.”

“And so heavy!” she exclaimed, trying to raise it. “The box alone must be of some value. Where is the key?”

“Small threw it into the Thames,” I answered. “I must borrow Mrs. Forrester’s poker.” There was in the front a thick and broad hasp, wrought in the image of a sitting Buddha. Under this I thrust the end of the poker and twisted it outward as a lever. The hasp sprang open with a loud snap. With trembling fingers I flung back the lid. We both stood gazing in astonishment. The box was empty!

No wonder that it was heavy. The iron-work was two-thirds of an inch thick all round. It was massive, well made, and solid, like a chest constructed to carry things of great price, but not one shred or crumb of metal or jewelry lay within it. It was absolutely and completely empty.

“The treasure is lost,” said Miss Morstan, calmly.

As I listened to the words and realised what they meant, a great shadow seemed to pass from my soul. I did not know how this Agra treasure had weighed me down, until now that it was finally removed. It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realise nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us. “Thank God!” I ejaculated from my very heart.

She looked at me with a quick, questioning smile. “Why do you say that?” she asked.

“Because you are within my reach again,” I said, taking her hand. She did not withdraw it. “Because I love you, Mary, as truly as ever a man loved a woman. Because this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. That is why I said, ‘Thank God.’”

“Then I say, ‘Thank God,’ too,” she whispered, as I drew her to my side. Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one.

CHAPTER XII

The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

A very patient man was that inspector in the cab, for it was a weary time before I rejoined him. His face clouded over when I showed him the empty box.

“There goes the reward!” said he, gloomily. “Where there is no money there is no pay. This night’s work would have been worth a tenner each to Sam Brown and me if the treasure had been there.”

“Mr. Thaddeus Sholto is a rich man,” I said. “He will see that you are rewarded, treasure or no.”

The inspector shook his head despondently, however. “It’s a bad job,” he repeated; “and so Mr. Athelney Jones will think.”

His forecast proved to be correct, for the detective looked blank enough when I got to Baker Street and showed him the empty box. They had only just arrived, Holmes, the prisoner, and he, for they had changed their plans so far as to report themselves at a station upon the way. My companion lounged in his arm-chair with his usual listless expression, while Small sat stolidly opposite to him with his wooden leg cocked over his sound one. As I exhibited the empty box he leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud.

“This is your doing, Small,” said Athelney Jones, angrily.

“Yes, I have put it away where you shall never lay hand upon it,” he cried, exultantly. “It is my treasure; and if I can’t have the loot I’ll take darned good care that no one else does. I tell you that no living man has any right to it, unless it is three men who are in the Andaman convict-barracks and myself. I know now that I cannot have the use of it, and I know that they cannot. I have acted all through for them as much as for myself. It’s been the sign of four with us always. Well I know that they would have had me do just what I have done, and throw the treasure into the Thames rather than let it go to kith or kin of Sholto or of Morstan. It was not to make them rich that we did for Achmet. You’ll find the treasure where the key is, and where little Tonga is. When I saw that your launch must catch us, I put the loot away in a safe place. There are no rupees for you this journey.”

“You are deceiving us, Small,” said Athelney Jones, sternly. “If you had wished to throw the treasure into the Thames it would have been easier for you to have thrown box and all.”

“Easier for me to throw, and easier for you to recover,” he answered, with a shrewd, sidelong look. “The man that was clever enough to hunt me down is clever enough to pick an iron box from the bottom of a river. Now that they are scattered over five miles or so, it may be a harder job. It went to my heart to do it, though. I was half mad when you came up with us. However, there’s no good grieving over it. I’ve had ups in my life, and I’ve had downs, but I’ve learned not to cry over spilled milk.”

“This is a very serious matter, Small,” said the detective. “If you had helped justice, instead of thwarting it in this way, you would have had a better chance at your trial.”

“Justice!” snarled the ex-convict. “A pretty justice! Whose loot is this, if it is not ours? Where is the justice that I should give it up to those who have never earned it? Look how I have earned it! Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp, all day at work under the mangrove-tree, all night chained up in the filthy convict-huts, bitten by mosquitoes, racked with ague, bullied by every cursed black-faced policeman who loved to take it out of a white man. That was how I earned the Agra treasure; and you talk to me of justice because I cannot bear to feel that I have paid this price only that another may enjoy it! I would rather swing a score of times, or have one of Tonga’s darts in my hide, than live in a convict’s cell and feel that another man is at his ease in a palace with the money that should be mine.” Small had dropped his mask of stoicism, and all this came out in a wild whirl of words, while his eyes blazed, and the handcuffs clanked together with the impassioned movement of his hands. I could understand, as I saw the fury and the passion of the man, that it was no groundless or unnatural terror which had possessed Major Sholto when he first learned that the injured convict was upon his track.

“You forget that we know nothing of all this,” said Holmes quietly. “We have not heard your story, and we cannot tell how far justice may originally have been on your side.”

“Well, sir, you have been very fair-spoken to me, though I can see that I have you to thank that I have these bracelets upon my wrists. Still, I bear no grudge for that. It is all fair and above-board. If you want to hear my story I have no wish to hold it back. What I say to you is God’s truth, every word of it. Thank you; you can put the glass beside me here, and I'll put my lips to it if I am dry.

"I am a Worcestershire man myself, — born near Pershore. I dare say you would find a heap of Smalls living there now if you were to look. I have often thought of taking a look round there, but the truth is that I was never much of a credit to the family, and I doubt if they would be so very glad to see me. They were all steady, chapel-going folk, small farmers, well known and respected over the country-side, while I was always a bit of a rover. At last, however, when I was about eighteen, I gave them no more trouble, for I got into a mess over a girl, and could only get out of it again by taking the queen's shilling and joining the 3d Buffs, which was just starting for India.

"I wasn't destined to do much soldiering, however. I had just got past the goose-step, and learned to handle my musket, when I was fool enough to go swimming in the Ganges. Luckily for me, my company sergeant, John Holder, was in the water at the same time, and he was one of the finest swimmers in the service. A crocodile took me, just as I was half-way across, and nipped off my right leg as clean as a surgeon could have done it, just above the knee. What with the shock and the loss of blood, I fainted, and should have drowned if Holder had not caught hold of me and paddled for the bank. I was five months in hospital over it, and when at last I was able to limp out of it with this timber toe strapped to my stump I found myself invalided out of the army and unfitted for any active occupation.

"I was, as you can imagine, pretty down on my luck at this time, for I was a useless cripple though not yet in my twentieth year. However, my misfortune soon proved to be a blessing in disguise. A man named Abelwhite, who had come out there as an indigo-planter, wanted an overseer to look after his coolies and keep them up to their work. He happened to be a friend of our colonel's, who had taken an interest in me since the accident. To make a long story short, the colonel recommended me strongly for the post and, as the work was mostly to be done on horseback, my leg was no great obstacle, for I had enough knee left to keep good grip on the saddle. What I had to do was to ride over the plantation, to keep an eye on the men as they worked, and to report the idlers. The pay was fair, I had comfortable quarters, and altogether I was content to spend the remainder of my life in indigo-planting. Mr. Abelwhite was a kind man, and he would often drop into my little shanty and smoke a pipe with me, for white folk out there feel their hearts warm to each other as they never do here at home.

"Well, I was never in luck's way long. Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell. Of course you know all about it, gentlemen, — a deal more than I do, very like, since reading is not in my line. I only know what I saw with my own eyes. Our plantation was at a place called Muttra, near the border of the Northwest Provinces. Night after night the whole sky was alight with the burning bungalows, and day after day we had small companies of Europeans passing through our estate with their wives and children, on their way to Agra, where were the nearest troops. Mr. Abelwhite was an obstinate man. He had it in his head that the affair had been exaggerated, and that it would blow over as suddenly as it had sprung up. There he sat on his veranda, drinking whiskey-pegs and smoking cheroots, while the country was in a blaze about him. Of course we stuck by him, I and Dawson, who, with his wife, used to do the book-work and the managing. Well, one fine day the crash came. I had been away on a distant plantation, and was riding slowly home in the evening, when my eye fell upon something all huddled together at the bottom of a steep nullah. I rode down to see what it was, and the cold struck through my heart when I found it was Dawson's wife, all cut into ribbons, and half eaten by jackals and native dogs. A little further up the road Dawson himself was lying on his face, quite dead, with an empty revolver in his hand and four Sepoys lying across each other in front of him. I reined up my horse, wondering which way I should turn, but at that moment I saw thick smoke curling up from Abelwhite's bungalow and the flames beginning to burst through the roof. I knew then that I could do my employer no good, but would only throw my own life away if I meddled in the matter. From where I stood I could see hundreds of the black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs, dancing and howling round the burning house. Some of them pointed at me, and a couple of bullets sang past my head; so I broke away across the paddy-fields, and found myself late at night safe within the walls at Agra.

"As it proved, however, there was no great safety there, either. The whole country was up like a swarm of bees. Wherever the English could collect in little bands they held just the ground that their guns commanded.

Everywhere else they were helpless fugitives. It was a fight of the millions against the hundreds; and the cruellest part of it was that these men that we fought against, foot, horse, and gunners, were our own picked troops, whom we had taught and trained, handling our own weapons, and blowing our own bugle-calls. At Agra there were the 3d Bengal Fusiliers, some Sikhs, two troops of horse, and a battery of artillery. A volunteer corps of clerks and merchants had been formed, and this I joined, wooden leg and all. We went out to meet the rebels at Shahgunge early in July, and we beat them back for a time, but our powder gave out, and we had to fall back upon the city. Nothing but the worst news came to us from every side, — which is not to be wondered at, for if you look at the map you will see that we were right in the heart of it. Lucknow is rather better than a hundred miles to the east, and Cawnpore about as far to the south. From every point on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage.

“The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts. Our handful of men were lost among the narrow, winding streets. Our leader moved across the river, therefore, and took up his position in the old fort at Agra. I don’t know if any of you gentlemen have ever read or heard anything of that old fort. It is a very queer place, — the queerest that ever I was in, and I have been in some rum corners, too. First of all, it is enormous in size. I should think that the enclosure must be acres and acres. There is a modern part, which took all our garrison, women, children, stores, and everything else, with plenty of room over. But the modern part is nothing like the size of the old quarter, where nobody goes, and which is given over to the scorpions and the centipedes. It is all full of great deserted halls, and winding passages, and long corridors twisting in and out, so that it is easy enough for folk to get lost in it. For this reason it was seldom that any one went into it, though now and again a party with torches might go exploring.

“The river washes along the front of the old fort, and so protects it, but on the sides and behind there are many doors, and these had to be guarded, of course, in the old quarter as well as in that which was actually held by our troops. We were short-handed, with hardly men enough to man the angles of the building and to serve the guns. It was impossible for us, therefore, to station a strong guard at every one of the innumerable gates. What we did was to organize a central guard-house in the middle of the fort, and to leave each gate under the charge of one white man and two or three natives. I was selected to take charge during certain hours of the night of a small isolated door upon the southwest side of the building. Two Sikh troopers were placed under my command, and I was instructed if anything went wrong to fire my musket, when I might rely upon help coming at once from the central guard. As the guard was a good two hundred paces away, however, and as the space between was cut up into a labyrinth of passages and corridors, I had great doubts as to whether they could arrive in time to be of any use in case of an actual attack.

"Well, I was pretty proud at having this small command given me, since I was a raw recruit, and a game-legged one at that. For two nights I kept the watch with my Punjaubees. They were tall, fierce-looking chaps, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan by name, both old fighting-men who had borne arms against us at Chilian-wallah. They could talk English pretty well, but I could get little out of them. They preferred to stand together and jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo. For myself, I used to stand outside the gate-way, looking down on the broad, winding river and on the twinkling lights of the great city. The beating of drums, the rattle of tomtoms, and the yells and howls of the rebels, drunk with opium and with bang, were enough to remind us all night of our dangerous neighbours across the stream. Every two hours the officer of the night used to come round to all the posts, to make sure that all was well.

"The third night of my watch was dark and dirty, with a small, driving rain. It was dreary work standing in the gate-way hour after hour in such weather. I tried again and again to make my Sikhs talk, but without much success. At two in the morning the rounds passed, and broke for a moment the weariness of the night. Finding that my companions would not be led into conversation, I took out my pipe, and laid down my musket to strike the match. In an instant the two Sikhs were upon me. One of them snatched my firelock up and levelled it at my head, while the other held a great knife to my throat and swore between his teeth that he would plunge it into me if I moved a step.

"My first thought was that these fellows were in league with the rebels, and that this was the beginning of an assault. If our door were in the hands of the Sepoys the place must fall, and the women and children be treated as they were in Cawnpore. Maybe you gentlemen think that I am just making out a case for myself, but I give you my word that when I thought of that, though I felt the point of the knife at my throat, I opened my mouth with the intention of giving a scream, if it was my last one, which might alarm the main guard. The man who held me seemed to know my thoughts; for, even as I braced myself to it, he whispered, ‘Don’t make a noise. The fort is safe enough. There are no rebel dogs on this side of the river.’ There was the ring of truth in what he said, and I knew that if I raised my voice I was a dead man. I could read it in the fellow’s brown eyes. I waited, therefore, in silence, to see what it was that they wanted from me.

“‘Listen to me, Sahib,’ said the taller and fiercer of the pair, the one whom they called Abdullah Khan. ‘You must either be with us now or you must be silenced forever. The thing is too great a one for us to hesitate. Either you are heart and soul with us on your oath on the cross of the Christians, or your body this night shall be thrown into the ditch and we shall pass over to our brothers in the rebel army. There is no middle way. Which is it to be, death or life? We can only give you three minutes to decide, for the time is passing, and all must be done before the rounds come again.’

“‘How can I decide?’ said I. ‘You have not told me what you want of me. But I tell you now that if it is anything against the safety of the fort I will have no truck with it, so you can drive home your knife and welcome.’

“‘It is nothing against the fort,’ said he. ‘We only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich. If you will be one of us this night, we will swear to you upon the naked knife, and by the threefold oath which no Sikh was ever known to break, that you shall have your fair share of the loot. A quarter of the treasure shall be yours. We can say no fairer.’

“‘But what is the treasure, then?’ I asked. ‘I am as ready to be rich as you can be, if you will but show me how it can be done.’

“‘You will swear, then,’ said he, ‘by the bones of your father, by the honor of your mother, by the cross of your faith, to raise no hand and speak no word against us, either now or afterwards?’

“‘I will swear it,’ I answered, ‘provided that the fort is not endangered.’

“‘Then my comrade and I will swear that you shall have a quarter of the treasure which shall be equally divided among the four of us.’

“‘There are but three,’ said I.

“‘No; Dost Akbar must have his share. We can tell the tale to you while we await them. Do you stand at the gate, Mahomet Singh, and give notice of their coming. The thing stands thus, Sahib, and I tell it to you because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we may trust you. Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the knife, and your body in the water. But the Sikh knows the Englishman, and the Englishman knows the Sikh. Hearken, then, to what I have to say.

"'There is a rajah in the northern provinces who has much wealth, though his lands are small. Much has come to him from his father, and more still he has set by himself, for he is of a low nature and hoards his gold rather than spend it. When the troubles broke out he would be friends both with the lion and the tiger, — with the Sepoy and with the Company's Raj. Soon, however, it seemed to him that the white men's day was come, for through all the land he could hear of nothing but of their death and their overthrow. Yet, being a careful man, he made such plans that, come what might, half at least of his treasure should be left to him. That which was in gold and silver he kept by him in the vaults of his palace, but the most precious stones and the choicest pearls that he had he put in an iron box, and sent it by a trusty servant who, under the guise of a merchant, should take it to the fort at Agra, there to lie until the land is at peace. Thus, if the rebels won he would have his money, but if the Company conquered his jewels would be saved to him. Having thus divided his hoard, he threw himself into the cause of the Sepoys, since they were strong upon his borders. By doing this, mark you, Sahib, his property becomes the due of those who have been true to their salt.

"'This pretended merchant, who travels under the name of Achmet, is now in the city of Agra, and desires to gain his way into the fort. He has with him as travelling-companion my foster-brother Dost Akbar, who knows his secret. Dost Akbar has promised this night to lead him to a side-postern of the fort, and has chosen this one for his purpose. Here he will come presently, and here he will find Mahomet Singh and myself awaiting him. The place is lonely, and none shall know of his coming. The world shall know of the merchant Achmet no more, but the great treasure of the rajah shall be divided among us. What say you to it, Sahib?'

"In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when they saw their ne’er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. I had, therefore, already made up my mind. Abdullah Khan, however, thinking that I hesitated, pressed the matter more closely.

“‘Consider, Sahib,’ said he, ‘that if this man is taken by the commandant he will be hung or shot, and his jewels taken by the government, so that no man will be a rupee the better for them. Now, since we do the taking of him, why should we not do the rest as well? The jewels will be as well with us as in the Company’s coffers. There will be enough to make every one of us rich men and great chiefs. No one can know about the matter, for here we are cut off from all men. What could be better for the purpose? Say again, then, Sahib, whether you are with us, or if we must look upon you as an enemy.’

“‘I am with you heart and soul,’ said I.

“‘It is well,’ he answered, handing me back my firelock. ‘You see that we trust you, for your word, like ours, is not to be broken. We have now only to wait for my brother and the merchant.’

“‘Does your brother know, then, of what you will do?’ I asked.

“‘The plan is his. He has devised it. We will go to the gate and share the watch with Mahomet Singh.’

“The rain was still falling steadily, for it was just the beginning of the wet season. Brown, heavy clouds were drifting across the sky, and it was hard to see more than a stone-cast. A deep moat lay in front of our door, but the water was in places nearly dried up, and it could easily be crossed. It was strange to me to be standing there with those two wild Punjaubees waiting for the man who was coming to his death.

“Suddenly my eye caught the glint of a shaded lantern at the other side of the moat. It vanished among the mound-heaps, and then appeared again coming slowly in our direction.

“‘Here they are!’ I exclaimed.

“‘You will challenge him, Sahib, as usual,’ whispered Abdullah. ‘Give him no cause for fear. Send us in with him, and we shall do the rest while you stay here on guard. Have the lantern ready to uncover, that we may be sure that it is indeed the man.’

“The light had flickered onwards, now stopping and now advancing, until I could see two dark figures upon the other side of the moat. I let them scramble down the sloping bank, splash through the mire, and climb halfway up to the gate, before I challenged them.

"'Who goes there?' said I, in a subdued voice.

"'Friends,' came the answer. I uncovered my lantern and threw a flood of light upon them. The first was an enormous Sikh, with a black beard which swept nearly down to his cummerbund. Outside of a show I have never seen so tall a man. The other was a little, fat, round fellow, with a great yellow turban, and a bundle in his hand, done up in a shawl. He seemed to be all in a quiver with fear, for his hands twitched as if he had the ague, and his head kept turning to left and right with two bright little twinkling eyes, like a mouse when he ventures out from his hole. It gave me the chills to think of killing him, but I thought of the treasure, and my heart set as hard as a flint within me. When he saw my white face he gave a little chirrup of joy and came running up towards me.

"'Your protection, Sahib,' he panted,—'your protection for the unhappy merchant Achmet. I have travelled across Rajpootana that I might seek the shelter of the fort at Agra. I have been robbed and beaten and abused because I have been the friend of the Company. It is a blessed night this when I am once more in safety, — I and my poor possessions.'

"'What have you in the bundle?' I asked.

"'An iron box,' he answered, 'which contains one or two little family matters which are of no value to others, but which I should be sorry to lose. Yet I am not a beggar; and I shall reward you, young Sahib, and your governor also, if he will give me the shelter I ask.'

"I could not trust myself to speak longer with the man. The more I looked at his fat, frightened face, the harder did it seem that we should slay him in cold blood. It was best to get it over.

"'Take him to the main guard,' said I. The two Sikhs closed in upon him on each side, and the giant walked behind, while they marched in through the dark gate-way. Never was a man so compassed round with death. I remained at the gate-way with the lantern.

"I could hear the measured tramp of their footsteps sounding through the lonely corridors. Suddenly it ceased, and I heard voices, and a scuffle, with the sound of blows. A moment later there came, to my horror, a rush of footsteps coming in my direction, with the loud breathing of a running man. I turned my lantern down the long, straight passage, and there was the fat man, running like the wind, with a smear of blood across his face, and close at his heels, bounding like a tiger, the great black-bearded Sikh, with a knife flashing in his hand. I have never seen a man run so fast as that little merchant. He was gaining on the Sikh, and I could see that if he once passed me and got to the open air he would save himself yet. My heart softened to him, but again the thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter. I cast my firelock between his legs as he raced past, and he rolled twice over like a shot rabbit. Ere he could stagger to his feet the Sikh was upon him, and buried his knife twice in his side. The man never uttered moan nor moved muscle, but lay were he had fallen. I think myself that he may have broken his neck with the fall. You see, gentlemen, that I am keeping my promise. I am telling you every work of the business just exactly as it happened, whether it is in my favor or not."

He stopped, and held out his manacled hands for the whiskey-and-water which Holmes had brewed for him. For myself, I confess that I had now conceived the utmost horror of the man, not only for this cold-blooded business in which he had been concerned, but even more for the somewhat flippant and careless way in which he narrated it. Whatever punishment was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me. Sherlock Holmes and Jones sat with their hands upon their knees, deeply interested in the story, but with the same disgust written upon their faces. He may have observed it, for there was a touch of defiance in his voice and manner as he proceeded.

"It was all very bad, no doubt," said he. "I should like to know how many fellows in my shoes would have refused a share of this loot when they knew that they would have their throats cut for their pains. Besides, it was my life or his when once he was in the fort. If he had got out, the whole business would come to light, and I should have been court-martialled and shot as likely as not; for people were not very lenient at a time like that."

"Go on with your story," said Holmes, shortly.

"Well, we carried him in, Abdullah, Akbar, and I. A fine weight he was, too, for all that he was so short. Mahomet Singh was left to guard the door. We took him to a place which the Sikhs had already prepared. It was some distance off, where a winding passage leads to a great empty hall, the brick walls of which were all crumbling to pieces. The earth floor had sunk in at one place, making a natural grave, so we left Achmet the merchant there, having first covered him over with loose bricks. This done, we all went back to the treasure.

"It lay where he had dropped it when he was first attacked. The box was the same which now lies open upon your table. A key was hung by a silken cord to that carved handle upon the top. We opened it, and the light of the lantern gleamed upon a collection of gems such as I have read of and thought about when I was a little lad at Pershore. It was blinding to look upon them. When we had feasted our eyes we took them all out and made a list of them. There were one hundred and forty-three diamonds of the first water, including one which has been called, I believe, 'the Great Mogul' and is said to be the second largest stone in existence. Then there were ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one hundred and seventy rubies, some of which, however, were small. There were forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates, and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cats'-eyes, turquoises, and other stones, the very names of which I did not know at the time, though I have become more familiar with them since. Besides this, there were nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in a gold coronet. By the way, these last had been taken out of the chest and were not there when I recovered it.

"After we had counted our treasures we put them back into the chest and carried them to the gate-way to show them to Mahomet Singh. Then we solemnly renewed our oath to stand by each other and be true to our secret. We agreed to conceal our loot in a safe place until the country should be at peace again, and then to divide it equally among ourselves. There was no use dividing it at present, for if gems of such value were found upon us it would cause suspicion, and there was no privacy in the fort nor any place where we could keep them. We carried the box, therefore, into the same hall where we had buried the body, and there, under certain bricks in the best-preserved wall, we made a hollow and put our treasure. We made careful note of the place, and next day I drew four plans, one for each of us, and put the sign of the four of us at the bottom, for we had sworn that we should each always act for all, so that none might take advantage. That is an oath that I can put my hand to my heart and swear that I have never broken.

"Well, there's no use my telling you gentlemen what came of the Indian mutiny. After Wilson took Delhi and Sir Colin relieved Lucknow the back of the business was broken. Fresh troops came pouring in, and Nana Sahib made himself scarce over the frontier. A flying column under Colonel Greathed came round to Agra and cleared the Pandies away from it. Peace seemed to be settling upon the country, and we four were beginning to hope that the time was at hand when we might safely go off with our shares of the plunder. In a moment, however, our hopes were shattered by our being arrested as the murderers of Achmet.

“It came about in this way. When the rajah put his jewels into the hands of Achmet he did it because he knew that he was a trusty man. They are suspicious folk in the East, however: so what does this rajah do but take a second even more trusty servant and set him to play the spy upon the first? This second man was ordered never to let Achmet out of his sight, and he followed him like his shadow. He went after him that night and saw him pass through the doorway. Of course he thought he had taken refuge in the fort, and applied for admission there himself next day, but could find no trace of Achmet. This seemed to him so strange that he spoke about it to a sergeant of guides, who brought it to the ears of the commandant. A thorough search was quickly made, and the body was discovered. Thus at the very moment that we thought that all was safe we were all four seized and brought to trial on a charge of murder, — three of us because we had held the gate that night, and the fourth because he was known to have been in the company of the murdered man. Not a word about the jewels came out at the trial, for the rajah had been deposed and driven out of India: so no one had any particular interest in them. The murder, however, was clearly made out, and it was certain that we must all have been concerned in it. The three Sikhs got penal servitude for life, and I was condemned to death, though my sentence was afterwards commuted into the same as the others.

“It was rather a queer position that we found ourselves in then. There we were all four tied by the leg and with precious little chance of ever getting out again, while we each held a secret which might have put each of us in a palace if we could only have made use of it. It was enough to make a man eat his heart out to have to stand the kick and the cuff of every petty jack-in-office, to have rice to eat and water to drink, when that gorgeous fortune was ready for him outside, just waiting to be picked up. It might have driven me mad; but I was always a pretty stubborn one, so I just held on and bided my time.

“At last it seemed to me to have come. I was changed from Agra to Madras, and from there to Blair Island in the Andamans. There are very few white convicts at this settlement, and, as I had behaved well from the first, I soon found myself a sort of privileged person. I was given a hut in Hope Town, which is a small place on the slopes of Mount Harriet, and I was left pretty much to myself. It is a dreary, fever-stricken place, and all beyond our little clearings was infested with wild cannibal natives, who were ready enough to blow a poisoned dart at us if they saw a chance. There was digging, and ditching, and yam-planting, and a dozen other things to be done, so we were busy enough all day; though in the evening we had a little time to ourselves. Among other things, I learned to dispense drugs for the surgeon, and picked up a smattering of his knowledge. All the time I was on the lookout for a chance of escape; but it is hundreds of miles from any other land, and there is little or no wind in those seas: so it was a terribly difficult job to get away.

"The surgeon, Dr. Somerton, was a fast, sporting young chap, and the other young officers would meet in his rooms of an evening and play cards. The surgery, where I used to make up my drugs, was next to his sitting-room, with a small window between us. Often, if I felt lonesome, I used to turn out the lamp in the surgery, and then, standing there, I could hear their talk and watch their play. I am fond of a hand at cards myself, and it was almost as good as having one to watch the others. There was Major Sholto, Captain Morstan, and Lieutenant Bromley Brown, who were in command of the native troops, and there was the surgeon himself, and two or three prison-officials, crafty old hands who played a nice sly safe game. A very snug little party they used to make.

"Well, there was one thing which very soon struck me, and that was that the soldiers used always to lose and the civilians to win. Mind, I don't say that there was anything unfair, but so it was. These prison-chaps had done little else than play cards ever since they had been at the Andamans, and they knew each other's game to a point, while the others just played to pass the time and threw their cards down anyhow. Night after night the soldiers got up poorer men, and the poorer they got the more keen they were to play. Major Sholto was the hardest hit. He used to pay in notes and gold at first, but soon it came to notes of hand and for big sums. He sometimes would win for a few deals, just to give him heart, and then the luck would set in against him worse than ever. All day he would wander about as black as thunder, and he took to drinking a deal more than was good for him.

"One night he lost even more heavily than usual. I was sitting in my hut when he and Captain Morstan came stumbling along on the way to their quarters. They were bosom friends, those two, and never far apart. The major was raving about his losses.

"'It's all up, Morstan,' he was saying, as they passed my hut. 'I shall have to send in my papers. I am a ruined man.'

"'Nonsense, old chap!' said the other, slapping him upon the shoulder. 'I've had a nasty facer myself, but—' That was all I could hear, but it was enough to set me thinking.

"A couple of days later Major Sholto was strolling on the beach: so I took the chance of speaking to him.

"'I wish to have your advice, major,' said I.

"'Well, Small, what is it?' he asked, taking his cheroot from his lips.

"'I wanted to ask you, sir,' said I, 'who is the proper person to whom hidden treasure should be handed over. I know where half a million worth lies, and, as I cannot use it myself, I thought perhaps the best thing that I could do would be to hand it over to the proper authorities, and then perhaps they would get my sentence shortened for me.'

"'Half a million, Small?' he gasped, looking hard at me to see if I was in earnest.

"'Quite that, sir, — in jewels and pearls. It lies there ready for any one. And the queer thing about it is that the real owner is outlawed and cannot hold property, so that it belongs to the first comer.'

"'To government, Small,' he stammered,—'to government.' But he said it in a halting fashion, and I knew in my heart that I had got him.

"'You think, then, sir, that I should give the information to the Governor-General?' said I, quietly.

"'Well, well, you must not do anything rash, or that you might repent. Let me hear all about it, Small. Give me the facts.'

"I told him the whole story, with small changes so that he could not identify the places. When I had finished he stood stock still and full of thought. I could see by the twitch of his lip that there was a struggle going on within him.

"'This is a very important matter, Small,' he said, at last. 'You must not say a word to any one about it, and I shall see you again soon.'

"Two nights later he and his friend Captain Morstan came to my hut in the dead of the night with a lantern.

"'I want you just to let Captain Morstan hear that story from your own lips, Small,' said he.

"I repeated it as I had told it before.

"'It rings true, eh?' said he. 'It's good enough to act upon?'

"Captain Morstan nodded.

"'Look here, Small,' said the major. 'We have been talking it over, my friend here and I, and we have come to the conclusion that this secret of yours is hardly a government matter, after all, but is a private concern of your own, which of course you have the power of disposing of as you think best. Now, the question is, what price would you ask for it? We might be inclined to take it up, and at least look into it, if we could agree as to terms.' He tried to speak in a cool, careless way, but his eyes were shining with excitement and greed.

"'Why, as to that, gentlemen,' I answered, trying also to be cool, but feeling as excited as he did, 'there is only one bargain which a man in my position can make. I shall want you to help me to my freedom, and to help my three companions to theirs. We shall then take you into partnership, and give you a fifth share to divide between you.'

"'Hum!' said he. 'A fifth share! That is not very tempting.'

"'It would come to fifty thousand apiece,' said I.

"'But how can we gain your freedom? You know very well that you ask an impossibility.'

"'Nothing of the sort,' I answered. 'I have thought it all out to the last detail. The only bar to our escape is that we can get no boat fit for the voyage, and no provisions to last us for so long a time. There are plenty of little yachts and yawls at Calcutta or Madras which would serve our turn well. Do you bring one over. We shall engage to get aboard her by night, and if you will drop us on any part of the Indian coast you will have done your part of the bargain.'

"'If there were only one,' he said.

"'None or all,' I answered. 'We have sworn it. The four of us must always act together.'

"'You see, Morstan,' said he, 'Small is a man of his word. He does not flinch from his friend. I think we may very well trust him.'

"'It's a dirty business,' the other answered. 'Yet, as you say, the money would save our commissions handsomely.'

"'Well, Small,' said the major, 'we must, I suppose, try and meet you. We must first, of course, test the truth of your story. Tell me where the box is hid, and I shall get leave of absence and go back to India in the monthly relief-boat to inquire into the affair.'

"'Not so fast,' said I, growing colder as he got hot. 'I must have the consent of my three comrades. I tell you that it is four or none with us.'

"'Nonsense!' he broke in. 'What have three black fellows to do with our agreement?'

"'Black or blue,' said I, 'they are in with me, and we all go together.'

"Well, the matter ended by a second meeting, at which Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar were all present. We talked the matter over again, and at last we came to an arrangement. We were to provide both the officers with charts of the part of the Agra fort and mark the place in the wall where the treasure was hid. Major Sholto was to go to India to test our story. If he found the box he was to leave it there, to send out a small yacht provisioned for a voyage, which was to lie off Rutland Island, and to which we were to make our way, and finally to return to his duties. Captain Morstan was then to apply for leave of absence, to meet us at Agra, and there we were to have a final division of the treasure, he taking the major's share as well as his own. All this we sealed by the most solemn oaths that the mind could think or the lips utter. I sat up all night with paper and ink, and by the morning I had the two charts all ready, signed with the sign of four, — that is, of Abdullah, Akbar, Mahomet, and myself.

"Well, gentlemen, I weary you with my long story, and I know that my friend Mr. Jones is impatient to get me safely stowed in chokey. I'll make it as short as I can. The villain Sholto went off to India, but he never came back again. Captain Morstan showed me his name among a list of passengers in one of the mail-boats very shortly afterwards. His uncle had died, leaving him a fortune, and he had left the army, yet he could stoop to treat five men as he had treated us. Morstan went over to Agra shortly afterwards, and found, as we expected, that the treasure was indeed gone. The scoundrel had stolen it all, without carrying out one of the conditions on which we had sold him the secret. From that day I lived only for vengeance. I thought of it by day and I nursed it by night. It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. I cared nothing for the law, — nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat, — that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto.

"Well, I have set my mind on many things in this life, and never one which I did not carry out. But it was weary years before my time came. I have told you that I had picked up something of medicine. One day when

Dr. Somerton was down with a fever a little Andaman Islander was picked up by a convict-gang in the woods. He was sick to death, and had gone to a lonely place to die. I took him in hand, though he was as venomous as a young snake, and after a couple of months I got him all right and able to walk. He took a kind of fancy to me then, and would hardly go back to his woods, but was always hanging about my hut. I learned a little of his lingo from him, and this made him all the fonder of me.

"Tonga — for that was his name — was a fine boatman, and owned a big, roomy canoe of his own. When I found that he was devoted to me and would do anything to serve me, I saw my chance of escape. I talked it over with him. He was to bring his boat round on a certain night to an old wharf which was never guarded, and there he was to pick me up. I gave him directions to have several gourds of water and a lot of yams, cocoa-nuts, and sweet potatoes.

"He was stanch and true, was little Tonga. No man ever had a more faithful mate. At the night named he had his boat at the wharf. As it chanced, however, there was one of the convict-guard down there, — a vile Pathan who had never missed a chance of insulting and injuring me. I had always vowed vengeance, and now I had my chance. It was as if fate had placed him in my way that I might pay my debt before I left the island. He stood on the bank with his back to me, and his carbine on his shoulder. I looked about for a stone to beat out his brains with, but none could I see. Then a queer thought came into my head and showed me where I could lay my hand on a weapon. I sat down in the darkness and unstrapped my wooden leg. With three long hops I was on him. He put his carbine to his shoulder, but I struck him full, and knocked the whole front of his skull in. You can see the split in the wood now where I hit him. We both went down together, for I could not keep my balance, but when I got up I found him still lying quiet enough. I made for the boat, and in an hour we were well out at sea. Tonga had brought all his earthly possessions with him, his arms and his gods. Among other things, he had a long bamboo spear, and some Andaman cocoa-nut matting, with which I made a sort of sail. For ten days we were beating about, trusting to luck, and on the eleventh we were picked up by a trader which was going from Singapore to Jiddah with a cargo of Malay pilgrims. They were a rum crowd, and Tonga and I soon managed to settle down among them. They had one very good quality: they let you alone and asked no questions.

"Well, if I were to tell you all the adventures that my little chum and I went through, you would not thank me, for I would have you here until the sun was shining. Here and there we drifted about the world, something always turning up to keep us from London. All the time, however, I never lost sight of my purpose. I would dream of Sholto at night. A hundred times I have killed him in my sleep. At last, however, some three or four years ago, we found ourselves in England. I had no great difficulty in finding where Sholto lived, and I set to work to discover whether he had realised the treasure, or if he still had it. I made friends with someone who could help me, — I name no names, for I don't want to get any one else in a hole, — and I soon found that he still had the jewels. Then I tried to get at him in many ways; but he was pretty sly, and had always two prize-fighters, besides his sons and his khitmutgar, on guard over him.

"One day, however, I got word that he was dying. I hurried at once to the garden, mad that he should slip out of my clutches like that, and, looking through the window, I saw him lying in his bed, with his sons on each side of him. I'd have come through and taken my chance with the three of them, only even as I looked at him his jaw dropped, and I knew that he was gone. I got into his room that same night, though, and I searched his papers to see if there was any record of where he had hidden our jewels. There was not a line, however: so I came away, bitter and savage as a man could be. Before I left I bethought me that if I ever met my Sikh friends again it would be a satisfaction to know that I had left some mark of our hatred: so I scrawled down the sign of the four of us, as it had been on the chart, and I pinned it on his bosom. It was too much that he should be taken to the grave without some token from the men whom he had robbed and befooled.

"We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal. He would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance: so we always had a hatful of pennies after a day's work. I still heard all the news from Pondicherry Lodge, and for some years there was no news to hear, except that they were hunting for the treasure. At last, however, came what we had waited for so long. The treasure had been found. It was up at the top of the house, in Mr. Bartholomew Sholto's chemical laboratory. I came at once and had a look at the place, but I could not see how with my wooden leg I was to make my way up to it. I learned, however, about a trap-door in the roof, and also about Mr. Sholto's supper-hour. It seemed to me that I could manage the thing easily through Tonga. I brought him out with me with a long rope wound round his waist. He could climb like a cat, and he soon made his way through the roof, but, as ill luck would have it, Bartholomew Sholto was still in the room, to his cost. Tonga thought he had done something very clever in killing him, for when I came up by the rope I found him strutting about as proud as a peacock. Very much surprised was he when I made at him with the rope's end and cursed him for a little blood-thirsty imp. I took the treasure-box and let it down, and then slid down myself, having first left the sign of the four upon the table, to show that the jewels had come back at last to those who had most right to them. Tonga then pulled up the rope, closed the window, and made off the way that he had come.

"I don't know that I have anything else to tell you. I had heard a waterman speak of the speed of Smith's launch the Aurora, so I thought she would be a handy craft for our escape. I engaged with old Smith, and was to give him a big sum if he got us safe to our ship. He knew, no doubt, that there was some screw loose, but he was not in our secrets. All this is the truth, and if I tell it to you, gentlemen, it is not to amuse you, — for you have not done me a very good turn, — but it is because I believe the best defence I can make is just to hold back nothing, but let all the world know how badly I have myself been served by Major Sholto, and how innocent I am of the death of his son."

"A very remarkable account," said Sherlock Holmes. "A fitting wind-up to an extremely interesting case. There is nothing at all new to me in the latter part of your narrative, except that you brought your own rope. That I did not know. By the way, I had hoped that Tonga had lost all his darts; yet he managed to shoot one at us in the boat."

"He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his blow-pipe at the time."

"Ah, of course," said Holmes. "I had not thought of that."

"Is there any other point which you would like to ask about?" asked the convict, affably.

"I think not, thank you," my companion answered.

"Well, Holmes," said Athelney Jones, "You are a man to be humored, and we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime, but duty is duty, and I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me. I shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under lock and key. The cab still waits, and there are two inspectors down-stairs. I am much obliged to you both for your assistance. Of course you will be wanted at the trial. Good-night to you."

"Good-night, gentlemen both," said Jonathan Small.

"You first, Small," remarked the wary Jones as they left the room. "I'll take particular care that you don't club me with your wooden leg, whatever you may have done to the gentleman at the Andaman Isles."

"Well, and there is the end of our little drama," I remarked, after we had set some time smoking in silence. "I fear that it may be the last investigation in which I shall have the chance of studying your methods. Miss Morstan has done me the honor to accept me as a husband in prospective."

He gave a most dismal groan. "I feared as much," said he. "I really cannot congratulate you."

I was a little hurt. "Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my choice?" I asked.

"Not at all. I think she is one of the most charming young ladies I ever met, and might have been most useful in such work as we have been doing. She had a decided genius that way: witness the way in which she preserved that Agra plan from all the other papers of her father. But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things. I should never marry myself, lest I bias my judgment."

"I trust," said I, laughing, "that my judgment may survive the ordeal. But you look weary."

"Yes, the reaction is already upon me. I shall be as limp as a rag for a week."

"Strange," said I, "how terms of what in another man I should call laziness alternate with your fits of splendid energy and vigor."

"Yes," he answered, "there are in me the makings of a very fine loafer and also of a pretty spry sort of fellow. I often think of those lines of old Goethe, —

Schade dass die Natur nur EINEN Mensch aus Dir schuf,
Denn zum wuerdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.

"By the way, a propos of this Norwood business, you see that they had, as I surmised, a confederate in the house, who could be none other than Lal Rao, the butler: so Jones actually has the undivided honor of having caught one fish in his great haul."

“The division seems rather unfair,” I remarked. “You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?”

“For me,” said Sherlock Holmes, “there still remains the cocaine-bottle.” And he stretched his long white hand up for it.

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

This collection of twelve stories were originally published as single stories in the *Strand Magazine* from July 1891 to June 1892. The book was published in England in 1892 and quickly grew in popularity.

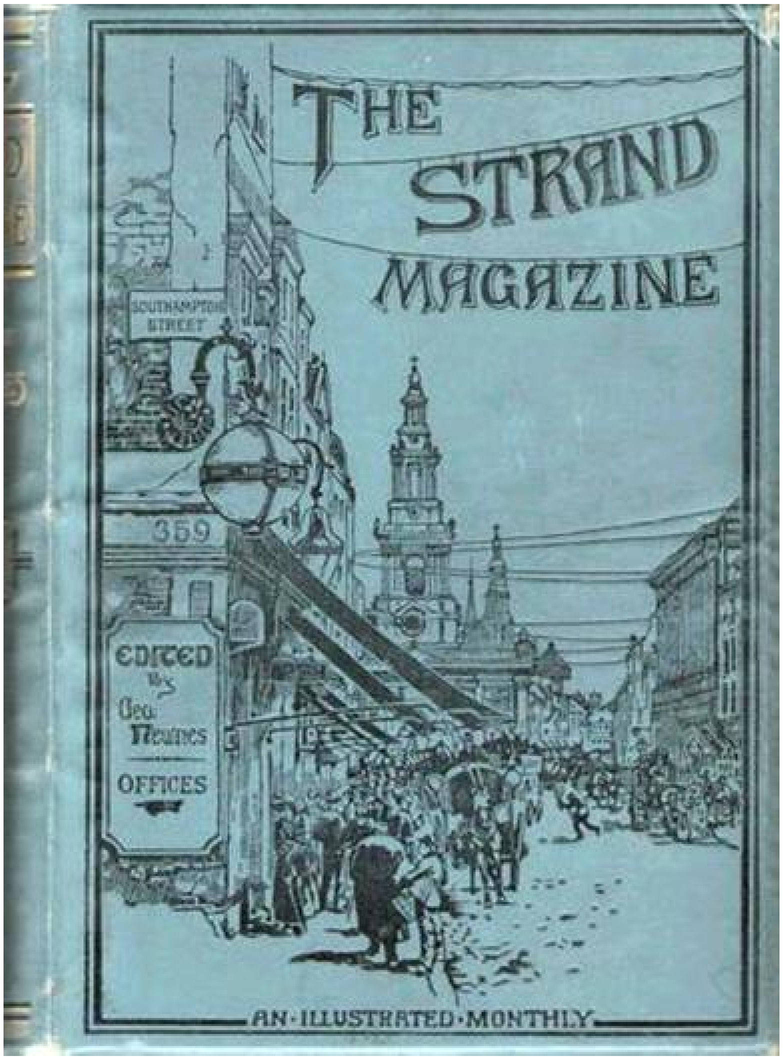
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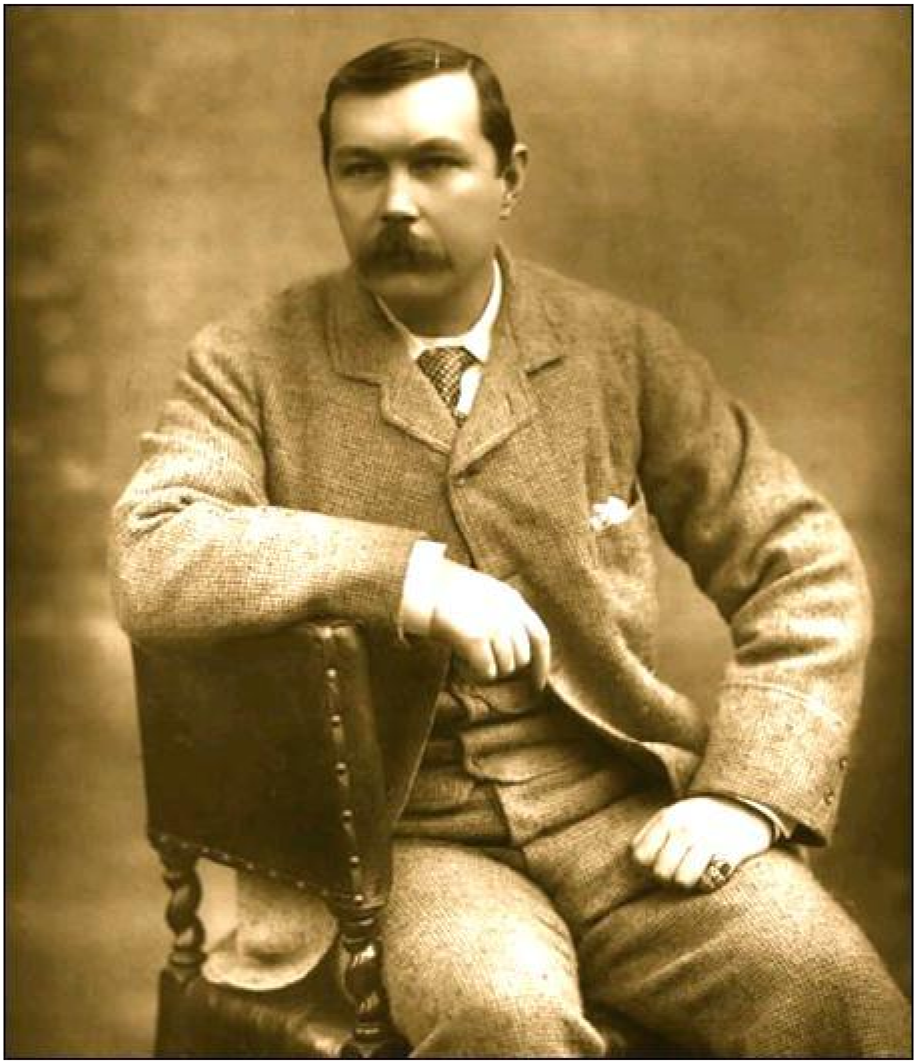

Conan Doyle, at the time of publication

A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

I.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer — excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other. My own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention, while Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in following out those clues, and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of my former friend and companion.

One night — it was on the twentieth of March, 1888 — I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner. Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

“Wedlock suits you,” he remarked. “I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you.”

“Seven!” I answered.

“Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness.”

“Then, how do you know?”

“I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?”

“My dear Holmes,” said I, “this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can’t imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out.”

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

“It is simplicity itself,” said he; “my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession.”

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. “When I hear you give your reasons,” I remarked, “the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.”

“Quite so,” he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.”

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. By the way, since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this.” He threw over a sheet of thick, pink-tinted notepaper which had been lying open upon the table. “It came by the last post,” said he. “Read it aloud.”

The note was undated, and without either signature or address.

“There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o’clock,” it said, “a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask."

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?"

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written.

"The man who wrote it was presumably well to do," I remarked, endeavouring to imitate my companion's processes. "Such paper could not be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and stiff."

"Peculiar — that is the very word," said Holmes. "It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to the light."

I did so, and saw a large "E" with a small "g," a "P," and a large "G" with a small "t" woven into the texture of the paper.

"What do you make of that?" asked Holmes.

"The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather."

"Not at all. The 'G' with the small 't' stands for 'Gesellschaft,' which is the German for 'Company.' It is a customary contraction like our 'Co.' 'P,' of course, stands for 'Papier.' Now for the 'Eg.' Let us glance at our Continental Gazetteer." He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves. "Eglow, Eglonitz — here we are, Egria. It is in a German-speaking country — in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. 'Remarkable as being the scene of the death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous glass-factories and paper-mills.' Ha, ha, my boy, what do you make of that?" His eyes sparkled, and he sent up a great blue triumphant cloud from his cigarette.

"The paper was made in Bohemia," I said.

"Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence—'This account of you we have from all quarters received.' A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. It is the German who is so uncourteous to his verbs. It only remains, therefore, to discover what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and prefers wearing a mask to showing his face. And here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts."

As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses' hoofs and grating wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp pull at the bell. Holmes whistled.

"A pair, by the sound," said he. "Yes," he continued, glancing out of the window. "A nice little brougham and a pair of beauties. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. There's money in this case, Watson, if there is nothing else."

"I think that I had better go, Holmes."

"Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity to miss it."

"But your client—"

"Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes. Sit down in that armchair, Doctor, and give us your best attention."

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage, paused immediately outside the door. Then there was a loud and authoritative tap.

"Come in!" said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. His dress was rich with a richness which would, in England, be looked upon as akin to bad taste. Heavy bands of astrakhan were slashed across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat, while the deep blue cloak which was thrown over his shoulders was lined with flame-coloured silk and secured at the neck with a brooch which consisted of a single flaming beryl. Boots which extended halfway up his calves, and which were trimmed at the tops with rich brown fur, completed the impression of barbaric opulence which was suggested by his whole appearance. He carried a broad-brimmed hat in his hand, while he wore across the upper part of his face, extending down past the cheekbones, a black vizard mask, which he had apparently adjusted that very moment, for his hand was still raised to it as he entered. From the lower part of the face he appeared to be a man of strong character, with a thick, hanging lip, and a long, straight chin suggestive of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy.

"You had my note?" he asked with a deep harsh voice and a strongly marked German accent. "I told you that I would call." He looked from one to the other of us, as if uncertain which to address.

“Pray take a seat,” said Holmes. “This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally good enough to help me in my cases. Whom have I the honour to address?”

“You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. I understand that this gentleman, your friend, is a man of honour and discretion, whom I may trust with a matter of the most extreme importance. If not, I should much prefer to communicate with you alone.”

I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into my chair. “It is both, or none,” said he. “You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me.”

The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. “Then I must begin,” said he, “by binding you both to absolute secrecy for two years; at the end of that time the matter will be of no importance. At present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it may have an influence upon European history.”

“I promise,” said Holmes.

“And I.”

“You will excuse this mask,” continued our strange visitor. “The august person who employs me wishes his agent to be unknown to you, and I may confess at once that the title by which I have just called myself is not exactly my own.”

“I was aware of it,” said Holmes dryly.

“The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution has to be taken to quench what might grow to be an immense scandal and seriously compromise one of the reigning families of Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia.”

“I was also aware of that,” murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

Our visitor glanced with some apparent surprise at the languid, lounging figure of the man who had been no doubt depicted to him as the most incisive reasoner and most energetic agent in Europe. Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his gigantic client.

“If your Majesty would condescend to state your case,” he remarked, “I should be better able to advise you.”

The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground. “You are right,” he cried; “I am the King. Why should I attempt to conceal it?”

“Why, indeed?” murmured Holmes. “Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia.”

“But you can understand,” said our strange visitor, sitting down once more and passing his hand over his high white forehead, “you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in my own person. Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. I have come *incognito* from Prague for the purpose of consulting you.”

“Then, pray consult,” said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

“The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you.”

“Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor,” murmured Holmes without opening his eyes. For many years he had adopted a system of docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things, so that it was difficult to name a subject or a person on which he could not at once furnish information. In this case I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes.

“Let me see!” said Holmes. “Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto — hum! La Scala, hum! Prima donna Imperial Opera of Warsaw — yes! Retired from operatic stage — ha! Living in London — quite so! Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back.”

“Precisely so. But how—”

“Was there a secret marriage?”

“None.”

“No legal papers or certificates?”

“None.”

“Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?”

"There is the writing."

"Pooh, pooh! Forgery."

"My private note-paper."

"Stolen."

"My own seal."

"Imitated."

"My photograph."

"Bought."

"We were both in the photograph."

"Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion."

"I was mad — insane."

"You have compromised yourself seriously."

"I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now."

"It must be recovered."

"We have tried and failed."

"Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought."

"She will not sell."

"Stolen, then."

"Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result."

"No sign of it?"

"Absolutely none."

Holmes laughed. "It is quite a pretty little problem," said he.

"But a very serious one to me," returned the King reproachfully.

"Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the photograph?"

"To ruin me."

"But how?"

"I am about to be married."

"So I have heard."

"To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. You may know the strict principles of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end."

"And Irene Adler?"

"Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know that she will do it. You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go — none."

"You are sure that she has not sent it yet?"

"I am sure."

"And why?"

"Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday."

"Oh, then we have three days yet," said Holmes with a yawn. "That is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to look into just at present. Your Majesty will, of course, stay in London for the present?"

"Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count Von Kramm."

"Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress."

"Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety."

"Then, as to money?"

"You have *carte blanche*."

"Absolutely?"

"I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph."

"And for present expenses?"

The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.

"There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes," he said.

Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.

"And Mademoiselle's address?" he asked.

"Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood."

Holmes took a note of it. "One other question," said he. "Was the photograph a cabinet?"

"It was."

"Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. And good-night, Watson," he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. "If you will be good enough to call to-morrow afternoon at three o’clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you.”

II.

At three o’clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o’clock in the morning. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own. Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head.

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend’s amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he. With a nod he vanished into the bedroom, whence he emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and respectable, as of old. Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in front of the fire and laughed heartily for some minutes.

“Well, really!” he cried, and then he choked and laughed again until he was obliged to lie back, limp and helpless, in the chair.

“What is it?”

“It’s quite too funny. I am sure you could never guess how I employed my morning, or what I ended by doing.”

“I can’t imagine. I suppose that you have been watching the habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler.”

“Quite so; but the sequel was rather unusual. I will tell you, however. I left the house a little after eight o’clock this morning in the character of a groom out of work. There is a wonderful sympathy and freemasonry among horsey men. Be one of them, and you will know all that there is to know. I soon found Briony Lodge. It is a *bijou* villa, with a garden at the back, but built out in front right up to the road, two stories. Chubb lock to the door. Large sitting-room on the right side, well furnished, with long windows almost to the floor, and those preposterous English window fasteners which a child could open. Behind there was nothing remarkable, save that the passage window could be reached from the top of the coach-house. I walked round it and examined it closely from every point of view, but without noting anything else of interest.

“I then lounged down the street and found, as I expected, that there was a mews in a lane which runs down by one wall of the garden. I lent the ostlers a hand in rubbing down their horses, and received in exchange twopence, a glass of half-and-half, two fills of shag tobacco, and as much information as I could desire about Miss Adler, to say nothing of half a dozen other people in the neighbourhood in whom I was not in the least interested, but whose biographies I was compelled to listen to.”

“And what of Irene Adler?” I asked.

“Oh, she has turned all the men’s heads down in that part. She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. So say the Serpentine-mews, to a man. She lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for dinner. Seldom goes out at other times, except when she sings. Has only one male visitor, but a good deal of him. He is dark, handsome, and dashing, never calls less than once a day, and often twice. He is a Mr. Godfrey Norton, of the Inner Temple. See the advantages of a cabman as a confidant. They had driven him home a dozen times from Serpentine-mews, and knew all about him. When I had listened to all they had to tell, I began to walk up and down near Briony Lodge once more, and to think over my plan of campaign.

“This Godfrey Norton was evidently an important factor in the matter. He was a lawyer. That sounded ominous. What was the relation between them, and what the object of his repeated visits? Was she his client, his friend, or his mistress? If the former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his keeping. If the latter, it was less likely. On the issue of this question depended whether I should continue my work at Briony Lodge, or turn my attention to the gentleman’s chambers in the Temple. It was a delicate point, and it widened the field of my inquiry. I fear that I bore you with these details, but I have to let you see my little difficulties, if you are to understand the situation.”

“I am following you closely,” I answered.

“I was still balancing the matter in my mind when a hansom cab drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman sprang out. He was a remarkably handsome man, dark, aquiline, and moustached — evidently the man of whom I had heard. He appeared to be in a great hurry, shouted to the cabman to wait, and brushed past the maid who opened the door with the air of a man who was thoroughly at home.

“He was in the house about half an hour, and I could catch glimpses of him in the windows of the sitting-room, pacing up and down, talking excitedly, and waving his arms. Of her I could see nothing. Presently he emerged, looking even more flurried than before. As he stepped up to the cab, he pulled a gold watch from his pocket and looked at it earnestly, ‘Drive like the devil,’ he shouted, ‘first to Gross & Hankey’s in Regent Street, and then to the Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!’

“Away they went, and I was just wondering whether I should not do well to follow them when up the lane came a neat little landau, the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under his ear, while all the tags of his harness were sticking out of the buckles. It hadn’t pulled up before she shot out of the hall door and into it. I only caught a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

“ ’The Church of St. Monica, John,’ she cried, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’

“This was quite too good to lose, Watson. I was just balancing whether I should run for it, or whether I should perch behind her landau when a cab came through the street. The driver looked twice at such a shabby fare, but I jumped in before he could object. ‘The Church of St. Monica,’ said I, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’ It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.

“My cabby drove fast. I don’t think I ever drove faster, but the others were there before us. The cab and the landau with their steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. I paid the man and hurried into the church. There was not a soul there save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be expostulating with them. They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. I lounged up the side aisle like any other idler who has dropped into a church. Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to me, and Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards me.

“ ’Thank God,’ he cried. ‘You’ll do. Come! Come!’

“ ’What then?’ I asked.

“ ’Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it won’t be legal.’

“I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was I found myself mumbling responses which were whispered in my ear, and vouching for things of which I knew nothing, and generally assisting in the secure tying up of Irene Adler, spinster, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and there was the gentleman thanking me on the one side and the lady on the other, while the clergyman beamed on me in front. It was the most preposterous position in which I ever found myself in my life, and it was the thought of it that started me laughing just now. It seems that there had been some informality about their license, that the clergyman absolutely refused to marry them without a witness of some sort, and that my lucky appearance saved the bridegroom from having to sally out into the streets in search of a best man. The bride gave me a sovereign, and I mean to wear it on my watch chain in memory of the occasion.”

“This is a very unexpected turn of affairs,” said I; “and what then?”

“Well, I found my plans very seriously menaced. It looked as if the pair might take an immediate departure, and so necessitate very prompt and energetic measures on my part. At the church door, however, they separated, he driving back to the Temple, and she to her own house. ‘I shall drive out in the park at five as usual,’ she said as she left him. I heard no more. They drove away in different directions, and I went off to make my own arrangements.”

“Which are?”

“Some cold beef and a glass of beer,” he answered, ringing the bell. “I have been too busy to think of food, and I am likely to be busier still this evening. By the way, Doctor, I shall want your co-operation.”

“I shall be delighted.”

“You don’t mind breaking the law?”

“Not in the least.”

“Nor running a chance of arrest?”

“Not in a good cause.”

“Oh, the cause is excellent!”

“Then I am your man.”

"I was sure that I might rely on you."

"But what is it you wish?"

"When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to you. Now," he said as he turned hungrily on the simple fare that our landlady had provided, "I must discuss it while I eat, for I have not much time. It is nearly five now. In two hours we must be on the scene of action. Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns from her drive at seven. We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her."

"And what then?"

"You must leave that to me. I have already arranged what is to occur. There is only one point on which I must insist. You must not interfere, come what may. You understand?"

"I am to be neutral?"

"To do nothing whatever. There will probably be some small unpleasantness. Do not join in it. It will end in my being conveyed into the house. Four or five minutes afterwards the sitting-room window will open. You are to station yourself close to that open window."

"Yes."

"You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you."

"Yes."

"And when I raise my hand — so — you will throw into the room what I give you to throw, and will, at the same time, raise the cry of fire. You quite follow me?"

"Entirely."

"It is nothing very formidable," he said, taking a long cigar-shaped roll from his pocket. "It is an ordinary plumber's smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. Your task is confined to that. When you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by quite a number of people. You may then walk to the end of the street, and I will rejoin you in ten minutes. I hope that I have made myself clear?"

"I am to remain neutral, to get near the window, to watch you, and at the signal to throw in this object, then to raise the cry of fire, and to wait you at the corner of the street."

"Precisely."

"Then you may entirely rely on me."

"That is excellent. I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I prepare for the new role I have to play."

He disappeared into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in the character of an amiable and simple-minded Nonconformist clergyman. His broad black hat, his baggy trousers, his white tie, his sympathetic smile, and general look of peering and benevolent curiosity were such as Mr. John Hare alone could have equalled. It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist in crime.

It was a quarter past six when we left Baker Street, and it still wanted ten minutes to the hour when we found ourselves in Serpentine Avenue. It was already dusk, and the lamps were just being lighted as we paced up and down in front of Briony Lodge, waiting for the coming of its occupant. The house was just such as I had pictured it from Sherlock Holmes' succinct description, but the locality appeared to be less private than I expected. On the contrary, for a small street in a quiet neighbourhood, it was remarkably animated. There was a group of shabbily dressed men smoking and laughing in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his wheel, two guardsmen who were flirting with a nurse-girl, and several well-dressed young men who were lounging up and down with cigars in their mouths.

"You see," remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of the house, "this marriage rather simplifies matters. The photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. The chances are that she would be as averse to its being seen by Mr. Godfrey Norton, as our client is to its coming to the eyes of his princess. Now the question is, Where are we to find the photograph?"

"Where, indeed?"

"It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. It is cabinet size. Too large for easy concealment about a woman's dress. She knows that the King is capable of having her waylaid and searched. Two attempts of the sort have already been made. We may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her."

"Where, then?"

"Her banker or her lawyer. There is that double possibility. But I am inclined to think neither. Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting. Why should she hand it over to anyone else? She could trust her own guardianship, but she could not tell what indirect or political influence might be brought to bear upon a business man. Besides, remember that she had resolved to use it within a few days. It must be where she can lay her hands upon it. It must be in her own house."

"But it has twice been burgled."

"Pshaw! They did not know how to look."

"But how will you look?"

"I will not look."

"What then?"

"I will get her to show me."

"But she will refuse."

"She will not be able to. But I hear the rumble of wheels. It is her carriage. Now carry out my orders to the letter."

As he spoke the gleam of the sidelights of a carriage came round the curve of the avenue. It was a smart little landau which rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. As it pulled up, one of the loafing men at the corner dashed forward to open the door in the hope of earning a copper, but was elbowed away by another loafer, who had rushed up with the same intention. A fierce quarrel broke out, which was increased by the two guardsmen, who took sides with one of the loungers, and by the scissors-grinder, who was equally hot upon the other side. A blow was struck, and in an instant the lady, who had stepped from her carriage, was the centre of a little knot of flushed and struggling men, who struck savagely at each other with their fists and sticks. Holmes dashed into the crowd to protect the lady; but, just as he reached her, he gave a cry and dropped to the ground, with the blood running freely down his face. At his fall the guardsmen took to their heels in one direction and the loungers in the other, while a number of better dressed people, who had watched the scuffle without taking part in it, crowded in to help the lady and to attend to the injured man. Irene Adler, as I will still call her, had hurried up the steps; but she stood at the top with her superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street.

"Is the poor gentleman much hurt?" she asked.

"He is dead," cried several voices.

"No, no, there's life in him!" shouted another. "But he'll be gone before you can get him to hospital."

"He's a brave fellow," said a woman. "They would have had the lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. They were a gang, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now."

"He can't lie in the street. May we bring him in, marm?"

"Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable sofa. This way, please!"

Slowly and solemnly he was borne into Briony Lodge and laid out in the principal room, while I still observed the proceedings from my post by the window. The lamps had been lit, but the blinds had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay upon the couch. I do not know whether he was seized with compunction at that moment for the part he was playing, but I know that I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself in my life than when I saw the beautiful creature against whom I was conspiring, or the grace and kindliness with which she waited upon the injured man. And yet it would be the blackest treachery to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted to me. I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under my ulster. After all, I thought, we are not injuring her. We are but preventing her from injuring another.

Holmes had sat up upon the couch, and I saw him motion like a man who is in need of air. A maid rushed across and threw open the window. At the same instant I saw him raise his hand and at the signal I tossed my rocket into the room with a cry of "Fire!" The word was no sooner out of my mouth than the whole crowd of spectators, well dressed and ill — gentlemen, ostlers, and servant maids — joined in a general shriek of "Fire!" Thick clouds of smoke curled through the room and out at the open window. I caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice of Holmes from within assuring them that it was a false alarm. Slipping through the shouting crowd I made my way to the corner of the street, and in ten minutes was rejoiced to find my friend's arm in mine, and to get away from the scene of uproar. He walked swiftly and in silence for some few minutes until we had turned down one of the quiet streets which lead towards the Edgeware Road.

"You did it very nicely, Doctor," he remarked. "Nothing could have been better. It is all right."

"You have the photograph?"

"I know where it is."

"And how did you find out?"

"She showed me, as I told you she would."

"I am still in the dark."

“I do not wish to make a mystery,” said he, laughing. “The matter was perfectly simple. You, of course, saw that everyone in the street was an accomplice. They were all engaged for the evening.”

“I guessed as much.”

“Then, when the row broke out, I had a little moist red paint in the palm of my hand. I rushed forward, fell down, clapped my hand to my face, and became a piteous spectacle. It is an old trick.”

“That also I could fathom.”

“Then they carried me in. She was bound to have me in. What else could she do? And into her sitting-room, which was the very room which I suspected. It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was determined to see which. They laid me on a couch, I motioned for air, they were compelled to open the window, and you had your chance.”

“How did that help you?”

“It was all-important. When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the Darlington Substitution Scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it. The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half drew it out. When I cried out that it was a false alarm, she replaced it, glanced at the rocket, rushed from the room, and I have not seen her since. I rose, and, making my excuses, escaped from the house. I hesitated whether to attempt to secure the photograph at once; but the coachman had come in, and as he was watching me narrowly, it seemed safer to wait. A little over-precipitance may ruin all.”

“And now?” I asked.

“Our quest is practically finished. I shall call with the King to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. We will be shown into the sitting-room to wait for the lady, but it is probable that when she comes she may find neither us nor the photograph. It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain it with his own hands."

"And when will you call?"

"At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to the King without delay."

We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

"Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been."

III.

I slept at Baker Street that night, and we were engaged upon our toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed into the room.

"You have really got it!" he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either shoulder and looking eagerly into his face.

"Not yet."

"But you have hopes?"

"I have hopes."

"Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone."

"We must have a cab."

"No, my brougham is waiting."

"Then that will simplify matters." We descended and started off once more for Briony Lodge.

"Irene Adler is married," remarked Holmes.

"Married! When?"

"Yesterday."

"But to whom?"

"To an English lawyer named Norton."

"But she could not love him."

"I am in hopes that she does."

"And why in hopes?"

"Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty's plan."

"It is true. And yet — ! Well! I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made!" He relapsed into a moody silence, which was not broken until we drew up in Serpentine Avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped from the brougham.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?" said she.

"I am Mr. Holmes," answered my companion, looking at her with a questioning and rather startled gaze.

"Indeed! My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing Cross for the Continent."

"What!" Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and surprise. "Do you mean that she has left England?"

"Never to return."

"And the papers?" asked the King hoarsely. "All is lost."

"We shall see." He pushed past the servant and rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the King and myself. The furniture was scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before her flight. Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a small sliding shutter, and, plunging in his hand, pulled out a photograph and a letter. The photograph was of Irene Adler herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to "Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for." My friend tore it open, and we all three read it together. It was dated at midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES, — You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that, if the King employed an agent, it would certainly be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran upstairs, got into my walking clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed.

“Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband.

“We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he. The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future. I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,

“Very truly yours,

“IRENE NORTON, *née* ADLER.”

“What a woman — oh, what a woman!” cried the King of Bohemia, when we had all three read this epistle. “Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was? Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?”

“From what I have seen of the lady, she seems, indeed, to be on a very different level to your Majesty,” said Holmes coldly. “I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty’s business to a more successful conclusion.”

“On the contrary, my dear sir,” cried the King; “nothing could be more successful. I know that her word is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire.”

“I am glad to hear your Majesty say so.”

“I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can reward you. This ring—” He slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

“Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly,” said Holmes.

“You have but to name it.”

“This photograph!”

The King stared at him in amazement.

“Irene’s photograph!” he cried. “Certainly, if you wish it.”

“I thank your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the matter. I have the honour to wish you a very good morning.” He bowed, and, turning away without observing the hand which the King had stretched out to him, he set off in my company for his chambers.

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman’s wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman.

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

I had called upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair and putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, Doctor, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling fact upon fact on you until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique things are very often connected not with the larger but with the smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative. I ask you not merely because my friend Dr. Watson has not heard the opening part but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events, I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little pride and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head thrust forward and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man and endeavoured, after the fashion of my companion, to read the indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey shepherd's check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

“How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?” he asked. “How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour. It’s as true as gospel, for I began as a ship’s carpenter.”

“Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed.”

“Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?”

“I won’t insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin.”

“Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?”

“What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk?”

“Well, but China?”

“The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes’ scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple.”

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. “Well, I never!” said he. “I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it after all.”

“I begin to think, Watson,” said Holmes, “that I make a mistake in explaining. ‘*Omne ignotum pro magnifico,*’ you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?”

“Yes, I have got it now,” he answered with his thick red finger planted halfway down the column. “Here it is. This is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir.”

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

“TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U. S. A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of £4 a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible.

Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is *The Morning Chronicle* of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson?"

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead; "I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that he is willing to come for half wages so as to learn the business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth, either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employé who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking and keeps the place clean — that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads and pay our debts, if we do nothing more.

“The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

“ ’I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.’

“ ’Why that?’ I asks.

“ ’Why,’ says he, ‘here’s another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. It’s worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits’ end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change colour, here’s a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.’

“ ’Why, what is it, then?’ I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn’t know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

“ ’Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?’ he asked with his eyes open.

“ ’Never.’

“ ’Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.’

“ ’And what are they worth?’ I asked.

“ ’Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one’s other occupations.’

“Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business has not been over good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

“ ’Tell me all about it,’ said I.

“ ’Well,’ said he, showing me the advertisement, ‘you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so, when he died, it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that colour. From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to do.’

“ ’But,’ said I, ‘there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.’

“ ’Not so many as you might think,’ he answered. ‘You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but real bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.’

“Now, it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that if there was to be any competition in the matter I stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a holiday, so we shut the business up and started off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

“I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the city to answer the advertisement. Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope’s Court looked like a coster’s orange barrow. I should not have thought there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of colour they were — straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real vivid flame-coloured tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could and soon found ourselves in the office.”

“Your experience has been a most entertaining one,” remarked Holmes as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. “Pray continue your very interesting statement.”

“There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a deal table, behind which sat a small man with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter, after all. However, when our turn came the little man was much more favourable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private word with us.

“ ’This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,’ said my assistant, ‘and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.’

“ ’And he is admirably suited for it,’ the other answered. ‘He has every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.’ He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my success.

“ ’It would be injustice to hesitate,’ said he. ‘You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.’ With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. ‘There is water in your eyes,’ said he as he released me. ‘I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobbler’s wax which would disgust you with human nature.’ He stepped over to the window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions until there was not a red-head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

“ ’My name,’ said he, ‘is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?’

“I answered that I had not.

“His face fell immediately.

“ ’Dear me!’ he said gravely, ‘that is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.’

“My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I thought that I was not to have the vacancy after all; but after thinking it over for a few minutes he said that it would be all right.

“ ’In the case of another,’ said he, ‘the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favour of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?’

“ ’Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,’ said I.

“ ’Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!’ said Vincent Spaulding. ‘I should be able to look after that for you.’

“ ’What would be the hours?’ I asked.

“ ’Ten to two.’

“Now a pawnbroker’s business is mostly done of an evening, Mr. Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evening, which is just before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

“ ’That would suit me very well,’ said I. ‘And the pay?’

“ ’Is £4 a week.’

“ ’And the work?’

“ ’Is purely nominal.’

“ ’What do you call purely nominal?’

“ ’Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don’t comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.’

“ ’It’s only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,’ said I.

“ ’No excuse will avail,’ said Mr. Duncan Ross; ‘neither sickness nor business nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.’

“ ’And the work?’

“ ’Is to copy out the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready to-morrow?’

“ ’Certainly,’ I answered.

“ ’Then, good-bye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.’ He bowed me out of the room and I went home with my assistant, hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased at my own good fortune.

“Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low spirits again; for I had quite persuaded myself that the whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill-pen, and seven sheets of foolscap paper, I started off for Pope’s Court.

“Well, to my surprise and delight, everything was as right as possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off upon the letter A, and then he left me; but he would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o’clock he bade me good-day, complimented me upon the amount that I had written, and locked the door of the office after me.

“This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the manager came in and planked down four golden sovereigns for my week’s work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By degrees Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a good one, and suited me so well, that I would not risk the loss of it.

“Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots and Archery and Armour and Architecture and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B’s before very long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end.”

“To an end?”

“Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as usual at ten o’clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read for yourself.”

He held up a piece of white cardboard about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

IS

DISSOLVED.

October 9, 1890.

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so completely overtopped every other consideration that we both burst out into a roar of laughter.

“I cannot see that there is anything very funny,” cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head. “If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere.”

“No, no,” cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. “I really wouldn’t miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?”

“I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant living on the ground floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-headed League. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him.

“ ’Well,’ said I, ‘the gentleman at No. 4.’

“ ’What, the red-headed man?’

“ ’Yes.’

“ ’Oh,’ said he, ‘his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.’

“ ’Where could I find him?’

“ ’Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul’s.’

“I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either

Mr. William Morris or Mr. Duncan Ross.”

“And what did you do then?” asked Holmes.

“I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you.”

“And you did very wisely,” said Holmes. “Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear.”

“Grave enough!” said Mr. Jabez Wilson. “Why, I have lost four pound a week.”

“As far as you are personally concerned,” remarked Holmes, “I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some £30, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them.”

“No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank — if it was a prank — upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two and thirty pounds.”

“We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement — how long had he been with you?”

“About a month then.”

“How did he come?”

“In answer to an advertisement.”

“Was he the only applicant?”

“No, I had a dozen.”

“Why did you pick him?”

“Because he was handy and would come cheap.”

“At half wages, in fact.”

“Yes.”

“What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?”

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. "I thought as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes when our visitor had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered frankly. "It is a most mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at the St. James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My practice is never very absorbing."

“Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!”

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a poky, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few clumps of faded laurel bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with “JABEZ WILSON” in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally he returned to the pawnbroker’s, and, having thumped vigorously upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

“Thank you,” said Holmes, “I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand.”

“Third right, fourth left,” answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

“Smart fellow, that,” observed Holmes as we walked away. “He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before.”

“Evidently,” said I, “Mr. Wilson’s assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him.”

“Not him.”

“What then?”

“The knees of his trousers.”

“And what did you see?”

“What I expected to see.”

“Why did you beat the pavement?”

“My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy’s country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it.”

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. It was difficult to realise as we looked at the line of fine shops and stately business premises that they really abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square which we had just quitted.

“Let me see,” said Holmes, standing at the corner and glancing along the line, “I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer’s, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane’s carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, Doctor, we’ve done our work, so it’s time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness and delicacy and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums.”

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the music at St. James’s Hall I felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

“You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor,” he remarked as we emerged.

“Yes, it would be as well.”

“And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious.”

“Why serious?”

“A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night.”

“At what time?”

“Ten will be early enough.”

“I shall be at Baker Street at ten.”

“Very well. And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.” He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed copier of the *Encyclopaedia* down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me. What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? Where were we going, and what were we to do? I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker’s assistant was a formidable man — a man who might play a deep game. I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter-past nine when I started from home and made my way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and as I entered the passage I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering his room, I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognised as Peter Jones, the official police agent, while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

“Ha! Our party is complete,” said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack. “Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night’s adventure.”

“We’re hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see,” said Jones in his consequential way. “Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him to do the running down.”

“I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase,” observed Mr. Merryweather gloomily.

“You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir,” said the police agent loftily. “He has his own little methods, which are, if he won’t mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly correct than the official force.”

“Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right,” said the stranger with deference. “Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber.”

“I think you will find,” said Sherlock Holmes, “that you will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some £30,000; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands.”

“John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He’s a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He’s a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He’ll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I’ve been on his track for years and have never set eyes on him yet.”

“I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. I’ve had one or two little turns also with Mr. John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started. If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second.”

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farrington Street.

“We are close there now,” my friend remarked. “This fellow Merryweather is a bank director, and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us.”

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and, following the guidance of Mr. Merryweather, we passed down a narrow passage and through a side door, which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

“You are not very vulnerable from above,” Holmes remarked as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

“Nor from below,” said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. “Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!” he remarked, looking up in surprise.

“I must really ask you to be a little more quiet!” said Holmes severely. “You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?”

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again and put his glass in his pocket.

“We have at least an hour before us,” he remarked, “for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, Doctor — as no doubt you have divined — in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present.”

“It is our French gold,” whispered the director. “We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it.”

“Your French gold?”

“Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject.”

“Which were very well justified,” observed Holmes. “And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern.”

“And sit in the dark?”

“I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a *partie carrée*, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy’s preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down.”

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern and left us in pitch darkness — such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment’s notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold dank air of the vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes. "That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must have almost gone, and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position; yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier in-breath of the bulky Jones from the thin, sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad, white stones turned over upon its side and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder-high and waist-high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes blandly. "You have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed! You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands," remarked our prisoner as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. "You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness, also, when you address me always to say 'sir' and 'please.' "

"All right," said Jones with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your Highness to the police-station?"

"That is better," said John Clay serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us and walked quietly off in the custody of the detective.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained in the early hours of the morning as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the *Encyclopaedia*, must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but, really, it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his accomplice's hair. The £4 a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must, then, be something out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing something in the cellar — something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard and upon the chairman of the bank directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?" I asked.

“Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson’s presence — in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night.”

“You reasoned it out beautifully,” I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. “It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.”

“It saved me from ennui,” he answered, yawning. “Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so.”

“And you are a benefactor of the race,” said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use,” he remarked. “ ’*L’homme c’est rien — l’oeuvre c’est tout*,’ as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand.”

A CASE OF IDENTITY

"My dear fellow," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side of the fire in his lodgings at Baker Street, "life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most *outré* results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable."

"And yet I am not convinced of it," I answered. "The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic."

"A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a realistic effect," remarked Holmes. "This is wanting in the police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."

I smiled and shook my head. "I can quite understand your thinking so." I said. "Of course, in your position of unofficial adviser and helper to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, throughout three continents, you are brought in contact with all that is strange and bizarre. But here" — I picked up the morning paper from the ground—"let us put it to a practical test. Here is the first heading upon which I come. 'A husband's cruelty to his wife.' There is half a column of print, but I know without reading it that it is all perfectly familiar to me. There is, of course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the bruise, the sympathetic sister or landlady. The crudest of writers could invent nothing more crude."

"Indeed, your example is an unfortunate one for your argument," said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. "This is the Dundas separation case, and, as it happens, I was engaged in clearing up some small points in connection with it. The husband was a teetotaler, there was no other woman, and the conduct complained of was that he had drifted into the habit of winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at his wife, which, you will allow, is not an action likely to occur to the imagination of the average story-teller. Take a pinch of snuff, Doctor, and acknowledge that I have scored over you in your example.”

He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. Its splendour was in such contrast to his homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon it.

“Ah,” said he, “I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks. It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia in return for my assistance in the case of the Irene Adler papers.”

“And the ring?” I asked, glancing at a remarkable brilliant which sparkled upon his finger.

“It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in which I served them was of such delicacy that I cannot confide it even to you, who have been good enough to chronicle one or two of my little problems.”

“And have you any on hand just now?” I asked with interest.

“Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of interest. They are important, you understand, without being interesting. Indeed, I have found that it is usually in unimportant matters that there is a field for the observation, and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the charm to an investigation. The larger crimes are apt to be the simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is the motive. In these cases, save for one rather intricate matter which has been referred to me from Marseilles, there is nothing which presents any features of interest. It is possible, however, that I may have something better before very many minutes are over, for this is one of my clients, or I am much mistaken.”

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish Duchess of Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backward and forward, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp clang of the bell.

“I have seen those symptoms before,” said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. “Oscillation upon the pavement always means an *affaire de coeur*. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts.”

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and the boy in buttons entered to announce Miss Mary Sutherland, while the lady herself loomed behind his small black figure like a full-sailed merchant-man behind a tiny pilot boat. Sherlock Holmes welcomed her with the easy courtesy for which he was remarkable, and, having closed the door and bowed her into an armchair, he looked her over in the minute and yet abstracted fashion which was peculiar to him.

“Do you not find,” he said, “that with your short sight it is a little trying to do so much typewriting?”

“I did at first,” she answered, “but now I know where the letters are without looking.” Then, suddenly realising the full purport of his words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear and astonishment upon her broad, good-humoured face. “You’ve heard about me, Mr. Holmes,” she cried, “else how could you know all that?”

“Never mind,” said Holmes, laughing; “it is my business to know things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?”

“I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherege, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. I’m not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

“Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?” asked Sherlock Holmes, with his finger-tips together and his eyes to the ceiling.

Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. “Yes, I did bang out of the house,” she said, “for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr. Windibank — that is, my father — took it all. He would not go to the police, and he would not go to you, and so at last, as he would do nothing and kept on saying that there was no harm done, it made me mad, and I just on with my things and came right away to you.”

“Your father,” said Holmes, “your stepfather, surely, since the name is different.”

“Yes, my stepfather. I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself.”

“And your mother is alive?”

“Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn’t best pleased, Mr. Holmes, when she married again so soon after father’s death, and a man who was nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father was a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road, and he left a tidy business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the foreman; but when Mr. Windibank came he made her sell the business, for he was very superior, being a traveller in wines. They got £4700 for the goodwill and interest, which wasn’t near as much as father could have got if he had been alive.”

I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this rambling and inconsequential narrative, but, on the contrary, he had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

“Your own little income,” he asked, “does it come out of the business?”

“Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4½ per cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can only touch the interest.”

“You interest me extremely,” said Holmes. “And since you draw so large a sum as a hundred a year, with what you earn into the bargain, you no doubt travel a little and indulge yourself in every way. I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about £60.”

“I could do with much less than that, Mr. Holmes, but you understand that as long as I live at home I don’t wish to be a burden to them, and so they have the use of the money just while I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the time. Mr. Windibank draws my interest every quarter and pays it over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I earn at typewriting. It brings me twopence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day.”

“You have made your position very clear to me,” said Holmes. “This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland’s face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. “I met him first at the gasfitters’ ball,” she said. “They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. He never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? He said the folk were not fit for us to know, when all father’s friends were to be there. And he said that I had nothing fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had never so much as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do, he went off to France upon the business of the firm, but we went, mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it was there I met Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

“I suppose,” said Holmes, “that when Mr. Windibank came back from France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball.”

“Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no use denying anything to a woman, for she would have her way.”

“I see. Then at the gasfitters’ ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

“Yes, sir. I met him that night, and he called next day to ask if we had got home all safe, and after that we met him — that is to say, Mr. Holmes, I met him twice for walks, but after that father came back again, and Mr. Hosmer Angel could not come to the house any more.”

“No?”

“Well, you know father didn’t like anything of the sort. He wouldn’t have any visitors if he could help it, and he used to say that a woman should be happy in her own family circle. But then, as I used to say to mother, a woman wants her own circle to begin with, and I had not got mine yet.”

“But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? Did he make no attempt to see you?”

“Well, father was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer wrote and said that it would be safer and better not to see each other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he used to write every day. I took the letters in in the morning, so there was no need for father to know.”

"Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that we took. Hosmer — Mr. Angel — was a cashier in an office in Leadenhall Street — and—"

"What office?"

"That's the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know."

"Where did he live, then?"

"He slept on the premises."

"And you don't know his address?"

"No — except that it was Leadenhall Street."

"Where did you address your letters, then?"

"To the Leadenhall Street Post Office, to be left till called for. He said that if they were sent to the office he would be chaffed by all the other clerks about having letters from a lady, so I offered to typewrite them, like he did his, but he wouldn't have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come from me, but when they were typewritten he always felt that the machine had come between us. That will just show you how fond he was of me, Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of."

"It was most suggestive," said Holmes. "It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important. Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

"He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and swollen glands when he was young, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating, whispering fashion of speech. He was always well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just as mine are, and he wore tinted glasses against the glare."

"Well, and what happened when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather, returned to France?"

"Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again and proposed that we should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would always be true to him. Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion. Mother was all in his favour from the first and was even fonder of him than I was. Then, when they talked of marrying within the week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to mind about father, but just to tell him afterwards, and mother said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed funny that I should ask his leave, as he was only a few years older than me; but I didn't want to do anything on the sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on the very morning of the wedding."

"It missed him, then?"

"Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived."

"Ha! that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. Was it to be in church?"

"Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast afterwards at the St. Pancras Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us he put us both into it and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked there was no one there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him."

"It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said Holmes.

"Oh, no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen occurred to separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him, and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it."

"Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?"

"Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw happened."

"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?"

"None."

"One more question. How did your mother take the matter?"

"She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again."

"And your father? Did you tell him?"

"Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said, what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the doors of the church, and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my money, or if he had married me and got my money settled on him, there might be some reason, but Hosmer was very independent about money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me half-mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night." She pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob heavily into it.

"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising, "and I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel vanish from your memory, as he has done from your life."

"Then you don't think I'll see him again?"

"I fear not."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"You will leave that question in my hands. I should like an accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can spare."

"I advertised for him in last Saturday's *Chronicle*," said she. "Here is the slip and here are four letters from him."

"Thank you. And your address?"

"No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell."

"Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. Where is your father's place of business?"

"He travels for Westhouse & Marbank, the great claret importers of Fenchurch Street."

"Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life."

"You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back."

For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect. She laid her little bundle of papers upon the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever she might be summoned.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for a few minutes with his fingertips still pressed together, his legs stretched out in front of him, and his gaze directed upward to the ceiling. Then he took down from the rack the old and oily clay pipe, which was to him as a counsellor, and, having lit it, he leaned back in his chair, with the thick blue cloud-wreaths spinning up from him, and a look of infinite languor in his face.

“Quite an interesting study, that maiden,” he observed. “I found her more interesting than her little problem, which, by the way, is rather a trite one. You will find parallel cases, if you consult my index, in Andover in ‘77, and there was something of the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. But the maiden herself was most instructive.”

“You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me,” I remarked.

“Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realise the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace. Now, what did you gather from that woman’s appearance? Describe it.”

“Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were greyish and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn’t observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way.”

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled.

“ ’Pon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman’s sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. As you observe, this woman had plush upon her sleeves, which is a most useful material for showing traces. The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewritist presses against the table, was beautifully defined. The sewing-machine, of the hand type, leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and, observing the dint of a pince-nez at either side of her nose, I ventured a remark upon short sight and typewriting, which seemed to surprise her.”

“It surprised me.”

“But, surely, it was obvious. I was then much surprised and interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots which she was wearing were not unlike each other, they were really odd ones; the one having a slightly decorated toe-cap, and the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned, it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry.”

“And what else?” I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend’s incisive reasoning.

“I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right glove was torn at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger. All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?”

I held the little printed slip to the light.

“Missing,” it said, “on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. About five ft. seven in. in height; strongly built, sallow complexion, black hair, a little bald in the centre, bushy, black side-whiskers and moustache; tinted glasses, slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen, in black frock-coat faced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert chain, and grey Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over elastic-sided boots. Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall Street. Anybody bringing—”

“That will do,” said Holmes. “As to the letters,” he continued, glancing over them, “they are very commonplace. Absolutely no clue in them to Mr.

Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you."

"They are typewritten," I remarked.

"Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the neat little 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive — in fact, we may call it conclusive."

"Of what?"

"My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it bears upon the case?"

"I cannot say that I do unless it were that he wished to be able to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were instituted."

"No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the City, the other is to the young lady's stepfather, Mr. Windibank, asking him whether he could meet us here at six o'clock to-morrow evening. It is just as well that we should do business with the male relatives. And now, Doctor, we can do nothing until the answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem upon the shelf for the interim."

I had had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers of reasoning and extraordinary energy in action that I felt that he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy demeanour with which he treated the singular mystery which he had been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in the case of the King of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of the Sign of Four, and the extraordinary circumstances connected with the Study in Scarlet, I felt that it would be a strange tangle indeed which he could not unravel.

I left him then, still puffing at his black clay pipe, with the conviction that when I came again on the next evening I would find that he held in his hands all the clues which would lead up to the identity of the disappearing bridegroom of Miss Mary Sutherland.

A professional case of great gravity was engaging my own attention at the time, and the whole of next day I was busy at the bedside of the sufferer. It was not until close upon six o'clock that I found myself free and was able to spring into a hansom and drive to Baker Street, half afraid that I might be too late to assist at the *dénouement* of the little mystery. I found Sherlock

Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. A formidable array of bottles and test-tubes, with the pungent cleanly smell of hydrochloric acid, told me that he had spent his day in the chemical work which was so dear to him.

“Well, have you solved it?” I asked as I entered.

“Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta.”

“No, no, the mystery!” I cried.

“Oh, that! I thought of the salt that I have been working upon. There was never any mystery in the matter, though, as I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest. The only drawback is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel.”

“Who was he, then, and what was his object in deserting Miss Sutherland?”

The question was hardly out of my mouth, and Holmes had not yet opened his lips to reply, when we heard a heavy footfall in the passage and a tap at the door.

“This is the girl’s stepfather, Mr. James Windibank,” said Holmes. “He has written to me to say that he would be here at six. Come in!”

The man who entered was a sturdy, middle-sized fellow, some thirty years of age, clean-shaven, and sallow-skinned, with a bland, insinuating manner, and a pair of wonderfully sharp and penetrating grey eyes. He shot a questioning glance at each of us, placed his shiny top-hat upon the sideboard, and with a slight bow sidled down into the nearest chair.

“Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank,” said Holmes. “I think that this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an appointment with me for six o’clock?”

“Yes, sir. I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not quite my own master, you know. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland has troubled you about this little matter, for I think it is far better not to wash linen of the sort in public. It was quite against my wishes that she came, but she is a very excitable, impulsive girl, as you may have noticed, and she is not easily controlled when she has made up her mind on a point. Of course, I did not mind you so much, as you are not connected with the official police, but it is not pleasant to have a family misfortune like this noised abroad. Besides, it is a useless expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?”

“On the contrary,” said Holmes quietly; “I have every reason to believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. “I am delighted to hear it,” he said.

“It is a curious thing,” remarked Holmes, “that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man’s handwriting. Unless they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. Some letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one side. Now, you remark in this note of yours, Mr. Windibank, that in every case there is some little slurring over of the ‘e,’ and a slight defect in the tail of the ‘r.’ There are fourteen other characteristics, but those are the more obvious.”

“We do all our correspondence with this machine at the office, and no doubt it is a little worn,” our visitor answered, glancing keenly at Holmes with his bright little eyes.

“And now I will show you what is really a very interesting study, Mr. Windibank,” Holmes continued. “I think of writing another little monograph some of these days on the typewriter and its relation to crime. It is a subject to which I have devoted some little attention. I have here four letters which purport to come from the missing man. They are all typewritten. In each case, not only are the ‘e’s’ slurred and the ‘r’s’ tailless, but you will observe, if you care to use my magnifying lens, that the fourteen other characteristics to which I have alluded are there as well.”

Mr. Windibank sprang out of his chair and picked up his hat. “I cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes,” he said. “If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it.”

“Certainly,” said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in the door. “I let you know, then, that I have caught him!”

“What! where?” shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

“Oh, it won’t do — really it won’t,” said Holmes suavely. “There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. It is quite too transparent, and it was a very bad compliment when you said that it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That’s right! Sit down and let us talk it over.”

Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. “It — it’s not actionable,” he stammered.

“I am very much afraid that it is not. But between ourselves, Windibank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong."

The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up on the corner of the mantelpiece and, leaning back with his hands in his pockets, began talking, rather to himself, as it seemed, than to us.

"The man married a woman very much older than himself for her money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a moustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself."

"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. "We never thought that she would have been so carried away."

"Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very decidedly carried away, and, having quite made up her mind that her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as far as it would go if a real effect were to be produced. There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affections from turning towards anyone else. But the deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbrous. The thing to do was clearly to bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind and prevent her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and hence also the allusions to a possibility of something happening on the very morning of the wedding. James Windibank wished Miss Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her, and then, as he could go no farther, he conveniently vanished away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a four-wheeler and out at the other. I think that was the chain of events, Mr. Windibank!"

Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold sneer upon his pale face.

"It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint."

"The law cannot, as you say, touch you," said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door, "yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!" he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face, "it is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to—" He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road.

"There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. "That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest."

"I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning," I remarked.

“Well, of course it was obvious from the first that this Mr. Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really profited by the incident, as far as we could see, was the stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognise even the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction.”

“And how did you verify them?”

“Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I knew the firm for which this man worked. Having taken the printed description. I eliminated everything from it which could be the result of a disguise — the whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me whether it answered to the description of any of their travellers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the typewriter, and I wrote to the man himself at his business address asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his reply was typewritten and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from Westhouse & Marbank, of Fenchurch Street, to say that the description tallied in every respect with that of their employé, James Windibank. *Voilà tout*!”

“And Miss Sutherland?”

“If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old Persian saying, ‘There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman.’ There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world.”

THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY

We were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. It was from Sherlock Holmes and ran in this way:

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from the west of England in connection with Boscombe Valley tragedy. Shall be glad if you will come with me. Air and scenery perfect. Leave Paddington by the 11:15."

"What do you say, dear?" said my wife, looking across at me. "Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a fairly long list at present."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the change would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' cases."

"I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go, I must pack at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller. My wants were few and simple, so that in less than the time stated I was in a cab with my valise, rattling away to Paddington Station. Sherlock Holmes was pacing up and down the platform, his tall, gaunt figure made even gaunter and taller by his long grey travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.

"It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biassed. If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets."

We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him. Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past Reading. Then he suddenly rolled them all into a gigantic ball and tossed them up onto the rack.

"Have you heard anything of the case?" he asked.

"Not a word. I have not seen a paper for some days."

"The London press has not had very full accounts. I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order to master the particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely difficult.”

“That sounds a little paradoxical.”

“But it is profoundly true. Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home. In this case, however, they have established a very serious case against the son of the murdered man.”

“It is a murder, then?”

“Well, it is conjectured to be so. I shall take nothing for granted until I have the opportunity of looking personally into it. I will explain the state of things to you, as far as I have been able to understand it, in a very few words.

“Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in Herefordshire. The largest landed proprietor in that part is a Mr. John Turner, who made his money in Australia and returned some years ago to the old country. One of the farms which he held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was also an ex-Australian. The men had known each other in the colonies, so that it was not unnatural that when they came to settle down they should do so as near each other as possible. Turner was apparently the richer man, so McCarthy became his tenant but still remained, it seems, upon terms of perfect equality, as they were frequently together. McCarthy had one son, a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only daughter of the same age, but neither of them had wives living. They appear to have avoided the society of the neighbouring English families and to have led retired lives, though both the McCarthys were fond of sport and were frequently seen at the race-meetings of the neighbourhood. McCarthy kept two servants — a man and a girl. Turner had a considerable household, some half-dozen at the least. That is as much as I have been able to gather about the families. Now for the facts.

“On June 3rd, that is, on Monday last, McCarthy left his house at Hatherley about three in the afternoon and walked down to the Boscombe Pool, which is a small lake formed by the spreading out of the stream which runs down the Boscombe Valley. He had been out with his serving-man in the morning at Ross, and he had told the man that he must hurry, as he had an appointment of importance to keep at three. From that appointment he never came back alive.

“From Hatherley Farmhouse to the Boscombe Pool is a quarter of a mile, and two people saw him as he passed over this ground. One was an old woman, whose name is not mentioned, and the other was William Crowder, a game-keeper in the employ of Mr. Turner. Both these witnesses depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. The game-keeper adds that within a few minutes of his seeing Mr. McCarthy pass he had seen his son, Mr. James McCarthy, going the same way with a gun under his arm. To the best of his belief, the father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was following him. He thought no more of the matter until he heard in the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

“The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder, the game-keeper, lost sight of them. The Boscombe Pool is thickly wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the edge. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, who is the daughter of the lodge-keeper of the Boscombe Valley estate, was in one of the woods picking flowers. She states that while she was there she saw, at the border of the wood and close by the lake, Mr. McCarthy and his son, and that they appeared to be having a violent quarrel. She heard Mr. McCarthy the elder using very strong language to his son, and she saw the latter raise up his hand as if to strike his father. She was so frightened by their violence that she ran away and told her mother when she reached home that she had left the two McCarthys quarrelling near Boscombe Pool, and that she was afraid that they were going to fight. She had hardly said the words when young Mr. McCarthy came running up to the lodge to say that he had found his father dead in the wood, and to ask for the help of the lodge-keeper. He was much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. On following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the grass beside the pool. The head had been beaten in by repeated blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. The injuries were such as might very well have been inflicted by the butt-end of his son’s gun, which was found lying on the grass within a few paces of the body. Under these circumstances the young man was instantly arrested, and a verdict of ‘wilful murder’ having been returned at the inquest on Tuesday, he was on Wednesday brought before the magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next Assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and the police-court.”

“I could hardly imagine a more damning case,” I remarked. “If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so here.”

“Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing,” answered Holmes thoughtfully. “It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very possible that he is indeed the culprit. There are several people in the neighbourhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the daughter of the neighbouring landowner, who believe in his innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect in connection with the Study in Scarlet, to work out the case in his interest. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the case to me, and hence it is that two middle-aged gentlemen are flying westward at fifty miles an hour instead of quietly digesting their breakfasts at home.”

“I am afraid,” said I, “that the facts are so obvious that you will find little credit to be gained out of this case.”

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact,” he answered, laughing. “Besides, we may chance to hit upon some other obvious facts which may have been by no means obvious to Mr. Lestrade. You know me too well to think that I am boasting when I say that I shall either confirm or destroy his theory by means which he is quite incapable of employing, or even of understanding. To take the first example to hand, I very clearly perceive that in your bedroom the window is upon the right-hand side, and yet I question whether Mr. Lestrade would have noted even so self-evident a thing as that.”

“How on earth—”

“My dear fellow, I know you well. I know the military neatness which characterises you. You shave every morning, and in this season you shave by the sunlight; but since your shaving is less and less complete as we get farther back on the left side, until it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less illuminated than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light and being satisfied with such a result. I only quote this as a trivial example of observation and inference. Therein lies my *métier*, and it is just possible that it may be of some service in the investigation which lies before us. There are one or two minor points which were brought out in the inquest, and which are worth considering.”

“What are they?”

“It appears that his arrest did not take place at once, but after the return to Hatherley Farm. On the inspector of constabulary informing him that he was a prisoner, he remarked that he was not surprised to hear it, and that it was no more than his deserts. This observation of his had the natural effect of removing any traces of doubt which might have remained in the minds of the coroner’s jury.”

“It was a confession,” I ejaculated.

“No, for it was followed by a protestation of innocence.”

“Coming on the top of such a damning series of events, it was at least a most suspicious remark.”

“On the contrary,” said Holmes, “it is the brightest rift which I can at present see in the clouds. However innocent he might be, he could not be such an absolute imbecile as not to see that the circumstances were very black against him. Had he appeared surprised at his own arrest, or feigned indignation at it, I should have looked upon it as highly suspicious, because such surprise or anger would not be natural under the circumstances, and yet might appear to be the best policy to a scheming man. His frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and firmness. As to his remark about his deserts, it was also not unnatural if you consider that he stood beside the dead body of his father, and that there is no doubt that he had that very day so far forgotten his filial duty as to bandy words with him, and even, according to the little girl whose evidence is so important, to raise his hand as if to strike him. The self-reproach and contrition which are displayed in his remark appear to me to be the signs of a healthy mind rather than of a guilty one.”

I shook my head. “Many men have been hanged on far slighter evidence,” I remarked.

“So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged.”

“What is the young man’s own account of the matter?”

“It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters, though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive. You will find it here, and may read it for yourself.”

He picked out from his bundle a copy of the local Herefordshire paper, and having turned down the sheet he pointed out the paragraph in which the unfortunate young man had given his own statement of what had occurred. I settled myself down in the corner of the carriage and read it very carefully. It ran in this way:

“Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called and gave evidence as follows: ‘I had been away from home for three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the morning of last Monday, the 3rd. My father was absent from home at the time of my arrival, and I was informed by the maid that he had driven over to Ross with John Cobb, the groom. Shortly after my return I heard the wheels of his trap in the yard, and, looking out of my window, I saw him get out and walk rapidly out of the yard, though I was not aware in which direction he was going. I then took my gun and strolled out in the direction of the Boscombe Pool, with the intention of visiting the rabbit warren which is upon the other side. On my way I saw William Crowder, the game-keeper, as he had stated in his evidence; but he is mistaken in thinking that I was following my father. I had no idea that he was in front of me. When about a hundred yards from the pool I heard a cry of “Cooee!” which was a usual signal between my father and myself. I then hurried forward, and found him standing by the pool. He appeared to be much surprised at seeing me and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. A conversation ensued which led to high words and almost to blows, for my father was a man of a very violent temper. Seeing that his passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him and returned towards Hatherley Farm. I had not gone more than 150 yards, however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me to run back again. I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired. I knelt beside him for some minutes, and then made my way to Mr. Turner’s lodge-keeper, his house being the nearest, to ask for assistance. I saw no one near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by his injuries. He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and forbidding in his manners, but he had, as far as I know, no active enemies. I know nothing further of the matter.’

“The Coroner: Did your father make any statement to you before he died?

“Witness: He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat.

“The Coroner: What did you understand by that?

“Witness: It conveyed no meaning to me. I thought that he was delirious.

“The Coroner: What was the point upon which you and your father had this final quarrel?

“Witness: I should prefer not to answer.

“The Coroner: I am afraid that I must press it.

“Witness: It is really impossible for me to tell you. I can assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which followed.

“The Coroner: That is for the court to decide. I need not point out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case considerably in any future proceedings which may arise.

“Witness: I must still refuse.

“The Coroner: I understand that the cry of ‘Cooee’ was a common signal between you and your father?

“Witness: It was.

“The Coroner: How was it, then, that he uttered it before he saw you, and before he even knew that you had returned from Bristol?

“Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know.

“A Juryman: Did you see nothing which aroused your suspicions when you returned on hearing the cry and found your father fatally injured?

“Witness: Nothing definite.

“The Coroner: What do you mean?

“Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. Yet I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay upon the ground to the left of me. It seemed to me to be something grey in colour, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps. When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was gone.

“ ’Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?’

“ ’Yes, it was gone.’

“ ‘You cannot say what it was?’

“ ’No, I had a feeling something was there.’

“ ’How far from the body?’

“ ’A dozen yards or so.’

“ ’And how far from the edge of the wood?’

“ ’About the same.’

“ ’Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen yards of it?’

“ ’Yes, but with my back towards it.’

“This concluded the examination of the witness.”

“I see,” said I as I glanced down the column, “that the coroner in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy. He calls attention, and with reason, to the discrepancy about his father having signalled to him before seeing him, also to his refusal to give details of his conversation with his father, and his singular account of his father’s dying words. They are all, as he remarks, very much against the son.”

Holmes laughed softly to himself and stretched himself out upon the cushioned seat. “Both you and the coroner have been at some pains,” said he, “to single out the very strongest points in the young man’s favour. Don’t you see that you alternately give him credit for having too much imagination and too little? Too little, if he could not invent a cause of quarrel which would give him the sympathy of the jury; too much, if he evolved from his own inner consciousness anything so *outré* as a dying reference to a rat, and the incident of the vanishing cloth. No, sir, I shall approach this case from the point of view that what this young man says is true, and we shall see whither that hypothesis will lead us. And now here is my pocket Petrarch, and not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the scene of action. We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be there in twenty minutes.”

It was nearly four o’clock when we at last, after passing through the beautiful Stroud Valley, and over the broad gleaming Severn, found ourselves at the pretty little country-town of Ross. A lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform. In spite of the light brown dustcoat and leather-leggings which he wore in deference to his rustic surroundings, I had no difficulty in recognising Lestrade, of Scotland Yard. With him we drove to the Hereford Arms where a room had already been engaged for us.

“I have ordered a carriage,” said Lestrade as we sat over a cup of tea. “I knew your energetic nature, and that you would not be happy until you had been on the scene of the crime.”

“It was very nice and complimentary of you,” Holmes answered. “It is entirely a question of barometric pressure.”

Lestrade looked startled. “I do not quite follow,” he said.

“How is the glass? Twenty-nine, I see. No wind, and not a cloud in the sky. I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination. I do not think that it is probable that I shall use the carriage to-night.”

Lestrade laughed indulgently. “You have, no doubt, already formed your conclusions from the newspapers,” he said. “The case is as plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer it becomes. Still, of course, one can’t refuse a lady, and such a very positive one, too. She has heard of you, and would have your opinion, though I repeatedly told her that there was nothing which you could do which I had not already done. Why, bless my soul! here is her carriage at the door.”

He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. Her violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink flush upon her cheeks, all thought of her natural reserve lost in her overpowering excitement and concern.

“Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!” she cried, glancing from one to the other of us, and finally, with a woman’s quick intuition, fastening upon my companion, “I am so glad that you have come. I have driven down to tell you so. I know that James didn’t do it. I know it, and I want you to start upon your work knowing it, too. Never let yourself doubt upon that point. We have known each other since we were little children, and I know his faults as no one else does; but he is too tender-hearted to hurt a fly. Such a charge is absurd to anyone who really knows him.”

“I hope we may clear him, Miss Turner,” said Sherlock Holmes. “You may rely upon my doing all that I can.”

“But you have read the evidence. You have formed some conclusion? Do you not see some loophole, some flaw? Do you not yourself think that he is innocent?”

“I think that it is very probable.”

“There, now!” she cried, throwing back her head and looking defiantly at Lestrade. “You hear! He gives me hopes.”

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. “I am afraid that my colleague has been a little quick in forming his conclusions,” he said.

“But he is right. Oh! I know that he is right. James never did it. And about his quarrel with his father, I am sure that the reason why he would not speak about it to the coroner was because I was concerned in it.”

“In what way?” asked Holmes.

“It is no time for me to hide anything. James and his father had many disagreements about me. Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that there should be a marriage between us. James and I have always loved each other as brother and sister; but of course he is young and has seen very little of life yet, and — and — well, he naturally did not wish to do anything like that yet. So there were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them.”

“And your father?” asked Holmes. “Was he in favour of such a union?”

“No, he was averse to it also. No one but Mr. McCarthy was in favour of it.” A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

“Thank you for this information,” said he. “May I see your father if I call to-morrow?”

“I am afraid the doctor won’t allow it.”

“The doctor?”

“Yes, have you not heard? Poor father has never been strong for years back, but this has broken him down completely. He has taken to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his nervous system is shattered. Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive who had known dad in the old days in Victoria.”

“Ha! In Victoria! That is important.”

“Yes, at the mines.”

“Quite so; at the gold-mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner made his money.”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Thank you, Miss Turner. You have been of material assistance to me.”

“You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. No doubt you will go to the prison to see James. Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do tell him that I know him to be innocent.”

“I will, Miss Turner.”

“I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if I leave him. Good-bye, and God help you in your undertaking.” She hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we heard the wheels of her carriage rattle off down the street.

“I am ashamed of you, Holmes,” said Lestrade with dignity after a few minutes’ silence. “Why should you raise up hopes which you are bound to disappoint? I am not over-tender of heart, but I call it cruel.”

“I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy,” said Holmes. “Have you an order to see him in prison?”

“Yes, but only for you and me.”

“Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. We have still time to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?”

“Ample.”

“Then let us do so. Watson, I fear that you will find it very slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours.”

I walked down to the station with them, and then wandered through the streets of the little town, finally returning to the hotel, where I lay upon the sofa and tried to interest myself in a yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin, however, when compared to the deep mystery through which we were groping, and I found my attention wander so continually from the action to the fact, that I at last flung it across the room and gave myself up entirely to a consideration of the events of the day. Supposing that this unhappy young man’s story were absolutely true, then what hellish thing, what absolutely unforeseen and extraordinary calamity could have occurred between the time when he parted from his father, and the moment when, drawn back by his screams, he rushed into the glade? It was something terrible and deadly. What could it be? Might not the nature of the injuries reveal something to my medical instincts? I rang the bell and called for the weekly county paper, which contained a verbatim account of the inquest. In the surgeon’s deposition it was stated that the posterior third of the left parietal bone and the left half of the occipital bone had been shattered by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon. I marked the spot upon my own head. Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. That was to some extent in favour of the accused, as when seen quarrelling he was face to face with his father. Still, it did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his back before the blow fell. Still, it might be worth while to call Holmes’ attention to it. Then there was the peculiar dying reference to a rat. What could that mean? It could not be delirium. A man dying from a sudden blow does not commonly become delirious. No, it was more likely to be an attempt to explain how he met his fate. But what could it indicate? I cudgelled my brains to find some possible explanation. And then the incident of the grey cloth seen by young McCarthy. If that were true the murderer must have dropped some part of his dress, presumably his overcoat, in his flight, and must have had the hardihood to return and to carry it away at the instant when the son was kneeling with his back turned not a dozen paces off. What a tissue of mysteries and improbabilities the whole thing was! I did not wonder at Lestrade's opinion, and yet I had so much faith in Sherlock Holmes' insight that I could not lose hope as long as every fresh fact seemed to strengthen his conviction of young McCarthy's innocence.

It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. He came back alone, for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked as he sat down. "It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able to go over the ground. On the other hand, a man should be at his very best and keenest for such nice work as that, and I did not wish to do it when fagged by a long journey. I have seen young McCarthy."

"And what did you learn from him?"

"Nothing."

"Could he throw no light?"

"None at all. I was inclined to think at one time that he knew who had done it and was screening him or her, but I am convinced now that he is as puzzled as everyone else. He is not a very quick-witted youth, though comely to look at and, I should think, sound at heart."

"I cannot admire his taste," I remarked, "if it is indeed a fact that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as this Miss Turner."

"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. This fellow is madly, insanely, in love with her, but some two years ago, when he was only a lad, and before he really knew her, for she had been away five years at a boarding-school, what does the idiot do but get into the clutches of a barmaid in Bristol and marry her at a registry office? No one knows a word of the matter, but you can imagine how maddening it must be to him to be upbraided for not doing what he would give his very eyes to do, but what he knows to be absolutely impossible. It was sheer frenzy of this sort which made him throw his hands up into the air when his father, at their last interview, was goading him on to propose to Miss Turner. On the other hand, he had no means of supporting himself, and his father, who was by all accounts a very hard man, would have thrown him over utterly had he known the truth. It was with his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. Mark that point. It is of importance. Good has come out of evil, however, for the barmaid, finding from the papers that he is in serious trouble and likely to be hanged, has thrown him over utterly and has written to him to say that she has a husband already in the Bermuda Dockyard, so that there is really no tie between them. I think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all that he has suffered."

"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

"Ah! who? I would call your attention very particularly to two points. One is that the murdered man had an appointment with someone at the pool, and that the someone could not have been his son, for his son was away, and he did not know when he would return. The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry 'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until to-morrow."

There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke bright and cloudless. At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool.

"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. "It is said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is despaired of."

"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. This business has had a very bad effect upon him. He was an old friend of McCarthy's, and, I may add, a great benefactor to him, for I have learned that he gave him Hatherley Farm rent free."

"Indeed! That is interesting," said Holmes.

"Oh, yes! In a hundred other ways he has helped him. Everybody about here speaks of his kindness to him."

"Really! Does it not strike you as a little singular that this McCarthy, who appears to have had little of his own, and to have been under such obligations to Turner, should still talk of marrying his son to Turner's daughter, who is, presumably, heiress to the estate, and that in such a very cocksure manner, as if it were merely a case of a proposal and all else would follow? It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself was averse to the idea. The daughter told us as much. Do you not deduce something from that?"

"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said Lestrade, winking at me. "I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies.”

“You are right,” said Holmes demurely; “you do find it very hard to tackle the facts.”

“Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it difficult to get hold of,” replied Lestrade with some warmth.

“And that is—”

“That McCarthy senior met his death from McCarthy junior and that all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine.”

“Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog,” said Holmes, laughing. “But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley Farm upon the left.”

“Yes, that is it.” It was a widespread, comfortable-looking building, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches of lichen upon the grey walls. The drawn blinds and the smokeless chimneys, however, gave it a stricken look, as though the weight of this horror still lay heavy upon it. We called at the door, when the maid, at Holmes’ request, showed us the boots which her master wore at the time of his death, and also a pair of the son’s, though not the pair which he had then had. Having measured these very carefully from seven or eight different points, Holmes desired to be led to the court-yard, from which we all followed the winding track which led to Boscombe Pool.

Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was hot upon such a scent as this. Men who had only known the quiet thinker and logician of Baker Street would have failed to recognise him. His face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal lust for the chase, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated upon the matter before him that a question or remark fell unheeded upon his ears, or, at the most, only provoked a quick, impatient snarl in reply. Swiftly and silently he made his way along the track which ran through the meadows, and so by way of the woods to the Boscombe Pool. It was damp, marshy ground, as is all that district, and there were marks of many feet, both upon the path and amid the short grass which bounded it on either side. Sometimes Holmes would hurry on, sometimes stop dead, and once he made quite a little detour into the meadow. Lestrade and I walked behind him, the detective indifferent and contemptuous, while

I watched my friend with the interest which sprang from the conviction that every one of his actions was directed towards a definite end.

The Boscombe Pool, which is a little reed-girt sheet of water some fifty yards across, is situated at the boundary between the Hatherley Farm and the private park of the wealthy Mr. Turner. Above the woods which lined it upon the farther side we could see the red, jutting pinnacles which marked the site of the rich landowner’s dwelling. On the Hatherley side of the pool the woods grew very thick, and there was a narrow belt of sodden grass twenty paces across between the edge of the trees and the reeds which lined the lake. Lestrade showed us the exact spot at which the body had been found, and, indeed, so moist was the ground, that I could plainly see the traces which had been left by the fall of the stricken man. To Holmes, as I could see by his eager face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read upon the trampled grass. He ran round, like a dog who is picking up a scent, and then turned upon my companion.

“What did you go into the pool for?” he asked.

“I fished about with a rake. I thought there might be some weapon or other trace. But how on earth—”

“Oh, tut, tut! I have no time! That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place. A mole could trace it, and there it vanishes among the reeds. Oh, how simple it would all have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo and wallowed all over it. Here is where the party with the lodge-keeper came, and they have covered all tracks for six or eight feet round the body. But here are three separate tracks of the same feet.” He drew out a lens and lay down upon his waterproof to have a better view, talking all the time rather to himself than to us. “These are young McCarthy’s feet. Twice he was walking, and once he ran swiftly, so that the soles are deeply marked and the heels hardly visible. That bears out his story. He ran when he saw his father on the ground. Then here are the father’s feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. And this? Ha, ha! What have we here? Tiptoes! tiptoes! Square, too, quite unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again — of course that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?” He ran up and down, sometimes losing, sometimes finding the track until we were well within the edge of the wood and under the shadow of a great beech, the largest tree in the neighbourhood. Holmes traced his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon his face with a little cry of satisfaction. For a long time he remained there, turning over the leaves and dried sticks, gathering up what seemed to me to be dust into an envelope and examining with his lens not only the ground but even the bark of the tree as far as he could reach. A jagged stone was lying among the moss, and this also he carefully examined and retained. Then he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the highroad, where all traces were lost.

"It has been a case of considerable interest," he remarked, returning to his natural manner. "I fancy that this grey house on the right must be the lodge. I think that I will go in and have a word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. Having done that, we may drive back to our luncheon. You may walk to the cab, and I shall be with you presently."

It was about ten minutes before we regained our cab and drove back into Ross, Holmes still carrying with him the stone which he had picked up in the wood.

"This may interest you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out. "The murder was done with it."

"I see no marks."

"There are none."

"How do you know, then?"

"The grass was growing under it. It had only lain there a few days. There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. It corresponds with the injuries. There is no sign of any other weapon."

"And the murderer?"

"Is a tall man, left-handed, limps with the right leg, wears thick-soled shooting-boots and a grey cloak, smokes Indian cigars, uses a cigar-holder, and carries a blunt pen-knife in his pocket. There are several other indications, but these may be enough to aid us in our search."

Lestrade laughed. "I am afraid that I am still a sceptic," he said. "Theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a hard-headed British jury."

"*Nous verrons,*" answered Holmes calmly. "You work your own method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon, and shall probably return to London by the evening train."

"And leave your case unfinished?"

"No, finished."

"But the mystery?"

"It is solved."

"Who was the criminal, then?"

"The gentleman I describe."

"But who is he?"

"Surely it would not be difficult to find out. This is not such a populous neighbourhood."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am a practical man," he said, "and I really cannot undertake to go about the country looking for a left-handed gentleman with a game leg. I should become the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."

"All right," said Holmes quietly. "I have given you the chance. Here are your lodgings. Good-bye. I shall drop you a line before I leave."

Having left Lestrade at his rooms, we drove to our hotel, where we found lunch upon the table. Holmes was silent and buried in thought with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position.

"Look here, Watson," he said when the cloth was cleared "just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't know quite what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a cigar and let me expound."

"Pray do so."

"Well, now, in considering this case there are two points about young McCarthy's narrative which struck us both instantly, although they impressed me in his favour and you against him. One was the fact that his father should, according to his account, cry 'Cooee!' before seeing him. The other was his singular dying reference to a rat. He mumbled several words, you understand, but that was all that caught the son's ear. Now from this double point our research must commence, and we will begin it by presuming that what the lad says is absolutely true."

"What of this 'Cooee!' then?"

"Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was mere chance that he was within earshot. The 'Cooee!' was meant to attract the attention of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. But 'Cooee' is a distinctly Australian cry, and one which is used between Australians. There is a strong presumption that the person whom McCarthy expected to meet him at Boscombe Pool was someone who had been in Australia."

"What of the rat, then?"

Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the table. “This is a map of the Colony of Victoria,” he said. “I wired to Bristol for it last night.” He put his hand over part of the map. “What do you read?”

“ARAT,” I read.

“And now?” He raised his hand.

“BALLARAT.”

“Quite so. That was the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. He was trying to utter the name of his murderer. So and so, of Ballarat.”

“It is wonderful!” I exclaimed.

“It is obvious. And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down considerably. The possession of a grey garment was a third point which, granting the son’s statement to be correct, was a certainty. We have come now out of mere vagueness to the definite conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey cloak.”

“Certainly.”

“And one who was at home in the district, for the pool can only be approached by the farm or by the estate, where strangers could hardly wander.”

“Quite so.”

“Then comes our expedition of to-day. By an examination of the ground I gained the trifling details which I gave to that imbecile Lestrade, as to the personality of the criminal.”

“But how did you gain them?”

“You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”

“His height I know that you might roughly judge from the length of his stride. His boots, too, might be told from their traces.”

“Yes, they were peculiar boots.”

“But his lameness?”

“The impression of his right foot was always less distinct than his left. He put less weight upon it. Why? Because he limped — he was lame.”

“But his left-handedness.”

“You were yourself struck by the nature of the injury as recorded by the surgeon at the inquest. The blow was struck from immediately behind, and yet was upon the left side. Now, how can that be unless it were by a left-handed man? He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar. I have, as you know, devoted some attention to this, and written a little monograph on the ashes of 140 different varieties of pipe, cigar, and cigarette tobacco. Having found the ash, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss where he had tossed it. It was an Indian cigar, of the variety which are rolled in Rotterdam."

"And the cigar-holder?"

"I could see that the end had not been in his mouth. Therefore he used a holder. The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a clean one, so I deduced a blunt pen-knife."

"Holmes," I said, "you have drawn a net round this man from which he cannot escape, and you have saved an innocent human life as truly as if you had cut the cord which was hanging him. I see the direction in which all this points. The culprit is—"

"Mr. John Turner," cried the hotel waiter, opening the door of our sitting-room, and ushering in a visitor.

The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. His slow, limping step and bowed shoulders gave the appearance of decrepitude, and yet his hard, deep-lined, craggy features, and his enormous limbs showed that he was possessed of unusual strength of body and of character. His tangled beard, grizzled hair, and outstanding, drooping eyebrows combined to give an air of dignity and power to his appearance, but his face was of an ashen white, while his lips and the corners of his nostrils were tinged with a shade of blue. It was clear to me at a glance that he was in the grip of some deadly and chronic disease.

"Pray sit down on the sofa," said Holmes gently. "You had my note?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. You said that you wished to see me here to avoid scandal."

"I thought people would talk if I went to the Hall."

"And why did you wish to see me?" He looked across at my companion with despair in his weary eyes, as though his question was already answered.

"Yes," said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. "It is so. I know all about McCarthy."

The old man sank his face in his hands. "God help me!" he cried. "But I would not have let the young man come to harm. I give you my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at the Assizes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Holmes gravely.

"I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. It would break her heart — it will break her heart when she hears that I am arrested."

"It may not come to that," said Holmes.

"What?"

"I am no official agent. I understand that it was your daughter who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests. Young McCarthy must be got off, however."

"I am a dying man," said old Turner. "I have had diabetes for years. My doctor says it is a question whether I shall live a month. Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a gaol."

Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand and a bundle of paper before him. "Just tell us the truth," he said. "I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is absolutely needed."

"It's as well," said the old man; "it's a question whether I shall live to the Assizes, so it matters little to me, but I should wish to spare Alice the shock. And now I will make the thing clear to you; it has been a long time in the acting, but will not take me long to tell.

"You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a devil incarnate. I tell you that. God keep you out of the clutches of such a man as he. His grip has been upon me these twenty years, and he has blasted my life. I'll tell you first how I came to be in his power.

"It was in the early '60's at the diggings. I was a young chap then, hot-blooded and reckless, ready to turn my hand at anything; I got among bad companions, took to drink, had no luck with my claim, took to the bush, and in a word became what you would call over here a highway robber. There were six of us, and we had a wild, free life of it, sticking up a station from time to time, or stopping the wagons on the road to the diggings. Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

"One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and we lay in wait for it and attacked it. There were six troopers and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of their saddles at the first volley.

Three of our boys were killed, however, before we got the swag. I put my pistol to the head of the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. I wish to the Lord that I had shot him then, but I spared him, though I saw his wicked little eyes fixed on my face, as though to remember every feature. We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made our way over to England without being suspected. There I parted from my old pals and determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. I bought this estate, which chanced to be in the market, and I set myself to do a little good with my money, to make up for the way in which I had earned it. I married, too, and though my wife died young she left me my dear little Alice. Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down the right path as nothing else had ever done. In a word, I turned over a new leaf and did my best to make up for the past. All was going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

"I had gone up to town about an investment, and I met him in Regent Street with hardly a coat to his back or a boot to his foot.

" 'Here we are, Jack,' says he, touching me on the arm; 'we'll be as good as a family to you. There's two of us, me and my son, and you can have the keeping of us. If you don't — it's a fine, law-abiding country is England, and there's always a policeman within hail.'

"Well, down they came to the west country, there was no shaking them off, and there they have lived rent free on my best land ever since. There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness; turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my elbow. It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. Whatever he wanted he must have, and whatever it was I gave him without question, land, money, houses, until at last he asked a thing which I could not give. He asked for Alice.

"His son, you see, had grown up, and so had my girl, and as I was known to be in weak health, it seemed a fine stroke to him that his lad should step into the whole property. But there I was firm. I would not have his cursed stock mixed with mine; not that I had any dislike to the lad, but his blood was in him, and that was enough. I stood firm. McCarthy threatened. I braved him to do his worst. We were to meet at the pool midway between our houses to talk it over.

"When I went down there I found him talking with his son, so I smoked a cigar and waited behind a tree until he should be alone. But as I listened to his talk all that was black and bitter in me seemed to come uppermost. He was urging his son to marry my daughter with as little regard for what she might think as if she were a slut from off the streets. It drove me mad to think that I and all that I held most dear should be in the power of such a man as this. Could I not snap the bond? I was already a dying and a desperate man. Though clear of mind and fairly strong of limb, I knew that my own fate was sealed. But my memory and my girl! Both could be saved if I could but silence that foul tongue. I did it, Mr. Holmes. I would do it again. Deeply as I have sinned, I have led a life of martyrdom to atone for it. But that my girl should be entangled in the same meshes which held me was more than I could suffer. I struck him down with no more compunction than if he had been some foul and venomous beast. His cry brought back his son; but I had gained the cover of the wood, though I was forced to go back to fetch the cloak which I had dropped in my flight. That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that occurred."

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," said Holmes as the old man signed the statement which had been drawn out. "I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation."

"I pray not, sir. And what do you intend to do?"

"In view of your health, nothing. You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the Assizes. I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is condemned I shall be forced to use it. If not, it shall never be seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or dead, shall be safe with us."

"Farewell, then," said the old man solemnly. "Your own deathbeds, when they come, will be the easier for the thought of the peace which you have given to mine." Tottering and shaking in all his giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

"God help us!" said Holmes after a long silence. "Why does fate play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.' "

James McCarthy was acquitted at the Assizes on the strength of a number of objections which had been drawn out by Holmes and submitted to the defending counsel. Old Turner lived for seven months after our interview, but he is now dead; and there is every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily together in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past.

THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS

When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes cases between the years ‘82 and ‘90, I am faced by so many which present strange and interesting features that it is no easy matter to know which to choose and which to leave. Some, however, have already gained publicity through the papers, and others have not offered a field for those peculiar qualities which my friend possessed in so high a degree, and which it is the object of these papers to illustrate. Some, too, have baffled his analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and have their explanations founded rather upon conjecture and surmise than on that absolute logical proof which was so dear to him. There is, however, one of these last which was so remarkable in its details and so startling in its results that I am tempted to give some account of it in spite of the fact that there are points in connection with it which never have been, and probably never will be, entirely cleared up.

The year ‘87 furnished us with a long series of cases of greater or less interest, of which I retain the records. Among my headings under this one twelve months I find an account of the adventure of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, of the facts connected with the loss of the British barque *Sophy Anderson*, of the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and finally of the Camberwell poisoning case. In the latter, as may be remembered, Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man’s watch, to prove that it had been wound up two hours before, and that therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time — a deduction which was of the greatest importance in clearing up the case. All these I may sketch out at some future date, but none of them present such singular features as the strange train of circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe.

It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional violence. All day the wind had screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were forced to raise our minds for the instant from the routine of life and to recognise the presence of those great elemental forces which shriek at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like untamed beasts in a cage. As evening drew in, the storm grew higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the fireplace cross-indexing his records of crime, while I at the other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until the howl of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text, and the splash of the rain to lengthen out into the long swash of the sea waves. My wife was on a visit to her mother's, and for a few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

"Come in!" said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing. The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety.

"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to his eyes. "I trust that I am not intruding. I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber."

"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. "They may rest here on the hook and will be dry presently. You have come up from the south-west, I see."

"Yes, from Horsham."

“That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive.”

“I have come for advice.”

“That is easily got.”

“And help.”

“That is not always so easy.”

“I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I heard from Major Prendergast how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal.”

“Ah, of course. He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards.”

“He said that you could solve anything.”

“He said too much.”

“That you are never beaten.”

“I have been beaten four times — three times by men, and once by a woman.”

“But what is that compared with the number of your successes?”

“It is true that I have been generally successful.”

“Then you may be so with me.”

“I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me with some details as to your case.”

“It is no ordinary one.”

“None of those which come to me are. I am the last court of appeal.”

“And yet I question, sir, whether, in all your experience, you have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of events than those which have happened in my own family.”

“You fill me with interest,” said Holmes. “Pray give us the essential facts from the commencement, and I can afterwards question you as to those details which seem to me to be most important.”

The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out towards the blaze.

“My name,” said he, “is John Openshaw, but my own affairs have, as far as I can understand, little to do with this awful business. It is a hereditary matter; so in order to give you an idea of the facts, I must go back to the commencement of the affair.

“You must know that my grandfather had two sons — my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory at Coventry, which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. He was a patentee of the

Openshaw unbreakable tire, and his business met with such success that he was able to sell it and to retire upon a handsome competence.

"My uncle Elias emigrated to America when he was a young man and became a planter in Florida, where he was reported to have done very well. At the time of the war he fought in Jackson's army, and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. When Lee laid down his arms my uncle returned to his plantation, where he remained for three or four years. About 1869 or 1870 he came back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham. He had made a very considerable fortune in the States, and his reason for leaving them was his aversion to the negroes, and his dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to them. He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or three fields round his house, and there he would take his exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave his room. He drank a great deal of brandy and smoked very heavily, but he would see no society and did not want any friends, not even his own brother.

"He didn't mind me; in fact, he took a fancy to me, for at the time when he saw me first I was a youngster of twelve or so. This would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years in England. He begged my father to let me live with him and he was very kind to me in his way. When he was sober he used to be fond of playing backgammon and draughts with me, and he would make me his representative both with the servants and with the tradespeople, so that by the time that I was sixteen I was quite master of the house. I kept all the keys and could go where I liked and do what I liked, so long as I did not disturb him in his privacy. There was one singular exception, however, for he had a single room, a lumber-room up among the attics, which was invariably locked, and which he would never permit either me or anyone else to enter. With a boy's curiosity I have peeped through the keyhole, but I was never able to see more than such a collection of old trunks and bundles as would be expected in such a room.

"One day — it was in March, 1883 — a letter with a foreign stamp lay upon the table in front of the colonel's plate. It was not a common thing for him to receive letters, for his bills were all paid in ready money, and he had no friends of any sort. 'From India!' said he as he took it up, 'Pondicherry postmark! What can this be?’ Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. I began to laugh at this, but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes were protruding, his skin the colour of putty, and he glared at the envelope which he still held in his trembling hand, ‘K. K. K.!’ he shrieked, and then, ‘My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!’

“ ’What is it, uncle?’ I cried.

“ ’Death,’ said he, and rising from the table he retired to his room, leaving me palpitating with horror. I took up the envelope and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the gum, the letter K three times repeated. There was nothing else save the five dried pips. What could be the reason of his overpowering terror? I left the breakfast-table, and as I ascended the stair I met him coming down with an old rusty key, which must have belonged to the attic, in one hand, and a small brass box, like a cashbox, in the other.

“ ’They may do what they like, but I’ll checkmate them still,’ said he with an oath. ‘Tell Mary that I shall want a fire in my room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.’

“I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to step up to the room. The fire was burning brightly, and in the grate there was a mass of black, fluffy ashes, as of burned paper, while the brass box stood open and empty beside it. As I glanced at the box I noticed, with a start, that upon the lid was printed the treble K which I had read in the morning upon the envelope.

“ ’I wish you, John,’ said my uncle, ‘to witness my will. I leave my estate, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages, to my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to you. If you can enjoy it in peace, well and good! If you find you cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest enemy. I am sorry to give you such a two-edged thing, but I can’t say what turn things are going to take. Kindly sign the paper where Mr. Fordham shows you.’

“I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with him. The singular incident made, as you may think, the deepest impression upon me, and I pondered over it and turned it every way in my mind without being able to make anything of it. Yet I could not shake off the vague feeling of dread which it left behind, though the sensation grew less keen as the weeks passed and nothing happened to disturb the usual routine of our lives. I could see a change in my uncle, however. He drank more than ever, and he was less inclined for any sort of society. Most of his time he would spend in his room, with the door locked upon the inside, but sometimes he would emerge in a sort of drunken frenzy and would burst out of the house and tear about the garden with a revolver in his hand, screaming out that he was afraid of no man, and that he was not to be cooped up, like a sheep in a pen, by man or devil. When these hot fits were over, however, he would rush tumultuously in at the door and lock and bar it behind him, like a man who can brazen it out no longer against the terror which lies at the roots of his soul. At such times I have seen his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it were new raised from a basin.

"Well, to come to an end of the matter, Mr. Holmes, and not to abuse your patience, there came a night when he made one of those drunken sallies from which he never came back. We found him, when we went to search for him, face downward in a little green-scummed pool, which lay at the foot of the garden. There was no sign of any violence, and the water was but two feet deep, so that the jury, having regard to his known eccentricity, brought in a verdict of 'suicide.' But I, who knew how he winced from the very thought of death, had much ado to persuade myself that he had gone out of his way to meet it. The matter passed, however, and my father entered into possession of the estate, and of some £14,000, which lay to his credit at the bank."

"One moment," Holmes interposed, "your statement is, I foresee, one of the most remarkable to which I have ever listened. Let me have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and the date of his supposed suicide."

"The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. His death was seven weeks later, upon the night of May 2nd."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"When my father took over the Horsham property, he, at my request, made a careful examination of the attic, which had been always locked up. We found the brass box there, although its contents had been destroyed. On the inside of the cover was a paper label, with the initials of K. K. K. repeated upon it, and 'Letters, memoranda, receipts, and a register' written beneath. These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had been destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. For the rest, there was nothing of much importance in the attic save a great many scattered papers and notebooks bearing upon my uncle’s life in America. Some of them were of the war time and showed that he had done his duty well and had borne the repute of a brave soldier. Others were of a date during the reconstruction of the Southern states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had evidently taken a strong part in opposing the carpet-bag politicians who had been sent down from the North.

“Well, it was the beginning of ‘84 when my father came to live at Horsham, and all went as well as possible with us until the January of ‘85. On the fourth day after the new year I heard my father give a sharp cry of surprise as we sat together at the breakfast-table. There he was, sitting with a newly opened envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the outstretched palm of the other one. He had always laughed at what he called my cock-and-bull story about the colonel, but he looked very scared and puzzled now that the same thing had come upon himself.

“ ’Why, what on earth does this mean, John?’ he stammered.

“My heart had turned to lead. ‘It is K. K. K.,’ said I.

“He looked inside the envelope. ‘So it is,’ he cried. ‘Here are the very letters. But what is this written above them?’

“ ’Put the papers on the sundial,’ I read, peeping over his shoulder.

“ ’What papers? What sundial?’ he asked.

“ ’The sundial in the garden. There is no other,’ said I; ‘but the papers must be those that are destroyed.’

“ ’Pooh!’ said he, gripping hard at his courage. ‘We are in a civilised land here, and we can’t have tomfoolery of this kind. Where does the thing come from?’

“ ’From Dundee,’ I answered, glancing at the postmark.

“ ’Some preposterous practical joke,’ said he. ‘What have I to do with sundials and papers? I shall take no notice of such nonsense.’

“ ’I should certainly speak to the police,’ I said.

“ ’And be laughed at for my pains. Nothing of the sort.’

“ ’Then let me do so?’

“ ’No, I forbid you. I won’t have a fuss made about such nonsense.’

“It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate man. I went about, however, with a heart which was full of forebodings.

“On the third day after the coming of the letter my father went from home to visit an old friend of his, Major Freebody, who is in command of one of the forts upon Portsdown Hill. I was glad that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from danger when he was away from home. In that, however, I was in error. Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram from the major, imploring me to come at once. My father had fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a shattered skull. I hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered his consciousness. He had, as it appears, been returning from Fareham in the twilight, and as the country was unknown to him, and the chalk-pit unfenced, the jury had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict of 'death from accidental causes.' Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of murder. There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads. And yet I need not tell you that my mind was far from at ease, and that I was well-nigh certain that some foul plot had been woven round him.

"In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. You will ask me why I did not dispose of it? I answer, because I was well convinced that our troubles were in some way dependent upon an incident in my uncle's life, and that the danger would be as pressing in one house as in another.

"It was in January, '85, that my poor father met his end, and two years and eight months have elapsed since then. During that time I have lived happily at Horsham, and I had begun to hope that this curse had passed away from the family, and that it had ended with the last generation. I had begun to take comfort too soon, however; yesterday morning the blow fell in the very shape in which it had come upon my father."

The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried orange pips.

"This is the envelope," he continued. "The postmark is London — eastern division. Within are the very words which were upon my father's last message: 'K. K. K.'; and then 'Put the papers on the sundial.' "

"What have you done?" asked Holmes.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"To tell the truth" — he sank his face into his thin, white hands—"I have felt helpless. I have felt like one of those poor rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. I seem to be in the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precautions can guard against."

“Tut! tut!” cried Sherlock Holmes. “You must act, man, or you are lost. Nothing but energy can save you. This is no time for despair.”

“I have seen the police.”

“Ah!”

“But they listened to my story with a smile. I am convinced that the inspector has formed the opinion that the letters are all practical jokes, and that the deaths of my relations were really accidents, as the jury stated, and were not to be connected with the warnings.”

Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. “Incredible imbecility!” he cried.

“They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in the house with me.”

“Has he come with you to-night?”

“No. His orders were to stay in the house.”

Again Holmes raved in the air.

“Why did you come to me,” he cried, “and, above all, why did you not come at once?”

“I did not know. It was only to-day that I spoke to Major Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to you.”

“It is really two days since you had the letter. We should have acted before this. You have no further evidence, I suppose, than that which you have placed before us — no suggestive detail which might help us?”

“There is one thing,” said John Openshaw. He rummaged in his coat pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted paper, he laid it out upon the table. “I have some remembrance,” said he, “that on the day when my uncle burned the papers I observed that the small, unburned margins which lay amid the ashes were of this particular colour. I found this single sheet upon the floor of his room, and I am inclined to think that it may be one of the papers which has, perhaps, fluttered out from among the others, and in that way has escaped destruction. Beyond the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. I think myself that it is a page from some private diary. The writing is undoubtedly my uncle’s.”

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper, which showed by its ragged edge that it had indeed been torn from a book. It was headed, “March, 1869,” and beneath were the following enigmatical notices:

“4th. Hudson came. Same old platform.

“7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and
John Swain, of St. Augustine.

“9th. McCauley cleared.

“10th. John Swain cleared.

“12th. Visited Paramore. All well.”

“Thank you!” said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it to our visitor. “And now you must on no account lose another instant. We cannot spare time even to discuss what you have told me. You must get home instantly and act.”

“What shall I do?”

“There is but one thing to do. It must be done at once. You must put this piece of paper which you have shown us into the brass box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say that all the other papers were burned by your uncle, and that this is the only one which remains. You must assert that in such words as will carry conviction with them. Having done this, you must at once put the box out upon the sundial, as directed. Do you understand?”

“Entirely.”

“Do not think of revenge, or anything of the sort, at present. I think that we may gain that by means of the law; but we have our web to weave, while theirs is already woven. The first consideration is to remove the pressing danger which threatens you. The second is to clear up the mystery and to punish the guilty parties.”

“I thank you,” said the young man, rising and pulling on his overcoat. “You have given me fresh life and hope. I shall certainly do as you advise.”

“Do not lose an instant. And, above all, take care of yourself in the meanwhile, for I do not think that there can be a doubt that you are threatened by a very real and imminent danger. How do you go back?”

“By train from Waterloo.”

“It is not yet nine. The streets will be crowded, so I trust that you may be in safety. And yet you cannot guard yourself too closely.”

“I am armed.”

“That is well. To-morrow I shall set to work upon your case.”

“I shall see you at Horsham, then?”

“No, your secret lies in London. It is there that I shall seek it.”

“Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news as to the box and the papers. I shall take your advice in every particular.” He shook hands with us and took his leave. Outside the wind still screamed and the rain splashed and pattered against the windows. This strange, wild story seemed to have come to us from amid the mad elements — blown in upon us like a sheet of sea-weed in a gale — and now to have been reabsorbed by them once more.

Sherlock Holmes sat for some time in silence, with his head sunk forward and his eyes bent upon the red glow of the fire. Then he lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he watched the blue smoke-rings as they chased each other up to the ceiling.

"I think, Watson," he remarked at last, "that of all our cases we have had none more fantastic than this."

"Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four."

"Well, yes. Save, perhaps, that. And yet this John Openshaw seems to me to be walking amid even greater perils than did the Sholtos."

"But have you," I asked, "formed any definite conception as to what these perils are?"

"There can be no question as to their nature," he answered.

"Then what are they? Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue this unhappy family?"

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together. "The ideal reasoner," he remarked, "would, when he had once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the aid of their senses. To carry the art, however, to its highest pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to utilise all the facts which have come to his knowledge; and this in itself implies, as you will readily see, a possession of all knowledge, which, even in these days of free education and encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare accomplishment. It is not so impossible, however, that a man should possess all knowledge which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have endeavoured in my case to do. If I remember rightly, you on one occasion, in the early days of our friendship, defined my limits in a very precise fashion."

"Yes," I answered, laughing. "It was a singular document. Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I remember. Botany variable, geology profound as regards the mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, sensational literature and crime records unique, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, lawyer, and self-poisoner by cocaine and tobacco. Those, I think, were the main points of my analysis."

Holmes grinned at the last item. "Well," he said, "I say now, as I said then, that a man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it. Now, for such a case as the one which has been submitted to us to-night, we need certainly to muster all our resources. Kindly hand me down the letter K of the *American Encyclopaedia* which stands upon the shelf beside you. Thank you. Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. In the first place, we may start with a strong presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for leaving America. Men at his time of life do not change all their habits and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for the lonely life of an English provincial town. His extreme love of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in fear of someone or something, so we may assume as a working hypothesis that it was fear of someone or something which drove him from America. As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by considering the formidable letters which were received by himself and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those letters?"

"The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London."

"From East London. What do you deduce from that?"

"They are all seaports. That the writer was on board of a ship."

"Excellent. We have already a clue. There can be no doubt that the probability — the strong probability — is that the writer was on board of a ship. And now let us consider another point. In the case of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the threat and its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days. Does that suggest anything?"

"A greater distance to travel."

“But the letter had also a greater distance to come.”

“Then I do not see the point.”

“There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing-ship. It looks as if they always send their singular warning or token before them when starting upon their mission. You see how quickly the deed followed the sign when it came from Dundee. If they had come from Pondicherry in a steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter. But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. I think that those seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the writer.”

“It is possible.”

“More than that. It is probable. And now you see the deadly urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to caution. The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which it would take the senders to travel the distance. But this one comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay.”

“Good God!” I cried. “What can it mean, this relentless persecution?”

“The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital importance to the person or persons in the sailing-ship. I think that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them. A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way as to deceive a coroner’s jury. There must have been several in it, and they must have been men of resource and determination. Their papers they mean to have, be the holder of them who it may. In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an individual and becomes the badge of a society.”

“But of what society?”

“Have you never—” said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and sinking his voice—”have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?”

“I never have.”

Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. “Here it is,” said he presently:

“ ’Ku Klux Klan. A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to the sound produced by cocking a rifle. This terrible secret society was formed by some ex-Confederate soldiers in the Southern states after the Civil War, and it rapidly formed local branches in different parts of the country, notably in Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Its power was used for political purposes, principally for the terrorising of the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country of those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic but generally recognised shape — a sprig of oak-leaves in some parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others. On receiving this the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might fly from the country. If he braved the matter out, death would unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and unforeseen manner. So perfect was the organisation of the society, and so systematic its methods, that there is hardly a case upon record where any man succeeded in braving it with impunity, or in which any of its outrages were traced home to the perpetrators. For some years the organisation flourished in spite of the efforts of the United States government and of the better classes of the community in the South. Eventually, in the year 1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date.'

"You will observe," said Holmes, laying down the volume, "that the sudden breaking up of the society was coincident with the disappearance of Openshaw from America with their papers. It may well have been cause and effect. It is no wonder that he and his family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track. You can understand that this register and diary may implicate some of the first men in the South, and that there may be many who will not sleep easy at night until it is recovered."

"Then the page we have seen—"

"Is such as we might expect. It ran, if I remember right, 'sent the pips to A, B, and C' — that is, sent the society's warning to them. Then there are successive entries that A and B cleared, or left the country, and finally that C was visited, with, I fear, a sinister result for C. Well, I think, Doctor, that we may let some light into this dark place, and I believe that the only chance young Openshaw has in the meantime is to do what I have told him. There is nothing more to be said or to be done to-night, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget for half an hour the miserable weather and the still more miserable ways of our fellow men."

It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

"You will excuse me for not waiting for you," said he; "I have, I foresee, a very busy day before me in looking into this case of young Openshaw's."

"What steps will you take?" I asked.

"It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries. I may have to go down to Horsham, after all."

"You will not go there first?"

"No, I shall commence with the City. Just ring the bell and the maid will bring up your coffee."

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and glanced my eye over it. It rested upon a heading which sent a chill to my heart.

"Holmes," I cried, "you are too late."

"Ah!" said he, laying down his cup, "I feared as much. How was it done?" He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

"My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading 'Tragedy Near Waterloo Bridge.' Here is the account:

" 'Between nine and ten last night Police-Constable Cook, of the H Division, on duty near Waterloo Bridge, heard a cry for help and a splash in the water. The night, however, was extremely dark and stormy, so that, in spite of the help of several passers-by, it was quite impossible to effect a rescue. The alarm, however, was given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was eventually recovered. It proved to be that of a young gentleman whose name, as it appears from an envelope which was found in his pocket, was John Openshaw, and whose residence is near Horsham. It is conjectured that he may have been hurrying down to catch the last train from Waterloo Station, and that in his haste and the extreme darkness he missed his path and walked over the edge of one of the small landing-places for river steamboats. The body exhibited no traces of violence, and there can be no doubt that the deceased had been the victim of an unfortunate accident, which should have the effect of calling the attention of the authorities to the condition of the riverside landing-stages.' "

We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him.

"That hurts my pride, Watson," he said at last. "It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride. It becomes a personal matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my hand upon this gang. That he should come to me for help, and that I should send him away to his death —!" He sprang from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable agitation, with a flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasping and unclasping of his long thin hands.

“They must be cunning devils,” he exclaimed at last. “How could they have decoyed him down there? The Embankment is not on the direct line to the station. The bridge, no doubt, was too crowded, even on such a night, for their purpose. Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!”

“To the police?”

“No; I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before.”

All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in the evening before I returned to Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o’clock before he entered, looking pale and worn. He walked up to the sideboard, and tearing a piece from the loaf he devoured it voraciously, washing it down with a long draught of water.

“You are hungry,” I remarked.

“Starving. It had escaped my memory. I have had nothing since breakfast.”

“Nothing?”

“Not a bite. I had no time to think of it.”

“And how have you succeeded?”

“Well.”

“You have a clue?”

“I have them in the hollow of my hand. Young Openshaw shall not long remain unavenged. Why, Watson, let us put their own devilish trade-mark upon them. It is well thought of!”

“What do you mean?”

He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he squeezed out the pips upon the table. Of these he took five and thrust them into an envelope. On the inside of the flap he wrote “S. H. for J. O.” Then he sealed it and addressed it to “Captain James Calhoun, Barque *Lone Star*, Savannah, Georgia.”

“That will await him when he enters port,” said he, chuckling. “It may give him a sleepless night. He will find it as sure a precursor of his fate as Openshaw did before him.”

“And who is this Captain Calhoun?”

“The leader of the gang. I shall have the others, but he first.”

“How did you trace it, then?”

He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with dates and names.

"I have spent the whole day," said he, "over Lloyd's registers and files of the old papers, following the future career of every vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in '83. There were thirty-six ships of fair tonnage which were reported there during those months. Of these, one, the *Lone Star*, instantly attracted my attention, since, although it was reported as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to one of the states of the Union."

"Texas, I think."

"I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must have an American origin."

"What then?"

"I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque *Lone Star* was there in January, '85, my suspicion became a certainty. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present in the port of London."

"Yes?"

"The *Lone Star* had arrived here last week. I went down to the Albert Dock and found that she had been taken down the river by the early tide this morning, homeward bound to Savannah. I wired to Gravesend and learned that she had passed some time ago, and as the wind is easterly I have no doubt that she is now past the Goodwins and not very far from the Isle of Wight."

"What will you do, then?"

"Oh, I have my hand upon him. He and the two mates, are as I learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship. The others are Finns and Germans. I know, also, that they were all three away from the ship last night. I had it from the stevedore who has been loading their cargo. By the time that their sailing-ship reaches Savannah the mail-boat will have carried this letter, and the cable will have informed the police of Savannah that these three gentlemen are badly wanted here upon a charge of murder."

There is ever a flaw, however, in the best laid of human plans, and the murderers of John Openshaw were never to receive the orange pips which would show them that another, as cunning and as resolute as themselves, was upon their track. Very long and very severe were the equinoctial gales that year. We waited long for news of the *Lone Star* of Savannah, but none ever reached us. We did at last hear that somewhere far out in the Atlantic a shattered stern-post of a boat was seen swinging in the trough of a wave, with the letters “L. S.” carved upon it, and that is all which we shall ever know of the fate of the *Lone Star*.

THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED LIP

Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man.

One night — it was in June, '89 — there came a ring to my bell, about the hour when a man gives his first yawn and glances at the clock. I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

"A patient!" said she. "You'll have to go out."

I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum. Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

"You will excuse my calling so late," she began, and then, suddenly losing her self-control, she ran forward, threw her arms about my wife's neck, and sobbed upon her shoulder. "Oh, I'm in such trouble!" she cried; "I do so want a little help."

"Why," said my wife, pulling up her veil, "it is Kate Whitney. How you startled me, Kate! I had not an idea who you were when you came in."

"I didn't know what to do, so I came straight to you." That was always the way. Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house.

"It was very sweet of you to come. Now, you must have some wine and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?"

"Oh, no, no! I want the doctor's advice and help, too. It's about Isa. He has not been home for two days. I am so frightened about him!"

It was not the first time that she had spoken to us of her husband’s trouble, to me as a doctor, to my wife as an old friend and school companion. We soothed and comforted her by such words as we could find. Did she know where her husband was? Was it possible that we could bring him back to her?

It seems that it was. She had the surest information that of late he had, when the fit was on him, made use of an opium den in the farthest east of the City. Hitherto his orgies had always been confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and shattered, in the evening. But now the spell had been upon him eight-and-forty hours, and he lay there, doubtless among the dregs of the docks, breathing in the poison or sleeping off the effects. There he was to be found, she was sure of it, at the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. But what was she to do? How could she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and pluck her husband out from among the ruffians who surrounded him?

There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of it. Might I not escort her to this place? And then, as a second thought, why should she come at all? I was Isa Whitney’s medical adviser, and as such I had influence over him. I could manage it better if I were alone. I promised her on my word that I would send him home in a cab within two hours if he were indeed at the address which she had given me. And so in ten minutes I had left my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me, and was speeding eastward in a hansom on a strange errand, as it seemed to me at the time, though the future only could show how strange it was to be.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search. Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecastle of an emigrant ship.

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. At the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon his knees, staring into the fire.

As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth.

“Thank you. I have not come to stay,” said I. “There is a friend of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him.”

There was a movement and an exclamation from my right, and peering through the gloom, I saw Whitney, pale, haggard, and unkempt, staring out at me.

“My God! It’s Watson,” said he. He was in a pitiable state of reaction, with every nerve in a twitter. “I say, Watson, what o’clock is it?”

“Nearly eleven.”

“Of what day?”

“Of Friday, June 19th.”

“Good heavens! I thought it was Wednesday. It is Wednesday. What d’you want to frighten a chap for?” He sank his face onto his arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

“I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself!”

“So I am. But you’ve got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here a few hours, three pipes, four pipes — I forget how many. But I’ll go home with you. I wouldn’t frighten Kate — poor little Kate. Give me your hand! Have you a cab?”

“Yes, I have one waiting.”

“Then I shall go in it. But I must owe something. Find what I owe, Watson. I am all off colour. I can do nothing for myself.”

I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying fumes of the drug, and looking about for the manager. As I passed the tall man who sat by the brazier I felt a sudden pluck at my skirt, and a low voice whispered, “Walk past me, and then look back at me.” The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. I glanced down. They could only have come from the old man at my side, and yet he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He made a slight motion to me to approach him, and instantly, as he turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided into a doddering, loose-lipped senility.

“Holmes!” I whispered, “what on earth are you doing in this den?”

“As low as you can,” he answered; “I have excellent ears. If you would have the great kindness to get rid of that sottish friend of yours I should be exceedingly glad to have a little talk with you.”

“I have a cab outside.”

“Then pray send him home in it. You may safely trust him, for he appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. I should recommend you also to send a note by the cabman to your wife to say that you have thrown in your lot with me. If you will wait outside, I shall be with you in five minutes.”

It was difficult to refuse any of Sherlock Holmes’ requests, for they were always so exceedingly definite, and put forward with such a quiet air of mastery. I felt, however, that when Whitney was once confined in the cab my mission was practically accomplished; and for the rest, I could not wish anything better than to be associated with my friend in one of those singular adventures which were the normal condition of his existence. In a few minutes I had written my note, paid Whitney’s bill, led him out to the cab, and seen him driven through the darkness. In a very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den, and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. For two streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot. Then, glancing quickly round, he straightened himself out and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

“I suppose, Watson,” said he, “that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views.”

“I was certainly surprised to find you there.”

“But not more so than I to find you.”

“I came to find a friend.”

“And I to find an enemy.”

“An enemy?”

“Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural prey. Briefly, Watson, I am in the midst of a very remarkable inquiry, and I have hoped to find a clue in the incoherent ramblings of these sots, as I have done before now. Had I been recognised in that den my life would not have been worth an hour’s purchase; for I have used it before now for my own purposes, and the rascally Lascar who runs it has sworn to have vengeance upon me. There is a trap-door at the back of that building, near the corner of Paul’s Wharf, which could tell some strange tales of what has passed through it upon the moonless nights.”

“What! You do not mean bodies?”

“Ay, bodies, Watson. We should be rich men if we had £1000 for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den. It is the vilest murder-trap on the whole riverside, and I fear that Neville St. Clair has entered it never to leave it more. But our trap should be here.” He put his two forefingers between his teeth and whistled shrilly — a signal which was answered by a similar whistle from the distance, followed shortly by the rattle of wheels and the clink of horses’ hoofs.

“Now, Watson,” said Holmes, as a tall dog-cart dashed up through the gloom, throwing out two golden tunnels of yellow light from its side lanterns. “You’ll come with me, won’t you?”

“If I can be of use.”

“Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still more so. My room at The Cedars is a double-bedded one.”

“The Cedars?”

“Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair’s house. I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry.”

“Where is it, then?”

“Near Lee, in Kent. We have a seven-mile drive before us.”

“But I am all in the dark.”

“Of course you are. You’ll know all about it presently. Jump up here. All right, John; we shall not need you. Here’s half a crown. Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. Give her her head. So long, then!”

He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay another dull wilderness of bricks and mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers. A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds. Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid to break in upon the current of his thoughts. We had driven several miles, and were beginning to get to the fringe of the belt of suburban villas, when he shook himself, shrugged his shoulders, and lit up his pipe with the air of a man who has satisfied himself that he is acting for the best.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. "It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. 'Pon my word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant. I was wondering what I should say to this dear little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

"You forget that I know nothing about it."

"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before we get to Lee. It seems absurdly simple, and yet, somehow I can get nothing to go upon. There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I can't get the end of it into my hand. Now, I'll state the case clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a spark where all is dark to me."

"Proceed, then."

"Some years ago — to be definite, in May, 1884 — there came to Lee a gentleman, Neville St. Clair by name, who appeared to have plenty of money. He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very nicely, and lived generally in good style. By degrees he made friends in the neighbourhood, and in 1887 he married the daughter of a local brewer, by whom he now has two children. He had no occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon Street every night. Mr. St. Clair is now thirty-seven years of age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain, amount to £88 10*s*., while he has £220 standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank. There is no reason, therefore, to think that money troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

“Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance, his wife received a telegram upon this same Monday, very shortly after his departure, to the effect that a small parcel of considerable value which she had been expecting was waiting for her at the offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company. Now, if you are well up in your London, you will know that the office of the company is in Fresno Street, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where you found me to-night. Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, started for the City, did some shopping, proceeded to the company’s office, got her packet, and found herself at exactly 4:35 walking through Swandam Lane on her way back to the station. Have you followed me so far?”

“It is very clear.”

“If you remember, Monday was an exceedingly hot day, and Mrs. St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab, as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she found herself. While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then vanished from the window so suddenly that it seemed to her that he had been plucked back by some irresistible force from behind. One singular point which struck her quick feminine eye was that although he wore some dark coat, such as he had started to town in, he had on neither collar nor necktie.

“Convinced that something was amiss with him, she rushed down the steps — for the house was none other than the opium den in which you found me to-night — and running through the front room she attempted to ascend the stairs which led to the first floor. At the foot of the stairs, however, she met this Lascar scoundrel of whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, aided by a Dane, who acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. Filled with the most maddening doubts and fears, she rushed down the lane and, by rare good-fortune, met in Fresno Street a number of constables with an inspector, all on their way to their beat. The inspector and two men accompanied her back, and in spite of the continued resistance of the proprietor, they made their way to the room in which Mr. St. Clair had last been seen. There was no sign of him there. In fact, in the whole of that floor there was no one to be found save a crippled wretch of hideous aspect, who, it seems, made his home there. Both he and the Lascar stoutly swore that no one else had been in the front room during the afternoon. So determined was their denial that the inspector was staggered, and had almost come to believe that Mrs. St. Clair had been deluded when, with a cry, she sprang at a small deal box which lay upon the table and tore the lid from it. Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had promised to bring home.

"This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious. The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an abominable crime. The front room was plainly furnished as a sitting-room and led into a small bedroom, which looked out upon the back of one of the wharves. Between the wharf and the bedroom window is a narrow strip, which is dry at low tide but is covered at high tide with at least four and a half feet of water. The bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. On examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the windowsill, and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of the bedroom. Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of his coat. His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch — all were there. There were no signs of violence upon any of these garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St. Clair. Out of the window he must apparently have gone for no other exit could be discovered, and the ominous bloodstains upon the sill gave little promise that he could save himself by swimming, for the tide was at its very highest at the moment of the tragedy.

"And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately implicated in the matter. The Lascar was known to be a man of the vilest antecedents, but as, by Mrs. St. Clair's story, he was known to have been at the foot of the stair within a very few seconds of her husband's appearance at the window, he could hardly have been more than an accessory to the crime. His defence was one of absolute ignorance, and he protested that he had no knowledge as to the doings of Hugh Boone, his lodger, and that he could not account in any way for the presence of the missing gentleman's clothes.

"So much for the Lascar manager. Now for the sinister cripple who lives upon the second floor of the opium den, and who was certainly the last human being whose eyes rested upon Neville St. Clair. His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. Some little distance down Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the wall. Here it is that this creature takes his daily seat, cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he is a piteous spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him. I have watched the fellow more than once before ever I thought of making his professional acquaintance, and I have been surprised at the harvest which he has reaped in a short time. His appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no one can pass him without observing him. A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by its contraction, has turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin, and a pair of very penetrating dark eyes, which present a singular contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid the common crowd of mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be thrown at him by the passers-by. This is the man whom we now learn to have been the lodger at the opium den, and to have been the last man to see the gentleman of whom we are in quest."

"But a cripple!" said I. "What could he have done single-handed against a man in the prime of life?"

"He is a cripple in the sense that he walks with a limp; but in other respects he appears to be a powerful and well-nurtured man. Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that weakness in one limb is often compensated for by exceptional strength in the others."

"Pray continue your narrative."

"Mrs. St. Clair had fainted at the sight of the blood upon the window, and she was escorted home in a cab by the police, as her presence could be of no help to them in their investigations. Inspector Barton, who had charge of the case, made a very careful examination of the premises, but without finding anything which threw any light upon the matter. One mistake had been made in not arresting Boone instantly, as he was allowed some few minutes during which he might have communicated with his friend the Lascar, but this fault was soon remedied, and he was seized and searched, without anything being found which could incriminate him. There were, it is true, some blood-stains upon his right shirt-sleeve, but he pointed to his ring-finger, which had been cut near the nail, and explained that the bleeding came from there, adding that he had been to the window not long before, and that the stains which had been observed there came doubtless from the same source. He denied strenuously having ever seen Mr. Neville St. Clair and swore that the presence of the clothes in his room was as much a mystery to him as to the police. As to Mrs. St. Clair's assertion that she had actually seen her husband at the window, he declared that she must have been either mad or dreaming. He was removed, loudly protesting, to the police-station, while the inspector remained upon the premises in the hope that the ebbing tide might afford some fresh clue.

"And it did, though they hardly found upon the mud-bank what they had feared to find. It was Neville St. Clair's coat, and not Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. And what do you think they found in the pockets?"

"I cannot imagine."

"No, I don't think you would guess. Every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies — 421 pennies and 270 half-pennies. It was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. But a human body is a different matter. There is a fierce eddy between the wharf and the house. It seemed likely enough that the weighted coat had remained when the stripped body had been sucked away into the river."

"But I understand that all the other clothes were found in the room. Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

"No, sir, but the facts might be met speciously enough. Suppose that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair through the window, there is no human eye which could have seen the deed. What would he do then? It would of course instantly strike him that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. He would seize the coat, then, and be in the act of throwing it out, when it would occur to him that it would swim and not sink. He has little time, for he has heard the scuffle downstairs when the wife tried to force her way up, and perhaps he has already heard from his Lascar confederate that the police are hurrying up the street. There is not an instant to be lost. He rushes to some secret hoard, where he has accumulated the fruits of his beggary, and he stuffs all the coins upon which he can lay his hands into the pockets to make sure of the coat's sinking. He throws it out, and would have done the same with the other garments had not he heard the rush of steps below, and only just had time to close the window when the police appeared."

"It certainly sounds feasible."

"Well, we will take it as a working hypothesis for want of a better. Boone, as I have told you, was arrested and taken to the station, but it could not be shown that there had ever before been anything against him. He had for years been known as a professional beggar, but his life appeared to have been a very quiet and innocent one. There the matter stands at present, and the questions which have to be solved — what Neville St. Clair was doing in the opium den, what happened to him when there, where is he now, and what Hugh Boone had to do with his disappearance — are all as far from a solution as ever. I confess that I cannot recall any case within my experience which looked at the first glance so simple and yet which presented such difficulties."

While Sherlock Holmes had been detailing this singular series of events, we had been whirling through the outskirts of the great town until the last straggling houses had been left behind, and we rattled along with a country hedge upon either side of us. Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.

"We are on the outskirts of Lee," said my companion. "We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent. See that light among the trees? That is The Cedars, and beside that lamp sits a woman whose anxious ears have already, I have little doubt, caught the clink of our horse's feet."

"But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?" I asked.

"Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here. Mrs. St. Clair has most kindly put two rooms at my disposal, and you may rest assured that she will have nothing but a welcome for my friend and colleague. I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have no news of her husband. Here we are. Whoa, there, whoa!"

We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its own grounds. A stable-boy had run out to the horse's head, and springing down, I followed Holmes up the small, winding gravel-drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one half-raised in her eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing question.

“Well?” she cried, “well?” And then, seeing that there were two of us, she gave a cry of hope which sank into a groan as she saw that my companion shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

“No good news?”

“None.”

“No bad?”

“No.”

“Thank God for that. But come in. You must be weary, for you have had a long day.”

“This is my friend, Dr. Watson. He has been of most vital use to me in several of my cases, and a lucky chance has made it possible for me to bring him out and associate him with this investigation.”

“I am delighted to see you,” said she, pressing my hand warmly. “You will, I am sure, forgive anything that may be wanting in our arrangements, when you consider the blow which has come so suddenly upon us.”

“My dear madam,” said I, “I am an old campaigner, and if I were not I can very well see that no apology is needed. If I can be of any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be indeed happy.”

“Now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said the lady as we entered a well-lit dining-room, upon the table of which a cold supper had been laid out, “I should very much like to ask you one or two plain questions, to which I beg that you will give a plain answer.”

“Certainly, madam.”

“Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given to fainting. I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion.”

“Upon what point?”

“In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?”

Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question. “Frankly, now!” she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.

“Frankly, then, madam, I do not.”

“You think that he is dead?”

“I do.”

“Murdered?”

“I don’t say that. Perhaps.”

“And on what day did he meet his death?”

“On Monday.”

“Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how it is that I have received a letter from him to-day.”

Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been galvanised.

“What!” he roared.

“Yes, to-day.” She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of paper in the air.

“May I see it?”

“Certainly.”

He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. I had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. The envelope was a very coarse one and was stamped with the Gravesend postmark and with the date of that very day, or rather of the day before, for it was considerably after midnight.

“Coarse writing,” murmured Holmes. “Surely this is not your husband’s writing, madam.”

“No, but the enclosure is.”

“I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go and inquire as to the address.”

“How can you tell that?”

“The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried itself. The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that blotting-paper has been used. If it had been written straight off, and then blotted, none would be of a deep black shade. This man has written the name, and there has then been a pause before he wrote the address, which can only mean that he was not familiar with it. It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles. Let us now see the letter. Ha! there has been an enclosure here!”

“Yes, there was a ring. His signet-ring.”

“And you are sure that this is your husband’s hand?”

“One of his hands.”

“One?”

“His hand when he wrote hurriedly. It is very unlike his usual writing, and yet I know it well.”

“ ’Dearest do not be frightened. All will come well. There is a huge error which it may take some little time to rectify. Wait in patience. —NEVILLE.’ Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. Hum! Posted to-day in Gravesend by a man with a dirty thumb. Ha! And the flap has been gummed, if I am not very much in error, by a person who had been chewing tobacco. And you have no doubt that it is your husband’s hand, madam?”

“None. Neville wrote those words.”

“And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. Well, Mrs. St. Clair, the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the danger is over.”

“But he must be alive, Mr. Holmes.”

“Unless this is a clever forgery to put us on the wrong scent. The ring, after all, proves nothing. It may have been taken from him.”

“No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!”

“Very well. It may, however, have been written on Monday and only posted to-day.”

“That is possible.”

“If so, much may have happened between.”

“Oh, you must not discourage me, Mr. Holmes. I know that all is well with him. There is so keen a sympathy between us that I should know if evil came upon him. On the very day that I saw him last he cut himself in the bedroom, and yet I in the dining-room rushed upstairs instantly with the utmost certainty that something had happened. Do you think that I would respond to such a trifle and yet be ignorant of his death?”

“I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner. And in this letter you certainly have a very strong piece of evidence to corroborate your view. But if your husband is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away from you?”

“I cannot imagine. It is unthinkable.”

“And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?”

“No.”

“And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?”

“Very much so.”

“Was the window open?”

"Yes."

"Then he might have called to you?"

"He might."

"He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?"

"Yes."

"A call for help, you thought?"

"Yes. He waved his hands."

"But it might have been a cry of surprise. Astonishment at the unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?"

"It is possible."

"And you thought he was pulled back?"

"He disappeared so suddenly."

"He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the room?"

"No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs."

"Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?"

"But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare throat."

"Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?"

"Never."

"Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?"

"Never."

"Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the principal points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day to-morrow."

A large and comfortable double-bedded room had been placed at our disposal, and I was quickly between the sheets, for I was weary after my night of adventure. Sherlock Holmes was a man, however, who, when he had an unsolved problem upon his mind, would go for days, and even for a week, without rest, turning it over, rearranging his facts, looking at it from every point of view until he had either fathomed it or convinced himself that his data were insufficient. It was soon evident to me that he was now preparing for an all-night sitting. He took off his coat and waistcoat, put on a large blue dressing-gown, and then wandered about the room collecting pillows from his bed and cushions from the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set aquiline features. So he sat as I dropped off to sleep, and so he sat when a sudden ejaculation caused me to wake up, and I found the summer sun shining into the apartment. The pipe was still between his lips, the smoke still curled upward, and the room was full of a dense tobacco haze, but nothing remained of the heap of shag which I had seen upon the previous night.

"Awake, Watson?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Game for a morning drive?"

"Certainly."

"Then dress. No one is stirring yet, but I know where the stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out." He chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night.

As I dressed I glanced at my watch. It was no wonder that no one was stirring. It was twenty-five minutes past four. I had hardly finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was putting in the horse.

"I want to test a little theory of mine," said he, pulling on his boots. "I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But I think I have the key of the affair now."

"And where is it?" I asked, smiling.

"In the bathroom," he answered. "Oh, yes, I am not joking," he continued, seeing my look of incredulity. "I have just been there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this Gladstone bag. Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will not fit the lock."

We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into the bright morning sunshine. In the road stood our horse and trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. We both sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. A few country carts were stirring, bearing in vegetables to the metropolis, but the lines of villas on either side were as silent and lifeless as some city in a dream.

"It has been in some points a singular case," said Holmes, flicking the horse on into a gallop. "I confess that I have been as blind as a mole, but it is better to learn wisdom late than never to learn it at all.”

In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the right and found ourselves in Bow Street. Sherlock Holmes was well known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted him. One of them held the horse’s head while the other led us in.

“Who is on duty?” asked Holmes.

“Inspector Bradstreet, sir.”

“Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?” A tall, stout official had come down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap and frogged jacket. “I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet.” “Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here.” It was a small, office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a telephone projecting from the wall. The inspector sat down at his desk.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?”

“I called about that beggarman, Boone — the one who was charged with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee.”

“Yes. He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries.”

“So I heard. You have him here?”

“In the cells.”

“Is he quiet?”

“Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel.”

“Dirty?”

“Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker’s. Well, when once his case has been settled, he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you saw him, you would agree with me that he needed it.”

“I should like to see him very much.”

“Would you? That is easily done. Come this way. You can leave your bag.”

“No, I think that I’ll take it.”

“Very good. Come this way, if you please.” He led us down a passage, opened a barred door, passed down a winding stair, and brought us to a whitewashed corridor with a line of doors on each side.

“The third on the right is his,” said the inspector. “Here it is!” He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door and glanced through.

“He is asleep,” said he. “You can see him very well.”

We both put our eyes to the grating. The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead.

“He’s a beauty, isn’t he?” said the inspector.

“He certainly needs a wash,” remarked Holmes. “I had an idea that he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me.” He opened the Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my astonishment, a very large bath-sponge.

“He! he! You are a funny one,” chuckled the inspector.

“Now, if you will have the great goodness to open that door very quietly, we will soon make him cut a much more respectable figure.”

“Well, I don’t know why not,” said the inspector. “He doesn’t look a credit to the Bow Street cells, does he?” He slipped his key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. The sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep slumber. Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner’s face.

“Let me introduce you,” he shouted, “to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee, in the county of Kent.”

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man’s face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. Then suddenly realising the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw himself down with his face to the pillow.

"Great heavens!" cried the inspector, "it is, indeed, the missing man. I know him from the photograph."

The prisoner turned with the reckless air of a man who abandons himself to his destiny. "Be it so," said he. "And pray what am I charged with?"

"With making away with Mr. Neville St. — Oh, come, you can't be charged with that unless they make a case of attempted suicide of it," said the inspector with a grin. "Well, I have been twenty-seven years in the force, but this really takes the cake."

"If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is obvious that no crime has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally detained."

"No crime, but a very great error has been committed," said Holmes. "You would have done better to have trusted your wife."

"It was not the wife; it was the children," groaned the prisoner. "God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?"

Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up," said he, "of course you can hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand, if you convince the police authorities that there is no possible case against you, I do not know that there is any reason that the details should find their way into the papers. Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case would then never go into court at all."

"God bless you!" cried the prisoner passionately. "I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children.

"You are the first who have ever heard my story. My father was a schoolmaster in Chesterfield, where I received an excellent education. I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and finally became a reporter on an evening paper in London. One day my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. There was the point from which all my adventures started. It was only by trying begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to base my articles. When an actor I had, of course, learned all the secrets of making up, and had been famous in the green-room for my skill. I took advantage now of my attainments. I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh-coloured plaster. Then with a red head of hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the business part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned home in the evening I found to my surprise that I had received no less than 26*s*. 4*d*.

"I wrote my articles and thought little more of the matter until, some time later, I backed a bill for a friend and had a writ served upon me for £25. I was at my wit's end where to get the money, but a sudden idea came to me. I begged a fortnight's grace from the creditor, asked for a holiday from my employers, and spent the time in begging in the City under my disguise. In ten days I had the money and had paid the debt.

"Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at £2 a week when I knew that I could earn as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on the ground, and sitting still. It was a long fight between my pride and the money, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets with coppers. Only one man knew my secret. He was the keeper of a low den in which I used to lodge in Swandam Lane, where I could every morning emerge as a squalid beggar and in the evenings transform myself into a well-dressed man about town. This fellow, a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that my secret was safe in his possession.

"Well, very soon I found that I was saving considerable sums of money. I do not mean that any beggar in the streets of London could earn £700 a year — which is less than my average takings — but I had exceptional advantages in my power of making up, and also in a facility of repartee, which improved by practice and made me quite a recognised character in the City. All day a stream of pennies, varied by silver, poured in upon me, and it was a very bad day in which I failed to take £2.

"As I grew richer I grew more ambitious, took a house in the country, and eventually married, without anyone having a suspicion as to my real occupation. My dear wife knew that I had business in the City. She little knew what.

"Last Monday I had finished for the day and was dressing in my room above the opium den when I looked out of my window and saw, to my horror and astonishment, that my wife was standing in the street, with her eyes fixed full upon me. I gave a cry of surprise, threw up my arms to cover my face, and, rushing to my confidant, the Lascar, entreated him to prevent anyone from coming up to me. I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that she could not ascend. Swiftly I threw off my clothes, pulled on those of a beggar, and put on my pigments and wig. Even a wife's eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. But then it occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that the clothes might betray me. I threw open the window, reopening by my violence a small cut which I had inflicted upon myself in the bedroom that morning. Then I seized my coat, which was weighted by the coppers which I had just transferred to it from the leather bag in which I carried my takings. I hurled it out of the window, and it disappeared into the Thames. The other clothes would have followed, but at that moment there was a rush of constables up the stair, and a few minutes after I found, rather, I confess, to my relief, that instead of being identified as Mr. Neville St. Clair, I was arrested as his murderer.

"I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. I was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and hence my preference for a dirty face. Knowing that my wife would be terribly anxious, I slipped off my ring and confided it to the Lascar at a moment when no constable was watching me, together with a hurried scrawl, telling her that she had no cause to fear."

"That note only reached her yesterday," said Holmes.

"Good God! What a week she must have spent!"

"The police have watched this Lascar," said Inspector Bradstreet, "and I can quite understand that he might find it difficult to post a letter unobserved. Probably he handed it to some sailor customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days."

"That was it," said Holmes, nodding approvingly; "I have no doubt of it. But have you never been prosecuted for begging?"

"Many times; but what was a fine to me?"

"It must stop here, however," said Bradstreet. "If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone."

"I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take."

"In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps may be taken. But if you are found again, then all must come out. I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for having cleared the matter up. I wish I knew how you reach your results."

"I reached this one," said my friend, "by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson, that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the purpose of examination.

"You are engaged," said I; "perhaps I interrupt you."

"Not at all. I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss my results. The matter is a perfectly trivial one" — he jerked his thumb in the direction of the old hat—"but there are points in connection with it which are not entirely devoid of interest and even of instruction."

I seated myself in his armchair and warmed my hands before his crackling fire, for a sharp frost had set in, and the windows were thick with the ice crystals. "I suppose," I remarked, "that, homely as it looks, this thing has some deadly story linked on to it — that it is the clue which will guide you in the solution of some mystery and the punishment of some crime."

"No, no. No crime," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. "Only one of those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events may be expected to take place, and many a little problem will be presented which may be striking and bizarre without being criminal. We have already had experience of such."

"So much so," I remarked, "that of the last six cases which I have added to my notes, three have been entirely free of any legal crime."

"Precisely. You allude to my attempt to recover the Irene Adler papers, to the singular case of Miss Mary Sutherland, and to the adventure of the man with the twisted lip. Well, I have no doubt that this small matter will fall into the same innocent category. You know Peterson, the commissionaire?"

"Yes."

“It is to him that this trophy belongs.”

“It is his hat.”

“No, no, he found it. Its owner is unknown. I beg that you will look upon it not as a battered billycock but as an intellectual problem. And, first, as to how it came here. It arrived upon Christmas morning, in company with a good fat goose, which is, I have no doubt, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson’s fire. The facts are these: about four o’clock on Christmas morning, Peterson, who, as you know, is a very honest fellow, was returning from some small jollification and was making his way homeward down Tottenham Court Road. In front of him he saw, in the gaslight, a tallish man, walking with a slight stagger, and carrying a white goose slung over his shoulder. As he reached the corner of Goodge Street, a row broke out between this stranger and a little knot of roughs. One of the latter knocked off the man’s hat, on which he raised his stick to defend himself and, swinging it over his head, smashed the shop window behind him. Peterson had rushed forward to protect the stranger from his assailants; but the man, shocked at having broken the window, and seeing an official-looking person in uniform rushing towards him, dropped his goose, took to his heels, and vanished amid the labyrinth of small streets which lie at the back of Tottenham Court Road. The roughs had also fled at the appearance of Peterson, so that he was left in possession of the field of battle, and also of the spoils of victory in the shape of this battered hat and a most unimpeachable Christmas goose.”

“Which surely he restored to their owner?”

“My dear fellow, there lies the problem. It is true that ‘For Mrs. Henry Baker’ was printed upon a small card which was tied to the bird’s left leg, and it is also true that the initials ‘H. B.’ are legible upon the lining of this hat, but as there are some thousands of Bakers, and some hundreds of Henry Bakers in this city of ours, it is not easy to restore lost property to any one of them.”

“What, then, did Peterson do?”

“He brought round both hat and goose to me on Christmas morning, knowing that even the smallest problems are of interest to me. The goose we retained until this morning, when there were signs that, in spite of the slight frost, it would be well that it should be eaten without unnecessary delay. Its finder has carried it off, therefore, to fulfil the ultimate destiny of a goose, while I continue to retain the hat of the unknown gentleman who lost his Christmas dinner."

"Did he not advertise?"

"No."

"Then, what clue could you have as to his identity?"

"Only as much as we can deduce."

"From his hat?"

"Precisely."

"But you are joking. What can you gather from this old battered felt?"

"Here is my lens. You know my methods. What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?"

I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over rather ruefully. It was a very ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and much the worse for wear. The lining had been of red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. There was no maker's name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials "H. B." were scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the brim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. For the rest, it was cracked, exceedingly dusty, and spotted in several places, although there seemed to have been some attempt to hide the discoloured patches by smearing them with ink.

"I can see nothing," said I, handing it back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences."

"Then, pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?"

He picked it up and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective fashion which was characteristic of him. "It is perhaps less suggestive than it might have been," he remarked, "and yet there are a few inferences which are very distinct, and a few others which represent at least a strong balance of probability. That the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight, but has less now than formerly, pointing to a moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may account also for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him."

"My dear Holmes!"

"He has, however, retained some degree of self-respect," he continued, disregarding my remonstrance. "He is a man who leads a sedentary life, goes out little, is out of training entirely, is middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the last few days, and which he anoints with lime-cream. These are the more patent facts which are to be deduced from his hat. Also, by the way, that it is extremely improbable that he has gas laid on in his house."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes."

"Not in the least. Is it possible that even now, when I give you these results, you are unable to see how they are attained?"

"I have no doubt that I am very stupid, but I must confess that I am unable to follow you. For example, how did you deduce that this man was intellectual?"

For answer Holmes clapped the hat upon his head. It came right over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose. "It is a question of cubic capacity," said he; "a man with so large a brain must have something in it."

"The decline of his fortunes, then?"

"This hat is three years old. These flat brims curled at the edge came in then. It is a hat of the very best quality. Look at the band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. If this man could afford to buy so expensive a hat three years ago, and has had no hat since, then he has assuredly gone down in the world."

"Well, that is clear enough, certainly. But how about the foresight and the moral retrogression?"

Sherlock Holmes laughed. "Here is the foresight," said he putting his finger upon the little disc and loop of the hat-securer. "They are never sold upon hats. If this man ordered one, it is a sign of a certain amount of foresight, since he went out of his way to take this precaution against the wind. But since we see that he has broken the elastic and has not troubled to replace it, it is obvious that he has less foresight now than formerly, which is a distinct proof of a weakening nature. On the other hand, he has endeavoured to conceal some of these stains upon the felt by daubing them with ink, which is a sign that he has not entirely lost his self-respect."

"Your reasoning is certainly plausible."

"The further points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is grizzled, that it has been recently cut, and that he uses lime-cream, are all to be gathered from a close examination of the lower part of the lining. The lens discloses a large number of hair-ends, clean cut by the scissors of the barber. They all appear to be adhesive, and there is a distinct odour of lime-cream. This dust, you will observe, is not the gritty, grey dust of the street but the fluffy brown dust of the house, showing that it has been hung up indoors most of the time, while the marks of moisture upon the inside are proof positive that the wearer perspired very freely, and could therefore, hardly be in the best of training."

"But his wife — you said that she had ceased to love him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks. When I see you, my dear Watson, with a week's accumulation of dust upon your hat, and when your wife allows you to go out in such a state, I shall fear that you also have been unfortunate enough to lose your wife's affection."

"But he might be a bachelor."

"Nay, he was bringing home the goose as a peace-offering to his wife. Remember the card upon the bird's leg."

"You have an answer to everything. But how on earth do you deduce that the gas is not laid on in his house?"

"One tallow stain, or even two, might come by chance; but when I see no less than five, I think that there can be little doubt that the individual must be brought into frequent contact with burning tallow — walks upstairs at night probably with his hat in one hand and a guttering candle in the other. Anyhow, he never got tallow-stains from a gas-jet. Are you satisfied?"

"Well, it is very ingenious," said I, laughing; "but since, as you said just now, there has been no crime committed, and no harm done save the loss of a goose, all this seems to be rather a waste of energy."

Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply, when the door flew open, and Peterson, the commissionaire, rushed into the apartment with flushed cheeks and the face of a man who is dazed with astonishment.

"The goose, Mr. Holmes! The goose, sir!" he gasped.

"Eh? What of it, then? Has it returned to life and flapped off through the kitchen window?" Holmes twisted himself round upon the sofa to get a fairer view of the man's excited face.

"See here, sir! See what my wife found in its crop!" He held out his hand and displayed upon the centre of the palm a brilliantly scintillating blue stone, rather smaller than a bean in size, but of such purity and radiance that it twinkled like an electric point in the dark hollow of his hand.

Sherlock Holmes sat up with a whistle. “By Jove, Peterson!” said he, “this is treasure trove indeed. I suppose you know what you have got?”

“A diamond, sir? A precious stone. It cuts into glass as though it were putty.”

“It’s more than a precious stone. It is *the* precious stone.”

“Not the Countess of Morcar’s blue carbuncle!” I ejaculated.

“Precisely so. I ought to know its size and shape, seeing that I have read the advertisement about it in *The Times* every day lately. It is absolutely unique, and its value can only be conjectured, but the reward offered of £1000 is certainly not within a twentieth part of the market price.”

“A thousand pounds! Great Lord of mercy!” The commissionaire plumped down into a chair and stared from one to the other of us.

“That is the reward, and I have reason to know that there are sentimental considerations in the background which would induce the Countess to part with half her fortune if she could but recover the gem.”

“It was lost, if I remember aright, at the Hotel Cosmopolitan,” I remarked.

“Precisely so, on December 22nd, just five days ago. John Horner, a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady’s jewel-case. The evidence against him was so strong that the case has been referred to the Assizes. I have some account of the matter here, I believe.” He rummaged amid his newspapers, glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out, doubled it over, and read the following paragraph:

“Hotel Cosmopolitan Jewel Robbery. John Horner, 26, plumber, was brought up upon the charge of having upon the 22nd inst., abstracted from the jewel-case of the Countess of Morcar the valuable gem known as the blue carbuncle. James Ryder, upper-attendant at the hotel, gave his evidence to the effect that he had shown Horner up to the dressing-room of the Countess of Morcar upon the day of the robbery in order that he might solder the second bar of the grate, which was loose. He had remained with Horner some little time, but had finally been called away. On returning, he found that Horner had disappeared, that the bureau had been forced open, and that the small morocco casket in which, as it afterwards transpired, the Countess was accustomed to keep her jewel, was lying empty upon the dressing-table. Ryder instantly gave the alarm, and Horner was arrested the same evening; but the stone could not be found either upon his person or in his rooms. Catherine Cusack, maid to the Countess, deposed to having heard Ryder’s cry of dismay on discovering the robbery, and to having rushed into the room, where she found matters as described by the last witness. Inspector Bradstreet, B division, gave evidence as to the arrest of Horner, who struggled frantically, and protested his innocence in the strongest terms. Evidence of a previous conviction for robbery having been given against the prisoner, the magistrate refused to deal summarily with the offence, but referred it to the Assizes. Horner, who had shown signs of intense emotion during the proceedings, fainted away at the conclusion and was carried out of court.”

“Hum! So much for the police-court,” said Holmes thoughtfully, tossing aside the paper. “The question for us now to solve is the sequence of events leading from a rifled jewel-case at one end to the crop of a goose in Tottenham Court Road at the other. You see, Watson, our little deductions have suddenly assumed a much more important and less innocent aspect. Here is the stone; the stone came from the goose, and the goose came from Mr. Henry Baker, the gentleman with the bad hat and all the other characteristics with which I have bored you. So now we must set ourselves very seriously to finding this gentleman and ascertaining what part he has played in this little mystery. To do this, we must try the simplest means first, and these lie undoubtedly in an advertisement in all the evening papers. If this fail, I shall have recourse to other methods.”

“What will you say?”

“Give me a pencil and that slip of paper. Now, then: ‘Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. Mr. Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6:30 this evening at 221B, Baker Street.’ That is clear and concise.”

“Very. But will he see it?”

“Well, he is sure to keep an eye on the papers, since, to a poor man, the loss was a heavy one. He was clearly so scared by his mischance in breaking the window and by the approach of Peterson that he thought of nothing but flight, but since then he must have bitterly regretted the impulse which caused him to drop his bird. Then, again, the introduction of his name will cause him to see it, for everyone who knows him will direct his attention to it. Here you are, Peterson, run down to the advertising agency and have this put in the evening papers.”

“In which, sir?”

“Oh, in the *Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James’s, Evening News, Standard, Echo*, and any others that occur to you.”

“Very well, sir. And this stone?”

“Ah, yes, I shall keep the stone. Thank you. And, I say, Peterson, just buy a goose on your way back and leave it here with me, for we must have one to give to this gentleman in place of the one which your family is now devouring.”

When the commissionaire had gone, Holmes took up the stone and held it against the light. “It’s a bonny thing,” said he. “Just see how it glints and sparkles. Of course it is a nucleus and focus of crime. Every good stone is. They are the devil’s pet baits. In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a bloody deed. This stone is not yet twenty years old. It was found in the banks of the Amoy River in southern China and is remarkable in having every characteristic of the carbuncle, save that it is blue in shade instead of ruby red. In spite of its youth, it has already a sinister history. There have been two murders, a vitriol-throwing, a suicide, and several robberies brought about for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallised charcoal. Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the gallows and the prison? I’ll lock it up in my strong box now and drop a line to the Countess to say that we have it.”

“Do you think that this man Horner is innocent?”

“I cannot tell.”

“Well, then, do you imagine that this other one, Henry Baker, had anything to do with the matter?”

“It is, I think, much more likely that Henry Baker is an absolutely innocent man, who had no idea that the bird which he was carrying was of considerably more value than if it were made of solid gold. That, however, I shall determine by a very simple test if we have an answer to our advertisement.”

“And you can do nothing until then?”

“Nothing.”

“In that case I shall continue my professional round. But I shall come back in the evening at the hour you have mentioned, for I should like to see the solution of so tangled a business.”

“Very glad to see you. I dine at seven. There is a woodcock, I believe. By the way, in view of recent occurrences, perhaps I ought to ask Mrs. Hudson to examine its crop.”

I had been delayed at a case, and it was a little after half-past six when I found myself in Baker Street once more. As I approached the house I saw a tall man in a Scotch bonnet with a coat which was buttoned up to his chin waiting outside in the bright semicircle which was thrown from the fanlight. Just as I arrived the door was opened, and we were shown up together to Holmes' room.

"Mr. Henry Baker, I believe," said he, rising from his armchair and greeting his visitor with the easy air of geniality which he could so readily assume. "Pray take this chair by the fire, Mr. Baker. It is a cold night, and I observe that your circulation is more adapted for summer than for winter. Ah, Watson, you have just come at the right time. Is that your hat, Mr. Baker?"

"Yes, sir, that is undoubtedly my hat."

He was a large man with rounded shoulders, a massive head, and a broad, intelligent face, sloping down to a pointed beard of grizzled brown. A touch of red in nose and cheeks, with a slight tremor of his extended hand, recalled Holmes' surmise as to his habits. His rusty black frock-coat was buttoned right up in front, with the collar turned up, and his lank wrists protruded from his sleeves without a sign of cuff or shirt. He spoke in a slow staccato fashion, choosing his words with care, and gave the impression generally of a man of learning and letters who had had ill-usage at the hands of fortune.

"We have retained these things for some days," said Holmes, "because we expected to see an advertisement from you giving your address. I am at a loss to know now why you did not advertise."

Our visitor gave a rather shamefaced laugh. "Shillings have not been so plentiful with me as they once were," he remarked. "I had no doubt that the gang of roughs who assaulted me had carried off both my hat and the bird. I did not care to spend more money in a hopeless attempt at recovering them."

"Very naturally. By the way, about the bird, we were compelled to eat it."

"To eat it!" Our visitor half rose from his chair in his excitement.

"Yes, it would have been of no use to anyone had we not done so. But I presume that this other goose upon the sideboard, which is about the same weight and perfectly fresh, will answer your purpose equally well?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," answered Mr. Baker with a sigh of relief.

"Of course, we still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on of your own bird, so if you wish—"

The man burst into a hearty laugh. "They might be useful to me as relics of my adventure," said he, "but beyond that I can hardly see what use the *disjecta membra* of my late acquaintance are going to be to me. No, sir, I think that, with your permission, I will confine my attentions to the excellent bird which I perceive upon the sideboard."

Sherlock Holmes glanced sharply across at me with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"There is your hat, then, and there your bird," said he. "By the way, would it bore you to tell me where you got the other one from? I am somewhat of a fowl fancier, and I have seldom seen a better grown goose."

"Certainly, sir," said Baker, who had risen and tucked his newly gained property under his arm. "There are a few of us who frequent the Alpha Inn, near the Museum — we are to be found in the Museum itself during the day, you understand. This year our good host, Windigate by name, instituted a goose club, by which, on consideration of some few pence every week, we were each to receive a bird at Christmas. My pence were duly paid, and the rest is familiar to you. I am much indebted to you, sir, for a Scotch bonnet is fitted neither to my years nor my gravity." With a comical pomposity of manner he bowed solemnly to both of us and strode off upon his way.

"So much for Mr. Henry Baker," said Holmes when he had closed the door behind him. "It is quite certain that he knows nothing whatever about the matter. Are you hungry, Watson?"

"Not particularly."

"Then I suggest that we turn our dinner into a supper and follow up this clue while it is still hot."

"By all means."

It was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped cravats about our throats. Outside, the stars were shining coldly in a cloudless sky, and the breath of the passers-by blew out into smoke like so many pistol shots. Our footfalls rang out crisply and loudly as we swung through the doctors' quarter, Wimpole Street, Harley Street, and so through Wigmore Street into Oxford Street. In a quarter of an hour we were in Bloomsbury at the Alpha Inn, which is a small public-house at the corner of one of the streets which runs down into Holborn. Holmes pushed open the door of the private bar and ordered two glasses of beer from the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord.

“Your beer should be excellent if it is as good as your geese,” said he.

“My geese!” The man seemed surprised.

“Yes. I was speaking only half an hour ago to Mr. Henry Baker, who was a member of your goose club.”

“Ah! yes, I see. But you see, sir, them’s not *our* geese.”

“Indeed! Whose, then?”

“Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent Garden.”

“Indeed? I know some of them. Which was it?”

“Breckinridge is his name.”

“Ah! I don’t know him. Well, here’s your good health landlord, and prosperity to your house. Good-night.”

“Now for Mr. Breckinridge,” he continued, buttoning up his coat as we came out into the frosty air. “Remember, Watson that though we have so homely a thing as a goose at one end of this chain, we have at the other a man who will certainly get seven years’ penal servitude unless we can establish his innocence. It is possible that our inquiry may but confirm his guilt; but, in any case, we have a line of investigation which has been missed by the police, and which a singular chance has placed in our hands. Let us follow it out to the bitter end. Faces to the south, then, and quick march!”

We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a zigzag of slums to Covent Garden Market. One of the largest stalls bore the name of Breckinridge upon it, and the proprietor a horsey-looking man, with a sharp face and trim side-whiskers was helping a boy to put up the shutters.

“Good-evening. It’s a cold night,” said Holmes.

The salesman nodded and shot a questioning glance at my companion.

“Sold out of geese, I see,” continued Holmes, pointing at the bare slabs of marble.

“Let you have five hundred to-morrow morning.”

“That’s no good.”

“Well, there are some on the stall with the gas-flare.”

“Ah, but I was recommended to you.”

“Who by?”

“The landlord of the Alpha.”

“Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen.”

"Fine birds they were, too. Now where did you get them from?"

To my surprise the question provoked a burst of anger from the salesman.

"Now, then, mister," said he, with his head cocked and his arms akimbo, "what are you driving at? Let's have it straight, now."

"It is straight enough. I should like to know who sold you the geese which you supplied to the Alpha."

"Well then, I shan't tell you. So now!"

"Oh, it is a matter of no importance; but I don't know why you should be so warm over such a trifle."

"Warm! You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am. When I pay good money for a good article there should be an end of the business; but it's 'Where are the geese?' and 'Who did you sell the geese to?' and 'What will you take for the geese?' One would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the fuss that is made over them."

"Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been making inquiries," said Holmes carelessly. "If you won't tell us the bet is off, that is all. But I'm always ready to back my opinion on a matter of fowls, and I have a fiver on it that the bird I ate is country bred."

"Well, then, you've lost your fiver, for it's town bred," snapped the salesman.

"It's nothing of the kind."

"I say it is."

"I don't believe it."

"D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled them ever since I was a nipper? I tell you, all those birds that went to the Alpha were town bred."

"You'll never persuade me to believe that."

"Will you bet, then?"

"It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. But I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be obstinate."

The salesman chuckled grimly. "Bring me the books, Bill," said he.

The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging lamp.

"Now then, Mr. Cocksure," said the salesman, "I thought that I was out of geese, but before I finish you'll find that there is still one left in my shop. You see this little book?"

"Well?"

"That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. D'you see? Well, then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger. Now, then! You see this other page in red ink? Well, that is a list of my town suppliers. Now, look at that third name. Just read it out to me."

"Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road — 249," read Holmes.

"Quite so. Now turn that up in the ledger."

Holmes turned to the page indicated. "Here you are, 'Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.' "

"Now, then, what's the last entry?"

" 'December 22nd. Twenty-four geese at 7*s*. 6*d*.' "

"Quite so. There you are. And underneath?"

" 'Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12*s*.' "

"What have you to say now?"

Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. He drew a sovereign from his pocket and threw it down upon the slab, turning away with the air of a man whose disgust is too deep for words. A few yards off he stopped under a lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless fashion which was peculiar to him.

"When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un' protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet," said he. "I daresay that if I had put £100 down in front of him, that man would not have given me such complete information as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our quest, and the only point which remains to be determined is whether we should go on to this Mrs. Oakshott to-night, or whether we should reserve it for to-morrow. It is clear from what that surly fellow said that there are others besides ourselves who are anxious about the matter, and I should—"

His remarks were suddenly cut short by a loud hubbub which broke out from the stall which we had just left. Turning round we saw a little rat-faced fellow standing in the centre of the circle of yellow light which was thrown by the swinging lamp, while Breckinridge, the salesman, framed in the door of his stall, was shaking his fists fiercely at the cringing figure.

"I've had enough of you and your geese," he shouted. "I wish you were all at the devil together. If you come pestering me any more with your silly talk I’ll set the dog at you. You bring Mrs. Oakshott here and I’ll answer her, but what have you to do with it? Did I buy the geese off you?”

“No; but one of them was mine all the same,” whined the little man.

“Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it.”

“She told me to ask you.”

“Well, you can ask the King of Proosia, for all I care. I’ve had enough of it. Get out of this!” He rushed fiercely forward, and the inquirer flitted away into the darkness.

“Ha! this may save us a visit to Brixton Road,” whispered Holmes. “Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this fellow.” Striding through the scattered knots of people who lounged round the flaring stalls, my companion speedily overtook the little man and touched him upon the shoulder. He sprang round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of colour had been driven from his face.

“Who are you, then? What do you want?” he asked in a quavering voice.

“You will excuse me,” said Holmes blandly, “but I could not help overhearing the questions which you put to the salesman just now. I think that I could be of assistance to you.”

“You? Who are you? How could you know anything of the matter?”

“My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don’t know.”

“But you can know nothing of this?”

“Excuse me, I know everything of it. You are endeavouring to trace some geese which were sold by Mrs. Oakshott, of Brixton Road, to a salesman named Breckinridge, by him in turn to Mr. Windigate, of the Alpha, and by him to his club, of which Mr. Henry Baker is a member.”

“Oh, sir, you are the very man whom I have longed to meet,” cried the little fellow with outstretched hands and quivering fingers. “I can hardly explain to you how interested I am in this matter.”

Sherlock Holmes hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. “In that case we had better discuss it in a cosy room rather than in this wind-swept market-place,” said he. “But pray tell me, before we go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of assisting.”

The man hesitated for an instant. “My name is John Robinson,” he answered with a sidelong glance.

“No, no; the real name,” said Holmes sweetly. “It is always awkward doing business with an alias.”

A flush sprang to the white cheeks of the stranger. “Well then,” said he, “my real name is James Ryder.”

“Precisely so. Head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. Pray step into the cab, and I shall soon be able to tell you everything which you would wish to know.”

The little man stood glancing from one to the other of us with half-frightened, half-hopeful eyes, as one who is not sure whether he is on the verge of a windfall or of a catastrophe. Then he stepped into the cab, and in half an hour we were back in the sitting-room at Baker Street. Nothing had been said during our drive, but the high, thin breathing of our new companion, and the claspings and unclaspings of his hands, spoke of the nervous tension within him.

“Here we are!” said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room. “The fire looks very seasonable in this weather. You look cold, Mr. Ryder. Pray take the basket-chair. I will just put on my slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. Now, then! You want to know what became of those geese?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Or rather, I fancy, of that goose. It was one bird, I imagine in which you were interested — white, with a black bar across the tail.”

Ryder quivered with emotion. “Oh, sir,” he cried, “can you tell me where it went to?”

“It came here.”

“Here?”

“Yes, and a most remarkable bird it proved. I don’t wonder that you should take an interest in it. It laid an egg after it was dead — the bonniest, brightest little blue egg that ever was seen. I have it here in my museum.”

Our visitor staggered to his feet and clutched the mantelpiece with his right hand. Holmes unlocked his strong-box and held up the blue carbuncle, which shone out like a star, with a cold, brilliant, many-pointed radiance. Ryder stood glaring with a drawn face, uncertain whether to claim or to disown it.

“The game’s up, Ryder,” said Holmes quietly. “Hold up, man, or you’ll be into the fire! Give him an arm back into his chair, Watson. He’s not got blood enough to go in for felony with impunity. Give him a dash of brandy. So! Now he looks a little more human. What a shrimp it is, to be sure!”

For a moment he had staggered and nearly fallen, but the brandy brought a tinge of colour into his cheeks, and he sat staring with frightened eyes at his accuser.

“I have almost every link in my hands, and all the proofs which I could possibly need, so there is little which you need tell me. Still, that little may as well be cleared up to make the case complete. You had heard, Ryder, of this blue stone of the Countess of Morcar’s?”

“It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it,” said he in a crackling voice.

“I see — her ladyship’s waiting-maid. Well, the temptation of sudden wealth so easily acquired was too much for you, as it has been for better men before you; but you were not very scrupulous in the means you used. It seems to me, Ryder, that there is the making of a very pretty villain in you. You knew that this man Horner, the plumber, had been concerned in some such matter before, and that suspicion would rest the more readily upon him. What did you do, then? You made some small job in my lady’s room — you and your confederate Cusack — and you managed that he should be the man sent for. Then, when he had left, you rifled the jewel-case, raised the alarm, and had this unfortunate man arrested. You then—”

Ryder threw himself down suddenly upon the rug and clutched at my companion’s knees. “For God’s sake, have mercy!” he shrieked. “Think of my father! Of my mother! It would break their hearts. I never went wrong before! I never will again. I swear it. I’ll swear it on a Bible. Oh, don’t bring it into court! For Christ’s sake, don’t!”

“Get back into your chair!” said Holmes sternly. “It is very well to cringe and crawl now, but you thought little enough of this poor Horner in the dock for a crime of which he knew nothing.”

“I will fly, Mr. Holmes. I will leave the country, sir. Then the charge against him will break down.”

“Hum! We will talk about that. And now let us hear a true account of the next act. How came the stone into the goose, and how came the goose into the open market? Tell us the truth, for there lies your only hope of safety.”

Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. “I will tell you it just as it happened, sir,” said he. “When Horner had been arrested, it seemed to me that it would be best for me to get away with the stone at once, for I did not know at what moment the police might not take it into their heads to search me and my room. There was no place about the hotel where it would be safe. I went out, as if on some commission, and I made for my sister’s house. She had married a man named Oakshott, and lived in Brixton Road, where she fattened fowls for the market. All the way there every man I met seemed to me to be a policeman or a detective; and, for all that it was a cold night, the sweat was pouring down my face before I came to the Brixton Road. My sister asked me what was the matter, and why I was so pale; but I told her that I had been upset by the jewel robbery at the hotel. Then I went into the back yard and smoked a pipe and wondered what it would be best to do.

"I had a friend once called Maudsley, who went to the bad, and has just been serving his time in Pentonville. One day he had met me, and fell into talk about the ways of thieves, and how they could get rid of what they stole. I knew that he would be true to me, for I knew one or two things about him; so I made up my mind to go right on to Kilburn, where he lived, and take him into my confidence. He would show me how to turn the stone into money. But how to get to him in safety? I thought of the agonies I had gone through in coming from the hotel. I might at any moment be seized and searched, and there would be the stone in my waistcoat pocket. I was leaning against the wall at the time and looking at the geese which were waddling about round my feet, and suddenly an idea came into my head which showed me how I could beat the best detective that ever lived.

"My sister had told me some weeks before that I might have the pick of her geese for a Christmas present, and I knew that she was always as good as her word. I would take my goose now, and in it I would carry my stone to Kilburn. There was a little shed in the yard, and behind this I drove one of the birds — a fine big one, white, with a barred tail. I caught it, and prying its bill open, I thrust the stone down its throat as far as my finger could reach. The bird gave a gulp, and I felt the stone pass along its gullet and down into its crop. But the creature flapped and struggled, and out came my sister to know what was the matter. As I turned to speak to her the brute broke loose and fluttered off among the others.

" 'Whatever were you doing with that bird, Jem?' says she.

" 'Well,' said I, 'you said you'd give me one for Christmas, and I was feeling which was the fattest.'

" 'Oh,' says she, 'we've set yours aside for you — Jem's bird, we call it. It's the big white one over yonder. There's twenty-six of them, which makes one for you, and one for us, and two dozen for the market.'

“ ’Thank you, Maggie,’ says I; ‘but if it is all the same to you, I’d rather have that one I was handling just now.’

“ ’The other is a good three pound heavier,’ said she, ‘and we fattened it expressly for you.’

“ ’Never mind. I’ll have the other, and I’ll take it now,’ said I.

“ ’Oh, just as you like,’ said she, a little huffed. ‘Which is it you want, then?’

“ ’That white one with the barred tail, right in the middle of the flock.’

“ ’Oh, very well. Kill it and take it with you.’

“Well, I did what she said, Mr. Holmes, and I carried the bird all the way to Kilburn. I told my pal what I had done, for he was a man that it was easy to tell a thing like that to. He laughed until he choked, and we got a knife and opened the goose. My heart turned to water, for there was no sign of the stone, and I knew that some terrible mistake had occurred. I left the bird, rushed back to my sister’s, and hurried into the back yard. There was not a bird to be seen there.

“ ’Where are they all, Maggie?’ I cried.

“ ’Gone to the dealer’s, Jem.’

“ ’Which dealer’s?’

“ ’Breckinridge, of Covent Garden.’

“ ’But was there another with a barred tail?’ I asked, ‘the same as the one I chose?’

“ ’Yes, Jem; there were two barred-tailed ones, and I could never tell them apart.’

“Well, then, of course I saw it all, and I ran off as hard as my feet would carry me to this man Breckinridge; but he had sold the lot at once, and not one word would he tell me as to where they had gone. You heard him yourselves to-night. Well, he has always answered me like that. My sister thinks that I am going mad. Sometimes I think that I am myself. And now — and now I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which I sold my character. God help me! God help me!” He burst into convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands.

There was a long silence, broken only by his heavy breathing and by the measured tapping of Sherlock Holmes’ finger-tips upon the edge of the table. Then my friend rose and threw open the door.

“Get out!” said he.

“What, sir! Oh, Heaven bless you!”

“No more words. Get out!”

And no more words were needed. There was a rush, a clatter upon the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running footfalls from the street.

“After all, Watson,” said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his clay pipe, “I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing; but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and you make him a gaol-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. If you will have the goodness to touch the bell, Doctor, we will begin another investigation, in which, also a bird will be the chief feature.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year ‘83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter-past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

“Very sorry to knock you up, Watson,” said he, “but it’s the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you.”

“What is it, then — a fire?”

“No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance.”

“My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything.”

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

“Good-morning, madam,” said Holmes cheerily. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering.”

“It is not cold which makes me shiver,” said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

“What, then?”

“It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror.” She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

“You must not fear,” said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. “We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see.”

“You know me, then?”

“No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station.”

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

“There is no mystery, my dear madam,” said he, smiling. “The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver.”

“Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct,” said she. “I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to — none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful.”

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

“Farintosh,” said he. “Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter.”

“Alas!” replied our visitor, “the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me.”

“I am all attention, madam.”

“My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.”

Holmes nodded his head. “The name is familiar to me,” said he.

“The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and

Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money — not less than £1000 a year — and this she bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died — she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

“Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gipsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

“You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has.”

“Your sister is dead, then?”

“She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother’s maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady’s house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion.”

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

“Pray be precise as to details,” said he.

“It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott’s, the second my sister’s, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?”

“Perfectly so.”

“The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o’clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

“ ’Tell me, Helen,’ said she, ‘have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?’

“ ’Never,’ said I.

“ ’I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?’

“ ’Certainly not. But why?’

“ ’Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from — perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.’

“ ’No, I have not. It must be those wretched gipsies in the plantation.’

“ ’Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.’

“ ’Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.’

“ ’Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.’ She smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.”

“Indeed,” said Holmes. “Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?”

“Always.”

“And why?”

“I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked.”

“Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement.”

“I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes, "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"

"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived."

"Was your sister dressed?"

"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box."

"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?"

"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott's conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."

"How about poison?"

"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."

"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"

"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band — a speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage — Percy Armitage — the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice.”

“You have done wisely,” said my friend. “But have you told me all?”

“Yes, all.”

“Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather.”

“Why, what do you mean?”

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor’s knee. Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

“You have been cruelly used,” said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. “He is a hard man,” she said, “and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength.”

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

“This is a very deep business,” he said at last. “There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?”

“As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way.”

“Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?”

“By no means.”

“Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?”

“I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o’clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming.”

“And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and breakfast?”

“No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon.” She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

“And what do you think of it all, Watson?” asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

“It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business.”

“Dark enough and sinister enough.”

“Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end.”

“What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?”

“I cannot think.”

“When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gipsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his stepdaughter’s marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars that secured the shutters falling back into its place, I think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines.”

“But what, then, did the gipsies do?”

“I cannot imagine.”

“I see many objections to any such theory.”

“And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of the devil!”

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

“Which of you is Holmes?” asked this apparition.

“My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me,” said my companion quietly.

“I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran.”

“Indeed, Doctor,” said Holmes blandly. “Pray take a seat.”

“I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?”

“It is a little cold for the time of the year,” said Holmes.

“What has she been saying to you?” screamed the old man furiously.

“But I have heard that the crocuses promise well,” continued my companion imperturbably.

“Ha! You put me off, do you?” said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. “I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler.”

My friend smiled.

“Holmes, the busybody!”

His smile broadened.

“Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!”

Holmes chuckled heartily. “Your conversation is most entertaining,” said he. “When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught.”

“I will go when I have said my say. Don’t you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here.” He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

“See that you keep yourself out of my grip,” he snarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace he strode out of the room.

“He seems a very amiable person,” said Holmes, laughing. “I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own.” As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

“Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors’ Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter.”

It was nearly one o’clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

“I have seen the will of the deceased wife,” said he. “To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife’s death was little short of £1100, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning’s work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley’s No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need.”

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

“Look there!” said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

“Stoke Moran?” said he.

“Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott,” remarked the driver.

“There is some building going on there,” said Holmes; “that is where we are going.”

“There’s the village,” said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; “but if you want to get to the house, you’ll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking.”

“And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner,” observed Holmes, shading his eyes. “Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest.”

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

“I thought it as well,” said Holmes as we climbed the stile, “that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word.”

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. “I have been waiting so eagerly for you,” she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. “All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening.”

“We have had the pleasure of making the doctor’s acquaintance,” said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

“Good heavens!” she cried, “he has followed me, then.”

“So it appears.”

“He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?”

“He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt’s at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine.”

The building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters?"

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

“Where does that bell communicate with?” he asked at last pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

“It goes to the housekeeper’s room.”

“It looks newer than the other things?”

“Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago.”

“Your sister asked for it, I suppose?”

“No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves.”

“Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor.” He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

“Why, it’s a dummy,” said he.

“Won’t it ring?”

“No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is.”

“How very absurd! I never noticed that before.”

“Very strange!” muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. “There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!”

“That is also quite modern,” said the lady.

“Done about the same time as the bell-rope?” remarked Holmes.

“Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time.”

“They seem to have been of a most interesting character — dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment.”

Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

“What’s in here?” he asked, tapping the safe.

“My stepfather’s business papers.”

“Oh! you have seen inside, then?”

“Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers.”

“There isn’t a cat in it, for example?”

“No. What a strange idea!”

“Well, look at this!” He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.

“No; we don’t keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon.”

“Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I daresay. There is one point which I should wish to determine.” He squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

“Thank you. That is quite settled,” said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. “Hullo! Here is something interesting!”

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

“What do you make of that, Watson?”

“It’s a common enough lash. But I don’t know why it should be tied.”

“That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it’s a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn.”

I had never seen my friend’s face so grim or his brow so dark as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie.

“It is very essential, Miss Stoner,” said he, “that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect.”

“I shall most certainly do so.”

“The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance.”

“I assure you that I am in your hands.”

“In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room.”

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

“Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?”

“Yes, that is the Crown.”

“Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?”

“Certainly.”

“You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night.”

“Oh, yes, easily.”

“The rest you will leave in our hands.”

“But what will you do?”

“We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you.”

“I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind,” said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion’s sleeve.

“Perhaps I have.”

“Then, for pity’s sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister’s death.”

“I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak.”

“You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright.”

“No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you.”

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the doctor's voice and saw the fury with which he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes as we sat together in the gathering darkness, "I have really some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of danger."

"Can I be of assistance?"

"Your presence might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very kind of you."

"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

“I cannot as yet see any connection.”

“Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?”

“No.”

“It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?”

“I cannot say that I have.”

“The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope — or so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull.”

“Holmes,” I cried, “I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime.”

“Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness’ sake let us have a quiet pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful.”

About nine o’clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

“That is our signal,” said Holmes, springing to his feet; “it comes from the middle window.”

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

“My God!” I whispered; “did you see it?”

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh and put his lips to my ear.

“It is a nice household,” he murmured. “That is the baboon.”

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes’ example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

“The least sound would be fatal to our plans.”

I nodded to show that I had heard.

“We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator.”

I nodded again.

“Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair.”

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn catlike whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible — a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

“You see it, Watson?” he yelled. “You see it?”

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. He had ceased to strike and was gazing up at the ventilator when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

“What can it mean?” I gasped.

“It means that it is all over,” Holmes answered. “And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr. Roylott’s room.”

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter and let the county police know what has happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile's neck he drew it from its horrid perch and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gipsies, and the use of the word 'band,' which was used by the poor girl, no doubt, to explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a bridge for something passing through the hole and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENGINEER’S THUMB

Of all the problems which have been submitted to my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for solution during the years of our intimacy, there were only two which I was the means of introducing to his notice — that of Mr. Hatherley’s thumb, and that of Colonel Warburton’s madness. Of these the latter may have afforded a finer field for an acute and original observer, but the other was so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details that it may be the more worthy of being placed upon record, even if it gave my friend fewer openings for those deductive methods of reasoning by which he achieved such remarkable results. The story has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but, like all such narratives, its effect is much less striking when set forth *en bloc* in a single half-column of print than when the facts slowly evolve before your own eyes, and the mystery clears gradually away as each new discovery furnishes a step which leads on to the complete truth. At the time the circumstances made a deep impression upon me, and the lapse of two years has hardly served to weaken the effect.

It was in the summer of ‘89, not long after my marriage, that the events occurred which I am now about to summarise. I had returned to civil practice and had finally abandoned Holmes in his Baker Street rooms, although I continually visited him and occasionally even persuaded him to forgo his Bohemian habits so far as to come and visit us. My practice had steadily increased, and as I happened to live at no very great distance from Paddington Station, I got a few patients from among the officials. One of these, whom I had cured of a painful and lingering disease, was never weary of advertising my virtues and of endeavouring to send me on every sufferer over whom he might have any influence.

One morning, at a little before seven o’clock, I was awakened by the maid tapping at the door to announce that two men had come from Paddington and were waiting in the consulting-room. I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my old ally, the guard, came out of the room and closed the door tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

"It's a new patient," he whispered. "I thought I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't slip away. There he is, all safe and sound. I must go now, Doctor; I have my dooties, just the same as you." And off he went, this trusty tout, without even giving me time to thank him.

I entered my consulting-room and found a gentleman seated by the table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a soft cloth cap which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong, masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I might find a doctor, a worthy fellow very kindly escorted me here. I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon the side-table."

I took it up and glanced at it. "Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic engineer, 16A, Victoria Street (3rd floor)." That was the name, style, and abode of my morning visitor. "I regret that I have kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library-chair. "You are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself a monotonous occupation."

"Oh, my night could not be called monotonous," said he, and laughed. He laughed very heartily, with a high, ringing note, leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides. All my medical instincts rose up against that laugh.

"Stop it!" I cried; "pull yourself together!" and I poured out some water from a caraffe.

It was useless, however. He was off in one of those hysterical outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis is over and gone. Presently he came to himself once more, very weary and pale-looking.

"I have been making a fool of myself," he gasped.

"Not at all. Drink this." I dashed some brandy into the water, and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

“That’s better!” said he. “And now, Doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be.”

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it. There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red, spongy surface where the thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

“Good heavens!” I cried, “this is a terrible injury. It must have bled considerably.”

“Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done, and I think that I must have been senseless for a long time. When I came to I found that it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very tightly round the wrist and braced it up with a twig.”

“Excellent! You should have been a surgeon.”

“It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province.”

“This has been done,” said I, examining the wound, “by a very heavy and sharp instrument.”

“A thing like a cleaver,” said he.

“An accident, I presume?”

“By no means.”

“What! a murderous attack?”

“Very murderous indeed.”

“You horrify me.”

I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it, and finally covered it over with cotton wadding and carbolised bandages. He lay back without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

“How is that?” I asked when I had finished.

“Capital! Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man. I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through.”

“Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently trying to your nerves.”

“Oh, no, not now. I shall have to tell my tale to the police; but, between ourselves, if it were not for the convincing evidence of this wound of mine, I should be surprised if they believed my statement, for it is a very extraordinary one, and I have not much in the way of proof with which to back it up; and, even if they believe me, the clues which I can give them are so vague that it is a question whether justice will be done.”

“Ha!” cried I, “if it is anything in the nature of a problem which you desire to see solved, I should strongly recommend you to come to my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, before you go to the official police.”

“Oh, I have heard of that fellow,” answered my visitor, “and I should be very glad if he would take the matter up, though of course I must use the official police as well. Would you give me an introduction to him?”

“I’ll do better. I’ll take you round to him myself.”

“I should be immensely obliged to you.”

“We’ll call a cab and go together. We shall just be in time to have a little breakfast with him. Do you feel equal to it?”

“Yes; I shall not feel easy until I have told my story.”

“Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you in an instant.” I rushed upstairs, explained the matter shortly to my wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my new acquaintance to Baker Street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I expected, lounging about his sitting-room in his dressing-gown, reading the agony column of *The Times* and smoking his before-breakfast pipe, which was composed of all the plugs and dottles left from his smokes of the day before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the mantelpiece. He received us in his quietly genial fashion, ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal. When it was concluded he settled our new acquaintance upon the sofa, placed a pillow beneath his head, and laid a glass of brandy and water within his reach.

“It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr. Hatherley,” said he. “Pray, lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired and keep up your strength with a little stimulant.”

“Thank you,” said my patient. “but I have felt another man since the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences.”

Holmes sat in his big armchair with the weary, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our visitor detailed to us.

“You must know,” said he, “that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London. By profession I am a hydraulic engineer, and I have had considerable experience of my work during the seven years that I was apprenticed to Venner & Matheson, the well-known firm, of

Greenwich. Two years ago, having served my time, and having also come into a fair sum of money through my poor father's death, I determined to start in business for myself and took professional chambers in Victoria Street.

"I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in business a dreary experience. To me it has been exceptionally so. During two years I have had three consultations and one small job, and that is absolutely all that my profession has brought me. My gross takings amount to £27 10*s*. Every day, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I waited in my little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to believe that I should never have any practice at all.

"Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of leaving the office, my clerk entered to say there was a gentleman waiting who wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with the name of 'Colonel Lysander Stark' engraved upon it. Close at his heels came the colonel himself, a man rather over the middle size, but of an exceeding thinness. I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. His whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his outstanding bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his natural habit, and due to no disease, for his eye was bright, his step brisk, and his bearing assured. He was plainly but neatly dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

" 'Mr. Hatherley?' said he, with something of a German accent. 'You have been recommended to me, Mr. Hatherley, as being a man who is not only proficient in his profession but is also discreet and capable of preserving a secret.'

"I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. 'May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?'

" 'Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor and are residing alone in London.'

" 'That is quite correct,' I answered; 'but you will excuse me if I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional qualifications. I understand that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?'

" 'Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute secrecy is quite essential — absolute secrecy, you understand, and of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than from one who lives in the bosom of his family.’

“ ’If I promise to keep a secret,’ said I, ‘you may absolutely depend upon my doing so.’

“He looked very hard at me as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye.

“ ’Do you promise, then?’ said he at last.

“ ’Yes, I promise.’

“ ’Absolute and complete silence before, during, and after? No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?’

“ ’I have already given you my word.’

“ ’Very good.’ He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was empty.

“ ’That’s all right,’ said he, coming back. ‘I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master’s affairs. Now we can talk in safety.’ He drew up his chair very close to mine and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

“A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man. Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from showing my impatience.

“ ’I beg that you will state your business, sir,’ said I; ‘my time is of value.’ Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the words came to my lips.

“ ’How would fifty guineas for a night’s work suit you?’ he asked.

“ ’Most admirably.’

“ ’I say a night’s work, but an hour’s would be nearer the mark. I simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which has got out of gear. If you show us what is wrong we shall soon set it right ourselves. What do you think of such a commission as that?’

“ ’The work appears to be light and the pay munificent.’

“ ’Precisely so. We shall want you to come to-night by the last train.’

“ ’Where to?’

“ ’To Eyford, in Berkshire. It is a little place near the borders of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. There is a train from Paddington which would bring you there at about 11:15.’

“ ’Very good.’

“ ’I shall come down in a carriage to meet you.’

“ ’There is a drive, then?’

“ ’Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. It is a good seven miles from Eyford Station.’

“ ’Then we can hardly get there before midnight. I suppose there would be no chance of a train back. I should be compelled to stop the night.’

“ ’Yes, we could easily give you a shake-down.’

“ ’That is very awkward. Could I not come at some more convenient hour?’

“ ’We have judged it best that you should come late. It is to recompense you for any inconvenience that we are paying to you, a young and unknown man, a fee which would buy an opinion from the very heads of your profession. Still, of course, if you would like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do so.’

“I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they would be to me. ‘Not at all,’ said I, ‘I shall be very happy to accommodate myself to your wishes. I should like, however, to understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to do.’

“ ’Quite so. It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. I have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all laid before you. I suppose that we are absolutely safe from eavesdroppers?’

“ ’Entirely.’

“ ’Then the matter stands thus. You are probably aware that fuller’s-earth is a valuable product, and that it is only found in one or two places in England?’

“ ’I have heard so.’

“ ’Some little time ago I bought a small place — a very small place — within ten miles of Reading. I was fortunate enough to discover that there was a deposit of fuller’s-earth in one of my fields. On examining it, however, I found that this deposit was a comparatively small one, and that it formed a link between two very much larger ones upon the right and left — both of them, however, in the grounds of my neighbours. These good people were absolutely ignorant that their land contained that which was quite as valuable as a gold-mine. Naturally, it was to my interest to buy their land before they discovered its true value, but unfortunately I had no capital by which I could do this. I took a few of my friends into the secret, however, and they suggested that we should quietly and secretly work our own little deposit and that in this way we should earn the money which would enable us to buy the neighbouring fields. This we have now been doing for some time, and in order to help us in our operations we erected a hydraulic press. This press, as I have already explained, has got out of order, and we wish your advice upon the subject. We guard our secret very jealously, however, and if it once became known that we had hydraulic engineers coming to our little house, it would soon rouse inquiry, and then, if the facts came out, it would be good-bye to any chance of getting these fields and carrying out our plans. That is why I have made you promise me that you will not tell a human being that you are going to Eyford to-night. I hope that I make it all plain?'

" 'I quite follow you,' said I. 'The only point which I could not quite understand was what use you could make of a hydraulic press in excavating fuller's-earth, which, as I understand, is dug out like gravel from a pit.'

" 'Ah!' said he carelessly, 'we have our own process. We compress the earth into bricks, so as to remove them without revealing what they are. But that is a mere detail. I have taken you fully into my confidence now, Mr. Hatherley, and I have shown you how I trust you.' He rose as he spoke. 'I shall expect you, then, at Eyford at 11:15.'

" 'I shall certainly be there.'

" 'And not a word to a soul.' He looked at me with a last long, questioning gaze, and then, pressing my hand in a cold, dank grasp, he hurried from the room.

"Well, when I came to think it all over in cool blood I was very much astonished, as you may both think, at this sudden commission which had been intrusted to me. On the one hand, of course, I was glad, for the fee was at least tenfold what I should have asked had I set a price upon my own services, and it was possible that this order might lead to other ones. On the other hand, the face and manner of my patron had made an unpleasant impression upon me, and I could not think that his explanation of the fuller's-earth was sufficient to explain the necessity for my coming at midnight, and his extreme anxiety lest I should tell anyone of my errand. However, I threw all fears to the winds, ate a hearty supper, drove to Paddington, and started off, having obeyed to the letter the injunction as to holding my tongue.

“At Reading I had to change not only my carriage but my station. However, I was in time for the last train to Eyford, and I reached the little dim-lit station after eleven o’clock. I was the only passenger who got out there, and there was no one upon the platform save a single sleepy porter with a lantern. As I passed out through the wicket gate, however, I found my acquaintance of the morning waiting in the shadow upon the other side. Without a word he grasped my arm and hurried me into a carriage, the door of which was standing open. He drew up the windows on either side, tapped on the wood-work, and away we went as fast as the horse could go.”

“One horse?” interjected Holmes.

“Yes, only one.”

“Did you observe the colour?”

“Yes, I saw it by the side-lights when I was stepping into the carriage. It was a chestnut.”

“Tired-looking or fresh?”

“Oh, fresh and glossy.”

“Thank you. I am sorry to have interrupted you. Pray continue your most interesting statement.”

“Away we went then, and we drove for at least an hour. Colonel Lysander Stark had said that it was only seven miles, but I should think, from the rate that we seemed to go, and from the time that we took, that it must have been nearer twelve. He sat at my side in silence all the time, and I was aware, more than once when I glanced in his direction, that he was looking at me with great intensity. The country roads seem to be not very good in that part of the world, for we lurched and jolted terribly. I tried to look out of the windows to see something of where we were, but they were made of frosted glass, and I could make out nothing save the occasional bright blur of a passing light. Now and then I hazarded some remark to break the monotony of the journey, but the colonel answered only in monosyllables, and the conversation soon flagged. At last, however, the bumping of the road was exchanged for the crisp smoothness of a gravel-drive, and the carriage came to a stand. Colonel Lysander Stark sprang out, and, as I followed after him, pulled me swiftly into a porch which gaped in front of us. We stepped, as it were, right out of the carriage and into the hall, so that I failed to catch the most fleeting glance of the front of the house. The instant that I had crossed the threshold the door slammed heavily behind us, and I heard faintly the rattle of the wheels as the carriage drove away.

“It was pitch dark inside the house, and the colonel fumbled about looking for matches and muttering under his breath. Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. It grew broader, and a woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, which she held above her head, pushing her face forward and peering at us. I could see that she was pretty, and from the gloss with which the light shone upon her dark dress I knew that it was a rich material. She spoke a few words in a foreign tongue in a tone as though asking a question, and when my companion answered in a gruff monosyllable she gave such a start that the lamp nearly fell from her hand. Colonel Stark went up to her, whispered something in her ear, and then, pushing her back into the room from whence she had come, he walked towards me again with the lamp in his hand.

“ ’Perhaps you will have the kindness to wait in this room for a few minutes,’ said he, throwing open another door. It was a quiet, little, plainly furnished room, with a round table in the centre, on which several German books were scattered. Colonel Stark laid down the lamp on the top of a harmonium beside the door. ‘I shall not keep you waiting an instant,’ said he, and vanished into the darkness.

“I glanced at the books upon the table, and in spite of my ignorance of German I could see that two of them were treatises on science, the others being volumes of poetry. Then I walked across to the window, hoping that I might catch some glimpse of the country-side, but an oak shutter, heavily barred, was folded across it. It was a wonderfully silent house. There was an old clock ticking loudly somewhere in the passage, but otherwise everything was deadly still. A vague feeling of uneasiness began to steal over me. Who were these German people, and what were they doing living in this strange, out-of-the-way place? And where was the place? I was ten miles or so from Eyford, that was all I knew, but whether north, south, east, or west I had no idea. For that matter, Reading, and possibly other large towns, were within that radius, so the place might not be so secluded, after all. Yet it was quite certain, from the absolute stillness, that we were in the country. I paced up and down the room, humming a tune under my breath to keep up my spirits and feeling that I was thoroughly earning my fifty-guinea fee.

“Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. The woman was standing in the aperture, the darkness of the hall behind her, the yellow light from my lamp beating upon her eager and beautiful face. I could see at a glance that she was sick with fear, and the sight sent a chill to my own heart. She held up one shaking finger to warn me to be silent, and she shot a few whispered words of broken English at me, her eyes glancing back, like those of a frightened horse, into the gloom behind her.

“ ’I would go,’ said she, trying hard, as it seemed to me, to speak calmly; ‘I would go. I should not stay here. There is no good for you to do.’

“ ’But, madam,’ said I, ‘I have not yet done what I came for. I cannot possibly leave until I have seen the machine.’

“ ’It is not worth your while to wait,’ she went on. ‘You can pass through the door; no one hinders.’ And then, seeing that I smiled and shook my head, she suddenly threw aside her constraint and made a step forward, with her hands wrung together. ‘For the love of Heaven!’ she whispered, ‘get away from here before it is too late!’

“But I am somewhat headstrong by nature, and the more ready to engage in an affair when there is some obstacle in the way. I thought of my fifty-guinea fee, of my wearisome journey, and of the unpleasant night which seemed to be before me. Was it all to go for nothing? Why should I slink away without having carried out my commission, and without the payment which was my due? This woman might, for all I knew, be a monomaniac. With a stout bearing, therefore, though her manner had shaken me more than I cared to confess, I still shook my head and declared my intention of remaining where I was. She was about to renew her entreaties when a door slammed overhead, and the sound of several footsteps was heard upon the stairs. She listened for an instant, threw up her hands with a despairing gesture, and vanished as suddenly and as noiselessly as she had come.

“The newcomers were Colonel Lysander Stark and a short thick man with a chinchilla beard growing out of the creases of his double chin, who was introduced to me as Mr. Ferguson.

“ ’This is my secretary and manager,’ said the colonel. ‘By the way, I was under the impression that I left this door shut just now. I fear that you have felt the draught.’

“ ’On the contrary,’ said I, ‘I opened the door myself because I felt the room to be a little close.’

“He shot one of his suspicious looks at me. ‘Perhaps we had better proceed to business, then,’ said he. ‘Mr. Ferguson and I will take you up to see the machine.’

“ ’I had better put my hat on, I suppose.’

“ ’Oh, no, it is in the house.’

“ ’What, you dig fuller’s-earth in the house?’

“ ’No, no. This is only where we compress it. But never mind that. All we wish you to do is to examine the machine and to let us know what is wrong with it.’

“We went upstairs together, the colonel first with the lamp, the fat manager and I behind him. It was a labyrinth of an old house, with corridors, passages, narrow winding staircases, and little low doors, the thresholds of which were hollowed out by the generations who had crossed them. There were no carpets and no signs of any furniture above the ground floor, while the plaster was peeling off the walls, and the damp was breaking through in green, unhealthy blotches. I tried to put on as unconcerned an air as possible, but I had not forgotten the warnings of the lady, even though I disregarded them, and I kept a keen eye upon my two companions. Ferguson appeared to be a morose and silent man, but I could see from the little that he said that he was at least a fellow-countryman.

“Colonel Lysander Stark stopped at last before a low door, which he unlocked. Within was a small, square room, in which the three of us could hardly get at one time. Ferguson remained outside, and the colonel ushered me in.

“ ’We are now,’ said he, ‘actually within the hydraulic press, and it would be a particularly unpleasant thing for us if anyone were to turn it on. The ceiling of this small chamber is really the end of the descending piston, and it comes down with the force of many tons upon this metal floor. There are small lateral columns of water outside which receive the force, and which transmit and multiply it in the manner which is familiar to you. The machine goes readily enough, but there is some stiffness in the working of it, and it has lost a little of its force. Perhaps you will have the goodness to look it over and to show us how we can set it right.’

“I took the lamp from him, and I examined the machine very thoroughly. It was indeed a gigantic one, and capable of exercising enormous pressure. When I passed outside, however, and pressed down the levers which controlled it, I knew at once by the whishing sound that there was a slight leakage, which allowed a regurgitation of water through one of the side cylinders. An examination showed that one of the india-rubber bands which was round the head of a driving-rod had shrunk so as not quite to fill the socket along which it worked. This was clearly the cause of the loss of power, and I pointed it out to my companions, who followed my remarks very carefully and asked several practical questions as to how they should proceed to set it right. When I had made it clear to them, I returned to the main chamber of the machine and took a good look at it to satisfy my own curiosity. It was obvious at a glance that the story of the fuller's-earth was the merest fabrication, for it would be absurd to suppose that so powerful an engine could be designed for so inadequate a purpose. The walls were of wood, but the floor consisted of a large iron trough, and when I came to examine it I could see a crust of metallic deposit all over it. I had stooped and was scraping at this to see exactly what it was when I heard a muttered exclamation in German and saw the cadaverous face of the colonel looking down at me.

“ 'What are you doing there?' he asked.

“I felt angry at having been tricked by so elaborate a story as that which he had told me. 'I was admiring your fuller's-earth,' said I; 'I think that I should be better able to advise you as to your machine if I knew what the exact purpose was for which it was used.'

“The instant that I uttered the words I regretted the rashness of my speech. His face set hard, and a baleful light sprang up in his grey eyes.

“ 'Very well,' said he, 'you shall know all about the machine.' He took a step backward, slammed the little door, and turned the key in the lock. I rushed towards it and pulled at the handle, but it was quite secure, and did not give in the least to my kicks and shoves. 'Hullo!' I yelled. 'Hullo! Colonel! Let me out!'

“And then suddenly in the silence I heard a sound which sent my heart into my mouth. It was the clank of the levers and the swish of the leaking cylinder. He had set the engine at work. The lamp still stood upon the floor where I had placed it when examining the trough. By its light I saw that the black ceiling was coming down upon me, slowly, jerkily, but, as none knew better than myself, with a force which must within a minute grind me to a shapeless pulp. I threw myself, screaming, against the door, and dragged with my nails at the lock. I implored the colonel to let me out, but the remorseless clanking of the levers drowned my cries. The ceiling was only a foot or two above my head, and with my hand upraised I could feel its hard, rough surface. Then it flashed through my mind that the pain of my death would depend very much upon the position in which I met it. If I lay on my face the weight would come upon my spine, and I shuddered to think of that dreadful snap. Easier the other way, perhaps; and yet, had I the nerve to lie and look up at that deadly black shadow wavering down upon me? Already I was unable to stand erect, when my eye caught something which brought a gush of hope back to my heart.

"I have said that though the floor and ceiling were of iron, the walls were of wood. As I gave a last hurried glance around, I saw a thin line of yellow light between two of the boards, which broadened and broadened as a small panel was pushed backward. For an instant I could hardly believe that here was indeed a door which led away from death. The next instant I threw myself through, and lay half-fainting upon the other side. The panel had closed again behind me, but the crash of the lamp, and a few moments afterwards the clang of the two slabs of metal, told me how narrow had been my escape.

"I was recalled to myself by a frantic plucking at my wrist, and I found myself lying upon the stone floor of a narrow corridor, while a woman bent over me and tugged at me with her left hand, while she held a candle in her right. It was the same good friend whose warning I had so foolishly rejected.

" 'Come! come!' she cried breathlessly. 'They will be here in a moment. They will see that you are not there. Oh, do not waste the so-precious time, but come!'

"This time, at least, I did not scorn her advice. I staggered to my feet and ran with her along the corridor and down a winding stair. The latter led to another broad passage, and just as we reached it we heard the sound of running feet and the shouting of two voices, one answering the other from the floor on which we were and from the one beneath. My guide stopped and looked about her like one who is at her wit's end. Then she threw open a door which led into a bedroom, through the window of which the moon was shining brightly.

" 'It is your only chance,' said she. 'It is high, but it may be that you can jump it.'

"As she spoke a light sprang into view at the further end of the passage, and I saw the lean figure of Colonel Lysander Stark rushing forward with a lantern in one hand and a weapon like a butcher's cleaver in the other. I rushed across the bedroom, flung open the window, and looked out. How quiet and sweet and wholesome the garden looked in the moonlight, and it could not be more than thirty feet down. I clambered out upon the sill, but I hesitated to jump until I should have heard what passed between my saviour and the ruffian who pursued me. If she were ill-used, then at any risks I was determined to go back to her assistance. The thought had hardly flashed through my mind before he was at the door, pushing his way past her; but she threw her arms round him and tried to hold him back.

“ ’Fritz! Fritz!’ she cried in English, ‘remember your promise after the last time. You said it should not be again. He will be silent! Oh, he will be silent!’

“ ’You are mad, Elise!’ he shouted, struggling to break away from her. ‘You will be the ruin of us. He has seen too much. Let me pass, I say!’ He dashed her to one side, and, rushing to the window, cut at me with his heavy weapon. I had let myself go, and was hanging by the hands to the sill, when his blow fell. I was conscious of a dull pain, my grip loosened, and I fell into the garden below.

“I was shaken but not hurt by the fall; so I picked myself up and rushed off among the bushes as hard as I could run, for I understood that I was far from being out of danger yet. Suddenly, however, as I ran, a deadly dizziness and sickness came over me. I glanced down at my hand, which was throbbing painfully, and then, for the first time, saw that my thumb had been cut off and that the blood was pouring from my wound. I endeavoured to tie my handkerchief round it, but there came a sudden buzzing in my ears, and next moment I fell in a dead faint among the rose-bushes.

“How long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. It must have been a very long time, for the moon had sunk, and a bright morning was breaking when I came to myself. My clothes were all sodden with dew, and my coat-sleeve was drenched with blood from my wounded thumb. The smarting of it recalled in an instant all the particulars of my night’s adventure, and I sprang to my feet with the feeling that I might hardly yet be safe from my pursuers. But to my astonishment, when I came to look round me, neither house nor garden were to be seen. I had been lying in an angle of the hedge close by the highroad, and just a little lower down was a long building, which proved, upon my approaching it, to be the very station at which I had arrived upon the previous night. Were it not for the ugly wound upon my hand, all that had passed during those dreadful hours might have been an evil dream.

“Half dazed, I went into the station and asked about the morning train. There would be one to Reading in less than an hour. The same porter was on duty, I found, as had been there when I arrived. I inquired of him whether he had ever heard of Colonel Lysander Stark. The name was strange to him. Had he observed a carriage the night before waiting for me? No, he had not. Was there a police-station anywhere near? There was one about three miles off.

“It was too far for me to go, weak and ill as I was. I determined to wait until I got back to town before telling my story to the police. It was a little past six when I arrived, so I went first to have my wound dressed, and then the doctor was kind enough to bring me along here. I put the case into your hands and shall do exactly what you advise.”

We both sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. Then Sherlock Holmes pulled down from the shelf one of the ponderous commonplace books in which he placed his cuttings.

“Here is an advertisement which will interest you,” said he. “It appeared in all the papers about a year ago. Listen to this: ‘Lost, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged twenty-six, a hydraulic engineer. Left his lodgings at ten o’clock at night, and has not been heard of since. Was dressed in,’ etc., etc. Ha! That represents the last time that the colonel needed to have his machine overhauled, I fancy.”

“Good heavens!” cried my patient. “Then that explains what the girl said.”

“Undoubtedly. It is quite clear that the colonel was a cool and desperate man, who was absolutely determined that nothing should stand in the way of his little game, like those out-and-out pirates who will leave no survivor from a captured ship. Well, every moment now is precious, so if you feel equal to it we shall go down to Scotland Yard at once as a preliminary to starting for Eyford.”

Some three hours or so afterwards we were all in the train together, bound from Reading to the little Berkshire village. There were Sherlock Holmes, the hydraulic engineer, Inspector Bradstreet, of Scotland Yard, a plain-clothes man, and myself. Bradstreet had spread an ordnance map of the county out upon the seat and was busy with his compasses drawing a circle with Eyford for its centre.

“There you are,” said he. “That circle is drawn at a radius of ten miles from the village. The place we want must be somewhere near that line. You said ten miles, I think, sir."

"It was an hour's good drive."

"And you think that they brought you back all that way when you were unconscious?"

"They must have done so. I have a confused memory, too, of having been lifted and conveyed somewhere."

"What I cannot understand," said I, "is why they should have spared you when they found you lying fainting in the garden. Perhaps the villain was softened by the woman's entreaties."

"I hardly think that likely. I never saw a more inexorable face in my life."

"Oh, we shall soon clear up all that," said Bradstreet. "Well, I have drawn my circle, and I only wish I knew at what point upon it the folk that we are in search of are to be found."

"I think I could lay my finger on it," said Holmes quietly.

"Really, now!" cried the inspector, "you have formed your opinion! Come, now, we shall see who agrees with you. I say it is south, for the country is more deserted there."

"And I say east," said my patient.

"I am for west," remarked the plain-clothes man. "There are several quiet little villages up there."

"And I am for north," said I, "because there are no hills there, and our friend says that he did not notice the carriage go up any."

"Come," cried the inspector, laughing; "it's a very pretty diversity of opinion. We have boxed the compass among us. Who do you give your casting vote to?"

"You are all wrong."

"But we can't all be."

"Oh, yes, you can. This is my point." He placed his finger in the centre of the circle. "This is where we shall find them."

"But the twelve-mile drive?" gasped Hatherley.

"Six out and six back. Nothing simpler. You say yourself that the horse was fresh and glossy when you got in. How could it be that if it had gone twelve miles over heavy roads?"

"Indeed, it is a likely ruse enough," observed Bradstreet thoughtfully. "Of course there can be no doubt as to the nature of this gang."

"None at all," said Holmes. "They are coiners on a large scale, and have used the machine to form the amalgam which has taken the place of silver."

“We have known for some time that a clever gang was at work,” said the inspector. “They have been turning out half-crowns by the thousand. We even traced them as far as Reading, but could get no farther, for they had covered their traces in a way that showed that they were very old hands. But now, thanks to this lucky chance, I think that we have got them right enough.”

But the inspector was mistaken, for those criminals were not destined to fall into the hands of justice. As we rolled into Eyford Station we saw a gigantic column of smoke which streamed up from behind a small clump of trees in the neighbourhood and hung like an immense ostrich feather over the landscape.

“A house on fire?” asked Bradstreet as the train steamed off again on its way.

“Yes, sir!” said the station-master.

“When did it break out?”

“I hear that it was during the night, sir, but it has got worse, and the whole place is in a blaze.”

“Whose house is it?”

“Dr. Becher’s.”

“Tell me,” broke in the engineer, “is Dr. Becher a German, very thin, with a long, sharp nose?”

The station-master laughed heartily. “No, sir, Dr. Becher is an Englishman, and there isn’t a man in the parish who has a better-lined waistcoat. But he has a gentleman staying with him, a patient, as I understand, who is a foreigner, and he looks as if a little good Berkshire beef would do him no harm.”

The station-master had not finished his speech before we were all hastening in the direction of the fire. The road topped a low hill, and there was a great widespread whitewashed building in front of us, spouting fire at every chink and window, while in the garden in front three fire-engines were vainly striving to keep the flames under.

“That’s it!” cried Hatherley, in intense excitement. “There is the gravel-drive, and there are the rose-bushes where I lay. That second window is the one that I jumped from.”

“Well, at least,” said Holmes, “you have had your revenge upon them. There can be no question that it was your oil-lamp which, when it was crushed in the press, set fire to the wooden walls, though no doubt they were too excited in the chase after you to observe it at the time. Now keep your eyes open in this crowd for your friends of last night, though I very much fear that they are a good hundred miles off by now.”

And Holmes’ fears came to be realised, for from that day to this no word has ever been heard either of the beautiful woman, the sinister German, or the morose Englishman. Early that morning a peasant had met a cart containing several people and some very bulky boxes driving rapidly in the direction of Reading, but there all traces of the fugitives disappeared, and even Holmes’ ingenuity failed ever to discover the least clue as to their whereabouts.

The firemen had been much perturbed at the strange arrangements which they had found within, and still more so by discovering a newly severed human thumb upon a window-sill of the second floor. About sunset, however, their efforts were at last successful, and they subdued the flames, but not before the roof had fallen in, and the whole place been reduced to such absolute ruin that, save some twisted cylinders and iron piping, not a trace remained of the machinery which had cost our unfortunate acquaintance so dearly. Large masses of nickel and of tin were discovered stored in an out-house, but no coins were to be found, which may have explained the presence of those bulky boxes which have been already referred to.

How our hydraulic engineer had been conveyed from the garden to the spot where he recovered his senses might have remained forever a mystery were it not for the soft mould, which told us a very plain tale. He had evidently been carried down by two persons, one of whom had remarkably small feet and the other unusually large ones. On the whole, it was most probable that the silent Englishman, being less bold or less murderous than his companion, had assisted the woman to bear the unconscious man out of the way of danger.

“Well,” said our engineer ruefully as we took our seats to return once more to London, “it has been a pretty business for me! I have lost my thumb and I have lost a fifty-guinea fee, and what have I gained?”

“Experience,” said Holmes, laughing. “Indirectly it may be of value, you know; you have only to put it into words to gain the reputation of being excellent company for the remainder of your existence.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE NOBLE BACHELOR

The Lord St. Simon marriage, and its curious termination, have long ceased to be a subject of interest in those exalted circles in which the unfortunate bridegroom moves. Fresh scandals have eclipsed it, and their more piquant details have drawn the gossips away from this four-year-old drama. As I have reason to believe, however, that the full facts have never been revealed to the general public, and as my friend Sherlock Holmes had a considerable share in clearing the matter up, I feel that no memoir of him would be complete without some little sketch of this remarkable episode.

It was a few weeks before my own marriage, during the days when I was still sharing rooms with Holmes in Baker Street, that he came home from an afternoon stroll to find a letter on the table waiting for him. I had remained indoors all day, for the weather had taken a sudden turn to rain, with high autumnal winds, and the Jezail bullet which I had brought back in one of my limbs as a relic of my Afghan campaign throbbed with dull persistence. With my body in one easy-chair and my legs upon another, I had surrounded myself with a cloud of newspapers until at last, saturated with the news of the day, I tossed them all aside and lay listless, watching the huge crest and monogram upon the envelope upon the table and wondering lazily who my friend's noble correspondent could be.

"Here is a very fashionable epistle," I remarked as he entered. "Your morning letters, if I remember right, were from a fish-monger and a tide-waiter."

"Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety," he answered, smiling, "and the humbler are usually the more interesting. This looks like one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie."

He broke the seal and glanced over the contents.

"Oh, come, it may prove to be something of interest, after all."

"Not social, then?"

"No, distinctly professional."

"And from a noble client?"

"One of the highest in England."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

“I assure you, Watson, without affectation, that the status of my client is a matter of less moment to me than the interest of his case. It is just possible, however, that that also may not be wanting in this new investigation. You have been reading the papers diligently of late, have you not?”

“It looks like it,” said I ruefully, pointing to a huge bundle in the corner. “I have had nothing else to do.”

“It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. I read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. The latter is always instructive. But if you have followed recent events so closely you must have read about Lord St. Simon and his wedding?”

“Oh, yes, with the deepest interest.”

“That is well. The letter which I hold in my hand is from Lord St. Simon. I will read it to you, and in return you must turn over these papers and let me have whatever bears upon the matter. This is what he says:

“ ’MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES: — Lord Backwater tells me that I may place implicit reliance upon your judgment and discretion. I have determined, therefore, to call upon you and to consult you in reference to the very painful event which has occurred in connection with my wedding. Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, is acting already in the matter, but he assures me that he sees no objection to your co-operation, and that he even thinks that it might be of some assistance. I will call at four o’clock in the afternoon, and, should you have any other engagement at that time, I hope that you will postpone it, as this matter is of paramount importance. Yours faithfully,

“ ’ST. SIMON.’

“It is dated from Grosvenor Mansions, written with a quill pen, and the noble lord has had the misfortune to get a smear of ink upon the outer side of his right little finger,” remarked Holmes as he folded up the epistle.

“He says four o’clock. It is three now. He will be here in an hour.”

“Then I have just time, with your assistance, to get clear upon the subject. Turn over those papers and arrange the extracts in their order of time, while I take a glance as to who our client is.” He picked a red-covered volume from a line of books of reference beside the mantelpiece. “Here he is,” said he, sitting down and flattening it out upon his knee. “ ’Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral.’ Hum! ‘Arms: Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. Born in 1846.’

He’s forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage. Was Under-Secretary for the colonies in a late administration. The Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs. They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on the distaff side. Ha! Well, there is nothing very instructive in all this. I think that I must turn to you Watson, for something more solid.”

“I have very little difficulty in finding what I want,” said I, “for the facts are quite recent, and the matter struck me as remarkable. I feared to refer them to you, however, as I knew that you had an inquiry on hand and that you disliked the intrusion of other matters.”

“Oh, you mean the little problem of the Grosvenor Square furniture van. That is quite cleared up now — though, indeed, it was obvious from the first. Pray give me the results of your newspaper selections.”

“Here is the first notice which I can find. It is in the personal column of the *Morning Post*, and dates, as you see, some weeks back: ‘A marriage has been arranged,’ it says, ‘and will, if rumour is correct, very shortly take place, between Lord Robert St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral, and Miss Hatty Doran, the only daughter of Aloysius Doran. Esq., of San Francisco, Cal., U.S.A.’ That is all.”

“Terse and to the point,” remarked Holmes, stretching his long, thin legs towards the fire.

“There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society papers of the same week. Ah, here it is: ‘There will soon be a call for protection in the marriage market, for the present free-trade principle appears to tell heavily against our home product. One by one the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across the Atlantic. An important addition has been made during the last week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by these charming invaders. Lord St. Simon, who has shown himself for over twenty years proof against the little god’s arrows, has now definitely announced his approaching marriage with Miss Hatty Doran, the fascinating daughter of a California millionaire. Miss Doran, whose graceful figure and striking face attracted much attention at the Westbury House festivities, is an only child, and it is currently reported that her dowry will run to considerably over the six figures, with expectancies for the future. As it is an open secret that the Duke of Balmoral has been compelled to sell his pictures within the last few years, and as Lord St. Simon has no property of his own save the small estate of Birchmoor, it is obvious that the Californian heiress is not the only gainer by an alliance which will enable her to make the easy and common transition from a Republican lady to a British peeress.' "

"Anything else?" asked Holmes, yawning.

"Oh, yes; plenty. Then there is another note in the *Morning Post* to say that the marriage would be an absolutely quiet one, that it would be at St. George's, Hanover Square, that only half a dozen intimate friends would be invited, and that the party would return to the furnished house at Lancaster Gate which has been taken by Mr. Aloysius Doran. Two days later — that is, on Wednesday last — there is a curt announcement that the wedding had taken place, and that the honeymoon would be passed at Lord Backwater's place, near Petersfield. Those are all the notices which appeared before the disappearance of the bride."

"Before the what?" asked Holmes with a start.

"The vanishing of the lady."

"When did she vanish, then?"

"At the wedding breakfast."

"Indeed. This is more interesting than it promised to be; quite dramatic, in fact."

"Yes; it struck me as being a little out of the common."

"They often vanish before the ceremony, and occasionally during the honeymoon; but I cannot call to mind anything quite so prompt as this. Pray let me have the details."

"I warn you that they are very incomplete."

"Perhaps we may make them less so."

"Such as they are, they are set forth in a single article of a morning paper of yesterday, which I will read to you. It is headed, 'Singular Occurrence at a Fashionable Wedding':

" 'The family of Lord Robert St. Simon has been thrown into the greatest consternation by the strange and painful episodes which have taken place in connection with his wedding. The ceremony, as shortly announced in the papers of yesterday, occurred on the previous morning; but it is only now that it has been possible to confirm the strange rumours which have been so persistently floating about. In spite of the attempts of the friends to hush the matter up, so much public attention has now been drawn to it that no good purpose can be served by affecting to disregard what is a common subject for conversation.

“ ’The ceremony, which was performed at St. George’s, Hanover Square, was a very quiet one, no one being present save the father of the bride, Mr. Aloysius Doran, the Duchess of Balmoral, Lord Backwater, Lord Eustace and Lady Clara St. Simon (the younger brother and sister of the bridegroom), and Lady Alicia Whittington. The whole party proceeded afterwards to the house of Mr. Aloysius Doran, at Lancaster Gate, where breakfast had been prepared. It appears that some little trouble was caused by a woman, whose name has not been ascertained, who endeavoured to force her way into the house after the bridal party, alleging that she had some claim upon Lord St. Simon. It was only after a painful and prolonged scene that she was ejected by the butler and the footman. The bride, who had fortunately entered the house before this unpleasant interruption, had sat down to breakfast with the rest, when she complained of a sudden indisposition and retired to her room. Her prolonged absence having caused some comment, her father followed her, but learned from her maid that she had only come up to her chamber for an instant, caught up an ulster and bonnet, and hurried down to the passage. One of the footmen declared that he had seen a lady leave the house thus apparelled, but had refused to credit that it was his mistress, believing her to be with the company. On ascertaining that his daughter had disappeared, Mr. Aloysius Doran, in conjunction with the bridegroom, instantly put themselves in communication with the police, and very energetic inquiries are being made, which will probably result in a speedy clearing up of this very singular business. Up to a late hour last night, however, nothing had transpired as to the whereabouts of the missing lady. There are rumours of foul play in the matter, and it is said that the police have caused the arrest of the woman who had caused the original disturbance, in the belief that, from jealousy or some other motive, she may have been concerned in the strange disappearance of the bride.’ ”

“And is that all?”

“Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is a suggestive one.”

“And it is—”

“That Miss Flora Millar, the lady who had caused the disturbance, has actually been arrested. It appears that she was formerly a *danseuse* at the Allegro, and that she has known the bridegroom for some years. There are no further particulars, and the whole case is in your hands now — so far as it has been set forth in the public press."

"And an exceedingly interesting case it appears to be. I would not have missed it for worlds. But there is a ring at the bell, Watson, and as the clock makes it a few minutes after four, I have no doubt that this will prove to be our noble client. Do not dream of going, Watson, for I very much prefer having a witness, if only as a check to my own memory."

"Lord Robert St. Simon," announced our page-boy, throwing open the door. A gentleman entered, with a pleasant, cultured face, high-nosed and pale, with something perhaps of petulance about the mouth, and with the steady, well-opened eye of a man whose pleasant lot it had ever been to command and to be obeyed. His manner was brisk, and yet his general appearance gave an undue impression of age, for he had a slight forward stoop and a little bend of the knees as he walked. His hair, too, as he swept off his very curly-brimmed hat, was grizzled round the edges and thin upon the top. As to his dress, it was careful to the verge of foppishness, with high collar, black frock-coat, white waistcoat, yellow gloves, patent-leather shoes, and light-coloured gaiters. He advanced slowly into the room, turning his head from left to right, and swinging in his right hand the cord which held his golden eyeglasses.

"Good-day, Lord St. Simon," said Holmes, rising and bowing. "Pray take the basket-chair. This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. Draw up a little to the fire, and we will talk this matter over."

"A most painful matter to me, as you can most readily imagine, Mr. Holmes. I have been cut to the quick. I understand that you have already managed several delicate cases of this sort, sir, though I presume that they were hardly from the same class of society."

"No, I am descending."

"I beg pardon."

"My last client of the sort was a king."

"Oh, really! I had no idea. And which king?"

"The King of Scandinavia."

"What! Had he lost his wife?"

"You can understand," said Holmes suavely, "that I extend to the affairs of my other clients the same secrecy which I promise to you in yours."

"Of course! Very right! very right! I'm sure I beg pardon. As to my own case, I am ready to give you any information which may assist you in forming an opinion."

"Thank you. I have already learned all that is in the public prints, nothing more. I presume that I may take it as correct — this article, for example, as to the disappearance of the bride."

Lord St. Simon glanced over it. "Yes, it is correct, as far as it goes."

"But it needs a great deal of supplementing before anyone could offer an opinion. I think that I may arrive at my facts most directly by questioning you."

"Pray do so."

"When did you first meet Miss Hatty Doran?"

"In San Francisco, a year ago."

"You were travelling in the States?"

"Yes."

"Did you become engaged then?"

"No."

"But you were on a friendly footing?"

"I was amused by her society, and she could see that I was amused."

"Her father is very rich?"

"He is said to be the richest man on the Pacific slope."

"And how did he make his money?"

"In mining. He had nothing a few years ago. Then he struck gold, invested it, and came up by leaps and bounds."

"Now, what is your own impression as to the young lady's — your wife's character?"

The nobleman swung his glasses a little faster and stared down into the fire. "You see, Mr. Holmes," said he, "my wife was twenty before her father became a rich man. During that time she ran free in a mining camp and wandered through woods or mountains, so that her education has come from Nature rather than from the schoolmaster. She is what we call in England a tomboy, with a strong nature, wild and free, unfettered by any sort of traditions. She is impetuous — volcanic, I was about to say. She is swift in making up her mind and fearless in carrying out her resolutions. On the other hand, I would not have given her the name which I have the honour to bear" — he gave a little stately cough—"had I not thought her to be at bottom a noble woman. I believe that she is capable of heroic self-sacrifice and that anything dishonourable would be repugnant to her."

"Have you her photograph?"

"I brought this with me." He opened a locket and showed us the full face of a very lovely woman. It was not a photograph but an ivory miniature, and the artist had brought out the full effect of the lustrous black hair, the large dark eyes, and the exquisite mouth. Holmes gazed long and earnestly at it. Then he closed the locket and handed it back to Lord St. Simon.

"The young lady came to London, then, and you renewed your acquaintance?"

"Yes, her father brought her over for this last London season. I met her several times, became engaged to her, and have now married her."

"She brought, I understand, a considerable dowry?"

"A fair dowry. Not more than is usual in my family."

"And this, of course, remains to you, since the marriage is a *fait accompli*?"

"I really have made no inquiries on the subject."

"Very naturally not. Did you see Miss Doran on the day before the wedding?"

"Yes."

"Was she in good spirits?"

"Never better. She kept talking of what we should do in our future lives."

"Indeed! That is very interesting. And on the morning of the wedding?"

"She was as bright as possible — at least until after the ceremony."

"And did you observe any change in her then?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I saw then the first signs that I had ever seen that her temper was just a little sharp. The incident however, was too trivial to relate and can have no possible bearing upon the case."

"Pray let us have it, for all that."

"Oh, it is childish. She dropped her bouquet as we went towards the vestry. She was passing the front pew at the time, and it fell over into the pew. There was a moment's delay, but the gentleman in the pew handed it up to her again, and it did not appear to be the worse for the fall. Yet when I spoke to her of the matter, she answered me abruptly; and in the carriage, on our way home, she seemed absurdly agitated over this trifling cause."

"Indeed! You say that there was a gentleman in the pew. Some of the general public were present, then?"

"Oh, yes. It is impossible to exclude them when the church is open."

"This gentleman was not one of your wife's friends?"

"No, no; I call him a gentleman by courtesy, but he was quite a common-looking person. I hardly noticed his appearance. But really I think that we are wandering rather far from the point."

"Lady St. Simon, then, returned from the wedding in a less cheerful frame of mind than she had gone to it. What did she do on re-entering her father's house?"

"I saw her in conversation with her maid."

"And who is her maid?"

"Alice is her name. She is an American and came from California with her."

"A confidential servant?"

"A little too much so. It seemed to me that her mistress allowed her to take great liberties. Still, of course, in America they look upon these things in a different way."

"How long did she speak to this Alice?"

"Oh, a few minutes. I had something else to think of."

"You did not overhear what they said?"

"Lady St. Simon said something about 'jumping a claim.' She was accustomed to use slang of the kind. I have no idea what she meant."

"American slang is very expressive sometimes. And what did your wife do when she finished speaking to her maid?"

"She walked into the breakfast-room."

"On your arm?"

"No, alone. She was very independent in little matters like that. Then, after we had sat down for ten minutes or so, she rose hurriedly, muttered some words of apology, and left the room. She never came back."

"But this maid, Alice, as I understand, deposes that she went to her room, covered her bride's dress with a long ulster, put on a bonnet, and went out."

"Quite so. And she was afterwards seen walking into Hyde Park in company with Flora Millar, a woman who is now in custody, and who had already made a disturbance at Mr. Doran's house that morning."

"Ah, yes. I should like a few particulars as to this young lady, and your relations to her."

Lord St. Simon shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. "We have been on a friendly footing for some years — I may say on a *very* friendly footing. She used to be at the Allegro. I have not treated her ungenerously, and she had no just cause of complaint against me, but you know what women are, Mr. Holmes. Flora was a dear little thing, but exceedingly hot-headed and devotedly attached to me. She wrote me dreadful letters when she heard that I was about to be married, and, to tell the truth, the reason why I had the marriage celebrated so quietly was that I feared lest there might be a scandal in the church. She came to Mr. Doran's door just after we returned, and she endeavoured to push her way in, uttering very abusive expressions towards my wife, and even threatening her, but I had foreseen the possibility of something of the sort, and I had two police fellows there in private clothes, who soon pushed her out again. She was quiet when she saw that there was no good in making a row."

"Did your wife hear all this?"

"No, thank goodness, she did not."

"And she was seen walking with this very woman afterwards?"

"Yes. That is what Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, looks upon as so serious. It is thought that Flora decoyed my wife out and laid some terrible trap for her."

"Well, it is a possible supposition."

"You think so, too?"

"I did not say a probable one. But you do not yourself look upon this as likely?"

"I do not think Flora would hurt a fly."

"Still, jealousy is a strange transformer of characters. Pray what is your own theory as to what took place?"

"Well, really, I came to seek a theory, not to propound one. I have given you all the facts. Since you ask me, however, I may say that it has occurred to me as possible that the excitement of this affair, the consciousness that she had made so immense a social stride, had the effect of causing some little nervous disturbance in my wife."

"In short, that she had become suddenly deranged?"

"Well, really, when I consider that she has turned her back — I will not say upon me, but upon so much that many have aspired to without success — I can hardly explain it in any other fashion."

"Well, certainly that is also a conceivable hypothesis," said Holmes, smiling. "And now, Lord St. Simon, I think that I have nearly all my data. May I ask whether you were seated at the breakfast-table so that you could see out of the window?"

"We could see the other side of the road and the Park."

“Quite so. Then I do not think that I need to detain you longer. I shall communicate with you.”

“Should you be fortunate enough to solve this problem,” said our client, rising.

“I have solved it.”

“Eh? What was that?”

“I say that I have solved it.”

“Where, then, is my wife?”

“That is a detail which I shall speedily supply.”

Lord St. Simon shook his head. “I am afraid that it will take wiser heads than yours or mine,” he remarked, and bowing in a stately, old-fashioned manner he departed.

“It is very good of Lord St. Simon to honour my head by putting it on a level with his own,” said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. “I think that I shall have a whisky and soda and a cigar after all this cross-questioning. I had formed my conclusions as to the case before our client came into the room.”

“My dear Holmes!”

“I have notes of several similar cases, though none, as I remarked before, which were quite as prompt. My whole examination served to turn my conjecture into a certainty. Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau’s example.”

“But I have heard all that you have heard.”

“Without, however, the knowledge of pre-existing cases which serves me so well. There was a parallel instance in Aberdeen some years back, and something on very much the same lines at Munich the year after the Franco-Prussian War. It is one of these cases — but, hullo, here is Lestrade! Good-afternoon, Lestrade! You will find an extra tumbler upon the sideboard, and there are cigars in the box.”

The official detective was attired in a pea-jacket and cravat, which gave him a decidedly nautical appearance, and he carried a black canvas bag in his hand. With a short greeting he seated himself and lit the cigar which had been offered to him.

“What’s up, then?” asked Holmes with a twinkle in his eye. “You look dissatisfied.”

“And I feel dissatisfied. It is this infernal St. Simon marriage case. I can make neither head nor tail of the business.”

“Really! You surprise me.”

“Who ever heard of such a mixed affair? Every clue seems to slip through my fingers. I have been at work upon it all day.”

“And very wet it seems to have made you,” said Holmes laying his hand upon the arm of the pea-jacket.

“Yes, I have been dragging the Serpentine.”

“In heaven’s name, what for?”

“In search of the body of Lady St. Simon.”

Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

“Have you dragged the basin of Trafalgar Square fountain?” he asked.

“Why? What do you mean?”

“Because you have just as good a chance of finding this lady in the one as in the other.”

Lestrade shot an angry glance at my companion. “I suppose you know all about it,” he snarled.

“Well, I have only just heard the facts, but my mind is made up.”

“Oh, indeed! Then you think that the Serpentine plays no part in the matter?”

“I think it very unlikely.”

“Then perhaps you will kindly explain how it is that we found this in it?” He opened his bag as he spoke, and tumbled onto the floor a wedding-dress of watered silk, a pair of white satin shoes and a bride’s wreath and veil, all discoloured and soaked in water. “There,” said he, putting a new wedding-ring upon the top of the pile. “There is a little nut for you to crack, Master Holmes.”

“Oh, indeed!” said my friend, blowing blue rings into the air. “You dragged them from the Serpentine?”

“No. They were found floating near the margin by a park-keeper. They have been identified as her clothes, and it seemed to me that if the clothes were there the body would not be far off.”

“By the same brilliant reasoning, every man’s body is to be found in the neighbourhood of his wardrobe. And pray what did you hope to arrive at through this?”

“At some evidence implicating Flora Millar in the disappearance.”

“I am afraid that you will find it difficult.”

“Are you, indeed, now?” cried Lestrade with some bitterness. “I am afraid, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your deductions and your inferences. You have made two blunders in as many minutes. This dress does implicate Miss Flora Millar.”

“And how?”

“In the dress is a pocket. In the pocket is a card-case. In the card-case is a note. And here is the very note.” He slapped it down upon the table in front of him. “Listen to this: ‘You will see me when all is ready. Come at once. F. H. M.’ Now my theory all along has been that Lady St. Simon was decoyed away by Flora Millar, and that she, with confederates, no doubt, was responsible for her disappearance. Here, signed with her initials, is the very note which was no doubt quietly slipped into her hand at the door and which lured her within their reach.”

“Very good, Lestrade,” said Holmes, laughing. “You really are very fine indeed. Let me see it.” He took up the paper in a listless way, but his attention instantly became riveted, and he gave a little cry of satisfaction. “This is indeed important,” said he.

“Ha! you find it so?”

“Extremely so. I congratulate you warmly.”

Lestrade rose in his triumph and bent his head to look. “Why,” he shrieked, “you’re looking at the wrong side!”

“On the contrary, this is the right side.”

“The right side? You’re mad! Here is the note written in pencil over here.”

“And over here is what appears to be the fragment of a hotel bill, which interests me deeply.”

“There’s nothing in it. I looked at it before,” said Lestrade. “ ’Oct. 4th, rooms 8*s*., breakfast 2*s*. 6*d*., cocktail 1*s*., lunch 2*s*. 6*d*., glass sherry, 8*d*.’ I see nothing in that.”

“Very likely not. It is most important, all the same. As to the note, it is important also, or at least the initials are, so I congratulate you again.”

“I’ve wasted time enough,” said Lestrade, rising. “I believe in hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories. Good-day, Mr. Holmes, and we shall see which gets to the bottom of the matter first.” He gathered up the garments, thrust them into the bag, and made for the door.

“Just one hint to you, Lestrade,” drawled Holmes before his rival vanished; “I will tell you the true solution of the matter. Lady St. Simon is a myth. There is not, and there never has been, any such person.”

Lestrade looked sadly at my companion. Then he turned to me, tapped his forehead three times, shook his head solemnly, and hurried away.

He had hardly shut the door behind him when Holmes rose to put on his overcoat. “There is something in what the fellow says about outdoor work,” he remarked, “so I think, Watson, that I must leave you to your papers for a little.”

It was after five o’clock when Sherlock Holmes left me, but I had no time to be lonely, for within an hour there arrived a confectioner’s man with a very large flat box. This he unpacked with the help of a youth whom he had brought with him, and presently, to my very great astonishment, a quite epicurean little cold supper began to be laid out upon our humble lodging-house mahogany. There were a couple of brace of cold woodcock, a pheasant, a *pâté de foie gras* pie with a group of ancient and cobwebby bottles. Having laid out all these luxuries, my two visitors vanished away, like the genii of the Arabian Nights, with no explanation save that the things had been paid for and were ordered to this address.

Just before nine o’clock Sherlock Holmes stepped briskly into the room. His features were gravely set, but there was a light in his eye which made me think that he had not been disappointed in his conclusions.

“They have laid the supper, then,” he said, rubbing his hands.

“You seem to expect company. They have laid for five.”

“Yes, I fancy we may have some company dropping in,” said he. “I am surprised that Lord St. Simon has not already arrived. Ha! I fancy that I hear his step now upon the stairs.”

It was indeed our visitor of the afternoon who came bustling in, dangling his glasses more vigorously than ever, and with a very perturbed expression upon his aristocratic features.

“My messenger reached you, then?” asked Holmes.

“Yes, and I confess that the contents startled me beyond measure. Have you good authority for what you say?”

“The best possible.”

Lord St. Simon sank into a chair and passed his hand over his forehead.

“What will the Duke say,” he murmured, “when he hears that one of the family has been subjected to such humiliation?”

“It is the purest accident. I cannot allow that there is any humiliation.”

“Ah, you look on these things from another standpoint.”

"I fail to see that anyone is to blame. I can hardly see how the lady could have acted otherwise, though her abrupt method of doing it was undoubtedly to be regretted. Having no mother, she had no one to advise her at such a crisis."

"It was a slight, sir, a public slight," said Lord St. Simon, tapping his fingers upon the table.

"You must make allowance for this poor girl, placed in so unprecedented a position."

"I will make no allowance. I am very angry indeed, and I have been shamefully used."

"I think that I heard a ring," said Holmes. "Yes, there are steps on the landing. If I cannot persuade you to take a lenient view of the matter, Lord St. Simon, I have brought an advocate here who may be more successful." He opened the door and ushered in a lady and gentleman. "Lord St. Simon," said he "allow me to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton. The lady, I think, you have already met."

At the sight of these newcomers our client had sprung from his seat and stood very erect, with his eyes cast down and his hand thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, a picture of offended dignity. The lady had taken a quick step forward and had held out her hand to him, but he still refused to raise his eyes. It was as well for his resolution, perhaps, for her pleading face was one which it was hard to resist.

"You're angry, Robert," said she. "Well, I guess you have every cause to be."

"Pray make no apology to me," said Lord St. Simon bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I know that I have treated you real bad and that I should have spoken to you before I went; but I was kind of rattled, and from the time when I saw Frank here again I just didn't know what I was doing or saying. I only wonder I didn't fall down and do a faint right there before the altar."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Moulton, you would like my friend and me to leave the room while you explain this matter?"

"If I may give an opinion," remarked the strange gentleman, "we've had just a little too much secrecy over this business already. For my part, I should like all Europe and America to hear the rights of it." He was a small, wiry, sunburnt man, clean-shaven, with a sharp face and alert manner.

"Then I'll tell our story right away," said the lady. "Frank here and I met in '84, in McQuire's camp, near the Rockies, where Pa was working a claim. We were engaged to each other, Frank and I; but then one day father struck a rich pocket and made a pile, while poor Frank here had a claim that petered out and came to nothing. The richer Pa grew the poorer was Frank; so at last Pa wouldn't hear of our engagement lasting any longer, and he took me away to 'Frisco. Frank wouldn't throw up his hand, though; so he followed me there, and he saw me without Pa knowing anything about it. It would only have made him mad to know, so we just fixed it all up for ourselves. Frank said that he would go and make his pile, too, and never come back to claim me until he had as much as Pa. So then I promised to wait for him to the end of time and pledged myself not to marry anyone else while he lived. 'Why shouldn't we be married right away, then,' said he, 'and then I will feel sure of you; and I won't claim to be your husband until I come back?' Well, we talked it over, and he had fixed it all up so nicely, with a clergyman all ready in waiting, that we just did it right there; and then Frank went off to seek his fortune, and I went back to Pa.

"The next I heard of Frank was that he was in Montana, and then he went prospecting in Arizona, and then I heard of him from New Mexico. After that came a long newspaper story about how a miners' camp had been attacked by Apache Indians, and there was my Frank's name among the killed. I fainted dead away, and I was very sick for months after. Pa thought I had a decline and took me to half the doctors in 'Frisco. Not a word of news came for a year and more, so that I never doubted that Frank was really dead. Then Lord St. Simon came to 'Frisco, and we came to London, and a marriage was arranged, and Pa was very pleased, but I felt all the time that no man on this earth would ever take the place in my heart that had been given to my poor Frank.

"Still, if I had married Lord St. Simon, of course I'd have done my duty by him. We can't command our love, but we can our actions. I went to the altar with him with the intention to make him just as good a wife as it was in me to be. But you may imagine what I felt when, just as I came to the altar rails, I glanced back and saw Frank standing and looking at me out of the first pew. I thought it was his ghost at first; but when I looked again there he was still, with a kind of question in his eyes, as if to ask me whether I were glad or sorry to see him. I wonder I didn't drop. I know that everything was turning round, and the words of the clergyman were just like the buzz of a bee in my ear. I didn't know what to do. Should I stop the service and make a scene in the church? I glanced at him again, and he seemed to know what I was thinking, for he raised his finger to his lips to tell me to be still. Then I saw him scribble on a piece of paper, and I knew that he was writing me a note. As I passed his pew on the way out I dropped my bouquet over to him, and he slipped the note into my hand when he returned me the flowers. It was only a line asking me to join him when he made the sign to me to do so. Of course I never doubted for a moment that my first duty was now to him, and I determined to do just whatever he might direct.

"When I got back I told my maid, who had known him in California, and had always been his friend. I ordered her to say nothing, but to get a few things packed and my ulster ready. I know I ought to have spoken to Lord St. Simon, but it was dreadful hard before his mother and all those great people. I just made up my mind to run away and explain afterwards. I hadn't been at the table ten minutes before I saw Frank out of the window at the other side of the road. He beckoned to me and then began walking into the Park. I slipped out, put on my things, and followed him. Some woman came talking something or other about Lord St. Simon to me — seemed to me from the little I heard as if he had a little secret of his own before marriage also — but I managed to get away from her and soon overtook Frank. We got into a cab together, and away we drove to some lodgings he had taken in Gordon Square, and that was my true wedding after all those years of waiting. Frank had been a prisoner among the Apaches, had escaped, came on to 'Frisco, found that I had given him up for dead and had gone to England, followed me there, and had come upon me at last on the very morning of my second wedding."

"I saw it in a paper," explained the American. "It gave the name and the church but not where the lady lived."

"Then we had a talk as to what we should do, and Frank was all for openness, but I was so ashamed of it all that I felt as if I should like to vanish away and never see any of them again — just sending a line to Pa, perhaps, to show him that I was alive. It was awful to me to think of all those lords and ladies sitting round that breakfast-table and waiting for me to come back. So Frank took my wedding-clothes and things and made a bundle of them, so that I should not be traced, and dropped them away somewhere where no one could find them. It is likely that we should have gone on to Paris to-morrow, only that this good gentleman, Mr. Holmes, came round to us this evening, though how he found us is more than I can think, and he showed us very clearly and kindly that I was wrong and that Frank was right, and that we should be putting ourselves in the wrong if we were so secret. Then he offered to give us a chance of talking to Lord St. Simon alone, and so we came right away round to his rooms at once. Now, Robert, you have heard it all, and I am very sorry if I have given you pain, and I hope that you do not think very meanly of me.”

Lord St. Simon had by no means relaxed his rigid attitude, but had listened with a frowning brow and a compressed lip to this long narrative.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but it is not my custom to discuss my most intimate personal affairs in this public manner.”

“Then you won’t forgive me? You won’t shake hands before I go?”

“Oh, certainly, if it would give you any pleasure.” He put out his hand and coldly grasped that which she extended to him.

“I had hoped,” suggested Holmes, “that you would have joined us in a friendly supper.”

“I think that there you ask a little too much,” responded his Lordship. “I may be forced to acquiesce in these recent developments, but I can hardly be expected to make merry over them. I think that with your permission I will now wish you all a very good-night.” He included us all in a sweeping bow and stalked out of the room.

“Then I trust that you at least will honour me with your company,” said Sherlock Holmes. “It is always a joy to meet an American, Mr. Moulton, for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes.”

“The case has been an interesting one,” remarked Holmes when our visitors had left us, “because it serves to show very clearly how simple the explanation may be of an affair which at first sight seems to be almost inexplicable. Nothing could be more natural than the sequence of events as narrated by this lady, and nothing stranger than the result when viewed, for instance, by Mr. Lestrade of Scotland Yard.”

“You were not yourself at fault at all, then?”

“From the first, two facts were very obvious to me, the one that the lady had been quite willing to undergo the wedding ceremony, the other that she had repented of it within a few minutes of returning home. Obviously something had occurred during the morning, then, to cause her to change her mind. What could that something be? She could not have spoken to anyone when she was out, for she had been in the company of the bridegroom. Had she seen someone, then? If she had, it must be someone from America because she had spent so short a time in this country that she could hardly have allowed anyone to acquire so deep an influence over her that the mere sight of him would induce her to change her plans so completely. You see we have already arrived, by a process of exclusion, at the idea that she might have seen an American. Then who could this American be, and why should he possess so much influence over her? It might be a lover; it might be a husband. Her young womanhood had, I knew, been spent in rough scenes and under strange conditions. So far I had got before I ever heard Lord St. Simon's narrative. When he told us of a man in a pew, of the change in the bride's manner, of so transparent a device for obtaining a note as the dropping of a bouquet, of her resort to her confidential maid, and of her very significant allusion to claim-jumping — which in miners' parlance means taking possession of that which another person has a prior claim to — the whole situation became absolutely clear. She had gone off with a man, and the man was either a lover or was a previous husband — the chances being in favour of the latter."

"And how in the world did you find them?"

"It might have been difficult, but friend Lestrade held information in his hands the value of which he did not himself know. The initials were, of course, of the highest importance, but more valuable still was it to know that within a week he had settled his bill at one of the most select London hotels."

"How did you deduce the select?"

"By the select prices. Eight shillings for a bed and eightpence for a glass of sherry pointed to one of the most expensive hotels. There are not many in London which charge at that rate. In the second one which I visited in Northumberland Avenue, I learned by an inspection of the book that Francis H. Moulton, an American gentleman, had left only the day before, and on looking over the entries against him, I came upon the very items which I had seen in the duplicate bill. His letters were to be forwarded to 226 Gordon Square; so thither I travelled, and being fortunate enough to find the loving couple at home, I ventured to give them some paternal advice and to point out to them that it would be better in every way that they should make their position a little clearer both to the general public and to Lord St.

Simon in particular. I invited them to meet him here, and, as you see, I made him keep the appointment."

"But with no very good result," I remarked. "His conduct was certainly not very gracious."

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes, smiling, "perhaps you would not be very gracious either, if, after all the trouble of wooing and wedding, you found yourself deprived in an instant of wife and of fortune. I think that we may judge Lord St. Simon very mercifully and thank our stars that we are never likely to find ourselves in the same position. Draw your chair up and hand me my violin, for the only problem we have still to solve is how to while away these bleak autumnal evenings."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BERYL CORONET

"Holmes," said I as I stood one morning in our bow-window looking down the street, "here is a madman coming along. It seems rather sad that his relatives should allow him to come out alone."

My friend rose lazily from his armchair and stood with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, looking over my shoulder. It was a bright, crisp February morning, and the snow of the day before still lay deep upon the ground, shimmering brightly in the wintry sun. Down the centre of Baker Street it had been ploughed into a brown crumbly band by the traffic, but at either side and on the heaped-up edges of the foot-paths it still lay as white as when it fell. The grey pavement had been cleaned and scraped, but was still dangerously slippery, so that there were fewer passengers than usual. Indeed, from the direction of the Metropolitan Station no one was coming save the single gentleman whose eccentric conduct had drawn my attention.

He was a man of about fifty, tall, portly, and imposing, with a massive, strongly marked face and a commanding figure. He was dressed in a sombre yet rich style, in black frock-coat, shining hat, neat brown gaiters, and well-cut pearl-grey trousers. Yet his actions were in absurd contrast to the dignity of his dress and features, for he was running hard, with occasional little springs, such as a weary man gives who is little accustomed to set any tax upon his legs. As he ran he jerked his hands up and down, waggled his head, and writhed his face into the most extraordinary contortions.

"What on earth can be the matter with him?" I asked. "He is looking up at the numbers of the houses."

"I believe that he is coming here," said Holmes, rubbing his hands.

"Here?"

"Yes; I rather think he is coming to consult me professionally. I think that I recognise the symptoms. Ha! did I not tell you?" As he spoke, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and pulled at our bell until the whole house resounded with the clanging.

A few moments later he was in our room, still puffing, still gesticulating, but with so fixed a look of grief and despair in his eyes that our smiles were turned in an instant to horror and pity. For a while he could not get his words out, but swayed his body and plucked at his hair like one who has been driven to the extreme limits of his reason. Then, suddenly springing to his feet, he beat his head against the wall with such force that we both rushed upon him and tore him away to the centre of the room. Sherlock Holmes pushed him down into the easy-chair and, sitting beside him, patted his hand and chatted with him in the easy, soothing tones which he knew so well how to employ.

“You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?” said he. “You are fatigued with your haste. Pray wait until you have recovered yourself, and then I shall be most happy to look into any little problem which you may submit to me.”

The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, fighting against his emotion. Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

“No doubt you think me mad?” said he.

“I see that you have had some great trouble,” responded Holmes.

“God knows I have! — a trouble which is enough to unseat my reason, so sudden and so terrible is it. Public disgrace I might have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet borne a stain. Private affliction also is the lot of every man; but the two coming together, and in so frightful a form, have been enough to shake my very soul. Besides, it is not I alone. The very noblest in the land may suffer unless some way be found out of this horrible affair.”

“Pray compose yourself, sir,” said Holmes, “and let me have a clear account of who you are and what it is that has befallen you.”

“My name,” answered our visitor, “is probably familiar to your ears. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street.”

The name was indeed well known to us as belonging to the senior partner in the second largest private banking concern in the City of London. What could have happened, then, to bring one of the foremost citizens of London to this most pitiable pass? We waited, all curiosity, until with another effort he braced himself to tell his story.

“I feel that time is of value,” said he; “that is why I hastened here when the police inspector suggested that I should secure your co-operation. I came to Baker Street by the Underground and hurried from there on foot, for the cabs go slowly through this snow. That is why I was so out of breath, for I am a man who takes very little exercise. I feel better now, and I will put the facts before you as shortly and yet as clearly as I can.

“It is, of course, well known to you that in a successful banking business as much depends upon our being able to find remunerative investments for our funds as upon our increasing our connection and the number of our depositors. One of our most lucrative means of laying out money is in the shape of loans, where the security is unimpeachable. We have done a good deal in this direction during the last few years, and there are many noble families to whom we have advanced large sums upon the security of their pictures, libraries, or plate.

“Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. I started when I saw the name, for it was that of none other than — well, perhaps even to you I had better say no more than that it was a name which is a household word all over the earth — one of the highest, noblest, most exalted names in England. I was overwhelmed by the honour and attempted, when he entered, to say so, but he plunged at once into business with the air of a man who wishes to hurry quickly through a disagreeable task.

“ ’Mr. Holder,’ said he, ‘I have been informed that you are in the habit of advancing money.’

“ ’The firm does so when the security is good.’ I answered.

“ ’It is absolutely essential to me,’ said he, ‘that I should have £50,000 at once. I could, of course, borrow so trifling a sum ten times over from my friends, but I much prefer to make it a matter of business and to carry out that business myself. In my position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place one’s self under obligations.’

“ ’For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?’ I asked.

“ ’Next Monday I have a large sum due to me, and I shall then most certainly repay what you advance, with whatever interest you think it right to charge. But it is very essential to me that the money should be paid at once.’

“ ’I should be happy to advance it without further parley from my own private purse,’ said I, ‘were it not that the strain would be rather more than it could bear. If, on the other hand, I am to do it in the name of the firm, then in justice to my partner I must insist that, even in your case, every businesslike precaution should be taken.’

“ ’I should much prefer to have it so,’ said he, raising up a square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair. ‘You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?’

“ ’One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,’ said I.

“ ’Precisely.’ He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft, flesh-coloured velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewellery which he had named. ‘There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,’ said he, ‘and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. The lowest estimate would put the worth of the coronet at double the sum which I have asked. I am prepared to leave it with you as my security.’

“I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some perplexity from it to my illustrious client.

“ ’You doubt its value?’ he asked.

“ ’Not at all. I only doubt—’

“ ’The propriety of my leaving it. You may set your mind at rest about that. I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. It is a pure matter of form. Is the security sufficient?’

“ ’Ample.’

“ ’You understand, Mr. Holder, that I am giving you a strong proof of the confidence which I have in you, founded upon all that I have heard of you. I rely upon you not only to be discreet and to refrain from all gossip upon the matter but, above all, to preserve this coronet with every possible precaution because I need not say that a great public scandal would be caused if any harm were to befall it. Any injury to it would be almost as serious as its complete loss, for there are no beryls in the world to match these, and it would be impossible to replace them. I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall call for it in person on Monday morning.’

“Seeing that my client was anxious to leave, I said no more but, calling for my cashier, I ordered him to pay over fifty £1000 notes. When I was alone once more, however, with the precious case lying upon the table in front of me, I could not but think with some misgivings of the immense responsibility which it entailed upon me. There could be no doubt that, as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it. I already regretted having ever consented to take charge of it. However, it was too late to alter the matter now, so I locked it up in my private safe and turned once more to my work.

“When evening came I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave so precious a thing in the office behind me. Bankers’ safes had been forced before now, and why should not mine be? If so, how terrible would be the position in which I should find myself! I determined, therefore, that for the next few days I would always carry the case backward and forward with me, so that it might never be really out of my reach. With this intention, I called a cab and drove out to my house at Streatham, carrying the jewel with me. I did not breathe freely until I had taken it upstairs and locked it in the bureau of my dressing-room.

“And now a word as to my household, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to thoroughly understand the situation. My groom and my page sleep out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. I have three maid-servants who have been with me a number of years and whose absolute reliability is quite above suspicion. Another, Lucy Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few months. She came with an excellent character, however, and has always given me satisfaction. She is a very pretty girl and has attracted admirers who have occasionally hung about the place. That is the only drawback which we have found to her, but we believe her to be a thoroughly good girl in every way.

“So much for the servants. My family itself is so small that it will not take me long to describe it. I am a widower and have an only son, Arthur. He has been a disappointment to me, Mr. Holmes — a grievous disappointment. I have no doubt that I am myself to blame. People tell me that I have spoiled him. Very likely I have. When my dear wife died I felt that he was all I had to love. I could not bear to see the smile fade even for a moment from his face. I have never denied him a wish. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I meant it for the best.

“It was naturally my intention that he should succeed me in my business, but he was not of a business turn. He was wild, wayward, and, to speak the truth, I could not trust him in the handling of large sums of money. When he was young he became a member of an aristocratic club, and there, having charming manners, he was soon the intimate of a number of men with long purses and expensive habits. He learned to play heavily at cards and to squander money on the turf, until he had again and again to come to me and implore me to give him an advance upon his allowance, that he might settle his debts of honour. He tried more than once to break away from the dangerous company which he was keeping, but each time the influence of his friend, Sir George Burnwell, was enough to draw him back again.

“And, indeed, I could not wonder that such a man as Sir George Burnwell should gain an influence over him, for he has frequently brought him to my house, and I have found myself that I could hardly resist the fascination of his manner. He is older than Arthur, a man of the world to his finger-tips, one who had been everywhere, seen everything, a brilliant talker, and a man of great personal beauty. Yet when I think of him in cold blood, far away from the glamour of his presence, I am convinced from his cynical speech and the look which I have caught in his eyes that he is one who should be deeply distrusted. So I think, and so, too, thinks my little Mary, who has a woman’s quick insight into character.

“And now there is only she to be described. She is my niece; but when my brother died five years ago and left her alone in the world I adopted her, and have looked upon her ever since as my daughter. She is a sunbeam in my house — sweet, loving, beautiful, a wonderful manager and housekeeper, yet as tender and quiet and gentle as a woman could be. She is my right hand. I do not know what I could do without her. In only one matter has she ever gone against my wishes. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. I think that if anyone could have drawn him into the right path it would have been she, and that his marriage might have changed his whole life; but now, alas! it is too late — forever too late!

“Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and I shall continue with my miserable story.

“When we were taking coffee in the drawing-room that night after dinner, I told Arthur and Mary my experience, and of the precious treasure which we had under our roof, suppressing only the name of my client. Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed. Mary and Arthur were much interested and wished to see the famous coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

“ ’Where have you put it?’ asked Arthur.

“ ’In my own bureau.’

“ ’Well, I hope to goodness the house won’t be burgled during the night.’ said he.

“ ’It is locked up,’ I answered.

“ ’Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. When I was a youngster I have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard.’

“He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of what he said. He followed me to my room, however, that night with a very grave face.

“ ’Look here, dad,’ said he with his eyes cast down, ‘can you let me have £200?’

“ ’No, I cannot!’ I answered sharply. ‘I have been far too generous with you in money matters.’

“ ’You have been very kind,’ said he, ‘but I must have this money, or else I can never show my face inside the club again.’

“ ’And a very good thing, too!’ I cried.

“ ’Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonoured man,’ said he. ‘I could not bear the disgrace. I must raise the money in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try other means.’

“I was very angry, for this was the third demand during the month. ‘You shall not have a farthing from me,’ I cried, on which he bowed and left the room without another word.

“When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my treasure was safe, and locked it again. Then I started to go round the house to see that all was secure — a duty which I usually leave to Mary but which I thought it well to perform myself that night. As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as I approached.

“ ’Tell me, dad,’ said she, looking, I thought, a little disturbed, ‘did you give Lucy, the maid, leave to go out to-night?’

“ ’Certainly not.’

“ ’She came in just now by the back door. I have no doubt that she has only been to the side gate to see someone, but I think that it is hardly safe and should be stopped.’

“ ’You must speak to her in the morning, or I will if you prefer it. Are you sure that everything is fastened?’

“ ’Quite sure, dad.’

“ ’Then, good-night.’ I kissed her and went up to my bedroom again, where I was soon asleep.

“I am endeavouring to tell you everything, Mr. Holmes, which may have any bearing upon the case, but I beg that you will question me upon any point which I do not make clear.”

“On the contrary, your statement is singularly lucid.”

“I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be particularly so. I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the anxiety in my mind tended, no doubt, to make me even less so than usual. About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in the house. It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an impression behind it as though a window had gently closed somewhere. I lay listening with all my ears. Suddenly, to my horror, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in the next room. I slipped out of bed, all palpitating with fear, and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

“ ’Arthur!’ I screamed, ‘you villain! you thief! How dare you touch that coronet?’

“The gas was half up, as I had left it, and my unhappy boy, dressed only in his shirt and trousers, was standing beside the light, holding the coronet in his hands. He appeared to be wrenching at it, or bending it with all his strength. At my cry he dropped it from his grasp and turned as pale as death. I snatched it up and examined it. One of the gold corners, with three of the beryls in it, was missing.

“ ’You blackguard!’ I shouted, beside myself with rage. ‘You have destroyed it! You have dishonoured me forever! Where are the jewels which you have stolen?’

“ ’Stolen!’ he cried.

“ ’Yes, thief!’ I roared, shaking him by the shoulder.

“ ’There are none missing. There cannot be any missing,’ said he.

“ ’There are three missing. And you know where they are. Must I call you a liar as well as a thief? Did I not see you trying to tear off another piece?’

“ ’You have called me names enough,’ said he, ‘I will not stand it any longer. I shall not say another word about this business, since you have chosen to insult me. I will leave your house in the morning and make my own way in the world.’

“ ’You shall leave it in the hands of the police!’ I cried half-mad with grief and rage. ‘I shall have this matter probed to the bottom.’

“ ’You shall learn nothing from me,’ said he with a passion such as I should not have thought was in his nature. ‘If you choose to call the police, let the police find what they can.’

“By this time the whole house was astir, for I had raised my voice in my anger. Mary was the first to rush into my room, and, at the sight of the coronet and of Arthur’s face, she read the whole story and, with a scream, fell down senseless on the ground. I sent the house-maid for the police and put the investigation into their hands at once. When the inspector and a constable entered the house, Arthur, who had stood sullenly with his arms folded, asked me whether it was my intention to charge him with theft. I answered that it had ceased to be a private matter, but had become a public one, since the ruined coronet was national property. I was determined that the law should have its way in everything.

“ ’At least,’ said he, ‘you will not have me arrested at once. It would be to your advantage as well as mine if I might leave the house for five minutes.’

“ ’That you may get away, or perhaps that you may conceal what you have stolen,’ said I. And then, realising the dreadful position in which I was placed, I implored him to remember that not only my honour but that of one who was far greater than I was at stake; and that he threatened to raise a scandal which would convulse the nation. He might avert it all if he would but tell me what he had done with the three missing stones.

“ ’You may as well face the matter,’ said I; ‘you have been caught in the act, and no confession could make your guilt more heinous. If you but make such reparation as is in your power, by telling us where the beryls are, all shall be forgiven and forgotten.’

“ ’Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,’ he answered, turning away from me with a sneer. I saw that he was too hardened for any words of mine to influence him. There was but one way for it. I called in the inspector and gave him into custody. A search was made at once not only of his person but of his room and of every portion of the house where he could possibly have concealed the gems; but no trace of them could be found, nor would the wretched boy open his mouth for all our persuasions and our threats. This morning he was removed to a cell, and I, after going through all the police formalities, have hurried round to you to implore you to use your skill in unravelling the matter. The police have openly confessed that they can at present make nothing of it. You may go to any expense which you think necessary. I have already offered a reward of £1000. My God, what shall I do! I have lost my honour, my gems, and my son in one night. Oh, what shall I do!”

He put a hand on either side of his head and rocked himself to and fro, droning to himself like a child whose grief has got beyond words.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

“Do you receive much company?” he asked.

“None save my partner with his family and an occasional friend of Arthur’s. Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. No one else, I think.”

“Do you go out much in society?”

“Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for it.”

“That is unusual in a young girl.”

“She is of a quiet nature. Besides, she is not so very young. She is four-and-twenty.”

“This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to her also.”

“Terrible! She is even more affected than I.”

“You have neither of you any doubt as to your son’s guilt?”

“How can we have when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet in his hands.”

“I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. Was the remainder of the coronet at all injured?”

“Yes, it was twisted.”

“Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to straighten it?”

“God bless you! You are doing what you can for him and for me. But it is too heavy a task. What was he doing there at all? If his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?”

“Precisely. And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie? His silence appears to me to cut both ways. There are several singular points about the case. What did the police think of the noise which awoke you from your sleep?”

“They considered that it might be caused by Arthur’s closing his bedroom door.”

“A likely story! As if a man bent on felony would slam his door so as to wake a household. What did they say, then, of the disappearance of these gems?”

“They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture in the hope of finding them.”

“Have they thought of looking outside the house?”

“Yes, they have shown extraordinary energy. The whole garden has already been minutely examined.”

“Now, my dear sir,” said Holmes. “is it not obvious to you now that this matter really strikes very much deeper than either you or the police were at first inclined to think? It appeared to you to be a simple case; to me it seems exceedingly complex. Consider what is involved by your theory. You suppose that your son came down from his bed, went, at great risk, to your dressing-room, opened your bureau, took out your coronet, broke off by main force a small portion of it, went off to some other place, concealed three gems out of the thirty-nine, with such skill that nobody can find them, and then returned with the other thirty-six into the room in which he exposed himself to the greatest danger of being discovered. I ask you now, is such a theory tenable?”

“But what other is there?” cried the banker with a gesture of despair. “If his motives were innocent, why does he not explain them?”

“It is our task to find that out,” replied Holmes; “so now, if you please, Mr. Holder, we will set off for Streatham together, and devote an hour to glancing a little more closely into details.”

My friend insisted upon my accompanying them in their expedition, which I was eager enough to do, for my curiosity and sympathy were deeply stirred by the story to which we had listened. I confess that the guilt of the banker’s son appeared to me to be as obvious as it did to his unhappy father, but still I had such faith in Holmes’ judgment that I felt that there must be some grounds for hope as long as he was dissatisfied with the accepted explanation. He hardly spoke a word the whole way out to the southern suburb, but sat with his chin upon his breast and his hat drawn over his eyes, sunk in the deepest thought. Our client appeared to have taken fresh heart at the little glimpse of hope which had been presented to him, and he even broke into a desultory chat with me over his business affairs. A short railway journey and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the modest residence of the great financier.

Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing back a little from the road. A double carriage-sweep, with a snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates which closed the entrance. On the right side was a small wooden thicket, which led into a narrow path between two neat hedges stretching from the road to the kitchen door, and forming the tradesmen’s entrance. On the left ran a lane which led to the stables, and was not itself within the grounds at all, being a public, though little used, thoroughfare. Holmes left us standing at the door and walked slowly all round the house, across the front, down the tradesmen’s path, and so round by the garden behind into the stable lane. So long was he that Mr. Holder and I went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should return. We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. She was rather above the middle height, slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against the absolute pallor of her skin. I do not think that I have ever seen such deadly paleness in a woman’s face. Her lips, too, were bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. As she swept silently into the room she impressed me with a greater sense of grief than the banker had done in the morning, and it was the more striking in her as she was evidently a woman of strong character, with immense capacity for self-restraint. Disregarding my presence, she went straight to her uncle and passed her hand over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

“You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you not, dad?” she asked.

“No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom.”

“But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what woman’s instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly.”

“Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?”

“Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him.”

“How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?”

“Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, do, do take my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in prison!”

“I shall never let it drop until the gems are found — never, Mary! Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it.”

“This gentleman?” she asked, facing round to me.

“No, his friend. He wished us to leave him alone. He is round in the stable lane now.”

“The stable lane?” She raised her dark eyebrows. “What can he hope to find there? Ah! this, I suppose, is he. I trust, sir, that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth, that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime.”

“I fully share your opinion, and I trust, with you, that we may prove it,” returned Holmes, going back to the mat to knock the snow from his shoes. “I believe I have the honour of addressing Miss Mary Holder. Might I ask you a question or two?”

“Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up.”

“You heard nothing yourself last night?”

“Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. I heard that, and I came down.”

“You shut up the windows and doors the night before. Did you fasten all the windows?”

“Yes.”

“Were they all fastened this morning?”

“Yes.”

“You have a maid who has a sweetheart? I think that you remarked to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?”

“Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and who may have heard uncle’s remarks about the coronet.”

“I see. You infer that she may have gone out to tell her sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery.”

“But what is the good of all these vague theories,” cried the banker impatiently, “when I have told you that I saw Arthur with the coronet in his hands?”

“Wait a little, Mr. Holder. We must come back to that. About this girl, Miss Holder. You saw her return by the kitchen door, I presume?”

“Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I met her slipping in. I saw the man, too, in the gloom.”

“Do you know him?”

“Oh, yes! he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round. His name is Francis Prosper.”

“He stood,” said Holmes, “to the left of the door — that is to say, farther up the path than is necessary to reach the door?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And he is a man with a wooden leg?”

Something like fear sprang up in the young lady’s expressive black eyes. “Why, you are like a magician,” said she. “How do you know that?” She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes’ thin, eager face.

“I should be very glad now to go upstairs,” said he. “I shall probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. Perhaps I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up.”

He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall onto the stable lane. This he opened and made a very careful examination of the sill with his powerful magnifying lens. “Now we shall go upstairs,” said he at last.

The banker’s dressing-room was a plainly furnished little chamber, with a grey carpet, a large bureau, and a long mirror. Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock.

“Which key was used to open it?” he asked.

“That which my son himself indicated — that of the cupboard of the lumber-room.”

“Have you it here?”

“That is it on the dressing-table.”

Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.

“It is a noiseless lock,” said he. “It is no wonder that it did not wake you. This case, I presume, contains the coronet. We must have a look at it.” He opened the case, and taking out the diadem he laid it upon the table. It was a magnificent specimen of the jeweller’s art, and the thirty-six stones were the finest that I have ever seen. At one side of the coronet was a cracked edge, where a corner holding three gems had been torn away.

“Now, Mr. Holder,” said Holmes, “here is the corner which corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately lost. Might I beg that you will break it off.”

The banker recoiled in horror. “I should not dream of trying,” said he.

“Then I will.” Holmes suddenly bent his strength upon it, but without result. “I feel it give a little,” said he; “but, though I am exceptionally strong in the fingers, it would take me all my time to break it. An ordinary man could not do it. Now, what do you think would happen if I did break it, Mr. Holder? There would be a noise like a pistol shot. Do you tell me that all this happened within a few yards of your bed and that you heard nothing of it?”

“I do not know what to think. It is all dark to me.”

"But perhaps it may grow lighter as we go. What do you think, Miss Holder?"

"I confess that I still share my uncle's perplexity."

"Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?"

"He had nothing on save only his trousers and shirt."

"Thank you. We have certainly been favoured with extraordinary luck during this inquiry, and it will be entirely our own fault if we do not succeed in clearing the matter up. With your permission, Mr. Holder, I shall now continue my investigations outside."

He went alone, at his own request, for he explained that any unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. For an hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

"I think that I have seen now all that there is to see, Mr. Holder," said he; "I can serve you best by returning to my rooms."

"But the gems, Mr. Holmes. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell."

The banker wrung his hands. "I shall never see them again!" he cried. "And my son? You give me hopes?"

"My opinion is in no way altered."

"Then, for God's sake, what was this dark business which was acted in my house last night?"

"If you can call upon me at my Baker Street rooms to-morrow morning between nine and ten I shall be happy to do what I can to make it clearer. I understand that you give me *carte blanche* to act for you, provided only that I get back the gems, and that you place no limit on the sum I may draw."

"I would give my fortune to have them back."

"Very good. I shall look into the matter between this and then. Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here again before evening."

It was obvious to me that my companion's mind was now made up about the case, although what his conclusions were was more than I could even dimly imagine. Several times during our homeward journey I endeavoured to sound him upon the point, but he always glided away to some other topic, until at last I gave it over in despair. It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our rooms once more. He hurried to his chamber and was down again in a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. With his collar turned up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he was a perfect sample of the class.

“I think that this should do,” said he, glancing into the glass above the fireplace. “I only wish that you could come with me, Watson, but I fear that it won’t do. I may be on the trail in this matter, or I may be following a will-o’-the-wisp, but I shall soon know which it is. I hope that I may be back in a few hours.” He cut a slice of beef from the joint upon the sideboard, sandwiched it between two rounds of bread, and thrusting this rude meal into his pocket he started off upon his expedition.

I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his hand. He chucked it down into a corner and helped himself to a cup of tea.

“I only looked in as I passed,” said he. “I am going right on.”

“Where to?”

“Oh, to the other side of the West End. It may be some time before I get back. Don’t wait up for me in case I should be late.”

“How are you getting on?”

“Oh, so so. Nothing to complain of. I have been out to Streatham since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. It is a very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a good deal. However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly respectable self.”

I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for satisfaction than his words alone would imply. His eyes twinkled, and there was even a touch of colour upon his sallow cheeks. He hastened upstairs, and a few minutes later I heard the slam of the hall door, which told me that he was off once more upon his congenial hunt.

I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so I retired to my room. It was no uncommon thing for him to be away for days and nights on end when he was hot upon a scent, so that his lateness caused me no surprise. I do not know at what hour he came in, but when I came down to breakfast in the morning there he was with a cup of coffee in one hand and the paper in the other, as fresh and trim as possible.

“You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson,” said he, “but you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this morning.”

“Why, it is after nine now,” I answered. “I should not be surprised if that were he. I thought I heard a ring.”

It was, indeed, our friend the financier. I was shocked by the change which had come over him, for his face which was naturally of a broad and massive mould, was now pinched and fallen in, while his hair seemed to me at least a shade whiter. He entered with a weariness and lethargy which was even more painful than his violence of the morning before, and he dropped heavily into the armchair which I pushed forward for him.

"I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried," said he. "Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without a care in the world. Now I am left to a lonely and dishonoured age. One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. My niece, Mary, has deserted me."

"Deserted you?"

"Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. I had said to her last night, in sorrow and not in anger, that if she had married my boy all might have been well with him. Perhaps it was thoughtless of me to say so. It is to that remark that she refers in this note:

" 'MY DEAREST UNCLE: — I feel that I have brought trouble upon you, and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune might never have occurred. I cannot, with this thought in my mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must leave you forever. Do not worry about my future, for that is provided for; and, above all, do not search for me, for it will be fruitless labour and an ill-service to me. In life or in death, I am ever your loving

" 'MARY.'

"What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? Do you think it points to suicide?"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. It is perhaps the best possible solution. I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of your troubles."

"Ha! You say so! You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have learned something! Where are the gems?"

"You would not think £1000 apiece an excessive sum for them?"

"I would pay ten."

"That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will cover the matter. And there is a little reward, I fancy. Have you your check-book? Here is a pen. Better make it out for £4000."

With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. Holmes walked over to his desk, took out a little triangular piece of gold with three gems in it, and threw it down upon the table.

With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

“You have it!” he gasped. “I am saved! I am saved!”

The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

“There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder,” said Sherlock Holmes rather sternly.

“Owe!” He caught up a pen. “Name the sum, and I will pay it.”

“No, the debt is not to me. You owe a very humble apology to that noble lad, your son, who has carried himself in this matter as I should be proud to see my own son do, should I ever chance to have one.”

“Then it was not Arthur who took them?”

“I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not.”

“You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him at once to let him know that the truth is known.”

“He knows it already. When I had cleared it all up I had an interview with him, and finding that he would not tell me the story, I told it to him, on which he had to confess that I was right and to add the very few details which were not yet quite clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips.”

“For heaven’s sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary mystery!”

“I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached it. And let me say to you, first, that which it is hardest for me to say and for you to hear: there has been an understanding between Sir George Burnwell and your niece Mary. They have now fled together.”

“My Mary? Impossible!”

“It is unfortunately more than possible; it is certain. Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most dangerous men in England — a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. Your niece knew nothing of such men. When he breathed his vows to her, as he had done to a hundred before her, she flattered herself that she alone had touched his heart. The devil knows best what he said, but at least she became his tool and was in the habit of seeing him nearly every evening.”

“I cannot, and I will not, believe it!” cried the banker with an ashen face.

"I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night. Your niece, when you had, as she thought, gone to your room, slipped down and talked to her lover through the window which leads into the stable lane. His footmarks had pressed right through the snow, so long had he stood there. She told him of the coronet. His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he bent her to his will. I have no doubt that she loved you, but there are women in whom the love of a lover extinguishes all other loves, and I think that she must have been one. She had hardly listened to his instructions when she saw you coming downstairs, on which she closed the window rapidly and told you about one of the servants' escapade with her wooden-legged lover, which was all perfectly true.

"Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you but he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts. In the middle of the night he heard a soft tread pass his door, so he rose and, looking out, was surprised to see his cousin walking very stealthily along the passage until she disappeared into your dressing-room. Petrified with astonishment, the lad slipped on some clothes and waited there in the dark to see what would come of this strange affair. Presently she emerged from the room again, and in the light of the passage-lamp your son saw that she carried the precious coronet in her hands. She passed down the stairs, and he, thrilling with horror, ran along and slipped behind the curtain near your door, whence he could see what passed in the hall beneath. He saw her stealthily open the window, hand out the coronet to someone in the gloom, and then closing it once more hurry back to her room, passing quite close to where he stood hid behind the curtain.

"As long as she was on the scene he could not take any action without a horrible exposure of the woman whom he loved. But the instant that she was gone he realised how crushing a misfortune this would be for you, and how all-important it was to set it right. He rushed down, just as he was, in his bare feet, opened the window, sprang out into the snow, and ran down the lane, where he could see a dark figure in the moonlight. Sir George Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him, and there was a struggle between them, your lad tugging at one side of the coronet, and his opponent at the other. In the scuffle, your son struck Sir George and cut him over the eye. Then something suddenly snapped, and your son, finding that he had the coronet in his hands, rushed back, closed the window, ascended to your room, and had just observed that the coronet had been twisted in the struggle and was endeavouring to straighten it when you appeared upon the scene.”

“Is it possible?” gasped the banker.

“You then roused his anger by calling him names at a moment when he felt that he had deserved your warmest thanks. He could not explain the true state of affairs without betraying one who certainly deserved little enough consideration at his hands. He took the more chivalrous view, however, and preserved her secret.”

“And that was why she shrieked and fainted when she saw the coronet,” cried Mr. Holder. “Oh, my God! what a blind fool I have been! And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes! The dear fellow wanted to see if the missing piece were at the scene of the struggle. How cruelly I have misjudged him!”

“When I arrived at the house,” continued Holmes, “I at once went very carefully round it to observe if there were any traces in the snow which might help me. I knew that none had fallen since the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost to preserve impressions. I passed along the tradesmen’s path, but found it all trampled down and indistinguishable. Just beyond it, however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood and talked with a man, whose round impressions on one side showed that he had a wooden leg. I could even tell that they had been disturbed, for the woman had run back swiftly to the door, as was shown by the deep toe and light heel marks, while Wooden-leg had waited a little, and then had gone away. I thought at the time that this might be the maid and her sweetheart, of whom you had already spoken to me, and inquiry showed it was so. I passed round the garden without seeing anything more than random tracks, which I took to be the police; but when I got into the stable lane a very long and complex story was written in the snow in front of me.

“There was a double line of tracks of a booted man, and a second double line which I saw with delight belonged to a man with naked feet. I was at once convinced from what you had told me that the latter was your son. The first had walked both ways, but the other had run swiftly, and as his tread was marked in places over the depression of the boot, it was obvious that he had passed after the other. I followed them up and found they led to the hall window, where Boots had worn all the snow away while waiting. Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred yards or more down the lane.

I saw where Boots had faced round, where the snow was cut up as though there had been a struggle, and, finally, where a few drops of blood had fallen, to show me that I was not mistaken. Boots had then run down the lane, and another little smudge of blood showed that it was he who had been hurt. When he came to the highroad at the other end, I found that the pavement had been cleared, so there was an end to that clue.

“On entering the house, however, I examined, as you remember, the sill and framework of the hall window with my lens, and I could at once see that someone had passed out. I could distinguish the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming in. I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what had occurred. A man had waited outside the window; someone had brought the gems; the deed had been overseen by your son; he had pursued the thief; had struggled with him; they had each tugged at the coronet, their united strength causing injuries which neither alone could have effected. He had returned with the prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his opponent. So far I was clear. The question now was, who was the man and who was it brought him the coronet?

“It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down, so there only remained your niece and the maids. But if it were the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in their place? There could be no possible reason. As he loved his cousin, however, there was an excellent explanation why he should retain her secret — the more so as the secret was a disgraceful one. When I remembered that you had seen her at that window, and how she had fainted on seeing the coronet again, my conjecture became a certainty.

“And who could it be who was her confederate? A lover evidently, for who else could outweigh the love and gratitude which she must feel to you? I knew that you went out little, and that your circle of friends was a very limited one. But among them was Sir George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil reputation among women. It must have been he who wore those boots and retained the missing gems. Even though he knew that Arthur had discovered him, he might still flatter himself that he was safe, for the lad could not say a word without compromising his own family.

“Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took next. I went in the shape of a loafer to Sir George’s house, managed to pick up an acquaintance with his valet, learned that his master had cut his head the night before, and, finally, at the expense of six shillings, made all sure by buying a pair of his cast-off shoes. With these I journeyed down to Streatham and saw that they exactly fitted the tracks.”

“I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening,” said Mr. Holder.

“Precisely. It was I. I found that I had my man, so I came home and changed my clothes. It was a delicate part which I had to play then, for I saw that a prosecution must be avoided to avert scandal, and I knew that so astute a villain would see that our hands were tied in the matter. I went and saw him. At first, of course, he denied everything. But when I gave him every particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster and took down a life-preserver from the wall. I knew my man, however, and I clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. Then he became a little more reasonable. I told him that we would give him a price for the stones he held — £1000 apiece. That brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. ‘Why, dash it all!’ said he, ‘I’ve let them go at six hundred for the three!’ I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. Off I set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at £1000 apiece. Then I looked in upon your son, told him that all was right, and eventually got to my bed about two o’clock, after what I may call a really hard day’s work.”

“A day which has saved England from a great public scandal,” said the banker, rising. “Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. Your skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. And now I must fly to my dear boy to apologise to him for the wrong which I have done him. As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my very heart. Not even your skill can inform me where she is now.”

“I think that we may safely say,” returned Holmes, “that she is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain, too, that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

"To the man who loves art for its own sake," remarked Sherlock Holmes, tossing aside the advertisement sheet of the *Daily Telegraph*, "it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived. It is pleasant to me to observe, Watson, that you have so far grasped this truth that in these little records of our cases which you have been good enough to draw up, and, I am bound to say, occasionally to embellish, you have given prominence not so much to the many *causes célèbres* and sensational trials in which I have figured but rather to those incidents which may have been trivial in themselves, but which have given room for those faculties of deduction and of logical synthesis which I have made my special province."

"And yet," said I, smiling, "I cannot quite hold myself absolved from the charge of sensationalism which has been urged against my records."

"You have erred, perhaps," he observed, taking up a glowing cinder with the tongs and lighting with it the long cherry-wood pipe which was wont to replace his clay when he was in a disputatious rather than a meditative mood—"you have erred perhaps in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature about the thing."

"It seems to me that I have done you full justice in the matter," I remarked with some coldness, for I was repelled by the egotism which I had more than once observed to be a strong factor in my friend's singular character.

"No, it is not selfishness or conceit," said he, answering, as was his wont, my thoughts rather than my words. "If I claim full justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing — a thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales."

It was a cold morning of the early spring, and we sat after breakfast on either side of a cheery fire in the old room at Baker Street. A thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark, shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths. Our gas was lit and shone on the white cloth and glimmer of china and metal, for the table had not been cleared yet. Sherlock Holmes had been silent all the morning, dipping continuously into the advertisement columns of a succession of papers until at last, having apparently given up his search, he had emerged in no very sweet temper to lecture me upon my literary shortcomings.

“At the same time,” he remarked after a pause, during which he had sat puffing at his long pipe and gazing down into the fire, “you can hardly be open to a charge of sensationalism, for out of these cases which you have been so kind as to interest yourself in, a fair proportion do not treat of crime, in its legal sense, at all. The small matter in which I endeavoured to help the King of Bohemia, the singular experience of Miss Mary Sutherland, the problem connected with the man with the twisted lip, and the incident of the noble bachelor, were all matters which are outside the pale of the law. But in avoiding the sensational, I fear that you may have bordered on the trivial.”

“The end may have been so,” I answered, “but the methods I hold to have been novel and of interest.”

“Pshaw, my dear fellow, what do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction! But, indeed, if you are trivial. I cannot blame you, for the days of the great cases are past. Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality. As to my own little practice, it seems to be degenerating into an agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to young ladies from boarding-schools. I think that I have touched bottom at last, however. This note I had this morning marks my zero-point, I fancy. Read it!” He tossed a crumpled letter across to me.

It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening, and ran thus:

“DEAR MR. HOLMES: — I am very anxious to consult you as to whether I should or should not accept a situation which has been offered to me as governess. I shall call at half-past ten to-morrow if I do not inconvenience you. Yours faithfully,

“VIOLET HUNTER.”

“Do you know the young lady?” I asked.

“Not I.”

“It is half-past ten now.”

“Yes, and I have no doubt that is her ring.”

“It may turn out to be of more interest than you think. You remember that the affair of the blue carbuncle, which appeared to be a mere whim at first, developed into a serious investigation. It may be so in this case, also.”

“Well, let us hope so. But our doubts will very soon be solved, for here, unless I am much mistaken, is the person in question.”

As he spoke the door opened and a young lady entered the room. She was plainly but neatly dressed, with a bright, quick face, freckled like a plover’s egg, and with the brisk manner of a woman who has had her own way to make in the world.

“You will excuse my troubling you, I am sure,” said she, as my companion rose to greet her, “but I have had a very strange experience, and as I have no parents or relations of any sort from whom I could ask advice, I thought that perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me what I should do.”

“Pray take a seat, Miss Hunter. I shall be happy to do anything that I can to serve you.”

I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and speech of his new client. He looked her over in his searching fashion, and then composed himself, with his lids drooping and his finger-tips together, to listen to her story.

“I have been a governess for five years,” said she, “in the family of Colonel Spence Munro, but two months ago the colonel received an appointment at Halifax, in Nova Scotia, and took his children over to America with him, so that I found myself without a situation. I advertised, and I answered advertisements, but without success. At last the little money which I had saved began to run short, and I was at my wit’s end as to what I should do.

“There is a well-known agency for governesses in the West End called Westaway’s, and there I used to call about once a week in order to see whether anything had turned up which might suit me. Westaway was the name of the founder of the business, but it is really managed by Miss Stoper. She sits in her own little office, and the ladies who are seeking employment wait in an anteroom, and are then shown in one by one, when she consults her ledgers and sees whether she has anything which would suit them.

“Well, when I called last week I was shown into the little office as usual, but I found that Miss Stoper was not alone. A prodigiously stout man with a very smiling face and a great heavy chin which rolled down in fold upon fold over his throat sat at her elbow with a pair of glasses on his nose, looking very earnestly at the ladies who entered. As I came in he gave quite a jump in his chair and turned quickly to Miss Stoper.

“ ’That will do,’ said he; ‘I could not ask for anything better. Capital! capital!’ He seemed quite enthusiastic and rubbed his hands together in the most genial fashion. He was such a comfortable-looking man that it was quite a pleasure to look at him.

“ ’You are looking for a situation, miss?’ he asked.

“ ’Yes, sir.’

“ ’As governess?’

“ ’Yes, sir.’

“ ’And what salary do you ask?’

“ ’I had £4 a month in my last place with Colonel Spence Munro.’

“ ’Oh, tut, tut! sweating — rank sweating!’ he cried, throwing his fat hands out into the air like a man who is in a boiling passion. ‘How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with such attractions and accomplishments?’

“ ’My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine,’ said I. ‘A little French, a little German, music, and drawing—’

“ ’Tut, tut!’ he cried. ‘This is all quite beside the question. The point is, have you or have you not the bearing and deportment of a lady? There it is in a nutshell. If you have not, you are not fitted for the rearing of a child who may some day play a considerable part in the history of the country. But if you have why, then, how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to accept anything under the three figures? Your salary with me, madam, would commence at £100 a year.’

“You may imagine, Mr. Holmes, that to me, destitute as I was, such an offer seemed almost too good to be true. The gentleman, however, seeing perhaps the look of incredulity upon my face, opened a pocket-book and took out a note.

“ ’It is also my custom,’ said he, smiling in the most pleasant fashion until his eyes were just two little shining slits amid the white creases of his face, ‘to advance to my young ladies half their salary beforehand, so that they may meet any little expenses of their journey and their wardrobe.’

“It seemed to me that I had never met so fascinating and so thoughtful a man. As I was already in debt to my tradesmen, the advance was a great convenience, and yet there was something unnatural about the whole transaction which made me wish to know a little more before I quite committed myself.

“ ’May I ask where you live, sir?’ said I.

“ ’Hampshire. Charming rural place. The Copper Beeches, five miles on the far side of Winchester. It is the most lovely country, my dear young lady, and the dearest old country-house.’

“ ’And my duties, sir? I should be glad to know what they would be.’

“ ’One child — one dear little romper just six years old. Oh, if you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper! Smack! smack! smack! Three gone before you could wink!’ He leaned back in his chair and laughed his eyes into his head again.

“I was a little startled at the nature of the child’s amusement, but the father’s laughter made me think that perhaps he was joking.

“ ’My sole duties, then,’ I asked, ‘are to take charge of a single child?’

“ ’No, no, not the sole, not the sole, my dear young lady,’ he cried. ‘Your duty would be, as I am sure your good sense would suggest, to obey any little commands my wife might give, provided always that they were such commands as a lady might with propriety obey. You see no difficulty, heh?’

“ ’I should be happy to make myself useful.’

“ ’Quite so. In dress now, for example. We are faddy people, you know — faddy but kind-hearted. If you were asked to wear any dress which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim. Heh?’

“ ’No,’ said I, considerably astonished at his words.

“ ’Or to sit here, or sit there, that would not be offensive to you?’

“ ’Oh, no.’

“ ’Or to cut your hair quite short before you come to us?’

“I could hardly believe my ears. As you may observe, Mr. Holmes, my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of chestnut. It has been considered artistic. I could not dream of sacrificing it in this offhand fashion.

“ ’I am afraid that that is quite impossible,’ said I. He had been watching me eagerly out of his small eyes, and I could see a shadow pass over his face as I spoke.

“ ’I am afraid that it is quite essential,’ said he. ‘It is a little fancy of my wife’s, and ladies’ fancies, you know, madam, ladies’ fancies must be consulted. And so you won’t cut your hair?’

“ ’No, sir, I really could not,’ I answered firmly.

“ ’Ah, very well; then that quite settles the matter. It is a pity, because in other respects you would really have done very nicely. In that case, Miss Stoper, I had best inspect a few more of your young ladies.’

“The manageress had sat all this while busy with her papers without a word to either of us, but she glanced at me now with so much annoyance upon her face that I could not help suspecting that she had lost a handsome commission through my refusal.

“ ’Do you desire your name to be kept upon the books?’ she asked.

“ ’If you please, Miss Stoper.’

“ ’Well, really, it seems rather useless, since you refuse the most excellent offers in this fashion,’ said she sharply. ‘You can hardly expect us to exert ourselves to find another such opening for you. Good-day to you, Miss Hunter.’ She struck a gong upon the table, and I was shown out by the page.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, when I got back to my lodgings and found little enough in the cupboard, and two or three bills upon the table. I began to ask myself whether I had not done a very foolish thing. After all, if these people had strange fads and expected obedience on the most extraordinary matters, they were at least ready to pay for their eccentricity. Very few governesses in England are getting £100 a year. Besides, what use was my hair to me? Many people are improved by wearing it short and perhaps I should be among the number. Next day I was inclined to think that I had made a mistake, and by the day after I was sure of it. I had almost overcome my pride so far as to go back to the agency and inquire whether the place was still open when I received this letter from the gentleman himself. I have it here and I will read it to you:

“ ’The Copper Beeches, near Winchester.

“ ’DEAR MISS HUNTER: — Miss Stoper has very kindly given me your address, and I write from here to ask you whether you have reconsidered your decision. My wife is very anxious that you should come, for she has been much attracted by my description of you. We are willing to give £30 a quarter, or £120 a year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which our fads may cause you. They are not very exacting, after all. My wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue and would like you to wear such a dress indoors in the morning. You need not, however, go to the expense of purchasing one, as we have one belonging to my dear daughter Alice (now in Philadelphia), which would, I should think, fit you very well. Then, as to sitting here or there, or amusing yourself in any manner indicated, that need cause you no inconvenience. As regards your hair, it is no doubt a pity, especially as I could not help remarking its beauty during our short interview, but I am afraid that I must remain firm upon this point, and I only hope that the increased salary may recompense you for the loss. Your duties, as far as the child is concerned, are very light. Now do try to come, and I shall meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. Let me know your train. Yours faithfully,

" 'JEPHRO RUCASTLE.'

"That is the letter which I have just received, Mr. Holmes, and my mind is made up that I will accept it. I thought, however, that before taking the final step I should like to submit the whole matter to your consideration."

"Well, Miss Hunter, if your mind is made up, that settles the question," said Holmes, smiling.

"But you would not advise me to refuse?"

"I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for."

"What is the meaning of it all, Mr. Holmes?"

"Ah, I have no data. I cannot tell. Perhaps you have yourself formed some opinion?"

"Well, there seems to me to be only one possible solution. Mr. Rucastle seemed to be a very kind, good-natured man. Is it not possible that his wife is a lunatic, that he desires to keep the matter quiet for fear she should be taken to an asylum, and that he humours her fancies in every way in order to prevent an outbreak?"

"That is a possible solution — in fact, as matters stand, it is the most probable one. But in any case it does not seem to be a nice household for a young lady."

"But the money, Mr. Holmes, the money!"

"Well, yes, of course the pay is good — too good. That is what makes me uneasy. Why should they give you £120 a year, when they could have their pick for £40? There must be some strong reason behind.”

“I thought that if I told you the circumstances you would understand afterwards if I wanted your help. I should feel so much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me.”

“Oh, you may carry that feeling away with you. I assure you that your little problem promises to be the most interesting which has come my way for some months. There is something distinctly novel about some of the features. If you should find yourself in doubt or in danger—”

“Danger! What danger do you foresee?”

Holmes shook his head gravely. “It would cease to be a danger if we could define it,” said he. “But at any time, day or night, a telegram would bring me down to your help.”

“That is enough.” She rose briskly from her chair with the anxiety all swept from her face. “I shall go down to Hampshire quite easy in my mind now. I shall write to Mr. Rucastle at once, sacrifice my poor hair to-night, and start for Winchester to-morrow.” With a few grateful words to Holmes she bade us both good-night and bustled off upon her way.

“At least,” said I as we heard her quick, firm steps descending the stairs, “she seems to be a young lady who is very well able to take care of herself.”

“And she would need to be,” said Holmes gravely. “I am much mistaken if we do not hear from her before many days are past.”

It was not very long before my friend’s prediction was fulfilled. A fortnight went by, during which I frequently found my thoughts turning in her direction and wondering what strange side-alley of human experience this lonely woman had strayed into. The unusual salary, the curious conditions, the light duties, all pointed to something abnormal, though whether a fad or a plot, or whether the man were a philanthropist or a villain, it was quite beyond my powers to determine. As to Holmes, I observed that he sat frequently for half an hour on end, with knitted brows and an abstracted air, but he swept the matter away with a wave of his hand when I mentioned it. “Data! data! data!” he cried impatiently. “I can’t make bricks without clay.” And yet he would always wind up by muttering that no sister of his should ever have accepted such a situation.

The telegram which we eventually received came late one night just as I was thinking of turning in and Holmes was settling down to one of those all-night chemical researches which he frequently indulged in, when I would leave him stooping over a retort and a test-tube at night and find him in the same position when I came down to breakfast in the morning. He opened the yellow envelope, and then, glancing at the message, threw it across to me.

“Just look up the trains in Bradshaw,” said he, and turned back to his chemical studies.

The summons was a brief and urgent one.

“Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday to-morrow,” it said. “Do come! I am at my wit’s end.

“HUNTER.”

“Will you come with me?” asked Holmes, glancing up.

“I should wish to.”

“Just look it up, then.”

“There is a train at half-past nine,” said I, glancing over my Bradshaw. “It is due at Winchester at 11:30.”

“That will do very nicely. Then perhaps I had better postpone my analysis of the acetones, as we may need to be at our best in the morning.”

By eleven o’clock the next day we were well upon our way to the old English capital. Holmes had been buried in the morning papers all the way down, but after we had passed the Hampshire border he threw them down and began to admire the scenery. It was an ideal spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white clouds drifting across from west to east. The sun was shining very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man’s energy. All over the countryside, away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light green of the new foliage.

“Are they not fresh and beautiful?” I cried with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.

But Holmes shook his head gravely.

“Do you know, Watson,” said he, “that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there.”

“Good heavens!” I cried. “Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?”

“They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.”

“You horrify me!”

“But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard’s blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. Had this lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I should never have had a fear for her. It is the five miles of country which makes the danger. Still, it is clear that she is not personally threatened.”

“No. If she can come to Winchester to meet us she can get away.”

“Quite so. She has her freedom.”

“What *can* be the matter, then? Can you suggest no explanation?”

“I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them. But which of these is correct can only be determined by the fresh information which we shall no doubt find waiting for us. Well, there is the tower of the cathedral, and we shall soon learn all that Miss Hunter has to tell.”

The Black Swan is an inn of repute in the High Street, at no distance from the station, and there we found the young lady waiting for us. She had engaged a sitting-room, and our lunch awaited us upon the table.

“I am so delighted that you have come,” she said earnestly. “It is so very kind of you both; but indeed I do not know what I should do. Your advice will be altogether invaluable to me.”

“Pray tell us what has happened to you.”

“I will do so, and I must be quick, for I have promised Mr. Rucastle to be back before three. I got his leave to come into town this morning, though he little knew for what purpose.”

“Let us have everything in its due order.” Holmes thrust his long thin legs out towards the fire and composed himself to listen.

“In the first place, I may say that I have met, on the whole, with no actual ill-treatment from Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle. It is only fair to them to say that. But I cannot understand them, and I am not easy in my mind about them.”

“What can you not understand?”

“Their reasons for their conduct. But you shall have it all just as it occurred. When I came down, Mr. Rucastle met me here and drove me in his dog-cart to the Copper Beeches. It is, as he said, beautifully situated, but it is not beautiful in itself, for it is a large square block of a house, whitewashed, but all stained and streaked with damp and bad weather. There are grounds round it, woods on three sides, and on the fourth a field which slopes down to the Southampton highroad, which curves past about a hundred yards from the front door. This ground in front belongs to the house, but the woods all round are part of Lord Southerton’s preserves. A clump of copper beeches immediately in front of the hall door has given its name to the place.

“I was driven over by my employer, who was as amiable as ever, and was introduced by him that evening to his wife and the child. There was no truth, Mr. Holmes, in the conjecture which seemed to us to be probable in your rooms at Baker Street. Mrs. Rucastle is not mad. I found her to be a silent, pale-faced woman, much younger than her husband, not more than thirty, I should think, while he can hardly be less than forty-five. From their conversation I have gathered that they have been married about seven years, that he was a widower, and that his only child by the first wife was the daughter who has gone to Philadelphia. Mr. Rucastle told me in private that the reason why she had left them was that she had an unreasoning aversion to her stepmother. As the daughter could not have been less than twenty, I can quite imagine that her position must have been uncomfortable with her father’s young wife.

“Mrs. Rucastle seemed to me to be colourless in mind as well as in feature. She impressed me neither favourably nor the reverse. She was a nonentity. It was easy to see that she was passionately devoted both to her husband and to her little son. Her light grey eyes wandered continually from one to the other, noting every little want and forestalling it if possible. He was kind to her also in his bluff, boisterous fashion, and on the whole they seemed to be a happy couple. And yet she had some secret sorrow, this woman. She would often be lost in deep thought, with the saddest look upon her face. More than once I have surprised her in tears. I have thought sometimes that it was the disposition of her child which weighed upon her mind, for I have never met so utterly spoiled and so ill-natured a little creature. He is small for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large. His whole life appears to be spent in an alternation between savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking. Giving pain to any creature weaker than himself seems to be his one idea of amusement, and he shows quite remarkable talent in planning the capture of mice, little birds, and insects. But I would rather not talk about the creature, Mr. Holmes, and, indeed, he has little to do with my story."

"I am glad of all details," remarked my friend, "whether they seem to you to be relevant or not."

"I shall try not to miss anything of importance. The one unpleasant thing about the house, which struck me at once, was the appearance and conduct of the servants. There are only two, a man and his wife. Toller, for that is his name, is a rough, uncouth man, with grizzled hair and whiskers, and a perpetual smell of drink. Twice since I have been with them he has been quite drunk, and yet Mr. Rucastle seemed to take no notice of it. His wife is a very tall and strong woman with a sour face, as silent as Mrs. Rucastle and much less amiable. They are a most unpleasant couple, but fortunately I spend most of my time in the nursery and my own room, which are next to each other in one corner of the building.

"For two days after my arrival at the Copper Beeches my life was very quiet; on the third, Mrs. Rucastle came down just after breakfast and whispered something to her husband.

" 'Oh, yes,' said he, turning to me, 'we are very much obliged to you, Miss Hunter, for falling in with our whims so far as to cut your hair. I assure you that it has not detracted in the tiniest iota from your appearance. We shall now see how the electric-blue dress will become you. You will find it laid out upon the bed in your room, and if you would be so good as to put it on we should both be extremely obliged.'

"The dress which I found waiting for me was of a peculiar shade of blue. It was of excellent material, a sort of beige, but it bore unmistakable signs of having been worn before. It could not have been a better fit if I had been measured for it. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle expressed a delight at the look of it, which seemed quite exaggerated in its vehemence. They were waiting for me in the drawing-room, which is a very large room, stretching along the entire front of the house, with three long windows reaching down to the floor. A chair had been placed close to the central window, with its back turned towards it. In this I was asked to sit, and then Mr. Rucastle, walking up and down on the other side of the room, began to tell me a series of the funniest stories that I have ever listened to. You cannot imagine how comical he was, and I laughed until I was quite weary. Mrs. Rucastle, however, who has evidently no sense of humour, never so much as smiled, but sat with her hands in her lap, and a sad, anxious look upon her face. After an hour or so, Mr. Rucastle suddenly remarked that it was time to commence the duties of the day, and that I might change my dress and go to little Edward in the nursery.

"Two days later this same performance was gone through under exactly similar circumstances. Again I changed my dress, again I sat in the window, and again I laughed very heartily at the funny stories of which my employer had an immense *répertoire*, and which he told inimitably. Then he handed me a yellow-backed novel, and moving my chair a little sideways, that my own shadow might not fall upon the page, he begged me to read aloud to him. I read for about ten minutes, beginning in the heart of a chapter, and then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he ordered me to cease and to change my dress.

"You can easily imagine, Mr. Holmes, how curious I became as to what the meaning of this extraordinary performance could possibly be. They were always very careful, I observed, to turn my face away from the window, so that I became consumed with the desire to see what was going on behind my back. At first it seemed to be impossible, but I soon devised a means. My hand-mirror had been broken, so a happy thought seized me, and I concealed a piece of the glass in my handkerchief. On the next occasion, in the midst of my laughter, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes, and was able with a little management to see all that there was behind me. I confess that I was disappointed. There was nothing. At least that was my first impression. At the second glance, however, I perceived that there was a man standing in the Southampton Road, a small bearded man in a grey suit, who seemed to be looking in my direction. The road is an important highway, and there are usually people there. This man, however, was leaning against the railings which bordered our field and was looking earnestly up. I lowered my handkerchief and glanced at Mrs. Rucastle to find her eyes fixed upon me with a most searching gaze. She said nothing, but I am convinced that she had divined that I had a mirror in my hand and had seen what was behind me. She rose at once.

“ ’Jephro,’ said she, ‘there is an impertinent fellow upon the road there who stares up at Miss Hunter.’

“ ’No friend of yours, Miss Hunter?’ he asked.

“ ’No, I know no one in these parts.’

“ ’Dear me! How very impertinent! Kindly turn round and motion to him to go away.’

“ ’Surely it would be better to take no notice.’

“ ’No, no, we should have him loitering here always. Kindly turn round and wave him away like that.’

“I did as I was told, and at the same instant Mrs. Rucastle drew down the blind. That was a week ago, and from that time I have not sat again in the window, nor have I worn the blue dress, nor seen the man in the road.”

“Pray continue,” said Holmes. “Your narrative promises to be a most interesting one.”

“You will find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may prove to be little relation between the different incidents of which I speak. On the very first day that I was at the Copper Beeches, Mr. Rucastle took me to a small outhouse which stands near the kitchen door. As we approached it I heard the sharp rattling of a chain, and the sound as of a large animal moving about.

“ ’Look in here!’ said Mr. Rucastle, showing me a slit between two planks. ‘Is he not a beauty?’

“I looked through and was conscious of two glowing eyes, and of a vague figure huddled up in the darkness.

“ ’Don’t be frightened,’ said my employer, laughing at the start which I had given. ‘It’s only Carlo, my mastiff. I call him mine, but really old Toller, my groom, is the only man who can do anything with him. We feed him once a day, and not too much then, so that he is always as keen as mustard. Toller lets him loose every night, and God help the trespasser whom he lays his fangs upon. For goodness’ sake don’t you ever on any pretext set your foot over the threshold at night, for it’s as much as your life is worth.’

“The warning was no idle one, for two nights later I happened to look out of my bedroom window about two o’clock in the morning. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the lawn in front of the house was silvered over and almost as bright as day. I was standing, rapt in the peaceful beauty of the scene, when I was aware that something was moving under the shadow of the copper beeches. As it emerged into the moonshine I saw what it was. It was a giant dog, as large as a calf, tawny tinted, with hanging jowl, black muzzle, and huge projecting bones. It walked slowly across the lawn and vanished into the shadow upon the other side. That dreadful sentinel sent a chill to my heart which I do not think that any burglar could have done.

"And now I have a very strange experience to tell you. I had, as you know, cut off my hair in London, and I had placed it in a great coil at the bottom of my trunk. One evening, after the child was in bed, I began to amuse myself by examining the furniture of my room and by rearranging my own little things. There was an old chest of drawers in the room, the two upper ones empty and open, the lower one locked. I had filled the first two with my linen, and as I had still much to pack away I was naturally annoyed at not having the use of the third drawer. It struck me that it might have been fastened by a mere oversight, so I took out my bunch of keys and tried to open it. The very first key fitted to perfection, and I drew the drawer open. There was only one thing in it, but I am sure that you would never guess what it was. It was my coil of hair.

"I took it up and examined it. It was of the same peculiar tint, and the same thickness. But then the impossibility of the thing obtruded itself upon me. How could my hair have been locked in the drawer? With trembling hands I undid my trunk, turned out the contents, and drew from the bottom my own hair. I laid the two tresses together, and I assure you that they were identical. Was it not extraordinary? Puzzle as I would, I could make nothing at all of what it meant. I returned the strange hair to the drawer, and I said nothing of the matter to the Rucastles as I felt that I had put myself in the wrong by opening a drawer which they had locked.

"I am naturally observant, as you may have remarked, Mr. Holmes, and I soon had a pretty good plan of the whole house in my head. There was one wing, however, which appeared not to be inhabited at all. A door which faced that which led into the quarters of the Tollers opened into this suite, but it was invariably locked. One day, however, as I ascended the stair, I met Mr. Rucastle coming out through this door, his keys in his hand, and a look on his face which made him a very different person to the round, jovial man to whom I was accustomed. His cheeks were red, his brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his temples with passion. He locked the door and hurried past me without a word or a look.

“This aroused my curiosity, so when I went out for a walk in the grounds with my charge, I strolled round to the side from which I could see the windows of this part of the house. There were four of them in a row, three of which were simply dirty, while the fourth was shuttered up. They were evidently all deserted. As I strolled up and down, glancing at them occasionally, Mr. Rucastle came out to me, looking as merry and jovial as ever.

“ ’Ah!’ said he, ‘you must not think me rude if I passed you without a word, my dear young lady. I was preoccupied with business matters.’

“I assured him that I was not offended. ‘By the way,’ said I, ‘you seem to have quite a suite of spare rooms up there, and one of them has the shutters up.’

“He looked surprised and, as it seemed to me, a little startled at my remark.

“ ’Photography is one of my hobbies,’ said he. ‘I have made my dark room up there. But, dear me! what an observant young lady we have come upon. Who would have believed it? Who would have ever believed it?’ He spoke in a jesting tone, but there was no jest in his eyes as he looked at me. I read suspicion there and annoyance, but no jest.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty — a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. They talk of woman’s instinct; perhaps it was woman’s instinct which gave me that feeling. At any rate, it was there, and I was keenly on the lookout for any chance to pass the forbidden door.

“It was only yesterday that the chance came. I may tell you that, besides Mr. Rucastle, both Toller and his wife find something to do in these deserted rooms, and I once saw him carrying a large black linen bag with him through the door. Recently he has been drinking hard, and yesterday evening he was very drunk; and when I came upstairs there was the key in the door. I have no doubt at all that he had left it there. Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle were both downstairs, and the child was with them, so that I had an admirable opportunity. I turned the key gently in the lock, opened the door, and slipped through.

“There was a little passage in front of me, unpapered and uncarpeted, which turned at a right angle at the farther end. Round this corner were three doors in a line, the first and third of which were open. They each led into an empty room, dusty and cheerless, with two windows in the one and one in the other, so thick with dirt that the evening light glimmered dimly through them. The centre door was closed, and across the outside of it had been fastened one of the broad bars of an iron bed, padlocked at one end to a ring in the wall, and fastened at the other with stout cord. The door itself was locked as well, and the key was not there. This barricaded door corresponded clearly with the shuttered window outside, and yet I could see by the glimmer from beneath it that the room was not in darkness. Evidently there was a skylight which let in light from above. As I stood in the passage gazing at the sinister door and wondering what secret it might veil, I suddenly heard the sound of steps within the room and saw a shadow pass backward and forward against the little slit of dim light which shone out from under the door. A mad, unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr. Holmes. My overstrung nerves failed me suddenly, and I turned and ran — ran as though some dreadful hand were behind me clutching at the skirt of my dress. I rushed down the passage, through the door, and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle, who was waiting outside.

“ ’So,’ said he, smiling, ‘it was you, then. I thought that it must be when I saw the door open.’

“ ’Oh, I am so frightened!’ I panted.

“ ’My dear young lady! my dear young lady!’ — you cannot think how caressing and soothing his manner was—’and what has frightened you, my dear young lady?’

“But his voice was just a little too coaxing. He overdid it. I was keenly on my guard against him.

“ ’I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing,’ I answered. ‘But it is so lonely and eerie in this dim light that I was frightened and ran out again. Oh, it is so dreadfully still in there!’

“ ’Only that?’ said he, looking at me keenly.

“ ’Why, what did you think?’ I asked.

“ ’Why do you think that I lock this door?’

“ ’I am sure that I do not know.’

“ ’It is to keep people out who have no business there. Do you see?’ He was still smiling in the most amiable manner.

“ ’I am sure if I had known—’

“ ’Well, then, you know now. And if you ever put your foot over that threshold again’ — here in an instant the smile hardened into a grin of rage, and he glared down at me with the face of a demon—’I’ll throw you to the mastiff.’

“I was so terrified that I do not know what I did. I suppose that I must have rushed past him into my room. I remember nothing until I found myself lying on my bed trembling all over. Then I thought of you, Mr. Holmes. I could not live there longer without some advice. I was frightened of the house, of the man, of the woman, of the servants, even of the child. They were all horrible to me. If I could only bring you down all would be well. Of course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was almost as strong as my fears. My mind was soon made up. I would send you a wire. I put on my hat and cloak, went down to the office, which is about half a mile from the house, and then returned, feeling very much easier. A horrible doubt came into my mind as I approached the door lest the dog might be loose, but I remembered that Toller had drunk himself into a state of insensibility that evening, and I knew that he was the only one in the household who had any influence with the savage creature, or who would venture to set him free. I slipped in in safety and lay awake half the night in my joy at the thought of seeing you. I had no difficulty in getting leave to come into Winchester this morning, but I must be back before three o’clock, for Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle are going on a visit, and will be away all the evening, so that I must look after the child. Now I have told you all my adventures, Mr. Holmes, and I should be very glad if you could tell me what it all means, and, above all, what I should do.”

Holmes and I had listened spellbound to this extraordinary story. My friend rose now and paced up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, and an expression of the most profound gravity upon his face.

“Is Toller still drunk?” he asked.

“Yes. I heard his wife tell Mrs. Rucastle that she could do nothing with him.”

“That is well. And the Rucastles go out to-night?”

“Yes.”

“Is there a cellar with a good strong lock?”

"Yes, the wine-cellar."

"You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter. Do you think that you could perform one more feat? I should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman."

"I will try. What is it?"

"We shall be at the Copper Beeches by seven o'clock, my friend and I. The Rucastles will be gone by that time, and Toller will, we hope, be incapable. There only remains Mrs. Toller, who might give the alarm. If you could send her into the cellar on some errand, and then turn the key upon her, you would facilitate matters immensely."

"I will do it."

"Excellent! We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. Of course there is only one feasible explanation. You have been brought there to personate someone, and the real person is imprisoned in this chamber. That is obvious. As to who this prisoner is, I have no doubt that it is the daughter, Miss Alice Rucastle, if I remember right, who was said to have gone to America. You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height, figure, and the colour of your hair. Hers had been cut off, very possibly in some illness through which she has passed, and so, of course, yours had to be sacrificed also. By a curious chance you came upon her tresses. The man in the road was undoubtedly some friend of hers — possibly her *fiancé* — and no doubt, as you wore the girl's dress and were so like her, he was convinced from your laughter, whenever he saw you, and afterwards from your gesture, that Miss Rucastle was perfectly happy, and that she no longer desired his attentions. The dog is let loose at night to prevent him from endeavouring to communicate with her. So much is fairly clear. The most serious point in the case is the disposition of the child."

"What on earth has that to do with it?" I ejaculated.

"My dear Watson, you as a medical man are continually gaining light as to the tendencies of a child by the study of the parents. Don't you see that the converse is equally valid. I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children. This child's disposition is abnormally cruel, merely for cruelty's sake, and whether he derives this from his smiling father, as I should suspect, or from his mother, it bodes evil for the poor girl who is in their power."

“I am sure that you are right, Mr. Holmes,” cried our client. “A thousand things come back to me which make me certain that you have hit it. Oh, let us lose not an instant in bringing help to this poor creature.”

“We must be circumspect, for we are dealing with a very cunning man. We can do nothing until seven o’clock. At that hour we shall be with you, and it will not be long before we solve the mystery.”

We were as good as our word, for it was just seven when we reached the Copper Beeches, having put up our trap at a wayside public-house. The group of trees, with their dark leaves shining like burnished metal in the light of the setting sun, were sufficient to mark the house even had Miss Hunter not been standing smiling on the door-step.

“Have you managed it?” asked Holmes.

A loud thudding noise came from somewhere downstairs. “That is Mrs. Toller in the cellar,” said she. “Her husband lies snoring on the kitchen rug. Here are his keys, which are the duplicates of Mr. Rucastle’s.”

“You have done well indeed!” cried Holmes with enthusiasm. “Now lead the way, and we shall soon see the end of this black business.”

We passed up the stair, unlocked the door, followed on down a passage, and found ourselves in front of the barricade which Miss Hunter had described. Holmes cut the cord and removed the transverse bar. Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but without success. No sound came from within, and at the silence Holmes’ face clouded over.

“I trust that we are not too late,” said he. “I think, Miss Hunter, that we had better go in without you. Now, Watson, put your shoulder to it, and we shall see whether we cannot make our way in.”

It was an old rickety door and gave at once before our united strength. Together we rushed into the room. It was empty. There was no furniture save a little pallet bed, a small table, and a basketful of linen. The skylight above was open, and the prisoner gone.

“There has been some villainy here,” said Holmes; “this beauty has guessed Miss Hunter’s intentions and has carried his victim off.”

“But how?”

“Through the skylight. We shall soon see how he managed it.” He swung himself up onto the roof. “Ah, yes,” he cried, “here’s the end of a long light ladder against the eaves. That is how he did it.”

“But it is impossible,” said Miss Hunter; “the ladder was not there when the Rucastles went away.”

"He has come back and done it. I tell you that he is a clever and dangerous man. I should not be very much surprised if this were he whose step I hear now upon the stair. I think, Watson, that it would be as well for you to have your pistol ready."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a man appeared at the door of the room, a very fat and burly man, with a heavy stick in his hand. Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and confronted him.

"You villain!" said he, "where's your daughter?"

The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open skylight.

"It is for me to ask you that," he shrieked, "you thieves! Spies and thieves! I have caught you, have I? You are in my power. I'll serve you!" He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he could go.

"He's gone for the dog!" cried Miss Hunter.

"I have my revolver," said I.

"Better close the front door," cried Holmes, and we all rushed down the stairs together. We had hardly reached the hall when we heard the baying of a hound, and then a scream of agony, with a horrible worrying sound which it was dreadful to listen to. An elderly man with a red face and shaking limbs came staggering out at a side door.

"My God!" he cried. "Someone has loosed the dog. It's not been fed for two days. Quick, quick, or it'll be too late!"

Holmes and I rushed out and round the angle of the house, with Toller hurrying behind us. There was the huge famished brute, its black muzzle buried in Rucastle's throat, while he writhed and screamed upon the ground. Running up, I blew its brains out, and it fell over with its keen white teeth still meeting in the great creases of his neck. With much labour we separated them and carried him, living but horribly mangled, into the house. We laid him upon the drawing-room sofa, and having dispatched the sobered Toller to bear the news to his wife, I did what I could to relieve his pain. We were all assembled round him when the door opened, and a tall, gaunt woman entered the room.

"Mrs. Toller!" cried Miss Hunter.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Rucastle let me out when he came back before he went up to you. Ah, miss, it is a pity you didn't let me know what you were planning, for I would have told you that your pains were wasted."

"Ha!" said Holmes, looking keenly at her. "It is clear that Mrs. Toller knows more about this matter than anyone else."

"Yes, sir, I do, and I am ready enough to tell what I know."

"Then, pray, sit down, and let us hear it for there are several points on which I must confess that I am still in the dark."

"I will soon make it clear to you," said she; "and I'd have done so before now if I could ha' got out from the cellar. If there's police-court business over this, you'll remember that I was the one that stood your friend, and that I was Miss Alice's friend too.

"She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the time that her father married again. She was slighted like and had no say in anything, but it never really became bad for her until after she met Mr. Fowler at a friend's house. As well as I could learn, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so quiet and patient, she was, that she never said a word about them but just left everything in Mr. Rucastle's hands. He knew he was safe with her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming forward, who would ask for all that the law would give him, then her father thought it time to put a stop on it. He wanted her to sign a paper, so that whether she married or not, he could use her money. When she wouldn't do it, he kept on worrying her until she got brain-fever, and for six weeks was at death's door. Then she got better at last, all worn to a shadow, and with her beautiful hair cut off; but that didn't make no change in her young man, and he stuck to her as true as man could be."

"Ah," said Holmes, "I think that what you have been good enough to tell us makes the matter fairly clear, and that I can deduce all that remains. Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this system of imprisonment?"

"Yes, sir."

"And brought Miss Hunter down from London in order to get rid of the disagreeable persistence of Mr. Fowler."

"That was it, sir."

"But Mr. Fowler being a persevering man, as a good seaman should be, blockaded the house, and having met you succeeded by certain arguments, metallic or otherwise, in convincing you that your interests were the same as his."

"Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed gentleman," said Mrs. Toller serenely.

"And in this way he managed that your good man should have no want of drink, and that a ladder should be ready at the moment when your master had gone out."

"You have it, sir, just as it happened."

"I am sure we owe you an apology, Mrs. Toller," said Holmes, "for you have certainly cleared up everything which puzzled us. And here comes the country surgeon and Mrs. Rucastle, so I think, Watson, that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our *locus standi* now is rather a questionable one."

And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door. Mr. Rucastle survived, but was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife. They still live with their old servants, who probably know so much of Rucastle's past life that he finds it difficult to part from them. Mr. Fowler and Miss Rucastle were married, by special license, in Southampton the day after their flight, and he is now the holder of a government appointment in the island of Mauritius. As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success.

THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

This collection of eleven Sherlock Holmes stories was originally published in 1894.

MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

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Adventure I. Silver Blaze

“I am afraid, Watson, that I shall have to go,” said Holmes, as we sat down together to our breakfast one morning.

“Go! Where to?”

“To Dartmoor; to King’s Pyland.”

I was not surprised. Indeed, my only wonder was that he had not already been mixed up in this extraordinary case, which was the one topic of conversation through the length and breadth of England. For a whole day my companion had rambled about the room with his chin upon his chest and his brows knitted, charging and recharging his pipe with the strongest black tobacco, and absolutely deaf to any of my questions or remarks. Fresh editions of every paper had been sent up by our news agent, only to be glanced over and tossed down into a corner. Yet, silent as he was, I knew perfectly well what it was over which he was brooding. There was but one problem before the public which could challenge his powers of analysis, and that was the singular disappearance of the favorite for the Wessex Cup, and the tragic murder of its trainer. When, therefore, he suddenly announced his intention of setting out for the scene of the drama it was only what I had both expected and hoped for.

“I should be most happy to go down with you if I should not be in the way,” said I.

“My dear Watson, you would confer a great favor upon me by coming. And I think that your time will not be misspent, for there are points about the case which promise to make it an absolutely unique one. We have, I think, just time to catch our train at Paddington, and I will go further into the matter upon our journey. You would oblige me by bringing with you your very excellent field-glass.”

And so it happened that an hour or so later I found myself in the corner of a first-class carriage flying along en route for Exeter, while Sherlock Holmes, with his sharp, eager face framed in his ear-flapped travelling-cap, dipped rapidly into the bundle of fresh papers which he had procured at Paddington. We had left Reading far behind us before he thrust the last one of them under the seat, and offered me his cigar-case.

“We are going well,” said he, looking out the window and glancing at his watch. “Our rate at present is fifty-three and a half miles an hour.”

“I have not observed the quarter-mile posts,” said I.

“Nor have I. But the telegraph posts upon this line are sixty yards apart, and the calculation is a simple one. I presume that you have looked into this matter of the murder of John Straker and the disappearance of Silver Blaze?”

“I have seen what the Telegraph and the Chronicle have to say.”

“It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence. The tragedy has been so uncommon, so complete and of such personal importance to so many people, that we are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis. The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact — of absolute undeniable fact — from the embellishments of theorists and reporters. Then, having established ourselves upon this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn and what are the special points upon which the whole mystery turns. On Tuesday evening I received telegrams from both Colonel Ross, the owner of the horse, and from Inspector Gregory, who is looking after the case, inviting my cooperation.”

“Tuesday evening!” I exclaimed. “And this is Thursday morning. Why didn’t you go down yesterday?”

“Because I made a blunder, my dear Watson — which is, I am afraid, a more common occurrence than any one would think who only knew me through your memoirs. The fact is that I could not believe it possible that the most remarkable horse in England could long remain concealed, especially in so sparsely inhabited a place as the north of Dartmoor. From hour to hour yesterday I expected to hear that he had been found, and that his abductor was the murderer of John Straker. When, however, another morning had come, and I found that beyond the arrest of young Fitzroy Simpson nothing had been done, I felt that it was time for me to take action. Yet in some ways I feel that yesterday has not been wasted.”

“You have formed a theory, then?”

“At least I have got a grip of the essential facts of the case. I shall enumerate them to you, for nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person, and I can hardly expect your co-operation if I do not show you the position from which we start.”

I lay back against the cushions, puffing at my cigar, while Holmes, leaning forward, with his long, thin forefinger checking off the points upon the palm of his left hand, gave me a sketch of the events which had led to our journey.

“Silver Blaze,” said he, “is from the Somomy stock, and holds as brilliant a record as his famous ancestor. He is now in his fifth year, and has brought in turn each of the prizes of the turf to Colonel Ross, his fortunate owner. Up to the time of the catastrophe he was the first favorite for the Wessex Cup, the betting being three to one on him. He has always, however, been a prime favorite with the racing public, and has never yet disappointed them, so that even at those odds enormous sums of money have been laid upon him. It is obvious, therefore, that there were many people who had the strongest interest in preventing Silver Blaze from being there at the fall of the flag next Tuesday.

“The fact was, of course, appreciated at King’s Pyland, where the Colonel’s training-stable is situated. Every precaution was taken to guard the favorite. The trainer, John Straker, is a retired jockey who rode in Colonel Ross’s colours before he became too heavy for the weighing-chair. He has served the Colonel for five years as jockey and for seven as trainer, and has always shown himself to be a zealous and honest servant. Under him were three lads; for the establishment was a small one, containing only four horses in all. One of these lads sat up each night in the stable, while the others slept in the loft. All three bore excellent characters. John Straker, who is a married man, lived in a small villa about two hundred yards from the stables. He has no children, keeps one maid-servant, and is comfortably off. The country round is very lonely, but about half a mile to the north there is a small cluster of villas which have been built by a Tavistock contractor for the use of invalids and others who may wish to enjoy the pure Dartmoor air. Tavistock itself lies two miles to the west, while across the moor, also about two miles distant, is the larger training establishment of Mapleton, which belongs to Lord Backwater, and is managed by Silas Brown. In every other direction the moor is a complete wilderness, inhabited only by a few roaming gypsies. Such was the general situation last Monday night when the catastrophe occurred.

“On that evening the horses had been exercised and watered as usual, and the stables were locked up at nine o’clock. Two of the lads walked up to the trainer’s house, where they had supper in the kitchen, while the third, Ned

Hunter, remained on guard. At a few minutes after nine the maid, Edith Baxter, carried down to the stables his supper, which consisted of a dish of curried mutton. She took no liquid, as there was a water-tap in the stables, and it was the rule that the lad on duty should drink nothing else. The maid carried a lantern with her, as it was very dark and the path ran across the open moor.

"Edith Baxter was within thirty yards of the stables, when a man appeared out of the darkness and called to her to stop. As he stepped into the circle of yellow light thrown by the lantern she saw that he was a person of gentlemanly bearing, dressed in a gray suit of tweeds, with a cloth cap. He wore gaiters, and carried a heavy stick with a knob to it. She was most impressed, however, by the extreme pallor of his face and by the nervousness of his manner. His age, she thought, would be rather over thirty than under it.

"'Can you tell me where I am?' he asked. 'I had almost made up my mind to sleep on the moor, when I saw the light of your lantern.'

"'You are close to the King's Pyland training-stables,' said she.

"'Oh, indeed! What a stroke of luck!' he cried. 'I understand that a stable-boy sleeps there alone every night. Perhaps that is his supper which you are carrying to him. Now I am sure that you would not be too proud to earn the price of a new dress, would you?' He took a piece of white paper folded up out of his waistcoat pocket. 'See that the boy has this to-night, and you shall have the prettiest frock that money can buy.'

"She was frightened by the earnestness of his manner, and ran past him to the window through which she was accustomed to hand the meals. It was already opened, and Hunter was seated at the small table inside. She had begun to tell him of what had happened, when the stranger came up again.

"'Good-evening,' said he, looking through the window. 'I wanted to have a word with you.' The girl has sworn that as he spoke she noticed the corner of the little paper packet protruding from his closed hand.

"'What business have you here?' asked the lad.

"'It's business that may put something into your pocket,' said the other. 'You've two horses in for the Wessex Cup — Silver Blaze and Bayard. Let me have the straight tip and you won't be a loser. Is it a fact that at the weights Bayard could give the other a hundred yards in five furlongs, and that the stable have put their money on him?'

"'So, you're one of those damned touts!' cried the lad. 'I'll show you how we serve them in King's Pyland.' He sprang up and rushed across the stable to unloose the dog. The girl fled away to the house, but as she ran she looked back and saw that the stranger was leaning through the window. A minute later, however, when Hunter rushed out with the hound he was gone, and though he ran all round the buildings he failed to find any trace of him."

"One moment," I asked. "Did the stable-boy, when he ran out with the dog, leave the door unlocked behind him?"

"Excellent, Watson, excellent!" murmured my companion. "The importance of the point struck me so forcibly that I sent a special wire to Dartmoor yesterday to clear the matter up. The boy locked the door before he left it. The window, I may add, was not large enough for a man to get through.

"Hunter waited until his fellow-grooms had returned, when he sent a message to the trainer and told him what had occurred. Straker was excited at hearing the account, although he does not seem to have quite realised its true significance. It left him, however, vaguely uneasy, and Mrs. Straker, waking at one in the morning, found that he was dressing. In reply to her inquiries, he said that he could not sleep on account of his anxiety about the horses, and that he intended to walk down to the stables to see that all was well. She begged him to remain at home, as she could hear the rain pattering against the window, but in spite of her entreaties he pulled on his large mackintosh and left the house.

"Mrs. Straker awoke at seven in the morning, to find that her husband had not yet returned. She dressed herself hastily, called the maid, and set off for the stables. The door was open; inside, huddled together upon a chair, Hunter was sunk in a state of absolute stupor, the favorite's stall was empty, and there were no signs of his trainer.

"The two lads who slept in the chaff-cutting loft above the harness-room were quickly aroused. They had heard nothing during the night, for they are both sound sleepers. Hunter was obviously under the influence of some powerful drug, and as no sense could be got out of him, he was left to sleep it off while the two lads and the two women ran out in search of the absentees. They still had hopes that the trainer had for some reason taken out the horse for early exercise, but on ascending the knoll near the house, from which all the neighbouring moors were visible, they not only could see no signs of the missing favorite, but they perceived something which warned them that they were in the presence of a tragedy.

“About a quarter of a mile from the stables John Straker’s overcoat was flapping from a furze-bush. Immediately beyond there was a bowl-shaped depression in the moor, and at the bottom of this was found the dead body of the unfortunate trainer. His head had been shattered by a savage blow from some heavy weapon, and he was wounded on the thigh, where there was a long, clean cut, inflicted evidently by some very sharp instrument. It was clear, however, that Straker had defended himself vigorously against his assailants, for in his right hand he held a small knife, which was clotted with blood up to the handle, while in his left he clasped a red and black silk cravat, which was recognised by the maid as having been worn on the preceding evening by the stranger who had visited the stables. Hunter, on recovering from his stupor, was also quite positive as to the ownership of the cravat. He was equally certain that the same stranger had, while standing at the window, drugged his curried mutton, and so deprived the stables of their watchman. As to the missing horse, there were abundant proofs in the mud which lay at the bottom of the fatal hollow that he had been there at the time of the struggle. But from that morning he has disappeared, and although a large reward has been offered, and all the gypsies of Dartmoor are on the alert, no news has come of him. Finally, an analysis has shown that the remains of his supper left by the stable-lad contain an appreciable quantity of powdered opium, while the people at the house partook of the same dish on the same night without any ill effect.

“Those are the main facts of the case, stripped of all surmise, and stated as baldly as possible. I shall now recapitulate what the police have done in the matter.

“Inspector Gregory, to whom the case has been committed, is an extremely competent officer. Were he but gifted with imagination he might rise to great heights in his profession. On his arrival he promptly found and arrested the man upon whom suspicion naturally rested. There was little difficulty in finding him, for he inhabited one of those villas which I have mentioned. His name, it appears, was Fitzroy Simpson. He was a man of excellent birth and education, who had squandered a fortune upon the turf, and who lived now by doing a little quiet and genteel book-making in the sporting clubs of London. An examination of his betting-book shows that bets to the amount of five thousand pounds had been registered by him against the favorite. On being arrested he volunteered that statement that he had come down to Dartmoor in the hope of getting some information about the King's Pyland horses, and also about Desborough, the second favorite, which was in charge of Silas Brown at the Mapleton stables. He did not attempt to deny that he had acted as described upon the evening before, but declared that he had no sinister designs, and had simply wished to obtain first-hand information. When confronted with his cravat, he turned very pale, and was utterly unable to account for its presence in the hand of the murdered man. His wet clothing showed that he had been out in the storm of the night before, and his stick, which was a Penang-lawyer weighted with lead, was just such a weapon as might, by repeated blows, have inflicted the terrible injuries to which the trainer had succumbed. On the other hand, there was no wound upon his person, while the state of Straker's knife would show that one at least of his assailants must bear his mark upon him. There you have it all in a nutshell, Watson, and if you can give me any light I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

I had listened with the greatest interest to the statement which Holmes, with characteristic clearness, had laid before me. Though most of the facts were familiar to me, I had not sufficiently appreciated their relative importance, nor their connection to each other.

"Is it not possible," I suggested, "that the incised wound upon Straker may have been caused by his own knife in the convulsive struggles which follow any brain injury?"

"It is more than possible; it is probable," said Holmes. "In that case one of the main points in favor of the accused disappears."

"And yet," said I, "even now I fail to understand what the theory of the police can be."

"I am afraid that whatever theory we state has very grave objections to it," returned my companion. "The police imagine, I take it, that this Fitzroy Simpson, having drugged the lad, and having in some way obtained a duplicate key, opened the stable door and took out the horse, with the intention, apparently, of kidnapping him altogether. His bridle is missing, so that Simpson must have put this on. Then, having left the door open behind him, he was leading the horse away over the moor, when he was either met or overtaken by the trainer. A row naturally ensued. Simpson beat out the trainer's brains with his heavy stick without receiving any injury from the small knife which Straker used in self-defence, and then the thief either led the horse on to some secret hiding-place, or else it may have bolted during the struggle, and be now wandering out on the moors. That is the case as it appears to the police, and improbable as it is, all other explanations are more improbable still. However, I shall very quickly test the matter when I am once upon the spot, and until then I cannot really see how we can get much further than our present position."

It was evening before we reached the little town of Tavistock, which lies, like the boss of a shield, in the middle of the huge circle of Dartmoor. Two gentlemen were awaiting us in the station — the one a tall, fair man with lion-like hair and beard and curiously penetrating light blue eyes; the other a small, alert person, very neat and dapper, in a frock-coat and gaiters, with trim little side-whiskers and an eye-glass. The latter was Colonel Ross, the well-known sportsman; the other, Inspector Gregory, a man who was rapidly making his name in the English detective service.

"I am delighted that you have come down, Mr. Holmes," said the Colonel. "The Inspector here has done all that could possibly be suggested, but I wish to leave no stone unturned in trying to avenge poor Straker and in recovering my horse."

"Have there been any fresh developments?" asked Holmes.

"I am sorry to say that we have made very little progress," said the Inspector. "We have an open carriage outside, and as you would no doubt like to see the place before the light fails, we might talk it over as we drive."

A minute later we were all seated in a comfortable landau, and were rattling through the quaint old Devonshire city. Inspector Gregory was full of his case, and poured out a stream of remarks, while Holmes threw in an occasional question or interjection. Colonel Ross leaned back with his arms folded and his hat tilted over his eyes, while I listened with interest to the dialogue of the two detectives. Gregory was formulating his theory, which was almost exactly what Holmes had foretold in the train.

"The net is drawn pretty close round Fitzroy Simpson," he remarked, "and I believe myself that he is our man. At the same time I recognise that the evidence is purely circumstantial, and that some new development may upset it."

"How about Straker's knife?"

"We have quite come to the conclusion that he wounded himself in his fall."

“My friend Dr. Watson made that suggestion to me as we came down. If so, it would tell against this man Simpson.”

“Undoubtedly. He has neither a knife nor any sign of a wound. The evidence against him is certainly very strong. He had a great interest in the disappearance of the favorite. He lies under suspicion of having poisoned the stable-boy, he was undoubtedly out in the storm, he was armed with a heavy stick, and his cravat was found in the dead man’s hand. I really think we have enough to go before a jury.”

Holmes shook his head. “A clever counsel would tear it all to rags,” said he. “Why should he take the horse out of the stable? If he wished to injure it why could he not do it there? Has a duplicate key been found in his possession? What chemist sold him the powdered opium? Above all, where could he, a stranger to the district, hide a horse, and such a horse as this? What is his own explanation as to the paper which he wished the maid to give to the stable-boy?”

“He says that it was a ten-pound note. One was found in his purse. But your other difficulties are not so formidable as they seem. He is not a stranger to the district. He has twice lodged at Tavistock in the summer. The opium was probably brought from London. The key, having served its purpose, would be hurled away. The horse may be at the bottom of one of the pits or old mines upon the moor.”

“What does he say about the cravat?”

“He acknowledges that it is his, and declares that he had lost it. But a new element has been introduced into the case which may account for his leading the horse from the stable.”

Holmes pricked up his ears.

“We have found traces which show that a party of gypsies encamped on Monday night within a mile of the spot where the murder took place. On Tuesday they were gone. Now, presuming that there was some understanding between Simpson and these gypsies, might he not have been leading the horse to them when he was overtaken, and may they not have him now?”

“It is certainly possible.”

“The moor is being scoured for these gypsies. I have also examined every stable and out-house in Tavistock, and for a radius of ten miles.”

“There is another training-stable quite close, I understand?”

“Yes, and that is a factor which we must certainly not neglect. As Desborough, their horse, was second in the betting, they had an interest in the disappearance of the favorite. Silas Brown, the trainer, is known to have had large bets upon the event, and he was no friend to poor Straker. We have, however, examined the stables, and there is nothing to connect him with the affair.”

“And nothing to connect this man Simpson with the interests of the Mapleton stables?”

“Nothing at all.”

Holmes leaned back in the carriage, and the conversation ceased. A few minutes later our driver pulled up at a neat little red-brick villa with overhanging eaves which stood by the road. Some distance off, across a paddock, lay a long gray-tiled out-building. In every other direction the low curves of the moor, bronze-coloured from the fading ferns, stretched away to the sky-line, broken only by the steeples of Tavistock, and by a cluster of houses away to the westward which marked the Mapleton stables. We all sprang out with the exception of Holmes, who continued to lean back with his eyes fixed upon the sky in front of him, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts. It was only when I touched his arm that he roused himself with a violent start and stepped out of the carriage.

“Excuse me,” said he, turning to Colonel Ross, who had looked at him in some surprise. “I was day-dreaming.” There was a gleam in his eyes and a suppressed excitement in his manner which convinced me, used as I was to his ways, that his hand was upon a clue, though I could not imagine where he had found it.

“Perhaps you would prefer at once to go on to the scene of the crime, Mr. Holmes?” said Gregory.

“I think that I should prefer to stay here a little and go into one or two questions of detail. Straker was brought back here, I presume?”

“Yes; he lies upstairs. The inquest is to-morrow.”

“He has been in your service some years, Colonel Ross?”

“I have always found him an excellent servant.”

“I presume that you made an inventory of what he had in his pockets at the time of his death, Inspector?”

“I have the things themselves in the sitting-room, if you would care to see them.”

“I should be very glad.” We all filed into the front room and sat round the central table while the Inspector unlocked a square tin box and laid a small heap of things before us. There was a box of vestas, two inches of tallow candle, an A D P brier-root pipe, a pouch of seal-skin with half an ounce of long-cut Cavendish, a silver watch with a gold chain, five sovereigns in gold, an aluminum pencil-case, a few papers, and an ivory-handled knife with a very delicate, inflexible blade marked Weiss & Co., London.

“This is a very singular knife,” said Holmes, lifting it up and examining it minutely. “I presume, as I see blood-stains upon it, that it is the one which was found in the dead man’s grasp. Watson, this knife is surely in your line?”

“It is what we call a cataract knife,” said I.

“I thought so. A very delicate blade devised for very delicate work. A strange thing for a man to carry with him upon a rough expedition, especially as it would not shut in his pocket.”

“The tip was guarded by a disk of cork which we found beside his body,” said the Inspector. “His wife tells us that the knife had lain upon the dressing-table, and that he had picked it up as he left the room. It was a poor weapon, but perhaps the best that he could lay his hands on at the moment.”

“Very possible. How about these papers?”

“Three of them are receipted hay-dealers’ accounts. One of them is a letter of instructions from Colonel Ross. This other is a milliner’s account for thirty-seven pounds fifteen made out by Madame Lesurier, of Bond Street, to William Derbyshire. Mrs. Straker tells us that Derbyshire was a friend of her husband’s and that occasionally his letters were addressed here.”

“Madam Derbyshire had somewhat expensive tastes,” remarked Holmes, glancing down the account. “Twenty-two guineas is rather heavy for a single costume. However there appears to be nothing more to learn, and we may now go down to the scene of the crime.”

As we emerged from the sitting-room a woman, who had been waiting in the passage, took a step forward and laid her hand upon the Inspector’s sleeve. Her face was haggard and thin and eager, stamped with the print of a recent horror.

“Have you got them? Have you found them?” she panted.

"No, Mrs. Straker. But Mr. Holmes here has come from London to help us, and we shall do all that is possible."

"Surely I met you in Plymouth at a garden-party some little time ago, Mrs. Straker?" said Holmes.

"No, sir; you are mistaken."

"Dear me! Why, I could have sworn to it. You wore a costume of dove-coloured silk with ostrich-feather trimming."

"I never had such a dress, sir," answered the lady.

"Ah, that quite settles it," said Holmes. And with an apology he followed the Inspector outside. A short walk across the moor took us to the hollow in which the body had been found. At the brink of it was the furze-bush upon which the coat had been hung.

"There was no wind that night, I understand," said Holmes.

"None; but very heavy rain."

"In that case the overcoat was not blown against the furze-bush, but placed there."

"Yes, it was laid across the bush."

"You fill me with interest, I perceive that the ground has been trampled up a good deal. No doubt many feet have been here since Monday night."

"A piece of matting has been laid here at the side, and we have all stood upon that."

"Excellent."

"In this bag I have one of the boots which Straker wore, one of Fitzroy Simpson's shoes, and a cast horseshoe of Silver Blaze."

"My dear Inspector, you surpass yourself!" Holmes took the bag, and, descending into the hollow, he pushed the matting into a more central position. Then stretching himself upon his face and leaning his chin upon his hands, he made a careful study of the trampled mud in front of him. "Hullo!" said he, suddenly. "What's this?" It was a wax vesta half burned, which was so coated with mud that it looked at first like a little chip of wood.

"I cannot think how I came to overlook it," said the Inspector, with an expression of annoyance.

"It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it."

"What! You expected to find it?"

"I thought it not unlikely."

He took the boots from the bag, and compared the impressions of each of them with marks upon the ground. Then he clambered up to the rim of the hollow, and crawled about among the ferns and bushes.

"I am afraid that there are no more tracks," said the Inspector. "I have examined the ground very carefully for a hundred yards in each direction."

"Indeed!" said Holmes, rising. "I should not have the impertinence to do it again after what you say. But I should like to take a little walk over the moor before it grows dark, that I may know my ground to-morrow, and I think that I shall put this horseshoe into my pocket for luck."

Colonel Ross, who had shown some signs of impatience at my companion's quiet and systematic method of work, glanced at his watch. "I wish you would come back with me, Inspector," said he. "There are several points on which I should like your advice, and especially as to whether we do not owe it to the public to remove our horse's name from the entries for the Cup."

"Certainly not," cried Holmes, with decision. "I should let the name stand."

The Colonel bowed. "I am very glad to have had your opinion, sir," said he. "You will find us at poor Straker's house when you have finished your walk, and we can drive together into Tavistock."

He turned back with the Inspector, while Holmes and I walked slowly across the moor. The sun was beginning to sink behind the stables of Mapleton, and the long, sloping plain in front of us was tinged with gold, deepening into rich, ruddy browns where the faded ferns and brambles caught the evening light. But the glories of the landscape were all wasted upon my companion, who was sunk in the deepest thought.

"It's this way, Watson," said he at last. "We may leave the question of who killed John Straker for the instant, and confine ourselves to finding out what has become of the horse. Now, supposing that he broke away during or after the tragedy, where could he have gone to? The horse is a very gregarious creature. If left to himself his instincts would have been either to return to King's Pyland or go over to Mapleton. Why should he run wild upon the moor? He would surely have been seen by now. And why should gypsies kidnap him? These people always clear out when they hear of trouble, for they do not wish to be pestered by the police. They could not hope to sell such a horse. They would run a great risk and gain nothing by taking him. Surely that is clear."

“Where is he, then?”

“I have already said that he must have gone to King’s Pyland or to Mapleton. He is not at King’s Pyland. Therefore he is at Mapleton. Let us take that as a working hypothesis and see what it leads us to. This part of the moor, as the Inspector remarked, is very hard and dry. But it falls away towards Mapleton, and you can see from here that there is a long hollow over yonder, which must have been very wet on Monday night. If our supposition is correct, then the horse must have crossed that, and there is the point where we should look for his tracks.”

We had been walking briskly during this conversation, and a few more minutes brought us to the hollow in question. At Holmes’ request I walked down the bank to the right, and he to the left, but I had not taken fifty paces before I heard him give a shout, and saw him waving his hand to me. The track of a horse was plainly outlined in the soft earth in front of him, and the shoe which he took from his pocket exactly fitted the impression.

“See the value of imagination,” said Holmes. “It is the one quality which Gregory lacks. We imagined what might have happened, acted upon the supposition, and find ourselves justified. Let us proceed.”

We crossed the marshy bottom and passed over a quarter of a mile of dry, hard turf. Again the ground sloped, and again we came on the tracks. Then we lost them for half a mile, but only to pick them up once more quite close to Mapleton. It was Holmes who saw them first, and he stood pointing with a look of triumph upon his face. A man’s track was visible beside the horse’s.

“The horse was alone before,” I cried.

“Quite so. It was alone before. Hullo, what is this?”

The double track turned sharp off and took the direction of King’s Pyland. Holmes whistled, and we both followed along after it. His eyes were on the trail, but I happened to look a little to one side, and saw to my surprise the same tracks coming back again in the opposite direction.

“One for you, Watson,” said Holmes, when I pointed it out. “You have saved us a long walk, which would have brought us back on our own traces. Let us follow the return track.”

We had not to go far. It ended at the paving of asphalt which led up to the gates of the Mapleton stables. As we approached, a groom ran out from them.

“We don’t want any loiterers about here,” said he.

“I only wished to ask a question,” said Holmes, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. “Should I be too early to see your master, Mr. Silas Brown, if I were to call at five o’clock to-morrow morning?”

“Bless you, sir, if any one is about he will be, for he is always the first stirring. But here he is, sir, to answer your questions for himself. No, sir, no; it is as much as my place is worth to let him see me touch your money. Afterwards, if you like.”

As Sherlock Holmes replaced the half-crown which he had drawn from his pocket, a fierce-looking elderly man strode out from the gate with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand.

“What’s this, Dawson!” he cried. “No gossiping! Go about your business! And you, what the devil do you want here?”

“Ten minutes’ talk with you, my good sir,” said Holmes in the sweetest of voices.

“I’ve no time to talk to every gadabout. We want no stranger here. Be off, or you may find a dog at your heels.”

Holmes leaned forward and whispered something in the trainer’s ear. He started violently and flushed to the temples.

“It’s a lie!” he shouted, “an infernal lie!”

“Very good. Shall we argue about it here in public or talk it over in your parlor?”

“Oh, come in if you wish to.”

Holmes smiled. “I shall not keep you more than a few minutes, Watson,” said he. “Now, Mr. Brown, I am quite at your disposal.”

It was twenty minutes, and the reds had all faded into grays before Holmes and the trainer reappeared. Never have I seen such a change as had been brought about in Silas Brown in that short time. His face was ashy pale, beads of perspiration shone upon his brow, and his hands shook until the hunting-crop wagged like a branch in the wind. His bullying, overbearing manner was all gone too, and he cringed along at my companion’s side like a dog with its master.

“Your instructions will be done. It shall all be done,” said he.

“There must be no mistake,” said Holmes, looking round at him. The other winced as he read the menace in his eyes.

“Oh no, there shall be no mistake. It shall be there. Should I change it first or not?”

Holmes thought a little and then burst out laughing. “No, don’t,” said he; “I shall write to you about it. No tricks, now, or—”

“Oh, you can trust me, you can trust me!”

“Yes, I think I can. Well, you shall hear from me to-morrow.” He turned upon his heel, disregarding the trembling hand which the other held out to him, and we set off for King’s Pyland.

“A more perfect compound of the bully, coward, and sneak than Master Silas Brown I have seldom met with,” remarked Holmes as we trudged along together.

“He has the horse, then?”

“He tried to bluster out of it, but I described to him so exactly what his actions had been upon that morning that he is convinced that I was watching him. Of course you observed the peculiarly square toes in the impressions, and that his own boots exactly corresponded to them. Again, of course no subordinate would have dared to do such a thing. I described to him how, when according to his custom he was the first down, he perceived a strange horse wandering over the moor. How he went out to it, and his astonishment at recognising, from the white forehead which has given the favorite its name, that chance had put in his power the only horse which could beat the one upon which he had put his money. Then I described how his first impulse had been to lead him back to King’s Pyland, and how the devil had shown him how he could hide the horse until the race was over, and how he had led it back and concealed it at Mapleton. When I told him every detail he gave it up and thought only of saving his own skin.”

“But his stables had been searched?”

“Oh, an old horse-faker like him has many a dodge.”

“But are you not afraid to leave the horse in his power now, since he has every interest in injuring it?”

“My dear fellow, he will guard it as the apple of his eye. He knows that his only hope of mercy is to produce it safe.”

“Colonel Ross did not impress me as a man who would be likely to show much mercy in any case.”

“The matter does not rest with Colonel Ross. I follow my own methods, and tell as much or as little as I choose. That is the advantage of being unofficial. I don’t know whether you observed it, Watson, but the Colonel’s manner has been just a trifle cavalier to me. I am inclined now to have a little amusement at his expense. Say nothing to him about the horse.”

“Certainly not without your permission.”

“And of course this is all quite a minor point compared to the question of who killed John Straker.”

“And you will devote yourself to that?”

“On the contrary, we both go back to London by the night train.”

I was thunderstruck by my friend’s words. We had only been a few hours in Devonshire, and that he should give up an investigation which he had begun so brilliantly was quite incomprehensible to me. Not a word more could I draw from him until we were back at the trainer’s house. The Colonel and the Inspector were awaiting us in the parlor.

“My friend and I return to town by the night-express,” said Holmes. “We have had a charming little breath of your beautiful Dartmoor air.”

The Inspector opened his eyes, and the Colonel’s lip curled in a sneer.

“So you despair of arresting the murderer of poor Straker,” said he.

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. “There are certainly grave difficulties in the way,” said he. “I have every hope, however, that your horse will start upon Tuesday, and I beg that you will have your jockey in readiness. Might I ask for a photograph of Mr. John Straker?”

The Inspector took one from an envelope and handed it to him.

“My dear Gregory, you anticipate all my wants. If I might ask you to wait here for an instant, I have a question which I should like to put to the maid.”

“I must say that I am rather disappointed in our London consultant,” said Colonel Ross, bluntly, as my friend left the room. “I do not see that we are any further than when he came.”

“At least you have his assurance that your horse will run,” said I.

“Yes, I have his assurance,” said the Colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders. “I should prefer to have the horse.”

I was about to make some reply in defence of my friend when he entered the room again.

“Now, gentlemen,” said he, “I am quite ready for Tavistock.”

As we stepped into the carriage one of the stable-lads held the door open for us. A sudden idea seemed to occur to Holmes, for he leaned forward and touched the lad upon the sleeve.

“You have a few sheep in the paddock,” he said. “Who attends to them?”

“I do, sir.”

“Have you noticed anything amiss with them of late?”

“Well, sir, not of much account; but three of them have gone lame, sir.”

I could see that Holmes was extremely pleased, for he chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

“A long shot, Watson; a very long shot,” said he, pinching my arm. “Gregory, let me recommend to your attention this singular epidemic among the sheep. Drive on, coachman!”

Colonel Ross still wore an expression which showed the poor opinion which he had formed of my companion’s ability, but I saw by the Inspector’s face that his attention had been keenly aroused.

“You consider that to be important?” he asked.

“Exceedingly so.”

“Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?”

“To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.”

“The dog did nothing in the night-time.”

“That was the curious incident,” remarked Sherlock Holmes.

Four days later Holmes and I were again in the train, bound for Winchester to see the race for the Wessex Cup. Colonel Ross met us by appointment outside the station, and we drove in his drag to the course beyond the town. His face was grave, and his manner was cold in the extreme.

“I have seen nothing of my horse,” said he.

“I suppose that you would know him when you saw him?” asked Holmes.

The Colonel was very angry. “I have been on the turf for twenty years, and never was asked such a question as that before,” said he. “A child would know Silver Blaze, with his white forehead and his mottled off-foreleg.”

“How is the betting?”

“Well, that is the curious part of it. You could have got fifteen to one yesterday, but the price has become shorter and shorter, until you can hardly get three to one now.”

“Hum!” said Holmes. “Somebody knows something, that is clear.”

As the drag drew up in the enclosure near the grand stand I glanced at the card to see the entries.

Wessex Plate [it ran] 50 sovs each h ft with 1000 sovs added for four and five year olds. Second, L300. Third, L200. New course (one mile and five furlongs). Mr. Heath Newton’s The Negro. Red cap. Cinnamon jacket. Colonel Wardlaw’s Pugilist. Pink cap. Blue and black jacket. Lord Backwater’s Desborough. Yellow cap and sleeves. Colonel Ross’s Silver

Blaze. Black cap. Red jacket. Duke of Balmoral’s Iris. Yellow and black stripes. Lord Singleford’s Rasper. Purple cap. Black sleeves.

“We scratched our other one, and put all hopes on your word,” said the Colonel. “Why, what is that? Silver Blaze favorite?”

“Five to four against Silver Blaze!” roared the ring. “Five to four against Silver Blaze! Five to fifteen against Desborough! Five to four on the field!”

“There are the numbers up,” I cried. “They are all six there.”

“All six there? Then my horse is running,” cried the Colonel in great agitation. “But I don’t see him. My colours have not passed.”

“Only five have passed. This must be he.”

As I spoke a powerful bay horse swept out from the weighing enclosure and cantered past us, bearing on its back the well-known black and red of the Colonel.

“That’s not my horse,” cried the owner. “That beast has not a white hair upon its body. What is this that you have done, Mr. Holmes?”

“Well, well, let us see how he gets on,” said my friend, imperturbably. For a few minutes he gazed through my field-glass. “Capital! An excellent start!” he cried suddenly. “There they are, coming round the curve!”

From our drag we had a superb view as they came up the straight. The six horses were so close together that a carpet could have covered them, but half way up the yellow of the Mapleton stable showed to the front. Before they reached us, however, Desborough’s bolt was shot, and the Colonel’s horse, coming away with a rush, passed the post a good six lengths before its rival, the Duke of Balmoral’s Iris making a bad third.

“It’s my race, anyhow,” gasped the Colonel, passing his hand over his eyes. “I confess that I can make neither head nor tail of it. Don’t you think that you have kept up your mystery long enough, Mr. Holmes?”

“Certainly, Colonel, you shall know everything. Let us all go round and have a look at the horse together. Here he is,” he continued, as we made our way into the weighing enclosure, where only owners and their friends find admittance. “You have only to wash his face and his leg in spirits of wine, and you will find that he is the same old Silver Blaze as ever.”

“You take my breath away!”

“I found him in the hands of a faker, and took the liberty of running him just as he was sent over.”

“My dear sir, you have done wonders. The horse looks very fit and well. It never went better in its life. I owe you a thousand apologies for having doubted your ability. You have done me a great service by recovering my horse. You would do me a greater still if you could lay your hands on the murderer of John Straker.”

“I have done so,” said Holmes quietly.

The Colonel and I stared at him in amazement. “You have got him! Where is he, then?”

“He is here.”

“Here! Where?”

“In my company at the present moment.”

The Colonel flushed angrily. “I quite recognise that I am under obligations to you, Mr. Holmes,” said he, “but I must regard what you have just said as either a very bad joke or an insult.”

Sherlock Holmes laughed. “I assure you that I have not associated you with the crime, Colonel,” said he. “The real murderer is standing immediately behind you.” He stepped past and laid his hand upon the glossy neck of the thoroughbred.

“The horse!” cried both the Colonel and myself.

“Yes, the horse. And it may lessen his guilt if I say that it was done in self-defence, and that John Straker was a man who was entirely unworthy of your confidence. But there goes the bell, and as I stand to win a little on this next race, I shall defer a lengthy explanation until a more fitting time.”

We had the corner of a Pullman car to ourselves that evening as we whirled back to London, and I fancy that the journey was a short one to Colonel Ross as well as to myself, as we listened to our companion’s narrative of the events which had occurred at the Dartmoor training-stables upon the Monday night, and the means by which he had unravelled them.

“I confess,” said he, “that any theories which I had formed from the newspaper reports were entirely erroneous. And yet there were indications there, had they not been overlaid by other details which concealed their true import. I went to Devonshire with the conviction that Fitzroy Simpson was the true culprit, although, of course, I saw that the evidence against him was by no means complete. It was while I was in the carriage, just as we reached the trainer’s house, that the immense significance of the curried mutton occurred to me. You may remember that I was distrait, and remained sitting after you had all alighted. I was marvelling in my own mind how I could possibly have overlooked so obvious a clue.”

“I confess,” said the Colonel, “that even now I cannot see how it helps us.”

“It was the first link in my chain of reasoning. Powdered opium is by no means tasteless. The flavor is not disagreeable, but it is perceptible. Were it mixed with any ordinary dish the eater would undoubtedly detect it, and would probably eat no more. A curry was exactly the medium which would disguise this taste. By no possible supposition could this stranger, Fitzroy Simpson, have caused curry to be served in the trainer’s family that night, and it is surely too monstrous a coincidence to suppose that he happened to come along with powdered opium upon the very night when a dish happened to be served which would disguise the flavor. That is unthinkable. Therefore Simpson becomes eliminated from the case, and our attention centers upon Straker and his wife, the only two people who could have chosen curried mutton for supper that night. The opium was added after the dish was set aside for the stable-boy, for the others had the same for supper with no ill effects. Which of them, then, had access to that dish without the maid seeing them?

“Before deciding that question I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for one true inference invariably suggests others. The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though some one had been in and had fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. Obviously the midnight visitor was some one whom the dog knew well.

“I was already convinced, or almost convinced, that John Straker went down to the stables in the dead of the night and took out Silver Blaze. For what purpose? For a dishonest one, obviously, or why should he drug his own stable-boy? And yet I was at a loss to know why. There have been cases before now where trainers have made sure of great sums of money by laying against their own horses, through agents, and then preventing them from winning by fraud. Sometimes it is a pulling jockey. Sometimes it is some surer and subtler means. What was it here? I hoped that the contents of his pockets might help me to form a conclusion.

“And they did so. You cannot have forgotten the singular knife which was found in the dead man’s hand, a knife which certainly no sane man would choose for a weapon. It was, as Dr. Watson told us, a form of knife which is used for the most delicate operations known in surgery. And it was to be used for a delicate operation that night. You must know, with your wide experience of turf matters, Colonel Ross, that it is possible to make a slight nick upon the tendons of a horse's ham, and to do it subcutaneously, so as to leave absolutely no trace. A horse so treated would develop a slight lameness, which would be put down to a strain in exercise or a touch of rheumatism, but never to foul play."

"Villain! Scoundrel!" cried the Colonel.

"We have here the explanation of why John Straker wished to take the horse out on to the moor. So spirited a creature would have certainly roused the soundest of sleepers when it felt the prick of the knife. It was absolutely necessary to do it in the open air."

"I have been blind!" cried the Colonel. "Of course that was why he needed the candle, and struck the match."

"Undoubtedly. But in examining his belongings I was fortunate enough to discover not only the method of the crime, but even its motives. As a man of the world, Colonel, you know that men do not carry other people's bills about in their pockets. We have most of us quite enough to do to settle our own. I at once concluded that Straker was leading a double life, and keeping a second establishment. The nature of the bill showed that there was a lady in the case, and one who had expensive tastes. Liberal as you are with your servants, one can hardly expect that they can buy twenty-guinea walking dresses for their ladies. I questioned Mrs. Straker as to the dress without her knowing it, and having satisfied myself that it had never reached her, I made a note of the milliner's address, and felt that by calling there with Straker's photograph I could easily dispose of the mythical Derbyshire.

"From that time on all was plain. Straker had led out the horse to a hollow where his light would be invisible. Simpson in his flight had dropped his cravat, and Straker had picked it up — with some idea, perhaps, that he might use it in securing the horse's leg. Once in the hollow, he had got behind the horse and had struck a light; but the creature frightened at the sudden glare, and with the strange instinct of animals feeling that some mischief was intended, had lashed out, and the steel shoe had struck Straker full on the forehead. He had already, in spite of the rain, taken off his overcoat in order to do his delicate task, and so, as he fell, his knife gashed his thigh. Do I make it clear?"

"Wonderful!" cried the Colonel. "Wonderful! You might have been there!"

“My final shot was, I confess a very long one. It struck me that so astute a man as Straker would not undertake this delicate tendon-nicking without a little practice. What could he practice on? My eyes fell upon the sheep, and I asked a question which, rather to my surprise, showed that my surmise was correct.

“When I returned to London I called upon the milliner, who had recognised Straker as an excellent customer of the name of Derbyshire, who had a very dashing wife, with a strong partiality for expensive dresses. I have no doubt that this woman had plunged him over head and ears in debt, and so led him into this miserable plot.”

“You have explained all but one thing,” cried the Colonel. “Where was the horse?”

“Ah, it bolted, and was cared for by one of your neighbours. We must have an amnesty in that direction, I think. This is Clapham Junction, if I am not mistaken, and we shall be in Victoria in less than ten minutes. If you care to smoke a cigar in our rooms, Colonel, I shall be happy to give you any other details which might interest you.”

Adventure II. The Yellow Face

[In publishing these short sketches based upon the numerous cases in which my companion’s singular gifts have made us the listeners to, and eventually the actors in, some strange drama, it is only natural that I should dwell rather upon his successes than upon his failures. And this not so much for the sake of his reputation — for, indeed, it was when he was at his wits’ end that his energy and his versatility were most admirable — but because where he failed it happened too often that no one else succeeded, and that the tale was left forever without a conclusion. Now and again, however, it chanced that even when he erred, the truth was still discovered. I have noted of some half-dozen cases of the kind; the Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual and that which I am about to recount are the two which present the strongest features of interest.]

Sherlock Holmes was a man who seldom took exercise for exercise’s sake. Few men were capable of greater muscular effort, and he was undoubtedly one of the finest boxers of his weight that I have ever seen; but he looked upon aimless bodily exertion as a waste of energy, and he seldom bestirred himself save when there was some professional object to be served. Then he was absolutely untiring and indefatigable. That he should have kept himself in training under such circumstances is remarkable, but his diet was usually of the sparest, and his habits were simple to the verge of austerity. Save for the occasional use of cocaine, he had no vices, and he only turned to the drug as a protest against the monotony of existence when cases were scanty and the papers uninteresting.

One day in early spring he had so far relaxed as to go for a walk with me in the Park, where the first faint shoots of green were breaking out upon the elms, and the sticky spear-heads of the chestnuts were just beginning to burst into their five-fold leaves. For two hours we rambled about together, in silence for the most part, as befits two men who know each other intimately. It was nearly five before we were back in Baker Street once more.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said our page-boy, as he opened the door. “There’s been a gentleman here asking for you, sir.”

Holmes glanced reproachfully at me. “So much for afternoon walks!” said he. “Has this gentleman gone, then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Didn’t you ask him in?”

“Yes, sir; he came in.”

“How long did he wait?”

“Half an hour, sir. He was a very restless gentleman, sir, a-walkin’ and a-stampin’ all the time he was here. I was waitin’ outside the door, sir, and I could hear him. At last he outs into the passage, and he cries, ‘Is that man never goin’ to come?’ Those were his very words, sir. ‘You’ll only need to wait a little longer,’ says I. ‘Then I’ll wait in the open air, for I feel half choked,’ says he. ‘I’ll be back before long.’ And with that he ups and he outs, and all I could say wouldn’t hold him back.”

“Well, well, you did your best,” said Holmes, as we walked into our room. “It’s very annoying, though, Watson. I was badly in need of a case, and this looks, from the man’s impatience, as if it were of importance. Hullo! That’s not your pipe on the table. He must have left his behind him. A nice old brier with a good long stem of what the tobacconists call amber. I wonder how many real amber mouthpieces there are in London? Some people think that a fly in it is a sign. Well, he must have been disturbed in his mind to leave a pipe behind him which he evidently values highly.”

“How do you know that he values it highly?” I asked.

“Well, I should put the original cost of the pipe at seven and sixpence. Now it has, you see, been twice mended, once in the wooden stem and once in the amber. Each of these mends, done, as you observe, with silver bands, must have cost more than the pipe did originally. The man must value the pipe highly when he prefers to patch it up rather than buy a new one with the same money.”

“Anything else?” I asked, for Holmes was turning the pipe about in his hand, and staring at it in his peculiar pensive way.

He held it up and tapped on it with his long, thin fore-finger, as a professor might who was lecturing on a bone.

“Pipes are occasionally of extraordinary interest,” said he. “Nothing has more individuality, save perhaps watches and bootlaces. The indications here, however, are neither very marked nor very important. The owner is obviously a muscular man, left-handed, with an excellent set of teeth, careless in his habits, and with no need to practise economy.”

My friend threw out the information in a very offhand way, but I saw that he cocked his eye at me to see if I had followed his reasoning.

“You think a man must be well-to-do if he smokes a seven-shilling pipe,” said I.

“This is Grosvenor mixture at eightpence an ounce,” Holmes answered, knocking a little out on his palm. “As he might get an excellent smoke for half the price, he has no need to practise economy.”

“And the other points?”

“He has been in the habit of lighting his pipe at lamps and gas-jets. You can see that it is quite charred all down one side. Of course a match could not have done that. Why should a man hold a match to the side of his pipe? But you cannot light it at a lamp without getting the bowl charred. And it is all on the right side of the pipe. From that I gather that he is a left-handed man. You hold your own pipe to the lamp, and see how naturally you, being right-handed, hold the left side to the flame. You might do it once the other way, but not as a constancy. This has always been held so. Then he has bitten through his amber. It takes a muscular, energetic fellow, and one with a good set of teeth, to do that. But if I am not mistaken I hear him upon the stair, so we shall have something more interesting than his pipe to study.”

An instant later our door opened, and a tall young man entered the room. He was well but quietly dressed in a dark-gray suit, and carried a brown wide-awake in his hand. I should have put him at about thirty, though he was really some years older.

“I beg your pardon,” said he, with some embarrassment; “I suppose I should have knocked. Yes, of course I should have knocked. The fact is that I am a little upset, and you must put it all down to that.” He passed his hand over his forehead like a man who is half dazed, and then fell rather than sat down upon a chair.

“I can see that you have not slept for a night or two,” said Holmes, in his easy, genial way. “That tries a man’s nerves more than work, and more even than pleasure. May I ask how I can help you?”

“I wanted your advice, sir. I don’t know what to do and my whole life seems to have gone to pieces.”

“You wish to employ me as a consulting detective?”

“Not that only. I want your opinion as a judicious man — as a man of the world. I want to know what I ought to do next. I hope to God you’ll be able to tell me.”

He spoke in little, sharp, jerky outbursts, and it seemed to me that to speak at all was very painful to him, and that his will all through was overriding his inclinations.

“It’s a very delicate thing,” said he. “One does not like to speak of one’s domestic affairs to strangers. It seems dreadful to discuss the conduct of one’s wife with two men whom I have never seen before. It’s horrible to have to do it. But I’ve got to the end of my tether, and I must have advice.”

“My dear Mr. Grant Munro—” began Holmes.

Our visitor sprang from his chair. “What!” he cried, “you know my name?”

“If you wish to preserve your incognito,” said Holmes, smiling, “I would suggest that you cease to write your name upon the lining of your hat, or else that you turn the crown towards the person whom you are addressing. I was about to say that my friend and I have listened to a good many strange secrets in this room, and that we have had the good fortune to bring peace to many troubled souls. I trust that we may do as much for you. Might I beg you, as time may prove to be of importance, to furnish me with the facts of your case without further delay?”

Our visitor again passed his hand over his forehead, as if he found it bitterly hard. From every gesture and expression I could see that he was a reserved, self-contained man, with a dash of pride in his nature, more likely to hide his wounds than to expose them. Then suddenly, with a fierce gesture of his closed hand, like one who throws reserve to the winds, he began.

“The facts are these, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “I am a married man, and have been so for three years. During that time my wife and I have loved each other as fondly and lived as happily as any two that ever were joined. We have not had a difference, not one, in thought or word or deed. And now, since last Monday, there has suddenly sprung up a barrier between us, and I find that there is something in her life and in her thought of which I know as little as if she were the woman who brushes by me in the street. We are estranged, and I want to know why.

“Now there is one thing that I want to impress upon you before I go any further, Mr. Holmes. Effie loves me. Don’t let there be any mistake about that. She loves me with her whole heart and soul, and never more than now. I know it. I feel it. I don’t want to argue about that. A man can tell easily enough when a woman loves him. But there’s this secret between us, and we can never be the same until it is cleared.”

“Kindly let me have the facts, Mr. Munro,” said Holmes, with some impatience.

“I’ll tell you what I know about Effie’s history. She was a widow when I met her first, though quite young — only twenty-five. Her name then was Mrs. Hebron. She went out to America when she was young, and lived in the town of Atlanta, where she married this Hebron, who was a lawyer with a good practice. They had one child, but the yellow fever broke out badly in the place, and both husband and child died of it. I have seen his death certificate. This sickened her of America, and she came back to live with a maiden aunt at Pinner, in Middlesex. I may mention that her husband had left her comfortably off, and that she had a capital of about four thousand five hundred pounds, which had been so well invested by him that it returned an average of seven per cent. She had only been six months at Pinner when I met her; we fell in love with each other, and we married a few weeks afterwards.

“I am a hop merchant myself, and as I have an income of seven or eight hundred, we found ourselves comfortably off, and took a nice eighty-pound-a-year villa at Norbury. Our little place was very countrified, considering that it is so close to town. We had an inn and two houses a little above us, and a single cottage at the other side of the field which faces us, and except those there were no houses until you got half way to the station. My business took me into town at certain seasons, but in summer I had less to do, and then in our country home my wife and I were just as happy as could be wished. I tell you that there never was a shadow between us until this accursed affair began.

“There’s one thing I ought to tell you before I go further. When we married, my wife made over all her property to me — rather against my will, for I saw how awkward it would be if my business affairs went wrong. However, she would have it so, and it was done. Well, about six weeks ago she came to me.

“‘Jack,’ said she, ‘when you took my money you said that if ever I wanted any I was to ask you for it.’

“‘Certainly,’ said I. ‘It’s all your own.’

“‘Well,’ said she, ‘I want a hundred pounds.’

“I was a bit staggered at this, for I had imagined it was simply a new dress or something of the kind that she was after.

“‘What on earth for?’ I asked.

“‘Oh,’ said she, in her playful way, ‘you said that you were only my banker, and bankers never ask questions, you know.’

“‘If you really mean it, of course you shall have the money,’ said I.

“‘Oh, yes, I really mean it.’

“‘And you won’t tell me what you want it for?’

“‘Some day, perhaps, but not just at present, Jack.’

“So I had to be content with that, though it was the first time that there had ever been any secret between us. I gave her a check, and I never thought any more of the matter. It may have nothing to do with what came afterwards, but I thought it only right to mention it.

“Well, I told you just now that there is a cottage not far from our house. There is just a field between us, but to reach it you have to go along the road and then turn down a lane. Just beyond it is a nice little grove of Scotch firs, and I used to be very fond of strolling down there, for trees are always a neighbourly kind of things. The cottage had been standing empty this eight months, and it was a pity, for it was a pretty two-storied place, with an old-fashioned porch and honeysuckle about it. I have stood many a time and thought what a neat little homestead it would make.

“Well, last Monday evening I was taking a stroll down that way, when I met an empty van coming up the lane, and saw a pile of carpets and things lying about on the grass-plot beside the porch. It was clear that the cottage had at last been let. I walked past it, and wondered what sort of folk they were who had come to live so near us. And as I looked I suddenly became aware that a face was watching me out of one of the upper windows.

“I don’t know what there was about that face, Mr. Holmes, but it seemed to send a chill right down my back. I was some little way off, so that I could not make out the features, but there was something unnatural and inhuman about the face. That was the impression that I had, and I moved quickly forwards to get a nearer view of the person who was watching me. But as I did so the face suddenly disappeared, so suddenly that it seemed to have been plucked away into the darkness of the room. I stood for five minutes thinking the business over, and trying to analyze my impressions. I could not tell if the face were that of a man or a woman. It had been too far from me for that. But its colour was what had impressed me most. It was of a livid chalky white, and with something set and rigid about it which was shockingly unnatural. So disturbed was I that I determined to see a little more of the new inmates of the cottage. I approached and knocked at the door, which was instantly opened by a tall, gaunt woman with a harsh, forbidding face.

"'What may you be wantin'?' she asked, in a Northern accent.

"'I am your neighbour over yonder,' said I, nodding towards my house. 'I see that you have only just moved in, so I thought that if I could be of any help to you in any—'

"'Ay, we'll just ask ye when we want ye,' said she, and shut the door in my face. Annoyed at the churlish rebuff, I turned my back and walked home. All evening, though I tried to think of other things, my mind would still turn to the apparition at the window and the rudeness of the woman. I determined to say nothing about the former to my wife, for she is a nervous, highly strung woman, and I had no wish that she would share the unpleasant impression which had been produced upon myself. I remarked to her, however, before I fell asleep, that the cottage was now occupied, to which she returned no reply.

"I am usually an extremely sound sleeper. It has been a standing jest in the family that nothing could ever wake me during the night. And yet somehow on that particular night, whether it may have been the slight excitement produced by my little adventure or not I know not, but I slept much more lightly than usual. Half in my dreams I was dimly conscious that something was going on in the room, and gradually became aware that my wife had dressed herself and was slipping on her mantle and her bonnet. My lips were parted to murmur out some sleepy words of surprise or remonstrance at this untimely preparation, when suddenly my half-opened eyes fell upon her face, illuminated by the candle-light, and astonishment held me dumb. She wore an expression such as I had never seen before — such as I should have thought her incapable of assuming. She was deadly pale and breathing fast, glancing furtively towards the bed as she fastened her mantle, to see if she had disturbed me. Then, thinking that I was still asleep, she slipped noiselessly from the room, and an instant later I heard a sharp creaking which could only come from the hinges of the front door. I sat up in bed and rapped my knuckles against the rail to make certain that I was truly awake. Then I took my watch from under the pillow. It was three in the morning. What on this earth could my wife be doing out on the country road at three in the morning?

"I had sat for about twenty minutes turning the thing over in my mind and trying to find some possible explanation. The more I thought, the more extraordinary and inexplicable did it appear. I was still puzzling over it when I heard the door gently close again, and her footsteps coming up the stairs.

"'Where in the world have you been, Effie?' I asked as she entered.

"She gave a violent start and a kind of gasping cry when I spoke, and that cry and start troubled me more than all the rest, for there was something indescribably guilty about them. My wife had always been a woman of a frank, open nature, and it gave me a chill to see her slinking into her own room, and crying out and wincing when her own husband spoke to her.

"'You awake, Jack!' she cried, with a nervous laugh. 'Why, I thought that nothing could awake you.'

"'Where have you been?' I asked, more sternly.

"'I don't wonder that you are surprised,' said she, and I could see that her fingers were trembling as she undid the fastenings of her mantle. 'Why, I never remember having done such a thing in my life before. The fact is that I felt as though I were choking, and had a perfect longing for a breath of fresh air. I really think that I should have fainted if I had not gone out. I stood at the door for a few minutes, and now I am quite myself again.'

"All the time that she was telling me this story she never once looked in my direction, and her voice was quite unlike her usual tones. It was evident to me that she was saying what was false. I said nothing in reply, but turned my face to the wall, sick at heart, with my mind filled with a thousand venomous doubts and suspicions. What was it that my wife was concealing from me? Where had she been during that strange expedition? I felt that I should have no peace until I knew, and yet I shrank from asking her again after once she had told me what was false. All the rest of the night I tossed and tumbled, framing theory after theory, each more unlikely than the last.

"I should have gone to the City that day, but I was too disturbed in my mind to be able to pay attention to business matters. My wife seemed to be as upset as myself, and I could see from the little questioning glances which she kept shooting at me that she understood that I disbelieved her statement, and that she was at her wits' end what to do. We hardly exchanged a word during breakfast, and immediately afterwards I went out for a walk, that I might think the matter out in the fresh morning air.

“I went as far as the Crystal Palace, spent an hour in the grounds, and was back in Norbury by one o’clock. It happened that my way took me past the cottage, and I stopped for an instant to look at the windows, and to see if I could catch a glimpse of the strange face which had looked out at me on the day before. As I stood there, imagine my surprise, Mr. Holmes, when the door suddenly opened and my wife walked out.

“I was struck dumb with astonishment at the sight of her; but my emotions were nothing to those which showed themselves upon her face when our eyes met. She seemed for an instant to wish to shrink back inside the house again; and then, seeing how useless all concealment must be, she came forward, with a very white face and frightened eyes which belied the smile upon her lips.

“‘Ah, Jack,’ she said, ‘I have just been in to see if I can be of any assistance to our new neighbours. Why do you look at me like that, Jack? You are not angry with me?’

“‘So,’ said I, ‘this is where you went during the night.’

“‘What do you mean?’ she cried.

“‘You came here. I am sure of it. Who are these people, that you should visit them at such an hour?’

“‘I have not been here before.’

“‘How can you tell me what you know is false?’ I cried. ‘Your very voice changes as you speak. When have I ever had a secret from you? I shall enter that cottage, and I shall probe the matter to the bottom.’

“‘No, no, Jack, for God’s sake!’ she gasped, in uncontrollable emotion. Then, as I approached the door, she seized my sleeve and pulled me back with convulsive strength.

“‘I implore you not to do this, Jack,’ she cried. ‘I swear that I will tell you everything some day, but nothing but misery can come of it if you enter that cottage.’ Then, as I tried to shake her off, she clung to me in a frenzy of entreaty.

“‘Trust me, Jack!’ she cried. ‘Trust me only this once. You will never have cause to regret it. You know that I would not have a secret from you if it were not for your own sake. Our whole lives are at stake in this. If you come home with me, all will be well. If you force your way into that cottage, all is over between us.’

"There was such earnestness, such despair, in her manner that her words arrested me, and I stood irresolute before the door.

"'I will trust you on one condition, and on one condition only,' said I at last. 'It is that this mystery comes to an end from now. You are at liberty to preserve your secret, but you must promise me that there shall be no more nightly visits, no more doings which are kept from my knowledge. I am willing to forget those which are passed if you will promise that there shall be no more in the future.'

"'I was sure that you would trust me,' she cried, with a great sigh of relief. 'It shall be just as you wish. Come away — oh, come away up to the house.'

"Still pulling at my sleeve, she led me away from the cottage. As we went I glanced back, and there was that yellow livid face watching us out of the upper window. What link could there be between that creature and my wife? Or how could the coarse, rough woman whom I had seen the day before be connected with her? It was a strange puzzle, and yet I knew that my mind could never know ease again until I had solved it.

"For two days after this I stayed at home, and my wife appeared to abide loyally by our engagement, for, as far as I know, she never stirred out of the house. On the third day, however, I had ample evidence that her solemn promise was not enough to hold her back from this secret influence which drew her away from her husband and her duty.

"I had gone into town on that day, but I returned by the 2.40 instead of the 3.36, which is my usual train. As I entered the house the maid ran into the hall with a startled face.

"'Where is your mistress?' I asked.

"'I think that she has gone out for a walk,' she answered.

"My mind was instantly filled with suspicion. I rushed upstairs to make sure that she was not in the house. As I did so I happened to glance out of one of the upper windows, and saw the maid with whom I had just been speaking running across the field in the direction of the cottage. Then of course I saw exactly what it all meant. My wife had gone over there, and had asked the servant to call her if I should return. Tingling with anger, I rushed down and hurried across, determined to end the matter once and forever. I saw my wife and the maid hurrying back along the lane, but I did not stop to speak with them. In the cottage lay the secret which was casting a shadow over my life. I vowed that, come what might, it should be a secret no longer. I did not even knock when I reached it, but turned the handle and rushed into the passage.

"It was all still and quiet upon the ground floor. In the kitchen a kettle was singing on the fire, and a large black cat lay coiled up in the basket; but there was no sign of the woman whom I had seen before. I ran into the other room, but it was equally deserted. Then I rushed up the stairs, only to find two other rooms empty and deserted at the top. There was no one at all in the whole house. The furniture and pictures were of the most common and vulgar description, save in the one chamber at the window of which I had seen the strange face. That was comfortable and elegant, and all my suspicions rose into a fierce bitter flame when I saw that on the mantelpiece stood a copy of a full-length photograph of my wife, which had been taken at my request only three months ago.

"I stayed long enough to make certain that the house was absolutely empty. Then I left it, feeling a weight at my heart such as I had never had before. My wife came out into the hall as I entered my house; but I was too hurt and angry to speak with her, and pushing past her, I made my way into my study. She followed me, however, before I could close the door.

"'I am sorry that I broke my promise, Jack,' said she; 'but if you knew all the circumstances I am sure that you would forgive me.'

"'Tell me everything, then,' said I.

"'I cannot, Jack, I cannot,' she cried.

"'Until you tell me who it is that has been living in that cottage, and who it is to whom you have given that photograph, there can never be any confidence between us,' said I, and breaking away from her, I left the house. That was yesterday, Mr. Holmes, and I have not seen her since, nor do I know anything more about this strange business. It is the first shadow that has come between us, and it has so shaken me that I do not know what I should do for the best. Suddenly this morning it occurred to me that you were the man to advise me, so I have hurried to you now, and I place myself unreservedly in your hands. If there is any point which I have not made clear, pray question me about it. But, above all, tell me quickly what I am to do, for this misery is more than I can bear."

Holmes and I had listened with the utmost interest to this extraordinary statement, which had been delivered in the jerky, broken fashion of a man who is under the influence of extreme emotions. My companion sat silent for some time, with his chin upon his hand, lost in thought.

"Tell me," said he at last, "could you swear that this was a man's face which you saw at the window?"

"Each time that I saw it I was some distance away from it, so that it is impossible for me to say."

"You appear, however, to have been disagreeably impressed by it."

"It seemed to be of an unnatural colour, and to have a strange rigidity about the features. When I approached, it vanished with a jerk."

"How long is it since your wife asked you for a hundred pounds?"

"Nearly two months."

"Have you ever seen a photograph of her first husband?"

"No; there was a great fire at Atlanta very shortly after his death, and all her papers were destroyed."

"And yet she had a certificate of death. You say that you saw it."

"Yes; she got a duplicate after the fire."

"Did you ever meet any one who knew her in America?"

"No."

"Did she ever talk of revisiting the place?"

"No."

"Or get letters from it?"

"No."

"Thank you. I should like to think over the matter a little now. If the cottage is now permanently deserted we may have some difficulty. If, on the other hand, as I fancy is more likely, the inmates were warned of your coming, and left before you entered yesterday, then they may be back now, and we should clear it all up easily. Let me advise you, then, to return to Norbury, and to examine the windows of the cottage again. If you have reason to believe that it is inhabited, do not force your way in, but send a wire to my friend and me. We shall be with you within an hour of receiving it, and we shall then very soon get to the bottom of the business."

"And if it is still empty?"

"In that case I shall come out to-morrow and talk it over with you. Good-by; and, above all, do not fret until you know that you really have a cause for it."

"I am afraid that this is a bad business, Watson," said my companion, as he returned after accompanying Mr. Grant Munro to the door. "What do you make of it?"

"It had an ugly sound," I answered.

“Yes. There’s blackmail in it, or I am much mistaken.”

“And who is the blackmailer?”

“Well, it must be the creature who lives in the only comfortable room in the place, and has her photograph above his fireplace. Upon my word, Watson, there is something very attractive about that livid face at the window, and I would not have missed the case for worlds.”

“You have a theory?”

“Yes, a provisional one. But I shall be surprised if it does not turn out to be correct. This woman’s first husband is in that cottage.”

“Why do you think so?”

“How else can we explain her frenzied anxiety that her second one should not enter it? The facts, as I read them, are something like this: This woman was married in America. Her husband developed some hateful qualities; or shall we say that he contracted some loathsome disease, and became a leper or an imbecile? She flies from him at last, returns to England, changes her name, and starts her life, as she thinks, afresh. She has been married three years, and believes that her position is quite secure, having shown her husband the death certificate of some man whose name she has assumed, when suddenly her whereabouts is discovered by her first husband; or, we may suppose, by some unscrupulous woman who has attached herself to the invalid. They write to the wife, and threaten to come and expose her. She asks for a hundred pounds, and endeavors to buy them off. They come in spite of it, and when the husband mentions casually to the wife that there are new-comers in the cottage, she knows in some way that they are her pursuers. She waits until her husband is asleep, and then she rushes down to endeavor to persuade them to leave her in peace. Having no success, she goes again next morning, and her husband meets her, as he has told us, as she comes out. She promises him then not to go there again, but two days afterwards the hope of getting rid of those dreadful neighbours was too strong for her, and she made another attempt, taking down with her the photograph which had probably been demanded from her. In the midst of this interview the maid rushed in to say that the master had come home, on which the wife, knowing that he would come straight down to the cottage, hurried the inmates out at the back door, into the grove of fir-trees, probably, which was mentioned as standing near. In this way he found the place deserted. I shall be very much surprised, however, if it is still so when he reconnoitres it this evening. What do you think of my theory?”

“It is all surmise.”

“But at least it covers all the facts. When new facts come to our knowledge which cannot be covered by it, it will be time enough to reconsider it. We can do nothing more until we have a message from our friend at Norbury.”

But we had not a very long time to wait for that. It came just as we had finished our tea. “The cottage is still tenanted,” it said. “Have seen the face again at the window. Will meet the seven o’clock train, and will take no steps until you arrive.”

He was waiting on the platform when we stepped out, and we could see in the light of the station lamps that he was very pale, and quivering with agitation.

“They are still there, Mr. Holmes,” said he, laying his hand hard upon my friend’s sleeve. “I saw lights in the cottage as I came down. We shall settle it now once and for all.”

“What is your plan, then?” asked Holmes, as he walked down the dark tree-lined road.

“I am going to force my way in and see for myself who is in the house. I wish you both to be there as witnesses.”

“You are quite determined to do this, in spite of your wife’s warning that it is better that you should not solve the mystery?”

“Yes, I am determined.”

“Well, I think that you are in the right. Any truth is better than indefinite doubt. We had better go up at once. Of course, legally, we are putting ourselves hopelessly in the wrong; but I think that it is worth it.”

It was a very dark night, and a thin rain began to fall as we turned from the high road into a narrow lane, deeply rutted, with hedges on either side. Mr. Grant Munro pushed impatiently forward, however, and we stumbled after him as best we could.

“There are the lights of my house,” he murmured, pointing to a glimmer among the trees. “And here is the cottage which I am going to enter.”

We turned a corner in the lane as he spoke, and there was the building close beside us. A yellow bar falling across the black foreground showed that the door was not quite closed, and one window in the upper story was brightly illuminated. As we looked, we saw a dark blur moving across the blind.

“There is that creature!” cried Grant Munro. “You can see for yourselves that some one is there. Now follow me, and we shall soon know all.”

We approached the door; but suddenly a woman appeared out of the shadow and stood in the golden track of the lamp-light. I could not see her face in the darkness, but her arms were thrown out in an attitude of entreaty.

“For God’s sake, don’t Jack!” she cried. “I had a presentiment that you would come this evening. Think better of it, dear! Trust me again, and you will never have cause to regret it.”

“I have trusted you too long, Effie,” he cried, sternly. “Leave go of me! I must pass you. My friends and I are going to settle this matter once and forever!” He pushed her to one side, and we followed closely after him. As he threw the door open an old woman ran out in front of him and tried to bar his passage, but he thrust her back, and an instant afterwards we were all upon the stairs. Grant Munro rushed into the lighted room at the top, and we entered at his heels.

It was a cosey, well-furnished apartment, with two candles burning upon the table and two upon the mantelpiece. In the corner, stooping over a desk, there sat what appeared to be a little girl. Her face was turned away as we entered, but we could see that she was dressed in a red frock, and that she had long white gloves on. As she whisked round to us, I gave a cry of surprise and horror. The face which she turned towards us was of the strangest livid tint, and the features were absolutely devoid of any expression. An instant later the mystery was explained. Holmes, with a laugh, passed his hand behind the child’s ear, a mask peeled off from her countenance, and there was a little coal black negress, with all her white teeth flashing in amusement at our amazed faces. I burst out laughing, out of sympathy with her merriment; but Grant Munro stood staring, with his hand clutching his throat.

“My God!” he cried. “What can be the meaning of this?”

“I will tell you the meaning of it,” cried the lady, sweeping into the room with a proud, set face. “You have forced me, against my own judgment, to tell you, and now we must both make the best of it. My husband died at Atlanta. My child survived.”

“Your child?”

She drew a large silver locket from her bosom. “You have never seen this open.”

“I understood that it did not open.”

She touched a spring, and the front hinged back. There was a portrait within of a man strikingly handsome and intelligent-looking, but bearing unmistakable signs upon his features of his African descent.

“That is John Hebron, of Atlanta,” said the lady, “and a nobler man never walked the earth. I cut myself off from my race in order to wed him, but never once while he lived did I for an instant regret it. It was our misfortune that our only child took after his people rather than mine. It is often so in such matches, and little Lucy is darker far than ever her father was. But dark or fair, she is my own dear little girlie, and her mother’s pet.” The little creature ran across at the words and nestled up against the lady’s dress. “When I left her in America,” she continued, “it was only because her health was weak, and the change might have done her harm. She was given to the care of a faithful Scotch woman who had once been our servant. Never for an instant did I dream of disowning her as my child. But when chance threw you in my way, Jack, and I learned to love you, I feared to tell you about my child. God forgive me, I feared that I should lose you, and I had not the courage to tell you. I had to choose between you, and in my weakness I turned away from my own little girl. For three years I have kept her existence a secret from you, but I heard from the nurse, and I knew that all was well with her. At last, however, there came an overwhelming desire to see the child once more. I struggled against it, but in vain. Though I knew the danger, I determined to have the child over, if it were but for a few weeks. I sent a hundred pounds to the nurse, and I gave her instructions about this cottage, so that she might come as a neighbour, without my appearing to be in any way connected with her. I pushed my precautions so far as to order her to keep the child in the house during the daytime, and to cover up her little face and hands so that even those who might see her at the window should not gossip about there being a black child in the neighbourhood. If I had been less cautious I might have been more wise, but I was half crazy with fear that you should learn the truth.

“It was you who told me first that the cottage was occupied. I should have waited for the morning, but I could not sleep for excitement, and so at last I slipped out, knowing how difficult it is to awake you. But you saw me go, and that was the beginning of my troubles. Next day you had my secret at your mercy, but you nobly refrained from pursuing your advantage. Three days later, however, the nurse and child only just escaped from the back door as you rushed in at the front one. And now to-night you at last know all, and I ask you what is to become of us, my child and me?” She clasped her hands and waited for an answer.

It was a long ten minutes before Grant Munro broke the silence, and when his answer came it was one of which I love to think. He lifted the little child, kissed her, and then, still carrying her, he held his other hand out to his wife and turned towards the door.

“We can talk it over more comfortably at home,” said he. “I am not a very good man, Effie, but I think that I am a better one than you have given me credit for being.”

Holmes and I followed them down the lane, and my friend plucked at my sleeve as we came out.

“I think,” said he, “that we shall be of more use in London than in Norbury.”

Not another word did he say of the case until late that night, when he was turning away, with his lighted candle, for his bedroom.

“Watson,” said he, “if it should ever strike you that I am getting a little over-confident in my powers, or giving less pains to a case than it deserves, kindly whisper ‘Norbury’ in my ear, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you.”

Adventure III. The Stock-Broker’s Clerk

Shortly after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Paddington district. Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice; but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus’s dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. The public not unnaturally goes on the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own case is beyond the reach of his drugs. Thus as my predecessor weakened his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from twelve hundred to little more than three hundred a year. I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes, for I was too busy to visit Baker Street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. I was surprised, therefore, when, one morning in June, as I sat reading the British Medical Journal after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell, followed by the high, somewhat strident tones of my old companion’s voice.

“Ah, my dear Watson,” said he, striding into the room, “I am very delighted to see you! I trust that Mrs. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitements connected with our adventure of the Sign of Four.”

“Thank you, we are both very well,” said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

“And I hope, also,” he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, “that the cares of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems.”

“On the contrary,” I answered, “it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes, and classifying some of our past results.”

“I trust that you don’t consider your collection closed.”

“Not at all. I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences.”

“To-day, for example?”

“Yes, to-day, if you like.”

“And as far off as Birmingham?”

“Certainly, if you wish it.”

“And the practice?”

“I do my neighbour’s when he goes. He is always ready to work off the debt.”

“Ha! Nothing could be better,” said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half closed lids. “I perceive that you have been unwell lately. Summer colds are always a little trying.”

“I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it.”

“So you have. You look remarkably robust.”

“How, then, did you know of it?”

“My dear fellow, you know my methods.”

“You deduced it, then?”

“Certainly.”

“And from what?”

“From your slippers.”

I glanced down at the new patent leathers which I was wearing. “How on earth—” I began, but Holmes answered my question before it was asked.

“Your slippers are new,” he said. “You could not have had them more than a few weeks. The soles which you are at this moment presenting to me are slightly scorched. For a moment I thought they might have got wet and been burned in the drying. But near the instep there is a small circular wafer of paper with the shopman’s hieroglyphics upon it. Damp would of course have removed this. You had, then, been sitting with your feet outstretched to the fire, which a man would hardly do even in so wet a June as this if he were in his full health.”

Like all Holmes’s reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. He read the thought upon my features, and his smile had a tinge of bitterness.

“I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain,” said he. “Results without causes are much more impressive. You are ready to come to Birmingham, then?”

“Certainly. What is the case?”

“You shall hear it all in the train. My client is outside in a four-wheeler. Can you come at once?”

"In an instant." I scribbled a note to my neighbour, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the door-step.

"Your neighbour is a doctor," said he, nodding at the brass plate.

"Yes; he bought a practice as I did."

"An old-established one?"

"Just the same as mine. Both have been ever since the houses were built."

"Ah! Then you got hold of the best of the two."

"I think I did. But how do you know?"

"By the steps, my boy. Yours are worn three inches deeper than his. But this gentleman in the cab is my client, Mr. Hall Pycroft. Allow me to introduce you to him. Whip your horse up, cabby, for we have only just time to catch our train."

The man whom I found myself facing was a well built, fresh-complexioned young fellow, with a frank, honest face and a slight, crisp, yellow mustache. He wore a very shiny top hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was — a smart young City man, of the class who have been labeled cockneys, but who give us our crack volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than any body of men in these islands. His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. It was not, however, until we were all in a first-class carriage and well started upon our journey to Birmingham that I was able to learn what the trouble was which had driven him to Sherlock Holmes.

"We have a clear run here of seventy minutes," Holmes remarked. "I want you, Mr. Hall Pycroft, to tell my friend your very interesting experience exactly as you have told it to me, or with more detail if possible. It will be of use to me to hear the succession of events again. It is a case, Watson, which may prove to have something in it, or may prove to have nothing, but which, at least, presents those unusual and outré features which are as dear to you as they are to me. Now, Mr. Pycroft, I shall not interrupt you again."

Our young companion looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

"The worst of the story is," said he, "that I show myself up as such a confounded fool. Of course it may work out all right, and I don't see that I could have done otherwise; but if I have lost my crib and get nothing in exchange I shall feel what a soft Johnnie I have been. I'm not very good at telling a story, Dr. Watson, but it is like this with me:

“I used to have a billet at Coxon & Woodhouse’s, of Draper’s Gardens, but they were let in early in the spring through the Venezuelan loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper. I had been with them five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we clerks were all turned adrift, the twenty-seven of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon’s, and I had saved about seventy of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots paddling up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

“At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams’s, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard Street. I dare say E. C. Is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes. Anyhow it was my innings that time, and I don’t ever wish to feel better pleased. The screw was a pound a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon’s.

“And now I come to the queer part of the business. I was in diggings out Hampstead way, 17 Potter’s Terrace. Well, I was sitting doing a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had ‘Arthur Pinner, Financial Agent,’ printed upon it. I had never heard the name before and could not imagine what he wanted with me; but, of course, I asked her to show him up. In he walked, a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the Sheeny about his nose. He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man who knew the value of time.”

“‘Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?’” said he.

“‘Yes, sir,’ I answered, pushing a chair towards him.

“‘Lately engaged at Coxon & Woodhouse’s?’

"'Yes, sir.'

"'And now on the staff of Mawson's.'

"'Quite so.'

"'Well,' said he, 'the fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. You remember Parker, who used to be Coxon's manager? He can never say enough about it.'

"Of course I was pleased to hear this. I had always been pretty sharp in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the City in this fashion.

"'You have a good memory?' said he.

"'Pretty fair,' I answered, modestly.

"'Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?' he asked.

"'Yes. I read the stock exchange list every morning.'

"'Now that shows real application!' he cried. 'That is the way to prosper! You won't mind my testing you, will you? Let me see. How are Ayrshires?'

"'A hundred and six and a quarter to a hundred and five and seven-eighths.'

"'And New Zealand consolidated?'

"'A hundred and four.

"'And British Broken Hills?'

"'Seven to seven-and-six.'

"'Wonderful!' he cried, with his hands up. 'This quite fits in with all that I had heard. My boy, my boy, you are very much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!'

"This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. 'Well,' said I, 'other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. I had a hard enough fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it.'

"'Pooh, man; you should soar above it. You are not in your true sphere. Now, I'll tell you how it stands with me. What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's, it's light to dark. Let me see. When do you go to Mawson's?'

"'On Monday.'

"'Ha, ha! I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all.'

"'Not go to Mawson's?'

"'No, sir. By that day you will be the business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with a hundred and thirty-four branches in the towns and villages of France, not counting one in Brussels and one in San Remo.'

"This took my breath away. 'I never heard of it,' said I.

"'Very likely not. It has been kept very quiet, for the capital was all privately subscribed, and it's too good a thing to let the public into. My brother, Harry Pinner, is promoter, and joins the board after allotment as managing director. He knew I was in the swim down here, and asked me to pick up a good man cheap. A young, pushing man with plenty of snap about him. Parker spoke of you, and that brought me here to-night. We can only offer you a beggarly five hundred to start with.'

"'Five hundred a year!' I shouted.

"'Only that at the beginning; but you are to have an overriding commission of one per cent on all business done by your agents, and you may take my word for it that this will come to more than your salary.'

"'But I know nothing about hardware.'

"'Tut, my boy; you know about figures.'

"My head buzzed, and I could hardly sit still in my chair. But suddenly a little chill of doubt came upon me.

"'I must be frank with you,' said I. 'Mawson only gives me two hundred, but Mawson is safe. Now, really, I know so little about your company that —'

"'Ah, smart, smart!' he cried, in a kind of ecstasy of delight. 'You are the very man for us. You are not to be talked over, and quite right, too. Now, here's a note for a hundred pounds, and if you think that we can do business you may just slip it into your pocket as an advance upon your salary.'

"'That is very handsome,' said I. 'When should I take over my new duties?'

"'Be in Birmingham to-morrow at one,' said he. 'I have a note in my pocket here which you will take to my brother. You will find him at 126b Corporation Street, where the temporary offices of the company are situated. Of course he must confirm your engagement, but between ourselves it will be all right.'

"'Really, I hardly know how to express my gratitude, Mr. Pinner,' said I.

"'Not at all, my boy. You have only got your deserts. There are one or two small things — mere formalities — which I must arrange with you.

You have a bit of paper beside you there. Kindly write upon it "I am perfectly willing to act as business manager to the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, at a minimum salary of L500."'

"I did as he asked, and he put the paper in his pocket.

"'There is one other detail,' said he. 'What do you intend to do about Mawson's?'

"I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy. 'I'll write and resign,' said I.

"'Precisely what I don't want you to do. I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive; accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. At last I fairly lost my temper. "If you want good men you should pay them a good price," said I.'

"'He would rather have our small price than your big one,' said he.

"'I'll lay you a fiver,' said I, 'that when he has my offer you'll never so much as hear from him again.'

"'Done!' said he. 'We picked him out of the gutter, and he won't leave us so easily.' Those were his very words."

"'The impudent scoundrel!' I cried. 'I've never so much as seen him in my life. Why should I consider him in any way? I shall certainly not write if you would rather I didn't.'

"'Good! That's a promise,' said he, rising from his chair. 'Well, I'm delighted to have got so good a man for my brother. Here's your advance of a hundred pounds, and here is the letter. Make a note of the address, 126b Corporation Street, and remember that one o'clock to-morrow is your appointment. Good-night; and may you have all the fortune that you deserve!'

"That's just about all that passed between us, as near as I can remember. You can imagine, Dr. Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary bit of good fortune. I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty time for my appointment. I took my things to a hotel in New Street, and then I made my way to the address which had been given me.

"It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. 126b was a passage between two large shops, which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies or professional men. The names of the occupants were painted at the bottom on the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. He was very like the chap I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean shaven and his hair was lighter.

"'Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?' he asked.

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Oh! I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. I had a note from my brother this morning in which he sang your praises very loudly.'

"'I was just looking for the offices when you came.

"'We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. Come up with me, and we will talk the matter over.'

"I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there, right under the slates, were a couple of empty, dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks, such as I was used to, and I dare say I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

"'Don't be disheartened, Mr. Pycroft,' said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. 'Rome was not built in a day, and we have lots of money at our backs, though we don't cut much dash yet in offices. Pray sit down, and let me have your letter.'

"I gave it to him, and he read it over very carefully.

"'You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother Arthur,' said he; 'and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. He swears by London, you know; and I by Birmingham; but this time I shall follow his advice. Pray consider yourself definitely engaged."

"'What are my duties?' I asked.

"'You will eventually manage the great depot in Paris, which will pour a flood of English crockery into the shops of a hundred and thirty-four agents in France. The purchase will be completed in a week, and meanwhile you will remain in Birmingham and make yourself useful.'

"'How?'

"For answer, he took a big red book out of a drawer.

"'This is a directory of Paris,' said he, 'with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and to mark off all the hardware sellers, with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them.'

"'Surely there are classified lists?' I suggested.

"'Not reliable ones. Their system is different from ours. Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at twelve. Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master.'

"I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand, I was definitely engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the offices, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went round to my employer, found him in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday — that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Harry Pinner.

"'Thank you very much,' said he; 'I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me.'

"'It took some time,' said I.

"'And now,' said he, 'I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery.'

"'Very good.'

"'And you can come up to-morrow evening, at seven, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labors.' He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed with gold."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he: "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. Of course you expect two brothers to be alike, but not that they should have the same tooth stuffed in the same way. He bowed me out, and I found myself in the street, hardly knowing whether I was on my head or my heels. Back I went to my hotel, put my head in a basin of cold water, and tried to think it out. Why had he sent me from London to Birmingham? Why had he got there before me? And why had he written a letter from himself to himself? It was altogether too much for me, and I could make no sense of it. And then suddenly it struck me that what was dark to me might be very light to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I had just time to get up to town by the night train to see him this morning, and to bring you both back with me to Birmingham."

There was a pause after the stock-broker's clerk had concluded his surprising experience. Then Sherlock Holmes cocked his eye at me, leaning back on the cushions with a pleased and yet critical face, like a connoisseur who has just taken his first sip of a comet vintage.

"Rather fine, Watson, is it not?" said he. "There are points in it which please me. I think that you will agree with me that an interview with Mr. Arthur Harry Pinner in the temporary offices of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, would be a rather interesting experience for both of us."

"But how can we do it?" I asked.

"Oh, easily enough," said Hall Pycroft, cheerily. "You are two friends of mine who are in want of a billet, and what could be more natural than that I should bring you both round to the managing director?"

"Quite so, of course," said Holmes. "I should like to have a look at the gentleman, and see if I can make anything of his little game. What qualities have you, my friend, which would make your services so valuable? or is it possible that—" He began biting his nails and staring blankly out of the window, and we hardly drew another word from him until we were in New Street.

At seven o'clock that evening we were walking, the three of us, down Corporation Street to the company's offices.

"It is no use our being at all before our time," said our client. "He only comes there to see me, apparently, for the place is deserted up to the very hour he names."

"That is suggestive," remarked Holmes.

"By Jove, I told you so!" cried the clerk. "That's he walking ahead of us there."

He pointed to a smallish, dark, well-dressed man who was bustling along the other side of the road. As we watched him he looked across at a boy who was bawling out the latest edition of the evening paper, and running over among the cabs and busses, he bought one from him. Then, clutching it in his hand, he vanished through a door-way.

"There he goes!" cried Hall Pycroft. "These are the company's offices into which he has gone. Come with me, and I'll fix it up as easily as possible."

Following his lead, we ascended five stories, until we found ourselves outside a half-opened door, at which our client tapped. A voice within bade us enter, and we entered a bare, unfurnished room such as Hall Pycroft had described. At the single table sat the man whom we had seen in the street, with his evening paper spread out in front of him, and as he looked up at us it seemed to me that I had never looked upon a face which bore such marks of grief, and of something beyond grief — of a horror such as comes to few men in a lifetime. His brow glistened with perspiration, his cheeks were of the dull, dead white of a fish's belly, and his eyes were wild and staring. He looked at his clerk as though he failed to recognise him, and I could see by the astonishment depicted upon our conductor's face that this was by no means the usual appearance of his employer.

"You look ill, Mr. Pinner!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am not very well," answered the other, making obvious efforts to pull himself together, and licking his dry lips before he spoke. "Who are these gentlemen whom you have brought with you?"

"One is Mr. Harris, of Bermondsey, and the other is Mr. Price, of this town," said our clerk, glibly. "They are friends of mine and gentlemen of experience, but they have been out of a place for some little time, and they hoped that perhaps you might find an opening for them in the company's employment."

"Very possibly! Very possibly!" cried Mr. Pinner with a ghastly smile. "Yes, I have no doubt that we shall be able to do something for you. What is your particular line, Mr. Harris?"

"I am an accountant," said Holmes.

“Ah yes, we shall want something of the sort. And you, Mr. Price?”

“A clerk,” said I.

“I have every hope that the company may accommodate you. I will let you know about it as soon as we come to any conclusion. And now I beg that you will go. For God’s sake leave me to myself!”

These last words were shot out of him, as though the constraint which he was evidently setting upon himself had suddenly and utterly burst asunder. Holmes and I glanced at each other, and Hall Pycroft took a step towards the table.

“You forget, Mr. Pinner, that I am here by appointment to receive some directions from you,” said he.

“Certainly, Mr. Pycroft, certainly,” the other resumed in a calmer tone. “You may wait here a moment; and there is no reason why your friends should not wait with you. I will be entirely at your service in three minutes, if I might trespass upon your patience so far.” He rose with a very courteous air, and, bowing to us, he passed out through a door at the farther end of the room, which he closed behind him.

“What now?” whispered Holmes. “Is he giving us the slip?”

“Impossible,” answered Pycroft.

“Why so?”

“That door leads into an inner room.”

“There is no exit?”

“None.”

“Is it furnished?”

“It was empty yesterday.”

“Then what on earth can he be doing? There is something which I don’t understand in this manner. If ever a man was three parts mad with terror, that man’s name is Pinner. What can have put the shivers on him?”

“He suspects that we are detectives,” I suggested.

“That’s it,” cried Pycroft.

Holmes shook his head. “He did not turn pale. He was pale when we entered the room,” said he. “It is just possible that—”

His words were interrupted by a sharp rat-tat from the direction of the inner door.

“What the deuce is he knocking at his own door for?” cried the clerk.

Again and much louder came the rat-tat-tat. We all gazed expectantly at the closed door. Glancing at Holmes, I saw his face turn rigid, and he leaned forward in intense excitement. Then suddenly came a low guggling, gargling sound, and a brisk drumming upon woodwork. Holmes sprang frantically across the room and pushed at the door. It was fastened on the inner side. Following his example, we threw ourselves upon it with all our weight. One hinge snapped, then the other, and down came the door with a crash. Rushing over it, we found ourselves in the inner room. It was empty.

But it was only for a moment that we were at fault. At one corner, the corner nearest the room which we had left, there was a second door. Holmes sprang to it and pulled it open. A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. His knees were drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which had broken in upon our conversation. In an instant I had caught him round the waist, and held him up while Holmes and Pycroft untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a clay-coloured face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath — a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before.

“What do you think of him, Watson?” asked Holmes.

I stooped over him and examined him. His pulse was feeble and intermittent, but his breathing grew longer, and there was a little shivering of his eyelids, which showed a thin white slit of ball beneath.

“It has been touch and go with him,” said I, “but he’ll live now. Just open that window, and hand me the water carafe.” I undid his collar, poured the cold water over his face, and raised and sank his arms until he drew a long, natural breath. “It’s only a question of time now,” said I, as I turned away from him.

Holmes stood by the table, with his hands deep in his trouser’s pockets and his chin upon his breast.

“I suppose we ought to call the police in now,” said he. “And yet I confess that I’d like to give them a complete case when they come.”

“It’s a blessed mystery to me,” cried Pycroft, scratching his head. “Whatever they wanted to bring me all the way up here for, and then—”

“Pooh! All that is clear enough,” said Holmes impatiently. “It is this last sudden move.”

“You understand the rest, then?”

“I think that it is fairly obvious. What do you say, Watson?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I must confess that I am out of my depths,” said I.

“Oh surely if you consider the events at first they can only point to one conclusion.”

“What do you make of them?”

“Well, the whole thing hinges upon two points. The first is the making of Pycroft write a declaration by which he entered the service of this preposterous company. Do you not see how very suggestive that is?”

“I am afraid I miss the point.”

“Well, why did they want him to do it? Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal, and there was no earthly business reason why this should be an exception. Don’t you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?”

“And why?”

“Quite so. Why? When we answer that we have made some progress with our little problem. Why? There can be only one adequate reason. Some one wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. And now if we pass on to the second point we find that each throws light upon the other. That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr. Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning.”

“My God!” cried our client, “what a blind beetle I have been!”

“Now you see the point about the handwriting. Suppose that some one turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. But in the interval the rogue had learned to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you.”

“Not a soul,” groaned Hall Pycroft.

“Very good. Of course it was of the utmost importance to prevent you from thinking better of it, and also to keep you from coming into contact with any one who might tell you that your double was at work in Mawson’s office. Therefore they gave you a handsome advance on your salary, and ran you off to the Midlands, where they gave you enough work to do to prevent your going to London, where you might have burst their little game up. That is all plain enough.”

“But why should this man pretend to be his own brother?”

“Well, that is pretty clear also. There are evidently only two of them in it. The other is impersonating you at the office. This one acted as your engager, and then found that he could not find you an employer without admitting a third person into his plot. That he was most unwilling to do. He changed his appearance as far as he could, and trusted that the likeness, which you could not fail to observe, would be put down to a family resemblance. But for the happy chance of the gold stuffing, your suspicions would probably never have been aroused.”

Hall Pycroft shook his clinched hands in the air. “Good Lord!” he cried, “while I have been fooled in this way, what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson’s? What should we do, Mr. Holmes? Tell me what to do.”

“We must wire to Mawson’s.”

“They shut at twelve on Saturdays.”

“Never mind. There may be some door-keeper or attendant—”

“Ah yes, they keep a permanent guard there on account of the value of the securities that they hold. I remember hearing it talked of in the City.”

“Very good; we shall wire to him, and see if all is well, and if a clerk of your name is working there. That is clear enough; but what is not so clear is why at sight of us one of the rogues should instantly walk out of the room and hang himself.”

“The paper!” croaked a voice behind us. The man was sitting up, blanched and ghastly, with returning reason in his eyes, and hands which rubbed nervously at the broad red band which still encircled his throat.

“The paper! Of course!” yelled Holmes, in a paroxysm of excitement. “Idiot that I was! I thought so much of our visit that the paper never entered my head for an instant. To be sure, the secret must be there.” He flattened it out upon the table, and a cry of triumph burst from his lips. “Look at this, Watson,” he cried. “It is a London paper, an early edition of the Evening Standard. Here is what we want. Look at the headlines: ‘Crime in the City. Murder at Mawson & Williams’s. Gigantic attempted Robbery. Capture of the Criminal.’ Here, Watson, we are all equally anxious to hear it, so kindly read it aloud to us.”

It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town, and the account of it ran in this way:

“A desperate attempt at robbery, culminating in the death of one man and the capture of the criminal, occurred this afternoon in the City. For some time back Mawson & Williams, the famous financial house, have been the guardians of securities which amount in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling. So conscious was the manager of the responsibility which devolved upon him in consequence of the great interests at stake that safes of the very latest construction have been employed, and an armed watchman has been left day and night in the building. It appears that last week a new clerk named Hall Pycroft was engaged by the firm. This person appears to have been none other that Beddington, the famous forger and cracksman, who, with his brother, had only recently emerged from a five years’ spell of penal servitude. By some means, which are not yet clear, he succeeded in winning, under a false name, this official position in the office, which he utilized in order to obtain moulding of various locks, and a thorough knowledge of the position of the strong room and the safes.

“It is customary at Mawson’s for the clerks to leave at midday on Saturday. Sergeant Tuson, of the City Police, was somewhat surprised, therefore to see a gentleman with a carpet bag come down the steps at twenty minutes past one. His suspicions being aroused, the sergeant followed the man, and with the aid of Constable Pollock succeeded, after a most desperate resistance, in arresting him. It was at once clear that a daring and gigantic robbery had been committed. Nearly a hundred thousand pounds’ worth of American railway bonds, with a large amount of scrip in mines and other companies, was discovered in the bag. On examining the premises the body of the unfortunate watchman was found doubled up and thrust into the largest of the safes, where it would not have been discovered until Monday morning had it not been for the prompt action of Sergeant Tuson. The man’s skull had been shattered by a blow from a poker delivered from behind. There could be no doubt that Beddington had obtained entrance by pretending that he had left something behind him, and having murdered the watchman, rapidly rifled the large safe, and then made off with his booty. His brother, who usually works with him, has not appeared in this job as far as can at present be ascertained, although the police are making energetic inquiries as to his whereabouts.”

“Well, we may save the police some little trouble in that direction,” said Holmes, glancing at the haggard figure huddled up by the window. “Human nature is a strange mixture, Watson. You see that even a villain and murderer can inspire such affection that his brother turns to suicide when he learns that his neck is forfeited. However, we have no choice as to our action. The doctor and I will remain on guard, Mr. Pycroft, if you will have the kindness to step out for the police.”

Adventure IV. The *“Gloria Scott”*

“I have some papers here,” said my friend Sherlock Holmes, as we sat one winter’s night on either side of the fire, “which I really think, Watson, that it would be worth your while to glance over. These are the documents in the extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it.”

He had picked from a drawer a little tarnished cylinder, and, undoing the tape, he handed me a short note scrawled upon a half-sheet of slate-gray paper.

“The supply of game for London is going steadily up,” it ran. “Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant’s life.”

As I glanced up from reading this enigmatical message, I saw Holmes chuckling at the expression upon my face.

“You look a little bewildered,” said he.

“I cannot see how such a message as this could inspire horror. It seems to me to be rather grotesque than otherwise.”

“Very likely. Yet the fact remains that the reader, who was a fine, robust old man, was knocked clean down by it as if it had been the butt end of a pistol.”

“You arouse my curiosity,” said I. “But why did you say just now that there were very particular reasons why I should study this case?”

“Because it was the first in which I was ever engaged.”

I had often endeavored to elicit from my companion what had first turned his mind in the direction of criminal research, but had never caught him before in a communicative humor. Now he sat forward in this arm-chair and spread out the documents upon his knees. Then he lit his pipe and sat for some time smoking and turning them over.

“You never heard me talk of Victor Trevor?” he asked. “He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college. I was never a very sociable fellow, Watson, always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought, so that I never mixed much with the men of my year. Bar fencing and boxing I had few athletic tastes, and then my line of study was quite distinct from that of the other fellows, so that we had no points of contact at all. Trevor was the only man I knew, and that only through the accident of his bull terrier freezing on to my ankle one morning as I went down to chapel.

"It was a prosaic way of forming a friendship, but it was effective. I was laid by the heels for ten days, but Trevor used to come in to inquire after me. At first it was only a minute's chat, but soon his visits lengthened, and before the end of the term we were close friends. He was a hearty, full-blooded fellow, full of spirits and energy, the very opposite to me in most respects, but we had some subjects in common, and it was a bond of union when I found that he was as friendless as I. Finally, he invited me down to his father's place at Donnithorpe, in Norfolk, and I accepted his hospitality for a month of the long vacation.

"Old Trevor was evidently a man of some wealth and consideration, a J.P., and a landed proprietor. Donnithorpe is a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere, in the country of the Broads. The house was an old-fashioned, wide-spread, oak-beamed brick building, with a fine lime-lined avenue leading up to it. There was excellent wild-duck shooting in the fens, remarkably good fishing, a small but select library, taken over, as I understood, from a former occupant, and a tolerable cook, so that he would be a fastidious man who could not put in a pleasant month there.

"Trevor senior was a widower, and my friend his only son.

"There had been a daughter, I heard, but she had died of diphtheria while on a visit to Birmingham. The father interested me extremely. He was a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of rude strength, both physically and mentally. He knew hardly any books, but he had traveled far, had seen much of the world. And had remembered all that he had learned. In person he was a thick-set, burly man with a shock of grizzled hair, a brown, weather-beaten face, and blue eyes which were keen to the verge of fierceness. Yet he had a reputation for kindness and charity on the country-side, and was noted for the leniency of his sentences from the bench.

"One evening, shortly after my arrival, we were sitting over a glass of port after dinner, when young Trevor began to talk about those habits of observation and inference which I had already formed into a system, although I had not yet appreciated the part which they were to play in my life. The old man evidently thought that his son was exaggerating in his description of one or two trivial feats which I had performed.

"'Come, now, Mr. Holmes,' said he, laughing good-humoredly. 'I'm an excellent subject, if you can deduce anything from me.'

"'I fear there is not very much,' I answered; 'I might suggest that you have gone about in fear of some personal attack within the last twelvemonth.'

"The laugh faded from his lips, and he stared at me in great surprise.

"'Well, that's true enough,' said he. 'You know, Victor,' turning to his son, 'when we broke up that poaching gang they swore to knife us, and Sir Edward Holly has actually been attacked. I've always been on my guard since then, though I have no idea how you know it.'

"'You have a very handsome stick,' I answered. 'By the inscription I observed that you had not had it more than a year. But you have taken some pains to bore the head of it and pour melted lead into the hole so as to make it a formidable weapon. I argued that you would not take such precautions unless you had some danger to fear.'

"'Anything else?' he asked, smiling.

"'You have boxed a good deal in your youth.'

"'Right again. How did you know it? Is my nose knocked a little out of the straight?'

"'No,' said I. 'It is your ears. They have the peculiar flattening and thickening which marks the boxing man.'

"'Anything else?'

"'You have done a good deal of digging by your callosities.'

"'Made all my money at the gold fields.'

"'You have been in New Zealand.'

"'Right again.'

"'You have visited Japan.'

"'Quite true.'

"'And you have been most intimately associated with some one whose initials were J. A., and whom you afterwards were eager to entirely forget.'

"Mr. Trevor stood slowly up, fixed his large blue eyes upon me with a strange wild stare, and then pitched forward, with his face among the nutshells which strewed the cloth, in a dead faint.

"You can imagine, Watson, how shocked both his son and I were. His attack did not last long, however, for when we undid his collar, and sprinkled the water from one of the finger-glasses over his face, he gave a gasp or two and sat up.

"'Ah, boys,' said he, forcing a smile, 'I hope I haven't frightened you. Strong as I look, there is a weak place in my heart, and it does not take much to knock me over. I don’t know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and of fancy would be children in your hands. That’s your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world.’

“And that recommendation, with the exaggerated estimate of my ability with which he prefaced it, was, if you will believe me, Watson, the very first thing which ever made me feel that a profession might be made out of what had up to that time been the merest hobby. At the moment, however, I was too much concerned at the sudden illness of my host to think of anything else.

“‘I hope that I have said nothing to pain you?’ said I.

“‘Well, you certainly touched upon rather a tender point. Might I ask how you know, and how much you know?’ He spoke now in a half-jesting fashion, but a look of terror still lurked at the back of his eyes.

“‘It is simplicity itself,’ said I. ‘When you bared your arm to draw that fish into the boat I saw that J. A. Had been tattooed in the bend of the elbow. The letters were still legible, but it was perfectly clear from their blurred appearance, and from the staining of the skin round them, that efforts had been made to obliterate them. It was obvious, then, that those initials had once been very familiar to you, and that you had afterwards wished to forget them.’

“What an eye you have!” he cried, with a sigh of relief. ‘It is just as you say. But we won’t talk of it. Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst. Come into the billiard-room and have a quiet cigar.’

“From that day, amid all his cordiality, there was always a touch of suspicion in Mr. Trevor’s manner towards me. Even his son remarked it. ‘You’ve given the governor such a turn,’ said he, ‘that he’ll never be sure again of what you know and what you don’t know.’ He did not mean to show it, I am sure, but it was so strongly in his mind that it peeped out at every action. At last I became so convinced that I was causing him uneasiness that I drew my visit to a close. On the very day, however, before I left, and incident occurred which proved in the sequel to be of importance.

“We were sitting out upon the lawn on garden chairs, the three of us, basking in the sun and admiring the view across the Broads, when a maid came out to say that there was a man at the door who wanted to see Mr. Trevor.

“‘What is his name?’ asked my host.

"'He would not give any.'

"'What does he want, then?'

"'He says that you know him, and that he only wants a moment's conversation.'

"'Show him round here.' An instant afterwards there appeared a little wizened fellow with a cringing manner and a shambling style of walking. He wore an open jacket, with a splotch of tar on the sleeve, a red-and-black check shirt, dungaree trousers, and heavy boots badly worn. His face was thin and brown and crafty, with a perpetual smile upon it, which showed an irregular line of yellow teeth, and his crinkled hands were half closed in a way that is distinctive of sailors. As he came slouching across the lawn I heard Mr. Trevor make a sort of hiccoughing noise in his throat, and jumping out of his chair, he ran into the house. He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of brandy as he passed me.

"'Well, my man,' said he. 'What can I do for you?'

"The sailor stood looking at him with puckered eyes, and with the same loose-lipped smile upon his face.

"'You don't know me?' he asked.

"'Why, dear me, it is surely Hudson,' said Mr. Trevor in a tone of surprise.

"'Hudson it is, sir,' said the seaman. 'Why, it's thirty year and more since I saw you last. Here you are in your house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness cask.'

"'Tut, you will find that I have not forgotten old times,' cried Mr. Trevor, and, walking towards the sailor, he said something in a low voice. 'Go into the kitchen,' he continued out loud, 'and you will get food and drink. I have no doubt that I shall find you a situation.'

"'Thank you, sir,' said the seaman, touching his fore-lock. 'I'm just off a two-yearer in an eight-knot tramp, short-handed at that, and I wants a rest. I thought I'd get it either with Mr. Beddoes or with you.'

"'Ah!' cried Trevor. 'You know where Mr. Beddoes is?'

"'Bless you, sir, I know where all my old friends are,' said the fellow with a sinister smile, and he slouched off after the maid to the kitchen. Mr. Trevor mumbled something to us about having been shipmate with the man when he was going back to the diggings, and then, leaving us on the lawn, he went indoors. An hour later, when we entered the house, we found him stretched dead drunk upon the dining-room sofa. The whole incident left a most ugly impression upon my mind, and I was not sorry next day to leave Donnithorpe behind me, for I felt that my presence must be a source of embarrassment to my friend.

“All this occurred during the first month of the long vacation. I went up to my London rooms, where I spent seven weeks working out a few experiments in organic chemistry. One day, however, when the autumn was far advanced and the vacation drawing to a close, I received a telegram from my friend imploring me to return to Donnithorpe, and saying that he was in great need of my advice and assistance. Of course I dropped everything and set out for the North once more.

“He met me with the dog-cart at the station, and I saw at a glance that the last two months had been very trying ones for him. He had grown thin and careworn, and had lost the loud, cheery manner for which he had been remarkable.

“‘The governor is dying,’ were the first words he said.

“‘Impossible!’ I cried. ‘What is the matter?’

“‘Apoplexy. Nervous shock, He’s been on the verge all day. I doubt if we shall find him alive.’

“I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news.

“‘What has caused it?’ I asked.

“‘Ah, that is the point. Jump in and we can talk it over while we drive. You remember that fellow who came upon the evening before you left us?’

“‘Perfectly.’

“‘Do you know who it was that we let into the house that day?’

“‘I have no idea.’

“‘It was the devil, Holmes,’ he cried.

“I stared at him in astonishment.

“‘Yes, it was the devil himself. We have not had a peaceful hour since — not one. The governor has never held up his head from that evening, and now the life has been crushed out of him and his heart broken, all through this accursed Hudson.’

“‘What power had he, then?’

“‘Ah, that is what I would give so much to know. The kindly, charitable, good old governor — how could he have fallen into the clutches of such a ruffian! But I am so glad that you have come, Holmes. I trust very much to your judgment and discretion, and I know that you will advise me for the best.’

"We were dashing along the smooth white country road, with the long stretch of the Broads in front of us glimmering in the red light of the setting sun. From a grove upon our left I could already see the high chimneys and the flag-staff which marked the squire's dwelling.

"'My father made the fellow gardener,' said my companion, 'and then, as that did not satisfy him, he was promoted to be butler. The house seemed to be at his mercy, and he wandered about and did what he chose in it. The maids complained of his drunken habits and his vile language. The dad raised their wages all round to recompense them for the annoyance. The fellow would take the boat and my father's best gun and treat himself to little shooting trips. And all this with such a sneering, leering, insolent face that I would have knocked him down twenty times over if he had been a man of my own age. I tell you, Holmes, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man.

"'Well, matters went from bad to worse with us, and this animal Hudson became more and more intrusive, until at last, on making some insolent reply to my father in my presence one day, I took him by the shoulders and turned him out of the room. He slunk away with a livid face and two venomous eyes which uttered more threats than his tongue could do. I don't know what passed between the poor dad and him after that, but the dad came to me next day and asked me whether I would mind apologizing to Hudson. I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household.

"'"Ah, my boy," said he, "it is all very well to talk, but you don't know how I am placed. But you shall know, Victor. I'll see that you shall know, come what may. You wouldn't believe harm of your poor old father, would you, lad?" He was very much moved, and shut himself up in the study all day, where I could see through the window that he was writing busily.

"'That evening there came what seemed to me to be a grand release, for Hudson told us that he was going to leave us. He walked into the dining-room as we sat after dinner, and announced his intention in the thick voice of a half-drunken man.

"'"I've had enough of Norfolk," said he. "I'll run down to Mr. Beddoes in Hampshire. He'll be as glad to see me as you were, I dare say."

"'"You're not going away in an unkind spirit, Hudson, I hope," said my father, with a tameness which made my blood boil.

"'"I've not had my 'pology," said he sulkily, glancing in my direction.

"'"Victor, you will acknowledge that you have used this worthy fellow rather roughly," said the dad, turning to me.

"'"On the contrary, I think that we have both shown extraordinary patience towards him," I answered.

"'"Oh, you do, do you?" he snarls. "Very good, mate. We'll see about that!"

"'He slouched out of the room, and half an hour afterwards left the house, leaving my father in a state of pitiable nervousness. Night after night I heard him pacing his room, and it was just as he was recovering his confidence that the blow did at last fall.'

"'And how?' I asked eagerly.

"'In a most extraordinary fashion. A letter arrived for my father yesterday evening, bearing the Fordingbridge post-mark. My father read it, clapped both his hands to his head, and began running round the room in little circles like a man who has been driven out of his senses. When I at last drew him down on to the sofa, his mouth and eyelids were all puckered on one side, and I saw that he had a stroke. Dr. Fordham came over at once. We put him to bed; but the paralysis has spread, he has shown no sign of returning consciousness, and I think that we shall hardly find him alive.'

"'You horrify me, Trevor!' I cried. 'What then could have been in this letter to cause so dreadful a result?'

"'Nothing. There lies the inexplicable part of it. The message was absurd and trivial. Ah, my God, it is as I feared!'

"As he spoke we came round the curve of the avenue, and saw in the fading light that every blind in the house had been drawn down. As we dashed up to the door, my friend's face convulsed with grief, a gentleman in black emerged from it.

"'When did it happen, doctor?' asked Trevor.

"'Almost immediately after you left.'

"'Did he recover consciousness?'

"'For an instant before the end.'

"'Any message for me.'

"'Only that the papers were in the back drawer of the Japanese cabinet.'

"My friend ascended with the doctor to the chamber of death, while I remained in the study, turning the whole matter over and over in my head, and feeling as sombre as ever I had done in my life. What was the past of this Trevor, pugilist, traveler, and gold-digger, and how had he placed himself in the power of this acid-faced seaman? Why, too, should he faint at an allusion to the half-effaced initials upon his arm, and die of fright when he had a letter from Fordingham? Then I remembered that Fordingham was in Hampshire, and that this Mr. Beddoes, whom the seaman had gone to visit and presumably to blackmail, had also been mentioned as living in Hampshire. The letter, then, might either come from Hudson, the seaman, saying that he had betrayed the guilty secret which appeared to exist, or it might come from Beddoes, warning an old confederate that such a betrayal was imminent. So far it seemed clear enough. But then how could this letter be trivial and grotesque, as describe by the son? He must have misread it. If so, it must have been one of those ingenious secret codes which mean one thing while they seem to mean another. I must see this letter. If there were a hidden meaning in it, I was confident that I could pluck it forth. For an hour I sat pondering over it in the gloom, until at last a weeping maid brought in a lamp, and close at her heels came my friend Trevor, pale but composed, with these very papers which lie upon my knee held in his grasp. He sat down opposite to me, drew the lamp to the edge of the table, and handed me a short note scribbled, as you see, upon a single sheet of gray paper. ‘The supply of game for London is going steadily up,’ it ran. ‘Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant’s life.’

“I dare say my face looked as bewildered as yours did just now when first I read this message. Then I reread it very carefully. It was evidently as I had thought, and some secret meaning must lie buried in this strange combination of words. Or could it be that there was a prearranged significance to such phrases as ‘fly-paper’ and ‘hen-pheasant’? Such a meaning would be arbitrary and could not be deduced in any way. And yet I was loath to believe that this was the case, and the presence of the word Hudson seemed to show that the subject of the message was as I had guessed, and that it was from Beddoes rather than the sailor. I tried it backwards, but the combination ‘life pheasant’s hen’ was not encouraging. Then I tried alternate words, but neither ‘the of for’ nor ‘supply game London’ promised to throw any light upon it.

“And then in an instant the key of the riddle was in my hands, and I saw that every third word, beginning with the first, would give a message which might well drive old Trevor to despair.

"It was short and terse, the warning, as I now read it to my companion:

"'The game is up. Hudson has told all. Fly for your life.'

"Victor Trevor sank his face into his shaking hands. 'It must be that, I suppose,' said he. "This is worse than death, for it means disgrace as well. But what is the meaning of these "head-keepers" and "hen-pheasants"?'

"'It means nothing to the message, but it might mean a good deal to us if we had no other means of discovering the sender. You see that he has begun by writing "The...game...is," and so on. Afterwards he had, to fulfill the prearranged cipher, to fill in any two words in each space. He would naturally use the first words which came to his mind, and if there were so many which referred to sport among them, you may be tolerably sure that he is either an ardent shot or interested in breeding. Do you know anything of this Beddoes?'

"'Why, now that you mention it,' said he, 'I remember that my poor father used to have an invitation from him to shoot over his preserves every autumn.'

"'Then it is undoubtedly from him that the note comes,' said I. 'It only remains for us to find out what this secret was which the sailor Hudson seems to have held over the heads of these two wealthy and respected men.'

"'Alas, Holmes, I fear that it is one of sin and shame!' cried my friend. 'But from you I shall have no secrets. Here is the statement which was drawn up by my father when he knew that the danger from Hudson had become imminent. I found it in the Japanese cabinet, as he told the doctor. Take it and read it to me, for I have neither the strength nor the courage to do it myself.'

"These are the very papers, Watson, which he handed to me, and I will read them to you, as I read them in the old study that night to him. They are endorsed outside, as you see, 'Some particulars of the voyage of the bark *Gloria Scott,* from her leaving Falmouth on the 8th October, 1855, to her destruction in N. Lat. 15 degrees 20', W. Long. 25 degrees 14' on Nov. 6th.' It is in the form of a letter, and runs in this way:

"'My dear, dear son, now that approaching disgrace begins to darken the closing years of my life, I can write with all truth and honesty that it is not the terror of the law, it is not the loss of my position in the county, nor is it my fall in the eyes of all who have known me, which cuts me to the heart; but it is the thought that you should come to blush for me — you who love me and who have seldom, I hope, had reason to do other than respect me.

But if the blow falls which is forever hanging over me, then I should wish you to read this, that you may know straight from me how far I have been to blame. On the other hand, if all should go well (which may kind God Almighty grant!), then if by any chance this paper should be still undestroyed and should fall into your hands, I conjure you, by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your dear mother, and by the love which had been between us, to hurl it into the fire and to never give one thought to it again.

"'If then your eye goes on to read this line, I know that I shall already have been exposed and dragged from my home, or as is more likely, for you know that my heart is weak, by lying with my tongue sealed forever in death. In either case the time for suppression is past, and every word which I tell you is the naked truth, and this I swear as I hope for mercy.

"'My name, dear lad, is not Trevor. I was James Armitage in my younger days, and you can understand now the shock that it was to me a few weeks ago when your college friend addressed me in words which seemed to imply that he had surprised my secret. As Armitage it was that I entered a London banking-house, and as Armitage I was convicted of breaking my country's laws, and was sentenced to transportation. Do not think very harshly of me, laddie. It was a debt of honor, so called, which I had to pay, and I used money which was not my own to do it, in the certainty that I could replace it before there could be any possibility of its being missed. But the most dreadful ill-luck pursued me. The money which I had reckoned upon never came to hand, and a premature examination of accounts exposed my deficit. The case might have been dealt leniently with, but the laws were more harshly administered thirty years ago than now, and on my twenty-third birthday I found myself chained as a felon with thirty-seven other convicts in 'tween-decks of the bark *Gloria Scott*, bound for Australia.

"'It was the year '55 when the Crimean war was at its height, and the old convict ships had been largely used as transports in the Black Sea. The government was compelled, therefore, to use smaller and less suitable vessels for sending out their prisoners. The Gloria Scott had been in the Chinese tea-trade, but she was an old-fashioned, heavy-bowed, broad-beamed craft, and the new clippers had cut her out. She was a five-hundred-ton boat; and besides her thirty-eight jail-birds, she carried twenty-six of a crew, eighteen soldiers, a captain, three mates, a doctor, a chaplain, and four warders. Nearly a hundred souls were in her, all told, when we set sail from Falmouth.

"'The partitions between the cells of the convicts, instead of being of thick oak, as is usual in convict-ships, were quite thin and frail. The man next to me, upon the aft side, was one whom I had particularly noticed when we were led down the quay. He was a young man with a clear, hairless face, a long, thin nose, and rather nut-cracker jaws. He carried his head very jauntily in the air, had a swaggering style of walking, and was, above all else, remarkable for his extraordinary height. I don't think any of our heads would have come up to his shoulder, and I am sure that he could not have measured less than six and a half feet. It was strange among so many sad and weary faces to see one which was full of energy and resolution. The sight of it was to me like a fire in a snow-storm. I was glad, then, to find that he was my neighbour, and gladder still when, in the dead of the night, I heard a whisper close to my ear, and found that he had managed to cut an opening in the board which separated us.

"'"Hullo, chummy!" said he, "what's your name, and what are you here for?"

"'I answered him, and asked in turn who I was talking with.

"'"I'm Jack Prendergast," said he, "and by God! You'll learn to bless my name before you've done with me."

"'I remembered hearing of his case, for it was one which had made an immense sensation throughout the country some time before my own arrest. He was a man of good family and of great ability, but of incurably vicious habits, who had by an ingenious system of fraud obtained huge sums of money from the leading London merchants.

"'"Ha, ha! You remember my case!" said he proudly.

"'"Very well, indeed."

"'"Then maybe you remember something queer about it?"

"'"What was that, then?"

"'"I'd had nearly a quarter of a million, hadn't I?"

"'"So it was said."

"'"But none was recovered, eh?"

"'"No."

"'"Well, where d'ye suppose the balance is?" he asked.

"'"I have no idea," said I.

"'"Right between my finger and thumb," he cried. "By God! I've got more pounds to my name than you've hairs on your head. And if you've money, my son, and know how to handle it and spread it, you can do anything. Now, you don't think it likely that a man who could do anything is going to wear his breeches out sitting in the stinking hold of a rat-gutted, beetle-ridden, mouldy old coffin of a Chin China coaster. No, sir, such a man will look after himself and will look after his chums. You may lay to that! You hold on to him, and you may kiss the book that he'll haul you through."

"'That was his style of talk, and at first I thought it meant nothing; but after a while, when he had tested me and sworn me in with all possible solemnity, he let me understand that there really was a plot to gain command of the vessel. A dozen of the prisoners had hatched it before they came aboard, Prendergast was the leader, and his money was the motive power.

"'"I'd a partner," said he, "a rare good man, as true as a stock to a barrel. He's got the dibbs, he has, and where do you think he is at this moment? Why, he's the chaplain of this ship — the chaplain, no less! He came aboard with a black coat, and his papers right, and money enough in his box to buy the thing right up from keel to main-truck. The crew are his, body and soul. He could buy 'em at so much a gross with a cash discount, and he did it before ever they signed on. He's got two of the warders and Mereer, the second mate, and he'd get the captain himself, if he thought him worth it."

"'"What are we to do, then?" I asked.

"'"What do you think?" said he. "We'll make the coats of some of these soldiers redder than ever the tailor did."

"'"But they are armed," said I.

"'"And so shall we be, my boy. There's a brace of pistols for every mother's son of us, and if we can't carry this ship, with the crew at our back, it's time we were all sent to a young misses' boarding-school. You speak to your mate upon the left to-night, and see if he is to be trusted."

"'I did so, and found my other neighbour to be a young fellow in much the same position as myself, whose crime had been forgery. His name was Evans, but he afterwards changed it, like myself, and he is now a rich and prosperous man in the south of England. He was ready enough to join the conspiracy, as the only means of saving ourselves, and before we had crossed the Bay there were only two of the prisoners who were not in the secret. One of these was of weak mind, and we did not dare to trust him, and the other was suffering from jaundice, and could not be of any use to us.

"'From the beginning there was really nothing to prevent us from taking possession of the ship. The crew were a set of ruffians, specially picked for the job. The sham chaplain came into our cells to exhort us, carrying a black bag, supposed to be full of tracts, and so often did he come that by the third day we had each stowed away at the foot of our beds a file, a brace of pistols, a pound of powder, and twenty slugs. Two of the warders were agents of Prendergast, and the second mate was his right-hand man. The captain, the two mates, two warders Lieutenant Martin, his eighteen soldiers, and the doctor were all that we had against us. Yet, safe as it was, we determined to neglect no precaution, and to make our attack suddenly by night. It came, however, more quickly than we expected, and in this way.

"'One evening, about the third week after our start, the doctor had come down to see one of the prisoners who was ill, and putting his hand down on the bottom of his bunk he felt the outline of the pistols. If he had been silent he might have blown the whole thing, but he was a nervous little chap, so he gave a cry of surprise and turned so pale that the man knew what was up in an instant and seized him. He was gagged before he could give the alarm, and tied down upon the bed. He had unlocked the door that led to the deck, and we were through it in a rush. The two sentries were shot down, and so was a corporal who came running to see what was the matter. There were two more soldiers at the door of the state-room, and their muskets seemed not to be loaded, for they never fired upon us, and they were shot while trying to fix their bayonets. Then we rushed on into the captain's cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay with his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while the chaplain stood with a smoking pistol in his hand at his elbow. The two mates had both been seized by the crew, and the whole business seemed to be settled.

"'The state-room was next the cabin, and we flocked in there and flopped down on the settees, all speaking together, for we were just mad with the feeling that we were free once more. There were lockers all round, and Wilson, the sham chaplain, knocked one of them in, and pulled out a dozen of brown sherry. We cracked off the necks of the bottles, poured the stuff out into tumblers, and were just tossing them off, when in an instant without warning there came the roar of muskets in our ears, and the saloon was so full of smoke that we could not see across the table. When it cleared again the place was a shambles. Wilson and eight others were wriggling on the top of each other on the floor, and the blood and the brown sherry on that table turn me sick now when I think of it. We were so cowed by the sight that I think we should have given the job up if it had not been for Prendergast. He bellowed like a bull and rushed for the door with all that were left alive at his heels. Out we ran, and there on the poop were the lieutenant and ten of his men. The swing skylights above the saloon table had been a bit open, and they had fired on us through the slit. We got on them before they could load, and they stood to it like men; but we had the upper hand of them, and in five minutes it was all over. My God! Was there ever a slaughter-house like that ship! Prendergast was like a raging devil, and he picked the soldiers up as if they had been children and threw them overboard alive or dead. There was one sergeant that was horribly wounded and yet kept on swimming for a surprising time, until some one in mercy blew out his brains. When the fighting was over there was no one left of our enemies except just the warders the mates, and the doctor.

"'It was over them that the great quarrel arose. There were many of us who were glad enough to win back our freedom, and yet who had no wish to have murder on our souls. It was one thing to knock the soldiers over with their muskets in their hands, and it was another to stand by while men were being killed in cold blood. Eight of us, five convicts and three sailors, said that we would not see it done. But there was no moving Prendergast and those who were with him. Our only chance of safety lay in making a clean job of it, said he, and he would not leave a tongue with power to wag in a witness-box. It nearly came to our sharing the fate of the prisoners, but at last he said that if we wished we might take a boat and go. We jumped at the offer, for we were already sick of these bloodthirsty doings, and we saw that there would be worse before it was done. We were given a suit of sailor togs each, a barrel of water, two casks, one of junk and one of biscuits, and a compass. Prendergast threw us over a chart, told us that we were shipwrecked mariners whose ship had foundered in Lat. 15 degrees and Long 25 degrees west, and then cut the painter and let us go.

"'And now I come to the most surprising part of my story, my dear son. The seamen had hauled the fore-yard aback during the rising, but now as we left them they brought it square again, and as there was a light wind from the north and east the bark began to draw slowly away from us. Our boat lay, rising and falling, upon the long, smooth rollers, and Evans and I, who were the most educated of the party, were sitting in the sheets working out our position and planning what coast we should make for. It was a nice question, for the Cape de Verdes were about five hundred miles to the north of us, and the African coast about seven hundred to the east. On the whole, as the wind was coming round to the north, we thought that Sierra Leone might be best, and turned our head in that direction, the bark being at that time nearly hull down on our starboard quarter. Suddenly as we looked at her we saw a dense black cloud of smoke shoot up from her, which hung like a monstrous tree upon the sky line. A few seconds later a roar like thunder burst upon our ears, and as the smoke thinned away there was no sign left of the *Gloria Scott*. In an instant we swept the boat's head round again and pulled with all our strength for the place where the haze still trailing over the water marked the scene of this catastrophe.

"'It was a long hour before we reached it, and at first we feared that we had come too late to save any one. A splintered boat and a number of crates and fragments of spars rising and falling on the waves showed us where the vessel had foundered; but there was no sign of life, and we had turned away in despair when we heard a cry for help, and saw at some distance a piece of wreckage with a man lying stretched across it. When we pulled him aboard the boat he proved to be a young seaman of the name of Hudson, who was so burned and exhausted that he could give us no account of what had happened until the following morning.

"'It seemed that after we had left, Prendergast and his gang had proceeded to put to death the five remaining prisoners. The two warders had been shot and thrown overboard, and so also had the third mate. Prendergast then descended into the 'tween-decks and with his own hands cut the throat of the unfortunate surgeon. There only remained the first mate, who was a bold and active man. When he saw the convict approaching him with the bloody knife in his hand he kicked off his bonds, which he had somehow contrived to loosen, and rushing down the deck he plunged into the after-hold. A dozen convicts, who descended with their pistols in search of him, found him with a match-box in his hand seated beside an open powder-barrel, which was one of a hundred carried on board, and swearing that he would blow all hands up if he were in any way molested. An instant later the explosion occurred, though Hudson thought it was caused by the misdirected bullet of one of the convicts rather than the mate’s match. Be the cause what it may, it was the end of the *Gloria Scott* and of the rabble who held command of her.

“‘Such, in a few words, my dear boy, is the history of this terrible business in which I was involved. Next day we were picked up by the brig *Hotspur*, bound for Australia, whose captain found no difficulty in believing that we were the survivors of a passenger ship which had foundered. The transport ship Gloria Scott was set down by the Admiralty as being lost at sea, and no word has ever leaked out as to her true fate. After an excellent voyage the *Hotspur* landed us at Sydney, where Evans and I changed our names and made our way to the diggings, where, among the crowds who were gathered from all nations, we had no difficulty in losing our former identities. The rest I need not relate. We prospered, we traveled, we came back as rich colonials to England, and we bought country estates. For more than twenty years we have led peaceful and useful lives, and we hoped that our past was forever buried. Imagine, then, my feelings when in the seaman who came to us I recognised instantly the man who had been picked off the wreck. He had tracked us down somehow, and had set himself to live upon our fears. You will understand now how it was that I strove to keep the peace with him, and you will in some measure sympathize with me in the fears which fill me, now that he has gone from me to his other victim with threats upon his tongue.’

“Underneath is written in a hand so shaky as to be hardly legible, ‘Beddoes writes in cipher to say H. Has told all. Sweet Lord, have mercy on our souls!’

“That was the narrative which I read that night to young Trevor, and I think, Watson, that under the circumstances it was a dramatic one. The good fellow was heart-broken at it, and went out to the Terai tea planting, where I hear that he is doing well. As to the sailor and Beddoes, neither of them was ever heard of again after that day on which the letter of warning was written. They both disappeared utterly and completely. No complaint had been lodged with the police, so that Beddoes had mistaken a threat for a deed. Hudson had been seen lurking about, and it was believed by the police that he had done away with Beddoes and had fled. For myself I believe that the truth was exactly the opposite. I think that it is most probable that Beddoes, pushed to desperation and believing himself to have been already betrayed, had revenged himself upon Hudson, and had fled from the country with as much money as he could lay his hands on. Those are the facts of the case, Doctor, and if they are of any use to your collection, I am sure that they are very heartily at your service.”

Adventure V. The Musgrave Ritual

An anomaly which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, although in his methods of thought he was the neatest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of a natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humors, would sit in an arm-chair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it.

Our chambers were always full of chemicals and of criminal relics which had a way of wandering into unlikely positions, and of turning up in the butter-dish or in even less desirable places. But his papers were my great crux. He had a horror of destroying documents, especially those which were connected with his past cases, and yet it was only once in every year or two that he would muster energy to docket and arrange them; for, as I have mentioned somewhere in these incoherent memoirs, the outbursts of passionate energy when he performed the remarkable feats with which his name is associated were followed by reactions of lethargy during which he would lie about with his violin and his books, hardly moving save from the sofa to the table. Thus month after month his papers accumulated, until every corner of the room was stacked with bundles of manuscript which were on no account to be burned, and which could not be put away save by their owner. One winter’s night, as we sat together by the fire, I ventured to suggest to him that, as he had finished pasting extracts into his commonplace book, he might employ the next two hours in making our room a little more habitable. He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he went off to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a large tin box behind him. This he placed in the middle of the floor and, squatting down upon a stool in front of it, he threw back the lid. I could see that it was already a third full of bundles of paper tied up with red tape into separate packages.

"There are cases enough here, Watson," said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. "I think that if you knew all that I had in this box you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in."

"These are the records of your early work, then?" I asked. "I have often wished that I had notes of those cases."

"Yes, my boy, these were all done prematurely before my biographer had come to glorify me." He lifted bundle after bundle in a tender, caressing sort of way. "They are not all successes, Watson," said he. "But there are some pretty little problems among them. Here's the record of the Tarleton murders, and the case of Vamberry, the wine merchant, and the adventure of the old Russian woman, and the singular affair of the aluminium crutch, as well as a full account of Ricoletti of the club-foot, and his abominable wife. And here — ah, now, this really is something a little recherché."

He dived his arm down to the bottom of the chest, and brought up a small wooden box with a sliding lid, such as children's toys are kept in. From within he produced a crumpled piece of paper, and old-fashioned brass key, a peg of wood with a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old disks of metal.

"Well, my boy, what do you make of this lot?" he asked, smiling at my expression.

"It is a curious collection."

"Very curious, and the story that hangs round it will strike you as being more curious still."

"These relics have a history then?"

"So much so that they are history."

"What do you mean by that?"

Sherlock Holmes picked them up one by one, and laid them along the edge of the table. Then he reseated himself in his chair and looked them over with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

“These,” said he, “are all that I have left to remind me of the adventure of the Musgrave Ritual.”

I had heard him mention the case more than once, though I had never been able to gather the details. “I should be so glad,” said I, “if you would give me an account of it.”

“And leave the litter as it is?” he cried, mischievously. “Your tidiness won’t bear much strain after all, Watson. But I should be glad that you should add this case to your annals, for there are points in it which make it quite unique in the criminal records of this or, I believe, of any other country. A collection of my trifling achievements would certainly be incomplete which contained no account of this very singular business.

“You may remember how the affair of the *Gloria Scott*, and my conversation with the unhappy man whose fate I told you of, first turned my attention in the direction of the profession which has become my life’s work. You see me now when my name has become known far and wide, and when I am generally recognised both by the public and by the official force as being a final court of appeal in doubtful cases. Even when you knew me first, at the time of the affair which you have commemorated in ‘A Study in Scarlet,’ I had already established a considerable, though not a very lucrative, connection. You can hardly realise, then, how difficult I found it at first, and how long I had to wait before I succeeded in making any headway.

“When I first came up to London I had rooms in Montague Street, just round the corner from the British Museum, and there I waited, filling in my too abundant leisure time by studying all those branches of science which might make me more efficient. Now and again cases came in my way, principally through the introduction of old fellow-students, for during my last years at the University there was a good deal of talk there about myself and my methods. The third of these cases was that of the Musgrave Ritual, and it is to the interest which was aroused by that singular chain of events, and the large issues which proved to be at stake, that I trace my first stride towards the position which I now hold.

“Reginald Musgrave had been in the same college as myself, and I had some slight acquaintance with him. He was not generally popular among the undergraduates, though it always seemed to me that what was set down as pride was really an attempt to cover extreme natural diffidence. In appearance he was a man of exceedingly aristocratic type, thin, high-nosed, and large-eyed, with languid and yet courtly manners. He was indeed a scion of one of the very oldest families in the kingdom, though his branch was a cadet one which had separated from the northern Musgraves some time in the sixteenth century, and had established itself in western Sussex, where the Manor House of Hurlstone is perhaps the oldest inhabited building in the county. Something of his birth place seemed to cling to the man, and I never looked at his pale, keen face or the poise of his head without associating him with gray archways and mullioned windows and all the venerable wreckage of a feudal keep. Once or twice we drifted into talk, and I can remember that more than once he expressed a keen interest in my methods of observation and inference.

"For four years I had seen nothing of him until one morning he walked into my room in Montague Street. He had changed little, was dressed like a young man of fashion — he was always a bit of a dandy — and preserved the same quiet, suave manner which had formerly distinguished him.

"'How has all gone with you Musgrave?' I asked, after we had cordially shaken hands.

"'You probably heard of my poor father's death,' said he; 'he was carried off about two years ago. Since then I have of course had the Hurlstone estates to manage, and as I am member for my district as well, my life has been a busy one. But I understand, Holmes, that you are turning to practical ends those powers with which you used to amaze us?'

"'Yes,' said I, 'I have taken to living by my wits.'

"'I am delighted to hear it, for your advice at present would be exceedingly valuable to me. We have had some very strange doings at Hurlstone, and the police have been able to throw no light upon the matter. It is really the most extraordinary and inexplicable business.'

"You can imagine with what eagerness I listened to him, Watson, for the very chance for which I had been panting during all those months of inaction seemed to have come within my reach. In my inmost heart I believed that I could succeed where others failed, and now I had the opportunity to test myself.

"'Pray, let me have the details,' I cried.

"Reginald Musgrave sat down opposite to me, and lit the cigarette which I had pushed towards him.

"'You must know,' said he, 'that though I am a bachelor, I have to keep up a considerable staff of servants at Hurlstone, for it is a rambling old place, and takes a good deal of looking after. I preserve, too, and in the pheasant months I usually have a house-party, so that it would not do to be short-handed. Altogether there are eight maids, the cook, the butler, two footmen, and a boy. The garden and the stables of course have a separate staff.

"'Of these servants the one who had been longest in our service was Brunton the butler. He was a young school-master out of place when he was first taken up by my father, but he was a man of great energy and character, and he soon became quite invaluable in the household. He was a well-grown, handsome man, with a splendid forehead, and though he has been with us for twenty years he cannot be more than forty now. With his personal advantages and his extraordinary gifts — for he can speak several languages and play nearly every musical instrument — it is wonderful that he should have been satisfied so long in such a position, but I suppose that he was comfortable, and lacked energy to make any change. The butler of Hurlstone is always a thing that is remembered by all who visit us.

"'But this paragon has one fault. He is a bit of a Don Juan, and you can imagine that for a man like him it is not a very difficult part to play in a quiet country district. When he was married it was all right, but since he has been a widower we have had no end of trouble with him. A few months ago we were in hopes that he was about to settle down again for he became engaged to Rachel Howells, our second house-maid; but he has thrown her over since then and taken up with Janet Tregellis, the daughter of the head game-keeper. Rachel — who is a very good girl, but of an excitable Welsh temperament — had a sharp touch of brain-fever, and goes about the house now — or did until yesterday — like a black-eyed shadow of her former self. That was our first drama at Hurlstone; but a second one came to drive it from our minds, and it was prefaced by the disgrace and dismissal of butler Brunton.

"'This was how it came about. I have said that the man was intelligent, and this very intelligence has caused his ruin, for it seems to have led to an insatiable curiosity about things which did not in the least concern him. I had no idea of the lengths to which this would carry him, until the merest accident opened my eyes to it.

"'I have said that the house is a rambling one. One day last week — on Thursday night, to be more exact — I found that I could not sleep, having foolishly taken a cup of strong café noir after my dinner. After struggling against it until two in the morning, I felt that it was quite hopeless, so I rose and lit the candle with the intention of continuing a novel which I was reading. The book, however, had been left in the billiard-room, so I pulled on my dressing-gown and started off to get it.

"'In order to reach the billiard-room I had to descend a flight of stairs and then to cross the head of a passage which led to the library and the gun-room. You can imagine my surprise when, as I looked down this corridor, I saw a glimmer of light coming from the open door of the library. I had myself extinguished the lamp and closed the door before coming to bed. Naturally my first thought was of burglars. The corridors at Hurlstone have their walls largely decorated with trophies of old weapons. From one of these I picked a battle-axe, and then, leaving my candle behind me, I crept on tiptoe down the passage and peeped in at the open door.

"'Brunton, the butler, was in the library. He was sitting, fully dressed, in an easy-chair, with a slip of paper which looked like a map upon his knee, and his forehead sunk forward upon his hand in deep thought. I stood dumb with astonishment, watching him from the darkness. A small taper on the edge of the table shed a feeble light which sufficed to show me that he was fully dressed. Suddenly, as I looked, he rose from his chair, and walking over to a bureau at the side, he unlocked it and drew out one of the drawers. From this he took a paper, and returning to his seat he flattened it out beside the taper on the edge of the table, and began to study it with minute attention. My indignation at this calm examination of our family documents overcame me so far that I took a step forward, and Brunton, looking up, saw me standing in the doorway. He sprang to his feet, his face turned livid with fear, and he thrust into his breast the chart-like paper which he had been originally studying.

"'"So!" said I. "This is how you repay the trust which we have reposed in you. You will leave my service to-morrow."

"'He bowed with the look of a man who is utterly crushed, and slunk past me without a word. The taper was still on the table, and by its light I glanced to see what the paper was which Brunton had taken from the bureau. To my surprise it was nothing of any importance at all, but simply a copy of the questions and answers in the singular old observance called the Musgrave Ritual. It is a sort of ceremony peculiar to our family, which each Musgrave for centuries past has gone through on his coming of age — a thing of private interest, and perhaps of some little importance to the archaeologist, like our own blazonings and charges, but of no practical use whatever.’

“‘We had better come back to the paper afterwards,’ said I.

“‘If you think it really necessary,’ he answered, with some hesitation. ‘To continue my statement, however: I relocked the bureau, using the key which Brunton had left, and I had turned to go when I was surprised to find that the butler had returned, and was standing before me.

“‘“Mr. Musgrave, sir,” he cried, in a voice which was hoarse with emotion, “I can’t bear disgrace, sir. I’ve always been proud above my station in life, and disgrace would kill me. My blood will be on your head, sir — it will, indeed — if you drive me to despair. If you cannot keep me after what has passed, then for God’s sake let me give you notice and leave in a month, as if of my own free will. I could stand that, Mr. Musgrave, but not to be cast out before all the folk that I know so well.”

“‘“You don’t deserve much consideration, Brunton,” I answered. “Your conduct has been most infamous. However, as you have been a long time in the family, I have no wish to bring public disgrace upon you. A month, however is too long. Take yourself away in a week, and give what reason you like for going.”

“‘“Only a week, sir?” he cried, in a despairing voice. “A fortnight — say at least a fortnight!”

“‘“A week,” I repeated, “and you may consider yourself to have been very leniently dealt with.”

“‘He crept away, his face sunk upon his breast, like a broken man, while I put out the light and returned to my room.

“‘“For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. I made no allusion to what had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace. On the third morning, however he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. As I left the dining-room I happened to meet Rachel Howells, the maid. I have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness, and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with her for being at work.

“‘“You should be in bed,” I said. “Come back to your duties when you are stronger.”

“‘She looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that her brain was affected.

“‘“I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave,” said she.

“‘“We will see what the doctor says,” I answered. “You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just say that I wish to see Brunton.”

“‘“The butler is gone,” said she.

“‘“Gone! Gone where?”

“‘“He is gone. No one has seen him. He is not in his room. Oh, yes, he is gone, he is gone!” She fell back against the wall with shriek after shriek of laughter, while I, horrified at this sudden hysterical attack, rushed to the bell to summon help. The girl was taken to her room, still screaming and sobbing, while I made inquiries about Brunton. There was no doubt about it that he had disappeared. His bed had not been slept in, he had been seen by no one since he had retired to his room the night before, and yet it was difficult to see how he could have left the house, as both windows and doors were found to be fastened in the morning. His clothes, his watch, and even his money were in his room, but the black suit which he usually wore was missing. His slippers, too, were gone, but his boots were left behind. Where then could butler Brunton have gone in the night, and what could have become of him now?

“‘Of course we searched the house from cellar to garret, but there was no trace of him. It is, as I have said, a labyrinth of an old house, especially the original wing, which is now practically uninhabited; but we ransacked every room and cellar without discovering the least sign of the missing man. It was incredible to me that he could have gone away leaving all his property behind him, and yet where could he be? I called in the local police, but without success. Rain had fallen on the night before and we examined the lawn and the paths all round the house, but in vain. Matters were in this state, when a new development quite drew our attention away from the original mystery.

“‘For two days Rachel Howells had been so ill, sometimes delirious, sometimes hysterical, that a nurse had been employed to sit up with her at night. On the third night after Brunton’s disappearance, the nurse, finding her patient sleeping nicely, had dropped into a nap in the arm-chair, when she woke in the early morning to find the bed empty, the window open, and no signs of the invalid. I was instantly aroused, and, with the two footmen, started off at once in search of the missing girl. It was not difficult to tell the direction which she had taken, for, starting from under her window, we could follow her footmarks easily across the lawn to the edge of the mere, where they vanished close to the gravel path which leads out of the grounds. The lake there is eight feet deep, and you can imagine our feelings when we saw that the trail of the poor demented girl came to an end at the edge of it.

"'Of course, we had the drags at once, and set to work to recover the remains, but no trace of the body could we find. On the other hand, we brought to the surface an object of a most unexpected kind. It was a linen bag which contained within it a mass of old rusted and discoloured metal and several dull-coloured pieces of pebble or glass. This strange find was all that we could get from the mere, and, although we made every possible search and inquiry yesterday, we know nothing of the fate either of Rachel Howells or of Richard Brunton. The county police are at their wits' end, and I have come up to you as a last resource.'

"You can imagine, Watson, with what eagerness I listened to this extraordinary sequence of events, and endeavored to piece them together, and to devise some common thread upon which they might all hang. The butler was gone. The maid was gone. The maid had loved the butler, but had afterwards had cause to hate him. She was of Welsh blood, fiery and passionate. She had been terribly excited immediately after his disappearance. She had flung into the lake a bag containing some curious contents. These were all factors which had to be taken into consideration, and yet none of them got quite to the heart of the matter. What was the starting-point of this chain of events? There lay the end of this tangled line.

"'I must see that paper, Musgrave,' said I, 'which this butler of your thought it worth his while to consult, even at the risk of the loss of his place.'

"'It is rather an absurd business, this ritual of ours,' he answered. 'But it has at least the saving grace of antiquity to excuse it. I have a copy of the questions and answers here if you care to run your eye over them.'

"He handed me the very paper which I have here, Watson, and this is the strange catechism to which each Musgrave had to submit when he came to man's estate. I will read you the questions and answers as they stand.

"'Whose was it?'

"'His who is gone.'

"'Who shall have it?'

"'He who will come.'

"'Where was the sun?'

"'Over the oak.'

"'Where was the shadow?'

"'Under the elm.'

"How was it stepped?'

"'North by ten and by ten, east by five and by five, south by two and by two, west by one and by one, and so under.'

"'What shall we give for it?'

"'All that is ours.'

"'Why should we give it?'

"'For the sake of the trust.'

"'The original has no date, but is in the spelling of the middle of the seventeenth century,' remarked Musgrave. 'I am afraid, however, that it can be of little help to you in solving this mystery.'

"'At least,' said I, 'it gives us another mystery, and one which is even more interesting than the first. It may be that the solution of the one may prove to be the solution of the other. You will excuse me, Musgrave, if I say that your butler appears to me to have been a very clever man, and to have had a clearer insight than ten generations of his masters.'

"'I hardly follow you,' said Musgrave. 'The paper seems to me to be of no practical importance.'

"'But to me it seems immensely practical, and I fancy that Brunton took the same view. He had probably seen it before that night on which you caught him.'

"'It is very possible. We took no pains to hide it.'

"'He simply wished, I should imagine, to refresh his memory upon that last occasion. He had, as I understand, some sort of map or chart which he was comparing with the manuscript, and which he thrust into his pocket when you appeared.'

"'That is true. But what could he have to do with this old family custom of ours, and what does this rigmarole mean?'

"'I don't think that we should have much difficulty in determining that,' said I; 'with your permission we will take the first train down to Sussex, and go a little more deeply into the matter upon the spot.'

"The same afternoon saw us both at Hurlstone. Possibly you have seen pictures and read descriptions of the famous old building, so I will confine my account of it to saying that it is built in the shape of an L, the long arm being the more modern portion, and the shorter the ancient nucleus, from which the other had developed. Over the low, heavily-lintelled door, in the centre of this old part, is chiseled the date, 1607, but experts are agreed that the beams and stone-work are really much older than this. The enormously thick walls and tiny windows of this part had in the last century driven the family into building the new wing, and the old one was used now as a store-house and a cellar, when it was used at all. A splendid park with fine old timber surrounds the house, and the lake, to which my client had referred, lay close to the avenue, about two hundred yards from the building.

"I was already firmly convinced, Watson, that there were not three separate mysteries here, but one only, and that if I could read the Musgrave Ritual aright I should hold in my hand the clue which would lead me to the truth concerning both the butler Brunton and the maid Howells. To that then I turned all my energies. Why should this servant be so anxious to master this old formula? Evidently because he saw something in it which had escaped all those generations of country squires, and from which he expected some personal advantage. What was it then, and how had it affected his fate?

"It was perfectly obvious to me, on reading the ritual, that the measurements must refer to some spot to which the rest of the document alluded, and that if we could find that spot, we should be in a fair way towards finding what the secret was which the old Musgraves had thought it necessary to embalm in so curious a fashion. There were two guides given us to start with, an oak and an elm. As to the oak there could be no question at all. Right in front of the house, upon the left-hand side of the drive, there stood a patriarch among oaks, one of the most magnificent trees that I have ever seen.

"'That was there when your ritual was drawn up,' said I, as we drove past it.

"'It was there at the Norman Conquest in all probability,' he answered. 'It has a girth of twenty-three feet.'

"'Have you any old elms?' I asked.

"'There used to be a very old one over yonder but it was struck by lightning ten years ago, and we cut down the stump.'

"'You can see where it used to be?'

"'Oh, yes.'

"'There are no other elms?'

"'No old ones, but plenty of beeches.'

"'I should like to see where it grew.'

"We had driven up in a dog-cart, and my client led me away at once, without our entering the house, to the scar on the lawn where the elm had stood. It was nearly midway between the oak and the house. My investigation seemed to be progressing.

"'I suppose it is impossible to find out how high the elm was?' I asked.

"'I can give you it at once. It was sixty-four feet.'

"'How do you come to know it?' I asked, in surprise.

"'When my old tutor used to give me an exercise in trigonometry, it always took the shape of measuring heights. When I was a lad I worked out every tree and building in the estate.'

"This was an unexpected piece of luck. My data were coming more quickly than I could have reasonably hoped.

"'Tell me,' I asked, 'did your butler ever ask you such a question?'

"Reginald Musgrave looked at me in astonishment. 'Now that you call it to my mind,' he answered, 'Brunton did ask me about the height of the tree some months ago, in connection with some little argument with the groom.'

"This was excellent news, Watson, for it showed me that I was on the right road. I looked up at the sun. It was low in the heavens, and I calculated that in less than an hour it would lie just above the topmost branches of the old oak. One condition mentioned in the Ritual would then be fulfilled. And the shadow of the elm must mean the farther end of the shadow, otherwise the trunk would have been chosen as the guide. I had, then, to find where the far end of the shadow would fall when the sun was just clear of the oak."

"That must have been difficult, Holmes, when the elm was no longer there."

"Well, at least I knew that if Brunton could do it, I could also. Besides, there was no real difficulty. I went with Musgrave to his study and whittled myself this peg, to which I tied this long string with a knot at each yard. Then I took two lengths of a fishing-rod, which came to just six feet, and I went back with my client to where the elm had been. The sun was just grazing the top of the oak. I fastened the rod on end, marked out the direction of the shadow, and measured it. It was nine feet in length.

"Of course the calculation now was a simple one. If a rod of six feet threw a shadow of nine, a tree of sixty-four feet would throw one of ninety-six, and the line of the one would of course be the line of the other. I measured out the distance, which brought me almost to the wall of the house, and I thrust a peg into the spot. You can imagine my exultation, Watson, when within two inches of my peg I saw a conical depression in the ground. I knew that it was the mark made by Brunton in his measurements, and that I was still upon his trail.

“From this starting-point I proceeded to step, having first taken the cardinal points by my pocket-compass. Ten steps with each foot took me along parallel with the wall of the house, and again I marked my spot with a peg. Then I carefully paced off five to the east and two to the south. It brought me to the very threshold of the old door. Two steps to the west meant now that I was to go two paces down the stone-flagged passage, and this was the place indicated by the Ritual.

“Never have I felt such a cold chill of disappointment, Watson. For a moment is seemed to me that there must be some radical mistake in my calculations. The setting sun shone full upon the passage floor, and I could see that the old, foot-worn gray stones with which it was paved were firmly cemented together, and had certainly not been moved for many a long year. Brunton had not been at work here. I tapped upon the floor, but it sounded the same all over, and there was no sign of any crack or crevice. But, fortunately, Musgrave, who had begun to appreciate the meaning of my proceedings, and who was now as excited as myself, took out his manuscript to check my calculation.

“‘And under,’ he cried. ‘You have omitted the “and under.”’

“I had thought that it meant that we were to dig, but now, of course, I saw at once that I was wrong. ‘There is a cellar under this then?’ I cried.

“‘Yes, and as old as the house. Down here, through this door.’

“We went down a winding stone stair, and my companion, striking a match, lit a large lantern which stood on a barrel in the corner. In an instant it was obvious that we had at last come upon the true place, and that we had not been the only people to visit the spot recently.

“It had been used for the storage of wood, but the billets, which had evidently been littered over the floor, were now piled at the sides, so as to leave a clear space in the middle. In this space lay a large and heavy flagstone with a rusted iron ring in the centre to which a thick shepherd’s-check muffler was attached.

“‘By Jove!’ cried my client. ‘That’s Brunton’s muffler. I have seen it on him, and could swear to it. What has the villain been doing here?’

“At my suggestion a couple of the county police were summoned to be present, and I then endeavored to raise the stone by pulling on the cravat. I could only move it slightly, and it was with the aid of one of the constables that I succeeded at last in carrying it to one side. A black hole yawned beneath into which we all peered, while Musgrave, kneeling at the side, pushed down the lantern.

“A small chamber about seven feet deep and four feet square lay open to us. At one side of this was a squat, brass-bound wooden box, the lid of which was hinged upwards, with this curious old-fashioned key projecting from the lock. It was furred outside by a thick layer of dust, and damp and worms had eaten through the wood, so that a crop of livid fungi was growing on the inside of it. Several discs of metal, old coins apparently, such as I hold here, were scattered over the bottom of the box, but it contained nothing else.

“At the moment, however, we had no thought for the old chest, for our eyes were riveted upon that which crouched beside it. It was the figure of a man, clad in a suit of black, who squatted down upon his hams with his forehead sunk upon the edge of the box and his two arms thrown out on each side of it. The attitude had drawn all the stagnant blood to the face, and no man could have recognised that distorted liver-coloured countenance; but his height, his dress, and his hair were all sufficient to show my client, when we had drawn the body up, that it was indeed his missing butler. He had been dead some days, but there was no wound or bruise upon his person to show how he had met his dreadful end. When his body had been carried from the cellar we found ourselves still confronted with a problem which was almost as formidable as that with which we had started.

“I confess that so far, Watson, I had been disappointed in my investigation. I had reckoned upon solving the matter when once I had found the place referred to in the Ritual; but now I was there, and was apparently as far as ever from knowing what it was which the family had concealed with such elaborate precautions. It is true that I had thrown a light upon the fate of Brunton, but now I had to ascertain how that fate had come upon him, and what part had been played in the matter by the woman who had disappeared. I sat down upon a keg in the corner and thought the whole matter carefully over.

“You know my methods in such cases, Watson. I put myself in the man’s place and, having first gauged his intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances. In this case the matter was simplified by Brunton's intelligence being quite first-rate, so that it was unnecessary to make any allowance for the personal equation, as the astronomers have dubbed it. He knew that something valuable was concealed. He had spotted the place. He found that the stone which covered it was just too heavy for a man to move unaided. What would he do next? He could not get help from outside, even if he had some one whom he could trust, without the unbarring of doors and considerable risk of detection. It was better, if he could, to have his helpmate inside the house. But whom could he ask? This girl had been devoted to him. A man always finds it hard to realise that he may have finally lost a woman's love, however badly he may have treated her. He would try by a few attentions to make his peace with the girl Howells, and then would engage her as his accomplice. Together they would come at night to the cellar, and their united force would suffice to raise the stone. So far I could follow their actions as if I had actually seen them.

"But for two of them, and one a woman, it must have been heavy work the raising of that stone. A burly Sussex policeman and I had found it no light job. What would they do to assist them? Probably what I should have done myself. I rose and examined carefully the different billets of wood which were scattered round the floor. Almost at once I came upon what I expected. One piece, about three feet in length, had a very marked indentation at one end, while several were flattened at the sides as if they had been compressed by some considerable weight. Evidently, as they had dragged the stone up they had thrust the chunks of wood into the chink, until at last, when the opening was large enough to crawl through, they would hold it open by a billet placed lengthwise, which might very well become indented at the lower end, since the whole weight of the stone would press it down on to the edge of this other slab. So far I was still on safe ground.

"And now how was I to proceed to reconstruct this midnight drama? Clearly, only one could fit into the hole, and that one was Brunton. The girl must have waited above. Brunton then unlocked the box, handed up the contents presumably — since they were not to be found — and then — and then what happened?

"What smouldering fire of vengeance had suddenly sprung into flame in this passionate Celtic woman's soul when she saw the man who had wronged her — wronged her, perhaps, far more than we suspected — in her power? Was it a chance that the wood had slipped, and that the stone had shut Brunton into what had become his sepulchre? Had she only been guilty of silence as to his fate? Or had some sudden blow from her hand dashed the support away and sent the slab crashing down into its place? Be that as it might, I seemed to see that woman's figure still clutching at her treasure trove and flying wildly up the winding stair, with her ears ringing perhaps with the muffled screams from behind her and with the drumming of frenzied hands against the slab of stone which was choking her faithless lover's life out.

"Here was the secret of her blanched face, her shaken nerves, her peals of hysterical laughter on the next morning. But what had been in the box? What had she done with that? Of course, it must have been the old metal and pebbles which my client had dragged from the mere. She had thrown them in there at the first opportunity to remove the last trace of her crime.

"For twenty minutes I had sat motionless, thinking the matter out. Musgrave still stood with a very pale face, swinging his lantern and peering down into the hole.

"'These are coins of Charles the First,' said he, holding out the few which had been in the box; 'you see we were right in fixing our date for the Ritual.'

"'We may find something else of Charles the First,' I cried, as the probable meaning of the first two questions of the Ritual broke suddenly upon me. 'Let me see the contents of the bag which you fished from the mere.'

"We ascended to his study, and he laid the debris before me. I could understand his regarding it as of small importance when I looked at it, for the metal was almost black and the stones lustreless and dull. I rubbed one of them on my sleeve, however, and it glowed afterwards like a spark in the dark hollow of my hand. The metal work was in the form of a double ring, but it had been bent and twisted out of its original shape.

"'You must bear in mind,' said I, 'that the royal party made head in England even after the death of the king, and that when they at last fled they probably left many of their most precious possessions buried behind them, with the intention of returning for them in more peaceful times.'

"'My ancestor, Sir Ralph Musgrave, was a prominent Cavalier and the right-hand man of Charles the Second in his wanderings,' said my friend.

"'Ah, indeed!' I answered. 'Well now, I think that really should give us the last link that we wanted. I must congratulate you on coming into the possession, though in rather a tragic manner of a relic which is of great intrinsic value, but of even greater importance as an historical curiosity.'

"'What is it, then?' he gasped in astonishment.

"'It is nothing less than the ancient crown of the kings of England.'

"'The crown!'

"'Precisely. Consider what the Ritual says: How does it run? "Whose was it?" "His who is gone." That was after the execution of Charles. Then, "Who shall have it?" "He who will come." That was Charles the Second, whose advent was already foreseen. There can, I think, be no doubt that this battered and shapeless diadem once encircled the brows of the royal Stuarts.'

"'And how came it in the pond?'

"'Ah, that is a question that will take some time to answer.' And with that I sketched out to him the whole long chain of surmise and of proof which I had constructed. The twilight had closed in and the moon was shining brightly in the sky before my narrative was finished.

"'And how was it then that Charles did not get his crown when he returned?' asked Musgrave, pushing back the relic into its linen bag.

"'Ah, there you lay your finger upon the one point which we shall probably never be able to clear up. It is likely that the Musgrave who held the secret died in the interval, and by some oversight left this guide to his descendant without explaining the meaning of it. From that day to this it has been handed down from father to son, until at last it came within reach of a man who tore its secret out of it and lost his life in the venture.'

"And that's the story of the Musgrave Ritual, Watson. They have the crown down at Hurlstone — though they had some legal bother and a considerable sum to pay before they were allowed to retain it. I am sure that if you mentioned my name they would be happy to show it to you. Of the woman nothing was ever heard, and the probability is that she got away out of England and carried herself and the memory of her crime to some land beyond the seas."

Adventure VI. The Reigate Puzzle

It was some time before the health of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of ‘87. The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. Even the triumphant issue of his labors could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanoeuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of spring time in the country was full of attractions to me also. My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the Colonel's roof. Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.

On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the Colonel's gun-room after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armory of Eastern weapons.

"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

"An alarm!" said I.

"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

"No clue?" asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the Colonel.

"None as yet. But the affair is a petty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair."

Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

"Was there any feature of interest?"

"I fancy not. The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope's 'Homer,' two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished."

"What an extraordinary assortment!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get."

Holmes grunted from the sofa.

"The county police ought to make something of that," said he; "why, it is surely obvious that—"

But I held up a warning finger.

"You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. For Heaven's sake don't get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the Colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. We were at breakfast when the Colonel's butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

"Have you heard the news, sir?" he gasped. "At the Cunningham's sir!"

"Burglary!" cried the Colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

"Murder!"

The Colonel whistled. "By Jove!" said he. "Who's killed, then? The J.P. or his son?"

"Neither, sir. It was William the coachman. Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again."

"Who shot him, then?"

"The burglar, sir. He was off like a shot and got clean away. He'd just broke in at the pantry window when William came on him and met his end in saving his master's property."

"What time?"

"It was last night, sir, somewhere about twelve."

"Ah, then, we'll step over afterwards," said the Colonel, coolly settling down to his breakfast again. "It's a baddish business," he added when the butler had gone; "he's our leading man about here, is old Cunningham, and a very decent fellow too. He'll be cut up over this, for the man has been in his service for years and was a good servant. It's evidently the same villains who broke into Acton's."

"And stole that very singular collection," said Holmes, thoughtfully.

"Precisely."

"Hum! It may prove the simplest matter in the world, but all the same at first glance this is just a little curious, is it not? A gang of burglars acting in the country might be expected to vary the scene of their operations, and not to crack two cribs in the same district within a few days. When you spoke last night of taking precautions I remember that it passed through my mind that this was probably the last parish in England to which the thief or thieves would be likely to turn their attention — which shows that I have still much to learn."

"I fancy it's some local practitioner," said the Colonel. "In that case, of course, Acton's and Cunningham's are just the places he would go for, since they are far the largest about here."

"And richest?"

"Well, they ought to be, but they've had a lawsuit for some years which has sucked the blood out of both of them, I fancy. Old Acton has some claim on half Cunningham's estate, and the lawyers have been at it with both hands."

"If it's a local villain there should not be much difficulty in running him down," said Holmes with a yawn. "All right, Watson, I don't intend to meddle."

"Inspector Forrester, sir," said the butler, throwing open the door.

The official, a smart, keen-faced young fellow, stepped into the room. "Good-morning, Colonel," said he; "I hope I don't intrude, but we hear that Mr. Holmes of Baker Street is here."

The Colonel waved his hand towards my friend, and the Inspector bowed.

"We thought that perhaps you would care to step across, Mr. Holmes."

"The fates are against you, Watson," said he, laughing. "We were chatting about the matter when you came in, Inspector. Perhaps you can let us have a few details." As he leaned back in his chair in the familiar attitude I knew that the case was hopeless.

"We had no clue in the Acton affair. But here we have plenty to go on, and there's no doubt it is the same party in each case. The man was seen."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir. But he was off like a deer after the shot that killed poor William Kirwan was fired. Mr. Cunningham saw him from the bedroom window, and Mr. Alec Cunningham saw him from the back passage. It was quarter to twelve when the alarm broke out. Mr. Cunningham had just got into bed, and Mr. Alec was smoking a pipe in his dressing-gown. They both heard William the coachman calling for help, and Mr. Alec ran down to see what was the matter. The back door was open, and as he came to the foot of the stairs he saw two men wrestling together outside. One of them fired a shot, the other dropped, and the murderer rushed across the garden and over the hedge. Mr. Cunningham, looking out of his bedroom, saw the fellow as he gained the road, but lost sight of him at once. Mr. Alec stopped to see if he could help the dying man, and so the villain got clean away. Beyond the fact that he was a middle-sized man and dressed in some dark stuff, we have no personal clue; but we are making energetic inquiries, and if he is a stranger we shall soon find him out."

"What was this William doing there? Did he say anything before he died?"

“Not a word. He lives at the lodge with his mother, and as he was a very faithful fellow we imagine that he walked up to the house with the intention of seeing that all was right there. Of course this Acton business has put every one on their guard. The robber must have just burst open the door — the lock has been forced — when William came upon him.”

“Did William say anything to his mother before going out?”

“She is very old and deaf, and we can get no information from her. The shock has made her half-witted, but I understand that she was never very bright. There is one very important circumstance, however. Look at this!”

He took a small piece of torn paper from a note-book and spread it out upon his knee.

“This was found between the finger and thumb of the dead man. It appears to be a fragment torn from a larger sheet. You will observe that the hour mentioned upon it is the very time at which the poor fellow met his fate. You see that his murderer might have torn the rest of the sheet from him or he might have taken this fragment from the murderer. It reads almost as though it were an appointment.”

Holmes took up the scrap of paper, a fac-simile of which is here reproduced.

d at quarter to twelve learn what maybe

“Presuming that it is an appointment,” continued the Inspector, “it is of course a conceivable theory that this William Kirwan — though he had the reputation of being an honest man, may have been in league with the thief. He may have met him there, may even have helped him to break in the door, and then they may have fallen out between themselves.”

“This writing is of extraordinary interest,” said Holmes, who had been examining it with intense concentration. “These are much deeper waters than I had thought.” He sank his head upon his hands, while the Inspector smiled at the effect which his case had had upon the famous London specialist.

“Your last remark,” said Holmes, presently, “as to the possibility of there being an understanding between the burglar and the servant, and this being a note of appointment from one to the other, is an ingenious and not entirely impossible supposition. But this writing opens up—” He sank his head into his hands again and remained for some minutes in the deepest thought. When he raised his face again, I was surprised to see that his cheek was tinged with colour, and his eyes as bright as before his illness. He sprang to his feet with all his old energy.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "I should like to have a quiet little glance into the details of this case. There is something in it which fascinates me extremely. If you will permit me, Colonel, I will leave my friend Watson and you, and I will step round with the Inspector to test the truth of one or two little fancies of mine. I will be with you again in half an hour."

An hour and half had elapsed before the Inspector returned alone.

"Mr. Holmes is walking up and down in the field outside," said he. "He wants us all four to go up to the house together."

"To Mr. Cunningham's?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't quite know, sir. Between ourselves, I think Mr. Holmes had not quite got over his illness yet. He's been behaving very queerly, and he is very much excited."

"I don't think you need alarm yourself," said I. "I have usually found that there was method in his madness."

"Some folks might say there was madness in his method," muttered the Inspector. "But he's all on fire to start, Colonel, so we had best go out if you are ready."

We found Holmes pacing up and down in the field, his chin sunk upon his breast, and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets.

"The matter grows in interest," said he. "Watson, your country-trip has been a distinct success. I have had a charming morning."

"You have been up to the scene of the crime, I understand," said the Colonel.

"Yes; the Inspector and I have made quite a little reconnaissance together."

"Any success?"

"Well, we have seen some very interesting things. I'll tell you what we did as we walk. First of all, we saw the body of this unfortunate man. He certainly died from a revolver wound as reported."

"Had you doubted it, then?"

"Oh, it is as well to test everything. Our inspection was not wasted. We then had an interview with Mr. Cunningham and his son, who were able to point out the exact spot where the murderer had broken through the garden-hedge in his flight. That was of great interest."

"Naturally."

"Then we had a look at this poor fellow's mother. We could get no information from her, however, as she is very old and feeble."

"And what is the result of your investigations?"

"The conviction that the crime is a very peculiar one. Perhaps our visit now may do something to make it less obscure. I think that we are both agreed, Inspector that the fragment of paper in the dead man's hand, bearing, as it does, the very hour of his death written upon it, is of extreme importance."

"It should give a clue, Mr. Holmes."

"It does give a clue. Whoever wrote that note was the man who brought William Kirwan out of his bed at that hour. But where is the rest of that sheet of paper?"

"I examined the ground carefully in the hope of finding it," said the Inspector.

"It was torn out of the dead man's hand. Why was some one so anxious to get possession of it? Because it incriminated him. And what would he do with it? Thrust it into his pocket, most likely, never noticing that a corner of it had been left in the grip of the corpse. If we could get the rest of that sheet it is obvious that we should have gone a long way towards solving the mystery."

"Yes, but how can we get at the criminal's pocket before we catch the criminal?"

"Well, well, it was worth thinking over. Then there is another obvious point. The note was sent to William. The man who wrote it could not have taken it; otherwise, of course, he might have delivered his own message by word of mouth. Who brought the note, then? Or did it come through the post?"

"I have made inquiries," said the Inspector. "William received a letter by the afternoon post yesterday. The envelope was destroyed by him."

"Excellent!" cried Holmes, clapping the Inspector on the back. "You've seen the postman. It is a pleasure to work with you. Well, here is the lodge, and if you will come up, Colonel, I will show you the scene of the crime."

We passed the pretty cottage where the murdered man had lived, and walked up an oak-lined avenue to the fine old Queen Anne house, which bears the date of Malplaquet upon the lintel of the door. Holmes and the Inspector led us round it until we came to the side gate, which is separated by a stretch of garden from the hedge which lines the road. A constable was standing at the kitchen door.

"Throw the door open, officer," said Holmes. "Now, it was on those stairs that young Mr. Cunningham stood and saw the two men struggling just where we are. Old Mr. Cunningham was at that window — the second on the left — and he saw the fellow get away just to the left of that bush. Then Mr. Alec ran out and knelt beside the wounded man. The ground is very hard, you see, and there are no marks to guide us." As he spoke two men came down the garden path, from round the angle of the house. The one was an elderly man, with a strong, deep-lined, heavy-eyed face; the other a dashing young fellow, whose bright, smiling expression and showy dress were in strange contract with the business which had brought us there.

"Still at it, then?" said he to Holmes. "I thought you Londoners were never at fault. You don't seem to be so very quick, after all."

"Ah, you must give us a little time," said Holmes good-humoredly.

"You'll want it," said young Alec Cunningham. "Why, I don't see that we have any clue at all."

"There's only one," answered the Inspector. "We thought that if we could only find — Good heavens, Mr. Holmes! What is the matter?"

My poor friend's face had suddenly assumed the most dreadful expression. His eyes rolled upwards, his features writhed in agony, and with a suppressed groan he dropped on his face upon the ground. Horrified at the suddenness and severity of the attack, we carried him into the kitchen, where he lay back in a large chair, and breathed heavily for some minutes. Finally, with a shamefaced apology for his weakness, he rose once more.

"Watson would tell you that I have only just recovered from a severe illness," he explained. "I am liable to these sudden nervous attacks."

"Shall I send you home in my trap?" asked old Cunningham.

"Well, since I am here, there is one point on which I should like to feel sure. We can very easily verify it."

"What was it?"

"Well, it seems to me that it is just possible that the arrival of this poor fellow William was not before, but after, the entrance of the burglary into the house. You appear to take it for granted that, although the door was forced, the robber never got in."

“I fancy that is quite obvious,” said Mr. Cunningham, gravely. “Why, my son Alec had not yet gone to bed, and he would certainly have heard any one moving about.”

“Where was he sitting?”

“I was smoking in my dressing-room.”

“Which window is that?”

“The last on the left next my father’s.”

“Both of your lamps were lit, of course?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“There are some very singular points here,” said Holmes, smiling. “Is it not extraordinary that a burglary — and a burglar who had had some previous experience — should deliberately break into a house at a time when he could see from the lights that two of the family were still afoot?”

“He must have been a cool hand.”

“Well, of course, if the case were not an odd one we should not have been driven to ask you for an explanation,” said young Mr. Alec. “But as to your ideas that the man had robbed the house before William tackled him, I think it a most absurd notion. Wouldn’t we have found the place disarranged, and missed the things which he had taken?”

“It depends on what the things were,” said Holmes. “You must remember that we are dealing with a burglar who is a very peculiar fellow, and who appears to work on lines of his own. Look, for example, at the queer lot of things which he took from Acton’s — what was it? — a ball of string, a letter-weight, and I don’t know what other odds and ends.”

“Well, we are quite in your hands, Mr. Holmes,” said old Cunningham. “Anything which you or the Inspector may suggest will most certainly be done.”

“In the first place,” said Holmes, “I should like you to offer a reward — coming from yourself, for the officials may take a little time before they would agree upon the sum, and these things cannot be done too promptly. I have jotted down the form here, if you would not mind signing it. Fifty pounds was quite enough, I thought.”

“I would willingly give five hundred,” said the J.P., taking the slip of paper and the pencil which Holmes handed to him. “This is not quite correct, however,” he added, glancing over the document.

“I wrote it rather hurriedly.”

“You see you begin, ‘Whereas, at about a quarter to one on Tuesday morning an attempt was made,’ and so on. It was at a quarter to twelve, as a matter of fact.”

I was pained at the mistake, for I knew how keenly Holmes would feel any slip of the kind. It was his specialty to be accurate as to fact, but his recent illness had shaken him, and this one little incident was enough to show me that he was still far from being himself. He was obviously embarrassed for an instant, while the Inspector raised his eyebrows, and Alec Cunningham burst into a laugh. The old gentleman corrected the mistake, however, and handed the paper back to Holmes.

“Get it printed as soon as possible,” he said; “I think your idea is an excellent one.”

Holmes put the slip of paper carefully away into his pocket-book.

“And now,” said he, “it really would be a good thing that we should all go over the house together and make certain that this rather erratic burglar did not, after all, carry anything away with him.”

Before entering, Holmes made an examination of the door which had been forced. It was evident that a chisel or strong knife had been thrust in, and the lock forced back with it. We could see the marks in the wood where it had been pushed in.

“You don’t use bars, then?” he asked.

“We have never found it necessary.”

“You don’t keep a dog?”

“Yes, but he is chained on the other side of the house.”

“When do the servants go to bed?”

“About ten.”

“I understand that William was usually in bed also at that hour.”

“Yes.”

“It is singular that on this particular night he should have been up. Now, I should be very glad if you would have the kindness to show us over the house, Mr. Cunningham.”

A stone-flagged passage, with the kitchens branching away from it, led by a wooden staircase directly to the first floor of the house. It came out upon the landing opposite to a second more ornamental stair which came up from the front hall. Out of this landing opened the drawing-room and several bedrooms, including those of Mr. Cunningham and his son. Holmes walked slowly, taking keen note of the architecture of the house. I could tell from his expression that he was on a hot scent, and yet I could not in the least imagine in what direction his inferences were leading him.

“My good sir,” said Mr. Cunningham with some impatience, “this is surely very unnecessary. That is my room at the end of the stairs, and my son’s is the one beyond it. I leave it to your judgment whether it was possible for the thief to have come up here without disturbing us.”

“You must try round and get on a fresh scent, I fancy,” said the son with a rather malicious smile.

“Still, I must ask you to humor me a little further. I should like, for example, to see how far the windows of the bedrooms command the front. This, I understand is your son’s room” — he pushed open the door—”and that, I presume, is the dressing-room in which he sat smoking when the alarm was given. Where does the window of that look out to?” He stepped across the bedroom, pushed open the door, and glanced round the other chamber.

“I hope that you are satisfied now?” said Mr. Cunningham, tartly.

“Thank you, I think I have seen all that I wished.”

“Then if it is really necessary we can go into my room.”

“If it is not too much trouble.”

The J. P. shrugged his shoulders, and led the way into his own chamber, which was a plainly furnished and commonplace room. As we moved across it in the direction of the window, Holmes fell back until he and I were the last of the group. Near the foot of the bed stood a dish of oranges and a carafe of water. As we passed it Holmes, to my unutterable astonishment, leaned over in front of me and deliberately knocked the whole thing over. The glass smashed into a thousand pieces and the fruit rolled about into every corner of the room.

“You’ve done it now, Watson,” said he, coolly. “A pretty mess you’ve made of the carpet.”

I stooped in some confusion and began to pick up the fruit, understanding for some reason my companion desired me to take the blame upon myself. The others did the same, and set the table on its legs again.

“Hullo!” cried the Inspector, “where’s he got to?”

Holmes had disappeared.

“Wait here an instant,” said young Alec Cunningham. “The fellow is off his head, in my opinion. Come with me, father, and see where he has got to!”

They rushed out of the room, leaving the Inspector, the Colonel, and me staring at each other.

"'Pon my word, I am inclined to agree with Master Alec," said the official. "It may be the effect of this illness, but it seems to me that—"

His words were cut short by a sudden scream of "Help! Help! Murder!" With a thrill I recognised the voice of that of my friend. I rushed madly from the room on to the landing. The cries, which had sunk down into a hoarse, inarticulate shouting, came from the room which we had first visited. I dashed in, and on into the dressing-room beyond. The two Cunninghams were bending over the prostrate figure of Sherlock Holmes, the younger clutching his throat with both hands, while the elder seemed to be twisting one of his wrists. In an instant the three of us had torn them away from him, and Holmes staggered to his feet, very pale and evidently greatly exhausted.

"Arrest these men, Inspector," he gasped.

"On what charge?"

"That of murdering their coachman, William Kirwan."

The Inspector stared about him in bewilderment. "Oh, come now, Mr. Holmes," said he at last, "I'm sure you don't really mean to—"

"Tut, man, look at their faces!" cried Holmes, curtly.

Never certainly have I seen a plainer confession of guilt upon human countenances. The older man seemed numbed and dazed with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. The son, on the other hand, had dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterized him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features. The Inspector said nothing, but, stepping to the door, he blew his whistle. Two of his constables came at the call.

"I have no alternative, Mr. Cunningham," said he. "I trust that this may all prove to be an absurd mistake, but you can see that — Ah, would you? Drop it!" He struck out with his hand, and a revolver which the younger man was in the act of cocking clattered down upon the floor.

"Keep that," said Holmes, quietly putting his foot upon it; "you will find it useful at the trial. But this is what we really wanted." He held up a little crumpled piece of paper.

"The remainder of the sheet!" cried the Inspector.

"Precisely."

“And where was it?”

“Where I was sure it must be. I’ll make the whole matter clear to you presently. I think, Colonel, that you and Watson might return now, and I will be with you again in an hour at the furthest. The Inspector and I must have a word with the prisoners, but you will certainly see me back at luncheon time.”

Sherlock Holmes was as good as his word, for about one o’clock he rejoined us in the Colonel’s smoking-room. He was accompanied by a little elderly gentleman, who was introduced to me as the Mr. Acton whose house had been the scene of the original burglary.

“I wished Mr. Acton to be present while I demonstrated this small matter to you,” said Holmes, “for it is natural that he should take a keen interest in the details. I am afraid, my dear Colonel, that you must regret the hour that you took in such a stormy petrel as I am.”

“On the contrary,” answered the Colonel, warmly, “I consider it the greatest privilege to have been permitted to study your methods of working. I confess that they quite surpass my expectations, and that I am utterly unable to account for your result. I have not yet seen the vestige of a clue.”

“I am afraid that my explanation may disillusion you but it has always been my habit to hide none of my methods, either from my friend Watson or from any one who might take an intelligent interest in them. But, first, as I am rather shaken by the knocking about which I had in the dressing-room, I think that I shall help myself to a dash of your brandy, Colonel. My strength had been rather tried of late.”

“I trust that you had no more of those nervous attacks.”

Sherlock Holmes laughed heartily. “We will come to that in its turn,” said he. “I will lay an account of the case before you in its due order, showing you the various points which guided me in my decision. Pray interrupt me if there is any inference which is not perfectly clear to you.

“It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise, out of a number of facts, which are incidental and which vital. Otherwise your energy and attention must be dissipated instead of being concentrated. Now, in this case there was not the slightest doubt in my mind from the first that the key of the whole matter must be looked for in the scrap of paper in the dead man’s hand.

“Before going into this, I would draw your attention to the fact that, if Alec Cunningham’s narrative was correct, and if the assailant, after shooting William Kirwan, had instantly fled, then it obviously could not be he who tore the paper from the dead man’s hand. But if it was not he, it must have been Alec Cunningham himself, for by the time that the old man had descended several servants were upon the scene. The point is a simple one, but the Inspector had overlooked it because he had started with the supposition that these county magnates had had nothing to do with the matter. Now, I make a point of never having any prejudices, and of following docilely wherever fact may lead me, and so, in the very first stage of the investigation, I found myself looking a little askance at the part which had been played by Mr. Alec Cunningham.

“And now I made a very careful examination of the corner of paper which the Inspector had submitted to us. It was at once clear to me that it formed part of a very remarkable document. Here it is. Do you not now observe something very suggestive about it?”

“It has a very irregular look,” said the Colonel.

“My dear sir,” cried Holmes, “there cannot be the least doubt in the world that it has been written by two persons doing alternate words. When I draw your attention to the strong t’s of ‘at’ and ‘to’, and ask you to compare them with the weak ones of ‘quarter’ and ‘twelve,’ you will instantly recognise the fact. A very brief analysis of these four words would enable you to say with the utmost confidence that the ‘learn’ and the ‘maybe’ are written in the stronger hand, and the ‘what’ in the weaker.”

“By Jove, it’s as clear as day!” cried the Colonel. “Why on earth should two men write a letter in such a fashion?”

“Obviously the business was a bad one, and one of the men who distrusted the other was determined that, whatever was done, each should have an equal hand in it. Now, of the two men, it is clear that the one who wrote the ‘at’ and ‘to’ was the ringleader.”

“How do you get at that?”

“We might deduce it from the mere character of the one hand as compared with the other. But we have more assured reasons than that for supposing it. If you examine this scrap with attention you will come to the conclusion that the man with the stronger hand wrote all his words first, leaving blanks for the other to fill up. These blanks were not always sufficient, and you can see that the second man had a squeeze to fit his ‘quarter’ in between the ‘at’ and the ‘to,’ showing that the latter were already written. The man who wrote all his words first is undoubtedly the man who planned the affair."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton.

"But very superficial," said Holmes. "We come now, however, to a point which is of importance. You may not be aware that the deduction of a man's age from his writing is one which has brought to considerable accuracy by experts. In normal cases one can place a man in his true decade with tolerable confidence. I say normal cases, because ill-health and physical weakness reproduce the signs of old age, even when the invalid is a youth. In this case, looking at the bold, strong hand of the one, and the rather broken-backed appearance of the other, which still retains its legibility although the t's have begun to lose their crossing, we can say that the one was a young man and the other was advanced in years without being positively decrepit."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton again.

"There is a further point, however, which is subtler and of greater interest. There is something in common between these hands. They belong to men who are blood-relatives. It may be most obvious to you in the Greek e's, but to me there are many small points which indicate the same thing. I have no doubt at all that a family mannerism can be traced in these two specimens of writing. I am only, of course, giving you the leading results now of my examination of the paper. There were twenty-three other deductions which would be of more interest to experts than to you. They all tend to deepen the impression upon my mind that the Cunninghams, father and son, had written this letter.

"Having got so far, my next step was, of course, to examine into the details of the crime, and to see how far they would help us. I went up to the house with the Inspector, and saw all that was to be seen. The wound upon the dead man was, as I was able to determine with absolute confidence, fired from a revolver at the distance of something over four yards. There was no powder-blackening on the clothes. Evidently, therefore, Alec Cunningham had lied when he said that the two men were struggling when the shot was fired. Again, both father and son agreed as to the place where the man escaped into the road. At that point, however, as it happens, there is a broadish ditch, moist at the bottom. As there were no indications of bootmarks about this ditch, I was absolutely sure not only that the

Cunninghams had again lied, but that there had never been any unknown man upon the scene at all.

“And now I have to consider the motive of this singular crime. To get at this, I endeavored first of all to solve the reason of the original burglary at Mr. Acton’s. I understood, from something which the Colonel told us, that a lawsuit had been going on between you, Mr. Acton, and the Cunninghams. Of course, it instantly occurred to me that they had broken into your library with the intention of getting at some document which might be of importance in the case.”

“Precisely so,” said Mr. Acton. “There can be no possible doubt as to their intentions. I have the clearest claim upon half of their present estate, and if they could have found a single paper — which, fortunately, was in the strong-box of my solicitors — they would undoubtedly have crippled our case.”

“There you are,” said Holmes, smiling. “It was a dangerous, reckless attempt, in which I seem to trace the influence of young Alec. Having found nothing they tried to divert suspicion by making it appear to be an ordinary burglary, to which end they carried off whatever they could lay their hands upon. That is all clear enough, but there was much that was still obscure. What I wanted above all was to get the missing part of that note. I was certain that Alec had torn it out of the dead man’s hand, and almost certain that he must have thrust it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Where else could he have put it? The only question was whether it was still there. It was worth an effort to find out, and for that object we all went up to the house.

“The Cunninghams joined us, as you doubtless remember, outside the kitchen door. It was, of course, of the very first importance that they should not be reminded of the existence of this paper, otherwise they would naturally destroy it without delay. The Inspector was about to tell them the importance which we attached to it when, by the luckiest chance in the world, I tumbled down in a sort of fit and so changed the conversation.

“Good heavens!” cried the Colonel, laughing, “do you mean to say all our sympathy was wasted and your fit an imposture?”

“Speaking professionally, it was admirably done,” cried I, looking in amazement at this man who was forever confounding me with some new phase of his astuteness.

“It is an art which is often useful,” said he. “When I recovered I managed, by a device which had perhaps some little merit of ingenuity, to get old Cunningham to write the word ‘twelve,’ so that I might compare it with the ‘twelve’ upon the paper.”

“Oh, what an ass I have been!” I exclaimed.

“I could see that you were commiserating me over my weakness,” said Holmes, laughing. “I was sorry to cause you the sympathetic pain which I know that you felt. We then went upstairs together, and having entered the room and seen the dressing-gown hanging up behind the door, I contrived, by upsetting a table, to engage their attention for the moment, and slipped back to examine the pockets. I had hardly got the paper, however — which was, as I had expected, in one of them — when the two Cunninghams were on me, and would, I verily believe, have murdered me then and there but for your prompt and friendly aid. As it is, I feel that young man’s grip on my throat now, and the father has twisted my wrist round in the effort to get the paper out of my hand. They saw that I must know all about it, you see, and the sudden change from absolute security to complete despair made them perfectly desperate.

“I had a little talk with old Cunningham afterwards as to the motive of the crime. He was tractable enough, though his son was a perfect demon, ready to blow out his own or anybody else’s brains if he could have got to his revolver. When Cunningham saw that the case against him was so strong he lost all heart and made a clean breast of everything. It seems that William had secretly followed his two masters on the night when they made their raid upon Mr. Acton’s, and having thus got them into his power, proceeded, under threats of exposure, to levy blackmail upon them. Mr. Alec, however, was a dangerous man to play games of that sort with. It was a stroke of positive genius on his part to see in the burglary scare which was convulsing the country side an opportunity of plausibly getting rid of the man whom he feared. William was decoyed up and shot, and had they only got the whole of the note and paid a little more attention to detail in the accessories, it is very possible that suspicion might never have been aroused.”

“And the note?” I asked.

Sherlock Holmes placed the subjoined paper before us.

> If you will only come around to the east gate you it will
> very much surprise you and be of the greatest service to you

> and also to Annie Morrison. But say nothing to anyone upon
> the matter.

“It is very much the sort of thing that I expected,” said he. “Of course, we do not yet know what the relations may have been between Alec Cunningham, William Kirwan, and Annie Morrison. The results shows that the trap was skillfully baited. I am sure that you cannot fail to be delighted with the traces of heredity shown in the p’s and in the tails of the g’s. The absence of the i-dots in the old man’s writing is also most characteristic. Watson, I think our quiet rest in the country has been a distinct success, and I shall certainly return much invigorated to Baker Street to-morrow.”

Adventure VII. The Crooked Man

One summer night, a few months after my marriage, I was seated by my own hearth smoking a last pipe and nodding over a novel, for my day's work had been an exhausting one. My wife had already gone upstairs, and the sound of the locking of the hall door some time before told me that the servants had also retired. I had risen from my seat and was knocking out the ashes of my pipe when I suddenly heard the clang of the bell.

I looked at the clock. It was a quarter to twelve. This could not be a visitor at so late an hour. A patient, evidently, and possibly an all-night sitting. With a wry face I went out into the hall and opened the door. To my astonishment it was Sherlock Holmes who stood upon my step.

"Ah, Watson," said he, "I hoped that I might not be too late to catch you."

"My dear fellow, pray come in."

"You look surprised, and no wonder! Relieved, too, I fancy! Hum! You still smoke the Arcadia mixture of your bachelor days then! There's no mistaking that fluffy ash upon your coat. It's easy to tell that you have been accustomed to wear a uniform, Watson. You'll never pass as a pure-bred civilian as long as you keep that habit of carrying your handkerchief in your sleeve. Could you put me up to-night?"

"With pleasure."

"You told me that you had bachelor quarters for one, and I see that you have no gentleman visitor at present. Your hat-stand proclaims as much."

"I shall be delighted if you will stay."

"Thank you. I'll fill the vacant peg then. Sorry to see that you've had the British workman in the house. He's a token of evil. Not the drains, I hope?"

"No, the gas."

"Ah! He has left two nail-marks from his boot upon your linoleum just where the light strikes it. No, thank you, I had some supper at Waterloo, but I'll smoke a pipe with you with pleasure."

I handed him my pouch, and he seated himself opposite to me and smoked for some time in silence. I was well aware that nothing but business of importance would have brought him to me at such an hour, so I waited patiently until he should come round to it.

"I see that you are professionally rather busy just now," said he, glancing very keenly across at me.

"Yes, I've had a busy day," I answered. "It may seem very foolish in your eyes," I added, "but really I don't know how you deduced it."

Holmes chuckled to himself.

"I have the advantage of knowing your habits, my dear Watson," said he. "When your round is a short one you walk, and when it is a long one you use a hansom. As I perceive that your boots, although used, are by no means dirty, I cannot doubt that you are at present busy enough to justify the hansom."

"Excellent!" I cried.

"Elementary," said he. "It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbour, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your own hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader. Now, at present I am in the position of these same readers, for I hold in this hand several threads of one of the strangest cases which ever perplexed a man's brain, and yet I lack the one or two which are needful to complete my theory. But I'll have them, Watson, I'll have them!" His eyes kindled and a slight flush sprang into his thin cheeks. For an instant only. When I glanced again his face had resumed that red-Indian composure which had made so many regard him as a machine rather than a man.

"The problem presents features of interest," said he. "I may even say exceptional features of interest. I have already looked into the matter, and have come, as I think, within sight of my solution. If you could accompany me in that last step you might be of considerable service to me."

"I should be delighted."

"Could you go as far as Aldershot to-morrow?"

"I have no doubt Jackson would take my practice."

"Very good. I want to start by the 11.10 from Waterloo."

"That would give me time."

"Then, if you are not too sleepy, I will give you a sketch of what has happened, and of what remains to be done."

"I was sleepy before you came. I am quite wakeful now."

"I will compress the story as far as may be done without omitting anything vital to the case. It is conceivable that you may even have read some account of the matter. It is the supposed murder of Colonel Barclay, of the Royal Munsters, at Aldershot, which I am investigating."

"I have heard nothing of it."

"It has not excited much attention yet, except locally. The facts are only two days old. Briefly they are these:

"The Royal Munsters is, as you know, one of the most famous Irish regiments in the British army. It did wonders both in the Crimea and the Mutiny, and has since that time distinguished itself upon every possible occasion. It was commanded up to Monday night by James Barclay, a gallant veteran, who started as a full private, was raised to commissioned rank for his bravery at the time of the Mutiny, and so lived to command the regiment in which he had once carried a musket.

"Colonel Barclay had married at the time when he was a sergeant, and his wife, whose maiden name was Miss Nancy Devoy, was the daughter of a former colour-sergeant in the same corps. There was, therefore, as can be imagined, some little social friction when the young couple (for they were still young) found themselves in their new surroundings. They appear, however, to have quickly adapted themselves, and Mrs. Barclay has always, I understand, been as popular with the ladies of the regiment as her husband was with his brother officers. I may add that she was a woman of great beauty, and that even now, when she has been married for upwards of thirty years, she is still of a striking and queenly appearance.

"Colonel Barclay's family life appears to have been a uniformly happy one. Major Murphy, to whom I owe most of my facts, assures me that he has never heard of any misunderstanding between the pair. On the whole, he thinks that Barclay's devotion to his wife was greater than his wife's to Barclay. He was acutely uneasy if he were absent from her for a day. She, on the other hand, though devoted and faithful, was less obtrusively affectionate. But they were regarded in the regiment as the very model of a middle-aged couple. There was absolutely nothing in their mutual relations to prepare people for the tragedy which was to follow.

"Colonel Barclay himself seems to have had some singular traits in his character. He was a dashing, jovial old soldier in his usual mood, but there were occasions on which he seemed to show himself capable of considerable violence and vindictiveness. This side of his nature, however, appears never to have been turned towards his wife. Another fact, which had struck Major Murphy and three out of five of the other officers with whom I conversed, was the singular sort of depression which came upon him at times. As the major expressed it, the smile had often been struck from his mouth, as if by some invisible hand, when he has been joining the gayeties and chaff of the mess-table. For days on end, when the mood was on him, he has been sunk in the deepest gloom. This and a certain tinge of superstition were the only unusual traits in his character which his brother officers had observed. The latter peculiarity took the form of a dislike to being left alone, especially after dark. This puerile feature in a nature which was conspicuously manly had often given rise to comment and conjecture.

"The first battalion of the Royal Munsters (which is the old 117th) has been stationed at Aldershot for some years. The married officers live out of barracks, and the Colonel has during all this time occupied a villa called Lachine, about half a mile from the north camp. The house stands in its own grounds, but the west side of it is not more than thirty yards from the high-road. A coachman and two maids form the staff of servants. These with their master and mistress were the sole occupants of Lachine, for the Barclays had no children, nor was it usual for them to have resident visitors.

"Now for the events at Lachine between nine and ten on the evening of last Monday."

"Mrs. Barclay was, it appears, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and had interested herself very much in the establishment of the Guild of St. George, which was formed in connection with the Watt Street Chapel for the purpose of supplying the poor with cast-off clothing. A meeting of the Guild had been held that evening at eight, and Mrs. Barclay had hurried over her dinner in order to be present at it. When leaving the house she was heard by the coachman to make some commonplace remark to her husband, and to assure him that she would be back before very long. She then called for Miss Morrison, a young lady who lives in the next villa, and the two went off together to their meeting. It lasted forty minutes, and at a quarter-past nine Mrs. Barclay returned home, having left Miss Morrison at her door as she passed.

"There is a room which is used as a morning-room at Lachine. This faces the road and opens by a large glass folding-door on to the lawn. The lawn is thirty yards across, and is only divided from the highway by a low wall with an iron rail above it. It was into this room that Mrs. Barclay went upon her return. The blinds were not down, for the room was seldom used in the evening, but Mrs. Barclay herself lit the lamp and then rang the bell, asking Jane Stewart, the house-maid, to bring her a cup of tea, which was quite contrary to her usual habits. The Colonel had been sitting in the dining-room, but hearing that his wife had returned he joined her in the morning-room. The coachman saw him cross the hall and enter it. He was never seen again alive.

"The tea which had been ordered was brought up at the end of ten minutes; but the maid, as she approached the door, was surprised to hear the voices of her master and mistress in furious altercation. She knocked without receiving any answer, and even turned the handle, but only to find that the door was locked upon the inside. Naturally enough she ran down to tell the cook, and the two women with the coachman came up into the hall and listened to the dispute which was still raging. They all agreed that only two voices were to be heard, those of Barclay and of his wife. Barclay's remarks were subdued and abrupt, so that none of them were audible to the listeners. The lady's, on the other hand, were most bitter, and when she raised her voice could be plainly heard. 'You coward!' she repeated over and over again. 'What can be done now? What can be done now? Give me back my life. I will never so much as breathe the same air with you again! You coward! You coward!' Those were scraps of her conversation, ending in a sudden dreadful cry in the man's voice, with a crash, and a piercing scream from the woman. Convinced that some tragedy had occurred, the coachman rushed to the door and strove to force it, while scream after scream issued from within. He was unable, however, to make his way in, and the maids were too distracted with fear to be of any assistance to him. A sudden thought struck him, however, and he ran through the hall door and round to the lawn upon which the long French windows open. One side of the window was open, which I understand was quite usual in the summer-time, and he passed without difficulty into the room. His mistress had ceased to scream and was stretched insensible upon a couch, while with his feet tilted over the side of an arm-chair, and his head upon the ground near the corner of the fender, was lying the unfortunate soldier stone dead in a pool of his own blood.

"Naturally, the coachman's first thought, on finding that he could do nothing for his master, was to open the door. But here an unexpected and singular difficulty presented itself. The key was not in the inner side of the door, nor could he find it anywhere in the room. He went out again, therefore, through the window, and having obtained the help of a policeman and of a medical man, he returned. The lady, against whom naturally the strongest suspicion rested, was removed to her room, still in a state of insensibility. The Colonel's body was then placed upon the sofa, and a careful examination made of the scene of the tragedy.

"The injury from which the unfortunate veteran was suffering was found to be a jagged cut some two inches long at the back part of his head, which had evidently been caused by a violent blow from a blunt weapon. Nor was it difficult to guess what that weapon may have been. Upon the floor, close to the body, was lying a singular club of hard carved wood with a bone handle. The Colonel possessed a varied collection of weapons brought from the different countries in which he had fought, and it is conjectured by the police that his club was among his trophies. The servants deny having seen it before, but among the numerous curiosities in the house it is possible that it may have been overlooked. Nothing else of importance was discovered in the room by the police, save the inexplicable fact that neither upon Mrs. Barclay's person nor upon that of the victim nor in any part of the room was the missing key to be found. The door had eventually to be opened by a locksmith from Aldershot.

"That was the state of things, Watson, when upon the Tuesday morning I, at the request of Major Murphy, went down to Aldershot to supplement the efforts of the police. I think that you will acknowledge that the problem was already one of interest, but my observations soon made me realise that it was in truth much more extraordinary than would at first sight appear.

"Before examining the room I cross-questioned the servants, but only succeeded in eliciting the facts which I have already stated. One other detail of interest was remembered by Jane Stewart, the housemaid. You will remember that on hearing the sound of the quarrel she descended and returned with the other servants. On that first occasion, when she was alone, she says that the voices of her master and mistress were sunk so low that she could hear hardly anything, and judged by their tones rather than their words that they had fallen out. On my pressing her, however, she remembered that she heard the word David uttered twice by the lady. The point is of the utmost importance as guiding us towards the reason of the sudden quarrel. The Colonel's name, you remember, was James.

“There was one thing in the case which had made the deepest impression both upon the servants and the police. This was the contortion of the Colonel’s face. It had set, according to their account, into the most dreadful expression of fear and horror which a human countenance is capable of assuming. More than one person fainted at the mere sight of him, so terrible was the effect. It was quite certain that he had foreseen his fate, and that it had caused him the utmost horror. This, of course, fitted in well enough with the police theory, if the Colonel could have seen his wife making a murderous attack upon him. Nor was the fact of the wound being on the back of his head a fatal objection to this, as he might have turned to avoid the blow. No information could be got from the lady herself, who was temporarily insane from an acute attack of brain-fever.

“From the police I learned that Miss Morrison, who you remember went out that evening with Mrs. Barclay, denied having any knowledge of what it was which had caused the ill-humor in which her companion had returned.

“Having gathered these facts, Watson, I smoked several pipes over them, trying to separate those which were crucial from others which were merely incidental. There could be no question that the most distinctive and suggestive point in the case was the singular disappearance of the door-key. A most careful search had failed to discover it in the room. Therefore it must have been taken from it. But neither the Colonel nor the Colonel’s wife could have taken it. That was perfectly clear. Therefore a third person must have entered the room. And that third person could only have come in through the window. It seemed to me that a careful examination of the room and the lawn might possibly reveal some traces of this mysterious individual. You know my methods, Watson. There was not one of them which I did not apply to the inquiry. And it ended by my discovering traces, but very different ones from those which I had expected. There had been a man in the room, and he had crossed the lawn coming from the road. I was able to obtain five very clear impressions of his foot-marks: one in the roadway itself, at the point where he had climbed the low wall, two on the lawn, and two very faint ones upon the stained boards near the window where he had entered. He had apparently rushed across the lawn, for his toe-marks were much deeper than his heels. But it was not the man who surprised me. It was his companion.”

“His companion!”

Holmes pulled a large sheet of tissue-paper out of his pocket and carefully unfolded it upon his knee.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

The paper was covered with he tracings of the foot-marks of some small animal. It had five well-marked foot-pads, an indication of long nails, and the whole print might be nearly as large as a dessert-spoon.

"It's a dog," said I.

"Did you ever hear of a dog running up a curtain? I found distinct traces that this creature had done so."

"A monkey, then?"

"But it is not the print of a monkey."

"What can it be, then?"

"Neither dog nor cat nor monkey nor any creature that we are familiar with. I have tried to reconstruct it from the measurements. Here are four prints where the beast has been standing motionless. You see that it is no less than fifteen inches from fore-foot to hind. Add to that the length of neck and head, and you get a creature not much less than two feet long — probably more if there is any tail. But now observe this other measurement. The animal has been moving, and we have the length of its stride. In each case it is only about three inches. You have an indication, you see, of a long body with very short legs attached to it. It has not been considerate enough to leave any of its hair behind it. But its general shape must be what I have indicated, and it can run up a curtain, and it is carnivorous."

"How do you deduce that?"

"Because it ran up the curtain. A canary's cage was hanging in the window, and its aim seems to have been to get at the bird."

"Then what was the beast?"

"Ah, if I could give it a name it might go a long way towards solving the case. On the whole, it was probably some creature of the weasel and stoat tribe — and yet it is larger than any of these that I have seen."

"But what had it to do with the crime?"

"That, also, is still obscure. But we have learned a good deal, you perceive. We know that a man stood in the road looking at the quarrel between the Barclays — the blinds were up and the room lighted. We know, also, that he ran across the lawn, entered the room, accompanied by a strange animal, and that he either struck the Colonel or, as is equally possible, that the Colonel fell down from sheer fright at the sight of him, and cut his head on the corner of the fender. Finally, we have the curious fact that the intruder carried away the key with him when he left.”

“Your discoveries seem to have left the business more obscure that it was before,” said I.

“Quite so. They undoubtedly showed that the affair was much deeper than was at first conjectured. I thought the matter over, and I came to the conclusion that I must approach the case from another aspect. But really, Watson, I am keeping you up, and I might just as well tell you all this on our way to Aldershot to-morrow.”

“Thank you, you have gone rather too far to stop.”

“It is quite certain that when Mrs. Barclay left the house at half-past seven she was on good terms with her husband. She was never, as I think I have said, ostentatiously affectionate, but she was heard by the coachman chatting with the Colonel in a friendly fashion. Now, it was equally certain that, immediately on her return, she had gone to the room in which she was least likely to see her husband, had flown to tea as an agitated woman will, and finally, on his coming in to her, had broken into violent recriminations. Therefore something had occurred between seven-thirty and nine o’clock which had completely altered her feelings towards him. But Miss Morrison had been with her during the whole of that hour and a half. It was absolutely certain, therefore, in spite of her denial, that she must know something of the matter.

“My first conjecture was, that possibly there had been some passages between this young lady and the old soldier, which the former had now confessed to the wife. That would account for the angry return, and also for the girl’s denial that anything had occurred. Nor would it be entirely incompatible with most of the words overhead. But there was the reference to David, and there was the known affection of the Colonel for his wife, to weigh against it, to say nothing of the tragic intrusion of this other man, which might, of course, be entirely disconnected with what had gone before. It was not easy to pick one’s steps, but, on the whole, I was inclined to dismiss the idea that there had been anything between the Colonel and Miss Morrison, but more than ever convinced that the young lady held the clue as to what it was which had turned Mrs. Barclay to hatred of her husband. I took the obvious course, therefore, of calling upon Miss M., of explaining to her that I was perfectly certain that she held the facts in her possession, and of assuring her that her friend, Mrs. Barclay, might find herself in the dock upon a capital charge unless the matter were cleared up.

"Miss Morrison is a little ethereal slip of a girl, with timid eyes and blond hair, but I found her by no means wanting in shrewdness and common-sense. She sat thinking for some time after I had spoken, and then, turning to me with a brisk air of resolution, she broke into a remarkable statement which I will condense for your benefit.

"'I promised my friend that I would say nothing of the matter, and a promise is a promise,' said she; 'but if I can really help her when so serious a charge is laid against her, and when her own mouth, poor darling, is closed by illness, then I think I am absolved from my promise. I will tell you exactly what happened upon Monday evening.

"'We were returning from the Watt Street Mission about a quarter to nine o'clock. On our way we had to pass through Hudson Street, which is a very quiet thoroughfare. There is only one lamp in it, upon the left-hand side, and as we approached this lamp I saw a man coming towards us with his back very bent, and something like a box slung over one of his shoulders. He appeared to be deformed, for he carried his head low and walked with his knees bent. We were passing him when he raised his face to look at us in the circle of light thrown by the lamp, and as he did so he stopped and screamed out in a dreadful voice, "My God, it's Nancy!" Mrs. Barclay turned as white as death, and would have fallen down had the dreadful-looking creature not caught hold of her. I was going to call for the police, but she, to my surprise, spoke quite civilly to the fellow.

"'"I thought you had been dead this thirty years, Henry," said she, in a shaking voice.

"'"So I have," said he, and it was awful to hear the tones that he said it in. He had a very dark, fearsome face, and a gleam in his eyes that comes back to me in my dreams. His hair and whiskers were shot with gray, and his face was all crinkled and puckered like a withered apple.

"'"Just walk on a little way, dear," said Mrs. Barclay; "I want to have a word with this man. There is nothing to be afraid of." She tried to speak boldly, but she was still deadly pale and could hardly get her words out for the trembling of her lips.

"'I did as she asked me, and they talked together for a few minutes. Then she came down the street with her eyes blazing, and I saw the crippled wretch standing by the lamp-post and shaking his clenched fists in the air as if he were mad with rage. She never said a word until we were at the door here, when she took me by the hand and begged me to tell no one what had happened.

““It’s an old acquaintance of mine who has come down in the world,” said she. When I promised her I would say nothing she kissed me, and I have never seen her since. I have told you now the whole truth, and if I withheld it from the police it is because I did not realise then the danger in which my dear friend stood. I know that it can only be to her advantage that everything should be known.’

“There was her statement, Watson, and to me, as you can imagine, it was like a light on a dark night. Everything which had been disconnected before began at once to assume its true place, and I had a shadowy presentiment of the whole sequence of events. My next step obviously was to find the man who had produced such a remarkable impression upon Mrs. Barclay. If he were still in Aldershot it should not be a very difficult matter. There are not such a very great number of civilians, and a deformed man was sure to have attracted attention. I spent a day in the search, and by evening — this very evening, Watson — I had run him down. The man’s name is Henry Wood, and he lives in lodgings in this same street in which the ladies met him. He has only been five days in the place. In the character of a registration-agent I had a most interesting gossip with his landlady. The man is by trade a conjurer and performer, going round the canteens after nightfall, and giving a little entertainment at each. He carries some creature about with him in that box; about which the landlady seemed to be in considerable trepidation, for she had never seen an animal like it. He uses it in some of his tricks according to her account. So much the woman was able to tell me, and also that it was a wonder the man lived, seeing how twisted he was, and that he spoke in a strange tongue sometimes, and that for the last two nights she had heard him groaning and weeping in his bedroom. He was all right, as far as money went, but in his deposit he had given her what looked like a bad florin. She showed it to me, Watson, and it was an Indian rupee.

“So now, my dear fellow, you see exactly how we stand and why it is I want you. It is perfectly plain that after the ladies parted from this man he followed them at a distance, that he saw the quarrel between husband and wife through the window, that he rushed in, and that the creature which he carried in his box got loose. That is all very certain. But he is the only person in this world who can tell us exactly what happened in that room.”

"And you intend to ask him?"

"Most certainly — but in the presence of a witness."

"And I am the witness?"

"If you will be so good. If he can clear the matter up, well and good. If he refuses, we have no alternative but to apply for a warrant."

"But how do you know he'll be there when we return?"

"You may be sure that I took some precautions. I have one of my Baker Street boys mounting guard over him who would stick to him like a burr, go where he might. We shall find him in Hudson Street to-morrow, Watson, and meanwhile I should be the criminal myself if I kept you out of bed any longer."

It was midday when we found ourselves at the scene of the tragedy, and, under my companion's guidance, we made our way at once to Hudson Street. In spite of his capacity for concealing his emotions, I could easily see that Holmes was in a state of suppressed excitement, while I was myself tingling with that half-sporting, half-intellectual pleasure which I invariably experienced when I associated myself with him in his investigations.

"This is the street," said he, as we turned into a short thoroughfare lined with plain two-storied brick houses. "Ah, here is Simpson to report."

"He's in all right, Mr. Holmes," cried a small street Arab, running up to us.

"Good, Simpson!" said Holmes, patting him on the head. "Come along, Watson. This is the house." He sent in his card with a message that he had come on important business, and a moment later we were face to face with the man whom we had come to see. In spite of the warm weather he was crouching over a fire, and the little room was like an oven. The man sat all twisted and huddled in his chair in a way which gave an indescribably impression of deformity; but the face which he turned towards us, though worn and swarthy, must at some time have been remarkable for its beauty. He looked suspiciously at us now out of yellow-shot, bilious eyes, and, without speaking or rising, he waved towards two chairs.

"Mr. Henry Wood, late of India, I believe," said Holmes, affably. "I've come over this little matter of Colonel Barclay's death."

"What should I know about that?"

"That's what I want to ascertain. You know, I suppose, that unless the matter is cleared up, Mrs. Barclay, who is an old friend of yours, will in all probability be tried for murder."

The man gave a violent start.

“I don’t know who you are,” he cried, “nor how you come to know what you do know, but will you swear that this is true that you tell me?”

“Why, they are only waiting for her to come to her senses to arrest her.”

“My God! Are you in the police yourself?”

“No.”

“What business is it of yours, then?”

“It’s every man’s business to see justice done.”

“You can take my word that she is innocent.”

“Then you are guilty.”

“No, I am not.”

“Who killed Colonel James Barclay, then?”

“It was a just providence that killed him. But, mind you this, that if I had knocked his brains out, as it was in my heart to do, he would have had no more than his due from my hands. If his own guilty conscience had not struck him down it is likely enough that I might have had his blood upon my soul. You want me to tell the story. Well, I don’t know why I shouldn’t, for there’s no cause for me to be ashamed of it.

“It was in this way, sir. You see me now with my back like a camel and my ribs all awry, but there was a time when Corporal Henry Wood was the smartest man in the 117th foot. We were in India then, in cantonments, at a place we’ll call Bhurtee. Barclay, who died the other day, was sergeant in the same company as myself, and the belle of the regiment, ay, and the finest girl that ever had the breath of life between her lips, was Nancy Devoy, the daughter of the colour-sergeant. There were two men that loved her, and one that she loved, and you’ll smile when you look at this poor thing huddled before the fire, and hear me say that it was for my good looks that she loved me.

“Well, though I had her heart, her father was set upon her marrying Barclay. I was a harum-scarum, reckless lad, and he had had an education, and was already marked for the sword-belt. But the girl held true to me, and it seemed that I would have had her when the Mutiny broke out, and all hell was loose in the country.

“We were shut up in Bhurtee, the regiment of us with half a battery of artillery, a company of Sikhs, and a lot of civilians and women-folk. There were ten thousand rebels round us, and they were as keen as a set of terriers round a rat-cage. About the second week of it our water gave out, and it was a question whether we could communicate with General Neill's column, which was moving up country. It was our only chance, for we could not hope to fight our way out with all the women and children, so I volunteered to go out and to warn General Neill of our danger. My offer was accepted, and I talked it over with Sergeant Barclay, who was supposed to know the ground better than any other man, and who drew up a route by which I might get through the rebel lines. At ten o'clock the same night I started off upon my journey. There were a thousand lives to save, but it was of only one that I was thinking when I dropped over the wall that night.

"My way ran down a dried-up watercourse, which we hoped would screen me from the enemy's sentries; but as I crept round the corner of it I walked right into six of them, who were crouching down in the dark waiting for me. In an instant I was stunned with a blow and bound hand and foot. But the real blow was to my heart and not to my head, for as I came to and listened to as much as I could understand of their talk, I heard enough to tell me that my comrade, the very man who had arranged the way that I was to take, had betrayed me by means of a native servant into the hands of the enemy.

"Well, there's no need for me to dwell on that part of it. You know now what James Barclay was capable of. Bhurtee was relieved by Neill next day, but the rebels took me away with them in their retreat, and it was many a long year before ever I saw a white face again. I was tortured and tried to get away, and was captured and tortured again. You can see for yourselves the state in which I was left. Some of them that fled into Nepaul took me with them, and then afterwards I was up past Darjeeling. The hill-folk up there murdered the rebels who had me, and I became their slave for a time until I escaped; but instead of going south I had to go north, until I found myself among the Afghans. There I wandered about for many a year, and at last came back to the Punjab, where I lived mostly among the natives and picked up a living by the conjuring tricks that I had learned. What use was it for me, a wretched cripple, to go back to England or to make myself known to my old comrades? Even my wish for revenge would not make me do that. I had rather that Nancy and my old pals should think of Harry Wood as having died with a straight back, than see him living and crawling with a stick like a chimpanzee. They never doubted that I was dead, and I meant that they never should. I heard that Barclay had married Nancy, and that he was rising rapidly in the regiment, but even that did not make me speak.

"But when one gets old one has a longing for home. For years I've been dreaming of the bright green fields and the hedges of England. At last I determined to see them before I died. I saved enough to bring me across, and then I came here where the soldiers are, for I know their ways and how to amuse them and so earn enough to keep me."

"Your narrative is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. "I have already heard of your meeting with Mrs. Barclay, and your mutual recognition. You then, as I understand, followed her home and saw through the window an altercation between her husband and her, in which she doubtless cast his conduct to you in his teeth. Your own feelings overcame you, and you ran across the lawn and broke in upon them."

"I did, sir, and at the sight of me he looked as I have never seen a man look before, and over he went with his head on the fender. But he was dead before he fell. I read death on his face as plain as I can read that text over the fire. The bare sight of me was like a bullet through his guilty heart."

"And then?"

"Then Nancy fainted, and I caught up the key of the door from her hand, intending to unlock it and get help. But as I was doing it it seemed to me better to leave it alone and get away, for the thing might look black against me, and any way my secret would be out if I were taken. In my haste I thrust the key into my pocket, and dropped my stick while I was chasing Teddy, who had run up the curtain. When I got him into his box, from which he had slipped, I was off as fast as I could run."

"Who's Teddy?" asked Holmes.

The man leaned over and pulled up the front of a kind of hutch in the corner. In an instant out there slipped a beautiful reddish-brown creature, thin and lithe, with the legs of a stoat, a long, thin nose, and a pair of the finest red eyes that ever I saw in an animal's head.

"It's a mongoose," I cried.

"Well, some call them that, and some call them ichneumon," said the man. "Snake-catcher is what I call them, and Teddy is amazing quick on cobras. I have one here without the fangs, and Teddy catches it every night to please the folk in the canteen.

"Any other point, sir?"

"Well, we may have to apply to you again if Mrs. Barclay should prove to be in serious trouble."

"In that case, of course, I'd come forward."

"But if not, there is no object in raking up this scandal against a dead man, foully as he has acted. You have at least the satisfaction of knowing that for thirty years of his life his conscience bitterly reproached him for this wicked deed. Ah, there goes Major Murphy on the other side of the street. Good-by, Wood. I want to learn if anything has happened since yesterday."

We were in time to overtake the major before he reached the corner.

"Ah, Holmes," he said: "I suppose you have heard that all this fuss has come to nothing?"

"What then?"

"The inquest is just over. The medical evidence showed conclusively that death was due to apoplexy. You see it was quite a simple case after all."

"Oh, remarkably superficial," said Holmes, smiling. "Come, Watson, I don't think we shall be wanted in Aldershot any more."

"There's one thing," said I, as we walked down to the station. "If the husband's name was James, and the other was Henry, what was this talk about David?"

"That one word, my dear Watson, should have told me the whole story had I been the ideal reasoner which you are so fond of depicting. It was evidently a term of reproach."

"Of reproach?"

"Yes; David strayed a little occasionally, you know, and on one occasion in the same direction as Sergeant James Barclay. You remember the small affair of Uriah and Bathsheba? My biblical knowledge is a trifle rusty, I fear, but you will find the story in the first or second of Samuel."

Adventure VIII. The Resident Patient

Glancing over the somewhat incoherent series of Memoirs with which I have endeavored to illustrate a few of the mental peculiarities of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have been struck by the difficulty which I have experienced in picking out examples which shall in every way answer my purpose. For in those cases in which Holmes has performed some tour de force of analytical reasoning, and has demonstrated the value of his peculiar methods of investigation, the facts themselves have often been so slight or so commonplace that I could not feel justified in laying them before the public. On the other hand, it has frequently happened that he has been concerned in some research where the facts have been of the most remarkable and dramatic character, but where the share which he has himself taken in determining their causes has been less pronounced than I, as his biographer, could wish. The small matter which I have chronicled under the heading of "A Study in Scarlet," and that other later one connected with the loss of the Gloria Scott, may serve as examples of this Scylla and Charybdis which are forever threatening the historian. It may be that in the business of which I am now about to write the part which my friend played is not sufficiently accentuated; and yet the whole train of circumstances is so remarkable that I cannot bring myself to omit it entirely from this series.

It had been a close, rainy day in October. Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. For myself, my term of service in India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer of 90 was no hardship. But the paper was uninteresting. Parliament had risen. Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumor or suspicion of unsolved crime. Appreciation of Nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.

Finding that Holmes was too absorbed for conversation, I had tossed aside the barren paper, and leaning back in my chair, I fell into a brown study. Suddenly my companion's voice broke in upon my thoughts.

"You are right, Watson," said he. "It does seem a very preposterous way of settling a dispute."

"Most preposterous!" I exclaimed, and then, suddenly realising how he had echoed the inmost thought of my soul, I sat up in my chair and stared at him in blank amazement.

"What is this, Holmes?" I cried. "This is beyond anything which I could have imagined."

He laughed heartily at my perplexity.

"You remember," said he, "that some little time ago, when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches, in which a close reasoner follows the unspoken thought of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour de force of the author. On my remarking that I was constantly in the habit of doing the same thing you expressed incredulity."

"Oh, no!"

"Perhaps not with your tongue, my dear Watson, but certainly with your eyebrows. So when I saw you throw down your paper and enter upon a train of thought, I was very happy to have the opportunity of reading it off, and eventually of breaking into it, as a proof that I had been in rapport with you."

But I was still far from satisfied. "In the example which you read to me," said I, "the reasoner drew his conclusions from the actions of the man whom he observed. If I remember right, he stumbled over a heap of stones, looked up at the stars, and so on. But I have been seated quietly in my chair, and what clues can I have given you?"

"You do yourself an injustice. The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants."

"Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?"

"Your features, and especially your eyes. Perhaps you cannot yourself recall how your reverie commenced?"

"No, I cannot."

“Then I will tell you. After throwing down your paper, which was the action which drew my attention to you, you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly-framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started. But it did not lead very far. Your eyes turned across to the unframed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher which stands upon the top of your books. You then glanced up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. You were thinking that if the portrait were framed it would just cover that bare space and correspond with Gordon’s picture over there.”

“You have followed me wonderfully!” I exclaimed.

“So far I could hardly have gone astray. But now your thoughts went back to Beecher, and you looked hard across as if you were studying the character in his features. Then your eyes ceased to pucker, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. You were recalling the incidents of Beecher’s career. I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the mission which he undertook on behalf of the North at the time of the Civil War, for I remember you expressing your passionate indignation at the way in which he was received by the more turbulent of our people. You felt so strongly about it that I knew you could not think of Beecher without thinking of that also. When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the picture, I suspected that your mind had now turned to the Civil War, and when I observed that your lips set, your eyes sparkled, and your hands clinched, I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the gallantry which was shown by both sides in that desperate struggle. But then, again, your face grew sadder; you shook your head. You were dwelling upon the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. Your hand stole towards your own old wound, and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind. At this point I agreed with you that it was preposterous, and was glad to find that all my deductions had been correct.”

“Absolutely!” said I. “And now that you have explained it, I confess that I am as amazed as before.”

“It was very superficial, my dear Watson, I assure you. I should not have intruded it upon your attention had you not shown some incredulity the other day. But the evening has brought a breeze with it. What do you say to a ramble through London?"

I was weary of our little sitting-room and gladly acquiesced. For three hours we strolled about together, watching the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life as it ebbs and flows through Fleet Street and the Strand. His characteristic talk, with its keen observance of detail and subtle power of inference held me amused and enthralled. It was ten o'clock before we reached Baker Street again. A brougham was waiting at our door.

"Hum! A doctor's — general practitioner, I perceive," said Holmes. "Not been long in practice, but has had a good deal to do. Come to consult us, I fancy! Lucky we came back!"

I was sufficiently conversant with Holmes's methods to be able to follow his reasoning, and to see that the nature and state of the various medical instruments in the wicker basket which hung in the lamplight inside the brougham had given him the data for his swift deduction. The light in our window above showed that this late visit was indeed intended for us. With some curiosity as to what could have sent a brother medico to us at such an hour, I followed Holmes into our sanctum.

A pale, taper-faced man with sandy whiskers rose up from a chair by the fire as we entered. His age may not have been more than three or four and thirty, but his haggard expression and unhealthy hue told of a life which has sapped his strength and robbed him of his youth. His manner was nervous and shy, like that of a sensitive gentleman, and the thin white hand which he laid on the mantelpiece as he rose was that of an artist rather than of a surgeon. His dress was quiet and sombre — a black frock-coat, dark trousers, and a touch of colour about his necktie.

"Good-evening, doctor," said Holmes, cheerily. "I am glad to see that you have only been waiting a very few minutes."

"You spoke to my coachman, then?"

"No, it was the candle on the side-table that told me. Pray resume your seat and let me know how I can serve you."

"My name is Doctor Percy Trevelyan," said our visitor, "and I live at 403 Brook Street."

"Are you not the author of a monograph upon obscure nervous lesions?" I asked.

His pale cheeks flushed with pleasure at hearing that his work was known to me.

"I so seldom hear of the work that I thought it was quite dead," said he. "My publishers gave me a most discouraging account of its sale. You are yourself, I presume, a medical man?"

"A retired army surgeon."

"My own hobby has always been nervous disease. I should wish to make it an absolute specialty, but, of course, a man must take what he can get at first. This, however, is beside the question, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I quite appreciate how valuable your time is. The fact is that a very singular train of events has occurred recently at my house in Brook Street, and to-night they came to such a head that I felt it was quite impossible for me to wait another hour before asking for your advice and assistance."

Sherlock Holmes sat down and lit his pipe. "You are very welcome to both," said he. "Pray let me have a detailed account of what the circumstances are which have disturbed you."

"One or two of them are so trivial," said Dr. Trevelyan, "that really I am almost ashamed to mention them. But the matter is so inexplicable, and the recent turn which it has taken is so elaborate, that I shall lay it all before you, and you shall judge what is essential and what is not.

"I am compelled, to begin with, to say something of my own college career. I am a London University man, you know, and I am sure that your will not think that I am unduly singing my own praises if I say that my student career was considered by my professors to be a very promising one. After I had graduated I continued to devote myself to research, occupying a minor position in King's College Hospital, and I was fortunate enough to excite considerable interest by my research into the pathology of catalepsy, and finally to win the Bruce Pinkerton prize and medal by the monograph on nervous lesions to which your friend has just alluded. I should not go too far if I were to say that there was a general impression at that time that a distinguished career lay before me.

"But the one great stumbling-block lay in my want of capital. As you will readily understand, a specialist who aims high is compelled to start in one of a dozen streets in the Cavendish Square quarter, all of which entail enormous rents and furnishing expenses. Besides this preliminary outlay, he must be prepared to keep himself for some years, and to hire a presentable carriage and horse. To do this was quite beyond my power, and I could only hope that by economy I might in ten years' time save enough to enable me to put up my plate. Suddenly, however, an unexpected incident opened up quite a new prospect to me.

"This was a visit from a gentleman of the name of Blessington, who was a complete stranger to me. He came up to my room one morning, and plunged into business in an instant.

"'You are the same Percy Trevelyan who has had so distinguished a career and won a great prize lately?' said he.

"I bowed.

"'Answer me frankly,' he continued, 'for you will find it to your interest to do so. You have all the cleverness which makes a successful man. Have you the tact?'

"I could not help smiling at the abruptness of the question.

"'I trust that I have my share,' I said.

"'Any bad habits? Not drawn towards drink, eh?'

"'Really, sir!' I cried.

"'Quite right! That's all right! But I was bound to ask. With all these qualities, why are you not in practice?'

"I shrugged my shoulders.

"'Come, come!' said he, in his bustling way. 'It's the old story. More in your brains than in your pocket, eh? What would you say if I were to start you in Brook Street?'

"I stared at him in astonishment.

"'Oh, it's for my sake, not for yours,' he cried. 'I'll be perfectly frank with you, and if it suits you it will suit me very well. I have a few thousands to invest, d'ye see, and I think I'll sink them in you.'

"'But why?' I gasped.

"'Well, it's just like any other speculation, and safer than most.'

"'What am I to do, then?'

"'I'll tell you. I'll take the house, furnish it, pay the maids, and run the whole place. All you have to do is just to wear out your chair in the consulting-room. I'll let you have pocket-money and everything. Then you hand over to me three quarters of what you earn, and you keep the other quarter for yourself.'

"This was the strange proposal, Mr. Holmes, with which the man Blessington approached me. I won't weary you with the account of how we bargained and negotiated. It ended in my moving into the house next Lady-day, and starting in practice on very much the same conditions as he had suggested. He came himself to live with me in the character of a resident patient. His heart was weak, it appears, and he needed constant medical supervision. He turned the two best rooms of the first floor into a sitting-room and bedroom for himself. He was a man of singular habits, shunning company and very seldom going out. His life was irregular, but in one respect he was regularity itself. Every evening, at the same hour, he walked into the consulting-room, examined the books, put down five and threepence for every guinea that I had earned, and carried the rest off to the strong-box in his own room.

"I may say with confidence that he never had occasion to regret his speculation. From the first it was a success. A few good cases and the reputation which I had won in the hospital brought me rapidly to the front, and during the last few years I have made him a rich man.

"So much, Mr. Holmes, for my past history and my relations with Mr. Blessington. It only remains for me now to tell you what has occurred to bring me here to-night.

"Some weeks ago Mr. Blessington came down to me in, as it seemed to me, a state of considerable agitation. He spoke of some burglary which, he said, had been committed in the West End, and he appeared, I remember, to be quite unnecessarily excited about it, declaring that a day should not pass before we should add stronger bolts to our windows and doors. For a week he continued to be in a peculiar state of restlessness, peering continually out of the windows, and ceasing to take the short walk which had usually been the prelude to his dinner. From his manner it struck me that he was in mortal dread of something or somebody, but when I questioned him upon the point he became so offensive that I was compelled to drop the subject. Gradually, as time passed, his fears appeared to die away, and he had renewed his former habits, when a fresh event reduced him to the pitiable state of prostration in which he now lies.

"What happened was this. Two days ago I received the letter which I now read to you. Neither address nor date is attached to it.

"'A Russian nobleman who is now resident in England,' it runs, 'would be glad to avail himself of the professional assistance of Dr. Percy Trevelyan. He has been for some years a victim to cataleptic attacks, on which, as is well known, Dr. Trevelyan is an authority. He proposes to call at about quarter past six to-morrow evening, if Dr. Trevelyan will make it convenient to be at home.'

“This letter interested me deeply, because the chief difficulty in the study of catalepsy is the rareness of the disease. You may believe, then, that I was in my consulting-room when, at the appointed hour, the page showed in the patient.

“He was an elderly man, thin, demure, and commonplace — by no means the conception one forms of a Russian nobleman. I was much more struck by the appearance of his companion. This was a tall young man, surprisingly handsome, with a dark, fierce face, and the limbs and chest of a Hercules. He had his hand under the other’s arm as they entered, and helped him to a chair with a tenderness which one would hardly have expected from his appearance.

“‘You will excuse my coming in, doctor,’ said he to me, speaking English with a slight lisp. ‘This is my father, and his health is a matter of the most overwhelming importance to me.’

“I was touched by this filial anxiety. ‘You would, perhaps, care to remain during the consultation?’ said I.

“‘Not for the world,’ he cried with a gesture of horror. ‘It is more painful to me than I can express. If I were to see my father in one of these dreadful seizures I am convinced that I should never survive it. My own nervous system is an exceptionally sensitive one. With your permission, I will remain in the waiting-room while you go into my father’s case.’

“To this, of course, I assented, and the young man withdrew. The patient and I then plunged into a discussion of his case, of which I took exhaustive notes. He was not remarkable for intelligence, and his answers were frequently obscure, which I attributed to his limited acquaintance with our language. Suddenly, however, as I sat writing, he ceased to give any answer at all to my inquiries, and on my turning towards him I was shocked to see that he was sitting bolt upright in his chair, staring at me with a perfectly blank and rigid face. He was again in the grip of his mysterious malady.

“My first feeling, as I have just said, was one of pity and horror. My second, I fear, was rather one of professional satisfaction. I made notes of my patient’s pulse and temperature, tested the rigidity of his muscles, and examined his reflexes. There was nothing markedly abnormal in any of these conditions, which harmonized with my former experiences. I had obtained good results in such cases by the inhalation of nitrite of amyl, and the present seemed an admirable opportunity of testing its virtues. The bottle was downstairs in my laboratory, so leaving my patient seated in his chair, I ran down to get it. There was some little delay in finding it — five minutes, let us say — and then I returned. Imagine my amazement to find the room empty and the patient gone.

“Of course, my first act was to run into the waiting-room. The son had gone also. The hall door had been closed, but not shut. My page who admits patients is a new boy and by no means quick. He waits downstairs, and runs up to show patients out when I ring the consulting-room bell. He had heard nothing, and the affair remained a complete mystery. Mr. Blessington came in from his walk shortly afterwards, but I did not say anything to him upon the subject, for, to tell the truth, I have got in the way of late of holding as little communication with him as possible.

“Well, I never thought that I should see anything more of the Russian and his son, so you can imagine my amazement when, at the very same hour this evening, they both came marching into my consulting-room, just as they had done before.

“‘I feel that I owe you a great many apologies for my abrupt departure yesterday, doctor,’ said my patient.

“‘I confess that I was very much surprised at it,’ said I.

“‘Well, the fact is,’ he remarked, ‘that when I recover from these attacks my mind is always very clouded as to all that has gone before. I woke up in a strange room, as it seemed to me, and made my way out into the street in a sort of dazed way when you were absent.’

“‘And I,’ said the son, ‘seeing my father pass the door of the waiting-room, naturally thought that the consultation had come to an end. It was not until we had reached home that I began to realise the true state of affairs.’

“‘Well,’ said I, laughing, ‘there is no harm done except that you puzzled me terribly; so if you, sir, would kindly step into the waiting-room I shall be happy to continue our consultation which was brought to so abrupt an ending.’

“‘For half an hour or so I discussed that old gentleman’s symptoms with him, and then, having prescribed for him, I saw him go off upon the arm of his son.

“I have told you that Mr. Blessington generally chose this hour of the day for his exercise. He came in shortly afterwards and passed upstairs. An instant later I heard him running down, and he burst into my consulting-room like a man who is mad with panic.

“‘Who has been in my room?’ he cried.

"'No one,' said I.

"'It's a lie! He yelled. 'Come up and look!'

"I passed over the grossness of his language, as he seemed half out of his mind with fear. When I went upstairs with him he pointed to several footprints upon the light carpet.

"'D'you mean to say those are mine?' he cried.

"They were certainly very much larger than any which he could have made, and were evidently quite fresh. It rained hard this afternoon, as you know, and my patients were the only people who called. It must have been the case, then, that the man in the waiting-room had, for some unknown reason, while I was busy with the other, ascended to the room of my resident patient. Nothing had been touched or taken, but there were the footprints to prove that the intrusion was an undoubted fact.

"Mr. Blessington seemed more excited over the matter than I should have thought possible, though of course it was enough to disturb anybody's peace of mind. He actually sat crying in an arm-chair, and I could hardly get him to speak coherently. It was his suggestion that I should come round to you, and of course I at once saw the propriety of it, for certainly the incident is a very singular one, though he appears to completely overrate its importance. If you would only come back with me in my brougham, you would at least be able to soothe him, though I can hardly hope that you will be able to explain this remarkable occurrence."

Sherlock Holmes had listened to this long narrative with an intentness which showed me that his interest was keenly aroused. His face was as impassive as ever, but his lids had drooped more heavily over his eyes, and his smoke had curled up more thickly from his pipe to emphasize each curious episode in the doctor's tale. As our visitor concluded, Holmes sprang up without a word, handed me my hat, picked his own from the table, and followed Dr. Trevelyan to the door. Within a quarter of an hour we had been dropped at the door of the physician's residence in Brook Street, one of those sombre, flat-faced houses which one associates with a West-End practice. A small page admitted us, and we began at once to ascend the broad, well-carpeted stair.

But a singular interruption brought us to a standstill. The light at the top was suddenly whisked out, and from the darkness came a reedy, quivering voice.

“I have a pistol,” it cried. “I give you my word that I’ll fire if you come any nearer.”

“This really grows outrageous, Mr. Blessington,” cried Dr. Trevelyan.

“Oh, then it is you, doctor,” said the voice, with a great heave of relief. “But those other gentlemen, are they what they pretend to be?”

We were conscious of a long scrutiny out of the darkness.

“Yes, yes, it’s all right,” said the voice at last. “You can come up, and I am sorry if my precautions have annoyed you.”

He relit the stair gas as he spoke, and we saw before us a singular-looking man, whose appearance, as well as his voice, testified to his jangled nerves. He was very fat, but had apparently at some time been much fatter, so that the skin hung about his face in loose pouches, like the cheeks of a blood-hound. He was of a sickly colour, and his thin, sandy hair seemed to bristle up with the intensity of his emotion. In his hand he held a pistol, but he thrust it into his pocket as we advanced.

“Good-evening, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “I am sure I am very much obliged to you for coming round. No one ever needed your advice more than I do. I suppose that Dr. Trevelyan has told you of this most unwarrantable intrusion into my rooms.”

“Quite so,” said Holmes. “Who are these two men Mr. Blessington, and why do they wish to molest you?”

“Well, well,” said the resident patient, in a nervous fashion, “of course it is hard to say that. You can hardly expect me to answer that, Mr. Holmes.”

“Do you mean that you don’t know?”

“Come in here, if you please. Just have the kindness to step in here.”

He led the way into his bedroom, which was large and comfortably furnished.

“You see that,” said he, pointing to a big black box at the end of his bed. “I have never been a very rich man, Mr. Holmes — never made but one investment in my life, as Dr. Trevelyan would tell you. But I don’t believe in bankers. I would never trust a banker, Mr. Holmes. Between ourselves, what little I have is in that box, so you can understand what it means to me when unknown people force themselves into my rooms.”

Holmes looked at Blessington in his questioning way and shook his head.

“I cannot possibly advise you if you try to deceive me,” said he.

“But I have told you everything.”

Holmes turned on his heel with a gesture of disgust. “Good-night, Dr. Trevelyan,” said he.

“And no advice for me?” cried Blessington, in a breaking voice.

“My advice to you, sir, is to speak the truth.”

A minute later we were in the street and walking for home. We had crossed Oxford Street and were half way down Harley Street before I could get a word from my companion.

“Sorry to bring you out on such a fool’s errand, Watson,” he said at last. “It is an interesting case, too, at the bottom of it.”

“I can make little of it,” I confessed.

“Well, it is quite evident that there are two men — more, perhaps, but at least two — who are determined for some reason to get at this fellow Blessington. I have no doubt in my mind that both on the first and on the second occasion that young man penetrated to Blessington’s room, while his confederate, by an ingenious device, kept the doctor from interfering.”

“And the catalepsy?”

“A fraudulent imitation, Watson, though I should hardly dare to hint as much to our specialist. It is a very easy complaint to imitate. I have done it myself.”

“And then?”

“By the purest chance Blessington was out on each occasion. Their reason for choosing so unusual an hour for a consultation was obviously to insure that there should be no other patient in the waiting-room. It just happened, however, that this hour coincided with Blessington’s constitutional, which seems to show that they were not very well acquainted with his daily routine. Of course, if they had been merely after plunder they would at least have made some attempt to search for it. Besides, I can read in a man’s eye when it is his own skin that he is frightened for. It is inconceivable that this fellow could have made two such vindictive enemies as these appear to be without knowing of it. I hold it, therefore, to be certain that he does know who these men are, and that for reasons of his own he suppresses it. It is just possible that to-morrow may find him in a more communicative mood.”

“Is there not one alternative,” I suggested, “grotesquely improbably, no doubt, but still just conceivable? Might the whole story of the cataleptic Russian and his son be a concoction of Dr. Trevelyan’s, who has, for his own purposes, been in Blessington’s rooms?”

I saw in the gaslight that Holmes wore an amused smile at this brilliant departure of mine.

“My dear fellow,” said he, “it was one of the first solutions which occurred to me, but I was soon able to corroborate the doctor’s tale. This young man has left prints upon the stair-carpet which made it quite superfluous for me to ask to see those which he had made in the room. When I tell you that his shoes were square-toed instead of being pointed like Blessington’s, and were quite an inch and a third longer than the doctor’s, you will acknowledge that there can be no doubt as to his individuality. But we may sleep on it now, for I shall be surprised if we do not hear something further from Brook Street in the morning.”

Sherlock Holmes’s prophecy was soon fulfilled, and in a dramatic fashion. At half-past seven next morning, in the first glimmer of daylight, I found him standing by my bedside in his dressing-gown.

“There’s a brougham waiting for us, Watson,” said he.

“What’s the matter, then?”

“The Brook Street business.”

“Any fresh news?”

“Tragic, but ambiguous,” said he, pulling up the blind. “Look at this — a sheet from a note-book, with ‘For God’s sake come at once — P. T.,’ scrawled upon it in pencil. Our friend, the doctor, was hard put to it when he wrote this. Come along, my dear fellow, for it’s an urgent call.”

In a quarter of an hour or so we were back at the physician’s house. He came running out to meet us with a face of horror.

“Oh, such a business!” he cried, with his hands to his temples.

“What then?”

“Blessington has committed suicide!”

Holmes whistled.

“Yes, he hanged himself during the night.”

We had entered, and the doctor had preceded us into what was evidently his waiting-room.

“I really hardly know what I am doing,” he cried. “The police are already upstairs. It has shaken me most dreadfully.”

“When did you find it out?”

“He has a cup of tea taken in to him early every morning. When the maid entered, about seven, there the unfortunate fellow was hanging in the middle of the room. He had tied his cord to the hook on which the heavy lamp used to hang, and he had jumped off from the top of the very box that he showed us yesterday.”

Holmes stood for a moment in deep thought.

“With your permission,” said he at last, “I should like to go upstairs and look into the matter.”

We both ascended, followed by the doctor.

It was a dreadful sight which met us as we entered the bedroom door. I have spoken of the impression of flabbiness which this man Blessington conveyed. As he dangled from the hook it was exaggerated and intensified until he was scarce human in his appearance. The neck was drawn out like a plucked chicken’s, making the rest of him seem the more obese and unnatural by the contrast. He was clad only in his long night-dress, and his swollen ankles and ungainly feet protruded starkly from beneath it. Beside him stood a smart-looking police-inspector, who was taking notes in a pocket-book.

“Ah, Mr. Holmes,” said he, heartily, as my friend entered, “I am delighted to see you.”

“Good-morning, Lanner,” answered Holmes; “you won’t think me an intruder, I am sure. Have you heard of the events which led up to this affair?”

“Yes, I heard something of them.”

“Have you formed any opinion?”

“As far as I can see, the man has been driven out of his senses by fright. The bed has been well slept in, you see. There’s his impression deep enough. It’s about five in the morning, you know, that suicides are most common. That would be about his time for hanging himself. It seems to have been a very deliberate affair.”

“I should say that he has been dead about three hours, judging by the rigidity of the muscles,” said I.

“Noticed anything peculiar about the room?” asked Holmes.

“Found a screw-driver and some screws on the wash-hand stand. Seems to have smoked heavily during the night, too. Here are four cigar-ends that I picked out of the fireplace.”

“Hum!” said Holmes, “have you got his cigar-holder?”

“No, I have seen none.”

“His cigar-case, then?”

“Yes, it was in his coat-pocket.”

Holmes opened it and smelled the single cigar which it contained.

“Oh, this is an Havana, and these others are cigars of the peculiar sort which are imported by the Dutch from their East Indian colonies. They are usually wrapped in straw, you know, and are thinner for their length than any other brand.” He picked up the four ends and examined them with his pocket-lens.

“Two of these have been smoked from a holder and two without,” said he. “Two have been cut by a not very sharp knife, and two have had the ends bitten off by a set of excellent teeth. This is no suicide, Mr. Lanner. It is a very deeply planned and cold-blooded murder.”

“Impossible!” cried the inspector.

“And why?”

“Why should any one murder a man in so clumsy a fashion as by hanging him?”

“That is what we have to find out.”

“How could they get in?”

“Through the front door.”

“It was barred in the morning.”

“Then it was barred after them.”

“How do you know?”

“I saw their traces. Excuse me a moment, and I may be able to give you some further information about it.”

He went over to the door, and turning the lock he examined it in his methodical way. Then he took out the key, which was on the inside, and inspected that also. The bed, the carpet, the chairs the mantelpiece, the dead body, and the rope were each in turn examined, until at last he professed himself satisfied, and with my aid and that of the inspector cut down the wretched object and laid it reverently under a sheet.

“How about this rope?” he asked.

“It is cut off this,” said Dr. Trevelyan, drawing a large coil from under the bed. “He was morbidly nervous of fire, and always kept this beside him, so that he might escape by the window in case the stairs were burning.”

“That must have saved them trouble,” said Holmes, thoughtfully. “Yes, the actual facts are very plain, and I shall be surprised if by the afternoon I cannot give you the reasons for them as well. I will take this photograph of Blessington, which I see upon the mantelpiece, as it may help me in my inquiries.”

“But you have told us nothing!” cried the doctor.

“Oh, there can be no doubt as to the sequence of events,” said Holmes. “There were three of them in it: the young man, the old man, and a third, to whose identity I have no clue. The first two, I need hardly remark, are the same who masqueraded as the Russian count and his son, so we can give a very full description of them. They were admitted by a confederate inside the house. If I might offer you a word of advice, Inspector, it would be to arrest the page, who, as I understand, has only recently come into your service, Doctor.”

“The young imp cannot be found,” said Dr. Trevelyan; “the maid and the cook have just been searching for him.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“He has played a not unimportant part in this drama,” said he. “The three men having ascended the stairs, which they did on tiptoe, the elder man first, the younger man second, and the unknown man in the rear—”

“My dear Holmes!” I ejaculated.

“Oh, there could be no question as to the superimposing of the footmarks. I had the advantage of learning which was which last night. They ascended, then, to Mr. Blessington’s room, the door of which they found to be locked. With the help of a wire, however, they forced round the key. Even without the lens you will perceive, by the scratches on this ward, where the pressure was applied.

“On entering the room their first proceeding must have been to gag Mr. Blessington. He may have been asleep, or he may have been so paralyzed with terror as to have been unable to cry out. These walls are thick, and it is conceivable that his shriek, if he had time to utter one, was unheard.

“Having secured him, it is evident to me that a consultation of some sort was held. Probably it was something in the nature of a judicial proceeding. It must have lasted for some time, for it was then that these cigars were smoked. The older man sat in that wicker chair; it was he who used the cigar-holder. The younger man sat over yonder; he knocked his ash off against the chest of drawers. The third fellow paced up and down. Blessington, I think, sat upright in the bed, but of that I cannot be absolutely certain.

“Well, it ended by their taking Blessington and hanging him. The matter was so prearranged that it is my belief that they brought with them some sort of block or pulley which might serve as a gallows. That screw-driver and those screws were, as I conceive, for fixing it up. Seeing the hook, however they naturally saved themselves the trouble. Having finished their work they made off, and the door was barred behind them by their confederate."

We had all listened with the deepest interest to this sketch of the night's doings, which Holmes had deduced from signs so subtle and minute that, even when he had pointed them out to us, we could scarcely follow him in his reasoning. The inspector hurried away on the instant to make inquiries about the page, while Holmes and I returned to Baker Street for breakfast.

"I'll be back by three," said he, when we had finished our meal. "Both the inspector and the doctor will meet me here at that hour, and I hope by that time to have cleared up any little obscurity which the case may still present."

Our visitors arrived at the appointed time, but it was a quarter to four before my friend put in an appearance. From his expression as he entered, however, I could see that all had gone well with him.

"Any news, Inspector?"

"We have got the boy, sir."

"Excellent, and I have got the men."

"You have got them!" we cried, all three.

"Well, at least I have got their identity. This so-called Blessington is, as I expected, well known at headquarters, and so are his assailants. Their names are Biddle, Hayward, and Moffat."

"The Worthingdon bank gang," cried the inspector.

"Precisely," said Holmes.

"Then Blessington must have been Sutton."

"Exactly," said Holmes.

"Why, that makes it as clear as crystal," said the inspector.

But Trevelyan and I looked at each other in bewilderment.

"You must surely remember the great Worthingdon bank business," said Holmes. "Five men were in it — these four and a fifth called Cartwright. Tobin, the care-taker, was murdered, and the thieves got away with seven thousand pounds. This was in 1875. They were all five arrested, but the evidence against them was by no means conclusive. This Blessington or Sutton, who was the worst of the gang, turned informer. On his evidence Cartwright was hanged and the other three got fifteen years apiece. When they got out the other day, which was some years before their full term, they set themselves, as you perceive, to hunt down the traitor and to avenge the death of their comrade upon him. Twice they tried to get at him and failed; a third time, you see, it came off. Is there anything further which I can explain, Dr. Trevelyan?"

"I think you have made it all remarkable clear," said the doctor. "No doubt the day on which he was perturbed was the day when he had seen of their release in the newspapers."

"Quite so. His talk about a burglary was the merest blind."

"But why could he not tell you this?"

"Well, my dear sir, knowing the vindictive character of his old associates, he was trying to hide his own identity from everybody as long as he could. His secret was a shameful one, and he could not bring himself to divulge it. However, wretch as he was, he was still living under the shield of British law, and I have no doubt, Inspector, that you will see that, though that shield may fail to guard, the sword of justice is still there to avenge."

Such were the singular circumstances in connection with the Resident Patient and the Brook Street Doctor. From that night nothing has been seen of the three murderers by the police, and it is surmised at Scotland Yard that they were among the passengers of the ill-fated steamer Norah Creina, which was lost some years ago with all hands upon the Portuguese coast, some leagues to the north of Oporto. The proceedings against the page broke down for want of evidence, and the Brook Street Mystery, as it was called, has never until now been fully dealt with in any public print.

Adventure IX. The Greek Interpreter

During my long and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Sherlock Holmes I had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life. This reticence upon his part had increased the somewhat inhuman effect which he produced upon me, until sometimes I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence. His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living, but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother.

It was after tea on a summer evening, and the conversation, which had roamed in a desultory, spasmodic fashion from golf clubs to the causes of the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic, came round at last to the question of atavism and hereditary aptitudes. The point under discussion was, how far any singular gift in an individual was due to his ancestry and how far to his own early training.

"In your own case," said I, "from all that you have told me, it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training."

"To some extent," he answered, thoughtfully. "My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms."

"But how do you know that it is hereditary?"

"Because my brother Mycroft possesses it in a larger degree than I do."

This was news to me indeed. If there were another man with such singular powers in England, how was it that neither police nor public had heard of him? I put the question, with a hint that it was my companion's modesty which made him acknowledge his brother as his superior. Holmes laughed at my suggestion.

“My dear Watson,” said he, “I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one’s self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one’s own powers. When I say, therefore, that Mycroft has better powers of observation than I, you may take it that I am speaking the exact and literal truth.”

“Is he your junior?”

“Seven years my senior.”

“How comes it that he is unknown?”

“Oh, he is very well known in his own circle.”

“Where, then?”

“Well, in the Diogenes Club, for example.”

I had never heard of the institution, and my face must have proclaimed as much, for Sherlock Holmes pulled out his watch.

“The Diogenes Club is the queerest club in London, and Mycroft one of the queerest men. He’s always there from quarter to five to twenty to eight. It’s six now, so if you care for a stroll this beautiful evening I shall be very happy to introduce you to two curiosities.”

Five minutes later we were in the street, walking towards Regent’s Circus.

“You wonder,” said my companion, “why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. He is incapable of it.”

“But I thought you said—”

“I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury.”

“It is not his profession, then?”

“By no means. What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante. He has an extraordinary faculty for figures, and audits the books in some of the government departments. Mycroft lodges in Pall

Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. From year’s end to year’s end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms.”

“I cannot recall the name.”

“Very likely not. There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger’s Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere.”

We had reached Pall Mall as we talked, and were walking down it from the St. James’s end. Sherlock Holmes stopped at a door some little distance from the Carlton, and, cautioning me not to speak, he led the way into the hall. Through the glass paneling I caught a glimpse of a large and luxurious room, in which a considerable number of men were sitting about and reading papers, each in his own little nook. Holmes showed me into a small chamber which looked out into Pall Mall, and then, leaving me for a minute, he came back with a companion whom I knew could only be his brother.

Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery gray, seemed to always retain that far-away, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock’s when he was exerting his full powers.

“I am glad to meet you, sir,” said he, putting out a broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal. “I hear of Sherlock everywhere since you became his chronicler. By the way, Sherlock, I expected to see you round last week, to consult me over that Manor House case. I thought you might be a little out of your depth.”

“No, I solved it,” said my friend, smiling.

“It was Adams, of course.”

"Yes, it was Adams."

"I was sure of it from the first." The two sat down together in the bow-window of the club. "To any one who wishes to study mankind this is the spot," said Mycroft. "Look at the magnificent types! Look at these two men who are coming towards us, for example."

"The billiard-marker and the other?"

"Precisely. What do you make of the other?"

The two men had stopped opposite the window. Some chalk marks over the waistcoat pocket were the only signs of billiards which I could see in one of them. The other was a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm.

"An old soldier, I perceive," said Sherlock.

"And very recently discharged," remarked the brother.

"Served in India, I see."

"And a non-commissioned officer."

"Royal Artillery, I fancy," said Sherlock.

"And a widower."

"But with a child."

"Children, my dear boy, children."

"Come," said I, laughing, "this is a little too much."

"Surely," answered Holmes, "it is not hard to say that a man with that bearing, expression of authority, and sunbaked skin, is a soldier, is more than a private, and is not long from India."

"That he has not left the service long is shown by his still wearing his ammunition boots, as they are called," observed Mycroft.

"He had not the cavalry stride, yet he wore his hat on one side, as is shown by the lighter skin of that side of his brow. His weight is against his being a sapper. He is in the artillery."

"Then, of course, his complete mourning shows that he has lost some one very dear. The fact that he is doing his own shopping looks as though it were his wife. He has been buying things for children, you perceive. There is a rattle, which shows that one of them is very young. The wife probably died in childbed. The fact that he has a picture-book under his arm shows that there is another child to be thought of."

I began to understand what my friend meant when he said that his brother possessed even keener faculties that he did himself. He glanced across at me and smiled. Mycroft took snuff from a tortoise-shell box, and brushed away the wandering grains from his coat front with a large, red silk handkerchief.

"By the way, Sherlock," said he, "I have had something quite after your own heart — a most singular problem — submitted to my judgment. I really had not the energy to follow it up save in a very incomplete fashion, but it gave me a basis for some pleasing speculation. If you would care to hear the facts—"

"My dear Mycroft, I should be delighted."

The brother scribbled a note upon a leaf of his pocket-book, and, ringing the bell, he handed it to the waiter.

"I have asked Mr. Melas to step across," said he. "He lodges on the floor above me, and I have some slight acquaintance with him, which led him to come to me in his perplexity. Mr. Melas is a Greek by extraction, as I understand, and he is a remarkable linguist. He earns his living partly as interpreter in the law courts and partly by acting as guide to any wealthy Orientals who may visit the Northumberland Avenue hotels. I think I will leave him to tell his very remarkable experience in his own fashion."

A few minutes later we were joined by a short, stout man whose olive face and coal-black hair proclaimed his Southern origin, though his speech was that of an educated Englishman. He shook hands eagerly with Sherlock Holmes, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure when he understood that the specialist was anxious to hear his story.

"I do not believe that the police credit me — on my word, I do not," said he in a wailing voice. "Just because they have never heard of it before, they think that such a thing cannot be. But I know that I shall never be easy in my mind until I know what has become of my poor man with the sticking-plaster upon his face."

"I am all attention," said Sherlock Holmes.

"This is Wednesday evening," said Mr. Melas. "Well then, it was Monday night — only two days ago, you understand — that all this happened. I am an interpreter, as perhaps my neighbour there has told you. I interpret all languages — or nearly all — but as I am a Greek by birth and with a Grecian name, it is with that particular tongue that I am principally associated. For many years I have been the chief Greek interpreter in London, and my name is very well known in the hotels.

"It happens not unfrequently that I am sent for at strange hours by foreigners who get into difficulties, or by travelers who arrive late and wish my services. I was not surprised, therefore, on Monday night when a Mr. Latimer, a very fashionably dressed young man, came up to my rooms and asked me to accompany him in a cab which was waiting at the door. A Greek friend had come to see him upon business, he said, and as he could speak nothing but his own tongue, the services of an interpreter were indispensable. He gave me to understand that his house was some little distance off, in Kensington, and he seemed to be in a great hurry, bustling me rapidly into the cab when we had descended to the street.

"I say into the cab, but I soon became doubtful as to whether it was not a carriage in which I found myself. It was certainly more roomy than the ordinary four-wheeled disgrace to London, and the fittings, though frayed, were of rich quality. Mr. Latimer seated himself opposite to me and we started off through Charing Cross and up the Shaftesbury Avenue. We had come out upon Oxford Street and I had ventured some remark as to this being a roundabout way to Kensington, when my words were arrested by the extraordinary conduct of my companion.

"He began by drawing a most formidable-looking bludgeon loaded with lead from his pocket, and switching it backward and forward several times, as if to test its weight and strength. Then he placed it without a word upon the seat beside him. Having done this, he drew up the windows on each side, and I found to my astonishment that they were covered with paper so as to prevent my seeing through them.

"'I am sorry to cut off your view, Mr. Melas,' said he. 'The fact is that I have no intention that you should see what the place is to which we are driving. It might possibly be inconvenient to me if you could find your way there again.'

"As you can imagine, I was utterly taken aback by such an address. My companion was a powerful, broad-shouldered young fellow, and, apart from the weapon, I should not have had the slightest chance in a struggle with him.

"'This is very extraordinary conduct, Mr. Latimer,' I stammered. 'You must be aware that what you are doing is quite illegal.'

"'It is somewhat of a liberty, no doubt,' said he, 'but we'll make it up to you. I must warn you, however, Mr. Melas, that if at any time to-night you attempt to raise an alarm or do anything which is against my interests, you will find it a very serious thing. I beg you to remember that no one knows where you are, and that, whether you are in this carriage or in my house, you are equally in my power.’

“His words were quiet, but he had a rasping way of saying them which was very menacing. I sat in silence wondering what on earth could be his reason for kidnapping me in this extraordinary fashion. Whatever it might be, it was perfectly clear that there was no possible use in my resisting, and that I could only wait to see what might befall.

“For nearly two hours we drove without my having the least clue as to where we were going. Sometimes the rattle of the stones told of a paved causeway, and at others our smooth, silent course suggested asphalt; but, save by this variation in sound, there was nothing at all which could in the remotest way help me to form a guess as to where we were. The paper over each window was impenetrable to light, and a blue curtain was drawn across the glass work in front. It was a quarter-past seven when we left Pall Mall, and my watch showed me that it was ten minutes to nine when we at last came to a standstill. My companion let down the window, and I caught a glimpse of a low, arched doorway with a lamp burning above it. As I was hurried from the carriage it swung open, and I found myself inside the house, with a vague impression of a lawn and trees on each side of me as I entered. Whether these were private grounds, however, or bona-fide country was more than I could possibly venture to say.

“There was a coloured gas-lamp inside which was turned so low that I could see little save that the hall was of some size and hung with pictures. In the dim light I could make out that the person who had opened the door was a small, mean-looking, middle-aged man with rounded shoulders. As he turned towards us the glint of the light showed me that he was wearing glasses.

“‘Is this Mr. Melas, Harold?’ said he.

“‘Yes.’

“‘Well done, well done! No ill-will, Mr. Melas, I hope, but we could not get on without you. If you deal fair with us you’ll not regret it, but if you try any tricks, God help you!’ He spoke in a nervous, jerky fashion, and with little giggling laughs in between, but somehow he impressed me with fear more than the other.

“‘What do you want with me?’ I asked.

“‘Only to ask a few questions of a Greek gentleman who is visiting us, and to let us have the answers. But say no more than you are told to say, or

—’ here came the nervous giggle again—’you had better never have been born.’

“As he spoke he opened a door and showed the way into a room which appeared to be very richly furnished, but again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. The chamber was certainly large, and the way in which my feet sank into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its richness. I caught glimpses of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantel-piece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armor at one side of it. There was a chair just under the lamp, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. The younger had left us, but he suddenly returned through another door, leading with him a gentleman clad in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly towards us. As he came into the circle of dim light which enables me to see him more clearly I was thrilled with horror at his appearance. He was deadly pale and terribly emaciated, with the protruding, brilliant eyes of a man whose spirit was greater than his strength. But what shocked me more than any signs of physical weakness was that his face was grotesquely criss-crossed with sticking-plaster, and that one large pad of it was fastened over his mouth.

“‘Have you the slate, Harold?’ cried the older man, as this strange being fell rather than sat down into a chair. ‘Are his hands loose? Now, then, give him the pencil. You are to ask the questions, Mr. Melas, and he will write the answers. Ask him first of all whether he is prepared to sign the papers?’

“The man’s eyes flashed fire.

“‘Never!’ he wrote in Greek upon the slate.

“‘On no condition?’ I asked, at the bidding of our tyrant.

“‘Only if I see her married in my presence by a Greek priest whom I know.’

“The man giggled in his venomous way.

“‘You know what awaits you, then?’

“‘I care nothing for myself.’

“These are samples of the questions and answers which made up our strange half-spoken, half-written conversation. Again and again I had to ask him whether he would give in and sign the documents. Again and again I had the same indignant reply. But soon a happy thought came to me. I took to adding on little sentences of my own to each question, innocent ones at first, to test whether either of our companions knew anything of the matter, and then, as I found that they showed no signs I played a more dangerous game. Our conversation ran something like this:

"'You can do no good by this obstinacy. Who are you?'

"'I care not. I am a stranger in London.'

"'Your fate will be upon your own head. How long have you been here?'

"'Let it be so. Three weeks.'

"'The property can never be yours. What ails you?'

"'It shall not go to villains. They are starving me.'

"'You shall go free if you sign. What house is this?'

"'I will never sign. I do not know.'

"'You are not doing her any service. What is your name?'

"'Let me hear her say so. Kratides.'

"'You shall see her if you sign. Where are you from?'

"'Then I shall never see her. Athens.'

"Another five minutes, Mr. Holmes, and I should have wormed out the whole story under their very noses. My very next question might have cleared the matter up, but at that instant the door opened and a woman stepped into the room. I could not see her clearly enough to know more than that she was tall and graceful, with black hair, and clad in some sort of loose white gown.

"'Harold,' said she, speaking English with a broken accent. 'I could not stay away longer. It is so lonely up there with only — Oh, my God, it is Paul!'

"These last words were in Greek, and at the same instant the man with a convulsive effort tore the plaster from his lips, and screaming out 'Sophy! Sophy!' rushed into the woman's arms. Their embrace was but for an instant, however, for the younger man seized the woman and pushed her out of the room, while the elder easily overpowered his emaciated victim, and dragged him away through the other door. For a moment I was left alone in the room, and I sprang to my feet with some vague idea that I might in some way get a clue to what this house was in which I found myself. Fortunately, however, I took no steps, for looking up I saw that the older man was standing in the door-way with his eyes fixed upon me.

"'That will do, Mr. Melas,' said he. 'You perceive that we have taken you into our confidence over some very private business. We should not have troubled you, only that our friend who speaks Greek and who began these negotiations has been forced to return to the East. It was quite necessary for us to find some one to take his place, and we were fortunate in hearing of your powers.’

“I bowed.

“‘There are five sovereigns here,’ said he, walking up to me, ‘which will, I hope, be a sufficient fee. But remember,’ he added, tapping me lightly on the chest and giggling, ‘if you speak to a human soul about this — one human soul, mind — well, may God have mercy upon your soul!”

“I cannot tell you the loathing and horror with which this insignificant-looking man inspired me. I could see him better now as the lamp-light shone upon him. His features were peaky and sallow, and his little pointed beard was thready and ill-nourished. He pushed his face forward as he spoke and his lips and eyelids were continually twitching like a man with St. Vitus’s dance. I could not help thinking that his strange, catchy little laugh was also a symptom of some nervous malady. The terror of his face lay in his eyes, however, steel gray, and glistening coldly with a malignant, inexorable cruelty in their depths.

“‘We shall know if you speak of this,’ said he. ‘We have our own means of information. Now you will find the carriage waiting, and my friend will see you on your way.’

“I was hurried through the hall and into the vehicle, again obtaining that momentary glimpse of trees and a garden. Mr. Latimer followed closely at my heels, and took his place opposite to me without a word. In silence we again drove for an interminable distance with the windows raised, until at last, just after midnight, the carriage pulled up.

“‘You will get down here, Mr. Melas,’ said my companion. ‘I am sorry to leave you so far from your house, but there is no alternative. Any attempt upon your part to follow the carriage can only end in injury to yourself.’

“He opened the door as he spoke, and I had hardly time to spring out when the coachman lashed the horse and the carriage rattled away. I looked around me in astonishment. I was on some sort of a heathy common mottled over with dark clumps of furze-bushes. Far away stretched a line of houses, with a light here and there in the upper windows. On the other side I saw the red signal-lamps of a railway.

“The carriage which had brought me was already out of sight. I stood gazing round and wondering where on earth I might be, when I saw some one coming towards me in the darkness. As he came up to me I made out that he was a railway porter.

"'Can you tell me what place this is?' I asked.

"'Wandsworth Common,' said he.

"'Can I get a train into town?'

"'If you walk on a mile or so to Clapham Junction,' said he, 'you'll just be in time for the last to Victoria.'

"So that was the end of my adventure, Mr. Holmes. I do not know where I was, nor whom I spoke with, nor anything save what I have told you. But I know that there is foul play going on, and I want to help that unhappy man if I can. I told the whole story to Mr. Mycroft Holmes next morning, and subsequently to the police."

We all sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. Then Sherlock looked across at his brother.

"Any steps?" he asked.

Mycroft picked up the Daily News, which was lying on the side-table.

"'Anybody supplying any information to the whereabouts of a Greek gentleman named Paul Kratides, from Athens, who is unable to speak English, will be rewarded. A similar reward paid to any one giving information about a Greek lady whose first name is Sophy. X 2473.' That was in all the dailies. No answer."

"How about the Greek Legation?"

"I have inquired. They know nothing."

"A wire to the head of the Athens police, then?"

"Sherlock has all the energy of the family," said Mycroft, turning to me. "Well, you take the case up by all means, and let me know if you do any good."

"Certainly," answered my friend, rising from his chair. "I'll let you know, and Mr. Melas also. In the meantime, Mr. Melas, I should certainly be on my guard, if I were you, for of course they must know through these advertisements that you have betrayed them."

As we walked home together, Holmes stopped at a telegraph office and sent off several wires.

"You see, Watson," he remarked, "our evening has been by no means wasted. Some of my most interesting cases have come to me in this way through Mycroft. The problem which we have just listened to, although it can admit of but one explanation, has still some distinguishing features."

"You have hopes of solving it?"

“Well, knowing as much as we do, it will be singular indeed if we fail to discover the rest. You must yourself have formed some theory which will explain the facts to which we have listened.”

“In a vague way, yes.”

“What was your idea, then?”

“It seemed to me to be obvious that this Greek girl had been carried off by the young Englishman named Harold Latimer.”

“Carried off from where?”

“Athens, perhaps.”

Sherlock Holmes shook his head. “This young man could not talk a word of Greek. The lady could talk English fairly well. Inference — that she had been in England some little time, but he had not been in Greece.”

“Well, then, we will presume that she had come on a visit to England, and that this Harold had persuaded her to fly with him.”

“That is more probable.”

“Then the brother — for that, I fancy, must be the relationship — comes over from Greece to interfere. He imprudently puts himself into the power of the young man and his older associate. They seize him and use violence towards him in order to make him sign some papers to make over the girl’s fortune — of which he may be trustee — to them. This he refuses to do. In order to negotiate with him they have to get an interpreter, and they pitch upon this Mr. Melas, having used some other one before. The girl is not told of the arrival of her brother, and finds it out by the merest accident.”

“Excellent, Watson!” cried Holmes. “I really fancy that you are not far from the truth. You see that we hold all the cards, and we have only to fear some sudden act of violence on their part. If they give us time we must have them.”

“But how can we find where this house lies?”

“Well, if our conjecture is correct and the girl’s name is or was Sophy Kratides, we should have no difficulty in tracing her. That must be our main hope, for the brother is, of course, a complete stranger. It is clear that some time has elapsed since this Harold established these relations with the girl — some weeks, at any rate — since the brother in Greece has had time to hear of it and come across. If they have been living in the same place during this time, it is probable that we shall have some answer to Mycroft’s advertisement.”

We had reached our house in Baker Street while we had been talking. Holmes ascended the stair first, and as he opened the door of our room he gave a start of surprise. Looking over his shoulder, I was equally astonished. His brother Mycroft was sitting smoking in the arm-chair.

"Come in, Sherlock! Come in, sir," said he blandly, smiling at our surprised faces. "You don't expect such energy from me, do you, Sherlock? But somehow this case attracts me."

"How did you get here?"

"I passed you in a hansom."

"There has been some new development?"

"I had an answer to my advertisement."

"Ah!"

"Yes, it came within a few minutes of your leaving."

"And to what effect?"

Mycroft Holmes took out a sheet of paper.

"Here it is," said he, "written with a J pen on royal cream paper by a middle-aged man with a weak constitution. 'Sir,' he says, 'in answer to your advertisement of to-day's date, I beg to inform you that I know the young lady in question very well. If you should care to call upon me I could give you some particulars as to her painful history. She is living at present at The Myrtles, Beckenham. Yours faithfully, J. Davenport.'

"He writes from Lower Brixton," said Mycroft Holmes. "Do you not think that we might drive to him now, Sherlock, and learn these particulars?"

"My dear Mycroft, the brother's life is more valuable than the sister's story. I think we should call at Scotland Yard for Inspector Gregson, and go straight out to Beckenham. We know that a man is being done to death, and every hour may be vital."

"Better pick up Mr. Melas on our way," I suggested. "We may need an interpreter."

"Excellent," said Sherlock Holmes. "Send the boy for a four-wheeler, and we shall be off at once." He opened the table-drawer as he spoke, and I noticed that he slipped his revolver into his pocket. "Yes," said he, in answer to my glance; "I should say from what we have heard, that we are dealing with a particularly dangerous gang."

It was almost dark before we found ourselves in Pall Mall, at the rooms of Mr. Melas. A gentleman had just called for him, and he was gone.

“Can you tell me where?” asked Mycroft Holmes.

“I don’t know, sir,” answered the woman who had opened the door; “I only know that he drove away with the gentleman in a carriage.”

“Did the gentleman give a name?”

“No, sir.”

“He wasn’t a tall, handsome, dark young man?”

“Oh, no, sir. He was a little gentleman, with glasses, thin in the face, but very pleasant in his ways, for he was laughing all the time that he was talking.”

“Come along!” cried Sherlock Holmes, abruptly. “This grows serious,” he observed, as we drove to Scotland Yard. “These men have got hold of Melas again. He is a man of no physical courage, as they are well aware from their experience the other night. This villain was able to terrorize him the instant that he got into his presence. No doubt they want his professional services, but, having used him, they may be inclined to punish him for what they will regard as his treachery.”

Our hope was that, by taking train, we might get to Beckenham as soon or sooner than the carriage. On reaching Scotland Yard, however, it was more than an hour before we could get Inspector Gregson and comply with the legal formalities which would enable us to enter the house. It was a quarter to ten before we reached London Bridge, and half past before the four of us alighted on the Beckenham platform. A drive of half a mile brought us to The Myrtles — a large, dark house standing back from the road in its own grounds. Here we dismissed our cab, and made our way up the drive together.

“The windows are all dark,” remarked the inspector. “The house seems deserted.”

“Our birds are flown and the nest empty,” said Holmes.

“Why do you say so?”

“A carriage heavily loaded with luggage has passed out during the last hour.”

The inspector laughed. “I saw the wheel-tracks in the light of the gate-lamp, but where does the luggage come in?”

“You may have observed the same wheel-tracks going the other way. But the outward-bound ones were very much deeper — so much so that we can say for a certainty that there was a very considerable weight on the carriage.”

“You get a trifle beyond me there,” said the inspector, shrugging his shoulder. “It will not be an easy door to force, but we will try if we cannot make some one hear us.”

He hammered loudly at the knocker and pulled at the bell, but without any success. Holmes had slipped away, but he came back in a few minutes.

“I have a window open,” said he.

“It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes,” remarked the inspector, as he noted the clever way in which my friend had forced back the catch. “Well, I think that under the circumstances we may enter without an invitation.”

One after the other we made our way into a large apartment, which was evidently that in which Mr. Melas had found himself. The inspector had lit his lantern, and by its light we could see the two doors, the curtain, the lamp, and the suit of Japanese mail as he had described them. On the table lay two glasses, and empty brandy-bottle, and the remains of a meal.

“What is that?” asked Holmes, suddenly.

We all stood still and listened. A low moaning sound was coming from somewhere over our heads. Holmes rushed to the door and out into the hall. The dismal noise came from upstairs. He dashed up, the inspector and I at his heels, while his brother Mycroft followed as quickly as his great bulk would permit.

Three doors faced up upon the second floor, and it was from the central of these that the sinister sounds were issuing, sinking sometimes into a dull mumble and rising again into a shrill whine. It was locked, but the key had been left on the outside. Holmes flung open the door and rushed in, but he was out again in an instant, with his hand to his throat.

“It’s charcoal,” he cried. “Give it time. It will clear.”

Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which flickered from a small brass tripod in the centre. It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which crouched against the wall. From the open door there reeked a horrible poisonous exhalation which set us gasping and coughing. Holmes rushed to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the window and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden.

“We can enter in a minute,” he gasped, darting out again. “Where is a candle? I doubt if we could strike a match in that atmosphere. Hold the light at the door and we shall get them out, Mycroft, now!”

With a rush we got to the poisoned men and dragged them out into the well-lit hall. Both of them were blue-lipped and insensible, with swollen, congested faces and protruding eyes. Indeed, so distorted were their features that, save for his black beard and stout figure, we might have failed to recognise in one of them the Greek interpreter who had parted from us only a few hours before at the Diogenes Club. His hands and feet were securely strapped together, and he bore over one eye the marks of a violent blow. The other, who was secured in a similar fashion, was a tall man in the last stage of emaciation, with several strips of sticking-plaster arranged in a grotesque pattern over his face. He had ceased to moan as we laid him down, and a glance showed me that for him at least our aid had come too late. Mr. Melas, however, still lived, and in less than an hour, with the aid of ammonia and brandy I had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes, and of knowing that my hand had drawn him back from that dark valley in which all paths meet.

It was a simple story which he had to tell, and one which did but confirm our own deductions. His visitor, on entering his rooms, had drawn a life-preserver from his sleeve, and had so impressed him with the fear of instant and inevitable death that he had kidnapped him for the second time. Indeed, it was almost mesmeric, the effect which this giggling ruffian had produced upon the unfortunate linguist, for he could not speak of him save with trembling hands and a blanched cheek. He had been taken swiftly to Beckenham, and had acted as interpreter in a second interview, even more dramatic than the first, in which the two Englishmen had menaced their prisoner with instant death if he did not comply with their demands. Finally, finding him proof against every threat, they had hurled him back into his prison, and after reproaching Melas with his treachery, which appeared from the newspaper advertisement, they had stunned him with a blow from a stick, and he remembered nothing more until he found us bending over him.

And this was the singular case of the Grecian Interpreter, the explanation of which is still involved in some mystery. We were able to find out, by communicating with the gentleman who had answered the advertisement, that the unfortunate young lady came of a wealthy Grecian family, and that she had been on a visit to some friends in England. While there she had met a young man named Harold Latimer, who had acquired an ascendancy over he and had eventually persuaded her to fly with him. Her friends, shocked at the event, had contented themselves with informing her brother at Athens, and had then washed their hands of the matter. The brother, on his arrival in England, had imprudently placed himself in the power of Latimer and of his associate, whose name was Wilson Kemp — a man of the foulest antecedents. These two, finding that through his ignorance of the language he was helpless in their hands, had kept him a prisoner, and had endeavored by cruelty and starvation to make him sign away his own and his sister's property. They had kept him in the house without the girl's knowledge, and the plaster over the face had been for the purpose of making recognition difficult in case she should ever catch a glimpse of him. Her feminine perception, however, had instantly seen through the disguise when, on the occasion of the interpreter's visit, she had seen him for the first time. The poor girl, however, was herself a prisoner, for there was no one about the house except the man who acted as coachman, and his wife, both of whom were tools of the conspirators. Finding that their secret was out, and that their prisoner was not to be coerced, the two villains with the girl had fled away at a few hours' notice from the furnished house which they had hired, having first, as they thought, taken vengeance both upon the man who had defied and the one who had betrayed them.

Months afterwards a curious newspaper cutting reached us from Buda-Pesth. It told how two Englishmen who had been traveling with a woman had met with a tragic end. They had each been stabbed, it seems, and the Hungarian police were of opinion that they had quarreled and had inflicted mortal injuries upon each other. Holmes, however, is, I fancy, of a different way of thinking, and holds to this day that, if one could find the Grecian girl, one might learn how the wrongs of herself and her brother came to be avenged.

Adventure X. The Naval Treaty

The July which immediately succeeded my marriage was made memorable by three cases of interest, in which I had the privilege of being associated with Sherlock Holmes and of studying his methods. I find them recorded in my notes under the headings of “The Adventure of the Second Stain,” “The Adventure of the Naval Treaty,” and “The Adventure of the Tired Captain.” The first of these, however, deals with interest of such importance and implicates so many of the first families in the kingdom that for many years it will be impossible to make it public. No case, however, in which Holmes was engaged has ever illustrated the value of his analytical methods so clearly or has impressed those who were associated with him so deeply. I still retain an almost verbatim report of the interview in which he demonstrated the true facts of the case to Monsieur Dubugue of the Paris police, and Fritz von Waldbaum, the well-known specialist of Dantzig, both of whom had wasted their energies upon what proved to be side-issues. The new century will have come, however, before the story can be safely told. Meanwhile I pass on to the second on my list, which promised also at one time to be of national importance, and was marked by several incidents which give it a quite unique character.

During my school-days I had been intimately associated with a lad named Percy Phelps, who was of much the same age as myself, though he was two classes ahead of me. He was a very brilliant boy, and carried away every prize which the school had to offer, finished his exploits by winning a scholarship which sent him on to continue his triumphant career at Cambridge. He was, I remember, extremely well connected, and even when we were all little boys together we knew that his mother’s brother was Lord Holdhurst, the great conservative politician. This gaudy relationship did him little good at school. On the contrary, it seemed rather a piquant thing to us to chevy him about the playground and hit him over the shins with a wicket. But it was another thing when he came out into the world. I heard vaguely that his abilities and the influences which he commanded had won him a good position at the Foreign Office, and then he passed completely out of my mind until the following letter recalled his existence:

Briarbrae, Woking. My dear Watson, — I have no doubt that you can remember “Tadpole” Phelps, who was in the fifth form when you were in the third. It is possible even that you may have heard that through my uncle’s influence I obtained a good appointment at the Foreign Office, and that I was in a situation of trust and honor until a horrible misfortune came suddenly to blast my career.

There is no use writing of the details of that dreadful event. In the event of your acceding to my request it is probably that I shall have to narrate them to you. I have only just recovered from nine weeks of brain-fever, and am still exceedingly weak. Do you think that you could bring your friend Mr. Holmes down to see me? I should like to have his opinion of the case, though the authorities assure me that nothing more can be done. Do try to bring him down, and as soon as possible. Every minute seems an hour while I live in this state of horrible suspense. Assure him that if I have not asked his advice sooner it was not because I did not appreciate his talents, but because I have been off my head ever since the blow fell. Now I am clear again, though I dare not think of it too much for fear of a relapse. I am still so weak that I have to write, as you see, by dictating. Do try to bring him.

Your old school-fellow,

Percy Phelps.

There was something that touched me as I read this letter, something pitiable in the reiterated appeals to bring Holmes. So moved was I that even had it been a difficult matter I should have tried it, but of course I knew well that Holmes loved his art, so that he was ever as ready to bring his aid as his client could be to receive it. My wife agreed with me that not a moment should be lost in laying the matter before him, and so within an hour of breakfast-time I found myself back once more in the old rooms in Baker Street.

Holmes was seated at his side-table clad in his dressing-gown, and working hard over a chemical investigation. A large curved retort was boiling furiously in the bluish flame of a Bunsen burner, and the distilled drops were condensing into a two-litre measure. My friend hardly glanced up as I entered, and I, seeing that his investigation must be of importance, seated myself in an arm-chair and waited. He dipped into this bottle or that, drawing out a few drops of each with his glass pipette, and finally brought a test-tube containing a solution over to the table. In his right hand he held a slip of litmus-paper.

“You come at a crisis, Watson,” said he. “If this paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red, it means a man’s life.” He dipped it into the test-tube and it flushed at once into a dull, dirty crimson. “Hum! I thought as much!” he cried. “I will be at your service in an instant, Watson. You will find tobacco in the Persian slipper.” He turned to his desk and scribbled off several telegrams, which were handed over to the page-boy. Then he threw himself down into the chair opposite, and drew up his knees until his fingers clasped round his long, thin shins.

“A very commonplace little murder,” said he. “You’ve got something better, I fancy. You are the stormy petrel of crime, Watson. What is it?”

I handed him the letter, which he read with the most concentrated attention.

“It does not tell us very much, does it?” he remarked, as he handed it back to me.

“Hardly anything.”

“And yet the writing is of interest.”

“But the writing is not his own.”

“Precisely. It is a woman’s.”

“A man’s surely,” I cried.

“No, a woman’s, and a woman of rare character. You see, at the commencement of an investigation it is something to know that your client is in close contact with some one who, for good or evil, has an exceptional nature. My interest is already awakened in the case. If you are ready we will start at once for Woking, and see this diplomatist who is in such evil case, and the lady to whom he dictates his letters.”

We were fortunate enough to catch an early train at Waterloo, and in a little under an hour we found ourselves among the fir-woods and the heather of Woking. Briarbrae proved to be a large detached house standing in extensive grounds within a few minutes’ walk of the station. On sending in our cards we were shown into an elegantly appointed drawing-room, where we were joined in a few minutes by a rather stout man who received us with much hospitality. His age may have been nearer forty than thirty, but his cheeks were so ruddy and his eyes so merry that he still conveyed the impression of a plump and mischievous boy.

“I am so glad that you have come,” said he, shaking our hands with effusion. “Percy has been inquiring for you all morning. Ah, poor old chap, he clings to any straw! His father and his mother asked me to see you, for the mere mention of the subject is very painful to them."

"We have had no details yet," observed Holmes. "I perceive that you are not yourself a member of the family."

Our acquaintance looked surprised, and then, glancing down, he began to laugh.

"Of course you saw the J H monogram on my locket," said he. "For a moment I thought you had done something clever. Joseph Harrison is my name, and as Percy is to marry my sister Annie I shall at least be a relation by marriage. You will find my sister in his room, for she has nursed him hand-and-foot this two months back. Perhaps we'd better go in at once, for I know how impatient he is."

The chamber in which we were shown was on the same floor as the drawing-room. It was furnished partly as a sitting and partly as a bedroom, with flowers arranged daintily in every nook and corner. A young man, very pale and worn, was lying upon a sofa near the open window, through which came the rich scent of the garden and the balmy summer air. A woman was sitting beside him, who rose as we entered.

"Shall I leave, Percy?" she asked.

He clutched her hand to detain her. "How are you, Watson?" said he, cordially. "I should never have known you under that moustache, and I dare say you would not be prepared to swear to me. This I presume is your celebrated friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

I introduced him in a few words, and we both sat down. The stout young man had left us, but his sister still remained with her hand in that of the invalid. She was a striking-looking woman, a little short and thick for symmetry, but with a beautiful olive complexion, large, dark, Italian eyes, and a wealth of deep black hair. Her rich tints made the white face of her companion the more worn and haggard by the contrast.

"I won't waste your time," said he, raising himself upon the sofa. "I'll plunge into the matter without further preamble. I was a happy and successful man, Mr. Holmes, and on the eve of being married, when a sudden and dreadful misfortune wrecked all my prospects in life.

"I was, as Watson may have told you, in the Foreign Office, and through the influences of my uncle, Lord Holdhurst, I rose rapidly to a responsible position. When my uncle became foreign minister in this administration he gave me several missions of trust, and as I always brought them to a successful conclusion, he came at last to have the utmost confidence in my ability and tact.

"Nearly ten weeks ago — to be more accurate, on the 23d of May — he called me into his private room, and, after complimenting me on the good work which I had done, he informed me that he had a new commission of trust for me to execute.

"'This,' said he, taking a gray roll of paper from his bureau, 'is the original of that secret treaty between England and Italy of which, I regret to say, some rumors have already got into the public press. It is of enormous importance that nothing further should leak out. The French or the Russian embassy would pay an immense sum to learn the contents of these papers. They should not leave my bureau were it not that it is absolutely necessary to have them copied. You have a desk in your office?"

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Then take the treaty and lock it up there. I shall give directions that you may remain behind when the others go, so that you may copy it at your leisure without fear of being overlooked. When you have finished, relock both the original and the draft in the desk, and hand them over to me personally to-morrow morning.'

"I took the papers and—"

"Excuse me an instant," said Holmes. "Were you alone during this conversation?"

"Absolutely."

"In a large room?"

"Thirty feet each way."

"In the centre?"

"Yes, about it."

"And speaking low?"

"My uncle's voice is always remarkably low. I hardly spoke at all."

"Thank you," said Holmes, shutting his eyes; "pray go on."

"I did exactly what he indicated, and waited until the other clerks had departed. One of them in my room, Charles Gorot, had some arrears of work to make up, so I left him there and went out to dine. When I returned he was gone. I was anxious to hurry my work, for I knew that Joseph — the Mr. Harrison whom you saw just now — was in town, and that he would travel down to Woking by the eleven-o'clock train, and I wanted if possible to catch it.

“When I came to examine the treaty I saw at once that it was of such importance that my uncle had been guilty of no exaggeration in what he had said. Without going into details, I may say that it defined the position of Great Britain towards the Triple Alliance, and fore-shadowed the policy which this country would pursue in the event of the French fleet gaining a complete ascendancy over that of Italy in the Mediterranean. The questions treated in it were purely naval. At the end were the signatures of the high dignitaries who had signed it. I glanced my eyes over it, and then settled down to my task of copying.

“It was a long document, written in the French language, and containing twenty-six separate articles. I copied as quickly as I could, but at nine o’clock I had only done nine articles, and it seemed hopeless for me to attempt to catch my train. I was feeling drowsy and stupid, partly from my dinner and also from the effects of a long day’s work. A cup of coffee would clear my brain. A commissionnaire remains all night in a little lodge at the foot of the stairs, and is in the habit of making coffee at his spirit-lamp for any of the officials who may be working over time. I rang the bell, therefore, to summon him.

“To my surprise, it was a woman who answered the summons, a large, coarse-faced, elderly woman, in an apron. She explained that she was the commissionnaire’s wife, who did the charing, and I gave her the order for the coffee.

“I wrote two more articles and then, feeling more drowsy than ever, I rose and walked up and down the room to stretch my legs. My coffee had not yet come, and I wondered what was the cause of the delay could be. Opening the door, I started down the corridor to find out. There was a straight passage, dimly lighted, which led from the room in which I had been working, and was the only exit from it. It ended in a curving staircase, with the commissionnaire’s lodge in the passage at the bottom. Half way down this staircase is a small landing, with another passage running into it at right angles. This second one leads by means of a second small stair to a side door, used by servants, and also as a short cut by clerks when coming from Charles Street. Here is a rough chart of the place.”

“Thank you. I think that I quite follow you,” said Sherlock Holmes.

“It is of the utmost importance that you should notice this point. I went down the stairs and into the hall, where I found the commissionnaire fast asleep in his box, with the kettle boiling furiously upon the spirit-lamp. I took off the kettle and blew out the lamp, for the water was spurting over the floor. Then I put out my hand and was about to shake the man, who was still sleeping soundly, when a bell over his head rang loudly, and he woke with a start.

"'Mr. Phelps, sir!' said he, looking at me in bewilderment.

"'I came down to see if my coffee was ready.'

"'I was boiling the kettle when I fell asleep, sir.' He looked at me and then up at the still quivering bell with an ever-growing astonishment upon his face.

"'If you was here, sir, then who rang the bell?' he asked.

"'The bell!' I cried. 'What bell is it?'

"'It's the bell of the room you were working in.'

"A cold hand seemed to close round my heart. Some one, then, was in that room where my precious treaty lay upon the table. I ran frantically up the stair and along the passage. There was no one in the corridors, Mr. Holmes. There was no one in the room. All was exactly as I left it, save only that the papers which had been committed to my care had been taken from the desk on which they lay. The copy was there, and the original was gone."

Holmes sat up in his chair and rubbed his hands. I could see that the problem was entirely to his heart. "Pray, what did you do then?" he murmured.

"I recognised in an instant that the thief must have come up the stairs from the side door. Of course I must have met him if he had come the other way."

"You were satisfied that he could not have been concealed in the room all the time, or in the corridor which you have just described as dimly lighted?"

"It is absolutely impossible. A rat could not conceal himself either in the room or the corridor. There is no cover at all."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"The commissionnaire, seeing by my pale face that something was to be feared, had followed me upstairs. Now we both rushed along the corridor and down the steep steps which led to Charles Street. The door at the bottom was closed, but unlocked. We flung it open and rushed out. I can distinctly remember that as we did so there came three chimes from a neighbouring clock. It was quarter to ten."

“That is of enormous importance,” said Holmes, making a note upon his shirt-cuff.

“The night was very dark, and a thin, warm rain was falling. There was no one in Charles Street, but a great traffic was going on, as usual, in Whitehall, at the extremity. We rushed along the pavement, bare-headed as we were, and at the far corner we found a policeman standing.

“‘A robbery has been committed,’ I gasped. ‘A document of immense value has been stolen from the Foreign Office. Has any one passed this way?’

“‘I have been standing here for a quarter of an hour, sir,’ said he; ‘only one person has passed during that time — a woman, tall and elderly, with a Paisley shawl.’

“‘Ah, that is only my wife,’ cried the commissionnaire; ‘has no one else passed?’

“‘No one.’

“‘Then it must be the other way that the thief took,’ cried the fellow, tugging at my sleeve.

“‘But I was not satisfied, and the attempts which he made to draw me away increased my suspicions.

“‘Which way did the woman go?’ I cried.

“‘I don’t know, sir. I noticed her pass, but I had no special reason for watching her. She seemed to be in a hurry.’

“‘How long ago was it?’

“‘Oh, not very many minutes.’

“‘Within the last five?’

“‘Well, it could not be more than five.’

“‘You’re only wasting your time, sir, and every minute now is of importance,’ cried the commissionnaire; ‘take my word for it that my old woman has nothing to do with it, and come down to the other end of the street. Well, if you won’t, I will.’ And with that he rushed off in the other direction.

“But I was after him in an instant and caught him by the sleeve.

“‘Where do you live?’ said I.

“‘16 Ivy Lane, Brixton,’ he answered. ‘But don’t let yourself be drawn away upon a false scent, Mr. Phelps. Come to the other end of the street and let us see if we can hear of anything.’

"Nothing was to be lost by following his advice. With the policeman we both hurried down, but only to find the street full of traffic, many people coming and going, but all only too eager to get to a place of safety upon so wet a night. There was no lounger who could tell us who had passed.

"Then we returned to the office, and searched the stairs and the passage without result. The corridor which led to the room was laid down with a kind of creamy linoleum which shows an impression very easily. We examined it very carefully, but found no outline of any footmark."

"Had it been raining all evening?"

"Since about seven."

"How is it, then, that the woman who came into the room about nine left no traces with her muddy boots?"

"I am glad you raised the point. It occurred to me at the time. The charwomen are in the habit of taking off their boots at the commissionnaire's office, and putting on list slippers."

"That is very clear. There were no marks, then, though the night was a wet one? The chain of events is certainly one of extraordinary interest. What did you do next?

"We examined the room also. There is no possibility of a secret door, and the windows are quite thirty feet from the ground. Both of them were fastened on the inside. The carpet prevents any possibility of a trap-door, and the ceiling is of the ordinary whitewashed kind. I will pledge my life that whoever stole my papers could only have come through the door."

"How about the fireplace?"

"They use none. There is a stove. The bell-rope hangs from the wire just to the right of my desk. Whoever rang it must have come right up to the desk to do it. But why should any criminal wish to ring the bell? It is a most insoluble mystery."

"Certainly the incident was unusual. What were your next steps? You examined the room, I presume, to see if the intruder had left any traces — any cigar-end or dropped glove or hairpin or other trifle?"

"There was nothing of the sort."

"No smell?"

"Well, we never thought of that."

"Ah, a scent of tobacco would have been worth a great deal to us in such an investigation."

“I never smoke myself, so I think I should have observed it if there had been any smell of tobacco. There was absolutely no clue of any kind. The only tangible fact was that the commissionnaire’s wife — Mrs. Tangey was the name — had hurried out of the place. He could give no explanation save that it was about the time when the woman always went home. The policeman and I agreed that our best plan would be to seize the woman before she could get rid of the papers, presuming that she had them.

“The alarm had reached Scotland Yard by this time, and Mr. Forbes, the detective, came round at once and took up the case with a great deal of energy. We hired a hansom, and in half an hour we were at the address which had been given to us. A young woman opened the door, who proved to be Mrs. Tangey’s eldest daughter. Her mother had not come back yet, and we were shown into the front room to wait.

“About ten minutes later a knock came at the door, and here we made the one serious mistake for which I blame myself. Instead of opening the door ourselves, we allowed the girl to do so. We heard her say, ‘Mother, there are two men in the house waiting to see you,’ and an instant afterwards we heard the patter of feet rushing down the passage. Forbes flung open the door, and we both ran into the back room or kitchen, but the woman had got there before us. She stared at us with defiant eyes, and then, suddenly recognising me, an expression of absolute astonishment came over her face.

“‘Why, if it isn’t Mr. Phelps, of the office!’ she cried.

“‘Come, come, who did you think we were when you ran away from us?’ asked my companion.

“‘I thought you were the brokers,’ said she, ‘we have had some trouble with a tradesman.’

“‘That’s not quite good enough,’ answered Forbes. ‘We have reason to believe that you have taken a paper of importance from the Foreign Office, and that you ran in here to dispose of it. You must come back with us to Scotland Yard to be searched.’

“It was in vain that she protested and resisted. A four-wheeler was brought, and we all three drove back in it. We had first made an examination of the kitchen, and especially of the kitchen fire, to see whether she might have made away with the papers during the instant that she was alone. There were no signs, however, of any ashes or scraps. When we reached Scotland Yard she was handed over at once to the female searcher. I waited in an agony of suspense until she came back with her report. There were no signs of the papers.

"Then for the first time the horror of my situation came in its full force. Hitherto I had been acting, and action had numbed thought. I had been so confident of regaining the treaty at once that I had not dared to think of what would be the consequence if I failed to do so. But now there was nothing more to be done, and I had leisure to realise my position. It was horrible. Watson there would tell you that I was a nervous, sensitive boy at school. It is my nature. I thought of my uncle and of his colleagues in the Cabinet, of the shame which I had brought upon him, upon myself, upon every one connected with me. What though I was the victim of an extraordinary accident? No allowance is made for accidents where diplomatic interests are at stake. I was ruined, shamefully, hopelessly ruined. I don't know what I did. I fancy I must have made a scene. I have a dim recollection of a group of officials who crowded round me, endeavoring to soothe me. One of them drove down with me to Waterloo, and saw me into the Woking train. I believe that he would have come all the way had it not been that Dr. Ferrier, who lives near me, was going down by that very train. The doctor most kindly took charge of me, and it was well he did so, for I had a fit in the station, and before we reached home I was practically a raving maniac.

"You can imagine the state of things here when they were roused from their beds by the doctor's ringing and found me in this condition. Poor Annie here and my mother were broken-hearted. Dr. Ferrier had just heard enough from the detective at the station to be able to give an idea of what had happened, and his story did not mend matters. It was evident to all that I was in for a long illness, so Joseph was bundled out of this cheery bedroom, and it was turned into a sick-room for me. Here I have lain, Mr. Holmes, for over nine weeks, unconscious, and raving with brain-fever. If it had not been for Miss Harrison here and for the doctor's care I should not be speaking to you now. She has nursed me by day and a hired nurse has looked after me by night, for in my mad fits I was capable of anything. Slowly my reason has cleared, but it is only during the last three days that my memory has quite returned. Sometimes I wish that it never had. The first thing that I did was to wire to Mr. Forbes, who had the case in hand. He came out, and assures me that, though everything has been done, no trace of a clue has been discovered. The commissionnaire and his wife have been examined in every way without any light being thrown upon the matter. The suspicions of the police then rested upon young Gorot, who, as you may remember, stayed over time in the office that night. His remaining behind and his French name were really the only two points which could suggest suspicion; but, as a matter of fact, I did not begin work until he had gone, and his people are of Huguenot extraction, but as English in sympathy and tradition as you and I are. Nothing was found to implicate him in any way, and there the matter dropped. I turn to you, Mr. Holmes, as absolutely my last hope. If you fail me, then my honor as well as my position are forever forfeited."

The invalid sank back upon his cushions, tired out by this long recital, while his nurse poured him out a glass of some stimulating medicine. Holmes sat silently, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed, in an attitude which might seem listless to a stranger, but which I knew betokened the most intense self-absorption.

"You statement has been so explicit," said he at last, "that you have really left me very few questions to ask. There is one of the very utmost importance, however. Did you tell any one that you had this special task to perform?"

"No one."

"Not Miss Harrison here, for example?"

"No. I had not been back to Woking between getting the order and executing the commission."

"And none of your people had by chance been to see you?"

"None."

"Did any of them know their way about in the office?"

"Oh, yes, all of them had been shown over it."

"Still, of course, if you said nothing to any one about the treaty these inquiries are irrelevant."

"I said nothing."

"Do you know anything of the commissionnaire?"

"Nothing except that he is an old soldier."

"What regiment?"

"Oh, I have heard — Coldstream Guards."

"Thank you. I have no doubt I can get details from Forbes. The authorities are excellent at amassing facts, though they do not always use them to advantage. What a lovely thing a rose is!"

He walked past the couch to the open window, and held up the drooping stalk of a moss-rose, looking down at the dainty blend of crimson and green. It was a new phase of his character to me, for I had never before seen him show any keen interest in natural objects.

“There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion,” said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. “It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers our desires, our food, are all really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers.”

Percy Phelps and his nurse looked at Holmes during this demonstration with surprise and a good deal of disappointment written upon their faces. He had fallen into a reverie, with the moss-rose between his fingers. It had lasted some minutes before the young lady broke in upon it.

“Do you see any prospect of solving this mystery, Mr. Holmes?” she asked, with a touch of asperity in her voice.

“Oh, the mystery!” he answered, coming back with a start to the realities of life. “Well, it would be absurd to deny that the case is a very abstruse and complicated one, but I can promise you that I will look into the matter and let you know any points which may strike me.”

“Do you see any clue?”

“You have furnished me with seven, but, of course, I must test them before I can pronounce upon their value.”

“You suspect some one?”

“I suspect myself.”

“What!”

“Of coming to conclusions too rapidly.”

“Then go to London and test your conclusions.”

“Your advice is very excellent, Miss Harrison,” said Holmes, rising. “I think, Watson, we cannot do better. Do not allow yourself to indulge in false hopes, Mr. Phelps. The affair is a very tangled one.”

“I shall be in a fever until I see you again,” cried the diplomatist.

“Well, I’ll come out by the same train to-morrow, though it’s more than likely that my report will be a negative one.”

"God bless you for promising to come," cried our client. "It gives me fresh life to know that something is being done. By the way, I have had a letter from Lord Holdhurst."

"Ha! What did he say?"

"He was cold, but not harsh. I dare say my severe illness prevented him from being that. He repeated that the matter was of the utmost importance, and added that no steps would be taken about my future — by which he means, of course, my dismissal — until my health was restored and I had an opportunity of repairing my misfortune."

"Well, that was reasonable and considerate," said Holmes. "Come, Watson, for we have a good day's work before us in town."

Mr. Joseph Harrison drove us down to the station, and we were soon whirling up in a Portsmouth train. Holmes was sunk in profound thought, and hardly opened his mouth until we had passed Clapham Junction.

"It's a very cheery thing to come into London by any of these lines which run high, and allow you to look down upon the houses like this."

I thought he was joking, for the view was sordid enough, but he soon explained himself.

"Look at those big, isolated clumps of building rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea."

"The board-schools."

"Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wise, better England of the future. I suppose that man Phelps does not drink?"

"I should not think so."

"Nor should I, but we are bound to take every possibility into account. The poor devil has certainly got himself into very deep water, and it's a question whether we shall ever be able to get him ashore. What did you think of Miss Harrison?"

"A girl of strong character."

"Yes, but she is a good sort, or I am mistaken. She and her brother are the only children of an iron-master somewhere up Northumberland way. He got engaged to her when traveling last winter, and she came down to be introduced to his people, with her brother as escort. Then came the smash, and she stayed on to nurse her lover, while brother Joseph, finding himself pretty snug, stayed on too. I've been making a few independent inquiries, you see. But to-day must be a day of inquiries."

“My practice—” I began.

“Oh, if you find your own cases more interesting than mine—” said Holmes, with some asperity.

“I was going to say that my practice could get along very well for a day or two, since it is the slackest time in the year.”

“Excellent,” said he, recovering his good-humor. “Then we’ll look into this matter together. I think that we should begin by seeing Forbes. He can probably tell us all the details we want until we know from what side the case is to be approached.”

“You said you had a clue?”

“Well, we have several, but we can only test their value by further inquiry. The most difficult crime to track is the one which is purposeless. Now this is not purposeless. Who is it who profits by it? There is the French ambassador, there is the Russian, there is whoever might sell it to either of these, and there is Lord Holdhurst.”

“Lord Holdhurst!”

“Well, it is just conceivable that a statesman might find himself in a position where he was not sorry to have such a document accidentally destroyed.”

“Not a statesman with the honorable record of Lord Holdhurst?”

“It is a possibility and we cannot afford to disregard it. We shall see the noble lord to-day and find out if he can tell us anything. Meanwhile I have already set inquiries on foot.”

“Already?”

“Yes, I sent wires from Woking station to every evening paper in London. This advertisement will appear in each of them.”

He handed over a sheet torn from a note-book. On it was scribbled in pencil: “L10 reward. The number of the cab which dropped a fare at or about the door of the Foreign Office in Charles Street at quarter to ten in the evening of May 23d. Apply 221 B, Baker Street.”

“You are confident that the thief came in a cab?”

“If not, there is no harm done. But if Mr. Phelps is correct in stating that there is no hiding-place either in the room or the corridors, then the person must have come from outside. If he came from outside on so wet a night, and yet left no trace of damp upon the linoleum, which was examined within a few minutes of his passing, then it is exceeding probable that he came in a cab. Yes, I think that we may safely deduce a cab.”

“It sounds plausible.”

“That is one of the clues of which I spoke. It may lead us to something. And then, of course, there is the bell — which is the most distinctive feature of the case. Why should the bell ring? Was it the thief who did it out of bravado? Or was it some one who was with the thief who did it in order to prevent the crime? Or was it an accident? Or was it — ?” He sank back into the state of intense and silent thought from which he had emerged; but it seemed to me, accustomed as I was to his every mood, that some new possibility had dawned suddenly upon him.

It was twenty past three when we reached our terminus, and after a hasty luncheon at the buffet we pushed on at once to Scotland Yard. Holmes had already wired to Forbes, and we found him waiting to receive us — a small, foxy man with a sharp but by no means amiable expression. He was decidedly frigid in his manner to us, especially when he heard the errand upon which we had come.

“I’ve heard of your methods before now, Mr. Holmes,” said he, tartly. “You are ready enough to use all the information that the police can lay at your disposal, and then you try to finish the case yourself and bring discredit on them.”

“On the contrary,” said Holmes, “out of my last fifty-three cases my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine. I don’t blame you for not knowing this, for you are young and inexperienced, but if you wish to get on in your new duties you will work with me and not against me.”

“I’d be very glad of a hint or two,” said the detective, changing his manner. “I’ve certainly had no credit from the case so far.”

“What steps have you taken?”

“Tangey, the commissionnaire, has been shadowed. He left the Guards with a good character and we can find nothing against him. His wife is a bad lot, though. I fancy she knows more about this than appears.”

“Have you shadowed her?”

“We have set one of our women on to her. Mrs. Tangey drinks, and our woman has been with her twice when she was well on, but she could get nothing out of her.”

“I understand that they have had brokers in the house?”

“Yes, but they were paid off.”

“Where did the money come from?”

“That was all right. His pension was due. They have not shown any sign of being in funds.”

“What explanation did she give of having answered the bell when Mr. Phelps rang for the coffee?”

“She said that he husband was very tired and she wished to relieve him.”

“Well, certainly that would agree with his being found a little later asleep in his chair. There is nothing against them then but the woman’s character. Did you ask her why she hurried away that night? Her haste attracted the attention of the police constable.”

“She was later than usual and wanted to get home.”

“Did you point out to her that you and Mr. Phelps, who started at least twenty minutes after her, got home before her?”

“She explains that by the difference between a ‘bus and a hansom.”

“Did she make it clear why, on reaching her house, she ran into the back kitchen?”

“Because she had the money there with which to pay off the brokers.”

“She has at least an answer for everything. Did you ask her whether in leaving she met any one or saw any one loitering about Charles Street?”

“She saw no one but the constable.”

“Well, you seem to have cross-examined her pretty thoroughly. What else have you done?”

“The clerk Gorot has been shadowed all these nine weeks, but without result. We can show nothing against him.”

“Anything else?”

“Well, we have nothing else to go upon — no evidence of any kind.”

“Have you formed a theory about how that bell rang?”

“Well, I must confess that it beats me. It was a cool hand, whoever it was, to go and give the alarm like that.”

“Yes, it was queer thing to do. Many thanks to you for what you have told me. If I can put the man into your hands you shall hear from me. Come along, Watson.”

“Where are we going to now?” I asked, as we left the office.

“We are now going to interview Lord Holdhurst, the cabinet minister and future premier of England.”

We were fortunate in finding that Lord Holdhurst was still in his chambers in Downing Street, and on Holmes sending in his card we were instantly shown up. The statesman received us with that old-fashioned courtesy for which he is remarkable, and seated us on the two luxuriant lounges on either side of the fireplace. Standing on the rug between us, with his slight, tall figure, his sharp features, thoughtful face, and curling hair prematurely tinged with gray, he seemed to represent that not too common type, a nobleman who is in truth noble.

"Your name is very familiar to me, Mr. Holmes," said he, smiling. "And, of course, I cannot pretend to be ignorant of the object of your visit. There has only been one occurrence in these offices which could call for your attention. In whose interest are you acting, may I ask?"

"In that of Mr. Percy Phelps," answered Holmes.

"Ah, my unfortunate nephew! You can understand that our kinship makes it the more impossible for me to screen him in any way. I fear that the incident must have a very prejudicial effect upon his career."

"But if the document is found?"

"Ah, that, of course, would be different."

"I had one or two questions which I wished to ask you, Lord Holdhurst."

"I shall be happy to give you any information in my power."

"Was it in this room that you gave your instructions as to the copying of the document?"

"It was."

"Then you could hardly have been overheard?"

"It is out of the question."

"Did you ever mention to any one that it was your intention to give any one the treaty to be copied?"

"Never."

"You are certain of that?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, since you never said so, and Mr. Phelps never said so, and nobody else knew anything of the matter, then the thief's presence in the room was purely accidental. He saw his chance and he took it."

The statesman smiled. "You take me out of my province there," said he.

Holmes considered for a moment. "There is another very important point which I wish to discuss with you," said he. "You feared, as I understand, that very grave results might follow from the details of this treaty becoming known."

A shadow passed over the expressive face of the statesman. "Very grave results indeed."

“Any have they occurred?”

“Not yet.”

“If the treaty had reached, let us say, the French or Russian Foreign Office, you would expect to hear of it?”

“I should,” said Lord Holdhurst, with a wry face.

“Since nearly ten weeks have elapsed, then, and nothing has been heard, it is not unfair to suppose that for some reason the treaty has not reached them.”

Lord Holdhurst shrugged his shoulders.

“We can hardly suppose, Mr. Holmes, that the thief took the treaty in order to frame it and hang it up.”

“Perhaps he is waiting for a better price.”

“If he waits a little longer he will get no price at all. The treaty will cease to be secret in a few months.”

“That is most important,” said Holmes. “Of course, it is a possible supposition that the thief has had a sudden illness—”

“An attack of brain-fever, for example?” asked the statesman, flashing a swift glance at him.

“I did not say so,” said Holmes, imperturbably. “And now, Lord Holdhurst, we have already taken up too much of your valuable time, and we shall wish you good-day.”

“Every success to your investigation, be the criminal who it may,” answered the nobleman, as he bowed us out the door.

“He’s a fine fellow,” said Holmes, as we came out into Whitehall. “But he has a struggle to keep up his position. He is far from rich and has many calls. You noticed, of course, that his boots had been resoled. Now, Watson, I won’t detain you from your legitimate work any longer. I shall do nothing more to-day, unless I have an answer to my cab advertisement. But I should be extremely obliged to you if you would come down with me to Woking to-morrow, by the same train which we took yesterday.”

I met him accordingly next morning and we traveled down to Woking together. He had had no answer to his advertisement, he said, and no fresh light had been thrown upon the case. He had, when he so willed it, the utter immobility of countenance of a red Indian, and I could not gather from his appearance whether he was satisfied or not with the position of the case. His conversation, I remember, was about the Bertillon system of measurements, and he expressed his enthusiastic admiration of the French savant.

We found our client still under the charge of his devoted nurse, but looking considerably better than before. He rose from the sofa and greeted us without difficulty when we entered.

“Any news?” he asked, eagerly.

“My report, as I expected, is a negative one,” said Holmes. “I have seen Forbes, and I have seen your uncle, and I have set one or two trains of inquiry upon foot which may lead to something.”

“You have not lost heart, then?”

“By no means.”

“God bless you for saying that!” cried Miss Harrison. “If we keep our courage and our patience the truth must come out.”

“We have more to tell you than you have for us,” said Phelps, reseating himself upon the couch.

“I hoped you might have something.”

“Yes, we have had an adventure during the night, and one which might have proved to be a serious one.” His expression grew very grave as he spoke, and a look of something akin to fear sprang up in his eyes. “Do you know,” said he, “that I begin to believe that I am the unconscious centre of some monstrous conspiracy, and that my life is aimed at as well as my honor?”

“Ah!” cried Holmes.

“It sounds incredible, for I have not, as far as I know, an enemy in the world. Yet from last night’s experience I can come to no other conclusion.”

“Pray let me hear it.”

“You must know that last night was the very first night that I have ever slept without a nurse in the room. I was so much better that I thought I could dispense with one. I had a night-light burning, however. Well, about two in the morning I had sunk into a light sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a slight noise. It was like the sound which a mouse makes when it is gnawing a plank, and I lay listening to it for some time under the impression that it must come from that cause. Then it grew louder, and suddenly there came from the window a sharp metallic snick. I sat up in amazement. There could be no doubt what the sounds were now. The first ones had been caused by some one forcing an instrument through the slit between the sashes, and the second by the catch being pressed back.

“There was a pause then for about ten minutes, as if the person were waiting to see whether the noise had awakened me. Then I heard a gentle creaking as the window was very slowly opened. I could stand it no longer, for my nerves are not what they used to be. I sprang out of bed and flung open the shutters. A man was crouching at the window. I could see little of him, for he was gone like a flash. He was wrapped in some sort of cloak which came across the lower part of his face. One thing only I am sure of, and that is that he had some weapon in his hand. It looked to me like a long knife. I distinctly saw the gleam of it as he turned to run.”

“This is most interesting,” said Holmes. “Pray what did you do then?”

“I should have followed him through the open window if I had been stronger. As it was, I rang the bell and roused the house. It took me some little time, for the bell rings in the kitchen and the servants all sleep upstairs. I shouted, however, and that brought Joseph down, and he roused the others. Joseph and the groom found marks on the bed outside the window, but the weather has been so dry lately that they found it hopeless to follow the trail across the grass. There’s a place, however, on the wooden fence which skirts the road which shows signs, they tell me, as if some one had got over, and had snapped the top of the rail in doing so. I have said nothing to the local police yet, for I thought I had best have your opinion first.”

This tale of our client’s appeared to have an extraordinary effect upon Sherlock Holmes. He rose from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable excitement.

“Misfortunes never come single,” said Phelps, smiling, though it was evident that his adventure had somewhat shaken him.

“You have certainly had your share,” said Holmes. “Do you think you could walk round the house with me?”

“Oh, yes, I should like a little sunshine. Joseph will come, too.”

“And I also,” said Miss Harrison.

“I am afraid not,” said Holmes, shaking his head. “I think I must ask you to remain sitting exactly where you are.”

The young lady resumed her seat with an air of displeasure. Her brother, however, had joined us and we set off all four together. We passed round the lawn to the outside of the young diplomatist’s window. There were, as he had said, marks upon the bed, but they were hopelessly blurred and vague.

Holmes stopped over them for an instant, and then rose shrugging his shoulders.

“I don’t think any one could make much of this,” said he. “Let us go round the house and see why this particular room was chosen by the burglar. I should have thought those larger windows of the drawing-room and dining-room would have had more attractions for him.”

“They are more visible from the road,” suggested Mr. Joseph Harrison.

“Ah, yes, of course. There is a door here which he might have attempted. What is it for?”

“It is the side entrance for trades-people. Of course it is locked at night.”

“Have you ever had an alarm like this before?”

“Never,” said our client.

“Do you keep plate in the house, or anything to attract burglars?”

“Nothing of value.”

Holmes strolled round the house with his hands in his pockets and a negligent air which was unusual with him.

“By the way,” said he to Joseph Harrison, “you found some place, I understand, where the fellow scaled the fence. Let us have a look at that!”

The plump young man led us to a spot where the top of one of the wooden rails had been cracked. A small fragment of the wood was hanging down. Holmes pulled it off and examined it critically.

“Do you think that was done last night? It looks rather old, does it not?”

“Well, possibly so.”

“There are no marks of any one jumping down upon the other side. No, I fancy we shall get no help here. Let us go back to the bedroom and talk the matter over.”

Percy Phelps was walking very slowly, leaning upon the arm of his future brother-in-law. Holmes walked swiftly across the lawn, and we were at the open window of the bedroom long before the others came up.

“Miss Harrison,” said Holmes, speaking with the utmost intensity of manner, “you must stay where you are all day. Let nothing prevent you from staying where you are all day. It is of the utmost importance.”

“Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Holmes,” said the girl in astonishment.

“When you go to bed lock the door of this room on the outside and keep the key. Promise to do this.”

“But Percy?”

“He will come to London with us.”

“And am I to remain here?”

“It is for his sake. You can serve him. Quick! Promise!”

She gave a quick nod of assent just as the other two came up.

“Why do you sit moping there, Annie?” cried her brother. “Come out into the sunshine!”

“No, thank you, Joseph. I have a slight headache and this room is deliciously cool and soothing.”

“What do you propose now, Mr. Holmes?” asked our client.

“Well, in investigating this minor affair we must not lose sight of our main inquiry. It would be a very great help to me if you would come up to London with us.”

“At once?”

“Well, as soon as you conveniently can. Say in an hour.”

“I feel quite strong enough, if I can really be of any help.”

“The greatest possible.”

“Perhaps you would like me to stay there to-night?”

“I was just going to propose it.”

“Then, if my friend of the night comes to revisit me, he will find the bird flown. We are all in your hands, Mr. Holmes, and you must tell us exactly what you would like done. Perhaps you would prefer that Joseph came with us so as to look after me?”

“Oh, no; my friend Watson is a medical man, you know, and he’ll look after you. We’ll have our lunch here, if you will permit us, and then we shall all three set off for town together.”

It was arranged as he suggested, though Miss Harrison excused herself from leaving the bedroom, in accordance with Holmes’s suggestion. What the object of my friend’s manoeuvres was I could not conceive, unless it were to keep the lady away from Phelps, who, rejoiced by his returning health and by the prospect of action, lunched with us in the dining-room. Holmes had a still more startling surprise for us, however, for, after accompanying us down to the station and seeing us into our carriage, he calmly announced that he had no intention of leaving Woking.

“There are one or two small points which I should desire to clear up before I go,” said he. “Your absence, Mr. Phelps, will in some ways rather assist me. Watson, when you reach London you would oblige me by driving at once to Baker Street with our friend here, and remaining with him until I see you again. It is fortunate that you are old school-fellows, as you must have much to talk over. Mr. Phelps can have the spare bedroom to-night, and I will be with you in time for breakfast, for there is a train which will take me into Waterloo at eight.”

“But how about our investigation in London?” asked Phelps, ruefully.

“We can do that to-morrow. I think that just at present I can be of more immediate use here.”

“You might tell them at Briarbrae that I hope to be back to-morrow night,” cried Phelps, as we began to move from the platform.

“I hardly expect to go back to Briarbrae,” answered Holmes, and waved his hand to us cheerily as we shot out from the station.

Phelps and I talked it over on our journey, but neither of us could devise a satisfactory reason for this new development.

“I suppose he wants to find out some clue as to the burglary last night, if a burglar it was. For myself, I don’t believe it was an ordinary thief.”

“What is your own idea, then?”

“Upon my word, you may put it down to my weak nerves or not, but I believe there is some deep political intrigue going on around me, and that for some reason that passes my understanding my life is aimed at by the conspirators. It sounds high-flown and absurd, but consider the facts! Why should a thief try to break in at a bedroom window, where there could be no hope of any plunder, and why should he come with a long knife in his hand?”

“You are sure it was not a house-breaker’s jimmy?”

“Oh, no, it was a knife. I saw the flash of the blade quite distinctly.”

“But why on earth should you be pursued with such animosity?”

“Ah, that is the question.”

“Well, if Holmes takes the same view, that would account for his action, would it not? Presuming that your theory is correct, if he can lay his hands upon the man who threatened you last night he will have gone a long way towards finding who took the naval treaty. It is absurd to suppose that you have two enemies, one of whom robs you, while the other threatens your life.”

“But Holmes said that he was not going to Briarbrae.”

“I have known him for some time,” said I, “but I never knew him do anything yet without a very good reason,” and with that our conversation drifted off on to other topics.

But it was a weary day for me. Phelps was still weak after his long illness, and his misfortune made him querulous and nervous. In vain I endeavored to interest him in Afghanistan, in India, in social questions, in anything which might take his mind out of the groove. He would always come back to his lost treaty, wondering, guessing, speculating, as to what Holmes was doing, what steps Lord Holdhurst was taking, what news we should have in the morning. As the evening wore on his excitement became quite painful.

"You have implicit faith in Holmes?" he asked.

"I have seen him do some remarkable things."

"But he never brought light into anything quite so dark as this?"

"Oh, yes; I have known him solve questions which presented fewer clues than yours."

"But not where such large interests are at stake?"

"I don't know that. To my certain knowledge he has acted on behalf of three of the reigning houses of Europe in very vital matters."

"But you know him well, Watson. He is such an inscrutable fellow that I never quite know what to make of him. Do you think he is hopeful? Do you think he expects to make a success of it?"

"He has said nothing."

"That is a bad sign."

"On the contrary, I have noticed that when he is off the trail he generally says so. It is when he is on a scent and is not quite absolutely sure yet that it is the right one that he is most taciturn. Now, my dear fellow, we can't help matters by making ourselves nervous about them, so let me implore you to go to bed and so be fresh for whatever may await us to-morrow."

I was able at last to persuade my companion to take my advice, though I knew from his excited manner that there was not much hope of sleep for him. Indeed, his mood was infectious, for I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem, and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last. Why had Holmes remained at Woking? Why had he asked Miss Harrison to remain in the sick-room all day? Why had he been so careful not to inform the people at Briarbrae that he intended to remain near them? I cudgelled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavor to find some explanation which would cover all these facts.

It was seven o’clock when I awoke, and I set off at once for Phelps’s room, to find him haggard and spent after a sleepless night. His first question was whether Holmes had arrived yet.

“He’ll be here when he promised,” said I, “and not an instant sooner or later.”

And my words were true, for shortly after eight a hansom dashed up to the door and our friend got out of it. Standing in the window we saw that his left hand was swathed in a bandage and that his face was very grim and pale. He entered the house, but it was some little time before he came upstairs.

“He looks like a beaten man,” cried Phelps.

I was forced to confess that he was right. “After all,” said I, “the clue of the matter lies probably here in town.”

Phelps gave a groan.

“I don’t know how it is,” said he, “but I had hoped for so much from his return. But surely his hand was not tied up like that yesterday. What can be the matter?”

“You are not wounded, Holmes?” I asked, as my friend entered the room.

“Tut, it is only a scratch through my own clumsiness,” he answered, nodding his good-mornings to us. “This case of yours, Mr. Phelps, is certainly one of the darkest which I have ever investigated.”

“I feared that you would find it beyond you.”

“It has been a most remarkable experience.”

“That bandage tells of adventures,” said I. “Won’t you tell us what has happened?”

“After breakfast, my dear Watson. Remember that I have breathed thirty miles of Surrey air this morning. I suppose that there has been no answer from my cabman advertisement? Well, well, we cannot expect to score every time.”

The table was all laid, and just as I was about to ring Mrs. Hudson entered with the tea and coffee. A few minutes later she brought in three covers, and we all drew up to the table, Holmes ravenous, I curious, and Phelps in the gloomiest state of depression.

“Mrs. Hudson has risen to the occasion,” said Holmes, uncovering a dish of curried chicken. “Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotch-woman. What have you here, Watson?”

“Ham and eggs,” I answered.

“Good! What are you going to take, Mr. Phelps — curried fowl or eggs, or will you help yourself?”

“Thank you. I can eat nothing,” said Phelps.

“Oh, come! Try the dish before you.”

“Thank you, I would really rather not.”

“Well, then,” said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle, “I suppose that you have no objection to helping me?”

Phelps raised the cover, and as he did so he uttered a scream, and sat there staring with a face as white as the plate upon which he looked. Across the centre of it was lying a little cylinder of blue-gray paper. He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, pressing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight. Then he fell back into an arm-chair so limp and exhausted with his own emotions that we had to pour brandy down his throat to keep him from fainting.

“There! there!” said Holmes, soothing, patting him upon the shoulder. “It was too bad to spring it on you like this, but Watson here will tell you that I never can resist a touch of the dramatic.”

Phelps seized his hand and kissed it. “God bless you!” he cried. “You have saved my honor.”

“Well, my own was at stake, you know,” said Holmes. “I assure you it is just as hateful to me to fail in a case as it can be to you to blunder over a commission.”

Phelps thrust away the precious document into the innermost pocket of his coat.

“I have not the heart to interrupt your breakfast any further, and yet I am dying to know how you got it and where it was.”

Sherlock Holmes swallowed a cup of coffee, and turned his attention to the ham and eggs. Then he rose, lit his pipe, and settled himself down into his chair.

“I’ll tell you what I did first, and how I came to do it afterwards,” said he. “After leaving you at the station I went for a charming walk through some admirable Surrey scenery to a pretty little village called Ripley, where I had my tea at an inn, and took the precaution of filling my flask and of putting a paper of sandwiches in my pocket. There I remained until evening, when I set off for Woking again, and found myself in the high-road outside Briarbrae just after sunset.

“Well, I waited until the road was clear — it is never a very frequented one at any time, I fancy — and then I clambered over the fence into the grounds.”

“Surely the gate was open!” ejaculated Phelps.

“Yes, but I have a peculiar taste in these matters. I chose the place where the three fir-trees stand, and behind their screen I got over without the least chance of any one in the house being able to see me. I crouched down among the bushes on the other side, and crawled from one to the other — witness the disreputable state of my trouser knees — until I had reached the clump of rhododendrons just opposite to your bedroom window. There I squatted down and awaited developments.

“The blind was not down in your room, and I could see Miss Harrison sitting there reading by the table. It was quarter-past ten when she closed her book, fastened the shutters, and retired.

“I heard her shut the door, and felt quite sure that she had turned the key in the lock.”

“The key!” ejaculated Phelps.

“Yes; I had given Miss Harrison instructions to lock the door on the outside and take the key with her when she went to bed. She carried out every one of my injunctions to the letter, and certainly without her cooperation you would not have that paper in you coat-pocket. She departed then and the lights went out, and I was left squatting in the rhododendron-bush.

“The night was fine, but still it was a very weary vigil. Of course it has the sort of excitement about it that the sportsman feels when he lies beside the water-course and waits for the big game. It was very long, though — almost as long, Watson, as when you and I waited in that deadly room when we looked into the little problem of the Speckled Band. There was a church-clock down at Woking which struck the quarters, and I thought more than once that it had stopped. At last however about two in the morning, I suddenly heard the gentle sound of a bolt being pushed back and the creaking of a key. A moment later the servants’ door was opened, and Mr. Joseph Harrison stepped out into the moonlight.”

“Joseph!” ejaculated Phelps.

“He was bare-headed, but he had a black coat thrown over his shoulder so that he could conceal his face in an instant if there were any alarm. He walked on tiptoe under the shadow of the wall, and when he reached the window he worked a long-bladed knife through the sash and pushed back the catch. Then he flung open the window, and putting his knife through the crack in the shutters, he thrust the bar up and swung them open.

"From where I lay I had a perfect view of the inside of the room and of every one of his movements. He lit the two candles which stood upon the mantelpiece, and then he proceeded to turn back the corner of the carpet in the neighbourhood of the door. Presently he stopped and picked out a square piece of board, such as is usually left to enable plumbers to get at the joints of the gas-pipes. This one covered, as a matter of fact, the T joint which gives off the pipe which supplies the kitchen underneath. Out of this hiding-place he drew that little cylinder of paper, pushed down the board, rearranged the carpet, blew out the candles, and walked straight into my arms as I stood waiting for him outside the window.

"Well, he has rather more viciousness than I gave him credit for, has Master Joseph. He flew at me with his knife, and I had to grasp him twice, and got a cut over the knuckles, before I had the upper hand of him. He looked murder out of the only eye he could see with when we had finished, but he listened to reason and gave up the papers. Having got them I let my man go, but I wired full particulars to Forbes this morning. If he is quick enough to catch his bird, well and good. But if, as I shrewdly suspect, he finds the nest empty before he gets there, why, all the better for the government. I fancy that Lord Holdhurst for one, and Mr. Percy Phelps for another, would very much rather that the affair never got as far as a police-court.

"My God!" gasped our client. "Do you tell me that during these long ten weeks of agony the stolen papers were within the very room with me all the time?"

"So it was."

"And Joseph! Joseph a villain and a thief!"

"Hum! I am afraid Joseph's character is a rather deeper and more dangerous one than one might judge from his appearance. From what I have heard from him this morning, I gather that he has lost heavily in dabbling with stocks, and that he is ready to do anything on earth to better his fortunes. Being an absolutely selfish man, when a chance presented itself he did not allow either his sister's happiness or your reputation to hold his hand."

Percy Phelps sank back in his chair. “My head whirls,” said he. “Your words have dazed me.”

“The principal difficulty in your case,” remarked Holmes, in his didactic fashion, “lay in the fact of there being too much evidence. What was vital was overlaid and hidden by what was irrelevant. Of all the facts which were presented to us we had to pick just those which we deemed to be essential, and then piece them together in their order, so as to reconstruct this very remarkable chain of events. I had already begun to suspect Joseph, from the fact that you had intended to travel home with him that night, and that therefore it was a likely enough thing that he should call for you, knowing the Foreign Office well, upon his way. When I heard that some one had been so anxious to get into the bedroom, in which no one but Joseph could have concealed anything — you told us in your narrative how you had turned Joseph out when you arrived with the doctor — my suspicions all changed to certainties, especially as the attempt was made on the first night upon which the nurse was absent, showing that the intruder was well acquainted with the ways of the house.”

“How blind I have been!”

“The facts of the case, as far as I have worked them out, are these: this Joseph Harrison entered the office through the Charles Street door, and knowing his way he walked straight into your room the instant after you left it. Finding no one there he promptly rang the bell, and at the instant that he did so his eyes caught the paper upon the table. A glance showed him that chance had put in his way a State document of immense value, and in an instant he had thrust it into his pocket and was gone. A few minutes elapsed, as you remember, before the sleepy commissionnaire drew your attention to the bell, and those were just enough to give the thief time to make his escape.

“He made his way to Woking by the first train, and having examined his booty and assured himself that it really was of immense value, he had concealed it in what he thought was a very safe place, with the intention of taking it out again in a day or two, and carrying it to the French embassy, or wherever he thought that a long price was to be had. Then came your sudden return. He, without a moment’s warning, was bundled out of his room, and from that time onward there were always at least two of you there to prevent him from regaining his treasure. The situation to him must have been a maddening one. But at last he thought he saw his chance. He tried to steal in, but was baffled by your wakefulness. You remember that you did not take your usual draught that night."

"I remember."

"I fancy that he had taken steps to make that draught efficacious, and that he quite relied upon your being unconscious. Of course, I understood that he would repeat the attempt whenever it could be done with safety. Your leaving the room gave him the chance he wanted. I kept Miss Harrison in it all day so that he might not anticipate us. Then, having given him the idea that the coast was clear, I kept guard as I have described. I already knew that the papers were probably in the room, but I had no desire to rip up all the planking and skirting in search of them. I let him take them, therefore, from the hiding-place, and so saved myself an infinity of trouble. Is there any other point which I can make clear?"

"Why did he try the window on the first occasion," I asked, "when he might have entered by the door?"

"In reaching the door he would have to pass seven bedrooms. On the other hand, he could get out on to the lawn with ease. Anything else?"

"You do not think," asked Phelps, "that he had any murderous intention? The knife was only meant as a tool."

"It may be so," answered Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "I can only say for certain that Mr. Joseph Harrison is a gentleman to whose mercy I should be extremely unwilling to trust."

Adventure XI. The Final Problem

It is with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these the last words in which I shall ever record the singular gifts by which my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes was distinguished. In an incoherent and, as I deeply feel, an entirely inadequate fashion, I have endeavored to give some account of my strange experiences in his company from the chance which first brought us together at the period of the “Study in Scarlet,” up to the time of his interference in the matter of the “Naval Treaty” — an interference which had the unquestionable effect of preventing a serious international complication. It was my intention to have stopped there, and to have said nothing of that event which has created a void in my life which the lapse of two years has done little to fill. My hand has been forced, however, by the recent letters in which Colonel James Moriarty defends the memory of his brother, and I have no choice but to lay the facts before the public exactly as they occurred. I alone know the absolute truth of the matter, and I am satisfied that the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression. As far as I know, there have been only three accounts in the public press: that in the Journal de Geneve on May 6th, 1891, the Reuter’s despatch in the English papers on May 7th, and finally the recent letter to which I have alluded. Of these the first and second were extremely condensed, while the last is, as I shall now show, an absolute perversion of the facts. It lies with me to tell for the first time what really took place between Professor Moriarty and Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

It may be remembered that after my marriage, and my subsequent start in private practice, the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes and myself became to some extent modified. He still came to me from time to time when he desired a companion in his investigation, but these occasions grew more and more seldom, until I find that in the year 1890 there were only three cases of which I retain any record. During the winter of that year and the early spring of 1891, I saw in the papers that he had been engaged by the French government upon a matter of supreme importance, and I received two notes from Holmes, dated from Narbonne and from Nimes, from which I gathered that his stay in France was likely to be a long one. It was with some surprise, therefore, that I saw him walk into my consulting-room upon the evening of April 24th. It struck me that he was looking even paler and thinner than usual.

“Yes, I have been using myself up rather too freely,” he remarked, in answer to my look rather than to my words; “I have been a little pressed of late. Have you any objection to my closing your shutters?”

The only light in the room came from the lamp upon the table at which I had been reading. Holmes edged his way round the wall and flinging the shutters together, he bolted them securely.

“You are afraid of something?” I asked.

“Well, I am.”

“Of what?”

“Of air-guns.”

“My dear Holmes, what do you mean?”

“I think that you know me well enough, Watson, to understand that I am by no means a nervous man. At the same time, it is stupidity rather than courage to refuse to recognise danger when it is close upon you. Might I trouble you for a match?” He drew in the smoke of his cigarette as if the soothing influence was grateful to him.

“I must apologize for calling so late,” said he, “and I must further beg you to be so unconventional as to allow me to leave your house presently by scrambling over your back garden wall.”

“But what does it all mean?” I asked.

He held out his hand, and I saw in the light of the lamp that two of his knuckles were burst and bleeding.

“It is not an airy nothing, you see,” said he, smiling. “On the contrary, it is solid enough for a man to break his hand over. Is Mrs. Watson in?”

“She is away upon a visit.”

“Indeed! You are alone?”

“Quite.”

“Then it makes it the easier for me to propose that you should come away with me for a week to the Continent.”

“Where?”

“Oh, anywhere. It’s all the same to me.”

There was something very strange in all this. It was not Holmes’s nature to take an aimless holiday, and something about his pale, worn face told me that his nerves were at their highest tension. He saw the question in my eyes, and, putting his finger-tips together and his elbows upon his knees, he explained the situation.

"You have probably never heard of Professor Moriarty?" said he.

"Never."

"Aye, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing!" he cried. "The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. I tell you, Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life. Between ourselves, the recent cases in which I have been of assistance to the royal family of Scandinavia, and to the French republic, have left me in such a position that I could continue to live in the quiet fashion which is most congenial to me, and to concentrate my attention upon my chemical researches. But I could not rest, Watson, I could not sit quiet in my chair, if I thought that such a man as Professor Moriarty were walking the streets of London unchallenged."

"What has he done, then?"

"His career has been an extraordinary one. He is a man of good birth and excellent education, endowed by nature with a phenomenal mathematical faculty. At the age of twenty-one he wrote a treatise upon the Binomial Theorem, which has had a European vogue. On the strength of it he won the Mathematical Chair at one of our smaller universities, and had, to all appearances, a most brilliant career before him. But the man had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers. Dark rumors gathered round him in the university town, and eventually he was compelled to resign his chair and to come down to London, where he set up as an army coach. So much is known to the world, but what I am telling you now is what I have myself discovered.

"As you are aware, Watson, there is no one who knows the higher criminal world of London so well as I do. For years past I have continually been conscious of some power behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrong-doer. Again and again in cases of the most varying sorts — forgery cases, robberies, murders — I have felt the presence of this force, and I have deduced its action in many of those undiscovered crimes in which I have not been personally consulted. For years I have endeavored to break through the veil which shrouded it, and at last the time came when I seized my thread and followed it, until it led me, after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty of mathematical celebrity.

"He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized. Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, we will say, a house to be rifled, a man to be removed — the word is passed to the Professor, the matter is organized and carried out. The agent may be caught. In that case money is found for his bail or his defence. But the central power which uses the agent is never caught — never so much as suspected. This was the organization which I deduced, Watson, and which I devoted my whole energy to exposing and breaking up.

"But the Professor was fenced round with safeguards so cunningly devised that, do what I would, it seemed impossible to get evidence which would convict in a court of law. You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill. But at last he made a trip — only a little, little trip — but it was more than he could afford when I was so close upon him. I had my chance, and, starting from that point, I have woven my net round him until now it is all ready to close. In three days — that is to say, on Monday next — matters will be ripe, and the Professor, with all the principal members of his gang, will be in the hands of the police. Then will come the greatest criminal trial of the century, the clearing up of over forty mysteries, and the rope for all of them; but if we move at all prematurely, you understand, they may slip out of our hands even at the last moment.

"Now, if I could have done this without the knowledge of Professor Moriarty, all would have been well. But he was too wily for that. He saw every step which I took to draw my toils round him. Again and again he strove to break away, but I as often headed him off. I tell you, my friend, that if a detailed account of that silent contest could be written, it would take its place as the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection. Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent. He cut deep, and yet I just undercut him. This morning the last steps were taken, and three days only were wanted to complete the business. I was sitting in my room thinking the matter over, when the door opened and Professor Moriarty stood before me.

"My nerves are fairly proof, Watson, but I must confess to a start when I saw the very man who had been so much in my thoughts standing there on my threshhold. His appearance was quite familiar to me. He is extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking, retaining something of the professor in his features. His shoulders are rounded from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes.

"'You have less frontal development than I should have expected,' said he, at last. 'It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one's dressing-gown.'

"The fact is that upon his entrance I had instantly recognised the extreme personal danger in which I lay. The only conceivable escape for him lay in silencing my tongue. In an instant I had slipped the revolver from the drawer into my pocket, and was covering him through the cloth. At his remark I drew the weapon out and laid it cocked upon the table. He still smiled and blinked, but there was something about his eyes which made me feel very glad that I had it there.

"'You evidently don't know me,' said he.

"'On the contrary,' I answered, 'I think it is fairly evident that I do. Pray take a chair. I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say.'

"'All that I have to say has already crossed your mind,' said he.

"'Then possibly my answer has crossed yours,' I replied.

"'You stand fast?'

"'Absolutely.'

"He clapped his hand into his pocket, and I raised the pistol from the table. But he merely drew out a memorandum-book in which he had scribbled some dates.

"'You crossed my path on the 4th of January,' said he. 'On the 23d you incommoded me; by the middle of February I was seriously inconvenienced by you; at the end of March I was absolutely hampered in my plans; and now, at the close of April, I find myself placed in such a position through your continual persecution that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty. The situation is becoming an impossible one.’

“‘Have you any suggestion to make?’ I asked.

“‘You must drop it, Mr. Holmes,’ said he, swaying his face about. ‘You really must, you know.’

“‘After Monday,’ said I.

“‘Tut, tut,’ said he. ‘I am quite sure that a man of your intelligence will see that there can be but one outcome to this affair. It is necessary that you should withdraw. You have worked things in such a fashion that we have only one resource left. It has been an intellectual treat to me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. You smile, sir, but I assure you that it really would.’

“‘Danger is part of my trade,’ I remarked.

“‘That is not danger,’ said he. ‘It is inevitable destruction. You stand in the way not merely of an individual, but of a mighty organization, the full extent of which you, with all your cleverness, have been unable to realise. You must stand clear, Mr. Holmes, or be trodden under foot.’

“‘I am afraid,’ said I, rising, ‘that in the pleasure of this conversation I am neglecting business of importance which awaits me elsewhere.’

“He rose also and looked at me in silence, shaking his head sadly.

“‘Well, well,’ said he, at last. ‘It seems a pity, but I have done what I could. I know every move of your game. You can do nothing before Monday. It has been a duel between you and me, Mr. Holmes. You hope to place me in the dock. I tell you that I will never stand in the dock. You hope to beat me. I tell you that you will never beat me. If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.’

“‘You have paid me several compliments, Mr. Moriarty,’ said I. ‘Let me pay you one in return when I say that if I were assured of the former eventuality I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter.’

“‘I can promise you the one, but not the other,’ he snarled, and so turned his rounded back upon me, and went peering and blinking out of the room.

“That was my singular interview with Professor Moriarty. I confess that it left an unpleasant effect upon my mind. His soft, precise fashion of speech leaves a conviction of sincerity which a mere bully could not produce. Of course, you will say: ‘Why not take police precautions against him?’ the reason is that I am well convinced that it is from his agents the blow will fall. I have the best proofs that it would be so.”

“You have already been assaulted?”

“My dear Watson, Professor Moriarty is not a man who lets the grass grow under his feet. I went out about mid-day to transact some business in Oxford Street. As I passed the corner which leads from Bentinck Street on to the Welbeck Street crossing a two-horse van furiously driven whizzed round and was on me like a flash. I sprang for the foot-path and saved myself by the fraction of a second. The van dashed round by Marylebone Lane and was gone in an instant. I kept to the pavement after that, Watson, but as I walked down Vere Street a brick came down from the roof of one of the houses, and was shattered to fragments at my feet. I called the police and had the place examined. There were slates and bricks piled up on the roof preparatory to some repairs, and they would have me believe that the wind had toppled over one of these. Of course I knew better, but I could prove nothing. I took a cab after that and reached my brother’s rooms in Pall Mall, where I spent the day. Now I have come round to you, and on my way I was attacked by a rough with a bludgeon. I knocked him down, and the police have him in custody; but I can tell you with the most absolute confidence that no possible connection will ever be traced between the gentleman upon whose front teeth I have barked my knuckles and the retiring mathematical coach, who is, I dare say, working out problems upon a black-board ten miles away. You will not wonder, Watson, that my first act on entering your rooms was to close your shutters, and that I have been compelled to ask your permission to leave the house by some less conspicuous exit than the front door.”

I had often admired my friend’s courage, but never more than now, as he sat quietly checking off a series of incidents which must have combined to make up a day of horror.

“You will spend the night here?” I said.

“No, my friend, you might find me a dangerous guest. I have my plans laid, and all will be well. Matters have gone so far now that they can move without my help as far as the arrest goes, though my presence is necessary for a conviction. It is obvious, therefore, that I cannot do better than get away for the few days which remain before the police are at liberty to act. It would be a great pleasure to me, therefore, if you could come on to the Continent with me.”

“The practice is quiet,” said I, “and I have an accommodating neighbour. I should be glad to come.”

“And to start to-morrow morning?”

“If necessary.”

“Oh yes, it is most necessary. Then these are your instructions, and I beg, my dear Watson, that you will obey them to the letter, for you are now playing a double-handed game with me against the cleverest rogue and the most powerful syndicate of criminals in Europe. Now listen! You will dispatch whatever luggage you intend to take by a trusty messenger unaddressed to Victoria to-night. In the morning you will send for a hansom, desiring your man to take neither the first nor the second which may present itself. Into this hansom you will jump, and you will drive to the Strand end of the Lowther Arcade, handing the address to the cabman upon a slip of paper, with a request that he will not throw it away. Have your fare ready, and the instant that your cab stops, dash through the Arcade, timing yourself to reach the other side at a quarter-past nine. You will find a small brougham waiting close to the curb, driven by a fellow with a heavy black cloak tipped at the collar with red. Into this you will step, and you will reach Victoria in time for the Continental express.”

“Where shall I meet you?”

“At the station. The second first-class carriage from the front will be reserved for us.”

“The carriage is our rendezvous, then?”

“Yes.”

It was in vain that I asked Holmes to remain for the evening. It was evident to me that he thought he might bring trouble to the roof he was under, and that that was the motive which impelled him to go. With a few hurried words as to our plans for the morrow he rose and came out with me into the garden, clambering over the wall which leads into Mortimer Street, and immediately whistling for a hansom, in which I heard him drive away.

In the morning I obeyed Holmes’s injunctions to the letter. A hansom was procured with such precaution as would prevent its being one which was placed ready for us, and I drove immediately after breakfast to the Lowther Arcade, through which I hurried at the top of my speed. A brougham was waiting with a very massive driver wrapped in a dark cloak, who, the instant that I had stepped in, whipped up the horse and rattled off to Victoria Station. On my alighting there he turned the carriage, and dashed away again without so much as a look in my direction.

So far all had gone admirably. My luggage was waiting for me, and I had no difficulty in finding the carriage which Holmes had indicated, the less so as it was the only one in the train which was marked “Engaged.” My only source of anxiety now was the non-appearance of Holmes. The station clock marked only seven minutes from the time when we were due to start. In vain I searched among the groups of travellers and leave-takers for the lithe figure of my friend. There was no sign of him. I spent a few minutes in assisting a venerable Italian priest, who was endeavoring to make a porter understand, in his broken English, that his luggage was to be booked through to Paris. Then, having taken another look round, I returned to my carriage, where I found that the porter, in spite of the ticket, had given me my decrepit Italian friend as a traveling companion. It was useless for me to explain to him that his presence was an intrusion, for my Italian was even more limited than his English, so I shrugged my shoulders resignedly, and continued to look out anxiously for my friend. A chill of fear had come over me, as I thought that his absence might mean that some blow had fallen during the night. Already the doors had all been shut and the whistle blown, when —

“My dear Watson,” said a voice, “you have not even condescended to say good-morning.”

I turned in uncontrollable astonishment. The aged ecclesiastic had turned his face towards me. For an instant the wrinkles were smoothed away, the nose drew away from the chin, the lower lip ceased to protrude and the mouth to mumble, the dull eyes regained their fire, the drooping figure expanded. The next the whole frame collapsed again, and Holmes had gone as quickly as he had come.

“Good heavens!” I cried; “how you startled me!”

“Every precaution is still necessary,” he whispered. “I have reason to think that they are hot upon our trail. Ah, there is Moriarty himself.”

The train had already begun to move as Holmes spoke. Glancing back, I saw a tall man pushing his way furiously through the crowd, and waving his hand as if he desired to have the train stopped. It was too late, however, for we were rapidly gathering momentum, and an instant later had shot clear of the station.

“With all our precautions, you see that we have cut it rather fine,” said Holmes, laughing. He rose, and throwing off the black cassock and hat which had formed his disguise, he packed them away in a hand-bag.

“Have you seen the morning paper, Watson?”

“No.”

“You haven’t’ seen about Baker Street, then?”

“Baker Street?”

“They set fire to our rooms last night. No great harm was done.”

“Good heavens, Holmes! this is intolerable.”

“They must have lost my track completely after their bludgeon-man was arrested. Otherwise they could not have imagined that I had returned to my rooms. They have evidently taken the precaution of watching you, however, and that is what has brought Moriarty to Victoria. You could not have made any slip in coming?”

“I did exactly what you advised.”

“Did you find your brougham?”

“Yes, it was waiting.”

“Did you recognise your coachman?”

“No.”

“It was my brother Mycroft. It is an advantage to get about in such a case without taking a mercenary into your confidence. But we must plan what we are to do about Moriarty now.”

“As this is an express, and as the boat runs in connection with it, I should think we have shaken him off very effectively.”

“My dear Watson, you evidently did not realise my meaning when I said that this man may be taken as being quite on the same intellectual plane as myself. You do not imagine that if I were the pursuer I should allow myself to be baffled by so slight an obstacle. Why, then, should you think so meanly of him?”

“What will he do?”

“What I should do?”

“What would you do, then?”

“Engage a special.”

“But it must be late.”

“By no means. This train stops at Canterbury; and there is always at least a quarter of an hour’s delay at the boat. He will catch us there.”

“One would think that we were the criminals. Let us have him arrested on his arrival.”

“It would be to ruin the work of three months. We should get the big fish, but the smaller would dart right and left out of the net. On Monday we should have them all. No, an arrest is inadmissible.”

“What then?”

“We shall get out at Canterbury.”

“And then?”

“Well, then we must make a cross-country journey to Newhaven, and so over to Dieppe. Moriarty will again do what I should do. He will get on to Paris, mark down our luggage, and wait for two days at the depot. In the meantime we shall treat ourselves to a couple of carpet-bags, encourage the manufactures of the countries through which we travel, and make our way at our leisure into Switzerland, via Luxembourg and Basle.”

At Canterbury, therefore, we alighted, only to find that we should have to wait an hour before we could get a train to Newhaven.

I was still looking rather ruefully after the rapidly disappearing luggage-van which contained my wardrobe, when Holmes pulled my sleeve and pointed up the line.

“Already, you see,” said he.

Far away, from among the Kentish woods there rose a thin spray of smoke. A minute later a carriage and engine could be seen flying along the open curve which leads to the station. We had hardly time to take our place behind a pile of luggage when it passed with a rattle and a roar, beating a blast of hot air into our faces.

“There he goes,” said Holmes, as we watched the carriage swing and rock over the points. “There are limits, you see, to our friend’s intelligence. It would have been a coup-de-maitre had he deduced what I would deduce and acted accordingly.”

“And what would he have done had he overtaken us?”

“There cannot be the least doubt that he would have made a murderous attack upon me. It is, however, a game at which two may play. The question now is whether we should take a premature lunch here, or run our chance of starving before we reach the buffet at Newhaven.”

We made our way to Brussels that night and spent two days there, moving on upon the third day as far as Strasburg. On the Monday morning Holmes had telegraphed to the London police, and in the evening we found a reply waiting for us at our hotel. Holmes tore it open, and then with a bitter curse hurled it into the grate.

“I might have known it!” he groaned. “He has escaped!”

“Moriarty?”

“They have secured the whole gang with the exception of him. He has given them the slip. Of course, when I had left the country there was no one to cope with him. But I did think that I had put the game in their hands. I think that you had better return to England, Watson.”

“Why?”

“Because you will find me a dangerous companion now. This man’s occupation is gone. He is lost if he returns to London. If I read his character right he will devote his whole energies to revenging himself upon me. He said as much in our short interview, and I fancy that he meant it. I should certainly recommend you to return to your practice.”

It was hardly an appeal to be successful with one who was an old campaigner as well as an old friend. We sat in the Strasburg salle-à-manger arguing the question for half an hour, but the same night we had resumed our journey and were well on our way to Geneva.

For a charming week we wandered up the Valley of the Rhone, and then, branching off at Leuk, we made our way over the Gemmi Pass, still deep in snow, and so, by way of Interlaken, to Meiringen. It was a lovely trip, the dainty green of the spring below, the virgin white of the winter above; but it was clear to me that never for one instant did Holmes forget the shadow which lay across him. In the homely Alpine villages or in the lonely mountain passes, I could tell by his quick glancing eyes and his sharp scrutiny of every face that passed us, that he was well convinced that, walk where we would, we could not walk ourselves clear of the danger which was dogging our footsteps.

Once, I remember, as we passed over the Gemmi, and walked along the border of the melancholy Daubensee, a large rock which had been dislodged from the ridge upon our right clattered down and roared into the lake behind us. In an instant Holmes had raced up on to the ridge, and, standing upon a lofty pinnacle, craned his neck in every direction. It was in vain that our guide assured him that a fall of stones was a common chance in the spring-time at that spot. He said nothing, but he smiled at me with the air of a man who sees the fulfillment of that which he had expected.

And yet for all his watchfulness he was never depressed. On the contrary, I can never recollect having seen him in such exuberant spirits. Again and again he recurred to the fact that if he could be assured that society was freed from Professor Moriarty he would cheerfully bring his own career to a conclusion.

“I think that I may go so far as to say, Watson, that I have not lived wholly in vain,” he remarked. “If my record were closed to-night I could still survey it with equanimity. The air of London is the sweeter for my presence. In over a thousand cases I am not aware that I have ever used my powers upon the wrong side. Of late I have been tempted to look into the problems furnished by nature rather than those more superficial ones for which our artificial state of society is responsible. Your memoirs will draw to an end, Watson, upon the day that I crown my career by the capture or extinction of the most dangerous and capable criminal in Europe.”

I shall be brief, and yet exact, in the little which remains for me to tell. It is not a subject on which I would willingly dwell, and yet I am conscious that a duty devolves upon me to omit no detail.

It was on the 3d of May that we reached the little village of Meiringen, where we put up at the Englischer Hof, then kept by Peter Steiler the elder. Our landlord was an intelligent man, and spoke excellent English, having served for three years as waiter at the Grosvenor Hotel in London. At his advice, on the afternoon of the 4th we set off together, with the intention of crossing the hills and spending the night at the hamlet of Rosenlaui. We had strict injunctions, however, on no account to pass the falls of Reichenbach, which are about half-way up the hill, without making a small detour to see them.

It is indeed, a fearful place. The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like the smoke from a burning house. The shaft into which the river hurls itself is an immense chasm, lined by glistening coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. The long sweep of green water roaring forever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing forever upward, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamor. We stood near the edge peering down at the gleam of the breaking water far below us against the black rocks, and listening to the half-human shout which came booming up with the spray out of the abyss.

The path has been cut half-way round the fall to afford a complete view, but it ends abruptly, and the traveler has to return as he came. We had turned to do so, when we saw a Swiss lad come running along it with a letter in his hand. It bore the mark of the hotel which we had just left, and was addressed to me by the landlord. It appeared that within a very few minutes of our leaving, an English lady had arrived who was in the last stage of consumption. She had wintered at Davos Platz, and was journeying now to join her friends at Lucerne, when a sudden hemorrhage had overtaken her. It was thought that she could hardly live a few hours, but it would be a great consolation to her to see an English doctor, and, if I would only return, etc. The good Steiler assured me in a postscript that he would himself look upon my compliance as a very great favor, since the lady absolutely refused to see a Swiss physician, and he could not but feel that he was incurring a great responsibility.

The appeal was one which could not be ignored. It was impossible to refuse the request of a fellow-countrywoman dying in a strange land. Yet I had my scruples about leaving Holmes. It was finally agreed, however, that he should retain the young Swiss messenger with him as guide and companion while I returned to Meiringen. My friend would stay some little time at the fall, he said, and would then walk slowly over the hill to Rosenlaui, where I was to rejoin him in the evening. As I turned away I saw Holmes, with his back against a rock and his arms folded, gazing down at the rush of the waters. It was the last that I was ever destined to see of him in this world.

When I was near the bottom of the descent I looked back. It was impossible, from that position, to see the fall, but I could see the curving path which winds over the shoulder of the hill and leads to it. Along this a man was, I remember, walking very rapidly.

I could see his black figure clearly outlined against the green behind him. I noted him, and the energy with which he walked but he passed from my mind again as I hurried on upon my errand.

It may have been a little over an hour before I reached Meiringen. Old Steiler was standing at the porch of his hotel.

“Well,” said I, as I came hurrying up, “I trust that she is no worse?”

A look of surprise passed over his face, and at the first quiver of his eyebrows my heart turned to lead in my breast.

“You did not write this?” I said, pulling the letter from my pocket. “There is no sick Englishwoman in the hotel?”

“Certainly not!” he cried. “But it has the hotel mark upon it! Ha, it must have been written by that tall Englishman who came in after you had gone. He said—”

But I waited for none of the landlord’s explanations. In a tingle of fear I was already running down the village street, and making for the path which I had so lately descended. It had taken me an hour to come down. For all my efforts two more had passed before I found myself at the fall of Reichenbach once more. There was Holmes’s Alpine-stock still leaning against the rock by which I had left him. But there was no sign of him, and it was in vain that I shouted. My only answer was my own voice reverberating in a rolling echo from the cliffs around me.

It was the sight of that Alpine-stock which turned me cold and sick. He had not gone to Rosenlaui, then. He had remained on that three-foot path, with sheer wall on one side and sheer drop on the other, until his enemy had overtaken him. The young Swiss had gone too. He had probably been in the pay of Moriarty, and had left the two men together. And then what had happened? Who was to tell us what had happened then?

I stood for a minute or two to collect myself, for I was dazed with the horror of the thing. Then I began to think of Holmes’s own methods and to try to practise them in reading this tragedy. It was, alas, only too easy to do. During our conversation we had not gone to the end of the path, and the Alpine-stock marked the place where we had stood. The blackish soil is kept forever soft by the incessant drift of spray, and a bird would leave its tread upon it. Two lines of footmarks were clearly marked along the farther end of the path, both leading away from me. There were none returning. A few yards from the end the soil was all ploughed up into a patch of mud, and the branches and ferns which fringed the chasm were torn and bedraggled. I lay upon my face and peered over with the spray spouting up all around me. It had darkened since I left, and now I could only see here and there the glistening of moisture upon the black walls, and far away down at the end of the shaft the gleam of the broken water. I shouted; but only the same half-human cry of the fall was borne back to my ears.

But it was destined that I should after all have a last word of greeting from my friend and comrade. I have said that his Alpine-stock had been left leaning against a rock which jutted on to the path. From the top of this bowlder the gleam of something bright caught my eye, and, raising my hand, I found that it came from the silver cigarette-case which he used to carry. As I took it up a small square of paper upon which it had lain fluttered down on to the ground. Unfolding it, I found that it consisted of three pages torn from his note-book and addressed to me. It was characteristic of the man that the direction was a precise, and the writing as firm and clear, as though it had been written in his study.

My dear Watson [it said], I write these few lines through the courtesy of Mr. Moriarty, who awaits my convenience for the final discussion of those questions which lie between us. He has been giving me a sketch of the methods by which he avoided the English police and kept himself informed of our movements. They certainly confirm the very high opinion which I had formed of his abilities. I am pleased to think that I shall be able to free society from any further effects of his presence, though I fear that it is at a cost which will give pain to my friends, and especially, my dear Watson, to you. I have already explained to you, however, that my career had in any case reached its crisis, and that no possible conclusion to it could be more congenial to me than this. Indeed, if I may make a full confession to you, I was quite convinced that the letter from Meiringen was a hoax, and I allowed you to depart on that errand under the persuasion that some development of this sort would follow. Tell Inspector Patterson that the papers which he needs to convict the gang are in pigeonhole M., done up in a blue envelope and inscribed “Moriarty.” I made every disposition of my property before leaving England, and handed it to my brother Mycroft. Pray give my greetings to Mrs. Watson, and believe me to be, my dear fellow,

Very sincerely yours,

Sherlock Holmes

A few words may suffice to tell the little that remains. An examination by experts leaves little doubt that a personal contest between the two men ended, as it could hardly fail to end in such a situation, in their reeling over, locked in each other’s arms. Any attempt at recovering the bodies was absolutely hopeless, and there, deep down in that dreadful caldron of swirling water and seething foam, will lie for all time the most dangerous criminal and the foremost champion of the law of their generation. The Swiss youth was never found again, and there can be no doubt that he was one of the numerous agents whom Moriarty kept in this employ. As to the gang, it will be within the memory of the public how completely the evidence which Holmes had accumulated exposed their organization, and how heavily the hand of the dead man weighed upon them. Of their terrible chief few details came out during the proceedings, and if I have now been compelled to make a clear statement of his career it is due to those injudicious champions who have endeavored to clear his memory by attacks upon him whom I shall ever regard as the best and the wisest man whom I have ever known.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

This the third of four crime novels featuring the Sherlock Holmes. Originally serialised in *The Strand Magazine* from August 1901 to April 1902, the novel is set mostly on Dartmoor in Devon in the West Country and tells the story of an attempted murder inspired by the legend of a fearsome, diabolical hound. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is now regarded by many critics as the best of the Holmes novels.

The narrative concerns Sir Charles Baskerville, who is found lying dead on the grounds of his country house, Baskerville Hall. Although the cause of death is believed to be a heart attack, the superstition of a Baskerville family curse had troubled Sir Charles in his final days. Due to the wrongdoing of an ancestor, the curse foretells the death of the Baskerville family by a ghostly hellhound. Following Sir Charles' death, footprints of a "gigantic hound" were found near to his body and so Sherlock Holmes is asked to investigate.

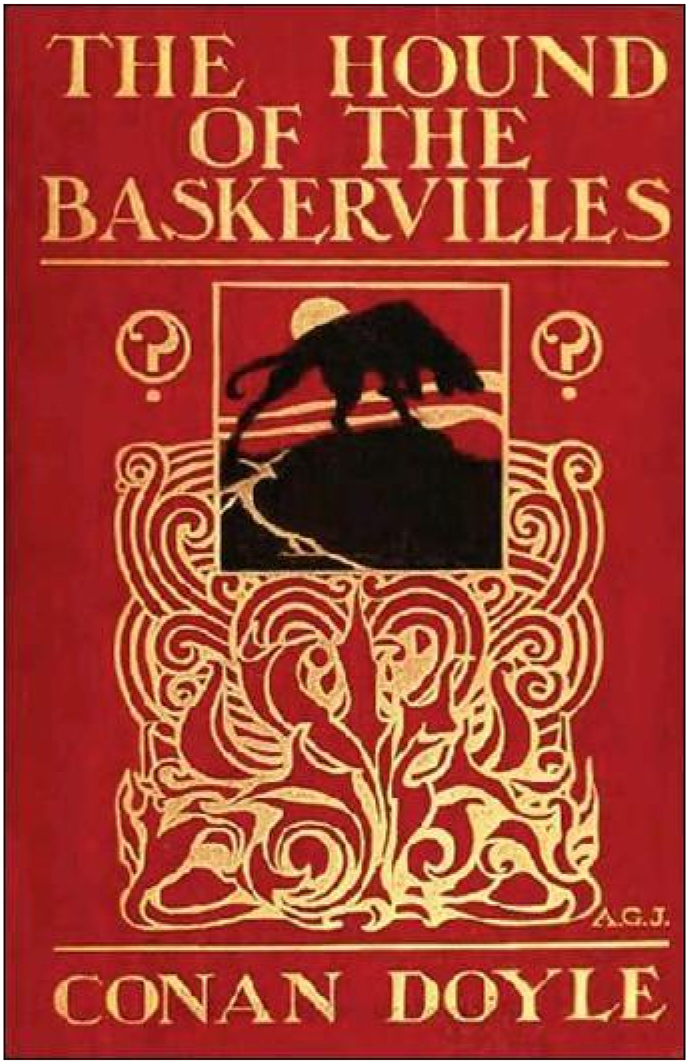
THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES
A.G.J.
CONAN DOYLE

The first edition

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

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CHAPTER 1

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a “Penang lawyer.” Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly an inch across. “To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the C.C.H.,” was engraved upon it, with the date “1884.” It was just such a stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry — dignified, solid, and reassuring.

“Well, Watson, what do you make of it?”

Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of my occupation.

“How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head.”

“I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee-pot in front of me,” said he. “But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor’s stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it.”

“I think,” said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, “that Dr. Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man, well-esteemed since those who know him give him this mark of their appreciation.”

“Good!” said Holmes. “Excellent!”

“I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot.”

“Why so?”

“Because this stick, though originally a very handsome one has been so knocked about that I can hardly imagine a town practitioner carrying it. The thick-iron ferrule is worn down, so it is evident that he has done a great amount of walking with it.”

“Perfectly sound!” said Holmes.

“And then again, there is the ‘friends of the C.C.H.’ I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small presentation in return.”

“Really, Watson, you excel yourself,” said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette. “I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt.”

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eyes. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.

“Interesting, though elementary,” said he as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. “There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick. It gives us the basis for several deductions.”

“Has anything escaped me?” I asked with some self-importance. “I trust that there is nothing of consequence which I have overlooked?”

“I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal.”

“Then I was right.”

“To that extent.”

“But that was all.”

“No, no, my dear Watson, not all — by no means all. I would suggest, for example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials ‘C.C.’ are placed before that hospital the words ‘Charing Cross’ very naturally suggest themselves.”

“You may be right.”

“The probability lies in that direction. And if we take this as a working hypothesis we have a fresh basis from which to start our construction of this unknown visitor.”

“Well, then, supposing that ‘C.C.H.’ does stand for ‘Charing Cross Hospital,’ what further inferences may we draw?”

“Do none suggest themselves? You know my methods. Apply them!”

“I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practised in town before going to the country.”

“I think that we might venture a little farther than this. Look at it in this light. On what occasion would it be most probable that such a presentation would be made? When would his friends unite to give him a pledge of their good will? Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start in practice for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. Is it, then, stretching our inference too far to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change?”

“It certainly seems probable.”

“Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the staff of the hospital, since only a man well-established in a London practice could hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country. What was he, then? If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff he could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician — little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago — the date is on the stick. So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff.”

I laughed incredulously as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his settee and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

“As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you,” said I, “but at least it is not difficult to find out a few particulars about the man’s age and professional career.” From my small medical shelf I took down the Medical Directory and turned up the name. There were several Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. I read his record aloud.

"Mortimer, James, M.R.C.S., 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon. House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital. Winner of the Jackson prize for Comparative Pathology, with essay entitled 'Is Disease a Reversion?' Corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society. Author of 'Some Freaks of Atavism' (Lancet 1882). 'Do We Progress?' (Journal of Psychology, March, 1883). Medical Officer for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley, and High Barrow."

"No mention of that local hunt, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous smile, "but a country doctor, as you very astutely observed. I think that I am fairly justified in my inferences. As to the adjectives, I said, if I remember right, amiable, unambitious, and absent-minded. It is my experience that it is only an amiable man in this world who receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his stick and not his visiting-card after waiting an hour in your room."

"And the dog?"

"Has been in the habit of carrying this stick behind his master. Being a heavy stick the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of his teeth are very plainly visible. The dog's jaw, as shown in the space between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not broad enough for a mastiff. It may have been — yes, by Jove, it is a curly-haired spaniel."

He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. Now he halted in the recess of the window. There was such a ring of conviction in his voice that I glanced up in surprise.

"My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?"

"For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very door-step, and there is the ring of its owner. Don't move, I beg you, Watson. He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be of assistance to me. Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill. What does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? Come in!"

The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected a typical country practitioner. He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak, which jutted out between two keen, gray eyes, set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. He was clad in a professional but rather slovenly fashion, for his frock-coat was dingy and his trousers frayed. Though young, his long back was already bowed, and he walked with a forward thrust of his head and a general air of peering benevolence. As he entered his eyes fell upon the stick in Holmes’s hand, and he ran towards it with an exclamation of joy. “I am so very glad,” said he. “I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. I would not lose that stick for the world.”

“A presentation, I see,” said Holmes.

“Yes, sir.”

“From Charing Cross Hospital?”

“From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage.”

“Dear, dear, that’s bad!” said Holmes, shaking his head.

Dr. Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment.

“Why was it bad?”

“Only that you have disarranged our little deductions. Your marriage, you say?”

“Yes, sir. I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of a consulting practice. It was necessary to make a home of my own.”

“Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all,” said Holmes. “And now, Dr. James Mortimer —— —”

“Mister, sir, Mister — a humble M.R.C.S.”

“And a man of precise mind, evidently.”

“A dabbler in science, Mr. Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores of the great unknown ocean. I presume that it is Mr. Sherlock Holmes whom I am addressing and not —— —”

“No, this is my friend Dr. Watson.”

“Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend. You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.”

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. “You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine,” said he. “I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one.”

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion.

“I presume, sir,” said he at last, “that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honour to call here last night and again to-day?”

“No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognised that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognising, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe —— —”

“Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?” asked Holmes with some asperity.

“To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.”

“Then had you not better consult him?”

“I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. But as a practical man of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone. I trust, sir, that I have not inadvertently —— —”

“Just a little,” said Holmes. “I think, Dr. Mortimer, you would do wisely if without more ado you would kindly tell me plainly what the exact nature of the problem is in which you demand my assistance.”

CHAPTER 2

The Curse of the Baskervilles

“I have in my pocket a manuscript,” said Dr. James Mortimer.

“I observed it as you entered the room,” said Holmes.

“It is an old manuscript.”

“Early eighteenth century, unless it is a forgery.”

“How can you say that, sir?”

“You have presented an inch or two of it to my examination all the time that you have been talking. It would be a poor expert who could not give the date of a document within a decade or so. You may possibly have read my little monograph upon the subject. I put that at 1730.”

“The exact date is 1742.” Dr. Mortimer drew it from his breast-pocket. “This family paper was committed to my care by Sir Charles Baskerville, whose sudden and tragic death some three months ago created so much excitement in Devonshire. I may say that I was his personal friend as well as his medical attendant. He was a strong-minded man, sir, shrewd, practical, and as unimaginative as I am myself. Yet he took this document very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such an end as did eventually overtake him.”

Holmes stretched out his hand for the manuscript and flattened it upon his knee.

“You will observe, Watson, the alternative use of the long s and the short. It is one of several indications which enabled me to fix the date.”

I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the faded script. At the head was written: “Baskerville Hall,” and below in large, scrawling figures: “1742.”

“It appears to be a statement of some sort.”

“Yes, it is a statement of a certain legend which runs in the Baskerville family.”

“But I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon which you wish to consult me?”

“Most modern. A most practical, pressing matter, which must be decided within twenty-four hours. But the manuscript is short and is intimately connected with the affair. With your permission I will read it to you.”

Holmes leaned back in his chair, placed his finger-tips together, and closed his eyes, with an air of resignation. Dr. Mortimer turned the manuscript to the light and read in a high, cracking voice the following curious, old-world narrative: —

“Of the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles there have been many statements, yet as I come in a direct line from Hugo Baskerville, and as I had the story from my father, who also had it from his, I have set it down with all belief that it occurred even as is here set forth. And I would have you believe, my sons, that the same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously forgive it, and that no ban is so heavy but that by prayer and repentance it may be removed. Learn then from this story not to fear the fruits of the past, but rather to be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not again be loosed to our undoing.

“Know then that in the time of the Great Rebellion (the history of which by the learned Lord Clarendon I most earnestly commend to your attention) this Manor of Baskerville was held by Hugo of that name, nor can it be gainsaid that he was a most wild, profane, and godless man. This, in truth, his neighbours might have pardoned, seeing that saints have never flourished in those parts, but there was in him a certain wanton and cruel humour which made his name a byword through the West. It chanced that this Hugo came to love (if, indeed, so dark a passion may be known under so bright a name) the daughter of a yeoman who held lands near the Baskerville estate. But the young maiden, being discreet and of good repute, would ever avoid him, for she feared his evil name. So it came to pass that one Michaelmas this Hugo, with five or six of his idle and wicked companions, stole down upon the farm and carried off the maiden, her father and brothers being from home, as he well knew. When they had brought her to the Hall the maiden was placed in an upper chamber, while Hugo and his friends sat down to a long carouse, as was their nightly custom. Now, the poor lass upstairs was like to have her wits turned at the singing and shouting and terrible oaths which came up to her from below, for they say that the words used by Hugo Baskerville, when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who said them. At last in the stress of her fear she did that which might have daunted the bravest or most active man, for by the aid of the growth of ivy which covered (and still covers) the south wall she came down from under the eaves, and so homeward across the moor, there being three leagues betwixt the Hall and her father’s farm.

“It chanced that some little time later Hugo left his guests to carry food and drink — with other worse things, perchance — to his captive, and so found the cage empty and the bird escaped. Then, as it would seem, he became as one that hath a devil, for, rushing down the stairs into the dining-hall, he sprang upon the great table, flagons and trenchers flying before him, and he cried aloud before all the company that he would that very night render his body and soul to the Powers of Evil if he might but overtake the wench. And while the revellers stood aghast at the fury of the man, one more wicked or, it may be, more drunken than the rest, cried out that they should put the hounds upon her. Whereat Hugo ran from the house, crying to his grooms that they should saddle his mare and unkennel the pack, and giving the hounds a kerchief of the maid’s, he swung them to the line, and so off full cry in the moonlight over the moor.

“Now, for some space the revellers stood agape, unable to understand all that had been done in such haste. But anon their bemused wits awoke to the nature of the deed which was like to be done upon the moorlands. Everything was now in an uproar, some calling for their pistols, some for their horses, and some for another flask of wine. But at length some sense came back to their crazed minds, and the whole of them, thirteen in number, took horse and started in pursuit. The moon shone clear above them, and they rode swiftly abreast, taking that course which the maid must needs have taken if she were to reach her own home.

“They had gone a mile or two when they passed one of the night shepherds upon the moorlands, and they cried to him to know if he had seen the hunt. And the man, as the story goes, was so crazed with fear that he could scarce speak, but at last he said that he had indeed seen the unhappy maiden, with the hounds upon her track. ‘But I have seen more than that,’ said he, ‘for Hugo Baskerville passed me upon his black mare, and there ran mute behind him such a hound of hell as God forbid should ever be at my heels.’ So the drunken squires cursed the shepherd and rode onward. But soon their skins turned cold, for there came a galloping across the moor, and the black mare, dabbled with white froth, went past with trailing bridle and empty saddle. Then the revellers rode close together, for a great fear was on them, but they still followed over the moor, though each, had he been alone, would have been right glad to have turned his horse’s head. Riding slowly in this fashion they came at last upon the hounds. These, though known for their valour and their breed, were whimpering in a cluster at the head of a deep dip or goyal, as we call it, upon the moor, some slinking away and some, with starting hackles and staring eyes, gazing down the narrow valley before them.

“The company had come to a halt, more sober men, as you may guess, than when they started. The most of them would by no means advance, but three of them, the boldest, or it may be the most drunken, rode forward down the goyal. Now, it opened into a broad space in which stood two of those great stones, still to be seen there, which were set by certain forgotten peoples in the days of old. The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen, dead of fear and of fatigue. But it was not the sight of her body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair upon the heads of these three daredevil roysterers, but it was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. And even as they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them, the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming, across the moor. One, it is said, died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days.

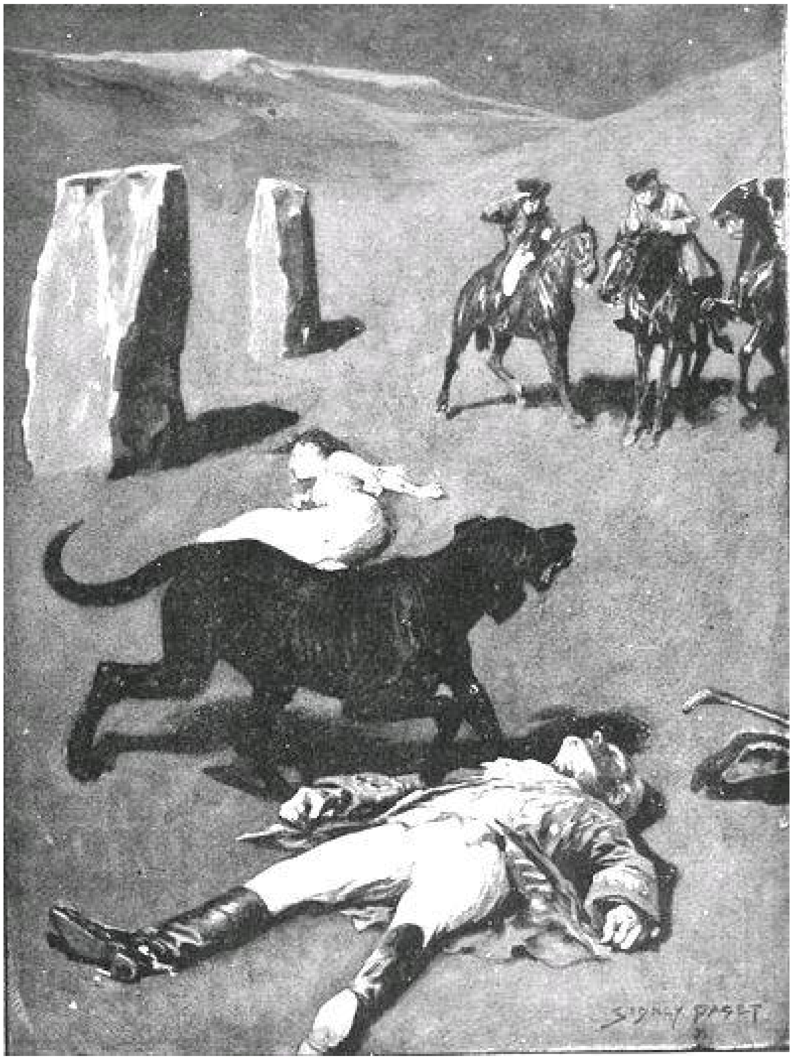

“Such is the tale, my sons, of the coming of the hound which is said to have plagued the family so sorely ever since. If I have set it down it is because that which is clearly known hath less terror than that which is but hinted at and guessed. Nor can it be denied that many of the family have been unhappy in their deaths, which have been sudden, bloody, and mysterious. Yet may we shelter ourselves in the infinite goodness of Providence, which would not forever punish the innocent beyond that third or fourth generation which is threatened in Holy Writ. To that Providence, my sons, I hereby commend you, and I counsel you by way of caution to forbear from crossing the moor in those dark hours when the powers of evil are exalted.

“[This from Hugo Baskerville to his sons Rodger and John, with instructions that they say nothing thereof to their sister Elizabeth.]”

When Dr. Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared across at Mr. Sherlock

Holmes. The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

“Well?” said he.

“Do you not find it interesting?”

“To a collector of fairy tales.”

Dr. Mortimer drew a folded newspaper out of his pocket.

“Now, Mr. Holmes, we will give you something a little more recent. This is the Devon County Chronicle of May 14th of this year. It is a short account of the facts elicited at the death of Sir Charles Baskerville which occurred a few days before that date.”

My friend leaned a little forward and his expression became intent. Our visitor readjusted his glasses and began: —

“The recent sudden death of Sir Charles Baskerville, whose name has been mentioned as the probable Liberal candidate for Mid-Devon at the next election, has cast a gloom over the county. Though Sir Charles had resided at Baskerville Hall for a comparatively short period his amiability of character and extreme generosity had won the affection and respect of all who had been brought into contact with him. In these days of *nouveaux riches* it is refreshing to find a case where the scion of an old county family which has fallen upon evil days is able to make his own fortune and to bring it back with him to restore the fallen grandeur of his line. Sir Charles, as is well known, made large sums of money in South African speculation. More wise than those who go on until the wheel turns against them, he realised his gains and returned to England with them. It is only two years since he took up his residence at Baskerville Hall, and it is common talk how large were those schemes of reconstruction and improvement which have been interrupted by his death. Being himself childless, it was his openly expressed desire that the whole country-side should, within his own lifetime, profit by his good fortune, and many will have personal reasons for bewailing his untimely end. His generous donations to local and county charities have been frequently chronicled in these columns.

“The circumstances connected with the death of Sir Charles cannot be said to have been entirely cleared up by the inquest, but at least enough has been done to dispose of those rumours to which local superstition has given rise. There is no reason whatever to suspect foul play, or to imagine that death could be from any but natural causes. Sir Charles was a widower, and a man who may be said to have been in some ways of an eccentric habit of mind. In spite of his considerable wealth he was simple in his personal tastes, and his indoor servants at Baskerville Hall consisted of a married couple named Barrymore, the husband acting as butler and the wife as housekeeper. Their evidence, corroborated by that of several friends, tends to show that Sir Charles's health has for some time been impaired, and points especially to some affection of the heart, manifesting itself in changes of colour, breathlessness, and acute attacks of nervous depression. Dr. James Mortimer, the friend and medical attendant of the deceased, has given evidence to the same effect.

"The facts of the case are simple. Sir Charles Baskerville was in the habit every night before going to bed of walking down the famous Yew Alley of Baskerville Hall. The evidence of the Barrymores shows that this had been his custom. On the 4th of May Sir Charles had declared his intention of starting next day for London, and had ordered Barrymore to prepare his luggage. That night he went out as usual for his nocturnal walk, in the course of which he was in the habit of smoking a cigar. He never returned. At twelve o'clock Barrymore, finding the hall door still open, became alarmed, and, lighting a lantern, went in search of his master. The day had been wet, and Sir Charles's footmarks were easily traced down the Alley. Half-way down this walk there is a gate which leads out on to the moor. There were indications that Sir Charles had stood for some little time here. He then proceeded down the Alley, and it was at the far end of it that his body was discovered. One fact which has not been explained is the statement of Barrymore that his master's footprints altered their character from the time that he passed the moor-gate, and that he appeared from thence onward to have been walking upon his toes. One Murphy, a gipsy horse-dealer, was on the moor at no great distance at the time, but he appears by his own confession to have been the worse for drink. He declares that he heard cries, but is unable to state from what direction they came. No signs of violence were to be discovered upon Sir Charles's person, and though the doctor's evidence pointed to an almost incredible facial distortion — so great that Dr. Mortimer refused at first to believe that it was indeed his friend and patient who lay before him — it was explained that that is a symptom which is not unusual in cases of dyspnoea and death from cardiac exhaustion. This explanation was borne out by the post-mortem examination, which showed long-standing organic disease, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. It is well that this is so, for it is obviously of the utmost importance that Sir

Charles's heir should settle at the Hall and continue the good work which has been so sadly interrupted. Had the prosaic finding of the coroner not finally put an end to the romantic stories which have been whispered in connection with the affair, it might have been difficult to find a tenant for Baskerville Hall. It is understood that the next of kin is Mr. Henry Baskerville, if he be still alive, the son of Sir Charles Baskerville's younger brother. The young man when last heard of was in America, and inquiries are being instituted with a view to informing him of his good fortune."

Dr. Mortimer refolded his paper and replaced it in his pocket.

"Those are the public facts, Mr. Holmes, in connection with the death of Sir Charles Baskerville."

"I must thank you," said Sherlock Holmes, "for calling my attention to a case which certainly presents some features of interest. I had observed some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied by that little affair of the Vatican cameos, and in my anxiety to oblige the Pope I lost touch with several interesting English cases. This article, you say, contains all the public facts?"

"It does."

"Then let me have the private ones." He leaned back, put his finger-tips together, and assumed his most impassive and judicial expression.

"In doing so," said Dr. Mortimer, who had begun to show signs of some strong emotion, "I am telling that which I have not confided to anyone. My motive for withholding it from the coroner's inquiry is that a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition. I had the further motive that Baskerville Hall, as the paper says, would certainly remain untenanted if anything were done to increase its already rather grim reputation. For both these reasons I thought that I was justified in telling rather less than I knew, since no practical good could result from it, but with you there is no reason why I should not be perfectly frank.

"The moor is very sparsely inhabited, and those who live near each other are thrown very much together. For this reason I saw a good deal of Sir Charles Baskerville. With the exception of Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, and Mr. Stapleton, the naturalist, there are no other men of education within many miles. Sir Charles was a retiring man, but the chance of his illness brought us together, and a community of interests in science kept us so. He had brought back much scientific information from South Africa, and many a charming evening we have spent together discussing the comparative anatomy of the Bushman and the Hottentot.

“Within the last few months it became increasingly plain to me that Sir Charles’s nervous system was strained to the breaking point. He had taken this legend which I have read you exceedingly to heart — so much so that, although he would walk in his own grounds, nothing would induce him to go out upon the moor at night. Incredible as it may appear to you, Mr. Holmes, he was honestly convinced that a dreadful fate overhung his family, and certainly the records which he was able to give of his ancestors were not encouraging. The idea of some ghastly presence constantly haunted him, and on more than one occasion he has asked me whether I had on my medical journeys at night ever seen any strange creature or heard the baying of a hound. The latter question he put to me several times, and always with a voice which vibrated with excitement.

“I can well remember driving up to his house in the evening some three weeks before the fatal event. He chanced to be at his hall door. I had descended from my gig and was standing in front of him, when I saw his eyes fix themselves over my shoulder, and stare past me with an expression of the most dreadful horror. I whisked round and had just time to catch a glimpse of something which I took to be a large black calf passing at the head of the drive. So excited and alarmed was he that I was compelled to go down to the spot where the animal had been and look around for it. It was gone, however, and the incident appeared to make the worst impression upon his mind. I stayed with him all the evening, and it was on that occasion, to explain the emotion which he had shown, that he confided to my keeping that narrative which I read to you when first I came. I mention this small episode because it assumes some importance in view of the tragedy which followed, but I was convinced at the time that the matter was entirely trivial and that his excitement had no justification.

“It was at my advice that Sir Charles was about to go to London. His heart was, I knew, affected, and the constant anxiety in which he lived, however chimerical the cause of it might be, was evidently having a serious effect upon his health. I thought that a few months among the distractions of town would send him back a new man. Mr. Stapleton, a mutual friend who was much concerned at his state of health, was of the same opinion. At the last instant came this terrible catastrophe.

“On the night of Sir Charles’s death Barrymore the butler, who made the discovery, sent Perkins the groom on horseback to me, and as I was sitting up late I was able to reach Baskerville Hall within an hour of the event. I checked and corroborated all the facts which were mentioned at the inquest. I followed the footsteps down the Yew Alley, I saw the spot at the moor-gate where he seemed to have waited, I remarked the change in the shape of the prints after that point, I noted that there were no other footsteps save those of Barrymore on the soft gravel, and finally I carefully examined the body, which had not been touched until my arrival. Sir Charles lay on his face, his arms out, his fingers dug into the ground, and his features convulsed with some strong emotion to such an extent that I could hardly have sworn to his identity. There was certainly no physical injury of any kind. But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did — some little distance off, but fresh and clear.”

“Footprints?”

“Footprints.”

“A man’s or a woman’s?”

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered: —

“Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!”

CHAPTER 3

The Problem

I confess at these words a shudder passed through me. There was a thrill in the doctor’s voice which showed that he was himself deeply moved by that which he told us. Holmes leaned forward in his excitement and his eyes had the hard, dry glitter which shot from them when he was keenly interested.

“You saw this?”

“As clearly as I see you.”

“And you said nothing?”

“What was the use?”

“How was it that no one else saw it?”

“The marks were some twenty yards from the body and no one gave them a thought. I don’t suppose I should have done so had I not known this legend.”

“There are many sheep-dogs on the moor?”

“No doubt, but this was no sheep-dog.”

“You say it was large?”

“Enormous.”

“But it had not approached the body?”

“No.”

“What sort of night was it?’

“Damp and raw.”

“But not actually raining?”

“No.”

“What is the Alley like?”

“There are two lines of old yew hedge, twelve feet high and impenetrable. The walk in the centre is about eight feet across.”

“Is there anything between the hedges and the walk?”

“Yes, there is a strip of grass about six feet broad on either side.”

“I understand that the yew hedge is penetrated at one point by a gate?”

“Yes, the wicket-gate which leads on to the moor.”

“Is there any other opening?”

“None.”

“So that to reach the Yew Alley one either has to come down it from the house or else to enter it by the moor-gate?”

“There is an exit through a summer-house at the far end.”

“Had Sir Charles reached this?”

“No; he lay about fifty yards from it.”

“Now, tell me, Dr. Mortimer — and this is important — the marks which you saw were on the path and not on the grass?”

“No marks could show on the grass.”

“Were they on the same side of the path as the moor-gate?”

“Yes; they were on the edge of the path on the same side as the moor-gate.”

“You interest me exceedingly. Another point. Was the wicket-gate closed?”

“Closed and padlocked.”

“How high was it?”

“About four feet high.”

“Then anyone could have got over it?”

“Yes.”

“And what marks did you see by the wicket-gate?”

“None in particular.”

“Good heaven! Did no one examine?”

“Yes, I examined myself.”

“And found nothing?”

“It was all very confused. Sir Charles had evidently stood there for five or ten minutes.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because the ash had twice dropped from his cigar.”

“Excellent! This is a colleague, Watson, after our own heart. But the marks?”

“He had left his own marks all over that small patch of gravel. I could discern no others.”

Sherlock Holmes struck his hand against his knee with an impatient gesture.

“If I had only been there!” he cried. “It is evidently a case of extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to the scientific expert. That gravel page upon which I might have read so much has been long ere this smudged by the rain and defaced by the clogs of curious peasants. Oh, Dr. Mortimer, Dr. Mortimer, to think that you should not have called me in! You have indeed much to answer for.”

“I could not call you in, Mr. Holmes, without disclosing these facts to the world, and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so. Besides, besides—”

“Why do you hesitate?”

“There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.”

“You mean that the thing is supernatural?”

“I did not positively say so.”

“No, but you evidently think it.”

“Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature.”

“For example?”

“I find that before the terrible event occurred several people had seen a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science. They all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral. I have cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman, one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer, who all tell the same story of this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the legend. I assure you that there is a reign of terror in the district, and that it is a hardy man who will cross the moor at night.”

“And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?”

“I do not know what to believe.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world,” said he. “In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task. Yet you must admit that the footmark is material.”

“The original hound was material enough to tug a man’s throat out, and yet he was diabolical as well.”

“I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists. But now, Dr. Mortimer, tell me this. If you hold these views, why have you come to consult me at all? You tell me in the same breath that it is useless to investigate Sir Charles’s death, and that you desire me to do it.”

"I did not say that I desired you to do it."

"Then, how can I assist you?"

"By advising me as to what I should do with Sir Henry Baskerville, who arrives at Waterloo Station" — Dr. Mortimer looked at his watch—"in exactly one hour and a quarter."

"He being the heir?"

"Yes. On the death of Sir Charles we inquired for this young gentleman and found that he had been farming in Canada. From the accounts which have reached us he is an excellent fellow in every way. I speak not as a medical man but as a trustee and executor of Sir Charles's will."

"There is no other claimant, I presume?"

"None. The only other kinsman whom we have been able to trace was Rodger Baskerville, the youngest of three brothers of whom poor Sir Charles was the elder. The second brother, who died young, is the father of this lad Henry. The third, Rodger, was the black sheep of the family. He came of the old masterful Baskerville strain, and was the very image, they tell me, of the family picture of old Hugo. He made England too hot to hold him, fled to Central America, and died there in 1876 of yellow fever. Henry is the last of the Baskervilles. In one hour and five minutes I meet him at Waterloo Station. I have had a wire that he arrived at Southampton this morning. Now, Mr. Holmes, what would you advise me to do with him?"

"Why should he not go to the home of his fathers?"

"It seems natural, does it not? And yet, consider that every Baskerville who goes there meets with an evil fate. I feel sure that if Sir Charles could have spoken with me before his death he would have warned me against bringing this, the last of the old race, and the heir to great wealth, to that deadly place. And yet it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak country-side depends upon his presence. All the good work which has been done by Sir Charles will crash to the ground if there is no tenant of the Hall. I fear lest I should be swayed too much by my own obvious interest in the matter, and that is why I bring the case before you and ask for your advice."

Holmes considered for a little time.

"Put into plain words, the matter is this," said he. "In your opinion there is a diabolical agency which makes Dartmoor an unsafe abode for a Baskerville — that is your opinion?"

“At least I might go the length of saying that there is some evidence that this may be so.”

“Exactly. But surely, if your supernatural theory be correct, it could work the young man evil in London as easily as in Devonshire. A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing.”

“You put the matter more flippantly, Mr. Holmes, than you would probably do if you were brought into personal contact with these things. Your advice, then, as I understand it, is that the young man will be as safe in Devonshire as in London. He comes in fifty minutes. What would you recommend?”

“I recommend, sir, that you take a cab, call off your spaniel who is scratching at my front door, and proceed to Waterloo to meet Sir Henry Baskerville.”

“And then?”

“And then you will say nothing to him at all until I have made up my mind about the matter.”

“How long will it take you to make up your mind?”

“Twenty-four hours. At ten o’clock to-morrow, Dr. Mortimer, I will be much obliged to you if you will call upon me here, and it will be of help to me in my plans for the future if you will bring Sir Henry Baskerville with you.”

“I will do so, Mr. Holmes.” He scribbled the appointment on his shirtcuff and hurried off in his strange, peering, absent-minded fashion. Holmes stopped him at the head of the stair.

“Only one more question, Dr. Mortimer. You say that before Sir Charles Baskerville’s death several people saw this apparition upon the moor?”

“Three people did.”

“Did any see it after?”

“I have not heard of any.”

“Thank you. Good morning.”

Holmes returned to his seat with that quiet look of inward satisfaction which meant that he had a congenial task before him.

“Going out, Watson?”

“Unless I can help you.”

“No, my dear fellow, it is at the hour of action that I turn to you for aid. But this is splendid, really unique from some points of view. When you pass

Bradley’s, would you ask him to send up a pound of the strongest shag tobacco? Thank you. It would be as well if you could make it convenient not to return before evening. Then I should be very glad to compare impressions as to this most interesting problem which has been submitted to us this morning.”

I knew that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for my friend in those hours of intense mental concentration during which he weighed every particle of evidence, constructed alternative theories, balanced one against the other, and made up his mind as to which points were essential and which immaterial. I therefore spent the day at my club and did not return to Baker Street until evening. It was nearly nine o’clock when I found myself in the sitting-room once more.

My first impression as I opened the door was that a fire had broken out, for the room was so filled with smoke that the light of the lamp upon the table was blurred by it. As I entered, however, my fears were set at rest, for it was the acrid fumes of strong coarse tobacco which took me by the throat and set me coughing. Through the haze I had a vague vision of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips. Several rolls of paper lay around him.

“Caught cold, Watson?” said he.

“No, it’s this poisonous atmosphere.”

“I suppose it is pretty thick, now that you mention it.”

“Thick! It is intolerable.”

“Open the window, then! You have been at your club all day, I perceive.”

“My dear Holmes!”

“Am I right?”

“Certainly, but how?”

He laughed at my bewildered expression.

“There is a delightful freshness about you, Watson, which makes it a pleasure to exercise any small powers which I possess at your expense. A gentleman goes forth on a showery and miry day. He returns immaculate in the evening with the gloss still on his hat and his boots. He has been a fixture therefore all day. He is not a man with intimate friends. Where, then, could he have been? Is it not obvious?”

“Well, it is rather obvious.”

“The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes. Where do you think that I have been?”

“A fixture also.”

“On the contrary, I have been to Devonshire.”

“In spirit?”

“Exactly. My body has remained in this arm-chair and has, I regret to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco. After you left I sent down to Stamford’s for the Ordnance map of this portion of the moor, and my spirit has hovered over it all day. I flatter myself that I could find my way about.”

“A large scale map, I presume?”

“Very large.” He unrolled one section and held it over his knee. “Here you have the particular district which concerns us. That is Baskerville Hall in the middle.”

“With a wood round it?”

“Exactly. I fancy the Yew Alley, though not marked under that name, must stretch along this line, with the moor, as you perceive, upon the right of it. This small clump of buildings here is the hamlet of Grimpen, where our friend Dr. Mortimer has his headquarters. Within a radius of five miles there are, as you see, only a very few scattered dwellings. Here is Lafter Hall, which was mentioned in the narrative. There is a house indicated here which may be the residence of the naturalist — Stapleton, if I remember right, was his name. Here are two moorland farm-houses, High Tor and Foulmire. Then fourteen miles away the great convict prison of Princetown. Between and around these scattered points extends the desolate, lifeless moor. This, then, is the stage upon which tragedy has been played, and upon which we may help to play it again.”

“It must be a wild place.”

“Yes, the setting is a worthy one. If the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men — —”

“Then you are yourself inclining to the supernatural explanation.”

“The devil’s agents may be of flesh and blood, may they not? There are two questions waiting for us at the outset. The one is whether any crime has been committed at all; the second is, what is the crime and how was it committed? Of course, if Dr. Mortimer’s surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. I think we’ll shut that window again, if you don’t mind. It is a singular thing, but I find that a concentrated atmosphere helps a concentration of thought. I have not pushed it to the length of getting into a box to think, but that is the logical outcome of my convictions. Have you turned the case over in your mind?”

“Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course of the day.”

“What do you make of it?”

“It is very bewildering.”

“It has certainly a character of its own. There are points of distinction about it. That change in the footprints, for example. What do you make of that?”

“Mortimer said that the man had walked on tiptoe down that portion of the alley.”

“He only repeated what some fool had said at the inquest. Why should a man walk on tiptoe down the alley?”

“What then?”

“He was running, Watson — running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart and fell dead upon his face.”

“Running from what?”

“There lies our problem. There are indications that the man was crazed with fear before ever he began to run.”

“How can you say that?”

“I am presuming that the cause of his fears came to him across the moor. If that were so, and it seems most probable, only a man who had lost his wits would have run from the house instead of towards it. If the gipsy’s evidence may be taken as true, he ran with cries for help in the direction where help was least likely to be. Then, again, whom was he waiting for that night, and why was he waiting for him in the Yew Alley rather than in his own house?”

“You think that he was waiting for someone?”

“The man was elderly and infirm. We can understand his taking an evening stroll, but the ground was damp and the night inclement. Is it natural that he should stand for five or ten minutes, as Dr. Mortimer, with more practical sense than I should have given him credit for, deduced from the cigar ash?”

“But he went out every evening.”

“I think it unlikely that he waited at the moor-gate every evening. On the contrary, the evidence is that he avoided the moor. That night he waited there. It was the night before he made his departure for London. The thing takes shape, Watson. It becomes coherent. Might I ask you to hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought upon this business until we have had the advantage of meeting Dr. Mortimer and Sir Henry Baskerville in the morning.”

CHAPTER 4

Sir Henry Baskerville

Our breakfast-table was cleared early, and Holmes waited in his dressing-gown for the promised interview. Our clients were punctual to their appointment, for the clock had just struck ten when Dr. Mortimer was shown up, followed by the young baronet. The latter was a small, alert, dark-eyed man about thirty years of age, very sturdily built, with thick black eyebrows and a strong, pugnacious face. He wore a ruddy-tinted tweed suit and had the weather-beaten appearance of one who has spent most of his time in the open air, and yet there was something in his steady eye and the quiet assurance of his bearing which indicated the gentleman.

“This is Sir Henry Baskerville,” said Dr. Mortimer.

“Why, yes,” said he, “and the strange thing is, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, that if my friend here had not proposed coming round to you this morning I should have come on my own account. I understand that you think out little puzzles, and I’ve had one this morning which wants more thinking out than I am able to give it.”

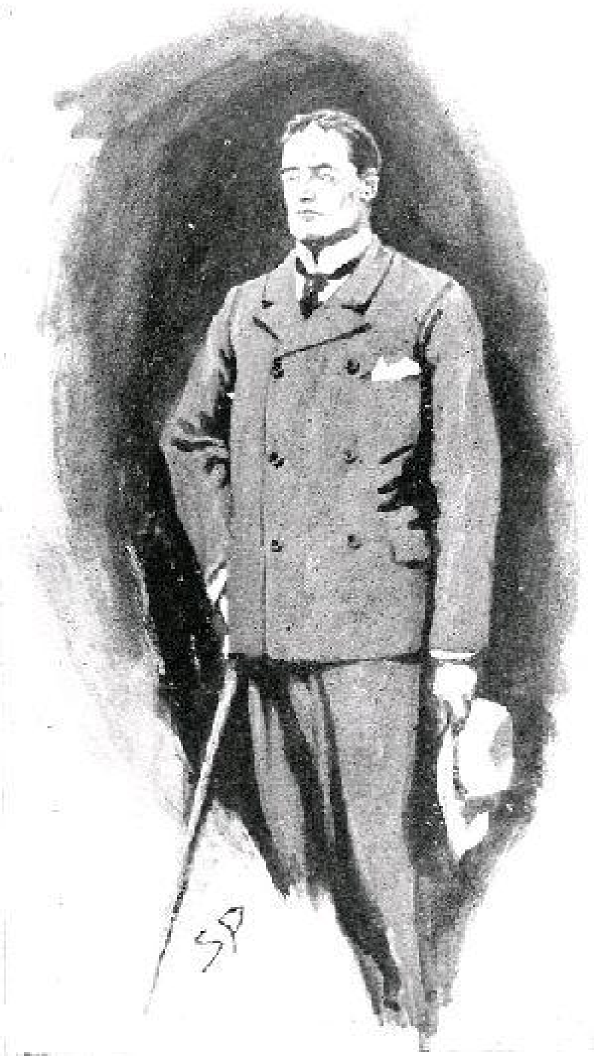

“Pray take a seat, Sir Henry. Do I understand you to say that you have yourself had some remarkable experience since you arrived in London?”

“Nothing of much importance, Mr. Holmes. Only a joke, as like as not. It was this letter, if you can call it a letter, which reached me this morning.”

He laid an envelope upon the table, and we all bent over it. It was of common quality, grayish in colour. The address, “Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel,” was printed in rough characters; the postmark “Charing Cross,” and the date of posting the preceding evening.

“Who knew that you were going to the Northumberland Hotel?” asked Holmes, glancing keenly across at our visitor.

“No one could have known. We only decided after I met Dr. Mortimer.”

“But Dr. Mortimer was no doubt already stopping there?”

“No, I had been staying with a friend,” said the doctor. “There was no possible indication that we intended to go to this hotel.”

"Hum! Someone seems to be very deeply interested in your movements." Out of the envelope he took a half-sheet of foolscap paper folded into four. This he opened and spread flat upon the table. Across the middle of it a single sentence had been formed by the expedient of pasting printed words upon it. It ran: "As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor." The word "moor" only was printed in ink.

"Now," said Sir Henry Baskerville, "perhaps you will tell me, Mr. Holmes, what in thunder is the meaning of that, and who it is that takes so much interest in my affairs?"

"What do you make of it, Dr. Mortimer? You must allow that there is nothing supernatural about this, at any rate?"

"No, sir, but it might very well come from someone who was convinced that the business is supernatural."

"What business?" asked Sir Henry sharply. "It seems to me that all you gentlemen know a great deal more than I do about my own affairs."

"You shall share our knowledge before you leave this room, Sir Henry. I promise you that," said Sherlock Holmes. "We will confine ourselves for the present with your permission to this very interesting document, which must have been put together and posted yesterday evening. Have you yesterday's Times, Watson?"

"It is here in the corner."

"Might I trouble you for it — the inside page, please, with the leading articles?" He glanced swiftly over it, running his eyes up and down the columns. "Capital article this on free trade. Permit me to give you an extract from it. 'You may be cajoled into imagining that your own special trade or your own industry will be encouraged by a protective tariff, but it stands to reason that such legislation must in the long run keep away wealth from the country, diminish the value of our imports, and lower the general conditions of life in this island.' What do you think of that, Watson?" cried Holmes in high glee, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. "Don't you think that is an admirable sentiment?"

Dr. Mortimer looked at Holmes with an air of professional interest, and Sir Henry Baskerville turned a pair of puzzled dark eyes upon me.

"I don't know much about the tariff and things of that kind," said he; "but it seems to me we've got a bit off the trail so far as that note is concerned."

"On the contrary, I think we are particularly hot upon the trail, Sir Henry. Watson here knows more about my methods than you do, but I fear that even he has not quite grasped the significance of this sentence.”

“No, I confess that I see no connection.”

“And yet, my dear Watson, there is so very close a connection that the one is extracted out of the other. ‘You,’ ‘your,’ ‘your,’ ‘life,’ ‘reason,’ ‘value,’ ‘keep away,’ ‘from the.’ Don’t you see now whence these words have been taken?”

“By thunder, you’re right! Well, if that isn’t smart!” cried Sir Henry.

“If any possible doubt remained it is settled by the fact that ‘keep away’ and ‘from the’ are cut out in one piece.”

“Well, now — so it is!”

“Really, Mr. Holmes, this exceeds anything which I could have imagined,” said Dr. Mortimer, gazing at my friend in amazement. “I could understand anyone saying that the words were from a newspaper; but that you should name which, and add that it came from the leading article, is really one of the most remarkable things which I have ever known. How did you do it?”

“I presume, Doctor, that you could tell the skull of a negro from that of an Esquimau?”

“Most certainly.”

“But how?”

“Because that is my special hobby. The differences are obvious. The supra-orbital crest, the facial angle, the maxillary curve, the—”

“But this is my special hobby, and the differences are equally obvious. There is as much difference to my eyes between the leaded bourgeois type of a Times article and the slovenly print of an evening half-penny paper as there could be between your negro and your Esquimau. The detection of types is one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special expert in crime, though I confess that once when I was very young I confused the Leeds Mercury with the Western Morning News. But a Times leader is entirely distinctive, and these words could have been taken from nothing else. As it was done yesterday the strong probability was that we should find the words in yesterday’s issue.”

“So far as I can follow you, then, Mr. Holmes,” said Sir Henry Baskerville, “someone cut out this message with a scissors—”

“Nail-scissors,” said Holmes. “You can see that it was a very short-bladed scissors, since the cutter had to take two snips over ‘keep away.’”

“That is so. Someone, then, cut out the message with a pair of short-bladed scissors, pasted it with paste—”

“Gum,” said Holmes.

“With gum on to the paper. But I want to know why the word ‘moor’ should have been written?”

“Because he could not find it in print. The other words were all simple and might be found in any issue, but ‘moor’ would be less common.”

“Why, of course, that would explain it. Have you read anything else in this message, Mr. Holmes?”

“There are one or two indications, and yet the utmost pains have been taken to remove all clues. The address, you observe is printed in rough characters. But the Times is a paper which is seldom found in any hands but those of the highly educated. We may take it, therefore, that the letter was composed by an educated man who wished to pose as an uneducated one, and his effort to conceal his own writing suggests that that writing might be known, or come to be known, by you. Again, you will observe that the words are not gummed on in an accurate line, but that some are much higher than others. ‘Life,’ for example is quite out of its proper place. That may point to carelessness or it may point to agitation and hurry upon the part of the cutter. On the whole I incline to the latter view, since the matter was evidently important, and it is unlikely that the composer of such a letter would be careless. If he were in a hurry it opens up the interesting question why he should be in a hurry, since any letter posted up to early morning would reach Sir Henry before he would leave his hotel. Did the composer fear an interruption — and from whom?”

“We are coming now rather into the region of guesswork,” said Dr. Mortimer.

“Say, rather, into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination, but we have always some material basis on which to start our speculation. Now, you would call it a guess, no doubt, but I am almost certain that this address has been written in a hotel.”

“How in the world can you say that?”

“If you examine it carefully you will see that both the pen and the ink have given the writer trouble. The pen has spluttered twice in a single word, and has run dry three times in a short address, showing that there was very little ink in the bottle. Now, a private pen or ink-bottle is seldom allowed to be in such a state, and the combination of the two must be quite rare. But you know the hotel ink and the hotel pen, where it is rare to get anything else. Yes, I have very little hesitation in saying that could we examine the waste-paper baskets of the hotels around Charing Cross until we found the remains of the mutilated Times leader we could lay our hands straight upon the person who sent this singular message. Halloa! Halloa! What's this?"

He was carefully examining the foolscap, upon which the words were pasted, holding it only an inch or two from his eyes.

"Well?"

"Nothing," said he, throwing it down. "It is a blank half-sheet of paper, without even a water-mark upon it. I think we have drawn as much as we can from this curious letter; and now, Sir Henry, has anything else of interest happened to you since you have been in London?"

"Why, no, Mr. Holmes. I think not."

"You have not observed anyone follow or watch you?"

"I seem to have walked right into the thick of a dime novel," said our visitor. "Why in thunder should anyone follow or watch me?"

"We are coming to that. You have nothing else to report to us before we go into this matter?"

"Well, it depends upon what you think worth reporting."

"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life well worth reporting."

Sir Henry smiled.

"I don't know much of British life yet, for I have spent nearly all my time in the States and in Canada. But I hope that to lose one of your boots is not part of the ordinary routine of life over here."

"You have lost one of your boots?"

"My dear sir," cried Dr. Mortimer, "it is only mislaid. You will find it when you return to the hotel. What is the use of troubling Mr. Holmes with trifles of this kind?"

"Well, he asked me for anything outside the ordinary routine."

"Exactly," said Holmes, "however foolish the incident may seem. You have lost one of your boots, you say?"

"Well, mislaid it, anyhow. I put them both outside my door last night, and there was only one in the morning. I could get no sense out of the chap who cleans them. The worst of it is that I only bought the pair last night in the Strand, and I have never had them on."

"If you have never worn them, why did you put them out to be cleaned?"

“They were tan boots and had never been varnished. That was why I put them out.”

“Then I understand that on your arrival in London yesterday you went out at once and bought a pair of boots?”

“I did a good deal of shopping. Dr. Mortimer here went round with me. You see, if I am to be squire down there I must dress the part, and it may be that I have got a little careless in my ways out West. Among other things I bought these brown boots — gave six dollars for them — and had one stolen before ever I had them on my feet.”

“It seems a singularly useless thing to steal,” said Sherlock Holmes. “I confess that I share Dr. Mortimer’s belief that it will not be long before the missing boot is found.”

“And, now, gentlemen,” said the baronet with decision, “it seems to me that I have spoken quite enough about the little that I know. It is time that you kept your promise and gave me a full account of what we are all driving at.”

“Your request is a very reasonable one,” Holmes answered. “Dr. Mortimer, I think you could not do better than to tell your story as you told it to us.”

Thus encouraged, our scientific friend drew his papers from his pocket, and presented the whole case as he had done upon the morning before. Sir Henry Baskerville listened with the deepest attention, and with an occasional exclamation of surprise.

“Well, I seem to have come into an inheritance with a vengeance,” said he when the long narrative was finished. “Of course, I’ve heard of the hound ever since I was in the nursery. It’s the pet story of the family, though I never thought of taking it seriously before. But as to my uncle’s death — well, it all seems boiling up in my head, and I can’t get it clear yet. You don’t seem quite to have made up your mind whether it’s a case for a policeman or a clergyman.”

“Precisely.”

“And now there’s this affair of the letter to me at the hotel. I suppose that fits into its place.”

“It seems to show that someone knows more than we do about what goes on upon the moor,” said Dr. Mortimer.

“And also,” said Holmes, “that someone is not ill-disposed towards you, since they warn you of danger.”

“Or it may be that they wish, for their own purposes, to scare me away.”

“Well, of course, that is possible also. I am very much indebted to you, Dr. Mortimer, for introducing me to a problem which presents several interesting alternatives. But the practical point which we now have to decide, Sir Henry, is whether it is or is not advisable for you to go to Baskerville Hall.”

“Why should I not go?”

“There seems to be danger.”

“Do you mean danger from this family fiend or do you mean danger from human beings?”

“Well, that is what we have to find out.”

“Whichever it is, my answer is fixed. There is no devil in hell, Mr. Holmes, and there is no man upon earth who can prevent me from going to the home of my own people, and you may take that to be my final answer.” His dark brows knitted and his face flushed to a dusky red as he spoke. It was evident that the fiery temper of the Baskervilles was not extinct in this their last representative. “Meanwhile,” said he, “I have hardly had time to think over all that you have told me. It’s a big thing for a man to have to understand and to decide at one sitting. I should like to have a quiet hour by myself to make up my mind. Now, look here, Mr. Holmes, it’s half-past eleven now and I am going back right away to my hotel. Suppose you and your friend, Dr. Watson, come round and lunch with us at two. I’ll be able to tell you more clearly then how this thing strikes me.”

“Is that convenient to you, Watson?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then you may expect us. Shall I have a cab called?”

“I’d prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather.”

“I’ll join you in a walk, with pleasure,” said his companion.

“Then we meet again at two o’clock. Au revoir, and good-morning!”

We heard the steps of our visitors descend the stair and the bang of the front door. In an instant Holmes had changed from the languid dreamer to the man of action.

“Your hat and boots, Watson, quick! Not a moment to lose!” He rushed into his room in his dressing-gown and was back again in a few seconds in a frock-coat. We hurried together down the stairs and into the street. Dr. Mortimer and Baskerville were still visible about two hundred yards ahead of us in the direction of Oxford Street.

“Shall I run on and stop them?”

“Not for the world, my dear Watson. I am perfectly satisfied with your company if you will tolerate mine. Our friends are wise, for it is certainly a very fine morning for a walk.”

He quickened his pace until we had decreased the distance which divided us by about half. Then, still keeping a hundred yards behind, we followed into Oxford Street and so down Regent Street. Once our friends stopped and stared into a shop window, upon which Holmes did the same. An instant afterwards he gave a little cry of satisfaction, and, following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now proceeding slowly onward again.

“There’s our man, Watson! Come along! We’ll have a good look at him, if we can do no more.”

At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab. Instantly the trapdoor at the top flew up, something was screamed to the driver, and the cab flew madly off down Regent Street. Holmes looked eagerly round for another, but no empty one was in sight. Then he dashed in wild pursuit amid the stream of the traffic, but the start was too great, and already the cab was out of sight.

“There now!” said Holmes bitterly as he emerged panting and white with vexation from the tide of vehicles. “Was ever such bad luck and such bad management, too? Watson, Watson, if you are an honest man you will record this also and set it against my successes!”

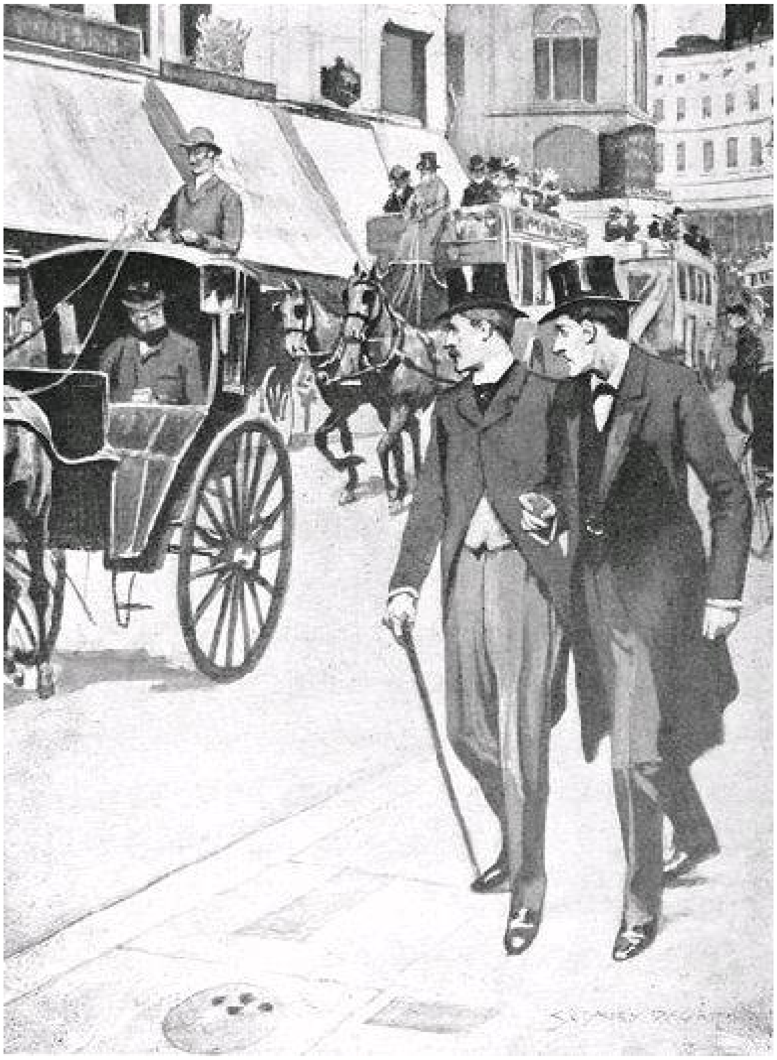

"Who was the man?"

"I have not an idea."

"A spy?"

"Well, it was evident from what we have heard that Baskerville has been very closely shadowed by someone since he has been in town. How else could it be known so quickly that it was the Northumberland Hotel which he had chosen? If they had followed him the first day I argued that they would follow him also the second. You may have observed that I twice strolled over to the window while Dr. Mortimer was reading his legend."

"Yes, I remember."

"I was looking out for loiterers in the street, but I saw none. We are dealing with a clever man, Watson. This matter cuts very deep, and though I have not finally made up my mind whether it is a benevolent or a malevolent agency which is in touch with us, I am conscious always of power and design. When our friends left I at once followed them in the hopes of marking down their invisible attendant. So wily was he that he had not trusted himself upon foot, but he had availed himself of a cab so that he could loiter behind or dash past them and so escape their notice. His method had the additional advantage that if they were to take a cab he was all ready to follow them. It has, however, one obvious disadvantage."

"It puts him in the power of the cabman."

"Exactly."

"What a pity we did not get the number!"

"My dear Watson, clumsy as I have been, you surely do not seriously imagine that I neglected to get the number? No. 2704 is our man. But that is no use to us for the moment."

"I fail to see how you could have done more."

"On observing the cab I should have instantly turned and walked in the other direction. I should then at my leisure have hired a second cab and followed the first at a respectful distance, or, better still, have driven to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there. When our unknown had followed Baskerville home we should have had the opportunity of playing his own game upon himself and seeing where he made for. As it is, by an indiscreet eagerness, which was taken advantage of with extraordinary quickness and energy by our opponent, we have betrayed ourselves and lost our man."

We had been sauntering slowly down Regent Street during this conversation, and Dr. Mortimer, with his companion, had long vanished in front of us.

"There is no object in our following them," said Holmes. "The shadow has departed and will not return. We must see what further cards we have in our hands and play them with decision. Could you swear to that man's face within the cab?"

"I could swear only to the beard."

"And so could I — from which I gather that in all probability it was a false one. A clever man upon so delicate an errand has no use for a beard save to conceal his features. Come in here, Watson!"

He turned into one of the district messenger offices, where he was warmly greeted by the manager.

"Ah, Wilson, I see you have not forgotten the little case in which I had the good fortune to help you?"

"No, sir, indeed I have not. You saved my good name, and perhaps my life."

"My dear fellow, you exaggerate. I have some recollection, Wilson, that you had among your boys a lad named Cartwright, who showed some ability during the investigation."

"Yes, sir, he is still with us."

"Could you ring him up? — thank you! And I should be glad to have change of this five-pound note."

A lad of fourteen, with a bright, keen face, had obeyed the summons of the manager. He stood now gazing with great reverence at the famous detective.

"Let me have the Hotel Directory," said Holmes. "Thank you! Now, Cartwright, there are the names of twenty-three hotels here, all in the immediate neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Do you see?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will visit each of these in turn."

"Yes, sir."

"You will begin in each case by giving the outside porter one shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings."

"Yes, sir."

"You will tell him that you want to see the waste-paper of yesterday. You will say that an important telegram has miscarried and that you are looking for it. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what you are really looking for is the centre page of the Times with some holes cut in it with scissors. Here is a copy of the Times. It is this page. You could easily recognise it, could you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"In each case the outside porter will send for the hall porter, to whom also you will give a shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings. You will then learn in possibly twenty cases out of the twenty-three that the waste of the day before has been burned or removed. In the three other cases you will be shown a heap of paper and you will look for this page of the Times among it. The odds are enormously against your finding it. There are ten shillings over in case of emergencies. Let me have a report by wire at Baker Street before evening. And now, Watson, it only remains for us to find out by wire the identity of the cabman, No. 2704, and then we will drop into one of the

Bond Street picture galleries and fill in the time until we are due at the hotel.”

CHAPTER 5

Three Broken Threads

Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will. For two hours the strange business in which we had been involved appeared to be forgotten, and he was entirely absorbed in the pictures of the modern Belgian masters. He would talk of nothing but art, of which he had the crudest ideas, from our leaving the gallery until we found ourselves at the Northumberland Hotel.

“Sir Henry Baskerville is upstairs expecting you,” said the clerk. “He asked me to show you up at once when you came.”

“Have you any objection to my looking at your register?” said Holmes.

“Not in the least.”

The book showed that two names had been added after that of Baskerville. One was Theophilus Johnson and family, of Newcastle; the other Mrs. Oldmore and maid, of High Lodge, Alton.

“Surely that must be the same Johnson whom I used to know,” said Holmes to the porter. “A lawyer, is he not, gray-headed, and walks with a limp?”

“No, sir; this is Mr. Johnson, the coal-owner, a very active gentleman, not older than yourself.”

“Surely you are mistaken about his trade?”

“No, sir! he has used this hotel for many years, and he is very well known to us.”

“Ah, that settles it. Mrs. Oldmore, too; I seem to remember the name. Excuse my curiosity, but often in calling upon one friend one finds another.”

“She is an invalid lady, sir. Her husband was once mayor of Gloucester. She always comes to us when she is in town.”

“Thank you; I am afraid I cannot claim her acquaintance. We have established a most important fact by these questions, Watson,” he continued in a low voice as we went upstairs together. “We know now that the people who are so interested in our friend have not settled down in his own hotel.

That means that while they are, as we have seen, very anxious to watch him, they are equally anxious that he should not see them. Now, this is a most suggestive fact.”

“What does it suggest?”

“It suggests — halloa, my dear fellow, what on earth is the matter?”

As we came round the top of the stairs we had run up against Sir Henry Baskerville himself. His face was flushed with anger, and he held an old and dusty boot in one of his hands. So furious was he that he was hardly articulate, and when he did speak it was in a much broader and more Western dialect than any which we had heard from him in the morning.

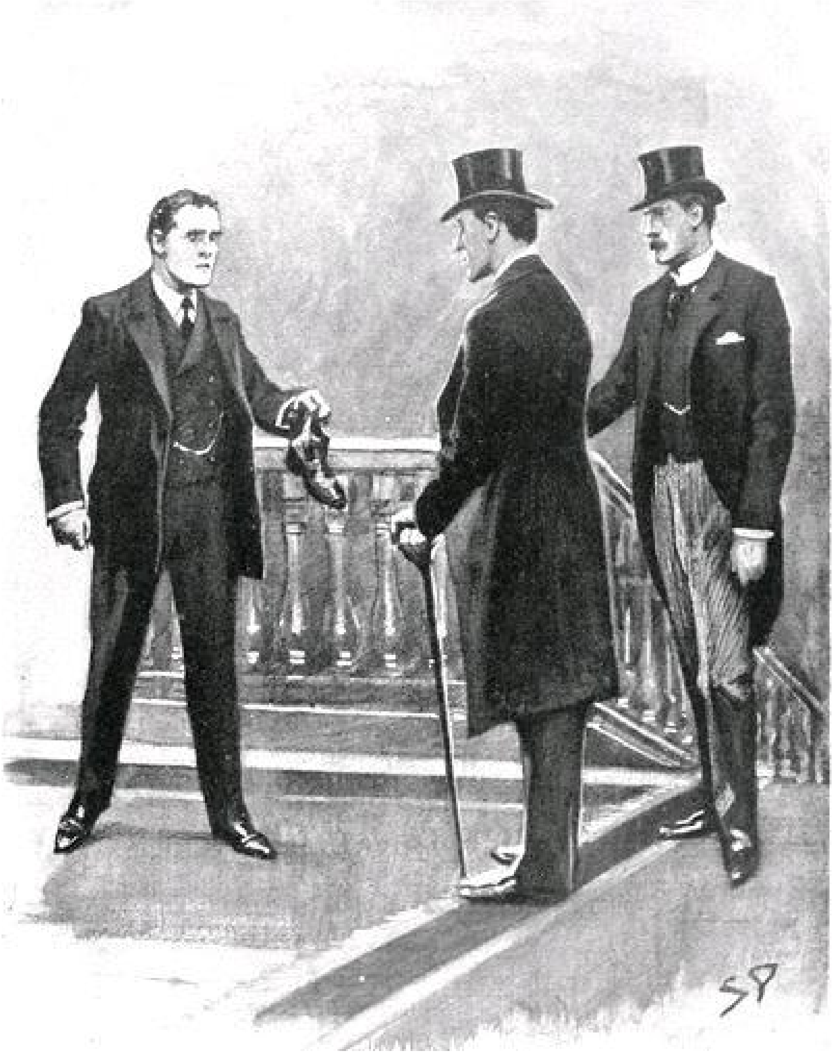

“Seems to me they are playing me for a sucker in this hotel,” he cried. “They’ll find they’ve started in to monkey with the wrong man unless they are careful. By thunder, if that chap can’t find my missing boot there will be trouble. I can take a joke with the best, Mr. Holmes, but they've got a bit over the mark this time."

"Still looking for your boot?"

"Yes, sir, and mean to find it."

"But, surely, you said that it was a new brown boot?"

"So it was, sir. And now it's an old black one."

"What! you don't mean to say —— ?"

"That's just what I do mean to say. I only had three pairs in the world — the new brown, the old black, and the patent leathers, which I am wearing. Last night they took one of my brown ones, and to-day they have sneaked one of the black. Well, have you got it? Speak out, man, and don't stand staring!"

An agitated German waiter had appeared upon the scene.

"No, sir; I have made inquiry all over the hotel, but I can hear no word of it."

"Well, either that boot comes back before sundown or I'll see the manager and tell him that I go right straight out of this hotel."

"It shall be found, sir — I promise you that if you will have a little patience it will be found."

"Mind it is, for it's the last thing of mine that I'll lose in this den of thieves. Well, well, Mr. Holmes, you'll excuse my troubling you about such a trifle — —"

"I think it's well worth troubling about."

"Why, you look very serious over it."

"How do you explain it?"

"I just don't attempt to explain it. It seems the very maddest, queerest thing that ever happened to me."

"The queerest perhaps — —" said Holmes, thoughtfully.

"What do you make of it yourself?"

"Well, I don't profess to understand it yet. This case of yours is very complex, Sir Henry. When taken in conjunction with your uncle's death I am not sure that of all the five hundred cases of capital importance which I have handled there is one which cuts so deep. But we hold several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them guides us to the truth. We may waste time in following the wrong one, but sooner or later we must come upon the right."

We had a pleasant luncheon in which little was said of the business which had brought us together. It was in the private sitting-room to which we afterwards repaired that Holmes asked Baskerville what were his intentions.

“To go to Baskerville Hall.”

“And when?”

“At the end of the week.”

“On the whole,” said Holmes, “I think that your decision is a wise one. I have ample evidence that you are being dogged in London, and amid the millions of this great city it is difficult to discover who these people are or what their object can be. If their intentions are evil they might do you a mischief, and we should be powerless to prevent it. You did not know, Dr. Mortimer, that you were followed this morning from my house?”

Dr. Mortimer started violently.

“Followed! By whom?”

“That, unfortunately, is what I cannot tell you. Have you among your neighbours or acquaintances on Dartmoor any man with a black, full beard?”

“No — or, let me see — why, yes. Barrymore, Sir Charles’s butler, is a man with a full, black beard.”

“Ha! Where is Barrymore?”

“He is in charge of the Hall.”

“We had best ascertain if he is really there, or if by any possibility he might be in London.”

“How can you do that?”

“Give me a telegraph form. ‘Is all ready for Sir Henry?’ That will do. Address to Mr. Barrymore, Baskerville Hall. What is the nearest telegraph-office? Grimpen. Very good, we will send a second wire to the postmaster, Grimpen: ‘Telegram to Mr. Barrymore to be delivered into his own hand. If absent, please return wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel.’ That should let us know before evening whether Barrymore is at his post in Devonshire or not.”

“That’s so,” said Baskerville. “By the way, Dr. Mortimer, who is this Barrymore, anyhow?”

“He is the son of the old caretaker, who is dead. They have looked after the Hall for four generations now. So far as I know, he and his wife are as respectable a couple as any in the county.”

“At the same time,” said Baskerville, “it’s clear enough that so long as there are none of the family at the Hall these people have a mighty fine home and nothing to do.”

“That is true.”

“Did Barrymore profit at all by Sir Charles’s will?” asked Holmes.

“He and his wife had five hundred pounds each.”

“Ha! Did they know that they would receive this?”

“Yes; Sir Charles was very fond of talking about the provisions of his will.”

“That is very interesting.”

“I hope,” said Dr. Mortimer, “that you do not look with suspicious eyes upon everyone who received a legacy from Sir Charles, for I also had a thousand pounds left to me.”

“Indeed! And anyone else?”

“There were many insignificant sums to individuals, and a large number of public charities. The residue all went to Sir Henry.”

“And how much was the residue?”

“Seven hundred and forty thousand pounds.”

Holmes raised his eyebrows in surprise. “I had no idea that so gigantic a sum was involved,” said he.

“Sir Charles had the reputation of being rich, but we did not know how very rich he was until we came to examine his securities. The total value of the estate was close on to a million.”

“Dear me! It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game. And one more question, Dr. Mortimer. Supposing that anything happened to our young friend here — you will forgive the unpleasant hypothesis! — who would inherit the estate?”

“Since Rodger Baskerville, Sir Charles’s younger brother died unmarried, the estate would descend to the Desmonds, who are distant cousins. James Desmond is an elderly clergyman in Westmoreland.”

“Thank you. These details are all of great interest. Have you met Mr. James Desmond?”

“Yes; he once came down to visit Sir Charles. He is a man of venerable appearance and of saintly life. I remember that he refused to accept any settlement from Sir Charles, though he pressed it upon him.”

“And this man of simple tastes would be the heir to Sir Charles’s thousands.”

"He would be the heir to the estate because that is entailed. He would also be the heir to the money unless it were willed otherwise by the present owner, who can, of course, do what he likes with it."

"And have you made your will, Sir Henry?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, I have not. I've had no time, for it was only yesterday that I learned how matters stood. But in any case I feel that the money should go with the title and estate. That was my poor uncle's idea. How is the owner going to restore the glories of the Baskervilles if he has not money enough to keep up the property? House, land, and dollars must go together."

"Quite so. Well, Sir Henry, I am of one mind with you as to the advisability of your going down to Devonshire without delay. There is only one provision which I must make. You certainly must not go alone."

"Dr. Mortimer returns with me."

"But Dr. Mortimer has his practice to attend to, and his house is miles away from yours. With all the good will in the world he may be unable to help you. No, Sir Henry, you must take with you someone, a trusty man, who will be always by your side."

"Is it possible that you could come yourself, Mr. Holmes?"

"If matters came to a crisis I should endeavour to be present in person; but you can understand that, with my extensive consulting practice and with the constant appeals which reach me from many quarters, it is impossible for me to be absent from London for an indefinite time. At the present instant one of the most revered names in England is being besmirched by a blackmailer, and only I can stop a disastrous scandal. You will see how impossible it is for me to go to Dartmoor."

"Whom would you recommend, then?"

Holmes laid his hand upon my arm.

"If my friend would undertake it there is no man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a tight place. No one can say so more confidently than I."

The proposition took me completely by surprise, but before I had time to answer, Baskerville seized me by the hand and wrung it heartily.

"Well, now, that is real kind of you, Dr. Watson," said he. "You see how it is with me, and you know just as much about the matter as I do. If you will come down to Baskerville Hall and see me through I'll never forget it."

The promise of adventure had always a fascination for me, and I was complimented by the words of Holmes and by the eagerness with which the baronet hailed me as a companion.

“I will come, with pleasure,” said I. “I do not know how I could employ my time better.”

“And you will report very carefully to me,” said Holmes. “When a crisis comes, as it will do, I will direct how you shall act. I suppose that by Saturday all might be ready?”

“Would that suit Dr. Watson?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then on Saturday, unless you hear to the contrary, we shall meet at the 10:30 train from Paddington.”

We had risen to depart when Baskerville gave a cry, of triumph, and diving into one of the corners of the room he drew a brown boot from under a cabinet.

“My missing boot!” he cried.

“May all our difficulties vanish as easily!” said Sherlock Holmes.

“But it is a very singular thing,” Dr. Mortimer remarked. “I searched this room carefully before lunch.”

“And so did I,” said Baskerville. “Every inch of it.”

“There was certainly no boot in it then.”

“In that case the waiter must have placed it there while we were lunching.”

The German was sent for but professed to know nothing of the matter, nor could any inquiry clear it up. Another item had been added to that constant and apparently purposeless series of small mysteries which had succeeded each other so rapidly. Setting aside the whole grim story of Sir Charles’s death, we had a line of inexplicable incidents all within the limits of two days, which included the receipt of the printed letter, the black-bearded spy in the hansom, the loss of the new brown boot, the loss of the old black boot, and now the return of the new brown boot. Holmes sat in silence in the cab as we drove back to Baker Street, and I knew from his drawn brows and keen face that his mind, like my own, was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted. All afternoon and late into the evening he sat lost in tobacco and thought.

Just before dinner two telegrams were handed in. The first ran: —

“Have just heard that Barrymore is at the Hall. — BASKERVILLE.” The second: —

“Visited twenty-three hotels as directed, but sorry, to report unable to trace cut sheet of Times. — CARTWRIGHT.”

“There go two of my threads, Watson. There is nothing more stimulating than a case where everything goes against you. We must cast round for another scent.”

“We have still the cabman who drove the spy.”

“Exactly. I have wired to get his name and address from the Official Registry. I should not be surprised if this were an answer to my question.”

The ring at the bell proved to be something even more satisfactory than an answer, however, for the door opened and a rough-looking fellow entered who was evidently the man himself.

“I got a message from the head office that a gent at this address had been inquiring for 2704,” said he. “I’ve driven my cab this seven years and never a word of complaint. I came here straight from the Yard to ask you to your face what you had against me.”

“I have nothing in the world against you, my good man,” said Holmes. “On the contrary, I have half a sovereign for you if you will give me a clear answer to my questions.”

“Well, I’ve had a good day and no mistake,” said the cabman, with a grin. “What was it you wanted to ask, sir?”

“First of all your name and address, in case I want you again.”

“John Clayton, 3 Turpey Street, the Borough. My cab is out of Shipley’s Yard, near Waterloo Station.”

Sherlock Holmes made a note of it.

“Now, Clayton, tell me all about the fare who came and watched this house at ten o’clock this morning and afterwards followed the two gentlemen down Regent Street.”

The man looked surprised and a little embarrassed. “Why, there’s no good my telling you things, for you seem to know as much as I do already,” said he. “The truth is that the gentleman told me that he was a detective and that I was to say nothing about him to anyone.”

“My good fellow, this is a very serious business, and you may find yourself in a pretty bad position if you try to hide anything from me. You say that your fare told you that he was a detective?”

“Yes, he did.”

“When did he say this?”

“When he left me.”

“Did he say anything more?”

“He mentioned his name.”

Holmes cast a swift glance of triumph at me. “Oh, he mentioned his name, did he? That was imprudent. What was the name that he mentioned?”

“His name,” said the cabman, “was Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

Never have I seen my friend more completely taken aback than by the cabman’s reply. For an instant he sat in silent amazement. Then he burst into a hearty laugh.

“A touch, Watson — an undeniable touch!” said he. “I feel a foil as quick and supple as my own. He got home upon me very prettily that time. So his name was Sherlock Holmes, was it?”

“Yes, sir, that was the gentleman’s name.”

“Excellent! Tell me where you picked him up and all that occurred.”

“He hailed me at half-past nine in Trafalgar Square. He said that he was a detective, and he offered me two guineas if I would do exactly what he wanted all day and ask no questions. I was glad enough to agree. First we drove down to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there until two gentlemen came out and took a cab from the rank. We followed their cab until it pulled up somewhere near here.”

“This very door,” said Holmes.

“Well, I couldn’t be sure of that, but I dare say my fare knew all about it. We pulled up half-way down the street and waited an hour and a half. Then the two gentlemen passed us, walking, and we followed down Baker Street and along — —”

“I know,” said Holmes.

“Until we got three-quarters down Regent Street. Then my gentleman threw up the trap, and he cried that I should drive right away to Waterloo Station as hard as I could go. I whipped up the mare and we were there under the ten minutes. Then he paid up his two guineas, like a good one, and away he went into the station. Only just as he was leaving he turned round and he said: ‘It might interest you to know that you have been driving Mr. Sherlock Holmes.’ That’s how I come to know the name.”

“I see. And you saw no more of him?”

“Not after he went into the station.”

“And how would you describe Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

The cabman scratched his head. “Well, he wasn’t altogether such an easy gentleman to describe. I’d put him at forty years of age, and he was of a middle height, two or three inches shorter than you, sir. He was dressed like a toff, and he had a black beard, cut square at the end, and a pale face. I don’t know as I could say more than that.”

“Colour of his eyes?”

“No, I can’t say that.”

“Nothing more that you can remember?”

“No, sir; nothing.”

“Well, then, here is your half-sovereign. There’s another one waiting for you if you can bring any more information. Good night!”

“Good night, sir, and thank you!”

John Clayton departed chuckling, and Holmes turned to me with a shrug of his shoulders and a rueful smile.

“Snap goes our third thread, and we end where we began,” said he. “The cunning rascal! He knew our number, knew that Sir Henry Baskerville had consulted me, spotted who I was in Regent Street, conjectured that I had got the number of the cab and would lay my hands on the driver, and so sent back this audacious message. I tell you, Watson, this time we have got a foeman who is worthy of our steel. I’ve been checkmated in London. I can only wish you better luck in Devonshire. But I’m not easy in my mind about it.”

“About what?”

“About sending you. It’s an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. Yes, my dear fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more.”

CHAPTER 6

Baskerville Hall

Sir Henry Baskerville and Dr. Mortimer were ready upon the appointed day, and we started as arranged for Devonshire. Mr. Sherlock Holmes drove with me to the station and gave me his last parting injunctions and advice.

“I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions, Watson,” said he; “I wish you simply to report facts in the fullest possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing.”

“What sort of facts?” I asked.

“Anything which may seem to have a bearing however indirect upon the case, and especially the relations between young Baskerville and his neighbours or any fresh particulars concerning the death of Sir Charles. I have made some inquiries myself in the last few days, but the results have, I fear, been negative. One thing only appears to be certain, and that is that Mr. James Desmond, who is the next heir, is an elderly gentleman of a very amiable disposition, so that this persecution does not arise from him. I really think that we may eliminate him entirely from our calculations. There remain the people who will actually surround Sir Henry Baskerville upon the moor.”

“Would it not be well in the first place to get rid of this Barrymore couple?”

“By no means. You could not make a greater mistake. If they are innocent it would be a cruel injustice, and if they are guilty we should be giving up all chance of bringing it home to them. No, no, we will preserve them upon our list of suspects. Then there is a groom at the Hall, if I remember right. There are two moorland farmers. There is our friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be entirely honest, and there is his wife, of whom we know nothing. There is this naturalist, Stapleton, and there is his sister, who is said to be a young lady of attractions. There is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who is also an unknown factor, and there are one or two other neighbours. These are the folk who must be your very special study.”

“I will do my best.”

"You have arms, I suppose?"

"Yes, I thought it as well to take them."

"Most certainly. Keep your revolver near you night and day, and never relax your precautions."

Our friends had already secured a first-class carriage and were waiting for us upon the platform.

"No, we have no news of any kind," said Dr. Mortimer in answer to my friend's questions. "I can swear to one thing, and that is that we have not been shadowed during the last two days. We have never gone out without keeping a sharp watch, and no one could have escaped our notice."

"You have always kept together, I presume?"

"Except yesterday afternoon. I usually give up one day to pure amusement when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of Surgeons."

"And I went to look at the folk in the park," said Baskerville. "But we had no trouble of any kind."

"It was imprudent, all the same," said Holmes, shaking his head and looking very grave. "I beg, Sir Henry, that you will not go about alone. Some great misfortune will befall you if you do. Did you get your other boot?"

"No, sir, it is gone forever."

"Indeed. That is very interesting. Well, good-bye," he added as the train began to glide down the platform. "Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us, and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted."

I looked back at the platform when we had left it far behind, and saw the tall, austere figure of Holmes standing motionless and gazing after us.

The journey was a swift and pleasant one, and I spent it in making the more intimate acquaintance of my two companions and in playing with Dr. Mortimer's spaniel. In a very few hours the brown earth had become ruddy, the brick had changed to granite, and red cows grazed in well-hedged fields where the lush grasses and more luxuriant vegetation spoke of a richer, if a damper, climate. Young Baskerville stared eagerly out of the window, and cried aloud with delight as he recognised the familiar features of the Devon scenery.

“I’ve been over a good part of the world since I left it, Dr. Watson,” said he; “but I have never seen a place to compare with it.”

“I never saw a Devonshire man who did not swear by his county,” I remarked.

“It depends upon the breed of men quite as much as on the county,” said Dr. Mortimer. “A glance at our friend here reveals the rounded head of the Celt, which carries inside it the Celtic enthusiasm and power of attachment. Poor Sir Charles’s head was of a very rare type, half Gaelic, half Ivernian in its characteristics. But you were very young when you last saw Baskerville Hall, were you not?”

“I was a boy in my ‘teens at the time of my father’s death, and had never seen the Hall, for he lived in a little cottage on the South Coast. Thence I went straight to a friend in America. I tell you it is all as new to me as it is to Dr. Watson, and I’m as keen as possible to see the moor.”

“Are you? Then your wish is easily granted, for there is your first sight of the moor,” said Dr. Mortimer, pointing out of the carriage window.

Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream. Baskerville sat for a long time, his eyes fixed upon it, and I read upon his eager face how much it meant to him, this first sight of that strange spot where the men of his blood had held sway so long and left their mark so deep. There he sat, with his tweed suit and his American accent, in the corner of a prosaic railway-carriage, and yet as I looked at his dark and expressive face I felt more than ever how true a descendant he was of that long line of high-blooded, fiery, and masterful men. There were pride, valour, and strength in his thick brows, his sensitive nostrils, and his large hazel eyes. If on that forbidding moor a difficult and dangerous quest should lie before us, this was at least a comrade for whom one might venture to take a risk with the certainty that he would bravely share it.

The train pulled up at a small wayside station and we all descended. Outside, beyond the low, white fence, a wagonette with a pair of cobs was waiting. Our coming was evidently a great event, for station-master and porters clustered round us to carry out our luggage. It was a sweet, simple country spot, but I was surprised to observe that by the gate there stood two soldierly men in dark uniforms, who leaned upon their short rifles and glanced keenly at us as we passed. The coachman, a hard-faced, gnarled little fellow, saluted Sir Henry Baskerville, and in a few minutes we were flying swiftly down the broad, white road. Rolling pasture lands curved upward on either side of us, and old gabled houses peeped out from amid the thick green foliage, but behind the peaceful and sunlit country-side there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister hills.

The wagonette swung round into a side road, and we curved upward through deep lanes worn by centuries of wheels, high banks on either side, heavy with dripping moss and fleshy hart's-tongue ferns. Bronzing bracken and mottled bramble gleamed in the light of the sinking sun. Still steadily rising, we passed over a narrow granite bridge, and skirted a noisy stream which gushed swiftly down, foaming and roaring amid the gray boulders. Both road and stream wound up through a valley dense with scrub oak and fir. At every turn Baskerville gave an exclamation of delight, looking eagerly about him and asking countless questions. To his eyes all seemed beautiful, but to me a tinge of melancholy lay upon the country-side, which bore so clearly the mark of the waning year. Yellow leaves carpeted the lanes and fluttered down upon us as we passed. The rattle of our wheels died away as we drove through drifts of rotting vegetation — sad gifts, as it seemed to me, for Nature to throw before the carriage of the returning heir of the Baskervilles.

“Halloa!” cried Dr. Mortimer, “what is this?”

A steep curve of heath-clad land, an outlying spur of the moor, lay in front of us. On the summit, hard and clear like an equestrian statue upon its pedestal, was a mounted soldier, dark and stern, his rifle poised ready over his forearm. He was watching the road along which we travelled.

“What is this, Perkins?” asked Dr. Mortimer.

Our driver half turned in his seat.

“There's a convict escaped from Princetown, sir. He's been out three days now, and the warders watch every road and every station, but they've had no sight of him yet. The farmers about here don't like it, sir, and that's a fact.”

“Well, I understand that they get five pounds if they can give information.”

“Yes, sir, but the chance of five pounds is but a poor thing compared to the chance of having your throat cut. You see, it isn't like any ordinary convict. This is a man that would stick at nothing.”

“Who is he, then?”

“It is Selden, the Notting Hill murderer.”

I remembered the case well, for it was one in which Holmes had taken an interest on account of the peculiar ferocity of the crime and the wanton brutality which had marked all the actions of the assassin. The commutation of his death sentence had been due to some doubts as to his complete sanity, so atrocious was his conduct. Our wagonette had topped a rise and in front of us rose the huge expanse of the moor, mottled with gnarled and craggy cairns and tors. A cold wind swept down from it and set us shivering. Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out. It needed but this to complete the grim suggestiveness of the barren waste, the chilling wind, and the darkling sky. Even Baskerville fell silent and pulled his overcoat more closely around him.

We had left the fertile country behind and beneath us. We looked back on it now, the slanting rays of a low sun turning the streams to threads of gold and glowing on the red earth new turned by the plough and the broad tangle of the woodlands. The road in front of us grew bleaker and wilder over huge russet and olive slopes, sprinkled with giant boulders. Now and then we passed a moorland cottage, walled and roofed with stone, with no creeper to break its harsh outline. Suddenly we looked down into a cup-like depression, patched with stunted oaks and firs which had been twisted and bent by the fury of years of storm. Two high, narrow towers rose over the trees. The driver pointed with his whip.

“Baskerville Hall,” said he.

Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars’ heads of the Baskervilles. The lodge was a ruin of black granite and bared ribs of rafters, but facing it was a new building, half constructed, the first fruit of Sir Charles’s South African gold.

Through the gateway we passed into the avenue, where the wheels were again hushed amid the leaves, and the old trees shot their branches in a sombre tunnel over our heads. Baskerville shuddered as he looked up the long, dark drive to where the house glimmered like a ghost at the farther end.

"Was it here?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, no, the Yew Alley is on the other side."

The young heir glanced round with a gloomy face.

"It's no wonder my uncle felt as if trouble were coming on him in such a place as this," said he. "It's enough to scare any man. I'll have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months, and you won't know it again, with a thousand candle-power Swan and Edison right here in front of the hall door."

The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before us. In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block of building from which a porch projected. The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat-of-arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenelated, and pierced with many loopholes. To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke.

"Welcome, Sir Henry! Welcome to Baskerville Hall!"

A tall man had stepped from the shadow of the porch to open the door of the wagonette. The figure of a woman was silhouetted against the yellow light of the hall. She came out and helped the man to hand down our bags.

"You don't mind my driving straight home, Sir Henry?" said Dr. Mortimer. "My wife is expecting me."

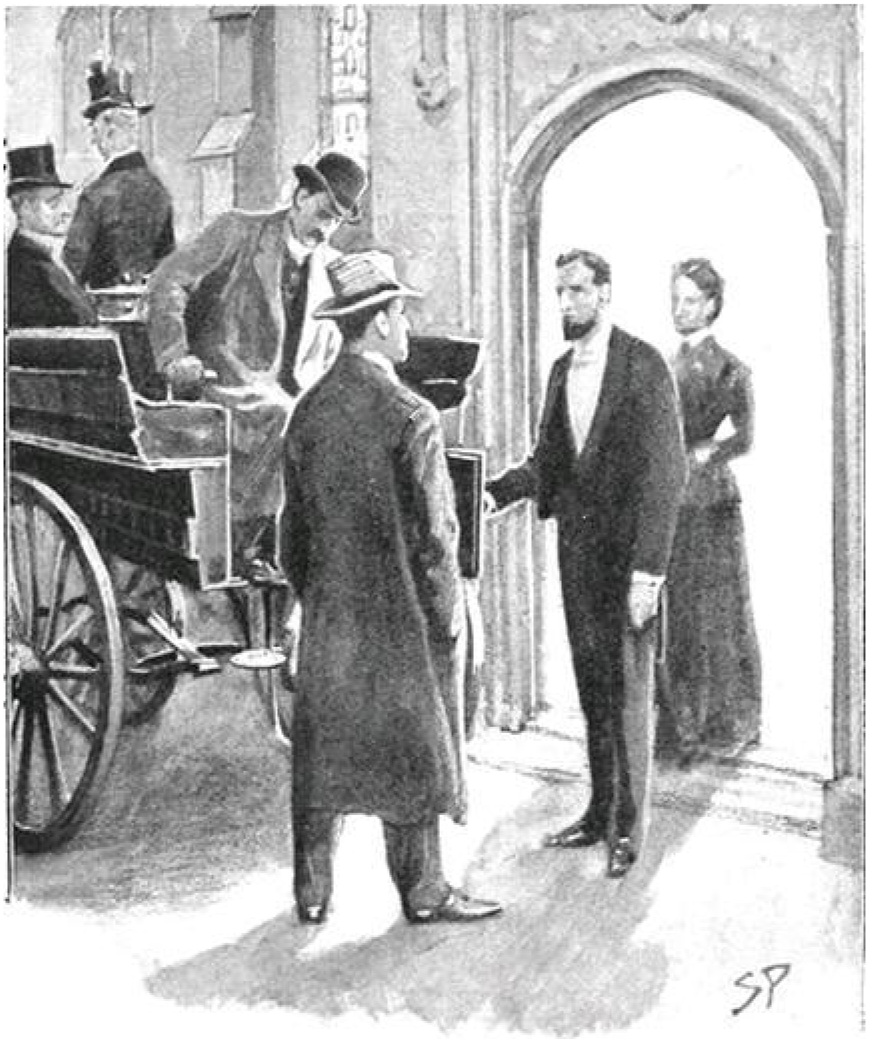

“Surely you will stay and have some dinner?”

“No, I must go. I shall probably find some work awaiting me. I would stay to show you over the house, but Barrymore will be a better guide than I. Good-bye, and never hesitate night or day to send for me if I can be of service.”

The wheels died away down the drive while Sir Henry and I turned into the hall, and the door clanged heavily behind us. It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily raftered with huge balks of age-blackened oak. In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log-fire crackled and snapped. Sir Henry and I held out our hands to it, for we were numb from our long drive. Then we gazed round us at the high, thin window of old stained glass, the oak panelling, the stags’ heads, the coats-of-arms upon the walls, all dim and sombre in the subdued light of the central lamp.

“It’s just as I imagined it,” said Sir Henry. “Is it not the very picture of an old family home? To think that this should be the same hall in which for five hundred years my people have lived. It strikes me solemn to think of it.”

I saw his dark face lit up with a boyish enthusiasm as he gazed about him. The light beat upon him where he stood, but long shadows trailed down the walls and hung like a black canopy above him. Barrymore had returned from taking our luggage to our rooms. He stood in front of us now with the subdued manner of a well-trained servant. He was a remarkable-looking man, tall, handsome, with a square black beard and pale, distinguished features.

“Would you wish dinner to be served at once, sir?”

“Is it ready?”

“In a very few minutes, sir. You will find hot water in your rooms. My wife and I will be happy, Sir Henry, to stay with you until you have made your fresh arrangements, but you will understand that under the new conditions this house will require a considerable staff.”

“What new conditions?”

“I only meant, sir, that Sir Charles led a very retired life, and we were able to look after his wants. You would, naturally, wish to have more company, and so you will need changes in your household.”

“Do you mean that your wife and you wish to leave?”

“Only when it is quite convenient to you, sir.”

“But your family have been with us for several generations, have they not? I should be sorry to begin my life here by breaking an old family connection.”

I seemed to discern some signs of emotion upon the butler’s white face.

“I feel that also, sir, and so does my wife. But to tell the truth, sir, we were both very much attached to Sir Charles, and his death gave us a shock and made these surroundings very painful to us. I fear that we shall never again be easy in our minds at Baskerville Hall.”

“But what do you intend to do?”

“I have no doubt, sir, that we shall succeed in establishing ourselves in some business. Sir Charles’s generosity has given us the means to do so. And now, sir, perhaps I had best show you to your rooms.”

A square balustraded gallery ran round the top of the old hall, approached by a double stair. From this central point two long corridors extended the whole length of the building, from which all the bedrooms opened. My own was in the same wing as Baskerville’s and almost next door to it. These rooms appeared to be much more modern than the central part of the house, and the bright paper and numerous candles did something to remove the sombre impression which our arrival had left upon my mind.

But the dining-room which opened out of the hall was a place of shadow and gloom. It was a long chamber with a step separating the dais where the family sat from the lower portion reserved for their dependents. At one end a minstrel’s gallery overlooked it. Black beams shot across above our heads, with a smoke-darkened ceiling beyond them. With rows of flaring torches to light it up, and the colour and rude hilarity of an old-time banquet, it might have softened; but now, when two black-clothed gentlemen sat in the little circle of light thrown by a shaded lamp, one’s voice became hushed and one’s spirit subdued. A dim line of ancestors, in every variety of dress, from the Elizabethan knight to the buck of the Regency, stared down upon us and daunted us by their silent company. We talked little, and I for one was glad when the meal was over and we were able to retire into the modern billiard-room and smoke a cigarette.

“My word, it isn’t a very cheerful place,” said Sir Henry. “I suppose one can tone down to it, but I feel a bit out of the picture at present. I don’t wonder that my uncle got a little jumpy if he lived all alone in such a house as this. However, if it suits you, we will retire early to-night, and perhaps things may seem more cheerful in the morning.”

I drew aside my curtains before I went to bed and looked out from my window. It opened upon the grassy space which lay in front of the hall door. Beyond, two copses of trees moaned and swung in a rising wind. A half moon broke through the rifts of racing clouds. In its cold light I saw beyond the trees a broken fringe of rocks, and the long, low curve of the melancholy moor. I closed the curtain, feeling that my last impression was in keeping with the rest.

And yet it was not quite the last. I found myself weary and yet wakeful, tossing restlessly from side to side, seeking for the sleep which would not come. Far away a chiming clock struck out the quarters of the hours, but otherwise a deathly silence lay upon the old house. And then suddenly, in the very dead of the night, there came a sound to my ears, clear, resonant, and unmistakable. It was the sob of a woman, the muffled, strangling gasp of one who is torn by an uncontrollable sorrow. I sat up in bed and listened intently. The noise could not have been far away and was certainly in the house. For half an hour I waited with every nerve on the alert, but there came no other sound save the chiming clock and the rustle of the ivy on the wall.

CHAPTER 7

The Stapletons of Merripit House

The fresh beauty of the following morning did something to efface from our minds the grim and gray impression which had been left upon both of us by our first experience of Baskerville Hall. As Sir Henry and I sat at breakfast the sunlight flooded in through the high mullioned windows, throwing watery patches of colour from the coats of arms which covered them. The dark panelling glowed like bronze in the golden rays, and it was hard to realise that this was indeed the chamber which had struck such a gloom into our souls upon the evening before.

“I guess it is ourselves and not the house that we have to blame!” said the baronet. “We were tired with our journey and chilled by our drive, so we took a gray view of the place. Now we are fresh and well, so it is all cheerful once more.”

“And yet it was not entirely a question of imagination,” I answered. “Did you, for example, happen to hear someone, a woman I think, sobbing in the night?”

“That is curious, for I did when I was half asleep fancy that I heard something of the sort. I waited quite a time, but there was no more of it, so I concluded that it was all a dream.”

“I heard it distinctly, and I am sure that it was really the sob of a woman.”

“We must ask about this right away.” He rang the bell and asked Barrymore whether he could account for our experience. It seemed to me that the pallid features of the butler turned a shade paler still as he listened to his master’s question.

“There are only two women in the house, Sir Henry,” he answered. “One is the scullery-maid, who sleeps in the other wing. The other is my wife, and I can answer for it that the sound could not have come from her.”

And yet he lied as he said it, for it chanced that after breakfast I met Mrs. Barrymore in the long corridor with the sun full upon her face. She was a large, impassive, heavy-featured woman with a stern set expression of mouth. But her tell-tale eyes were red and glanced at me from between swollen lids. It was she, then, who wept in the night, and if she did so her husband must know it. Yet he had taken the obvious risk of discovery in declaring that it was not so. Why had he done this? And why did she weep so bitterly? Already round this pale-faced, handsome, black-bearded man there was gathering an atmosphere of mystery and of gloom. It was he who had been the first to discover the body of Sir Charles, and we had only his word for all the circumstances which led up to the old man's death. Was it possible that it was Barrymore after all whom we had seen in the cab in Regent Street? The beard might well have been the same. The cabman had described a somewhat shorter man, but such an impression might easily have been erroneous. How could I settle the point forever? Obviously the first thing to do was to see the Grimpen postmaster, and find whether the test telegram had really been placed in Barrymore's own hands. Be the answer what it might, I should at least have something to report to Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Henry had numerous papers to examine after breakfast, so that the time was propitious for my excursion. It was a pleasant walk of four miles along the edge of the moor, leading me at last to a small gray hamlet, in which two larger buildings, which proved to be the inn and the house of Dr. Mortimer, stood high above the rest. The postmaster, who was also the village grocer, had a clear recollection of the telegram.

"Certainly, sir," said he, "I had the telegram delivered to Mr. Barrymore exactly as directed."

"Who delivered it?"

"My boy here. James, you delivered that telegram to Mr. Barrymore at the Hall last week, did you not?"

"Yes, father, I delivered it."

"Into his own hands?" I asked.

"Well, he was up in the loft at the time, so that I could not put it into his own hands, but I gave it into Mrs. Barrymore's hands, and she promised to deliver it at once."

"Did you see Mr. Barrymore?"

"No, sir; I tell you he was in the loft."

"If you didn't see him, how do you know he was in the loft?"

"Well, surely his own wife ought to know where he is," said the postmaster testily. "Didn't he get the telegram? If there is any mistake it is for Mr. Barrymore himself to complain."

It seemed hopeless to pursue the inquiry any farther, but it was clear that in spite of Holmes’s ruse we had no proof that Barrymore had not been in London all the time. Suppose that it were so — suppose that the same man had been the last who had seen Sir Charles alive, and the first to dog the new heir when he returned to England. What then? Was he the agent of others or had he some sinister design of his own? What interest could he have in persecuting the Baskerville family? I thought of the strange warning clipped out of the leading article of the Times. Was that his work or was it possibly the doing of someone who was bent upon counteracting his schemes? The only conceivable motive was that which had been suggested by Sir Henry, that if the family could be scared away a comfortable and permanent home would be secured for the Barrymores. But surely such an explanation as that would be quite inadequate to account for the deep and subtle scheming which seemed to be weaving an invisible net round the young baronet. Holmes himself had said that no more complex case had come to him in all the long series of his sensational investigations. I prayed, as I walked back along the gray, lonely road, that my friend might soon be freed from his preoccupations and able to come down to take this heavy burden of responsibility from my shoulders.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of running feet behind me and by a voice which called me by name. I turned, expecting to see Dr. Mortimer, but to my surprise it was a stranger who was pursuing me. He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired and lean-jawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a gray suit and wearing a straw hat. A tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands.

“You will, I am sure, excuse my presumption, Dr. Watson,” said he, as he came panting up to where I stood. “Here on the moor we are homely folk and do not wait for formal introductions. You may possibly have heard my name from our mutual friend, Mortimer. I am Stapleton, of Merripit House.”

“Your net and box would have told me as much,” said I, “for I knew that Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist. But how did you know me?”

“I have been calling on Mortimer, and he pointed you out to me from the window of his surgery as you passed. As our road lay the same way I thought that I would overtake you and introduce myself. I trust that Sir Henry is none the worse for his journey?”

"He is very well, thank you."

"We were all rather afraid that after the sad death of Sir Charles the new baronet might refuse to live here. It is asking much of a wealthy man to come down and bury himself in a place of this kind, but I need not tell you that it means a very great deal to the country-side. Sir Henry has, I suppose, no superstitious fears in the matter?"

"I do not think that it is likely."

"Of course you know the legend of the fiend dog which haunts the family?"

"I have heard it."

"It is extraordinary how credulous the peasants are about here! Any number of them are ready to swear that they have seen such a creature upon the moor." He spoke with a smile, but I seemed to read in his eyes that he took the matter more seriously. "The story took a great hold upon the imagination of Sir Charles, and I have no doubt that it led to his tragic end."

"But how?"

"His nerves were so worked up that the appearance of any dog might have had a fatal effect upon his diseased heart. I fancy that he really did see something of the kind upon that last night in the Yew Alley. I feared that some disaster might occur, for I was very fond of the old man, and I knew that his heart was weak."

"How did you know that?"

"My friend Mortimer told me."

"You think, then, that some dog pursued Sir Charles, and that he died of fright in consequence?"

"Have you any better explanation?"

"I have not come to any conclusion."

"Has Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

The words took away my breath for an instant, but a glance at the placid face and steadfast eyes of my companion showed that no surprise was intended.

"It is useless for us to pretend that we do not know you, Dr. Watson," said he. "The records of your detective have reached us here, and you could not celebrate him without being known yourself. When Mortimer told me your name he could not deny your identity. If you are here, then it follows that Mr. Sherlock Holmes is interesting himself in the matter, and I am naturally curious to know what view he may take."

"I am afraid that I cannot answer that question."

"May I ask if he is going to honour us with a visit himself?"

"He cannot leave town at present. He has other cases which engage his attention."

"What a pity! He might throw some light on that which is so dark to us. But as to your own researches, if there is any possible way in which I can be of service to you I trust that you will command me. If I had any indication of the nature of your suspicions or how you propose to investigate the case, I might perhaps even now give you some aid or advice."

"I assure you that I am simply here upon a visit to my friend, Sir Henry, and that I need no help of any kind."

"Excellent!" said Stapleton. "You are perfectly right to be wary and discreet. I am justly reproved for what I feel was an unjustifiable intrusion, and I promise you that I will not mention the matter again."

We had come to a point where a narrow grassy path struck off from the road and wound away across the moor. A steep, boulder-sprinkled hill lay upon the right which had in bygone days been cut into a granite quarry. The face which was turned towards us formed a dark cliff, with ferns and brambles growing in its niches. From over a distant rise there floated a gray plume of smoke.

"A moderate walk along this moor-path brings us to Merripit House," said he. "Perhaps you will spare an hour that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister."

My first thought was that I should be by Sir Henry's side. But then I remembered the pile of papers and bills with which his study table was littered. It was certain that I could not help with those. And Holmes had expressly said that I should study the neighbours upon the moor. I accepted Stapleton's invitation, and we turned together down the path.

"It is a wonderful place, the moor," said he, looking round over the undulating downs, long green rollers, with crests of jagged granite foaming up into fantastic surges. "You never tire of the moor. You cannot think the wonderful secrets which it contains. It is so vast, and so barren, and so mysterious."

"You know it well, then?"

"I have only been here two years. The residents would call me a newcomer. We came shortly after Sir Charles settled. But my tastes led me to explore every part of the country round, and I should think that there are few men who know it better than I do.”

“Is it hard to know?”

“Very hard. You see, for example, this great plain to the north here with the queer hills breaking out of it. Do you observe anything remarkable about that?”

“It would be a rare place for a gallop.”

“You would naturally think so and the thought has cost several their lives before now. You notice those bright green spots scattered thickly over it?”

“Yes, they seem more fertile than the rest.”

Stapleton laughed.

“That is the great Grimpen Mire,” said he. “A false step yonder means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last. Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it, but after these autumn rains it is an awful place. And yet I can find my way to the very heart of it and return alive. By George, there is another of those miserable ponies!”

Something brown was rolling and tossing among the green sedges. Then a long, agonized, writhing neck shot upward and a dreadful cry echoed over the moor. It turned me cold with horror, but my companion’s nerves seemed to be stronger than mine.

“It’s gone!” said he. “The mire has him. Two in two days, and many more, perhaps, for they get in the way of going there in the dry weather, and never know the difference until the mire has them in its clutches. It’s a bad place, the great Grimpen Mire.”

“And you say you can penetrate it?”

“Yes, there are one or two paths which a very active man can take. I have found them out.”

“But why should you wish to go into so horrible a place?”

“Well, you see the hills beyond? They are really islands cut off on all sides by the impassable mire, which has crawled round them in the course of years. That is where the rare plants and the butterflies are, if you have the wit to reach them.”

“I shall try my luck some day.”

He looked at me with a surprised face.

“For God’s sake put such an idea out of your mind,” said he. “Your blood would be upon my head. I assure you that there would not be the least chance of your coming back alive. It is only by remembering certain complex landmarks that I am able to do it.”

“Halloa!” I cried. “What is that?”

A long, low moan, indescribably sad, swept over the moor. It filled the whole air, and yet it was impossible to say whence it came. From a dull murmur it swelled into a deep roar, and then sank back into a melancholy, throbbing murmur once again. Stapleton looked at me with a curious expression in his face.

“Queer place, the moor!” said he.

“But what is it?”

“The peasants say it is the Hound of the Baskervilles calling for its prey. I’ve heard it once or twice before, but never quite so loud.”

I looked round, with a chill of fear in my heart, at the huge swelling plain, mottled with the green patches of rushes. Nothing stirred over the vast expanse save a pair of ravens, which croaked loudly from a tor behind us.

“You are an educated man. You don’t believe such nonsense as that?” said I. “What do you think is the cause of so strange a sound?”

“Bogs make queer noises sometimes. It’s the mud settling, or the water rising, or something.”

“No, no, that was a living voice.”

“Well, perhaps it was. Did you ever hear a bittern booming?”

“No, I never did.”

“It’s a very rare bird — practically extinct — in England now, but all things are possible upon the moor. Yes, I should not be surprised to learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns.”

“It’s the weirdest, strangest thing that ever I heard in my life.”

“Yes, it’s rather an uncanny place altogether. Look at the hill- side yonder. What do you make of those?”

The whole steep slope was covered with gray circular rings of stone, a score of them at least.

“What are they? Sheep-pens?”

“No, they are the homes of our worthy ancestors. Prehistoric man lived thickly on the moor, and as no one in particular has lived there since, we find all his little arrangements exactly as he left them. These are his wigwams with the roofs off. You can even see his hearth and his couch if you have the curiosity to go inside.

“But it is quite a town. When was it inhabited?”

“Neolithic man — no date.”

“What did he do?”

“He grazed his cattle on these slopes, and he learned to dig for tin when the bronze sword began to supersede the stone axe. Look at the great trench in the opposite hill. That is his mark. Yes, you will find some very singular points about the moor, Dr. Watson. Oh, excuse me an instant! It is surely Cyclopides.”

A small fly or moth had fluttered across our path, and in an instant Stapleton was rushing with extraordinary energy and speed in pursuit of it. To my dismay the creature flew straight for the great mire, and my acquaintance never paused for an instant, bounding from tuft to tuft behind it, his green net waving in the air. His gray clothes and jerky, zigzag, irregular progress made him not unlike some huge moth himself. I was standing watching his pursuit with a mixture of admiration for his extraordinary activity and fear lest he should lose his footing in the treacherous mire, when I heard the sound of steps, and turning round found a woman near me upon the path. She had come from the direction in which the plume of smoke indicated the position of Merripit House, but the dip of the moor had hid her until she was quite close.

I could not doubt that this was the Miss Stapleton of whom I had been told, since ladies of any sort must be few upon the moor, and I remembered that I had heard someone describe her as being a beauty. The woman who approached me was certainly that, and of a most uncommon type. There could not have been a greater contrast between brother and sister, for Stapleton was neutral tinted, with light hair and gray eyes, while she was darker than any brunette whom I have seen in England — slim, elegant, and tall. She had a proud, finely cut face, so regular that it might have seemed impassive were it not for the sensitive mouth and the beautiful dark, eager eyes. With her perfect figure and elegant dress she was, indeed, a strange apparition upon a lonely moorland path. Her eyes were on her brother as I turned, and then she quickened her pace towards me. I had raised my hat and was about to make some explanatory remark, when her own words turned all my thoughts into a new channel.

“Go back!” she said. “Go straight back to London, instantly.”

I could only stare at her in stupid surprise. Her eyes blazed at me, and she tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

"Why should I go back?" I asked.

"I cannot explain." She spoke in a low, eager voice, with a curious lisp in her utterance. "But for God's sake do what I ask you. Go back and never set foot upon the moor again."

"But I have only just come."

"Man, man!" she cried. "Can you not tell when a warning is for your own good? Go back to London! Start to-night! Get away from this place at all costs! Hush, my brother is coming! Not a word of what I have said. Would you mind getting that orchid for me among the mares-tails yonder? We are very rich in orchids on the moor, though, of course, you are rather late to see the beauties of the place."

Stapleton had abandoned the chase and came back to us breathing hard and flushed with his exertions.

"Halloa, Beryl!" said he, and it seemed to me that the tone of his greeting was not altogether a cordial one.

"Well, Jack, you are very hot."

"Yes, I was chasing a Cyclopides. He is very rare and seldom found in the late autumn. What a pity that I should have missed him!" He spoke unconcernedly, but his small light eyes glanced incessantly from the girl to me.

"You have introduced yourselves, I can see."

"Yes. I was telling Sir Henry that it was rather late for him to see the true beauties of the moor."

"Why, who do you think this is?"

"I imagine that it must be Sir Henry Baskerville."

"No, no," said I. "Only a humble commoner, but his friend. My name is Dr. Watson."

A flush of vexation passed over her expressive face. "We have been talking at cross purposes," said she.

"Why, you had not very much time for talk," her brother remarked with the same questioning eyes.

"I talked as if Dr. Watson were a resident instead of being merely a visitor," said she. "It cannot much matter to him whether it is early or late for the orchids. But you will come on, will you not, and see Merripit House?"

A short walk brought us to it, a bleak moorland house, once the farm of some grazier in the old prosperous days, but now put into repair and turned into a modern dwelling. An orchard surrounded it, but the trees, as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of the whole place was mean and melancholy. We were admitted by a strange, wizened, rusty-coated old manservant, who seemed in keeping with the house. Inside, however, there were large rooms furnished with an elegance in which I seemed to recognise the taste of the lady. As I looked from their windows at the interminable granite-flecked moor rolling unbroken to the farthest horizon I could not but marvel at what could have brought this highly educated man and this beautiful woman to live in such a place.

"Queer spot to choose, is it not?" said he as if in answer to my thought. "And yet we manage to make ourselves fairly happy, do we not, Beryl?"

"Quite happy," said she, but there was no ring of conviction in her words.

"I had a school," said Stapleton. "It was in the north country. The work to a man of my temperament was mechanical and uninteresting, but the privilege of living with youth, of helping to mould those young minds, and of impressing them with one's own character and ideals, was very dear to me. However, the fates were against us. A serious epidemic broke out in the school and three of the boys died. It never recovered from the blow, and much of my capital was irretrievably swallowed up. And yet, if it were not for the loss of the charming companionship of the boys, I could rejoice over my own misfortune, for, with my strong tastes for botany and zoology, I find an unlimited field of work here, and my sister is as devoted to Nature as I am. All this, Dr. Watson, has been brought upon your head by your expression as you surveyed the moor out of our window."

"It certainly did cross my mind that it might be a little dull — less for you, perhaps, than for your sister."

"No, no, I am never dull," said she, quickly.

"We have books, we have our studies, and we have interesting neighbours. Dr. Mortimer is a most learned man in his own line. Poor Sir Charles was also an admirable companion. We knew him well, and miss him more than I can tell. Do you think that I should intrude if I were to call this afternoon and make the acquaintance of Sir Henry?"

"I am sure that he would be delighted."

"Then perhaps you would mention that I propose to do so. We may in our humble way do something to make things more easy for him until he becomes accustomed to his new surroundings. Will you come upstairs, Dr. Watson, and inspect my collection of Lepidoptera? I think it is the most complete one in the south-west of England. By the time that you have looked through them lunch will be almost ready."

But I was eager to get back to my charge. The melancholy of the moor, the death of the unfortunate pony, the weird sound which had been associated with the grim legend of the Baskervilles, all these things tinged my thoughts with sadness. Then on the top of these more or less vague impressions there had come the definite and distinct warning of Miss Stapleton, delivered with such intense earnestness that I could not doubt that some grave and deep reason lay behind it. I resisted all pressure to stay for lunch, and I set off at once upon my return journey, taking the grass-grown path by which we had come.

It seems, however, that there must have been some short cut for those who knew it, for before I had reached the road I was astounded to see Miss Stapleton sitting upon a rock by the side of the track. Her face was beautifully flushed with her exertions, and she held her hand to her side.

"I have run all the way in order to cut you off, Dr. Watson," said she. "I had not even time to put on my hat. I must not stop, or my brother may miss me. I wanted to say to you how sorry I am about the stupid mistake I made in thinking that you were Sir Henry. Please forget the words I said, which have no application whatever to you."

"But I can't forget them, Miss Stapleton," said I. "I am Sir Henry's friend, and his welfare is a very close concern of mine. Tell me why it was that you were so eager that Sir Henry should return to London."

"A woman's whim, Dr. Watson. When you know me better you will understand that I cannot always give reasons for what I say or do."

"No, no. I remember the thrill in your voice. I remember the look in your eyes. Please, please, be frank with me, Miss Stapleton, for ever since I have been here I have been conscious of shadows all round me. Life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track. Tell me then what it was that you meant, and I will promise to convey your warning to Sir Henry."

An expression of irresolution passed for an instant over her face, but her eyes had hardened again when she answered me.

“You make too much of it, Dr. Watson,” said she. “My brother and I were very much shocked by the death of Sir Charles. We knew him very intimately, for his favourite walk was over the moor to our house. He was deeply impressed with the curse which hung over the family, and when this tragedy came I naturally felt that there must be some grounds for the fears which he had expressed. I was distressed therefore when another member of the family came down to live here, and I felt that he should be warned of the danger which he will run. That was all which I intended to convey.

“But what is the danger?”

“You know the story of the hound?”

“I do not believe in such nonsense.”

“But I do. If you have any influence with Sir Henry, take him away from a place which has always been fatal to his family. The world is wide. Why should he wish to live at the place of danger?”

“Because it is the place of danger. That is Sir Henry’s nature. I fear that unless you can give me some more definite information than this it would be impossible to get him to move.”

“I cannot say anything definite, for I do not know anything definite.”

“I would ask you one more question, Miss Stapleton. If you meant no more than this when you first spoke to me, why should you not wish your brother to overhear what you said? There is nothing to which he, or anyone else, could object.”

“My brother is very anxious to have the Hall inhabited, for he thinks it is for the good of the poor folk upon the moor. He would be very angry if he knew that I have said anything which might induce Sir Henry to go away. But I have done my duty now and I will say no more. I must get back, or he will miss me and suspect that I have seen you. Good-bye!” She turned and had disappeared in a few minutes among the scattered boulders, while I, with my soul full of vague fears, pursued my way to Baskerville Hall.

CHAPTER 8

First Report of Dr. Watson

From this point onward I will follow the course of events by transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me on the table. One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can possibly do.

Baskerville Hall, October 13th.

MY DEAR HOLMES, — My previous letters and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but on the other hand you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their gray stone huts against the scarred hill-sides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy.

All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and will probably be very uninteresting to your severely practical mind. I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Let me, therefore, return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because up to to-day there was nothing of importance to relate. Then a very surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course. But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other factors in the situation.

One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped convict upon the moor. There is strong reason now to believe that he has got right away, which is a considerable relief to the lonely householders of this district. A fortnight has passed since his flight, during which he has not been seen and nothing has been heard of him. It is surely inconceivable that he could have held out upon the moor during all that time. Of course, so far as his concealment goes there is no difficulty at all. Any one of these stone huts would give him a hiding-place. But there is nothing to eat unless he were to catch and slaughter one of the moor sheep. We think, therefore, that he has gone, and the outlying farmers sleep the better in consequence.

We are four able-bodied men in this household, so that we could take good care of ourselves, but I confess that I have had uneasy moments when I have thought of the Stapletons. They live miles from any help. There are one maid, an old manservant, the sister, and the brother, the latter not a very strong man. They would be helpless in the hands of a desperate fellow like this Notting Hill criminal, if he could once effect an entrance. Both Sir Henry and I were concerned at their situation, and it was suggested that Perkins the groom should go over to sleep there, but Stapleton would not hear of it.

The fact is that our friend, the baronet, begins to display a considerable interest in our fair neighbour. It is not to be wondered at, for time hangs heavily in this lonely spot to an active man like him, and she is a very fascinating and beautiful woman. There is something tropical and exotic about her which forms a singular contrast to her cool and unemotional brother. Yet he also gives the idea of hidden fires. He has certainly a very marked influence over her, for I have seen her continually glance at him as she talked as if seeking approbation for what she said. I trust that he is kind to her. There is a dry glitter in his eyes, and a firm set of his thin lips, which goes with a positive and possibly a harsh nature. You would find him an interesting study.

He came over to call upon Baskerville on that first day, and the very next morning he took us both to show us the spot where the legend of the wicked Hugo is supposed to have had its origin. It was an excursion of some miles across the moor to a place which is so dismal that it might have suggested the story. We found a short valley between rugged tors which led to an open, grassy space flecked over with the white cotton grass. In the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at the upper end, until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some monstrous beast. In every way it corresponded with the scene of the old tragedy. Sir Henry was much interested and asked Stapleton more than once whether he did really believe in the possibility of the interference of the supernatural in the affairs of men. He spoke lightly, but it was evident that he was very much in earnest. Stapleton was guarded in his replies, but it was easy to see that he said less than he might, and that he would not express his whole opinion out of consideration for the feelings of the baronet. He told us of similar cases, where families had suffered from some evil influence, and he left us with the impression that he shared the popular view upon the matter.

On our way back we stayed for lunch at Merripit House, and it was there that Sir Henry made the acquaintance of Miss Stapleton. From the first moment that he saw her he appeared to be strongly attracted by her, and I am much mistaken if the feeling was not mutual. He referred to her again and again on our walk home, and since then hardly a day has passed that we have not seen something of the brother and sister. They dine here to-night, and there is some talk of our going to them next week. One would imagine that such a match would be very welcome to Stapleton, and yet I have more than once caught a look of the strongest disapprobation in his face when Sir Henry has been paying some attention to his sister. He is much attached to her, no doubt, and would lead a lonely life without her, but it would seem the height of selfishness if he were to stand in the way of her making so brilliant a marriage. Yet I am certain that he does not wish their intimacy to ripen into love, and I have several times observed that he has taken pains to prevent them from being *tête-à-tête*. By the way, your instructions to me never to allow Sir Henry to go out alone will become very much more onerous if a love affair were to be added to our other difficulties. My popularity would soon suffer if I were to carry out your orders to the letter.

The other day — Thursday, to be more exact — Dr. Mortimer lunched with us. He has been excavating a barrow at Long Down, and has got a prehistoric skull which fills him with great joy. Never was there such a single-minded enthusiast as he! The Stapletons came in afterwards, and the good doctor took us all to the Yew Alley, at Sir Henry’s request, to show us exactly how everything occurred upon that fatal night. It is a long, dismal walk, the Yew Alley, between two high walls of clipped hedge, with a narrow band of grass upon either side. At the far end is an old tumble-down summer-house. Half-way down is the moor-gate, where the old gentleman left his cigar-ash. It is a white wooden gate with a latch. Beyond it lies the wide moor. I remembered your theory of the affair and tried to picture all that had occurred. As the old man stood there he saw something coming across the moor, something which terrified him so that he lost his wits, and ran and ran until he died of sheer horror and exhaustion. There was the long, gloomy tunnel down which he fled. And from what? A sheep-dog of the moor? Or a spectral hound, black, silent, and monstrous? Was there a human agency in the matter? Did the pale, watchful Barrymore know more than he cared to say? It was all dim and vague, but always there is the dark shadow of crime behind it.

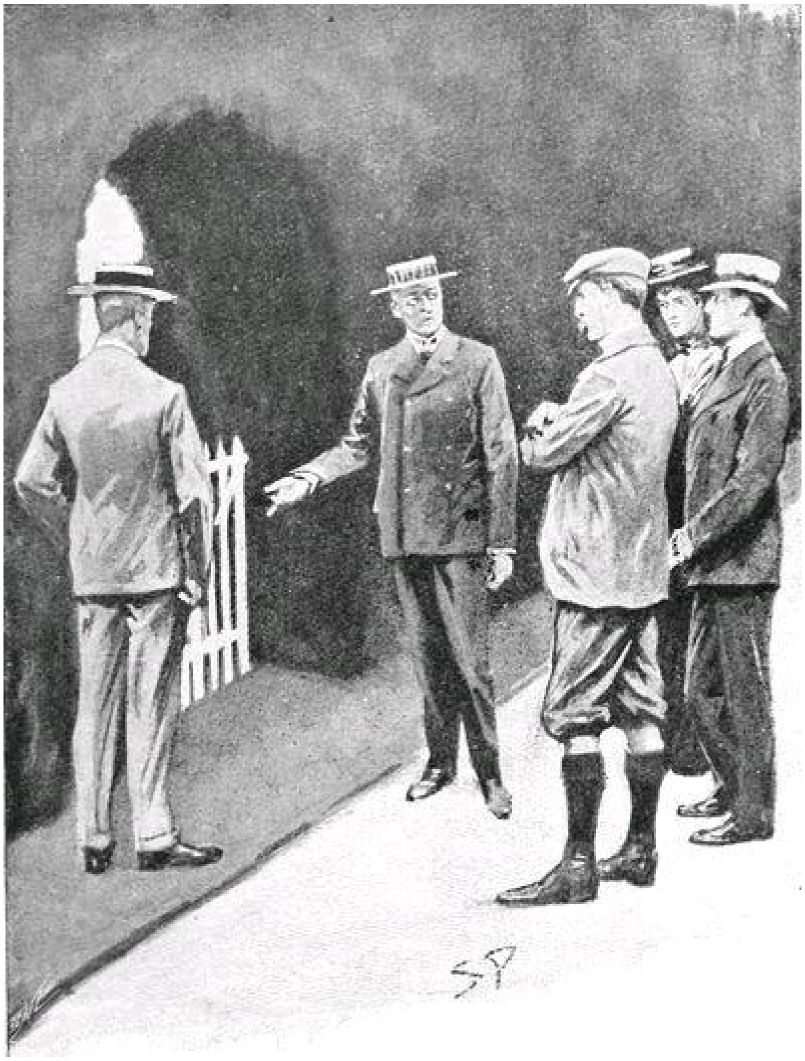

One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. This is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four miles to the south of us. He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. His passion is for the British law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation. He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to take up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found it a costly amusement. Sometimes he will shut up a right of way and defy the parish to make him open it. At others he will with his own hands tear down some other man's gate and declare that a path has existed there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him for trespass. He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he applies his knowledge sometimes in favour of the villagers of Fernworthy and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in triumph down the village street or else burned in effigy, according to his latest exploit. He is said to have about seven lawsuits upon his hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his fortune and so draw his sting and leave him harmless for the future. Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I only mention him because you were particular that I should send some description of the people who surround us. He is curiously employed at present, for, being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent telescope, with which he lies upon the roof of his own house and sweeps the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped convict. If he would confine his energies to this all would be well, but there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer for opening a grave without the consent of the next-of-kin, because he dug up the Neolithic skull in the barrow on Long Down. He helps to keep our lives from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly needed.

And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of Lafter Hall, let me end on that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and especially about the surprising development of last night.

First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in order to make sure that Barrymore was really here. I have already explained that the testimony of the postmaster shows that the test was worthless and that we have no proof one way or the other. I told Sir Henry how the matter stood, and he at once, in his downright fashion, had Barrymore up and asked him whether he had received the telegram himself. Barrymore said that he had.

"Did the boy deliver it into your own hands?" asked Sir Henry.

Barrymore looked surprised, and considered for a little time.

“No,” said he, “I was in the box-room at the time, and my wife brought it up to me.”

“Did you answer it yourself?”

“No; I told my wife what to answer and she went down to write it.”

In the evening he recurred to the subject of his own accord.

“I could not quite understand the object of your questions this morning, Sir Henry,” said he. “I trust that they do not mean that I have done anything to forfeit your confidence?”

Sir Henry had to assure him that it was not so and pacify him by giving him a considerable part of his old wardrobe, the London outfit having now all arrived.

Mrs. Barrymore is of interest to me. She is a heavy, solid person, very limited, intensely respectable, and inclined to be puritanical. You could hardly conceive a less emotional subject. Yet I have told you how, on the first night here, I heard her sobbing bitterly, and since then I have more than once observed traces of tears upon her face. Some deep sorrow gnaws ever at her heart. Sometimes I wonder if she has a guilty memory which haunts her, and sometimes I suspect Barrymore of being a domestic tyrant. I have always felt that there was something singular and questionable in this man’s character, but the adventure of last night brings all my suspicions to a head.

And yet it may seem a small matter in itself. You are aware that I am not a very sound sleeper, and since I have been on guard in this house my slumbers have been lighter than ever. Last night, about two in the morning, I was aroused by a stealthy step passing my room. I rose, opened my door, and peeped out. A long black shadow was trailing down the corridor. It was thrown by a man who walked softly down the passage with a candle held in his hand. He was in shirt and trousers, with no covering to his feet. I could merely see the outline, but his height told me that it was Barrymore. He walked very slowly and circumspectly, and there was something indescribably guilty and furtive in his whole appearance.

I have told you that the corridor is broken by the balcony which runs round the hall, but that it is resumed upon the farther side. I waited until he had passed out of sight and then I followed him. When I came round the balcony he had reached the end of the farther corridor, and I could see from the glimmer of light through an open door that he had entered one of the rooms. Now, all these rooms are unfurnished and unoccupied, so that his expedition became more mysterious than ever. The light shone steadily as if he were standing motionless. I crept down the passage as noiselessly as I could and peeped round the corner of the door.

Barrymore was crouching at the window with the candle held against the glass. His profile was half turned towards me, and his face seemed to be rigid with expectation as he stared out into the blackness of the moor. For some minutes he stood watching intently. Then he gave a deep groan and with an impatient gesture he put out the light. Instantly I made my way back to my room, and very shortly came the stealthy steps passing once more upon their return journey. Long afterwards when I had fallen into a light sleep I heard a key turn somewhere in a lock, but I could not tell whence the sound came. What it all means I cannot guess, but there is some secret business going on in this house of gloom which sooner or later we shall get to the bottom of. I do not trouble you with my theories, for you asked me to furnish you only with facts. I have had a long talk with Sir Henry this morning, and we have made a plan of campaign founded upon my observations of last night. I will not speak about it just now, but it should make my next report interesting reading.

CHAPTER 9

(Second Report of Dr. Watson)

THE LIGHT UPON THE MOOR

BASKERVILLE HALL, Oct. 15th.

MY DEAR HOLMES, — If I was compelled to leave you without much news during the early days of my mission you must acknowledge that I am making up for lost time, and that events are now crowding thick and fast upon us. In my last report I ended upon my top note with Barrymore at the window, and now I have quite a budget already which will, unless I am much mistaken, considerably surprise you. Things have taken a turn which I could not have anticipated. In some ways they have within the last forty-eight hours become much clearer and in some ways they have become more complicated. But I will tell you all and you shall judge for yourself.

Before breakfast on the morning following my adventure I went down the corridor and examined the room in which Barrymore had been on the night before. The western window through which he had stared so intently has, I noticed, one peculiarity above all other windows in the house — it commands the nearest outlook on the moor. There is an opening between two trees which enables one from this point of view to look right down upon it, while from all the other windows it is only a distant glimpse which can be obtained. It follows, therefore, that Barrymore, since only this window would serve the purpose, must have been looking out for something or somebody upon the moor. The night was very dark, so that I can hardly imagine how he could have hoped to see anyone. It had struck me that it was possible that some love intrigue was on foot. That would have accounted for his stealthy movements and also for the uneasiness of his wife. The man is a striking-looking fellow, very well equipped to steal the heart of a country girl, so that this theory seemed to have something to support it. That opening of the door which I had heard after I had returned to my room might mean that he had gone out to keep some clandestine appointment. So I reasoned with myself in the morning, and I tell you the direction of my suspicions, however much the result may have shown that they were unfounded.

But whatever the true explanation of Barrymore’s movements might be, I felt that the responsibility of keeping them to myself until I could explain them was more than I could bear. I had an interview with the baronet in his study after breakfast, and I told him all that I had seen. He was less surprised than I had expected.

“I knew that Barrymore walked about nights, and I had a mind to speak to him about it,” said he. “Two or three times I have heard his steps in the passage, coming and going, just about the hour you name.”

“Perhaps then he pays a visit every night to that particular window,” I suggested.

“Perhaps he does. If so, we should be able to shadow him, and see what it is that he is after. I wonder what your friend Holmes would do, if he were here.”

“I believe that he would do exactly what you now suggest,” said I. “He would follow Barrymore and see what he did.”

“Then we shall do it together.”

“But surely he would hear us.”

“The man is rather deaf, and in any case we must take our chance of that. We’ll sit up in my room to-night and wait until he passes.” Sir Henry rubbed his hands with pleasure, and it was evident that he hailed the adventure as a relief to his somewhat quiet life upon the moor.

The baronet has been in communication with the architect who prepared the plans for Sir Charles, and with a contractor from London, so that we may expect great changes to begin here soon. There have been decorators and furnishers up from Plymouth, and it is evident that our friend has large ideas, and means to spare no pains or expense to restore the grandeur of his family. When the house is renovated and refurnished, all that he will need will be a wife to make it complete. Between ourselves there are pretty clear signs that this will not be wanting if the lady is willing, for I have seldom seen a man more infatuated with a woman than he is with our beautiful neighbour, Miss Stapleton. And yet the course of true love does not run quite as smoothly as one would under the circumstances expect. To-day, for example, its surface was broken by a very unexpected ripple, which has caused our friend considerable perplexity and annoyance.

After the conversation which I have quoted about Barrymore, Sir Henry put on his hat and prepared to go out. As a matter of course I did the same.

“What, are you coming, Watson?” he asked, looking at me in a curious way.

“That depends on whether you are going on the moor,” said I.

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, you know what my instructions are. I am sorry to intrude, but you heard how earnestly Holmes insisted that I should not leave you, and especially that you should not go alone upon the moor.”

Sir Henry put his hand upon my shoulder with a pleasant smile.

“My dear fellow,” said he, “Holmes, with all his wisdom, did not foresee some things which have happened since I have been on the moor. You understand me? I am sure that you are the last man in the world who would wish to be a spoil-sport. I must go out alone.”

It put me in a most awkward position. I was at a loss what to say or what to do, and before I had made up my mind he picked up his cane and was gone.

But when I came to think the matter over my conscience reproached me bitterly for having on any pretext allowed him to go out of my sight. I imagined what my feelings would be if I had to return to you and to confess that some misfortune had occurred through my disregard for your instructions. I assure you my cheeks flushed at the very thought. It might not even now be too late to overtake him, so I set off at once in the direction of Merripit House.

I hurried along the road at the top of my speed without seeing anything of Sir Henry, until I came to the point where the moor path branches off. There, fearing that perhaps I had come in the wrong direction after all, I mounted a hill from which I could command a view — the same hill which is cut into the dark quarry. Thence I saw him at once. He was on the moor path, about a quarter of a mile off, and a lady was by his side who could only be Miss Stapleton. It was clear that there was already an understanding between them and that they had met by appointment. They were walking slowly along in deep conversation, and I saw her making quick little movements of her hands as if she were very earnest in what she was saying, while he listened intently, and once or twice shook his head in strong dissent. I stood among the rocks watching them, very much puzzled as to what I should do next. To follow them and break into their intimate conversation seemed to be an outrage, and yet my clear duty was never for an instant to let him out of my sight. To act the spy upon a friend was a hateful task. Still, I could see no better course than to observe him from the hill, and to clear my conscience by confessing to him afterwards what I had done. It is true that if any sudden danger had threatened him I was too far away to be of use, and yet I am sure that you will agree with me that the position was very difficult, and that there was nothing more which I could do.

Our friend, Sir Henry, and the lady had halted on the path and were standing deeply absorbed in their conversation, when I was suddenly aware that I was not the only witness of their interview. A wisp of green floating in the air caught my eye, and another glance showed me that it was carried on a stick by a man who was moving among the broken ground. It was Stapleton with his butterfly-net. He was very much closer to the pair than I was, and he appeared to be moving in their direction. At this instant Sir Henry suddenly drew Miss Stapleton to his side. His arm was round her, but it seemed to me that she was straining away from him with her face averted. He stooped his head to hers, and she raised one hand as if in protest. Next moment I saw them spring apart and turn hurriedly round. Stapleton was the cause of the interruption. He was running wildly towards them, his absurd net dangling behind him. He gesticulated and almost danced with excitement in front of the lovers. What the scene meant I could not imagine, but it seemed to me that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry, who offered explanations, which became more angry as the other refused to accept them. The lady stood by in haughty silence. Finally Stapleton turned upon his heel and beckoned in a peremptory way to his sister, who, after an irresolute glance at Sir Henry, walked off by the side of her brother. The naturalist’s angry gestures showed that the lady was included in his displeasure. The baronet stood for a minute looking after them, and then he walked slowly back the way that he had come, his head hanging, the very picture of dejection.

What all this meant I could not imagine, but I was deeply ashamed to have witnessed so intimate a scene without my friend’s knowledge. I ran down the hill therefore and met the baronet at the bottom. His face was flushed with anger and his brows were wrinkled, like one who is at his wit’s ends what to do.

“Halloa, Watson! Where have you dropped from?” said he. “You don’t mean to say that you came after me in spite of all?”

I explained everything to him: how I had found it impossible to remain behind, how I had followed him, and how I had witnessed all that had occurred. For an instant his eyes blazed at me, but my frankness disarmed his anger, and he broke at last into a rather rueful laugh.

“You would have thought the middle of that prairie a fairly safe place for a man to be private,” said he, “but, by thunder, the whole country-side seems to have been out to see me do my wooing — and a mighty poor wooing at that! Where had you engaged a seat?”

“I was on that hill.”

“Quite in the back row, eh? But her brother was well up to the front. Did you see him come out on us?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Did he ever strike you as being crazy — this brother of hers?”

“I can’t say that he ever did.”

“I dare say not. I always thought him sane enough until to-day, but you can take it from me that either he or I ought to be in a strait-jacket. What’s the matter with me, anyhow? You’ve lived near me for some weeks, Watson. Tell me straight, now! Is there anything that would prevent me from making a good husband to a woman that I loved?”

“I should say not.”

“He can’t object to my worldly position, so it must be myself that he has this down on. What has he against me? I never hurt man or woman in my life that I know of. And yet he would not so much as let me touch the tips of her fingers.”

“Did he say so?”

“That, and a deal more. I tell you, Watson, I’ve only known her these few weeks, but from the first I just felt that she was made for me, and she, too — she was happy when she was with me, and that I’ll swear. There’s a light in a woman’s eyes that speaks louder than words. But he has never let us get together, and it was only to-day for the first time that I saw a chance of having a few words with her alone. She was glad to meet me, but when she did it was not love that she would talk about, and she wouldn’t have let me talk about it either if she could have stopped it. She kept coming back to it that this was a place of danger, and that she would never be happy until I had left it. I told her that since I had seen her I was in no hurry to leave it, and that if she really wanted me to go, the only way to work it was for her to arrange to go with me. With that I offered in as many words to marry her, but before she could answer, down came this brother of hers, running at us with a face on him like a madman. He was just white with rage, and those light eyes of his were blazing with fury. What was I doing with the lady? How dared I offer her attentions which were distasteful to her? Did I think that because I was a baronet I could do what I liked? If he had not been her brother I should have known better how to answer him. As it was I told him that my feelings towards his sister were such as I was not ashamed of, and that I hoped that she might honour me by becoming my wife. That seemed to make the matter no better, so then I lost my temper too, and I answered him rather more hotly than I should perhaps, considering that she was standing by. So it ended by his going off with her, as you saw, and here am I as badly puzzled a man as any in this county. Just tell me what it all means, Watson, and I'll owe you more than ever I can hope to pay."

I tried one or two explanations, but, indeed, I was completely puzzled myself. Our friend's title, his fortune, his age, his character, and his appearance are all in his favour, and I know nothing against him unless it be this dark fate which runs in his family. That his advances should be rejected so brusquely without any reference to the lady's own wishes, and that the lady should accept the situation without protest, is very amazing. However, our conjectures were set at rest by a visit from Stapleton himself that very afternoon. He had come to offer apologies for his rudeness of the morning, and after a long private interview with Sir Henry in his study, the upshot of their conversation was that the breach is quite healed, and that we are to dine at Merripit House next Friday as a sign of it.

"I don't say now that he isn't a crazy man," said Sir Henry; "I can't forget the look in his eyes when he ran at me this morning, but I must allow that no man could make a more handsome apology than he has done."

"Did he give any explanation of his conduct?"

"His sister is everything in his life, he says. That is natural enough, and I am glad that he should understand her value. They have always been together, and according to his account he has been a very lonely man with only her as a companion, so that the thought of losing her was really terrible to him. He had not understood, he said, that I was becoming attached to her, but when he saw with his own eyes that it was really so, and that she might be taken away from him, it gave him such a shock that for a time he was not responsible for what he said or did. He was very sorry for all that had passed, and he recognised how foolish and how selfish it was that he should imagine that he could hold a beautiful woman like his sister to himself for her whole life. If she had to leave him he had rather it was to a neighbour like myself than to anyone else. But in any case it was a blow to him, and it would take him some time before he could prepare himself to meet it. He would withdraw all opposition upon his part if I would promise for three months to let the matter rest and to be content with cultivating the lady's friendship during that time without claiming her love. This I promised, and so the matter rests."

So there is one of our small mysteries cleared up. It is something to have touched bottom anywhere in this bog in which we are floundering. We know now why Stapleton looked with disfavour upon his sister's suitor — even when that suitor was so eligible a one as Sir Henry. And now I pass on to another thread which I have extricated out of the tangled skein, the mystery of the sobs in the night, of the tear-stained face of Mrs. Barrymore, of the secret journey of the butler to the western lattice window. Congratulate me, my dear Holmes, and tell me that I have not disappointed you as an agent — that you do not regret the confidence which you showed in me when you sent me down. All these things have by one night's work been thoroughly cleared.

I have said "by one night's work," but, in truth, it was by two nights' work, for on the first we drew entirely blank. I sat up with Sir Henry in his rooms until nearly three o'clock in the morning, but no sound of any sort did we hear except the chiming clock upon the stairs. It was a most melancholy vigil, and ended by each of us falling asleep in our chairs. Fortunately we were not discouraged, and we determined to try again. The next night we lowered the lamp, and sat smoking cigarettes without making the least sound. It was incredible how slowly the hours crawled by, and yet we were helped through it by the same sort of patient interest which the hunter must feel as he watches the trap into which he hopes the game may wander. One struck, and two, and we had almost for the second time given it up in despair, when in an instant we both sat bolt upright in our chairs, with all our weary senses keenly on the alert once more. We had heard the creak of a step in the passage.

Very stealthily we heard it pass along until it died away in the distance. Then the baronet gently opened his door and we set out in pursuit. Already our man had gone round the gallery, and the corridor was all in darkness. Softly we stole along until we had come into the other wing. We were just in time to catch a glimpse of the tall, black-bearded figure, his shoulders rounded, as he tip-toed down the passage. Then he passed through the same door as before, and the light of the candle framed it in the darkness and shot one single yellow beam across the gloom of the corridor. We shuffled cautiously towards it, trying every plank before we dared to put our whole weight upon it. We had taken the precaution of leaving our boots behind us, but, even so, the old boards snapped and creaked beneath our tread. Sometimes it seemed impossible that he should fail to hear our approach. However, the man is fortunately rather deaf, and he was entirely preoccupied in that which he was doing. When at last we reached the door and peeped through we found him crouching at the window, candle in hand, his white, intent face pressed against the pane, exactly as I had seen him two nights before.

We had arranged no plan of campaign, but the baronet is a man to whom the most direct way is always the most natural. He walked into the room, and as he did so Barrymore sprang up from the window with a sharp hiss of his breath and stood, livid and trembling, before us. His dark eyes, glaring out of the white mask of his face, were full of horror and astonishment as he gazed from Sir Henry to me.

“What are you doing here, Barrymore?”

“Nothing, sir.” His agitation was so great that he could hardly speak, and the shadows sprang up and down from the shaking of his candle. “It was the window, sir. I go round at night to see that they are fastened.”

“On the second floor?”

“Yes, sir, all the windows.”

“Look here, Barrymore,” said Sir Henry, sternly; “we have made up our minds to have the truth out of you, so it will save you trouble to tell it sooner rather than later. Come, now! No lies! What were you doing at that window?”

The fellow looked at us in a helpless way, and he wrung his hands together like one who is in the last extremity of doubt and misery.

“I was doing no harm, sir. I was holding a candle to the window.”

“And why were you holding a candle to the window?”

“Don’t ask me, Sir Henry — don’t ask me! I give you my word, sir, that it is not my secret, and that I cannot tell it. If it concerned no one but myself

I would not try to keep it from you."

A sudden idea occurred to me, and I took the candle from the trembling hand of the butler.

"He must have been holding it as a signal," said I. "Let us see if there is any answer." I held it as he had done, and stared out into the darkness of the night. Vaguely I could discern the black bank of the trees and the lighter expanse of the moor, for the moon was behind the clouds. And then I gave a cry of exultation, for a tiny pin-point of yellow light had suddenly transfixed the dark veil, and glowed steadily in the centre of the black square framed by the window.

"There it is!" I cried.

"No, no, sir, it is nothing — nothing at all!" the butler broke in; "I assure you, sir — —"

"Move your light across the window, Watson!" cried the baronet. "See, the other moves also! Now, you rascal, do you deny that it is a signal? Come, speak up! Who is your confederate out yonder, and what is this conspiracy that is going on?"

The man's face became openly defiant.

"It is my business, and not yours. I will not tell."

"Then you leave my employment right away."

"Very good, sir. If I must I must."

"And you go in disgrace. By thunder, you may well be ashamed of yourself. Your family has lived with mine for over a hundred years under this roof, and here I find you deep in some dark plot against me."

"No, no, sir; no, not against you!" It was a woman's voice, and Mrs. Barrymore, paler and more horror-struck than her husband, was standing at the door. Her bulky figure in a shawl and skirt might have been comic were it not for the intensity of feeling upon her face.

"We have to go, Eliza. This is the end of it. You can pack our things," said the butler.

"Oh, John, John, have I brought you to this? It is my doing, Sir Henry — all mine. He has done nothing except for my sake and because I asked him."

"Speak out, then! What does it mean?"

"My unhappy brother is starving on the moor. We cannot let him perish at our very gates. The light is a signal to him that food is ready for him, and his light out yonder is to show the spot to which to bring it."

“Then your brother is—”

“The escaped convict, sir — Selden, the criminal.”

“That’s the truth, sir,” said Barrymore. “I said that it was not my secret and that I could not tell it to you. But now you have heard it, and you will see that if there was a plot it was not against you.”

This, then, was the explanation of the stealthy expeditions at night and the light at the window. Sir Henry and I both stared at the woman in amazement. Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?

“Yes, sir, my name was Selden, and he is my younger brother. We humoured him too much when he was a lad, and gave him his own way in everything until he came to think that the world was made for his pleasure, and that he could do what he liked in it. Then as he grew older he met wicked companions, and the devil entered into him until he broke my mother’s heart and dragged our name in the dirt. From crime to crime he sank lower and lower, until it is only the mercy of God which has snatched him from the scaffold; but to me, sir, he was always the little curly-headed boy that I had nursed and played with, as an elder sister would. That was why he broke prison, sir. He knew that I was here and that we could not refuse to help him. When he dragged himself here one night, weary and starving, with the warders hard at his heels, what could we do? We took him in and fed him and cared for him. Then you returned, sir, and my brother thought he would be safer on the moor than anywhere else until the hue and cry was over, so he lay in hiding there. But every second night we made sure if he was still there by putting a light in the window, and if there was an answer my husband took out some bread and meat to him. Every day we hoped that he was gone, but as long as he was there we could not desert him. That is the whole truth, as I am an honest Christian woman, and you will see that if there is blame in the matter it does not lie with my husband, but with me, for whose sake he has done all that he has.”

The woman’s words came with an intense earnestness which carried conviction with them.

“Is this true, Barrymore?”

“Yes, Sir Henry. Every word of it.”

“Well, I cannot blame you for standing by your own wife. Forget what I have said. Go to your room, you two, and we shall talk further about this matter in the morning.”

When they were gone we looked out of the window again. Sir Henry had flung it open, and the cold night wind beat in upon our faces. Far away in the black distance there still glowed that one tiny point of yellow light.

“I wonder he dares,” said Sir Henry.

“It may be so placed as to be only visible from here.”

“Very likely. How far do you think it is?”

“Out by the Cleft Tor, I think.”

“Not more than a mile or two off.”

“Hardly that.”

“Well, it cannot be far if Barrymore had to carry out the food to it. And he is waiting, this villain, beside that candle. By thunder, Watson, I am going out to take that man!”

The same thought had crossed my own mind. It was not as if the Barrymores had taken us into their confidence. Their secret had been forced from them. The man was a danger to the community, an unmitigated scoundrel for whom there was neither pity nor excuse. We were only doing our duty in taking this chance of putting him back where he could do no harm. With his brutal and violent nature, others would have to pay the price if we held our hands. Any night, for example, our neighbours the Stapletons might be attacked by him, and it may have been the thought of this which made Sir Henry so keen upon the adventure.

“I will come,” said I.

“Then get your revolver and put on your boots. The sooner we start the better, as the fellow may put out his light and be off.”

In five minutes we were outside the door, starting upon our expedition. We hurried through the dark shrubbery, amid the dull moaning of the autumn wind and the rustle of the falling leaves. The night air was heavy with the smell of damp and decay. Now and again the moon peeped out for an instant, but clouds were driving over the face of the sky, and just as we came out on the moor a thin rain began to fall. The light still burned steadily in front.

“Are you armed?” I asked.

“I have a hunting-crop.”

“We must close in on him rapidly, for he is said to be a desperate fellow. We shall take him by surprise and have him at our mercy before he can resist.”

“I say, Watson,” said the baronet, “what would Holmes say to this? How about that hour of darkness in which the power of evil is exalted?”

As if in answer to his words there rose suddenly out of the vast gloom of the moor that strange cry which I had already heard upon the borders of the great Grimpen Mire. It came with the wind through the silence of the night, a long, deep mutter, then a rising howl, and then the sad moan in which it died away. Again and again it sounded, the whole air throbbing with it, strident, wild, and menacing. The baronet caught my sleeve and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

“My God, what’s that, Watson?”

“I don’t know. It’s a sound they have on the moor. I heard it once before.”

It died away, and an absolute silence closed in upon us. We stood straining our ears, but nothing came.

“Watson,” said the baronet, “it was the cry of a hound.”

My blood ran cold in my veins, for there was a break in his voice which told of the sudden horror which had seized him.

“What do they call this sound?” he asked.

“Who?”

“The folk on the country-side.”

“Oh, they are ignorant people. Why should you mind what they call it?”

“Tell me, Watson. What do they say of it?”

I hesitated but could not escape the question.

“They say it is the cry of the Hound of the Baskervilles.”

He groaned and was silent for a few moments.

“A hound it was,” he said, at last, “but it seemed to come from miles away, over yonder, I think.”

“It was hard to say whence it came.”

“It rose and fell with the wind. Isn’t that the direction of the great Grimpen Mire?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Well, it was up there. Come now, Watson, didn’t you think yourself that it was the cry of a hound? I am not a child. You need not fear to speak the truth.”

“Stapleton was with me when I heard it last. He said that it might be the calling of a strange bird.”

“No, no, it was a hound. My God, can there be some truth in all these stories? Is it possible that I am really in danger from so dark a cause? You don’t believe it, do you, Watson?”

“No, no.”

“And yet it was one thing to laugh about it in London, and it is another to stand out here in the darkness of the moor and to hear such a cry as that. And my uncle! There was the footprint of the hound beside him as he lay. It all fits together. I don’t think that I am a coward, Watson, but that sound seemed to freeze my very blood. Feel my hand!”

It was as cold as a block of marble.

“You’ll be all right to-morrow.”

“I don’t think I’ll get that cry out of my head. What do you advise that we do now?”

“Shall we turn back?”

“No, by thunder; we have come out to get our man, and we will do it. We after the convict, and a hell-hound, as likely as not, after us. Come on! We’ll see it through if all the fiends of the pit were loose upon the moor.”

We stumbled slowly along in the darkness, with the black loom of the craggy hills around us, and the yellow speck of light burning steadily in front. There is nothing so deceptive as the distance of a light upon a pitch-dark night, and sometimes the glimmer seemed to be far away upon the horizon and sometimes it might have been within a few yards of us. But at last we could see whence it came, and then we knew that we were indeed very close. A guttering candle was stuck in a crevice of the rocks which flanked it on each side so as to keep the wind from it and also to prevent it from being visible, save in the direction of Baskerville Hall. A boulder of granite concealed our approach, and crouching behind it we gazed over it at the signal light. It was strange to see this single candle burning there in the middle of the moor, with no sign of life near it — just the one straight yellow flame and the gleam of the rock on each side of it.

“What shall we do now?” whispered Sir Henry.

“Wait here. He must be near his light. Let us see if we can get a glimpse of him.”

The words were hardly out of my mouth when we both saw him. Over the rocks, in the crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hillsides. The light beneath him was reflected in his small, cunning eyes which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness, like a crafty and savage animal who has heard the steps of the hunters.

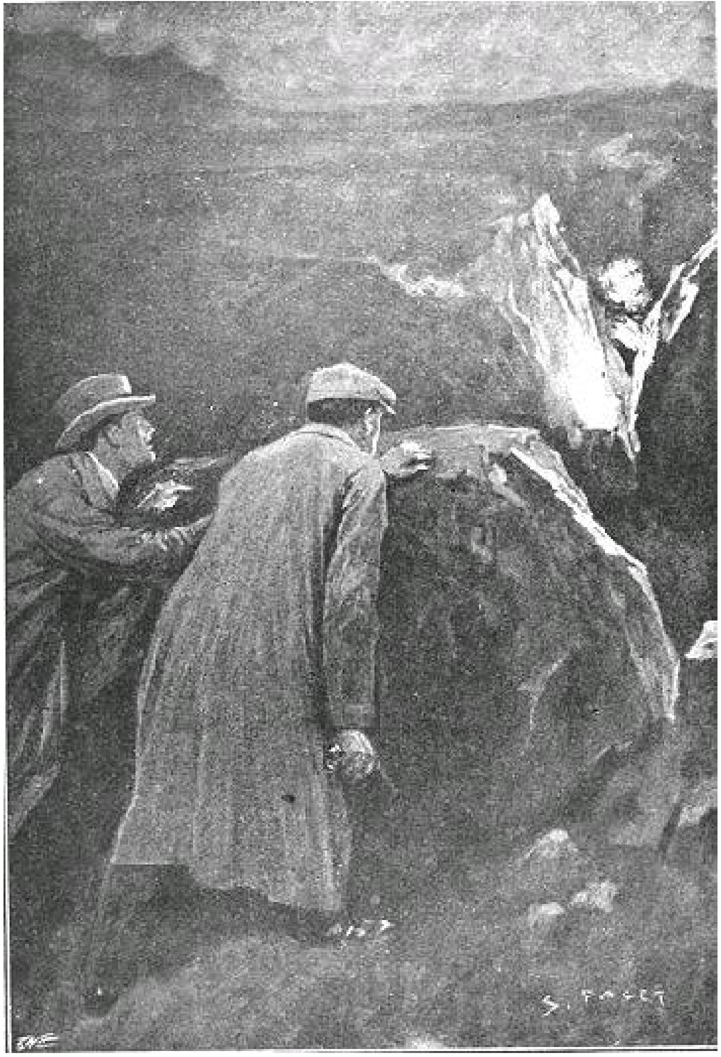

Something had evidently aroused his suspicions. It may have been that Barrymore had some private signal which we had neglected to give, or the fellow may have had some other reason for thinking that all was not well, but I could read his fears upon his wicked face. Any instant he might dash out the light and vanish in the darkness. I sprang forward therefore, and Sir Henry did the same. At the same moment the convict screamed out a curse at us and hurled a rock which splintered up against the boulder which had sheltered us. I caught one glimpse of his short, squat, strongly- built figure as he sprang to his feet and turned to run. At the same moment by a lucky chance the moon broke through the clouds. We rushed over the brow of the hill, and there was our man running with great speed down the other side, springing over the stones in his way with the activity of a mountain goat. A lucky long shot of my revolver might have crippled him, but I had brought it only to defend myself if attacked, and not to shoot an unarmed man who was running away.

We were both swift runners and in fairly good training, but we soon found that we had no chance of overtaking him. We saw him for a long time in the moonlight until he was only a small speck moving swiftly among the boulders upon the side of a distant hill. We ran and ran until we were completely blown, but the space between us grew ever wider. Finally we stopped and sat panting on two rocks, while we watched him disappearing in the distance.

And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. We had risen from our rocks and were turning to go home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining back-ground, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. It was not the convict. This man was far from the place where the latter had disappeared. Besides, he was a much taller man. With a cry of surprise I pointed him out to the baronet, but in the instant during which I had turned to grasp his arm the man was gone. There was the sharp pinnacle of granite still cutting the lower edge of the moon, but its peak bore no trace of that silent and motionless figure.

I wished to go in that direction and to search the tor, but it was some distance away. The baronet's nerves were still quivering from that cry, which recalled the dark story of his family, and he was not in the mood for fresh adventures. He had not seen this lonely man upon the tor and could not feel the thrill which his strange presence and his commanding attitude had given to me. "A warder, no doubt," said he. "The moor has been thick with them since this fellow escaped." Well, perhaps his explanation may be the right one, but I should like to have some further proof of it. To-day we mean to communicate to the Princetown people where they should look for their missing man, but it is hard lines that we have not actually had the triumph of bringing him back as our own prisoner. Such are the adventures of last night, and you must acknowledge, my dear Holmes, that I have done you very well in the matter of a report. Much of what I tell you is no doubt quite irrelevant, but still I feel that it is best that I should let you have all the facts and leave you to select for yourself those which will be of most service to you in helping you to your conclusions. We are certainly making some progress. So far as the Barrymores go we have found the motive of their actions, and that has cleared up the situation very much. But the moor with its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever. Perhaps in my next I may be able to throw some light upon this also. Best of all would it be if you could come down to us. In any case you will hear from me again in the course of the next few days.

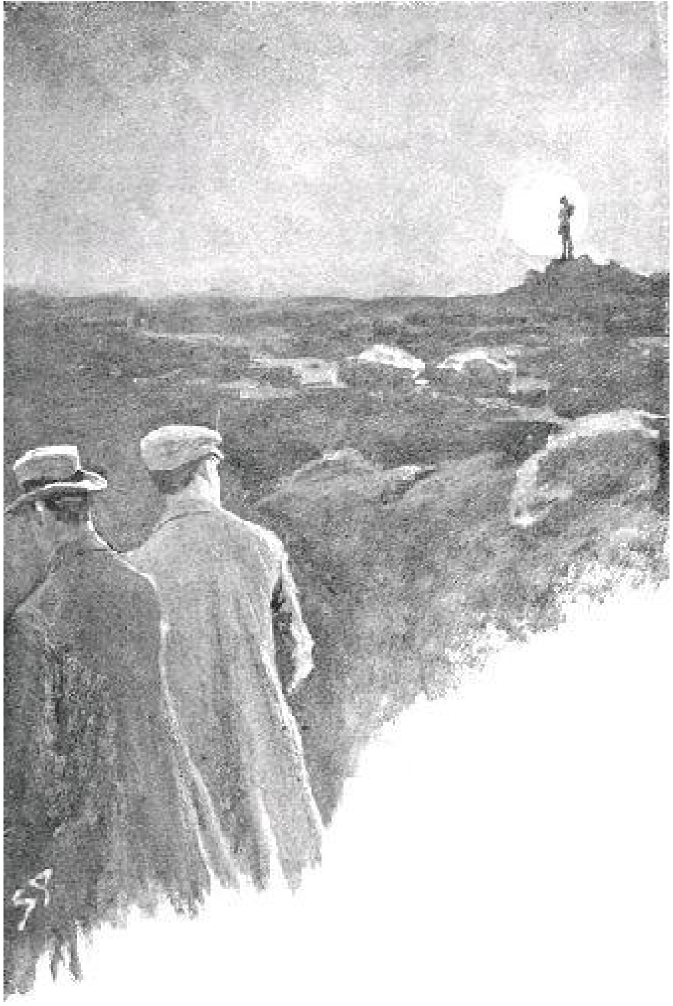

CHAPTER 10

Extract from the Diary of Dr. Watson

So far I have been able to quote from the reports which I have forwarded during these early days to Sherlock Holmes. Now, however, I have arrived at a point in my narrative where I am compelled to abandon this method and to trust once more to my recollections, aided by the diary which I kept at the time. A few extracts from the latter will carry me on to those scenes which are indelibly fixed in every detail upon my memory. I proceed, then, from the morning which followed our abortive chase of the convict and our other strange experiences upon the moor.

OCTOBER 16TH. — A dull and foggy day with a drizzle of rain. The house is banked in with rolling clouds, which rise now and then to show the dreary curves of the moor, with thin, silver veins upon the sides of the hills, and the distant boulders gleaming where the light strikes upon their wet faces. It is melancholy outside and in. The baronet is in a black reaction after the excitements of the night. I am conscious myself of a weight at my heart and a feeling of impending danger — ever present danger, which is the more terrible because I am unable to define it.

And have I not cause for such a feeling? Consider the long sequence of incidents which have all pointed to some sinister influence which is at work around us. There is the death of the last occupant of the Hall, fulfilling so exactly the conditions of the family legend, and there are the repeated reports from peasants of the appearance of a strange creature upon the moor. Twice I have with my own ears heard the sound which resembled the distant baying of a hound. It is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature. A spectral hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of. Stapleton may fall in with such a superstition, and Mortimer also; but if I have one quality upon earth it is common-sense, and nothing will persuade me to believe in such a thing. To do so would be to descend to the level of these poor peasants, who are not content with a mere fiend dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes. Holmes would not listen to such fancies, and I am his agent. But facts are facts, and I have twice heard this crying upon the moor. Suppose that there were really some huge hound loose upon it; that would go far to explain everything. But where could such a hound lie concealed, where did it get its food, where did it come from, how was it that no one saw it by day? It must be confessed that the natural explanation offers almost as many difficulties as the other. And always, apart from the hound, there is the fact of the human agency in London, the man in the cab, and the letter which warned Sir Henry against the moor. This at least was real, but it might have been the work of a protecting friend as easily as of an enemy. Where is that friend or enemy now? Has he remained in London, or has he followed us down here? Could he — could he be the stranger whom I saw upon the tor?

It is true that I have had only the one glance at him, and yet there are some things to which I am ready to swear. He is no one whom I have seen down here, and I have now met all the neighbours. The figure was far taller than that of Stapleton, far thinner than that of Frankland. Barrymore it might possibly have been, but we had left him behind us, and I am certain that he could not have followed us. A stranger then is still dogging us, just as a stranger dogged us in London. We have never shaken him off. If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies.

My first impulse was to tell Sir Henry all my plans. My second and wisest one is to play my own game and speak as little as possible to anyone. He is silent and distrait. His nerves have been strangely shaken by that sound upon the moor. I will say nothing to add to his anxieties, but I will take my own steps to attain my own end.

We had a small scene this morning after breakfast. Barrymore asked leave to speak with Sir Henry, and they were closeted in his study some little time. Sitting in the billiard-room I more than once heard the sound of voices raised, and I had a pretty good idea what the point was which was under discussion. After a time the baronet opened his door and called for me.

“Barrymore considers that he has a grievance,” he said. “He thinks that it was unfair on our part to hunt his brother-in-law down when he, of his own free will, had told us the secret.”

The butler was standing very pale but very collected before us.

“I may have spoken too warmly, sir,” said he, “and if I have, I am sure that I beg your pardon. At the same time, I was very much surprised when I heard you two gentlemen come back this morning and learned that you had been chasing Selden. The poor fellow has enough to fight against without my putting more upon his track.”

“If you had told us of your own free will it would have been a different thing,” said the baronet, “you only told us, or rather your wife only told us, when it was forced from you and you could not help yourself.”

“I didn’t think you would have taken advantage of it, Sir Henry — indeed I didn’t.”

“The man is a public danger. There are lonely houses scattered over the moor, and he is a fellow who would stick at nothing. You only want to get a glimpse of his face to see that. Look at Mr. Stapleton’s house, for example, with no one but himself to defend it. There’s no safety for anyone until he is under lock and key.”

“He’ll break into no house, sir. I give you my solemn word upon that. But he will never trouble anyone in this country again. I assure you, Sir Henry, that in a very few days the necessary arrangements will have been made and he will be on his way to South America. For God’s sake, sir, I beg of you not to let the police know that he is still on the moor. They have given up the chase there, and he can lie quiet until the ship is ready for him. You can’t tell on him without getting my wife and me into trouble. I beg you, sir, to say nothing to the police.”

“What do you say, Watson?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “If he were safely out of the country it would relieve the tax-payer of a burden.”

“But how about the chance of his holding someone up before he goes?”

“He would not do anything so mad, sir. We have provided him with all that he can want. To commit a crime would be to show where he was hiding.”

“That is true,” said Sir Henry. “Well, Barrymore—”

“God bless you, sir, and thank you from my heart! It would have killed my poor wife had he been taken again.”

“I guess we are aiding and abetting a felony, Watson? But, after what we have heard I don’t feel as if I could give the man up, so there is an end of it. All right, Barrymore, you can go.”

With a few broken words of gratitude the man turned, but he hesitated and then came back.

“You’ve been so kind to us, sir, that I should like to do the best I can for you in return. I know something, Sir Henry, and perhaps I should have said it before, but it was long after the inquest that I found it out. I’ve never breathed a word about it yet to mortal man. It’s about poor Sir Charles’s death.”

The baronet and I were both upon our feet. “Do you know how he died?”

“No, sir, I don’t know that.”

“What then?”

“I know why he was at the gate at that hour. It was to meet a woman.”

“To meet a woman! He?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And the woman’s name?”

“I can’t give you the name, sir, but I can give you the initials. Her initials were L. L.”

“How do you know this, Barrymore?”

“Well, Sir Henry, your uncle had a letter that morning. He had usually a great many letters, for he was a public man and well known for his kind heart, so that everyone who was in trouble was glad to turn to him. But that morning, as it chanced, there was only this one letter, so I took the more notice of it. It was from Coombe Tracey, and it was addressed in a woman’s hand.”

“Well?”

“Well, sir, I thought no more of the matter, and never would have done had it not been for my wife. Only a few weeks ago she was cleaning out Sir Charles’s study — it had never been touched since his death — and she found the ashes of a burned letter in the back of the grate. The greater part of it was charred to pieces, but one little slip, the end of a page, hung together, and the writing could still be read, though it was gray on a black ground. It seemed to us to be a postscript at the end of the letter, and it said: ‘Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o clock. Beneath it were signed the initials L. L.”

“Have you got that slip?”

“No, sir, it crumbled all to bits after we moved it.”

“Had Sir Charles received any other letters in the same writing?”

"Well, sir, I took no particular notice of his letters. I should not have noticed this one, only it happened to come alone."

"And you have no idea who L. L. is?"

"No, sir. No more than you have. But I expect if we could lay our hands upon that lady we should know more about Sir Charles's death."

"I cannot understand, Barrymore, how you came to conceal this important information."

"Well, sir, it was immediately after that our own trouble came to us. And then again, sir, we were both of us very fond of Sir Charles, as we well might be considering all that he has done for us. To rake this up couldn't help our poor master, and it's well to go carefully when there's a lady in the case. Even the best of us — —"

"You thought it might injure his reputation?"

"Well, sir, I thought no good could come of it. But now you have been kind to us, and I feel as if it would be treating you unfairly not to tell you all that I know about the matter."

"Very good, Barrymore; you can go." When the butler had left us Sir Henry turned to me. "Well, Watson, what do you think of this new light?"

"It seems to leave the darkness rather blacker than before."

"So I think. But if we can only trace L. L. it should clear up the whole business. We have gained that much. We know that there is someone who has the facts if we can only find her. What do you think we should do?"

"Let Holmes know all about it at once. It will give him the clue for which he has been seeking. I am much mistaken if it does not bring him down."

I went at once to my room and drew up my report of the morning's conversation for Holmes. It was evident to me that he had been very busy of late, for the notes which I had from Baker Street were few and short, with no comments upon the information which I had supplied and hardly any reference to my mission. No doubt his blackmailing case is absorbing all his faculties. And yet this new factor must surely arrest his attention and renew his interest. I wish that he were here.

OCTOBER 17TH. — All day to-day the rain poured down, rustling on the ivy and dripping from the eaves. I thought of the convict out upon the bleak, cold, shelterless moor. Poor devil! Whatever his crimes, he has suffered something to atone for them. And then I thought of that other one — the face in the cab, the figure against the moon. Was he also out in that deluged — the unseen watcher, the man of darkness? In the evening I put on my waterproof and I walked far upon the sodden moor, full of dark imaginings, the rain beating upon my face and the wind whistling about my ears. God help those who wander into the great mire now, for even the firm uplands are becoming a morass. I found the black tor upon which I had seen the solitary watcher, and from its craggy summit I looked out myself across the melancholy downs. Rain squalls drifted across their russet face, and the heavy, slate-coloured clouds hung low over the landscape, trailing in gray wreaths down the sides of the fantastic hills. In the distant hollow on the left, half hidden by the mist, the two thin towers of Baskerville Hall rose above the trees. They were the only signs of human life which I could see, save only those prehistoric huts which lay thickly upon the slopes of the hills. Nowhere was there any trace of that lonely man whom I had seen on the same spot two nights before.

As I walked back I was overtaken by Dr. Mortimer driving in his dog-cart over a rough moorland track which led from the outlying farmhouse of Foulmire. He has been very attentive to us, and hardly a day has passed that he has not called at the Hall to see how we were getting on. He insisted upon my climbing into his dog-cart, and he gave me a lift homeward. I found him much troubled over the disappearance of his little spaniel. It had wandered on to the moor and had never come back. I gave him such consolation as I might, but I thought of the pony on the Grimpen Mire, and I do not fancy that he will see his little dog again.

“By the way, Mortimer,” said I as we jolted along the rough road, “I suppose there are few people living within driving distance of this whom you do not know?”

“Hardly any, I think.”

“Can you, then, tell me the name of any woman whose initials are L. L.?”

He thought for a few minutes.

“No,” said he. “There are a few gipsies and labouring folk for whom I can’t answer, but among the farmers or gentry there is no one whose initials are those. Wait a bit though,” he added after a pause. “There is Laura Lyons — her initials are L. L. — but she lives in Coombe Tracey.”

“Who is she?” I asked.

“She is Frankland’s daughter.”

“What! Old Frankland the crank?”

“Exactly. She married an artist named Lyons, who came sketching on the moor. He proved to be a blackguard and deserted her. The fault from what I hear may not have been entirely on one side. Her father refused to have anything to do with her because she had married without his consent, and perhaps for one or two other reasons as well. So, between the old sinner and the young one the girl has had a pretty bad time."

"How does she live?"

"I fancy old Frankland allows her a pittance, but it cannot be more, for his own affairs are considerably involved. Whatever she may have deserved one could not allow her to go hopelessly to the bad. Her story got about, and several of the people here did something to enable her to earn an honest living. Stapleton did for one, and Sir Charles for another. I gave a trifle myself. It was to set her up in a typewriting business."

He wanted to know the object of my inquiries, but I managed to satisfy his curiosity without telling him too much, for there is no reason why we should take anyone into our confidence. To-morrow morning I shall find my way to Coombe Tracey, and if I can see this Mrs. Laura Lyons, of equivocal reputation, a long step will have been made towards clearing one incident in this chain of mysteries. I am certainly developing the wisdom of the serpent, for when Mortimer pressed his questions to an inconvenient extent I asked him casually to what type Frankland's skull belonged, and so heard nothing but craniology for the rest of our drive. I have not lived for years with Sherlock Holmes for nothing.

I have only one other incident to record upon this tempestuous and melancholy day. This was my conversation with Barrymore just now, which gives me one more strong card which I can play in due time.

Mortimer had stayed to dinner, and he and the baronet played ecarté afterwards. The butler brought me my coffee into the library, and I took the chance to ask him a few questions.

"Well," said I, "has this precious relation of yours departed, or is he still lurking out yonder?"

"I don't know, sir. I hope to heaven that he has gone, for he has brought nothing but trouble here! I've not heard of him since I left out food for him last, and that was three days ago."

"Did you see him then?"

"No, sir, but the food was gone when next I went that way."

"Then he was certainly there?"

"So you would think, sir, unless it was the other man who took it."

I sat with my coffee-cup halfway to my lips and stared at Barrymore.

“You know that there is another man then?”

“Yes, sir; there is another man upon the moor.”

“Have you seen him?”

“No, sir.”

“How do you know of him then?”

“Selden told me of him, sir, a week ago or more. He’s in hiding, too, but he’s not a convict as far as I can make out. I don’t like it, Dr. Watson — I tell you straight, sir, that I don’t like it.” He spoke with a sudden passion of earnestness.

“Now, listen to me, Barrymore! I have no interest in this matter but that of your master. I have come here with no object except to help him. Tell me, frankly, what it is that you don’t like.”

Barrymore hesitated for a moment, as if he regretted his outburst, or found it difficult to express his own feelings in words.

“It’s all these goings-on, sir,” he cried at last, waving his hand towards the rain-lashed window which faced the moor. “There’s foul play somewhere, and there’s black villainy brewing, to that I’ll swear! Very glad I should be, sir, to see Sir Henry on his way back to London again!”

“But what is it that alarms you?”

“Look at Sir Charles’s death! That was bad enough, for all that the coroner said. Look at the noises on the moor at night. There’s not a man would cross it after sundown if he was paid for it. Look at this stranger hiding out yonder, and watching and waiting! What’s he waiting for? What does it mean? It means no good to anyone of the name of Baskerville, and very glad I shall be to be quit of it all on the day that Sir Henry’s new servants are ready to take over the Hall.”

“But about this stranger,” said I. “Can you tell me anything about him? What did Selden say? Did he find out where he hid, or what he was doing?”

“He saw him once or twice, but he is a deep one, and gives nothing away. At first he thought that he was the police, but soon he found that he had some lay of his own. A kind of gentleman he was, as far as he could see, but what he was doing he could not make out.”

“And where did he say that he lived?”

“Among the old houses on the hillside — the stone huts where the old folk used to live.”

“But how about his food?”

“Selden found out that he has got a lad who works for him and brings him all he needs. I dare say he goes to Coombe Tracey for what he wants.”

“Very good, Barrymore. We may talk further of this some other time.” When the butler had gone I walked over to the black window, and I looked through a blurred pane at the driving clouds and at the tossing outline of the wind-swept trees. It is a wild night indoors, and what must it be in a stone hut upon the moor. What passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time! And what deep and earnest purpose can he have which calls for such a trial! There, in that hut upon the moor, seems to lie the very centre of that problem which has vexed me so sorely. I swear that another day shall not have passed before I have done all that man can do to reach the heart of the mystery.

CHAPTER 11

The Man on the Tor

The extract from my private diary which forms the last chapter has brought my narrative up to the 18th of October, a time when these strange events began to move swiftly towards their terrible conclusion. The incidents of the next few days are indelibly graven upon my recollection, and I can tell them without reference to the notes made at the time. I start then from the day which succeeded that upon which I had established two facts of great importance, the one that Mrs. Laura Lyons of Coombe Tracey had written to Sir Charles Baskerville and made an appointment with him at the very place and hour that he met his death, the other that the lurking man upon the moor was to be found among the stone huts upon the hill-side. With these two facts in my possession I felt that either my intelligence or my courage must be deficient if I could not throw some further light upon these dark places.

I had no opportunity to tell the baronet what I had learned about Mrs. Lyons upon the evening before, for Dr. Mortimer remained with him at cards until it was very late. At breakfast, however, I informed him about my discovery, and asked him whether he would care to accompany me to Coombe Tracey. At first he was very eager to come, but on second thoughts it seemed to both of us that if I went alone the results might be better. The more formal we made the visit the less information we might obtain. I left Sir Henry behind, therefore, not without some prickings of conscience, and drove off upon my new quest.

When I reached Coombe Tracey I told Perkins to put up the horses, and I made inquiries for the lady whom I had come to interrogate. I had no difficulty in finding her rooms, which were central and well appointed. A maid showed me in without ceremony, and as I entered the sitting-room a lady, who was sitting before a Remington typewriter, sprang up with a pleasant smile of welcome. Her face fell, however, when she saw that I was a stranger, and she sat down again and asked me the object of my visit.

The first impression left by Mrs. Lyons was one of extreme beauty. Her eyes and hair were of the same rich hazel colour, and her cheeks, though considerably freckled, were flushed with the exquisite bloom of the brunette, the dainty pink which lurks at the heart of the sulphur rose. Admiration was, I repeat, the first impression. But the second was criticism. There was something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty. But these, of course, are after-thoughts. At the moment I was simply conscious that I was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that she was asking me the reasons for my visit. I had not quite understood until that instant how delicate my mission was.

"I have the pleasure," said I, "of knowing your father." It was a clumsy introduction, and the lady made me feel it.

"There is nothing in common between my father and me," she said. "I owe him nothing, and his friends are not mine. If it were not for the late Sir Charles Baskerville and some other kind hearts I might have starved for all that my father cared."

"It was about the late Sir Charles Baskerville that I have come here to see you."

The freckles started out on the lady's face.

"What can I tell you about him?" she asked, and her fingers played nervously over the stops of her typewriter.

"You knew him, did you not?"

"I have already said that I owe a great deal to his kindness. If I am able to support myself it is largely due to the interest which he took in my unhappy situation."

"Did you correspond with him?"

The lady looked quickly up with an angry gleam in her hazel eyes.

"What is the object of these questions?" she asked sharply.

"The object is to avoid a public scandal. It is better that I should ask them here than that the matter should pass outside our control."

She was silent and her face was still very pale. At last she looked up with something reckless and defiant in her manner.

"Well, I'll answer," she said. "What are your questions?"

"Did you correspond with Sir Charles?"

"I certainly wrote to him once or twice to acknowledge his delicacy and his generosity."

“Have you the dates of those letters?”

“No.”

“Have you ever met him?”

“Yes, once or twice, when he came into Coombe Tracey. He was a very retiring man, and he preferred to do good by stealth.”

“But if you saw him so seldom and wrote so seldom, how did he know enough about your affairs to be able to help you, as you say that he has done?”

She met my difficulty with the utmost readiness.

“There were several gentlemen who knew my sad history and united to help me. One was Mr. Stapleton, a neighbour and intimate friend of Sir Charles’s. He was exceedingly kind, and it was through him that Sir Charles learned about my affairs.”

I knew already that Sir Charles Baskerville had made Stapleton his almoner upon several occasions, so the lady’s statement bore the impress of truth upon it.

“Did you ever write to Sir Charles asking him to meet you?” I continued.

Mrs. Lyons flushed with anger again.

“Really, sir, this is a very extraordinary question.”

“I am sorry, madam, but I must repeat it.”

“Then I answer, certainly not.”

“Not on the very day of Sir Charles’s death?”

The flush had faded in an instant, and a deathly face was before me. Her dry lips could not speak the “No” which I saw rather than heard.

“Surely your memory deceives you,” said I. “I could even quote a passage of your letter. It ran ‘Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o’clock.’”

I thought that she had fainted, but she recovered herself by a supreme effort.

“Is there no such thing as a gentleman?” she gasped.

“You do Sir Charles an injustice. He did burn the letter. But sometimes a letter may be legible even when burned. You acknowledge now that you wrote it?”

“Yes, I did write it,” she cried, pouring out her soul in a torrent of words. “I did write it. Why should I deny it? I have no reason to be ashamed of it. I wished him to help me. I believed that if I had an interview I could gain his help, so I asked him to meet me.”

“But why at such an hour?”

“Because I had only just learned that he was going to London next day and might be away for months. There were reasons why I could not get there earlier.”

“But why a rendezvous in the garden instead of a visit to the house?”

“Do you think a woman could go alone at that hour to a bachelor’s house?”

“Well, what happened when you did get there?”

“I never went.”

“Mrs. Lyons!”

“No, I swear it to you on all I hold sacred. I never went. Something intervened to prevent my going.”

“What was that?”

“That is a private matter. I cannot tell it.”

“You acknowledge then that you made an appointment with Sir Charles at the very hour and place at which he met his death, but you deny that you kept the appointment.”

“That is the truth.”

Again and again I cross-questioned her, but I could never get past that point.

“Mrs. Lyons,” said I, as I rose from this long and inconclusive interview, “you are taking a very great responsibility and putting yourself in a very false position by not making an absolutely clean breast of all that you know. If I have to call in the aid of the police you will find how seriously you are compromised. If your position is innocent, why did you in the first instance deny having written to Sir Charles upon that date?”

“Because I feared that some false conclusion might be drawn from it and that I might find myself involved in a scandal.”

“And why were you so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy your letter?”

“If you have read the letter you will know.”

“I did not say that I had read all the letter.”

“You quoted some of it.”

“I quoted the postscript. The letter had, as I said, been burned and it was not all legible. I ask you once again why it was that you were so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy this letter which he received on the day of his death.”

"The matter is a very private one."

"The more reason why you should avoid a public investigation."

"I will tell you, then. If you have heard anything of my unhappy history you will know that I made a rash marriage and had reason to regret it."

"I have heard so much."

"My life has been one incessant persecution from a husband whom I abhor. The law is upon his side, and every day I am faced by the possibility that he may force me to live with him. At the time that I wrote this letter to Sir Charles I had learned that there was a prospect of my regaining my freedom if certain expenses could be met. It meant everything to me — peace of mind, happiness, self-respect — everything. I knew Sir Charles's generosity, and I thought that if he heard the story from my own lips he would help me."

"Then how is it that you did not go?"

"Because I received help in the interval from another source."

"Why then, did you not write to Sir Charles and explain this?"

"So I should have done had I not seen his death in the paper next morning."

The woman's story hung coherently together, and all my questions were unable to shake it. I could only check it by finding if she had, indeed, instituted divorce proceedings against her husband at or about the time of the tragedy.

It was unlikely that she would dare to say that she had not been to Baskerville Hall if she really had been, for a trap would be necessary to take her there, and could not have returned to Coombe Tracey until the early hours of the morning. Such an excursion could not be kept secret. The probability was, therefore, that she was telling the truth, or, at least, a part of the truth. I came away baffled and disheartened. Once again I had reached that dead wall which seemed to be built across every path by which I tried to get at the object of my mission. And yet the more I thought of the lady's face and of her manner the more I felt that something was being held back from me. Why should she turn so pale? Why should she fight against every admission until it was forced from her? Why should she have been so reticent at the time of the tragedy? Surely the explanation of all this could not be as innocent as she would have me believe. For the moment I could proceed no farther in that direction, but must turn back to that other clue which was to be sought for among the stone huts upon the moor.

And that was a most vague direction. I realised it as I drove back and noted how hill after hill showed traces of the ancient people. Barrymore's only indication had been that the stranger lived in one of these abandoned huts, and many hundreds of them are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the moor. But I had my own experience for a guide since it had shown me the man himself standing upon the summit of the Black Tor. That then should be the centre of my search. From there I should explore every hut upon the moor until I lighted upon the right one. If this man were inside it I should find out from his own lips, at the point of my revolver if necessary, who he was and why he had dogged us so long. He might slip away from us in the crowd of Regent Street, but it would puzzle him to do so upon the lonely moor. On the other hand, if I should find the hut and its tenant should not be within it I must remain there, however long the vigil, until he returned. Holmes had missed him in London. It would indeed be a triumph for me if I could run him to earth, where my master had failed.

Luck had been against us again and again in this inquiry, but now at last it came to my aid. And the messenger of good fortune was none other than Mr. Frankland, who was standing, gray-whiskered and red-faced, outside the gate of his garden, which opened on to the high road along which I travelled.

"Good-day, Dr. Watson," cried he with unwonted good humour, "you must really give your horses a rest, and come in to have a glass of wine and to congratulate me."

My feelings towards him were very far from being friendly after what I had heard of his treatment of his daughter, but I was anxious to send Perkins and the wagonette home, and the opportunity was a good one. I alighted and sent a message to Sir Henry that I should walk over in time for dinner. Then I followed Frankland into his dining-room.

"It is a great day for me, sir — one of the red-letter days of my life," he cried with many chuckles. "I have brought off a double event. I mean to teach them in these parts that law is law, and that there is a man here who does not fear to invoke it. I have established a right of way through the centre of old Middleton's park, slap across it, sir, within a hundred yards of his own front door. What do you think of that? We'll teach these magnates that they cannot ride roughshod over the rights of the commoners, confound them! And I've closed the wood where the Fernworthy folk used to picnic. These infernal people seem to think that there are no rights of property, and that they can swarm where they like with their papers and their bottles. Both cases decided, Dr. Watson, and both in my favour. I haven't had such a day since I had Sir John Morland for trespass, because he shot in his own warren."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"Look it up in the books, sir. It will repay reading — Frankland v. Morland, Court of Queen's Bench. It cost me 200 pounds, but I got my verdict."

"Did it do you any good?"

"None, sir, none. I am proud to say that I had no interest in the matter. I act entirely from a sense of public duty. I have no doubt, for example, that the Fernworthy people will burn me in effigy to-night. I told the police last time they did it that they should stop these disgraceful exhibitions. The County Constabulary is in a scandalous state, sir, and it has not afforded me the protection to which I am entitled. The case of Frankland v. Regina will bring the matter before the attention of the public. I told them that they would have occasion to regret their treatment of me, and already my words have come true."

"How so?" I asked.

The old man put on a very knowing expression.

"Because I could tell them what they are dying to know; but nothing would induce me to help the rascals in any way."

I had been casting round for some excuse by which I could get away from his gossip, but now I began to wish to hear more of it. I had seen enough of the contrary nature of the old sinner to understand that any strong sign of interest would be the surest way to stop his confidences.

"Some poaching case, no doubt?" said I, with an indifferent manner.

"Ha, ha, my boy, a very much more important matter than that! What about the convict on the moor?"

I started. "You don't mean that you know where he is?" said I.

"I may not know exactly where he is, but I am quite sure that I could help the police to lay their hands on him. Has it never struck you that the way to catch that man was to find out where he got his food, and so trace it to him?"

He certainly seemed to be getting uncomfortably near the truth. "No doubt," said I; "but how do you know that he is anywhere upon the moor?"

“I know it because I have seen with my own eyes the messenger who takes him his food.”

My heart sank for Barrymore. It was a serious thing to be in the power of this spiteful old busybody. But his next remark took a weight from my mind.

“You’ll be surprised to hear that his food is taken to him by a child. I see him every day through my telescope upon the roof. He passes along the same path at the same hour, and to whom should he be going except to the convict?”

Here was luck indeed! And yet I suppressed all appearance of interest. A child! Barrymore had said that our unknown was supplied by a boy. It was on his track, and not upon the convict’s, that Frankland had stumbled. If I could get his knowledge it might save me a long and weary hunt. But incredulity and indifference were evidently my strongest cards.

“I should say that it was much more likely that it was the son of one of the moorland shepherds taking out his father’s dinner.”

The least appearance of opposition struck fire out of the old autocrat. His eyes looked malignantly at me, and his gray whiskers bristled like those of an angry cat.

“Indeed, sir!” said he, pointing out over the wide-stretching moor. “Do you see that Black Tor over yonder? Well, do you see the low hill beyond with the thornbush upon it? It is the stoniest part of the whole moor. Is that a place where a shepherd would be likely to take his station? Your suggestion, sir, is a most absurd one.”

I meekly answered that I had spoken without knowing all the facts. My submission pleased him and led him to further confidences.

“You may be sure, sir, that I have very good grounds before I come to an opinion. I have seen the boy again and again with his bundle. Every day, and sometimes twice a day, I have been able — but wait a moment, Dr. Watson. Do my eyes deceive me, or is there at the present moment something moving upon that hill- side?”

It was several miles off, but I could distinctly see a small dark dot against the dull green and gray.

“Come, sir, come!” cried Frankland, rushing upstairs. “You will see with your own eyes and judge for yourself.”

The telescope, a formidable instrument mounted upon a tripod, stood upon the flat leads of the house. Frankland clapped his eye to it and gave a cry of satisfaction.

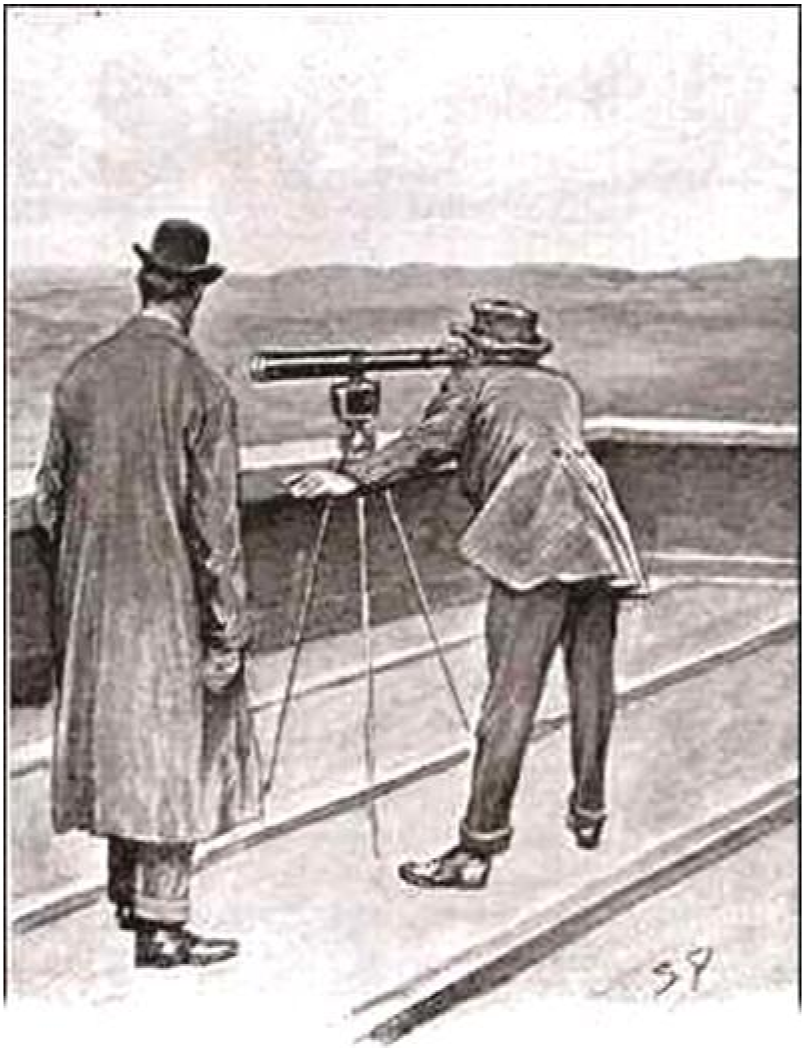

“Quick, Dr. Watson, quick, before he passes over the hill!”

There he was, sure enough, a small urchin with a little bundle upon his shoulder, toiling slowly up the hill. When he reached the crest I saw the ragged uncouth figure outlined for an instant against the cold blue sky. He looked round him with a furtive and stealthy air, as one who dreads pursuit. Then he vanished over the hill.

“Well! Am I right?”

“Certainly, there is a boy who seems to have some secret errand.”

“And what the errand is even a county constable could guess. But not one word shall they have from me, and I bind you to secrecy also, Dr. Watson. Not a word! You understand!”

“Just as you wish.”

"They have treated me shamefully — shamefully. When the facts come out in Frankland v. Regina I venture to think that a thrill of indignation will run through the country. Nothing would induce me to help the police in any way. For all they cared it might have been me, instead of my effigy, which these rascals burned at the stake. Surely you are not going! You will help me to empty the decanter in honour of this great occasion!"

But I resisted all his solicitations and succeeded in dissuading him from his announced intention of walking home with me. I kept the road as long as his eye was on me, and then I struck off across the moor and made for the stony hill over which the boy had disappeared. Everything was working in my favour, and I swore that it should not be through lack of energy or perseverance that I should miss the chance which fortune had thrown in my way.

The sun was already sinking when I reached the summit of the hill, and the long slopes beneath me were all golden-green on one side and gray shadow on the other. A haze lay low upon the farthest sky-line, out of which jutted the fantastic shapes of Belliver and Vixen Tor. Over the wide expanse there was no sound and no movement. One great gray bird, a gull or curlew, soared aloft in the blue heaven. He and I seemed to be the only living things between the huge arch of the sky and the desert beneath it. The barren scene, the sense of loneliness, and the mystery and urgency of my task all struck a chill into my heart. The boy was nowhere to be seen. But down beneath me in a cleft of the hills there was a circle of the old stone huts, and in the middle of them there was one which retained sufficient roof to act as a screen against the weather. My heart leaped within me as I saw it. This must be the burrow where the stranger lurked. At last my foot was on the threshold of his hiding place — his secret was within my grasp.

As I approached the hut, walking as warily as Stapleton would do when with poised net he drew near the settled butterfly, I satisfied myself that the place had indeed been used as a habitation. A vague pathway among the boulders led to the dilapidated opening which served as a door. All was silent within. The unknown might be lurking there, or he might be prowling on the moor. My nerves tingled with the sense of adventure. Throwing aside my cigarette, I closed my hand upon the butt of my revolver and, walking swiftly up to the door, I looked in. The place was empty.

But there were ample signs that I had not come upon a false scent. This was certainly where the man lived. Some blankets rolled in a waterproof lay upon that very stone slab upon which Neolithic man had once slumbered. The ashes of a fire were heaped in a rude grate. Beside it lay some cooking utensils and a bucket half-full of water. A litter of empty tins showed that the place had been occupied for some time, and I saw, as my eyes became accustomed to the checkered light, a pannikin and a half-full bottle of spirits standing in the corner. In the middle of the hut a flat stone served the purpose of a table, and upon this stood a small cloth bundle — the same, no doubt, which I had seen through the telescope upon the shoulder of the boy. It contained a loaf of bread, a tinned tongue, and two tins of preserved peaches. As I set it down again, after having examined it, my heart leaped to see that beneath it there lay a sheet of paper with writing upon it. I raised it, and this was what I read, roughly scrawled in pencil: —

Dr. Watson has gone to Coombe Tracey.

For a minute I stood there with the paper in my hands thinking out the meaning of this curt message. It was I, then, and not Sir Henry, who was being dogged by this secret man. He had not followed me himself, but he had set an agent — the boy, perhaps — upon my track, and this was his report. Possibly I had taken no step since I had been upon the moor which had not been observed and reported. Always there was this feeling of an unseen force, a fine net drawn round us with infinite skill and delicacy, holding us so lightly that it was only at some supreme moment that one realised that one was indeed entangled in its meshes.

If there was one report there might be others, so I looked round the hut in search of them. There was no trace, however, of anything of the kind, nor could I discover any sign which might indicate the character or intentions of the man who lived in this singular place, save that he must be of Spartan habits and cared little for the comforts of life. When I thought of the heavy rains and looked at the gaping roof I understood how strong and immutable must be the purpose which had kept him in that inhospitable abode. Was he our malignant enemy, or was he by chance our guardian angel? I swore that I would not leave the hut until I knew.

Outside the sun was sinking low and the west was blazing with scarlet and gold. Its reflection was shot back in ruddy patches by the distant pools which lay amid the great Grimpen Mire. There were the two towers of Baskerville Hall, and there a distant blur of smoke which marked the village of Grimpen. Between the two, behind the hill, was the house of the Stapletons. All was sweet and mellow and peaceful in the golden evening light, and yet as I looked at them my soul shared none of the peace of nature but quivered at the vagueness and the terror of that interview which every instant was bringing nearer. With tingling nerves, but a fixed purpose, I sat in the dark recess of the hut and waited with sombre patience for the coming of its tenant.

And then at last I heard him. Far away came the sharp clink of a boot striking upon a stone. Then another and yet another, coming nearer and nearer. I shrank back into the darkest corner, and cocked the pistol in my pocket, determined not to discover myself until I had an opportunity of seeing something of the stranger. There was a long pause which showed that he had stopped. Then once more the footsteps approached and a shadow fell across the opening of the hut.

“It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson,” said a well-known voice. “I really think that you will be more comfortable outside than in.”

CHAPTER 12

Death on the Moor

For a moment or two I sat breathless, hardly able to believe my ears. Then my senses and my voice came back to me, while a crushing weight of responsibility seemed in an instant to be lifted from my soul. That cold, incisive, ironical voice could belong to but one man in all the world.

“Holmes!” I cried—”Holmes!”

“Come out,” said he, “and please be careful with the revolver.”

I stooped under the rude lintel, and there he sat upon a stone outside, his gray eyes dancing with amusement as they fell upon my astonished features. He was thin and worn, but clear and alert, his keen face bronzed by the sun and roughened by the wind. In his tweed suit and cloth cap he looked like any other tourist upon the moor, and he had contrived, with that cat-like love of personal cleanliness which was one of his characteristics, that his chin should be as smooth and his linen as perfect as if he were in Baker Street.

“I never was more glad to see anyone in my life,” said I, as I wrung him by the hand.

“Or more astonished, eh?”

“Well, I must confess to it.”

“The surprise was not all on one side, I assure you. I had no idea that you had found my occasional retreat, still less that you were inside it, until I was within twenty paces of the door.”

“My footprint, I presume?”

“No, Watson; I fear that I could not undertake to recognise your footprint amid all the footprints of the world. If you seriously desire to deceive me you must change your tobacconist; for when I see the stub of a cigarette marked Bradley, Oxford Street, I know that my friend Watson is in the neighbourhood. You will see it there beside the path. You threw it down, no doubt, at that supreme moment when you charged into the empty hut.”

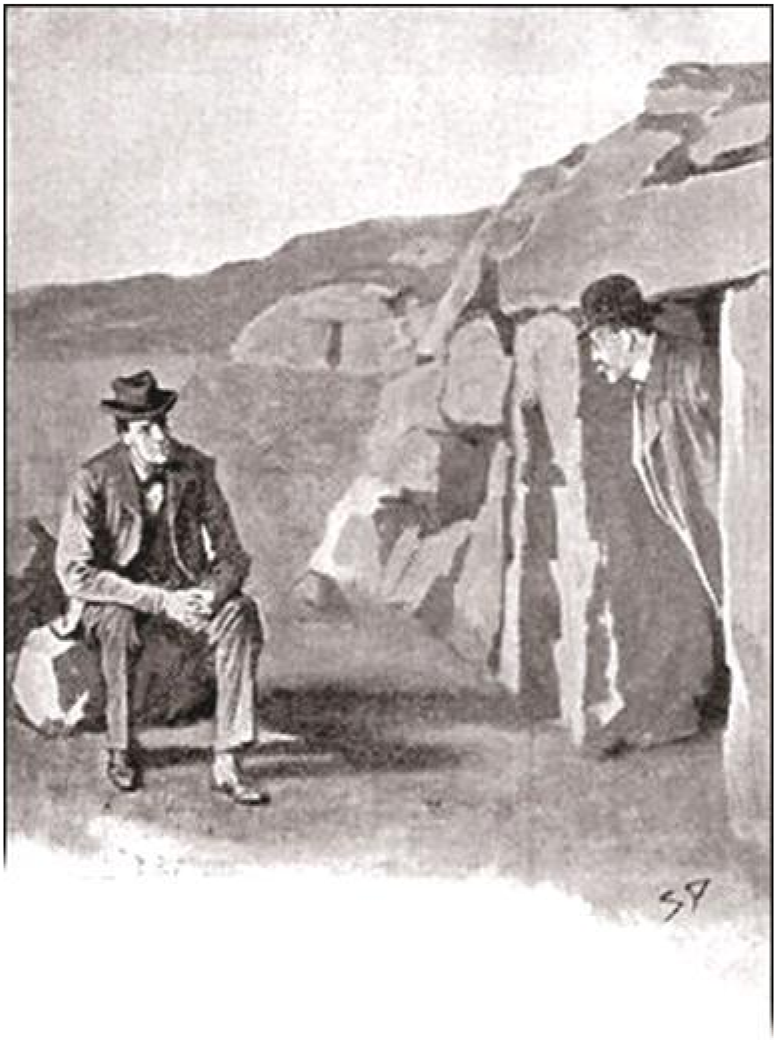

"Exactly."

"I thought as much — and knowing your admirable tenacity I was convinced that you were sitting in ambush, a weapon within reach, waiting for the tenant to return. So you actually thought that I was the criminal?"

"I did not know who you were, but I was determined to find out."

"Excellent, Watson! And how did you localise me? You saw me, perhaps, on the night of the convict hunt, when I was so imprudent as to allow the moon to rise behind me?"

"Yes, I saw you then."

"And have no doubt searched all the huts until you came to this one?"

"No, your boy had been observed, and that gave me a guide where to look."

"The old gentleman with the telescope, no doubt. I could not make it out when first I saw the light flashing upon the lens." He rose and peeped into the hut. “Ha, I see that Cartwright has brought up some supplies. What’s this paper? So you have been to Coombe Tracey, have you?”

“Yes.”

“To see Mrs. Laura Lyons?”

“Exactly.”

“Well done! Our researches have evidently been running on parallel lines, and when we unite our results I expect we shall have a fairly full knowledge of the case.”

“Well, I am glad from my heart that you are here, for indeed the responsibility and the mystery were both becoming too much for my nerves. But how in the name of wonder did you come here, and what have you been doing? I thought that you were in Baker Street working out that case of blackmailing.”

“That was what I wished you to think.”

“Then you use me, and yet do not trust me!” I cried with some bitterness. “I think that I have deserved better at your hands, Holmes.”

“My dear fellow, you have been invaluable to me in this as in many other cases, and I beg that you will forgive me if I have seemed to play a trick upon you. In truth, it was partly for your own sake that I did it, and it was my appreciation of the danger which you ran which led me to come down and examine the matter for myself. Had I been with Sir Henry and you it is confident that my point of view would have been the same as yours, and my presence would have warned our very formidable opponents to be on their guard. As it is, I have been able to get about as I could not possibly have done had I been living in the Hall, and I remain an unknown factor in the business, ready to throw in all my weight at a critical moment.”

“But why keep me in the dark?”

“For you to know could not have helped us, and might possibly have led to my discovery. You would have wished to tell me something, or in your kindness you would have brought me out some comfort or other, and so an unnecessary risk would be run. I brought Cartwright down with me — you remember the little chap at the express office — and he has seen after my simple wants: a loaf of bread and a clean collar. What does man want more? He has given me an extra pair of eyes upon a very active pair of feet, and both have been invaluable.”

“Then my reports have all been wasted!” — My voice trembled as I recalled the pains and the pride with which I had composed them.

Holmes took a bundle of papers from his pocket.

"Here are your reports, my dear fellow, and very well thumbed, I assure you. I made excellent arrangements, and they are only delayed one day upon their way. I must compliment you exceedingly upon the zeal and the intelligence which you have shown over an extraordinarily difficult case."

I was still rather raw over the deception which had been practised upon me, but the warmth of Holmes's praise drove my anger from my mind. I felt also in my heart that he was right in what he said and that it was really best for our purpose that I should not have known that he was upon the moor.

"That's better," said he, seeing the shadow rise from my face. "And now tell me the result of your visit to Mrs. Laura Lyons — it was not difficult for me to guess that it was to see her that you had gone, for I am already aware that she is the one person in Coombe Tracey who might be of service to us in the matter. In fact, if you had not gone to-day it is exceedingly probable that I should have gone to-morrow."

The sun had set and dusk was settling over the moor. The air had turned chill and we withdrew into the hut for warmth. There, sitting together in the twilight, I told Holmes of my conversation with the lady. So interested was he that I had to repeat some of it twice before he was satisfied.

"This is most important," said he when I had concluded. "It fills up a gap which I had been unable to bridge, in this most complex affair. You are aware, perhaps, that a close intimacy exists between this lady and the man Stapleton?"

"I did not know of a close intimacy."

"There can be no doubt about the matter. They meet, they write, there is a complete understanding between them. Now, this puts a very powerful weapon into our hands. If I could only use it to detach his wife — —"

"His wife?"

"I am giving you some information now, in return for all that you have given me. The lady who has passed here as Miss Stapleton is in reality his wife."

"Good heavens, Holmes! Are you sure of what you say? How could he have permitted Sir Henry to fall in love with her?"

"Sir Henry's falling in love could do no harm to anyone except Sir Henry. He took particular care that Sir Henry did not make love to her, as you have yourself observed. I repeat that the lady is his wife and not his sister."

"But why this elaborate deception?"

“Because he foresaw that she would be very much more useful to him in the character of a free woman.”

All my unspoken instincts, my vague suspicions, suddenly took shape and centred upon the naturalist. In that impassive, colourless man, with his straw hat and his butterfly-net, I seemed to see something terrible — a creature of infinite patience and craft, with a smiling face and a murderous heart.

“It is he, then, who is our enemy — it is he who dogged us in London?”

“So I read the riddle.”

“And the warning — it must have come from her!”

“Exactly.”

The shape of some monstrous villainy, half seen, half guessed, loomed through the darkness which had girt me so long.

“But are you sure of this, Holmes? How do you know that the woman is his wife?”

“Because he so far forgot himself as to tell you a true piece of autobiography upon the occasion when he first met you, and I dare say he has many a time regretted it since. He was once a schoolmaster in the north of England. Now, there is no one more easy to trace than a schoolmaster. There are scholastic agencies by which one may identify any man who has been in the profession. A little investigation showed me that a school had come to grief under atrocious circumstances, and that the man who had owned it — the name was different — had disappeared with his wife. The descriptions agreed. When I learned that the missing man was devoted to entomology the identification was complete.”

The darkness was rising, but much was still hidden by the shadows.

“If this woman is in truth his wife, where does Mrs. Laura Lyons come in?” I asked.

“That is one of the points upon which your own researches have shed a light. Your interview with the lady has cleared the situation very much. I did not know about a projected divorce between herself and her husband. In that case, regarding Stapleton as an unmarried man, she counted no doubt upon becoming his wife.”

“And when she is undeceived?”

“Why, then we may find the lady of service. It must be our first duty to see her — both of us — to-morrow. Don’t you think, Watson, that you are away from your charge rather long? Your place should be at Baskerville Hall."

The last red streaks had faded away in the west and night had settled upon the moor. A few faint stars were gleaming in a violet sky.

"One last question, Holmes," I said, as I rose. "Surely there is no need of secrecy between you and me. What is the meaning of it all? What is he after?"

Holmes's voice sank as he answered: ——

"It is murder, Watson — refined, cold-blooded, deliberate murder. Do not ask me for particulars. My nets are closing upon him, even as his are upon Sir Henry, and with your help he is already almost at my mercy. There is but one danger which can threaten us. It is that he should strike before we are ready to do so. Another day — two at the most — and I have my case complete, but until then guard your charge as closely as ever a fond mother watched her ailing child. Your mission to-day has justified itself, and yet I could almost wish that you had not left his side. Hark!"

A terrible scream — a prolonged yell of horror and anguish — burst out of the silence of the moor. That frightful cry turned the blood to ice in my veins.

"Oh, my God!" I gasped. "What is it? What does it mean?"

Holmes had sprung to his feet, and I saw his dark, athletic outline at the door of the hut, his shoulders stooping, his head thrust forward, his face peering into the darkness.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Hush!"

The cry had been loud on account of its vehemence, but it had pealed out from somewhere far off on the shadowy plain. Now it burst upon our ears, nearer, louder, more urgent than before.

"Where is it?" Holmes whispered; and I knew from the thrill of his voice that he, the man of iron, was shaken to the soul. "Where is it, Watson?"

"There, I think." I pointed into the darkness.

"No, there!"

Again the agonized cry swept through the silent night, louder and much nearer than ever. And a new sound mingled with it, a deep, muttered rumble, musical and yet menacing, rising and falling like the low, constant murmur of the sea.

"The hound!" cried Holmes. "Come, Watson, come! Great heavens, if we are too late!"

He had started running swiftly over the moor, and I had followed at his heels. But now from somewhere among the broken ground immediately in front of us there came one last despairing yell, and then a dull, heavy thud. We halted and listened. Not another sound broke the heavy silence of the windless night.

I saw Holmes put his hand to his forehead like a man distracted. He stamped his feet upon the ground.

“He has beaten us, Watson. We are too late.”

“No, no, surely not!”

“Fool that I was to hold my hand. And you, Watson, see what comes of abandoning your charge! But, by Heaven, if the worst has happened, we’ll avenge him!”

Blindly we ran through the gloom, blundering against boulders, forcing our way through gorse bushes, panting up hills and rushing down slopes, heading always in the direction whence those dreadful sounds had come. At every rise Holmes looked eagerly round him, but the shadows were thick upon the moor, and nothing moved upon its dreary face.

“Can you see anything?”

“Nothing.”

“But, hark, what is that?”

A low moan had fallen upon our ears. There it was again upon our left! On that side a ridge of rocks ended in a sheer cliff which overlooked a stone-strewn slope. On its jagged face was spread-eagled some dark, irregular object. As we ran towards it the vague outline hardened into a definite shape. It was a prostrate man face downward upon the ground, the head doubled under him at a horrible angle, the shoulders rounded and the body hunched together as if in the act of throwing a somersault. So grotesque was the attitude that I could not for the instant realise that that moan had been the passing of his soul. Not a whisper, not a rustle, rose now from the dark figure over which we stooped. Holmes laid his hand upon him, and held it up again, with an exclamation of horror. The gleam of the match which he struck shone upon his clotted fingers and upon the ghastly pool which widened slowly from the crushed skull of the victim. And it shone upon something else which turned our hearts sick and faint within us — the body of Sir Henry Baskerville!

There was no chance of either of us forgetting that peculiar ruddy tweed suit — the very one which he had worn on the first morning that we had seen him in Baker Street. We caught the one clear glimpse of it, and then the match flickered and went out, even as the hope had gone out of our souls. Holmes groaned, and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

“The brute! the brute!” I cried with clenched hands. “Oh Holmes, I shall never forgive myself for having left him to his fate.”

“I am more to blame than you, Watson. In order to have my case well rounded and complete, I have thrown away the life of my client. It is the greatest blow which has befallen me in my career. But how could I know — how could l know — that he would risk his life alone upon the moor in the face of all my warnings?”

“That we should have heard his screams — my God, those screams! — and yet have been unable to save him! Where is this brute of a hound which drove him to his death? It may be lurking among these rocks at this instant. And Stapleton, where is he? He shall answer for this deed.”

“He shall. I will see to that. Uncle and nephew have been murdered — the one frightened to death by the very sight of a beast which he thought to be supernatural, the other driven to his end in his wild flight to escape from it. But now we have to prove the connection between the man and the beast. Save from what we heard, we cannot even swear to the existence of the latter, since Sir Henry has evidently died from the fall. But, by heavens, cunning as he is, the fellow shall be in my power before another day is past!”

We stood with bitter hearts on either side of the mangled body, overwhelmed by this sudden and irrevocable disaster which had brought all our long and weary labours to so piteous an end. Then, as the moon rose we climbed to the top of the rocks over which our poor friend had fallen, and from the summit we gazed out over the shadowy moor, half silver and half gloom. Far away, miles off, in the direction of Grimpen, a single steady yellow light was shining. It could only come from the lonely abode of the Stapletons. With a bitter curse I shook my fist at it as I gazed.

“Why should we not seize him at once?”

“Our case is not complete. The fellow is wary and cunning to the last degree. It is not what we know, but what we can prove. If we make one false move the villain may escape us yet.”

“What can we do?”

“There will be plenty for us to do to-morrow. To-night we can only perform the last offices to our poor friend.”

Together we made our way down the precipitous slope and approached the body, black and clear against the silvered stones. The agony of those contorted limbs struck me with a spasm of pain and blurred my eyes with tears.

“We must send for help, Holmes! We cannot carry him all the way to the Hall. Good heavens, are you mad?”

He had uttered a cry and bent over the body. Now he was dancing and laughing and wringing my hand. Could this be my stern, self-contained friend? These were hidden fires, indeed!

“A beard! A beard! The man has a beard!”

“A beard?”

“It is not the baronet — it is — why, it is my neighbour, the convict!”

With feverish haste we had turned the body over, and that dripping beard was pointing up to the cold, clear moon. There could be no doubt about the beetling forehead, the sunken animal eyes. It was indeed the same face which had glared upon me in the light of the candle from over the rock — the face of Selden, the criminal.

Then in an instant it was all clear to me. I remembered how the baronet had told me that he had handed his old wardrobe to Barrymore. Barrymore had passed it on in order to help Selden in his escape. Boots, shirt, cap — it was all Sir Henry’s. The tragedy was still black enough, but this man had at least deserved death by the laws of his country. I told Holmes how the matter stood, my heart bubbling over with thankfulness and joy.

“Then the clothes have been the poor devil’s death,” said he. “It is clear enough that the hound has been laid on from some article of Sir Henry’s — the boot which was abstracted in the hotel, in all probability — and so ran this man down. There is one very singular thing, however: How came Selden, in the darkness, to know that the hound was on his trail?”

“He heard him.”

“To hear a hound upon the moor would not work a hard man like this convict into such a paroxysm of terror that he would risk recapture by screaming wildly for help. By his cries he must have run a long way after he knew the animal was on his track. How did he know?”

“A greater mystery to me is why this hound, presuming that all our conjectures are correct—”

“I presume nothing.”

“Well, then, why this hound should be loose to-night. I suppose that it does not always run loose upon the moor. Stapleton would not let it go unless he had reason to think that Sir Henry would be there.”

“My difficulty is the more formidable of the two, for I think that we shall very shortly get an explanation of yours, while mine may remain forever a mystery. The question now is, what shall we do with this poor wretch’s body? We cannot leave it here to the foxes and the ravens.”

“I suggest that we put it in one of the huts until we can communicate with the police.”

“Exactly. I have no doubt that you and I could carry it so far. Halloa, Watson, what’s this? It’s the man himself, by all that’s wonderful and audacious! Not a word to show your suspicions — not a word, or my plans crumble to the ground.”

A figure was approaching us over the moor, and I saw the dull red glow of a cigar. The moon shone upon him, and I could distinguish the dapper shape and jaunty walk of the naturalist. He stopped when he saw us, and then came on again.

“Why, Dr. Watson, that’s not you, is it? You are the last man that I should have expected to see out on the moor at this time of night. But, dear me, what’s this? Somebody hurt? Not — don’t tell me that it is our friend Sir Henry!” He hurried past me and stooped over the dead man. I heard a sharp intake of his breath and the cigar fell from his fingers.

“Who — who’s this?” he stammered.

“It is Selden, the man who escaped from Princetown.”

Stapleton turned a ghastly face upon us, but by a supreme effort he had overcome his amazement and his disappointment. He looked sharply from Holmes to me.

“Dear me! What a very shocking affair! How did he die?”

“He appears to have broken his neck by falling over these rocks. My friend and I were strolling on the moor when we heard a cry.”

“I heard a cry also. That was what brought me out. I was uneasy about Sir Henry.”

“Why about Sir Henry in particular?” I could not help asking.

“Because I had suggested that he should come over. When he did not come I was surprised, and I naturally became alarmed for his safety when I heard cries upon the moor. By the way” — his eyes darted again from my face to Holmes’s—”did you hear anything else besides a cry?”

“No,” said Holmes; “did you?”

“No.”

“What do you mean, then?”

“Oh, you know the stories that the peasants tell about a phantom hound, and so on. It is said to be heard at night upon the moor. I was wondering if there were any evidence of such a sound to-night.”

“We heard nothing of the kind,” said I.

“And what is your theory of this poor fellow’s death?”

“I have no doubt that anxiety and exposure have driven him off his head. He has rushed about the moor in a crazy state and eventually fallen over here and broken his neck.”

“That seems the most reasonable theory,” said Stapleton, and he gave a sigh which I took to indicate his relief. “What do you think about it, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

My friend bowed his compliments.

“You are quick at identification,” said he.

“We have been expecting you in these parts since Dr. Watson came down. You are in time to see a tragedy.”

“Yes, indeed. I have no doubt that my friend’s explanation will cover the facts. I will take an unpleasant remembrance back to London with me to-morrow.”

“Oh, you return to-morrow?”

“That is my intention.”

“I hope your visit has cast some light upon those occurrences which have puzzled us?”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“One cannot always have the success for which one hopes. An investigator needs facts, and not legends or rumours. It has not been a satisfactory case.”

My friend spoke in his frankest and most unconcerned manner. Stapleton still looked hard at him. Then he turned to me.

“I would suggest carrying this poor fellow to my house, but it would give my sister such a fright that I do not feel justified in doing it. I think that if we put something over his face he will be safe until morning.”

And so it was arranged. Resisting Stapleton’s offer of hospitality, Holmes and I set off to Baskerville Hall, leaving the naturalist to return alone. Looking back we saw the figure moving slowly away over the broad moor, and behind him that one black smudge on the silvered slope which showed where the man was lying who had come so horribly to his end.

CHAPTER 13

Fixing the Nets

“We’re at close grips at last,” said Holmes as we walked together across the moor. “What a nerve the fellow has! How he pulled himself together in the face of what must have been a paralyzing shock when he found that the wrong man had fallen a victim to his plot. I told you in London, Watson, and I tell you now again, that we have never had a foeman more worthy of our steel.”

“I am sorry that he has seen you.”

“And so was I at first. But there was no getting out of it.”

“What effect do you think it will have upon his plans now that he knows you are here?”

“It may cause him to be more cautious, or it may drive him to desperate measures at once. Like most clever criminals, he may be too confident in his own cleverness and imagine that he has completely deceived us.”

“Why should we not arrest him at once?”

“My dear Watson, you were born to be a man of action. Your instinct is always to do something energetic. But supposing, for argument’s sake, that we had him arrested to-night, what on earth the better off should we be for that? We could prove nothing against him. There’s the devilish cunning of it! If he were acting through a human agent we could get some evidence, but if we were to drag this great dog to the light of day it would not help us in putting a rope round the neck of its master.”

“Surely we have a case.”

“Not a shadow of one — only surmise and conjecture. We should be laughed out of court if we came with such a story and such evidence.”

“There is Sir Charles’s death.”

“Found dead without a mark upon him. You and I know that he died of sheer fright, and we know also what frightened him; but how are we to get twelve stolid jurymen to know it? What signs are there of a hound? Where are the marks of its fangs? Of course we know that a hound does not bite a dead body and that Sir Charles was dead before ever the brute overtook him. But we have to prove all this, and we are not in a position to do it.”

“Well, then, to-night?”

“We are not much better off to-night. Again, there was no direct connection between the hound and the man’s death. We never saw the hound. We heard it; but we could not prove that it was running upon this man’s trail. There is a complete absence of motive. No, my dear fellow; we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we have no case at present, and that it is worth our while to run any risk in order to establish one.”

“And how do you propose to do so?”

“I have great hopes of what Mrs. Laura Lyons may do for us when the position of affairs is made clear to her. And I have my own plan as well. Sufficient for to-morrow is the evil thereof; but I hope before the day is past to have the upper hand at last.”

I could draw nothing further from him, and he walked, lost in thought, as far as the Baskerville gates.

“Are you coming up?”

“Yes; I see no reason for further concealment. But one last word, Watson. Say nothing of the hound to Sir Henry. Let him think that Selden’s death was as Stapleton would have us believe. He will have a better nerve for the ordeal which he will have to undergo to-morrow, when he is engaged, if I remember your report aright, to dine with these people.”

“And so am I.”

“Then you must excuse yourself and he must go alone. That will be easily arranged. And now, if we are too late for dinner, I think that we are both ready for our suppers.”

Sir Henry was more pleased than surprised to see Sherlock Holmes, for he had for some days been expecting that recent events would bring him down from London. He did raise his eyebrows, however, when he found that my friend had neither any luggage nor any explanations for its absence. Between us we soon supplied his wants, and then over a belated supper we explained to the baronet as much of our experience as it seemed desirable that he should know. But first I had the unpleasant duty of breaking the news to Barrymore and his wife. To him it may have been an unmitigated relief, but she wept bitterly in her apron. To all the world he was the man of violence, half animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little wilful boy of her own girlhood, the child who had clung to her hand. Evil indeed is the man who has not one woman to mourn him.

"I've been moping in the house all day since Watson went off in the morning," said the baronet. "I guess I should have some credit, for I have kept my promise. If I hadn't sworn not to go about alone I might have had a more lively evening, for I had a message from Stapleton asking me over there."

"I have no doubt that you would have had a more lively evening," said Holmes drily. "By the way, I don't suppose you appreciate that we have been mourning over you as having broken your neck?"

Sir Henry opened his eyes. "How was that?"

"This poor wretch was dressed in your clothes. I fear your servant who gave them to him may get into trouble with the police."

"That is unlikely. There was no mark on any of them, as far as I know."

"That's lucky for him — in fact, it's lucky for all of you, since you are all on the wrong side of the law in this matter. I am not sure that as a conscientious detective my first duty is not to arrest the whole household. Watson's reports are most incriminating documents."

"But how about the case?" asked the baronet. "Have you made anything out of the tangle? I don't know that Watson and I are much the wiser since we came down."

"I think that I shall be in a position to make the situation rather more clear to you before long. It has been an exceedingly difficult and most complicated business. There are several points upon which we still want light — but it is coming all the same."

"We've had one experience, as Watson has no doubt told you. We heard the hound on the moor, so I can swear that it is not all empty superstition. I had something to do with dogs when I was out West, and I know one when I hear one. If you can muzzle that one and put him on a chain I'll be ready to swear you are the greatest detective of all time."

"I think I will muzzle him and chain him all right if you will give me your help."

"Whatever you tell me to do I will do."

"Very good; and I will ask you also to do it blindly, without always asking the reason."

"Just as you like."

“If you will do this I think the chances are that our little problem will soon be solved. I have no doubt — —”

He stopped suddenly and stared fixedly up over my head into the air. The lamp beat upon his face, and so intent was it and so still that it might have been that of a clear-cut classical statue, a personification of alertness and expectation.

“What is it?” we both cried.

I could see as he looked down that he was repressing some internal emotion. His features were still composed, but his eyes shone with amused exultation.

“Excuse the admiration of a connoisseur,” said he as he waved his hand towards the line of portraits which covered the opposite wall. “Watson won’t allow that I know anything of art, but that is mere jealousy, because our views upon the subject differ. Now, these are a really very fine series of portraits.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear you say so,” said Sir Henry, glancing with some surprise at my friend. “I don’t pretend to know much about these things, and I’d be a better judge of a horse or a steer than of a picture. I didn’t know that you found time for such things.”

“I know what is good when I see it, and I see it now. That’s a Kneller, I’ll swear, that lady in the blue silk over yonder, and the stout gentleman with the wig ought to be a Reynolds. They are all family portraits, I presume?”

“Every one.”

“Do you know the names?”

“Barrymore has been coaching me in them, and I think I can say my lessons fairly well.”

“Who is the gentleman with the telescope?”

“That is Rear-Admiral Baskerville, who served under Rodney in the West Indies. The man with the blue coat and the roll of paper is Sir William Baskerville, who was Chairman of Committees of the House of Commons under Pitt.”

“And this Cavalier opposite to me — the one with the black velvet and the lace?”

“Ah, you have a right to know about him. That is the cause of all the mischief, the wicked Hugo, who started the Hound of the Baskervilles. We’re not likely to forget him.”

I gazed with interest and some surprise upon the portrait.

“Dear me!” said Holmes, “he seems a quiet, meek-mannered man enough, but I dare say that there was a lurking devil in his eyes. I had pictured him as a more robust and ruffianly person.”

“There’s no doubt about the authenticity, for the name and the date, 1647, are on the back of the canvas.”

Holmes said little more, but the picture of the old roysterer seemed to have a fascination for him, and his eyes were continually fixed upon it during supper. It was not until later, when Sir Henry had gone to his room, that I was able to follow the trend of his thoughts. He led me back into the banqueting-hall, his bedroom candle in his hand, and he held it up against the time-stained portrait on the wall.

“Do you see anything there?”

I looked at the broad plumed hat, the curling love-locks, the white lace collar, and the straight, severe face which was framed between them. It was not a brutal countenance, but it was prim, hard, and stern, with a firm-set, thin-lipped mouth, and a coldly intolerant eye.

“Is it like anyone you know?”

“There is something of Sir Henry about the jaw.”

“Just a suggestion, perhaps. But wait an instant!” He stood upon a chair, and, holding up the light in his left hand, he curved his right arm over the broad hat and round the long ringlets.

“Good heavens!” I cried, in amazement.

The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas.

“Ha, you see it now. My eyes have been trained to examine faces and not their trimmings. It is the first quality of a criminal investigator that he should see through a disguise.”

“But this is marvellous. It might be his portrait.”

“Yes, it is an interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual. A study of family portraits is enough to convert a man to the doctrine of reincarnation. The fellow is a Baskerville — that is evident.”

“With designs upon the succession.”

“Exactly. This chance of the picture has supplied us with one of our most obvious missing links. We have him, Watson, we have him, and I dare swear that before to-morrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!” He burst into one of his rare fits of laughter as he turned away from the picture. I have not heard him laugh often, and it has always boded ill to somebody.

I was up betimes in the morning, but Holmes was afoot earlier still, for I saw him as I dressed, coming up the drive.

“Yes, we should have a full day to-day,” he remarked, and he rubbed his hands with the joy of action. “The nets are all in place, and the drag is about to begin. We’ll know before the day is out whether we have caught our big, lean-jawed pike, or whether he has got through the meshes.”

“Have you been on the moor already?”

“I have sent a report from Grimpen to Princetown as to the death of Selden. I think I can promise that none of you will be troubled in the matter. And I have also communicated with my faithful Cartwright, who would certainly have pined away at the door of my hut, as a dog does at his master’s grave, if I had not set his mind at rest about my safety.”

“What is the next move?”

“To see Sir Henry. Ah, here he is!”

“Good morning, Holmes,” said the baronet. “You look like a general who is planning a battle with his chief of the staff.”

“That is the exact situation. Watson was asking for orders.”

“And so do I.”

“Very good. You are engaged, as I understand, to dine with our friends the Stapletons to-night.”

“I hope that you will come also. They are very hospitable people, and I am sure that they would be very glad to see you.”

“I fear that Watson and I must go to London.”

“To London?”

“Yes, I think that we should be more useful there at the present juncture.”

The baronet’s face perceptibly lengthened.

“I hoped that you were going to see me through this business. The Hall and the moor are not very pleasant places when one is alone.”

“My dear fellow, you must trust me implicitly and do exactly what I tell you. You can tell your friends that we should have been happy to have come with you, but that urgent business required us to be in town. We hope very soon to return to Devonshire. Will you remember to give them that message?”

“If you insist upon it.”

“There is no alternative, I assure you.”

I saw by the baronet’s clouded brow that he was deeply hurt by what he regarded as our desertion.

“When do you desire to go?” he asked coldly.

“Immediately after breakfast. We will drive in to Coombe Tracey, but Watson will leave his things as a pledge that he will come back to you. Watson, you will send a note to Stapleton to tell him that you regret that you cannot come.”

“I have a good mind to go to London with you,” said the baronet. “Why should I stay here alone?”

“Because it is your post of duty. Because you gave me your word that you would do as you were told, and I tell you to stay.”

“All right, then, I’ll stay.”

“One more direction! I wish you to drive to Merripit House. Send back your trap, however, and let them know that you intend to walk home.”

“To walk across the moor?”

“Yes.”

“But that is the very thing which you have so often cautioned me not to do.”

“This time you may do it with safety. If I had not every confidence in your nerve and courage I would not suggest it, but it is essential that you should do it.”

“Then I will do it.”

“And as you value your life do not go across the moor in any direction save along the straight path which leads from Merripit House to the Grimpen Road, and is your natural way home.”

“I will do just what you say.”

“Very good. I should be glad to get away as soon after breakfast as possible, so as to reach London in the afternoon.”

I was much astounded by this programme, though I remembered that Holmes had said to Stapleton on the night before that his visit would terminate next day. It had not crossed my mind, however, that he would wish me to go with him, nor could I understand how we could both be absent at a moment which he himself declared to be critical. There was nothing for it, however, but implicit obedience; so we bade good-bye to our rueful friend, and a couple of hours afterwards we were at the station of Coombe Tracey and had dispatched the trap upon its return journey. A small boy was waiting upon the platform.

“Any orders, sir?”

“You will take this train to town, Cartwright. The moment you arrive you will send a wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, in my name, to say that if he finds the pocket-book which I have dropped he is to send it by registered post to Baker Street.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And ask at the station office if there is a message for me.”

The boy returned with a telegram, which Holmes handed to me. It ran: “Wire received. Coming down with unsigned warrant. Arrive five-forty. — LESTRADE.”

“That is in answer to mine of this morning. He is the best of the professionals, I think, and we may need his assistance. Now, Watson, I think that we cannot employ our time better than by calling upon your acquaintance, Mrs. Laura Lyons.”

His plan of campaign was beginning to be evident. He would use the baronet in order to convince the Stapletons that we were really gone, while we should actually return at the instant when we were likely to be needed. That telegram from London, if mentioned by Sir Henry to the Stapletons, must remove the last suspicions from their minds. Already I seemed to see our nets drawing closer around that lean-jawed pike.

Mrs. Laura Lyons was in her office, and Sherlock Holmes opened his interview with a frankness and directness which considerably amazed her.

“I am investigating the circumstances which attended the death of the late Sir Charles Baskerville,” said he. “My friend here, Dr. Watson, has informed me of what you have communicated, and also of what you have withheld in connection with that matter.”

“What have I withheld?” she asked defiantly.

“You have confessed that you asked Sir Charles to be at the gate at ten o’clock. We know that that was the place and hour of his death. You have withheld what the connection is between these events.”

“There is no connection.”

“In that case the coincidence must indeed be an extraordinary one. But I think that we shall succeed in establishing a connection after all. I wish to be perfectly frank with you, Mrs. Lyons. We regard this case as one of murder, and the evidence may implicate not only your friend Mr. Stapleton, but his wife as well.”

The lady sprang from her chair.

“His wife!” she cried.

“The fact is no longer a secret. The person who has passed for his sister is really his wife.”

Mrs. Lyons had resumed her seat. Her hands were grasping the arms of her chair, and I saw that the pink nails had turned white with the pressure of her grip.

“His wife!” she said again. “His wife! He is not a married man.”

Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“Prove it to me! Prove it to me! And if you can do so — !” The fierce flash of her eyes said more than any words.

“I have come prepared to do so,” said Holmes, drawing several papers from his pocket. “Here is a photograph of the couple taken in York four years ago. It is indorsed ‘Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur,’ but you will have no difficulty in recognising him, and her also, if you know her by sight. Here are three written descriptions by trustworthy witnesses of Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur, who at that time kept St. Oliver’s private school. Read them and see if you can doubt the identity of these people.”

She glanced at them, and then looked up at us with the set, rigid face of a desperate woman.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “this man had offered me marriage on condition that I could get a divorce from my husband. He has lied to me, the villain, in every conceivable way. Not one word of truth has he ever told me. And why — why? I imagined that all was for my own sake. But now I see that I was never anything but a tool in his hands. Why should I preserve faith with him who never kept any with me? Why should I try to shield him from the consequences of his own wicked acts? Ask me what you like, and there is nothing which I shall hold back. One thing I swear to you, and that is that when I wrote the letter I never dreamed of any harm to the old gentleman, who had been my kindest friend.”

“I entirely believe you, madam,” said Sherlock Holmes. “The recital of these events must be very painful to you, and perhaps it will make it easier if I tell you what occurred, and you can check me if I make any material mistake. The sending of this letter was suggested to you by Stapleton?”

“He dictated it.”

“I presume that the reason he gave was that you would receive help from Sir Charles for the legal expenses connected with your divorce?”

“Exactly.”

“And then after you had sent the letter he dissuaded you from keeping the appointment?”

“He told me that it would hurt his self-respect that any other man should find the money for such an object, and that though he was a poor man himself he would devote his last penny to removing the obstacles which divided us.”

“He appears to be a very consistent character. And then you heard nothing until you read the reports of the death in the paper?”

“No.”

“And he made you swear to say nothing about your appointment with Sir Charles?”

“He did. He said that the death was a very mysterious one, and that I should certainly be suspected if the facts came out. He frightened me into remaining silent.”

“Quite so. But you had your suspicions?”

She hesitated and looked down.

“I knew him,” she said. “But if he had kept faith with me I should always have done so with him.”

“I think that on the whole you have had a fortunate escape,” said Sherlock Holmes. “You have had him in your power and he knew it, and yet you are alive. You have been walking for some months very near to the edge of a precipice. We must wish you good-morning now, Mrs. Lyons, and it is probable that you will very shortly hear from us again.”

“Our case becomes rounded off, and difficulty after difficulty thins away in front of us,” said Holmes as we stood waiting for the arrival of the express from town. “I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia, in the year ‘66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own. Even now we have no clear case against this very wily man. But I shall be very much surprised if it is not clear enough before we go to bed this night.”

The London express came roaring into the station, and a small, wiry bulldog of a man had sprung from a first-class carriage. We all three shook hands, and I saw at once from the reverential way in which Lestrade gazed at my companion that he had learned a good deal since the days when they had first worked together. I could well remember the scorn which the theories of the reasoner used then to excite in the practical man.

“Anything good?” he asked.

“The biggest thing for years,” said Holmes. “We have two hours before we need think of starting. I think we might employ it in getting some dinner and then, Lestrade, we will take the London fog out of your throat by giving you a breath of the pure night air of Dartmoor. Never been there? Ah, well, I don’t suppose you will forget your first visit.”

CHAPTER 14

The Hound of the Baskervilles

One of Sherlock Holmes's defects — if, indeed, one may call it a defect — was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfilment. Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances. The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistants. I had often suffered under it, but never more so than during that long drive in the darkness. The great ordeal was in front of us; at last we were about to make our final effort, and yet Holmes had said nothing, and I could only surmise what his course of action would be. My nerves thrilled with anticipation when at last the cold wind upon our faces and the dark, void spaces on either side of the narrow road told me that we were back upon the moor once again. Every stride of the horses and every turn of the wheels was taking us nearer to our supreme adventure.

Our conversation was hampered by the presence of the driver of the hired wagonette, so that we were forced to talk of trivial matters when our nerves were tense with emotion and anticipation. It was a relief to me, after that unnatural restraint, when we at last passed Frankland's house and knew that we were drawing near to the Hall and to the scene of action. We did not drive up to the door but got down near the gate of the avenue. The wagonette was paid off and ordered to return to Coombe Tracey forthwith, while we started to walk to Merripit House.

"Are you armed, Lestrade?"

The little detective smiled.

"As long as I have my trousers I have a hip-pocket, and as long as I have my hip-pocket I have something in it."

"Good! My friend and I are also ready for emergencies."

"You're mighty close about this affair, Mr. Holmes. What's the game now?"

“A waiting game.”

“My word, it does not seem a very cheerful place,” said the detective with a shiver, glancing round him at the gloomy slopes of the hill and at the huge lake of fog which lay over the Grimpen Mire. “I see the lights of a house ahead of us.”

“That is Merripit House and the end of our journey. I must request you to walk on tiptoe and not to talk above a whisper.”

We moved cautiously along the track as if we were bound for the house, but Holmes halted us when we were about two hundred yards from it.

“This will do,” said he. “These rocks upon the right make an admirable screen.”

“We are to wait here?”

“Yes, we shall make our little ambush here. Get into this hollow, Lestrade. You have been inside the house, have you not, Watson? Can you tell the position of the rooms? What are those latticed windows at this end?”

“I think they are the kitchen windows.”

“And the one beyond, which shines so brightly?”

“That is certainly the dining-room.”

“The blinds are up. You know the lie of the land best. Creep forward quietly and see what they are doing — but for heaven’s sake don’t let them know that they are watched!”

I tiptoed down the path and stooped behind the low wall which surrounded the stunted orchard. Creeping in its shadow I reached a point whence I could look straight through the uncurtained window.

There were only two men in the room, Sir Henry and Stapleton. They sat with their profiles towards me on either side of the round table. Both of them were smoking cigars, and coffee and wine were in front of them. Stapleton was talking with animation, but the baronet looked pale and distrait. Perhaps the thought of that lonely walk across the ill-omened moor was weighing heavily upon his mind.

As I watched them Stapleton rose and left the room, while Sir Henry filled his glass again and leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar. I heard the creak of a door and the crisp sound of boots upon gravel. The steps passed along the path on the other side of the wall under which I crouched. Looking over, I saw the naturalist pause at the door of an out-house in the corner of the orchard. A key turned in a lock, and as he passed in there was a curious scuffling noise from within. He was only a minute or so inside, and then I heard the key turn once more and he passed me and re-entered the house. I saw him rejoin his guest, and I crept quietly back to where my companions were waiting to tell them what I had seen.

"You say, Watson, that the lady is not there?" Holmes asked, when I had finished my report.

"No."

"Where can she be, then, since there is no light in any other room except the kitchen?"

"I cannot think where she is."

I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog. It was drifting slowly in our direction, and banked itself up like a wall on that side of us, low, but thick and well defined. The moon shone on it, and it looked like a great shimmering ice-field, with the heads of the distant tors as rocks borne upon its surface. Holmes's face was turned towards it, and he muttered impatiently as he watched its sluggish drift.

"It's moving towards us, Watson."

"Is that serious?"

"Very serious, indeed — the one thing upon earth which could have disarranged my plans. He can't be very long, now. It is already ten o'clock. Our success and even his life may depend upon his coming out before the fog is over the path."

The night was clear and fine above us. The stars shone cold and bright, while a half-moon bathed the whole scene in a soft, uncertain light. Before us lay the dark bulk of the house, its serrated roof and bristling chimneys hard outlined against the silver-spangled sky. Broad bars of golden light from the lower windows stretched across the orchard and the moor. One of them was suddenly shut off. The servants had left the kitchen. There only remained the lamp in the dining-room where the two men, the murderous host and the unconscious guest, still chatted over their cigars.

Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the house. Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. The farther wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapour. As we watched it the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the house and rolled slowly into one dense bank, on which the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. Holmes struck his hand passionately upon the rock in front of us and stamped his feet in his impatience.

“If he isn’t out in a quarter of an hour the path will be covered. In half an hour we won’t be able to see our hands in front of us.”

“Shall we move farther back upon higher ground?”

“Yes, I think it would be as well.”

So as the fog-bank flowed onward we fell back before it until we were half a mile from the house, and still that dense white sea, with the moon silvering its upper edge, swept slowly and inexorably on.

“We are going too far,” said Holmes. “We dare not take the chance of his being overtaken before he can reach us. At all costs we must hold our ground where we are.” He dropped on his knees and clapped his ear to the ground. “Thank God, I think that I hear him coming.”

A sound of quick steps broke the silence of the moor. Crouching among the stones we stared intently at the silver-tipped bank in front of us. The steps grew louder, and through the fog, as through a curtain, there stepped the man whom we were awaiting. He looked round him in surprise as he emerged into the clear, starlit night. Then he came swiftly along the path, passed close to where we lay, and went on up the long slope behind us. As he walked he glanced continually over either shoulder, like a man who is ill at ease.

“Hist!” cried Holmes, and I heard the sharp click of a cocking pistol. “Look out! It’s coming!”

There was a thin, crisp, continuous patter from somewhere in the heart of that crawling bank. The cloud was within fifty yards of where we lay, and we glared at it, all three, uncertain what horror was about to break from the heart of it. I was at Holmes’s elbow, and I glanced for an instant at his face. It was pale and exultant, his eyes shining brightly in the moonlight. But suddenly they started forward in a rigid, fixed stare, and his lips parted in amazement. At the same instant Lestrade gave a yell of terror and threw himself face downward upon the ground. I sprang to my feet, my inert hand grasping my pistol, my mind paralyzed by the dreadful shape which had sprung out upon us from the shadows of the fog. A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

With long bounds the huge black creature was leaping down the track, following hard upon the footsteps of our friend. So paralyzed were we by the apparition that we allowed him to pass before we had recovered our nerve. Then Holmes and I both fired together, and the creature gave a hideous howl, which showed that one at least had hit him. He did not pause, however, but bounded onward. Far away on the path we saw Sir Henry looking back, his face white in the moonlight, his hands raised in horror, glaring helplessly at the frightful thing which was hunting him down.

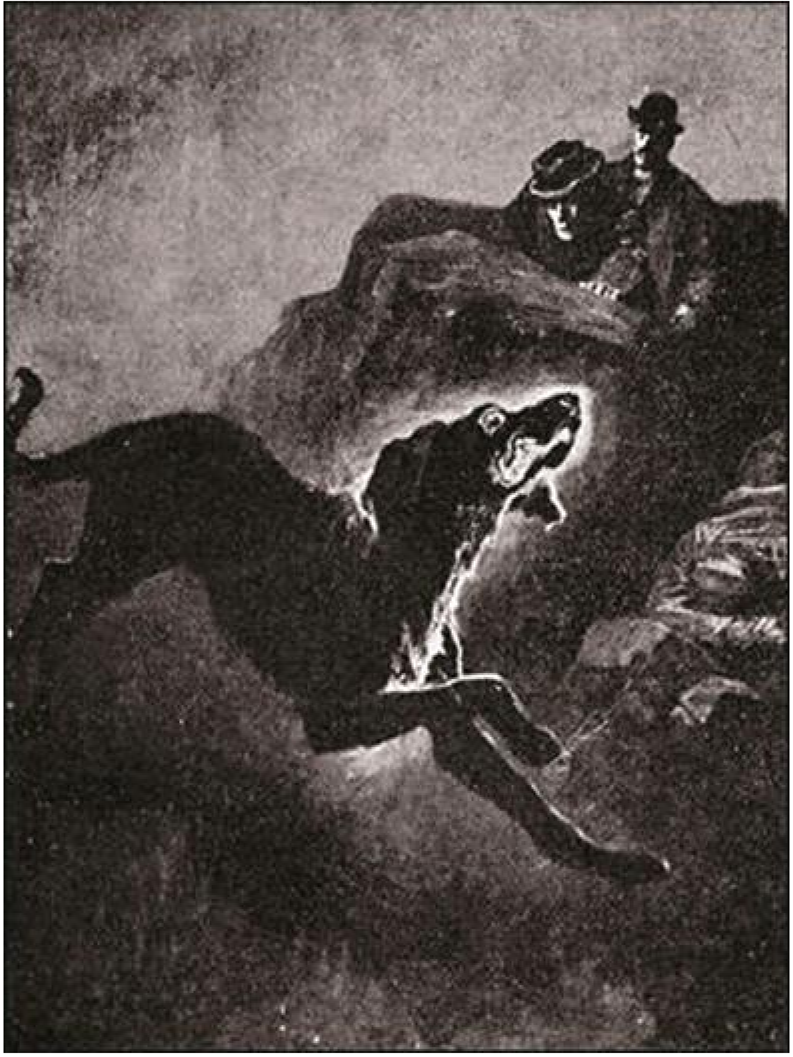

But that cry of pain from the hound had blown all our fears to the winds. If he was vulnerable he was mortal, and if we could wound him we could kill him. Never have I seen a man run as Holmes ran that night. I am reckoned fleet of foot, but he outpaced me as much as I outpaced the little professional. In front of us as we flew up the track we heard scream after scream from Sir Henry and the deep roar of the hound. I was in time to see the beast spring upon its victim, hurl him to the ground, and worry at his throat. But the next instant Holmes had emptied five barrels of his revolver into the creature's flank. With a last howl of agony and a vicious snap in the air, it rolled upon its back, four feet pawing furiously, and then fell limp upon its side. I stooped, panting, and pressed my pistol to the dreadful, shimmering head, but it was useless to press the trigger. The giant hound was dead.

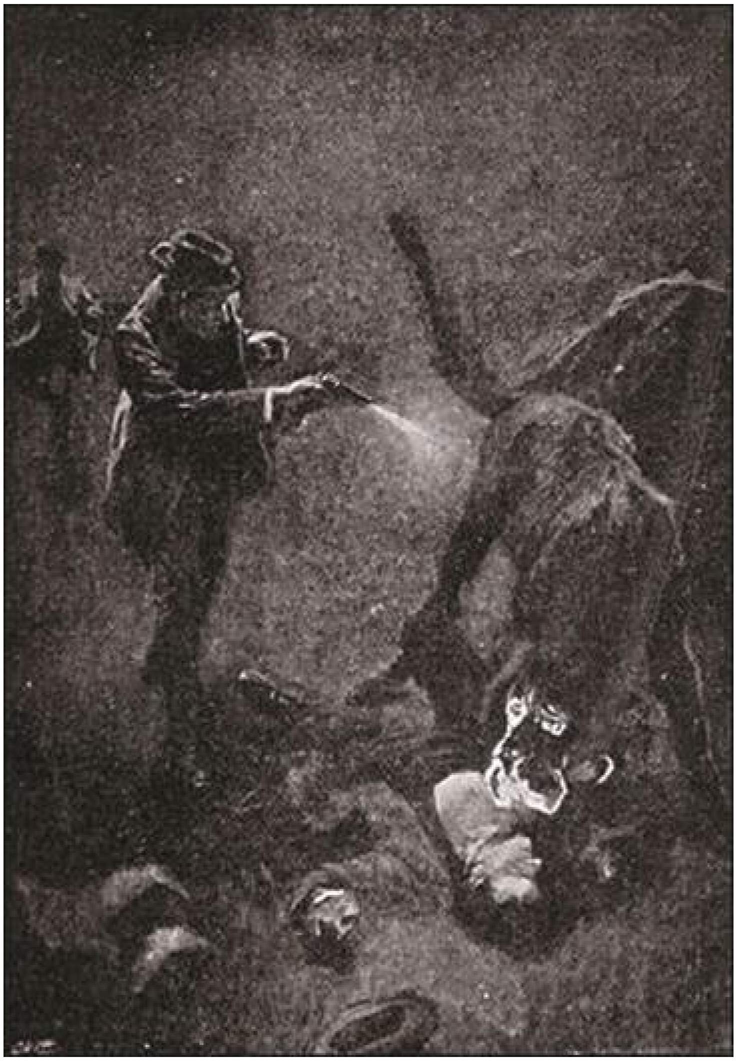

Sir Henry lay insensible where he had fallen. We tore away his collar, and Holmes breathed a prayer of gratitude when we saw that there was no sign of a wound and that the rescue had been in time. Already our friend's eyelids shivered and he made a feeble effort to move. Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and two frightened eyes were looking up at us.

"My God!" he whispered. "What was it? What, in heaven's name, was it?"

"It's dead, whatever it is," said Holmes. "We've laid the family ghost once and forever."

In mere size and strength it was a terrible creature which was lying stretched before us. It was not a pure bloodhound and it was not a pure mastiff; but it appeared to be a combination of the two — gaunt, savage, and as large as a small lioness. Even now, in the stillness of death, the huge jaws seemed to be dripping with a bluish flame and the small, deep-set, cruel eyes were ringed with fire. I placed my hand upon the glowing muzzle, and as I held them up my own fingers smouldered and gleamed in the darkness.

"Phosphorus," I said.

"A cunning preparation of it," said Holmes, sniffing at the dead animal. "There is no smell which might have interfered with his power of scent. We owe you a deep apology, Sir Henry, for having exposed you to this fright. I was prepared for a hound, but not for such a creature as this. And the fog gave us little time to receive him."

"You have saved my life."

"Having first endangered it. Are you strong enough to stand?"

"Give me another mouthful of that brandy and I shall be ready for anything. So! Now, if you will help me up. What do you propose to do?"

"To leave you here. You are not fit for further adventures to-night. If you will wait, one or other of us will go back with you to the Hall."

He tried to stagger to his feet; but he was still ghastly pale and trembling in every limb. We helped him to a rock, where he sat shivering with his face buried in his hands.

"We must leave you now," said Holmes. "The rest of our work must be done, and every moment is of importance. We have our case, and now we only want our man.

"It's a thousand to one against our finding him at the house," he continued as we retraced our steps swiftly down the path. "Those shots must have told him that the game was up."

"We were some distance off, and this fog may have deadened them."

“He followed the hound to call him off — of that you may be certain. No, no, he’s gone by this time! But we’ll search the house and make sure.”

The front door was open, so we rushed in and hurried from room to room to the amazement of a doddering old manservant, who met us in the passage. There was no light save in the dining-room, but Holmes caught up the lamp and left no corner of the house unexplored. No sign could we see of the man whom we were chasing. On the upper floor, however, one of the bedroom doors was locked.

“There’s someone in here,” cried Lestrade. “I can hear a movement. Open this door!”

A faint moaning and rustling came from within. Holmes struck the door just over the lock with the flat of his foot and it flew open. Pistol in hand, we all three rushed into the room.

But there was no sign within it of that desperate and defiant villain whom we expected to see. Instead we were faced by an object so strange and so unexpected that we stood for a moment staring at it in amazement.

The room had been fashioned into a small museum, and the walls were lined by a number of glass-topped cases full of that collection of butterflies and moths the formation of which had been the relaxation of this complex and dangerous man. In the centre of this room there was an upright beam, which had been placed at some period as a support for the old worm-eaten baulk of timber which spanned the roof. To this post a figure was tied, so swathed and muffled in the sheets which had been used to secure it that one could not for the moment tell whether it was that of a man or a woman. One towel passed round the throat and was secured at the back of the pillar. Another covered the lower part of the face, and over it two dark eyes — eyes full of grief and shame and a dreadful questioning — stared back at us. In a minute we had torn off the gag, unswathed the bonds, and Mrs. Stapleton sank upon the floor in front of us. As her beautiful head fell upon her chest I saw the clear red weal of a whiplash across her neck.

“The brute!” cried Holmes. “Here, Lestrade, your brandy-bottle! Put her in the chair! She has fainted from ill-usage and exhaustion.”

She opened her eyes again.

“Is he safe?” she asked. “Has he escaped?”

“He cannot escape us, madam.”

“No, no, I did not mean my husband. Sir Henry? Is he safe?”

“Yes.”

“And the hound?”

“It is dead.”

She gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

“Thank God! Thank God! Oh, this villain! See how he has treated me!” She shot her arms out from her sleeves, and we saw with horror that they were all mottled with bruises. “But this is nothing — nothing! It is my mind and soul that he has tortured and defiled. I could endure it all, ill-usage, solitude, a life of deception, everything, as long as I could still cling to the hope that I had his love, but now I know that in this also I have been his dupe and his tool.” She broke into passionate sobbing as she spoke.

“You bear him no good will, madam,” said Holmes. “Tell us then where we shall find him. If you have ever aided him in evil, help us now and so atone.”

“There is but one place where he can have fled,” she answered. “There is an old tin mine on an island in the heart of the mire. It was there that he kept his hound and there also he had made preparations so that he might have a refuge. That is where he would fly.”

The fog-bank lay like white wool against the window. Holmes held the lamp towards it.

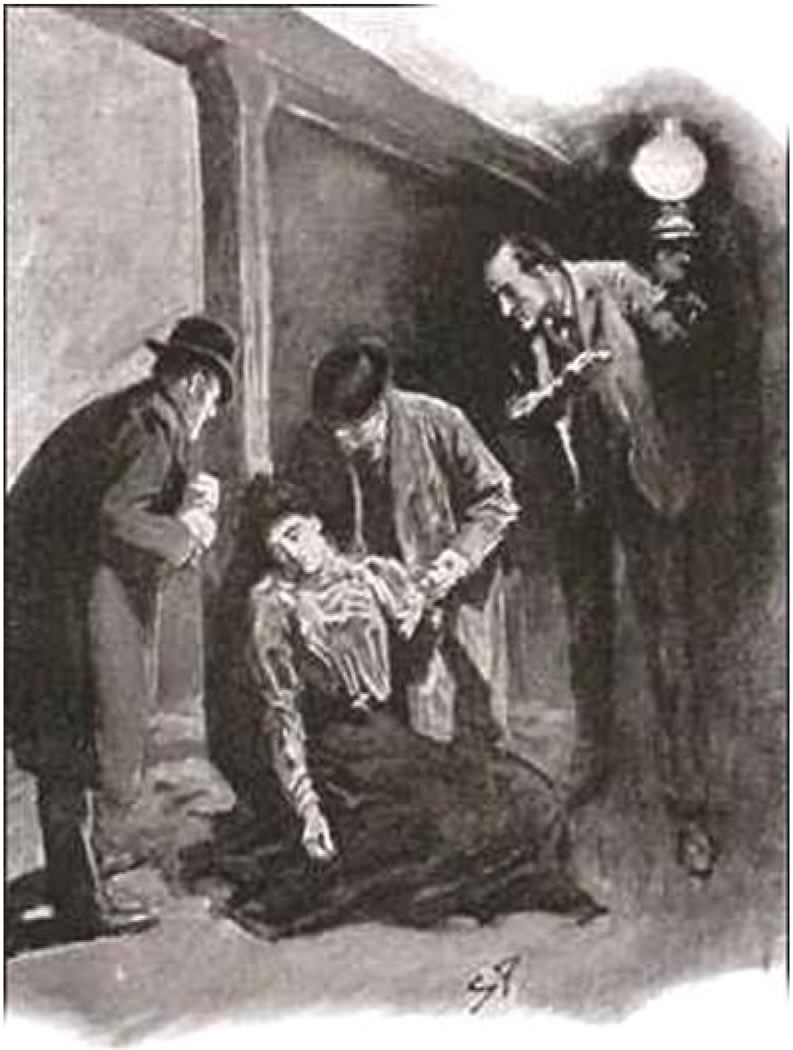

“See,” said he. “No one could find his way into the Grimpen Mire to-night.”

She laughed and clapped her hands. Her eyes and teeth gleamed with fierce merriment.

“He may find his way in, but never out,” she cried. “How can he see the guiding wands to-night? We planted them together, he and I, to mark the pathway through the mire. Oh, if I could only have plucked them out to-day. Then indeed you would have had him at your mercy!”

It was evident to us that all pursuit was in vain until the fog had lifted. Meanwhile we left Lestrade in possession of the house while Holmes and I went back with the baronet to Baskerville Hall. The story of the Stapletons could no longer be withheld from him, but he took the blow bravely when he learned the truth about the woman whom he had loved. But the shock of the night’s adventures had shattered his nerves, and before morning he lay delirious in a high fever, under the care of Dr. Mortimer. The two of them were destined to travel together round the world before Sir Henry had become once more the hale, hearty man that he had been before he became master of that ill-omened estate.

And now I come rapidly to the conclusion of this singular narrative, in which I have tried to make the reader share those dark fears and vague surmises which clouded our lives so long and ended in so tragic a manner. On the morning after the death of the hound the fog had lifted and we were guided by Mrs. Stapleton to the point where they had found a pathway through the bog. It helped us to realise the horror of this woman's life when we saw the eagerness and joy with which she laid us on her husband's track. We left her standing upon the thin peninsula of firm, peaty soil which tapered out into the widespread bog. From the end of it a small wand planted here and there showed where the path zigzagged from tuft to tuft of rushes among those green-scummed pits and foul quagmires which barred the way to the stranger. Rank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants sent an odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour onto our faces, while a false step plunged us more than once thigh-deep into the dark, quivering mire, which shook for yards in soft undulations around our feet. Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it it was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us. Once only we saw a trace that someone had passed that perilous way before us. From amid a tuft of cotton grass which bore it up out of the slime some dark thing was projecting. Holmes sank to his waist as he stepped from the path to seize it, and had we not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again. He held an old black boot in the air. "Meyers, Toronto," was printed on the leather inside.

"It is worth a mud bath," said he. "It is our friend Sir Henry's missing boot."

"Thrown there by Stapleton in his flight."

"Exactly. He retained it in his hand after using it to set the hound upon the track. He fled when he knew the game was up, still clutching it. And he hurled it away at this point of his flight. We know at least that he came so far in safety."

But more than that we were never destined to know, though there was much which we might surmise. There was no chance of finding footsteps in the mire, for the rising mud oozed swiftly in upon them, but as we at last reached firmer ground beyond the morass we all looked eagerly for them. But no slightest sign of them ever met our eyes. If the earth told a true story, then Stapleton never reached that island of refuge towards which he struggled through the fog upon that last night. Somewhere in the heart of the great Grimpen Mire, down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in, this cold and cruel-hearted man is forever buried.

Many traces we found of him in the bog-girt island where he had hid his savage ally. A huge driving-wheel and a shaft half-filled with rubbish showed the position of an abandoned mine. Beside it were the crumbling remains of the cottages of the miners, driven away no doubt by the foul reek of the surrounding swamp. In one of these a staple and chain with a quantity of gnawed bones showed where the animal had been confined. A skeleton with a tangle of brown hair adhering to it lay among the debris.

“A dog!” said Holmes. “By Jove, a curly-haired spaniel. Poor Mortimer will never see his pet again. Well, I do not know that this place contains any secret which we have not already fathomed. He could hide his hound, but he could not hush its voice, and hence came those cries which even in daylight were not pleasant to hear. On an emergency he could keep the hound in the out-house at Merripit, but it was always a risk, and it was only on the supreme day, which he regarded as the end of all his efforts, that he dared do it. This paste in the tin is no doubt the luminous mixture with which the creature was daubed. It was suggested, of course, by the story of the family hell-hound, and by the desire to frighten old Sir Charles to death. No wonder the poor devil of a convict ran and screamed, even as our friend did, and as we ourselves might have done, when he saw such a creature bounding through the darkness of the moor upon his track. It was a cunning device, for, apart from the chance of driving your victim to his death, what peasant would venture to inquire too closely into such a creature should he get sight of it, as many have done, upon the moor? I said it in London, Watson, and I say it again now, that never yet have we helped to hunt down a more dangerous man than he who is lying yonder” — he swept his long arm towards the huge mottled expanse of green-splotched bog which stretched away until it merged into the russet slopes of the moor.

CHAPTER 15

A Retrospection

It was the end of November and Holmes and I sat, upon a raw and foggy night, on either side of a blazing fire in our sitting-room in Baker Street. Since the tragic upshot of our visit to Devonshire he had been engaged in two affairs of the utmost importance, in the first of which he had exposed the atrocious conduct of Colonel Upwood in connection with the famous card scandal of the Nonpareil Club, while in the second he had defended the unfortunate Mme. Montpensier from the charge of murder which hung over her in connection with the death of her step-daughter, Mlle. Carére, the young lady who, as it will be remembered, was found six months later alive and married in New York. My friend was in excellent spirits over the success which had attended a succession of difficult and important cases, so that I was able to induce him to discuss the details of the Baskerville mystery. I had waited patiently for the opportunity, for I was aware that he would never permit cases to overlap, and that his clear and logical mind would not be drawn from its present work to dwell upon memories of the past. Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer were, however, in London, on their way to that long voyage which had been recommended for the restoration of his shattered nerves. They had called upon us that very afternoon, so that it was natural that the subject should come up for discussion.

“The whole course of events,” said Holmes, “from the point of view of the man who called himself Stapleton was simple and direct, although to us, who had no means in the beginning of knowing the motives of his actions and could only learn part of the facts, it all appeared exceedingly complex. I have had the advantage of two conversations with Mrs. Stapleton, and the case has now been so entirely cleared up that I am not aware that there is anything which has remained a secret to us. You will find a few notes upon the matter under the heading B in my indexed list of cases.”

“Perhaps you would kindly give me a sketch of the course of events from memory.”

“Certainly, though I cannot guarantee that I carry all the facts in my mind. Intense mental concentration has a curious way of blotting out what has passed. The barrister who has his case at his fingers’ ends, and is able to argue with an expert upon his own subject finds that a week or two of the courts will drive it all out of his head once more. So each of my cases displaces the last, and Mlle. Carére has blurred my recollection of Baskerville Hall. To-morrow some other little problem may be submitted to my notice which will in turn dispossess the fair French lady and the infamous Upwood. So far as the case of the Hound goes, however, I will give you the course of events as nearly as I can, and you will suggest anything which I may have forgotten.

“My inquiries show beyond all question that the family portrait did not lie, and that this fellow was indeed a Baskerville. He was a son of that Rodger Baskerville, the younger brother of Sir Charles, who fled with a sinister reputation to South America, where he was said to have died unmarried. He did, as a matter of fact, marry, and had one child, this fellow, whose real name is the same as his father’s. He married Beryl Garcia, one of the beauties of Costa Rica, and, having purloined a considerable sum of public money, he changed his name to Vandeleur and fled to England, where he established a school in the east of Yorkshire. His reason for attempting this special line of business was that he had struck up an acquaintance with a consumptive tutor upon the voyage home, and that he had used this man’s ability to make the undertaking a success. Fraser, the tutor, died however, and the school which had begun well sank from disrepute into infamy. The Vandeleurs found it convenient to change their name to Stapleton, and he brought the remains of his fortune, his schemes for the future, and his taste for entomology to the south of England. I learned at the British Museum that he was a recognised authority upon the subject, and that the name of Vandeleur has been permanently attached to a certain moth which he had, in his Yorkshire days, been the first to describe.

“We now come to that portion of his life which has proved to be of such intense interest to us. The fellow had evidently made inquiry and found that only two lives intervened between him and a valuable estate. When he went to Devonshire his plans were, I believe, exceedingly hazy, but that he meant mischief from the first is evident from the way in which he took his wife with him in the character of his sister. The idea of using her as a decoy was clearly already in his mind, though he may not have been certain how the details of his plot were to be arranged. He meant in the end to have the estate, and he was ready to use any tool or run any risk for that end. His first act was to establish himself as near to his ancestral home as he could, and his second was to cultivate a friendship with Sir Charles Baskerville and with the neighbours.

“The baronet himself told him about the family hound, and so prepared the way for his own death. Stapleton, as I will continue to call him, knew that the old man’s heart was weak and that a shock would kill him. So much he had learned from Dr. Mortimer. He had heard also that Sir Charles was superstitious and had taken this grim legend very seriously. His ingenious mind instantly suggested a way by which the baronet could be done to death, and yet it would be hardly possible to bring home the guilt to the real murderer.

“Having conceived the idea he proceeded to carry it out with considerable finesse. An ordinary schemer would have been content to work with a savage hound. The use of artificial means to make the creature diabolical was a flash of genius upon his part. The dog he bought in London from Ross and Mangles, the dealers in Fulham Road. It was the strongest and most savage in their possession. He brought it down by the North Devon line and walked a great distance over the moor so as to get it home without exciting any remarks. He had already on his insect hunts learned to penetrate the Grimpen Mire, and so had found a safe hiding-place for the creature. Here he kennelled it and waited his chance.

“But it was some time coming. The old gentleman could not be decoyed outside of his grounds at night. Several times Stapleton lurked about with his hound, but without avail. It was during these fruitless quests that he, or rather his ally, was seen by peasants, and that the legend of the demon dog received a new confirmation. He had hoped that his wife might lure Sir Charles to his ruin, but here she proved unexpectedly independent. She would not endeavour to entangle the old gentleman in a sentimental attachment which might deliver him over to his enemy. Threats and even, I am sorry to say, blows refused to move her. She would have nothing to do with it, and for a time Stapleton was at a deadlock.

“He found a way out of his difficulties through the chance that Sir Charles, who had conceived a friendship for him, made him the minister of his charity in the case of this unfortunate woman, Mrs. Laura Lyons. By representing himself as a single man he acquired complete influence over her, and he gave her to understand that in the event of her obtaining a divorce from her husband he would marry her. His plans were suddenly brought to a head by his knowledge that Sir Charles was about to leave the Hall on the advice of Dr. Mortimer, with whose opinion he himself pretended to coincide. He must act at once, or his victim might get beyond his power. He therefore put pressure upon Mrs. Lyons to write this letter, imploring the old man to give her an interview on the evening before his departure for London. He then, by a specious argument, prevented her from going, and so had the chance for which he had waited.

"Driving back in the evening from Coombe Tracey he was in time to get his hound, to treat it with his infernal paint, and to bring the beast round to the gate at which he had reason to expect that he would find the old gentleman waiting. The dog, incited by its master, sprang over the wicket-gate and pursued the unfortunate baronet, who fled screaming down the Yew Alley. In that gloomy tunnel it must indeed have been a dreadful sight to see that huge black creature, with its flaming jaws and blazing eyes, bounding after its victim. He fell dead at the end of the alley from heart disease and terror. The hound had kept upon the grassy border while the baronet had run down the path, so that no track but the man's was visible. On seeing him lying still the creature had probably approached to sniff at him, but finding him dead had turned away again. It was then that it left the print which was actually observed by Dr. Mortimer. The hound was called off and hurried away to its lair in the Grimpen Mire, and a mystery was left which puzzled the authorities, alarmed the country-side, and finally brought the case within the scope of our observation.

"So much for the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. You perceive the devilish cunning of it, for really it would be almost impossible to make a case against the real murderer. His only accomplice was one who could never give him away, and the grotesque, inconceivable nature of the device only served to make it more effective. Both of the women concerned in the case, Mrs. Stapleton and Mrs. Laura Lyons, were left with a strong suspicion against Stapleton. Mrs. Stapleton knew that he had designs upon the old man, and also of the existence of the hound. Mrs. Lyons knew neither of these things, but had been impressed by the death occurring at the time of an uncancelled appointment which was only known to him. However, both of them were under his influence, and he had nothing to fear from them. The first half of his task was successfully accomplished but the more difficult still remained.

"It is possible that Stapleton did not know of the existence of an heir in Canada. In any case he would very soon learn it from his friend Dr. Mortimer, and he was told by the latter all details about the arrival of Henry Baskerville. Stapleton's first idea was that this young stranger from Canada might possibly be done to death in London without coming down to Devonshire at all. He distrusted his wife ever since she had refused to help him in laying a trap for the old man, and he dared not leave her long out of his sight for fear he should lose his influence over her. It was for this reason that he took her to London with him. They lodged, I find, at the Mexborough Private Hotel, in Craven Street, which was actually one of those called upon by my agent in search of evidence. Here he kept his wife imprisoned in her room while he, disguised in a beard, followed Dr. Mortimer to Baker Street and afterwards to the station and to the Northumberland Hotel. His wife had some inkling of his plans; but she had such a fear of her husband — a fear founded upon brutal ill-treatment — that she dare not write to warn the man whom she knew to be in danger. If the letter should fall into Stapleton's hands her own life would not be safe. Eventually, as we know, she adopted the expedient of cutting out the words which would form the message, and addressing the letter in a disguised hand. It reached the baronet, and gave him the first warning of his danger.

"It was very essential for Stapleton to get some article of Sir Henry's attire so that, in case he was driven to use the dog, he might always have the means of setting him upon his track. With characteristic promptness and audacity he set about this at once, and we cannot doubt that the boots or chamber-maid of the hotel was well bribed to help him in his design. By chance, however, the first boot which was procured for him was a new one and, therefore, useless for his purpose. He then had it returned and obtained another — a most instructive incident, since it proved conclusively to my mind that we were dealing with a real hound, as no other supposition could explain this anxiety to obtain an old boot and this indifference to a new one. The more outre and grotesque an incident is the more carefully it deserves to be examined, and the very point which appears to complicate a case is, when duly considered and scientifically handled, the one which is most likely to elucidate it.

“Then we had the visit from our friends next morning, shadowed always by Stapleton in the cab. From his knowledge of our rooms and of my appearance, as well as from his general conduct, I am inclined to think that Stapleton’s career of crime has been by no means limited to this single Baskerville affair. It is suggestive that during the last three years there have been four considerable burglaries in the West Country, for none of which was any criminal ever arrested. The last of these, at Folkestone Court, in May, was remarkable for the cold-blooded pistoling of the page, who surprised the masked and solitary burglar. I cannot doubt that Stapleton recruited his waning resources in this fashion, and that for years he has been a desperate and dangerous man.

“We had an example of his readiness of resource that morning when he got away from us so successfully, and also of his audacity in sending back my own name to me through the cabman. From that moment he understood that I had taken over the case in London, and that therefore there was no chance for him there. He returned to Dartmoor and awaited the arrival of the baronet.”

“One moment!” said I. “You have, no doubt, described the sequence of events correctly, but there is one point which you have left unexplained. What became of the hound when its master was in London?”

“I have given some attention to this matter and it is undoubtedly of importance. There can be no question that Stapleton had a confidant, though it is unlikely that he ever placed himself in his power by sharing all his plans with him. There was an old manservant at Merripit House, whose name was Anthony. His connection with the Stapletons can be traced for several years, as far back as the schoolmastering days, so that he must have been aware that his master and mistress were really husband and wife. This man has disappeared and has escaped from the country. It is suggestive that Anthony is not a common name in England, while Antonio is so in all Spanish or Spanish-American countries. The man, like Mrs. Stapleton herself, spoke good English, but with a curious lisping accent. I have myself seen this old man cross the Grimpen Mire by the path which Stapleton had marked out. It is very probable, therefore, that in the absence of his master it was he who cared for the hound, though he may never have known the purpose for which the beast was used.

“The Stapletons then went down to Devonshire, whither they were soon followed by Sir Henry and you. One word now as to how I stood myself at that time. It may possibly recur to your memory that when I examined the paper upon which the printed words were fastened I made a close inspection for the water-mark. In doing so I held it within a few inches of my eyes, and was conscious of a faint smell of the scent known as white jessamine. There are seventy-five perfumes, which it is very necessary that a criminal expert should be able to distinguish from each other, and cases have more than once within my own experience depended upon their prompt recognition. The scent suggested the presence of a lady, and already my thoughts began to turn towards the Stapletons. Thus I had made certain of the hound, and had guessed at the criminal before ever we went to the west country.

“It was my game to watch Stapleton. It was evident, however, that I could not do this if I were with you, since he would be keenly on his guard. I deceived everybody, therefore, yourself included, and I came down secretly when I was supposed to be in London. My hardships were not so great as you imagined, though such trifling details must never interfere with the investigation of a case. I stayed for the most part at Coombe Tracey, and only used the hut upon the moor when it was necessary to be near the scene of action. Cartwright had come down with me, and in his disguise as a country boy he was of great assistance to me. I was dependent upon him for food and clean linen. When I was watching Stapleton, Cartwright was frequently watching you, so that I was able to keep my hand upon all the strings.

“I have already told you that your reports reached me rapidly, being forwarded instantly from Baker Street to Coombe Tracey. They were of great service to me, and especially that one incidentally truthful piece of biography of Stapleton’s. I was able to establish the identity of the man and the woman and knew at last exactly how I stood. The case had been considerably complicated through the incident of the escaped convict and the relations between him and the Barrymores. This also you cleared up in a very effective way, though I had already come to the same conclusions from my own observations.

“By the time that you discovered me upon the moor I had a complete knowledge of the whole business, but I had not a case which could go to a jury. Even Stapleton’s attempt upon Sir Henry that night which ended in the death of the unfortunate convict did not help us much in proving murder against our man. There seemed to be no alternative but to catch him red-handed, and to do so we had to use Sir Henry, alone and apparently unprotected, as a bait. We did so, and at the cost of a severe shock to our client we succeeded in completing our case and driving Stapleton to his destruction. That Sir Henry should have been exposed to this is, I must confess, a reproach to my management of the case, but we had no means of foreseeing the terrible and paralyzing spectacle which the beast presented, nor could we predict the fog which enabled him to burst upon us at such short notice. We succeeded in our object at a cost which both the specialist and Dr. Mortimer assure me will be a temporary one. A long journey may enable our friend to recover not only from his shattered nerves but also from his wounded feelings. His love for the lady was deep and sincere, and to him the saddest part of all this black business was that he should have been deceived by her.

“It only remains to indicate the part which she had played throughout. There can be no doubt that Stapleton exercised an influence over her which may have been love or may have been fear, or very possibly both, since they are by no means incompatible emotions. It was, at least, absolutely effective. At his command she consented to pass as his sister, though he found the limits of his power over her when he endeavoured to make her the direct accessory to murder. She was ready to warn Sir Henry so far as she could without implicating her husband, and again and again she tried to do so. Stapleton himself seems to have been capable of jealousy, and when he saw the baronet paying court to the lady, even though it was part of his own plan, still he could not help interrupting with a passionate outburst which revealed the fiery soul which his self-contained manner so cleverly concealed. By encouraging the intimacy he made it certain that Sir Henry would frequently come to Merripit House and that he would sooner or later get the opportunity which he desired. On the day of the crisis, however, his wife turned suddenly against him. She had learned something of the death of the convict, and she knew that the hound was being kept in the out-house on the evening that Sir Henry was coming to dinner. She taxed her husband with his intended crime, and a furious scene followed, in which he showed her for the first time that she had a rival in his love. Her fidelity turned in an instant to bitter hatred and he saw that she would betray him. He tied her up, therefore, that she might have no chance of warning Sir Henry, and he hoped, no doubt, that when the whole country-side put down the baronet’s death to the curse of his family, as they certainly would do, he could win his wife back to accept an accomplished fact and to keep silent upon what she knew. In this I fancy that in any case he made a miscalculation, and that, if we had not been there, his doom would none the less have been sealed. A woman of Spanish blood does not condone such an injury so lightly. And now, my dear Watson, without referring to my notes, I cannot give you a more detailed account of this curious case. I do not know that anything essential has been left unexplained.”

“He could not hope to frighten Sir Henry to death as he had done the old uncle with his bogie hound.”

“The beast was savage and half-starved. If its appearance did not frighten its victim to death, at least it would paralyze the resistance which might be offered.”

“No doubt. There only remains one difficulty. If Stapleton came into the succession, how could he explain the fact that he, the heir, had been living unannounced under another name so close to the property? How could he claim it without causing suspicion and inquiry?”

“It is a formidable difficulty, and I fear that you ask too much when you expect me to solve it. The past and the present are within the field of my inquiry, but what a man may do in the future is a hard question to answer. Mrs. Stapleton has heard her husband discuss the problem on several occasions. There were three possible courses. He might claim the property from South America, establish his identity before the British authorities there and so obtain the fortune without ever coming to England at all; or he might adopt an elaborate disguise during the short time that he need be in London; or, again, he might furnish an accomplice with the proofs and papers, putting him in as heir, and retaining a claim upon some proportion of his income. We cannot doubt from what we know of him that he would have found some way out of the difficulty. And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for ‘Les Huguenots.’ Have you heard the De Reszkes? Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini’s for a little dinner on the way?”

THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

This collection of 13 Sherlock Holmes stories was originally published in 1903.

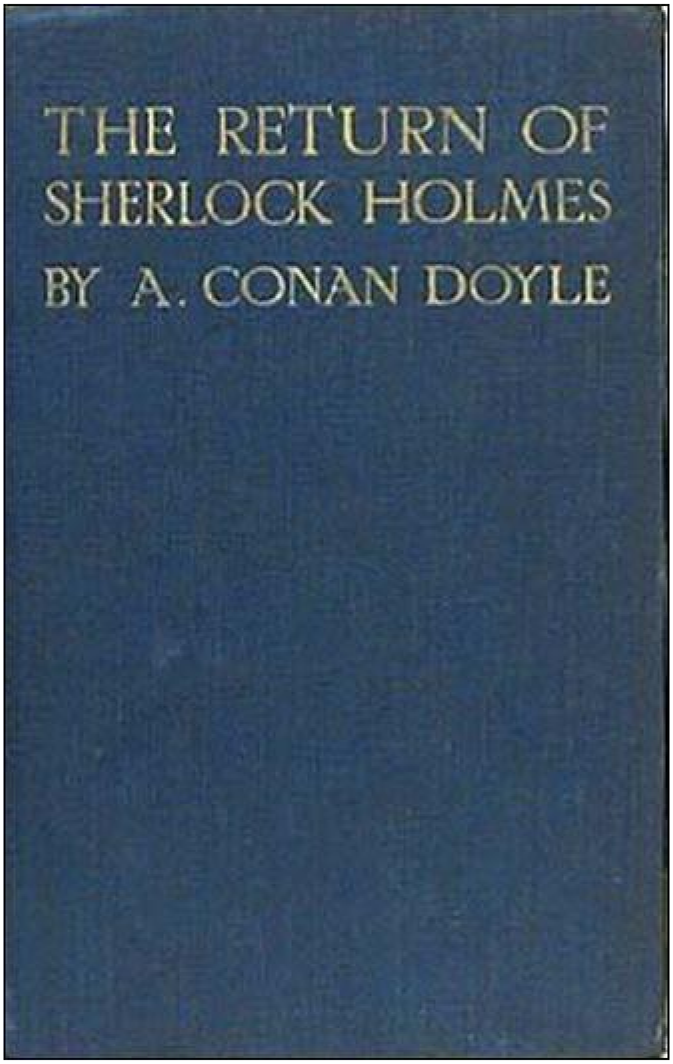
THE RETURN OF
SHERLOCK HOLMES
BY A. CONAN DOYLE

The first edition

THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE

It was in the spring of the year 1894 that all London was interested, and the fashionable world dismayed, by the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair under most unusual and inexplicable circumstances. The public has already learned those particulars of the crime which came out in the police investigation, but a good deal was suppressed upon that occasion, since the case for the prosecution was so overwhelmingly strong that it was not necessary to bring forward all the facts. Only now, at the end of nearly ten years, am I allowed to supply those missing links which make up the whole of that remarkable chain. The crime was of interest in itself, but that interest was as nothing to me compared to the inconceivable sequel, which afforded me the greatest shock and surprise of any event in my adventurous life. Even now, after this long interval, I find myself thrilling as I think of it, and feeling once more that sudden flood of joy, amazement, and incredulity which utterly submerged my mind. Let me say to that public, which has shown some interest in those glimpses which I have occasionally given them of the thoughts and actions of a very remarkable man, that they are not to blame me if I have not shared my knowledge with them, for I should have considered it my first duty to do so, had I not been barred by a positive prohibition from his own lips, which was only withdrawn upon the third of last month.

It can be imagined that my close intimacy with Sherlock Holmes had interested me deeply in crime, and that after his disappearance I never failed to read with care the various problems which came before the public. And I even attempted, more than once, for my own private satisfaction, to employ his methods in their solution, though with indifferent success. There was none, however, which appealed to me like this tragedy of Ronald Adair. As I read the evidence at the inquest, which led up to a verdict of willful murder against some person or persons unknown, I realised more clearly than I had ever done the loss which the community had sustained by the death of Sherlock Holmes. There were points about this strange business which would, I was sure, have specially appealed to him, and the efforts of the police would have been supplemented, or more probably anticipated, by the trained observation and the alert mind of the first criminal agent in

Europe. All day, as I drove upon my round, I turned over the case in my mind and found no explanation which appeared to me to be adequate. At the risk of telling a twice-told tale, I will recapitulate the facts as they were known to the public at the conclusion of the inquest.

The Honourable Ronald Adair was the second son of the Earl of Maynooth, at that time governor of one of the Australian colonies. Adair's mother had returned from Australia to undergo the operation for cataract, and she, her son Ronald, and her daughter Hilda were living together at 427 Park Lane. The youth moved in the best society — had, so far as was known, no enemies and no particular vices. He had been engaged to Miss Edith Woodley, of Carstairs, but the engagement had been broken off by mutual consent some months before, and there was no sign that it had left any very profound feeling behind it. For the rest {sic} the man's life moved in a narrow and conventional circle, for his habits were quiet and his nature unemotional. Yet it was upon this easy-going young aristocrat that death came, in most strange and unexpected form, between the hours of ten and eleven-twenty on the night of March 30, 1894.

Ronald Adair was fond of cards — playing continually, but never for such stakes as would hurt him. He was a member of the Baldwin, the Cavendish, and the Bagatelle card clubs. It was shown that, after dinner on the day of his death, he had played a rubber of whist at the latter club. He had also played there in the afternoon. The evidence of those who had played with him — Mr. Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran — showed that the game was whist, and that there was a fairly equal fall of the cards. Adair might have lost five pounds, but not more. His fortune was a considerable one, and such a loss could not in any way affect him. He had played nearly every day at one club or other, but he was a cautious player, and usually rose a winner. It came out in evidence that, in partnership with Colonel Moran, he had actually won as much as four hundred and twenty pounds in a sitting, some weeks before, from Godfrey Milner and Lord Balmoral. So much for his recent history as it came out at the inquest.

On the evening of the crime, he returned from the club exactly at ten. His mother and sister were out spending the evening with a relation. The servant deposed that she heard him enter the front room on the second floor, generally used as his sitting-room. She had lit a fire there, and as it smoked she had opened the window. No sound was heard from the room until eleven-twenty, the hour of the return of Lady Maynooth and her daughter.

Desiring to say good-night, she attempted to enter her son’s room. The door was locked on the inside, and no answer could be got to their cries and knocking. Help was obtained, and the door forced. The unfortunate young man was found lying near the table. His head had been horribly mutilated by an expanding revolver bullet, but no weapon of any sort was to be found in the room. On the table lay two banknotes for ten pounds each and seventeen pounds ten in silver and gold, the money arranged in little piles of varying amount. There were some figures also upon a sheet of paper, with the names of some club friends opposite to them, from which it was conjectured that before his death he was endeavouring to make out his losses or winnings at cards.

A minute examination of the circumstances served only to make the case more complex. In the first place, no reason could be given why the young man should have fastened the door upon the inside. There was the possibility that the murderer had done this, and had afterwards escaped by the window. The drop was at least twenty feet, however, and a bed of crocuses in full bloom lay beneath. Neither the flowers nor the earth showed any sign of having been disturbed, nor were there any marks upon the narrow strip of grass which separated the house from the road. Apparently, therefore, it was the young man himself who had fastened the door. But how did he come by his death? No one could have climbed up to the window without leaving traces. Suppose a man had fired through the window, he would indeed be a remarkable shot who could with a revolver inflict so deadly a wound. Again, Park Lane is a frequented thoroughfare; there is a cab stand within a hundred yards of the house. No one had heard a shot. And yet there was the dead man and there the revolver bullet, which had mushroomed out, as soft-nosed bullets will, and so inflicted a wound which must have caused instantaneous death. Such were the circumstances of the Park Lane Mystery, which were further complicated by entire absence of motive, since, as I have said, young Adair was not known to have any enemy, and no attempt had been made to remove the money or valuables in the room.

All day I turned these facts over in my mind, endeavouring to hit upon some theory which could reconcile them all, and to find that line of least resistance which my poor friend had declared to be the starting-point of every investigation. I confess that I made little progress. In the evening I strolled across the Park, and found myself about six o’clock at the Oxford

Street end of Park Lane. A group of loafers upon the pavements, all staring up at a particular window, directed me to the house which I had come to see. A tall, thin man with coloured glasses, whom I strongly suspected of being a plain-clothes detective, was pointing out some theory of his own, while the others crowded round to listen to what he said. I got as near him as I could, but his observations seemed to me to be absurd, so I withdrew again in some disgust. As I did so I struck against an elderly, deformed man, who had been behind me, and I knocked down several books which he was carrying. I remember that as I picked them up, I observed the title of one of them, THE ORIGIN OF TREE WORSHIP, and it struck me that the fellow must be some poor bibliophile, who, either as a trade or as a hobby, was a collector of obscure volumes. I endeavoured to apologize for the accident, but it was evident that these books which I had so unfortunately maltreated were very precious objects in the eyes of their owner. With a snarl of contempt he turned upon his heel, and I saw his curved back and white side-whiskers disappear among the throng.

My observations of No. 427 Park Lane did little to clear up the problem in which I was interested. The house was separated from the street by a low wall and railing, the whole not more than five feet high. It was perfectly easy, therefore, for anyone to get into the garden, but the window was entirely inaccessible, since there was no waterpipe or anything which could help the most active man to climb it. More puzzled than ever, I retraced my steps to Kensington. I had not been in my study five minutes when the maid entered to say that a person desired to see me. To my astonishment it was none other than my strange old book collector, his sharp, wizened face peering out from a frame of white hair, and his precious volumes, a dozen of them at least, wedged under his right arm.

“You’re surprised to see me, sir,” said he, in a strange, croaking voice.

I acknowledged that I was.

“Well, I’ve a conscience, sir, and when I chanced to see you go into this house, as I came hobbling after you, I thought to myself, I’ll just step in and see that kind gentleman, and tell him that if I was a bit gruff in my manner there was not any harm meant, and that I am much obliged to him for picking up my books.”

“You make too much of a trifle,” said I. “May I ask how you knew who I was?”

“Well, sir, if it isn’t too great a liberty, I am a neighbour of yours, for you’ll find my little bookshop at the corner of Church Street, and very happy to see you, I am sure. Maybe you collect yourself, sir. Here’s BRITISH BIRDS, and CATULLUS, and THE HOLY WAR — a bargain, every one of them. With five volumes you could just fill that gap on that second shelf. It looks untidy, does it not, sir?”

I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again, Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life. Certainly a gray mist swirled before my eyes, and when it cleared I found my collar-ends undone and the tingling after-taste of brandy upon my lips. Holmes was bending over my chair, his flask in his hand.

“My dear Watson,” said the well-remembered voice, “I owe you a thousand apologies. I had no idea that you would be so affected.”

I gripped him by the arms.

“Holmes!” I cried. “Is it really you? Can it indeed be that you are alive? Is it possible that you succeeded in climbing out of that awful abyss?”

“Wait a moment,” said he. “Are you sure that you are really fit to discuss things? I have given you a serious shock by my unnecessarily dramatic reappearance.”

“I am all right, but indeed, Holmes, I can hardly believe my eyes. Good heavens! to think that you — you of all men — should be standing in my study.” Again I gripped him by the sleeve, and felt the thin, sinewy arm beneath it. “Well, you’re not a spirit anyhow,” said I. “My dear chap, I’m overjoyed to see you. Sit down, and tell me how you came alive out of that dreadful chasm.”

He sat opposite to me, and lit a cigarette in his old, nonchalant manner. He was dressed in the seedy frockcoat of the book merchant, but the rest of that individual lay in a pile of white hair and old books upon the table. Holmes looked even thinner and keener than of old, but there was a dead-white tinge in his aquiline face which told me that his life recently had not been a healthy one.

“I am glad to stretch myself, Watson,” said he. “It is no joke when a tall man has to take a foot off his stature for several hours on end. Now, my dear fellow, in the matter of these explanations, we have, if I may ask for your cooperation, a hard and dangerous night’s work in front of us. Perhaps it would be better if I gave you an account of the whole situation when that work is finished.”

“I am full of curiosity. I should much prefer to hear now.”

“You’ll come with me to-night?”

“When you like and where you like.”

“This is, indeed, like the old days. We shall have time for a mouthful of dinner before we need go. Well, then, about that chasm. I had no serious difficulty in getting out of it, for the very simple reason that I never was in it.”

“You never were in it?”

“No, Watson, I never was in it. My note to you was absolutely genuine. I had little doubt that I had come to the end of my career when I perceived the somewhat sinister figure of the late Professor Moriarty standing upon the narrow pathway which led to safety. I read an inexorable purpose in his gray eyes. I exchanged some remarks with him, therefore, and obtained his courteous permission to write the short note which you afterwards received. I left it with my cigarette-box and my stick, and I walked along the pathway, Moriarty still at my heels. When I reached the end I stood at bay. He drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. I have some knowledge, however, of baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me. I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds, and clawed the air with both his hands. But for all his efforts he could not get his balance, and over he went. With my face over the brink, I saw him fall for a long way. Then he struck a rock, bounded off, and splashed into the water.”

I listened with amazement to this explanation, which Holmes delivered between the puffs of his cigarette.

“But the tracks!” I cried. “I saw, with my own eyes, that two went down the path and none returned.”

“It came about in this way. The instant that the Professor had disappeared, it struck me what a really extraordinarily lucky chance Fate had placed in my way. I knew that Moriarty was not the only man who had sworn my death. There were at least three others whose desire for vengeance upon me would only be increased by the death of their leader.

They were all most dangerous men. One or other would certainly get me. On the other hand, if all the world was convinced that I was dead they would take liberties, these men, they would soon lay themselves open, and sooner or later I could destroy them. Then it would be time for me to announce that I was still in the land of the living. So rapidly does the brain act that I believe I had thought this all out before Professor Moriarty had reached the bottom of the Reichenbach Fall.

“I stood up and examined the rocky wall behind me. In your picturesque account of the matter, which I read with great interest some months later, you assert that the wall was sheer. That was not literally true. A few small footholds presented themselves, and there was some indication of a ledge. The cliff is so high that to climb it all was an obvious impossibility, and it was equally impossible to make my way along the wet path without leaving some tracks. I might, it is true, have reversed my boots, as I have done on similar occasions, but the sight of three sets of tracks in one direction would certainly have suggested a deception. On the whole, then, it was best that I should risk the climb. It was not a pleasant business, Watson. The fall roared beneath me. I am not a fanciful person, but I give you my word that I seemed to hear Moriarty’s voice screaming at me out of the abyss. A mistake would have been fatal. More than once, as tufts of grass came out in my hand or my foot slipped in the wet notches of the rock, I thought that I was gone. But I struggled upward, and at last I reached a ledge several feet deep and covered with soft green moss, where I could lie unseen, in the most perfect comfort. There I was stretched, when you, my dear Watson, and all your following were investigating in the most sympathetic and inefficient manner the circumstances of my death.

“At last, when you had all formed your inevitable and totally erroneous conclusions, you departed for the hotel, and I was left alone. I had imagined that I had reached the end of my adventures, but a very unexpected occurrence showed me that there were surprises still in store for me. A huge rock, falling from above, boomed past me, struck the path, and bounded over into the chasm. For an instant I thought that it was an accident, but a moment later, looking up, I saw a man’s head against the darkening sky, and another stone struck the very ledge upon which I was stretched, within a foot of my head. Of course, the meaning of this was obvious. Moriarty had not been alone. A confederate — and even that one glance had told me how dangerous a man that confederate was — had kept guard while the

Professor had attacked me. From a distance, unseen by me, he had been a witness of his friend's death and of my escape. He had waited, and then making his way round to the top of the cliff, he had endeavoured to succeed where his comrade had failed.

"I did not take long to think about it, Watson. Again I saw that grim face look over the cliff, and I knew that it was the precursor of another stone. I scrambled down on to the path. I don't think I could have done it in cold blood. It was a hundred times more difficult than getting up. But I had no time to think of the danger, for another stone sang past me as I hung by my hands from the edge of the ledge. Halfway down I slipped, but, by the blessing of God, I landed, torn and bleeding, upon the path. I took to my heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness, and a week later I found myself in Florence, with the certainty that no one in the world knew what had become of me.

"I had only one confidant — my brother Mycroft. I owe you many apologies, my dear Watson, but it was all-important that it should be thought I was dead, and it is quite certain that you would not have written so convincing an account of my unhappy end had you not yourself thought that it was true. Several times during the last three years I have taken up my pen to write to you, but always I feared lest your affectionate regard for me should tempt you to some indiscretion which would betray my secret. For that reason I turned away from you this evening when you upset my books, for I was in danger at the time, and any show of surprise and emotion upon your part might have drawn attention to my identity and led to the most deplorable and irreparable results. As to Mycroft, I had to confide in him in order to obtain the money which I needed. The course of events in London did not run so well as I had hoped, for the trial of the Moriarty gang left two of its most dangerous members, my own most vindictive enemies, at liberty. I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhassa, and spending some days with the head lama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend. I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office. Returning to France, I spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the south of France. Having concluded this to my satisfaction and learning that only one of my enemies was now left in London, I was about to return when my movements were hastened by the news of this very remarkable Park Lane Mystery, which not only appealed to me by its own merits, but which seemed to offer some most peculiar personal opportunities. I came over at once to London, called in my own person at Baker Street, threw Mrs. Hudson into violent hysterics, and found that Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock to-day I found myself in my old armchair in my own old room, and only wishing that I could have seen my old friend Watson in the other chair which he has so often adorned."

Such was the remarkable narrative to which I listened on that April evening — a narrative which would have been utterly incredible to me had it not been confirmed by the actual sight of the tall, spare figure and the keen, eager face, which I had never thought to see again. In some manner he had learned of my own sad bereavement, and his sympathy was shown in his manner rather than in his words. "Work is the best antidote to sorrow, my dear Watson," said he; "and I have a piece of work for us both to-night which, if we can bring it to a successful conclusion, will in itself justify a man's life on this planet." In vain I begged him to tell me more. "You will hear and see enough before morning," he answered. "We have three years of the past to discuss. Let that suffice until half-past nine, when we start upon the notable adventure of the empty house."

It was indeed like old times when, at that hour, I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket, and the thrill of adventure in my heart. Holmes was cold and stern and silent. As the gleam of the street-lamps flashed upon his austere features, I saw that his brows were drawn down in thought and his thin lips compressed. I knew not what wild beast we were about to hunt down in the dark jungle of criminal London, but I was well assured, from the bearing of this master huntsman, that the adventure was a most grave one — while the sardonic smile which occasionally broke through his ascetic gloom boded little good for the object of our quest.

I had imagined that we were bound for Baker Street, but Holmes stopped the cab at the corner of Cavendish Square. I observed that as he stepped out he gave a most searching glance to right and left, and at every subsequent street corner he took the utmost pains to assure that he was not followed.

Our route was certainly a singular one. Holmes's knowledge of the byways of London was extraordinary, and on this occasion he passed rapidly and with an assured step through a network of mews and stables, the very existence of which I had never known. We emerged at last into a small road, lined with old, gloomy houses, which led us into Manchester Street, and so to Blandford Street. Here he turned swiftly down a narrow passage, passed through a wooden gate into a deserted yard, and then opened with a key the back door of a house. We entered together, and he closed it behind us.

The place was pitch dark, but it was evident to me that it was an empty house. Our feet creaked and crackled over the bare planking, and my outstretched hand touched a wall from which the paper was hanging in ribbons. Holmes's cold, thin fingers closed round my wrist and led me forward down a long hall, until I dimly saw the murky fanlight over the door. Here Holmes turned suddenly to the right and we found ourselves in a large, square, empty room, heavily shadowed in the corners, but faintly lit in the centre from the lights of the street beyond. There was no lamp near, and the window was thick with dust, so that we could only just discern each other's figures within. My companion put his hand upon my shoulder and his lips close to my ear.

"Do you know where we are?" he whispered.

"Surely that is Baker Street," I answered, staring through the dim window.

"Exactly. We are in Camden House, which stands opposite to our own old quarters."

"But why are we here?"

"Because it commands so excellent a view of that picturesque pile. Might I trouble you, my dear Watson, to draw a little nearer to the window, taking every precaution not to show yourself, and then to look up at our old rooms — the starting-point of so many of your little fairy-tales? We will see if my three years of absence have entirely taken away my power to surprise you."

I crept forward and looked across at the familiar window. As my eyes fell upon it, I gave a gasp and a cry of amazement. The blind was down, and a strong light was burning in the room. The shadow of a man who was seated in a chair within was thrown in hard, black outline upon the luminous screen of the window. There was no mistaking the poise of the head, the squareness of the shoulders, the sharpness of the features. The face was turned half-round, and the effect was that of one of those black silhouettes which our grandparents loved to frame. It was a perfect reproduction of Holmes. So amazed was I that I threw out my hand to make sure that the man himself was standing beside me. He was quivering with silent laughter.

“Well?” said he.

“Good heavens!” I cried. “It is marvellous.”

“I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety,” said he, and I recognised in his voice the joy and pride which the artist takes in his own creation. “It really is rather like me, is it not?”

“I should be prepared to swear that it was you.”

“The credit of the execution is due to Monsieur Oscar Meunier, of Grenoble, who spent some days in doing the moulding. It is a bust in wax. The rest I arranged myself during my visit to Baker Street this afternoon.”

“But why?”

“Because, my dear Watson, I had the strongest possible reason for wishing certain people to think that I was there when I was really elsewhere.”

“And you thought the rooms were watched?”

“I KNEW that they were watched.”

“By whom?”

“By my old enemies, Watson. By the charming society whose leader lies in the Reichenbach Fall. You must remember that they knew, and only they knew, that I was still alive. Sooner or later they believed that I should come back to my rooms. They watched them continuously, and this morning they saw me arrive.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I recognised their sentinel when I glanced out of my window. He is a harmless enough fellow, Parker by name, a garroter by trade, and a remarkable performer upon the jew’s-harp. I cared nothing for him. But I cared a great deal for the much more formidable person who was behind him, the bosom friend of Moriarty, the man who dropped the rocks over the cliff, the most cunning and dangerous criminal in London. That is the man who is after me to-night Watson, and that is the man who is quite unaware that we are after him.”

My friend’s plans were gradually revealing themselves. From this convenient retreat, the watchers were being watched and the trackers tracked. That angular shadow up yonder was the bait, and we were the hunters. In silence we stood together in the darkness and watched the hurrying figures who passed and repassed in front of us. Holmes was silent and motionless; but I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his eyes were fixed intently upon the stream of passers-by. It was a bleak and boisterous night and the wind whistled shrilly down the long street. Many people were moving to and fro, most of them muffled in their coats and cravats. Once or twice it seemed to me that I had seen the same figure before, and I especially noticed two men who appeared to be sheltering themselves from the wind in the doorway of a house some distance up the street. I tried to draw my companion's attention to them; but he gave a little ejaculation of impatience, and continued to stare into the street. More than once he fidgeted with his feet and tapped rapidly with his fingers upon the wall. It was evident to me that he was becoming uneasy, and that his plans were not working out altogether as he had hoped. At last, as midnight approached and the street gradually cleared, he paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. I was about to make some remark to him, when I raised my eyes to the lighted window, and again experienced almost as great a surprise as before. I clutched Holmes's arm, and pointed upward.

"The shadow has moved!" I cried.

It was indeed no longer the profile, but the back, which was turned towards us.

Three years had certainly not smoothed the asperities of his temper or his impatience with a less active intelligence than his own.

"Of course it has moved," said he. "Am I such a farcical bungler, Watson, that I should erect an obvious dummy, and expect that some of the sharpest men in Europe would be deceived by it? We have been in this room two hours, and Mrs. Hudson has made some change in that figure eight times, or once in every quarter of an hour. She works it from the front, so that her shadow may never be seen. Ah!" He drew in his breath with a shrill, excited intake. In the dim light I saw his head thrown forward, his whole attitude rigid with attention. Outside the street was absolutely deserted. Those two men might still be crouching in the doorway, but I could no longer see them. All was still and dark, save only that brilliant yellow screen in front of us with the black figure outlined upon its centre. Again in the utter silence I heard that thin, sibilant note which spoke of intense suppressed excitement. An instant later he pulled me back into the blackest corner of the room, and I felt his warning hand upon my lips. The fingers which clutched me were quivering. Never had I known my friend more moved, and yet the dark street still stretched lonely and motionless before us.

But suddenly I was aware of that which his keener senses had already distinguished. A low, stealthy sound came to my ears, not from the direction of Baker Street, but from the back of the very house in which we lay concealed. A door opened and shut. An instant later steps crept down the passage — steps which were meant to be silent, but which reverberated harshly through the empty house. Holmes crouched back against the wall, and I did the same, my hand closing upon the handle of my revolver. Peering through the gloom, I saw the vague outline of a man, a shade blacker than the blackness of the open door. He stood for an instant, and then he crept forward, crouching, menacing, into the room. He was within three yards of us, this sinister figure, and I had braced myself to meet his spring, before I realised that he had no idea of our presence. He passed close beside us, stole over to the window, and very softly and noiselessly raised it for half a foot. As he sank to the level of this opening, the light of the street, no longer dimmed by the dusty glass, fell full upon his face. The man seemed to be beside himself with excitement. His two eyes shone like stars, and his features were working convulsively. He was an elderly man, with a thin, projecting nose, a high, bald forehead, and a huge grizzled moustache. An opera hat was pushed to the back of his head, and an evening dress shirt-front gleamed out through his open overcoat. His face was gaunt and swarthy, scored with deep, savage lines. In his hand he carried what appeared to be a stick, but as he laid it down upon the floor it gave a metallic clang. Then from the pocket of his overcoat he drew a bulky object, and he busied himself in some task which ended with a loud, sharp click, as if a spring or bolt had fallen into its place. Still kneeling upon the floor he bent forward and threw all his weight and strength upon some lever, with the result that there came a long, whirling, grinding noise, ending once more in a powerful click. He straightened himself then, and I saw that what he held in his hand was a sort of gun, with a curiously misshapen butt. He opened it at the breech, put something in, and snapped the breech-lock. Then, crouching down, he rested the end of the barrel upon the ledge of the open window, and I saw his long moustache droop over the stock and his eye gleam as it peered along the sights. I heard a little sigh of satisfaction as he cuddled the butt into his shoulder; and saw that amazing target, the black man on the yellow ground, standing clear at the end of his foresight. For an instant he was rigid and motionless. Then his finger tightened on the trigger. There was a strange, loud whiz and a long, silvery tinkle of broken glass. At that instant Holmes sprang like a tiger on to the marksman's back, and hurled him flat upon his face. He was up again in a moment, and with convulsive strength he seized Holmes by the throat, but I struck him on the head with the butt of my revolver, and he dropped again upon the floor. I fell upon him, and as I held him my comrade blew a shrill call upon a whistle. There was the clatter of running feet upon the pavement, and two policemen in uniform, with one plain-clothes detective, rushed through the front entrance and into the room.

"That you, Lestrade?" said Holmes.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. I took the job myself. It's good to see you back in London, sir."

"I think you want a little unofficial help. Three undetected murders in one year won't do, Lestrade. But you handled the Molesey Mystery with less than your usual — that's to say, you handled it fairly well."

We had all risen to our feet, our prisoner breathing hard, with a stalwart constable on each side of him. Already a few loiterers had begun to collect in the street. Holmes stepped up to the window, closed it, and dropped the blinds. Lestrade had produced two candles, and the policemen had uncovered their lanterns. I was able at last to have a good look at our prisoner.

It was a tremendously virile and yet sinister face which was turned towards us. With the brow of a philosopher above and the jaw of a sensualist below, the man must have started with great capacities for good or for evil. But one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, cynical lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and the threatening, deep-lined brow, without reading Nature's plainest danger-signals. He took no heed of any of us, but his eyes were fixed upon Holmes's face with an expression in which hatred and amazement were equally blended. "You fiend!" he kept on muttering. "You clever, clever fiend!"

"Ah, Colonel!" said Holmes, arranging his rumpled collar. "'Journeys end in lovers' meetings,' as the old play says. I don't think I have had the pleasure of seeing you since you favoured me with those attentions as I lay on the ledge above the Reichenbach Fall."

The colonel still stared at my friend like a man in a trance. “You cunning, cunning fiend!” was all that he could say.

“I have not introduced you yet,” said Holmes. “This, gentlemen, is Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her Majesty’s Indian Army, and the best heavy-game shot that our Eastern Empire has ever produced. I believe I am correct Colonel, in saying that your bag of tigers still remains unrivalled?”

The fierce old man said nothing, but still glared at my companion. With his savage eyes and bristling moustache he was wonderfully like a tiger himself.

“I wonder that my very simple stratagem could deceive so old a SHIKARI,” said Holmes. “It must be very familiar to you. Have you not tethered a young kid under a tree, lain above it with your rifle, and waited for the bait to bring up your tiger? This empty house is my tree, and you are my tiger. You have possibly had other guns in reserve in case there should be several tigers, or in the unlikely supposition of your own aim failing you. These,” he pointed around, “are my other guns. The parallel is exact.”

Colonel Moran sprang forward with a snarl of rage, but the constables dragged him back. The fury upon his face was terrible to look at.

“I confess that you had one small surprise for me,” said Holmes. “I did not anticipate that you would yourself make use of this empty house and this convenient front window. I had imagined you as operating from the street, where my friend, Lestrade and his merry men were awaiting you. With that exception, all has gone as I expected.”

Colonel Moran turned to the official detective.

“You may or may not have just cause for arresting me,” said he, “but at least there can be no reason why I should submit to the gibes of this person. If I am in the hands of the law, let things be done in a legal way.”

“Well, that’s reasonable enough,” said Lestrade. “Nothing further you have to say, Mr. Holmes, before we go?”

Holmes had picked up the powerful air-gun from the floor, and was examining its mechanism.

“An admirable and unique weapon,” said he, “noiseless and of tremendous power: I knew Von Herder, the blind German mechanic, who constructed it to the order of the late Professor Moriarty. For years I have been aware of its existence though I have never before had the opportunity of handling it. I commend it very specially to your attention, Lestrade and also the bullets which fit it.”

“You can trust us to look after that, Mr. Holmes,” said Lestrade, as the whole party moved towards the door. “Anything further to say?”

“Only to ask what charge you intend to prefer?”

“What charge, sir? Why, of course, the attempted murder of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

“Not so, Lestrade. I do not propose to appear in the matter at all. To you, and to you only, belongs the credit of the remarkable arrest which you have effected. Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you! With your usual happy mixture of cunning and audacity, you have got him.”

“Got him! Got whom, Mr. Holmes?”

“The man that the whole force has been seeking in vain — Colonel Sebastian Moran, who shot the Honourable Ronald Adair with an expanding bullet from an air-gun through the open window of the second-floor front of No. 427 Park Lane, upon the thirtieth of last month. That’s the charge, Lestrade. And now, Watson, if you can endure the draught from a broken window, I think that half an hour in my study over a cigar may afford you some profitable amusement.”

Our old chambers had been left unchanged through the supervision of Mycroft Holmes and the immediate care of Mrs. Hudson. As I entered I saw, it is true, an unwonted tidiness, but the old landmarks were all in their place. There were the chemical corner and the acid-stained, deal-topped table. There upon a shelf was the row of formidable scrap-books and books of reference which many of our fellow-citizens would have been so glad to burn. The diagrams, the violin-case, and the pipe-rack — even the Persian slipper which contained the tobacco — all met my eyes as I glanced round me. There were two occupants of the room — one, Mrs. Hudson, who beamed upon us both as we entered — the other, the strange dummy which had played so important a part in the evening’s adventures. It was a wax-coloured model of my friend, so admirably done that it was a perfect facsimile. It stood on a small pedestal table with an old dressing-gown of Holmes’s so draped round it that the illusion from the street was absolutely perfect.

“I hope you observed all precautions, Mrs. Hudson?” said Holmes.

“I went to it on my knees, sir, just as you told me.”

“Excellent. You carried the thing out very well. Did you observe where the bullet went?”

“Yes, sir. I’m afraid it has spoilt your beautiful bust, for it passed right through the head and flattened itself on the wall. I picked it up from the carpet. Here it is!”

Holmes held it out to me. “A soft revolver bullet, as you perceive, Watson. There’s genius in that, for who would expect to find such a thing fired from an airgun? All right, Mrs. Hudson. I am much obliged for your assistance. And now, Watson, let me see you in your old seat once more, for there are several points which I should like to discuss with you.”

He had thrown off the seedy frockcoat, and now he was the Holmes of old in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown which he took from his effigy.

“The old SHIKARI’S nerves have not lost their steadiness, nor his eyes their keenness,” said he, with a laugh, as he inspected the shattered forehead of his bust.

“Plumb in the middle of the back of the head and smack through the brain. He was the best shot in India, and I expect that there are few better in London. Have you heard the name?”

“No, I have not.”

“Well, well, such is fame! But, then, if I remember right, you had not heard the name of Professor James Moriarty, who had one of the great brains of the century. Just give me down my index of biographies from the shelf.”

He turned over the pages lazily, leaning back in his chair and blowing great clouds from his cigar.

“My collection of M’s is a fine one,” said he. “Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious, and here is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory, and Mathews, who knocked out my left canine in the waiting-room at Charing Cross, and, finally, here is our friend of to-night.”

He handed over the book, and I read:

MORAN, SEBASTIAN, COLONEL. Unemployed. Formerly 1st Bangalore Pioneers. Born London, 1840. Son of Sir Augustus Moran, C. B., once British Minister to Persia. Educated Eton and Oxford. Served in Jowaki Campaign, Afghan Campaign, Charasiab (despatches), Sherpur, and Cabul. Author of HEAVY GAME OF THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS (1881); THREE MONTHS IN THE JUNGLE (1884). Address: Conduit Street. Clubs: The Anglo-Indian, the Tankerville, the Bagatelle Card Club.

On the margin was written, in Holmes’s precise hand:

The second most dangerous man in London.

“This is astonishing,” said I, as I handed back the volume. “The man’s career is that of an honourable soldier.”

“It is true,” Holmes answered. “Up to a certain point he did well. He was always a man of iron nerve, and the story is still told in India how he crawled down a drain after a wounded man-eating tiger. There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height, and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see it often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family.”

“It is surely rather fanciful.”

“Well, I don’t insist upon it. Whatever the cause, Colonel Moran began to go wrong. Without any open scandal, he still made India too hot to hold him. He retired, came to London, and again acquired an evil name. It was at this time that he was sought out by Professor Moriarty, to whom for a time he was chief of the staff. Moriarty supplied him liberally with money, and used him only in one or two very high-class jobs, which no ordinary criminal could have undertaken. You may have some recollection of the death of Mrs. Stewart, of Lauder, in 1887. Not? Well, I am sure Moran was at the bottom of it, but nothing could be proved. So cleverly was the colonel concealed that, even when the Moriarty gang was broken up, we could not incriminate him. You remember at that date, when I called upon you in your rooms, how I put up the shutters for fear of air-guns? No doubt you thought me fanciful. I knew exactly what I was doing, for I knew of the existence of this remarkable gun, and I knew also that one of the best shots in the world would be behind it. When we were in Switzerland he followed us with Moriarty, and it was undoubtedly he who gave me that evil five minutes on the Reichenbach ledge.

“You may think that I read the papers with some attention during my sojourn in France, on the look-out for any chance of laying him by the heels. So long as he was free in London, my life would really not have been worth living. Night and day the shadow would have been over me, and sooner or later his chance must have come. What could I do? I could not shoot him at sight, or I should myself be in the dock. There was no use appealing to a magistrate. They cannot interfere on the strength of what would appear to them to be a wild suspicion. So I could do nothing. But I watched the criminal news, knowing that sooner or later I should get him. Then came the death of this Ronald Adair. My chance had come at last. Knowing what I did, was it not certain that Colonel Moran had done it? He had played cards with the lad, he had followed him home from the club, he had shot him through the open window. There was not a doubt of it. The bullets alone are enough to put his head in a noose. I came over at once. I was seen by the sentinel, who would, I knew, direct the colonel's attention to my presence. He could not fail to connect my sudden return with his crime, and to be terribly alarmed. I was sure that he would make an attempt to get me out of the way AT once, and would bring round his murderous weapon for that purpose. I left him an excellent mark in the window, and, having warned the police that they might be needed — by the way, Watson, you spotted their presence in that doorway with unerring accuracy — I took up what seemed to me to be a judicious post for observation, never dreaming that he would choose the same spot for his attack. Now, my dear Watson, does anything remain for me to explain?"

"Yes," said I. "You have not made it clear what was Colonel Moran's motive in murdering the Honourable Ronald Adair?"

"Ah! my dear Watson, there we come into those realms of conjecture, where the most logical mind may be at fault. Each may form his own hypothesis upon the present evidence, and yours is as likely to be correct as mine."

"You have formed one, then?"

"I think that it is not difficult to explain the facts. It came out in evidence that Colonel Moran and young Adair had, between them, won a considerable amount of money. Now, undoubtedly played foul — of that I have long been aware. I believe that on the day of the murder Adair had discovered that Moran was cheating. Very likely he had spoken to him privately, and had threatened to expose him unless he voluntarily resigned his membership of the club, and promised not to play cards again. It is unlikely that a youngster like Adair would at once make a hideous scandal by exposing a well known man so much older than himself. Probably he acted as I suggest. The exclusion from his clubs would mean ruin to Moran, who lived by his ill-gotten card-gains. He therefore murdered Adair, who at the time was endeavouring to work out how much money he should himself return, since he could not profit by his partner's foul play. He locked the door lest the ladies should surprise him and insist upon knowing what he was doing with these names and coins. Will it pass?"

"I have no doubt that you have hit upon the truth."

"It will be verified or disproved at the trial. Meanwhile, come what may, Colonel Moran will trouble us no more. The famous air-gun of Von Herder will embellish the Scotland Yard Museum, and once again Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE NORWOOD BUILDER

“From the point of view of the criminal expert,” said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, “London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty.”

“I can hardly think that you would find many decent citizens to agree with you,” I answered.

“Well, well, I must not be selfish,” said he, with a smile, as he pushed back his chair from the breakfast-table. “The community is certainly the gainer, and no one the loser, save the poor out-of-work specialist, whose occupation has gone. With that man in the field, one’s morning paper presented infinite possibilities. Often it was only the smallest trace, Watson, the faintest indication, and yet it was enough to tell me that the great malignant brain was there, as the gentlest tremors of the edges of the web remind one of the foul spider which lurks in the centre. Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage — to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole. To the scientific student of the higher criminal world, no capital in Europe offered the advantages which London then possessed. But now — —” He shrugged his shoulders in humorous deprecation of the state of things which he had himself done so much to produce.

At the time of which I speak, Holmes had been back for some months, and I at his request had sold my practice and returned to share the old quarters in Baker Street. A young doctor, named Verner, had purchased my small Kensington practice, and given with astonishingly little demur the highest price that I ventured to ask — an incident which only explained itself some years later, when I found that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes, and that it was my friend who had really found the money.

Our months of partnership had not been so uneventful as he had stated, for I find, on looking over my notes, that this period includes the case of the papers of ex-President Murillo, and also the shocking affair of the Dutch steamship FRIESLAND, which so nearly cost us both our lives. His cold and proud nature was always averse, however, from anything in the shape of public applause, and he bound me in the most stringent terms to say no further word of himself, his methods, or his successes — a prohibition which, as I have explained, has only now been removed.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes was leaning back in his chair after his whimsical protest, and was unfolding his morning paper in a leisurely fashion, when our attention was arrested by a tremendous ring at the bell, followed immediately by a hollow drumming sound, as if someone were beating on the outer door with his fist. As it opened there came a tumultuous rush into the hall, rapid feet clattered up the stair, and an instant later a wild-eyed and frantic young man, pale, disheveled, and palpitating, burst into the room. He looked from one to the other of us, and under our gaze of inquiry he became conscious that some apology was needed for this unceremonious entry.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Holmes,” he cried. “You mustn’t blame me. I am nearly mad. Mr. Holmes, I am the unhappy John Hector McFarlane.”

He made the announcement as if the name alone would explain both his visit and its manner, but I could see, by my companion’s unresponsive face, that it meant no more to him than to me.

“Have a cigarette, Mr. McFarlane,” said he, pushing his case across. “I am sure that, with your symptoms, my friend Dr. Watson here would prescribe a sedative. The weather has been so very warm these last few days. Now, if you feel a little more composed, I should be glad if you would sit down in that chair, and tell us very slowly and quietly who you are, and what it is that you want. You mentioned your name, as if I should recognise it, but I assure you that, beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.”

Familiar as I was with my friend’s methods, it was not difficult for me to follow his deductions, and to observe the untidiness of attire, the sheaf of legal papers, the watch-charm, and the breathing which had prompted them. Our client, however, stared in amazement.

“Yes, I am all that, Mr. Holmes; and, in addition, I am the most unfortunate man at this moment in London. For heaven’s sake, don’t abandon me, Mr. Holmes! If they come to arrest me before I have finished my story, make them give me time, so that I may tell you the whole truth. I could go to jail happy if I knew that you were working for me outside.”

“Arrest you!” said Holmes. “This is really most grati — most interesting. On what charge do you expect to be arrested?”

“Upon the charge of murdering Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood.”

My companion’s expressive face showed a sympathy which was not, I am afraid, entirely unmixed with satisfaction.

“Dear me,” said he, “it was only this moment at breakfast that I was saying to my friend, Dr. Watson, that sensational cases had disappeared out of our papers.”

Our visitor stretched forward a quivering hand and picked up the DAILY TELEGRAPH, which still lay upon Holmes’s knee.

“If you had looked at it, sir, you would have seen at a glance what the errand is on which I have come to you this morning. I feel as if my name and my misfortune must be in every man’s mouth.” He turned it over to expose the central page. “Here it is, and with your permission I will read it to you. Listen to this, Mr. Holmes. The headlines are: ‘Mysterious Affair at Lower Norwood. Disappearance of a Well Known Builder. Suspicion of Murder and Arson. A Clue to the Criminal.’ That is the clue which they are already following, Mr. Holmes, and I know that it leads infallibly to me. I have been followed from London Bridge Station, and I am sure that they are only waiting for the warrant to arrest me. It will break my mother’s heart — it will break her heart!” He wrung his hands in an agony of apprehension, and swayed backward and forward in his chair.

I looked with interest upon this man, who was accused of being the perpetrator of a crime of violence. He was flaxen-haired and handsome, in a washed-out negative fashion, with frightened blue eyes, and a clean-shaven face, with a weak, sensitive mouth. His age may have been about twenty-seven, his dress and bearing that of a gentleman. From the pocket of his light summer overcoat protruded the bundle of indorsed papers which proclaimed his profession.

“We must use what time we have,” said Holmes. “Watson, would you have the kindness to take the paper and to read the paragraph in question?”

Underneath the vigorous headlines which our client had quoted, I read the following suggestive narrative:

“Late last night, or early this morning, an incident occurred at Lower Norwood which points, it is feared, to a serious crime. Mr. Jonas Oldacre is a well known resident of that suburb, where he has carried on his business as a builder for many years. Mr. Oldacre is a bachelor, fifty-two years of age, and lives in Deep Dene House, at the Sydenham end of the road of that name. He has had the reputation of being a man of eccentric habits, secretive and retiring. For some years he has practically withdrawn from the business, in which he is said to have massed considerable wealth. A small timber-yard still exists, however, at the back of the house, and last night, about twelve o'clock, an alarm was given that one of the stacks was on fire. The engines were soon upon the spot, but the dry wood burned with great fury, and it was impossible to arrest the conflagration until the stack had been entirely consumed. Up to this point the incident bore the appearance of an ordinary accident, but fresh indications seem to point to serious crime. Surprise was expressed at the absence of the master of the establishment from the scene of the fire, and an inquiry followed, which showed that he had disappeared from the house. An examination of his room revealed that the bed had not been slept in, that a safe which stood in it was open, that a number of important papers were scattered about the room, and finally, that there were signs of a murderous struggle, slight traces of blood being found within the room, and an oaken walking-stick, which also showed stains of blood upon the handle. It is known that Mr. Jonas Oldacre had received a late visitor in his bedroom upon that night, and the stick found has been identified as the property of this person, who is a young London solicitor named John Hector McFarlane, junior partner of Graham and McFarlane, of 426 Gresham Buildings, E. C. The police believe that they have evidence in their possession which supplies a very convincing motive for the crime, and altogether it cannot be doubted that sensational developments will follow.

"LATER. — It is rumoured as we go to press that Mr. John Hector McFarlane has actually been arrested on the charge of the murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. It is at least certain that a warrant has been issued. There have been further and sinister developments in the investigation at Norwood. Besides the signs of a struggle in the room of the unfortunate builder it is now known that the French windows of his bedroom (which is on the ground floor) were found to be open, that there were marks as if some bulky object had been dragged across to the wood-pile, and, finally, it is asserted that charred remains have been found among the charcoal ashes of the fire. The police theory is that a most sensational crime has been committed, that the victim was clubbed to death in his own bedroom, his papers rifled, and his dead body dragged across to the wood-stack, which was then ignited so as to hide all traces of the crime. The conduct of the criminal investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, who is following up the clues with his accustomed energy and sagacity.”

Sherlock Holmes listened with closed eyes and fingertips together to this remarkable account.

“The case has certainly some points of interest,” said he, in his languid fashion. “May I ask, in the first place, Mr. McFarlane, how it is that you are still at liberty, since there appears to be enough evidence to justify your arrest?”

“I live at Torrington Lodge, Blackheath, with my parents, Mr. Holmes, but last night, having to do business very late with Mr. Jonas Oldacre, I stayed at an hotel in Norwood, and came to my business from there. I knew nothing of this affair until I was in the train, when I read what you have just heard. I at once saw the horrible danger of my position, and I hurried to put the case into your hands. I have no doubt that I should have been arrested either at my city office or at my home. A man followed me from London Bridge Station, and I have no doubt — Great heaven! what is that?”

It was a clang of the bell, followed instantly by heavy steps upon the stair. A moment later, our old friend Lestrade appeared in the doorway. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of one or two uniformed policemen outside.

“Mr. John Hector McFarlane?” said Lestrade.

Our unfortunate client rose with a ghastly face.

“I arrest you for the wilful murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood.”

McFarlane turned to us with a gesture of despair, and sank into his chair once more like one who is crushed.

“One moment, Lestrade,” said Holmes. “Half an hour more or less can make no difference to you, and the gentleman was about to give us an account of this very interesting affair, which might aid us in clearing it up.”

“I think there will be no difficulty in clearing it up,” said Lestrade, grimly.

“None the less, with your permission, I should be much interested to hear his account.”

“Well, Mr. Holmes, it is difficult for me to refuse you anything, for you have been of use to the force once or twice in the past, and we owe you a good turn at Scotland Yard,” said Lestrade. “At the same time I must remain with my prisoner, and I am bound to warn him that anything he may say will appear in evidence against him.”

“I wish nothing better,” said our client. “All I ask is that you should hear and recognise the absolute truth.”

Lestrade looked at his watch. “I’ll give you half an hour,” said he.

“I must explain first,” said McFarlane, “that I knew nothing of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. His name was familiar to me, for many years ago my parents were acquainted with him, but they drifted apart. I was very much surprised therefore, when yesterday, about three o’clock in the afternoon, he walked into my office in the city. But I was still more astonished when he told me the object of his visit. He had in his hand several sheets of a notebook, covered with scribbled writing — here they are — and he laid them on my table.

“‘Here is my will,’ said he. ‘I want you, Mr. McFarlane, to cast it into proper legal shape. I will sit here while you do so.’

“I set myself to copy it, and you can imagine my astonishment when I found that, with some reservations, he had left all his property to me. He was a strange little ferret-like man, with white eyelashes, and when I looked up at him I found his keen gray eyes fixed upon me with an amused expression. I could hardly believe my own as I read the terms of the will; but he explained that he was a bachelor with hardly any living relation, that he had known my parents in his youth, and that he had always heard of me as a very deserving young man, and was assured that his money would be in worthy hands. Of course, I could only stammer out my thanks. The will was duly finished, signed, and witnessed by my clerk. This is it on the blue paper, and these slips, as I have explained, are the rough draft. Mr. Jonas Oldacre then informed me that there were a number of documents — building leases, title-deeds, mortgages, scrip, and so forth — which it was necessary that I should see and understand. He said that his mind would not be easy until the whole thing was settled, and he begged me to come out to his house at Norwood that night, bringing the will with me, and to arrange matters. ‘Remember, my boy, not one word to your parents about the affair until everything is settled. We will keep it as a little surprise for them.’ He was very insistent upon this point, and made me promise it faithfully.

“You can imagine, Mr. Holmes, that I was not in a humour to refuse him anything that he might ask. He was my benefactor, and all my desire was to carry out his wishes in every particular. I sent a telegram home, therefore, to say that I had important business on hand, and that it was impossible for me to say how late I might be. Mr. Oldacre had told me that he would like me to have supper with him at nine, as he might not be home before that hour. I had some difficulty in finding his house, however, and it was nearly half-past before I reached it. I found him — —”

“One moment!” said Holmes. “Who opened the door?”

“A middle-aged woman, who was, I suppose, his housekeeper.”

“And it was she, I presume, who mentioned your name?”

“Exactly,” said McFarlane.

“Pray proceed.”

McFarlane wiped his damp brow, and then continued his narrative:

“I was shown by this woman into a sitting-room, where a frugal supper was laid out. Afterwards, Mr. Jonas Oldacre led me into his bedroom, in which there stood a heavy safe. This he opened and took out a mass of documents, which we went over together. It was between eleven and twelve when we finished. He remarked that we must not disturb the housekeeper. He showed me out through his own French window, which had been open all this time.”

“Was the blind down?” asked Holmes.

“I will not be sure, but I believe that it was only half down. Yes, I remember how he pulled it up in order to swing open the window. I could not find my stick, and he said, ‘Never mind, my boy, I shall see a good deal of you now, I hope, and I will keep your stick until you come back to claim it.’ I left him there, the safe open, and the papers made up in packets upon the table. It was so late that I could not get back to Blackheath, so I spent the night at the Anerley Arms, and I knew nothing more until I read of this horrible affair in the morning.”

“Anything more that you would like to ask, Mr. Holmes?” said Lestrade, whose eyebrows had gone up once or twice during this remarkable explanation.

“Not until I have been to Blackheath.”

“You mean to Norwood,” said Lestrade.

“Oh, yes, no doubt that is what I must have meant,” said Holmes, with his enigmatical smile. Lestrade had learned by more experiences than he would care to acknowledge that that brain could cut through that which was impenetrable to him. I saw him look curiously at my companion.

"I think I should like to have a word with you presently, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he. "Now, Mr. McFarlane, two of my constables are at the door, and there is a four-wheeler waiting." The wretched young man arose, and with a last beseeching glance at us walked from the room. The officers conducted him to the cab, but Lestrade remained.

Holmes had picked up the pages which formed the rough draft of the will, and was looking at them with the keenest interest upon his face.

"There are some points about that document, Lestrade, are there not?" said he, pushing them over.

The official looked at them with a puzzled expression.

"I can read the first few lines and these in the middle of the second page, and one or two at the end. Those are as clear as print," said he, "but the writing in between is very bad, and there are three places where I cannot read it at all."

"What do you make of that?" said Holmes.

"Well, what do YOU make of it?"

"That it was written in a train. The good writing represents stations, the bad writing movement, and the very bad writing passing over points. A scientific expert would pronounce at once that this was drawn up on a suburban line, since nowhere save in the immediate vicinity of a great city could there be so quick a succession of points. Granting that his whole journey was occupied in drawing up the will, then the train was an express, only stopping once between Norwood and London Bridge."

Lestrade began to laugh.

"You are too many for me when you begin to get on your theories, Mr. Holmes," said he. "How does this bear on the case?"

"Well, it corroborates the young man's story to the extent that the will was drawn up by Jonas Oldacre in his journey yesterday. It is curious — is it not? — that a man should draw up so important a document in so haphazard a fashion. It suggests that he did not think it was going to be of much practical importance. If a man drew up a will which he did not intend ever to be effective, he might do it so."

"Well, he drew up his own death warrant at the same time," said Lestrade.

"Oh, you think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Well, it is quite possible, but the case is not clear to me yet."

“Not clear? Well, if that isn’t clear, what COULD be clear? Here is a young man who learns suddenly that, if a certain older man dies, he will succeed to a fortune. What does he do? He says nothing to anyone, but he arranges that he shall go out on some pretext to see his client that night. He waits until the only other person in the house is in bed, and then in the solitude of a man’s room he murders him, burns his body in the wood-pile, and departs to a neighbouring hotel. The blood-stains in the room and also on the stick are very slight. It is probable that he imagined his crime to be a bloodless one, and hoped that if the body were consumed it would hide all traces of the method of his death — traces which, for some reason, must have pointed to him. Is not all this obvious?”

“It strikes me, my good Lestrade, as being just a trifle too obvious,” said Holmes. “You do not add imagination to your other great qualities, but if you could for one moment put yourself in the place of this young man, would you choose the very night after the will had been made to commit your crime? Would it not seem dangerous to you to make so very close a relation between the two incidents? Again, would you choose an occasion when you are known to be in the house, when a servant has let you in? And, finally, would you take the great pains to conceal the body, and yet leave your own stick as a sign that you were the criminal? Confess, Lestrade, that all this is very unlikely.”

“As to the stick, Mr. Holmes, you know as well as I do that a criminal is often flurried, and does such things, which a cool man would avoid. He was very likely afraid to go back to the room. Give me another theory that would fit the facts.”

“I could very easily give you half a dozen,” said Holmes. “Here for example, is a very possible and even probable one. I make you a free present of it. The older man is showing documents which are of evident value. A passing tramp sees them through the window, the blind of which is only half down. Exit the solicitor. Enter the tramp! He seizes a stick, which he observes there, kills Oldacre, and departs after burning the body.”

“Why should the tramp burn the body?”

“For the matter of that, why should McFarlane?”

“To hide some evidence.”

“Possibly the tramp wanted to hide that any murder at all had been committed.”

“And why did the tramp take nothing?”

“Because they were papers that he could not negotiate.”

Lestrade shook his head, though it seemed to me that his manner was less absolutely assured than before.

“Well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you may look for your tramp, and while you are finding him we will hold on to our man. The future will show which is right. Just notice this point, Mr. Holmes: that so far as we know, none of the papers were removed, and that the prisoner is the one man in the world who had no reason for removing them, since he was heir-at-law, and would come into them in any case.”

My friend seemed struck by this remark.

“I don’t mean to deny that the evidence is in some ways very strongly in favour of your theory,” said he. “I only wish to point out that there are other theories possible. As you say, the future will decide. Good-morning! I dare say that in the course of the day I shall drop in at Norwood and see how you are getting on.”

When the detective departed, my friend rose and made his preparations for the day’s work with the alert air of a man who has a congenial task before him.

“My first movement Watson,” said he, as he bustled into his frockcoat, “must, as I said, be in the direction of Blackheath.”

“And why not Norwood?”

“Because we have in this case one singular incident coming close to the heels of another singular incident. The police are making the mistake of concentrating their attention upon the second, because it happens to be the one which is actually criminal. But it is evident to me that the logical way to approach the case is to begin by trying to throw some light upon the first incident — the curious will, so suddenly made, and to so unexpected an heir. It may do something to simplify what followed. No, my dear fellow, I don’t think you can help me. There is no prospect of danger, or I should not dream of stirring out without you. I trust that when I see you in the evening, I will be able to report that I have been able to do something for this unfortunate youngster, who has thrown himself upon my protection.”

It was late when my friend returned, and I could see, by a glance at his haggard and anxious face, that the high hopes with which he had started had not been fulfilled. For an hour he droned away upon his violin, endeavouring to soothe his own ruffled spirits. At last he flung down the instrument, and plunged into a detailed account of his misadventures.

“It’s all going wrong, Watson — all as wrong as it can go. I kept a bold face before Lestrade, but, upon my soul, I believe that for once the fellow is on the right track and we are on the wrong. All my instincts are one way, and all the facts are the other, and I much fear that British juries have not yet attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over Lestrade’s facts.”

“Did you go to Blackheath?”

“Yes, Watson, I went there, and I found very quickly that the late lamented Oldacre was a pretty considerable blackguard. The father was away in search of his son. The mother was at home — a little, fluffy, blue-eyed person, in a tremor of fear and indignation. Of course, she would not admit even the possibility of his guilt. But she would not express either surprise or regret over the fate of Oldacre. On the contrary, she spoke of him with such bitterness that she was unconsciously considerably strengthening the case of the police for, of course, if her son had heard her speak of the man in this fashion, it would predispose him towards hatred and violence. ‘He was more like a malignant and cunning ape than a human being,’ said she, ‘and he always was, ever since he was a young man.’

“‘You knew him at that time?’ said I.

“‘Yes, I knew him well, in fact, he was an old suitor of mine. Thank heaven that I had the sense to turn away from him and to marry a better, if poorer, man. I was engaged to him, Mr. Holmes, when I heard a shocking story of how he had turned a cat loose in an aviary, and I was so horrified at his brutal cruelty that I would have nothing more to do with him.’ She rummaged in a bureau, and presently she produced a photograph of a woman, shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife. ‘That is my own photograph,’ she said. ‘He sent it to me in that state, with his curse, upon my wedding morning.’

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘at least he has forgiven you now, since he has left all his property to your son.’

“‘Neither my son nor I want anything from Jonas Oldacre, dead or alive!’ she cried, with a proper spirit. ‘There is a God in heaven, Mr. Holmes, and that same God who has punished that wicked man will show, in His own good time, that my son’s hands are guiltless of his blood.’

“Well, I tried one or two leads, but could get at nothing which would help our hypothesis, and several points which would make against it. I gave it up at last and off I went to Norwood.

“This place, Deep Dene House, is a big modern villa of staring brick, standing back in its own grounds, with a laurel-clumped lawn in front of it. To the right and some distance back from the road was the timber-yard which had been the scene of the fire. Here’s a rough plan on a leaf of my notebook. This window on the left is the one which opens into Oldacre’s room. You can look into it from the road, you see. That is about the only bit of consolation I have had to-day. Lestrade was not there, but his head constable did the honours. They had just found a great treasure-trove. They had spent the morning raking among the ashes of the burned wood-pile, and besides the charred organic remains they had secured several discoloured metal discs. I examined them with care, and there was no doubt that they were trouser buttons. I even distinguished that one of them was marked with the name of ‘Hyams,’ who was Oldacres tailor. I then worked the lawn very carefully for signs and traces, but this drought has made everything as hard as iron. Nothing was to be seen save that some body or bundle had been dragged through a low privet hedge which is in a line with the wood-pile. All that, of course, fits in with the official theory. I crawled about the lawn with an August sun on my back, but I got up at the end of an hour no wiser than before.

“Well, after this fiasco I went into the bedroom and examined that also. The blood-stains were very slight, mere smears and discolourations, but undoubtedly fresh. The stick had been removed, but there also the marks were slight. There is no doubt about the stick belonging to our client. He admits it. Footmarks of both men could be made out on the carpet, but none of any third person, which again is a trick for the other side. They were piling up their score all the time and we were at a standstill.

“Only one little gleam of hope did I get — and yet it amounted to nothing. I examined the contents of the safe, most of which had been taken out and left on the table. The papers had been made up into sealed envelopes, one or two of which had been opened by the police. They were not, so far as I could judge, of any great value, nor did the bank-book show that Mr. Oldacre was in such very affluent circumstances. But it seemed to me that all the papers were not there. There were allusions to some deeds — possibly the more valuable — which I could not find. This, of course, if we could definitely prove it, would turn Lestrade’s argument against himself, for who would steal a thing if he knew that he would shortly inherit it?

“Finally, having drawn every other cover and picked up no scent, I tried my luck with the housekeeper. Mrs. Lexington is her name — a little, dark, silent person, with suspicious and sidelong eyes. She could tell us something if she would — I am convinced of it. But she was as close as wax. Yes, she had let Mr. McFarlane in at half-past nine. She wished her hand had withered before she had done so. She had gone to bed at half-past ten. Her room was at the other end of the house, and she could hear nothing of what had passed. Mr. McFarlane had left his hat, and to the best of her had been awakened by the alarm of fire. Her poor, dear master had certainly been murdered. Had he any enemies? Well, every man had enemies, but Mr. Oldacre kept himself very much to himself, and only met people in the way of business. She had seen the buttons, and was sure that they belonged to the clothes which he had worn last night. The wood-pile was very dry, for it had not rained for a month. It burned like tinder, and by the time she reached the spot, nothing could be seen but flames. She and all the firemen smelled the burned flesh from inside it. She knew nothing of the papers, nor of Mr. Oldacre’s private affairs.

“So, my dear Watson, there’s my report of a failure. And yet — and yet —” he clenched his thin hands in a paroxysm of conviction—”I KNOW it’s all wrong. I feel it in my bones. There is something that has not come out, and that housekeeper knows it. There was a sort of sulky defiance in her eyes, which only goes with guilty knowledge. However, there’s no good talking any more about it, Watson; but unless some lucky chance comes our way I fear that the Norwood Disappearance Case will not figure in that chronicle of our successes which I foresee that a patient public will sooner or later have to endure.”

“Surely,” said I, “the man’s appearance would go far with any jury?”

“That is a dangerous argument my dear Watson. You remember that terrible murderer, Bert Stevens, who wanted us to get him off in ‘87? Was there ever a more mild-mannered, Sunday-school young man?”

“It is true.”

“Unless we succeed in establishing an alternative theory, this man is lost. You can hardly find a flaw in the case which can now be presented against him, and all further investigation has served to strengthen it. By the way, there is one curious little point about those papers which may serve us as the starting-point for an inquiry. On looking over the bank-book I found that the low state of the balance was principally due to large checks which have been made out during the last year to Mr. Cornelius. I confess that I should be interested to know who this Mr. Cornelius may be with whom a retired builder has such very large transactions. Is it possible that he has had a hand in the affair? Cornelius might be a broker, but we have found no scrip to correspond with these large payments. Failing any other indication, my researches must now take the direction of an inquiry at the bank for the gentleman who has cashed these checks. But I fear, my dear fellow, that our case will end ingloriously by Lestrade hanging our client, which will certainly be a triumph for Scotland Yard."

I do not know how far Sherlock Holmes took any sleep that night, but when I came down to breakfast I found him pale and harassed, his bright eyes the brighter for the dark shadows round them. The carpet round his chair was littered with cigarette-ends and with the early editions of the morning papers. An open telegram lay upon the table.

"What do you think of this, Watson?" he asked, tossing it across.

It was from Norwood, and ran as follows:

Important fresh evidence to hand. McFarlane's guilt definitely established. Advise you to abandon case. LESTRADE.

"This sounds serious," said I.

"It is Lestrade's little cock-a-doodle of victory," Holmes answered, with a bitter smile. "And yet it may be premature to abandon the case. After all, important fresh evidence is a two-edged thing, and may possibly cut in a very different direction to that which Lestrade imagines. Take your breakfast, Watson, and we will go out together and see what we can do. I feel as if I shall need your company and your moral support today."

My friend had no breakfast himself, for it was one of his peculiarities that in his more intense moments he would permit himself no food, and I have known him presume upon his iron strength until he has fainted from pure inanition. "At present I cannot spare energy and nerve force for digestion," he would say in answer to my medical remonstrances. I was not surprised, therefore, when this morning he left his untouched meal behind him, and started with me for Norwood. A crowd of morbid sightseers were still gathered round Deep Dene House, which was just such a suburban villa as I had pictured. Within the gates Lestrade met us, his face flushed with victory, his manner grossly triumphant.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, have you proved us to be wrong yet? Have you found your tramp?" he cried.

“I have formed no conclusion whatever,” my companion answered.

“But we formed ours yesterday, and now it proves to be correct, so you must acknowledge that we have been a little in front of you this time, Mr. Holmes.”

“You certainly have the air of something unusual having occurred,” said Holmes.

Lestrade laughed loudly.

“You don’t like being beaten any more than the rest of us do,” said he. “A man can’t expect always to have it his own way, can he, Dr. Watson? Step this way, if you please, gentlemen, and I think I can convince you once for all that it was John McFarlane who did this crime.”

He led us through the passage and out into a dark hall beyond.

“This is where young McFarlane must have come out to get his hat after the crime was done,” said he. “Now look at this.” With dramatic suddenness he struck a match, and by its light exposed a stain of blood upon the whitewashed wall. As he held the match nearer, I saw that it was more than a stain. It was the well-marked print of a thumb.

“Look at that with your magnifying glass, Mr. Holmes.”

“Yes, I am doing so.”

“You are aware that no two thumb-marks are alike?”

“I have heard something of the kind.”

“Well, then, will you please compare that print with this wax impression of young McFarlane’s right thumb, taken by my orders this morning?”

As he held the waxen print close to the blood-stain, it did not take a magnifying glass to see that the two were undoubtedly from the same thumb. It was evident to me that our unfortunate client was lost.

“That is final,” said Lestrade.

“Yes, that is final,” I involuntarily echoed.

“It is final,” said Holmes.

Something in his tone caught my ear, and I turned to look at him. An extraordinary change had come over his face. It was writhing with inward merriment. His two eyes were shining like stars. It seemed to me that he was making desperate efforts to restrain a convulsive attack of laughter.

“Dear me! Dear me!” he said at last. “Well, now, who would have thought it? And how deceptive appearances may be, to be sure! Such a nice young man to look at! It is a lesson to us not to trust our own judgment, is it not, Lestrade?”

“Yes, some of us are a little too much inclined to be cock-sure, Mr. Holmes,” said Lestrade. The man’s insolence was maddening, but we could not resent it.

“What a providential thing that this young man should press his right thumb against the wall in taking his hat from the peg! Such a very natural action, too, if you come to think of it.” Holmes was outwardly calm, but his whole body gave a wriggle of suppressed excitement as he spoke.

“By the way, Lestrade, who made this remarkable discovery?”

“It was the housekeeper, Mrs. Lexington, who drew the night constable’s attention to it.”

“Where was the night constable?”

“He remained on guard in the bedroom where the crime was committed, so as to see that nothing was touched.”

“But why didn’t the police see this mark yesterday?”

“Well, we had no particular reason to make a careful examination of the hall. Besides, it’s not in a very prominent place, as you see.”

“No, no — of course not. I suppose there is no doubt that the mark was there yesterday?”

Lestrade looked at Holmes as if he thought he was going out of his mind. I confess that I was myself surprised both at his hilarious manner and at his rather wild observation.

“I don’t know whether you think that McFarlane came out of jail in the dead of the night in order to strengthen the evidence against himself,” said Lestrade. “I leave it to any expert in the world whether that is not the mark of his thumb.”

“It is unquestionably the mark of his thumb.”

“There, that’s enough,” said Lestrade. “I am a practical man, Mr. Holmes, and when I have got my evidence I come to my conclusions. If you have anything to say, you will find me writing my report in the sitting-room.”

Holmes had recovered his equanimity, though I still seemed to detect gleams of amusement in his expression.

“Dear me, this is a very sad development, Watson, is it not?” said he. “And yet there are singular points about it which hold out some hopes for our client.”

“I am delighted to hear it,” said I, heartily. “I was afraid it was all up with him.”

“I would hardly go so far as to say that, my dear Watson. The fact is that there is one really serious flaw in this evidence to which our friend attaches so much importance.”

“Indeed, Holmes! What is it?”

“Only this: that I KNOW that that mark was not there when I examined the hall yesterday. And now, Watson, let us have a little stroll round in the sunshine.”

With a confused brain, but with a heart into which some warmth of hope was returning, I accompanied my friend in a walk round the garden. Holmes took each face of the house in turn, and examined it with great interest. He then led the way inside, and went over the whole building from basement to attic. Most of the rooms were unfurnished, but none the less Holmes inspected them all minutely. Finally, on the top corridor, which ran outside three untenanted bedrooms, he again was seized with a spasm of merriment.

“There are really some very unique features about this case, Watson,” said he. “I think it is time now that we took our friend Lestrade into our confidence. He has had his little smile at our expense, and perhaps we may do as much by him, if my reading of this problem proves to be correct. Yes, yes, I think I see how we should approach it.”

The Scotland Yard inspector was still writing in the parlour when Holmes interrupted him.

“I understood that you were writing a report of this case,” said he.

“So I am.”

“Don’t you think it may be a little premature? I can’t help thinking that your evidence is not complete.”

Lestrade knew my friend too well to disregard his words. He laid down his pen and looked curiously at him.

“What do you mean, Mr. Holmes?”

“Only that there is an important witness whom you have not seen.”

“Can you produce him?”

“I think I can.”

“Then do so.”

“I will do my best. How many constables have you?”

“There are three within call.”

“Excellent!” said Holmes. “May I ask if they are all large, able-bodied men with powerful voices?”

“I have no doubt they are, though I fail to see what their voices have to do with it.”

“Perhaps I can help you to see that and one or two other things as well,” said Holmes. “Kindly summon your men, and I will try.”

Five minutes later, three policemen had assembled in the hall.

“In the outhouse you will find a considerable quantity of straw,” said Holmes. “I will ask you to carry in two bundles of it. I think it will be of the greatest assistance in producing the witness whom I require. Thank you very much. I believe you have some matches in your pocket Watson. Now, Mr. Lestrade, I will ask you all to accompany me to the top landing.”

As I have said, there was a broad corridor there, which ran outside three empty bedrooms. At one end of the corridor we were all marshalled by Sherlock Holmes, the constables grinning and Lestrade staring at my friend with amazement, expectation, and derision chasing each other across his features. Holmes stood before us with the air of a conjurer who is performing a trick.

“Would you kindly send one of your constables for two buckets of water? Put the straw on the floor here, free from the wall on either side. Now I think that we are all ready.”

Lestrade’s face had begun to grow red and angry. “I don’t know whether you are playing a game with us, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said he. “If you know anything, you can surely say it without all this tomfoolery.”

“I assure you, my good Lestrade, that I have an excellent reason for everything that I do. You may possibly remember that you chaffed me a little, some hours ago, when the sun seemed on your side of the hedge, so you must not grudge me a little pomp and ceremony now. Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a match to the edge of the straw?”

I did so, and driven by the draught a coil of gray smoke swirled down the corridor, while the dry straw crackled and flamed.

“Now we must see if we can find this witness for you, Lestrade. Might I ask you all to join in the cry of ‘Fire!’? Now then; one, two, three — —”

“Fire!” we all yelled.

“Thank you. I will trouble you once again.”

“Fire!”

“Just once more, gentlemen, and all together.”

“Fire!” The shout must have rung over Norwood.

It had hardly died away when an amazing thing happened. A door suddenly flew open out of what appeared to be solid wall at the end of the corridor, and a little, wizened man darted out of it, like a rabbit out of its burrow.

"Capital!" said Holmes, calmly. "Watson, a bucket of water over the straw. That will do! Lestrade, allow me to present you with your principal missing witness, Mr. Jonas Oldacre."

The detective stared at the newcomer with blank amazement. The latter was blinking in the bright light of the corridor, and peering at us and at the smouldering fire. It was an odious face — crafty, vicious, malignant, with shifty, light-gray eyes and white lashes.

"What's this, then?" said Lestrade, at last. "What have you been doing all this time, eh?"

Oldacre gave an uneasy laugh, shrinking back from the furious red face of the angry detective.

"I have done no harm."

"No harm? You have done your best to get an innocent man hanged. If it wasn't for this gentleman here, I am not sure that you would not have succeeded."

The wretched creature began to whimper.

"I am sure, sir, it was only my practical joke."

"Oh! a joke, was it? You won't find the laugh on your side, I promise you. Take him down, and keep him in the sitting-room until I come. Mr. Holmes," he continued, when they had gone, "I could not speak before the constables, but I don't mind saying, in the presence of Dr. Watson, that this is the brightest thing that you have done yet, though it is a mystery to me how you did it. You have saved an innocent man's life, and you have prevented a very grave scandal, which would have ruined my reputation in the Force."

Holmes smiled, and clapped Lestrade upon the shoulder.

"Instead of being ruined, my good sir, you will find that your reputation has been enormously enhanced. Just make a few alterations in that report which you were writing, and they will understand how hard it is to throw dust in the eyes of Inspector Lestrade."

"And you don't want your name to appear?"

"Not at all. The work is its own reward. Perhaps I shall get the credit also at some distant day, when I permit my zealous historian to lay out his foolscap once more — eh, Watson? Well, now, let us see where this rat has been lurking."

A lath-and-plaster partition had been run across the passage six feet from the end, with a door cunningly concealed in it. It was lit within by slits under the eaves. A few articles of furniture and a supply of food and water were within, together with a number of books and papers.

"There's the advantage of being a builder," said Holmes, as we came out. "He was able to fix up his own little hiding-place without any confederate — save, of course, that precious housekeeper of his, whom I should lose no time in adding to your bag, Lestrade."

"I'll take your advice. But how did you know of this place, Mr. Holmes?"

"I made up my mind that the fellow was in hiding in the house. When I paced one corridor and found it six feet shorter than the corresponding one below, it was pretty clear where he was. I thought he had not the nerve to lie quiet before an alarm of fire. We could, of course, have gone in and taken him, but it amused me to make him reveal himself. Besides, I owed you a little mystification, Lestrade, for your chaff in the morning."

"Well, sir, you certainly got equal with me on that. But how in the world did you know that he was in the house at all?"

"The thumb-mark, Lestrade. You said it was final; and so it was, in a very different sense. I knew it had not been there the day before. I pay a good deal of attention to matters of detail, as you may have observed, and I had examined the hall, and was sure that the wall was clear. Therefore, it had been put on during the night."

"But how?"

"Very simply. When those packets were sealed up, Jonas Oldacre got McFarlane to secure one of the seals by putting his thumb upon the soft wax. It would be done so quickly and so naturally, that I daresay the young man himself has no recollection of it. Very likely it just so happened, and Oldacre had himself no notion of the use he would put it to. Brooding over the case in that den of his, it suddenly struck him what absolutely damning evidence he could make against McFarlane by using that thumb-mark. It was the simplest thing in the world for him to take a wax impression from the seal, to moisten it in as much blood as he could get from a pin-prick, and to put the mark upon the wall during the night, either with his own hand or with that of his housekeeper. If you examine among those documents which he took with him into his retreat, I will lay you a wager that you find the seal with the thumb-mark upon it.”

“Wonderful!” said Lestrade. “Wonderful! It’s all as clear as crystal, as you put it. But what is the object of this deep deception, Mr. Holmes?”

It was amusing to me to see how the detective’s overbearing manner had changed suddenly to that of a child asking questions of its teacher.

“Well, I don’t think that is very hard to explain. A very deep, malicious, vindictive person is the gentleman who is now waiting us downstairs. You know that he was once refused by McFarlane’s mother? You don’t! I told you that you should go to Blackheath first and Norwood afterwards. Well, this injury, as he would consider it, has rankled in his wicked, scheming brain, and all his life he has longed for vengeance, but never seen his chance. During the last year or two, things have gone against him — secret speculation, I think — and he finds himself in a bad way. He determines to swindle his creditors, and for this purpose he pays large checks to a certain Mr. Cornelius, who is, I imagine, himself under another name. I have not traced these checks yet, but I have no doubt that they were banked under that name at some provincial town where Oldacre from time to time led a double existence. He intended to change his name altogether, draw this money, and vanish, starting life again elsewhere.”

“Well, that’s likely enough.”

“It would strike him that in disappearing he might throw all pursuit off his track, and at the same time have an ample and crushing revenge upon his old sweetheart, if he could give the impression that he had been murdered by her only child. It was a masterpiece of villainy, and he carried it out like a master. The idea of the will, which would give an obvious motive for the crime, the secret visit unknown to his own parents, the retention of the stick, the blood, and the animal remains and buttons in the wood-pile, all were admirable. It was a net from which it seemed to me, a few hours ago, that there was no possible escape. But he had not that supreme gift of the artist, the knowledge of when to stop. He wished to improve that which was already perfect — to draw the rope tighter yet round the neck of his unfortunate victim — and so he ruined all. Let us descend, Lestrade. There are just one or two questions that I would ask him.”

The malignant creature was seated in his own parlour, with a policeman upon each side of him.

“It was a joke, my good sir — a practical joke, nothing more,” he whined incessantly. “I assure you, sir, that I simply concealed myself in order to see the effect of my disappearance, and I am sure that you would not be so unjust as to imagine that I would have allowed any harm to befall poor young Mr. McFarlane.”

“That’s for a jury to decide,” said Lestrade. “Anyhow, we shall have you on a charge of conspiracy, if not for attempted murder.”

“And you’ll probably find that your creditors will impound the banking account of Mr. Cornelius,” said Holmes.

The little man started, and turned his malignant eyes upon my friend.

“I have to thank you for a good deal,” said he. “Perhaps I’ll pay my debt some day.”

Holmes smiled indulgently.

“I fancy that, for some few years, you will find your time very fully occupied,” said he. “By the way, what was it you put into the wood-pile besides your old trousers? A dead dog, or rabbits, or what? You won’t tell? Dear me, how very unkind of you! Well, well, I daresay that a couple of rabbits would account both for the blood and for the charred ashes. If ever you write an account, Watson, you can make rabbits serve your turn.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE DANCING MEN

Holmes had been seated for some hours in silence with his long, thin back curved over a chemical vessel in which he was brewing a particularly malodorous product. His head was sunk upon his breast, and he looked from my point of view like a strange, lank bird, with dull gray plumage and a black top-knot.

"So, Watson," said he, suddenly, "you do not propose to invest in South African securities?"

I gave a start of astonishment. Accustomed as I was to Holmes's curious faculties, this sudden intrusion into my most intimate thoughts was utterly inexplicable.

"How on earth do you know that?" I asked.

He wheeled round upon his stool, with a steaming test-tube in his hand, and a gleam of amusement in his deep-set eyes.

"Now, Watson, confess yourself utterly taken aback," said he.

"I am."

"I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect."

"Why?"

"Because in five minutes you will say that it is all so absurdly simple."

"I am sure that I shall say nothing of the kind."

"You see, my dear Watson," — he propped his test-tube in the rack, and began to lecture with the air of a professor addressing his class—"it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious, effect. Now, it was not really difficult, by an inspection of the groove between your left forefinger and thumb, to feel sure that you did NOT propose to invest your small capital in the gold fields."

"I see no connection."

"Very likely not; but I can quickly show you a close connection. Here are the missing links of the very simple chain: 1. You had chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night. 2. You put chalk there when you play billiards, to steady the cue. 3. You never play billiards except with Thurston. 4. You told me, four weeks ago, that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month, and which he desired you to share with him. 5. Your check book is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key. 6. You do not propose to invest your money in this manner."

"How absurdly simple!" I cried.

"Quite so!" said he, a little nettled. "Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you. Here is an unexplained one. See what you can make of that, friend Watson." He tossed a sheet of paper upon the table, and turned once more to his chemical analysis.

I looked with amazement at the absurd hieroglyphics upon the paper.

"Why, Holmes, it is a child's drawing," I cried.

"Oh, that's your idea!"

"What else should it be?"

"That is what Mr. Hilton Cubitt, of Riding Thorpe Manor, Norfolk, is very anxious to know. This little conundrum came by the first post, and he was to follow by the next train. There's a ring at the bell, Watson. I should not be very much surprised if this were he."

A heavy step was heard upon the stairs, and an instant later there entered a tall, ruddy, clean-shaven gentleman, whose clear eyes and florid cheeks told of a life led far from the fogs of Baker Street. He seemed to bring a whiff of his strong, fresh, bracing, east-coast air with him as he entered. Having shaken hands with each of us, he was about to sit down, when his eye rested upon the paper with the curious markings, which I had just examined and left upon the table.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, what do you make of these?" he cried. "They told me that you were fond of queer mysteries, and I don't think you can find a queerer one than that. I sent the paper on ahead, so that you might have time to study it before I came."

"It is certainly rather a curious production," said Holmes. "At first sight it would appear to be some childish prank. It consists of a number of absurd little figures dancing across the paper upon which they are drawn. Why should you attribute any importance to so grotesque an object?"

"I never should, Mr. Holmes. But my wife does. It is frightening her to death. She says nothing, but I can see terror in her eyes. That's why I want to sift the matter to the bottom."

Holmes held up the paper so that the sunlight shone full upon it. It was a page torn from a notebook. The markings were done in pencil, and ran in this way:

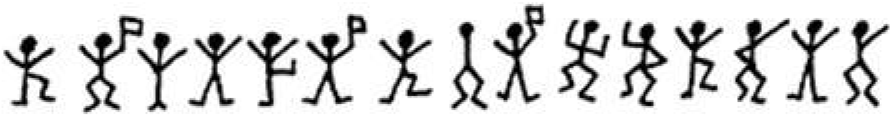

Holmes examined it for some time, and then, folding it carefully up, he placed it in his pocketbook.

“This promises to be a most interesting and unusual case,” said he. “You gave me a few particulars in your letter, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, but I should be very much obliged if you would kindly go over it all again for the benefit of my friend, Dr. Watson.”

“I’m not much of a story-teller,” said our visitor, nervously clasping and unclasping his great, strong hands. “You’ll just ask me anything that I don’t make clear. I’ll begin at the time of my marriage last year, but I want to say first of all that, though I’m not a rich man, my people have been at Riding Thorpe for a matter of five centuries, and there is no better known family in the County of Norfolk. Last year I came up to London for the Jubilee, and I stopped at a boarding-house in Russell Square, because Parker, the vicar of our parish, was staying in it. There was an American young lady there — Patrick was the name — Elsie Patrick. In some way we became friends, until before my month was up I was as much in love as man could be. We were quietly married at a registry office, and we returned to Norfolk a wedded couple. You’ll think it very mad, Mr. Holmes, that a man of a good old family should marry a wife in this fashion, knowing nothing of her past or of her people, but if you saw her and knew her, it would help you to understand.

“She was very straight about it, was Elsie. I can’t say that she did not give me every chance of getting out of it if I wished to do so. ‘I have had some very disagreeable associations in my life,’ said she, ‘I wish to forget all about them. I would rather never allude to the past, for it is very painful to me. If you take me, Hilton, you will take a woman who has nothing that she need be personally ashamed of, but you will have to be content with my word for it, and to allow me to be silent as to all that passed up to the time when I became yours. If these conditions are too hard, then go back to Norfolk, and leave me to the lonely life in which you found me.’ It was only the day before our wedding that she said those very words to me. I told her that I was content to take her on her own terms, and I have been as good as my word.

"Well we have been married now for a year, and very happy we have been. But about a month ago, at the end of June, I saw for the first time signs of trouble. One day my wife received a letter from America. I saw the American stamp. She turned deadly white, read the letter, and threw it into the fire. She made no allusion to it afterwards, and I made none, for a promise is a promise, but she has never known an easy hour from that moment. There is always a look of fear upon her face — a look as if she were waiting and expecting. She would do better to trust me. She would find that I was her best friend. But until she speaks, I can say nothing. Mind you, she is a truthful woman, Mr. Holmes, and whatever trouble there may have been in her past life it has been no fault of hers. I am only a simple Norfolk squire, but there is not a man in England who ranks his family honour more highly than I do. She knows it well, and she knew it well before she married me. She would never bring any stain upon it — of that I am sure.

"Well, now I come to the queer part of my story. About a week ago — it was the Tuesday of last week — I found on one of the window-sills a number of absurd little dancing figures like these upon the paper. They were scrawled with chalk. I thought that it was the stable-boy who had drawn them, but the lad swore he knew nothing about it. Anyhow, they had come there during the night. I had them washed out, and I only mentioned the matter to my wife afterwards. To my surprise, she took it very seriously, and begged me if any more came to let her see them. None did come for a week, and then yesterday morning I found this paper lying on the sundial in the garden. I showed it to Elsie, and down she dropped in a dead faint. Since then she has looked like a woman in a dream, half dazed, and with terror always lurking in her eyes. It was then that I wrote and sent the paper to you, Mr. Holmes. It was not a thing that I could take to the police, for they would have laughed at me, but you will tell me what to do. I am not a rich man, but if there is any danger threatening my little woman, I would spend my last copper to shield her."

He was a fine creature, this man of the old English soil — simple, straight, and gentle, with his great, earnest blue eyes and broad, comely face. His love for his wife and his trust in her shone in his features. Holmes had listened to his story with the utmost attention, and now he sat for some time in silent thought.

“Don’t you think, Mr. Cubitt,” said he, at last, “that your best plan would be to make a direct appeal to your wife, and to ask her to share her secret with you?”

Hilton Cubitt shook his massive head.

“A promise is a promise, Mr. Holmes. If Elsie wished to tell me she would. If not, it is not for me to force her confidence. But I am justified in taking my own line — and I will.”

“Then I will help you with all my heart. In the first place, have you heard of any strangers being seen in your neighbourhood?”

“No.”

“I presume that it is a very quiet place. Any fresh face would cause comment?”

“In the immediate neighbourhood, yes. But we have several small watering-places not very far away. And the farmers take in lodgers.”

“These hieroglyphics have evidently a meaning. If it is a purely arbitrary one, it may be impossible for us to solve it. If, on the other hand, it is systematic, I have no doubt that we shall get to the bottom of it. But this particular sample is so short that I can do nothing, and the facts which you have brought me are so indefinite that we have no basis for an investigation. I would suggest that you return to Norfolk, that you keep a keen lookout, and that you take an exact copy of any fresh dancing men which may appear. It is a thousand pities that we have not a reproduction of those which were done in chalk upon the window-sill. Make a discreet inquiry also as to any strangers in the neighbourhood. When you have collected some fresh evidence, come to me again. That is the best advice which I can give you, Mr. Hilton Cubitt. If there are any pressing fresh developments, I shall be always ready to run down and see you in your Norfolk home.”

The interview left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful, and several times in the next few days I saw him take his slip of paper from his notebook and look long and earnestly at the curious figures inscribed upon it. He made no allusion to the affair, however, until one afternoon a fortnight or so later. I was going out when he called me back.

“You had better stay here, Watson.”

“Why?”

"Because I had a wire from Hilton Cubitt this morning. You remember Hilton Cubitt, of the dancing men? He was to reach Liverpool Street at one-twenty. He may be here at any moment. I gather from his wire that there have been some new incidents of importance."

We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom could bring him. He was looking worried and depressed, with tired eyes and a lined forehead.

"It's getting on my nerves, this business, Mr. Holmes," said he, as he sank, like a wearied man, into an armchair. "It's bad enough to feel that you are surrounded by unseen, unknown folk, who have some kind of design upon you, but when, in addition to that, you know that it is just killing your wife by inches, then it becomes as much as flesh and blood can endure. She's wearing away under it — just wearing away before my eyes."

"Has she said anything yet?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, she has not. And yet there have been times when the poor girl has wanted to speak, and yet could not quite bring herself to take the plunge. I have tried to help her, but I daresay I did it clumsily, and scared her from it. She has spoken about my old family, and our reputation in the county, and our pride in our unsullied honour, and I always felt it was leading to the point, but somehow it turned off before we got there."

"But you have found out something for yourself?"

"A good deal, Mr. Holmes. I have several fresh dancing-men pictures for you to examine, and, what is more important, I have seen the fellow."

"What, the man who draws them?"

"Yes, I saw him at his work. But I will tell you everything in order. When I got back after my visit to you, the very first thing I saw next morning was a fresh crop of dancing men. They had been drawn in chalk upon the black wooden door of the tool-house, which stands beside the lawn in full view of the front windows. I took an exact copy, and here it is." He unfolded a paper and laid it upon the table. Here is a copy of the hieroglyphics:

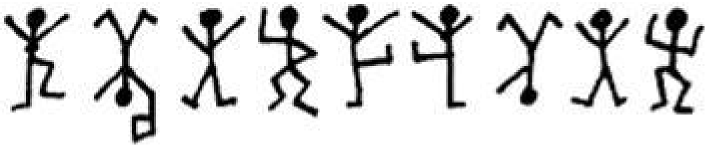

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "Excellent! Pray continue."

"When I had taken the copy, I rubbed out the marks, but, two mornings later, a fresh inscription had appeared. I have a copy of it here:"

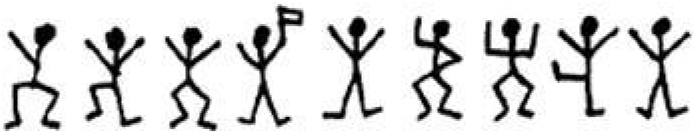

Holmes rubbed his hands and chuckled with delight.

“Our material is rapidly accumulating,” said he.

“Three days later a message was left scrawled upon paper, and placed under a pebble upon the sundial. Here it is. The characters are, as you see, exactly the same as the last one. After that I determined to lie in wait, so I got out my revolver and I sat up in my study, which overlooks the lawn and garden. About two in the morning I was seated by the window, all being dark save for the moonlight outside, when I heard steps behind me, and there was my wife in her dressing-gown. She implored me to come to bed. I told her frankly that I wished to see who it was who played such absurd tricks upon us. She answered that it was some senseless practical joke, and that I should not take any notice of it.

“‘If it really annoys you, Hilton, we might go and travel, you and I, and so avoid this nuisance.’

“‘What, be driven out of our own house by a practical joker?’ said I. ‘Why, we should have the whole county laughing at us.’

“‘Well, come to bed,’ said she, ‘and we can discuss it in the morning.’

“Suddenly, as she spoke, I saw her white face grow whiter yet in the moonlight, and her hand tightened upon my shoulder. Something was moving in the shadow of the tool-house. I saw a dark, creeping figure which crawled round the corner and squatted in front of the door. Seizing my pistol, I was rushing out, when my wife threw her arms round me and held me with convulsive strength. I tried to throw her off, but she clung to me most desperately. At last I got clear, but by the time I had opened the door and reached the house the creature was gone. He had left a trace of his presence, however, for there on the door was the very same arrangement of dancing men which had already twice appeared, and which I have copied on that paper. There was no other sign of the fellow anywhere, though I ran all over the grounds. And yet the amazing thing is that he must have been there all the time, for when I examined the door again in the morning, he had scrawled some more of his pictures under the line which I had already seen.”

“Have you that fresh drawing?”

“Yes, it is very short, but I made a copy of it, and here it is.”

Again he produced a paper. The new dance was in this form:

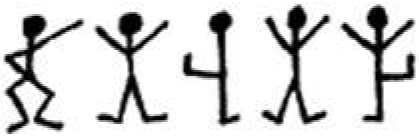

“Tell me,” said Holmes — and I could see by his eyes that he was much excited—”was this a mere addition to the first or did it appear to be entirely separate?”

“It was on a different panel of the door.”

“Excellent! This is far the most important of all for our purpose. It fills me with hopes. Now, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, please continue your most interesting statement.”

“I have nothing more to say, Mr. Holmes, except that I was angry with my wife that night for having held me back when I might have caught the skulking rascal. She said that she feared that I might come to harm. For an instant it had crossed my mind that perhaps what she really feared was that HE might come to harm, for I could not doubt that she knew who this man was, and what he meant by these strange signals. But there is a tone in my wife’s voice, Mr. Holmes, and a look in her eyes which forbid doubt, and I am sure that it was indeed my own safety that was in her mind. There’s the whole case, and now I want your advice as to what I ought to do. My own inclination is to put half a dozen of my farm lads in the shrubbery, and when this fellow comes again to give him such a hiding that he will leave us in peace for the future.”

“I fear it is too deep a case for such simple remedies,” said Holmes. “How long can you stay in London?”

“I must go back to-day. I would not leave my wife alone all night for anything. She is very nervous, and begged me to come back.”

“I daresay you are right. But if you could have stopped, I might possibly have been able to return with you in a day or two. Meanwhile you will leave me these papers, and I think that it is very likely that I shall be able to pay you a visit shortly and to throw some light upon your case.”

Sherlock Holmes preserved his calm professional manner until our visitor had left us, although it was easy for me, who knew him so well, to see that he was profoundly excited. The moment that Hilton Cubitt’s broad back had disappeared through the door my comrade rushed to the table, laid out all the slips of paper containing dancing men in front of him, and threw himself into an intricate and elaborate calculation. For two hours I watched him as he covered sheet after sheet of paper with figures and letters, so completely absorbed in his task that he had evidently forgotten my presence. Sometimes he was making progress and whistled and sang at his work; sometimes he was puzzled, and would sit for long spells with a furrowed brow and a vacant eye. Finally he sprang from his chair with a cry of satisfaction, and walked up and down the room rubbing his hands together. Then he wrote a long telegram upon a cable form. “If my answer to this is as I hope, you will have a very pretty case to add to your collection, Watson,” said he. “I expect that we shall be able to go down to Norfolk tomorrow, and to take our friend some very definite news as to the secret of his annoyance.”

I confess that I was filled with curiosity, but I was aware that Holmes liked to make his disclosures at his own time and in his own way, so I waited until it should suit him to take me into his confidence.

But there was a delay in that answering telegram, and two days of impatience followed, during which Holmes pricked up his ears at every ring of the bell. On the evening of the second there came a letter from Hilton Cubitt. All was quiet with him, save that a long inscription had appeared that morning upon the pedestal of the sundial. He inclosed a copy of it, which is here reproduced:

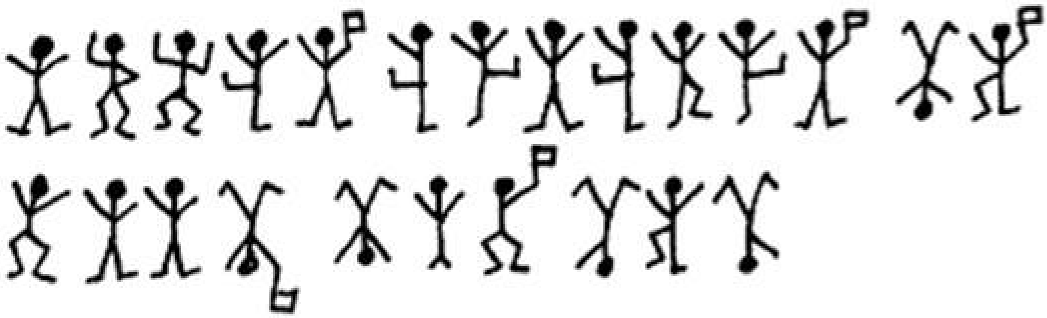

Holmes bent over this grotesque frieze for some minutes, and then suddenly sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and dismay. His face was haggard with anxiety.

“We have let this affair go far enough,” said he. “Is there a train to North Walsham to-night?”

I turned up the time-table. The last had just gone.

“Then we shall breakfast early and take the very first in the morning,” said Holmes. “Our presence is most urgently needed. Ah! here is our expected cablegram. One moment, Mrs. Hudson, there may be an answer. No, that is quite as I expected. This message makes it even more essential that we should not lose an hour in letting Hilton Cubitt know how matters stand, for it is a singular and a dangerous web in which our simple Norfolk squire is entangled.”

So, indeed, it proved, and as I come to the dark conclusion of a story which had seemed to me to be only childish and bizarre, I experience once again the dismay and horror with which I was filled. Would that I had some brighter ending to communicate to my readers, but these are the chronicles of fact, and I must follow to their dark crisis the strange chain of events which for some days made Riding Thorpe Manor a household word through the length and breadth of England.

We had hardly alighted at North Walsham, and mentioned the name of our destination, when the station-master hurried towards us. “I suppose that you are the detectives from London?” said he.

A look of annoyance passed over Holmes’s face.

“What makes you think such a thing?”

“Because Inspector Martin from Norwich has just passed through. But maybe you are the surgeons. She’s not dead — or wasn’t by last accounts. You may be in time to save her yet — though it be for the gallows.”

Holmes’s brow was dark with anxiety.

“We are going to Riding Thorpe Manor,” said he, “but we have heard nothing of what has passed there.”

“It’s a terrible business,” said the stationmaster. “They are shot, both Mr. Hilton Cubitt and his wife. She shot him and then herself — so the servants say. He’s dead and her life is despaired of. Dear, dear, one of the oldest families in the county of Norfolk, and one of the most honoured.”

Without a word Holmes hurried to a carriage, and during the long seven miles’ drive he never opened his mouth. Seldom have I seen him so utterly despondent. He had been uneasy during all our journey from town, and I had observed that he had turned over the morning papers with anxious attention, but now this sudden realisation of his worst fears left him in a blank melancholy. He leaned back in his seat, lost in gloomy speculation. Yet there was much around to interest us, for we were passing through as singular a countryside as any in England, where a few scattered cottages represented the population of to-day, while on every hand enormous square-towered churches bristled up from the flat green landscape and told of the glory and prosperity of old East Anglia. At last the violet rim of the German Ocean appeared over the green edge of the Norfolk coast, and the driver pointed with his whip to two old brick and timber gables which projected from a grove of trees. "That's Riding Thorpe Manor," said he.

As we drove up to the porticoed front door, I observed in front of it, beside the tennis lawn, the black tool-house and the pedestalled sundial with which we had such strange associations. A dapper little man, with a quick, alert manner and a waxed moustache, had just descended from a high dog-cart. He introduced himself as Inspector Martin, of the Norfolk Constabulary, and he was considerably astonished when he heard the name of my companion.

"Why, Mr. Holmes, the crime was only committed at three this morning. How could you hear of it in London and get to the spot as soon as I?"

"I anticipated it. I came in the hope of preventing it."

"Then you must have important evidence, of which we are ignorant, for they were said to be a most united couple."

"I have only the evidence of the dancing men," said Holmes. "I will explain the matter to you later. Meanwhile, since it is too late to prevent this tragedy, I am very anxious that I should use the knowledge which I possess in order to insure that justice be done. Will you associate me in your investigation, or will you prefer that I should act independently?"

"I should be proud to feel that we were acting together, Mr. Holmes," said the inspector, earnestly.

"In that case I should be glad to hear the evidence and to examine the premises without an instant of unnecessary delay."

Inspector Martin had the good sense to allow my friend to do things in his own fashion, and contented himself with carefully noting the results. The local surgeon, an old, white-haired man, had just come down from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt's room, and he reported that her injuries were serious, but not necessarily fatal. The bullet had passed through the front of her brain, and it would probably be some time before she could regain consciousness. On the question of whether she had been shot or had shot herself, he would not venture to express any decided opinion. Certainly the bullet had been discharged at very close quarters. There was only the one pistol found in the room, two barrels of which had been emptied. Mr. Hilton Cubitt had been shot through the heart. It was equally conceivable that he had shot her and then himself, or that she had been the criminal, for the revolver lay upon the floor midway between them.

“Has he been moved?” asked Holmes.

“We have moved nothing except the lady. We could not leave her lying wounded upon the floor.”

“How long have you been here, Doctor?”

“Since four o’clock.”

“Anyone else?”

“Yes, the constable here.”

“And you have touched nothing?”

“Nothing.”

“You have acted with great discretion. Who sent for you?”

“The housemaid, Saunders.”

“Was it she who gave the alarm?”

“She and Mrs. King, the cook.”

“Where are they now?”

“In the kitchen, I believe.”

“Then I think we had better hear their story at once.”

The old hall, oak-panelled and high-windowed, had been turned into a court of investigation. Holmes sat in a great, old-fashioned chair, his inexorable eyes gleaming out of his haggard face. I could read in them a set purpose to devote his life to this quest until the client whom he had failed to save should at last be avenged. The trim Inspector Martin, the old, gray-headed country doctor, myself, and a stolid village policeman made up the rest of that strange company.

The two women told their story clearly enough. They had been aroused from their sleep by the sound of an explosion, which had been followed a minute later by a second one. They slept in adjoining rooms, and Mrs. King had rushed in to Saunders. Together they had descended the stairs. The door of the study was open, and a candle was burning upon the table. Their master lay upon his face in the centre of the room. He was quite dead. Near the window his wife was crouching, her head leaning against the wall. She was horribly wounded, and the side of her face was red with blood. She breathed heavily, but was incapable of saying anything. The passage, as well as the room, was full of smoke and the smell of powder. The window was certainly shut and fastened upon the inside. Both women were positive upon the point. They had at once sent for the doctor and for the constable. Then, with the aid of the groom and the stable-boy, they had conveyed their injured mistress to her room. Both she and her husband had occupied the bed. She was clad in her dress — he in his dressing-gown, over his night-clothes. Nothing had been moved in the study. So far as they knew, there had never been any quarrel between husband and wife. They had always looked upon them as a very united couple.

These were the main points of the servants' evidence. In answer to Inspector Martin, they were clear that every door was fastened upon the inside, and that no one could have escaped from the house. In answer to Holmes, they both remembered that they were conscious of the smell of powder from the moment that they ran out of their rooms upon the top floor. "I commend that fact very carefully to your attention," said Holmes to his professional colleague. "And now I think that we are in a position to undertake a thorough examination of the room."

The study proved to be a small chamber, lined on three sides with books, and with a writing-table facing an ordinary window, which looked out upon the garden. Our first attention was given to the body of the unfortunate squire, whose huge frame lay stretched across the room. His disordered dress showed that he had been hastily aroused from sleep. The bullet had been fired at him from the front, and had remained in his body, after penetrating the heart. His death had certainly been instantaneous and painless. There was no powder-marking either upon his dressing-gown or on his hands. According to the country surgeon, the lady had stains upon her face, but none upon her hand.

"The absence of the latter means nothing, though its presence may mean everything," said Holmes. "Unless the powder from a badly fitting cartridge happens to spurt backward, one may fire many shots without leaving a sign. I would suggest that Mr. Cubitt's body may now be removed. I suppose, Doctor, you have not recovered the bullet which wounded the lady?"

"A serious operation will be necessary before that can be done. But there are still four cartridges in the revolver. Two have been fired and two wounds inflicted, so that each bullet can be accounted for."

"So it would seem," said Holmes. "Perhaps you can account also for the bullet which has so obviously struck the edge of the window?"

He had turned suddenly, and his long, thin finger was pointing to a hole which had been drilled right through the lower window-sash, about an inch above the bottom.

"By George!" cried the inspector. "How ever did you see that?"

"Because I looked for it."

"Wonderful!" said the country doctor. "You are certainly right, sir. Then a third shot has been fired, and therefore a third person must have been present. But who could that have been, and how could he have got away?"

"That is the problem which we are now about to solve," said Sherlock Holmes. "You remember, Inspector Martin, when the servants said that on leaving their room they were at once conscious of a smell of powder, I remarked that the point was an extremely important one?"

"Yes, sir; but I confess I did not quite follow you."

"It suggested that at the time of the firing, the window as well as the door of the room had been open. Otherwise the fumes of powder could not have been blown so rapidly through the house. A draught in the room was necessary for that. Both door and window were only open for a very short time, however."

"How do you prove that?"

"Because the candle was not guttered."

"Capital!" cried the inspector. "Capital!

"Feeling sure that the window had been open at the time of the tragedy, I conceived that there might have been a third person in the affair, who stood outside this opening and fired through it. Any shot directed at this person might hit the sash. I looked, and there, sure enough, was the bullet mark!"

"But how came the window to be shut and fastened?"

"The woman's first instinct would be to shut and fasten the window. But, halloa! What is this?"

It was a lady's hand-bag which stood upon the study table — a trim little handbag of crocodile-skin and silver. Holmes opened it and turned the contents out. There were twenty fifty-pound notes of the Bank of England, held together by an india-rubber band — nothing else.

"This must be preserved, for it will figure in the trial," said Holmes, as he handed the bag with its contents to the inspector. "It is now necessary that we should try to throw some light upon this third bullet, which has clearly, from the splintering of the wood, been fired from inside the room. I should like to see Mrs. King, the cook, again. You said, Mrs. King, that you were awakened by a LOUD explosion. When you said that, did you mean that it seemed to you to be louder than the second one?"

“Well, sir, it wakened me from my sleep, so it is hard to judge. But it did seem very loud.”

“You don’t think that it might have been two shots fired almost at the same instant?”

“I am sure I couldn’t say, sir.”

“I believe that it was undoubtedly so. I rather think, Inspector Martin, that we have now exhausted all that this room can teach us. If you will kindly step round with me, we shall see what fresh evidence the garden has to offer.”

A flower-bed extended up to the study window, and we all broke into an exclamation as we approached it. The flowers were trampled down, and the soft soil was imprinted all over with footmarks. Large, masculine feet they were, with peculiarly long, sharp toes. Holmes hunted about among the grass and leaves like a retriever after a wounded bird. Then, with a cry of satisfaction, he bent forward and picked up a little brazen cylinder.

“I thought so,” said he, “the revolver had an ejector, and here is the third cartridge. I really think, Inspector Martin, that our case is almost complete.”

The country inspector’s face had shown his intense amazement at the rapid and masterful progress of Holmes’s investigation. At first he had shown some disposition to assert his own position, but now he was overcome with admiration, and ready to follow without question wherever Holmes led.

“Whom do you suspect?” he asked.

“I’ll go into that later. There are several points in this problem which I have not been able to explain to you yet. Now that I have got so far, I had best proceed on my own lines, and then clear the whole matter up once and for all.”

“Just as you wish, Mr. Holmes, so long as we get our man.”

“I have no desire to make mysteries, but it is impossible at the moment of action to enter into long and complex explanations. I have the threads of this affair all in my hand. Even if this lady should never recover consciousness, we can still reconstruct the events of last night and insure that justice be done. First of all, I wish to know whether there is any inn in this neighbourhood known as ‘Elrige’s’?”

The servants were cross-questioned, but none of them had heard of such a place. The stable-boy threw a light upon the matter by remembering that a farmer of that name lived some miles off, in the direction of East Ruston.

“Is it a lonely farm?”

“Very lonely, sir.”

“Perhaps they have not heard yet of all that happened here during the night?”

“Maybe not, sir.”

Holmes thought for a little, and then a curious smile played over his face.

“Saddle a horse, my lad,” said he. “I shall wish you to take a note to Elrige’s Farm.”

He took from his pocket the various slips of the dancing men. With these in front of him, he worked for some time at the study-table. Finally he handed a note to the boy, with directions to put it into the hands of the person to whom it was addressed, and especially to answer no questions of any sort which might be put to him. I saw the outside of the note, addressed in straggling, irregular characters, very unlike Holmes’s usual precise hand. It was consigned to Mr. Abe Slaney, Elriges Farm, East Ruston, Norfolk.

“I think, Inspector,” Holmes remarked, “that you would do well to telegraph for an escort, as, if my calculations prove to be correct, you may have a particularly dangerous prisoner to convey to the county jail. The boy who takes this note could no doubt forward your telegram. If there is an afternoon train to town, Watson, I think we should do well to take it, as I have a chemical analysis of some interest to finish, and this investigation draws rapidly to a close.”

When the youth had been dispatched with the note, Sherlock Holmes gave his instructions to the servants. If any visitor were to call asking for Mrs. Hilton Cubitt, no information should be given as to her condition, but he was to be shown at once into the drawing-room. He impressed these points upon them with the utmost earnestness. Finally he led the way into the drawing-room, with the remark that the business was now out of our hands, and that we must while away the time as best we might until we could see what was in store for us. The doctor had departed to his patients, and only the inspector and myself remained.

“I think that I can help you to pass an hour in an interesting and profitable manner,” said Holmes, drawing his chair up to the table, and spreading out in front of him the various papers upon which were recorded the antics of the dancing men. “As to you, friend Watson, I owe you every atonement for having allowed your natural curiosity to remain so long unsatisfied. To you, Inspector, the whole incident may appeal as a remarkable professional study. I must tell you, first of all, the interesting circumstances connected with the previous consultations which Mr. Hilton Cubitt has had with me in Baker Street.” He then shortly recapitulated the facts which have already been recorded. “I have here in front of me these singular productions, at which one might smile, had they not proved themselves to be the forerunners of so terrible a tragedy. I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyze one hundred and sixty separate ciphers, but I confess that this is entirely new to me. The object of those who invented the system has apparently been to conceal that these characters convey a message, and to give the idea that they are the mere random sketches of children.

“Having once recognised, however, that the symbols stood for letters, and having applied the rules which guide us in all forms of secret writings, the solution was easy enough. The first message submitted to me was so short that it was impossible for me to do more than to say, with some confidence, that the symbol XXX stood for E. As you are aware, E is the most common letter in the English alphabet, and it predominates to so marked an extent that even in a short sentence one would expect to find it most often. Out of fifteen symbols in the first message, four were the same, so it was reasonable to set this down as E. It is true that in some cases the figure was bearing a flag, and in some cases not, but it was probable, from the way in which the flags were distributed, that they were used to break the sentence up into words. I accepted this as a hypothesis, and noted that E was represented by:

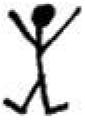

“But now came the real difficulty of the inquiry. The order of the English letters after E is by no means well marked, and any preponderance which may be shown in an average of a printed sheet may be reversed in a single short sentence. Speaking roughly, T, A, O, I, N, S, H, R, D, and L are the numerical order in which letters occur, but T, A, O, and I are very nearly abreast of each other, and it would be an endless task to try each combination until a meaning was arrived at. I therefore waited for fresh material. In my second interview with Mr. Hilton Cubitt he was able to give me two other short sentences and one message, which appeared — since there was no flag — to be a single word. Here are the symbols:

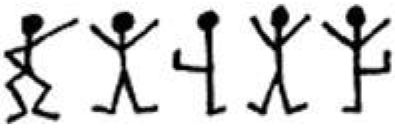

Now, in the single word I have already got the two E’s coming second and fourth in a word of five letters. It might be ‘sever,’ or ‘lever,’ or ‘never.’ There can be no question that the latter as a reply to an appeal is far the most probable, and the circumstances pointed to its being a reply written by the lady. Accepting it as correct, we are now able to say that the symbols

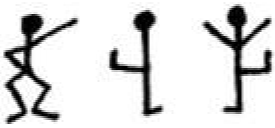

stand respectively for N, V, and R.

“Even now I was in considerable difficulty, but a happy thought put me in possession of several other letters. It occurred to me that if these appeals came, as I expected, from someone who had been intimate with the lady in her early life, a combination which contained two E’s with three letters between might very well stand for the name ‘ELSIE.’ On examination I found that such a combination formed the termination of the message which was three times repeated. It was certainly some appeal to ‘Elsie.’ In this way I had got my L, S, and I. But what appeal could it be? There were only four letters in the word which preceded ‘Elsie,’ and it ended in E. Surely the word must be ‘COME.’ I tried all other four letters ending in E, but could find none to fit the case. So now I was in possession of C, O, and M, and I was in a position to attack the first message once more, dividing it into words and putting dots for each symbol which was still unknown. So treated, it worked out in this fashion:

.M .ERE ..E SL.NE.

“Now the first letter CAN only be A, which is a most useful discovery, since it occurs no fewer than three times in this short sentence, and the H is also apparent in the second word. Now it becomes:

AM HERE A.E SLANE.

Or, filling in the obvious vacancies in the name:

AM HERE ABE SLANEY.

I had so many letters now that I could proceed with considerable confidence to the second message, which worked out in this fashion:

A. ELRI. ES.

Here I could only make sense by putting T and G for the missing letters, and supposing that the name was that of some house or inn at which the writer was staying."

Inspector Martin and I had listened with the utmost interest to the full and clear account of how my friend had produced results which had led to so complete a command over our difficulties.

"What did you do then, sir?" asked the inspector.

"I had every reason to suppose that this Abe Slaney was an American, since Abe is an American contraction, and since a letter from America had been the starting-point of all the trouble. I had also every cause to think that there was some criminal secret in the matter. The lady's allusions to her past, and her refusal to take her husband into her confidence, both pointed in that direction. I therefore cabled to my friend, Wilson Hargreave, of the New York Police Bureau, who has more than once made use of my knowledge of London crime. I asked him whether the name of Abe Slaney was known to him. Here is his reply: 'The most dangerous crook in Chicago.' On the very evening upon which I had his answer, Hilton Cubitt sent me the last message from Slaney. Working with known letters, it took this form:

ELSIE .RE.ARE TO MEET THY GO.

The addition of a P and a D completed a message which showed me that the rascal was proceeding from persuasion to threats, and my knowledge of the crooks of Chicago prepared me to find that he might very rapidly put his words into action. I at once came to Norfolk with my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, but, unhappily, only in time to find that the worst had already occurred."

"It is a privilege to be associated with you in the handling of a case," said the inspector, warmly. "You will excuse me, however, if I speak frankly to you. You are only answerable to yourself, but I have to answer to my superiors. If this Abe Slaney, living at Elrige's, is indeed the murderer, and if he has made his escape while I am seated here, I should certainly get into serious trouble."

"You need not be uneasy. He will not try to escape."

"How do you know?"

“To fly would be a confession of guilt.”

“Then let us go arrest him.”

“I expect him here every instant.”

“But why should he come.”

“Because I have written and asked him.”

“But this is incredible, Mr. Holmes! Why should he come because you have asked him? Would not such a request rather rouse his suspicions and cause him to fly?”

“I think I have known how to frame the letter,” said Sherlock Holmes. “In fact, if I am not very much mistaken, here is the gentleman himself coming up the drive.”

A man was striding up the path which led to the door. He was a tall, handsome, swarthy fellow, clad in a suit of gray flannel, with a Panama hat, a bristling black beard, and a great, aggressive hooked nose, and flourishing a cane as he walked. He swaggered up a path as if as if the place belonged to him, and we heard his loud, confident peal at the bell.

“I think, gentlemen,” said Holmes, quietly, “that we had best take up our position behind the door. Every precaution is necessary when dealing with such a fellow. You will need your handcuffs, Inspector. You can leave the talking to me.”

We waited in silence for a minute — one of those minutes which one can never forget. Then the door opened and the man stepped in. In an instant Holmes clapped a pistol to his head, and Martin slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. It was all done so swiftly and deftly that the fellow was helpless before he knew that he was attacked. He glared from one to the other of us with a pair of blazing black eyes. Then he burst into a bitter laugh.

“Well, gentlemen, you have the drop on me this time. I seem to have knocked up against something hard. But I came here in answer to a letter from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt. Don’t tell me that she is in this? Don’t tell me that she helped to set a trap for me?”

“Mrs. Hilton Cubitt was seriously injured, and is at death’s door.”

The man gave a hoarse cry of grief, which rang through the house.

“You’re crazy!” he cried, fiercely. “It was he that was hurt, not she. Who would have hurt little Elsie? I may have threatened her — God forgive me! — but I would not have touched a hair of her pretty head. Take it back — you! Say that she is not hurt!”

“She was found badly wounded, by the side of her dead husband.”

He sank with a deep groan on the settee and buried his face in his manacled hands. For five minutes he was silent. Then he raised his face once more, and spoke with the cold composure of despair.

“I have nothing to hide from you, gentlemen,” said he. “If I shot the man he had his shot at me, and there’s no murder in that. But if you think I could have hurt that woman, then you don’t know either me or her. I tell you, there was never a man in this world loved a woman more than I loved her. I had a right to her. She was pledged to me years ago. Who was this Englishman that he should come between us? I tell you that I had the first right to her, and that I was only claiming my own.

“She broke away from your influence when she found the man that you are,” said Holmes, sternly. “She fled from America to avoid you, and she married an honourable gentleman in England. You dogged her and followed her and made her life a misery to her, in order to induce her to abandon the husband whom she loved and respected in order to fly with you, whom she feared and hated. You have ended by bringing about the death of a noble man and driving his wife to suicide. That is your record in this business, Mr. Abe Slaney, and you will answer for it to the law.”

“If Elsie dies, I care nothing what becomes of me,” said the American. He opened one of his hands, and looked at a note crumpled up in his palm. “See here, mister! he cried, with a gleam of suspicion in his eyes, “you’re not trying to scare me over this, are you? If the lady is hurt as bad as you say, who was it that wrote this note?” He tossed it forward on to the table.

“I wrote it, to bring you here.”

“You wrote it? There was no one on earth outside the Joint who knew the secret of the dancing men. How came you to write it?”

“What one man can invent another can discover,” said Holmes. There is a cab coming to convey you to Norwich, Mr. Slaney. But meanwhile, you have time to make some small reparation for the injury you have wrought. Are you aware that Mrs. Hilton Cubitt has herself lain under grave suspicion of the murder of her husband, and that it was only my presence here, and the knowledge which I happened to possess, which has saved her from the accusation? The least that you owe her is to make it clear to the whole world that she was in no way, directly or indirectly, responsible for his tragic end.”

“I ask nothing better,” said the American. “I guess the very best case I can make for myself is the absolute naked truth.”

“It is my duty to warn you that it will be used against you,” cried the inspector, with the magnificent fair play of the British criminal law.

Slaney shrugged his shoulders.

“I’ll chance that,” said he. “First of all, I want you gentlemen to understand that I have known this lady since she was a child. There were seven of us in a gang in Chicago, and Elsie’s father was the boss of the Joint. He was a clever man, was old Patrick. It was he who invented that writing, which would pass as a child’s scrawl unless you just happened to have the key to it. Well, Elsie learned some of our ways, but she couldn’t stand the business, and she had a bit of honest money of her own, so she gave us all the slip and got away to London. She had been engaged to me, and she would have married me, I believe, if I had taken over another profession, but she would have nothing to do with anything on the cross. It was only after her marriage to this Englishman that I was able to find out where she was. I wrote to her, but got no answer. After that I came over, and, as letters were no use, I put my messages where she could read them.

“Well, I have been here a month now. I lived in that farm, where I had a room down below, and could get in and out every night, and no one the wiser. I tried all I could to coax Elsie away. I knew that she read the messages, for once she wrote an answer under one of them. Then my temper got the better of me, and I began to threaten her. She sent me a letter then, imploring me to go away, and saying that it would break her heart if any scandal should come upon her husband. She said that she would come down when her husband was asleep at three in the morning, and speak with me through the end window, if I would go away afterwards and leave her in peace. She came down and brought money with her, trying to bribe me to go. This made me mad, and I caught her arm and tried to pull her through the window. At that moment in rushed the husband with his revolver in his hand. Elsie had sunk down upon the floor, and we were face to face. I was heeled also, and I held up my gun to scare him off and let me get away. He fired and missed me. I pulled off almost at the same instant, and down he dropped. I made away across the garden, and as I went I heard the window shut behind me. That’s God’s truth, gentlemen, every word of it, and I heard no more about it until that lad came riding up with a note which made me walk in here, like a jay, and give myself into your hands.”

A cab had driven up whilst the American had been talking. Two uniformed policemen sat inside. Inspector Martin rose and touched his prisoner on the shoulder.

"It is time for us to go."

"Can I see her first?"

"No, she is not conscious. Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I only hope that if ever again I have an important case, I shall have the good fortune to have you by my side."

We stood at the window and watched the cab drive away. As I turned back, my eye caught the pellet of paper which the prisoner had tossed upon the table. It was the note with which Holmes had decoyed him.

"See if you can read it, Watson," said he, with a smile.

It contained no word, but this little line of dancing men:

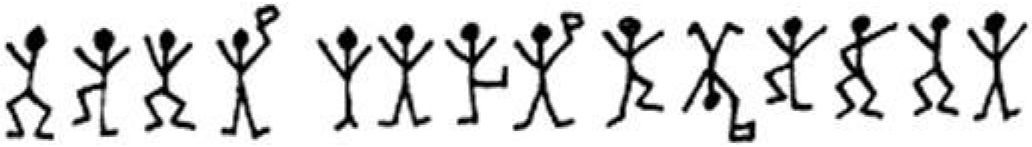

"If you use the code which I have explained," said Holmes, "you will find that it simply means 'Come here at once.' I was convinced that it was an invitation which he would not refuse, since he could never imagine that it could come from anyone but the lady. And so, my dear Watson, we have ended by turning the dancing men to good when they have so often been the agents of evil, and I think that I have fulfilled my promise of giving you something unusual for your notebook. Three-forty is our train, and I fancy we should be back in Baker Street for dinner."

Only one word of epilogue. The American, Abe Slaney, was condemned to death at the winter assizes at Norwich, but his penalty was changed to penal servitude in consideration of mitigating circumstances, and the certainty that Hilton Cubitt had fired the first shot. Of Mrs. Hilton Cubitt I only know that I have heard she recovered entirely, and that she still remains a widow, devoting her whole life to the care of the poor and to the administration of her husband's estate.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SOLITARY CYCLIST

From the years 1894 to 1901 inclusive, Mr. Sherlock Holmes was a very busy man. It is safe to say that there was no public case of any difficulty in which he was not consulted during those eight years, and there were hundreds of private cases, some of them of the most intricate and extraordinary character, in which he played a prominent part. Many startling successes and a few unavoidable failures were the outcome of this long period of continuous work. As I have preserved very full notes of all these cases, and was myself personally engaged in many of them, it may be imagined that it is no easy task to know which I should select to lay before the public. I shall, however, preserve my former rule, and give the preference to those cases which derive their interest not so much from the brutality of the crime as from the ingenuity and dramatic quality of the solution. For this reason I will now lay before the reader the facts connected with Miss Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist of Charlington, and the curious sequel of our investigation, which culminated in unexpected tragedy. It is true that the circumstance did not admit of any striking illustration of those powers for which my friend was famous, but there were some points about the case which made it stand out in those long records of crime from which I gather the material for these little narratives.

On referring to my notebook for the year 1895, I find that it was upon Saturday, the 23rd of April, that we first heard of Miss Violet Smith. Her visit was, I remember, extremely unwelcome to Holmes, for he was immersed at the moment in a very abstruse and complicated problem concerning the peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected. My friend, who loved above all things precision and concentration of thought, resented anything which distracted his attention from the matter in hand. And yet, without a harshness which was foreign to his nature, it was impossible to refuse to listen to the story of the young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly, who presented herself at Baker Street late in the evening, and implored his assistance and advice. It was vain to urge that his time was already fully occupied, for the young lady had come with the determination to tell her story, and it was evident that nothing short of force could get her out of the room until she had done so. With a resigned air and a somewhat weary smile, Holmes begged the beautiful intruder to take a seat, and to inform us what it was that was troubling her.

"At least it cannot be your health," said he, as his keen eyes darted over her, "so ardent a bicyclist must be full of energy."

She glanced down in surprise at her own feet, and I observed the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal.

"Yes, I bicycle a good deal, Mr. Holmes, and that has something to do with my visit to you to-day."

My friend took the lady's ungloved hand, and examined it with as close an attention and as little sentiment as a scientist would show to a specimen.

"You will excuse me, I am sure. It is my business," said he, as he dropped it. "I nearly fell into the error of supposing that you were typewriting. Of course, it is obvious that it is music. You observe the spatulate finger-ends, Watson, which is common to both professions? There is a spirituality about the face, however" — she gently turned it towards the light—"which the typewriter does not generate. This lady is a musician."

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, I teach music."

"In the country, I presume, from your complexion."

"Yes, sir, near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey."

"A beautiful neighbourhood, and full of the most interesting associations. You remember, Watson, that it was near there that we took Archie Stamford, the forger. Now, Miss Violet, what has happened to you, near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey?"

The young lady, with great clearness and composure, made the following curious statement:

"My father is dead, Mr. Holmes. He was James Smith, who conducted the orchestra at the old Imperial Theatre. My mother and I were left without a relation in the world except one uncle, Ralph Smith, who went to Africa twenty-five years ago, and we have never had a word from him since. When father died, we were left very poor, but one day we were told that there was an advertisement in the TIMES, inquiring for our whereabouts. You can imagine how excited we were, for we thought that someone had left us a fortune. We went at once to the lawyer whose name was given in the paper.

There we, met two gentlemen, Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Woodley, who were home on a visit from South Africa. They said that my uncle was a friend of theirs, that he had died some months before in great poverty in Johannesburg, and that he had asked them with his last breath to hunt up his relations, and see that they were in no want. It seemed strange to us that Uncle Ralph, who took no notice of us when he was alive, should be so careful to look after us when he was dead, but Mr. Carruthers explained that the reason was that my uncle had just heard of the death of his brother, and so felt responsible for our fate."

"Excuse me," said Holmes. "When was this interview?"

"Last December — four months ago."

"Pray proceed."

"Mr. Woodley seemed to me to be a most odious person. He was for ever making eyes at me — a coarse, puffy-faced, red-moustached young man, with his hair plastered down on each side of his forehead. I thought that he was perfectly hateful — and I was sure that Cyril would not wish me to know such a person."

"Oh, Cyril is his name!" said Holmes, smiling.

The young lady blushed and laughed.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, Cyril Morton, an electrical engineer, and we hope to be married at the end of the summer. Dear me, how DID I get talking about him? What I wished to say was that Mr. Woodley was perfectly odious, but that Mr. Carruthers, who was a much older man, was more agreeable. He was a dark, sallow, clean-shaven, silent person, but he had polite manners and a pleasant smile. He inquired how we were left, and on finding that we were very poor, he suggested that I should come and teach music to his only daughter, aged ten. I said that I did not like to leave my mother, on which he suggested that I should go home to her every week-end, and he offered me a hundred a year, which was certainly splendid pay. So it ended by my accepting, and I went down to Chiltern Grange, about six miles from Farnham. Mr. Carruthers was a widower, but he had engaged a lady housekeeper, a very respectable, elderly person, called Mrs. Dixon, to look after his establishment. The child was a dear, and everything promised well. Mr. Carruthers was very kind and very musical, and we had most pleasant evenings together. Every week-end I went home to my mother in town.

"The first flaw in my happiness was the arrival of the red-moustached Mr. Woodley. He came for a visit of a week, and oh! it seemed three months to me. He was a dreadful person — a bully to everyone else, but to me something infinitely worse. He made odious love to me, boasted of his wealth, said that if I married him I could have the finest diamonds in London, and finally, when I would have nothing to do with him, he seized me in his arms one day after dinner — he was hideously strong — and swore that he would not let me go until I had kissed him. Mr. Carruthers came in and tore him from me, on which he turned upon his own host, knocking him down and cutting his face open. That was the end of his visit, as you can imagine. Mr. Carruthers apologized to me next day, and assured me that I should never be exposed to such an insult again. I have not seen Mr. Woodley since.

"And now, Mr. Holmes, I come at last to the special thing which has caused me to ask your advice to-day. You must know that every Saturday forenoon I ride on my bicycle to Farnham Station, in order to get the 12:22 to town. The road from Chiltern Grange is a lonely one, and at one spot it is particularly so, for it lies for over a mile between Charlington Heath upon one side and the woods which lie round Charlington Hall upon the other. You could not find a more lonely tract of road anywhere, and it is quite rare to meet so much as a cart, or a peasant, until you reach the high road near Crooksbury Hill. Two weeks ago I was passing this place, when I chanced to look back over my shoulder, and about two hundred yards behind me I saw a man, also on a bicycle. He seemed to be a middle-aged man, with a short, dark beard. I looked back before I reached Farnham, but the man was gone, so I thought no more about it. But you can imagine how surprised I was, Mr. Holmes, when, on my return on the Monday, I saw the same man on the same stretch of road. My astonishment was increased when the incident occurred again, exactly as before, on the following Saturday and Monday. He always kept his distance and did not molest me in any way, but still it certainly was very odd. I mentioned it to Mr. Carruthers, who seemed interested in what I said, and told me that he had ordered a horse and trap, so that in future I should not pass over these lonely roads without some companion.

"The horse and trap were to have come this week, but for some reason they were not delivered, and again I had to cycle to the station. That was this morning. You can think that I looked out when I came to Charlington Heath, and there, sure enough, was the man, exactly as he had been the two weeks before. He always kept so far from me that I could not clearly see his face, but it was certainly someone whom I did not know. He was dressed in a dark suit with a cloth cap. The only thing about his face that I could clearly see was his dark beard. To-day I was not alarmed, but I was filled with curiosity, and I determined to find out who he was and what he wanted. I slowed down my machine, but he slowed down his. Then I stopped altogether, but he stopped also. Then I laid a trap for him. There is a sharp turning of the road, and I pedalled very quickly round this, and then I stopped and waited. I expected him to shoot round and pass me before he could stop. But he never appeared. Then I went back and looked round the corner. I could see a mile of road, but he was not on it. To make it the more extraordinary, there was no side road at this point down which he could have gone."

Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. "This case certainly presents some features of its own," said he. "How much time elapsed between your turning the corner and your discovery that the road was clear?"

"Two or three minutes."

"Then he could not have retreated down the road, and you say that there are no side roads?"

"None."

"Then he certainly took a footpath on one side or the other."

"It could not have been on the side of the heath, or I should have seen him."

"So, by the process of exclusion, we arrive at the fact that he made his way toward Charlington Hall, which, as I understand, is situated in its own grounds on one side of the road. Anything else?"

"Nothing, Mr. Holmes, save that I was so perplexed that I felt I should not be happy until I had seen you and had your advice."

Holmes sat in silence for some little time.

"Where is the gentleman to whom you are engaged?" he asked at last.

"He is in the Midland Electrical Company, at Coventry."

"He would not pay you a surprise visit?"

"Oh, Mr. Holmes! As if I should not know him!"

"Have you had any other admirers?"

"Several before I knew Cyril."

"And since?"

"There was this dreadful man, Woodley, if you can call him an admirer."

"No one else?"

Our fair client seemed a little confused.

“Who was he?” asked Holmes.

“Oh, it may be a mere fancy of mine; but it had seemed to me sometimes that my employer, Mr. Carruthers, takes a great deal of interest in me. We are thrown rather together. I play his accompaniments in the evening. He has never said anything. He is a perfect gentleman. But a girl always knows.”

“Ha!” Holmes looked grave. “What does he do for a living?”

“He is a rich man.”

“No carriages or horses?”

“Well, at least he is fairly well-to-do. But he goes into the city two or three times a week. He is deeply interested in South African gold shares.”

“You will let me know any fresh development, Miss Smith. I am very busy just now, but I will find time to make some inquiries into your case. In the meantime, take no step without letting me know. Good-bye, and I trust that we shall have nothing but good news from you.”

“It is part of the settled order of Nature that such a girl should have followers,” said Holmes, he pulled at his meditative pipe, “but for choice not on bicycles in lonely country roads. Some secretive lover, beyond all doubt. But there are curious and suggestive details about the case, Watson.”

“That he should appear only at that point?”

“Exactly. Our first effort must be to find who are the tenants of Charlington Hall. Then, again, how about the connection between Carruthers and Woodley, since they appear to be men of such a different type? How came they BOTH to be so keen upon looking up Ralph Smith’s relations? One more point. What sort of a menage is it which pays double the market price for a governess but does not keep a horse, although six miles from the station? Odd, Watson — very odd!”

“You will go down?”

“No, my dear fellow, YOU will go down. This may be some trifling intrigue, and I cannot break my other important research for the sake of it. On Monday you will arrive early at Farnham; you will conceal yourself near Charlington Heath; you will observe these facts for yourself, and act as your own judgment advises. Then, having inquired as to the occupants of the Hall, you will come back to me and report. And now, Watson, not another word of the matter until we have a few solid stepping-stones on which we may hope to get across to our solution.”

We had ascertained from the lady that she went down upon the Monday by the train which leaves Waterloo at 9:50, so I started early and caught the 9:13. At Farnham Station I had no difficulty in being directed to Charlington Heath. It was impossible to mistake the scene of the young lady's adventure, for the road runs between the open heath on one side and an old yew hedge upon the other, surrounding a park which is studded with magnificent trees. There was a main gateway of lichen-studded stone, each side pillar surmounted by mouldering heraldic emblems, but besides this central carriage drive I observed several points where there were gaps in the hedge and paths leading through them. The house was invisible from the road, but the surroundings all spoke of gloom and decay.

The heath was covered with golden patches of flowering gorse, gleaming magnificently in the light of the bright spring sunshine. Behind one of these clumps I took up my position, so as to command both the gateway of the Hall and a long stretch of the road upon either side. It had been deserted when I left it, but now I saw a cyclist riding down it from the opposite direction to that in which I had come. He was clad in a dark suit, and I saw that he had a black beard. On reaching the end of the Charlington grounds, he sprang from his machine and led it through a gap in the hedge, disappearing from my view.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then a second cyclist appeared. This time it was the young lady coming from the station. I saw her look about her as she came to the Charlington hedge. An instant later the man emerged from his hiding-place, sprang upon his cycle, and followed her. In all the broad landscape those were the only moving figures, the graceful girl sitting very straight upon her machine, and the man behind her bending low over his handle-bar with a curiously furtive suggestion in every movement. She looked back at him and slowed her pace. He slowed also. She stopped. He at once stopped, too, keeping two hundred yards behind her. Her next movement was as unexpected as it was spirited. She suddenly whisked her wheels round and dashed straight at him. He was as quick as she, however, and darted off in desperate flight. Presently she came back up the road again, her head haughtily in the air, not deigning to take any further notice of her silent attendant. He had turned also, and still kept his distance until the curve of the road hid them from my sight.

I remained in my hiding-place, and it was well that I did so, for presently the man reappeared, cycling slowly back. He turned in at the Hall gates, and dismounted from his machine. For some minutes I could see him standing among the trees. His hands were raised, and he seemed to be settling his necktie. Then he mounted his cycle, and rode away from me down the drive towards the Hall. I ran across the heath and peered through the trees. Far away I could catch glimpses of the old gray building with its bristling Tudor chimneys, but the drive ran through a dense shrubbery, and I saw no more of my man.

However, it seemed to me that I had done a fairly good morning's work, and I walked back in high spirits to Farnham. The local house agent could tell me nothing about Charlington Hall, and referred me to a well known firm in Pall Mall. There I halted on my way home, and met with courtesy from the representative. No, I could not have Charlington Hall for the summer. I was just too late. It had been let about a month ago. Mr. Williamson was the name of the tenant. He was a respectable, elderly gentleman. The polite agent was afraid he could say no more, as the affairs of his clients were not matters which he could discuss.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes listened with attention to the long report which I was able to present to him that evening, but it did not elicit that word of curt praise which I had hoped for and should have valued. On the contrary, his austere face was even more severe than usual as he commented upon the things that I had done and the things that I had not.

"Your hiding-place, my dear Watson, was very faulty. You should have been behind the hedge, then you would have had a close view of this interesting person. As it is, you were some hundreds of yards away and can tell me even less than Miss Smith. She thinks she does not know the man; I am convinced she does. Why, otherwise, should he be so desperately anxious that she should not get so near him as to see his features? You describe him as bending over the handle-bar. Concealment again, you see. You really have done remarkably badly. He returns to the house, and you want to find out who he is. You come to a London house agent!"

"What should I have done?" I cried, with some heat.

"Gone to the nearest public-house. That is the centre of country gossip. They would have told you every name, from the master to the scullery-maid. Williamson? It conveys nothing to my mind. If he is an elderly man he is not this active cyclist who sprints away from that young lady's athletic pursuit. What have we gained by your expedition? The knowledge that the girl's story is true. I never doubted it. That there is a connection between the cyclist and the Hall. I never doubted that either. That the Hall is tenanted by Williamson. Who's the better for that? Well, well, my dear sir, don't look so depressed. We can do little more until next Saturday, and in the meantime I may make one or two inquiries myself."

Next morning, we had a note from Miss Smith, recounting shortly and accurately the very incidents which I had seen, but the pith of the letter lay in the postscript:

I am sure that you will respect my confidence, Mr. Holmes, when I tell you that my place here has become difficult, owing to the fact that my employer has proposed marriage to me. I am convinced that his feelings are most deep and most honourable. At the same time, my promise is of course given. He took my refusal very seriously, but also very gently. You can understand, however, that the situation is a little strained. "Our young friend seems to be getting into deep waters," said Holmes, thoughtfully, as he finished the letter. "The case certainly presents more features of interest and more possibility of development than I had originally thought. I should be none the worse for a quiet, peaceful day in the country, and I am inclined to run down this afternoon and test one or two theories which I have formed."

Holmes's quiet day in the country had a singular termination, for he arrived at Baker Street late in the evening, with a cut lip and a discoloured lump upon his forehead, besides a general air of dissipation which would have made his own person the fitting object of a Scotland Yard investigation. He was immensely tickled by his own adventures and laughed heartily as he recounted them.

"I get so little active exercise that it is always a treat," said he. "You are aware that I have some proficiency in the good old British sport of boxing. Occasionally, it is of service, to-day, for example, I should have come to very ignominious grief without it."

I begged him to tell me what had occurred.

"I found that country pub which I had already recommended to your notice, and there I made my discreet inquiries. I was in the bar, and a garrulous landlord was giving me all that I wanted. Williamson is a white-bearded man, and he lives alone with a small staff of servants at the Hall. There is some rumor that he is or has been a clergyman, but one or two incidents of his short residence at the Hall struck me as peculiarly unecclesiastical. I have already made some inquiries at a clerical agency, and they tell me that there WAS a man of that name in orders, whose career has been a singularly dark one. The landlord further informed me that there are usually week-end visitors—’a warm lot, sir’ — at the Hall, and especially one gentleman with a red moustache, Mr. Woodley by name, who was always there. We had got as far as this, when who should walk in but the gentleman himself, who had been drinking his beer in the tap-room and had heard the whole conversation. Who was I? What did I want? What did I mean by asking questions? He had a fine flow of language, and his adjectives were very vigorous. He ended a string of abuse by a vicious backhander, which I failed to entirely avoid. The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart. So ended my country trip, and it must be confessed that, however enjoyable, my day on the Surrey border has not been much more profitable than your own.”

The Thursday brought us another letter from our client.

You will not be surprised, Mr. Holmes [said she] to hear that I am leaving Mr. Carruthers’s employment. Even the high pay cannot reconcile me to the discomforts of my situation. On Saturday I come up to town, and I do not intend to return. Mr. Carruthers has got a trap, and so the dangers of the lonely road, if there ever were any dangers, are now over.

As to the special cause of my leaving, it is not merely the strained situation with Mr. Carruthers, but it is the reappearance of that odious man, Mr. Woodley. He was always hideous, but he looks more awful than ever now, for he appears to have had an accident and he is much disfigured. I saw him out of the window, but I am glad to say I did not meet him. He had a long talk with Mr. Carruthers, who seemed much excited afterwards. Woodley must be staying in the neighbourhood, for he did not sleep here, and yet I caught a glimpse of him again this morning, slinking about in the shrubbery. I would sooner have a savage wild animal loose about the place. I loathe and fear him more than I can say. How CAN Mr. Carruthers endure such a creature for a moment? However, all my troubles will be over on Saturday.

“So I trust, Watson, so I trust,” said Holmes, gravely. “There is some deep intrigue going on round that little woman, and it is our duty to see that no one molests her upon that last journey. I think, Watson, that we must spare time to run down together on Saturday morning and make sure that this curious and inclusive investigation has no untoward ending.”

I confess that I had not up to now taken a very serious view of the case, which had seemed to me rather grotesque and bizarre than dangerous. That a man should lie in wait for and follow a very handsome woman is no unheard-of thing, and if he has so little audacity that he not only dared not address her, but even fled from her approach, he was not a very formidable assailant. The ruffian Woodley was a very different person, but, except on one occasion, he had not molested our client, and now he visited the house of Carruthers without intruding upon her presence. The man on the bicycle was doubtless a member of those week-end parties at the Hall of which the publican had spoken, but who he was, or what he wanted, was as obscure as ever. It was the severity of Holmes's manner and the fact that he slipped a revolver into his pocket before leaving our rooms which impressed me with the feeling that tragedy might prove to lurk behind this curious train of events.

A rainy night had been followed by a glorious morning, and the heath-covered countryside, with the glowing clumps of flowering gorse, seemed all the more beautiful to eyes which were weary of the duns and drabs and slate grays of London. Holmes and I walked along the broad, sandy road inhaling the fresh morning air and rejoicing in the music of the birds and the fresh breath of the spring. From a rise of the road on the shoulder of Crooksbury Hill, we could see the grim Hall bristling out from amidst the ancient oaks, which, old as they were, were still younger than the building which they surrounded. Holmes pointed down the long tract of road which wound, a reddish yellow band, between the brown of the heath and the budding green of the woods. Far away, a black dot, we could see a vehicle moving in our direction. Holmes gave an exclamation of impatience.

"I have given a margin of half an hour," said he. "If that is her trap, she must be making for the earlier train. I fear, Watson, that she will be past Charlington before we can possibly meet her."

From the instant that we passed the rise, we could no longer see the vehicle, but we hastened onward at such a pace that my sedentary life began to tell upon me, and I was compelled to fall behind. Holmes, however, was always in training, for he had inexhaustible stores of nervous energy upon which to draw. His springy step never slowed until suddenly, when he was a hundred yards in front of me, he halted, and I saw him throw up his hand with a gesture of grief and despair. At the same instant an empty dog-cart, the horse cantering, the reins trailing, appeared round the curve of the road and rattled swiftly towards us.

“Too late, Watson, too late!” cried Holmes, as I ran panting to his side. “Fool that I was not to allow for that earlier train! It’s abduction, Watson — abduction! Murder! Heaven knows what! Block the road! Stop the horse! That’s right. Now, jump in, and let us see if I can repair the consequences of my own blunder.”

We had sprung into the dog-cart, and Holmes, after turning the horse, gave it a sharp cut with the whip, and we flew back along the road. As we turned the curve, the whole stretch of road between the Hall and the heath was opened up. I grasped Holmes’s arm.

“That’s the man!” I gasped. A solitary cyclist was coming towards us. His head was down and his shoulders rounded, as he put every ounce of energy that he possessed on to the pedals. He was flying like a racer. Suddenly he raised his bearded face, saw us close to him, and pulled up, springing from his machine. That coal-black beard was in singular contrast to eyes were as bright as if he had a fever. He stared at us and at the dog-cart. Then a look of amazement came over his face.

“Halloa! Stop there!” he shouted, holding his bicycle to block our road. “Where did you get that dog-cart? Pull up, man!” he yelled, drawing a pistol from his side “Pull up, I say, or, by George, I’ll put a bullet into your horse.”

Holmes threw the reins into my lap and sprang down from the cart.

“You’re the man we want to see. Where is Miss Violet Smith?” he said, in his quick, clear way.

“That’s what I’m asking you. You’re in her dog-cart. You ought to know where she is.”

“We met the dog-cart on the road. There was no one in it. We drove back to help the young lady.”

“Good Lord! Good Lord! What shall I do?” cried the stranger, in an ecstasy of despair. “They’ve got her, that hell-hound Woodley and the blackguard parson. Come, man, come, if you really are her friend. Stand by me and we’ll save her, if I have to leave my carcass in Charlington Wood.”

He ran distractedly, his pistol in his hand, towards a gap in the hedge. Holmes followed him, and I, leaving the horse grazing beside the road, followed Holmes.

“This is where they came through,” said he, pointing to the marks of several feet upon the muddy path. “Halloa! Stop a minute! Who’s this in the bush?”

It was a young fellow about seventeen, dressed like an ostler, with leather cords and gaiters. He lay upon his back, his knees drawn up, a terrible cut upon his head. He was insensible, but alive. A glance at his wound told me that it had not penetrated the bone.

“That’s Peter, the groom,” cried the stranger. “He drove her. The beasts have pulled him off and clubbed him. Let him lie; we can’t do him any good, but we may save her from the worst fate that can befall a woman.”

We ran frantically down the path, which wound among the trees. We had reached the shrubbery which surrounded the house when Holmes pulled up.

“They didn’t go to the house. Here are their marks on the left — here, beside the laurel bushes. Ah! I said so.”

As he spoke, a woman’s shrill scream — a scream which vibrated with a frenzy of horror — burst from the thick, green clump of bushes in front of us. It ended suddenly on its highest note with a choke and a gurgle.

“This way! This way! They are in the bowling-alley,” cried the stranger, darting through the bushes. “Ah, the cowardly dogs! Follow me, gentlemen! Too late! too late! by the living Jingo!”

We had broken suddenly into a lovely glade of greensward surrounded by ancient trees. On the farther side of it, under the shadow of a mighty oak, there stood a singular group of three people. One was a woman, our client, drooping and faint, a handkerchief round her mouth. Opposite her stood a brutal, heavy-faced, red-moustached young man, his gaitered legs parted wide, one arm akimbo, the other waving a riding crop, his whole attitude suggestive of triumphant bravado. Between them an elderly, gray-bearded man, wearing a short surplice over a light tweed suit, had evidently just completed the wedding service, for he pocketed his prayer-book as we appeared, and slapped the sinister bridegroom upon the back in jovial congratulation.

“They’re married!” I gasped.

“Come on!” cried our guide, “come on!” He rushed across the glade, Holmes and I at his heels. As we approached, the lady staggered against the trunk of the tree for support. Williamson, the ex-clergyman, bowed to us with mock politeness, and the bully, Woodley, advanced with a shout of brutal and exultant laughter.

“You can take your beard off, Bob,” said he. “I know you, right enough. Well, you and your pals have just come in time for me to be able to introduce you to Mrs. Woodley.”

Our guide’s answer was a singular one. He snatched off the dark beard which had disguised him and threw it on the ground, disclosing a long, sallow, clean-shaven face below it. Then he raised his revolver and covered the young ruffian, who was advancing upon him with his dangerous riding-crop swinging in his hand.

“Yes,” said our ally, “I am Bob Carruthers, and I’ll see this woman righted, if I have to swing for it. I told you what I’d do if you molested her, and, by the Lord! I’ll be as good as my word.”

“You’re too late. She’s my wife.”

“No, she’s your widow.”

His revolver cracked, and I saw the blood spurt from the front of Woodley’s waistcoat. He spun round with a scream and fell upon his back, his hideous red face turning suddenly to a dreadful mottled pallor. The old man, still clad in his surplice, burst into such a string of foul oaths as I have never heard, and pulled out a revolver of his own, but, before he could raise it, he was looking down the barrel of Holmes’s weapon.

“Enough of this,” said my friend, coldly. “Drop that pistol! Watson, pick it up! Hold it to his head. Thank you. You, Carruthers, give me that revolver. We’ll have no more violence. Come, hand it over!”

“Who are you, then?”

“My name is Sherlock Holmes.”

“Good Lord!”

“You have heard of me, I see. I will represent the official police until their arrival. Here, you!” he shouted to a frightened groom, who had appeared at the edge of the glade. “Come here. Take this note as hard as you can ride to Farnham.” He scribbled a few words upon a leaf from his notebook. “Give it to the superintendent at the police-station. Until he comes, I must detain you all under my personal custody.”

The strong, masterful personality of Holmes dominated the tragic scene, and all were equally puppets in his hands. Williamson and Carruthers found themselves carrying the wounded Woodley into the house, and I gave my arm to the frightened girl. The injured man was laid on his bed, and at Holmes’s request I examined him. I carried my report to where he sat in the old tapestry-hung dining-room with his two prisoners before him.

"He will live," said I.

"What!" cried Carruthers, springing out of his chair. "I'll go upstairs and finish him first. Do you tell me that that angel, is to be tied to Roaring Jack Woodley for life?"

"You need not concern yourself about that," said Holmes. "There are two very good reasons why she should, under no circumstances, be his wife. In the first place, we are very safe in questioning Mr. Williamson's right to solemnize a marriage."

"I have been ordained," cried the old rascal.

"And also unfrocked."

"Once a clergyman, always a clergyman."

"I think not. How about the license?"

"We had a license for the marriage. I have it here in my pocket."

"Then you got it by trick. But, in any case a forced marriage is no marriage, but it is a very serious felony, as you will discover before you have finished. You'll have time to think the point out during the next ten years or so, unless I am mistaken. As to you, Carruthers, you would have done better to keep your pistol in your pocket."

"I begin to think so, Mr. Holmes, but when I thought of all the precaution I had taken to shield this girl — for I loved her, Mr. Holmes, and it is the only time that ever I knew what love was — it fairly drove me mad to think that she was in the power of the greatest brute and bully in South Africa — a man whose name is a holy terror from Kimberley to Johannesburg. Why, Mr. Holmes, you'll hardly believe it, but ever since that girl has been in my employment I never once let her go past this house, where I knew the rascals were lurking, without following her on my bicycle, just to see that she came to no harm. I kept my distance from her, and I wore a beard, so that she should not recognise me, for she is a good and high-spirited girl, and she wouldn't have stayed in my employment long if she had thought that I was following her about the country roads."

"Why didn't you tell her of her danger?"

"Because then, again, she would have left me, and I couldn't bear to face that. Even if she couldn't love me, it was a great deal to me just to see her dainty form about the house, and to hear the sound of her voice."

"Well," said I, "you call that love, Mr. Carruthers, but I should call it selfishness."

“Maybe the two things go together. Anyhow, I couldn’t let her go. Besides, with this crowd about, it was well that she should have someone near to look after her. Then, when the cable came, I knew they were bound to make a move.”

“What cable?”

Carruthers took a telegram from his pocket “That’s it,” said he.

It was short and concise:

The old man is dead.

“Hum!” said Holmes. “I think I see how things worked, and I can understand how this message would, as you say, bring them to a head. But while you wait, you might tell me what you can.”

The old reprobate with the surplice burst into a volley of bad language.

“By heaven!” said he, “if you squeal on us, Bob Carruthers, I’ll serve you as you served Jack Woodley. You can bleat about the girl to your heart’s content, for that’s your own affair, but if you round on your pals to this plain-clothes copper, it will be the worst day’s work that ever you did.”

“Your reverence need not be excited,” said Holmes, lighting a cigarette. “The case is clear enough against you, and all I ask is a few details for my private curiosity. However, if there’s any difficulty in your telling me, I’ll do the talking, and then you will see how far you have a chance of holding back your secrets. In the first place, three of you came from South Africa on this game — you Williamson, you Carruthers, and Woodley.”

“Lie number one,” said the old man; “I never saw either of them until two months ago, and I have never been in Africa in my life, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Busybody Holmes!”

“What he says is true,” said Carruthers.

“Well, well, two of you came over. His reverence is our own homemade article. You had known Ralph Smith in South Africa. You had reason to believe he would not live long. You found out that his niece would inherit his fortune. How’s that — eh?”

Carruthers nodded and Williamson swore.

“She was next of kin, no doubt, and you were aware that the old fellow would make no will.”

“Couldn’t read or write,” said Carruthers.

“So you came over, the two of you, and hunted up the girl. The idea was that one of you was to marry her, and the other have a share of the plunder. For some reason, Woodley was chosen as the husband. Why was that?”

“We played cards for her on the voyage. He won.”

“I see. You got the young lady into your service, and there Woodley was to do the courting. She recognised the drunken brute that he was, and would have nothing to do with him. Meanwhile, your arrangement was rather upset by the fact that you had yourself fallen in love with the lady. You could no longer bear the idea of this ruffian owning her?”

“No, by George, I couldn’t!”

“There was a quarrel between you. He left you in a rage, and began to make his own plans independently of you.”

“It strikes me, Williamson, there isn’t very much that we can tell this gentleman,” cried Carruthers, with a bitter laugh. “Yes, we quarreled, and he knocked me down. I am level with him on that, anyhow. Then I lost sight of him. That was when he picked up with this outcast padre here. I found that they had set up housekeeping together at this place on the line that she had to pass for the station. I kept my eye on her after that, for I knew there was some devilry in the wind. I saw them from time to time, for I was anxious to know what they were after. Two days ago Woodley came up to my house with this cable, which showed that Ralph Smith was dead. He asked me if I would stand by the bargain. I said I would not. He asked me if I would marry the girl myself and give him a share. I said I would willingly do so, but that she would not have me. He said, ‘Let us get her married first and after a week or two she may see things a bit different.’ I said I would have nothing to do with violence. So he went off cursing, like the foul-mouthed blackguard that he was, and swearing that he would have her yet. She was leaving me this week-end, and I had got a trap to take her to the station, but I was so uneasy in my mind that I followed her on my bicycle. She had got a start, however, and before I could catch her, the mischief was done. The first thing I knew about it was when I saw you two gentlemen driving back in her dog-cart.”

Holmes rose and tossed the end of his cigarette into the grate. “I have been very obtuse, Watson,” said he. “When in your report you said that you had seen the cyclist as you thought arrange his necktie in the shrubbery, that alone should have told me all. However, we may congratulate ourselves upon a curious and, in some respects, a unique case. I perceive three of the county constabulary in the drive, and I am glad to see that the little ostler is able to keep pace with them, so it is likely that neither he nor the interesting bridegroom will be permanently damaged by their morning’s adventures. I think, Watson, that in your medical capacity, you might wait upon Miss Smith and tell her that if she is sufficiently recovered, we shall be happy to escort her to her mother's home. If she is not quite convalescent you will find that a hint that we were about to telegraph to a young electrician in the Midlands would probably complete the cure. As to you, Mr. Carruthers, I think that you have done what you could to make amends for your share in an evil plot. There is my card, sir, and if my evidence can be of help in your trial, it shall be at your disposal."

In the whirl of our incessant activity, it has often been difficult for me, as the reader has probably observed, to round off my narratives, and to give those final details which the curious might expect. Each case has been the prelude to another, and the crisis once over, the actors have passed for ever out of our busy lives. I find, however, a short note at the end of my manuscript dealing with this case, in which I have put it upon record that Miss Violet Smith did indeed inherit a large fortune, and that she is now the wife of Cyril Morton, the senior partner of Morton & Kennedy, the famous Westminster electricians. Williamson and Woodley were both tried for abduction and assault, the former getting seven years the latter ten. Of the fate of Carruthers, I have no record, but I am sure that his assault was not viewed very gravely by the court, since Woodley had the reputation of being a most dangerous ruffian, and I think that a few, months were sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

We have had some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc. His card, which seemed too small to carry the weight of his academic distinctions, preceded him by a few seconds, and then he entered himself — so large, so pompous, and so dignified that he was the very embodiment of self-possession and solidity. And yet his first action, when the door had closed behind him, was to stagger against the table, whence he slipped down upon the floor, and there was that majestic figure prostrate and insensible upon our bearskin hearth-rug.

We had sprung to our feet, and for a few moments we stared in silent amazement at this ponderous piece of wreckage, which told of some sudden and fatal storm far out on the ocean of life. Then Holmes hurried with a cushion for his head, and I with brandy for his lips. The heavy, white face was seamed with lines of trouble, the hanging pouches under the closed eyes were leaden in colour, the loose mouth drooped dolorously at the corners, the rolling chins were unshaven. Collar and shirt bore the grime of a long journey, and the hair bristled unkempt from the well-shaped head. It was a sorely stricken man who lay before us.

“What is it, Watson?” asked Holmes.

“Absolute exhaustion — possibly mere hunger and fatigue,” said I, with my finger on the thready pulse, where the stream of life trickled thin and small.

“Return ticket from Mackleton, in the north of England,” said Holmes, drawing it from the watch-pocket. “It is not twelve o’clock yet. He has certainly been an early starter.”

The puckered eyelids had begun to quiver, and now a pair of vacant gray eyes looked up at us. An instant later the man had scrambled on to his feet, his face crimson with shame.

“Forgive this weakness, Mr. Holmes, I have been a little overwrought. Thank you, if I might have a glass of milk and a biscuit, I have no doubt that I should be better. I came personally, Mr. Holmes, in order to insure that you would return with me. I feared that no telegram would convince you of the absolute urgency of the case."

"When you are quite restored — —"

"I am quite well again. I cannot imagine how I came to be so weak. I wish you, Mr. Holmes, to come to Mackleton with me by the next train."

My friend shook his head.

"My colleague, Dr. Watson, could tell you that we are very busy at present. I am retained in this case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder is coming up for trial. Only a very important issue could call me from London at present."

"Important!" Our visitor threw up his hands. "Have you heard nothing of the abduction of the only son of the Duke of Holdernesse?"

"What! the late Cabinet Minister?"

"Exactly. We had tried to keep it out of the papers, but there was some rumor in the GLOBE last night. I thought it might have reached your ears."

Holmes shot out his long, thin arm and picked out Volume "H" in his encyclopaedia of reference.

"'Holdernesse, 6th Duke, K.G., P.C.' — half the alphabet! 'Baron Beverley, Earl of Carston' — dear me, what a list! 'Lord Lieutenant of Hallamshire since 1900. Married Edith, daughter of Sir Charles Appledore, 1888. Heir and only child, Lord Saltire. Owns about two hundred and fifty thousand acres. Minerals in Lancashire and Wales. Address: Carlton House Terrace; Holdernesse Hall, Hallamshire; Carston Castle, Bangor, Wales. Lord of the Admiralty, 1872; Chief Secretary of State for — —' Well, well, this man is certainly one of the greatest subjects of the Crown!"

"The greatest and perhaps the wealthiest. I am aware, Mr. Holmes, that you take a very high line in professional matters, and that you are prepared to work for the work's sake. I may tell you, however, that his Grace has already intimated that a check for five thousand pounds will be handed over to the person who can tell him where his son is, and another thousand to him who can name the man or men who have taken him."

"It is a princely offer," said Holmes. "Watson, I think that we shall accompany Dr. Huxtable back to the north of England. And now, Dr. Huxtable, when you have consumed that milk, you will kindly tell me what has happened, when it happened, how it happened, and, finally, what Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, of the Priory School, near Mackleton, has to do with the matter, and why he comes three days after an event — the state of your chin gives the date — to ask for my humble services."

Our visitor had consumed his milk and biscuits. The light had come back to his eyes and the colour to his cheeks, as he set himself with great vigour and lucidity to explain the situation.

"I must inform you, gentlemen, that the Priory is a preparatory school, of which I am the founder and principal. HUXTABLE'S SIDELIGHTS ON HORACE may possibly recall my name to your memories. The Priory is, without exception, the best and most select preparatory school in England. Lord Leverstoke, the Earl of Blackwater, Sir Cathcart Soames — they all have intrusted their sons to me. But I felt that my school had reached its zenith when, weeks ago, the Duke of Holdernesse sent Mr. James Wilder, his secretary, with intimation that young Lord Saltire, ten years old, his only son and heir, was about to be committed to my charge. Little did I think that this would be the prelude to the most crushing misfortune of my life.

"On May 1st the boy arrived, that being the beginning of the summer term. He was a charming youth, and he soon fell into our ways. I may tell you — I trust that I am not indiscreet, but half-confidences are absurd in such a case — that he was not entirely happy at home. It is an open secret that the Duke's married life had not been a peaceful one, and the matter had ended in a separation by mutual consent, the Duchess taking up her residence in the south of France. This had occurred very shortly before, and the boy's sympathies are known to have been strongly with his mother. He moped after her departure from Holdernesse Hall, and it was for this reason that the Duke desired to send him to my establishment. In a fortnight the boy was quite at home with us and was apparently absolutely happy.

"He was last seen on the night of May 13th — that is, the night of last Monday. His room was on the second floor and was approached through another larger room, in which two boys were sleeping. These boys saw and heard nothing, so that it is certain that young Saltire did not pass out that way. His window was open, and there is a stout ivy plant leading to the ground. We could trace no footmarks below, but it is sure that this is the only possible exit.

"His absence was discovered at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning. His bed had been slept in. He had dressed himself fully, before going off, in his usual school suit of black Eton jacket and dark gray trousers. There were no signs that anyone had entered the room, and it is quite certain that anything in the nature of cries or ones struggle would have been heard, since Caunter, the elder boy in the inner room, is a very light sleeper.

"When Lord Saltire's disappearance was discovered, I at once called a roll of the whole establishment — boys, masters, and servants. It was then that we ascertained that Lord Saltire had not been alone in his flight. Heidegger, the German master, was missing. His room was on the second floor, at the farther end of the building, facing the same way as Lord Saltire's. His bed had also been slept in, but he had apparently gone away partly dressed, since his shirt and socks were lying on the floor. He had undoubtedly let himself down by the ivy, for we could see the marks of his feet where he had landed on the lawn. His bicycle was kept in a small shed beside this lawn, and it also was gone.

"He had been with me for two years, and came with the best references, but he was a silent, morose man, not very popular either with masters or boys. No trace could be found of the fugitives, and now, on Thursday morning, we are as ignorant as we were on Tuesday. Inquiry was, of course, made at once at Holdernesse Hall. It is only a few miles away, and we imagined that, in some sudden attack of homesickness, he had gone back to his father, but nothing had been heard of him. The Duke is greatly agitated, and, as to me, you have seen yourselves the state of nervous prostration to which the suspense and the responsibility have reduced me. Mr. Holmes, if ever you put forward your full powers, I implore you to do so now, for never in your life could you have a case which is more worthy of them."

Sherlock Holmes had listened with the utmost intentness to the statement of the unhappy schoolmaster. His drawn brows and the deep furrow between them showed that he needed no exhortation to concentrate all his attention upon a problem which, apart from the tremendous interests involved must appeal so directly to his love of the complex and the unusual. He now drew out his notebook and jotted down one or two memoranda.

"You have been very remiss in not coming to me sooner," said he, severely. "You start me on my investigation with a very serious handicap. It is inconceivable, for example, that this ivy and this lawn would have yielded nothing to an expert observer."

"I am not to blame, Mr. Holmes. His Grace was extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. He was afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world. He has a deep horror of anything of the kind."

"But there has been some official investigation?"

"Yes, sir, and it has proved most disappointing. An apparent clue was at once obtained, since a boy and a young man were reported to have been seen leaving a neighbouring station by an early train. Only last night we had news that the couple had been hunted down in Liverpool, and they prove to have no connection whatever with the matter in hand. Then it was that in my despair and disappointment, after a sleepless night, I came straight to you by the early train."

"I suppose the local investigation was relaxed while this false clue was being followed up?"

"It was entirely dropped."

"So that three days have been wasted. The affair has been most deplorably handled."

"I feel it and admit it."

"And yet the problem should be capable of ultimate solution. I shall be very happy to look into it. Have you been able to trace any connection between the missing boy and this German master?"

"None at all."

"Was he in the master's class?"

"No, he never exchanged a word with him, so far as I know."

"That is certainly very singular. Had the boy a bicycle?"

"No."

"Was any other bicycle missing?"

"No."

"Is that certain?"

"Quite."

"Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest that this German rode off upon a bicycle in the dead of the night, bearing the boy in his arms?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what is the theory in your mind?"

"The bicycle may have been a blind. It may have been hidden somewhere, and the pair gone off on foot."

"Quite so, but it seems rather an absurd blind, does it not? Were there other bicycles in this shed?"

"Several."

"Would he not have hidden a couple, had he desired to give the idea that they had gone off upon them?"

"I suppose he would."

“Of course he would. The blind theory won’t do. But the incident is an admirable starting-point for an investigation. After all, a bicycle is not an easy thing to conceal or to destroy. One other question. Did anyone call to see the boy on the day before he disappeared?”

“No.”

“Did he get any letters?”

“Yes, one letter.”

“From whom?”

“From his father.”

“Do you open the boys’ letters?”

“No.”

“How do you know it was from the father?”

“The coat of arms was on the envelope, and it was addressed in the Duke’s peculiar stiff hand. Besides, the Duke remembers having written.”

“When had he a letter before that?”

“Not for several days.”

“Had he ever one from France?”

“No, never.

“You see the point of my questions, of course. Either the boy was carried off by force or he went of his own free will. In the latter case, you would expect that some prompting from outside would be needed to make so young a lad do such a thing. If he has had no visitors, that prompting must have come in letters; hence I try to find out who were his correspondents.”

“I fear I cannot help you much. His only correspondent, so far as I know, was his own father.”

“Who wrote to him on the very day of his disappearance. Were the relations between father and son very friendly?”

“His Grace is never very friendly with anyone. He is completely immersed in large public questions, and is rather inaccessible to all ordinary emotions. But he was always kind to the boy in his own way.”

“But the sympathies of the latter were with the mother?”

“Yes.”

“Did he say so?”

“No.”

“The Duke, then?”

“Good heaven, no!”

“Then how could you know?”

"I have had some confidential talks with Mr. James Wilder, his Graces secretary. It was he who gave me the information about Lord Saltire's feelings."

"I see. By the way, that last letter of the Dukes — was it found in the boy's room after he was gone?"

"No, he had taken it with him. I think, Mr. Holmes, it is time that we were leaving for Euston."

"I will order a four-wheeler. In a quarter of an hour, we shall be at your service. If you are telegraphing home, Mr. Huxtable, it would be well to allow the people in your neighbourhood to imagine that the inquiry is still going on in Liverpool, or wherever else that red herring led your pack. In the meantime I will do a little quiet work at your own doors, and perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it."

That evening found us in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, in which Dr. Huxtable's famous school is situated. It was already dark when we reached it. A card was lying on the hall table, and the butler whispered something to his master, who turned to us with agitation in every heavy feature.

"The Duke is here," said he. "The Duke and Mr. Wilder are in the study. Come, gentlemen, and I will introduce you."

I was, of course, familiar with the pictures of the famous statesman, but the man himself was very different from his representation. He was a tall and stately person, scrupulously dressed, with a drawn, thin face, and a nose which was grotesquely curved and long. His complexion was of a dead pallor, which was more startling by contrast with a long, dwindling beard of vivid red, which flowed down over his white waistcoat with his watch-chain gleaming through its fringe. Such was the stately presence who looked stonily at us from the centre of Dr. Huxtable's hearthrug. Beside him stood a very young man, whom I understood to be Wilder, the private secretary. He was small, nervous, alert with intelligent light-blue eyes and mobile features. It was he who at once, in an incisive and positive tone, opened the conversation.

"I called this morning, Dr. Huxtable, too late to prevent you from starting for London. I learned that your object was to invite Mr. Sherlock Holmes to undertake the conduct of this case. His Grace is surprised, Dr. Huxtable, that you should have taken such a step without consulting him."

"When I learned that the police had failed — —"

"His Grace is by no means convinced that the police have failed."

"But surely, Mr. Wilder — —"

"You are well aware, Dr. Huxtable, that his Grace is particularly anxious to avoid all public scandal. He prefers to take as few people as possible into his confidence."

"The matter can be easily remedied," said the brow-beaten doctor; "Mr. Sherlock Holmes can return to London by the morning train."

"Hardly that, Doctor, hardly that," said Holmes, in his blandest voice. "This northern air is invigorating and pleasant, so I propose to spend a few days upon your moors, and to occupy my mind as best I may. Whether I have the shelter of your roof or of the village inn is, of course, for you to decide."

I could see that the unfortunate doctor was in the last stage of indecision, from which he was rescued by the deep, sonorous voice of the red-bearded Duke, which boomed out like a dinner-gong.

"I agree with Mr. Wilder, Dr. Huxtable, that you would have done wisely to consult me. But since Mr. Holmes has already been taken into your confidence, it would indeed be absurd that we should not avail ourselves of his services. Far from going to the inn, Mr. Holmes, I should be pleased if you would come and stay with me at Holdernesse Hall."

"I thank your Grace. For the purposes of my investigation, I think that it would be wiser for me to remain at the scene of the mystery."

"Just as you like, Mr. Holmes. Any information which Mr. Wilder or I can give you is, of course, at your disposal."

"It will probably be necessary for me to see you at the Hall," said Holmes. "I would only ask you now, sir, whether you have formed any explanation in your own mind as to the mysterious disappearance of your son?"

"No sir I have not."

"Excuse me if I allude to that which is painful to you, but I have no alternative. Do you think that the Duchess had anything to do with the matter?"

The great minister showed perceptible hesitation.

"I do not think so," he said, at last.

"The other most obvious explanation is that the child has been kidnapped for the purpose of levying ransom. You have not had any demand of the sort?”

“No, sir.”

“One more question, your Grace. I understand that you wrote to your son upon the day when this incident occurred.”

“No, I wrote upon the day before.”

“Exactly. But he received it on that day?”

“Yes.”

“Was there anything in your letter which might have unbalanced him or induced him to take such a step?”

“No, sir, certainly not.”

“Did you post that letter yourself?”

The nobleman’s reply was interrupted by his secretary, who broke in with some heat.

“His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself,” said he. “This letter was laid with others upon the study table, and I myself put them in the post-bag.”

“You are sure this one was among them?”

“Yes, I observed it.”

“How many letters did your Grace write that day?”

“Twenty or thirty. I have a large correspondence. But surely this is somewhat irrelevant?”

“Not entirely,” said Holmes.

“For my own part,” the Duke continued, “I have advised the police to turn their attention to the south of France. I have already said that I do not believe that the Duchess would encourage so monstrous an action, but the lad had the most wrong-headed opinions, and it is possible that he may have fled to her, aided and abetted by this German. I think, Dr. Huxtable, that we will now return to the Hall.”

I could see that there were other questions which Holmes would have wished to put, but the nobleman’s abrupt manner showed that the interview was at an end. It was evident that to his intensely aristocratic nature this discussion of his intimate family affairs with a stranger was most abhorrent, and that he feared lest every fresh question would throw a fiercer light into the discreetly shadowed corners of his ducal history.

When the nobleman and his secretary had left, my friend flung himself at once with characteristic eagerness into the investigation.

The boy’s chamber was carefully examined, and yielded nothing save the absolute conviction that it was only through the window that he could have escaped. The German master’s room and effects gave no further clue. In his case a trailer of ivy had given way under his weight, and we saw by the light of a lantern the mark on the lawn where his heels had come down. That one dint in the short, green grass was the only material witness left of this inexplicable nocturnal flight.

Sherlock Holmes left the house alone, and only returned after eleven. He had obtained a large ordnance map of the neighbourhood, and this he brought into my room, where he laid it out on the bed, and, having balanced the lamp in the middle of it, he began to smoke over it, and occasionally to point out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

“This case grows upon me, Watson,” said he. “There are decidedly some points of interest in connection with it. In this early stage, I want you to realise those geographical features which may have a good deal to do with our investigation.

“Look at this map. This dark square is the Priory School. I’ll put a pin in it. Now, this line is the main road. You see that it runs east and west past the school, and you see also that there is no side road for a mile either way. If these two folk passed away by road, it was THIS road.”

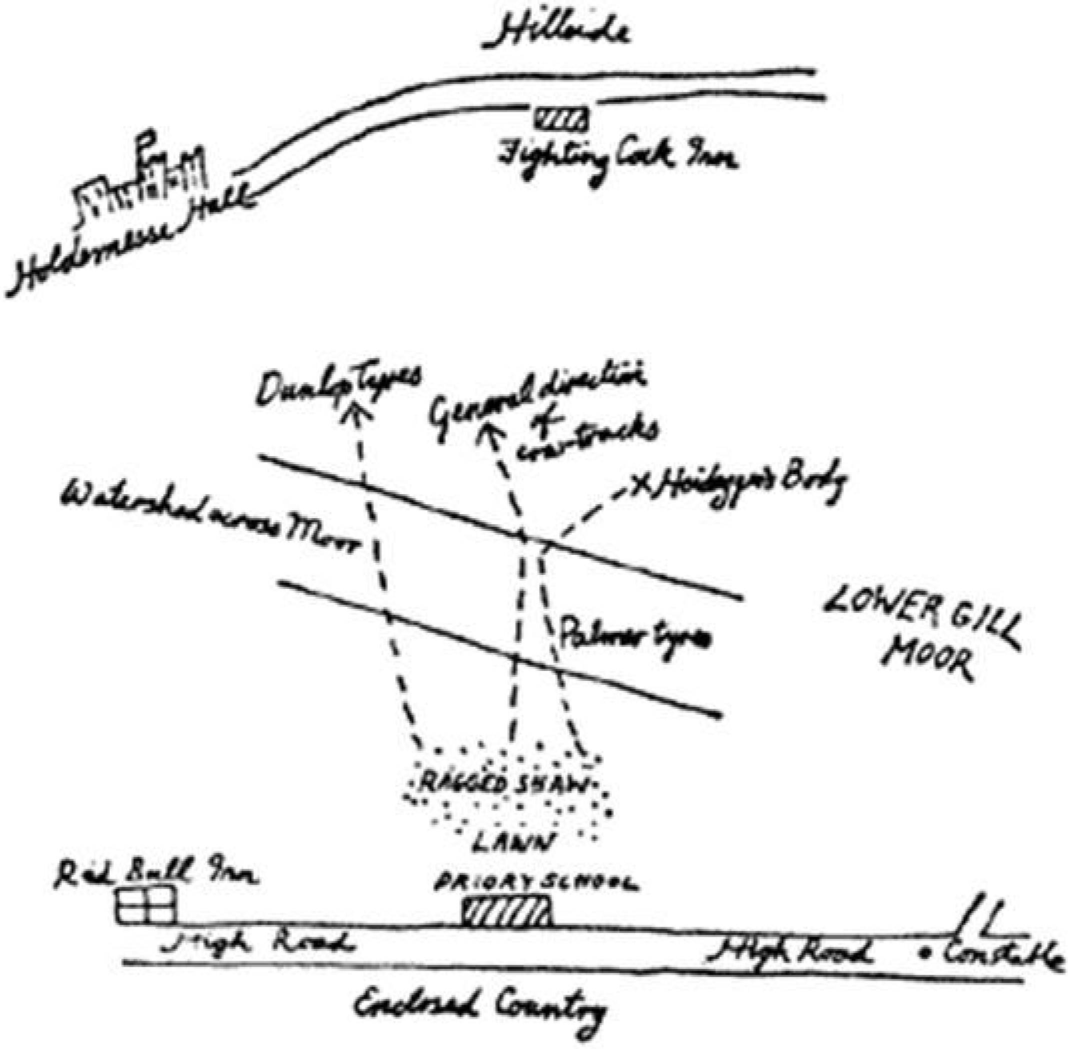
Hillside
Fighting Cock Inn
Holdernesse Hall
Dunlop Tyres
General direction of cow tracks
× Heidegger's Body
Watershed across Moor
Palmer tyres
LOWER GILL MOOR
RAGGED SHAW
LAWN
PRIORY SCHOOL
Red Bull Inn
High Road
High Road
• Constable
Enclosed Country

“Exactly.”

“By a singular and happy chance, we are able to some extent to check what passed along this road during the night in question. At this point, where my pipe is now resting, a county constable was on duty from twelve to six. It is, as you perceive, the first cross-road on the east side. This man declares that he was not absent from his post for an instant, and he is positive that neither boy nor man could have gone that way unseen. I have spoken with this policeman to-night and he appears to me to be a perfectly reliable person. That blocks this end. We have now to deal with the other. There is an inn here, the Red Bull, the landlady of which was ill. She had sent to Mackleton for a doctor, but he did not arrive until morning, being absent at another case. The people at the inn were alert all night, awaiting his coming, and one or other of them seems to have continually had an eye upon the road. They declare that no one passed. If their evidence is good, then we are fortunate enough to be able to block the west, and also to be able to say that the fugitives did NOT use the road at all.”

“But the bicycle?” I objected.

“Quite so. We will come to the bicycle presently. To continue our reasoning: if these people did not go by the road, they must have traversed the country to the north of the house or to the south of the house. That is certain. Let us weigh the one against the other. On the south of the house is, as you perceive, a large district of arable land, cut up into small fields, with stone walls between them. There, I admit that a bicycle is impossible. We can dismiss the idea. We turn to the country on the north. Here there lies a grove of trees, marked as the ‘Ragged Shaw,’ and on the farther side stretches a great rolling moor, Lower Gill Moor, extending for ten miles and sloping gradually upward. Here, at one side of this wilderness, is Holdernesse Hall, ten miles by road, but only six across the moor. It is a peculiarly desolate plain. A few moor farmers have small holdings, where they rear sheep and cattle. Except these, the plover and the curlew are the only inhabitants until you come to the Chesterfield high road. There is a church there, you see, a few cottages, and an inn. Beyond that the hills become precipitous. Surely it is here to the north that our quest must lie.”

“But the bicycle?” I persisted.

“Well, well!” said Holmes, impatiently. “A good cyclist does not need a high road. The moor is intersected with paths, and the moon was at the full. Halloa! what is this?”

There was an agitated knock at the door, and an instant afterwards Dr. Huxtable was in the room. In his hand he held a blue cricket-cap with a white chevron on the peak.

“At last we have a clue!” he cried. “Thank heaven! at last we are on the dear boy’s track! It is his cap.”

“Where was it found?”

“In the van of the gipsies who camped on the moor. They left on Tuesday. To-day the police traced them down and examined their caravan. This was found.”

“How do they account for it?”

“They shuffled and lied — said that they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. They know where he is, the rascals! Thank goodness, they are all safe under lock and key. Either the fear of the law or the Duke’s purse will certainly get out of them all that they know.”

“So far, so good,” said Holmes, when the doctor had at last left the room. “It at least bears out the theory that it is on the side of the Lower Gill Moor that we must hope for results. The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gipsies. Look here, Watson! There is a watercourse across the moor. You see it marked here in the map. In some parts it widens into a morass. This is particularly so in the region between Holdernesse Hall and the school. It is vain to look elsewhere for tracks in this dry weather, but at THAT point there is certainly a chance of some record being left. I will call you early to-morrow morning, and you and I will try if we can throw some little light upon the mystery.”

The day was just breaking when I woke to find the long, thin form of Holmes by my bedside. He was fully dressed, and had apparently already been out.

“I have done the lawn and the bicycle shed,” said, he. “I have also had a rumble through the Ragged Shaw. Now, Watson, there is cocoa ready in the next room. I must beg you to hurry, for we have a great day before us.”

His eyes shone, and his cheek was flushed with the exhilaration of the master workman who sees his work lie ready before him. A very different Holmes, this active, alert man, from the introspective and pallid dreamer of Baker Street. I felt, as I looked upon that supple, figure, alive with nervous energy, that it was indeed a strenuous day that awaited us.

And yet it opened in the blackest disappointment. With high hopes we struck across the peaty, russet moor, intersected with a thousand sheep paths, until we came to the broad, light-green belt which marked the morass between us and Holdernesse. Certainly, if the lad had gone homeward, he must have passed this, and he could not pass it without leaving his traces. But no sign of him or the German could be seen. With a darkening face my friend strode along the margin, eagerly observant of every muddy stain upon the mossy surface. Sheep-marks there were in profusion, and at one place, some miles down, cows had left their tracks. Nothing more.

“Check number one,” said Holmes, looking gloomily over the rolling expanse of the moor. “There is another morass down yonder, and a narrow neck between. Halloa! halloa! halloa! what have we here?”

We had come on a small black ribbon of pathway. In the middle of it, clearly marked on the sodden soil, was the track of a bicycle.

“Hurrah!” I cried. “We have it.”

But Holmes was shaking his head, and his face was puzzled and expectant rather than joyous.

"A bicycle, certainly, but not THE bicycle," said he. "I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tires. This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover. Heidegger's tires were Palmer's, leaving longitudinal stripes. Aveling, the mathematical master, was sure upon the point. Therefore, it is not Heidegger's track."

"The boy's, then?"

"Possibly, if we could prove a bicycle to have been in his possession. But this we have utterly failed to do. This track, as you perceive, was made by a rider who was going from the direction of the school."

"Or towards it?"

"No, no, my dear Watson. The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. It may or may not be connected with our inquiry, but we will follow it backwards before we go any farther."

We did so, and at the end of a few hundred yards lost the tracks as we emerged from the boggy portion of the moor. Following the path backwards, we picked out another spot, where a spring trickled across it. Here, once again, was the mark of the bicycle, though nearly obliterated by the hoofs of cows. After that there was no sign, but the path ran right on into Ragged Shaw, the wood which backed on to the school. From this wood the cycle must have emerged. Holmes sat down on a boulder and rested his chin in his hands. I had smoked two cigarettes before he moved.

"Well, well," said he, at last. "It is, of course, possible that a cunning man might change the tires of his bicycle in order to leave unfamiliar tracks. A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with. We will leave this question undecided and hark back to our morass again, for we have left a good deal unexplored."

We continued our systematic survey of the edge of the sodden portion of the moor, and soon our perseverance was gloriously rewarded. Right across the lower part of the bog lay a miry path. Holmes gave a cry of delight as he approached it. An impression like a fine bundle of telegraph wires ran down the centre of it. It was the Palmer tires.

“Here is Herr Heidegger, sure enough!” cried Holmes, exultantly. “My reasoning seems to have been pretty sound, Watson.”

“I congratulate you.”

“But we have a long way still to go. Kindly walk clear of the path. Now let us follow the trail. I fear that it will not lead very far.”

We found, however, as we advanced that this portion of the moor is intersected with soft patches, and, though we frequently lost sight of the track, we always succeeded in picking it up once more.

“Do you observe,” said Holmes, “that the rider is now undoubtedly forcing the pace? There can be no doubt of it. Look at this impression, where you get both tires clear. The one is as deep as the other. That can only mean that the rider is throwing his weight on to the handle-bar, as a man does when he is sprinting. By Jove! he has had a fall.”

There was a broad, irregular smudge covering some yards of the track. Then there were a few footmarks, and the tire reappeared once more.

“A side-slip,” I suggested.

Holmes held up a crumpled branch of flowering gorse. To my horror I perceived that the yellow blossoms were all dabbled with crimson. On the path, too, and among the heather were dark stains of clotted blood.

“Bad!” said Holmes. “Bad! Stand clear, Watson! Not an unnecessary footstep! What do I read here? He fell wounded — he stood up — he remounted — he proceeded. But there is no other track. Cattle on this side path. He was surely not gored by a bull? Impossible! But I see no traces of anyone else. We must push on, Watson. Surely, with stains as well as the track to guide us, he cannot escape us now.”

Our search was not a very long one. The tracks of the tire began to curve fantastically upon the wet and shining path. Suddenly, as I looked ahead, the gleam of metal caught my eye from amid the thick gorse-bushes. Out of them we dragged a bicycle, Palmer-tired, one pedal bent, and the whole front of it horribly smeared and slobbered with blood. On the other side of the bushes a shoe was projecting. We ran round, and there lay the unfortunate rider. He was a tall man, full-bearded, with spectacles, one glass of which had been knocked out. The cause of his death was a frightful blow upon the head, which had crushed in part of his skull. That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the vitality and courage of the man. He wore shoes, but no socks, and his open coat disclosed a nightshirt beneath it. It was undoubtedly the German master.

Holmes turned the body over reverently, and examined it with great attention. He then sat in deep thought for a time, and I could see by his ruffled brow that this grim discovery had not, in his opinion, advanced us much in our inquiry.

“It is a little difficult to know what to do, Watson,” said he, at last. “My own inclinations are to push this inquiry on, for we have already lost so much time that we cannot afford to waste another hour. On the other hand, we are bound to inform the police of the discovery, and to see that this poor fellow’s body is looked after.”

“I could take a note back.”

“But I need your company and assistance. Wait a bit! There is a fellow cutting peat up yonder. Bring him over here, and he will guide the police.”

I brought the peasant across, and Holmes dispatched the frightened man with a note to Dr. Huxtable.

“Now, Watson,” said he, “we have picked up two clues this morning. One is the bicycle with the Palmer tire, and we see what that has led to. The other is the bicycle with the patched Dunlop. Before we start to investigate that, let us try to realise what we do know, so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental.”

“First of all, I wish to impress upon you that the boy certainly left of his own free-will. He got down from his window and he went off, either alone or with someone. That is sure.”

I assented.

“Well, now, let us turn to this unfortunate German master. The boy was fully dressed when he fled. Therefore, he foresaw what he would do. But the German went without his socks. He certainly acted on very short notice.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Why did he go? Because, from his bedroom window, he saw the flight of the boy, because he wished to overtake him and bring him back. He seized his bicycle, pursued the lad, and in pursuing him met his death.”

“So it would seem.”

“Now I come to the critical part of my argument. The natural action of a man in pursuing a little boy would be to run after him. He would know that he could overtake him. But the German does not do so. He turns to his bicycle. I am told that he was an excellent cyclist. He would not do this, if he did not see that the boy had some swift means of escape.”

“The other bicycle.”

“Let us continue our reconstruction. He meets his death five miles from the school — not by a bullet, mark you, which even a lad might conceivably discharge, but by a savage blow dealt by a vigorous arm. The lad, then, HAD a companion in his flight. And the flight was a swift one, since it took five miles before an expert cyclist could overtake them. Yet we survey the ground round the scene of the tragedy. What do we find? A few cattle-tracks, nothing more. I took a wide sweep round, and there is no path within fifty yards. Another cyclist could have had nothing to do with the actual murder, nor were there any human foot-marks.”

“Holmes,” I cried, “this is impossible.”

“Admirable!” he said. “A most illuminating remark. It IS impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong. Yet you saw for yourself. Can you suggest any fallacy?”

“He could not have fractured his skull in a fall?”

“In a morass, Watson?”

“I am at my wit’s end.”

“Tut, tut, we have solved some worse problems. At least we have plenty of material, if we can only use it. Come, then, and, having exhausted the Palmer, let us see what the Dunlop with the patched cover has to offer us.”

We picked up the track and followed it onward for some distance, but soon the moor rose into a long, heather-tufted curve, and we left the watercourse behind us. No further help from tracks could be hoped for. At the spot where we saw the last of the Dunlop tire it might equally have led to Holdernesse Hall, the stately towers of which rose some miles to our left, or to a low, gray village which lay in front of us and marked the position of the Chesterfield high road.

As we approached the forbidding and squalid inn, with the sign of a game-cock above the door, Holmes gave a sudden groan, and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling. He had had one of those violent strains of the ankle which leave a man helpless. With difficulty he limped up to the door, where a squat, dark, elderly man was smoking a black clay pipe.

“How are you, Mr. Reuben Hayes?” said Holmes.

“Who are you, and how do you get my name so pat?” the countryman answered, with a suspicious flash of a pair of cunning eyes.

"Well, it's printed on the board above your head. It's easy to see a man who is master of his own house. I suppose you haven't such a thing as a carriage in your stables?"

"No, I have not."

"I can hardly put my foot to the ground."

"Don't put it to the ground."

"But I can't walk."

"Well, then hop."

Mr. Reuben Hayes's manner was far from gracious, but Holmes took it with admirable good-humour.

"Look here, my man," said he. "This is really rather an awkward fix for me. I don't mind how I get on."

"Neither do I," said the morose landlord.

"The matter is very important. I would offer you a sovereign for the use of a bicycle."

The landlord pricked up his ears.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Holdernesse Hall."

"Pals of the Dook, I suppose?" said the landlord, surveying our mud-stained garments with ironical eyes.

Holmes laughed good-naturedly.

"He'll be glad to see us, anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because we bring him news of his lost son."

The landlord gave a very visible start.

"What, you're on his track?"

"He has been heard of in Liverpool. They expect to get him every hour."

Again a swift change passed over the heavy, unshaven face. His manner was suddenly genial.

"I've less reason to wish the Dook well than most men," said he, "for I was head coachman once, and cruel bad he treated me. It was him that sacked me without a character on the word of a lying corn-chandler. But I'm glad to hear that the young lord was heard of in Liverpool, and I'll help you to take the news to the Hall."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "We'll have some food first. Then you can bring round the bicycle."

"I haven't got a bicycle."

Holmes held up a sovereign.

“I tell you, man, that I haven’t got one. I’ll let you have two horses as far as the Hall.”

“Well, well,” said Holmes, “we’ll talk about it when we’ve had something to eat.”

When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen, it was astonishing how rapidly that sprained ankle recovered. It was nearly nightfall, and we had eaten nothing since early morning, so that we spent some time over our meal. Holmes was lost in thought, and once or twice he walked over to the window and stared earnestly out. It opened on to a squalid courtyard. In the far corner was a smithy, where a grimy lad was at work. On the other side were the stables. Holmes had sat down again after one of these excursions, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with a loud exclamation.

“By heaven, Watson, I believe that I’ve got it!” he cried. “Yes, yes, it must be so. Watson, do you remember seeing any cow-tracks to-day?”

“Yes, several.”

“Where?”

“Well, everywhere. They were at the morass, and again on the path, and again near where poor Heidegger met his death.”

“Exactly. Well, now, Watson, how many cows did you see on the moor?”

“I don’t remember seeing any.”

“Strange, Watson, that we should see tracks all along our line, but never a cow on the whole moor. Very strange, Watson, eh?”

“Yes, it is strange.”

“Now, Watson, make an effort, throw your mind back. Can you see those tracks upon the path?”

“Yes, I can.”

“Can you recall that the tracks were sometimes like that, Watson,” — he arranged a number of bread-crumbs in this fashion — : : : : :—”and sometimes like this” — : . : . : . : .—”and occasionally like this” — . : . : . : . “Can you remember that?”

“No, I cannot.”

“But I can. I could swear to it. However, we will go back at our leisure and verify it. What a blind beetle I have been, not to draw my conclusion.”

“And what is your conclusion?”

“Only that it is a remarkable cow which walks, canters, and gallops. By George! Watson, it was no brain of a country publican that thought out such a blind as that. The coast seems to be clear, save for that lad in the smithy. Let us slip out and see what we can see."

There were two rough-haired, unkempt horses in the tumble-down stable. Holmes raised the hind leg of one of them and laughed aloud.

"Old shoes, but newly shod — old shoes, but new nails. This case deserves to be a classic. Let us go across to the smithy."

The lad continued his work without regarding us. I saw Holmes's eye darting to right and left among the litter of iron and wood which was scattered about the floor. Suddenly, however, we heard a step behind us, and there was the landlord, his heavy eyebrows drawn over his savage eyes, his swarthy features convulsed with passion. He held a short, metal-headed stick in his hand, and he advanced in so menacing a fashion that I was right glad to feel the revolver in my pocket.

"You infernal spies!" the man cried. "What are you doing there?"

"Why, Mr. Reuben Hayes," said Holmes, coolly, "one might think that you were afraid of our finding something out."

The man mastered himself with a violent effort, and his grim mouth loosened into a false laugh, which was more menacing than his frown.

"You're welcome to all you can find out in my smithy," said he. "But look here, mister, I don't care for folk poking about my place without my leave, so the sooner you pay your score and get out of this the better I shall be pleased."

"All right, Mr. Hayes, no harm meant," said Holmes. "We have been having a look at your horses, but I think I'll walk, after all. It's not far, I believe."

"Not more than two miles to the Hall gates. That's the road to the left." He watched us with sullen eyes until we had left his premises.

We did not go very far along the road, for Holmes stopped the instant that the curve hid us from the landlord's view.

"We were warm, as the children say, at that inn," said he. "I seem to grow colder every step that I take away from it. No, no, I can't possibly leave it."

"I am convinced," said I, "that this Reuben Hayes knows all about it. A more self-evident villain I never saw."

"Oh! he impressed you in that way, did he? There are the horses, there is the smithy. Yes, it is an interesting place, this Fighting Cock. I think we shall have another look at it in an unobtrusive way."

A long, sloping hillside, dotted with gray limestone boulders, stretched behind us. We had turned off the road, and were making our way up the hill, when, looking in the direction of Holdernesse Hall, I saw a cyclist coming swiftly along.

"Get down, Watson!" cried Holmes, with a heavy hand upon my shoulder. We had hardly sunk from view when the man flew past us on the road. Amid a rolling cloud of dust, I caught a glimpse of a pale, agitated face — a face with horror in every lineament, the mouth open, the eyes staring wildly in front. It was like some strange caricature of the dapper James Wilder whom we had seen the night before.

"The Duke's secretary!" cried Holmes. "Come, Watson, let us see what he does."

We scrambled from rock to rock, until in a few moments we had made our way to a point from which we could see the front door of the inn. Wilder's bicycle was leaning against the wall beside it. No one was moving about the house, nor could we catch a glimpse of any faces at the windows. Slowly the twilight crept down as the sun sank behind the high towers of Holdernesse Hall. Then, in the gloom, we saw the two side-lamps of a trap light up in the stable-yard of the inn, and shortly afterwards heard the rattle of hoofs, as it wheeled out into the road and tore off at a furious pace in the direction of Chesterfield.

"What do you make of that, Watson?" Holmes whispered.

"It looks like a flight."

"A single man in a dog-cart, so far as I could see. Well, it certainly was not Mr. James Wilder, for there he is at the door."

A red square of light had sprung out of the darkness. In the middle of it was the black figure of the secretary, his head advanced, peering out into the night. It was evident that he was expecting someone. Then at last there were steps in the road, a second figure was visible for an instant against the light, the door shut, and all was black once more. Five minutes later a lamp was lit in a room upon the first floor.

"It seems to be a curious class of custom that is done by the Fighting Cock," said Holmes.

"The bar is on the other side."

"Quite so. These are what one may call the private guests. Now, what in the world is Mr. James Wilder doing in that den at this hour of night, and who is the companion who comes to meet him there? Come, Watson, we must really take a risk and try to investigate this a little more closely."

Together we stole down to the road and crept across to the door of the inn. The bicycle still leaned against the wall. Holmes struck a match and held it to the back wheel, and I heard him chuckle as the light fell upon a patched Dunlop tire. Up above us was the lighted window.

"I must have a peep through that, Watson. If you bend your back and support yourself upon the wall, I think that I can manage."

An instant later, his feet were on my shoulders, but he was hardly up before he was down again.

"Come, my friend," said he, "our day's work has been quite long enough. I think that we have gathered all that we can. It's a long walk to the school, and the sooner we get started the better."

He hardly opened his lips during that weary trudge across the moor, nor would he enter the school when he reached it, but went on to Mackleton Station, whence he could send some telegrams. Late at night I heard him consoling Dr. Huxtable, prostrated by the tragedy of his master's death, and later still he entered my room as alert and vigorous as he had been when he started in the morning. "All goes well, my friend," said he. "I promise that before to-morrow evening we shall have reached the solution of the mystery."

At eleven o'clock next morning my friend and I were walking up the famous yew avenue of Holdernesse Hall. We were ushered through the magnificent Elizabethan doorway and into his Grace's study. There we found Mr. James Wilder, demure and courtly, but with some trace of that wild terror of the night before still lurking in his furtive eyes and in his twitching features.

"You have come to see his Grace? I am sorry, but the fact is that the Duke is far from well. He has been very much upset by the tragic news. We received a telegram from Dr. Huxtable yesterday afternoon, which told us of your discovery."

"I must see the Duke, Mr. Wilder."

"But he is in his room."

"Then I must go to his room."

"I believe he is in his bed."

"I will see him there."

Holmes’s cold and inexorable manner showed the secretary that it was useless to argue with him.

“Very good, Mr. Holmes, I will tell him that you are here.”

After an hour’s delay, the great nobleman appeared. His face was more cadaverous than ever, his shoulders had rounded, and he seemed to me to be an altogether older man than he had been the morning before. He greeted us with a stately courtesy and seated himself at his desk, his red beard streaming down on the table.

“Well, Mr. Holmes?” said he.

But my friend’s eyes were fixed upon the secretary, who stood by his master’s chair.

“I think, your Grace, that I could speak more freely in Mr. Wilder’s absence.”

The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes.

“If your Grace wishes — —”

“Yes, yes, you had better go. Now, Mr. Holmes, what have you to say?”

My friend waited until the door had closed behind the retreating secretary.

“The fact is, your Grace,” said he, “that my colleague, Dr. Watson, and myself had an assurance from Dr. Huxtable that a reward had been offered in this case. I should like to have this confirmed from your own lips.”

“Certainly, Mr. Holmes.”

“It amounted, if I am correctly informed, to five thousand pounds to anyone who will tell you where your son is?”

“Exactly.”

“And another thousand to the man who will name the person or persons who keep him in custody?”

“Exactly.”

“Under the latter heading is included, no doubt, not only those who may have taken him away, but also those who conspire to keep him in his present position?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the Duke, impatiently. “If you do your work well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you will have no reason to complain of niggardly treatment.”

My friend rubbed his thin hands together with an appearance of avidity which was a surprise to me, who knew his frugal tastes.

"I fancy that I see your Grace's check-book upon the table," said he. "I should be glad if you would make me out a check for six thousand pounds. It would be as well, perhaps, for you to cross it. The Capital and Counties Bank, Oxford Street branch are my agents."

His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair and looked stonily at my friend.

"Is this a joke, Mr. Holmes? It is hardly a subject for pleasantry."

"Not at all, your Grace. I was never more earnest in my life."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I have earned the reward. I know where your son is, and I know some, at least, of those who are holding him."

The Duke's beard had turned more aggressively red than ever against his ghastly white face.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"He is, or was last night, at the Fighting Cock Inn, about two miles from your park gate."

The Duke fell back in his chair.

"And whom do you accuse?"

Sherlock Holmes's answer was an astounding one. He stepped swiftly forward and touched the Duke upon the shoulder.

"I accuse YOU," said he. "And now, your Grace, I'll trouble you for that check."

Never shall I forget the Duke's appearance as he sprang up and clawed with his hands, like one who is sinking into an abyss. Then, with an extraordinary effort of aristocratic self-command, he sat down and sank his face in his hands. It was some minutes before he spoke.

"How much do you know?" he asked at last, without raising his head.

"I saw you together last night."

"Does anyone else beside your friend know?"

"I have spoken to no one."

The Duke took a pen in his quivering fingers and opened his check-book.

"I shall be as good as my word, Mr. Holmes. I am about to write your check, however unwelcome the information which you have gained may be to me. When the offer was first made, I little thought the turn which events might take. But you and your friend are men of discretion, Mr. Holmes?"

"I hardly understand your Grace."

“I must put it plainly, Mr. Holmes. If only you two know of this incident, there is no reason why it should go any farther. I think twelve thousand pounds is the sum that I owe you, is it not?”

But Holmes smiled and shook his head.

“I fear, your Grace, that matters can hardly be arranged so easily. There is the death of this schoolmaster to be accounted for.”

“But James knew nothing of that. You cannot hold him responsible for that. It was the work of this brutal ruffian whom he had the misfortune to employ.”

“I must take the view, your Grace, that when a man embarks upon a crime, he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it.”

“Morally, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. But surely not in the eyes of the law. A man cannot be condemned for a murder at which he was not present, and which he loathes and abhors as much as you do. The instant that he heard of it he made a complete confession to me, so filled was he with horror and remorse. He lost not an hour in breaking entirely with the murderer. Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save him — you must save him! I tell you that you must save him!” The Duke had dropped the last attempt at self-command, and was pacing the room with a convulsed face and with his clenched hands raving in the air. At last he mastered himself and sat down once more at his desk. “I appreciate your conduct in coming here before you spoke to anyone else,” said he. “At least, we may take counsel how far we can minimize this hideous scandal.”

“Exactly,” said Holmes. “I think, your Grace, that this can only be done by absolute frankness between us. I am disposed to help your Grace to the best of my ability, but, in order to do so, I must understand to the last detail how the matter stands. I realise that your words applied to Mr. James Wilder, and that he is not the murderer.”

“No, the murderer has escaped.”

Sherlock Holmes smiled demurely.

“Your Grace can hardly have heard of any small reputation which I possess, or you would not imagine that it is so easy to escape me. Mr. Reuben Hayes was arrested at Chesterfield, on my information, at eleven o’clock last night. I had a telegram from the head of the local police before I left the school this morning.”

The Duke leaned back in his chair and stared with amazement at my friend.

“You seem to have powers that are hardly human,” said he. “So Reuben Hayes is taken? I am right glad to hear it, if it will not react upon the fate of James.”

“Your secretary?”

“No, sir, my son.”

It was Holmes’s turn to look astonished.

“I confess that this is entirely new to me, your Grace. I must beg you to be more explicit.”

“I will conceal nothing from you. I agree with you that complete frankness, however painful it may be to me, is the best policy in this desperate situation to which James’s folly and jealousy have reduced us. When I was a very young man, Mr. Holmes, I loved with such a love as comes only once in a lifetime. I offered the lady marriage, but she refused it on the grounds that such a match might mar my career. Had she lived, I would certainly never have married anyone else. She died, and left this one child, whom for her sake I have cherished and cared for. I could not acknowledge the paternity to the world, but I gave him the best of educations, and since he came to manhood I have kept him near my person. He surmised my secret, and has presumed ever since upon the claim which he has upon me, and upon his power of provoking a scandal which would be abhorrent to me. His presence had something to do with the unhappy issue of my marriage. Above all, he hated my young legitimate heir from the first with a persistent hatred. You may well ask me why, under these circumstances, I still kept James under my roof. I answer that it was because I could see his mother’s face in his, and that for her dear sake there was no end to my long-suffering. All her pretty ways too — there was not one of them which he could not suggest and bring back to my memory. I COULD not send him away. But I feared so much lest he should do Arthur — that is, Lord Saltire — a mischief, that I dispatched him for safety to Dr. Huxtable’s school.

“James came into contact with this fellow Hayes, because the man was a tenant of mine, and James acted as agent. The fellow was a rascal from the beginning, but, in some extraordinary way, James became intimate with him. He had always a taste for low company. When James determined to kidnap Lord Saltire, it was of this man’s service that he availed himself. You remember that I wrote to Arthur upon that last day. Well, James opened the letter and inserted a note asking Arthur to meet him in a little wood called the Ragged Shaw, which is near to the school. He used the Duchess's name, and in that way got the boy to come. That evening James bicycled over — I am telling you what he has himself confessed to me — and he told Arthur, whom he met in the wood, that his mother longed to see him, that she was awaiting him on the moor, and that if he would come back into the wood at midnight he would find a man with a horse, who would take him to her. Poor Arthur fell into the trap. He came to the appointment, and found this fellow Hayes with a led pony. Arthur mounted, and they set off together. It appears — though this James only heard yesterday — that they were pursued, that Hayes struck the pursuer with his stick, and that the man died of his injuries. Hayes brought Arthur to his public-house, the Fighting Cock, where he was confined in an upper room, under the care of Mrs. Hayes, who is a kindly woman, but entirely under the control of her brutal husband.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, that was the state of affairs when I first saw you two days ago. I had no more idea of the truth than you. You will ask me what was James's motive in doing such a deed. I answer that there was a great deal which was unreasoning and fanatical in the hatred which he bore my heir. In his view he should himself have been heir of all my estates, and he deeply resented those social laws which made it impossible. At the same time, he had a definite motive also. He was eager that I should break the entail, and he was of opinion that it lay in my power to do so. He intended to make a bargain with me — to restore Arthur if I would break the entail, and so make it possible for the estate to be left to him by will. He knew well that I should never willingly invoke the aid of the police against him. I say that he would have proposed such a bargain to me, but he did not actually do so, for events moved too quickly for him, and he had not time to put his plans into practice.

"What brought all his wicked scheme to wreck was your discovery of this man Heidegger's dead body. James was seized with horror at the news. It came to us yesterday, as we sat together in this study. Dr. Huxtable had sent a telegram. James was so overwhelmed with grief and agitation that my suspicions, which had never been entirely absent, rose instantly to a certainty, and I taxed him with the deed. He made a complete voluntary confession. Then he implored me to keep his secret for three days longer, so as to give his wretched accomplice a chance of saving his guilty life. I yielded — as I have always yielded — to his prayers, and instantly James hurried off to the Fighting Cock to warn Hayes and give him the means of flight. I could not go there by daylight without provoking comment, but as soon as night fell I hurried off to see my dear Arthur. I found him safe and well, but horrified beyond expression by the dreadful deed he had witnessed. In deference to my promise, and much against my will, I consented to leave him there for three days, under the charge of Mrs. Hayes, since it was evident that it was impossible to inform the police where he was without telling them also who was the murderer, and I could not see how that murderer could be punished without ruin to my unfortunate James. You asked for frankness, Mr. Holmes, and I have taken you at your word, for I have now told you everything without an attempt at circumlocution or concealment. Do you in turn be as frank with me."

"I will," said Holmes. "In the first place, your Grace, I am bound to tell you that you have placed yourself in a most serious position in the eyes of the law. You have condoned a felony, and you have aided the escape of a murderer, for I cannot doubt that any money which was taken by James Wilder to aid his accomplice in his flight came from your Grace's purse."

The Duke bowed his assent.

"This is, indeed, a most serious matter. Even more culpable in my opinion, your Grace, is your attitude towards your younger son. You leave him in this den for three days."

"Under solemn promises — —"

"What are promises to such people as these? You have no guarantee that he will not be spirited away again. To humour your guilty elder son, you have exposed your innocent younger son to imminent and unnecessary danger. It was a most unjustifiable action."

The proud lord of Holdernesse was not accustomed to be so rated in his own ducal hall. The blood flushed into his high forehead, but his conscience held him dumb.

"I will help you, but on one condition only. It is that you ring for the footman and let me give such orders as I like."

Without a word, the Duke pressed the electric bell. A servant entered.

"You will be glad to hear," said Holmes, "that your young master is found. It is the Duke's desire that the carriage shall go at once to the Fighting Cock Inn to bring Lord Saltire home.

"Now," said Holmes, when the rejoicing lackey had disappeared, "having secured the future, we can afford to be more lenient with the past. I am not in an official position, and there is no reason, so long as the ends of justice are served, why I should disclose all that I know. As to Hayes, I say nothing. The gallows awaits him, and I would do nothing to save him from it. What he will divulge I cannot tell, but I have no doubt that your Grace could make him understand that it is to his interest to be silent. From the police point of view he will have kidnapped the boy for the purpose of ransom. If they do not themselves find it out, I see no reason why I should prompt them to take a broader point of view. I would warn your Grace, however, that the continued presence of Mr. James Wilder in your household can only lead to misfortune."

"I understand that, Mr. Holmes, and it is already settled that he shall leave me forever, and go to seek his fortune in Australia."

"In that case, your Grace, since you have yourself stated that any unhappiness in your married life was caused by his presence I would suggest that you make such amends as you can to the Duchess, and that you try to resume those relations which have been so unhappily interrupted."

"That also I have arranged, Mr. Holmes. I wrote to the Duchess this morning."

"In that case," said Holmes, rising, "I think that my friend and I can congratulate ourselves upon several most happy results from our little visit to the North. There is one other small point upon which I desire some light. This fellow Hayes had shod his horses with shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. Was it from Mr. Wilder that he learned so extraordinary a device?"

The Duke stood in thought for a moment, with a look of intense surprise on his face. Then he opened a door and showed us into a large room furnished as a museum. He led the way to a glass case in a corner, and pointed to the inscription.

"These shoes," it ran, "were dug up in the moat of Holdernesse Hall. They are for the use of horses, but they are shaped below with a cloven foot of iron, so as to throw pursuers off the track. They are supposed to have belonged to some of the marauding Barons of Holdernesse in the Middle Ages."

Holmes opened the case, and moistening his finger he passed it along the shoe. A thin film of recent mud was left upon his skin.

"Thank you," said he, as he replaced the glass. "It is the second most interesting object that I have seen in the North."

“And the first?”

Holmes folded up his check and placed it carefully in his notebook. “I am a poor man,” said he, as he patted it affectionately, and thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket.

THE ADVENTURE OF BLACK PETER

I have never known my friend to be in better form, both mental and physical, than in the year ‘95. His increasing fame had brought with it an immense practice, and I should be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who crossed our humble threshold in Baker Street. Holmes, however, like all great artists, lived for his art’s sake, and, save in the case of the Duke of Holdernesse, I have seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services. So unworldly was he — or so capricious — that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.

In this memorable year ‘95, a curious and incongruous succession of cases had engaged his attention, ranging from his famous investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca — an inquiry which was carried out by him at the express desire of His Holiness the Pope — down to his arrest of Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, which removed a plague-spot from the East End of London. Close on the heels of these two famous cases came the tragedy of Woodman’s Lee, and the very obscure circumstances which surrounded the death of Captain Peter Carey. No record of the doings of Mr. Sherlock Holmes would be complete which did not include some account of this very unusual affair.

During the first week of July, my friend had been absent so often and so long from our lodgings that I knew he had something on hand. The fact that several rough-looking men called during that time and inquired for Captain Basil made me understand that Holmes was working somewhere under one of the numerous disguises and names with which he concealed his own formidable identity. He had at least five small refuges in different parts of London, in which he was able to change his personality. He said nothing of his business to me, and it was not my habit to force a confidence. The first positive sign which he gave me of the direction which his investigation was taking was an extraordinary one. He had gone out before breakfast, and I had sat down to mine when he strode into the room, his hat upon his head and a huge barbed-headed spear tucked like an umbrella under his arm.

“Good gracious, Holmes!” I cried. “You don’t mean to say that you have been walking about London with that thing?”

“I drove to the butcher’s and back.”

“The butcher’s?”

“And I return with an excellent appetite. There can be no question, my dear Watson, of the value of exercise before breakfast. But I am prepared to bet that you will not guess the form that my exercise has taken.”

“I will not attempt it.”

He chuckled as he poured out the coffee.

“If you could have looked into Allardyce’s back shop, you would have seen a dead pig swung from a hook in the ceiling, and a gentleman in his shirt sleeves furiously stabbing at it with this weapon. I was that energetic person, and I have satisfied myself that by no exertion of my strength can I transfix the pig with a single blow. Perhaps you would care to try?”

“Not for worlds. But why were you doing this?”

“Because it seemed to me to have an indirect bearing upon the mystery of Woodman’s Lee. Ah, Hopkins, I got your wire last night, and I have been expecting you. Come and join us.”

Our visitor was an exceedingly alert man, thirty years of age, dressed in a quiet tweed suit, but retaining the erect bearing of one who was accustomed to official uniform. I recognised him at once as Stanley Hopkins, a young police inspector, for whose future Holmes had high hopes, while he in turn professed the admiration and respect of a pupil for the scientific methods of the famous amateur. Hopkins’s brow was clouded, and he sat down with an air of deep dejection.

“No, thank you, sir. I breakfasted before I came round. I spent the night in town, for I came up yesterday to report.”

“And what had you to report?”

“Failure, sir, absolute failure.”

“You have made no progress?”

“None.”

“Dear me! I must have a look at the matter.”

“I wish to heavens that you would, Mr. Holmes. It’s my first big chance, and I am at my wit’s end. For goodness’ sake, come down and lend me a hand.”

“Well, well, it just happens that I have already read all the available evidence, including the report of the inquest, with some care. By the way, what do you make of that tobacco pouch, found on the scene of the crime? Is there no clue there?”

Hopkins looked surprised.

“It was the man’s own pouch, sir. His initials were inside it. And it was of sealskin, — and he was an old sealer.”

“But he had no pipe.”

“No, sir, we could find no pipe. Indeed, he smoked very little, and yet he might have kept some tobacco for his friends.”

“No doubt. I only mention it because, if I had been handling the case, I should have been inclined to make that the starting-point of my investigation. However, my friend, Dr. Watson, knows nothing of this matter, and I should be none the worse for hearing the sequence of events once more. Just give us some short sketches of the essentials.”

Stanley Hopkins drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

“I have a few dates here which will give you the career of the dead man, Captain Peter Carey. He was born in ‘45 — fifty years of age. He was a most daring and successful seal and whale fisher. In 1883 he commanded the steam sealer SEA UNICORN, of Dundee. He had then had several successful voyages in succession, and in the following year, 1884, he retired. After that he travelled for some years, and finally he bought a small place called Woodman’s Lee, near Forest Row, in Sussex. There he has lived for six years, and there he died just a week ago to-day.

“There were some most singular points about the man. In ordinary life, he was a strict Puritan — a silent, gloomy fellow. His household consisted of his wife, his daughter, aged twenty, and two female servants. These last were continually changing, for it was never a very cheery situation, and sometimes it became past all bearing. The man was an intermittent drunkard, and when he had the fit on him he was a perfect fiend. He has been known to drive his wife and daughter out of doors in the middle of the night and flog them through the park until the whole village outside the gates was aroused by their screams.

“He was summoned once for a savage assault upon the old vicar, who had called upon him to remonstrate with him upon his conduct. In short, Mr. Holmes, you would go far before you found a more dangerous man than Peter Carey, and I have heard that he bore the same character when he commanded his ship. He was known in the trade as Black Peter, and the name was given him, not only on account of his swarthy features and the colour of his huge beard, but for the humours which were the terror of all around him. I need not say that he was loathed and avoided by every one of his neighbours, and that I have not heard one single word of sorrow about his terrible end.

"You must have read in the account of the inquest about the man's cabin, Mr. Holmes, but perhaps your friend here has not heard of it. He had built himself a wooden outhouse — he always called it the 'cabin' — a few hundred yards from his house, and it was here that he slept every night. It was a little, single-roomed hut, sixteen feet by ten. He kept the key in his pocket, made his own bed, cleaned it himself, and allowed no other foot to cross the threshold. There are small windows on each side, which were covered by curtains and never opened. One of these windows was turned towards the high road, and when the light burned in it at night the folk used to point it out to each other and wonder what Black Peter was doing in there. That's the window, Mr. Holmes, which gave us one of the few bits of positive evidence that came out at the inquest.

"You remember that a stonemason, named Slater, walking from Forest Row about one o'clock in the morning — two days before the murder — stopped as he passed the grounds and looked at the square of light still shining among the trees. He swears that the shadow of a man's head turned sideways was clearly visible on the blind, and that this shadow was certainly not that of Peter Carey, whom he knew well. It was that of a bearded man, but the beard was short and bristled forward in a way very different from that of the captain. So he says, but he had been two hours in the public-house, and it is some distance from the road to the window. Besides, this refers to the Monday, and the crime was done upon the Wednesday.

"On the Tuesday, Peter Carey was in one of his blackest moods, flushed with drink and as savage as a dangerous wild beast. He roamed about the house, and the women ran for it when they heard him coming. Late in the evening, he went down to his own hut. About two o'clock the following morning, his daughter, who slept with her window open, heard a most fearful yell from that direction, but it was no unusual thing for him to bawl and shout when he was in drink, so no notice was taken. On rising at seven, one of the maids noticed that the door of the hut was open, but so great was the terror which the man caused that it was midday before anyone would venture down to see what had become of him. Peeping into the open door, they saw a sight which sent them flying, with white faces, into the village. Within an hour, I was on the spot and had taken over the case.

"Well, I have fairly steady nerves, as you know, Mr. Holmes, but I give you my word, that I got a shake when I put my head into that little house. It was droning like a harmonium with the flies and bluebottles, and the floor and walls were like a slaughter-house. He had called it a cabin, and a cabin it was, sure enough, for you would have thought that you were in a ship. There was a bunk at one end, a sea-chest, maps and charts, a picture of the SEA UNICORN, a line of logbooks on a shelf, all exactly as one would expect to find it in a captain's room. And there, in the middle of it, was the man himself — his face twisted like a lost soul in torment, and his great brindled beard stuck upward in his agony. Right through his broad breast a steel harpoon had been driven, and it had sunk deep into the wood of the wall behind him. He was pinned like a beetle on a card. Of course, he was quite dead, and had been so from the instant that he had uttered that last yell of agony.

"I know your methods, sir, and I applied them. Before I permitted anything to be moved, I examined most carefully the ground outside, and also the floor of the room. There were no footmarks."

"Meaning that you saw none?"

"I assure you, sir, that there were none."

"My good Hopkins, I have investigated many crimes, but I have never yet seen one which was committed by a flying creature. As long as the criminal remains upon two legs so long must there be some indentation, some abrasion, some trifling displacement which can be detected by the scientific searcher. It is incredible that this blood-bespattered room contained no trace which could have aided us. I understand, however, from the inquest that there were some objects which you failed to overlook?"

The young inspector winced at my companion's ironical comments.

"I was a fool not to call you in at the time Mr. Holmes. However, that's past praying for now. Yes, there were several objects in the room which called for special attention. One was the harpoon with which the deed was committed. It had been snatched down from a rack on the wall. Two others remained there, and there was a vacant place for the third. On the stock was engraved 'SS. SEA UNICORN, Dundee.' This seemed to establish that the crime had been done in a moment of fury, and that the murderer had seized the first weapon which came in his way. The fact that the crime was committed at two in the morning, and yet Peter Carey was fully dressed, suggested that he had an appointment with the murderer, which is borne out by the fact that a bottle of rum and two dirty glasses stood upon the table."

"Yes," said Holmes; "I think that both inferences are permissible. Was there any other spirit but rum in the room?"

"Yes, there was a tantalus containing brandy and whisky on the sea-chest. It is of no importance to us, however, since the decanters were full, and it had therefore not been used."

"For all that, its presence has some significance," said Holmes. "However, let us hear some more about the objects which do seem to you to bear upon the case."

"There was this tobacco-pouch upon the table."

"What part of the table?"

"It lay in the middle. It was of coarse sealskin — the straight-haired skin, with a leather thong to bind it. Inside was 'P.C.' on the flap. There was half an ounce of strong ship's tobacco in it."

"Excellent! What more?"

Stanley Hopkins drew from his pocket a drab-covered notebook. The outside was rough and worn, the leaves discoloured. On the first page were written the initials "J.H.N." and the date "1883." Holmes laid it on the table and examined it in his minute way, while Hopkins and I gazed over each shoulder. On the second page were the printed letters "C.P.R.," and then came several sheets of numbers. Another heading was "Argentine," another "Costa Rica," and another "San Paulo," each with pages of signs and figures after it.

"What do you make of these?" asked Holmes.

"They appear to be lists of Stock Exchange securities. I thought that 'J.H.N.' were the initials of a broker, and that 'C.P.R.' may have been his client."

"Try Canadian Pacific Railway," said Holmes.

Stanley Hopkins swore between his teeth, and struck his thigh with his clenched hand.

"What a fool I have been!" he cried. "Of course, it is as you say. Then 'J.H.N.' are the only initials we have to solve. I have already examined the old Stock Exchange lists, and I can find no one in 1883, either in the house or among the outside brokers, whose initials correspond with these. Yet I feel that the clue is the most important one that I hold. You will admit, Mr. Holmes, that there is a possibility that these initials are those of the second person who was present — in other words, of the murderer. I would also urge that the introduction into the case of a document relating to large masses of valuable securities gives us for the first time some indication of a motive for the crime."

Sherlock Holmes's face showed that he was thoroughly taken aback by this new development.

"I must admit both your points," said he. "I confess that this notebook, which did not appear at the inquest, modifies any views which I may have formed. I had come to a theory of the crime in which I can find no place for this. Have you endeavoured to trace any of the securities here mentioned?"

"Inquiries are now being made at the offices, but I fear that the complete register of the stockholders of these South American concerns is in South America, and that some weeks must elapse before we can trace the shares."

Holmes had been examining the cover of the notebook with his magnifying lens.

"Surely there is some discolouration here," said he.

"Yes, sir, it is a blood-stain. I told you that I picked the book off the floor."

"Was the blood-stain above or below?"

"On the side next the boards."

"Which proves, of course, that the book was dropped after the crime was committed."

"Exactly, Mr. Holmes. I appreciated that point, and I conjectured that it was dropped by the murderer in his hurried flight. It lay near the door."

"I suppose that none of these securities have been found among the property of the dead man?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any reason to suspect robbery?"

"No, sir. Nothing seemed to have been touched."

"Dear me, it is certainly a very interesting case. Then there was a knife, was there not?"

"A sheath-knife, still in its sheath. It lay at the feet of the dead man. Mrs. Carey has identified it as being her husband's property."

Holmes was lost in thought for some time.

“Well,” said he, at last, “I suppose I shall have to come out and have a look at it.”

Stanley Hopkins gave a cry of joy.

“Thank you, sir. That will, indeed, be a weight off my mind.”

Holmes shook his finger at the inspector.

“It would have been an easier task a week ago,” said he. “But even now my visit may not be entirely fruitless. Watson, if you can spare the time, I should be very glad of your company. If you will call a four-wheeler, Hopkins, we shall be ready to start for Forest Row in a quarter of an hour.”

Alighting at the small wayside station, we drove for some miles through the remains of widespread woods, which were once part of that great forest which for so long held the Saxon invaders at bay — the impenetrable “weald,” for sixty years the bulwark of Britain. Vast sections of it have been cleared, for this is the seat of the first iron-works of the country, and the trees have been felled to smelt the ore. Now the richer fields of the North have absorbed the trade, and nothing save these ravaged groves and great scars in the earth show the work of the past. Here, in a clearing upon the green slope of a hill, stood a long, low, stone house, approached by a curving drive running through the fields. Nearer the road, and surrounded on three sides by bushes, was a small outhouse, one window and the door facing in our direction. It was the scene of the murder.

Stanley Hopkins led us first to the house, where he introduced us to a haggard, gray-haired woman, the widow of the murdered man, whose gaunt and deep-lined face, with the furtive look of terror in the depths of her red-rimmed eyes, told of the years of hardship and ill-usage which she had endured. With her was her daughter, a pale, fair-haired girl, whose eyes blazed defiantly at us as she told us that she was glad that her father was dead, and that she blessed the hand which had struck him down. It was a terrible household that Black Peter Carey had made for himself, and it was with a sense of relief that we found ourselves in the sunlight again and making our way along a path which had been worn across the fields by the feet of the dead man.

The outhouse was the simplest of dwellings, wooden-walled, shingle-roofed, one window beside the door and one on the farther side. Stanley Hopkins drew the key from his pocket and had stooped to the lock, when he paused with a look of attention and surprise upon his face.

“Someone has been tampering with it,” he said.

There could be no doubt of the fact. The woodwork was cut, and the scratches showed white through the paint, as if they had been that instant done. Holmes had been examining the window.

“Someone has tried to force this also. Whoever it was has failed to make his way in. He must have been a very poor burglar.”

“This is a most extraordinary thing,” said the inspector, “I could swear that these marks were not here yesterday evening.”

“Some curious person from the village, perhaps,” I suggested.

“Very unlikely. Few of them would dare to set foot in the grounds, far less try to force their way into the cabin. What do you think of it, Mr. Holmes?”

“I think that fortune is very kind to us.”

“You mean that the person will come again?”

“It is very probable. He came expecting to find the door open. He tried to get in with the blade of a very small penknife. He could not manage it. What would he do?”

“Come again next night with a more useful tool.”

“So I should say. It will be our fault if we are not there to receive him. Meanwhile, let me see the inside of the cabin.”

The traces of the tragedy had been removed, but the furniture within the little room still stood as it had been on the night of the crime. For two hours, with most intense concentration, Holmes examined every object in turn, but his face showed that his quest was not a successful one. Once only he paused in his patient investigation.

“Have you taken anything off this shelf, Hopkins?”

“No, I have moved nothing.”

“Something has been taken. There is less dust in this corner of the shelf than elsewhere. It may have been a book lying on its side. It may have been a box. Well, well, I can do nothing more. Let us walk in these beautiful woods, Watson, and give a few hours to the birds and the flowers. We shall meet you here later, Hopkins, and see if we can come to closer quarters with the gentleman who has paid this visit in the night.”

It was past eleven o’clock when we formed our little ambuscade. Hopkins was for leaving the door of the hut open, but Holmes was of the opinion that this would rouse the suspicions of the stranger. The lock was a perfectly simple one, and only a strong blade was needed to push it back. Holmes also suggested that we should wait, not inside the hut, but outside it, among the bushes which grew round the farther window. In this way we should be able to watch our man if he struck a light, and see what his object was in this stealthy nocturnal visit.

It was a long and melancholy vigil, and yet brought with it something of the thrill which the hunter feels when he lies beside the water-pool, and waits for the coming of the thirsty beast of prey. What savage creature was it which might steal upon us out of the darkness? Was it a fierce tiger of crime, which could only be taken fighting hard with flashing fang and claw, or would it prove to be some skulking jackal, dangerous only to the weak and unguarded?

In absolute silence we crouched amongst the bushes, waiting for whatever might come. At first the steps of a few belated villagers, or the sound of voices from the village, lightened our vigil, but one by one these interruptions died away, and an absolute stillness fell upon us, save for the chimes of the distant church, which told us of the progress of the night, and for the rustle and whisper of a fine rain falling amid the foliage which roofed us in.

Half-past two had chimed, and it was the darkest hour which precedes the dawn, when we all started as a low but sharp click came from the direction of the gate. Someone had entered the drive. Again there was a long silence, and I had begun to fear that it was a false alarm, when a stealthy step was heard upon the other side of the hut, and a moment later a metallic scraping and clinking. The man was trying to force the lock. This time his skill was greater or his tool was better, for there was a sudden snap and the creak of the hinges. Then a match was struck, and next instant the steady light from a candle filled the interior of the hut. Through the gauze curtain our eyes were all riveted upon the scene within.

The nocturnal visitor was a young man, frail and thin, with a black moustache, which intensified the deadly pallor of his face. He could not have been much above twenty years of age. I have never seen any human being who appeared to be in such a pitiable fright, for his teeth were visibly chattering, and he was shaking in every limb. He was dressed like a gentleman, in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with a cloth cap upon his head. We watched him staring round with frightened eyes. Then he laid the candle-end upon the table and disappeared from our view into one of the corners. He returned with a large book, one of the logbooks which formed a line upon the shelves. Leaning on the table, he rapidly turned over the leaves of this volume until he came to the entry which he sought. Then, with an angry gesture of his clenched hand, he closed the book, replaced it in the corner, and put out the light. He had hardly turned to leave the hut when Hopkin's hand was on the fellow's collar, and I heard his loud gasp of terror as he understood that he was taken. The candle was relit, and there was our wretched captive, shivering and cowering in the grasp of the detective. He sank down upon the sea-chest, and looked helplessly from one of us to the other.

"Now, my fine fellow," said Stanley Hopkins, "who are you, and what do you want here?"

The man pulled himself together, and faced us with an effort at self-composure.

"You are detectives, I suppose?" said he. "You imagine I am connected with the death of Captain Peter Carey. I assure you that I am innocent."

"We'll see about that," said Hopkins. "First of all, what is your name?"

"It is John Hopley Neligan."

I saw Holmes and Hopkins exchange a quick glance.

"What are you doing here?"

"Can I speak confidentially?"

"No, certainly not."

"Why should I tell you?"

"If you have no answer, it may go badly with you at the trial."

The young man winced.

"Well, I will tell you," he said. "Why should I not? And yet I hate to think of this old scandal gaining a new lease of life. Did you ever hear of Dawson and Neligan?"

I could see, from Hopkins's face, that he never had, but Holmes was keenly interested.

"You mean the West Country bankers," said he. "They failed for a million, ruined half the county families of Cornwall, and Neligan disappeared."

"Exactly. Neligan was my father."

At last we were getting something positive, and yet it seemed a long gap between an absconding banker and Captain Peter Carey pinned against the wall with one of his own harpoons. We all listened intently to the young man's words.

“It was my father who was really concerned. Dawson had retired. I was only ten years of age at the time, but I was old enough to feel the shame and horror of it all. It has always been said that my father stole all the securities and fled. It is not true. It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realise them, all would be well and every creditor paid in full. He started in his little yacht for Norway just before the warrant was issued for his arrest. I can remember that last night when he bade farewell to my mother. He left us a list of the securities he was taking, and he swore that he would come back with his honour cleared, and that none who had trusted him would suffer. Well, no word was ever heard from him again. Both the yacht and he vanished utterly. We believed, my mother and I, that he and it, with the securities that he had taken with him, were at the bottom of the sea. We had a faithful friend, however, who is a business man, and it was he who discovered some time ago that some of the securities which my father had with him had reappeared on the London market. You can imagine our amazement. I spent months in trying to trace them, and at last, after many doubtings and difficulties, I discovered that the original seller had been Captain Peter Carey, the owner of this hut.

“Naturally, I made some inquiries about the man. I found that he had been in command of a whaler which was due to return from the Arctic seas at the very time when my father was crossing to Norway. The autumn of that year was a stormy one, and there was a long succession of southerly gales. My father’s yacht may well have been blown to the north, and there met by Captain Peter Carey’s ship. If that were so, what had become of my father? In any case, if I could prove from Peter Carey’s evidence how these securities came on the market it would be a proof that my father had not sold them, and that he had no view to personal profit when he took them.

“I came down to Sussex with the intention of seeing the captain, but it was at this moment that his terrible death occurred. I read at the inquest a description of his cabin, in which it stated that the old logbooks of his vessel were preserved in it. It struck me that if I could see what occurred in the month of August, 1883, on board the SEA UNICORN, I might settle the mystery of my father’s fate. I tried last night to get at these logbooks, but was unable to open the door. To-night I tried again and succeeded, but I find that the pages which deal with that month have been torn from the book. It was at that moment I found myself a prisoner in your hands.”

“Is that all?” asked Hopkins.

“Yes, that is all.” His eyes shifted as he said it.

“You have nothing else to tell us?”

He hesitated.

“No, there is nothing.”

“You have not been here before last night?”

“No.

“Then how do you account for THAT?” cried Hopkins, as he held up the damning notebook, with the initials of our prisoner on the first leaf and the blood-stain on the cover.

The wretched man collapsed. He sank his face in his hands, and trembled all over.

“Where did you get it?” he groaned. “I did not know. I thought I had lost it at the hotel.”

“That is enough,” said Hopkins, sternly. “Whatever else you have to say, you must say in court. You will walk down with me now to the police-station. Well, Mr. Holmes, I am very much obliged to you and to your friend for coming down to help me. As it turns out your presence was unnecessary, and I would have brought the case to this successful issue without you, but, none the less, I am grateful. Rooms have been reserved for you at the Brambletye Hotel, so we can all walk down to the village together.”

“Well, Watson, what do you think of it?” asked Holmes, as we travelled back next morning.

“I can see that you are not satisfied.”

“Oh, yes, my dear Watson, I am perfectly satisfied. At the same time, Stanley Hopkins’s methods do not commend themselves to me. I am disappointed in Stanley Hopkins. I had hoped for better things from him. One should always look for a possible alternative, and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation.”

“What, then, is the alternative?”

“The line of investigation which I have myself been pursuing. It may give us nothing. I cannot tell. But at least I shall follow it to the end.”

Several letters were waiting for Holmes at Baker Street. He snatched one of them up, opened it, and burst out into a triumphant chuckle of laughter.

“Excellent, Watson! The alternative develops. Have you telegraph forms? Just write a couple of messages for me: ‘Sumner, Shipping Agent, Ratcliff Highway. Send three men on, to arrive ten to-morrow morning. — Basil.’

That's my name in those parts. The other is: 'Inspector Stanley Hopkins, 46 Lord Street, Brixton. Come breakfast to-morrow at nine-thirty. Important. Wire if unable to come. — Sherlock Holmes.' There, Watson, this infernal case has haunted me for ten days. I hereby banish it completely from my presence. To-morrow, I trust that we shall hear the last of it forever."

Sharp at the hour named Inspector Stanley Hopkins appeared, and we sat down together to the excellent breakfast which Mrs. Hudson had prepared. The young detective was in high spirits at his success.

"You really think that your solution must be correct?" asked Holmes.

"I could not imagine a more complete case."

"It did not seem to me conclusive."

"You astonish me, Mr. Holmes. What more could one ask for?"

"Does your explanation cover every point?"

"Undoubtedly. I find that young Neligan arrived at the Brambletye Hotel on the very day of the crime. He came on the pretence of playing golf. His room was on the ground-floor, and he could get out when he liked. That very night he went down to Woodman's Lee, saw Peter Carey at the hut, quarrelled with him, and killed him with the harpoon. Then, horrified by what he had done, he fled out of the hut, dropping the notebook which he had brought with him in order to question Peter Carey about these different securities. You may have observed that some of them were marked with ticks, and the others — the great majority — were not. Those which are ticked have been traced on the London market, but the others, presumably, were still in the possession of Carey, and young Neligan, according to his own account, was anxious to recover them in order to do the right thing by his father's creditors. After his flight he did not dare to approach the hut again for some time, but at last he forced himself to do so in order to obtain the information which he needed. Surely that is all simple and obvious?"

Holmes smiled and shook his head. "It seems to me to have only one drawback, Hopkins, and that is that it is intrinsically impossible. Have you tried to drive a harpoon through a body? No? Tut, tut my dear sir, you must really pay attention to these details. My friend Watson could tell you that I spent a whole morning in that exercise. It is no easy matter, and requires a strong and practised arm. But this blow was delivered with such violence that the head of the weapon sank deep into the wall. Do you imagine that this anaemic youth was capable of so frightful an assault? Is he the man who hobnobbed in rum and water with Black Peter in the dead of the night?

Was it his profile that was seen on the blind two nights before? No, no, Hopkins, it is another and more formidable person for whom we must seek."

The detective's face had grown longer and longer during Holmes's speech. His hopes and his ambitions were all crumbling about him. But he would not abandon his position without a struggle.

"You can't deny that Neligan was present that night, Mr. Holmes. The book will prove that. I fancy that I have evidence enough to satisfy a jury, even if you are able to pick a hole in it. Besides, Mr. Holmes, I have laid my hand upon MY man. As to this terrible person of yours, where is he?"

"I rather fancy that he is on the stair," said Holmes, serenely. "I think, Watson, that you would do well to put that revolver where you can reach it." He rose and laid a written paper upon a side-table. "Now we are ready," said he.

There had been some talking in gruff voices outside, and now Mrs. Hudson opened the door to say that there were three men inquiring for Captain Basil.

"Show them in one by one," said Holmes.

"The first who entered was a little Ribston pippin of a man, with ruddy cheeks and fluffy white side-whiskers. Holmes had drawn a letter from his pocket.

"What name?" he asked.

"James Lancaster."

"I am sorry, Lancaster, but the berth is full. Here is half a sovereign for your trouble. Just step into this room and wait there for a few minutes."

The second man was a long, dried-up creature, with lank hair and sallow cheeks. His name was Hugh Pattins. He also received his dismissal, his half-sovereign, and the order to wait.

The third applicant was a man of remarkable appearance. A fierce bulldog face was framed in a tangle of hair and beard, and two bold, dark eyes gleamed behind the cover of thick, tufted, overhung eyebrows. He saluted and stood sailor-fashion, turning his cap round in his hands.

"Your name?" asked Holmes.

"Patrick Cairns."

"Harpooner?"

"Yes, sir. Twenty-six voyages."

"Dundee, I suppose?"

“Yes, sir.”

“And ready to start with an exploring ship?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What wages?”

“Eight pounds a month.”

“Could you start at once?”

“As soon as I get my kit.”

“Have you your papers?”

“Yes, sir.” He took a sheaf of worn and greasy forms from his pocket. Holmes glanced over them and returned them.

“You are just the man I want,” said he. “Here’s the agreement on the side-table. If you sign it the whole matter will be settled.”

The seaman lurched across the room and took up the pen.

“Shall I sign here?” he asked, stooping over the table.

Holmes leaned over his shoulder and passed both hands over his neck.

“This will do,” said he.

I heard a click of steel and a bellow like an enraged bull. The next instant Holmes and the seaman were rolling on the ground together. He was a man of such gigantic strength that, even with the handcuffs which Holmes had so deftly fastened upon his wrists, he would have very quickly overpowered my friend had Hopkins and I not rushed to his rescue. Only when I pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver to his temple did he at last understand that resistance was vain. We lashed his ankles with cord, and rose breathless from the struggle.

“I must really apologize, Hopkins,” said Sherlock Holmes. “I fear that the scrambled eggs are cold. However, you will enjoy the rest of your breakfast all the better, will you not, for the thought that you have brought your case to a triumphant conclusion.”

Stanley Hopkins was speechless with amazement.

“I don’t know what to say, Mr. Holmes,” he blurted out at last, with a very red face. “It seems to me that I have been making a fool of myself from the beginning. I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master. Even now I see what you have done, but I don’t know how you did it or what it signifies.”

“Well, well,” said Holmes, good-humouredly. “We all learn by experience, and your lesson this time is that you should never lose sight of the alternative. You were so absorbed in young Neligan that you could not spare a thought to Patrick Cairns, the true murderer of Peter Carey.”

The hoarse voice of the seaman broke in on our conversation.

“See here, mister,” said he, “I make no complaint of being man-handled in this fashion, but I would have you call things by their right names. You say I murdered Peter Carey, I say I KILLED Peter Carey, and there’s all the difference. Maybe you don’t believe what I say. Maybe you think I am just slinging you a yarn.”

“Not at all,” said Holmes. “Let us hear what you have to say.”

“It’s soon told, and, by the Lord, every word of it is truth. I knew Black Peter, and when he pulled out his knife I whipped a harpoon through him sharp, for I knew that it was him or me. That’s how he died. You can call it murder. Anyhow, I’d as soon die with a rope round my neck as with Black Peter’s knife in my heart.”

“How came you there?” asked Holmes.

“I’ll tell it you from the beginning. Just sit me up a little, so as I can speak easy. It was in ‘83 that it happened — August of that year. Peter Carey was master of the SEA UNICORN, and I was spare harpooner. We were coming out of the ice-pack on our way home, with head winds and a week’s southerly gale, when we picked up a little craft that had been blown north. There was one man on her — a landsman. The crew had thought she would founder and had made for the Norwegian coast in the dinghy. I guess they were all drowned. Well, we took him on board, this man, and he and the skipper had some long talks in the cabin. All the baggage we took off with him was one tin box. So far as I know, the man’s name was never mentioned, and on the second night he disappeared as if he had never been. It was given out that he had either thrown himself overboard or fallen overboard in the heavy weather that we were having. Only one man knew what had happened to him, and that was me, for, with my own eyes, I saw the skipper tip up his heels and put him over the rail in the middle watch of a dark night, two days before we sighted the Shetland Lights. Well, I kept my knowledge to myself, and waited to see what would come of it. When we got back to Scotland it was easily hushed up, and nobody asked any questions. A stranger died by accident and it was nobody’s business to inquire. Shortly after Peter Carey gave up the sea, and it was long years before I could find where he was. I guessed that he had done the deed for the sake of what was in that tin box, and that he could afford now to pay me well for keeping my mouth shut. I found out where he was through a sailor man that had met him in London, and down I went to squeeze him. The first night he was reasonable enough, and was ready to give me what would make me free of the sea for life. We were to fix it all two nights later. When I came, I found him three parts drunk and in a vile temper. We sat down and we drank and we yarned about old times, but the more he drank the less I liked the look on his face. I spotted that harpoon upon the wall, and I thought I might need it before I was through. Then at last he broke out at me, spitting and cursing, with murder in his eyes and a great clasp-knife in his hand. He had not time to get it from the sheath before I had the harpoon through him. Heavens! what a yell he gave! and his face gets between me and my sleep. I stood there, with his blood splashing round me, and I waited for a bit, but all was quiet, so I took heart once more. I looked round, and there was the tin box on the shelf. I had as much right to it as Peter Carey, anyhow, so I took it with me and left the hut. Like a fool I left my baccy-pouch upon the table.

"Now I'll tell you the queerest part of the whole story. I had hardly got outside the hut when I heard someone coming, and I hid among the bushes. A man came slinking along, went into the hut, gave a cry as if he had seen a ghost, and legged it as hard as he could run until he was out of sight. Who he was or what he wanted is more than I can tell. For my part I walked ten miles, got a train at Tunbridge Wells, and so reached London, and no one the wiser.

"Well, when I came to examine the box I found there was no money in it, and nothing but papers that I would not dare to sell. I had lost my hold on Black Peter and was stranded in London without a shilling. There was only my trade left. I saw these advertisements about harpooners, and high wages, so I went to the shipping agents, and they sent me here. That's all I know, and I say again that if I killed Black Peter, the law should give me thanks, for I saved them the price of a hempen rope."

"A very clear statement said Holmes," rising and lighting his pipe. "I think, Hopkins, that you should lose no time in conveying your prisoner to a place of safety. This room is not well adapted for a cell, and Mr. Patrick Cairns occupies too large a proportion of our carpet."

"Mr. Holmes," said Hopkins, "I do not know how to express my gratitude. Even now I do not understand how you attained this result."

"Simply by having the good fortune to get the right clue from the beginning. It is very possible if I had known about this notebook it might have led away my thoughts, as it did yours. But all I heard pointed in the one direction. The amazing strength, the skill in the use of the harpoon, the rum and water, the sealskin tobacco-pouch with the coarse tobacco — all these pointed to a seaman, and one who had been a whaler. I was convinced that the initials 'P.C.' upon the pouch were a coincidence, and not those of Peter Carey, since he seldom smoked, and no pipe was found in his cabin. You remember that I asked whether whisky and brandy were in the cabin. You said they were. How many landsmen are there who would drink rum when they could get these other spirits? Yes, I was certain it was a seaman."

"And how did you find him?"

"My dear sir, the problem had become a very simple one. If it were a seaman, it could only be a seaman who had been with him on the SEA UNICORN. So far as I could learn he had sailed in no other ship. I spent three days in wiring to Dundee, and at the end of that time I had ascertained the names of the crew of the SEA UNICORN in 1883. When I found Patrick Cairns among the harpooners, my research was nearing its end. I argued that the man was probably in London, and that he would desire to leave the country for a time. I therefore spent some days in the East End, devised an Arctic expedition, put forth tempting terms for harpooners who would serve under Captain Basil — and behold the result!"

"Wonderful!" cried Hopkins. "Wonderful!"

"You must obtain the release of young Neligan as soon as possible," said Holmes. "I confess that I think you owe him some apology. The tin box must be returned to him, but, of course, the securities which Peter Carey has sold are lost forever. There's the cab, Hopkins, and you can remove your man. If you want me for the trial, my address and that of Watson will be somewhere in Norway — I'll send particulars later."

THE ADVENTURE OF CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON

It is years since the incidents of which I speak took place, and yet it is with diffidence that I allude to them. For a long time, even with the utmost discretion and reticence, it would have been impossible to make the facts public, but now the principal person concerned is beyond the reach of human law, and with due suppression the story may be told in such fashion as to injure no one. It records an absolutely unique experience in the career both of Mr. Sherlock Holmes and of myself. The reader will excuse me if I conceal the date or any other fact by which he might trace the actual occurrence.

We had been out for one of our evening rambles, Holmes and I, and had returned about six o'clock on a cold, frosty winter's evening. As Holmes turned up the lamp the light fell upon a card on the table. He glanced at it, and then, with an ejaculation of disgust, threw it on the floor. I picked it up and read:

CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON, Appledore Towers, Hampstead. Agent.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"The worst man in London," Holmes answered, as he sat down and stretched his legs before the fire. "Is anything on the back of the card?"

I turned it over.

"Will call at 6:30 — C.A.M.," I read.

"Hum! He's about due. Do you feel a creeping, shrinking sensation, Watson, when you stand before the serpents in the Zoo, and see the slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces? Well, that's how Milverton impresses me. I've had to do with fifty murderers in my career, but the worst of them never gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow. And yet I can't get out of doing business with him — indeed, he is here at my invitation."

"But who is he?"

"I'll tell you, Watson. He is the king of all the blackmailers. Heaven help the man, and still more the woman, whose secret and reputation come into the power of Milverton! With a smiling face and a heart of marble, he will squeeze and squeeze until he has drained them dry. The fellow is a genius in his way, and would have made his mark in some more savoury trade. His method is as follows: He allows it to be known that he is prepared to pay very high sums for letters which compromise people of wealth and position. He receives these wares not only from treacherous valets or maids, but frequently from genteel ruffians, who have gained the confidence and affection of trusting women. He deals with no niggard hand. I happen to know that he paid seven hundred pounds to a footman for a note two lines in length, and that the ruin of a noble family was the result. Everything which is in the market goes to Milverton, and there are hundreds in this great city who turn white at his name. No one knows where his grip may fall, for he is far too rich and far too cunning to work from hand to mouth. He will hold a card back for years in order to play it at the moment when the stake is best worth winning. I have said that he is the worst man in London, and I would ask you how could one compare the ruffian, who in hot blood bludgeons his mate, with this man, who methodically and at his leisure tortures the soul and wrings the nerves in order to add to his already swollen money-bags?”

I had seldom heard my friend speak with such intensity of feeling.

“But surely,” said I, “the fellow must be within the grasp of the law?”

“Technically, no doubt, but practically not. What would it profit a woman, for example, to get him a few months’ imprisonment if her own ruin must immediately follow? His victims dare not hit back. If ever he blackmailed an innocent person, then indeed we should have him, but he is as cunning as the Evil One. No, no, we must find other ways to fight him.”

“And why is he here?”

“Because an illustrious client has placed her piteous case in my hands. It is the Lady Eva Blackwell, the most beautiful debutante of last season. She is to be married in a fortnight to the Earl of Dovercourt. This fiend has several imprudent letters — imprudent, Watson, nothing worse — which were written to an impecunious young squire in the country. They would suffice to break off the match. Milverton will send the letters to the Earl unless a large sum of money is paid him. I have been commissioned to meet him, and — to make the best terms I can.”

At that instant there was a clatter and a rattle in the street below. Looking down I saw a stately carriage and pair, the brilliant lamps gleaming on the glossy haunches of the noble chestnuts. A footman opened the door, and a small, stout man in a shaggy astrakhan overcoat descended. A minute later he was in the room.

Charles Augustus Milverton was a man of fifty, with a large, intellectual head, a round, plump, hairless face, a perpetual frozen smile, and two keen gray eyes, which gleamed brightly from behind broad, gold-rimmed glasses. There was something of Mr. Pickwick's benevolence in his appearance, marred only by the insincerity of the fixed smile and by the hard glitter of those restless and penetrating eyes. His voice was as smooth and suave as his countenance, as he advanced with a plump little hand extended, murmuring his regret for having missed us at his first visit. Holmes disregarded the outstretched hand and looked at him with a face of granite. Milverton's smile broadened, he shrugged his shoulders removed his overcoat, folded it with great deliberation over the back of a chair, and then took a seat.

"This gentleman?" said he, with a wave in my direction. "Is it discreet? Is it right?"

"Dr. Watson is my friend and partner."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes. It is only in your client's interests that I protested. The matter is so very delicate — —"

"Dr. Watson has already heard of it."

"Then we can proceed to business. You say that you are acting for Lady Eva. Has she empowered you to accept my terms?"

"What are your terms?"

"Seven thousand pounds."

"And the alternative?"

"My dear sir, it is painful for me to discuss it, but if the money is not paid on the 14th, there certainly will be no marriage on the 18th." His insufferable smile was more complacent than ever.

Holmes thought for a little.

"You appear to me," he said, at last, "to be taking matters too much for granted. I am, of course, familiar with the contents of these letters. My client will certainly do what I may advise. I shall counsel her to tell her future husband the whole story and to trust to his generosity."

Milverton chuckled.

"You evidently do not know the Earl," said he.

From the baffled look upon Holmes's face, I could see clearly that he did.

“What harm is there in the letters?” he asked.

“They are sprightly — very sprightly,” Milverton answered. “The lady was a charming correspondent. But I can assure you that the Earl of Dovercourt would fail to appreciate them. However, since you think otherwise, we will let it rest at that. It is purely a matter of business. If you think that it is in the best interests of your client that these letters should be placed in the hands of the Earl, then you would indeed be foolish to pay so large a sum of money to regain them.” He rose and seized his astrakhan coat.

Holmes was gray with anger and mortification.

“Wait a little,” he said. “You go too fast. We should certainly make every effort to avoid scandal in so delicate a matter.”

Milverton relapsed into his chair.

“I was sure that you would see it in that light,” he purred.

“At the same time,” Holmes continued, “Lady Eva is not a wealthy woman. I assure you that two thousand pounds would be a drain upon her resources, and that the sum you name is utterly beyond her power. I beg, therefore, that you will moderate your demands, and that you will return the letters at the price I indicate, which is, I assure you, the highest that you can get.”

Milverton’s smile broadened and his eyes twinkled humorously.

“I am aware that what you say is true about the lady’s resources,” said he. “At the same time you must admit that the occasion of a lady’s marriage is a very suitable time for her friends and relatives to make some little effort upon her behalf. They may hesitate as to an acceptable wedding present. Let me assure them that this little bundle of letters would give more joy than all the candelabra and butter-dishes in London.”

“It is impossible,” said Holmes.

“Dear me, dear me, how unfortunate!” cried Milverton, taking out a bulky pocketbook. “I cannot help thinking that ladies are ill-advised in not making an effort. Look at this!” He held up a little note with a coat-of-arms upon the envelope. “That belongs to — well, perhaps it is hardly fair to tell the name until to-morrow morning. But at that time it will be in the hands of the lady’s husband. And all because she will not find a beggarly sum which she could get by turning her diamonds into paste. It IS such a pity! Now, you remember the sudden end of the engagement between the Honourable Miss Miles and Colonel Dorking? Only two days before the wedding, there was a paragraph in the MORNING POST to say that it was all off. And why? It is almost incredible, but the absurd sum of twelve hundred pounds would have settled the whole question. Is it not pitiful? And here I find you, a man of sense, boggling about terms, when your client's future and honour are at stake. You surprise me, Mr. Holmes."

"What I say is true," Holmes answered. "The money cannot be found. Surely it is better for you to take the substantial sum which I offer than to ruin this woman's career, which can profit you in no way?"

"There you make a mistake, Mr. Holmes. An exposure would profit me indirectly to a considerable extent. I have eight or ten similar cases maturing. If it was circulated among them that I had made a severe example of the Lady Eva, I should find all of them much more open to reason. You see my point?"

Holmes sprang from his chair.

"Get behind him, Watson! Don't let him out! Now, sir, let us see the contents of that notebook."

Milverton had glided as quick as a rat to the side of the room and stood with his back against the wall.

"Mr. Holmes, Mr. Holmes," he said, turning the front of his coat and exhibiting the butt of a large revolver, which projected from the inside pocket. "I have been expecting you to do something original. This has been done so often, and what good has ever come from it? I assure you that I am armed to the teeth, and I am perfectly prepared to use my weapons, knowing that the law will support me. Besides, your supposition that I would bring the letters here in a notebook is entirely mistaken. I would do nothing so foolish. And now, gentlemen, I have one or two little interviews this evening, and it is a long drive to Hampstead." He stepped forward, took up his coat, laid his hand on his revolver, and turned to the door. I picked up a chair, but Holmes shook his head, and I laid it down again. With bow, a smile, and a twinkle, Milverton was out of the room, and a few moments after we heard the slam of the carriage door and the rattle of the wheels as he drove away.

Holmes sat motionless by the fire, his hands buried deep in his trouser pockets, his chin sunk upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the glowing embers. For half an hour he was silent and still. Then, with the gesture of a man who has taken his decision, he sprang to his feet and passed into his bedroom. A little later a rakish young workman, with a goatee beard and a swagger, lit his clay pipe at the lamp before descending into the street. "I'll be back some time, Watson," said he, and vanished into the night. I understood that he had opened his campaign against Charles Augustus Milverton, but I little dreamed the strange shape which that campaign was destined to take.

For some days Holmes came and went at all hours in this attire, but beyond a remark that his time was spent at Hampstead, and that it was not wasted, I knew nothing of what he was doing. At last, however, on a wild, tempestuous evening, when the wind screamed and rattled against the windows, he returned from his last expedition, and having removed his disguise he sat before the fire and laughed heartily in his silent inward fashion.

"You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?"

"No, indeed!"

"You'll be interested to hear that I'm engaged."

"My dear fellow! I congrat — —"

"To Milverton's housemaid."

"Good heavens, Holmes!"

"I wanted information, Watson."

"Surely you have gone too far?"

"It was a most necessary step. I am a plumber with a rising business, Escott, by name. I have walked out with her each evening, and I have talked with her. Good heavens, those talks! However, I have got all I wanted. I know Milverton's house as I know the palm of my hand."

"But the girl, Holmes?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't help it, my dear Watson. You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table. However, I rejoice to say that I have a hated rival, who will certainly cut me out the instant that my back is turned. What a splendid night it is!"

"You like this weather?"

"It suits my purpose. Watson, I mean to burgle Milverton's house to-night."

I had a catching of the breath, and my skin went cold at the words, which were slowly uttered in a tone of concentrated resolution. As a flash of lightning in the night shows up in an instant every detail of a wild landscape, so at one glance I seemed to see every possible result of such an action — the detection, the capture, the honoured career ending in irreparable failure and disgrace, my friend himself lying at the mercy of the odious Milverton.

"For heaven's sake, Holmes, think what you are doing," I cried.

"My dear fellow, I have given it every consideration. I am never precipitate in my actions, nor would I adopt so energetic and, indeed, so dangerous a course, if any other were possible. Let us look at the matter clearly and fairly. I suppose that you will admit that the action is morally justifiable, though technically criminal. To burgle his house is no more than to forcibly take his pocketbook — an action in which you were prepared to aid me."

I turned it over in my mind.

"Yes," I said, "it is morally justifiable so long as our object is to take no articles save those which are used for an illegal purpose."

"Exactly. Since it is morally justifiable, I have only to consider the question of personal risk. Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this, when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?"

"You will be in such a false position."

"Well, that is part of the risk. There is no other possible way of regaining these letters. The unfortunate lady has not the money, and there are none of her people in whom she could confide. To-morrow is the last day of grace, and unless we can get the letters to-night, this villain will be as good as his word and will bring about her ruin. I must, therefore, abandon my client to her fate or I must play this last card. Between ourselves, Watson, it's a sporting duel between this fellow Milverton and me. He had, as you saw, the best of the first exchanges, but my self-respect and my reputation are concerned to fight it to a finish."

"Well, I don't like it, but I suppose it must be," said I. "When do we start?"

"You are not coming."

"Then you are not going," said I. "I give you my word of honour — and I never broke it in my life — that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away, unless you let me share this adventure with you."

"You can't help me."

"How do you know that? You can't tell what may happen. Anyway, my resolution is taken. Other people besides you have self-respect, and even reputations.”

Holmes had looked annoyed, but his brow cleared, and he clapped me on the shoulder.

“Well, well, my dear fellow, be it so. We have shared this same room for some years, and it would be amusing if we ended by sharing the same cell. You know, Watson, I don’t mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal. This is the chance of my lifetime in that direction. See here!” He took a neat little leather case out of a drawer, and opening it he exhibited a number of shining instruments. “This is a first-class, up-to-date burgling kit, with nickel-plated jemmy, diamond-tipped glass-cutter, adaptable keys, and every modern improvement which the march of civilization demands. Here, too, is my dark lantern. Everything is in order. Have you a pair of silent shoes?”

“I have rubber-soled tennis shoes.”

“Excellent! And a mask?”

“I can make a couple out of black silk.”

“I can see that you have a strong, natural turn for this sort of thing. Very good, do you make the masks. We shall have some cold supper before we start. It is now nine-thirty. At eleven we shall drive as far as Church Row. It is a quarter of an hour’s walk from there to Appledore Towers. We shall be at work before midnight. Milverton is a heavy sleeper, and retires punctually at ten-thirty. With any luck we should be back here by two, with the Lady Eva’s letters in my pocket.”

Holmes and I put on our dress-clothes, so that we might appear to be two theatre-goers homeward bound. In Oxford Street we picked up a hansom and drove to an address in Hampstead. Here we paid off our cab, and with our great coats buttoned up, for it was bitterly cold, and the wind seemed to blow through us, we walked along the edge of the heath.

“It’s a business that needs delicate treatment,” said Holmes. “These documents are contained in a safe in the fellow’s study, and the study is the ante-room of his bed-chamber. On the other hand, like all these stout, little men who do themselves well, he is a plethoric sleeper. Agatha — that’s my fiancee — says it is a joke in the servants’ hall that it’s impossible to wake the master. He has a secretary who is devoted to his interests, and never budges from the study all day. That’s why we are going at night. Then he has a beast of a dog which roams the garden. I met Agatha late the last two evenings, and she locks the brute up so as to give me a clear run. This is the house, this big one in its own grounds. Through the gate — now to the right among the laurels. We might put on our masks here, I think. You see, there is not a glimmer of light in any of the windows, and everything is working splendidly.”

With our black silk face-coverings, which turned us into two of the most truculent figures in London, we stole up to the silent, gloomy house. A sort of tiled veranda extended along one side of it, lined by several windows and two doors.

“That’s his bedroom,” Holmes whispered. “This door opens straight into the study. It would suit us best, but it is bolted as well as locked, and we should make too much noise getting in. Come round here. There’s a greenhouse which opens into the drawing-room.”

The place was locked, but Holmes removed a circle of glass and turned the key from the inside. An instant afterwards he had closed the door behind us, and we had become felons in the eyes of the law. The thick, warm air of the conservatory and the rich, choking fragrance of exotic plants took us by the throat. He seized my hand in the darkness and led me swiftly past banks of shrubs which brushed against our faces. Holmes had remarkable powers, carefully cultivated, of seeing in the dark. Still holding my hand in one of his, he opened a door, and I was vaguely conscious that we had entered a large room in which a cigar had been smoked not long before. He felt his way among the furniture, opened another door, and closed it behind us. Putting out my hand I felt several coats hanging from the wall, and I understood that I was in a passage. We passed along it and Holmes very gently opened a door upon the right-hand side. Something rushed out at us and my heart sprang into my mouth, but I could have laughed when I realised that it was the cat. A fire was burning in this new room, and again the air was heavy with tobacco smoke. Holmes entered on tiptoe, waited for me to follow, and then very gently closed the door. We were in Milverton’s study, and a portiere at the farther side showed the entrance to his bedroom.

It was a good fire, and the room was illuminated by it. Near the door I saw the gleam of an electric switch, but it was unnecessary, even if it had been safe, to turn it on. At one side of the fireplace was a heavy curtain which covered the bay window we had seen from outside. On the other side was the door which communicated with the veranda. A desk stood in the centre, with a turning-chair of shining red leather. Opposite was a large bookcase, with a marble bust of Athene on the top. In the corner, between the bookcase and the wall, there stood a tall, green safe, the firelight flashing back from the polished brass knobs upon its face. Holmes stole across and looked at it. Then he crept to the door of the bedroom, and stood with slanting head listening intently. No sound came from within. Meanwhile it had struck me that it would be wise to secure our retreat through the outer door, so I examined it. To my amazement, it was neither locked nor bolted. I touched Holmes on the arm, and he turned his masked face in that direction. I saw him start, and he was evidently as surprised as I.

"I don't like it," he whispered, putting his lips to my very ear. "I can't quite make it out. Anyhow, we have no time to lose."

"Can I do anything?"

"Yes, stand by the door. If you hear anyone come, bolt it on the inside, and we can get away as we came. If they come the other way, we can get through the door if our job is done, or hide behind these window curtains if it is not. Do you understand?"

I nodded, and stood by the door. My first feeling of fear had passed away, and I thrilled now with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers. The high object of our mission, the consciousness that it was unselfish and chivalrous, the villainous character of our opponent, all added to the sporting interest of the adventure. Far from feeling guilty, I rejoiced and exulted in our dangers. With a glow of admiration I watched Holmes unrolling his case of instruments and choosing his tool with the calm, scientific accuracy of a surgeon who performs a delicate operation. I knew that the opening of safes was a particular hobby with him, and I understood the joy which it gave him to be confronted with this green and gold monster, the dragon which held in its maw the reputations of many fair ladies. Turning up the cuffs of his dress-coat — he had placed his overcoat on a chair — Holmes laid out two drills, a jemmy, and several skeleton keys. I stood at the centre door with my eyes glancing at each of the others, ready for any emergency, though, indeed, my plans were somewhat vague as to what I should do if we were interrupted. For half an hour, Holmes worked with concentrated energy, laying down one tool, picking up another, handling each with the strength and delicacy of the trained mechanic. Finally I heard a click, the broad green door swung open, and inside I had a glimpse of a number of paper packets, each tied, sealed, and inscribed. Holmes picked one out, but it was as hard to read by the flickering fire, and he drew out his little dark lantern, for it was too dangerous, with Milverton in the next room, to switch on the electric light. Suddenly I saw him halt, listen intently, and then in an instant he had swung the door of the safe to, picked up his coat, stuffed his tools into the pockets, and darted behind the window curtain, motioning me to do the same.

It was only when I had joined him there that I heard what had alarmed his quicker senses. There was a noise somewhere within the house. A door slammed in the distance. Then a confused, dull murmur broke itself into the measured thud of heavy footsteps rapidly approaching. They were in the passage outside the room. They paused at the door. The door opened. There was a sharp snick as the electric light was turned on. The door closed once more, and the pungent reek of a strong cigar was borne to our nostrils. Then the footsteps continued backward and forward, backward and forward, within a few yards of us. Finally there was a creak from a chair, and the footsteps ceased. Then a key clicked in a lock, and I heard the rustle of papers.

So far I had not dared to look out, but now I gently parted the division of the curtains in front of me and peeped through. From the pressure of Holmes's shoulder against mine, I knew that he was sharing my observations. Right in front of us, and almost within our reach, was the broad, rounded back of Milverton. It was evident that we had entirely miscalculated his movements, that he had never been to his bedroom, but that he had been sitting up in some smoking or billiard room in the farther wing of the house, the windows of which we had not seen. His broad, grizzled head, with its shining patch of baldness, was in the immediate foreground of our vision. He was leaning far back in the red leather chair, his legs outstretched, a long, black cigar projecting at an angle from his mouth. He wore a semi-military smoking jacket, claret-coloured, with a black velvet collar. In his hand he held a long, legal document which he was reading in an indolent fashion, blowing rings of tobacco smoke from his lips as he did so. There was no promise of a speedy departure in his composed bearing and his comfortable attitude.

I felt Holmes's hand steal into mine and give me a reassuring shake, as if to say that the situation was within his powers, and that he was easy in his mind. I was not sure whether he had seen what was only too obvious from my position, that the door of the safe was imperfectly closed, and that Milverton might at any moment observe it. In my own mind I had determined that if I were sure, from the rigidity of his gaze, that it had caught his eye, I would at once spring out, throw my great coat over his head, pinion him, and leave the rest to Holmes. But Milverton never looked up. He was languidly interested by the papers in his hand, and page after page was turned as he followed the argument of the lawyer. At least, I thought, when he has finished the document and the cigar he will go to his room, but before he had reached the end of either, there came a remarkable development, which turned our thoughts into quite another channel.

Several times I had observed that Milverton looked at his watch, and once he had risen and sat down again, with a gesture of impatience. The idea, however, that he might have an appointment at so strange an hour never occurred to me until a faint sound reached my ears from the veranda outside. Milverton dropped his papers and sat rigid in his chair. The sound was repeated, and then there came a gentle tap at the door. Milverton rose and opened it.

"Well," said he, curtly, "you are nearly half an hour late."

So this was the explanation of the unlocked door and of the nocturnal vigil of Milverton. There was the gentle rustle of a woman's dress. I had closed the slit between the curtains as Milverton's face had turned in our direction, but now I ventured very carefully to open it once more. He had resumed his seat, the cigar still projecting at an insolent angle from the corner of his mouth. In front of him, in the full glare of the electric light, there stood a tall, slim, dark woman, a veil over her face, a mantle drawn round her chin. Her breath came quick and fast, and every inch of the lithe figure was quivering with strong emotion.

"Well," said Milverton, "you made me lose a good night's rest, my dear. I hope you'll prove worth it. You couldn't come any other time — eh?"

The woman shook her head.

"Well, if you couldn't you couldn't. If the Countess is a hard mistress, you have your chance to get level with her now. Bless the girl, what are you shivering about? That's right. Pull yourself together. Now, let us get down to business." He took a notebook from the drawer of his desk. "You say that you have five letters which compromise the Countess d'Albert. You want to sell them. I want to buy them. So far so good. It only remains to fix a price.

I should want to inspect the letters, of course. If they are really good specimens — Great heavens, is it you?”

The woman, without a word, had raised her veil and dropped the mantle from her chin. It was a dark, handsome, clear-cut face which confronted Milverton — a face with a curved nose, strong, dark eyebrows shading hard, glittering eyes, and a straight, thin-lipped mouth set in a dangerous smile.

“It is I,” she said, “the woman whose life you have ruined.”

Milverton laughed, but fear vibrated in his voice. “You were so very obstinate,” said he. “Why did you drive me to such extremities? I assure you I wouldn’t hurt a fly of my own accord, but every man has his business, and what was I to do? I put the price well within your means. You would not pay.”

“So you sent the letters to my husband, and he — the noblest gentleman that ever lived, a man whose boots I was never worthy to lace — he broke his gallant heart and died. You remember that last night, when I came through that door, I begged and prayed you for mercy, and you laughed in my face as you are trying to laugh now, only your coward heart cannot keep your lips from twitching. Yes, you never thought to see me here again, but it was that night which taught me how I could meet you face to face, and alone. Well, Charles Milverton, what have you to say?”

“Don’t imagine that you can bully me,” said he, rising to his feet. “I have only to raise my voice and I could call my servants and have you arrested. But I will make allowance for your natural anger. Leave the room at once as you came, and I will say no more.”

The woman stood with her hand buried in her bosom, and the same deadly smile on her thin lips.

“You will ruin no more lives as you have ruined mine. You will wring no more hearts as you wrung mine. I will free the world of a poisonous thing. Take that, you hound — and that! — and that! — and that!”

She had drawn a little gleaming revolver, and emptied barrel after barrel into Milverton’s body, the muzzle within two feet of his shirt front. He shrank away and then fell forward upon the table, coughing furiously and clawing among the papers. Then he staggered to his feet, received another shot, and rolled upon the floor. “You’ve done me,” he cried, and lay still. The woman looked at him intently, and ground her heel into his upturned face. She looked again, but there was no sound or movement. I heard a sharp rustle, the night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone.

No interference upon our part could have saved the man from his fate, but, as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton’s shrinking body I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes’s cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip — that it was no affair of ours, that justice had overtaken a villain, that we had our own duties and our own objects, which were not to be lost sight of. But hardly had the woman rushed from the room when Holmes, with swift, silent steps, was over at the other door. He turned the key in the lock. At the same instant we heard voices in the house and the sound of hurrying feet. The revolver shots had roused the household. With perfect coolness Holmes slipped across to the safe, filled his two arms with bundles of letters, and poured them all into the fire. Again and again he did it, until the safe was empty. Someone turned the handle and beat upon the outside of the door. Holmes looked swiftly round. The letter which had been the messenger of death for Milverton lay, all mottled with his blood, upon the table. Holmes tossed it in among the blazing papers. Then he drew the key from the outer door, passed through after me, and locked it on the outside. “This way, Watson,” said he, “we can scale the garden wall in this direction.”

I could not have believed that an alarm could have spread so swiftly. Looking back, the huge house was one blaze of light. The front door was open, and figures were rushing down the drive. The whole garden was alive with people, and one fellow raised a view-halloa as we emerged from the veranda and followed hard at our heels. Holmes seemed to know the grounds perfectly, and he threaded his way swiftly among a plantation of small trees, I close at his heels, and our foremost pursuer panting behind us. It was a six-foot wall which barred our path, but he sprang to the top and over. As I did the same I felt the hand of the man behind me grab at my ankle, but I kicked myself free and scrambled over a grass-strewn coping. I fell upon my face among some bushes, but Holmes had me on my feet in an instant, and together we dashed away across the huge expanse of Hampstead Heath. We had run two miles, I suppose, before Holmes at last halted and listened intently. All was absolute silence behind us. We had shaken off our pursuers and were safe.

We had breakfasted and were smoking our morning pipe on the day after the remarkable experience which I have recorded, when Mr. Lestrade, of

Scotland Yard, very solemn and impressive, was ushered into our modest sitting-room.

“Good-morning, Mr. Holmes,” said he; “good-morning. May I ask if you are very busy just now?”

“Not too busy to listen to you.”

“I thought that, perhaps, if you had nothing particular on hand, you might care to assist us in a most remarkable case, which occurred only last night at Hampstead.”

“Dear me!” said Holmes. “What was that?”

“A murder — a most dramatic and remarkable murder. I know how keen you are upon these things, and I would take it as a great favour if you would step down to Appledore Towers, and give us the benefit of your advice. It is no ordinary crime. We have had our eyes upon this Mr. Milverton for some time, and, between ourselves, he was a bit of a villain. He is known to have held papers which he used for blackmailing purposes. These papers have all been burned by the murderers. No article of value was taken, as it is probable that the criminals were men of good position, whose sole object was to prevent social exposure.”

“Criminals?” said Holmes. “Plural?”

“Yes, there were two of them. They were as nearly as possible captured red-handed. We have their footmarks, we have their description, it’s ten to one that we trace them. The first fellow was a bit too active, but the second was caught by the under-gardener, and only got away after a struggle. He was a middle-sized, strongly built man — square jaw, thick neck, moustache, a mask over his eyes.”

“That’s rather vague,” said Sherlock Holmes. “My, it might be a description of Watson!”

“It’s true,” said the inspector, with amusement. “It might be a description of Watson.”

“Well, I’m afraid I can’t help you, Lestrade,” said Holmes. “The fact is that I knew this fellow Milverton, that I considered him one of the most dangerous men in London, and that I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge. No, it’s no use arguing. I have made up my mind. My sympathies are with the criminals rather than with the victim, and I will not handle this case.”

Holmes had not said one word to me about the tragedy which we had witnessed, but I observed all the morning that he was in his most thoughtful mood, and he gave me the impression, from his vacant eyes and his abstracted manner, of a man who is striving to recall something to his memory. We were in the middle of our lunch, when he suddenly sprang to his feet. “By Jove, Watson, I’ve got it!” he cried. “Take your hat! Come with me!” He hurried at his top speed down Baker Street and along Oxford Street, until we had almost reached Regent Circus. Here, on the left hand, there stands a shop window filled with photographs of the celebrities and beauties of the day. Holmes’s eyes fixed themselves upon one of them, and following his gaze I saw the picture of a regal and stately lady in Court dress, with a high diamond tiara upon her noble head. I looked at that delicately curved nose, at the marked eyebrows, at the straight mouth, and the strong little chin beneath it. Then I caught my breath as I read the time-honoured title of the great nobleman and statesman whose wife she had been. My eyes met those of Holmes, and he put his finger to his lips as we turned away from the window.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SIX NAPOLEONS

It was no very unusual thing for Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, to look in upon us of an evening, and his visits were welcome to Sherlock Holmes, for they enabled him to keep in touch with all that was going on at the police headquarters. In return for the news which Lestrade would bring, Holmes was always ready to listen with attention to the details of any case upon which the detective was engaged, and was able occasionally, without any active interference, to give some hint or suggestion drawn from his own vast knowledge and experience.

On this particular evening, Lestrade had spoken of the weather and the newspapers. Then he had fallen silent, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar. Holmes looked keenly at him.

“Anything remarkable on hand?” he asked.

“Oh, no, Mr. Holmes — nothing very particular.”

“Then tell me about it.”

Lestrade laughed.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, there is no use denying that there IS something on my mind. And yet it is such an absurd business, that I hesitated to bother you about it. On the other hand, although it is trivial, it is undoubtedly queer, and I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common. But, in my opinion, it comes more in Dr. Watson’s line than ours.”

“Disease?” said I.

“Madness, anyhow. And a queer madness, too. You wouldn’t think there was anyone living at this time of day who had such a hatred of Napoleon the First that he would break any image of him that he could see.”

Holmes sank back in his chair.

“That’s no business of mine,” said he.

“Exactly. That’s what I said. But then, when the man commits burglary in order to break images which are not his own, that brings it away from the doctor and on to the policeman.”

Holmes sat up again.

“Burglary! This is more interesting. Let me hear the details.”

Lestrade took out his official notebook and refreshed his memory from its pages.

“The first case reported was four days ago,” said he. “It was at the shop of Morse Hudson, who has a place for the sale of pictures and statues in the Kennington Road. The assistant had left the front shop for an instant, when he heard a crash, and hurrying in he found a plaster bust of Napoleon, which stood with several other works of art upon the counter, lying shivered into fragments. He rushed out into the road, but, although several passers-by declared that they had noticed a man run out of the shop, he could neither see anyone nor could he find any means of identifying the rascal. It seemed to be one of those senseless acts of Hooliganism which occur from time to time, and it was reported to the constable on the beat as such. The plaster cast was not worth more than a few shillings, and the whole affair appeared to be too childish for any particular investigation.

“The second case, however, was more serious, and also more singular. It occurred only last night.

“In Kennington Road, and within a few hundred yards of Morse Hudson’s shop, there lives a well-known medical practitioner, named Dr. Barnicot, who has one of the largest practices upon the south side of the Thames. His residence and principal consulting-room is at Kennington Road, but he has a branch surgery and dispensary at Lower Brixton Road, two miles away. This Dr. Barnicot is an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and his house is full of books, pictures, and relics of the French Emperor. Some little time ago he purchased from Morse Hudson two duplicate plaster casts of the famous head of Napoleon by the French sculptor, Devine. One of these he placed in his hall in the house at Kennington Road, and the other on the mantelpiece of the surgery at Lower Brixton. Well, when Dr. Barnicot came down this morning he was astonished to find that his house had been burgled during the night, but that nothing had been taken save the plaster head from the hall. It had been carried out and had been dashed savagely against the garden wall, under which its splintered fragments were discovered.”

Holmes rubbed his hands.

“This is certainly very novel,” said he.

“I thought it would please you. But I have not got to the end yet. Dr. Barnicot was due at his surgery at twelve o’clock, and you can imagine his amazement when, on arriving there, he found that the window had been opened in the night and that the broken pieces of his second bust were strewn all over the room. It had been smashed to atoms where it stood. In neither case were there any signs which could give us a clue as to the criminal or lunatic who had done the mischief. Now, Mr. Holmes, you have got the facts.”

“They are singular, not to say grotesque,” said Holmes. “May I ask whether the two busts smashed in Dr. Barnicot’s rooms were the exact duplicates of the one which was destroyed in Morse Hudson’s shop?”

“They were taken from the same mould.”

“Such a fact must tell against the theory that the man who breaks them is influenced by any general hatred of Napoleon. Considering how many hundreds of statues of the great Emperor must exist in London, it is too much to suppose such a coincidence as that a promiscuous iconoclast should chance to begin upon three specimens of the same bust.”

“Well, I thought as you do,” said Lestrade. “On the other hand, this Morse Hudson is the purveyor of busts in that part of London, and these three were the only ones which had been in his shop for years. So, although, as you say, there are many hundreds of statues in London, it is very probable that these three were the only ones in that district. Therefore, a local fanatic would begin with them. What do you think, Dr. Watson?”

“There are no limits to the possibilities of monomania,” I answered. “There is the condition which the modern French psychologists have called the ‘IDEE FIXE,’ which may be trifling in character, and accompanied by complete sanity in every other way. A man who had read deeply about Napoleon, or who had possibly received some hereditary family injury through the great war, might conceivably form such an IDEE FIXE and under its influence be capable of any fantastic outrage.”

“That won’t do, my dear Watson,” said Holmes, shaking his head, “for no amount of IDEE FIXE would enable your interesting monomaniac to find out where these busts were situated.”

“Well, how do YOU explain it?”

“I don’t attempt to do so. I would only observe that there is a certain method in the gentleman’s eccentric proceedings. For example, in Dr. Barnicot’s hall, where a sound might arouse the family, the bust was taken outside before being broken, whereas in the surgery, where there was less danger of an alarm, it was smashed where it stood. The affair seems absurdly trifling, and yet I dare call nothing trivial when I reflect that some of my most classic cases have had the least promising commencement. You will remember, Watson, how the dreadful business of the Abernetty family was first brought to my notice by the depth which the parsley had sunk into the butter upon a hot day. I can't afford, therefore, to smile at your three broken busts, Lestrade, and I shall be very much obliged to you if you will let me hear of any fresh development of so singular a chain of events."

The development for which my friend had asked came in a quicker and an infinitely more tragic form than he could have imagined. I was still dressing in my bedroom next morning, when there was a tap at the door and Holmes entered, a telegram in his hand. He read it aloud:

"Come instantly, 131 Pitt Street, Kensington.

"LESTRADE."

"What is it, then?" I asked.

"Don't know — may be anything. But I suspect it is the sequel of the story of the statues. In that case our friend the image-breaker has begun operations in another quarter of London. There's coffee on the table, Watson, and I have a cab at the door."

In half an hour we had reached Pitt Street, a quiet little backwater just beside one of the briskest currents of London life. No. 131 was one of a row, all flat-chested, respectable, and most unromantic dwellings. As we drove up, we found the railings in front of the house lined by a curious crowd. Holmes whistled.

"By George! It's attempted murder at the least. Nothing less will hold the London message-boy. There's a deed of violence indicated in that fellow's round shoulders and outstretched neck. What's this, Watson? The top steps swilled down and the other ones dry. Footsteps enough, anyhow! Well, well, there's Lestrade at the front window, and we shall soon know all about it."

The official received us with a very grave face and showed us into a sitting-room, where an exceedingly unkempt and agitated elderly man, clad in a flannel dressing-gown, was pacing up and down. He was introduced to us as the owner of the house — Mr. Horace Harker, of the Central Press Syndicate.

"It's the Napoleon bust business again," said Lestrade. "You seemed interested last night, Mr. Holmes, so I thought perhaps you would be glad to be present now that the affair has taken a very much graver turn."

"What has it turned to, then?"

"To murder. Mr. Harker, will you tell these gentlemen exactly what has occurred?"

The man in the dressing-gown turned upon us with a most melancholy face.

"It's an extraordinary thing," said he, "that all my life I have been collecting other people's news, and now that a real piece of news has come my own way I am so confused and bothered that I can't put two words together. If I had come in here as a journalist, I should have interviewed myself and had two columns in every evening paper. As it is, I am giving away valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself. However, I've heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and if you'll only explain this queer business, I shall be paid for my trouble in telling you the story."

Holmes sat down and listened.

"It all seems to centre round that bust of Napoleon which I bought for this very room about four months ago. I picked it up cheap from Harding Brothers, two doors from the High Street Station. A great deal of my journalistic work is done at night, and I often write until the early morning. So it was to-day. I was sitting in my den, which is at the back of the top of the house, about three o'clock, when I was convinced that I heard some sounds downstairs. I listened, but they were not repeated, and I concluded that they came from outside. Then suddenly, about five minutes later, there came a most horrible yell — the most dreadful sound, Mr. Holmes, that ever I heard. It will ring in my ears as long as I live. I sat frozen with horror for a minute or two. Then I seized the poker and went downstairs. When I entered this room I found the window wide open, and I at once observed that the bust was gone from the mantelpiece. Why any burglar should take such a thing passes my understanding, for it was only a plaster cast and of no real value whatever.

"You can see for yourself that anyone going out through that open window could reach the front doorstep by taking a long stride. This was clearly what the burglar had done, so I went round and opened the door. Stepping out into the dark, I nearly fell over a dead man, who was lying there. I ran back for a light and there was the poor fellow, a great gash in his throat and the whole place swimming in blood. He lay on his back, his knees drawn up, and his mouth horribly open. I shall see him in my dreams. I had just time to blow on my police-whistle, and then I must have fainted, for I knew nothing more until I found the policeman standing over me in the hall."

“Well, who was the murdered man?” asked Holmes.

“There’s nothing to show who he was,” said Lestrade. “You shall see the body at the mortuary, but we have made nothing of it up to now. He is a tall man, sunburned, very powerful, not more than thirty. He is poorly dressed, and yet does not appear to be a labourer. A horn-handled clasp knife was lying in a pool of blood beside him. Whether it was the weapon which did the deed, or whether it belonged to the dead man, I do not know. There was no name on his clothing, and nothing in his pockets save an apple, some string, a shilling map of London, and a photograph. Here it is.”

It was evidently taken by a snapshot from a small camera. It represented an alert, sharp-featured simian man, with thick eyebrows and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face, like the muzzle of a baboon.

“And what became of the bust?” asked Holmes, after a careful study of this picture.

“We had news of it just before you came. It has been found in the front garden of an empty house in Campden House Road. It was broken into fragments. I am going round now to see it. Will you come?”

“Certainly. I must just take one look round.” He examined the carpet and the window. “The fellow had either very long legs or was a most active man,” said he. “With an area beneath, it was no mean feat to reach that window ledge and open that window. Getting back was comparatively simple. Are you coming with us to see the remains of your bust, Mr. Harker?”

The disconsolate journalist had seated himself at a writing-table.

“I must try and make something of it,” said he, “though I have no doubt that the first editions of the evening papers are out already with full details. It’s like my luck! You remember when the stand fell at Doncaster? Well, I was the only journalist in the stand, and my journal the only one that had no account of it, for I was too shaken to write it. And now I’ll be too late with a murder done on my own doorstep.”

As we left the room, we heard his pen travelling shrilly over the foolscap.

The spat where the fragments of the bust had been found was only a few hundred yards away. For the first time our eyes rested upon this presentment of the great emperor, which seemed to raise such frantic and destructive hatred in the mind of the unknown. It lay scattered, in splintered shards, upon the grass. Holmes picked up several of them and examined them carefully. I was convinced, from his intent face and his purposeful manner, that at last he was upon a clue.

“Well?” asked Lestrade.

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“We have a long way to go yet,” said he. “And yet — and yet — well, we have some suggestive facts to act upon. The possession of this trifling bust was worth more, in the eyes of this strange criminal, than a human life. That is one point. Then there is the singular fact that he did not break it in the house, or immediately outside the house, if to break it was his sole object.”

“He was rattled and bustled by meeting this other fellow. He hardly knew what he was doing.”

“Well, that’s likely enough. But I wish to call your attention very particularly to the position of this house, in the garden of which the bust was destroyed.”

Lestrade looked about him.

“It was an empty house, and so he knew that he would not be disturbed in the garden.”

“Yes, but there is another empty house farther up the street which he must have passed before he came to this one. Why did he not break it there, since it is evident that every yard that he carried it increased the risk of someone meeting him?”

“I give it up,” said Lestrade.

Holmes pointed to the street lamp above our heads.

“He could see what he was doing here, and he could not there. That was his reason.”

“By Jove! that’s true,” said the detective. “Now that I come to think of it, Dr. Barnicot’s bust was broken not far from his red lamp. Well, Mr. Holmes, what are we to do with that fact?”

“To remember it — to docket it. We may come on something later which will bear upon it. What steps do you propose to take now, Lestrade?”

“The most practical way of getting at it, in my opinion, is to identify the dead man. There should be no difficulty about that. When we have found who he is and who his associates are, we should have a good start in learning what he was doing in Pitt Street last night, and who it was who met him and killed him on the doorstep of Mr. Horace Harker. Don’t you think so?”

“No doubt; and yet it is not quite the way in which I should approach the case.”

“What would you do then?”

“Oh, you must not let me influence you in any way. I suggest that you go on your line and I on mine. We can compare notes afterwards, and each will supplement the other.”

“Very good,” said Lestrade.

“If you are going back to Pitt Street, you might see Mr. Horace Harker. Tell him for me that I have quite made up my mind, and that it is certain that a dangerous homicidal lunatic, with Napoleonic delusions, was in his house last night. It will be useful for his article.”

Lestrade stared.

“You don’t seriously believe that?”

Holmes smiled.

“Don’t I? Well, perhaps I don’t. But I am sure that it will interest Mr. Horace Harker and the subscribers of the Central Press Syndicate. Now, Watson, I think that we shall find that we have a long and rather complex day’s work before us. I should be glad, Lestrade, if you could make it convenient to meet us at Baker Street at six o’clock this evening. Until then I should like to keep this photograph, found in the dead man’s pocket. It is possible that I may have to ask your company and assistance upon a small expedition which will have be undertaken to-night, if my chain of reasoning should prove to be correct. Until then good-bye and good luck!”

Sherlock Holmes and I walked together to the High Street, where we stopped at the shop of Harding Brothers, whence the bust had been purchased. A young assistant informed us that Mr. Harding would be absent until afternoon, and that he was himself a newcomer, who could give us no information. Holmes’s face showed his disappointment and annoyance.

“Well, well, we can’t expect to have it all our own way, Watson,” he said, at last. “We must come back in the afternoon, if Mr. Harding will not be here until then. I am, as you have no doubt surmised, endeavouring to trace these busts to their source, in order to find if there is not something peculiar which may account for their remarkable fate. Let us make for Mr. Morse Hudson, of the Kennington Road, and see if he can throw any light upon the problem.”

A drive of an hour brought us to the picture-dealer’s establishment. He was a small, stout man with a red face and a peppery manner.

“Yes, sir. On my very counter, sir,” said he. “What we pay rates and taxes for I don’t know, when any ruffian can come in and break one’s goods. Yes, sir, it was I who sold Dr. Barnicot his two statues. Disgraceful, sir! A Nihilist plot — that’s what I make it. No one but an anarchist would go about breaking statues. Red republicans — that’s what I call ‘em. Who did I get the statues from? I don’t see what that has to do with it. Well, if you really want to know, I got them from Gelder & Co., in Church Street, Stepney. They are a well-known house in the trade, and have been this twenty years. How many had I? Three — two and one are three — two of Dr. Barnicot’s, and one smashed in broad daylight on my own counter. Do I know that photograph? No, I don’t. Yes, I do, though. Why, it’s Beppo. He was a kind of Italian piece-work man, who made himself useful in the shop. He could carve a bit, and gild and frame, and do odd jobs. The fellow left me last week, and I’ve heard nothing of him since. No, I don’t know where he came from nor where he went to. I had nothing against him while he was here. He was gone two days before the bust was smashed.”

“Well, that’s all we could reasonably expect from Morse Hudson,” said Holmes, as we emerged from the shop. “We have this Beppo as a common factor, both in Kennington and in Kensington, so that is worth a ten-mile drive. Now, Watson, let us make for Gelder & Co., of Stepney, the source and origin of the busts. I shall be surprised if we don’t get some help down there.”

In rapid succession we passed through the fringe of fashionable London, hotel London, theatrical London, literary London, commercial London, and, finally, maritime London, till we came to a riverside city of a hundred thousand souls, where the tenement houses swelter and reek with the outcasts of Europe. Here, in a broad thoroughfare, once the abode of wealthy City merchants, we found the sculpture works for which we searched. Outside was a considerable yard full of monumental masonry. Inside was a large room in which fifty workers were carving or moulding. The manager, a big blond German, received us civilly and gave a clear answer to all Holmes’s questions. A reference to his books showed that hundreds of casts had been taken from a marble copy of Devine’s head of Napoleon, but that the three which had been sent to Morse Hudson a year or so before had been half of a batch of six, the other three being sent to Harding Brothers, of Kensington. There was no reason why those six should be different from any of the other casts. He could suggest no possible cause why anyone should wish to destroy them — in fact, he laughed at the idea. Their wholesale price was six shillings, but the retailer would get twelve or more. The cast was taken in two moulds from each side of the face, and then these two profiles of plaster of Paris were joined together to make the complete bust. The work was usually done by Italians, in the room we were in. When finished, the busts were put on a table in the passage to dry, and afterwards stored. That was all he could tell us.

But the production of the photograph had a remarkable effect upon the manager. His face flushed with anger, and his brows knotted over his blue Teutonic eyes.

“Ah, the rascal!” he cried. “Yes, indeed, I know him very well. This has always been a respectable establishment, and the only time that we have ever had the police in it was over this very fellow. It was more than a year ago now. He knifed another Italian in the street, and then he came to the works with the police on his heels, and he was taken here. Beppo was his name — his second name I never knew. Serve me right for engaging a man with such a face. But he was a good workman — one of the best.”

“What did he get?”

“The man lived and he got off with a year. I have no doubt he is out now, but he has not dared to show his nose here. We have a cousin of his here, and I daresay he could tell you where he is.”

“No, no,” cried Holmes, “not a word to the cousin — not a word, I beg of you. The matter is very important, and the farther I go with it, the more important it seems to grow. When you referred in your ledger to the sale of those casts I observed that the date was June 3rd of last year. Could you give me the date when Beppo was arrested?”

“I could tell you roughly by the pay-list,” the manager answered. “Yes,” he continued, after some turning over of pages, “he was paid last on May 20th.”

“Thank you,” said Holmes. “I don’t think that I need intrude upon your time and patience any more.” With a last word of caution that he should say nothing as to our researches, we turned our faces westward once more.

The afternoon was far advanced before we were able to snatch a hasty luncheon at a restaurant. A news-bill at the entrance announced “Kensington Outrage. Murder by a Madman,” and the contents of the paper showed that Mr. Horace Harker had got his account into print after all. Two columns were occupied with a highly sensational and flowery rendering of the whole incident. Holmes propped it against the cruet-stand and read it while he ate. Once or twice he chuckled.

"This is all right, Watson," said he. "Listen to this:

"It is satisfactory to know that there can be no difference of opinion upon this case, since Mr. Lestrade, one of the most experienced members of the official force, and Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well known consulting expert, have each come to the conclusion that the grotesque series of incidents, which have ended in so tragic a fashion, arise from lunacy rather than from deliberate crime. No explanation save mental aberration can cover the facts.

"The Press, Watson, is a most valuable institution, if you only know how to use it. And now, if you have quite finished, we will hark back to Kensington and see what the manager of Harding Brothers has to say on the matter."

The founder of that great emporium proved to be a brisk, crisp little person, very dapper and quick, with a clear head and a ready tongue.

"Yes, sir, I have already read the account in the evening papers. Mr. Horace Harker is a customer of ours. We supplied him with the bust some months ago. We ordered three busts of that sort from Gelder & Co., of Stepney. They are all sold now. To whom? Oh, I daresay by consulting our sales book we could very easily tell you. Yes, we have the entries here. One to Mr. Harker you see, and one to Mr. Josiah Brown, of Laburnum Lodge, Laburnum Vale, Chiswick, and one to Mr. Sandeford, of Lower Grove Road, Reading. No, I have never seen this face which you show me in the photograph. You would hardly forget it, would you, sir, for I've seldom seen an uglier. Have we any Italians on the staff? Yes, sir, we have several among our workpeople and cleaners. I daresay they might get a peep at that sales book if they wanted to. There is no particular reason for keeping a watch upon that book. Well, well, it's a very strange business, and I hope that you will let me know if anything comes of your inquiries."

Holmes had taken several notes during Mr. Harding's evidence, and I could see that he was thoroughly satisfied by the turn which affairs were taking. He made no remark, however, save that, unless we hurried, we should be late for our appointment with Lestrade. Sure enough, when we reached Baker Street the detective was already there, and we found him pacing up and down in a fever of impatience. His look of importance showed that his day's work had not been in vain.

"Well?" he asked. "What luck, Mr. Holmes?"

“We have had a very busy day, and not entirely a wasted one,” my friend explained. “We have seen both the retailers and also the wholesale manufacturers. I can trace each of the busts now from the beginning.”

“The busts,” cried Lestrade. “Well, well, you have your own methods, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and it is not for me to say a word against them, but I think I have done a better day’s work than you. I have identified the dead man.”

“You don’t say so?”

“And found a cause for the crime.”

“Splendid!”

“We have an inspector who makes a specialty of Saffron Hill and the Italian Quarter. Well, this dead man had some Catholic emblem round his neck, and that, along with his colour, made me think he was from the South. Inspector Hill knew him the moment he caught sight of him. His name is Pietro Venucci, from Naples, and he is one of the greatest cut-throats in London. He is connected with the Mafia, which, as you know, is a secret political society, enforcing its decrees by murder. Now, you see how the affair begins to clear up. The other fellow is probably an Italian also, and a member of the Mafia. He has broken the rules in some fashion. Pietro is set upon his track. Probably the photograph we found in his pocket is the man himself, so that he may not knife the wrong person. He dogs the fellow, he sees him enter a house, he waits outside for him, and in the scuffle he receives his own death-wound. How is that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

Holmes clapped his hands approvingly.

“Excellent, Lestrade, excellent!” he cried. “But I didn’t quite follow your explanation of the destruction of the busts.”

“The busts! You never can get those busts out of your head. After all, that is nothing; petty larceny, six months at the most. It is the murder that we are really investigating, and I tell you that I am gathering all the threads into my hands.”

“And the next stage?”

“Is a very simple one. I shall go down with Hill to the Italian Quarter, find the man whose photograph we have got, and arrest him on the charge of murder. Will you come with us?”

“I think not. I fancy we can attain our end in a simpler way. I can’t say for certain, because it all depends — well, it all depends upon a factor which is completely outside our control. But I have great hopes — in fact, the betting is exactly two to one — that if you will come with us to-night I shall be able to help you to lay him by the heels."

"In the Italian Quarter?"

"No, I fancy Chiswick is an address which is more likely to find him. If you will come with me to Chiswick to-night, Lestrade, I'll promise to go to the Italian Quarter with you to-morrow, and no harm will be done by the delay. And now I think that a few hours' sleep would do us all good, for I do not propose to leave before eleven o'clock, and it is unlikely that we shall be back before morning. You'll dine with us, Lestrade, and then you are welcome to the sofa until it is time for us to start. In the meantime, Watson, I should be glad if you would ring for an express messenger, for I have a letter to send and it is important that it should go at once."

Holmes spent the evening in rummaging among the files of the old daily papers with which one of our lumber-rooms was packed. When at last he descended, it was with triumph in his eyes, but he said nothing to either of us as to the result of his researches. For my own part, I had followed step by step the methods by which he had traced the various windings of this complex case, and, though I could not yet perceive the goal which we would reach, I understood clearly that Holmes expected this grotesque criminal to make an attempt upon the two remaining busts, one of which, I remembered, was at Chiswick. No doubt the object of our journey was to catch him in the very act, and I could not but admire the cunning with which my friend had inserted a wrong clue in the evening paper, so as to give the fellow the idea that he could continue his scheme with impunity. I was not surprised when Holmes suggested that I should take my revolver with me. He had himself picked up the loaded hunting-crop, which was his favourite weapon.

A four-wheeler was at the door at eleven, and in it we drove to a spot at the other side of Hammersmith Bridge. Here the cabman was directed to wait. A short walk brought us to a secluded road fringed with pleasant houses, each standing in its own grounds. In the light of a street lamp we read "Laburnum Villa" upon the gate-post of one of them. The occupants had evidently retired to rest, for all was dark save for a fanlight over the hall door, which shed a single blurred circle on to the garden path. The wooden fence which separated the grounds from the road threw a dense black shadow upon the inner side, and here it was that we crouched.

“I fear that you’ll have a long wait,” Holmes whispered. “We may thank our stars that it is not raining. I don’t think we can even venture to smoke to pass the time. However, it’s a two to one chance that we get something to pay us for our trouble.”

It proved, however, that our vigil was not to be so long as Holmes had led us to fear, and it ended in a very sudden and singular fashion. In an instant, without the least sound to warn us of his coming, the garden gate swung open, and a lithe, dark figure, as swift and active as an ape, rushed up the garden path. We saw it whisk past the light thrown from over the door and disappear against the black shadow of the house. There was a long pause, during which we held our breath, and then a very gentle creaking sound came to our ears. The window was being opened. The noise ceased, and again there was a long silence. The fellow was making his way into the house. We saw the sudden flash of a dark lantern inside the room. What he sought was evidently not there, for again we saw the flash through another blind, and then through another.

“Let us get to the open window. We will nab him as he climbs out,” Lestrade whispered.

But before we could move, the man had emerged again. As he came out into the glimmering patch of light, we saw that he carried something white under his arm. He looked stealthily all round him. The silence of the deserted street reassured him. Turning his back upon us he laid down his burden, and the next instant there was the sound of a sharp tap, followed by a clatter and rattle. The man was so intent upon what he was doing that he never heard our steps as we stole across the grass plot. With the bound of a tiger Holmes was on his back, and an instant later Lestrade and I had him by either wrist, and the handcuffs had been fastened. As we turned him over I saw a hideous, sallow face, with writhing, furious features, glaring up at us, and I knew that it was indeed the man of the photograph whom we had secured.

But it was not our prisoner to whom Holmes was giving his attention. Squatted on the doorstep, he was engaged in most carefully examining that which the man had brought from the house. It was a bust of Napoleon, like the one which we had seen that morning, and it had been broken into similar fragments. Carefully Holmes held each separate shard to the light, but in no way did it differ from any other shattered piece of plaster. He had just completed his examination when the hall lights flew up, the door opened, and the owner of the house, a jovial, rotund figure in shirt and trousers, presented himself.

“Mr. Josiah Brown, I suppose?” said Holmes.

“Yes, sir; and you, no doubt, are Mr. Sherlock Holmes? I had the note which you sent by the express messenger, and I did exactly what you told me. We locked every door on the inside and awaited developments. Well, I’m very glad to see that you have got the rascal. I hope, gentlemen, that you will come in and have some refreshment.”

However, Lestrade was anxious to get his man into safe quarters, so within a few minutes our cab had been summoned and we were all four upon our way to London. Not a word would our captive say, but he glared at us from the shadow of his matted hair, and once, when my hand seemed within his reach, he snapped at it like a hungry wolf. We stayed long enough at the police-station to learn that a search of his clothing revealed nothing save a few shillings and a long sheath knife, the handle of which bore copious traces of recent blood.

“That’s all right,” said Lestrade, as we parted. “Hill knows all these gentry, and he will give a name to him. You’ll find that my theory of the Mafia will work out all right. But I’m sure I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Holmes, for the workmanlike way in which you laid hands upon him. I don’t quite understand it all yet.”

“I fear it is rather too late an hour for explanations,” said Holmes. “Besides, there are one or two details which are not finished off, and it is one of those cases which are worth working out to the very end. If you will come round once more to my rooms at six o’clock to-morrow, I think I shall be able to show you that even now you have not grasped the entire meaning of this business, which presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime. If ever I permit you to chronicle any more of my little problems, Watson, I foresee that you will enliven your pages by an account of the singular adventure of the Napoleonic busts.”

When we met again next evening, Lestrade was furnished with much information concerning our prisoner. His name, it appeared, was Beppo, second name unknown. He was a well-known ne’er-do-well among the Italian colony. He had once been a skilful sculptor and had earned an honest living, but he had taken to evil courses and had twice already been in jail — once for a petty theft, and once, as we had already heard, for stabbing a fellow-countryman. He could talk English perfectly well. His reasons for destroying the busts were still unknown, and he refused to answer any questions upon the subject, but the police had discovered that these same busts might very well have been made by his own hands, since he was engaged in this class of work at the establishment of Gelder & Co. To all this information, much of which we already knew, Holmes listened with polite attention, but I, who knew him so well, could clearly see that his thoughts were elsewhere, and I detected a mixture of mingled uneasiness and expectation beneath that mask which he was wont to assume. At last he started in his chair, and his eyes brightened. There had been a ring at the bell. A minute later we heard steps upon the stairs, and an elderly red-faced man with grizzled side-whiskers was ushered in. In his right hand he carried an old-fashioned carpet-bag, which he placed upon the table.

"Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?"

My friend bowed and smiled. "Mr. Sandeford, of Reading, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes, sir, I fear that I am a little late, but the trains were awkward. You wrote to me about a bust that is in my possession."

"Exactly."

"I have your letter here. You said, 'I desire to possess a copy of Devine's Napoleon, and am prepared to pay you ten pounds for the one which is in your possession.' Is that right?"

"Certainly."

"I was very much surprised at your letter, for I could not imagine how you knew that I owned such a thing."

"Of course you must have been surprised, but the explanation is very simple. Mr. Harding, of Harding Brothers, said that they had sold you their last copy, and he gave me your address."

"Oh, that was it, was it? Did he tell you what I paid for it?"

"No, he did not."

"Well, I am an honest man, though not a very rich one. I only gave fifteen shillings for the bust, and I think you ought to know that before I take ten pounds from you.

"I am sure the scruple does you honour, Mr. Sandeford. But I have named that price, so I intend to stick to it."

"Well, it is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. I brought the bust up with me, as you asked me to do. Here it is!" He opened his bag, and at last we saw placed upon our table a complete specimen of that bust which we had already seen more than once in fragments.

Holmes took a paper from his pocket and laid a ten-pound note upon the table.

"You will kindly sign that paper, Mr. Sandeford, in the presence of these witnesses. It is simply to say that you transfer every possible right that you ever had in the bust to me. I am a methodical man, you see, and you never know what turn events might take afterwards. Thank you, Mr. Sandeford; here is your money, and I wish you a very good evening."

When our visitor had disappeared, Sherlock Holmes's movements were such as to rivet our attention. He began by taking a clean white cloth from a drawer and laying it over the table. Then he placed his newly acquired bust in the centre of the cloth. Finally, he picked up his hunting-crop and struck Napoleon a sharp blow on the top of the head. The figure broke into fragments, and Holmes bent eagerly over the shattered remains. Next instant, with a loud shout of triumph he held up one splinter, in which a round, dark object was fixed like a plum in a pudding.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias."

Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then, with a spontaneous impulse, we both broke at clapping, as at the well-wrought crisis of a play. A flush of colour sprang to Holmes's pale cheeks, and he bowed to us like the master dramatist who receives the homage of his audience. It was at such moments that for an instant he ceased to be a reasoning machine, and betrayed his human love for admiration and applause. The same singularly proud and reserved nature which turned away with disdain from popular notoriety was capable of being moved to its depths by spontaneous wonder and praise from a friend.

"Yes, gentlemen," said he, "it is the most famous pearl now existing in the world, and it has been my good fortune, by a connected chain of inductive reasoning, to trace it from the Prince of Colonna's bedroom at the Dacre Hotel, where it was lost, to the interior of this, the last of the six busts of Napoleon which were manufactured by Gelder & Co., of Stepney. You will remember, Lestrade, the sensation caused by the disappearance of this valuable jewel and the vain efforts of the London police to recover it. I was myself consulted upon the case, but I was unable to throw any light upon it. Suspicion fell upon the maid of the Princess, who was an Italian, and it was proved that she had a brother in London, but we failed to trace any connection between them. The maid's name was Lucretia Venucci, and there is no doubt in my mind that this Pietro who was murdered two nights ago was the brother. I have been looking up the dates in the old files of the paper, and I find that the disappearance of the pearl was exactly two days before the arrest of Beppo, for some crime of violence — an event which took place in the factory of Gelder & Co., at the very moment when these busts were being made. Now you clearly see the sequence of events, though you see them, of course, in the inverse order to the way in which they presented themselves to me. Beppo had the pearl in his possession. He may have stolen it from Pietro, he may have been Pietro's confederate, he may have been the go-between of Pietro and his sister. It is of no consequence to us which is the correct solution.

"The main fact is that he HAD the pearl, and at that moment, when it was on his person, he was pursued by the police. He made for the factory in which he worked, and he knew that he had only a few minutes in which to conceal this enormously valuable prize, which would otherwise be found on him when he was searched. Six plaster casts of Napoleon were drying in the passage. One of them was still soft. In an instant Beppo, a skilful workman, made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl, and with a few touches covered over the aperture once more. It was an admirable hiding-place. No one could possibly find it. But Beppo was condemned to a year's imprisonment, and in the meanwhile his six busts were scattered over London. He could not tell which contained his treasure. Only by breaking them could he see. Even shaking would tell him nothing, for as the plaster was wet it was probable that the pearl would adhere to it — as, in fact, it has done. Beppo did not despair, and he conducted his search with considerable ingenuity and perseverance. Through a cousin who works with Gelder, he found out the retail firms who had bought the busts. He managed to find employment with Morse Hudson, and in that way tracked down three of them. The pearl was not there. Then, with the help of some Italian employee, he succeeded in finding out where the other three busts had gone. The first was at Harker's. There he was dogged by his confederate, who held Beppo responsible for the loss of the pearl, and he stabbed him in the scuffle which followed."

"If he was his confederate, why should he carry his photograph?" I asked.

“As a means of tracing him, if he wished to inquire about him from any third person. That was the obvious reason. Well, after the murder I calculated that Beppo would probably hurry rather than delay his movements. He would fear that the police would read his secret, and so he hastened on before they should get ahead of him. Of course, I could not say that he had not found the pearl in Harker’s bust. I had not even concluded for certain that it was the pearl, but it was evident to me that he was looking for something, since he carried the bust past the other houses in order to break it in the garden which had a lamp overlooking it. Since Harker’s bust was one in three, the chances were exactly as I told you — two to one against the pearl being inside it. There remained two busts, and it was obvious that he would go for the London one first. I warned the inmates of the house, so as to avoid a second tragedy, and we went down, with the happiest results. By that time, of course, I knew for certain that it was the Borgia pearl that we were after. The name of the murdered man linked the one event with the other. There only remained a single bust — the Reading one — and the pearl must be there. I bought it in your presence from the owner — and there it lies.”

We sat in silence for a moment.

“Well,” said Lestrade, “I’ve seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don’t know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We’re not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir, we are very proud of you, and if you come down to-morrow, there’s not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn’t be glad to shake you by the hand.”

“Thank you!” said Holmes. “Thank you!” and as he turned away, it seemed to me that he was more nearly moved by the softer human emotions than I had ever seen him. A moment later he was the cold and practical thinker once more. “Put the pearl in the safe, Watson,” said he, “and get out the papers of the Conk-Singleton forgery case. Good-bye, Lestrade. If any little problem comes your way, I shall be happy, if I can, to give you a hint or two as to its solution.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE STUDENTS

It was in the year ‘95 that a combination of events, into which I need not enter, caused Mr. Sherlock Holmes and myself to spend some weeks in one of our great university towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure which I am about to relate befell us. It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader exactly to identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive. So painful a scandal may well be allowed to die out. With due discretion the incident itself may, however, be described, since it serves to illustrate some of those qualities for which my friend was remarkable. I will endeavour, in my statement, to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place, or give a clue as to the people concerned.

We were residing at the time in furnished lodgings close to a library where Sherlock Holmes was pursuing some laborious researches in early English charters — researches which led to results so striking that they may be the subject of one of my future narratives. Here it was that one evening we received a visit from an acquaintance, Mr. Hilton Soames, tutor and lecturer at the College of St. Luke’s. Mr. Soames was a tall, spare man, of a nervous and excitable temperament. I had always known him to be restless in his manner, but on this particular occasion he was in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that it was clear something very unusual had occurred.

“I trust, Mr. Holmes, that you can spare me a few hours of your valuable time. We have had a very painful incident at St. Luke’s, and really, but for the happy chance of your being in town, I should have been at a loss what to do.”

“I am very busy just now, and I desire no distractions,” my friend answered. “I should much prefer that you called in the aid of the police.”

“No, no, my dear sir; such a course is utterly impossible. When once the law is evoked it cannot be stayed again, and this is just one of those cases where, for the credit of the college, it is most essential to avoid scandal.

Your discretion is as well known as your powers, and you are the one man in the world who can help me. I beg you, Mr. Holmes, to do what you can."

My friend's temper had not improved since he had been deprived of the congenial surroundings of Baker Street. Without his scrapbooks, his chemicals, and his homely untidiness, he was an uncomfortable man. He shrugged his shoulders in ungracious acquiescence, while our visitor in hurried words and with much excitable gesticulation poured forth his story.

"I must explain to you, Mr. Holmes, that to-morrow is the first day of the examination for the Fortescue Scholarship. I am one of the examiners. My subject is Greek, and the first of the papers consists of a large passage of Greek translation which the candidate has not seen. This passage is printed on the examination paper, and it would naturally be an immense advantage if the candidate could prepare it in advance. For this reason, great care is taken to keep the paper secret.

"To-day, about three o'clock, the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers. The exercise consists of half a chapter of Thucydides. I had to read it over carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct. At four-thirty my task was not yet completed. I had, however, promised to take tea in a friend's rooms, so I left the proof upon my desk. I was absent rather more than an hour.

"You are aware, Mr. Holmes, that our college doors are double — a green baize one within and a heavy oak one without. As I approached my outer door, I was amazed to see a key in it. For an instant I imagined that I had left my own there, but on feeling in my pocket I found that it was all right. The only duplicate which existed, so far as I knew, was that which belonged to my servant, Bannister — a man who has looked after my room for ten years, and whose honesty is absolutely above suspicion. I found that the key was indeed his, that he had entered my room to know if I wanted tea, and that he had very carelessly left the key in the door when he came out. His visit to my room must have been within a very few minutes of my leaving it. His forgetfulness about the key would have mattered little upon any other occasion, but on this one day it has produced the most deplorable consequences.

"The moment I looked at my table, I was aware that someone had rummaged among my papers. The proof was in three long slips. I had left them all together. Now, I found that one of them was lying on the floor, one was on the side table near the window, and the third was where I had left it.”

Holmes stirred for the first time.

“The first page on the floor, the second in the window, the third where you left it,” said he.

“Exactly, Mr. Holmes. You amaze me. How could you possibly know that?”

“Pray continue your very interesting statement.”

“For an instant I imagined that Bannister had taken the unpardonable liberty of examining my papers. He denied it, however, with the utmost earnestness, and I am convinced that he was speaking the truth. The alternative was that someone passing had observed the key in the door, had known that I was out, and had entered to look at the papers. A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one, and an unscrupulous man might very well run a risk in order to gain an advantage over his fellows.

“Bannister was very much upset by the incident. He had nearly fainted when we found that the papers had undoubtedly been tampered with. I gave him a little brandy and left him collapsed in a chair, while I made a most careful examination of the room. I soon saw that the intruder had left other traces of his presence besides the rumpled papers. On the table in the window were several shreds from a pencil which had been sharpened. A broken tip of lead was lying there also. Evidently the rascal had copied the paper in a great hurry, had broken his pencil, and had been compelled to put a fresh point to it.”

“Excellent!” said Holmes, who was recovering his good-humour as his attention became more engrossed by the case. “Fortune has been your friend.”

“This was not all. I have a new writing-table with a fine surface of red leather. I am prepared to swear, and so is Bannister, that it was smooth and unstained. Now I found a clean cut in it about three inches long — not a mere scratch, but a positive cut. Not only this, but on the table I found a small ball of black dough or clay, with specks of something which looks like sawdust in it. I am convinced that these marks were left by the man who rifled the papers. There were no footmarks and no other evidence as to his identity. I was at my wit’s end, when suddenly the happy thought occurred to me that you were in the town, and I came straight round to put the matter into your hands. Do help me, Mr. Holmes. You see my dilemma. Either I must find the man or else the examination must be postponed until fresh papers are prepared, and since this cannot be done without explanation, there will ensue a hideous scandal, which will throw a cloud not only on the college, but on the university. Above all things, I desire to settle the matter quietly and discreetly."

"I shall be happy to look into it and to give you such advice as I can," said Holmes, rising and putting on his overcoat. "The case is not entirely devoid of interest. Had anyone visited you in your room after the papers came to you?"

"Yes, young Daulat Ras, an Indian student, who lives on the same stair, came in to ask me some particulars about the examination."

"For which he was entered?"

"Yes."

"And the papers were on your table?"

"To the best of my belief, they were rolled up."

"But might be recognised as proofs?"

"Possibly."

"No one else in your room?"

"No."

"Did anyone know that these proofs would be there?"

"No one save the printer."

"Did this man Bannister know?"

"No, certainly not. No one knew."

"Where is Bannister now?"

"He was very ill, poor fellow. I left him collapsed in the chair. I was in such a hurry to come to you."

"You left your door open?"

"I locked up the papers first."

"Then it amounts to this, Mr. Soames: that, unless the Indian student recognised the roll as being proofs, the man who tampered with them came upon them accidentally without knowing that they were there."

"So it seems to me."

Holmes gave an enigmatic smile.

"Well," said he, "let us go round. Not one of your cases, Watson — mental, not physical. All right; come if you want to. Now, Mr. Soames — at your disposal!"

The sitting-room of our client opened by a long, low, latticed window on to the ancient lichen-tinted court of the old college. A Gothic arched door led to a worn stone staircase. On the ground floor was the tutor's room. Above were three students, one on each story. It was already twilight when we reached the scene of our problem. Holmes halted and looked earnestly at the window. Then he approached it, and, standing on tiptoe with his neck craned, he looked into the room.

"He must have entered through the door. There is no opening except the one pane," said our learned guide.

"Dear me!" said Holmes, and he smiled in a singular way as he glanced at our companion. "Well, if there is nothing to be learned here, we had best go inside."

The lecturer unlocked the outer door and ushered us into his room. We stood at the entrance while Holmes made an examination of the carpet.

"I am afraid there are no signs here," said he. "One could hardly hope for any upon so dry a day. Your servant seems to have quite recovered. You left him in a chair, you say. Which chair?"

"By the window there."

"I see. Near this little table. You can come in now. I have finished with the carpet. Let us take the little table first. Of course, what has happened is very clear. The man entered and took the papers, sheet by sheet, from the central table. He carried them over to the window table, because from there he could see if you came across the courtyard, and so could effect an escape."

"As a matter of fact, he could not," said Soames, "for I entered by the side door."

"Ah, that's good! Well, anyhow, that was in his mind. Let me see the three strips. No finger impressions — no! Well, he carried over this one first, and he copied it. How long would it take him to do that, using every possible contraction? A quarter of an hour, not less. Then he tossed it down and seized the next. He was in the midst of that when your return caused him to make a very hurried retreat — VERY hurried, since he had not time to replace the papers which would tell you that he had been there. You were not aware of any hurrying feet on the stair as you entered the outer door?"

"No, I can't say I was."

"Well, he wrote so furiously that he broke his pencil, and had, as you observe, to sharpen it again. This is of interest, Watson. The pencil was not an ordinary one. It was above the usual size, with a soft lead, the outer colour was dark blue, the maker’s name was printed in silver lettering, and the piece remaining is only about an inch and a half long. Look for such a pencil, Mr. Soames, and you have got your man. When I add that he possesses a large and very blunt knife, you have an additional aid.”

Mr. Soames was somewhat overwhelmed by this flood of information. “I can follow the other points,” said he, “but really, in this matter of the length — —”

Holmes held out a small chip with the letters NN and a space of clear wood after them.

“You see?”

“No, I fear that even now — —”

“Watson, I have always done you an injustice. There are others. What could this NN be? It is at the end of a word. You are aware that Johann Faber is the most common maker’s name. Is it not clear that there is just as much of the pencil left as usually follows the Johann?” He held the small table sideways to the electric light. “I was hoping that if the paper on which he wrote was thin, some trace of it might come through upon this polished surface. No, I see nothing. I don’t think there is anything more to be learned here. Now for the central table. This small pellet is, I presume, the black, doughy mass you spoke of. Roughly pyramidal in shape and hollowed out, I perceive. As you say, there appear to be grains of sawdust in it. Dear me, this is very interesting. And the cut — a positive tear, I see. It began with a thin scratch and ended in a jagged hole. I am much indebted to you for directing my attention to this case, Mr. Soames. Where does that door lead to?”

“To my bedroom.”

“Have you been in it since your adventure?”

“No, I came straight away for you.”

“I should like to have a glance round. What a charming, old-fashioned room! Perhaps you will kindly wait a minute, until I have examined the floor. No, I see nothing. What about this curtain? You hang your clothes behind it. If anyone were forced to conceal himself in this room he must do it there, since the bed is too low and the wardrobe too shallow. No one there, I suppose?”

As Holmes drew the curtain I was aware, from some little rigidity and alertness of his attitude, that he was prepared for an emergency. As a matter of fact, the drawn curtain disclosed nothing but three or four suits of clothes hanging from a line of pegs. Holmes turned away, and stooped suddenly to the floor.

“Halloa! What’s this?” said he.

It was a small pyramid of black, putty-like stuff, exactly like the one upon the table of the study. Holmes held it out on his open palm in the glare of the electric light.

“Your visitor seems to have left traces in your bedroom as well as in your sitting-room, Mr. Soames.”

“What could he have wanted there?”

“I think it is clear enough. You came back by an unexpected way, and so he had no warning until you were at the very door. What could he do? He caught up everything which would betray him, and he rushed into your bedroom to conceal himself.”

“Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, do you mean to tell me that, all the time I was talking to Bannister in this room, we had the man prisoner if we had only known it?”

“So I read it.”

“Surely there is another alternative, Mr. Holmes. I don’t know whether you observed my bedroom window?”

“Lattice-paned, lead framework, three separate windows, one swinging on hinge, and large enough to admit a man.”

“Exactly. And it looks out on an angle of the courtyard so as to be partly invisible. The man might have effected his entrance there, left traces as he passed through the bedroom, and finally, finding the door open, have escaped that way.”

Holmes shook his head impatiently.

“Let us be practical,” said he. “I understand you to say that there are three students who use this stair, and are in the habit of passing your door?”

“Yes, there are.”

“And they are all in for this examination?”

“Yes.”

“Have you any reason to suspect any one of them more than the others?”

Soames hesitated.

“It is a very delicate question,” said he. “One hardly likes to throw suspicion where there are no proofs.”

“Let us hear the suspicions. I will look after the proofs.”

“I will tell you, then, in a few words the character of the three men who inhabit these rooms. The lower of the three is Gilchrist, a fine scholar and athlete, plays in the Rugby team and the cricket team for the college, and got his Blue for the hurdles and the long jump. He is a fine, manly fellow. His father was the notorious Sir Jabez Gilchrist, who ruined himself on the turf. My scholar has been left very poor, but he is hard-working and industrious. He will do well.

“The second floor is inhabited by Daulat Ras, the Indian. He is a quiet, inscrutable fellow; as most of those Indians are. He is well up in his work, though his Greek is his weak subject. He is steady and methodical.

“The top floor belongs to Miles McLaren. He is a brilliant fellow when he chooses to work — one of the brightest intellects of the university; but he is wayward, dissipated, and unprincipled. He was nearly expelled over a card scandal in his first year. He has been idling all this term, and he must look forward with dread to the examination.”

“Then it is he whom you suspect?”

“I dare not go so far as that. But, of the three, he is perhaps the least unlikely.”

“Exactly. Now, Mr. Soames, let us have a look at your servant, Bannister.”

He was a little, white-faced, clean-shaven, grizzly-haired fellow of fifty. He was still suffering from this sudden disturbance of the quiet routine of his life. His plump face was twitching with his nervousness, and his fingers could not keep still.

“We are investigating this unhappy business, Bannister,” said his master.

“Yes, sir.”

“I understand,” said Holmes, “that you left your key in the door?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was it not very extraordinary that you should do this on the very day when there were these papers inside?”

“It was most unfortunate, sir. But I have occasionally done the same thing at other times.”

“When did you enter the room?”

“It was about half-past four. That is Mr. Soames’ tea time.”

“How long did you stay?”

“When I saw that he was absent, I withdrew at once.”

“Did you look at these papers on the table?”

“No, sir — certainly not.”

“How came you to leave the key in the door?”

“I had the tea-tray in my hand. I thought I would come back for the key. Then I forgot.”

“Has the outer door a spring lock?”

“No, sir.”

“Then it was open all the time?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Anyone in the room could get out?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When Mr. Soames returned and called for you, you were very much disturbed?”

“Yes, sir. Such a thing has never happened during the many years that I have been here. I nearly fainted, sir.”

“So I understand. Where were you when you began to feel bad?”

“Where was I, sir? Why, here, near the door.”

“That is singular, because you sat down in that chair over yonder near the corner. Why did you pass these other chairs?”

“I don’t know, sir, it didn’t matter to me where I sat.”

“I really don’t think he knew much about it, Mr. Holmes. He was looking very bad — quite ghastly.”

“You stayed here when your master left?”

“Only for a minute or so. Then I locked the door and went to my room.”

“Whom do you suspect?”

“Oh, I would not venture to say, sir. I don’t believe there is any gentleman in this university who is capable of profiting by such an action. No, sir, I’ll not believe it.”

“Thank you, that will do,” said Holmes. “Oh, one more word. You have not mentioned to any of the three gentlemen whom you attend that anything is amiss?”

“No, sir — not a word.”

“You haven’t seen any of them?”

“No, sir.”

“Very good. Now, Mr. Soames, we will take a walk in the quadrangle, if you please.”

Three yellow squares of light shone above us in the gathering gloom.

"Your three birds are all in their nests," said Holmes, looking up. "Halloa! What's that? One of them seems restless enough."

It was the Indian, whose dark silhouette appeared suddenly upon his blind. He was pacing swiftly up and down his room.

"I should like to have a peep at each of them," said Holmes. "Is it possible?"

"No difficulty in the world," Soames answered. "This set of rooms is quite the oldest in the college, and it is not unusual for visitors to go over them. Come along, and I will personally conduct you."

"No names, please!" said Holmes, as we knocked at Gilchrist's door. A tall, flaxen-haired, slim young fellow opened it, and made us welcome when he understood our errand. There were some really curious pieces of mediaeval domestic architecture within. Holmes was so charmed with one of them that he insisted on drawing it in his notebook, broke his pencil, had to borrow one from our host and finally borrowed a knife to sharpen his own. The same curious accident happened to him in the rooms of the Indian — a silent, little, hook-nosed fellow, who eyed us askance, and was obviously glad when Holmes's architectural studies had come to an end. I could not see that in either case Holmes had come upon the clue for which he was searching. Only at the third did our visit prove abortive. The outer door would not open to our knock, and nothing more substantial than a torrent of bad language came from behind it. "I don't care who you are. You can go to blazes!" roared the angry voice. "Tomorrow's the exam, and I won't be drawn by anyone."

"A rude fellow," said our guide, flushing with anger as we withdrew down the stair. "Of course, he did not realise that it was I who was knocking, but none the less his conduct was very uncourteous, and, indeed, under the circumstances rather suspicious."

Holmes's response was a curious one.

"Can you tell me his exact height?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. Holmes, I cannot undertake to say. He is taller than the Indian, not so tall as Gilchrist. I suppose five foot six would be about it."

"That is very important," said Holmes. "And now, Mr. Soames, I wish you good-night."

Our guide cried aloud in his astonishment and dismay. "Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, you are surely not going to leave me in this abrupt fashion! You don't seem to realise the position. To-morrow is the examination. I must take some definite action to-night. I cannot allow the examination to be held if one of the papers has been tampered with. The situation must be faced.”

“You must leave it as it is. I shall drop round early to-morrow morning and chat the matter over. It is possible that I may be in a position then to indicate some course of action. Meanwhile, you change nothing — nothing at all.”

“Very good, Mr. Holmes.”

“You can be perfectly easy in your mind. We shall certainly find some way out of your difficulties. I will take the black clay with me, also the pencil cuttings. Good-bye.”

When we were out in the darkness of the quadrangle, we again looked up at the windows. The Indian still paced his room. The others were invisible.

“Well, Watson, what do you think of it?” Holmes asked, as we came out into the main street. “Quite a little parlour game — sort of three-card trick, is it not? There are your three men. It must be one of them. You take your choice. Which is yours?”

“The foul-mouthed fellow at the top. He is the one with the worst record. And yet that Indian was a sly fellow also. Why should he be pacing his room all the time?”

“There is nothing in that. Many men do it when they are trying to learn anything by heart.”

“He looked at us in a queer way.”

“So would you, if a flock of strangers came in on you when you were preparing for an examination next day, and every moment was of value. No, I see nothing in that. Pencils, too, and knives — all was satisfactory. But that fellow DOES puzzle me.”

“Who?”

“Why, Bannister, the servant. What’s his game in the matter?”

“He impressed me as being a perfectly honest man.”

“So he did me. That’s the puzzling part. Why should a perfectly honest man — Well, well, here’s a large stationer’s. We shall begin our researches here.”

There were only four stationers of any consequences in the town, and at each Holmes produced his pencil chips, and bid high for a duplicate. All were agreed that one could be ordered, but that it was not a usual size of pencil and that it was seldom kept in stock. My friend did not appear to be depressed by his failure, but shrugged his shoulders in half-humorous resignation.

"No good, my dear Watson. This, the best and only final clue, has run to nothing. But, indeed, I have little doubt that we can build up a sufficient case without it. By Jove! my dear fellow, it is nearly nine, and the landlady babbled of green peas at seven-thirty. What with your eternal tobacco, Watson, and your irregularity at meals, I expect that you will get notice to quit, and that I shall share your downfall — not, however, before we have solved the problem of the nervous tutor, the careless servant, and the three enterprising students."

Holmes made no further allusion to the matter that day, though he sat lost in thought for a long time after our belated dinner. At eight in the morning, he came into my room just as I finished my toilet.

"Well, Watson," said he, "it is time we went down to St. Luke's. Can you do without breakfast?"

"Certainly."

"Soames will be in a dreadful fidget until we are able to tell him something positive."

"Have you anything positive to tell him?"

"I think so."

"You have formed a conclusion?"

"Yes, my dear Watson, I have solved the mystery."

"But what fresh evidence could you have got?"

"Aha! It is not for nothing that I have turned myself out of bed at the untimely hour of six. I have put in two hours' hard work and covered at least five miles, with something to show for it. Look at that!"

He held out his hand. On the palm were three little pyramids of black, doughy clay.

"Why, Holmes, you had only two yesterday."

"And one more this morning. It is a fair argument that wherever No. 3 came from is also the source of Nos. 1 and 2. Eh, Watson? Well, come along and put friend Soames out of his pain."

The unfortunate tutor was certainly in a state of pitiable agitation when we found him in his chambers. In a few hours the examination would commence, and he was still in the dilemma between making the facts public and allowing the culprit to compete for the valuable scholarship. He could hardly stand still so great was his mental agitation, and he ran towards Holmes with two eager hands outstretched.

“Thank heaven that you have come! I feared that you had given it up in despair. What am I to do? Shall the examination proceed?”

“Yes, let it proceed, by all means.”

“But this rascal?”

“He shall not compete.”

“You know him?”

“I think so. If this matter is not to become public, we must give ourselves certain powers and resolve ourselves into a small private court-martial. You there, if you please, Soames! Watson you here! I’ll take the armchair in the middle. I think that we are now sufficiently imposing to strike terror into a guilty breast. Kindly ring the bell!”

Bannister entered, and shrank back in evident surprise and fear at our judicial appearance.

“You will kindly close the door,” said Holmes. “Now, Bannister, will you please tell us the truth about yesterday’s incident?”

The man turned white to the roots of his hair.

“I have told you everything, sir.”

“Nothing to add?”

“Nothing at all, sir.”

“Well, then, I must make some suggestions to you. When you sat down on that chair yesterday, did you do so in order to conceal some object which would have shown who had been in the room?”

Bannister’s face was ghastly.

“No, sir, certainly not.”

“It is only a suggestion,” said Holmes, suavely. “I frankly admit that I am unable to prove it. But it seems probable enough, since the moment that Mr. Soames’s back was turned, you released the man who was hiding in that bedroom.”

Bannister licked his dry lips.

“There was no man, sir.”

“Ah, that’s a pity, Bannister. Up to now you may have spoken the truth, but now I know that you have lied.”

The man’s face set in sullen defiance.

“There was no man, sir.”

“Come, come, Bannister!”

“No, sir, there was no one.”

“In that case, you can give us no further information. Would you please remain in the room? Stand over there near the bedroom door. Now, Soames, I am going to ask you to have the great kindness to go up to the room of young Gilchrist, and to ask him to step down into yours.”

An instant later the tutor returned, bringing with him the student. He was a fine figure of a man, tall, lithe, and agile, with a springy step and a pleasant, open face. His troubled blue eyes glanced at each of us, and finally rested with an expression of blank dismay upon Bannister in the farther corner.

“Just close the door,” said Holmes. “Now, Mr. Gilchrist, we are all quite alone here, and no one need ever know one word of what passes between us. We can be perfectly frank with each other. We want to know, Mr. Gilchrist, how you, an honourable man, ever came to commit such an action as that of yesterday?”

The unfortunate young man staggered back, and cast a look full of horror and reproach at Bannister.

“No, no, Mr. Gilchrist, sir, I never said a word — never one word!” cried the servant.

“No, but you have now,” said Holmes. “Now, sir, you must see that after Bannister’s words your position is hopeless, and that your only chance lies in a frank confession.”

For a moment Gilchrist, with upraised hand, tried to control his writhing features. The next he had thrown himself on his knees beside the table, and burying his face in his hands, he had burst into a storm of passionate sobbing.

“Come, come,” said Holmes, kindly, “it is human to err, and at least no one can accuse you of being a callous criminal. Perhaps it would be easier for you if I were to tell Mr. Soames what occurred, and you can check me where I am wrong. Shall I do so? Well, well, don’t trouble to answer. Listen, and see that I do you no injustice.

“From the moment, Mr. Soames, that you said to me that no one, not even Bannister, could have told that the papers were in your room, the case began to take a definite shape in my mind. The printer one could, of course, dismiss. He could examine the papers in his own office. The Indian I also thought nothing of. If the proofs were in a roll, he could not possibly know what they were. On the other hand, it seemed an unthinkable coincidence that a man should dare to enter the room, and that by chance on that very day the papers were on the table. I dismissed that. The man who entered knew that the papers were there. How did he know?

“When I approached your room, I examined the window. You amused me by supposing that I was contemplating the possibility of someone having in broad daylight, under the eyes of all these opposite rooms, forced himself through it. Such an idea was absurd. I was measuring how tall a man would need to be in order to see, as he passed, what papers were on the central table. I am six feet high, and I could do it with an effort. No one less than that would have a chance. Already you see I had reason to think that, if one of your three students was a man of unusual height, he was the most worth watching of the three.

“I entered, and I took you into my confidence as to the suggestions of the side table. Of the centre table I could make nothing, until in your description of Gilchrist you mentioned that he was a long-distance jumper. Then the whole thing came to me in an instant, and I only needed certain corroborative proofs, which I speedily obtained.

“What happened with {sic} this: This young fellow had employed his afternoon at the athletic grounds, where he had been practising the jump. He returned carrying his jumping-shoes, which are provided, as you are aware, with several sharp spikes. As he passed your window he saw, by means of his great height, these proofs upon your table, and conjectured what they were. No harm would have been done had it not been that, as he passed your door, he perceived the key which had been left by the carelessness of your servant. A sudden impulse came over him to enter, and see if they were indeed the proofs. It was not a dangerous exploit for he could always pretend that he had simply looked in to ask a question.

“Well, when he saw that they were indeed the proofs, it was then that he yielded to temptation. He put his shoes on the table. What was it you put on that chair near the window?”

“Gloves,” said the young man.

Holmes looked triumphantly at Bannister. “He put his gloves on the chair, and he took the proofs, sheet by sheet, to copy them. He thought the tutor must return by the main gate and that he would see him. As we know, he came back by the side gate. Suddenly he heard him at the very door. There was no possible escape. He forgot his gloves but he caught up his shoes and darted into the bedroom. You observe that the scratch on that table is slight at one side, but deepens in the direction of the bedroom door. That in itself is enough to show us that the shoe had been drawn in that direction, and that the culprit had taken refuge there. The earth round the spike had been left on the table, and a second sample was loosened and fell in the bedroom. I may add that I walked out to the athletic grounds this morning, saw that tenacious black clay is used in the jumping-pit and carried away a specimen of it, together with some of the fine tan or sawdust which is strewn over it to prevent the athlete from slipping. Have I told the truth, Mr. Gilchrist?”

The student had drawn himself erect.

“Yes, sir, it is true,” said he.

“Good heavens! have you nothing to add?” cried Soames.

“Yes, sir, I have, but the shock of this disgraceful exposure has bewildered me. I have a letter here, Mr. Soames, which I wrote to you early this morning in the middle of a restless night. It was before I knew that my sin had found me out. Here it is, sir. You will see that I have said, ‘I have determined not to go in for the examination. I have been offered a commission in the Rhodesian Police, and I am going out to South Africa at once.’”

“I am indeed pleased to hear that you did not intend to profit by your unfair advantage,” said Soames. “But why did you change your purpose?”

Gilchrist pointed to Bannister.

“There is the man who set me in the right path,” said he.

“Come now, Bannister,” said Holmes. “It will be clear to you, from what I have said, that only you could have let this young man out, since you were left in the room, and must have locked the door when you went out. As to his escaping by that window, it was incredible. Can you not clear up the last point in this mystery, and tell us the reasons for your action?”

“It was simple enough, sir, if you only had known, but, with all your cleverness, it was impossible that you could know. Time was, sir, when I was butler to old Sir Jabez Gilchrist, this young gentleman’s father. When he was ruined I came to the college as servant, but I never forgot my old employer because he was down in the world. I watched his son all I could for the sake of the old days. Well, sir, when I came into this room yesterday, when the alarm was given, the very first thing I saw was Mr. Gilchrist’s tan gloves a-lying in that chair. I knew those gloves well, and I understood their message. If Mr. Soames saw them, the game was up. I flopped down into that chair, and nothing would budge me until Mr. Soames he went for you. Then out came my poor young master, whom I had dandled on my knee, and confessed it all to me. Wasn’t it natural, sir, that I should save him, and wasn’t it natural also that I should try to speak to him as his dead father would have done, and make him understand that he could not profit by such a deed? Could you blame me, sir?”

“No, indeed,” said Holmes, heartily, springing to his feet. “Well, Soames, I think we have cleared your little problem up, and our breakfast awaits us at home. Come, Watson! As to you, sir, I trust that a bright future awaits you in Rhodesia. For once you have fallen low. Let us see, in the future, how high you can rise.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GOLDEN PINCE-NEZ

When I look at the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894, I confess that it is very difficult for me, out of such a wealth of material, to select the cases which are most interesting in themselves, and at the same time most conducive to a display of those peculiar powers for which my friend was famous. As I turn over the pages, I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby, the banker. Here also I find an account of the Addleton tragedy, and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow. The famous Smith-Mortimer succession case comes also within this period, and so does the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin — an exploit which won for Holmes an autograph letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour. Each of these would furnish a narrative, but on the whole I am of opinion that none of them unites so many singular points of interest as the episode of Yoxley Old Place, which includes not only the lamentable death of young Willoughby Smith, but also those subsequent developments which threw so curious a light upon the causes of the crime.

It was a wild, tempestuous night, towards the close of November. Holmes and I sat together in silence all the evening, he engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest, I deep in a recent treatise upon surgery. Outside the wind howled down Baker Street, while the rain beat fiercely against the windows. It was strange there, in the very depths of the town, with ten miles of man’s handiwork on every side of us, to feel the iron grip of Nature, and to be conscious that to the huge elemental forces all London was no more than the molehills that dot the fields. I walked to the window, and looked out on the deserted street. The occasional lamps gleamed on the expanse of muddy road and shining pavement. A single cab was splashing its way from the Oxford Street end.

“Well, Watson, it’s as well we have not to turn out to-night,” said Holmes, laying aside his lens and rolling up the palimpsest. “I’ve done enough for one sitting. It is trying work for the eyes. So far as I can make out, it is nothing more exciting than an Abbey's accounts dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. Halloa! halloa! halloa! What's this?"

Amid the droning of the wind there had come the stamping of a horse's hoofs, and the long grind of a wheel as it rasped against the curb. The cab which I had seen had pulled up at our door.

"What can he want?" I ejaculated, as a man stepped out of it.

"Want? He wants us. And we, my poor Watson, want overcoats and cravats and goloshes, and every aid that man ever invented to fight the weather. Wait a bit, though! There's the cab off again! There's hope yet. He'd have kept it if he had wanted us to come. Run down, my dear fellow, and open the door, for all virtuous folk have been long in bed."

When the light of the hall lamp fell upon our midnight visitor, I had no difficulty in recognising him. It was young Stanley Hopkins, a promising detective, in whose career Holmes had several times shown a very practical interest.

"Is he in?" he asked, eagerly.

"Come up, my dear sir," said Holmes's voice from above. "I hope you have no designs upon us such a night as this."

The detective mounted the stairs, and our lamp gleamed upon his shining waterproof. I helped him out of it, while Holmes knocked a blaze out of the logs in the grate.

"Now, my dear Hopkins, draw up and warm your toes," said he. "Here's a cigar, and the doctor has a prescription containing hot water and a lemon, which is good medicine on a night like this. It must be something important which has brought you out in such a gale."

"It is indeed, Mr. Holmes. I've had a bustling afternoon, I promise you. Did you see anything of the Yoxley case in the latest editions?"

"I've seen nothing later than the fifteenth century to-day."

"Well, it was only a paragraph, and all wrong at that, so you have not missed anything. I haven't let the grass grow under my feet. It's down in Kent, seven miles from Chatham and three from the railway line. I was wired for at 3:15, reached Yoxley Old Place at 5, conducted my investigation, was back at Charing Cross by the last train, and straight to you by cab."

"Which means, I suppose, that you are not quite clear about your case?"

"It means that I can make neither head nor tail of it. So far as I can see, it is just as tangled a business as ever I handled, and yet at first it seemed so simple that one couldn’t go wrong. There’s no motive, Mr. Holmes. That’s what bothers me — I can’t put my hand on a motive. Here’s a man dead — there’s no denying that — but, so far as I can see, no reason on earth why anyone should wish him harm.”

Holmes lit his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

“Let us hear about it,” said he.

“I’ve got my facts pretty clear,” said Stanley Hopkins. “All I want now is to know what they all mean. The story, so far as I can make it out, is like this. Some years ago this country house, Yoxley Old Place, was taken by an elderly man, who gave the name of Professor Coram. He was an invalid, keeping his bed half the time, and the other half hobbling round the house with a stick or being pushed about the grounds by the gardener in a Bath chair. He was well liked by the few neighbours who called upon him, and he has the reputation down there of being a very learned man. His household used to consist of an elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Marker, and of a maid, Susan Tarlton. These have both been with him since his arrival, and they seem to be women of excellent character. The professor is writing a learned book, and he found it necessary, about a year ago, to engage a secretary. The first two that he tried were not successes, but the third, Mr. Willoughby Smith, a very young man straight from the university, seems to have been just what his employer wanted. His work consisted in writing all the morning to the professor’s dictation, and he usually spent the evening in hunting up references and passages which bore upon the next day’s work. This Willoughby Smith has nothing against him, either as a boy at Uppingham or as a young man at Cambridge. I have seen his testimonials, and from the first he was a decent, quiet, hard-working fellow, with no weak spot in him at all. And yet this is the lad who has met his death this morning in the professor’s study under circumstances which can point only to murder.”

The wind howled and screamed at the windows. Holmes and I drew closer to the fire, while the young inspector slowly and point by point developed his singular narrative.

“If you were to search all England,” said he, “I don’t suppose you could find a household more self-contained or freer from outside influences. Whole weeks would pass, and not one of them go past the garden gate. The professor was buried in his work and existed for nothing else. Young Smith knew nobody in the neighbourhood, and lived very much as his employer did. The two women had nothing to take them from the house. Mortimer, the gardener, who wheels the Bath chair, is an army pensioner — an old Crimean man of excellent character. He does not live in the house, but in a three-roomed cottage at the other end of the garden. Those are the only people that you would find within the grounds of Yoxley Old Place. At the same time, the gate of the garden is a hundred yards from the main London to Chatham road. It opens with a latch, and there is nothing to prevent anyone from walking in.

"Now I will give you the evidence of Susan Tarlton, who is the only person who can say anything positive about the matter. It was in the forenoon, between eleven and twelve. She was engaged at the moment in hanging some curtains in the upstairs front bedroom. Professor Coram was still in bed, for when the weather is bad he seldom rises before midday. The housekeeper was busied with some work in the back of the house. Willoughby Smith had been in his bedroom, which he uses as a sitting-room, but the maid heard him at that moment pass along the passage and descend to the study immediately below her. She did not see him, but she says that she could not be mistaken in his quick, firm tread. She did not hear the study door close, but a minute or so later there was a dreadful cry in the room below. It was a wild, hoarse scream, so strange and unnatural that it might have come either from a man or a woman. At the same instant there was a heavy thud, which shook the old house, and then all was silence. The maid stood petrified for a moment, and then, recovering her courage, she ran downstairs. The study door was shut and she opened it. Inside, young Mr. Willoughby Smith was stretched upon the floor. At first she could see no injury, but as she tried to raise him she saw that blood was pouring from the underside of his neck. It was pierced by a very small but very deep wound, which had divided the carotid artery. The instrument with which the injury had been inflicted lay upon the carpet beside him. It was one of those small sealing-wax knives to be found on old-fashioned writing-tables, with an ivory handle and a stiff blade. It was part of the fittings of the professor's own desk.

"At first the maid thought that young Smith was already dead, but on pouring some water from the carafe over his forehead he opened his eyes for an instant. 'The professor,' he murmured—'it was she.' The maid is prepared to swear that those were the exact words. He tried desperately to say something else, and he held his right hand up in the air. Then he fell back dead.

"In the meantime the housekeeper had also arrived upon the scene, but she was just too late to catch the young man's dying words. Leaving Susan with the body, she hurried to the professors room. He was sitting up in bed, horribly agitated, for he had heard enough to convince him that something terrible had occurred. Mrs. Marker is prepared to swear that the professor was still in his night-clothes, and indeed it was impossible for him to dress without the help of Mortimer, whose orders were to come at twelve o'clock. The professor declares that he heard the distant cry, but that he knows nothing more. He can give no explanation of the young man's last words, 'The professor — it was she,' but imagines that they were the outcome of delirium. He believes that Willoughby Smith had not an enemy in the world, and can give no reason for the crime. His first action was to send Mortimer, the gardener, for the local police. A little later the chief constable sent for me. Nothing was moved before I got there, and strict orders were given that no one should walk upon the paths leading to the house. It was a splendid chance of putting your theories into practice, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. There was really nothing wanting."

"Except Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said my companion, with a somewhat bitter smile. "Well, let us hear about it. What sort of a job did you make of it?"

"I must ask you first, Mr. Holmes, to glance at this rough plan, which will give you a general idea of the position of the professor's study and the various points of the case. It will help you in following my investigation."

He unfolded the rough chart, which I here reproduce,

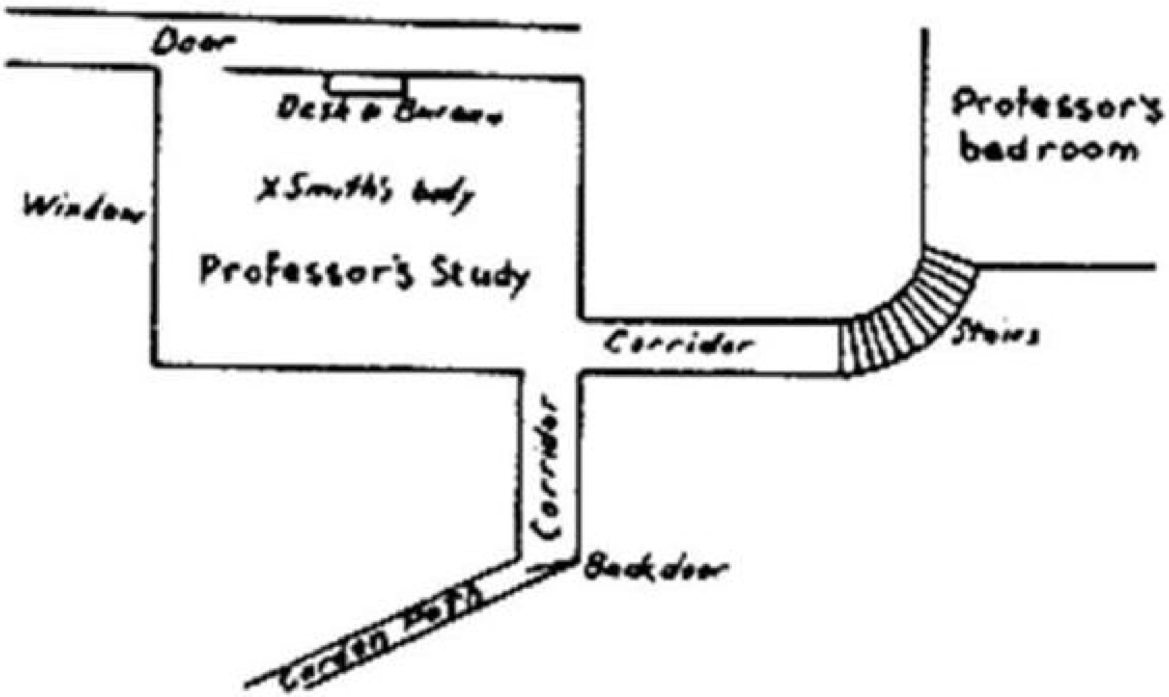

and he laid it across Holmes’s knee. I rose and, standing behind Holmes, studied it over his shoulder.

“It is very rough, of course, and it only deals with the points which seem to me to be essential. All the rest you will see later for yourself. Now, first of all, presuming that the assassin entered the house, how did he or she come in? Undoubtedly by the garden path and the back door, from which there is direct access to the study. Any other way would have been exceedingly complicated. The escape must have also been made along that line, for of the two other exits from the room one was blocked by Susan as she ran downstairs and the other leads straight to the professor’s bedroom. I therefore directed my attention at once to the garden path, which was saturated with recent rain, and would certainly show any footmarks.

“My examination showed me that I was dealing with a cautious and expert criminal. No footmarks were to be found on the path. There could be no question, however, that someone had passed along the grass border which lines the path, and that he had done so in order to avoid leaving a track. I could not find anything in the nature of a distinct impression, but the grass was trodden down, and someone had undoubtedly passed. It could only have been the murderer, since neither the gardener nor anyone else had been there that morning, and the rain had only begun during the night.”

“One moment,” said Holmes. “Where does this path lead to?”

“To the road.”

“How long is it?”

“A hundred yards or so.”

“At the point where the path passes through the gate, you could surely pick up the tracks?”

“Unfortunately, the path was tiled at that point.”

“Well, on the road itself?”

“No, it was all trodden into mire.”

“Tut-tut! Well, then, these tracks upon the grass, were they coming or going?”

“It was impossible to say. There was never any outline.”

“A large foot or a small?”

“You could not distinguish.”

Holmes gave an ejaculation of impatience.

“It has been pouring rain and blowing a hurricane ever since,” said he. “It will be harder to read now than that palimpsest. Well, well, it can’t be helped. What did you do, Hopkins, after you had made certain that you had made certain of nothing?”

“I think I made certain of a good deal, Mr. Holmes. I knew that someone had entered the house cautiously from without. I next examined the corridor. It is lined with cocoanut matting and had taken no impression of any kind. This brought me into the study itself. It is a scantily furnished room. The main article is a large writing-table with a fixed bureau. This bureau consists of a double column of drawers, with a central small cupboard between them. The drawers were open, the cupboard locked. The drawers, it seems, were always open, and nothing of value was kept in them. There were some papers of importance in the cupboard, but there were no signs that this had been tampered with, and the professor assures me that nothing was missing. It is certain that no robbery has been committed.

“I come now to the body of the young man. It was found near the bureau, and just to the left of it, as marked upon that chart. The stab was on the right side of the neck and from behind forward, so that it is almost impossible that it could have been self-inflicted.”

“Unless he fell upon the knife,” said Holmes.

“Exactly. The idea crossed my mind. But we found the knife some feet away from the body, so that seems impossible. Then, of course, there are the man’s own dying words. And, finally, there was this very important piece of evidence which was found clasped in the dead man’s right hand.”

From his pocket Stanley Hopkins drew a small paper packet. He unfolded it and disclosed a golden pince-nez, with two broken ends of black silk cord dangling from the end of it. “Willoughby Smith had excellent sight,” he added. “There can be no question that this was snatched from the face or the person of the assassin.”

Sherlock Holmes took the glasses into his hand, and examined them with the utmost attention and interest. He held them on his nose, endeavoured to read through them, went to the window and stared up the street with them, looked at them most minutely in the full light of the lamp, and finally, with a chuckle, seated himself at the table and wrote a few lines upon a sheet of paper, which he tossed across to Stanley Hopkins.

“That’s the best I can do for you,” said he. “It may prove to be of some use.”

The astonished detective read the note aloud. It ran as follows:

“Wanted, a woman of good address, attired like a lady. She has a remarkably thick nose, with eyes which are set close upon either side of it. She has a puckered forehead, a peering expression, and probably rounded shoulders. There are indications that she has had recourse to an optician at least twice during the last few months. As her glasses are of remarkable strength, and as opticians are not very numerous, there should be no difficulty in tracing her.”

Holmes smiled at the astonishment of Hopkins, which must have been reflected upon my features. “Surely my deductions are simplicity itself,” said he. “It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses, especially so remarkable a pair as these. That they belong to a woman I infer from their delicacy, and also, of course, from the last words of the dying man. As to her being a person of refinement and well dressed, they are, as you perceive, handsomely mounted in solid gold, and it is inconceivable that anyone who wore such glasses could be slatternly in other respects. You will find that the clips are too wide for your nose, showing that the lady’s nose was very broad at the base. This sort of nose is usually a short and coarse one, but there is a sufficient number of exceptions to prevent me from being dogmatic or from insisting upon this point in my description. My own face is a narrow one, and yet I find that I cannot get my eyes into the centre, nor near the centre, of these glasses. Therefore, the lady’s eyes are set very near to the sides of the nose. You will perceive, Watson, that the glasses are concave and of unusual strength. A lady whose vision has been so extremely contracted all her life is sure to have the physical characteristics of such vision, which are seen in the forehead, the eyelids, and the shoulders.”

“Yes,” I said, “I can follow each of your arguments. I confess, however, that I am unable to understand how you arrive at the double visit to the optician.”

Holmes took the glasses in his hand.

“You will perceive,” he said, “that the clips are lined with tiny bands of cork to soften the pressure upon the nose. One of these is discoloured and worn to some slight extent, but the other is new. Evidently one has fallen off and been replaced. I should judge that the older of them has not been there more than a few months. They exactly correspond, so I gather that the lady went back to the same establishment for the second.”

“By George, it’s marvellous!” cried Hopkins, in an ecstasy of admiration. “To think that I had all that evidence in my hand and never knew it! I had intended, however, to go the round of the London opticians.”

“Of course you would. Meanwhile, have you anything more to tell us about the case?”

“Nothing, Mr. Holmes. I think that you know as much as I do now — probably more. We have had inquiries made as to any stranger seen on the country roads or at the railway station. We have heard of none. What beats me is the utter want of all object in the crime. Not a ghost of a motive can anyone suggest.”

“Ah! there I am not in a position to help you. But I suppose you want us to come out to-morrow?”

“If it is not asking too much, Mr. Holmes. There’s a train from Charing Cross to Chatham at six in the morning, and we should be at Yoxley Old Place between eight and nine.”

“Then we shall take it. Your case has certainly some features of great interest, and I shall be delighted to look into it. Well, it’s nearly one, and we had best get a few hours’ sleep. I daresay you can manage all right on the sofa in front of the fire. I’ll light my spirit lamp, and give you a cup of coffee before we start.”

The gale had blown itself out next day, but it was a bitter morning when we started upon our journey. We saw the cold winter sun rise over the dreary marshes of the Thames and the long, sullen reaches of the river, which I shall ever associate with our pursuit of the Andaman Islander in the earlier days of our career. After a long and weary journey, we alighted at a small station some miles from Chatham. While a horse was being put into a trap at the local inn, we snatched a hurried breakfast, and so we were all ready for business when we at last arrived at Yoxley Old Place. A constable met us at the garden gate.

"Well, Wilson, any news?"

"No, sir — nothing."

"No reports of any stranger seen?"

"No, sir. Down at the station they are certain that no stranger either came or went yesterday."

"Have you had inquiries made at inns and lodgings?"

"Yes, sir: there is no one that we cannot account for."

"Well, it's only a reasonable walk to Chatham. Anyone might stay there or take a train without being observed. This is the garden path of which I spoke, Mr. Holmes. I'll pledge my word there was no mark on it yesterday."

"On which side were the marks on the grass?"

"This side, sir. This narrow margin of grass between the path and the flower-bed. I can't see the traces now, but they were clear to me then."

"Yes, yes: someone has passed along," said Holmes, stooping over the grass border. "Our lady must have picked her steps carefully, must she not, since on the one side she would leave a track on the path, and on the other an even clearer one on the soft bed?"

"Yes, sir, she must have been a cool hand."

I saw an intent look pass over Holmes's face.

"You say that she must have come back this way?"

"Yes, sir, there is no other."

"On this strip of grass?"

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"Hum! It was a very remarkable performance — very remarkable. Well, I think we have exhausted the path. Let us go farther. This garden door is usually kept open, I suppose? Then this visitor had nothing to do but to walk in. The idea of murder was not in her mind, or she would have provided herself with some sort of weapon, instead of having to pick this knife off the writing-table. She advanced along this corridor, leaving no traces upon the cocoanut matting. Then she found herself in this study. How long was she there? We have no means of judging."

"Not more than a few minutes, sir. I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Marker, the housekeeper, had been in there tidying not very long before — about a quarter of an hour, she says."

"Well, that gives us a limit. Our lady enters this room, and what does she do? She goes over to the writing-table. What for? Not for anything in the drawers. If there had been anything worth her taking, it would surely have been locked up. No, it was for something in that wooden bureau. Halloa! what is that scratch upon the face of it? Just hold a match, Watson. Why did you not tell me of this, Hopkins?"

The mark which he was examining began upon the brass-work on the right-hand side of the keyhole, and extended for about four inches, where it had scratched the varnish from the surface.

"I noticed it, Mr. Holmes, but you'll always find scratches round a keyhole."

"This is recent, quite recent. See how the brass shines where it is cut. An old scratch would be the same colour as the surface. Look at it through my lens. There's the varnish, too, like earth on each side of a furrow. Is Mrs. Marker there?"

A sad-faced, elderly woman came into the room.

"Did you dust this bureau yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice this scratch?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"I am sure you did not, for a duster would have swept away these shreds of varnish. Who has the key of this bureau?"

"The Professor keeps it on his watch-chain."

"Is it a simple key?"

"No, sir, it is a Chubb's key."

"Very good. Mrs. Marker, you can go. Now we are making a little progress. Our lady enters the room, advances to the bureau, and either opens it or tries to do so. While she is thus engaged, young Willoughby Smith enters the room. In her hurry to withdraw the key, she makes this scratch upon the door. He seizes her, and she, snatching up the nearest object, which happens to be this knife, strikes at him in order to make him let go his hold. The blow is a fatal one. He falls and she escapes, either with or without the object for which she has come. Is Susan, the maid, there? Could anyone have got away through that door after the time that you heard the cry, Susan?”

“No sir, it is impossible. Before I got down the stair, I’d have seen anyone in the passage. Besides, the door never opened, or I would have heard it.”

“That settles this exit. Then no doubt the lady went out the way she came. I understand that this other passage leads only to the professor’s room. There is no exit that way?”

“No, sir.”

“We shall go down it and make the acquaintance of the professor. Halloa, Hopkins! this is very important, very important indeed. The professor’s corridor is also lined with cocoanut matting.”

“Well, sir, what of that?”

“Don’t you see any bearing upon the case? Well, well. I don’t insist upon it. No doubt I am wrong. And yet it seems to me to be suggestive. Come with me and introduce me.”

We passed down the passage, which was of the same length as that which led to the garden. At the end was a short flight of steps ending in a door. Our guide knocked, and then ushered us into the professor’s bedroom.

It was a very large chamber, lined with innumerable volumes, which had overflowed from the shelves and lay in piles in the corners, or were stacked all round at the base of the cases. The bed was in the centre of the room, and in it, propped up with pillows, was the owner of the house. I have seldom seen a more remarkable-looking person. It was a gaunt, aquiline face which was turned towards us, with piercing dark eyes, which lurked in deep hollows under overhung and tufted brows. His hair and beard were white, save that the latter was curiously stained with yellow around his mouth. A cigarette glowed amid the tangle of white hair, and the air of the room was fetid with stale tobacco smoke. As he held out his hand to Holmes, I perceived that it was also stained with yellow nicotine.

“A smoker, Mr. Holmes?” said he, speaking in well-chosen English, with a curious little mincing accent. “Pray take a cigarette. And you, sir? I can recommend them, for I have them especially prepared by Ionides, of Alexandria. He sends me a thousand at a time, and I grieve to say that I have to arrange for a fresh supply every fortnight. Bad, sir, very bad, but an old man has few pleasures. Tobacco and my work — that is all that is left to me.”

Holmes had lit a cigarette and was shooting little darting glances all over the room.

“Tobacco and my work, but now only tobacco,” the old man exclaimed. “Alas! what a fatal interruption! Who could have foreseen such a terrible catastrophe? So estimable a young man! I assure you that, after a few months’ training, he was an admirable assistant. What do you think of the matter, Mr. Holmes?”

“I have not yet made up my mind.”

“I shall indeed be indebted to you if you can throw a light where all is so dark to us. To a poor bookworm and invalid like myself such a blow is paralyzing. I seem to have lost the faculty of thought. But you are a man of action — you are a man of affairs. It is part of the everyday routine of your life. You can preserve your balance in every emergency. We are fortunate, indeed, in having you at our side.”

Holmes was pacing up and down one side of the room whilst the old professor was talking. I observed that he was smoking with extraordinary rapidity. It was evident that he shared our host’s liking for the fresh Alexandrian cigarettes.

“Yes, sir, it is a crushing blow,” said the old man. “That is my MAGNUM OPUS — the pile of papers on the side table yonder. It is my analysis of the documents found in the Coptic monasteries of Syria and Egypt, a work which will cut deep at the very foundation of revealed religion. With my enfeebled health I do not know whether I shall ever be able to complete it, now that my assistant has been taken from me. Dear me! Mr. Holmes, why, you are even a quicker smoker than I am myself.”

Holmes smiled.

“I am a connoisseur,” said he, taking another cigarette from the box — his fourth — and lighting it from the stub of that which he had finished. “I will not trouble you with any lengthy cross-examination, Professor Coram, since I gather that you were in bed at the time of the crime, and could know nothing about it. I would only ask this: What do you imagine that this poor fellow meant by his last words: ‘The professor — it was she’?”

The professor shook his head.

“Susan is a country girl,” said he, “and you know the incredible stupidity of that class. I fancy that the poor fellow murmured some incoherent delirious words, and that she twisted them into this meaningless message.”

“I see. You have no explanation yourself of the tragedy?”

“Possibly an accident, possibly — I only breathe it among ourselves — a suicide. Young men have their hidden troubles — some affair of the heart, perhaps, which we have never known. It is a more probable supposition than murder.”

“But the eyeglasses?”

“Ah! I am only a student — a man of dreams. I cannot explain the practical things of life. But still, we are aware, my friend, that love-gages may take strange shapes. By all means take another cigarette. It is a pleasure to see anyone appreciate them so. A fan, a glove, glasses — who knows what article may be carried as a token or treasured when a man puts an end to his life? This gentleman speaks of footsteps in the grass, but, after all, it is easy to be mistaken on such a point. As to the knife, it might well be thrown far from the unfortunate man as he fell. It is possible that I speak as a child, but to me it seems that Willoughby Smith has met his fate by his own hand.”

Holmes seemed struck by the theory thus put forward, and he continued to walk up and down for some time, lost in thought and consuming cigarette after cigarette.

“Tell me, Professor Coram,” he said, at last, “what is in that cupboard in the bureau?”

“Nothing that would help a thief. Family papers, letters from my poor wife, diplomas of universities which have done me honour. Here is the key. You can look for yourself.”

Holmes picked up the key, and looked at it for an instant, then he handed it back.

“No, I hardly think that it would help me,” said he. “I should prefer to go quietly down to your garden, and turn the whole matter over in my head. There is something to be said for the theory of suicide which you have put forward. We must apologize for having intruded upon you, Professor Coram, and I promise that we won’t disturb you until after lunch. At two o’clock we will come again, and report to you anything which may have happened in the interval.”

Holmes was curiously distrait, and we walked up and down the garden path for some time in silence.

“Have you a clue?” I asked, at last.

“It depends upon those cigarettes that I smoked,” said he. “It is possible that I am utterly mistaken. The cigarettes will show me.”

“My dear Holmes,” I exclaimed, “how on earth — —”

“Well, well, you may see for yourself. If not, there’s no harm done. Of course, we always have the optician clue to fall back upon, but I take a short cut when I can get it. Ah, here is the good Mrs. Marker! Let us enjoy five minutes of instructive conversation with her.”

I may have remarked before that Holmes had, when he liked, a peculiarly ingratiating way with women, and that he very readily established terms of confidence with them. In half the time which he had named, he had captured the housekeeper’s goodwill and was chatting with her as if he had known her for years.

“Yes, Mr. Holmes, it is as you say, sir. He does smoke something terrible. All day and sometimes all night, sir. I’ve seen that room of a morning — well, sir, you’d have thought it was a London fog. Poor young Mr. Smith, he was a smoker also, but not as bad as the professor. His health — well, I don’t know that it’s better nor worse for the smoking.”

“Ah!” said Holmes, “but it kills the appetite.”

“Well, I don’t know about that, sir.”

“I suppose the professor eats hardly anything?”

“Well, he is variable. I’ll say that for him.”

“I’ll wager he took no breakfast this morning, and won’t face his lunch after all the cigarettes I saw him consume.”

“Well, you’re out there, sir, as it happens, for he ate a remarkable big breakfast this morning. I don’t know when I’ve known him make a better one, and he’s ordered a good dish of cutlets for his lunch. I’m surprised myself, for since I came into that room yesterday and saw young Mr. Smith lying there on the floor, I couldn’t bear to look at food. Well, it takes all sorts to make a world, and the professor hasn’t let it take his appetite away.”

We loitered the morning away in the garden. Stanley Hopkins had gone down to the village to look into some rumours of a strange woman who had been seen by some children on the Chatham Road the previous morning. As to my friend, all his usual energy seemed to have deserted him. I had never known him handle a case in such a half-hearted fashion. Even the news brought back by Hopkins that he had found the children, and that they had undoubtedly seen a woman exactly corresponding with Holmes’s description, and wearing either spectacles or eyeglasses, failed to rouse any sign of keen interest. He was more attentive when Susan, who waited upon us at lunch, volunteered the information that she believed Mr. Smith had been out for a walk yesterday morning, and that he had only returned half an hour before the tragedy occurred. I could not myself see the bearing of this incident, but I clearly perceived that Holmes was weaving it into the general scheme which he had formed in his brain. Suddenly he sprang from his chair and glanced at his watch. “Two o’clock, gentlemen,” said he. “We must go up and have it out with our friend, the professor.”

The old man had just finished his lunch, and certainly his empty dish bore evidence to the good appetite with which his housekeeper had credited him. He was, indeed, a weird figure as he turned his white mane and his glowing eyes towards us. The eternal cigarette smouldered in his mouth. He had been dressed and was seated in an armchair by the fire.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, have you solved this mystery yet?” He shoved the large tin of cigarettes which stood on a table beside him towards my companion. Holmes stretched out his hand at the same moment, and between them they tipped the box over the edge. For a minute or two we were all on our knees retrieving stray cigarettes from impossible places. When we rose again, I observed Holmes’s eyes were shining and his cheeks tinged with colour. Only at a crisis have I seen those battle-signals flying.

“Yes,” said he, “I have solved it.”

Stanley Hopkins and I stared in amazement. Something like a sneer quivered over the gaunt features of the old professor.

“Indeed! In the garden?”

“No, here.”

“Here! When?”

“This instant.”

“You are surely joking, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You compel me to tell you that this is too serious a matter to be treated in such a fashion.”

“I have forged and tested every link of my chain, Professor Coram, and I am sure that it is sound. What your motives are, or what exact part you play in this strange business, I am not yet able to say. In a few minutes I shall probably hear it from your own lips. Meanwhile I will reconstruct what is past for your benefit, so that you may know the information which I still require.

“A lady yesterday entered your study. She came with the intention of possessing herself of certain documents which were in your bureau. She had a key of her own. I have had an opportunity of examining yours, and I do not find that slight discolouration which the scratch made upon the varnish would have produced. You were not an accessory, therefore, and she came, so far as I can read the evidence, without your knowledge to rob you.”

The professor blew a cloud from his lips. “This is most interesting and instructive,” said he. “Have you no more to add? Surely, having traced this lady so far, you can also say what has become of her.”

“I will endeavour to do so. In the first place she was seized by your secretary, and stabbed him in order to escape. This catastrophe I am inclined to regard as an unhappy accident, for I am convinced that the lady had no intention of inflicting so grievous an injury. An assassin does not come unarmed. Horrified by what she had done, she rushed wildly away from the scene of the tragedy. Unfortunately for her, she had lost her glasses in the scuffle, and as she was extremely short-sighted she was really helpless without them. She ran down a corridor, which she imagined to be that by which she had come — both were lined with cocoanut matting — and it was only when it was too late that she understood that she had taken the wrong passage, and that her retreat was cut off behind her. What was she to do? She could not go back. She could not remain where she was. She must go on. She went on. She mounted a stair, pushed open a door, and found herself in your room.”

The old man sat with his mouth open, staring wildly at Holmes. Amazement and fear were stamped upon his expressive features. Now, with an effort, he shrugged his shoulders and burst into insincere laughter.

“All very fine, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “But there is one little flaw in your splendid theory. I was myself in my room, and I never left it during the day.”

“I am aware of that, Professor Coram.”

“And you mean to say that I could lie upon that bed and not be aware that a woman had entered my room?”

“I never said so. You WERE aware of it. You spoke with her. You recognised her. You aided her to escape.”

Again the professor burst into high-keyed laughter. He had risen to his feet, and his eyes glowed like embers.

“You are mad!” he cried. “You are talking insanely. I helped her to escape? Where is she now?”

“She is there,” said Holmes, and he pointed to a high bookcase in the corner of the room.

I saw the old man throw up his arms, a terrible convulsion passed over his grim face, and he fell back in his chair. At the same instant the bookcase at which Holmes pointed swung round upon a hinge, and a woman rushed out into the room. “You are right!” she cried, in a strange foreign voice. “You are right! I am here.”

She was brown with the dust and draped with the cobwebs which had come from the walls of her hiding-place. Her face, too, was streaked with grime, and at the best she could never have been handsome, for she had the exact physical characteristics which Holmes had divined, with, in addition, a long and obstinate chin. What with her natural blindness, and what with the change from dark to light, she stood as one dazed, blinking about her to see where and who we were. And yet, in spite of all these disadvantages, there was a certain nobility in the woman’s bearing — a gallantry in the defiant chin and in the upraised head, which compelled something of respect and admiration.

Stanley Hopkins had laid his hand upon her arm and claimed her as his prisoner, but she waved him aside gently, and yet with an over-mastering dignity which compelled obedience. The old man lay back in his chair with a twitching face, and stared at her with brooding eyes.

“Yes, sir, I am your prisoner,” she said. “From where I stood I could hear everything, and I know that you have learned the truth. I confess it all. It was I who killed the young man. But you are right — you who say it was an accident. I did not even know that it was a knife which I held in my hand, for in my despair I snatched anything from the table and struck at him to make him let me go. It is the truth that I tell.”

“Madam,” said Holmes, “I am sure that it is the truth. I fear that you are far from well.”

She had turned a dreadful colour, the more ghastly under the dark dust-streaks upon her face. She seated herself on the side of the bed; then she resumed.

“I have only a little time here,” she said, “but I would have you to know the whole truth. I am this man’s wife. He is not an Englishman. He is a Russian. His name I will not tell.”

For the first time the old man stirred. “God bless you, Anna!” he cried. “God bless you!”

She cast a look of the deepest disdain in his direction. “Why should you cling so hard to that wretched life of yours, Sergius?” said she. “It has done harm to many and good to none — not even to yourself. However, it is not for me to cause the frail thread to be snapped before God’s time. I have enough already upon my soul since I crossed the threshold of this cursed house. But I must speak or I shall be too late.

“I have said, gentlemen, that I am this man’s wife. He was fifty and I a foolish girl of twenty when we married. It was in a city of Russia, a university — I will not name the place.”

“God bless you, Anna!” murmured the old man again.

“We were reformers — revolutionists — Nihilists, you understand. He and I and many more. Then there came a time of trouble, a police officer was killed, many were arrested, evidence was wanted, and in order to save his own life and to earn a great reward, my husband betrayed his own wife and his companions. Yes, we were all arrested upon his confession. Some of us found our way to the gallows, and some to Siberia. I was among these last, but my term was not for life. My husband came to England with his ill-gotten gains and has lived in quiet ever since, knowing well that if the Brotherhood knew where he was not a week would pass before justice would be done.”

The old man reached out a trembling hand and helped himself to a cigarette. “I am in your hands, Anna,” said he. “You were always good to me.”

“I have not yet told you the height of his villainy,” said she. “Among our comrades of the Order, there was one who was the friend of my heart. He was noble, unselfish, loving — all that my husband was not. He hated violence. We were all guilty — if that is guilt — but he was not. He wrote forever dissuading us from such a course. These letters would have saved him. So would my diary, in which, from day to day, I had entered both my feelings towards him and the view which each of us had taken. My husband found and kept both diary and letters. He hid them, and he tried hard to swear away the young man’s life. In this he failed, but Alexis was sent a convict to Siberia, where now, at this moment, he works in a salt mine. Think of that, you villain, you villain! — now, now, at this very moment, Alexis, a man whose name you are not worthy to speak, works and lives like a slave, and yet I have your life in my hands, and I let you go.”

“You were always a noble woman, Anna,” said the old man, puffing at his cigarette.

She had risen, but she fell back again with a little cry of pain.

“I must finish,” she said. “When my term was over I set myself to get the diary and letters which, if sent to the Russian government, would procure my friend’s release. I knew that my husband had come to England. After months of searching I discovered where he was. I knew that he still had the diary, for when I was in Siberia I had a letter from him once, reproaching me and quoting some passages from its pages. Yet I was sure that, with his revengeful nature, he would never give it to me of his own free-will. I must get it for myself. With this object I engaged an agent from a private detective firm, who entered my husband’s house as a secretary — it was your second secretary, Sergius, the one who left you so hurriedly. He found that papers were kept in the cupboard, and he got an impression of the key. He would not go farther. He furnished me with a plan of the house, and he told me that in the forenoon the study was always empty, as the secretary was employed up here. So at last I took my courage in both hands, and I came down to get the papers for myself. I succeeded; but at what a cost!

“I had just taken the paper; and was locking the cupboard, when the young man seized me. I had seen him already that morning. He had met me on the road, and I had asked him to tell me where Professor Coram lived, not knowing that he was in his employ.”

“Exactly! Exactly!” said Holmes. “The secretary came back, and told his employer of the woman he had met. Then, in his last breath, he tried to send a message that it was she — the she whom he had just discussed with him.”

“You must let me speak,” said the woman, in an imperative voice, and her face contracted as if in pain. “When he had fallen I rushed from the room, chose the wrong door, and found myself in my husband’s room. He spoke of giving me up. I showed him that if he did so, his life was in my hands. If he gave me to the law, I could give him to the Brotherhood. It was not that I wished to live for my own sake, but it was that I desired to accomplish my purpose. He knew that I would do what I said — that his own fate was involved in mine. For that reason, and for no other, he shielded me. He thrust me into that dark hiding-place — a relic of old days, known only to himself. He took his meals in his own room, and so was able to give me part of his food. It was agreed that when the police left the house I should slip away by night and come back no more. But in some way you have read our plans.” She tore from the bosom of her dress a small packet. “These are my last words,” said she; “here is the packet which will save Alexis. I confide it to your honour and to your love of justice. Take it! You will deliver it at the Russian Embassy. Now, I have done my duty, and ——”

“Stop her!” cried Holmes. He had bounded across the room and had wrenched a small phial from her hand.

“Too late!” she said, sinking back on the bed. “Too late! I took the poison before I left my hiding-place. My head swims! I am going! I charge you, sir, to remember the packet.”

“A simple case, and yet, in some ways, an instructive one,” Holmes remarked, as we travelled back to town. “It hinged from the outset upon the pince-nez. But for the fortunate chance of the dying man having seized these, I am not sure that we could ever have reached our solution. It was clear to me, from the strength of the glasses, that the wearer must have been very blind and helpless when deprived of them. When you asked me to believe that she walked along a narrow strip of grass without once making a false step, I remarked, as you may remember, that it was a noteworthy performance. In my mind I set it down as an impossible performance, save in the unlikely case that she had a second pair of glasses. I was forced, therefore, to consider seriously the hypothesis that she had remained within the house. On perceiving the similarity of the two corridors, it became clear that she might very easily have made such a mistake, and, in that case, it was evident that she must have entered the professor’s room. I was keenly on the alert, therefore, for whatever would bear out this supposition, and I examined the room narrowly for anything in the shape of a hiding-place. The carpet seemed continuous and firmly nailed, so I dismissed the idea of a trap-door. There might well be a recess behind the books. As you are aware, such devices are common in old libraries. I observed that books were piled on the floor at all other points, but that one bookcase was left clear. This, then, might be the door. I could see no marks to guide me, but the carpet was of a dun colour, which lends itself very well to examination. I therefore smoked a great number of those excellent cigarettes, and I dropped the ash all over the space in front of the suspected bookcase. It was a simple trick, but exceedingly effective. I then went downstairs, and I ascertained, in your presence, Watson, without your perceiving the drift of my remarks, that Professor Coram’s consumption of food had increased —

as one would expect when he is supplying a second person. We then ascended to the room again, when, by upsetting the cigarette-box, I obtained a very excellent view of the floor, and was able to see quite clearly, from the traces upon the cigarette ash, that the prisoner had in our absence come out from her retreat. Well, Hopkins, here we are at Charing Cross, and I congratulate you on having brought your case to a successful conclusion. You are going to headquarters, no doubt. I think, Watson, you and I will drive together to the Russian Embassy.”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MISSING THREE-QUARTER

We were fairly accustomed to receive weird telegrams at Baker Street, but I have a particular recollection of one which reached us on a gloomy February morning, some seven or eight years ago, and gave Mr. Sherlock Holmes a puzzled quarter of an hour. It was addressed to him, and ran thus:

Please await me. Terrible misfortune. Right wing three-quarter missing, indispensable to-morrow. OVERTON.

“Strand postmark, and dispatched ten thirty-six,” said Holmes, reading it over and over. “Mr. Overton was evidently considerably excited when he sent it, and somewhat incoherent in consequence. Well, well, he will be here, I daresay, by the time I have looked through the TIMES, and then we shall know all about it. Even the most insignificant problem would be welcome in these stagnant days.”

Things had indeed been very slow with us, and I had learned to dread such periods of inaction, for I knew by experience that my companion’s brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work. For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career. Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes’s ascetic face, and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes. Therefore I blessed this Mr. Overton whoever he might be, since he had come with his enigmatic message to break that dangerous calm which brought more peril to my friend than all the storms of his tempestuous life.

As we had expected, the telegram was soon followed by its sender, and the card of Mr. Cyril Overton, Trinity College, Cambridge, announced the arrival of an enormous young man, sixteen stone of solid bone and muscle, who spanned the doorway with his broad shoulders, and looked from one of us to the other with a comely face which was haggard with anxiety.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

My companion bowed.

"I've been down to Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes. I saw Inspector Stanley Hopkins. He advised me to come to you. He said the case, so far as he could see, was more in your line than in that of the regular police."

"Pray sit down and tell me what is the matter."

"It's awful, Mr. Holmes — simply awful I wonder my hair isn't gray. Godfrey Staunton — you've heard of him, of course? He's simply the hinge that the whole team turns on. I'd rather spare two from the pack, and have Godfrey for my three-quarter line. Whether it's passing, or tackling, or dribbling, there's no one to touch him, and then, he's got the head, and can hold us all together. What am I to do? That's what I ask you, Mr. Holmes. There's Moorhouse, first reserve, but he is trained as a half, and he always edges right in on to the scrum instead of keeping out on the touchline. He's a fine place-kick, it's true, but then he has no judgment, and he can't sprint for nuts. Why, Morton or Johnson, the Oxford fliers, could romp round him. Stevenson is fast enough, but he couldn't drop from the twenty-five line, and a three-quarter who can't either punt or drop isn't worth a place for pace alone. No, Mr. Holmes, we are done unless you can help me to find Godfrey Staunton."

My friend had listened with amused surprise to this long speech, which was poured forth with extraordinary vigour and earnestness, every point being driven home by the slapping of a brawny hand upon the speaker's knee. When our visitor was silent Holmes stretched out his hand and took down letter "S" of his commonplace book. For once he dug in vain into that mine of varied information.

"There is Arthur H. Staunton, the rising young forger," said he, "and there was Henry Staunton, whom I helped to hang, but Godfrey Staunton is a new name to me."

It was our visitor's turn to look surprised.

"Why, Mr. Holmes, I thought you knew things," said he. "I suppose, then, if you have never heard of Godfrey Staunton, you don't know Cyril Overton either?"

Holmes shook his head good humouredly.

"Great Scott!" cried the athlete. "Why, I was first reserve for England against Wales, and I've skippered the 'Varsity all this year. But that's nothing! I didn't think there was a soul in England who didn't know

Godfrey Staunton, the crack three-quarter, Cambridge, Blackheath, and five Internationals. Good Lord! Mr. Holmes, where HAVE you lived?”

Holmes laughed at the young giant’s naive astonishment.

“You live in a different world to me, Mr. Overton — a sweeter and healthier one. My ramifications stretch out into many sections of society, but never, I am happy to say, into amateur sport, which is the best and soundest thing in England. However, your unexpected visit this morning shows me that even in that world of fresh air and fair play, there may be work for me to do. So now, my good sir, I beg you to sit down and to tell me, slowly and quietly, exactly what it is that has occurred, and how you desire that I should help you.”

Young Overton’s face assumed the bothered look of the man who is more accustomed to using his muscles than his wits, but by degrees, with many repetitions and obscurities which I may omit from his narrative, he laid his strange story before us.

“It’s this way, Mr. Holmes. As I have said, I am the skipper of the Rugger team of Cambridge ‘Varsity, and Godfrey Staunton is my best man. To-morrow we play Oxford. Yesterday we all came up, and we settled at Bentley’s private hotel. At ten o’clock I went round and saw that all the fellows had gone to roost, for I believe in strict training and plenty of sleep to keep a team fit. I had a word or two with Godfrey before he turned in. He seemed to me to be pale and bothered. I asked him what was the matter. He said he was all right — just a touch of headache. I bade him good-night and left him. Half an hour later, the porter tells me that a rough-looking man with a beard called with a note for Godfrey. He had not gone to bed, and the note was taken to his room. Godfrey read it, and fell back in a chair as if he had been pole-axed. The porter was so scared that he was going to fetch me, but Godfrey stopped him, had a drink of water, and pulled himself together. Then he went downstairs, said a few words to the man who was waiting in the hall, and the two of them went off together. The last that the porter saw of them, they were almost running down the street in the direction of the Strand. This morning Godfrey’s room was empty, his bed had never been slept in, and his things were all just as I had seen them the night before. He had gone off at a moment’s notice with this stranger, and no word has come from him since. I don’t believe he will ever come back. He was a sportsman, was Godfrey, down to his marrow, and he wouldn’t have stopped his training and let in his skipper if it were not for some cause that was too strong for him. No: I feel as if he were gone for good, and we should never see him again.”

Sherlock Holmes listened with the deepest attention to this singular narrative.

“What did you do?” he asked.

“I wired to Cambridge to learn if anything had been heard of him there. I have had an answer. No one has seen him.”

“Could he have got back to Cambridge?”

“Yes, there is a late train — quarter-past eleven.”

“But, so far as you can ascertain, he did not take it?”

“No, he has not been seen.”

“What did you do next?”

“I wired to Lord Mount-James.”

“Why to Lord Mount-James?”

“Godfrey is an orphan, and Lord Mount-James is his nearest relative — his uncle, I believe.”

“Indeed. This throws new light upon the matter. Lord Mount-James is one of the richest men in England.”

“So I’ve heard Godfrey say.”

“And your friend was closely related?”

“Yes, he was his heir, and the old boy is nearly eighty — cram full of gout, too. They say he could chalk his billiard-cue with his knuckles. He never allowed Godfrey a shilling in his life, for he is an absolute miser, but it will all come to him right enough.”

“Have you heard from Lord Mount-James?”

“No.”

“What motive could your friend have in going to Lord Mount-James?”

“Well, something was worrying him the night before, and if it was to do with money it is possible that he would make for his nearest relative, who had so much of it, though from all I have heard he would not have much chance of getting it. Godfrey was not fond of the old man. He would not go if he could help it.”

“Well, we can soon determine that. If your friend was going to his relative, Lord Mount-James, you have then to explain the visit of this rough-looking fellow at so late an hour, and the agitation that was caused by his coming.”

Cyril Overton pressed his hands to his head. “I can make nothing of it,” said he.

“Well, well, I have a clear day, and I shall be happy to look into the matter,” said Holmes. “I should strongly recommend you to make your preparations for your match without reference to this young gentleman. It must, as you say, have been an overpowering necessity which tore him away in such a fashion, and the same necessity is likely to hold him away. Let us step round together to the hotel, and see if the porter can throw any fresh light upon the matter.”

Sherlock Holmes was a past-master in the art of putting a humble witness at his ease, and very soon, in the privacy of Godfrey Staunton’s abandoned room, he had extracted all that the porter had to tell. The visitor of the night before was not a gentleman, neither was he a workingman. He was simply what the porter described as a “medium-looking chap,” a man of fifty, beard grizzled, pale face, quietly dressed. He seemed himself to be agitated. The porter had observed his hand trembling when he had held out the note. Godfrey Staunton had crammed the note into his pocket. Staunton had not shaken hands with the man in the hall. They had exchanged a few sentences, of which the porter had only distinguished the one word “time.” Then they had hurried off in the manner described. It was just half-past ten by the hall clock.

“Let me see,” said Holmes, seating himself on Staunton’s bed. “You are the day porter, are you not?”

“Yes, sir, I go off duty at eleven.”

“The night porter saw nothing, I suppose?”

“No, sir, one theatre party came in late. No one else.”

“Were you on duty all day yesterday?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you take any messages to Mr. Staunton?”

“Yes, sir, one telegram.”

“Ah! that’s interesting. What o’clock was this?”

“About six.”

“Where was Mr. Staunton when he received it?”

“Here in his room.”

“Were you present when he opened it?”

“Yes, sir, I waited to see if there was an answer.”

“Well, was there?”

“Yes, sir, he wrote an answer.”

“Did you take it?”

“No, he took it himself.”

“But he wrote it in your presence.”

“Yes, sir. I was standing by the door, and he with his back turned at that table. When he had written it, he said: ‘All right, porter, I will take this myself.’”

“What did he write it with?”

“A pen, sir.”

“Was the telegraphic form one of these on the table?”

“Yes, sir, it was the top one.”

Holmes rose. Taking the forms, he carried them over to the window and carefully examined that which was uppermost.

“It is a pity he did not write in pencil,” said he, throwing them down again with a shrug of disappointment. “As you have no doubt frequently observed, Watson, the impression usually goes through — a fact which has dissolved many a happy marriage. However, I can find no trace here. I rejoice, however, to perceive that he wrote with a broad-pointed quill pen, and I can hardly doubt that we will find some impression upon this blotting-pad. Ah, yes, surely this is the very thing!”

He tore off a strip of the blotting-paper and turned towards us the following hieroglyphic:

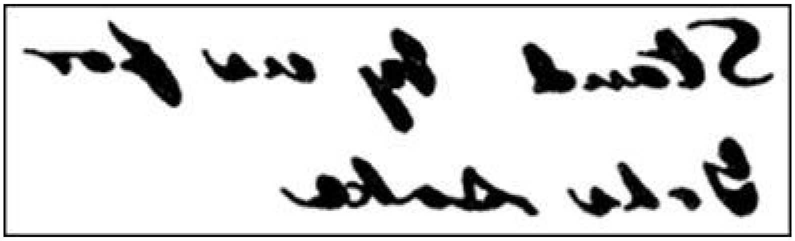

Cyril Overton was much excited. “Hold it to the glass!” he cried.

“That is unnecessary,” said Holmes. “The paper is thin, and the reverse will give the message. Here it is.” He turned it over, and we read:

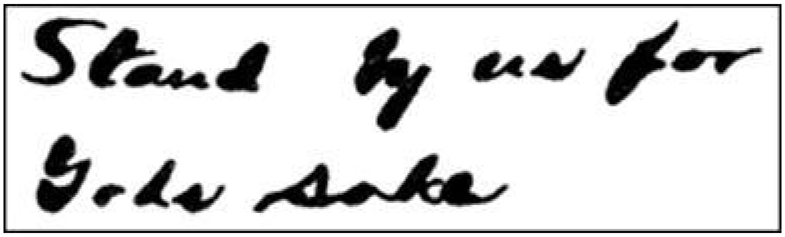

Stand by us for
Gods sake

[Stand by us for Gods sake]

"So that is the tail end of the telegram which Godfrey Staunton dispatched within a few hours of his disappearance. There are at least six words of the message which have escaped us; but what remains—'Stand by us for God's sake!' — proves that this young man saw a formidable danger which approached him, and from which someone else could protect him. 'US,' mark you! Another person was involved. Who should it be but the pale-faced, bearded man, who seemed himself in so nervous a state? What, then, is the connection between Godfrey Staunton and the bearded man? And what is the third source from which each of them sought for help against pressing danger? Our inquiry has already narrowed down to that."

"We have only to find to whom that telegram is addressed," I suggested.

"Exactly, my dear Watson. Your reflection, though profound, had already crossed my mind. But I daresay it may have come to your notice that, counterfoil of another man's message, there may be some disinclination on the part of the officials to oblige you. There is so much red tape in these matters. However, I have no doubt that with a little delicacy and finesse the end may be attained. Meanwhile, I should like in your presence, Mr. Overton, to go through these papers which have been left upon the table."

There were a number of letters, bills, and notebooks, which Holmes turned over and examined with quick, nervous fingers and darting, penetrating eyes. "Nothing here," he said, at last. "By the way, I suppose your friend was a healthy young fellow — nothing amiss with him?"

"Sound as a bell."

"Have you ever known him ill?"

"Not a day. He has been laid up with a hack, and once he slipped his knee-cap, but that was nothing."

"Perhaps he was not so strong as you suppose. I should think he may have had some secret trouble. With your assent, I will put one or two of these papers in my pocket, in case they should bear upon our future inquiry."

"One moment — one moment!" cried a querulous voice, and we looked up to find a queer little old man, jerking and twitching in the doorway. He was dressed in rusty black, with a very broad-brimmed top-hat and a loose white necktie — the whole effect being that of a very rustic parson or of an undertaker's mute. Yet, in spite of his shabby and even absurd appearance, his voice had a sharp crackle, and his manner a quick intensity which commanded attention.

“Who are you, sir, and by what right do you touch this gentleman’s papers?” he asked.

“I am a private detective, and I am endeavouring to explain his disappearance.”

“Oh, you are, are you? And who instructed you, eh?”

“This gentleman, Mr. Staunton’s friend, was referred to me by Scotland Yard.”

“Who are you, sir?”

“I am Cyril Overton.”

“Then it is you who sent me a telegram. My name is Lord Mount-James. I came round as quickly as the Bayswater bus would bring me. So you have instructed a detective?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And are you prepared to meet the cost?”

“I have no doubt, sir, that my friend Godfrey, when we find him, will be prepared to do that.”

“But if he is never found, eh? Answer me that!”

“In that case, no doubt his family — —”

“Nothing of the sort, sir!” screamed the little man. “Don’t look to me for a penny — not a penny! You understand that, Mr. Detective! I am all the family that this young man has got, and I tell you that I am not responsible. If he has any expectations it is due to the fact that I have never wasted money, and I do not propose to begin to do so now. As to those papers with which you are making so free, I may tell you that in case there should be anything of any value among them, you will be held strictly to account for what you do with them.”

“Very good, sir,” said Sherlock Holmes. “May I ask, in the meanwhile, whether you have yourself any theory to account for this young man’s disappearance?”

“No, sir, I have not. He is big enough and old enough to look after himself, and if he is so foolish as to lose himself, I entirely refuse to accept the responsibility of hunting for him.”

“I quite understand your position,” said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. “Perhaps you don’t quite understand mine. Godfrey Staunton appears to have been a poor man. If he has been kidnapped, it could not have been for anything which he himself possesses. The fame of your wealth has gone abroad, Lord Mount-James, and it is entirely possible that a gang of thieves have secured your nephew in order to gain from him some information as to your house, your habits, and your treasure."

The face of our unpleasant little visitor turned as white as his neckcloth.

"Heavens, sir, what an idea! I never thought of such villainy! What inhuman rogues there are in the world! But Godfrey is a fine lad — a staunch lad. Nothing would induce him to give his old uncle away. I'll have the plate moved over to the bank this evening. In the meantime spare no pains, Mr. Detective! I beg you to leave no stone unturned to bring him safely back. As to money, well, so far as a fiver or even a tenner goes you can always look to me."

Even in his chastened frame of mind, the noble miser could give us no information which could help us, for he knew little of the private life of his nephew. Our only clue lay in the truncated telegram, and with a copy of this in his hand Holmes set forth to find a second link for his chain. We had shaken off Lord Mount-James, and Overton had gone to consult with the other members of his team over the misfortune which had befallen them.

There was a telegraph-office at a short distance from the hotel. We halted outside it.

"It's worth trying, Watson," said Holmes. "Of course, with a warrant we could demand to see the counterfoils, but we have not reached that stage yet. I don't suppose they remember faces in so busy a place. Let us venture it."

"I am sorry to trouble you," said he, in his blandest manner, to the young woman behind the grating; "there is some small mistake about a telegram I sent yesterday. I have had no answer, and I very much fear that I must have omitted to put my name at the end. Could you tell me if this was so?"

The young woman turned over a sheaf of counterfoils.

"What o'clock was it?" she asked.

"A little after six."

"Whom was it to?"

Holmes put his finger to his lips and glanced at me. "The last words in it were 'For God's sake,'" he whispered, confidentially; "I am very anxious at getting no answer."

The young woman separated one of the forms.

“This is it. There is no name,” said she, smoothing it out upon the counter.

“Then that, of course, accounts for my getting no answer,” said Holmes. “Dear me, how very stupid of me, to be sure! Good-morning, miss, and many thanks for having relieved my mind.” He chuckled and rubbed his hands when we found ourselves in the street once more.

“Well?” I asked.

“We progress, my dear Watson, we progress. I had seven different schemes for getting a glimpse of that telegram, but I could hardly hope to succeed the very first time.”

“And what have you gained?”

“A starting-point for our investigation.” He hailed a cab. “King’s Cross Station,” said he.

“We have a journey, then?”

“Yes, I think we must run down to Cambridge together. All the indications seem to me to point in that direction.”

“Tell me,” I asked, as we rattled up Gray’s Inn Road, “have you any suspicion yet as to the cause of the disappearance? I don’t think that among all our cases I have known one where the motives are more obscure. Surely you don’t really imagine that he may be kidnapped in order to give information against his wealthy uncle?”

“I confess, my dear Watson, that that does not appeal to me as a very probable explanation. It struck me, however, as being the one which was most likely to interest that exceedingly unpleasant old person.”

“It certainly did that; but what are your alternatives?”

“I could mention several. You must admit that it is curious and suggestive that this incident should occur on the eve of this important match, and should involve the only man whose presence seems essential to the success of the side. It may, of course, be a coincidence, but it is interesting. Amateur sport is free from betting, but a good deal of outside betting goes on among the public, and it is possible that it might be worth someone’s while to get at a player as the ruffians of the turf get at a race-horse. There is one explanation. A second very obvious one is that this young man really is the heir of a great property, however modest his means may at present be, and it is not impossible that a plot to hold him for ransom might be concocted.”

“These theories take no account of the telegram.”

"Quite true, Watson. The telegram still remains the only solid thing with which we have to deal, and we must not permit our attention to wander away from it. It is to gain light upon the purpose of this telegram that we are now upon our way to Cambridge. The path of our investigation is at present obscure, but I shall be very much surprised if before evening we have not cleared it up, or made a considerable advance along it."

It was already dark when we reached the old university city. Holmes took a cab at the station and ordered the man to drive to the house of Dr. Leslie Armstrong. A few minutes later, we had stopped at a large mansion in the busiest thoroughfare. We were shown in, and after a long wait were at last admitted into the consulting-room, where we found the doctor seated behind his table.

It argues the degree in which I had lost touch with my profession that the name of Leslie Armstrong was unknown to me. Now I am aware that he is not only one of the heads of the medical school of the university, but a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science. Yet even without knowing his brilliant record one could not fail to be impressed by a mere glance at the man, the square, massive face, the brooding eyes under the thatched brows, and the granite moulding of the inflexible jaw. A man of deep character, a man with an alert mind, grim, ascetic, self-contained, formidable — so I read Dr. Leslie Armstrong. He held my friend's card in his hand, and he looked up with no very pleased expression upon his dour features.

"I have heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I am aware of your profession — one of which I by no means approve."

"In that, Doctor, you will find yourself in agreement with every criminal in the country," said my friend, quietly.

"So far as your efforts are directed towards the suppression of crime, sir, they must have the support of every reasonable member of the community, though I cannot doubt that the official machinery is amply sufficient for the purpose. Where your calling is more open to criticism is when you pry into the secrets of private individuals, when you rake up family matters which are better hidden, and when you incidentally waste the time of men who are more busy than yourself. At the present moment, for example, I should be writing a treatise instead of conversing with you."

"No doubt, Doctor; and yet the conversation may prove more important than the treatise. Incidentally, I may tell you that we are doing the reverse of what you very justly blame, and that we are endeavouring to prevent anything like public exposure of private matters which must necessarily follow when once the case is fairly in the hands of the official police. You may look upon me simply as an irregular pioneer, who goes in front of the regular forces of the country. I have come to ask you about Mr. Godfrey Staunton.”

“What about him?”

“You know him, do you not?”

“He is an intimate friend of mine.”

“You are aware that he has disappeared?”

“Ah, indeed!” There was no change of expression in the rugged features of the doctor.

“He left his hotel last night — he has not been heard of.”

“No doubt he will return.”

“To-morrow is the ‘Varsity football match.”

“I have no sympathy with these childish games. The young man’s fate interests me deeply, since I know him and like him. The football match does not come within my horizon at all.”

“I claim your sympathy, then, in my investigation of Mr. Staunton’s fate. Do you know where he is?”

“Certainly not.”

“You have not seen him since yesterday?”

“No, I have not.”

“Was Mr. Staunton a healthy man?”

“Absolutely.”

“Did you ever know him ill?”

“Never.”

Holmes popped a sheet of paper before the doctor’s eyes. “Then perhaps you will explain this receipted bill for thirteen guineas, paid by Mr. Godfrey Staunton last month to Dr. Leslie Armstrong, of Cambridge. I picked it out from among the papers upon his desk.”

The doctor flushed with anger.

“I do not feel that there is any reason why I should render an explanation to you, Mr. Holmes.”

Holmes replaced the bill in his notebook. “If you prefer a public explanation, it must come sooner or later,” said he. “I have already told you that I can hush up that which others will be bound to publish, and you would really be wiser to take me into your complete confidence.”

“I know nothing about it.”

“Did you hear from Mr. Staunton in London?”

“Certainly not.”

“Dear me, dear me — the postoffice again!” Holmes sighed, wearily. “A most urgent telegram was dispatched to you from London by Godfrey Staunton at six-fifteen yesterday evening — a telegram which is undoubtedly associated with his disappearance — and yet you have not had it. It is most culpable. I shall certainly go down to the office here and register a complaint.”

Dr. Leslie Armstrong sprang up from behind his desk, and his dark face was crimson with fury.

“I’ll trouble you to walk out of my house, sir,” said he. “You can tell your employer, Lord Mount-James, that I do not wish to have anything to do either with him or with his agents. No, sir — not another word!” He rang the bell furiously. “John, show these gentlemen out!” A pompous butler ushered us severely to the door, and we found ourselves in the street. Holmes burst out laughing.

“Dr. Leslie Armstrong is certainly a man of energy and character,” said he. “I have not seen a man who, if he turns his talents that way, was more calculated to fill the gap left by the illustrious Moriarty. And now, my poor Watson, here we are, stranded and friendless in this inhospitable town, which we cannot leave without abandoning our case. This little inn just opposite Armstrong’s house is singularly adapted to our needs. If you would engage a front room and purchase the necessaries for the night, I may have time to make a few inquiries.”

These few inquiries proved, however, to be a more lengthy proceeding than Holmes had imagined, for he did not return to the inn until nearly nine o’clock. He was pale and dejected, stained with dust, and exhausted with hunger and fatigue. A cold supper was ready upon the table, and when his needs were satisfied and his pipe alight he was ready to take that half comic and wholly philosophic view which was natural to him when his affairs were going awry. The sound of carriage wheels caused him to rise and glance out of the window. A brougham and pair of grays, under the glare of a gas-lamp, stood before the doctor’s door.

“It’s been out three hours,” said Holmes; “started at half-past six, and here it is back again. That gives a radius of ten or twelve miles, and he does it once, or sometimes twice, a day.”

“No unusual thing for a doctor in practice.”

“But Armstrong is not really a doctor in practice. He is a lecturer and a consultant, but he does not care for general practice, which distracts him from his literary work. Why, then, does he make these long journeys, which must be exceedingly irksome to him, and who is it that he visits?”

“His coachman — —”

“My dear Watson, can you doubt that it was to him that I first applied? I do not know whether it came from his own innate depravity or from the promptings of his master, but he was rude enough to set a dog at me. Neither dog nor man liked the look of my stick, however, and the matter fell through. Relations were strained after that, and further inquiries out of the question. All that I have learned I got from a friendly native in the yard of our own inn. It was he who told me of the doctor’s habits and of his daily journey. At that instant, to give point to his words, the carriage came round to the door.”

“Could you not follow it?”

“Excellent, Watson! You are scintillating this evening. The idea did cross my mind. There is, as you may have observed, a bicycle shop next to our inn. Into this I rushed, engaged a bicycle, and was able to get started before the carriage was quite out of sight. I rapidly overtook it, and then, keeping at a discreet distance of a hundred yards or so, I followed its lights until we were clear of the town. We had got well out on the country road, when a somewhat mortifying incident occurred. The carriage stopped, the doctor alighted, walked swiftly back to where I had also halted, and told me in an excellent sardonic fashion that he feared the road was narrow, and that he hoped his carriage did not impede the passage of my bicycle. Nothing could have been more admirable than his way of putting it. I at once rode past the carriage, and, keeping to the main road, I went on for a few miles, and then halted in a convenient place to see if the carriage passed. There was no sign of it, however, and so it became evident that it had turned down one of several side roads which I had observed. I rode back, but again saw nothing of the carriage, and now, as you perceive, it has returned after me. Of course, I had at the outset no particular reason to connect these journeys with the disappearance of Godfrey Staunton, and was only inclined to investigate them on the general grounds that everything which concerns Dr. Armstrong is at present of interest to us, but, now that I find he keeps so keen a look-out upon anyone who may follow him on these excursions, the affair appears more important, and I shall not be satisfied until I have made the matter clear.”

“We can follow him to-morrow.”

“Can we? It is not so easy as you seem to think. You are not familiar with Cambridgeshire scenery, are you? It does not lend itself to concealment. All this country that I passed over to-night is as flat and clean as the palm of your hand, and the man we are following is no fool, as he very clearly showed to-night. I have wired to Overton to let us know any fresh London developments at this address, and in the meantime we can only concentrate our attention upon Dr. Armstrong, whose name the obliging young lady at the office allowed me to read upon the counterfoil of Staunton’s urgent message. He knows where the young man is — to that I’ll swear, and if he knows, then it must be our own fault if we cannot manage to know also. At present it must be admitted that the odd trick is in his possession, and, as you are aware, Watson, it is not my habit to leave the game in that condition.”

And yet the next day brought us no nearer to the solution of the mystery. A note was handed in after breakfast, which Holmes passed across to me with a smile.

SIR [it ran]:

I can assure you that you are wasting your time in dogging my movements. I have, as you discovered last night, a window at the back of my brougham, and if you desire a twenty-mile ride which will lead you to the spot from which you started, you have only to follow me. Meanwhile, I can inform you that no spying upon me can in any way help Mr. Godfrey Staunton, and I am convinced that the best service you can do to that gentleman is to return at once to London and to report to your employer that you are unable to trace him. Your time in Cambridge will certainly be wasted. Yours faithfully, LESLIE ARMSTRONG.

“An outspoken, honest antagonist is the doctor,” said Holmes. “Well, well, he excites my curiosity, and I must really know before I leave him.”

“His carriage is at his door now,” said I. “There he is stepping into it. I saw him glance up at our window as he did so. Suppose I try my luck upon the bicycle?”

“No, no, my dear Watson! With all respect for your natural acumen, I do not think that you are quite a match for the worthy doctor. I think that possibly I can attain our end by some independent explorations of my own. I am afraid that I must leave you to your own devices, as the appearance of TWO inquiring strangers upon a sleepy countryside might excite more gossip than I care for. No doubt you will find some sights to amuse you in this venerable city, and I hope to bring back a more favourable report to you before evening.”

Once more, however, my friend was destined to be disappointed. He came back at night weary and unsuccessful.

“I have had a blank day, Watson. Having got the doctor’s general direction, I spent the day in visiting all the villages upon that side of Cambridge, and comparing notes with publicans and other local news agencies. I have covered some ground. Chesterton, Histon, Waterbeach, and Oakington have each been explored, and have each proved disappointing. The daily appearance of a brougham and pair could hardly have been overlooked in such Sleepy Hollows. The doctor has scored once more. Is there a telegram for me?”

“Yes, I opened it. Here it is:

“Ask for Pompey from Jeremy Dixon, Trinity College.”

“I don’t understand it.”

“Oh, it is clear enough. It is from our friend Overton, and is in answer to a question from me. I’ll just send round a note to Mr. Jeremy Dixon, and then I have no doubt that our luck will turn. By the way, is there any news of the match?”

“Yes, the local evening paper has an excellent account in its last edition. Oxford won by a goal and two tries. The last sentences of the description say:

“‘The defeat of the Light Blues may be entirely attributed to the unfortunate absence of the crack International, Godfrey Staunton, whose want was felt at every instant of the game. The lack of combination in the three-quarter line and their weakness both in attack and defence more than neutralised the efforts of a heavy and hard-working pack.’”

“Then our friend Overton’s forebodings have been justified,” said Holmes. “Personally I am in agreement with Dr. Armstrong, and football does not come within my horizon. Early to bed to-night, Watson, for I foresee that to-morrow may be an eventful day.”

I was horrified by my first glimpse of Holmes next morning, for he sat by the fire holding his tiny hypodermic syringe. I associated that instrument with the single weakness of his nature, and I feared the worst when I saw it glittering in his hand. He laughed at my expression of dismay and laid it upon the table.

"No, no, my dear fellow, there is no cause for alarm. It is not upon this occasion the instrument of evil, but it will rather prove to be the key which will unlock our mystery. On this syringe I base all my hopes. I have just returned from a small scouting expedition, and everything is favourable. Eat a good breakfast, Watson, for I propose to get upon Dr. Armstrong's trail to-day, and once on it I will not stop for rest or food until I run him to his burrow."

"In that case," said I, "we had best carry our breakfast with us, for he is making an early start. His carriage is at the door."

"Never mind. Let him go. He will be clever if he can drive where I cannot follow him. When you have finished, come downstairs with me, and I will introduce you to a detective who is a very eminent specialist in the work that lies before us."

When we descended I followed Holmes into the stable yard, where he opened the door of a loose-box and led out a squat, lop-eared, white-and-tan dog, something between a beagle and a foxhound.

"Let me introduce you to Pompey," said he. "Pompey is the pride of the local draghounds — no very great flier, as his build will show, but a staunch hound on a scent. Well, Pompey, you may not be fast, but I expect you will be too fast for a couple of middle-aged London gentlemen, so I will take the liberty of fastening this leather leash to your collar. Now, boy, come along, and show what you can do." He led him across to the doctor's door. The dog sniffed round for an instant, and then with a shrill whine of excitement started off down the street, tugging at his leash in his efforts to go faster. In half an hour, we were clear of the town and hastening down a country road.

"What have you done, Holmes?" I asked.

"A threadbare and venerable device, but useful upon occasion. I walked into the doctor's yard this morning, and shot my syringe full of aniseed over the hind wheel. A draghound will follow aniseed from here to John o'Groat's, and our friend, Armstrong, would have to drive through the Cam before he would shake Pompey off his trail. Oh, the cunning rascal! This is how he gave me the slip the other night."

The dog had suddenly turned out of the main road into a grass-grown lane. Half a mile farther this opened into another broad road, and the trail turned hard to the right in the direction of the town, which we had just quitted. The road took a sweep to the south of the town, and continued in the opposite direction to that in which we started.

“This DETOUR has been entirely for our benefit, then?” said Holmes. “No wonder that my inquiries among those villagers led to nothing. The doctor has certainly played the game for all it is worth, and one would like to know the reason for such elaborate deception. This should be the village of Trumpington to the right of us. And, by Jove! here is the brougham coming round the corner. Quick, Watson — quick, or we are done!”

He sprang through a gate into a field, dragging the reluctant Pompey after him. We had hardly got under the shelter of the hedge when the carriage rattled past. I caught a glimpse of Dr. Armstrong within, his shoulders bowed, his head sunk on his hands, the very image of distress. I could tell by my companion’s graver face that he also had seen.

“I fear there is some dark ending to our quest,” said he. “It cannot be long before we know it. Come, Pompey! Ah, it is the cottage in the field!”

There could be no doubt that we had reached the end of our journey. Pompey ran about and whined eagerly outside the gate, where the marks of the brougham’s wheels were still to be seen. A footpath led across to the lonely cottage. Holmes tied the dog to the hedge, and we hastened onward. My friend knocked at the little rustic door, and knocked again without response. And yet the cottage was not deserted, for a low sound came to our ears — a kind of drone of misery and despair which was indescribably melancholy. Holmes paused irresolute, and then he glanced back at the road which he had just traversed. A brougham was coming down it, and there could be no mistaking those gray horses.

“By Jove, the doctor is coming back!” cried Holmes. “That settles it. We are bound to see what it means before he comes.”

He opened the door, and we stepped into the hall. The droning sound swelled louder upon our ears until it became one long, deep wail of distress. It came from upstairs. Holmes darted up, and I followed him. He pushed open a half-closed door, and we both stood appalled at the sight before us.

A woman, young and beautiful, was lying dead upon the bed. Her calm pale face, with dim, wide-opened blue eyes, looked upward from amid a great tangle of golden hair. At the foot of the bed, half sitting, half kneeling, his face buried in the clothes, was a young man, whose frame was racked by his sobs. So absorbed was he by his bitter grief, that he never looked up until Holmes's hand was on his shoulder.

"Are you Mr. Godfrey Staunton?"

"Yes, yes, I am — but you are too late. She is dead."

The man was so dazed that he could not be made to understand that we were anything but doctors who had been sent to his assistance. Holmes was endeavouring to utter a few words of consolation and to explain the alarm which had been caused to his friends by his sudden disappearance when there was a step upon the stairs, and there was the heavy, stern, questioning face of Dr. Armstrong at the door.

"So, gentlemen," said he, "you have attained your end and have certainly chosen a particularly delicate moment for your intrusion. I would not brawl in the presence of death, but I can assure you that if I were a younger man your monstrous conduct would not pass with impunity."

"Excuse me, Dr. Armstrong, I think we are a little at cross-purposes," said my friend, with dignity. "If you could step downstairs with us, we may each be able to give some light to the other upon this miserable affair."

A minute later, the grim doctor and ourselves were in the sitting-room below.

"Well, sir?" said he.

"I wish you to understand, in the first place, that I am not employed by Lord Mount-James, and that my sympathies in this matter are entirely against that nobleman. When a man is lost it is my duty to ascertain his fate, but having done so the matter ends so far as I am concerned, and so long as there is nothing criminal I am much more anxious to hush up private scandals than to give them publicity. If, as I imagine, there is no breach of the law in this matter, you can absolutely depend upon my discretion and my cooperation in keeping the facts out of the papers."

Dr. Armstrong took a quick step forward and wrung Holmes by the hand.

"You are a good fellow," said he. "I had misjudged you. I thank heaven that my compunction at leaving poor Staunton all alone in this plight caused me to turn my carriage back and so to make your acquaintance. Knowing as much as you do, the situation is very easily explained. A year ago Godfrey Staunton lodged in London for a time and became passionately attached to his landlady's daughter, whom he married. She was as good as she was beautiful and as intelligent as she was good. No man need be ashamed of such a wife. But Godfrey was the heir to this crabbed old nobleman, and it was quite certain that the news of his marriage would have been the end of his inheritance. I knew the lad well, and I loved him for his many excellent qualities. I did all I could to help him to keep things straight. We did our very best to keep the thing from everyone, for, when once such a whisper gets about, it is not long before everyone has heard it. Thanks to this lonely cottage and his own discretion, Godfrey has up to now succeeded. Their secret was known to no one save to me and to one excellent servant, who has at present gone for assistance to Trumpington. But at last there came a terrible blow in the shape of dangerous illness to his wife. It was consumption of the most virulent kind. The poor boy was half crazed with grief, and yet he had to go to London to play this match, for he could not get out of it without explanations which would expose his secret. I tried to cheer him up by wire, and he sent me one in reply, imploring me to do all I could. This was the telegram which you appear in some inexplicable way to have seen. I did not tell him how urgent the danger was, for I knew that he could do no good here, but I sent the truth to the girl's father, and he very injudiciously communicated it to Godfrey. The result was that he came straight away in a state bordering on frenzy, and has remained in the same state, kneeling at the end of her bed, until this morning death put an end to her sufferings. That is all, Mr. Holmes, and I am sure that I can rely upon your discretion and that of your friend."

Holmes grasped the doctor's hand.

"Come, Watson," said he, and we passed from that house of grief into the pale sunlight of the winter day.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ABBEY GRANGE

It was on a bitterly cold and frosty morning, towards the end of the winter of ‘97, that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. It was Holmes. The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face, and told me at a glance that something was amiss.

“Come, Watson, come!” he cried. “The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!”

Ten minutes later we were both in a cab, and rattling through the silent streets on our way to Charing Cross Station. The first faint winter’s dawn was beginning to appear, and we could dimly see the occasional figure of an early workman as he passed us, blurred and indistinct in the opalescent London reek. Holmes nestled in silence into his heavy coat, and I was glad to do the same, for the air was most bitter, and neither of us had broken our fast.

It was not until we had consumed some hot tea at the station and taken our places in the Kentish train that we were sufficiently thawed, he to speak and I to listen. Holmes drew a note from his pocket, and read aloud:

Abbey Grange, Marsham, Kent, 3:30 A.M. MY DEAR MR. HOLMES:

I should be very glad of your immediate assistance in what promises to be a most remarkable case. It is something quite in your line. Except for releasing the lady I will see that everything is kept exactly as I have found it, but I beg you not to lose an instant, as it is difficult to leave Sir Eustace there. Yours faithfully, STANLEY HOPKINS.

“Hopkins has called me in seven times, and on each occasion his summons has been entirely justified,” said Holmes. “I fancy that every one of his cases has found its way into your collection, and I must admit, Watson, that you have some power of selection, which atones for much which I deplore in your narratives. Your fatal habit of looking at everything from the point of view of a story instead of as a scientific exercise has ruined what might have been an instructive and even classical series of demonstrations. You slur over work of the utmost finesse and delicacy, in order to dwell upon sensational details which may excite, but cannot possibly instruct, the reader.”

“Why do you not write them yourself?” I said, with some bitterness.

“I will, my dear Watson, I will. At present I am, as you know, fairly busy, but I propose to devote my declining years to the composition of a textbook, which shall focus the whole art of detection into one volume. Our present research appears to be a case of murder.”

“You think this Sir Eustace is dead, then?”

“I should say so. Hopkins’s writing shows considerable agitation, and he is not an emotional man. Yes, I gather there has been violence, and that the body is left for our inspection. A mere suicide would not have caused him to send for me. As to the release of the lady, it would appear that she has been locked in her room during the tragedy. We are moving in high life, Watson, crackling paper, ‘E.B.’ monogram, coat-of-arms, picturesque address. I think that friend Hopkins will live up to his reputation, and that we shall have an interesting morning. The crime was committed before twelve last night.”

“How can you possibly tell?”

“By an inspection of the trains, and by reckoning the time. The local police had to be called in, they had to communicate with Scotland Yard, Hopkins had to go out, and he in turn had to send for me. All that makes a fair night’s work. Well, here we are at Chiselhurst Station, and we shall soon set our doubts at rest.”

A drive of a couple of miles through narrow country lanes brought us to a park gate, which was opened for us by an old lodge-keeper, whose haggard face bore the reflection of some great disaster. The avenue ran through a noble park, between lines of ancient elms, and ended in a low, widespread house, pillared in front after the fashion of Palladio. The central part was evidently of a great age and shrouded in ivy, but the large windows showed that modern changes had been carried out, and one wing of the house appeared to be entirely new. The youthful figure and alert, eager face of Inspector Stanley Hopkins confronted us in the open doorway.

“I’m very glad you have come, Mr. Holmes. And you, too, Dr. Watson. But, indeed, if I had my time over again, I should not have troubled you, for since the lady has come to herself, she has given so clear an account of the affair that there is not much left for us to do. You remember that Lewisham gang of burglars?”

“What, the three Randalls?”

“Exactly; the father and two sons. It’s their work. I have not a doubt of it. They did a job at Sydenham a fortnight ago and were seen and described.

Rather cool to do another so soon and so near, but it is they, beyond all doubt. It’s a hanging matter this time.”

“Sir Eustace is dead, then?”

“Yes, his head was knocked in with his own poker.”

“Sir Eustace Brackenstall, the driver tells me.”

“Exactly — one of the richest men in Kent — Lady Brackenstall is in the morning-room. Poor lady, she has had a most dreadful experience. She seemed half dead when I saw her first. I think you had best see her and hear her account of the facts. Then we will examine the dining-room together.”

Lady Brackenstall was no ordinary person. Seldom have I seen so graceful a figure, so womanly a presence, and so beautiful a face. She was a blonde, golden-haired, blue-eyed, and would no doubt have had the perfect complexion which goes with such colouring, had not her recent experience left her drawn and haggard. Her sufferings were physical as well as mental, for over one eye rose a hideous, plum-coloured swelling, which her maid, a tall, austere woman, was bathing assiduously with vinegar and water. The lady lay back exhausted upon a couch, but her quick, observant gaze, as we entered the room, and the alert expression of her beautiful features, showed that neither her wits nor her courage had been shaken by her terrible experience. She was enveloped in a loose dressing-gown of blue and silver, but a black sequin-covered dinner-dress lay upon the couch beside her.

“I have told you all that happened, Mr. Hopkins,” she said, wearily. “Could you not repeat it for me? Well, if you think it necessary, I will tell these gentlemen what occurred. Have they been in the dining-room yet?”

“I thought they had better hear your ladyship’s story first.”

“I shall be glad when you can arrange matters. It is horrible to me to think of him still lying there.” She shuddered and buried her face in her hands. As she did so, the loose gown fell back from her forearms. Holmes uttered an exclamation.

“You have other injuries, madam! What is this?” Two vivid red spots stood out on one of the white, round limbs. She hastily covered it.

“It is nothing. It has no connection with this hideous business to-night. If you and your friend will sit down, I will tell you all I can.

“I am the wife of Sir Eustace Brackenstall. I have been married about a year. I suppose that it is no use my attempting to conceal that our marriage has not been a happy one. I fear that all our neighbours would tell you that, even if I were to attempt to deny it. Perhaps the fault may be partly mine. I was brought up in the freer, less conventional atmosphere of South Australia, and this English life, with its proprieties and its primness, is not congenial to me. But the main reason lies in the one fact, which is notorious to everyone, and that is that Sir Eustace was a confirmed drunkard. To be with such a man for an hour is unpleasant. Can you imagine what it means for a sensitive and high-spirited woman to be tied to him for day and night? It is a sacrilege, a crime, a villainy to hold that such a marriage is binding. I say that these monstrous laws of yours will bring a curse upon the land — God will not let such wickedness endure.” For an instant she sat up, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes blazing from under the terrible mark upon her brow. Then the strong, soothing hand of the austere maid drew her head down on to the cushion, and the wild anger died away into passionate sobbing. At last she continued:

“I will tell you about last night. You are aware, perhaps, that in this house all the servants sleep in the modern wing. This central block is made up of the dwelling-rooms, with the kitchen behind and our bedroom above. My maid, Theresa, sleeps above my room. There is no one else, and no sound could alarm those who are in the farther wing. This must have been well known to the robbers, or they would not have acted as they did.

“Sir Eustace retired about half-past ten. The servants had already gone to their quarters. Only my maid was up, and she had remained in her room at the top of the house until I needed her services. I sat until after eleven in this room, absorbed in a book. Then I walked round to see that all was right before I went upstairs. It was my custom to do this myself, for, as I have explained, Sir Eustace was not always to be trusted. I went into the kitchen, the butler’s pantry, the gun-room, the billiard-room, the drawing-room, and finally the dining-room. As I approached the window, which is covered with thick curtains, I suddenly felt the wind blow upon my face and realised that it was open. I flung the curtain aside and found myself face to face with a broad-shouldered elderly man, who had just stepped into the room. The window is a long French one, which really forms a door leading to the lawn. I held my bedroom candle lit in my hand, and, by its light, behind the first man I saw two others, who were in the act of entering. I stepped back, but the fellow was on me in an instant. He caught me first by the wrist and then by the throat. I opened my mouth to scream, but he struck me a savage blow with his fist over the eye, and felled me to the ground. I must have been unconscious for a few minutes, for when I came to myself, I found that they had torn down the bell-rope, and had secured me tightly to the oaken chair which stands at the head of the dining-table. I was so firmly bound that I could not move, and a handkerchief round my mouth prevented me from uttering a sound. It was at this instant that my unfortunate husband entered the room. He had evidently heard some suspicious sounds, and he came prepared for such a scene as he found. He was dressed in nightshirt and trousers, with his favourite blackthorn cudgel in his hand. He rushed at the burglars, but another — it was an elderly man — stooped, picked the poker out of the grate and struck him a horrible blow as he passed. He fell with a groan and never moved again. I fainted once more, but again it could only have been for a very few minutes during which I was insensible. When I opened my eyes I found that they had collected the silver from the sideboard, and they had drawn a bottle of wine which stood there. Each of them had a glass in his hand. I have already told you, have I not, that one was elderly, with a beard, and the others young, hairless lads. They might have been a father with his two sons. They talked together in whispers. Then they came over and made sure that I was securely bound. Finally they withdrew, closing the window after them. It was quite a quarter of an hour before I got my mouth free. When I did so, my screams brought the maid to my assistance. The other servants were soon alarmed, and we sent for the local police, who instantly communicated with London. That is really all that I can tell you, gentlemen, and I trust that it will not be necessary for me to go over so painful a story again."

"Any questions, Mr. Holmes?" asked Hopkins.

"I will not impose any further tax upon Lady Brackenstall's patience and time," said Holmes. "Before I go into the dining-room, I should like to hear your experience." He looked at the maid.

"I saw the men before ever they came into the house," said she. "As I sat by my bedroom window I saw three men in the moonlight down by the lodge gate yonder, but I thought nothing of it at the time. It was more than an hour after that I heard my mistress scream, and down I ran, to find her, poor lamb, just as she says, and him on the floor, with his blood and brains over the room. It was enough to drive a woman out of her wits, tied there, and her very dress spotted with him, but she never wanted courage, did Miss Mary Fraser of Adelaide and Lady Brackenstall of Abbey Grange hasn't learned new ways. You've questioned her long enough, you gentlemen, and now she is coming to her own room, just with her old Theresa, to get the rest that she badly needs.”

With a motherly tenderness the gaunt woman put her arm round her mistress and led her from the room.

“She has been with her all her life,” said Hopkins. “Nursed her as a baby, and came with her to England when they first left Australia, eighteen months ago. Theresa Wright is her name, and the kind of maid you don’t pick up nowadays. This way, Mr. Holmes, if you please!”

The keen interest had passed out of Holmes’s expressive face, and I knew that with the mystery all the charm of the case had departed. There still remained an arrest to be effected, but what were these commonplace rogues that he should soil his hands with them? An abstruse and learned specialist who finds that he has been called in for a case of measles would experience something of the annoyance which I read in my friend’s eyes. Yet the scene in the dining-room of the Abbey Grange was sufficiently strange to arrest his attention and to recall his waning interest.

It was a very large and high chamber, with carved oak ceiling, oaken panelling, and a fine array of deer’s heads and ancient weapons around the walls. At the further end from the door was the high French window of which we had heard. Three smaller windows on the right-hand side filled the apartment with cold winter sunshine. On the left was a large, deep fireplace, with a massive, overhanging oak mantelpiece. Beside the fireplace was a heavy oaken chair with arms and cross-bars at the bottom. In and out through the open woodwork was woven a crimson cord, which was secured at each side to the crosspiece below. In releasing the lady, the cord had been slipped off her, but the knots with which it had been secured still remained. These details only struck our attention afterwards, for our thoughts were entirely absorbed by the terrible object which lay upon the tigerskin hearthrug in front of the fire.

It was the body of a tall, well-made man, about forty years of age. He lay upon his back, his face upturned, with his white teeth grinning through his short, black beard. His two clenched hands were raised above his head, and a heavy, blackthorn stick lay across them. His dark, handsome, aquiline features were convulsed into a spasm of vindictive hatred, which had set his dead face in a terribly fiendish expression. He had evidently been in his bed when the alarm had broken out, for he wore a foppish, embroidered nightshirt, and his bare feet projected from his trousers. His head was horribly injured, and the whole room bore witness to the savage ferocity of the blow which had struck him down. Beside him lay the heavy poker, bent into a curve by the concussion. Holmes examined both it and the indescribable wreck which it had wrought.

“He must be a powerful man, this elder Randall,” he remarked.

“Yes,” said Hopkins. “I have some record of the fellow, and he is a rough customer.”

“You should have no difficulty in getting him.”

“Not the slightest. We have been on the look-out for him, and there was some idea that he had got away to America. Now that we know that the gang are here, I don’t see how they can escape. We have the news at every seaport already, and a reward will be offered before evening. What beats me is how they could have done so mad a thing, knowing that the lady could describe them and that we could not fail to recognise the description.”

“Exactly. One would have expected that they would silence Lady Brackenstall as well.”

“They may not have realised,” I suggested, “that she had recovered from her faint.”

“That is likely enough. If she seemed to be senseless, they would not take her life. What about this poor fellow, Hopkins? I seem to have heard some queer stories about him.”

“He was a good-hearted man when he was sober, but a perfect fiend when he was drunk, or rather when he was half drunk, for he seldom really went the whole way. The devil seemed to be in him at such times, and he was capable of anything. From what I hear, in spite of all his wealth and his title, he very nearly came our way once or twice. There was a scandal about his drenching a dog with petroleum and setting it on fire — her ladyship’s dog, to make the matter worse — and that was only hushed up with difficulty. Then he threw a decanter at that maid, Theresa Wright — there was trouble about that. On the whole, and between ourselves, it will be a brighter house without him. What are you looking at now?”

Holmes was down on his knees, examining with great attention the knots upon the red cord with which the lady had been secured. Then he carefully scrutinized the broken and frayed end where it had snapped off when the burglar had dragged it down.

“When this was pulled down, the bell in the kitchen must have rung loudly,” he remarked.

“No one could hear it. The kitchen stands right at the back of the house.”

“How did the burglar know no one would hear it? How dared he pull at a bell-rope in that reckless fashion?”

“Exactly, Mr. Holmes, exactly. You put the very question which I have asked myself again and again. There can be no doubt that this fellow must have known the house and its habits. He must have perfectly understood that the servants would all be in bed at that comparatively early hour, and that no one could possibly hear a bell ring in the kitchen. Therefore, he must have been in close league with one of the servants. Surely that is evident. But there are eight servants, and all of good character.”

“Other things being equal,” said Holmes, “one would suspect the one at whose head the master threw a decanter. And yet that would involve treachery towards the mistress to whom this woman seems devoted. Well, well, the point is a minor one, and when you have Randall you will probably find no difficulty in securing his accomplice. The lady’s story certainly seems to be corroborated, if it needed corroboration, by every detail which we see before us.” He walked to the French window and threw it open. “There are no signs here, but the ground is iron hard, and one would not expect them. I see that these candles in the mantelpiece have been lighted.”

“Yes, it was by their light and that of the lady’s bedroom candle, that the burglars saw their way about.”

“And what did they take?”

“Well, they did not take much — only half a dozen articles of plate off the sideboard. Lady Brackenstall thinks that they were themselves so disturbed by the death of Sir Eustace that they did not ransack the house, as they would otherwise have done.”

“No doubt that is true, and yet they drank some wine, I understand.”

“To steady their nerves.”

“Exactly. These three glasses upon the sideboard have been untouched, I suppose?”

“Yes, and the bottle stands as they left it.”

“Let us look at it. Halloa, halloa! What is this?”

The three glasses were grouped together, all of them tinged with wine, and one of them containing some dregs of beeswing. The bottle stood near them, two-thirds full, and beside it lay a long, deeply stained cork. Its appearance and the dust upon the bottle showed that it was no common vintage which the murderers had enjoyed.

A change had come over Holmes’s manner. He had lost his listless expression, and again I saw an alert light of interest in his keen, deep-set eyes. He raised the cork and examined it minutely.

“How did they draw it?” he asked.

Hopkins pointed to a half-opened drawer. In it lay some table linen and a large corkscrew.

“Did Lady Brackenstall say that screw was used?”

“No, you remember that she was senseless at the moment when the bottle was opened.”

“Quite so. As a matter of fact, that screw was not used. This bottle was opened by a pocket screw, probably contained in a knife, and not more than an inch and a half long. If you will examine the top of the cork, you will observe that the screw was driven in three times before the cork was extracted. It has never been transfixed. This long screw would have transfixed it and drawn it up with a single pull. When you catch this fellow, you will find that he has one of these multiplex knives in his possession.”

“Excellent!” said Hopkins.

“But these glasses do puzzle me, I confess. Lady Brackenstall actually SAW the three men drinking, did she not?”

“Yes; she was clear about that.”

“Then there is an end of it. What more is to be said? And yet, you must admit, that the three glasses are very remarkable, Hopkins. What? You see nothing remarkable? Well, well, let it pass. Perhaps, when a man has special knowledge and special powers like my own, it rather encourages him to seek a complex explanation when a simpler one is at hand. Of course, it must be a mere chance about the glasses. Well, good-morning, Hopkins. I don’t see that I can be of any use to you, and you appear to have your case very clear. You will let me know when Randall is arrested, and any further developments which may occur. I trust that I shall soon have to congratulate you upon a successful conclusion. Come, Watson, I fancy that we may employ ourselves more profitably at home.”

During our return journey, I could see by Holmes’s face that he was much puzzled by something which he had observed. Every now and then, by an effort, he would throw off the impression, and talk as if the matter were clear, but then his doubts would settle down upon him again, and his knitted brows and abstracted eyes would show that his thoughts had gone back once more to the great dining-room of the Abbey Grange, in which this midnight tragedy had been enacted. At last, by a sudden impulse, just as our train was crawling out of a suburban station, he sprang on to the platform and pulled me out after him.

"Excuse me, my dear fellow," said he, as we watched the rear carriages of our train disappearing round a curve, "I am sorry to make you the victim of what may seem a mere whim, but on my life, Watson, I simply CAN'T leave that case in this condition. Every instinct that I possess cries out against it. It's wrong — it's all wrong — I'll swear that it's wrong. And yet the lady's story was complete, the maid's corroboration was sufficient, the detail was fairly exact. What have I to put up against that? Three wine-glasses, that is all. But if I had not taken things for granted, if I had examined everything with the care which I should have shown had we approached the case DE NOVO and had no cut-and-dried story to warp my mind, should I not then have found something more definite to go upon? Of course I should. Sit down on this bench, Watson, until a train for Chiselhurst arrives, and allow me to lay the evidence before you, imploring you in the first instance to dismiss from your mind the idea that anything which the maid or her mistress may have said must necessarily be true. The lady's charming personality must not be permitted to warp our judgment.

"Surely there are details in her story which, if we looked at in cold blood, would excite our suspicion. These burglars made a considerable haul at Sydenham a fortnight ago. Some account of them and of their appearance was in the papers, and would naturally occur to anyone who wished to invent a story in which imaginary robbers should play a part. As a matter of fact, burglars who have done a good stroke of business are, as a rule, only too glad to enjoy the proceeds in peace and quiet without embarking on another perilous undertaking. Again, it is unusual for burglars to operate at so early an hour, it is unusual for burglars to strike a lady to prevent her screaming, since one would imagine that was the sure way to make her scream, it is unusual for them to commit murder when their numbers are sufficient to overpower one man, it is unusual for them to be content with a limited plunder when there was much more within their reach, and finally, I should say, that it was very unusual for such men to leave a bottle half empty. How do all these unusuals strike you, Watson?"

"Their cumulative effect is certainly considerable, and yet each of them is quite possible in itself. The most unusual thing of all, as it seems to me, is that the lady should be tied to the chair."

"Well, I am not so clear about that, Watson, for it is evident that they must either kill her or else secure her in such a way that she could not give immediate notice of their escape. But at any rate I have shown, have I not, that there is a certain element of improbability about the lady's story? And now, on the top of this, comes the incident of the wineglasses."

"What about the wineglasses?"

"Can you see them in your mind's eye?"

"I see them clearly."

"We are told that three men drank from them. Does that strike you as likely?"

"Why not? There was wine in each glass."

"Exactly, but there was beeswing only in one glass. You must have noticed that fact. What does that suggest to your mind?"

"The last glass filled would be most likely to contain beeswing."

"Not at all. The bottle was full of it, and it is inconceivable that the first two glasses were clear and the third heavily charged with it. There are two possible explanations, and only two. One is that after the second glass was filled the bottle was violently agitated, and so the third glass received the beeswing. That does not appear probable. No, no, I am sure that I am right."

"What, then, do you suppose?"

"That only two glasses were used, and that the dregs of both were poured into a third glass, so as to give the false impression that three people had been here. In that way all the beeswing would be in the last glass, would it not? Yes, I am convinced that this is so. But if I have hit upon the true explanation of this one small phenomenon, then in an instant the case rises from the commonplace to the exceedingly remarkable, for it can only mean that Lady Brackenstall and her maid have deliberately lied to us, that not one word of their story is to be believed, that they have some very strong reason for covering the real criminal, and that we must construct our case for ourselves without any help from them. That is the mission which now lies before us, and here, Watson, is the Sydenham train."

The household at the Abbey Grange were much surprised at our return, but Sherlock Holmes, finding that Stanley Hopkins had gone off to report to headquarters, took possession of the dining-room, locked the door upon the inside, and devoted himself for two hours to one of those minute and laborious investigations which form the solid basis on which his brilliant edifices of deduction were reared. Seated in a corner like an interested student who observes the demonstration of his professor, I followed every step of that remarkable research. The window, the curtains, the carpet, the chair, the rope — each in turn was minutely examined and duly pondered. The body of the unfortunate baronet had been removed, and all else remained as we had seen it in the morning. Finally, to my astonishment, Holmes climbed up on to the massive mantelpiece. Far above his head hung the few inches of red cord which were still attached to the wire. For a long time he gazed upward at it, and then in an attempt to get nearer to it he rested his knee upon a wooden bracket on the wall. This brought his hand within a few inches of the broken end of the rope, but it was not this so much as the bracket itself which seemed to engage his attention. Finally, he sprang down with an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"It's all right, Watson," said he. "We have got our case — one of the most remarkable in our collection. But, dear me, how slow-witted I have been, and how nearly I have committed the blunder of my lifetime! Now, I think that, with a few missing links, my chain is almost complete."

"You have got your men?"

"Man, Watson, man. Only one, but a very formidable person. Strong as a lion — witness the blow that bent that poker! Six foot three in height, active as a squirrel, dexterous with his fingers, finally, remarkably quick-witted, for this whole ingenious story is of his concoction. Yes, Watson, we have come upon the handiwork of a very remarkable individual. And yet, in that bell-rope, he has given us a clue which should not have left us a doubt."

"Where was the clue?"

"Well, if you were to pull down a bell-rope, Watson, where would you expect it to break? Surely at the spot where it is attached to the wire. Why should it break three inches from the top, as this one has done?"

"Because it is frayed there?"

"Exactly. This end, which we can examine, is frayed. He was cunning enough to do that with his knife. But the other end is not frayed. You could not observe that from here, but if you were on the mantelpiece you would see that it is cut clean off without any mark of fraying whatever. You can reconstruct what occurred. The man needed the rope. He would not tear it down for fear of giving the alarm by ringing the bell. What did he do? He sprang up on the mantelpiece, could not quite reach it, put his knee on the bracket — you will see the impression in the dust — and so got his knife to bear upon the cord. I could not reach the place by at least three inches — from which I infer that he is at least three inches a bigger man than I. Look at that mark upon the seat of the oaken chair! What is it?"

"Blood."

"Undoubtedly it is blood. This alone puts the lady's story out of court. If she were seated on the chair when the crime was done, how comes that mark? No, no, she was placed in the chair AFTER the death of her husband. I'll wager that the black dress shows a corresponding mark to this. We have not yet met our Waterloo, Watson, but this is our Marengo, for it begins in defeat and ends in victory. I should like now to have a few words with the nurse, Theresa. We must be wary for a while, if we are to get the information which we want."

She was an interesting person, this stern Australian nurse — taciturn, suspicious, ungracious, it took some time before Holmes's pleasant manner and frank acceptance of all that she said thawed her into a corresponding amiability. She did not attempt to conceal her hatred for her late employer.

"Yes, sir, it is true that he threw the decanter at me. I heard him call my mistress a name, and I told him that he would not dare to speak so if her brother had been there. Then it was that he threw it at me. He might have thrown a dozen if he had but left my bonny bird alone. He was forever ill-treating her, and she too proud to complain. She will not even tell me all that he has done to her. She never told me of those marks on her arm that you saw this morning, but I know very well that they come from a stab with a hatpin. The sly devil — God forgive me that I should speak of him so, now that he is dead! But a devil he was, if ever one walked the earth. He was all honey when first we met him — only eighteen months ago, and we both feel as if it were eighteen years. She had only just arrived in London. Yes, it was her first voyage — she had never been from home before. He won her with his title and his money and his false London ways. If she made a mistake she has paid for it, if ever a woman did. What month did we meet him? Well, I tell you it was just after we arrived. We arrived in June, and it was July. They were married in January of last year. Yes, she is down in the morning-room again, and I have no doubt she will see you, but you must not ask too much of her, for she has gone through all that flesh and blood will stand."

Lady Brackenstall was reclining on the same couch, but looked brighter than before. The maid had entered with us, and began once more to foment the bruise upon her mistress's brow.

"I hope," said the lady, "that you have not come to cross-examine me again?"

"No," Holmes answered, in his gentlest voice, "I will not cause you any unnecessary trouble, Lady Brackenstall, and my whole desire is to make things easy for you, for I am convinced that you are a much-tried woman. If you will treat me as a friend and trust me, you may find that I will justify your trust."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To tell me the truth."

"Mr. Holmes!"

"No, no, Lady Brackenstall — it is no use. You may have heard of any little reputation which I possess. I will stake it all on the fact that your story is an absolute fabrication."

Mistress and maid were both staring at Holmes with pale faces and frightened eyes.

"You are an impudent fellow!" cried Theresa. "Do you mean to say that my mistress has told a lie?"

Holmes rose from his chair.

"Have you nothing to tell me?"

"I have told you everything."

"Think once more, Lady Brackenstall. Would it not be better to be frank?"

For an instant there was hesitation in her beautiful face. Then some new strong thought caused it to set like a mask.

"I have told you all I know."

Holmes took his hat and shrugged his shoulders. "I am sorry," he said, and without another word we left the room and the house. There was a pond in the park, and to this my friend led the way. It was frozen over, but a single hole was left for the convenience of a solitary swan. Holmes gazed at it, and then passed on to the lodge gate. There he scribbled a short note for Stanley Hopkins, and left it with the lodge-keeper.

"It may be a hit, or it may be a miss, but we are bound to do something for friend Hopkins, just to justify this second visit," said he. "I will not quite take him into my confidence yet. I think our next scene of operations must be the shipping office of the Adelaide-Southampton line, which stands at the end of Pall Mall, if I remember right. There is a second line of steamers which connect South Australia with England, but we will draw the larger cover first."

Holmes's card sent in to the manager ensured instant attention, and he was not long in acquiring all the information he needed. In June of '95, only one of their line had reached a home port. It was the ROCK OF GIBRALTAR, their largest and best boat. A reference to the passenger list showed that Miss Fraser, of Adelaide, with her maid had made the voyage in her. The boat was now somewhere south of the Suez Canal on her way to Australia. Her officers were the same as in '95, with one exception. The first officer, Mr. Jack Crocker, had been made a captain and was to take charge of their new ship, the BASS ROCK, sailing in two days' time from Southampton. He lived at Sydenham, but he was likely to be in that morning for instructions, if we cared to wait for him.

No, Mr. Holmes had no desire to see him, but would be glad to know more about his record and character.

His record was magnificent. There was not an officer in the fleet to touch him. As to his character, he was reliable on duty, but a wild, desperate fellow off the deck of his ship — hot-headed, excitable, but loyal, honest, and kind-hearted. That was the pith of the information with which Holmes left the office of the Adelaide-Southampton company. Thence he drove to Scotland Yard, but, instead of entering, he sat in his cab with his brows drawn down, lost in profound thought. Finally he drove round to the Charing Cross telegraph office, sent off a message, and then, at last, we made for Baker Street once more.

"No, I couldn't do it, Watson," said he, as we reentered our room. "Once that warrant was made out, nothing on earth would save him. Once or twice in my career I feel that I have done more real harm by my discovery of the criminal than ever he had done by his crime. I have learned caution now, and I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my own conscience. Let us know a little more before we act."

Before evening, we had a visit from Inspector Stanley Hopkins. Things were not going very well with him.

"I believe that you are a wizard, Mr. Holmes. I really do sometimes think that you have powers that are not human. Now, how on earth could you know that the stolen silver was at the bottom of that pond?"

"I didn't know it."

"But you told me to examine it."

"You got it, then?"

"Yes, I got it."

"I am very glad if I have helped you."

"But you haven't helped me. You have made the affair far more difficult. What sort of burglars are they who steal silver and then throw it into the nearest pond?"

"It was certainly rather eccentric behaviour. I was merely going on the idea that if the silver had been taken by persons who did not want it — who merely took it for a blind, as it were — then they would naturally be anxious to get rid of it."

"But why should such an idea cross your mind?"

"Well, I thought it was possible. When they came out through the French window, there was the pond with one tempting little hole in the ice, right in front of their noses. Could there be a better hiding-place?"

"Ah, a hiding-place — that is better!" cried Stanley Hopkins. "Yes, yes, I see it all now! It was early, there were folk upon the roads, they were afraid of being seen with the silver, so they sank it in the pond, intending to return for it when the coast was clear. Excellent, Mr. Holmes — that is better than your idea of a blind."

"Quite so, you have got an admirable theory. I have no doubt that my own ideas were quite wild, but you must admit that they have ended in discovering the silver."

"Yes, sir — yes. It was all your doing. But I have had a bad setback."

"A setback?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. The Randall gang were arrested in New York this morning."

"Dear me, Hopkins! That is certainly rather against your theory that they committed a murder in Kent last night."

"It is fatal, Mr. Holmes — absolutely fatal. Still, there are other gangs of three besides the Randalls, or it may be some new gang of which the police have never heard."

"Quite so, it is perfectly possible. What, are you off?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, there is no rest for me until I have got to the bottom of the business. I suppose you have no hint to give me?"

"I have given you one."

“Which?”

“Well, I suggested a blind.”

“But why, Mr. Holmes, why?”

“Ah, that’s the question, of course. But I commend the idea to your mind. You might possibly find that there was something in it. You won’t stop for dinner? Well, good-bye, and let us know how you get on.”

Dinner was over, and the table cleared before Holmes alluded to the matter again. He had lit his pipe and held his slippered feet to the cheerful blaze of the fire. Suddenly he looked at his watch.

“I expect developments, Watson.”

“When?”

“Now — within a few minutes. I dare say you thought I acted rather badly to Stanley Hopkins just now?”

“I trust your judgment.”

“A very sensible reply, Watson. You must look at it this way: what I know is unofficial, what he knows is official. I have the right to private judgment, but he has none. He must disclose all, or he is a traitor to his service. In a doubtful case I would not put him in so painful a position, and so I reserve my information until my own mind is clear upon the matter.”

“But when will that be?”

“The time has come. You will now be present at the last scene of a remarkable little drama.”

There was a sound upon the stairs, and our door was opened to admit as fine a specimen of manhood as ever passed through it. He was a very tall young man, golden-moustached, blue-eyed, with a skin which had been burned by tropical suns, and a springy step, which showed that the huge frame was as active as it was strong. He closed the door behind him, and then he stood with clenched hands and heaving breast, choking down some overmastering emotion.

“Sit down, Captain Crocker. You got my telegram?”

Our visitor sank into an armchair and looked from one to the other of us with questioning eyes.

“I got your telegram, and I came at the hour you said. I heard that you had been down to the office. There was no getting away from you. Let’s hear the worst. What are you going to do with me? Arrest me? Speak out, man! You can’t sit there and play with me like a cat with a mouse.”

“Give him a cigar,” said Holmes. “Bite on that, Captain Crocker, and don’t let your nerves run away with you. I should not sit here smoking with you if I thought that you were a common criminal, you may be sure of that. Be frank with me and we may do some good. Play tricks with me, and I’ll crush you.”

“What do you wish me to do?”

“To give me a true account of all that happened at the Abbey Grange last night — a TRUE account, mind you, with nothing added and nothing taken off. I know so much already that if you go one inch off the straight, I’ll blow this police whistle from my window and the affair goes out of my hands forever.”

The sailor thought for a little. Then he struck his leg with his great sunburned hand.

“I’ll chance it,” he cried. “I believe you are a man of your word, and a white man, and I’ll tell you the whole story. But one thing I will say first. So far as I am concerned, I regret nothing and I fear nothing, and I would do it all again and be proud of the job. Damn the beast, if he had as many lives as a cat, he would owe them all to me! But it’s the lady, Mary — Mary Fraser — for never will I call her by that accursed name. When I think of getting her into trouble, I who would give my life just to bring one smile to her dear face, it’s that that turns my soul into water. And yet — and yet — what less could I do? I’ll tell you my story, gentlemen, and then I’ll ask you, as man to man, what less could I do?

“I must go back a bit. You seem to know everything, so I expect that you know that I met her when she was a passenger and I was first officer of the ROCK OF GIBRALTAR. From the first day I met her, she was the only woman to me. Every day of that voyage I loved her more, and many a time since have I kneeled down in the darkness of the night watch and kissed the deck of that ship because I knew her dear feet had trod it. She was never engaged to me. She treated me as fairly as ever a woman treated a man. I have no complaint to make. It was all love on my side, and all good comradeship and friendship on hers. When we parted she was a free woman, but I could never again be a free man.

“Next time I came back from sea, I heard of her marriage. Well, why shouldn’t she marry whom she liked? Title and money — who could carry them better than she? She was born for all that is beautiful and dainty. I didn’t grieve over her marriage. I was not such a selfish hound as that. I just rejoiced that good luck had come her way, and that she had not thrown herself away on a penniless sailor. That’s how I loved Mary Fraser.

“Well, I never thought to see her again, but last voyage I was promoted, and the new boat was not yet launched, so I had to wait for a couple of months with my people at Sydenham. One day out in a country lane I met Theresa Wright, her old maid. She told me all about her, about him, about everything. I tell you, gentlemen, it nearly drove me mad. This drunken hound, that he should dare to raise his hand to her, whose boots he was not worthy to lick! I met Theresa again. Then I met Mary herself — and met her again. Then she would meet me no more. But the other day I had a notice that I was to start on my voyage within a week, and I determined that I would see her once before I left. Theresa was always my friend, for she loved Mary and hated this villain almost as much as I did. From her I learned the ways of the house. Mary used to sit up reading in her own little room downstairs. I crept round there last night and scratched at the window. At first she would not open to me, but in her heart I know that now she loves me, and she could not leave me in the frosty night. She whispered to me to come round to the big front window, and I found it open before me, so as to let me into the dining-room. Again I heard from her own lips things that made my blood boil, and again I cursed this brute who mishandled the woman I loved. Well, gentlemen, I was standing with her just inside the window, in all innocence, as God is my judge, when he rushed like a madman into the room, called her the vilest name that a man could use to a woman, and welted her across the face with the stick he had in his hand. I had sprung for the poker, and it was a fair fight between us. See here, on my arm, where his first blow fell. Then it was my turn, and I went through him as if he had been a rotten pumpkin. Do you think I was sorry? Not I! It was his life or mine, but far more than that, it was his life or hers, for how could I leave her in the power of this madman? That was how I killed him. Was I wrong? Well, then, what would either of you gentlemen have done, if you had been in my position?”

“She had screamed when he struck her, and that brought old Theresa down from the room above. There was a bottle of wine on the sideboard, and I opened it and poured a little between Mary’s lips, for she was half dead with shock. Then I took a drop myself. Theresa was as cool as ice, and it was her plot as much as mine. We must make it appear that burglars had done the thing. Theresa kept on repeating our story to her mistress, while I swarmed up and cut the rope of the bell. Then I lashed her in her chair, and frayed out the end of the rope to make it look natural, else they would wonder how in the world a burglar could have got up there to cut it. Then I gathered up a few plates and pots of silver, to carry out the idea of the robbery, and there I left them, with orders to give the alarm when I had a quarter of an hour's start. I dropped the silver into the pond, and made off for Sydenham, feeling that for once in my life I had done a real good night's work. And that's the truth and the whole truth, Mr. Holmes, if it costs me my neck."

Holmes smoked for some time in silence. Then he crossed the room, and shook our visitor by the hand.

"That's what I think," said he. "I know that every word is true, for you have hardly said a word which I did not know. No one but an acrobat or a sailor could have got up to that bell-rope from the bracket, and no one but a sailor could have made the knots with which the cord was fastened to the chair. Only once had this lady been brought into contact with sailors, and that was on her voyage, and it was someone of her own class of life, since she was trying hard to shield him, and so showing that she loved him. You see how easy it was for me to lay my hands upon you when once I had started upon the right trail."

"I thought the police never could have seen through our dodge."

"And the police haven't, nor will they, to the best of my belief. Now, look here, Captain Crocker, this is a very serious matter, though I am willing to admit that you acted under the most extreme provocation to which any man could be subjected. I am not sure that in defence of your own life your action will not be pronounced legitimate. However, that is for a British jury to decide. Meanwhile I have so much sympathy for you that, if you choose to disappear in the next twenty-four hours, I will promise you that no one will hinder you."

"And then it will all come out?"

"Certainly it will come out."

The sailor flushed with anger.

"What sort of proposal is that to make a man? I know enough of law to understand that Mary would be held as accomplice. Do you think I would leave her alone to face the music while I slunk away? No, sir, let them do their worst upon me, but for heaven's sake, Mr. Holmes, find some way of keeping my poor Mary out of the courts."

Holmes for a second time held out his hand to the sailor.

“I was only testing you, and you ring true every time. Well, it is a great responsibility that I take upon myself, but I have given Hopkins an excellent hint and if he can’t avail himself of it I can do no more. See here, Captain Crocker, we’ll do this in due form of law. You are the prisoner. Watson, you are a British jury, and I never met a man who was more eminently fitted to represent one. I am the judge. Now, gentleman of the jury, you have heard the evidence. Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?”

“Not guilty, my lord,” said I.

“VOX POPULI, VOX DEI. You are acquitted, Captain Crocker. So long as the law does not find some other victim you are safe from me. Come back to this lady in a year, and may her future and yours justify us in the judgment which we have pronounced this night!”

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SECOND STAIN

I had intended “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange” to be the last of those exploits of my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, which I should ever communicate to the public. This resolution of mine was not due to any lack of material, since I have notes of many hundreds of cases to which I have never alluded, nor was it caused by any waning interest on the part of my readers in the singular personality and unique methods of this remarkable man. The real reason lay in the reluctance which Mr. Holmes has shown to the continued publication of his experiences. So long as he was in actual professional practice the records of his successes were of some practical value to him, but since he has definitely retired from London and betaken himself to study and bee-farming on the Sussex Downs, notoriety has become hateful to him, and he has peremptorily requested that his wishes in this matter should be strictly observed. It was only upon my representing to him that I had given a promise that “The Adventure of the Second Stain” should be published when the times were ripe, and pointing out to him that it is only appropriate that this long series of episodes should culminate in the most important international case which he has ever been called upon to handle, that I at last succeeded in obtaining his consent that a carefully guarded account of the incident should at last be laid before the public. If in telling the story I seem to be somewhat vague in certain details, the public will readily understand that there is an excellent reason for my reticence.

It was, then, in a year, and even in a decade, that shall be nameless, that upon one Tuesday morning in autumn we found two visitors of European fame within the walls of our humble room in Baker Street. The one, austere, high-nosed, eagle-eyed, and dominant, was none other than the illustrious Lord Bellinger, twice Premier of Britain. The other, dark, clear-cut, and elegant, hardly yet of middle age, and endowed with every beauty of body and of mind, was the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, and the most rising statesman in the country. They sat side by side upon our paper-littered settee, and it was easy to see from their worn and anxious faces that it was business of the most pressing importance which had brought them. The Premier’s thin, blue-veined hands were clasped tightly over the ivory head of his umbrella, and his gaunt, ascetic face looked gloomily from Holmes to me. The European Secretary pulled nervously at his moustache and fidgeted with the seals of his watch-chain.

“When I discovered my loss, Mr. Holmes, which was at eight o’clock this morning, I at once informed the Prime Minister. It was at his suggestion that we have both come to you.”

“Have you informed the police?”

“No, sir,” said the Prime Minister, with the quick, decisive manner for which he was famous. “We have not done so, nor is it possible that we should do so. To inform the police must, in the long run, mean to inform the public. This is what we particularly desire to avoid.”

“And why, sir?”

“Because the document in question is of such immense importance that its publication might very easily — I might almost say probably — lead to European complications of the utmost moment. It is not too much to say that peace or war may hang upon the issue. Unless its recovery can be attended with the utmost secrecy, then it may as well not be recovered at all, for all that is aimed at by those who have taken it is that its contents should be generally known.”

“I understand. Now, Mr. Trelawney Hope, I should be much obliged if you would tell me exactly the circumstances under which this document disappeared.”

“That can be done in a very few words, Mr. Holmes. The letter — for it was a letter from a foreign potentate — was received six days ago. It was of such importance that I have never left it in my safe, but have taken it across each evening to my house in Whitehall Terrace, and kept it in my bedroom in a locked despatch-box. It was there last night. Of that I am certain. I actually opened the box while I was dressing for dinner and saw the document inside. This morning it was gone. The despatch-box had stood beside the glass upon my dressing-table all night. I am a light sleeper, and so is my wife. We are both prepared to swear that no one could have entered the room during the night. And yet I repeat that the paper is gone.”

“What time did you dine?”

“Half-past seven.”

“How long was it before you went to bed?”

“My wife had gone to the theatre. I waited up for her. It was half-past eleven before we went to our room.”

“Then for four hours the despatch-box had lain unguarded?”

“No one is ever permitted to enter that room save the house-maid in the morning, and my valet, or my wife’s maid, during the rest of the day. They are both trusty servants who have been with us for some time. Besides, neither of them could possibly have known that there was anything more valuable than the ordinary departmental papers in my despatch-box.”

“Who did know of the existence of that letter?”

“No one in the house.”

“Surely your wife knew?”

“No, sir. I had said nothing to my wife until I missed the paper this morning.”

The Premier nodded approvingly.

“I have long known, sir, how high is your sense of public duty,” said he. “I am convinced that in the case of a secret of this importance it would rise superior to the most intimate domestic ties.”

The European Secretary bowed.

“You do me no more than justice, sir. Until this morning I have never breathed one word to my wife upon this matter.”

“Could she have guessed?”

“No, Mr. Holmes, she could not have guessed — nor could anyone have guessed.”

“Have you lost any documents before?”

“No, sir.”

“Who is there in England who did know of the existence of this letter?”

“Each member of the Cabinet was informed of it yesterday, but the pledge of secrecy which attends every Cabinet meeting was increased by the solemn warning which was given by the Prime Minister. Good heavens, to think that within a few hours I should myself have lost it!” His handsome face was distorted with a spasm of despair, and his hands tore at his hair. For a moment we caught a glimpse of the natural man, impulsive, ardent, keenly sensitive. The next the aristocratic mask was replaced, and the gentle voice had returned. “Besides the members of the Cabinet there are two, or possibly three, departmental officials who know of the letter. No one else in England, Mr. Holmes, I assure you.”

“But abroad?”

“I believe that no one abroad has seen it save the man who wrote it. I am well convinced that his Ministers — that the usual official channels have not been employed.”

Holmes considered for some little time.

“Now, sir, I must ask you more particularly what this document is, and why its disappearance should have such momentous consequences?”

The two statesmen exchanged a quick glance and the Premier’s shaggy eyebrows gathered in a frown.

“Mr. Holmes, the envelope is a long, thin one of pale blue colour. There is a seal of red wax stamped with a crouching lion. It is addressed in large, bold handwriting to — —”

“I fear, sir,” said Holmes, “that, interesting and indeed essential as these details are, my inquiries must go more to the root of things. What WAS the letter?”

“That is a State secret of the utmost importance, and I fear that I cannot tell you, nor do I see that it is necessary. If by the aid of the powers which you are said to possess you can find such an envelope as I describe with its enclosure, you will have deserved well of your country, and earned any reward which it lies in our power to bestow.”

Sherlock Holmes rose with a smile.

“You are two of the most busy men in the country,” said he, “and in my own small way I have also a good many calls upon me. I regret exceedingly that I cannot help you in this matter, and any continuation of this interview would be a waste of time.”

The Premier sprang to his feet with that quick, fierce gleam of his deep-set eyes before which a Cabinet has cowered. “I am not accustomed, sir,” he began, but mastered his anger and resumed his seat. For a minute or more we all sat in silence. Then the old statesman shrugged his shoulders.

“We must accept your terms, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right, and it is unreasonable for us to expect you to act unless we give you our entire confidence.”

“I agree with you,” said the younger statesman.

“Then I will tell you, relying entirely upon your honour and that of your colleague, Dr. Watson. I may appeal to your patriotism also, for I could not imagine a greater misfortune for the country than that this affair should come out.”

“You may safely trust us.”

“The letter, then, is from a certain foreign potentate who has been ruffled by some recent Colonial developments of this country. It has been written hurriedly and upon his own responsibility entirely. Inquiries have shown that his Ministers know nothing of the matter. At the same time it is couched in so unfortunate a manner, and certain phrases in it are of so provocative a character, that its publication would undoubtedly lead to a most dangerous state of feeling in this country. There would be such a ferment, sir, that I do not hesitate to say that within a week of the publication of that letter this country would be involved in a great war."

Holmes wrote a name upon a slip of paper and handed it to the Premier.

"Exactly. It was he. And it is this letter — this letter which may well mean the expenditure of a thousand millions and the lives of a hundred thousand men — which has become lost in this unaccountable fashion."

"Have you informed the sender?"

"Yes, sir, a cipher telegram has been despatched."

"Perhaps he desires the publication of the letter."

"No, sir, we have strong reason to believe that he already understands that he has acted in an indiscreet and hot-headed manner. It would be a greater blow to him and to his country than to us if this letter were to come out."

"If this is so, whose interest is it that, the letter should come out? Why should anyone desire to steal it or to publish it?"

"There, Mr. Holmes, you take me into regions of high international politics. But if you consider the European situation you will have no difficulty in perceiving the motive. The whole of Europe is an armed camp. There is a double league which makes a fair balance of military power. Great Britain holds the scales. If Britain were driven into war with one confederacy, it would assure the supremacy of the other confederacy, whether they joined in the war or not. Do you follow?"

"Very clearly. It is then the interest of the enemies of this potentate to secure and publish this letter, so as to make a breach between his country and ours?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to whom would this document be sent if it fell into the hands of an enemy?"

"To any of the great Chancelleries of Europe. It is probably speeding on its way thither at the present instant as fast as steam can take it."

Mr. Trelawney Hope dropped his head on his chest and groaned aloud. The Premier placed his hand kindly upon his shoulder.

“It is your misfortune, my dear fellow. No one can blame you. There is no precaution which you have neglected. Now, Mr. Holmes, you are in full possession of the facts. What course do you recommend?”

Holmes shook his head mournfully.

“You think, sir, that unless this document is recovered there will be war?”

“I think it is very probable.”

“Then, sir, prepare for war.”

“That is a hard saying, Mr. Holmes.”

“Consider the facts, sir. It is inconceivable that it was taken after eleven-thirty at night, since I understand that Mr. Hope and his wife were both in the room from that hour until the loss was found out. It was taken, then, yesterday evening between seven-thirty and eleven-thirty, probably near the earlier hour, since whoever took it evidently knew that it was there and would naturally secure it as early as possible. Now, sir, if a document of this importance were taken at that hour, where can it be now? No one has any reason to retain it. It has been passed rapidly on to those who need it. What chance have we now to overtake or even to trace it? It is beyond our reach.”

The Prime Minister rose from the settee.

“What you say is perfectly logical, Mr. Holmes. I feel that the matter is indeed out of our hands.”

“Let us presume, for argument’s sake, that the document was taken by the maid or by the valet — —”

“They are both old and tried servants.”

“I understand you to say that your room is on the second floor, that there is no entrance from without, and that from within no one could go up unobserved. It must, then, be somebody in the house who has taken it. To whom would the thief take it? To one of several international spies and secret agents, whose names are tolerably familiar to me. There are three who may be said to be the heads of their profession. I will begin my research by going round and finding if each of them is at his post. If one is missing — especially if he has disappeared since last night — we will have some indication as to where the document has gone.”

“Why should he be missing?” asked the European Secretary. “He would take the letter to an Embassy in London, as likely as not.”

“I fancy not. These agents work independently, and their relations with the Embassies are often strained.”

The Prime Minister nodded his acquiescence.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Holmes. He would take so valuable a prize to headquarters with his own hands. I think that your course of action is an excellent one. Meanwhile, Hope, we cannot neglect all our other duties on account of this one misfortune. Should there be any fresh developments during the day we shall communicate with you, and you will no doubt let us know the results of your own inquiries."

The two statesmen bowed and walked gravely from the room.

When our illustrious visitors had departed Holmes lit his pipe in silence and sat for some time lost in the deepest thought. I had opened the morning paper and was immersed in a sensational crime which had occurred in London the night before, when my friend gave an exclamation, sprang to his feet, and laid his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Yes," said he, "there is no better way of approaching it. The situation is desperate, but not hopeless. Even now, if we could be sure which of them has taken it, it is just possible that it has not yet passed out of his hands. After all, it is a question of money with these fellows, and I have the British treasury behind me. If it's on the market I'll buy it — if it means another penny on the income-tax. It is conceivable that the fellow might hold it back to see what bids come from this side before he tries his luck on the other. There are only those three capable of playing so bold a game — there are Oberstein, La Rothiere, and Eduardo Lucas. I will see each of them."

I glanced at my morning paper.

"Is that Eduardo Lucas of Godolphin Street?"

"Yes."

"You will not see him."

"Why not?"

"He was murdered in his house last night."

My friend has so often astonished me in the course of our adventures that it was with a sense of exultation that I realised how completely I had astonished him. He stared in amazement, and then snatched the paper from my hands. This was the paragraph which I had been engaged in reading when he rose from his chair.

MURDER IN WESTMINSTER

A crime of mysterious character was committed last night at 16 Godolphin Street, one of the old-fashioned and secluded rows of eighteenth century houses which lie between the river and the Abbey, almost in the shadow of the great Tower of the Houses of Parliament. This small but select mansion has been inhabited for some years by Mr. Eduardo Lucas, well known in society circles both on account of his charming personality and because he has the well-deserved reputation of being one of the best amateur tenors in the country. Mr. Lucas is an unmarried man, thirty-four years of age, and his establishment consists of Mrs. Pringle, an elderly housekeeper, and of Mitton, his valet. The former retires early and sleeps at the top of the house. The valet was out for the evening, visiting a friend at Hammersmith. From ten o’clock onward Mr. Lucas had the house to himself. What occurred during that time has not yet transpired, but at a quarter to twelve Police-constable Barrett, passing along Godolphin Street observed that the door of No. 16 was ajar. He knocked, but received no answer. Perceiving a light in the front room, he advanced into the passage and again knocked, but without reply. He then pushed open the door and entered. The room was in a state of wild disorder, the furniture being all swept to one side, and one chair lying on its back in the centre. Beside this chair, and still grasping one of its legs, lay the unfortunate tenant of the house. He had been stabbed to the heart and must have died instantly. The knife with which the crime had been committed was a curved Indian dagger, plucked down from a trophy of Oriental arms which adorned one of the walls. Robbery does not appear to have been the motive of the crime, for there had been no attempt to remove the valuable contents of the room. Mr. Eduardo Lucas was so well known and popular that his violent and mysterious fate will arouse painful interest and intense sympathy in a widespread circle of friends.

“Well, Watson, what do you make of this?” asked Holmes, after a long pause.

“It is an amazing coincidence.”

“A coincidence! Here is one of the three men whom we had named as possible actors in this drama, and he meets a violent death during the very hours when we know that that drama was being enacted. The odds are enormous against its being coincidence. No figures could express them. No, my dear Watson, the two events are connected — MUST be connected. It is for us to find the connection.”

“But now the official police must know all.”

“Not at all. They know all they see at Godolphin Street. They know — and shall know — nothing of Whitehall Terrace. Only WE know of both events, and can trace the relation between them. There is one obvious point which would, in any case, have turned my suspicions against Lucas. Godolphin Street, Westminster, is only a few minutes' walk from Whitehall Terrace. The other secret agents whom I have named live in the extreme West End. It was easier, therefore, for Lucas than for the others to establish a connection or receive a message from the European Secretary's household — a small thing, and yet where events are compressed into a few hours it may prove essential. Halloa! what have we here?"

Mrs. Hudson had appeared with a lady's card upon her salver. Holmes glanced at it, raised his eyebrows, and handed it over to me.

"Ask Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope if she will be kind enough to step up," said he.

A moment later our modest apartment, already so distinguished that morning, was further honoured by the entrance of the most lovely woman in London. I had often heard of the beauty of the youngest daughter of the Duke of Belminster, but no description of it, and no contemplation of colourless photographs, had prepared me for the subtle, delicate charm and the beautiful colouring of that exquisite head. And yet as we saw it that autumn morning, it was not its beauty which would be the first thing to impress the observer. The cheek was lovely but it was paled with emotion, the eyes were bright but it was the brightness of fever, the sensitive mouth was tight and drawn in an effort after self-command. Terror — not beauty — was what sprang first to the eye as our fair visitor stood framed for an instant in the open door.

"Has my husband been here, Mr. Holmes?"

"Yes, madam, he has been here."

"Mr. Holmes. I implore you not to tell him that I came here." Holmes bowed coldly, and motioned the lady to a chair.

"Your ladyship places me in a very delicate position. I beg that you will sit down and tell me what you desire, but I fear that I cannot make any unconditional promise."

She swept across the room and seated herself with her back to the window. It was a queenly presence — tall, graceful, and intensely womanly. "Mr. Holmes," she said — and her white-gloved hands clasped and unclasped as she spoke—"I will speak frankly to you in the hopes that it may induce you to speak frankly in return. There is complete confidence between my husband and me on all matters save one. That one is politics. On this his lips are sealed. He tells me nothing. Now, I am aware that there was a most deplorable occurrence in our house last night. I know that a paper has disappeared. But because the matter is political my husband refuses to take me into his complete confidence. Now it is essential — essential, I say — that I should thoroughly understand it. You are the only other person, save only these politicians, who knows the true facts. I beg you then, Mr. Holmes, to tell me exactly what has happened and what it will lead to. Tell me all, Mr. Holmes. Let no regard for your client's interests keep you silent, for I assure you that his interests, if he would only see it, would be best served by taking me into his complete confidence. What was this paper which was stolen?"

"Madam, what you ask me is really impossible."

She groaned and sank her face in her hands.

"You must see that this is so, madam. If your husband thinks fit to keep you in the dark over this matter, is it for me, who has only learned the true facts under the pledge of professional secrecy, to tell what he has withheld? It is not fair to ask it. It is him whom you must ask."

"I have asked him. I come to you as a last resource. But without your telling me anything definite, Mr. Holmes, you may do a great service if you would enlighten me on one point."

"What is it, madam?"

"Is my husband's political career likely to suffer through this incident?"

"Well, madam, unless it is set right it may certainly have a very unfortunate effect."

"Ah!" She drew in her breath sharply as one whose doubts are resolved.

"One more question, Mr. Holmes. From an expression which my husband dropped in the first shock of this disaster I understood that terrible public consequences might arise from the loss of this document."

"If he said so, I certainly cannot deny it."

"Of what nature are they?"

"Nay, madam, there again you ask me more than I can possibly answer."

"Then I will take up no more of your time. I cannot blame you, Mr. Holmes, for having refused to speak more freely, and you on your side will not, I am sure, think the worse of me because I desire, even against his will, to share my husband's anxieties. Once more I beg that you will say nothing of my visit."

She looked back at us from the door, and I had a last impression of that beautiful haunted face, the startled eyes, and the drawn mouth. Then she was gone.

"Now, Watson, the fair sex is your department," said Holmes, with a smile, when the dwindling frou-frou of skirts had ended in the slam of the front door. "What was the fair lady's game? What did she really want?"

"Surely her own statement is clear and her anxiety very natural."

"Hum! Think of her appearance, Watson — her manner, her suppressed excitement, her restlessness, her tenacity in asking questions. Remember that she comes of a caste who do not lightly show emotion."

"She was certainly much moved."

"Remember also the curious earnestness with which she assured us that it was best for her husband that she should know all. What did she mean by that? And you must have observed, Watson, how she manoeuvred to have the light at her back. She did not wish us to read her expression."

"Yes, she chose the one chair in the room."

"And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. No powder on her nose — that proved to be the correct solution. How can you build on such a quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling tongs. Good-morning, Watson."

"You are off?"

"Yes, I will while away the morning at Godolphin Street with our friends of the regular establishment. With Eduardo Lucas lies the solution of our problem, though I must admit that I have not an inkling as to what form it may take. It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts. Do you stay on guard, my good Watson, and receive any fresh visitors. I'll join you at lunch if I am able."

All that day and the next and the next Holmes was in a mood which his friends would call taciturn, and others morose. He ran out and ran in, smoked incessantly, played snatches on his violin, sank into reveries, devoured sandwiches at irregular hours, and hardly answered the casual questions which I put to him. It was evident to me that things were not going well with him or his quest. He would say nothing of the case, and it was from the papers that I learned the particulars of the inquest, and the arrest with the subsequent release of John Mitton, the valet of the deceased. The coroner's jury brought in the obvious Wilful Murder, but the parties remained as unknown as ever. No motive was suggested. The room was full of articles of value, but none had been taken. The dead man’s papers had not been tampered with. They were carefully examined, and showed that he was a keen student of international politics, an indefatigable gossip, a remarkable linguist, and an untiring letter writer. He had been on intimate terms with the leading politicians of several countries. But nothing sensational was discovered among the documents which filled his drawers. As to his relations with women, they appeared to have been promiscuous but superficial. He had many acquaintances among them, but few friends, and no one whom he loved. His habits were regular, his conduct inoffensive. His death was an absolute mystery and likely to remain so.

As to the arrest of John Mitton, the valet, it was a council of despair as an alternative to absolute inaction. But no case could be sustained against him. He had visited friends in Hammersmith that night. The ALIBI was complete. It is true that he started home at an hour which should have brought him to Westminster before the time when the crime was discovered, but his own explanation that he had walked part of the way seemed probable enough in view of the fineness of the night. He had actually arrived at twelve o’clock, and appeared to be overwhelmed by the unexpected tragedy. He had always been on good terms with his master. Several of the dead man’s possessions — notably a small case of razors — had been found in the valet’s boxes, but he explained that they had been presents from the deceased, and the housekeeper was able to corroborate the story. Mitton had been in Lucas’s employment for three years. It was noticeable that Lucas did not take Mitton on the Continent with him. Sometimes he visited Paris for three months on end, but Mitton was left in charge of the Godolphin Street house. As to the housekeeper, she had heard nothing on the night of the crime. If her master had a visitor he had himself admitted him.

So for three mornings the mystery remained, so far as I could follow it in the papers. If Holmes knew more, he kept his own counsel, but, as he told me that Inspector Lestrade had taken him into his confidence in the case, I knew that he was in close touch with every development. Upon the fourth day there appeared a long telegram from Paris which seemed to solve the whole question.

A discovery has just been made by the Parisian police [said the DAILY TELEGRAPH] which raises the veil which hung round the tragic fate of Mr. Eduardo Lucas, who met his death by violence last Monday night at

Godolphin Street, Westminster. Our readers will remember that the deceased gentleman was found stabbed in his room, and that some suspicion attached to his valet, but that the case broke down on an ALIBI. Yesterday a lady, who has been known as Mme. Henri Fournaye, occupying a small villa in the Rue Austerlitz, was reported to the authorities by her servants as being insane. An examination showed she had indeed developed mania of a dangerous and permanent form. On inquiry, the police have discovered that Mme. Henri Fournaye only returned from a journey to London on Tuesday last, and there is evidence to connect her with the crime at Westminster. A comparison of photographs has proved conclusively that M. Henri Fournaye and Eduardo Lucas were really one and the same person, and that the deceased had for some reason lived a double life in London and Paris. Mme. Fournaye, who is of Creole origin, is of an extremely excitable nature, and has suffered in the past from attacks of jealousy which have amounted to frenzy. It is conjectured that it was in one of these that she committed the terrible crime which has caused such a sensation in London. Her movements upon the Monday night have not yet been traced, but it is undoubted that a woman answering to her description attracted much attention at Charing Cross Station on Tuesday morning by the wildness of her appearance and the violence of her gestures. It is probable, therefore, that the crime was either committed when insane, or that its immediate effect was to drive the unhappy woman out of her mind. At present she is unable to give any coherent account of the past, and the doctors hold out no hopes of the reestablishment of her reason. There is evidence that a woman, who might have been Mme. Fournaye, was seen for some hours upon Monday night watching the house in Godolphin Street.

“What do you think of that, Holmes?” I had read the account aloud to him, while he finished his breakfast.

“My dear Watson,” said he, as he rose from the table and paced up and down the room, “You are most long-suffering, but if I have told you nothing in the last three days, it is because there is nothing to tell. Even now this report from Paris does not help us much.”

“Surely it is final as regards the man’s death.”

“The man’s death is a mere incident — a trivial episode — in comparison with our real task, which is to trace this document and save a European catastrophe. Only one important thing has happened in the last three days, and that is that nothing has happened. I get reports almost hourly from the government, and it is certain that nowhere in Europe is there any sign of trouble. Now, if this letter were loose — no, it CAN'T be loose — but if it isn't loose, where can it be? Who has it? Why is it held back? That's the question that beats in my brain like a hammer. Was it, indeed, a coincidence that Lucas should meet his death on the night when the letter disappeared? Did the letter ever reach him? If so, why is it not among his papers? Did this mad wife of his carry it off with her? If so, is it in her house in Paris? How could I search for it without the French police having their suspicions aroused? It is a case, my dear Watson, where the law is as dangerous to us as the criminals are. Every man's hand is against us, and yet the interests at stake are colossal. Should I bring it to a successful conclusion, it will certainly represent the crowning glory of my career. Ah, here is my latest from the front!" He glanced hurriedly at the note which had been handed in. "Halloa! Lestrade seems to have observed something of interest. Put on your hat, Watson, and we will stroll down together to Westminster."

It was my first visit to the scene of the crime — a high, dingy, narrow-chested house, prim, formal, and solid, like the century which gave it birth. Lestrade's bulldog features gazed out at us from the front window, and he greeted us warmly when a big constable had opened the door and let us in. The room into which we were shown was that in which the crime had been committed, but no trace of it now remained save an ugly, irregular stain upon the carpet. This carpet was a small square drugget in the centre of the room, surrounded by a broad expanse of beautiful, old-fashioned wood-flooring in square blocks, highly polished. Over the fireplace was a magnificent trophy of weapons, one of which had been used on that tragic night. In the window was a sumptuous writing-desk, and every detail of the apartment, the pictures, the rugs, and the hangings, all pointed to a taste which was luxurious to the verge of effeminacy.

"Seen the Paris news?" asked Lestrade.

Holmes nodded.

"Our French friends seem to have touched the spot this time. No doubt it's just as they say. She knocked at the door — surprise visit, I guess, for he kept his life in water-tight compartments — he let her in, couldn't keep her in the street. She told him how she had traced him, reproached him. One thing led to another, and then with that dagger so handy the end soon came. It wasn't all done in an instant, though, for these chairs were all swept over yonder, and he had one in his hand as if he had tried to hold her off with it. We’ve got it all clear as if we had seen it.”

Holmes raised his eyebrows.

“And yet you have sent for me?”

“Ah, yes, that’s another matter — a mere trifle, but the sort of thing you take an interest in — queer, you know, and what you might call freakish. It has nothing to do with the main fact — can’t have, on the face of it.”

“What is it, then?”

“Well, you know, after a crime of this sort we are very careful to keep things in their position. Nothing has been moved. Officer in charge here day and night. This morning, as the man was buried and the investigation over — so far as this room is concerned — we thought we could tidy up a bit. This carpet. You see, it is not fastened down, only just laid there. We had occasion to raise it. We found — —”

“Yes? You found — —”

Holmes’s face grew tense with anxiety.

“Well, I’m sure you would never guess in a hundred years what we did find. You see that stain on the carpet? Well, a great deal must have soaked through, must it not?”

“Undoubtedly it must.”

“Well, you will be surprised to hear that there is no stain on the white woodwork to correspond.”

“No stain! But there must — —”

“Yes, so you would say. But the fact remains that there isn’t.”

He took the corner of the carpet in his hand and, turning it over, he showed that it was indeed as he said.

“But the under side is as stained as the upper. It must have left a mark.”

Lestrade chuckled with delight at having puzzled the famous expert.

“Now, I’ll show you the explanation. There IS a second stain, but it does not correspond with the other. See for yourself.” As he spoke he turned over another portion of the carpet, and there, sure enough, was a great crimson spill upon the square white facing of the old-fashioned floor. “What do you make of that, Mr. Holmes?”

“Why, it is simple enough. The two stains did correspond, but the carpet has been turned round. As it was square and unfastened it was easily done.”

“The official police don’t need you, Mr. Holmes, to tell them that the carpet must have been turned round. That’s clear enough, for the stains lie above each other — if you lay it over this way. But what I want to know is, who shifted the carpet, and why?"

I could see from Holmes's rigid face that he was vibrating with inward excitement.

"Look here, Lestrade," said he, "has that constable in the passage been in charge of the place all the time?"

"Yes, he has."

"Well, take my advice. Examine him carefully. Don't do it before us. Well wait here. You take him into the back room. You'll be more likely to get a confession out of him alone. Ask him how he dared to admit people and leave them alone in this room. Don't ask him if he has done it. Take it for granted. Tell him you KNOW someone has been here. Press him. Tell him that a full confession is his only chance of forgiveness. Do exactly what I tell you!"

"By George, if he knows I'll have it out of him!" cried Lestrade. He darted into the hall, and a few moments later his bullying voice sounded from the back room.

"Now, Watson, now!" cried Holmes with frenzied eagerness. All the demoniacal force of the man masked behind that listless manner burst out in a paroxysm of energy. He tore the drugget from the floor, and in an instant was down on his hands and knees clawing at each of the squares of wood beneath it. One turned sideways as he dug his nails into the edge of it. It hinged back like the lid of a box. A small black cavity opened beneath it. Holmes plunged his eager hand into it and drew it out with a bitter snarl of anger and disappointment. It was empty.

"Quick, Watson, quick! Get it back again!" The wooden lid was replaced, and the drugget had only just been drawn straight when Lestrade's voice was heard in the passage. He found Holmes leaning languidly against the mantelpiece, resigned and patient, endeavouring to conceal his irrepressible yawns.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Holmes, I can see that you are bored to death with the whole affair. Well, he has confessed, all right. Come in here, MacPherson. Let these gentlemen hear of your most inexcusable conduct."

The big constable, very hot and penitent, sidled into the room.

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure. The young woman came to the door last evening — mistook the house, she did. And then we got talking. It's lonesome, when you're on duty here all day."

“Well, what happened then?”

“She wanted to see where the crime was done — had read about it in the papers, she said. She was a very respectable, well-spoken young woman, sir, and I saw no harm in letting her have a peep. When she saw that mark on the carpet, down she dropped on the floor, and lay as if she were dead. I ran to the back and got some water, but I could not bring her to. Then I went round the corner to the Ivy Plant for some brandy, and by the time I had brought it back the young woman had recovered and was off — ashamed of herself, I daresay, and dared not face me.”

“How about moving that drugget?”

“Well, sir, it was a bit rumpled, certainly, when I came back. You see, she fell on it and it lies on a polished floor with nothing to keep it in place. I straightened it out afterwards.”

“It’s a lesson to you that you can’t deceive me, Constable MacPherson,” said Lestrade, with dignity. “No doubt you thought that your breach of duty could never be discovered, and yet a mere glance at that drugget was enough to convince me that someone had been admitted to the room. It’s lucky for you, my man, that nothing is missing, or you would find yourself in Queer Street. I’m sorry to have called you down over such a petty business, Mr. Holmes, but I thought the point of the second stain not corresponding with the first would interest you.”

“Certainly, it was most interesting. Has this woman only been here once, constable?”

“Yes, sir, only once.”

“Who was she?”

“Don’t know the name, sir. Was answering an advertisement about typewriting and came to the wrong number — very pleasant, genteel young woman, sir.”

“Tall? Handsome?”

“Yes, sir, she was a well-grown young woman. I suppose you might say she was handsome. Perhaps some would say she was very handsome. ‘Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!’ says she. She had pretty, coaxing ways, as you might say, and I thought there was no harm in letting her just put her head through the door.”

“How was she dressed?”

“Quiet, sir — a long mantle down to her feet.”

“What time was it?”

"It was just growing dusk at the time. They were lighting the lamps as I came back with the brandy."

"Very good," said Holmes. "Come, Watson, I think that we have more important work elsewhere."

As we left the house Lestrade remained in the front room, while the repentant constable opened the door to let us out. Holmes turned on the step and held up something in his hand. The constable stared intently.

"Good Lord, sir!" he cried, with amazement on his face. Holmes put his finger on his lips, replaced his hand in his breast pocket, and burst out laughing as we turned down the street. "Excellent!" said he. "Come, friend Watson, the curtain rings up for the last act. You will be relieved to hear that there will be no war, that the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope will suffer no setback in his brilliant career, that the indiscreet Sovereign will receive no punishment for his indiscretion, that the Prime Minister will have no European complication to deal with, and that with a little tact and management upon our part nobody will be a penny the worse for what might have been a very ugly incident."

My mind filled with admiration for this extraordinary man.

"You have solved it!" I cried.

"Hardly that, Watson. There are some points which are as dark as ever. But we have so much that it will be our own fault if we cannot get the rest. We will go straight to Whitehall Terrace and bring the matter to a head."

When we arrived at the residence of the European Secretary it was for Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope that Sherlock Holmes inquired. We were shown into the morning-room.

"Mr. Holmes!" said the lady, and her face was pink with her indignation. "This is surely most unfair and ungenerous upon your part. I desired, as I have explained, to keep my visit to you a secret, lest my husband should think that I was intruding into his affairs. And yet you compromise me by coming here and so showing that there are business relations between us."

"Unfortunately, madam, I had no possible alternative. I have been commissioned to recover this immensely important paper. I must therefore ask you, madam, to be kind enough to place it in my hands."

The lady sprang to her feet, with the colour all dashed in an instant from her beautiful face. Her eyes glazed — she tottered — I thought that she would faint. Then with a grand effort she rallied from the shock, and a supreme astonishment and indignation chased every other expression from her features.

“You — you insult me, Mr. Holmes.”

“Come, come, madam, it is useless. Give up the letter.”

She darted to the bell.

“The butler shall show you out.”

“Do not ring, Lady Hilda. If you do, then all my earnest efforts to avoid a scandal will be frustrated. Give up the letter and all will be set right. If you will work with me I can arrange everything. If you work against me I must expose you.”

She stood grandly defiant, a queenly figure, her eyes fixed upon his as if she would read his very soul. Her hand was on the bell, but she had forborne to ring it.

“You are trying to frighten me. It is not a very manly thing, Mr. Holmes, to come here and browbeat a woman. You say that you know something. What is it that you know?”

“Pray sit down, madam. You will hurt yourself there if you fall. I will not speak until you sit down. Thank you.”

“I give you five minutes, Mr. Holmes.”

“One is enough, Lady Hilda. I know of your visit to Eduardo Lucas, of your giving him this document, of your ingenious return to the room last night, and of the manner in which you took the letter from the hiding-place under the carpet.”

She stared at him with an ashen face and gulped twice before she could speak.

“You are mad, Mr. Holmes — you are mad!” she cried, at last.

He drew a small piece of cardboard from his pocket. It was the face of a woman cut out of a portrait.

“I have carried this because I thought it might be useful,” said he. “The policeman has recognised it.”

She gave a gasp, and her head dropped back in the chair.

“Come, Lady Hilda. You have the letter. The matter may still be adjusted. I have no desire to bring trouble to you. My duty ends when I have returned the lost letter to your husband. Take my advice and be frank with me. It is your only chance.”

Her courage was admirable. Even now she would not own defeat.

“I tell you again, Mr. Holmes, that you are under some absurd illusion.”

Holmes rose from his chair.

"I am sorry for you, Lady Hilda. I have done my best for you. I can see that it is all in vain."

He rang the bell. The butler entered.

"Is Mr. Trelawney Hope at home?"

"He will be home, sir, at a quarter to one."

Holmes glanced at his watch.

"Still a quarter of an hour," said he. "Very good, I shall wait."

The butler had hardly closed the door behind him when Lady Hilda was down on her knees at Holmes's feet, her hands outstretched, her beautiful face upturned and wet with her tears.

"Oh, spare me, Mr. Holmes! Spare me!" she pleaded, in a frenzy of supplication. "For heaven's sake, don't tell him! I love him so! I would not bring one shadow on his life, and this I know would break his noble heart."

Holmes raised the lady. "I am thankful, madam, that you have come to your senses even at this last moment! There is not an instant to lose. Where is the letter?"

She darted across to a writing-desk, unlocked it, and drew out a long blue envelope.

"Here it is, Mr. Holmes. Would to heaven I had never seen it!"

"How can we return it?" Holmes muttered. "Quick, quick, we must think of some way! Where is the despatch-box?"

"Still in his bedroom."

"What a stroke of luck! Quick, madam, bring it here!" A moment later she had appeared with a red flat box in her hand.

"How did you open it before? You have a duplicate key? Yes, of course you have. Open it!"

From out of her bosom Lady Hilda had drawn a small key. The box flew open. It was stuffed with papers. Holmes thrust the blue envelope deep down into the heart of them, between the leaves of some other document. The box was shut, locked, and returned to the bedroom.

"Now we are ready for him," said Holmes. "We have still ten minutes. I am going far to screen you, Lady Hilda. In return you will spend the time in telling me frankly the real meaning of this extraordinary affair."

"Mr. Holmes, I will tell you everything," cried the lady. "Oh, Mr. Holmes, I would cut off my right hand before I gave him a moment of sorrow! There is no woman in all London who loves her husband as I do, and yet if he knew how I have acted — how I have been compelled to act — he would never forgive me. For his own honour stands so high that he could not forget or pardon a lapse in another. Help me, Mr. Holmes! My happiness, his happiness, our very lives are at stake!”

“Quick, madam, the time grows short!”

“It was a letter of mine, Mr. Holmes, an indiscreet letter written before my marriage — a foolish letter, a letter of an impulsive, loving girl. I meant no harm, and yet he would have thought it criminal. Had he read that letter his confidence would have been forever destroyed. It is years since I wrote it. I had thought that the whole matter was forgotten. Then at last I heard from this man, Lucas, that it had passed into his hands, and that he would lay it before my husband. I implored his mercy. He said that he would return my letter if I would bring him a certain document which he described in my husband’s despatch-box. He had some spy in the office who had told him of its existence. He assured me that no harm could come to my husband. Put yourself in my position, Mr. Holmes! What was I to do?”

“Take your husband into your confidence.”

“I could not, Mr. Holmes, I could not! On the one side seemed certain ruin, on the other, terrible as it seemed to take my husband’s paper, still in a matter of politics I could not understand the consequences, while in a matter of love and trust they were only too clear to me. I did it, Mr. Holmes! I took an impression of his key. This man, Lucas, furnished a duplicate. I opened his despatch-box, took the paper, and conveyed it to Godolphin Street.”

“What happened there, madam?”

“I tapped at the door as agreed. Lucas opened it. I followed him into his room, leaving the hall door ajar behind me, for I feared to be alone with the man. I remember that there was a woman outside as I entered. Our business was soon done. He had my letter on his desk, I handed him the document. He gave me the letter. At this instant there was a sound at the door. There were steps in the passage. Lucas quickly turned back the drugget, thrust the document into some hiding-place there, and covered it over.

“What happened after that is like some fearful dream. I have a vision of a dark, frantic face, of a woman’s voice, which screamed in French, ‘My waiting is not in vain. At last, at last I have found you with her!’ There was a savage struggle. I saw him with a chair in his hand, a knife gleamed in hers. I rushed from the horrible scene, ran from the house, and only next morning in the paper did I learn the dreadful result. That night I was happy, for I had my letter, and I had not seen yet what the future would bring.

"It was the next morning that I realised that I had only exchanged one trouble for another. My husband's anguish at the loss of his paper went to my heart. I could hardly prevent myself from there and then kneeling down at his feet and telling him what I had done. But that again would mean a confession of the past. I came to you that morning in order to understand the full enormity of my offence. From the instant that I grasped it my whole mind was turned to the one thought of getting back my husband's paper. It must still be where Lucas had placed it, for it was concealed before this dreadful woman entered the room. If it had not been for her coming, I should not have known where his hiding-place was. How was I to get into the room? For two days I watched the place, but the door was never left open. Last night I made a last attempt. What I did and how I succeeded, you have already learned. I brought the paper back with me, and thought of destroying it, since I could see no way of returning it without confessing my guilt to my husband. Heavens, I hear his step upon the stair!"

The European Secretary burst excitedly into the room. "Any news, Mr. Holmes, any news?" he cried.

"I have some hopes."

"Ah, thank heaven!" His face became radiant. "The Prime Minister is lunching with me. May he share your hopes? He has nerves of steel, and yet I know that he has hardly slept since this terrible event. Jacobs, will you ask the Prime Minister to come up? As to you, dear, I fear that this is a matter of politics. We will join you in a few minutes in the dining-room."

The Prime Minister's manner was subdued, but I could see by the gleam of his eyes and the twitchings of his bony hands that he shared the excitement of his young colleague.

"I understand that you have something to report, Mr. Holmes?"

"Purely negative as yet," my friend answered. "I have inquired at every point where it might be, and I am sure that there is no danger to be apprehended."

"But that is not enough, Mr. Holmes. We cannot live forever on such a volcano. We must have something definite."

"I am in hopes of getting it. That is why I am here. The more I think of the matter the more convinced I am that the letter has never left this house."

"Mr. Holmes!"

"If it had it would certainly have been public by now."

"But why should anyone take it in order to keep it in his house?"

"I am not convinced that anyone did take it."

"Then how could it leave the despatch-box?"

"I am not convinced that it ever did leave the despatch-box."

"Mr. Holmes, this joking is very ill-timed. You have my assurance that it left the box."

"Have you examined the box since Tuesday morning?"

"No. It was not necessary."

"You may conceivably have overlooked it."

"Impossible, I say."

"But I am not convinced of it. I have known such things to happen. I presume there are other papers there. Well, it may have got mixed with them."

"It was on the top."

"Someone may have shaken the box and displaced it."

"No, no, I had everything out."

"Surely it is easily decided, Hope," said the Premier. "Let us have the despatch-box brought in."

The Secretary rang the bell.

"Jacobs, bring down my despatch-box. This is a farcical waste of time, but still, if nothing else will satisfy you, it shall be done. Thank you, Jacobs, put it here. I have always had the key on my watch-chain. Here are the papers, you see. Letter from Lord Merrow, report from Sir Charles Hardy, memorandum from Belgrade, note on the Russo-German grain taxes, letter from Madrid, note from Lord Flowers —— Good heavens! what is this? Lord Bellinger! Lord Bellinger!"

The Premier snatched the blue envelope from his hand.

"Yes, it is it — and the letter is intact. Hope, I congratulate you."

"Thank you! Thank you! What a weight from my heart. But this is inconceivable — impossible. Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard, a sorcerer! How did you know it was there?"

"Because I knew it was nowhere else."

"I cannot believe my eyes!" He ran wildly to the door. "Where is my wife? I must tell her that all is well. Hilda! Hilda!" we heard his voice on the stairs.

The Premier looked at Holmes with twinkling eyes.

“Come, sir,” said he. “There is more in this than meets the eye. How came the letter back in the box?”

Holmes turned away smiling from the keen scrutiny of those wonderful eyes.

“We also have our diplomatic secrets,” said he and, picking up his hat, he turned to the door.

THE END

THE VALLEY OF FEAR

This is the final Sherlock Holmes novel, which was first published in the *Strand Magazine* between September 1914 and May 1915. In the novel, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson receive a letter from an informant known by the pseudonym Fred Porlock. Porlock is part of Professor Moriarty’s criminal organization. The letter is written in a numeric code, and Holmes realises that the numbers refer to words in a book, by page and column. They decode the letter (finding the book in question to be Whitaker’s Almanack), which warns that John Douglas of Birlstone House is about to be murdered.

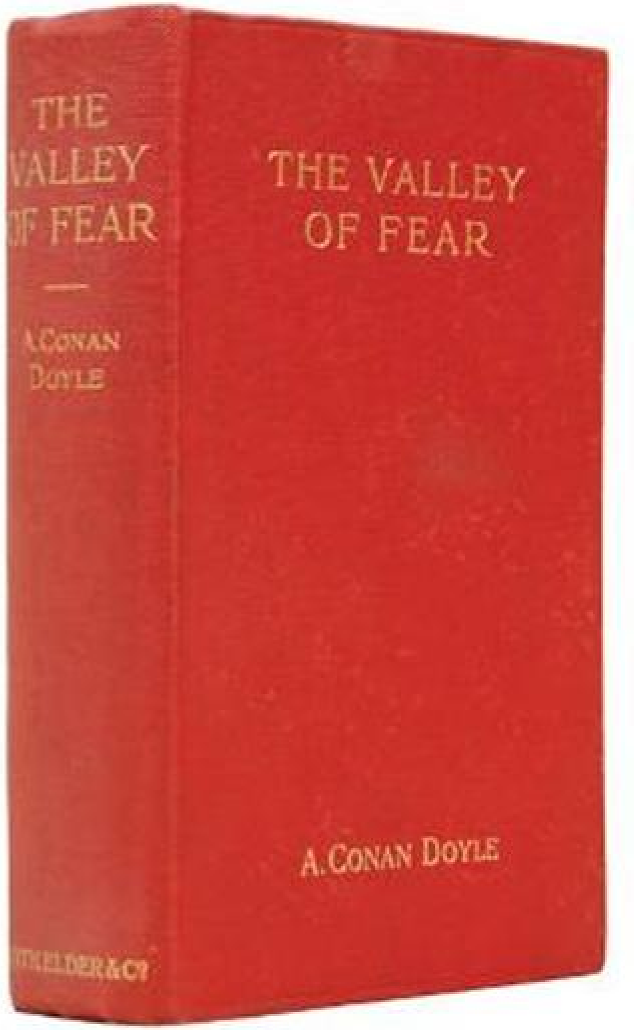
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OF FEAR
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THE VALLEY
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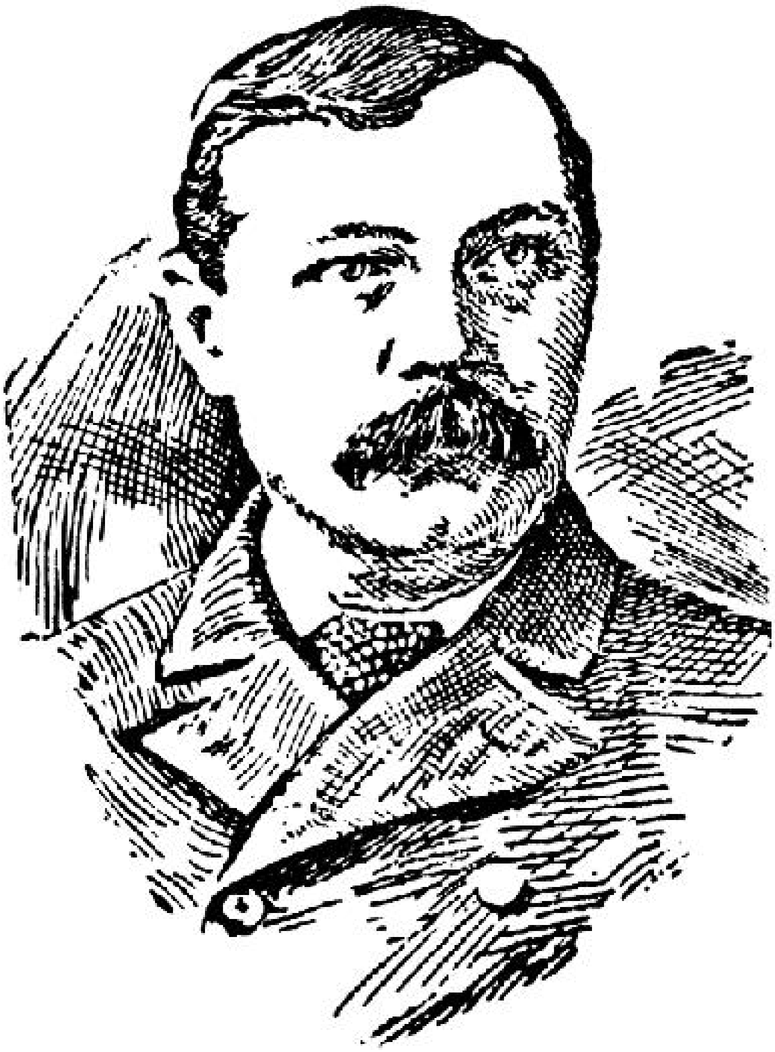

An illustration of Conan Doyle, close to the time of publication

PART 1 — The Tragedy of Birlstone

CHAPTER 1 — The Warning

“I am inclined to think—” said I.

“I should do so,” Sherlock Holmes remarked impatiently.

I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals; but I’ll admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption. “Really, Holmes,” said I severely, “you are a little trying at times.”

He was too much absorbed with his own thoughts to give any immediate answer to my remonstrance. He leaned upon his hand, with his untasted breakfast before him, and he stared at the slip of paper which he had just drawn from its envelope. Then he took the envelope itself, held it up to the light, and very carefully studied both the exterior and the flap.

“It is Porlock’s writing,” said he thoughtfully. “I can hardly doubt that it is Porlock’s writing, though I have seen it only twice before. The Greek e with the peculiar top flourish is distinctive. But if it is Porlock, then it must be something of the very first importance.”

He was speaking to himself rather than to me; but my vexation disappeared in the interest which the words awakened.

“Who then is Porlock?” I asked.

“Porlock, Watson, is a nom-de-plume, a mere identification mark; but behind it lies a shifty and evasive personality. In a former letter he frankly informed me that the name was not his own, and defied me ever to trace him among the teeming millions of this great city. Porlock is important, not for himself, but for the great man with whom he is in touch. Picture to yourself the pilot fish with the shark, the jackal with the lion — anything that is insignificant in companionship with what is formidable: not only formidable, Watson, but sinister — in the highest degree sinister. That is where he comes within my purview. You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?”

“The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as—”

“My blushes, Watson!” Holmes murmured in a deprecating voice.

“I was about to say, as he is unknown to the public.”

“A touch! A distinct touch!” cried Holmes. “You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself. But in calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law — and there lie the glory and the wonder of it! The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations — that's the man! But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism, so admirable in his management and self-effacement, that for those very words that you have uttered he could hale you to a court and emerge with your year's pension as a solatium for his wounded character. Is he not the celebrated author of The Dynamics of an Asteroid, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it? Is this a man to traduce? Foul-mouthed doctor and slandered professor — such would be your respective roles! That's genius, Watson. But if I am spared by lesser men, our day will surely come."

"May I be there to see!" I exclaimed devoutly. "But you were speaking of this man Porlock."

"Ah, yes — the so-called Porlock is a link in the chain some little way from its great attachment. Porlock is not quite a sound link — between ourselves. He is the only flaw in that chain so far as I have been able to test it."

"But no chain is stronger than its weakest link."

"Exactly, my dear Watson! Hence the extreme importance of Porlock. Led on by some rudimentary aspirations towards right, and encouraged by the judicious stimulation of an occasional ten-pound note sent to him by devious methods, he has once or twice given me advance information which has been of value — that highest value which anticipates and prevents rather than avenges crime. I cannot doubt that, if we had the cipher, we should find that this communication is of the nature that I indicate."

Again Holmes flattened out the paper upon his unused plate. I rose and, leaning over him, stared down at the curious inscription, which ran as follows:

534 C2 13 127 36 31 4 17 21 41 DOUGLAS 109 293 5 37 BIRLSTONE 26 BIRLSTONE 9 47 171

"What do you make of it, Holmes?"

"It is obviously an attempt to convey secret information."

"But what is the use of a cipher message without the cipher?"

“In this instance, none at all.”

“Why do you say ‘in this instance’?”

“Because there are many ciphers which I would read as easily as I do the apocrypha of the agony column: such crude devices amuse the intelligence without fatiguing it. But this is different. It is clearly a reference to the words in a page of some book. Until I am told which page and which book I am powerless.”

“But why ‘Douglas’ and ‘Birlstone’?”

“Clearly because those are words which were not contained in the page in question.”

“Then why has he not indicated the book?”

“Your native shrewdness, my dear Watson, that innate cunning which is the delight of your friends, would surely prevent you from inclosing cipher and message in the same envelope. Should it miscarry, you are undone. As it is, both have to go wrong before any harm comes from it. Our second post is now overdue, and I shall be surprised if it does not bring us either a further letter of explanation, or, as is more probable, the very volume to which these figures refer.”

Holmes’s calculation was fulfilled within a very few minutes by the appearance of Billy, the page, with the very letter which we were expecting.

“The same writing,” remarked Holmes, as he opened the envelope, “and actually signed,” he added in an exultant voice as he unfolded the epistle. “Come, we are getting on, Watson.” His brow clouded, however, as he glanced over the contents.

“Dear me, this is very disappointing! I fear, Watson, that all our expectations come to nothing. I trust that the man Porlock will come to no harm.

“DEAR MR. HOLMES [he says]:

“I will go no further in this matter. It is too dangerous — he suspects me. I can see that he suspects me. He came to me quite unexpectedly after I had actually addressed this envelope with the intention of sending you the key to the cipher. I was able to cover it up. If he had seen it, it would have gone hard with me. But I read suspicion in his eyes. Please burn the cipher message, which can now be of no use to you.

“FRED PORLOCK.”

Holmes sat for some little time twisting this letter between his fingers, and frowning, as he stared into the fire.

“After all,” he said at last, “there may be nothing in it. It may be only his guilty conscience. Knowing himself to be a traitor, he may have read the accusation in the other’s eyes.”

“The other being, I presume, Professor Moriarty.”

“No less! When any of that party talk about ‘He’ you know whom they mean. There is one predominant ‘He’ for all of them.”

“But what can he do?”

“Hum! That’s a large question. When you have one of the first brains of Europe up against you, and all the powers of darkness at his back, there are infinite possibilities. Anyhow, Friend Porlock is evidently scared out of his senses — kindly compare the writing in the note to that upon its envelope; which was done, he tells us, before this ill-omened visit. The one is clear and firm. The other hardly legible.”

“Why did he write at all? Why did he not simply drop it?”

“Because he feared I would make some inquiry after him in that case, and possibly bring trouble on him.”

“No doubt,” said I. “Of course.” I had picked up the original cipher message and was bending my brows over it. “It’s pretty maddening to think that an important secret may lie here on this slip of paper, and that it is beyond human power to penetrate it.”

Sherlock Holmes had pushed away his untasted breakfast and lit the unsavoury pipe which was the companion of his deepest meditations. “I wonder!” said he, leaning back and staring at the ceiling. “Perhaps there are points which have escaped your Machiavellian intellect. Let us consider the problem in the light of pure reason. This man’s reference is to a book. That is our point of departure.”

“A somewhat vague one.”

“Let us see then if we can narrow it down. As I focus my mind upon it, it seems rather less impenetrable. What indications have we as to this book?”

“None.”

“Well, well, it is surely not quite so bad as that. The cipher message begins with a large 534, does it not? We may take it as a working hypothesis that 534 is the particular page to which the cipher refers. So our book has already become a LARGE book, which is surely something gained. What other indications have we as to the nature of this large book? The next sign is C2. What do you make of that, Watson?”

“Chapter the second, no doubt.”

“Hardly that, Watson. You will, I am sure, agree with me that if the page be given, the number of the chapter is immaterial. Also that if page 534 finds us only in the second chapter, the length of the first one must have been really intolerable.”

“Column!” I cried.

“Brilliant, Watson. You are scintillating this morning. If it is not column, then I am very much deceived. So now, you see, we begin to visualise a large book printed in double columns which are each of a considerable length, since one of the words is numbered in the document as the two hundred and ninety-third. Have we reached the limits of what reason can supply?”

“I fear that we have.”

“Surely you do yourself an injustice. One more coruscation, my dear Watson — yet another brain-wave! Had the volume been an unusual one, he would have sent it to me. Instead of that, he had intended, before his plans were nipped, to send me the clue in this envelope. He says so in his note. This would seem to indicate that the book is one which he thought I would have no difficulty in finding for myself. He had it — and he imagined that I would have it, too. In short, Watson, it is a very common book.”

“What you say certainly sounds plausible.”

“So we have contracted our field of search to a large book, printed in double columns and in common use.”

“The Bible!” I cried triumphantly.

“Good, Watson, good! But not, if I may say so, quite good enough! Even if I accepted the compliment for myself I could hardly name any volume which would be less likely to lie at the elbow of one of Moriarty’s associates. Besides, the editions of Holy Writ are so numerous that he could hardly suppose that two copies would have the same pagination. This is clearly a book which is standardized. He knows for certain that his page 534 will exactly agree with my page 534.”

“But very few books would correspond with that.”

“Exactly. Therein lies our salvation. Our search is narrowed down to standardized books which anyone may be supposed to possess.”

“Bradshaw!”

“There are difficulties, Watson. The vocabulary of Bradshaw is nervous and terse, but limited. The selection of words would hardly lend itself to the sending of general messages. We will eliminate Bradshaw. The dictionary is, I fear, inadmissible for the same reason. What then is left?"

"An almanac!"

"Excellent, Watson! I am very much mistaken if you have not touched the spot. An almanac! Let us consider the claims of Whitaker's Almanac. It is in common use. It has the requisite number of pages. It is in double column. Though reserved in its earlier vocabulary, it becomes, if I remember right, quite garrulous towards the end." He picked the volume from his desk. "Here is page 534, column two, a substantial block of print dealing, I perceive, with the trade and resources of British India. Jot down the words, Watson! Number thirteen is 'Mahratta.' Not, I fear, a very auspicious beginning. Number one hundred and twenty-seven is 'Government'; which at least makes sense, though somewhat irrelevant to ourselves and Professor Moriarty. Now let us try again. What does the Mahratta government do? Alas! the next word is 'pig's-bristles.' We are undone, my good Watson! It is finished!"

He had spoken in jesting vein, but the twitching of his bushy eyebrows bespoke his disappointment and irritation. I sat helpless and unhappy, staring into the fire. A long silence was broken by a sudden exclamation from Holmes, who dashed at a cupboard, from which he emerged with a second yellow-covered volume in his hand.

"We pay the price, Watson, for being too up-to-date!" he cried. "We are before our time, and suffer the usual penalties. Being the seventh of January, we have very properly laid in the new almanac. It is more than likely that Porlock took his message from the old one. No doubt he would have told us so had his letter of explanation been written. Now let us see what page 534 has in store for us. Number thirteen is 'There,' which is much more promising. Number one hundred and twenty-seven is 'is'—'There is' " — Holmes's eyes were gleaming with excitement, and his thin, nervous fingers twitched as he counted the words—"'danger.' Ha! Ha! Capital! Put that down, Watson. 'There is danger — may — come — very soon — one.' Then we have the name 'Douglas'—'rich — country — now — at Birlstone — House — Birlstone — confidence — is — pressing.' There, Watson! What do you think of pure reason and its fruit? If the greengrocer had such a thing as a laurel wreath, I should send Billy round for it."

I was staring at the strange message which I had scrawled, as he deciphered it, upon a sheet of foolscap on my knee.

“What a queer, scrambling way of expressing his meaning!” said I.

“On the contrary, he has done quite remarkably well,” said Holmes. “When you search a single column for words with which to express your meaning, you can hardly expect to get everything you want. You are bound to leave something to the intelligence of your correspondent. The purport is perfectly clear. Some deviltry is intended against one Douglas, whoever he may be, residing as stated, a rich country gentleman. He is sure —’confidence’ was as near as he could get to ‘confident’ — that it is pressing. There is our result — and a very workmanlike little bit of analysis it was!”

Holmes had the impersonal joy of the true artist in his better work, even as he mourned darkly when it fell below the high level to which he aspired. He was still chuckling over his success when Billy swung open the door and Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard was ushered into the room.

Those were the early days at the end of the ‘80’s, when Alec MacDonald was far from having attained the national fame which he has now achieved. He was a young but trusted member of the detective force, who had distinguished himself in several cases which had been intrusted to him. His tall, bony figure gave promise of exceptional physical strength, while his great cranium and deep-set, lustrous eyes spoke no less clearly of the keen intelligence which twinkled out from behind his bushy eyebrows. He was a silent, precise man with a dour nature and a hard Aberdonian accent.

Twice already in his career had Holmes helped him to attain success, his own sole reward being the intellectual joy of the problem. For this reason the affection and respect of the Scotchman for his amateur colleague were profound, and he showed them by the frankness with which he consulted Holmes in every difficulty. Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself; but talent instantly recognises genius, and MacDonald had talent enough for his profession to enable him to perceive that there was no humiliation in seeking the assistance of one who already stood alone in Europe, both in his gifts and in his experience. Holmes was not prone to friendship, but he was tolerant of the big Scotchman, and smiled at the sight of him.

“You are an early bird, Mr. Mac,” said he. “I wish you luck with your worm. I fear this means that there is some mischief afoot.”

“If you said ‘hope’ instead of ‘fear,’ it would be nearer the truth, I’m thinking, Mr. Holmes,” the inspector answered, with a knowing grin. “Well, maybe a wee nip would keep out the raw morning chill. No, I won’t smoke, I thank you. I’ll have to be pushing on my way; for the early hours of a case are the precious ones, as no man knows better than your own self. But — but—”

The inspector had stopped suddenly, and was staring with a look of absolute amazement at a paper upon the table. It was the sheet upon which I had scrawled the enigmatic message.

“Douglas!” he stammered. “Birlstone! What’s this, Mr. Holmes? Man, it’s witchcraft! Where in the name of all that is wonderful did you get those names?”

“It is a cipher that Dr. Watson and I have had occasion to solve. But why — what’s amiss with the names?”

The inspector looked from one to the other of us in dazed astonishment. “Just this,” said he, “that Mr. Douglas of Birlstone Manor House was horribly murdered last night!”

CHAPTER 2 — Sherlock Holmes Discourses

It was one of those dramatic moments for which my friend existed. It would be an overstatement to say that he was shocked or even excited by the amazing announcement. Without having a tinge of cruelty in his singular composition, he was undoubtedly callous from long overstimulation. Yet, if his emotions were dulled, his intellectual perceptions were exceedingly active. There was no trace then of the horror which I had myself felt at this curt declaration; but his face showed rather the quiet and interested composure of the chemist who sees the crystals falling into position from his oversaturated solution.

“Remarkable!” said he. “Remarkable!”

“You don’t seem surprised.”

“Interested, Mr. Mac, but hardly surprised. Why should I be surprised? I receive an anonymous communication from a quarter which I know to be important, warning me that danger threatens a certain person. Within an hour I learn that this danger has actually materialised and that the person is dead. I am interested; but, as you observe, I am not surprised.”

In a few short sentences he explained to the inspector the facts about the letter and the cipher. MacDonald sat with his chin on his hands and his great sandy eyebrows bunched into a yellow tangle.

“I was going down to Birlstone this morning,” said he. “I had come to ask you if you cared to come with me — you and your friend here. But from what you say we might perhaps be doing better work in London.”

“I rather think not,” said Holmes.

“Hang it all, Mr. Holmes!” cried the inspector. “The papers will be full of the Birlstone mystery in a day or two; but where’s the mystery if there is a man in London who prophesied the crime before ever it occurred? We have only to lay our hands on that man, and the rest will follow.”

“No doubt, Mr. Mac. But how do you propose to lay your hands on the so-called Porlock?”

MacDonald turned over the letter which Holmes had handed him. “Posted in Camberwell — that doesn’t help us much. Name, you say, is assumed. Not much to go on, certainly. Didn’t you say that you have sent him money?”

"Twice."

"And how?"

"In notes to Camberwell post office."

"Did you ever trouble to see who called for them?"

"No."

The inspector looked surprised and a little shocked. "Why not?"

"Because I always keep faith. I had promised when he first wrote that I would not try to trace him."

"You think there is someone behind him?"

"I know there is."

"This professor that I've heard you mention?"

"Exactly!"

Inspector MacDonald smiled, and his eyelid quivered as he glanced towards me. "I won't conceal from you, Mr. Holmes, that we think in the C.I.D. that you have a wee bit of a bee in your bonnet over this professor. I made some inquiries myself about the matter. He seems to be a very respectable, learned, and talented sort of man."

"I'm glad you've got so far as to recognise the talent."

"Man, you can't but recognise it! After I heard your view I made it my business to see him. I had a chat with him on eclipses. How the talk got that way I canna think; but he had out a reflector lantern and a globe, and made it all clear in a minute. He lent me a book; but I don't mind saying that it was a bit above my head, though I had a good Aberdeen upbringing. He'd have made a grand meenister with his thin face and gray hair and solemn-like way of talking. When he put his hand on my shoulder as we were parting, it was like a father's blessing before you go out into the cold, cruel world."

Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. "Great!" he said. "Great! Tell me, Friend MacDonald, this pleasing and touching interview was, I suppose, in the professor's study?"

"That's so."

"A fine room, is it not?"

"Very fine — very handsome indeed, Mr. Holmes."

"You sat in front of his writing desk?"

"Just so."

"Sun in your eyes and his face in the shadow?"

"Well, it was evening; but I mind that the lamp was turned on my face."

“It would be. Did you happen to observe a picture over the professor’s head?”

“I don’t miss much, Mr. Holmes. Maybe I learned that from you. Yes, I saw the picture — a young woman with her head on her hands, peeping at you sideways.”

“That painting was by Jean Baptiste Greuze.”

The inspector endeavoured to look interested.

“Jean Baptiste Greuze,” Holmes continued, joining his finger tips and leaning well back in his chair, “was a French artist who flourished between the years 1750 and 1800. I allude, of course to his working career. Modern criticism has more than indorsed the high opinion formed of him by his contemporaries.”

The inspector’s eyes grew abstracted. “Hadn’t we better—” he said.

“We are doing so,” Holmes interrupted. “All that I am saying has a very direct and vital bearing upon what you have called the Birlstone Mystery. In fact, it may in a sense be called the very centre of it.”

MacDonald smiled feebly, and looked appealingly to me. “Your thoughts move a bit too quick for me, Mr. Holmes. You leave out a link or two, and I can’t get over the gap. What in the whole wide world can be the connection between this dead painting man and the affair at Birlstone?”

“All knowledge comes useful to the detective,” remarked Holmes. “Even the trivial fact that in the year 1865 a picture by Greuze entitled La Jeune Fille a l’Agneau fetched one million two hundred thousand francs — more than forty thousand pounds — at the Portalis sale may start a train of reflection in your mind.”

It was clear that it did. The inspector looked honestly interested.

“I may remind you,” Holmes continued, “that the professor’s salary can be ascertained in several trustworthy books of reference. It is seven hundred a year.”

“Then how could he buy—”

“Quite so! How could he?”

“Ay, that’s remarkable,” said the inspector thoughtfully. “Talk away, Mr. Holmes. I’m just loving it. It’s fine!”

Holmes smiled. He was always warmed by genuine admiration — the characteristic of the real artist. “What about Birlstone?” he asked.

“We’ve time yet,” said the inspector, glancing at his watch. “I’ve a cab at the door, and it won’t take us twenty minutes to Victoria. But about this picture: I thought you told me once, Mr. Holmes, that you had never met Professor Moriarty."

"No, I never have."

"Then how do you know about his rooms?"

"Ah, that's another matter. I have been three times in his rooms, twice waiting for him under different pretexts and leaving before he came. Once — well, I can hardly tell about the once to an official detective. It was on the last occasion that I took the liberty of running over his papers — with the most unexpected results."

"You found something compromising?"

"Absolutely nothing. That was what amazed me. However, you have now seen the point of the picture. It shows him to be a very wealthy man. How did he acquire wealth? He is unmarried. His younger brother is a station master in the west of England. His chair is worth seven hundred a year. And he owns a Greuze."

"Well?"

"Surely the inference is plain."

"You mean that he has a great income and that he must earn it in an illegal fashion?"

"Exactly. Of course I have other reasons for thinking so — dozens of exiguous threads which lead vaguely up towards the centre of the web where the poisonous, motionless creature is lurking. I only mention the Greuze because it brings the matter within the range of your own observation."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, I admit that what you say is interesting: it's more than interesting — it's just wonderful. But let us have it a little clearer if you can. Is it forgery, coining, burglary — where does the money come from?"

"Have you ever read of Jonathan Wild?"

"Well, the name has a familiar sound. Someone in a novel, was he not? I don't take much stock of detectives in novels — chaps that do things and never let you see how they do them. That's just inspiration: not business."

"Jonathan Wild wasn't a detective, and he wasn't in a novel. He was a master criminal, and he lived last century — 1750 or thereabouts."

"Then he's no use to me. I'm a practical man."

"Mr. Mac, the most practical thing that you ever did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. Everything comes in circles — even Professor Moriarty. Jonathan Wild was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent. commission. The old wheel turns, and the same spoke comes up. It's all been done before, and will be again. I'll tell you one or two things about Moriarty which may interest you."

"You'll interest me, right enough."

"I happen to know who is the first link in his chain — a chain with this Napoleon-gone-wrong at one end, and a hundred broken fighting men, pickpockets, blackmailers, and card sharpers at the other, with every sort of crime in between. His chief of staff is Colonel Sebastian Moran, as aloof and guarded and inaccessible to the law as himself. What do you think he pays him?"

"I'd like to hear."

"Six thousand a year. That's paying for brains, you see — the American business principle. I learned that detail quite by chance. It's more than the Prime Minister gets. That gives you an idea of Moriarty's gains and of the scale on which he works. Another point: I made it my business to hunt down some of Moriarty's checks lately — just common innocent checks that he pays his household bills with. They were drawn on six different banks. Does that make any impression on your mind?"

"Queer, certainly! But what do you gather from it?"

"That he wanted no gossip about his wealth. No single man should know what he had. I have no doubt that he has twenty banking accounts; the bulk of his fortune abroad in the Deutsche Bank or the Credit Lyonnais as likely as not. Sometime when you have a year or two to spare I commend to you the study of Professor Moriarty."

Inspector MacDonald had grown steadily more impressed as the conversation proceeded. He had lost himself in his interest. Now his practical Scotch intelligence brought him back with a snap to the matter in hand.

"He can keep, anyhow," said he. "You've got us side-tracked with your interesting anecdotes, Mr. Holmes. What really counts is your remark that there is some connection between the professor and the crime. That you get from the warning received through the man Porlock. Can we for our present practical needs get any further than that?"

“We may form some conception as to the motives of the crime. It is, as I gather from your original remarks, an inexplicable, or at least an unexplained, murder. Now, presuming that the source of the crime is as we suspect it to be, there might be two different motives. In the first place, I may tell you that Moriarty rules with a rod of iron over his people. His discipline is tremendous. There is only one punishment in his code. It is death. Now we might suppose that this murdered man — this Douglas whose approaching fate was known by one of the arch-criminal’s subordinates — had in some way betrayed the chief. His punishment followed, and would be known to all — if only to put the fear of death into them.”

“Well, that is one suggestion, Mr. Holmes.”

“The other is that it has been engineered by Moriarty in the ordinary course of business. Was there any robbery?”

“I have not heard.”

“If so, it would, of course, be against the first hypothesis and in favour of the second. Moriarty may have been engaged to engineer it on a promise of part spoils, or he may have been paid so much down to manage it. Either is possible. But whichever it may be, or if it is some third combination, it is down at Birlstone that we must seek the solution. I know our man too well to suppose that he has left anything up here which may lead us to him.”

“Then to Birlstone we must go!” cried MacDonald, jumping from his chair. “My word! it’s later than I thought. I can give you, gentlemen, five minutes for preparation, and that is all.”

“And ample for us both,” said Holmes, as he sprang up and hastened to change from his dressing gown to his coat. “While we are on our way, Mr. Mac, I will ask you to be good enough to tell me all about it.”

“All about it” proved to be disappointingly little, and yet there was enough to assure us that the case before us might well be worthy of the expert’s closest attention. He brightened and rubbed his thin hands together as he listened to the meagre but remarkable details. A long series of sterile weeks lay behind us, and here at last there was a fitting object for those remarkable powers which, like all special gifts, become irksome to their owner when they are not in use. That razor brain blunted and rusted with inaction.

Sherlock Holmes’s eyes glistened, his pale cheeks took a warmer hue, and his whole eager face shone with an inward light when the call for work reached him. Leaning forward in the cab, he listened intently to MacDonald’s short sketch of the problem which awaited us in Sussex. The inspector was himself dependent, as he explained to us, upon a scribbled account forwarded to him by the milk train in the early hours of the morning. White Mason, the local officer, was a personal friend, and hence MacDonald had been notified much more promptly than is usual at Scotland Yard when provincials need their assistance. It is a very cold scent upon which the Metropolitan expert is generally asked to run.

“DEAR INSPECTOR MACDONALD [said the letter which he read to us]:

“Official requisition for your services is in separate envelope. This is for your private eye. Wire me what train in the morning you can get for Birlstone, and I will meet it — or have it met if I am too occupied. This case is a snorter. Don’t waste a moment in getting started. If you can bring Mr. Holmes, please do so; for he will find something after his own heart. We would think the whole had been fixed up for theatrical effect if there wasn’t a dead man in the middle of it. My word! it IS a snorter.”

“Your friend seems to be no fool,” remarked Holmes.

“No, sir, White Mason is a very live man, if I am any judge.”

“Well, have you anything more?”

“Only that he will give us every detail when we meet.”

“Then how did you get at Mr. Douglas and the fact that he had been horribly murdered?”

“That was in the inclosed official report. It didn’t say ‘horrible’: that’s not a recognised official term. It gave the name John Douglas. It mentioned that his injuries had been in the head, from the discharge of a shotgun. It also mentioned the hour of the alarm, which was close on to midnight last night. It added that the case was undoubtedly one of murder, but that no arrest had been made, and that the case was one which presented some very perplexing and extraordinary features. That’s absolutely all we have at present, Mr. Holmes.”

“Then, with your permission, we will leave it at that, Mr. Mac. The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession. I can see only two things for certain at present — a great brain in London, and a dead man in Sussex. It’s the chain between that we are going to trace.”

CHAPTER 3 — The Tragedy of Birlstone

Now for a moment I will ask leave to remove my own insignificant personality and to describe events which occurred before we arrived upon the scene by the light of knowledge which came to us afterwards. Only in this way can I make the reader appreciate the people concerned and the strange setting in which their fate was cast.

The village of Birlstone is a small and very ancient cluster of half-timbered cottages on the northern border of the county of Sussex. For centuries it had remained unchanged; but within the last few years its picturesque appearance and situation have attracted a number of well-to-do residents, whose villas peep out from the woods around. These woods are locally supposed to be the extreme fringe of the great Weald forest, which thins away until it reaches the northern chalk downs. A number of small shops have come into being to meet the wants of the increased population; so there seems some prospect that Birlstone may soon grow from an ancient village into a modern town. It is the centre for a considerable area of country, since Tunbridge Wells, the nearest place of importance, is ten or twelve miles to the eastward, over the borders of Kent.

About half a mile from the town, standing in an old park famous for its huge beech trees, is the ancient Manor House of Birlstone. Part of this venerable building dates back to the time of the first crusade, when Hugo de Capus built a fortalice in the centre of the estate, which had been granted to him by the Red King. This was destroyed by fire in 1543, and some of its smoke-blackened corner stones were used when, in Jacobean times, a brick country house rose upon the ruins of the feudal castle.

The Manor House, with its many gables and its small diamond-paned windows, was still much as the builder had left it in the early seventeenth century. Of the double moats which had guarded its more warlike predecessor, the outer had been allowed to dry up, and served the humble function of a kitchen garden. The inner one was still there, and lay forty feet in breadth, though now only a few feet in depth, round the whole house. A small stream fed it and continued beyond it, so that the sheet of water, though turbid, was never ditchlike or unhealthy. The ground floor windows were within a foot of the surface of the water.

The only approach to the house was over a drawbridge, the chains and windlass of which had long been rusted and broken. The latest tenants of the Manor House had, however, with characteristic energy, set this right, and the drawbridge was not only capable of being raised, but actually was raised every evening and lowered every morning. By thus renewing the custom of the old feudal days the Manor House was converted into an island during the night — a fact which had a very direct bearing upon the mystery which was soon to engage the attention of all England.

The house had been untenanted for some years and was threatening to moulder into a picturesque decay when the Douglases took possession of it. This family consisted of only two individuals — John Douglas and his wife. Douglas was a remarkable man, both in character and in person. In age he may have been about fifty, with a strong-jawed, rugged face, a grizzling moustache, peculiarly keen gray eyes, and a wiry, vigorous figure which had lost nothing of the strength and activity of youth. He was cheery and genial to all, but somewhat offhand in his manners, giving the impression that he had seen life in social strata on some far lower horizon than the county society of Sussex.

Yet, though looked at with some curiosity and reserve by his more cultivated neighbours, he soon acquired a great popularity among the villagers, subscribing handsomely to all local objects, and attending their smoking concerts and other functions, where, having a remarkably rich tenor voice, he was always ready to oblige with an excellent song. He appeared to have plenty of money, which was said to have been gained in the California gold fields, and it was clear from his own talk and that of his wife that he had spent a part of his life in America.

The good impression which had been produced by his generosity and by his democratic manners was increased by a reputation gained for utter indifference to danger. Though a wretched rider, he turned out at every meet, and took the most amazing falls in his determination to hold his own with the best. When the vicarage caught fire he distinguished himself also by the fearlessness with which he reentered the building to save property, after the local fire brigade had given it up as impossible. Thus it came about that John Douglas of the Manor House had within five years won himself quite a reputation in Birlstone.

His wife, too, was popular with those who had made her acquaintance; though, after the English fashion, the callers upon a stranger who settled in the county without introductions were few and far between. This mattered the less to her, as she was retiring by disposition, and very much absorbed, to all appearance, in her husband and her domestic duties. It was known that she was an English lady who had met Mr. Douglas in London, he being at that time a widower. She was a beautiful woman, tall, dark, and slender, some twenty years younger than her husband; a disparity which seemed in no wise to mar the contentment of their family life.

It was remarked sometimes, however, by those who knew them best, that the confidence between the two did not appear to be complete, since the wife was either very reticent about her husband's past life, or else, as seemed more likely, was imperfectly informed about it. It had also been noted and commented upon by a few observant people that there were signs sometimes of some nerve-strain upon the part of Mrs. Douglas, and that she would display acute uneasiness if her absent husband should ever be particularly late in his return. On a quiet countryside, where all gossip is welcome, this weakness of the lady of the Manor House did not pass without remark, and it bulked larger upon people's memory when the events arose which gave it a very special significance.

There was yet another individual whose residence under that roof was, it is true, only an intermittent one, but whose presence at the time of the strange happenings which will now be narrated brought his name prominently before the public. This was Cecil James Barker, of Hales Lodge, Hampstead.

Cecil Barker's tall, loose-jointed figure was a familiar one in the main street of Birlstone village; for he was a frequent and welcome visitor at the Manor House. He was the more noticed as being the only friend of the past unknown life of Mr. Douglas who was ever seen in his new English surroundings. Barker was himself an undoubted Englishman; but by his remarks it was clear that he had first known Douglas in America and had there lived on intimate terms with him. He appeared to be a man of considerable wealth, and was reputed to be a bachelor.

In age he was rather younger than Douglas — forty-five at the most — a tall, straight, broad-chested fellow with a clean-shaved, prize-fighter face, thick, strong, black eyebrows, and a pair of masterful black eyes which might, even without the aid of his very capable hands, clear a way for him through a hostile crowd. He neither rode nor shot, but spent his days in wandering round the old village with his pipe in his mouth, or in driving with his host, or in his absence with his hostess, over the beautiful countryside. “An easy-going, free-handed gentleman,” said Ames, the butler. “But, my word! I had rather not be the man that crossed him!” He was cordial and intimate with Douglas, and he was no less friendly with his wife — a friendship which more than once seemed to cause some irritation to the husband, so that even the servants were able to perceive his annoyance. Such was the third person who was one of the family when the catastrophe occurred.

As to the other denizens of the old building, it will suffice out of a large household to mention the prim, respectable, and capable Ames, and Mrs. Allen, a buxom and cheerful person, who relieved the lady of some of her household cares. The other six servants in the house bear no relation to the events of the night of January 6th.

It was at eleven forty-five that the first alarm reached the small local police station, in charge of Sergeant Wilson of the Sussex Constabulary. Cecil Barker, much excited, had rushed up to the door and pealed furiously upon the bell. A terrible tragedy had occurred at the Manor House, and John Douglas had been murdered. That was the breathless burden of his message. He had hurried back to the house, followed within a few minutes by the police sergeant, who arrived at the scene of the crime a little after twelve o’clock, after taking prompt steps to warn the county authorities that something serious was afoot.

On reaching the Manor House, the sergeant had found the drawbridge down, the windows lighted up, and the whole household in a state of wild confusion and alarm. The white-faced servants were huddling together in the hall, with the frightened butler wringing his hands in the doorway. Only Cecil Barker seemed to be master of himself and his emotions; he had opened the door which was nearest to the entrance and he had beckoned to the sergeant to follow him. At that moment there arrived Dr. Wood, a brisk and capable general practitioner from the village. The three men entered the fatal room together, while the horror-stricken butler followed at their heels, closing the door behind him to shut out the terrible scene from the maid servants.

The dead man lay on his back, sprawling with outstretched limbs in the centre of the room. He was clad only in a pink dressing gown, which covered his night clothes. There were carpet slippers on his bare feet. The doctor knelt beside him and held down the hand lamp which had stood on the table. One glance at the victim was enough to show the healer that his presence could be dispensed with. The man had been horribly injured. Lying across his chest was a curious weapon, a shotgun with the barrel sawed off a foot in front of the triggers. It was clear that this had been fired at close range and that he had received the whole charge in the face, blowing his head almost to pieces. The triggers had been wired together, so as to make the simultaneous discharge more destructive.

The country policeman was unnerved and troubled by the tremendous responsibility which had come so suddenly upon him. “We will touch nothing until my superiors arrive,” he said in a hushed voice, staring in horror at the dreadful head.

“Nothing has been touched up to now,” said Cecil Barker. “I’ll answer for that. You see it all exactly as I found it.”

“When was that?” The sergeant had drawn out his notebook.

“It was just half-past eleven. I had not begun to undress, and I was sitting by the fire in my bedroom when I heard the report. It was not very loud — it seemed to be muffled. I rushed down — I don’t suppose it was thirty seconds before I was in the room.”

“Was the door open?”

“Yes, it was open. Poor Douglas was lying as you see him. His bedroom candle was burning on the table. It was I who lit the lamp some minutes afterward.”

“Did you see no one?”

“No. I heard Mrs. Douglas coming down the stair behind me, and I rushed out to prevent her from seeing this dreadful sight. Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, came and took her away. Ames had arrived, and we ran back into the room once more.”

“But surely I have heard that the drawbridge is kept up all night.”

“Yes, it was up until I lowered it.”

“Then how could any murderer have got away? It is out of the question! Mr. Douglas must have shot himself.”

“That was our first idea. But see!” Barker drew aside the curtain, and showed that the long, diamond-paned window was open to its full extent. “And look at this!” He held the lamp down and illuminated a smudge of blood like the mark of a boot-sole upon the wooden sill. “Someone has stood there in getting out.”

“You mean that someone waded across the moat?”

“Exactly!”

“Then if you were in the room within half a minute of the crime, he must have been in the water at that very moment.”

“I have not a doubt of it. I wish to heaven that I had rushed to the window! But the curtain screened it, as you can see, and so it never occurred to me. Then I heard the step of Mrs. Douglas, and I could not let her enter the room. It would have been too horrible.”

“Horrible enough!” said the doctor, looking at the shattered head and the terrible marks which surrounded it. “I’ve never seen such injuries since the Birlstone railway smash.”

“But, I say,” remarked the police sergeant, whose slow, bucolic common sense was still pondering the open window. “It’s all very well your saying that a man escaped by wading this moat, but what I ask you is, how did he ever get into the house at all if the bridge was up?”

“Ah, that’s the question,” said Barker.

“At what o’clock was it raised?”

“It was nearly six o’clock,” said Ames, the butler.

“I’ve heard,” said the sergeant, “that it was usually raised at sunset. That would be nearer half-past four than six at this time of year.”

“Mrs. Douglas had visitors to tea,” said Ames. “I couldn’t raise it until they went. Then I wound it up myself.”

“Then it comes to this,” said the sergeant: “If anyone came from outside — IF they did — they must have got in across the bridge before six and been in hiding ever since, until Mr. Douglas came into the room after eleven.”

“That is so! Mr. Douglas went round the house every night the last thing before he turned in to see that the lights were right. That brought him in here. The man was waiting and shot him. Then he got away through the window and left his gun behind him. That’s how I read it; for nothing else will fit the facts.”

The sergeant picked up a card which lay beside the dead man on the floor. The initials V.V. and under them the number 341 were rudely scrawled in ink upon it.

“What’s this?” he asked, holding it up.

Barker looked at it with curiosity. “I never noticed it before,” he said. “The murderer must have left it behind him.”

“V.V. — 341. I can make no sense of that.”

The sergeant kept turning it over in his big fingers. “What’s V.V.? Somebody’s initials, maybe. What have you got there, Dr. Wood?”

It was a good-sized hammer which had been lying on the rug in front of the fireplace — a substantial, workmanlike hammer. Cecil Barker pointed to a box of brass-headed nails upon the mantelpiece.

“Mr. Douglas was altering the pictures yesterday,” he said. “I saw him myself, standing upon that chair and fixing the big picture above it. That accounts for the hammer.”

“We’d best put it back on the rug where we found it,” said the sergeant, scratching his puzzled head in his perplexity. “It will want the best brains in the force to get to the bottom of this thing. It will be a London job before it is finished.” He raised the hand lamp and walked slowly round the room. “Hullo!” he cried, excitedly, drawing the window curtain to one side. “What o’clock were those curtains drawn?”

“When the lamps were lit,” said the butler. “It would be shortly after four.”

“Someone had been hiding here, sure enough.” He held down the light, and the marks of muddy boots were very visible in the corner. “I’m bound to say this bears out your theory, Mr. Barker. It looks as if the man got into the house after four when the curtains were drawn, and before six when the bridge was raised. He slipped into this room, because it was the first that he saw. There was no other place where he could hide, so he popped in behind this curtain. That all seems clear enough. It is likely that his main idea was to burgle the house; but Mr. Douglas chanced to come upon him, so he murdered him and escaped.”

“That’s how I read it,” said Barker. “But, I say, aren’t we wasting precious time? Couldn’t we start out and scout the country before the fellow gets away?”

The sergeant considered for a moment.

“There are no trains before six in the morning; so he can’t get away by rail. If he goes by road with his legs all dripping, it’s odds that someone will notice him. Anyhow, I can’t leave here myself until I am relieved. But I think none of you should go until we see more clearly how we all stand.”

The doctor had taken the lamp and was narrowly scrutinizing the body. “What’s this mark?” he asked. “Could this have any connection with the crime?”

The dead man’s right arm was thrust out from his dressing gown, and exposed as high as the elbow. About halfway up the forearm was a curious brown design, a triangle inside a circle, standing out in vivid relief upon the lard-coloured skin.

“It’s not tattooed,” said the doctor, peering through his glasses. “I never saw anything like it. The man has been branded at some time as they brand cattle. What is the meaning of this?”

“I don’t profess to know the meaning of it,” said Cecil Barker; “but I have seen the mark on Douglas many times this last ten years.”

“And so have I,” said the butler. “Many a time when the master has rolled up his sleeves I have noticed that very mark. I’ve often wondered what it could be.”

“Then it has nothing to do with the crime, anyhow,” said the sergeant. “But it’s a rum thing all the same. Everything about this case is rum. Well, what is it now?”

The butler had given an exclamation of astonishment and was pointing at the dead man’s outstretched hand.

“They’ve taken his wedding ring!” he gasped.

“What!”

“Yes, indeed. Master always wore his plain gold wedding ring on the little finger of his left hand. That ring with the rough nugget on it was above it, and the twisted snake ring on the third finger. There’s the nugget and there’s the snake, but the wedding ring is gone.”

“He’s right,” said Barker.

“Do you tell me,” said the sergeant, “that the wedding ring was BELOW the other?”

“Always!”

“Then the murderer, or whoever it was, first took off this ring you call the nugget ring, then the wedding ring, and afterwards put the nugget ring back again.”

“That is so!”

The worthy country policeman shook his head. “Seems to me the sooner we get London on to this case the better,” said he. “White Mason is a smart man. No local job has ever been too much for White Mason. It won’t be long now before he is here to help us. But I expect we’ll have to look to London before we are through. Anyhow, I’m not ashamed to say that it is a deal too thick for the likes of me.”

CHAPTER 4 — Darkness

At three in the morning the chief Sussex detective, obeying the urgent call from Sergeant Wilson of Birlstone, arrived from headquarters in a light dog-cart behind a breathless trotter. By the five-forty train in the morning he had sent his message to Scotland Yard, and he was at the Birlstone station at twelve o’clock to welcome us. White Mason was a quiet, comfortable-looking person in a loose tweed suit, with a clean-shaved, ruddy face, a stoutish body, and powerful bandy legs adorned with gaiters, looking like a small farmer, a retired gamekeeper, or anything upon earth except a very favourable specimen of the provincial criminal officer.

“A real downright snorter, Mr. MacDonald!” he kept repeating. “We’ll have the pressmen down like flies when they understand it. I’m hoping we will get our work done before they get poking their noses into it and messing up all the trails. There has been nothing like this that I can remember. There are some bits that will come home to you, Mr. Holmes, or I am mistaken. And you also, Dr. Watson; for the medicos will have a word to say before we finish. Your room is at the Westville Arms. There’s no other place; but I hear that it is clean and good. The man will carry your bags. This way, gentlemen, if you please.”

He was a very bustling and genial person, this Sussex detective. In ten minutes we had all found our quarters. In ten more we were seated in the parlour of the inn and being treated to a rapid sketch of those events which have been outlined in the previous chapter. MacDonald made an occasional note; while Holmes sat absorbed, with the expression of surprised and reverent admiration with which the botanist surveys the rare and precious bloom.

“Remarkable!” he said, when the story was unfolded, “most remarkable! I can hardly recall any case where the features have been more peculiar.”

“I thought you would say so, Mr. Holmes,” said White Mason in great delight. “We’re well up with the times in Sussex. I’ve told you now how matters were, up to the time when I took over from Sergeant Wilson between three and four this morning. My word! I made the old mare go! But I need not have been in such a hurry, as it turned out; for there was nothing immediate that I could do. Sergeant Wilson had all the facts. I checked them and considered them and maybe added a few of my own.”

“What were they?” asked Holmes eagerly.

“Well, I first had the hammer examined. There was Dr. Wood there to help me. We found no signs of violence upon it. I was hoping that if Mr. Douglas defended himself with the hammer, he might have left his mark upon the murderer before he dropped it on the mat. But there was no stain.”

“That, of course, proves nothing at all,” remarked Inspector MacDonald. “There has been many a hammer murder and no trace on the hammer.”

“Quite so. It doesn’t prove it wasn’t used. But there might have been stains, and that would have helped us. As a matter of fact there were none. Then I examined the gun. They were buckshot cartridges, and, as Sergeant Wilson pointed out, the triggers were wired together so that, if you pulled on the hinder one, both barrels were discharged. Whoever fixed that up had made up his mind that he was going to take no chances of missing his man. The sawed gun was not more than two foot long — one could carry it easily under one’s coat. There was no complete maker’s name; but the printed letters P-E-N were on the fluting between the barrels, and the rest of the name had been cut off by the saw.”

“A big P with a flourish above it, E and N smaller?” asked Holmes.

“Exactly.”

“Pennsylvania Small Arms Company — well-known American firm,” said Holmes.

White Mason gazed at my friend as the little village practitioner looks at the Harley Street specialist who by a word can solve the difficulties that perplex him.

“That is very helpful, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. Wonderful! Wonderful! Do you carry the names of all the gun makers in the world in your memory?”

Holmes dismissed the subject with a wave.

“No doubt it is an American shotgun,” White Mason continued. “I seem to have read that a sawed-off shotgun is a weapon used in some parts of America. Apart from the name upon the barrel, the idea had occurred to me. There is some evidence then, that this man who entered the house and killed its master was an American.”

MacDonald shook his head. “Man, you are surely travelling overfast,” said he. “I have heard no evidence yet that any stranger was ever in the house at all.”

“The open window, the blood on the sill, the queer card, the marks of boots in the corner, the gun!”

“Nothing there that could not have been arranged. Mr. Douglas was an American, or had lived long in America. So had Mr. Barker. You don’t need to import an American from outside in order to account for American doings.”

“Ames, the butler—”

“What about him? Is he reliable?”

“Ten years with Sir Charles Chandos — as solid as a rock. He has been with Douglas ever since he took the Manor House five years ago. He has never seen a gun of this sort in the house.”

“The gun was made to conceal. That’s why the barrels were sawed. It would fit into any box. How could he swear there was no such gun in the house?”

“Well, anyhow, he had never seen one.”

MacDonald shook his obstinate Scotch head. “I’m not convinced yet that there was ever anyone in the house,” said he. “I’m asking you to conseedar” (his accent became more Aberdonian as he lost himself in his argument) “I’m asking you to conseedar what it involves if you suppose that this gun was ever brought into the house, and that all these strange things were done by a person from outside. Oh, man, it’s just inconceivable! It’s clean against common sense! I put it to you, Mr. Holmes, judging it by what we have heard.”

“Well, state your case, Mr. Mac,” said Holmes in his most judicial style.

“The man is not a burglar, supposing that he ever existed. The ring business and the card point to premeditated murder for some private reason. Very good. Here is a man who slips into a house with the deliberate intention of committing murder. He knows, if he knows anything, that he will have a deeficulty in making his escape, as the house is surrounded with water. What weapon would he choose? You would say the most silent in the world. Then he could hope when the deed was done to slip quickly from the window, to wade the moat, and to get away at his leisure. That’s understandable. But is it understandable that he should go out of his way to bring with him the most noisy weapon he could select, knowing well that it will fetch every human being in the house to the spot as quick as they can run, and that it is all odds that he will be seen before he can get across the moat? Is that credible, Mr. Holmes?”

“Well, you put the case strongly,” my friend replied thoughtfully. “It certainly needs a good deal of justification. May I ask, Mr. White Mason, whether you examined the farther side of the moat at once to see if there were any signs of the man having climbed out from the water?”

“There were no signs, Mr. Holmes. But it is a stone ledge, and one could hardly expect them.”

“No tracks or marks?”

“None.”

“Ha! Would there be any objection, Mr. White Mason, to our going down to the house at once? There may possibly be some small point which might be suggestive.”

“I was going to propose it, Mr. Holmes; but I thought it well to put you in touch with all the facts before we go. I suppose if anything should strike you—” White Mason looked doubtfully at the amateur.

“I have worked with Mr. Holmes before,” said Inspector MacDonald. “He plays the game.”

“My own idea of the game, at any rate,” said Holmes, with a smile. “I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of the police. If I have ever separated myself from the official force, it is because they have first separated themselves from me. I have no wish ever to score at their expense. At the same time, Mr. White Mason, I claim the right to work in my own way and give my results at my own time — complete rather than in stages.”

“I am sure we are honoured by your presence and to show you all we know,” said White Mason cordially. “Come along, Dr. Watson, and when the time comes we’ll all hope for a place in your book.”

We walked down the quaint village street with a row of pollarded elms on each side of it. Just beyond were two ancient stone pillars, weather-stained and lichen-blotched, bearing upon their summits a shapeless something which had once been the rampant lion of Capus of Birlstone. A short walk along the winding drive with such sward and oaks around it as one only sees in rural England, then a sudden turn, and the long, low Jacobean house of dingy, liver-coloured brick lay before us, with an old-fashioned garden of cut yews on each side of it. As we approached it, there was the wooden drawbridge and the beautiful broad moat as still and luminous as quicksilver in the cold, winter sunshine.

Three centuries had flowed past the old Manor House, centuries of births and of homecomings, of country dances and of the meetings of fox hunters. Strange that now in its old age this dark business should have cast its shadow upon the venerable walls! And yet those strange, peaked roofs and quaint, overhung gables were a fitting covering to grim and terrible intrigue. As I looked at the deep-set windows and the long sweep of the dull-coloured, water-lapped front, I felt that no more fitting scene could be set for such a tragedy.

“That’s the window,” said White Mason, “that one on the immediate right of the drawbridge. It’s open just as it was found last night.”

“It looks rather narrow for a man to pass.”

“Well, it wasn’t a fat man, anyhow. We don’t need your deductions, Mr. Holmes, to tell us that. But you or I could squeeze through all right.”

Holmes walked to the edge of the moat and looked across. Then he examined the stone ledge and the grass border beyond it.

“I’ve had a good look, Mr. Holmes,” said White Mason. “There is nothing there, no sign that anyone has landed — but why should he leave any sign?”

“Exactly. Why should he? Is the water always turbid?”

“Generally about this colour. The stream brings down the clay.”

“How deep is it?”

“About two feet at each side and three in the middle.”

“So we can put aside all idea of the man having been drowned in crossing.”

“No, a child could not be drowned in it.”

We walked across the drawbridge, and were admitted by a quaint, gnarled, dried-up person, who was the butler, Ames. The poor old fellow was white and quivering from the shock. The village sergeant, a tall, formal, melancholy man, still held his vigil in the room of Fate. The doctor had departed.

“Anything fresh, Sergeant Wilson?” asked White Mason.

“No, sir.”

“Then you can go home. You’ve had enough. We can send for you if we want you. The butler had better wait outside. Tell him to warn Mr. Cecil Barker, Mrs. Douglas, and the housekeeper that we may want a word with them presently. Now, gentlemen, perhaps you will allow me to give you the views I have formed first, and then you will be able to arrive at your own."

He impressed me, this country specialist. He had a solid grip of fact and a cool, clear, common-sense brain, which should take him some way in his profession. Holmes listened to him intently, with no sign of that impatience which the official exponent too often produced.

"Is it suicide, or is it murder — that's our first question, gentlemen, is it not? If it were suicide, then we have to believe that this man began by taking off his wedding ring and concealing it; that he then came down here in his dressing gown, trampled mud into a corner behind the curtain in order to give the idea someone had waited for him, opened the window, put blood on the—"

"We can surely dismiss that," said MacDonald.

"So I think. Suicide is out of the question. Then a murder has been done. What we have to determine is, whether it was done by someone outside or inside the house."

"Well, let's hear the argument."

"There are considerable difficulties both ways, and yet one or the other it must be. We will suppose first that some person or persons inside the house did the crime. They got this man down here at a time when everything was still and yet no one was asleep. They then did the deed with the queerest and noisiest weapon in the world so as to tell everyone what had happened — a weapon that was never seen in the house before. That does not seem a very likely start, does it?"

"No, it does not."

"Well, then, everyone is agreed that after the alarm was given only a minute at the most had passed before the whole household — not Mr. Cecil Barker alone, though he claims to have been the first, but Ames and all of them were on the spot. Do you tell me that in that time the guilty person managed to make footmarks in the corner, open the window, mark the sill with blood, take the wedding ring off the dead man's finger, and all the rest of it? It's impossible!"

"You put it very clearly," said Holmes. "I am inclined to agree with you."

"Well, then, we are driven back to the theory that it was done by someone from outside. We are still faced with some big difficulties; but anyhow they have ceased to be impossibilities. The man got into the house between four-thirty and six; that is to say, between dusk and the time when the bridge was raised. There had been some visitors, and the door was open; so there was nothing to prevent him. He may have been a common burglar, or he may have had some private grudge against Mr. Douglas. Since Mr. Douglas has spent most of his life in America, and this shotgun seems to be an American weapon, it would seem that the private grudge is the more likely theory. He slipped into this room because it was the first he came to, and he hid behind the curtain. There he remained until past eleven at night. At that time Mr. Douglas entered the room. It was a short interview, if there were any interview at all; for Mrs. Douglas declares that her husband had not left her more than a few minutes when she heard the shot."

"The candle shows that," said Holmes.

"Exactly. The candle, which was a new one, is not burned more than half an inch. He must have placed it on the table before he was attacked; otherwise, of course, it would have fallen when he fell. This shows that he was not attacked the instant that he entered the room. When Mr. Barker arrived the candle was lit and the lamp was out."

"That's all clear enough."

"Well, now, we can reconstruct things on those lines. Mr. Douglas enters the room. He puts down the candle. A man appears from behind the curtain. He is armed with this gun. He demands the wedding ring — Heaven only knows why, but so it must have been. Mr. Douglas gave it up. Then either in cold blood or in the course of a struggle — Douglas may have gripped the hammer that was found upon the mat — he shot Douglas in this horrible way. He dropped his gun and also it would seem this queer card — V.V. 341, whatever that may mean — and he made his escape through the window and across the moat at the very moment when Cecil Barker was discovering the crime. How's that, Mr. Holmes?"

"Very interesting, but just a little unconvincing."

"Man, it would be absolute nonsense if it wasn't that anything else is even worse!" cried MacDonald. "Somebody killed the man, and whoever it was I could clearly prove to you that he should have done it some other way. What does he mean by allowing his retreat to be cut off like that? What does he mean by using a shotgun when silence was his one chance of escape? Come, Mr. Holmes, it's up to you to give us a lead, since you say Mr. White Mason's theory is unconvincing."

Holmes had sat intently observant during this long discussion, missing no word that was said, with his keen eyes darting to right and to left, and his forehead wrinkled with speculation.

"I should like a few more facts before I get so far as a theory, Mr. Mac," said he, kneeling down beside the body. "Dear me! these injuries are really appalling. Can we have the butler in for a moment?... Ames, I understand that you have often seen this very unusual mark — a branded triangle inside a circle — upon Mr. Douglas's forearm?"

"Frequently, sir."

"You never heard any speculation as to what it meant?"

"No, sir."

"It must have caused great pain when it was inflicted. It is undoubtedly a burn. Now, I observe, Ames, that there is a small piece of plaster at the angle of Mr. Douglas's jaw. Did you observe that in life?"

"Yes, sir, he cut himself in shaving yesterday morning."

"Did you ever know him to cut himself in shaving before?"

"Not for a very long time, sir."

"Suggestive!" said Holmes. "It may, of course, be a mere coincidence, or it may point to some nervousness which would indicate that he had reason to apprehend danger. Had you noticed anything unusual in his conduct, yesterday, Ames?"

"It struck me that he was a little restless and excited, sir."

"Ha! The attack may not have been entirely unexpected. We do seem to make a little progress, do we not? Perhaps you would rather do the questioning, Mr. Mac?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, it's in better hands than mine."

"Well, then, we will pass to this card — V.V. 341. It is rough cardboard. Have you any of the sort in the house?"

"I don't think so."

Holmes walked across to the desk and dabbed a little ink from each bottle on to the blotting paper. "It was not printed in this room," he said; "this is black ink and the other purplish. It was done by a thick pen, and these are fine. No, it was done elsewhere, I should say. Can you make anything of the inscription, Ames?"

"No, sir, nothing."

"What do you think, Mr. Mac?"

"It gives me the impression of a secret society of some sort; the same with his badge upon the forearm."

"That's my idea, too," said White Mason.

“Well, we can adopt it as a working hypothesis and then see how far our difficulties disappear. An agent from such a society makes his way into the house, waits for Mr. Douglas, blows his head nearly off with this weapon, and escapes by wading the moat, after leaving a card beside the dead man, which will, when mentioned in the papers, tell other members of the society that vengeance has been done. That all hangs together. But why this gun, of all weapons?”

“Exactly.”

“And why the missing ring?”

“Quite so.”

“And why no arrest? It’s past two now. I take it for granted that since dawn every constable within forty miles has been looking out for a wet stranger?”

“That is so, Mr. Holmes.”

“Well, unless he has a burrow close by or a change of clothes ready, they can hardly miss him. And yet they HAVE missed him up to now!” Holmes had gone to the window and was examining with his lens the blood mark on the sill. “It is clearly the tread of a shoe. It is remarkably broad; a splay-foot, one would say. Curious, because, so far as one can trace any footmark in this mud-stained corner, one would say it was a more shapely sole. However, they are certainly very indistinct. What’s this under the side table?”

“Mr. Douglas’s dumb-bells,” said Ames.

“Dumb-bell — there’s only one. Where’s the other?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Holmes. There may have been only one. I have not noticed them for months.”

“One dumb-bell—” Holmes said seriously; but his remarks were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door.

A tall, sunburned, capable-looking, clean-shaved man looked in at us. I had no difficulty in guessing that it was the Cecil Barker of whom I had heard. His masterful eyes travelled quickly with a questioning glance from face to face.

“Sorry to interrupt your consultation,” said he, “but you should hear the latest news.”

“An arrest?”

“No such luck. But they’ve found his bicycle. The fellow left his bicycle behind him. Come and have a look. It is within a hundred yards of the hall door.”

We found three or four grooms and idlers standing in the drive inspecting a bicycle which had been drawn out from a clump of evergreens in which it had been concealed. It was a well used Rudge-Whitworth, splashed as from a considerable journey. There was a saddlebag with spanner and oilcan, but no clue as to the owner.

“It would be a grand help to the police,” said the inspector, “if these things were numbered and registered. But we must be thankful for what we’ve got. If we can’t find where he went to, at least we are likely to get where he came from. But what in the name of all that is wonderful made the fellow leave it behind? And how in the world has he got away without it? We don’t seem to get a gleam of light in the case, Mr. Holmes.”

“Don’t we?” my friend answered thoughtfully. “I wonder!”

CHAPTER 5 — The People of the Drama

“Have you seen all you want of the study?” asked White Mason as we reentered the house.

“For the time,” said the inspector, and Holmes nodded.

“Then perhaps you would now like to hear the evidence of some of the people in the house. We could use the dining room, Ames. Please come yourself first and tell us what you know.”

The butler’s account was a simple and a clear one, and he gave a convincing impression of sincerity. He had been engaged five years before, when Douglas first came to Birlstone. He understood that Mr. Douglas was a rich gentleman who had made his money in America. He had been a kind and considerate employer — not quite what Ames was used to, perhaps; but one can’t have everything. He never saw any signs of apprehension in Mr. Douglas: on the contrary, he was the most fearless man he had ever known. He ordered the drawbridge to be pulled up every night because it was the ancient custom of the old house, and he liked to keep the old ways up.

Mr. Douglas seldom went to London or left the village; but on the day before the crime he had been shopping at Tunbridge Wells. He (Ames) had observed some restlessness and excitement on the part of Mr. Douglas that day; for he had seemed impatient and irritable, which was unusual with him. He had not gone to bed that night; but was in the pantry at the back of the house, putting away the silver, when he heard the bell ring violently. He heard no shot; but it was hardly possible he would, as the pantry and kitchens were at the very back of the house and there were several closed doors and a long passage between. The housekeeper had come out of her room, attracted by the violent ringing of the bell. They had gone to the front of the house together.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs he had seen Mrs. Douglas coming down it. No, she was not hurrying; it did not seem to him that she was particularly agitated. Just as she reached the bottom of the stair Mr. Barker had rushed out of the study. He had stopped Mrs. Douglas and begged her to go back.

“For God’s sake, go back to your room!” he cried. “Poor Jack is dead! You can do nothing. For God’s sake, go back!”

After some persuasion upon the stairs Mrs. Douglas had gone back. She did not scream. She made no outcry whatever. Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, had taken her upstairs and stayed with her in the bedroom. Ames and Mr. Barker had then returned to the study, where they had found everything exactly as the police had seen it. The candle was not lit at that time; but the lamp was burning. They had looked out of the window; but the night was very dark and nothing could be seen or heard. They had then rushed out into the hall, where Ames had turned the windlass which lowered the drawbridge. Mr. Barker had then hurried off to get the police.

Such, in its essentials, was the evidence of the butler.

The account of Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, was, so far as it went, a corroboration of that of her fellow servant. The housekeeper’s room was rather nearer to the front of the house than the pantry in which Ames had been working. She was preparing to go to bed when the loud ringing of the bell had attracted her attention. She was a little hard of hearing. Perhaps that was why she had not heard the shot; but in any case the study was a long way off. She remembered hearing some sound which she imagined to be the slamming of a door. That was a good deal earlier — half an hour at least before the ringing of the bell. When Mr. Ames ran to the front she went with him. She saw Mr. Barker, very pale and excited, come out of the study. He intercepted Mrs. Douglas, who was coming down the stairs. He entreated her to go back, and she answered him, but what she said could not be heard.

“Take her up! Stay with her!” he had said to Mrs. Allen.

She had therefore taken her to the bedroom, and endeavoured to soothe her. She was greatly excited, trembling all over, but made no other attempt to go downstairs. She just sat in her dressing gown by her bedroom fire, with her head sunk in her hands. Mrs. Allen stayed with her most of the night. As to the other servants, they had all gone to bed, and the alarm did not reach them until just before the police arrived. They slept at the extreme back of the house, and could not possibly have heard anything.

So far the housekeeper could add nothing on cross-examination save lamentations and expressions of amazement.

Cecil Barker succeeded Mrs. Allen as a witness. As to the occurrences of the night before, he had very little to add to what he had already told the police. Personally, he was convinced that the murderer had escaped by the window. The bloodstain was conclusive, in his opinion, on that point.

Besides, as the bridge was up, there was no other possible way of escaping. He could not explain what had become of the assassin or why he had not taken his bicycle, if it were indeed his. He could not possibly have been drowned in the moat, which was at no place more than three feet deep.

In his own mind he had a very definite theory about the murder. Douglas was a reticent man, and there were some chapters in his life of which he never spoke. He had emigrated to America when he was a very young man. He had prospered well, and Barker had first met him in California, where they had become partners in a successful mining claim at a place called Benito Canyon. They had done very well; but Douglas had suddenly sold out and started for England. He was a widower at that time. Barker had afterwards realised his money and come to live in London. Thus they had renewed their friendship.

Douglas had given him the impression that some danger was hanging over his head, and he had always looked upon his sudden departure from California, and also his renting a house in so quiet a place in England, as being connected with this peril. He imagined that some secret society, some implacable organization, was on Douglas’s track, which would never rest until it killed him. Some remarks of his had given him this idea; though he had never told him what the society was, nor how he had come to offend it. He could only suppose that the legend upon the placard had some reference to this secret society.

“How long were you with Douglas in California?” asked Inspector MacDonald.

“Five years altogether.”

“He was a bachelor, you say?”

“A widower.”

“Have you ever heard where his first wife came from?”

“No, I remember his saying that she was of German extraction, and I have seen her portrait. She was a very beautiful woman. She died of typhoid the year before I met him.”

“You don’t associate his past with any particular part of America?”

“I have heard him talk of Chicago. He knew that city well and had worked there. I have heard him talk of the coal and iron districts. He had travelled a good deal in his time.”

“Was he a politician? Had this secret society to do with politics?”

“No, he cared nothing about politics.”

"You have no reason to think it was criminal?"

"On the contrary, I never met a straighter man in my life."

"Was there anything curious about his life in California?"

"He liked best to stay and to work at our claim in the mountains. He would never go where other men were if he could help it. That's why I first thought that someone was after him. Then when he left so suddenly for Europe I made sure that it was so. I believe that he had a warning of some sort. Within a week of his leaving half a dozen men were inquiring for him."

"What sort of men?"

"Well, they were a mighty hard-looking crowd. They came up to the claim and wanted to know where he was. I told them that he was gone to Europe and that I did not know where to find him. They meant him no good — it was easy to see that."

"Were these men Americans — Californians?"

"Well, I don't know about Californians. They were Americans, all right. But they were not miners. I don't know what they were, and was very glad to see their backs."

"That was six years ago?"

"Nearer seven."

"And then you were together five years in California, so that this business dates back not less than eleven years at the least?"

"That is so."

"It must be a very serious feud that would be kept up with such earnestness for as long as that. It would be no light thing that would give rise to it."

"I think it shadowed his whole life. It was never quite out of his mind."

"But if a man had a danger hanging over him, and knew what it was, don't you think he would turn to the police for protection?"

"Maybe it was some danger that he could not be protected against. There's one thing you should know. He always went about armed. His revolver was never out of his pocket. But, by bad luck, he was in his dressing gown and had left it in the bedroom last night. Once the bridge was up, I guess he thought he was safe."

"I should like these dates a little clearer," said MacDonald. "It is quite six years since Douglas left California. You followed him next year, did you not?"

"That is so."

"And he had been married five years. You must have returned about the time of his marriage."

"About a month before. I was his best man."

"Did you know Mrs. Douglas before her marriage?"

"No, I did not. I had been away from England for ten years."

"But you have seen a good deal of her since."

Barker looked sternly at the detective. "I have seen a good deal of HIM since," he answered. "If I have seen her, it is because you cannot visit a man without knowing his wife. If you imagine there is any connection—"

"I imagine nothing, Mr. Barker. I am bound to make every inquiry which can bear upon the case. But I mean no offense."

"Some inquiries are offensive," Barker answered angrily.

"It's only the facts that we want. It is in your interest and everyone's interest that they should be cleared up. Did Mr. Douglas entirely approve your friendship with his wife?"

Barker grew paler, and his great, strong hands were clasped convulsively together. "You have no right to ask such questions!" he cried. "What has this to do with the matter you are investigating?"

"I must repeat the question."

"Well, I refuse to answer."

"You can refuse to answer; but you must be aware that your refusal is in itself an answer, for you would not refuse if you had not something to conceal."

Barker stood for a moment with his face set grimly and his strong black eyebrows drawn low in intense thought. Then he looked up with a smile. "Well, I guess you gentlemen are only doing your clear duty after all, and I have no right to stand in the way of it. I'd only ask you not to worry Mrs. Douglas over this matter; for she has enough upon her just now. I may tell you that poor Douglas had just one fault in the world, and that was his jealousy. He was fond of me — no man could be fonder of a friend. And he was devoted to his wife. He loved me to come here, and was forever sending for me. And yet if his wife and I talked together or there seemed any sympathy between us, a kind of wave of jealousy would pass over him, and he would be off the handle and saying the wildest things in a moment. More than once I've sworn off coming for that reason, and then he would write me such penitent, imploring letters that I just had to. But you can take it from me, gentlemen, if it was my last word, that no man ever had a more loving, faithful wife — and I can say also no friend could be more loyal than I!”

It was spoken with fervour and feeling, and yet Inspector MacDonald could not dismiss the subject.

“You are aware,” said he, “that the dead man’s wedding ring has been taken from his finger?”

“So it appears,” said Barker.

“What do you mean by ‘appears’? You know it as a fact.”

The man seemed confused and undecided. “When I said ‘appears’ I meant that it was conceivable that he had himself taken off the ring.”

“The mere fact that the ring should be absent, whoever may have removed it, would suggest to anyone’s mind, would it not, that the marriage and the tragedy were connected?”

Barker shrugged his broad shoulders. “I can’t profess to say what it means,” he answered. “But if you mean to hint that it could reflect in any way upon this lady’s honour” — his eyes blazed for an instant, and then with an evident effort he got a grip upon his own emotions—”well, you are on the wrong track, that’s all.”

“I don’t know that I’ve anything else to ask you at present,” said MacDonald, coldly.

“There was one small point,” remarked Sherlock Holmes. “When you entered the room there was only a candle lighted on the table, was there not?”

“Yes, that was so.”

“By its light you saw that some terrible incident had occurred?”

“Exactly.”

“You at once rang for help?”

“Yes.”

“And it arrived very speedily?”

“Within a minute or so.”

“And yet when they arrived they found that the candle was out and that the lamp had been lighted. That seems very remarkable.”

Again Barker showed some signs of indecision. “I don’t see that it was remarkable, Mr. Holmes,” he answered after a pause. “The candle threw a very bad light. My first thought was to get a better one. The lamp was on the table; so I lit it.”

“And blew out the candle?”

“Exactly.”

Holmes asked no further question, and Barker, with a deliberate look from one to the other of us, which had, as it seemed to me, something of defiance in it, turned and left the room.

Inspector MacDonald had sent up a note to the effect that he would wait upon Mrs. Douglas in her room; but she had replied that she would meet us in the dining room. She entered now, a tall and beautiful woman of thirty, reserved and self-possessed to a remarkable degree, very different from the tragic and distracted figure I had pictured. It is true that her face was pale and drawn, like that of one who has endured a great shock; but her manner was composed, and the finely moulded hand which she rested upon the edge of the table was as steady as my own. Her sad, appealing eyes travelled from one to the other of us with a curiously inquisitive expression. That questioning gaze transformed itself suddenly into abrupt speech.

“Have you found anything out yet?” she asked.

Was it my imagination that there was an undertone of fear rather than of hope in the question?

“We have taken every possible step, Mrs. Douglas,” said the inspector. “You may rest assured that nothing will be neglected.”

“Spare no money,” she said in a dead, even tone. “It is my desire that every possible effort should be made.”

“Perhaps you can tell us something which may throw some light upon the matter.”

“I fear not; but all I know is at your service.”

“We have heard from Mr. Cecil Barker that you did not actually see — that you were never in the room where the tragedy occurred?”

“No, he turned me back upon the stairs. He begged me to return to my room.”

“Quite so. You had heard the shot, and you had at once come down.”

“I put on my dressing gown and then came down.”

“How long was it after hearing the shot that you were stopped on the stair by Mr. Barker?”

“It may have been a couple of minutes. It is so hard to reckon time at such a moment. He implored me not to go on. He assured me that I could do nothing. Then Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, led me upstairs again. It was all like some dreadful dream.”

“Can you give us any idea how long your husband had been downstairs before you heard the shot?”

“No, I cannot say. He went from his dressing room, and I did not hear him go. He did the round of the house every night, for he was nervous of fire. It is the only thing that I have ever known him nervous of.”

“That is just the point which I want to come to, Mrs. Douglas. You have known your husband only in England, have you not?”

“Yes, we have been married five years.”

“Have you heard him speak of anything which occurred in America and might bring some danger upon him?”

Mrs. Douglas thought earnestly before she answered. “Yes,” she said at last, “I have always felt that there was a danger hanging over him. He refused to discuss it with me. It was not from want of confidence in me — there was the most complete love and confidence between us — but it was out of his desire to keep all alarm away from me. He thought I should brood over it if I knew all, and so he was silent.”

“How did you know it, then?”

Mrs. Douglas’s face lit with a quick smile. “Can a husband ever carry about a secret all his life and a woman who loves him have no suspicion of it? I knew it by his refusal to talk about some episodes in his American life. I knew it by certain precautions he took. I knew it by certain words he let fall. I knew it by the way he looked at unexpected strangers. I was perfectly certain that he had some powerful enemies, that he believed they were on his track, and that he was always on his guard against them. I was so sure of it that for years I have been terrified if ever he came home later than was expected.”

“Might I ask,” asked Holmes, “what the words were which attracted your attention?”

“The Valley of Fear,” the lady answered. “That was an expression he has used when I questioned him. ‘I have been in the Valley of Fear. I am not out of it yet.’—’Are we never to get out of the Valley of Fear?’ I have asked him when I have seen him more serious than usual. ‘Sometimes I think that we never shall,’ he has answered.”

“Surely you asked him what he meant by the Valley of Fear?”

“I did; but his face would become very grave and he would shake his head. ‘It is bad enough that one of us should have been in its shadow,’ he said. ‘Please God it shall never fall upon you!’ It was some real valley in which he had lived and in which something terrible had occurred to him, of that I am certain; but I can tell you no more.”

“And he never mentioned any names?”

“Yes, he was delirious with fever once when he had his hunting accident three years ago. Then I remember that there was a name that came continually to his lips. He spoke it with anger and a sort of horror. McGinty was the name — Bodymaster McGinty. I asked him when he recovered who Bodymaster McGinty was, and whose body he was master of. ‘Never of mine, thank God!’ he answered with a laugh, and that was all I could get from him. But there is a connection between Bodymaster McGinty and the Valley of Fear.”

“There is one other point,” said Inspector MacDonald. “You met Mr. Douglas in a boarding house in London, did you not, and became engaged to him there? Was there any romance, anything secret or mysterious, about the wedding?”

“There was romance. There is always romance. There was nothing mysterious.”

“He had no rival?”

“No, I was quite free.”

“You have heard, no doubt, that his wedding ring has been taken. Does that suggest anything to you? Suppose that some enemy of his old life had tracked him down and committed this crime, what possible reason could he have for taking his wedding ring?”

For an instant I could have sworn that the faintest shadow of a smile flickered over the woman’s lips.

“I really cannot tell,” she answered. “It is certainly a most extraordinary thing.”

“Well, we will not detain you any longer, and we are sorry to have put you to this trouble at such a time,” said the inspector. “There are some other points, no doubt; but we can refer to you as they arise.”

She rose, and I was again conscious of that quick, questioning glance with which she had just surveyed us. “What impression has my evidence made upon you?” The question might as well have been spoken. Then, with a bow, she swept from the room.

“She’s a beautiful woman — a very beautiful woman,” said MacDonald thoughtfully, after the door had closed behind her. “This man Barker has certainly been down here a good deal. He is a man who might be attractive to a woman. He admits that the dead man was jealous, and maybe he knew best himself what cause he had for jealousy. Then there's that wedding ring. You can't get past that. The man who tears a wedding ring off a dead man's — What do you say to it, Mr. Holmes?"

My friend had sat with his head upon his hands, sunk in the deepest thought. Now he rose and rang the bell. "Ames," he said, when the butler entered, "where is Mr. Cecil Barker now?"

"I'll see, sir."

He came back in a moment to say that Barker was in the garden.

"Can you remember, Ames, what Mr. Barker had on his feet last night when you joined him in the study?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. He had a pair of bedroom slippers. I brought him his boots when he went for the police."

"Where are the slippers now?"

"They are still under the chair in the hall."

"Very good, Ames. It is, of course, important for us to know which tracks may be Mr. Barker's and which from outside."

"Yes, sir. I may say that I noticed that the slippers were stained with blood — so indeed were my own."

"That is natural enough, considering the condition of the room. Very good, Ames. We will ring if we want you."

A few minutes later we were in the study. Holmes had brought with him the carpet slippers from the hall. As Ames had observed, the soles of both were dark with blood.

"Strange!" murmured Holmes, as he stood in the light of the window and examined them minutely. "Very strange indeed!"

Stooping with one of his quick feline pounces, he placed the slipper upon the blood mark on the sill. It exactly corresponded. He smiled in silence at his colleagues.

The inspector was transfigured with excitement. His native accent rattled like a stick upon railings.

"Man," he cried, "there's not a doubt of it! Barker has just marked the window himself. It's a good deal broader than any bootmark. I mind that you said it was a splay-foot, and here's the explanation. But what's the game, Mr. Holmes — what's the game?"

"Ay, what's the game?" my friend repeated thoughtfully.

White Mason chuckled and rubbed his fat hands together in his professional satisfaction. “I said it was a snorter!” he cried. “And a real snorter it is!”

CHAPTER 6 — A Dawning Light

The three detectives had many matters of detail into which to inquire; so I returned alone to our modest quarters at the village inn. But before doing so I took a stroll in the curious old-world garden which flanked the house. Rows of very ancient yew trees cut into strange designs girded it round. Inside was a beautiful stretch of lawn with an old sundial in the middle, the whole effect so soothing and restful that it was welcome to my somewhat jangled nerves.

In that deeply peaceful atmosphere one could forget, or remember only as some fantastic nightmare, that darkened study with the sprawling, bloodstained figure on the floor. And yet, as I strolled round it and tried to steep my soul in its gentle balm, a strange incident occurred, which brought me back to the tragedy and left a sinister impression in my mind.

I have said that a decoration of yew trees circled the garden. At the end farthest from the house they thickened into a continuous hedge. On the other side of this hedge, concealed from the eyes of anyone approaching from the direction of the house, there was a stone seat. As I approached the spot I was aware of voices, some remark in the deep tones of a man, answered by a little ripple of feminine laughter.

An instant later I had come round the end of the hedge and my eyes lit upon Mrs. Douglas and the man Barker before they were aware of my presence. Her appearance gave me a shock. In the dining-room she had been demure and discreet. Now all pretense of grief had passed away from her. Her eyes shone with the joy of living, and her face still quivered with amusement at some remark of her companion. He sat forward, his hands clasped and his forearms on his knees, with an answering smile upon his bold, handsome face. In an instant — but it was just one instant too late — they resumed their solemn masks as my figure came into view. A hurried word or two passed between them, and then Barker rose and came towards me.

“Excuse me, sir,” said he, “but am I addressing Dr. Watson?”

I bowed with a coldness which showed, I dare say, very plainly the impression which had been produced upon my mind.

“We thought that it was probably you, as your friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes is so well known. Would you mind coming over and speaking to Mrs. Douglas for one instant?”

I followed him with a dour face. Very clearly I could see in my mind’s eye that shattered figure on the floor. Here within a few hours of the tragedy were his wife and his nearest friend laughing together behind a bush in the garden which had been his. I greeted the lady with reserve. I had grieved with her grief in the dining room. Now I met her appealing gaze with an unresponsive eye.

“I fear that you think me callous and hard-hearted,” said she.

I shrugged my shoulders. “It is no business of mine,” said I.

“Perhaps some day you will do me justice. If you only realised—”

“There is no need why Dr. Watson should realise,” said Barker quickly. “As he has himself said, it is no possible business of his.”

“Exactly,” said I, “and so I will beg leave to resume my walk.”

“One moment, Dr. Watson,” cried the woman in a pleading voice. “There is one question which you can answer with more authority than anyone else in the world, and it may make a very great difference to me. You know Mr. Holmes and his relations with the police better than anyone else can. Supposing that a matter were brought confidentially to his knowledge, is it absolutely necessary that he should pass it on to the detectives?”

“Yes, that’s it,” said Barker eagerly. “Is he on his own or is he entirely in with them?”

“I really don’t know that I should be justified in discussing such a point.”

“I beg — I implore that you will, Dr. Watson! I assure you that you will be helping us — helping me greatly if you will guide us on that point.”

There was such a ring of sincerity in the woman’s voice that for the instant I forgot all about her levity and was moved only to do her will.

“Mr. Holmes is an independent investigator,” I said. “He is his own master, and would act as his own judgment directed. At the same time, he would naturally feel loyalty towards the officials who were working on the same case, and he would not conceal from them anything which would help them in bringing a criminal to justice. Beyond this I can say nothing, and I would refer you to Mr. Holmes himself if you wanted fuller information.”

So saying I raised my hat and went upon my way, leaving them still seated behind that concealing hedge. I looked back as I rounded the far end of it, and saw that they were still talking very earnestly together, and, as they were gazing after me, it was clear that it was our interview that was the subject of their debate.

“I wish none of their confidences,” said Holmes, when I reported to him what had occurred. He had spent the whole afternoon at the Manor House in consultation with his two colleagues, and returned about five with a ravenous appetite for a high tea which I had ordered for him. “No confidences, Watson; for they are mighty awkward if it comes to an arrest for conspiracy and murder.”

“You think it will come to that?”

He was in his most cheerful and debonair humour. “My dear Watson, when I have exterminated that fourth egg I shall be ready to put you in touch with the whole situation. I don’t say that we have fathomed it — far from it — but when we have traced the missing dumb-bell—”

“The dumb-bell!”

“Dear me, Watson, is it possible that you have not penetrated the fact that the case hangs upon the missing dumb-bell? Well, well, you need not be downcast; for between ourselves I don’t think that either Inspector Mac or the excellent local practitioner has grasped the overwhelming importance of this incident. One dumb-bell, Watson! Consider an athlete with one dumb-bell! Picture to yourself the unilateral development, the imminent danger of a spinal curvature. Shocking, Watson, shocking!”

He sat with his mouth full of toast and his eyes sparkling with mischief, watching my intellectual entanglement. The mere sight of his excellent appetite was an assurance of success; for I had very clear recollections of days and nights without a thought of food, when his baffled mind had chafed before some problem while his thin, eager features became more attenuated with the asceticism of complete mental concentration. Finally he lit his pipe, and sitting in the inglenook of the old village inn he talked slowly and at random about his case, rather as one who thinks aloud than as one who makes a considered statement.

“A lie, Watson — a great, big, thumping, obtrusive, uncompromising lie — that’s what meets us on the threshold! There is our starting point. The whole story told by Barker is a lie. But Barker’s story is corroborated by Mrs. Douglas. Therefore she is lying also. They are both lying, and in a conspiracy. So now we have the clear problem. Why are they lying, and what is the truth which they are trying so hard to conceal? Let us try, Watson, you and I, if we can get behind the lie and reconstruct the truth.

“How do I know that they are lying? Because it is a clumsy fabrication which simply could not be true. Consider! According to the story given to us, the assassin had less than a minute after the murder had been committed to take that ring, which was under another ring, from the dead man’s finger, to replace the other ring — a thing which he would surely never have done — and to put that singular card beside his victim. I say that this was obviously impossible.

“You may argue — but I have too much respect for your judgment, Watson, to think that you will do so — that the ring may have been taken before the man was killed. The fact that the candle had been lit only a short time shows that there had been no lengthy interview. Was Douglas, from what we hear of his fearless character, a man who would be likely to give up his wedding ring at such short notice, or could we conceive of his giving it up at all? No, no, Watson, the assassin was alone with the dead man for some time with the lamp lit. Of that I have no doubt at all.

“But the gunshot was apparently the cause of death. Therefore the shot must have been fired some time earlier than we are told. But there could be no mistake about such a matter as that. We are in the presence, therefore, of a deliberate conspiracy upon the part of the two people who heard the gunshot — of the man Barker and of the woman Douglas. When on the top of this I am able to show that the blood mark on the windowsill was deliberately placed there by Barker, in order to give a false clue to the police, you will admit that the case grows dark against him.

“Now we have to ask ourselves at what hour the murder actually did occur. Up to half-past ten the servants were moving about the house; so it was certainly not before that time. At a quarter to eleven they had all gone to their rooms with the exception of Ames, who was in the pantry. I have been trying some experiments after you left us this afternoon, and I find that no noise which MacDonald can make in the study can penetrate to me in the pantry when the doors are all shut.

“It is otherwise, however, from the housekeeper’s room. It is not so far down the corridor, and from it I could vaguely hear a voice when it was very loudly raised. The sound from a shotgun is to some extent muffled when the discharge is at very close range, as it undoubtedly was in this instance. It would not be very loud, and yet in the silence of the night it should have easily penetrated to Mrs. Allen’s room. She is, as she has told us, somewhat deaf; but none the less she mentioned in her evidence that she did hear something like a door slamming half an hour before the alarm was given. Half an hour before the alarm was given would be a quarter to eleven. I have no doubt that what she heard was the report of the gun, and that this was the real instant of the murder.

"If this is so, we have now to determine what Barker and Mrs. Douglas, presuming that they are not the actual murderers, could have been doing from quarter to eleven, when the sound of the shot brought them down, until quarter past eleven, when they rang the bell and summoned the servants. What were they doing, and why did they not instantly give the alarm? That is the question which faces us, and when it has been answered we shall surely have gone some way to solve our problem."

"I am convinced myself," said I, "that there is an understanding between those two people. She must be a heartless creature to sit laughing at some jest within a few hours of her husband's murder."

"Exactly. She does not shine as a wife even in her own account of what occurred. I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind, as you are aware, Watson, but my experience of life has taught me that there are few wives, having any regard for their husbands, who would let any man's spoken word stand between them and that husband's dead body. Should I ever marry, Watson, I should hope to inspire my wife with some feeling which would prevent her from being walked off by a housekeeper when my corpse was lying within a few yards of her. It was badly stage-managed; for even the rawest investigators must be struck by the absence of the usual feminine ululation. If there had been nothing else, this incident alone would have suggested a prearranged conspiracy to my mind."

"You think then, definitely, that Barker and Mrs. Douglas are guilty of the murder?"

"There is an appalling directness about your questions, Watson," said Holmes, shaking his pipe at me. "They come at me like bullets. If you put it that Mrs. Douglas and Barker know the truth about the murder, and are conspiring to conceal it, then I can give you a whole-souled answer. I am sure they do. But your more deadly proposition is not so clear. Let us for a moment consider the difficulties which stand in the way.

"We will suppose that this couple are united by the bonds of a guilty love, and that they have determined to get rid of the man who stands between them. It is a large supposition; for discreet inquiry among servants and others has failed to corroborate it in any way. On the contrary, there is a good deal of evidence that the Douglases were very attached to each other."

"That, I am sure, cannot be true," said I, thinking of the beautiful smiling face in the garden.

"Well at least they gave that impression. However, we will suppose that they are an extraordinarily astute couple, who deceive everyone upon this point, and conspire to murder the husband. He happens to be a man over whose head some danger hangs—"

"We have only their word for that."

Holmes looked thoughtful. "I see, Watson. You are sketching out a theory by which everything they say from the beginning is false. According to your idea, there was never any hidden menace, or secret society, or Valley of Fear, or Boss MacSomebody, or anything else. Well, that is a good sweeping generalisation. Let us see what that brings us to. They invent this theory to account for the crime. They then play up to the idea by leaving this bicycle in the park as proof of the existence of some outsider. The stain on the windowsill conveys the same idea. So does the card on the body, which might have been prepared in the house. That all fits into your hypothesis, Watson. But now we come on the nasty, angular, uncompromising bits which won't slip into their places. Why a cut-off shotgun of all weapons — and an American one at that? How could they be so sure that the sound of it would not bring someone on to them? It's a mere chance as it is that Mrs. Allen did not start out to inquire for the slamming door. Why did your guilty couple do all this, Watson?"

"I confess that I can't explain it."

"Then again, if a woman and her lover conspire to murder a husband, are they going to advertise their guilt by ostentatiously removing his wedding ring after his death? Does that strike you as very probable, Watson?"

"No, it does not."

"And once again, if the thought of leaving a bicycle concealed outside had occurred to you, would it really have seemed worth doing when the dullest detective would naturally say this is an obvious blind, as the bicycle is the first thing which the fugitive needed in order to make his escape."

"I can conceive of no explanation."

"And yet there should be no combination of events for which the wit of man cannot conceive an explanation. Simply as a mental exercise, without any assertion that it is true, let me indicate a possible line of thought. It is, I admit, mere imagination; but how often is imagination the mother of truth?

"We will suppose that there was a guilty secret, a really shameful secret in the life of this man Douglas. This leads to his murder by someone who is, we will suppose, an avenger, someone from outside. This avenger, for some reason which I confess I am still at a loss to explain, took the dead man's wedding ring. The vendetta might conceivably date back to the man's first marriage, and the ring be taken for some such reason.

"Before this avenger got away, Barker and the wife had reached the room. The assassin convinced them that any attempt to arrest him would lead to the publication of some hideous scandal. They were converted to this idea, and preferred to let him go. For this purpose they probably lowered the bridge, which can be done quite noiselessly, and then raised it again. He made his escape, and for some reason thought that he could do so more safely on foot than on the bicycle. He therefore left his machine where it would not be discovered until he had got safely away. So far we are within the bounds of possibility, are we not?"

"Well, it is possible, no doubt," said I, with some reserve.

"We have to remember, Watson, that whatever occurred is certainly something very extraordinary. Well, now, to continue our supposititious case, the couple — not necessarily a guilty couple — realise after the murderer is gone that they have placed themselves in a position in which it may be difficult for them to prove that they did not themselves either do the deed or connive at it. They rapidly and rather clumsily met the situation. The mark was put by Barker's bloodstained slipper upon the windowsill to suggest how the fugitive got away. They obviously were the two who must have heard the sound of the gun; so they gave the alarm exactly as they would have done, but a good half hour after the event."

"And how do you propose to prove all this?"

"Well, if there were an outsider, he may be traced and taken. That would be the most effective of all proofs. But if not — well, the resources of science are far from being exhausted. I think that an evening alone in that study would help me much."

"An evening alone!"

"I propose to go up there presently. I have arranged it with the estimable Ames, who is by no means wholehearted about Barker. I shall sit in that room and see if its atmosphere brings me inspiration. I'm a believer in the genius loci. You smile, Friend Watson. Well, we shall see. By the way, you have that big umbrella of yours, have you not?”

“It is here.”

“Well, I’ll borrow that if I may.”

“Certainly — but what a wretched weapon! If there is danger—”

“Nothing serious, my dear Watson, or I should certainly ask for your assistance. But I’ll take the umbrella. At present I am only awaiting the return of our colleagues from Tunbridge Wells, where they are at present engaged in trying for a likely owner to the bicycle.”

It was nightfall before Inspector MacDonald and White Mason came back from their expedition, and they arrived exultant, reporting a great advance in our investigation.

“Man, I’ll admeet that I had my doubts if there was ever an outsider,” said MacDonald, “but that’s all past now. We’ve had the bicycle identified, and we have a description of our man; so that’s a long step on our journey.”

“It sounds to me like the beginning of the end,” said Holmes. “I’m sure I congratulate you both with all my heart.”

“Well, I started from the fact that Mr. Douglas had seemed disturbed since the day before, when he had been at Tunbridge Wells. It was at Tunbridge Wells then that he had become conscious of some danger. It was clear, therefore, that if a man had come over with a bicycle it was from Tunbridge Wells that he might be expected to have come. We took the bicycle over with us and showed it at the hotels. It was identified at once by the manager of the Eagle Commercial as belonging to a man named Hargrave, who had taken a room there two days before. This bicycle and a small valise were his whole belongings. He had registered his name as coming from London, but had given no address. The valise was London made, and the contents were British; but the man himself was undoubtedly an American.”

“Well, well,” said Holmes gleefully, “you have indeed done some solid work while I have been sitting spinning theories with my friend! It’s a lesson in being practical, Mr. Mac.”

“Ay, it’s just that, Mr. Holmes,” said the inspector with satisfaction.

“But this may all fit in with your theories,” I remarked.

“That may or may not be. But let us hear the end, Mr. Mac. Was there nothing to identify this man?”

“So little that it was evident that he had carefully guarded himself against identification. There were no papers or letters, and no marking upon the clothes. A cycle map of the county lay on his bedroom table. He had left the hotel after breakfast yesterday morning on his bicycle, and no more was heard of him until our inquiries.”

“That’s what puzzles me, Mr. Holmes,” said White Mason. “If the fellow did not want the hue and cry raised over him, one would imagine that he would have returned and remained at the hotel as an inoffensive tourist. As it is, he must know that he will be reported to the police by the hotel manager and that his disappearance will be connected with the murder.”

“So one would imagine. Still, he has been justified of his wisdom up to date, at any rate, since he has not been taken. But his description — what of that?”

MacDonald referred to his notebook. “Here we have it so far as they could give it. They don’t seem to have taken any very particular stock of him; but still the porter, the clerk, and the chambermaid are all agreed that this about covers the points. He was a man about five foot nine in height, fifty or so years of age, his hair slightly grizzled, a grayish moustache, a curved nose, and a face which all of them described as fierce and forbidding.”

“Well, bar the expression, that might almost be a description of Douglas himself,” said Holmes. “He is just over fifty, with grizzled hair and moustache, and about the same height. Did you get anything else?”

“He was dressed in a heavy gray suit with a reefer jacket, and he wore a short yellow overcoat and a soft cap.”

“What about the shotgun?”

“It is less than two feet long. It could very well have fitted into his valise. He could have carried it inside his overcoat without difficulty.”

“And how do you consider that all this bears upon the general case?”

“Well, Mr. Holmes,” said MacDonald, “when we have got our man — and you may be sure that I had his description on the wires within five minutes of hearing it — we shall be better able to judge. But, even as it stands, we have surely gone a long way. We know that an American calling himself Hargrave came to Tunbridge Wells two days ago with bicycle and valise. In the latter was a sawed-off shotgun; so he came with the deliberate purpose of crime. Yesterday morning he set off for this place on his bicycle, with his gun concealed in his overcoat. No one saw him arrive, so far as we can learn; but he need not pass through the village to reach the park gates, and there are many cyclists upon the road. Presumably he at once concealed his cycle among the laurels where it was found, and possibly lurked there himself, with his eye on the house, waiting for Mr. Douglas to come out. The shotgun is a strange weapon to use inside a house; but he had intended to use it outside, and there it has very obvious advantages, as it would be impossible to miss with it, and the sound of shots is so common in an English sporting neighbourhood that no particular notice would be taken."

"That is all very clear," said Holmes.

"Well, Mr. Douglas did not appear. What was he to do next? He left his bicycle and approached the house in the twilight. He found the bridge down and no one about. He took his chance, intending, no doubt, to make some excuse if he met anyone. He met no one. He slipped into the first room that he saw, and concealed himself behind the curtain. Thence he could see the drawbridge go up, and he knew that his only escape was through the moat. He waited until quarter-past eleven, when Mr. Douglas upon his usual nightly round came into the room. He shot him and escaped, as arranged. He was aware that the bicycle would be described by the hotel people and be a clue against him; so he left it there and made his way by some other means to London or to some safe hiding place which he had already arranged. How is that, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, Mr. Mac, it is very good and very clear so far as it goes. That is your end of the story. My end is that the crime was committed half an hour earlier than reported; that Mrs. Douglas and Barker are both in a conspiracy to conceal something; that they aided the murderer's escape — or at least that they reached the room before he escaped — and that they fabricated evidence of his escape through the window, whereas in all probability they had themselves let him go by lowering the bridge. That's my reading of the first half."

The two detectives shook their heads.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, if this is true, we only tumble out of one mystery into another," said the London inspector.

"And in some ways a worse one," added White Mason. "The lady has never been in America in all her life. What possible connection could she have with an American assassin which would cause her to shelter him?"

"I freely admit the difficulties," said Holmes. "I propose to make a little investigation of my own to-night, and it is just possible that it may contribute something to the common cause.”

“Can we help you, Mr. Holmes?”

“No, no! Darkness and Dr. Watson’s umbrella — my wants are simple. And Ames, the faithful Ames, no doubt he will stretch a point for me. All my lines of thought lead me back invariably to the one basic question — why should an athletic man develop his frame upon so unnatural an instrument as a single dumb-bell?”

It was late that night when Holmes returned from his solitary excursion. We slept in a double-bedded room, which was the best that the little country inn could do for us. I was already asleep when I was partly awakened by his entrance.

“Well, Holmes,” I murmured, “have you found anything out?”

He stood beside me in silence, his candle in his hand. Then the tall, lean figure inclined towards me. “I say, Watson,” he whispered, “would you be afraid to sleep in the same room with a lunatic, a man with softening of the brain, an idiot whose mind has lost its grip?”

“Not in the least,” I answered in astonishment.

“Ah, that’s lucky,” he said, and not another word would he utter that night.

CHAPTER 7 — The Solution

Next morning, after breakfast, we found Inspector MacDonald and White Mason seated in close consultation in the small parlour of the local police sergeant. On the table in front of them were piled a number of letters and telegrams, which they were carefully sorting and docketing. Three had been placed on one side.

“Still on the track of the elusive bicyclist?” Holmes asked cheerfully. “What is the latest news of the ruffian?”

MacDonald pointed ruefully to his heap of correspondence.

“He is at present reported from Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton, Derby, East Ham, Richmond, and fourteen other places. In three of them — East Ham, Leicester, and Liverpool — there is a clear case against him, and he has actually been arrested. The country seems to be full of the fugitives with yellow coats.”

“Dear me!” said Holmes sympathetically. “Now, Mr. Mac and you, Mr. White Mason, I wish to give you a very earnest piece of advice. When I went into this case with you I bargained, as you will no doubt remember, that I should not present you with half-proved theories, but that I should retain and work out my own ideas until I had satisfied myself that they were correct. For this reason I am not at the present moment telling you all that is in my mind. On the other hand, I said that I would play the game fairly by you, and I do not think it is a fair game to allow you for one unnecessary moment to waste your energies upon a profitless task. Therefore I am here to advise you this morning, and my advice to you is summed up in three words — abandon the case.”

MacDonald and White Mason stared in amazement at their celebrated colleague.

“You consider it hopeless!” cried the inspector.

“I consider your case to be hopeless. I do not consider that it is hopeless to arrive at the truth.”

“But this cyclist. He is not an invention. We have his description, his valise, his bicycle. The fellow must be somewhere. Why should we not get him?”

"Yes, yes, no doubt he is somewhere, and no doubt we shall get him; but I would not have you waste your energies in East Ham or Liverpool. I am sure that we can find some shorter cut to a result."

"You are holding something back. It's hardly fair of you, Mr. Holmes." The inspector was annoyed.

"You know my methods of work, Mr. Mac. But I will hold it back for the shortest time possible. I only wish to verify my details in one way, which can very readily be done, and then I make my bow and return to London, leaving my results entirely at your service. I owe you too much to act otherwise; for in all my experience I cannot recall any more singular and interesting study."

"This is clean beyond me, Mr. Holmes. We saw you when we returned from Tunbridge Wells last night, and you were in general agreement with our results. What has happened since then to give you a completely new idea of the case?"

"Well, since you ask me, I spent, as I told you that I would, some hours last night at the Manor House."

"Well, what happened?"

"Ah, I can only give you a very general answer to that for the moment. By the way, I have been reading a short but clear and interesting account of the old building, purchasable at the modest sum of one penny from the local tobacconist."

Here Holmes drew a small tract, embellished with a rude engraving of the ancient Manor House, from his waistcoat pocket.

"It immensely adds to the zest of an investigation, my dear Mr. Mac, when one is in conscious sympathy with the historical atmosphere of one's surroundings. Don't look so impatient; for I assure you that even so bald an account as this raises some sort of picture of the past in one's mind. Permit me to give you a sample. 'Erected in the fifth year of the reign of James I, and standing upon the site of a much older building, the Manor House of Birlstone presents one of the finest surviving examples of the moated Jacobean residence—'"

"You are making fools of us, Mr. Holmes!"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Mac! — the first sign of temper I have detected in you. Well, I won't read it verbatim, since you feel so strongly upon the subject. But when I tell you that there is some account of the taking of the place by a parliamentary colonel in 1644, of the concealment of Charles for several days in the course of the Civil War, and finally of a visit there by the second George, you will admit that there are various associations of interest connected with this ancient house."

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Holmes; but that is no business of ours."

"Is it not? Is it not? Breadth of view, my dear Mr. Mac, is one of the essentials of our profession. The interplay of ideas and the oblique uses of knowledge are often of extraordinary interest. You will excuse these remarks from one who, though a mere connoisseur of crime, is still rather older and perhaps more experienced than yourself."

"I'm the first to admit that," said the detective heartily. "You get to your point, I admit; but you have such a deuced round-the-corner way of doing it."

"Well, well, I'll drop past history and get down to present-day facts. I called last night, as I have already said, at the Manor House. I did not see either Barker or Mrs. Douglas. I saw no necessity to disturb them; but I was pleased to hear that the lady was not visibly pining and that she had partaken of an excellent dinner. My visit was specially made to the good Mr. Ames, with whom I exchanged some amiabilities, which culminated in his allowing me, without reference to anyone else, to sit alone for a time in the study."

"What! With that?" I ejaculated.

"No, no, everything is now in order. You gave permission for that, Mr. Mac, as I am informed. The room was in its normal state, and in it I passed an instructive quarter of an hour."

"What were you doing?"

"Well, not to make a mystery of so simple a matter, I was looking for the missing dumb-bell. It has always bulked rather large in my estimate of the case. I ended by finding it."

"Where?"

"Ah, there we come to the edge of the unexplored. Let me go a little further, a very little further, and I will promise that you shall share everything that I know."

"Well, we're bound to take you on your own terms," said the inspector; "but when it comes to telling us to abandon the case — why in the name of goodness should we abandon the case?"

"For the simple reason, my dear Mr. Mac, that you have not got the first idea what it is that you are investigating."

“We are investigating the murder of Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor.”

“Yes, yes, so you are. But don’t trouble to trace the mysterious gentleman upon the bicycle. I assure you that it won’t help you.”

“Then what do you suggest that we do?”

“I will tell you exactly what to do, if you will do it.”

“Well, I’m bound to say I’ve always found you had reason behind all your queer ways. I’ll do what you advise.”

“And you, Mr. White Mason?”

The country detective looked helplessly from one to the other. Holmes and his methods were new to him. “Well, if it is good enough for the inspector, it is good enough for me,” he said at last.

“Capital!” said Holmes. “Well, then, I should recommend a nice, cheery country walk for both of you. They tell me that the views from Birlstone Ridge over the Weald are very remarkable. No doubt lunch could be got at some suitable hostelry; though my ignorance of the country prevents me from recommending one. In the evening, tired but happy—”

“Man, this is getting past a joke!” cried MacDonald, rising angrily from his chair.

“Well, well, spend the day as you like,” said Holmes, patting him cheerfully upon the shoulder. “Do what you like and go where you will, but meet me here before dusk without fail — without fail, Mr. Mac.”

“That sounds more like sanity.”

“All of it was excellent advice; but I don’t insist, so long as you are here when I need you. But now, before we part, I want you to write a note to Mr. Barker.”

“Well?”

“I’ll dictate it, if you like. Ready?

“Dear Sir:

“It has struck me that it is our duty to drain the moat, in the hope that we may find some—”

“It’s impossible,” said the inspector. “I’ve made inquiry.”

“Tut, tut! My dear sir, please do what I ask you.”

“Well, go on.”

“ — in the hope that we may find something which may bear upon our investigation. I have made arrangements, and the workmen will be at work early to-morrow morning diverting the stream—”

“Impossible!”

“ — diverting the stream; so I thought it best to explain matters beforehand.

“Now sign that, and send it by hand about four o’clock. At that hour we shall meet again in this room. Until then we may each do what we like; for I can assure you that this inquiry has come to a definite pause.”

Evening was drawing in when we reassembled. Holmes was very serious in his manner, myself curious, and the detectives obviously critical and annoyed.

“Well, gentlemen,” said my friend gravely, “I am asking you now to put everything to the test with me, and you will judge for yourselves whether the observations I have made justify the conclusions to which I have come. It is a chill evening, and I do not know how long our expedition may last; so I beg that you will wear your warmest coats. It is of the first importance that we should be in our places before it grows dark; so with your permission we shall get started at once.”

We passed along the outer bounds of the Manor House park until we came to a place where there was a gap in the rails which fenced it. Through this we slipped, and then in the gathering gloom we followed Holmes until we had reached a shrubbery which lies nearly opposite to the main door and the drawbridge. The latter had not been raised. Holmes crouched down behind the screen of laurels, and we all three followed his example.

“Well, what are we to do now?” asked MacDonald with some gruffness.

“Possess our souls in patience and make as little noise as possible,” Holmes answered.

“What are we here for at all? I really think that you might treat us with more frankness.”

Holmes laughed. “Watson insists that I am the dramatist in real life,” said he. “Some touch of the artist wells up within me, and calls insistently for a well-staged performance. Surely our profession, Mr. Mac, would be a drab and sordid one if we did not sometimes set the scene so as to glorify our results. The blunt accusation, the brutal tap upon the shoulder — what can one make of such a denouement? But the quick inference, the subtle trap, the clever forecast of coming events, the triumphant vindication of bold theories — are these not the pride and the justification of our life’s work? At the present moment you thrill with the glamour of the situation and the anticipation of the hunt. Where would be that thrill if I had been as definite as a timetable? I only ask a little patience, Mr. Mac, and all will be clear to you."

"Well, I hope the pride and justification and the rest of it will come before we all get our death of cold," said the London detective with comic resignation.

We all had good reason to join in the aspiration; for our vigil was a long and bitter one. Slowly the shadows darkened over the long, sombre face of the old house. A cold, damp reek from the moat chilled us to the bones and set our teeth chattering. There was a single lamp over the gateway and a steady globe of light in the fatal study. Everything else was dark and still.

"How long is this to last?" asked the inspector finally. "And what is it we are watching for?"

"I have no more notion than you how long it is to last," Holmes answered with some asperity. "If criminals would always schedule their movements like railway trains, it would certainly be more convenient for all of us. As to what it is we — Well, THAT'S what we are watching for!"

As he spoke the bright, yellow light in the study was obscured by somebody passing to and fro before it. The laurels among which we lay were immediately opposite the window and not more than a hundred feet from it. Presently it was thrown open with a whining of hinges, and we could dimly see the dark outline of a man's head and shoulders looking out into the gloom. For some minutes he peered forth in furtive, stealthy fashion, as one who wishes to be assured that he is unobserved. Then he leaned forward, and in the intense silence we were aware of the soft lapping of agitated water. He seemed to be stirring up the moat with something which he held in his hand. Then suddenly he hauled something in as a fisherman lands a fish — some large, round object which obscured the light as it was dragged through the open casement.

"Now!" cried Holmes. "Now!"

We were all upon our feet, staggering after him with our stiffened limbs, while he ran swiftly across the bridge and rang violently at the bell. There was the rasping of bolts from the other side, and the amazed Ames stood in the entrance. Holmes brushed him aside without a word and, followed by all of us, rushed into the room which had been occupied by the man whom we had been watching.

The oil lamp on the table represented the glow which we had seen from outside. It was now in the hand of Cecil Barker, who held it towards us as we entered. Its light shone upon his strong, resolute, clean-shaved face and his menacing eyes.

"What the devil is the meaning of all this?" he cried. "What are you after, anyhow?"

Holmes took a swift glance round, and then pounced upon a sodden bundle tied together with cord which lay where it had been thrust under the writing table.

"This is what we are after, Mr. Barker — this bundle, weighted with a dumb-bell, which you have just raised from the bottom of the moat."

Barker stared at Holmes with amazement in his face. "How in thunder came you to know anything about it?" he asked.

"Simply that I put it there."

"You put it there! You!"

"Perhaps I should have said 'replaced it there,'" said Holmes. "You will remember, Inspector MacDonald, that I was somewhat struck by the absence of a dumb-bell. I drew your attention to it; but with the pressure of other events you had hardly the time to give it the consideration which would have enabled you to draw deductions from it. When water is near and a weight is missing it is not a very far-fetched supposition that something has been sunk in the water. The idea was at least worth testing; so with the help of Ames, who admitted me to the room, and the crook of Dr. Watson's umbrella, I was able last night to fish up and inspect this bundle.

"It was of the first importance, however, that we should be able to prove who placed it there. This we accomplished by the very obvious device of announcing that the moat would be dried to-morrow, which had, of course, the effect that whoever had hidden the bundle would most certainly withdraw it the moment that darkness enabled him to do so. We have no less than four witnesses as to who it was who took advantage of the opportunity, and so, Mr. Barker, I think the word lies now with you."

Sherlock Holmes put the sopping bundle upon the table beside the lamp and undid the cord which bound it. From within he extracted a dumb-bell, which he tossed down to its fellow in the corner. Next he drew forth a pair of boots. "American, as you perceive," he remarked, pointing to the toes. Then he laid upon the table a long, deadly, sheathed knife. Finally he unravelled a bundle of clothing, comprising a complete set of underclothes, socks, a gray tweed suit, and a short yellow overcoat.

"The clothes are commonplace," remarked Holmes, "save only the overcoat, which is full of suggestive touches." He held it tenderly towards the light. "Here, as you perceive, is the inner pocket prolonged into the lining in such fashion as to give ample space for the truncated fowling piece. The tailor's tab is on the neck—'Neal, Outfitter, Vermissa, U.S.A.' I have spent an instructive afternoon in the rector's library, and have enlarged my knowledge by adding the fact that Vermissa is a flourishing little town at the head of one of the best known coal and iron valleys in the United States. I have some recollection, Mr. Barker, that you associated the coal districts with Mr. Douglas's first wife, and it would surely not be too far-fetched an inference that the V.V. upon the card by the dead body might stand for Vermissa Valley, or that this very valley which sends forth emissaries of murder may be that Valley of Fear of which we have heard. So much is fairly clear. And now, Mr. Barker, I seem to be standing rather in the way of your explanation."

It was a sight to see Cecil Barker's expressive face during this exposition of the great detective. Anger, amazement, consternation, and indecision swept over it in turn. Finally he took refuge in a somewhat acrid irony.

"You know such a lot, Mr. Holmes, perhaps you had better tell us some more," he sneered.

"I have no doubt that I could tell you a great deal more, Mr. Barker; but it would come with a better grace from you."

"Oh, you think so, do you? Well, all I can say is that if there's any secret here it is not my secret, and I am not the man to give it away."

"Well, if you take that line, Mr. Barker," said the inspector quietly, "we must just keep you in sight until we have the warrant and can hold you."

"You can do what you damn please about that," said Barker defiantly.

The proceedings seemed to have come to a definite end so far as he was concerned; for one had only to look at that granite face to realise that no peine forte et dure would ever force him to plead against his will. The deadlock was broken, however, by a woman's voice. Mrs. Douglas had been standing listening at the half opened door, and now she entered the room.

"You have done enough for now, Cecil," said she. "Whatever comes of it in the future, you have done enough."

"Enough and more than enough," remarked Sherlock Holmes gravely. "I have every sympathy with you, madam, and should strongly urge you to have some confidence in the common sense of our jurisdiction and to take the police voluntarily into your complete confidence. It may be that I am myself at fault for not following up the hint which you conveyed to me through my friend, Dr. Watson; but, at that time I had every reason to believe that you were directly concerned in the crime. Now I am assured that this is not so. At the same time, there is much that is unexplained, and I should strongly recommend that you ask Mr. Douglas to tell us his own story."

Mrs. Douglas gave a cry of astonishment at Holmes's words. The detectives and I must have echoed it, when we were aware of a man who seemed to have emerged from the wall, who advanced now from the gloom of the corner in which he had appeared. Mrs. Douglas turned, and in an instant her arms were round him. Barker had seized his outstretched hand.

"It's best this way, Jack," his wife repeated; "I am sure that it is best."

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Douglas," said Sherlock Holmes, "I am sure that you will find it best."

The man stood blinking at us with the dazed look of one who comes from the dark into the light. It was a remarkable face, bold gray eyes, a strong, short-clipped, grizzled moustache, a square, projecting chin, and a humorous mouth. He took a good look at us all, and then to my amazement he advanced to me and handed me a bundle of paper.

"I've heard of you," said he in a voice which was not quite English and not quite American, but was altogether mellow and pleasing. "You are the historian of this bunch. Well, Dr. Watson, you've never had such a story as that pass through your hands before, and I'll lay my last dollar on that. Tell it your own way; but there are the facts, and you can't miss the public so long as you have those. I've been cooped up two days, and I've spent the daylight hours — as much daylight as I could get in that rat trap — in putting the thing into words. You're welcome to them — you and your public. There's the story of the Valley of Fear."

"That's the past, Mr. Douglas," said Sherlock Holmes quietly. "What we desire now is to hear your story of the present."

"You'll have it, sir," said Douglas. "May I smoke as I talk? Well, thank you, Mr. Holmes. You're a smoker yourself, if I remember right, and you'll guess what it is to be sitting for two days with tobacco in your pocket and afraid that the smell will give you away." He leaned against the mantelpiece and sucked at the cigar which Holmes had handed him. "I've heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I never guessed that I should meet you. But before you are through with that," he nodded at my papers, "you will say I've brought you something fresh."

Inspector MacDonald had been staring at the newcomer with the greatest amazement. "Well, this fairly beats me!" he cried at last. "If you are Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor, then whose death have we been investigating for these two days, and where in the world have you sprung from now? You seemed to me to come out of the floor like a jack-in-a-box."

"Ah, Mr. Mac," said Holmes, shaking a reproving forefinger, "you would not read that excellent local compilation which described the concealment of King Charles. People did not hide in those days without excellent hiding places, and the hiding place that has once been used may be again. I had persuaded myself that we should find Mr. Douglas under this roof."

"And how long have you been playing this trick upon us, Mr. Holmes?" said the inspector angrily. "How long have you allowed us to waste ourselves upon a search that you knew to be an absurd one?"

"Not one instant, my dear Mr. Mac. Only last night did I form my views of the case. As they could not be put to the proof until this evening, I invited you and your colleague to take a holiday for the day. Pray what more could I do? When I found the suit of clothes in the moat, it at once became apparent to me that the body we had found could not have been the body of Mr. John Douglas at all, but must be that of the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells. No other conclusion was possible. Therefore I had to determine where Mr. John Douglas himself could be, and the balance of probability was that with the connivance of his wife and his friend he was concealed in a house which had such conveniences for a fugitive, and awaiting quieter times when he could make his final escape."

"Well, you figured it out about right," said Douglas approvingly. "I thought I'd dodge your British law; for I was not sure how I stood under it, and also I saw my chance to throw these hounds once for all off my track. Mind you, from first to last I have done nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing that I would not do again; but you'll judge that for yourselves when I tell you my story. Never mind warning me, Inspector: I'm ready to stand pat upon the truth.

"I'm not going to begin at the beginning. That's all there," he indicated my bundle of papers, "and a mighty queer yarn you'll find it. It all comes down to this: That there are some men that have good cause to hate me and would give their last dollar to know that they had got me. So long as I am alive and they are alive, there is no safety in this world for me. They hunted me from Chicago to California, then they chased me out of America; but when I married and settled down in this quiet spot I thought my last years were going to be peaceable.

“I never explained to my wife how things were. Why should I pull her into it? She would never have a quiet moment again; but would always be imagining trouble. I fancy she knew something, for I may have dropped a word here or a word there; but until yesterday, after you gentlemen had seen her, she never knew the rights of the matter. She told you all she knew, and so did Barker here; for on the night when this thing happened there was mighty little time for explanations. She knows everything now, and I would have been a wiser man if I had told her sooner. But it was a hard question, dear,” he took her hand for an instant in his own, “and I acted for the best.

“Well, gentlemen, the day before these happenings I was over in Tunbridge Wells, and I got a glimpse of a man in the street. It was only a glimpse; but I have a quick eye for these things, and I never doubted who it was. It was the worst enemy I had among them all — one who has been after me like a hungry wolf after a caribou all these years. I knew there was trouble coming, and I came home and made ready for it. I guessed I’d fight through it all right on my own, my luck was a proverb in the States about ‘76. I never doubted that it would be with me still.

“I was on my guard all that next day, and never went out into the park. It’s as well, or he’d have had the drop on me with that buckshot gun of his before ever I could draw on him. After the bridge was up — my mind was always more restful when that bridge was up in the evenings — I put the thing clear out of my head. I never dreamed of his getting into the house and waiting for me. But when I made my round in my dressing gown, as was my habit, I had no sooner entered the study than I scented danger. I guess when a man has had dangers in his life — and I’ve had more than most in my time — there is a kind of sixth sense that waves the red flag. I saw the signal clear enough, and yet I couldn’t tell you why. Next instant I spotted a boot under the window curtain, and then I saw why plain enough.

“I’d just the one candle that was in my hand; but there was a good light from the hall lamp through the open door. I put down the candle and jumped for a hammer that I’d left on the mantel. At the same moment he sprang at me. I saw the glint of a knife, and I lashed at him with the hammer. I got him somewhere; for the knife tinkled down on the floor. He dodged round the table as quick as an eel, and a moment later he'd got his gun from under his coat. I heard him cock it; but I had got hold of it before he could fire. I had it by the barrel, and we wrestled for it all ends up for a minute or more. It was death to the man that lost his grip.

"He never lost his grip; but he got it butt downward for a moment too long. Maybe it was I that pulled the trigger. Maybe we just jolted it off between us. Anyhow, he got both barrels in the face, and there I was, staring down at all that was left of Ted Baldwin. I'd recognised him in the township, and again when he sprang for me; but his own mother wouldn't recognise him as I saw him then. I'm used to rough work; but I fairly turned sick at the sight of him.

"I was hanging on the side of the table when Barker came hurrying down. I heard my wife coming, and I ran to the door and stopped her. It was no sight for a woman. I promised I'd come to her soon. I said a word or two to Barker — he took it all in at a glance — and we waited for the rest to come along. But there was no sign of them. Then we understood that they could hear nothing, and that all that had happened was known only to ourselves.

"It was at that instant that the idea came to me. I was fairly dazzled by the brilliance of it. The man's sleeve had slipped up and there was the branded mark of the lodge upon his forearm. See here!"

The man whom we had known as Douglas turned up his own coat and cuff to show a brown triangle within a circle exactly like that which we had seen upon the dead man.

"It was the sight of that which started me on it. I seemed to see it all clear at a glance. There were his height and hair and figure, about the same as my own. No one could swear to his face, poor devil! I brought down this suit of clothes, and in a quarter of an hour Barker and I had put my dressing gown on him and he lay as you found him. We tied all his things into a bundle, and I weighted them with the only weight I could find and put them through the window. The card he had meant to lay upon my body was lying beside his own.

"My rings were put on his finger; but when it came to the wedding ring," he held out his muscular hand, "you can see for yourselves that I had struck the limit. I have not moved it since the day I was married, and it would have taken a file to get it off. I don't know, anyhow, that I should have cared to part with it; but if I had wanted to I couldn't. So we just had to leave that detail to take care of itself. On the other hand, I brought a bit of plaster down and put it where I am wearing one myself at this instant. You slipped up there, Mr. Holmes, clever as you are; for if you had chanced to take off that plaster you would have found no cut underneath it.

"Well, that was the situation. If I could lie low for a while and then get away where I could be joined by my 'widow' we should have a chance at last of living in peace for the rest of our lives. These devils would give me no rest so long as I was above ground; but if they saw in the papers that Baldwin had got his man, there would be an end of all my troubles. I hadn't much time to make it all clear to Barker and to my wife; but they understood enough to be able to help me. I knew all about this hiding place, so did Ames; but it never entered his head to connect it with the matter. I retired into it, and it was up to Barker to do the rest.

"I guess you can fill in for yourselves what he did. He opened the window and made the mark on the sill to give an idea of how the murderer escaped. It was a tall order, that; but as the bridge was up there was no other way. Then, when everything was fixed, he rang the bell for all he was worth. What happened afterward you know. And so, gentlemen, you can do what you please; but I've told you the truth and the whole truth, so help me God! What I ask you now is how do I stand by the English law?"

There was a silence which was broken by Sherlock Holmes.

"The English law is in the main a just law. You will get no worse than your deserts from that, Mr. Douglas. But I would ask you how did this man know that you lived here, or how to get into your house, or where to hide to get you?"

"I know nothing of this."

Holmes's face was very white and grave. "The story is not over yet, I fear," said he. "You may find worse dangers than the English law, or even than your enemies from America. I see trouble before you, Mr. Douglas. You'll take my advice and still be on your guard."

And now, my long-suffering readers, I will ask you to come away with me for a time, far from the Sussex Manor House of Birlstone, and far also from the year of grace in which we made our eventful journey which ended with the strange story of the man who had been known as John Douglas. I wish you to journey back some twenty years in time, and westward some thousands of miles in space, that I may lay before you a singular and terrible narrative — so singular and so terrible that you may find it hard to believe that even as I tell it, even so did it occur.

Do not think that I intrude one story before another is finished. As you read on you will find that this is not so. And when I have detailed those distant events and you have solved this mystery of the past, we shall meet once more in those rooms on Baker Street, where this, like so many other wonderful happenings, will find its end.

PART 2 — The Scowrers

CHAPTER 1 — The Man

It was the fourth of February in the year 1875. It had been a severe winter, and the snow lay deep in the gorges of the Gilmerton Mountains. The steam ploughs had, however, kept the railroad open, and the evening train which connects the long line of coal-mining and iron-working settlements was slowly groaning its way up the steep gradients which lead from Stagville on the plain to Vermissa, the central township which lies at the head of Vermissa Valley. From this point the track sweeps downward to Bartons Crossing, Helmdale, and the purely agricultural county of Merton. It was a single track railroad; but at every siding — and they were numerous — long lines of trucks piled with coal and iron ore told of the hidden wealth which had brought a rude population and a bustling life to this most desolate corner of the United States of America.

For desolate it was! Little could the first pioneer who had traversed it have ever imagined that the fairest prairies and the most lush water pastures were valueless compared to this gloomy land of black crag and tangled forest. Above the dark and often scarcely penetrable woods upon their flanks, the high, bare crowns of the mountains, white snow, and jagged rock towered upon each flank, leaving a long, winding, tortuous valley in the centre. Up this the little train was slowly crawling.

The oil lamps had just been lit in the leading passenger car, a long, bare carriage in which some twenty or thirty people were seated. The greater number of these were workmen returning from their day’s toil in the lower part of the valley. At least a dozen, by their grimed faces and the safety lanterns which they carried, proclaimed themselves miners. These sat smoking in a group and conversed in low voices, glancing occasionally at two men on the opposite side of the car, whose uniforms and badges showed them to be policemen.

Several women of the labouring class and one or two travellers who might have been small local storekeepers made up the rest of the company, with the exception of one young man in a corner by himself. It is with this man that we are concerned. Take a good look at him; for he is worth it.

He is a fresh-complexioned, middle-sized young man, not far, one would guess, from his thirtieth year. He has large, shrewd, humorous gray eyes which twinkle inquiringly from time to time as he looks round through his spectacles at the people about him. It is easy to see that he is of a sociable and possibly simple disposition, anxious to be friendly to all men. Anyone could pick him at once as gregarious in his habits and communicative in his nature, with a quick wit and a ready smile. And yet the man who studied him more closely might discern a certain firmness of jaw and grim tightness about the lips which would warn him that there were depths beyond, and that this pleasant, brown-haired young Irishman might conceivably leave his mark for good or evil upon any society to which he was introduced.

Having made one or two tentative remarks to the nearest miner, and receiving only short, gruff replies, the traveller resigned himself to uncongenial silence, staring moodily out of the window at the fading landscape.

It was not a cheering prospect. Through the growing gloom there pulsed the red glow of the furnaces on the sides of the hills. Great heaps of slag and dumps of cinders loomed up on each side, with the high shafts of the collieries towering above them. Huddled groups of mean, wooden houses, the windows of which were beginning to outline themselves in light, were scattered here and there along the line, and the frequent halting places were crowded with their swarthy inhabitants.

The iron and coal valleys of the Vermissa district were no resorts for the leisured or the cultured. Everywhere there were stern signs of the crudest battle of life, the rude work to be done, and the rude, strong workers who did it.

The young traveller gazed out into this dismal country with a face of mingled repulsion and interest, which showed that the scene was new to him. At intervals he drew from his pocket a bulky letter to which he referred, and on the margins of which he scribbled some notes. Once from the back of his waist he produced something which one would hardly have expected to find in the possession of so mild-mannered a man. It was a navy revolver of the largest size. As he turned it slantwise to the light, the glint upon the rims of the copper shells within the drum showed that it was fully loaded. He quickly restored it to his secret pocket, but not before it had been observed by a working man who had seated himself upon the adjoining bench.

“Hullo, mate!” said he. “You seem heeled and ready.”

The young man smiled with an air of embarrassment.

“Yes,” said he, “we need them sometimes in the place I come from.”

“And where may that be?”

“I’m last from Chicago.”

“A stranger in these parts?”

“Yes.”

“You may find you need it here,” said the workman.

“Ah! is that so?” The young man seemed interested.

“Have you heard nothing of doings hereabouts?”

“Nothing out of the way.”

“Why, I thought the country was full of it. You’ll hear quick enough. What made you come here?”

“I heard there was always work for a willing man.”

“Are you a member of the union?”

“Sure.”

“Then you’ll get your job, I guess. Have you any friends?”

“Not yet; but I have the means of making them.”

“How’s that, then?”

“I am one of the Eminent Order of Freemen. There’s no town without a lodge, and where there is a lodge I’ll find my friends.”

The remark had a singular effect upon his companion. He glanced round suspiciously at the others in the car. The miners were still whispering among themselves. The two police officers were dozing. He came across, seated himself close to the young traveller, and held out his hand.

“Put it there,” he said.

A hand-grip passed between the two.

“I see you speak the truth,” said the workman. “But it’s well to make certain.” He raised his right hand to his right eyebrow. The traveller at once raised his left hand to his left eyebrow.

“Dark nights are unpleasant,” said the workman.

“Yes, for strangers to travel,” the other answered.

“That’s good enough. I’m Brother Scanlan, Lodge 341, Vermissa Valley. Glad to see you in these parts.”

“Thank you. I’m Brother John McMurdo, Lodge 29, Chicago. Bodymaster J.H. Scott. But I am in luck to meet a brother so early.”

“Well, there are plenty of us about. You won’t find the order more flourishing anywhere in the States than right here in Vermissa Valley. But we could do with some lads like you. I can't understand a spry man of the union finding no work to do in Chicago."

"I found plenty of work to do," said McMurdo.

"Then why did you leave?"

McMurdo nodded towards the policemen and smiled. "I guess those chaps would be glad to know," he said.

Scanlan groaned sympathetically. "In trouble?" he asked in a whisper.

"Deep."

"A penitentiary job?"

"And the rest."

"Not a killing!"

"It's early days to talk of such things," said McMurdo with the air of a man who had been surprised into saying more than he intended. "I've my own good reasons for leaving Chicago, and let that be enough for you. Who are you that you should take it on yourself to ask such things?" His gray eyes gleamed with sudden and dangerous anger from behind his glasses.

"All right, mate, no offense meant. The boys will think none the worse of you, whatever you may have done. Where are you bound for now?"

"Vermissa."

"That's the third halt down the line. Where are you staying?"

McMurdo took out an envelope and held it close to the murky oil lamp. "Here is the address — Jacob Shafter, Sheridan Street. It's a boarding house that was recommended by a man I knew in Chicago."

"Well, I don't know it; but Vermissa is out of my beat. I live at Hobson's Patch, and that's here where we are drawing up. But, say, there's one bit of advice I'll give you before we part: If you're in trouble in Vermissa, go straight to the Union House and see Boss McGinty. He is the Bodymaster of Vermissa Lodge, and nothing can happen in these parts unless Black Jack McGinty wants it. So long, mate! Maybe we'll meet in lodge one of these evenings. But mind my words: If you are in trouble, go to Boss McGinty."

Scanlan descended, and McMurdo was left once again to his thoughts. Night had now fallen, and the flames of the frequent furnaces were roaring and leaping in the darkness. Against their lurid background dark figures were bending and straining, twisting and turning, with the motion of winch or of windlass, to the rhythm of an eternal clank and roar.

"I guess hell must look something like that," said a voice.

McMurdo turned and saw that one of the policemen had shifted in his seat and was staring out into the fiery waste.

"For that matter," said the other policeman, "I allow that hell must BE something like that. If there are worse devils down yonder than some we could name, it's more than I'd expect. I guess you are new to this part, young man?"

"Well, what if I am?" McMurdo answered in a surly voice.

"Just this, mister, that I should advise you to be careful in choosing your friends. I don't think I'd begin with Mike Scanlan or his gang if I were you."

"What the hell is it to you who are my friends?" roared McMurdo in a voice which brought every head in the carriage round to witness the altercation. "Did I ask you for your advice, or did you think me such a sucker that I couldn't move without it? You speak when you are spoken to, and by the Lord you'd have to wait a long time if it was me!" He thrust out his face and grinned at the patrolmen like a snarling dog.

The two policemen, heavy, good-natured men, were taken aback by the extraordinary vehemence with which their friendly advances had been rejected.

"No offense, stranger," said one. "It was a warning for your own good, seeing that you are, by your own showing, new to the place."

"I'm new to the place; but I'm not new to you and your kind!" cried McMurdo in cold fury. "I guess you're the same in all places, shoving your advice in when nobody asks for it."

"Maybe we'll see more of you before very long," said one of the patrolmen with a grin. "You're a real hand-picked one, if I am a judge."

"I was thinking the same," remarked the other. "I guess we may meet again."

"I'm not afraid of you, and don't you think it!" cried McMurdo. "My name's Jack McMurdo — see? If you want me, you'll find me at Jacob Shafter's on Sheridan Street, Vermissa; so I'm not hiding from you, am I? Day or night I dare to look the like of you in the face — don't make any mistake about that!"

There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration from the miners at the dauntless demeanour of the newcomer, while the two policemen shrugged their shoulders and renewed a conversation between themselves.

A few minutes later the train ran into the ill-lit station, and there was a general clearing; for Vermissa was by far the largest town on the line. McMurdo picked up his leather gripsack and was about to start off into the darkness, when one of the miners accosted him.

"By Gar, mate! you know how to speak to the cops," he said in a voice of awe. "It was grand to hear you. Let me carry your grip and show you the road. I'm passing Shafter's on the way to my own shack."

There was a chorus of friendly "Good-nights" from the other miners as they passed from the platform. Before ever he had set foot in it, McMurdo the turbulent had become a character in Vermissa.

The country had been a place of terror; but the town was in its way even more depressing. Down that long valley there was at least a certain gloomy grandeur in the huge fires and the clouds of drifting smoke, while the strength and industry of man found fitting monuments in the hills which he had spilled by the side of his monstrous excavations. But the town showed a dead level of mean ugliness and squalor. The broad street was churned up by the traffic into a horrible rutted paste of muddy snow. The sidewalks were narrow and uneven. The numerous gas-lamps served only to show more clearly a long line of wooden houses, each with its veranda facing the street, unkempt and dirty.

As they approached the centre of the town the scene was brightened by a row of well-lit stores, and even more by a cluster of saloons and gaming houses, in which the miners spent their hard-earned but generous wages.

"That's the Union House," said the guide, pointing to one saloon which rose almost to the dignity of being a hotel. "Jack McGinty is the boss there."

"What sort of a man is he?" McMurdo asked.

"What! have you never heard of the boss?"

"How could I have heard of him when you know that I am a stranger in these parts?"

"Well, I thought his name was known clear across the country. It's been in the papers often enough."

"What for?"

"Well," the miner lowered his voice—"over the affairs."

"What affairs?"

"Good Lord, mister! you are queer, if I must say it without offense. There's only one set of affairs that you'll hear of in these parts, and that's the affairs of the Scowrers.”

“Why, I seem to have read of the Scowrers in Chicago. A gang of murderers, are they not?”

“Hush, on your life!” cried the miner, standing still in alarm, and gazing in amazement at his companion. “Man, you won’t live long in these parts if you speak in the open street like that. Many a man has had the life beaten out of him for less.”

“Well, I know nothing about them. It’s only what I have read.”

“And I’m not saying that you have not read the truth.” The man looked nervously round him as he spoke, peering into the shadows as if he feared to see some lurking danger. “If killing is murder, then God knows there is murder and to spare. But don’t you dare to breathe the name of Jack McGinty in connection with it, stranger; for every whisper goes back to him, and he is not one that is likely to let it pass. Now, that’s the house you’re after, that one standing back from the street. You’ll find old Jacob Shafter that runs it as honest a man as lives in this township.”

“I thank you,” said McMurdo, and shaking hands with his new acquaintance he plodded, gripsack in hand, up the path which led to the dwelling house, at the door of which he gave a resounding knock.

It was opened at once by someone very different from what he had expected. It was a woman, young and singularly beautiful. She was of the German type, blonde and fair-haired, with the piquant contrast of a pair of beautiful dark eyes with which she surveyed the stranger with surprise and a pleasing embarrassment which brought a wave of colour over her pale face. Framed in the bright light of the open doorway, it seemed to McMurdo that he had never seen a more beautiful picture; the more attractive for its contrast with the sordid and gloomy surroundings. A lovely violet growing upon one of those black slag-heaps of the mines would not have seemed more surprising. So entranced was he that he stood staring without a word, and it was she who broke the silence.

“I thought it was father,” said she with a pleasing little touch of a German accent. “Did you come to see him? He is down town. I expect him back every minute.”

McMurdo continued to gaze at her in open admiration until her eyes dropped in confusion before this masterful visitor.

“No, miss,” he said at last, “I’m in no hurry to see him. But your house was recommended to me for board. I thought it might suit me — and now I know it will.”

“You are quick to make up your mind,” said she with a smile.

“Anyone but a blind man could do as much,” the other answered.

She laughed at the compliment. “Come right in, sir,” she said. “I’m Miss Ettie Shafter, Mr. Shafter’s daughter. My mother’s dead, and I run the house. You can sit down by the stove in the front room until father comes along — Ah, here he is! So you can fix things with him right away.”

A heavy, elderly man came plodding up the path. In a few words McMurdo explained his business. A man of the name of Murphy had given him the address in Chicago. He in turn had had it from someone else. Old Shafter was quite ready. The stranger made no bones about terms, agreed at once to every condition, and was apparently fairly flush of money. For seven dollars a week paid in advance he was to have board and lodging.

So it was that McMurdo, the self-confessed fugitive from justice, took up his abode under the roof of the Shafters, the first step which was to lead to so long and dark a train of events, ending in a far distant land.

CHAPTER 2 — The Bodymaster

McMurdo was a man who made his mark quickly. Wherever he was the folk around soon knew it. Within a week he had become infinitely the most important person at Shafter’s. There were ten or a dozen boarders there; but they were honest foremen or commonplace clerks from the stores, of a very different calibre from the young Irishman. Of an evening when they gathered together his joke was always the readiest, his conversation the brightest, and his song the best. He was a born boon companion, with a magnetism which drew good humour from all around him.

And yet he showed again and again, as he had shown in the railway carriage, a capacity for sudden, fierce anger, which compelled the respect and even the fear of those who met him. For the law, too, and all who were connected with it, he exhibited a bitter contempt which delighted some and alarmed others of his fellow boarders.

From the first he made it evident, by his open admiration, that the daughter of the house had won his heart from the instant that he had set eyes upon her beauty and her grace. He was no backward suitor. On the second day he told her that he loved her, and from then onward he repeated the same story with an absolute disregard of what she might say to discourage him.

“Someone else?” he would cry. “Well, the worse luck for someone else! Let him look out for himself! Am I to lose my life’s chance and all my heart’s desire for someone else? You can keep on saying no, Ettie: the day will come when you will say yes, and I’m young enough to wait.”

He was a dangerous suitor, with his glib Irish tongue, and his pretty, coaxing ways. There was about him also that glamour of experience and of mystery which attracts a woman’s interest, and finally her love. He could talk of the sweet valleys of County Monaghan from which he came, of the lovely, distant island, the low hills and green meadows of which seemed the more beautiful when imagination viewed them from this place of grime and snow.

Then he was versed in the life of the cities of the North, of Detroit, and the lumber camps of Michigan, and finally of Chicago, where he had worked in a planing mill. And afterwards came the hint of romance, the feeling that strange things had happened to him in that great city, so strange and so intimate that they might not be spoken of. He spoke wistfully of a sudden leaving, a breaking of old ties, a flight into a strange world, ending in this dreary valley, and Ettie listened, her dark eyes gleaming with pity and with sympathy — those two qualities which may turn so rapidly and so naturally to love.

McMurdo had obtained a temporary job as bookkeeper for he was a well-educated man. This kept him out most of the day, and he had not found occasion yet to report himself to the head of the lodge of the Eminent Order of Freemen. He was reminded of his omission, however, by a visit one evening from Mike Scanlan, the fellow member whom he had met in the train. Scanlan, the small, sharp-faced, nervous, black-eyed man, seemed glad to see him once more. After a glass or two of whisky he broached the object of his visit.

"Say, McMurdo," said he, "I remembered your address, so I made bold to call. I'm surprised that you've not reported to the Bodymaster. Why haven't you seen Boss McGinty yet?"

"Well, I had to find a job. I have been busy."

"You must find time for him if you have none for anything else. Good Lord, man! you're a fool not to have been down to the Union House and registered your name the first morning after you came here! If you run against him — well, you mustn't, that's all!"

McMurdo showed mild surprise. "I've been a member of the lodge for over two years, Scanlan, but I never heard that duties were so pressing as all that."

"Maybe not in Chicago."

"Well, it's the same society here."

"Is it?"

Scanlan looked at him long and fixedly. There was something sinister in his eyes.

"Isn't it?"

"You'll tell me that in a month's time. I hear you had a talk with the patrolmen after I left the train."

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, it got about — things do get about for good and for bad in this district."

"Well, yes. I told the hounds what I thought of them."

“By the Lord, you’ll be a man after McGinty’s heart!”

“What, does he hate the police too?”

Scanlan burst out laughing. “You go and see him, my lad,” said he as he took his leave. “It’s not the police but you that he’ll hate if you don’t! Now, take a friend’s advice and go at once!”

It chanced that on the same evening McMurdo had another more pressing interview which urged him in the same direction. It may have been that his attentions to Ettie had been more evident than before, or that they had gradually obtruded themselves into the slow mind of his good German host; but, whatever the cause, the boarding-house keeper beckoned the young man into his private room and started on the subject without any circumlocution.

“It seems to me, mister,” said he, “that you are gettin’ set on my Ettie. Ain’t that so, or am I wrong?”

“Yes, that is so,” the young man answered.

“Vell, I vant to tell you right now that it ain’t no manner of use. There’s someone slipped in afore you.”

“She told me so.”

“Vell, you can lay that she told you truth. But did she tell you who it vas?”

“No, I asked her; but she wouldn’t tell.”

“I dare say not, the leetle baggage! Perhaps she did not vish to frighten you avay.”

“Frighten!” McMurdo was on fire in a moment.

“Ah, yes, my friend! You need not be ashamed to be frightened of him. It is Teddy Baldwin.”

“And who the devil is he?”

“He is a boss of Scowrers.”

“Scowrers! I’ve heard of them before. It’s Scowrers here and Scowrers there, and always in a whisper! What are you all afraid of? Who are the Scowrers?”

The boarding-house keeper instinctively sank his voice, as everyone did who talked about that terrible society. “The Scowrers,” said he, “are the Eminent Order of Freemen!”

The young man stared. “Why, I am a member of that order myself.”

“You! I vould never have had you in my house if I had known it — not if you vere to pay me a hundred dollar a veek.”

“What’s wrong with the order? It’s for charity and good fellowship. The rules say so.”

“Maybe in some places. Not here!”

“What is it here?”

“It’s a murder society, that’s vat it is.”

McMurdo laughed incredulously. “How can you prove that?” he asked.

“Prove it! Are there not fifty murders to prove it? Vat about Milman and Van Shorst, and the Nicholson family, and old Mr. Hyam, and little Billy James, and the others? Prove it! Is there a man or a voman in this valley vat does not know it?”

“See here!” said McMurdo earnestly. “I want you to take back what you’ve said, or else make it good. One or the other you must do before I quit this room. Put yourself in my place. Here am I, a stranger in the town. I belong to a society that I know only as an innocent one. You’ll find it through the length and breadth of the States, but always as an innocent one. Now, when I am counting upon joining it here, you tell me that it is the same as a murder society called the Scowrers. I guess you owe me either an apology or else an explanation, Mr. Shafter.”

“I can but tell you vat the whole vorld knows, mister. The bosses of the one are the bosses of the other. If you offend the one, it is the other vat vill strike you. We have proved it too often.”

“That’s just gossip — I want proof!” said McMurdo.

“If you live here long you vill get your proof. But I forget that you are yourself one of them. You vill soon be as bad as the rest. But you vill find other lodgings, mister. I cannot have you here. Is it not bad enough that one of these people come courting my Ettie, and that I dare not turn him down, but that I should have another for my boarder? Yes, indeed, you shall not sleep here after to-night!”

McMurdo found himself under sentence of banishment both from his comfortable quarters and from the girl whom he loved. He found her alone in the sitting-room that same evening, and he poured his troubles into her ear.

“Sure, your father is after giving me notice,” he said. “It’s little I would care if it was just my room, but indeed, Ettie, though it’s only a week that I’ve known you, you are the very breath of life to me, and I can’t live without you!”

“Oh, hush, Mr. McMurdo, don’t speak so!” said the girl. “I have told you, have I not, that you are too late? There is another, and if I have not promised to marry him at once, at least I can promise no one else.”

“Suppose I had been first, Ettie, would I have had a chance?”

The girl sank her face into her hands. “I wish to heaven that you had been first!” she sobbed.

McMurdo was down on his knees before her in an instant. “For God’s sake, Ettie, let it stand at that!” he cried. “Will you ruin your life and my own for the sake of this promise? Follow your heart, acushla! ‘Tis a safer guide than any promise before you knew what it was that you were saying.”

He had seized Ettie’s white hand between his own strong brown ones.

“Say that you will be mine, and we will face it out together!”

“Not here?”

“Yes, here.”

“No, no, Jack!” His arms were round her now. “It could not be here. Could you take me away?”

A struggle passed for a moment over McMurdo’s face; but it ended by setting like granite. “No, here,” he said. “I’ll hold you against the world, Ettie, right here where we are!”

“Why should we not leave together?”

“No, Ettie, I can’t leave here.”

“But why?”

“I’d never hold my head up again if I felt that I had been driven out. Besides, what is there to be afraid of? Are we not free folks in a free country? If you love me, and I you, who will dare to come between?”

“You don’t know, Jack. You’ve been here too short a time. You don’t know this Baldwin. You don’t know McGinty and his Scowrers.”

“No, I don’t know them, and I don’t fear them, and I don’t believe in them!” said McMurdo. “I’ve lived among rough men, my darling, and instead of fearing them it has always ended that they have feared me — always, Ettie. It’s mad on the face of it! If these men, as your father says, have done crime after crime in the valley, and if everyone knows them by name, how comes it that none are brought to justice? You answer me that, Ettie!”

“Because no witness dares to appear against them. He would not live a month if he did. Also because they have always their own men to swear that the accused one was far from the scene of the crime. But surely, Jack, you must have read all this. I had understood that every paper in the United States was writing about it."

"Well, I have read something, it is true; but I had thought it was a story. Maybe these men have some reason in what they do. Maybe they are wronged and have no other way to help themselves."

"Oh, Jack, don't let me hear you speak so! That is how he speaks — the other one!"

"Baldwin — he speaks like that, does he?"

"And that is why I loathe him so. Oh, Jack, now I can tell you the truth. I loathe him with all my heart; but I fear him also. I fear him for myself; but above all I fear him for father. I know that some great sorrow would come upon us if I dared to say what I really felt. That is why I have put him off with half-promises. It was in real truth our only hope. But if you would fly with me, Jack, we could take father with us and live forever far from the power of these wicked men."

Again there was the struggle upon McMurdo's face, and again it set like granite. "No harm shall come to you, Ettie — nor to your father either. As to wicked men, I expect you may find that I am as bad as the worst of them before we're through."

"No, no, Jack! I would trust you anywhere."

McMurdo laughed bitterly. "Good Lord! how little you know of me! Your innocent soul, my darling, could not even guess what is passing in mine. But, hullo, who's the visitor?"

The door had opened suddenly, and a young fellow came swaggering in with the air of one who is the master. He was a handsome, dashing young man of about the same age and build as McMurdo himself. Under his broad-brimmed black felt hat, which he had not troubled to remove, a handsome face with fierce, domineering eyes and a curved hawk-bill of a nose looked savagely at the pair who sat by the stove.

Ettie had jumped to her feet full of confusion and alarm. "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Baldwin," said she. "You're earlier than I had thought. Come and sit down."

Baldwin stood with his hands on his hips looking at McMurdo. "Who is this?" he asked curtly.

"It's a friend of mine, Mr. Baldwin, a new boarder here. Mr. McMurdo, may I introduce you to Mr. Baldwin?"

The young men nodded in surly fashion to each other.

“Maybe Miss Ettie has told you how it is with us?” said Baldwin.

“I didn’t understand that there was any relation between you.”

“Didn’t you? Well, you can understand it now. You can take it from me that this young lady is mine, and you’ll find it a very fine evening for a walk.”

“Thank you, I am in no humour for a walk.”

“Aren’t you?” The man’s savage eyes were blazing with anger. “Maybe you are in a humour for a fight, Mr. Boarder!”

“That I am!” cried McMurdo, springing to his feet. “You never said a more welcome word.”

“For God’s sake, Jack! Oh, for God’s sake!” cried poor, distracted Ettie. “Oh, Jack, Jack, he will hurt you!”

“Oh, it’s Jack, is it?” said Baldwin with an oath. “You’ve come to that already, have you?”

“Oh, Ted, be reasonable — be kind! For my sake, Ted, if ever you loved me, be big-hearted and forgiving!”

“I think, Ettie, that if you were to leave us alone we could get this thing settled,” said McMurdo quietly. “Or maybe, Mr. Baldwin, you will take a turn down the street with me. It’s a fine evening, and there’s some open ground beyond the next block.”

“I’ll get even with you without needing to dirty my hands,” said his enemy. “You’ll wish you had never set foot in this house before I am through with you!”

“No time like the present,” cried McMurdo.

“I’ll choose my own time, mister. You can leave the time to me. See here!” He suddenly rolled up his sleeve and showed upon his forearm a peculiar sign which appeared to have been branded there. It was a circle with a triangle within it. “D’you know what that means?”

“I neither know nor care!”

“Well, you will know, I’ll promise you that. You won’t be much older, either. Perhaps Miss Ettie can tell you something about it. As to you, Ettie, you’ll come back to me on your knees — d’ye hear, girl? — on your knees — and then I’ll tell you what your punishment may be. You’ve sowed — and by the Lord, I’ll see that you reap!” He glanced at them both in fury. Then he turned upon his heel, and an instant later the outer door had banged behind him.

For a few moments McMurdo and the girl stood in silence. Then she threw her arms around him.

"Oh, Jack, how brave you were! But it is no use, you must fly! To-night — Jack — to-night! It's your only hope. He will have your life. I read it in his horrible eyes. What chance have you against a dozen of them, with Boss McGinty and all the power of the lodge behind them?"

McMurdo disengaged her hands, kissed her, and gently pushed her back into a chair. "There, acushla, there! Don't be disturbed or fear for me. I'm a Freeman myself. I'm after telling your father about it. Maybe I am no better than the others; so don't make a saint of me. Perhaps you hate me too, now that I've told you as much?"

"Hate you, Jack? While life lasts I could never do that! I've heard that there is no harm in being a Freeman anywhere but here; so why should I think the worse of you for that? But if you are a Freeman, Jack, why should you not go down and make a friend of Boss McGinty? Oh, hurry, Jack, hurry! Get your word in first, or the hounds will be on your trail."

"I was thinking the same thing," said McMurdo. "I'll go right now and fix it. You can tell your father that I'll sleep here to-night and find some other quarters in the morning."

The bar of McGinty's saloon was crowded as usual; for it was the favourite loafing place of all the rougher elements of the town. The man was popular; for he had a rough, jovial disposition which formed a mask, covering a great deal which lay behind it. But apart from this popularity, the fear in which he was held throughout the township, and indeed down the whole thirty miles of the valley and past the mountains on each side of it, was enough in itself to fill his bar; for none could afford to neglect his good will.

Besides those secret powers which it was universally believed that he exercised in so pitiless a fashion, he was a high public official, a municipal councillor, and a commissioner of roads, elected to the office through the votes of the ruffians who in turn expected to receive favours at his hands. Assessments and taxes were enormous; the public works were notoriously neglected, the accounts were slurred over by bribed auditors, and the decent citizen was terrorized into paying public blackmail, and holding his tongue lest some worse thing befall him.

Thus it was that, year by year, Boss McGinty's diamond pins became more obtrusive, his gold chains more weighty across a more gorgeous vest, and his saloon stretched farther and farther, until it threatened to absorb one whole side of the Market Square.

McMurdo pushed open the swinging door of the saloon and made his way amid the crowd of men within, through an atmosphere blurred with tobacco smoke and heavy with the smell of spirits. The place was brilliantly lighted, and the huge, heavily gilt mirrors upon every wall reflected and multiplied the garish illumination. There were several bartenders in their shirt sleeves, hard at work mixing drinks for the loungers who fringed the broad, brass-trimmed counter.

At the far end, with his body resting upon the bar and a cigar stuck at an acute angle from the corner of his mouth, stood a tall, strong, heavily built man who could be none other than the famous McGinty himself. He was a black-maned giant, bearded to the cheek-bones, and with a shock of raven hair which fell to his collar. His complexion was as swarthy as that of an Italian, and his eyes were of a strange dead black, which, combined with a slight squint, gave them a particularly sinister appearance.

All else in the man — his noble proportions, his fine features, and his frank bearing — fitted in with that jovial, man-to-man manner which he affected. Here, one would say, is a bluff, honest fellow, whose heart would be sound however rude his outspoken words might seem. It was only when those dead, dark eyes, deep and remorseless, were turned upon a man that he shrank within himself, feeling that he was face to face with an infinite possibility of latent evil, with a strength and courage and cunning behind it which made it a thousand times more deadly.

Having had a good look at his man, McMurdo elbowed his way forward with his usual careless audacity, and pushed himself through the little group of courtiers who were fawning upon the powerful boss, laughing uproariously at the smallest of his jokes. The young stranger’s bold gray eyes looked back fearlessly through their glasses at the deadly black ones which turned sharply upon him.

“Well, young man, I can’t call your face to mind.”

“I’m new here, Mr. McGinty.”

“You are not so new that you can’t give a gentleman his proper title.”

“He’s Councillor McGinty, young man,” said a voice from the group.

“I’m sorry, Councillor. I’m strange to the ways of the place. But I was advised to see you.”

“Well, you see me. This is all there is. What d’you think of me?”

“Well, it’s early days. If your heart is as big as your body, and your soul as fine as your face, then I’d ask for nothing better,” said McMurdo.

“By Gar! you’ve got an Irish tongue in your head anyhow,” cried the saloon-keeper, not quite certain whether to humour this audacious visitor or to stand upon his dignity.

“So you are good enough to pass my appearance?”

“Sure,” said McMurdo.

“And you were told to see me?”

“I was.”

“And who told you?”

“Brother Scanlan of Lodge 341, Vermissa. I drink your health Councillor, and to our better acquaintance.” He raised a glass with which he had been served to his lips and elevated his little finger as he drank it.

McGinty, who had been watching him narrowly, raised his thick black eyebrows. “Oh, it’s like that, is it?” said he. “I’ll have to look a bit closer into this, Mister—”

“McMurdo.”

“A bit closer, Mr. McMurdo; for we don’t take folk on trust in these parts, nor believe all we’re told neither. Come in here for a moment, behind the bar.”

There was a small room there, lined with barrels. McGinty carefully closed the door, and then seated himself on one of them, biting thoughtfully on his cigar and surveying his companion with those disquieting eyes. For a couple of minutes he sat in complete silence. McMurdo bore the inspection cheerfully, one hand in his coat pocket, the other twisting his brown moustache. Suddenly McGinty stooped and produced a wicked-looking revolver.

“See here, my joker,” said he, “if I thought you were playing any game on us, it would be short work for you.”

“This is a strange welcome,” McMurdo answered with some dignity, “for the Bodymaster of a lodge of Freemen to give to a stranger brother.”

“Ay, but it’s just that same that you have to prove,” said McGinty, “and God help you if you fail! Where were you made?”

“Lodge 29, Chicago.”

“When?”

“June 24, 1872.”

“What Bodymaster?”

“James H. Scott.”

“Who is your district ruler?”

“Bartholomew Wilson.”

“Hum! You seem glib enough in your tests. What are you doing here?”

“Working, the same as you — but a poorer job.”

“You have your back answer quick enough.”

“Yes, I was always quick of speech.”

“Are you quick of action?”

“I have had that name among those that knew me best.”

“Well, we may try you sooner than you think. Have you heard anything of the lodge in these parts?”

“I’ve heard that it takes a man to be a brother.”

“True for you, Mr. McMurdo. Why did you leave Chicago?”

“I’m damned if I tell you that!”

McGinty opened his eyes. He was not used to being answered in such fashion, and it amused him. “Why won’t you tell me?”

“Because no brother may tell another a lie.”

“Then the truth is too bad to tell?”

“You can put it that way if you like.”

“See here, mister, you can’t expect me, as Bodymaster, to pass into the lodge a man for whose past he can’t answer.”

McMurdo looked puzzled. Then he took a worn newspaper cutting from an inner pocket.

“You wouldn’t squeal on a fellow?” said he.

“I’ll wipe my hand across your face if you say such words to me!” cried McGinty hotly.

“You are right, Councillor,” said McMurdo meekly. “I should apologize. I spoke without thought. Well, I know that I am safe in your hands. Look at that clipping.”

McGinty glanced his eyes over the account of the shooting of one Jonas Pinto, in the Lake Saloon, Market Street, Chicago, in the New Year week of 1874.

“Your work?” he asked, as he handed back the paper.

McMurdo nodded.

“Why did you shoot him?”

“I was helping Uncle Sam to make dollars. Maybe mine were not as good gold as his, but they looked as well and were cheaper to make. This man

Pinto helped me to shove the queer—”

“To do what?”

“Well, it means to pass the dollars out into circulation. Then he said he would split. Maybe he did split. I didn’t wait to see. I just killed him and lighted out for the coal country.”

“Why the coal country?”

“‘Cause I’d read in the papers that they weren’t too particular in those parts.”

McGinty laughed. “You were first a coiner and then a murderer, and you came to these parts because you thought you’d be welcome.”

“That’s about the size of it,” McMurdo answered.

“Well, I guess you’ll go far. Say, can you make those dollars yet?”

McMurdo took half a dozen from his pocket. “Those never passed the Philadelphia mint,” said he.

“You don’t say!” McGinty held them to the light in his enormous hand, which was hairy as a gorilla’s. “I can see no difference. Gar! you’ll be a mighty useful brother, I’m thinking! We can do with a bad man or two among us, Friend McMurdo: for there are times when we have to take our own part. We’d soon be against the wall if we didn’t shove back at those that were pushing us.”

“Well, I guess I’ll do my share of shoving with the rest of the boys.”

“You seem to have a good nerve. You didn’t squirm when I shoved this gun at you.”

“It was not me that was in danger.”

“Who then?”

“It was you, Councillor.” McMurdo drew a cocked pistol from the side pocket of his peajacket. “I was covering you all the time. I guess my shot would have been as quick as yours.”

“By Gar!” McGinty flushed an angry red and then burst into a roar of laughter. “Say, we’ve had no such holy terror come to hand this many a year. I reckon the lodge will learn to be proud of you.... Well, what the hell do you want? And can’t I speak alone with a gentleman for five minutes but you must butt in on us?”

The bartender stood abashed. “I’m sorry, Councillor, but it’s Ted Baldwin. He says he must see you this very minute.”

The message was unnecessary; for the set, cruel face of the man himself was looking over the servant’s shoulder. He pushed the bartender out and closed the door on him.

“So,” said he with a furious glance at McMurdo, “you got here first, did you? I’ve a word to say to you, Councillor, about this man.”

“Then say it here and now before my face,” cried McMurdo.

“I’ll say it at my own time, in my own way.”

“Tut! Tut!” said McGinty, getting off his barrel. “This will never do. We have a new brother here, Baldwin, and it’s not for us to greet him in such fashion. Hold out your hand, man, and make it up!”

“Never!” cried Baldwin in a fury.

“I’ve offered to fight him if he thinks I have wronged him,” said McMurdo. “I’ll fight him with fists, or, if that won’t satisfy him, I’ll fight him any other way he chooses. Now, I’ll leave it to you, Councillor, to judge between us as a Bodymaster should.”

“What is it, then?”

“A young lady. She’s free to choose for herself.”

“Is she?” cried Baldwin.

“As between two brothers of the lodge I should say that she was,” said the Boss.

“Oh, that’s your ruling, is it?”

“Yes, it is, Ted Baldwin,” said McGinty, with a wicked stare. “Is it you that would dispute it?”

“You would throw over one that has stood by you this five years in favour of a man that you never saw before in your life? You’re not Bodymaster for life, Jack McGinty, and by God! when next it comes to a vote—”

The Councillor sprang at him like a tiger. His hand closed round the other’s neck, and he hurled him back across one of the barrels. In his mad fury he would have squeezed the life out of him if McMurdo had not interfered.

“Easy, Councillor! For heaven’s sake, go easy!” he cried, as he dragged him back.

McGinty released his hold, and Baldwin, cowed and shaken gasping for breath, and shivering in every limb, as one who has looked over the very edge of death, sat up on the barrel over which he had been hurled.

“You’ve been asking for it this many a day, Ted Baldwin — now you’ve got it!” cried McGinty, his huge chest rising and falling. “Maybe you think if I was voted down from Bodymaster you would find yourself in my shoes.

It's for the lodge to say that. But so long as I am the chief I'll have no man lift his voice against me or my rulings."

"I have nothing against you," mumbled Baldwin, feeling his throat.

"Well, then," cried the other, relapsing in a moment into a bluff joviality, "we are all good friends again and there's an end of the matter."

He took a bottle of champagne down from the shelf and twisted out the cork.

"See now," he continued, as he filled three high glasses. "Let us drink the quarrelling toast of the lodge. After that, as you know, there can be no bad blood between us. Now, then the left hand on the apple of my throat. I say to you, Ted Baldwin, what is the offense, sir?"

"The clouds are heavy," answered Baldwin

"But they will forever brighten."

"And this I swear!"

The men drank their glasses, and the same ceremony was performed between Baldwin and McMurdo

"There!" cried McGinty, rubbing his hands. "That's the end of the black blood. You come under lodge discipline if it goes further, and that's a heavy hand in these parts, as Brother Baldwin knows — and as you will damn soon find out, Brother McMurdo, if you ask for trouble!"

"Faith, I'd be slow to do that," said McMurdo. He held out his hand to Baldwin. "I'm quick to quarrel and quick to forgive. It's my hot Irish blood, they tell me. But it's over for me, and I bear no grudge."

Baldwin had to take the proffered hand; for the baleful eye of the terrible Boss was upon him. But his sullen face showed how little the words of the other had moved him.

McGinty clapped them both on the shoulders. "Tut! These girls! These girls!" he cried. "To think that the same petticoats should come between two of my boys! It's the devil's own luck! Well, it's the colleen inside of them that must settle the question; for it's outside the jurisdiction of a Bodymaster — and the Lord be praised for that! We have enough on us, without the women as well. You'll have to be affiliated to Lodge 341, Brother McMurdo. We have our own ways and methods, different from Chicago. Saturday night is our meeting, and if you come then, we'll make you free forever of the Vermissa Valley."

CHAPTER 3 — Lodge 341, Vermissa

On the day following the evening which had contained so many exciting events, McMurdo moved his lodgings from old Jacob Shafter’s and took up his quarters at the Widow MacNamara’s on the extreme outskirts of the town. Scanlan, his original acquaintance aboard the train, had occasion shortly afterwards to move into Vermissa, and the two lodged together. There was no other boarder, and the hostess was an easy-going old Irishwoman who left them to themselves; so that they had a freedom for speech and action welcome to men who had secrets in common.

Shafter had relented to the extent of letting McMurdo come to his meals there when he liked; so that his intercourse with Ettie was by no means broken. On the contrary, it drew closer and more intimate as the weeks went by.

In his bedroom at his new abode McMurdo felt it safe to take out the coining moulds, and under many a pledge of secrecy a number of brothers from the lodge were allowed to come in and see them, each carrying away in his pocket some examples of the false money, so cunningly struck that there was never the slightest difficulty or danger in passing it. Why, with such a wonderful art at his command, McMurdo should condescend to work at all was a perpetual mystery to his companions; though he made it clear to anyone who asked him that if he lived without any visible means it would very quickly bring the police upon his track.

One policeman was indeed after him already; but the incident, as luck would have it, did the adventurer a great deal more good than harm. After the first introduction there were few evenings when he did not find his way to McGinty’s saloon, there to make closer acquaintance with “the boys,” which was the jovial title by which the dangerous gang who infested the place were known to one another. His dashing manner and fearlessness of speech made him a favourite with them all; while the rapid and scientific way in which he polished off his antagonist in an “all in” bar-room scrap earned the respect of that rough community. Another incident, however, raised him even higher in their estimation.

Just at the crowded hour one night, the door opened and a man entered with the quiet blue uniform and peaked cap of the mine police. This was a special body raised by the railways and colliery owners to supplement the efforts of the ordinary civil police, who were perfectly helpless in the face of the organized ruffianism which terrorized the district. There was a hush as he entered, and many a curious glance was cast at him; but the relations between policemen and criminals are peculiar in some parts of the States, and McGinty himself, standing behind his counter, showed no surprise when the policeman enrolled himself among his customers.

“A straight whisky; for the night is bitter,” said the police officer. “I don’t think we have met before, Councillor?”

“You’ll be the new captain?” said McGinty.

“That’s so. We’re looking to you, Councillor, and to the other leading citizens, to help us in upholding law and order in this township. Captain Marvin is my name.”

“We’d do better without you, Captain Marvin,” said McGinty coldly; “for we have our own police of the township, and no need for any imported goods. What are you but the paid tool of the capitalists, hired by them to club or shoot your poorer fellow citizen?”

“Well, well, we won’t argue about that,” said the police officer good-humouredly. “I expect we all do our duty same as we see it; but we can’t all see it the same.” He had drunk off his glass and had turned to go, when his eyes fell upon the face of Jack McMurdo, who was scowling at his elbow. “Hullo! Hullo!” he cried, looking him up and down. “Here’s an old acquaintance!”

McMurdo shrank away from him. “I was never a friend to you nor any other cursed copper in my life,” said he.

“An acquaintance isn’t always a friend,” said the police captain, grinning. “You’re Jack McMurdo of Chicago, right enough, and don’t you deny it!”

McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. “I’m not denying it,” said he. “D’ye think I’m ashamed of my own name?”

“You’ve got good cause to be, anyhow.”

“What the devil d’you mean by that?” he roared with his fists clenched.

“No, no, Jack, bluster won’t do with me. I was an officer in Chicago before ever I came to this darned coal bunker, and I know a Chicago crook when I see one.”

McMurdo’s face fell. “Don’t tell me that you’re Marvin of the Chicago Central!” he cried.

"Just the same old Teddy Marvin, at your service. We haven't forgotten the shooting of Jonas Pinto up there."

"I never shot him."

"Did you not? That's good impartial evidence, ain't it? Well, his death came in uncommon handy for you, or they would have had you for shoving the queer. Well, we can let that be bygones; for, between you and me — and perhaps I'm going further than my duty in saying it — they could get no clear case against you, and Chicago's open to you to-morrow."

"I'm very well where I am."

"Well, I've given you the pointer, and you're a sulky dog not to thank me for it."

"Well, I suppose you mean well, and I do thank you," said McMurdo in no very gracious manner.

"It's mum with me so long as I see you living on the straight," said the captain. "But, by the Lord! if you get off after this, it's another story! So good-night to you — and good-night, Councillor."

He left the bar-room; but not before he had created a local hero. McMurdo's deeds in far Chicago had been whispered before. He had put off all questions with a smile, as one who did not wish to have greatness thrust upon him. But now the thing was officially confirmed. The bar loafers crowded round him and shook him heartily by the hand. He was free of the community from that time on. He could drink hard and show little trace of it; but that evening, had his mate Scanlan not been at hand to lead him home, the feted hero would surely have spent his night under the bar.

On a Saturday night McMurdo was introduced to the lodge. He had thought to pass in without ceremony as being an initiate of Chicago; but there were particular rites in Vermissa of which they were proud, and these had to be undergone by every postulant. The assembly met in a large room reserved for such purposes at the Union House. Some sixty members assembled at Vermissa; but that by no means represented the full strength of the organization, for there were several other lodges in the valley, and others across the mountains on each side, who exchanged members when any serious business was afoot, so that a crime might be done by men who were strangers to the locality. Altogether there were not less than five hundred scattered over the coal district.

In the bare assembly room the men were gathered round a long table. At the side was a second one laden with bottles and glasses, on which some members of the company were already turning their eyes. McGinty sat at the head with a flat black velvet cap upon his shock of tangled black hair, and a coloured purple stole round his neck, so that he seemed to be a priest presiding over some diabolical ritual. To right and left of him were the higher lodge officials, the cruel, handsome face of Ted Baldwin among them. Each of these wore some scarf or medallion as emblem of his office.

They were, for the most part, men of mature age; but the rest of the company consisted of young fellows from eighteen to twenty-five, the ready and capable agents who carried out the commands of their seniors. Among the older men were many whose features showed the tigerish, lawless souls within; but looking at the rank and file it was difficult to believe that these eager and open-faced young fellows were in very truth a dangerous gang of murderers, whose minds had suffered such complete moral perversion that they took a horrible pride in their proficiency at the business, and looked with deepest respect at the man who had the reputation of making what they called "a clean job."

To their contorted natures it had become a spirited and chivalrous thing to volunteer for service against some man who had never injured them, and whom in many cases they had never seen in their lives. The crime committed, they quarrelled as to who had actually struck the fatal blow, and amused one another and the company by describing the cries and contortions of the murdered man.

At first they had shown some secrecy in their arrangements; but at the time which this narrative describes their proceedings were extraordinarily open, for the repeated failure of the law had proved to them that, on the one hand, no one would dare to witness against them, and on the other they had an unlimited number of stanch witnesses upon whom they could call, and a well-filled treasure chest from which they could draw the funds to engage the best legal talent in the state. In ten long years of outrage there had been no single conviction, and the only danger that ever threatened the Scowrers lay in the victim himself — who, however outnumbered and taken by surprise, might and occasionally did leave his mark upon his assailants.

McMurdo had been warned that some ordeal lay before him; but no one would tell him in what it consisted. He was led now into an outer room by two solemn brothers. Through the plank partition he could hear the murmur of many voices from the assembly within. Once or twice he caught the sound of his own name, and he knew that they were discussing his candidacy. Then there entered an inner guard with a green and gold sash across his chest.

“The Bodymaster orders that he shall be trussed, blinded, and entered,” said he.

The three of them removed his coat, turned up the sleeve of his right arm, and finally passed a rope round above the elbows and made it fast. They next placed a thick black cap right over his head and the upper part of his face, so that he could see nothing. He was then led into the assembly hall.

It was pitch dark and very oppressive under his hood. He heard the rustle and murmur of the people round him, and then the voice of McGinty sounded dull and distant through the covering of his ears.

“John McMurdo,” said the voice, “are you already a member of the Ancient Order of Freemen?”

He bowed in assent.

“Is your lodge No. 29, Chicago?”

He bowed again.

“Dark nights are unpleasant,” said the voice.

“Yes, for strangers to travel,” he answered.

“The clouds are heavy.”

“Yes, a storm is approaching.”

“Are the brethren satisfied?” asked the Bodymaster.

There was a general murmur of assent.

“We know, Brother, by your sign and by your countersign that you are indeed one of us,” said McGinty. “We would have you know, however, that in this county and in other counties of these parts we have certain rites, and also certain duties of our own which call for good men. Are you ready to be tested?”

“I am.”

“Are you of stout heart?”

“I am.”

“Take a stride forward to prove it.”

As the words were said he felt two hard points in front of his eyes, pressing upon them so that it appeared as if he could not move forward without a danger of losing them. None the less, he nerved himself to step resolutely out, and as he did so the pressure melted away. There was a low murmur of applause.

“He is of stout heart,” said the voice. “Can you bear pain?”

“As well as another,” he answered.

“Test him!”

It was all he could do to keep himself from screaming out, for an agonizing pain shot through his forearm. He nearly fainted at the sudden shock of it; but he bit his lip and clenched his hands to hide his agony.

“I can take more than that,” said he.

This time there was loud applause. A finer first appearance had never been made in the lodge. Hands clapped him on the back, and the hood was plucked from his head. He stood blinking and smiling amid the congratulations of the brothers.

“One last word, Brother McMurdo,” said McGinty. “You have already sworn the oath of secrecy and fidelity, and you are aware that the punishment for any breach of it is instant and inevitable death?”

“I am,” said McMurdo.

“And you accept the rule of the Bodymaster for the time being under all circumstances?”

“I do.”

“Then in the name of Lodge 341, Vermissa, I welcome you to its privileges and debates. You will put the liquor on the table, Brother Scanlan, and we will drink to our worthy brother.”

McMurdo’s coat had been brought to him; but before putting it on he examined his right arm, which still smarted heavily. There on the flesh of the forearm was a circle with a triangle within it, deep and red, as the branding iron had left it. One or two of his neighbours pulled up their sleeves and showed their own lodge marks.

“We’ve all had it,” said one; “but not all as brave as you over it.”

“Tut! It was nothing,” said he; but it burned and ached all the same.

When the drinks which followed the ceremony of initiation had all been disposed of, the business of the lodge proceeded. McMurdo, accustomed only to the prosaic performances of Chicago, listened with open ears and more surprise than he ventured to show to what followed.

“The first business on the agenda paper,” said McGinty, “is to read the following letter from Division Master Windle of Merton County Lodge 249. He says:

“Dear Sir:

“There is a job to be done on Andrew Rae of Rae & Sturmash, coal owners near this place. You will remember that your lodge owes us a return, having had the service of two brethren in the matter of the patrolman last fall. You will send two good men, they will be taken charge of by Treasurer Higgins of this lodge, whose address you know. He will show them when to act and where. Yours in freedom,

"J.W. WINDLE D.M.A.O.F."

"Windle has never refused us when we have had occasion to ask for the loan of a man or two, and it is not for us to refuse him." McGinty paused and looked round the room with his dull, malevolent eyes. "Who will volunteer for the job?"

Several young fellows held up their hands. The Bodymaster looked at them with an approving smile.

"You'll do, Tiger Cormac. If you handle it as well as you did the last, you won't be wrong. And you, Wilson."

"I've no pistol," said the volunteer, a mere boy in his teens.

"It's your first, is it not? Well, you have to be blooded some time. It will be a great start for you. As to the pistol, you'll find it waiting for you, or I'm mistaken. If you report yourselves on Monday, it will be time enough. You'll get a great welcome when you return."

"Any reward this time?" asked Cormac, a thick-set, dark-faced, brutal-looking young man, whose ferocity had earned him the nickname of "Tiger."

"Never mind the reward. You just do it for the honour of the thing. Maybe when it is done there will be a few odd dollars at the bottom of the box."

"What has the man done?" asked young Wilson.

"Sure, it's not for the likes of you to ask what the man has done. He has been judged over there. That's no business of ours. All we have to do is to carry it out for them, same as they would for us. Speaking of that, two brothers from the Merton lodge are coming over to us next week to do some business in this quarter."

"Who are they?" asked someone.

"Faith, it is wiser not to ask. If you know nothing, you can testify nothing, and no trouble can come of it. But they are men who will make a clean job when they are about it."

"And time, too!" cried Ted Baldwin. "Folk are gettin' out of hand in these parts. It was only last week that three of our men were turned off by

Foreman Blaker. It's been owing him a long time, and he'll get it full and proper."

"Get what?" McMurdo whispered to his neighbour.

"The business end of a buckshot cartridge!" cried the man with a loud laugh. "What think you of our ways, Brother?"

McMurdo's criminal soul seemed to have already absorbed the spirit of the vile association of which he was now a member. "I like it well," said he. "'Tis a proper place for a lad of mettle."

Several of those who sat around heard his words and applauded them.

"What's that?" cried the black-maned Bodymaster from the end of the table.

"'Tis our new brother, sir, who finds our ways to his taste."

McMurdo rose to his feet for an instant. "I would say, Eminent Bodymaster, that if a man should be wanted I should take it as an honour to be chosen to help the lodge."

There was great applause at this. It was felt that a new sun was pushing its rim above the horizon. To some of the elders it seemed that the progress was a little too rapid.

"I would move," said the secretary, Harraway, a vulture-faced old graybeard who sat near the chairman, "that Brother McMurdo should wait until it is the good pleasure of the lodge to employ him."

"Sure, that was what I meant; I'm in your hands," said McMurdo.

"Your time will come, Brother," said the chairman. "We have marked you down as a willing man, and we believe that you will do good work in these parts. There is a small matter to-night in which you may take a hand if it so please you."

"I will wait for something that is worth while."

"You can come to-night, anyhow, and it will help you to know what we stand for in this community. I will make the announcement later. Meanwhile," he glanced at his agenda paper, "I have one or two more points to bring before the meeting. First of all, I will ask the treasurer as to our bank balance. There is the pension to Jim Carnaway's widow. He was struck down doing the work of the lodge, and it is for us to see that she is not the loser."

"Jim was shot last month when they tried to kill Chester Wilcox of Marley Creek," McMurdo's neighbour informed him.

"The funds are good at the moment," said the treasurer, with the bankbook in front of him. "The firms have been generous of late. Max Linder & Co. paid five hundred to be left alone. Walker Brothers sent in a hundred; but I took it on myself to return it and ask for five. If I do not hear by Wednesday, their winding gear may get out of order. We had to burn their breaker last year before they became reasonable. Then the West Section Coaling Company has paid its annual contribution. We have enough on hand to meet any obligations."

"What about Archie Swindon?" asked a brother.

"He has sold out and left the district. The old devil left a note for us to say that he had rather be a free crossing sweeper in New York than a large mine owner under the power of a ring of blackmailers. By Gar! it was as well that he made a break for it before the note reached us! I guess he won't show his face in this valley again."

An elderly, clean-shaved man with a kindly face and a good brow rose from the end of the table which faced the chairman. "Mr. Treasurer," he asked, "may I ask who has bought the property of this man that we have driven out of the district?"

"Yes, Brother Morris. It has been bought by the State & Merton County Railroad Company."

"And who bought the mines of Todman and of Lee that came into the market in the same way last year?"

"The same company, Brother Morris."

"And who bought the ironworks of Manson and of Shuman and of Van Deher and of Atwood, which have all been given up of late?"

"They were all bought by the West Gilmerton General Mining Company."

"I don't see, Brother Morris," said the chairman, "that it matters to us who buys them, since they can't carry them out of the district."

"With all respect to you, Eminent Bodymaster, I think it may matter very much to us. This process has been going on now for ten long years. We are gradually driving all the small men out of trade. What is the result? We find in their places great companies like the Railroad or the General Iron, who have their directors in New York or Philadelphia, and care nothing for our threats. We can take it out of their local bosses; but it only means that others will be sent in their stead. And we are making it dangerous for ourselves. The small men could not harm us. They had not the money nor the power.

So long as we did not squeeze them too dry, they would stay on under our power. But if these big companies find that we stand between them and their profits, they will spare no pains and no expense to hunt us down and bring us to court."

There was a hush at these ominous words, and every face darkened as gloomy looks were exchanged. So omnipotent and unchallenged had they been that the very thought that there was possible retribution in the background had been banished from their minds. And yet the idea struck a chill to the most reckless of them.

"It is my advice," the speaker continued, "that we go easier upon the small men. On the day that they have all been driven out the power of this society will have been broken."

Unwelcome truths are not popular. There were angry cries as the speaker resumed his seat. McGinty rose with gloom upon his brow.

"Brother Morris," said he, "you were always a croaker. So long as the members of this lodge stand together there is no power in the United States that can touch them. Sure, have we not tried it often enough in the lawcourts? I expect the big companies will find it easier to pay than to fight, same as the little companies do. And now, Brethren," McGinty took off his black velvet cap and his stole as he spoke, "this lodge has finished its business for the evening, save for one small matter which may be mentioned when we are parting. The time has now come for fraternal refreshment and for harmony."

Strange indeed is human nature. Here were these men, to whom murder was familiar, who again and again had struck down the father of the family, some man against whom they had no personal feeling, without one thought of compunction or of compassion for his weeping wife or helpless children, and yet the tender or pathetic in music could move them to tears. McMurdo had a fine tenor voice, and if he had failed to gain the good will of the lodge before, it could no longer have been withheld after he had thrilled them with "I'm Sitting on the Stile, Mary," and "On the Banks of Allan Water."

In his very first night the new recruit had made himself one of the most popular of the brethren, marked already for advancement and high office. There were other qualities needed, however, besides those of good fellowship, to make a worthy Freeman, and of these he was given an example before the evening was over. The whisky bottle had passed round many times, and the men were flushed and ripe for mischief when their Bodymaster rose once more to address them.

“Boys,” said he, “there’s one man in this town that wants trimming up, and it’s for you to see that he gets it. I’m speaking of James Stanger of the Herald. You’ve seen how he’s been opening his mouth against us again?”

There was a murmur of assent, with many a muttered oath. McGinty took a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket.

“LAW AND ORDER!”

That’s how he heads it.

“REIGN OF TERROR IN THE COAL AND IRON DISTRICT

“Twelve years have now elapsed since the first assassinations which proved the existence of a criminal organization in our midst. From that day these outrages have never ceased, until now they have reached a pitch which makes us the opprobrium of the civilised world. Is it for such results as this that our great country welcomes to its bosom the alien who flies from the despotisms of Europe? Is it that they shall themselves become tyrants over the very men who have given them shelter, and that a state of terrorism and lawlessness should be established under the very shadow of the sacred folds of the starry Flag of Freedom which would raise horror in our minds if we read of it as existing under the most effete monarchy of the East? The men are known. The organization is patent and public. How long are we to endure it? Can we forever live —

“Sure, I’ve read enough of the slush!” cried the chairman, tossing the paper down upon the table. “That’s what he says of us. The question I’m asking you is what shall we say to him?”

“Kill him!” cried a dozen fierce voices.

“I protest against that,” said Brother Morris, the man of the good brow and shaved face. “I tell you, Brethren, that our hand is too heavy in this valley, and that there will come a point where in self-defense every man will unite to crush us out. James Stanger is an old man. He is respected in the township and the district. His paper stands for all that is solid in the valley. If that man is struck down, there will be a stir through this state that will only end with our destruction.”

“And how would they bring about our destruction, Mr. Standback?” cried McGinty. “Is it by the police? Sure, half of them are in our pay and half of them afraid of us. Or is it by the law courts and the judge? Haven’t we tried that before now, and what ever came of it?”

“There is a Judge Lynch that might try the case,” said Brother Morris.

A general shout of anger greeted the suggestion.

“I have but to raise my finger,” cried McGinty, “and I could put two hundred men into this town that would clear it out from end to end.” Then suddenly raising his voice and bending his huge black brows into a terrible frown, “See here, Brother Morris, I have my eye on you, and have had for some time! You’ve no heart yourself, and you try to take the heart out of others. It will be an ill day for you, Brother Morris, when your own name comes on our agenda paper, and I’m thinking that it’s just there that I ought to place it.”

Morris had turned deadly pale, and his knees seemed to give way under him as he fell back into his chair. He raised his glass in his trembling hand and drank before he could answer. “I apologize, Eminent Bodymaster, to you and to every brother in this lodge if I have said more than I should. I am a faithful member — you all know that — and it is my fear lest evil come to the lodge which makes me speak in anxious words. But I have greater trust in your judgment than in my own, Eminent Bodymaster, and I promise you that I will not offend again.”

The Bodymaster’s scowl relaxed as he listened to the humble words. “Very good, Brother Morris. It’s myself that would be sorry if it were needful to give you a lesson. But so long as I am in this chair we shall be a united lodge in word and in deed. And now, boys,” he continued, looking round at the company, “I’ll say this much, that if Stanger got his full deserts there would be more trouble than we need ask for. These editors hang together, and every journal in the state would be crying out for police and troops. But I guess you can give him a pretty severe warning. Will you fix it, Brother Baldwin?”

“Sure!” said the young man eagerly.

“How many will you take?”

“Half a dozen, and two to guard the door. You’ll come, Gower, and you, Mansel, and you, Scanlan, and the two Willabys.”

“I promised the new brother he should go,” said the chairman.

Ted Baldwin looked at McMurdo with eyes which showed that he had not forgotten nor forgiven. “Well, he can come if he wants,” he said in a surly voice. “That’s enough. The sooner we get to work the better.”

The company broke up with shouts and yells and snatches of drunken song. The bar was still crowded with revellers, and many of the brethren remained there. The little band who had been told off for duty passed out into the street, proceeding in twos and threes along the sidewalk so as not to provoke attention. It was a bitterly cold night, with a half-moon shining brilliantly in a frosty, star-spangled sky. The men stopped and gathered in a yard which faced a high building. The words, "Vermissa Herald" were printed in gold lettering between the brightly lit windows. From within came the clanking of the printing press.

"Here, you," said Baldwin to McMurdo, "you can stand below at the door and see that the road is kept open for us. Arthur Willaby can stay with you. You others come with me. Have no fears, boys; for we have a dozen witnesses that we are in the Union Bar at this very moment."

It was nearly midnight, and the street was deserted save for one or two revellers upon their way home. The party crossed the road, and, pushing open the door of the newspaper office, Baldwin and his men rushed in and up the stair which faced them. McMurdo and another remained below. From the room above came a shout, a cry for help, and then the sound of trampling feet and of falling chairs. An instant later a gray-haired man rushed out on the landing.

He was seized before he could get farther, and his spectacles came tinkling down to McMurdo's feet. There was a thud and a groan. He was on his face, and half a dozen sticks were clattering together as they fell upon him. He writhed, and his long, thin limbs quivered under the blows. The others ceased at last; but Baldwin, his cruel face set in an infernal smile, was hacking at the man's head, which he vainly endeavoured to defend with his arms. His white hair was dabbled with patches of blood. Baldwin was still stooping over his victim, putting in a short, vicious blow whenever he could see a part exposed, when McMurdo dashed up the stair and pushed him back.

"You'll kill the man," said he. "Drop it!"

Baldwin looked at him in amazement. "Curse you!" he cried. "Who are you to interfere — you that are new to the lodge? Stand back!" He raised his stick; but McMurdo had whipped his pistol out of his pocket.

"Stand back yourself!" he cried. "I'll blow your face in if you lay a hand on me. As to the lodge, wasn't it the order of the Bodymaster that the man was not to be killed — and what are you doing but killing him?"

"It's truth he says," remarked one of the men.

“By Gar! you’d best hurry yourselves!” cried the man below. “The windows are all lighting up, and you’ll have the whole town here inside of five minutes.”

There was indeed the sound of shouting in the street, and a little group of compositors and pressmen was forming in the hall below and nerving itself to action. Leaving the limp and motionless body of the editor at the head of the stair, the criminals rushed down and made their way swiftly along the street. Having reached the Union House, some of them mixed with the crowd in McGinty’s saloon, whispering across the bar to the Boss that the job had been well carried through. Others, and among them McMurdo, broke away into side streets, and so by devious paths to their own homes.

CHAPTER 4 — The Valley of Fear

When McMurdo awoke next morning he had good reason to remember his initiation into the lodge. His head ached with the effect of the drink, and his arm, where he had been branded, was hot and swollen. Having his own peculiar source of income, he was irregular in his attendance at his work; so he had a late breakfast, and remained at home for the morning writing a long letter to a friend. Afterwards he read the Daily Herald. In a special column put in at the last moment he read:

OUTRAGE AT THE HERALD OFFICE — EDITOR SERIOUSLY INJURED.

It was a short account of the facts with which he was himself more familiar than the writer could have been. It ended with the statement:

The matter is now in the hands of the police; but it can hardly be hoped that their exertions will be attended by any better results than in the past. Some of the men were recognised, and there is hope that a conviction may be obtained. The source of the outrage was, it need hardly be said, that infamous society which has held this community in bondage for so long a period, and against which the Herald has taken so uncompromising a stand. Mr. Stanger’s many friends will rejoice to hear that, though he has been cruelly and brutally beaten, and though he has sustained severe injuries about the head, there is no immediate danger to his life.

Below it stated that a guard of police, armed with Winchester rifles, had been requisitioned for the defense of the office.

McMurdo had laid down the paper, and was lighting his pipe with a hand which was shaky from the excesses of the previous evening, when there was a knock outside, and his landlady brought to him a note which had just been handed in by a lad. It was unsigned, and ran thus:

I should wish to speak to you, but would rather not do so in your house. You will find me beside the flagstaff upon Miller Hill. If you will come there now, I have something which it is important for you to hear and for me to say.

McMurdo read the note twice with the utmost surprise; for he could not imagine what it meant or who was the author of it. Had it been in a feminine hand, he might have imagined that it was the beginning of one of those adventures which had been familiar enough in his past life. But it was the writing of a man, and of a well educated one, too. Finally, after some hesitation, he determined to see the matter through.

Miller Hill is an ill-kept public park in the very centre of the town. In summer it is a favourite resort of the people, but in winter it is desolate enough. From the top of it one has a view not only of the whole straggling, grimy town, but of the winding valley beneath, with its scattered mines and factories blackening the snow on each side of it, and of the wooded and white-capped ranges flanking it.

McMurdo strolled up the winding path hedged in with evergreens until he reached the deserted restaurant which forms the centre of summer gaiety. Beside it was a bare flagstaff, and underneath it a man, his hat drawn down and the collar of his overcoat turned up. When he turned his face McMurdo saw that it was Brother Morris, he who had incurred the anger of the Bodymaster the night before. The lodge sign was given and exchanged as they met.

“I wanted to have a word with you, Mr. McMurdo,” said the older man, speaking with a hesitation which showed that he was on delicate ground. “It was kind of you to come.”

“Why did you not put your name to the note?”

“One has to be cautious, mister. One never knows in times like these how a thing may come back to one. One never knows either who to trust or who not to trust.”

“Surely one may trust brothers of the lodge.”

“No, no, not always,” cried Morris with vehemence. “Whatever we say, even what we think, seems to go back to that man McGinty.”

“Look here!” said McMurdo sternly. “It was only last night, as you know well, that I swore good faith to our Bodymaster. Would you be asking me to break my oath?”

“If that is the view you take,” said Morris sadly, “I can only say that I am sorry I gave you the trouble to come and meet me. Things have come to a bad pass when two free citizens cannot speak their thoughts to each other.”

McMurdo, who had been watching his companion very narrowly, relaxed somewhat in his bearing. “Sure I spoke for myself only,” said he. “I am a newcomer, as you know, and I am strange to it all. It is not for me to open my mouth, Mr. Morris, and if you think well to say anything to me I am here to hear it.”

“And to take it back to Boss McGinty!” said Morris bitterly.

“Indeed, then, you do me injustice there,” cried McMurdo. “For myself I am loyal to the lodge, and so I tell you straight; but I would be a poor creature if I were to repeat to any other what you might say to me in confidence. It will go no further than me; though I warn you that you may get neither help nor sympathy.”

“I have given up looking for either the one or the other,” said Morris. “I may be putting my very life in your hands by what I say; but, bad as you are — and it seemed to me last night that you were shaping to be as bad as the worst — still you are new to it, and your conscience cannot yet be as hardened as theirs. That was why I thought to speak with you.”

“Well, what have you to say?”

“If you give me away, may a curse be on you!”

“Sure, I said I would not.”

“I would ask you, then, when you joined the Freeman’s society in Chicago and swore vows of charity and fidelity, did ever it cross your mind that you might find it would lead you to crime?”

“If you call it crime,” McMurdo answered.

“Call it crime!” cried Morris, his voice vibrating with passion. “You have seen little of it if you can call it anything else. Was it crime last night when a man old enough to be your father was beaten till the blood dripped from his white hairs? Was that crime — or what else would you call it?”

“There are some would say it was war,” said McMurdo, “a war of two classes with all in, so that each struck as best it could.”

“Well, did you think of such a thing when you joined the Freeman’s society at Chicago?”

“No, I’m bound to say I did not.”

“Nor did I when I joined it at Philadelphia. It was just a benefit club and a meeting place for one’s fellows. Then I heard of this place — curse the hour that the name first fell upon my ears! — and I came to better myself! My God! to better myself! My wife and three children came with me. I started a drygoods store on Market Square, and I prospered well. The word had gone round that I was a Freeman, and I was forced to join the local lodge, same as you did last night. I’ve the badge of shame on my forearm and something worse branded on my heart. I found that I was under the orders of a black villain and caught in a meshwork of crime. What could I do? Every word I said to make things better was taken as treason, same as it was last night. I can’t get away; for all I have in the world is in my store. If I leave the society, I know well that it means murder to me, and God knows what to my wife and children. Oh, man, it is awful — awful!” He put his hands to his face, and his body shook with convulsive sobs.

McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. “You were too soft for the job,” said he. “You are the wrong sort for such work.”

“I had a conscience and a religion; but they made me a criminal among them. I was chosen for a job. If I backed down I knew well what would come to me. Maybe I’m a coward. Maybe it’s the thought of my poor little woman and the children that makes me one. Anyhow I went. I guess it will haunt me forever.

“It was a lonely house, twenty miles from here, over the range yonder. I was told off for the door, same as you were last night. They could not trust me with the job. The others went in. When they came out their hands were crimson to the wrists. As we turned away a child was screaming out of the house behind us. It was a boy of five who had seen his father murdered. I nearly fainted with the horror of it, and yet I had to keep a bold and smiling face; for well I knew that if I did not it would be out of my house that they would come next with their bloody hands and it would be my little Fred that would be screaming for his father.

“But I was a criminal then, part sharer in a murder, lost forever in this world, and lost also in the next. I am a good Catholic; but the priest would have no word with me when he heard I was a Scowrer, and I am excommunicated from my faith. That’s how it stands with me. And I see you going down the same road, and I ask you what the end is to be. Are you ready to be a cold-blooded murderer also, or can we do anything to stop it?”

“What would you do?” asked McMurdo abruptly. “You would not inform?”

“God forbid!” cried Morris. “Sure, the very thought would cost me my life.”

“That’s well,” said McMurdo. “I’m thinking that you are a weak man and that you make too much of the matter.”

“Too much! Wait till you have lived here longer. Look down the valley! See the cloud of a hundred chimneys that overshadows it! I tell you that the cloud of murder hangs thicker and lower than that over the heads of the people. It is the Valley of Fear, the Valley of Death. The terror is in the hearts of the people from the dusk to the dawn. Wait, young man, and you will learn for yourself."

"Well, I'll let you know what I think when I have seen more," said McMurdo carelessly. "What is very clear is that you are not the man for the place, and that the sooner you sell out — if you only get a dime a dollar for what the business is worth — the better it will be for you. What you have said is safe with me; but, by Gar! if I thought you were an informer—"

"No, no!" cried Morris piteously.

"Well, let it rest at that. I'll bear what you have said in mind, and maybe some day I'll come back to it. I expect you meant kindly by speaking to me like this. Now I'll be getting home."

"One word before you go," said Morris. "We may have been seen together. They may want to know what we have spoken about."

"Ah! that's well thought of."

"I offer you a clerkship in my store."

"And I refuse it. That's our business. Well, so long, Brother Morris, and may you find things go better with you in the future."

That same afternoon, as McMurdo sat smoking, lost in thought beside the stove of his sitting-room, the door swung open and its framework was filled with the huge figure of Boss McGinty. He passed the sign, and then seating himself opposite to the young man he looked at him steadily for some time, a look which was as steadily returned.

"I'm not much of a visitor, Brother McMurdo," he said at last. "I guess I am too busy over the folk that visit me. But I thought I'd stretch a point and drop down to see you in your own house."

"I'm proud to see you here, Councillor," McMurdo answered heartily, bringing his whisky bottle out of the cupboard. "It's an honour that I had not expected."

"How's the arm?" asked the Boss.

McMurdo made a wry face. "Well, I'm not forgetting it," he said; "but it's worth it."

"Yes, it's worth it," the other answered, "to those that are loyal and go through with it and are a help to the lodge. What were you speaking to Brother Morris about on Miller Hill this morning?"

The question came so suddenly that it was well that he had his answer prepared. He burst into a hearty laugh. "Morris didn't know I could earn a living here at home. He shan't know either; for he has got too much conscience for the likes of me. But he's a good-hearted old chap. It was his idea that I was at a loose end, and that he would do me a good turn by offering me a clerkship in a drygoods store."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yes, that was it."

"And you refused it?"

"Sure. Couldn't I earn ten times as much in my own bedroom with four hours' work?"

"That's so. But I wouldn't get about too much with Morris."

"Why not?"

"Well, I guess because I tell you not. That's enough for most folk in these parts."

"It may be enough for most folk; but it ain't enough for me, Councillor," said McMurdo boldly. "If you are a judge of men, you'll know that."

The swarthy giant glared at him, and his hairy paw closed for an instant round the glass as though he would hurl it at the head of his companion. Then he laughed in his loud, boisterous, insincere fashion.

"You're a queer card, for sure," said he. "Well, if you want reasons, I'll give them. Did Morris say nothing to you against the lodge?"

"No."

"Nor against me?"

"No."

"Well, that's because he daren't trust you. But in his heart he is not a loyal brother. We know that well. So we watch him and we wait for the time to admonish him. I'm thinking that the time is drawing near. There's no room for scabby sheep in our pen. But if you keep company with a disloyal man, we might think that you were disloyal, too. See?"

"There's no chance of my keeping company with him; for I dislike the man," McMurdo answered. "As to being disloyal, if it was any man but you he would not use the word to me twice."

"Well, that's enough," said McGinty, draining off his glass. "I came down to give you a word in season, and you've had it."

"I'd like to know," said McMurdo, "how you ever came to learn that I had spoken with Morris at all?"

McGinty laughed. "It's my business to know what goes on in this township," said he. "I guess you'd best reckon on my hearing all that passes. Well, time's up, and I'll just say—"

But his leavetaking was cut short in a very unexpected fashion. With a sudden crash the door flew open, and three frowning, intent faces glared in at them from under the peaks of police caps. McMurdo sprang to his feet and half drew his revolver; but his arm stopped midway as he became conscious that two Winchester rifles were levelled at his head. A man in uniform advanced into the room, a six-shooter in his hand. It was Captain Marvin, once of Chicago, and now of the Mine Constabulary. He shook his head with a half-smile at McMurdo.

"I thought you'd be getting into trouble, Mr. Crooked McMurdo of Chicago," said he. "Can't keep out of it, can you? Take your hat and come along with us."

"I guess you'll pay for this, Captain Marvin," said McGinty. "Who are you, I'd like to know, to break into a house in this fashion and molest honest, law-abiding men?"

"You're standing out in this deal, Councillor McGinty," said the police captain. "We are not out after you, but after this man McMurdo. It is for you to help, not to hinder us in our duty."

"He is a friend of mine, and I'll answer for his conduct," said the Boss.

"By all accounts, Mr. McGinty, you may have to answer for your own conduct some of these days," the captain answered. "This man McMurdo was a crook before ever he came here, and he's a crook still. Cover him, Patrolman, while I disarm him."

"There's my pistol," said McMurdo coolly. "Maybe, Captain Marvin, if you and I were alone and face to face you would not take me so easily."

"Where's your warrant?" asked McGinty. "By Gar! a man might as well live in Russia as in Vermissa while folk like you are running the police. It's a capitalist outrage, and you'll hear more of it, I reckon."

"You do what you think is your duty the best way you can, Councillor. We'll look after ours."

"What am I accused of?" asked McMurdo.

"Of being concerned in the beating of old Editor Stanger at the Herald office. It wasn't your fault that it isn't a murder charge."

"Well, if that's all you have against him," cried McGinty with a laugh, "you can save yourself a deal of trouble by dropping it right now. This man was with me in my saloon playing poker up to midnight, and I can bring a dozen to prove it."

"That's your affair, and I guess you can settle it in court to-morrow. Meanwhile, come on, McMurdo, and come quietly if you don't want a gun across your head. You stand wide, Mr. McGinty; for I warn you I will stand no resistance when I am on duty!"

So determined was the appearance of the captain that both McMurdo and his boss were forced to accept the situation. The latter managed to have a few whispered words with the prisoner before they parted.

"What about—" he jerked his thumb upward to signify the coining plant.

"All right," whispered McMurdo, who had devised a safe hiding place under the floor.

"I'll bid you good-bye," said the Boss, shaking hands. "I'll see Reilly the lawyer and take the defense upon myself. Take my word for it that they won't be able to hold you."

"I wouldn't bet on that. Guard the prisoner, you two, and shoot him if he tries any games. I'll search the house before I leave."

He did so; but apparently found no trace of the concealed plant. When he had descended he and his men escorted McMurdo to headquarters. Darkness had fallen, and a keen blizzard was blowing so that the streets were nearly deserted; but a few loiterers followed the group, and emboldened by invisibility shouted imprecations at the prisoner.

"Lynch the cursed Scowrer!" they cried. "Lynch him!" They laughed and jeered as he was pushed into the police station. After a short, formal examination from the inspector in charge he was put into the common cell. Here he found Baldwin and three other criminals of the night before, all arrested that afternoon and waiting their trial next morning.

But even within this inner fortress of the law the long arm of the Freemen was able to extend. Late at night there came a jailer with a straw bundle for their bedding, out of which he extracted two bottles of whisky, some glasses, and a pack of cards. They spent a hilarious night, without an anxious thought as to the ordeal of the morning.

Nor had they cause, as the result was to show. The magistrate could not possibly, on the evidence, have held them for a higher court. On the one hand the compositors and pressmen were forced to admit that the light was uncertain, that they were themselves much perturbed, and that it was difficult for them to swear to the identity of the assailants; although they believed that the accused were among them. Cross examined by the clever attorney who had been engaged by McGinty, they were even more nebulous in their evidence.

The injured man had already deposed that he was so taken by surprise by the suddenness of the attack that he could state nothing beyond the fact that the first man who struck him wore a moustache. He added that he knew them to be Scowrers, since no one else in the community could possibly have any enmity to him, and he had long been threatened on account of his outspoken editorials. On the other hand, it was clearly shown by the united and unfaltering evidence of six citizens, including that high municipal official, Councillor McGinty, that the men had been at a card party at the Union House until an hour very much later than the commission of the outrage.

Needless to say that they were discharged with something very near to an apology from the bench for the inconvenience to which they had been put, together with an implied censure of Captain Marvin and the police for their officious zeal.

The verdict was greeted with loud applause by a court in which McMurdo saw many familiar faces. Brothers of the lodge smiled and waved. But there were others who sat with compressed lips and brooding eyes as the men filed out of the dock. One of them, a little, dark-bearded, resolute fellow, put the thoughts of himself and comrades into words as the ex-prisoners passed him.

“You damned murderers!” he said. “We’ll fix you yet!”

CHAPTER 5 — The Darkest Hour

If anything had been needed to give an impetus to Jack McMurdo’s popularity among his fellows it would have been his arrest and acquittal. That a man on the very night of joining the lodge should have done something which brought him before the magistrate was a new record in the annals of the society. Already he had earned the reputation of a good boon companion, a cheery reveller, and withal a man of high temper, who would not take an insult even from the all-powerful Boss himself. But in addition to this he impressed his comrades with the idea that among them all there was not one whose brain was so ready to devise a bloodthirsty scheme, or whose hand would be more capable of carrying it out. “He’ll be the boy for the clean job,” said the oldsters to one another, and waited their time until they could set him to his work.

McGinty had instruments enough already; but he recognised that this was a supremely able one. He felt like a man holding a fierce bloodhound in leash. There were curs to do the smaller work; but some day he would slip this creature upon its prey. A few members of the lodge, Ted Baldwin among them, resented the rapid rise of the stranger and hated him for it; but they kept clear of him, for he was as ready to fight as to laugh.

But if he gained favour with his fellows, there was another quarter, one which had become even more vital to him, in which he lost it. Ettie Shafter’s father would have nothing more to do with him, nor would he allow him to enter the house. Ettie herself was too deeply in love to give him up altogether, and yet her own good sense warned her of what would come from a marriage with a man who was regarded as a criminal.

One morning after a sleepless night she determined to see him, possibly for the last time, and make one strong endeavour to draw him from those evil influences which were sucking him down. She went to his house, as he had often begged her to do, and made her way into the room which he used as his sitting-room. He was seated at a table, with his back turned and a letter in front of him. A sudden spirit of girlish mischief came over her — she was still only nineteen. He had not heard her when she pushed open the door. Now she tiptoed forward and laid her hand lightly upon his bended shoulders.

If she had expected to startle him, she certainly succeeded; but only in turn to be startled herself. With a tiger spring he turned on her, and his right hand was feeling for her throat. At the same instant with the other hand he crumpled up the paper that lay before him. For an instant he stood glaring. Then astonishment and joy took the place of the ferocity which had convulsed his features — a ferocity which had sent her shrinking back in horror as from something which had never before intruded into her gentle life.

"It's you!" said he, mopping his brow. "And to think that you should come to me, heart of my heart, and I should find nothing better to do than to want to strangle you! Come then, darling," and he held out his arms, "let me make it up to you."

But she had not recovered from that sudden glimpse of guilty fear which she had read in the man's face. All her woman's instinct told her that it was not the mere fright of a man who is startled. Guilt — that was it — guilt and fear!

"What's come over you, Jack?" she cried. "Why were you so scared of me? Oh, Jack, if your conscience was at ease, you would not have looked at me like that!"

"Sure, I was thinking of other things, and when you came tripping so lightly on those fairy feet of yours—"

"No, no, it was more than that, Jack." Then a sudden suspicion seized her. "Let me see that letter you were writing."

"Ah, Ettie, I couldn't do that."

Her suspicions became certainties. "It's to another woman," she cried. "I know it! Why else should you hold it from me? Was it to your wife that you were writing? How am I to know that you are not a married man — you, a stranger, that nobody knows?"

"I am not married, Ettie. See now, I swear it! You're the only one woman on earth to me. By the cross of Christ I swear it!"

He was so white with passionate earnestness that she could not but believe him.

"Well, then," she cried, "why will you not show me the letter?"

"I'll tell you, acushla," said he. "I'm under oath not to show it, and just as I wouldn't break my word to you so I would keep it to those who hold my promise. It's the business of the lodge, and even to you it's secret. And if I was scared when a hand fell on me, can’t you understand it when it might have been the hand of a detective?”

She felt that he was telling the truth. He gathered her into his arms and kissed away her fears and doubts.

“Sit here by me, then. It’s a queer throne for such a queen; but it’s the best your poor lover can find. He’ll do better for you some of these days, I’m thinking. Now your mind is easy once again, is it not?”

“How can it ever be at ease, Jack, when I know that you are a criminal among criminals, when I never know the day that I may hear you are in court for murder? ‘McMurdo the Scowrer,’ that’s what one of our boarders called you yesterday. It went through my heart like a knife.”

“Sure, hard words break no bones.”

“But they were true.”

“Well, dear, it’s not so bad as you think. We are but poor men that are trying in our own way to get our rights.”

Ettie threw her arms round her lover’s neck. “Give it up, Jack! For my sake, for God’s sake, give it up! It was to ask you that I came here to-day. Oh, Jack, see — I beg it of you on my bended knees! Kneeling here before you I implore you to give it up!”

He raised her and soothed her with her head against his breast.

“Sure, my darlin’, you don’t know what it is you are asking. How could I give it up when it would be to break my oath and to desert my comrades? If you could see how things stand with me you could never ask it of me. Besides, if I wanted to, how could I do it? You don’t suppose that the lodge would let a man go free with all its secrets?”

“I’ve thought of that, Jack. I’ve planned it all. Father has saved some money. He is weary of this place where the fear of these people darkens our lives. He is ready to go. We would fly together to Philadelphia or New York, where we would be safe from them.”

McMurdo laughed. “The lodge has a long arm. Do you think it could not stretch from here to Philadelphia or New York?”

“Well, then, to the West, or to England, or to Germany, where father came from — anywhere to get away from this Valley of Fear!”

McMurdo thought of old Brother Morris. “Sure, it is the second time I have heard the valley so named,” said he. “The shadow does indeed seem to lie heavy on some of you.”

“It darkens every moment of our lives. Do you suppose that Ted Baldwin has ever forgiven us? If it were not that he fears you, what do you suppose our chances would be? If you saw the look in those dark, hungry eyes of his when they fall on me!”

“By Gar! I’d teach him better manners if I caught him at it! But see here, little girl. I can’t leave here. I can’t — take that from me once and for all. But if you will leave me to find my own way, I will try to prepare a way of getting honourably out of it.”

“There is no honour in such a matter.”

“Well, well, it’s just how you look at it. But if you’ll give me six months, I’ll work it so that I can leave without being ashamed to look others in the face.”

The girl laughed with joy. “Six months!” she cried. “Is it a promise?”

“Well, it may be seven or eight. But within a year at the furthest we will leave the valley behind us.”

It was the most that Ettie could obtain, and yet it was something. There was this distant light to illuminate the gloom of the immediate future. She returned to her father’s house more light-hearted than she had ever been since Jack McMurdo had come into her life.

It might be thought that as a member, all the doings of the society would be told to him; but he was soon to discover that the organization was wider and more complex than the simple lodge. Even Boss McGinty was ignorant as to many things; for there was an official named the County Delegate, living at Hobson’s Patch farther down the line, who had power over several different lodges which he wielded in a sudden and arbitrary way. Only once did McMurdo see him, a sly, little gray-haired rat of a man, with a slinking gait and a sidelong glance which was charged with malice. Evans Pott was his name, and even the great Boss of Vermissa felt towards him something of the repulsion and fear which the huge Danton may have felt for the puny but dangerous Robespierre.

One day Scanlan, who was McMurdo’s fellow boarder, received a note from McGinty inclosing one from Evans Pott, which informed him that he was sending over two good men, Lawler and Andrews, who had instructions to act in the neighbourhood; though it was best for the cause that no particulars as to their objects should be given. Would the Bodymaster see to it that suitable arrangements be made for their lodgings and comfort until the time for action should arrive? McGinty added that it was impossible for anyone to remain secret at the Union House, and that, therefore, he would be obliged if McMurdo and Scanlan would put the strangers up for a few days in their boarding house.

The same evening the two men arrived, each carrying his gripsack. Lawler was an elderly man, shrewd, silent, and self-contained, clad in an old black frock coat, which with his soft felt hat and ragged, grizzled beard gave him a general resemblance to an itinerant preacher. His companion Andrews was little more than a boy, frank-faced and cheerful, with the breezy manner of one who is out for a holiday and means to enjoy every minute of it. Both men were total abstainers, and behaved in all ways as exemplary members of the society, with the one simple exception that they were assassins who had often proved themselves to be most capable instruments for this association of murder. Lawler had already carried out fourteen commissions of the kind, and Andrews three.

They were, as McMurdo found, quite ready to converse about their deeds in the past, which they recounted with the half-bashful pride of men who had done good and unselfish service for the community. They were reticent, however, as to the immediate job in hand.

“They chose us because neither I nor the boy here drink,” Lawler explained. “They can count on us saying no more than we should. You must not take it amiss, but it is the orders of the County Delegate that we obey.”

“Sure, we are all in it together,” said Scanlan, McMurdo’s mate, as the four sat together at supper.

“That’s true enough, and we’ll talk till the cows come home of the killing of Charlie Williams or of Simon Bird, or any other job in the past. But till the work is done we say nothing.”

“There are half a dozen about here that I have a word to say to,” said McMurdo, with an oath. “I suppose it isn’t Jack Knox of Ironhill that you are after. I’d go some way to see him get his deserts.”

“No, it’s not him yet.”

“Or Herman Strauss?”

“No, nor him either.”

“Well, if you won’t tell us we can’t make you; but I’d be glad to know.”

Lawler smiled and shook his head. He was not to be drawn.

In spite of the reticence of their guests, Scanlan and McMurdo were quite determined to be present at what they called “the fun.” When, therefore, at an early hour one morning McMurdo heard them creeping down the stairs he awakened Scanlan, and the two hurried on their clothes. When they were dressed they found that the others had stolen out, leaving the door open behind them. It was not yet dawn, and by the light of the lamps they could see the two men some distance down the street. They followed them warily, treading noiselessly in the deep snow.

The boarding house was near the edge of the town, and soon they were at the crossroads which is beyond its boundary. Here three men were waiting, with whom Lawler and Andrews held a short, eager conversation. Then they all moved on together. It was clearly some notable job which needed numbers. At this point there are several trails which lead to various mines. The strangers took that which led to the Crow Hill, a huge business which was in strong hands which had been able, thanks to their energetic and fearless New England manager, Josiah H. Dunn, to keep some order and discipline during the long reign of terror.

Day was breaking now, and a line of workmen were slowly making their way, singly and in groups, along the blackened path.

McMurdo and Scanlan strolled on with the others, keeping in sight of the men whom they followed. A thick mist lay over them, and from the heart of it there came the sudden scream of a steam whistle. It was the ten-minute signal before the cages descended and the day’s labour began.

When they reached the open space round the mine shaft there were a hundred miners waiting, stamping their feet and blowing on their fingers; for it was bitterly cold. The strangers stood in a little group under the shadow of the engine house. Scanlan and McMurdo climbed a heap of slag from which the whole scene lay before them. They saw the mine engineer, a great bearded Scotchman named Menzies, come out of the engine house and blow his whistle for the cages to be lowered.

At the same instant a tall, loose-framed young man with a clean-shaved, earnest face advanced eagerly towards the pit head. As he came forward his eyes fell upon the group, silent and motionless, under the engine house. The men had drawn down their hats and turned up their collars to screen their faces. For a moment the presentiment of Death laid its cold hand upon the manager’s heart. At the next he had shaken it off and saw only his duty towards intrusive strangers.

“Who are you?” he asked as he advanced. “What are you loitering there for?”

There was no answer; but the lad Andrews stepped forward and shot him in the stomach. The hundred waiting miners stood as motionless and helpless as if they were paralyzed. The manager clapped his two hands to the wound and doubled himself up. Then he staggered away; but another of the assassins fired, and he went down sidewise, kicking and clawing among a heap of clinkers. Menzies, the Scotchman, gave a roar of rage at the sight and rushed with an iron spanner at the murderers; but was met by two balls in the face which dropped him dead at their very feet.

There was a surge forward of some of the miners, and an inarticulate cry of pity and of anger; but a couple of the strangers emptied their six-shooters over the heads of the crowd, and they broke and scattered, some of them rushing wildly back to their homes in Vermissa.

When a few of the bravest had rallied, and there was a return to the mine, the murderous gang had vanished in the mists of morning, without a single witness being able to swear to the identity of these men who in front of a hundred spectators had wrought this double crime.

Scanlan and McMurdo made their way back; Scanlan somewhat subdued, for it was the first murder job that he had seen with his own eyes, and it appeared less funny than he had been led to believe. The horrible screams of the dead manager’s wife pursued them as they hurried to the town. McMurdo was absorbed and silent; but he showed no sympathy for the weakening of his companion.

“Sure, it is like a war,” he repeated. “What is it but a war between us and them, and we hit back where we best can.”

There was high revel in the lodge room at the Union House that night, not only over the killing of the manager and engineer of the Crow Hill mine, which would bring this organization into line with the other blackmailed and terror-stricken companies of the district, but also over a distant triumph which had been wrought by the hands of the lodge itself.

It would appear that when the County Delegate had sent over five good men to strike a blow in Vermissa, he had demanded that in return three Vermissa men should be secretly selected and sent across to kill William Hales of Stake Royal, one of the best known and most popular mine owners in the Gilmerton district, a man who was believed not to have an enemy in the world; for he was in all ways a model employer. He had insisted, however, upon efficiency in the work, and had, therefore, paid off certain drunken and idle employees who were members of the all-powerful society.

Coffin notices hung outside his door had not weakened his resolution, and so in a free, civilised country he found himself condemned to death.

The execution had now been duly carried out. Ted Baldwin, who sprawled now in the seat of honour beside the Bodymaster, had been chief of the party. His flushed face and glazed, bloodshot eyes told of sleeplessness and drink. He and his two comrades had spent the night before among the mountains. They were unkempt and weather-stained. But no heroes, returning from a forlorn hope, could have had a warmer welcome from their comrades.

The story was told and retold amid cries of delight and shouts of laughter. They had waited for their man as he drove home at nightfall, taking their station at the top of a steep hill, where his horse must be at a walk. He was so furred to keep out the cold that he could not lay his hand on his pistol. They had pulled him out and shot him again and again. He had screamed for mercy. The screams were repeated for the amusement of the lodge.

“Let’s hear again how he squealed,” they cried.

None of them knew the man; but there is eternal drama in a killing, and they had shown the Scowrers of Gilmerton that the Vermissa men were to be relied upon.

There had been one contretemps; for a man and his wife had driven up while they were still emptying their revolvers into the silent body. It had been suggested that they should shoot them both; but they were harmless folk who were not connected with the mines, so they were sternly bidden to drive on and keep silent, lest a worse thing befall them. And so the blood-mottled figure had been left as a warning to all such hard-hearted employers, and the three noble avengers had hurried off into the mountains where unbroken nature comes down to the very edge of the furnaces and the slag heaps. Here they were, safe and sound, their work well done, and the plaudits of their companions in their ears.

It had been a great day for the Scowrers. The shadow had fallen even darker over the valley. But as the wise general chooses the moment of victory in which to redouble his efforts, so that his foes may have no time to steady themselves after disaster, so Boss McGinty, looking out upon the scene of his operations with his brooding and malicious eyes, had devised a new attack upon those who opposed him. That very night, as the half-drunken company broke up, he touched McMurdo on the arm and led him aside into that inner room where they had their first interview.

"See here, my lad," said he, "I've got a job that's worthy of you at last. You'll have the doing of it in your own hands."

"Proud I am to hear it," McMurdo answered.

"You can take two men with you — Manders and Reilly. They have been warned for service. We'll never be right in this district until Chester Wilcox has been settled, and you'll have the thanks of every lodge in the coal fields if you can down him."

"I'll do my best, anyhow. Who is he, and where shall I find him?"

McGinty took his eternal half-chewed, half-smoked cigar from the corner of his mouth, and proceeded to draw a rough diagram on a page torn from his notebook.

"He's the chief foreman of the Iron Dike Company. He's a hard citizen, an old colour sergeant of the war, all scars and grizzle. We've had two tries at him; but had no luck, and Jim Carnaway lost his life over it. Now it's for you to take it over. That's the house — all alone at the Iron Dike crossroad, same as you see here on the map — without another within earshot. It's no good by day. He's armed and shoots quick and straight, with no questions asked. But at night — well, there he is with his wife, three children, and a hired help. You can't pick or choose. It's all or none. If you could get a bag of blasting powder at the front door with a slow match to it—"

"What's the man done?"

"Didn't I tell you he shot Jim Carnaway?"

"Why did he shoot him?"

"What in thunder has that to do with you? Carnaway was about his house at night, and he shot him. That's enough for me and you. You've got to settle the thing right."

"There's these two women and the children. Do they go up too?"

"They have to — else how can we get him?"

"It seems hard on them; for they've done nothing."

"What sort of fool's talk is this? Do you back out?"

"Easy, Councillor, easy! What have I ever said or done that you should think I would be after standing back from an order of the Bodymaster of my own lodge? If it's right or if it's wrong, it's for you to decide."

"You'll do it, then?"

"Of course I will do it."

"When?"

"Well, you had best give me a night or two that I may see the house and make my plans. Then—"

"Very good," said McGinty, shaking him by the hand. "I leave it with you. It will be a great day when you bring us the news. It's just the last stroke that will bring them all to their knees."

McMurdo thought long and deeply over the commission which had been so suddenly placed in his hands. The isolated house in which Chester Wilcox lived was about five miles off in an adjacent valley. That very night he started off all alone to prepare for the attempt. It was daylight before he returned from his reconnaissance. Next day he interviewed his two subordinates, Manders and Reilly, reckless youngsters who were as elated as if it were a deer-hunt.

Two nights later they met outside the town, all three armed, and one of them carrying a sack stuffed with the powder which was used in the quarries. It was two in the morning before they came to the lonely house. The night was a windy one, with broken clouds drifting swiftly across the face of a three-quarter moon. They had been warned to be on their guard against bloodhounds; so they moved forward cautiously, with their pistols cocked in their hands. But there was no sound save the howling of the wind, and no movement but the swaying branches above them.

McMurdo listened at the door of the lonely house; but all was still within. Then he leaned the powder bag against it, ripped a hole in it with his knife, and attached the fuse. When it was well alight he and his two companions took to their heels, and were some distance off, safe and snug in a sheltering ditch, before the shattering roar of the explosion, with the low, deep rumble of the collapsing building, told them that their work was done. No cleaner job had ever been carried out in the bloodstained annals of the society.

But alas that work so well organized and boldly carried out should all have gone for nothing! Warned by the fate of the various victims, and knowing that he was marked down for destruction, Chester Wilcox had moved himself and his family only the day before to some safer and less known quarters, where a guard of police should watch over them. It was an empty house which had been torn down by the gunpowder, and the grim old colour sergeant of the war was still teaching discipline to the miners of Iron Dike.

"Leave him to me," said McMurdo. "He's my man, and I'll get him sure if I have to wait a year for him."

A vote of thanks and confidence was passed in full lodge, and so for the time the matter ended. When a few weeks later it was reported in the papers that Wilcox had been shot at from an ambuscade, it was an open secret that McMurdo was still at work upon his unfinished job.

Such were the methods of the Society of Freemen, and such were the deeds of the Scowrers by which they spread their rule of fear over the great and rich district which was for so long a period haunted by their terrible presence. Why should these pages be stained by further crimes? Have I not said enough to show the men and their methods?

These deeds are written in history, and there are records wherein one may read the details of them. There one may learn of the shooting of Policemen Hunt and Evans because they had ventured to arrest two members of the society — a double outrage planned at the Vermissa lodge and carried out in cold blood upon two helpless and disarmed men. There also one may read of the shooting of Mrs. Larbey when she was nursing her husband, who had been beaten almost to death by orders of Boss McGinty. The killing of the elder Jenkins, shortly followed by that of his brother, the mutilation of James Murdoch, the blowing up of the Staphouse family, and the murder of the Stendals all followed hard upon one another in the same terrible winter.

Darkly the shadow lay upon the Valley of Fear. The spring had come with running brooks and blossoming trees. There was hope for all Nature bound so long in an iron grip; but nowhere was there any hope for the men and women who lived under the yoke of the terror. Never had the cloud above them been so dark and hopeless as in the early summer of the year 1875.

CHAPTER 6 — Danger

It was the height of the reign of terror. McMurdo, who had already been appointed Inner Deacon, with every prospect of some day succeeding McGinty as Bodymaster, was now so necessary to the councils of his comrades that nothing was done without his help and advice. The more popular he became, however, with the Freemen, the blacker were the scowls which greeted him as he passed along the streets of Vermissa. In spite of their terror the citizens were taking heart to band themselves together against their oppressors. Rumours had reached the lodge of secret gatherings in the Herald office and of distribution of firearms among the law-abiding people. But McGinty and his men were undisturbed by such reports. They were numerous, resolute, and well armed. Their opponents were scattered and powerless. It would all end, as it had done in the past, in aimless talk and possibly in impotent arrests. So said McGinty, McMurdo, and all the bolder spirits.

It was a Saturday evening in May. Saturday was always the lodge night, and McMurdo was leaving his house to attend it when Morris, the weaker brother of the order, came to see him. His brow was creased with care, and his kindly face was drawn and haggard.

“Can I speak with you freely, Mr. McMurdo?”

“Sure.”

“I can’t forget that I spoke my heart to you once, and that you kept it to yourself, even though the Boss himself came to ask you about it.”

“What else could I do if you trusted me? It wasn’t that I agreed with what you said.”

“I know that well. But you are the one that I can speak to and be safe. I’ve a secret here,” he put his hand to his breast, “and it is just burning the life out of me. I wish it had come to any one of you but me. If I tell it, it will mean murder, for sure. If I don’t, it may bring the end of us all. God help me, but I am near out of my wits over it!”

McMurdo looked at the man earnestly. He was trembling in every limb. He poured some whisky into a glass and handed it to him. “That’s the physic for the likes of you,” said he. “Now let me hear of it.”

Morris drank, and his white face took a tinge of colour. “I can tell it to you all in one sentence,” said he. “There’s a detective on our trail.”

McMurdo stared at him in astonishment. “Why, man, you’re crazy,” he said. “Isn’t the place full of police and detectives and what harm did they ever do us?”

“No, no, it’s no man of the district. As you say, we know them, and it is little that they can do. But you’ve heard of Pinkerton’s?”

“I’ve read of some folk of that name.”

“Well, you can take it from me you’ve no show when they are on your trail. It’s not a take-it-or-miss-it government concern. It’s a dead earnest business proposition that’s out for results and keeps out till by hook or crook it gets them. If a Pinkerton man is deep in this business, we are all destroyed.”

“We must kill him.”

“Ah, it’s the first thought that came to you! So it will be up at the lodge. Didn’t I say to you that it would end in murder?”

“Sure, what is murder? Isn’t it common enough in these parts?”

“It is, indeed; but it’s not for me to point out the man that is to be murdered. I’d never rest easy again. And yet it’s our own necks that may be at stake. In God’s name what shall I do?” He rocked to and fro in his agony of indecision.

But his words had moved McMurdo deeply. It was easy to see that he shared the other’s opinion as to the danger, and the need for meeting it. He gripped Morris’s shoulder and shook him in his earnestness.

“See here, man,” he cried, and he almost screeched the words in his excitement, “you won’t gain anything by sitting keening like an old wife at a wake. Let’s have the facts. Who is the fellow? Where is he? How did you hear of him? Why did you come to me?”

“I came to you; for you are the one man that would advise me. I told you that I had a store in the East before I came here. I left good friends behind me, and one of them is in the telegraph service. Here’s a letter that I had from him yesterday. It’s this part from the top of the page. You can read it yourself.”

This was what McMurdo read:

How are the Scowrers getting on in your parts? We read plenty of them in the papers. Between you and me I expect to hear news from you before long. Five big corporations and the two railroads have taken the thing up in dead earnest. They mean it, and you can bet they'll get there! They are right deep down into it. Pinkerton has taken hold under their orders, and his best man, Birdy Edwards, is operating. The thing has got to be stopped right now.

"Now read the postscript."

Of course, what I give you is what I learned in business; so it goes no further. It's a queer cipher that you handle by the yard every day and can get no meaning from.

McMurdo sat in silence for some time, with the letter in his listless hands. The mist had lifted for a moment, and there was the abyss before him.

"Does anyone else know of this?" he asked.

"I have told no one else."

"But this man — your friend — has he any other person that he would be likely to write to?"

"Well, I dare say he knows one or two more."

"Of the lodge?"

"It's likely enough."

"I was asking because it is likely that he may have given some description of this fellow Birdy Edwards — then we could get on his trail."

"Well, it's possible. But I should not think he knew him. He is just telling me the news that came to him by way of business. How would he know this Pinkerton man?"

McMurdo gave a violent start.

"By Gar!" he cried, "I've got him. What a fool I was not to know it. Lord! but we're in luck! We will fix him before he can do any harm. See here, Morris, will you leave this thing in my hands?"

"Sure, if you will only take it off mine."

"I'll do that. You can stand right back and let me run it. Even your name need not be mentioned. I'll take it all on myself, as if it were to me that this letter has come. Will that content you?"

"It's just what I would ask."

"Then leave it at that and keep your head shut. Now I'll get down to the lodge, and we'll soon make old man Pinkerton sorry for himself."

"You wouldn't kill this man?"

"The less you know, Friend Morris, the easier your conscience will be, and the better you will sleep. Ask no questions, and let these things settle themselves. I have hold of it now."

Morris shook his head sadly as he left. “I feel that his blood is on my hands,” he groaned.

“Self-protection is no murder, anyhow,” said McMurdo, smiling grimly. “It’s him or us. I guess this man would destroy us all if we left him long in the valley. Why, Brother Morris, we’ll have to elect you Bodymaster yet; for you’ve surely saved the lodge.”

And yet it was clear from his actions that he thought more seriously of this new intrusion than his words would show. It may have been his guilty conscience, it may have been the reputation of the Pinkerton organization, it may have been the knowledge that great, rich corporations had set themselves the task of clearing out the Scowrers; but, whatever his reason, his actions were those of a man who is preparing for the worst. Every paper which would incriminate him was destroyed before he left the house. After that he gave a long sigh of satisfaction; for it seemed to him that he was safe. And yet the danger must still have pressed somewhat upon him; for on his way to the lodge he stopped at old man Shafter’s. The house was forbidden him; but when he tapped at the window Ettie came out to him. The dancing Irish deviltry had gone from her lover’s eyes. She read his danger in his earnest face.

“Something has happened!” she cried. “Oh, Jack, you are in danger!”

“Sure, it is not very bad, my sweetheart. And yet it may be wise that we make a move before it is worse.”

“Make a move?”

“I promised you once that I would go some day. I think the time is coming. I had news to-night, bad news, and I see trouble coming.”

“The police?”

“Well, a Pinkerton. But, sure, you wouldn’t know what that is, acushla, nor what it may mean to the likes of me. I’m too deep in this thing, and I may have to get out of it quick. You said you would come with me if I went.”

“Oh, Jack, it would be the saving of you!”

“I’m an honest man in some things, Ettie. I wouldn’t hurt a hair of your bonny head for all that the world can give, nor ever pull you down one inch from the golden throne above the clouds where I always see you. Would you trust me?”

She put her hand in his without a word. “Well, then, listen to what I say, and do as I order you, for indeed it’s the only way for us. Things are going to happen in this valley. I feel it in my bones. There may be many of us that will have to look out for ourselves. I'm one, anyhow. If I go, by day or night, it's you that must come with me!"

"I'd come after you, Jack."

"No, no, you shall come WITH me. If this valley is closed to me and I can never come back, how can I leave you behind, and me perhaps in hiding from the police with never a chance of a message? It's with me you must come. I know a good woman in the place I come from, and it's there I'd leave you till we can get married. Will you come?"

"Yes, Jack, I will come."

"God bless you for your trust in me! It's a fiend out of hell that I should be if I abused it. Now, mark you, Ettie, it will be just a word to you, and when it reaches you, you will drop everything and come right down to the waiting room at the depot and stay there till I come for you."

"Day or night, I'll come at the word, Jack."

Somewhat eased in mind, now that his own preparations for escape had been begun, McMurdo went on to the lodge. It had already assembled, and only by complicated signs and countersigns could he pass through the outer guard and inner guard who close-tiled it. A buzz of pleasure and welcome greeted him as he entered. The long room was crowded, and through the haze of tobacco smoke he saw the tangled black mane of the Bodymaster, the cruel, unfriendly features of Baldwin, the vulture face of Harraway, the secretary, and a dozen more who were among the leaders of the lodge. He rejoiced that they should all be there to take counsel over his news.

"Indeed, it's glad we are to see you, Brother!" cried the chairman. "There's business here that wants a Solomon in judgment to set it right."

"It's Lander and Egan," explained his neighbour as he took his seat. "They both claim the head money given by the lodge for the shooting of old man Crabbe over at Stylestown, and who's to say which fired the bullet?"

McMurdo rose in his place and raised his hand. The expression of his face froze the attention of the audience. There was a dead hush of expectation.

"Eminent Bodymaster," he said, in a solemn voice, "I claim urgency!"

"Brother McMurdo claims urgency," said McGinty. "It's a claim that by the rules of this lodge takes precedence. Now Brother, we attend you."

McMurdo took the letter from his pocket.

“Eminent Bodymaster and Brethren,” he said, “I am the bearer of ill news this day; but it is better that it should be known and discussed, than that a blow should fall upon us without warning which would destroy us all. I have information that the most powerful and richest organizations in this state have bound themselves together for our destruction, and that at this very moment there is a Pinkerton detective, one Birdy Edwards, at work in the valley collecting the evidence which may put a rope round the necks of many of us, and send every man in this room into a felon’s cell. That is the situation for the discussion of which I have made a claim of urgency.”

There was a dead silence in the room. It was broken by the chairman.

“What is your evidence for this, Brother McMurdo?” he asked.

“It is in this letter which has come into my hands,” said McMurdo. He read the passage aloud. “It is a matter of honour with me that I can give no further particulars about the letter, nor put it into your hands; but I assure you that there is nothing else in it which can affect the interests of the lodge. I put the case before you as it has reached me.”

“Let me say, Mr. Chairman,” said one of the older brethren, “that I have heard of Birdy Edwards, and that he has the name of being the best man in the Pinkerton service.”

“Does anyone know him by sight?” asked McGinty.

“Yes,” said McMurdo, “I do.”

There was a murmur of astonishment through the hall.

“I believe we hold him in the hollow of our hands,” he continued with an exulting smile upon his face. “If we act quickly and wisely, we can cut this thing short. If I have your confidence and your help, it is little that we have to fear.”

“What have we to fear, anyhow? What can he know of our affairs?”

“You might say so if all were as stanch as you, Councillor. But this man has all the millions of the capitalists at his back. Do you think there is no weaker brother among all our lodges that could not be bought? He will get at our secrets — maybe has got them already. There’s only one sure cure.”

“That he never leaves the valley,” said Baldwin.

McMurdo nodded. “Good for you, Brother Baldwin,” he said. “You and I have had our differences, but you have said the true word to-night.”

“Where is he, then? Where shall we know him?”

“Eminent Bodymaster,” said McMurdo, earnestly, “I would put it to you that this is too vital a thing for us to discuss in open lodge. God forbid that I should throw a doubt on anyone here; but if so much as a word of gossip got to the ears of this man, there would be an end of any chance of our getting him. I would ask the lodge to choose a trusty committee, Mr. Chairman — yourself, if I might suggest it, and Brother Baldwin here, and five more. Then I can talk freely of what I know and of what I advise should be done."

The proposition was at once adopted, and the committee chosen. Besides the chairman and Baldwin there were the vulture-faced secretary, Harraway, Tiger Cormac, the brutal young assassin, Carter, the treasurer, and the brothers Willaby, fearless and desperate men who would stick at nothing.

The usual revelry of the lodge was short and subdued: for there was a cloud upon the men's spirits, and many there for the first time began to see the cloud of avenging Law drifting up in that serene sky under which they had dwelt so long. The horrors they had dealt out to others had been so much a part of their settled lives that the thought of retribution had become a remote one, and so seemed the more startling now that it came so closely upon them. They broke up early and left their leaders to their council.

"Now, McMurdo!" said McGinty when they were alone. The seven men sat frozen in their seats.

"I said just now that I knew Birdy Edwards," McMurdo explained. "I need not tell you that he is not here under that name. He's a brave man, but not a crazy one. He passes under the name of Steve Wilson, and he is lodging at Hobson's Patch."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I fell into talk with him. I thought little of it at the time, nor would have given it a second thought but for this letter; but now I'm sure it's the man. I met him on the cars when I went down the line on Wednesday — a hard case if ever there was one. He said he was a reporter. I believed it for the moment. Wanted to know all he could about the Scowrers and what he called 'the outrages' for a New York paper. Asked me every kind of question so as to get something. You bet I was giving nothing away. 'I'd pay for it and pay well,' said he, 'if I could get some stuff that would suit my editor.' I said what I thought would please him best, and he handed me a twenty-dollar bill for my information. 'There's ten times that for you,' said he, 'if you can find me all that I want.'"

"What did you tell him, then?"

"Any stuff I could make up."

“How do you know he wasn’t a newspaper man?”

“I’ll tell you. He got out at Hobson’s Patch, and so did I. I chanced into the telegraph bureau, and he was leaving it.

“‘See here,’ said the operator after he’d gone out, ‘I guess we should charge double rates for this.’—’I guess you should,’ said I. He had filled the form with stuff that might have been Chinese, for all we could make of it. ‘He fires a sheet of this off every day,’ said the clerk. ‘Yes,’ said I; ‘it’s special news for his paper, and he’s scared that the others should tap it.’ That was what the operator thought and what I thought at the time; but I think differently now.”

“By Gar! I believe you are right,” said McGinty. “But what do you allow that we should do about it?”

“Why not go right down now and fix him?” someone suggested.

“Ay, the sooner the better.”

“I’d start this next minute if I knew where we could find him,” said McMurdo. “He’s in Hobson’s Patch; but I don’t know the house. I’ve got a plan, though, if you’ll only take my advice.”

“Well, what is it?”

“I’ll go to the Patch to-morrow morning. I’ll find him through the operator. He can locate him, I guess. Well, then I’ll tell him that I’m a Freeman myself. I’ll offer him all the secrets of the lodge for a price. You bet he’ll tumble to it. I’ll tell him the papers are at my house, and that it’s as much as my life would be worth to let him come while folk were about. He’ll see that that’s horse sense. Let him come at ten o’clock at night, and he shall see everything. That will fetch him sure.”

“Well?”

“You can plan the rest for yourselves. Widow MacNamara’s is a lonely house. She’s as true as steel and as deaf as a post. There’s only Scanlan and me in the house. If I get his promise — and I’ll let you know if I do — I’d have the whole seven of you come to me by nine o’clock. We’ll get him in. If ever he gets out alive — well, he can talk of Birdy Edwards’s luck for the rest of his days!”

“There’s going to be a vacancy at Pinkerton’s or I’m mistaken. Leave it at that, McMurdo. At nine to-morrow we’ll be with you. You once get the door shut behind him, and you can leave the rest with us.”

CHAPTER 7 — The Trapping of Birdy Edwards

As McMurdo had said, the house in which he lived was a lonely one and very well suited for such a crime as they had planned. It was on the extreme fringe of the town and stood well back from the road. In any other case the conspirators would have simply called out their man, as they had many a time before, and emptied their pistols into his body; but in this instance it was very necessary to find out how much he knew, how he knew it, and what had been passed on to his employers.

It was possible that they were already too late and that the work had been done. If that was indeed so, they could at least have their revenge upon the man who had done it. But they were hopeful that nothing of great importance had yet come to the detective's knowledge, as otherwise, they argued, he would not have troubled to write down and forward such trivial information as McMurdo claimed to have given him. However, all this they would learn from his own lips. Once in their power, they would find a way to make him speak. It was not the first time that they had handled an unwilling witness.

McMurdo went to Hobson's Patch as agreed. The police seemed to take particular interest in him that morning, and Captain Marvin — he who had claimed the old acquaintance with him at Chicago — actually addressed him as he waited at the station. McMurdo turned away and refused to speak with him. He was back from his mission in the afternoon, and saw McGinty at the Union House.

"He is coming," he said.

"Good!" said McGinty. The giant was in his shirt sleeves, with chains and seals gleaming athwart his ample waistcoat and a diamond twinkling through the fringe of his bristling beard. Drink and politics had made the Boss a very rich as well as powerful man. The more terrible, therefore, seemed that glimpse of the prison or the gallows which had risen before him the night before.

"Do you reckon he knows much?" he asked anxiously.

McMurdo shook his head gloomily. "He's been here some time — six weeks at the least. I guess he didn't come into these parts to look at the prospect. If he has been working among us all that time with the railroad money at his back, I should expect that he has got results, and that he has passed them on."

"There's not a weak man in the lodge," cried McGinty. "True as steel, every man of them. And yet, by the Lord! there is that skunk Morris. What about him? If any man gives us away, it would be he. I've a mind to send a couple of the boys round before evening to give him a beating up and see what they can get from him."

"Well, there would be no harm in that," McMurdo answered. "I won't deny that I have a liking for Morris and would be sorry to see him come to harm. He has spoken to me once or twice over lodge matters, and though he may not see them the same as you or I, he never seemed the sort that squeals. But still it is not for me to stand between him and you."

"I'll fix the old devil!" said McGinty with an oath. "I've had my eye on him this year past."

"Well, you know best about that," McMurdo answered. "But whatever you do must be to-morrow; for we must lie low until the Pinkerton affair is settled up. We can't afford to set the police buzzing, to-day of all days."

"True for you," said McGinty. "And we'll learn from Birdy Edwards himself where he got his news if we have to cut his heart out first. Did he seem to scent a trap?"

McMurdo laughed. "I guess I took him on his weak point," he said. "If he could get on a good trail of the Scowrers, he's ready to follow it into hell. I took his money," McMurdo grinned as he produced a wad of dollar notes, "and as much more when he has seen all my papers."

"What papers?"

"Well, there are no papers. But I filled him up about constitutions and books of rules and forms of membership. He expects to get right down to the end of everything before he leaves."

"Faith, he's right there," said McGinty grimly. "Didn't he ask you why you didn't bring him the papers?"

"As if I would carry such things, and me a suspected man, and Captain Marvin after speaking to me this very day at the depot!"

"Ay, I heard of that," said McGinty. "I guess the heavy end of this business is coming on to you. We could put him down an old shaft when we've done with him; but however we work it we can't get past the man living at Hobson's Patch and you being there to-day."

McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. “If we handle it right, they can never prove the killing,” said he. “No one can see him come to the house after dark, and I’ll lay to it that no one will see him go. Now see here, Councillor, I’ll show you my plan and I’ll ask you to fit the others into it. You will all come in good time. Very well. He comes at ten. He is to tap three times, and me to open the door for him. Then I’ll get behind him and shut it. He’s our man then.”

“That’s all easy and plain.”

“Yes; but the next step wants considering. He’s a hard proposition. He’s heavily armed. I’ve fooled him proper, and yet he is likely to be on his guard. Suppose I show him right into a room with seven men in it where he expected to find me alone. There is going to be shooting, and somebody is going to be hurt.”

“That’s so.”

“And the noise is going to bring every damned copper in the township on top of it.”

“I guess you are right.”

“This is how I should work it. You will all be in the big room — same as you saw when you had a chat with me. I’ll open the door for him, show him into the parlour beside the door, and leave him there while I get the papers. That will give me the chance of telling you how things are shaping. Then I will go back to him with some faked papers. As he is reading them I will jump for him and get my grip on his pistol arm. You’ll hear me call and in you will rush. The quicker the better; for he is as strong a man as I, and I may have more than I can manage. But I allow that I can hold him till you come.”

“It’s a good plan,” said McGinty. “The lodge will owe you a debt for this. I guess when I move out of the chair I can put a name to the man that’s coming after me.”

“Sure, Councillor, I am little more than a recruit,” said McMurdo; but his face showed what he thought of the great man’s compliment.

When he had returned home he made his own preparations for the grim evening in front of him. First he cleaned, oiled, and loaded his Smith & Wesson revolver. Then he surveyed the room in which the detective was to be trapped. It was a large apartment, with a long deal table in the centre, and the big stove at one side. At each of the other sides were windows. There were no shutters on these: only light curtains which drew across. McMurdo examined these attentively. No doubt it must have struck him that the apartment was very exposed for so secret a meeting. Yet its distance from the road made it of less consequence. Finally he discussed the matter with his fellow lodger. Scanlan, though a Scowrer, was an inoffensive little man who was too weak to stand against the opinion of his comrades, but was secretly horrified by the deeds of blood at which he had sometimes been forced to assist. McMurdo told him shortly what was intended.

"And if I were you, Mike Scanlan, I would take a night off and keep clear of it. There will be bloody work here before morning."

"Well, indeed then, Mac," Scanlan answered. "It's not the will but the nerve that is wanting in me. When I saw Manager Dunn go down at the colliery yonder it was just more than I could stand. I'm not made for it, same as you or McGinty. If the lodge will think none the worse of me, I'll just do as you advise and leave you to yourselves for the evening."

The men came in good time as arranged. They were outwardly respectable citizens, well clad and cleanly; but a judge of faces would have read little hope for Birdy Edwards in those hard mouths and remorseless eyes. There was not a man in the room whose hands had not been reddened a dozen times before. They were as hardened to human murder as a butcher to sheep.

Foremost, of course, both in appearance and in guilt, was the formidable Boss. Harraway, the secretary, was a lean, bitter man with a long, scraggy neck and nervous, jerky limbs, a man of incorruptible fidelity where the finances of the order were concerned, and with no notion of justice or honesty to anyone beyond. The treasurer, Carter, was a middle-aged man, with an impassive, rather sulky expression, and a yellow parchment skin. He was a capable organizer, and the actual details of nearly every outrage had sprung from his plotting brain. The two Willabys were men of action, tall, lithe young fellows with determined faces, while their companion, Tiger Cormac, a heavy, dark youth, was feared even by his own comrades for the ferocity of his disposition. These were the men who assembled that night under the roof of McMurdo for the killing of the Pinkerton detective.

Their host had placed whisky upon the table, and they had hastened to prime themselves for the work before them. Baldwin and Cormac were already half-drunk, and the liquor had brought out all their ferocity. Cormac placed his hands on the stove for an instant — it had been lighted, for the nights were still cold.

"That will do," said he, with an oath.

"Ay," said Baldwin, catching his meaning. "If he is strapped to that, we will have the truth out of him."

"We'll have the truth out of him, never fear," said McMurdo. He had nerves of steel, this man; for though the whole weight of the affair was on him his manner was as cool and unconcerned as ever. The others marked it and applauded.

"You are the one to handle him," said the Boss approvingly. "Not a warning will he get till your hand is on his throat. It's a pity there are no shutters to your windows."

McMurdo went from one to the other and drew the curtains tighter. "Sure no one can spy upon us now. It's close upon the hour."

"Maybe he won't come. Maybe he'll get a sniff of danger," said the secretary.

"He'll come, never fear," McMurdo answered. "He is as eager to come as you can be to see him. Hark to that!"

They all sat like wax figures, some with their glasses arrested halfway to their lips. Three loud knocks had sounded at the door.

"Hush!" McMurdo raised his hand in caution. An exulting glance went round the circle, and hands were laid upon their weapons.

"Not a sound, for your lives!" McMurdo whispered, as he went from the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

With strained ears the murderers waited. They counted the steps of their comrade down the passage. Then they heard him open the outer door. There were a few words as of greeting. Then they were aware of a strange step inside and of an unfamiliar voice. An instant later came the slam of the door and the turning of the key in the lock. Their prey was safe within the trap. Tiger Cormac laughed horribly, and Boss McGinty clapped his great hand across his mouth.

"Be quiet, you fool!" he whispered. "You'll be the undoing of us yet!"

There was a mutter of conversation from the next room. It seemed interminable. Then the door opened, and McMurdo appeared, his finger upon his lip.

He came to the end of the table and looked round at them. A subtle change had come over him. His manner was as of one who has great work to do. His face had set into granite firmness. His eyes shone with a fierce excitement behind his spectacles. He had become a visible leader of men.

They stared at him with eager interest; but he said nothing. Still with the same singular gaze he looked from man to man.

"Well!" cried Boss McGinty at last. "Is he here? Is Birdy Edwards here?"

"Yes," McMurdo answered slowly. "Birdy Edwards is here. I am Birdy Edwards!"

There were ten seconds after that brief speech during which the room might have been empty, so profound was the silence. The hissing of a kettle upon the stove rose sharp and strident to the ear. Seven white faces, all turned upward to this man who dominated them, were set motionless with utter terror. Then, with a sudden shivering of glass, a bristle of glistening rifle barrels broke through each window, while the curtains were torn from their hangings.

At the sight Boss McGinty gave the roar of a wounded bear and plunged for the half-opened door. A levelled revolver met him there with the stern blue eyes of Captain Marvin of the Mine Police gleaming behind the sights. The Boss recoiled and fell back into his chair.

"You're safer there, Councillor," said the man whom they had known as McMurdo. "And you, Baldwin, if you don't take your hand off your pistol, you'll cheat the hangman yet. Pull it out, or by the Lord that made me — There, that will do. There are forty armed men round this house, and you can figure it out for yourself what chance you have. Take their pistols, Marvin!"

There was no possible resistance under the menace of those rifles. The men were disarmed. Sulky, sheepish, and amazed, they still sat round the table.

"I'd like to say a word to you before we separate," said the man who had trapped them. "I guess we may not meet again until you see me on the stand in the courthouse. I'll give you something to think over between now and then. You know me now for what I am. At last I can put my cards on the table. I am Birdy Edwards of Pinkerton's. I was chosen to break up your gang. I had a hard and dangerous game to play. Not a soul, not one soul, not my nearest and dearest, knew that I was playing it. Only Captain Marvin here and my employers knew that. But it's over to-night, thank God, and I am the winner!"

The seven pale, rigid faces looked up at him. There was unappeasable hatred in their eyes. He read the relentless threat.

"Maybe you think that the game is not over yet. Well, I take my chance of that. Anyhow, some of you will take no further hand, and there are sixty more besides yourselves that will see a jail this night. I'll tell you this, that when I was put upon this job I never believed there was such a society as yours. I thought it was paper talk, and that I would prove it so. They told me it was to do with the Freemen; so I went to Chicago and was made one. Then I was surer than ever that it was just paper talk; for I found no harm in the society, but a deal of good.

"Still, I had to carry out my job, and I came to the coal valleys. When I reached this place I learned that I was wrong and that it wasn't a dime novel after all. So I stayed to look after it. I never killed a man in Chicago. I never minted a dollar in my life. Those I gave you were as good as any others; but I never spent money better. But I knew the way into your good wishes and so I pretended to you that the law was after me. It all worked just as I thought.

"So I joined your infernal lodge, and I took my share in your councils. Maybe they will say that I was as bad as you. They can say what they like, so long as I get you. But what is the truth? The night I joined you beat up old man Stanger. I could not warn him, for there was no time; but I held your hand, Baldwin, when you would have killed him. If ever I have suggested things, so as to keep my place among you, they were things which I knew I could prevent. I could not save Dunn and Menzies, for I did not know enough; but I will see that their murderers are hanged. I gave Chester Wilcox warning, so that when I blew his house in he and his folk were in hiding. There was many a crime that I could not stop; but if you look back and think how often your man came home the other road, or was down in town when you went for him, or stayed indoors when you thought he would come out, you'll see my work."

"You blasted traitor!" hissed McGinty through his closed teeth.

"Ay, John McGinty, you may call me that if it eases your smart. You and your like have been the enemy of God and man in these parts. It took a man to get between you and the poor devils of men and women that you held under your grip. There was just one way of doing it, and I did it. You call me a traitor; but I guess there's many a thousand will call me a deliverer that went down into hell to save them. I've had three months of it. I wouldn't have three such months again if they let me loose in the treasury at Washington for it. I had to stay till I had it all, every man and every secret right here in this hand. I'd have waited a little longer if it hadn't come to my knowledge that my secret was coming out. A letter had come into the town that would have set you wise to it all. Then I had to act and act quickly.

"I've nothing more to say to you, except that when my time comes I'll die the easier when I think of the work I have done in this valley. Now, Marvin, I'll keep you no more. Take them in and get it over."

There is little more to tell. Scanlan had been given a sealed note to be left at the address of Miss Ettie Shafter, a mission which he had accepted with a wink and a knowing smile. In the early hours of the morning a beautiful woman and a much muffled man boarded a special train which had been sent by the railroad company, and made a swift, unbroken journey out of the land of danger. It was the last time that ever either Ettie or her lover set foot in the Valley of Fear. Ten days later they were married in Chicago, with old Jacob Shafter as witness of the wedding.

The trial of the Scowrers was held far from the place where their adherents might have terrified the guardians of the law. In vain they struggled. In vain the money of the lodge — money squeezed by blackmail out of the whole countryside — was spent like water in the attempt to save them. That cold, clear, unimpassioned statement from one who knew every detail of their lives, their organization, and their crimes was unshaken by all the wiles of their defenders. At last after so many years they were broken and scattered. The cloud was lifted forever from the valley.

McGinty met his fate upon the scaffold, cringing and whining when the last hour came. Eight of his chief followers shared his fate. Fifty-odd had various degrees of imprisonment. The work of Birdy Edwards was complete.

And yet, as he had guessed, the game was not over yet. There was another hand to be played, and yet another and another. Ted Baldwin, for one, had escaped the scaffold; so had the Willabys; so had several others of the fiercest spirits of the gang. For ten years they were out of the world, and then came a day when they were free once more — a day which Edwards, who knew his men, was very sure would be an end of his life of peace. They had sworn an oath on all that they thought holy to have his blood as a vengeance for their comrades. And well they strove to keep their vow!

From Chicago he was chased, after two attempts so near success that it was sure that the third would get him. From Chicago he went under a changed name to California, and it was there that the light went for a time out of his life when Ettie Edwards died. Once again he was nearly killed, and once again under the name of Douglas he worked in a lonely canyon, where with an English partner named Barker he amassed a fortune. At last there came a warning to him that the bloodhounds were on his track once more, and he cleared — only just in time — for England. And thence came the John Douglas who for a second time married a worthy mate, and lived for five years as a Sussex county gentleman, a life which ended with the strange happenings of which we have heard.

Epilogue

The police trial had passed, in which the case of John Douglas was referred to a higher court. So had the Quarter Sessions, at which he was acquitted as having acted in self-defense.

“Get him out of England at any cost,” wrote Holmes to the wife. “There are forces here which may be more dangerous than those he has escaped. There is no safety for your husband in England.”

Two months had gone by, and the case had to some extent passed from our minds. Then one morning there came an enigmatic note slipped into our letter box. “Dear me, Mr. Holmes. Dear me!” said this singular epistle. There was neither superscription nor signature. I laughed at the quaint message; but Holmes showed unwonted seriousness.

“Deviltry, Watson!” he remarked, and sat long with a clouded brow.

Late last night Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, brought up a message that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Holmes, and that the matter was of the utmost importance. Close at the heels of his messenger came Cecil Barker, our friend of the moated Manor House. His face was drawn and haggard.

“I’ve had bad news — terrible news, Mr. Holmes,” said he.

“I feared as much,” said Holmes.

“You have not had a cable, have you?”

“I have had a note from someone who has.”

“It’s poor Douglas. They tell me his name is Edwards; but he will always be Jack Douglas of Benito Canyon to me. I told you that they started together for South Africa in the Palmyra three weeks ago.”

“Exactly.”

“The ship reached Cape Town last night. I received this cable from Mrs. Douglas this morning:

“‘Jack has been lost overboard in gale off St. Helena. No one knows how accident occurred.’

“‘IVY DOUGLAS.’”

“Ha! It came like that, did it?” said Holmes thoughtfully. “Well, I’ve no doubt it was well stage-managed.”

“You mean that you think there was no accident?”

“None in the world.”

“He was murdered?”

“Surely!”

“So I think also. These infernal Scowrers, this cursed vindictive nest of criminals—”

“No, no, my good sir,” said Holmes. “There is a master hand here. It is no case of sawed-off shotguns and clumsy six-shooters. You can tell an old master by the sweep of his brush. I can tell a Moriarty when I see one. This crime is from London, not from America.”

“But for what motive?”

“Because it is done by a man who cannot afford to fail, one whose whole unique position depends upon the fact that all he does must succeed. A great brain and a huge organization have been turned to the extinction of one man. It is crushing the nut with the triphammer — an absurd extravagance of energy — but the nut is very effectually crushed all the same.”

“How came this man to have anything to do with it?”

“I can only say that the first word that ever came to us of the business was from one of his lieutenants. These Americans were well advised. Having an English job to do, they took into partnership, as any foreign criminal could do, this great consultant in crime. From that moment their man was doomed. At first he would content himself by using his machinery in order to find their victim. Then he would indicate how the matter might be treated. Finally, when he read in the reports of the failure of this agent, he would step in himself with a master touch. You heard me warn this man at Birlstone Manor House that the coming danger was greater than the past. Was I right?”

Barker beat his head with his clenched fist in his impotent anger. “Do not tell me that we have to sit down under this? Do you say that no one can ever get level with this king devil?”

“No, I don’t say that,” said Holmes, and his eyes seemed to be looking far into the future. “I don’t say that he can’t be beat. But you must give me time — you must give me time!”

We all sat in silence for some minutes while those fateful eyes still strained to pierce the veil.

HIS LAST BOW

This is a collection of eight Sherlock Holmes stories. Originally published in 1917, it contains the various Holmes stories published between 1908 and 1913, as well as the one-off title story from 1917.

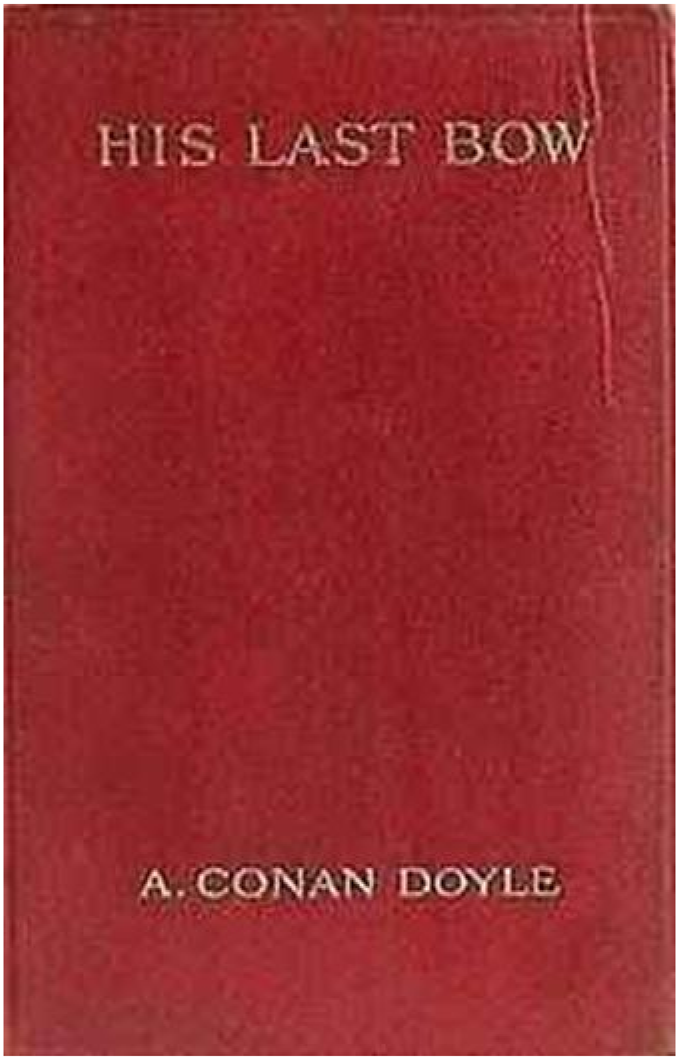
HIS LAST BOW
A. CONAN DOYLE

The first edition

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The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge

The Singular Experience of Mr. John Scott Eccles

I find it recorded in my notebook that it was a bleak and windy day towards the end of March in the year 1892. Holmes had received a telegram while we sat at our lunch, and he had scribbled a reply. He made no remark, but the matter remained in his thoughts, for he stood in front of the fire afterwards with a thoughtful face, smoking his pipe, and casting an occasional glance at the message. Suddenly he turned upon me with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"I suppose, Watson, we must look upon you as a man of letters," said he. "How do you define the word 'grotesque'?"

"Strange — remarkable," I suggested.

He shook his head at my definition.

"There is surely something more than that," said he; "some underlying suggestion of the tragic and the terrible. If you cast your mind back to some of those narratives with which you have afflicted a long-suffering public, you will recognise how often the grotesque has deepened into the criminal. Think of that little affair of the red-headed men. That was grotesque enough in the outset, and yet it ended in a desperate attempt at robbery. Or, again, there was that most grotesque affair of the five orange pips, which led straight to a murderous conspiracy. The word puts me on the alert."

"Have you it there?" I asked.

He read the telegram aloud.

"Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. May I consult you?

"Scott Eccles,

"Post Office, Charing Cross."

"Man or woman?" I asked.

"Oh, man, of course. No woman would ever send a reply-paid telegram. She would have come."

"Will you see him?"

"My dear Watson, you know how bored I have been since we locked up Colonel Carruthers. My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built. Life is commonplace, the papers are sterile; audacity and romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world. Can you ask me, then, whether I am ready to look into any new problem, however trivial it may prove? But here, unless I am mistaken, is our client."

A measured step was heard upon the stairs, and a moment later a stout, tall, gray-whiskered and solemnly respectable person was ushered into the room. His life history was written in his heavy features and pompous manner. From his spats to his gold-rimmed spectacles he was a Conservative, a churchman, a good citizen, orthodox and conventional to the last degree. But some amazing experience had disturbed his native composure and left its traces in his bristling hair, his flushed, angry cheeks, and his flurried, excited manner. He plunged instantly into his business.

"I have had a most singular and unpleasant experience, Mr. Holmes," said he. "Never in my life have I been placed in such a situation. It is most improper — most outrageous. I must insist upon some explanation." He swelled and puffed in his anger.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Scott Eccles," said Holmes in a soothing voice. "May I ask, in the first place, why you came to me at all?"

"Well, sir, it did not appear to be a matter which concerned the police, and yet, when you have heard the facts, you must admit that I could not leave it where it was. Private detectives are a class with whom I have absolutely no sympathy, but none the less, having heard your name—"

"Quite so. But, in the second place, why did you not come at once?"

Holmes glanced at his watch.

"It is a quarter-past two," he said. "Your telegram was dispatched about one. But no one can glance at your toilet and attire without seeing that your disturbance dates from the moment of your waking."

Our client smoothed down his unbrushed hair and felt his unshaven chin.

"You are right, Mr. Holmes. I never gave a thought to my toilet. I was only too glad to get out of such a house. But I have been running round making inquiries before I came to you. I went to the house agents, you know, and they said that Mr. Garcia's rent was paid up all right and that everything was in order at Wisteria Lodge."

"Come, come, sir," said Holmes, laughing. "You are like my friend, Dr. Watson, who has a bad habit of telling his stories wrong end foremost. Please arrange your thoughts and let me know, in their due sequence, exactly what those events are which have sent you out unbrushed and unkempt, with dress boots and waistcoat buttoned awry, in search of advice and assistance.”

Our client looked down with a rueful face at his own unconventional appearance.

“I’m sure it must look very bad, Mr. Holmes, and I am not aware that in my whole life such a thing has ever happened before. But will tell you the whole queer business, and when I have done so you will admit, I am sure, that there has been enough to excuse me.”

But his narrative was nipped in the bud. There was a bustle outside, and Mrs. Hudson opened the door to usher in two robust and official-looking individuals, one of whom was well known to us as Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard, an energetic, gallant, and, within his limitations, a capable officer. He shook hands with Holmes and introduced his comrade as Inspector Baynes, of the Surrey Constabulary.

“We are hunting together, Mr. Holmes, and our trail lay in this direction.” He turned his bulldog eyes upon our visitor. “Are you Mr. John Scott Eccles, of Popham House, Lee?”

“I am.”

“We have been following you about all the morning.”

“You traced him through the telegram, no doubt,” said Holmes.

“Exactly, Mr. Holmes. We picked up the scent at Charing Cross Post-Office and came on here.”

“But why do you follow me? What do you want?”

“We wish a statement, Mr. Scott Eccles, as to the events which let up to the death last night of Mr. Aloysius Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, near Esher.”

Our client had sat up with staring eyes and every tinge of colour struck from his astonished face.

“Dead? Did you say he was dead?”

“Yes, sir, he is dead.”

“But how? An accident?”

“Murder, if ever there was one upon earth.”

“Good God! This is awful! You don’t mean — you don’t mean that I am suspected?”

“A letter of yours was found in the dead man’s pocket, and we know by it that you had planned to pass last night at his house.”

“So I did.”

“Oh, you did, did you?”

Out came the official notebook.

"Wait a bit, Gregson," said Sherlock Holmes. "All you desire is a plain statement, is it not?"

"And it is my duty to warn Mr. Scott Eccles that it may be used against him."

"Mr. Eccles was going to tell us about it when you entered the room. I think, Watson, a brandy and soda would do him no harm. Now, sir, I suggest that you take no notice of this addition to your audience, and that you proceed with your narrative exactly as you would have done had you never been interrupted."

Our visitor had gulped off the brandy and the colour had returned to his face. With a dubious glance at the inspector's notebook, he plunged at once into his extraordinary statement.

"I am a bachelor," said he, "and being of a sociable turn I cultivate a large number of friends. Among these are the family of a retired brewer called Melville, living at Abermarle Mansion, Kensington. It was at his table that I met some weeks ago a young fellow named Garcia. He was, I understood, of Spanish descent and connected in some way with the embassy. He spoke perfect English, was pleasing in his manners, and as good-looking a man as ever I saw in my life.

"In some way we struck up quite a friendship, this young fellow and I. He seemed to take a fancy to me from the first, and within two days of our meeting he came to see me at Lee. One thing led to another, and it ended in his inviting me out to spend a few days at his house, Wisteria Lodge, between Esher and Oxshott. Yesterday evening I went to Esher to fulfil this engagement.

"He had described his household to me before I went there. He lived with a faithful servant, a countryman of his own, who looked after all his needs. This fellow could speak English and did his housekeeping for him. Then there was a wonderful cook, he said, a half-breed whom he had picked up in his travels, who could serve an excellent dinner. I remember that he remarked what a queer household it was to find in the heart of Surrey, and that I agreed with him, though it has proved a good deal queerer than I thought.

"I drove to the place — about two miles on the south side of Esher. The house was a fair-sized one, standing back from the road, with a curving drive which was banked with high evergreen shrubs. It was an old, tumbledown building in a crazy state of disrepair. When the trap pulled up on the grass-grown drive in front of the blotched and weather-stained door, I had doubts as to my wisdom in visiting a man whom I knew so slightly. He opened the door himself, however, and greeted me with a great show of cordiality. I was handed over to the manservant, a melancholy, swarthy individual, who led the way, my bag in his hand, to my bedroom. The whole place was depressing. Our dinner was tete-a-tete, and though my host did his best to be entertaining, his thoughts seemed to continually wander, and he talked so vaguely and wildly that I could hardly understand him. He continually drummed his fingers on the table, gnawed his nails, and gave other signs of nervous impatience. The dinner itself was neither well served nor well cooked, and the gloomy presence of the taciturn servant did not help to enliven us. I can assure you that many times in the course of the evening I wished that I could invent some excuse which would take me back to Lee.

“One thing comes back to my memory which may have a bearing upon the business that you two gentlemen are investigating. I thought nothing of it at the time. Near the end of dinner a note was handed in by the servant. I noticed that after my host had read it he seemed even more distrait and strange than before. He gave up all pretence at conversation and sat, smoking endless cigarettes, lost in his own thoughts, but he made no remark as to the contents. About eleven I was glad to go to bed. Some time later Garcia looked in at my door — the room was dark at the time — and asked me if I had rung. I said that I had not. He apologized for having disturbed me so late, saying that it was nearly one o’clock. I dropped off after this and slept soundly all night.

“And now I come to the amazing part of my tale. When I woke it was broad daylight. I glanced at my watch, and the time was nearly nine. I had particularly asked to be called at eight, so I was very much astonished at this forgetfulness. I sprang up and rang for the servant. There was no response. I rang again and again, with the same result. Then I came to the conclusion that the bell was out of order. I huddled on my clothes and hurried downstairs in an exceedingly bad temper to order some hot water. You can imagine my surprise when I found that there was no one there. I shouted in the hall. There was no answer. Then I ran from room to room. All were deserted. My host had shown me which was his bedroom the night before, so I knocked at the door. No reply. I turned the handle and walked in. The room was empty, and the bed had never been slept in. He had gone with the rest. The foreign host, the foreign footman, the foreign cook, all had vanished in the night! That was the end of my visit to Wisteria Lodge."

Sherlock Holmes was rubbing his hands and chuckling as he added this bizarre incident to his collection of strange episodes.

"Your experience is, so far as I know, perfectly unique," said he. "May I ask, sir, what you did then?"

"I was furious. My first idea was that I had been the victim of some absurd practical joke. I packed my things, banged the hall door behind me, and set off for Esher, with my bag in my hand. I called at Allan Brothers', the chief land agents in the village, and found that it was from this firm that the villa had been rented. It struck me that the whole proceeding could hardly be for the purpose of making a fool of me, and that the main object must be to get out of the rent. It is late in March, so quarter-day is at hand. But this theory would not work. The agent was obliged to me for my warning, but told me that the rent had been paid in advance. Then I made my way to town and called at the Spanish embassy. The man was unknown there. After this I went to see Melville, at whose house I had first met Garcia, but I found that he really knew rather less about him than I did. Finally when I got your reply to my wire I came out to you, since I gather that you are a person who gives advice in difficult cases. But now, Mr. Inspector, I understand, from what you said when you entered the room, that you can carry the story on, and that some tragedy had occurred. I can assure you that every word I have said is the truth, and that, outside of what I have told you, I know absolutely nothing about the fate of this man. My only desire is to help the law in every possible way."

"I am sure of it, Mr. Scott Eccles — I am sure of it," said Inspector Gregson in a very amiable tone. "I am bound to say that everything which you have said agrees very closely with the facts as they have come to our notice. For example, there was that note which arrived during dinner. Did you chance to observe what became of it?"

"Yes, I did. Garcia rolled it up and threw it into the fire."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Baynes?"

The country detective was a stout, puffy, red man, whose face was only redeemed from grossness by two extraordinarily bright eyes, almost hidden behind the heavy creases of cheek and brow. With a slow smile he drew a folded and discoloured scrap of paper from his pocket.

"It was a dog-grate, Mr. Holmes, and he overpitched it. I picked this out unburned from the back of it."

Holmes smiled his appreciation.

"You must have examined the house very carefully to find a single pellet of paper."

"I did, Mr. Holmes. It's my way. Shall I read it, Mr. Gregson?"

The Londoner nodded.

"The note is written upon ordinary cream-laid paper without watermark. It is a quarter-sheet. The paper is cut off in two snips with a short-bladed scissors. It has been folded over three times and sealed with purple wax, put on hurriedly and pressed down with some flat oval object. It is addressed to Mr. Garcia, Wisteria Lodge. It says:

"Our own colours, green and white. Green open, white shut. Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize. Godspeed. D.

"It is a woman's writing, done with a sharp-pointed pen, but the address is either done with another pen or by someone else. It is thicker and bolder, as you see."

"A very remarkable note," said Holmes, glancing it over. "I must compliment you, Mr. Baynes, upon your attention to detail in your examination of it. A few trifling points might perhaps be added. The oval seal is undoubtedly a plain sleeve-link — what else is of such a shape? The scissors were bent nail scissors. Short as the two snips are, you can distinctly see the same slight curve in each."

The country detective chuckled.

"I thought I had squeezed all the juice out of it, but I see there was a little over," he said. "I'm bound to say that I make nothing of the note except that there was something on hand, and that a woman, as usual was at the bottom of it."

Mr. Scott Eccles had fidgeted in his seat during this conversation.

"I am glad you found the note, since it corroborates my story," said he. "But I beg to point out that I have not yet heard what has happened to Mr. Garcia, nor what has become of his household."

"As to Garcia," said Gregson, "that is easily answered. He was found dead this morning upon Oxshott Common, nearly a mile from his home. His head had been smashed to pulp by heavy blows of a sandbag or some such instrument, which had crushed rather than wounded. It is a lonely corner, and there is no house within a quarter of a mile of the spot. He had apparently been struck down first from behind, but his assailant had gone on beating him long after he was dead. It was a most furious assault. There are no footsteps nor any clue to the criminals.”

“Robbed?”

“No, there was no attempt at robbery.”

“This is very painful — very painful and terrible,” said Mr. Scott Eccles in a querulous voice, “but it is really uncommonly hard on me. I had nothing to do with my host going off upon a nocturnal excursion and meeting so sad an end. How do I come to be mixed up with the case?”

“Very simply, sir,” Inspector Baynes answered. “The only document found in the pocket of the deceased was a letter from you saying that you would be with him on the night of his death. It was the envelope of this letter which gave us the dead man’s name and address. It was after nine this morning when we reached his house and found neither you nor anyone else inside it. I wired to Mr. Gregson to run you down in London while I examined Wisteria Lodge. Then I came into town, joined Mr. Gregson, and here we are.”

“I think now,” said Gregson, rising, “we had best put this matter into an official shape. You will come round with us to the station, Mr. Scott Eccles, and let us have your statement in writing.”

“Certainly, I will come at once. But I retain your services, Mr. Holmes. I desire you to spare no expense and no pains to get at the truth.”

My friend turned to the country inspector.

“I suppose that you have no objection to my collaborating with you, Mr. Baynes?”

“Highly honoured, sir, I am sure.”

“You appear to have been very prompt and businesslike in all that you have done. Was there any clue, may I ask, as to the exact hour that the man met his death?”

“He had been there since one o’clock. There was rain about that time, and his death had certainly been before the rain.”

“But that is perfectly impossible, Mr. Baynes,” cried our client. “His voice is unmistakable. I could swear to it that it was he who addressed me in my bedroom at that very hour.”

“Remarkable, but by no means impossible,” said Holmes, smiling.

“You have a clue?” asked Gregson.

“On the face of it the case is not a very complex one, though it certainly presents some novel and interesting features. A further knowledge of facts is necessary before I would venture to give a final and definite opinion. By the way, Mr. Baynes, did you find anything remarkable besides this note in your examination of the house?”

The detective looked at my friend in a singular way.

“There were,” said he, “one or two VERY remarkable things. Perhaps when I have finished at the police-station you would care to come out and give me your opinion of them.”

“I am entirely at your service,” said Sherlock Holmes, ringing the bell. “You will show these gentlemen out, Mrs. Hudson, and kindly send the boy with this telegram. He is to pay a five-shilling reply.”

We sat for some time in silence after our visitors had left. Holmes smoked hard, with his browns drawn down over his keen eyes, and his head thrust forward in the eager way characteristic of the man.

“Well, Watson,” he asked, turning suddenly upon me, “what do you make of it?”

“I can make nothing of this mystification of Scott Eccles.”

“But the crime?”

“Well, taken with the disappearance of the man’s companions, I should say that they were in some way concerned in the murder and had fled from justice.”

“That is certainly a possible point of view. On the face of it you must admit, however, that it is very strange that his two servants should have been in a conspiracy against him and should have attacked him on the one night when he had a guest. They had him alone at their mercy every other night in the week.”

“Then why did they fly?”

“Quite so. Why did they fly? There is a big fact. Another big fact is the remarkable experience of our client, Scott Eccles. Now, my dear Watson, is it beyond the limits of human ingenuity to furnish an explanation which would cover both of these big facts? If it were one which would also admit of the mysterious note with its very curious phraseology, why, then it would be worth accepting as a temporary hypothesis. If the fresh facts which come to our knowledge all fit themselves into the scheme, then our hypothesis may gradually become a solution.”

“But what is our hypothesis?”

Holmes leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes.

"You must admit, my dear Watson, that the idea of a joke is impossible. There were grave events afoot, as the sequel showed, and the coaxing of Scott Eccles to Wisteria Lodge had some connection with them."

"But what possible connection?"

"Let us take it link by link. There is, on the face of it, something unnatural about this strange and sudden friendship between the young Spaniard and Scott Eccles. It was the former who forced the pace. He called upon Eccles at the other end of London on the very day after he first met him, and he kept in close touch with him until he got him down to Esher. Now, what did he want with Eccles? What could Eccles supply? I see no charm in the man. He is not particulary intelligent — not a man likely to be congenial to a quick-witted Latin. Why, then, was he picked out from all the other people whom Garcia met as particularly suited to his purpose? Has he any one outstanding quality? I say that he has. He is the very type of conventional British respectability, and the very man as a witness to impress another Briton. You saw yourself how neither of the inspectors dreamed of questioning his statement, extraordinary as it was."

"But what was he to witness?"

"Nothing, as things turned out, but everything had they gone another way. That is how I read the matter."

"I see, he might have proved an alibi."

"Exactly, my dear Watson; he might have proved an alibi. We will suppose, for argument's sake, that the household of Wisteria Lodge are confederates in some design. The attempt, whatever it may be, is to come off, we will say, before one o'clock. By some juggling of the clocks it is quite possible that they may have got Scott Eccles to bed earlier than he thought, but in any case it is likely that when Garcia went out of his way to tell him that it was one it was really not more than twelve. If Garcia could do whatever he had to do and be back by the hour mentioned he had evidently a powerful reply to any accusation. Here was this irreproachable Englishman ready to swear in any court of law that the accused was in the house all the time. It was an insurance against the worst."

"Yes, yes, I see that. But how about the disappearance of the others?"

"I have not all my facts yet, but I do not think there are any insuperable difficulties. Still, it is an error to argue in front of your data. You find yourself insensibly twisting them round to fit your theories."

“And the message?”

“How did it run? ‘Our own colours, green and white.’ Sounds like racing. ‘Green open, white shut.’ That is clearly a signal. ‘Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize.’ This is an assignation. We may find a jealous husband at the bottom of it all. It was clearly a dangerous quest. She would not have said ‘Godspeed’ had it not been so. ‘D’ — that should be a guide.”

“The man was a Spaniard. I suggest that ‘D’ stands for Dolores, a common female name in Spain.”

“Good, Watson, very good — but quite inadmissable. A Spaniard would write to a Spaniard in Spanish. The writer of this note is certainly English. Well, we can only possess our soul in patience until this excellent inspector come back for us. Meanwhile we can thank our lucky fate which has rescued us for a few short hours from the insufferable fatigues of idleness.”

An answer had arrived to Holmes’s telegram before our Surrey officer had returned. Holmes read it and was about to place it in his notebook when he caught a glimpse of my expectant face. He tossed it across with a laugh.

“We are moving in exalted circles,” said he.

The telegram was a list of names and addresses:

Lord Harringby, The Dingle; Sir George Ffolliott, Oxshott Towers; Mr. Hynes Hynes, J.P., Purdley Place; Mr. James Baker Williams, Forton Old Hall; Mr. Henderson, High Gable; Rev. Joshua Stone, Nether Walsling.

“This is a very obvious way of limiting our field of operations,” said Holmes. “No doubt Baynes, with his methodical mind, has already adopted some similar plan.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“Well, my dear fellow, we have already arrived at the conclusion that the message received by Garcia at dinner was an appointment or an assignation. Now, if the obvious reading of it is correct, and in order to keep the tryst one has to ascend a main stair and seek the seventh door in a corridor, it is perfectly clear that the house is a very large one. It is equally certain that this house cannot be more than a mile or two from Oxshott, since Garcia was walking in that direction and hoped, according to my reading of the facts, to be back in Wisteria Lodge in time to avail himself of an alibi, which would only be valid up to one o’clock. As the number of large houses close to Oxshott must be limited, I adopted the obvious method of sending to the agents mentioned by Scott Eccles and obtaining a list of them. Here they are in this telegram, and the other end of our tangled skein must lie among them.”

It was nearly six o’clock before we found ourselves in the pretty Surrey village of Esher, with Inspector Baynes as our companion.

Holmes and I had taken things for the night, and found comfortable quarters at the Bull. Finally we set out in the company of the detective on our visit to Wisteria Lodge. It was a cold, dark March evening, with a sharp wind and a fine rain beating upon our faces, a fit setting for the wild common over which our road passed and the tragic goal to which it led us.

The Tiger of San Pedro

A cold and melancholy walk of a couple of miles brought us to a high wooden gate, which opened into a gloomy avenue of chestnuts. The curved and shadowed drive led us to a low, dark house, pitch-black against a slate-coloured sky. From the front window upon the left of the door there peeped a glimmer of a feeble light.

"There's a constable in possession," said Baynes. "I'll knock at the window." He stepped across the grass plot and tapped with his hand on the pane. Through the fogged glass I dimly saw a man spring up from a chair beside the fire, and heard a sharp cry from within the room. An instant later a white-faced, hard-breathing policeman had opened the door, the candle wavering in his trembling hand.

"What's the matter, Walters?" asked Baynes sharply.

The man mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and agave a long sigh of relief.

"I am glad you have come, sir. It has been a long evening, and I don't think my nerve is as good as it was."

"Your nerve, Walters? I should not have thought you had a nerve in your body."

"Well, sir, it's this lonely, silent house and the queer thing in the kitchen. Then when you tapped at the window I thought it had come again."

"That what had come again?"

"The devil, sir, for all I know. It was at the window."

"What was at the window, and when?"

"It was just about two hours ago. The light was just fading. I was sitting reading in the chair. I don't know what made me look up, but there was a face looking in at me through the lower pane. Lord, sir, what a face it was! I'll see it in my dreams."

"Tut, tut, Walters. This is not talk for a police-constable."

"I know, sir, I know; but it shook me, sir, and there's no use to deny it. It wasn't black, sir, nor was it white, nor any colour that I know but a kind of queer shade like clay with a splash of milk in it. Then there was the size of it — it was twice yours, sir. And the look of it — the great staring goggle eyes, and the line of white teeth like a hungry beast. I tell you, sir, I couldn't move a finger, nor get my breath, till it whisked away and was gone. Out I ran and through the shrubbery, but thank God there was no one there."

"If I didn't know you were a good man, Walters, I should put a black mark against you for this. If it were the devil himself a constable on duty should never thank God that he could not lay his hands upon him. I suppose the whole thing is not a vision and a touch of nerves?"

"That, at least, is very easily settled," said Holmes, lighting his little pocket lantern. "Yes," he reported, after a short examination of the grass bed, "a number twelve shoe, I should say. If he was all on the same scale as his foot he must certainly have been a giant."

"What became of him?"

"He seems to have broken through the shrubbery and made for the road."

"Well," said the inspector with a grave and thoughtful face, "whoever he may have been, and whatever he may have wanted, he's gone for the present, and we have more immediate things to attend to. Now, Mr. Holmes, with your permission, I will show you round the house."

The various bedrooms and sitting-rooms had yielded nothing to a careful search. Apparently the tenants had brought little or nothing with them, and all the furniture down to the smallest details had been taken over with the house. A good deal of clothing with the stamp of Marx and Co., High Holborn, had been left behind. Telegraphic inquiries had been already made which showed that Marx knew nothing of his customer save that he was a good payer. Odds and ends, some pipes, a few novels, two of them in Spanish, and old-fashioned pinfire revolver, and a guitar were among the personal property.

"Nothing in all this," said Baynes, stalking, candle in hand, from room to room. "But now, Mr. Holmes, I invite your attention to the kitchen."

It was a gloomy, high-ceilinged room at the back of the house, with a straw litter in one corner, which served apparently as a bed for the cook. The table was piled with half-eaten dishes and dirty plates, the debris of last night's dinner.

"Look at this," said Baynes. "What do you make of it?"

He held up his candle before an extraordinary object which stood at the back of the dresser. It was so wrinkled and shrunken and withered that it was difficult to say what it might have been. One could but say that it was black and leathery and that it bore some resemblance to a dwarfish, human figure. At first, as I examined it, I thought that it was a mummified negro baby, and then it seemed a very twisted and ancient monkey. Finally I was left in doubt as to whether it was animal or human. A double band of white shells were strung round the centre of it.

"Very interesting — very interesting, indeed!" said Holmes, peering at this sinister relic. "Anything more?"

In silence Baynes led the way to the sink and held forward his candle. The limbs and body of some large, white bird, torn savagely to pieces with the feathers still on, were littered all over it. Holmes pointed to the wattles on the severed head.

"A white cock," said he. "Most interesting! It is really a very curious case."

But Mr. Baynes had kept his most sinister exhibit to the last. From under the sink he drew a zinc pail which contained a quantity of blood. Then from the table he took a platter heaped with small pieces of charred bone.

"Something has been killed and something has been burned. We raked all these out of the fire. We had a doctor in this morning. He says that they are not human."

Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands.

"I must congratulate you, Inspector, on handling so distinctive and instructive a case. Your powers, if I may say so without offence, seem superior to your opportunities."

Inspector Baynes's small eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"You're right, Mr. Holmes. We stagnate in the provinces. A case of this sort gives a man a chance, and I hope that I shall take it. What do you make of these bones?"

"A lamb, I should say, or a kid."

"And the white cock?"

"Curious, Mr. Baynes, very curious. I should say almost unique."

"Yes, sir, there must have been some very strange people with some very strange ways in this house. One of them is dead. Did his companions follow him and kill him? If they did we should have them, for every port is watched. But my own views are different. Yes, sir, my own views are very different."

"You have a theory then?"

"And I'll work it myself, Mr. Holmes. It's only due to my own credit to do so. Your name is made, but I have still to make mine. I should be glad to be able to say afterwards that I had solved it without your help."

Holmes laughed good-humoredly.

“Well, well, Inspector,” said he. “Do you follow your path and I will follow mine. My results are always very much at your service if you care to apply to me for them. I think that I have seen all that I wish in this house, and that my time may be more profitably employed elsewhere. Au revoir and good luck!”

I could tell by numerous subtle signs, which might have been lost upon anyone but myself, that Holmes was on a hot scent. As impassive as ever to the casual observer, there were none the less a subdued eagerness and suggestion of tension in his brightened eyes and brisker manner which assured me that the game was afoot. After his habit he said nothing, and after mine I asked no questions. Sufficient for me to share the sport and lend my humble help to the capture without distracting that intent brain with needless interruption. All would come round to me in due time.

I waited, therefore — but to my ever-deepening disappointment I waited in vain. Day succeeded day, and my friend took no step forward. One morning he spent in town, and I learned from a casual reference that he had visited the British Museum. Save for this one excursion, he spent his days in long and often solitary walks, or in chatting with a number of village gossips whose acquaintance he had cultivated.

“I’m sure, Watson, a week in the country will be invaluable to you,” he remarked. “It is very pleasant to see the first green shoots upon the hedges and the catkins on the hazels once again. With a spud, a tin box, and an elementary book on botany, there are instructive days to be spent.” He prowled about with this equipment himself, but it was a poor show of plants which he would bring back of an evening.

Occasionally in our rambles we came across Inspector Baynes. His fat, red face wreathed itself in smiles and his small eyes glittered as he greeted my companion. He said little about the case, but from that little we gathered that he also was not dissatisfied at the course of events. I must admit, however, that I was somewhat surprised when, some five days after the crime, I opened my morning paper to find in large letters:

THE OXSHOTT MYSTERY

A SOLUTION

ARREST OF SUPPOSED ASSASSIN

Holmes sprang in his chair as if he had been stung when I read the headlines.

“By Jove!” he cried. “You don’t mean that Baynes has got him?”

“Apparently,” said I as I read the following report:

“Great excitement was caused in Esher and the neighbouring district when it was learned late last night that an arrest had been effected in connection with the Oxshott murder. It will be remembered that Mr. Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, was found dead on Oxshott Common, his body showing signs of extreme violence, and that on the same night his servant and his cook fled, which appeared to show their participation in the crime. It was suggested, but never proved, that the deceased gentleman may have had valuables in the house, and that their abstraction was the motive of the crime. Every effort was made by Inspector Baynes, who has the case in hand, to ascertain the hiding place of the fugitives, and he had good reason to believe that they had not gone far but were lurking in some retreat which had been already prepared. It was certain from the first, however, that they would eventually be detected, as the cook, from the evidence of one or two tradespeople who have caught a glimpse of him through the window, was a man of most remarkable appearance — being a huge and hideous mulatto, with yellowish features of a pronounced negroid type. This man has been seen since the crime, for he was detected and pursued by Constable Walters on the same evening, when he had the audacity to revisit Wisteria Lodge. Inspector Baynes, considering that such a visit must have some purpose in view and was likely, therefore, to be repeated, abandoned the house but left an ambuscade in the shrubbery. The man walked into the trap and was captured last night after a struggle in which Constable Downing was badly bitten by the savage. We understand that when the prison is brought before the magistrates a remand will be applied for by the police, and that great developments are hoped from his capture.”

“Really we must see Baynes at once,” cried Holmes, picking up his hat. “We will just catch him before he starts.” We hurried down the village street and found, as we had expected, that the inspector was just leaving his lodgings.

“You’ve seen the paper, Mr. Holmes?” he asked, holding one out to us.

“Yes, Baynes, I’ve seen it. Pray don’t think it a liberty if I give you a word of friendly warning.”

“Of warning, Mr. Holmes?”

“I have looked into this case with some care, and I am not convinced that you are on the right lines. I don’t want you to commit yourself too far unless you are sure.”

“You’re very kind, Mr. Holmes.”

“I assure you I speak for your good.”

It seemed to me that something like a wink quivered for an instant over one of Mr. Baynes’s tiny eyes.

“We agreed to work on our own lines, Mr. Holmes. That’s what I am doing.”

“Oh, very good,” said Holmes. “Don’t blame me.”

“No, sir; I believe you mean well by me. But we all have our own systems, Mr. Holmes. You have yours, and maybe I have mine.”

“Let us say no more about it.”

“You’re welcome always to my news. This fellow is a perfect savage, as strong as a cart-horse and as fierce as the devil. He chewed Downing’s thumb nearly off before they could master him. He hardly speaks a word of English, and we can get nothing out of him but grunts.”

“And you think you have evidence that he murdered his late master?”

“I didn’t say so, Mr. Holmes; I didn’t say so. We all have our little ways. You try yours and I will try mine. That’s the agreement.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders as we walked away together. “I can’t make the man out. He seems to be riding for a fall. Well, as he says, we must each try our own way and see what comes of it. But there’s something in Inspector Baynes which I can’t quite understand.”

“Just sit down in that chair, Watson,” said Sherlock Holmes when we had returned to our apartment at the Bull. “I want to put you in touch with the situation, as I may need your help to-night. Let me show you the evolution of this case so far as I have been able to follow it. Simple as it has been in its leading features, it has none the less presented surprising difficulties in the way of an arrest. There are gaps in that direction which we have still to fill.

“We will go back to the note which was handed in to Garcia upon the evening of his death. We may put aside this idea of Baynes’s that Garcia’s servants were concerned in the matter. The proof of this lies in the fact that it was HE who had arranged for the presence of Scott Eccles, which could only have been done for the purpose of an alibi. It was Garcia, then, who had an enterprise, and apparently a criminal enterprise, in hand that night in the course of which he met his death. I say ‘criminal’ because only a man with a criminal enterprise desires to establish an alibi. Who, then, is most likely to have taken his life? Surely the person against whom the criminal enterprise was directed. So far it seems to me that we are on safe ground.

"We can now see a reason for the disappearance of Garcia's household. They were ALL confederates in the same unknown crime. If it came off when Garcia returned, any possible suspicion would be warded off by the Englishman's evidence, and all would be well. But the attempt was a dangerous one, and if Garcia did NOT return by a certain hour it was probable that his own life had been sacrificed. It had been arranged, therefore, that in such a case his two subordinates were to make for some prearranged spot where they could escape investigation and be in a position afterwards to renew their attempt. That would fully explain the facts, would it not?"

The whole inexplicable tangle seemed to straighten out before me. I wondered, as I always did, how it had not been obvious to me before.

"But why should one servant return?"

"We can imagine that in the confusion of flight something precious, something which he could not bear to part with, had been left behind. That would explain his persistence, would it not?"

"Well, what is the next step?"

"The next step is the note received by Garcia at the dinner. It indicates a confederate at the other end. Now, where was the other end? I have already shown you that it could only lie in some large house, and that the number of large houses is limited. My first days in this village were devoted to a series of walks in which in the intervals of my botanical researches I made a reconnaissance of all the large houses and an examination of the family history of the occupants. One house, and only one, riveted my attention. It is the famous old Jacobean grange of High Gable, one mile on the farther side of Oxshott, and less than half a mile from the scene of the tragedy. The other mansions belonged to prosaic and respectable people who live far aloof from romance. But Mr. Henderson, of High Gable, was by all accounts a curious man to whom curious adventures might befall. I concentrated my attention, therefore, upon him and his household.

"A singular set of people, Watson — the man himself the most singular of them all. I managed to see him on a plausible pretext, but I seemed to read in his dark, deepset, brooding eyes that he was perfectly aware of my true business. He is a man of fifty, strong, active, with iron-gray hair, great bunched black eyebrows, the step of a deer and the air of an emperor — a fierce, masterful man, with a red-hot spirit behind his parchment face. He is either a foreigner or has lived long in the tropics, for he is yellow and sapless, but tough as whipcord. His friend and secretary, Mr. Lucas, is undoubtedly a foreigner, chocolate brown, wily, suave, and catlike, with a poisonous gentleness of speech. You see, Watson, we have come already upon two sets of foreigners — one at Wisteria Lodge and one at High Gable — so our gaps are beginning to close.

"These two men, close and confidential friends, are the centre of the household; but there is one other person who for our immediate purpose may be even more important. Henderson has two children — girls of eleven and thirteen. Their governess is a Miss Burnet, an Englishwoman of forty or thereabouts. There is also one confidential manservant. This little group forms the real family, for their travel about together, and Henderson is a great traveller, always on the move. It is only within the last weeks that he has returned, after a year's absence, to High Gable. I may add that he is enormously rich, and whatever his whims may be he can very easily satisfy them. For the rest, his house is full of butlers, footmen, maidservants, and the usual overfed, underworked staff of a large English country house.

"So much I learned partly from village gossip and partly from my own observation. There are no better instruments than discharged servants with a grievance, and I was lucky enough to find one. I call it luck, but it would not have come my way had I not been looking out for it. As Baynes remarks, we all have our systems. It was my system which enabled me to find John Warner, late gardener of High Gable, sacked in a moment of temper by his imperious employer. He in turn had friends among the indoor servants who unite in their fear and dislike of their master. So I had my key to the secrets of the establishment.

"Curious people, Watson! I don't pretend to understand it all yet, but very curious people anyway. It's a double-winged house, and the servants live on one side, the family on the other. There's no link between the two save for Henderson's own servant, who serves the family's meals. Everything is carried to a certain door, which forms the one connection. Governess and children hardly go out at all, except into the garden. Henderson never by any chance walks alone. His dark secretary is like his shadow. The gossip among the servants is that their master is terribly afraid of something. 'Sold his soul to the devil in exchange for money,' says Warner, 'and expects his creditor to come up and claim his own.' Where they came from, or who they are, nobody has an idea. They are very violent. Twice Henderson has lashed at folk with his dog-whip, and only his long purse and heavy compensation have kept him out of the courts.

"Well, now, Watson, let us judge the situation by this new information. We may take it that the letter came out of this strange household and was an invitation to Garcia to carry out some attempt which had already been planned. Who wrote the note? It was someone within the citadel, and it was a woman. Who then but Miss Burnet, the governess? All our reasoning seems to point that way. At any rate, we may take it as a hypothesis and see what consequences it would entail. I may add that Miss Burnet's age and character make it certain that my first idea that there might be a love interest in our story is out of the question.

"If she wrote the note she was presumably the friend and confederate of Garcia. What, then, might she be expected to do if she heard of his death? If he met it in some nefarious enterprise her lips might be sealed. Still, in her heart, she must retain bitterness and hatred against those who had killed him and would presumably help so far as she could to have revenge upon them. Could we see her, then and try to use her? That was my first thought. But now we come to a sinister fact. Miss Burnet has not been seen by any human eye since the night of the murder. From that evening she has utterly vanished. Is she alive? Has she perhaps met her end on the same night as the friend whom she had summoned? Or is she merely a prisoner? There is the point which we still have to decide.

"You will appreciate the difficulty of the situation, Watson. There is nothing upon which we can apply for a warrant. Our whole scheme might seem fantastic if laid before a magistrate. The woman's disappearance counts for nothing, since in that extraordinary household any member of it might be invisible for a week. And yet she may at the present moment be in danger of her life. All I can do is to watch the house and leave my agent, Warner, on guard at the gates. We can't let such a situation continue. If the law can do nothing we must take the risk ourselves."

"What do you suggest?"

"I know which is her room. It is accessible from the top of an outhouse. My suggestion is that you and I go to-night and see if we can strike at the very heart of the mystery."

It was not, I must confess, a very alluring prospect. The old house with its atmosphere of murder, the singular and formidable inhabitants, the unknown dangers of the approach, and the fact that we were putting ourselves legally in a false position all combined to damp my ardour. But there was something in the ice-cold reasoning of Holmes which made it impossible to shrink from any adventure which he might recommend. One knew that thus, and only thus, could a solution be found. I clasped his hand in silence, and the die was cast.

But it was not destined that our investigation should have so adventurous an ending. It was about five o'clock, and the shadows of the March evening were beginning to fall, when an excited rustic rushed into our room.

"They've gone, Mr. Holmes. They went by the last train. The lady broke away, and I've got her in a cab downstairs."

"Excellent, Warner!" cried Holmes, springing to his feet. "Watson, the gaps are closing rapidly."

In the cab was a woman, half-collapsed from nervous exhaustion. She bore upon her aquiline and emaciated face the traces of some recent tragedy. Her head hung listlessly upon her breast, but as she raised it and turned her dull eyes upon us I saw that her pupils were dark dots in the centre of the broad gray iris. She was drugged with opium.

"I watched at the gate, same as you advised, Mr. Holmes," said our emissary, the discharged gardener. "When the carriage came out I followed it to the station. She was like one walking in her sleep, but when they tried to get her into the train she came to life and struggled. They pushed her into the carriage. She fought her way out again. I took her part, got her into a cab, and here we are. I shan't forget the face at the carriage window as I led her away. I'd have a short life if he had his way — the black-eyed, scowling, yellow devil."

We carried her upstairs, laid her on the sofa, and a couple of cups of the strongest coffee soon cleared her brain from the mists of the drug. Baynes had been summoned by Holmes, and the situation rapidly explained to him.

"Why, sir, you've got me the very evidence I want," said the inspector warmly, shaking my friend by the hand. "I was on the same scent as you from the first."

"What! You were after Henderson?"

"Why, Mr. Holmes, when you were crawling in the shrubbery at High Gable I was up one of the trees in the plantation and saw you down below. It was just who would get his evidence first."

"Then why did you arrest the mulatto?"

Baynes chuckled.

“I was sure Henderson, as he calls himself, felt that he was suspected, and that he would lie low and make no move so long as he thought he was in any danger. I arrested the wrong man to make him believe that our eyes were off him. I knew he would be likely to clear off then and give us a chance of getting at Miss Burnet.”

Holmes laid his hand upon the inspector’s shoulder.

“You will rise high in your profession. You have instinct and intuition,” said he.

Baynes flushed with pleasure.

“I’ve had a plain-clothes man waiting at the station all the week. Wherever the High Gable folk go he will keep them in sight. But he must have been hard put to it when Miss Burnet broke away. However, your man picked her up, and it all ends well. We can’t arrest without her evidence, that is clear, so the sooner we get a statement the better.”

“Every minute she gets stronger,” said Holmes, glancing at the governess. “But tell me, Baynes, who is this man Henderson?”

“Henderson,” the inspector answered, “is Don Murillo, once called the Tiger of San Pedro.”

The Tiger of San Pedro! The whole history of the man came back to me in a flash. He had made his name as the most lewd and bloodthirsty tyrant that had ever governed any country with a pretence to civilization. Strong, fearless, and energetic, he had sufficient virtue to enable him to impose his odious vices upon a cowering people for ten or twelve years. His name was a terror through all Central America. At the end of that time there was a universal rising against him. But he was as cunning as he was cruel, and at the first whisper of coming trouble he had secretly conveyed his treasures aboard a ship which was manned by devoted adherents. It was an empty palace which was stormed by the insurgents next day. The dictator, his two children, his secretary, and his wealth had all escaped them. From that moment he had vanished from the world, and his identity had been a frequent subject for comment in the European press.

“Yes, sir, Don Murillo, the Tiger of San Pedro,” said Baynes. “If you look it up you will find that the San Pedro colours are green and white, same as in the note, Mr. Holmes. Henderson he called himself, but I traced him back, Paris and Rome and Madrid to Barcelona, where his ship came in in

‘86. They’ve been looking for him all the time for their revenge, but it is only now that they have begun to find him out.”

“They discovered him a year ago,” said Miss Burnet, who had sat up and was now intently following the conversation. “Once already his life has been attempted, but some evil spirit shielded him. Now, again, it is the noble, chivalrous Garcia who has fallen, while the monster goes safe. But another will come, and yet another, until some day justice will be done; that is as certain as the rise of to-morrow’s sun.” Her thin hands clenched, and her worn face blanched with the passion of her hatred.

“But how come you into this matter, Miss Burnet?” asked Holmes. “How can an English lady join in such a murderous affair?”

“I join in it because there is no other way in the world by which justice can be gained. What does the law of England care for the rivers of blood shed years ago in San Pedro, or for the shipload of treasure which this man has stolen? To you they are like crimes committed in some other planet. But WE know. We have learned the truth in sorrow and in suffering. To us there is no fiend in hell like Juan Murillo, and no peace in life while his victims still cry for vengeance.”

“No doubt,” said Holmes, “he was as you say. I have heard that he was atrocious. But how are you affected?”

“I will tell you it all. This villain’s policy was to murder, on one pretext or another, every man who showed such promise that he might in time come to be a dangerous rival. My husband — yes, my real name is Signora Victor Durando — was the San Pedro minister in London. He met me and married me there. A nobler man never lived upon earth. Unhappily, Murillo heard of his excellence, recalled him on some pretext, and had him shot. With a premonition of his fate he had refused to take me with him. His estates were confiscated, and I was left with a pittance and a broken heart.

“Then came the downfall of the tyrant. He escaped as you have just described. But the many whose lives he had ruined, whose nearest and dearest had suffered torture and death at his hands, would not let the matter rest. They banded themselves into a society which should never be dissolved until the work was done. It was my part after we had discovered in the transformed Henderson the fallen despot, to attach myself to his household and keep the others in touch with his movements. This I was able to do by securing the position of governess in his family. He little knew that the woman who faced him at every meal was the woman whose husband he had hurried at an hour’s notice into eternity. I smiled on him, did my duty to his children, and bided my time. An attempt was made in Paris and failed. We zig-zagged swiftly here and there over Europe to throw off the pursuers and finally returned to this house, which he had taken upon his first arrival in England.

“But here also the ministers of justice were waiting. Knowing that he would return there, Garcia, who is the son of the former highest dignitary in San Pedro, was waiting with two trusty companions of humble station, all three fired with the same reasons for revenge. He could do little during the day, for Murillo took every precaution and never went out save with his satellite Lucas, or Lopez as he was known in the days of his greatness. At night, however, he slept alone, and the avenger might find him. On a certain evening, which had been prearranged, I sent my friend final instructions, for the man was forever on the alert and continually changed his room. I was to see that the doors were open and the signal of a green or white light in a window which faced the drive was to give notice if all was safe or if the attempt had better be postponed.

“But everything went wrong with us. In some way I had excited the suspicion of Lopez, the secretary. He crept up behind me and sprang upon me just as I had finished the note. He and his master dragged me to my room and held judgment upon me as a convicted traitress. Then and there they would have plunged their knives into me could they have seen how to escape the consequences of the deed. Finally, after much debate, they concluded that my murder was too dangerous. But they determined to get rid forever of Garcia. They had gagged me, and Murillo twisted my arm round until I gave him the address. I swear that he might have twisted it off had I understood what it would mean to Garcia. Lopez addressed the note which I had written, sealed it with his sleeve-link, and sent it by the hand of the servant, Jose. How they murdered him I do not know, save that it was Murillo’s hand who struck him down, for Lopez had remained to guard me. I believe he must have waited among the gorse bushes through which the path winds and struck him down as he passed. At first they were of a mind to let him enter the house and to kill him as a detected burglar; but they argued that if they were mixed up in an inquiry their own identity would at once be publicly disclosed and they would be open to further attacks. With the death of Garcia, the pursuit might cease, since such a death might frighten others from the task.

“All would now have been well for them had it not been for my knowledge of what they had done. I have no doubt that there were times when my life hung in the balance. I was confined to my room, terrorized by the most horrible threats, cruelly ill-used to break my spirit — see this stab on my shoulder and the bruises from end to end of my arms — and a gag was thrust into my mouth on the one occasion when I tried to call from the window. For five days this cruel imprisonment continued, with hardly enough food to hold body and soul together. This afternoon a good lunch was brought me, but the moment after I took it I knew that I had been drugged. In a sort of dream I remember being half-led, half-carried to the carriage; in the same state I was conveyed to the train. Only then, when the wheels were almost moving, did I suddenly realise that my liberty lay in my own hands. I sprang out, they tried to drag me back, and had it not been for the help of this good man, who led me to the cab, I should never had broken away. Now, thank God, I am beyond their power forever.”

We had all listened intently to this remarkable statement. It was Holmes who broke the silence.

“Our difficulties are not over,” he remarked, shaking his head. “Our police work ends, but our legal work begins.”

“Exactly,” said I. “A plausible lawyer could make it out as an act of self-defence. There may be a hundred crimes in the background, but it is only on this one that they can be tried.”

“Come, come,” said Baynes cheerily, “I think better of the law than that. Self-defence is one thing. To entice a man in cold blood with the object of murdering him is another, whatever danger you may fear from him. No, no, we shall all be justified when we see the tenants of High Gable at the next Guildford Assizes.”

It is a matter of history, however, that a little time was still to elapse before the Tiger of San Pedro should meet with his deserts. Wily and bold, he and his companion threw their pursuer off their track by entering a lodging-house in Edmonton Street and leaving by the back-gate into Curzon Square. From that day they were seen no more in England. Some six months afterwards the Marquess of Montalva and Signor Rulli, his secretary, were both murdered in their rooms at the Hotel Escurial at Madrid. The crime was ascribed to Nihilism, and the murderers were never arrested. Inspector Baynes visited us at Baker Street with a printed description of the dark face of the secretary, and of the masterful features, the magnetic black eyes, and the tufted brows of his master. We could not doubt that justice, if belated, had come at last.

“A chaotic case, my dear Watson,” said Holmes over an evening pipe. “It will not be possible for you to present in that compact form which is dear to your heart. It covers two continents, concerns two groups of mysterious persons, and is further complicated by the highly respectable presence of our friend, Scott Eccles, whose inclusion shows me that the deceased Garcia had a scheming mind and a well-developed instinct of self-preservation. It is remarkable only for the fact that amid a perfect jungle of possibilities we, with our worthy collaborator, the inspector, have kept our close hold on the essentials and so been guided along the crooked and winding path. Is there any point which is not quite clear to you?”

“The object of the mulatto cook’s return?”

“I think that the strange creature in the kitchen may account for it. The man was a primitive savage from the backwoods of San Pedro, and this was his fetish. When his companion and he had fled to some prearranged retreat — already occupied, no doubt by a confederate — the companion had persuaded him to leave so compromising an article of furniture. But the mulatto’s heart was with it, and he was driven back to it next day, when, on reconnoitering through the window, he found policeman Walters in possession. He waited three days longer, and then his piety or his superstition drove him to try once more. Inspector Baynes, who, with his usual astuteness, had minimized the incident before me, had really recognised its importance and had left a trap into which the creature walked. Any other point, Watson?”

“The torn bird, the pail of blood, the charred bones, all the mystery of that weird kitchen?”

Holmes smiled as he turned up an entry in his note-book.

“I spent a morning in the British Museum reading up on that and other points. Here is a quotation from Eckermann’s Voodooism and the Negroid Religions:

“‘The true voodoo-worshipper attempts nothing of importance without certain sacrifices which are intended to propitiate his unclean gods. In extreme cases these rites take the form of human sacrifices followed by cannibalism. The more usual victims are a white cock, which is plucked in pieces alive, or a black goat, whose throat is cut and body burned.’

“So you see our savage friend was very orthodox in his ritual. It is grotesque, Watson,” Holmes added, as he slowly fastened his notebook, “but, as I have had occasion to remark, there is but one step from the grotesque to the horrible.”

The Adventure of the Cardboard Box

In choosing a few typical cases which illustrate the remarkable mental qualities of my friend, Sherlock Holmes, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to select those which presented the minimum of sensationalism, while offering a fair field for his talents. It is, however, unfortunately impossible entirely to separate the sensational from the criminal, and a chronicler is left in the dilemma that he must either sacrifice details which are essential to his statement and so give a false impression of the problem, or he must use matter which chance, and not choice, has provided him with. With this short preface I shall turn to my notes of what proved to be a strange, though a peculiarly terrible, chain of events.

It was a blazing hot day in August. Baker Street was like an oven, and the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow brickwork of the house across the road was painful to the eye. It was hard to believe that these were the same walls which loomed so gloomily through the fogs of winter. Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. For myself, my term of service in India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer at ninety was no hardship. But the morning paper was uninteresting. Parliament had risen. Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime. Appreciation of nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.

Finding that Holmes was too absorbed for conversation I had tossed aside the barren paper, and leaning back in my chair I fell into a brown study. Suddenly my companion’s voice broke in upon my thoughts:

“You are right, Watson,” said he. “It does seem a most preposterous way of settling a dispute.”

"Most preposterous!" I exclaimed, and then suddenly realising how he had echoed the inmost thought of my soul, I sat up in my chair and stared at him in blank amazement.

"What is this, Holmes?" I cried. "This is beyond anything which I could have imagined."

He laughed heartily at my perplexity.

"You remember," said he, "that some little time ago when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches in which a close reasoner follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour-de-force of the author. On my remarking that I was constantly in the habit of doing the same thing you expressed incredulity."

"Oh, no!"

"Perhaps not with your tongue, my dear Watson, but certainly with your eyebrows. So when I saw you throw down your paper and enter upon a train of thought, I was very happy to have the oportunity of reading it off, and eventually of breaking into it, as a proof that I had been in rapport with you."

But I was still far from satisfied. "In the example which you read to me," said I, "the reasoner drew his conclusions from the actions of the man whom he observed. If I remember right, he stumbled over a heap of stones, looked up at the stars, and so on. But I have been seated quietly in my chair, and what clues can I have given you?"

"You do yourself an injustice. The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants."

"Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?"

"Your features and especially your eyes. Perhaps you cannot yourself recall how your reverie commenced?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then I will tell you. After throwing down your paper, which was the action which drew my attention to you, you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started. But it did not lead very far. Your eyes flashed across to the unframed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher which stands upon the top of your books. Then you glanced up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. You were thinking that if the portrait were framed it would just cover that bare space and correspond with Gordon’s picture over there.”

“You have followed me wonderfully!” I exclaimed.

“So far I could hardly have gone astray. But now your thoughts went back to Beecher, and you looked hard across as if you were studying the character in his features. Then your eyes ceased to pucker, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. You were recalling the incidents of Beecher’s career. I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the mission which he undertook on behalf of the North at the time of the Civil War, for I remember your expressing your passionate indignation at the way in which he was received by the more turbulent of our people. You felt so strongly about it that I knew you could not think of Beecher without thinking of that also. When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the picture, I suspected that your mind had now turned to the Civil War, and when I observed that your lips set, your eyes sparkled, and your hands clenched I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the gallantry which was shown by both sides in that desperate struggle. But then, again, your face grew sadder; you shook your head. You were dwelling upon the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. Your hand stole towards your own old wound and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind. At this point I agreed with you that it was preposterous and was glad to find that all my deductions had been correct.”

“Absolutely!” said I. “And now that you have explained it, I confess that I am as amazed as before.”

“It was very superficial, my dear Watson, I assure you. I should not have intruded it upon your attention had you not shown some incredulity the other day. But I have in my hands here a little problem which may prove to be more difficult of solution than my small essay in thought reading. Have you observed in the paper a short paragraph referring to the remarkable contents of a packet sent through the post to Miss Cushing, of Cross Street, Croydon?”

“No, I saw nothing.”

“Ah! then you must have overlooked it. Just toss it over to me. Here it is, under the financial column. Perhaps you would be good enough to read it aloud.”

I picked up the paper which he had thrown back to me and read the paragraph indicated. It was headed, “A Gruesome Packet.”

> “Miss Susan Cushing, living at Cross Street, Croydon, has been made the victim of what must be regarded as a peculiarly revolting practical joke unless some more sinister meaning should prove to be attached to the incident. At two o’clock yesterday afternoon a small packet, wrapped in brown paper, was handed in by the postman. A cardboard box was inside, which was filled with coarse salt. On emptying this, Miss Cushing was horrified to find two human ears, apparently quite freshly severed. The box had been sent by parcel post from Belfast upon the morning before. There is no indication as to the sender, and the matter is the more mysterious as Miss Cushing, who is a maiden lady of fifty, has led a most retired life, and has so few acquaintances or correspondents that it is a rare event for her to receive anything through the post. Some years ago, however, when she resided at Penge, she let apartments in her house to three young medical students, whom she was obliged to get rid of on account of their noisy and irregular habits. The police are of opinion that this outrage may have been perpetrated upon Miss Cushing by these youths, who owed her a grudge and who hoped to frighten her by sending her these relics of the dissecting-rooms. Some probability is lent to the theory by the fact that one of these students came from the north of Ireland, and, to the best of Miss Cushing’s belief, from Belfast. In the meantime, the matter is being actively investigated, Mr. Lestrade, one of the very smartest of our detective officers, being in charge of the case.”

“So much for the Daily Chronicle,” said Holmes as I finished reading. “Now for our friend Lestrade. I had a note from him this morning, in which he says:

> “I think that this case is very much in your line. We have every hope of clearing the matter up, but we find a little

> difficulty in getting anything to work upon. We have, of course, wired to the Belfast post-office, but a large number of parcels were handed in upon that day, and they have no means of identifying this particular one, or of remembering the sender. The box is a half-pound box of honeydew tobacco and does not help us in any way. The medical student theory still appears to me to be the most feasible, but if you should have a few hours to spare I should be very happy to see you out here. I shall be either at the house or in the police-station all day.

What say you, Watson? Can you rise superior to the heat and run down to Croydon with me on the off chance of a case for your annals?"

"I was longing for something to do."

"You shall have it then. Ring for our boots and tell them to order a cab. I'll be back in a moment when I have changed my dressing-gown and filled my cigar-case."

A shower of rain fell while we were in the train, and the heat was far less oppressive in Croydon than in town. Holmes had sent on a wire, so that Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret-like as ever, was waiting for us at the station. A walk of five minutes took us to Cross Street, where Miss Cushing resided.

It was a very long street of two-story brick houses, neat and prim, with whitened stone steps and little groups of aproned women gossiping at the doors. Halfway down, Lestrade stopped and tapped at a door, which was opened by a small servant girl. Miss Cushing was sitting in the front room, into which we were ushered. She was a placid-faced woman, with large, gentle eyes, and grizzled hair curving down over her temples on each side. A worked antimacassar lay upon her lap and a basket of coloured silks stood upon a stool beside her.

"They are in the outhouse, those dreadful things," said she as Lestrade entered. "I wish that you would take them away altogether."

"So I shall, Miss Cushing. I only kept them here until my friend, Mr. Holmes, should have seen them in your presence."

"Why in my presence, sir?"

"In case he wished to ask any questions."

“What is the use of asking me questions when I tell you I know nothing whatever about it?”

“Quite so, madam,” said Holmes in his soothing way. “I have no doubt that you have been annoyed more than enough already over this business.”

“Indeed, I have, sir. I am a quiet woman and live a retired life. It is something new for me to see my name in the papers and to find the police in my house. I won’t have those things in here, Mr. Lestrade. If you wish to see them you must go to the outhouse.”

It was a small shed in the narrow garden which ran behind the house. Lestrade went in and brought out a yellow cardboard box, with a piece of brown paper and some string. There was a bench at the end of the path, and we all sat down while Holmes examined, one by one, the articles which Lestrade had handed to him.

“The string is exceedingly interesting,” he remarked, holding it up to the light and sniffing at it. “What do you make of this string, Lestrade?”

“It has been tarred.”

“Precisely. It is a piece of tarred twine. You have also, no doubt, remarked that Miss Cushing has cut the cord with a scissors, as can be seen by the double fray on each side. This is of importance.”

“I cannot see the importance,” said Lestrade.

“The importance lies in the fact that the knot is left intact, and that this knot is of a peculiar character.”

“It is very neatly tied. I had already made a note to that effect,” said Lestrade complacently.

“So much for the string, then,” said Holmes, smiling, “now for the box wrapper. Brown paper, with a distinct smell of coffee. What, did you not observe it? I think there can be no doubt of it. Address printed in rather straggling characters: ‘Miss S. Cushing, Cross Street, Croydon.’ Done with a broad-pointed pen, probably a J, and with very inferior ink. The word ‘Croydon’ has been originally spelled with an ‘i,’ which has been changed to ‘y.’ The parcel was directed, then, by a man — the printing is distinctly masculine — of limited education and unacquainted with the town of Croydon. So far, so good! The box is a yellow half-pound honeydew box, with nothing distinctive save two thumb marks at the left bottom corner. It is filled with rough salt of the quality used for preserving hides and other of the coarser commercial purposes. And embedded in it are these very singular enclosures.”

He took out the two ears as he spoke, and laying a board across his knee he examined them minutely, while Lestrade and I, bending forward on each side of him, glanced alternately at these dreadful relics and at the thoughtful, eager face of our companion. Finally he returned them to the box once more and sat for a while in deep meditation.

“You have observed, of course,” said he at last, “that the ears are not a pair.”

“Yes, I have noticed that. But if this were the practical joke of some students from the dissecting-rooms, it would be as easy for them to send two odd ears as a pair.”

“Precisely. But this is not a practical joke.”

“You are sure of it?”

“The presumption is strongly against it. Bodies in the dissectingrooms are injected with preservative fluid. These ears bear no signs of this. They are fresh, too. They have been cut off with a blunt instrument, which would hardly happen if a student had done it. Again, carbolic or rectified spirits would be the preservatives which would suggest themselves to the medical mind, certainly not rough salt. I repeat that there is no practical joke here, but that we are investigating a serious crime.”

A vague thrill ran through me as I listened to my companion’s words and saw the stern gravity which had hardened his features. This brutal preliminary seemed to shadow forth some strange and inexplicable horror in the background. Lestrade, however, shook his head like a man who is only half convinced.

“There are objections to the joke theory, no doubt,” said he, “but there are much stronger reasons against the other. We know that this woman has led a most quiet and respectable life at Penge and here for the last twenty years. She has hardly been away from her home for a day during that time. Why on earth, then, should any criminal send her the proofs of his guilt, especially as, unless she is a most consummate actress, she understands quite as little of the matter as we do?”

“That is the problem which we have to solve,” Holmes answered, “and for my part I shall set about it by presuming that my reasoning is correct, and that a double murder has been committed. One of these ears is a woman’s, small, finely formed, and pierced for an earring. The other is a man’s, sun-burned, discoloured, and also pierced for an earring. These two people are presumably dead, or we should have heard their story before now. To-day is Friday. The packet was posted on Thursday morning. The tragedy, then, occurred on Wednesday or Tuesday or earlier. If the two people were murdered, who but their murderer would have sent this sign of his work to Miss Cushing? We may take it that the sender of the packet is the man whom we want. But he must have some strong reason for sending Miss Cushing this packet. What reason then? It must have been to tell her that the deed was done! or to pain her, perhaps. But in that case she knows who it is. Does she know? I doubt it. If she knew, why should she call the police in? She might have buried the ears, and no one would have been the wiser. That is what she would have done if she had wished to shield the criminal. But if she does not wish to shield him she would give his name. There is a tangle here which needs straightening out." He had been talking in a high, quick voice, staring blankly up over the garden fence, but now he sprang briskly to his feet and walked towards the house.

"I have a few questions to ask Miss Cushing," said he.

"In that case I may leave you here," said Lestrade, "for I have another small business on hand. I think that I have nothing further to learn from Miss Cushing. You will find me at the police-station."

"We shall look in on our way to the train," answered Holmes. A moment later he and I were back in the front room, where the impassive lady was still quietly working away at her antimacassar. She put it down on her lap as we entered and looked at us with her frank, searching blue eyes.

"I am convinced, sir," she said, "that this matter is a mistake, and that the parcel was never meant for me at all. I have said this several times to the gentleman from Scotland Yard, but he simply laughs at me. I have not an enemy in the world, as far as I know, so why should anyone play me such a trick?"

"I am coming to be of the same opinion, Miss Cushing," said Holmes, taking a seat beside her. "I think that it is more than probable " he paused, and I was surprised, on glancing round to see that he was staring with singular intentness at the lady's profile. Surprise and satisfaction were both for an instant to be read upon his eager face, though when she glanced round to find out the cause of his silence he had become as demure as ever. I stared hard myself at her flat, grizzled hair, her trim cap, her little gilt earrings, her placid features; but I could see nothing which could account for my companion's evident excitement.

"There were one or two questions—"

"Oh, I am weary of questions!" cried Miss Cushing impatiently.

"You have two sisters, I believe."

"How could you know that?"

"I observed the very instant that I entered the room that you have a portrait group of three ladies upon the mantelpiece, one of whom is undoubtedly yourself, while the others are so exceedingly like you that there could be no doubt of the relationship."

"Yes, you are quite right. Those are my sisters, Sarah and Mary."

"And here at my elbow is another portrait, taken at Liverpool, of your younger sister, in the company of a man who appears to be a steward by his uniform. I observe that she was unmarried at the time."

"You are very quick at observing."

"That is my trade."

"Well, you are quite right. But she was married to Mr. Browner a few days afterwards. He was on the South American line when that was taken, but he was so fond of her that he couldn't abide to leave her for so long, and he got into the Liverpool and London boats."

"Ah, the Conqueror, perhaps?"

"No, the May Day, when last I heard. Jim came down here to see me once. That was before he broke the pledge; but afterwards he would always take drink when he was ashore, and a little drink would send him stark, staring mad. Ah! it was a bad day that ever he took a glass in his hand again. First he dropped me, then he quarrelled with Sarah, and now that Mary has stopped writing we don't know how things are going with them."

It was evident that Miss Cushing had come upon a subject on which she felt very deeply. Like most people who lead a lonely life, she was shy at first, but ended by becoming extremely communicative. She told us many details about her brother-in-law the steward, and then wandering off on the subject of her former lodgers, the medical students, she gave us a long account of their delinquencies, with their names and those of their hospitals. Holmes listened attentively to everything, throwing in a question from time to time.

"About your second sister, Sarah," said he. "I wonder, since you are both maiden ladies, that you do not keep house together."

"Ah! you don't know Sarah's temper or you would wonder no more. I tried it when I came to Croydon, and we kept on until about two months ago, when we had to part. I don’t want to say a word against my own sister, but she was always meddlesome and hard to please, was Sarah.”

“You say that she quarrelled with your Liverpool relations.”

“Yes, and they were the best of friends at one time. Why, she went up there to live in order to be near them. And now she has no word hard enough for Jim Browner. The last six months that she was here she would speak of nothing but his drinking and his ways. He had caught her meddling, I suspect, and given her a bit of his mind, and that was the start of it.”

“Thank you, Miss Cushing,” said Holmes, rising and bowing. “Your sister Sarah lives, I think you said, at New Street Wallington? Good-bye, and I am very sorry that you should have been troubled over a case with which, as you say, you have nothing whatever to do.”

There was a cab passing as we came out, and Holmes hailed it.

“How far to Wallington?” he asked.

“Only about a mile, sir.”

“Very good. Jump in, Watson. We must strike while the iron is hot. Simple as the case is, there have been one or two very instructive details in connection with it. Just pull up at a telegraph office as you pass, cabby.”

Holmes sent off a short wire and for the rest of the drive lay back in the cab, with his hat tilted over his nose to keep the sun from his face. Our driver pulled up at a house which was not unlike the one which we had just quitted. My companion ordered him to wait, and had his hand upon the knocker, when the door opened and a grave young gentleman in black, with a very shiny hat, appeared on the step.

“Is Miss Cushing at home?” asked Holmes.

“Miss Sarah Cushing is extremely ill,” said he. “She has been suffering since yesterday from brain symptoms of great severity. As her medical adviser, I cannot possibly take the responsibility of allowing anyone to see her. I should recommend you to call again in ten days.” He drew on his gloves, closed the door, and marched off down the street.

“Well, if we can’t we can’t,” said Holmes, cheerfully.

“Perhaps she could not or would not have told you much.”

“I did not wish her to tell me anything. I only wanted to look at her. However, I think that I have got all that I want. Drive us to some decent hotel, cabby, where we may have some lunch, and afterwards we shall drop down upon friend Lestrade at the police-station.”

We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing but violins, narrating with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings. This led him to Paganini, and we sat for an hour over a bottle of claret while he told me anecdote after anecdote of that extraordinary man. The afternoon was far advanced and the hot glare had softened into a mellow glow before we found ourselves at the police-station. Lestrade was waiting for us at the door.

"A telegram for you, Mr. Holmes," said he.

"Ha! It is the answer!" He tore it open, glanced his eyes over it, and crumpled it into his pocket. "That's all right," said he.

"Have you found out anything?"

"I have found out everything!"

"What!" Lestrade stared at him in amazement. "You are joking."

"I was never more serious in my life. A shocking crime has been committed, and I think I have now laid bare every detail of it."

"And the criminal?"

Holmes scribbled a few words upon the back of one of his visiting cards and threw it over to Lestrade.

"That is the name," he said. "You cannot effect an arrest until to-morrow night at the earliest. I should prefer that you do not mention my name at all in connection with the case, as I choose to be only associated with those crimes which present some difficulty in their solution. Come on, Watson." We strode off together to the station, leaving Lestrade still staring with a delighted face at the card which Holmes had thrown him.

"The case," said Sherlock Holmes as we chatted over our cigars that night in our rooms at Baker Street, "is one where, as in the investigations which you have chronicled under the names of 'A Study in Scarlet' and of 'The Sign of Four,' we have been compelled to reason backward from effects to causes. I have written to Lestrade asking him to supply us with the details which are now wanting, and which he will only get after he has secured his man. That he may be safely trusted to do, for although he is absolutely devoid of reason, he is as tenacious as a bulldog when he once understands what he has to do, and, indeed, it is just this tenacity which has brought him to the top at Scotland Yard."

"Your case is not complete, then?" I asked.

"It is fairly complete in essentials. We know who the author of the revolting business is, although one of the victims still escapes us. Of course, you have formed your own conclusions."

"I presume that this Jim Browner, the steward of a Liverpool boat, is the man whom you suspect?"

"Oh! it is more than a suspicion."

"And yet I cannot see anything save very vague indications."

"On the contrary, to my mind nothing could be more clear. Let me run over the principal steps. We approached the case, you remember, with an absolutely blank mind, which is always an advantage. We had formed no theories. We were simply there to observe and to draw inferences from our observations. What did we see first? A very placid and respectable lady, who seemed quite innocent of any secret, and a portrait which showed me that she had two younger sisters. It instantly flashed across my mind that the box might have been meant for one of these. I set the idea aside as one which could be disproved or confirmed at our leisure. Then we went to the garden, as you remember, and we saw the very singular contents of the little yellow box.

"The string was of the quality which is used by sailmakers aboard ship, and at once a whiff of the sea was perceptible in our investigation. When I observed that the knot was one which is popular with sailors, that the parcel had been posted at a port, and that the male ear was pierced for an earring which is so much more common among sailors than landsmen, I was quite certain that all the actors in the tragedy were to be found among our seafaring classes.

"When I came to examine the address of the packet I observed that it was to Miss S. Cushing. Now, the oldest sister would, of course, be Miss Cushing, and although her initial was 'S' it might belong to one of the others as well. In that case we should have to commence our investigation from a fresh basis altogether. I therefore went into the house with the intention of clearing up this point. I was about to assure Miss Cushing that I was convinced that a mistake had been made when you may remember that I came suddenly to a stop. The fact was that I had just seen something which filled me with surprise and at the same time narrowed the field of our inquiry immensely.

"As a medical man, you are aware, Watson, that there is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear. Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive and differs from all other ones. In last year's Anthropological Journal you will find two short monographs from my pen upon the subject. I had, therefore, examined the ears in the box with the eyes of an expert and had carefully noted their anatomical peculiarities. Imagine my surprise, then, when on looking at Miss Cushing I perceived that her ear corresponded exactly with the female ear which I had just inspected. The matter was entirely beyond coincidence. There was the same shortening of the pinna, the same broad curve of the upper lobe, the same convolution of the inner cartilage. In all essentials it was the same ear.

"Of course I at once saw the enormous importance of the observation. It was evident that the victim was a blood relation and probably a very close one. I began to talk to her about her family, and you remember that she at once gave us some exceedingly valuable details

"In the first place, her sister's name was Sarah, and her address had until recently been the same, so that it was quite obvious how the mistake had occurred and for whom the packet was meant. Then we heard of this steward, married to the third sister, and learned that he had at one time been so intimate with Miss Sarah that she had actually gone up to Liverpool to be near the Browners, but a quarrel had afterwards divided them. This quarrel had put a stop to all communications for some months, so that if Browner had occasion to address a packet to Miss Sarah, he would undoubtedly have done so to her old address.

"And now the matter had begun to straighten itself out wonderfully. We had learned of the existence of this steward, an impulsive man, of strong passions — you remember that he threw up what must have been a very superior berth in order to be nearer to his wife — subject, too, to occasional fits of hard drinking. We had reason to believe that his wife had been murdered, and that a man — presumably a seafaring man — had been murdered at the same time. Jealousy, of course, at once suggests itself as the motive for the crime. And why should these proofs of the deed be sent to Miss Sarah Cushing? Probably because during her residence in Liverpool she had some hand in bringing about the events which led to the tragedy. You will observe that this line of boats calls at Belfast, Dublin, and Waterford; so that, presuming that Browner had committed the deed and had embarked at once upon his steamer, the May Day, Belfast would be the first place at which he could post his terrible packet.

“A second solution was at this stage obviously possible, and although I thought it exceedingly unlikely, I was determined to elucidate it before going further. An unsuccessful lover might have killed Mr. and Mrs. Browner, and the male ear might have belonged to the husband. There were many grave objections to this theory, but it was conceivable. I therefore sent off a telegram to my friend Algar, of the Liverpool force, and asked him to find out if Mrs. Browner were at home, and if Browner had departed in the May Day. Then we went on to Wallington to visit Miss Sarah.

“I was curious, in the first place, to see how far the family ear had been reproduced in her. Then, of course, she might give us very important information, but I was not sanguine that she would. She must have heard of the business the day before, since all Croydon was ringing with it, and she alone could have understood for whom the packet was meant. If she had been willing to help justice she would probably have communicated with the police already. However, it was clearly our duty to see her, so we went. We found that the news of the arrival of the packet — for her illness dated from that time — had such an effect upon her as to bring on brain fever. It was clearer than ever that she understood its full significance, but equally clear that we should have to wait some time for any assistance from her.

“However, we were really independent of her help. Our answers were waiting for us at the police-station, where I had directed Algar to send them. Nothing could be more conclusive. Mrs. Browner’s house had been closed for more than three days, and the neighbours were of opinion that she had gone south to see her relatives. It had been ascertained at the shipping offices that Browner had left aboard of the May Day, and I calculate that she is due in the Thames to-morrow night. When he arrives he will be met by the obtuse but resolute Lestrade, and I have no doubt that we shall have all our details filled in.”

Sherlock Holmes was not disappointed in his expectations. Two days later he received a bulky envelope, which contained a short note from the detective, and a typewritten document, which covered several pages of foolscap.

“Lestrade has got him all right,” said Holmes, glancing up at me. “Perhaps it would interest you to hear what he says.

“MY DEAR MR. HOLMES:

“In accordance with the scheme which we had formed in
order to test our theories” [“the ‘we’ is rather fine, Watson,

is it not?”] “I went down to the Albert Dock yesterday
at 6 P. M., and boarded the S. S. May Day, belonging to the
Liverpool, Dublin, and London Steam Packet Company. On
inquiry, I found that there was a steward on board of the
name of James Browner and that he had acted during
the voyage in such an extraordinary manner that the captain
had been compelled to relieve him of his duties. On
descending to his berth, I found him seated upon a chest with
his head sunk upon his hands, rocking himself to and fro.
He is a big, powerful chap, clean-shaven, and very swarthy —
something like Aldridge, who helped us in the bogus laundry
affair. He jumped up when he heard my business, and I
had my whistle to my lips to call a couple of river police,
who were round the corner, but he seemed to have no heart
in him, and he held out his hands quietly enough for the
darbies. We brought him along to the cells, and his box as
well, for we thought there might be something incriminating;
but, bar a big sharp knife such as most sailors have, we
got nothing for our trouble. However, we find that we shall
want no more evidence, for on being brought before the
inspector at the station he asked leave to make a statement,
which was, of course, taken down, just as he made it, by
our shorthand man. We had three copies typewritten, one of
which I enclose. The affair proves, as I always thought it
would, to be an extremely simple one, but I am obliged to
you for assisting me in my investigation. With kind regards,
“Yours very truly,
“G. LESTRADE

“Hum! The investigation really was a very simple one,” remarked Holmes, “but I don’t think it struck him in that light when he first called us in. However, let us see what Jim Browner has to say for himself. This is his statement as made before Inspector Montgomery at the Shadwell Police Station, and it has the advantage of being verbatim.”

“ ‘Have I anything to say? Yes, I have a deal to say. I have to make a clean breast of it all. You can hang me, or you can leave me alone. I don’t care a plug which you do. I tell you I’ve not shut an eye in sleep since I did it, and I don’t believe I ever will again until I get past all waking.

Sometimes it’s his face, but most generally it’s hers. I’m never without one or the other before me. He looks frowning and black-like, but she has a kind o’ surprise upon her face. Ay, the white lamb, she might well be surprised when she read death on a face that had seldom looked anything but love upon her before.

“ ‘But it was Sarah’s fault, and may the curse of a broken man put a blight on her and set the blood rotting in her veins! It’s not that I want to clear myself. I know that I went back to drink, like the beast that I was. But she would have forgiven me; she would have stuck as close to me as a rope to a block if that woman had never darkened our door. For Sarah Cushing loved me — that’s the root of the business — she loved me until all her love turned to poisonous hate when she knew that I thought more of my wife’s footmark in the mud than I did of her whole body and soul.

“ ‘There were three sisters altogether. The old one was just a good woman, the second was a devil, and the third was an angel. Sarah was thirty-three, and Mary was twenty-nine when I married. We were just as happy as the day was long when we set up house together, and in all Liverpool there was no better woman than my Mary. And then we asked Sarah up for a week, and the week grew into a month, and one thing led to another, until she was just one of ourselves.

“ ‘I was blue ribbon at that time, and we were putting a little money by, and all was as bright as a new dollar. My God, whoever would have thought that it could have come to this? Whoever would have dreamed it?

“ ‘I used to be home for the week-ends very often, and sometimes if the ship were held back for cargo I would have a whole week at a time, and in this way I saw a deal of my sister-in-law, Sarah. She was a fine tall woman, black and quick and fierce, with a proud way of carrying her head, and a glint from her eye like a spark from a flint. But when little Mary was there I had never a thought of her, and that I swear as I hope for God’s mercy.

“ ‘It had seemed to me sometimes that she liked to be alone with me, or to coax me out for a walk with her, but I had never thought anything of that. But one evening my eyes were opened. I had come up from the ship and found my wife out, but Sarah at home. “Where’s Mary?” I asked. “Oh, she has gone to pay some accounts.” I was impatient and paced up and down the room. “Can’t you be happy for five minutes without Mary, Jim?” says she. “It’s a bad compliment to me that you can’t be contented with my society for so short a time.” “That’s all right, my lass,” said I, putting out my hand towards her in a kindly way, but she had it in both hers in an instant, and they burned as if they were in a fever. I looked into her eyes and I read it all there. There was no need for her to speak, nor for me either. I frowned and drew my hand away. Then she stood by my side in silence for a bit, and then put up her hand and patted me on the shoulder. "Steady old Jim!" said she, and with a kind o' mocking laugh, she ran out of the room.

" 'Well, from that time Sarah hated me with her whole heart and soul, and she is a woman who can hate, too. I was a fool to let her go on biding with us — a besotted fool — but I never said a word to Mary, for I knew it would grieve her. Things went on much as before, but after a time I began to find that there was a bit of a change in Mary herself. She had always been so trusting and so innocent, but now she became queer and suspicious, wanting to know where I had been and what I had been doing, and whom my letters were from, and what I had in my pockets, and a thousand such follies. Day by day she grew queerer and more irritable, and we had ceaseless rows about nothing. I was fairly puzzled by it all. Sarah avoided me now, but she and Mary were just inseparable. I can see now how she was plotting and scheming and poisoning my wife's mind against me, but I was such a blind beetle that I could not understand it at the time. Then I broke my blue ribbon and began to drink again, but I think I should not have done it if Mary had been the same as ever. She had some reason to be disgusted with me now, and the gap between us began to be wider and wider. And then this Alec Fairbairn chipped in, and things became a thousand times blacker.

" 'It was to see Sarah that he came to my house first, but soon it was to see us, for he was a man with winning ways, and he made friends wherever he went. He was a dashing, swaggering chap, smart and curled, who had seen half the world and could talk of what he had seen. He was good company, I won't deny it, and he had wonderful polite ways with him for a sailor man, so that I think there must have been a time when he knew more of the poop than the forecastle. For a month he was in and out of my house, and never once did it cross my mind that harm might come of his soft, tricky ways. And then at last something made me suspect, and from that day my peace was gone forever.

" 'It was only a little thing, too. I had come into the parlour unexpected, and as I walked in at the door I saw a light of welcome on my wife's face.

But as she saw who it was it faded again, and she turned away with a look of disappointment. That was enough for me. There was no one but Alec Fairbairn whose step she could have mistaken for mine. If I could have seen him then I should have killed him, for I have always been like a madman when my temper gets loose. Mary saw the devil's light in my eyes, and she ran forward with her hands on my sleeve. "Don't, Jim, don't!" says she. "Where's Sarah?" I asked. "In the kitchen," says she. "Sarah," says I as I went in, "this man Fairbairn is never to darken my door again." "Why not?" says she. "Because I order it." "Oh!" says she, "if my friends are not good enough for this house, then I am not good enough for it either." "You can do what you like," says I, "but if Fairbairn shows his face here again I'll send you one of his ears for a keepsake." She was frightened by my face, I think, for she never answered a word, and the same evening she left my house.

" 'Well, I don't know now whether it was pure devilry on the part of this woman, or whether she thought that she could turn me against my wife by encouraging her to misbehave. Anyway, she took a house just two streets off and let lodgings to sailors. Fairbairn used to stay there, and Mary would go round to have tea with her sister and him. How often she went I don't know, but I followed her one day, and as I broke in at the door Fairbairn got away over the back garden wall, like the cowardly skunk that he was. I swore to my wife that I would kill her if I found her in his company again, and I led her back with me, sobbing and trembling, and as white as a piece of paper. There was no trace of love between us any longer. I could see that she hated me and feared me, and when the thought of it drove me to drink, then she despised me as well.

" 'Well, Sarah found that she could not make a living in Liverpool, so she went back, as I understand, to live with her sister in Croydon, and things jogged on much the same as ever at home. And then came this last week and all the misery and ruin.

" 'It was in this way. We had gone on the May Day for a round voyage of seven days, but a hogshead got loose and started one of our plates, so that we had to put back into port for twelve hours. I left the ship and came home, thinking what a surprise it would be for my wife, and hoping that maybe she would be glad to see me so soon. The thought was in my head as I turned into my own street, and at that moment a cab passed me, and there she was, sitting by the side of Fairbairn, the two chatting and laughing, with never a thought for me as I stood watching them from the footpath.

" 'I tell you, and I give you my word for it, that from that moment I was not my own master, and it is all like a dim dream when I look back on it. I had been drinking hard of late, and the two things together fairly turned my brain. There's something throbbing in my head now, like a docker's hammer, but that morning I seemed to have all Niagara whizzing and buzzing in my ears.

" 'Well, I took to my heels, and l ran after the cab. I had a heavy oak stick in my hand, and I tell you I saw red from the first; but as I ran I got cunning, too, and hung back a little to see them without being seen. They pulled up soon at the railway station. There was a good crowd round the booking-office, so I got quite close to them without being seen. They took tickets for New Brighton. So did I, but I got in three carriages behind them. When we reached it they walked along the Parade, and I was never more than a hundred yards from them. At last I saw them hire a boat and start for a row, for it was a very hot day, and they thought, no doubt, that it would be cooler on the water.

" 'It was just as if they had been given into my hands. There was a bit of a haze, and you could not see more than a few hundred yards. I hired a boat for myself, and I pulled after them. I could see the blur of their craft, but they were going nearly as fast as I, and they must have been a long mile from the shore before I caught them up. The haze was like a curtain all round us, and there were we three in the middle of it. My God, shall I ever forget their faces when they saw who was in the boat that was closing in upon them? She screamed out. He swore like a madman and jabbed at me with an oar, for he must have seen death in my eyes. I got past it and got one in with my stick that crushed his head like an egg. I would have spared her, perhaps, for all my madness, but she threw her arms round him, crying out to him, and calling him "Alec." I struck again, and she lay stretched beside him. I was like a wild beast then that had tasted blood. If Sarah had been there, by the Lord, she should have joined them. I pulled out my knife, and — well, there! I've said enough. It gave me a kind of savage joy when I thought how Sarah would feel when she had such signs as these of what her meddling had brought about. Then I tied the bodies into the boat, stove a plank, and stood by until they had sunk. I knew very well that the owner would think that they had lost their bearings in the haze, and had drifted off out to sea. I cleaned myself up, got back to land, and joined my ship without a soul having a suspicion of what had passed. That night I made up the packet for Sarah Cushing, and next day I sent it from Belfast.

“ ‘There you have the whole truth of it. You can hang me, or do what you like with me, but you cannot punish me as I have been punished already. I cannot shut my eyes but I see those two faces staring at me — staring at me as they stared when my boat broke through the haze. I killed them quick, but they are killing me slow; and if I have another night of it I shall be either mad or dead before morning. You won’t put me alone into a cell, sir? For pity’s sake don’t, and may you be treated in your day of agony as you treat me now.’

“What is the meaning of it, Watson?” said Holmes solemnly as he laid down the paper. “What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever.”

The Adventure of the Red Circle

“Well, Mrs. Warren, I cannot see that you have any particular cause for uneasiness, nor do I understand why I, whose time is of some value, should interfere in the matter. I really have other things to engage me.” So spoke Sherlock Holmes and turned back to the great scrapbook in which he was arranging and indexing some of his recent material.

But the landlady had the pertinacity and also the cunning of her sex. She held her ground firmly.

“You arranged an affair for a lodger of mine last year,” she said—”Mr. Fairdale Hobbs.”

“Ah, yes — a simple matter.”

“But he would never cease talking of it — your kindness, sir, and the way in which you brought light into the darkness. I remembered his words when I was in doubt and darkness myself. I know you could if you only would.”

Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him justice, upon the side of kindliness. The two forces made him lay down his gum-brush with a sigh of resignation and push back his chair.

“Well, well, Mrs. Warren, let us hear about it, then. You don’t object to tobacco, I take it? Thank you, Watson — the matches! You are uneasy, as I understand, because your new lodger remains in his rooms and you cannot see him. Why, bless you, Mrs. Warren, if I were your lodger you often would not see me for weeks on end.”

“No doubt, sir; but this is different. It frightens me, Mr. Holmes. I can’t sleep for fright. To hear his quick step moving here and moving there from early morning to late at night, and yet never to catch so much as a glimpse of him — it’s more than I can stand. My husband is as nervous over it as I am, but he is out at his work all day, while I get no rest from it. What is he hiding for? What has he done? Except for the girl, I am all alone in the house with him, and it’s more than my nerves can stand.”

Holmes leaned forward and laid his long, thin fingers upon the woman’s shoulder. He had an almost hypnotic power of soothing when he wished. The scared look faded from her eyes, and her agitated features smoothed into their usual commonplace. She sat down in the chair which he had indicated

"If I take it up I must understand every detail," said he. "Take time to consider. The smallest point may be the most essential. You say that the man came ten days ago and paid you for a fortnight's board and lodging?"

"He asked my terms, sir. I said fifty shillings a week. There is a small sitting-room and bedroom, and all complete, at the top of the house."

"Well?"

"He said, 'I'll pay you five pounds a week if I can have it on my own terms.' I'm a poor woman, sir, and Mr. Warren earns little, and the money meant much to me. He took out a tenpound note, and he held it out to me then and there. 'You can have the same every fortnight for a long time to come if you keep the terms,' he said. 'If not, I'll have no more to do with you.' "

"What were the terms?"

"Well, sir, they were that he was to have a key of the house. That was all right. Lodgers often have them. Also, that he was to be left entirely to himself and never, upon any excuse, to be disturbed."

"Nothing wonderful in that, surely?"

"Not in reason, sir. But this is out of all reason. He has been there for ten days, and neither Mr. Warren, nor I, nor the girl has once set eyes upon him. We can hear that quick step of his pacing up and down, up and down, night, morning, and noon; but except on that first night he has never once gone out of the house."

"Oh, he went out the first night, did he?"

"Yes, sir, and returned very late — after we were all in bed. He told me after he had taken the rooms that he would do so and asked me not to bar the door. I heard him come up the stair after midnight."

"But his meals?"

"It was his particular direction that we should always, when he rang, leave his meal upon a chair, outside his door. Then he rings again when he has finished, and we take it down from the same chair. If he wants anything else he prints it on a slip of paper and leaves it."

"Prints it?"

"Yes, sir; prints it in pencil. Just the word, nothing more. Here's one I brought to show you — SOAP. Here's another — MATCH. This is one he left the first morning — DAILY GAZETTE. I leave that paper with his breakfast every morning."

“Dear me, Watson,” said Holmes, staring with great curiosity at the slips of foolscap which the landlady had handed to him, “this is certainly a little unusual. Seclusion I can understand; but why print? Printing is a clumsy process. Why not write? What would it suggest, Watson?”

“That he desired to conceal his handwriting.”

“But why? What can it matter to him that his landlady should have a word of his writing? Still, it may be as you say. Then, again, why such laconic messages?”

“I cannot imagine.”

“It opens a pleasing field for intelligent speculation. The words are written with a broad-pointed, violet-tinted pencil of a not unusual pattern. You will observe that the paper is torn away at the side here after the printing was done, so that the s of ‘SOAP’ is partly gone. Suggestive, Watson, is it not?”

“Of caution?”

“Exactly. There was evidently some mark, some thumbprint, something which might give a clue to the person’s identity. Now, Mrs. Warren, you say that the man was of middle size, dark, and bearded. What age would he be?”

“Youngish, sir — not over thirty.”

“Well, can you give me no further indications?”

“He spoke good English, sir, and yet I thought he was a foreigner by his accent.”

“And he was well dressed?”

“Very smartly dressed, sir — quite the gentleman. Dark clothes -nothing you would note.”

“He gave no name?”

“No, sir.”

“And has had no letters or callers?”

“None.”

“But surely you or the girl enter his room of a morning?”

“No, sir; he looks after himself entirely.”

“Dear me! that is certainly remarkable. What about his luggage?”

“He had one big brown bag with him — nothing else.”

“Well, we don’t seem to have much material to help us. Do you say nothing has come out of that room — absolutely nothing?”

The landlady drew an envelope from her bag; from it she shook out two burnt matches and a cigarette-end upon the table.

“They were on his tray this morning. I brought them because I had heard that you can read great things out of small ones.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“There is nothing here,” said he. “The matches have, of course, been used to light cigarettes. That is obvious from the shortness of the but end. Half the match is consumed in lighting a pipe or cigar. But, dear me! this cigarette stub is certainly remarkable. The gentleman was bearded and moustached, you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t understand that. I should say that only a cleanshaven man could have smoked this. Why, Watson, even your modest moustache would have been singed.”

“A holder?” I suggested.

“No, no; the end is matted. I suppose there could not be two people in your rooms, Mrs. Warren?”

“No, sir. He eats so little that I often wonder it can keep life in one.”

“Well, I think we must wait for a little more material. After all, you have nothing to complain of. You have received your rent, and he is not a troublesome lodger, though he is certainly an unusual one. He pays you well, and if he chooses to lie concealed it is no direct business of yours. We have no excuse for an intrusion upon his privacy until we have some reason to think that there is a guilty reason for it. I’ve taken up the matter, and I won’t lose sight of it. Report to me if anything fresh occurs, and rely upon my assistance if it should be needed.

“There are certainly some points of interest in this case, Watson,” he remarked when the landlady had left us. “It may, of course, be trivial — individual eccentricity; or it may be very much deeper than appears on the surface. The first thing that strikes one is the obvious possibility that the person now in the rooms may be entirely different from the one who engaged them.”

“Why should you think so?”

“Well, apart from this cigarette-end, was it not suggestive that the only time the lodger went out was immediately after his taking the rooms? He came back — or someone came back — when all witnesses were out of the way. We have no proof that the person who came back was the person who went out. Then, again, the man who took the rooms spoke English well. This other, however, prints ‘match’ when it should have been ‘matches.’ I can imagine that the word was taken out of a dictionary, which would give the noun but not the plural. The laconic style may be to conceal the absence of knowledge of English. Yes, Watson, there are good reasons to suspect that there has been a substitution of lodgers.”

“But for what possible end?”

“Ah! there lies our problem. There is one rather obvious line of investigation.” He took down the great book in which, day by day, he filed the agony columns of the various London journals. “Dear me!” said he, turning over the pages, “what a chorus of groans, cries, and bleatings! What a rag-bag of singular happenings! But surely the most valuable hunting-ground that ever was given to a student of the unusual! This person is alone and cannot be approached by letter without a breach of that absolute secrecy which is desired. How is any news or any message to reach him from without? Obviously by advertisement through a newspaper. There seems no other way, and fortunately we need concern ourselves with the one paper only. Here are the Daily Gazette extracts of the last fortnight. ‘Lady with a black boa at Prince’s Skating Club’ — that we may pass. ‘Surely Jimmy will not break his mother’s heart’ — that appears to be irrelevant. ‘If the lady who fainted in the Brixton bus’ — she does not interest me. ‘Every day my heart longs—’ Bleat, Watson — unmitigated bleat! Ah, this is a little more possible. Listen to this: ‘Be patient. Will find some sure means of communication. Meanwhile, this column. G.’ That is two days after Mrs. Warren’s lodger arrived. It sounds plausible, does it not? The mysterious one could understand English, even if he could not print it. Let us see if we can pick up the trace again. Yes, here we are — three days later. ‘Am making successful arrangements. Patience and prudence. The clouds will pass. G.’ Nothing for a week after that. Then comes something much more definite: ‘The path is clearing. If I find chance signal message remember code agreed -one A, two B, and so on. You will hear soon. G.’ That was in yesterday’s paper, and there is nothing in to-day’s. It’s all very appropriate to Mrs. Warren’s lodger. If we wait a little, Watson, I don’t doubt that the affair will grow more intelligible.”

So it proved; for in the morning I found my friend standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire and a smile of complete satisfaction upon his face.

"How's this, Watson?" he cried, picking up the paper from the table. " 'High red house with white stone facings. Third floor. Second window left. After dusk. G.' That is definite enough. I think after breakfast we must make a little reconnaissance of Mrs. Warren's neighbourhood. Ah, Mrs. Warren! what news do you bring us this morning?"

Our client had suddenly burst into the room with an explosive energy which told of some new and momentous development.

"It's a police matter, Mr. Holmes!" she cried. "I'll have no more of it! He shall pack out of there with his baggage. I would have gone straight up and told him so, only I thought it was but fair to you to take your opinion first. But I'm at the end of my patience, and when it comes to knocking my old man about "

"Knocking Mr. Warren about?"

"Using him roughly, anyway."

"But who used him roughly?"

"Ah! that's what we want to know! It was this morning, sir. Mr. Warren is a timekeeper at Morton and Waylight's, in Tottenham Court Road. He has to be out of the house before seven. Well, this morning he had not gone ten paces down the road when two men came up behind him, threw a coat over his head, and bundled him into a cab that was beside the curb. They drove him an hour, and then opened the door and shot him out. He lay in the roadway so shaken in his wits that he never saw what became of the cab. When he picked himself up he found he was on Hampstead Heath; so he took a bus home, and there he lies now on the sofa, while I came straight round to tell you what had happened."

"Most interesting," said Holmes. "Did he observe the appearance of these men — did he hear them talk?"

"No; he is clean dazed. He just knows that he was lifted up as if by magic and dropped as if by magic. Two at least were in it, and maybe three."

"And you connect this attack with your lodger?"

"Well, we've lived there fifteen years and no such happenings ever came before. I've had enough of him. Money's not everything. I'll have him out of my house before the day is done."

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Warren. Do nothing rash. I begin to think that this affair may be very much more important than appeared at first sight. It is clear now that some danger is threatening your lodger. It is equally clear that his enemies, lying in wait for him near your door, mistook your husband for him in the foggy morning light. On discovering their mistake they released him. What they would have done had it not been a mistake, we can only conjecture."

"Well, what am I to do, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have a great fancy to see this lodger of yours, Mrs. Warren."

"I don't see how that is to be managed, unless you break in the door. I always hear him unlock it as I go down the stair after I leave the tray."

"He has to take the tray in. Surely we could conceal ourselves and see him do it."

The landlady thought for a moment.

"Well, sir, there's the box-room opposite. I could arrange a looking-glass, maybe, and if you were behind the door—"

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "When does he lunch?"

"About one, sir."

"Then Dr. Watson and I will come round in time. For the present, Mrs. Warren, good-bye."

At half-past twelve we found ourselves upon the steps of Mrs. Warren's house — a high, thin, yellow-brick edifice in Great Orme Street, a narrow thoroughfare at the northeast side of the British Museum. Standing as it does near the corner of the street it commands a view down Howe Street, with its more pretentious houses. Holmes pointed with a chuckle to one of these, a row of residential flats, which projected so that they could not fail to catch the eye.

"See, Watson!" said he. " 'High red house with stone facings.' There is the signal station all right. We know the place, and we know the code; so surely our task should be simple. There's a 'to let' card in that window. It is evidently an empty flat to which the confederate has access. Well, Mrs. Warren, what now?"

"I have it all ready for you. If you will both come up and leave your boots below on the landing, I'll put you there now."

It was an excellent hiding-place which she had arranged. The mirror was so placed that, seated in the dark, we could very plainly see the door opposite. We had hardly settled down in it, and Mrs. Warren left us, when a distant tinkle announced that our mysterious neighbour had rung. Presently the landlady appeared with the tray, laid it down upon a chair beside the closed door, and then, treading heavily, departed. Crouching together in the angle of the door, we kept our eyes fixed upon the mirror. Suddenly, as the landlady's footsteps died away, there was the creak of a turning key, the handle revolved, and two thin hands darted out and lifted the tray from the chair. An instant later it was hurriedly replaced, and I caught a glimpse of a dark, beautiful, horrified face glaring at the narrow opening of the boxroom. Then the door crashed to, the key turned once more, and all was silence. Holmes twitched my sleeve, and together we stole down the stair.

"I will call again in the evening," said he to the expectant landlady. "I think, Watson, we can discuss this business better in our own quarters."

"My surmise, as you saw, proved to be correct," said he, speaking from the depths of his easy-chair. "There has been a substitution of lodgers. What I did not foresee is that we should find a woman, and no ordinary woman, Watson."

"She saw us."

"Well, she saw something to alarm her. That is certain. The general sequence of events is pretty clear, is it not? A couple seek refuge in London from a very terrible and instant danger. The measure of that danger is the rigour of their precautions. The man, who has some work which he must do, desires to leave the woman in absolute safety while he does it. It is not an easy problem, but he solved it in an original fashion, and so effectively that her presence was not even known to the landlady who supplies her with food. The printed messages, as is now evident, were to prevent her sex being discovered by her writing. The man cannot come near the woman, or he will guide their enemies to her. Since he cannot communicate with her direct, he has recourse to the agony column of a paper. So far all is clear."

"But what is at the root of it?"

"Ah, yes, Watson — severely practical, as usual! What is at the root of it all? Mrs. Warren's whimsical problem enlarges somewhat and assumes a more sinister aspect as we proceed. This much we can say: that it is no ordinary love escapade. You saw the woman's face at the sign of danger. We have heard, too, of the attack upon the landlord, which was undoubtedly meant for the lodger. These alarms, and the desperate need for secrecy, argue that the matter is one of life or death. The attack upon Mr. Warren further shows that the enemy, whoever they are, are themselves not aware of the substitution of the female lodger for the male. It is very curious and complex, Watson."

"Why should you go further in it? What have you to gain from it?"

“What, indeed? It is art for art’s sake, Watson. I suppose when you doctored you found yourself studying cases without thought of a fee?”

“For my education, Holmes.”

“Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last. This is an instructive case. There is neither money nor credit in it, and yet one would wish to tidy it up. When dusk comes we should find ourselves one stage advanced in our investigation.”

When we returned to Mrs. Warren’s rooms, the gloom of a London winter evening had thickened into one gray curtain, a dead monotone of colour, broken only by the sharp yellow squares of the windows and the blurred haloes of the gas-lamps. As we peered from the darkened sitting-room of the lodginghouse, one more dim light glimmered high up through the obscurity.

“Someone is moving in that room,” said Holmes in a whisper, his gaunt and eager face thrust forward to the window-pane. “Yes, I can see his shadow. There he is again! He has a candle in his hand. Now he is peering across. He wants to be sure that she is on the lookout. Now he begins to flash. Take the message also, Watson, that we may check each other. A single flash — that is A, surely. Now, then. How many did you make it? Twenty. So did I. That should mean T. AT — that’s intelligible enough! Another T. Surely this is the beginning of a second word. Now, then — TENTA. Dead stop. That can’t be all, Watson? ATTENTA gives no sense. Nor is it any better as three words AT, TEN, TA, unless T. A. are a person’s initials. There it goes again! What’s that? ATTE why, it is the same message over again. Curious, Watson, very curious! Now he is off once more! AT - why, he is repeating it for the third time. ATTENTA three times! How often will he repeat it? No, that seems to be the finish. He has withdrawn from the window. What do you make of it, Watson?”

“A cipher message, Holmes.”

My companion gave a sudden chuckle of comprehension.

“And not a very obscure cipher, Watson,” said he. “Why, of course, it is Italian! The A means that it is addressed to a woman. ‘Beware! Beware! Beware!’ How’s that, Watson?”

“I believe you have hit it.”

“Not a doubt of it. It is a very urgent message, thrice repeated to make it more so. But beware of what? Wait a bit; he is coming to the window once more.”

Again we saw the dim silhouette of a crouching man and the whisk of the small flame across the window as the signals were renewed. They came more rapidly than before — so rapid that it was hard to follow them.

"PERICOLO pericolo — eh, what's that, Watson? 'Danger,' isn't it? Yes, by Jove, it's a danger signal. There he goes again! PERI. Halloa, what on earth—"

The light had suddenly gone out, the glimmering square of window had disappeared, and the third floor formed a dark band round the lofty building, with its tiers of shining casements. That last warning cry had been suddenly cut short. How, and by whom? The same thought occurred on the instant to us both. Holmes sprang up from where he crouched by the window.

"This is serious, Watson," he cried. "There is some devilry going forward! Why should such a message stop in such a way? I should put Scotland Yard in touch with this business — and yet, it is too pressing for us to leave."

"Shall I go for the police?"

"We must define the situation a little more clearly. It may bear some more innocent interpretation. Come. Watson, let us go across ourselves and see what we can make of it."

As we walked rapidly down Howe Street I glanced back at the building which we had left. There, dimly outlined at the top window, I could see the shadow of a head, a woman's head, gazing tensely, rigidly, out into the night, waiting with breathless suspense for the renewal of that interrupted message. At the doorway of the Howe Street flats a man, muffled in a cravat and greatcoat, was leaning against the railing. He started as the hall-light fell upon our faces.

"Holmes!" he cried.

"Why, Gregson!" said my companion as he shook hands with the Scotland Yard detective. "Journeys end with lovers' meetings. What brings you here?"

"The same reasons that bring you, I expect," said Gregson. "How you got on to it I can't imagine."

"Different threads, but leading up to the same tangle. I've been taking the signals."

"Signals?"

"Yes, from that window. They broke off in the middle. We came over to see the reason. But since it is safe in your hands I see no object in continuing the business."

"Wait a bit!" cried Gregson eagerly. "I'll do you this justice, Mr. Holmes, that I was never in a case yet that I didn't feel stronger for having you on my side. There's only the one exit to these flats, so we have him safe."

"Who is he?"

"Well, well, we score over you for once, Mr. Holmes. You must give us best this time." He struck his stick sharply upon the ground, on which a cabman, his whip in his hand, sauntered over from a four-wheeler which stood on the far side of the street. "May I introduce you to Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" he said to the cabman. "This is Mr. Leverton, of Pinkerton's American Agency."

"The hero of the Long Island cave mystery?" said Holmes. "Sir, I am pleased to meet you."

The American, a quiet, businesslike young man, with a cleanshaven, hatchet face, flushed up at the words of commendation. "I am on the trail of my life now, Mr. Holmes," said he. "If I can get Gorgiano—"

"What! Gorgiano of the Red Circle?"

"Oh, he has a European fame, has he? Well, we've learned all about him in America. We know he is at the bottom of fifty murders, and yet we have nothing positive we can take him on. I tracked him over from New York, and I've been close to him for a week in London, waiting some excuse to get my hand on his collar. Mr. Gregson and I ran him to ground in that big tenement house, and there's only the one door, so he can't slip us. There's three folk come out since he went in, but I'll swear he wasn't one of them."

"Mr. Holmes talks of signals," said Gregson. "I expect, as usual, he knows a good deal that we don't."

In a few clear words Holmes explained the situation as it had appeared to us.

The American struck his hands together with vexation.

"He's on to us!" he cried.

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, it figures out that way, does it not? Here he is, sending out messages to an accomplice — there are several of his gang in London. Then suddenly, just as by your own account he was telling them that there was danger, he broke short off. What could it mean except that from the window he had suddenly either caught sight of us in the street, or in some way come to understand how close the danger was, and that he must act right away if he was to avoid it? What do you suggest, Mr. Holmes?"

"That we go up at once and see for ourselves."

"But we have no warrant for his arrest."

"He is in unoccupied premises under suspicious circumstances," said Gregson. "That is good enough for the moment. When we have him by the heels we can see if New York can't help us to keep him. I'll take the responsibility of arresting him now."

Our official detectives may blunder in the matter of intelligence, but never in that of courage. Gregson climbed the stair to arrest this desperate murderer with the same absolutely quiet and businesslike bearing with which he would have ascended the official staircase of Scotland Yard. The Pinkerton man had tried to push past him, but Gregson had firmly elbowed him back. London dangers were the privilege of the London force.

The door of the left-hand flat upon the third landing was standing ajar. Gregson pushed it open. Within all was absolute silence and darkness. I struck a match and lit the detective's lantern. As I did so, and as the flicker steadied into a flame, we all gave a gasp of surprise. On the deal boards of the carpetless floor there was outlined a fresh track of blood. The red steps pointed towards us and led away from an inner room, the door of which was closed. Gregson flung it open and held his light full blaze in front of him, while we all peered eagerly over his shoulders.

In the middle of the floor of the empty room was huddled the figure of an enormous man, his clean-shaven, swarthy face grotesquely horrible in its contortion and his head encircled by a ghastly crimson halo of blood, lying in a broad wet circle upon the white woodwork. His knees were drawn up, his hands thrown out in agony, and from the centre of his broad, brown, upturned throat there projected the white haft of a knife driven blade-deep into his body. Giant as he was, the man must have gone down like a pole-axed ox before that terrific blow. Beside his right hand a most formidable horn-handled, two-edged dagger lay upon the floor, and near it a black kid glove.

"By George! it's Black Gorgiano himself!" cried the American detective. "Someone has got ahead of us this time."

"Here is the candle in the window, Mr. Holmes," said Gregson. "Why, whatever are you doing?"

Holmes had stepped across, had lit the candle, and was passing it backward and forward across the window-panes. Then he peered into the darkness, blew the candle out, and threw it on the floor.

“I rather think that will be helpful,” said he. He came over and stood in deep thought while the two professionals were examining the body. “You say that three people came out from the flat while you were waiting downstairs,” said he at last. “Did you observe them closely?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Was there a fellow about thirty, black-bearded, dark, of middle size?”

“Yes; he was the last to pass me.”

“That is your man, I fancy. I can give you his description, and we have a very excellent outline of his footmark. That should be enough for you.”

“Not much, Mr. Holmes, among the millions of London.”

“Perhaps not. That is why I thought it best to summon this lady to your aid.”

We all turned round at the words. There, framed in the doorway, was a tall and beautiful woman — the mysterious lodger of Bloomsbury. Slowly she advanced, her face pale and drawn with a frightful apprehension, her eyes fixed and staring, her terrified gaze riveted upon the dark figure on the floor.

“You have killed him!” she muttered. “Oh, Dio mio, you have killed him!” Then I heard a sudden sharp intake of her breath, and she sprang into the air with a cry of joy. Round and round the room she danced, her hands clapping, her dark eyes gleaming with delighted wonder, and a thousand pretty Italian exclamations pouring from her lips. It was terrible and amazing to see such a woman so convulsed with joy at such a sight. Suddenly she stopped and gazed at us all with a questioning stare.

“But you! You are police, are you not? You have killed Giuseppe Gorgiano. Is it not so?”

“We are police, madam.”

She looked round into the shadows of the room.

“But where, then, is Gennaro?” she asked. “He is my husband, Gennaro Lucca. I am Emilia Lucca, and we are both from New York. Where is Gennaro? He called me this moment from this window, and I ran with all my speed.”

“It was I who called,” said Holmes.

“You! How could you call?”

“Your cipher was not difficult, madam. Your presence here was desirable. I knew that I had only to flash ‘Vieni’ and you would surely come.”

The beautiful Italian looked with awe at my companion.

“I do not understand how you know these things,” she said. “Giuseppe Gorgiano — how did he—” She paused, and then suddenly her face lit up with pride and delight. “Now I see it! My Gennaro! My splendid, beautiful Gennaro, who has guarded me safe from all harm, he did it, with his own strong hand he killed the monster! Oh, Gennaro, how wonderful you are! What woman could ever be worthy of such a man?”

“Well, Mrs. Lucca,” said the prosaic Gregson, laying his hand upon the lady’s sleeve with as little sentiment as if she were a Notting Hill hooligan, “I am not very clear yet who you are or what you are; but you’ve said enough to make it very clear that we shall want you at the Yard.”

“One moment, Gregson,” said Holmes. “I rather fancy that this lady may be as anxious to give us information as we can be to get it. You understand, madam, that your husband will be arrested and tried for the death of the man who lies before us? What you say may be used in evidence. But if you think that he has acted from motives which are not criminal, and which he would wish to have known, then you cannot serve him better than by telling us the whole story.”

“Now that Gorgiano is dead we fear nothing,” said the lady. “He was a devil and a monster, and there can be no judge in the world who would punish my husband for having killed him.”

“In that case,” said Holmes, “my suggestion is that we lock this door, leave things as we found them, go with this lady to her room, and form our opinion after we have heard what it is that she has to say to us.”

Half an hour later we were seated, all four, in the small sitting-room of Signora Lucca, listening to her remarkable narrative of those sinister events, the ending of which we had chanced to witness. She spoke in rapid and fluent but very unconventional English, which, for the sake of clearness, I will make grammatical.

“I was born in Posilippo, near Naples,” said she, “and was the daughter of Augusto Barelli, who was the chief lawyer and once the deputy of that part. Gennaro was in my father’s employment, and I came to love him, as any woman must. He had neither money nor position — nothing but his beauty and strength and energy — so my father forbade the match. We fled together, were married at Bari, and sold my jewels to gain the money which would take us to America. This was four years ago, and we have been in New York ever since.

“Fortune was very good to us at first. Gennaro was able to do a service to an Italian gentleman — he saved him from some ruffians in the place called the Bowery and so made a powerful friend. His name was Tito Castalotte and he was the senior partner of the great firm of Castalotte and Zamba, who are the chief fruit importers of New York. Signor Zamba is an invalid, and our new friend Castalotte has all power within the firm, which employs more than three hundred men. He took my husband into his employment, made him head of a department, and showed his good-will towards him in every way. Signor Castalotte was a bachelor, and I believe that he felt as if Gennaro was his son, and both my husband and I loved him as if he were our father. We had taken and furnished a little house in Brooklyn, and our whole future seemed assured when that black cloud appeared which was soon to overspread our sky.

“One night, when Gennaro returned from his work, he brought a fellow-countryman back with him. His name was Gorgiano, and he had come also from Posilippo. He was a huge man, as you can testify, for you have looked upon his corpse. Not only was his body that of a giant but everything about him was grotesque, gigantic, and terrifying. His voice was like thunder in our little house. There was scarce room for the whirl of his great arms as he talked. His thoughts, his emotions, his passions, all were exaggerated and monstrous. He talked, or rather roared, with such energy that others could but sit and listen, cowed with the mighty stream of words. His eyes blazed at you and held you at his mercy. He was a terrible and wonderful man. I thank God that he is dead!

“He came again and again. Yet I was aware that Gennaro was no more happy than I was in his presence. My poor husband would sit pale and listless, listening to the endless raving upon politics and upon social questions which made up our visitor’s conversation. Gennaro said nothing, but I, who knew him so well, could read in his face some emotion which I had never seen there before. At first I thought that it was dislike. And then, gradually, I understood that it was more than dislike. It was fear — a deep, secret, shrinking fear. That night — the night that I read his terror — I put my arms round him and I implored him by his love for me and by all that he held dear to hold nothing from me, and to tell me why this huge man overshadowed him so.

"He told me, and my own heart grew cold as ice as I listened. My poor Gennaro, in his wild and fiery days, when all the world seemed against him and his mind was driven half mad by the injustices of life, had joined a Neapolitan society, the Red Circle, which was allied to the old Carbonari. The oaths and secrets of this brotherhood were frightful, but once within its rule no escape was possible. When we had fled to America Gennaro thought that he had cast it all off forever. What was his horror one evening to meet in the streets the very man who had initiated him in Naples, the giant Gorgiano, a man who had earned the name of 'Death' in the south of Italy, for he was red to the elbow in murder! He had come to New York to avoid the Italian police, and he had already planted a branch of this dreadful society in his new home. All this Gennaro told me and showed me a summons which he had received that very day, a Red Circle drawn upon the head of it telling him that a lodge would be held upon a certain date, and that his presence at it was required and ordered.

"That was bad enough, but worse was to come. I had noticed for some time that when Gorgiano came to us, as he constantly did, in the evening, he spoke much to me; and even when his words were to my husband those terrible, glaring, wild-beast eyes of his were always turned upon me. One night his secret came out. I had awakened what he called 'love' within him — the love of a brute — a savage. Gennaro had not yet returned when he came. He pushed his way in, seized me in his mighty arms, hugged me in his bear's embrace, covered me with kisses, and implored me to come away with him. I was struggling and screaming when Gennaro entered and attacked him. He struck Gennaro senseless and fled from the house which he was never more to enter. It was a deadly enemy that we made that night.

"A few days later came the meeting. Gennaro returned from it with a face which told me that something dreadful had occurred. It was worse than we could have imagined possible. The funds of the society were raised by blackmailing rich Italians and threatening them with violence should they refuse the money. It seems that Castalotte, our dear friend and benefactor, had been approached. He had refused to yield to threats, and he had handed the notices to the police. It was resolved now that such an example should be made of him as would prevent any other victim from rebelling. At the meeting it was arranged that he and his house should be blown up with dynamite. There was a drawing of lots as to who should carry out the deed. Gennaro saw our enemy's cruel face smiling at him as he dipped his hand in the bag. No doubt it had been prearranged in some fashion, for it was the fatal disc with the Red Circle upon it, the mandate for murder, which lay upon his palm. He was to kill his best friend, or he was to expose himself and me to the vengeance of his comrades. It was part of their fiendish system to punish those whom they feared or hated by injuring not only their own persons but those whom they loved, and it was the knowledge of this which hung as a terror over my poor Gennaro's head and drove him nearly crazy with apprehension.

"All that night we sat together, our arms round each other, each strengthening each for the troubles that lay before us. The very next evening had been fixed for the attempt. By midday my husband and I were on our way to London, but not before he had given our benefactor full warning of his danger, and had also left such information for the police as would safeguard his life for the future.

"The rest, gentlemen, you know for yourselves. We were sure that our enemies would be behind us like our own shadows. Gorgiano had his private reasons for vengeance, but in any case we knew how ruthless, cunning, and untiring he could be. Both Italy and America are full of stories of his dreadful powers. If ever they were exerted it would be now. My darling made use of the few clear days which our start had given us in arranging for a refuge for me in such a fashion that no possible danger could reach me. For his own part, he wished to be free that he might communicate both with the American and with the Italian police. I do not myself know where he lived, or how. All that I learned was through the columns of a newspaper. But once as I looked through my window, I saw two Italians watching the house, and I understood that in some way Gorgiano had found out our retreat. Finally Gennaro told me, through the paper, that he would signal to me from a certain window, but when the signals came they were nothing but warnings, which were suddenly interrupted. It is very clear to me now that he knew Gorgiano to be close upon him, and that, thank God, he was ready for him when he came. And now, gentlemen, I would ask you whether we have anything to fear from the law, or whether any judge upon earth would condemn my Gennaro for what he has done?"

"Well, Mr. Gregson," said the American, looking across at the official, "I don't know what your British point of view may be, but I guess that in New York this lady's husband will receive a pretty general vote of thanks."

“She will have to come with me and see the chief,” Gregson answered. “If what she says is corroborated, I do not think she or her husband has much to fear. But what I can’t make head or tail of, Mr. Holmes, is how on earth you got yourself mixed up in the matter.”

“Education, Gregson, education. Still seeking knowledge at the old university. Well, Watson, you have one more specimen of the tragic and grotesque to add to your collection. By the way, it is not eight o’clock, and a Wagner night at Covent Garden! If we hurry, we might be in time for the second act.”

The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

In the third week of November, in the year 1895, a dense yellow fog settled down upon London. From the Monday to the Thursday I doubt whether it was ever possible from our windows in Baker Street to see the loom of the opposite houses. The first day Holmes had spent in cross-indexing his huge book of references. The second and third had been patiently occupied upon a subject which he had recently made his hobby — the music of the Middle Ages. But when, for the fourth time, after pushing back our chairs from breakfast we saw the greasy, heavy brown swirl still drifting past us and condensing in oily drops upon the window-panes, my comrade's impatient and active nature could endure this drab existence no longer. He paced restlessly about our sitting-room in a fever of suppressed energy, biting his nails, tapping the furniture, and chafing against inaction.

"Nothing of interest in the paper, Watson?" he said.

I was aware that by anything of interest, Holmes meant anything of criminal interest. There was the news of a revolution, of a possible war, and of an impending change of government; but these did not come within the horizon of my companion. I could see nothing recorded in the shape of crime which was not commonplace and futile. Holmes groaned and resumed his restless meanderings.

"The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow," said he in the querulous voice of the sportsman whose game has failed him. "Look out of this window, Watson. See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloudbank. The thief or the murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim."

"There have," said I, "been numerous petty thefts."

Holmes snorted his contempt.

"This great and sombre stage is set for something more worthy than that," said he. "It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal."

"It is, indeed!" said I heartily.

"Suppose that I were Brooks or Woodhouse, or any of the fifty men who have good reason for taking my life, how long could I survive against my own pursuit? A summons, a bogus appointment, and all would be over. It is well they don’t have days of fog in the Latin countries — the countries of assassination. By Jove! here comes something at last to break our dead monotony.”

It was the maid with a telegram. Holmes tore it open and burst out laughing.

“Well, well! What next?” said he. “Brother Mycroft is coming round.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Why not? It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane. Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall — that is his cycle. Once, and only once, he has been here. What upheaval can possibly have derailed him?”

“Does he not explain?”

Holmes handed me his brother’s telegram.

Must see you over Cadogan West. Coming at once.

MYCROFT.

“Cadogan West? I have heard the name.”

“It recalls nothing to my mind. But that Mycroft should break out in this erratic fashion! A planet might as well leave its orbit. By the way, do you know what Mycroft is?”

I had some vague recollection of an explanation at the time of the Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.

“You told me that he had some small office under the British government.”

Holmes chuckled.

“I did not know you quite so well in those days. One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in thinking that he is under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British government.”

“My dear Holmes!”

“I thought I might surprise you. Mycroft draws four hundred and fifty pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country.”

“But how?”

“Well, his position is unique. He has made it for himself. There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again. He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living.

The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other. They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. Again and again his word has decided the national policy. He lives in it. He thinks of nothing else save when, as an intellectual exercise, he unbends if I call upon him and ask him to advise me on one of my little problems. But Jupiter is descending to-day. What on earth can it mean? Who is Cadogan West, and what is he to Mycroft?"

"I have it," I cried, and plunged among the litter of papers upon the sofa. "Yes, yes, here he is, sure enough! Cadogan West was the young man who was found dead on the Underground on Tuesday morning."

Holmes sat up at attention, his pipe halfway to his lips.

"This must be serious, Watson. A death which has caused my brother to alter his habits can be no ordinary one. What in the world can he have to do with it? The case was featureless as I remember it. The young man had apparently fallen out of the train and killed himself. He had not been robbed, and there was no particular reason to suspect violence. Is that not so?"

"There has been an inquest," said I, "and a good many fresh facts have come out. Looked at more closely, I should certainly say that it was a curious case."

"Judging by its effect upon my brother, I should think it must be a most extraordinary one." He snuggled down in his armchair. "Now, Watson, let us have the facts."

"The man's name was Arthur Cadogan West. He was twenty-seven years of age, unmarried, and a clerk at Woolwich Arsenal."

"Government employ. Behold the link with Brother Mycroft!"

"He left Woolwich suddenly on Monday night. Was last seen by his fiancee, Miss Violet Westbury, whom he left abruptly in the fog about 7:30

that evening. There was no quarrel between them and she can give no motive for his action. The next thing heard of him was when his dead body was discovered by a plate-layer named Mason, just outside Aldgate Station on the Underground system in London.”

“When?”

“The body was found at six on the Tuesday morning. It was lying wide of the metals upon the left hand of the track as one goes eastward, at a point close to the station, where the line emerges from the tunnel in which it runs. The head was badly crushed — an injury which might well have been caused by a fall from the train. The body could only have come on the line in that way. Had it been carried down from any neighbouring street, it must have passed the station barriers, where a collector is always standing. This point seems absolutely certain.”

“Very good. The case is definite enough. The man, dead or alive, either fell or was precipitated from a train. So much is clear to me. Continue.”

“The trains which traverse the lines of rail beside which the body was found are those which run from west to east, some being purely Metropolitan, and some from Willesden and outlying junctions. It can be stated for certain that this young man when he met his death, was travelling in this direction at some late hour of the night, but at what point he entered the train it is impossible to state.”

“His ticket, of course, would show that.”

“There was no ticket in his pockets.”

“No ticket! Dear me, Watson, this is really very singular. According to my experience it is not possible to reach the platform of a Metropolitan train without exhibiting one’s ticket. Presumably, then, the young man had one. Was it taken from him in order to conceal the station from which he came? It is possible. Or did he drop it in the carriage? That also is possible. But the point is of curious interest. I understand that there was no sign of robbery?”

“Apparently not. There is a list here of his possessions. His purse contained two pounds fifteen. He had also a check-book on the Woolwich branch of the Capital and Counties Bank. Through this his identity was established. There were also two dress-circle tickets for the Woolwich Theatre, dated for that very evening. Also a small packet of technical papers.”

Holmes gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

“There we have it at last, Watson! British government — Woolwich. Arsenal — technical papers — Brother Mycroft, the chain is complete. But here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to speak for himself.”

A moment later the tall and portly form of Mycroft Holmes was ushered into the room. Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in its lips, and so subtle in its play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross body and remembered only the dominant mind.

At his heels came our old friend Lestrade, of Scotland Yard — thin and austere. The gravity of both their faces foretold some weighty quest. The detective shook hands without a word. Mycroft Holmes struggled out of his overcoat and subsided into an armchair.

“A most annoying business, Sherlock,” said he. “I extremely dislike altering my habits, but the powers that be would take no denial. In the present state of Siam it is most awkward that I should be away from the office. But it is a real crisis. I have never seen the Prime Minister so upset. As to the Admiralty — it is buzzing like an overturned bee-hive. Have you read up the case?”

“We have just done so. What were the technical papers?”

“Ah, there’s the point! Fortunately, it has not come out. The press would be furious if it did. The papers which this wretched youth had in his pocket were the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine.”

Mycroft Holmes spoke with a solemnity which showed his sense of the importance of the subject. His brother and I sat expectant.

“Surely you have heard of it? I thought everyone had heard of it.”

“Only as a name.”

“Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. It has been the most jealously guarded of all government secrets. You may take it from me that naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius of a Bruce-Partington’s operation. Two years ago a very large sum was smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly of the invention. Every effort has been made to keep the secret. The plans, which are exceedingly intricate, comprising some thirty separate patents, each essential to the working of the whole, are kept in an elaborate safe in a confidential office adjoining the arsenal, with burglar-proof doors and windows. Under no conceivable circumstances were the plans to be taken from the office. If the chief constructor of the Navy desired to consult them, even he was forced to go to the Woolwich office for the purpose. And yet here we find them in the pocket of a dead junior clerk in the heart of London. From an official point of view it’s simply awful.”

“But you have recovered them?”

“No, Sherlock, no! That’s the pinch. We have not. Ten papers were taken from Woolwich. There were seven in the pocket of Cadogan West. The three most essential are gone — stolen, vanished. You must drop everything, Sherlock. Never mind your usual petty puzzles of the police-court. It’s a vital international problem that you have to solve. Why did Cadogan West take the papers, where are the missing ones, how did he die, how came his body where it was found, how can the evil be set right? Find an answer to all these questions, and you will have done good service for your country.”

“Why do you not solve it yourself, Mycroft? You can see as far as I.”

“Possibly, Sherlock. But it is a question of getting details. Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there, to cross-question railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye — it is not my metier. No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up. If you have a fancy to see your name in the next honours list—”

My friend smiled and shook his head.

“I play the game for the game’s own sake,” said he. “But the problem certainly presents some points of interest, and I shall be very pleased to look into it. Some more facts, please.”

“I have jotted down the more essential ones upon this sheet of paper, together with a few addresses which you will find of service. The actual official guardian of the papers is the famous government expert, Sir James Walter. whose decorations and sub-titles fill two lines of a book of reference. He has grown gray in the service, is a gentleman, a favoured guest in the most exalted houses, and, above all, a man whose patriotism is beyond suspicion. He is one of two who have a key of the safe. I may add that the papers were undoubtedly in the office during working hours on Monday, and that Sir James left for London about three o’clock taking his key with him. He was at the house of Admiral Sinclair at Barclay Square during the whole of the evening when this incident occurred.”

“Has the fact been verified?”

“Yes; his brother, Colonel Valentine Walter, has testified to his departure from Woolwich, and Admiral Sinclair to his arrival in London; so Sir James is no longer a direct factor in the problem.”

“Who was the other man with a key?”

“The senior clerk and draughtsman, Mr. Sidney Johnson. He is a man of forty, married, with five children. He is a silent, morose man, but he has, on the whole, an excellent record in the public service. He is unpopular with his colleagues, but a hard worker. According to his own account, corroborated only by the word of his wife, he was at home the whole of Monday evening after office hours, and his key has never left the watch-chain upon which it hangs.”

“Tell us about Cadogan West.”

“He has been ten years in the service and has done good work. He has the reputation of being hot-headed and impetuous, but a straight, honest man. We have nothing against him. He was next to Sidney Johnson in the office. His duties brought him into daily, personal contact with the plans. No one else had the handling of them.”

“Who locked the plans up that night?”

“Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk.”

“Well, it is surely perfectly clear who took them away. They are actually found upon the person of this junior clerk, Cadogan West. That seems final, does it not?”

“It does, Sherlock, and yet it leaves so much unexplained. In the first place, why did he take them?”

“I presume they were of value?”

“He could have got several thousands for them very easily.”

“Can you suggest any possible motive for taking the papers to London except to sell them?”

“No, I cannot.”

“Then we must take that as our working hypothesis. Young West took the papers. Now this could only be done by having a false key—”

“Several false keys. He had to open the building and the room.”

“He had, then, several false keys. He took the papers to London to sell the secret, intending, no doubt, to have the plans themselves back in the safe next morning before they were missed. While in London on this treasonable mission he met his end.”

“How?”

“We will suppose that he was travelling back to Woolwich when he was killed and thrown out of the compartment.”

“Aldgate, where the body was found, is considerably past the station for London Bridge, which would be his route to Woolwich.”

“Many circumstances could be imagined under which he would pass London Bridge. There was someone in the carriage, for example, with whom he was having an absorbing interview. This interview led to a violent scene in which he lost his life. Possibly he tried to leave the carriage, fell out on the line, and so met his end. The other closed the door. There was a thick fog, and nothing could be seen.”

“No better explanation can be given with our present knowledge; and yet consider, Sherlock, how much you leave untouched. We will suppose, for argument’s sake, that young Cadogan West had determined to convey these papers to London. He would naturally have made an appointment with the foreign agent and kept his evening clear. Instead of that he took two tickets for the theatre, escorted his fiancee halfway there, and then suddenly disappeared.”

“A blind,” said Lestrade, who had sat listening with some impatience to the conversation.

“A very singular one. That is objection No. 1. Objection No. 2: We will suppose that he reaches London and sees the foreign agent. He must bring back the papers before morning or the loss will be discovered. He took away ten. Only seven were in his pocket. What had become of the other three? He certainly would not leave them of his own free will. Then, again, where is the price of his treason? One would have expected to find a large sum of money in his pocket.”

“It seems to me perfectly clear,” said Lestrade. “I have no doubt at all as to what occurred. He took the papers to sell them. He saw the agent. They could not agree as to price. He started home again, but the agent went with him. In the train the agent murdered him, took the more essential papers, and threw his body from the carriage. That would account for everything, would it not?”

“Why had he no ticket?”

“The ticket would have shown which station was nearest the agent’s house. Therefore he took it from the murdered man’s pocket.”

“Good, Lestrade, very good,” said Holmes. “Your theory holds together. But if this is true, then the case is at an end. On the one hand, the traitor is dead. On the other, the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine are presumably already on the Continent. What is there for us to do?”

“To act, Sherlock — to act!” cried Mycroft, springing to his feet. “All my instincts are against this explanation. Use your powers! Go to the scene of the crime! See the people concerned! Leave no stone unturned! In all your career you have never had so great a chance of serving your country.”

“Well, well!” said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. “Come, Watson! And you, Lestrade, could you favour us with your company for an hour or two? We will begin our investigation by a visit to Aldgate Station. Good-bye, Mycroft. I shall let you have a report before evening, but I warn you in advance that you have little to expect.”

An hour later Holmes, Lestrade and I stood upon the Underground railroad at the point where it emerges from the tunnel immediately before Aldgate Station. A courteous red-faced old gentleman represented the railway company.

“This is where the young man’s body lay,” said he, indicating a spot about three feet from the metals. “It could not have fallen from above, for these, as you see, are all blank walls. Therefore, it could only have come from a train, and that train, so far as we can trace it, must have passed about midnight on Monday.”

“Have the carriages been examined for any sign of violence?”

“There are no such signs, and no ticket has been found.”

“No record of a door being found open?”

“None.”

“We have had some fresh evidence this morning,” said Lestrade. “A passenger who passed Aldgate in an ordinary Metropolitan train about 11:40 on Monday night declares that he heard a heavy thud, as of a body striking the line, just before the train reached the station. There was dense fog, however, and nothing could be seen. He made no report of it at the time. Why whatever is the matter with Mr. Holmes?”

My friend was standing with an expression of strained intensity upon his face, staring at the railway metals where they curved out of the tunnel. Aldgate is a junction, and there was a network of points. On these his eager, questioning eyes were fixed, and I saw on his keen, alert face that tightening of the lips, that quiver of the nostrils, and concentration of the heavy tufted brows which I knew so well.

"Points," he muttered, "the points."

"What of it? What do you mean?"

"I suppose there are no great number of points on a system such as this?"

"No; there are very few."

"And a curve, too. Points, and a curve. By Jove! if it were only so."

"What is it, Mr. Holmes? Have you a clue?"

"An idea — an indication, no more. But the case certainly grows in interest. Unique, perfectly unique, and yet why not? I do not see any indications of bleeding on the line."

"There were hardly any."

"But I understand that there was a considerable wound."

"The bone was crushed, but there was no great external injury."

"And yet one would have expected some bleeding. Would it be possible for me to inspect the train which contained the passenger who heard the thud of a fall in the fog?"

"I fear not, Mr. Holmes. The train has been broken up before now, and the carriages redistributed."

"I can assure you, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade, "that every carriage has been carefully examined. I saw to it myself."

It was one of my friend's most obvious weaknesses that he was impatient with less alert intelligences than his own.

"Very likely," said he, turning away. "As it happens, it was not the carriages which I desired to examine. Watson, we have done all we can here. We need not trouble you any further, Mr. Lestrade. I think our investigations must now carry us to Woolwich."

At London Bridge, Holmes wrote a telegram to his brother, which he handed to me before dispatching it. It ran thus:

See some light in the darkness, but it may possibly flicker
out. Meanwhile, please send by messenger, to await return
at Baker Street, a complete list of all foreign spies or
international agents known to be in England, with full
address.
SHERLOCK.

"That should be helpful, Watson," he remarked as we took our seats in the Woolwich train. "We certainly owe Brother Mycroft a debt for having introduced us to what promises to be a really very remarkable case.”

His eager face still wore that expression of intense and high-strung energy, which showed me that some novel and suggestive circumstance had opened up a stimulating line of thought. See the foxhound with hanging ears and drooping tail as it lolls about the kennels, and compare it with the same hound as, with gleaming eyes and straining muscles, it runs upon a breast-high scent — such was the change in Holmes since the morning. He was a different man from the limp and lounging figure in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown who had prowled so restlessly only a few hours before round the fog-girt room.

“There is material here. There is scope,” said he. “I am dull indeed not to have understood its possibilities.”

“Even now they are dark to me.”

“The end is dark to me also, but I have hold of one idea which may lead us far. The man met his death elsewhere, and his body was on the roof of a carriage.”

“On the roof!”

“Remarkable, is it not? But consider the facts. Is it a coincidence that it is found at the very point where the train pitches and sways as it comes round on the points? Is not that the place where an object upon the roof might be expected to fall off? The points would affect no object inside the train. Either the body fell from the roof, or a very curious coincidence has occurred. But now consider the question of the blood. Of course, there was no bleeding on the line if the body had bled elsewhere. Each fact is suggestive in itself. Together they have a cumulative force.”

“And the ticket, too!” I cried.

“Exactly. We could not explain the absence of a ticket. This would explain it. Everything fits together.”

“But suppose it were so, we are still as far as ever from unravelling the mystery of his death. Indeed, it becomes not simpler but stranger.”

“Perhaps,” said Holmes thoughtfully, “perhaps.” He relapsed into a silent reverie, which lasted until the slow train drew up at last in Woolwich Station. There he called a cab and drew Mycroft’s paper from his pocket.

“We have quite a little round of afternoon calls to make,” said he. “I think that Sir James Walter claims our first attention. “

The house of the famous official was a fine villa with green lawns, stretching down to the Thames. As we reached it the fog was lifting, and a thin, watery sunshine was breaking through. A butler answered our ring.

"Sir James, sir!" said he with solemn face. "Sir James died this morning."

"Good heavens!" cried Holmes in amazement. "How did he die?"

"Perhaps you would care to step in, sir, and see his brother, Colonel Valentine?"

"Yes, we had best do so."

We were ushered into a dim-lit drawing-room, where an instant later we were joined by a very tall, handsome, light-bearded man of fifty, the younger brother of the dead scientist. His wild eyes, stained cheeks, and unkempt hair all spoke of the sudden blow which had fallen upon the household. He was hardly articulate as he spoke of it.

"It was this horrible scandal," said he. "My brother, Sir James, was a man of very sensitive honour, and he could not survive such an affair. It broke his heart. He was always so proud of the efficiency of his department, and this was a crushing blow."

"We had hoped that he might have given us some indications which would have helped us to clear the matter up."

"I assure you that it was all a mystery to him as it is to you and to all of us. He had already put all his knowledge at the disposal of the police. Naturally he had no doubt that Cadogan West was guilty. But all the rest was inconceivable."

"You cannot throw any new light upon the affair?"

"I know nothing myself save what I have read or heard. I have no desire to be discourteous, but you can understand, Mr. Holmes, that we are much disturbed at present, and I must ask you to hasten this interview to an end."

"This is indeed an unexpected development," said my friend when we had regained the cab. "I wonder if the death was natural, or whether the poor old fellow killed himself! If the latter, may it be taken as some sign of self-reproach for duty neglected? We must leave that question to the future. Now we shall turn to the Cadogan Wests."

A small but well-kept house in the outskirts of the town sheltered the bereaved mother. The old lady was too dazed with grief to be of any use to us, but at her side was a white-faced young lady, who introduced herself as Miss Violet Westbury, the fiancee of the dead man, and the last to see him upon that fatal night.

"I cannot explain it, Mr. Holmes," she said. "I have not shut an eye since the tragedy, thinking, thinking, thinking, night and day, what the true meaning of it can be. Arthur was the most single-minded, chivalrous, patriotic man upon earth. He would have cut his right hand off before he would sell a State secret confided to his keeping. It is absurd, impossible, preposterous to anyone who knew him.”

“But the facts, Miss Westbury?”

“Yes, yes I admit I cannot explain them.”

“Was he in any want of money?”

“No; his needs were very simple and his salary ample. He had saved a few hundreds, and we were to marry at the New Year.”

“No signs of any mental excitement? Come, Miss Westbury, be absolutely frank with us.”

The quick eye of my companion had noted some change in her manner. She coloured and hesitated.

“Yes,” she said at last, “I had a feeling that there was something on his mind.”

“For long?”

“Only for the last week or so. He was thoughtful and worried. Once I pressed him about it. He admitted that there was something, and that it was concerned with his official life. ‘It is too serious for me to speak about, even to you,’ said he. I could get nothing more.”

Holmes looked grave.

“Go on, Miss Westbury. Even if it seems to tell against him, go on. We cannot say what it may lead to.”

“Indeed, I have nothing more to tell. Once or twice it seemed to me that he was on the point of telling me something. He spoke one evening of the importance of the secret, and I have some recollection that he said that no doubt foreign spies would pay a great deal to have it.”

My friend’s face grew graver still.

“Anything else?”

“He said that we were slack about such matters — that it would be easy for a traitor to get the plans.”

“Was it only recently that he made such remarks?”

“Yes, quite recently.”

“Now tell us of that last evening.”

“We were to go to the theatre. The fog was so thick that a cab was useless. We walked, and our way took us close to the office. Suddenly he darted away into the fog.”

“Without a word?”

“He gave an exclamation; that was all. I waited but he never returned. Then I walked home. Next morning, after the office opened, they came to inquire. About twelve o’clock we heard the terrible news. Oh, Mr. Holmes, if you could only, only save his honour! It was so much to him.”

Holmes shook his head sadly.

“Come, Watson,” said he, “our ways lie elsewhere. Our next station must be the office from which the papers were taken.

“It was black enough before against this young man, but our inquiries make it blacker,” he remarked as the cab lumbered off. “His coming marriage gives a motive for the crime. He naturally wanted money. The idea was in his head, since he spoke about it. He nearly made the girl an accomplice in the treason by telling her his plans. It is all very bad.”

“But surely, Holmes, character goes for something? Then, again, why should he leave the girl in the street and dart away to commit a felony?”

“Exactly! There are certainly objections. But it is a formidable case which they have to meet.”

Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk, met us at the office and received us with that respect which my companion’s card always commanded. He was a thin, gruff, bespectacled man of middle age, his cheeks haggard, and his hands twitching from the nervous strain to which he had been subjected.

“It is bad, Mr. Holmes, very bad! Have you heard of the death of the chief?”

“We have just come from his house.”

“The place is disorganized. The chief dead, Cadogan West dead, our papers stolen. And yet, when we closed our door on Monday evening, we were as efficient an office as any in the government service. Good God, it’s dreadful to think of! That West, of all men, should have done such a thing!”

“You are sure of his guilt, then?”

“I can see no other way out of it. And yet I would have trusted him as I trust myself.”

“At what hour was the office closed on Monday?”

“At five.”

“Did you close it?”

“I am always the last man out.”

“Where were the plans?”

“In that safe. I put them there myself.”

“Is there no watchman to the building?”

“There is, but he has other departments to look after as well. He is an old soldier and a most trustworthy man. He saw nothing that evening. Of course the fog was very thick.”

“Suppose that Cadogan West wished to make his way into the building after hours; he would need three keys, would he not, before he could reach the papers?”

“Yes, he would. The key of the outer door, the key of the office, and the key of the safe.”

“Only Sir James Walter and you had those keys?”

“I had no keys of the doors — only of the safe.”

“Was Sir James a man who was orderly in his habits?”

“Yes, I think he was. I know that so far as those three keys are concerned he kept them on the same ring. I have often seen them there.”

“And that ring went with him to London?”

“He said so.”

“And your key never left your possession?”

“Never.”

“Then West, if he is the culprit, must have had a duplicate. And yet none was found upon his body. One other point: if a clerk in this office desired to sell the plans, would it not be simpler to copy the plans for himself than to take the originals, as was actually done?”

“It would take considerable technical knowledge to copy the plans in an effective way.”

“But I suppose either Sir James, or you, or West had that technical knowledge?”

“No doubt we had, but I beg you won’t try to drag me into the matter, Mr. Holmes. What is the use of our speculating in this way when the original plans were actually found on West?”

“Well, it is certainly singular that he should run the risk of taking originals if he could safely have taken copies, which would have equally served his turn.”

“Singular, no doubt — and yet he did so.”

“Every inquiry in this case reveals something inexplicable. Now there are three papers still missing. They are, as I understand, the vital ones.”

“Yes, that is so.”

“Do you mean to say that anyone holding these three papers and without the seven others, could construct a Bruce-Partington submarine?”

“I reported to that effect to the Admiralty. But to-day I have been over the drawings again, and I am not so sure of it. The double valves with the automatic self-adjusting slots are drawn in one of the papers which have been returned. Until the foreigners had invented that for themselves they could not make the boat. Of course they might soon get over the difficulty.”

“But the three missing drawings are the most important?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“I think, with your permission, I will now take a stroll round me premises. I do not recall any other question which I desired to ask.”

He examined the lock of the safe, the door of the room, and finally the iron shutters of the window. It was only when we were on the lawn outside that his interest was strongly excited. There was a laurel bush outside the window, and several of the branches bore signs of having been twisted or snapped. He examined them carefully with his lens, and then some dim and vague marks upon the earth beneath. Finally he asked the chief clerk to close the iron shutters, and he pointed out to me that they hardly met in the centre, and that it would be possible for anyone outside to see what was going on within the room.

“The indications are ruined by the three days’ delay. They may mean something or nothing. Well, Watson, I do not think that Woolwich can help us further. It is a small crop which we have gathered. Let us see if we can do better in London.”

Yet we added one more sheaf to our harvest before we left Woolwich Station. The clerk in the ticket office was able to say with confidence that he saw Cadogan West — whom he knew well by sight — upon the Monday night, and that he went to London by the 8:15 to London Bridge. He was alone and took a single third-class ticket. The clerk was struck at the time by his excited and nervous manner. So shaky was he that he could hardly pick up his change, and the clerk had helped him with it. A reference to the timetable showed that the 8:15 was the first train which it was possible for West to take after he had left the lady about 7:30.

“Let us reconstruct, Watson,” said Holmes after half an hour of silence. “I am not aware that in all our joint researches we have ever had a case which was more difficult to get at. Every fresh advance which we make only reveals a fresh ridge beyond. And yet we have surely made some appreciable progress.

“The effect of our inquiries at Woolwich has in the main been against young Cadogan West; but the indications at the window would lend themselves to a more favourable hypothesis. Let us suppose, for example, that he had been approached by some foreign agent. It might have been done under such pledges as would have prevented him from speaking of it, and yet would have affected his thoughts in the direction indicated by his remarks to his fiancee. Very good. We will now suppose that as he went to the theatre with the young lady he suddenly, in the fog, caught a glimpse of this same agent going in the direction of the office. He was an impetuous man, quick in his decisions. Everything gave way to his duty. He followed the man, reached the window, saw the abstraction of the documents, and pursued the thief. In this way we get over the objection that no one would take originals when he could make copies. This outsider had to take originals. So far it holds together.”

“What is the next step?”

“Then we come into difficulties. One would imagine that under such circumstances the first act of young Cadogan West would be to seize the villain and raise the alarm. Why did he not do so? Could it have been an official superior who took the papers? That would explain West’s conduct. Or could the thief have given West the slip in the fog, and West started at once to London to head him off from his own rooms, presuming that he knew where the rooms were? The call must have been very pressing, since he left his girl standing in the fog and made no effort to communicate with her. Our scent runs cold here, and there is a vast gap between either hypothesis and the laying of West’s body, with seven papers in his pocket, on the roof of a Metropolitan train. My instinct now is to work from the other end. If Mycroft has given us the list of addresses we may be able to pick our man and follow two tracks instead of one.”

Surely enough, a note awaited us at Baker Street. A government messenger had brought it post-haste. Holmes glanced at it and threw it over to me.

> There are numerous small fry, but few who would handle so big an affair. The only men worth considering are Adolph Meyer, of 13 Great George Street, Westminster; Louis La Rothiere, of Campden Mansions, Notting Hill; and Hugo

Oberstein, 13 Caulfield Gardens, Kensington. The latter
was known to be in town on Monday and is now reported as
having left. Glad to hear you have seen some light. The
Cabinet awaits your final report with the utmost anxiety.
Urgent representations have arrived from the very highest
quarter. The whole force of the State is at your back if you
should need it.

MYCROFT.

"I'm afraid," said Holmes, smiling, "that all the queen's horses and all the queen's men cannot avail in this matter." He had spread out his big map of London and leaned eagerly over it. "Well, well," said he presently with an exclamation of satisfaction, "things are turning a little in our direction at last. Why Watson, I do honestly believe that we are going to pull it off, after all." He slapped me on the shoulder with a sudden burst of hilarity. "I am going out now. It is only a reconnaissance. I will do nothing serious without my trusted comrade and biographer at my elbow. Do you stay here, and the odds are that you will see me again in an hour or two. If time hangs heavy get foolscap and a pen, and begin your narrative of how we saved the State."

I felt some reflection of his elation in my own mind, for I knew well that he would not depart so far from his usual austerity of demeanour unless there was good cause for exultation. All the long November evening I waited, filled with impatience for his return. At last, shortly after nine o'clock, there arrived a messenger with a note:

Am dining at Goldini's Restaurant, Gloucester Road,
Kensington. Please come at once and join me there. Bring
with you a jemmy, a dark lantern, a chisel, and a revolver.

S. H.

It was a nice equipment for a respectable citizen to carry through the dim, fog-draped streets. I stowed them all discreetly away in my overcoat and drove straight to the address given. There sat my friend at a little round table near the door of the garish Italian restaurant.

"Have you had something to eat? Then join me in a coffee and curacao. Try one of the proprietor's cigars. They are less poisonous than one would expect. Have you the tools?"

"They are here, in my overcoat."

“Excellent. Let me give you a short sketch of what I have done, with some indication of what we are about to do. Now it must be evident to you, Watson, that this young man’s body was placed on the roof of the train. That was clear from the instant that I determined the fact that it was from the roof, and not from a carriage, that he had fallen.”

“Could it not have been dropped from a bridge?”

“I should say it was impossible. If you examine the roofs you will find that they are slightly rounded, and there is no railing round them. Therefore, we can say for certain that young Cadogan West was placed on it.”

“How could he be placed there?”

“That was the question which we had to answer. There is only one possible way. You are aware that the Underground runs clear of tunnels at some points in the West End. I had a vague memory that as I have travelled by it I have occasionally seen windows just above my head. Now, suppose that a train halted under such a window, would there be any difficulty in laying a body upon the roof?”

“It seems most improbable.”

“We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Here all other contingencies have failed. When I found that the leading international agent, who had just left London, lived in a row of houses which abutted upon the Underground, I was so pleased that you were a little astonished at my sudden frivolity.”

“Oh, that was it, was it?”

“Yes, that was it. Mr. Hugo Oberstein, of 13 Caulfield Gardens, had become my objective. I began my operations at Gloucester Road Station, where a very helpful official walked with me along the track and allowed me to satisfy myself not only that the back-stair windows of Caulfield Gardens open on the line but the even more essential fact that, owing to the intersection of one of the larger railways, the Underground trains are frequently held motionless for some minutes at that very spot.”

“Splendid, Holmes! You have got it!”

“So far — so far, Watson. We advance, but the goal is afar. Well, having seen the back of Caulfield Gardens, I visited the front and satisfied myself that the bird was indeed flown. It is a considerable house, unfurnished, so far as I could judge, in the upper rooms. Oberstein lived there with a single valet, who was probably a confederate entirely in his confidence. We must bear in mind that Oberstein has gone to the Continent to dispose of his booty, but not with any idea of flight; for he had no reason to fear a warrant, and the idea of an amateur domiciliary visit would certainly never occur to him. Yet that is precisely what we are about to make.”

“Could we not get a warrant and legalise it?”

“Hardly on the evidence.”

“What can we hope to do?”

“We cannot tell what correspondence may be there.”

“I don’t like it, Holmes.”

“My dear fellow, you shall keep watch in the street. I’ll do the criminal part. It’s not a time to stick at trifles. Think of Mycroft’s note, of the Admiralty, the Cabinet, the exalted person who waits for news. We are bound to go.”

My answer was to rise from the table.

“You are right, Holmes. We are bound to go.”

He sprang up and shook me by the hand.

“I knew you would not shrink at the last,” said he, and for a moment I saw something in his eyes which was nearer to tenderness than I had ever seen. The next instant he was his masterful, practical self once more.

“It is nearly half a mile, but there is no hurry. Let us walk,” said he. “Don’t drop the instruments, I beg. Your arrest as a suspicious character would be a most unfortunate complication.”

Caulfield Gardens was one of those lines of flat-faced, pillared, and porticoed houses which are so prominent a product of the middle Victorian epoch in the West End of London. Next door there appeared to be a children’s party, for the merry buzz of young voices and the clatter of a piano resounded through the night. The fog still hung about and screened us with its friendly shade. Holmes had lit his lantern and flashed it upon the massive door.

“This is a serious proposition,” said he. “It is certainly bolted as well as locked. We would do better in the area. There is an excellent archway down yonder in case a too zealous policeman should intrude. Give me a hand, Watson, and I’ll do the same for you.”

A minute later we were both in the area. Hardly had we reached the dark shadows before the step of the policeman was heard in the fog above. As its soft rhythm died away, Holmes set to work upon the lower door. I saw him stoop and strain until with a sharp crash it flew open. We sprang through into the dark passage, closing the area door behind us. Holmes led the way up the curving, uncarpeted stair. His little fan of yellow light shone upon a low window.

“Here we are, Watson — this must be the one.” He threw it open, and as he did so there was a low, harsh murmur, growing steadily into a loud roar as a train dashed past us in the darkness. Holmes swept his light along the window-sill. It was thickly coated with soot from the passing engines, but the black surface was blurred and rubbed in places.

“You can see where they rested the body. Halloa, Watson! what is this? There can be no doubt that it is a blood mark.” He was pointing to faint discolourations along the woodwork of the window. “Here it is on the stone of the stair also. The demonstration is complete. Let us stay here until a train stops. “

We had not long to wait. The very next train roared from the tunnel as before, but slowed in the open, and then, with a creaking of brakes, pulled up immediately beneath us. It was not four feet from the window-ledge to the roof of the carriages. Holmes softly closed the window.

“So far we are justified,” said he. “What do you think of it, Watson?”

“A masterpiece. You have never risen to a greater height.”

“I cannot agree with you there. From the moment that I conceived the idea of the body being upon the roof, which surely was not a very abstruse one, all the rest was inevitable. If it were not for the grave interests involved the affair up to this point would be insignificant. Our difficulties are still before us. But perhaps we may find something here which may help us.”

We had ascended the kitchen stair and entered the suite of rooms upon the first floor. One was a dining-room, severely furnished and containing nothing of interest. A second was a bedroom, which also drew blank. The remaining room appeared more promising, and my companion settled down to a systematic examination. It was littered with books and papers, and was evidently used as a study. Swiftly and methodically Holmes turned over the contents of drawer after drawer and cupboard after cupboard, but no gleam of success came to brighten his austere face. At the end of an hour he was no further than when he started.

“The cunning dog has covered his tracks,” said he. “He has left nothing to incriminate him. His dangerous correspondence has been destroyed or removed. This is our last chance.”

It was a small tin cash-box which stood upon the writing-desk. Holmes pried it open with his chisel. Several rolls of paper were within, covered with figures and calculations, without any note to show to what they referred. The recurring words “water pressure” and “pressure to the square inch” suggested some possible relation to a submarine. Holmes tossed them all impatiently aside. There only remained an envelope with some small newspaper slips inside it. He shook them out on the table, and at once I saw by his eager face that his hopes had been raised.

“What’s this, Watson? Eh? What’s this? Record of a series of messages in the advertisements of a paper. Daily Telegraph agony column by the print and paper. Right-hand top corner of a page. No dates — but messages arrange themselves. This must be the first:

“Hoped to hear sooner. Terms agreed to. Write fully to
address given on card.
PIERROT.

“Next comes:

“Too complex for description. Must have full report.
Stuff awaits you when goods delivered.
PIERROT.

“Then comes:

“Matter presses. Must withdraw offer unless contract
completed. Make appointment by letter. Will confirm by
advertisement.
PIERROT.

“Finally:

“Monday night after nine. Two taps. Only ourselves. Do
not be so suspicious. Payment in hard cash when goods
delivered.
PIERROT.

“A fairly complete record, Watson! If we could only get at the man at the other end!” He sat lost in thought, tapping his fingers on the table. Finally he sprang to his feet.

“Well, perhaps it won’t be so difficult, after all. There is nothing more to be done here, Watson. I think we might drive round to the offices of the Daily Telegraph, and so bring a good day’s work to a conclusion.”

Mycroft Holmes and Lestrade had come round by appointment after breakfast next day and Sherlock Holmes had recounted to them our proceedings of the day before. The professional shook his head over our confessed burglary.

“We can’t do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “No wonder you get results that are beyond us. But some of these days you’ll go too far, and you’ll find yourself and your friend in trouble.”

“For England, home and beauty — eh, Watson? Martyrs on the altar of our country. But what do you think of it, Mycroft?”

“Excellent, Sherlock! Admirable! But what use will you make of it?”

Holmes picked up the Daily Telegraph which lay upon the table.

“Have you seen Pierrot’s advertisement to-day?”

“What? Another one?”

“Yes, here it is:

“To-night. Same hour. Same place. Two taps. Most
vitally important. Your own safety at stake.
PIERROT.

“By George!” cried Lestrade. “If he answers that we’ve got him!”

“That was my idea when I put it in. I think if you could both make it convenient to come with us about eight o’clock to Caulfield Gardens we might possibly get a little nearer to a solution.”

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Sherlock Holmes was his power of throwing his brain out of action and switching all his thoughts on to lighter things whenever he had convinced himself that he could no longer work to advantage. I remember that during the whole of that memorable day he lost himself in a monograph which he had undertaken upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus. For my own part I had none of this power of detachment, and the day, in consequence, appeared to be interminable. The great national importance of the issue, the suspense in high quarters, the direct nature of the experiment which we were trying — all combined to work upon my nerve. It was a relief to me when at last, after a light dinner, we set out upon our expedition. Lestrade and Mycroft met us by appointment at the outside of Gloucester Road Station. The area door of Oberstein’s house had been left open the night before, and it was necessary for me, as Mycroft Holmes absolutely and indignantly declined to climb the railings, to pass in and open the hall door. By nine o’clock we were all seated in the study, waiting patiently for our man.

An hour passed and yet another. When eleven struck, the measured beat of the great church clock seemed to sound the dirge of our hopes. Lestrade and Mycroft were fidgeting in their seats and looking twice a minute at their watches. Holmes sat silent and composed, his eyelids half shut, but every sense on the alert. He raised his head with a sudden jerk.

“He is coming,” said he.

There had been a furtive step past the door. Now it returned. We heard a shuffling sound outside, and then two sharp taps with the knocker. Holmes rose, motioning to us to remain seated. The gas in the hall was a mere point of light. He opened the outer door, and then as a dark figure slipped past him he closed and fastened it. “This way!” we heard him say, and a moment later our man stood before us. Holmes had followed him closely, and as the man turned with a cry of surprise and alarm he caught him by the collar and threw him back into the room. Before our prisoner had recovered his balance the door was shut and Holmes standing with his back against it. The man glared round him, staggered, and fell senseless upon the floor. With the shock, his broad-brimmed hat flew from his head, his cravat slipped down from his lips, and there were the long light beard and the soft, handsome delicate features of Colonel Valentine Walter.

Holmes gave a whistle of surprise.

“You can write me down an ass this time, Watson,” said he. “This was not the bird that I was looking for.”

“Who is he?” asked Mycroft eagerly.

“The younger brother of the late Sir James Walter, the head of the Submarine Department. Yes, yes; I see the fall of the cards. He is coming to. I think that you had best leave his examination to me.”

We had carried the prostrate body to the sofa. Now our prisoner sat up, looked round him with a horror-stricken face, and passed his hand over his forehead, like one who cannot believe his own senses.

“What is this?” he asked. “I came here to visit Mr. Oberstein.”

“Everything is known, Colonel Walter,” said Holmes. “How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension. But your whole correspondence and relations with Oberstein are within our knowledge. So also are the circumstances connected with the death of young Cadogan West. Let me advise you to gain at least the small credit for repentance and confession, since there are still some details which we can only learn from your lips.”

The man groaned and sank his face in his hands. We waited, but he was silent.

“I can assure you,” said Holmes, “that every essential is already known. We know that you were pressed for money; that you took an impress of the keys which your brother held; and that you entered into a correspondence with Oberstein, who answered your letters through the advertisement columns of the Daily Telegraph. We are aware that you went down to the office in the fog on Monday night, but that you were seen and followed by young Cadogan West, who had probably some previous reason to suspect you. He saw your theft, but could not give the alarm, as it was just possible that you were taking the papers to your brother in London. Leaving all his private concerns, like the good citizen that he was, he followed you closely in the fog and kept at your heels until you reached this very house. There he intervened, and then it was, Colonel Walter, that to treason you added the more terrible crime of murder.”

“I did not! I did not! Before God I swear that I did not!” cried our wretched prisoner.

“Tell us, then, how Cadogan West met his end before you laid him upon the roof of a railway carriage.”

“I will. I swear to you that I will. I did the rest. I confess it. It was just as you say. A Stock Exchange debt had to be paid. I needed the money badly. Oberstein offered me five thousand. It was to save myself from ruin. But as to murder, I am as innocent as you.”

“What happened, then?”

“He had his suspicions before, and he followed me as you describe. I never knew it until I was at the very door. It was thick fog, and one could not see three yards. I had given two taps and Oberstein had come to the door. The young man rushed up and demanded to know what we were about to do with the papers. Oberstein had a short life-preserver. He always carried it with him. As West forced his way after us into the house Oberstein struck him on the head. The blow was a fatal one. He was dead within five minutes. There he lay in the hall, and we were at our wit’s end what to do. Then Oberstein had this idea about the trains which halted under his back window. But first he examined the papers which I had brought. He said that three of them were essential, and that he must keep them. ‘You cannot keep them,’ said I. ‘There will be a dreadful row at Woolwich if they are not returned.’ ‘I must keep them,’ said he, ‘for they are so technical that it is impossible in the time to make copies.’ ‘Then they must all go back together tonight,’ said I. He thought for a little, and then he cried out that he had it. ‘Three I will keep,’ said he. ‘The others we will stuff into the pocket of this young man. When he is found the whole business will assuredly be put to his account. I could see no other way out of it, so we did as he suggested. We waited half an hour at the window before a train stopped. It was so thick that nothing could be seen, and we had no difficulty in lowering West’s body on to the train. That was the end of the matter so far as I was concerned.”

“And your brother?”

“He said nothing, but he had caught me once with his keys, and I think that he suspected. I read in his eyes that he suspected. As you know, he never held up his head again.”

There was silence in the room. It was broken by Mycroft Holmes.

“Can you not make reparation? It would ease your conscience, and possibly your punishment.”

“What reparation can I make?”

“Where is Oberstein with the papers?”

“I do not know.”

“Did he give you no address?”

“He said that letters to the Hotel du Louvre, Paris, would eventually reach him.”

“Then reparation is still within your power,” said Sherlock Holmes.

“I will do anything I can. I owe this fellow no particular good-will. He has been my ruin and my downfall.”

“Here are paper and pen. Sit at this desk and write to my dictation. Direct the envelope to the address given. That is right. Now the letter:

“DEAR SIR:

> “With regard to our transaction, you will no doubt have observed by now that one essential detail is missing. I have a tracing which will make it complete. This has involved me in extra trouble, however, and I must ask you for a further advance of five hundred pounds. I will not trust it to the post, nor will I take anything but gold or notes. I would come to you abroad, but it would excite remark if I left the country at present. Therefore I shall expect to meet you in the smoking-room of the Charing Cross Hotel at noon on Saturday. Remember that only English notes, or gold, will be taken.

That will do very well. I shall be very much surprised if it does not fetch our man.”

And it did! It is a matter of history — that secret history of a nation which is often so much more intimate and interesting than its public chronicles — that Oberstein, eager to complete the coup of his lifetime, came to the lure and was safely engulfed for fifteen years in a British prison. In his trunk were found the invaluable Bruce-Partington plans, which he had put up for auction in all the naval centres of Europe.

Colonel Walter died in prison towards the end of the second year of his sentence. As to Holmes, he returned refreshed to his monograph upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, which has since been printed for private circulation, and is said by experts to be the last word upon the subject. Some weeks afterwards I learned incidentally that my friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin. When I asked him if he had bought it, he answered that it was a present from a certain gracious lady in whose interests he had once been fortunate enough to carry out a small commission. He said no more, but I fancy that I could guess at that lady’s august name, and I have little doubt that the emerald pin will forever recall to my friend’s memory the adventure of the Bruce-Partington plans.

The Adventure of the Dying Detective

Mrs. Hudson, the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, was a longsuffering woman. Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in his life which must have sorely tried her patience. His incredible untidiness, his addiction to music at strange hours, his occasional revolver practice within doors, his weird and often malodorous scientific experiments, and the atmosphere of violence and danger which hung around him made him the very worst tenant in London. On the other hand, his payments were princely. I have no doubt that the house might have been purchased at the price which Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him.

The landlady stood in the deepest awe of him and never dared to interfere with him, however outrageous his proceedings might seem. She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women. He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent. Knowing how genuine was her regard for him, I listened earnestly to her story when she came to my rooms in the second year of my married life and told me of the sad condition to which my poor friend was reduced.

“He’s dying, Dr. Watson,” said she. “For three days he has been sinking, and I doubt if he will last the day. He would not let me get a doctor. This morning when I saw his bones sticking out of his face and his great bright eyes looking at me I could stand no more of it. ‘With your leave or without it, Mr. Holmes, I am going for a doctor this very hour,’ said I. ‘Let it be Watson, then,’ said he. I wouldn’t waste an hour in coming to him, sir, or you may not see him alive.”

I was horrified for I had heard nothing of his illness. I need not say that I rushed for my coat and my hat. As we drove back I asked for the details.

“There is little I can tell you, sir. He has been working at a case down at Rotherhithe, in an alley near the river, and he has brought this illness back with him. He took to his bed on Wednesday afternoon and has never moved since. For these three days neither food nor drink has passed his lips.”

“Good God! Why did you not call in a doctor?”

“He wouldn’t have it, sir. You know how masterful he is. I didn’t dare to disobey him. But he’s not long for this world, as you’ll see for yourself the moment that you set eyes on him.”

He was indeed a deplorable spectacle. In the dim light of a foggy November day the sick room was a gloomy spot, but it was that gaunt, wasted face staring at me from the bed which sent a chill to my heart. His eyes had the brightness of fever, there was a hectic flush upon either cheek, and dark crusts clung to his lips; the thin hands upon the coverlet twitched incessantly, his voice was croaking and spasmodic. He lay listlessly as I entered the room, but the sight of me brought a gleam of recognition to his eyes.

“Well, Watson, we seem to have fallen upon evil days,” said he in a feeble voice, but with something of his old carelessness of manner.

“My dear fellow!” I cried, approaching him.

“Stand back! Stand right back!” said he with the sharp imperiousness which I had associated only with moments of crisis. “If you approach me, Watson, I shall order you out of the house.”

“But why?”

“Because it is my desire. Is that not enough?”

Yes, Mrs. Hudson was right. He was more masterful than ever. It was pitiful, however, to see his exhaustion.

“I only wished to help,” I explained.

“Exactly! You will help best by doing what you are told.”

“Certainly, Holmes.”

He relaxed the austerity of his manner.

“You are not angry?” he asked, gasping for breath.

Poor devil, how could I be angry when I saw him lying in such a plight before me?

“It’s for your own sake, Watson,” he croaked.

“For my sake?”

“I know what is the matter with me. It is a coolie disease from Sumatra — a thing that the Dutch know more about than we, though they have made little of it up to date. One thing only is certain. It is infallibly deadly, and it is horribly contagious.”

He spoke now with a feverish energy, the long hands twitching and jerking as he motioned me away.

"Contagious by touch, Watson — that's it, by touch. Keep your distance and all is well."

"Good heavens, Holmes! Do you suppose that such a consideration weighs with me for an instant? It would not affect me in the case of a stranger. Do you imagine it would prevent me from doing my duty to so old a friend?"

Again I advanced, but he repulsed me with a look of furious anger.

"If you will stand there I will talk. If you do not you must leave the room."

I have so deep a respect for the extraordinary qualities of Holmes that I have always deferred to his wishes, even when I least understood them. But now all my professional instincts were aroused. Let him be my master elsewhere, I at least was his in a sick room.

"Holmes," said I, "you are not yourself. A sick man is but a child, and so I will treat you. Whether you like it or not, I will examine your symptoms and treat you for them."

He looked at me with venomous eyes.

"If I am to have a doctor whether I will or not, let me at least have someone in whom I have confidence," said he.

"Then you have none in me?"

"In your friendship, certainly. But facts are facts, Watson, and, after all, you are only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications. It is painful to have to say these things, but you leave me no choice."

I was bitterly hurt.

"Such a remark is unworthy of you, Holmes. It shows me very clearly the state of your own nerves. But if you have no confidence in me I would not intrude my services. Let me bring Sir Jasper Meek or Penrose Fisher, or any of the best men in London. But someone you must have, and that is final. If you think that I am going to stand here and see you die without either helping you myself or bringing anyone else to help you, then you have mistaken your man."

"You mean well, Watson," said the sick man with something between a sob and a groan. "Shall I demonstrate your own ignorance? What do you know, pray, of Tapanuli fever? What do you know of the black Formosa corruption?"

"I have never heard of either."

“There are many problems of disease, many strange pathological possibilities, in the East, Watson.” He paused after each sentence to collect his failing strength. “I have learned so much during some recent researches which have a medico-criminal aspect. It was in the course of them that I contracted this complaint. You can do nothing.”

“Possibly not. But I happen to know that Dr. Ainstree, the greatest living authority upon tropical disease, is now in London. All remonstrance is useless, Holmes, I am going this instant to fetch him.” I turned resolutely to the door.

Never have I had such a shock! In an instant, with a tigerspring, the dying man had intercepted me. I heard the sharp snap of a twisted key. The next moment he had staggered back to his bed, exhausted and panting after his one tremendous outflame of energy.

“You won’t take the key from me by force, Watson. I’ve got you, my friend. Here you are, and here you will stay until I will otherwise. But I’ll humour you.” (All this in little gasps, with terrible struggles for breath between.) “You’ve only my own good at heart. Of course I know that very well. You shall have your way, but give me time to get my strength. Not now, Watson, not now. It’s four o’clock. At six you can go.”

“This is insanity, Holmes.”

“Only two hours, Watson. I promise you will go at six. Are you content to wait?”

“I seem to have no choice.”

“None in the world, Watson. Thank you, I need no help in arranging the clothes. You will please keep your distance. Now, Watson, there is one other condition that I would make. You will seek help, not from the man you mention, but from the one that I choose.”

“By all means.”

“The first three sensible words that you have uttered since you entered this room, Watson. You will find some books over there. I am somewhat exhausted; I wonder how a battery feels when it pours electricity into a non-conductor? At six, Watson, we resume our conversation.”

But it was destined to be resumed long before that hour, and in circumstances which gave me a shock hardly second to that caused by his spring to the door. I had stood for some minutes looking at the silent figure in the bed. His face was almost covered by the clothes and he appeared to be asleep. Then, unable to settle down to reading, I walked slowly round the room, examining the pictures of celebrated criminals with which every wall was adorned. Finally, in my aimless perambulation, I came to the mantelpiece. A litter of pipes, tobacco-pouches, syringes, penknives, revolver-cartridges, and other debris was scattered over it. In the midst of these was a small black and white ivory box with a sliding lid. It was a neat little thing, and I had stretched out my hand to examine it more closely when — It was a dreadful cry that he gave — a yell which might have been heard down the street. My skin went cold and my hair bristled at that horrible scream. As I turned I caught a glimpse of a convulsed face and frantic eyes. I stood paralyzed, with the little box in my hand.

“Put it down! Down, this instant, Watson — this instant, I say!” His head sank back upon the pillow and he gave a deep sigh of relief as I replaced the box upon the mantelpiece. “I hate to have my things touched, Watson. You know that I hate it. You fidget me beyond endurance. You, a doctor — you are enough to drive a patient into an asylum. Sit down, man, and let me have my rest!”

The incident left a most unpleasant impression upon my mind. The violent and causeless excitement, followed by this brutality of speech, so far removed from his usual suavity, showed me how deep was the disorganization of his mind. Of all ruins, that of a noble mind is the most deplorable. I sat in silent dejection until the stipulated time had passed. He seemed to have been watching the clock as well as I, for it was hardly six before he began to talk with the same feverish animation as before.

“Now, Watson,” said he. “Have you any change in your pocket?”

“Yes.”

“Any silver?”

“A good deal.”

“How many half-crowns?”

“I have five.”

“Ah, too few! Too few! How very unfortunate, Watson! However, such as they are you can put them in your watchpocket. And all the rest of your money in your left trouserpocket. Thank you. It will balance you so much better like that.”

This was raving insanity. He shuddered, and again made a sound between a cough and a sob.

“You will now light the gas, Watson, but you will be very careful that not for one instant shall it be more than half on. I implore you to be careful, Watson. Thank you, that is excellent. No, you need not draw the blind. Now you will have the kindness to place some letters and papers upon this table within my reach. Thank you. Now some of that litter from the mantelpiece. Excellent, Watson! There is a sugar-tongs there. Kindly raise that small ivory box with its assistance. Place it here among the papers. Good! You can now go and fetch Mr. Culverton Smith, of 13 Lower Burke Street."

To tell the truth, my desire to fetch a doctor had somewhat weakened, for poor Holmes was so obviously delirious that it seemed dangerous to leave him. However, he was as eager now to consult the person named as he had been obstinate in refusing.

"I never heard the name," said I.

"Possibly not, my good Watson. It may surprise you to know that the man upon earth who is best versed in this disease is not a medical man, but a planter. Mr. Culverton Smith is a well-known resident of Sumatra, now visiting London. An outbreak of the disease upon his plantation, which was distant from medical aid, caused him to study it himself, with some rather far-reaching consequences. He is a very methodical person, and I did not desire you to start before six, because I was well aware that you would not find him in his study. If you could persuade him to come here and give us the benefit of his unique experience of this disease, the investigation of which has been his dearest hobby, I cannot doubt that he could help me."

I give Holmes's remarks as a consecutive whole and will not attempt to indicate how they were interrupted by gaspings for breath and those clutchings of his hands which indicated the pain from which he was suffering. His appearance had changed for the worse during the few hours that I had been with him. Those hectic spots were more pronounced, the eyes shone more brightly out of darker hollows, and a cold sweat glimmered upon his brow. He still retained, however, the jaunty gallantry of his speech. To the last gasp he would always be the master.

"You will tell him exactly how you have left me," said he. "You will convey the very impression which is in your own mind — a dying man — a dying and delirious man. Indeed, I cannot think why the whole bed of the ocean is not one solid mass of oysters, so prolific the creatures seem. Ah, I am wandering! Strange how the brain controls the brain! What was I saying, Watson?"

"My directions for Mr. Culverton Smith."

"Ah, yes, I remember. My life depends upon it. Plead with him, Watson. There is no good feeling between us. His nephew, Watson — I had suspicions of foul play and I allowed him to see it. The boy died horribly. He has a grudge against me. You will soften him, Watson. Beg him, pray him, get him here by any means. He can save me — only he!"

"I will bring him in a cab, if I have to carry him down to it."

"You will do nothing of the sort. You will persuade him to come. And then you will return in front of him. Make any excuse so as not to come with him. Don't forget, Watson. You won't fail me. You never did fail me. No doubt there are natural enemies which limit the increase of the creatures. You and I, Watson, we have done our part. Shall the world, then, be overrun by oysters? No, no; horrible! You'll convey all that is in your mind."

I left him full of the image of this magnificent intellect babbling like a foolish child. He had handed me the key, and with a happy thought I took it with me lest he should lock himself in. Mrs. Hudson was waiting, trembling and weeping, in the passage. Behind me as I passed from the flat I heard Holmes's high, thin voice in some delirious chant. Below, as I stood whistling for a cab, a man came on me through the fog.

"How is Mr. Holmes, sir?" he asked.

It was an old acquaintance, Inspector Morton, of Scotland Yard, dressed in unofficial tweeds.

"He is very ill," I answered.

He looked at me in a most singular fashion. Had it not been too fiendish, I could have imagined that the gleam of the fanlight showed exultation in his face.

"I heard some rumour of it," said he.

The cab had driven up, and I left him.

Lower Burke Street proved to be a line of fine houses lying in the vague borderland between Notting Hill and Kensington. The particular one at which my cabman pulled up had an air of smug and demure respectability in its old-fashioned iron railings, its massive folding-door, and its shining brasswork. All was in keeping with a solemn butler who appeared framed in the pink radiance of a tinted electric light behind him.

"Yes, Mr. Culverton Smith is in. Dr. Watson! Very good, sir, I will take up your card."

My humble name and title did not appear to impress Mr. Culverton Smith. Through the half-open door I heard a high, petulant, penetrating voice.

“Who is this person? What does he want? Dear me, Staples, how often have I said that I am not to be disturbed in my hours of study?”

There came a gentle flow of soothing explanation from the butler.

“Well, I won’t see him, Staples. I can’t have my work interrupted like this. I am not at home. Say so. Tell him to come in the morning if he really must see me.”

Again the gentle murmur.

“Well, well, give him that message. He can come in the morning, or he can stay away. My work must not be hindered.”

I thought of Holmes tossing upon his bed of sickness and counting the minutes, perhaps, until I could bring help to him. It was not a time to stand upon ceremony. His life depended upon my promptness. Before the apologetic butler had delivered his message I had pushed past him and was in the room.

With a shrill cry of anger a man rose from a reclining chair beside the fire. I saw a great yellow face, coarse-grained and greasy, with heavy, double-chin, and two sullen, menacing gray eyes which glared at me from under tufted and sandy brows. A high bald head had a small velvet smoking-cap poised coquettishly upon one side of its pink curve. The skull was of enormous capacity, and yet as I looked down I saw to my amazement that the figure of the man was small and frail, twisted in the shoulders and back like one who has suffered from rickets in his childhood.

“What’s this?” he cried in a high, screaming voice. “What is the meaning of this intrusion? Didn’t I send you word that I would see you to-morrow morning?”

“I am sorry,” said I, “but the matter cannot be delayed. Mr. Sherlock Holmes—”

The mention of my friend’s name had an extraordinary effect upon the little man. The look of anger passed in an instant from his face. His features became tense and alert.

“Have you come from Holmes?” he asked.

“I have just left him.”

“What about Holmes? How is he?”

“He is desperately ill. That is why I have come.”

The man motioned me to a chair, and turned to resume his own. As he did so I caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. I could have sworn that it was set in a malicious and abominable smile. Yet I persuaded myself that it must have been some nervous contraction which I had surprised, for he turned to me an instant later with genuine concern upon his features.

"I am sorry to hear this," said he. "I only know Mr. Holmes through some business dealings which we have had, but I have every respect for his talents and his character. He is an amateur of crime, as I am of disease. For him the villain, for me the microbe. There are my prisons," he continued, pointing to a row of bottles and jars which stood upon a side table. "Among those gelatine cultivations some of the very worst offenders in the world are now doing time."

"It was on account of your special knowledge that Mr. Holmes desired to see you. He has a high opinion of you and thought that you were the one man in London who could help him."

The little man started, and the jaunty smoking-cap slid to the floor.

"Why?" he asked. "Why should Mr. Holmes think that I could help him in his trouble?"

"Because of your knowledge of Eastern diseases."

"But why should he think that this disease which he has contracted is Eastern?"

"Because, in some professional inquiry, he has been working among Chinese sailors down in the docks."

Mr. Culverton Smith smiled pleasantly and picked up his smoking-cap.

"Oh, that's it — is it?" said he. "I trust the matter is not so grave as you suppose. How long has he been ill?"

"About three days."

"Is he delirious?"

"Occasionally."

"Tut, tut! This sounds serious. It would be inhuman not to answer his call. I very much resent any interruption to my work, Dr. Watson, but this case is certainly exceptional. I will come with you at once."

I remembered Holmes's injunction.

"I have another appointment," said I.

"Very good. I will go alone. I have a note of Mr. Holmes's address. You can rely upon my being there within half an hour at most."

It was with a sinking heart that I reentered Holmes's bedroom. For all that I knew the worst might have happened in my absence. To my enormous relief, he had improved greatly in the interval. His appearance was as ghastly as ever, but all trace of delirium had left him and he spoke in a feeble voice, it is true, but with even more than his usual crispness and lucidity.

"Well, did you see him, Watson?"

"Yes; he is coming."

"Admirable, Watson! Admirable! You are the best of messengers."

"He wished to return with me."

"That would never do, Watson. That would be obviously impossible. Did he ask what ailed me?"

"I told him about the Chinese in the East End."

"Exactly! Well, Watson, you have done all that a good friend could. You can now disappear from the scene."

"I must wait and hear his opinion, Holmes."

"Of course you must. But I have reasons to suppose that this opinion would be very much more frank and valuable if he imagines that we are alone. There is just room behind the head of my bed, Watson."

"My dear Holmes!"

"I fear there is no alternative, Watson. The room does not lend itself to concealment, which is as well, as it is the less likely to arouse suspicion. But just there, Watson, I fancy that it could be done." Suddenly he sat up with a rigid intentness upon his haggard face. "There are the wheels, Watson. Quick, man, if you love me! And don't budge, whatever happens — whatever happens, do you hear? Don't speak! Don't move! Just listen with all your ears." Then in an instant his sudden access of strength departed, and his masterful, purposeful talk droned away into the low, vague murmurings of a semi-delirious man.

From the hiding-place into which I had been so swiftly hustled I heard the footfalls upon the stair, with the opening and the closing of the bedroom door. Then, to my surprise, there came a long silence, broken only by the heavy breathings and gaspings of the sick man. I could imagine that our visitor was standing by the bedside and looking down at the sufferer. At last that strange hush was broken.

"Holmes!" he cried. "Holmes!" in the insistent tone of one who awakens a sleeper. "Can't you hear me, Holmes?" There was a rustling, as if he had shaken the sick man roughly by the shoulder.

"Is that you, Mr. Smith?" Holmes whispered. "I hardly dared hope that you would come."

The other laughed.

"I should imagine not," he said. "And yet, you see, I am here. Coals of fire, Holmes — coals of fire!"

"It is very good of you — very noble of you. I appreciate your special knowledge."

Our visitor sniggered.

"You do. You are, fortunately, the only man in London who does. Do you know what is the matter with you?"

"The same," said Holmes.

"Ah! You recognise the symptoms?"

"Only too well."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised, Holmes. I shouldn't be surprised if it were the same. A bad lookout for you if it is. Poor Victor was a dead man on the fourth day — a strong, hearty young fellow. It was certainly, as you said, very surprising that he should have contracted an out-of-the-way Asiatic disease in the heart of London — a disease, too, of which I had made such a very special study. Singular coincidence, Holmes. Very smart of you to notice it, but rather uncharitable to suggest that it was cause and effect."

"I knew that you did it."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, you couldn't prove it, anyhow. But what do you think of yourself spreading reports about me like that, and then crawling to me for help the moment you are in trouble? What sort of a game is that — eh?"

I heard the rasping, laboured breathing of the sick man. "Give me the water!" he gasped.

"You're precious near your end, my friend, but I don't want you to go till I have had a word with you. That's why I give you water. There, don't slop it about! That's right. Can you understand what I say?"

Holmes groaned.

"Do what you can for me. Let bygones be bygones," he whispered. "I'll put the words out of my head — I swear I will. Only cure me, and I'll forget it."

"Forget what?"

"Well, about Victor Savage's death. You as good as admitted just now that you had done it. I'll forget it."

"You can forget it or remember it, just as you like. I don't see you in the witness-box. Quite another shaped box, my good Holmes, I assure you. It matters nothing to me that you should know how my nephew died. It's not him we are talking about. It's you."

"Yes, yes."

"The fellow who came for me — I've forgotten his name — said that you contracted it down in the East End among the sailors."

"I could only account for it so."

"You are proud of your brains, Holmes, are you not? Think yourself smart, don't you? You came across someone who was smarter this time. Now cast your mind back, Holmes. Can you think of no other way you could have got this thing?"

"I can't think. My mind is gone. For heaven's sake help me! "

"Yes, I will help you. I'll help you to understand just where you are and how you got there. I'd like you to know before you die."

"Give me something to ease my pain."

"Painful, is it? Yes, the coolies used to do some squealing towards the end. Takes you as cramp, I fancy."

"Yes, yes; it is cramp."

"Well, you can hear what I say, anyhow. Listen now! Can you remember any unusual incident in your life just about the time your symptoms began?"

"No, no; nothing."

"Think again."

"I'm too ill to think."

"Well, then, I'll help you. Did anything come by post?"

"By post?"

"A box by chance?"

"I'm fainting — I'm gone!"

"Listen, Holmes!" There was a sound as if he was shaking the dying man, and it was all that I could do to hold myself quiet in my hiding-place. "You must hear me. You shall hear me. Do you remember a box — an ivory box? It came on Wednesday. You opened it — do you remember?"

"Yes, yes, I opened it. There was a sharp spring inside it. Some joke—"

“It was no joke, as you will find to your cost. You fool, you would have it and you have got it. Who asked you to cross my path? If you had left me alone I would not have hurt you.”

“I remember,” Holmes gasped. “The spring! It drew blood. This box — this on the table.”

“The very one, by George! And it may as well leave the room in my pocket. There goes your last shred of evidence. But you have the truth now, Holmes, and you can die with the knowledge that I killed you. You knew too much of the fate of Victor Savage, so I have sent you to share it. You are very near your end, Holmes. I will sit here and I will watch you die.”

Holmes’s voice had sunk to an almost inaudible whisper.

“What is that?” said Smith. “Turn up the gas? Ah, the shadows begin to fall, do they? Yes, I will turn it up, that I may see you the better.” He crossed the room and the light suddenly brightened. “Is there any other little service that I can do you, my friend?”

“A match and a cigarette.”

I nearly called out in my joy and my amazement. He was speaking in his natural voice — a little weak, perhaps, but the very voice I knew. There was a long pause, and I felt that Culverton Smith was standing in silent amazement looking down at his companion.

“What’s the meaning of this?” I heard him say at last in a dry, rasping tone.

“The best way of successfully acting a part is to be it,” said Holmes. “I give you my word that for three days I have tasted neither food nor drink until you were good enough to pour me out that glass of water. But it is the tobacco which I find most irksome. Ah, here are some cigarettes.” I heard the striking of a match. “That is very much better. Halloa! halloa! Do I hear the step of a friend?”

There were footfalls outside, the door opened, and Inspector Morton appeared.

“All is in order and this is your man,” said Holmes.

The officer gave the usual cautions.

“I arrest you on the charge of the murder of one Victor Savage,” he concluded.

“And you might add of the attempted murder of one Sherlock Holmes,” remarked my friend with a chuckle. “To save an invalid trouble, Inspector, Mr. Culverton Smith was good enough to give our signal by turning up the gas. By the way, the prisoner has a small box in the right-hand pocket of his coat which it would be as well to remove. Thank you. I would handle it gingerly if I were you. Put it down here. It may play its part in the trial."

There was a sudden rush and a scuffle, followed by the clash of iron and a cry of pain.

"You'll only get yourself hurt," said the inspector. "Stand still, will you?" There was the click of the closing handcuffs.

"A nice trap!" cried the high, snarling voice. "It will bring you into the dock, Holmes, not me. He asked me to come here to cure him. I was sorry for him and I came. Now he will pretend, no doubt, that I have said anything which he may invent which will corroborate his insane suspicions. You can lie as you like, Holmes. My word is always as good as yours."

"Good heavens!" cried Holmes. "I had totally forgotten him. My dear Watson, I owe you a thousand apologies. To think that I should have overlooked you! I need not introduce you to Mr. Culverton Smith, since I understand that you met somewhat earlier in the evening. Have you the cab below? I will follow you when I am dressed, for I may be of some use at the station.

"I never needed it more," said Holmes as he refreshed himself with a glass of claret and some biscuits in the intervals of his toilet. "However, as you know, my habits are irregular, and such a feat means less to me than to most men. It was very essential that I should impress Mrs. Hudson with the reality of my condition, since she was to convey it to you, and you in turn to him. You won't be offended, Watson? You will realise that among your many talents dissimulation finds no place, and that if you had shared my secret you would never have been able to impress Smith with the urgent necessity of his presence, which was the vital point of the whole scheme. Knowing his vindictive nature, I was perfectly certain that he would come to look upon his handiwork."

"But your appearance, Holmes — your ghastly face?"

"Three days of absolute fast does not improve one's beauty, Watson. For the rest, there is nothing which a sponge may not cure. With vaseline upon one's forehead, belladonna in one's eyes, rouge over the cheek-bones, and crusts of beeswax round one's lips, a very satisfying effect can be produced. Malingering is a subject upon which I have sometimes thought of writing a monograph. A little occasional talk about half-crowns, oysters, or any other extraneous subject produces a pleasing effect of delirium."

“But why would you not let me near you, since there was in truth no infection?”

“Can you ask, my dear Watson? Do you imagine that I have no respect for your medical talents? Could I fancy that your astute judgment would pass a dying man who, however weak, had no rise of pulse or temperature? At four yards, I could deceive you. If I failed to do so, who would bring my Smith within my grasp? No, Watson, I would not touch that box. You can just see if you look at it sideways where the sharp spring like a viper’s tooth emerges as you open it. I dare say it was by some such device that poor Savage, who stood between this monster and a reversion, was done to death. My correspondence, however, is, as you know, a varied one, and I am somewhat upon my guard against any packages which reach me. It was clear to me, however, that by pretending that he had really succeeded in his design I might surprise a confession. That pretence I have carried out with the thoroughness of the true artist. Thank you, Watson, you must help me on with my coat. When we have finished at the police-station I think that something nutritious at Simpson’s would not be out of place.”

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

"But why Turkish?" asked Mr. Sherlock Holmes, gazing fixedly at my boots. I was reclining in a cane-backed chair at the moment, and my protruded feet had attracted his ever-active attention.

"English," I answered in some surprise. "I got them at Latimer's, in Oxford Street."

Holmes smiled with an expression of weary patience.

"The bath!" he said; "the bath! Why the relaxing and expensive Turkish rather than the invigorating home-made article?"

"Because for the last few days I have been feeling rheumatic and old. A Turkish bath is what we call an alterative in medicine — a fresh starting-point, a cleanser of the system.

"By the way, Holmes," I added, "I have no doubt the connection between my boots and a Turkish bath is a perfectly self-evident one to a logical mind, and yet I should be obliged to you if you would indicate it."

"The train of reasoning is not very obscure, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous twinkle. "It belongs to the same elementary class of deduction which I should illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab in your drive this morning."

"I don't admit that a fresh illustration is an explanation," said I with some asperity.

"Bravo, Watson! A very dignified and logical remonstrance. Let me see, what were the points? Take the last one first — the cab. You observe that you have some splashes on the left sleeve and shoulder of your coat. Had you sat in the centre of a hansom you would probably have had no splashes, and if you had they would certainly have been symmetrical. Therefore it is clear that you sat at the side. Therefore it is equally clear that you had a companion."

"That is very evident."

"Absurdly commonplace, is it not?"

"But the boots and the bath?"

"Equally childish. You are in the habit of doing up your boots in a certain way. I see them on this occasion fastened with an elaborate double bow, which is not your usual method of tying them. You have, therefore, had them off. Who has tied them? A bootmaker — or the boy at the bath. It is unlikely that it is the bootmaker, since your boots are nearly new. Well, what remains? The bath. Absurd, is it not? But, for all that, the Turkish bath has served a purpose."

"What is that?"

"You say that you have had it because you need a change. Let me suggest that you take one. How would Lausanne do, my dear Watson — first-class tickets and all expenses paid on a princely scale?"

"Splendid! But why?"

Holmes leaned back in his armchair and took his notebook from his pocket.

"One of the most dangerous classes in the world," said he, "is the drifting and friendless woman. She is the most harmless and often the most useful of mortals, but she is the inevitable inciter of crime in others. She is helpless. She is migratory. She has sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel. She is lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and boardinghouses. She is a stray chicken in a world of foxes. When she is gobbled up she is hardly missed. I much fear that some evil has come to the Lady Frances Carfax."

I was relieved at this sudden descent from the general to the particular. Holmes consulted his notes.

"Lady Frances," he continued, "is the sole survivor of the direct family of the late Earl of Rufton. The estates went, as you may remember, in the male line. She was left with limited means, but with some very remarkable old Spanish jewellery of silver and curiously cut diamonds to which she was fondly attached — too attached, for she refused to leave them with her banker and always carried them about with her. A rather pathetic figure, the Lady Frances, a beautiful woman, still in fresh middle age, and yet, by a strange change, the last derelict of what only twenty years ago was a goodly fleet."

"What has happened to her, then?"

"Ah, what has happened to the Lady Frances? Is she alive or dead? There is our problem. She is a lady of precise habits, and for four years it has been her invariable custom to write every second week to Miss Dobney, her old governess, who has long retired and lives in Camberwell. It is this Miss Dobney who has consulted me. Nearly five weeks have passed without a word. The last letter was from the Hotel National at Lausanne. Lady

Frances seems to have left there and given no address. The family are anxious, and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be spared if we can clear the matter up."

"Is Miss Dobney the only source of information? Surely she had other correspondents?"

"There is one correspondent who is a sure draw, Watson. That is the bank. Single ladies must live, and their passbooks are compressed diaries. She banks at Silvester's. I have glanced over her account. The last check but one paid her bill at Lausanne, but it was a large one and probably left her with cash in hand. Only one check has been drawn since."

"To whom, and where?"

"To Miss Marie Devine. There is nothing to show where the check was drawn. It was cashed at the Credit Lyonnais at Montpellier less than three weeks ago. The sum was fifty pounds."

"And who is Miss Marie Devine?"

"That also I have been able to discover. Miss Marie Devine was the maid of Lady Frances Carfax. Why she should have paid her this check we have not yet determined. I have no doubt, however, that your researches will soon clear the matter up."

"MY researches!"

"Hence the health-giving expedition to Lausanne. You know that I cannot possibly leave London while old Abrahams is in such mortal terror of his life. Besides, on general principles it is best that I should not leave the country. Scotland Yard feels lonely without me, and it causes an unhealthy excitement among the criminal classes. Go, then, my dear Watson, and if my humble counsel can ever be valued at so extravagant a rate as two pence a word, it waits your disposal night and day at the end of the Continental wire."

Two days later found me at the Hotel National at Lausanne, where I received every courtesy at the hands of M. Moser, the well-known manager. Lady Frances, as he informed me, had stayed there for several weeks. She had been much liked by all who met her. Her age was not more than forty. She was still handsome and bore every sign of having in her youth been a very lovely woman. M. Moser knew nothing of any valuable jewellery, but it had been remarked by the servants that the heavy trunk in the lady's bedroom was always scrupulously locked. Marie Devine, the maid, was as popular as her mistress. She was actually engaged to one of the head waiters in the hotel, and there was no difficulty in getting her address. It was 11 Rue de Trajan, Montpellier. All this I jotted down and felt that Holmes himself could not have been more adroit in collecting his facts.

Only one corner still remained in the shadow. No light which I possessed could clear up the cause for the lady's sudden departure. She was very happy at Lausanne. There was every reason to believe that she intended to remain for the season in her luxurious rooms overlooking the lake. And yet she had left at a single day's notice, which involved her in the useless payment of a week's rent. Only Jules Vibart, the lover of the maid, had any suggestion to offer. He connected the sudden departure with the visit to the hotel a day or two before of a tall, dark, bearded man. "Un sauvage — un veritable sauvage!" cried Jules Vibart. The man had rooms somewhere in the town. He had been seen talking earnestly to Madame on the promenade by the lake. Then he had called. She had refused to see him. He was English, but of his name there was no record. Madame had left the place immediately afterwards. Jules Vibart, and, what was of more importance, Jules Vibart's sweetheart, thought that this call and the departure were cause and effect. Only one thing Jules would not discuss. That was the reason why Marie had left her mistress. Of that he could or would say nothing. If I wished to know, I must go to Montpellier and ask her.

So ended the first chapter of my inquiry. The second was devoted to the place which Lady Frances Carfax had sought when she left Lausanne. Concerning this there had been some secrecy, which confirmed the idea that she had gone with the intention of throwing someone off her track. Otherwise why should not her luggage have been openly labelled for Baden? Both she and it reached the Rhenish spa by some circuitous route. This much I gathered from the manager of Cook's local office. So to Baden I went, after dispatching to Holmes an account of all my proceedings and receiving in reply a telegram of half-humorous commendation.

At Baden the track was not difficult to follow. Lady Frances had stayed at the Englischer Hof for a fortnight. While there she had made the acquaintance of a Dr. Shlessinger and his wife, a missionary from South America. Like most lonely ladies, Lady Frances found her comfort and occupation in religion. Dr. Shlessinger's remarkable personality, his whole hearted devotion, and the fact that he was recovering from a disease contracted in the exercise of his apostolic duties affected her deeply. She had helped Mrs. Shlessinger in the nursing of the convalescent saint. He spent his day, as the manager described it to me, upon a lounge-chair on the veranda, with an attendant lady upon either side of him. He was preparing a map of the Holy Land, with special reference to the kingdom of the Midianites, upon which he was writing a monograph. Finally, having improved much in health, he and his wife had returned to London, and Lady Frances had started thither in their company. This was just three weeks before, and the manager had heard nothing since. As to the maid, Marie, she had gone off some days beforehand in floods of tears, after informing the other maids that she was leaving service forever. Dr. Shlessinger had paid the bill of the whole party before his departure.

"By the way," said the landlord in conclusion, "you are not the only friend of Lady Frances Carfax who is inquiring after her just now. Only a week or so ago we had a man here upon the same errand."

"Did he give a name?" I asked.

"None; but he was an Englishman, though of an unusual type."

"A savage?" said I, linking my facts after the fashion of my illustrious friend.

"Exactly. That describes him very well. He is a bulky, bearded, sunburned fellow, who looks as if he would be more at home in a farmers' inn than in a fashionable hotel. A hard, fierce man, I should think, and one whom I should be sorry to offend."

Already the mystery began to define itself, as figures grow clearer with the lifting of a fog. Here was this good and pious lady pursued from place to place by a sinister and unrelenting figure. She feared him, or she would not have fled from Lausanne. He had still followed. Sooner or later he would overtake her. Had he already overtaken her? Was THAT the secret of her continued silence? Could the good people who were her companions not screen her from his violence or his blackmail? What horrible purpose, what deep design, lay behind this long pursuit? There was the problem which I had to solve.

To Holmes I wrote showing how rapidly and surely I had got down to the roots of the matter. In reply I had a telegram asking for a description of Dr. Shlessinger's left ear. Holmes's ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest — indeed, I had already reached Montpellier in my pursuit of the maid, Marie, before his message came.

I had no difficulty in finding the ex-servant and in learning all that she could tell me. She was a devoted creature, who had only left her mistress because she was sure that she was in good hands, and because her own approaching marriage made a separation inevitable in any case. Her mistress had, as she confessed with distress, shown some irritability of temper towards her during their stay in Baden, and had even questioned her once as if she had suspicions of her honesty, and this had made the parting easier than it would otherwise have been. Lady Frances had given her fifty pounds as a wedding-present. Like me, Marie viewed with deep distrust the stranger who had driven her mistress from Lausanne. With her own eyes she had seen him seize the lady's wrist with great violence on the public promenade by the lake. He was a fierce and terrible man. She believed that it was out of dread of him that Lady Frances had accepted the escort of the Shlessingers to London. She had never spoken to Marie about it, but many little signs had convinced the maid that her mistress lived in a state of continual nervous apprehension. So far she had got in her narrative, when suddenly she sprang from her chair and her face was convulsed with surprise and fear. "See!" she cried. "The miscreant follows still! There is the very man of whom I speak."

Through the open sitting-room window I saw a huge, swarthy man with a bristling black beard walking slowly down the centre of the street and staring eagerly at he numbers of the houses. It was clear that, like myself, he was on the track of the maid. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, I rushed out and accosted him.

"You are an Englishman," I said.

"What if I am?" he asked with a most villainous scowl.

"May I ask what your name is?"

"No, you may not," said he with decision.

The situation was awkward, but the most direct way is often the best.

"Where is the Lady Frances Carfax?" I asked.

He stared at me with amazement.

"What have you done with her? Why have you pursued her? I insist upon an answer!" said I.

The fellow gave a bellow of anger and sprang upon me like a tiger. I have held my own in many a struggle, but the man had a grip of iron and the fury of a fiend. His hand was on my throat and my senses were nearly gone before an unshaven French ouvrier in a blue blouse darted out from a cabaret opposite, with a cudgel in his hand, and struck my assailant a sharp crack over the forearm, which made him leave go his hold. He stood for an instant fuming with rage and uncertain whether he should not renew his attack. Then, with a snarl of anger, he left me and entered the cottage from which I had just come. I turned to thank my preserver, who stood beside me in the roadway.

“Well, Watson,” said he, “a very pretty hash you have made of it! I rather think you had better come back with me to London by the night express.”

An hour afterwards, Sherlock Holmes, in his usual garb and style, was seated in my private room at the hotel. His explanation of his sudden and opportune appearance was simplicity itself, for, finding that he could get away from London, he determined to head me off at the next obvious point of my travels. In the disguise of a workingman he had sat in the cabaret waiting for my appearance.

“And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson,” said he. “I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing.”

“Perhaps you would have done no better,” I answered bitterly.

“There is no ‘perhaps’ about it. I HAVE done better. Here is the Hon. Philip Green, who is a fellow-lodger with you in this hotel, and we may find him the starting-point for a more successful investigation.”

A card had come up on a salver, and it was followed by the same bearded ruffian who had attacked me in the street. He started when he saw me.

“What is this, Mr. Holmes?” he asked. “I had your note and I have come. But what has this man to do with the matter?”

“This is my old friend and associate, Dr. Watson, who is helping us in this affair.”

The stranger held out a huge, sunburned hand, with a few words of apology.

“I hope I didn’t harm you. When you accused me of hurting her I lost my grip of myself. Indeed, I’m not responsible in these days. My nerves are like live wires. But this situation is beyond me. What I want to know, in the first place, Mr. Holmes, is, how in the world you came to hear of my existence at all.”

“I am in touch with Miss Dobney, Lady Frances’s governess.”

“Old Susan Dobney with the mob cap! I remember her well.”

"And she remembers you. It was in the days before — before you found it better to go to South Africa."

"Ah, I see you know my whole story. I need hide nothing from you. I swear to you, Mr. Holmes, that there never was in this world a man who loved a woman with a more wholehearted love than I had for Frances. I was a wild youngster, I know — not worse than others of my class. But her mind was pure as snow. She could not bear a shadow of coarseness. So, when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me. And yet she loved me — that is the wonder of it! — loved me well enough to remain single all her sainted days just for my sake alone. When the years had passed and I had made my money at Barberton I thought perhaps I could seek her out and soften her. I had heard that she was still unmarried, I found her at Lausanne and tried all I knew. She weakened, I think, but her will was strong, and when next I called she had left the town. I traced her to Baden, and then after a time heard that her maid was here. I'm a rough fellow, fresh from a rough life, and when Dr. Watson spoke to me as he did I lost hold of myself for a moment. But for God's sake tell me what has become of the Lady Frances."

"That is for us to find out," said Sherlock Holmes with peculiar gravity. "What is your London address, Mr. Green?"

"The Langham Hotel will find me."

"Then may I recommend that you return there and be on hand in case I should want you? I have no desire to encourage false hopes, but you may rest assured that all that can be done will be done for the safety of Lady Frances. I can say no more for the instant. I will leave you this card so that you may be able to keep in touch with us. Now, Watson, if you will pack your bag I will cable to Mrs. Hudson to make one of her best efforts for two hungry travellers at 7:30 to-morrow."

A telegram was awaiting us when we reached our Baker Street rooms, which Holmes read with an exclamation of interest and threw across to me. "Jagged or torn," was the message, and the place of origin, Baden.

"What is this?" I asked.

"It is everything," Holmes answered. "You may remember my seemingly irrelevant question as to this clerical gentleman's left ear. You did not answer it."

"I had left Baden and could not inquire."

"Exactly. For this reason I sent a duplicate to the manager of the Englischer Hof, whose answer lies here."

"What does it show?"

"It shows, my dear Watson, that we are dealing with an exceptionally astute and dangerous man. The Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, missionary from South America, is none other than Holy Peters, one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved — and for a young country it has turned out some very finished types. His particular specialty is the beguiling of lonely ladies by playing upon their religious feelings, and his so-called wife, an Englishwoman named Fraser, is a worthy helpmate. The nature of his tactics suggested his identity to me, and this physical peculiarity — he was badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89 — confirmed my suspicion. This poor lady is in the hands of a most infernal couple, who will stick at nothing, Watson. That she is already dead is a very likely supposition. If not, she is undoubtedly in some sort of confinement and unable to write to Miss Dobney or her other friends. It is always possible that she never reached London, or that she has passed through it, but the former is improbable, as, with their system of registration, it is not easy for foreigners to play tricks with the Continental police; and the latter is also unlikely, as these rogues could not hope to find any other place where it would be as easy to keep a person under restraint. All my instincts tell me that she is in London, but as we have at present no possible means of telling where, we can only take the obvious steps, eat our dinner, and possess our souls in patience. Later in the evening I will stroll down and have a word with friend Lestrade at Scotland Yard."

But neither the official police nor Holmes's own small but very efficient organization sufficed to clear away the mystery. Amid the crowded millions of London the three persons we sought were as completely obliterated as if they had never lived. Advertisements were tried, and failed. Clues were followed, and led to nothing. Every criminal resort which Shlessinger might frequent was drawn in vain. His old associates were watched, but they kept clear of him. And then suddenly, after a week of helpless suspense there came a flash of light. A silver-and-brilliant pendant of old Spanish design had been pawned at Bovington's, in Westminster Road. The pawner was a large, clean-shaven man of clerical appearance. His name and address were demonstrably false. The ear had escaped notice, but thedescription was surely that of Shlessinger.

Three times had our bearded friend from the Langham called for news — the third time within an hour of this fresh development. His clothes were getting looser on his great body. He seemed to be wilting away in his anxiety. "If you will only give me something to do!" was his constant wail. At last Holmes could oblige him.

"He has begun to pawn the jewels. We should get him now."

"But does this mean that any harm has befallen the Lady Frances?"

Holmes shook his head very gravely.

"Supposing that they have held her prisoner up to now, it is clear that they cannot let her loose without their own destruction. We must prepare for the worst."

"What can I do?"

"These people do not know you by sight?"

"No."

"It is possible that he will go to some other pawnbroker in the future. in that case, we must begin again. On the other hand, he has had a fair price and no questions asked, so if he is in need of ready-money he will probably come back to Bovington's. I will give you a note to them, and they will let you wait in the shop. If the fellow comes you will follow him home. But no indiscretion, and, above all, no violence. I put you on your honour that you will take no step without my knowledge and consent."

For two days the Hon. Philip Green (he was, I may mention, the son of the famous admiral of that name who commanded the Sea of Azof fleet in the Crimean War) brought us no news. On the evening of the third he rushed into our sitting-room, pale, trembling, with every muscle of his powerful frame quivering with excitement.

"We have him! We have him!" he cried.

He was incoherent in his agitation. Holmes soothed him with a few words and thrust him into an armchair.

"Come, now, give us the order of events," said he.

"She came only an hour ago. It was the wife, this time, but the pendant she brought was the fellow of the other. She is a tall, pale woman, with ferret eyes."

"That is the lady," said Holmes.

"She left the office and I followed her. She walked up the Kennington Road, and I kept behind her. Presently she went into a shop. Mr. Holmes, it was an undertaker's."

My companion started. “Well?” he asked in that vibrant voice which told of the fiery soul behind the cold gray face.

“She was talking to the woman behind the counter. I entered as well. ‘It is late,’ I heard her say, or words to that effect. The woman was excusing herself. ‘It should be there before now,’ she answered. ‘It took longer, being out of the ordinary.’ They both stopped and looked at me, so I asked some questions and then left the shop.”

“You did excellently well. What happened next?”

“The woman came out, but I had hid myself in a doorway. Her suspicions had been aroused, I think, for she looked round her. Then she called a cab and got in. I was lucky enough to get another and so to follow her. She got down at last at No. 36, Poultney Square, Brixton. I drove past, left my cab at the corner of the square, and watched the house.”

“Did you see anyone?”

“The windows were all in darkness save one on the lower floor. The blind was down, and I could not see in. I was standing there, wondering what I should do next, when a covered van drove up with two men in it. They descended, took something out of the van, and carried it up the steps to the hall door. Mr. Holmes, it was a coffin.”

“Ah!”

“For an instant I was on the point of rushing in. The door had been opened to admit the men and their burden. It was the woman who had opened it. But as I stood there she caught a glimpse of me, and I think that she recognised me. I saw her start, and she hastily closed the door. I remembered my promise to you, and here I am.”

“You have done excellent work,” said Holmes, scribbling a few words upon a half-sheet of paper. “We can do nothing legal without a warrant, and you can serve the cause best by taking this note down to the authorities and getting one. There may be some difficulty, but I should think that the sale of the jewellery should be sufficient. Lestrade will see to all details.”

“But they may murder her in the meanwhile. What could the coffin mean, and for whom could it be but for her?”

“We will do all that can be done, Mr. Green. Not a moment will be lost. Leave it in our hands. Now Watson,” he added as our client hurried away, “he will set the regular forces on the move. We are, as usual, the irregulars, and we must take our own line of action. The situation strikes me as so desperate that the most extreme measures are justified. Not a moment is to be lost in getting to Poultney Square.

"Let us try to reconstruct the situation," said he as we drove swiftly past the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Bridge. "These villains have coaxed this unhappy lady to London, after first alienating her from her faithful maid. If she has written any letters they have been intercepted. Through some confederate they have engaged a furnished house. Once inside it, they have made her a prisoner, and they have become possessed of the valuable jewellery which has been their object from the first. Already they have begun to sell part of it, which seems safe enough to them, since they have no reason to think that anyone is interested in the lady's fate. When she is released she will, of course, denounce them. Therefore, she must not be released. But they cannot keep her under lock and key forever. So murder is their only solution."

"That seems very clear."

"Now we will take another line of reasoning. When you follow two deparate chains of thought, Watson, you will find some point of intersection which should approximate to the truth. We will start now, not from the lady but from the coffin and argue backward. That incident proves, I fear, beyond all doubt that the lady is dead. It points also to an orthodox burial with proper accompaniment of medical certificate and official sanction. Had the lady been obviously murdered, they would have buried her in a hole in the back garden. But here all is open and regular. What does this mean? Surely that they have done her to death in some way which has deceived the doctor and simulated a natural end — poisoning, perhaps. And yet how strange that they should ever let a doctor approach her unless he were a confederate, which is hardly a credible proposition."

"Could they have forged a medical certificate?"

"Dangerous, Watson, very dangerous. No, I hardly see them doing that. Pull up, cabby! This is evidently the undertaker's, for we have just passed the pawnbroker's. Would go in, Watson? Your appearance inspires confidence. Ask what hour the Poultney Square funeral takes place to-morrow."

The woman in the shop answered me without hesitation that it was to be at eight o'clock in the morning. "You see, Watson, no mystery; everything above-board! In some way the legal forms have undoubtedly been complied with, and they think that they have little to fear. Well, there's nothing for it now but a direct frontal attack. Are you armed?"

"My stick!"

"Well, well, we shall be strong enough. 'Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just.' We simply can't afford to wait for the police or to keep within the four corners of the law. You can drive off, cabby. Now, Watson, we'll just take our luck together, as we have occasionally in the past."

He had rung loudly at the door of a great dark house in the centre of Poultney Square. It was opened immediately, and the figure of a tall woman was outlined against the dim-lit hall.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked sharply, peering at us through the darkness.

"I want to speak to Dr. Shlessinger," said Holmes.

"There is no such person here," she answered, and tried to close the door, but Holmes had jammed it with his foot.

"Well, I want to see the man who lives here, whatever he may call himself," said Holmes firmly.

She hesitated. Then she threw open the door. "Well, come in!" said she. "My husband is not afraid to face any man in the world." She closed the door behind us and showed us into a sitting-room on the right side of the hall, turning up the gas as she left us. "Mr. Peters will be with you in an instant," she said.

Her words were literally true, for we had hardly time to look around the dusty and moth-eaten apartment in which we found ourselves before the door opened and a big, clean-shaven bald-headed man stepped lightly into the room. He had a large red face, with pendulous cheeks, and a general air of superficial benevolence which was marred by a cruel, vicious mouth.

"There is surely some mistake here, gentlemen," he said in an unctuous, make-everything-easy voice. "I fancy that you have been misdirected. Possibly if you tried farther down the street—"

"That will do; we have no time to waste," said my companion firmly. "You are Henry Peters, of Adelaide, late the Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, of Baden and South America. I am as sure of that as that my own name is Sherlock Holmes."

Peters, as I will now call him, started and stared hard at his formidable pursuer. "I guess your name does not frighten me, Mr. Holmes," said he coolly. “When a man’s conscience is easy you can’t rattle him. What is your business in my house?”

“I want to know what you have done with the Lady Frances Carfax, whom you brought away with you from Baden.”

“I’d be very glad if you could tell me where that lady may be,” Peters answered coolly. “I’ve a bill against her for a nearly a hundred pounds, and nothing to show for it but a couple of trumpery pendants that the dealer would hardly look at. She attached herself to Mrs. Peters and me at Baden — it is a fact that I was using another name at the time — and she stuck on to us until we came to London. I paid her bill and her ticket. Once in London, she gave us the slip, and, as I say, left these out-of-date jewels to pay her bills. You find her, Mr. Holmes, and I’m your debtor.”

“I MEAN to find her,” said Sherlock Holmes. “I’m going through this house till I do find her.”

“Where is your warrant?”

Holmes half drew a revolver from his pocket. “This will have to serve till a better one comes.”

“Why, you’re a common burglar.”

“So you might describe me,” said Holmes cheerfully. “My companion is also a dangerous ruffian. And together we are going through your house.”

Our opponent opened the door.

“Fetch a policeman, Annie!” said he. There was a whisk of feminine skirts down the passage, and the hall door was opened and shut.

“Our time is limited, Watson,” said Holmes. “If you try to stop us, Peters, you will most certainly get hurt. Where is that coffin which was brought into your house?”

“What do you want with the coffin? It is in use. There is a body in it.”

“I must see the body.”

“Never with my consent.”

“Then without it.” With a quick movement Holmes pushed the fellow to one side and passed into the hall. A door half opened stood immediately before us. We entered. It was the dining-room. On the table, under a half-lit chandelier, the coffin was lying. Holmes turned up the gas and raised the lid. Deep down in the recesses of the coffin lay an emaciated figure. The glare from the lights above beat down upon an aged and withered face. By no possible process of cruelty, starvation, or disease could this wornout wreck be the still beautiful Lady Frances. Holmes's face showed his amazement, and also his relief.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "It's someone else."

"Ah, you've blundered badly for once, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Peters, who had followed us into the room.

"Who is the dead woman?"

"Well, if you really must know, she is an old nurse of my wife's, Rose Spender by name, whom we found in the Brixton Workhouse Infirmary. We brought her round here, called in Dr. Horsom, of 13 Firbank Villas — mind you take the address, Mr. Holmes — and had her carefully tended, as Christian folk should. On the third day she died — certificate says senile decay — but that's only the doctor's opinion, and of course you know better. We ordered her funeral to be carried out by Stimson and Co., of the Kennington Road, who will bury her at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Can you pick any hole in that, Mr. Holmes? You've made a silly blunder, and you may as well own up to it. I'd give something for a photograph of your gaping, staring face when you pulled aside that lid expecting to see the Lady Frances Carfax and only found a poor old woman of ninety."

Holmes's expression was as impassive as ever under the jeers of his antagonist, but his clenched hands betrayed his acute annoyance.

"I am going through your house," said he.

"Are you, though!" cried Peters as a woman's voice and heavy steps sounded in the passage. "We'll soon see about that. This way, officers, if you please. These men have forced their way into my house, and I cannot get rid of them. Help me to put them out."

A sergeant and a constable stood in the doorway. Holmes drew his card from his case.

"This is my name and address. This is my friend, Dr. Watson."

"Bless you, sir, we know you very well," said the sergeant, "but you can't stay here without a warrant."

"Of course not. I quite understand that."

"Arrest him!" cried Peters.

"We know where to lay our hands on this gentleman if he is wanted," said the sergeant majestically, "but you'll have to go, Mr. Holmes."

"Yes, Watson, we shall have to go."

A minute later we were in the street once more. Holmes was as cool as ever, but I was hot with anger and humiliation. The sergeant had followed us.

“Sorry, Mr. Holmes, but that’s the law.”

“Exactly, Sergeant, you could not do otherwise.”

“I expect there was good reason for your presence there. If there is anything I can do—”

“It’s a missing lady, Sergeant, and we think she is in that house. I expect a warrant presently.”

“Then I’ll keep my eye on the parties, Mr. Holmes. If anything comes along, I will surely let you know.”

It was only nine o’clock, and we were off full cry upon the trail at once. First we drove to Brixton Workhoused Infirmary, where we found that it was indeed the truth that a charitable couple had called some days before, that they had claimed an imbecile old woman as a former servant, and that they had obtained permission to take her away with them. No surprise was expressed at the news that she had since died.

The doctor was our next goal. He had been called in, had found the woman dying of pure senility, had actually seen her pass away, and had signed the certificate in due form. “I assure you that everything was perfectly normal and there was no room for foul play in the matter,” said he. Nothing in the house had struck him as suspicious save that for people of their class it was remarkable that they should have no servant. So far and no further went the doctor.

Finally we found our way to Scotland Yard. There had been difficulties of procedure in regard to the warrant. Some delay was inevitable. The magistrate’s signature might not be obtained until next morning. If Holmes would call about nine he could go down with Lestrade and see it acted upon. So ended the day, save that near midnight our friend, the sergeant, called to say that he had seen flickering lights here and there in the windows of the great dark house, but that no one had left it and none had entered. We could but pray for patience and wait for the morrow.

Sherlock Holmes was too irritable for conversation and too restless for sleep. I left him smoking hard, with his heavy, dark brows knotted together, and his long, nervous fingers tapping upon the arms of his chair, as he turned over in his mind every possible solution of the mystery. Several times in the course of the night I heard him prowling about the house. Finally, just after I had been called in the morning, he rushed into my room.

He was in his dressing-gown, but his pale, hollow-eyed face told me that his night had been a sleepless one.

"What time was the funeral? Eight, was it not?" he asked eagerly. "Well, it is 7:20 now. Good heavens, Watson, what has become of any brains that God has given me? Quick, man, quick! It's life or death — a hundred chances on death to one on life. I'll never forgive myself, never, if we are too late!"

Five minutes had not passed before we were flying in a hansom down Baker Street. But even so it was twenty-five to eight as we passed Big Ben, and eight struck as we tore down the Brixton Road. But others were late as well as we. Ten minutes after the hour the hearse was still standing at the door of the house, and even as our foaming horse came to a halt the coffin, supported by three men, appeared on the threshold. Holmes darted forward and barred their way.

"Take it back!" he cried, laying his hand on the breast of the foremost. "Take it back this instant!"

"What the devil do you mean? Once again I ask you, where is your warrant?" shouted the furious Peters, his big red face glaring over the farther end of the coffin.

"The warrant is on its way. The coffin shall remain in the house until it comes."

The authority in Holmes's voice had its effect upon the bearers. Peters had suddenly vanished into the house, and they obeyed these new orders. "Quick, Watson, quick! Here is a screw-driver!" he shouted as the coffin was replaced upon the table. "Here's one for you, my man! A sovereign if the lid comes off in a minute! Ask no questions — work away! That's good! Another! And another! Now pull all together! It's giving! It's giving! Ah, that does it at last."

With a united effort we tore off the coffin-lid. As we did so there came from the inside a stupefying and overpowering smell of chloroform. A body lay within, its head all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic. Holmes plucked it off and disclosed the statuesque face of a handsome and spiritual woman of middle age. In an instant he had passed his arm round the figure and raised her to a sitting position.

"Is she gone, Watson? Is there a spark left? Surely we are not too late!"

For half an hour it seemed that we were. What with actual suffocation, and what with the poisonous fumes of the chloroform, the Lady Frances seemed to have passed the last point of recall. And then, at last, with artificial respiration, with injected ether, and with every device that science could suggest, some flutter of life, some quiver of the eyelids, some dimming of a mirror, spoke of the slowly returning life. A cab had driven up, and Holmes, parting the blind, looked out at it. “Here is Lestrade with his warrant,” said he. “He will find that his birds have flown. And here,” he added as a heavy step hurried along the passage, “is someone who has a better right to nurse this lady than we have. Good morning, Mr. Green; I think that the sooner we can move the Lady Frances the better. Meanwhile, the funeral may proceed, and the poor old woman who still lies in that coffin may go to her last resting-place alone.”

“Should you care to add the case to your annals, my dear Watson,” said Holmes that evening, “it can only be as an example of that temporary eclipse to which even the best-balanced mind may be exposed. Such slips are common to all mortals, and the greatest is he who can recognise and repair them. To this modified credit I may, perhaps, make some claim. My night was haunted by the thought that somewhere a clue, a strange sentence, a curious observation, had come under my notice and had been too easily dismissed. Then, suddenly, in the gray of the morning, the words came back to me. It was the remark of the undertaker’s wife, as reported by Philip Green. She had said, ‘It should be there before now. It took longer, being out of the ordinary.’ It was the coffin of which she spoke. It had been out of the ordinary. That could only mean that it had been made to some special measurement. But why? Why? Then in an instant I remembered the deep sides, and the little wasted figure at the bottom. Why so large a coffin for so small a body? To leave room for another body. Both would be buried under the one certificate. It had all been so clear, if only my own sight had not been dimmed. At eight the Lady Frances would be buried. Our one chance was to stop the coffin before it left the house.

“It was a desperate chance that we might find her alive, but it WAS a chance, as the result showed. These people had never, to my knowledge, done a murder. They might shrink from actual violence at the last. The could bury her with no sign of how she met her end, and even if she were exhumed there was a chance for them. I hoped that such considerations might prevail with them. You can reconstruct the scene well enough. You saw the horrible den upstairs, where the poor lady had been kept so long. They rushed in and overpowered her with their chloroform, carried her down, poured more into the coffin to insure against her waking, and then screwed down the lid. A clever device, Watson. It is new to me in the annals of crime. If our ex-missionary friends escape the clutches of Lestrade, I shall expect to hear of some brilliant incidents in their future career.”

The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot

In recording from time to time some of the curious experiences and interesting recollections which I associate with my long and intimate friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have continually been faced by difficulties caused by his own aversion to publicity. To his sombre and cynical spirit all popular applause was always abhorrent, and nothing amused him more at the end of a successful case than to hand over the actual exposure to some orthodox official, and to listen with a mocking smile to the general chorus of misplaced congratulation. It was indeed this attitude upon the part of my friend and certainly not any lack of interesting material which has caused me of late years to lay very few of my records before the public. My participation in some if his adventures was always a privilege which entailed discretion and reticence upon me.

It was, then, with considerable surprise that I received a telegram from Holmes last Tuesday — he has never been known to write where a telegram would serve — in the following terms:

Why not tell them of the Cornish horror — strangest case I have handled.

I have no idea what backward sweep of memory had brought the matter fresh to his mind, or what freak had caused him to desire that I should recount it; but I hasten, before another cancelling telegram may arrive, to hunt out the notes which give me the exact details of the case and to lay the narrative before my readers.

It was, then, in the spring of the year 1897 that Holmes’s iron constitution showed some symptoms of giving way in the face of constant hard work of a most exacting kind, aggravated, perhaps, by occasional indiscretions of his own. In March of that year Dr. Moore Agar, of Harley Street, whose dramatic introduction to Holmes I may some day recount, gave positive injunctions that the famous private agent lay aside all his cases and surrender himself to complete rest if he wished to avert an absolute breakdown. The state of his health was not a matter in which he himself took the faintest interest, for his mental detachment was absolute, but he was induced at last, on the threat of being permanently disqualified from work, to give himself a complete change of scene and air. Thus it was that in the early spring of that year we found ourselves together in a small cottage near Poldhu Bay, at the further extremity of the Cornish peninsula.

It was a singular spot, and one peculiarly well suited to the grim humour of my patient. From the windows of our little whitewashed house, which stood high upon a grassy headland, we looked down upon the whole sinister semicircle of Mounts Bay, that old death trap of sailing vessels, with its fringe of black cliffs and surge-swept reefs on which innumerable seamen have met their end. With a northerly breeze it lies placid and sheltered, inviting the storm-tossed craft to tack into it for rest and protection.

Then come the sudden swirl round of the wind, the blistering gale from the south-west, the dragging anchor, the lee shore, and the last battle in the creaming breakers. The wise mariner stands far out from that evil place.

On the land side our surroundings were as sombre as on the sea. It was a country of rolling moors, lonely and dun-coloured, with an occasional church tower to mark the site of some old-world village. In every direction upon these moors there were traces of some vanished race which had passed utterly away, and left as its sole record strange monuments of stone, irregular mounds which contained the burned ashes of the dead, and curious earthworks which hinted at prehistoric strife. The glamour and mystery of the place, with its sinister atmosphere of forgotten nations, appealed to the imagination of my friend, and he spent much of his time in long walks and solitary meditations upon the moor. The ancient Cornish language had also arrested his attention, and he had, I remember, conceived the idea that it was akin to the Chaldean, and had been largely derived from the Phoenician traders in tin. He had received a consignment of books upon philology and was settling down to develop this thesis when suddenly, to my sorrow and to his unfeigned delight, we found ourselves, even in that land of dreams, plunged into a problem at our very doors which was more intense, more engrossing, and infinitely more mysterious than any of those which had driven us from London. Our simple life and peaceful, healthy routine were violently interrupted, and we were precipitated into the midst of a series of events which caused the utmost excitement not only in Cornwall but throughout the whole west of England. Many of my readers may retain some recollection of what was called at the time “The Cornish Horror,” though a most imperfect account of the matter reached the London press. Now, after thirteen years, I will give the true details of this inconceivable affair to the public.

I have said that scattered towers marked the villages which dotted this part of Cornwall. The nearest of these was the hamlet of Tredannick Wollas, where the cottages of a couple of hundred inhabitants clustered round an ancient, moss-grown church. The vicar of the parish, Mr. Roundhay, was something of an archaeologist, and as such Holmes had made his acquaintance. He was a middle-aged man, portly and affable, with a considerable fund of local lore. At his invitation we had taken tea at the vicarage and had come to know, also, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis, an independent gentleman, who increased the clergyman’s scanty resources by taking rooms in his large, straggling house. The vicar, being a bachelor, was glad to come to such an arrangement, though he had little in common with his lodger, who was a thin, dark, spectacled man, with a stoop which gave the impression of actual, physical deformity. I remember that during our short visit we found the vicar garrulous, but his lodger strangely reticent, a sad-faced, introspective man, sitting with averted eyes, brooding apparently upon his own affairs.

These were the two men who entered abruptly into our little sitting-room on Tuesday, March the 16th, shortly after our breakfast hour, as we were smoking together, preparatory to our daily excursion upon the moors.

“Mr. Holmes,” said the vicar in an agitated voice, “the most extraordinary and tragic affair has occurred during the night. It is the most unheard-of business. We can only regard it as a special Providence that you should chance to be here at the time, for in all England you are the one man we need.”

I glared at the intrusive vicar with no very friendly eyes; but Holmes took his pipe from his lips and sat up in his chair like an old hound who hears the view-halloa. He waved his hand to the sofa, and our palpitating visitor with his agitated companion sat side by side upon it. Mr. Mortimer Tregennis was more self-contained than the clergyman, but the twitching of his thin hands and the brightness of his dark eyes showed that they shared a common emotion.

“Shall I speak or you?” he asked of the vicar.

“Well, as you seem to have made the discovery, whatever it may be, and the vicar to have had it second-hand, perhaps you had better do the speaking,” said Holmes.

I glanced at the hastily clad clergyman, with the formally dressed lodger seated beside him, and was amused at the surprise which Holmes’s simple deduction had brought to their faces.

"Perhaps I had best say a few words first," said the vicar, "and then you can judge if you will listen to the details from Mr. Tregennis, or whether we should not hasten at once to the scene of this mysterious affair. I may explain, then, that our friend here spent last evening in the company of his two brothers, Owen and George, and of his sister Brenda, at their house of Tredannick Wartha, which is near the old stone cross upon the moor. He left them shortly after ten o'clock, playing cards round the dining-room table, in excellent health and spirits. This morning, being an early riser, he walked in that direction before breakfast and was overtaken by the carriage of Dr. Richards, who explained that he had just been sent for on a most urgent call to Tredannick Wartha. Mr. Mortimer Tregennis naturally went with him. When he arrived at Tredannick Wartha he found an extraordinary state of things. His two brothers and his sister were seated round the table exactly as he had left them, the cards still spread in front of them and the candles burned down to their sockets. The sister lay back stone-dead in her chair, while the two brothers sat on each side of her laughing, shouting, and singing, the senses stricken clean out of them. All three of them, the dead woman and the two demented men, retained upon their faces an expression of the utmost horror — a convulsion of terror which was dreadful to look upon. There was no sign of the presence of anyone in the house, except Mrs. Porter, the old cook and housekeeper, who declared that she had slept deeply and heard no sound during the night. Nothing had been stolen or disarranged, and there is absolutely no explanation of what the horror can be which has frightened a woman to death and two strong men out of their senses. There is the situation, Mr. Holmes, in a nutshell, and if you can help us to clear it up you will have done a great work."

I had hoped that in some way I could coax my companion back into the quiet which had been the object of our journey; but one glance at his intense face and contracted eyebrows told me how vain was now the expectation. He sat for some little time in silence, absorbed in the strange drama which had broken in upon our peace.

"I will look into this matter," he said at last. "On the face of it, it would appear to be a case of a very exceptional nature. Have you been there yourself, Mr. Roundhay?"

"No, Mr. Holmes. Mr. Tregennis brought back the account to the vicarage, and I at once hurried over with him to consult you."

“How far is it to the house where this singular tragedy occurred?”

“About a mile inland.”

“Then we shall walk over together. But before we start I must ask you a few questions, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis.”

The other had been silent all this time, but I had observed that his more controlled excitement was even greater than the obtrusive emotion of the clergyman. He sat with a pale, drawn face, his anxious gaze fixed upon Holmes, and his thin hands clasped convulsively together. His pale lips quivered as he listened to the dreadful experience which had befallen his family, and his dark eyes seemed to reflect something of the horror of the scene.

“Ask what you like, Mr. Holmes,” said he eagerly. “It is a bad thing to speak of, but I will answer you the truth.”

“Tell me about last night.”

“Well, Mr. Holmes, I supped there, as the vicar has said, and my elder brother George proposed a game of whist afterwards. We sat down about nine o’clock. It was a quarter-past ten when I moved to go. I left them all round the table, as merry as could be.”

“Who let you out?”

“Mrs. Porter had gone to bed, so I let myself out. I shut the hall door behind me. The window of the room in which they sat was closed, but the blind was not drawn down. There was no change in door or window this morning, or any reason to think that any stranger had been to the house. Yet there they sat, driven clean mad with terror, and Brenda lying dead of fright, with her head hanging over the arm of the chair. I’ll never get the sight of that room out of my mind so long as I live.”

“The facts, as you state them, are certainly most remarkable,” said Holmes. “I take it that you have no theory yourself which can in any way account for them?”

“It’s devilish, Mr. Holmes, devilish!” cried Mortimer Tregennis. “It is not of this world. Something has come into that room which has dashed the light of reason from their minds. What human contrivance could do that?”

“I fear,” said Holmes, “that if the matter is beyond humanity it is certainly beyond me. Yet we must exhaust all natural explanations before we fall back upon such a theory as this. As to yourself, Mr. Tregennis, I take it you were divided in some way from your family, since they lived together and you had rooms apart?”

“That is so, Mr. Holmes, though the matter is past and done with. We were a family of tin-miners at Redruth, but we sold our venture to a company, and so retired with enough to keep us. I won’t deny that there was some feeling about the division of the money and it stood between us for a time, but it was all forgiven and forgotten, and we were the best of friends together.”

“Looking back at the evening which you spent together, does anything stand out in your memory as throwing any possible light upon the tragedy? Think carefully, Mr. Tregennis, for any clue which can help me.”

“There is nothing at all, sir.”

“Your people were in their usual spirits?”

“Never better.”

“Were they nervous people? Did they ever show any apprehension of coming danger?”

“Nothing of the kind.”

“You have nothing to add then, which could assist me?”

Mortimer Tregennis considered earnestly for a moment.

“There is one thing occurs to me,” said he at last. “As we sat at the table my back was to the window, and my brother George, he being my partner at cards, was facing it. I saw him once look hard over my shoulder, so I turned round and looked also. The blind was up and the window shut, but I could just make out the bushes on the lawn, and it seemed to me for a moment that I saw something moving among them. I couldn’t even say if it was man or animal, but I just thought there was something there. When I asked him what he was looking at, he told me that he had the same feeling. That is all that I can say.”

“Did you not investigate?”

“No; the matter passed as unimportant.”

“You left them, then, without any premonition of evil?”

“None at all.”

“I am not clear how you came to hear the news so early this morning.”

“I am an early riser and generally take a walk before breakfast. This morning I had hardly started when the doctor in his carriage overtook me. He told me that old Mrs. Porter had sent a boy down with an urgent message. I sprang in beside him and we drove on. When we got there we looked into that dreadful room. The candles and the fire must have burned out hours before, and they had been sitting there in the dark until dawn had broken. The doctor said Brenda must have been dead at least six hours. There were no signs of violence. She just lay across the arm of the chair with that look on her face. George and Owen were singing snatches of songs and gibbering like two great apes. Oh, it was awful to see! I couldn’t stand it, and the doctor was as white as a sheet. Indeed, he fell into a chair in a sort of faint, and we nearly had him on our hands as well.”

“Remarkable — most remarkable!” said Holmes, rising and taking his hat. “I think, perhaps, we had better go down to Tredannick Wartha without further delay. I confess that I have seldom known a case which at first sight presented a more singular problem.”

Our proceedings of that first morning did little to advance the investigation. It was marked, however, at the outset by an incident which left the most sinister impression upon my mind. The approach to the spot at which the tragedy occurred is down a narrow, winding, country lane. While we made our way along it we heard the rattle of a carriage coming towards us and stood aside to let it pass. As it drove by us I caught a glimpse through the closed window of a horribly contorted, grinning face glaring out at us. Those staring eyes and gnashing teeth flashed past us like a dreadful vision.

“My brothers!” cried Mortimer Tregennis, white to his lips. “They are taking them to Helston.”

We looked with horror after the black carriage, lumbering upon its way. Then we turned our steps towards this ill-omened house in which they had met their strange fate.

It was a large and bright dwelling, rather a villa than a cottage, with a considerable garden which was already, in that Cornish air, well filled with spring flowers. Towards this garden the window of the sitting-room fronted, and from it, according to Mortimer Tregennis, must have come that thing of evil which had by sheer horror in a single instant blasted their minds. Holmes walked slowly and thoughtfully among the flower-plots and along the path before we entered the porch. So absorbed was he in his thoughts, I remember, that he stumbled over the watering-pot, upset its contents, and deluged both our feet and the garden path. Inside the house we were met by the elderly Cornish housekeeper, Mrs. Porter, who, with the aid of a young girl, looked after the wants of the family. She readily answered all Holmes’s questions. She had heard nothing in the night. Her employers had all been in excellent spirits lately, and she had never known them more cheerful and prosperous. She had fainted with horror upon entering the room in the morning and seeing that dreadful company round the table. She had, when she recovered, thrown open the window to let the morning air in, and had run down to the lane, whence she sent a farm-lad for the doctor. The lady was on her bed upstairs if we cared to see her. It took four strong men to get the brothers into the asylum carriage. She would not herself stay in the house another day and was starting that very afternoon to rejoin her family at St. Ives.

We ascended the stairs and viewed the body. Miss Brenda Tregennis had been a very beautiful girl, though now verging upon middle age. Her dark, clear-cut face was handsome, even in death, but there still lingered upon it something of that convulsion of horror which had been her last human emotion. From her bedroom we descended to the sitting-room, where this strange tragedy had actually occurred. The charred ashes of the overnight fire lay in the grate. On the table were the four guttered and burned-out candles, with the cards scattered over its surface. The chairs had been moved back against the walls, but all else was as it had been the night before. Holmes paced with light, swift steps about the room; he sat in the various chairs, drawing them up and reconstructing their positions. He tested how much of the garden was visible; he examined the floor, the ceiling, and the fireplace; but never once did I see that sudden brightening of his eyes and tightening of his lips which would have told me that he saw some gleam of light in this utter darkness.

“Why a fire?” he asked once. “Had they always a fire in this small room on a spring evening?”

Mortimer Tregennis explained that the night was cold and damp. For that reason, after his arrival, the fire was lit. “What are you going to do now, Mr. Holmes?” he asked.

My friend smiled and laid his hand upon my arm. “I think, Watson, that I shall resume that course of tobacco-poisoning which you have so often and so justly condemned,” said he. “With your permission, gentlemen, we will now return to our cottage, for I am not aware that any new factor is likely to come to our notice here. I will turn the facts over in my mind, Mr, Tregennis, and should anything occur to me I will certainly communicate with you and the vicar. In the meantime I wish you both good-morning.”

It was not until long after we were back in Poldhu Cottage that Holmes broke his complete and absorbed silence. He sat coiled in his armchair, his haggard and ascetic face hardly visible amid the blue swirl of his tobacco smoke, his black brows drawn down, his forehead contracted, his eyes vacant and far away. Finally he laid down his pipe and sprang to his feet.

“It won’t do, Watson!” said he with a laugh. “Let us walk along the cliffs together and search for flint arrows. We are more likely to find them than clues to this problem. To let the brain work without sufficient material is like racing an engine. It racks itself to pieces. The sea air, sunshine, and patience, Watson — all else will come.

“Now, let us calmly define our position, Watson,” he continued as we skirted the cliffs together. “Let us get a firm grip of the very little which we DO know, so that when fresh facts arise we may be ready to fit them into their places. I take it, in the first place, that neither of us is prepared to admit diabolical intrusions into the affairs of men. Let us begin by ruling that entirely out of our minds. Very good. There remain three persons who have been grievously stricken by some conscious or unconscious human agency. That is firm ground. Now, when did this occur? Evidently, assuming his narrative to be true, it was immediately after Mr. Mortimer Tregennis had left the room. That is a very important point. The presumption is that it was within a few minutes afterwards. The cards still lay upon the table. It was already past their usual hour for bed. Yet they had not changed their position or pushed back their chairs. I repeat, then, that the occurrence was immediately after his departure, and not later than eleven o’clock last night.

“Our next obvious step is to check, so far as we can, the movements of Mortimer Tregennis after he left the room. In this there is no difficulty, and they seem to be above suspicion. Knowing my methods as you do, you were, of course, conscious of the somewhat clumsy water-pot expedient by which I obtained a clearer impress of his foot than might otherwise have been possible. The wet, sandy path took it admirably. Last night was also wet, you will remember, and it was not difficult — having obtained a sample print — to pick out his track among others and to follow his movements. He appears to have walked away swiftly in the direction of the vicarage.

“If, then, Mortimer Tregennis disappeared from the scene, and yet some outside person affected the card-players, how can we reconstruct that person, and how was such an impression of horror conveyed? Mrs. Porter may be eliminated. She is evidently harmless. Is there any evidence that someone crept up to the garden window and in some manner produced so terrific an effect that he drove those who saw it out of their senses? The only suggestion in this direction comes from Mortimer Tregennis himself, who says that his brother spoke about some movement in the garden. That is certainly remarkable, as the night was rainy, cloudy, and dark. Anyone who had the design to alarm these people would be compelled to place his very face against the glass before he could be seen. There is a three-foot flower-border outside this window, but no indication of a footmark. It is difficult to imagine, then, how an outsider could have made so terrible an impression upon the company, nor have we found any possible motive for so strange and elaborate an attempt. You perceive our difficulties, Watson?”

“They are only too clear,” I answered with conviction.

“And yet, with a little more material, we may prove that they are not insurmountable,” said Holmes. “I fancy that among your extensive archives, Watson, you may find some which were nearly as obscure. Meanwhile, we shall put the case aside until more accurate data are available, and devote the rest of our morning to the pursuit of neolithic man.”

I may have commented upon my friend’s power of mental detachment, but never have I wondered at it more than upon that spring morning in Cornwall when for two hours he discoursed upon celts, arrowheads, and shards, as lightly as if no sinister mystery were waiting for his solution. It was not until we had returned in the afternoon to our cottage that we found a visitor awaiting us, who soon brought our minds back to the matter in hand. Neither of us needed to be told who that visitor was. The huge body, the craggy and deeply seamed face with the fierce eyes and hawk-like nose, the grizzled hair which nearly brushed our cottage ceiling, the beard — golden at the fringes and white near the lips, save for the nicotine stain from his perpetual cigar — all these were as well known in London as in Africa, and could only be associated with the tremendous personality of Dr. Leon Sterndale, the great lion-hunter and explorer.

We had heard of his presence in the district and had once or twice caught sight of his tall figure upon the moorland paths. He made no advances to us, however, nor would we have dreamed of doing so to him, as it was well known that it was his love of seclusion which caused him to spend the greater part of the intervals between his journeys in a small bungalow buried in the lonely wood of Beauchamp Arriance. Here, amid his books and his maps, he lived an absolutely lonely life, attending to his own simple wants and paying little apparent heed to the affairs of his neighbours. It was a surprise to me, therefore, to hear him asking Holmes in an eager voice whether he had made any advance in his reconstruction of this mysterious episode. “The county police are utterly at fault,” said he, “but perhaps your wider experience has suggested some conceivable explanation. My only claim to being taken into your confidence is that during my many residences here I have come to know this family of Tregennis very well — indeed, upon my Cornish mother’s side I could call them cousins — and their strange fate has naturally been a great shock to me. I may tell you that I had got as far as Plymouth upon my way to Africa, but the news reached me this morning, and I came straight back again to help in the inquiry.”

Holmes raised his eyebrows.

“Did you lose your boat through it?”

“I will take the next.”

“Dear me! that is friendship indeed.”

“I tell you they were relatives.”

“Quite so — cousins of your mother. Was your baggage aboard the ship?”

“Some of it, but the main part at the hotel.”

“I see. But surely this event could not have found its way into the Plymouth morning papers.”

“No, sir; I had a telegram.”

“Might I ask from whom?”

A shadow passed over the gaunt face of the explorer.

“You are very inquisitive, Mr. Holmes.”

“It is my business.”

With an effort Dr. Sterndale recovered his ruffled composure.

“I have no objection to telling you,” he said. “It was Mr. Roundhay, the vicar, who sent me the telegram which recalled me.”

“Thank you,” said Holmes. “I may say in answer to your original question that I have not cleared my mind entirely on the subject of this case, but that I have every hope of reaching some conclusion. It would be premature to say more.”

“Perhaps you would not mind telling me if your suspicions point in any particular direction?”

“No, I can hardly answer that.”

“Then I have wasted my time and need not prolong my visit.” The famous doctor strode out of our cottage in considerable ill-humour, and within five minutes Holmes had followed him. I saw him no more until the evening, when he returned with a slow step and haggard face which assured me that he had made no great progress with his investigation. He glanced at a telegram which awaited him and threw it into the grate.

“From the Plymouth hotel, Watson,” he said. “I learned the name of it from the vicar, and I wired to make certain that Dr. Leon Sterndale’s account was true. It appears that he did indeed spend last night there, and that he has actually allowed some of his baggage to go on to Africa, while he returned to be present at this investigation. What do you make of that, Watson?”

“He is deeply interested.”

“Deeply interested — yes. There is a thread here which we had not yet grasped and which might lead us through the tangle. Cheer up, Watson, for I am very sure that our material has not yet all come to hand. When it does we may soon leave our difficulties behind us.”

Little did I think how soon the words of Holmes would be realised, or how strange and sinister would be that new development which opened up an entirely fresh line of investigation. I was shaving at my window in the morning when I heard the rattle of hoofs and, looking up, saw a dog-cart coming at a gallop down the road. It pulled up at our door, and our friend, the vicar, sprang from it and rushed up our garden path. Holmes was already dressed, and we hastened down to meet him.

Our visitor was so excited that he could hardly articulate, but at last in gasps and bursts his tragic story came out of him.

“We are devil-ridden, Mr. Holmes! My poor parish is devil-ridden!” he cried. “Satan himself is loose in it! We are given over into his hands!” He danced about in his agitation, a ludicrous object if it were not for his ashy face and startled eyes. Finally he shot out his terrible news.

“Mr. Mortimer Tregennis died during the night, and with exactly the same symptoms as the rest of his family.”

Holmes sprang to his feet, all energy in an instant.

“Can you fit us both into your dog-cart?”

“Yes, I can.”

“Then, Watson, we will postpone our breakfast. Mr. Roundhay, we are entirely at your disposal. Hurry — hurry, before things get disarranged.”

The lodger occupied two rooms at the vicarage, which were in an angle by themselves, the one above the other. Below was a large sitting-room; above, his bedroom. They looked out upon a croquet lawn which came up to the windows. We had arrived before the doctor or the police, so that everything was absolutely undisturbed. Let me describe exactly the scene as we saw it upon that misty March morning. It has left an impression which can never be effaced from my mind.

The atmosphere of the room was of a horrible and depressing stuffiness. The servant had first entered had thrown up the window, or it would have been even more intolerable. This might partly be due to the fact that a lamp stood flaring and smoking on the centre table. Beside it sat the dead man, leaning back in his chair, his thin beard projecting, his spectacles pushed up on to his forehead, and his lean dark face turned towards the window and twisted into the same distortion of terror which had marked the features of his dead sister. His limbs were convulsed and his fingers contorted as though he had died in a very paroxysm of fear. He was fully clothed, though there were signs that his dressing had been done in a hurry. We had already learned that his bed had been slept in, and that the tragic end had come to him in the early morning.

One realised the red-hot energy which underlay Holmes’s phlegmatic exterior when one saw the sudden change which came over him from the moment that he entered the fatal apartment. In an instant he was tense and alert, his eyes shining, his face set, his limbs quivering with eager activity. He was out on the lawn, in through the window, round the room, and up into the bedroom, for all the world like a dashing foxhound drawing a cover. In the bedroom he made a rapid cast around and ended by throwing open the window, which appeared to give him some fresh cause for excitement, for he leaned out of it with loud ejaculations of interest and delight. Then he rushed down the stair, out through the open window, threw himself upon his face on the lawn, sprang up and into the room once more, all with the energy of the hunter who is at the very heels of his quarry. The lamp, which was an ordinary standard, he examined with minute care, making certain measurements upon its bowl. He carefully scrutinized with his lens the talc shield which covered the top of the chimney and scraped off some ashes which adhered to its upper surface, putting some of them into an envelope, which he placed in his pocketbook. Finally, just as the doctor and the official police put in an appearance, he beckoned to the vicar and we all three went out upon the lawn.

“I am glad to say that my investigation has not been entirely barren,” he remarked. “I cannot remain to discuss the matter with the police, but I should be exceedingly obliged, Mr. Roundhay, if you would give the inspector my compliments and direct his attention to the bedroom window and to the sitting-room lamp. Each is suggestive, and together they are almost conclusive. If the police would desire further information I shall be happy to see any of them at the cottage. And now, Watson, I think that, perhaps, we shall be better employed elsewhere.”

It may be that the police resented the intrusion of an amateur, or that they imagined themselves to be upon some hopeful line of investigation; but it is certain that we heard nothing from them for the next two days. During this time Holmes spent some of his time smoking and dreaming in the cottage; but a greater portion in country walks which he undertook alone, returning after many hours without remark as to where he had been. One experiment served to show me the line of his investigation. He had bought a lamp which was the duplicate of the one which had burned in the room of Mortimer Tregennis on the morning of the tragedy. This he filled with the same oil as that used at the vicarage, and he carefully timed the period which it would take to be exhausted. Another experiment which he made was of a more unpleasant nature, and one which I am not likely ever to forget.

“You will remember, Watson,” he remarked one afternoon, “that there is a single common point of resemblance in the varying reports which have reached us. This concerns the effect of the atmosphere of the room in each case upon those who had first entered it. You will recollect that Mortimer Tregennis, in describing the episode of his last visit to his brother’s house, remarked that the doctor on entering the room fell into a chair? You had forgotten? Well I can answer for it that it was so. Now, you will remember also that Mrs. Porter, the housekeeper, told us that she herself fainted upon entering the room and had afterwards opened the window. In the second case — that of Mortimer Tregennis himself — you cannot have forgotten the horrible stuffiness of the room when we arrived, though the servant had thrown open the window. That servant, I found upon inquiry, was so ill that she had gone to her bed. You will admit, Watson, that these facts are very suggestive. In each case there is evidence of a poisonous atmosphere. In each case, also, there is combustion going on in the room — in the one case a fire, in the other a lamp. The fire was needed, but the lamp was lit — as a comparison of the oil consumed will show — long after it was broad daylight. Why? Surely because there is some connection between three things — the burning, the stuffy atmosphere, and, finally, the madness or death of those unfortunate people. That is clear, is it not?”

“It would appear so.”

“At least we may accept it as a working hypothesis. We will suppose, then, that something was burned in each case which produced an atmosphere causing strange toxic effects. Very good. In the first instance — that of the Tregennis family — this substance was placed in the fire. Now the window was shut, but the fire would naturally carry fumes to some extent up the chimney. Hence one would expect the effects of the poison to be less than in the second case, where there was less escape for the vapour. The result seems to indicate that it was so, since in the first case only the woman, who had presumably the more sensitive organism, was killed, the others exhibiting that temporary or permanent lunacy which is evidently the first effect of the drug. In the second case the result was complete. The facts, therefore, seem to bear out the theory of a poison which worked by combustion.

“With this train of reasoning in my head I naturally looked about in Mortimer Tregennis’s room to find some remains of this substance. The obvious place to look was the talc shelf or smoke-guard of the lamp. There, sure enough, I perceived a number of flaky ashes, and round the edges a fringe of brownish powder, which had not yet been consumed. Half of this I took, as you saw, and I placed it in an envelope.”

“Why half, Holmes?”

“It is not for me, my dear Watson, to stand in the way of the official police force. I leave them all the evidence which I found. The poison still remained upon the talc had they the wit to find it. Now, Watson, we will light our lamp; we will, however, take the precaution to open our window to avoid the premature decease of two deserving members of society, and you will seat yourself near that open window in an armchair unless, like a sensible man, you determine to have nothing to do with the affair. Oh, you will see it out, will you? I thought I knew my Watson. This chair I will place opposite yours, so that we may be the same distance from the poison and face to face. The door we will leave ajar. Each is now in a position to watch the other and to bring the experiment to an end should the symptoms seem alarming. Is that all clear? Well, then, I take our powder — or what remains of it — from the envelope, and I lay it above the burning lamp. So! Now, Watson, let us sit down and await developments."

They were not long in coming. I had hardly settled in my chair before I was conscious of a thick, musky odour, subtle and nauseous. At the very first whiff of it my brain and my imagination were beyond all control. A thick, black cloud swirled before my eyes, and my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe. Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul. A freezing horror took possession of me. I felt that my hair was rising, that my eyes were protruding, that my mouth was opened, and my tongue like leather. The turmoil within my brain was such that something must surely snap. I tried to scream and was vaguely aware of some hoarse croak which was my own voice, but distant and detached from myself At the same moment, in some effort of escape, I broke through that cloud of despair and had a glimpse of Holmes's face, white, rigid, and drawn with horror — the very look which I had seen upon the features of the dead. It was that vision which gave me an instant of sanity and of strength. I dashed from my chair, threw my arms round Holmes, and together we lurched through the door, and an instant afterwards had thrown ourselves down upon the grass plot and were lying side by side, conscious only of the glorious sunshine which was bursting its way through the hellish cloud of terror which had girt us in. Slowly it rose from our souls like the mists from a landscape until peace and reason had returned, and we were sitting upon the grass, wiping our clammy foreheads, and looking with apprehension at each other to mark the last traces of that terrific experience which we had undergone.

"Upon my word, Watson!" said Holmes at last with an unsteady voice, "I owe you both my thanks and an apology. It was an unjustifiable experiment even for one's self, and doubly so for a friend. I am really very sorry."

"You know," I answered with some emotion, for I have never seen so much of Holmes's heart before, "that it is my greatest joy and privilege to help you."

He relapsed at once into the half-humorous, half-cynical vein which was his habitual attitude to those about him. "It would be superfluous to drive us mad, my dear Watson," said he. "A candid observer would certainly declare that we were so already before we embarked upon so wild an experiment. I confess that I never imagined that the effect could be so sudden and so severe." He dashed into the cottage, and, reappearing with the burning lamp held at full arm's length, he threw it among a bank of brambles. "We must give the room a little time to clear. I take it, Watson, that you have no longer a shadow of a doubt as to how these tragedies were produced?"

"None whatever."

"But the cause remains as obscure as before. Come into the arbour here and let us discuss it together. That villainous stuff seems still to linger round my throat. I think we must admit that all the evidence points to this man, Mortimer Tregennis, having been the criminal in the first tragedy, though he was the victim in the second one. We must remember, in the first place, that there is some story of a family quarrel, followed by a reconciliation. How bitter that quarrel may have been, or how hollow the reconciliation we cannot tell. When I think of Mortimer Tregennis, with the foxy face and the small shrewd, beady eyes behind the spectacles, he is not a man whom I should judge to be of a particularly forgiving disposition. Well, in the next place, you will remember that this idea of someone moving in the garden, which took our attention for a moment from the real cause of the tragedy, emanated from him. He had a motive in misleading us. Finally, if he did not throw the substance into the fire at the moment of leaving the room, who did do so? The affair happened immediately after his departure. Had anyone else come in, the family would certainly have risen from the table. Besides, in peaceful Cornwall, visitors did not arrive after ten o'clock at night. We may take it, then, that all the evidence points to Mortimer Tregennis as the culprit."

"Then his own death was suicide!"

"Well, Watson, it is on the face of it a not impossible supposition. The man who had the guilt upon his soul of having brought such a fate upon his own family might well be driven by remorse to inflict it upon himself. There are, however, some cogent reasons against it. Fortunately, there is one man in England who knows all about it, and I have made arrangements by which we shall hear the facts this afternoon from his own lips. Ah! he is a little before his time. Perhaps you would kindly step this way, Dr. Leon Sterndale. We have been conducing a chemical experiment indoors which has left our little room hardly fit for the reception of so distinguished a visitor.”

I had heard the click of the garden gate, and now the majestic figure of the great African explorer appeared upon the path. He turned in some surprise towards the rustic arbour in which we sat.

“You sent for me, Mr. Holmes. I had your note about an hour ago, and I have come, though I really do not know why I should obey your summons.”

“Perhaps we can clear the point up before we separate,” said Holmes. “Meanwhile, I am much obliged to you for your courteous acquiescence. You will excuse this informal reception in the open air, but my friend Watson and I have nearly furnished an additional chapter to what the papers call the Cornish Horror, and we prefer a clear atmosphere for the present. Perhaps, since the matters which we have to discuss will affect you personally in a very intimate fashion, it is as well that we should talk where there can be no eavesdropping.”

The explorer took his cigar from his lips and gazed sternly at my companion.

“I am at a loss to know, sir,” he said, “what you can have to speak about which affects me personally in a very intimate fashion.”

“The killing of Mortimer Tregennis,” said Holmes.

For a moment I wished that I were armed. Sterndale’s fierce face turned to a dusky red, his eyes glared, and the knotted, passionate veins started out in his forehead, while he sprang forward with clenched hands towards my companion. Then he stopped, and with a violent effort he resumed a cold, rigid calmness, which was, perhaps, more suggestive of danger than his hot-headed outburst.

“I have lived so long among savages and beyond the law,” said he, “that I have got into the way of being a law to myself. You would do well, Mr. Holmes, not to forget it, for I have no desire to do you an injury.”

“Nor have I any desire to do you an injury, Dr. Sterndale. Surely the clearest proof of it is that, knowing what I know, I have sent for you and not for the police.”

Sterndale sat down with a gasp, overawed for, perhaps, the first time in his adventurous life. There was a calm assurance of power in Holmes's manner which could not be withstood. Our visitor stammered for a moment, his great hands opening and shutting in his agitation.

"What do you mean?" he asked at last. "If this is bluff upon your part, Mr. Holmes, you have chosen a bad man for your experiment. Let us have no more beating about the bush. What DO you mean?"

"I will tell you," said Holmes, "and the reason why I tell you is that I hope frankness may beget frankness. What my next step may be will depend entirely upon the nature of your own defence."

"My defence?"

"Yes, sir."

"My defence against what?"

"Against the charge of killing Mortimer Tregennis."

Sterndale mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Upon my word, you are getting on," said he. "Do all your successes depend upon this prodigious power of bluff?"

"The bluff," said Holmes sternly, "is upon your side, Dr. Leon Sterndale, and not upon mine. As a proof I will tell you some of the facts upon which my conclusions are based. Of your return from Plymouth, allowing much of your property to go on to Africa, I will say nothing save that it first informed me that you were one of the factors which had to be taken into account in reconstructing this drama—"

"I came back—"

"I have heard your reasons and regard them as unconvincing and inadequate. We will pass that. You came down here to ask me whom I suspected. I refused to answer you. You then went to the vicarage, waited outside it for some time, and finally returned to your cottage."

"How do you know that?"

"I followed you."

"I saw no one."

"That is what you may expect to see when I follow you. You spent a restless night at your cottage, and you formed certain plans, which in the early morning you proceeded to put into execution. Leaving your door just as day was breaking, you filled your pocket with some reddish gravel that was lying heaped beside your gate."

Sterndale gave a violent start and looked at Holmes in amazement.

"You then walked swiftly for the mile which separated you from the vicarage. You were wearing, I may remark, the same pair of ribbed tennis shoes which are at the present moment upon your feet. At the vicarage you passed through the orchard and the side hedge, coming out under the window of the lodger Tregennis. It was now daylight, but the household was not yet stirring. You drew some of the gravel from your pocket, and you threw it up at the window above you."

Sterndale sprang to his feet.

"I believe that you are the devil himself!" he cried.

Holmes smiled at the compliment. "It took two, or possibly three, handfuls before the lodger came to the window. You beckoned him to come down. He dressed hurriedly and descended to his sitting-room. You entered by the window. There was an interview — a short one — during which you walked up and down the room. Then you passed out and closed the window, standing on the lawn outside smoking a cigar and watching what occurred. Finally, after the death of Tregennis, you withdrew as you had come. Now, Dr. Sterndale, how do you justify such conduct, and what were the motives for your actions? If you prevaricate or trifle with me, I give you my assurance that the matter will pass out of my hands forever."

Our visitor's face had turned ashen gray as he listened to the words of his accuser. Now he sat for some time in thought with his face sunk in his hands. Then with a sudden impulsive gesture he plucked a photograph from his breast-pocket and threw it on the rustic table before us.

"That is why I have done it," said he.

It showed the bust and face of a very beautiful woman. Holmes stooped over it.

"Brenda Tregennis," said he.

"Yes, Brenda Tregennis," repeated our visitor. "For years I have loved her. For years she has loved me. There is the secret of that Cornish seclusion which people have marvelled at. It has brought me close to the one thing on earth that was dear to me. I could not marry her, for I have a wife who has left me for years and yet whom, by the deplorable laws of England, I could not divorce. For years Brenda waited. For years I waited. And this is what we have waited for." A terrible sob shook his great frame, and he clutched his throat under his brindled beard. Then with an effort he mastered himself and spoke on:

“The vicar knew. He was in our confidence. He would tell you that she was an angel upon earth. That was why he telegraphed to me and I returned. What was my baggage or Africa to me when I learned that such a fate had come upon my darling? There you have the missing clue to my action, Mr. Holmes.”

“Proceed,” said my friend.

Dr. Sterndale drew from his pocket a paper packet and laid it upon the table. On the outside was written “Radix pedis diaboli” with a red poison label beneath it. He pushed it towards me. “I understand that you are a doctor, sir. Have you ever heard of this preparation?”

“Devil’s-foot root! No, I have never heard of it.”

“It is no reflection upon your professional knowledge,” said he, “for I believe that, save for one sample in a laboratory at Buda, there is no other specimen in Europe. It has not yet found its way either into the pharmacopoeia or into the literature of toxicology. The root is shaped like a foot, half human, half goatlike; hence the fanciful name given by a botanical missionary. It is used as an ordeal poison by the medicine-men in certain districts of West Africa and is kept as a secret among them. This particular specimen I obtained under very extraordinary circumstances in the Ubangi country.” He opened the paper as he spoke and disclosed a heap of reddish-brown, snuff-like powder.

“Well, sir?” asked Holmes sternly.

“I am about to tell you, Mr. Holmes, all that actually occurred, for you already know so much that it is clearly to my interest that you should know all. I have already explained the relationship in which I stood to the Tregennis family. For the sake of the sister I was friendly with the brothers. There was a family quarrel about money which estranged this man Mortimer, but it was supposed to be made up, and I afterwards met him as I did the others. He was a sly, subtle, scheming man, and several things arose which gave me a suspicion of him, but I had no cause for any positive quarrel.

“One day, only a couple of weeks ago, he came down to my cottage and I showed him some of my African curiosities. Among other things I exhibited this powder, and I told him of its strange properties, how it stimulates those brain centres which control the emotion of fear, and how either madness or death is the fate of the unhappy native who is subjected to the ordeal by the priest of his tribe. I told him also how powerless European science would be to detect it. How he took it I cannot say, for I never left the room, but there is no doubt that it was then, while I was opening cabinets and stooping to boxes, that he managed to abstract some of the devil's-foot root. I well remember how he plied me with questions as to the amount and the time that was needed for its effect, but I little dreamed that he could have a personal reason for asking.

"I thought no more of the matter until the vicar's telegram reached me at Plymouth. This villain had thought that I would be at sea before the news could reach me, and that I should be lost for years in Africa. But I returned at once. Of course, I could not listen to the details without feeling assured that my poison had been used. I came round to see you on the chance that some other explanation had suggested itself to you. But there could be none. I was convinced that Mortimer Tregennis was the murderer; that for the sake of money, and with the idea, perhaps, that if the other members of his family were all insane he would be the sole guardian of their joint property, he had used the devil's-foot powder upon them, driven two of them out of their senses, and killed his sister Brenda, the one human being whom I have ever loved or who has ever loved me. There was his crime; what was to be his punishment?

"Should I appeal to the law? Where were my proofs? I knew that the facts were true, but could I help to make a jury of countrymen believe so fantastic a story? I might or I might not. But I could not afford to fail. My soul cried out for revenge. I have said to you once before, Mr. Holmes, that I have spent much of my life outside the law, and that I have come at last to be a law to myself. So it was even now. I determined that the fate which he had given to others should be shared by himself. Either that or I would do justice upon him with my own hand. In all England there can be no man who sets less value upon his own life than I do at the present moment.

"Now I have told you all. You have yourself supplied the rest. I did, as you say, after a restless night, set off early from my cottage. I foresaw the difficulty of arousing him, so I gathered some gravel from the pile which you have mentioned, and I used it to throw up to his window. He came down and admitted me through the window of the sitting-room. I laid his offence before him. I told him that I had come both as judge and executioner. The wretch sank into a chair, paralyzed at the sight of my revolver. I lit the lamp, put the powder above it, and stood outside the window, ready to carry out my threat to shoot him should he try to leave the room. In five minutes he died. My God! how he died! But my heart was flint, for he endured nothing which my innocent darling had not felt before him. There is my story, Mr. Holmes. Perhaps, if you loved a woman, you would have done as much yourself. At any rate, I am in your hands. You can take what steps you like. As I have already said, there is no man living who can fear death less than I do."

Holmes sat for some little time in silence.

"What were your plans?" he asked at last.

"I had intended to bury myself in central Africa. My work there is but half finished."

"Go and do the other half," said Holmes. "I, at least, am not prepared to prevent you."

Dr. Sterndale raised his giant figure, bowed gravely, and walked from the arbour. Holmes lit his pipe and handed me his pouch.

"Some fumes which are not poisonous would be a welcome change," said he. "I think you must agree, Watson, that it is not a case in which we are called upon to interfere. Our investigation has been independent, and our action shall be so also. You would not denounce the man?"

"Certainly not," I answered.

"I have never loved, Watson, but if I did and if the woman I loved had met such an end, I might act even as our lawless lion-hunter has done. Who knows? Well, Watson, I will not offend your intelligence by explaining what is obvious. The gravel upon the window-sill was, of course, the starting-point of my research. It was unlike anything in the vicarage garden. Only when my attention had been drawn to Dr. Sterndale and his cottage did I find its counterpart. The lamp shining in broad daylight and the remains of powder upon the shield were successive links in a fairly obvious chain. And now, my dear Watson, I think we may dismiss the matter from our mind and go back with a clear conscience to the study of those Chaldean roots which are surely to be traced in the Cornish branch of the great Celtic speech."

His Last Bow.- The War Service of Sherlock Holmes

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It was nine o'clock at night upon the second of August — the most terrible August in the history of the world. One might have thought already that God's curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air. The sun had long set, but one blood-red gash like an open wound lay low in the distant west. Above, the stars were shining brightly, and below, the lights of the shipping glimmered in the bay. The two famous Germans stood beside the stone parapet of the garden walk, with the long, low, heavily gabled house behind them, and they looked down upon the broad sweep of the beach at the foot of the great chalk cliff on which Von Bork, like some wandering eagle, had perched himself four years before. They stood with their heads close together, talking in low, confidential tones. From below the two glowing ends of their cigars might have been the smouldering eyes of some malignant fiend looking down in the darkness.

A remarkable man this Von Bork — a man who could hardly be matched among all the devoted agents of the Kaiser. It was his talents which had first recommended him for the English mission, the most important mission of all, but since he had taken it over those talents had become more and more manifest to the half-dozen people in the world who were really in touch with the truth. One of these was his present companion, Baron Von Herling, the chief secretary of the legation, whose huge 100-horse-power Benz car was blocking the country lane as it waited to waft its owner back to London.

"So far as I can judge the trend of events, you will probably be back in Berlin within the week," the secretary was saying. "When you get there, my dear Von Bork, I think you will be surprised at the welcome you will receive. I happen to know what is thought in the highest quarters of your work in this country." He was a huge man, the secretary, deep, broad, and tall, with a slow, heavy fashion of speech which had been his main asset in his political career.

Von Bork laughed.

“They are not very hard to deceive,” he remarked. “A more docile, simple folk could not be imagined.”

“I don’t know about that,” said the other thoughtfully. “They have strange limits and one must learn to observe them. It is that surface simplicity of theirs which makes a trap for the stranger. One’s first impression is that they are entirely soft. Then one comes suddenly upon something very hard, and you know that you have reached the limit and must adapt yourself to the fact. They have, for example, their insular conventions which simply must be observed.”

“Meaning, ‘good form’ and that sort of thing?” Von Bork sighed as one who had suffered much.

“Meaning British prejudice in all its queer manifestations. As an example I may quote one of my own worst blunders — I can afford to talk of my blunders, for you know my work well enough to be aware of my successes. It was on my first arrival. I was invited to a week-end gathering at the country house of a cabinet minister. The conversation was amazingly indiscreet.”

Von Bork nodded. “I’ve been there,” said he dryly.

“Exactly. Well, I naturally sent a resume of the information to Berlin. Unfortunately our good chancellor is a little heavy-handed in these matters, and he transmitted a remark which showed that he was aware of what had been said. This, of course, took the trail straight up to me. You’ve no idea the harm that it did me. There was nothing soft about our British hosts on that occasion, I can assure you. I was two years living it down. Now you, with this sporting pose of yours—”

“No, no, don’t call it a pose. A pose is an artificial thing. This is quite natural. I am a born sportsman. I enjoy it.”

“Well, that makes it the more effective. You yacht against them, you hunt with them, you play polo, you match them in every game, your four-in-hand takes the prize at Olympia. I have even heard that you go the length of boxing with the young officers. What is the result? Nobody takes you seriously. You are a ‘good old sport,’ ‘quite a decent fellow for a German,’ a hard-drinking, night-club, knock-about-town, devil-may-care young fellow. And all the time this quiet country house of yours is the centre of half the mischief in England, and the sporting squire the most astute secret-service man in Europe. Genius, my dear Von Bork — genius!”

“You flatter me, Baron. But certainly I may claim that my four years in this country have not been unproductive. I’ve never shown you my little store. Would you mind stepping in for a moment?”

The door of the study opened straight on to the terrace. Von Bork pushed it back, and, leading the way, he clicked the switch of the electric light. He then closed the door behind the bulky form which followed him and carefully adjusted the heavy curtain over the latticed window. Only when all these precautions had been taken and tested did he turn his sunburned aquiline face to his guest.

“Some of my papers have gone,” said he. “When my wife and the household left yesterday for Flushing they took the less important with them. I must, of course, claim the protection of the embassy for the others”

“Your name has already been files as one of the personal suite. There will be no difficulties for you or your baggage. Of course, it is just possible that we may not have to go. England may leave France to her fate. We are sure that there is no binding treaty between them.”

“And Belgium?”

“Yes, and Belgium, too.”

Von Bork shook his head. “I don’t see how that could be. There is a definite treaty there. She could never recover from such a humiliation.”

“She would at least have peace for the moment.”

“But her honour?”

“Tut, my dear sir, we live in a utilitarian age. Honour is a mediaeval conception. Besides England is not ready. It is an inconceivable thing, but even our special war tax of fifty million, which one would think made our purpose as clear as if we had advertised it on the front page of the Times, has not roused these people from their slumbers. Here and there one hears a question. It is my business to find an answer. Here and there also there is an irritation. It is my business to soothe it. But I can assure you that so far as the essentials go — the storage of munitions, the preparation for submarine attack, the arrangements for making high explosives — nothing is prepared. How, then, can England come in, especially when we have stirred her up such a devil’s brew of Irish civil war, window-breaking Furies, and God knows what to keep her thoughts at home.”

“She must think of her future.”

“Ah, that is another matter. I fancy that in the future we have our own very definite plans about England, and that your information will be very vital to us. It is to-day or to-morrow with Mr. John Bull. If he prefers to-day we are perfectly ready. If it is to-morrow we shall be more ready still. I should think they would be wiser to fight with allies than without them, but that is their own affair. This week is their week of destiny. But you were speaking of your papers.” He sat in the armchair with the light shining upon his broad bald head, while he puffed sedately at his cigar.

The large oak-panelled, book-lined room had a curtain hung in the further corner. When this was drawn it disclosed a large, brass-bound safe. Von Bork detached a small key from his watch chain, and after some considerable manipulation of the lock he swung open the heavy door.

“Look!” said he, standing clear, with a wave of his hand.

The light shone vividly into the opened safe, and the secretary of the embassy gazed with an absorbed interest at the rows of stuffed pigeon-holes with which it was furnished. Each pigeonhole had its label, and his eyes as he glanced along them read a long series of such titles as “Fords,” “Harbour defences,” “Aeroplanes,” “Ireland,” “Egypt,” “Portsmouth forts,” “The Channel,” “Rosythe,” and a score of others. Each compartment was bristling with papers and plans.

“Colossal!” said the secretary. Putting down his cigar he softly clapped his fat hands.

“And all in four years, Baron. Not such a bad show for the hard-drinking, hard-riding country squire. But the gem of my collection is coming and there is the setting all ready for it.” He pointed to a space over which “Naval Signals” was printed.

“But you have a good dossier there already.”

“Out of date and waste paper. The Admiralty in some way got the alarm and every code has been changed. It was a blow, Baron — the worst setback in my whole campaign. But thanks to my check-book and the good Altamont all will be well to-night.”

The Baron looked at his watch and gave a guttural exclamation of disappointment.

“Well, I really can wait no longer. You can imagine that things are moving at present in Carlton Terrace and that we have all to be at our posts. I had hoped to be able to bring news of your great coup. Did Altamont name no hour?”

Von Bork pushed over a telegram.

Will come without fail to-night and bring new sparking plugs.

ALTAMONT.

“Sparking plugs, eh?”

“You see he poses as a motor expert and I keep a full garage. In our code everything likely to come up is named after some spare part. If he talks of a radiator it is a battleship, of an oil pump a cruiser, and so on. Sparking plugs are naval signals.”

“From Portsmouth at midday,” said the secretary, examining the superscription. “By the way, what do you give him?”

“Five hundred pounds for this particular job. Of course he has a salary as well.”

“The greedy rogue. They are useful, these traitors, but I grudge them their blood money.”

“I grudge Altamont nothing. He is a wonderful worker. If I pay him well, at least he delivers the goods, to use his own phrase. Besides he is not a traitor. I assure you that our most pan-Germanic Junker is a sucking dove in his feelings towards England as compared with a real bitter Irish-American.”

“Oh, an Irish-American?”

“If you heard him talk you would not doubt it. Sometimes I assure you I can hardly understand him. He seems to have declared war on the King’s English as well as on the English king. Must you really go? He may be here any moment.”

“No. I’m sorry, but I have already overstayed my time. We shall expect you early to-morrow, and when you get that signal book through the little door on the Duke of York’s steps you can put a triumphant finis to your record in England. What! Tokay!”

He indicated a heavily sealed dust-covered bottle which stood with two high glasses upon a salver.

“May I offer you a glass before your journey?”

“No, thanks. But it looks like revelry.”

“Altamont has a nice taste in wines, and he took a fancy to my Tokay. He is a touchy fellow and needs humouring in small things. I have to study him, I assure you.” They had strolled out on to the terrace again, and along it to the further end where at a touch from the Baron’s chauffeur the great car shivered and chuckled. “Those are the lights of Harwich, I suppose,” said the secretary, pulling on his dust coat. “How still and peaceful it all seems. There may be other lights within the week, and the English coast a less tranquil place! The heavens, too, may not be quite so peaceful if all that the good Zeppelin promises us comes true. By the way, who is that?”

Only one window showed a light behind them; in it there stood a lamp, and beside it, seated at a table, was a dear old ruddy-faced woman in a country cap. She was bending over her knitting and stopping occasionally to stroke a large black cat upon a stool beside her.

“That is Martha, the only servant I have left.”

The secretary chuckled.

“She might almost personify Britannia,” said he, “with her complete self-absorption and general air of comfortable somnolence. Well, au revoir, Von Bork!” With a final wave of his hand he sprang into the car, and a moment later the two golden cones from the headlights shot forward through the darkness. The secretary lay back in the cushions of the luxurious limousine, with his thoughts so full of the impending European tragedy that he hardly observed that as his car swung round the village street it nearly passed over a little Ford coming in the opposite direction.

Von Bork walked slowly back to the study when the last gleams of the motor lamps had faded into the distance. As he passed he observed that his old housekeeper had put out her lamp and retired. It was a new experience to him, the silence and darkness of his widespread house, for his family and household had been a large one. It was a relief to him, however, to think that they were all in safety and that, but for that one old woman who had lingered in the kitchen, he had the whole place to himself. There was a good deal of tidying up to do inside his study and he set himself to do it until his keen, handsome face was flushed with the heat of the burning papers. A leather valise stood beside his table, and into this he began to pack very neatly and systematically the precious contents of his safe. He had hardly got started with the work, however, when his quick ears caught the sound of a distant car. Instantly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, strapped up the valise, shut the safe, locked it, and hurried out on to the terrace. He was just in time to see the lights of a small car come to a halt at the gate. A passenger sprang out of it and advanced swiftly towards him, while the chauffeur, a heavily built, elderly man with a gray moustache, settled down like one who resigns himself to a long vigil.

“Well?” asked Von Bork eagerly, running forward to meet his visitor.

For answer the man waved a small brown-paper parcel triumphantly above his head.

"You can give me the glad hand to-night, mister," he cried. "I'm bringing home the bacon at last."

"The signals?"

"Same as I said in my cable. Every last one of them, semaphore, lamp code, Marconi — a copy, mind you, not the original. That was too dangerous. But it's the real goods, and you can lay to that." He slapped the German upon the shoulder with a rough familiarity from which the other winced.

"Come in," he said. "I'm all alone in the house. I was only waiting for this. Of course a copy is better than the original. If an original were missing they would change the whole thing. You think it's all safe about the copy?"

The Irish-American had entered the study and stretched his long limbs from the armchair. He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty, with clear-cut features and a small goatee beard which gave him a general resemblance to the caricatures of Uncle Sam. A half-smoked, sodden cigar hung from the corner of his mouth, and as he sat down he struck a match and relit it. "Making ready for a move?" he remarked as he looked round him. "Say, mister," he added, as his eyes fell upon the safe from which the curtain was now removed, "you don't tell me you keep your papers in that?"

"Why not?"

"Gosh, in a wide-open contraption like that! And they reckon you to be some spy. Why, a Yankee crook would be into that with a can-opener. If I'd known that any letter of mine was goin' to lie loose in a thing like that I'd have been a mug to write to you at all."

"It would puzzle any crook to force that safe," Von Bork answered. "You won't cut that metal with any tool."

"But the lock?"

"No, it's a double combination lock. You know what that is?"

"Search me," said the American.

"Well, you need a word as well as a set of figures before you can get the lock to work." He rose and showed a double radiating disc round the keyhole. "This outer one is for the letters, the inner one for the figures."

"Well, well, that's fine."

"So it's not quite as simple as you thought. It was four years ago that I had it made, and what do you think I chose for the word and figures?"

"It's beyond me."

“Well, I chose August for the word, and 1914 for the figures, and here we are.”

The American’s face showed his surprise and admiration.

“My, but that was smart! You had it down to a fine thing.”

“Yes, a few of us even then could have guessed the date. Here it is, and I’m shutting down to-morrow morning. “

“Well, I guess you’ll have to fix me up also. I’m not staying in this gol-darned country all on my lonesome. In a week or less, from what I see, John Bull will be on his hind legs and fair ramping. I’d rather watch him from over the water.”

“But you’re an American citizen?”

“Well, so was Jack James an American citizen, but he’s doing time in Portland all the same. It cuts no ice with a British copper to tell him you’re an American citizen. ‘It’s British law and order over here,’ says he. By the way, mister, talking of Jack James, it seems to me you don’t do much to cover your men.”

“What do you mean?” Von Bork asked sharply.

“Well, you are their employer, ain’t you? It’s up to you to see that they don’t fall down. But they do fall down, and when did you ever pick them up? There’s James—”

“It was James’s own fault. You know that yourself. He was too self-willed for the job.”

“James was a bonehead — I give you that. Then there was Hollis. “

“The man was mad.”

“Well, he went a bit woozy towards the end. It’s enough to make a man bughouse when he has to play a part from morning to night with a hundred guys all ready to set the coppers wise to him. But now there is Steiner—”

Von Bork started violently, and his ruddy face turned a shade paler.

“What about Steiner?”

“Well, they’ve got him, that’s all. They raided his store last night, and he and his papers are all in Portsmouth jail. You’ll go off and he, poor devil, will have to stand the racket, and lucky if he gets off with his life. That’s why I want to get over the water as soon as you do.”

Von Bork was a strong, self-contained man, but it was easy to see that the news had shaken him.

“How could they have got on to Steiner?” he muttered. “That’s the worst blow yet.”

“Well, you nearly had a worse one, for I believe they are not far off me.”

“You don’t mean that!”

“Sure thing. My landlady down Fratton way had some inquiries, and when I heard of it I guessed it was time for me to hustle. But what I want to know, mister, is how the coppers know these things? Steiner is the fifth man you’ve lost since I signed on with you, and I know the name of the sixth if I don’t get a move on. How do you explain it, and ain’t you ashamed to see your men go down like this?”

Von Bork flushed crimson.

“How dare you speak in such a way!”

“If I didn’t dare things, mister, I wouldn’t be in your service. But I’ll tell you straight what is in my mind. I’ve heard that with you German politicians when an agent has done his work you are not sorry to see him put away.”

Von Bork sprang to his feet.

“Do you dare to suggest that I have given away my own agents!”

“I don’t stand for that, mister, but there’s a stool pigeon or a cross somewhere, and it’s up to you to find out where it is. Anyhow I am taking no more chances. It’s me for little Holland, and the sooner the better.”

Von Bork had mastered his anger.

“We have been allies too long to quarrel now at the very hour of victory,” he said. “You’ve done splendid work and taken risks, and I can’t forget it. By all means go to Holland, and you can get a boat from Rotterdam to New York. No other line will be safe a week from now. I’ll take that book and pack it with the rest.”

The American held the small parcel in his hand, but made no motion to give it up.

“What about the dough?” he asked.

“The what?”

“The boodle. The reward. The 500 pounds. The gunner turned damned nasty at the last, and I had to square him with an extra hundred dollars or it would have been nitsky for you and me. ‘Nothin’ doin’!’ says he, and he meant it, too, but the last hundred did it. It’s cost me two hundred pound from first to last, so it isn’t likely I’d give it up without gettin’ my wad. “

Von Bork smiled with some bitterness. “You don’t seem to have a very high opinion of my honour,” said he, “you want the money before you give up the book.”

“Well, mister, it is a business proposition.”

“All right. Have your way.” He sat down at the table and scribbled a check, which he tore from the book, but he refrained from handing it to his companion. “After all, since we are to be on such terms, Mr. Altamont,” said he, “I don’t see why I should trust you any more than you trust me. Do you understand?” he added, looking back over his shoulder at the American. “There’s the check upon the table. I claim the right to examine that parcel before you pick the money up.”

The American passed it over without a word. Von Bork undid a winding of string and two wrappers of paper. Then he sat gazing for a moment in silent amazement at a small blue book which lay before him. Across the cover was printed in golden letters Practical Handbook of Bee Culture. Only for one instant did the master spy glare at this strangely irrelevant inscription. The next he was gripped at the back of his neck by a grasp of iron, and a chloroformed sponge was held in front of his writhing face.

“Another glass, Watson!” said Mr. Sherlock Holmes as he extended the bottle of Imperial Tokay.

The thickset chauffeur, who had seated himself by the table pushed forward his glass with some eagerness.

“It is a good wine, Holmes.”

“A remarkable wine, Watson. Our friend upon the sofa has assured me that it is from Franz Josef’s special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace. Might I trouble you to open the window for chloroform vapour does not help the palate.”

The safe was ajar, and Holmes standing in front of it was removing dossier after dossier, swiftly examining each, and then packing it neatly in Von Bork’s valise. The German lay upon the sofa sleeping stertorously with a strap round his upper arms and another round his legs. “We need not hurry ourselves, Watson. We are safe from interruption. Would you mind touching the bell? There is no one in the house except old Martha, who has played her part to admiration. I got her the situation here when first I took the matter up. Ah, Martha, you will be glad to hear that all is well.”

The pleasant old lady had appeared in the doorway. She curtseyed with a smile to Mr. Holmes, but glanced with some apprehension at the figure upon the sofa.

“It is all right, Martha. He has not been hurt at all.”

"I am glad of that, Mr. Holmes. According to his lights he has been a kind master. He wanted me to go with his wife to Germany yesterday, but that would hardly have suited your plans, would it, sir?"

"No, indeed, Martha. So long as you were here I was easy in my mind. We waited some time for your signal to-night."

"It was the secretary, sir."

"I know. His car passed ours."

"I thought he would never go. I knew that it would not suit your plans, sir, to find him here."

"No, indeed. Well, it only meant that we waited half an hour or so until I saw your lamp go out and knew that the coast was clear. You can report to me to-morrow in London, Martha, at Claridge's Hotel."

"Very good, sir."

"I suppose you have everything ready to leave."

"Yes, sir. He posted seven letters to-day. I have the addresses as usual."

"Very good, Martha. I will look into them to-morrow. Goodnight. These papers," he continued as the old lady vanished, "are not of very great importance, for, of course, the information which they represent has been sent off long ago to the German government. These are the originals which could not safely be got out of the country."

"Then they are of no use."

"I should not go so far as to say that, Watson. They will at least show our people what is known and what is not. I may say that a good many of these papers have come through me, and I need not add are thoroughly untrustworthy. It would brighten my declining years to see a German cruiser navigating the Solent according to the mine-field plans which I have furnished. But you, Watson" — he stopped his work and took his old friend by the shoulders—"I've hardly seen you in the light yet. How have the years used you? You look the same blithe boy as ever. "

"I feel twenty years younger, Holmes. I have seldom felt so happy as when I got your wire asking me to meet you at Harwich with the car. But you, Holmes — you have changed very little — save for that horrible goatee."

"These are the sacrifices one makes for one's country, Watson," said Holmes, pulling at his little tuft. "To-morrow it will be but a dreadful memory. With my hair cut and a few other superficial changes I shall no doubt reappear at Claridge's tomorrow as I was before this American stunt

— I beg your pardon, Watson, my well of English seems to be permanently defiled — before this American job came my way.”

“But you have retired, Holmes. We heard of you as living the life of a hermit among your bees and your books in a small farm upon the South Downs.”

“Exactly, Watson. Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years!” He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen. “Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London.”

“But how did you get to work again?”

“Ah, I have often marvelled at it myself. The Foreign Minister alone I could have withstood, but when the Premier also deigned to visit my humble roof! The fact is, Watson, that this gentleman upon the sofa was a bit too good for our people. He was in a class by himself. Things were going wrong, and no one could understand why they were going wrong. Agents were suspected or even caught, but there was evidence of some strong and secret central force. It was absolutely necessary to expose it. Strong pressure was brought upon me to look into the matter. It has cost me two years, Watson, but they have not been devoid of excitement. When I say that I started my pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbareen, and so eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork, who recommended me as a likely man, you will realise that the matter was complex. Since then I have been honoured by his confidence, which has not prevented most of his plans going subtly wrong and five of his best agents being in prison. I watched them, Watson, and I picked them as they ripened. Well, sir, I hope that you are none the worse!”

The last remark was addressed to Von Bork himself, who after much gasping and blinking had lain quietly listening to Holmes’s statement. He broke out now into a furious stream of German invective, his face convulsed with passion. Holmes continued his swift investigation of documents while his prisoner cursed and swore.

“Though unmusical, German is the most expressive of all languages,” he observed when Von Bork had stopped from pure exhaustion. “Hullo! Hullo!” he added as he looked hard at the corner of a tracing before putting it in the box. “This should put another bird in the cage. I had no idea that the paymaster was such a rascal, though I have long had an eye upon him. Mister Von Bork, you have a great deal to answer for.”

The prisoner had raised himself with some difficulty upon the sofa and was staring with a strange mixture of amazement and hatred at his captor. I shall get level with you, Altamont,” he said, speaking with slow deliberation. “If it takes me all my life I shall get level with you!”

“The old sweet song,” said Holmes. “How often have I heard it in days gone by. It was a favourite ditty of the late lamented Professor Moriarty. Colonel Sebastian Moran has also been known to warble it. And yet I live and keep bees upon the South Downs.”

“Curse you, you double traitor!” cried the German, straining against his bonds and glaring murder from his furious eyes.

“No, no, it is not so bad as that,” said Holmes, smiling. “As my speech surely shows you, Mr. Altamont of Chicago had no existence in fact. I used him and he is gone.”

“Then who are you?”

“It is really immaterial who I am, but since the matter seems to interest you, Mr. Von Bork, I may say that this is not my first acquaintance with the members of your family. I have done a good deal of business in Germany in the past and my name is probably familiar to you.”

“I would wish to know it,” said the Prussian grimly.

“It was I who brought about the separation between Irene Adler and the late King of Bohemia when your cousin Heinrich was the Imperial Envoy. It was I also who saved from murder, by the Nihilist Klopman, Count Von und Zu Grafenstein, who was your mother’s elder brother. It was I—”

Von Bork sat up in amazement.

“There is only one man,” he cried.

“Exactly,” said Holmes.

Von Bork groaned and sank back on the sofa. “And most of that information came through you,” he cried. “What is it worth? What have I done? It is my ruin forever!”

“It is certainly a little untrustworthy,” said Holmes. “It will require some checking and you have little time to check it. Your admiral may find the new guns rather larger than he expects, and the cruisers perhaps a trifle faster.”

Von Bork clutched at his own throat in despair.

"There are a good many other points of detail which will, no doubt, come to light in good time. But you have one quality which is very rare in a German, Mr. Von Bork: you are a sportsman and you will bear me no ill-will when you realise that you, who have outwitted so many other people, have at last been outwitted yourself. After all, you have done your best for your country, and I have done my best for mine, and what could be more natural? Besides," he added, not unkindly, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the prostrate man, "it is better than to fall before some more ignoble foe. These papers are now ready. Watson. If you will help me with our prisoner, I think that we may get started for London at once."

It was no easy task to move Von Bork, for he was a strong and a desperate man. Finally, holding either arm, the two friends walked him very slowly down the garden walk which he had trod with such proud confidence when he received the congratulations of the famous diplomatist only a few hours before. After a short, final struggle he was hoisted, still bound hand and foot, into the spare seat of the little car. His precious valise was wedged in beside him.

"I trust that you are as comfortable as circumstances permit," said Holmes when the final arrangements were made. "Should I be guilty of a liberty if I lit a cigar and placed it between your lips?"

But all amenities were wasted upon the angry German.

"I suppose you realise, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he, "that if your government bears you out in this treatment it becomes an act of war."

"What about your government and all this treatment?" said Holmes, tapping the valise.

"You are a private individual. You have no warrant for my arrest. The whole proceeding is absolutely illegal and outrageous."

"Absolutely," said Holmes.

"Kidnapping a German subject."

"And stealing his private papers."

"Well, you realise your position, you and your accomplice here. If I were to shout for help as we pass through the village—"

"My dear sir, if you did anything so foolish you would probably enlarge the two limited titles of our village inns by giving us 'The Dangling Prussian' as a signpost. The Englishman is a patient creature, but at present his temper is a little inflamed, and it would be as well not to try him too far. No, Mr. Von Bork, you will go with us in a quiet, sensible fashion to

Scotland Yard, whence you can send for your friend, Baron Von Herling, and see if even now you may not fill that place which he has reserved for you in the ambassadorial suite. As to you, Watson, you are joining us with your old service, as I understand, so London won't be out of your way. Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have."

The two friends chatted in intimate converse for a few minutes, recalling once again the days of the past, while their prisoner vainly wriggled to undo the bonds that held him. As they turned to the car Holmes pointed back to the moonlit sea and shook a thoughtful head.

"There's an east wind coming, Watson."

"I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."

"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. Start her up, Watson, for it's time that we were on our way. I have a check for five hundred pounds which should be cashed early, for the drawer is quite capable of stopping it if he can."

THE FIELD BAZAAR

This short story was written during an Edinburgh University fundraising event. Doyle had been requested by his university to contribute a short piece of literature for a charity magazine. In the story Watson has received a similar request and whilst he reads the letter at breakfast, Holmes correctly deduces the sender of the letter and Watson’s thoughts with regard to the letter. It shares many similarities to the canonical stories. Aside from the metafictional twist in which Watson supplants Doyle as the author publishing his own stories in a magazine, it also plays not only about the famous skill of Holmes’ observations producing apparently miraculous results, but also upon the notion of the ‘traditional breakfast scenes’ which open many Holmes short stories.

Conan Doyle, 1899

THE FIELD BAZAAR

“I should certainly do it,” said Sherlock Holmes.

I started at the interruption, for my companion had been eating his breakfast with his attention entirely centered upon the paper which was propped up by the coffee pot. Now I looked across at him to find his eyes fastened upon me with the half-amused, half-questioning expression which he usually assumed when he felt he had made an intellectual point.

“Do what?” I asked.

He smiled as he took his slipper from the mantelpiece and drew from it enough shag tobacco to fill the old clay pipe with which he invariably rounded off his breakfast.

“A most characteristic question of yours, Watson,” said he. “You will not, I am sure, be offended if I say that any reputation for sharpness which I may possess has been entirely gained by the admirable foil which you have made for me. Have I not heard of debutantes who have insisted upon plainness in their chaperones? There is a certain analogy.”

Our long companionship in the Baker Street rooms had left us on those easy terms of intimacy when much may be said without offence. And yet I acknowledged that I was nettled at his remark.

“I may be very obtuse,” said I, “but I confess that I am unable to see how you have managed to know that I was... I was...”

“Asked to help in the Edinburgh University Bazaar...”

“Precisely. The letter has only just come to hand, and I have not spoken to you since.”

“In spite of that,” said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and putting his finger tips together, “I would even venture to suggest that the object of the bazaar is to enlarge the University cricket field.”

I looked at him in such bewilderment that he vibrated with silent laughter.

“The fact is, my dear Watson, that you are an excellent subject,” said he. “You are never blasé. You respond instantly to any external stimulus. Your mental processes may be slow but they are never obscure, and I found during breakfast that you were easier reading than the leader in the Times in front of me.”

“I should be glad to know how your arrived at your conclusions,” said I.

“I fear that my good nature in giving explanations has seriously compromised my reputation,” said Holmes. “But in this case the train of reasoning is based upon such obvious facts that no credit can be claimed for it. You entered the room with a thoughtful expression, the expression of a man who is debating some point in his mind. In your hand you held a solitary letter. Now last night you retired in the best of spirits, so it was clear that it was this letter in your hand which had caused the change in you.”

“This is obvious.”

“It is all obvious when it is explained to you. I naturally asked myself what the letter could contain which might have this effect upon you. As you walked you held the flap side of the envelope towards me, and I saw upon it the same shield-shaped device which I have observed upon your old college cricket cap. It was clear, then, that the request came from Edinburgh University - or from some club connected with the University. When you reached the table you laid down the letter beside your plate with the address uppermost, and you walked over to look at the framed photograph upon the left of the mantelpiece.”

It amazed me to see the accuracy with which he had observed my movements. “What next?” I asked.

“I began by glancing at the address, and I could tell, even at the distance of six feet, that it was an unofficial communication. This I gathered from the use of the word ‘Doctor’ upon the address, to which, as a Bachelor of Medicine, you have no legal claim. I knew that University officials are pedantic in their correct use of titles, and I was thus enabled to say with certainty that your letter was unofficial. When on your return to the table you turned over your letter and allowed me to perceive that the enclosure was a printed one, the idea of a bazaar first occurred to me. I had already weighed the possibility of its being a political communication, but this seemed improbable in the present stagnant conditions of politics.

“When you returned to the table your face still retained its expression and it was evident that your examination of the photograph had not changed the current of your thoughts. In that case it must itself bear upon the subject in question. I turned my attention to the photograph, therefore, and saw at once that it consisted of yourself as a member of the Edinburgh University Eleven, with the pavillion and cricket field in the background. My small experience of cricket clubs has taught me that next to churches and cavalry ensigns they are the most debt-laden things upon earth. When upon your return to the table I saw you take out your pencil and draw lines upon the envelope, I was convinced that your were endeavoring to realise some projected improvement which was to be brought about by a bazaar. Your face still showed some indecision, so that I was able to break in upon you with my advice that you should assist in so good an object."

I could not help smiling at the extreme simplicity of his explanation.

"Of course, it was as easy as possible," said I.

My remark appeared to nettle him.

"I may add," said he, "that the particular help which you have been asked to give was that you should write in their album, and that you have already made up your mind that the present incident will be the subject of your article."

"But how - -!" I cried.

"It is as easy as possible," said he, "and I leave its solution to your own ingenuity. In the meantime," he added, rasing his paper, "you will excuse me if I return to this very interesting article upon the trees of Cremona, and the exact reasons for the pre-eminence in the manufacture of violins. It is one of those small outlying problems to which I am sometimes tempted to direct my attention."

HOW WATSON LEARNT THE TRICK

This short story was written for Queen Mary, wife of King George V. When the Queen’s Dolls’ House was created in 1923, as a demonstration of British ingenuity and craftsmanship as well as a tribute to the beloved queen, many prominent authors created miniature books to be part of its library. This story, handwritten in a volume the size of a postage stamp, was Doyle’s contribution. It was subsequently published in The Book of the Queen’s Dolls’ House.

HOW WATSON LEARNT THE TRICK

Watson had been watching his companion intently ever since he had sat down to the breakfast table. Holmes happened to look up and catch his eye.

“Well, Watson, what are you thinking about?” he asked.

“About you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, Holmes. I was thinking how superficial are these tricks of yours, and how wonderful it is that the public should continue to show interest in them.”

“I quite agree,” said Holmes. “In fact, I have a recollection that I have myself made a similar remark.”

“Your methods,” said Watson severely, “are really easily acquired.”

“No doubt,” Holmes answered with a smile. “Perhaps you will yourself give an example of this method of reasoning.”

“With pleasure,” said Watson. “I am able to say that you were greatly preoccupied when you got up this morning.”

“Excellent!” said Holmes. “How could you possibly know that?”

“Because you are usually a very tidy man and yet you have forgotten to shave.”

“Dear me! How very clever!” said Holmes. “I had no idea, Watson, that you were so apt a pupil. Has your eagle eye detected anything more?”

“Yes, Holmes. You have a client named Barlow, and you have not been successful with his case.”

“Dear me, how could you know that?”

“I saw the name outside his envelope. When you opened it you gave a groan and thrust it into your pocket with a frown on your face.”

“Admirable! You are indeed observant. Any other points?”

“I fear, Holmes, that you have taken to financial speculation.”

“How *could* you tell that, Watson?”

“You opened the paper, turned to the financial page, and gave a loud exclamation of interest.”

“Well, that is very clever of you, Watson. Any more?”

“Yes, Holmes, you have put on your black coat, instead of your dressing gown, which proves that your are expecting some important visitor at once."

"Anything more?"

"I have no doubt that I could find other points, Holmes, but I only give you these few, in order to show you that there are other people in the world who can be as clever as you."

"And some not so clever," said Holmes. "I admit that they are few, but I am afraid, my dear Watson, that I must count you among them."

"What do you mean, Holmes?"

"Well, my dear fellow, I fear your deductions have not been so happy as I should have wished."

"You mean that I was mistaken."

"Just a little that way, I fear. Let us take the points in their order: I did not shave because I have sent my razor to be sharpened. I put on my coat because I have, worse luck, an early meeting with my dentist. His name is Barlow, and the letter was to confirm the appointment. The cricket page is beside the financial one, and I turned to it to find if Surrey was holding its own against Kent. But go on, Watson, go on! It 's a very superficial trick, and no doubt you will soon acquire it."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TALL MAN

When searching through Conan Doyle’s papers, a biographer of his came across an unfinished short story, with a plan and quotes. Various authors have attempted to complete the story and put it alongside the canon. Some are very close to Doyle’s plot, others including variations.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TALL MAN

A girl calls on Sherlock Holmes in great distress. A murder has been committed in her village - her uncle has been found shot in his bedroom, apparently through the open window. Her lover has been arrested. He is suspected on several grounds:

(1) He has had a violent quarrel with the old man, who has threatened to alter his will, which is in the girl's favour, if she ever speaks to her lover again.

(2) A revolver has been found in his house, with his initials scratched on the butt and one chamber discharged. The bullet found in the dead man's body fits this revolver.

(3) He possesses a light ladder, the only one in the village, and there are marks of the foot of such a ladder on the soil below the bedroom window, while similar soil (fresh) has been found on the feet of the ladder.

His only reply is that he never possessed a revolver, and that it has been discovered in a drawer of the hatstand in his hall, where it would be easy for anyone to place it. As for the mould on the ladder (which he has not used for a month) he has no explanation whatever.

Notwithstanding these damning proofs, however, the girl persists in believing her lover to be perfectly innocent, while she suspects another man, who has also been making love to her, though she has no evidence whatever against him, except that she feels by instinct that he is a villain who would stick at nothing.

Sherlock and Watson go down to the village and inspect the spot, together with the detective in charge of the case. The marks of the ladder attract Holmes's special attention. He ponders - looks about him - inquires if there is any place where anything bulky could be concealed. There is - a disused well, which has not been searched because apparently nothing is missing. Sherlock, however, insists on the well being explored. A village boy consents to be lowered into it, with a candle. Before he goes down Holmes whispers something in his ear - he appears surpised. The boy is lowered and, on his signal, pulled up again. He brings to the surface *a pair of stilts!*

"Good Lord!" cries the detective, "who on earth could have expected this?" - "I did," replies Holmes. - "But, why?" - "Because the marks on the garden soil were made by two perpendicular poles - the feet of a ladder, which is on the slope, would have made depressions slanting towards the wall."

(N.B. The soil was a strip beside a gravel path on which the stilts left no impression.)

This discovery lessened the weight of the evidence of the ladder, though the other evidence remained.

The next step was to trace the user of the stilts, if possible. But he had been to wary, and after two days nothing had been discovered. At the inquest the young man was found guilty of murder. But, Holmes is convinced of his innocence. In these circumstances, and as a last hope, he resolves on a sensational stratagem.

He goes up to London, and, returning on the evening of the day when the old man is buried, he and Watson and the detective go to the cottage of the man whom the girl suspects, taking with them a man whom Holmes has brought from London, who has a disguise which makes him the living image of the murdered man, wizened body, grey shriveled face, skullcap and all. They have also with them the pair of stilts. On reaching the cottage, the disguised man mounts the stilts and stalks up the path towards the man's open bedroom window, at the same time crying out his name in a ghastly sepulchral voice. The man, who is already half mad with guilty terrors, rushes to the window and beholds in the moonlight the terrific spectacle of his victim stalking towards him. He reels back with a scream as the apparition, advancing to the window, calls in the same unearthly voice - "as you came for me, I have come for you!" When the party rush upstairs into his room he darts to them, clinging to them, gasping, and, pointing to the window, where the dead man's face is glaring in, shrieks out, "Save me! My God! He has come for me as I came for him."

Collapsing after this dramatic scene, he makes a full confession. He has marked the revolver, and concealed it where it was found - he has also smeared the ladder-foot with soil from the old man's garden. His object was to put his rival out of the way, in the hope of gaining possession of the girl and her money.

THE CASE-BOOK OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

This is the final collection of Sherlock Holmes stories. Originally published in 1927, it contains stories published between 1921 and 1927.

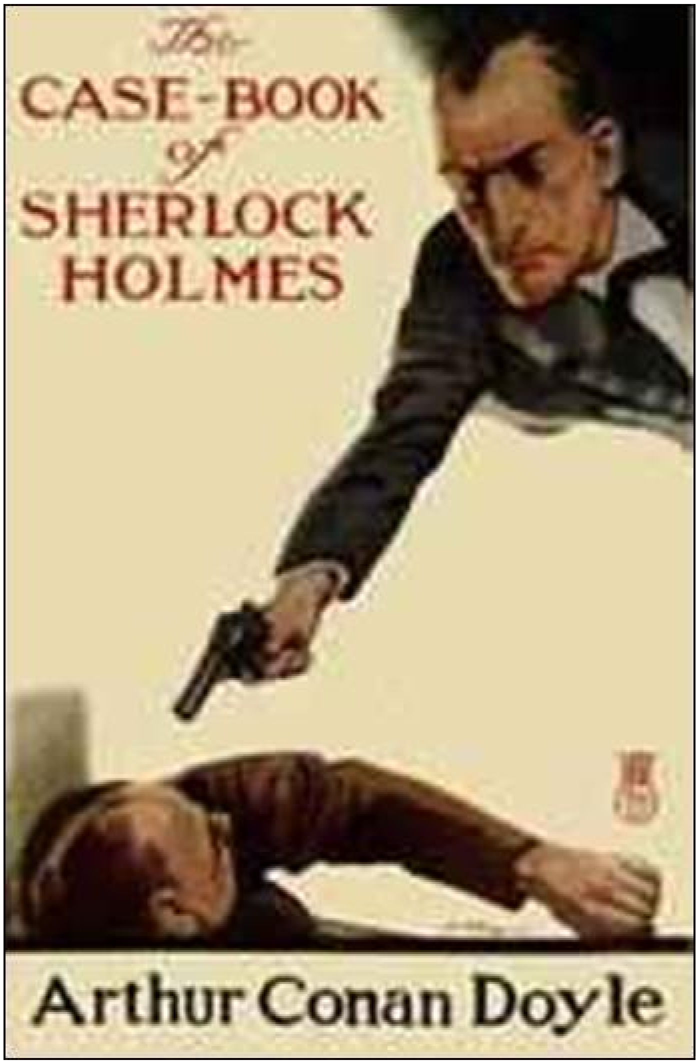
The
CASE-BOOK
of
SHERLOCK
HOLMES
Arthur Conan Doyle

An early edition of the collection

THE CASE-BOOK OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

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PREFACE

I fear that Mr. Sherlock Holmes may become like one of those popular tenors who, having outlived their time, are still tempted to make repeated farewell bows to their indulgent audiences. This must cease and he must go the way of all flesh, material or imaginary. One likes to think that there is some fantastic limbo for the children of imagination, some strange, impossible place where the beaux of Fielding may still make love to the belles of Richardson, where Scott’s heroes still may strut, Dickens’s delightful Cockneys still raise a laugh, and Thackeray’s worldlings continue to carry on their reprehensible careers. Perhaps in some humble corner of such a Valhalla, Sherlock and his Watson may for a time find a place, while some more astute sleuth with some even less astute comrade may fill the stage which they have vacated.

His career has been a long one — though it is possible to exaggerate it; decrepit gentlemen who approach me and declare that his adventures formed the reading of their boyhood do not meet the response from me which they seem to expect. One is not anxious to have one’s personal dates handled so unkindly. As a matter of cold fact, Holmes made his debut in A Study in Scarlet and in The Sign of Four, two small booklets which appeared between 1887 and 1889. It was in 1891 that “A Scandal in Bohemia,” the first of the long series of short stories, appeared in The Strand Magazine. The public seemed appreciative and desirous of more, so that from that date, thirty-nine years ago, they have been produced in a broken series which now contains no fewer than fifty-six stories, republished in The Adventures, The Memoirs, The Return, and His Last Bow. and there remain these twelve published during the last few years which are here produced under the title of The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes. He began his adventures in the very heart of the later Victorian era, carried it through the all-too-short reign of Edward, and has managed to hold his own little niche even in these feverish days. Thus it would be true to say that those who first read of him, as young men, have lived to see their own grown-up children following the same adventures in the same magazine. It is a striking example of the patience and loyalty of the British public.

I had fully determined at the conclusion of The Memoirs to bring Holmes to an end, as I felt that my literary energies should not be directed too much into one channel. That pale, clear-cut face and loose-limbed figure were taking up an undue share of my imagination. I did the deed, but fortunately no coroner had pronounced upon the remains, and so, after a long interval, it was not difficult for me to respond to the flattering demand and to explain my rash act away. I have never regretted it, for I have not in actual practice found that these lighter sketches have prevented me from exploring and finding my limitations in such varied branches of literature as history, poetry, historical novels, psychic research, and the drama. Had Holmes never existed I could not have done more, though he may perhaps have stood a little in the way of the recognition of my more serious literary work.

And so, reader, farewell to Sherlock Holmes! I thank you for your past constancy, and can but hope that some return has been made in the shape of that distraction from the worries of life and stimulating change of thought which can only be found in the fairy kingdom of romance.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

ADVENTURE I. THE ADVENTURE OF THE MAZARIN STONE

It was pleasant to Dr. Watson to find himself once more in the untidy room of the first floor in Baker Street which had been the starting-point of so many remarkable adventures. He looked round him at the scientific charts upon the wall, the acid-charred bench of chemicals, the violin-case leaning in the corner, the coal-scuttle, which contained of old the pipes and tobacco. Finally, his eyes came round to the fresh and smiling face of Billy, the young but very wise and tactful page, who had helped a little to fill up the gap of loneliness and isolation which surrounded the saturnine figure of the great detective.

"It all seems very unchanged, Billy. You don't change, either. I hope the same can be said of him?"

Billy glanced with some solicitude at the closed door of the bedroom.

"I think he's in bed and asleep," he said.

It was seven in the evening of a lovely summer's day, but Dr. Watson was sufficiently familiar with the irregularity of his old friend's hours to feel no surprise at the idea.

"That means a case, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, he is very hard at it just now. I'm frightened for his health. He gets paler and thinner, and he eats nothing. 'When will you be pleased to dine, Mr. Holmes?' Mrs. Hudson asked. 'Seven-thirty, the day after to-morrow,' said he. You know his way when he is keen on a case."

"Yes, Billy, I know."

"He's following someone. Yesterday he was out as a workman looking for a job. To-day he was an old woman. Fairly took me in, he did, and I ought to know his ways by now." Billy pointed with a grin to a very baggy parasol which leaned against the sofa. "That's part of the old woman's outfit," he said.

"But what is it all about, Billy?"

Billy sank his voice, as one who discusses great secrets of State. "I don't mind telling you, sir, but it should go no farther. It's this case of the Crown diamond."

“What — the hundred-thousand-pound burglary?”

“Yes, sir. They must get it back, sir. Why, we had the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both sitting on that very sofa. Mr. Holmes was very nice to them. He soon put them at their ease and promised he would do all he could. Then there is Lord Cantlemere—”

“Ah!”

“Yes, sir, you know what that means. He’s a stiff’un, sir, if I may say so. I can get along with the Prime Minister, and I’ve nothing against the Home Secretary, who seemed a civil, obliging sort of man, but I can’t stand his Lordship. Neither can Mr. Holmes, sir. You see, he don’t believe in Mr. Holmes and he was against employing him. He’d rather he failed.”

“And Mr. Holmes knows it?”

“Mr. Holmes always knows whatever there is to know.”

“Well, we’ll hope he won’t fail and that Lord Cantlemere will be confounded. But I say, Billy, what is that curtain for across the window?”

“Mr. Holmes had it put up there three days ago. We’ve got something funny behind it.”

Billy advanced and drew away the drapery which screened the alcove of the bow window.

Dr. Watson could not restrain a cry of amazement. There was a facsimile of his old friend, dressing-gown and all, the face turned three-quarters towards the window and downward, as though reading an invisible book, while the body was sunk deep in an armchair. Billy detached the head and held it in the air.

“We put it at different angles, so that it may seem more lifelike. I wouldn’t dare touch it if the blind were not down. But when it’s up you can see this from across the way.”

“We used something of the sort once before.”

“Before my time,” said Billy. He drew the window curtains apart and looked out into the street. “There are folk who watch us from over yonder. I can see a fellow now at the window. Have a look for yourself.”

Watson had taken a step forward when the bedroom door opened, and the long, thin form of Holmes emerged, his face pale and drawn, but his step and bearing as active as ever. With a single spring he was at the window, and had drawn the blind once more.

“That will do, Billy,” said he. “You were in danger of your life then, my boy, and I can’t do without you just yet. Well, Watson, it is good to see you in your old quarters once again. You come at a critical moment."

"So I gather."

"You can go, Billy. That boy is a problem, Watson. How far am I justified in allowing him to be in danger?"

"Danger of what, Holmes?"

"Of sudden death. I'm expecting something this evening."

"Expecting what?"

"To be murdered, Watson."

"No, no, you are joking, Holmes!"

"Even my limited sense of humour could evolve a better joke than that. But we may be comfortable in the meantime, may we not? Is alcohol permitted? The gasogene and cigars are in the old place. Let me see you once more in the customary armchair. You have not, I hope, learned to despise my pipe and my lamentable tobacco? It has to take the place of food these days."

"But why not eat?"

"Because the faculties become refined when you starve them. Why, surely, as a doctor, my dear Watson, you must admit that what your digestion gains in the way of blood supply is so much lost to the brain. I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix. Therefore, it is the brain I must consider."

"But this danger, Holmes?"

"Ah. yes, in case it should come off, it would perhaps be as well that you should burden your memory with the name and address of the murderer. You can give it to Scotland Yard, with my love and a parting blessing. Sylvius is the name — Count Negretto Sylvius. Write it down, man, write it down! 136 Moorside Gardens, N. W. Got it?"

Watson's honest face was twitching with anxiety. He knew only too well the immense risks taken by Holmes and was well aware that what he said was more likely to be under-statement than exaggeration. Watson was always the man of action, and he rose to the occasion.

"Count me in, Holmes. I have nothing to do for a day or two."

"Your morals don't improve, Watson. You have added fibbing to your other vices. You bear every sign of the busy medical man, with calls on him every hour."

"Not such important ones. But can't you have this fellow arrested?"

"Yes, Watson, I could. That's what worries him so."

“But why don’t you?”

“Because I don’t know where the diamond is.”

“Ah! Billy told me — the missing Crown jewel!”

“Yes, the great yellow Mazarin stone. I’ve cast my net and I have my fish. But I have not got the stone. What is the use of taking them? We can make the world a better place by laying them by the heels. But that is not what I am out for. It’s the stone I want.”

“And is this Count Sylvius one of your fish?”

“Yes, and he’s a shark. He bites. The other is Sam Merton the boxer. Not a bad fellow, Sam, but the Count has used him. Sam’s not a shark. He is a great big silly bull-headed gudgeon. But he is flopping about in my net all the same.”

“Where is this Count Sylvius?”

“I’ve been at his very elbow all the morning. You’ve seen me as an old lady, Watson. I was never more convincing. He actually picked up my parasol for me once. ‘By your leave, madame,’ said he — half-ltalian, you know, and with the Southern graces of manner when in the mood, but a devil incarnate in the other mood. Life is full of whimsical happenings, Watson.”

“It might have been tragedy.”

“Well, perhaps it might. I followed him to old Straubenzee’s workshop in the Minories. Straubenzee made the air-gun — a very pretty bit of work, as I understand, and I rather fancy it is in the opposite window at the present moment. Have you seen the dummy? Of course, Billy showed it to you. Well, it may get a bullet through its beautiful head at any moment. Ah, Billy, what is it?”

The boy had reappeared in the room with a card upon a tray. Holmes glanced at it with raised eyebrows and an amused smile.

“The man himself. I had hardly expected this. Grasp the nettle, Watson! A man of nerve. Possibly you have heard of his reputation as a shooter of big game. It would indeed be a triumphant ending to his excellent sporting record if he added me to his bag. This is a proof that he feels my toe very close behind his heel.”

“Send for the police.”

“I probably shall. But not just yet. Would you glance carefully out of the window, Watson, and see if anyone is hanging about in the street?”

Watson looked warily round the edge of the curtain.

“Yes, there is one rough fellow near the door.”

“That will be Sam Merton — the faithful but rather fatuous Sam. Where is this gentleman, Billy?”

“In the waiting-room, sir.”

“Show him up when I ring.”

“Yes, sir.”

“If I am not in the room, show him in all the same.”

“Yes, sir.”

Watson waited until the door was closed, and then he turned earnestly to his companion.

“Look here, Holmes, this is simply impossible. This is a desperate man, who sticks at nothing. He may have come to murder you.”

“I should not be surprised.”

“I insist upon staying with you.”

“You would be horribly in the way.”

“In his way?”

“No, my dear fellow — in my way.”

“Well, I can’t possibly leave you.”

“Yes, you can, Watson. And you will, for you have never failed to play the game. I am sure you will play it to the end. This man has come for his own purpose, but he may stay for mine.”

Holmes took out his notebook and scribbled a few lines. “Take a cab to Scotland Yard and give this to Youghal of the C. I. D. Come back with the police. The fellow’s arrest will follow.”

“I’ll do that with joy.

“Before you return I may have just time enough to find out where the stone is.” He touched the bell. “I think we will go out through the bedroom. This second exit is exceedingly useful. I rather want to see my shark without his seeing me, and I have, as you will remember, my own way of doing it.”

It was, therefore, an empty room into which Billy, a minute later, ushered Count Sylvius. The famous game-shot, sportsman, and man-about-town was a big, swarthy fellow, with a formidable dark moustache shading a cruel, thin-lipped mouth, and surmounted by a long, curved nose like the beak of an eagle. He was well dressed, but his brilliant necktie, shining pin, and glittering rings were flamboyant in their effect. As the door closed behind him he looked round him with fierce, startled eyes, like one who suspects a trap at every turn. Then he gave a violent start as he saw the impassive head and the collar of the dressing-gown which projected above the armchair in the window. At first his expression was one of pure amazement. Then the light of a horrible hope gleamed in his dark, murderous eyes. He took one more glance round to see that there were no witnesses, and then, on tiptoe, his thick stick half raised, he approached the silent figure. He was crouching for his final spring and blow when a cool, sardonic voice greeted him from the open bedroom door:

“Don’t break it, Count! Don’t break it!”

The assassin staggered back, amazement in his convulsed face. For an instant he half raised his loaded cane once more, as if he would turn his violence from the effigy to the original; but there was something in that steady gray eye and mocking smile which caused his hand to sink to his side.

“It’s a pretty little thing,” said Holmes, advancing towards the image. “Tavernier, the French modeller, made it. He is as good at waxworks as your friend Straubenzee is at air-guns.”

“Air-guns, sir! What do you mean?”

“Put your hat and stick on the side-table. Thank you! Pray take a seat. Would you care to put your revolver out also? Oh, very good, if you prefer to sit upon it. Your visit is really most opportune, for I wanted badly to have a few minutes’ chat with you.”

The Count scowled, with heavy, threatening eyebrows.

“I, too, wished to have some words with you, Holmes. That is why I am here. I won’t deny that I intended to assault you just now.”

Holmes swung his leg on the edge of the table.

“I rather gathered that you had some idea of the sort in your head,” said he. “But why these personal attentions?”

“Because you have gone out of your way to annoy me. Because you have put your creatures upon my track.”

“My creatures! I assure you no!”

“Nonsense! I have had them followed. Two can play at that game, Holmes.”

“It is a small point, Count Sylvius, but perhaps you would kindly give me my prefix when you address me. You can understand that, with my routine of work, I should find myself on familiar terms with half the rogues’ gallery, and you will agree that exceptions are invidious.”

"Well, Mr. Holmes, then."

"Excellent! But I assure you you are mistaken about my alleged agents."

Count Sylvius laughed contemptuously.

"Other people can observe as well as you. Yesterday there was an old sporting man. To-day it was an elderly woman. They held me in view all day."

"Really, sir, you compliment me. Old Baron Dowson said the night before he was hanged that in my case what the law had gained the stage had lost. And now you give my little impersonations your kindly praise?"

"It was you — you yourself?"

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "You can see in the corner the parasol which you so politely handed to me in the Minories before you began to suspect."

"If I had known, you might never—"

"Have seen this humble home again. I was well aware of it. We all have neglected opportunities to deplore. As it happens, you did not know, so here we are!"

The Count's knotted brows gathered more heavily over his menacing eyes. "What you say only makes the matter worse. It was not your agents but your play-acting, busybody self! You admit that you have dogged me. Why?"

"Come now, Count. You used to shoot lions in Algeria."

"Well?"

"But why?"

"Why? The sport — the excitement — the danger!"

"And, no doubt, to free the country from a pest?"

"Exactly!"

"My reasons in a nutshell!"

The Count sprang to his feet, and his hand involuntarily moved back to his hip-pocket.

"Sit down, sir, sit down! There was another, more practical, reason. I want that yellow diamond!"

Count Sylvius lay back in his chair with an evil smile.

"Upon my word!" said he.

"You knew that I was after you for that. The real reason why you are here to-night is to find out how much I know about the matter and how far my removal is absolutely essential. Well, I should say that, from your point of view, it is absolutely essential, for I know all about it, save only one thing, which you are about to tell me."

"Oh, indeed! And pray, what is this missing fact?"

"Where the Crown diamond now is."

The Count looked sharply at his companion. "Oh, you want to know that, do you? How the devil should I be able to lell you where it is?"

"You can, and you will."

"Indeed!"

"You can't bluff me, Count Sylvius." Holmes's eyes, as he gazed at him, contracted and lightened until they were like two menacing points of steel. "You are absolute plate-glass. I see to the very back of your mind."

"Then, of course, you see where the diamond is!"

Holmes clapped his hands with amusement, and then pointed a derisive finger. "Then you do know. You have admitted it!"

"I admit nothing."

"Now, Count, if you will be reasonable we can do business. If not, you will get hurt."

Count Sylvius threw up his eyes to the ceiling. "And you talk about bluff!" said he.

Holmes looked at him thoughtfully like a master chess-player who meditates his crowning move. Then he threw open the table drawer and drew out a squat notebook.

"Do you know what I keep in this book?"

"No, sir, I do not!"

"You!"

"Me!"

"Yes, sir, you! You are all here — every action of yor vile and dangerous life."

"Damn you, Holmes!" cried the Count with blazing eyes. "There are limits to my patience!"

"It's all here, Count. The real facts as to the death of old Mrs. Harold, who left you the Blymer estate, which you so rapidly gambled away."

"You are dreaming!"

"And the complete life history of Miss Minnie Warrender."

"Tut! You will make nothing of that!"

"Plenty more here, Count. Here is the robbery in the train de-luxe to the Riviera on February 13, 1892. Here is the forged check in the same year on the Credit Lyonnais."

"No, you're wrong there."

"Then I am right on the others! Now, Count, you are a card-player. When the other fellow has all the trumps, it saves time to throw down your hand."

"What has all this talk to do with the jewel of which you spoke?"

"Gently, Count. Restrain that eager mind! Let me get to the points in my own humdrum fashion. I have all this against you; but, above all, I have a clear case against both you and your fighting bully in the case of the Crown diamond."

"Indeed!"

"I have the cabman who took you to Whitehall and the cabman who brought you away. I have the commissionaire who saw you near the case. I have Ikey Sanders, who refused to cut it up for you. Ikey has peached, and the game is up."

The veins stood out on the Count's forehead. His dark, hairy hands were clenched in a convulsion of restrained emotion. He tried to speak, but the words would not shape themselves.

"That's the hand I play from," said Holmes. "I put it all upon the table. But one card is missing. It's the king of diamonds. I don't know where the stone is."

"You never shall know."

"No? Now, be reasonable, Count. Consider the situation. You are going to be locked up for twenty years. So is Sam Merton. What good are you going to get out of your diamond? None in the world. But if you hand it over — well, I'll compound a felony. We don't want you or Sam. We want the stone. Give that up, and so far as I am concerned you can go free so long as you behave yourself in the future. If you make another slip well, it will be the last. But this time my commission is to get the stone, not you."

"But if I refuse?"

"Why, then — alas! — it must be you and not the stone."

Billy had appeared in answer to a ring.

"I think, Count, that it would be as well to have your friend Sam at this conference. After all, his interests should be represented. Billy, you will see a large and ugly gentleman outside the front door. Ask him to come up."

"If he won't come, sir?"

"No violence, Billy. Don't be rough with him. If you tell him that Count Sylvius wants him he will certainly come."

“What are you going to do now?” asked the Count as Billy disappeared.

“My friend Watson was with me just now. I told him that I had a shark and a gudgeon in my net; now I am drawing the net and up they come together.”

The Count had risen from his chair, and his hand was behind his back. Holmes held something half protruding from the pocket of his dressing-gown.

“You won’t die in your bed, Holmes.”

“I have often had the same idea. Does it matter very much? After all, Count, your own exit is more likely to be perpendicular than horizontal. But these anticipations of the future are morbid. Why not give ourselves up to the unrestrained enjoyment of the present?”

A sudden wild-beast light sprang up in the dark, menacing eyes of the master criminal. Holmes’s figure seemed to grow taller as he grew tense and ready.

“It is no use your fingering your revolver, my friend,” he said in a quiet voice. “You know perfectly well that you dare not use it, even if I gave you time to draw it. Nasty, noisy things, revolvers, Count. Better stick to air-guns. Ah! I think I hear the fairy footstep of your estimable partner. Good day, Mr. Merton. Rather dull in the street, is it not?”

The prize-fighter, a heavily built young man with a stupid, obstinate, slab-sided face, stood awkwardly at the door, looking about him with a puzzled expression. Holmes’s debonair manner was a new experience, and though he vaguely felt that it was hostile, he did not know how to counter it. He turned to his more astute comrade for help.

“What’s the game now, Count? What’s this fellow want? What’s up?” His voice was deep and raucous.

The Count shrugged his shoulders, and it was Holmes who answered.

“If I may put it in a nutshell, Mr. Merton, I should say it was all up.”

The boxer still addressed his remarks to his associate.

“Is this cove trying to be funny, or what? I’m not in the funny mood myself.”

“No, I expect not,” said Holmes. “I think I can promise you that you will feel even less humorous as the evening advances. Now, look here, Count Sylvius. I’m a busy man and I can’t waste time. I’m going into that bedroom. Pray make yourselves quite at home in my absence. You can explain to your friend how the matter lies without the restraint of my presence. I shall try over the Hoffman ‘Barcarole’ upon my violin. In five minutes I shall return for your final answer. You quite grasp the alternative, do you not? Shall we take you, or shall we have the stone?”

Holmes withdrew, picking up his violin from the corner as he passed. A few moments later the long-drawn, wailing notes of that most haunting of tunes came faintly through the closed door of the bedroom.

“What is it, then?” asked Merton anxiously as his companion turned to him. “Does he know about the stone?”

“He knows a damned sight too much about it. I’m not sure that he doesn’t know all about it.”

“Good Lord!” The boxer’s sallow face turned a shade whiter.

“Ikey Sanders has split on us.”

“He has, has he? I’ll do him down a thick ‘un for that if I swing for it.”

“That won’t help us much. We’ve got to make up our minds what to do.”

“Half a mo’,” said the boxer, looking suspiciously at the bedroom door. “He’s a leary cove that wants watching. I suppose he’s not listening?”

“How can he be listening with that music going?”

“That’s right. Maybe somebody’s behind a curtain. Too many curtains in this room.” As he looked round he suddenly saw for the first time the effigy in the window, and stood staring and pointing, too amazed for words.

“Tut! it’s only a dummy,” said the Count.

“A fake, is it? Well, strike me! Madame Tussaud ain’t in it. It’s the living spit of him, gown and all. But them curtains Count!”

“Oh, confound the curtains! We are wasting our time, and there is none too much. He can lag us over this stone.”

“The deuce he can!”

“But he’ll let us slip if we only tell him where the swag is.”

“What! Give it up? Give up a hundred thousand quid?”

“It’s one or the other.”

Merton scratched his short-cropped pate.

“He’s alone in there. Let’s do him in. If his light were out we should have nothing to fear.”

The Count shook his head.

“He is armed and ready. If we shot him we could hardly get away in a place like this. Besides, it’s likely enough that the police know whatever evidence he has got. Hallo! What was that?”

There was a vague sound which seemed to come from the window. Both men sprang round, but all was quiet. Save for the one strange figure seated in the chair, the room was certainly empty.

"Something in the street," said Merton. "Now look here, guv'nor, you've got the brains. Surely you can think a way out of it. If slugging is no use then it's up to you."

"I've fooled better men than he," the Count answered. "The stone is here in my secret pocket. I take no chances leaving it about. It can be out of England to-night and cut into four pieces in Amsterdam before Sunday. He knows nothing of Van Seddar."

"I thought Van Seddar was going next week."

"He was. But now he must get off by the next boat. One or other of us must slip round with the stone to Lime Street and tell him."

"But the false bottom ain't ready."

"Well, he must take it as it is and chance it. There's not a moment to lose." Again, with the sense of danger which becomes an instinct with the sportsman, he paused and looked hard at the window. Yes, it was surely from the street that the faint sound had come.

"As to Holmes," he continued, "we can fool him easily enough. You see, the damned fool won't arrest us if he can get the stone. Well, we'll promise him the stone. We'll put him on the wrong track about it, and before he finds that it is the wrong track it will be in Holland and we out of the country."

"That sounds good to me!" cried Sam Merton with a grin.

"You go on and tell the Dutchman to get a move on him. I'll see this sucker and fill him up with a bogus confession. I'll tell him that the stone is in Liverpool. Confound that whining music; it gets on my nerves! By the time he finds it isn't in Liverpool it will be in quarters and we on the blue water. Come back here, out of a line with that keyhole. Here is the stone."

"I wonder you dare carry it."

"Where could I have it safer? If we could take it out of Whitehall someone else could surely take it out of my lodgings."

"Let's have a look at it."

Count Sylvius cast a somewhat unflattering glance at his associate and disregarded the unwashed hand which was extended towards him.

"What — d'ye think I'm going to snatch it off you? See here, mister, I'm getting a bit tired of your ways."

“Well, well, no offence, Sam. We can’t afford to quarrel. Come over to the window if you want to see the beauty properly. Now hold it to the light! Here!”

“Thank you!”

With a single spring Holmes had leaped from the dummy’s chair and had grasped the precious jewel. He held it now in one hand, while his other pointed a revolver at the Count’s head. The two villains staggered back in utter amazement. Before they had recovered Holmes had pressed the electric bell.

“No violence, gentlemen — no violence, I beg of you! Consider the furniture! It must be very clear to you that your position is an impossible one. The police are waiting below.”

The Count’s bewilderment overmastered his rage and fear.

“But how the deuce — ?” he gasped.

“Your surprise is very natural. You are not aware that a second door from my bedroom leads behind that curtain. I fancied that you must have heard me when I displaced the figure, but luck was on my side. It gave me a chance of listening to your racy conversation which would have been painfully constrained had you been aware of my presence.”

The Count gave a gesture of resignation.

“We give you best, Holmes. I believe you are the devil himself.”

“Not far from him, at any rate,” Holmes answered with a polite smile.

Sam Merton’s slow intellect had only gradually appreciated the situation. Now, as the sound of heavy steps came from the stairs outside, he broke silence at last.

“A fair cop!” said he. “But, I say, what about that bloomin’ fiddle! I hear it yet.”

“Tut, tut!” Holmes answered. “You are perfectly right. Let it play! These modern gramophones are a remarkable invention.”

There was an inrush of police, the handcuffs clicked and the criminals were led to the waiting cab. Watson lingered with Holmes, congratulating him upon this fresh leaf added to his laurels. Once more their conversation was interrupted by the imperturbable Billy with his card-tray.

“Lord Cantlemere sir.”

“Show him up, Billy. This is the eminent peer who represents the very highest interests,” said Holmes. “He is an excellent and loyal person, but rather of the old regime. Shall we make him unbend? Dare we venture upon a slight liberty? He knows, we may conjecture, nothing of what has occurred.”

The door opened to admit a thin, austere figure with a hatchet face and drooping mid-Victorian whiskers of a glossy blackness which hardly corresponded with the rounded shoulders and feeble gait. Holmes advanced affably, and shook an unresponsive hand.

“How do you do, Lord Cantlemere? It is chilly for the time of year, but rather warm indoors. May I take your overcoat?”

“No, I thank you; I will not take it off.”

Holmes laid his hand insistently upon the sleeve.

“Pray allow me! My friend Dr. Watson would assure you that these changes of temperature are most insidious.”

His Lordship shook himself free with some impatience.

“I am quite comfortable, sir. I have no need to stay. I have simply looked in to know how your self-appointed task was progressing.”

“It is difficult — very difficult.”

“I feared that you would find it so.”

There was a distinct sneer in the old courtier’s words and manner.

“Every man finds his limitations, Mr. Holmes, but at least it cures us of the weakness of self-satisfaction.”

“Yes, sir, I have been much perplexed.”

“No doubt.”

“Especially upon one point. Possibly you could help me upon

“You apply for my advice rather late in the day. I thought that you had your own all-sufficient methods. Still, I am ready to help you.”

“You see, Lord Cantlemere, we can no doubt frame a case against the actual thieves.”

“When you have caught them.”

“Exactly. But the question is — how shall we proceed against the receiver?”

“Is this not rather premature?”

“It is as well to have our plans ready. Now, what would you regard as final evidence against the receiver?”

“The actual possession of the stone.”

“You would arrest him upon that?”

“Most undoubtedly.”

Holmes seldom laughed, but he got as near it as his old friend Watson could remember.

“In that case, my dear sir, I shall be under the painful necessity of advising your arrest.”

Lord Cantlemere was very angry. Some of the ancient fires flickered up into his sallow cheeks.

“You take a great liberty, Mr. Holmes. In fifty years of official life I cannot recall such a case. I am a busy man, sir engaged upon important affairs, and I have no time or taste for foolish jokes. I may tell you frankly, sir, that I have never been a believer in your powers, and that I have always been of the opinion that the matter was far safer in the hands of the regular police force. Your conduct confirms all my conclusions. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-evening.”

Holmes had swiftly changed his position and was between the peer and the door.

“One moment, sir,” said he. “To actually go off with the Mazarin stone would be a more serious offence than to be found in temporary possession of it.”

“Sir, this is intolerable! Let me pass.”

“Put your hand in the right-hand pocket of your overcoat.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Come — come, do what I ask.”

An instant later the amazed peer was standing, blinking and stammering, with the great yellow stone on his shaking palm.

“What! What! How is this, Mr. Holmes?”

“Too bad, Lord Cantlemere, too bad!” cried Holmes. “My old friend here will tell you that I have an impish habit of practical joking. Also that I can never resist a dramatic situation. I took the liberty — the very great liberty, I admit — of putting the stone into your pocket at the beginning of our interview.”

The old peer stared from the stone to the smiling face before him.

“Sir, I am bewildered. But — yes — it is indeed the Mazarin stone. We are greatly your debtors, Mr. Holmes. Your sense of humour may, as you admit, be somewhat perverted, and its exhibition remarkably untimely, but at least I withdraw any reflection I have made upon your amazing professional powers. But how—”

“The case is but half finished; the details can wait. No doubt, Lord Cantlemere, your pleasure in telling of this successful result in the exalted circle to which you return will be some small atonement for my practical joke. Billy, you will show his Lordship out, and tell Mrs. Hudson that I should be glad if she would send up dinner for two as soon as possible.”

ADVENTURE II. THE PROBLEM OF THOR BRIDGE

Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatchbox with my name, John H. Watson, M. D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming. A problem without a solution may interest the student, but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader. Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. No less remarkable is that of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science. Apart from these unfathomed cases, there are some which involve the secrets of private families to an extent which would mean consternation in many exalted quarters if it were thought possible that they might find their way into print. I need not say that such a breach of confidence is unthinkable, and that these records will be separated and destroyed now that my friend has time to turn his energies to the matter. There remain a considerable residue of cases of greater or less interest which I might have edited before had I not feared to give the public a surfeit which might react upon the reputation of the man whom above all others I revere. In some I was myself concerned and can speak as an eye-witness, while in others I was either not present or played so small a part that they could only be told as by a third person. The following narrative is drawn from my own experience.

It was a wild morning in October, and I observed as I was dressing how the last remaining leaves were being whirled from the solitary plane tree which graces the yard behind our house. I descended to breakfast prepared to find my companion in depressed spirits, for, like all great artists, he was easily impressed by his surroundings. On the contrary, I found that he had nearly finished his meal, and that his mood was particularly bright and joyous, with that somewhat sinister cheerfulness which was characteristic of his lighter moments.

"You have a case, Holmes?" I remarked.

"The faculty of deduction is certainly contagious, Watson," he answered. "It has enabled you to probe my secret. Yes, I have a case. After a month of trivialities and stagnation the wheels move once more."

"Might I share it?"

"There is little to share, but we may discuss it when you have consumed the two hard-boiled eggs with which our new cook has favoured us. Their condition may not be unconnected with the copy of the Family Herald which I observed yesterday upon the hall-table. Even so trivial a matter as cooking an egg demands an attention which is conscious of the passage of time and incompatible with the love romance in that excellent periodical."

A quarter of an hour later the table had been cleared and we were face to face. He had drawn a letter from his pocket.

"You have heard of Neil Gibson, the Gold King?" he said.

"You mean the American Senator?"

"Well, he was once Senator for some Western state, but is better known as the greatest gold-mining magnate in the world."

"Yes, I know of him. He has surely lived in England for some time. His name is very familiar."

"Yes, he bought a considerable estate in Hampshire some five years ago. Possibly you have already heard of the tragic end of his wife?"

"Of course. I remember it now. That is why the name is familiar. But I really know nothing of the details."

Holmes waved his hand towards some papers on a chair. "I had no idea that the case was coming my way or I should have had my extracts ready," said he. "The fact is that the problem, though exceedingly sensational, appeared to present no difficulty. The interesting personality of the accused does not obscure the clearness of the evidence. That was the view taken by the coroner's jury and also in the police-court proceedings. It is now referred to the Assizes at Winchester. I fear it is a thankless business. I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them. Unless some entirely new and unexpected ones come to light I do not see what my client can hope for.”

“Your client?”

“Ah, I forgot I had not told you. I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backward. You had best read this first.”

The letter which he handed to me, written in a bold, masterful hand, ran as follows:

CLARIDGE’S HOTEL,

October 3rd.

DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:

I can’t see the best woman God ever made go to her death without doing all that is possible to save her. I can’t explain things — I can’t even try to explain them, but I know beyond all doubt that Miss Dunbar is innocent. You know the facts — who doesn’t? It has been the gossip of the country. And never a voice raised for her! It’s the damned injustice of it all that makes me crazy. That woman has a heart that wouldn’t let her kill a fly. Well, I’ll come at eleven to-morrow and see if you can get some ray of light in the dark. Maybe I have a clue and don’t know it. Anyhow, all I know and all I have and all I am are for your use if only you can save her. If ever in your life you showed your powers, put them now into this case.

Yours faithfully,

J. NEIL GIBSON.

“There you have it,” said Sherlock Holmes, knocking out the ashes of his after-breakfast pipe and slowly refilling it. “That is the gentleman I await. As to the story, you have hardly time to master all these papers, so I must give it to you in a nutshell if you are to take an intelligent interest in the proceedings. This man is the greatest financial power in the world, and a man, as I understand, of most violent and formidable character. He married a wife, the victim of this tragedy, of whom I know nothing save that she was past her prime, which was the more unfortunate as a very attractive governess superintended the education of two young children. These are the three people concerned, and the scene is a grand old manor house, the centre of a historical English state. Then as to the tragedy. The wife was found in the grounds nearly half a mile from the house, late at night, clad in her dinner dress, with a shawl over her shoulders and a revolver bullet through her brain. No weapon was found near her and there was no local clue as to the murder. No weapon near her, Watson — mark that! The crime seems to have been committed late in the evening, and the body was found by a gamekeeper about eleven o'clock, when it was examined by the police and by a doctor before being carried up to the house. Is this too condensed, or can you follow it clearly?"

"It is all very clear. But why suspect the governess?"

"Well, in the first place there is some very direct evidence. A revolver with one discharged chamber and a calibre which corresponded with the bullet was found on the floor of her wardrobe." His eyes fixed and he repeated in broken words, "On — the — floor — of — her — wardrobe." Then he sank into silence, and I saw that some train of thought had been set moving which I should be foolish to interrupt. Suddenly with a start he emerged into brisk life once more. "Yes, Watson, it was found. Pretty damning, eh? So the two juries thought. Then the dead woman had a note upon her making an appointment at that very place and signed by the governess. How's that? Finally there is the motive. Senator Gibson is an attractive person. If his wife dies, who more likely to succeed her than the young lady who had already by all accounts received pressing attentions from her employer? Love, fortune, power, all depending upon one middleaged life. Ugly, Watson — very ugly!"

"Yes, indeed, Holmes."

"Nor could she prove an alibi. On the contrary, she had to admit that she was down near Thor Bridge — that was the scene of the tragedy — about that hour. She couldn't deny it, for some passing villager had seen her there."

"That really seems final."

"And yet, Watson — and yet! This bridge — a single broad span of stone with balustraded sides — carries the drive over the narrowest part of a long, deep, reed-girt sheet of water. Thor Mere it is called. In the mouth of the bridge lay the dead woman. Such are the main facts. But here, if I mistake not, is our client, considerably before his time."

Billy had opened the door, but the name which he announced was an unexpected one. Mr. Marlow Bates was a stranger to both of us. He was a thin, nervous wisp of a man with frightened eyes and a twitching, hesitating manner — a man whom my own professional eye would judge to be on the brink of an absolute nervous breakdown.

"You seem agitated, Mr. Bates," said Holmes. "Pray sit down. I fear I can only give you a short time, for I have an appointment at eleven."

“I know you have,” our visitor gasped, shooting out short sentences like a man who is out of breath. “Mr. Gibson is coming. Mr. Gibson is my employer. I am manager of his estate. Mr. Holmes, he is a villain — an infernal villain.”

“Strong language, Mr. Bates.”

“I have to be emphatic, Mr. Holmes, for the time is so limited. I would not have him find me here for the world. He is almost due now. But I was so situated that I could not come earlier. His secretary, Mr. Ferguson, only told me this morning of his appointment with you.”

“And you are his manager?”

“I have given him notice. In a couple of weeks I shall have shaken off his accursed slavery. A hard man, Mr. Holmes, hard to all about him. Those public charities are a screen to cover his private iniquities. But his wife was his chief victim. He was brutal to her — yes, sir, brutal! How she came by her death I do not know, but I am sure that he had made her life a misery to her. She was a creature of the tropics, a Brazilian by birth, as no doubt you know.”

“No, it had escaped me.”

“Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. A child of the sun and of passion. She had loved him as such women can love, but when her own physical charms had faded — I am told that they once were great — there was nothing to hold him. We all liked her and felt for her and hated him for the way that he treated her. But he is plausible and cunning. That is all I have to say to you. Don’t take him at his face value. There is more behind. Now I’ll go. No, no, don’t detain me! He is almost due.”

With a frightened look at the clock our strange visitor literally ran to the door and disappeared.

“Well! Well!” said Holmes after an interval of silence. “Mr. Gibson seems to have a nice loyal household. But the warning is a useful one, and now we can only wait till the man himself appears.”

Sharp at the hour we heard a heavy step upon the stairs, and the famous millionaire was shown into the room. As I looked upon him I understood not only the fears and dislike of his manager but also the execrations which so many business rivals have heaped upon his head. If I were a sculptor and desired to idealise the successful man of affairs, iron of nerve and leathery of conscience, I should choose Mr. Neil Gibson as my model. His tall, gaunt, craggy figure had a suggestion of hunger and rapacity. An Abraham

Lincoln keyed to base uses instead of high ones would give some idea of the man. His face might have been chiselled in granite, hard-set, craggy, remorseless, with deep lines upon it, the scars of many a crisis. Cold gray eyes, looking shrewdly out from under bristling brows, surveyed us each in turn. He bowed in perfunctory fashion as Holmes mentioned my name, and then with a masterful air of possession he drew a chair up to my companion and seated himself with his bony knees almost touching him.

"Let me say right here, Mr. Holmes," he began, "that money is nothing to me in this case. You can burn it if it's any use in lighting you to the truth. This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it's up to you to do it. Name your figure!"

"My professional charges are upon a fixed scale," said Holmes coldly. "I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether."

"Well, if dollars make no difference to you, think of the reputation. If you pull this off every paper in England and America will be booming you. You'll be the talk of two continents."

"Thank you, Mr. Gibson, I do not think that I am in need of booming. It may surprise you to know that I prefer to work anonymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me. But we are wasting time. Let us get down to the facts."

"I think that you will find all the main ones in the press reports. I don't know that I can add anything which will help you. But if there is anything you would wish more light upon — well, I am here to give it."

"Well, there is just one point."

"What is it?"

"What were the exact relations between you and Miss Dunbar?"

The Gold King gave a violent start and half rose from his chair. Then his massive calm came back to him.

"I suppose you are within your rights — and maybe doing your duty — in asking such a question, Mr. Holmes."

"We will agree to suppose so," said Holmes.

"Then I can assure you that our relations were entirely and always those of an employer towards a young lady whom he never conversed with, or ever saw, save when she was in the company of his children."

Holmes rose from his chair.

"I am a rather busy man, Mr. Gibson," said he, "and I have no time or taste for aimless conversations. I wish you goodmorning."

Our visitor had risen also, and his great loose figure towered above Holmes. There was an angry gleam from under those bristling brows and a tinge of colour in the sallow cheeks.

“What the devil do you mean by this, Mr. Holmes? Do you dismiss my case?”

“Well, Mr. Gibson, at least I dismiss you. I should have thought my words were plain.”

“Plain enough, but what’s at the back of it? Raising the price on me, or afraid to tackle it, or what? I’ve a right to a plain answer.”

“Well, perhaps you have,” said Holmes. “I’ll give you one. This case is quite sufficiently complicated to start with without the further difficulty of false information.”

“Meaning that I lie.”

“Well, I was trying to express it as delicately as I could, but if you insist upon the word I will not contradict you.”

I sprang to my feet, for the expression upon the millionaire’s face was fiendish in its intensity, and he had raised his great knotted fist. Holmes smiled languidly and reached his hand out for his pipe.

“Don’t be noisy, Mr. Gibson. I find that after breakfast even the smallest argument is unsettling. I suggest that a stroll in the morning air and a little quiet thought will be greatly to your advantage.”

With an effort the Gold King mastered his fury. I could not but admire him, for by a supreme self-command he had turned in a minute from a hot flame of anger to a frigid and contemptuous indifference.

“Well, it’s your choice. I guess you know how to run your own business. I can’t make you touch the case against your will. You’ve done yourself no good this morning, Mr. Holmes, for I have broken stronger men than you. No man ever crossed me and was the better for it.”

“So many have said so, and yet here I am,” said Holmes, smiling. “Well, good-morning, Mr. Gibson. You have a good deal yet to learn.”

Our visitor made a noisy exit, but Holmes smoked in imperturbable silence with dreamy eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

“Any views, Watson?” he asked at last.

“Well, Holmes, I must confess that when I consider that this is a man who would certainly brush any obstacle from his path, and when I remember that his wife may have been an obstacle and an object of dislike, as that man Bates plainly told us, it seems to me—”

“Exactly. And to me also.”

“But what were his relations with the governess, and how did you discover them?”

“Bluff, Watson, bluff! When I considered the passionate, unconventional, unbusinesslike tone of his letter and contrasted it with his self-contained manner and appearance, it was pretty clear that there was some deep emotion which centred upon the accused woman rather than upon the victim. We’ve got to understand the exact relations of those three people if we are to reach the truth. You saw the frontal attack which I made upon him, and how imperturbably he received it. Then I bluffed him by giving him the impression that I was absolutely certain, when in reality I was only extremely suspicious.”

“Perhaps he will come back?”

“He is sure to come back. He must come back. He can’t leave it where it is. Ha! isn’t that a ring? Yes, there is his footstep. Well, Mr. Gibson, I was just saying to Dr. Watson that you were somewhat overdue.”

The Gold King had reentered the room in a more chastened mood than he had left it. His wounded pride still showed in his resentful eyes, but his common sense had shown him that he must yield if he would attain his end.

“I’ve been thinking it over, Mr. Holmes, and I feel that I have been hasty in taking your remarks amiss. You are justified in getting down to the facts, whatever they may be, and I think the more of you for it. I can assure you, however, that the relations between Miss Dunbar and me don’t really touch this case.”

“That is for me to decide, is it not?”

“Yes, I guess that is so. You’re like a surgeon who wants every symptom before he can give his diagnosis.”

“Exactly. That expresses it. And it is only a patient who has an object in deceiving his surgeon who would conceal the facts of his case.”

“That may be so, but you will admit, Mr. Holmes, that most men would shy off a bit when they are asked point-blank what their relations with a woman may be — if there is really some serious feeling in the case. I guess most men have a little private reserve of their own in some corner of their souls where they don’t welcome intruders. And you burst suddenly into it. But the object excuses you, since it was to try and save her. Well, the stakes are down and the reserve open, and you can explore where you will. What is it you want?”

“The truth.”

The Gold King paused for a moment as one who marshals his thoughts. His grim, deep-lined face had become even sadder and more grave.

“I can give it to you in a very few words, Mr. Holmes,” said he at last. “There are some things that are painful as well as difficult to say, so I won’t go deeper than is needful. I met my wife when I was gold-hunting in Brazil. Maria Pinto was the daughter of a government official at Manaos, and she was very beautiful. I was young and ardent in those days, but even now, as I look back with colder blood and a more critical eye, I can see that she was rare and wonderful in her beauty. It was a deep rich nature, too, passionate, whole-hearted, tropical, ill-balanced, very different from the American women whom I had known. Well, to make a long story short, I loved her and I married her. It was only when the romance had passed — and it lingered for years — that I realised that we had nothing — absolutely nothing — in common. My love faded. If hers had faded also it might have been easier. But you know the wonderful way of women! Do what I might, nothing could turn her from me. If I have been harsh to her, even brutal as some have said, it has been because I knew that if I could kill her love, or if it turned to hate, it would be easier for both of us. But nothing changed her. She adored me in those English woods as she had adored me twenty years ago on the banks of the Amazon. Do what I might, she was as devoted as ever.

“Then came Miss Grace Dunbar. She answered our advertisement and became governess to our two children. Perhaps you have seen her portrait in the papers. The whole world has proclaimed that she also is a very beautiful woman. Now, I make no pretence to be more moral than my neighbours, and I will admit to you that I could not live under the same roof with such a woman and in daily contact with her without feeling a passionate regard for her. Do you blame me, Mr. Holmes?”

“I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection.”

“Well, maybe so,” said the millionaire, though for a moment the reproof had brought the old angry gleam into his eyes. “I’m not pretending to be any better than I am. I guess all my life I’ve been a man that reached out his hand for what he wanted, and I never wanted anything more than the love and possession of that woman. I told her so.”

“Oh, you did, did you?”

Holmes could look very formidable when he was moved.

“I said to her that if I could marry her I would, but that it was out of my power. I said that money was no object and that all I could do to make her happy and comfortable would be done.”

“Very generous, I am sure,” said Holmes with a sneer.

“See here, Mr. Holmes. I came to you on a question of evidence, not on a question of morals. I’m not asking for your criticism.”

“It is only for the young lady’s sake that I touch your case at all,” said Holmes sternly. “I don’t know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”

To my surprise the Gold King took the reproof with equanimity.

“That’s how I feel myself about it now. I thank God that my plans did not work out as I intended. She would have none of it, and she wanted to leave the house instantly.”

“Why did she not?”

“Well, in the first place, others were dependent upon her, and it was no light matter for her to let them all down by sacrificing her living. When I had sworn — as I did — that she should never be molested again, she consented to remain. But there was another reason. She knew the influence she had over me, and that it was stronger than any other influence in the world. She wanted to use it for good.”

“How?”

“Well, she knew something of my affairs. They are large, Mr. Holmes — large beyond the belief of an ordinary man. I can make or break — and it is usually break. It wasn’t individuals only. It was communities, cities, even nations. Business is a hard game, and the weak go to the wall. I played the game for all it was worth. I never squealed myself, and I never cared if the other fellow squealed. But she saw it different. I guess she was right. She believed and said that a fortune for one man that was more than he needed should not be built on ten thousand ruined men who were left without the means of life. That was how she saw it, and I guess she could see past the dollars to something that was more lasting. She found that I listened to what she said, and she believed she was serving the world by influencing my actions. So she stayed — and then this came along.”

“Can you throw any light upon that?”

The Gold King paused for a minute or more, his head sunk in his hands, lost in deep thought.

“It’s very black against her. I can’t deny that. And women lead an inward life and may do things beyond the judgment of a man. At first I was so rattled and taken aback that I was ready to think she had been led away in some extraordinary fashion that was clean against her usual nature. One explanation came into my head. I give it to you, Mr. Holmes, for what it is worth. There is no doubt that my wife was bitterly jealous. There is a soul-jealousy that can be as frantic as any body-jealousy, and though my wife had no cause — and I think she understood this — for the latter, she was aware that this English girl exerted an influence upon my mind and my acts that she herself never had. It was an influence for good, but that did not mend the matter. She was crazy with hatred and the heat of the Amazon was always in her blood. She might have planned to murder Miss Dunbar — or we will say to threaten her with a gun and so frighten her into leaving us. Then there might have been a scuffle and the gun gone off and shot the woman who held it.”

“That possibility had already occurred to me,” said Holmes. “Indeed, it is the only obvious alternative to deliberate murder.”

“But she utterly denies it.”

“Well, that is not final — is it? One can understand that a woman placed in so awful a position might hurry home still in her bewilderment holding the revolver. She might even throw it down among her clothes, hardly knowing what she was doing, and when it was found she might try to lie her way out by a total denial, since all explanation was impossible. What is against such a supposition?”

“Miss Dunbar herself.”

“Well, perhaps.”

Holmes looked at his watch. “I have no doubt we can get the necessary permits this morning and reach Winchester by the evening train. When I have seen this young lady it is very possible that I may be of more use to you in the matter, though I cannot promise that my conclusions will necessarily be such as you desire.”

There was some delay in the official pass, and instead of reaching Winchester that day we went down to Thor Place, the Hampshire estate of Mr. Neil Gibson. He did not accompany us himself, but we had the address of Sergeant Coventry, of the local police, who had first examined into the affair. He was a tall, thin, cadaverous man, with a secretive and mysterious manner which conveyed the idea that he knew or suspected a very great deal more than he dared say. He had a trick, too, of suddenly sinking his voice to a whisper as if he had come upon something of vital importance, though the information was usually commonplace enough. Behind these tricks of manner he soon showed himself to be a decent, honest fellow who was not too proud to admit that he was out of his depth and would welcome any help.

"Anyhow, I'd rather have you than Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes," said he. "If the Yard gets called into a case, then the local loses all credit for success and may be blamed for failure. Now, you play straight, so I've heard."

"I need not appear in the matter at all," said Holmes to the evident relief of our melancholy acquaintance. "If I can clear it up I don't ask to have my name mentioned."

"Well, it's very handsome of you, I am sure. And your friend, Dr. Watson, can be trusted, I know. Now, Mr. Holmes, as we walk down to the place there is one question I should like to ask you. I'd breathe it to no soul but you." He looked round as though he hardly dare utter the words. "Don't you think there might be a case against Mr. Neil Gibson himself?"

"I have been considering that."

"You've not seen Miss Dunbar. She is a wonderful fine woman in every way. He may well have wished his wife out of the road. And these Americans are readier with pistols than our folk are. It was his pistol, you know."

"Was that clearly made out?"

"Yes, sir. It was one of a pair that he had."

"One of a pair? Where is the other?"

"Well, the gentleman has a lot of firearms of one sort and another. We never quite matched that particular pistol — but the box was made for two."

"If it was one of a pair you should surely be able to match it."

"Well, we have them all laid out at the house if you would care to look them over."

"Later, perhaps. I think we will walk down together and have a look at the scene of the tragedy."

This conversation had taken place in the little front room of Sergeant Coventry's humble cottage which served as the local police-station. A walk of half a mile or so across a wind-swept heath, all gold and bronze with the fading ferns, brought us to a side-gate opening into the grounds of the Thor Place estate. A path led us through the pheasant preserves, and then from a clearing we saw the widespread, half-timbered house, half Tudor and half Georgian, upon the crest of the hill. Beside us there was a long, reedy pool, constricted in the centre where the main carriage drive passed over a stone bridge, but swelling into small lakes on either side. Our guide paused at the mouth of this bridge, and he pointed to the ground.

"That was where Mrs. Gibson's body lay. I marked it by that stone."

"I understand that you were there before it was moved?"

"Yes, they sent for me at once."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Gibson himself. The moment the alarm was given and he had rushed down with others from the house, he insisted that nothing should be moved until the police should arrive."

"That was sensible. I gathered from the newspaper report that the shot was fired from close quarters."

"Yes, sir, very close."

"Near the right temple?"

"Just behind it, sir."

"How did the body lie?"

"On the back, sir. No trace of a struggle. No marks. No weapon. The short note from Miss Dunbar was clutched in her left hand."

"Clutched, you say?"

"Yes, sir, we could hardly open the fingers."

"That is of great importance. It excludes the idea that anyone could have placed the note there after death in order to furnish a false clue. Dear me! The note, as I remember, was quite short:

"'I will be at Thor Bridge at nine o'clock. G. DUNBAR.'

"Was that not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Miss Dunbar admit writing it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was her explanation?"

"Her defence was reserved for the Assizes. She would say nothing."

"The problem is certainly a very interesting one. The point of the letter is very obscure, is it not?"

"Well, sir," said the guide, "it seemed, if I may be so bold as to say so, the only really clear point in the whole case."

Holmes shook his head.

"Granting that the letter is genuine and was really written, it was certainly received some time before — say one hour or two. Why, then, was this lady still clasping it in her left hand? Why should she carry it so carefully? She did not need to refer to it in the interview. Does it not seem remarkable?"

"Well, sir, as you put it, perhaps it does."

"I think I should like to sit quietly for a few minutes and think it out." He seated himself upon the stone ledge of the bridge, and I could see his quick gray eyes darting their questioning glances in every direction. Suddenly he sprang up again and ran across to the opposite parapet, whipped his lens from his pocket, and began to examine the stonework.

"This is curious," said he.

"Yes, sir, we saw the chip on the ledge. I expect it's been done by some passer-by."

The stonework was gray, but at this one point it showed white for a space not larger than a sixpence. When examined closely one could see that the surface was chipped as by a sharp blow.

"It took some violence to do that," said Holmes thoughtfully. With his cane he struck the ledge several times without leaving a mark. "Yes, it was a hard knock. In a curious place, too. It was not from above but from below, for you see that it is on the lower edge of the parapet."

"But it is at least fifteen feet from the body."

"Yes, it is fifteen feet from the body. It may have nothing to do with the matter, but it is a point worth noting. I do not think that we have anything more to learn here. There were no footsteps, you say?"

"The ground was iron hard, sir. There were no traces at all."

"Then we can go. We will go up to the house first and look over these weapons of which you speak. Then we shall get on to Winchester, for I should desire to see Miss Dunbar before we go farther."

Mr. Neil Gibson had not returned from town, but we saw in the house the neurotic Mr. Bates who had called upon us in the morning. He showed us with a sinister relish the formidable array of firearms of various shapes and sizes which his employer had accumulated in the course of an adventurous life.

“Mr. Gibson has his enemies, as anyone would expect who knew him and his methods,” said he. “He sleeps with a loaded revolver in the drawer beside his bed. He is a man of violence, sir, and there are times when all of us are afraid of him. I am sure that the poor lady who has passed was often terrified.”

“Did you ever witness physical violence towards her?”

“No, I cannot say that. But I have heard words which were nearly as bad — words of cold, cutting contempt, even before the servants.”

“Our millionaire does not seem to shine in private life,” remarked Holmes as we made our way to the station. “Well, Watson, we have come on a good many facts, some of them new ones, and yet I seem some way from my conclusion. In spite of the very evident dislike which Mr. Bates has to his employer, I gather from him that when the alarm came he was undoubtedly in his library. Dinner was over at 8:30 and all was normal up to then. It is true that the alarm was somewhat late in the evening, but the tragedy certainly occurred about the hour named in the note. There is no evidence at all that Mr. Gibson had been out of doors since his return from town at five o’clock. On the other hand, Miss Dunbar, as I understand it, admits that she had made an appointment to meet Mrs. Gibson at the bridge. Beyond this she would say nothing, as her lawyer had advised her to reserve her defence. We have several very vital questions to ask that young lady, and my mind will not be easy until we have seen her. I must confess that the case would seem to me to be very black against her if it were not for one thing.”

“And what is that, Holmes?”

“The finding of the pistol in her wardrobe.”

“Dear me, Holmes!” I cried, “that seemed to me to be the most damning incident of all.”

“Not so, Watson. It had struck me even at my first perfunctory reading as very strange, and now that I am in closer touch with the case it is my only firm ground for hope. We must look for consistency. Where there is a want of it we must suspect deception.”

“I hardly follow you.”

“Well now, Watson, suppose for a moment that we visualise you in the character of a woman who, in a cold, premeditated fashion, is about to get rid of a rival. You have planned it. A note has been written. The victim has come. You have your weapon. The crime is done. It has been workmanlike and complete. Do you tell me that after carrying out so crafty a crime you would now ruin your reputation as a criminal by forgetting to fling your weapon into those adjacent reed-beds which would forever cover it, but you must needs carry it carefully home and put it in your own wardrobe, the very first place that would be searched? Your best friends would hardly call you a schemer, Watson, and yet I could not picture you doing anything so crude as that."

"In the excitement of the moment."

"No, no, Watson, I will not admit that it is possible. Where a crime is coolly premeditated, then the means of covering it are coolly premeditated also. I hope, therefore, that we are in the presence of a serious misconception."

"But there is so much to explain."

"Well, we shall set about explaining it. When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth. For example, there is this revolver. Miss Dunbar disclaims all knowledge of it. On our new theory she is speaking truth when she says so. Therefore, it was placed in her wardrobe. Who placed it there? Someone who wished to incriminate her. Was not that person the actual criminal? You see how we come at once upon a most fruitful line of inquiry."

We were compelled to spend the night at Winchester, as the formalities had not yet been completed, but next morning, in the company of Mr. Joyce Cummings, the rising barrister who was entrusted with the defence, we were allowed to see the young lady in her cell. I had expected from all that we had heard to see a beautiful woman, but I can never forget the effect which Miss Dunbar produced upon me. It was no wonder that even the masterful millionaire had found in her something more powerful than himself — something which could control and guide him. One felt, too, as one looked at the strong, clear-cut, and yet sensitive face, that even should she be capable of some impetuous deed, none the less there was an innate nobility of character which would make her influence always for the good. She was a brunette, tall, with a noble figure and commanding presence, but her dark eyes had in them the appealing, helpless expression of the hunted creature who feels the nets around it, but can see no way out from the toils. Now, as she realised the presence and the help of my famous friend, there came a touch of colour in her wan cheeks and a light of hope began to glimmer in the glance which she turned upon us.

“Perhaps Mr. Neil Gibson has told you something of what occurred between us?” she asked in a low, agitated voice.

“Yes,” Holmes answered, “you need not pain yourself by entering into that part of the story. After seeing you, I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson’s statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him. But why was the whole situation not brought out in court?”

“It seemed to me incredible that such a charge could be sustained. I thought that if we waited the whole thing must clear itself up without our being compelled to enter into painful details of the inner life of the family. But I understand that far from clearing it has become even more serious.”

“My dear young lady,” cried Holmes earnestly, “I beg you to have no illusions upon the point. Mr. Cummings here would assure you that all the cards are at present against us, and that we must do everything that is possible if we are to win clear. It would be a cruel deception to pretend that you are not in very great danger. Give me all the help you can, then, to get at the truth.”

“I will conceal nothing.”

“Tell us, then, of your true relations with Mr. Gibson’s wife.”

“She hated me, Mr. Holmes. She hated me with all the fervour of her tropical nature. She was a woman who would do nothing by halves, and the measure of her love for her husband was the measure also of her hatred for me. It is probable that she misunderstood our relations. I would not wish to wrong her, but she loved so vividly in a physical sense that she could hardly understand the mental, and even spiritual, tie which held her husband to me, or imagine that it was only my desire to influence his power to good ends which kept me under his roof. I can see now that I was wrong. Nothing could justify me in remaining where I was a cause of unhappiness, and yet it is certain that the unhappiness would have remained even if I had left the house.”

“Now, Miss Dunbar,” said Holmes, “I beg you to tell us exactly what occurred that evening.”

“I can tell you the truth so far as I know it, Mr. Holmes, but I am in a position to prove nothing, and there are points — the most vital points — which I can neither explain nor can I imagine any explanation.”

“If you will find the facts, perhaps others may find the explanation.”

“With regard, then, to my presence at Thor Bridge that night, I received a note from Mrs. Gibson in the morning. It lay on the table of the schoolroom, and it may have been left there by her own hand. It implored me to see her there after dinner, said she had something important to say to me, and asked me to leave an answer on the sundial in the garden, as she desired no one to be in our confidence. I saw no reason for such secrecy, but I did as she asked, accepting the appointment. She asked me to destroy her note and I burned it in the schoolroom grate. She was very much afraid of her husband, who treated her with a harshness for which I frequently reproached him, and I could only imagine that she acted in this way because she did not wish him to know of our interview.”

“Yet she kept your reply very carefully?”

“Yes. I was surprised to hear that she had it in her hand when she died.”

“Well, what happened then?”

“I went down as I had promised. When I reached the bridge she was waiting for me. Never did I realise till that moment how this poor creature hated me. She was like a mad woman — indeed, I think she was a mad woman, subtly mad with the deep power of deception which insane people may have. How else could she have met me with unconcern every day and yet had so raging a hatred of me in her heart? I will not say what she said. She poured her whole wild fury out in burning and horrible words. I did not even answer — I could not. It was dreadful to see her. I put my hands to my ears and rushed away. When I left her she was standing, still shrieking out her curses at me, in the mouth of the bridge.”

“Where she was afterwards found?”

“Within a few yards from the spot.”

“And yet, presuming that she met her death shortly after you left her, you heard no shot?”

“No, I heard nothing. But, indeed, Mr. Holmes, I was so agitated and horrified by this terrible outbreak that I rushed to get back to the peace of my own room, and I was incapable of noticing anything which happened.”

“You say that you returned to your room. Did you leave it again before next morning?”

“Yes, when the alarm came that the poor creature had met her death I ran out with the others.”

“Did you see Mr. Gibson?”

"Yes, he had just returned from the bridge when I saw him. He had sent for the doctor and the police."

"Did he seem to you much perturbed?"

"Mr. Gibson is a very strong, self-contained man. I do not think that he would ever show his emotions on the surface. But I, who knew him so well, could see that he was deeply concerned."

"Then we come to the all-important point. This pistol that was found in your room. Had you ever seen it before?"

"Never, I swear it."

"When was it found?"

"Next morning, when the police made their search."

"Among your clothes?"

"Yes, on the floor of my wardrobe under my dresses."

"You could not guess how long it had been there?"

"It had not been there the morning before."

"How do you know?"

"Because I tidied out the wardrobe."

"That is final. Then someone came into your room and placed the pistol there in order to inculpate you."

"It must have been so."

"And when?"

"It could only have been at meal-time, or else at the hours when I would be in the schoolroom with the children."

"As you were when you got the note?"

"Yes, from that time onward for the whole morning."

"Thank you, Miss Dunbar. Is there any other point which could help me in the investigation?"

"I can think of none."

"There was some sign of violence on the stonework of the bridge — a perfectly fresh chip just opposite the body. Could you suggest any possible explanation of that?"

"Surely it must be a mere coincidence."

"Curious, Miss Dunbar, very curious. Why should it appear at the very time of the tragedy, and why at the very place?"

"But what could have caused it? Only great violence could have such an effect."

Holmes did not answer. His pale, eager face had suddenly assumed that tense, far-away expression which I had learned to associate with the supreme manifestations of his genius. So evident was the crisis in his mind that none of us dared to speak, and we sat, barrister, prisoner, and myself, watching him in a concentrated and absorbed silence. Suddenly he sprang from his chair, vibrating with nervous energy and the pressing need for action.

"Come, Watson, come!" he cried.

"What is it, Mr. Holmes?"

"Never mind, my dear lady. You will hear from me, Mr. Cummings. With the help of the god of justice I will give you a case which will make England ring. You will get news by to-morrow, Miss Dunbar, and meanwhile take my assurance that the clouds are lifting and that I have every hope that the light of truth is breaking through."

It was not a long journey from Winchester to Thor Place, but it was long to me in my impatience, while for Holmes it was evident that it seemed endless; for, in his nervous restlessness he could not sit still, but paced the carriage or drummed with his long, sensitive fingers upon the cushions beside him. Suddenly, however, as we neared our destination he seated himself opposite to me — we had a first-class carriage to ourselves — and laying a hand upon each of my knees he looked into my eyes with the peculiarly mischievous gaze which was charactenstic of his more imp-like moods.

"Watson," said he, "I have some recollection that you go armed upon these excursions of ours."

It was as well for him that I did so, for he took little care for his own safety when his mind was once absorbed by a problem so that more than once my revolver had been a good friend in need. I reminded him of the fact.

"Yes, yes, I am a little absent-minded in such matters. But have you your revolver on you?"

I produced it from my hip-pocket, a short, handy, but very serviceable little weapon. He undid the catch, shook out the cartridges, and examined it with care.

"It's heavy — remarkably heavy," said he.

"Yes, it is a solid bit of work."

He mused over it for a minute.

“Do you know, Watson,” said he, “I believe your revolver is going to have a very intimate connection with the mystery which we are investigating.”

“My dear Holmes, you are joking.”

“No, Watson, I am very serious. There is a test before us. If the test comes off, all will be clear. And the test will depend upon the conduct of this little weapon. One cartridge out. Now we will replace the other five and put on the safety-catch. So! That increases the weight and makes it a better reproduction.”

I had no glimmer of what was in his mind, nor did he enlighten me, but sat lost in thought until we pulled up in the little Hampshire station. We secured a ramshackle trap, and in a quarter of an hour were at the house of our confidential friend, the sergeant.

“A clue, Mr. Holmes? What is it?”

“It all depends upon the behaviour of Dr. Watson’s revolver,” said my friend. “Here it is. Now, officer, can you give me ten yards of string?”

The village shop provided a ball of stout twine.

“I think that this is all we will need,” said Holmes. “Now, if you please, we will get off on what I hope is the last stage of our journey.”

The sun was setting and turning the rolling Hampshire moor into a wonderful autumnal panorama. The sergeant, with many critical and incredulous glances, which showed his deep doubts of the sanity of my companion, lurched along beside us. As we approached the scene of the crime I could see that my friend under all his habitual coolness was in truth deeply agitated.

“Yes,” he said in answer to my remark, “you have seen me miss my mark before, Watson. I have an instinct for such things, and yet it has sometimes played me false. It seemed a certainty when first it flashed across my mind in the cell at Winchester, but one drawback of an active mind is that one can always conceive alternative explanations which would make our scent a false one. And yet — and yet — Well, Watson, we can but try.”

As he walked he had firmly tied one end of the string to the handle of the revolver. We had now reached the scene of the tragedy. With great care he marked out under the guidance of the policeman the exact spot where the body had been stretched. He then hunted among the heather and the ferns until he found a considerable stone. This he secured to the other end of his line of string, and he hung it over the parapet of the bridge so that it swung clear above the water. He then stood on the fatal spot, some distance from the edge of the bridge, with my revolver in his hand, the string being taut between the weapon and the heavy stone on the farther side.

"Now for it!" he cried.

At the words he raised the pistol to his head, and then let go his grip. In an instant it had been whisked away by the weight of the stone, had struck with a sharp crack against the parapet, and had vanished over the side into the water. It had hardly gone before Holmes was kneeling beside the stonework, and a joyous cry showed that he had found what he expected.

"Was there ever a more exact demonstration?" he cried. "See, Watson, your revolver has solved the problem!" As he spoke he pointed to a second chip of the exact size and shape of the first which had appeared on the under edge of the stone balustrade.

"We'll stay at the inn to-night," he continued as he rose and faced the astonished sergeant. "You will, of course, get a grappling-hook and you will easily restore my friend's revolver. You will also find beside it the revolver, string and weight with which this vindictive woman attempted to disguise her own crime and to fasten a charge of murder upon an innocent victim. You can let Mr. Gibson know that I will see him in the morning, when steps can be taken for Miss Dunbar's vindication."

Late that evening, as we sat together smoking our pipes in the village inn, Holmes gave me a brief review of what had passed.

"I fear, Watson," said he, "that you will not improve any reputation which I may have acquired by adding the case of the Thor Bridge mystery to your annals. I have been sluggish in mind and wanting in that mixture of imagination and reality which is the basis of my art. I confess that the chip in the stonework was a sufficient clue to suggest the true solution, and that I blame myself for not having attained it sooner.

"It must be admitted that the workings of this unhappy woman's mind were deep and subtle, so that it was no very simple matter to unravel her plot. I do not think that in our adventures we have ever come across a stranger example of what perverted love can bring about. Whether Miss Dunbar was her rival in a physical or in a merely mental sense seems to have been equally unforgivable in her eyes. No doubt she blamed this innocent lady for all those harsh dealings and unkind words with which her husband tried to repel her too demonstrative affection. Her first resolution was to end her own life. Her second was to do it in such a way as to involve her victim in a fate which was worse far than any sudden death could be.

“We can follow the various steps quite clearly, and they show a remarkable subtlety of mind. A note was extracted very cleverly from Miss Dunbar which would make it appear that she had chosen the scene of the crime. In her anxiety that it should be discovered she somewhat overdid it by holding it in her hand to the last. This alone should have excited my suspicions earlier than it did.

“Then she took one of her husband’s revolvers — there was, as you saw, an arsenal in the house — and kept it for her own use. A similar one she concealed that morning in Miss Dunbar’s wardrobe after discharging one barrel, which she could easily do in the woods without attracting attention. She then went down to the bridge where she had contrived this exceedingly ingenious method for getting rid of her weapon. When Miss Dunbar appeared she used her last breath in pouring out her hatred, and then, when she was out of hearing, carried out her terrible purpose. Every link is now in its place and the chain is complete. The papers may ask why the mere was not dragged in the first instance, but it is easy to be wise after the event, and in any case the expanse of a reed-filled lake is no easy matter to drag unless you have a clear perception of what you are looking for and where. Well, Watson, we have helped a remarkable woman, and also a formidable man. Should they in the future join their forces, as seems not unlikely, the financial world may find that Mr. Neil Gibson has learned something in that schoolroom of sorrow where our earthly lessons are taught.”

ADVENTURE III. THE ADVENTURE OF THE CREEPING MAN

Mr. Sherlock Holmes was always of opinion that I should publish the singular facts connected with Professor Presbury, if only to dispel once for all the ugly rumours which some twenty years ago agitated the university and were echoed in the learned societies of London. There were, however, certain obstacles in the way, and the true history of this curious case remained entombed in the tin box which contains so many records of my friend’s adventures. Now we have at last obtained permission to ventilate the facts which formed one of the very last cases handled by Holmes before his retirement from practice. Even now a certain reticence and discretion have to be observed in laying the matter before the public.

It was one Sunday evening early in September of the year 1903 that I received one of Holmes’s laconic messages:

Come at once if convenient — if inconvenient come all the same. S.H.

The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable. When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my role was obvious. But apart from this I had uses. I was a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. He liked to think aloud in my presence. His remarks could hardly be said to be made to me — many of them would have been as appropriately addressed to his bedstead — but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.

When I arrived at Baker Street I found him huddled up in his armchair with updrawn knees, his pipe in his mouth and his brow furrowed with thought. It was clear that he was in the throes of some vexatious problem. With a wave of his hand he indicated my old armchair, but otherwise for half an hour he gave no sign that he was aware of my presence. Then with a start he seemed to come from his reverie, and with his usual whimsical smile he greeted me back to what had once been my home.

"You will excuse a certain abstraction of mind, my dear Watson," said he. "Some curious facts have been submitted to me within the last twenty-four hours, and they in turn have given rise to some speculations of a more general character. I have serious thoughts of writing a small monograph upon the uses of dogs in the work of the detective."

"But surely, Holmes, this has been explored," said I. "Bloodhounds — sleuth-hounds—"

"No, no, Watson, that side of the matter is, of course, obvious. But there is another which is far more subtle. You may recollect that in the case which you, in your sensational way, coupled with the Copper Beeches, I was able, by watching the mind of the child, to form a deduction as to the criminal habits of the very smug and respectable father."

"Yes, I remember it well."

"My line of thoughts about dogs is analogous. A dog reflects the family life. Whoever saw a frisky dog in a gloomy family, or a sad dog in a happy one? Snarling people have snarling dogs, dangerous people have dangerous ones. And their passing moods may reflect the passing moods of others."

I shook my head. "Surely, Holmes, this is a little far-fetched," said I.

He had refilled his pipe and resumed his seat, taking no notice of my comment.

"The practical application of what I have said is very close to the problem which I am investigating. It is a tangled skein, you understand. and I am looking for a loose end. One possible loose end lies in the question: Why does Professor Presbury's wolfhound, Roy, endeavour to bite him?"

I sank back in my chair in some disappointment. Was it for so trivial a question as this that I had been summoned from my work? Holmes glanced across at me.

"The same old Watson!" said he. "You never learn that the gravest issues may depend upon the smallest things. But is it not on the face of it strange that a staid, elderly philosopher — you've heard of Presbury, of course, the famous Camford physiologist? — that such a man, whose friend has been his devoted wolfhound, should now have been twice attacked by his own dog? What do you make of it?"

"The dog is ill."

“Well, that has to be considered. But he attacks no one else, nor does he apparently molest his master, save on very special occasions. Curious, Watson — very curious. But young Mr. Bennett is before his time if that is his ring. I had hoped to have a longer chat with you before he came.”

There was a quick step on the stairs, a sharp tap at the door and a moment later the new client presented himself. He was a tall, handsome youth about thirty, well dressed and elegant, but with something in his bearing which suggested the shyness of the student rather than the self-possession of the man of the world. He shook hands with Holmes, and then looked with some surprise at me.

“This matter is very delicate, Mr. Holmes,” he said. “Consider the relation in which I stand to Professor Presbury both privately and publicly. I really can hardly justify myself if I speak before any third person.”

“Have no fear, Mr. Bennett. Dr. Watson is the very soul of discretion, and I can assure you that this is a matter in which I am very likely to need an assistant.”

“As you like, Mr. Holmes. You will, I am sure, understand my having some reserves in the matter.”

“You will appreciate it, Watson, when I tell you that this gentleman, Mr. Trevor Bennett, is professional assistant to the great scientist, lives under his roof, and is engaged to his only daughter. Certainly we must agree that the professor has every claim upon his loyalty and devotion. But it may best be shown by taking the necessary steps to clear up this strange mystery.”

“I hope so, Mr. Holmes. That is my one object. Does Dr. Watson know the situation?”

“I have not had time to explain it.”

“Then perhaps I had better go over the ground again before explaining some fresh developments.”

“I will do so myself,” said Holmes, “in order to show that I have the events in their due order. The professor, Watson, is a man of European reputation. His life has been academic. There has never been a breath of scandal. He is a widower with one daughter, Edith. He is, I gather, a man of very virile and positive, one might almost say combative, character. So the matter stood until a very few months ago.

“Then the current of his life was broken. He is sixty-one years of age, but he became engaged to the daughter of Professor Morphy, his colleague in the chair of comparative anatomy. It was not, as I understand, the reasoned courting of an elderly man but rather the passionate frenzy of youth, for no one could have shown himself a more devoted lover. The lady, Alice Morphy, was a very perfect girl both in mind and body, so that there was every excuse for the professor's infatuation. None the less, it did not meet with full approval in his own family."

"We thought it rather excessive," said our visitor.

"Exactly. Excessive and a little violent and unnatural. Professor Presbury was rich, however, and there was no objection upon the part of the father. The daughter, however, had other views, and there were already several candidates for her hand, who, if they were less eligible from a worldly point of view, were at least more of an age. The girl seemed to like the professor in spite of his eccentricities. It was only age which stood in the way.

"About this time a little mystery suddenly clouded the normal routine of the professor's life. He did what he had never done before. He left home and gave no indication where he was going. He was away a fortnight and returned looking rather travel-worn. He made no allusion to where he had been, although he was usually the frankest of men. It chanced, however, that our client here, Mr. Bennett, received a letter from a fellowstudent in Prague, who said that he was glad to have seen Professor Presbury there, although he had not been able to talk to him. Only in this way did his own household learn where he had been.

"Now comes the point. From that time onward a curious change came over the professor. He became furtive and sly. Those around him had always the feeling that he was not the man that they had known, but that he was under some shadow which had darkened his higher qualities. His intellect was not affected. His lectures were as brilliant as ever. But always there was something new, something sinister and unexpected. His daughter, who was devoted to him, tried again and again to resume the old relations and to penetrate this mask which her father seemed to have put on. You, sir, as I understand, did the same — but all was in vain. And now, Mr. Bennett, tell in your own words the incident of the letters."

"You must understand, Dr. Watson, that the professor had no secrets from me. If I were his son or his younger brother I could not have more completely enjoyed his confidence. As his secretary I handled every paper which came to him, and I opened and subdivided his letters. Shortly after his return all this was changed. He told me that certain letters might come to him from London which would be marked by a cross under the stamp.

These were to be set aside for his own eyes only. I may say that several of these did pass through my hands, that they had the E. C. mark, and were in an illiterate handwriting. If he answered them at all the answers did not pass through my hands nor into the letterbasket in which our correspondence was collected."

"And the box," said Holmes.

"Ah, yes, the box. The professor brought back a little wooden box from his travels. It was the one thing which suggested a Continental tour, for it was one of those quaint carved things which one associates with Germany. This he placed in his instrument cupboard. One day, in looking for a canula, I took up the box. To my surprise he was very angry, and reproved me in words which were quite savage for my curiosity. It was the first time such a thing had happened, and I was deeply hurt. I endeavoured to explain that it was a mere accident that I had touched the box, but all the evening I was conscious that he looked at me harshly and that the incident was rankling in his mind." Mr. Bennett drew a little diary book from his pocket. "That was on July 2d," said he.

"You are certainly an admirable witness," said Holmes. "I may need some of these dates which you have noted."

"I learned method among other things from my great teacher. From the time that I observed abnormality in his behaviour I felt that it was my duty to study his case. Thus I have it here that it was on that very day, July 2d, that Roy attacked the professor as he came from his study into the hall. Again, on July 11th, there was a scene of the same sort, and then I have a note of yet another upon July 20th. After that we had to banish Roy to the stables. He was a dear, affectionate animal — but I fear I weary you."

Mr. Bennett spoke in a tone of reproach, for it was very clear that Holmes was not listening. His face was rigid and his eyes gazed abstractedly at the ceiling. With an effort he recovered himself.

"Singular! Most singular!" he murmured. "These details were new to me, Mr. Bennett. I think we have now fairly gone over the old ground, have we not? But you spoke of some fresh developments."

The pleasant, open face of our visitor clouded over, shadowed by some grim remembrance. "What I speak of occurred the night before last," said he. "I was lying awake about two in the morning, when I was aware of a dull muffled sound coming from the passage. I opened my door and peeped out. I should explain that the professor sleeps at the end of the passage—"

“The date being?” asked Holmes.

Our visitor was clearly annoyed at so irrelevant an interruption.

“I have said, sir, that it was the night before last — that is, September 4th.”

Holmes nodded and smiled.

“Pray continue,” said he.

“He sleeps at the end of the passage and would have to pass my door in order to reach the staircase. It was a really terrifying experience, Mr. Holmes. I think that I am as strong-nerved as my neighbours, but I was shaken by what I saw. The passage was dark save that one window halfway along it threw a patch of light. I could see that something was coming along the passage, something dark and crouching. Then suddenly it emerged into the light, and I saw that it was he. He was crawling, Mr. Holmes — crawling! He was not quite on his hands and knees. I should rather say on his hands and feet, with his face sunk between his hands. Yet he seemed to move with ease. I was so paralyzed by the sight that it was not until he had reached my door that I was able to step forward and ask if I could assist him. His answer was extraordinary. He sprang up, spat out some atrocious word at me, and hurried on past me, and down the staircase. I waited about for an hour, but he did not come back. It must have been daylight before he regained his room.”

“Well, Watson, what make you of that?” asked Holmes with the air of the pathologist who presents a rare specimen.

“Lumbago, possibly. I have known a severe attack make a man walk in just such a way, and nothing would be more trying to the temper.”

“Good, Watson! You always keep us flat-footed on the ground. But we can hardly accept lumbago, since he was able to stand erect in a moment.”

“He was never better in health,” said Bennett. “In fact, he is stronger than I have known him for years. But there are the facts, Mr. Holmes. It is not a case in which we can consult the police, and yet we are utterly at our wit’s end as to what to do, and we feel in some strange way that we are drifting towards disaster. Edith — Miss Presbury — feels as I do, that we cannot wait passively any longer.”

“It is certainly a very curious and suggestive case. What do you think, Watson?”

“Speaking as a medical man,” said I, “it appears to be a case for an alienist. The old gentleman’s cerebral processes were disturbed by the love affair. He made a journey abroad in the hope of breaking himself of the passion. His letters and the box may be connected with some other private transaction — a loan, perhaps, or share cenificates, which are in the box."

"And the wolfhound no doubt disapproved of the financial bargain. No, no, Watson, there is more in it than this. Now, I can only suggest—"

What Sherlock Holmes was about to suggest will never be known, for at this moment the door opened and a young lady was shown into the room. As she appeared Mr. Bennett sprang up with a cry and ran forward with his hands out to meet those which she had herself outstretched.

"Edith, dear! Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"I felt I must follow you. Oh, Jack, I have been so dreadfully frightened! It is awful to be there alone."

"Mr. Holmes, this is the young lady I spoke of. This is my fiancee."

"We were gradually coming to that conclusion, were we not, Watson?" Holmes answered with a smile. "I take it, Miss Presbury, that there is some fresh development in the case, and that you thought we should know?"

Our new visitor, a bright, handsome girl of a conventional English type, smiled back at Holmes as she seated herself beside Mr. Bennett.

"When I found Mr. Bennett had left his hotel I thought I should probably find him here. Of course, he had told me that he would consult you. But, oh, Mr. Holmes, can you do nothing for my poor father?"

"I have hopes, Miss Presbury, but the case is still obscure. Perhaps what you have to say may throw some fresh light upon it."

"It was last night, Mr. Holmes. He had been very strange all day. I am sure that there are times when he has no recollection of what he does. He lives as in a strange dream. Yesterday was such a day. It was not my father with whom I lived. His outward shell was there, but it was not really he."

"Tell me what happened."

"I was awakened in the night by the dog barking most furiously. Poor Roy, he is chained now near the stable. I may say that I always sleep with my door locked; for, as Jack — as Mr. Bennett — will tell you, we all have a feeling of impending danger. My room is on the second floor. It happened that the blind was up in my window, and there was bright moonlight outside. As I lay with my eyes fixed upon the square of light, listening to the frenzied barkings of the dog, I was amazed to see my father's face looking in at me. Mr. Holmes, I nearly died of surprise and horror. There it was pressed against the windowpane, and one hand seemed to be raised as if to push up the window. If that window had opened, I think I should have gone mad. It was no delusion, Mr. Holmes. Don't deceive yourself by thinking so. I dare say it was twenty seconds or so that I lay paralyzed and watched the face. Then it vanished, but I could not — I could not spring out of bed and look out after it. I lay cold and shivering till morning. At breakfast he was sharp and fierce in manner, and made no allusion to the adventure of the night. Neither did I, but I gave an excuse for coming to town — and here I am."

Holmes looked thoroughly surprised at Miss Presbury's narrative.

"My dear young lady, you say that your room is on the second floor. Is there a long ladder in the garden?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, that is the amazing part of it. There is no possible way of reaching the window — and yet he was there."

"The date being September 5th," said Holmes. "That certainly complicates matters."

It was the young lady's turn to look surprised. "This is the second time that you have alluded to the date, Mr. Holmes," said Bennett. "Is it possible that it has any bearing upon the case?"

"It is possible — very possible — and yet I have not my full material at present."

"Possibly you are thinking of the connection between insanity and phases of the moon?"

"No, I assure you. It was quite a different line of thought. Possibly you can leave your notebook with me, and I will check the dates. Now I think, Watson, that our line of action is perfectly clear. This young lady has informed us — and I have the greatest confidence in her intuition — that her father remembers little or nothing which occurs upon certain dates. We will therefore call upon him as if he had given us an appointment upon such a date. He will put it down to his own lack of memory. Thus we will open our campaign by having a good close view of him."

"That is excellent," said Mr. Bennett. "I warn you, however, that the professor is irascible and violent at times."

Holmes smiled. "There are reasons why we should come at once — very cogent reasons if my theories hold good. To-morrow, Mr. Bennett, will certainly see us in Camford. There is, if I remember right, an inn called the Chequers where the port used to be above mediocrity and the linen was above reproach. I think, Watson, that our lot for the next few days might lie in less pleasant places."

Monday morning found us on our way to the famous university town — an easy effort on the part of Holmes, who had no roots to pull up, but one which involved frantic planning and hurrying on my part, as my practice was by this time not inconsiderable. Holmes made no allusion to the case until after we had deposited our suitcases at the ancient hostel of which he had spoken.

"I think, Watson, that we can catch the professor just before lunch. He lectures at eleven and should have an interval at home."

"What possible excuse have we for calling?"

Holmes glanced at his notebook.

"There was a period of excitement upon August 26th. We will assume that he is a little hazy as to what he does at such times. If we insist that we are there by appointment I think he will hardly venture to contradict us. Have you the effrontery necessary to put it through?"

"We can but try."

"Excellent, Watson! Compound of the Busy Bee and Excelsior. We can but try — the motto of the firm. A friendly native will surely guide us."

Such a one on the back of a smart hansom swept us past a row of ancient colleges and, finally turning into a tree-lined drive, pulled up at the door of a charming house, girt round with lawns and covered with purple wistaria. Professor Presbury was certainly surrounded with every sign not only of comfort but of luxury. Even as we pulled up, a grizzled head appeared at the front window, and we were aware of a pair of keen eyes from under shaggy brows which surveyed us through large horn glasses. A moment later we were actually in his sanctum, and the mysterious scientist, whose vagaries had brought us from London, was standing before us. There was certainly no sign of eccentricity either in his manner or appearance, for he was a portly, largefeatured man, grave, tall, and frock-coated, with the dignity of bearing which a lecturer needs. His eyes were his most remarkable feature, keen, observant, and clever to the verge of cunning.

He looked at our cards. "Pray sit down, gentlemen. What can I do for you?"

Mr. Holmes smiled amiably.

"It was the question which I was about to put to you, Professor."

"To me, sir!"

“Possibly there is some mistake. I heard through a second person that Professor Presbury of Camford had need of my services.”

“Oh, indeed!” It seemed to me that there was a malicious sparkle in the intense gray eyes. “You heard that, did you? May I ask the name of your informant?”

“I am sorry, Professor, but the matter was rather confidential. If I have made a mistake there is no harm done. I can only express my regret.”

“Not at all. I should wish to go further into this matter. It interests me. Have you any scrap of writing, any letter or telegram, to bear out your assertion?”

“No, I have not.”

“I presume that you do not go so far as to assert that I summoned you?”

“I would rather answer no questions,” said Holmes.

“No, I dare say not,” said the professor with asperity. “However, that particular one can be answered very easily without your aid.”

He walked across the room to the bell. Our London friend Mr. Bennett, answered the call.

“Come in, Mr. Bennett. These two gentlemen have come from London under the impression that they have been summoned. You handle all my correspondence. Have you a note of anything going to a person named Holmes?”

“No, sir,” Bennett answered with a flush.

“That is conclusive,” said the professor, glaring angrily at my companion. “Now, sir” — he leaned forward with his two hands upon the table—” it seems to me that your position is a very questionable one.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“I can only repeat that I am sorry that we have made a needless intrusion.”

“Hardly enough, Mr. Holmes!” the old man cried in a high screaming voice, with extraordinary malignancy upon his face. He got between us and the door as he spoke, and he shook his two hands at us with furious passion. “You can hardly get out of it so easily as that.” His face was convulsed, and he grinned and gibbered at us in his senseless rage. I am convinced that we should have had to fight our way out of the room if Mr. Bennett had not intervened.

“My dear Professor,” he cried, “consider your position! Consider the scandal at the university! Mr. Holmes is a wellknown man. You cannot possibly treat him with such discourtesy."

Sulkily our host — if I may call him so — cleared the path to the door. We were glad to find ourselves outside the house and in the quiet of the tree-lined drive. Holmes seemed greatly amused by the episode.

"Our learned friend's nerves are somewhat out of order," said he. "Perhaps our intrusion was a little crude, and yet we have gained that personal contact which I desired. But, dear me, Watson, he is surely at our heels. The villain still pursues us."

There were the sounds of running feet behind, but it was, to my relief, not the formidable professor but his assistant who appeared round the curve of the drive. He came panting up to us.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Holmes. I wished to apologize."

"My dear sir, there is no need. It is all in the way of professional experience."

"I have never seen him in a more dangerous mood. But he grows more sinister. You can understand now why his daughter and I are alarmed. And yet his mind is perfectly clear."

"Too clear!" said Holmes. "That was my miscalculation. It is evident that his memory is much more reliable than I had thought. By the way, can we, before we go, see the window of Miss Presbury's room?"

Mr. Bennett pushed his way through some shrubs, and we had a view of the side of the house.

"It is there. The second on the left."

"Dear me, it seems hardly accessible. And yet you will observe that there is a creeper below and a water-pipe above which give some foothold."

"I could not climb it myself," said Mr. Bennett.

"Very likely. It would certainly be a dangerous exploit for any normal man."

"There was one other thing I wish to tell you, Mr. Holmes. I have the address of the man in London to whom the professor writes. He seems to have written this morning, and I got it from his blotting-paper. It is an ignoble position for a trusted secretary, but what else can I do?"

Holmes glanced at the paper and put it into his pocket.

"Dorak — a curious name. Slavonic, I imagine. Well, it is an important link in the chain. We return to London this afternoon, Mr. Bennett. I see no good purpose to be served by our remaining. We cannot arrest the professor because he has done no crime, nor can we place him under constraint, for he cannot be proved to be mad. No action is as yet possible."

"Then what on earth are we to do?"

"A little patience, Mr. Bennett. Things will soon develop. Unless I am mistaken, next Tuesday may mark a crisis. Certainly we shall be in Camford on that day. Meanwhile, the general position is undeniably unpleasant, and if Miss Presbury can prolong her visit"

"That is easy."

"Then let her stay till we can assure her that all danger is past. Meanwhile, let him have his way and do not cross him. So long as he is in a good humour all is well."

"There he is!" said Bennett in a startled whisper. Looking between the branches we saw the tall, erect figure emerge from the hall door and look around him. He stood leaning forward, his hands swinging straight before him, his head turning from side to side. The secretary with a last wave slipped off among the trees, and we saw him presently rejoin his employer, the two entering the house together in what seemed to be animated and even excited conversation.

"I expect the old gentleman has been putting two and two together," said Holmes as we walked hotelward. "He struck me as having a particularly clear and logical brain from the little I saw of him. Explosive, no doubt, but then from his point of view he has something to explode about if detectives are put on his track and he suspects his own household of doing it. I rather fancy that friend Bennett is in for an uncomfortable time."

Holmes stopped at a post-office and sent off a telegram on our way. The answer reached us in the evening, and he tossed it across to me.

Have visited the Commercial Road and seen Dorak. Suave person, Bohemian, elderly. Keeps large general store. MERCER.

"Mercer is since your time," said Holmes. "He is my general utility man who looks up routine business. It was important to know something of the man with whom our professor was so secretly corresponding. His nationality connects up with the Prague visit."

"Thank goodness that something connects with something," said I. "At present we seem to be faced by a long series of inexplicable incidents with no bearing upon each other. For example, what possible connection can there be between an angry wolfhound and a visit to Bohemia, or either of them with a man crawling down a passage at night? As to your dates, that is the biggest mystification of all."

Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands. We were, I may say, seated in the old sitting-room of the ancient hotel, with a bottle of the famous vintage of which Holmes had spoken on the table between us.

"Well, now, let us take the dates first," said he, his fingertips together and his manner as if he were addressing a class. "This excellent young man's diary shows that there was trouble upon July 2d, and from then onward it seems to have been at nine-day intervals, with, so far as I remember, only one exception. Thus the last outbreak upon Friday was on September 3d, which also falls into the series, as did August 26th, which preceded it. The thing is beyond coincidence."

I was forced to agree.

"Let us, then, form the provisional theory that every nine days the professor takes some strong drug which has a passing but highly poisonous effect. His naturally violent nature is intensified by it. He learned to take this drug while he was in Prague, and is now supplied with it by a Bohemian intermediary in London. This all hangs together, Watson!"

"But the dog, the face at the window, the creeping man in the passage?"

"Well, well, we have made a beginning. I should not expect any fresh developments until next Tuesday. In the meantime we can only keep in touch with friend Bennett and enjoy the amenities of this charming town."

In the morning Mr. Bennett slipped round to bring us the latest report. As Holmes had imagined, times had not been easy with him. Without exactly accusing him of being responsible for our presence, the professor had been very rough and rude in his speech, and evidently felt some strong grievance. This morning he was quite himself again, however, and had delivered his usual brilliant lecture to a crowded class. "Apart from his queer fits," said Bennett, "he has actually more energy and vitality than I can ever remember, nor was his brain ever clearer. But it's not he — it's never the man whom we have known."

"I don't think you have anything to fear now for a week at least," Holmes answered. "I am a busy man, and Dr. Watson has his patients to attend to. Let us agree that we meet here at this hour next Tuesday, and I shall be surprised if before we leave you again we are not able to explain, even if we cannot perhaps put an end to, your troubles. Meanwhile, keep us posted in what occurs."

I saw nothing of my friend for the next few days, but on the following Monday evening I had a short note asking me to meet him next day at the train. From what he told me as we travelled up to Camford all was well, the peace of the professor's house had been unruffled, and his own conduct perfectly normal. This also was the report which was given us by Mr. Bennett himself when he called upon us that evening at our old quarters in the Chequers. "He heard from his London correspondent to-day. There was a letter and there was a small packet, each with the cross under the stamp which warned me not to touch them. There has been nothing else."

"That may prove quite enough," said Holmes grimly. "Now, Mr. Bennett, we shall, I think, come to some conclusion tonight. If my deductions are correct we should have an opportunity of bringing matters to a head. In order to do so it is necessary to hold the professor under observation. I would suggest, therefore, that you remain awake and on the lookout. Should you hear him pass your door, do not interrupt him, but follow him as discreetly as you can. Dr. Watson and I will not be far off. By the way, where is the key of that little box of which you spoke?"

"Upon his watch-chain."

"I fancy our researches must lie in that direction. At the worst the lock should not be very formidable. Have you any other able-bodied man on the premises?"

"There is the coachman, Macphail."

"Where does he sleep?"

"Over the stables."

"We might possibly want him. Well, we can do no more until we see how things develop, Good-bye — but I expect that we shall see you before morning."

It was nearly midnight before we took our station among some bushes immediately opposite the hall door of the professor. It was a fine night, but chilly, and we were glad of our warm overcoats. There was a breeze, and clouds were scudding across the sky, obscuring from time to time the half-moon. It would have been a dismal vigil were it not for the expectation and excitement which carried us along, and the assurance of my comrade that we had probably reached the end of the strange sequence of events which had engaged our attention.

"If the cycle of nine days holds good then we shall have the professor at his worst to-night," said Holmes. "The fact that these strange symptoms began after his visit to Prague, that he is in secret correspondence with a Bohemian dealer in London, who presumably represents someone in Prague, and that he received a packet from him this very day, all point in one direction. What he takes and why he takes it are still beyond our ken, but that it emanates in some way from Prague is clear enough. He takes it under definite directions which regulate this ninth-day system, which was the first point which attracted my attention. But his symptoms are most remarkable. Did you observe his knuckles?"

I had to confess that I did not.

"Thick and horny in a way which is quite new in my experience. Always look at the hands first, Watson. Then cuffs, trouserknees, and boots. Very curious knuckles which can only be explained by the mode of progression observed by—" Holmes paused and suddenly clapped his hand to his forehead. "Oh, Watson, Watson, what a fool I have been! It seems incredible, and yet it must be true. All points in one direction. How could I miss seeing the connection of ideas? Those knuckles how could I have passed those knuckles? And the dog! And the ivy! It's surely time that I disappeared into that little farm of my dreams. Look out, Watson! Here he is! We shall have the chance of seeing for ourselves."

The hall door had slowly opened, and against the lamplit background we saw the tall figure of Professor Presbury. He was clad in his dressing gown. As he stood outlined in the doorway he was erect but leaning forward with dangling arms, as when we saw him last.

Now he stepped forward into the drive, and an extraordinary change came over him. He sank down into a crouching position and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were overflowing with energy and vitality. He moved along the face of the house and then round the corner. As he disappeared Bennett slipped through the hall door and softly followed him.

"Come, Watson, come!" cried Holmes, and we stole as softly as we could through the bushes until we had gained a spot whence we could see the other side of the house, which was bathed in the light of the half-moon. The professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view. With his dressing-gown flapping on each side of him, he looked like some huge bat glued against the side of his own house, a great square dark patch upon the moonlit wall. Presently he tired of this amusement, and, dropping from branch to branch, he squatted down into the old attitude and moved towards the stables, creeping along in the same strange way as before. The wolfhound was out now, barking furiously, and more excited than ever when it actually caught sight of its master. It was straining on its chain and quivering with eagerness and rage. The professor squatted down very deliberately just out of reach of the hound and began to provoke it in every possible way. He took handfuls of pebbles from the drive and threw them in the dog's face, prodded him with a stick which he had picked up, flicked his hands about only a few inches from the gaping mouth, and endeavoured in every way to increase the animal's fury, which was already beyond all control. In all our adventures I do not know that I have ever seen a more strange sight than this impassive and still dignified figure crouching frog-like upon the ground and goading to a wilder exhibition of passion the maddened hound, which ramped and raged in front of him, by all manner of ingenious and calculated cruelty.

And then in a moment it happened! It was not the chain that broke, but it was the collar that slipped, for it had been made for a thick-necked Newfoundland. We heard the rattle of falling metal, and the next instant dog and man were rolling on the ground together, the one roaring in rage, the other screaming in a strange shrill falsetto of terror. It was a very narrow thing for the professor's life. The savage creature had him fairly by the throat, its fangs had bitten deep, and he was senseless before we could reach them and drag the two apart. It might have been a dangerous task for us, but Bennett's voice and presence brought the great wolflhound instantly to reason. The uproar had brought the sleepy and astonished coachman from his room above the stables. "I'm not surprised," said he, shaking his head. "I've seen him at it before. I knew the dog would get him sooner or later."

The hound was secured, and together we carried the professor up to his room, where Bennett, who had a medical degree, helped me to dress his torn throat. The sharp teeth had passed dangerously near the carotid artery, and the haemorrhage was serious. In half an hour the danger was past, I had given the patient an injection of morphia, and he had sunk into deep sleep. Then, and only then, were we able to look at each other and to take stock of the situation.

"I think a first-class surgeon should see him," said I.

"For God's sake, no!" cried Bennett. "At present the scandal is confined to our own household. It is safe with us. If it gets beyond these walls it will never stop. Consider his position at the university, his European reputation, the feelings of his daughter."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "I think it may be quite possible to keep the matter to ourselves, and also to prevent its recurrence now that we have a free hand. The key from the watch-chain, Mr. Bennett. Macphail will guard the patient and let us know if there is any change. Let us see what we can find in the professor's mysterious box."

There was not much, but there was enough — an empty phial, another nearly full, a hypodermic syringe, several letters in a crabbed, foreign hand. The marks on the envelopes showed that they were those which had disturbed the routine of the secretary, and each was dated from the Commercial Road and signed "A. Dorak." They were mere invoices to say that a fresh bottle was being sent to Professor Presbury, or receipt to acknowledge money. There was one other envelope, however, in a more educated hand and bearing the Austrian stamp with the postmark of Prague. "Here we have our material!" cried Holmes as he tore out the enclosure.

HONOURED COLLEAGUE [it ran]:

Since your esteemed visit I have thought much of your case, and though in your circumstances there are some special reasons for the treatment, I would none the less enjoin caution, as my results have shown that it is not without danger of a kind. It is possible that the serum of anthropoid would have been better. I have, as I explained to you, used black-faced langur because a specimen was accessible. Langur is, of course, a crawler and climber, while anthropoid walks erect and is in all ways nearer. I beg you to take every possible precaution that there be no premature revelation of the process. I have one other client in England, and Dorak is my agent for both. Weekly reports will oblige.

Yours with high esteem,

H. LOWENSTEIN.

Lowenstein! The name brought back to me the memory of some snippet from a newspaper which spoke of an obscure scientist who was striving in some unknown way for the secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life. Lowenstein of Prague! Lowenstein with the wondrous strength-giving serum, tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal its source. In a few words I said what I remembered. Bennett had taken a manual of zoology from the shelves. "'Langur,'" he read, "'the great black-faced monkey of the Himalayan slopes, biggest and most human of climbing monkeys.' Many details are added. Well, thanks to you, Mr. Holmes, it is very clear that we have traced the evil to its source."

"The real source," said Holmes, "lies, of course, in that untimely love affair which gave our impetuous professor the idea that he could only gain his wish by turning himself into a younger man. When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it. The highest type of man may revert to the animal if he leaves the straight road of destiny." He sat musing for a little with the phial in his hand, looking at the clear liquid within. "When I have written to this man and told him that I hold him criminally responsible for the poisons which he circulates, we will have no more trouble. But it may recur. Others may find a better way. There is danger there — a very real danger to humanity. Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. The spiritual would not avoid the call to something higher. It would be the survival of the least fit. What sort of cesspool may not our poor world become?" Suddenly the dreamer disappeared, and Holmes, the man of action, sprang from his chair. "I think there is nothing more to be said, Mr. Bennett. The various incidents will now fit themselves easily into the general scheme. The dog, of course, was aware of the change far more quickly than you. His smell would insure that. It was the monkey, not the professor, whom Roy attacked, just as it was the monkey who teased Roy. Climbing was a joy to the creature, and it was a mere chance, I take it, that the pastime brought him to the young lady's window. There is an early train to town, Watson, but I think we shall just have time for a cup of tea at the Chequers before we catch it."

ADVENTURE IV. THE ADVENTURE OF THE SUSSEX VAMPIRE

Holmes had read carefully a note which the last post had brought him. Then, with the dry chuckle which was his nearest approach to a laugh, he tossed it over to me.

“For a mixture of the modern and the mediaeval, of the practical and of the wildly fanciful, I think this is surely the limit,” said he. “What do you make of it, Watson?”

I read as follows:

46, OLD JEWRY,

Nov. 19th.

Re Vampires

SIR:

Our client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, has made some inquiry from us in a communication of even date concerning vampires. As our firm specialises entirely upon the assessment of machinery the matter hardly comes within our purview, and we have therefore recommended Mr. Ferguson to call upon you and lay the matter before you. We have not forgotten your successful action in the case of Matilda Briggs.

We are, sir,

Faithfully yours,

MORRISON, MORRISON, AND DODD.

per E. J. C.

“Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson,” said Holmes in a reminiscent voice. “It was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared. But what do we know about vampires? Does it come within our purview either? Anything is better than stagnation, but really we seem to have been switched on to a Grimms’ fairy tale. Make a long arm, Watson, and see what V has to say.”

I leaned back and took down the great index volume to which he referred. Holmes balanced it on his knee, and his eyes moved slowly and lovingly over the record of old cases, mixed with the accumulated information of a lifetime.

"Voyage of the Gloria Scott," he read. "That was a bad business. I have some recollection that you made a record of it, Watson, though I was unable to congratulate you upon the result. Victor Lynch, the forger. Venomous lizard or gila. Remarkable case, that! Vittoria, the circus belle. Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. Vipers. Vigor, the Hammersmith wonder. Hullo! Hullo! Good old index. You can't beat it. Listen to this, Watson. Vampirism in Hungary. And again, Vampires in Transylvania." He turned over the pages with eagerness, but after a short intent perusal he threw down the great book with a snarl of disappointment.

"Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy."

"But surely," said I, "the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? A living person might have the habit. I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth."

"You are right, Watson. It mentions the legend in one of these references. But are we to give serious attention to such things? This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply. I fear that we cannot take Mr. Robert Ferguson very seriously. Possibly this note may be from him and may throw some light upon what is worrying him."

He took up a second letter which had lain unnoticed upon the table while he had been absorbed with the first. This he began to read with a smile of amusement upon his face which gradually faded away into an expression of intense interest and concentration. When he had finished he sat for some little time lost in thought with the letter dangling from his fingers. Finally, with a start, he aroused himself from his reverie.

"Cheeseman's, Lamberley. Where is Lamberley, Watson?"

"It is in Sussex, South of Horsham."

"Not very far, eh? And Cheeseman's?"

"I know that country, Holmes. It is full of old houses which are named after the men who built them centuries ago. You get Odley's and Harvey's and Carriton's — the folk are forgotten but their names live in their houses."

“Precisely,” said Holmes coldly. It was one of the peculiarities of his proud, self-contained nature that though he docketed any fresh information very quietly and accurately in his brain, he seldom made any acknowledgment to the giver. “I rather fancy we shall know a good deal more about Cheeseman’s, Lamberley, before we are through. The letter is, as I had hoped, from Robert Ferguson. By the way, he claims acquaintance with you.”

“With me!”

“You had better read it.”

He handed the letter across. It was headed with the address quoted.

DEAR MR HOLMES [it said]:

I have been recommended to you by my lawyers, but indeed the matter is so extraordinarily delicate that it is most difficult to discuss. It concerns a friend for whom I am acting. This gentleman married some five years ago a Peruvian lady, the daughter of a Peruvian merchant, whom he had met in connection with the importation of nitrates. The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their union as a mistake. He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore or understand. This was the more painful as she was as loving a wife as a man could have — to all appearance absolutely devoted.

Now for the point which I will make more plain when we meet. Indeed, this note is merely to give you a general idea of the situation and to ascertain whether you would care to interest yourself in the matter. The lady began to show some curious traits quite alien to her ordinarily sweet and gentle disposition. The gentleman had been married twice and he had one son by the first wife. This boy was now fifteen, a very charming and affectionate youth, though unhappily injured through an accident in childhood. Twice the wife was caught in the act of assaulting this poor lad in the most unprovoked way. Once she struck him with a stick and left a great weal on his arm. This was a small matter, however, compared with her conduct to her own child, a dear boy just under one year of age. On one occasion about a month ago this child had been left by its nurse for a few minutes. A loud cry from the baby, as of pain, called the nurse back. As she ran into the room she saw her employer, the lady, leaning over the baby and apparently biting his neck. There was a small wound in the neck from which a stream of blood had escaped. The nurse was so horrified that she wished to call the husband, but the lady implored her not to do so and actually gave her five pounds as a price for her silence. No explanation was ever given, and for the moment the matter was passed over. It left, however, a terrible impression upon the nurse's mind, and from that time she began to watch her mistress closely and to keep a closer guard upon the baby, whom she tenderly loved. It seemed to her that even as she watched the mother, so the mother watched her, and that every time she was compelled to leave the baby alone the mother was waiting to get at it. Day and night the nurse covered the child, and day and night the silent, watchful mother seemed to be lying in wait as a wolf waits for a lamb. It must read most incredible to you, and yet I beg you to take it seriously, for a child's life and a man's sanity may depend upon it.

At last there came one dreadful day when the facts could no longer be concealed from the husband. The nurse's nerve had given way; she could stand the strain no longer, and she made a clean breast of it all to the man. To him it seemed as wild a tale as it may now seem to you. He knew his wife to be a loving wife, and, save for the assaults upon her stepson, a loving mother. Why, then, should she wound her own dear little baby? He told the nurse that she was dreaming, that her suspicions were those of a lunatic, and that such libels upon her mistress were not to be tolerated. While they were talking a sudden cry of pain was heard. Nurse and master rushed together to the nursery. Imagine his feelings, Mr. Holmes, as he saw his wife rise from a kneeling position beside the cot and saw blood upon the child's exposed neck and upon the sheet. With a cry of horror, he turned his wife's face to the light and saw blood all round her lips. It was she — she beyond all question — who had drunk the poor baby's blood. So the matter stands. She is now confined to her room. There has been no explanation. The husband is half demented. He knows, and I know, little of vampirism beyond the name. We had thought it was some wild tale of foreign parts. And yet here in the very heart of the English Sussex — well, all this can be discussed with you in the morning. Will you see me? Will you use your great powers in aiding a distracted man? If so, kindly wire to Ferguson, Cheeseman's, Lamberley, and I will be at your rooms by ten o'clock.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT FERGUSON.

P. S. I believe your friend Watson played Rugby for Blackheath when I was three-quarter for Richmond. It is the only personal introduction which I can give.

"Of course I remembered him," said I as I laid down the letter. "Big Bob Ferguson, the finest three-quarter Richmond ever had. He was always a good-natured chap. It's like him to be so concerned over a friend's case."

Holmes looked at me thoughtfully and shook his head.

"I never get your limits, Watson," said he. "There are unexplored possibilities about you. Take a wire down, like a good fellow. 'Will examine your case with pleasure.'"

"Your case!"

"We must not let him think that this agency is a home for the weak-minded. Of course it is his case. Send him that wire and let the matter rest till morning."

Promptly at ten o'clock next morning Ferguson strode into our room. I had remembered him as a long, slab-sided man with loose limbs and a fine turn of speed which had carried him round many an opposing back. There is surely nothing in life more painful than to meet the wreck of a fine athlete whom one has known in his prime. His great frame had fallen in, his flaxen hair was scanty, and his shoulders were bowed. I fear that I roused corresponding emotions in him.

"Hullo, Watson," said he, and his voice was still deep and hearty. "You don't look quite the man you did when I threw you over the ropes into the crowd at the Old Deer Park. I expect I have changed a bit also. But it's this last day or two that has aged me. I see by your telegram, Mr. Holmes, that it is no use my pretending to be anyone's deputy.".

"It is simpler to deal direct," said Holmes.

"Of course it is. But you can imagine how difficult it is when you are speaking of the one woman whom you are bound to protect and help. What can I do? How am I to go to the police with such a story? And yet the kiddies have got to be protected. Is it madness, Mr. Holmes? Is it something in the blood? Have you any similar case in your experience? For God's sake, give me some advice, for I am at my wit's end."

"Very naturally, Mr. Ferguson. Now sit here and pull yourself together and give me a few clear answers. I can assure you that I am very far from being at my wit's end, and that I am confident we shall find some solution.

First of all, tell me what steps you have taken. Is your wife still near the children?”

“We had a dreadful scene. She is a most loving woman, Mr. Holmes. If ever a woman loved a man with all her heart and soul, she loves me. She was cut to the heart that I should have discovered this horrible, this incredible, secret. She would not even speak. She gave no answer to my reproaches, save to gaze at me with a sort of wild, despairing look in her eyes. Then she rushed to her room and locked herself in. Since then she has refused to see me. She has a maid who was with her before her marriage, Dolores by name — a friend rather than a servant. She takes her food to her.”

“Then the child is in no immediate danger?”

“Mrs. Mason, the nurse, has sworn that she will not leave it night or day. I can absolutely trust her. I am more uneasy about poor little Jack, for, as I told you in my note, he has twice been assaulted by her.”

“But never wounded?”

“No, she struck him savagely. It is the more terrible as he is a poor little inoffensive cripple.” Ferguson’s gaunt features softened as he spoke of his boy. “You would think that the dear lad’s condition would soften anyone’s heart. A fall in childhood and a twisted spine, Mr. Holmes. But the dearest, most loving heart within.”

Holmes had picked up the letter of yesterday and was reading it over. “What other inmates are there in your house, Mr. Ferguson?”

“Two servants who have not been long with us. One stablehand, Michael, who sleeps in the house. My wife, myself, my boy Jack, baby, Dolores, and Mrs. Mason. That is all.”

“I gather that you did not know your wife well at the time of your marriage?”

“I had only known her a few weeks.”

“How long had this maid Dolores been with her?”

“Some years.”

“Then your wife’s character would really be better known by Dolores than by you?”

“Yes, you may say so.”

Holmes made a note.

“I fancy,” said he, “that I may be of more use at Lamberley than here. It is eminently a case for personal investigation. If the lady remains in her room, our presence could not annoy or inconvenience her. Of course, we would stay at the inn."

Ferguson gave a gesture of relief.

"It is what I hoped, Mr. Holmes. There is an excellent train at two from Victoria if you could come."

"Of course we could come. There is a lull at present. I can give you my undivided energies. Watson, of course, comes with us. But there are one or two points upon which I wish to be very sure before I start. This unhappy lady, as I understand it, has appeared to assault both the children, her own baby and your little son?"

"That is so."

"But the assaults take different forms, do they not? She has beaten your son."

"Once with a stick and once very savagely with her hands."

"Did she give no explanation why she struck him?"

"None save that she hated him. Again and again she said so."

"Well, that is not unknown among stepmothers. A posthumous jealousy, we will say. Is the lady jealous by nature?"

"Yes, she is very jealous — jealous with all the strength of her fiery tropical love."

"But the boy — he is fifteen, I understand, and probably very developed in mind, since his body has been circumscribed in action. Did he give you no explanation of these assaults?"

"No, he declared there was no reason."

"Were they good friends at other times?"

"No, there was never any love between them."

"Yet you say he is affectionate?"

"Never in the world could there be so devoted a son. My life is his life. He is absorbed in what I say or do."

Once again Holmes made a note. For some time he sat lost in thought.

"No doubt you and the boy were great comrades before this second marriage. You were thrown very close together, were you not?"

"Very much so."

"And the boy, having so affectionate a nature, was devoted, no doubt, to the memory of his mother?"

"Most devoted."

“He would certainly seem to be a most interesting lad. There is one other point about these assaults. Were the strange attacks upon the baby and the assaults upon yow son at the same period?”

“In the first case it was so. It was as if some frenzy had seized her, and she had vented her rage upon both. In the second case it was only Jack who suffered. Mrs. Mason had no complaint to make about the baby.”

“That certainly complicates matters.”

“I don’t quite follow you, Mr. Holmes.”

“Possibly not. One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them. A bad habit, Mr. Ferguson, but human nature is weak. I fear that your old friend here has given an exaggerated view of my scientific methods. However, I will only say at the present stage that your problem does not appear to me to be insoluble, and that you may expect to find us at Victoria at two o’clock.”

It was evening of a dull, foggy November day when, having left our bags at the Chequers, Lamberley, we drove through the Sussex clay of a long winding lane and finally reached the isolated and ancient farmhouse in which Ferguson dwelt. It was a large, straggling building, very old in the centre, very new at the wings with towering Tudor chimneys and a lichen-spotted, high-pitched roof of Horsham slabs. The doorsteps were worn into curves, and the ancient tiles which lined the porch were marked with the rebus of a cheese and a man after the original builder. Within, the ceilings were corrugated with heavy oaken beams, and the uneven floors sagged into sharp curves. An odour of age and decay pervaded the whole crumbling building.

There was one very large central room into which Ferguson led us. Here, in a huge old-fashioned fireplace with an iron screen behind it dated 1670, there blazed and spluttered a splendid log fire.

The room, as I gazed round, was a most singular mixture of dates and of places. The half-panelled walls may well have belonged to the original yeoman farmer of the seventeenth century. They were ornamented, however, on the lower part by a line of well-chosen modern water-colours; while above, where yellow plaster took the place of oak, there was hung a fine collection of South American utensils and weapons, which had been brought, no doubt, by the Peruvian lady upstairs. Holmes rose, with that quick curiosity which sprang from his eager mind, and examined them with some care. He returned with his eyes full of thought.

“Hullo!” he cried. “Hullo!”

A spaniel had lain in a basket in the corner. It came slowly forward towards its master, walking with difficulty. Its hind legs moved irregularly and its tail was on the ground. It licked Ferguson’s hand.

“What is it, Mr. Holmes?”

“The dog. What’s the matter with it?”

“That’s what puzzled the vet. A sort of paralysis. Spinal meningitis, he thought. But it is passing. He’ll be all right soon — won’t you, Carlo?”

A shiver of assent passed through the drooping tail. The dog’s mournful eyes passed from one of us to the other. He knew that we were discussing his case.

“Did it come on suddenly?”

“In a single night.”

“How long ago?”

“It may have been four months ago.”

“Very remarkable. Very suggestive.”

“What do you see in it, Mr. Holmes?”

“A confirmation of what I had already thought.”

“For God’s sake, what do you think, Mr. Holmes? It may be a mere intellectual puzzle to you, but it is life and death to me! My wife a would-be murderer — my child in constant danger! Don’t play with me, Mr. Holmes. It is too terribly serious.”

The big Rugby three-quarter was trembling all over. Holmes put his hand soothingly upon his arm.

“I fear that there is pain for you, Mr. Ferguson, whatever the solution may be,” said he. “I would spare you all I can. I cannot say more for the instant, but before I leave this house I hope I may have something definite.”

“Please God you may! If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go up to my wife’s room and see if there has been any change.”

He was away some minutes, during which Holmes resumed his examination of the curiosities upon the wall. When our host returned it was clear from his downcast face that he had made no progress. He brought with him a tall, slim, brown-faced girl.

“The tea is ready, Dolores,” said Ferguson. “See that your mistress has everything she can wish.”

“She verra ill,” cried the girl, looking with indignant eyes at her master. “She no ask for food. She verra ill. She need doctor. I frightened stay alone with her without doctor.”

Ferguson looked at me with a question in his eyes.

“I should be so glad if I could be of use.”

“Would your mistress see Dr. Watson?”

“I take him. I no ask leave. She needs doctor.”

“Then I’ll come with you at once.”

I followed the girl, who was quivering with strong emotion, up the staircase and down an ancient corridor. At the end was an iron-clamped and massive door. It struck me as I looked at it that if Ferguson tried to force his way to his wife he would find it no easy matter. The girl drew a key from her pocket, and the heavy oaken planks creaked upon their old hinges. I passed in and she swiftly followed, fastening the door behind her.

On the bed a woman was lying who was clearly in a high fever. She was only half conscious, but as I entered she raised a pair of frightened but beautiful eyes and glared at me in apprehension. Seeing a stranger, she appeared to be relieved and sank back with a sigh upon the pillow. I stepped up to her with a few reassuring words, and she lay still while I took her pulse and temperature. Both were high, and yet my impression was that the condition was rather that of mental and nervous excitement than of any actual seizure.

“She lie like that one day, two day. I ‘fraid she die,” said the girl.

The woman turned her flushed and handsome face towards me.

“Where is my husband?”

“He is below and would wish to see you.”

“I will not see him. I will not see him.” Then she seemed to wander off into delirium. “A fiend! A fiend! Oh, what shall I do with this devil?”

“Can I help you in any way?”

“No. No one can help. It is finished. All is destroyed. Do what I will, all is destroyed.”

The woman must have some strange delusion. I could not see honest Bob Ferguson in the character of fiend or devil.

“Madame,” I said, “your husband loves you dearly. He is deeply grieved at this happening.”

Again she turned on me those glorious eyes.

“He loves me. Yes. But do I not love him? Do I not love him even to sacrifice myself rather than break his dear heart? That is how I love him. And yet he could think of me — he could speak of me so.”

“He is full of grief, but he cannot understand.”

“No, he cannot understand. But he should trust.”

“Will you not see him?” I suggested.

“No, no, I cannot forget those terrible words nor the look upon his face. I will not see him. Go now. You can do nothing for me. Tell him only one thing. I want my child. I have a right to my child. That is the only message I can send him.” She turned her face to the wall and would say no more.

I returned to the room downstairs, where Ferguson and Holmes still sat by the fire. Ferguson listened moodily to my account of the interview.

“How can I send her the child?” he said. “How do I know what strange impulse might come upon her? How can I ever forget how she rose from beside it with its blood upon her lips?” He shuddered at the recollection. “The child is safe with Mrs. Mason, and there he must remain.”

A smart maid, the only modern thing which we had seen in the house, had brought in some tea. As she was serving it the door opened and a youth entered the room. He was a remarkable lad, pale-faced and fair-haired, with excitable light blue eyes which blazed into a sudden flame of emotion and joy as they rested upon his father. He rushed forward and threw his arms round his neck with the abandon of a loving girl.

“Oh, daddy,” he cried, “I did not know that you were due yet. I should have been here to meet you. Oh, I am so glad to see you!”

Ferguson gently disengaged himself from the embrace with some little show of embarrassment.

“Dear old chap,” said he, patting the flaxen head with a very tender hand. “I came early because my friends, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, have been persuaded to come down and spend an evening with us.”

“Is that Mr. Holmes, the detective?”

“Yes.”

The youth looked at us with a very penetrating and, as it seemed to me, unfriendly gaze.

“What about your other child, Mr. Ferguson?” asked Holmes. “Might we make the acquaintance of the baby?”

“Ask Mrs. Mason to bring baby down,” said Ferguson. The boy went off with a curious, shambling gait which told my surgical eyes that he was suffering from a weak spine. Presently he returned, and behind him came a tall, gaunt woman bearing in her arms a very beautiful child, dark-eyed, golden-haired, a wonderful mixture of the Saxon and the Latin. Ferguson was evidently devoted to it, for he took it into his arms and fondled it most tenderly.

"Fancy anyone having the heart to hurt him," he muttered as he glanced down at the small, angry red pucker upon the cherub throat.

It was at this moment that I chanced to glance at Holmes and saw a most singular intentness in his expression. His face was as set as if it had been carved out of old ivory, and his eyes, which had glanced for a moment at father and child, were now fixed with eager curiosity upon something at the other side of the room. Following his gaze I could only guess that he was looking out through the window at the melancholy, dripping garden. It is true that a shutter had half closed outside and obstructed the view, but none the less it was certainly at the window that Holmes was fixing his concentrated attention. Then he smiled, and his eyes came back to the baby. On its chubby neck there was this small puckered mark. Without speaking, Holmes examined it with care. Finally he shook one of the dimpled fists which waved in front of him.

"Good-bye, little man. You have made a strange start in life. Nurse, I should wish to have a word with you in private."

He took her aside and spoke earnestly for a few minutes. I only heard the last words, which were: "Your anxiety will soon, I hope, be set at rest." The woman, who seemed to be a sour, silent kind of creature, withdrew with the child.

"What is Mrs. Mason like?" asked Holmes.

"Not very prepossessing externally, as you can see, but a heart of gold, and devoted to the child."

"Do you like her, Jack?" Holmes turned suddenly upon the boy. His expressive mobile face shadowed over, and he shook his head.

"Jacky has very strong likes and dislikes," said Ferguson, putting his arm round the boy. "Luckily I am one of his likes."

The boy cooed and nestled his head upon his father's breast. Ferguson gently disengaged him.

"Run away, little Jacky," said he, and he watched his son with loving eyes until he disappeared. "Now, Mr. Holmes," he continued when the boy was gone, "I really feel that I have brought you on a fool's errand, for what can you possibly do save give me your sympathy? It must be an exceedingly delicate and complex affair from your point of view."

“It is certainly delicate,” said my friend with an amused smile, “but I have not been struck up to now with its complexity. It has been a case for intellectual deduction, but when this original intellectual deduction is confirmed point by point by quite a number of independent incidents, then the subjective becomes objective and we can say confidently that we have reached our goal. I had, in fact, reached it before we left Baker Street, and the rest has merely been observation and confirmation.”

Ferguson put his big hand to his furrowed forehead.

“For heaven’s sake, Holmes,” he said hoarsely; “if you can see the truth in this matter, do not keep me in suspense. How do I stand? What shall I do? I care nothing as to how you have found your facts so long as you have really got them.”

“Certainly I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. But you will permit me to handle the matter in my own way? Is the lady capable of seeing us, Watson?”

“She is ill, but she is quite rational.”

“Very good. It is only in her presence that we can clear the matter up. Let us go up to her.”

“She will not see me,” cried Ferguson.

“Oh, yes, she will,” said Holmes. He scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper. “You at least have the entree, Watson. Will you have the goodness to give the lady this note?”

I ascended again and handed the note to Dolores, who cautiously opened the door. A minute later I heard a cry from within, a cry in which joy and surprise seemed to be blended. Dolores looked out.

“She will see them. She will leesten,” said she.

At my summons Ferguson and Holmes came up. As we entered the room Ferguson took a step or two towards his wife, who had raised herself in the bed, but she held out her hand to repulse him. He sank into an armchair, while Holmes seated himself beside him, after bowing to the lady, who looked at him with wide-eyed amazement.

“I think we can dispense with Dolores,” said Holmes. “Oh, very well, madame, if you would rather she stayed I can see no objection. Now, Mr. Ferguson, I am a busy man with many calls, and my methods have to be short and direct. The swiftest surgery is the least painful. Let me first say what will ease your mind. Your wife is a very good, a very loving, and a very ill-used woman.”

Ferguson sat up with a cry of joy.

“Prove that, Mr. Holmes, and I am your debtor forever.”

“I will do so, but in doing so I must wound you deeply in another direction.”

“I care nothing so long as you clear my wife. Everything on earth is insignificant compared to that.”

“Let me tell you, then, the train of reasoning which passed through my mind in Baker Street. The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England. And yet your observation was precise. You had seen the lady rise from beside the child’s cot with the blood upon her lips.”

“I did.”

“Did it not occur to you that a bleeding wound may be sucked for some other purpose than to draw the blood from it? Was there not a queen in English history who sucked such a wound to draw poison from it?”

“Poison!”

“A South American household. My instinct felt the presence of those weapons upon the wall before my eyes ever saw them. It might have been other poison, but that was what occurred to me. When I saw that little empty quiver beside the small birdbow, it was just what I expected to see. If the child were pricked with one of those arrows dipped in curare or some other devilish drug, it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out.

“And the dog! If one were to use such a poison, would one not try it first in order to see that it had not lost its power? I did not foresee the dog, but at least I understand him and he fitted into my reconstruction.

“Now do you understand? Your wife feared such an attack. She saw it made and saved the child’s life, and yet she shrank from telling you all the truth, for she knew how you loved the boy and feared lest it break your heart.”

“Jacky!”

“I watched him as you fondled the child just now. His face was clearly reflected in the glass of the window where the shutter formed a background. I saw such jealousy, such cruel hatred, as I have seldom seen in a human face.”

“My Jacky!”

“You have to face it, Mr. Ferguson. It is the more painful because it is a distorted love, a maniacal exaggerated love for you, and possibly for his dead mother, which has prompted his action. His very soul is consumed with hatred for this splendid child, whose health and beauty are a contrast to his own weakness.”

“Good God! It is incredible!”

“Have I spoken the truth, madame?”

The lady was sobbing, with her face buried in the pillows. Now she turned to her husband.

“How could I tell you, Bob? I felt the blow it would be to you. It was better that I should wait and that it should come from some other lips than mine. When this gentleman, who seems to have powers of magic, wrote that he knew all, I was glad.”

“I think a year at sea would be my prescription for Master Jacky,” said Holmes, rising from his chair. “Only one thing is still clouded, madame. We can quite understand your attacks upon Master Jacky. There is a limit to a mother’s patience. But how did you dare to leave the child these last two days?”

“I had told Mrs. Mason. She knew.”

“Exactly. So I imagined.”

Ferguson was standing by the bed, choking, his hands outstretched and quivering.

“This, I fancy, is the time for our exit, Watson,” said Holmes in a whisper. “If you will take one elbow of the too faithful Dolores, I will take the other. There, now,” he added as he closed the door behind him, “I think we may leave them to settle the rest among themselves.”

I have only one further note of this case. It is the letter which Holmes wrote in final answer to that with which the narrative begins. It ran thus:

BAKER STREET,
Nov. 21st.
Re Vampires
SIR:

Referring to your letter of the 19th, I beg to state that I have looked into the inquiry of your client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, and that the matter has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. With thanks for your recommendation,

I am, sir,
Faithfully yours,
SHERLOCK HOLMES.

ADVENTURE V. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE GARRIDEBS

It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy. It cost one man his reason, it cost me a blood-letting, and it cost yet another man the penalties of the law. Yet there was certainly an element of comedy. Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

I remember the date very well, for it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. I only refer to the matter in passing, for in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion. I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June, 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War. Holmes had spent several days in bed, as was his habit from time to time, but he emerged that morning with a long foolscap document in his hand and a twinkle of amusement in his austere gray eyes.

“There is a chance for you to make some money. friend Watson,” said he. “Have you ever heard the name of Garrideb?”

I admitted that I had not.

“Well, if you can lay your hand upon a Garrideb, there’s money in it.”

“Why?”

“Ah, that’s a long story — rather a whimsical one, too. I don’t think in all our explorations of human complexities we have ever come upon anything more singular. The fellow will be here presently for cross-examination, so I won’t open the matter up till he comes. But, meanwhile, that’s the name we want.”

The telephone directory lay on the table beside me, and I turned over the pages in a rather hopeless quest. But to my amazement there was this strange name in its due place. I gave a cry of triumph.

“Here you are, Holmes! Here it is!”

Holmes took the book from my hand.

“‘Garrideb, N.,’” he read, “‘136 Little Ryder Street, W.’ Sorry to disappoint you, my dear Watson, but this is the man himself. That is the address upon his letter. We want another to match him.”

Mrs. Hudson had come in with a card upon a tray. I took it up and glanced at it.

“Why, here it is!” I cried in amazement. “This is a different initial. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, Moorville, Kansas, U.S.A.”

Holmes smiled as he looked at the card. “I am afraid you must make yet another effort, Watson,” said he. “This gentleman is also in the plot already, though I certainly did not expect to see him this morning. However, he is in a position to tell us a good deal which I want to know.”

A moment later he was in the room. Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh, clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. The general effect was chubby and rather childlike, so that one received the impression of quite a young man with a broad set smile upon his face. His eyes, however, were arresting. Seldom in any human head have I seen a pair which bespoke a more intense inward life, so bright were they, so alert, so responsive to every change of thought. His accent was American, but was not accompanied by any eccentricity of speech.

“Mr. Holmes?” he asked, glancing from one to the other. “Ah, yes! Your pictures are not unlike you, sir, if I may say so. I believe you have had a letter from my namesake, Mr. Nathan Garrideb, have you not?”

“Pray sit down,” said Sherlock Holmes. “We shall, I fancy, have a good deal to discuss.” He took up his sheets of foolscap. “You are, of course, the Mr. John Garrideb mentioned in this document. But surely you have been in England some time?”

“Why do you say that, Mr. Holmes?” I seemed to read sudden suspicion in those expressive eyes.

“Your whole outfit is English.”

Mr. Garrideb forced a laugh. “I’ve read of your tricks, Mr. Holmes, but I never thought I would be the subject of them. Where do you read that?”

“The shoulder cut of your coat, the toes of your boots — could anyone doubt it?”

“Well, well, I had no idea I was so obvious a Britisher. But business brought me over here some time ago, and so, as you say, my outfit is nearly all London. However, I guess your time is of value, and we did not meet to talk about the cut of my socks. What about getting down to that paper you hold in your hand?”

Holmes had in some way ruffled our visitor, whose chubby face had assumed a far less amiable expression.

"Patience! Patience, Mr. Garrideb!" said my friend in a soothing voice. "Dr. Watson would tell you that these little digressions of mine sometimes prove in the end to have some bearing on the matter. But why did Mr. Nathan Garrideb not come with you?"

"Why did he ever drag you into it at all?" asked our visitor with a sudden outflame of anger. "What in thunder had you to do with it? Here was a bit of professional business between two gentlemen, and one of them must needs call in a detective! I saw him this morning, and he told me this fool-trick he had played me, and that's why I am here. But I feel bad about it, all the same."

"There was no reflection upon you, Mr. Garrideb. It was simply zeal upon his part to gain your end — an end which is, I understand, equally vital for both of you. He knew that I had means of getting information, and, therefore, it was very natural that he should apply to me."

Our visitor's angry face gradually cleared.

"Well, that puts it different," said he. "When I went to see him this morning and he told me he had sent to a detective, I just asked for your address and came right away. I don't want police butting into a private matter. But if you are content just to help us find the man, there can be no harm in that."

"Well, that is just how it stands," said Holmes. "And now, sir, since you are here, we had best have a clear account from your own lips. My friend here knows nothing of the details."

Mr. Garrideb surveyed me with not too friendly a gaze.

"Need he know?" he asked.

"We usually work together."

"Well, there's no reason it should be kept a secret. I'll give you the facts as short as I can make them. If you came from Kansas I would not need to explain to you who Alexander Hamilton Garrideb was. He made his money in real estate, and afterwards in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort Dodge. It's grazing-land and lumber-land and arable-land and mineralised-land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it.

“He had no kith nor kin — or, if he had, I never heard of it. But he took a kind of pride in the queerness of his name. That was what brought us together. I was in the law at Topeka, and one day I had a visit from the old man, and he was tickled to death to meet another man with his own name. It was his pet fad, and he was dead set to find out if there were any more Garridebs in the world. ‘Find me another!’ said he. I told him I was a busy man and could not spend my life hiking round the world in search of Garridebs. ‘None the less,’ said he, ‘that is just what you will do if things pan out as I planned them.’ I thought he was joking, but there was a powerful lot of meaning in the words, as I was soon to discover.

“For he died within a year of saying them, and he left a will behind him. It was the queerest will that has ever been filed in the State of Kansas. His property was divided into three parts and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. It’s five million dollars for each if it is a cent, but we can’t lay a finger on it until we all three stand in a row.

“It was so big a chance that I just let my legal practice slide and I set forth looking for Garridebs. There is not one in the United States. I went through it, sir, with a fine-toothed comb and never a Garrideb could I catch. Then I tried the old country. Sure enough there was the name in the London telephone directory. I went after him two days ago and explained the whole matter to him. But he is a lone man, like myself, with some women relations, but no men. It says three adult men in the will. So you see we still have a vacancy, and if you can help to fill it we will be very ready to pay your charges.”

“Well, Watson,” said Holmes with a smile, “I said it was rather whimsical, did I not? I should have thought, sir, that your obvious way was to advertise in the agony columns of the papers.”

“I have done that, Mr. Holmes. No replies.”

“Dear me! Well, it is certainly a most curious little problem. I may take a glance at it in my leisure. By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. I used to have a correspondent — he is dead now — old Dr. Lysander Starr, who was mayor in 1890.”

“Good old Dr. Starr!” said our visitor. “His name is still honoured. Well, Mr. Holmes, I suppose all we can do is to report to you and let you know how we progress. I reckon you will hear within a day or two.” With this assurance our American bowed and departed.

Holmes had lit his pipe, and he sat for some time with a curious smile upon his face.

"Well?" I asked at last.

"I am wondering, Watson — just wondering!"

"At what?"

Holmes took his pipe from his lips.

"I was wondering, Watson, what on earth could be the object of this man in telling us such a rigmarole of lies. I nearly asked him so — for there are times when a brutal frontal attack is the best policy — but I judged it better to let him think he had fooled us. Here is a man with an English coat frayed at the elbow and trousers bagged at the knee with a year's wear, and yet by this document and by his own account he is a provincial American lately landed in London. There have been no advertisements in the agony columns. You know that I miss nothing there. They are my favourite covert for putting up a bird, and I would never have overlooked such a cock pheasant as that. I never knew a Dr. Lysander Starr, of Topeka. Touch him where you would he was false. I think the fellow is really an American, but he has worn his accent smooth with years of London. What is his game, then, and what motive lies behind this preposterous search for Garridebs? It's worth our attention, for, granting that the man is a rascal, he is certainly a complex and ingenious one. We must now find out if our other correspondent is a fraud also. Just ring him up, Watson."

I did so, and heard a thin, quavering voice at the other end of the line.

"Yes, yes, I am Mr. Nathan Garrideb. Is Mr. Holmes there? I should very much like to have a word with Mr. Holmes."

My friend took the instrument and I heard the usual syncopated dialogue.

"Yes, he has been here. I understand that you don't know him.... How long? ... Only two days! ... Yes, yes, of course, it is a most captivating prospect. Will you be at home this evening? I suppose your namesake will not be there? . . . Very good, we will come then, for I would rather have a chat without him.... Dr. Watson will come with me.... I understand from your note that you did not go out often.... Well, we shall be round about six. You need not mention it to the American lawyer.... Very good. Good-bye!"

It was twilight of a lovely spring evening, and even Little Ryder Street, one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgware Road, within a stone-cast of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory, looked golden and wonderful in the slanting rays of the setting sun. The particular house to which we were directed was a large, old-fashioned, Early Georgian edifice, with a flat brick face broken only by two deep bay windows on the ground floor. It was on this ground floor that our client lived, and, indeed, the low windows proved to be the front of the huge room in which he spent his waking hours. Holmes pointed as we passed to the small brass plate which bore the curious name.

"Up some years, Watson," he remarked, indicating its discoloured surface. "It's his real name, anyhow, and that is something to note."

The house had a common stair, and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors. Our client opened the door for us himself and apologized by saying that the woman in charge left at four o'clock. Mr. Nathan Garrideb proved to be a very tall, loosejointed, round-backed person, gaunt and bald, some sixty-odd years of age. He had a cadaverous face, with the dull dead skin of a man to whom exercise was unknown. Large round spectacles and a small projecting goat's beard combined with his stooping attitude to give him an expression of peering curiosity. The general effect, however, was amiable, though eccentric.

The room was as curious as its occupant. It looked like a small museum. It was both broad and deep, with cupboards and cabinets all round, crowded with specimens, geological and anatomical. Cases of butterflies and moths flanked each side of the entrance. A large table in the centre was littered with all sorts of debris, while the tall brass tube of a powerful microscope bristled up among them. As I glanced round I was surprised at the universality of the man's interests. Here was a case of ancient coins. There was a cabinet of flint instruments. Behind his central table was a large cupboard of fossil bones. Above was a line of plaster skulls with such names as "Neanderthal," "Heidelberg," "Cro-Magnon" printed beneath them. It was clear that he was a student of many subjects. As he stood in front of us now, he held a piece of chamois leather in his right hand with which he was polishing a coin.

"Syracusan — of the best period," he explained, holding it up. "They degenerated greatly towards the end. At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school. You will find a chair here, Mr. Holmes. Pray allow me to clear these bones. And you, sir — ah, yes, Dr. Watson — if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side. You see round me my little interests in life. My doctor lectures me about never going out, but why should I go out when I have so much to hold me here? I can assure you that the adequate cataloguing of one of those cabinets would take me three good months."

Holmes looked round him with curiosity.

"But do you tell me that you never go out?" he said.

"Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's. Otherwise I very seldom leave my room. I am not too strong, and my researches are very absorbing. But you can imagine, Mr. Holmes, what a terrific shock — pleasant but terrific — it was for me when I heard of this unparalleled good fortune. It only needs one more Garrideb to complete the matter, and surely we can find one. I had a brother, but he is dead, and female relatives are disqualified. But there must surely be others in the world. I had heard that you handled strange cases, and that was why I sent to you. Of course, this American gentleman is quite right, and I should have taken his advice first, but I acted for the best."

"I think you acted very wisely indeed," said Holmes. "But are you really anxious to acquire an estate in America?"

"Certainly not, sir. Nothing would induce me to leave my collection. But this gentleman has assured me that he will buy me out as soon as we have established our claim. Five million dollars was the sum named. There are a dozen specimens in the market at the present moment which fill gaps in my collection, and which I am unable to purchase for want of a few hundred pounds. Just think what I could do with five million dollars. Why, I have the nucleus of a national collection. I shall be the Hans Sloane of my age."

His eyes gleamed behind his great spectacles. It was very clear that no pains would be spared by Mr. Nathan Garrideb in finding a namesake.

"I merely called to make your acquaintance, and there is no reason why I should interrupt your studies," said Holmes. "I prefer to establish personal touch with those with whom I do business. There are few questions I need ask, for I have your very clear narrative in my pocket, and I filled up the blanks when this American gentleman called. I understand that up to this week you were unaware of his existence."

"That is so. He called last Tuesday."

"Did he tell you of our interview to-day?"

"Yes, he came straight back to me. He had been very angry."

"Why should he be angry?"

“He seemed to think it was some reflection on his honour. But he was quite cheerful again when he returned.”

“Did he suggest any course of action?”

“No, sir, he did not.”

“Has he had, or asked for, any money from you?”

“No, sir, never!”

“You see no possible object he has in view?”

“None, except what he states.”

“Did you tell him of our telephone appointment?”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

Holmes was lost in thought. I could see that he was puzzled.

“Have you any articles of great value in your collection?”

“No, sir. I am not a rich man. It is a good collection, but not a very valuable one.”

“You have no fear of burglars?”

“Not the least.”

“How long have you been in these rooms?”

“Nearly five years.”

Holmes’s cross-examination was interrupted by an imperative knocking at the door. No sooner had our client unlatched it than the American lawyer burst excitedly into the room.

“Here you are!” he cried, waving a paper over his head. “I thought I should be in time to get you. Mr. Nathan Garrideb, my congratulations! You are a rich man, sir. Our business is happily finished and all is well. As to you, Mr. Holmes, we can only say we are sorry if we have given you any useless trouble.”

He handed over the paper to our client, who stood staring at a marked advertisement. Holmes and I leaned forward and read it over his shoulder. This is how it ran:

HOWARD GARRIDEB

CONSTRUCTOR OF AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY

Binders, reapers, steam and hand plows, drills, harrows, farmer’s carts, buckboards, and all other appliances. Estimates for Artesian Wells.

Apply Grosvenor Buildings, Aston

“Glorious!” gasped our host. “That makes our third man.”

“I had opened up inquiries in Birmingham,” said the American, “and my agent there has sent me this advertisement from a local paper. We must hustle and put the thing through. I have written to this man and told him that you will see him in his office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock."

"You want me to see him?"

"What do you say, Mr. Holmes? Don't you think it would be wiser? Here am I, a wandering American with a wonderful tale. Why should he believe what I tell him? But you are a Britisher with solid references, and he is bound to take notice of what you say. I would go with you if you wished, but I have a very busy day to-morrow, and I could always follow you if you are in any trouble."

"Well, I have not made such a journey for years."

"It is nothing, Mr. Garrideb. I have figured out our connections. You leave at twelve and should be there soon after two. Then you can be back the same night. All you have to do is to see this man, explain the matter, and get an affidavit of his existence. By the Lord!" he added hotly, "considering I've come all the way from the centre of America, it is surely little enough if you go a hundred miles in order to put this matter through."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "I think what this gentleman says is very true."

Mr. Nathan Garrideb shrugged his shoulders with a disconsolate air. "Well, if you insist I shall go," said he. "It is certainly hard for me to refuse you anything, considering the glory of hope that you have brought into my life."

"Then that is agreed," said Holmes, "and no doubt you will let me have a report as soon as you can."

"I'll see to that," said the American. "Well," he added looking at his watch, "I'll have to get on. I'll call to-morrow, Mr. Nathan, and see you off to Birmingham. Coming my way, Mr. Holmes? Well, then, good-bye, and we may have good news for you to-morrow night."

I noticed that my friend's face cleared when the American left the room, and the look of thoughtful perplexity had vanished.

"I wish I could look over your collection, Mr. Garrideb," said he. "In my profession all sorts of odd knowledge comes useful, and this room of yours is a storehouse of it."

Our client shone with pleasure and his eyes gleamed from behind his big glasses.

"I had always heard, sir, that you were a very intelligent man," said he. "I could take you round now if you have the time."

“Unfortunately, I have not. But these specimens are so well labelled and classified that they hardly need your personal explanation. If I should be able to look in to-morrow, I presume that there would be no objection to my glancing over them?”

“None at all. You are most welcome. The place will, of course, be shut up, but Mrs. Saunders is in the basement up to four o’clock and would let you in with her key.”

“Well, I happen to be clear to-morrow afternoon. If you would say a word to Mrs. Saunders it would be quite in order. By the way, who is your house-agent?”

Our client was amazed at the sudden question.

“Holloway and Steele, in the Edgware Road. But why?”

“I am a bit of an archaeologist myself when it comes to houses,” said Holmes, laughing. “I was wondering if this was Queen Anne or Georgian.”

“Georgian, beyond doubt.”

“Really. I should have thought a little earlier. However, it is easily ascertained. Well, good-bye, Mr. Garrideb, and may you have every success in your Birmingham journey.”

The house-agent’s was close by, but we found that it was closed for the day, so we made our way back to Baker Street. It was not till after dinner that Holmes reverted to the subject.

“Our little problem draws to a close,” said he. “No doubt you have outlined the solution in your own mind.”

“I can make neither head nor tail of it.”

“The head is surely clear enough and the tail we should see to-morrow. Did you notice nothing curious about that advertisement?”

“I saw that the word ‘plough’ was misspelt.”

“Oh, you did notice that, did you? Come, Watson, you improve all the time. Yes, it was bad English but good American. The printer had set it up as received. Then the buckboards. That is American also. And artesian wells are commoner with them than with us. It was a typical American advertisement, but purporting to be from an English firm. What do you make of that?”

“I can only suppose that this American lawyer put it in himself. What his object was I fail to understand.”

“Well, there are alternative explanations. Anyhow, he wanted to get this good old fossil up to Birmingham. That is very clear. I might have told him that he was clearly going on a wild-goose chase, but, on second thoughts, it seemed better to clear the stage by letting him go. To-morrow, Watson — well, to-morrow will speak for itself."

Holmes was up and out early. When he returned at lunchtime I noticed that his face was very grave.

"This is a more serious matter than I had expected, Watson," said he. "It is fair to tell you so, though I know it will only be an additional reason to you for running your head into danger. I should know my Watson by now. But there is danger, and you should know it."

"Well, it is not the first we have shared, Holmes. I hope it may not be the last. What is the particular danger this time?"

"We are up against a very hard case. I have identified Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law. He is none other than 'Killer' Evans, of sinister and murderous reputation."

"I fear I am none the wiser."

"Ah, it is not part of your profession to carry about a portable Newgate Calendar in your memory. I have been down to see friend Lestrade at the Yard. There may be an occasional want of imaginative intuition down there, but they lead the world for thoroughness and method. I had an idea that we might get on the track of our American friend in their records. Sure enough, I found his chubby face smiling up at me from the rogues' portrait gallery. 'James Winter, alias Morecroft, alias Killer Evans,' was the inscription below." Holmes drew an envelope from his pocket. "I scribbled down a few points from his dossier: Aged forty-four. Native of Chicago. Known to have shot three men in the States. Escaped from penitentiary through political influence. Came to London in 1893. Shot a man over cards in a night-club in the Waterloo Road in January, 1895. Man died, but he was shown to have been the aggressor in the row. Dead man was identified as Rodger Prescott, famous as forger and coiner in Chicago. Killer Evans released in 1901. Has been under police supervision since, but so far as known has led an honest life. Very dangerous man, usually carries arms and is prepared to use them. That is our bird, Watson — a sporting bird, as you must admit."

"But what is his game?"

"Well, it begins to define itself. I have been to the houseagent's. Our client, as he told us, has been there five years. It was unlet for a year before then. The previous tenant was a gentleman at large named Waldron. Waldron's appearance was well remembered at the office. He had suddenly vanished and nothing more been heard of him. He was a tall, bearded man with very dark features. Now, Prescott, the man whom Killer Evans had shot, was, according to Scotland Yard, a tall, dark man with a beard. As a working hypothesis, I think we may take it that Prescott, the American criminal, used to live in the very room which our innocent friend now devotes to his museum. So at last we get a link, you see."

"And the next link?"

"Well, we must go now and look for that."

He took a revolver from the drawer and handed it to me.

"I have my old favourite with me. If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. I'll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson, and then I think it will be time for our Ryder Street adventure."

It was just four o'clock when we reached the curious apartment of Nathan Garrideb. Mrs. Saunders, the caretaker, was about to leave, but she had no hesitation in admitting us, for the door shut with a spring lock, and Holmes promised to see that all was safe before we left. Shortly afterwards the outer door closed, her bonnet passed the bow window, and we knew that we were alone in the lower floor of the house. Holmes made a rapid examination of the premises. There was one cupboard in a dark corner which stood out a little from the wall. It was behind this that we eventually crouched while Holmes in a whisper outlined his intentions.

"He wanted to get our amiable friend out of his room — that is very clear, and, as the collector never went out, it took some planning to do it. The whole of this Garrideb invention was apparently for no other end. I must say, Watson, that there is a certain devilish ingenuity about it, even if the queer name of the tenant did give him an opening which he could hardly have expected. He wove his plot with remarkable cunning.''

"But what did he want?"

"Well, that is what we are here to find out. It has nothing whatever to do with our client, so far as I can read the situation. It is something connected with the man he murdered — the man who may have been his confederate in crime. There is some guilty secret in the room. That is how I read it. At first I thought our friend might have something in his collection more valuable than he knew — something worth the attention of a big criminal. But the fact that Rodger Prescott of evil memory inhabited these rooms points to some deeper reason. Well, Watson, we can but possess our souls in patience and see what the hour may bring."

That hour was not long in striking. We crouched closer in the shadow as we heard the outer door open and shut. Then came the sharp, metallic snap of a key, and the American was in the room. He closed the door softly behind him, took a sharp glance around him to see that all was safe, threw off his overcoat, and walked up to the central table with the brisk manner of one who knows exactly what he has to do and how to do it. He pushed the table to one side, tore up the square of carpet on which it rested, rolled it completely back, and then, drawing a jemmy from his inside pocket, he knelt down and worked vigorously upon the floor. Presently we heard the sound of sliding boards, and an instant later a square had opened in the planks. Killer Evans struck a match, lit a stump of candle, and vanished from our view.

Clearly our moment had come. Holmes touched my wrist as a signal, and together we stole across to the open trap-door. Gently as we moved, however, the old floor must have creaked under our feet, for the head of our American, peering anxiously round, emerged suddenly from the open space. His face turned upon us with a glare of baffled rage, which gradually softened into a rather shamefaced grin as he realised that two pistols were pointed at his head.

"Well, well!" said he coolly as he scrambled to the surface. "I guess you have been one too many for me, Mr. Holmes. Saw through my game, I suppose, and played me for a sucker from the first. Well, sir, I hand it to you; you have me beat and—"

In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast and had fired two shots. I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. There was a crash as Holmes's pistol came down on the man's head. I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend's wiry arms were round me, and he was leading me to a chair.

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

It was worth a wound — it was worth many wounds — to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

“It’s nothing, Holmes. It’s a mere scratch.”

He had ripped up my trousers with his pocket-knife.

“You are right,” he cried with an immense sigh of relief. “It is quite superficial.” His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. “By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive. Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?”

He had nothing to say for himself. He only sat and scowled. I leaned on Holmes’s arm, and together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of paper, a litter of bottles, and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles.

“A printing press — a counterfeiter’s outfit,” said Holmes.

“Yes, sir,” said our prisoner, staggering slowly to his feet and then sinking into the chair. “The greatest counterfeiter London ever saw. That’s Prescott’s machine, and those bundles on the table are two thousand of Prescott’s notes worth a hundred each and fit to pass anywhere. Help yourselves, gentlemen. Call it a deal and let me beat it.”

Holmes laughed.

“We don’t do things like that, Mr. Evans. There is no bolthole for you in this country. You shot this man Prescott, did you not?”

“Yes, sir, and got five years for it, though it was he who pulled on me. Five years — when I should have had a medal the size of a soup plate. No living man could tell a Prescott from a Bank of England, and if I hadn’t put him out he would have flooded London with them. I was the only one in the world who knew where he made them. Can you wonder that I wanted to get to the place? And can you wonder that when I found this crazy boob of a bug-hunter with the queer name squatting right on the top of it, and never quitting his room, I had to do the best I could to shift him? Maybe I would have been wiser if I had put him away. It would have been easy enough, but I’m a soft-hearted guy that can’t begin shooting unless the other man has a gun also. But say, Mr. Holmes, what have I done wrong, anyhow? I’ve not used this plant. I’ve not hurt this old stiff. Where do you get me?”

“Only attempted murder, so far as I can see,” said Holmes. “But that’s not our job. They take that at the next stage. What we wanted at present was just your sweet self. Please give the Yard a call, Watson. It won’t be entirely unexpected.”

So those were the facts about Killer Evans and his remarkable invention of the three Garridebs. We heard later that our poor old friend never got over the shock of his dissipated dreams. When his castle in the air fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins. He was last heard of at a nursing-home in Brixton. It was a glad day at the Yard when the Prescott outfit was discovered, for, though they knew that it existed, they had never been able, after the death of the man, to find out where it was. Evans had indeed done great service and caused several worthy C. I. D. men to sleep the sounder, for the counterfeiter stands in a class by himself as a public danger. They would willingly have subscribed to that soup-plate medal of which the criminal had spoken, but an unappreciative bench took a less favourable view, and the Killer returned to those shades from which he had just emerged.

ADVENTURE VI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS CLIENT

“It can’t hurt now,” was Mr. Sherlock Holmes’s comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend’s career.

Both Holmes and I had a weakness for the Turkish bath. It was over a smoke in the pleasant lassitude of the drying-room that I have found him less reticent and more human than anywhere else. On the upper floor of the Northumberland Avenue establishment there is an isolated corner where two couches lie side by side, and it was on these that we lay upon September 3, 1902, the day when my narrative begins. I had asked him whether anything was stirring, and for answer he had shot his long, thin, nervous arm out of the sheets which enveloped him and had drawn an envelope from the inside pocket of the coat which hung beside him.

“It may be some fussy, self-important fool; it may be a matter of life or death,” said he as he handed me the note. “I know no more than this message tells me.”

It was from the Carlton Club and dated the evening before. This is what I read:

Sir James Damery presents his compliments to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and will call upon him at 4:30 to-morrow. Sir James begs to say that the matter upon which he desires to consult Mr. Holmes is very delicate and also very important. He trusts, therefore, that Mr. Holmes will make every effort to grant this interview, and that he will confirm it over the telephone to the Carlton Club.

“I need not say that I have confirmed it, Watson,” said Holmes as I returned the paper. “Do you know anything of this man Damery?”

“Only that this name is a household word in society.”

“Well, I can tell you a little more than that. He has rather a reputation for arranging delicate matters which are to be kept out of the papers. You may remember his negotiations with Sir George Lewis over the Hammerford Will case. He is a man of the world with a natural turn for diplomacy. I am bound, therefore, to hope that it is not a false scent and that he has some real need for our assistance.”

“Our?”

“Well, if you will be so good, Watson.”

“I shall be honoured.”

“Then you have the hour — 4:30. Until then we can put the matter out of our heads.”

I was living in my own rooms in Queen Anne Street at the time, but I was round at Baker Street before the time named. Sharp to the half-hour, Colonel Sir James Damery was announced. It is hardly necessary to describe him, for many will remember that large, bluff, honest personality, that broad, cleanshaven face, and, above all, that pleasant, mellow voice. Frankness shone from his gray Irish eyes, and good humour played round his mobile, smiling lips. His lucent top-hat, his dark frock-coat, indeed, every detail, from the pearl pin in the black satin cravat to the lavender spats over the varnished shoes, spoke of the meticulous care in dress for which he was famous. The big, masterful aristocrat dominated the little room.

“Of course, I was prepared to find Dr. Watson,” he remarked with a courteous bow. “His collaboration may be very necessary, for we are dealing on this occasion, Mr. Holmes, with a man to whom violence is familiar and who will, literally, stick at nothing. I should say that there is no more dangerous man in Europe.”

“I have had several opponents to whom that flattering term has been applied,” said Holmes with a smile. “Don’t you smoke? Then you will excuse me if I light my pipe. If your man is more dangerous than the late Professor Moriarty, or than the living Colonel Sebastian Moran, then he is indeed worth meeting. May I ask his name?”

“Have you ever heard of Baron Gruner?”

“You mean the Austrian murderer?”

Colonel Damery threw up his kid-gloved hands with a laugh. “There is no getting past you, Mr. Holmes! Wonderful! So you have already sized him up as a murderer?”

“It is my business to follow the details of Continental crime. Who could possibly have read what happened at Prague and have any doubts as to the man’s guilt! It was a purely technical legal point and the suspicious death of a witness that saved him! I am as sure that he killed his wife when the socalled ‘accident’ happened in the Splugen Pass as if I had seen him do it. I knew, also, that he had come to England and had a presentiment that sooner or later he would find me some work to do. Well, what has Baron Gruner been up to? I presume it is not this old tragedy which has come up again?”

“No, it is more serious than that. To revenge crime is important, but to prevent it is more so. It is a terrible thing, Mr. Holmes, to see a dreadful event, an atrocious situation, preparing itself before your eyes, to clearly understand whither it will lead and yet to be utterly unable to avert it. Can a human being be placed in a more trying position?”

“Perhaps not.”

“Then you will sympathize with the client in whose interests I am acting.”

“I did not understand that you were merely an intermediary. Who is the principal?”

“Mr. Holmes, I must beg you not to press that question. It is important that I should be able to assure him that his honoured name has been in no way dragged into the matter. His motives are, to the last degree, honourable and chivalrous, but he prefers to remain unknown. I need not say that your fees will be assured and that you will be given a perfectly free hand. Surely the actual name of your client is immaterial?”

“I am sorry,” said Holmes. “I am accustomed to have mystery at one end of my cases, but to have it at both ends is too confusing. I fear, Sir James, that I must decline to act.”

Our visitor was greatly disturbed. His large, sensitive face was darkened with emotion and disappointment.

“You hardly realise the effect of your own action, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “You place me in a most serious dilemma for I am perfectly certain that you would be proud to take over the case if I could give you the facts, and yet a promise forbids me from revealing them all. May I, at least, lay all that I can before you?”

“By all means, so long as it is understood that I commit myself to nothing.”

“That is understood. In the first place, you have no doubt heard of General de Merville?”

“De Merville of Khyber fame? Yes, I have heard of him.”

"He has a daughter, Violet de Merville, young, rich, beautiful, accomplished, a wonder-woman in every way. It is this daughter, this lovely, innocent girl, whom we are endeavouring to save from the clutches of a fiend."

"Baron Gruner has some hold over her, then?"

"The strongest of all holds where a woman is concerned — the hold of love. The fellow is, as you may have heard, extraordinarily handsome, with a most fascinating manner. a gentle voice and that air of romance and mystery which means so much to a woman. He is said to have the whole sex at his mercy and to have made ample use of the fact."

"But how came such a man to meet a lady of the standing of Miss Violet de Merville?"

"It was on a Mediterranean yachting voyage. The company, though select, paid their own passages. No doubt the promoters hardly realised the Baron's true character until it was too late. The villain attached himself to the lady, and with such effect that he has completely and absolutely won her heart. To say that she loves him hardly expresses it. She dotes upon him, she is obsessed by him. Outside of him there is nothing on earth. She will not hear one word against him. Everything has been done to cure her of her madness, but in vain. To sum up, she proposes to marry him next month. As she is of age and has a will of iron, it is hard to know how to prevent her."

"Does she know about the Austrian episode?"

"The cunning devil has told her every unsavoury public scandal of his past life, but always in such a way as to make himself out to be an innocent martyr. She absolutely accepts his version and will listen to no other."

"Dear me! But surely you have inadvertently let out the name of your client? It is no doubt General de Merville."

Our visitor fidgeted in his chair.

"I could deceive you by saying so, Mr. Holmes, but it would not be true. De Merville is a broken man. The strong soldier has been utterly demoralised by this incident. He has lost the nerve which never failed him on the battlefield and has become a weak, doddering old man, utterly incapable of contending with a brilliant, forceful rascal like this Austrian. My client however is an old friend, one who has known the General intimately for many years and taken a paternal interest in this young girl since she wore short frocks. He cannot see this tragedy consummated without some attempt to stop it. There is nothing in which Scotland Yard can act. It was his own suggestion that you should be called in, but it was, as I have said, on the express stipulation that he should not be personally involved in the matter. I have no doubt, Mr. Holmes, with your great powers you could easily trace my client back through me, but I must ask you, as a point of honour, to refrain from doing so, and not to break in upon his incognito."

Holmes gave a whimsical smile.

"I think I may safely promise that," said he. "I may add that your problem interests me, and that I shall be prepared to look into it. How shall I keep in touch with you?"

"The Carlton Club will find me. But in case of emergency, there is a private telephone call, 'XX.31.'"

Holmes noted it down and sat, still smiling, with the open memorandum-book upon his knee.

"The Baron's present address, please?"

"Vernon Lodge, near Kingston. It is a large house. He has been fortunate in some rather shady speculations and is a rich man, which naturally makes him a more dangerous antagonist."

"Is he at home at present?"

"Yes."

"Apart from what you have told me, can you give me any further information about the man?"

"He has expensive tastes. He is a horse fancier. For a short time he played polo at Hurlingham, but then this Prague affair got noised about and he had to leave. He collects books and pictures. He is a man with a considerable artistic side to his nature. He is, I believe, a recognised authority upon Chinese pottery and has written a book upon the subject."

"A complex mind," said Holmes. "All great criminals have that. My old friend Charlie Peace was a violin virtuoso. Wainwright was no mean artist. I could quote many more. Well, Sir James, you will inform your client that I am turning my mind upon Baron Gruner. I can say no more. I have some sources of information of my own, and I dare say we may find some means of opening the matter up."

When our visitor had left us Holmes sat so long in deep thought that it seemed to me that he had forgotten my presence. At last, however, he came briskly back to earth.

"Well, Watson, any views?" he asked.

“I should think you had better see the young lady herself.”

“My dear Watson, if her poor old broken father cannot move her, how shall I, a stranger, prevail? And yet there is something in the suggestion if all else fails. But I think we must begin from a different angle. I rather fancy that Shinwell Johnson might be a help.”

I have not had occasion to mention Shinwell Johnson in these memoirs because I have seldom drawn my cases from the latter phases of my friend’s career. During the first years of the century he became a valuable assistant. Johnson, I grieve to say, made his name first as a very dangerous villain and served two terms at Parkhurst. Finally he repented and allied himself to Holmes, acting as his agent in the huge criminal underworld of London and obtaining information which often proved to be of vital importance. Had Johnson been a “nark” of the police he would soon have been exposed, but as he dealt with cases which never came directly into the courts, his activities were never realised by his companions. With the glamour of his two convictions upon him, he had the entree of every night-club, doss house, and gamblingden in the town, and his quick observation and active brain made him an ideal agent for gaining information. It was to him that Sherlock Holmes now proposed to turn.

It was not possible for me to follow the immediate steps taken by my friend, for I had some pressing professional business of my own, but I met him by appointment that evening at Simpson’s, where, sitting at a small table in the front window and looking down at the rushing stream of life in the Strand, he told me something of what had passed.

“Johnson is on the prowl,” said he. “He may pick up some garbage in the darker recesses of the underworld, for it is down there, amid the black roots of crime, that we must hunt for this man’s secrets.”

“But if the lady will not accept what is already known, why should any fresh discovery of yours turn her from her purpose?”

“Who knows, Watson? Woman’s heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle. Baron Gruner remarked to me—”

“He remarked to you!”

“Oh, to be sure, I had not told you of my plans. Well, Watson, I love to come to close grips with my man. I like to meet him eye to eye and read for myself the stuff that he is made of. When I had given Johnson his instructions I took a cab out to Kingston and found the Baron in a most affable mood.”

“Did he recognise you?”

“There was no difficulty about that, for I simply sent in my card. He is an excellent antagonist, cool as ice, silky voiced and soothing as one of your fashionable consultants, and poisonous as a cobra. He has breeding in him — a real aristocrat of crime with a superficial suggestion of afternoon tea and all the cruelty of the grave behind it. Yes, I am glad to have had my attention called to Baron Adelbert Gruner.”

“You say he was affable?”

“A purring cat who thinks he sees prospective mice. Some people’s affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls. His greeting was characteristic. ‘I rather thought I should see you sooner or later, Mr. Holmes,’ said he. ‘You have been engaged, no doubt by General de Merville, to endeavour to stop my marriage with his daughter, Violet. That is so, is it not?’

“I acquiesced.

“‘My dear man,’ said he. ‘you will only ruin your own well-deserved reputation. It is not a case in which you can possibly succeed. You will have barren work, to say nothing of incurring some danger. Let me very strongly advise you to draw off at once.’

“‘It is curious,’ I answered, ‘but that was the very advice which I had intended to give you. I have a respect for your brains, Baron, and the little which I have seen of your personality has not lessened it. Let me put it to you as man to man. No one wants to rake up your past and make you unduly uncomfortable. It is over, and you are now in smooth waters, but if you persist in this marriage you will raise up a swarm of powerful enemies who will never leave you alone until they have made England too hot to hold you. Is the game worth it? Surely you would be wiser if you left the lady alone. It would not be pleasant for you if these facts of your past were brought to her notice.’

“The Baron has little waxed tips of hair under his nose, like the short antennae of an insect. These quivered with amusement as he listened, and he finally broke into a gentle chuckle.

“‘Excuse my amusement, Mr. Holmes,’ said he, ‘but it is really funny to see you trying to play a hand with no cards in it. I don’t think anyone could do it better, but it is rather pathetic all the same. Not a colour card there, Mr. Holmes, nothing but the smallest of the small.'

"'So you think.'

"'So I know. Let me make the thing clear to you, for my own hand is so strong that I can afford to show it. I have been fortunate enough to win the entire affection of this lady. This was given to me in spite of the fact that I told her very clearly of all the unhappy incidents in my past life. I also told her that certain wicked and designing persons — I hope you recognise yourself — would come to her and tell her these things. and I warned her how to treat them. You have heard of post-hypnotic suggestion. Mr. Holmes. Well you will see how it works for a man of personality can use hypnotism without any vulgar passes or tomfoolery. So she is ready for you and, I have no doubt, would give you an appointment, for she is quite amenable to her father's will — save only in the one little matter.'

"Well, Watson, there seemed to be no more to say, so I took my leave with as much cold dignity as I could summon, but, as I had my hand on the door-handle, he stopped me.

"'By the way, Mr. Holmes,' said he, 'did you know Le Brun, the French agent?'

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Do you know what befell him?'

"'I heard that he was beaten by some Apaches in the Montmartre district and crippled for life.'

"'Quite true, Mr. Holmes. By a curious coincidence he had been inquiring into my affairs only a week before. Don't do it, Mr. Holmes; it's not a lucky thing to do. Several have found that out. My last word to you is, go your own way and let me go mine. Good-bye!'

"So there you are, Watson. You are up to date now."

"The fellow seems dangerous."

"Mighty dangerous. I disregard the blusterer, but this is the sort of man who says rather less than he means."

"Must you interfere? Does it really matter if he marries the girl?"

"Considering that he undoubtedly murdered his last wife, I should say it mattered very much. Besides, the client! Well, well, we need not discuss that. When you have finished your coffee you had best come home with me, for the blithe Shinwell will be there with his report."

We found him sure enough, a huge, coarse, red-faced, scorbutic man, with a pair of vivid black eyes which were the only external sign of the very cunning mind within. It seems that he had dived down into what was peculiarly his kingdom, and beside him on the settee was a brand which he had brought up in the shape of a slim, flame-like young woman with a pale, intense face, youthful, and yet so worn with sin and sorrow that one read the terrible years which had left their leprous mark upon her.

"This is Miss Kitty Winter," said Shinwell Johnson, waving his fat hand as an introduction. "What she don't know — well, there, she'll speak for herself. Put my hand right on her, Mr. Holmes, within an hour of your message."

"I'm easy to find," said the young woman. "Hell, London, gets me every time. Same address for Porky Shinwell. We're old mates, Porky, you and I. But, by cripes! there is another who ought to be down in a lower hell than we if there was any justice in the world! That is the man you are after, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes smiled. "I gather we have your good wishes, Miss Winter."

"If I can help to put him where he belongs, I'm yours to the rattle," said our visitor with fierce energy. There was an intensity of hatred in her white, set face and her blazing eyes such as woman seldom and man never can attain.

"You needn't go into my past, Mr. Holmes. That's neither here nor there. But what I am Adelbert Gruner made me. If I could pull him down!" She clutched frantically with her hands into the air. "Oh, if I could only pull him into the pit where he has pushed so many!"

"You know how the matter stands?"

"Porky Shinwell has been telling me. He's after some other poor fool and wants to marry her this time. You want to stop it. Well, you surely know enough about this devil to prevent any decent girl in her senses wanting to be in the same parish with him."

"She is not in her senses. She is madly in love. She has been told all about him. She cares nothing."

"Told about the murder?"

"Yes."

"My Lord, she must have a nerve!"

"She puts them all down as slanders."

"Couldn't you lay proofs before her silly eyes?"

“Well, can you help us do so?”

“Ain’t I a proof myself? If I stood before her and told her how he used me—”

“Would you do this?”

“Would I? Would I not!”

“Well, it might be worth trying. But he has told her most of his sins and had pardon from her, and I understand she will not reopen the question.”

“I’ll lay he didn’t tell her all,” said Miss Winter. “I caught a glimpse of one or two murders besides the one that made such a fuss. He would speak of someone in his velvet way and then look at me with a steady eye and say: ‘He died within a month.’ It wasn’t hot air, either. But I took little notice — you see, I loved him myself at that time. Whatever he did went with me, same as with this poor fool! There was just one thing that shook me. Yes, by cripes! if it had not been for his poisonous, lying tongue that explains and soothes. I’d have left him that very night. It’s a book he has — a brown leather book with a lock, and his arms in gold on the outside. I think he was a bit drunk that night, or he would not have shown it to me.”

“What was it, then?”

“I tell you. Mr. Holmes. this man collects women, and takes a pride in his collection. as some men collect moths or butterflies. He had it all in that book. Snapshot photographs. names, details, everything about them. It was a beastly book — a book no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together. But it was Adelbert Gruner’s book all the same. ‘Souls I have ruined.’ He could have put that on the outside if he had been so minded. However, that’s neither here nor there, for the book would not serve you, and, if it would, you can’t get it.”

“Where is it?”

“How can I tell you where it is now? It’s more than a year since I left him. I know where he kept it then. He’s a precise, tidy cat of a man in many of his ways, so maybe it is still in the pigeon-hole of the old bureau in the inner study. Do you know his house?”

“I’ve been in the study,” said Holmes.

“Have you. though? You haven’t been slow on the job if you only started this morning. Maybe dear Adelbert has met his match this time. The outer study is the one with the Chinese crockery in it — big glass cupboard between the windows. Then behind his desk is the door that leads to the inner study — a small room where he keeps papers and things.”

“Is he not afraid of burglars?”

“Adelbert is no coward. His worst enemy couldn’t say that of him. He can look after himself. There’s a burglar alarm at night. Besides, what is there for a burglar — unless they got away with all this fancy crockery?”

“No good,” said Shinwell Johnson with the decided voice of the expert. “No fence wants stuff of that sort that you can neither melt nor sell.”

“Quite so,” said Holmes. “Well, now, Miss Winter. if you would call here tomorrow evening at five. I would consider in the meanwhile whether your suggestion of seeing this lady personally may not be arranged. I am exceedingly obliged to you for your cooperation. I need not say that my clients will consider liberally—”

“None of that, Mr. Holmes,” cried the young woman. “I am not out for money. Let me see this man in the mud, and I’ve got all I’ve worked for — in the mud with my foot on his cursed face. That’s my price. I’m with you tomorrow or any other day so long as you are on his track. Porky here can tell you always where to find me.”

I did not see Holmes again until the following evening when we dined once more at our Strand restaurant. He shrugged his shoulders when I asked him what luck he had had in his interview. Then he told the story, which I would repeat in this way. His hard, dry statement needs some little editing to soften it into the terms of real life.

“There was no difficulty at all about the appointment,” said Holmes, “for the girl glories in showing abject filial obedience in all secondary things in an attempt to atone for her flagrant breach of it in her engagement. The General phoned that all was ready, and the fiery Miss W. turned up according to schedule, so that at half-past five a cab deposited us outside 104 Berkeley Square, where the old soldier resides — one of those awful gray London castles which would make a church seem frivolous. A footman showed us into a great yellow-curtained drawing-room, and there was the lady awaiting us, demure, pale, self-contained, as inflexible and remote as a snow image on a mountain.

“I don’t quite know how to make her clear to you, Watson. Perhaps you may meet her before we are through, and you can use your own gift of words. She is beautiful, but with the ethereal other-world beauty of some fanatic whose thoughts are set on high. I have seen such faces in the pictures of the old masters of the Middle Ages. How a beastman could have laid his vile paws upon such a being of the beyond I cannot imagine. You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel. You never saw a worse case than this.

"She knew what we had come for, of course — that villain had lost no time in poisoning her mind against us. Miss Winter's advent rather amazed her, I think, but she waved us into our respective chairs like a reverend abbess receiving two rather leprous mendicants. If your head is inclined to swell. my dear Watson, take a course of Miss Violet de Merville.

"'Well, sir,' said she in a voice like the wind from an iceberg, 'your name is familiar to me. You have called. as I understand, to malign my fiance, Baron Gruner. It is only by my father's request that I see you at all, and I warn you in advance that anything you can say could not possibly have the slightest effect upon my mind.'

"I was sorry for her, Watson. I thought of her for the moment as I would have thought of a daughter of my own. I am not often eloquent. I use my head, not my heart. But I really did plead with her with all the warmth of words that I could find in my nature. I pictured to her the awful position of the woman who only wakes to a man's character after she is his wife — a woman who has to submit to be caressed by bloody hands and lecherous lips. I spared her nothing — the shame, the fear, the agony, the hopelessness of it all. All my hot words could not bring one tinge of colour to those ivory cheeks or one gleam of emotion to those abstracted eyes. I thought of what the rascal had said about a post-hypnotic influence. One could really believe that she was living above the earth in some ecstatic dream. Yet there was nothing indefinite in her replies.

"'I have listened to you with patience, Mr. Holmes,' said she. 'The effect upon my mind is exactly as predicted. I am aware that Adelbert, that my fiance, has had a stormy life in which he has incurred bitter hatreds and most unjust aspersions. You are only the last of a series who have brought their slanders before me. Possibly you mean well, though I learn that you are a paid agent who would have been equally willing to act for the Baron as against him. But in any case I wish you to understand once for all that I love him and that he loves me, and that the opinion of all the world is no more to me than the twitter of those birds outside the window. If his noble nature has ever for an instant fallen, it may be that I have been specially sent to raise it to its true and lofty level. I am not clear' — here she turned eyes upon my companion—'who this young lady may be.'

"I was about to answer when the girl broke in like a whirlwind. If ever you saw flame and ice face to face, it was those two women.

"'I'll tell you who I am,' she cried, springing out of her chair, her mouth all twisted with passion—'I am his last mistress. I am one of a hundred that he has tempted and used and ruined and thrown into the refuse heap, as he will you also. Your refuse heap is more likely to be a grave, and maybe that's the best. I tell you, you foolish woman, if you marry this man he'll be the death of you. It may be a broken heart or it may be a broken neck, but he'll have you one way or the other. It's not out of love for you I'm speaking. I don't care a tinker's curse whether you live or die. It's out of hate for him and to spite him and to get back on him for what he did to me. But it's all the same, and you needn't look at me like that, my fine lady, for you may be lower than I am before you are through with it.'

"'I should prefer not to discuss such matters,' said Miss de Merville coldly. 'Let me say once for all that I am aware of three passages in my fiance's life in which he became entangled with designing women, and that I am assured of his hearty repentance for any evil that he may have done.'

"'Three passages!' screamed my companion. 'You fool! You unutterable fool!'

"'Mr. Holmes, I beg that you will bring this interview to an end,' said the icy voice. 'I have obeyed my father's wish in seeing you, but I am not compelled to listen to the ravings of this person.'

"With an oath Miss Winter darted forward, and if I had not caught her wrist she would have clutched this maddening woman by the hair. I dragged her towards the door and was lucky to get her back into the cab without a public scene, for she was beside herself with rage. In a cold way I felt pretty furious myself, Watson, for there was something indescribably annoying in the calm aloofness and supreme self-complaisance of the woman whom we were trying to save. So now once again you know exactly how we stand, and it is clear that I must plan some fresh opening move, for this gambit won't work. I'll keep in touch with you, Watson, for it is more than likely that you will have your part to play, though it is just possible that the next move may lie with them rather than with us."

And it did. Their blow fell — or his blow rather, for never could I believe that the lady was privy to it. I think I could show you the very paving-stone upon which I stood when my eyes fell upon the placard, and a pang of horror passed through my very soul. It was between the Grand Hotel and

Charing Cross Station, where a one-legged news-vender displayed his evening papers. The date was just two days after the last conversation. There, black upon yellow, was the terrible news-sheet:

MURDEROUS ATTACK UPON SHERLOCK HOLMES

I think I stood stunned for some moments. Then I have a confused recollection of snatching at a paper, of the remonstrance of the man, whom I had not paid, and, finally, of standing in the doorway of a chemist's shop while I turned up the fateful paragraph. This was how it ran:

We learn with regret that Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well-known private detective, was the victim this morning of a murderous assault which has left him in a precarious position. There are no exact details to hand, but the event seems to have occurred about twelve o'clock in Regent Street, outside the Cafe Royal. The attack was made by two men armed with sticks, and Mr. Holmes was beaten about the head and body, receiving injuries which the doctors describe as most serious. He was carried to Charing Cross Hospital and afterwards insisted upon being taken to his rooms in Baker Street. The miscreants who attacked him appear to have been respectably dressed men, who escaped from the bystanders by passing through the Cafe Royal and out into Glasshouse Street behind it.

No doubt they belonged to that criminal fraternity which has so often had occasion to bewail the activity and ingenuity of the injured man.

I need not say that my eyes had hardly glanced over the paragraph before I had sprung into a hansom and was on my way to Baker Street. I found Sir Leslie Oakshott, the famous surgeon, in the hall and his brougham waiting at the curb.

“No immediate danger,” was his report. “Two lacerated scalp wounds and some considerable bruises. Several stitches have been necessary. Morphine has been injected and quiet is essential, but an interview of a few minutes would not be absolutely forbidden.”

With this permission I stole into the darkened room. The sufferer was wide awake, and I heard my name in a hoarse whisper. The blind was three-quarters down, but one ray of sunlight slanted through and struck the bandaged head of the injured man. A crimson patch had soaked through the white linen compress. I sat beside him and bent my head.

“All right, Watson. Don't look so scared,” he muttered in a very weak voice. “It's not as bad as it seems.”

“Thank God for that!”

"I'm a bit of a single-stick expert. as you know. I took most of them on my guard. It was the second man that was too much for me."

"What can I do, Holmes? Of course, it was that damned fellow who set them on. I'll go and thrash the hide off him if you give the word."

"Good old Watson! No, we can do nothing there unless the police lay their hands on the men. But their get-away had been well prepared. We may be sure of that. Wait a little. I have my plans. The first thing is to exaggerate my injuries. They'll come to you for news. Put it on thick, Watson. Lucky if I live the week out concussion delirium — what you like! You can't overdo it."

"But Sir Leslie Oakshott?"

"Oh, he's all right. He shall see the worst side of me. I'll look after that."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Tell Shinwell Johnson to get that girl out of the way. Those beauties will be after her now. They know, of course, that she was with me in the case. If they dared to do me in it is not likely they will neglect her. That is urgent. Do it to-night."

"I'll go now. Anything more?"

"Put my pipe on the table — and the tobacco-slipper. Right! Come in each morning and we will plan our campaign."

I arranged with Johnson that evening to take Miss Winter to a quiet suburb and see that she lay low until the danger was past.

For six days the public were under the impression that Holmes was at the door of death. The bulletins were very grave and there were sinister paragraphs in the papers. My continual visits assured me that it was not so bad as that. His wiry constitution and his determined will were working wonders. He was recovering fast, and I had suspicions at times that he was really finding himself faster than he pretended even to me. There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

On the seventh day the stitches were taken out, in spite of which there was a report of erysipelas in the evening papers. The same evening papers had an announcement which I was bound, sick or well, to carry to my friend. It was simply that among the passengers on the Cunard boat

Ruritania, starting from Liverpool on Friday, was the Baron Adelbert Gruner, who had some important financial business to settle in the States before his impending wedding to Miss Violet de Merville, only daughter of, etc., etc. Holmes listened to the news with a cold, concentrated look upon his pale face, which told me that it hit him hard.

"Friday!" he cried. "Only three clear days. I believe the rascal wants to put himself out of danger's way. But he won't, Watson! By the Lord Harry, he won't! Now, Watson, I want you to do something for me."

"I am here to be used, Holmes."

"Well, then, spend the next twenty-four hours in an intensive study of Chinese pottery."

He gave no explanations and I asked for none. By long experience I had learned the wisdom of obedience. But when I had left his room I walked down Baker Street, revolving in my head how on earth I was to carry out so strange an order. Finally I drove to the London Library in St. James's Square, put the matter to my friend Lomax, the sublibrarian, and departed to my rooms with a goodly volume under my arm.

It is said that the barrister who crams up a case with such care that he can examine an expert witness upon the Monday has forgotten all his forced knowledge before the Saturday. Certainly I should not like now to pose as an authority upon ceramics. And yet all that evening, and all that night with a short interval for rest, and all next morning, I was sucking in knowledge and committing names to memory. There I learned of the hall-marks of the great artist-decorators, of the mystery of cyclical dates, the marks of the Hung-wu and the beauties of the Yung-lo, the writings of Tang-ying, and the glories of the primitive period of the Sung and the Yuan. I was charged with all this information when I called upon Holmes next evening. He was out of bed now, though you would not have guessed it from the published reports, and he sat with his much-bandaged head resting upon his hand in the depth of his favourite armchair.

"Why, Holmes," I said, "if one believed the papers, you are dying."

"That," said he, "is the very impression which I intended to convey. And now, Watson, have you learned your lessons?"

"At least I have tried to."

"Good. You could keep up an intelligent conversation on the subject?"

"I believe I could."

"Then hand me that little box from the mantelpiece."

He opened the lid and took out a small object most carefully wrapped in some fine Eastern silk. This he unfolded, and disclosed a delicate little saucer of the most beautiful deep-blue colour.

“It needs careful handling, Watson. This is the real egg-shell pottery of the Ming dynasty. No finer piece ever passed through Christie’s. A complete set of this would be worth a king’s ransom — in fact, it is doubtful if there is a complete set outside the imperial palace of Peking. The sight of this would drive a real connoisseur wild.”

“What am I to do with it?”

Holmes handed me a card upon which was printed: “Dr. Hill Barton, 369 Half Moon Street.”

“That is your name for the evening, Watson. You will call upon Baron Gruner. I know something of his habits, and at half-past eight he would probably be disengaged. A note will tell him in advance that you are about to call, and you will say that you are bringing him a specimen of an absolutely unique set of Ming china. You may as well be a medical man, since that is a part which you can play without duplicity. You are a collector this set has come your way, you have heard of the Baron’s interest in the subject, and you are not averse to selling at a price.”

“What price?”

“Well asked, Watson. You would certainly fall down badly if you did not know the value of your own wares. This saucer was got for me by Sir James, and comes, I understand, from the collection of his client. You will not exaggerate if you say that it could hardly be matched in the world.”

“I could perhaps suggest that the set should be valued by an expert.”

“Excellent, Watson! You scintillate to-day. Suggest Christie or Sotheby. Your delicacy prevents your putting a price for yourself.”

“But if he won’t see me?”

“Oh, yes, he will see you. He has the collection mania in its most acute form — and especially on this subject, on which he is an acknowledged authority. Sit down, Watson, and I will dictate the letter. No answer needed. You will merely say that you are coming, and why.”

It was an admirable document, short, courteous, and stimulating to the curiosity of the connoisseur. A district messenger was duly dispatched with it. On the same evening, with the precious saucer in my hand and the card of Dr. Hill Barton in my pocket, I set off on my own adventure.

The beautiful house and grounds indicated that Baron Gruner was, as Sir James had said, a man of considerable wealth. A long winding drive, with banks of rare shrubs on either side, opened out into a great gravelled square adorned with statues. The place had been built by a South African gold king in the days of the great boom, and the long, low house with the turrets at the corners, though an architectural nightmare, was imposing in its size and solidity. A butler, who would have adorned a bench of bishops, showed me in and handed me over to a plush-clad footman, who ushered me into the Baron's presence.

He was standing at the open front of a great case which stood between the windows and which contained part of his Chinese collection. He turned as I entered with a small brown vase in his hand.

"Pray sit down, Doctor," said he. "I was looking over my own treasures and wondering whether I could really afford to add to them. This little Tang specimen, which dates from the seventh century, would probably interest you. I am sure you never saw finer workmanship or a richer glaze. Have you the Ming saucer with you of which you spoke?"

I carefully unpacked it and handed it to him. He seated himself at his desk, pulled over the lamp, for it was growing dark, and set himself to examine it. As he did so the yellow light beat upon his own features, and I was able to study them at my ease.

He was certainly a remarkably handsome man. His European reputation for beauty was fully deserved. In figure he was not more than of middle size, but was built upon graceful and active lines. His face was swarthy, almost Oriental, with large, dark, languorous eyes which might easily hold an irresistible fascination for women. His hair and moustache were raven black, the latter short, pointed, and carefully waxed. His features were regular and pleasing, save only his straight, thin-lipped mouth. If ever I saw a murderer's mouth it was there — a cruel, hard gash in the face, compressed, inexorable, and terrible. He was ill-advised to train his moustache away from it, for it was Nature's danger-signal, set as a warning to his victims. His voice was engaging and his manners perfect. In age I should have put him at little over thirty, though his record afterwards showed that he was forty-two.

"Very fine — very fine indeed!" he said at last. "And you say you have a set of six to correspond. What puzzles me is that I should not have heard of such magnificent specimens. I only know of one in England to match this, and it is certainly not likely to be in the market. Would it be indiscreet if I were to ask you, Dr. Hill Barton, how you obtained this?"

"Does it really matter?" I asked with as careless an air as I could muster.

"You can see that the piece is genuine, and, as to the value, I am content to take an expert's valuation."

"Very mysterious," said he with a quick, suspicious flash of his dark eyes. "In dealing with objects of such value, one naturally wishes to know all about the transaction. That the piece is genuine is certain. I have no doubts at all about that. But suppose — I am bound to take every possibility into account — that it should prove afterwards that you had no right to sell?"

"I would guarantee you against any claim of the son."

"That, of course, would open up the question as to what your guarantee was worth."

"My bankers would answer that."

"Quite so. And yet the whole transaction strikes me as rather unusual."

"You can do business or not," said I with indifference. "I have given you the first offer as I understood that you were a connoisseur, but I shall have no difficulty in other quaerers."

"Who told you I was a connoisseur?"

"I was aware that you had written a book upon the subject."

"Have you read the book?"

"No."

"Dear me, this becomes more and more difficult for me to understand! You are a connoisseur and collector with a very valuable piece in your collection, and yet you have never troubled to consult the one book which would have told you of the real meaning and value of what you held. How do you explain that?"

"I am a very busy man. I am a doctor in practice."

"That is no answer. If a man has a hobby he follows it up, whatever his other pursuits may be. You said in your note that you were a connoisseur."

"So I am."

"Might I ask you a few questions to test you? I am obliged to tell you, Doctor — if you are indeed a doctor — that the incident becomes more and more suspicious. I would ask you what do you know of the Emperor Shomu and how do you associate him with the Shoso-in near Nara? Dear me, does that puzzle you? Tell me a little about the Nonhern Wei dynasty and its place in the history of ceramics."

I sprang from my chair in simulated anger.

"This is intolerable, sir," said I. "I came here to do you a favour, and not to be examined as if I were a schoolboy. My knowledge on these subjects may be second only to your own, but I certainly shall not answer questions which have been put in so offensive a way."

He looked at me steadily. The languor had gone from his eyes. They suddenly glared. There was a gleam of teeth from between those cruel lips.

"What is the game? You are here as a spy. You are an emissary of Holmes. This is a trick that you are playing upon me. The fellow is dying I hear, so he sends his tools to keep watch upon me. You've made your way in here without leave, and, by God! you may find it harder to get out than to get in."

He had sprung to his feet, and I stepped back, bracing myself for an attack, for the man was beside himself with rage. He may have suspected me from the first; certainly this cross-examination had shown him the truth; but it was clear that I could not hope to deceive him. He dived his hand into a side-drawer and rummaged furiously. Then something struck upon his ear, for he stood listening intently.

"Ah!" he cried. "Ah!" and dashed into the room behind him.

Two steps took me to the open door, and my mind will ever carry a clear picture of the scene within. The window leading out to the garden was wide open. Beside it, looking like some terrible ghost, his head gin with bloody bandages, his face drawn and white, stood Sherlock Holmes. The next instant he was through the gap, and I heard the crash of his body among the laurel bushes outside. With a howl of rage the master of the house rushed after him to the open window.

And then! It was done in an instant, and yet I clearly saw it. An arm — a woman's arm — shot out from among the leaves. At the same instant the Baron uttered a horrible cry — a yell which will always ring in my memory. He clapped his two hands to his face and rushed round the room, beating his head horribly against the walls. Then he fell upon the carpet, rolling and writhing, while scream after scream resounded through the house.

"Water! For God's sake, water!" was his cry.

I seized a carafe from a side-table and rushed to his aid. At the same moment the butler and several footmen ran in from the hall. I remember that one of them fainted as I knelt by the injured man and turned that awful face to the light of the lamp. The vitriol was eating into it everywhere and dripping from the ears and the chin. One eye was already white and glazed. The other was red and inflamed. The features which I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist has passed a wet and foul sponge. They were blurred, discoloured, inhuman, terrible.

In a few words I explained exactly what had occurred, so far as the vitriol attack was concerned. Some had climbed through the window and others had rushed out on to the lawn, but it was dark and it had begun to rain. Between his screams the victim raged and raved against the avenger. “It was that hell-cat, Kitty Winter!” he cried. “Oh, the she-devil! She shall pay for it! She shall pay! Oh, God in heaven, this pain is more than I can bear!”

I bathed his face in oil, put cotton wadding on the raw surfaces, and administered a hypodermic of morphia. All suspicion of me had passed from his mind in the presence of this shock, and he clung to my hands as if I might have the power even yet to clear those dead-fish eyes which glazed up at me. I could have wept over the ruin had I not remembered very clearly the vile life which had led up to so hideous a change. It was loathsome to feel the pawing of his burning hands, and I was relieved when his family surgeon, closely followed by a specialist, came to relieve me of my charge. An inspector of police had also arrived, and to him I handed my real card. It would have been useless as well as foolish to do otherwise, for I was nearly as well known by sight at the Yard as Holmes himself. Then I left that house of gloom and terror. Within an hour I was at Baker Street.

Holmes was seated in his familiar chair, looking very pale and exhausted. Apart from his injuries, even his iron nerves had been shocked by the events of the evening, and he listened with horror to my account of the Baron’s transformation.

“The wages of sin, Watson — the wages of sin!” said he. “Sooner or later it will always come. God knows, there was sin enough,” he added, taking up a brown volume from the table. “Here is the book the woman talked of. If this will not break off the marriage, nothing ever could. But it will, Watson. It must. No self-respecting woman could stand it.”

“It is his love diary?”

“Or his lust diary. Call it what you will. The moment the woman told us of it I realised what a tremendous weapon was there if we could but lay our hands on it. I said nothing at the time to indicate my thoughts, for this woman might have given it away. But I brooded over it. Then this assault upon me gave me the chance of letting the Baron think that no precautions need be taken against me. That was all to the good. I would have waited a little longer, but his visit to America forced my hand. He would never have left so compromising a document behind him. Therefore we had to act at once. Burglary at night is impossible. He takes precautions. But there was a chance in the evening if I could only be sure that his attention was engaged. That was where you and your blue saucer came in. But I had to be sure of the position of the book, and I knew I had only a few minutes in which to act, for my time was limited by your knowledge of Chinese pottery. Therefore I gathered the girl up at the last moment. How could I guess what the little packet was that she carried so carefully under her cloak? I thought she had come altogether on my business, but it seems she had some of her own."

"He guessed I came from you."

"I feared he would. But you held him in play just long enough for me to get the book, though not long enough for an unobserved escape. Ah, Sir James, I am very glad you have come!"

Our courtly friend had appeared in answer to a previous summons. He listened with the deepest attention to Holmes's account of what had occurred.

"You have done wonders — wonders!" he cried when he had heard the narrative. "But if these injuries are as terrible as Dr. Watson describes, then surely our purpose of thwarting the marriage is sufficiently gained without the use of this horrible book."

Holmes shook his head.

"Women of the De Merville type do not act like that. She would love him the more as a disfigured martyr. No, no. It is his moral side, not his physical, which we have to destroy. That book will bring her back to earth — and I know nothing else that could. It is in his own writing. She cannot get past it."

Sir James carried away both it and the precious saucer. As I was myself overdue, I went down with him into the street. A brougham was waiting for him. He sprang in, gave a hurried order to the cockaded coachman, and drove swiftly away. He flung his overcoat half out of the window to cover the armorial bearings upon the panel, but I had seen them in the glare of our fanlight none the less. I gasped with surprise. Then I turned back and ascended the stair to Holmes's room.

“I have found out who our client is,” I cried, bursting with my great news. “Why, Holmes, it is—”

“It is a loyal friend and a chivalrous gentleman,” said Holmes, holding up a restraining hand. “Let that now and forever be enough for us.”

I do not know how the incriminating book was used. Sir James may have managed it. Or it is more probable that so delicate a task was entrusted to the young lady’s father. The effect, at any rate, was all that could be desired.

Three days later appeared a paragraph in the Morning Post to say that the marriage between Baron Adelbert Gruner and Miss Violet de Merville would not take place. The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

ADVENTURE VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLANCHED SOLDIER

The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. For a long time he has worried me to write an experience of my own. Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures. “Try it yourself, Holmes!” he has retorted, and I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realise that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader. The following case can hardly fail to do so, as it is among the strangest happenings in my collection though it chanced that Watson had no note of it in his collection. Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

I find from my notebook that it was in January, 1903, just after the conclusion of the Boer War, that I had my visit from Mr. James M. Dodd, a big, fresh, sunburned, upstanding Briton. The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone.

It is my habit to sit with my back to the window and to place my visitors in the opposite chair, where the light falls full upon them. Mr. James M. Dodd seemed somewhat at a loss how to begin the interview. I did not attempt to help him, for his silence gave me more time for observation. I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power, and so I gave him some of my conclusions.

“From South Africa, sir, I perceive.”

“Yes, sir,” he answered, with some surprise.

“Imperial Yeomanry, I fancy.”

“Exactly.”

“Middlesex Corps, no doubt.”

“That is so. Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard.”

I smiled at his bewildered expression.

“When a gentleman of virile appearance enters my room with such tan upon his face as an English sun could never give, and with his handkerchief in his sleeve instead of in his pocket, it is not difficult to place him. You wear a short beard, which shows that you were not a regular. You have the cut of a riding-man. As to Middlesex, your card has already shown me that you are a stockbroker from Throgmorton Street. What other regiment would you join?”

“You see everything.”

“I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see. However, Mr. Dodd, it was not to discuss the science of observation that you called upon me this morning. What has been happening at Tuxbury Old Park?”

“Mr. Holmes — !”

“My dear sir, there is no mystery. Your letter came with that heading, and as you fixed this appointment in very pressing terms it was clear that something sudden and important had occurred.”

“Yes, indeed. But the letter was written in the afternoon, and a good deal has happened since then. If Colonel Emsworth had not kicked me out—”

“Kicked you out!”

“Well, that was what it amounted to. He is a hard nail, is Colonel Emsworth. The greatest martinet in the Army in his day, and it was a day of rough language, too. I couldn’t have stuck the colonel if it had not been for Godfrey’s sake.”

I lit my pipe and leaned back in my chair.

“Perhaps you will explain what you are talking about.”

My client grinned mischievously.

“I had got into the way of supposing that you knew everything without being told,” said he. “But I will give you the facts, and I hope to God that you will be able to tell me what they mean. I’ve been awake all night puzzling my brain, and the more I think the more incredible does it become.

“When I joined up in January, 1901 — just two years ago — young Godfrey Emsworth had joined the same squadron. He was Colonel Emsworth’s only son — Emsworth the Crimean V. C. — and he had the fighting blood in him, so it is no wonder he volunteered. There was not a finer lad in the regiment. We formed a friendship — the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. He was my mate — and that means a good deal in the Army. We took the rough and the smooth together for a year of hard fighting. Then he was hit with a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside-Pretoria. I got one letter from the hospital at Cape Town and one from Southampton. Since then not a word — not one word, Mr. Holmes, for six months and more, and he my closest pal.

“Well, when the war was over, and we all got back, I wrote to his father and asked where Godfrey was. No answer. I waited a bit and then I wrote again. This time I had a reply, short and gruff. Godfrey had gone on a voyage round the world, and it was not likely that he would be back for a year. That was all.

“I wasn’t satisfied, Mr. Holmes. The whole thing seemed to me so damned unnatural. He was a good lad, and he would not drop a pal like that. It was not like him. Then, again, I happened to know that he was heir to a lot of money, and also that his father and he did not always hit it off too well. The old man was sometimes a bully, and young Godfrey had too much spirit to stand it. No, I wasn’t satisfied, and I determined that I would get to the root of the matter. It happened, however, that my own affairs needed a lot of straightening out, after two years’ absence, and so it is only this week that I have been able to take up Godfrey’s case again. But since I have taken it up I mean to drop everything in order to see it through.”

Mr. James M. Dodd appeared to be the sort of person whom it would be better to have as a friend than as an enemy. His blue eyes were stern and his square jaw had set hard as he spoke.

“Well, what have you done?” I asked.

“My first move was to get down to his home, Tuxbury Old Park, near Bedford, and to see for myself how the ground lay. I wrote to the mother, therefore — I had had quite enough of the curmudgeon of a father — and I made a clean frontal attack: Godfrey was my chum, I had a great deal of interest which I might tell her of our common experiences, I should be in the neighbourhood, would there be any objection, et cetera? In reply I had quite an amiable answer from her and an offer to put me up for the night. That was what took me down on Monday.

"Tuxbury Old Hall is inaccessible — five miles from anywhere. There was no trap at the station, so I had to walk, carrying my suitcase, and it was nearly dark before I arrived. It is a great wandering house, standing in a considerable park. I should judge it was of all sorts of ages and styles, starting on a half-timbered Elizabethan foundation and ending in a Victorian portico. Inside it was all panelling and tapestry and half-effaced old pictures, a house of shadows and mystery. There was a butler, old Ralph, who seemed about the same age as the house, and there was his wife, who might have been older. She had been Godfrey's nurse, and I had heard him speak of her as second only to his mother in his affections, so I was drawn to her in spite of her queer appearance. The mother I liked also — a gentle little white mouse of a woman. It was only the colonel himself whom I barred.

"We had a bit of barney right away, and I should have walked back to the station if I had not felt that it might be playing his game for me to do so. I was shown straight into his study, and there I found him, a huge, bow-backed man with a smoky skin and a straggling gray beard, seated behind his littered desk. A red-veined nose jutted out like a vulture's beak, and two fierce gray eyes glared at me from under tufted brows. I could understand now why Godfrey seldom spoke of his father.

"'Well, sir,' said he in a rasping voice, 'I should be interested to know the real reasons for this visit.'

"I answered that I had explained them in my letter to his wife.

"'Yes, yes, you said that you had known Godfrey in Africa. We have, of course, only your word for that.'

"'I have his letters to me in my pocket.'

"'Kindly let me see them.'

"He glanced at the two which I handed him, and then he tossed them back.

"'Well, what then?' he asked.

"'I was fond of your son Godfrey, sir. Many ties and memories united us. Is it not natural that I should wonder at his sudden silence and should wish to know what has become of him?'

"'I have some recollections, sir, that I had already corresponded with you and had told you what had become of him. He has gone upon a voyage round the world. His health was in a poor way after his African experiences, and both his mother and I were of opinion that camplete rest and change were needed. Kindly pass that explanation on to any other friends who may be interested in the matter.’

“‘Certainly,’ I answered. ‘But perhaps you would have the goodness to let me have the name of the steamer and of the line by which he sailed, together with the date. I have no doubt that I should be able to get a letter through to him.’

“My request seemed both to puzzle and to irritate my host. His great eyebrows came down over his eyes, and he tapped his fingers impatiently on the table. He looked up at last with the expression of one who has seen his adversary make a dangerous move at chess, and has decided how to meet it.

“‘Many people, Mr. Dodd,’ said he, ‘would take offence at your infernal pertinacity and would think that this insistence had reached the point of damned impertinence.’

“‘You must put it down, sir, to my real love for your son.’

“‘Exactly. I have already made every allowance upon that score. I must ask you, however, to drop these inquiries. Every family has its own inner knowledge and its own motives, which cannot always be made clear to outsiders, however well-intentioned. My wife is anxious to hear something of Godfrey’s past which you are in a position to tell her, but I would ask you to let the present and the future alone. Such inquiries serve no useful purpose, sir, and place us in a delicate and difficult position.’

“So I came to a dead end, Mr. Holmes. There was no getting past it. I could only pretend to accept the situation and register a vow inwardly that I would never rest until my friend’s fate had been cleared up. It was a dull evening. We dined quietly, the three of us, in a gloomy, faded old room. The lady questioned me eagerly about her son, but the old man seemed morose and depressed. I was so bored by the whole proceeding that I made an excuse as soon as I decently could and retired to my bedroom. It was a large, bare room on the ground floor, as gloomy as the rest of the house, but after a year of sleeping upon the veldt, Mr. Holmes, one is not too particular about one’s quarters. I opened the curtains and looked out into the garden, remarking that it was a fine night with a bright half-moon. Then I sat down by the roaring fire with the lamp on a table beside me, and endeavoured to distract my mind with a novel. I was interrupted, however, by Ralph, the old butler, who came in with a fresh supply of coals.

"'I thought you might run short in the night-time, sir. It is bitter weather and these rooms are cold.'

"He hesitated before leaving the room, and when I looked round he was standing facing me with a wistful look upon his wrinkled face.

"'Beg your pardon, sir, but I could not help hearing what you said of young Master Godfrey at dinner. You know, sir, that my wife nursed him, and so I may say I am his foster-father. It's natural we should take an interest. And you say he carried himself well, sir?'

"'There was no braver man in the regiment. He pulled me out once from under the rifles of the Boers, or maybe I should not be here.'

"The old butler rubbed his skinny hands.

"'Yes, sir, yes, that is Master Godfrey all over. He was always courageous. There's not a tree in the park, sir, that he has not climbed. Nothing would stop him. He was a fine boy — and oh, sir, he was a fine man.'

"I sprang to my feet.

"'Look here!' I cried. 'You say he was. You speak as if he were dead. What is all this mystery? What has become of Godfrey Emsworth?'

"I gripped the old man by the shoulder, but he shrank away.

"'I don't know what you mean, sir. Ask the master about Master Godfrey. He knows. It is not for me to interfere.'

"He was leaving the room, but I held his arm

"'Listen,' I said. 'You are going to answer one question before you leave if I have to hold you all night. Is Godfrey dead?"

"He could not face my eyes. He was like a man hypnotized The answer was dragged from his lips. It was a terrible and unexpected one.

"'I wish to God he was!' he cried, and, tearing himself free he dashed from the room.

"You will think, Mr. Holmes, that I returned to my chair in no very happy state of mind. The old man's words seemed to me to bear only one interpretation. Clearly my poor friend had become involved in some criminal or, at the least, disreputable transaction which touched the family honour. That stern old man had sent his son away and hidden him from the world lest some scandal should come to light. Godfrey was a reckless fellow. He was easily influenced by those around him. No doubt he had fallen into bad hands and been misled to his ruin. It was a piteous business, if it was indeed so, but even now it was my duty to hunt him out and see if I could aid him. I was anxiously pondering the matter when I looked up, and there was Godfrey Emsworth standing before me."

My client had paused as one in deep emotion.

"Pray continue," I said. "Your problem presents some very unusual features."

"He was outside the window, Mr. Holmes, with his face pressed against the glass. I have told you that I looked out at the night. When I did so I left the curtains partly open. His figure was framed in this gap. The window came down to the ground and I could see the whole length of it, but it was his face which held my gaze. He was deadly pale — never have I seen a man so white. I reckon ghosts may look like that; but his eyes met mine, and they were the eyes of a living man. He sprang back when he saw that I was looking at him, and he vanished into the darkness.

"There was something shocking about the man, Mr. Holmes. It wasn't merely that ghastly face glimmering as white as cheese in the darkness. It was more subtle than that — something slinking, something furtive, something guilty — something very unlike the frank, manly lad that I had known. It left a feeling of horror in my mind.

"But when a man has been soldiering for a year or two with brother Boer as a playmate, he keeps his nerve and acts quickly. Godfrey had hardly vanished before I was at the window. There was an awkward catch, and I was some little time before I could throw it up. Then I nipped through and ran down the garden path in the direction that I thought he might have taken.

"It was a long path and the light was not very good, but it seemed to me something was moving ahead of me. I ran on and called his name, but it was no use. When I got to the end of the path there were several others branching in different directions to various outhouses. I stood hesitating, and as I did so I heard distinctly the sound of a closing door. It was not behind me in the house, but ahead of me, somewhere in the darkness. That was enough, Mr. Holmes, to assure me that what I had seen was not a vision. Godfrey had run away from me, and he had shut a door behind him. Of that I was certain.

"There was nothing more I could do, and I spent an uneasy night turning the matter over in my mind and trying to find some theory which would cover the facts. Next day I found the colonel rather more conciliatory, and as his wife remarked that there were some places of interest in the neighbourhood, it gave me an opening to ask whether my presence for one more night would incommode them. A somewhat grudging acquiescence from the old man gave me a clear day in which to make my observations. I was already perfectly convinced that Godfrey was in hiding somewhere near, but where and why remained to be solved.

"The house was so large and so rambling that a regiment might be hid away in it and no one the wiser. If the secret lay there it was difficult for me to penetrate it. But the door which I had heard close was certainly not in the house. I must explore the garden and see what I could find. There was no difficulty in the way, for the old people were busy in their own fashion and left me to my own devices.

"There were several small outhouses, but at the end of the garden there was a detached building of some size — large enough for a gardener's or a gamekeeper's residence. Could this be the place whence the sound of that shutting door had come? I approached it in a careless fashion as though I were strolling aimlessly round the grounds. As I did so, a small, brisk, bearded man in a black coat and bowler hat — not at all the gardener type — came out of the door. To my surprise, he locked it after him and put the key in his pocket. Then he looked at me with some surprise on his face.

"'Are you a visitor here?' he asked.

"I explained that I was and that I was a friend of Godfrey's.

"'What a pity that he should be away on his travels, for he would have so liked to see me,' I continued.

"'Quite so. Exactly,' said he with a rather guilty air. 'No doubt you will renew your visit at some more propitious time.' He passed on, but when I turned I observed that he was standing watching me, half-concealed by the laurels at the far end of the garden.

"I had a good look at the little house as I passed it, but the windows were heavily curtained, and, so far as one could see, it was empty. I might spoil my own game and even be ordered off the premises if I were too audacious, for I was still conscious that I was being watched. Therefore, I strolled back to the house and waited for night before I went on with my inquiry. When all was dark and quiet I slipped out of my window and made my way as silently as possible to the mysterious lodge.

"I have said that it was heavily curtained, but now I found that the windows were shuttered as well. Some light, however, was breaking through one of them, so I concentrated my attention upon this. I was in luck, for the curtain had not been quite closed, and there was a crack in the shutter, so that I could see the inside of the room. It was a cheery place enough, a bright lamp and a blazing fire. Opposite to me was seated the little man whom I had seen in the morning. He was smoking a pipe and reading a paper."

"What paper?" I asked.

My client seemed annoyed at the interruption of his narrative.

"Can it matter?" he asked.

"It is most essential."

"I really took no notice."

"Possibly you observed whether it was a broad-leafed paper or of that smaller type which one associates with weeklies."

"Now that you mention it, it was not large. It might have been the Spectator. However, I had little thought to spare upon such details, for a second man was seated with his back to the window, and I could swear that this second man was Godfrey. I could not see his face, but I knew the familiar slope of his shoulders. He was leaning upon his elbow in an attitude of great melancholy, his body turned towards the fire. I was hesitating as to what I should do when there was a sharp tap on my shoulder, and there was Colonel Emsworth beside me.

"'This way, sir!' said he in a low voice. He walked in silence to the house, and I followed him into my own bedroom. He had picked up a time-table in the hall.

" There is a train to London at 8:30,' said he. 'The trap will be at the door at eight.'

"He was white with rage, and, indeed, I felt myself in so difficult a position that I could only stammer out a few incoherent apologies in which I tried to excuse myself by urging my anxiety for my friend.

"'The matter will not bear discussion,' said he abruptly. 'You have made a most damnable intrusion into the privacy of our family. You were here as a guest and you have become a spy. I have nothing more to say, sir, save that I have no wish ever to see you again.'

"At this I lost my temper, Mr. Holmes, and I spoke with some warmth.

"'I have seen your son, and I am convinced that for some reason of your own you are concealing him from the world. I have no idea what your motives are in cutting him off in this fashion, but I am sure that he is no longer a free agent. I warn you, Colonel Emsworth, that until I am assured as to the safety and well-being of my friend I shall never desist in my efforts to get to the bottom of the mystery, and I shall certainly not allow myself to be intimidated by anything which you may say or do.'

"The old fellow looked diabolical, and I really thought he was about to attack me. I have said that he was a gaunt, fierce old giant, and though I am no weakling I might have been hard put to it to hold my own against him. However, after a long glare of rage he turned upon his heel and walked out of the room. For my part, I took the appointed train in the morning, with the full intention of coming straight to you and asking for your advice and assistance at the appointment for which I had already written."

Such was the problem which my visitor laid before me. It presented, as the astute reader will have already perceived, few difficulties in its solution, for a very limited choice of alternatives must get to the root of the matter. Still, elementary as it was, there were points of interest and novelty about it which may excuse my placing it upon record. I now proceeded, using my familiar method of logical analysis, to narrow down the possible solutions.

"The servants," I asked; "how many were in the house?"

"To the best of my belief there were only the old butler and his wife. They seemed to live in the simplest fashion."

"There was no servant, then, in the detached house?"

"None, unless the little man with the beard acted as such. He seemed, however, to be quite a superior person."

"That seems very suggestive. Had you any indication that food was conveyed from the one house to the other?"

"Now that you mention it, I did see old Ralph carrying a basket down the garden walk and going in the direction of this house. The idea of food did not occur to me at the moment."

"Did you make any local inquiries?"

"Yes, I did. I spoke to the station-master and also to the innkeeper in the village. I simply asked if they knew anything of my old comrade, Godfrey Emsworth. Both of them assured me that he had gone for a voyage round the world. He had come home and then had almost at once started off again. The story was evidently universally accepted."

“You said nothing of your suspicions?”

“Nothing.”

“That was very wise. The matter should certainly be inquired into. I will go back with you to Tuxbury Old Park.”

“To-day?”

It happened that at the moment I was clearing up the case which my friend Watson has described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved. I had also a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might arise from its neglect. Therefore it was not until the beginning of the next week, as my diary records, that I was able to start forth on my mission to Bedfordshire in company with Mr. James M. Dodd. As we drove to Eustonn we picked up a grave and tacitum gentleman of iron-gray aspect, with whom I had made the necessary arrangements.

“This is an old friend,” said I to Dodd. “It is possible that his presence may be entirely unnecessary, and, on the other hand, it may be essential. It is not necessary at the present stage to go further into the matter.”

The narratives of Watson have accustomed the reader, no doubt, to the fact that I do not waste words or disclose my thoughts while a case is actually under consideration. Dodd seemed surprised, but nothing more was said, and the three of us continued our journey together. In the train I asked Dodd one more question which I wished our companion to hear.

“You say that you saw your friend’s face quite clearly at the window, so clearly that you are sure of his identity?”

“I have no doubt about it whatever. His nose was pressed against the glass. The lamplight shone full upon him.”

“It could not have been someone resembling him?”

“No, no, it was he.”

“But you say he was changed?”

“Only in colour. His face was — how shall I describe it? — it was of a fish-belly whiteness. It was bleached.”

“Was it equally pale all over?”

“I think not. It was his brow which I saw so clearly as it was pressed against the window.”

“Did you call to him?”

"I was too startled and horrified for the moment. Then I pursued him, as I have told you, but without result."

My case was practically complete, and there was only one small incident needed to round it off. When, after a considerable drive, we arrived at the strange old rambling house which my client had described, it was Ralph, the elderly butler, who opened the door. I had requisitioned the carriage for the day and had asked my elderly friend to remain within it unless we should summon him. Ralph, a little wrinkled old fellow, was in the conventional costume of black coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, with only one curious variant. He wore brown leather gloves, which at sight of us he instantly shuffled off, laying them down on the hall-table as we passed in. I have, as my friend Watson may have remarked, an abnormally acute set of senses, and a faint but incisive scent was apparent. It seemed to centre on the hall table. I turned, placed my hat there, knocked it off, stooped to pick it up, and contrived to bring my nose within a foot of the gloves. Yes, it was undoubtedly from them that the curious tarry odour was oozing. I passed on into the study with my case complete. Alas, that I should have to show my hand so when I tell my own story! It was by concealing such links in the chain that Watson was enabled to produce his meretricious finales.

Colonel Emsworth was not in his room, but he came quickly enough on receipt of Ralph's message. We heard his quick, heavy step in the passage. The door was flung open and he rushed in with bristling beard and twisted features, as terrible an old man as ever I have seen. He held our cards in his hand, and he tore them up and stamped on the fragments.

"Have I not told you, you infernal busybody, that you are warned off the premises? Never dare to show your damned face here again. If you enter again without my leave I shall be within my rights if I use violence. I'll shoot you, sir! By God, I will! As to you, sir," turning upon me, "I extend the same warning to you. I am familiar with your ignoble profession, but you must take your reputed talents to some other field. There is no opening for them here."

"I cannot leave here," said my client firmly, "until I hear from Godfrey's own lips that he is under no restraint."

Our involuntary host rang the bell.

"Ralph," he said, "telephone down to the county police and ask the inspector to send up two constables. Tell him there are burglars in the house."

"One moment," said I. "You must be aware, Mr. Dodd, that Colonel Emsworth is within his rights and that we have no legal status within his house. On the other hand, he should recognise that your action is prompted entirely by solicitude for his son. I venture to hope that if I were allowed to have five minutes conversation with Colonel Emsworth I could certainly alter his view of the matter."

"I am not so easily altered," said the old soldier. "Ralph, do what I have told you. What the devil are you waiting for? Ring up the police!"

"Nothing of the sort," I said, putting my back to the door. "Any police interference would bring about the very catastrophe which you dread." I took out my notebook and scribbled one word upon a loose sheet. "That," said I as I handed it to Colonel Emsworth, "is what has brought us here."

He stared at the writing with a face from which every expression save amazement had vanished.

"How do you know?" he gasped, sitting down heavily in his chair.

"It is my business to know things. That is my trade."

He sat in deep thought, his gaunt hand tugging at his straggling beard. Then he made a gesture of resignation.

"Well, if you wish to see Godfrey, you shall. It is no doing of mine, but you have forced my hand. Ralph, tell Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Kent that in five minutes we shall be with them."

At the end of that time we passed down the garden path and found ourselves in front of the mystery house at the end. A small bearded man stood at the door with a look of considerable astonishment upon his face.

"This is very sudden, Colonel Emsworth," said he. "This will disarrange all our plans."

"I can't help it, Mr. Kent. Our hands have been forced. Can Mr. Godfrey see us?"

"Yes, he is waiting inside." He turned and led us into a large plainly furnished front room. A man was standing with his back to the fire, and at the sight of him my client sprang forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, Godfrey, old man, this is fine!"

But the other waved him back.

"Don't touch me, Jimmie. Keep your distance. Yes, you may well stare! I don't quite look the smart Lance-Corporal Emsworth, of B Squadron, do I?"

His appearance was certainly extraordinary. One could see that he had indeed been a handsome man with clear-cut features sunburned by an African sun, but mottled in patches over this darker surface were curious whitish patches which had bleached his skin.

"That's why I don't court visitors," said he. "I don't mind you, Jimmie, but I could have done without your friend. I suppose there is some good reason for it, but you have me at a disadvantage."

"I wanted to be sure that all was well with you, Godfrey. I saw you that night when you looked into my window, and I could not let the matter rest till I had cleared things up."

"Old Ralph told me you were there, and I couldn't help taking a peep at you. I hoped you would not have seen me, and I had to run to my burrow when I heard the window go up."

"But what in heaven's name is the matter?"

"Well, it's not a long story to tell," said he, lighting a cigarette. "You remember that morning fight at Buffelsspruit, outside Pretoria, on the Eastern railway line? You heard I was hit?"

"Yes, I heard that but I never got particulars."

"Three of us got separated from the others. It was very broken country, you may remember. There was Simpson — the fellow we called Baldy Simpson — and Anderson, and I. We were clearing brother Boer, but he lay low and got the three of us. The other two were killed. I got an elephant bullet through my shoulder. I stuck on to my horse, however, and he galloped several miles before I fainted and rolled off the saddle.

"When I came to myself it was nightfall, and I raised myself up, feeling very weak and ill. To my surprise there was a house close beside me, a fairly large house with a broad stoep and many windows. It was deadly cold. You remember the kind of numb cold which used to come at evening, a deadly, sickening sort of cold, very different from a crisp healthy frost. Well, I was chilled to the bone, and my only hope seemed to lie in reaching that house. I staggered to my feet and dragged myself along, hardly conscious of what I did. I have a dim memory of slowly ascending the steps, entering a wide-opened door, passing into a large room which contained several beds, and throwing myself down with a gasp of satisfaction upon one of them. It was unmade, but that troubled me not at all. I drew the clothes over my shivering body and in a moment I was in a deep sleep.

"It was morning when I wakened, and it seemed to me that instead of coming out into a world of sanity I had emerged into some extraordinary nightmare. The African sun flooded through the big, curtainless windows, and every detail of the great, bare, whitewashed dormitory stood out hard and clear. In front of me was standing a small, dwarf-like man with a huge, bulbous head, who was jabbering excitedly in Dutch, waving two horrible hands which looked to me like brown sponges. Behind him stood a group of people who seemed to be intensely amused by the situation, but a chill came over me as I looked at them. Not one of them was a normal human being. Every one was twisted or swollen or disfigured in some strange way. The laughter of these strange monstrosities was a dreadful thing to hear.

"It seemed that none of them could speak English, but the situation wanted clearing up, for the creature with the big head was growing furiously angry, and, uttering wild-beast cries, he had laid his deformed hands upon me and was dragging me out of bed, regardless of the fresh flow of blood from my wound. The little monster was as strong as a bull, and I don't know what he might have done to me had not an elderly man who was clearly in authority been attracted to the room by the hubbub; He said a few stern words in Dutch, and my persecutor shrank away. Then he turned upon me, gazing at me in the utmost amazement.

"'How in the world did you come here?' he asked in amazement. 'Wait a bit! I see that you are tired out and that wounded shoulder of yours wants looking after. I am a doctor, and I'll soon have you tied up. But, man alive! you are in far greater danger here than ever you were on the battlefield. You are in the Leper Hospital, and you have slept in a leper's bed.'

"Need I tell you more, Jimmie? It seems that in view of the approaching battle all these poor creatures had been evacuated the day before. Then, as the British advanced, they had been brought back by this, their medical superintendent, who assured me that, though he believed he was immune to the disease, he would none the less never have dared to do what I had done. He put me in a private room, treated me kindly, and within a week or so I was removed to the general hospital at Pretoria.

"So there you have my tragedy. I hoped against hope, but it was not until I had reached home that the terrible signs which you see upon my face told me that I had not escaped. What was I to do? I was in this lonely house. We had two servants whom we could utterly trust. There was a house where I could live. Under pledge of secrecy, Mr. Kent, who is a surgeon, was prepared to stay with me. It seemed simple enough on those lines. The alternative was a dreadful one — segregation for life among strangers with never a hope of release. But absolute secrecy was necessary, or even in this quiet countryside there would have been an outcry, and I should have been dragged to my horrible doom. Even you, Jimmie — even you had to be kept in the dark. Why my father has relented I cannot imagine."

Colonel Emsworth pointed to me.

"This is the gentleman who forced my hand." He unfolded the scrap of paper on which I had written the word "Leprosy." "It seemed to me that if he knew so much as that it was safer that he should know all."

"And so it was," said I. "Who knows but good may come of it? I understand that only Mr. Kent has seen the patient. May I ask, sir, if you are an authority on such complaints, which are, I understand, tropical or semi-tropical in their nature?"

"I have the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man," he observed with some stiffness.

"I have no doubt, sir, that you are fully competent, but I am sure that you will agree that in such a case a second opinion is valuable. You have avoided this, I understand, for fear that pressure should be put upon you to segregate the patient."

"That is so," said Colonel Emsworth.

"I foresaw this situation," I explained, "and I have brought with me a friend whose discretion may absolutely be trusted. I was able once to do him a professional service, and he is ready to advise as a friend rather than as a specialist. His name is Sir James Saunders."

The prospect of an interview with Lord Roberts would not have excited greater wonder and pleasure in a raw subaltern than was now reflected upon the face of Mr. Kent.

"I shall indeed be proud," he murmured.

"Then I will ask Sir James to step this way. He is at present in the carriage outside the door. Meanwhile, Colonel Emsworth, we may perhaps assemble in your study, where I could give the necessary explanations."

And here it is that I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematized common sense, into a prodigy. When I tell my own story I have no such aid. And yet I will give my process of thought even as I gave it to my small audience, which included Godfrey’s mother in the study of Colonel Emsworth.

“That process,” said I, “starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. It may well be that several explanations remain, in which case one tries test after test until one or other of them has a convincing amount of support. We will now apply this principle to the case in point. As it was first presented to me, there were three possible explanations of the seclusion or incarceration of this gentleman in an outhouse of his father’s mansion. There was the explanation that he was in hiding for a crime, or that he was mad and that they wished to avoid an asylum, or that he had some disease which caused his segregation. I could think of no other adequate solutions. These, then, had to be sifted and balanced against each other.

“The criminal solution would not bear inspection. No unsolved crime had been reported from that district. I was sure of that. If it were some crime not yet discovered, then clearly it would be to the interest of the family to get rid of the delinquent and send him abroad rather than keep him concealed at home. I could see no explanation for such a line of conduct.

“Insanity was more plausible. The presence of the second person in the outhouse suggested a keeper. The fact that he locked the door when he came out strengthened the supposition and gave the idea of constraint. On the other hand, this constraint could not be severe or the young man could not have got loose and come down to have a look at his friend. You will remember, Mr. Dodd, that I felt round for points, asking you, for example, about the paper which Mr. Kent was reading. Had it been the Lancet or the British Medical Journal it would have helped me. It is not illegal, however, to keep a lunatic upon private premises so long as there is a qualified person in attendance and that the authorities have been duly notified. Why, then, all this desperate desire for secrecy? Once again I could not get the theory to fit the facts.

“There remained the third possibility, into which, rare and unlikely as it was, everything seemed to fit. Leprosy is not uncommon in South Africa. By some extraordinary chance this youth might have contracted it. His people would be placed in a very dreadful position, since they would desire to save him from segregation. Great secrecy would be needed to prevent rumours from getting about and subsequent interference by the authorities.

A devoted medical man, if sufficiently paid, would easily be found to take charge of the sufferer. There would be no reason why the latter should not be allowed freedom after dark. Bleaching of the skin is a common result of the disease. The case was a strong one — so strong that I determined to act as if it were actually proved. When on arriving here I noticed that Ralph, who carries out the meals, had gloves which are impregnated with disinfectants, my last doubts were removed. A single word showed you, sir, that your secret was discovered, and if I wrote rather than said it, it was to prove to you that my discretion was to be trusted."

I was finishing this little analysis of the case when the door was opened and the austere figure of the great dermatologist was ushered in. But for once his sphinx-like features had relaxed and there was a warm humanity in his eyes. He strode up to Colonel Emsworth and shook him by the hand.

"It is often my lot to bring ill-tidings and seldom good," said he. "This occasion is the more welcome. It is not leprosy."

"What?"

"A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scalelike affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective. Yes, Mr. Holmes, the coincidence is a remarkable one. But is it coincidence? Are there not subtle forces at work of which we know little? Are we assured that the apprehension from which this young man has no doubt suffered terribly since his exposure to its contagion may not produce a physical effect which simulates that which it fears? At any rate, I pledge my professional reputation — But the lady has fainted! I think that Mr. Kent had better be with her until she recovers from this joyous shock."

ADVENTURE VIII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE RETIRED COLOURMAN

Sherlock Holmes was in a melancholy and philosophic mood that morning. His alert practical nature was subject to such reactions.

“Did you see him?” he asked.

“You mean the old fellow who has just gone out?”

“Precisely.”

“Yes, I met him at the door.”

“What did you think of him?”

“A pathetic, futile, broken creature.”

“Exactly, Watson. Pathetic and futile. But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow — misery.”

“Is he one of your clients?”

“Well, I suppose I may call him so. He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack. They argue that they can do nothing more, and that whatever happens the patient can be no worse than he is.”

“What is the matter?”

Holmes took a rather soiled card from the table. “Josiah Amberley. He says he was junior partner of Brickfall and Amberley, who are manufacturers of artistic materials. You will see their names upon paint-boxes. He made his little pile, retired from business at the age of sixty-one, bought a house at Lewisham. and settled down to rest after a life of ceaseless grind. One would think his future was tolerably assured.”

“Yes, indeed.”

Holmes glanced over some notes which he had scribbled upon the back of an envelope.

“Retired in 1896, Watson. Early in 1897 he married a woman twenty years younger than himself — a good-looking woman, too. if the photograph does not flatter. A competence, a wife, leisure — it seemed a straight road which lay before him. And yet within two years he is, as you have seen, as broken and miserable a creature as crawls beneath the sun."

"But what has happened?"

"The old story, Watson. A treacherous friend and a fickle wife. It would appear that Amberley has one hobby in life, and it is chess. Not far from him at Lewisham there lives a young doctor who is also a chess-player. I have noted his name as Dr. Ray Ernest. Ernest was frequently in the house, and an intimacy between him and Mrs. Amberley was a natural sequence, for you must admit that our unfortunate client has few outward graces, whatever his inner virtues may be. The couple went off together last week — destination untraced. What is more, the faithless spouse carried off the old man's deed-box as her personal luggage with a good part of his life's savings within. Can we find the lady? Can we save the money? A commonplace problem so far as it has developed, and yet a vital one for Josiah Amberley."

"What will you do about it?"

"Well, the immediate question, my dear Watson, happens to be, What will you do? — if you will be good enough to understudy me. You know that I am preoccupied with this case of the two Coptic Patriarchs, which should come to a head to-day. I really have not time to go out to Lewisham, and yet evidence taken on the spot has a special value. The old fellow was quite insistent that I should go, but I explained my difficulty. He is prepared to meet a representative."

"By all means," I answered. "I confess I don't see that I can be of much service, but I am willing to do my best." And so it was that on a summer afternoon I set forth to Lewisham, little dreaming that within a week the affair in which I was engaging would be the eager debate of all England.

It was late that evening before I returned to Baker Street and gave an account of my mission. Holmes lay with his gaunt figure stretched in his deep chair, his pipe curling forth slow wreaths of acrid tobacco, while his eyelids drooped over his eyes so lazily that he might almost have been asleep were it not that at any halt or questionable passage of my narrative they half lifted, and two gray eyes, as bright and keen as rapiers, transfixed me with their searching glance.

"The Haven is the name of Mr. Josiah Amberley's house," I explained. "I think it would interest you, Holmes. It is like some penurious patrician who has sunk into the company of his inferiors. You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient culture and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun-baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of wall—"

"Cut out the poetry, Watson," said Holmes severely. "I note that it was a high brick wall."

"Exactly. I should not have known which was The Haven had I not asked a lounger who was smoking in the street. I have a reason for mentioning him. He was a tall, dark, heavily moustached, rather military-looking man. He nodded in answer to my inquiry and gave me a curiously questioning glance, which came back to my memory a little later.

"I had hardly entered the gateway before I saw Mr. Amberley coming down the drive. I only had a glimpse of him this morning, and he certainly gave me the impression of a strange creature, but when I saw him in full light his appearance was even more abnormal."

"I have, of course, studied it, and yet I should be interested to have your impression," said Holmes.

"He seemed to me like a man who was literally bowed down by care. His back was curved as though he carried a heavy burden. Yet he was not the weakling that I had at first imagined, for his shoulders and chest have the framework of a giant, though his figure tapers away into a pair of spindled legs."

"Left shoe wrinkled, right one smooth."

"I did not observe that."

"No, you wouldn't. I spotted his artificial limb. But proceed."

"I was struck by the snaky locks of grizzled hair which curled from under his old straw hat, and his face with its fierce, eager expression and the deeply lined features."

"Very good, Watson. What did he say?"

"He began pouring out the story of his grievances. We walked down the drive together, and of course I took a good look round. I have never seen a worse-kept place. The garden was all running to seed, giving me an impression of wild neglect in which the plants had been allowed to find the way of Nature rather than of art. How any decent woman could have tolerated such a state of things, I don't know. The house, too, was slatternly to the last degree, but the poor man seemed himself to be aware of it and to be trying to remedy it, for a great pot of green paint stood in the centre of the hall, and he was carrying a thick brush in his left hand. He had been working on the woodwork.

"He took me into his dingy sanctum, and we had a long chat. Of course, he was disappointed that you had not come yourself. 'I hardly expected,' he said, 'that so humble an individual as myself, especially after my heavy financial loss, could obtain the complete attention of so famous a man as Mr. Sherlock Holmes.'

"I assured him that the financial question did not arise. 'No of course, it is art for art's sake with him,' said he, 'but even on the artistic side of crime he might have found something here to study. And human nature, Dr. Watson — the black ingratitude of it all! When did I ever refuse one of her requests? Was ever a woman so pampered? And that young man — he might have been my own son. He had the run of my house. And yet see how they have treated me! Oh, Dr. Watson, it is a dreadful, dreadful world!'

"That was the burden of his song for an hour or more. He had, it seems, no suspicion of an intrigue. They lived alone save for a woman who comes in by the day and leaves every evening at six. On that particular evening old Amberley, wishing to give his wife a treat, had taken two upper circle seats at the Haymarket Theatre. At the last moment she had complained of a headache and had refused to go. He had gone alone. There seemed to be no doubt about the fact, for he produced the unused ticket which he had taken for his wife."

"That is remarkable — most remarkable," said Holmes, whose interest in the case seemed to be rising. "Pray continue, Watson. I find your narrative most arresting. Did you personally examine this ticket? You did not, perchance, take the number?"

"It so happens that I did," I answered with some pride. "It chanced to be my old school number, thirty-one, and so is stuck in my head."

"Excellent, Watson! His seat, then, was either thirty or thirty-two."

"Quite so," I answered with some mystification. "And on B row."

"That is most satisfactory. What else did he tell you?"

"He showed me his strong-room, as he called it. It really is a strong-room — like a bank — with iron door and shutter — burglarproof, as he claimed. However, the woman seems to have had a duplicate key, and between them they had carried off some seven thousand pounds' worth of cash and securities."

"Securities! How could they dispose of those?"

“He said that he had given the police a list and that he hoped they would be unsaleable. He had got back from the theatre about midnight and found the place plundered, the door and window open, and the fugitives gone. There was no letter or message, nor has he heard a word since. He at once gave the alarm to the police.”

Holmes brooded for some minutes.

“You say he was painting. What was he painting?”

“Well, he was painting the passage. But he had already painted the door and woodwork of this room I spoke of.”

“Does it not strike you as a strange occupation in the circumstances?”

“‘One must do something to ease an aching heart.’ That was his own explanation. It was eccentric, no doubt, but he is clearly an eccentric man. He tore up one of his wife’s photographs in my presence — tore it up furiously in a tempest of passion. ‘I never wish to see her damned face again,’ he shrieked.”

“Anything more, Watson?”

“Yes, one thing which struck me more than anything else. I had driven to the Blackheath Station and had caught my train there when, just as it was starting, I saw a man dart into the carriage next to my own. You know that I have a quick eye for faces, Holmes. It was undoubtedly the tall, dark man whom I had addressed in the street. I saw him once more at London Bridge, and then I lost him in the crowd. But I am convinced that he was following me.”

“No doubt! No doubt!” said Holmes. “A tall, dark, heavily moustached man, you say, with gray-tinted sun-glasses?”

“Holmes, you are a wizard. I did not say so, but he had gray-tinted sun-glasses.”

“And a Masonic tie-pin?”

“Holmes!”

“Quite simple, my dear Watson. But let us get down to what is practical. I must admit to you that the case, which seemed to me to be so absurdly simple as to be hardly worth my notice, is rapidly assuming a very different aspect. It is true that though in your mission you have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought.”

“What have I missed?”

"Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. You know that I am quite impersonal. No one else would have done better. Some possibly not so well. But clearly you have missed some vital points. What is the opinion of the neighbours about this man Amberley and his wife? That surely is of importance. What of Dr. Ernest? Was he the gay Lothario one would expect? With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice. What about the girl at the post-office, or the wife of the greengrocer? I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange. All this you have left undone."

"It can still be done."

"It has been done. Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room. As a matter of fact, my information confirms the man's story. He has the local repute of being a miser as well as a harsh and exacting husband. That he had a large sum of money in that strong-room of his is certain. So also is it that young Dr. Ernest, an unmarried man, played chess with Amberley, and probably played the fool with his wife. All this seems plain sailing, and one would think that there was no more to be said — and yet! — and yet!"

"Where lies the difficulty?"

"In my imagination, perhaps. Well, leave it there, Watson. Let us escape from this weary workaday world by the side door of music. Carina sings to-night at the Albert Hall, and we still have time to dress, dine, and enjoy."

In the morning I was up betimes, but some toast crumbs and two empty eggshells told me that my companion was earlier still. I found a scribbled note upon the table.

DEAR WATSON:

There are one or two points of contact which I should wish to establish with Mr. Josiah Amberley. When I have done so we can dismiss the case — or not. I would only ask you to be on hand about three o'clock, as I conceive it possible that I may want you.

S.H.

I saw nothing of Holmes all day, but at the hour named he returned, grave, preoccupied, and aloof. At such times it was wiser to leave him to himself.

"Has Amberley been here yet?"

"No."

"Ah! I am expecting him."

He was not disappointed, for presently the old fellow arrived with a very worried and puzzled expression upon his austere face.

“I’ve had a telegram, Mr. Holmes. I can make nothing of it.” He handed it over, and Holmes read it aloud.

“Come at once without fail. Can give you information as to your recent loss. ELMAN. The Vicarage.”

“Dispatched at 2:10 from Little Purlington,” said Holmes. “Little Purlington is in Essex, I believe, not far from Frinton. Well, of course you will start at once. This is evidently from a responsible person, the vicar of the place. Where is my Crockford? Yes, here we have him: ‘J. C. Elman, M. A., Living of Moosmoor cum Little Purlington.’ Look up the trains, Watson.”

“There is one at 5:20 from Liverpool Street.”

“Excellent. You had best go with him, Watson. He may need help or advice. Clearly we have come to a crisis in this affair.”

But our client seemed by no means eager to start.

“It’s perfectly absurd, Mr. Holmes,” he said. “What can this man possibly know of what has occurred? It is waste of time and money.”

“He would not have telegraphed to you if he did not know something. Wire at once that you are coming.”

“I don’t think I shall go.”

Holmes assumed his sternest aspect.

“It would make the worst possible impression both on the police and upon myself, Mr. Amberley, if when so obvious a clue arose you should refuse to follow it up. We should feel that you were not really in earnest in this investigation.”

Our client seemed horrified at the suggestion.

“Why, of course I shall go if you look at it in that way,” said he. “On the face of it, it seems absurd to suppose that this parson knows anything, but if you think—”

“I do think,” said Holmes with emphasis, and so we were launched upon our journey. Holmes took me aside before we left the room and gave me one word of counsel, which showed that he considered the matter to be of importance. “Whatever you do, see that he really does go,” said he. “Should he break away or return, get to the nearest telephone exchange and send the single word ‘Bolted.’ I will arrange here that it shall reach me wherever I am.”

Little Purlington is not an easy place to reach, for it is on a branch line. My remembrance of the journey is not a pleasant one, for the weather was hot, the train slow, and my companion sullen and silent, hardly talking at all save to make an occasional sardonic remark as to the futility of our proceedings. When we at last reached the little station it was a two-mile drive before we came to the Vicarage, where a big, solemn, rather pompous clergyman received us in his study. Our telegram lay before him.

"Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what can I do for you?"

"We came," I explained, "in answer to your wire."

"My wire! I sent no wire."

"I mean the wire which you sent to Mr. Josiah Amberley about his wife and his money."

"If this is a joke, sir, it is a very questionable one," said the vicar angrily. "I have never heard of the gentleman you name, and I have not sent a wire to anyone."

Our client and I looked at each other in amazement.

"Perhaps there is some mistake," said I; "are there perhaps two vicarages? Here is the wire itself, signed Elman and dated from the Vicarage."

"There is only one vicarage, sir, and only one vicar, and this wire is a scandalous forgery, the origin of which shall certainly be investigated by the police. Meanwhile, I can see no possible object in prolonging this interview."

So Mr. Amberley and I found ourselves on the roadside in what seemed to me to be the most primitive village in England. We made for the telegraph office, but it was already closed. There was a telephone, however, at the little Railway Arms, and by it I got into touch with Holmes, who shared in our amazement at the result of our journey.

"Most singular!" said the distant voice. "Most remarkable! I much fear, my dear Watson, that there is no return train to-night. I have unwittingly condemned you to the horrors of a country inn. However, there is always Nature, Watson — Nature and Josiah Amberley — you can be in close commune with both." I heard his dry chuckle as he turned away.

It was soon apparent to me that my companion's reputation as a miser was not undeserved. He had grumbled at the expense of the journey, had insisted upon travelling third-class, and was now clamorous in his objections to the hotel bill. Next morning, when we did at last arrive in London, it was hard to say which of us was in the worse humour.

“You had best take Baker Street as we pass,” said I. “Mr. Holmes may have some fresh instructions.”

“If they are not worth more than the last ones they are not of much use,” said Amberley with a malevolent scowl. None the less, he kept me company. I had already warned Holmes by telegram of the hour of our arrival, but we found a message waiting that he was at Lewisham and would expect us there. That was a surprise, but an even greater one was to find that he was not alone in the sitting-room of our client. A stern-looking, impassive man sat beside him, a dark man with gray-tinted glasses and a large Masonic pin projecting from his tie.

“This is my friend Mr. Barker,” said Holmes. “He has been interesting himself also in your business, Mr. Josiah Amberley, though we have been working independently. But we both have the same question to ask you!”

Mr. Amberley sat down heavily. He sensed impending danger. I read it in his straining eyes and his twitching features.

“What is the question, Mr. Holmes?”

“Only this: What did you do with the bodies?”

The man sprang to his feet with a hoarse scream. He clawed into the air with his bony hands. His mouth was open, and for the instant he looked like some horrible bird of prey. In a flash we got a glimpse of the real Josiah Amberley, a misshapen demon with a soul as distorted as his body. As he fell back into his chair he clapped his hand to his lips as if to stifle a cough. Holmes sprang at his throat like a tiger and twisted his face towards the ground. A white pellet fell from between his gasping lips.

“No short cuts, Josiah Amberley. Things must be done decently and in order. What about it, Barker?”

“I have a cab at the door,” said our taciturn companion.

“It is only a few hundred yards to the station. We will go together. You can stay here, Watson. I shall be back within half an hour.”

The old colourman had the strength of a lion in that great trunk of his, but he was helpless in the hands of the two experienced man-handlers. Wriggling and twisting he was dragged to the waiting cab, and I was left to my solitary vigil in the ill-omened house. In less time than he had named, however, Holmes was back, in company with a smart young police inspector.

"I've left Barker to look after the formalities," said Holmes. "You had not met Barker, Watson. He is my hated rival upon the Surrey shore. When you said a tall dark man it was not difficult for me to complete the picture. He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?"

"He has certainly interfered several times," the inspector answered with reserve.

"His methods are irregular, no doubt, like my own. The irregulars are useful sometimes, you know. You, for example, with your compulsory warning about whatever he said being used against him, could never have bluffed this rascal into what is virtually a confession."

"Perhaps not. But we get there all the same, Mr. Holmes. Don't imagine that we had not formed our own views of this case, and that we would not have laid our hands on our man. You will excuse us for feeling sore when you jump in with methods which we cannot use, and so rob us of the credit."

"There shall be no such robbery, MacKinnon. I assure you that I efface myself from now onward, and as to Barker, he has done nothing save what I told him."

The inspector seemed considerably relieved.

"That is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. Praise or blame can matter little to you, but it is very different to us when the newspapers begin to ask questions."

"Quite so. But they are pretty sure to ask questions anyhow, so it would be as well to have answers. What will you say, for example, when the intelligent and enterprising reporter asks you what the exact points were which aroused your suspicion, and finally gave you a certain conviction as to the real facts?"

The inspector looked puzzled.

"We don't seem to have got any real facts yet, Mr. Holmes. You say that the prisoner, in the presence of three witnesses, practically confessed by trying to commit suicide, that he had murdered his wife and her lover. What other facts have you?"

"Have you arranged for a search?"

"There are three constables on their way."

"Then you will soon get the clearest fact of all. The bodies cannot be far away. Try the cellars and the garden. It should not take long to dig up the likely places. This house is older than the water-pipes. There must be a disused well somewhere. Try your luck there."

"But how did you know of it, and how was it done?"

"I'll show you first how it was done, and then I will give the explanation which is due to you, and even more to my longsuffering friend here, who has been invaluable throughout. But, first, I would give you an insight into this man's mentality. It is a very unusual one — so much so that I think his destination is more likely to be Broadmoor than the scaffold. He has, to a high degree, the sort of mind which one associates with the mediaeval Italian nature rather than with the modern Briton. He was a miserable miser who made his wife so wretched by his niggardly ways that she was a ready prey for any adventurer. Such a one came upon the scene in the person of this chess-playing doctor. Amberley excelled at chess — one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind. Like all misers, he was a jealous man, and his jealousy became a frantic mania. Rightly or wrongly, he suspected an intrigue. He determined to have his revenge, and he planned it with diabolical cleverness. Come here!"

Holmes led us along the passage with as much certainty as if he had lived in the house and halted at the open door of the strong-room.

"Pooh! What an awful smell of paint!" cried the inspector.

"That was our first clue," said Holmes. "You can thank Dr. Watson's observation for that, though he failed to draw the inference. It set my foot upon the trail. Why should this man at such a time be filling his house with strong odours? Obviously, to cover some other smell which he wisfhed to conceal — some guilty smell which would suggest suspicions. Then came the idea of a room such as you see here with iron door and shutter — a hermetically sealed room. Put those two facts together, and whither do they lead? I could only determine that by examining the house myself. I was already certain that the case was serious, for I had examined the box-office chart at the Haymarket Theatre — another of Dr. Watson's bull's-eyes — and ascertained that neither B thirty nor thirty-two of the upper circle had been occupied that night. Therefore, Amberley had not been to the theatre, and his alibi fell to the ground. He made a bad slip when he allowed my astute friend to notice the number of the seat taken for his wife. The question now arose how I might be able to examine the house. I sent an agent to the most impossible village I could think of, and summoned my man to it at such an hour that he could not possibly get back. To prevent any miscarriage, Dr. Watson accompanied him. The good vicar's name I took, of course, out of my Crockford. Do I make it all clear to you?"

"It is masterly," said the inspector in an awed voice.

"There being no fear of interruption I proceeded to burgle the house. Burglary has always been an alternative profession had I cared to adopt it, and I have little doubt that I should have come to the front. Observe what I found. You see the gas-pipe along the skirting here. Very good. It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. The pipe runs out into the strong-room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the centre of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. That end is wide open. At any moment by turning the outside tap the room could be flooded with gas. With door and shutter closed and the tap full on I would not give two minutes of conscious sensation to anyone shut up in that little chamber. By what devilish device he decoyed them there I do not know, but once inside the door they were at his mercy."

The inspector examined the pipe with interest. "One of our officers mentioned the smell of gas," said he, "but of course the window and door were open then, and the paint — or some of it — was already about. He had begun the work of painting the day before, according to his story. But what next, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, then came an incident which was rather unexpected to myself. I was slipping through the pantry window in the early dawn when I felt a hand inside my collar, and a voice said: 'Now, you rascal, what are you doing in there?' When I could twist my head round I looked into the tinted spectacles of my friend and rival, Mr. Barker. It was a curious foregathering and set us both smiling. It seems that he had been engaged by Dr. Ray Ernest's family to make some investigations and had come to the same conclusion as to foul play. He had watched the house for some days and had spotted Dr. Watson as one of the obviously suspicious characters who had called there. He could hardly arrest Watson, but when he saw a man actually climbing out of the pantry window there came a limit to his restraint. Of course, I told him how matters stood and we continued the case together."

"Why him? Why not us?"

"Because it was in my mind to put that little test which answered so admirably. I fear you would not have gone so far."

The inspector smiled.

“Well, maybe not. I understand that I have your word, Mr. Holmes, that you step right out of the case now and that you turn all your results over to us.”

“Certainly, that is always my custom.”

“Well, in the name of the force I thank you. It seems a clear case, as you put it, and there can’t be much difficulty over the bodies.”

“I’ll show you a grim little bit of evidence,” said Holmes, “and I am sure Amberley himself never observed it. You’ll get results, Inspector, by always putting yourself in the other fellow’s place, and thinking what you would do yourself. It takes some imagination, but it pays. Now, we will suppose that you were shut up in this little room, had not two minutes to live, but wanted to get even with the fiend who was probably mocking at you from the other side of the door. What would you do?”

“Write a message.”

“Exactly. You would like to tell people how you died. No use writing on paper. That would be seen. If you wrote on the wall someone might rest upon it. Now, look here! Just above the skirting is scribbled with a purple indelible pencil: ‘We we—’ That’s all.’’

“What do you make of that?”

“Well, it’s only a foot above the ground. The poor devil was on the floor dying when he wrote it. He lost his senses before he could finish.”

“He was writing, ‘We were murdered.’”

“That’s how I read it. If you find an indelible pencil on the body—”

“We’ll look out for it, you may be sure. But those securities? Clearly there was no robbery at all. And yet he did possess those bonds. We verified that.”

“You may be sure he has them hidden in a safe place. When the whole elopement had passed into history, he would suddenly discover them and announce that the guilty couple had relented and sent back the plunder or had dropped it on the way.”

“You certainly seem to have met every difficulty,” said the inspector. “Of course, he was bound to call us in, but why he should have gone to you I can’t understand.”

“Pure swank!” Holmes answered. “He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could touch him. He could say to any suspicious neighbour, ‘Look at the steps I have taken. I have consulted not only the police but even Sherlock Holmes.’”

The inspector laughed.

“We must forgive you your ‘even,’ Mr. Holmes,” said he “it’s as workmanlike a job as I can remember.”

A couple of days later my friend tossed across to me a copy of the bi-weekly North Surrey Observer. Under a series of flaming headlines, which began with “The Haven Horror” and ended with “Brilliant Police Investigation,” there was a packed column of print which gave the first consecutive account of the affair. The concluding paragraph is typical of the whole. It ran thus:

The remarkable acumen by which Inspector MacKinnon deduced from the smell of paint that some other smell, that of gas, for example, might be concealed; the bold deduction that the strong-room might also be the death-chamber, and the subsequent inquiry which led to the discovery of the bodies in a disused well, cleverly concealed by a dogkennel, should live in the history of crime as a standing example of the intelligence of our professional detectives.

“Well, well, MacKinnon is a good fellow,” said Holmes with a tolerant smile. “You can file it in our archives, Watson. Some day the true story may be told.”

ADVENTURE IX. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE GABLES

I don’t think that any of my adventures with Mr. Sherlock Holmes opened quite so abruptly, or so dramatically, as that which I associate with The Three Gables. I had not seen Holmes for some days and had no idea of the new channel into which his activities had been directed. He was in a chatty mood that morning, however, and had just settled me into the well-worn low armchair on one side of the fire, while he had curled down with his pipe in his mouth upon the opposite chair, when our visitor arrived. If I had said that a mad bull had arrived it would give a clearer impression of what occurred.

The door had flown open and a huge negro had burst into the room. He would have been a comic figure if he had not been terrific, for he was dressed in a very loud gray check suit with a flowing salmon-coloured tie. His broad face and flattened nose were thrust forward, as his sullen dark eyes, with a smouldering gleam of malice in them, turned from one of us to the other.

“Which of you gen’l’men is Masser Holmes?” he asked.

Holmes raised his pipe with a languid smile.

“Oh! it’s you, is it?” said our visitor, coming with an unpleasant, stealthy step round the angle of the table. “See here, Masser Holmes, you keep your hands out of other folks’ business. Leave folks to manage their own affairs. Got that, Masser Holmes?”

“Keep on talking,” said Holmes. “It’s fine.”

“Oh! it’s fine, is it?” growled the savage. “It won’t be so damn fine if I have to trim you up a bit. I’ve handled your kind before now, and they didn’t look fine when I was through with them. Look at that, Masser Holmes!”

He swung a huge knotted lump of a fist under my friend’s nose. Holmes examined it closely with an air of great interest.

“Were you born so?” he asked. “Or did it come by degrees?”

It may have been the icy coolness of my friend, or it may have been the slight clatter which I made as I picked up the poker. In any case, our visitor’s manner became less flamboyant.

“Well, I’ve given you fair warnin’,” said he. “I’ve a friend that’s interested out Harrow way — you know what I’m meaning — and he don’t intend to have no buttin’ in by you. Got that? You ain’t the law, and I ain’t the law either, and if you come in I’ll be on hand also. Don’t you forget it.”

“I’ve wanted to meet you for some time,” said Holmes. “I won’t ask you to sit down, for I don’t like the smell of you, but aren’t you Steve Dixie, the bruiser?”

“That’s my name, Masser Holmes, and you’ll get put through it for sure if you give me any lip.”

“It is certainly the last thing you need,” said Holmes, staring at our visitor’s hideous mouth. “But it was the killing of young Perkins outside the Holborn — Bar What! you’re not going?”

The negro had sprung back, and his face was leaden. “I won’t listen to no such talk,” said he. “What have I to do with this ‘ere Perkins, Masser Holmes? I was trainin’ at the Bull Ring in Birmingham when this boy done gone get into trouble.”

“Yes, you’ll tell the magistrate about it, Steve,” said Holmes. “I’ve been watching you and Barney Stockdale—”

“So help me the Lord! Masser Holmes—”

“That’s enough. Get out of it. I’ll pick you up when I want you.”

“Good-mornin’, Masser Holmes. I hope there ain’t no hard feelin’s about this ‘ere visit?”

“There will be unless you tell me who sent you.”

“Why, there ain’t no secret about that, Masser Holmes. It was that same gen’l’man that you have just done gone mention.”

“And who set him on to it?”

“S’elp me. I don’t know, Masser Holmes. He just say, ‘Steve, you go see Mr. Holmes, and tell him his life ain’t safe if he go down Harrow way.’ That’s the whole truth.” Without waiting for any further questioning, our visitor bolted out of the room almost as precipitately as he had entered. Holmes knocked out the ashes of his pipe with a quiet chuckle.

“I am glad you were not forced to break his woolly head, Watson. I observed your manoeuvres with the poker. But he is really rather a harmless fellow, a great muscular, foolish, blustering baby, and easily cowed, as you have seen. He is one of the Spencer John gang and has taken part in some dirty work of late which I may clear up when I have time. His immediate principal, Barney, is a more astute person. They specialise in assaults, intimidation, and the like. What I want to know is, who is at the back of them on this particular occasion?”

“But why do they want to intimidate you?”

“It is this Harrow Weald case. It decides me to look into the matter, for if it is worth anyone’s while to take so much trouble, there must be something in it.”

“But what is it?”

“I was going to tell you when we had this comic interlude. Here is Mrs. Maberley’s note. If you care to come with me we will wire her and go out at once.”

DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES [I read]:

I have had a succession of strange incidents occur to me in connection with this house, and I should much value your advice. You would find me at home any time to-morrow. The house is within a short walk of the Weald Station. I believe that my late husband, Mortimer Maberley, was one of your early clients.

Yours faithfully, MARY MABERLEY.

The address was “The Three Gables, Harrow Weald.”

“So that’s that!” said Holmes. “And now, if you can spare the time, Watson, we will get upon our way.”

A short railway journey, and a shorter drive, brought us to the house, a brick and timber villa, standing in its own acre of undeveloped grassland. Three small projections above. the upper windows made a feeble attempt to justify its name. Behind was a grove of melancholy, half-grown pines, and the whole aspect of the place was poor and depressing. None the less, we found the house to be well furnished, and the lady who received us was a most engaging elderly person, who bore every mark of refinement and culture.

“I remember your husband well, madam,” said Holmes, “though it is some years since he used my services in some trifling matter.”

“Probably you would be more familiar with the name of my son Douglas.”

Holmes looked at her with great interest.

“Dear me! Are you the mother of Douglas Maberley? I knew him slightly. But of course all London knew him. What a magnificent creature he was! Where is he now?”

"Dead, Mr. Holmes, dead! He was attache at Rome, and he died there of pneumonia last month."

"I am sorry. One could not connect death with such a man. I have never known anyone so vitally alive. He lived intensely — every fibre of him!"

"Too intensely, Mr. Holmes. That was the ruin of him. You remember him as he was — debonair and splendid. You did not see the moody, morose, brooding creature into which he developed. His heart was broken. In a single month I seemed to see my gallant boy turn into a worn-out cynical man."

"A love affair — a woman?"

"Or a fiend. Well, it was not to talk of my poor lad that I asked you to come, Mr. Holmes."

"Dr. Watson and I are at your service."

"There have been some very strange happenings. I have been in this house more than a year now, and as I wished to lead a retired life I have seen little of my neighbours. Three days ago I had a call from a man who said that he was a house agent. He said that this house would exactly suit a client of his, and that if I would part with it money would be no object. It seemed to me very strange as there are several empty houses on the market which appear to be equally eligible, but naturally I was interested in what he said. I therefore named a price which was five hundred pounds more than I gave. He at once closed with the offer, but added that his client desired to buy the furniture as well and would I put a price upon it. Some of this furniture is from my old home, and it is, as you see, very good, so that I named a good round sum. To this also he at once agreed. I had always wanted to travel, and the bargain was so good a one that it really seemed that I should be my own mistress for the rest of my life.

"Yesterday the man arrived with the agreement all drawn out. Luckily I showed it to Mr. Sutro, my lawyer, who lives in Harrow. He said to me, 'This is a very strange document. Are you aware that if you sign it you could not legally take anything out of the house — not even your own private possessions?' When the man came again in the evening I pointed this out, and I said that I meant only to sell the furniture.

"'No, no, everything,' said he.

"'But my clothes? My jewels?'

"'Well, well, some concession might be made for your personal effects. But nothing shall go out of the house unchecked. My client is a very liberal man, but he has his fads and his own way of doing things. It is everything or nothing with him.’

“‘Then it must be nothing,’ said I. And there the matter was left, but the whole thing seemed to me to be so unusual that I thought—”

Here we had a very extraordinary interruption.

Holmes raised his hand for silence. Then he strode across the room, flung open the door, and dragged in a great gaunt woman whom he had seized by the shoulder. She entered with ungainly struggle like some huge awkward chicken, torn, squawking, out of its coop.

“Leave me alone! What are you a-doin’ of?” she screeched.

“Why, Susan, what is this?”

“Well, ma’am, I was comin’ in to ask if the visitors was stayin’ for lunch when this man jumped out at me.”

“I have been listening to her for the last five minutes, but did not wish to interrupt your most interesting narrative. Just a little wheezy, Susan, are you not? You breathe too heavily for that kind of work.”

Susan turned a sulky but amazed face upon her captor. “Who be you, anyhow, and what right have you a-pullin’ me about like this?”

“It was merely that I wished to ask a question in your presence. Did you, Mrs. Maberley, mention to anyone that you were going to write to me and consult me?”

“No, Mr. Holmes, I did not.”

“Who posted your letter?”

“Susan did.”

“Exactly. Now, Susan, to whom was it that you wrote or sent a message to say that your mistress was asking advice from me?”

“It’s a lie. I sent no message.”

“Now, Susan, wheezy people may not live long, you know. It’s a wicked thing to tell fibs. Whom did you tell?”

“Susan!” cried her mistress, “I believe you are a bad, treacherous woman. I remember now that I saw you speaking to someone over the hedge.”

“That was my own business,” said the woman sullenly.

“Suppose I tell you that it was Barney Stockdale to whom you spoke?” said Holmes.

“Well, if you know, what do you want to ask for?”

“I was not sure, but I know now. Well now, Susan, it will be worth ten pounds to you if you will tell me who is at the back of Barney.”

"Someone that could lay down a thousand pounds for every ten you have in the world."

"So, a rich man? No; you smiled — a rich woman. Now we have got so far, you may as well give the name and earn the tenner."

"I'll see you in hell first."

"Oh, Susan! Language!"

"I am clearing out of here. I've had enough of you all. I'll send for my box to-morrow." She flounced for the door.

"Good-bye, Susan. Paregoric is the stuff.... Now," he continued, turning suddenly from lively to severe when the door had closed behind the flushed and angry woman, "this gang means business. Look how close they play the game. Your letter to me had the 10 P.M. postmark. And yet Susan passes the word to Barney. Barney has time to go to his employer and get instructions; he or she — I incline to the latter from Susan's grin when she thought I had blundered — forms a plan. Black Steve is called in, and I am warned off by eleven o'clock next morning. That's quick work, you know."

"But what do they want?"

"Yes, that's the question. Who had the house before you?"

"A retired sea captain called Ferguson."

"Anything remarkable about him?"

"Not that ever I heard of."

"I was wondering whether he could have buried something. Of course, when people bury treasure nowadays they do it in the Post-Office bank. But there are always some lunatics about. It would be a dull world without them. At first I thought of some buried valuable. But why, in that case, should they want your furniture? You don't happen to have a Raphael or a first folio Shakespeare without knowing it?"

"No, I don't think I have anything rarer than a Crown Derby tea-set."

"That would hardly justify all this mystery. Besides, why should they not openly state what they want? If they covet your tea-set, they can surely offer a price for it without buying you out, lock, stock, and barrel. No, as I read it, there is something which you do not know that you have, and which you would not give up if you did know."

"That is how I read it," said I.

"Dr. Watson agrees, so that settles it."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, what can it be?"

“Let us see whether by this purely mental analysis we can get it to a finer point. You have been in this house a year.”

“Nearly two.”

“All the better. During this long period no one wants anything from you. Now suddenly within three or four days you have urgent demands. What would you gather from that?”

“It can only mean,” said I, “that the object, whatever it may be, has only just come into the house.”

“Settled once again,” said Holmes. “Now, Mrs. Maberley has any object just arrived?”

“No, I have bought nothing new this year.”

“Indeed! That is very remarkable. Well, I think we had best let matters develop a little further until we have clearer data. Is that lawyer of yours a capable man?”

“Mr. Sutro is most capable.”

“Have you another maid, or was the fair Susan, who has just banged your front door alone?”

“I have a young girl.”

“Try and get Sutro to spend a night or two in the house. You might possibly want protection.”

“Against whom?”

“Who knows? The matter is certainly obscure. If I can’t find what they are after, I must approach the matter from the other end and try to get at the principal. Did this house-agent man give any address?”

“Simply his card and occupation. Haines-Johnson, Auctioneer and Valuer.”

“I don’t think we shall find him in the directory. Honest business men don’t conceal their place of business. Well, you will let me know any fresh development. I have taken up your case, and you may rely upon it that I shall see it through.”

As we passed through the hall Holmes’s eyes, which missed nothing, lighted upon several trunks and cases which were piled in a corner. The labels shone out upon them.

“‘Milano.’ ‘Lucerne.’ These are from Italy.”

“They are poor Douglas’s things.”

“You have not unpacked them? How long have you had them?”

“They arrived last week.”

"But you said — why, surely this might be the missing link. How do we know that there is not something of value there?"

"There could not possibly be, Mr. Holmes. Poor Douglas had only his pay and a small annuity. What could he have of value?"

Holmes was lost in thought.

"Delay no longer, Mrs. Maberley," he said at last. "Have these things taken upstairs to your bedroom. Examine them as soon as possible and see what they cohtain. I will come tomorrow and hear your report."

It was quite evident that The Three Gables was under very close surveillance, for as we came round the high hedge at the end of the lane there was the negro prize-fighter standing in the shadow. We came on him quite suddenly, and a grim and menacing figure he looked in that lonely place. Holmes clapped his hand to his pocket.

"Lookin' for your gun, Masser Holmes?"

"No, for my scent-bottle, Steve."

"You are funny, Masser Holmes, ain't you?"

"It won't be funny for you, Steve, if I get after you. I gave you fair warning this morning."

"Well, Masser Holmes, I done gone think over what you said, and I don't want no more talk about that affair of Masser Perkins. S'pose I can help you, Masser Holmes, I will."

"Well, then, tell me who is behind you on this job."

"So help me the Lord! Masser Holmes, I told you the truth before. I don't know. My boss Barney gives me orders and that's all."

"Well, just bear in mind, Steve, that the lady in that house, and everything under that roof, is under my protection. Don't forget it."

"All right, Masser Holmes. I'll remember."

"I've got him thoroughly frightened for his own skin, Watson," Holmes remarked as we walked on. "I think he would double-cross his employer if he knew who he was. It was lucky I had some knowledge of the Spencer John crowd, and that Steve was one of them. Now, Watson, this is a case for Langdale Pike, and I am going to see him now. When I get back I may be clearer in the matter."

I saw no more of Holmes during the day, but I could well imagine how he spent it, for Langdale Pike was his human book of reference upon all matters of social scandal. This strange, languid creature spent his waking hours in the bow window of a St. James's Street club and was the receiving-station as well as the transmitter for all the gossip of the metropolis. He made, it was said, a four-figure income by the paragraphs which he contributed every week to the garbage papers which cater to an inquisitive public. If ever, far down in the turbid depths of London life, there was some strange swirl or eddy, it was marked with automatic exactness by this human dial upon the surface. Holmes discreetly helped Langdale to knowledge, and on occasion was helped in turn.

When I met my friend in his room early next morning, I was conscious from his bearing that all was well, but none the less a most unpleasant surprise was awaiting us. It took the shape of the following telegram.

Please come out at once. Client's house burgled in the night. Police in possession.

SUTRO.

Holmes whistled. "The drama has come to a crisis, and quicker than I had expected. There is a great driving-power at the back of this business, Watson, which does not surprise me after what I have heard. This Sutro, of course, is her lawyer. I made a mistake, I fear, in not asking you to spend the night on guard. This fellow has clearly proved a broken reed. Well, there is nothing for it but another journey to Harrow Weald."

We found The Three Gables a very different establishment to the orderly household of the previous day. A small group of idlers had assembled at the garden gate, while a couple of constables were examining the windows and the geranium beds. Within we met a gray old gentleman, who introduced himself as the lawyer together with a bustling, rubicund inspector, who greeted Hoimes as an old friend.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, no chance for you in this case, I'm afraid. Just a common, ordinary burglary, and well within the capacity of the poor old police. No experts need apply."

"I am sure the case is in very good hands," said Holmes. "Merely a common burglary, you say?"

"Quite so. We know pretty well who the men are and where to find them. It is that gang of Barney Stockdale, with the big nigger in it — they've been seen about here."

"Excellent! What did they get?"

"Well, they don't seem to have got much. Mrs. Maberley was chloroformed and the house was — Ah! here is the lady herself."

Our friend of yesterday, looking very pale and ill, had entered the room, leaning upon a little maidservant.

“You gave me good advice, Mr. Holmes,” said she, smiling ruefully. “Alas, I did not take it! I did not wish to trouble Mr. Sutro, and so I was unprotected.”

“I only heard of it this morning,” the lawyer explained.

“Mr. Holmes advised me to have some friend in the house. I neglected his advice, and I have paid for it.”

“You look wretchedly ill,” said Holmes. “Perhaps you are hardly equal to telling me what occurred.”

“It is all here,” said the inspector, tapping a bulky notebook.

“Still, if the lady is not too exhausted—”

“There is really so little to tell. I have no doubt that wicked Susan had planned an entrance for them. They must have known the house to an inch. I was conscious for a moment of the chloroform rag which was thrust over my mouth, but I have no notion how long I may have been senseless. When I woke, one man was at the bedside and another was rising with a bundle in his hand from among my son’s baggage, which was partially opened and littered over the floor. Before he could get away I sprang up and seized him.”

“You took a big risk,” said the inspector.

“I clung to him, but he shook me off, and the other may have struck me, for I can remember no more. Mary the maid heard the noise and began screaming out of the window. That brought the police, but the rascals had got away.”

“What did they take?”

“Well, I don’t think there is anything of value missing. I am sure there was nothing in my son’s trunks.”

“Did the men leave no clue?”

“There was one sheet of paper which I may have torn from the man that I grasped. It was lying all crumpled on the floor. It is in my son’s handwriting.”

“Which means that it is not of much use,” said the inspector. “Now if it had been in the burglar’s—”

“Exactly,” said Holmes. “What rugged common sense! None the less, I should be curious to see it.”

The inspector drew a folded sheet of foolscap from his pocketbook.

“I never pass anything, however trifling,” said he with some pomposity. “That is my advice to you, Mr. Holmes. In twentyfive years’ experience I have learned my lesson. There is always the chance of finger-marks or something.”

Holmes inspected the sheet of paper.

“What do you make of it, Inspector?”

“Seems to be the end of some queer novel, so far as I can see.”

“It may certainly prove to be the end of a queer tale,” said Holmes. “You have noticed the number on the top of the page. It is two hundred and forty-five. Where are the odd two hundred and forty-four pages?”

“Well, I suppose the burglars got those. Much good may it do them!”

“It seems a queer thing to break into a house in order to steal such papers as that. Does it suggest anything to you, Inspector?”

“Yes, sir, it suggests that in their hurry the rascals just grabbed at what came first to hand. I wish them joy of what they got.”

“Why should they go to my son’s things?” asked Mrs. Maberley.

“Well, they found nothing valuable downstairs, so they tried their luck upstairs. That is how I read it. What do you make of it, Mr. Holmes?”

“I must think it over, Inspector. Come to the window, Watson.” Then, as we stood together, he read over the fragment of paper. It began in the middle of a sentence and ran like this:

“...face bled considerably from the cuts and blows, but it was nothing to the bleeding of his heart as he saw that lovely face, the face for which he had been prepared to sacrifice his very life, looking out at his agony and humiliation. She smiled — yes, by Heaven! she smiled, like the heartless fiend she was, as he looked up at her. It was at that moment that love died and hate was born. Man must live for something. If it is not for your embrace, my lady, then it shall surely be for your undoing and my complete revenge.”

“Queer grammar!” said Holmes with a smile as he handed the paper back to the inspector. “Did you notice how the ‘he’ suddenly changed to ‘my’? The writer was so carried away by his own story that he imagined himself at the supreme moment to be the hero.”

“It seemed mighty poor stuff,” said the inspector as he replaced it in his book. “What! are you off, Mr. Holmes?”

“I don’t think there is anything more for me to do now that the case is in such capable hands. By the way, Mrs. Maberley, did you say you wished to travel?”

“It has always been my dream, Mr. Holmes.”

“Where would you like to go — Cairo, Madeira, the Riviera?”

“Oh if I had the money I would go round the world.”

“Quite so. Round the world. Well, good-morning. I may drop you a line in the evening.” As we passed the window I caught a glimpse of the inspector’s smile and shake of the head. “These clever fellows have always a touch of madness.” That was what I read in the inspector’s smile.

“Now, Watson, we are at the last lap of our little journey,” said Holmes when we were back in the roar of central London once more. “I think we had best clear the matter up at once, and it would be well that you should come with me, for it is safer to have a witness when you are dealing with such a lady as Isadora Klein.”

We had taken a cab and were speeding to some address in Grosvenor Square. Holmes had been sunk in thought, but he roused himself suddenly.

“By the way, Watson, I suppose you see it all clearly?”

“No, I can’t say that I do. I only gather that we are going to see the lady who is behind all this mischief.”

“Exactly! But does the name Isadora Klein convey nothing to you? She was, of course, the celebrated beauty. There was never a woman to touch her. She is pure Spanish, the real blood of the masterfui Conquistadors, and her people have been leaders in Pernambuco for generations. She married the aged German sugar king, Klein, and presently found herself the richest as well as the most lovely widow upon earth. Then there was an interval of adventure when she pleased her own tastes. She had several lovers, and Douglas Maberley, one of the most striking men in London, was one of them. It was by all accounts more than an adventure with him. He was not a society butterfly but a strong, proud man who gave and expected all. But she is the ‘belle dame sans merci’ of fiction. When her caprice is satisfied the matter is ended, and if the other party in the matter can’t take her word for it she knows how to bring it home to him.”

“Then that was his own story—”

“Ah! you are piecing it together now. I hear that she is about to marry the young Duke of Lomond, who might almost be her son. His Grace’s ma might overlook the age, but a big scandal would be a different matter, so it is imperative — Ah! here we are.”

It was one of the finest corner-houses of the West End. A machine-like footman took up our cards and returned with word that the lady was not at home. “Then we shall wait until she is,” said Holmes cheerfully.

The machine broke down.

“Not at home means not at home to you,” said the footman.

“Good,” Holmes answered. “That means that we shall not have to wait. Kindly give this note to your mistress.”

He scribbled three or four words upon a sheet of his notebook, folded it, and handed it to the man.

“What did you say, Holmes?” I asked.

“I simply wrote: ‘Shall it be the police, then?’ I think that should pass us in.”

It did — with amazing celerity. A minute later we were in an Arabian Nights drawing-room, vast and wonderful, in a half gloom, picked out with an occasional pink electric light. The lady had come, I felt, to that time of life when even the proudest beauty finds the half light more welcome. She rose from a settee as we entered: tall, queenly, a perfect figure, a lovely mask-like face, with two wonderful Spanish eyes which looked murder at us both.

“What is this intrusion — and this insulting message?” she asked, holding up the slip of paper.

“I need not explain, madame. I have too much respect for your intelligence to do so — though I confess that intelligence has been surprisingly at fault of late.”

“How so, sir?”

“By supposing that your hired bullies could frighten me from my work. Surely no man would take up my profession if it were not that danger attracts him. It was you, then, who forced me to examine the case of young Maberley.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about. What have I to do with hired bullies?”

Holmes turned away wearily.

“Yes, I have underrated your intelligence. Well, good-afternoon!”

“Stop! Where are you going?”

“To Scotland Yard.”

We had not got halfway to the door before she had overtaken us and was holding his arm. She had turned in a moment from steel to velvet.

“Come and sit down, gentlemen. Let us talk this matter over. I feel that I may be frank with you, Mr. Holmes. You have the feelings of a gentleman. How quick a woman’s instinct is to find it out. I will treat you as a friend.”

“I cannot promise to reciprocate, madame. I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go. I am ready to listen, and then I will tell you how I will act.”

“No doubt it was foolish of me to threaten a brave man like yourself.”

“What was really foolish, madame, is that you have placed yourself in the power of a band of rascals who may blackmail or give you away.”

“No, no! I am not so simple. Since I have promised to be frank, I may say that no one, save Barney Stockdale and Susan, his wife, have the least idea who their employer is. As to them, well, it is not the first—” She smiled and nodded with a charming coquettish intimacy.

“I see. You’ve tested them before.”

“They are good hounds who run silent.”

“Such hounds have a way sooner or later of biting the hand that feeds them. They will be arrested for this burglary. The police are already after them.”

“They will take what comes to them. That is what they are paid for. I shall not appear in the matter.”

“Unless I bring you into it.”

“No, no, you would not. You are a gentleman. It is a woman’s secret.”

“In the first place, you must give back this manuscript.”

She broke into a ripple of laughter and walked to the fireplace. There was a calcined mass which she broke up with the poker. “Shall I give this back?” she asked. So roguish and exquisite did she look as she stood before us with a challenging smile that I felt of all Holmes’s criminals this was the one whom he would find it hardest to face. However, he was immune from sentiment.

“That seals your fate,” he said coldly. “You are very prompt in your actions, madame, but you have overdone it on this occasion.”

She threw the poker down with a clatter.

“How hard you are!” she cried. “May I tell you the whole story?”

“I fancy I could tell it to you.”

“But you must look at it with my eyes, Mr. Holmes. You must realise it from the point of view of a woman who sees all her life’s ambition about to be ruined at the last moment. Is such a woman to be blamed if she protects herself?"

"The original sin was yours."

"Yes, yes! I admit it. He was a dear boy, Douglas, but it so chanced that he could not fit into my plans. He wanted marriage — marriage, Mr. Holmes — with a penniless commoner. Nothing less would serve him. Then he became pertinacious. Because I had given he seemed to think that I still must give, and to him only. It was intolerable. At last I had to make him realise it."

"By hiring ruffians to beat him under your own window."

"You do indeed seem to know everything. Well, it is true. Barney and the boys drove him away, and were, I admit, a little rough in doing so. But what did he do then? Could I have believed that a gentleman would do such an act? He wrote a book in which he described his own story. I, of course, was the wolf; he the lamb. It was all there, under different names, of course; but who in all London would have failed to recognise it? What do you say to that, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, he was within his rights."

"It was as if the air of Italy had got into his blood and brought with it the old cruel Italian spirit. He wrote to me and sent me a copy of his book that I might have the torture of anticipation. There were two copies, he said — one for me, one for his publisher."

"How did you know the publisher's had not reached him?"

"I knew who his publisher was. It is not his only novel, you know. I found out that he had not heard from Italy. Then came Douglas's sudden death. So long as that other manuscript was in the world there was no safety for me. Of course, it must be among his effects, and these would be returned to his mother. I set the gang at work. One of them got into the house as servant. I wanted to do the thing honestly. I really and truly did. I was ready to buy the house and everything in it. I offered any price she cared to ask. I only tried the other way when everything else had failed. Now, Mr. Holmes, granting that I was too hard on Douglas — and, God knows, I am sorry for it! — what else could I do with my whole future at stake?"

Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well," said he, "I suppose I shall have to compound a felony as usual. How much does it cost to go round the world in first-class style?"

The lady stared in amazement.

“Could it be done on five thousand pounds?”

“Well, I should think so, indeed!”

“Very good. I think you will sign me a check for that, and I will see that it comes to Mrs. Maberley. You owe her a little change of air. Meantime, lady” — he wagged a cautionary forefinger—”have a care! Have a care! You can’t play with edged tools forever without cutting those dainty hands.”

ADVENTURE X. THE ADVENTURE OF THE LION’S MANE

It is a most singular thing that a problem which was certainly as abstruse and unusual as any which I have faced in my long professional career should have come to me after my retirement, and be brought, as it were, to my very door. It occurred after my withdrawal to my little Sussex home, when I had given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London. At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him. Thus I must act as my own chronicler. Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty! As it is, however, I must needs tell my tale in my own plain way, showing by my words each step upon the difficult road which lay before me as I searched for the mystery of the Lion’s Mane.

My villa is situated upon the southern slope of the downs, commanding a great view of the Channel. At this point the coast-line is entirely of chalk cliffs, which can only be descended by a single, long, tortuous path, which is steep and slippery. At the bottom of the path lie a hundred yards of pebbles and shingle, even when the tide is at full. Here and there, however, there are curves and hollows which make splendid swimmingpools filled afresh with each flow. This admirable beach extends for some miles in each direction, save only at one point where the little cove and village of Fulworth break the line.

My house is lonely. I, my old housekeeper, and my bees have the estate all to ourselves. Half a mile off, however, is Harold Stackhurst’s well-known coaching establishment, The Gables, quite a large place, which contains some score of young fellows preparing for various professions, with a staff of several masters. Stackhurst himself was a well-known rowing Blue in his day, and an excellent all-round scholar. He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation.

Towards the end of July, 1907, there was a severe gale, the wind blowing up-channel, heaping the seas to the base of the cliffs and leaving a lagoon at the turn of the tide. On the morning of which I speak the wind had abated, and all Nature was newly washed and fresh. It was impossible to work upon so delightful a day, and I strolled out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air. I walked along the cliff path which led to the steep descent to the beach. As I walked I heard a shout behind me, and there was Harold Stackhurst waving his hand in cheery greeting.

"What a morning, Mr. Holmes! I thought I should see you out."

"Going for a swim, I see."

"At your old tricks again," he laughed, patting his bulging pocket. "Yes. McPherson started early, and I expect I may find him there."

Fitzroy McPherson was the science master, a fine upstanding young fellow whose life had been crippled by heart trouble following rheumatic fever. He was a natural athlete, however, and excelled in every game which did not throw too great a strain upon him. Summer and winter he went for his swim, and, as I am a swimmer myself, I have often joined him.

At this moment we saw the man himself. His head showed above the edge of the cliff where the path ends. Then his whole figure appeared at the top, staggering like a drunken man. The next instant he threw up his hands and, with a terrible cry, fell upon his face. Stackhurst and I rushed forward — it may have been fifty yards — and turned him on his back. He was obviously dying. Those glazed sunken eyes and dreadful livid cheeks could mean nothing else. One glimmer of life came into his face for an instant, and he uttered two or three words with an eager air of warning. They were slurred and indistinct, but to my ear the last of them, which burst in a shriek from his lips, were "the Lion's Mane." It was utterly irrelevant and unintelligible, and yet I could twist the sound into no other sense. Then he half raised himself from the ground, threw his arms into the air, and fell forward on his side. He was dead.

My companion was paralyzed by the sudden horror of it, but I, as may well be imagined, had every sense on the alert. And I had need, for it was speedily evident that we were in the presence of an extraordinary case. The man was dressed only in his Burberry overcoat, his trousers, and an unlaced pair of canvas shoes. As he fell over, his Burberry, which had been simply thrown round his shoulders, slipped off, exposing his trunk. We stared at it in amazement. His back was covered with dark red lines as though he had been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge. The instrument with which this punishment had been inflicted was clearly flexible, for the long, angry weals curved round his shoulders and ribs. There was blood dripping down his chin, for he had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony. His drawn and distorted face told how terrible that agony had been.

I was kneeling and Stackhurst standing by the body when a shadow fell across us, and we found that Ian Murdoch was by our side. Murdoch was the mathematical coach at the establishment, a tall, dark, thin man, so taciturn and aloof that none can be said to have been his friend. He seemed to live in some high abstract region of surds and conic sections, with little to connect him with ordinary life. He was looked upon as an oddity by the students, and would have been their butt, but there was some strange outlandish blood in the man, which showed itself not only in his coal-black eyes and swarthy face but also in occasional outbreaks of temper, which could only be described as ferocious. On one occasion, being plagued by a little dog belonging to McPherson, he had caught the creature up and hurled it through the plate-glass window, an action for which Stackhurst would certainly have given him his dismissal had he not been a very valuable teacher. Such was the strange complex man who now appeared beside us. He seemed to be honestly shocked at the sight before him, though the incident of the dog may show that there was no great sympathy between the dead man and himself.

“Poor fellow! Poor fellow! What can I do? How can I help?”

“Were you with him? Can you tell us what has happened?”

“No, no, I was late this morning. I was not on the beach at all. I have come straight from The Gables. What can I do?”

“You can hurry to the police-station at Fulworth. Report the matter at once.”

Without a word he made off at top speed, and I proceeded to take the matter in hand, while Stackhurst, dazed at this tragedy, remained by the body. My first task naturally was to note who was on the beach. From the top of the path I could see the whole sweep of it, and it was absolutely deserted save that two or three dark figures could be seen far away moving towards the village of Fulworth. Having satisfied myself upon this point, I walked slowly down the path. There was clay or soft marl mixed with the chalk, and every here and there I saw the same footstep, both ascending and descending. No one else had gone down to the beach by this track that morning. At one place I observed the print of an open hand with the fingers towards the incline. This could only mean that poor McPherson had fallen as he ascended. There were rounded depressions, too, which suggested that he had come down upon his knees more than once. At the bottom of the path was the considerable lagoon left by the retreating tide. At the side of it McPherson had undressed, for there lay his towel on a rock. It was folded and dry, so that it would seem that, after all, he had never entered the water. Once or twice as I hunted round amid the hard shingle I came on little patches of sand where the print of his canvas shoe, and also of his naked foot, could be seen. The latter fact proved that he had made all ready to bathe, though the towel indicated that he had not actually done so.

And here was the problem clearly defined — as strange a one as had ever confronted me. The man had not been on the beach more than a quarter of an hour at the most. Stackhurst had followed him from The Gables, so there could be no doubt about that. He had gone to bathe and had stripped, as the naked footsteps showed. Then he had suddenly huddled on his clothes again — they were all dishevelled and unfastened — and he had returned without bathing, or at any rate without drying himself. And the reason for his change of purpose had been that he had been scourged in some savage, inhuman fashion, tortured until he bit his lip through in his agony, and was left with only strength enough to crawl away and to die. Who had done this barbarous deed? There were, it is true, small grottos and caves in the base of the cliffs, but the low sun shone directly into them, and there was no place for concealment. Then, again, there were those distant figures on the beach. They seemed too far away to have been connected with the crime, and the broad lagoon in which McPherson had intended to bathe lay between him and them, lapping up to the rocks. On the sea two or three fishingboats were at no great distance. Their occupants might be examined at our leisure. There were several roads for inquiry, but none which led to any very obvious goal.

When I at last returned to the body I found that a little group of wondering folk had gathered round it. Stackhurst was, of course, still there, and Ian Murdoch had just arrived with Anderson, the village constable, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed — a breed which covers much good sense under a heavy, silent exterior. He listened to everything, took note of all we said, and finally drew me aside.

"I'd be glad of your advice, Mr. Holmes. This is a big thing for me to handle, and I'll hear of it from Lewes if I go wrong."

I advised him to send for his immediate superior, and for a doctor; also to allow nothing to be moved, and as few fresh footmarks as possible to be made, until they came. In the meantime I searched the dead man's pockets. There were his handkerchief, a large knife, and a small folding card-case. From this projected a slip of paper, which I unfolded and handed to the constable. There was written on it in a scrawling, feminine hand:

I will be there, you may be sure.

MAUDIE.

It read like a love affair, an assignation, though when and where were a blank. The constable replaced it in the card-case and returned it with the other things to the pockets of the Burberry. Then, as nothing more suggested itself, I walked back to my house for breakfast, having first arranged that the base of the cliffs should be thoroughly searched.

Stackhurst was round in an hour or two to tell me that the body had been removed to The Gables, where the inquest would be held. He brought with him some serious and definite news. As I expected, nothing had been found in the small caves below the cliff, but he had examined the papers in McPherson's desk and there were several which showed an intimate correspondence with a certain Miss Maud Bellamy, of Fulworth. We had then established the identity of the writer of the note.

"The police have the letters," he explained. "I could not bring them. But there is no doubt that it was a serious love affair. I see no reason, however, to connect it with that horrible happening save, indeed, that the lady had made an appointment with him."

"But hardly at a bathing-pool which all of you were in the habit of using," I remarked.

"It is mere chance," said he, "that several of the students were not with McPherson."

"Was it mere chance?"

Stackhurst knit his brows in thought.

"Ian Murdoch held them back," said he. "He would insist upon some algebraic demonstration before breakfast. Poor chap, he is dreadfully cut up about it all."

“And yet I gather that they were not friends.”

“At one time they were not. But for a year or more Murdoch has been as near to McPherson as he ever could be to anyone. He is not of a very sympathetic disposition by nature.”

“So I understand. I seem to remember your telling me once about a quarrel over the ill-usage of a dog.”

“That blew over all right.”

“But left some vindictive feeling, perhaps.”

“No, no, I am sure they were real friends.”

“Well, then, we must explore the matter of the girl. Do you know her?”

“Everyone knows her. She is the beauty of the neighbourhood — a real beauty, Holmes, who would draw attention everywhere. I knew that McPherson was attracted by her, but I had no notion that it had gone so far as these letters would seem to indicate.”

“But who is she?”

“She is the daughter of old Tom Bellamy who owns all the boats and bathing-cots at Fulworth. He was a fisherman to start with, but is now a man of some substance. He and his son William run the business.”

“Shall we walk into Fulworth and see them?”

“On what pretext?”

“Oh, we can easily find a pretext. After all, this poor man did not ill-use himself in this outrageous way. Some human hand was on the handle of that scourge, if indeed it was a scourge which inflicted the injuries. His circle of acquaintances in this lonely place was surely limited. Let us follow it up in every direction and we can hardly fail to come upon the motive, which in turn should lead us to the criminal.”

It would have been a pleasant walk across the thyme-scented downs had our minds not been poisoned by the tragedy we had witnessed. The village of Fulworth lies in a hollow curving in a semicircle round the bay. Behind the old-fashioned hamlet several modern houses have been built upon the rising ground. It was to one of these that Stackhurst guided me.

“That’s The Haven, as Bellamy called it. The one with the corner tower and slate roof. Not bad for a man who started with nothing but — By Jove, look at that!”

The garden gate of The Haven had opened and a man had emerged. There was no mistaking that tall, angular, straggling figure. It was Ian Murdoch, the mathematician. A moment later we confronted him upon the road.

“Hullo!” said Stackhurst. The man nodded, gave us a sideways glance from his curious dark eyes, and would have-passed us, but his principal pulled him up.

“What were you doing there?” he asked.

Murdoch’s face flushed with anger. “I am your subordinate, sir, under your roof. I am not aware that I owe you any account of my private actions.”

Stackhurst’s nerves were near the surface after all he had endured. Otherwise, perhaps, he would have waited. Now he lost his temper completely.

“In the circumstances your answer is pure impertinence, Mr. Murdoch.”

“Your own question might perhaps come under the same heading.”

“This is not the first time that I have had to overlook your insubordinate ways. It will certainly be the last. You will kindly make fresh arrangements for your future as speedily as you can.”

“I had intended to do so. I have lost to-day the only person who made The Gables habitable.”

He strode off upon his way, while Stackhurst, with angry eyes, stood glaring after him. “Is he not an impossible, intolerable man?” he cried.

The one thing that impressed itself forcibly upon my mind was that Mr. Ian Murdoch was taking the first chance to open a path of escape from the scene of the crime. Suspicion, vague and nebulous, was now beginning to take outline in my mind. Perhaps the visit to the Bellamys might throw some further light upon the matter. Stackhurst pulled himself together, and we went forward to the house.

Mr. Bellamy proved to be a middle-aged man with a flaming red beard. He seemed to be in a very angry mood, and his face was soon as florid as his hair.

“No, sir, I do not desire any particulars. My son here” — indicating a powerful young man, with a heavy, sullen face, in the corner of the sitting-room—”is of one mind with me that Mr. McPherson’s attentions to Maud were insulting. Yes, sir, the word ‘marriage’ was never mentioned, and yet there were letters and meetings, and a great deal more of which neither of us could approve. She has no mother, and we are her only guardians. We are determined—”

But the words were taken from his mouth by the appearance of the lady herself. There was no gainsaying that she would have graced any assembly in the world. Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart, but I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate colouring, without realising that no young man would cross her path unscathed. Such was the girl who had pushed open the door and stood now, wide-eyed and intense, in front of Harold Stackhurst.

"I know already that Fitzroy is dead," she said. "Do not be afraid to tell me the particulars."

"This other gentleman of yours let us know the news," explained the father.

"There is no reason why my sister should be brought into the matter," growled the younger man.

The sister turned a sharp, fierce look upon him. "This is my business, William. Kindly leave me to manage it in my own way. By all accounts there has been a crime committed. If I can help to show who did it, it is the least I can do for him who is gone."

She listened to a short account from my companion, with a composed concentration which showed me that she possessed strong character as well as great beauty. Maud Bellamy will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman. It seems that she already knew me by sight, for she turned to me at the end.

"Bring them to justice, Mr. Holmes. You have my sympathy and my help, whoever they may be." It seemed to me that she glanced defiantly at her father and brother as she spoke.

"Thank you," said I. "I value a woman's instinct in such matters. You use the word 'they.' You think that more than one was concerned?"

"I knew Mr. McPherson well enough to be aware that he was a brave and a strong man. No single person could ever have inflicted such an outrage upon him."

"Might I have one word with you alone?"

"I tell you, Maud, not to mix yourself up in the matter," cried her father angrily.

She looked at me helplessly. "What can I do?"

"The whole world will know the facts presently, so there can be no harm if I discuss them here," said I. "I should have preferred privacy, but if your father will not allow it he must share the deliberations." Then I spoke of the note which had been found in the dead man’s pocket. “It is sure to be produced at the inquest. May I ask you to throw any light upon it that you can?”

“I see no reason for mystery,” she answered. “We were engaged to be married, and we only kept it secret because Fitzroy’s uncle, who is very old and said to be dying, might have disinherited him if he had married against his wish. There was no other reason.”

“You could have told us,” growled Mr. Bellamy.

“So I would, father, if you had ever shown sympathy.”

“I object to my girl picking up with men outside her own station.”

“It was your prejudice against him which prevented us from telling you. As to this appointment” — she fumbled in her dress and produced a crumpled note—”it was in answer to this.”

DEAREST [ran the message]:

The old place on the beach just after sunset on Tuesday.

It is the only time I can get away.

F.M.

“Tuesday was to-day, and I had meant to meet him to-night.”

I turned over the paper. “This never came by post. How did you get it?”

“I would rather not answer that question. It has really nothing to do with the matter which you are investigating. But anything which bears upon that I will most freely answer.”

She was as good as her word, but there was nothing which was helpful in our investigation. She had no reason to think that her fiance had any hidden enemy, but she admitted that she had had several warm admirers.

“May I ask if Mr. Ian Murdoch was one of them?”

She blushed and seemed confused.

“There was a time when I thought he was. But that was all changed when he understood the relations between Fitzroy and myself.”

Again the shadow round this strange man seemed to me to be taking more definite shape. His record must be examined. His rooms must be privately searched. Stackhurst was a willing collaborator, for in his mind also suspicions were forming. We returned from our visit to The Haven with the hope that one free end of this tangled skein was already in our hands.

A week passed. The inquest had thrown no light upon the matter and had been adjourned for further evidence. Stackhurst had made discreet inquiry about his subordinate, and there had been a superficial search of his room, but without result. Personally, I had gone over the whole ground again, both physically and mentally, but with no new conclusions. In all my chronicles the reader will find no case which brought me so completely to the limit of my powers. Even my imagination could conceive no solution to the mystery. And then there came the incident of the dog.

It was my old housekeeper who heard of it first by that strange wireless by which such people collect the news of the countryside.

“Sad story this, sir, about Mr. McPherson’s dog,” said she one evening.

I do not encourage such conversations, but the words arrested my attention.

“What of Mr. McPherson’s dog?”

“Dead, sir. Died of grief for its master.”

“Who told you this?”

“Why, sir, everyone is talking of it. It took on terrible, and has eaten nothing for a week. Then to-day two of the young gentlemen from The Gables found it dead — down on the beach, sir, at the very place where its master met his end.”

“At the very place.” The words stood out clear in my memory. Some dim perception that the matter was vital rose in my mind. That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs. But “in the very place”! Why should this lonely beach be fatal to it? Was it possible that it also had been sacrificed to some revengeful feud? Was it possible — ? Yes, the perception was dim, but already something was building up in my mind. In a few minutes I was on my way to The Gables, where I found Stackhurst in his study. At my request he sent for Sudbury and Blount, the two students who had found the dog.

“Yes, it lay on the very edge of the pool,” said one of them. “It must have followed the trail of its dead master.”

I saw the faithful little creature, an Airedale terrier, laid out upon the mat in the hall. The body was stiff and rigid, the eyes projecting, and the limbs contorted. There was agony in every line of it.

From The Gables I walked down to the bathing-pool. The sun had sunk and the shadow of the great cliff lay black across the water, which glimmered dully like a sheet of lead. The place was deserted and there was no sign of life save for two sea-birds circling and screaming overhead. In the fading light I could dimly make out the little dog’s spoor upon the sand round the very rock on which his master's towel had been laid. For a long time I stood in deep meditation while the shadows grew darker around me. My mind was filled with racing thoughts. You have known what it was to be in a nightmare in which you feel that there is some all-important thing for which you search and which you know is there, though it remains forever just beyond your reach. That was how I felt that evening as I stood alone by that place of death. Then at last I turned and walked slowly homeward.

I had just reached the top of the path when it came to me. Like a flash, I remembered the thing for which I had so eagerly and vainly grasped. You will know, or Watson has written in vain, that I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein — so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there. I had known that there was something which might bear upon this matter. It was still vague, but at least I knew how I could make it clear. It was monstrous, incredible, and yet it was always a possibility. I would test it to the full.

There is a great garret in my little house which is stuffed with books. It was into this that I plunged and rummaged for an hour. At the end of that time I emerged with a little chocolate and silver volume. Eagerly I turned up the chapter of which I had a dim remembrance. Yes, it was indeed a far-fetched and unlikely proposition, and yet I could not be at rest until I had made sure if it might, indeed, be so. It was late when I retired, with my mind eagerly awaiting the work of the morrow.

But that work met with an annoying interruption. I had hardly swallowed my early cup of tea and was starting for the beach when I had a call from Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary — a steady, solid, bovine man with thoughtful eyes, which looked at me now with a very troubled expression.

"I know your immense experience, sir," said he. "This is quite unofficial, of course, and need go no farther. But I am fairly up against it in this McPherson case. The question is, shall I make an arrest, or shall I not?"

"Meaning Mr. Ian Murdoch?"

"Yes, sir. There is really no one else when you come to think of it. That's the advantage of this solitude. We narrow it down to a very small compass. If he did not do it, then who did?"

“What have you against him?”

He had gleaned along the same furrows as I had. There was Murdoch’s character and the mystery which seemed to hang round the man. His furious bursts of temper, as shown in the incident of the dog. The fact that he had quarrelled with McPherson in the past, and that there was some reason to think that he might have resented his attentions to Miss Bellamy. He had all my points, but no fresh ones, save that Murdoch seemed to be making every preparation for departure.

“What would my position be if I let him slip away with all this evidence against him?” The burly, phlegmatic man was sorely troubled in his mind.

“Consider,” I said, “all the essential gaps in your case. On the morning of the crime he can surely prove an alibi. He had been with his scholars till the last moment, and within a few minutes of McPherson’s appearance he came upon us from behind. Then bear in mind the absolute impossibility that he could single-handed have inflicted this outrage upon a man quite as strong as himself. Finally, there is this question of the instrument with which these injuries were inflicted.”

“What could it be but a scourge or flexible whip of some sort?”

“Have you examined the marks?” I asked.

“I have seen them. So has the doctor.”

“But I have examined them very carefully with a lens. They have peculiarities.”

“What are they, Mr. Holmes?”

I stepped to my bureau and brought out an enlarged photograph. “This is my method in such cases,” I explained.

“You certainly do things thoroughly, Mr. Holmes.”

“I should hardly be what I am if I did not. Now let us consider this weal which extends round the right shoulder. Do you observe nothing remarkable?”

“I can’t say I do.”

“Surely it is evident that it is unequal in its intensity. There is a dot of extravasated blood here, and another there. There are similar indications in this other weal down here. What can that mean?”

“I have no idea. Have you?”

“Perhaps I have. Perhaps I haven’t. I may be able to say more soon. Anything which will define what made that mark will bring us a long way towards the criminal.”

“It is, of course, an absurd idea,” said the policeman, “but if a red-hot net of wire had been laid across the back, then these better marked points would represent where the meshes crossed each other.”

“A most ingenious comparison. Or shall we say a very stiff cat-o’-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it?”

“By Jove, Mr. Holmes, I think you have hit it.”

“Or there may be some very different cause, Mr. Bardle. But your case is far too weak for an arrest. Besides, we have those last words — the ‘Lion’s Mane.’”

“I have wondered whether Ian—”

“Yes, I have considered that. If the second word had borne any resemblance to Murdoch — but it did not. He gave it almost in a shriek. I am sure that it was ‘Mane.’”

“Have you no alternative, Mr. Holmes?”

“Perhaps I have. But I do not care to discuss it until there is something more solid to discuss.”

“And when will that be?”

“In an hour — possibly less.”

The inspector rubbed his chin and looked at me with dubious eyes.

“I wish I could see what was in your mind, Mr. Holmes. Perhaps it’s those fishing-boats.”

“No, no, they were too far out.”

“Well, then, is it Bellamy and that big son of his? They were not too sweet upon Mr. McPherson. Could they have done him a mischief?”

“No, no, you won’t draw me until I am ready,” said I with a smile. “Now, Inspector, we each have our own work to do. Perhaps if you were to meet me here at midday—”

So far we had got when there came the tremendous interruption which was the beginning of the end.

My outer door was flung open, there were blundering footsteps in the passage, and Ian Murdoch staggered into the room, pallid, dishevelled, his clothes in wild disorder, clawing with his bony hands at the furniture to hold himself erect. “Brandy! Brandy!” he gasped, and fell groaning upon the sofa.

He was not alone. Behind him came Stackhurst, hatless and panting, almost as distrait as his companion.

"Yes, yes, brandy!" he cried. "The man is at his last gasp. It was all I could do to bring him here. He fainted twice upon the way."

Half a tumbler of the raw spirit brought about a wondrous change. He pushed himself up on one arm and swung his coat from his shoulders. "For God's sake oil, opium, morphia!" he cried. "Anything to ease this infernal agony!"

The inspector and I cried out at the sight. There, crisscrossed upon the man's naked shoulder, was the same strange reticulated pattern of red, inflamed lines which had been the death-mark of Fitzroy McPherson.

The pain was evidently terrible and was more than local, for the sufferer's breathing would stop for a time, his face would turn black, and then with loud gasps he would clap his hand to his heart, while his brow dropped beads of sweat. At any moment he might die. More and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life. Pads of cotton-wool soaked in salad-oil seemed to take the agony from the strange wounds. At last his head fell heavily upon the cushion. Exhausted Nature had taken refuge in its last storehouse of vitality. It was half a sleep and half a faint, but at least it was ease from pain.

To question him had been impossible, but the moment we were assured of his condition Stackhurst turned upon me.

"My God!" he cried, "what is it, Holmes? What is it?"

"Where did you find him?"

"Down on the beach. Exactly where poor McPherson met his end. If this man's heart had been weak as McPherson's was, he would not be here now. More than once I thought he was gone as I brought him up. It was too far to The Gables, so I made for you."

"Did you see him on the beach?"

"I was walking on the cliff when I heard his cry. He was at the edge of the water, reeling about like a drunken man. I ran down, threw some clothes about him, and brought him up. For heaven's sake, Holmes, use all the powers you have and spare no pains to lift the curse from this place, for life is becoming unendurable. Can you, with all your world-wide reputation, do nothing for us?"

"I think I can, Stackhurst. Come with me now! And you, Inspector, come along! We will see if we cannot deliver this murderer into your hands."

Leaving the unconscious man in the charge of my housekeeper, we all three went down to the deadly lagoon. On the shingle there was piled a little heap of towels and clothes left by the stricken man. Slowly I walked round the edge of the water, my comrades in Indian file behind me. Most of the pool was quite shallow, but under the cliff where the beach was hollowed out it was four or five feet deep. It was to this part that a swimmer would naturally go, for it formed a beautiful pellucid green pool as clear as crystal. A line of rocks lay above it at the base of the cliff, and along this I led the way, peering eagerly into the depths beneath me. I had reached the deepest and stillest pool when my eyes caught that for which they were searching, and I burst into a shout of triumph.

“Cyanea!” I cried. “Cyanea! Behold the Lion’s Mane!”

The strange object at which I pointed did indeed look like a tangled mass torn from the mane of a lion. It lay upon a rocky shelf some three feet under the water, a curious waving, vibrating, hairy creature with streaks of silver among its yellow tresses. It pulsated with a slow, heavy dilation and contraction.

“It has done mischief enough. Its day is over!” I cried. “Help me, Stackhurst! Let us end the murderer forever.”

There was a big boulder just above the ledge, and we pushed it until it fell with a tremendous splash into the water. When the ripples had cleared we saw that it had settled upon the ledge below. One flapping edge of yellow membrane showed that our victim was beneath it. A thick oily scum oozed out from below the stone and stained the water round, rising slowly to the surface.

“Well, this gets me!” cried the inspector. “What was it, Mr. Holmes? I’m born and bred in these parts, but I never saw such a thing. It don’t belong to Sussex.”

“Just as well for Sussex,” I remarked. “It may have been the southwest gale that brought it up. Come back to my house, both of you, and I will give you the terrible experience of one who has good reason to remember his own meeting with the same peril of the seas.”

When we reached my study we found that Murdoch was so far recovered that he could sit up. He was dazed in mind, and every now and then was shaken by a paroxysm of pain. In broken words he explained that he had no notion what had occurred to him, save that terrific pangs had suddenly shot through him, and that it had taken all his fortitude to reach the bank.

“Here is a book,” I said, taking up the little volume, “which first brought light into what might have been forever dark. It is ‘Out of Doors’, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with this vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. Cyanea capillata is the miscreant’s full name, and he can be as dangerous to life as, and far more painful than, the bite of the cobra. Let me briefly give this extract.

“‘If the bather should see a loose roundish mass of tawny membranes and fibres, something like very large handfuls of lion’s mane and silver paper, let him beware, for this is the fearful stinger, Cyanea capillata.’

“Could our sinister acquaintance be more clearly described?

“He goes on to tell of his own encounter with one when swimming off the coast of Kent. He found that the creature radiated almost invisible filaments to the distance of fifty feet, and that anyone within that circumference from the deadly centre was in danger of death. Even at a distance the effect upon Wood was almost fatal.

“‘The multitudinous threads caused light scarlet lines upon the skin which on closer examination resolved into minute dots or pustules, each dot charged as it were with a red-hot needle making its way through the nerves.’

“The local pain was, as he explains, the least part of the exquisite torment.

“‘Pangs shot through the chest, causing me to fall as if struck by a bullet. The pulsation would cease, and then the heart would give six or seven leaps as if it would force its way through the chest.’

“It nearly killed him, although he had only been exposed to it in the disturbed ocean and not in the narrow calm waters of a bathing-pool. He says that he could hardly recognise himself afterwards, so white, wrinkled and shrivelled was his face. He gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seems to have saved his life. There is the book, Inspector. I leave it with you, and you cannot doubt that it contains a full explanation of the tragedy of poor McPherson.”

“And incidentally exonerates me,” remarked Ian Murdoch with a wry smile. “I do not blame you, Inspector, nor you, Mr. Holmes, for your suspicions were natural. I feel that on the very eve of my arrest I have only cleared myself by sharing the fate of my poor friend.”

“No, Mr. Murdoch. I was already upon the track, and had I been out as early as I intended I might well have saved you from this terrific experience.”

"But how did you know, Mr. Holmes?"

"I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles. That phrase 'the Lion's Mane' haunted my mind. I knew that I had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context. You have seen that it does describe the creature. I have no doubt that it was floating on the water when McPherson saw it, and that this phrase was the only one by which he could convey to us a warning as to the creature which had been his death."

"Then I, at least, am cleared," said Murdoch, rising slowly to his feet. "There are one or two words of explanation which I should give, for I know the direction in which your inquiries have run. It is true that I loved this lady, but from the day when she chose my friend McPherson my one desire was to help her to happiness. I was well content to stand aside and act as their go-between. Often I carried their messages, and it was because I was in their confidence and because she was so dear to me that I hastened to tell her of my friend's death, lest someone should forestall me in a more sudden and heartless manner. She would not tell you, sir, of our relations lest you should disapprove and I might suffer. But with your leave I must try to get back to The Gables, for my bed will be very welcome."

Stackhurst held out his hand. "Our nerves have all been at concert-pitch," said he. "Forgive what is past, Murdoch. We shall understand each other better in the future." They passed out together with their arms linked in friendly fashion. The inspector remained, staring at me in silence with his ox-like eyes.

"Well, you've done it!" he cried at last. "I had read of you, but I never believed it. It's wonderful!"

I was forced to shake my head. To accept such praise was to lower one's own standards.

"I was slow at the outset — culpably slow. Had the body been found in the water I could hardly have missed it. It was the towel which misled me. The poor fellow had never thought to dry himself, and so I in turn was led to believe that he had never been in the water. Why, then, should the attack of any water creature suggest itself to me? That was where I went astray. Well, well, Inspector, I often ventured to chaff you gentlemen of the police force, but Cyanea capillata very nearly avenged Scotland Yard."

ADVENTURE XI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE VEILED LODGER

When one considers that Mr. Sherlock Holmes was in active practice for twenty-three years, and that during seventeen of these I was allowed to cooperate with him and to keep notes of his doings, it will be clear that I have a mass of material at my command. The problem has always been not to find but to choose. There is the long row of year-books which fill a shelf and there are the dispatch-cases filled with documents, a perfect quarry for the student not only of crime but of the social and official scandals of the late Victorian era. Concerning these latter, I may say that the writers of agonized letters, who beg that the honour of their families or the reputation of famous forebears may not be touched, have nothing to fear. The discretion and high sense of professional honour which have always distinguished my friend are still at work in the choice of these memoirs, and no confidence will be abused. I deprecate, however, in the strongest way the attempts which have been made lately to get at and to destroy these papers. The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes's authority for saying that the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant will be given to the public. There is at least one reader who will understand.

It is not reasonable to suppose that every one of these cases gave Holmes the opportunity of showing those curious gifts of instinct and observation which I have endeavoured to set forth in these memoirs. Sometimes he had with much effort to pick the fruit, sometimes it fell easily into his lap. But the most terrible human tragedies were often involved in those cases which brought him the fewest personal opportunities, and it is one of these which I now desire to record. In telling it, I have made a slight change of name and place, but otherwise the facts are as stated.

One forenoon — it was late in 1896 — I received a hurried note from Holmes asking for my attendance. When I arrived I found him seated in a smoke-laden atmosphere, with an elderly, motherly woman of the buxom landlady type in the corresponding chair in front of him.

"This is Mrs. Merrilow, of South Brixton," said my friend with a wave of the hand. "Mrs. Merrilow does not object to tobacco, Watson, if you wish to indulge your filthy habits. Mrs. Merrilow has an interesting story to tell which may well lead to further developments in which your presence may be useful."

"Anything I can do—"

"You will understand, Mrs. Merrilow, that if I come to Mrs. Ronder I should prefer to have a witness. You will make her understand that before we arrive."

"Lord bless you, Mr. Holmes," said our visitor, "she is that anxious to see you that you might bring the whole parish at your heels!"

"Then we shall come early in the afternoon. Let us see that we have our facts correct before we start. If we go over them it will help Dr. Watson to understand the situation. You say that Mrs. Ronder has been your lodger for seven years and that you have only once seen her face."

"And I wish to God I had not!" said Mrs. Merrilow.

"It was, I understand, terribly mutilated."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, you would hardly say it was a face at all. That's how it looked. Our milkman got a glimpse of her once peeping out of the upper window, and he dropped his tin and the milk all over the front garden. That is the kind of face it is. When I saw her — I happened on her unawares — she covered up quick, and then she said, 'Now, Mrs. Merrilow, you know at last why it is that I never raise my veil.'"

"Do you know anything about her history?"

"Nothing at all."

"Did she give references when she came?"

"No, sir, but she gave hard cash, and plenty of it. A quarter's rent right down on the table in advance and no arguing about terms. In these times a poor woman like me can't afford to turn down a chance like that."

"Did she give any reason for choosing your house?"

"Mine stands well back from the road and is more private than most. Then, again, I only take the one, and I have no family of my own. I reckon she had tried others and found that mine suited her best. It's privacy she is after, and she is ready to pay for it."

"You say that she never showed her face from first to last save on the one accidental occasion. Well, it is a very remarkable story, most remarkable, and I don't wonder that you want it examined."

"I don't, Mr. Holmes. I am quite satisfied so long as I get my rent. You could not have a quieter lodger, or one who gives less trouble."

"Then what has brought matters to a head?"

"Her health, Mr. Holmes. She seems to be wasting away. And there's something terrible on her mind. 'Murder!' she cries. 'Murder!' And once I heard her: 'You cruel beast! You monster!' she cried. It was in the night, and it fair rang through the house and sent the shivers through me. So I went to her in the morning. 'Mrs. Ronder,' I says, 'if you have anything that is troubling your soul, there's the clergy,' I says, 'and there's the police. Between them you should get some help.' 'For God's sake, not the police!' says she, 'and the clergy can't change what is past. And yet,' she says, 'it would ease my mind if someone knew the truth before I died.' 'Well,' says I, 'if you won't have the regulars, there is this detective man what we read about' — beggin' your pardon, Mr. Holmes. And she, she fair jumped at it. 'That's the man,' says she. 'I wonder I never thought of it before. Bring him here, Mrs. Merrilow, and if he won't come, tell him I am the wife of Ronder's wild beast show. Say that, and give him the name Abbas Parva. Here it is as she wrote it, Abbas Parva. 'That will bring him if he's the man I think he is.'"

"And it will, too," remarked Holmes. "Very good, Mrs. Merrilow. I should like to have a little chat with Dr. Watson. That will carry us till lunch-time. About three o'clock you may expect to see us at your house in Brixton."

Our visitor had no sooner waddled out of the room — no other verb can describe Mrs. Merrilow's method of progression — than Sherlock Holmes threw himself with fierce energy upon the pile of commonplace books in the corner. For a few minutes there was a constant swish of the leaves, and then with a grunt of satisfaction he came upon what he sought. So excited was he that he did not rise, but sat upon the floor like some strange Buddha, with crossed legs, the huge books all round him, and one open upon his knees.

"The case worried me at the time, Watson. Here are my marginal notes to prove it. I confess that I could make nothing of it. And yet I was convinced that the coroner was wrong. Have you no recollection of the Abbas Parva tragedy?"

"None, Holmes."

"And yet you were with me then. But certainly my own impression was very superficial. For there was nothing to go by, and none of the parties had engaged my services. Perhaps you would care to read the papers?"

"Could you not give me the points?"

"That is very easily done. It will probably come back to your memory as I talk. Ronder, of course, was a household word. He was the rival of Wombwell, and of Sanger, one of the greatest showmen of his day. There is evidence, however, that he took to drink, and that both he and his show were on the down grade at the time of the great tragedy. The caravan had halted for the night at Abbas Parva, which is a small village in Berkshire, when this horror occurred. They were on their way to Wimbledon, travelling by road, and they were simply camping and not exhibiting, as the place is so small a one that it would not have paid them to open.

"They had among their exhibits a very fine North African lion. Sahara King was its name, and it was the habit, both of Ronder and his wife, to give exhibitions inside its cage. Here, you see, is a photograph of the performance by which you will perceive that Ronder was a huge porcine person and that his wife was a very magnificent woman. It was deposed at the inquest that there had been some signs that the lion was dangerous, but, as usual, familiarity begat contempt, and no notice was taken of the fact.

"It was usual for either Ronder or his wife to feed the lion at night. Sometimes one went, sometimes both, but they never allowed anyone else to do it, for they believed that so long as they were the food-carriers he would regard them as benefactors and would never molest them. On this particular night, seven years ago, they both went, and a very terrible happening followed, the details of which have never been made clear.

"It seems that the whole camp was roused near midnight by the roars of the animal and the screams of the woman. The different grooms and employees rushed from their tents, carrying lanterns, and by their light an awful sight was revealed. Ronder lay, with the back of his head crushed in and deep claw-marks across his scalp, some ten yards from the cage, which was open. Close to the door of the cage lay Mrs. Ronder upon her back, with the creature squatting and snarling above her. It had torn her face in such a fashion that it was never thought that she could live. Several of the circus men, headed by Leonardo, the strong man, and Griggs, the clown, drove the creature off with poles, upon which it sprang back into the cage and was at once locked in. How it had got loose was a mystery. It was conjectured that the pair intended to enter the cage, but that when the door was loosed the creature bounded out upon them. There was no other point of interest in the evidence save that the woman in a delirium of agony kept screaming, ‘Coward! Coward!’ as she was carried back to the van in which they lived. It was six months before she was fit to give evidence, but the inquest was duly held, with the obvious verdict of death from misadventure.”

“What alternative could be conceived?” said I.

“You may well say so. And yet there were one or two points which worried young Edmunds, of the Berkshire Constabulary. A smart lad that! He was sent later to Allahabad. That was how I came into the matter, for he dropped in and smoked a pipe or two over it.”

“A thin, yellow-haired man?”

“Exactly. I was sure you would pick up the trail presently.”

“But what worried him?”

“Well, we were both worried. It was so deucedly difficult to reconstruct the affair. Look at it from the lion’s point of view. He is liberated. What does he do? He takes half a dozen bounds forward, which brings him to Ronder. Ronder turns to fly — the claw-marks were on the back of his head — but the lion strikes him down. Then, instead of bounding on and escaping, he returns to the woman, who was close to the cage, and he knocks her over and chews her face up. Then, again, those cries of hers would seem to imply that her husband had in some way failed her. What could the poor devil have done to help her? You see the difficulty?”

“Quite.”

“And then there was another thing. It comes back to me now as I think it over. There was some evidence that just at the time the lion roared and the woman screamed, a man began shouting in terror.”

“This man Ronder, no doubt.”

“Well, if his skull was smashed in you would hardly expect to hear from him again. There were at least two witnesses who spoke of the cries of a man being mingled with those of a woman.”

“I should think the whole camp was crying out by then. As to the other points, I think I could suggest a solution.”

“I should be glad to consider it.”

“The two were together, ten yards from the cage, when the lion got loose. The man turned and was struck down. The woman conceived the idea of getting into the cage and shutting the door. It was her only refuge. She made for it, and just as she reached it the beast bounded after her and knocked her over. She was angry with her husband for having encouraged the beast's rage by turning. If they had faced it they might have cowed it. Hence her cries of 'Coward!'"

"Brilliant, Watson! Only one flaw in your diamond."

"What is the flaw, Holmes?"

"If they were both ten paces from the cage, how came the beast to get loose?"

"Is it possible that they had some enemy who loosed it?"

"And why should it attack them savagely when it was in the habit of playing with them, and doing tricks with them inside the cage?"

"Possibly the same enemy had done something to enrage it."

Holmes looked thoughtful and remained in silence for some moments.

"Well, Watson, there is this to be said for your theory. Ronder was a man of many enemies. Edmunds told me that in his cups he was horrible. A huge bully of a man, he cursed and slashed at everyone who came in his way. I expect those cries about a monster, of which our visitor has spoken, were nocturnal reminiscences of the dear departed. However, our speculations are futile until we have all the facts. There is a cold partridge on the sideboard, Watson, and a bottle of Montrachet. Let us renew our energies before we make a fresh call upon them."

When our hansom deposited us at the house of Mrs. Merrilow, we found that plump lady blocking up the open door of her humble but retired abode. It was very clear that her chief preoccupation was lest she should lose a valuable lodger, and she implored us, before showing us up, to say and do nothing which could lead to so undesirable an end. Then, having reassured her, we followed her up the straight, badly carpeted staircase and were shown into the room of the mysterious lodger.

It was a close, musty, ill-ventilated place, as might be expected, since its inmate seldom left it. From keeping beasts in a cage, the woman seemed, by some retribution of fate, to have become herself a beast in a cage. She sat now in a broken armchair in the shadowy corner of the room. Long years of inaction had coarsened the lines of her figure, but at some period it must have been beautiful, and was still full and voluptuous. A thick dark veil covered her face, but it was cut off close at her upper lip and disclosed a perfectly shaped mouth and a delicately rounded chin. I could well conceive that she had indeed been a very remarkable woman. Her voice, too, was well modulated and pleasing.

"My name is not unfamiliar to you, Mr. Holmes," said she. "I thought that it would bring you."

"That is so, madam, though I do not know how you are aware that I was interested in your case."

"I learned it when I had recovered my health and was examined by Mr. Edmunds, the county detective. I fear I lied to him. Perhaps it would have been wiser had I told the truth."

"It is usually wiser to tell the truth. But why did you lie to him?"

"Because the fate of someone else depended upon it. I know that he was a very worthless being, and yet I would not have his destruction upon my conscience. We had been so close — so close!"

"But has this impediment been removed?"

"Yes, sir. The person that I allude to is dead."

"Then why should you not now tell the police anything you know?"

"Because there is another person to be considered. That other person is myself. I could not stand the scandal and publicity which would come from a police examination. I have not long to live, but I wish to die undisturbed. And yet I wanted to find one man of judgment to whom I could tell my terrible story, so that when I am gone all might be understood."

"You compliment me, madam. At the same time, I am a responsible person. I do not promise you that when you have spoken I may not myself think it my duty to refer the case to the police."

"I think not, Mr. Holmes. I know your character and methods too well, for I have followed your work for some years. Reading is the only pleasure which fate has left me, and I miss little which passes in the world. But in any case, I will take my chance of the use which you may make of my tragedy. It will ease my mind to tell it."

"My friend and I would be glad to hear it."

The woman rose and took from a drawer the photograph of a man. He was clearly a professional acrobat, a man of magnificent physique, taken with his huge arms folded across his swollen chest and a smile breaking from under his heavy moustache — the self-satisfied smile of the man of many conquests.

"That is Leonardo," she said.

"Leonardo, the strong man, who gave evidence?"

“The same. And this — this is my husband.”

It was a dreadful face — a human pig, or rather a human wild boar, for it was formidable in its bestiality. One could imagine that vile mouth champing and foaming in its rage, and one could conceive those small, vicious eyes darting pure malignancy as they looked forth upon the world. Ruffian, bully, beast — it was all written on that heavy-jowled face.

“Those two pictures will help you, gentlemen, to understand the story. I was a poor circus girl brought up on the sawdust, and doing springs through the hoop before I was ten. When I became a woman this man loved me, if such lust as his can be called love, and in an evil moment I became his wife. From that day I was in hell, and he the devil who tormented me. There was no one in the show who did not know of his treatment. He deserted me for others. He tied me down and lashed me with his ridingwhip when I complained. They all pitied me and they all loathed him, but what could they do? They feared him, one and all. For he was terrible at all times, and murderous when he was drunk. Again and again he was had up for assault, and for cruelty to the beasts, but he had plenty of money and the fines were nothing to him. The best men all left us, and the show began to go downhill. It was only Leonardo and I who kept it up — with little Jimmy Griggs, the clown. Poor devil, he had not much to be funny about, but he did what he could to hold things together.

“Then Leonardo came more and more into my life. You see what he was like. I know now the poor spirit that was hidden in that splendid body, but compared to my husband he seemed like the angel Gabriel. He pitied me and helped me, till at last our intimacy turned to love — deep, deep, passionate love, such love as I had dreamed of but never hoped to feel. My husband suspected it, but I think that he was a coward as well as a bully, and that Leonardo was the one man that he was afraid of. He took revenge in his own way by torturing me more than ever. One night my cries brought Leonardo to the door of our van. We were near tragedy that night, and soon my lover and I understood that it could not be avoided. My husband was not fit to live. We planned that he should die.

“Leonardo had a clever, scheming brain. It was he who planned it. I do not say that to blame him, for I was ready to go with him every inch of the way. But I should never have had the wit to think of such a plan. We made a club — Leonardo made it — and in the leaden head he fastened five long steel nails, the points outward, with just such a spread as the lion’s paw.

This was to give my husband his death-blow, and yet to leave the evidence that it was the lion which we would loose who had done the deed.

"It was a pitch-dark night when my husband and I went down, as was our custom, to feed the beast. We carried with us the raw meat in a zinc pail. Leonardo was waiting at the corner of the big van which we should have to pass before we reached the cage. He was too slow, and we walked past him before he could strike, but he followed us on tiptoe and I heard the crash as the club smashed my husband's skull. My heart leaped with joy at the sound. I sprang forward, and I undid the catch which held the door of the great lion's cage.

"And then the terrible thing happened. You may have heard how quick these creatures are to scent human blood, and how it excites them. Some strange instinct had told the creature in one instant that a human being had been slain. As I slipped the bars it bounded out and was on me in an instant. Leonardo could have saved me. If he had rushed forward and struck the beast with his club he might have cowed it. But the man lost his nerve. I heard him shout in his terror, and then I saw him turn and fly. At the same instant the teeth of the lion met in my face. Its hot, filthy breath had already poisoned me and I was hardly conscious of pain. With the palms of my hands I tried to push the great steaming, blood-stained jaws away from me, and I screamed for help. I was conscious that the camp was stirring, and then dimly I remembered a group of men. Leonardo, Griggs, and others, dragging me from under the creature's paws. That was my last memory, Mr. Holmes, for many a weary month. When I came to myself and saw myself in the mirror, I cursed that lion — oh, how I cursed him! — not because he had torn away my beauty but because he had not torn away my life. I had but one desire, Mr. Holmes, and I had enough money to gratify it. It was that I should cover myself so that my poor face should be seen by none, and that I should dwell where none whom I had ever known should find me. That was all that was left to me to do — and that is what I have done. A poor wounded beast that has crawled into its hole to die — that is the end of Eugenia Ronder."

We sat in silence for some time after the unhappy woman had told her story. Then Holmes stretched out his long arm and patted her hand with such a show of sympathy as I had seldom known him to exhibit.

"Poor girl!" he said. "Poor girl! The ways of fate are indeed hard to understand. If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is a cruel jest. But what of this man Leonardo?”

“I never saw him or heard from him again. Perhaps I have been wrong to feel so bitterly against him. He might as soon have loved one of the freaks whom we carried round the country as the thing which the lion had left. But a woman’s love is not so easily set aside. He had left me under the beast’s claws, he had deserted me in my need, and yet I could not bring myself to give him to the gallows. For myself, I cared nothing what became of me. What could be more dreadful than my actual life? But I stood between Leonardo and his fate.”

“And he is dead?”

“He was drowned last month when bathing near Margate. I saw his death in the paper.”

“And what did he do with this five-clawed club, which is the most singular and ingenious part of all your story?”

“I cannot tell, Mr. Holmes. There is a chalk-pit by the camp, with a deep green pool at the base of it. Perhaps in the depths of that pool—”

“Well, well, it is of little consequence now. The case is closed.”

“Yes,” said the woman, “the case is closed.”

We had risen to go, but there was something in the woman’s voice which arrested Holmes’s attention. He turned swiftly upon her.

“Your life is not your own,” he said. “Keep your hands off it.”

“What use is it to anyone?”

“How can you tell? The example of patient suffering is in itself the most precious of all lessons to an impatient world.”

The woman’s answer was a terrible one. She raised her veil and stepped forward into the light.

“I wonder if you would bear it,” she said.

It was horrible. No words can describe the framework of a face when the face itself is gone. Two living and beautiful brown eyes looking sadly out from that grisly ruin did but make the view more awful. Holmes held up his hand in a gesture of pity and protest, and together we left the room.

Two days later, when I called upon my friend, he pointed with some pride to a small blue bottle upon his mantelpiece. I picked it up. There was a red poison label. A pleasant almondy odour rose when I opened it.

“Prussic acid?” said I.

“Exactly. It came by post. ‘I send you my temptation. I will follow your advice.’ That was the message. I think, Watson, we can guess the name of the brave woman who sent it.”

ADVENTURE XII. THE ADVENTURE OF SHOSCOMBE OLD PLACE

Sherlock Holmes had been bending for a long time over a low-power microscope. Now he straightened himself up and looked round at me in triumph.

“It is glue, Watson,” said he. “Unquestionably it is glue. Have a look at these scattered objects in the field!”

I stooped to the eyepiece and focussed for my vision.

“Those hairs are threads from a tweed coat. The irregular gray masses are dust. There are epithelial scales on the left. Those brown blobs in the centre are undoubtedly glue.”

“Well,” I said, laughing, “I am prepared to take your word for it. Does anything depend upon it?”

“It is a very fine demonstration,” he answered. “In the St. Pancras case you may remember that a cap was found beside the dead policeman. The accused man denies that it is his. But he is a picture-frame maker who habitually handles glue.”

“Is it one of your cases?”

“No; my friend, Merivale, of the Yard, asked me to look into the case. Since I ran down that coiner by the zinc and copper filings in the seam of his cuff they have begun to realise the importance of the microscope.” He looked impatiently at his watch. “I had a new client calling, but he is overdue. By the way, Watson, you know something of racing?”

“I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension.”

“Then I’ll make you my ‘Handy Guide to the Turf.’ What about Sir Robert Norberton? Does the name recall anything?”

“Well, I should say so. He lives at Shoscombe Old Place, and I know it well, for my summer quarters were down there once. Norberton nearly came within your province once.”

“How was that?”

“It was when he horsewhipped Sam Brewer, the well-known Curzon Street money-lender, on Newmarket Heath. He nearly killed the man.”

“Ah, he sounds interesting! Does he often indulge in that way?”

"Well, he has the name of being a dangerous man. He is about the most daredevil rider in England — second in the Grand National a few years back. He is one of those men who have overshot their true generation. He should have been a buck in the days of the Regency — a boxer, an athlete, a plunger on the turf, a lover of fair ladies, and, by all account, so far down Queer Street that he may never find his way back again."

"Capital, Watson! A thumb-nail sketch. I seem to know the man. Now, can you give me some idea of Shoscombe Old Place?"

"Only that it is in the centre of Shoscombe Park, and that the famous Shoscombe stud and training quarters are to be found there."

"And the head trainer," said Holmes, "is John Mason. You need not look surprised at my knowledge, Watson, for this is a letter from him which I am unfolding. But let us have some more about Shoscombe. I seem to have struck a rich vein."

"There are the Shoscombe spaniels," said I. "You hear of them at every dog show. The most exclusive breed in England. They are the special pride of the lady of Shoscombe Old Place."

"Sir Robert Norberton's wife, I presume!"

"Sir Robert has never married. Just as well, I think, considering his prospects. He lives with his widowed sister, Lady Beatrice Falder."

"You mean that she lives with him?"

"No, no. The place belonged to her late husband, Sir James. Norberton has no claim on it at all. It is only a life interest and reverts to her husband's brother. Meantime, she draws the rents every year."

"And brother Robert, I suppose, spends the said rents?"

"That is about the size of it. He is a devil of a fellow and must lead her a most uneasy life. Yet I have heard that she is devoted to him. But what is amiss at Shoscombe?"

"Ah, that is just what I want to know. And here, I expect, is the man who can tell us."

The door had opened and the page had shown in a tall, clean-shaven man with the firm, austere expression which is only seen upon those who have to control horses or boys. Mr. John Mason had many of both under his sway, and he looked equal to the task. He bowed with cold self-possession and seated himself upon the chair to which Holmes had waved him.

"You had my note, Mr. Holmes?"

"Yes, but it explained nothing."

“It was too delicate a thing for me to put the details on paper. And too complicated. It was only face to face I could do it.”

“Well, we are at your disposal.”

“First of all, Mr. Holmes, I think that my employer, Sir Robert, has gone mad.”

Holmes raised his eyebrows. “This is Baker Street, not Harley Street,” said he. “But why do you say so?”

“Well, sir, when a man does one queer thing, or two queer things, there may be a meaning to it, but when everything he does is queer, then you begin to wonder. I believe Shoscombe Prince and the Derby have turned his brain.”

“That is a colt you are running?”

“The best in England, Mr. Holmes. I should know, if anyone does. Now, I’ll be plain with you, for I know you are gentlemen of honour and that it won’t go beyond the room. Sir Robert has got to win this Derby. He’s up to the neck, and it’s his last chance. Everything he could raise or borrow is on the horse — and at fine odds, too! You can get forties now, but it was nearer the hundred when he began to back him.”

“But how is that if the horse is so good?”

“The public don’t know how good he is. Sir Robert has been too clever for the touts. He has the Prince’s half-brother out for spins. You can’t tell ‘em apart. But there are two lengths in a furlong between them when it comes to a gallop. He thinks of nothing but the horse and the race. His whole life is on it. He’s holding off the Jews till then. If the Prince fails him he is done.”

“It seems a rather desperate gamble, but where does the madness come in?”

“Well, first of all, you have only to look at him. I don’t believe he sleeps at night. He is down at the stables at all hours. His eyes are wild. It has all been too much for his nerves. Then there is his conduct to Lady Beatrice!”

“Ah! What is that?”

“They have always been the best of friends. They had the same tastes, the two of them, and she loved the horses as much as he did. Every day at the same hour she would drive down to see them — and, above all, she loved the Prince. He would prick up his ears when he heard the wheels on the gravel, and he would trot out each morning to the carriage to get his lump of sugar. But that’s all over now.”

"Why?"

"Well, she seems to have lost all interest in the horses. For a week now she has driven past the stables with never so much as 'Good-morning'!"

"You think there has been a quarrel?"

"And a bitter, savage, spitelful quarrel at that. Why else would he give away her pet spaniel that she loved as if he were her child? He gave it a few days ago to old Barnes, what keeps the Green Dragon, three miles off, at Crendall."

"That certainly did seem strange."

"Of course, with her weak heart and dropsy one couldn't expect that she could get about with him, but he spent two hours every evening in her room. He might well do what he could, for she has been a rare good friend to him. But that's all over, too. He never goes near her. And she takes it to heart. She is brooding and sulky and drinking, Mr. Holmes — drinking like a fish."

"Did she drink before this estrangement?"

"Well, she took her glass, but now it is often a whole bottle of an evening. So Stephens, the butler, told me. It's all changed, Mr. Holmes, and there is something damned rotten about it. But then, again, what is master doing down at the old church crypt at night? And who is the man that meets him there?"

Holmes rubbed his hands.

"Go on, Mr. Mason. You get more and more interesting."

"It was the butler who saw him go. Twelve o'clock at night and raining hard. So next night I was up at the house and, sure enough, master was off again. Stephens and I went after him, but it was jumpy work, for it would have been a bad job if he had seen us. He's a terrible man with his fists if he gets started, and no respecter of persons. So we were shy of getting too near, but we marked him down all light. It was the haunted crypt that he was making for, and there was a man waiting for him there."

"What is this haunted cryp?"

"Well, sir, there is an old ruined chapel in the park. It is so old that nobody could fix its date. And under it there's a crypt which has a bad name among us. It's a dark, damp, lonely place by day, but there are few in that county that would have the nerve to go near it at night. But master's not afraid. He never feared anything in his life. But what is he doing there in the night-time?"

“Wait a bit!” said Holmes. “You say there is another man there. It must be one of your own stablemen, or someone from the house! Surely you have only to spot who it is and question him?”

“It’s no one I know.”

“How can you say that?”

“Because I have seen him, Mr. Holmes. It was on that second night. Sir Robert turned and passed us — me and Stephens, quaking in the bushes like two bunny-rabbits, for there was a bit of moon that night. But we could hear the other moving about behind. We were not afraid of him. So we up when Sir Robert was gone and pretended we were just having a walk like in the moonlight, and so we came right on him as casual and innocent as you please. ‘Hullo, mate! who may you be?’ says I. I guess he had not heard us coming, so he looked over his shoulder with a face as if he had seen the devil coming out of hell. He let out a yell, and away he went as hard as he could lick it in the darkness. He could run! — I’ll give him that. In a minute he was out of sight and hearing, and who he was, or what he was, we never found.”

“But you saw him clearly in the moonlight?”

“Yes, I would swear to his yellow face — a mean dog, I should say. What could he have in common with Sir Robert?”

Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

“Who keeps Lady Beatrice Falder company?” he asked at last.

“There is her maid, Carrie Evans. She has been with her this five years.”

“And is, no doubt, devoted?”

Mr. Mason shuffled uncomfortably.

“She’s devoted enough,” he answered at last. “But I won’t say to whom.”

“Ah!” said Holmes.

“I can’t tell tales out of school.”

“I quite understand, Mr. Mason. Of course, the situation is clear enough. From Dr. Watson’s description of Sir Robert I can realise that no woman is safe from him. Don’t you think the quarrel between brother and sister may lie there?”

“Well, the scandal has been pretty clear for a long time.”

“But she may not have seen it before. Let us suppose that she has suddenly found it out. She wants to get rid of the woman. Her brother will not permit it. The invalid, with her weak heart and inability to get about, has no means of enforcing her will. The hated maid is still tied to her. The lady refuses to speak, sulks, takes to drink. Sir Robert in his anger takes her pet spaniel away from her. Does not all this hang together?"

"Well, it might do — so far as it goes."

"Exactly! As far as it goes. How would all that bear upon the visits by night to the old crypt? We can't fit that into our plot."

"No, sir, and there is something more that I can't fit in. Why should Sir Robert want to dig up a dead body?"

Holmes sat up abruptly.

"We only found it out yesterday — after I had written to you. Yesterday Sir Robert had gone to London, so Stephens and I went down to the crypt. It was all in order, sir, except that in one corner was a bit of a human body."

"You informed the police, I suppose?"

Our visitor smiled grimly.

"Well, sir, I think it would hardly interest them. It was just the head and a few bones of a mummy. It may have been a thousand years old. But it wasn't there before. That I'll swear, and so will Stephens. It had been stowed away in a corner and covered over with a board, but that corner had always been empty before."

"What did you do with it?"

"Well, we just left it there."

"That was wise. You say Sir Robert was away yesterday. Has he returned?"

"We expect him back to-day."

"When did Sir Robert give away his sister's dog?"

"It was just a week ago to-day. The creature was howling outside the old wellhouse, and Sir Robert was in one of his tantrums that morning. He caught it up, and I thought he would have killed it. Then he gave it to Sandy Bain, the jockey, and told him to take the dog to old Barnes at the Green Dragon, for he never wished to see it again."

Holmes sat for some time in silent thought. He had lit the oldest and foulest of his pipes.

"I am not clear yet what you want me to do in this matter, Mr. Mason," he said at last. "Can't you make it more definite?"

"Perhaps this will make it more definite, Mr. Holmes," said our visltor.

He took a paper from his pocket, and, unwrapping it carefully, he exposed a charred fragment of bone.

Holmes examined it with interest.

"Where did you get it?"

"There is a central heating furnace in the cellar under Lady Beatrice's room. It's been off for some time, but Sir Robert complained of cold and had it on again.

"Harvey runs it — he's one of my lads. This very morning he came to me with this which he found raking out the cinders. He didn't like the look of it."

"Nor do I," said Holmes. "What do you make of it, Watson?"

It was burned to a black cinder, but there could be no question as to its anatomical significance.

"It's the upper condyle of a human femur," said I.

"Exactly!" Holmes had become very serious. "When does this lad tend to the furnace?"

"He makes it up every evening and then leaves it."

"Then anyone could visit it during the night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you enter it from outside?"

"There is one door from outside. There is another which leads up by a stair to the passage in which Lady Beatrice's room is situated."

"These are deep waters, Mr. Mason; deep and rather dirty. You say that Sir Robert was not at home last night?"

"No, sir."

"Then, whoever was burning bones, it was not he."

"That's true. sir."

"What is the name of that inn you spoke of?"

"The Green Dragon."

"Is there good fishing in that part of Berkshire?" The honest trainer showed very clearly upon his face that he was convinced that yet another lunatic had come into his harassed life.

"Well, sir, I've heard there are trout in the mill-stream and pike in the Hall lake."

"That's good enough. Watson and I are famous fishermen — are we not, Watson? You may address us in future at the Green Dragon. We should reach it to-night. I need not say that we don't want to see you, Mr. Mason, but a note will reach us, and no doubt I could find you if I want you. When we have gone a little farther into the matter I will let you have a considered opinion."

Thus it was that on a bright May evening Holmes and I found ourselves alone in a first-class carriage and bound for the little “halt-on-demand” station of Shoscombe. The rack above us was covered with a formidable litter of rods, reels, and baskets. On reaching our destination a short drive took us to an old-fashioned tavern, where a sporting host, Josiah Barnes, entered eagerly into our plans for the extirpation of the fish of the neighbourhood.

“What about the Hall lake and the chance of a pike?” said Holmes.

The face of the innkeeper clouded.

“That wouldn’t do, sir. You might chance to find yourself in the lake before you were through.”

“How’s that, then?”

“It’s Sir Robert, sir. He’s terrible jealous of touts. If you two strangers were as near his training quarters as that he’d be after you as sure as fate. He ain’t taking no chances, Sir Robert ain’t.”

“I’ve heard he has a horse entered for the Derby.”

“Yes, and a good colt, too. He carries all our money for the race, and all Sir Robert’s into the bargain. By the way” — he looked at us with thoughtful eyes—”I suppose you ain’t on the turf yourselves?”

“No, indeed. Just two weary Londoners who badly need some good Berkshire air.”

“Well, you are in the right place for that. There is a deal of it lying about. But mind what I have told you about Sir Robert. He’s the sort that strikes first and speaks afterwards. Keep clear of the park.”

“Surely, Mr. Barnes! We certainly shall. By the way, that was a most beautiful spaniel that was whining in the hall.”

“I should say it was. That was the real Shoscombe breed. There ain’t a better in England.”

“I am a dog-fancier myself,” said Holmes. “Now, if it is a fair question, what would a prize dog like that cost?”

“More than I could pay, sir. It was Sir Robert himself who gave me this one. That’s why I have to keep it on a lead. It would be off to the Hall in a jiffy if I gave it its head.”

“We are getting some cards in our hand, Watson,” said Holmes when the landlord had left us. “It’s not an easy one to play, but we may see our way in a day or two. By the way, Sir Robert is still in London, I hear. We might, perhaps, enter the sacred domain to-night without fear of bodily assault. There are one or two points on which I should like reassurance."

"Have you any theory, Holmes?"

"Only this, Watson, that something happened a week or so ago which has cut deep into the life of the Shoscombe household. What is that something? We can only guess at it from its effects. They seem to be of a curiously mixed character. But that should surely help us. It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless.

"Let us consider our data. The brother no longer visits the beloved invalid sister. He gives away her favourite dog. Her dog, Watson! Does that suggest nothing to you?"

"Nothing but the brother's spite."

"Well, it might be so. Or — well, there is an alternative. Now to continue our review of the situation from the time that the quarrel, if there is a quarrel, began. The lady keeps her room, alters her habits, is not seen save when she drives out with her maid, refuses to stop at the stables to greet her favourite horse and apparently takes to drink. That covers the case, does it not?"

"Save for the business in the crypt."

"That is another line of thought. There are two, and I beg you will not tangle them. Line A, which concerns Lady Beatrice, has a vaguely sinister flavour, has it not?"

"I can make nothing of it."

"Well, now, let us take up line B, which concerns Sir Robert. He is mad keen upon winning the Derby. He is in the hands of the Jews, and may at any moment be sold up and his racing stables seized by his creditors. He is a daring and desperate man. He derives his income from his sister. His sister's maid is his willing tool. So far we seem to be on fairly safe ground, do we not?"

"But the crypt?"

"Ah, yes, the crypt! Let us suppose, Watson — it is merely a scandalous supposition, a hypothesis put forward for argument's sake — that Sir Robert has done away with his sister."

"My dear Holmes, it is out of the question."

"Very possibly, Watson. Sir Robert is a man of an honourable stock. But you do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles. Let us for a moment argue upon this supposition. He could not fly the country until he had realised his fortune, and that fortune could only be realised by bringing off this coup with Shoscombe Prince. Therefore, he has still to stand his ground. To do this he would have to dispose of the body of his victim, and he would also have to find a substitute who would impersonate her. With the maid as his confidante that would not be impossible. The woman's body might be conveyed to the crypt, which is a place so seldom visited, and it might be secretly destroyed at night in the furnace, leaving behind it such evidence as we have already seen. What say you to that, Watson?"

"Well, it is all possible if you grant the original monstrous supposition."

"I think that there is a small experiment which we may try to-morrow, Watson, in order to throw some light on the matter. Meanwhile, if we mean to keep up our characters, I suggest that we have our host in for a glass of his own wine and hold some high converse upon eels and dace, which seems to be the straight road to his affections. We may chance to come upon some useful local gossip in the process."

In the morning Holmes discovered that we had come without our spoon-bait for jack, which absolved us from fishing for the day. About eleven o'clock we started for a walk, and he obtained leave to take the black spaniel with us.

"This is the place," said he as we came to two high park gates with heraldic griffins towering above them. "About midday, Mr Barnes informs me, the old lady takes a drive, and the carriage must slow down while the gates are opened. When it comes through, and before it gathers speed, I want you, Watson, to stop the coachman with some question. Never mind me. I shall stand behind this holly-bush and see what I can see."

It was not a long vigil. Within a quarter of an hour we saw the big open yellow barouche coming down the long avenue, with two splendid, high-stepping gray carriage horses in the shafts. Holmes crouched behind his bush with the dog. I stood unconcemedly swinging a cane in the roadway. A keeper ran out and the gates swung open.

The carriage had slowed to a walk, and I was able to get a good look at the occupants. A highly coloured young woman with flaxen hair and impudent eyes sat on the left. At her right was an elderly person with rounded back and a huddle of shawls about her face and shoulders which proclaimed the invalid. When the horses reached the highroad I held up my hand with an authoritative gesture, and as the coachman pulled up I inquired if Sir Robert was at Shoscombe Old Place.

At the same moment Holmes stepped out and released the spaniel. With a joyous cry it dashed forward to the carriage and sprang upon the step. Then in a moment its eager greeting changed to furious rage, and it snapped at the black skirt above it.

"Drive on! Drive on!" shrieked a harsh voice. The coachman lashed the horses, and we were left standing in the roadway.

"Well, Watson, that's done it," said Holmes as he fastened the lead to the neck of the excited spaniel. "He thought it was his mistress, and he found it was a stranger. Dogs don't make mistakes."

"But it was the voice of a man!" I cried.

"Exactly! We have added one card to our hand, Watson, but it needs careful playing, all the same."

My companion seemed to have no further plans for the day, and we did actually use our fishing tackle in the mill-stream with the result that we had a dish of trout for our supper. It was only after that meal that Holmes showed signs of renewed activity. Once more we found ourselves upon the same road as in the morning, which led us to the park gates. A tall, dark figure was awaiting us there, who proved to be our London acquaintance, Mr. John Mason, the trainer.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said he. "I got your note, Mr. Holmes. Sir Robert has not returned yet, but I hear that he is expected to-night."

"How far is this crypt from the house?" asked Holmes.

"A good quarter of a mile."

"Then I think we can disregard him altogether."

"I can't afford to do that, Mr. Holmes. The moment he arrives he will want to see me to get the last news of Shoscombe Prince."

"I see! In that case we must work without you, Mr. Mason. You can show us the crypt and then leave us."

It was pitch-dark and without a moon, but Mason led us over the grasslands until a dark mass loomed up in front of us which proved to be the ancient chapel. We entered the broken gap which was once the porch, and our guide, stumbling among heaps of loose masonry, picked his way to the corner of the building, where a steep stair led down into the crypt. Striking a match, he illuminated the melancholy place — dismal and evil-smelling, with ancient crumbling walls of rough-hewn stone, and piles of coffins, some of lead and some of stone, extending upon one side right up to the arched and groined roof which lost itself in the shadows above our heads.

Holmes had lit his lantern, which shot a tiny tunnel of vivid yellow light upon the mournful scene. Its rays were reflected back from the coffin-plates, many of them adorned with the griffin and coronet of this old family which carried its honours even to the gate of Death.

“You spoke of some bones, Mr. Mason. Could you show them before you go?”

“They are here in this corner.” The trainer strode across and then stood in silent surprise as our light was turned upon the place. “They are gone,” said he.

“So I expected,” said Holmes, chuckling. “I fancy the ashes of them might even now be found in that oven which had already consumed a part.”

“But why in the world would anyone want to burn the bones of a man who has been dead a thousand years?” asked John Mason.

“That is what we are here to find out,” said Holmes. “It may mean a long search, and we need not detain you. I fancy that we shall get our solution before morning.”

When John Mason had left us, Holmes set to work making a very careful examination of the graves, ranging from a very ancient one, which appeared to be Saxon, in the centre, through a long line of Norman Hugos and Odos, until we reached the Sir William and Sir Denis Falder of the eighteenth century. It was an hour or more before Holmes came to a leaden coffin standing on end before the entrance to the vault. I heard his little cry of satisfaction and was aware from his hurried but purposeful movements that he had reached a goal. With his lens he was eagerly examining the edges of the heavy lid. Then he drew from his pocket a short jemmy, a box-opener, which he thrust into a chink, levering back the whole front, which seemed to be secured by only a couple of clamps. There was a rending, tearing sound as it gave way, but it had hardly hinged back and partly revealed the contents before we had an unforeseen interruption.

Someone was walking in the chapel above. It was the firm, rapid step of one who came with a definite purpose and knew well the ground upon which he walked. A light streamed down the stairs, and an instant later the man who bore it was framed in the Gothic archway. He was a terrible figure, huge in stature and fierce in manner. A large stable-lantern which he held in front of him shone upward upon a strong, heavily moustached face and angry eyes, which glared round him into every recess of the vault, finally fixing themselves with a deadly stare upon my companion and myself.

"Who the devil are you?" he thundered. "And what are you doing upon my property?" Then, as Holmes returned no answer he took a couple of steps forward and raised a heavy stick which he carried. "Do you hear me?" he cried. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" His cudgel quivered in the air.

But instead of shrinking Holmes advanced to meet him.

"I also have a question to ask you, Sir Robert," he said in his sternest tone. "Who is this? And what is it doing here?"

He turned and tore open the coffin-lid behind him. In the glare of the lantern I saw a body swathed in a sheet from head to foot with dreadful, witch-like features, all nose and chin, projecting at one end, the dim, glazed eyes staring from a discoloured and crumbling face.

The baronet had staggered back with a cry and supported himself against a stone sarcophagus.

"How came you to know of this?" he cried. And then, with some return of his truculent manner: "What business is it of yours?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes," said my companion. "Possibly it is familiar to you. In any case, my business is that of every other good citizen — to uphold the law. It seems to me that you have much to answer for."

Sir Robert glared for a moment, but Holmes's quiet voice and cool, assured manner had their effect.

"'Fore God, Mr. Holmes, it's all right," said he. "Appearances are against me, I'll admit, but I could act no otherwise."

"I should be happy to think so, but I fear your explanations must be before the police."

Sir Robert shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Well, if it must be, it must. Come up to the house and you can judge for yourself how the matter stands."

A quarter of an hour later we found ourselves in what I judge, from the lines of polished barrels behind glass covers, to be the gun-room of the old house. It was comfortably furnished, and here Sir Robert left us for a few moments. When he returned he had two companions with him; the one, the florid young woman whom we had seen in the carriage; the other, a small rat-faced man with a disagreeably furtive manner. These two wore an appearance of utter bewilderment, which showed that the baronet had not yet had time to explain to them the turn events had taken.

“There,” said Sir Robert with a wave of his hand, “are Mr. and Mrs. Norlett. Mrs. Norlett, under her maiden name of Evans, has for some years been my sister’s confidential maid. I have brought them here because I feel that my best course is to explain the true position to you, and they are the two people upon earth who can substantiate what I say.”

“Is this necessary, Sir Robert? Have you thought what you are doing?” cried the woman.

“As to me, I entirely disclaim all responsibility,” said her husband.

Sir Robert gave him a glance of contempt. “I will take all responsibility,” said he. “Now, Mr. Holmes, listen to a plain statement of the facts.

“You have clearly gone pretty deeply into my affairs or I should not have found you where I did. Therefore, you know already, in all probability, that I am running a dark horse for the Derby and that everything depends upon my success. If I win, all is easy. If I lose — well, I dare not think of that!”

“I understand the position,” said Holmes.

“I am dependent upon my sister, Lady Beatrice, for everything. But it is well known that her interest in the estate is for her own life only. For myself, I am deeply in the hands of the Jews. I have always known that if my sister were to die my creditors would be on to my estate like a flock of vultures. Everything would be seized — my stables, my horses — everything. Well, Mr. Holmes, my sister did die just a week ago.”

“And you told no one!”

“What could I do? Absolute ruin faced me. If I could stave things off for three weeks all would be well. Her maid’s husband — this man here — is an actor. It came into our heads — it came into my head — that he could for that short period personate my sister. It was but a case of appearing daily in the carriage, for no one need enter her room save the maid. It was not difficult to arrange. My sister died of the dropsy which had long afflicted her.”

“That will be for a coroner to decide.”

“Her doctor would certify that for months her symptoms have threatened such an end.”

“Well, what did you do?”

“The body could not remain there. On the first night Norlett and I carried it out to the old well-house, which is now never used. We were followed, however, by her pet spaniel, which yapped continually at the door, so I felt some safer place was needed. I got rid of the spaniel, and we carried the body to the crypt of the church. There was no indignity or irreverence, Mr. Holmes. I do not feel that I have wronged the dead."

"Your conduct seems to me inexcusable, Sir Robert."

The baronet shook his head impatiently. "It is easy to preach," said he. "Perhaps you would have felt differently if you had been in my position. One cannot see all one's hopes and all one's plans shattered at the last moment and make no effort to save them. It seemed to me that it would be no unworthy resting-place if we put her for the time in one of the coffins of her husband's ancestors lying in what is still consecrated ground. We opened such a coffin, removed the contents, and placed her as you have seen her. As to the old relics which we took out, we could not leave them on the floor of the crypt. Norlett and I removed them, and he descended at night and burned them in the central furnace. There is my story, Mr. Holmes, though how you forced my hand so that I have to tell it is more than I can say."

Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

"There is one flaw in your narrative, Sir Robert," he said at last. "Your bets on the race, and therefore your hopes for the future, would hold good even if your creditors seized your estate."

"The horse would be part of the estate. What do they care for my bets? As likely as not they would not run him at all. My chief creditor is, unhappily, my most bitter enemy — a rascally fellow, Sam Brewer, whom I was once compelled to horsewhip on Newmarket Heath. Do you suppose that he would try to save me?"

"Well, Sir Robert," said Holmes, rising, "this matter must, of course, be referred to the police. It was my duty to bring the facts to light, and there I must leave it. As to the morality or decency of your conduct, it is not for me to express an opinion. It is nearly midnight, Watson, and I think we may make our way back to our humble abode."

It is generally known now that this singular episode ended upon a happier note than Sir Robert's actions deserved. Shoscombe Prince did win the Derby, the sporting owner did net eighty thousand pounds in bets, and the creditors did hold their hand until the race was over, when they were paid in full, and enough was left to reestablish Sir Robert in a fair position in life. Both police and coroner took a lenient view of the transaction, and beyond a mild censure for the delay in registering the lady’s decease, the lucky owner got away scatheless from this strange incident in a career which has now outlived its shadows and promises to end in an honoured old age.

THE END

The Sherlock Holmes Stories

In order of publication:

A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA
THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE
A CASE OF IDENTITY
THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY
THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS
THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED LIP
THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE
THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND
THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENGINEER’S THUMB
THE ADVENTURE OF THE NOBLE BACHELOR
THE ADVENTURE OF THE BERYL CORONET
THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES
ADVENTURE I. SILVER BLAZE
ADVENTURE II. THE YELLOW FACE
ADVENTURE III. THE STOCK-BROKER’S CLERK
ADVENTURE IV. THE “*GLORIA SCOTT*”
ADVENTURE V. THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL
ADVENTURE VI. THE REIGATE PUZZLE
ADVENTURE VII. THE CROOKED MAN
ADVENTURE VIII. THE RESIDENT PATIENT
ADVENTURE IX. THE GREEK INTERPRETER
ADVENTURE X. THE NAVAL TREATY
ADVENTURE XI. THE FINAL PROBLEM
THE ADVENTURE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE ADVENTURE OF THE NORWOOD BUILDER
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ADVENTURE V. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE GARRIDEBS
ADVENTURE VI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS CLIENT
ADVENTURE VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLANCHED SOLDIER
ADVENTURE VIII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE RETIRED COLOURMAN
ADVENTURE IX. THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE GABLES
ADVENTURE X. THE ADVENTURE OF THE LION’S MANE
ADVENTURE XI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE VEILED LODGER
ADVENTURE XII. THE ADVENTURE OF SHOSCOMBE OLD PLACE

The Challenger Works

Conan Doyle dressed as the character Professor Challenger

THE LOST WORLD

This novel was published in 1912 and tells the story of an expedition to South America, where prehistoric animals still survive. It was originally published serially in the popular Strand Magazine during the months of April 1912-November 1912. The character of Professor Challenger was introduced in this novel.

THE LOST WORLD
BY A. CONAN DOYLE

The first edition

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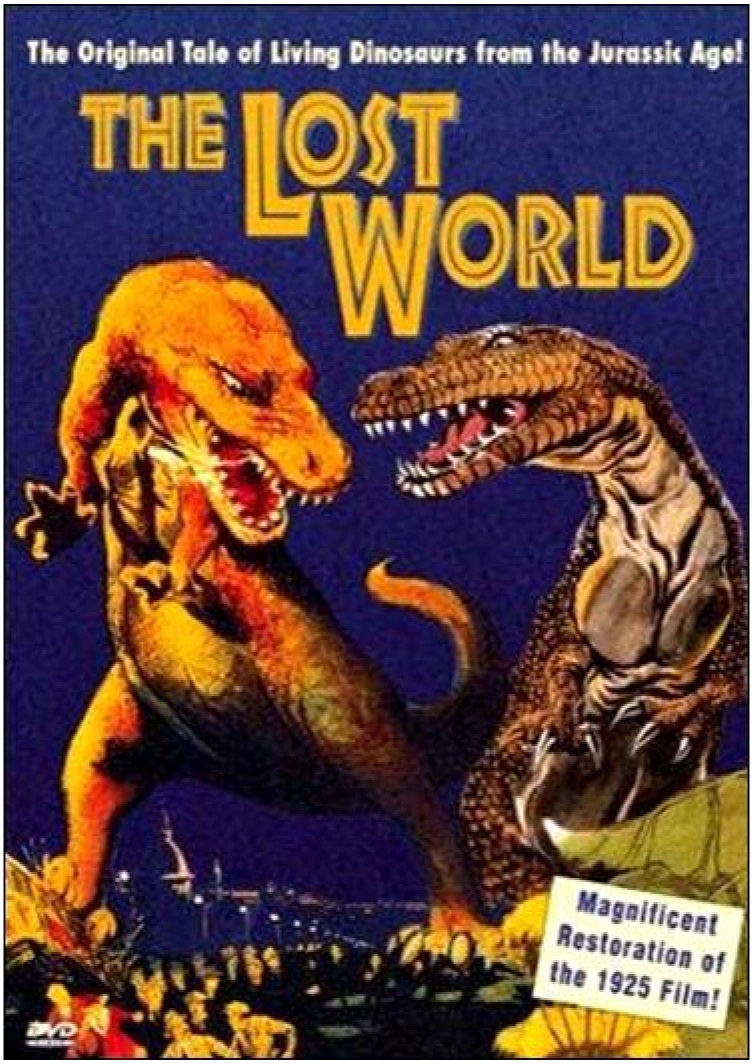
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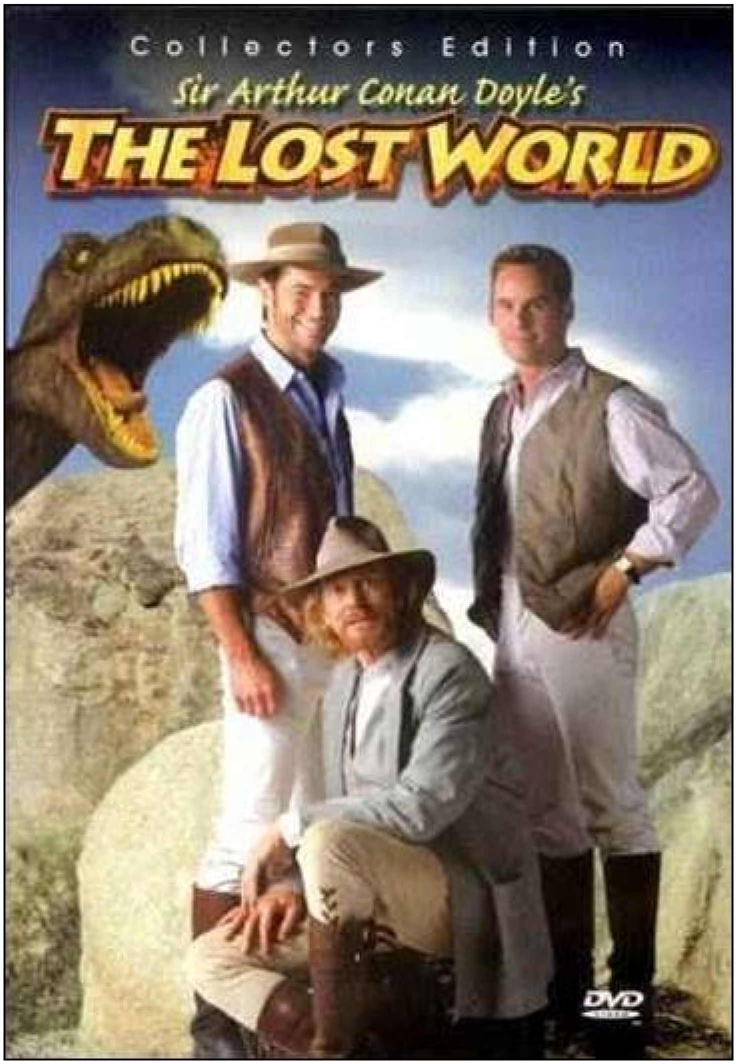
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THE LOST WORLD

I have wrought my simple plan
    If I give one hour of joy
To the boy who’s half a man,
    Or the man who’s half a boy.

CHAPTER I

“There Are Heroisms All Round Us”

Mr. Hungerton, her father, really was the most tactless person upon earth, — a fluffy, feathery, untidy cockatoo of a man, perfectly good-natured, but absolutely centered upon his own silly self. If anything could have driven me from Gladys, it would have been the thought of such a father-in-law. I am convinced that he really believed in his heart that I came round to the Chestnuts three days a week for the pleasure of his company, and very especially to hear his views upon bimetallism, a subject upon which he was by way of being an authority.

For an hour or more that evening I listened to his monotonous chirrup about bad money driving out good, the token value of silver, the depreciation of the rupee, and the true standards of exchange.

“Suppose,” he cried with feeble violence, “that all the debts in the world were called up simultaneously, and immediate payment insisted upon, — what under our present conditions would happen then?”

I gave the self-evident answer that I should be a ruined man, upon which he jumped from his chair, reproved me for my habitual levity, which made it impossible for him to discuss any reasonable subject in my presence, and bounced off out of the room to dress for a Masonic meeting.

At last I was alone with Gladys, and the moment of Fate had come! All that evening I had felt like the soldier who awaits the signal which will send him on a forlorn hope; hope of victory and fear of repulse alternating in his mind.

She sat with that proud, delicate profile of hers outlined against the red curtain. How beautiful she was! And yet how aloof! We had been friends, quite good friends; but never could I get beyond the same comradeship which I might have established with one of my fellow-reporters upon the Gazette, — perfectly frank, perfectly kindly, and perfectly unsexual. My instincts are all against a woman being too frank and at her ease with me. It is no compliment to a man. Where the real sex feeling begins, timidity and distrust are its companions, heritage from old wicked days when love and violence went often hand in hand. The bent head, the averted eye, the faltering voice, the wincing figure — these, and not the unshrinking gaze and frank reply, are the true signals of passion. Even in my short life I had learned as much as that — or had inherited it in that race memory which we call instinct.

Gladys was full of every womanly quality. Some judged her to be cold and hard; but such a thought was treason. That delicately bronzed skin, almost oriental in its colouring, that raven hair, the large liquid eyes, the full but exquisite lips, — all the stigmata of passion were there. But I was sadly conscious that up to now I had never found the secret of drawing it forth. However, come what might, I should have done with suspense and bring matters to a head to-night. She could but refuse me, and better be a repulsed lover than an accepted brother.

So far my thoughts had carried me, and I was about to break the long and uneasy silence, when two critical, dark eyes looked round at me, and the proud head was shaken in smiling reproof. “I have a presentiment that you are going to propose, Ned. I do wish you wouldn’t; for things are so much nicer as they are.”

I drew my chair a little nearer. “Now, how did you know that I was going to propose?” I asked in genuine wonder.

“Don’t women always know? Do you suppose any woman in the world was ever taken unawares? But — oh, Ned, our friendship has been so good and so pleasant! What a pity to spoil it! Don’t you feel how splendid it is that a young man and a young woman should be able to talk face to face as we have talked?”

“I don’t know, Gladys. You see, I can talk face to face with — with the station-master.” I can’t imagine how that official came into the matter; but in he trotted, and set us both laughing. “That does not satisfy me in the least. I want my arms round you, and your head on my breast, and — oh, Gladys, I want — —”

She had sprung from her chair, as she saw signs that I proposed to demonstrate some of my wants. “You’ve spoiled everything, Ned,” she said. “It’s all so beautiful and natural until this kind of thing comes in! It is such a pity! Why can’t you control yourself?”

“I didn’t invent it,” I pleaded. “It’s nature. It’s love.”

“Well, perhaps if both love, it may be different. I have never felt it.”

“But you must — you, with your beauty, with your soul! Oh, Gladys, you were made for love! You must love!”

“One must wait till it comes.”

“But why can’t you love me, Gladys? Is it my appearance, or what?”

She did unbend a little. She put forward a hand — such a gracious, stooping attitude it was — and she pressed back my head. Then she looked into my upturned face with a very wistful smile.

“No it isn’t that,” she said at last. “You’re not a conceited boy by nature, and so I can safely tell you it is not that. It’s deeper.”

“My character?”

She nodded severely.

“What can I do to mend it? Do sit down and talk it over. No, really, I won’t if you’ll only sit down!”

She looked at me with a wondering distrust which was much more to my mind than her whole-hearted confidence. How primitive and bestial it looks when you put it down in black and white! — and perhaps after all it is only a feeling peculiar to myself. Anyhow, she sat down.

“Now tell me what’s amiss with me?”

“I’m in love with somebody else,” said she.

It was my turn to jump out of my chair.

“It’s nobody in particular,” she explained, laughing at the expression of my face: “only an ideal. I’ve never met the kind of man I mean.”

“Tell me about him. What does he look like?”

“Oh, he might look very much like you.”

“How dear of you to say that! Well, what is it that he does that I don’t do? Just say the word, — teetotal, vegetarian, aeronaut, theosophist, superman. I’ll have a try at it, Gladys, if you will only give me an idea what would please you.”

She laughed at the elasticity of my character. “Well, in the first place, I don’t think my ideal would speak like that,” said she. “He would be a harder, sterner man, not so ready to adapt himself to a silly girl’s whim. But, above all, he must be a man who could do, who could act, who could look Death in the face and have no fear of him, a man of great deeds and strange experiences. It is never a man that I should love, but always the glories he had won; for they would be reflected upon me. Think of Richard Burton! When I read his wife’s life of him I could so understand her love! And Lady Stanley! Did you ever read the wonderful last chapter of that book about her husband? These are the sort of men that a woman could worship with all her soul, and yet be the greater, not the less, on account of her love, honored by all the world as the inspirer of noble deeds.”

She looked so beautiful in her enthusiasm that I nearly brought down the whole level of the interview. I gripped myself hard, and went on with the argument.

“We can’t all be Stanleys and Burtons,” said I; “besides, we don’t get the chance, — at least, I never had the chance. If I did, I should try to take it.”

“But chances are all around you. It is the mark of the kind of man I mean that he makes his own chances. You can’t hold him back. I’ve never met him, and yet I seem to know him so well. There are heroisms all round us waiting to be done. It’s for men to do them, and for women to reserve their love as a reward for such men. Look at that young Frenchman who went up last week in a balloon. It was blowing a gale of wind; but because he was announced to go he insisted on starting. The wind blew him fifteen hundred miles in twenty-four hours, and he fell in the middle of Russia. That was the kind of man I mean. Think of the woman he loved, and how other women must have envied her! That’s what I should like to be, — envied for my man.”

“I’d have done it to please you.”

“But you shouldn’t do it merely to please me. You should do it because you can’t help yourself, because it’s natural to you, because the man in you is crying out for heroic expression. Now, when you described the Wigan coal explosion last month, could you not have gone down and helped those people, in spite of the choke-damp?”

“I did.”

“You never said so.”

“There was nothing worth bucking about.”

“I didn’t know.” She looked at me with rather more interest. “That was brave of you.”

“I had to. If you want to write good copy, you must be where the things are.”

“What a prosaic motive! It seems to take all the romance out of it. But, still, whatever your motive, I am glad that you went down that mine.” She gave me her hand; but with such sweetness and dignity that I could only stoop and kiss it. “I dare say I am merely a foolish woman with a young girl’s fancies. And yet it is so real with me, so entirely part of my very self, that I cannot help acting upon it. If I marry, I do want to marry a famous man!”

“Why should you not?” I cried. “It is women like you who brace men up. Give me a chance, and see if I will take it! Besides, as you say, men ought to MAKE their own chances, and not wait until they are given. Look at Clive — just a clerk, and he conquered India! By George! I’ll do something in the world yet!”

She laughed at my sudden Irish effervescence. “Why not?” she said. “You have everything a man could have, — youth, health, strength, education, energy. I was sorry you spoke. And now I am glad — so glad — if it wakens these thoughts in you!”

“And if I do — —”

Her dear hand rested like warm velvet upon my lips. “Not another word, Sir! You should have been at the office for evening duty half an hour ago; only I hadn’t the heart to remind you. Some day, perhaps, when you have won your place in the world, we shall talk it over again.”

And so it was that I found myself that foggy November evening pursuing the Camberwell tram with my heart glowing within me, and with the eager determination that not another day should elapse before I should find some deed which was worthy of my lady. But who — who in all this wide world could ever have imagined the incredible shape which that deed was to take, or the strange steps by which I was led to the doing of it?

And, after all, this opening chapter will seem to the reader to have nothing to do with my narrative; and yet there would have been no narrative without it, for it is only when a man goes out into the world with the thought that there are heroisms all round him, and with the desire all alive in his heart to follow any which may come within sight of him, that he breaks away as I did from the life he knows, and ventures forth into the wonderful mystic twilight land where lie the great adventures and the great rewards. Behold me, then, at the office of the Daily Gazette, on the staff of which I was a most insignificant unit, with the settled determination that very night, if possible, to find the quest which should be worthy of my Gladys! Was it hardness, was it selfishness, that she should ask me to risk my life for her own glorification? Such thoughts may come to middle age; but never to ardent three-and-twenty in the fever of his first love.

CHAPTER II

“Try Your Luck with Professor Challenger”

I always liked McArdle, the crabbed, old, round-backed, red-headed news editor, and I rather hoped that he liked me. Of course, Beaumont was the real boss; but he lived in the rarefied atmosphere of some Olympian height from which he could distinguish nothing smaller than an international crisis or a split in the Cabinet. Sometimes we saw him passing in lonely majesty to his inner sanctum, with his eyes staring vaguely and his mind hovering over the Balkans or the Persian Gulf. He was above and beyond us. But McArdle was his first lieutenant, and it was he that we knew. The old man nodded as I entered the room, and he pushed his spectacles far up on his bald forehead.

“Well, Mr. Malone, from all I hear, you seem to be doing very well,” said he in his kindly Scotch accent.

I thanked him.

“The colliery explosion was excellent. So was the Southwark fire. You have the true descreeptive touch. What did you want to see me about?”

“To ask a favor.”

He looked alarmed, and his eyes shunned mine. “Tut, tut! What is it?”

“Do you think, Sir, that you could possibly send me on some mission for the paper? I would do my best to put it through and get you some good copy.”

“What sort of meesion had you in your mind, Mr. Malone?”

“Well, Sir, anything that had adventure and danger in it. I really would do my very best. The more difficult it was, the better it would suit me.”

“You seem very anxious to lose your life.”

“To justify my life, Sir.”

“Dear me, Mr. Malone, this is very — very exalted. I’m afraid the day for this sort of thing is rather past. The expense of the ‘special meesion’ business hardly justifies the result, and, of course, in any case it would only be an experienced man with a name that would command public confidence who would get such an order. The big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there’s no room for romance anywhere. Wait a bit, though!” he added, with a sudden smile upon his face. “Talking of the blank spaces of the map gives me an idea. What about exposing a fraud — a modern Munchausen — and making him rideeculous? You could show him up as the liar that he is! Eh, man, it would be fine. How does it appeal to you?”

“Anything — anywhere — I care nothing.”

McArdle was plunged in thought for some minutes.

“I wonder whether you could get on friendly — or at least on talking terms with the fellow,” he said, at last. “You seem to have a sort of genius for establishing relations with people — seempathy, I suppose, or animal magnetism, or youthful vitality, or something. I am conscious of it myself.”

“You are very good, sir.”

“So why should you not try your luck with Professor Challenger, of Enmore Park?”

I dare say I looked a little startled.

“Challenger!” I cried. “Professor Challenger, the famous zoologist! Wasn’t he the man who broke the skull of Blundell, of the Telegraph?”

The news editor smiled grimly.

“Do you mind? Didn’t you say it was adventures you were after?”

“It is all in the way of business, sir,” I answered.

“Exactly. I don’t suppose he can always be so violent as that. I’m thinking that Blundell got him at the wrong moment, maybe, or in the wrong fashion. You may have better luck, or more tact in handling him. There’s something in your line there, I am sure, and the Gazette should work it.”

“I really know nothing about him,” said I. “I only remember his name in connection with the police-court proceedings, for striking Blundell.”

“I have a few notes for your guidance, Mr. Malone. I’ve had my eye on the Professor for some little time.” He took a paper from a drawer. “Here is a summary of his record. I give it you briefly: —

“‘Challenger, George Edward. Born: Largs, N. B., 1863. Educ.: Largs Academy; Edinburgh University. British Museum Assistant, 1892. Assistant-Keeper of Comparative Anthropology Department, 1893. Resigned after acrimonious correspondence same year. Winner of Crayston Medal for Zoological Research. Foreign Member of’ — well, quite a lot of things, about two inches of small type—’Societe Belge, American Academy of Sciences, La Plata, etc., etc. Ex-President Palaeontological

Society. Section H, British Association' — so on, so on!—'Publications: "Some Observations Upon a Series of Kalmuck Skulls"; "Outlines of Vertebrate Evolution"; and numerous papers, including "The underlying fallacy of Weissmannism," which caused heated discussion at the Zoological Congress of Vienna. Recreations: Walking, Alpine climbing. Address: Enmore Park, Kensington, W.'

"There, take it with you. I've nothing more for you to-night."

I pocketed the slip of paper.

"One moment, sir," I said, as I realised that it was a pink bald head, and not a red face, which was fronting me. "I am not very clear yet why I am to interview this gentleman. What has he done?"

The face flashed back again.

"Went to South America on a solitary expedeetion two years ago. Came back last year. Had undoubtedly been to South America, but refused to say exactly where. Began to tell his adventures in a vague way, but somebody started to pick holes, and he just shut up like an oyster. Something wonderful happened — or the man's a champion liar, which is the more probable supposeetion. Had some damaged photographs, said to be fakes. Got so touchy that he assaults anyone who asks questions, and heaves reporters down the stairs. In my opinion he's just a homicidal megalomaniac with a turn for science. That's your man, Mr. Malone. Now, off you run, and see what you can make of him. You're big enough to look after yourself. Anyway, you are all safe. Employers' Liability Act, you know."

A grinning red face turned once more into a pink oval, fringed with gingery fluff; the interview was at an end.

I walked across to the Savage Club, but instead of turning into it I leaned upon the railings of Adelphi Terrace and gazed thoughtfully for a long time at the brown, oily river. I can always think most sanely and clearly in the open air. I took out the list of Professor Challenger's exploits, and I read it over under the electric lamp. Then I had what I can only regard as an inspiration. As a Pressman, I felt sure from what I had been told that I could never hope to get into touch with this cantankerous Professor. But these recriminations, twice mentioned in his skeleton biography, could only mean that he was a fanatic in science. Was there not an exposed margin there upon which he might be accessible? I would try.

I entered the club. It was just after eleven, and the big room was fairly full, though the rush had not yet set in. I noticed a tall, thin, angular man seated in an arm-chair by the fire. He turned as I drew my chair up to him. It was the man of all others whom I should have chosen — Tarp Henry, of the staff of Nature, a thin, dry, leathery creature, who was full, to those who knew him, of kindly humanity. I plunged instantly into my subject.

"What do you know of Professor Challenger?"

"Challenger?" He gathered his brows in scientific disapproval. "Challenger was the man who came with some cock-and-bull story from South America."

"What story?"

"Oh, it was rank nonsense about some queer animals he had discovered. I believe he has retracted since. Anyhow, he has suppressed it all. He gave an interview to Reuter's, and there was such a howl that he saw it wouldn't do. It was a discreditable business. There were one or two folk who were inclined to take him seriously, but he soon choked them off."

"How?"

"Well, by his insufferable rudeness and impossible behavior. There was poor old Wadley, of the Zoological Institute. Wadley sent a message: 'The President of the Zoological Institute presents his compliments to Professor Challenger, and would take it as a personal favor if he would do them the honor to come to their next meeting.' The answer was unprintable."

"You don't say?"

"Well, a bowdlerized version of it would run: 'Professor Challenger presents his compliments to the President of the Zoological Institute, and would take it as a personal favor if he would go to the devil.'"

"Good Lord!"

"Yes, I expect that's what old Wadley said. I remember his wail at the meeting, which began: 'In fifty years experience of scientific intercourse — —' It quite broke the old man up."

"Anything more about Challenger?"

"Well, I'm a bacteriologist, you know. I live in a nine-hundred-diameter microscope. I can hardly claim to take serious notice of anything that I can see with my naked eye. I'm a frontiersman from the extreme edge of the Knowable, and I feel quite out of place when I leave my study and come into touch with all you great, rough, hulking creatures. I'm too detached to talk scandal, and yet at scientific conversaziones I HAVE heard something of Challenger, for he is one of those men whom nobody can ignore. He’s as clever as they make ‘em — a full-charged battery of force and vitality, but a quarrelsome, ill-conditioned faddist, and unscrupulous at that. He had gone the length of faking some photographs over the South American business.”

“You say he is a faddist. What is his particular fad?”

“He has a thousand, but the latest is something about Weissmann and Evolution. He had a fearful row about it in Vienna, I believe.”

“Can’t you tell me the point?”

“Not at the moment, but a translation of the proceedings exists. We have it filed at the office. Would you care to come?”

“It’s just what I want. I have to interview the fellow, and I need some lead up to him. It’s really awfully good of you to give me a lift. I’ll go with you now, if it is not too late.”

Half an hour later I was seated in the newspaper office with a huge tome in front of me, which had been opened at the article “Weissmann versus Darwin,” with the sub heading, “Spirited Protest at Vienna. Lively Proceedings.” My scientific education having been somewhat neglected, I was unable to follow the whole argument, but it was evident that the English Professor had handled his subject in a very aggressive fashion, and had thoroughly annoyed his Continental colleagues. “Protests,” “Uproar,” and “General appeal to the Chairman” were three of the first brackets which caught my eye. Most of the matter might have been written in Chinese for any definite meaning that it conveyed to my brain.

“I wish you could translate it into English for me,” I said, pathetically, to my help-mate.

“Well, it is a translation.”

“Then I’d better try my luck with the original.”

“It is certainly rather deep for a layman.”

“If I could only get a single good, meaty sentence which seemed to convey some sort of definite human idea, it would serve my turn. Ah, yes, this one will do. I seem in a vague way almost to understand it. I’ll copy it out. This shall be my link with the terrible Professor.”

“Nothing else I can do?”

“Well, yes; I propose to write to him. If I could frame the letter here, and use your address it would give atmosphere.”

"We'll have the fellow round here making a row and breaking the furniture."

"No, no; you'll see the letter — nothing contentious, I assure you."

"Well, that's my chair and desk. You'll find paper there. I'd like to censor it before it goes."

It took some doing, but I flatter myself that it wasn't such a bad job when it was finished. I read it aloud to the critical bacteriologist with some pride in my handiwork.

"DEAR PROFESSOR CHALLENGER," it said, "As a humble student of Nature, I have always taken the most profound interest in your speculations as to the differences between Darwin and Weissmann. I have recently had occasion to refresh my memory by re-reading — —"

"You infernal liar!" murmured Tarp Henry.

—"by re-reading your masterly address at Vienna. That lucid and admirable statement seems to be the last word in the matter. There is one sentence in it, however — namely: 'I protest strongly against the insufferable and entirely dogmatic assertion that each separate id is a microcosm possessed of an historical architecture elaborated slowly through the series of generations.' Have you no desire, in view of later research, to modify this statement? Do you not think that it is over-accentuated? With your permission, I would ask the favor of an interview, as I feel strongly upon the subject, and have certain suggestions which I could only elaborate in a personal conversation. With your consent, I trust to have the honor of calling at eleven o'clock the day after to-morrow (Wednesday) morning.

"I remain, Sir, with assurances of profound respect, yours very truly,

EDWARD D. MALONE."

"How's that?" I asked, triumphantly.

"Well if your conscience can stand it — —"

"It has never failed me yet."

"But what do you mean to do?"

"To get there. Once I am in his room I may see some opening. I may even go the length of open confession. If he is a sportsman he will be tickled."

“Tickled, indeed! He’s much more likely to do the tickling. Chain mail, or an American football suit — that’s what you’ll want. Well, good-bye. I’ll have the answer for you here on Wednesday morning — if he ever deigns to answer you. He is a violent, dangerous, cantankerous character, hated by everyone who comes across him, and the butt of the students, so far as they dare take a liberty with him. Perhaps it would be best for you if you never heard from the fellow at all.”

CHAPTER III

“He is a Perfectly Impossible Person”

My friend’s fear or hope was not destined to be realised. When I called on Wednesday there was a letter with the West Kensington postmark upon it, and my name scrawled across the envelope in a handwriting which looked like a barbed-wire railing. The contents were as follows: —

“ENMORE PARK, W.
“SIR, — I have duly received your note, in which you claim to endorse my views, although I am not aware that they are dependent upon endorsement either from you or anyone else. You have ventured to use the word ‘speculation’ with regard to my statement upon the subject of Darwinism, and I would call your attention to the fact that such a word in such a connection is offensive to a degree. The context convinces me, however, that you have sinned rather through ignorance and tactlessness than through malice, so I am content to pass the matter by. You quote an isolated sentence from my lecture, and appear to have some difficulty in understanding it. I should have thought that only a sub-human intelligence could have failed to grasp the point, but if it really needs amplification I shall consent to see you at the hour named, though visits and visitors of every sort are exceeding distasteful to me. As to your suggestion that I may modify my opinion, I would have you know that it is not my habit to do so after a deliberate expression of my mature views. You will kindly show the envelope of this letter to my man, Austin, when you call, as he has to take every precaution to shield me from the intrusive rascals who call themselves ‘journalists.’
“Yours faithfully,
”GEORGE EDWARD CHALLENGER.”

This was the letter that I read aloud to Tarp Henry, who had come down early to hear the result of my venture. His only remark was, “There’s some new stuff, cuticura or something, which is better than arnica.” Some people have such extraordinary notions of humor.

It was nearly half-past ten before I had received my message, but a taxicab took me round in good time for my appointment. It was an imposing porticoed house at which we stopped, and the heavily-curtained windows gave every indication of wealth upon the part of this formidable Professor. The door was opened by an odd, swarthy, dried-up person of uncertain age, with a dark pilot jacket and brown leather gaiters. I found afterwards that he was the chauffeur, who filled the gaps left by a succession of fugitive butlers. He looked me up and down with a searching light blue eye.

“Expected?” he asked.

“An appointment.”

“Got your letter?”

I produced the envelope.

“Right!” He seemed to be a person of few words. Following him down the passage I was suddenly interrupted by a small woman, who stepped out from what proved to be the dining-room door. She was a bright, vivacious, dark-eyed lady, more French than English in her type.

“One moment,” she said. “You can wait, Austin. Step in here, sir. May I ask if you have met my husband before?”

“No, madam, I have not had the honor.”

“Then I apologize to you in advance. I must tell you that he is a perfectly impossible person — absolutely impossible. If you are forewarned you will be the more ready to make allowances.”

“It is most considerate of you, madam.”

“Get quickly out of the room if he seems inclined to be violent. Don’t wait to argue with him. Several people have been injured through doing that. Afterwards there is a public scandal and it reflects upon me and all of us. I suppose it wasn’t about South America you wanted to see him?”

I could not lie to a lady.

“Dear me! That is his most dangerous subject. You won’t believe a word he says — I’m sure I don’t wonder. But don’t tell him so, for it makes him very violent. Pretend to believe him, and you may get through all right. Remember he believes it himself. Of that you may be assured. A more honest man never lived. Don’t wait any longer or he may suspect. If you find him dangerous — really dangerous — ring the bell and hold him off until I come. Even at his worst I can usually control him.”

With these encouraging words the lady handed me over to the taciturn Austin, who had waited like a bronze statue of discretion during our short interview, and I was conducted to the end of the passage. There was a tap at a door, a bull’s bellow from within, and I was face to face with the Professor.

He sat in a rotating chair behind a broad table, which was covered with books, maps, and diagrams. As I entered, his seat spun round to face me. His appearance made me gasp. I was prepared for something strange, but not for so overpowering a personality as this. It was his size which took one’s breath away — his size and his imposing presence. His head was enormous, the largest I have ever seen upon a human being. I am sure that his top-hat, had I ever ventured to don it, would have slipped over me entirely and rested on my shoulders. He had the face and beard which I associate with an Assyrian bull; the former florid, the latter so black as almost to have a suspicion of blue, spade-shaped and rippling down over his chest. The hair was peculiar, plastered down in front in a long, curving wisp over his massive forehead. The eyes were blue-gray under great black tufts, very clear, very critical, and very masterful. A huge spread of shoulders and a chest like a barrel were the other parts of him which appeared above the table, save for two enormous hands covered with long black hair. This and a bellowing, roaring, rumbling voice made up my first impression of the notorious Professor Challenger.

“Well?” said he, with a most insolent stare. “What now?”

I must keep up my deception for at least a little time longer, otherwise here was evidently an end of the interview.

“You were good enough to give me an appointment, sir,” said I, humbly, producing his envelope.

He took my letter from his desk and laid it out before him.

“Oh, you are the young person who cannot understand plain English, are you? My general conclusions you are good enough to approve, as I understand?”

“Entirely, sir — entirely!” I was very emphatic.

“Dear me! That strengthens my position very much, does it not? Your age and appearance make your support doubly valuable. Well, at least you are better than that herd of swine in Vienna, whose gregarious grunt is, however, not more offensive than the isolated effort of the British hog.” He glared at me as the present representative of the beast.

“They seem to have behaved abominably,” said I.

“I assure you that I can fight my own battles, and that I have no possible need of your sympathy. Put me alone, sir, and with my back to the wall. G. E. C. is happiest then. Well, sir, let us do what we can to curtail this visit, which can hardly be agreeable to you, and is inexpressibly irksome to me. You had, as I have been led to believe, some comments to make upon the proposition which I advanced in my thesis.”

There was a brutal directness about his methods which made evasion difficult. I must still make play and wait for a better opening. It had seemed simple enough at a distance. Oh, my Irish wits, could they not help me now, when I needed help so sorely? He transfixed me with two sharp, steely eyes. “Come, come!” he rumbled.

“I am, of course, a mere student,” said I, with a fatuous smile, “hardly more, I might say, than an earnest inquirer. At the same time, it seemed to me that you were a little severe upon Weissmann in this matter. Has not the general evidence since that date tended to — well, to strengthen his position?”

“What evidence?” He spoke with a menacing calm.

“Well, of course, I am aware that there is not any what you might call DEFINITE evidence. I alluded merely to the trend of modern thought and the general scientific point of view, if I might so express it.”

He leaned forward with great earnestness.

“I suppose you are aware,” said he, checking off points upon his fingers, “that the cranial index is a constant factor?”

“Naturally,” said I.

“And that telegony is still sub judice?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And that the germ plasm is different from the parthenogenetic egg?”

“Why, surely!” I cried, and gloried in my own audacity.

“But what does that prove?” he asked, in a gentle, persuasive voice.

“Ah, what indeed?” I murmured. “What does it prove?”

“Shall I tell you?” he cooed.

“Pray do.”

“It proves,” he roared, with a sudden blast of fury, “that you are the damnedest imposter in London — a vile, crawling journalist, who has no more science than he has decency in his composition!”

He had sprung to his feet with a mad rage in his eyes. Even at that moment of tension I found time for amazement at the discovery that he was quite a short man, his head not higher than my shoulder — a stunted Hercules whose tremendous vitality had all run to depth, breadth, and brain.

“Gibberish!” he cried, leaning forward, with his fingers on the table and his face projecting. “That’s what I have been talking to you, sir — scientific gibberish! Did you think you could match cunning with me — you with your walnut of a brain? You think you are omnipotent, you infernal scribblers, don’t you? That your praise can make a man and your blame can break him? We must all bow to you, and try to get a favorable word, must we? This man shall have a leg up, and this man shall have a dressing down! Creeping vermin, I know you! You’ve got out of your station. Time was when your ears were clipped. You’ve lost your sense of proportion. Swollen gas-bags! I’ll keep you in your proper place. Yes, sir, you haven’t got over G. E. C. There’s one man who is still your master. He warned you off, but if you WILL come, by the Lord you do it at your own risk. Forfeit, my good Mr. Malone, I claim forfeit! You have played a rather dangerous game, and it strikes me that you have lost it.”

“Look here, sir,” said I, backing to the door and opening it; “you can be as abusive as you like. But there is a limit. You shall not assault me.”

“Shall I not?” He was slowly advancing in a peculiarly menacing way, but he stopped now and put his big hands into the side-pockets of a rather boyish short jacket which he wore. “I have thrown several of you out of the house. You will be the fourth or fifth. Three pound fifteen each — that is how it averaged. Expensive, but very necessary. Now, sir, why should you not follow your brethren? I rather think you must.” He resumed his unpleasant and stealthy advance, pointing his toes as he walked, like a dancing master.

I could have bolted for the hall door, but it would have been too ignominious. Besides, a little glow of righteous anger was springing up within me. I had been hopelessly in the wrong before, but this man’s menaces were putting me in the right.

“I’ll trouble you to keep your hands off, sir. I’ll not stand it.”

“Dear me!” His black moustache lifted and a white fang twinkled in a sneer. “You won’t stand it, eh?”

“Don’t be such a fool, Professor!” I cried. “What can you hope for? I’m fifteen stone, as hard as nails, and play center three-quarter every Saturday for the London Irish. I’m not the man — —”

It was at that moment that he rushed me. It was lucky that I had opened the door, or we should have gone through it. We did a Catharine-wheel together down the passage. Somehow we gathered up a chair upon our way, and bounded on with it towards the street. My mouth was full of his beard, our arms were locked, our bodies intertwined, and that infernal chair radiated its legs all round us. The watchful Austin had thrown open the hall door. We went with a back somersault down the front steps. I have seen the two Macs attempt something of the kind at the halls, but it appears to take some practise to do it without hurting oneself. The chair went to matchwood at the bottom, and we rolled apart into the gutter. He sprang to his feet, waving his fists and wheezing like an asthmatic.

“Had enough?” he panted.

“You infernal bully!” I cried, as I gathered myself together.

Then and there we should have tried the thing out, for he was effervescing with fight, but fortunately I was rescued from an odious situation. A policeman was beside us, his notebook in his hand.

“What’s all this? You ought to be ashamed” said the policeman. It was the most rational remark which I had heard in Enmore Park. “Well,” he insisted, turning to me, “what is it, then?”

“This man attacked me,” said I.

“Did you attack him?” asked the policeman.

The Professor breathed hard and said nothing.

“It’s not the first time, either,” said the policeman, severely, shaking his head. “You were in trouble last month for the same thing. You’ve blackened this young man’s eye. Do you give him in charge, sir?”

I relented.

“No,” said I, “I do not.”

“What’s that?” said the policeman.

“I was to blame myself. I intruded upon him. He gave me fair warning.”

The policeman snapped up his notebook.

“Don’t let us have any more such goings-on,” said he. “Now, then! Move on, there, move on!” This to a butcher’s boy, a maid, and one or two loafers who had collected. He clumped heavily down the street, driving this little flock before him. The Professor looked at me, and there was something humorous at the back of his eyes.

“Come in!” said he. “I’ve not done with you yet.”

The speech had a sinister sound, but I followed him none the less into the house. The man-servant, Austin, like a wooden image, closed the door behind us.

CHAPTER IV

“It’s Just the very Biggest Thing in the World”

Hardly was it shut when Mrs. Challenger darted out from the dining-room. The small woman was in a furious temper. She barred her husband’s way like an enraged chicken in front of a bulldog. It was evident that she had seen my exit, but had not observed my return.

“You brute, George!” she screamed. “You’ve hurt that nice young man.”

He jerked backwards with his thumb.

“Here he is, safe and sound behind me.”

She was confused, but not unduly so.

“I am so sorry, I didn’t see you.”

“I assure you, madam, that it is all right.”

“He has marked your poor face! Oh, George, what a brute you are! Nothing but scandals from one end of the week to the other. Everyone hating and making fun of you. You’ve finished my patience. This ends it.”

“Dirty linen,” he rumbled.

“It’s not a secret,” she cried. “Do you suppose that the whole street — the whole of London, for that matter —— Get away, Austin, we don’t want you here. Do you suppose they don’t all talk about you? Where is your dignity? You, a man who should have been Regius Professor at a great University with a thousand students all revering you. Where is your dignity, George?”

“How about yours, my dear?”

“You try me too much. A ruffian — a common brawling ruffian — that’s what you have become.”

“Be good, Jessie.”

“A roaring, raging bully!”

“That’s done it! Stool of penance!” said he.

To my amazement he stooped, picked her up, and placed her sitting upon a high pedestal of black marble in the angle of the hall. It was at least seven feet high, and so thin that she could hardly balance upon it. A more absurd object than she presented cocked up there with her face convulsed with anger, her feet dangling, and her body rigid for fear of an upset, I could not imagine.

“Let me down!” she wailed.

“Say ‘please.’”

“You brute, George! Let me down this instant!”

“Come into the study, Mr. Malone.”

“Really, sir —— !” said I, looking at the lady.

“Here’s Mr. Malone pleading for you, Jessie. Say ‘please,’ and down you come.”

“Oh, you brute! Please! please!”

He took her down as if she had been a canary.

“You must behave yourself, dear. Mr. Malone is a Pressman. He will have it all in his rag to-morrow, and sell an extra dozen among our neighbours. ‘Strange story of high life’ — you felt fairly high on that pedestal, did you not? Then a sub-title, ‘Glimpse of a singular menage.’ He’s a foul feeder, is Mr. Malone, a carrion eater, like all of his kind — porcus ex grege diaboli — a swine from the devil’s herd. That’s it, Malone — what?”

“You are really intolerable!” said I, hotly.

He bellowed with laughter.

“We shall have a coalition presently,” he boomed, looking from his wife to me and puffing out his enormous chest. Then, suddenly altering his tone, “Excuse this frivolous family badinage, Mr. Malone. I called you back for some more serious purpose than to mix you up with our little domestic pleasantries. Run away, little woman, and don’t fret.” He placed a huge hand upon each of her shoulders. “All that you say is perfectly true. I should be a better man if I did what you advise, but I shouldn’t be quite George Edward Challenger. There are plenty of better men, my dear, but only one G. E. C. So make the best of him.” He suddenly gave her a resounding kiss, which embarrassed me even more than his violence had done. “Now, Mr. Malone,” he continued, with a great accession of dignity, “this way, if YOU please.”

We re-entered the room which we had left so tumultuously ten minutes before. The Professor closed the door carefully behind us, motioned me into an arm-chair, and pushed a cigar-box under my nose.

“Real San Juan Colorado,” he said. “Excitable people like you are the better for narcotics. Heavens! don’t bite it! Cut — and cut with reverence! Now lean back, and listen attentively to whatever I may care to say to you.

If any remark should occur to you, you can reserve it for some more opportune time.

“First of all, as to your return to my house after your most justifiable expulsion” — he protruded his beard, and stared at me as one who challenges and invites contradiction—”after, as I say, your well-merited expulsion. The reason lay in your answer to that most officious policeman, in which I seemed to discern some glimmering of good feeling upon your part — more, at any rate, than I am accustomed to associate with your profession. In admitting that the fault of the incident lay with you, you gave some evidence of a certain mental detachment and breadth of view which attracted my favorable notice. The sub-species of the human race to which you unfortunately belong has always been below my mental horizon. Your words brought you suddenly above it. You swam up into my serious notice. For this reason I asked you to return with me, as I was minded to make your further acquaintance. You will kindly deposit your ash in the small Japanese tray on the bamboo table which stands at your left elbow.”

All this he boomed forth like a professor addressing his class. He had swung round his revolving chair so as to face me, and he sat all puffed out like an enormous bull-frog, his head laid back and his eyes half-covered by supercilious lids. Now he suddenly turned himself sideways, and all I could see of him was tangled hair with a red, protruding ear. He was scratching about among the litter of papers upon his desk. He faced me presently with what looked like a very tattered sketch-book in his hand.

“I am going to talk to you about South America,” said he. “No comments if you please. First of all, I wish you to understand that nothing I tell you now is to be repeated in any public way unless you have my express permission. That permission will, in all human probability, never be given. Is that clear?”

“It is very hard,” said I. “Surely a judicious account — —”

He replaced the notebook upon the table.

“That ends it,” said he. “I wish you a very good morning.”

“No, no!” I cried. “I submit to any conditions. So far as I can see, I have no choice.”

“None in the world,” said he.

“Well, then, I promise.”

“Word of honor?”

“Word of honor.”

He looked at me with doubt in his insolent eyes.

"After all, what do I know about your honor?" said he.

"Upon my word, sir," I cried, angrily, "you take very great liberties! I have never been so insulted in my life."

He seemed more interested than annoyed at my outbreak.

"Round-headed," he muttered. "Brachycephalic, gray-eyed, black-haired, with suggestion of the negroid. Celtic, I presume?"

"I am an Irishman, sir."

"Irish Irish?"

"Yes, sir."

"That, of course, explains it. Let me see; you have given me your promise that my confidence will be respected? That confidence, I may say, will be far from complete. But I am prepared to give you a few indications which will be of interest. In the first place, you are probably aware that two years ago I made a journey to South America — one which will be classical in the scientific history of the world? The object of my journey was to verify some conclusions of Wallace and of Bates, which could only be done by observing their reported facts under the same conditions in which they had themselves noted them. If my expedition had no other results it would still have been noteworthy, but a curious incident occurred to me while there which opened up an entirely fresh line of inquiry.

"You are aware — or probably, in this half-educated age, you are not aware — that the country round some parts of the Amazon is still only partially explored, and that a great number of tributaries, some of them entirely uncharted, run into the main river. It was my business to visit this little-known back-country and to examine its fauna, which furnished me with the materials for several chapters for that great and monumental work upon zoology which will be my life's justification. I was returning, my work accomplished, when I had occasion to spend a night at a small Indian village at a point where a certain tributary — the name and position of which I withhold — opens into the main river. The natives were Cucama Indians, an amiable but degraded race, with mental powers hardly superior to the average Londoner. I had effected some cures among them upon my way up the river, and had impressed them considerably with my personality, so that I was not surprised to find myself eagerly awaited upon my return. I gathered from their signs that someone had urgent need of my medical services, and I followed the chief to one of his huts. When I entered I found that the sufferer to whose aid I had been summoned had that instant expired. He was, to my surprise, no Indian, but a white man; indeed, I may say a very white man, for he was flaxen-haired and had some characteristics of an albino. He was clad in rags, was very emaciated, and bore every trace of prolonged hardship. So far as I could understand the account of the natives, he was a complete stranger to them, and had come upon their village through the woods alone and in the last stage of exhaustion.

"The man's knapsack lay beside the couch, and I examined the contents. His name was written upon a tab within it — Maple White, Lake Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. It is a name to which I am prepared always to lift my hat. It is not too much to say that it will rank level with my own when the final credit of this business comes to be apportioned.

"From the contents of the knapsack it was evident that this man had been an artist and poet in search of effects. There were scraps of verse. I do not profess to be a judge of such things, but they appeared to me to be singularly wanting in merit. There were also some rather commonplace pictures of river scenery, a paint-box, a box of coloured chalks, some brushes, that curved bone which lies upon my inkstand, a volume of Baxter's 'Moths and Butterflies,' a cheap revolver, and a few cartridges. Of personal equipment he either had none or he had lost it in his journey. Such were the total effects of this strange American Bohemian.

"I was turning away from him when I observed that something projected from the front of his ragged jacket. It was this sketch-book, which was as dilapidated then as you see it now. Indeed, I can assure you that a first folio of Shakespeare could not be treated with greater reverence than this relic has been since it came into my possession. I hand it to you now, and I ask you to take it page by page and to examine the contents."

He helped himself to a cigar and leaned back with a fiercely critical pair of eyes, taking note of the effect which this document would produce.

I had opened the volume with some expectation of a revelation, though of what nature I could not imagine. The first page was disappointing, however, as it contained nothing but the picture of a very fat man in a pea-jacket, with the legend, "Jimmy Colver on the Mail-boat," written beneath it. There followed several pages which were filled with small sketches of Indians and their ways. Then came a picture of a cheerful and corpulent ecclesiastic in a shovel hat, sitting opposite a very thin European, and the inscription: "Lunch with Fra Cristofero at Rosario." Studies of women and babies accounted for several more pages, and then there was an unbroken series of animal drawings with such explanations as “Manatee upon Sandbank,” “Turtles and Their Eggs,” “Black Ajouti under a Miriti Palm” — the matter disclosing some sort of pig-like animal; and finally came a double page of studies of long-snouted and very unpleasant saurians. I could make nothing of it, and said so to the Professor.

“Surely these are only crocodiles?”

“Alligators! Alligators! There is hardly such a thing as a true crocodile in South America. The distinction between them — —”

“I meant that I could see nothing unusual — nothing to justify what you have said.”

He smiled serenely.

“Try the next page,” said he.

I was still unable to sympathize. It was a full-page sketch of a landscape roughly tinted in colour — the kind of painting which an open-air artist takes as a guide to a future more elaborate effort. There was a pale-green foreground of feathery vegetation, which sloped upwards and ended in a line of cliffs dark red in colour, and curiously ribbed like some basaltic formations which I have seen. They extended in an unbroken wall right across the background. At one point was an isolated pyramidal rock, crowned by a great tree, which appeared to be separated by a cleft from the main crag. Behind it all, a blue tropical sky. A thin green line of vegetation fringed the summit of the ruddy cliff.

“Well?” he asked.

“It is no doubt a curious formation,” said I “but I am not geologist enough to say that it is wonderful.”

“Wonderful!” he repeated. “It is unique. It is incredible. No one on earth has ever dreamed of such a possibility. Now the next.”

I turned it over, and gave an exclamation of surprise. There was a full-page picture of the most extraordinary creature that I had ever seen. It was the wild dream of an opium smoker, a vision of delirium. The head was like that of a fowl, the body that of a bloated lizard, the trailing tail was furnished with upward-turned spikes, and the curved back was edged with a high serrated fringe, which looked like a dozen cocks’ wattles placed behind each other. In front of this creature was an absurd mannikin, or dwarf, in human form, who stood staring at it.

“Well, what do you think of that?” cried the Professor, rubbing his hands with an air of triumph.

“It is monstrous — grotesque.”

“But what made him draw such an animal?”

“Trade gin, I should think.”

“Oh, that’s the best explanation you can give, is it?”

“Well, sir, what is yours?”

“The obvious one that the creature exists. That is actually sketched from the life.”

I should have laughed only that I had a vision of our doing another Catharine-wheel down the passage.

“No doubt,” said I, “no doubt,” as one humors an imbecile. “I confess, however,” I added, “that this tiny human figure puzzles me. If it were an Indian we could set it down as evidence of some pigmy race in America, but it appears to be a European in a sun-hat.”

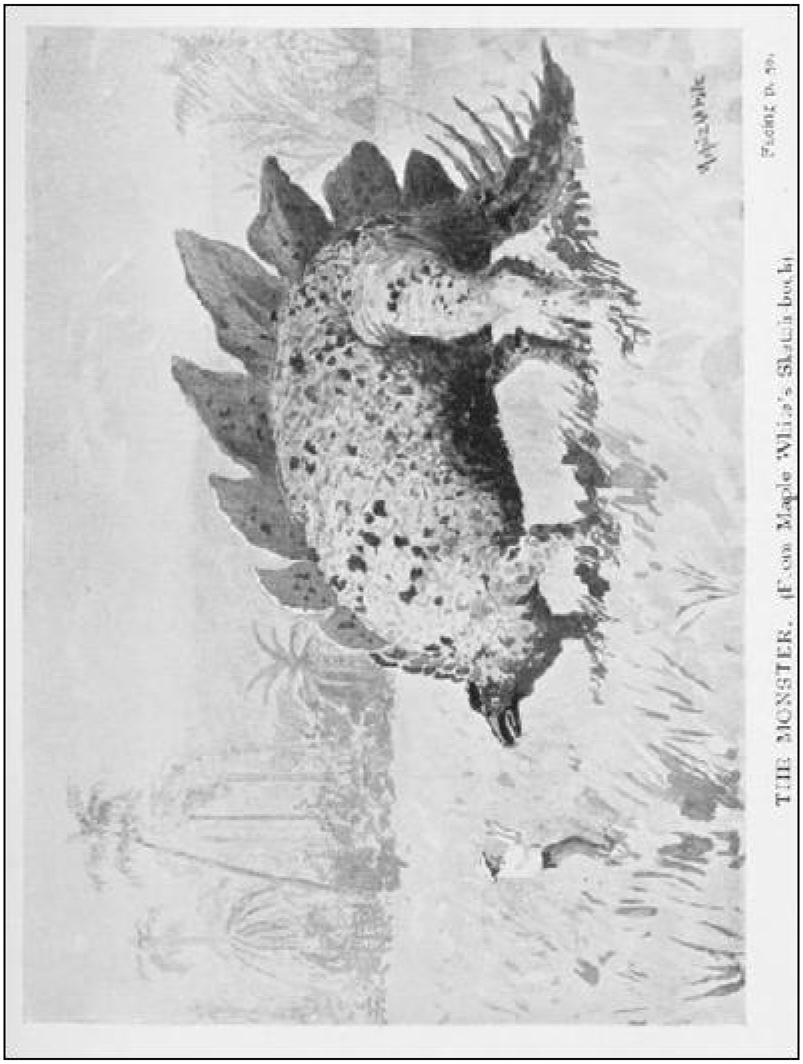

THE MONSTER. (From Maple White's Sketch-book)

Facing p. 90

The Professor snorted like an angry buffalo. “You really touch the limit,” said he. “You enlarge my view of the possible. Cerebral paresis! Mental inertia! Wonderful!”

He was too absurd to make me angry. Indeed, it was a waste of energy, for if you were going to be angry with this man you would be angry all the time. I contented myself with smiling wearily. “It struck me that the man was small,” said I.

“Look here!” he cried, leaning forward and dabbing a great hairy sausage of a finger on to the picture. “You see that plant behind the animal; I suppose you thought it was a dandelion or a Brussels sprout — what? Well, it is a vegetable ivory palm, and they run to about fifty or sixty feet. Don’t you see that the man is put in for a purpose? He couldn’t really have stood in front of that brute and lived to draw it. He sketched himself in to give a scale of heights. He was, we will say, over five feet high. The tree is ten times bigger, which is what one would expect.”

“Good heavens!” I cried. “Then you think the beast was —— Why, Charing Cross station would hardly make a kennel for such a brute!”

“Apart from exaggeration, he is certainly a well-grown specimen,” said the Professor, complacently.

“But,” I cried, “surely the whole experience of the human race is not to be set aside on account of a single sketch” — I had turned over the leaves and ascertained that there was nothing more in the book—”a single sketch by a wandering American artist who may have done it under hashish, or in the delirium of fever, or simply in order to gratify a freakish imagination. You can’t, as a man of science, defend such a position as that.”

For answer the Professor took a book down from a shelf.

“This is an excellent monograph by my gifted friend, Ray Lankester!” said he. “There is an illustration here which would interest you. Ah, yes, here it is! The inscription beneath it runs: ‘Probable appearance in life of the Jurassic Dinosaur Stegosaurus. The hind leg alone is twice as tall as a full-grown man.’ Well, what do you make of that?”

He handed me the open book. I started as I looked at the picture. In this reconstructed animal of a dead world there was certainly a very great resemblance to the sketch of the unknown artist.

“That is certainly remarkable,” said I.

“But you won’t admit that it is final?”

“Surely it might be a coincidence, or this American may have seen a picture of the kind and carried it in his memory. It would be likely to recur to a man in a delirium.”

“Very good,” said the Professor, indulgently; “we leave it at that. I will now ask you to look at this bone.” He handed over the one which he had already described as part of the dead man’s possessions. It was about six inches long, and thicker than my thumb, with some indications of dried cartilage at one end of it.

“To what known creature does that bone belong?” asked the Professor.

I examined it with care and tried to recall some half-forgotten knowledge.

“It might be a very thick human collar-bone,” I said.

My companion waved his hand in contemptuous deprecation.

“The human collar-bone is curved. This is straight. There is a groove upon its surface showing that a great tendon played across it, which could not be the case with a clavicle.”

“Then I must confess that I don’t know what it is.”

“You need not be ashamed to expose your ignorance, for I don’t suppose the whole South Kensington staff could give a name to it.” He took a little bone the size of a bean out of a pill-box. “So far as I am a judge this human bone is the analogue of the one which you hold in your hand. That will give you some idea of the size of the creature. You will observe from the cartilage that this is no fossil specimen, but recent. What do you say to that?”

“Surely in an elephant — —”

He winced as if in pain.

“Don’t! Don’t talk of elephants in South America. Even in these days of Board schools — —”

“Well,” I interrupted, “any large South American animal — a tapir, for example.”

“You may take it, young man, that I am versed in the elements of my business. This is not a conceivable bone either of a tapir or of any other creature known to zoology. It belongs to a very large, a very strong, and, by all analogy, a very fierce animal which exists upon the face of the earth, but has not yet come under the notice of science. You are still unconvinced?”

“I am at least deeply interested.”

“Then your case is not hopeless. I feel that there is reason lurking in you somewhere, so we will patiently grope round for it. We will now leave the dead American and proceed with my narrative. You can imagine that I could hardly come away from the Amazon without probing deeper into the matter. There were indications as to the direction from which the dead traveler had come. Indian legends would alone have been my guide, for I found that rumors of a strange land were common among all the riverine tribes. You have heard, no doubt, of Curupuri?”

“Never.”

“Curupuri is the spirit of the woods, something terrible, something malevolent, something to be avoided. None can describe its shape or nature, but it is a word of terror along the Amazon. Now all tribes agree as to the direction in which Curupuri lives. It was the same direction from which the American had come. Something terrible lay that way. It was my business to find out what it was.”

“What did you do?” My flippancy was all gone. This massive man compelled one’s attention and respect.

A DISTANT VIEW OF THE PLATEAU. (From a photograph by Professor Challenger)

Facing p. [illegible]

“I overcame the extreme reluctance of the natives — a reluctance which extends even to talk upon the subject — and by judicious persuasion and gifts, aided, I will admit, by some threats of coercion, I got two of them to act as guides. After many adventures which I need not describe, and after traveling a distance which I will not mention, in a direction which I withhold, we came at last to a tract of country which has never been described, nor, indeed, visited save by my unfortunate predecessor. Would you kindly look at this?”

He handed me a photograph — half-plate size.

“The unsatisfactory appearance of it is due to the fact,” said he, “that on descending the river the boat was upset and the case which contained the undeveloped films was broken, with disastrous results. Nearly all of them were totally ruined — an irreparable loss. This is one of the few which partially escaped. This explanation of deficiencies or abnormalities you will kindly accept. There was talk of faking. I am not in a mood to argue such a point.”

The photograph was certainly very off-coloured. An unkind critic might easily have misinterpreted that dim surface. It was a dull gray landscape, and as I gradually deciphered the details of it I realised that it represented a long and enormously high line of cliffs exactly like an immense cataract seen in the distance, with a sloping, tree-clad plain in the foreground.

“I believe it is the same place as the painted picture,” said I.

“It is the same place,” the Professor answered. “I found traces of the fellow’s camp. Now look at this.”

It was a nearer view of the same scene, though the photograph was extremely defective. I could distinctly see the isolated, tree-crowned pinnacle of rock which was detached from the crag.

“I have no doubt of it at all,” said I.

“Well, that is something gained,” said he. “We progress, do we not? Now, will you please look at the top of that rocky pinnacle? Do you observe something there?”

“An enormous tree.”

“But on the tree?”

“A large bird,” said I.

He handed me a lens.

“Yes,” I said, peering through it, “a large bird stands on the tree. It appears to have a considerable beak. I should say it was a pelican.”

“I cannot congratulate you upon your eyesight,” said the Professor. “It is not a pelican, nor, indeed, is it a bird. It may interest you to know that I succeeded in shooting that particular specimen. It was the only absolute proof of my experiences which I was able to bring away with me.”

“You have it, then?” Here at last was tangible corroboration.

“I had it. It was unfortunately lost with so much else in the same boat accident which ruined my photographs. I clutched at it as it disappeared in the swirl of the rapids, and part of its wing was left in my hand. I was insensible when washed ashore, but the miserable remnant of my superb specimen was still intact; I now lay it before you.”

From a drawer he produced what seemed to me to be the upper portion of the wing of a large bat. It was at least two feet in length, a curved bone, with a membranous veil beneath it.

“A monstrous bat!” I suggested.

“Nothing of the sort,” said the Professor, severely. “Living, as I do, in an educated and scientific atmosphere, I could not have conceived that the first principles of zoology were so little known. Is it possible that you do not know the elementary fact in comparative anatomy, that the wing of a bird is really the forearm, while the wing of a bat consists of three elongated fingers with membranes between? Now, in this case, the bone is certainly not the forearm, and you can see for yourself that this is a single membrane hanging upon a single bone, and therefore that it cannot belong to a bat. But if it is neither bird nor bat, what is it?”

My small stock of knowledge was exhausted.

“I really do not know,” said I.

He opened the standard work to which he had already referred me.

“Here,” said he, pointing to the picture of an extraordinary flying monster, “is an excellent reproduction of the dimorphodon, or pterodactyl, a flying reptile of the Jurassic period. On the next page is a diagram of the mechanism of its wing. Kindly compare it with the specimen in your hand.”

A wave of amazement passed over me as I looked. I was convinced. There could be no getting away from it. The cumulative proof was overwhelming. The sketch, the photographs, the narrative, and now the actual specimen — the evidence was complete. I said so — I said so warmly, for I felt that the Professor was an ill-used man. He leaned back in his chair with drooping eyelids and a tolerant smile, basking in this sudden gleam of sunshine.

“It’s just the very biggest thing that I ever heard of!” said I, though it was my journalistic rather than my scientific enthusiasm that was roused. “It is colossal. You are a Columbus of science who has discovered a lost world. I’m awfully sorry if I seemed to doubt you. It was all so unthinkable. But I understand evidence when I see it, and this should be good enough for anyone.”

The Professor purred with satisfaction.

“And then, sir, what did you do next?”

“It was the wet season, Mr. Malone, and my stores were exhausted. I explored some portion of this huge cliff, but I was unable to find any way to scale it. The pyramidal rock upon which I saw and shot the pterodactyl was more accessible. Being something of a cragsman, I did manage to get half way to the top of that. From that height I had a better idea of the plateau upon the top of the crags. It appeared to be very large; neither to east nor to west could I see any end to the vista of green-capped cliffs. Below, it is a swampy, jungly region, full of snakes, insects, and fever. It is a natural protection to this singular country."

"Did you see any other trace of life?"

"No, sir, I did not; but during the week that we lay encamped at the base of the cliff we heard some very strange noises from above."

"But the creature that the American drew? How do you account for that?"

"We can only suppose that he must have made his way to the summit and seen it there. We know, therefore, that there is a way up. We know equally that it must be a very difficult one, otherwise the creatures would have come down and overrun the surrounding country. Surely that is clear?"

"But how did they come to be there?"

"I do not think that the problem is a very obscure one," said the Professor; "there can only be one explanation. South America is, as you may have heard, a granite continent. At this single point in the interior there has been, in some far distant age, a great, sudden volcanic upheaval. These cliffs, I may remark, are basaltic, and therefore plutonic. An area, as large perhaps as Sussex, has been lifted up en bloc with all its living contents, and cut off by perpendicular precipices of a hardness which defies erosion from all the rest of the continent. What is the result? Why, the ordinary laws of Nature are suspended. The various checks which influence the struggle for existence in the world at large are all neutralised or altered. Creatures survive which would otherwise disappear. You will observe that both the pterodactyl and the stegosaurus are Jurassic, and therefore of a great age in the order of life. They have been artificially conserved by those strange accidental conditions."

"But surely your evidence is conclusive. You have only to lay it before the proper authorities."

"So in my simplicity, I had imagined," said the Professor, bitterly. "I can only tell you that it was not so, that I was met at every turn by incredulity, born partly of stupidity and partly of jealousy. It is not my nature, sir, to cringe to any man, or to seek to prove a fact if my word has been doubted. After the first I have not condescended to show such corroborative proofs as I possess. The subject became hateful to me — I would not speak of it. When men like yourself, who represent the foolish curiosity of the public, came to disturb my privacy I was unable to meet them with dignified reserve. By nature I am, I admit, somewhat fiery, and under provocation I am inclined to be violent. I fear you may have remarked it."

I nursed my eye and was silent.

"My wife has frequently remonstrated with me upon the subject, and yet I fancy that any man of honor would feel the same. To-night, however, I propose to give an extreme example of the control of the will over the emotions. I invite you to be present at the exhibition." He handed me a card from his desk. "You will perceive that Mr. Percival Waldron, a naturalist of some popular repute, is announced to lecture at eight-thirty at the Zoological Institute's Hall upon 'The Record of the Ages.' I have been specially invited to be present upon the platform, and to move a vote of thanks to the lecturer. While doing so, I shall make it my business, with infinite tact and delicacy, to throw out a few remarks which may arouse the interest of the audience and cause some of them to desire to go more deeply into the matter. Nothing contentious, you understand, but only an indication that there are greater deeps beyond. I shall hold myself strongly in leash, and see whether by this self-restraint I attain a more favorable result."

"And I may come?" I asked eagerly.

"Why, surely," he answered, cordially. He had an enormously massive genial manner, which was almost as overpowering as his violence. His smile of benevolence was a wonderful thing, when his cheeks would suddenly bunch into two red apples, between his half-closed eyes and his great black beard. "By all means, come. It will be a comfort to me to know that I have one ally in the hall, however inefficient and ignorant of the subject he may be. I fancy there will be a large audience, for Waldron, though an absolute charlatan, has a considerable popular following. Now, Mr. Malone, I have given you rather more of my time than I had intended. The individual must not monopolize what is meant for the world. I shall be pleased to see you at the lecture to-night. In the meantime, you will understand that no public use is to be made of any of the material that I have given you."

"But Mr. McArdle — my news editor, you know — will want to know what I have done."

“Tell him what you like. You can say, among other things, that if he sends anyone else to intrude upon me I shall call upon him with a riding-whip. But I leave it to you that nothing of all this appears in print. Very good. Then the Zoological Institute’s Hall at eight-thirty to-night.” I had a last impression of red cheeks, blue rippling beard, and intolerant eyes, as he waved me out of the room.

CHAPTER V

“Question!”

What with the physical shocks incidental to my first interview with Professor Challenger and the mental ones which accompanied the second, I was a somewhat demoralised journalist by the time I found myself in Enmore Park once more. In my aching head the one thought was throbbing that there really was truth in this man’s story, that it was of tremendous consequence, and that it would work up into inconceivable copy for the Gazette when I could obtain permission to use it. A taxicab was waiting at the end of the road, so I sprang into it and drove down to the office. McArdle was at his post as usual.

“Well,” he cried, expectantly, “what may it run to? I’m thinking, young man, you have been in the wars. Don’t tell me that he assaulted you.”

“We had a little difference at first.”

“What a man it is! What did you do?”

“Well, he became more reasonable and we had a chat. But I got nothing out of him — nothing for publication.”

“I’m not so sure about that. You got a black eye out of him, and that’s for publication. We can’t have this reign of terror, Mr. Malone. We must bring the man to his bearings. I’ll have a leaderette on him to-morrow that will raise a blister. Just give me the material and I will engage to brand the fellow for ever. Professor Munchausen — how’s that for an inset headline? Sir John Mandeville redivivus — Cagliostro — all the imposters and bullies in history. I’ll show him up for the fraud he is.”

“I wouldn’t do that, sir.”

“Why not?”

“Because he is not a fraud at all.”

“What!” roared McArdle. “You don’t mean to say you really believe this stuff of his about mammoths and mastodons and great sea sairpents?”

“Well, I don’t know about that. I don’t think he makes any claims of that kind. But I do believe he has got something new.”

“Then for Heaven’s sake, man, write it up!”

“I’m longing to, but all I know he gave me in confidence and on condition that I didn’t.” I condensed into a few sentences the Professor’s narrative. “That’s how it stands.”

McArdle looked deeply incredulous.

“Well, Mr. Malone,” he said at last, “about this scientific meeting to-night; there can be no privacy about that, anyhow. I don’t suppose any paper will want to report it, for Waldron has been reported already a dozen times, and no one is aware that Challenger will speak. We may get a scoop, if we are lucky. You’ll be there in any case, so you’ll just give us a pretty full report. I’ll keep space up to midnight.”

My day was a busy one, and I had an early dinner at the Savage Club with Tarp Henry, to whom I gave some account of my adventures. He listened with a sceptical smile on his gaunt face, and roared with laughter on hearing that the Professor had convinced me.

“My dear chap, things don’t happen like that in real life. People don’t stumble upon enormous discoveries and then lose their evidence. Leave that to the novelists. The fellow is as full of tricks as the monkey-house at the Zoo. It’s all bosh.”

“But the American poet?”

“He never existed.”

“I saw his sketch-book.”

“Challenger’s sketch-book.”

“You think he drew that animal?”

“Of course he did. Who else?”

“Well, then, the photographs?”

“There was nothing in the photographs. By your own admission you only saw a bird.”

“A pterodactyl.”

“That’s what HE says. He put the pterodactyl into your head.”

“Well, then, the bones?”

“First one out of an Irish stew. Second one vamped up for the occasion. If you are clever and know your business you can fake a bone as easily as you can a photograph.”

I began to feel uneasy. Perhaps, after all, I had been premature in my acquiescence. Then I had a sudden happy thought.

“Will you come to the meeting?” I asked.

Tarp Henry looked thoughtful.

“He is not a popular person, the genial Challenger,” said he. “A lot of people have accounts to settle with him. I should say he is about the best-hated man in London. If the medical students turn out there will be no end of a rag. I don’t want to get into a bear-garden.”

“You might at least do him the justice to hear him state his own case.”

“Well, perhaps it’s only fair. All right. I’m your man for the evening.”

When we arrived at the hall we found a much greater concourse than I had expected. A line of electric broughams discharged their little cargoes of white-bearded professors, while the dark stream of humbler pedestrians, who crowded through the arched door-way, showed that the audience would be popular as well as scientific. Indeed, it became evident to us as soon as we had taken our seats that a youthful and even boyish spirit was abroad in the gallery and the back portions of the hall. Looking behind me, I could see rows of faces of the familiar medical student type. Apparently the great hospitals had each sent down their contingent. The behavior of the audience at present was good-humored, but mischievous. Scraps of popular songs were chorused with an enthusiasm which was a strange prelude to a scientific lecture, and there was already a tendency to personal chaff which promised a jovial evening to others, however embarrassing it might be to the recipients of these dubious honors.

Thus, when old Doctor Meldrum, with his well-known curly-brimmed opera-hat, appeared upon the platform, there was such a universal query of “Where DID you get that tile?” that he hurriedly removed it, and concealed it furtively under his chair. When gouty Professor Wadley limped down to his seat there were general affectionate inquiries from all parts of the hall as to the exact state of his poor toe, which caused him obvious embarrassment. The greatest demonstration of all, however, was at the entrance of my new acquaintance, Professor Challenger, when he passed down to take his place at the extreme end of the front row of the platform. Such a yell of welcome broke forth when his black beard first protruded round the corner that I began to suspect Tarp Henry was right in his surmise, and that this assemblage was there not merely for the sake of the lecture, but because it had got rumored abroad that the famous Professor would take part in the proceedings.

There was some sympathetic laughter on his entrance among the front benches of well-dressed spectators, as though the demonstration of the students in this instance was not unwelcome to them. That greeting was, indeed, a frightful outburst of sound, the uproar of the carnivora cage when the step of the bucket-bearing keeper is heard in the distance. There was an offensive tone in it, perhaps, and yet in the main it struck me as mere riotous outcry, the noisy reception of one who amused and interested them, rather than of one they disliked or despised. Challenger smiled with weary and tolerant contempt, as a kindly man would meet the yapping of a litter of puppies. He sat slowly down, blew out his chest, passed his hand caressingly down his beard, and looked with drooping eyelids and supercilious eyes at the crowded hall before him. The uproar of his advent had not yet died away when Professor Ronald Murray, the chairman, and Mr. Waldron, the lecturer, threaded their way to the front, and the proceedings began.

Professor Murray will, I am sure, excuse me if I say that he has the common fault of most Englishmen of being inaudible. Why on earth people who have something to say which is worth hearing should not take the slight trouble to learn how to make it heard is one of the strange mysteries of modern life. Their methods are as reasonable as to try to pour some precious stuff from the spring to the reservoir through a non-conducting pipe, which could by the least effort be opened. Professor Murray made several profound remarks to his white tie and to the water-carafe upon the table, with a humorous, twinkling aside to the silver candlestick upon his right. Then he sat down, and Mr. Waldron, the famous popular lecturer, rose amid a general murmur of applause. He was a stern, gaunt man, with a harsh voice, and an aggressive manner, but he had the merit of knowing how to assimilate the ideas of other men, and to pass them on in a way which was intelligible and even interesting to the lay public, with a happy knack of being funny about the most unlikely objects, so that the precession of the Equinox or the formation of a vertebrate became a highly humorous process as treated by him.

It was a bird’s-eye view of creation, as interpreted by science, which, in language always clear and sometimes picturesque, he unfolded before us. He told us of the globe, a huge mass of flaming gas, flaring through the heavens. Then he pictured the solidification, the cooling, the wrinkling which formed the mountains, the steam which turned to water, the slow preparation of the stage upon which was to be played the inexplicable drama of life. On the origin of life itself he was discreetly vague. That the germs of it could hardly have survived the original roasting was, he declared, fairly certain. Therefore it had come later. Had it built itself out of the cooling, inorganic elements of the globe? Very likely. Had the germs of it arrived from outside upon a meteor? It was hardly conceivable. On the whole, the wisest man was the least dogmatic upon the point. We could not — or at least we had not succeeded up to date in making organic life in our laboratories out of inorganic materials. The gulf between the dead and the living was something which our chemistry could not as yet bridge. But there was a higher and subtler chemistry of Nature, which, working with great forces over long epochs, might well produce results which were impossible for us. There the matter must be left.

This brought the lecturer to the great ladder of animal life, beginning low down in molluscs and feeble sea creatures, then up rung by rung through reptiles and fishes, till at last we came to a kangaroo-rat, a creature which brought forth its young alive, the direct ancestor of all mammals, and presumably, therefore, of everyone in the audience. ("No, no," from a sceptical student in the back row.) If the young gentleman in the red tie who cried "No, no," and who presumably claimed to have been hatched out of an egg, would wait upon him after the lecture, he would be glad to see such a curiosity. (Laughter.) It was strange to think that the climax of all the age-long process of Nature had been the creation of that gentleman in the red tie. But had the process stopped? Was this gentleman to be taken as the final type — the be-all and end-all of development? He hoped that he would not hurt the feelings of the gentleman in the red tie if he maintained that, whatever virtues that gentleman might possess in private life, still the vast processes of the universe were not fully justified if they were to end entirely in his production. Evolution was not a spent force, but one still working, and even greater achievements were in store.

Having thus, amid a general titter, played very prettily with his interrupter, the lecturer went back to his picture of the past, the drying of the seas, the emergence of the sand-bank, the sluggish, viscous life which lay upon their margins, the overcrowded lagoons, the tendency of the sea creatures to take refuge upon the mud-flats, the abundance of food awaiting them, their consequent enormous growth. "Hence, ladies and gentlemen," he added, "that frightful brood of saurians which still affright our eyes when seen in the Wealden or in the Solenhofen slates, but which were fortunately extinct long before the first appearance of mankind upon this planet."

"Question!" boomed a voice from the platform.

Mr. Waldron was a strict disciplinarian with a gift of acid humor, as exemplified upon the gentleman with the red tie, which made it perilous to interrupt him. But this interjection appeared to him so absurd that he was at a loss how to deal with it. So looks the Shakespearean who is confronted by a rancid Baconian, or the astronomer who is assailed by a flat-earth fanatic. He paused for a moment, and then, raising his voice, repeated slowly the words: “Which were extinct before the coming of man.”

“Question!” boomed the voice once more.

Waldron looked with amazement along the line of professors upon the platform until his eyes fell upon the figure of Challenger, who leaned back in his chair with closed eyes and an amused expression, as if he were smiling in his sleep.

“I see!” said Waldron, with a shrug. “It is my friend Professor Challenger,” and amid laughter he renewed his lecture as if this was a final explanation and no more need be said.

But the incident was far from being closed. Whatever path the lecturer took amid the wilds of the past seemed invariably to lead him to some assertion as to extinct or prehistoric life which instantly brought the same bulls’ bellow from the Professor. The audience began to anticipate it and to roar with delight when it came. The packed benches of students joined in, and every time Challenger’s beard opened, before any sound could come forth, there was a yell of “Question!” from a hundred voices, and an answering counter cry of “Order!” and “Shame!” from as many more. Waldron, though a hardened lecturer and a strong man, became rattled. He hesitated, stammered, repeated himself, got snarled in a long sentence, and finally turned furiously upon the cause of his troubles.

“This is really intolerable!” he cried, glaring across the platform. “I must ask you, Professor Challenger, to cease these ignorant and unmannerly interruptions.”

There was a hush over the hall, the students rigid with delight at seeing the high gods on Olympus quarrelling among themselves. Challenger levered his bulky figure slowly out of his chair.

“I must in turn ask you, Mr. Waldron,” he said, “to cease to make assertions which are not in strict accordance with scientific fact.”

The words unloosed a tempest. “Shame! Shame!” “Give him a hearing!” “Put him out!” “Shove him off the platform!” “Fair play!” emerged from a general roar of amusement or execration. The chairman was on his feet flapping both his hands and bleating excitedly. “Professor Challenger — personal — views — later,” were the solid peaks above his clouds of inaudible mutter. The interrupter bowed, smiled, stroked his beard, and relapsed into his chair. Waldron, very flushed and warlike, continued his observations. Now and then, as he made an assertion, he shot a venomous glance at his opponent, who seemed to be slumbering deeply, with the same broad, happy smile upon his face.

At last the lecture came to an end — I am inclined to think that it was a premature one, as the peroration was hurried and disconnected. The thread of the argument had been rudely broken, and the audience was restless and expectant. Waldron sat down, and, after a chirrup from the chairman, Professor Challenger rose and advanced to the edge of the platform. In the interests of my paper I took down his speech verbatim.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” he began, amid a sustained interruption from the back. “I beg pardon — Ladies, Gentlemen, and Children — I must apologize, I had inadvertently omitted a considerable section of this audience” (tumult, during which the Professor stood with one hand raised and his enormous head nodding sympathetically, as if he were bestowing a pontifical blessing upon the crowd), “I have been selected to move a vote of thanks to Mr. Waldron for the very picturesque and imaginative address to which we have just listened. There are points in it with which I disagree, and it has been my duty to indicate them as they arose, but, none the less, Mr. Waldron has accomplished his object well, that object being to give a simple and interesting account of what he conceives to have been the history of our planet. Popular lectures are the easiest to listen to, but Mr. Waldron” (here he beamed and blinked at the lecturer) “will excuse me when I say that they are necessarily both superficial and misleading, since they have to be graded to the comprehension of an ignorant audience.” (Ironical cheering.) “Popular lecturers are in their nature parasitic.” (Angry gesture of protest from Mr. Waldron.) “They exploit for fame or cash the work which has been done by their indigent and unknown brethren. One smallest new fact obtained in the laboratory, one brick built into the temple of science, far outweighs any second-hand exposition which passes an idle hour, but can leave no useful result behind it. I put forward this obvious reflection, not out of any desire to disparage Mr. Waldron in particular, but that you may not lose your sense of proportion and mistake the acolyte for the high priest.” (At this point Mr. Waldron whispered to the chairman, who half rose and said something severely to his water-carafe.) “But enough of this!” (Loud and prolonged cheers.) “Let me pass to some subject of wider interest. What is the particular point upon which I, as an original investigator, have challenged our lecturer’s accuracy? It is upon the permanence of certain types of animal life upon the earth. I do not speak upon this subject as an amateur, nor, I may add, as a popular lecturer, but I speak as one whose scientific conscience compels him to adhere closely to facts, when I say that Mr. Waldron is very wrong in supposing that because he has never himself seen a so-called prehistoric animal, therefore these creatures no longer exist. They are indeed, as he has said, our ancestors, but they are, if I may use the expression, our contemporary ancestors, who can still be found with all their hideous and formidable characteristics if one has but the energy and hardihood to seek their haunts. Creatures which were supposed to be Jurassic, monsters who would hunt down and devour our largest and fiercest mammals, still exist.” (Cries of “Bosh!” “Prove it!” “How do YOU know?” “Question!”) “How do I know, you ask me? I know because I have visited their secret haunts. I know because I have seen some of them.” (Applause, uproar, and a voice, “Liar!”) “Am I a liar?” (General hearty and noisy assent.) “Did I hear someone say that I was a liar? Will the person who called me a liar kindly stand up that I may know him?” (A voice, “Here he is, sir!” and an inoffensive little person in spectacles, struggling violently, was held up among a group of students.) “Did you venture to call me a liar?” (“No, sir, no!” shouted the accused, and disappeared like a jack-in-the-box.) “If any person in this hall dares to doubt my veracity, I shall be glad to have a few words with him after the lecture.” (“Liar!”) “Who said that?” (Again the inoffensive one plunging desperately, was elevated high into the air.) “If I come down among you ——” (General chorus of “Come, love, come!” which interrupted the proceedings for some moments, while the chairman, standing up and waving both his arms, seemed to be conducting the music. The Professor, with his face flushed, his nostrils dilated, and his beard bristling, was now in a proper Berserk mood.) “Every great discoverer has been met with the same incredulity — the sure brand of a generation of fools. When great facts are laid before you, you have not the intuition, the imagination which would help you to understand them. You can only throw mud at the men who have risked their lives to open new fields to science. You persecute the prophets! Galileo! Darwin, and I — —" (Prolonged cheering and complete interruption.)

All this is from my hurried notes taken at the time, which give little notion of the absolute chaos to which the assembly had by this time been reduced. So terrific was the uproar that several ladies had already beaten a hurried retreat. Grave and reverend seniors seemed to have caught the prevailing spirit as badly as the students, and I saw white-bearded men rising and shaking their fists at the obdurate Professor. The whole great audience seethed and simmered like a boiling pot. The Professor took a step forward and raised both his hands. There was something so big and arresting and virile in the man that the clatter and shouting died gradually away before his commanding gesture and his masterful eyes. He seemed to have a definite message. They hushed to hear it.

"I will not detain you," he said. "It is not worth it. Truth is truth, and the noise of a number of foolish young men — and, I fear I must add, of their equally foolish seniors — cannot affect the matter. I claim that I have opened a new field of science. You dispute it." (Cheers.) "Then I put you to the test. Will you accredit one or more of your own number to go out as your representatives and test my statement in your name?"

Mr. Summerlee, the veteran Professor of Comparative Anatomy, rose among the audience, a tall, thin, bitter man, with the withered aspect of a theologian. He wished, he said, to ask Professor Challenger whether the results to which he had alluded in his remarks had been obtained during a journey to the headwaters of the Amazon made by him two years before.

Professor Challenger answered that they had.

Mr. Summerlee desired to know how it was that Professor Challenger claimed to have made discoveries in those regions which had been overlooked by Wallace, Bates, and other previous explorers of established scientific repute.

Professor Challenger answered that Mr. Summerlee appeared to be confusing the Amazon with the Thames; that it was in reality a somewhat larger river; that Mr. Summerlee might be interested to know that with the Orinoco, which communicated with it, some fifty thousand miles of country were opened up, and that in so vast a space it was not impossible for one person to find what another had missed.

Mr. Summerlee declared, with an acid smile, that he fully appreciated the difference between the Thames and the Amazon, which lay in the fact that any assertion about the former could be tested, while about the latter it could not. He would be obliged if Professor Challenger would give the latitude and the longitude of the country in which prehistoric animals were to be found.

Professor Challenger replied that he reserved such information for good reasons of his own, but would be prepared to give it with proper precautions to a committee chosen from the audience. Would Mr. Summerlee serve on such a committee and test his story in person?

Mr. Summerlee: “Yes, I will.” (Great cheering.)

Professor Challenger: “Then I guarantee that I will place in your hands such material as will enable you to find your way. It is only right, however, since Mr. Summerlee goes to check my statement that I should have one or more with him who may check his. I will not disguise from you that there are difficulties and dangers. Mr. Summerlee will need a younger colleague. May I ask for volunteers?”

It is thus that the great crisis of a man’s life springs out at him. Could I have imagined when I entered that hall that I was about to pledge myself to a wilder adventure than had ever come to me in my dreams? But Gladys — was it not the very opportunity of which she spoke? Gladys would have told me to go. I had sprung to my feet. I was speaking, and yet I had prepared no words. Tarp Henry, my companion, was plucking at my skirts and I heard him whispering, “Sit down, Malone! Don’t make a public ass of yourself.” At the same time I was aware that a tall, thin man, with dark gingery hair, a few seats in front of me, was also upon his feet. He glared back at me with hard angry eyes, but I refused to give way.

“I will go, Mr. Chairman,” I kept repeating over and over again.

“Name! Name!” cried the audience.

“My name is Edward Dunn Malone. I am the reporter of the Daily Gazette. I claim to be an absolutely unprejudiced witness.”

“What is YOUR name, sir?” the chairman asked of my tall rival.

“I am Lord John Roxton. I have already been up the Amazon, I know all the ground, and have special qualifications for this investigation.”

“Lord John Roxton’s reputation as a sportsman and a traveler is, of course, world-famous,” said the chairman; “at the same time it would certainly be as well to have a member of the Press upon such an expedition.”

“Then I move,” said Professor Challenger, “that both these gentlemen be elected, as representatives of this meeting, to accompany Professor Summerlee upon his journey to investigate and to report upon the truth of my statements.”

And so, amid shouting and cheering, our fate was decided, and I found myself borne away in the human current which swirled towards the door, with my mind half stunned by the vast new project which had risen so suddenly before it. As I emerged from the hall I was conscious for a moment of a rush of laughing students — down the pavement, and of an arm wielding a heavy umbrella, which rose and fell in the midst of them. Then, amid a mixture of groans and cheers, Professor Challenger’s electric brougham slid from the curb, and I found myself walking under the silvery lights of Regent Street, full of thoughts of Gladys and of wonder as to my future.

Suddenly there was a touch at my elbow. I turned, and found myself looking into the humorous, masterful eyes of the tall, thin man who had volunteered to be my companion on this strange quest.

“Mr. Malone, I understand,” said he. “We are to be companions — what? My rooms are just over the road, in the Albany. Perhaps you would have the kindness to spare me half an hour, for there are one or two things that I badly want to say to you.”

CHAPTER VI

“I was the Flail of the Lord”

Lord John Roxton and I turned down Vigo Street together and through the dingy portals of the famous aristocratic rookery. At the end of a long drab passage my new acquaintance pushed open a door and turned on an electric switch. A number of lamps shining through tinted shades bathed the whole great room before us in a ruddy radiance. Standing in the doorway and glancing round me, I had a general impression of extraordinary comfort and elegance combined with an atmosphere of masculine virility. Everywhere there were mingled the luxury of the wealthy man of taste and the careless untidiness of the bachelor. Rich furs and strange iridescent mats from some Oriental bazaar were scattered upon the floor. Pictures and prints which even my unpractised eyes could recognise as being of great price and rarity hung thick upon the walls. Sketches of boxers, of ballet-girls, and of racehorses alternated with a sensuous Fragonard, a martial Girardet, and a dreamy Turner. But amid these varied ornaments there were scattered the trophies which brought back strongly to my recollection the fact that Lord John Roxton was one of the great all-round sportsmen and athletes of his day. A dark-blue oar crossed with a cherry-pink one above his mantel-piece spoke of the old Oxonian and Leander man, while the foils and boxing-gloves above and below them were the tools of a man who had won supremacy with each. Like a dado round the room was the jutting line of splendid heavy game-heads, the best of their sort from every quarter of the world, with the rare white rhinoceros of the Lado Enclave drooping its supercilious lip above them all.

In the center of the rich red carpet was a black and gold Louis Quinze table, a lovely antique, now sacrilegiously desecrated with marks of glasses and the scars of cigar-stumps. On it stood a silver tray of smokables and a burnished spirit-stand, from which and an adjacent siphon my silent host proceeded to charge two high glasses. Having indicated an arm-chair to me and placed my refreshment near it, he handed me a long, smooth Havana. Then, seating himself opposite to me, he looked at me long and fixedly with his strange, twinkling, reckless eyes — eyes of a cold light blue, the colour of a glacier lake.

Through the thin haze of my cigar-smoke I noted the details of a face which was already familiar to me from many photographs — the strongly-curved nose, the hollow, worn cheeks, the dark, ruddy hair, thin at the top, the crisp, virile moustaches, the small, aggressive tuft upon his projecting chin. Something there was of Napoleon III., something of Don Quixote, and yet again something which was the essence of the English country gentleman, the keen, alert, open-air lover of dogs and of horses. His skin was of a rich flower-pot red from sun and wind. His eyebrows were tufted and overhanging, which gave those naturally cold eyes an almost ferocious aspect, an impression which was increased by his strong and furrowed brow. In figure he was spare, but very strongly built — indeed, he had often proved that there were few men in England capable of such sustained exertions. His height was a little over six feet, but he seemed shorter on account of a peculiar rounding of the shoulders. Such was the famous Lord John Roxton as he sat opposite to me, biting hard upon his cigar and watching me steadily in a long and embarrassing silence.

“Well,” said he, at last, “we’ve gone and done it, young fellah my lad.” (This curious phrase he pronounced as if it were all one word—”young-fellah-me-lad.”) “Yes, we’ve taken a jump, you an’ me. I suppose, now, when you went into that room there was no such notion in your head — what?”

“No thought of it.”

“The same here. No thought of it. And here we are, up to our necks in the tureen. Why, I’ve only been back three weeks from Uganda, and taken a place in Scotland, and signed the lease and all. Pretty goin’s on — what? How does it hit you?”

“Well, it is all in the main line of my business. I am a journalist on the Gazette.”

“Of course — you said so when you took it on. By the way, I’ve got a small job for you, if you’ll help me.”

“With pleasure.”

“Don’t mind takin’ a risk, do you?”

“What is the risk?”

“Well, it’s Ballinger — he’s the risk. You’ve heard of him?”

“No.”

"Why, young fellah, where HAVE you lived? Sir John Ballinger is the best gentleman jock in the north country. I could hold him on the flat at my best, but over jumps he's my master. Well, it's an open secret that when he's out of trainin' he drinks hard — strikin' an average, he calls it. He got delirium on Toosday, and has been ragin' like a devil ever since. His room is above this. The doctors say that it is all up with the old dear unless some food is got into him, but as he lies in bed with a revolver on his coverlet, and swears he will put six of the best through anyone that comes near him, there's been a bit of a strike among the serving-men. He's a hard nail, is Jack, and a dead shot, too, but you can't leave a Grand National winner to die like that — what?"

"What do you mean to do, then?" I asked.

"Well, my idea was that you and I could rush him. He may be dozin', and at the worst he can only wing one of us, and the other should have him. If we can get his bolster-cover round his arms and then 'phone up a stomach-pump, we'll give the old dear the supper of his life."

It was a rather desperate business to come suddenly into one's day's work. I don't think that I am a particularly brave man. I have an Irish imagination which makes the unknown and the untried more terrible than they are. On the other hand, I was brought up with a horror of cowardice and with a terror of such a stigma. I dare say that I could throw myself over a precipice, like the Hun in the history books, if my courage to do it were questioned, and yet it would surely be pride and fear, rather than courage, which would be my inspiration. Therefore, although every nerve in my body shrank from the whisky-maddened figure which I pictured in the room above, I still answered, in as careless a voice as I could command, that I was ready to go. Some further remark of Lord Roxton's about the danger only made me irritable.

"Talking won't make it any better," said I. "Come on."

I rose from my chair and he from his. Then with a little confidential chuckle of laughter, he patted me two or three times on the chest, finally pushing me back into my chair.

"All right, sonny my lad — you'll do," said he. I looked up in surprise.

"I saw after Jack Ballinger myself this mornin'. He blew a hole in the skirt of my kimono, bless his shaky old hand, but we got a jacket on him, and he's to be all right in a week. I say, young fellah, I hope you don't mind — what? You see, between you an' me close-tiled, I look on this South

American business as a mighty serious thing, and if I have a pal with me I want a man I can bank on. So I sized you down, and I'm bound to say that you came well out of it. You see, it's all up to you and me, for this old Summerlee man will want dry-nursin' from the first. By the way, are you by any chance the Malone who is expected to get his Rugby cap for Ireland?"

"A reserve, perhaps."

"I thought I remembered your face. Why, I was there when you got that try against Richmond — as fine a swervin' run as I saw the whole season. I never miss a Rugby match if I can help it, for it is the manliest game we have left. Well, I didn't ask you in here just to talk sport. We've got to fix our business. Here are the sailin's, on the first page of the Times. There's a Booth boat for Para next Wednesday week, and if the Professor and you can work it, I think we should take it — what? Very good, I'll fix it with him. What about your outfit?"

"My paper will see to that."

"Can you shoot?"

"About average Territorial standard."

"Good Lord! as bad as that? It's the last thing you young fellahs think of learnin'. You're all bees without stings, so far as lookin' after the hive goes. You'll look silly, some o' these days, when someone comes along an' sneaks the honey. But you'll need to hold your gun straight in South America, for, unless our friend the Professor is a madman or a liar, we may see some queer things before we get back. What gun have you?"

He crossed to an oaken cupboard, and as he threw it open I caught a glimpse of glistening rows of parallel barrels, like the pipes of an organ.

"I'll see what I can spare you out of my own battery," said he.

One by one he took out a succession of beautiful rifles, opening and shutting them with a snap and a clang, and then patting them as he put them back into the rack as tenderly as a mother would fondle her children.

"This is a Bland's .577 axite express," said he. "I got that big fellow with it." He glanced up at the white rhinoceros. "Ten more yards, and he'd would have added me to HIS collection.

'On that conical bullet his one chance hangs, 'Tis the weak one's advantage fair.'

Hope you know your Gordon, for he's the poet of the horse and the gun and the man that handles both. Now, here's a useful tool — .470, telescopic sight, double ejector, point-blank up to three-fifty. That's the rifle I used against the Peruvian slave-drivers three years ago. I was the flail of the Lord up in those parts, I may tell you, though you won't find it in any Blue-book. There are times, young fellah, when every one of us must make a stand for human right and justice, or you never feel clean again. That's why I made a little war on my own. Declared it myself, waged it myself, ended it myself. Each of those nicks is for a slave murderer — a good row of them — what? That big one is for Pedro Lopez, the king of them all, that I killed in a backwater of the Putomayo River. Now, here's something that would do for you." He took out a beautiful brown-and-silver rifle. "Well rubbered at the stock, sharply sighted, five cartridges to the clip. You can trust your life to that." He handed it to me and closed the door of his oak cabinet.

"By the way," he continued, coming back to his chair, "what do you know of this Professor Challenger?"

"I never saw him till to-day."

"Well, neither did I. It's funny we should both sail under sealed orders from a man we don't know. He seemed an uppish old bird. His brothers of science don't seem too fond of him, either. How came you to take an interest in the affair?"

I told him shortly my experiences of the morning, and he listened intently. Then he drew out a map of South America and laid it on the table.

"I believe every single word he said to you was the truth," said he, earnestly, "and, mind you, I have something to go on when I speak like that. South America is a place I love, and I think, if you take it right through from Darien to Fuego, it's the grandest, richest, most wonderful bit of earth upon this planet. People don't know it yet, and don't realise what it may become. I've been up an' down it from end to end, and had two dry seasons in those very parts, as I told you when I spoke of the war I made on the slave-dealers. Well, when I was up there I heard some yarns of the same kind — traditions of Indians and the like, but with somethin' behind them, no doubt. The more you knew of that country, young fellah, the more you would understand that anythin' was possible — ANYTHIN'! There are just some narrow water-lanes along which folk travel, and outside that it is all darkness. Now, down here in the Matto Grande" — he swept his cigar over a part of the map—"or up in this corner where three countries meet, nothin' would surprise me. As that chap said to-night, there are fifty-thousand miles of water-way runnin' through a forest that is very near the size of Europe. You and I could be as far away from each other as Scotland is from

Constantinople, and yet each of us be in the same great Brazilian forest. Man has just made a track here and a scrape there in the maze. Why, the river rises and falls the best part of forty feet, and half the country is a morass that you can't pass over. Why shouldn't somethin' new and wonderful lie in such a country? And why shouldn't we be the men to find it out? Besides," he added, his queer, gaunt face shining with delight, "there's a sportin' risk in every mile of it. I'm like an old golf-ball — I've had all the white paint knocked off me long ago. Life can whack me about now, and it can't leave a mark. But a sportin' risk, young fellah, that's the salt of existence. Then it's worth livin' again. We're all gettin' a deal too soft and dull and comfy. Give me the great waste lands and the wide spaces, with a gun in my fist and somethin' to look for that's worth findin'. I've tried war and steeplechasin' and aeroplanes, but this huntin' of beasts that look like a lobster-supper dream is a brand-new sensation." He chuckled with glee at the prospect.

Perhaps I have dwelt too long upon this new acquaintance, but he is to be my comrade for many a day, and so I have tried to set him down as I first saw him, with his quaint personality and his queer little tricks of speech and of thought. It was only the need of getting in the account of my meeting which drew me at last from his company. I left him seated amid his pink radiance, oiling the lock of his favorite rifle, while he still chuckled to himself at the thought of the adventures which awaited us. It was very clear to me that if dangers lay before us I could not in all England have found a cooler head or a braver spirit with which to share them.

That night, wearied as I was after the wonderful happenings of the day, I sat late with McArdle, the news editor, explaining to him the whole situation, which he thought important enough to bring next morning before the notice of Sir George Beaumont, the chief. It was agreed that I should write home full accounts of my adventures in the shape of successive letters to McArdle, and that these should either be edited for the Gazette as they arrived, or held back to be published later, according to the wishes of Professor Challenger, since we could not yet know what conditions he might attach to those directions which should guide us to the unknown land. In response to a telephone inquiry, we received nothing more definite than a fulmination against the Press, ending up with the remark that if we would notify our boat he would hand us any directions which he might think it proper to give us at the moment of starting. A second question from us failed to elicit any answer at all, save a plaintive bleat from his wife to the effect that her husband was in a very violent temper already, and that she hoped we would do nothing to make it worse. A third attempt, later in the day, provoked a terrific crash, and a subsequent message from the Central Exchange that Professor Challenger's receiver had been shattered. After that we abandoned all attempt at communication.

And now my patient readers, I can address you directly no longer. From now onwards (if, indeed, any continuation of this narrative should ever reach you) it can only be through the paper which I represent. In the hands of the editor I leave this account of the events which have led up to one of the most remarkable expeditions of all time, so that if I never return to England there shall be some record as to how the affair came about. I am writing these last lines in the saloon of the Booth liner Francisca, and they will go back by the pilot to the keeping of Mr. McArdle. Let me draw one last picture before I close the notebook — a picture which is the last memory of the old country which I bear away with me. It is a wet, foggy morning in the late spring; a thin, cold rain is falling. Three shining mackintoshed figures are walking down the quay, making for the gang-plank of the great liner from which the blue-peter is flying. In front of them a porter pushes a trolley piled high with trunks, wraps, and gun-cases. Professor Summerlee, a long, melancholy figure, walks with dragging steps and drooping head, as one who is already profoundly sorry for himself. Lord John Roxton steps briskly, and his thin, eager face beams forth between his hunting-cap and his muffler. As for myself, I am glad to have got the bustling days of preparation and the pangs of leave-taking behind me, and I have no doubt that I show it in my bearing. Suddenly, just as we reach the vessel, there is a shout behind us. It is Professor Challenger, who had promised to see us off. He runs after us, a puffing, red-faced, irascible figure.

"No thank you," says he; "I should much prefer not to go aboard. I have only a few words to say to you, and they can very well be said where we are. I beg you not to imagine that I am in any way indebted to you for making this journey. I would have you to understand that it is a matter of perfect indifference to me, and I refuse to entertain the most remote sense of personal obligation. Truth is truth, and nothing which you can report can affect it in any way, though it may excite the emotions and allay the curiosity of a number of very ineffectual people. My directions for your instruction and guidance are in this sealed envelope. You will open it when you reach a town upon the Amazon which is called Manaos, but not until the date and hour which is marked upon the outside. Have I made myself clear? I leave the strict observance of my conditions entirely to your honor. No, Mr. Malone, I will place no restriction upon your correspondence, since the ventilation of the facts is the object of your journey; but I demand that you shall give no particulars as to your exact destination, and that nothing be actually published until your return. Good-bye, sir. You have done something to mitigate my feelings for the loathsome profession to which you unhappily belong. Good-bye, Lord John. Science is, as I understand, a sealed book to you; but you may congratulate yourself upon the hunting-field which awaits you. You will, no doubt, have the opportunity of describing in the Field how you brought down the rocketing dimorphodon. And good-bye to you also, Professor Summerlee. If you are still capable of self-improvement, of which I am frankly unconvinced, you will surely return to London a wiser man."

So he turned upon his heel, and a minute later from the deck I could see his short, squat figure bobbing about in the distance as he made his way back to his train. Well, we are well down Channel now. There's the last bell for letters, and it's good-bye to the pilot. We'll be "down, hull-down, on the old trail" from now on. God bless all we leave behind us, and send us safely back.

CHAPTER VII

“To-morrow we Disappear into the Unknown”

I will not bore those whom this narrative may reach by an account of our luxurious voyage upon the Booth liner, nor will I tell of our week’s stay at Para (save that I should wish to acknowledge the great kindness of the Pereira da Pinta Company in helping us to get together our equipment). I will also allude very briefly to our river journey, up a wide, slow-moving, clay-tinted stream, in a steamer which was little smaller than that which had carried us across the Atlantic. Eventually we found ourselves through the narrows of Obidos and reached the town of Manaos. Here we were rescued from the limited attractions of the local inn by Mr. Shortman, the representative of the British and Brazilian Trading Company. In his hospital Fazenda we spent our time until the day when we were empowered to open the letter of instructions given to us by Professor Challenger. Before I reach the surprising events of that date I would desire to give a clearer sketch of my comrades in this enterprise, and of the associates whom we had already gathered together in South America. I speak freely, and I leave the use of my material to your own discretion, Mr. McArdle, since it is through your hands that this report must pass before it reaches the world.

The scientific attainments of Professor Summerlee are too well known for me to trouble to recapitulate them. He is better equipped for a rough expedition of this sort than one would imagine at first sight. His tall, gaunt, stringy figure is insensible to fatigue, and his dry, half-sarcastic, and often wholly unsympathetic manner is uninfluenced by any change in his surroundings. Though in his sixty-sixth year, I have never heard him express any dissatisfaction at the occasional hardships which we have had to encounter. I had regarded his presence as an encumbrance to the expedition, but, as a matter of fact, I am now well convinced that his power of endurance is as great as my own. In temper he is naturally acid and sceptical. From the beginning he has never concealed his belief that Professor Challenger is an absolute fraud, that we are all embarked upon an absurd wild-goose chase and that we are likely to reap nothing but disappointment and danger in South America, and corresponding ridicule in England. Such are the views which, with much passionate distortion of his thin features and wagging of his thin, goat-like beard, he poured into our ears all the way from Southampton to Manaos. Since landing from the boat he has obtained some consolation from the beauty and variety of the insect and bird life around him, for he is absolutely whole-hearted in his devotion to science. He spends his days flitting through the woods with his shot-gun and his butterfly-net, and his evenings in mounting the many specimens he has acquired. Among his minor peculiarities are that he is careless as to his attire, unclean in his person, exceedingly absent-minded in his habits, and addicted to smoking a short briar pipe, which is seldom out of his mouth. He has been upon several scientific expeditions in his youth (he was with Robertson in Papua), and the life of the camp and the canoe is nothing fresh to him.

Lord John Roxton has some points in common with Professor Summerlee, and others in which they are the very antithesis to each other. He is twenty years younger, but has something of the same spare, scraggy physique. As to his appearance, I have, as I recollect, described it in that portion of my narrative which I have left behind me in London. He is exceedingly neat and prim in his ways, dresses always with great care in white drill suits and high brown mosquito-boots, and shaves at least once a day. Like most men of action, he is laconic in speech, and sinks readily into his own thoughts, but he is always quick to answer a question or join in a conversation, talking in a queer, jerky, half-humorous fashion. His knowledge of the world, and very especially of South America, is surprising, and he has a whole-hearted belief in the possibilities of our journey which is not to be dashed by the sneers of Professor Summerlee. He has a gentle voice and a quiet manner, but behind his twinkling blue eyes there lurks a capacity for furious wrath and implacable resolution, the more dangerous because they are held in leash. He spoke little of his own exploits in Brazil and Peru, but it was a revelation to me to find the excitement which was caused by his presence among the riverine natives, who looked upon him as their champion and protector. The exploits of the Red Chief, as they called him, had become legends among them, but the real facts, as far as I could learn them, were amazing enough.

These were that Lord John had found himself some years before in that no-man’s-land which is formed by the half-defined frontiers between Peru, Brazil, and Columbia. In this great district the wild rubber tree flourishes, and has become, as in the Congo, a curse to the natives which can only be compared to their forced labor under the Spaniards upon the old silver mines of Darien. A handful of villainous half-breeds dominated the country, armed such Indians as would support them, and turned the rest into slaves, terrorizing them with the most inhuman tortures in order to force them to gather the india-rubber, which was then floated down the river to Para. Lord John Roxton expostulated on behalf of the wretched victims, and received nothing but threats and insults for his pains. He then formally declared war against Pedro Lopez, the leader of the slave-drivers, enrolled a band of runaway slaves in his service, armed them, and conducted a campaign, which ended by his killing with his own hands the notorious half-breed and breaking down the system which he represented.

No wonder that the ginger-headed man with the silky voice and the free and easy manners was now looked upon with deep interest upon the banks of the great South American river, though the feelings he inspired were naturally mixed, since the gratitude of the natives was equaled by the resentment of those who desired to exploit them. One useful result of his former experiences was that he could talk fluently in the Lingoa Geral, which is the peculiar talk, one-third Portuguese and two-thirds Indian, which is current all over Brazil.

I have said before that Lord John Roxton was a South Americomaniac. He could not speak of that great country without ardor, and this ardor was infectious, for, ignorant as I was, he fixed my attention and stimulated my curiosity. How I wish I could reproduce the glamour of his discourses, the peculiar mixture of accurate knowledge and of racy imagination which gave them their fascination, until even the Professor’s cynical and sceptical smile would gradually vanish from his thin face as he listened. He would tell the history of the mighty river so rapidly explored (for some of the first conquerors of Peru actually crossed the entire continent upon its waters), and yet so unknown in regard to all that lay behind its ever-changing banks.

“What is there?” he would cry, pointing to the north. “Wood and marsh and unpenetrated jungle. Who knows what it may shelter? And there to the south? A wilderness of swampy forest, where no white man has ever been. The unknown is up against us on every side. Outside the narrow lines of the rivers what does anyone know? Who will say what is possible in such a country? Why should old man Challenger not be right?” At which direct defiance the stubborn sneer would reappear upon Professor Summerlee’s face, and he would sit, shaking his sardonic head in unsympathetic silence, behind the cloud of his briar-root pipe.

So much, for the moment, for my two white companions, whose characters and limitations will be further exposed, as surely as my own, as this narrative proceeds. But already we have enrolled certain retainers who may play no small part in what is to come. The first is a gigantic negro named Zambo, who is a black Hercules, as willing as any horse, and about as intelligent. Him we enlisted at Para, on the recommendation of the steamship company, on whose vessels he had learned to speak a halting English.

It was at Para also that we engaged Gomez and Manuel, two half-breeds from up the river, just come down with a cargo of redwood. They were swarthy fellows, bearded and fierce, as active and wiry as panthers. Both of them had spent their lives in those upper waters of the Amazon which we were about to explore, and it was this recommendation which had caused Lord John to engage them. One of them, Gomez, had the further advantage that he could speak excellent English. These men were willing to act as our personal servants, to cook, to row, or to make themselves useful in any way at a payment of fifteen dollars a month. Besides these, we had engaged three Mojo Indians from Bolivia, who are the most skilful at fishing and boat work of all the river tribes. The chief of these we called Mojo, after his tribe, and the others are known as Jose and Fernando. Three white men, then, two half-breeds, one negro, and three Indians made up the personnel of the little expedition which lay waiting for its instructions at Manaos before starting upon its singular quest.

At last, after a weary week, the day had come and the hour. I ask you to picture the shaded sitting-room of the Fazenda St. Ignatio, two miles inland from the town of Manaos. Outside lay the yellow, brassy glare of the sunshine, with the shadows of the palm trees as black and definite as the trees themselves. The air was calm, full of the eternal hum of insects, a tropical chorus of many octaves, from the deep drone of the bee to the high, keen pipe of the mosquito. Beyond the veranda was a small cleared garden, bounded with cactus hedges and adorned with clumps of flowering shrubs, round which the great blue butterflies and the tiny humming-birds fluttered and darted in crescents of sparkling light. Within we were seated round the cane table, on which lay a sealed envelope. Inscribed upon it, in the jagged handwriting of Professor Challenger, were the words: —

“Instructions to Lord John Roxton and party. To be opened at Manaos upon July 15th, at 12 o’clock precisely.”

Lord John had placed his watch upon the table beside him.

“We have seven more minutes,” said he. “The old dear is very precise.”

Professor Summerlee gave an acid smile as he picked up the envelope in his gaunt hand.

“What can it possibly matter whether we open it now or in seven minutes?” said he. “It is all part and parcel of the same system of quackery and nonsense, for which I regret to say that the writer is notorious.”

“Oh, come, we must play the game accordin’ to rules,” said Lord John. “It’s old man Challenger’s show and we are here by his good will, so it would be rotten bad form if we didn’t follow his instructions to the letter.”

“A pretty business it is!” cried the Professor, bitterly. “It struck me as preposterous in London, but I’m bound to say that it seems even more so upon closer acquaintance. I don’t know what is inside this envelope, but, unless it is something pretty definite, I shall be much tempted to take the next down-river boat and catch the Bolivia at Para. After all, I have some more responsible work in the world than to run about disproving the assertions of a lunatic. Now, Roxton, surely it is time.”

“Time it is,” said Lord John. “You can blow the whistle.” He took up the envelope and cut it with his penknife. From it he drew a folded sheet of paper. This he carefully opened out and flattened on the table. It was a blank sheet. He turned it over. Again it was blank. We looked at each other in a bewildered silence, which was broken by a discordant burst of derisive laughter from Professor Summerlee.

“It is an open admission,” he cried. “What more do you want? The fellow is a self-confessed humbug. We have only to return home and report him as the brazen imposter that he is.”

“Invisible ink!” I suggested.

“I don’t think!” said Lord Roxton, holding the paper to the light. “No, young fellah my lad, there is no use deceiving yourself. I’ll go bail for it that nothing has ever been written upon this paper.”

“May I come in?” boomed a voice from the veranda.

The shadow of a squat figure had stolen across the patch of sunlight. That voice! That monstrous breadth of shoulder! We sprang to our feet with a gasp of astonishment as Challenger, in a round, boyish straw-hat with a coloured ribbon — Challenger, with his hands in his jacket-pockets and his canvas shoes daintily pointing as he walked — appeared in the open space before us. He threw back his head, and there he stood in the golden glow with all his old Assyrian luxuriance of beard, all his native insolence of drooping eyelids and intolerant eyes.

"I fear," said he, taking out his watch, "that I am a few minutes too late. When I gave you this envelope I must confess that I had never intended that you should open it, for it had been my fixed intention to be with you before the hour. The unfortunate delay can be apportioned between a blundering pilot and an intrusive sandbank. I fear that it has given my colleague, Professor Summerlee, occasion to blaspheme."

"I am bound to say, sir," said Lord John, with some sternness of voice, "that your turning up is a considerable relief to us, for our mission seemed to have come to a premature end. Even now I can't for the life of me understand why you should have worked it in so extraordinary a manner."

Instead of answering, Professor Challenger entered, shook hands with myself and Lord John, bowed with ponderous insolence to Professor Summerlee, and sank back into a basket-chair, which creaked and swayed beneath his weight.

"Is all ready for your journey?" he asked.

"We can start to-morrow."

"Then so you shall. You need no chart of directions now, since you will have the inestimable advantage of my own guidance. From the first I had determined that I would myself preside over your investigation. The most elaborate charts would, as you will readily admit, be a poor substitute for my own intelligence and advice. As to the small ruse which I played upon you in the matter of the envelope, it is clear that, had I told you all my intentions, I should have been forced to resist unwelcome pressure to travel out with you."

"Not from me, sir!" exclaimed Professor Summerlee, heartily. "So long as there was another ship upon the Atlantic."

Challenger waved him away with his great hairy hand.

"Your common sense will, I am sure, sustain my objection and realise that it was better that I should direct my own movements and appear only at the exact moment when my presence was needed. That moment has now arrived. You are in safe hands. You will not now fail to reach your destination. From henceforth I take command of this expedition, and I must ask you to complete your preparations to-night, so that we may be able to make an early start in the morning. My time is of value, and the same thing may be said, no doubt, in a lesser degree of your own. I propose, therefore, that we push on as rapidly as possible, until I have demonstrated what you have come to see."

Lord John Roxton has chartered a large steam launch, the Esmeralda, which was to carry us up the river. So far as climate goes, it was immaterial what time we chose for our expedition, as the temperature ranges from seventy-five to ninety degrees both summer and winter, with no appreciable difference in heat. In moisture, however, it is otherwise; from December to May is the period of the rains, and during this time the river slowly rises until it attains a height of nearly forty feet above its low-water mark. It floods the banks, extends in great lagoons over a monstrous waste of country, and forms a huge district, called locally the Gapo, which is for the most part too marshy for foot-travel and too shallow for boating. About June the waters begin to fall, and are at their lowest at October or November. Thus our expedition was at the time of the dry season, when the great river and its tributaries were more or less in a normal condition.

The current of the river is a slight one, the drop being not greater than eight inches in a mile. No stream could be more convenient for navigation, since the prevailing wind is south-east, and sailing boats may make a continuous progress to the Peruvian frontier, dropping down again with the current. In our own case the excellent engines of the Esmeralda could disregard the sluggish flow of the stream, and we made as rapid progress as if we were navigating a stagnant lake. For three days we steamed north-westwards up a stream which even here, a thousand miles from its mouth, was still so enormous that from its center the two banks were mere shadows upon the distant skyline. On the fourth day after leaving Manaos we turned into a tributary which at its mouth was little smaller than the main stream. It narrowed rapidly, however, and after two more days' steaming we reached an Indian village, where the Professor insisted that we should land, and that the Esmeralda should be sent back to Manaos. We should soon come upon rapids, he explained, which would make its further use impossible. He added privately that we were now approaching the door of the unknown country, and that the fewer whom we took into our confidence the better it would be. To this end also he made each of us give our word of honor that we would publish or say nothing which would give any exact clue as to the whereabouts of our travels, while the servants were all solemnly sworn to the same effect. It is for this reason that I am compelled to be vague in my narrative, and I would warn my readers that in any map or diagram which I may give the relation of places to each other may be correct, but the points of the compass are carefully confused, so that in no way can it be taken as an actual guide to the country. Professor Challenger's reasons for secrecy may be valid or not, but we had no choice but to adopt them, for he was prepared to abandon the whole expedition rather than modify the conditions upon which he would guide us.

It was August 2nd when we snapped our last link with the outer world by bidding farewell to the Esmeralda. Since then four days have passed, during which we have engaged two large canoes from the Indians, made of so light a material (skins over a bamboo framework) that we should be able to carry them round any obstacle. These we have loaded with all our effects, and have engaged two additional Indians to help us in the navigation. I understand that they are the very two — Ataca and Ipetu by name — who accompanied Professor Challenger upon his previous journey. They appeared to be terrified at the prospect of repeating it, but the chief has patriarchal powers in these countries, and if the bargain is good in his eyes the clansman has little choice in the matter.

So to-morrow we disappear into the unknown. This account I am transmitting down the river by canoe, and it may be our last word to those who are interested in our fate. I have, according to our arrangement, addressed it to you, my dear Mr. McArdle, and I leave it to your discretion to delete, alter, or do what you like with it. From the assurance of Professor Challenger's manner — and in spite of the continued scepticism of Professor Summerlee — I have no doubt that our leader will make good his statement, and that we are really on the eve of some most remarkable experiences.

CHAPTER VIII

“The Outlying Pickets of the New World”

Our friends at home may well rejoice with us, for we are at our goal, and up to a point, at least, we have shown that the statement of Professor Challenger can be verified. We have not, it is true, ascended the plateau, but it lies before us, and even Professor Summerlee is in a more chastened mood. Not that he will for an instant admit that his rival could be right, but he is less persistent in his incessant objections, and has sunk for the most part into an observant silence. I must hark back, however, and continue my narrative from where I dropped it. We are sending home one of our local Indians who is injured, and I am committing this letter to his charge, with considerable doubts in my mind as to whether it will ever come to hand.

When I wrote last we were about to leave the Indian village where we had been deposited by the Esmeralda. I have to begin my report by bad news, for the first serious personal trouble (I pass over the incessant bickerings between the Professors) occurred this evening, and might have had a tragic ending. I have spoken of our English-speaking half-breed, Gomez — a fine worker and a willing fellow, but afflicted, I fancy, with the vice of curiosity, which is common enough among such men. On the last evening he seems to have hid himself near the hut in which we were discussing our plans, and, being observed by our huge negro Zambo, who is as faithful as a dog and has the hatred which all his race bear to the half-breeds, he was dragged out and carried into our presence. Gomez whipped out his knife, however, and but for the huge strength of his captor, which enabled him to disarm him with one hand, he would certainly have stabbed him. The matter has ended in reprimands, the opponents have been compelled to shake hands, and there is every hope that all will be well. As to the feuds of the two learned men, they are continuous and bitter. It must be admitted that Challenger is provocative in the last degree, but Summerlee has an acid tongue, which makes matters worse. Last night Challenger said that he never cared to walk on the Thames Embankment and look up the river, as it was always sad to see one’s own eventual goal.

He is convinced, of course, that he is destined for Westminster Abbey. Summerlee rejoined, however, with a sour smile, by saying that he understood that Millbank Prison had been pulled down. Challenger's conceit is too colossal to allow him to be really annoyed. He only smiled in his beard and repeated "Really! Really!" in the pitying tone one would use to a child. Indeed, they are children both — the one wizened and cantankerous, the other formidable and overbearing, yet each with a brain which has put him in the front rank of his scientific age. Brain, character, soul — only as one sees more of life does one understand how distinct is each.

The very next day we did actually make our start upon this remarkable expedition. We found that all our possessions fitted very easily into the two canoes, and we divided our personnel, six in each, taking the obvious precaution in the interests of peace of putting one Professor into each canoe. Personally, I was with Challenger, who was in a beatific humor, moving about as one in a silent ecstasy and beaming benevolence from every feature. I have had some experience of him in other moods, however, and shall be the less surprised when the thunderstorms suddenly come up amidst the sunshine. If it is impossible to be at your ease, it is equally impossible to be dull in his company, for one is always in a state of half-tremulous doubt as to what sudden turn his formidable temper may take.

For two days we made our way up a good-sized river some hundreds of yards broad, and dark in colour, but transparent, so that one could usually see the bottom. The affluents of the Amazon are, half of them, of this nature, while the other half are whitish and opaque, the difference depending upon the class of country through which they have flowed. The dark indicate vegetable decay, while the others point to clayey soil. Twice we came across rapids, and in each case made a portage of half a mile or so to avoid them. The woods on either side were primeval, which are more easily penetrated than woods of the second growth, and we had no great difficulty in carrying our canoes through them. How shall I ever forget the solemn mystery of it? The height of the trees and the thickness of the boles exceeded anything which I in my town-bred life could have imagined, shooting upwards in magnificent columns until, at an enormous distance above our heads, we could dimly discern the spot where they threw out their side-branches into Gothic upward curves which coalesced to form one great matted roof of verdure, through which only an occasional golden ray of sunshine shot downwards to trace a thin dazzling line of light amidst the majestic obscurity. As we walked noiselessly amid the thick, soft carpet of decaying vegetation the hush fell upon our souls which comes upon us in the twilight of the Abbey, and even Professor Challenger’s full-chested notes sank into a whisper. Alone, I should have been ignorant of the names of these giant growths, but our men of science pointed out the cedars, the great silk cotton trees, and the redwood trees, with all that profusion of various plants which has made this continent the chief supplier to the human race of those gifts of Nature which depend upon the vegetable world, while it is the most backward in those products which come from animal life. Vivid orchids and wonderful coloured lichens smoldered upon the swarthy tree-trunks and where a wandering shaft of light fell full upon the golden allamanda, the scarlet star-clusters of the tacsonia, or the rich deep blue of ipomaea, the effect was as a dream of fairyland. In these great wastes of forest, life, which abhors darkness, struggles ever upwards to the light. Every plant, even the smaller ones, curls and writhes to the green surface, twining itself round its stronger and taller brethren in the effort. Climbing plants are monstrous and luxuriant, but others which have never been known to climb elsewhere learn the art as an escape from that somber shadow, so that the common nettle, the jasmine, and even the jacitara palm tree can be seen circling the stems of the cedars and striving to reach their crowns. Of animal life there was no movement amid the majestic vaulted aisles which stretched from us as we walked, but a constant movement far above our heads told of that multitudinous world of snake and monkey, bird and sloth, which lived in the sunshine, and looked down in wonder at our tiny, dark, stumbling figures in the obscure depths immeasurably below them. At dawn and at sunset the howler monkeys screamed together and the parrakeets broke into shrill chatter, but during the hot hours of the day only the full drone of insects, like the beat of a distant surf, filled the ear, while nothing moved amid the solemn vistas of stupendous trunks, fading away into the darkness which held us in. Once some bandy-legged, lurching creature, an ant-eater or a bear, scuttled clumsily amid the shadows. It was the only sign of earth life which I saw in this great Amazonian forest.

And yet there were indications that even human life itself was not far from us in those mysterious recesses. On the third day out we were aware of a singular deep throbbing in the air, rhythmic and solemn, coming and going fitfully throughout the morning. The two boats were paddling within a few yards of each other when first we heard it, and our Indians remained motionless, as if they had been turned to bronze, listening intently with expressions of terror upon their faces.

“What is it, then?” I asked.

“Drums,” said Lord John, carelessly; “war drums. I have heard them before.”

“Yes, sir, war drums,” said Gomez, the half-breed. “Wild Indians, bravos, not mansos; they watch us every mile of the way; kill us if they can.”

“How can they watch us?” I asked, gazing into the dark, motionless void.

The half-breed shrugged his broad shoulders.

“The Indians know. They have their own way. They watch us. They talk the drum talk to each other. Kill us if they can.”

By the afternoon of that day — my pocket diary shows me that it was Tuesday, August 18th — at least six or seven drums were throbbing from various points. Sometimes they beat quickly, sometimes slowly, sometimes in obvious question and answer, one far to the east breaking out in a high staccato rattle, and being followed after a pause by a deep roll from the north. There was something indescribably nerve-shaking and menacing in that constant mutter, which seemed to shape itself into the very syllables of the half-breed, endlessly repeated, “We will kill you if we can. We will kill you if we can.” No one ever moved in the silent woods. All the peace and soothing of quiet Nature lay in that dark curtain of vegetation, but away from behind there came ever the one message from our fellow-man. “We will kill you if we can,” said the men in the east. “We will kill you if we can,” said the men in the north.

All day the drums rumbled and whispered, while their menace reflected itself in the faces of our coloured companions. Even the hardy, swaggering half-breed seemed cowed. I learned, however, that day once for all that both Summerlee and Challenger possessed that highest type of bravery, the bravery of the scientific mind. Theirs was the spirit which upheld Darwin among the gauchos of the Argentine or Wallace among the head-hunters of Malaya. It is decreed by a merciful Nature that the human brain cannot think of two things simultaneously, so that if it be steeped in curiosity as to science it has no room for merely personal considerations. All day amid that incessant and mysterious menace our two Professors watched every bird upon the wing, and every shrub upon the bank, with many a sharp wordy contention, when the snarl of Summerlee came quick upon the deep growl of Challenger, but with no more sense of danger and no more reference to drum-beating Indians than if they were seated together in the smoking-room of the Royal Society's Club in St. James's Street. Once only did they condescend to discuss them.

"Miranha or Amajuaca cannibals," said Challenger, jerking his thumb towards the reverberating wood.

"No doubt, sir," Summerlee answered. "Like all such tribes, I shall expect to find them of poly-synthetic speech and of Mongolian type."

"Polysynthetic certainly," said Challenger, indulgently. "I am not aware that any other type of language exists in this continent, and I have notes of more than a hundred. The Mongolian theory I regard with deep suspicion."

"I should have thought that even a limited knowledge of comparative anatomy would have helped to verify it," said Summerlee, bitterly.

Challenger thrust out his aggressive chin until he was all beard and hat-rim. "No doubt, sir, a limited knowledge would have that effect. When one's knowledge is exhaustive, one comes to other conclusions." They glared at each other in mutual defiance, while all round rose the distant whisper, "We will kill you — we will kill you if we can."

That night we moored our canoes with heavy stones for anchors in the center of the stream, and made every preparation for a possible attack. Nothing came, however, and with the dawn we pushed upon our way, the drum-beating dying out behind us. About three o'clock in the afternoon we came to a very steep rapid, more than a mile long — the very one in which Professor Challenger had suffered disaster upon his first journey. I confess that the sight of it consoled me, for it was really the first direct corroboration, slight as it was, of the truth of his story. The Indians carried first our canoes and then our stores through the brushwood, which is very thick at this point, while we four whites, our rifles on our shoulders, walked between them and any danger coming from the woods. Before evening we had successfully passed the rapids, and made our way some ten miles above them, where we anchored for the night. At this point I reckoned that we had come not less than a hundred miles up the tributary from the main stream.

It was in the early forenoon of the next day that we made the great departure. Since dawn Professor Challenger had been acutely uneasy, continually scanning each bank of the river. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction and pointed to a single tree, which projected at a peculiar angle over the side of the stream.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

"It is surely an Assai palm," said Summerlee.

"Exactly. It was an Assai palm which I took for my landmark. The secret opening is half a mile onwards upon the other side of the river. There is no break in the trees. That is the wonder and the mystery of it. There where you see light-green rushes instead of dark-green undergrowth, there between the great cotton woods, that is my private gate into the unknown. Push through, and you will understand."

It was indeed a wonderful place. Having reached the spot marked by a line of light-green rushes, we poled out two canoes through them for some hundreds of yards, and eventually emerged into a placid and shallow stream, running clear and transparent over a sandy bottom. It may have been twenty yards across, and was banked in on each side by most luxuriant vegetation. No one who had not observed that for a short distance reeds had taken the place of shrubs, could possibly have guessed the existence of such a stream or dreamed of the fairyland beyond.

For a fairyland it was — the most wonderful that the imagination of man could conceive. The thick vegetation met overhead, interlacing into a natural pergola, and through this tunnel of verdure in a golden twilight flowed the green, pellucid river, beautiful in itself, but marvelous from the strange tints thrown by the vivid light from above filtered and tempered in its fall. Clear as crystal, motionless as a sheet of glass, green as the edge of an iceberg, it stretched in front of us under its leafy archway, every stroke of our paddles sending a thousand ripples across its shining surface. It was a fitting avenue to a land of wonders. All sign of the Indians had passed away, but animal life was more frequent, and the tameness of the creatures showed that they knew nothing of the hunter. Fuzzy little black-velvet monkeys, with snow-white teeth and gleaming, mocking eyes, chattered at us as we passed. With a dull, heavy splash an occasional cayman plunged in from the bank. Once a dark, clumsy tapir stared at us from a gap in the bushes, and then lumbered away through the forest; once, too, the yellow, sinuous form of a great puma whisked amid the brushwood, and its green, baleful eyes glared hatred at us over its tawny shoulder. Bird life was abundant, especially the wading birds, stork, heron, and ibis gathering in little groups, blue, scarlet, and white, upon every log which jutted from the bank, while beneath us the crystal water was alive with fish of every shape and colour.

For three days we made our way up this tunnel of hazy green sunshine. On the longer stretches one could hardly tell as one looked ahead where the distant green water ended and the distant green archway began. The deep peace of this strange waterway was unbroken by any sign of man.

"No Indian here. Too much afraid. Curupuri," said Gomez.

"Curupuri is the spirit of the woods," Lord John explained. "It's a name for any kind of devil. The poor beggars think that there is something fearsome in this direction, and therefore they avoid it."

On the third day it became evident that our journey in the canoes could not last much longer, for the stream was rapidly growing more shallow. Twice in as many hours we stuck upon the bottom. Finally we pulled the boats up among the brushwood and spent the night on the bank of the river. In the morning Lord John and I made our way for a couple of miles through the forest, keeping parallel with the stream; but as it grew ever shallower we returned and reported, what Professor Challenger had already suspected, that we had reached the highest point to which the canoes could be brought. We drew them up, therefore, and concealed them among the bushes, blazing a tree with our axes, so that we should find them again. Then we distributed the various burdens among us — guns, ammunition, food, a tent, blankets, and the rest — and, shouldering our packages, we set forth upon the more laborious stage of our journey.

An unfortunate quarrel between our pepper-pots marked the outset of our new stage. Challenger had from the moment of joining us issued directions to the whole party, much to the evident discontent of Summerlee. Now, upon his assigning some duty to his fellow-Professor (it was only the carrying of an aneroid barometer), the matter suddenly came to a head.

"May I ask, sir," said Summerlee, with vicious calm, "in what capacity you take it upon yourself to issue these orders?"

Challenger glared and bristled.

"I do it, Professor Summerlee, as leader of this expedition."

"I am compelled to tell you, sir, that I do not recognise you in that capacity."

"Indeed!" Challenger bowed with unwieldy sarcasm. "Perhaps you would define my exact position."

"Yes, sir. You are a man whose veracity is upon trial, and this committee is here to try it. You walk, sir, with your judges."

“Dear me!” said Challenger, seating himself on the side of one of the canoes. “In that case you will, of course, go on your way, and I will follow at my leisure. If I am not the leader you cannot expect me to lead.”

Thank heaven that there were two sane men — Lord John Roxton and myself — to prevent the petulance and folly of our learned Professors from sending us back empty-handed to London. Such arguing and pleading and explaining before we could get them mollified! Then at last Summerlee, with his sneer and his pipe, would move forwards, and Challenger would come rolling and grumbling after. By some good fortune we discovered about this time that both our savants had the very poorest opinion of Dr. Illingworth of Edinburgh. Thenceforward that was our one safety, and every strained situation was relieved by our introducing the name of the Scotch zoologist, when both our Professors would form a temporary alliance and friendship in their detestation and abuse of this common rival.

Advancing in single file along the bank of the stream, we soon found that it narrowed down to a mere brook, and finally that it lost itself in a great green morass of sponge-like mosses, into which we sank up to our knees. The place was horribly haunted by clouds of mosquitoes and every form of flying pest, so we were glad to find solid ground again and to make a circuit among the trees, which enabled us to outflank this pestilent morass, which droned like an organ in the distance, so loud was it with insect life.

On the second day after leaving our canoes we found that the whole character of the country changed. Our road was persistently upwards, and as we ascended the woods became thinner and lost their tropical luxuriance. The huge trees of the alluvial Amazonian plain gave place to the Phoenix and coco palms, growing in scattered clumps, with thick brushwood between. In the damper hollows the Mauritia palms threw out their graceful drooping fronds. We traveled entirely by compass, and once or twice there were differences of opinion between Challenger and the two Indians, when, to quote the Professor’s indignant words, the whole party agreed to “trust the fallacious instincts of undeveloped savages rather than the highest product of modern European culture.” That we were justified in doing so was shown upon the third day, when Challenger admitted that he recognised several landmarks of his former journey, and in one spot we actually came upon four fire-blackened stones, which must have marked a camping-place.

The road still ascended, and we crossed a rock-studded slope which took two days to traverse. The vegetation had again changed, and only the vegetable ivory tree remained, with a great profusion of wonderful orchids, among which I learned to recognise the rare Nuttonia Vexillaria and the glorious pink and scarlet blossoms of Cattleya and odontoglossum. Occasional brooks with pebbly bottoms and fern-draped banks gurgled down the shallow gorges in the hill, and offered good camping-grounds every evening on the banks of some rock-studded pool, where swarms of little blue-backed fish, about the size and shape of English trout, gave us a delicious supper.

On the ninth day after leaving the canoes, having done, as I reckon, about a hundred and twenty miles, we began to emerge from the trees, which had grown smaller until they were mere shrubs. Their place was taken by an immense wilderness of bamboo, which grew so thickly that we could only penetrate it by cutting a pathway with the machetes and billhooks of the Indians. It took us a long day, traveling from seven in the morning till eight at night, with only two breaks of one hour each, to get through this obstacle. Anything more monotonous and wearying could not be imagined, for, even at the most open places, I could not see more than ten or twelve yards, while usually my vision was limited to the back of Lord John’s cotton jacket in front of me, and to the yellow wall within a foot of me on either side. From above came one thin knife-edge of sunshine, and fifteen feet over our heads one saw the tops of the reeds swaying against the deep blue sky. I do not know what kind of creatures inhabit such a thicket, but several times we heard the plunging of large, heavy animals quite close to us. From their sounds Lord John judged them to be some form of wild cattle. Just as night fell we cleared the belt of bamboos, and at once formed our camp, exhausted by the interminable day.

Early next morning we were again afoot, and found that the character of the country had changed once again. Behind us was the wall of bamboo, as definite as if it marked the course of a river. In front was an open plain, sloping slightly upwards and dotted with clumps of tree-ferns, the whole curving before us until it ended in a long, whale-backed ridge. This we reached about midday, only to find a shallow valley beyond, rising once again into a gentle incline which led to a low, rounded sky-line. It was here, while we crossed the first of these hills, that an incident occurred which may or may not have been important.

Professor Challenger, who with the two local Indians was in the van of the party, stopped suddenly and pointed excitedly to the right. As he did so we saw, at the distance of a mile or so, something which appeared to be a huge gray bird flap slowly up from the ground and skim smoothly off, flying very low and straight, until it was lost among the tree-ferns.

“Did you see it?” cried Challenger, in exultation. “Summerlee, did you see it?”

His colleague was staring at the spot where the creature had disappeared.

“What do you claim that it was?” he asked.

“To the best of my belief, a pterodactyl.”

Summerlee burst into derisive laughter “A pter-fiddlestick!” said he. “It was a stork, if ever I saw one.”

Challenger was too furious to speak. He simply swung his pack upon his back and continued upon his march. Lord John came abreast of me, however, and his face was more grave than was his wont. He had his Zeiss glasses in his hand.

“I focused it before it got over the trees,” said he. “I won’t undertake to say what it was, but I’ll risk my reputation as a sportsman that it wasn’t any bird that ever I clapped eyes on in my life.”

So there the matter stands. Are we really just at the edge of the unknown, encountering the outlying pickets of this lost world of which our leader speaks? I give you the incident as it occurred and you will know as much as I do. It stands alone, for we saw nothing more which could be called remarkable.

And now, my readers, if ever I have any, I have brought you up the broad river, and through the screen of rushes, and down the green tunnel, and up the long slope of palm trees, and through the bamboo brake, and across the plain of tree-ferns. At last our destination lay in full sight of us. When we had crossed the second ridge we saw before us an irregular, palm-studded plain, and then the line of high red cliffs which I have seen in the picture. There it lies, even as I write, and there can be no question that it is the same. At the nearest point it is about seven miles from our present camp, and it curves away, stretching as far as I can see. Challenger struts about like a prize peacock, and Summerlee is silent, but still sceptical. Another day should bring some of our doubts to an end. Meanwhile, as Jose, whose arm was pierced by a broken bamboo, insists upon returning, I send this letter back in his charge, and only hope that it may eventually come to hand. I will write again as the occasion serves. I have enclosed with this a rough chart of our journey, which may have the effect of making the account rather easier to understand.

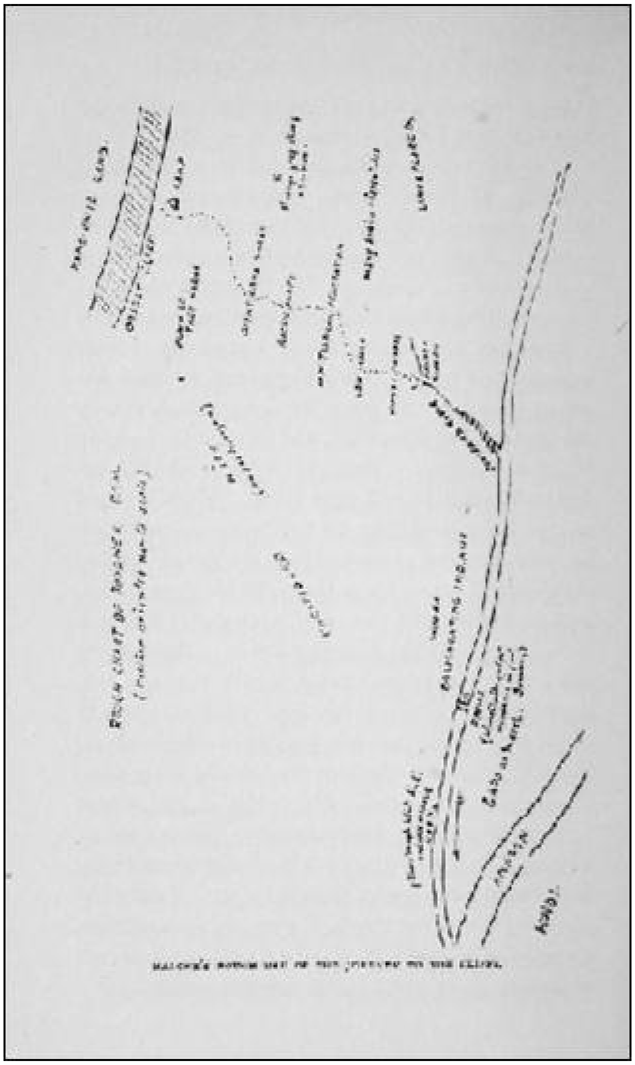

CHAPTER IX

“Who could have Foreseen it?”

A dreadful thing has happened to us. Who could have foreseen it? I cannot foresee any end to our troubles. It may be that we are condemned to spend our whole lives in this strange, inaccessible place. I am still so confused that I can hardly think clearly of the facts of the present or of the chances of the future. To my astounded senses the one seems most terrible and the other as black as night.

No men have ever found themselves in a worse position; nor is there any use in disclosing to you our exact geographical situation and asking our friends for a relief party. Even if they could send one, our fate will in all human probability be decided long before it could arrive in South America.

We are, in truth, as far from any human aid as if we were in the moon. If we are to win through, it is only our own qualities which can save us. I have as companions three remarkable men, men of great brain-power and of unshaken courage. There lies our one and only hope. It is only when I look upon the untroubled faces of my comrades that I see some glimmer through the darkness. Outwardly I trust that I appear as unconcerned as they. Inwardly I am filled with apprehension.

Let me give you, with as much detail as I can, the sequence of events which have led us to this catastrophe.

When I finished my last letter I stated that we were within seven miles from an enormous line of ruddy cliffs, which encircled, beyond all doubt, the plateau of which Professor Challenger spoke. Their height, as we approached them, seemed to me in some places to be greater than he had stated — running up in parts to at least a thousand feet — and they were curiously striated, in a manner which is, I believe, characteristic of basaltic upheavals. Something of the sort is to be seen in Salisbury Crags at Edinburgh. The summit showed every sign of a luxuriant vegetation, with bushes near the edge, and farther back many high trees. There was no indication of any life that we could see.

That night we pitched our camp immediately under the cliff — a most wild and desolate spot. The crags above us were not merely perpendicular, but curved outwards at the top, so that ascent was out of the question. Close to us was the high thin pinnacle of rock which I believe I mentioned earlier in this narrative. It is like a broad red church spire, the top of it being level with the plateau, but a great chasm gaping between. On the summit of it there grew one high tree. Both pinnacle and cliff were comparatively low — some five or six hundred feet, I should think.

"It was on that," said Professor Challenger, pointing to this tree, "that the pterodactyl was perched. I climbed half-way up the rock before I shot him. I am inclined to think that a good mountaineer like myself could ascend the rock to the top, though he would, of course, be no nearer to the plateau when he had done so."

As Challenger spoke of his pterodactyl I glanced at Professor Summerlee, and for the first time I seemed to see some signs of a dawning credulity and repentance. There was no sneer upon his thin lips, but, on the contrary, a gray, drawn look of excitement and amazement. Challenger saw it, too, and reveled in the first taste of victory.

"Of course," said he, with his clumsy and ponderous sarcasm, "Professor Summerlee will understand that when I speak of a pterodactyl I mean a stork — only it is the kind of stork which has no feathers, a leathery skin, membranous wings, and teeth in its jaws." He grinned and blinked and bowed until his colleague turned and walked away.

In the morning, after a frugal breakfast of coffee and manioc — we had to be economical of our stores — we held a council of war as to the best method of ascending to the plateau above us.

Challenger presided with a solemnity as if he were the Lord Chief Justice on the Bench. Picture him seated upon a rock, his absurd boyish straw hat tilted on the back of his head, his supercilious eyes dominating us from under his drooping lids, his great black beard wagging as he slowly defined our present situation and our future movements.

Beneath him you might have seen the three of us — myself, sunburnt, young, and vigorous after our open-air tramp; Summerlee, solemn but still critical, behind his eternal pipe; Lord John, as keen as a razor-edge, with his supple, alert figure leaning upon his rifle, and his eager eyes fixed eagerly upon the speaker. Behind us were grouped the two swarthy half-breeds and the little knot of Indians, while in front and above us towered those huge, ruddy ribs of rocks which kept us from our goal.

"I need not say," said our leader, "that on the occasion of my last visit I exhausted every means of climbing the cliff, and where I failed I do not think that anyone else is likely to succeed, for I am something of a mountaineer. I had none of the appliances of a rock-climber with me, but I have taken the precaution to bring them now. With their aid I am positive I could climb that detached pinnacle to the summit; but so long as the main cliff overhangs, it is vain to attempt ascending that. I was hurried upon my last visit by the approach of the rainy season and by the exhaustion of my supplies. These considerations limited my time, and I can only claim that I have surveyed about six miles of the cliff to the east of us, finding no possible way up. What, then, shall we now do?"

"There seems to be only one reasonable course," said Professor Summerlee. "If you have explored the east, we should travel along the base of the cliff to the west, and seek for a practicable point for our ascent."

"That's it," said Lord John. "The odds are that this plateau is of no great size, and we shall travel round it until we either find an easy way up it, or come back to the point from which we started."

"I have already explained to our young friend here," said Challenger (he has a way of alluding to me as if I were a school child ten years old), "that it is quite impossible that there should be an easy way up anywhere, for the simple reason that if there were the summit would not be isolated, and those conditions would not obtain which have effected so singular an interference with the general laws of survival. Yet I admit that there may very well be places where an expert human climber may reach the summit, and yet a cumbrous and heavy animal be unable to descend. It is certain that there is a point where an ascent is possible."

"How do you know that, sir?" asked Summerlee, sharply.

"Because my predecessor, the American Maple White, actually made such an ascent. How otherwise could he have seen the monster which he sketched in his notebook?"

"There you reason somewhat ahead of the proved facts," said the stubborn Summerlee. "I admit your plateau, because I have seen it; but I have not as yet satisfied myself that it contains any form of life whatever."

"What you admit, sir, or what you do not admit, is really of inconceivably small importance. I am glad to perceive that the plateau itself has actually obtruded itself upon your intelligence.” He glanced up at it, and then, to our amazement, he sprang from his rock, and, seizing Summerlee by the neck, he tilted his face into the air. “Now sir!” he shouted, hoarse with excitement. “Do I help you to realise that the plateau contains some animal life?”

I have said that a thick fringe of green overhung the edge of the cliff. Out of this there had emerged a black, glistening object. As it came slowly forth and overhung the chasm, we saw that it was a very large snake with a peculiar flat, spade-like head. It wavered and quivered above us for a minute, the morning sun gleaming upon its sleek, sinuous coils. Then it slowly drew inwards and disappeared.

Summerlee had been so interested that he had stood unresisting while Challenger tilted his head into the air. Now he shook his colleague off and came back to his dignity.

“I should be glad, Professor Challenger,” said he, “if you could see your way to make any remarks which may occur to you without seizing me by the chin. Even the appearance of a very ordinary rock python does not appear to justify such a liberty.”

“But there is life upon the plateau all the same,” his colleague replied in triumph. “And now, having demonstrated this important conclusion so that it is clear to anyone, however prejudiced or obtuse, I am of opinion that we cannot do better than break up our camp and travel to westward until we find some means of ascent.”

The ground at the foot of the cliff was rocky and broken so that the going was slow and difficult. Suddenly we came, however, upon something which cheered our hearts. It was the site of an old encampment, with several empty Chicago meat tins, a bottle labeled “Brandy,” a broken tin-opener, and a quantity of other travelers’ debris. A crumpled, disintegrated newspaper revealed itself as the Chicago Democrat, though the date had been obliterated.

“Not mine,” said Challenger. “It must be Maple White’s.”

Lord John had been gazing curiously at a great tree-fern which overshadowed the encampment. “I say, look at this,” said he. “I believe it is meant for a sign-post.”

A slip of hard wood had been nailed to the tree in such a way as to point to the westward.

“Most certainly a sign-post,” said Challenger. “What else? Finding himself upon a dangerous errand, our pioneer has left this sign so that any party which follows him may know the way he has taken. Perhaps we shall come upon some other indications as we proceed.”

We did indeed, but they were of a terrible and most unexpected nature. Immediately beneath the cliff there grew a considerable patch of high bamboo, like that which we had traversed in our journey. Many of these stems were twenty feet high, with sharp, strong tops, so that even as they stood they made formidable spears. We were passing along the edge of this cover when my eye was caught by the gleam of something white within it. Thrusting in my head between the stems, I found myself gazing at a fleshless skull. The whole skeleton was there, but the skull had detached itself and lay some feet nearer to the open.

With a few blows from the machetes of our Indians we cleared the spot and were able to study the details of this old tragedy. Only a few shreds of clothes could still be distinguished, but there were the remains of boots upon the bony feet, and it was very clear that the dead man was a European. A gold watch by Hudson, of New York, and a chain which held a stylographic pen, lay among the bones. There was also a silver cigarette-case, with “J. C., from A. E. S.,” upon the lid. The state of the metal seemed to show that the catastrophe had occurred no great time before.

“Who can he be?” asked Lord John. “Poor devil! every bone in his body seems to be broken.”

“And the bamboo grows through his smashed ribs,” said Summerlee. “It is a fast-growing plant, but it is surely inconceivable that this body could have been here while the canes grew to be twenty feet in length.”

“As to the man’s identity,” said Professor Challenger, “I have no doubt whatever upon that point. As I made my way up the river before I reached you at the fazenda I instituted very particular inquiries about Maple White. At Para they knew nothing. Fortunately, I had a definite clew, for there was a particular picture in his sketch-book which showed him taking lunch with a certain ecclesiastic at Rosario. This priest I was able to find, and though he proved a very argumentative fellow, who took it absurdly amiss that I should point out to him the corrosive effect which modern science must have upon his beliefs, he none the less gave me some positive information. Maple White passed Rosario four years ago, or two years before I saw his dead body. He was not alone at the time, but there was a friend, an

American named James Colver, who remained in the boat and did not meet this ecclesiastic. I think, therefore, that there can be no doubt that we are now looking upon the remains of this James Colver."

"Nor," said Lord John, "is there much doubt as to how he met his death. He has fallen or been chucked from the top, and so been impaled. How else could he come by his broken bones, and how could he have been stuck through by these canes with their points so high above our heads?"

A hush came over us as we stood round these shattered remains and realised the truth of Lord John Roxton's words. The beetling head of the cliff projected over the cane-brake. Undoubtedly he had fallen from above. But had he fallen? Had it been an accident? Or — already ominous and terrible possibilities began to form round that unknown land.

We moved off in silence, and continued to coast round the line of cliffs, which were as even and unbroken as some of those monstrous Antarctic ice-fields which I have seen depicted as stretching from horizon to horizon and towering high above the mast-heads of the exploring vessel.

In five miles we saw no rift or break. And then suddenly we perceived something which filled us with new hope. In a hollow of the rock, protected from rain, there was drawn a rough arrow in chalk, pointing still to the westwards.

"Maple White again," said Professor Challenger. "He had some presentiment that worthy footsteps would follow close behind him."

"He had chalk, then?"

"A box of coloured chalks was among the effects I found in his knapsack. I remember that the white one was worn to a stump."

"That is certainly good evidence," said Summerlee. "We can only accept his guidance and follow on to the westward."

We had proceeded some five more miles when again we saw a white arrow upon the rocks. It was at a point where the face of the cliff was for the first time split into a narrow cleft. Inside the cleft was a second guidance mark, which pointed right up it with the tip somewhat elevated, as if the spot indicated were above the level of the ground.

It was a solemn place, for the walls were so gigantic and the slit of blue sky so narrow and so obscured by a double fringe of verdure, that only a dim and shadowy light penetrated to the bottom. We had had no food for many hours, and were very weary with the stony and irregular journey, but our nerves were too strung to allow us to halt. We ordered the camp to be pitched, however, and, leaving the Indians to arrange it, we four, with the two half-breeds, proceeded up the narrow gorge.

It was not more than forty feet across at the mouth, but it rapidly closed until it ended in an acute angle, too straight and smooth for an ascent. Certainly it was not this which our pioneer had attempted to indicate. We made our way back — the whole gorge was not more than a quarter of a mile deep — and then suddenly the quick eyes of Lord John fell upon what we were seeking. High up above our heads, amid the dark shadows, there was one circle of deeper gloom. Surely it could only be the opening of a cave.

The base of the cliff was heaped with loose stones at the spot, and it was not difficult to clamber up. When we reached it, all doubt was removed. Not only was it an opening into the rock, but on the side of it there was marked once again the sign of the arrow. Here was the point, and this the means by which Maple White and his ill-fated comrade had made their ascent.

We were too excited to return to the camp, but must make our first exploration at once. Lord John had an electric torch in his knapsack, and this had to serve us as light. He advanced, throwing his little clear circlet of yellow radiance before him, while in single file we followed at his heels.

The cave had evidently been water-worn, the sides being smooth and the floor covered with rounded stones. It was of such a size that a single man could just fit through by stooping. For fifty yards it ran almost straight into the rock, and then it ascended at an angle of forty-five. Presently this incline became even steeper, and we found ourselves climbing upon hands and knees among loose rubble which slid from beneath us. Suddenly an exclamation broke from Lord Roxton.

“It’s blocked!” said he.

Clustering behind him we saw in the yellow field of light a wall of broken basalt which extended to the ceiling.

“The roof has fallen in!”

In vain we dragged out some of the pieces. The only effect was that the larger ones became detached and threatened to roll down the gradient and crush us. It was evident that the obstacle was far beyond any efforts which we could make to remove it. The road by which Maple White had ascended was no longer available.

Too much cast down to speak, we stumbled down the dark tunnel and made our way back to the camp.

One incident occurred, however, before we left the gorge, which is of importance in view of what came afterwards.

We had gathered in a little group at the bottom of the chasm, some forty feet beneath the mouth of the cave, when a huge rock rolled suddenly downwards — and shot past us with tremendous force. It was the narrowest escape for one or all of us. We could not ourselves see whence the rock had come, but our half-breed servants, who were still at the opening of the cave, said that it had flown past them, and must therefore have fallen from the summit. Looking upwards, we could see no sign of movement above us amidst the green jungle which topped the cliff. There could be little doubt, however, that the stone was aimed at us, so the incident surely pointed to humanity — and malevolent humanity — upon the plateau.

We withdrew hurriedly from the chasm, our minds full of this new development and its bearing upon our plans. The situation was difficult enough before, but if the obstructions of Nature were increased by the deliberate opposition of man, then our case was indeed a hopeless one. And yet, as we looked up at that beautiful fringe of verdure only a few hundreds of feet above our heads, there was not one of us who could conceive the idea of returning to London until we had explored it to its depths.

On discussing the situation, we determined that our best course was to continue to coast round the plateau in the hope of finding some other means of reaching the top. The line of cliffs, which had decreased considerably in height, had already begun to trend from west to north, and if we could take this as representing the arc of a circle, the whole circumference could not be very great. At the worst, then, we should be back in a few days at our starting-point.

We made a march that day which totaled some two-and-twenty miles, without any change in our prospects. I may mention that our aneroid shows us that in the continual incline which we have ascended since we abandoned our canoes we have risen to no less than three thousand feet above sea-level. Hence there is a considerable change both in the temperature and in the vegetation. We have shaken off some of that horrible insect life which is the bane of tropical travel. A few palms still survive, and many tree-ferns, but the Amazonian trees have been all left behind. It was pleasant to see the convolvulus, the passion-flower, and the begonia, all reminding me of home, here among these inhospitable rocks. There was a red begonia just the same colour as one that is kept in a pot in the window of a certain villa in Streatham — but I am drifting into private reminiscence.

That night — I am still speaking of the first day of our circumnavigation of the plateau — a great experience awaited us, and one which for ever set at rest any doubt which we could have had as to the wonders so near us.

You will realise as you read it, my dear Mr. McArdle, and possibly for the first time that the paper has not sent me on a wild-goose chase, and that there is inconceivably fine copy waiting for the world whenever we have the Professor's leave to make use of it. I shall not dare to publish these articles unless I can bring back my proofs to England, or I shall be hailed as the journalistic Munchausen of all time. I have no doubt that you feel the same way yourself, and that you would not care to stake the whole credit of the Gazette upon this adventure until we can meet the chorus of criticism and scepticism which such articles must of necessity elicit. So this wonderful incident, which would make such a headline for the old paper, must still wait its turn in the editorial drawer.

And yet it was all over in a flash, and there was no sequel to it, save in our own convictions.

What occurred was this. Lord John had shot an ajouti — which is a small, pig-like animal — and, half of it having been given to the Indians, we were cooking the other half upon our fire. There is a chill in the air after dark, and we had all drawn close to the blaze. The night was moonless, but there were some stars, and one could see for a little distance across the plain. Well, suddenly out of the darkness, out of the night, there swooped something with a swish like an aeroplane. The whole group of us were covered for an instant by a canopy of leathery wings, and I had a momentary vision of a long, snake-like neck, a fierce, red, greedy eye, and a great snapping beak, filled, to my amazement, with little, gleaming teeth. The next instant it was gone — and so was our dinner. A huge black shadow, twenty feet across, skimmed up into the air; for an instant the monster wings blotted out the stars, and then it vanished over the brow of the cliff above us. We all sat in amazed silence round the fire, like the heroes of Virgil when the Harpies came down upon them. It was Summerlee who was the first to speak.

"Professor Challenger," said he, in a solemn voice, which quavered with emotion, "I owe you an apology. Sir, I am very much in the wrong, and I beg that you will forget what is past."

It was handsomely said, and the two men for the first time shook hands. So much we have gained by this clear vision of our first pterodactyl. It was worth a stolen supper to bring two such men together.

But if prehistoric life existed upon the plateau it was not superabundant, for we had no further glimpse of it during the next three days. During this time we traversed a barren and forbidding country, which alternated between stony desert and desolate marshes full of many wild-fowl, upon the north and east of the cliffs. From that direction the place is really inaccessible, and, were it not for a hardish ledge which runs at the very base of the precipice, we should have had to turn back. Many times we were up to our waists in the slime and blubber of an old, semi-tropical swamp. To make matters worse, the place seemed to be a favorite breeding-place of the Jaracaca snake, the most venomous and aggressive in South America. Again and again these horrible creatures came writhing and springing towards us across the surface of this putrid bog, and it was only by keeping our shot-guns for ever ready that we could feel safe from them. One funnel-shaped depression in the morass, of a livid green in colour from some lichen which festered in it, will always remain as a nightmare memory in my mind. It seems to have been a special nest of these vermins, and the slopes were alive with them, all writhing in our direction, for it is a peculiarity of the Jaracaca that he will always attack man at first sight. There were too many for us to shoot, so we fairly took to our heels and ran until we were exhausted. I shall always remember as we looked back how far behind we could see the heads and necks of our horrible pursuers rising and falling amid the reeds. Jaracaca Swamp we named it in the map which we are constructing.

The cliffs upon the farther side had lost their ruddy tint, being chocolate-brown in colour; the vegetation was more scattered along the top of them, and they had sunk to three or four hundred feet in height, but in no place did we find any point where they could be ascended. If anything, they were more impossible than at the first point where we had met them. Their absolute steepness is indicated in the photograph which I took over the stony desert.

“Surely,” said I, as we discussed the situation, “the rain must find its way down somehow. There are bound to be water-channels in the rocks.”

“Our young friend has glimpses of lucidity,” said Professor Challenger, patting me upon the shoulder.

“The rain must go somewhere,” I repeated.

“He keeps a firm grip upon actuality. The only drawback is that we have conclusively proved by ocular demonstration that there are no water channels down the rocks.”

“Where, then, does it go?” I persisted.

“I think it may be fairly assumed that if it does not come outwards it must run inwards.”

“Then there is a lake in the center.”

“So I should suppose.”

“It is more than likely that the lake may be an old crater,” said Summerlee. “The whole formation is, of course, highly volcanic. But, however that may be, I should expect to find the surface of the plateau slope inwards with a considerable sheet of water in the center, which may drain off, by some subterranean channel, into the marshes of the Jaracaca Swamp.”

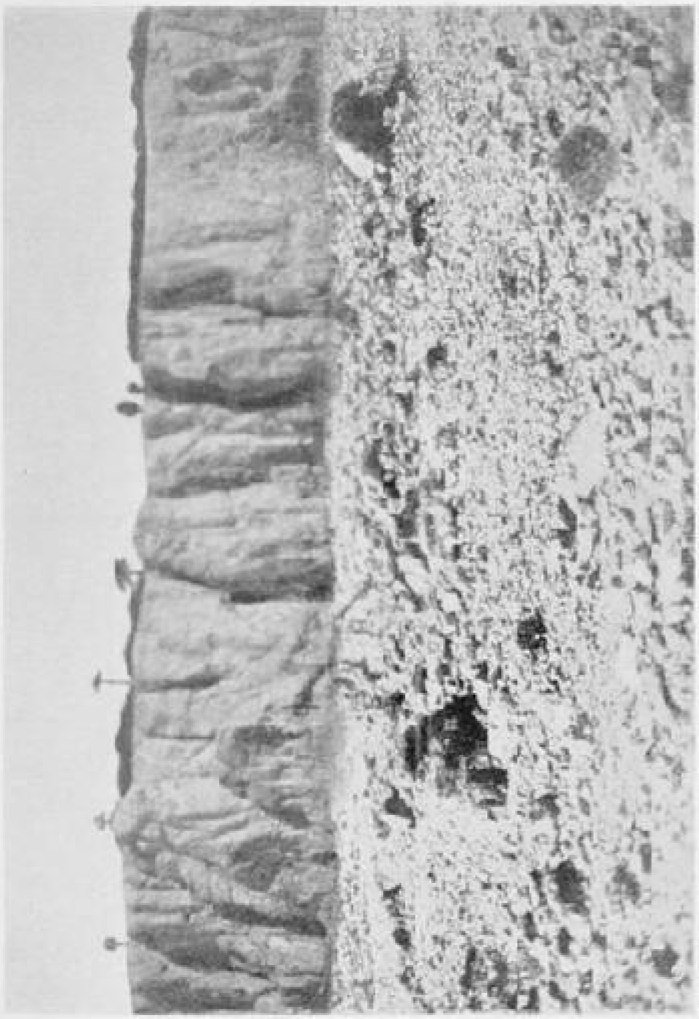

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THE PLATEAU.

(Photographed by E. D. Malone, from the stony plain on the N. E.)

“Or evaporation might preserve an equilibrium,” remarked Challenger, and the two learned men wandered off into one of their usual scientific arguments, which were as comprehensible as Chinese to the layman.

On the sixth day we completed our first circuit of the cliffs, and found ourselves back at the first camp, beside the isolated pinnacle of rock. We were a disconsolate party, for nothing could have been more minute than our investigation, and it was absolutely certain that there was no single point where the most active human being could possibly hope to scale the cliff. The place which Maple White’s chalk-marks had indicated as his own means of access was now entirely impassable.

What were we to do now? Our stores of provisions, supplemented by our guns, were holding out well, but the day must come when they would need replenishment. In a couple of months the rains might be expected, and we should be washed out of our camp. The rock was harder than marble, and any attempt at cutting a path for so great a height was more than our time or resources would admit. No wonder that we looked gloomily at each other that night, and sought our blankets with hardly a word exchanged. I remember that as I dropped off to sleep my last recollection was that Challenger was squatting, like a monstrous bull-frog, by the fire, his huge head in his hands, sunk apparently in the deepest thought, and entirely oblivious to the good-night which I wished him.

But it was a very different Challenger who greeted us in the morning — a Challenger with contentment and self-congratulation shining from his whole person. He faced us as we assembled for breakfast with a deprecating false modesty in his eyes, as who should say, "I know that I deserve all that you can say, but I pray you to spare my blushes by not saying it." His beard bristled exultantly, his chest was thrown out, and his hand was thrust into the front of his jacket. So, in his fancy, may he see himself sometimes, gracing the vacant pedestal in Trafalgar Square, and adding one more to the horrors of the London streets.

"Eureka!" he cried, his teeth shining through his beard. "Gentlemen, you may congratulate me and we may congratulate each other. The problem is solved."

"You have found a way up?"

"I venture to think so."

"And where?"

For answer he pointed to the spire-like pinnacle upon our right.

Our faces — or mine, at least — fell as we surveyed it. That it could be climbed we had our companion's assurance. But a horrible abyss lay between it and the plateau.

"We can never get across," I gasped.

"We can at least all reach the summit," said he. "When we are up I may be able to show you that the resources of an inventive mind are not yet exhausted."

After breakfast we unpacked the bundle in which our leader had brought his climbing accessories. From it he took a coil of the strongest and lightest rope, a hundred and fifty feet in length, with climbing irons, clamps, and other devices. Lord John was an experienced mountaineer, and Summerlee had done some rough climbing at various times, so that I was really the novice at rock-work of the party; but my strength and activity may have made up for my want of experience.

It was not in reality a very stiff task, though there were moments which made my hair bristle upon my head. The first half was perfectly easy, but from there upwards it became continually steeper until, for the last fifty feet, we were literally clinging with our fingers and toes to tiny ledges and crevices in the rock. I could not have accomplished it, nor could Summerlee, if Challenger had not gained the summit (it was extraordinary to see such activity in so unwieldy a creature) and there fixed the rope round the trunk of the considerable tree which grew there. With this as our support, we were soon able to scramble up the jagged wall until we found ourselves upon the small grassy platform, some twenty-five feet each way, which formed the summit.

The first impression which I received when I had recovered my breath was of the extraordinary view over the country which we had traversed. The whole Brazilian plain seemed to lie beneath us, extending away and away until it ended in dim blue mists upon the farthest sky-line. In the foreground was the long slope, strewn with rocks and dotted with tree-ferns; farther off in the middle distance, looking over the saddle-back hill, I could just see the yellow and green mass of bamboos through which we had passed; and then, gradually, the vegetation increased until it formed the huge forest which extended as far as the eyes could reach, and for a good two thousand miles beyond.

I was still drinking in this wonderful panorama when the heavy hand of the Professor fell upon my shoulder.

“This way, my young friend,” said he; “vestigia nulla retrorsum. Never look rearwards, but always to our glorious goal.”

The level of the plateau, when I turned, was exactly that on which we stood, and the green bank of bushes, with occasional trees, was so near that it was difficult to realise how inaccessible it remained. At a rough guess the gulf was forty feet across, but, so far as I could see, it might as well have been forty miles. I placed one arm round the trunk of the tree and leaned over the abyss. Far down were the small dark figures of our servants, looking up at us. The wall was absolutely precipitous, as was that which faced me.

“This is indeed curious,” said the creaking voice of Professor Summerlee.

I turned, and found that he was examining with great interest the tree to which I clung. That smooth bark and those small, ribbed leaves seemed familiar to my eyes. “Why,” I cried, “it’s a beech!”

“Exactly,” said Summerlee. “A fellow-countryman in a far land.”

“Not only a fellow-countryman, my good sir,” said Challenger, “but also, if I may be allowed to enlarge your simile, an ally of the first value. This beech tree will be our saviour.”

“By George!” cried Lord John, “a bridge!”

“Exactly, my friends, a bridge! It is not for nothing that I expended an hour last night in focusing my mind upon the situation. I have some recollection of once remarking to our young friend here that G. E. C. is at his best when his back is to the wall. Last night you will admit that all our backs were to the wall. But where will-power and intellect go together, there is always a way out. A drawbridge had to be found which could be dropped across the abyss. Behold it!”

It was certainly a brilliant idea. The tree was a good sixty feet in height, and if it only fell the right way it would easily cross the chasm. Challenger had slung the camp axe over his shoulder when he ascended. Now he handed it to me.

“Our young friend has the thews and sinews,” said he. “I think he will be the most useful at this task. I must beg, however, that you will kindly refrain from thinking for yourself, and that you will do exactly what you are told.”

Under his direction I cut such gashes in the sides of the trees as would ensure that it should fall as we desired. It had already a strong, natural tilt in the direction of the plateau, so that the matter was not difficult. Finally I set to work in earnest upon the trunk, taking turn and turn with Lord John. In a little over an hour there was a loud crack, the tree swayed forward, and then crashed over, burying its branches among the bushes on the farther side. The severed trunk rolled to the very edge of our platform, and for one terrible second we all thought it was over. It balanced itself, however, a few inches from the edge, and there was our bridge to the unknown.

All of us, without a word, shook hands with Professor Challenger, who raised his straw hat and bowed deeply to each in turn.

“I claim the honor,” said he, “to be the first to cross to the unknown land — a fitting subject, no doubt, for some future historical painting.”

He had approached the bridge when Lord John laid his hand upon his coat.

“My dear chap,” said he, “I really cannot allow it.”

“Cannot allow it, sir!” The head went back and the beard forward.

“When it is a matter of science, don’t you know, I follow your lead because you are by way of bein’ a man of science. But it’s up to you to follow me when you come into my department.”

“Your department, sir?”

“We all have our professions, and soldierin’ is mine. We are, accordin’ to my ideas, invadin’ a new country, which may or may not be chock-full of enemies of sorts. To barge blindly into it for want of a little common sense and patience isn’t my notion of management.”

The remonstrance was too reasonable to be disregarded. Challenger tossed his head and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

“Well, sir, what do you propose?”

“For all I know there may be a tribe of cannibals waitin’ for lunch-time among those very bushes,” said Lord John, looking across the bridge. “It’s better to learn wisdom before you get into a cookin’-pot; so we will content ourselves with hopin’ that there is no trouble waitin’ for us, and at the same time we will act as if there were. Malone and I will go down again, therefore, and we will fetch up the four rifles, together with Gomez and the other. One man can then go across and the rest will cover him with guns, until he sees that it is safe for the whole crowd to come along.”

Challenger sat down upon the cut stump and groaned his impatience; but Summerlee and I were of one mind that Lord John was our leader when such practical details were in question. The climb was a more simple thing now that the rope dangled down the face of the worst part of the ascent. Within an hour we had brought up the rifles and a shot-gun. The half-breeds had ascended also, and under Lord John’s orders they had carried up a bale of provisions in case our first exploration should be a long one. We had each bandoliers of cartridges.

“Now, Challenger, if you really insist upon being the first man in,” said Lord John, when every preparation was complete.

“I am much indebted to you for your gracious permission,” said the angry Professor; for never was a man so intolerant of every form of authority. “Since you are good enough to allow it, I shall most certainly take it upon myself to act as pioneer upon this occasion.”

Seating himself with a leg overhanging the abyss on each side, and his hatchet slung upon his back, Challenger hopped his way across the trunk and was soon at the other side. He clambered up and waved his arms in the air.

“At last!” he cried; “at last!”

I gazed anxiously at him, with a vague expectation that some terrible fate would dart at him from the curtain of green behind him. But all was quiet, save that a strange, many-coloured bird flew up from under his feet and vanished among the trees.

Summerlee was the second. His wiry energy is wonderful in so frail a frame. He insisted upon having two rifles slung upon his back, so that both Professors were armed when he had made his transit. I came next, and tried hard not to look down into the horrible gulf over which I was passing. Summerlee held out the butt-end of his rifle, and an instant later I was able to grasp his hand. As to Lord John, he walked across — actually walked without support! He must have nerves of iron.

And there we were, the four of us, upon the dreamland, the lost world, of Maple White. To all of us it seemed the moment of our supreme triumph. Who could have guessed that it was the prelude to our supreme disaster? Let me say in a few words how the crushing blow fell upon us.

We had turned away from the edge, and had penetrated about fifty yards of close brushwood, when there came a frightful rending crash from behind us. With one impulse we rushed back the way that we had come. The bridge was gone!

Far down at the base of the cliff I saw, as I looked over, a tangled mass of branches and splintered trunk. It was our beech tree. Had the edge of the platform crumbled and let it through? For a moment this explanation was in all our minds. The next, from the farther side of the rocky pinnacle before us a swarthy face, the face of Gomez the half-breed, was slowly protruded. Yes, it was Gomez, but no longer the Gomez of the demure smile and the mask-like expression. Here was a face with flashing eyes and distorted features, a face convulsed with hatred and with the mad joy of gratified revenge.

“Lord Roxton!” he shouted. “Lord John Roxton!”

“Well,” said our companion, “here I am.”

A shriek of laughter came across the abyss.

"Yes, there you are, you English dog, and there you will remain! I have waited and waited, and now has come my chance. You found it hard to get up; you will find it harder to get down. You cursed fools, you are trapped, every one of you!"

We were too astounded to speak. We could only stand there staring in amazement. A great broken bough upon the grass showed whence he had gained his leverage to tilt over our bridge. The face had vanished, but presently it was up again, more frantic than before.

"We nearly killed you with a stone at the cave," he cried; "but this is better. It is slower and more terrible. Your bones will whiten up there, and none will know where you lie or come to cover them. As you lie dying, think of Lopez, whom you shot five years ago on the Putomayo River. I am his brother, and, come what will I will die happy now, for his memory has been avenged." A furious hand was shaken at us, and then all was quiet.

Had the half-breed simply wrought his vengeance and then escaped, all might have been well with him. It was that foolish, irresistible Latin impulse to be dramatic which brought his own downfall. Roxton, the man who had earned himself the name of the Flail of the Lord through three countries, was not one who could be safely taunted. The half-breed was descending on the farther side of the pinnacle; but before he could reach the ground Lord John had run along the edge of the plateau and gained a point from which he could see his man. There was a single crack of his rifle, and, though we saw nothing, we heard the scream and then the distant thud of the falling body. Roxton came back to us with a face of granite.

"I have been a blind simpleton," said he, bitterly, "It's my folly that has brought you all into this trouble. I should have remembered that these people have long memories for blood-feuds, and have been more upon my guard."

"What about the other one? It took two of them to lever that tree over the edge."

"I could have shot him, but I let him go. He may have had no part in it. Perhaps it would have been better if I had killed him, for he must, as you say, have lent a hand."

Now that we had the clue to his action, each of us could cast back and remember some sinister act upon the part of the half-breed — his constant desire to know our plans, his arrest outside our tent when he was overhearing them, the furtive looks of hatred which from time to time one or other of us had surprised. We were still discussing it, endeavoring to adjust our minds to these new conditions, when a singular scene in the plain below arrested our attention.

A man in white clothes, who could only be the surviving half-breed, was running as one does run when Death is the pacemaker. Behind him, only a few yards in his rear, bounded the huge ebony figure of Zambo, our devoted negro. Even as we looked, he sprang upon the back of the fugitive and flung his arms round his neck. They rolled on the ground together. An instant afterwards Zambo rose, looked at the prostrate man, and then, waving his hand joyously to us, came running in our direction. The white figure lay motionless in the middle of the great plain.

Our two traitors had been destroyed, but the mischief that they had done lived after them. By no possible means could we get back to the pinnacle. We had been natives of the world; now we were natives of the plateau. The two things were separate and apart. There was the plain which led to the canoes. Yonder, beyond the violet, hazy horizon, was the stream which led back to civilization. But the link between was missing. No human ingenuity could suggest a means of bridging the chasm which yawned between ourselves and our past lives. One instant had altered the whole conditions of our existence.

It was at such a moment that I learned the stuff of which my three comrades were composed. They were grave, it is true, and thoughtful, but of an invincible serenity. For the moment we could only sit among the bushes in patience and wait the coming of Zambo. Presently his honest black face topped the rocks and his Herculean figure emerged upon the top of the pinnacle.

“What I do now?” he cried. “You tell me and I do it.”

It was a question which it was easier to ask than to answer. One thing only was clear. He was our one trusty link with the outside world. On no account must he leave us.

“No no!” he cried. “I not leave you. Whatever come, you always find me here. But no able to keep Indians. Already they say too much Curupuri live on this place, and they go home. Now you leave them me no able to keep them.”

It was a fact that our Indians had shown in many ways of late that they were weary of their journey and anxious to return. We realised that Zambo spoke the truth, and that it would be impossible for him to keep them.

"Make them wait till to-morrow, Zambo," I shouted; "then I can send letter back by them."

"Very good, sarr! I promise they wait till to-morrow," said the negro. "But what I do for you now?"

There was plenty for him to do, and admirably the faithful fellow did it. First of all, under our directions, he undid the rope from the tree-stump and threw one end of it across to us. It was not thicker than a clothes-line, but it was of great strength, and though we could not make a bridge of it, we might well find it invaluable if we had any climbing to do. He then fastened his end of the rope to the package of supplies which had been carried up, and we were able to drag it across. This gave us the means of life for at least a week, even if we found nothing else. Finally he descended and carried up two other packets of mixed goods — a box of ammunition and a number of other things, all of which we got across by throwing our rope to him and hauling it back. It was evening when he at last climbed down, with a final assurance that he would keep the Indians till next morning.

And so it is that I have spent nearly the whole of this our first night upon the plateau writing up our experiences by the light of a single candle-lantern.

We supped and camped at the very edge of the cliff, quenching our thirst with two bottles of Apollinaris which were in one of the cases. It is vital to us to find water, but I think even Lord John himself had had adventures enough for one day, and none of us felt inclined to make the first push into the unknown. We forbore to light a fire or to make any unnecessary sound.

To-morrow (or to-day, rather, for it is already dawn as I write) we shall make our first venture into this strange land. When I shall be able to write again — or if I ever shall write again — I know not. Meanwhile, I can see that the Indians are still in their place, and I am sure that the faithful Zambo will be here presently to get my letter. I only trust that it will come to hand.

P.S. — The more I think the more desperate does our position seem. I see no possible hope of our return. If there were a high tree near the edge of the plateau we might drop a return bridge across, but there is none within fifty yards. Our united strength could not carry a trunk which would serve our purpose. The rope, of course, is far too short that we could descend by it. No, our position is hopeless — hopeless!

CHAPTER X

“The most Wonderful Things have Happened”

The most wonderful things have happened and are continually happening to us. All the paper that I possess consists of five old note-books and a lot of scraps, and I have only the one stylographic pencil; but so long as I can move my hand I will continue to set down our experiences and impressions, for, since we are the only men of the whole human race to see such things, it is of enormous importance that I should record them whilst they are fresh in my memory and before that fate which seems to be constantly impending does actually overtake us. Whether Zambo can at last take these letters to the river, or whether I shall myself in some miraculous way carry them back with me, or, finally, whether some daring explorer, coming upon our tracks with the advantage, perhaps, of a perfected monoplane, should find this bundle of manuscript, in any case I can see that what I am writing is destined to immortality as a classic of true adventure.

On the morning after our being trapped upon the plateau by the villainous Gomez we began a new stage in our experiences. The first incident in it was not such as to give me a very favorable opinion of the place to which we had wandered. As I roused myself from a short nap after day had dawned, my eyes fell upon a most singular appearance upon my own leg. My trouser had slipped up, exposing a few inches of my skin above my sock. On this there rested a large, purplish grape. Astonished at the sight, I leaned forward to pick it off, when, to my horror, it burst between my finger and thumb, squirting blood in every direction. My cry of disgust had brought the two professors to my side.

“Most interesting,” said Summerlee, bending over my shin. “An enormous blood-tick, as yet, I believe, unclassified.”

“The first-fruits of our labors,” said Challenger in his booming, pedantic fashion. “We cannot do less than call it Ixodes Maloni. The very small inconvenience of being bitten, my young friend, cannot, I am sure, weigh with you as against the glorious privilege of having your name inscribed in the deathless roll of zoology. Unhappily you have crushed this fine specimen at the moment of satiation."

"Filthy vermin!" I cried.

Professor Challenger raised his great eyebrows in protest, and placed a soothing paw upon my shoulder.

"You should cultivate the scientific eye and the detached scientific mind," said he. "To a man of philosophic temperament like myself the blood-tick, with its lancet-like proboscis and its distending stomach, is as beautiful a work of Nature as the peacock or, for that matter, the aurora borealis. It pains me to hear you speak of it in so unappreciative a fashion. No doubt, with due diligence, we can secure some other specimen."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Summerlee, grimly, "for one has just disappeared behind your shirt-collar."

Challenger sprang into the air bellowing like a bull, and tore frantically at his coat and shirt to get them off. Summerlee and I laughed so that we could hardly help him. At last we exposed that monstrous torso (fifty-four inches, by the tailor's tape). His body was all matted with black hair, out of which jungle we picked the wandering tick before it had bitten him. But the bushes round were full of the horrible pests, and it was clear that we must shift our camp.

But first of all it was necessary to make our arrangements with the faithful negro, who appeared presently on the pinnacle with a number of tins of cocoa and biscuits, which he tossed over to us. Of the stores which remained below he was ordered to retain as much as would keep him for two months. The Indians were to have the remainder as a reward for their services and as payment for taking our letters back to the Amazon. Some hours later we saw them in single file far out upon the plain, each with a bundle on his head, making their way back along the path we had come. Zambo occupied our little tent at the base of the pinnacle, and there he remained, our one link with the world below.

And now we had to decide upon our immediate movements. We shifted our position from among the tick-laden bushes until we came to a small clearing thickly surrounded by trees upon all sides. There were some flat slabs of rock in the center, with an excellent well close by, and there we sat in cleanly comfort while we made our first plans for the invasion of this new country. Birds were calling among the foliage — especially one with a peculiar whooping cry which was new to us — but beyond these sounds there were no signs of life.

Our first care was to make some sort of list of our own stores, so that we might know what we had to rely upon. What with the things we had ourselves brought up and those which Zambo had sent across on the rope, we were fairly well supplied. Most important of all, in view of the dangers which might surround us, we had our four rifles and one thousand three hundred rounds, also a shot-gun, but not more than a hundred and fifty medium pellet cartridges. In the matter of provisions we had enough to last for several weeks, with a sufficiency of tobacco and a few scientific implements, including a large telescope and a good field-glass. All these things we collected together in the clearing, and as a first precaution, we cut down with our hatchet and knives a number of thorny bushes, which we piled round in a circle some fifteen yards in diameter. This was to be our headquarters for the time — our place of refuge against sudden danger and the guard-house for our stores. Fort Challenger, we called it.

It was midday before we had made ourselves secure, but the heat was not oppressive, and the general character of the plateau, both in its temperature and in its vegetation, was almost temperate. The beech, the oak, and even the birch were to be found among the tangle of trees which girt us in. One huge gingko tree, topping all the others, shot its great limbs and maidenhair foliage over the fort which we had constructed. In its shade we continued our discussion, while Lord John, who had quickly taken command in the hour of action, gave us his views.

“So long as neither man nor beast has seen or heard us, we are safe,” said he. “From the time they know we are here our troubles begin. There are no signs that they have found us out as yet. So our game surely is to lie low for a time and spy out the land. We want to have a good look at our neighbours before we get on visitin’ terms.”

“But we must advance,” I ventured to remark.

“By all means, sonny my boy! We will advance. But with common sense. We must never go so far that we can’t get back to our base. Above all, we must never, unless it is life or death, fire off our guns.”

“But YOU fired yesterday,” said Summerlee.

“Well, it couldn’t be helped. However, the wind was strong and blew outwards. It is not likely that the sound could have traveled far into the plateau. By the way, what shall we call this place? I suppose it is up to us to give it a name?"

There were several suggestions, more or less happy, but Challenger's was final.

"It can only have one name," said he. "It is called after the pioneer who discovered it. It is Maple White Land."

Maple White Land it became, and so it is named in that chart which has become my special task. So it will, I trust, appear in the atlas of the future.

The peaceful penetration of Maple White Land was the pressing subject before us. We had the evidence of our own eyes that the place was inhabited by some unknown creatures, and there was that of Maple White's sketch-book to show that more dreadful and more dangerous monsters might still appear. That there might also prove to be human occupants and that they were of a malevolent character was suggested by the skeleton impaled upon the bamboos, which could not have got there had it not been dropped from above. Our situation, stranded without possibility of escape in such a land, was clearly full of danger, and our reasons endorsed every measure of caution which Lord John's experience could suggest. Yet it was surely impossible that we should halt on the edge of this world of mystery when our very souls were tingling with impatience to push forward and to pluck the heart from it.

We therefore blocked the entrance to our zareba by filling it up with several thorny bushes, and left our camp with the stores entirely surrounded by this protecting hedge. We then slowly and cautiously set forth into the unknown, following the course of the little stream which flowed from our spring, as it should always serve us as a guide on our return.

Hardly had we started when we came across signs that there were indeed wonders awaiting us. After a few hundred yards of thick forest, containing many trees which were quite unknown to me, but which Summerlee, who was the botanist of the party, recognised as forms of conifera and of cycadaceous plants which have long passed away in the world below, we entered a region where the stream widened out and formed a considerable bog. High reeds of a peculiar type grew thickly before us, which were pronounced to be equisetacea, or mare's-tails, with tree-ferns scattered amongst them, all of them swaying in a brisk wind. Suddenly Lord John, who was walking first, halted with uplifted hand.

“Look at this!” said he. “By George, this must be the trail of the father of all birds!”

An enormous three-toed track was imprinted in the soft mud before us. The creature, whatever it was, had crossed the swamp and had passed on into the forest. We all stopped to examine that monstrous spoor. If it were indeed a bird — and what animal could leave such a mark? — its foot was so much larger than an ostrich’s that its height upon the same scale must be enormous. Lord John looked eagerly round him and slipped two cartridges into his elephant-gun.

“I’ll stake my good name as a shikarree,” said he, “that the track is a fresh one. The creature has not passed ten minutes. Look how the water is still oozing into that deeper print! By Jove! See, here is the mark of a little one!”

Sure enough, smaller tracks of the same general form were running parallel to the large ones.

“But what do you make of this?” cried Professor Summerlee, triumphantly, pointing to what looked like the huge print of a five-fingered human hand appearing among the three-toed marks.

“Wealden!” cried Challenger, in an ecstasy. “I’ve seen them in the Wealden clay. It is a creature walking erect upon three-toed feet, and occasionally putting one of its five-fingered forepaws upon the ground. Not a bird, my dear Roxton — not a bird.”

“A beast?”

“No; a reptile — a dinosaur. Nothing else could have left such a track. They puzzled a worthy Sussex doctor some ninety years ago; but who in the world could have hoped — hoped — to have seen a sight like that?”

His words died away into a whisper, and we all stood in motionless amazement. Following the tracks, we had left the morass and passed through a screen of brushwood and trees. Beyond was an open glade, and in this were five of the most extraordinary creatures that I have ever seen. Crouching down among the bushes, we observed them at our leisure.

There were, as I say, five of them, two being adults and three young ones. In size they were enormous. Even the babies were as big as elephants, while the two large ones were far beyond all creatures I have ever seen. They had slate-coloured skin, which was scaled like a lizard’s and shimmered where the sun shone upon it. All five were sitting up, balancing themselves upon their broad, powerful tails and their huge three-toed hind-feet, while with their small five-fingered front-feet they pulled down the branches upon which they browsed. I do not know that I can bring their appearance home to you better than by saying that they looked like monstrous kangaroos, twenty feet in length, and with skins like black crocodiles.

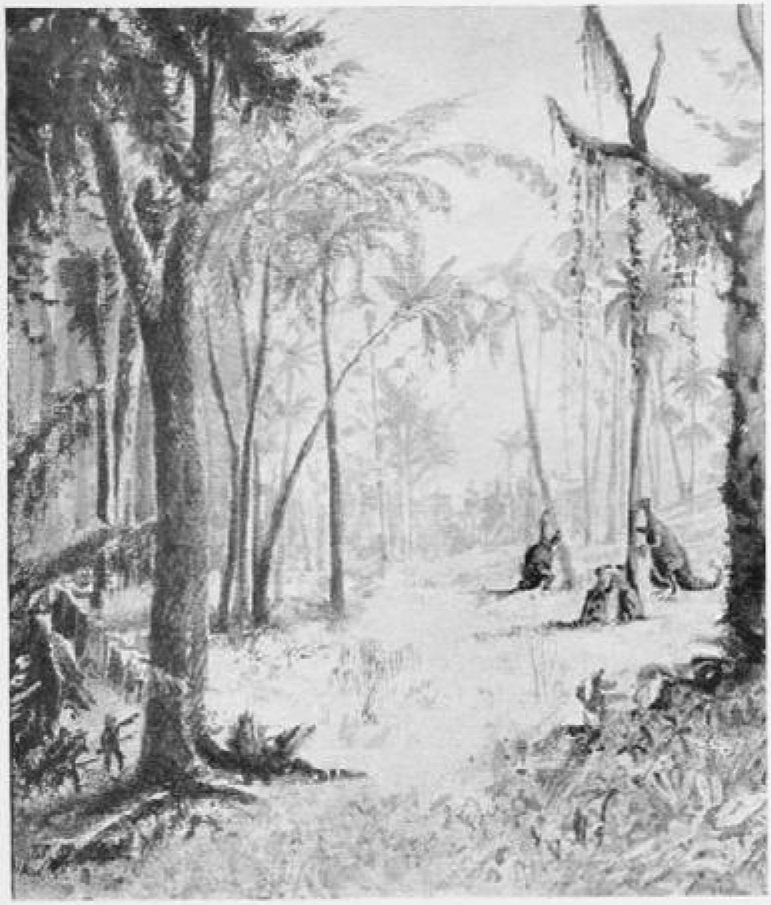

Facing p. 178

GLADE OF THE IGUANODONS.
(Reconstructed by Mr. Pat L. Forbes from sketch by E. D. Malone).

I do not know how long we stayed motionless gazing at this marvelous spectacle. A strong wind blew towards us and we were well concealed, so there was no chance of discovery. From time to time the little ones played round their parents in unwieldy gambols, the great beasts bounding into the air and falling with dull thuds upon the earth. The strength of the parents seemed to be limitless, for one of them, having some difficulty in reaching a bunch of foliage which grew upon a considerable-sized tree, put his fore-legs round the trunk and tore it down as if it had been a sapling. The action seemed, as I thought, to show not only the great development of its muscles, but also the small one of its brain, for the whole weight came crashing down upon the top of it, and it uttered a series of shrill yelps to show that, big as it was, there was a limit to what it could endure. The incident made it think, apparently, that the neighbourhood was dangerous, for it slowly lurched off through the wood, followed by its mate and its three enormous infants. We saw the shimmering slaty gleam of their skins between the tree-trunks, and their heads undulating high above the brushwood. Then they vanished from our sight.

I looked at my comrades. Lord John was standing at gaze with his finger on the trigger of his elephant-gun, his eager hunter's soul shining from his fierce eyes. What would he not give for one such head to place between the two crossed oars above the mantelpiece in his snuggery at the Albany! And yet his reason held him in, for all our exploration of the wonders of this unknown land depended upon our presence being concealed from its inhabitants. The two professors were in silent ecstasy. In their excitement they had unconsciously seized each other by the hand, and stood like two little children in the presence of a marvel, Challenger's cheeks bunched up into a seraphic smile, and Summerlee's sardonic face softening for the moment into wonder and reverence.

"Nunc dimittis!" he cried at last. "What will they say in England of this?"

"My dear Summerlee, I will tell you with great confidence exactly what they will say in England," said Challenger. "They will say that you are an infernal liar and a scientific charlatan, exactly as you and others said of me."

"In the face of photographs?"

"Faked, Summerlee! Clumsily faked!"

"In the face of specimens?"

"Ah, there we may have them! Malone and his filthy Fleet Street crew may be all yelping our praises yet. August the twenty-eighth — the day we saw five live iguanodons in a glade of Maple White Land. Put it down in your diary, my young friend, and send it to your rag."

"And be ready to get the toe-end of the editorial boot in return," said Lord John. "Things look a bit different from the latitude of London, young fellah my lad. There's many a man who never tells his adventures, for he can't hope to be believed. Who's to blame them? For this will seem a bit of a dream to ourselves in a month or two. WHAT did you say they were?"

“Iguanodons,” said Summerlee. “You’ll find their footmarks all over the Hastings sands, in Kent, and in Sussex. The South of England was alive with them when there was plenty of good lush green-stuff to keep them going. Conditions have changed, and the beasts died. Here it seems that the conditions have not changed, and the beasts have lived.”

“If ever we get out of this alive, I must have a head with me,” said Lord John. “Lord, how some of that Somaliland-Uganda crowd would turn a beautiful pea-green if they saw it! I don’t know what you chaps think, but it strikes me that we are on mighty thin ice all this time.”

I had the same feeling of mystery and danger around us. In the gloom of the trees there seemed a constant menace and as we looked up into their shadowy foliage vague terrors crept into one’s heart. It is true that these monstrous creatures which we had seen were lumbering, inoffensive brutes which were unlikely to hurt anyone, but in this world of wonders what other survivals might there not be — what fierce, active horrors ready to pounce upon us from their lair among the rocks or brushwood? I knew little of prehistoric life, but I had a clear remembrance of one book which I had read in which it spoke of creatures who would live upon our lions and tigers as a cat lives upon mice. What if these also were to be found in the woods of Maple White Land!

It was destined that on this very morning — our first in the new country — we were to find out what strange hazards lay around us. It was a loathsome adventure, and one of which I hate to think. If, as Lord John said, the glade of the iguanodons will remain with us as a dream, then surely the swamp of the pterodactyls will forever be our nightmare. Let me set down exactly what occurred.

We passed very slowly through the woods, partly because Lord Roxton acted as scout before he would let us advance, and partly because at every second step one or other of our professors would fall, with a cry of wonder, before some flower or insect which presented him with a new type. We may have traveled two or three miles in all, keeping to the right of the line of the stream, when we came upon a considerable opening in the trees. A belt of brushwood led up to a tangle of rocks — the whole plateau was strewn with boulders. We were walking slowly towards these rocks, among bushes which reached over our waists, when we became aware of a strange low gabbling and whistling sound, which filled the air with a constant clamor and appeared to come from some spot immediately before us. Lord John held up his hand as a signal for us to stop, and he made his way swiftly, stooping and running, to the line of rocks. We saw him peep over them and give a gesture of amazement. Then he stood staring as if forgetting us, so utterly entranced was he by what he saw. Finally he waved us to come on, holding up his hand as a signal for caution. His whole bearing made me feel that something wonderful but dangerous lay before us.

Creeping to his side, we looked over the rocks. The place into which we gazed was a pit, and may, in the early days, have been one of the smaller volcanic blow-holes of the plateau. It was bowl-shaped and at the bottom, some hundreds of yards from where we lay, were pools of green-scummed, stagnant water, fringed with bullrushes. It was a weird place in itself, but its occupants made it seem like a scene from the Seven Circles of Dante. The place was a rookery of pterodactyls. There were hundreds of them congregated within view. All the bottom area round the water-edge was alive with their young ones, and with hideous mothers brooding upon their leathery, yellowish eggs. From this crawling flapping mass of obscene reptilian life came the shocking clamor which filled the air and the mephitic, horrible, musty odor which turned us sick. But above, perched each upon its own stone, tall, gray, and withered, more like dead and dried specimens than actual living creatures, sat the horrible males, absolutely motionless save for the rolling of their red eyes or an occasional snap of their rat-trap beaks as a dragon-fly went past them. Their huge, membranous wings were closed by folding their fore-arms, so that they sat like gigantic old women, wrapped in hideous web-coloured shawls, and with their ferocious heads protruding above them. Large and small, not less than a thousand of these filthy creatures lay in the hollow before us.

Our professors would gladly have stayed there all day, so entranced were they by this opportunity of studying the life of a prehistoric age. They pointed out the fish and dead birds lying about among the rocks as proving the nature of the food of these creatures, and I heard them congratulating each other on having cleared up the point why the bones of this flying dragon are found in such great numbers in certain well-defined areas, as in the Cambridge Green-sand, since it was now seen that, like penguins, they lived in gregarious fashion.

Finally, however, Challenger, bent upon proving some point which Summerlee had contested, thrust his head over the rock and nearly brought destruction upon us all. In an instant the nearest male gave a shrill, whistling cry, and flapped its twenty-foot span of leathery wings as it soared up into the air. The females and young ones huddled together beside the water, while the whole circle of sentinels rose one after the other and sailed off into the sky. It was a wonderful sight to see at least a hundred creatures of such enormous size and hideous appearance all swooping like swallows with swift, shearing wing-strokes above us; but soon we realised that it was not one on which we could afford to linger. At first the great brutes flew round in a huge ring, as if to make sure what the exact extent of the danger might be. Then, the flight grew lower and the circle narrower, until they were whizzing round and round us, the dry, rustling flap of their huge slate-coloured wings filling the air with a volume of sound that made me think of Hendon aerodrome upon a race day.

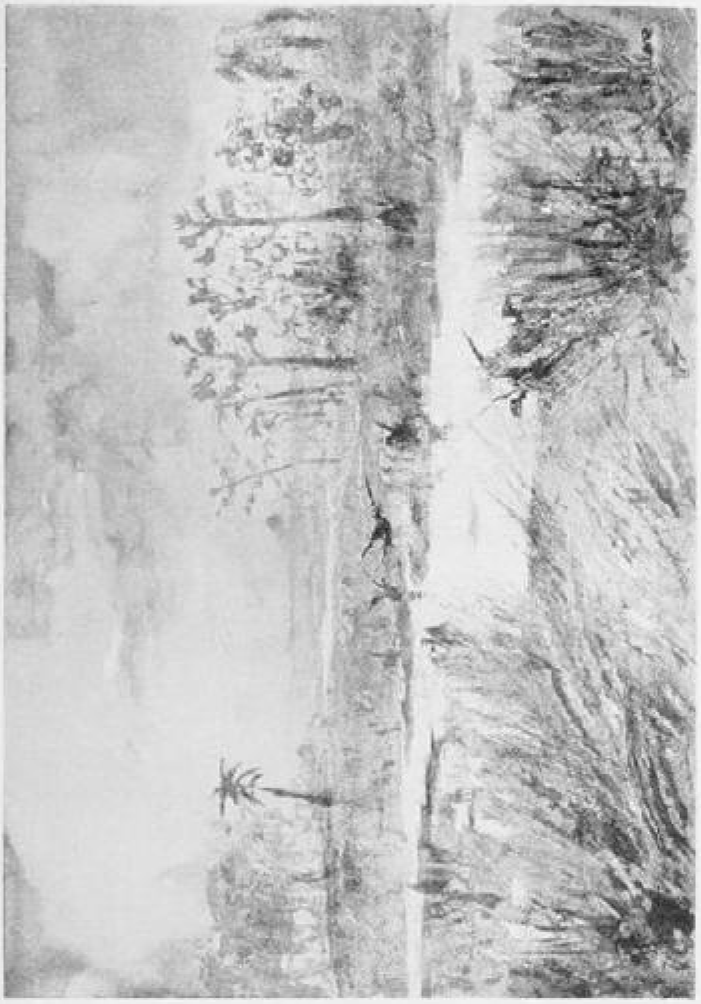

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THE SWAMP OF THE PTERODACTYLS.

(Reconstructed by Pat L. Forbes from sketch by E. D. Malone).

“Make for the wood and keep together,” cried Lord John, clubbing his rifle. “The brutes mean mischief.”

The moment we attempted to retreat the circle closed in upon us, until the tips of the wings of those nearest to us nearly touched our faces. We beat at them with the stocks of our guns, but there was nothing solid or vulnerable to strike. Then suddenly out of the whizzing, slate-coloured circle a long neck shot out, and a fierce beak made a thrust at us. Another and another followed. Summerlee gave a cry and put his hand to his face, from which the blood was streaming. I felt a prod at the back of my neck, and turned dizzy with the shock. Challenger fell, and as I stooped to pick him up I was again struck from behind and dropped on the top of him. At the same instant I heard the crash of Lord John’s elephant-gun, and, looking up, saw one of the creatures with a broken wing struggling upon the ground, spitting and gurgling at us with a wide-opened beak and blood-shot, goggled eyes, like some devil in a medieval picture. Its comrades had flown higher at the sudden sound, and were circling above our heads.

“Now,” cried Lord John, “now for our lives!”

We staggered through the brushwood, and even as we reached the trees the harpies were on us again. Summerlee was knocked down, but we tore him up and rushed among the trunks. Once there we were safe, for those huge wings had no space for their sweep beneath the branches. As we limped homewards, sadly mauled and discomfited, we saw them for a long time flying at a great height against the deep blue sky above our heads, soaring round and round, no bigger than wood-pigeons, with their eyes no doubt still following our progress. At last, however, as we reached the thicker woods they gave up the chase, and we saw them no more.

“A most interesting and convincing experience,” said Challenger, as we halted beside the brook and he bathed a swollen knee. “We are exceptionally well informed, Summerlee, as to the habits of the enraged pterodactyl.”

Summerlee was wiping the blood from a cut in his forehead, while I was tying up a nasty stab in the muscle of the neck. Lord John had the shoulder of his coat torn away, but the creature’s teeth had only grazed the flesh.

“It is worth noting,” Challenger continued, “that our young friend has received an undoubted stab, while Lord John’s coat could only have been torn by a bite. In my own case, I was beaten about the head by their wings, so we have had a remarkable exhibition of their various methods of offence.”

“It has been touch and go for our lives,” said Lord John, gravely, “and I could not think of a more rotten sort of death than to be outed by such filthy vermin. I was sorry to fire my rifle, but, by Jove! there was no great choice.”

“We should not be here if you hadn’t,” said I, with conviction.

“It may do no harm,” said he. “Among these woods there must be many loud cracks from splitting or falling trees which would be just like the sound of a gun. But now, if you are of my opinion, we have had thrills enough for one day, and had best get back to the surgical box at the camp for some carbolic. Who knows what venom these beasts may have in their hideous jaws?”

But surely no men ever had just such a day since the world began. Some fresh surprise was ever in store for us. When, following the course of our brook, we at last reached our glade and saw the thorny barricade of our camp, we thought that our adventures were at an end. But we had something more to think of before we could rest. The gate of Fort Challenger had been untouched, the walls were unbroken, and yet it had been visited by some strange and powerful creature in our absence. No footmark showed a trace of its nature, and only the overhanging branch of the enormous ginko tree suggested how it might have come and gone; but of its malevolent strength there was ample evidence in the condition of our stores. They were strewn at random all over the ground, and one tin of meat had been crushed into pieces so as to extract the contents. A case of cartridges had been shattered into matchwood, and one of the brass shells lay shredded into pieces beside it. Again the feeling of vague horror came upon our souls, and we gazed round with frightened eyes at the dark shadows which lay around us, in all of which some fearsome shape might be lurking. How good it was when we were hailed by the voice of Zambo, and, going to the edge of the plateau, saw him sitting grinning at us upon the top of the opposite pinnacle.

“All well, Massa Challenger, all well!” he cried. “Me stay here. No fear. You always find me when you want.”

His honest black face, and the immense view before us, which carried us half-way back to the affluent of the Amazon, helped us to remember that we really were upon this earth in the twentieth century, and had not by some magic been conveyed to some raw planet in its earliest and wildest state. How difficult it was to realise that the violet line upon the far horizon was well advanced to that great river upon which huge steamers ran, and folk talked of the small affairs of life, while we, marooned among the creatures of a bygone age, could but gaze towards it and yearn for all that it meant!

One other memory remains with me of this wonderful day, and with it I will close this letter. The two professors, their tempers aggravated no doubt by their injuries, had fallen out as to whether our assailants were of the genus pterodactylus or dimorphodon, and high words had ensued. To avoid their wrangling I moved some little way apart, and was seated smoking upon the trunk of a fallen tree, when Lord John strolled over in my direction.

"I say, Malone," said he, "do you remember that place where those beasts were?"

"Very clearly."

"A sort of volcanic pit, was it not?"

"Exactly," said I.

"Did you notice the soil?"

"Rocks."

"But round the water — where the reeds were?"

"It was a bluish soil. It looked like clay."

"Exactly. A volcanic tube full of blue clay."

"What of that?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said he, and strolled back to where the voices of the contending men of science rose in a prolonged duet, the high, strident note of Summerlee rising and falling to the sonorous bass of Challenger. I should have thought no more of Lord John's remark were it not that once again that night I heard him mutter to himself: "Blue clay — clay in a volcanic tube!" They were the last words I heard before I dropped into an exhausted sleep.

CHAPTER XI

“For once I was the Hero”

Lord John Roxton was right when he thought that some specially toxic quality might lie in the bite of the horrible creatures which had attacked us. On the morning after our first adventure upon the plateau, both Summerlee and I were in great pain and fever, while Challenger’s knee was so bruised that he could hardly limp. We kept to our camp all day, therefore, Lord John busying himself, with such help as we could give him, in raising the height and thickness of the thorny walls which were our only defense. I remember that during the whole long day I was haunted by the feeling that we were closely observed, though by whom or whence I could give no guess.

So strong was the impression that I told Professor Challenger of it, who put it down to the cerebral excitement caused by my fever. Again and again I glanced round swiftly, with the conviction that I was about to see something, but only to meet the dark tangle of our hedge or the solemn and cavernous gloom of the great trees which arched above our heads. And yet the feeling grew ever stronger in my own mind that something observant and something malevolent was at our very elbow. I thought of the Indian superstition of the Curupuri — the dreadful, lurking spirit of the woods — and I could have imagined that his terrible presence haunted those who had invaded his most remote and sacred retreat.

That night (our third in Maple White Land) we had an experience which left a fearful impression upon our minds, and made us thankful that Lord John had worked so hard in making our retreat impregnable. We were all sleeping round our dying fire when we were aroused — or, rather, I should say, shot out of our slumbers — by a succession of the most frightful cries and screams to which I have ever listened. I know no sound to which I could compare this amazing tumult, which seemed to come from some spot within a few hundred yards of our camp. It was as ear-splitting as any whistle of a railway-engine; but whereas the whistle is a clear, mechanical, sharp-edged sound, this was far deeper in volume and vibrant with the uttermost strain of agony and horror. We clapped our hands to our ears to shut out that nerve-shaking appeal. A cold sweat broke out over my body, and my heart turned sick at the misery of it. All the woes of tortured life, all its stupendous indictment of high heaven, its innumerable sorrows, seemed to be centered and condensed into that one dreadful, agonized cry. And then, under this high-pitched, ringing sound there was another, more intermittent, a low, deep-chested laugh, a growling, throaty gurgle of merriment which formed a grotesque accompaniment to the shriek with which it was blended. For three or four minutes on end the fearsome duet continued, while all the foliage rustled with the rising of startled birds. Then it shut off as suddenly as it began. For a long time we sat in horrified silence. Then Lord John threw a bundle of twigs upon the fire, and their red glare lit up the intent faces of my companions and flickered over the great boughs above our heads.

"What was it?" I whispered.

"We shall know in the morning," said Lord John. "It was close to us — not farther than the glade."

"We have been privileged to overhear a prehistoric tragedy, the sort of drama which occurred among the reeds upon the border of some Jurassic lagoon, when the greater dragon pinned the lesser among the slime," said Challenger, with more solemnity than I had ever heard in his voice. "It was surely well for man that he came late in the order of creation. There were powers abroad in earlier days which no courage and no mechanism of his could have met. What could his sling, his throwing-stick, or his arrow avail him against such forces as have been loose to-night? Even with a modern rifle it would be all odds on the monster."

"I think I should back my little friend," said Lord John, caressing his Express. "But the beast would certainly have a good sporting chance."

Summerlee raised his hand.

"Hush!" he cried. "Surely I hear something?"

From the utter silence there emerged a deep, regular pat-pat. It was the tread of some animal — the rhythm of soft but heavy pads placed cautiously upon the ground. It stole slowly round the camp, and then halted near our gateway. There was a low, sibilant rise and fall — the breathing of the creature. Only our feeble hedge separated us from this horror of the night. Each of us had seized his rifle, and Lord John had pulled out a small bush to make an embrasure in the hedge.

"By George!" he whispered. "I think I can see it!"

I stooped and peered over his shoulder through the gap. Yes, I could see it, too. In the deep shadow of the tree there was a deeper shadow yet, black, inchoate, vague — a crouching form full of savage vigor and menace. It was no higher than a horse, but the dim outline suggested vast bulk and strength. That hissing pant, as regular and full-volumed as the exhaust of an engine, spoke of a monstrous organism. Once, as it moved, I thought I saw the glint of two terrible, greenish eyes. There was an uneasy rustling, as if it were crawling slowly forward.

"I believe it is going to spring!" said I, cocking my rifle.

"Don't fire! Don't fire!" whispered Lord John. "The crash of a gun in this silent night would be heard for miles. Keep it as a last card."

"If it gets over the hedge we're done," said Summerlee, and his voice crackled into a nervous laugh as he spoke.

"No, it must not get over," cried Lord John; "but hold your fire to the last. Perhaps I can make something of the fellow. I'll chance it, anyhow."

It was as brave an act as ever I saw a man do. He stooped to the fire, picked up a blazing branch, and slipped in an instant through a sallyport which he had made in our gateway. The thing moved forward with a dreadful snarl. Lord John never hesitated, but, running towards it with a quick, light step, he dashed the flaming wood into the brute's face. For one moment I had a vision of a horrible mask like a giant toad's, of a warty, leprous skin, and of a loose mouth all beslobbered with fresh blood. The next, there was a crash in the underwood and our dreadful visitor was gone.

"I thought he wouldn't face the fire," said Lord John, laughing, as he came back and threw his branch among the faggots.

"You should not have taken such a risk!" we all cried.

"There was nothin' else to be done. If he had got among us we should have shot each other in tryin' to down him. On the other hand, if we had fired through the hedge and wounded him he would soon have been on the top of us — to say nothin' of giving ourselves away. On the whole, I think that we are jolly well out of it. What was he, then?"

Our learned men looked at each other with some hesitation.

"Personally, I am unable to classify the creature with any certainty," said Summerlee, lighting his pipe from the fire.

"In refusing to commit yourself you are but showing a proper scientific reserve," said Challenger, with massive condescension. "I am not myself prepared to go farther than to say in general terms that we have almost certainly been in contact to-night with some form of carnivorous dinosaur. I have already expressed my anticipation that something of the sort might exist upon this plateau."

"We have to bear in mind," remarked Summerlee, "that there are many prehistoric forms which have never come down to us. It would be rash to suppose that we can give a name to all that we are likely to meet."

"Exactly. A rough classification may be the best that we can attempt. To-morrow some further evidence may help us to an identification. Meantime we can only renew our interrupted slumbers."

"But not without a sentinel," said Lord John, with decision. "We can't afford to take chances in a country like this. Two-hour spells in the future, for each of us."

"Then I'll just finish my pipe in starting the first one," said Professor Summerlee; and from that time onwards we never trusted ourselves again without a watchman.

In the morning it was not long before we discovered the source of the hideous uproar which had aroused us in the night. The iguanodon glade was the scene of a horrible butchery. From the pools of blood and the enormous lumps of flesh scattered in every direction over the green sward we imagined at first that a number of animals had been killed, but on examining the remains more closely we discovered that all this carnage came from one of these unwieldy monsters, which had been literally torn to pieces by some creature not larger, perhaps, but far more ferocious, than itself.

Our two professors sat in absorbed argument, examining piece after piece, which showed the marks of savage teeth and of enormous claws.

"Our judgment must still be in abeyance," said Professor Challenger, with a huge slab of whitish-coloured flesh across his knee. "The indications would be consistent with the presence of a saber-toothed tiger, such as are still found among the breccia of our caverns; but the creature actually seen was undoubtedly of a larger and more reptilian character. Personally, I should pronounce for allosaurus."

"Or megalosaurus," said Summerlee.

"Exactly. Any one of the larger carnivorous dinosaurs would meet the case. Among them are to be found all the most terrible types of animal life that have ever cursed the earth or blessed a museum." He laughed sonorously at his own conceit, for, though he had little sense of humor, the crudest pleasantry from his own lips moved him always to roars of appreciation.

“The less noise the better,” said Lord Roxton, curtly. “We don’t know who or what may be near us. If this fellah comes back for his breakfast and catches us here we won’t have so much to laugh at. By the way, what is this mark upon the iguanodon’s hide?”

On the dull, scaly, slate-coloured skin somewhere above the shoulder, there was a singular black circle of some substance which looked like asphalt. None of us could suggest what it meant, though Summerlee was of opinion that he had seen something similar upon one of the young ones two days before. Challenger said nothing, but looked pompous and puffy, as if he could if he would, so that finally Lord John asked his opinion direct.

“If your lordship will graciously permit me to open my mouth, I shall be happy to express my sentiments,” said he, with elaborate sarcasm. “I am not in the habit of being taken to task in the fashion which seems to be customary with your lordship. I was not aware that it was necessary to ask your permission before smiling at a harmless pleasantry.”

It was not until he had received his apology that our touchy friend would suffer himself to be appeased. When at last his ruffled feelings were at ease, he addressed us at some length from his seat upon a fallen tree, speaking, as his habit was, as if he were imparting most precious information to a class of a thousand.

“With regard to the marking,” said he, “I am inclined to agree with my friend and colleague, Professor Summerlee, that the stains are from asphalt. As this plateau is, in its very nature, highly volcanic, and as asphalt is a substance which one associates with Plutonic forces, I cannot doubt that it exists in the free liquid state, and that the creatures may have come in contact with it. A much more important problem is the question as to the existence of the carnivorous monster which has left its traces in this glade. We know roughly that this plateau is not larger than an average English county. Within this confined space a certain number of creatures, mostly types which have passed away in the world below, have lived together for innumerable years. Now, it is very clear to me that in so long a period one would have expected that the carnivorous creatures, multiplying unchecked, would have exhausted their food supply and have been compelled to either modify their flesh-eating habits or die of hunger. This we see has not been so. We can only imagine, therefore, that the balance of Nature is preserved by some check which limits the numbers of these ferocious creatures. One of the many interesting problems, therefore, which await our solution is to discover what that check may be and how it operates. I venture to trust that we may have some future opportunity for the closer study of the carnivorous dinosaurs."

"And I venture to trust we may not," I observed.

The Professor only raised his great eyebrows, as the schoolmaster meets the irrelevant observation of the naughty boy.

"Perhaps Professor Summerlee may have an observation to make," he said, and the two savants ascended together into some rarefied scientific atmosphere, where the possibilities of a modification of the birth-rate were weighed against the decline of the food supply as a check in the struggle for existence.

That morning we mapped out a small portion of the plateau, avoiding the swamp of the pterodactyls, and keeping to the east of our brook instead of to the west. In that direction the country was still thickly wooded, with so much undergrowth that our progress was very slow.

I have dwelt up to now upon the terrors of Maple White Land; but there was another side to the subject, for all that morning we wandered among lovely flowers — mostly, as I observed, white or yellow in colour, these being, as our professors explained, the primitive flower-shades. In many places the ground was absolutely covered with them, and as we walked ankle-deep on that wonderful yielding carpet, the scent was almost intoxicating in its sweetness and intensity. The homely English bee buzzed everywhere around us. Many of the trees under which we passed had their branches bowed down with fruit, some of which were of familiar sorts, while other varieties were new. By observing which of them were pecked by the birds we avoided all danger of poison and added a delicious variety to our food reserve. In the jungle which we traversed were numerous hard-trodden paths made by the wild beasts, and in the more marshy places we saw a profusion of strange footmarks, including many of the iguanodon. Once in a grove we observed several of these great creatures grazing, and Lord John, with his glass, was able to report that they also were spotted with asphalt, though in a different place to the one which we had examined in the morning. What this phenomenon meant we could not imagine.

We saw many small animals, such as porcupines, a scaly ant-eater, and a wild pig, piebald in colour and with long curved tusks. Once, through a break in the trees, we saw a clear shoulder of green hill some distance away, and across this a large dun-coloured animal was traveling at a considerable pace. It passed so swiftly that we were unable to say what it was; but if it were a deer, as was claimed by Lord John, it must have been as large as those monstrous Irish elk which are still dug up from time to time in the bogs of my native land.

Ever since the mysterious visit which had been paid to our camp we always returned to it with some misgivings. However, on this occasion we found everything in order.

That evening we had a grand discussion upon our present situation and future plans, which I must describe at some length, as it led to a new departure by which we were enabled to gain a more complete knowledge of Maple White Land than might have come in many weeks of exploring. It was Summerlee who opened the debate. All day he had been querulous in manner, and now some remark of Lord John's as to what we should do on the morrow brought all his bitterness to a head.

"What we ought to be doing to-day, to-morrow, and all the time," said he, "is finding some way out of the trap into which we have fallen. You are all turning your brains towards getting into this country. I say that we should be scheming how to get out of it."

"I am surprised, sir," boomed Challenger, stroking his majestic beard, "that any man of science should commit himself to so ignoble a sentiment. You are in a land which offers such an inducement to the ambitious naturalist as none ever has since the world began, and you suggest leaving it before we have acquired more than the most superficial knowledge of it or of its contents. I expected better things of you, Professor Summerlee."

"You must remember," said Summerlee, sourly, "that I have a large class in London who are at present at the mercy of an extremely inefficient locum tenens. This makes my situation different from yours, Professor Challenger, since, so far as I know, you have never been entrusted with any responsible educational work."

"Quite so," said Challenger. "I have felt it to be a sacrilege to divert a brain which is capable of the highest original research to any lesser object. That is why I have sternly set my face against any proffered scholastic appointment."

"For example?" asked Summerlee, with a sneer; but Lord John hastened to change the conversation.

“I must say,” said he, “that I think it would be a mighty poor thing to go back to London before I know a great deal more of this place than I do at present.”

“I could never dare to walk into the back office of my paper and face old McArdle,” said I. (You will excuse the frankness of this report, will you not, sir?) “He’d never forgive me for leaving such unexhausted copy behind me. Besides, so far as I can see it is not worth discussing, since we can’t get down, even if we wanted.”

“Our young friend makes up for many obvious mental lacunae by some measure of primitive common sense,” remarked Challenger. “The interests of his deplorable profession are immaterial to us; but, as he observes, we cannot get down in any case, so it is a waste of energy to discuss it.”

“It is a waste of energy to do anything else,” growled Summerlee from behind his pipe. “Let me remind you that we came here upon a perfectly definite mission, entrusted to us at the meeting of the Zoological Institute in London. That mission was to test the truth of Professor Challenger’s statements. Those statements, as I am bound to admit, we are now in a position to endorse. Our ostensible work is therefore done. As to the detail which remains to be worked out upon this plateau, it is so enormous that only a large expedition, with a very special equipment, could hope to cope with it. Should we attempt to do so ourselves, the only possible result must be that we shall never return with the important contribution to science which we have already gained. Professor Challenger has devised means for getting us on to this plateau when it appeared to be inaccessible; I think that we should now call upon him to use the same ingenuity in getting us back to the world from which we came.”

I confess that as Summerlee stated his view it struck me as altogether reasonable. Even Challenger was affected by the consideration that his enemies would never stand confuted if the confirmation of his statements should never reach those who had doubted them.

“The problem of the descent is at first sight a formidable one,” said he, “and yet I cannot doubt that the intellect can solve it. I am prepared to agree with our colleague that a protracted stay in Maple White Land is at present inadvisable, and that the question of our return will soon have to be faced. I absolutely refuse to leave, however, until we have made at least a superficial examination of this country, and are able to take back with us something in the nature of a chart.”

Professor Summerlee gave a snort of impatience.

“We have spent two long days in exploration,” said he, “and we are no wiser as to the actual geography of the place than when we started. It is clear that it is all thickly wooded, and it would take months to penetrate it and to learn the relations of one part to another. If there were some central peak it would be different, but it all slopes downwards, so far as we can see. The farther we go the less likely it is that we will get any general view.”

It was at that moment that I had my inspiration. My eyes chanced to light upon the enormous gnarled trunk of the gingko tree which cast its huge branches over us. Surely, if its bole exceeded that of all others, its height must do the same. If the rim of the plateau was indeed the highest point, then why should this mighty tree not prove to be a watchtower which commanded the whole country? Now, ever since I ran wild as a lad in Ireland I have been a bold and skilled tree-climber. My comrades might be my masters on the rocks, but I knew that I would be supreme among those branches. Could I only get my legs on to the lowest of the giant off-shoots, then it would be strange indeed if I could not make my way to the top. My comrades were delighted at my idea.

“Our young friend,” said Challenger, bunching up the red apples of his cheeks, “is capable of acrobatic exertions which would be impossible to a man of a more solid, though possibly of a more commanding, appearance. I applaud his resolution.”

“By George, young fellah, you’ve put your hand on it!” said Lord John, clapping me on the back. “How we never came to think of it before I can’t imagine! There’s not more than an hour of daylight left, but if you take your notebook you may be able to get some rough sketch of the place. If we put these three ammunition cases under the branch, I will soon hoist you on to it.”

He stood on the boxes while I faced the trunk, and was gently raising me when Challenger sprang forward and gave me such a thrust with his huge hand that he fairly shot me into the tree. With both arms clasping the branch, I scrambled hard with my feet until I had worked, first my body, and then my knees, onto it. There were three excellent off-shoots, like huge rungs of a ladder, above my head, and a tangle of convenient branches beyond, so that I clambered onwards with such speed that I soon lost sight of the ground and had nothing but foliage beneath me. Now and then I encountered a check, and once I had to shin up a creeper for eight or ten feet, but I made excellent progress, and the booming of Challenger's voice seemed to be a great distance beneath me. The tree was, however, enormous, and, looking upwards, I could see no thinning of the leaves above my head. There was some thick, bush-like clump which seemed to be a parasite upon a branch up which I was swarming. I leaned my head round it in order to see what was beyond, and I nearly fell out of the tree in my surprise and horror at what I saw.

A face was gazing into mine — at the distance of only a foot or two. The creature that owned it had been crouching behind the parasite, and had looked round it at the same instant that I did. It was a human face — or at least it was far more human than any monkey's that I have ever seen. It was long, whitish, and blotched with pimples, the nose flattened, and the lower jaw projecting, with a bristle of coarse whiskers round the chin. The eyes, which were under thick and heavy brows, were bestial and ferocious, and as it opened its mouth to snarl what sounded like a curse at me I observed that it had curved, sharp canine teeth. For an instant I read hatred and menace in the evil eyes. Then, as quick as a flash, came an expression of overpowering fear. There was a crash of broken boughs as it dived wildly down into the tangle of green. I caught a glimpse of a hairy body like that of a reddish pig, and then it was gone amid a swirl of leaves and branches.

"What's the matter?" shouted Roxton from below. "Anything wrong with you?"

"Did you see it?" I cried, with my arms round the branch and all my nerves tingling.

"We heard a row, as if your foot had slipped. What was it?"

I was so shocked at the sudden and strange appearance of this ape-man that I hesitated whether I should not climb down again and tell my experience to my companions. But I was already so far up the great tree that it seemed a humiliation to return without having carried out my mission.

After a long pause, therefore, to recover my breath and my courage, I continued my ascent. Once I put my weight upon a rotten branch and swung for a few seconds by my hands, but in the main it was all easy climbing. Gradually the leaves thinned around me, and I was aware, from the wind upon my face, that I had topped all the trees of the forest. I was determined, however, not to look about me before I had reached the very highest point, so I scrambled on until I had got so far that the topmost branch was bending beneath my weight. There I settled into a convenient fork, and, balancing myself securely, I found myself looking down at a most wonderful panorama of this strange country in which we found ourselves.

The sun was just above the western sky-line, and the evening was a particularly bright and clear one, so that the whole extent of the plateau was visible beneath me. It was, as seen from this height, of an oval contour, with a breadth of about thirty miles and a width of twenty. Its general shape was that of a shallow funnel, all the sides sloping down to a considerable lake in the center. This lake may have been ten miles in circumference, and lay very green and beautiful in the evening light, with a thick fringe of reeds at its edges, and with its surface broken by several yellow sandbanks, which gleamed golden in the mellow sunshine. A number of long dark objects, which were too large for alligators and too long for canoes, lay upon the edges of these patches of sand. With my glass I could clearly see that they were alive, but what their nature might be I could not imagine.

From the side of the plateau on which we were, slopes of woodland, with occasional glades, stretched down for five or six miles to the central lake. I could see at my very feet the glade of the iguanodons, and farther off was a round opening in the trees which marked the swamp of the pterodactyls. On the side facing me, however, the plateau presented a very different aspect. There the basalt cliffs of the outside were reproduced upon the inside, forming an escarpment about two hundred feet high, with a woody slope beneath it. Along the base of these red cliffs, some distance above the ground, I could see a number of dark holes through the glass, which I conjectured to be the mouths of caves. At the opening of one of these something white was shimmering, but I was unable to make out what it was. I sat charting the country until the sun had set and it was so dark that I could no longer distinguish details. Then I climbed down to my companions waiting for me so eagerly at the bottom of the great tree. For once I was the hero of the expedition. Alone I had thought of it, and alone I had done it; and here was the chart which would save us a month's blind groping among unknown dangers. Each of them shook me solemnly by the hand.

But before they discussed the details of my map I had to tell them of my encounter with the ape-man among the branches.

"He has been there all the time," said I.

"How do you know that?" asked Lord John.

"Because I have never been without that feeling that something malevolent was watching us. I mentioned it to you, Professor Challenger."

“Our young friend certainly said something of the kind. He is also the one among us who is endowed with that Celtic temperament which would make him sensitive to such impressions.”

“The whole theory of telepathy — —” began Summerlee, filling his pipe.

“Is too vast to be now discussed,” said Challenger, with decision. “Tell me, now,” he added, with the air of a bishop addressing a Sunday-school, “did you happen to observe whether the creature could cross its thumb over its palm?”

“No, indeed.”

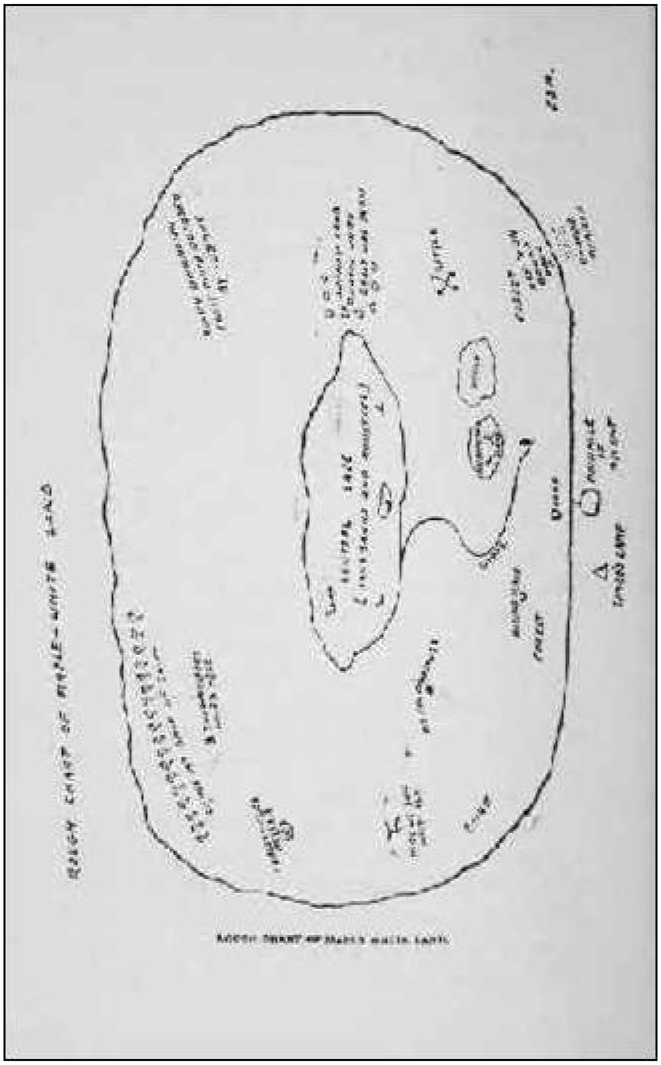
ROUGH CHART OF MAPLE-WHITE LAND
CENTRAL LAKE
FOREST
PINNACLE OF ASCENT

“Had it a tail?”

“No.”

“Was the foot prehensile?”

"I do not think it could have made off so fast among the branches if it could not get a grip with its feet."

"In South America there are, if my memory serves me — you will check the observation, Professor Summerlee — some thirty-six species of monkeys, but the anthropoid ape is unknown. It is clear, however, that he exists in this country, and that he is not the hairy, gorilla-like variety, which is never seen out of Africa or the East." (I was inclined to interpolate, as I looked at him, that I had seen his first cousin in Kensington.) "This is a whiskered and colourless type, the latter characteristic pointing to the fact that he spends his days in arboreal seclusion. The question which we have to face is whether he approaches more closely to the ape or the man. In the latter case, he may well approximate to what the vulgar have called the 'missing link.' The solution of this problem is our immediate duty."

"It is nothing of the sort," said Summerlee, abruptly. "Now that, through the intelligence and activity of Mr. Malone" (I cannot help quoting the words), "we have got our chart, our one and only immediate duty is to get ourselves safe and sound out of this awful place."

"The flesh-pots of civilization," groaned Challenger.

"The ink-pots of civilization, sir. It is our task to put on record what we have seen, and to leave the further exploration to others. You all agreed as much before Mr. Malone got us the chart."

"Well," said Challenger, "I admit that my mind will be more at ease when I am assured that the result of our expedition has been conveyed to our friends. How we are to get down from this place I have not as yet an idea. I have never yet encountered any problem, however, which my inventive brain was unable to solve, and I promise you that to-morrow I will turn my attention to the question of our descent." And so the matter was allowed to rest.

But that evening, by the light of the fire and of a single candle, the first map of the lost world was elaborated. Every detail which I had roughly noted from my watch-tower was drawn out in its relative place. Challenger's pencil hovered over the great blank which marked the lake.

"What shall we call it?" he asked.

"Why should you not take the chance of perpetuating your own name?" said Summerlee, with his usual touch of acidity.

"I trust, sir, that my name will have other and more personal claims upon posterity," said Challenger, severely. "Any ignoramus can hand down his worthless memory by imposing it upon a mountain or a river. I need no such monument.”

Summerlee, with a twisted smile, was about to make some fresh assault when Lord John hastened to intervene.

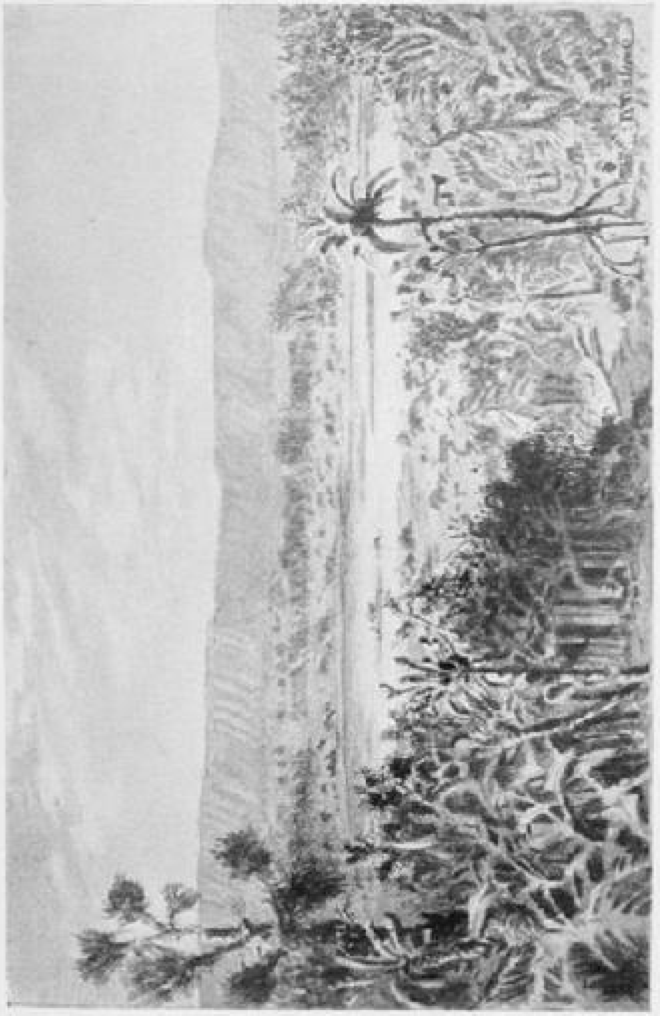

Facing p. 204

GENERAL VIEW OF PLATEAU FROM TOP OF GINGKO TREE

(Constructed by Mr. Pat L. Forbes from Mr. Malone's rough sketch.)

“It’s up to you, young fellah, to name the lake,” said he. “You saw it first, and, by George, if you choose to put ‘Lake Malone’ on it, no one has a better right.”

“By all means. Let our young friend give it a name,” said Challenger.

“Then,” said I, blushing, I dare say, as I said it, “let it be named Lake Gladys.”

“Don’t you think the Central Lake would be more descriptive?” remarked Summerlee.

“I should prefer Lake Gladys.”

Challenger looked at me sympathetically, and shook his great head in mock disapproval. “Boys will be boys,” said he. “Lake Gladys let it be.”

CHAPTER XII

“It was Dreadful in the Forest”

I have said — or perhaps I have not said, for my memory plays me sad tricks these days — that I glowed with pride when three such men as my comrades thanked me for having saved, or at least greatly helped, the situation. As the youngster of the party, not merely in years, but in experience, character, knowledge, and all that goes to make a man, I had been overshadowed from the first. And now I was coming into my own. I warmed at the thought. Alas! for the pride which goes before a fall! That little glow of self-satisfaction, that added measure of self-confidence, were to lead me on that very night to the most dreadful experience of my life, ending with a shock which turns my heart sick when I think of it.

It came about in this way. I had been unduly excited by the adventure of the tree, and sleep seemed to be impossible. Summerlee was on guard, sitting hunched over our small fire, a quaint, angular figure, his rifle across his knees and his pointed, goat-like beard wagging with each weary nod of his head. Lord John lay silent, wrapped in the South American poncho which he wore, while Challenger snored with a roll and rattle which reverberated through the woods. The full moon was shining brightly, and the air was crisply cold. What a night for a walk! And then suddenly came the thought, “Why not?” Suppose I stole softly away, suppose I made my way down to the central lake, suppose I was back at breakfast with some record of the place — would I not in that case be thought an even more worthy associate? Then, if Summerlee carried the day and some means of escape were found, we should return to London with first-hand knowledge of the central mystery of the plateau, to which I alone, of all men, would have penetrated. I thought of Gladys, with her “There are heroisms all round us.” I seemed to hear her voice as she said it. I thought also of McArdle. What a three column article for the paper! What a foundation for a career! A correspondentship in the next great war might be within my reach. I clutched at a gun — my pockets were full of cartridges — and, parting the thorn bushes at the gate of our zareba, quickly slipped out. My last glance showed me the unconscious Summerlee, most futile of sentinels, still nodding away like a queer mechanical toy in front of the smouldering fire.

I had not gone a hundred yards before I deeply repented my rashness. I may have said somewhere in this chronicle that I am too imaginative to be a really courageous man, but that I have an overpowering fear of seeming afraid. This was the power which now carried me onwards. I simply could not slink back with nothing done. Even if my comrades should not have missed me, and should never know of my weakness, there would still remain some intolerable self-shame in my own soul. And yet I shuddered at the position in which I found myself, and would have given all I possessed at that moment to have been honorably free of the whole business.

It was dreadful in the forest. The trees grew so thickly and their foliage spread so widely that I could see nothing of the moon-light save that here and there the high branches made a tangled filigree against the starry sky. As the eyes became more used to the obscurity one learned that there were different degrees of darkness among the trees — that some were dimly visible, while between and among them there were coal-black shadowed patches, like the mouths of caves, from which I shrank in horror as I passed. I thought of the despairing yell of the tortured iguanodon — that dreadful cry which had echoed through the woods. I thought, too, of the glimpse I had in the light of Lord John’s torch of that bloated, warty, blood-slavering muzzle. Even now I was on its hunting-ground. At any instant it might spring upon me from the shadows — this nameless and horrible monster. I stopped, and, picking a cartridge from my pocket, I opened the breech of my gun. As I touched the lever my heart leaped within me. It was the shot-gun, not the rifle, which I had taken!

Again the impulse to return swept over me. Here, surely, was a most excellent reason for my failure — one for which no one would think the less of me. But again the foolish pride fought against that very word. I could not — must not — fail. After all, my rifle would probably have been as useless as a shot-gun against such dangers as I might meet. If I were to go back to camp to change my weapon I could hardly expect to enter and to leave again without being seen. In that case there would be explanations, and my attempt would no longer be all my own. After a little hesitation, then, I screwed up my courage and continued upon my way, my useless gun under my arm.

The darkness of the forest had been alarming, but even worse was the white, still flood of moonlight in the open glade of the iguanodons. Hid among the bushes, I looked out at it. None of the great brutes were in sight. Perhaps the tragedy which had befallen one of them had driven them from their feeding-ground. In the misty, silvery night I could see no sign of any living thing. Taking courage, therefore, I slipped rapidly across it, and among the jungle on the farther side I picked up once again the brook which was my guide. It was a cheery companion, gurgling and chuckling as it ran, like the dear old trout-stream in the West Country where I have fished at night in my boyhood. So long as I followed it down I must come to the lake, and so long as I followed it back I must come to the camp. Often I had to lose sight of it on account of the tangled brush-wood, but I was always within earshot of its tinkle and splash.

As one descended the slope the woods became thinner, and bushes, with occasional high trees, took the place of the forest. I could make good progress, therefore, and I could see without being seen. I passed close to the pterodactyl swamp, and as I did so, with a dry, crisp, leathery rattle of wings, one of these great creatures — it was twenty feet at least from tip to tip — rose up from somewhere near me and soared into the air. As it passed across the face of the moon the light shone clearly through the membranous wings, and it looked like a flying skeleton against the white, tropical radiance. I crouched low among the bushes, for I knew from past experience that with a single cry the creature could bring a hundred of its loathsome mates about my ears. It was not until it had settled again that I dared to steal onwards upon my journey.

The night had been exceedingly still, but as I advanced I became conscious of a low, rumbling sound, a continuous murmur, somewhere in front of me. This grew louder as I proceeded, until at last it was clearly quite close to me. When I stood still the sound was constant, so that it seemed to come from some stationary cause. It was like a boiling kettle or the bubbling of some great pot. Soon I came upon the source of it, for in the center of a small clearing I found a lake — or a pool, rather, for it was not larger than the basin of the Trafalgar Square fountain — of some black, pitch-like stuff, the surface of which rose and fell in great blisters of bursting gas. The air above it was shimmering with heat, and the ground round was so hot that I could hardly bear to lay my hand on it. It was clear that the great volcanic outburst which had raised this strange plateau so many years ago had not yet entirely spent its forces. Blackened rocks and mounds of lava I had already seen everywhere peeping out from amid the luxuriant vegetation which draped them, but this asphalt pool in the jungle was the first sign that we had of actual existing activity on the slopes of the ancient crater. I had no time to examine it further for I had need to hurry if I were to be back in camp in the morning.

It was a fearsome walk, and one which will be with me so long as memory holds. In the great moonlight clearings I slunk along among the shadows on the margin. In the jungle I crept forward, stopping with a beating heart whenever I heard, as I often did, the crash of breaking branches as some wild beast went past. Now and then great shadows loomed up for an instant and were gone — great, silent shadows which seemed to prowl upon padded feet. How often I stopped with the intention of returning, and yet every time my pride conquered my fear, and sent me on again until my object should be attained.

At last (my watch showed that it was one in the morning) I saw the gleam of water amid the openings of the jungle, and ten minutes later I was among the reeds upon the borders of the central lake. I was exceedingly dry, so I lay down and took a long draught of its waters, which were fresh and cold. There was a broad pathway with many tracks upon it at the spot which I had found, so that it was clearly one of the drinking-places of the animals. Close to the water’s edge there was a huge isolated block of lava. Up this I climbed, and, lying on the top, I had an excellent view in every direction.

The first thing which I saw filled me with amazement. When I described the view from the summit of the great tree, I said that on the farther cliff I could see a number of dark spots, which appeared to be the mouths of caves. Now, as I looked up at the same cliffs, I saw discs of light in every direction, ruddy, clearly-defined patches, like the port-holes of a liner in the darkness. For a moment I thought it was the lava-glow from some volcanic action; but this could not be so. Any volcanic action would surely be down in the hollow and not high among the rocks. What, then, was the alternative? It was wonderful, and yet it must surely be. These ruddy spots must be the reflection of fires within the caves — fires which could only be lit by the hand of man. There were human beings, then, upon the plateau. How gloriously my expedition was justified! Here was news indeed for us to bear back with us to London!

For a long time I lay and watched these red, quivering blotches of light. I suppose they were ten miles off from me, yet even at that distance one could observe how, from time to time, they twinkled or were obscured as someone passed before them. What would I not have given to be able to crawl up to them, to peep in, and to take back some word to my comrades as to the appearance and character of the race who lived in so strange a place! It was out of the question for the moment, and yet surely we could not leave the plateau until we had some definite knowledge upon the point.

Lake Gladys — my own lake — lay like a sheet of quicksilver before me, with a reflected moon shining brightly in the center of it. It was shallow, for in many places I saw low sandbanks protruding above the water. Everywhere upon the still surface I could see signs of life, sometimes mere rings and ripples in the water, sometimes the gleam of a great silver-sided fish in the air, sometimes the arched, slate-coloured back of some passing monster. Once upon a yellow sandbank I saw a creature like a huge swan, with a clumsy body and a high, flexible neck, shuffling about upon the margin. Presently it plunged in, and for some time I could see the arched neck and darting head undulating over the water. Then it dived, and I saw it no more.

My attention was soon drawn away from these distant sights and brought back to what was going on at my very feet. Two creatures like large armadillos had come down to the drinking-place, and were squatting at the edge of the water, their long, flexible tongues like red ribbons shooting in and out as they lapped. A huge deer, with branching horns, a magnificent creature which carried itself like a king, came down with its doe and two fawns and drank beside the armadillos. No such deer exist anywhere else upon earth, for the moose or elks which I have seen would hardly have reached its shoulders. Presently it gave a warning snort, and was off with its family among the reeds, while the armadillos also scuttled for shelter. A new-comer, a most monstrous animal, was coming down the path.

For a moment I wondered where I could have seen that ungainly shape, that arched back with triangular fringes along it, that strange bird-like head held close to the ground. Then it came back, to me. It was the stegosaurus — the very creature which Maple White had preserved in his sketch-book, and which had been the first object which arrested the attention of Challenger! There he was — perhaps the very specimen which the American artist had encountered. The ground shook beneath his tremendous weight, and his gulpings of water resounded through the still night. For five minutes he was so close to my rock that by stretching out my hand I could have touched the hideous waving hackles upon his back. Then he lumbered away and was lost among the boulders.

Looking at my watch, I saw that it was half-past two o’clock, and high time, therefore, that I started upon my homeward journey. There was no difficulty about the direction in which I should return for all along I had kept the little brook upon my left, and it opened into the central lake within a stone’s-throw of the boulder upon which I had been lying. I set off, therefore, in high spirits, for I felt that I had done good work and was bringing back a fine budget of news for my companions. Foremost of all, of course, were the sight of the fiery caves and the certainty that some troglodytic race inhabited them. But besides that I could speak from experience of the central lake. I could testify that it was full of strange creatures, and I had seen several land forms of primeval life which we had not before encountered. I reflected as I walked that few men in the world could have spent a stranger night or added more to human knowledge in the course of it.

I was plodding up the slope, turning these thoughts over in my mind, and had reached a point which may have been half-way to home, when my mind was brought back to my own position by a strange noise behind me. It was something between a snore and a growl, low, deep, and exceedingly menacing. Some strange creature was evidently near me, but nothing could be seen, so I hastened more rapidly upon my way. I had traversed half a mile or so when suddenly the sound was repeated, still behind me, but louder and more menacing than before. My heart stood still within me as it flashed across me that the beast, whatever it was, must surely be after ME. My skin grew cold and my hair rose at the thought. That these monsters should tear each other to pieces was a part of the strange struggle for existence, but that they should turn upon modern man, that they should deliberately track and hunt down the predominant human, was a staggering and fearsome thought. I remembered again the blood-beslobbered face which we had seen in the glare of Lord John’s torch, like some horrible vision from the deepest circle of Dante’s hell. With my knees shaking beneath me, I stood and glared with starting eyes down the moonlit path which lay behind me. All was quiet as in a dream landscape. Silver clearings and the black patches of the bushes — nothing else could I see.

Then from out of the silence, imminent and threatening, there came once more that low, throaty croaking, far louder and closer than before. There could no longer be a doubt. Something was on my trail, and was closing in upon me every minute.

I stood like a man paralyzed, still staring at the ground which I had traversed. Then suddenly I saw it. There was movement among the bushes at the far end of the clearing which I had just traversed. A great dark shadow disengaged itself and hopped out into the clear moonlight. I say “hopped” advisedly, for the beast moved like a kangaroo, springing along in an erect position upon its powerful hind legs, while its front ones were held bent in front of it. It was of enormous size and power, like an erect elephant, but its movements, in spite of its bulk, were exceedingly alert. For a moment, as I saw its shape, I hoped that it was an iguanodon, which I knew to be harmless, but, ignorant as I was, I soon saw that this was a very different creature. Instead of the gentle, deer-shaped head of the great three-toed leaf-eater, this beast had a broad, squat, toad-like face like that which had alarmed us in our camp. His ferocious cry and the horrible energy of his pursuit both assured me that this was surely one of the great flesh-eating dinosaurs, the most terrible beasts which have ever walked this earth. As the huge brute loped along it dropped forward upon its fore-paws and brought its nose to the ground every twenty yards or so. It was smelling out my trail. Sometimes, for an instant, it was at fault. Then it would catch it up again and come bounding swiftly along the path I had taken.

Even now when I think of that nightmare the sweat breaks out upon my brow. What could I do? My useless fowling-piece was in my hand. What help could I get from that? I looked desperately round for some rock or tree, but I was in a bushy jungle with nothing higher than a sapling within sight, while I knew that the creature behind me could tear down an ordinary tree as though it were a reed. My only possible chance lay in flight. I could not move swiftly over the rough, broken ground, but as I looked round me in despair I saw a well-marked, hard-beaten path which ran across in front of me. We had seen several of the sort, the runs of various wild beasts, during our expeditions. Along this I could perhaps hold my own, for I was a fast runner, and in excellent condition. Flinging away my useless gun, I set myself to do such a half-mile as I have never done before or since. My limbs ached, my chest heaved, I felt that my throat would burst for want of air, and yet with that horror behind me I ran and I ran and ran. At last I paused, hardly able to move. For a moment I thought that I had thrown him off. The path lay still behind me. And then suddenly, with a crashing and a rending, a thudding of giant feet and a panting of monster lungs the beast was upon me once more. He was at my very heels. I was lost.

Madman that I was to linger so long before I fled! Up to then he had hunted by scent, and his movement was slow. But he had actually seen me as I started to run. From then onwards he had hunted by sight, for the path showed him where I had gone. Now, as he came round the curve, he was springing in great bounds. The moonlight shone upon his huge projecting eyes, the row of enormous teeth in his open mouth, and the gleaming fringe of claws upon his short, powerful forearms. With a scream of terror I turned and rushed wildly down the path. Behind me the thick, gasping breathing of the creature sounded louder and louder. His heavy footfall was beside me. Every instant I expected to feel his grip upon my back. And then suddenly there came a crash — I was falling through space, and everything beyond was darkness and rest.

As I emerged from my unconsciousness — which could not, I think, have lasted more than a few minutes — I was aware of a most dreadful and penetrating smell. Putting out my hand in the darkness I came upon something which felt like a huge lump of meat, while my other hand closed upon a large bone. Up above me there was a circle of starlit sky, which showed me that I was lying at the bottom of a deep pit. Slowly I staggered to my feet and felt myself all over. I was stiff and sore from head to foot, but there was no limb which would not move, no joint which would not bend. As the circumstances of my fall came back into my confused brain, I looked up in terror, expecting to see that dreadful head silhouetted against the paling sky. There was no sign of the monster, however, nor could I hear any sound from above. I began to walk slowly round, therefore, feeling in every direction to find out what this strange place could be into which I had been so opportunely precipitated.

It was, as I have said, a pit, with sharply-sloping walls and a level bottom about twenty feet across. This bottom was littered with great gobbets of flesh, most of which was in the last state of putridity. The atmosphere was poisonous and horrible. After tripping and stumbling over these lumps of decay, I came suddenly against something hard, and I found that an upright post was firmly fixed in the center of the hollow. It was so high that I could not reach the top of it with my hand, and it appeared to be covered with grease.

Suddenly I remembered that I had a tin box of wax-vestas in my pocket. Striking one of them, I was able at last to form some opinion of this place into which I had fallen. There could be no question as to its nature. It was a trap — made by the hand of man. The post in the center, some nine feet long, was sharpened at the upper end, and was black with the stale blood of the creatures who had been impaled upon it. The remains scattered about were fragments of the victims, which had been cut away in order to clear the stake for the next who might blunder in. I remembered that Challenger had declared that man could not exist upon the plateau, since with his feeble weapons he could not hold his own against the monsters who roamed over it. But now it was clear enough how it could be done. In their narrow-mouthed caves the natives, whoever they might be, had refuges into which the huge saurians could not penetrate, while with their developed brains they were capable of setting such traps, covered with branches, across the paths which marked the run of the animals as would destroy them in spite of all their strength and activity. Man was always the master.

The sloping wall of the pit was not difficult for an active man to climb, but I hesitated long before I trusted myself within reach of the dreadful creature which had so nearly destroyed me. How did I know that he was not lurking in the nearest clump of bushes, waiting for my reappearance? I took heart, however, as I recalled a conversation between Challenger and Summerlee upon the habits of the great saurians. Both were agreed that the monsters were practically brainless, that there was no room for reason in their tiny cranial cavities, and that if they have disappeared from the rest of the world it was assuredly on account of their own stupidity, which made it impossible for them to adapt themselves to changing conditions.

To lie in wait for me now would mean that the creature had appreciated what had happened to me, and this in turn would argue some power connecting cause and effect. Surely it was more likely that a brainless creature, acting solely by vague predatory instinct, would give up the chase when I disappeared, and, after a pause of astonishment, would wander away in search of some other prey? I clambered to the edge of the pit and looked over. The stars were fading, the sky was whitening, and the cold wind of morning blew pleasantly upon my face. I could see or hear nothing of my enemy. Slowly I climbed out and sat for a while upon the ground, ready to spring back into my refuge if any danger should appear. Then, reassured by the absolute stillness and by the growing light, I took my courage in both hands and stole back along the path which I had come. Some distance down it I picked up my gun, and shortly afterwards struck the brook which was my guide. So, with many a frightened backward glance, I made for home.

And suddenly there came something to remind me of my absent companions. In the clear, still morning air there sounded far away the sharp, hard note of a single rifle-shot. I paused and listened, but there was nothing more. For a moment I was shocked at the thought that some sudden danger might have befallen them. But then a simpler and more natural explanation came to my mind. It was now broad daylight. No doubt my absence had been noticed. They had imagined, that I was lost in the woods, and had fired this shot to guide me home. It is true that we had made a strict resolution against firing, but if it seemed to them that I might be in danger they would not hesitate. It was for me now to hurry on as fast as possible, and so to reassure them.

I was weary and spent, so my progress was not so fast as I wished; but at last I came into regions which I knew. There was the swamp of the pterodactyls upon my left; there in front of me was the glade of the iguanodons. Now I was in the last belt of trees which separated me from Fort Challenger. I raised my voice in a cheery shout to allay their fears. No answering greeting came back to me. My heart sank at that ominous stillness. I quickened my pace into a run. The zareba rose before me, even as I had left it, but the gate was open. I rushed in. In the cold, morning light it was a fearful sight which met my eyes. Our effects were scattered in wild confusion over the ground; my comrades had disappeared, and close to the smouldering ashes of our fire the grass was stained crimson with a hideous pool of blood.

I was so stunned by this sudden shock that for a time I must have nearly lost my reason. I have a vague recollection, as one remembers a bad dream, of rushing about through the woods all round the empty camp, calling wildly for my companions. No answer came back from the silent shadows. The horrible thought that I might never see them again, that I might find myself abandoned all alone in that dreadful place, with no possible way of descending into the world below, that I might live and die in that nightmare country, drove me to desperation. I could have torn my hair and beaten my head in my despair. Only now did I realise how I had learned to lean upon my companions, upon the serene self-confidence of Challenger, and upon the masterful, humorous coolness of Lord John Roxton. Without them I was like a child in the dark, helpless and powerless. I did not know which way to turn or what I should do first.

After a period, during which I sat in bewilderment, I set myself to try and discover what sudden misfortune could have befallen my companions. The whole disordered appearance of the camp showed that there had been some sort of attack, and the rifle-shot no doubt marked the time when it had occurred. That there should have been only one shot showed that it had been all over in an instant. The rifles still lay upon the ground, and one of them — Lord John's — had the empty cartridge in the breech. The blankets of Challenger and of Summerlee beside the fire suggested that they had been asleep at the time. The cases of ammunition and of food were scattered about in a wild litter, together with our unfortunate cameras and plate-carriers, but none of them were missing. On the other hand, all the exposed provisions — and I remembered that there were a considerable quantity of them — were gone. They were animals, then, and not natives, who had made the inroad, for surely the latter would have left nothing behind.

But if animals, or some single terrible animal, then what had become of my comrades? A ferocious beast would surely have destroyed them and left their remains. It is true that there was that one hideous pool of blood, which told of violence. Such a monster as had pursued me during the night could have carried away a victim as easily as a cat would a mouse. In that case the others would have followed in pursuit. But then they would assuredly have taken their rifles with them. The more I tried to think it out with my confused and weary brain the less could I find any plausible explanation. I searched round in the forest, but could see no tracks which could help me to a conclusion. Once I lost myself, and it was only by good luck, and after an hour of wandering, that I found the camp once more.

Suddenly a thought came to me and brought some little comfort to my heart. I was not absolutely alone in the world. Down at the bottom of the cliff, and within call of me, was waiting the faithful Zambo. I went to the edge of the plateau and looked over. Sure enough, he was squatting among his blankets beside his fire in his little camp. But, to my amazement, a second man was seated in front of him. For an instant my heart leaped for joy, as I thought that one of my comrades had made his way safely down.

But a second glance dispelled the hope. The rising sun shone red upon the man’s skin. He was an Indian. I shouted loudly and waved my handkerchief. Presently Zambo looked up, waved his hand, and turned to ascend the pinnacle. In a short time he was standing close to me and listening with deep distress to the story which I told him.

“Devil got them for sure, Massa Malone,” said he. “You got into the devil’s country, sah, and he take you all to himself. You take advice, Massa Malone, and come down quick, else he get you as well.”

“How can I come down, Zambo?”

“You get creepers from trees, Massa Malone. Throw them over here. I make fast to this stump, and so you have bridge.”

“We have thought of that. There are no creepers here which could bear us.”

“Send for ropes, Massa Malone.”

“Who can I send, and where?”

“Send to Indian villages, sah. Plenty hide rope in Indian village. Indian down below; send him.”

“Who is he?

“One of our Indians. Other ones beat him and take away his pay. He come back to us. Ready now to take letter, bring rope, — anything.”

To take a letter! Why not? Perhaps he might bring help; but in any case he would ensure that our lives were not spent for nothing, and that news of all that we had won for Science should reach our friends at home. I had two completed letters already waiting. I would spend the day in writing a third, which would bring my experiences absolutely up to date. The Indian could bear this back to the world. I ordered Zambo, therefore, to come again in the evening, and I spent my miserable and lonely day in recording my own adventures of the night before. I also drew up a note, to be given to any white merchant or captain of a steam-boat whom the Indian could find, imploring them to see that ropes were sent to us, since our lives must depend upon it. These documents I threw to Zambo in the evening, and also my purse, which contained three English sovereigns. These were to be given to the Indian, and he was promised twice as much if he returned with the ropes.

So now you will understand, my dear Mr. McArdle, how this communication reaches you, and you will also know the truth, in case you never hear again from your unfortunate correspondent. To-night I am too weary and too depressed to make my plans. To-morrow I must think out some way by which I shall keep in touch with this camp, and yet search round for any traces of my unhappy friends.

CHAPTER XIII

“A Sight which I shall Never Forget”

Just as the sun was setting upon that melancholy night I saw the lonely figure of the Indian upon the vast plain beneath me, and I watched him, our one faint hope of salvation, until he disappeared in the rising mists of evening which lay, rose-tinted from the setting sun, between the far-off river and me.

It was quite dark when I at last turned back to our stricken camp, and my last vision as I went was the red gleam of Zambo’s fire, the one point of light in the wide world below, as was his faithful presence in my own shadowed soul. And yet I felt happier than I had done since this crushing blow had fallen upon me, for it was good to think that the world should know what we had done, so that at the worst our names should not perish with our bodies, but should go down to posterity associated with the result of our labors.

It was an awesome thing to sleep in that ill-fated camp; and yet it was even more unnerving to do so in the jungle. One or the other it must be. Prudence, on the one hand, warned me that I should remain on guard, but exhausted Nature, on the other, declared that I should do nothing of the kind. I climbed up on to a limb of the great gingko tree, but there was no secure perch on its rounded surface, and I should certainly have fallen off and broken my neck the moment I began to doze. I got down, therefore, and pondered over what I should do. Finally, I closed the door of the zareba, lit three separate fires in a triangle, and having eaten a hearty supper dropped off into a profound sleep, from which I had a strange and most welcome awakening. In the early morning, just as day was breaking, a hand was laid upon my arm, and starting up, with all my nerves in a tingle and my hand feeling for a rifle, I gave a cry of joy as in the cold gray light I saw Lord John Roxton kneeling beside me.

It was he — and yet it was not he. I had left him calm in his bearing, correct in his person, prim in his dress. Now he was pale and wild-eyed, gasping as he breathed like one who has run far and fast. His gaunt face was scratched and bloody, his clothes were hanging in rags, and his hat was gone. I stared in amazement, but he gave me no chance for questions. He was grabbing at our stores all the time he spoke.

"Quick, young fellah! Quick!" he cried. "Every moment counts. Get the rifles, both of them. I have the other two. Now, all the cartridges you can gather. Fill up your pockets. Now, some food. Half a dozen tins will do. That's all right! Don't wait to talk or think. Get a move on, or we are done!"

Still half-awake, and unable to imagine what it all might mean, I found myself hurrying madly after him through the wood, a rifle under each arm and a pile of various stores in my hands. He dodged in and out through the thickest of the scrub until he came to a dense clump of brush-wood. Into this he rushed, regardless of thorns, and threw himself into the heart of it, pulling me down by his side.

"There!" he panted. "I think we are safe here. They'll make for the camp as sure as fate. It will be their first idea. But this should puzzle 'em."

"What is it all?" I asked, when I had got my breath. "Where are the professors? And who is it that is after us?"

"The ape-men," he cried. "My God, what brutes! Don't raise your voice, for they have long ears — sharp eyes, too, but no power of scent, so far as I could judge, so I don't think they can sniff us out. Where have you been, young fellah? You were well out of it."

In a few sentences I whispered what I had done.

"Pretty bad," said he, when he had heard of the dinosaur and the pit. "It isn't quite the place for a rest cure. What? But I had no idea what its possibilities were until those devils got hold of us. The man-eatin' Papuans had me once, but they are Chesterfields compared to this crowd."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"It was in the early mornin'. Our learned friends were just stirrin'. Hadn't even begun to argue yet. Suddenly it rained apes. They came down as thick as apples out of a tree. They had been assemblin' in the dark, I suppose, until that great tree over our heads was heavy with them. I shot one of them through the belly, but before we knew where we were they had us spread-eagled on our backs. I call them apes, but they carried sticks and stones in their hands and jabbered talk to each other, and ended up by tyin' our hands with creepers, so they are ahead of any beast that I have seen in my wanderin's. Ape-men — that's what they are — Missin' Links, and I wish they had stayed missin'. They carried off their wounded comrade — he was bleedin' like a pig — and then they sat around us, and if ever I saw frozen murder it was in their faces. They were big fellows, as big as a man and a deal stronger. Curious glassy gray eyes they have, under red tufts, and they just sat and gloated and gloated. Challenger is no chicken, but even he was cowed. He managed to struggle to his feet, and yelled out at them to have done with it and get it over. I think he had gone a bit off his head at the suddenness of it, for he raged and cursed at them like a lunatic. If they had been a row of his favorite Pressmen he could not have slanged them worse."

"Well, what did they do?" I was enthralled by the strange story which my companion was whispering into my ear, while all the time his keen eyes were shooting in every direction and his hand grasping his cocked rifle.

"I thought it was the end of us, but instead of that it started them on a new line. They all jabbered and chattered together. Then one of them stood out beside Challenger. You'll smile, young fellah, but 'pon my word they might have been kinsmen. I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. This old ape-man — he was their chief — was a sort of red Challenger, with every one of our friend's beauty points, only just a trifle more so. He had the short body, the big shoulders, the round chest, no neck, a great ruddy frill of a beard, the tufted eyebrows, the 'What do you want, damn you!' look about the eyes, and the whole catalogue. When the ape-man stood by Challenger and put his paw on his shoulder, the thing was complete. Summerlee was a bit hysterical, and he laughed till he cried. The ape-men laughed too — or at least they put up the devil of a cacklin' — and they set to work to drag us off through the forest. They wouldn't touch the guns and things — thought them dangerous, I expect — but they carried away all our loose food. Summerlee and I got some rough handlin' on the way — there's my skin and my clothes to prove it — for they took us a bee-line through the brambles, and their own hides are like leather. But Challenger was all right. Four of them carried him shoulder high, and he went like a Roman emperor. What's that?"

It was a strange clicking noise in the distance not unlike castanets.

"There they go!" said my companion, slipping cartridges into the second double barrelled "Express." "Load them all up, young fellah my lad, for we're not going to be taken alive, and don't you think it! That's the row they make when they are excited. By George! they'll have something to excite them if they put us up. The 'Last Stand of the Grays' won't be in it.

‘With their rifles grasped in their stiffened hands, mid a ring of the dead and dyin’,’ as some fathead sings. Can you hear them now?”

“Very far away.”

“That little lot will do no good, but I expect their search parties are all over the wood. Well, I was telling you my tale of woe. They got us soon to this town of theirs — about a thousand huts of branches and leaves in a great grove of trees near the edge of the cliff. It’s three or four miles from here. The filthy beasts fingered me all over, and I feel as if I should never be clean again. They tied us up — the fellow who handled me could tie like a bosun — and there we lay with our toes up, beneath a tree, while a great brute stood guard over us with a club in his hand. When I say ‘we’ I mean Summerlee and myself. Old Challenger was up a tree, eatin’ pines and havin’ the time of his life. I’m bound to say that he managed to get some fruit to us, and with his own hands he loosened our bonds. If you’d seen him sitting up in that tree hob-nobbin’ with his twin brother — and singin’ in that rollin’ bass of his, ‘Ring out, wild bells,’ cause music of any kind seemed to put ‘em in a good humor, you’d have smiled; but we weren’t in much mood for laughin’, as you can guess. They were inclined, within limits, to let him do what he liked, but they drew the line pretty sharply at us. It was a mighty consolation to us all to know that you were runnin’ loose and had the archives in your keepin’.

“Well, now, young fellah, I’ll tell you what will surprise you. You say you saw signs of men, and fires, traps, and the like. Well, we have seen the natives themselves. Poor devils they were, down-faced little chaps, and had enough to make them so. It seems that the humans hold one side of this plateau — over yonder, where you saw the caves — and the ape-men hold this side, and there is bloody war between them all the time. That’s the situation, so far as I could follow it. Well, yesterday the ape-men got hold of a dozen of the humans and brought them in as prisoners. You never heard such a jabberin’ and shriekin’ in your life. The men were little red fellows, and had been bitten and clawed so that they could hardly walk. The ape-men put two of them to death there and then — fairly pulled the arm off one of them — it was perfectly beastly. Plucky little chaps they are, and hardly gave a squeak. But it turned us absolutely sick. Summerlee fainted, and even Challenger had as much as he could stand. I think they have cleared, don’t you?”

We listened intently, but nothing save the calling of the birds broke the deep peace of the forest. Lord Roxton went on with his story.

"I think you have had the escape of your life, young fellah my lad. It was catchin' those Indians that put you clean out of their heads, else they would have been back to the camp for you as sure as fate and gathered you in. Of course, as you said, they have been watchin' us from the beginnin' out of that tree, and they knew perfectly well that we were one short. However, they could think only of this new haul; so it was I, and not a bunch of apes, that dropped in on you in the morning. Well, we had a horrid business afterwards. My God! what a nightmare the whole thing is! You remember the great bristle of sharp canes down below where we found the skeleton of the American? Well, that is just under ape-town, and that's the jumpin'-off place of their prisoners. I expect there's heaps of skeletons there, if we looked for 'em. They have a sort of clear parade-ground on the top, and they make a proper ceremony about it. One by one the poor devils have to jump, and the game is to see whether they are merely dashed to pieces or whether they get skewered on the canes. They took us out to see it, and the whole tribe lined up on the edge. Four of the Indians jumped, and the canes went through 'em like knittin' needles through a pat of butter. No wonder we found that poor Yankee's skeleton with the canes growin' between his ribs. It was horrible — but it was doocedly interestin' too. We were all fascinated to see them take the dive, even when we thought it would be our turn next on the spring-board.

"Well, it wasn't. They kept six of the Indians up for to-day — that's how I understood it — but I fancy we were to be the star performers in the show. Challenger might get off, but Summerlee and I were in the bill. Their language is more than half signs, and it was not hard to follow them. So I thought it was time we made a break for it. I had been plottin' it out a bit, and had one or two things clear in my mind. It was all on me, for Summerlee was useless and Challenger not much better. The only time they got together they got slangin' because they couldn't agree upon the scientific classification of these red-headed devils that had got hold of us. One said it was the dryopithecus of Java, the other said it was pithecanthropus. Madness, I call it — Loonies, both. But, as I say, I had thought out one or two points that were helpful. One was that these brutes could not run as fast as a man in the open. They have short, bandy legs, you see, and heavy bodies. Even Challenger could give a few yards in a hundred to the best of them, and you or I would be a perfect Shrubb. Another point was that they knew nothin' about guns. I don't believe they ever understood how the fellow I shot came by his hurt. If we could get at our guns there was no sayin' what we could do.

"So I broke away early this mornin', gave my guard a kick in the tummy that laid him out, and sprinted for the camp. There I got you and the guns, and here we are."

"But the professors!" I cried, in consternation.

"Well, we must just go back and fetch 'em. I couldn't bring 'em with me. Challenger was up the tree, and Summerlee was not fit for the effort. The only chance was to get the guns and try a rescue. Of course they may scupper them at once in revenge. I don't think they would touch Challenger, but I wouldn't answer for Summerlee. But they would have had him in any case. Of that I am certain. So I haven't made matters any worse by boltin'. But we are honor bound to go back and have them out or see it through with them. So you can make up your soul, young fellah my lad, for it will be one way or the other before evenin'."

I have tried to imitate here Lord Roxton's jerky talk, his short, strong sentences, the half-humorous, half-reckless tone that ran through it all. But he was a born leader. As danger thickened his jaunty manner would increase, his speech become more racy, his cold eyes glitter into ardent life, and his Don Quixote moustache bristle with joyous excitement. His love of danger, his intense appreciation of the drama of an adventure — all the more intense for being held tightly in — his consistent view that every peril in life is a form of sport, a fierce game betwixt you and Fate, with Death as a forfeit, made him a wonderful companion at such hours. If it were not for our fears as to the fate of our companions, it would have been a positive joy to throw myself with such a man into such an affair. We were rising from our brushwood hiding-place when suddenly I felt his grip upon my arm.

"By George!" he whispered, "here they come!"

From where we lay we could look down a brown aisle, arched with green, formed by the trunks and branches. Along this a party of the ape-men were passing. They went in single file, with bent legs and rounded backs, their hands occasionally touching the ground, their heads turning to left and right as they trotted along. Their crouching gait took away from their height, but I should put them at five feet or so, with long arms and enormous chests. Many of them carried sticks, and at the distance they looked like a line of very hairy and deformed human beings. For a moment I caught this clear glimpse of them. Then they were lost among the bushes.

“Not this time,” said Lord John, who had caught up his rifle. “Our best chance is to lie quiet until they have given up the search. Then we shall see whether we can’t get back to their town and hit ‘em where it hurts most. Give ‘em an hour and we’ll march.”

We filled in the time by opening one of our food tins and making sure of our breakfast. Lord Roxton had had nothing but some fruit since the morning before and ate like a starving man. Then, at last, our pockets bulging with cartridges and a rifle in each hand, we started off upon our mission of rescue. Before leaving it we carefully marked our little hiding-place among the brush-wood and its bearing to Fort Challenger, that we might find it again if we needed it. We slunk through the bushes in silence until we came to the very edge of the cliff, close to the old camp. There we halted, and Lord John gave me some idea of his plans.

“So long as we are among the thick trees these swine are our masters,” said he. “They can see us and we cannot see them. But in the open it is different. There we can move faster than they. So we must stick to the open all we can. The edge of the plateau has fewer large trees than further inland. So that’s our line of advance. Go slowly, keep your eyes open and your rifle ready. Above all, never let them get you prisoner while there is a cartridge left — that’s my last word to you, young fellah.”

When we reached the edge of the cliff I looked over and saw our good old black Zambo sitting smoking on a rock below us. I would have given a great deal to have hailed him and told him how we were placed, but it was too dangerous, lest we should be heard. The woods seemed to be full of the ape-men; again and again we heard their curious clicking chatter. At such times we plunged into the nearest clump of bushes and lay still until the sound had passed away. Our advance, therefore, was very slow, and two hours at least must have passed before I saw by Lord John’s cautious movements that we must be close to our destination. He motioned to me to lie still, and he crawled forward himself. In a minute he was back again, his face quivering with eagerness.

“Come!” said he. “Come quick! I hope to the Lord we are not too late already!”

I found myself shaking with nervous excitement as I scrambled forward and lay down beside him, looking out through the bushes at a clearing which stretched before us.

It was a sight which I shall never forget until my dying day — so weird, so impossible, that I do not know how I am to make you realise it, or how in a few years I shall bring myself to believe in it if I live to sit once more on a lounge in the Savage Club and look out on the drab solidity of the Embankment. I know that it will seem then to be some wild nightmare, some delirium of fever. Yet I will set it down now, while it is still fresh in my memory, and one at least, the man who lay in the damp grasses by my side, will know if I have lied.

A wide, open space lay before us — some hundreds of yards across — all green turf and low bracken growing to the very edge of the cliff. Round this clearing there was a semi-circle of trees with curious huts built of foliage piled one above the other among the branches. A rookery, with every nest a little house, would best convey the idea. The openings of these huts and the branches of the trees were thronged with a dense mob of ape-people, whom from their size I took to be the females and infants of the tribe. They formed the background of the picture, and were all looking out with eager interest at the same scene which fascinated and bewildered us.

In the open, and near the edge of the cliff, there had assembled a crowd of some hundred of these shaggy, red-haired creatures, many of them of immense size, and all of them horrible to look upon. There was a certain discipline among them, for none of them attempted to break the line which had been formed. In front there stood a small group of Indians — little, clean-limbed, red fellows, whose skins glowed like polished bronze in the strong sunlight. A tall, thin white man was standing beside them, his head bowed, his arms folded, his whole attitude expressive of his horror and dejection. There was no mistaking the angular form of Professor Summerlee.

In front of and around this dejected group of prisoners were several ape-men, who watched them closely and made all escape impossible. Then, right out from all the others and close to the edge of the cliff, were two figures, so strange, and under other circumstances so ludicrous, that they absorbed my attention. The one was our comrade, Professor Challenger. The remains of his coat still hung in strips from his shoulders, but his shirt had been all torn out, and his great beard merged itself in the black tangle which covered his mighty chest. He had lost his hat, and his hair, which had grown long in our wanderings, was flying in wild disorder. A single day seemed to have changed him from the highest product of modern civilization to the most desperate savage in South America. Beside him stood his master, the king of the ape-men. In all things he was, as Lord John had said, the very image of our Professor, save that his colouring was red instead of black. The same short, broad figure, the same heavy shoulders, the same forward hang of the arms, the same bristling beard merging itself in the hairy chest. Only above the eyebrows, where the sloping forehead and low, curved skull of the ape-man were in sharp contrast to the broad brow and magnificent cranium of the European, could one see any marked difference. At every other point the king was an absurd parody of the Professor.

All this, which takes me so long to describe, impressed itself upon me in a few seconds. Then we had very different things to think of, for an active drama was in progress. Two of the ape-men had seized one of the Indians out of the group and dragged him forward to the edge of the cliff. The king raised his hand as a signal. They caught the man by his leg and arm, and swung him three times backwards and forwards with tremendous violence. Then, with a frightful heave they shot the poor wretch over the precipice. With such force did they throw him that he curved high in the air before beginning to drop. As he vanished from sight, the whole assembly, except the guards, rushed forward to the edge of the precipice, and there was a long pause of absolute silence, broken by a mad yell of delight. They sprang about, tossing their long, hairy arms in the air and howling with exultation. Then they fell back from the edge, formed themselves again into line, and waited for the next victim.

This time it was Summerlee. Two of his guards caught him by the wrists and pulled him brutally to the front. His thin figure and long limbs struggled and fluttered like a chicken being dragged from a coop. Challenger had turned to the king and waved his hands frantically before him. He was begging, pleading, imploring for his comrade’s life. The ape-man pushed him roughly aside and shook his head. It was the last conscious movement he was to make upon earth. Lord John’s rifle cracked, and the king sank down, a tangled red sprawling thing, upon the ground.

“Shoot into the thick of them! Shoot! sonny, shoot!” cried my companion.

There are strange red depths in the soul of the most commonplace man. I am tenderhearted by nature, and have found my eyes moist many a time over the scream of a wounded hare. Yet the blood lust was on me now. I found myself on my feet emptying one magazine, then the other, clicking open the breech to re-load, snapping it to again, while cheering and yelling with pure ferocity and joy of slaughter as I did so. With our four guns the two of us made a horrible havoc. Both the guards who held Summerlee were down, and he was staggering about like a drunken man in his amazement, unable to realise that he was a free man. The dense mob of ape-men ran about in bewilderment, marveling whence this storm of death was coming or what it might mean. They waved, gesticulated, screamed, and tripped up over those who had fallen. Then, with a sudden impulse, they all rushed in a howling crowd to the trees for shelter, leaving the ground behind them spotted with their stricken comrades. The prisoners were left for the moment standing alone in the middle of the clearing.

Challenger's quick brain had grasped the situation. He seized the bewildered Summerlee by the arm, and they both ran towards us. Two of their guards bounded after them and fell to two bullets from Lord John. We ran forward into the open to meet our friends, and pressed a loaded rifle into the hands of each. But Summerlee was at the end of his strength. He could hardly totter. Already the ape-men were recovering from their panic. They were coming through the brushwood and threatening to cut us off. Challenger and I ran Summerlee along, one at each of his elbows, while Lord John covered our retreat, firing again and again as savage heads snarled at us out of the bushes. For a mile or more the chattering brutes were at our very heels. Then the pursuit slackened, for they learned our power and would no longer face that unerring rifle. When we had at last reached the camp, we looked back and found ourselves alone.

So it seemed to us; and yet we were mistaken. We had hardly closed the thornbush door of our zareba, clasped each other's hands, and thrown ourselves panting upon the ground beside our spring, when we heard a patter of feet and then a gentle, plaintive crying from outside our entrance. Lord Roxton rushed forward, rifle in hand, and threw it open. There, prostrate upon their faces, lay the little red figures of the four surviving Indians, trembling with fear of us and yet imploring our protection. With an expressive sweep of his hands one of them pointed to the woods around them, and indicated that they were full of danger. Then, darting forward, he threw his arms round Lord John's legs, and rested his face upon them.

"By George!" cried our peer, pulling at his moustache in great perplexity, "I say — what the deuce are we to do with these people? Get up, little chappie, and take your face off my boots."

Summerlee was sitting up and stuffing some tobacco into his old briar.

"We've got to see them safe," said he. "You've pulled us all out of the jaws of death. My word! it was a good bit of work!"

"Admirable!" cried Challenger. "Admirable! Not only we as individuals, but European science collectively, owe you a deep debt of gratitude for what you have done. I do not hesitate to say that the disappearance of Professor Summerlee and myself would have left an appreciable gap in modern zoological history. Our young friend here and you have done most excellently well."

He beamed at us with the old paternal smile, but European science would have been somewhat amazed could they have seen their chosen child, the hope of the future, with his tangled, unkempt head, his bare chest, and his tattered clothes. He had one of the meat-tins between his knees, and sat with a large piece of cold Australian mutton between his fingers. The Indian looked up at him, and then, with a little yelp, cringed to the ground and clung to Lord John's leg.

"Don't you be scared, my bonnie boy," said Lord John, patting the matted head in front of him. "He can't stick your appearance, Challenger; and, by George! I don't wonder. All right, little chap, he's only a human, just the same as the rest of us."

"Really, sir!" cried the Professor.

"Well, it's lucky for you, Challenger, that you ARE a little out of the ordinary. If you hadn't been so like the king — —"

"Upon my word, Lord John, you allow yourself great latitude."

"Well, it's a fact."

"I beg, sir, that you will change the subject. Your remarks are irrelevant and unintelligible. The question before us is what are we to do with these Indians? The obvious thing is to escort them home, if we knew where their home was."

"There is no difficulty about that," said I. "They live in the caves on the other side of the central lake."

"Our young friend here knows where they live. I gather that it is some distance."

"A good twenty miles," said I.

Summerlee gave a groan.

“I, for one, could never get there. Surely I hear those brutes still howling upon our track.”

As he spoke, from the dark recesses of the woods we heard far away the jabbering cry of the ape-men. The Indians once more set up a feeble wail of fear.

“We must move, and move quick!” said Lord John. “You help Summerlee, young fellah. These Indians will carry stores. Now, then, come along before they can see us.”

In less than half-an-hour we had reached our brushwood retreat and concealed ourselves. All day we heard the excited calling of the ape-men in the direction of our old camp, but none of them came our way, and the tired fugitives, red and white, had a long, deep sleep. I was dozing myself in the evening when someone plucked my sleeve, and I found Challenger kneeling beside me.

“You keep a diary of these events, and you expect eventually to publish it, Mr. Malone,” said he, with solemnity.

“I am only here as a Press reporter,” I answered.

“Exactly. You may have heard some rather fatuous remarks of Lord John Roxton’s which seemed to imply that there was some — some resemblance — —”

“Yes, I heard them.”

“I need not say that any publicity given to such an idea — any levity in your narrative of what occurred — would be exceedingly offensive to me.”

“I will keep well within the truth.”

“Lord John’s observations are frequently exceedingly fanciful, and he is capable of attributing the most absurd reasons to the respect which is always shown by the most undeveloped races to dignity and character. You follow my meaning?”

“Entirely.”

“I leave the matter to your discretion.” Then, after a long pause, he added: “The king of the ape-men was really a creature of great distinction — a most remarkably handsome and intelligent personality. Did it not strike you?”

“A most remarkable creature,” said I.

And the Professor, much eased in his mind, settled down to his slumber once more.

CHAPTER XIV

“Those Were the Real Conquests”

We had imagined that our pursuers, the ape-men, knew nothing of our brush-wood hiding-place, but we were soon to find out our mistake. There was no sound in the woods — not a leaf moved upon the trees, and all was peace around us — but we should have been warned by our first experience how cunningly and how patiently these creatures can watch and wait until their chance comes. Whatever fate may be mine through life, I am very sure that I shall never be nearer death than I was that morning. But I will tell you the thing in its due order.

We all awoke exhausted after the terrific emotions and scanty food of yesterday. Summerlee was still so weak that it was an effort for him to stand; but the old man was full of a sort of surly courage which would never admit defeat. A council was held, and it was agreed that we should wait quietly for an hour or two where we were, have our much-needed breakfast, and then make our way across the plateau and round the central lake to the caves where my observations had shown that the Indians lived. We relied upon the fact that we could count upon the good word of those whom we had rescued to ensure a warm welcome from their fellows. Then, with our mission accomplished and possessing a fuller knowledge of the secrets of Maple White Land, we should turn our whole thoughts to the vital problem of our escape and return. Even Challenger was ready to admit that we should then have done all for which we had come, and that our first duty from that time onwards was to carry back to civilization the amazing discoveries we had made.

We were able now to take a more leisurely view of the Indians whom we had rescued. They were small men, wiry, active, and well-built, with lank black hair tied up in a bunch behind their heads with a leathern thong, and leathern also were their loin-clothes. Their faces were hairless, well formed, and good-humored. The lobes of their ears, hanging ragged and bloody, showed that they had been pierced for some ornaments which their captors had torn out. Their speech, though unintelligible to us, was fluent among themselves, and as they pointed to each other and uttered the word “Accala” many times over, we gathered that this was the name of the nation. Occasionally, with faces which were convulsed with fear and hatred, they shook their clenched hands at the woods round and cried: “Doda! Doda!” which was surely their term for their enemies.

“What do you make of them, Challenger?” asked Lord John. “One thing is very clear to me, and that is that the little chap with the front of his head shaved is a chief among them.”

It was indeed evident that this man stood apart from the others, and that they never ventured to address him without every sign of deep respect. He seemed to be the youngest of them all, and yet, so proud and high was his spirit that, upon Challenger laying his great hand upon his head, he started like a spurred horse and, with a quick flash of his dark eyes, moved further away from the Professor. Then, placing his hand upon his breast and holding himself with great dignity, he uttered the word “Maretas” several times. The Professor, unabashed, seized the nearest Indian by the shoulder and proceeded to lecture upon him as if he were a potted specimen in a class-room.

“The type of these people,” said he in his sonorous fashion, “whether judged by cranial capacity, facial angle, or any other test, cannot be regarded as a low one; on the contrary, we must place it as considerably higher in the scale than many South American tribes which I can mention. On no possible supposition can we explain the evolution of such a race in this place. For that matter, so great a gap separates these ape-men from the primitive animals which have survived upon this plateau, that it is inadmissible to think that they could have developed where we find them.”

“Then where the dooce did they drop from?” asked Lord John.

“A question which will, no doubt, be eagerly discussed in every scientific society in Europe and America,” the Professor answered. “My own reading of the situation for what it is worth—” he inflated his chest enormously and looked insolently around him at the words—”is that evolution has advanced under the peculiar conditions of this country up to the vertebrate stage, the old types surviving and living on in company with the newer ones. Thus we find such modern creatures as the tapir — an animal with quite a respectable length of pedigree — the great deer, and the ant-eater in the companionship of reptilian forms of jurassic type. So much is clear. And now come the ape-men and the Indian. What is the scientific mind to think of their presence? I can only account for it by an invasion from outside. It is probable that there existed an anthropoid ape in South America, who in past ages found his way to this place, and that he developed into the creatures we have seen, some of which" — here he looked hard at me—"were of an appearance and shape which, if it had been accompanied by corresponding intelligence, would, I do not hesitate to say, have reflected credit upon any living race. As to the Indians I cannot doubt that they are more recent immigrants from below. Under the stress of famine or of conquest they have made their way up here. Faced by ferocious creatures which they had never before seen, they took refuge in the caves which our young friend has described, but they have no doubt had a bitter fight to hold their own against wild beasts, and especially against the ape-men who would regard them as intruders, and wage a merciless war upon them with a cunning which the larger beasts would lack. Hence the fact that their numbers appear to be limited. Well, gentlemen, have I read you the riddle aright, or is there any point which you would query?"

Professor Summerlee for once was too depressed to argue, though he shook his head violently as a token of general disagreement. Lord John merely scratched his scanty locks with the remark that he couldn't put up a fight as he wasn't in the same weight or class. For my own part I performed my usual role of bringing things down to a strictly prosaic and practical level by the remark that one of the Indians was missing.

"He has gone to fetch some water," said Lord Roxton. "We fitted him up with an empty beef tin and he is off."

"To the old camp?" I asked.

"No, to the brook. It's among the trees there. It can't be more than a couple of hundred yards. But the beggar is certainly taking his time."

"I'll go and look after him," said I. I picked up my rifle and strolled in the direction of the brook, leaving my friends to lay out the scanty breakfast. It may seem to you rash that even for so short a distance I should quit the shelter of our friendly thicket, but you will remember that we were many miles from Ape-town, that so far as we knew the creatures had not discovered our retreat, and that in any case with a rifle in my hands I had no fear of them. I had not yet learned their cunning or their strength.

I could hear the murmur of our brook somewhere ahead of me, but there was a tangle of trees and brushwood between me and it. I was making my way through this at a point which was just out of sight of my companions, when, under one of the trees, I noticed something red huddled among the bushes. As I approached it, I was shocked to see that it was the dead body of the missing Indian. He lay upon his side, his limbs drawn up, and his head screwed round at a most unnatural angle, so that he seemed to be looking straight over his own shoulder. I gave a cry to warn my friends that something was amiss, and running forwards I stooped over the body. Surely my guardian angel was very near me then, for some instinct of fear, or it may have been some faint rustle of leaves, made me glance upwards. Out of the thick green foliage which hung low over my head, two long muscular arms covered with reddish hair were slowly descending. Another instant and the great stealthy hands would have been round my throat. I sprang backwards, but quick as I was, those hands were quicker still. Through my sudden spring they missed a fatal grip, but one of them caught the back of my neck and the other one my face. I threw my hands up to protect my throat, and the next moment the huge paw had slid down my face and closed over them. I was lifted lightly from the ground, and I felt an intolerable pressure forcing my head back and back until the strain upon the cervical spine was more than I could bear. My senses swam, but I still tore at the hand and forced it out from my chin. Looking up I saw a frightful face with cold inexorable light blue eyes looking down into mine. There was something hypnotic in those terrible eyes. I could struggle no longer. As the creature felt me grow limp in his grasp, two white canines gleamed for a moment at each side of the vile mouth, and the grip tightened still more upon my chin, forcing it always upwards and back. A thin, oval-tinted mist formed before my eyes and little silvery bells tinkled in my ears. Dully and far off I heard the crack of a rifle and was feebly aware of the shock as I was dropped to the earth, where I lay without sense or motion.

I awoke to find myself on my back upon the grass in our lair within the thicket. Someone had brought the water from the brook, and Lord John was sprinkling my head with it, while Challenger and Summerlee were propping me up, with concern in their faces. For a moment I had a glimpse of the human spirits behind their scientific masks. It was really shock, rather than any injury, which had prostrated me, and in half-an-hour, in spite of aching head and stiff neck, I was sitting up and ready for anything.

“But you’ve had the escape of your life, young fellah my lad,” said Lord Roxton. “When I heard your cry and ran forward, and saw your head twisted half-off and your stohwassers kickin’ in the air, I thought we were one short. I missed the beast in my flurry, but he dropped you all right and was off like a streak. By George! I wish I had fifty men with rifles. I'd clear out the whole infernal gang of them and leave this country a bit cleaner than we found it."

It was clear now that the ape-men had in some way marked us down, and that we were watched on every side. We had not so much to fear from them during the day, but they would be very likely to rush us by night; so the sooner we got away from their neighbourhood the better. On three sides of us was absolute forest, and there we might find ourselves in an ambush. But on the fourth side — that which sloped down in the direction of the lake — there was only low scrub, with scattered trees and occasional open glades. It was, in fact, the route which I had myself taken in my solitary journey, and it led us straight for the Indian caves. This then must for every reason be our road.

One great regret we had, and that was to leave our old camp behind us, not only for the sake of the stores which remained there, but even more because we were losing touch with Zambo, our link with the outside world. However, we had a fair supply of cartridges and all our guns, so, for a time at least, we could look after ourselves, and we hoped soon to have a chance of returning and restoring our communications with our negro. He had faithfully promised to stay where he was, and we had not a doubt that he would be as good as his word.

It was in the early afternoon that we started upon our journey. The young chief walked at our head as our guide, but refused indignantly to carry any burden. Behind him came the two surviving Indians with our scanty possessions upon their backs. We four white men walked in the rear with rifles loaded and ready. As we started there broke from the thick silent woods behind us a sudden great ululation of the ape-men, which may have been a cheer of triumph at our departure or a jeer of contempt at our flight. Looking back we saw only the dense screen of trees, but that long-drawn yell told us how many of our enemies lurked among them. We saw no sign of pursuit, however, and soon we had got into more open country and beyond their power.

As I tramped along, the rearmost of the four, I could not help smiling at the appearance of my three companions in front. Was this the luxurious Lord John Roxton who had sat that evening in the Albany amidst his Persian rugs and his pictures in the pink radiance of the tinted lights? And was this the imposing Professor who had swelled behind the great desk in his massive study at Enmore Park? And, finally, could this be the austere and prim figure which had risen before the meeting at the Zoological Institute? No three tramps that one could have met in a Surrey lane could have looked more hopeless and bedraggled. We had, it is true, been only a week or so upon the top of the plateau, but all our spare clothing was in our camp below, and the one week had been a severe one upon us all, though least to me who had not to endure the handling of the ape-men. My three friends had all lost their hats, and had now bound handkerchiefs round their heads, their clothes hung in ribbons about them, and their unshaven grimy faces were hardly to be recognised. Both Summerlee and Challenger were limping heavily, while I still dragged my feet from weakness after the shock of the morning, and my neck was as stiff as a board from the murderous grip that held it. We were indeed a sorry crew, and I did not wonder to see our Indian companions glance back at us occasionally with horror and amazement on their faces.

In the late afternoon we reached the margin of the lake, and as we emerged from the bush and saw the sheet of water stretching before us our native friends set up a shrill cry of joy and pointed eagerly in front of them. It was indeed a wonderful sight which lay before us. Sweeping over the glassy surface was a great flotilla of canoes coming straight for the shore upon which we stood. They were some miles out when we first saw them, but they shot forward with great swiftness, and were soon so near that the rowers could distinguish our persons. Instantly a thunderous shout of delight burst from them, and we saw them rise from their seats, waving their paddles and spears madly in the air. Then bending to their work once more, they flew across the intervening water, beached their boats upon the sloping sand, and rushed up to us, prostrating themselves with loud cries of greeting before the young chief. Finally one of them, an elderly man, with a necklace and bracelet of great lustrous glass beads and the skin of some beautiful mottled amber-coloured animal slung over his shoulders, ran forward and embraced most tenderly the youth whom we had saved. He then looked at us and asked some questions, after which he stepped up with much dignity and embraced us also each in turn. Then, at his order, the whole tribe lay down upon the ground before us in homage. Personally I felt shy and uncomfortable at this obsequious adoration, and I read the same feeling in the faces of Roxton and Summerlee, but Challenger expanded like a flower in the sun.

"They may be undeveloped types," said he, stroking his beard and looking round at them, "but their deportment in the presence of their superiors might be a lesson to some of our more advanced Europeans. Strange how correct are the instincts of the natural man!"

It was clear that the natives had come out upon the war-path, for every man carried his spear — a long bamboo tipped with bone — his bow and arrows, and some sort of club or stone battle-axe slung at his side. Their dark, angry glances at the woods from which we had come, and the frequent repetition of the word "Doda," made it clear enough that this was a rescue party who had set forth to save or revenge the old chief's son, for such we gathered that the youth must be. A council was now held by the whole tribe squatting in a circle, whilst we sat near on a slab of basalt and watched their proceedings. Two or three warriors spoke, and finally our young friend made a spirited harangue with such eloquent features and gestures that we could understand it all as clearly as if we had known his language.

"What is the use of returning?" he said. "Sooner or later the thing must be done. Your comrades have been murdered. What if I have returned safe? These others have been done to death. There is no safety for any of us. We are assembled now and ready." Then he pointed to us. "These strange men are our friends. They are great fighters, and they hate the ape-men even as we do. They command," here he pointed up to heaven, "the thunder and the lightning. When shall we have such a chance again? Let us go forward, and either die now or live for the future in safety. How else shall we go back unashamed to our women?"

The little red warriors hung upon the words of the speaker, and when he had finished they burst into a roar of applause, waving their rude weapons in the air. The old chief stepped forward to us, and asked us some questions, pointing at the same time to the woods. Lord John made a sign to him that he should wait for an answer and then he turned to us.

"Well, it's up to you to say what you will do," said he; "for my part I have a score to settle with these monkey-folk, and if it ends by wiping them off the face of the earth I don't see that the earth need fret about it. I'm goin' with our little red pals and I mean to see them through the scrap. What do you say, young fellah?"

"Of course I will come."

"And you, Challenger?"

"I will assuredly co-operate."

"And you, Summerlee?"

"We seem to be drifting very far from the object of this expedition, Lord John. I assure you that I little thought when I left my professional chair in London that it was for the purpose of heading a raid of savages upon a colony of anthropoid apes."

"To such base uses do we come," said Lord John, smiling. "But we are up against it, so what's the decision?"

"It seems a most questionable step," said Summerlee, argumentative to the last, "but if you are all going, I hardly see how I can remain behind."

"Then it is settled," said Lord John, and turning to the chief he nodded and slapped his rifle.

The old fellow clasped our hands, each in turn, while his men cheered louder than ever. It was too late to advance that night, so the Indians settled down into a rude bivouac. On all sides their fires began to glimmer and smoke. Some of them who had disappeared into the jungle came back presently driving a young iguanodon before them. Like the others, it had a daub of asphalt upon its shoulder, and it was only when we saw one of the natives step forward with the air of an owner and give his consent to the beast's slaughter that we understood at last that these great creatures were as much private property as a herd of cattle, and that these symbols which had so perplexed us were nothing more than the marks of the owner. Helpless, torpid, and vegetarian, with great limbs but a minute brain, they could be rounded up and driven by a child. In a few minutes the huge beast had been cut up and slabs of him were hanging over a dozen camp fires, together with great scaly ganoid fish which had been speared in the lake.

Summerlee had lain down and slept upon the sand, but we others roamed round the edge of the water, seeking to learn something more of this strange country. Twice we found pits of blue clay, such as we had already seen in the swamp of the pterodactyls. These were old volcanic vents, and for some reason excited the greatest interest in Lord John. What attracted Challenger, on the other hand, was a bubbling, gurgling mud geyser, where some strange gas formed great bursting bubbles upon the surface. He thrust a hollow reed into it and cried out with delight like a schoolboy then he was able, on touching it with a lighted match, to cause a sharp explosion and a blue flame at the far end of the tube. Still more pleased was he when, inverting a leathern pouch over the end of the reed, and so filling it with the gas, he was able to send it soaring up into the air.

"An inflammable gas, and one markedly lighter than the atmosphere. I should say beyond doubt that it contained a considerable proportion of free hydrogen. The resources of G. E. C. are not yet exhausted, my young friend. I may yet show you how a great mind molds all Nature to its use." He swelled with some secret purpose, but would say no more.

There was nothing which we could see upon the shore which seemed to me so wonderful as the great sheet of water before us. Our numbers and our noise had frightened all living creatures away, and save for a few pterodactyls, which soared round high above our heads while they waited for the carrion, all was still around the camp. But it was different out upon the rose-tinted waters of the central lake. It boiled and heaved with strange life. Great slate-coloured backs and high serrated dorsal fins shot up with a fringe of silver, and then rolled down into the depths again. The sand-banks far out were spotted with uncouth crawling forms, huge turtles, strange saurians, and one great flat creature like a writhing, palpitating mat of black greasy leather, which flopped its way slowly to the lake. Here and there high serpent heads projected out of the water, cutting swiftly through it with a little collar of foam in front, and a long swirling wake behind, rising and falling in graceful, swan-like undulations as they went. It was not until one of these creatures wriggled on to a sand-bank within a few hundred yards of us, and exposed a barrel-shaped body and huge flippers behind the long serpent neck, that Challenger, and Summerlee, who had joined us, broke out into their duet of wonder and admiration.

"Plesiosaurus! A fresh-water plesiosaurus!" cried Summerlee. "That I should have lived to see such a sight! We are blessed, my dear Challenger, above all zoologists since the world began!"

It was not until the night had fallen, and the fires of our savage allies glowed red in the shadows, that our two men of science could be dragged away from the fascinations of that primeval lake. Even in the darkness as we lay upon the strand, we heard from time to time the snort and plunge of the huge creatures who lived therein.

At earliest dawn our camp was astir and an hour later we had started upon our memorable expedition. Often in my dreams have I thought that I might live to be a war correspondent. In what wildest one could I have conceived the nature of the campaign which it should be my lot to report! Here then is my first despatch from a field of battle:

Our numbers had been reinforced during the night by a fresh batch of natives from the caves, and we may have been four or five hundred strong when we made our advance. A fringe of scouts was thrown out in front, and behind them the whole force in a solid column made their way up the long slope of the bush country until we were near the edge of the forest. Here they spread out into a long straggling line of spearmen and bowmen. Roxton and Summerlee took their position upon the right flank, while Challenger and I were on the left. It was a host of the stone age that we were accompanying to battle — we with the last word of the gunsmith's art from St. James' Street and the Strand.

We had not long to wait for our enemy. A wild shrill clamor rose from the edge of the wood and suddenly a body of ape-men rushed out with clubs and stones, and made for the center of the Indian line. It was a valiant move but a foolish one, for the great bandy-legged creatures were slow of foot, while their opponents were as active as cats. It was horrible to see the fierce brutes with foaming mouths and glaring eyes, rushing and grasping, but forever missing their elusive enemies, while arrow after arrow buried itself in their hides. One great fellow ran past me roaring with pain, with a dozen darts sticking from his chest and ribs. In mercy I put a bullet through his skull, and he fell sprawling among the aloes. But this was the only shot fired, for the attack had been on the center of the line, and the Indians there had needed no help of ours in repulsing it. Of all the ape-men who had rushed out into the open, I do not think that one got back to cover.

But the matter was more deadly when we came among the trees. For an hour or more after we entered the wood, there was a desperate struggle in which for a time we hardly held our own. Springing out from among the scrub the ape-men with huge clubs broke in upon the Indians and often felled three or four of them before they could be speared. Their frightful blows shattered everything upon which they fell. One of them knocked Summerlee's rifle to matchwood and the next would have crushed his skull had an Indian not stabbed the beast to the heart. Other ape-men in the trees above us hurled down stones and logs of wood, occasionally dropping bodily on to our ranks and fighting furiously until they were felled. Once our allies broke under the pressure, and had it not been for the execution done by our rifles they would certainly have taken to their heels. But they were gallantly rallied by their old chief and came on with such a rush that the ape-men began in turn to give way. Summerlee was weaponless, but I was emptying my magazine as quick as I could fire, and on the further flank we heard the continuous cracking of our companion’s rifles.

Then in a moment came the panic and the collapse. Screaming and howling, the great creatures rushed away in all directions through the brushwood, while our allies yelled in their savage delight, following swiftly after their flying enemies. All the feuds of countless generations, all the hatreds and cruelties of their narrow history, all the memories of ill-usage and persecution were to be purged that day. At last man was to be supreme and the man-beast to find forever his allotted place. Fly as they would the fugitives were too slow to escape from the active savages, and from every side in the tangled woods we heard the exultant yells, the twanging of bows, and the crash and thud as ape-men were brought down from their hiding-places in the trees.

I was following the others, when I found that Lord John and Challenger had come across to join us.

“It’s over,” said Lord John. “I think we can leave the tidying up to them. Perhaps the less we see of it the better we shall sleep.”

Challenger’s eyes were shining with the lust of slaughter.

“We have been privileged,” he cried, strutting about like a gamecock, “to be present at one of the typical decisive battles of history — the battles which have determined the fate of the world. What, my friends, is the conquest of one nation by another? It is meaningless. Each produces the same result. But those fierce fights, when in the dawn of the ages the cave-dwellers held their own against the tiger folk, or the elephants first found that they had a master, those were the real conquests — the victories that count. By this strange turn of fate we have seen and helped to decide even such a contest. Now upon this plateau the future must ever be for man.”

It needed a robust faith in the end to justify such tragic means. As we advanced together through the woods we found the ape-men lying thick, transfixed with spears or arrows. Here and there a little group of shattered Indians marked where one of the anthropoids had turned to bay, and sold his life dearly. Always in front of us we heard the yelling and roaring which showed the direction of the pursuit. The ape-men had been driven back to their city, they had made a last stand there, once again they had been broken, and now we were in time to see the final fearful scene of all. Some eighty or a hundred males, the last survivors, had been driven across that same little clearing which led to the edge of the cliff, the scene of our own exploit two days before. As we arrived the Indians, a semicircle of spearmen, had closed in on them, and in a minute it was over, Thirty or forty died where they stood. The others, screaming and clawing, were thrust over the precipice, and went hurtling down, as their prisoners had of old, on to the sharp bamboos six hundred feet below. It was as Challenger had said, and the reign of man was assured forever in Maple White Land. The males were exterminated, Ape Town was destroyed, the females and young were driven away to live in bondage, and the long rivalry of untold centuries had reached its bloody end.

For us the victory brought much advantage. Once again we were able to visit our camp and get at our stores. Once more also we were able to communicate with Zambo, who had been terrified by the spectacle from afar of an avalanche of apes falling from the edge of the cliff.

“Come away, Massas, come away!” he cried, his eyes starting from his head. “The debbil get you sure if you stay up there.”

“It is the voice of sanity!” said Summerlee with conviction. “We have had adventures enough and they are neither suitable to our character or our position. I hold you to your word, Challenger. From now onwards you devote your energies to getting us out of this horrible country and back once more to civilization.”

CHAPTER XV

“Our Eyes have seen Great Wonders”

I write this from day to day, but I trust that before I come to the end of it, I may be able to say that the light shines, at last, through our clouds. We are held here with no clear means of making our escape, and bitterly we chafe against it. Yet, I can well imagine that the day may come when we may be glad that we were kept, against our will, to see something more of the wonders of this singular place, and of the creatures who inhabit it.

The victory of the Indians and the annihilation of the ape-men, marked the turning point of our fortunes. From then onwards, we were in truth masters of the plateau, for the natives looked upon us with a mixture of fear and gratitude, since by our strange powers we had aided them to destroy their hereditary foe. For their own sakes they would, perhaps, be glad to see the departure of such formidable and incalculable people, but they have not themselves suggested any way by which we may reach the plains below. There had been, so far as we could follow their signs, a tunnel by which the place could be approached, the lower exit of which we had seen from below. By this, no doubt, both ape-men and Indians had at different epochs reached the top, and Maple White with his companion had taken the same way. Only the year before, however, there had been a terrific earthquake, and the upper end of the tunnel had fallen in and completely disappeared. The Indians now could only shake their heads and shrug their shoulders when we expressed by signs our desire to descend. It may be that they cannot, but it may also be that they will not, help us to get away.

At the end of the victorious campaign the surviving ape-folk were driven across the plateau (their wailings were horrible) and established in the neighbourhood of the Indian caves, where they would, from now onwards, be a servile race under the eyes of their masters. It was a rude, raw, primeval version of the Jews in Babylon or the Israelites in Egypt. At night we could hear from amid the trees the long-drawn cry, as some primitive Ezekiel mourned for fallen greatness and recalled the departed glories of

Ape Town. Hewers of wood and drawers of water, such were they from now onwards.

We had returned across the plateau with our allies two days after the battle, and made our camp at the foot of their cliffs. They would have had us share their caves with them, but Lord John would by no means consent to it considering that to do so would put us in their power if they were treacherously disposed. We kept our independence, therefore, and had our weapons ready for any emergency, while preserving the most friendly relations. We also continually visited their caves, which were most remarkable places, though whether made by man or by Nature we have never been able to determine. They were all on the one stratum, hollowed out of some soft rock which lay between the volcanic basalt forming the ruddy cliffs above them, and the hard granite which formed their base.

The openings were about eighty feet above the ground, and were led up to by long stone stairs, so narrow and steep that no large animal could mount them. Inside they were warm and dry, running in straight passages of varying length into the side of the hill, with smooth gray walls decorated with many excellent pictures done with charred sticks and representing the various animals of the plateau. If every living thing were swept from the country the future explorer would find upon the walls of these caves ample evidence of the strange fauna — the dinosaurs, iguanodons, and fish lizards — which had lived so recently upon earth.

Since we had learned that the huge iguanodons were kept as tame herds by their owners, and were simply walking meat-stores, we had conceived that man, even with his primitive weapons, had established his ascendancy upon the plateau. We were soon to discover that it was not so, and that he was still there upon tolerance.

It was on the third day after our forming our camp near the Indian caves that the tragedy occurred. Challenger and Summerlee had gone off together that day to the lake where some of the natives, under their direction, were engaged in harpooning specimens of the great lizards. Lord John and I had remained in our camp, while a number of the Indians were scattered about upon the grassy slope in front of the caves engaged in different ways. Suddenly there was a shrill cry of alarm, with the word “Stoa” resounding from a hundred tongues. From every side men, women, and children were rushing wildly for shelter, swarming up the staircases and into the caves in a mad stampede.

Looking up, we could see them waving their arms from the rocks above and beckoning to us to join them in their refuge. We had both seized our magazine rifles and ran out to see what the danger could be. Suddenly from the near belt of trees there broke forth a group of twelve or fifteen Indians, running for their lives, and at their very heels two of those frightful monsters which had disturbed our camp and pursued me upon my solitary journey. In shape they were like horrible toads, and moved in a succession of springs, but in size they were of an incredible bulk, larger than the largest elephant. We had never before seen them save at night, and indeed they are nocturnal animals save when disturbed in their lairs, as these had been. We now stood amazed at the sight, for their blotched and warty skins were of a curious fish-like iridescence, and the sunlight struck them with an ever-varying rainbow bloom as they moved.

We had little time to watch them, however, for in an instant they had overtaken the fugitives and were making a dire slaughter among them. Their method was to fall forward with their full weight upon each in turn, leaving him crushed and mangled, to bound on after the others. The wretched Indians screamed with terror, but were helpless, run as they would, before the relentless purpose and horrible activity of these monstrous creatures. One after another they went down, and there were not half-a-dozen surviving by the time my companion and I could come to their help. But our aid was of little avail and only involved us in the same peril. At the range of a couple of hundred yards we emptied our magazines, firing bullet after bullet into the beasts, but with no more effect than if we were pelting them with pellets of paper. Their slow reptilian natures cared nothing for wounds, and the springs of their lives, with no special brain center but scattered throughout their spinal cords, could not be tapped by any modern weapons. The most that we could do was to check their progress by distracting their attention with the flash and roar of our guns, and so to give both the natives and ourselves time to reach the steps which led to safety. But where the conical explosive bullets of the twentieth century were of no avail, the poisoned arrows of the natives, dipped in the juice of strophanthus and steeped afterwards in decayed carrion, could succeed. Such arrows were of little avail to the hunter who attacked the beast, because their action in that torpid circulation was slow, and before its powers failed it could certainly overtake and slay its assailant. But now, as the two monsters hounded us to the very foot of the stairs, a drift of darts came whistling from every chink in the cliff above them. In a minute they were feathered with them, and yet with no sign of pain they clawed and slobbered with impotent rage at the steps which would lead them to their victims, mounting clumsily up for a few yards and then sliding down again to the ground. But at last the poison worked. One of them gave a deep rumbling groan and dropped his huge squat head on to the earth. The other bounded round in an eccentric circle with shrill, wailing cries, and then lying down writhed in agony for some minutes before it also stiffened and lay still. With yells of triumph the Indians came flocking down from their caves and danced a frenzied dance of victory round the dead bodies, in mad joy that two more of the most dangerous of all their enemies had been slain. That night they cut up and removed the bodies, not to eat — for the poison was still active — but lest they should breed a pestilence. The great reptilian hearts, however, each as large as a cushion, still lay there, beating slowly and steadily, with a gentle rise and fall, in horrible independent life. It was only upon the third day that the ganglia ran down and the dreadful things were still.

Some day, when I have a better desk than a meat-tin and more helpful tools than a worn stub of pencil and a last, tattered note-book, I will write some fuller account of the Accala Indians — of our life amongst them, and of the glimpses which we had of the strange conditions of wondrous Maple White Land. Memory, at least, will never fail me, for so long as the breath of life is in me, every hour and every action of that period will stand out as hard and clear as do the first strange happenings of our childhood. No new impressions could efface those which are so deeply cut. When the time comes I will describe that wondrous moonlit night upon the great lake when a young ichthyosaurus — a strange creature, half seal, half fish, to look at, with bone-covered eyes on each side of his snout, and a third eye fixed upon the top of his head — was entangled in an Indian net, and nearly upset our canoe before we towed it ashore; the same night that a green water-snake shot out from the rushes and carried off in its coils the steersman of Challenger’s canoe. I will tell, too, of the great nocturnal white thing — to this day we do not know whether it was beast or reptile — which lived in a vile swamp to the east of the lake, and flitted about with a faint phosphorescent glimmer in the darkness. The Indians were so terrified at it that they would not go near the place, and, though we twice made expeditions and saw it each time, we could not make our way through the deep marsh in which it lived. I can only say that it seemed to be larger than a cow and had the strangest musky odor. I will tell also of the huge bird which chased Challenger to the shelter of the rocks one day — a great running bird, far taller than an ostrich, with a vulture-like neck and cruel head which made it a walking death. As Challenger climbed to safety one dart of that savage curving beak shore off the heel of his boot as if it had been cut with a chisel. This time at least modern weapons prevailed and the great creature, twelve feet from head to foot — phororachus its name, according to our panting but exultant Professor — went down before Lord Roxton's rifle in a flurry of waving feathers and kicking limbs, with two remorseless yellow eyes glaring up from the midst of it. May I live to see that flattened vicious skull in its own niche amid the trophies of the Albany. Finally, I will assuredly give some account of the toxodon, the giant ten-foot guinea pig, with projecting chisel teeth, which we killed as it drank in the gray of the morning by the side of the lake.

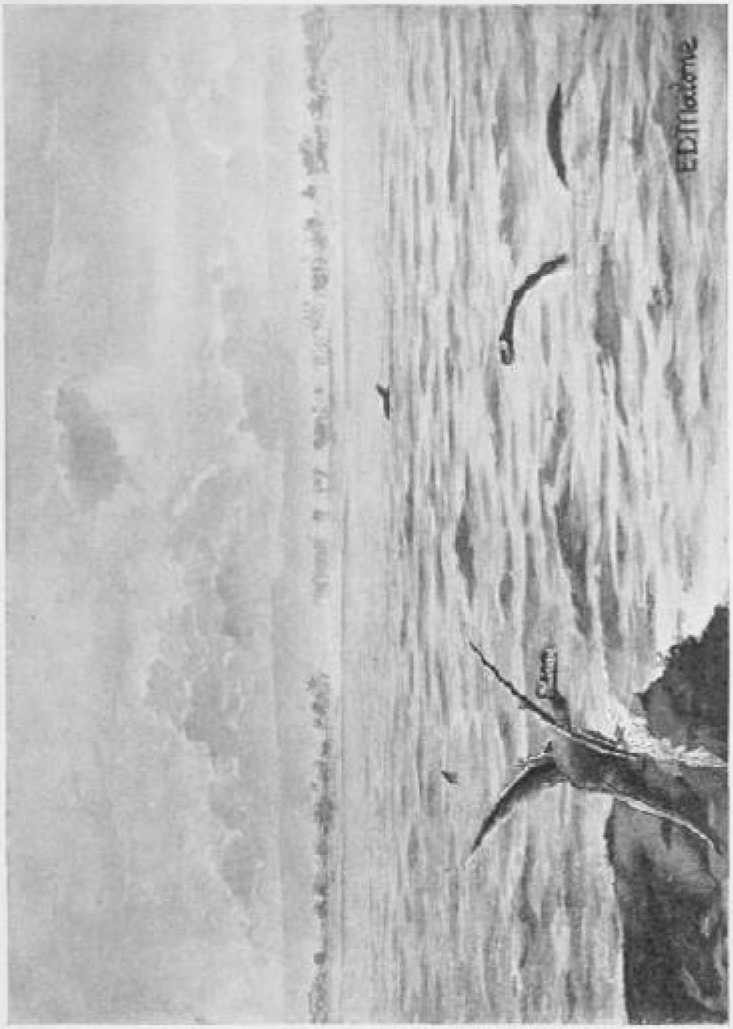

THE CENTRAL LAKE.

(Reconstructed by Mr. Pat L. Forbes from sketch of E. D. Malone.

Facing p. 275.

All this I shall some day write at fuller length, and amidst these more stirring days I would tenderly sketch in these lovely summer evenings, when with the deep blue sky above us we lay in good comradeship among the long grasses by the wood and marveled at the strange fowl that swept over us and the quaint new creatures which crept from their burrows to watch us, while above us the boughs of the bushes were heavy with luscious fruit, and below us strange and lovely flowers peeped at us from among the herbage; or those long moonlit nights when we lay out upon the shimmering surface of the great lake and watched with wonder and awe the huge circles rippling out from the sudden splash of some fantastic monster; or the greenish gleam, far down in the deep water, of some strange creature upon the confines of darkness. These are the scenes which my mind and my pen will dwell upon in every detail at some future day.

But, you will ask, why these experiences and why this delay, when you and your comrades should have been occupied day and night in the devising of some means by which you could return to the outer world? My answer is, that there was not one of us who was not working for this end, but that our work had been in vain. One fact we had very speedily discovered: The Indians would do nothing to help us. In every other way they were our friends — one might almost say our devoted slaves — but when it was suggested that they should help us to make and carry a plank which would bridge the chasm, or when we wished to get from them thongs of leather or liana to weave ropes which might help us, we were met by a good-humored, but an invincible, refusal. They would smile, twinkle their eyes, shake their heads, and there was the end of it. Even the old chief met us with the same obstinate denial, and it was only Maretas, the youngster whom we had saved, who looked wistfully at us and told us by his gestures that he was grieved for our thwarted wishes. Ever since their crowning triumph with the ape-men they looked upon us as supermen, who bore victory in the tubes of strange weapons, and they believed that so long as we remained with them good fortune would be theirs. A little red-skinned wife and a cave of our own were freely offered to each of us if we would but forget our own people and dwell forever upon the plateau. So far all had been kindly, however far apart our desires might be; but we felt well assured that our actual plans of a descent must be kept secret, for we had reason to fear that at the last they might try to hold us by force.

In spite of the danger from dinosaurs (which is not great save at night, for, as I may have said before, they are mostly nocturnal in their habits) I have twice in the last three weeks been over to our old camp in order to see our negro who still kept watch and ward below the cliff. My eyes strained eagerly across the great plain in the hope of seeing afar off the help for which we had prayed. But the long cactus-strewn levels still stretched away, empty and bare, to the distant line of the cane-brake.

“They will soon come now, Massa Malone. Before another week pass Indian come back and bring rope and fetch you down.” Such was the cheery cry of our excellent Zambo.

I had one strange experience as I came from this second visit which had involved my being away for a night from my companions. I was returning along the well-remembered route, and had reached a spot within a mile or so of the marsh of the pterodactyls, when I saw an extraordinary object approaching me. It was a man who walked inside a framework made of bent canes so that he was enclosed on all sides in a bell-shaped cage. As I drew nearer I was more amazed still to see that it was Lord John Roxton. When he saw me he slipped from under his curious protection and came towards me laughing, and yet, as I thought, with some confusion in his manner.

“Well, young fellah,” said he, “who would have thought of meetin’ you up here?”

“What in the world are you doing?” I asked.

“Visitin’ my friends, the pterodactyls,” said he.

“But why?”

“Interestin’ beasts, don’t you think? But unsociable! Nasty rude ways with strangers, as you may remember. So I rigged this framework which keeps them from bein’ too pressin’ in their attentions.”

“But what do you want in the swamp?”

He looked at me with a very questioning eye, and I read hesitation in his face.

“Don’t you think other people besides Professors can want to know things?” he said at last. “I’m studyin’ the pretty dears. That’s enough for you.”

“No offense,” said I.

His good-humor returned and he laughed.

“No offense, young fellah. I’m goin’ to get a young devil chick for Challenger. That’s one of my jobs. No, I don’t want your company. I’m safe in this cage, and you are not. So long, and I’ll be back in camp by night-fall.”

He turned away and I left him wandering on through the wood with his extraordinary cage around him.

If Lord John’s behavior at this time was strange, that of Challenger was more so. I may say that he seemed to possess an extraordinary fascination for the Indian women, and that he always carried a large spreading palm branch with which he beat them off as if they were flies, when their attentions became too pressing. To see him walking like a comic opera Sultan, with this badge of authority in his hand, his black beard bristling in front of him, his toes pointing at each step, and a train of wide-eyed Indian girls behind him, clad in their slender drapery of bark cloth, is one of the most grotesque of all the pictures which I will carry back with me. As to

Summerlee, he was absorbed in the insect and bird life of the plateau, and spent his whole time (save that considerable portion which was devoted to abusing Challenger for not getting us out of our difficulties) in cleaning and mounting his specimens.

Challenger had been in the habit of walking off by himself every morning and returning from time to time with looks of portentous solemnity, as one who bears the full weight of a great enterprise upon his shoulders. One day, palm branch in hand, and his crowd of adoring devotees behind him, he led us down to his hidden work-shop and took us into the secret of his plans.

The place was a small clearing in the center of a palm grove. In this was one of those boiling mud geysers which I have already described. Around its edge were scattered a number of leathern thongs cut from iguanodon hide, and a large collapsed membrane which proved to be the dried and scraped stomach of one of the great fish lizards from the lake. This huge sack had been sewn up at one end and only a small orifice left at the other. Into this opening several bamboo canes had been inserted and the other ends of these canes were in contact with conical clay funnels which collected the gas bubbling up through the mud of the geyser. Soon the flaccid organ began to slowly expand and show such a tendency to upward movements that Challenger fastened the cords which held it to the trunks of the surrounding trees. In half an hour a good-sized gas-bag had been formed, and the jerking and straining upon the thongs showed that it was capable of considerable lift. Challenger, like a glad father in the presence of his first-born, stood smiling and stroking his beard, in silent, self-satisfied content as he gazed at the creation of his brain. It was Summerlee who first broke the silence.

“You don’t mean us to go up in that thing, Challenger?” said he, in an acid voice.

“I mean, my dear Summerlee, to give you such a demonstration of its powers that after seeing it you will, I am sure, have no hesitation in trusting yourself to it.”

“You can put it right out of your head now, at once,” said Summerlee with decision, “nothing on earth would induce me to commit such a folly. Lord John, I trust that you will not countenance such madness?”

“Dooced ingenious, I call it,” said our peer. “I’d like to see how it works.”

"So you shall," said Challenger. "For some days I have exerted my whole brain force upon the problem of how we shall descend from these cliffs. We have satisfied ourselves that we cannot climb down and that there is no tunnel. We are also unable to construct any kind of bridge which may take us back to the pinnacle from which we came. How then shall I find a means to convey us? Some little time ago I had remarked to our young friend here that free hydrogen was evolved from the geyser. The idea of a balloon naturally followed. I was, I will admit, somewhat baffled by the difficulty of discovering an envelope to contain the gas, but the contemplation of the immense entrails of these reptiles supplied me with a solution to the problem. Behold the result!"

He put one hand in the front of his ragged jacket and pointed proudly with the other.

By this time the gas-bag had swollen to a goodly rotundity and was jerking strongly upon its lashings.

"Midsummer madness!" snorted Summerlee.

Lord John was delighted with the whole idea. "Clever old dear, ain't he?" he whispered to me, and then louder to Challenger. "What about a car?"

"The car will be my next care. I have already planned how it is to be made and attached. Meanwhile I will simply show you how capable my apparatus is of supporting the weight of each of us."

"All of us, surely?"

"No, it is part of my plan that each in turn shall descend as in a parachute, and the balloon be drawn back by means which I shall have no difficulty in perfecting. If it will support the weight of one and let him gently down, it will have done all that is required of it. I will now show you its capacity in that direction."

He brought out a lump of basalt of a considerable size, constructed in the middle so that a cord could be easily attached to it. This cord was the one which we had brought with us on to the plateau after we had used it for climbing the pinnacle. It was over a hundred feet long, and though it was thin it was very strong. He had prepared a sort of collar of leather with many straps depending from it. This collar was placed over the dome of the balloon, and the hanging thongs were gathered together below, so that the pressure of any weight would be diffused over a considerable surface. Then the lump of basalt was fastened to the thongs, and the rope was allowed to hang from the end of it, being passed three times round the Professor's arm.

"I will now," said Challenger, with a smile of pleased anticipation, "demonstrate the carrying power of my balloon." As he said so he cut with a knife the various lashings that held it.

Never was our expedition in more imminent danger of complete annihilation. The inflated membrane shot up with frightful velocity into the air. In an instant Challenger was pulled off his feet and dragged after it. I had just time to throw my arms round his ascending waist when I was myself whipped up into the air. Lord John had me with a rat-trap grip round the legs, but I felt that he also was coming off the ground. For a moment I had a vision of four adventurers floating like a string of sausages over the land that they had explored. But, happily, there were limits to the strain which the rope would stand, though none apparently to the lifting powers of this infernal machine. There was a sharp crack, and we were in a heap upon the ground with coils of rope all over us. When we were able to stagger to our feet we saw far off in the deep blue sky one dark spot where the lump of basalt was speeding upon its way.

"Splendid!" cried the undaunted Challenger, rubbing his injured arm. "A most thorough and satisfactory demonstration! I could not have anticipated such a success. Within a week, gentlemen, I promise that a second balloon will be prepared, and that you can count upon taking in safety and comfort the first stage of our homeward journey." So far I have written each of the foregoing events as it occurred. Now I am rounding off my narrative from the old camp, where Zambo has waited so long, with all our difficulties and dangers left like a dream behind us upon the summit of those vast ruddy crags which tower above our heads. We have descended in safety, though in a most unexpected fashion, and all is well with us. In six weeks or two months we shall be in London, and it is possible that this letter may not reach you much earlier than we do ourselves. Already our hearts yearn and our spirits fly towards the great mother city which holds so much that is dear to us.

It was on the very evening of our perilous adventure with Challenger's home-made balloon that the change came in our fortunes. I have said that the one person from whom we had had some sign of sympathy in our attempts to get away was the young chief whom we had rescued. He alone had no desire to hold us against our will in a strange land. He had told us as much by his expressive language of signs. That evening, after dusk, he came down to our little camp, handed me (for some reason he had always shown his attentions to me, perhaps because I was the one who was nearest his age) a small roll of the bark of a tree, and then pointing solemnly up at the row of caves above him, he had put his finger to his lips as a sign of secrecy and had stolen back again to his people.

I took the slip of bark to the firelight and we examined it together. It was about a foot square, and on the inner side there was a singular arrangement of lines, which I here reproduce:

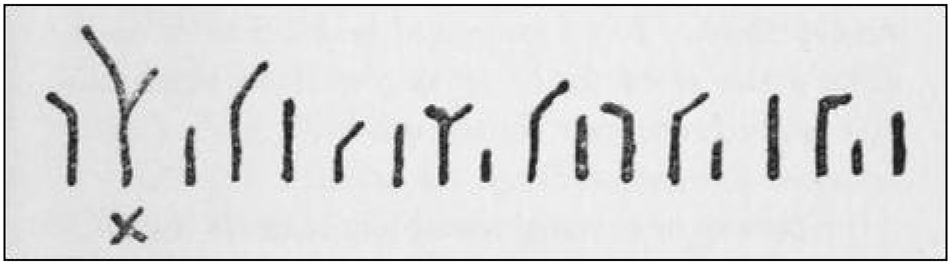

They were neatly done in charcoal upon the white surface, and looked to me at first sight like some sort of rough musical score.

“Whatever it is, I can swear that it is of importance to us,” said I. “I could read that on his face as he gave it.”

“Unless we have come upon a primitive practical joker,” Summerlee suggested, “which I should think would be one of the most elementary developments of man.”

“It is clearly some sort of script,” said Challenger.

“Looks like a guinea puzzle competition,” remarked Lord John, craning his neck to have a look at it. Then suddenly he stretched out his hand and seized the puzzle.

“By George!” he cried, “I believe I’ve got it. The boy guessed right the very first time. See here! How many marks are on that paper? Eighteen. Well, if you come to think of it there are eighteen cave openings on the hill-side above us.”

“He pointed up to the caves when he gave it to me,” said I.

“Well, that settles it. This is a chart of the caves. What! Eighteen of them all in a row, some short, some deep, some branching, same as we saw them. It’s a map, and here’s a cross on it. What’s the cross for? It is placed to mark one that is much deeper than the others.”

“One that goes through,” I cried.

“I believe our young friend has read the riddle,” said Challenger. “If the cave does not go through I do not understand why this person, who has every reason to mean us well, should have drawn our attention to it. But if it does go through and comes out at the corresponding point on the other side, we should not have more than a hundred feet to descend."

"A hundred feet!" grumbled Summerlee.

"Well, our rope is still more than a hundred feet long," I cried. "Surely we could get down."

"How about the Indians in the cave?" Summerlee objected.

"There are no Indians in any of the caves above our heads," said I. "They are all used as barns and store-houses. Why should we not go up now at once and spy out the land?"

There is a dry bituminous wood upon the plateau — a species of araucaria, according to our botanist — which is always used by the Indians for torches. Each of us picked up a faggot of this, and we made our way up weed-covered steps to the particular cave which was marked in the drawing. It was, as I had said, empty, save for a great number of enormous bats, which flapped round our heads as we advanced into it. As we had no desire to draw the attention of the Indians to our proceedings, we stumbled along in the dark until we had gone round several curves and penetrated a considerable distance into the cavern. Then, at last, we lit our torches. It was a beautiful dry tunnel with smooth gray walls covered with native symbols, a curved roof which arched over our heads, and white glistening sand beneath our feet. We hurried eagerly along it until, with a deep groan of bitter disappointment, we were brought to a halt. A sheer wall of rock had appeared before us, with no chink through which a mouse could have slipped. There was no escape for us there.

We stood with bitter hearts staring at this unexpected obstacle. It was not the result of any convulsion, as in the case of the ascending tunnel. The end wall was exactly like the side ones. It was, and had always been, a cul-de-sac.

"Never mind, my friends," said the indomitable Challenger. "You have still my firm promise of a balloon."

Summerlee groaned.

"Can we be in the wrong cave?" I suggested.

"No use, young fellah," said Lord John, with his finger on the chart. "Seventeen from the right and second from the left. This is the cave sure enough."

I looked at the mark to which his finger pointed, and I gave a sudden cry of joy.

"I believe I have it! Follow me! Follow me!"

I hurried back along the way we had come, my torch in my hand. "Here," said I, pointing to some matches upon the ground, "is where we lit up."

"Exactly."

"Well, it is marked as a forked cave, and in the darkness we passed the fork before the torches were lit. On the right side as we go out we should find the longer arm."

It was as I had said. We had not gone thirty yards before a great black opening loomed in the wall. We turned into it to find that we were in a much larger passage than before. Along it we hurried in breathless impatience for many hundreds of yards. Then, suddenly, in the black darkness of the arch in front of us we saw a gleam of dark red light. We stared in amazement. A sheet of steady flame seemed to cross the passage and to bar our way. We hastened towards it. No sound, no heat, no movement came from it, but still the great luminous curtain glowed before us, silvering all the cave and turning the sand to powdered jewels, until as we drew closer it discovered a circular edge.

"The moon, by George!" cried Lord John. "We are through, boys! We are through!"

It was indeed the full moon which shone straight down the aperture which opened upon the cliffs. It was a small rift, not larger than a window, but it was enough for all our purposes. As we craned our necks through it we could see that the descent was not a very difficult one, and that the level ground was no very great way below us. It was no wonder that from below we had not observed the place, as the cliffs curved overhead and an ascent at the spot would have seemed so impossible as to discourage close inspection. We satisfied ourselves that with the help of our rope we could find our way down, and then returned, rejoicing, to our camp to make our preparations for the next evening.

What we did we had to do quickly and secretly, since even at this last hour the Indians might hold us back. Our stores we would leave behind us, save only our guns and cartridges. But Challenger had some unwieldy stuff which he ardently desired to take with him, and one particular package, of which I may not speak, which gave us more labor than any. Slowly the day passed, but when the darkness fell we were ready for our departure. With much labor we got our things up the steps, and then, looking back, took one last long survey of that strange land, soon I fear to be vulgarized, the prey of hunter and prospector, but to each of us a dreamland of glamour and romance, a land where we had dared much, suffered much, and learned much — OUR land, as we shall ever fondly call it. Along upon our left the neighbouring caves each threw out its ruddy cheery firelight into the gloom. From the slope below us rose the voices of the Indians as they laughed and sang. Beyond was the long sweep of the woods, and in the center, shimmering vaguely through the gloom, was the great lake, the mother of strange monsters. Even as we looked a high whickering cry, the call of some weird animal, rang clear out of the darkness. It was the very voice of Maple White Land bidding us good-bye. We turned and plunged into the cave which led to home.

Two hours later, we, our packages, and all we owned, were at the foot of the cliff. Save for Challenger's luggage we had never a difficulty. Leaving it all where we descended, we started at once for Zambo's camp. In the early morning we approached it, but only to find, to our amazement, not one fire but a dozen upon the plain. The rescue party had arrived. There were twenty Indians from the river, with stakes, ropes, and all that could be useful for bridging the chasm. At least we shall have no difficulty now in carrying our packages, when to-morrow we begin to make our way back to the Amazon.

And so, in humble and thankful mood, I close this account. Our eyes have seen great wonders and our souls are chastened by what we have endured. Each is in his own way a better and deeper man. It may be that when we reach Para we shall stop to refit. If we do, this letter will be a mail ahead. If not, it will reach London on the very day that I do. In either case, my dear Mr. McArdle, I hope very soon to shake you by the hand.

CHAPTER XVI

“A Procession! A Procession!”

I should wish to place upon record here our gratitude to all our friends upon the Amazon for the very great kindness and hospitality which was shown to us upon our return journey. Very particularly would I thank Senhor Penalosa and other officials of the Brazilian Government for the special arrangements by which we were helped upon our way, and Senhor Pereira of Para, to whose forethought we owe the complete outfit for a decent appearance in the civilised world which we found ready for us at that town. It seemed a poor return for all the courtesy which we encountered that we should deceive our hosts and benefactors, but under the circumstances we had really no alternative, and I hereby tell them that they will only waste their time and their money if they attempt to follow upon our traces. Even the names have been altered in our accounts, and I am very sure that no one, from the most careful study of them, could come within a thousand miles of our unknown land.

The excitement which had been caused through those parts of South America which we had to traverse was imagined by us to be purely local, and I can assure our friends in England that we had no notion of the uproar which the mere rumor of our experiences had caused through Europe. It was not until the Ivernia was within five hundred miles of Southampton that the wireless messages from paper after paper and agency after agency, offering huge prices for a short return message as to our actual results, showed us how strained was the attention not only of the scientific world but of the general public. It was agreed among us, however, that no definite statement should be given to the Press until we had met the members of the Zoological Institute, since as delegates it was our clear duty to give our first report to the body from which we had received our commission of investigation. Thus, although we found Southampton full of Pressmen, we absolutely refused to give any information, which had the natural effect of focussing public attention upon the meeting which was advertised for the evening of November 7th. For this gathering, the Zoological Hall which had been the scene of the inception of our task was found to be far too small, and it was only in the Queen's Hall in Regent Street that accommodation could be found. It is now common knowledge the promoters might have ventured upon the Albert Hall and still found their space too scanty.

It was for the second evening after our arrival that the great meeting had been fixed. For the first, we had each, no doubt, our own pressing personal affairs to absorb us. Of mine I cannot yet speak. It may be that as it stands further from me I may think of it, and even speak of it, with less emotion. I have shown the reader in the beginning of this narrative where lay the springs of my action. It is but right, perhaps, that I should carry on the tale and show also the results. And yet the day may come when I would not have it otherwise. At least I have been driven forth to take part in a wondrous adventure, and I cannot but be thankful to the force that drove me.

And now I turn to the last supreme eventful moment of our adventure. As I was racking my brain as to how I should best describe it, my eyes fell upon the issue of my own Journal for the morning of the 8th of November with the full and excellent account of my friend and fellow-reporter Macdona. What can I do better than transcribe his narrative — head-lines and all? I admit that the paper was exuberant in the matter, out of compliment to its own enterprise in sending a correspondent, but the other great dailies were hardly less full in their account. Thus, then, friend Mac in his report:

THE NEW WORLD

GREAT MEETING AT THE QUEEN'S HALL

SCENES OF UPROAR

EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENT

WHAT WAS IT?

NOCTURNAL RIOT IN REGENT STREET

(Special)

“The much-discussed meeting of the Zoological Institute, convened to hear the report of the Committee of Investigation sent out last year to South America to test the assertions made by Professor Challenger as to the continued existence of prehistoric life upon that Continent, was held last night in the greater Queen’s Hall, and it is safe to say that it is likely to be a red letter date in the history of Science, for the proceedings were of so remarkable and sensational a character that no one present is ever likely to forget them.” (Oh, brother scribe Macdona, what a monstrous opening sentence!) “The tickets were theoretically confined to members and their friends, but the latter is an elastic term, and long before eight o’clock, the hour fixed for the commencement of the proceedings, all parts of the Great Hall were tightly packed. The general public, however, which most unreasonably entertained a grievance at having been excluded, stormed the doors at a quarter to eight, after a prolonged melee in which several people were injured, including Inspector Scoble of H. Division, whose leg was unfortunately broken. After this unwarrantable invasion, which not only filled every passage, but even intruded upon the space set apart for the Press, it is estimated that nearly five thousand people awaited the arrival of the travelers. When they eventually appeared, they took their places in the front of a platform which already contained all the leading scientific men, not only of this country, but of France and of Germany. Sweden was also represented, in the person of Professor Sergius, the famous Zoologist of the University of Upsala. The entrance of the four heroes of the occasion was the signal for a remarkable demonstration of welcome, the whole audience rising and cheering for some minutes. An acute observer might, however, have detected some signs of dissent amid the applause, and gathered that the proceedings were likely to become more lively than harmonious. It may safely be prophesied, however, that no one could have foreseen the extraordinary turn which they were actually to take.

“Of the appearance of the four wanderers little need be said, since their photographs have for some time been appearing in all the papers. They bear few traces of the hardships which they are said to have undergone. Professor Challenger’s beard may be more shaggy, Professor Summerlee’s features more ascetic, Lord John Roxton’s figure more gaunt, and all three may be burned to a darker tint than when they left our shores, but each appeared to be in most excellent health. As to our own representative, the well-known athlete and international Rugby football player, E. D. Malone, he looks trained to a hair, and as he surveyed the crowd a smile of good-humored contentment pervaded his honest but homely face.” (All right, Mac, wait till I get you alone!)

“When quiet had been restored and the audience resumed their seats after the ovation which they had given to the travelers, the chairman, the Duke of Durham, addressed the meeting. ‘He would not,’ he said, ‘stand for more than a moment between that vast assembly and the treat which lay before them. It was not for him to anticipate what Professor Summerlee, who was the spokesman of the committee, had to say to them, but it was common rumor that their expedition had been crowned by extraordinary success.’ (Applause.) ‘Apparently the age of romance was not dead, and there was common ground upon which the wildest imaginings of the novelist could meet the actual scientific investigations of the searcher for truth. He would only add, before he sat down, that he rejoiced — and all of them would rejoice — that these gentlemen had returned safe and sound from their difficult and dangerous task, for it cannot be denied that any disaster to such an expedition would have inflicted a well-nigh irreparable loss to the cause of Zoological science.’ (Great applause, in which Professor Challenger was observed to join.)

“Professor Summerlee’s rising was the signal for another extraordinary outbreak of enthusiasm, which broke out again at intervals throughout his address. That address will not be given in extenso in these columns, for the reason that a full account of the whole adventures of the expedition is being published as a supplement from the pen of our own special correspondent. Some general indications will therefore suffice. Having described the genesis of their journey, and paid a handsome tribute to his friend Professor Challenger, coupled with an apology for the incredulity with which his assertions, now fully vindicated, had been received, he gave the actual course of their journey, carefully withholding such information as would aid the public in any attempt to locate this remarkable plateau. Having described, in general terms, their course from the main river up to the time that they actually reached the base of the cliffs, he enthralled his hearers by his account of the difficulties encountered by the expedition in their repeated attempts to mount them, and finally described how they succeeded in their desperate endeavors, which cost the lives of their two devoted half-breed servants.” (This amazing reading of the affair was the result of

Summerlee's endeavors to avoid raising any questionable matter at the meeting.)

"Having conducted his audience in fancy to the summit, and marooned them there by reason of the fall of their bridge, the Professor proceeded to describe both the horrors and the attractions of that remarkable land. Of personal adventures he said little, but laid stress upon the rich harvest reaped by Science in the observations of the wonderful beast, bird, insect, and plant life of the plateau. Peculiarly rich in the coleoptera and in the lepidoptera, forty-six new species of the one and ninety-four of the other had been secured in the course of a few weeks. It was, however, in the larger animals, and especially in the larger animals supposed to have been long extinct, that the interest of the public was naturally centered. Of these he was able to give a goodly list, but had little doubt that it would be largely extended when the place had been more thoroughly investigated. He and his companions had seen at least a dozen creatures, most of them at a distance, which corresponded with nothing at present known to Science. These would in time be duly classified and examined. He instanced a snake, the cast skin of which, deep purple in colour, was fifty-one feet in length, and mentioned a white creature, supposed to be mammalian, which gave forth well-marked phosphorescence in the darkness; also a large black moth, the bite of which was supposed by the Indians to be highly poisonous. Setting aside these entirely new forms of life, the plateau was very rich in known prehistoric forms, dating back in some cases to early Jurassic times. Among these he mentioned the gigantic and grotesque stegosaurus, seen once by Mr. Malone at a drinking-place by the lake, and drawn in the sketch-book of that adventurous American who had first penetrated this unknown world. He described also the iguanodon and the pterodactyl — two of the first of the wonders which they had encountered. He then thrilled the assembly by some account of the terrible carnivorous dinosaurs, which had on more than one occasion pursued members of the party, and which were the most formidable of all the creatures which they had encountered. Thence he passed to the huge and ferocious bird, the phororachus, and to the great elk which still roams upon this upland. It was not, however, until he sketched the mysteries of the central lake that the full interest and enthusiasm of the audience were aroused. One had to pinch oneself to be sure that one was awake as one heard this sane and practical Professor in cold measured tones describing the monstrous three-eyed fish-lizards and the huge water-snakes which inhabit this enchanted sheet of water. Next he touched upon the Indians, and upon the extraordinary colony of anthropoid apes, which might be looked upon as an advance upon the pithecanthropus of Java, and as coming therefore nearer than any known form to that hypothetical creation, the missing link. Finally he described, amongst some merriment, the ingenious but highly dangerous aeronautic invention of Professor Challenger, and wound up a most memorable address by an account of the methods by which the committee did at last find their way back to civilization.

"It had been hoped that the proceedings would end there, and that a vote of thanks and congratulation, moved by Professor Sergius, of Upsala University, would be duly seconded and carried; but it was soon evident that the course of events was not destined to flow so smoothly. Symptoms of opposition had been evident from time to time during the evening, and now Dr. James Illingworth, of Edinburgh, rose in the center of the hall. Dr. Illingworth asked whether an amendment should not be taken before a resolution.

"THE CHAIRMAN: 'Yes, sir, if there must be an amendment.'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'Your Grace, there must be an amendment.'

"THE CHAIRMAN: 'Then let us take it at once.'

"PROFESSOR SUMMERLEE (springing to his feet): 'Might I explain, your Grace, that this man is my personal enemy ever since our controversy in the Quarterly Journal of Science as to the true nature of Bathybius?'

"THE CHAIRMAN: 'I fear I cannot go into personal matters. Proceed.'

"Dr. Illingworth was imperfectly heard in part of his remarks on account of the strenuous opposition of the friends of the explorers. Some attempts were also made to pull him down. Being a man of enormous physique, however, and possessed of a very powerful voice, he dominated the tumult and succeeded in finishing his speech. It was clear, from the moment of his rising, that he had a number of friends and sympathizers in the hall, though they formed a minority in the audience. The attitude of the greater part of the public might be described as one of attentive neutrality.

"Dr. Illingworth began his remarks by expressing his high appreciation of the scientific work both of Professor Challenger and of Professor Summerlee. He much regretted that any personal bias should have been read into his remarks, which were entirely dictated by his desire for scientific truth. His position, in fact, was substantially the same as that taken up by Professor Summerlee at the last meeting. At that last meeting Professor Challenger had made certain assertions which had been queried by his colleague. Now this colleague came forward himself with the same assertions and expected them to remain unquestioned. Was this reasonable? ('Yes,' 'No,' and prolonged interruption, during which Professor Challenger was heard from the Press box to ask leave from the chairman to put Dr. Illingworth into the street.) A year ago one man said certain things. Now four men said other and more startling ones. Was this to constitute a final proof where the matters in question were of the most revolutionary and incredible character? There had been recent examples of travelers arriving from the unknown with certain tales which had been too readily accepted. Was the London Zoological Institute to place itself in this position? He admitted that the members of the committee were men of character. But human nature was very complex. Even Professors might be misled by the desire for notoriety. Like moths, we all love best to flutter in the light. Heavy-game shots liked to be in a position to cap the tales of their rivals, and journalists were not averse from sensational coups, even when imagination had to aid fact in the process. Each member of the committee had his own motive for making the most of his results. ('Shame! shame!') He had no desire to be offensive. ('You are!' and interruption.) The corroboration of these wondrous tales was really of the most slender description. What did it amount to? Some photographs. {Was it possible that in this age of ingenious manipulation photographs could be accepted as evidence?} What more? We have a story of a flight and a descent by ropes which precluded the production of larger specimens. It was ingenious, but not convincing. It was understood that Lord John Roxton claimed to have the skull of a phororachus. He could only say that he would like to see that skull.

"LORD JOHN ROXTON: 'Is this fellow calling me a liar?' (Uproar.)

"THE CHAIRMAN: 'Order! order! Dr. Illingworth, I must direct you to bring your remarks to a conclusion and to move your amendment.'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'Your Grace, I have more to say, but I bow to your ruling. I move, then, that, while Professor Summerlee be thanked for his interesting address, the whole matter shall be regarded as 'non-proven,' and shall be referred back to a larger, and possibly more reliable Committee of Investigation.'

“It is difficult to describe the confusion caused by this amendment. A large section of the audience expressed their indignation at such a slur upon the travelers by noisy shouts of dissent and cries of, ‘Don’t put it!’ ‘Withdraw!’ ‘Turn him out!’ On the other hand, the malcontents — and it cannot be denied that they were fairly numerous — cheered for the amendment, with cries of ‘Order!’ ‘Chair!’ and ‘Fair play!’ A scuffle broke out in the back benches, and blows were freely exchanged among the medical students who crowded that part of the hall. It was only the moderating influence of the presence of large numbers of ladies which prevented an absolute riot. Suddenly, however, there was a pause, a hush, and then complete silence. Professor Challenger was on his feet. His appearance and manner are peculiarly arresting, and as he raised his hand for order the whole audience settled down expectantly to give him a hearing.

“‘It will be within the recollection of many present,’ said Professor Challenger, ‘that similar foolish and unmannerly scenes marked the last meeting at which I have been able to address them. On that occasion Professor Summerlee was the chief offender, and though he is now chastened and contrite, the matter could not be entirely forgotten. I have heard to-night similar, but even more offensive, sentiments from the person who has just sat down, and though it is a conscious effort of self-effacement to come down to that person’s mental level, I will endeavor to do so, in order to allay any reasonable doubt which could possibly exist in the minds of anyone.’ (Laughter and interruption.) ‘I need not remind this audience that, though Professor Summerlee, as the head of the Committee of Investigation, has been put up to speak to-night, still it is I who am the real prime mover in this business, and that it is mainly to me that any successful result must be ascribed. I have safely conducted these three gentlemen to the spot mentioned, and I have, as you have heard, convinced them of the accuracy of my previous account. We had hoped that we should find upon our return that no one was so dense as to dispute our joint conclusions. Warned, however, by my previous experience, I have not come without such proofs as may convince a reasonable man. As explained by Professor Summerlee, our cameras have been tampered with by the ape-men when they ransacked our camp, and most of our negatives ruined.’ (Jeers, laughter, and ‘Tell us another!’ from the back.) ‘I have mentioned the ape-men, and I cannot forbear from saying that some of the sounds which now meet my ears bring back most vividly to my recollection my experiences with those interesting creatures.' (Laughter.) 'In spite of the destruction of so many invaluable negatives, there still remains in our collection a certain number of corroborative photographs showing the conditions of life upon the plateau. Did they accuse them of having forged these photographs?' (A voice, 'Yes,' and considerable interruption which ended in several men being put out of the hall.) 'The negatives were open to the inspection of experts. But what other evidence had they? Under the conditions of their escape it was naturally impossible to bring a large amount of baggage, but they had rescued Professor Summerlee's collections of butterflies and beetles, containing many new species. Was this not evidence?' (Several voices, 'No.') 'Who said no?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH (rising): 'Our point is that such a collection might have been made in other places than a prehistoric plateau.' (Applause.)

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'No doubt, sir, we have to bow to your scientific authority, although I must admit that the name is unfamiliar. Passing, then, both the photographs and the entomological collection, I come to the varied and accurate information which we bring with us upon points which have never before been elucidated. For example, upon the domestic habits of the pterodactyl—'(A voice: 'Bosh,' and uproar)—'I say, that upon the domestic habits of the pterodactyl we can throw a flood of light. I can exhibit to you from my portfolio a picture of that creature taken from life which would convince you — —'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'No picture could convince us of anything.'

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'You would require to see the thing itself?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'Undoubtedly.'

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'And you would accept that?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH (laughing): 'Beyond a doubt.'

"It was at this point that the sensation of the evening arose — a sensation so dramatic that it can never have been paralleled in the history of scientific gatherings. Professor Challenger raised his hand in the air as a signal, and at once our colleague, Mr. E. D. Malone, was observed to rise and to make his way to the back of the platform. An instant later he re-appeared in company of a gigantic negro, the two of them bearing between them a large square packing-case. It was evidently of great weight, and was slowly carried forward and placed in front of the Professor's chair. All sound had hushed in the audience and everyone was absorbed in the spectacle before them. Professor Challenger drew off the top of the case, which formed a sliding lid. Peering down into the box he snapped his fingers several times and was heard from the Press seat to say, ‘Come, then, pretty, pretty!’ in a coaxing voice. An instant later, with a scratching, rattling sound, a most horrible and loathsome creature appeared from below and perched itself upon the side of the case. Even the unexpected fall of the Duke of Durham into the orchestra, which occurred at this moment, could not distract the petrified attention of the vast audience. The face of the creature was like the wildest gargoyle that the imagination of a mad medieval builder could have conceived. It was malicious, horrible, with two small red eyes as bright as points of burning coal. Its long, savage mouth, which was held half-open, was full of a double row of shark-like teeth. Its shoulders were humped, and round them were draped what appeared to be a faded gray shawl. It was the devil of our childhood in person. There was a turmoil in the audience — someone screamed, two ladies in the front row fell senseless from their chairs, and there was a general movement upon the platform to follow their chairman into the orchestra. For a moment there was danger of a general panic. Professor Challenger threw up his hands to still the commotion, but the movement alarmed the creature beside him. Its strange shawl suddenly unfurled, spread, and fluttered as a pair of leathery wings. Its owner grabbed at its legs, but too late to hold it. It had sprung from the perch and was circling slowly round the Queen’s Hall with a dry, leathery flapping of its ten-foot wings, while a putrid and insidious odor pervaded the room. The cries of the people in the galleries, who were alarmed at the near approach of those glowing eyes and that murderous beak, excited the creature to a frenzy. Faster and faster it flew, beating against walls and chandeliers in a blind frenzy of alarm. ‘The window! For heaven’s sake shut that window!’ roared the Professor from the platform, dancing and wringing his hands in an agony of apprehension. Alas, his warning was too late! In a moment the creature, beating and bumping along the wall like a huge moth within a gas-shade, came upon the opening, squeezed its hideous bulk through it, and was gone. Professor Challenger fell back into his chair with his face buried in his hands, while the audience gave one long, deep sigh of relief as they realised that the incident was over.

“Then — oh! how shall one describe what took place then — when the full exuberance of the majority and the full reaction of the minority united to make one great wave of enthusiasm, which rolled from the back of the hall, gathering volume as it came, swept over the orchestra, submerged the platform, and carried the four heroes away upon its crest?” (Good for you, Mac!) “If the audience had done less than justice, surely it made ample amends. Every one was on his feet. Every one was moving, shouting, gesticulating. A dense crowd of cheering men were round the four travelers. ‘Up with them! up with them!’ cried a hundred voices. In a moment four figures shot up above the crowd. In vain they strove to break loose. They were held in their lofty places of honor. It would have been hard to let them down if it had been wished, so dense was the crowd around them. ‘Regent Street! Regent Street!’ sounded the voices. There was a swirl in the packed multitude, and a slow current, bearing the four upon their shoulders, made for the door. Out in the street the scene was extraordinary. An assemblage of not less than a hundred thousand people was waiting. The close-packed throng extended from the other side of the Langham Hotel to Oxford Circus. A roar of acclamation greeted the four adventurers as they appeared, high above the heads of the people, under the vivid electric lamps outside the hall. ‘A procession! A procession!’ was the cry. In a dense phalanx, blocking the streets from side to side, the crowd set forth, taking the route of Regent Street, Pall Mall, St. James’s Street, and Piccadilly. The whole central traffic of London was held up, and many collisions were reported between the demonstrators upon the one side and the police and taxi-cabmen upon the other. Finally, it was not until after midnight that the four travelers were released at the entrance to Lord John Roxton’s chambers in the Albany, and that the exuberant crowd, having sung ‘They are Jolly Good Fellows’ in chorus, concluded their program with ‘God Save the King.’ So ended one of the most remarkable evenings that London has seen for a considerable time.”

So far my friend Macdona; and it may be taken as a fairly accurate, if florid, account of the proceedings. As to the main incident, it was a bewildering surprise to the audience, but not, I need hardly say, to us. The reader will remember how I met Lord John Roxton upon the very occasion when, in his protective crinoline, he had gone to bring the “Devil’s chick” as he called it, for Professor Challenger. I have hinted also at the trouble which the Professor’s baggage gave us when we left the plateau, and had I described our voyage I might have said a good deal of the worry we had to coax with putrid fish the appetite of our filthy companion. If I have not said much about it before, it was, of course, that the Professor’s earnest desire was that no possible rumor of the unanswerable argument which we carried should be allowed to leak out until the moment came when his enemies were to be confuted.

One word as to the fate of the London pterodactyl. Nothing can be said to be certain upon this point. There is the evidence of two frightened women that it perched upon the roof of the Queen’s Hall and remained there like a diabolical statue for some hours. The next day it came out in the evening papers that Private Miles, of the Coldstream Guards, on duty outside Marlborough House, had deserted his post without leave, and was therefore courtmartialed. Private Miles’ account, that he dropped his rifle and took to his heels down the Mall because on looking up he had suddenly seen the devil between him and the moon, was not accepted by the Court, and yet it may have a direct bearing upon the point at issue. The only other evidence which I can adduce is from the log of the SS. Friesland, a Dutch-American liner, which asserts that at nine next morning, Start Point being at the time ten miles upon their starboard quarter, they were passed by something between a flying goat and a monstrous bat, which was heading at a prodigious pace south and west. If its homing instinct led it upon the right line, there can be no doubt that somewhere out in the wastes of the Atlantic the last European pterodactyl found its end.

And Gladys — oh, my Gladys! — Gladys of the mystic lake, now to be re-named the Central, for never shall she have immortality through me. Did I not always see some hard fiber in her nature? Did I not, even at the time when I was proud to obey her behest, feel that it was surely a poor love which could drive a lover to his death or the danger of it? Did I not, in my truest thoughts, always recurring and always dismissed, see past the beauty of the face, and, peering into the soul, discern the twin shadows of selfishness and of fickleness glooming at the back of it? Did she love the heroic and the spectacular for its own noble sake, or was it for the glory which might, without effort or sacrifice, be reflected upon herself? Or are these thoughts the vain wisdom which comes after the event? It was the shock of my life. For a moment it had turned me to a cynic. But already, as I write, a week has passed, and we have had our momentous interview with Lord John Roxton and — well, perhaps things might be worse.

Let me tell it in a few words. No letter or telegram had come to me at Southampton, and I reached the little villa at Streatham about ten o’clock that night in a fever of alarm. Was she dead or alive? Where were all my nightly dreams of the open arms, the smiling face, the words of praise for her man who had risked his life to humor her whim? Already I was down from the high peaks and standing flat-footed upon earth. Yet some good reasons given might still lift me to the clouds once more. I rushed down the garden path, hammered at the door, heard the voice of Gladys within, pushed past the staring maid, and strode into the sitting-room. She was seated in a low settee under the shaded standard lamp by the piano. In three steps I was across the room and had both her hands in mine.

"Gladys!" I cried, "Gladys!"

She looked up with amazement in her face. She was altered in some subtle way. The expression of her eyes, the hard upward stare, the set of the lips, was new to me. She drew back her hands.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"Gladys!" I cried. "What is the matter? You are my Gladys, are you not — little Gladys Hungerton?"

"No," said she, "I am Gladys Potts. Let me introduce you to my husband."

How absurd life is! I found myself mechanically bowing and shaking hands with a little ginger-haired man who was coiled up in the deep arm-chair which had once been sacred to my own use. We bobbed and grinned in front of each other.

"Father lets us stay here. We are getting our house ready," said Gladys.

"Oh, yes," said I.

"You didn't get my letter at Para, then?"

"No, I got no letter."

"Oh, what a pity! It would have made all clear."

"It is quite clear," said I.

"I've told William all about you," said she. "We have no secrets. I am so sorry about it. But it couldn't have been so very deep, could it, if you could go off to the other end of the world and leave me here alone. You're not crabby, are you?"

"No, no, not at all. I think I'll go."

"Have some refreshment," said the little man, and he added, in a confidential way, "It's always like this, ain't it? And must be unless you had polygamy, only the other way round; you understand." He laughed like an idiot, while I made for the door.

I was through it, when a sudden fantastic impulse came upon me, and I went back to my successful rival, who looked nervously at the electric push.

"Will you answer a question?" I asked.

"Well, within reason," said he.

"How did you do it? Have you searched for hidden treasure, or discovered a pole, or done time on a pirate, or flown the Channel, or what? Where is the glamour of romance? How did you get it?"

He stared at me with a hopeless expression upon his vacuous, good-natured, scrubby little face.

"Don't you think all this is a little too personal?" he said.

"Well, just one question," I cried. "What are you? What is your profession?"

"I am a solicitor's clerk," said he. "Second man at Johnson and Merivale's, 41 Chancery Lane."

"Good-night!" said I, and vanished, like all disconsolate and broken-hearted heroes, into the darkness, with grief and rage and laughter all simmering within me like a boiling pot.

One more little scene, and I have done. Last night we all supped at Lord John Roxton's rooms, and sitting together afterwards we smoked in good comradeship and talked our adventures over. It was strange under these altered surroundings to see the old, well-known faces and figures. There was Challenger, with his smile of condescension, his drooping eyelids, his intolerant eyes, his aggressive beard, his huge chest, swelling and puffing as he laid down the law to Summerlee. And Summerlee, too, there he was with his short briar between his thin moustache and his gray goat's-beard, his worn face protruded in eager debate as he queried all Challenger's propositions. Finally, there was our host, with his rugged, eagle face, and his cold, blue, glacier eyes with always a shimmer of devilment and of humor down in the depths of them. Such is the last picture of them that I have carried away.

It was after supper, in his own sanctum — the room of the pink radiance and the innumerable trophies — that Lord John Roxton had something to say to us. From a cupboard he had brought an old cigar-box, and this he laid before him on the table.

"There's one thing," said he, "that maybe I should have spoken about before this, but I wanted to know a little more clearly where I was. No use to raise hopes and let them down again. But it's facts, not hopes, with us now. You may remember that day we found the pterodactyl rookery in the swamp — what? Well, somethin' in the lie of the land took my notice. Perhaps it has escaped you, so I will tell you. It was a volcanic vent full of blue clay." The Professors nodded.

"Well, now, in the whole world I've only had to do with one place that was a volcanic vent of blue clay. That was the great De Beers Diamond Mine of Kimberley — what? So you see I got diamonds into my head. I rigged up a contraption to hold off those stinking beasts, and I spent a happy day there with a spud. This is what I got."

He opened his cigar-box, and tilting it over he poured about twenty or thirty rough stones, varying from the size of beans to that of chestnuts, on the table.

"Perhaps you think I should have told you then. Well, so I should, only I know there are a lot of traps for the unwary, and that stones may be of any size and yet of little value where colour and consistency are clean off. Therefore, I brought them back, and on the first day at home I took one round to Spink's, and asked him to have it roughly cut and valued."

He took a pill-box from his pocket, and spilled out of it a beautiful glittering diamond, one of the finest stones that I have ever seen.

"There's the result," said he. "He prices the lot at a minimum of two hundred thousand pounds. Of course it is fair shares between us. I won't hear of anythin' else. Well, Challenger, what will you do with your fifty thousand?"

"If you really persist in your generous view," said the Professor, "I should found a private museum, which has long been one of my dreams."

"And you, Summerlee?"

"I would retire from teaching, and so find time for my final classification of the chalk fossils."

"I'll use my own," said Lord John Roxton, "in fitting a well-formed expedition and having another look at the dear old plateau. As to you, young fellah, you, of course, will spend yours in gettin' married."

"Not just yet," said I, with a rueful smile. "I think, if you will have me, that I would rather go with you."

Lord Roxton said nothing, but a brown hand was stretched out to me across the table.

THE POISON BELT

This novella is Doyle’s second story about Professor Challenger. Written in 1913, approximately a year before the outbreak of World War I, much of it takes place — rather oddly, given that it follows *The Lost World*, a story set in the jungle — in a room in Challenger’s house. This would be the last story written about Challenger until the 1920s, by which time Doyle’s spiritualist beliefs had begun to influence his writing.

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CHAPTER I

THE BLURRING OF LINES

It is imperative that now at once, while these stupendous events are still clear in my mind, I should set them down with that exactness of detail which time may blur. But even as I do so, I am overwhelmed by the wonder of the fact that it should be our little group of the “Lost World” — Professor Challenger, Professor Summerlee, Lord John Roxton, and myself — who have passed through this amazing experience.

When, some years ago, I chronicled in the Daily Gazette our epoch-making journey in South America, I little thought that it should ever fall to my lot to tell an even stranger personal experience, one which is unique in all human annals and must stand out in the records of history as a great peak among the humble foothills which surround it. The event itself will always be marvellous, but the circumstances that we four were together at the time of this extraordinary episode came about in a most natural and, indeed, inevitable fashion. I will explain the events which led up to it as shortly and as clearly as I can, though I am well aware that the fuller the detail upon such a subject the more welcome it will be to the reader, for the public curiosity has been and still is insatiable.

It was upon Friday, the twenty-seventh of August — a date forever memorable in the history of the world — that I went down to the office of my paper and asked for three days’ leave of absence from Mr. McArdle, who still presided over our news department. The good old Scotchman shook his head, scratched his dwindling fringe of ruddy fluff, and finally put his reluctance into words.

“I was thinking, Mr. Malone, that we could employ you to advantage these days. I was thinking there was a story that you are the only man that could handle as it should be handled.”

“I am sorry for that,” said I, trying to hide my disappointment. “Of course if I am needed, there is an end of the matter. But the engagement was important and intimate. If I could be spared — —”

“Well, I don’t see that you can.”

It was bitter, but I had to put the best face I could upon it. After all, it was my own fault, for I should have known by this time that a journalist has no right to make plans of his own.

"Then I'll think no more of it," said I with as much cheerfulness as I could assume at so short a notice. "What was it that you wanted me to do?"

"Well, it was just to interview that deevil of a man down at Rotherfield."

"You don't mean Professor Challenger?" I cried.

"Aye, it's just him that I do mean. He ran young Alec Simpson of the Courier a mile down the high road last week by the collar of his coat and the slack of his breeches. You'll have read of it, likely, in the police report. Our boys would as soon interview a loose alligator in the zoo. But you could do it, I'm thinking — an old friend like you."

"Why," said I, greatly relieved, "this makes it all easy. It so happens that it was to visit Professor Challenger at Rotherfield that I was asking for leave of absence. The fact is, that it is the anniversary of our main adventure on the plateau three years ago, and he has asked our whole party down to his house to see him and celebrate the occasion."

"Capital!" cried McArdle, rubbing his hands and beaming through his glasses. "Then you will be able to get his opeenions out of him. In any other man I would say it was all moonshine, but the fellow has made good once, and who knows but he may again!"

"Get what out of him?" I asked. "What has he been doing?"

"Haven't you seen his letter on 'Scientific Possibeelities' in to-day's Times?"

"No."

McArdle dived down and picked a copy from the floor.

"Read it aloud," said he, indicating a column with his finger. "I'd be glad to hear it again, for I am not sure now that I have the man's meaning clear in my head."

This was the letter which I read to the news editor of the Gazette: —

"SCIENTIFIC POSSIBILITIES"

"Sir, — I have read with amusement, not wholly unmixed with some less complimentary emotion, the complacent and wholly fatuous letter of James Wilson MacPhail which has lately appeared in your columns upon the subject of the blurring of Fraunhofer's lines in the spectra both of the planets and of the fixed stars. He dismisses the matter as of no significance.

To a wider intelligence it may well seem of very great possible importance — so great as to involve the ultimate welfare of every man, woman, and child upon this planet. I can hardly hope, by the use of scientific language, to convey any sense of my meaning to those ineffectual people who gather their ideas from the columns of a daily newspaper. I will endeavour, therefore, to condescend to their limitation and to indicate the situation by the use of a homely analogy which will be within the limits of the intelligence of your readers.”

“Man, he’s a wonder — a living wonder!” said McArdle, shaking his head reflectively. “He’d put up the feathers of a sucking-dove and set up a riot in a Quakers’ meeting. No wonder he has made London too hot for him. It’s a peety, Mr. Malone, for it’s a grand brain! We’ll let’s have the analogy.”

“We will suppose,” I read, “that a small bundle of connected corks was launched in a sluggish current upon a voyage across the Atlantic. The corks drift slowly on from day to day with the same conditions all round them. If the corks were sentient we could imagine that they would consider these conditions to be permanent and assured. But we, with our superior knowledge, know that many things might happen to surprise the corks. They might possibly float up against a ship, or a sleeping whale, or become entangled in seaweed. In any case, their voyage would probably end by their being thrown up on the rocky coast of Labrador. But what could they know of all this while they drifted so gently day by day in what they thought was a limitless and homogeneous ocean?

“Your readers will possibly comprehend that the Atlantic, in this parable, stands for the mighty ocean of ether through which we drift and that the bunch of corks represents the little and obscure planetary system to which we belong. A third-rate sun, with its rag tag and bobtail of insignificant satellites, we float under the same daily conditions towards some unknown end, some squalid catastrophe which will overwhelm us at the ultimate confines of space, where we are swept over an etheric Niagara or dashed upon some unthinkable Labrador. I see no room here for the shallow and ignorant optimism of your correspondent, Mr. James Wilson MacPhail, but many reasons why we should watch with a very close and interested attention every indication of change in those cosmic surroundings upon which our own ultimate fate may depend.”

“Man, he’d have made a grand meenister,” said McArdle. “It just booms like an organ. Let’s get doun to what it is that’s troubling him.”

“The general blurring and shifting of Fraunhofer’s lines of the spectrum point, in my opinion, to a widespread cosmic change of a subtle and singular character. Light from a planet is the reflected light of the sun. Light from a star is a self-produced light. But the spectra both from planets and stars have, in this instance, all undergone the same change. Is it, then, a change in those planets and stars? To me such an idea is inconceivable. What common change could simultaneously come upon them all? Is it a change in our own atmosphere? It is possible, but in the highest degree improbable, since we see no signs of it around us, and chemical analysis has failed to reveal it. What, then, is the third possibility? That it may be a change in the conducting medium, in that infinitely fine ether which extends from star to star and pervades the whole universe. Deep in that ocean we are floating upon a slow current. Might that current not drift us into belts of ether which are novel and have properties of which we have never conceived? There is a change somewhere. This cosmic disturbance of the spectrum proves it. It may be a good change. It may be an evil one. It may be a neutral one. We do not know. Shallow observers may treat the matter as one which can be disregarded, but one who like myself is possessed of the deeper intelligence of the true philosopher will understand that the possibilities of the universe are incalculable and that the wisest man is he who holds himself ready for the unexpected. To take an obvious example, who would undertake to say that the mysterious and universal outbreak of illness, recorded in your columns this very morning as having broken out among the indigenous races of Sumatra, has no connection with some cosmic change to which they may respond more quickly than the more complex peoples of Europe? I throw out the idea for what it is worth. To assert it is, in the present stage, as unprofitable as to deny it, but it is an unimaginative numskull who is too dense to perceive that it is well within the bounds of scientific possibility.

“Yours faithfully,
”GEORGE EDWARD CHALLENGER.

“THE BRIARS, ROTHERFIELD.”

“It’s a fine, steemulating letter,” said McArdle thoughtfully, fitting a cigarette into the long glass tube which he used as a holder. “What’s your opeenion of it, Mr. Malone?”

I had to confess my total and humiliating ignorance of the subject at issue. What, for example, were Fraunhofer’s lines? McArdle had just been studying the matter with the aid of our tame scientist at the office, and he picked from his desk two of those many-coloured spectral bands which bear a general resemblance to the hat-ribbons of some young and ambitious cricket club. He pointed out to me that there were certain black lines which formed crossbars upon the series of brilliant colours extending from the red at one end through gradations of orange, yellow, green, blue, and indigo to the violet at the other.

“Those dark bands are Fraunhofer’s lines,” said he. “The colours are just light itself. Every light, if you can split it up with a prism, gives the same colours. They tell us nothing. It is the lines that count, because they vary according to what it may be that produces the light. It is these lines that have been blurred instead of clear this last week, and all the astronomers have been quarreling over the reason. Here’s a photograph of the blurred lines for our issue to-morrow. The public have taken no interest in the matter up to now, but this letter of Challenger’s in the Times will make them wake up, I’m thinking.”

“And this about Sumatra?”

“Well, it’s a long cry from a blurred line in a spectrum to a sick nigger in Sumatra. And yet the chiel has shown us once before that he knows what he’s talking about. There is some queer illness down yonder, that’s beyond all doubt, and to-day there’s a cable just come in from Singapore that the lighthouses are out of action in the Straits of Sundan, and two ships on the beach in consequence. Anyhow, it’s good enough for you to interview Challenger upon. If you get anything definite, let us have a column by Monday.”

I was coming out from the news editor’s room, turning over my new mission in my mind, when I heard my name called from the waiting-room below. It was a telegraph-boy with a wire which had been forwarded from my lodgings at Streatham. The message was from the very man we had been discussing, and ran thus: —

Malone, 17, Hill Street, Streatham. — Bring oxygen. — Challenger.

"Bring oxygen!" The Professor, as I remembered him, had an elephantine sense of humour capable of the most clumsy and unwieldly gambollings. Was this one of those jokes which used to reduce him to uproarious laughter, when his eyes would disappear and he was all gaping mouth and wagging beard, supremely indifferent to the gravity of all around him? I turned the words over, but could make nothing even remotely jocose out of them. Then surely it was a concise order — though a very strange one. He was the last man in the world whose deliberate command I should care to disobey. Possibly some chemical experiment was afoot; possibly —— Well, it was no business of mine to speculate upon why he wanted it. I must get it. There was nearly an hour before I should catch the train at Victoria. I took a taxi, and having ascertained the address from the telephone book, I made for the Oxygen Tube Supply Company in Oxford Street.

As I alighted on the pavement at my destination, two youths emerged from the door of the establishment carrying an iron cylinder, which, with some trouble, they hoisted into a waiting motor-car. An elderly man was at their heels scolding and directing in a creaky, sardonic voice. He turned towards me. There was no mistaking those austere features and that goatee beard. It was my old cross-grained companion, Professor Summerlee.

"What!" he cried. "Don't tell me that *you* have had one of these preposterous telegrams for oxygen?"

I exhibited it.

"Well, well! I have had one too, and, as you see, very much against the grain, I have acted upon it. Our good friend is as impossible as ever. The need for oxygen could not have been so urgent that he must desert the usual means of supply and encroach upon the time of those who are really busier than himself. Why could he not order it direct?"

I could only suggest that he probably wanted it at once.

"Or thought he did, which is quite another matter. But it is superfluous now for you to purchase any, since I have this considerable supply."

"Still, for some reason he seems to wish that I should bring oxygen too. It will be safer to do exactly what he tells me."

Accordingly, in spite of many grumbles and remonstrances from Summerlee, I ordered an additional tube, which was placed with the other in his motor-car, for he had offered me a lift to Victoria.

I turned away to pay off my taxi, the driver of which was very cantankerous and abusive over his fare. As I came back to Professor

Summerlee, he was having a furious altercation with the men who had carried down the oxygen, his little white goat's beard jerking with indignation. One of the fellows called him, I remember, "a silly old bleached cockatoo," which so enraged his chauffeur that he bounded out of his seat to take the part of his insulted master, and it was all we could do to prevent a riot in the street.

These little things may seem trivial to relate, and passed as mere incidents at the time. It is only now, as I look back, that I see their relation to the whole story which I have to unfold.

The chauffeur must, as it seemed to me, have been a novice or else have lost his nerve in this disturbance, for he drove vilely on the way to the station. Twice we nearly had collisions with other equally erratic vehicles, and I remember remarking to Summerlee that the standard of driving in London had very much declined. Once we brushed the very edge of a great crowd which was watching a fight at the corner of the Mall. The people, who were much excited, raised cries of anger at the clumsy driving, and one fellow sprang upon the step and waved a stick above our heads. I pushed him off, but we were glad when we had got clear of them and safe out of the park. These little events, coming one after the other, left me very jangled in my nerves, and I could see from my companion's petulant manner that his own patience had got to a low ebb.

But our good humour was restored when we saw Lord John Roxton waiting for us upon the platform, his tall, thin figure clad in a yellow tweed shooting-suit. His keen face, with those unforgettable eyes, so fierce and yet so humorous, flushed with pleasure at the sight of us. His ruddy hair was shot with grey, and the furrows upon his brow had been cut a little deeper by Time's chisel, but in all else he was the Lord John who had been our good comrade in the past.

"Hullo, Herr Professor! Hullo, young fella!" he shouted as he came toward us.

He roared with amusement when he saw the oxygen cylinders upon the porter's trolly behind us. "So you've got them too!" he cried. "Mine is in the van. Whatever can the old dear be after?"

"Have you seen his letter in the Times?" I asked.

"What was it?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Summerlee harshly.

“Well, it’s at the bottom of this oxygen business, or I am mistaken,” said I.

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried Summerlee again with quite unnecessary violence. We had all got into a first-class smoker, and he had already lit the short and charred old briar pipe which seemed to singe the end of his long, aggressive nose.

“Friend Challenger is a clever man,” said he with great vehemence. “No one can deny it. It’s a fool that denies it. Look at his hat. There’s a sixty-ounce brain inside it — a big engine, running smooth, and turning out clean work. Show me the engine-house and I’ll tell you the size of the engine. But he is a born charlatan — you’ve heard me tell him so to his face — a born charlatan, with a kind of dramatic trick of jumping into the limelight. Things are quiet, so friend Challenger sees a chance to set the public talking about him. You don’t imagine that he seriously believes all this nonsense about a change in the ether and a danger to the human race? Was ever such a cock-and-bull story in this life?”

He sat like an old white raven, croaking and shaking with sardonic laughter.

A wave of anger passed through me as I listened to Summerlee. It was disgraceful that he should speak thus of the leader who had been the source of all our fame and given us such an experience as no men have ever enjoyed. I had opened my mouth to utter some hot retort, when Lord John got before me.

“You had a scrap once before with old man Challenger,” said he sternly, “and you were down and out inside ten seconds. It seems to me, Professor Summerlee, he’s beyond your class, and the best you can do with him is to walk wide and leave him alone.”

“Besides,” said I, “he has been a good friend to every one of us. Whatever his faults may be, he is as straight as a line, and I don’t believe he ever speaks evil of his comrades behind their backs.”

“Well said, young fellah-my-lad,” said Lord John Roxton. Then, with a kindly smile, he slapped Professor Summerlee upon his shoulder. “Come, Herr Professor, we’re not going to quarrel at this time of day. We’ve seen too much together. But keep off the grass when you get near Challenger, for this young fellah and I have a bit of a weakness for the old dear.”

But Summerlee was in no humour for compromise. His face was screwed up in rigid disapproval, and thick curls of angry smoke rolled up from his pipe.

“As to you, Lord John Roxton,” he creaked, “your opinion upon a matter of science is of as much value in my eyes as my views upon a new type of shot-gun would be in yours. I have my own judgment, sir, and I use it in my own way. Because it has misled me once, is that any reason why I should accept without criticism anything, however far-fetched, which this man may care to put forward? Are we to have a Pope of science, with infallible decrees laid down *ex cathedra*, and accepted without question by the poor humble public? I tell you, sir, that I have a brain of my own and that I should feel myself to be a snob and a slave if I did not use it. If it pleases you to believe this rigmarole about ether and Fraunhofer’s lines upon the spectrum, do so by all means, but do not ask one who is older and wiser than yourself to share in your folly. Is it not evident that if the ether were affected to the degree which he maintains, and if it were obnoxious to human health, the result of it would already be apparent upon ourselves?” Here he laughed with uproarious triumph over his own argument. “Yes, sir, we should already be very far from our normal selves, and instead of sitting quietly discussing scientific problems in a railway train we should be showing actual symptoms of the poison which was working within us. Where do we see any signs of this poisonous cosmic disturbance? Answer me that, sir! Answer me that! Come, come, no evasion! I pin you to an answer!”

I felt more and more angry. There was something very irritating and aggressive in Summerlee’s demeanour.

“I think that if you knew more about the facts you might be less positive in your opinion,” said I.

Summerlee took his pipe from his mouth and fixed me with a stony stare.

“Pray what do you mean, sir, by that somewhat impertinent observation?”

“I mean that when I was leaving the office the news editor told me that a telegram had come in confirming the general illness of the Sumatra natives, and adding that the lights had not been lit in the Straits of Sunda.”

“Really, there should be some limits to human folly!” cried Summerlee in a positive fury. “Is it possible that you do not realise that ether, if for a moment we adopt Challenger’s preposterous supposition, is a universal substance which is the same here as at the other side of the world? Do you for an instant suppose that there is an English ether and a Sumatran ether? Perhaps you imagine that the ether of Kent is in some way superior to the ether of Surrey, through which this train is now bearing us. There really are no bounds to the credulity and ignorance of the average layman. Is it conceivable that the ether in Sumatra should be so deadly as to cause total insensibility at the very time when the ether here has had no appreciable effect upon us whatever? Personally, I can truly say that I never felt stronger in body or better balanced in mind in my life.”

“That may be. I don’t profess to be a scientific man,” said I, “though I have heard somewhere that the science of one generation is usually the fallacy of the next. But it does not take much common sense to see that, as we seem to know so little about ether, it might be affected by some local conditions in various parts of the world and might show an effect over there which would only develop later with us.”

“With ‘might’ and ‘may’ you can prove anything,” cried Summerlee furiously. “Pigs may fly. Yes, sir, pigs *may* fly — but they don’t. It is not worth arguing with you. Challenger has filled you with his nonsense and you are both incapable of reason. I had as soon lay arguments before those railway cushions.”

“I must say, Professor Summerlee, that your manners do not seem to have improved since I last had the pleasure of meeting you,” said Lord John severely.

“You lordlings are not accustomed to hear the truth,” Summerlee answered with a bitter smile. “It comes as a bit of a shock, does it not, when someone makes you realise that your title leaves you none the less a very ignorant man?”

“Upon my word, sir,” said Lord John, very stern and rigid, “if you were a younger man you would not dare to speak to me in so offensive a fashion.”

Summerlee thrust out his chin, with its little wagging tuft of goatee beard.

“I would have you know, sir, that, young or old, there has never been a time in my life when I was afraid to speak my mind to an ignorant coxcomb — yes, sir, an ignorant coxcomb, if you had as many titles as slaves could invent and fools could adopt.”

For a moment Lord John’s eyes blazed, and then, with a tremendous effort, he mastered his anger and leaned back in his seat with arms folded and a bitter smile upon his face. To me all this was dreadful and deplorable. Like a wave, the memory of the past swept over me, the good comradeship, the happy, adventurous days — all that we had suffered and worked for and won. That it should have come to this — to insults and abuse! Suddenly I was sobbing — sobbing in loud, gulping, uncontrollable sobs which refused to be concealed. My companions looked at me in surprise. I covered my face with my hands.

“It’s all right,” said I. “Only — only it *is* such a pity!”

“You’re ill, young fellah, that’s what’s amiss with you,” said Lord John. “I thought you were queer from the first.”

“Your habits, sir, have not mended in these three years,” said Summerlee, shaking his head. “I also did not fail to observe your strange manner the moment we met. You need not waste your sympathy, Lord John. These tears are purely alcoholic. The man has been drinking. By the way, Lord John, I called you a coxcomb just now, which was perhaps unduly severe. But the word reminds me of a small accomplishment, trivial but amusing, which I used to possess. You know me as the austere man of science. Can you believe that I once had a well-deserved reputation in several nurseries as a farmyard imitator? Perhaps I can help you to pass the time in a pleasant way. Would it amuse you to hear me crow like a cock?”

“No, sir,” said Lord John, who was still greatly offended, “it would *not* amuse me.”

“My imitation of the clucking hen who had just laid an egg was also considered rather above the average. Might I venture?”

“No, sir, no — certainly not.”

But in spite of this earnest prohibition, Professor Summerlee laid down his pipe and for the rest of our journey he entertained — or failed to entertain — us by a succession of bird and animal cries which seemed so absurd that my tears were suddenly changed into boisterous laughter, which must have become quite hysterical as I sat opposite this grave Professor and saw him — or rather heard him — in the character of the uproarious rooster or the puppy whose tail had been trodden upon. Once Lord John passed across his newspaper, upon the margin of which he had written in pencil, “Poor devil! Mad as a hatter.” No doubt it was very eccentric, and yet the performance struck me as extraordinarily clever and amusing.

Whilst this was going on, Lord John leaned forward and told me some interminable story about a buffalo and an Indian rajah which seemed to me to have neither beginning nor end. Professor Summerlee had just begun to chirrup like a canary, and Lord John to get to the climax of his story, when the train drew up at Jarvis Brook, which had been given us as the station for Rotherfield.

And there was Challenger to meet us. His appearance was glorious. Not all the turkey-cocks in creation could match the slow, high-stepping dignity with which he paraded his own railway station and the benignant smile of condescending encouragement with which he regarded everybody around him. If he had changed in anything since the days of old, it was that his points had become accentuated. The huge head and broad sweep of forehead, with its plastered lock of black hair, seemed even greater than before. His black beard poured forward in a more impressive cascade, and his clear grey eyes, with their insolent and sardonic eyelids, were even more masterful than of yore.

He gave me the amused hand-shake and encouraging smile which the head master bestows upon the small boy, and, having greeted the others and helped to collect their bags and their cylinders of oxygen, he stowed us and them away in a large motor-car which was driven by the same impassive Austin, the man of few words, whom I had seen in the character of butler upon the occasion of my first eventful visit to the Professor. Our journey led us up a winding hill through beautiful country. I sat in front with the chauffeur, but behind me my three comrades seemed to me to be all talking together. Lord John was still struggling with his buffalo story, so far as I could make out, while once again I heard, as of old, the deep rumble of Challenger and the insistent accents of Summerlee as their brains locked in high and fierce scientific debate. Suddenly Austin slanted his mahogany face toward me without taking his eyes from his steering-wheel.

“I’m under notice,” said he.

“Dear me!” said I.

Everything seemed strange to-day. Everyone said queer, unexpected things. It was like a dream.

“It’s forty-seven times,” said Austin reflectively.

“When do you go?” I asked, for want of some better observation. “I don’t go,” said Austin.

The conversation seemed to have ended there, but presently he came back to it.

“If I was to go, who would look after ‘im?” He jerked his head toward his master. “Who would ‘e get to serve ‘im?”

“Someone else,” I suggested lamely.

“Not ‘e. No one would stay a week. If I was to go, that ‘ouse would run down like a watch with the mainspring out. I’m telling you because you’re ‘is friend, and you ought to know. If I was to take ‘im at ‘is word — but there, I wouldn’t have the ‘eart. ‘E and the missus would be like two babes left out in a bundle. I’m just everything. And then ‘e goes and gives me notice.”

“Why would no one stay?” I asked.

“Well, they wouldn’t make allowances, same as I do. ‘E’s a very clever man, the master — so clever that ‘e’s clean balmy sometimes. I’ve seen ‘im right off ‘is onion, and no error. Well, look what ‘e did this morning.”

“What did he do?”

Austin bent over to me.

“‘E bit the ‘ousekeeper,” said he in a hoarse whisper.

“Bit her?”

“Yes, sir. Bit ‘er on the leg. I saw ‘er with my own eyes startin’ a marathon from the ‘all-door.”

“Good gracious!”

“So you’d say, sir, if you could see some of the goings on. ‘E don’t make friends with the neighbours. There’s some of them thinks that when ‘e was up among those monsters you wrote about, it was just ‘‘Ome, Sweet ‘Ome’ for the master, and ‘e was never in fitter company. That’s what *they* say. But I’ve served ‘im ten years, and I’m fond of ‘im, and, mind you, ‘e’s a great man, when all’s said an’ done, and it’s an honor to serve ‘im. But ‘e does try one cruel at times. Now look at that, sir. That ain’t what you might call old-fashioned ‘ospitality, is it now? Just you read it for yourself.”

The car on its lowest speed had ground its way up a steep, curving ascent. At the corner a notice-board peered over a well-clipped hedge. As Austin said, it was not difficult to read, for the words were few and arresting: —

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          + ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— —— -
+
          |          WARNING.          |
          |          ————          |
          |  Visitors, Pressmen, and Mendicants   |
          |        are not encouraged.          |
          |                              |
          |            G. E. CHALLENGER.    |
          + ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— ———— —— -
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"No, it's not what you might call 'earty," said Austin, shaking his head and glancing up at the deplorable placard. "It wouldn't look well in a Christmas card. I beg your pardon, sir, for I haven't spoke as much as this for many a long year, but to-day my feelings seem to 'ave got the better of me. 'E can sack me till 'e's blue in the face, but I ain't going, and that's flat. I'm 'is man and 'e's my master, and so it will be, I expect, to the end of the chapter."

We had passed between the white posts of a gate and up a curving drive, lined with rhododendron bushes. Beyond stood a low brick house, picked out with white woodwork, very comfortable and pretty. Mrs. Challenger, a small, dainty, smiling figure, stood in the open doorway to welcome us.

"Well, my dear," said Challenger, bustling out of the car, "here are our visitors. It is something new for us to have visitors, is it not? No love lost between us and our neighbours, is there? If they could get rat poison into our baker's cart, I expect it would be there."

"It's dreadful — dreadful!" cried the lady, between laughter and tears. "George is always quarreling with everyone. We haven't a friend on the countryside."

"It enables me to concentrate my attention upon my incomparable wife," said Challenger, passing his short, thick arm round her waist. Picture a gorilla and a gazelle, and you have the pair of them. "Come, come, these gentlemen are tired from the journey, and luncheon should be ready. Has Sarah returned?"

The lady shook her head ruefully, and the Professor laughed loudly and stroked his beard in his masterful fashion.

"Austin," he cried, "when you have put up the car you will kindly help your mistress to lay the lunch. Now, gentlemen, will you please step into my study, for there are one or two very urgent things which I am anxious to say to you."

CHAPTER II

THE TIDE OF DEATH

As we crossed the hall the telephone-bell rang, and we were the involuntary auditors of Professor Challenger's end of the ensuing dialogue. I say "we," but no one within a hundred yards could have failed to hear the booming of that monstrous voice, which reverberated through the house. His answers lingered in my mind.

"Yes, yes, of course, it is I.... Yes, certainly, *the* Professor Challenger, the famous Professor, who else?... Of course, every word of it, otherwise I should not have written it.... I shouldn't be surprised.... There is every indication of it.... Within a day or so at the furthest.... Well, I can't help that, can I?... Very unpleasant, no doubt, but I rather fancy it will affect more important people than you. There is no use whining about it.... No, I couldn't possibly. You must take your chance.... That's enough, sir. Nonsense! I have something more important to do than to listen to such twaddle."

He shut off with a crash and led us upstairs into a large airy apartment which formed his study. On the great mahogany desk seven or eight unopened telegrams were lying.

"Really," he said as he gathered them up, "I begin to think that it would save my correspondents' money if I were to adopt a telegraphic address. Possibly 'Noah, Rotherfield,' would be the most appropriate."

As usual when he made an obscure joke, he leaned against the desk and bellowed in a paroxysm of laughter, his hands shaking so that he could hardly open the envelopes.

"Noah! Noah!" he gasped, with a face of beetroot, while Lord John and I smiled in sympathy and Summerlee, like a dyspeptic goat, wagged his head in sardonic disagreement. Finally Challenger, still rumbling and exploding, began to open his telegrams. The three of us stood in the bow window and occupied ourselves in admiring the magnificent view.

It was certainly worth looking at. The road in its gentle curves had really brought us to a considerable elevation — seven hundred feet, as we afterwards discovered. Challenger’s house was on the very edge of the hill, and from its southern face, in which was the study window, one looked across the vast stretch of the weald to where the gentle curves of the South Downs formed an undulating horizon. In a cleft of the hills a haze of smoke marked the position of Lewes. Immediately at our feet there lay a rolling plain of heather, with the long, vivid green stretches of the Crowborough golf course, all dotted with the players. A little to the south, through an opening in the woods, we could see a section of the main line from London to Brighton. In the immediate foreground, under our very noses, was a small enclosed yard, in which stood the car which had brought us from the station.

An ejaculation from Challenger caused us to turn. He had read his telegrams and had arranged them in a little methodical pile upon his desk. His broad, rugged face, or as much of it as was visible over the matted beard, was still deeply flushed, and he seemed to be under the influence of some strong excitement.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, in a voice as if he was addressing a public meeting, “this is indeed an interesting reunion, and it takes place under extraordinary — I may say unprecedented — circumstances. May I ask if you have observed anything upon your journey from town?”

“The only thing which I observed,” said Summerlee with a sour smile, “was that our young friend here has not improved in his manners during the years that have passed. I am sorry to state that I have had to seriously complain of his conduct in the train, and I should be wanting in frankness if I did not say that it has left a most unpleasant impression in my mind.”

“Well, well, we all get a bit prosy sometimes,” said Lord John. “The young fellah meant no real harm. After all, he’s an International, so if he takes half an hour to describe a game of football he has more right to do it than most folk.”

“Half an hour to describe a game!” I cried indignantly. “Why, it was you that took half an hour with some long-winded story about a buffalo. Professor Summerlee will be my witness.”

“I can hardly judge which of you was the most utterly wearisome,” said Summerlee. “I declare to you, Challenger, that I never wish to hear of football or of buffaloes so long as I live.”

“I have never said one word to-day about football,” I protested.

Lord John gave a shrill whistle, and Summerlee shook his head sadly.

"So early in the day too," said he. "It is indeed deplorable. As I sat there in sad but thoughtful silence — —"

"In silence!" cried Lord John. "Why, you were doin' a music-hall turn of imitations all the way — more like a runaway gramophone than a man."

Summerlee drew himself up in bitter protest.

"You are pleased to be facetious, Lord John," said he with a face of vinegar.

"Why, dash it all, this is clear madness," cried Lord John. "Each of us seems to know what the others did and none of us knows what he did himself. Let's put it all together from the first. We got into a first-class smoker, that's clear, ain't it? Then we began to quarrel over friend Challenger's letter in the Times."

"Oh, you did, did you?" rumbled our host, his eyelids beginning to droop.

"You said, Summerlee, that there was no possible truth in his contention."

"Dear me!" said Challenger, puffing out his chest and stroking his beard. "No possible truth! I seem to have heard the words before. And may I ask with what arguments the great and famous Professor Summerlee proceeded to demolish the humble individual who had ventured to express an opinion upon a matter of scientific possibility? Perhaps before he exterminates that unfortunate nonentity he will condescend to give some reasons for the adverse views which he has formed."

He bowed and shrugged and spread open his hands as he spoke with his elaborate and elephantine sarcasm.

"The reason was simple enough," said the dogged Summerlee. "I contended that if the ether surrounding the earth was so toxic in one quarter that it produced dangerous symptoms, it was hardly likely that we three in the railway carriage should be entirely unaffected."

The explanation only brought uproarious merriment from Challenger. He laughed until everything in the room seemed to rattle and quiver.

"Our worthy Summerlee is, not for the first time, somewhat out of touch with the facts of the situation," said he at last, mopping his heated brow. "Now, gentlemen, I cannot make my point better than by detailing to you what I have myself done this morning. You will the more easily condone any mental aberration upon your own part when you realise that even I have had moments when my balance has been disturbed. We have had for some years in this household a housekeeper — one Sarah, with whose second name I have never attempted to burden my memory. She is a woman of a severe and forbidding aspect, prim and demure in her bearing, very impassive in her nature, and never known within our experience to show signs of any emotion. As I sat alone at my breakfast — Mrs. Challenger is in the habit of keeping her room of a morning — it suddenly entered my head that it would be entertaining and instructive to see whether I could find any limits to this woman's inperturbability. I devised a simple but effective experiment. Having upset a small vase of flowers which stood in the centre of the cloth, I rang the bell and slipped under the table. She entered and, seeing the room empty, imagined that I had withdrawn to the study. As I had expected, she approached and leaned over the table to replace the vase. I had a vision of a cotton stocking and an elastic-sided boot. Protruding my head, I sank my teeth into the calf of her leg. The experiment was successful beyond belief. For some moments she stood paralyzed, staring down at my head. Then with a shriek she tore herself free and rushed from the room. I pursued her with some thoughts of an explanation, but she flew down the drive, and some minutes afterwards I was able to pick her out with my field-glasses traveling very rapidly in a south-westerly direction. I tell you the anecdote for what it is worth. I drop it into your brains and await its germination. Is it illuminative? Has it conveyed anything to your minds? What do *you* think of it, Lord John?"

Lord John shook his head gravely.

"You'll be gettin' into serious trouble some of these days if you don't put a brake on," said he.

"Perhaps you have some observation to make, Summerlee?"

"You should drop all work instantly, Challenger, and take three months in a German watering-place," said he.

"Profound! Profound!" cried Challenger. "Now, my young friend, is it possible that wisdom may come from you where your seniors have so signally failed?"

And it did. I say it with all modesty, but it did. Of course, it all seems obvious enough to you who know what occurred, but it was not so very clear when everything was new. But it came on me suddenly with the full force of absolute conviction.

"Poison!" I cried.

Then, even as I said the word, my mind flashed back over the whole morning's experiences, past Lord John with his buffalo, past my own hysterical tears, past the outrageous conduct of Professor Summerlee, to the queer happenings in London, the row in the park, the driving of the chauffeur, the quarrel at the oxygen warehouse. Everything fitted suddenly into its place.

“Of course,” I cried again. “It is poison. We are all poisoned.”

“Exactly,” said Challenger, rubbing his hands, “we are all poisoned. Our planet has swum into the poison belt of ether, and is now flying deeper into it at the rate of some millions of miles a minute. Our young friend has expressed the cause of all our troubles and perplexities in a single word, ‘poison.’”

We looked at each other in amazed silence. No comment seemed to meet the situation.

“There is a mental inhibition by which such symptoms can be checked and controlled,” said Challenger. “I cannot expect to find it developed in all of you to the same point which it has reached in me, for I suppose that the strength of our different mental processes bears some proportion to each other. But no doubt it is appreciable even in our young friend here. After the little outburst of high spirits which so alarmed my domestic I sat down and reasoned with myself. I put it to myself that I had never before felt impelled to bite any of my household. The impulse had then been an abnormal one. In an instant I perceived the truth. My pulse upon examination was ten beats above the usual, and my reflexes were increased. I called upon my higher and saner self, the real G. E. C., seated serene and impregnable behind all mere molecular disturbance. I summoned him, I say, to watch the foolish mental tricks which the poison would play. I found that I was indeed the master. I could recognise and control a disordered mind. It was a remarkable exhibition of the victory of mind over matter, for it was a victory over that particular form of matter which is most intimately connected with mind. I might almost say that mind was at fault and that personality controlled it. Thus, when my wife came downstairs and I was impelled to slip behind the door and alarm her by some wild cry as she entered, I was able to stifle the impulse and to greet her with dignity and restraint. An overpowering desire to quack like a duck was met and mastered in the same fashion.

“Later, when I descended to order the car and found Austin bending over it absorbed in repairs, I controlled my open hand even after I had lifted it and refrained from giving him an experience which would possibly have caused him to follow in the steps of the housekeeper. On the contrary, I touched him on the shoulder and ordered the car to be at the door in time to meet your train. At the present instant I am most forcibly tempted to take Professor Summerlee by that silly old beard of his and to shake his head violently backwards and forwards. And yet, as you see, I am perfectly restrained. Let me commend my example to you.”

“I’ll look out for that buffalo,” said Lord John.

“And I for the football match.”

“It may be that you are right, Challenger,” said Summerlee in a chastened voice. “I am willing to admit that my turn of mind is critical rather than constructive and that I am not a ready convert to any new theory, especially when it happens to be so unusual and fantastic as this one. However, as I cast my mind back over the events of the morning, and as I reconsider the fatuous conduct of my companions, I find it easy to believe that some poison of an exciting kind was responsible for their symptoms.”

Challenger slapped his colleague good-humouredly upon the shoulder. “We progress,” said he. “Decidedly we progress.”

“And pray, sir,” asked Summerlee humbly, “what is your opinion as to the present outlook?”

“With your permission I will say a few words upon that subject.” He seated himself upon his desk, his short, stumpy legs swinging in front of him. “We are assisting at a tremendous and awful function. It is, in my opinion, the end of the world.”

The end of the world! Our eyes turned to the great bow-window and we looked out at the summer beauty of the country-side, the long slopes of heather, the great country-houses, the cozy farms, the pleasure-seekers upon the links.

The end of the world! One had often heard the words, but the idea that they could ever have an immediate practical significance, that it should not be at some vague date, but now, to-day, that was a tremendous, a staggering thought. We were all struck solemn and waited in silence for Challenger to continue. His overpowering presence and appearance lent such force to the solemnity of his words that for a moment all the crudities and absurdities of the man vanished, and he loomed before us as something majestic and beyond the range of ordinary humanity. Then to me, at least, there came back the cheering recollection of how twice since we had entered the room he had roared with laughter. Surely, I thought, there are limits to mental detachment. The crisis cannot be so great or so pressing after all.

"You will conceive a bunch of grapes," said he, "which are covered by some infinitesimal but noxious bacillus. The gardener passes it through a disinfecting medium. It may be that he desires his grapes to be cleaner. It may be that he needs space to breed some fresh bacillus less noxious than the last. He dips it into the poison and they are gone. Our Gardener is, in my opinion, about to dip the solar system, and the human bacillus, the little mortal vibrio which twisted and wriggled upon the outer rind of the earth, will in an instant be sterilized out of existence."

Again there was silence. It was broken by the high trill of the telephone-bell.

"There is one of our bacilli squeaking for help," said he with a grim smile. "They are beginning to realise that their continued existence is not really one of the necessities of the universe."

He was gone from the room for a minute or two. I remember that none of us spoke in his absence. The situation seemed beyond all words or comments.

"The medical officer of health for Brighton," said he when he returned. "The symptoms are for some reason developing more rapidly upon the sea level. Our seven hundred feet of elevation give us an advantage. Folk seem to have learned that I am the first authority upon the question. No doubt it comes from my letter in the Times. That was the mayor of a provincial town with whom I talked when we first arrived. You may have heard me upon the telephone. He seemed to put an entirely inflated value upon his own life. I helped him to readjust his ideas."

Summerlee had risen and was standing by the window. His thin, bony hands were trembling with his emotion.

"Challenger," said he earnestly, "this thing is too serious for mere futile argument. Do not suppose that I desire to irritate you by any question I may ask. But I put it to you whether there may not be some fallacy in your information or in your reasoning. There is the sun shining as brightly as ever in the blue sky. There are the heather and the flowers and the birds. There are the folk enjoying themselves upon the golf-links and the laborers yonder cutting the corn. You tell us that they and we may be upon the very brink of destruction — that this sunlit day may be that day of doom which the human race has so long awaited. So far as we know, you found this tremendous judgment upon what? Upon some abnormal lines in a spectrum — upon rumours from Sumatra — upon some curious personal excitement which we have discerned in each other. This latter symptom is not so marked but that you and we could, by a deliberate effort, control it. You need not stand on ceremony with us, Challenger. We have all faced death together before now. Speak out, and let us know exactly where we stand, and what, in your opinion, are our prospects for our future."

It was a brave, good speech, a speech from that stanch and strong spirit which lay behind all the acidities and angularities of the old zoologist. Lord John rose and shook him by the hand.

"My sentiment to a tick," said he. "Now, Challenger, it's up to you to tell us where we are. We ain't nervous folk, as you know well; but when it comes to makin' a week-end visit and finding you've run full butt into the Day of Judgment, it wants a bit of explainin'. What's the danger, and how much of it is there, and what are we goin' to do to meet it?"

He stood, tall and strong, in the sunshine at the window, with his brown hand upon the shoulder of Summerlee. I was lying back in an armchair, an extinguished cigarette between my lips, in that sort of half-dazed state in which impressions become exceedingly distinct. It may have been a new phase of the poisoning, but the delirious promptings had all passed away and were succeeded by an exceedingly languid and, at the same time, perceptive state of mind. I was a spectator. It did not seem to be any personal concern of mine. But here were three strong men at a great crisis, and it was fascinating to observe them. Challenger bent his heavy brows and stroked his beard before he answered. One could see that he was very carefully weighing his words.

"What was the last news when you left London?" he asked.

"I was at the Gazette office about ten," said I. "There was a Reuter just come in from Singapore to the effect that the sickness seemed to be universal in Sumatra and that the lighthouses had not been lit in consequence."

"Events have been moving somewhat rapidly since then," said Challenger, picking up his pile of telegrams. "I am in close touch both with the authorities and with the press, so that news is converging upon me from all parts. There is, in fact, a general and very insistent demand that I should come to London; but I see no good end to be served. From the accounts the poisonous effect begins with mental excitement; the rioting in Paris this morning is said to have been very violent, and the Welsh colliers are in a state of uproar. So far as the evidence to hand can be trusted, this stimulative stage, which varies much in races and in individuals, is succeeded by a certain exaltation and mental lucidity — I seem to discern some signs of it in our young friend here — which, after an appreciable interval, turns to coma, deepening rapidly into death. I fancy, so far as my toxicology carries me, that there are some vegetable nerve poisons — —”

“Datura,” suggested Summerlee.

“Excellent!” cried Challenger. “It would make for scientific precision if we named our toxic agent. Let it be daturon. To you, my dear Summerlee, belongs the honour — posthumous, alas, but none the less unique — of having given a name to the universal destroyer, the Great Gardener’s disinfectant. The symptoms of daturon, then, may be taken to be such as I indicate. That it will involve the whole world and that no life can possibly remain behind seems to me to be certain, since ether is a universal medium. Up to now it has been capricious in the places which it has attacked, but the difference is only a matter of a few hours, and it is like an advancing tide which covers one strip of sand and then another, running hither and thither in irregular streams, until at last it has submerged it all. There are laws at work in connection with the action and distribution of daturon which would have been of deep interest had the time at our disposal permitted us to study them. So far as I can trace them” — here he glanced over his telegrams —”the less developed races have been the first to respond to its influence. There are deplorable accounts from Africa, and the Australian aborigines appear to have been already exterminated. The Northern races have as yet shown greater resisting power than the Southern. This, you see, is dated from Marseilles at nine-forty-five this morning. I give it to you verbatim: —

“‘All night delirious excitement throughout Provence. Tumult of vine growers at Nimes. Socialistic upheaval at Toulon. Sudden illness attended by coma attacked population this morning. *peste foudroyante*. Great numbers of dead in the streets. Paralysis of business and universal chaos.’

“An hour later came the following, from the same source: —

“‘We are threatened with utter extermination. Cathedrals and churches full to overflowing. The dead outnumber the living. It is inconceivable and horrible. Decease seems to be painless, but swift and inevitable.’

“There is a similar telegram from Paris, where the development is not yet as acute. India and Persia appear to be utterly wiped out. The Slavonic population of Austria is down, while the Teutonic has hardly been affected. Speaking generally, the dwellers upon the plains and upon the seashore seem, so far as my limited information goes, to have felt the effects more rapidly than those inland or on the heights. Even a little elevation makes a considerable difference, and perhaps if there be a survivor of the human race, he will again be found upon the summit of some Ararat. Even our own little hill may presently prove to be a temporary island amid a sea of disaster. But at the present rate of advance a few short hours will submerge us all."

Lord John Roxton wiped his brow.

"What beats me," said he, "is how you could sit there laughin' with that stack of telegrams under your hand. I've seen death as often as most folk, but universal death — it's awful!"

"As to the laughter," said Challenger, "you will bear in mind that, like yourselves, I have not been exempt from the stimulating cerebral effects of the etheric poison. But as to the horror with which universal death appears to inspire you, I would put it to you that it is somewhat exaggerated. If you were sent to sea alone in an open boat to some unknown destination, your heart might well sink within you. The isolation, the uncertainty, would oppress you. But if your voyage were made in a goodly ship, which bore within it all your relations and your friends, you would feel that, however uncertain your destination might still remain, you would at least have one common and simultaneous experience which would hold you to the end in the same close communion. A lonely death may be terrible, but a universal one, as painless as this would appear to be, is not, in my judgment, a matter for apprehension. Indeed, I could sympathize with the person who took the view that the horror lay in the idea of surviving when all that is learned, famous, and exalted had passed away."

"What, then, do you propose to do?" asked Summerlee, who had for once nodded his assent to the reasoning of his brother scientist.

"To take our lunch," said Challenger as the boom of a gong sounded through the house. "We have a cook whose omelettes are only excelled by her cutlets. We can but trust that no cosmic disturbance has dulled her excellent abilities. My Scharzberger of '96 must also be rescued, so far as our earnest and united efforts can do it, from what would be a deplorable waste of a great vintage." He levered his great bulk off the desk, upon which he had sat while he announced the doom of the planet. "Come," said he. "If there is little time left, there is the more need that we should spend it in sober and reasonable enjoyment."

And, indeed, it proved to be a very merry meal. It is true that we could not forget our awful situation. The full solemnity of the event loomed ever at the back of our minds and tempered our thoughts. But surely it is the soul which has never faced death which shies strongly from it at the end. To each of us men it had, for one great epoch in our lives, been a familiar presence. As to the lady, she leaned upon the strong guidance of her mighty husband and was well content to go whither his path might lead. The future was our fate. The present was our own. We passed it in goodly comradeship and gentle merriment. Our minds were, as I have said, singularly lucid. Even I struck sparks at times. As to Challenger, he was wonderful! Never have I so realised the elemental greatness of the man, the sweep and power of his understanding. Summerlee drew him on with his chorus of subacid criticism, while Lord John and I laughed at the contest and the lady, her hand upon his sleeve, controlled the bellowings of the philosopher. Life, death, fate, the destiny of man — these were the stupendous subjects of that memorable hour, made vital by the fact that as the meal progressed strange, sudden exaltations in my mind and tinglings in my limbs proclaimed that the invisible tide of death was slowly and gently rising around us. Once I saw Lord John put his hand suddenly to his eyes, and once Summerlee dropped back for an instant in his chair. Each breath we breathed was charged with strange forces. And yet our minds were happy and at ease. Presently Austin laid the cigarettes upon the table and was about to withdraw.

“Austin!” said his master.

“Yes, sir?”

“I thank you for your faithful service.” A smile stole over the servant’s gnarled face.

“I’ve done my duty, sir.”

“I’m expecting the end of the world to-day, Austin.”

“Yes, sir. What time, sir?”

“I can’t say, Austin. Before evening.”

“Very good, sir.”

The taciturn Austin saluted and withdrew. Challenger lit a cigarette, and, drawing his chair closer to his wife’s, he took her hand in his.

“You know how matters stand, dear,” said he. “I have explained it also to our friends here. You’re not afraid are you?”

“It won’t be painful, George?”

"No more than laughing-gas at the dentist's. Every time you have had it you have practically died."

"But that is a pleasant sensation."

"So may death be. The worn-out bodily machine can't record its impression, but we know the mental pleasure which lies in a dream or a trance. Nature may build a beautiful door and hang it with many a gauzy and shimmering curtain to make an entrance to the new life for our wondering souls. In all my probings of the actual, I have always found wisdom and kindness at the core; and if ever the frightened mortal needs tenderness, it is surely as he makes the passage perilous from life to life. No, Summerlee, I will have none of your materialism, for I, at least, am too great a thing to end in mere physical constituents, a packet of salts and three bucketfuls of water. Here — here" — and he beat his great head with his huge, hairy fist—"there is something which uses matter, but is not of it — something which might destroy death, but which death can never destroy."

"Talkin' of death," said Lord John. "I'm a Christian of sorts, but it seems to me there was somethin' mighty natural in those ancestors of ours who were buried with their axes and bows and arrows and the like, same as if they were livin' on just the same as they used to. I don't know," he added, looking round the table in a shamefaced way, "that I wouldn't feel more homely myself if I was put away with my old .450 Express and the fowlin'-piece, the shorter one with the rubbered stock, and a clip or two of cartridges — just a fool's fancy, of course, but there it is. How does it strike you, Herr Professor?"

"Well," said Summerlee, "since you ask my opinion, it strikes me as an indefensible throwback to the Stone Age or before it. I'm of the twentieth century myself, and would wish to die like a reasonable civilised man. I don't know that I am more afraid of death than the rest of you, for I am an oldish man, and, come what may, I can't have very much longer to live; but it is all against my nature to sit waiting without a struggle like a sheep for the butcher. Is it quite certain, Challenger, that there is nothing we can do?"

"To save us — nothing," said Challenger. "To prolong our lives a few hours and thus to see the evolution of this mighty tragedy before we are actually involved in it — that may prove to be within my powers. I have taken certain steps — —"

"The oxygen?"

"Exactly. The oxygen."

“But what can oxygen effect in the face of a poisoning of the ether? There is not a greater difference in quality between a brick-bat and a gas than there is between oxygen and ether. They are different planes of matter. They cannot impinge upon one another. Come, Challenger, you could not defend such a proposition.”

“My good Summerlee, this etheric poison is most certainly influenced by material agents. We see it in the methods and distribution of the outbreak. We should not *a priori* have expected it, but it is undoubtedly a fact. Hence I am strongly of opinion that a gas like oxygen, which increases the vitality and the resisting power of the body, would be extremely likely to delay the action of what you have so happily named the daturon. It may be that I am mistaken, but I have every confidence in the correctness of my reasoning.”

“Well,” said Lord John, “if we’ve got to sit suckin’ at those tubes like so many babies with their bottles, I’m not takin’ any.”

“There will be no need for that,” Challenger answered. “We have made arrangements — it is to my wife that you chiefly owe it — that her boudoir shall be made as airtight as is practicable. With matting and varnished paper.”

“Good heavens, Challenger, you don’t suppose you can keep out ether with varnished paper?”

“Really, my worthy friend, you are a trifle perverse in missing the point. It is not to keep out the ether that we have gone to such trouble. It is to keep in the oxygen. I trust that if we can ensure an atmosphere hyper-oxygenated to a certain point, we may be able to retain our senses. I had two tubes of the gas and you have brought me three more. It is not much, but it is something.”

“How long will they last?”

“I have not an idea. We will not turn them on until our symptoms become unbearable. Then we shall dole the gas out as it is urgently needed. It may give us some hours, possibly even some days, on which we may look out upon a blasted world. Our own fate is delayed to that extent, and we will have the very singular experience, we five, of being, in all probability, the absolute rear guard of the human race upon its march into the unknown. Perhaps you will be kind enough now to give me a hand with the cylinders. It seems to me that the atmosphere already grows somewhat more oppressive.”

CHAPTER III

SUBMERGED

The chamber which was destined to be the scene of our unforgettable experience was a charmingly feminine sitting-room, some fourteen or sixteen feet square. At the end of it, divided by a curtain of red velvet, was a small apartment which formed the Professor's dressing-room. This in turn opened into a large bedroom. The curtain was still hanging, but the boudoir and dressing-room could be taken as one chamber for the purposes of our experiment. One door and the window frame had been plastered round with varnished paper so as to be practically sealed. Above the other door, which opened on to the landing, there hung a fanlight which could be drawn by a cord when some ventilation became absolutely necessary. A large shrub in a tub stood in each corner.

"How to get rid of our excessive carbon dioxide without unduly wasting our oxygen is a delicate and vital question," said Challenger, looking round him after the five iron tubes had been laid side by side against the wall. "With longer time for preparation I could have brought the whole concentrated force of my intelligence to bear more fully upon the problem, but as it is we must do what we can. The shrubs will be of some small service. Two of the oxygen tubes are ready to be turned on at an instant's notice, so that we cannot be taken unawares. At the same time, it would be well not to go far from the room, as the crisis may be a sudden and urgent one."

There was a broad, low window opening out upon a balcony. The view beyond was the same as that which we had already admired from the study. Looking out, I could see no sign of disorder anywhere. There was a road curving down the side of the hill, under my very eyes. A cab from the station, one of those prehistoric survivals which are only to be found in our country villages, was toiling slowly up the hill. Lower down was a nurse girl wheeling a perambulator and leading a second child by the hand. The blue reeks of smoke from the cottages gave the whole widespread landscape an air of settled order and homely comfort. Nowhere in the blue heaven or on the sunlit earth was there any foreshadowing of a catastrophe. The harvesters were back in the fields once more and the golfers, in pairs and fours, were still streaming round the links. There was so strange a turmoil within my own head, and such a jangling of my overstrung nerves, that the indifference of those people was amazing.

"Those fellows don't seem to feel any ill effects," said I, pointing down at the links.

"Have you played golf?" asked Lord John.

"No, I have not."

"Well, young fellah, when you do you'll learn that once fairly out on a round, it would take the crack of doom to stop a true golfer. Halloa! There's that telephone-bell again."

From time to time during and after lunch the high, insistent ring had summoned the Professor. He gave us the news as it came through to him in a few curt sentences. Such terrific items had never been registered in the world's history before. The great shadow was creeping up from the south like a rising tide of death. Egypt had gone through its delirium and was now comatose. Spain and Portugal, after a wild frenzy in which the Clericals and the Anarchists had fought most desperately, were now fallen silent. No cable messages were received any longer from South America. In North America the southern states, after some terrible racial rioting, had succumbed to the poison. North of Maryland the effect was not yet marked, and in Canada it was hardly perceptible. Belgium, Holland, and Denmark had each in turn been affected. Despairing messages were flashing from every quarter to the great centres of learning, to the chemists and the doctors of world-wide repute, imploring their advice. The astronomers too were deluged with inquiries. Nothing could be done. The thing was universal and beyond our human knowledge or control. It was death — painless but inevitable — death for young and old, for weak and strong, for rich and poor, without hope or possibility of escape. Such was the news which, in scattered, distracted messages, the telephone had brought us. The great cities already knew their fate and so far as we could gather were preparing to meet it with dignity and resignation. Yet here were our golfers and laborers like the lambs who gambol under the shadow of the knife. It seemed amazing. And yet how could they know? It had all come upon us in one giant stride. What was there in the morning paper to alarm them? And now it was but three in the afternoon. Even as we looked some rumour seemed to have spread, for we saw the reapers hurrying from the fields. Some of the golfers were returning to the club-house. They were running as if taking refuge from a shower. Their little caddies trailed behind them. Others were continuing their game. The nurse had turned and was pushing her perambulator hurriedly up the hill again. I noticed that she had her hand to her brow. The cab had stopped and the tired horse, with his head sunk to his knees, was resting. Above there was a perfect summer sky — one huge vault of unbroken blue, save for a few fleecy white clouds over the distant downs. If the human race must die to-day, it was at least upon a glorious death-bed. And yet all that gentle loveliness of nature made this terrific and wholesale destruction the more pitiable and awful. Surely it was too goodly a residence that we should be so swiftly, so ruthlessly, evicted from it!

But I have said that the telephone-bell had rung once more. Suddenly I heard Challenger's tremendous voice from the hall.

"Malone!" he cried. "You are wanted."

I rushed down to the instrument. It was McArdle speaking from London.

"That you, Mr. Malone?" cried his familiar voice. "Mr. Malone, there are terrible goings-on in London. For God's sake, see if Professor Challenger can suggest anything that can be done."

"He can suggest nothing, sir," I answered. "He regards the crisis as universal and inevitable. We have some oxygen here, but it can only defer our fate for a few hours."

"Oxygen!" cried the agonized voice. "There is no time to get any. The office has been a perfect pandemonium ever since you left in the morning. Now half of the staff are insensible. I am weighed down with heaviness myself. From my window I can see the people lying thick in Fleet Street. The traffic is all held up. Judging by the last telegrams, the whole world — —"

His voice had been sinking, and suddenly stopped. An instant later I heard through the telephone a muffled thud, as if his head had fallen forward on the desk.

"Mr. McArdle!" I cried. "Mr. McArdle!"

There was no answer. I knew as I replaced the receiver that I should never hear his voice again.

At that instant, just as I took a step backwards from the telephone, the thing was on us. It was as if we were bathers, up to our shoulders in water, who suddenly are submerged by a rolling wave. An invisible hand seemed to have quietly closed round my throat and to be gently pressing the life from me. I was conscious of immense oppression upon my chest, great tightness within my head, a loud singing in my ears, and bright flashes before my eyes. I staggered to the balustrades of the stair. At the same moment, rushing and snorting like a wounded buffalo, Challenger dashed past me, a terrible vision, with red-purple face, engorged eyes, and bristling hair. His little wife, insensible to all appearance, was slung over his great shoulder, and he blundered and thundered up the stair, scrambling and tripping, but carrying himself and her through sheer will-force through that mephitic atmosphere to the haven of temporary safety. At the sight of his effort I too rushed up the steps, clambering, falling, clutching at the rail, until I tumbled half senseless upon by face on the upper landing. Lord John's fingers of steel were in the collar of my coat, and a moment later I was stretched upon my back, unable to speak or move, on the boudoir carpet. The woman lay beside me, and Summerlee was bunched in a chair by the window, his head nearly touching his knees. As in a dream I saw Challenger, like a monstrous beetle, crawling slowly across the floor, and a moment later I heard the gentle hissing of the escaping oxygen. Challenger breathed two or three times with enormous gulps, his lungs roaring as he drew in the vital gas.

"It works!" he cried exultantly. "My reasoning has been justified!" He was up on his feet again, alert and strong. With a tube in his hand he rushed over to his wife and held it to her face. In a few seconds she moaned, stirred, and sat up. He turned to me, and I felt the tide of life stealing warmly through my arteries. My reason told me that it was but a little respite, and yet, carelessly as we talk of its value, every hour of existence now seemed an inestimable thing. Never have I known such a thrill of sensuous joy as came with that freshet of life. The weight fell away from my lungs, the band loosened from my brow, a sweet feeling of peace and gentle, languid comfort stole over me. I lay watching Summerlee revive under the same remedy, and finally Lord John took his turn. He sprang to his feet and gave me a hand to rise, while Challenger picked up his wife and laid her on the settee.

"Oh, George, I am so sorry you brought me back," she said, holding him by the hand. "The door of death is indeed, as you said, hung with beautiful, shimmering curtains; for, once the choking feeling had passed, it was all unspeakably soothing and beautiful. Why have you dragged me back?"

“Because I wish that we make the passage together. We have been together so many years. It would be sad to fall apart at the supreme moment.”

For a moment in his tender voice I caught a glimpse of a new Challenger, something very far from the bullying, ranting, arrogant man who had alternately amazed and offended his generation. Here in the shadow of death was the innermost Challenger, the man who had won and held a woman’s love. Suddenly his mood changed and he was our strong captain once again.

“Alone of all mankind I saw and foretold this catastrophe,” said he with a ring of exultation and scientific triumph in his voice. “As to you, my good Summerlee, I trust your last doubts have been resolved as to the meaning of the blurring of the lines in the spectrum and that you will no longer contend that my letter in the Times was based upon a delusion.”

For once our pugnacious colleague was deaf to a challenge. He could but sit gasping and stretching his long, thin limbs, as if to assure himself that he was still really upon this planet. Challenger walked across to the oxygen tube, and the sound of the loud hissing fell away till it was the most gentle sibilation.

“We must husband our supply of the gas,” said he. “The atmosphere of the room is now strongly hyperoxygenated, and I take it that none of us feel any distressing symptoms. We can only determine by actual experiments what amount added to the air will serve to neutralise the poison. Let us see how that will do.”

We sat in silent nervous tension for five minutes or more, observing our own sensations. I had just begun to fancy that I felt the constriction round my temples again when Mrs. Challenger called out from the sofa that she was fainting. Her husband turned on more gas.

“In pre-scientific days,” said he, “they used to keep a white mouse in every submarine, as its more delicate organization gave signs of a vicious atmosphere before it was perceived by the sailors. You, my dear, will be our white mouse. I have now increased the supply and you are better.”

“Yes, I am better.”

“Possibly we have hit upon the correct mixture. When we have ascertained exactly how little will serve we shall be able to compute how long we shall be able to exist. Unfortunately, in resuscitating ourselves we have already consumed a considerable proportion of this first tube.”

"Does it matter?" asked Lord John, who was standing with his hands in his pockets close to the window. "If we have to go, what is the use of holdin' on? You don't suppose there's any chance for us?"

Challenger smiled and shook his head.

"Well, then, don't you think there is more dignity in takin' the jump and not waitin' to be pushed in? If it must be so, I'm for sayin' our prayers, turnin' off the gas, and openin' the window."

"Why not?" said the lady bravely. "Surely, George, Lord John is right and it is better so."

"I most strongly object," cried Summerlee in a querulous voice. "When we must die let us by all means die, but to deliberately anticipate death seems to me to be a foolish and unjustifiable action."

"What does our young friend say to it?" asked Challenger.

"I think we should see it to the end."

"And I am strongly of the same opinion," said he.

"Then, George, if you say so, I think so too," cried the lady.

"Well, well, I'm only puttin' it as an argument," said Lord John. "If you all want to see it through I am with you. It's dooced interestin', and no mistake about that. I've had my share of adventures in my life, and as many thrills as most folk, but I'm endin' on my top note."

"Granting the continuity of life," said Challenger.

"A large assumption!" cried Summerlee. Challenger stared at him in silent reproof.

"Granting the continuity of life," said he, in his most didactic manner, "none of us can predicate what opportunities of observation one may have from what we may call the spirit plane to the plane of matter. It surely must be evident to the most obtuse person" (here he glared a Summerlee) "that it is while we are ourselves material that we are most fitted to watch and form a judgment upon material phenomena. Therefore it is only by keeping alive for these few extra hours that we can hope to carry on with us to some future existence a clear conception of the most stupendous event that the world, or the universe so far as we know it, has ever encountered. To me it would seem a deplorable thing that we should in any way curtail by so much as a minute so wonderful an experience."

"I am strongly of the same opinion," cried Summerlee.

"Carried without a division," said Lord John. "By George, that poor devil of a chauffeur of yours down in the yard has made his last journey. No use makin’ a sally and bringin’ him in?”

“It would be absolute madness,” cried Summerlee.

“Well, I suppose it would,” said Lord John. “It couldn’t help him and would scatter our gas all over the house, even if we ever got back alive. My word, look at the little birds under the trees!”

We drew four chairs up to the long, low window, the lady still resting with closed eyes upon the settee. I remember that the monstrous and grotesque idea crossed my mind — the illusion may have been heightened by the heavy stuffiness of the air which we were breathing — that we were in four front seats of the stalls at the last act of the drama of the world.

In the immediate foreground, beneath our very eyes, was the small yard with the half-cleaned motor-car standing in it. Austin, the chauffeur, had received his final notice at last, for he was sprawling beside the wheel, with a great black bruise upon his forehead where it had struck the step or mud-guard in falling. He still held in his hand the nozzle of the hose with which he had been washing down his machine. A couple of small plane trees stood in the corner of the yard, and underneath them lay several pathetic little balls of fluffy feathers, with tiny feet uplifted. The sweep of death’s scythe had included everything, great and small, within its swath.

Over the wall of the yard we looked down upon the winding road, which led to the station. A group of the reapers whom we had seen running from the fields were lying all pell-mell, their bodies crossing each other, at the bottom of it. Farther up, the nurse-girl lay with her head and shoulders propped against the slope of the grassy bank. She had taken the baby from the perambulator, and it was a motionless bundle of wraps in her arms. Close behind her a tiny patch upon the roadside showed where the little boy was stretched. Still nearer to us was the dead cab-horse, kneeling between the shafts. The old driver was hanging over the splash-board like some grotesque scarecrow, his arms dangling absurdly in front of him. Through the window we could dimly discern that a young man was seated inside. The door was swinging open and his hand was grasping the handle, as if he had attempted to leap forth at the last instant. In the middle distance lay the golf links, dotted as they had been in the morning with the dark figures of the golfers, lying motionless upon the grass of the course or among the heather which skirted it. On one particular green there were eight bodies stretched where a foursome with its caddies had held to their game to the last. No bird flew in the blue vault of heaven, no man or beast moved upon the vast countryside which lay before us. The evening sun shone its peaceful radiance across it, but there brooded over it all the stillness and the silence of universal death — a death in which we were so soon to join. At the present instant that one frail sheet of glass, by holding in the extra oxygen which counteracted the poisoned ether, shut us off from the fate of all our kind. For a few short hours the knowledge and foresight of one man could preserve our little oasis of life in the vast desert of death and save us from participation in the common catastrophe. Then the gas would run low, we too should lie gasping upon that cherry-coloured boudoir carpet, and the fate of the human race and of all earthly life would be complete. For a long time, in a mood which was too solemn for speech, we looked out at the tragic world.

"There is a house on fire," said Challenger at last, pointing to a column of smoke which rose above the trees. "There will, I expect, be many such — possibly whole cities in flames — when we consider how many folk may have dropped with lights in their hands. The fact of combustion is in itself enough to show that the proportion of oxygen in the atmosphere is normal and that it is the ether which is at fault. Ah, there you see another blaze on the top of Crowborough Hill. It is the golf clubhouse, or I am mistaken. There is the church clock chiming the hour. It would interest our philosophers to know that man-made mechanisms has survived the race who made it."

"By George!" cried Lord John, rising excitedly from his chair. "What's that puff of smoke? It's a train."

We heard the roar of it, and presently it came flying into sight, going at what seemed to me to be a prodigious speed. Whence it had come, or how far, we had no means of knowing. Only by some miracle of luck could it have gone any distance. But now we were to see the terrific end of its career. A train of coal trucks stood motionless upon the line. We held our breath as the express roared along the same track. The crash was horrible. Engine and carriages piled themselves into a hill of splintered wood and twisted iron. Red spurts of flame flickered up from the wreckage until it was all ablaze. For half an hour we sat with hardly a word, stunned by the stupendous sight.

"Poor, poor people!" cried Mrs. Challenger at last, clinging with a whimper to her husband's arm.

"My dear, the passengers on that train were no more animate than the coals into which they crashed or the carbon which they have now become," said Challenger, stroking her hand soothingly. "It was a train of the living when it left Victoria, but it was driven and freighted by the dead long before it reached its fate."

"All over the world the same thing must be going on," said I as a vision of strange happenings rose before me. "Think of the ships at sea — how they will steam on and on, until the furnaces die down or until they run full tilt upon some beach. The sailing ships too — how they will back and fill with their cargoes of dead sailors, while their timbers rot and their joints leak, till one by one they sink below the surface. Perhaps a century hence the Atlantic may still be dotted with the old drifting derelicts."

"And the folk in the coal-mines," said Summerlee with a dismal chuckle. "If ever geologists should by any chance live upon earth again they will have some strange theories of the existence of man in carboniferous strata."

"I don't profess to know about such things," remarked Lord John, "but it seems to me the earth will be 'To let, empty,' after this. When once our human crowd is wiped off it, how will it ever get on again?"

"The world was empty before," Challenger answered gravely. "Under laws which in their inception are beyond and above us, it became peopled. Why may the same process not happen again?"

"My dear Challenger, you can't mean that?"

"I am not in the habit, Professor Summerlee, of saying things which I do not mean. The observation is trivial." Out went the beard and down came the eyelids.

"Well, you lived an obstinate dogmatist, and you mean to die one," said Summerlee sourly.

"And you, sir, have lived an unimaginative obstructionist and never can hope now to emerge from it."

"Your worst critics will never accuse you of lacking imagination," Summerlee retorted.

"Upon my word!" said Lord John. "It would be like you if you used up our last gasp of oxygen in abusing each other. What can it matter whether folk come back or not? It surely won't be in our time."

"In that remark, sir, you betray your own very pronounced limitations," said Challenger severely. "The true scientific mind is not to be tied down by its own conditions of time and space. It builds itself an observatory erected upon the border line of present, which separates the infinite past from the infinite future. From this sure post it makes its sallies even to the beginning and to the end of all things. As to death, the scientific mind dies at its post working in normal and methodic fashion to the end. It disregards so petty a thing as its own physical dissolution as completely as it does all other limitations upon the plane of matter. Am I right, Professor Summerlee?”

Summerlee grumbled an ungracious assent.

“With certain reservations, I agree,” said he.

“The ideal scientific mind,” continued Challenger—”I put it in the third person rather than appear to be too self-complacent — the ideal scientific mind should be capable of thinking out a point of abstract knowledge in the interval between its owner falling from a balloon and reaching the earth. Men of this strong fibre are needed to form the conquerors of nature and the bodyguard of truth.”

“It strikes me nature’s on top this time,” said Lord John, looking out of the window. “I’ve read some leadin’ articles about you gentlemen controllin’ her, but she’s gettin’ a bit of her own back.”

“It is but a temporary setback,” said Challenger with conviction. “A few million years, what are they in the great cycle of time? The vegetable world has, as you can see, survived. Look at the leaves of that plane tree. The birds are dead, but the plant flourishes. From this vegetable life in pond and in marsh will come, in time, the tiny crawling microscopic slugs which are the pioneers of that great army of life in which for the instant we five have the extraordinary duty of serving as rear guard. Once the lowest form of life has established itself, the final advent of man is as certain as the growth of the oak from the acorn. The old circle will swing round once more.”

“But the poison?” I asked. “Will that not nip life in the bud?”

“The poison may be a mere stratum or layer in the ether — a mephitic Gulf Stream across that mighty ocean in which we float. Or tolerance may be established and life accommodate itself to a new condition. The mere fact that with a comparatively small hyperoxygenation of our blood we can hold out against it is surely a proof in itself that no very great change would be needed to enable animal life to endure it.”

The smoking house beyond the trees had burst into flames. We could see the high tongues of fire shooting up into the air.

“It’s pretty awful,” muttered Lord John, more impressed than I had ever seen him.

“Well, after all, what does it matter?” I remarked. “The world is dead. Cremation is surely the best burial.”

“It would shorten us up if this house went ablaze.”

“I foresaw the danger,” said Challenger, “and asked my wife to guard against it.”

“Everything is quite safe, dear. But my head begins to throb again. What a dreadful atmosphere!”

“We must change it,” said Challenger. He bent over his cylinder of oxygen.

“It’s nearly empty,” said he. “It has lasted us some three and a half hours. It is now close on eight o’clock. We shall get through the night comfortably. I should expect the end about nine o’clock to-morrow morning. We shall see one sunrise, which shall be all our own.”

He turned on his second tube and opened for half a minute the fanlight over the door. Then as the air became perceptibly better, but our own symptoms more acute, he closed it once again.

“By the way,” said he, “man does not live upon oxygen alone. It’s dinner time and over. I assure you, gentlemen, that when I invited you to my home and to what I had hoped would be an interesting reunion, I had intended that my kitchen should justify itself. However, we must do what we can. I am sure that you will agree with me that it would be folly to consume our air too rapidly by lighting an oil-stove. I have some small provision of cold meats, bread, and pickles which, with a couple of bottles of claret, may serve our turn. Thank you, my dear — now as ever you are the queen of managers.”

It was indeed wonderful how, with the self-respect and sense of propriety of the British housekeeper, the lady had within a few minutes adorned the central table with a snow-white cloth, laid the napkins upon it, and set forth the simple meal with all the elegance of civilization, including an electric torch lamp in the centre. Wonderful also was it to find that our appetites were ravenous.

“It is the measure of our emotion,” said Challenger with that air of condescension with which he brought his scientific mind to the explanation of humble facts. “We have gone through a great crisis. That means molecular disturbance. That in turn means the need for repair. Great sorrow or great joy should bring intense hunger — not abstinence from food, as our novelists will have it.”

“That’s why the country folk have great feasts at funerals,” I hazarded.

“Exactly. Our young friend has hit upon an excellent illustration. Let me give you another slice of tongue.”

“The same with savages,” said Lord John, cutting away at the beef. “I’ve seen them buryin’ a chief up the Aruwimi River, and they ate a hippo that must have weighed as much as a tribe. There are some of them down New Guinea way that eat the late-lamented himself, just by way of a last tidy up. Well, of all the funeral feasts on this earth, I suppose the one we are takin’ is the queerest.”

“The strange thing is,” said Mrs. Challenger, “that I find it impossible to feel grief for those who are gone. There are my father and mother at Bedford. I know that they are dead, and yet in this tremendous universal tragedy I can feel no sharp sorrow for any individuals, even for them.”

“And my old mother in her cottage in Ireland,” said I. “I can see her in my mind’s eye, with her shawl and her lace cap, lying back with closed eyes in the old high-backed chair near the window, her glasses and her book beside her. Why should I mourn her? She has passed and I am passing, and I may be nearer her in some other life than England is to Ireland. Yet I grieve to think that that dear body is no more.”

“As to the body,” remarked Challenger, “we do not mourn over the parings of our nails nor the cut locks of our hair, though they were once part of ourselves. Neither does a one-legged man yearn sentimentally over his missing member. The physical body has rather been a source of pain and fatigue to us. It is the constant index of our limitations. Why then should we worry about its detachment from our psychical selves?”

“If they can indeed be detached,” Summerlee grumbled. “But, anyhow, universal death is dreadful.”

“As I have already explained,” said Challenger, “a universal death must in its nature be far less terrible than a isolated one.”

“Same in a battle,” remarked Lord John. “If you saw a single man lying on that floor with his chest knocked in and a hole in his face it would turn you sick. But I’ve seen ten thousand on their backs in the Soudan, and it gave me no such feelin’, for when you are makin’ history the life of any man is too small a thing to worry over. When a thousand million pass over together, same as happened to-day, you can’t pick your own partic’lar out of the crowd.”

“I wish it were well over with us,” said the lady wistfully. “Oh, George, I am so frightened.”

“You’ll be the bravest of us all, little lady, when the time comes. I’ve been a blusterous old husband to you, dear, but you’ll just bear in mind that G. E. C. is as he was made and couldn’t help himself. After all, you wouldn’t have had anyone else?”

“No one in the whole wide world, dear,” said she, and put her arms round his bull neck. We three walked to the window and stood amazed at the sight which met our eyes.

Darkness had fallen and the dead world was shrouded in gloom. But right across the southern horizon was one long vivid scarlet streak, waxing and waning in vivid pulses of life, leaping suddenly to a crimson zenith and then dying down to a glowing line of fire.

“Lewes is ablaze!”

“No, it is Brighton which is burning,” said Challenger, stepping across to join us. “You can see the curved back of the downs against the glow. That fire is miles on the farther side of it. The whole town must be alight.”

There were several red glares at different points, and the pile of *debris* upon the railway line was still smoldering darkly, but they all seemed mere pin-points of light compared to that monstrous conflagration throbbing beyond the hills. What copy it would have made for the Gazette! Had ever a journalist such an opening and so little chance of using it — the scoop of scoops, and no one to appreciate it? And then, suddenly, the old instinct of recording came over me. If these men of science could be so true to their life’s work to the very end, why should not I, in my humble way, be as constant? No human eye might ever rest upon what I had done. But the long night had to be passed somehow, and for me at least, sleep seemed to be out of the question. My notes would help to pass the weary hours and to occupy my thoughts. Thus it is that now I have before me the notebook with its scribbled pages, written confusedly upon my knee in the dim, waning light of our one electric torch. Had I the literary touch, they might have been worthy of the occasion, As it is, they may still serve to bring to other minds the long-drawn emotions and tremors of that awful night.

CHAPTER IV

A DIARY OF THE DYING

How strange the words look scribbled at the top of the empty page of my book! How stranger still that it is I, Edward Malone, who have written them — I who started only some twelve hours ago from my rooms in Streatham without one thought of the marvels which the day was to bring forth! I look back at the chain of incidents, my interview with McArdle, Challenger's first note of alarm in the Times, the absurd journey in the train, the pleasant luncheon, the catastrophe, and now it has come to this — that we linger alone upon an empty planet, and so sure is our fate that I can regard these lines, written from mechanical professional habit and never to be seen by human eyes, as the words of one who is already dead, so closely does he stand to the shadowed borderland over which all outside this one little circle of friends have already gone. I feel how wise and true were the words of Challenger when he said that the real tragedy would be if we were left behind when all that is noble and good and beautiful had passed. But of that there can surely be no danger. Already our second tube of oxygen is drawing to an end. We can count the poor dregs of our lives almost to a minute.

We have just been treated to a lecture, a good quarter of an hour long, from Challenger, who was so excited that he roared and bellowed as if he were addressing his old rows of scientific sceptics in the Queen's Hall. He had certainly a strange audience to harangue: his wife perfectly acquiescent and absolutely ignorant of his meaning, Summerlee seated in the shadow, querulous and critical but interested, Lord John lounging in a corner somewhat bored by the whole proceeding, and myself beside the window watching the scene with a kind of detached attention, as if it were all a dream or something in which I had no personal interest whatever. Challenger sat at the centre table with the electric light illuminating the slide under the microscope which he had brought from his dressing room. The small vivid circle of white light from the mirror left half of his rugged, bearded face in brilliant radiance and half in deepest shadow. He had, it seems, been working of late upon the lowest forms of life, and what excited him at the present moment was that in the microscopic slide made up the day before he found the amoeba to be still alive.

"You can see it for yourselves," he kept repeating in great excitement. "Summerlee, will you step across and satisfy yourself upon the point? Malone, will you kindly verify what I say? The little spindle-shaped things in the centre are diatoms and may be disregarded since they are probably vegetable rather than animal. But the right-hand side you will see an undoubted amoeba, moving sluggishly across the field. The upper screw is the fine adjustment. Look at it for yourselves."

Summerlee did so and acquiesced. So did I and perceived a little creature which looked as if it were made of ground glass flowing in a sticky way across the lighted circle. Lord John was prepared to take him on trust.

"I'm not troublin' my head whether he's alive or dead," said he. "We don't so much as know each other by sight, so why should I take it to heart? I don't suppose he's worryin' himself over the state of *our* health."

I laughed at this, and Challenger looked in my direction with his coldest and most supercilious stare. It was a most petrifying experience.

"The flippancy of the half-educated is more obstructive to science than the obtuseness of the ignorant," said he. "If Lord John Roxton would condescend — —"

"My dear George, don't be so peppery," said his wife, with her hand on the black mane that drooped over the microscope. "What can it matter whether the amoeba is alive or not?"

"It matters a great deal," said Challenger gruffly.

"Well, let's hear about it," said Lord John with a good-humoured smile. "We may as well talk about that as anything else. If you think I've been too off-hand with the thing, or hurt its feelin's in any way, I'll apologize."

"For my part," remarked Summerlee in his creaky, argumentative voice, "I can't see why you should attach such importance to the creature being alive. It is in the same atmosphere as ourselves, so naturally the poison does not act upon it. If it were outside of this room it would be dead, like all other animal life."

"Your remarks, my good Summerlee," said Challenger with enormous condescension (oh, if I could paint that over-bearing, arrogant face in the vivid circle of reflection from the microscope mirror!)—"your remarks show that you imperfectly appreciate the situation. This specimen was mounted yesterday and is hermetically sealed. None of our oxygen can reach it. But the ether, of course, has penetrated to it, as to every other point upon the universe. Therefore, it has survived the poison. Hence, we may argue that every amoeba outside this room, instead of being dead, as you have erroneously stated, has really survived the catastrophe."

"Well, even now I don't feel inclined to hip-hurrah about it," said Lord John. "What does it matter?"

"It just matters this, that the world is a living instead of a dead one. If you had the scientific imagination, you would cast your mind forward from this one fact, and you would see some few millions of years hence — a mere passing moment in the enormous flux of the ages — the whole world teeming once more with the animal and human life which will spring from this tiny root. You have seen a prairie fire where the flames have swept every trace of grass or plant from the surface of the earth and left only a blackened waste. You would think that it must be forever desert. Yet the roots of growth have been left behind, and when you pass the place a few years hence you can no longer tell where the black scars used to be. Here in this tiny creature are the roots of growth of the animal world, and by its inherent development, and evolution, it will surely in time remove every trace of this incomparable crisis in which we are now involved."

"Dooced interestin'!" said Lord John, lounging across and looking through the microscope. "Funny little chap to hang number one among the family portraits. Got a fine big shirt-stud on him!"

"The dark object is his nucleus," said Challenger with the air of a nurse teaching letters to a baby.

"Well, we needn't feel lonely," said Lord John laughing. "There's somebody livin' besides us on the earth."

"You seem to take it for granted, Challenger," said Summerlee, "that the object for which this world was created was that it should produce and sustain human life."

"Well, sir, and what object do you suggest?" asked Challenger, bristling at the least hint of contradiction.

"Sometimes I think that it is only the monstrous conceit of mankind which makes him think that all this stage was erected for him to strut upon."

"We cannot be dogmatic about it, but at least without what you have ventured to call monstrous conceit we can surely say that we are the highest thing in nature."

“The highest of which we have cognisance.”

“That, sir, goes without saying.”

“Think of all the millions and possibly billions of years that the earth swung empty through space — or, if not empty, at least without a sign or thought of the human race. Think of it, washed by the rain and scorched by the sun and swept by the wind for those unnumbered ages. Man only came into being yesterday so far as geological times goes. Why, then, should it be taken for granted that all this stupendous preparation was for his benefit?”

“For whose then — or for what?”

Summerlee shrugged his shoulders.

“How can we tell? For some reason altogether beyond our conception — and man may have been a mere accident, a by-product evolved in the process. It is as if the scum upon the surface of the ocean imagined that the ocean was created in order to produce and sustain it or a mouse in a cathedral thought that the building was its own proper ordained residence.”

I have jotted down the very words of their argument, but now it degenerates into a mere noisy wrangle with much polysyllabic scientific jargon upon each side. It is no doubt a privilege to hear two such brains discuss the highest questions; but as they are in perpetual disagreement, plain folk like Lord John and I get little that is positive from the exhibition. They neutralise each other and we are left as they found us. Now the hubbub has ceased, and Summerlee is coiled up in his chair, while Challenger, still fingering the screws of his microscope, is keeping up a continual low, deep, inarticulate growl like the sea after a storm. Lord John comes over to me, and we look out together into the night.

There is a pale new moon — the last moon that human eyes will ever rest upon — and the stars are most brilliant. Even in the clear plateau air of South America I have never seen them brighter. Possibly this etheric change has some effect upon light. The funeral pyre of Brighton is still blazing, and there is a very distant patch of scarlet in the western sky, which may mean trouble at Arundel or Chichester, possibly even at Portsmouth. I sit and muse and make an occasional note. There is a sweet melancholy in the air. Youth and beauty and chivalry and love — is this to be the end of it all? The starlit earth looks a dreamland of gentle peace. Who would imagine it as the terrible Golgotha strewn with the bodies of the human race? Suddenly, I find myself laughing.

“Halloa, young fellah!” says Lord John, staring at me in surprise. “We could do with a joke in these hard times. What was it, then?”

“I was thinking of all the great unsolved questions,” I answer, “the questions that we spent so much labor and thought over. Think of Anglo-German competition, for example — or the Persian Gulf that my old chief was so keen about. Whoever would have guessed, when we fumed and fretted so, how they were to be eventually solved?”

We fall into silence again. I fancy that each of us is thinking of friends that have gone before. Mrs. Challenger is sobbing quietly, and her husband is whispering to her. My mind turns to all the most unlikely people, and I see each of them lying white and rigid as poor Austin does in the yard. There is McArdle, for example, I know exactly where he is, with his face upon his writing desk and his hand on his own telephone, just as I heard him fall. Beaumont, the editor, too — I suppose he is lying upon the blue-and-red Turkey carpet which adorned his sanctum. And the fellows in the reporters’ room — Macdona and Murray and Bond. They had certainly died hard at work on their job, with note-books full of vivid impressions and strange happenings in their hands. I could just imagine how this one would have been packed off to the doctors, and that other to Westminster, and yet a third to St. Paul’s. What glorious rows of head-lines they must have seen as a last vision beautiful, never destined to materialise in printer’s ink! I could see Macdona among the doctors—”Hope in Harley Street” — Mac had always a weakness for alliteration. “Interview with Mr. Soley Wilson.” “Famous Specialist says ‘Never despair!’” “Our Special Correspondent found the eminent scientist seated upon the roof, whither he had retreated to avoid the crowd of terrified patients who had stormed his dwelling. With a manner which plainly showed his appreciation of the immense gravity of the occasion, the celebrated physician refused to admit that every avenue of hope had been closed.” That’s how Mac would start. Then there was Bond; he would probably do St. Paul’s. He fancied his own literary touch. My word, what a theme for him! “Standing in the little gallery under the dome and looking down upon that packed mass of despairing humanity, groveling at this last instant before a Power which they had so persistently ignored, there rose to my ears from the swaying crowd such a low moan of entreaty and terror, such a shuddering cry for help to the Unknown, that — —” and so forth.

Yes, it would be a great end for a reporter, though, like myself, he would die with the treasures still unused. What would Bond not give, poor chap, to see “J. H. B.” at the foot of a column like that?

But what drivel I am writing! It is just an attempt to pass the weary time. Mrs. Challenger has gone to the inner dressing-room, and the Professor says that she is asleep. He is making notes and consulting books at the central table, as calmly as if years of placid work lay before him. He writes with a very noisy quill pen which seems to be screeching scorn at all who disagree with him.

Summerlee has dropped off in his chair and gives from time to time a peculiarly exasperating snore. Lord John lies back with his hands in his pockets and his eyes closed. How people can sleep under such conditions is more than I can imagine.

Three-thirty a.m. I have just wakened with a start. It was five minutes past eleven when I made my last entry. I remember winding up my watch and noting the time. So I have wasted some five hours of the little span still left to us. Who would have believed it possible? But I feel very much fresher, and ready for my fate — or try to persuade myself that I am. And yet, the fitter a man is, and the higher his tide of life, the more must he shrink from death. How wise and how merciful is that provision of nature by which his earthly anchor is usually loosened by many little imperceptible tugs, until his consciousness has drifted out of its untenable earthly harbor into the great sea beyond!

Mrs. Challenger is still in the dressing room. Challenger has fallen asleep in his chair. What a picture! His enormous frame leans back, his huge, hairy hands are clasped across his waistcoat, and his head is so tilted that I can see nothing above his collar save a tangled bristle of luxuriant beard. He shakes with the vibration of his own snoring. Summerlee adds his occasional high tenor to Challenger’s sonorous bass. Lord John is sleeping also, his long body doubled up sideways in a basket-chair. The first cold light of dawn is just stealing into the room, and everything is grey and mournful.

I look out at the sunrise — that fateful sunrise which will shine upon an unpeopled world. The human race is gone, extinguished in a day, but the planets swing round and the tides rise or fall, and the wind whispers, and all nature goes her way, down, as it would seem, to the very amoeba, with never a sign that he who styled himself the lord of creation had ever blessed or cursed the universe with his presence. Down in the yard lies Austin with sprawling limbs, his face glimmering white in the dawn, and the hose nozzle still projecting from his dead hand. The whole of human kind is typified in that one half-ludicrous and half-pathetic figure, lying so helpless beside the machine which it used to control.

Here end the notes which I made at the time. Henceforward events were too swift and too poignant to allow me to write, but they are too clearly outlined in my memory that any detail could escape me.

Some chokiness in my throat made me look at the oxygen cylinders, and I was startled at what I saw. The sands of our lives were running very low. At some period in the night Challenger had switched the tube from the third to the fourth cylinder. Now it was clear that this also was nearly exhausted. That horrible feeling of constriction was closing in upon me. I ran across and, unscrewing the nozzle, I changed it to our last supply. Even as I did so my conscience pricked me, for I felt that perhaps if I had held my hand all of them might have passed in their sleep. The thought was banished, however, by the voice of the lady from the inner room crying: —

“George, George, I am stifling!”

“It is all right, Mrs. Challenger,” I answered as the others started to their feet. “I have just turned on a fresh supply.”

Even at such a moment I could not help smiling at Challenger, who with a great hairy fist in each eye was like a huge, bearded baby, new wakened out of sleep. Summerlee was shivering like a man with the ague, human fears, as he realised his position, rising for an instant above the stoicism of the man of science. Lord John, however, was as cool and alert as if he had just been roused on a hunting morning.

“Fifthly and lastly,” said he, glancing at the tube. “Say, young fellah, don’t tell me you’ve been writin’ up your impressions in that paper on your knee.”

“Just a few notes to pass the time.”

“Well, I don’t believe anyone but an Irishman would have done that. I expect you’ll have to wait till little brother amoeba gets grown up before you’ll find a reader. He don’t seem to take much stock of things just at present. Well, Herr Professor, what are the prospects?”

Challenger was looking out at the great drifts of morning mist which lay over the landscape. Here and there the wooded hills rose like conical islands out of this woolly sea.

"It might be a winding sheet," said Mrs. Challenger, who had entered in her dressing-gown. "There's that song of yours, George, 'Ring out the old, ring in the new.' It was prophetic. But you are shivering, my poor dear friends. I have been warm under a coverlet all night, and you cold in your chairs. But I'll soon set you right."

The brave little creature hurried away, and presently we heard the sizzling of a kettle. She was back soon with five steaming cups of cocoa upon a tray.

"Drink these," said she. "You will feel so much better."

And we did. Summerlee asked if he might light his pipe, and we all had cigarettes. It steadied our nerves, I think, but it was a mistake, for it made a dreadful atmosphere in that stuffy room. Challenger had to open the ventilator.

"How long, Challenger?" asked Lord John.

"Possibly three hours," he answered with a shrug.

"I used to be frightened," said his wife. "But the nearer I get to it, the easier it seems. Don't you think we ought to pray, George?"

"You will pray, dear, if you wish," the big man answered, very gently. "We all have our own ways of praying. Mine is a complete acquiescence in whatever fate may send me — a cheerful acquiescence. The highest religion and the highest science seem to unite on that."

"I cannot truthfully describe my mental attitude as acquiescence and far less cheerful acquiescence," grumbled Summerlee over his pipe. "I submit because I have to. I confess that I should have liked another year of life to finish my classification of the chalk fossils."

"Your unfinished work is a small thing," said Challenger pompously, "when weighed against the fact that my own *magnum opus*, 'The Ladder of Life,' is still in the first stages. My brain, my reading, my experience — in fact, my whole unique equipment — were to be condensed into that epoch-making volume. And yet, as I say, I acquiesce."

"I expect we've all left some loose ends stickin' out," said Lord John. "What are yours, young fellah?"

"I was working at a book of verses," I answered.

"Well, the world has escaped that, anyhow," said Lord John. "There's always compensation somewhere if you grope around."

"What about you?" I asked.

"Well, it just so happens that I was tidied up and ready. I'd promised Merivale to go to Tibet for a snow leopard in the spring. But it's hard on you, Mrs. Challenger, when you have just built up this pretty home."

"Where George is, there is my home. But, oh, what would I not give for one last walk together in the fresh morning air upon those beautiful downs!"

Our hearts re-echoed her words. The sun had burst through the gauzy mists which veiled it, and the whole broad Weald was washed in golden light. Sitting in our dark and poisonous atmosphere that glorious, clean, wind-swept countryside seemed a very dream of beauty. Mrs. Challenger held her hand stretched out to it in her longing. We drew up chairs and sat in a semicircle in the window. The atmosphere was already very close. It seemed to me that the shadows of death were drawing in upon us — the last of our race. It was like an invisible curtain closing down upon every side.

"That cylinder is not lastin' too well," said Lord John with a long gasp for breath.

"The amount contained is variable," said Challenger, "depending upon the pressure and care with which it has been bottled. I am inclined to agree with you, Roxton, that this one is defective."

"So we are to be cheated out of the last hour of our lives," Summerlee remarked bitterly. "An excellent final illustration of the sordid age in which we have lived. Well, Challenger, now is your time if you wish to study the subjective phenomena of physical dissolution."

"Sit on the stool at my knee and give me your hand," said Challenger to his wife. "I think, my friends, that a further delay in this insufferable atmosphere is hardly advisable. You would not desire it, dear, would you?"

His wife gave a little groan and sank her face against his leg.

"I've seen the folk bathin' in the Serpentine in winter," said Lord John. "When the rest are in, you see one or two shiverin' on the bank, envyin' the others that have taken the plunge. It's the last that have the worst of it. I'm all for a header and have done with it."

"You would open the window and face the ether?"

"Better be poisoned than stifled."

Summerlee nodded his reluctant acquiescence and held out his thin hand to Challenger.

"We've had our quarrels in our time, but that's all over," said he. "We were good friends and had a respect for each other under the surface. Good-by!”

“Good-by, young fellah!” said Lord John. “The window’s plastered up. You can’t open it.”

Challenger stooped and raised his wife, pressing her to his breast, while she threw her arms round his neck.

“Give me that field-glass, Malone,” said he gravely.

I handed it to him.

“Into the hands of the Power that made us we render ourselves again!” he shouted in his voice of thunder, and at the words he hurled the field-glass through the window.

Full in our flushed faces, before the last tinkle of falling fragments had died away, there came the wholesome breath of the wind, blowing strong and sweet.

I don’t know how long we sat in amazed silence. Then as in a dream, I heard Challenger’s voice once more.

“We are back in normal conditions,” he cried. “The world has cleared the poison belt, but we alone of all mankind are saved.”

CHAPTER V

THE DEAD WORLD

I remember that we all sat gasping in our chairs, with that sweet, wet south-western breeze, fresh from the sea, flapping the muslin curtains and cooling our flushed faces. I wonder how long we sat! None of us afterwards could agree at all on that point. We were bewildered, stunned, semi-conscious. We had all braced our courage for death, but this fearful and sudden new fact — that we must continue to live after we had survived the race to which we belonged — struck us with the shock of a physical blow and left us prostrate. Then gradually the suspended mechanism began to move once more; the shuttles of memory worked; ideas weaved themselves together in our minds. We saw, with vivid, merciless clearness, the relations between the past, the present, and the future — the lives that we had led and the lives which we would have to live. Our eyes turned in silent horror upon those of our companions and found the same answering look in theirs. Instead of the joy which men might have been expected to feel who had so narrowly escaped an imminent death, a terrible wave of darkest depression submerged us. Everything on earth that we loved had been washed away into the great, infinite, unknown ocean, and here were we marooned upon this desert island of a world, without companions, hopes, or aspirations. A few years' skulking like jackals among the graves of the human race and then our belated and lonely end would come.

"It's dreadful, George, dreadful!" the lady cried in an agony of sobs. "If we had only passed with the others! Oh, why did you save us? I feel as if it is we that are dead and everyone else alive."

Challenger's great eyebrows were drawn down in concentrated thought, while his huge, hairy paw closed upon the outstretched hand of his wife. I had observed that she always held out her arms to him in trouble as a child would to its mother.

"Without being a fatalist to the point of nonresistance," said he, "I have always found that the highest wisdom lies in an acquiescence with the actual.” He spoke slowly, and there was a vibration of feeling in his sonorous voice.

“I do *not* acquiesce,” said Summerlee firmly.

“I don’t see that it matters a row of pins whether you acquiesce or whether you don’t,” remarked Lord John. “You’ve got to take it, whether you take it fightin’ or take it lyin’ down, so what’s the odds whether you acquiesce or not?

“I can’t remember that anyone asked our permission before the thing began, and nobody’s likely to ask it now. So what difference can it make what we may think of it?”

“It is just all the difference between happiness and misery,” said Challenger with an abstracted face, still patting his wife’s hand. “You can swim with the tide and have peace in mind and soul, or you can thrust against it and be bruised and weary. This business is beyond us, so let us accept it as it stands and say no more.”

“But what in the world are we to do with our lives?” I asked, appealing in desperation to the blue, empty heaven.

“What am I to do, for example? There are no newspapers, so there’s an end of my vocation.”

“And there’s nothin’ left to shoot, and no more soldierin’, so there’s an end of mine,” said Lord John.

“And there are no students, so there’s an end of mine,” cried Summerlee.

“But I have my husband and my house, so I can thank heaven that there is no end of mine,” said the lady.

“Nor is there an end of mine,” remarked Challenger, “for science is not dead, and this catastrophe in itself will offer us many most absorbing problems for investigation.”

He had now flung open the windows and we were gazing out upon the silent and motionless landscape.

“Let me consider,” he continued. “It was about three, or a little after, yesterday afternoon that the world finally entered the poison belt to the extent of being completely submerged. It is now nine o’clock. The question is, at what hour did we pass out from it?”

“The air was very bad at daybreak,” said I.

“Later than that,” said Mrs. Challenger. “As late as eight o’clock I distinctly felt the same choking at my throat which came at the outset.”

“Then we shall say that it passed just after eight o’clock. For seventeen hours the world has been soaked in the poisonous ether. For that length of time the Great Gardener has sterilized the human mold which had grown over the surface of His fruit. Is it possible that the work is incompletely done — that others may have survived besides ourselves?”

“That’s what I was wonderin’” said Lord John. “Why should we be the only pebbles on the beach?”

“It is absurd to suppose that anyone besides ourselves can possibly have survived,” said Summerlee with conviction. “Consider that the poison was so virulent that even a man who is as strong as an ox and has not a nerve in his body, like Malone here, could hardly get up the stairs before he fell unconscious. Is it likely that anyone could stand seventeen minutes of it, far less hours?”

“Unless someone saw it coming and made preparation, same as old friend Challenger did.”

“That, I think, is hardly probable,” said Challenger, projecting his beard and sinking his eyelids. “The combination of observation, inference, and anticipatory imagination which enabled me to foresee the danger is what one can hardly expect twice in the same generation.”

“Then your conclusion is that everyone is certainly dead?”

“There can be little doubt of that. We have to remember, however, that the poison worked from below upwards and would possibly be less virulent in the higher strata of the atmosphere. It is strange, indeed, that it should be so; but it presents one of those features which will afford us in the future a fascinating field for study. One could imagine, therefore, that if one had to search for survivors one would turn one’s eyes with best hopes of success to some Tibetan village or some Alpine farm, many thousands of feet above the sea level.”

“Well, considerin’ that there are no railroads and no steamers you might as well talk about survivors in the moon,” said Lord John. “But what I’m askin’ myself is whether it’s really over or whether it’s only half-time.”

Summerlee craned his neck to look round the horizon. “It seems clear and fine,” said he in a very dubious voice; “but so it did yesterday. I am by no means assured that it is all over.”

Challenger shrugged his shoulders.

“We must come back once more to our fatalism,” said he. “If the world has undergone this experience before, which is not outside the range of possibility; it was certainly a very long time ago. Therefore, we may reasonably hope that it will be very long before it occurs again."

"That's all very well," said Lord John, "but if you get an earthquake shock you are mighty likely to have a second one right on the top of it. I think we'd be wise to stretch our legs and have a breath of air while we have the chance. Since our oxygen is exhausted we may just as well be caught outside as in."

It was strange the absolute lethargy which had come upon us as a reaction after our tremendous emotions of the last twenty-four hours. It was both mental and physical, a deep-lying feeling that nothing mattered and that everything was a weariness and a profitless exertion. Even Challenger had succumbed to it, and sat in his chair, with his great head leaning upon his hands and his thoughts far away, until Lord John and I, catching him by each arm, fairly lifted him on to his feet, receiving only the glare and growl of an angry mastiff for our trouble. However, once we had got out of our narrow haven of refuge into the wider atmosphere of everyday life, our normal energy came gradually back to us once more.

But what were we to begin to do in that graveyard of a world? Could ever men have been faced with such a question since the dawn of time? It is true that our own physical needs, and even our luxuries, were assured for the future. All the stores of food, all the vintages of wine, all the treasures of art were ours for the taking. But what were we to *do*? Some few tasks appealed to us at once, since they lay ready to our hands. We descended into the kitchen and laid the two domestics upon their respective beds. They seemed to have died without suffering, one in the chair by the fire, the other upon the scullery floor. Then we carried in poor Austin from the yard. His muscles were set as hard as a board in the most exaggerated rigor mortis, while the contraction of the fibres had drawn his mouth into a hard sardonic grin. This symptom was prevalent among all who had died from the poison. Wherever we went we were confronted by those grinning faces, which seemed to mock at our dreadful position, smiling silently and grimly at the ill-fated survivors of their race.

"Look here," said Lord John, who had paced restlessly about the dining-room whilst we partook of some food, "I don't know how you fellows feel about it, but for my part, I simply *can't* sit here and do nothin'."

"Perhaps," Challenger answered, "you would have the kindness to suggest what you think we ought to do."

"Get a move on us and see all that has happened."

"That is what I should myself propose."

"But not in this little country village. We can see from the window all that this place can teach us."

"Where should we go, then?"

"To London!"

"That's all very well," grumbled Summerlee. "You may be equal to a forty-mile walk, but I'm not so sure about Challenger, with his stumpy legs, and I am perfectly sure about myself." Challenger was very much annoyed.

"If you could see your way, sir, to confining your remarks to your own physical peculiarities, you would find that you had an ample field for comment," he cried.

"I had no intention to offend you, my dear Challenger," cried our tactless friend, "You can't be held responsible for your own physique. If nature has given you a short, heavy body you cannot possibly help having stumpy legs."

Challenger was too furious to answer. He could only growl and blink and bristle. Lord John hastened to intervene before the dispute became more violent.

"You talk of walking. Why should we walk?" said he.

"Do you suggest taking a train?" asked Challenger, still simmering.

"What's the matter with the motor-car? Why should we not go in that?"

"I am not an expert," said Challenger, pulling at his beard reflectively. "At the same time, you are right in supposing that the human intellect in its higher manifestations should be sufficiently flexible to turn itself to anything. Your idea is an excellent one, Lord John. I myself will drive you all to London."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Summerlee with decision.

"No, indeed, George!" cried his wife. "You only tried once, and you remember how you crashed through the gate of the garage."

"It was a momentary want of concentration," said Challenger complacently. "You can consider the matter settled. I will certainly drive you all to London."

The situation was relieved by Lord John.

"What's the car?" he asked.

"A twenty-horsepower Humber."

“Why, I’ve driven one for years,” said he. “By George!” he added. “I never thought I’d live to take the whole human race in one load. There’s just room for five, as I remember it. Get your things on, and I’ll be ready at the door by ten o’clock.”

Sure enough, at the hour named, the car came purring and crackling from the yard with Lord John at the wheel. I took my seat beside him, while the lady, a useful little buffer state, was squeezed in between the two men of wrath at the back. Then Lord John released his brakes, slid his lever rapidly from first to third, and we sped off upon the strangest drive that ever human beings have taken since man first came upon the earth.

You are to picture the loveliness of nature upon that August day, the freshness of the morning air, the golden glare of the summer sunshine, the cloudless sky, the luxuriant green of the Sussex woods, and the deep purple of heather-clad downs. As you looked round upon the many-coloured beauty of the scene all thought of a vast catastrophe would have passed from your mind had it not been for one sinister sign — the solemn, all-embracing silence. There is a gentle hum of life which pervades a closely-settled country, so deep and constant that one ceases to observe it, as the dweller by the sea loses all sense of the constant murmur of the waves. The twitter of birds, the buzz of insects, the far-off echo of voices, the lowing of cattle, the distant barking of dogs, roar of trains, and rattle of carts — all these form one low, unremitting note, striking unheeded upon the ear. We missed it now. This deadly silence was appalling. So solemn was it, so impressive, that the buzz and rattle of our motor-car seemed an unwarrantable intrusion, an indecent disregard of this reverent stillness which lay like a pall over and round the ruins of humanity. It was this grim hush, and the tall clouds of smoke which rose here and there over the country-side from smoldering buildings, which cast a chill into our hearts as we gazed round at the glorious panorama of the Weald.

And then there were the dead! At first those endless groups of drawn and grinning faces filled us with a shuddering horror. So vivid and mordant was the impression that I can live over again that slow descent of the station hill, the passing by the nurse-girl with the two babes, the sight of the old horse on his knees between the shafts, the cabman twisted across his seat, and the young man inside with his hand upon the open door in the very act of springing out. Lower down were six reapers all in a litter, their limbs crossing, their dead, unwinking eyes gazing upwards at the glare of heaven.

These things I see as in a photograph. But soon, by the merciful provision of nature, the over-excited nerve ceased to respond. The very vastness of the horror took away from its personal appeal. Individuals merged into groups, groups into crowds, crowds into a universal phenomenon which one soon accepted as the inevitable detail of every scene. Only here and there, where some particularly brutal or grotesque incident caught the attention, did the mind come back with a sudden shock to the personal and human meaning of it all.

Above all, there was the fate of the children. That, I remember, filled us with the strongest sense of intolerable injustice. We could have wept — Mrs. Challenger did weep — when we passed a great council school and saw the long trail of tiny figures scattered down the road which led from it. They had been dismissed by their terrified teachers and were speeding for their homes when the poison caught them in its net. Great numbers of people were at the open windows of the houses. In Tunbridge Wells there was hardly one which had not its staring, smiling face. At the last instant the need of air, that very craving for oxygen which we alone had been able to satisfy, had sent them flying to the window. The sidewalks too were littered with men and women, hatless and bonnetless, who had rushed out of the houses. Many of them had fallen in the roadway. It was a lucky thing that in Lord John we had found an expert driver, for it was no easy matter to pick one’s way. Passing through the villages or towns we could only go at a walking pace, and once, I remember, opposite the school at Tonbridge, we had to halt some time while we carried aside the bodies which blocked our path.

A few small, definite pictures stand out in my memory from amid that long panorama of death upon the Sussex and Kentish high roads. One was that of a great, glittering motor-car standing outside the inn at the village of Southborough. It bore, as I should guess, some pleasure party upon their return from Brighton or from Eastbourne. There were three gaily dressed women, all young and beautiful, one of them with a Peking spaniel upon her lap. With them were a rakish-looking elderly man and a young aristocrat, his eyeglass still in his eye, his cigarette burned down to the stub between the fingers of his begloved hand. Death must have come on them in an instant and fixed them as they sat. Save that the elderly man had at the last moment torn out his collar in an effort to breathe, they might all have been asleep. On one side of the car a waiter with some broken glasses beside a tray was huddled near the step. On the other, two very ragged tramps, a man and a woman, lay where they had fallen, the man with his long, thin arm still outstretched, even as he had asked for alms in his lifetime. One instant of time had put aristocrat, waiter, tramp, and dog upon one common footing of inert and dissolving protoplasm.

I remember another singular picture, some miles on the London side of Sevenoaks. There is a large convent upon the left, with a long, green slope in front of it. Upon this slope were assembled a great number of school children, all kneeling at prayer. In front of them was a fringe of nuns, and higher up the slope, facing towards them, a single figure whom we took to be the Mother Superior. Unlike the pleasure-seekers in the motor-car, these people seemed to have had warning of their danger and to have died beautifully together, the teachers and the taught, assembled for their last common lesson.

My mind is still stunned by that terrific experience, and I grope vainly for means of expression by which I can reproduce the emotions which we felt. Perhaps it is best and wisest not to try, but merely to indicate the facts. Even Summerlee and Challenger were crushed, and we heard nothing of our companions behind us save an occasional whimper from the lady. As to Lord John, he was too intent upon his wheel and the difficult task of threading his way along such roads to have time or inclination for conversation. One phrase he used with such wearisome iteration that it stuck in my memory and at last almost made me laugh as a comment upon the day of doom.

“Pretty doin’s! What!”

That was his ejaculation as each fresh tremendous combination of death and disaster displayed itself before us. “Pretty doin’s! What!” he cried, as we descended the station hill at Rotherfield, and it was still “Pretty doin’s! What!” as we picked our way through a wilderness of death in the High Street of Lewisham and the Old Kent Road.

It was here that we received a sudden and amazing shock. Out of the window of a humble corner house there appeared a fluttering handkerchief waving at the end of a long, thin human arm. Never had the sight of unexpected death caused our hearts to stop and then throb so wildly as did this amazing indication of life. Lord John ran the motor to the curb, and in an instant we had rushed through the open door of the house and up the staircase to the second-floor front room from which the signal proceeded.

A very old lady sat in a chair by the open window, and close to her, laid across a second chair, was a cylinder of oxygen, smaller but of the same shape as those which had saved our own lives. She turned her thin, drawn, bespectacled face toward us as we crowded in at the doorway.

“I feared that I was abandoned here forever,” said she, “for I am an invalid and cannot stir.”

“Well, madam,” Challenger answered, “it is a lucky chance that we happened to pass.”

“I have one all-important question to ask you,” said she. “Gentlemen, I beg that you will be frank with me. What effect will these events have upon London and North-Western Railway shares?”

We should have laughed had it not been for the tragic eagerness with which she listened for our answer. Mrs. Burston, for that was her name, was an aged widow, whose whole income depended upon a small holding of this stock. Her life had been regulated by the rise and fall of the dividend, and she could form no conception of existence save as it was affected by the quotation of her shares. In vain we pointed out to her that all the money in the world was hers for the taking and was useless when taken. Her old mind would not adapt itself to the new idea, and she wept loudly over her vanished stock. “It was all I had,” she wailed. “If that is gone I may as well go too.”

Amid her lamentations we found out how this frail old plant had lived where the whole great forest had fallen. She was a confirmed invalid and an asthmatic. Oxygen had been prescribed for her malady, and a tube was in her room at the moment of the crisis. She had naturally inhaled some as had been her habit when there was a difficulty with her breathing. It had given her relief, and by doling out her supply she had managed to survive the night. Finally she had fallen asleep and been awakened by the buzz of our motor-car. As it was impossible to take her on with us, we saw that she had all necessaries of life and promised to communicate with her in a couple of days at the latest. So we left her, still weeping bitterly over her vanished stock.

As we approached the Thames the block in the streets became thicker and the obstacles more bewildering. It was with difficulty that we made our way across London Bridge. The approaches to it upon the Middlesex side were choked from end to end with frozen traffic which made all further advance in that direction impossible. A ship was blazing brightly alongside one of the wharves near the bridge, and the air was full of drifting smuts and of a heavy acrid smell of burning. There was a cloud of dense smoke somewhere near the Houses of Parliament, but it was impossible from where we were to see what was on fire.

"I don't know how it strikes you," Lord John remarked as he brought his engine to a standstill, "but it seems to me the country is more cheerful than the town. Dead London is gettin' on my nerves. I'm for a cast round and then gettin' back to Rotherfield."

"I confess that I do not see what we can hope for here," said Professor Summerlee.

"At the same time," said Challenger, his great voice booming strangely amid the silence, "it is difficult for us to conceive that out of seven millions of people there is only this one old woman who by some peculiarity of constitution or some accident of occupation has managed to survive this catastrophe."

"If there should be others, how can we hope to find them, George?" asked the lady. "And yet I agree with you that we cannot go back until we have tried."

Getting out of the car and leaving it by the curb, we walked with some difficulty along the crowded pavement of King William Street and entered the open door of a large insurance office. It was a corner house, and we chose it as commanding a view in every direction. Ascending the stair, we passed through what I suppose to have been the board-room, for eight elderly men were seated round a long table in the centre of it. The high window was open and we all stepped out upon the balcony. From it we could see the crowded city streets radiating in every direction, while below us the road was black from side to side with the tops of the motionless taxis. All, or nearly all, had their heads pointed outwards, showing how the terrified men of the city had at the last moment made a vain endeavor to rejoin their families in the suburbs or the country. Here and there amid the humbler cabs towered the great brass-spangled motor-car of some wealthy magnate, wedged hopelessly among the dammed stream of arrested traffic. Just beneath us there was such a one of great size and luxurious appearance, with its owner, a fat old man, leaning out, half his gross body through the window, and his podgy hand, gleaming with diamonds, outstretched as he urged his chauffeur to make a last effort to break through the press.

A dozen motor-buses towered up like islands in this flood, the passengers who crowded the roofs lying all huddled together and across each others' laps like a child's toys in a nursery. On a broad lamp pedestal in the centre of the roadway, a burly policeman was standing, leaning his back against the post in so natural an attitude that it was hard to realise that he was not alive, while at his feet there lay a ragged newsboy with his bundle of papers on the ground beside him. A paper-cart had got blocked in the crowd, and we could read in large letters, black upon yellow, "Scene at Lord's. County Match Interrupted." This must have been the earliest edition, for there were other placards bearing the legend, "Is It the End? Great Scientist's Warning." And another, "Is Challenger Justified? Ominous Rumours."

Challenger pointed the latter placard out to his wife, as it thrust itself like a banner above the throng. I could see him throw out his chest and stroke his beard as he looked at it. It pleased and flattered that complex mind to think that London had died with his name and his words still present in their thoughts. His feelings were so evident that they aroused the sardonic comment of his colleague.

"In the limelight to the last, Challenger," he remarked.

"So it would appear," he answered complacently. "Well," he added as he looked down the long vista of the radiating streets, all silent and all choked up with death, "I really see no purpose to be served by our staying any longer in London. I suggest that we return at once to Rotherfield and then take counsel as to how we shall most profitably employ the years which lie before us."

Only one other picture shall I give of the scenes which we carried back in our memories from the dead city. It is a glimpse which we had of the interior of the old church of St. Mary's, which is at the very point where our car was awaiting us. Picking our way among the prostrate figures upon the steps, we pushed open the swing door and entered. It was a wonderful sight. The church was crammed from end to end with kneeling figures in every posture of supplication and abasement. At the last dreadful moment, brought suddenly face to face with the realities of life, those terrific realities which hang over us even while we follow the shadows, the terrified people had rushed into those old city churches which for generations had hardly ever held a congregation. There they huddled as close as they could kneel, many of them in their agitation still wearing their hats, while above them in the pulpit a young man in lay dress had apparently been addressing them when he and they had been overwhelmed by the same fate. He lay now, like Punch in his booth, with his head and two limp arms hanging over the ledge of the pulpit. It was a nightmare, the grey, dusty church, the rows of agonized figures, the dimness and silence of it all. We moved about with hushed whispers, walking upon our tip-toes.

And then suddenly I had an idea. At one corner of the church, near the door, stood the ancient font, and behind it a deep recess in which there hung the ropes for the bell-ringers. Why should we not send a message out over London which would attract to us anyone who might still be alive? I ran across, and pulling at the list-covered rope, I was surprised to find how difficult it was to swing the bell. Lord John had followed me.

“By George, young fellah!” said he, pulling off his coat. “You’ve hit on a dooced good notion. Give me a grip and we’ll soon have a move on it.”

But, even then, so heavy was the bell that it was not until Challenger and Summerlee had added their weight to ours that we heard the roaring and clanging above our heads which told us that the great clapper was ringing out its music. Far over dead London resounded our message of comradeship and hope to any fellow-man surviving. It cheered our own hearts, that strong, metallic call, and we turned the more earnestly to our work, dragged two feet off the earth with each upward jerk of the rope, but all straining together on the downward heave, Challenger the lowest of all, bending all his great strength to the task and flopping up and down like a monstrous bull-frog, croaking with every pull. It was at that moment that an artist might have taken a picture of the four adventurers, the comrades of many strange perils in the past, whom fate had now chosen for so supreme an experience. For half an hour we worked, the sweat dropping from our faces, our arms and backs aching with the exertion. Then we went out into the portico of the church and looked eagerly up and down the silent, crowded streets. Not a sound, not a motion, in answer to our summons.

“It’s no use. No one is left,” I cried.

“We can do nothing more,” said Mrs. Challenger. “For God’s sake, George, let us get back to Rotherfield. Another hour of this dreadful, silent city would drive me mad.”

We got into the car without another word. Lord John backed her round and turned her to the south. To us the chapter seemed closed. Little did we foresee the strange new chapter which was to open.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT AWAKENING

And now I come to the end of this extraordinary incident, so overshadowing in its importance, not only in our own small, individual lives, but in the general history of the human race. As I said when I began my narrative, when that history comes to be written, this occurrence will surely stand out among all other events like a mountain towering among its foothills. Our generation has been reserved for a very special fate since it has been chosen to experience so wonderful a thing. How long its effect may last — how long mankind may preserve the humility and reverence which this great shock has taught it — can only be shown by the future. I think it is safe to say that things can never be quite the same again. Never can one realise how powerless and ignorant one is, and how one is upheld by an unseen hand, until for an instant that hand has seemed to close and to crush. Death has been imminent upon us. We know that at any moment it may be again. That grim presence shadows our lives, but who can deny that in that shadow the sense of duty, the feeling of sobriety and responsibility, the appreciation of the gravity and of the objects of life, the earnest desire to develop and improve, have grown and become real with us to a degree that has leavened our whole society from end to end? It is something beyond sects and beyond dogmas. It is rather an alteration of perspective, a shifting of our sense of proportion, a vivid realisation that we are insignificant and evanescent creatures, existing on sufferance and at the mercy of the first chill wind from the unknown. But if the world has grown graver with this knowledge it is not, I think, a sadder place in consequence. Surely we are agreed that the more sober and restrained pleasures of the present are deeper as well as wiser than the noisy, foolish hustle which passed so often for enjoyment in the days of old — days so recent and yet already so inconceivable. Those empty lives which were wasted in aimless visiting and being visited, in the worry of great and unnecessary households, in the arranging and eating of elaborate and tedious meals, have now found rest and health in the reading, the music, the gentle family communion which comes from a simpler and saner division of their time. With greater health and greater pleasure they are richer than before, even after they have paid those increased contributions to the common fund which have so raised the standard of life in these islands.

There is some clash of opinion as to the exact hour of the great awakening. It is generally agreed that, apart from the difference of clocks, there may have been local causes which influenced the action of the poison. Certainly, in each separate district the resurrection was practically simultaneous. There are numerous witnesses that Big Ben pointed to ten minutes past six at the moment. The Astronomer Royal has fixed the Greenwich time at twelve past six. On the other hand, Laird Johnson, a very capable East Anglia observer, has recorded six-twenty as the hour. In the Hebrides it was as late as seven. In our own case there can be no doubt whatever, for I was seated in Challenger's study with his carefully tested chronometer in front of me at the moment. The hour was a quarter-past six.

An enormous depression was weighing upon my spirits. The cumulative effect of all the dreadful sights which we had seen upon our journey was heavy upon my soul. With my abounding animal health and great physical energy any kind of mental clouding was a rare event. I had the Irish faculty of seeing some gleam of humor in every darkness. But now the obscurity was appalling and unrelieved. The others were downstairs making their plans for the future. I sat by the open window, my chin resting upon my hand and my mind absorbed in the misery of our situation. Could we continue to live? That was the question which I had begun to ask myself. Was it possible to exist upon a dead world? Just as in physics the greater body draws to itself the lesser, would we not feel an overpowering attraction from that vast body of humanity which had passed into the unknown? How would the end come? Would it be from a return of the poison? Or would the earth be uninhabitable from the mephitic products of universal decay? Or, finally, might our awful situation prey upon and unbalance our minds? A group of insane folk upon a dead world! My mind was brooding upon this last dreadful idea when some slight noise caused me to look down upon the road beneath me. The old cab horse was coming up the hill!

I was conscious at the same instant of the twittering of birds, of someone coughing in the yard below, and of a background of movement in the landscape. And yet I remember that it was that absurd, emaciated, superannuated cab-horse which held my gaze. Slowly and wheezily it was climbing the slope. Then my eye traveled to the driver sitting hunched up upon the box and finally to the young man who was leaning out of the window in some excitement and shouting a direction. They were all indubitably, aggressively alive!

Everybody was alive once more! Had it all been a delusion? Was it conceivable that this whole poison belt incident had been an elaborate dream? For an instant my startled brain was really ready to believe it. Then I looked down, and there was the rising blister on my hand where it was frayed by the rope of the city bell. It had really been so, then. And yet here was the world resuscitated — here was life come back in an instant full tide to the planet. Now, as my eyes wandered all over the great landscape, I saw it in every direction — and moving, to my amazement, in the very same groove in which it had halted. There were the golfers. Was it possible that they were going on with their game? Yes, there was a fellow driving off from a tee, and that other group upon the green were surely putting for the hole. The reapers were slowly trooping back to their work. The nurse-girl slapped one of her charges and then began to push the perambulator up the hill. Everyone had unconcernedly taken up the thread at the very point where they had dropped it.

I rushed downstairs, but the hall door was open, and I heard the voices of my companions, loud in astonishment and congratulation, in the yard. How we all shook hands and laughed as we came together, and how Mrs. Challenger kissed us all in her emotion, before she finally threw herself into the bear-hug of her husband.

“But they could not have been asleep!” cried Lord John. “Dash it all, Challenger, you don’t mean to believe that those folk were asleep with their staring eyes and stiff limbs and that awful death grin on their faces!”

“It can only have been the condition that is called catalepsy,” said Challenger. “It has been a rare phenomenon in the past and has constantly been mistaken for death. While it endures, the temperature falls, the respiration disappears, the heartbeat is indistinguishable — in fact, it *is* death, save that it is evanescent. Even the most comprehensive mind” — here he closed his eyes and simpered—”could hardly conceive a universal outbreak of it in this fashion.”

“You may label it catalepsy,” remarked Summerlee, “but, after all, that is only a name, and we know as little of the result as we do of the poison which has caused it. The most we can say is that the vitiated ether has produced a temporary death.”

Austin was seated all in a heap on the step of the car. It was his coughing which I had heard from above. He had been holding his head in silence, but now he was muttering to himself and running his eyes over the car.

“Young fat-head!” he grumbled. “Can’t leave things alone!”

“What’s the matter, Austin?”

“Lubricators left running, sir. Someone has been fooling with the car. I expect it’s that young garden boy, sir.”

Lord John looked guilty.

“I don’t know what’s amiss with me,” continued Austin, staggering to his feet. “I expect I came over queer when I was hosing her down. I seem to remember flopping over by the step. But I’ll swear I never left those lubricator taps on.”

In a condensed narrative the astonished Austin was told what had happened to himself and the world. The mystery of the dripping lubricators was also explained to him. He listened with an air of deep distrust when told how an amateur had driven his car and with absorbed interest to the few sentences in which our experiences of the sleeping city were recorded. I can remember his comment when the story was concluded.

“Was you outside the Bank of England, sir?”

“Yes, Austin.”

“With all them millions inside and everybody asleep?”

“That was so.”

“And I not there!” he groaned, and turned dismally once more to the hosing of his car.

There was a sudden grinding of wheels upon gravel. The old cab had actually pulled up at Challenger’s door. I saw the young occupant step out from it. An instant later the maid, who looked as tousled and bewildered as if she had that instant been aroused from the deepest sleep, appeared with a card upon a tray. Challenger snorted ferociously as he looked at it, and his thick black hair seemed to bristle up in his wrath.

“A pressman!” he growled. Then with a deprecating smile: “After all, it is natural that the whole world should hasten to know what I think of such an episode.”

“That can hardly be his errand,” said Summerlee, “for he was on the road in his cab before ever the crisis came.”

I looked at the card: “James Baxter, London Correspondent, New York Monitor.”

“You’ll see him?” said I.

“Not I.”

“Oh, George! You should be kinder and more considerate to others. Surely you have learned something from what we have undergone.”

He tut-tutted and shook his big, obstinate head.

“A poisonous breed! Eh, Malone? The worst weed in modern civilization, the ready tool of the quack and the hindrance of the self-respecting man! When did they ever say a good word for me?”

“When did you ever say a good word to them?” I answered. “Come, sir, this is a stranger who has made a journey to see you. I am sure that you won’t be rude to him.”

“Well, well,” he grumbled, “you come with me and do the talking. I protest in advance against any such outrageous invasion of my private life.” Muttering and mumbling, he came rolling after me like an angry and rather ill-conditioned mastiff.

The dapper young American pulled out his notebook and plunged instantly into his subject.

“I came down, sir,” said he, “because our people in America would very much like to hear more about this danger which is, in your opinion, pressing upon the world.”

“I know of no danger which is now pressing upon the world,” Challenger answered gruffly.

The pressman looked at him in mild surprise.

“I meant, sir, the chances that the world might run into a belt of poisonous ether.”

“I do not now apprehend any such danger,” said Challenger.

The pressman looked even more perplexed.

“You are Professor Challenger, are you not?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; that is my name.”

“I cannot understand, then, how you can say that there is no such danger. I am alluding to your own letter, published above your name in the London Times of this morning.”

It was Challenger’s turn to look surprised.

“This morning?” said he. “No London Times was published this morning.”

“Surely, sir,” said the American in mild remonstrance, “you must admit that the London Times is a daily paper.” He drew out a copy from his inside pocket. “Here is the letter to which I refer.”

Challenger chuckled and rubbed his hands.

“I begin to understand,” said he. “So you read this letter this morning?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And came at once to interview me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you observe anything unusual upon the journey down?”

“Well, to tell the truth, your people seemed more lively and generally human than I have ever seen them. The baggage man set out to tell me a funny story, and that’s a new experience for me in this country.”

“Nothing else?”

“Why, no, sir, not that I can recall.”

“Well, now, what hour did you leave Victoria?”

The American smiled.

“I came here to interview you, Professor, but it seems to be a case of ‘Is this nigger fishing, or is this fish niggering?’ You’re doing most of the work.”

“It happens to interest me. Do you recall the hour?”

“Sure. It was half-past twelve.”

“And you arrived?”

“At a quarter-past two.”

“And you hired a cab?”

“That was so.”

“How far do you suppose it is to the station?”

“Well, I should reckon the best part of two miles.”

“So how long do you think it took you?”

“Well, half an hour, maybe, with that asthmatic in front.”

“So it should be three o’clock?”

“Yes, or a trifle after it.”

“Look at your watch.”

The American did so and then stared at us in astonishment.

“Say!” he cried. “It’s run down. That horse has broken every record, sure. The sun is pretty low, now that I come to look at it. Well, there’s something here I don’t understand.”

“Have you no remembrance of anything remarkable as you came up the hill?”

“Well, I seem to recollect that I was mighty sleepy once. It comes back to me that I wanted to say something to the driver and that I couldn’t make him heed me. I guess it was the heat, but I felt swimmy for a moment. That’s all.”

“So it is with the whole human race,” said Challenger to me. “They have all felt swimmy for a moment. None of them have as yet any comprehension of what has occurred. Each will go on with his interrupted job as Austin has snatched up his hose-pipe or the golfer continued his game. Your editor, Malone, will continue the issue of his papers, and very much amazed he will be at finding that an issue is missing. Yes, my young friend,” he added to the American reporter, with a sudden mood of amused geniality, “it may interest you to know that the world has swum through the poisonous current which swirls like the Gulf Stream through the ocean of ether. You will also kindly note for your own future convenience that to-day is not Friday, August the twenty-seventh, but Saturday, August the twenty-eighth, and that you sat senseless in your cab for twenty-eight hours upon the Rotherfield hill.”

And “right here,” as my American colleague would say, I may bring this narrative to an end. It is, as you are probably aware, only a fuller and more detailed version of the account which appeared in the Monday edition of the Daily Gazette — an account which has been universally admitted to be the greatest journalistic scoop of all time, which sold no fewer than three-and-a-half million copies of the paper. Framed upon the wall of my sanctum I retain those magnificent headlines: —

TWENTY-EIGHT HOURS’ WORLD COMA
UNPRECEDENTED EXPERIENCE
CHALLENGER JUSTIFIED
OUR CORRESPONDENT ESCAPES
ENTHRALLING NARRATIVE
THE OXYGEN ROOM
WEIRD MOTOR DRIVE
DEAD LONDON
REPLACING THE MISSING PAGE

GREAT FIRES AND LOSS OF LIFE
WILL IT RECUR?

Underneath this glorious scroll came nine and a half columns of narrative, in which appeared the first, last, and only account of the history of the planet, so far as one observer could draw it, during one long day of its existence. Challenger and Summerlee have treated the matter in a joint scientific paper, but to me alone was left the popular account. Surely I can sing "Nunc dimittis." What is left but anti-climax in the life of a journalist after that!

But let me not end on sensational headlines and a merely personal triumph. Rather let me quote the sonorous passages in which the greatest of daily papers ended its admirable leader upon the subject — a leader which might well be filed for reference by every thoughtful man.

"It has been a well-worn truism," said the Times, "that our human race are a feeble folk before the infinite latent forces which surround us. From the prophets of old and from the philosophers of our own time the same message and warning have reached us. But, like all oft-repeated truths, it has in time lost something of its actuality and cogency. A lesson, an actual experience, was needed to bring it home. It is from that salutory but terrible ordeal that we have just emerged, with minds which are still stunned by the suddenness of the blow and with spirits which are chastened by the realisation of our own limitations and impotence. The world has paid a fearful price for its schooling. Hardly yet have we learned the full tale of disaster, but the destruction by fire of New York, of Orleans, and of Brighton constitutes in itself one of the greatest tragedies in the history of our race. When the account of the railway and shipping accidents has been completed, it will furnish grim reading, although there is evidence to show that in the vast majority of cases the drivers of trains and engineers of steamers succeeded in shutting off their motive power before succumbing to the poison. But the material damage, enormous as it is both in life and in property, is not the consideration which will be uppermost in our minds to-day. All this may in time be forgotten. But what will not be forgotten, and what will and should continue to obsess our imaginations, is this revelation of the possibilities of the universe, this destruction of our ignorant self-complacency, and this demonstration of how narrow is the path of our material existence and what abysses may lie upon either side of it.

Solemnity and humility are at the base of all our emotions to-day. May they be the foundations upon which a more earnest and reverent race may build a more worthy temple.”

THE LAND OF MIST

This novel was published in 1926. Although this is a Professor Challenger story, it centres more on his daughter Enid and his old friend Edward Malone. Another friend from *The Lost World*, Lord John Roxton, also appears in the novel.

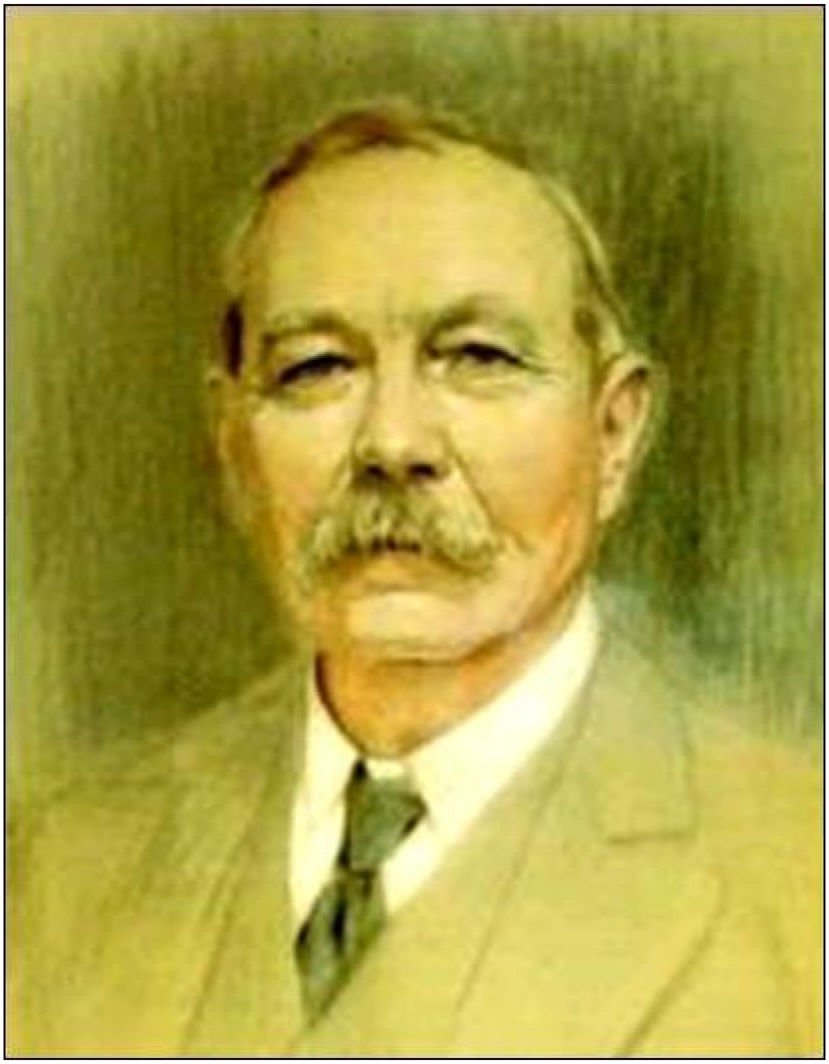

Conan Doyle, close to the time of publication

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1. In Which Our Special Commissioners Make A Start

THE great Professor Challenger has been — very improperly and imperfectly — used in fiction. A daring author placed him in impossible and romantic situations in order to see how he would react to them. He reacted to the extent of a libel action, an abortive appeal for suppression, a riot in Sloane Street, two personal assaults, and the loss of his position as lecturer upon Physiology at the London School of Sub-Tropical Hygiene. Otherwise, the matter passed more peaceably than might have been expected.

But he was losing something of his fire. Those huge shoulders were a little bowed. The spade-shaped Assyrian beard showed tangles of grey amid the black, his eyes were a trifle less aggressive, his smile less self-complacent, his voice as monstrous as ever but less ready to roar down all opposition. Yet he was dangerous, as all around him were painfully aware. The volcano was not extinct, and constant rumblings threatened some new explosion. Life had much yet to teach him, but he was a little less intolerant in learning.

There was a definite date for the change which had been wrought in him. It was the death of his wife. That little bird of a woman had made her nest in the big man’s heart. He had all the tenderness and chivalry which the strong can have for the weak. By yielding everything she had won everything, as a sweet-natured, tactful woman can. And when she died suddenly from virulent pneumonia following influenza, the man staggered and went down. He came up again, smiling ruefully like the stricken boxer, and ready to carry on for many a round with Fate. But he was not the same man, and if it had not been for the help and comradeship of his daughter Enid, he might have never rallied from the blow. She it was who, with clever craft, lured him into every subject which would excite his combative nature and infuriate his mind, until he lived once more in the present and not the past. It was only when she saw him turbulent in controversy, violent to pressmen, and generally offensive to those around him, that she felt he was really in a fair way to recovery.

Enid Challenger was a remarkable girl and should have a paragraph to herself. With the raven-black hair of her father, and the blue eyes and fresh colour of her mother, she was striking, if not beautiful, in appearance. She was quiet, but she was very strong. From her infancy she had either to take her own part against her father, or else to consent to be crushed and to become a mere automaton worked by his strong fingers. She was strong enough to hold her own in a gentle, elastic fashion, which bent to his moods and reasserted itself when they were past. Lately she had felt the constant pressure too oppressive and she had relieved it by feeling out for a career of her own. She did occasional odd jobs for the London press, and did them in such fashion that her name was beginning to be known in Fleet Street. In finding this opening she had been greatly helped by an old friend of her father — and possibly of the reader — Mr. Edward Malone of the *Daily Gazette*

Malone was still the same athletic Irishman who had once won his international cap at Rugby, but life had toned him down also, and made him a more subdued and thoughtful man. He had put away a good deal when last his football-boots had been packed away for good. His muscles may have wilted and his joints stiffened, but his mind was deeper and more active. The boy was dead and the man was born. In person he had altered little, but his moustache was heavier, his back a little rounded, and some lines of thought were tracing themselves upon his brow. Post-war conditions and new world problems had left their mark. For the rest he had made his name in journalism and even to a small degree in literature. He was still a bachelor, though there were some who thought that his hold on that condition was precarious and that Miss Enid Challenger's little white fingers could disengage it. Certainly they were very good chums.

It was a Sunday evening in October, and the lights were just beginning to twinkle out through the fog which had shrouded London from early morning. Professor Challenger's flat at Victoria West Gardens was upon the third floor, and the mist lay thick upon the windows, while the low hum of the attenuated Sunday traffic rose up from an invisible highway beneath, which was outlined only by scattered patches of dull radiance. Professor Challenger sat with his thick, bandy legs outstretched to the fire, and his hands thrust deeply into trouser pockets. His dress had a little of the eccentricity of genius, for he wore a loose-collared shirt, a large knotted maroon-coloured silk tie, and a black velvet smoking-jacket, which, with his flowing beard, gave him the appearance of an elderly and Bohemian artist. On one side of him ready for an excursion, with bowl hat, short-skirted dress of black, and all the other fashionable devices with which women contrive to deform the beauties of nature, there sat his daughter, while Malone, hat in hand, waited by the window.

"I think we should get off, Enid. It is nearly seven," said he.

They were writing joint articles upon the religious denominations of London, and on each Sunday evening they sallied out together to sample some new one and get copy for the next week's issue of the *Gazette*.

"It's not till eight, Ted. We have lots of time."

"Sit down, sir! Sit down!" boomed Challenger, tugging at his beard as was his habit if his temper was rising. "there is nothing annoys me more than having anyone standing behind me. A relic of atavism and the fear of a dagger, but still persistent. That's right. For heaven's sake put your hat down! You have a perpetual air of catching a train."

"That's the journalistic life," said Malone. "If we don't catch the perpetual train we get left. Even Enid is beginning to understand that. But still, as you say, there is time enough."

"How far have you got?" asked Challenger.

Enid consulted a business-like little reporter's notebook. "We have done seven. There was Westminster Abbey for the Church in its most picturesque form, and Saint Agatha for the High Church, and Tudor Place for the Low. Then there was the Westminster Cathedral for Catholics, Endell Street for Presbyterians, and Gloucester Square for Unitarians. But to-night we are trying to introduce some variety. We are doing the Spiritualists."

Challenger snorted like an angry buffalo.

"Next week the lunatic asylums, I presume," said he. "You don't mean to tell me, Malone, that these ghost people have got churches of their own."

"I've been looking into that," said Malone. "I always look up cold facts and figures before I tackle a job. They have over four hundred registered churches in Great Britain."

Challenger's snorts now sounded like a whole herd of buffaloes.

"There seems to me to be absolutely no limit to the inanity and credulity of the human race. Homo Sapiens! Homo idioticus! Who do they pray to — the ghosts?"

"Well, that's what we want to find out. We should get some copy out of them. I need not say that I share your view entirely, but I've seen something of Atkinson of St. Mary’s Hospital lately. He is a rising surgeon, you know.”

“I’ve heard of him — cerebro-spinal.”

“That’s the man. He is level-headed and is looked on as an authority on psychic research, as they call the new science which deals with these matters.”

“Science, indeed!”

“Well, that is what they call it. He seems to take these people seriously. I consult him when I want a reference, for he has the literature at his fingers’ end. ‘Pioneers of the Human Race’ — that was his description.”

“Pioneering them to Bedlam,” growled Challenger. “And literature! What literature have they?”

“Well, that was another surprise. Atkinson has five hundred volumes, but complains that his psychic library is very imperfect. You see, there is French, German, Italian, as well as our own.”

“Well, thank God all the folly is not confined to poor old England. Pestilential nonsense!”

Have you read it up at all, Father?” asked Enid.

“Read it up! I, with all my interests and no time for one-half of them! Enid, you are too absurd.”

“Sorry, Father. You spoke with such assurance, I thought you knew something about it.”

Challenger’s huge head swung round and his lion’s glare rested upon his daughter.

“Do you conceive that a logical brain, a brain of the first order, needs to read and to study before it can detect a manifest absurdity? Am I to study mathematics in order to confute the man who tells me that two and two are five? Must I study physics once more and take down my Principia because some rogue or fool insists that a table can rise in the air against the law of gravity? Does it take five hundred volume to inform us of a thing which is proved in every police-court when an impostor is exposed? Enid, I am ashamed of you!”

His daughter laughed merrily.

“Well, Dad, you need not roar at me any more. I give in. In fact, I have the same feeling that you have.”

“None the less,” said Malone, “some good men support them. I don’t see that you can laugh at Lodge and Crookes and the others.”

“Don’t be absurd, Malone. Every great mind has its weaker side. It is a sort of reaction against all the good sense. You come suddenly upon a vein of positive nonsense. That is what is the matter with these fellows. No, Enid, I haven’t read their reasons, and I don’t mean to, either; some things are beyond the pale. If we re-open all the old questions, how can we ever get ahead with the new ones? This matter is settled by common sense, the law of England, and by the universal assent of every sane European.”

“So that’s that!” said Enid.

“However,” he continued, “I can admit that there are occasional excuses for misunderstandings upon the point.” He sank his voice, and his great grey eyes looked sadly up into vacancy. “ I have known cases where the coldest intellect — even my own intellect — might, for a moment have been shaken.”

Malone scented copy.

“Yes, sir?”

Challenger hesitated. He seemed to be struggling with himself. He wished to speak, and yet speech was painful. Then, with an abrupt, impatient gesture, he plunged into his story:

“I never told you, Enid. It was too . . . too intimate. Perhaps too absurd. I was ashamed to have been so shaken. But it shows how even the best balanced may be caught unawares.”

“Yes, sir?”

“It was after my wife’s death. You knew her, Malone You can guess what it meant to me. It was the night after the cremation . . . horrible, Malone, horrible! I saw the dear little body slide down, down . . . and then the glare of flame and the door clanged to.” His great body shook and he passed his big, hairy hand over his eyes.

“I don’t know why I tell you this; the talk seemed to lead up to it. It may be a warning to you. That night — the night after the cremation — I sat up in the hall. She was there,” he nodded at Enid. “She had fallen asleep in a chair, poor girl. You know the house at Rotherfield, Malone. It was in the big hall. I sat by the fireplace, the room all draped in shadow, and my mind draped In shadow also. I should have sent her to bed, but she was lying back in her chair and I did not wish to wake her. It may have been one in the morning — I remember the moon shining through the stained-glass window. I sat and I brooded. Then suddenly there came a noise.”

“Yes, sir?”

"It was low at first just a ticking. Then it grew louder and more distinct — it was a clear rat-tat-tat. Now comes the queer coincidence, the sort of thing out of which legends grow when credulous folk have the shaping of them. You must know that my wife had a peculiar way of knocking at a door. It was really a little tune which she played with her fingers. I got into the some way so that we could each know when the other knocked. Well, it seemed to me — of course my mind was strained and abnormal — that the taps shaped themselves into the well-known rhythm of her knock. I couldn't localise it. You can think how eagerly I tried. It was above me, somewhere on the woodwork. I lost sense of time. I daresay it was repeated a dozen times at least."

"Oh, Dad, you never told me!"

"No, but I woke you up. I asked you to sit quiet with me for a little."

"Yes, I remember that!"

"Well, we sat, but nothing happened. Not a sound more. Of course it was a delusion. Some insect in the wood; the ivy on the outer wall. My own brain furnished the rhythm. Thus do we make fools and children of ourselves. But it gave me an insight. I saw how even a clever man could be deceived by his own emotions."

"But how do you know, sir, that it was not your wife."

"Absurd, Malone! Absurd, I say! I tell you I saw her in the flames. What was there left?"

"Her soul, her spirit."

Challenger shook his head sadly.

"When that dear body dissolved into its elements — when its gases went into the air and its residue of solids sank into a grey dust — it was the end. There was no more. She had played her part, played it beautifully, nobly. It was done. Death ends all, Malone. This soul talk is the Animism of savages. It is a superstition, a myth. As a physiologist I will undertake to produce crime or virtue by vascular control or cerebral stimulation. I will turn a Jekyll into a Hyde by a surgical operation. Another can do it by a psychological suggestion. Alcohol will do it. Drugs will do it. Absurd, Malone, absurd! As the tree falls, so does it lie. There is no next morning . . . night — eternal night . . . and long rest for the weary worker."

"Well, it's a sad philosophy."

"Better a sad than a false one."

“Perhaps so. There is something virile and manly in facing the worst. I would not contradict. My reason is with you.”

“But my instincts are against!” cried Enid. “No, no, never can I believe it.” She threw her arms round the great bull neck. “Don’t tell me, Daddy, that you with all your complex brain and wonderful self are a thing with no more life hereafter than a broken clock!”

“Four buckets of water and a bagful of salts,” said Challenger as he smilingly detached his daughter’s grip. “That’s your daddy, my lass, and you may as well reconcile your mind to it. Well, it’s twenty to eight. —Come back, if you can, Malone, and let me hear your adventures among the insane.”

2. Which Describes an Evening in Strange Company

THE love-affair of Enid Challenger and Edward Malone is not of the slightest interest to the reader, for the simple reason that it is not of the slightest interest to the writer. The unseen, unnoticed lure of the unborn babe is common to all youthful humanity. We deal in this chronicle with matters which are less common and of higher interest. It is only mentioned in order to explain those terms of frank and intimate comradeship which the narrative discloses. If the human race has obviously improved in anything — in Anglo-Celtic countries, at least — it is that the prim affectations and sly deceits of the past are lessened, and that young men and women can meet in an equality of clean and honest comradeship.

A taxi took the adventurers down Edgware Road and into the side-street called “Helbeck Terrace.” Halfway down, the dull line of brick houses was broken by one glowing gap, where an open arch threw a flood of light into the street. The cab pulled up and the man opened the door.

“This is the Spiritualist Church, sir,” said he. Then, as he saluted to acknowledge his tip, he added in the wheezy voice of the man of all weathers: “Tommy-rot, I call it, sir.” Having eased his conscience thus, he climbed into his seat and a moment later his red rear-lamp was a waning circle in the gloom. Malone laughed.

“Vox populi, Enid. That is as far as the public has got at present.”

“Well, it is as far as we have got, for that matter.”

“Yes, but we are prepared to give them a show. I don’t suppose Cabby is. By Jove, it will be hard luck if we can’t get in!”

There was a crowd at the door and a man was facing them from the top of the step, waving his arms to keep them back.

“It’s no good, friends. I am very sorry, but we can’t help it. We’ve been threatened twice with prosecution for over-crowding.” He turned facetious. “Never heard of an Orthodox Church getting into trouble for that. No, sir, no.”

“I’ve come all the way from ‘Ammersmith,” wailed a voice. The light beat upon the eager, anxious face of the speaker, a little woman in black with a baby in her arms.

"You've come for clairvoyance, Mam," said the usher, with intelligence. "See here, give me the name and address and I will write you, and Mrs. Debbs will give you a sitting gratis. That's better than taking your chance in the crowd when, with all the will in the world, you can't all get a turn. You'll have her to yourself. No, sir, there's no use shovin' . . . What's that? . . . Press?"

He had caught Malone by the elbow.

"Did you say Press? The Press boycott us, sir. Look at the weekly list of services in a Saturday's Times if you doubt it. You wouldn't know there was such a thing as Spiritualism.... What paper, sir? ... 'The *Daily Gazette*.' Well, well, we are getting on. And the lady, too? . . . Special article — my word! Stick to me, sir, and I'll see what I can do. Shut the doors, Joe. No use, friends. When the building fund gets on a bit we'll have more room for you. Now, Miss, this way, if you please."

This way proved to be down the street and round a side-alley which brought them to a small door with a red lamp shining above it.

"I'll have to put you on the platform — there's no standing room in the body of the hall."

"Good gracious!" cried Enid.

"You'll have a fine view, Miss, and maybe get a readin' for yourself if your lucky. It often happens that those nearest the medium get the best chance. Now, sir, in here!"

Here was a frowsy little room with some hats and top-coats draping the dirty, white-washed walls. A thin, austere woman, with eyes which gleamed from behind her glasses, was warming her gaunt hands over a small fire. With his back to the fire in the traditional British attitude was a large, fat man with a bloodless face, a ginger moustache and curious, light-blue eyes — the eyes of a deep-sea mariner. A little bald-headed man with huge horn-rimmed spectacles, and a very handsome and athletic youth in a blue lounge-suit completed the group.

"The others have gone on the platform, Mr. Peeble. There's only five seats left for ourselves." It was the fat man talking.

"I know, I know," said the man who had been addressed as Peeble, a nervous, stringy, dried-up person as he now appeared in the light. " But this is the Press, Mr. Bolsover. *Daily Gazette* special article.... Malone, the name, and Challenger. This is Mr. Bolsover, our President. This is Mrs.

Debbs of Liverpool, the famous clairvoyante. Here is Mr. James, and this tall young gentleman is Mr. Hardy Williams, our energetic secretary. Mr. Williams is a nailer for the buildin' fund. Keep your eye on your pockets if Mr. Williams is around."

They all laughed.

"Collection comes later," said Mr. Williams, smiling.

"A good, rousing article is our best collection," said the stout president. "Ever been to a meeting before, sir?"

"No," said Malone.

"Don't know much about it, I expect."

"No, I don't."

"Well, well, we must expect a slating. They get it from the humorous angle at first. We'll have you writing a very comic account. I never could see anything very funny in the spirit of one's dead wife, but it's a matter of taste and of knowledge also. If they don't know, how can they take it seriously? I don't blame them. We were mostly like that ourselves once. I was one of Bradlaugh's men, and sat under Joseph MacCabe until my old Dad came and pulled me out."

"Good for him!" said the Liverpool medium.

"It was the first time I found I had powers of my own. I saw him like I see you now."

"Was he one of us in the body?"

"Knew no more than I did. But they come on amazin' at the other side if the right folk get hold of them."

"Time's up!" said Mr. Peeble, snapping his watch. "You are on the right of the chair, Mrs. Debbs. Will you go first? Then you, Mr. Chairman. Then you two and myself. Get on the left, Mr. Hardy Williams, and lead the singin'. They want warmin' up and you can do it. Now then, if you please!"

The platform was already crowded, but the newcomers threaded their way to the front amid a decorous murmur of welcome. Mr. Peeble shoved and exhorted and two end seats emerged upon which Enid and Malone perched themselves. The arrangement suited them well, for they could use their notebooks freely behind the shelter of the folk in front.

"What is your reaction?" whispered Enid.

"Not impressed as yet."

"No, nor I," said Enid, "but it's very interesting all the same."

People who are in earnest are always interesting, whether you agree with them or not, and it was impossible to doubt that these people were extremely earnest. The hall was crammed, and as one looked down one saw line after line of upturned faces, curiously alike in type, women predominating, but men running them close. That type was not distinguished nor intellectual, but it was undeniably healthy, honest and sane. Small trades-folk, male and female shopwalkers, better class artisans, lower middle-class women worn with household cares, occasional young folk in search of a sensation — these were the impressions which the audience conveyed to the trained observation of Malone.

The fat president rose and raised his hand.

"My friends," said he, "we have had once more to exclude a great number of people who desired to be with us to-night. It's all a question of the building fund, and Mr. Williams on my left will be glad to hear from any of you I was in a hotel last week and they had a notice hung up in the reception bureau: 'No cheques accepted'. That's not the way Brother Williams talks. You just try him."

The audience laughed. The atmosphere was clearly that of the lecture-hall rather than of the Church.

"There's just one more thing I want to say before I sit down. I'm not here to talk. I'm here to hold this chair down and I mean to do it. It's a hard thing I ask. I want Spiritualists to keep away on Sunday nights. They take up the room that inquirers should have. You can have the morning service. But its better for the cause that there should be room for the stranger. You've had it. Thank God for it. Give the other man a chance." The president plumped back into his chair.

Mr. Peeble sprang to his feet. He was clearly the general utility man who emerges in every society and probably becomes its autocrat. With his thin, eager face and darting hands he was more than a live wire — he was a whole bundle of live wires. Electricity seemed to crackle from his fingertips.

"Hymn One!" he shrieked.

A harmonium droned and the audience rose. It was a fine hymn and lustily sung:

"The world hath felt a quickening breath
From Heaven's eternal shore,
And souls triumphant over death

Return to earth once more.”

There was a ring of exultation in the voices as the refrain rolled out:

“For this we hold our Jubilee
For this with joy we sing,
Oh Grave, where is thy victory
Oh Death, where is thy sting?”

Yes, they were in earnest, these people. And they did not appear to be mentally weaker than their fellows. And yet both Enid and Malone felt a sensation of great pity as they looked at them. How sad to be deceived upon so intimate a matter as this, to be duped by impostors who used their most sacred feelings and their beloved dead as counters with which to cheat them. What did they know of the laws of evidence, of the cold, immutable decrees of scientific law? Poor earnest, honest, deluded people!

“Now!” screamed Mr. Peeble. “We shall ask Mr. Munro from Australia to give us the invocation.”

A wild-looking old man with a shaggy beard and slumbering fire in his eyes rose up and stood for a few seconds with his gaze cast down. Then he began a prayer, very simple, very unpremeditated. Malone jotted down the first sentence: “Oh, Father, we are very ignorant folk and do not well know how to approach you, but we will pray to you the best we know how.” It was all cast in that humble key. Enid and Malone exchanged a swift glance of appreciation.

There was another hymn, less successful than the first, and the chairman then announced that Mr. James Jones of North Wales would now deliver a trance address which would embody the views of his well-known control, Alasha the Atlantean.

Mr. James Jones, a brisk and decided little man in a faded check suit, came to the front and, after standing a minute or so as if in deep thought, gave a violent shudder and began to talk. It must be admitted that save for a certain fixed stare and vacuous glazing of the eye there was nothing to show that anything save Mr. James Jones of North Wales was the orator. It has also to be stated that if Mr. Jones shuddered at the beginning it was the turn of his audience to shudder afterwards. Granting his own claim, he had proved clearly that an Atlantean spirit might be a portentous bore. He droned on with platitudes and ineptitudes while Malone whispered to Enid that if Alasha was a fair specimen of the population it was just as well that his native land was safely engulfed in the Atlantic Ocean. When, with another rather melodramatic shudder, he emerged from his trance, the chairman sprang to his feet with an alacrity which showed that he was taking no risks lest the Atlantean should return.

"We have present with us to-night," he cried, "Mrs. Debbs, the well-known clairvoyante of Liverpool. Mrs. Debbs is, as many of you know, richly endowed with several of those gifts of the spirit of which Saint Paul speaks, and the discerning of spirits is among them. These things depend upon laws which are beyond our control, but a sympathetic atmosphere is essential, and Mrs. Debbs will ask for your good wishes and your prayers while she endeavours to get into touch with some of those shining ones on the other side who may honour us with their presence to-night."

The president sat down and Mrs. Debbs rose amid discreet applause. Very tall, very pale, very thin, with an aquiline face and eyes shining brightly from behind her gold-rimmed glasses, she stood facing her expectant audience. Her head was bent. She seemed to be listening.

"Vibrations!" she cried at last. "I want helpful vibrations. Give me a verse on the harmonium, please."

The instrument droned out "Jesu, Lover of my soul."

The audience sat in silence, expectant and a little awed.

The hall was not too well lit and dark shadows lurked in the corners. The medium still bent her head as if her ears were straining. Then she raised her hand and the music stopped.

"Presently! Presently! All in good time," said the woman, addressing some invisible companion. Then to the audience, "I don't feel that the conditions are very good to-night. I will do my best and so will they. But I must talk to you first."

And she talked. What she said seemed to the two strangers to be absolute gabble. There was no consecutive sense in it, though now and again a phrase or sentence caught the attention. Malone put his stylo in his pocket. There was no use reporting a lunatic. A Spiritualist next him saw his bewildered disgust and leaned towards him.

"She's tuning in. She's getting her wave length," he whispered. "It's all a matter of vibration. Ah, there you are!"

She had stopped in the very middle of a sentence. Her long arm and quivering forefinger shot out. She was pointing at an elderly woman in the second row.

"You! Yes, you, with the red feather. No, not you. The stout lady in front. Yes, you! There is a spirit building up behind you. It is a man. He is a tall man — six foot maybe. High forehead, eyes grey or blue, a long chin brown moustache, lines on his face. Do you recognise him, friend?"

The stout woman looked alarmed, but shook her head.

"Well, see if I can help you. He is holding up a book — brown book with a clasp. It's a ledger same as they have in offices. I get the words 'Caledonian Insurance'. Is that any help?"

The stout woman pursed her lips and shook her head.

"Well, I can give you a little more. He died after a long illness. I get chest trouble — asthma."

The stout woman was still obdurate, but a small, angry, red-faced person, two places away from her, sprang to her feet.

"It's my 'usband, ma'm. Tell 'im I don't want to 'ave any more dealin's with him." She sat down with decision.

"Yes, that's right. He moves to you now. He was nearer the other. He wants to say he's sorry. It doesn't do, you know, to have hard feelings to the dead. Forgive and forget. It's all over. I get a message for you. It is: 'Do it and my blessing go with you'! Does that mean anything to you?"

The angry woman looked pleased and nodded.

"Very good." The clairvoyante suddenly darted out her finger towards the crowd at the door "It's for the soldier."

A soldier in khaki, looking very much amazed, was in the front of the knot of people.

"Wot's for me?" he asked.

"It's a soldier. He has a corporal's stripes. He is a big man with grizzled hair. He has a yellow tab on his shoulders. I get the initials J. H. Do you know him?"

"Yes — but he's dead," said the soldier.

He had not understood that it was a Spiritualistic Church, and the whole proceedings had been a mystery to him. They were rapidly explained by his neighbours. "My Gawd!" cried the soldier, and vanished amid a general titter. In the pause Malone could hear the constant mutter of the medium as she spoke to someone unseen.

"Yes, yes, wait your turn! Speak up, woman! Well, take your place near him. How should I know? Well, I will if I can." She was like a janitor at the theatre marshalling a queue.

Her next attempt was a total failure. A solid man with bushy side-whiskers absolutely refused to have anything to do with an elderly gentleman who claimed kinship. The medium worked with admirable patience, coming back again and again with some fresh detail, but no progress could be made.

"Are you a Spiritualist, friend?"

"Yes, for ten years."

"Well, you know there are difficulties."

"Yes, I know that."

"Think it over. It may come to you later. We must just leave it at that. I am only sorry for your friend."

There was a pause during which Enid and Malone exchanged whispered confidences.

"What do you make of it, Enid?"

"I don't know. It confuses me."

"I believe it is half guess-work and the other half a case of confederates. These people are all of the same church, and naturally they know each other's affairs. If they don't know they can inquire."

"Someone said it was Mrs. Debbs' first visit."

"Yes but they could easily coach her up. It is all clever quackery and bluff. It must be, for just think what is implied if it is not."

"Telepathy, perhaps."

"Yes, some element of that also. Listen! She is off again."

Her next attempt was more fortunate. A lugubrious man at the back of the hall readily recognised the description and claims of his deceased wife.

"I get the name Walter."

"Yes, that's me."

"She called you Wat?"

"No."

"Well, she calls you Wat now. 'Tell Wat to give my love to the children'. That's how I get it. She is worrying about the children."

"She always did."

"Well, they don't change. Furniture. Something about furniture. She says you gave it away. Is that right?"

"Well, I might as well."

The audience tittered. It was strange how the most solemn and comic were eternally blended — strange and yet very natural and human.

“She has a message: ‘The man will pay up and all will be well. Be a good man, Wat, and we will be happier here then ever we were on earth’.”

The man put his hand over his eyes. As the seeress stood irresolute the tall young secretary half rose and whispered something in her ear. The woman shot a swift glance over her left shoulder in the direction of the visitors.

“I’ll come back to it,” said she.

She gave two more descriptions to the audience, both of them rather vague, and both recognised with some reservations. It was a curious fact that her details were such as she could not possibly see at the distance. Thus, dealing with a form which she claimed had built up at the far end of the hall, she could none the less give the colour of the eyes and small points of the face. Malone noted the point as one which he could use for destructive criticism. He was just jotting it down when the woman’s voice sounded louder and, looking up, he found that she had turned her head and her spectacles were flashing in his direction.

“It is not often I give a reading from the platform,” said she, her face rotating between him and the audience, “but we have friends here to-night, and it may interest them to come in contact with the spirit people. There is a presence building up behind the gentleman with a moustache — the gentleman who sits next to the young lady. Yes, sir, behind you. He is a man of middle size, rather inclined to shortness. He is old, over sixty, with white hair, curved nose and a white, small beard of the variety that is called goatee. He is no relation, I gather, but a friend. Does that suggest anyone to you, sir?”

Malone shook his head with some contempt. “It would nearly fit any old man,” he whispered to Enid.

“We will try to get a little closer. He has deep lines on his face. I should say he was an irritable man in his lifetime. He was quick and nervous in his ways. Does that help you?”

Again Malone shook his head.

“Rot! Perfect rot,” he muttered.

“Well, he seems very anxious, so we must do what we can for him. He holds up a book. It is a learned book. He opens it and I see diagrams in it. Perhaps he wrote it — or perhaps he taught from it. Yes, he nods. He taught from it. He was a teacher.”

Malone remained unresponsive.

“I don’t know that I can help him any more. Ah! there is one thing. He has a mole over his right eyebrow.”

Malone started as if he had been stung.

“One mole?” he cried.

The spectacles flashed round again.

“Two moles — one large, one small.”

“My God!” gasped Malone. “It’s Professor Summerlee!”

“Ah, you’ve got it. There’s a message: ‘Greetings to old—’ It’s a long name and begins with a C. I can’t get it. Does it mean anything?”

“Yes.”

In an instant she had turned and was describing something or someone else. But she had left a badly-shaken man upon the platform behind her.

It was at this point that the orderly service had a remarkable interruption which surprised the audience as much as it did the two visitors. This was the sudden appearance beside the chairman of a tall, pale-faced bearded man dressed like a superior artisan, who held up his hand with a quietly impressive gesture as one who was accustomed to exert authority. He then half-turned and said a word to Mr. Bolsover.

“This is Mr. Miromar of Dalston,” said the chairman. “Mr. Miromar has a message to deliver. We are always glad to hear from Mr. Miromar.”

The reporters could only get a half-view of the newcomer’s face, but both of them were struck by his noble bearing and by the massive outline of his head which promised very unusual intellectual power. His voice when he spoke rang clearly and pleasantly through the hall.

“I have been ordered to give the message wherever I think that there are ears to hear it. There are some here who are ready for it, and that is why I have come. They wish that the human race should gradually understand the situation so that there shall be the less shock or panic. I am one of several who are chosen to carry the news.”

“A lunatic, I’m afraid!” whispered Malone, scribbling hard upon his knee. There was a general inclination to smile among the audience. And yet there was something in the man’s manner and voice which made them hang on every word.

“Things have now reached a climax. The very idea of progress has been made material. It is progress to go swiftly, to send swift messages, to build new machinery. All this is a diversion of real ambition. There is only one real progress — spiritual progress. Mankind gives it a lip tribute but presses on upon its false road of material science.

"The Central Intelligence recognised that amid all the apathy there was also much honest doubt which had out-grown old creeds and had a right to fresh evidence. Therefore fresh evidence was sent — evidence which made the life after death as clear as the sun in the heavens. It was laughed at by scientists, condemned by the churches, became the butt of the newspapers, and was discarded with contempt. That was the last and greatest blunder of humanity."

The audience had their chins up now. General speculations were beyond their mental horizon. But this was very clear to their comprehension. There was a murmur of sympathy and applause.

"The thing was now hopeless. It had got beyond all control. Therefore something sterner was needed since Heaven's gift had been disregarded. The blow fell. Ten million young men were laid dead upon the ground. Twice as many were mutilated. That was God's first warning to mankind. But it was vain. The same dull materialism prevailed as before. Years of grace were given, and save the stirrings of the spirit seen in such churches as these, no change was anywhere to be seen. The nations heaped up fresh loads of sin, and sin must ever be atoned for. Russia became a cesspool. Germany was unrepentant of her terrible materialism which had been the prime cause of the war. Spain and Italy were sunk in alternate atheism and superstition. France had no religious ideal. Britain was confused and distracted, full of wooden sects which had nothing of life in them. America had abused her glorious opportunities and, instead of being the loving younger brother to a stricken Europe, she held up all economic reconstruction by her money claims; she dishonoured the signature of her own president, and she refused to join that League of Peace which was the one hope of the future. All have sinned, but some more than others, and their punishment will be in exact proportion.

"And that punishment soon comes. These are the exact words I have been asked to give you. I read them lest I should in any way garble them."

He took a slip of paper from his pocket and read:

"'What we want is, not that folk should be frightened, but that they should begin to change themselves — to develop themselves on more spiritual lines. We are not trying to make people nervous, but to prepare while there is yet time. The world cannot go on as it has done. It would destroy itself if it did. Above all we must sweep away the dark cloud of theology which has come between mankind and God'."

He folded up the paper and replaced it in his pocket. "That is what I have been asked to tell you. Spread the news where there seems to be a window in the soul. Say to them, 'Repent! Reform! the Time is at hand'."

He had paused and seemed about to turn. The spell was broken. The audience rustled and leaned back in its seats. Then a voice from the back:

"Is this the end of the world, mister?"

"No," said the stranger, curtly.

"Is it the Second Coming?" asked another voice.

"Yes."

With quick light steps he threaded his way among the chairs on the platform and stood near the door. When Malone next looked round he was gone.

"He is one of these Second-coming fanatics," he whispered to Enid. "There are a lot of them — Christadelphians, Russellites, Bible Students and what-not. But he was impressive."

"Very," said Enid.

"We have, I am sure, been very interested in what our friend has told us," said the chairman. "Mr. Miromar is in hearty sympathy with our movement even though he cannot be said actually to belong to it. I am sure he is always welcome upon our platforms. As to his prophecy, it seems to me the world has had enough trouble without our anticipating any more. If it is as our friend says, we can't do much to mend the matter. We can only go about our daily jobs, do them as well as we can, and await the event in full confidence of help from above. If it's the Day of Judgment to-morrow," he added, smiling, "I mean to look after my provision store at Hammersmith to-day. We shall now continue with the service."

There was a vigorous appeal for money and a great deal about the building-fund from the young secretary. "It's a shame to think that there are more left in the street than in the building on a Sunday night. We all give our services. No one takes a penny. Mrs. Debbs is here for her bare expenses. But we want another thousand pounds before we can start. There is one brother here who mortgaged his house to help us. That's the spirit that wins. Now let us see what you can do for us to-night."

A dozen soup-plates circulated, and a hymn was sung to the accompaniment of much chinking of coin. Enid and Malone conversed in undertones.

"Professor Summerlee died, you know, at Naples last year."

"Yes, I remember him well."

"And 'old C' was, of course, your father."

"It was really remarkable."

"Poor old Summerlee. He thought survival was an absurdity. And here he is — or here he seems to be."

The soup-plates returned — it was mostly brown soup, unhappily, and they were deposited on the table where the eager eye of the secretary appraised their value. Then the little shaggy man from Australia gave a benediction in the same simple fashion as the opening prayer. It needed no Apostolic succession or laying-on of hands to make one feel that his words were from a human heart and might well go straight to a Divine one. Then the audience rose and sang their final farewell hymn — a hymn with a haunting tune and a sad, sweet refrain of "God keep you safely till we meet once more." Enid was surprised to feel the tears running down her cheeks. These earnest, simple folks with their direct methods had wrought upon her more than all the gorgeous service and rolling music of the cathedral.

Mr. Bolsover, the stout president, was in the waiting-room and so was Mrs. Debbs.

"Well, I expect you are going to let us have it," he laughed. "We are used to it Mr. Malone. We don't mind. But you will see the turn some day. These articles may rise up in judgement."

"I will treat it fairly, I assure you."

"Well, we ask no more." The medium was leaning with her elbow on the mantel piece, austere and aloof.

"I am afraid you are tired," said Enid.

"No, young lady, I am never tired in doing the work of the spirit people. They see to that."

"May I ask," Malone ventured, "whether you ever knew Professor Summerlee?"

The medium shook her head. "No, sir, no. They always think I know them. I know none of them. They come and I describe them."

"How do you get the message?"

"Clairaudient. I hear it. I hear them all the time. The poor things all want to come through and they pluck at me and pull me and pester me on the platform. ‘Me next — me — me’! That’s what I hear. I do my best, but I can’t handle them all.”

“Can you tell me anything of that prophetic person?” asked Malone of the chairman. Mr. Bolsover shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating smile.

“He is an Independent. We see him now and again as a sort of comet passing across us. By the way, it comes back to me that he prophesied the war. I’m a practical man myself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. We get plenty in ready cash without any bills for the future. Well, good night! Treat us as well as you can.”

“Good night,” said Enid.

“Good night,” said Mrs. Debbs. “By the way, young lady, you are a medium yourself. Good night!”

And so they found themselves in the street once more inhaling long draughts of the night air. It was sweet after that crowded hall. A minute later they were in the rush of the Edgware Road and Malone had hailed a cab to carry them back to Victoria Gardens.

3. In Which Professor Challenger Gives His Opinion

ENID had stepped into the cab and Malone was following when his name was called and a man came running down the street. He was tall, middle-aged, handsome and well-dressed, with the clean-shaven, self- confident face of the successful surgeon.

"Hullo, Malone! Stop!"

"Why, it's Atkinson! Enid, let me introduce you. This is Mr. Atkinson of St. Mary's about whom I spoke to your father. Can we give you a lift? We are going towards Victoria."

"Capital!" The surgeon followed them into the cab. "I was amazed to see you at a Spiritualist meeting."

"We were only there professionally. Miss Challenger and I are both on the Press."

"Oh, really! The *Daily Gazette*, I suppose, as before. Well, you will have one more subscriber, for I shall want to see what you made of to-night's show."

"You'll have to wait till next Sunday. It is one of a series."

"Oh, I say, I can't wait as long as that. What did you make of it?"

"I really don't know. I shall have to read my notes carefully to-morrow and think it over, and compare impressions with my colleague here. She has the intuition, you see, which goes for so much in religious matters."

"And what is your intuition, Miss Challenger?"

"Good — oh yes, good! But, dear me, what an extraordinary mixture!"

"Yes, indeed. I have been several times and it always leaves the same mixed impression upon my own mind. Some of it is ludicrous, and some of it might be dishonest, and yet again some of it is clearly wonderful."

"But you are not on the Press. Why were you there?"

"Because I am deeply interested. You see, I am a student of psychic matters and have been for some years am not a convinced one but I am sympathetic, and I have sufficient sense of proportion to realise that while I seem to be sitting in judgment upon the subject it may in truth be the subject which is sitting in judgment upon me."

Malone nodded appreciation.

"It is enormous. You will realise that as you get to close grips with it. It is half a dozen great subjects in one. And it is all in the hands of these good humble folk who, in the face of every discouragement and personal loss, have carried it on for more than seventy years. It is really very like the rise of Christianity. It was run by slaves and underlings until it gradually extended upwards. There were three hundred years between Caesar's slave and Caesar getting the light. "

"But the preacher!" cried Enid in protest.

Mr. Atkinson laughed.

"You mean our friend from Atlantis. What a terrible bore the fellow was! I confess I don't know what to make of performances like that. Self-deception, I think, and the temporary emergence of some fresh strand of personality which dramatizes itself in this way. The only thing I am quite sure of is that it is not really an inhabitant of Atlantis who arrives from his long voyage with this awful cargo of platitudes. Well, here we are!"

"I have to deliver this young lady safe and sound to her father," said Malone. "Look here, Atkinson, don't leave us. The Professor would really like to see you."

"What at this hour! Why, he would throw me down the stairs."

"You've been hearing stories," said Enid. "Really it is not so bad as that. Some people annoy him, but I am sure you are not one of them. Won't you chance it?"

"With that encouragement, certainly." And the three walked down the bright outer corridor to the lift. Challenger, clad now in a brilliant blue dressing-gown, was eagerly awaiting them. He eyed Atkinson as a fighting bulldog eyes some canine stranger. The inspection seemed to satisfy him, however, for he growled that he was glad to meet him.

"I've heard of your name, sir, and of your rising reputation. Your resection of the cord last year made some stir, I understand. But have you been down among the lunatics also?"

"Well, if you call them so," said Atkinson with a laugh.

"Good Heavens, what else could I call them? I remember now that my young friend here " (Challenger had a way of alluding to Malone as if he were a promising boy of ten) "told me you were studying the subject." He roared with offensive laughter. "'The proper study of mankind is spooks', eh, Mr. Atkinson?"

“Dad really knows nothing about it, so don’t be offended with him,” said Enid. “But I assure you, Dad, you would have been interested.” She proceeded to give a sketch of their adventures, though interrupted by a running commentary of groans, grunts and derisive jeers. It was only when the Summerlee episode was reached that Challenger’s indignation and contempt could no longer be restrained. The old volcano blew his head off and a torrent of red-hot invective descended upon his listeners.

“The blasphemous rascals!” he shouted. “To think that they can’t let poor old Summerlee rest in his grave. We had our differences in his time and I will admit that I was compelled to take a moderate view of his intelligence” but if he came back from the grave he would certainly have something worth hearing to say to us. It is an absurdity — a wicked, indecent absurdity upon the face of it. I object to any friend of mine being made a puppet for the laughter of an audience of fools. They didn’t laugh! They must have laughed when they heard an educated man, a man whom I have met upon equal terms, talking such nonsense. I say it was nonsense. Don’t contradict me, Malone. I won’t have it! His message might have been the postscript of a schoolgirl’s letter. Isn’t that nonsense, coming from such a source? Are you not in agreement, Mr. Atkinson? No! I had hoped better things from you.”

“But the description?”

“Good Heavens, where are your brains? Have not the names of Summerlee and Malone been associated with my own in some peculiarly feeble fiction which attained some notoriety? Is it not also known that you two innocents were doing the Churches week by week? Was it not patent that sooner or later you would come to a Spiritualist gathering? Here was a chance for a convert! They set a bait and poor old gudgeon Malone came along and swallowed it. Here he is with the hook still stuck in his silly mouth. Oh, yes, Malone, plain speaking is needed and you shall have it.” The Professor’s black mane was bristling and his eyes glaring from one member of the company to another.

“Well, we want every view expressed,” said Atkinson.

“You seem very qualified, sir, to express the negative one. At the same time I would repeat in my own person the words of Thackeray. He said to some objector: ‘What you say is natural, but if you had seen what I have seen you might alter your opinion’. Perhaps sometime you will be able to look into the matter, for your high position in the scientific world would give your opinion great weight.”

“If I have a high place in the scientific world as you say, it is because I have concentrated upon what is useful and discarded what is nebulous or absurd. My brain, sir, does not pare the edges. It cuts right through. It has cut right through this and has found fraud and folly.”

“Both are there at times,” said Atkinson, “and yet . . . and yet! Ah, well, Malone, I’m some way from home and it is late. You will excuse me, Professor. I am honoured to have met you.”

Malone was leaving also and the two friends had a few minutes’ chat before they went their separate ways, Atkinson to Wimpole Street and Malone to South Norwood, where he was now living.

“Grand old fellow!” said Malone, chuckling. “You must never get offended with him. He means no harm. He is splendid.”

“Of course he is. But if anything could make me a real out-and-out Spiritualist it is that sort of intolerance. It is very common, though it is generally cast rather in the tone of the quiet sneer than of the noisy roar. I like the latter best. By the way, Malone, if you care to go deeper into this subject I may be able to help you. You’ve heard of Linden?”

“Linden, the professional medium. Yes, I’ve been told he is the greatest blackguard unhung.”

“Ah, well, they usually talk of them like that. You must judge for yourself. He put his knee-cap out last winter and I put it in again, and that has made a friendly bond between us. It’s not always easy to get him, and of course a small fee, a guinea I think, is usual, but if you wanted a sitting I could work it.”

“You think him genuine?”

Atkinson shrugged his shoulders.

“I daresay they all take the line of least resistance. I can only say that I have never detected him in fraud. You must judge for yourself.”

“I will,” said Malone. “I am getting hot on this trail. And there is copy in it, too. When things are more easy I’ll write to you, Atkinson, and we can go more deeply into the matter.”

4. Which Describes Some Strange Doings In Hammersmith

THE article by the Joint Commissioners (such was their glorious title) aroused interest and contention. It had been accompanied by a depreciating leaderette from the sub-editor which was meant to calm the susceptibilities of his orthodox readers, as who should say: “These things have to be noticed and seem to be true, but of course you and I recognise how pestilential it all is.” Malone found himself at once plunged into a huge correspondence, for and against, which in itself was enough to show how vitally the question was in the minds of men. All the previous articles had only elicited a growl here or there from a hide-bound Catholic or from an iron-clad Evangelical, but now his post-bag was full. Most of them were ridiculing the idea that psychic forces existed and many were from writers who, whatever they might know of psychic forces, had obviously not yet learned to spell. The Spiritualists were in many cases not more pleased than the others, for Malone had — even while his account was true — exercised a journalist’s privilege of laying an accent on the more humorous sides of it.

One morning in the succeeding week Mr. Malone was aware of a large presence in the small room wherein he did his work at the office. A page-boy, who preceded the stout visitor, had laid a card on the corner of the table which bore the legend ‘James Bolsover, Provision Merchant, High Street, Hammersmith.’ It was none other than the genial president of last Sunday’s congregation. He wagged a paper accusingly at Malone, but his good-humoured face was wreathed in smiles.

“Well, well,” said he. “I told you that the funny side would get you.”

“Don’t you think it a fair account?”

“ Well, yes, Mr. Malone, I think you and the young woman have done your best for us. But, of course, you know nothing and it all seems queer to you. Come to think of it, it would be a deal queerer if all the clever men who leave this earth could not among them find some way of getting a word back to us.”

“But it’s such a stupid word sometimes.”

“Well, there are a lot of stupid people leave the world. They don’t change. And then, you know, one never knows what sort of message is needed. We had a clergyman in to see Mrs. Debbs yesterday. He was broken-hearted because he had lost his daughter. Mrs. Debbs got several messages through that she was happy and that only his grief hurt her. ‘That’s no use’, said he. ‘Anyone could say that. That’s not my girl’. And then suddenly she said: ‘But I wish to goodness you would not wear a Roman collar with a coloured shirt’. That sounded a trivial message, but the man began to cry. ‘That’s her’, he sobbed. ‘She was always chipping me about my collars’. It’s the little things that count in this life — just the homely, intimate things, Mr. Malone.”

Malone shook his head.

“Anyone would remark on a coloured shirt and a clerical collar.”

Mr. Bolsover laughed. “You’re a hard proposition. So was I once, so I can’t blame you. But I called here with a purpose. I expect you are a busy man and I know that I am, so I’ll get down to the brass tacks. First, I wanted to say that all our people that have any sense are pleased with the article. Mr. Algernon Mailey wrote me that it would do good, and if he is pleased we are all pleased.”

“Mailey the barrister?”

“Mailey, the religious reformer. That’s how he will be known.”

“Well, what else?”

“Only that we would help you if you and the young lady wanted to go further in the matter. Not for publicity, mind you, but just for your own good — though we don’t shrink from publicity, either. I have psychical phenomena seances at my own home without a professional medium, and if you would like . . . “

“There’s nothing I would like so much.”

“Then you shall come — both of you. I don’t have many outsiders. I wouldn’t have one of those psychic research people inside my doors. Why should I go out of my way to be insulted by all their suspicions and their traps? They seem to think that folk have no feelings. But you have some ordinary common sense. That’s all we ask.”

“But I don’t believe. Would that not stand in the way?”

“Not in the least. So long as you are fair-minded and don’t disturb the conditions, all is well. Spirits out of the body don’t like disagreeable people any more than spirits in the body do. Be gentle and civil, same as you would to any other company."

"Well, I can promise that."

"They are funny sometimes," said Mr. Bolsover, in reminiscent vein. "It is as well to keep on the right side of them. They are not allowed to hurt humans, but we all do things we're not allowed to do, and they are very human themselves. You remember how *The Times* correspondent got his head cut open with the tambourine in one of the Davenport Brothers' seances. Very wrong, of course, but it happened. No friend ever got his head cut open. There was another case down Stepney way. A money lender went to a seance. Some victim that he had driven to suicide got into the medium. He got the moneylender by the throat and it was a close thing for his life. But I'm off, Mr. Malone. We sit once a week and have done for four years without a break. Eight o'clock Thursdays. Give us a day's notice and I'll get Mr. Mailey to meet you. He can answer questions better than I. Next Thursday! Very good." And Mr. Bolsover lurched out of the room.

Both Malone and Enid Challenger had, perhaps, been more shaken by their short experience than they had admitted, but both were sensible people who agreed that every possible natural cause should be exhausted — and very thoroughly exhausted — before the bounds of what is possible should be enlarged. Both of them had the utmost respect for the ponderous intellect of Challenger and were affected by his strong views, though Malone was compelled to admit in the frequent arguments in which he was plunged that the opinion of a clever man who has had no experience is really of less value than that of the man in the street who has actually been there.

These arguments, as often as not, were with Mervin, editor of the psychic paper Dawn, which dealt with every phase of the occult, from the lore of the Rosicrucians to the strange regions of the students of the Great Pyramid, or of those who uphold the Jewish origin of our blonde Anglo-Saxons. Mervin was a small, eager man with a brain of a high order, which might have carried him to the most lucrative heights of his profession had he not determined to sacrifice worldly prospects in order to help what seemed to him to be a great truth. As Malone was eager for knowledge and Mervin was equally keen to impart it, the waiters at the Literary Club found it no easy matter to get them away from the corner-table in the window at which they were wont to lunch. Looking down at the long, grey curve of the Embankment and the noble river with its vista of bridges, the pair would linger over their coffee, smoking cigarettes and discussing various sides of this most gigantic and absorbing subject, which seemed already to have disclosed new horizons to the mind of Malone.

There was one warning given by Mervin which aroused impatience amounting almost to anger in Malone’s mind. He had the hereditary Irish objection to coercion and it seemed to him to be appearing once more in an insidious and particularly objectionable form.

“You are going to one of Bolsover’s family seances,” said Mervin. “They are, of course, well known among our people, though few have been actually admitted, so you may consider yourself privileged. He has clearly taken a fancy to you.”

“He thought I wrote fairly about them.”

“Well, it wasn’t much of an article, but still among the dreary, purblind nonsense that assails us it did show some traces of dignity and balance and sense of proportion.”

Malone waved a deprecating cigarette.

“Bolsover’s seances and others like them are, or course, things of no moment to the real psychic. They are like the rude foundations of a building which certainly help to sustain the edifice, but are forgotten when once you come to inhabit it. It is the higher superstructure with which we have to do. You would think that the physical phenomena were the whole subject — those and a fringe of ghosts and haunted houses — if you were to believe the cheap papers who cater for the sensationalist. Of course, these physical phenomena have a use of their own. They rivet the attention of the inquirer and encourage him to go further. Personally, having seen them all, I would not go across the road to see them again. But I would go across many roads to get high messages from the beyond.”

“Yes, I quite appreciate the distinction, looking at it from your point of view. Personally, of course, I am equally agnostic as to the messages and the phenomena.”

“Quite so. St. Paul was a good psychic. He makes the point so neatly that even his ignorant translators were unable to disguise the real occult meanings as they have succeeded in doing in so many cases.”

“Can you quote it?”

“I know my New Testament pretty well, but I am not letter-perfect. It is the passage where he says that the gift of tongues, which was an obvious sensational thing, was for the uninstructed, but that prophecies, that is real spiritual messages, were for the elect. In other words that an experienced Spiritualist has no need of phenomena."

"I'll look that passage up."

"You will find it in Corinthians, I think. By the way, there must have been a pretty high average of intelligence among those old congregations if Paul's letters could have been read aloud to them and thoroughly comprehended."

"That is generally admitted, is it not?"

"Well, it is a concrete example of it. However, I am down a side-track. What I wanted to say to you is that you must not take Bolsover's little spirit circus too seriously. It is honest as far as it goes, but it goes a mighty short way. It's a disease, this phenomena hunting. I know some of our people, women mostly, who buzz around seance rooms continually, seeing the same thing over and over, sometimes real, sometimes, I fear, imitation. What better are they for that as souls or as citizens or in any other way? No, when your foot is firm on the bottom rung don't mark time on it, but step up to the next rung and get firm upon that."

"I quite get your point. But I'm still on the solid ground."

"Solid!" cried Mervin. "Good Lord! But the paper goes to press to-day and I must get down to the printer. With a circulation of ten thousand or so we do things modestly, you know — not like you plutocrats of the daily press. I am practically the staff."

"You said you had a warning."

"Yes, yes, I wanted to give you a warning." Mervin's thin, eager face became intensely serious. "If you have any ingrained religious or other prejudices which may cause you to turn down this subject after you have investigated it, then don't investigate at all — for it is dangerous."

"What do you mean — dangerous?"

"They don't mind honest doubt, or honest criticism, but if they are badly treated they are dangerous."

"Who are 'they'?"

"Ah, who are they? I wonder. Guides, controls, psychic entities of some kind. Who the agents of vengeance — or I should say justice — are, is really not essential. The point is that they exist."

"Oh, rot, Mervin!"

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Pernicious rot! These are the old theological bogies of the Middle Ages coming up again. I am surprised at a sensible man like you!"

Mervin smiled — he had a whimsical smile — but his eyes, looking out from under bushy yellow brows, were as serious as ever.

"You may come to change your opinion. There are some queer sides to this question. As a friend I put you wise to this one."

"Well, put me wise, then."

Thus encouraged, Mervin went into the matter. He rapidly sketched the career and fate of a number of men who had, in his opinion, played an unfair game with these forces, become an obstruction, and suffered for it. He spoke of judges who had given prejudiced decisions against the cause, of journalists who had worked up stunt cases for sensational purposes and to throw discredit on the movement; of others who had interviewed mediums to make game of them, or who, having started to investigate, had drawn back alarmed, and given a negative decision when their inner soul knew that the facts were true. It was a formidable list, for it was long and precise, but Malone was not to be driven.

"If you pick your cases I have no doubt one could make such a list about any subject. Mr. Jones said that Raphael was a bungler, and Mr. Jones died of angina pectoris. Therefore it is dangerous to criticize Raphael. That seems to be the argument."

"Well, if you like to think so."

"Take the other side. Look at Morgate. He has always been an enemy, for he is a convinced materialist. But he prospers — look at his professorship."

"Ah, an honest doubter. Certainly. Why not?"

"And Morgan who at one time exposed mediums."

"If they were really false he did good service."

"And Falconer who has written so bitterly about you?"

"Ah, Falconer! Do you know anything of Falconer's private life? No. Well, take it from me he has got his dues. He doesn't know why. Some day these gentlemen will begin to compare notes and then it may dawn on them. But they get it."

He went on to tell a horrible story of one who had devoted his considerable talents to picking Spiritualism to pieces, though really convinced of its truth, because his worldly ends were served thereby. The end was ghastly — too ghastly for Malone.

"Oh, cut it out, Mervin!" he cried impatiently. "I'll say what I think, no more and no less, and I won't be cared by you or your spooks into altering my opinions."

"I never asked you to."

"You got a bit near it. What you have said strikes me as pure superstition. If what you say is true you should have the police after you."

"Yes, if we did it. But it is out of our hands. However, Malone, for what it's worth I have given you the warning and you can now go your way. Bye-bye! You can always ring me up at the office of Dawn."

If you want to know if a man is of the true Irish blood there is one infallible test. Put him in front of a swing-door with "Push" or "Pull" printed upon it. The Englishman will obey like a sensible man. The Irishman, with less sense but more individuality, will at once and with vehemence do the opposite. So it was with Malone. Mervin's well-meant warning simply raised a rebellious spirit within him, and when he called for Enid to take her to the Bolsover seance he had gone back several degrees in his dawning sympathy for the subject. Challenger bade them farewell with many gibes, his beard projecting forward and his eyes closed with upraised eyebrows, as was his wont when inclined to be facetious.

"You have your powder-bag, my dear Enid. If you see a particularly good specimen of ectoplasm in the course of the evening don't forget your father. I have a microscope, chemical reagents and everything ready. Perhaps even a small poltergeist might come your way. Any trifle would be welcome."

His bull's bellow of laughter followed them into the lift.

The provision merchant's establishment of Mr. Bolsover proved to be a euphemism for an old-fashioned grocer's shop in the most crowded part of Hammersmith. The neighbouring church was chiming out the three-quarters as the taxi drove up, and the shop was full of people. So Enid and Malone walked up and down outside. As they were so engaged another taxi drove up and a large, untidy-looking, ungainly bearded man in a suit of Harris tweed stepped out of it. He glanced at his watch and then began to pace the pavement. Presently he noted the others and came up to them.

"May I ask if you are the journalists who are going to attend the seance? . . . I thought so. Old Bolsover is terribly busy so you were wise to wait. Bless him, he is one of God's saints in his way."

"You are Mr. Algernon Mailey, I presume?"

“Yes. I am the gentleman whose credulity is giving rise to considerable anxiety upon the part of my friends, as one of the rags remarked the other day.” His laugh was so infectious that the others were-bound to laugh also. Certainly, with his athletic proportions, which had run a little to seed but were still notable, and with his virile voice and strong if homely face, he gave no impression of instability.

“We are all labelled with some stigma by our opponents” said he. “I wonder what yours will be.”

“We must not sail under false colours, Mr. Mailey,” said Enid. “We are not yet among the believers.”

“Quite right. You should take your time over it. It is infinitely the most important thing in the world, so it is worth taking time over. I took many years myself. Folk can be blamed for neglecting it, but no one can be blamed for being cautious in examination. Now I am all out for it, as you are aware, because I know it is true. There is such a difference between believing and knowing. I lecture a good deal. But I never want to convert my audience. I don’t believe in sudden conversions. They are shallow, superficial things. All I want is to put the thing before the people as clearly as I can. I just tell them the truth and why we know it is the truth. Then my job is done. They can take it or leave it. If they are wise they will explore along the paths that I indicate. If they are unwise they miss their chance. I don’t want to press them or to proselytize. It’s their affair, not mine.”

“Well, that seems a reasonable view,” said Enid, who was attracted by the frank manner of their new acquaintance. They were standing now in the full flood of light cast by Bolsover’s big plate-glass window. She had a good look at him, his broad forehead, his curious grey eyes, thoughtful and yet eager, his straw-coloured beard which indicated the outline of an aggressive chin. He was solidity personified — the very opposite of the fanatic whom she had imagined. His name had been a good deal in the papers lately as a protagonist in the long battle, and she remembered that it had never been mentioned without an answering snort from her father.

“I wonder,” she said to Malone, “what would happen if Mr. Mailey were locked up in a room with Dad!”

Malone laughed. “There used to be a schoolboy question as to what would occur if an irresistible force were to strike an invincible obstacle.”

“Oh, you are the daughter of Professor Challenger,” said Mailey with interest. “He is a big figure in the scientific world. What a grand world it would be if it would only realise its own limitations."

"I don't quite follow you."

"It is this scientific world which is at the bottom of much of our materialism. It has helped us in comfort — if comfort is any use to us. Otherwise it has usually been a curse to us, for it has called itself progress and given us a false impression that we are making progress, whereas we are really drifting very steadily backwards."

"Really, I can't quite agree with you there, Mr. Mailey," said Malone, who was getting restive under what seemed to him dogmatic assertion. "Look at wireless. Look at the S.O.S. call at sea. Is that not a benefit to mankind?"

"Oh, it works out all right sometimes. I value my electric reading-lamp, and that is a product of science. It gives us, as I said before, comfort and occasionally safety."

"Why, then, do you depreciate it?"

"Because it obscures the vital thing — the object of life. We were not put into this planet in order that we should go fifty miles an hour in a motor-car, or cross the Atlantic in an airship, or send messages either with or without wires. These are the mere trimmings and fringes of life. But these men of science have so riveted our attention on these fringes that we forget the central object."

"I don't follow you."

"It is not how fast you go that matters, it is the object of your journey. It is not how you send a message, it is what the value of the message may be. At every stage this so-called progress may be a curse, and yet as long as we use the word we confuse it with real progress and imagine that we are doing that for which God sent us into the world."

"Which is?"

"To prepare ourselves for the next phase of life. There is mental preparation and spiritual preparation, and we are neglecting both. To be in an old age better men and women, more unselfish, more broadminded, more genial and tolerant, that is what we are for. It is a soul factory, and it is turning out a bad article. But Hullo!" he burst into his infectious laugh. "Here I am delivering my lecture in the street. Force of habit, you see. My son says that if you press the third button of my waistcoat I automatically deliver a lecture. But here is the good Bolsover to your rescue."

The worthy grocer had caught sight of them through the window and came bustling out, untying his white apron.

"Good evening, all! I won't have you waiting in the cold. Besides, there's the clock, and time's up. It does not do to keep them waiting. Punctuality for all that's my motto and theirs. My lads will shut up the shop. This way, and mind the sugar-barrel."

They threaded their way amid boxes of dried fruits and piles of cheese, finally passing between two great casks which hardly left room for the grocer's portly form. A narrow door beyond opened into the residential part of the establishment. Ascending the narrow stair, Bolsover threw open a door and the visitors found themselves in a considerable room in which a number of people were seated round a large table. There was Mrs. Bolsover herself, large, cheerful and buxom like her husband. Three daughters were all of the same pleasing type. There was an elderly woman who seemed to be some relation, and two other colourless females who were described as neighbours and Spiritualists. The only other man was a little grey-headed fellow with a pleasant face and quick, twinkling eyes, who sat at a harmonium in the corner.

"Mr. Smiley, our musician," said Bolsover. "I don't know what we could do without Mr. Smiley. It's vibrations, you know. Mr. Mailey could tell you about that. Ladies, you know Mr. Mailey, our very good friend. And these are the two inquirers — Miss Challenger and Mr. Malone." The Bolsover family all smiled genially, but the nondescript elderly person rose to her feet and surveyed them with an austere face.

"You're very welcome here, you two strangers," she said. "But we would say to you that we want outward reverence. We respect the shining ones and we will not have them insulted."

"I assure you we are very earnest and fairminded," said Malone.

"We've had our lesson. We haven't forgotten the Meadows' affair, Mr. Bolsover."

"No, no, Mrs. Seldon. That won't happen again. We were rather upset over that," Bolsover added, turning to the visitors. "That man came here as our guest, and when the lights were out he poked the other sitters with his finger so as to make them think it was a spirit hand. Then he wrote the whole thing up as an exposure in the public Press, when the only fraudulent thing present had been himself."

Malone was honestly shocked. “I can assure you we are incapable of such conduct.”

The old lady sat down, but still regarded them with a suspicious eye. Bolsover bustled about and got things ready.

“You sit here” Mr. Mailey. Mr. Malone, will you sit between my wife and my daughter? Where would the young lady like to sit?”“

Enid was feeling rather nervous. “I think,” said she, “that I would like to sit next to Mr. Malone.”

Bolsover chuckled and winked at his wife.

“Quite so. Most natural, I am sure.” They all settled into their places. Mr. Bolsover had switched off the electric light, but a candle burned in the middle of the table. Malone thought what a picture it would have made for a Rembrandt. Deep shadows draped it in, but the yellow light flickered upon the circle of faces — the strong, homely, heavy features of Bolsover, the solid line of his family circle, the sharp, austere countenance of Mrs. Seldon, the earnest eyes and yellow beard of Mailey, the worn, tired faces of the two Spiritualist women, and finally the firm, noble profile of the girl who sat beside him. The whole world had suddenly narrowed down to that one little group, so intensely concentrated upon its own purpose.

On the table there was scattered a curious collection of objects, which had all the same appearance of tools which had long been used. There was a battered brass speaking-trumpet, very discoloured, a tambourine, a musical-box, and a number of smaller objects. “We never know what they may want,” said Bolsover, waving his hand over them. “ If Wee One calls for a thing and it isn’t there she lets us know all about it — oh, yes, something shocking!”

“She has a temper of her own has Wee One,” remarked Mrs. Bolsover.

“Why not, the pretty dear?” said the austere lady. “I expect she has enough to try it with researchers and what-not. I often wonder she troubles to come at all.”

“Wee One is our little girl guide,” said Bolsover. “You’ll hear her presently.”

“I do hope she will come,” said Enid.

“Well, she never failed us yet, except when that man Meadows clawed hold of the trumpet and put it outside the circle.”

“Who is the medium?” asked Malone.

“Well, we don’t know ourselves. We all help, I think. Maybe, I give as much as anyone. And mother, she is a help.”

“Our family is a co-operative store,” said his wife, and everyone laughed.

“I thought one medium was necessary.”

“It is usual but not necessary,” said Mailey in his deep, authoritative voice. “Crawford showed that pretty clearly in the Gallagher seances when he proved, by weighing chairs, that everyone in the circle lost from half to two pounds at a sitting, though the medium, Miss Kathleen, lost as many as ten or twelve. Here the long series of sittings — How long, Mr. Bolsover?”

“Four years unbroken.”

“The long series has developed everyone to some extent, so that there is a high average output from each, instead of an extraordinary amount from one.”

“Output of what?”

“Animal magnetism, ectoplasm — in fact, power. That is the most comprehensive word. The Christ used that word. ‘Much power has gone out of me’. It is ‘dunamis’ in the Greek, but the translators missed the point and translated it ‘virtue’. If a good Greek scholar who was also a profound occult student was to re-translate the New Testament we should get some eye-openers. Dear old Ellis Powell did a little in that direction. His death was a loss to the world.”

“Aye, indeed,” said Bolsover in a reverent voice. “But now, before we get to work, Mr. Malone, I want you just to note one or two things. You see the white spots on the trumpet and the tambourine? Those are luminous points so that we can see where they are. The table is just our dining-table, good British oak. You can examine it if you like. But you’ll see things that won’t depend upon the table. Now, Mr. Smiley, out goes the light and we’ll ask you for ‘The Rock of Ages’.”

The harmonium droned in the darkness and the circle sang. They sang very tunefully, too, for the girls had fresh voices and true ears. Low and vibrant, the solemn rhythm became most impressive when no sense but that of hearing was free to act. Their hands, according to instructions, were laid lightly upon the table, and they were warned not to cross their legs. Malone, with his hand touching Enid’s, could feel the little quiverings which showed that her nerves were highly strung. The homely, jovial voice of Bolsover relieved the tension.

“That should do it,” he said. “I feel as if the conditions were good to-night. Just a touch of frost in the air, too. I’ll ask you now to join with me in prayer.”

It was effective, that simple, earnest prayer in the darkness — an inky darkness which was only broken by the last red glow of a dying fire.

“Oh, great Father of us all,” said the voice. “You who are beyond our thoughts and who yet pervade our lives, grant that all evil may be kept from us this night and that we may be privileged to get in touch, if only for an hour, with those who dwell upon a higher plane than ours. You are our Father as well as theirs. Permit us, for a short space, to meet in brotherhood, that we may have an added knowledge of that eternal life which awaits us, and so be helped during our years of waiting in this lower world.” He ended with the “Our Father”, in which we all joined. Then they all sat in expectant silence Outside was the dull roar of traffic and the occasional ill-tempered squawk of a passing car. Inside there was absolute stillness. Enid and Malone felt every sense upon the alert and every nerve on edge as they gazed out into the gloom.

“Nothing doing, mother,” said Bolsover at last. “It’s the strange company. New vibrations. They have to tune them in to get harmony. Give us another tune, Mr. Smiley.” Again the harmonium droned. It was still playing when a woman’s voice cried: “Stop! Stop! They are here!”

Again they waited without result.

“Yes! Yes! I heard Wee One. She is here, right enough. I’m sure of it.”

Silence again, and then it came — such a marvel to the visitors, such a matter of course to the circle.

“Gooda evenin’!” cried a voice.

There was a burst of greeting and of welcoming laughter from the circle. They were all speaking at once. “Good evening, Wee One!” “There you are, dear!” “I knew you would come!” “Well done, little girl guide!”

“Gooda evenin’, all!” replied the voice. “Wee One so glad see Daddy and Mummy and the rest. Oh, what big man with beard! Mailey, Mister Mailey, I meet him before. He big Mailey, I little femaley. Glad to see you, Mr. Big Man.”

Enid and Malone listened with amazement, but it was impossible to be nervous in face of the perfectly natural way in which the company accepted it. The voice was very thin and high — more so than any artificial falsetto could produce. It was the voice of a female child. That was certain. Also that there was no female child in the room unless one had been smuggled in after the light went out. That was possible. But the voice seemed to be in the middle of the table. How could a child get there?

"Easy get there, Mr. Gentleman," said the voice, answering his unspoken thought. "Daddy strong man. Daddy lift Wee One on to table. Now I show what Daddy not able to do."

"The trumpet's up!" cried Bolsover.

The little circle of luminous paint rose noiselessly into the air. Now it was swaying above their heads.

"Go up and hit the ceiling!" cried Bolsover. Up it went and they heard the metallic tapping above them. Then the high voice came from above:

"Clever Daddy! Daddy got fishing-rod and put trumpet up to ceiling. But how Daddy make the voice, eh? What you say, pretty English Missy? Here is a present from Wee One."

Something soft dropped on Enid's lap. She put her hand down and felt it.

"It's a flower — a chrysanthemum. Thank you, Wee One!"

"An apport?" asked Mailey.

"No, no, Mr. Mailey," said Bolsover. "They were in the vase on the harmonium. Speak to her, Miss Challenger. Keep the vibrations going."

"Who are you, Wee One?" asked Enid, looking up at the moving spot above her.

"I am little black girl. Eight-year-old little black girl."

"Oh, come, dear," said mother in her rich, coaxing voice. "You were eight when you came to us first, and that was years ago."

"Years ago to you. All one time to me. I to do my job as eight-year child. When job done then Wee One become Big One all in one day. No time here, same as you have. I always eight-year-old."

"In the ordinary way they grow up exactly as we do here," said Mailey. "But if they have a special bit of work for which a child is needed, then as a child they remain It's a sort of arrested development."

"That's me. 'Rested envelopment'," said the voice proudly. "I learn good England when big man here."

They all laughed. It was the most genial, free-and-easy association possible. Malone heard Enid's voice whispering in his ear.

"Pinch me from time to time, Edward — just to make me sure that I am not in a dream."

"I have to pinch myself, too."

“What about your song, Wee One?” asked Bolsover.

“Oh, yes, indeeda! Wee One sing to you.” She began some simple song, but faded away in a squeak, while the trumpet clattered on to the table.

“Ah, power run down!” said Mailey. “I think a little more music will set us right. ‘Lead, Kindly Light’”

They sang the beautiful hymn together. As the verse closed an amazing thing happened — amazing, at least, to the novices, though it called for no remark from the circle. The trumpet still shone upon the table, but two voices, those apparently of a man and a woman, broke out in the air above them and joined very tunefully in the singing. The hymn died away and all was silence and tense expectancy once more.

It was broken by a deep male voice from the darkness. It was an educated English voice, well modulated, a voice which spoke in a fashion to which the good Bolsover could never attain.

“Good evening, friends. The power seems good tonight.”

“Good evening, Luke. Good evening!” cried everyone.

“It is our teaching guide,” Bolsover explained. “He is a high spirit from the sixth sphere who gives us instruction.”

“I may seem high to you,” said the voice. “But what am I to those in turn who instruct me! It is not my wisdom. Give me no credit. I do but pass it on.”

“Always like that,” said Bolsover. “No swank. It’s a sign of his height.”

“I see you have two inquirers present. Good evening, young lady! You know nothing of your own powers or destiny. You will find them out. Good evening, sir, you are on the threshold of great knowledge. Is there any subject upon which you would wish me to say a few words? I see that you are making notes.”

Malone had, as a fact, disengaged his hand in the darkness and was jotting down in shorthand the sequence of events.

“What shall I speak of?”

“Of love and marriage,” suggested Mrs. Bolsover, nudging her husband.

“Well, I will say a few words on that. I will not take long, for others are waiting. The room is crowded with spirit people. I wish you to understand that there is one man, and only one, for each woman, and one woman only for each man. When those two meet they fly together and are one through all the endless chain of existence. Until they meet all unions are mere accidents which have no meaning. Sooner or later each couple becomes complete. It may not be here. It may be in the next sphere where the sexes meet as they do on earth. Or it may be further delayed. But every man and every woman has his or her affinity, and will find it. Of earthly marriages perhaps one in five is permanent. The others are accidental. Real marriage is of the soul and spirit. Sex actions are a mere external symbol which mean nothing and are foolish, or even pernicious, when the thing which they should symbolize is wanting. Am I clear?"

"Very clear," said Mailey.

"Some have the wrong mate here. Some have no mate, which is more fortunate. But all will sooner or later get the right mate. That is certain. Do not think that you will not necessarily have your present husband when you pass over."

"Gawd be praised! Gawd be thanked!" cried a voice.

"No. Mrs. Melder, it is love — real love — which unites us here. He goes his way. You go yours. You are on separate planes, perhaps. Some day you will each find your own, when your youth has come back as it will over here."

"You speak of love. Do you mean sexual love?" asked Mailey.

"Where are we gettin' to?" murmured Mrs. Bolsover.

"Children are not born here. That is only on the earth plane. It was this aspect of marriage to which the great Teacher referred when he said: 'There will be neither marriage nor giving in marriage'. No! It is purer, deeper, more wonderful, a unity of souls, a complete merging of interests and knowledge without a loss of individuality. The nearest you ever get to it is the first high passion, too beautiful for physical expression when two high-souled lovers meet upon your plane. They find lower expression afterwards, but they will always in their hearts know that the first delicate, exquisite soul-union was the more lovely. So it is with us. Any question?"

"If a woman loves two men equally, what then?" asked Malone.

"It seldom happens. She nearly always knows which is really nearest to her. If she really did so, then it would be a proof that neither was the real affinity, for he is bound to stand high above all. Of course, if she . . ."

The voice trailed off and the trumpet fell.

"Sing 'Angels are hoverin' around'!" cried Bolsover. "Smiley, hit that old harmonium. The vibrations are at zero."

Another bout of music, another silence, and then a most dismal voice. Never had Enid heard so sad a voice. It was like clods on a coffin. At first it was a deep mutter. Then it was a prayer — a Latin prayer apparently — for twice the word *Domine* sounded and once the word *peccavimus*. There was an indescribable air of depression and desolation in the room. “For God’s sake what is it?” cried Malone.

The circle was equally puzzled.

“Some poor chap out of the lower spheres, I think,” said Bolsover. “Orthodox folk say we should avoid them. I say we should hurry up and help them.”

“Right, Bolsover!” said Mailey, with hearty approval. “Get on with it, quick!”

“Can we do anything for you, friend?”

There was silence.

“He doesn’t know. He doesn’t understand the conditions. Where is Luke? He’ll know what to do.”

“What is it, friend?” asked the pleasant voice of the guide.

“There is some poor fellow here. We want to help him.”

“Ah! yes, yes, he has come from the outer darkness,” said Luke in a sympathetic voice. “He doesn’t know. He doesn’t understand. They come over here with a fixed idea, and when they find the real thing is quite different from anything they have been taught by the Churches, they are helpless. Some adapt themselves and they go on. Others don’t, and they just wander on unchanging, like this man. He was a cleric, and a very narrow, bigoted one. This is the growth of his own mental seed sown upon earth — sown in ignorance and reaped in misery.”

“What is amiss with him?”

“He does not know he is dead. He walks in the mist. It is all an evil dream to him. He has been years so. To him it seems an eternity.”

“Why do you not tell him — instruct him?”

“We cannot. We—”

The trumpet crashed.

“Music, Smiley, music! Now the vibrations should be better.”

“The higher spirits cannot reach earth-bound folk,” said Mailey. “They are in very different zones of vibration. It is we who are near them and can help them.”

“Yes, you! you!” cried the voice of Luke.

“Mr. Mailey, speak to him. You know him!” The low mutter had broken out again in the same weary monotone.

"Friend, I would have a word with you," said Mailey in a firm, loud voice. The mutter ceased and one felt that the invisible presence was straining its attention. " Friend, we are sorry at your condition. You have passed on. You see us and you wonder why we do not see you. You are in the other world. But you do not know it, because it is not as you expected. You have not been received as you imagined. It is because you imagined wrong. Understand that all is well, and that God is good, and that all happiness is awaiting you if you will but raise your mind and pray for help, and above all think less of your own condition and more of those other poor souls who are round you."

There was a silence and Luke spoke again.

"He has heard you. He wants to thank you. He has some glimmer now of his condition. It will grow within him. He wants to know if he may come again."

"Yes! yes!" cried Bolsover. "We have quite a number who report progress from time to time. God bless you, friend. Come as often as you can." The mutter had ceased and there seemed to be a new feeling of peace in the air. The high voice of Wee One was heard.

"Plenty power still left. Red Cloud here. Show what he can do, if Daddy likes."

"Red Cloud is our Indian control. He is usually busy when any purely physical phenomena have to be done. You there, Red Cloud?""

Three loud thuds, like a hammer on wood, sounded from the darkness.

"Good evening, Red Cloud!"

A new voice, slow, staccato, laboured, sounded above them.

"Good day, Chief! How the squaw? How the papooses? Strange faces in wigwam to-night."

"Seeking knowledge, Red Cloud. Can you show what you can do?"

"I try. Wait a little. Do all I can."

Again there was a long hush of expectancy. Then the novices were faced once more with the miraculous.

There came a dull glow in the darkness. It was apparently a wisp of luminous vapour. It whisked across from one side to the other and then circled in the air. By degrees it condensed into a circular disc of radiance about the size of a bull's-eye lantern. It cast no reflection round it and was simply a clean-cut circle in the gloom. Once it approached Enid's face and Malone saw it clearly from the side.

“Why, there is a hand holding it!” he cried, with sudden suspicion.

“Yes, there is a materialised hand,” said Mailey. “I can see it clearly.”

“Would you like it to touch you” Mr. Malone?”

“Yes, if it will.”

The light vanished and an instant afterwards Malone felt pressure upon his own hand. He turned it palm upwards and clearly felt three fingers laid across it, smooth, warm fingers of adult size. He closed his own fingers and the hand seemed to melt away in his grasp.

“It has gone!” he gasped.

“Yes! Red Cloud is not very good at materialisations. Perhaps we don’t give him the proper sort of power. But his lights are excellent.”

Several more had broken out. They were of different types, slow-moving clouds and little dancing sparks like glow-worms. At the same time both visitors were conscious of a cold wind which blew upon their faces. It was no delusion, for Enid felt her hair stream across her forehead.

“You fed the rushing wind,” said Mailey. “Some of these lights would pass for tongues of fire, would they not? Pentecost does not seem such a very remote or impossible thing, does it?”

The tambourine had risen in the air, and the dot of luminous paint showed that it was circling round. Presently it descended and touched their heads each in turn. Then with a jingle it quivered down upon the table.

“Why a tambourine? It seems always to be a tambourine,” remarked Malone.

“It is a convenient little instrument,” Mailey explained. “The only one which shows automatically by its noise where it is flying. I don’t know what other I could suggest except a musical-box.”

“Our box here flies round somethin’ amazin’ “ said Mrs. Bolsover. “It thinks nothing of winding itself up in the air as it flies. It’s a heavy box too.”

“Nine pounds,” said Bolsover. “Well, we seem to have got to the end of things. I don’t think we shall get much more to-night. It has not been a bad sitting — what I should call a fair average sitting. We must wait a little before we turn on the light. Well, Mr. Malone, what do you think of it? Let’s have any objections now before we part. That’s the worst of you inquirers, you know. You often bottle things up in your own minds and let them loose afterwards, when it would have been easy to settle it at the time.

Very nice and polite to our faces, and then we are a gang of swindlers in the report.”

Malone’s head was throbbing and he passed his hand over his heated brow.

“I am confused,” he said, “but impressed. Oh, yes, certainly impressed. I’ve read of these things, but it is very different when you see them. What weighs most with me is the obvious sincerity and sanity of all you people. No one could doubt that.”

“Come. We’re gettin’ on.” said Bolsover.

“I try to think the objections which would be raised by others who were not present. I’ll have to answer them. First, there is the oddity of it all. It is so different to our preconceptions of spirit people.”

“We must fit our theories to the facts,” said Mailey. “Up to now we have fitted the facts to our theories. You must remember that we have been dealing to-night — with all respect to our dear good hosts — with a simple, primitive, earthly type of spirit, who has his very definite uses, but is not to be taken as an average type. You might as well take the stevedore whom you see on the quay as being a representative Englishman.”

“There’s Luke” said Bolsover.

“Ah, yes, he is, of course, very much higher. You heard him and could judge. What else, Mr. Malone?”

“Well, the darkness! Everything done in darkness. Why should all mediumship be associated with gloom?”

“You mean all physical mediumship. That is the only branch of the subject which needs darkness. It is purely chemical, like the darkness of the photographic room. It preserves the delicate physical substance which, drawn from the human body, is the basis of these phenomena. A cabinet is used for the purpose of condensing this same vaporous substance and helping it to solidify. Am I clear?”

“Yes, but it is a pity all the same. It gives a horrible air of deceit to the whole business.”

“We get it now and again in the light, Mr. Malone,” said Bolsover. “I don’t know if Wee One is gone yet. Wait a bit! Where are the matches?” He lit the candle, which set them all blinking after their long darkness, “Now let us see what we can do.”

There was a round wood platter or circle of wood lying among the miscellaneous objects littered over the table to serve as playthings for the strange forces. Bolsover stared at it. They all stared at it. They had risen but no one was within three feet of it.

"Please, Wee One, please!" cried Mrs. Bolsover. Malone could hardly believe his eyes. The disc began to move. It quivered and then rattled upon the table, exactly as the lid of a boiling pot might do.

"Up with it, Wee One!" They were all clapping their hands.

The circle of wood, in the full light of the candle, rose upon edge and stood there shaking, as if trying to keep its balance.

"Give three tilts, Wee One."

The disc inclined forward three times. Then it fell flat and remained so.

"I am so glad you have seen that," said Mailey. "There is Telekenesis in its simplest and most decisive form."

"I could not have believed it!" cried Enid.

"Nor I," said Malone. "I have extended my knowledge of what is possible. Mr. Bolsover, you have enlarged my views."

"Good, Mr. Malone!"

"As to the power at the back of these things I am still ignorant. As to the thing themselves I have now and henceforward not the slightest doubt in the world. I know that they are true. I wish you all good night. It is not likely that Miss Challenger or I will ever forget the evening that we have spent under your roof"

It was like another world when they came out into the frosty air, and saw the taxis bearing back the pleasure-seekers from the theatre or cinema palace. Mailey stood beside them while they waited for a cab.

"I know exactly how you feel," he said, smiling. "You look at all these bustling, complacent people, and you marvel to think how little they know of the possibilities of life. Don't you want to stop them? Don't you want to tell them? And yet they would only think you a liar or a lunatic. Funny situation, is it not?"

"I've lost all my bearings for the moment."

"They will come back to-morrow morning. It is curious how fleeting these impressions are. You will persuade yourselves that you have been dreaming. Well, good-bye — and let me know if I can help your studies in the future." The friends — one could hardly yet call them lovers — were absorbed in thought during their drive home. When he reached Victoria Gardens Malone escorted Enid to the door of the flat, but he did not go in with her. Somehow the jeers of Challenger which usually rather woke sympathy within him would now get upon his nerves. As it was he heard his greeting in the hall.

“Well, Enid. Where’s your spook? Spill him out of the bag on the floor and let us have a look at him.” His evening’s adventure ended as it had begun, with a bellow of laughter which pursued him down the lift.

5. Where Our Commissioners Have A Remarkable Experience

MALONE sat at the side table of the smoking-room of the Literary Club. He had Enid’s impressions of the seance before him — very subtle and observant they were — and he was endeavouring to merge them in his own experience. A group of men were smoking and chatting round the fire. This did not disturb the journalist, who found, as many do, that his brain and his pen worked best sometimes when they were stimulated by the knowledge that he was part of a busy world. Presently, however, somebody who observed his presence brought the talk round to psychic subjects, and then it was more difficult for him to remain aloof. He leaned back in his chair and listened.

Polter, the famous novelist, was there, a brilliant man with a subtle mind, which he used too often to avoid obvious truth and to defend some impossible position for the sake of the empty dialectic exercise. He was holding forth now to an admiring, but not entirely a subservient audience.

“Science,” said he, “is gradually sweeping the world clear of all these old cobwebs of superstition. The world was like some old, dusty attic, and the sun of science is bursting in, flooding it with light, while the dust settles gradually to the floor.”

“By science,” said someone maliciously, “you mean, of course, men like Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, Lombroso, Richet, and so forth.”

Polter was not accustomed to be countered, and usually became rude.

“No, sir, I mean nothing so preposterous,” he answered, with a glare. “No name, however eminent, can claim to stand for science so long as he is a member of an insignificant minority of scientific men.”

“He is, then, a crank,” said Pollifex, the artist, who usually played jackal to Polter.

The objector, one Millworthy, a free-lance of journalism, was not to be so easily silenced.

“Then Galileo was a crank in his day,” said he. “And Harvey was a crank when he was laughed at over the circulation of the blood.”

“It’s the circulation of the *Daily Gazette* which is at stake,” said Marrible, the humorist of the club. “If they get off their stunt I don’t suppose they care a tinker’s curse what is truth or what is not.”

“Why such things should be examined at all, except in a police court, I can’t imagine,” said Polter. “It is a dispersal of energy, a misdirection of human thought into channels which lead nowhere. We have plenty of obvious, material things to examine. Let us get on with our job.”

Atkinson, the surgeon, was one of the circle, and had sat silently listening. Now he spoke.

“I think the learned bodies should find more time for the consideration of psychic matters.”

“Less,” said Polter.

“You can’t have less than nothing. They ignore them altogether. Some time ago I had a series of cases of telepathic rapport which I wished to lay before the Royal Society. My colleague Wilson, the zoologist, also had a paper which he proposed to read. They went in together. His was accepted and mine rejected. The title of his paper was ‘The Reproductive System of the Dung-Beetle’.”

There was a general laugh.

“Quite right, too,” said Polter. “The humble dung-beetle was at least a fact. All this psychic stuff is not.”

“No doubt you have good grounds for your views,” chirped the mischievous Millworthy, a mild youth with a velvety manner. “I have little time for solid reading, so I should like to ask you which of Dr. Crawford’s three books you consider the best?”

“I never heard of the fellow.”

Millworthy simulated intense surprise.

“Good Heavens, man! Why, he is *the* authority. If you want pure laboratory experiments those are the books. You might as well lay down the law about zoology and confess that you had never heard of Darwin.”

“This is not science,” said Polter, emphatically.

“What is really not science,” said Atkinson, with some heat, “is the laying down of the law on matters which you have not studied. It is talk of that sort which has brought me to the edge of Spiritualism, when I compare this dogmatic ignorance with the earnest search for truth conducted by the great Spiritualists. Many of them took twenty years of work before they formed their conclusions.”

"But their conclusions are worthless because they are upholding a formed opinion."

"But each of them fought a long fight before he formed that opinion. I know a few of them, and there is not one who did not take a lot of convincing." Polter shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, they can have their spooks if it makes them happier so long as they let me keep my feet firm on the ground."

"Or stuck in the mud," said Atkinson.

"I would rather be in the mud with sane people thin in the air with lunatics," said Polter. "I know some of these Spiritualists people and I believe that you can divide them equally into fools and rogues."

Malone had listened with interest and then with a growing indignation. Now he suddenly took fire.

"Look here, Polter," he said, turning his chair towards the company, "it is fools and dolts like you which are holding back the world's progress. You admit that you have read nothing of this, and I'll swear you have seen nothing. Yet you use the position and the name which you have won in other matters in order to discredit a number of people who, whatever they may be, are certainly very earnest and very thoughtful."

"Oh," said Polter, "I had no idea you had got so far. You don't dare to say so in your articles. You are a Spiritualist then. That rather discounts your views, does it not?"

"I am not a Spiritualist, but I am an honest inquirer, and that is more than you have ever been. You call them rogues and fools, but, little as I know, I am sure that some of them are men and women whose boots you are not worthy to clean."

"Oh, come, Malone!" cried one or two voices, but the insulted Polter was on his feet. "It's men like you who empty this club," he cried, as he swept out. "I shall certainly never come here again to be insulted."

"I say, you've done it, Malone!"

"I felt inclined to help him out with a kick. Why should he ride roughshod over other people's feelings and beliefs? He has got on and most of us haven't, so he thinks it's a condescension to come among us."

"Dear old Irishman!" said Atkinson, patting his shoulder. "Rest, perturbed spirit, rest! But I wanted to have a word with you. Indeed, I was waiting here because I did not want to interrupt you."

"I've had interruptions enough!" cried Malone. "How could I work with that damned donkey braying in my ear?"

"Well, I've only a word to say. I've got a sitting with Linden, the famous medium of whom I spoke to you, at the Psychic College to-night. I have an extra ticket. Would you care to come?"

"Come? I should think so!"

"I have another ticket. I should have asked Polter if he had not been so offensive. Linden does not mind sceptics, but objects to scoffers. Who should I ask?"

"Let Miss Enid Challenger come. We work together, you know."

"Why, of course I will. Will you let her know?"

"Certainly."

"It's at seven o'clock to-night. The Psychic College. You know the place down at Holland Park."

"Yes, I have the address. Very well, Miss Challenger and I will certainly be there."

Behold the pair, then, upon a fresh psychic adventure. They picked Atkinson up at Wimpole Street, and then traversed that long, roaring rushing, driving belt of the great city which extends through Oxford Street and Bayswater to Notting Hill and the stately Victorian houses of Holland Park. It was at one of these that the taxi drew up, a large, imposing building, standing back a little from the road. A smart maid admitted them, and the subdued light of the tinted hall-lamp fell upon shining linoleum and polished woodwork with the gleam of white marble statuary in the corner. Enid's female perceptions told her of a well-run, well-appointed establishment, with a capable direction at the head. This direction took the shape of a kindly Scottish lady who met them in the hall and greeted Mr. Atkinson as an old friend. She was, in turn, introduced to the journalists as Mrs. Ogilvy. Malone had already heard how her husband and she had founded and run this remarkable institute, which is the centre of psychic experiment in London, at a very great cost, both in labour and in money, to themselves.

"Linden and his wife have gone up," said Mrs. Ogilvy. "He seems to think that the conditions are favourable. The rest are in the drawing-room. Won't you join them for a few minutes?"

Quite a number of people had gathered for the seance, some of them old psychic students who were mildly interested, others, beginners who looked about them with rather startled eyes, wondering what was going to happen next. A tall man was standing near the door who turned and disclosed the tawny beard and open face of Algernon Mailey. He shook hands with the newcomers.

"Another experience, Mr. Malone? Well, I thought you gave a very fair account of the last. You are still a neophyte, but you are well within the gates of the temple. Are you alarmed, Miss Challenger?"

"I don't think I could be while you were around," she answered.

He laughed.

"Of course, a materialisation seance is a little different to any other — more impressive, in a way. You'll find it very instructive, Malone, as bearing upon psychic photography and other matters. By the way, you should try for a psychic picture. The famous Hope works upstairs."

"I always thought that that at least was fraud."

"On the contrary, I should say it was the best established of all phenomena, the one which leaves the most permanent proof. I've been a dozen times under every possible test conditions. The real trouble is, not that it lends itself to fraud, but that it lends itself to exploitation by that villainous journalism which cares only for a sensation. Do you know anyone here?"

"No, we don't."

"The tall, handsome lady is the Duchess of Rossland. Then, there are Lord and Lady Montnoir, the middle-aged couple near the fire. Real, good folk and among the very few of the aristocracy who have shown earnestness and moral courage in this matter. The talkative lady is Miss Badley, who lives for seances, a jaded Society woman in search of new sensations — always visible, always audible, and always empty. I don't know the two men. I heard someone say they were researchers from the university. The stout man with the lady in black is Sir James Smith — they lost two boys in the war. The tall, dark person, is a weird man named Barclay, who lives, I understand, in one room and seldom comes out save for a seance."

"And the man with the horn glasses?"

"That is a pompous ass named Weatherby. He is one of those who wander about on the obscure edges of Masonry, talking with whispers and reverence of mysteries where no mystery is. Spiritualism, with its very real and awful mysteries, is, to him, a vulgar thing because it brought consolation to common folk, but he loves to read papers on the Palladian

Cultus, ancient and accepted Scottish rites, and Baphometic figures. Eliphas Levi is his prophet.”

“It sounds very learned.” said Enid.

“Or very absurd. But, hullo! Here are mutual friends.” The two Bolsovers had arrived, very hot and frowsy and genial. There is no such leveller of classes as Spiritualism, and the charwoman with psychic force is the superior of the millionaire who lacks it. The Bolsovers and the aristocrats fraternized instantly. The Duchess was just asking for admission to the grocer’s circle, when Mrs. Ogilvy bustled in.

“I think everyone is here now,” she said. “It is time to go upstairs.”

The seance room was a large, comfortable chamber on the first floor, with a circle of easy chairs, and a curtain-hung divan which served as a cabinet. The medium and his wife were waiting there. Mr. Linden was a gentle, large-featured man, stoutish in build, deep-chested, clean-shaven, with dreamy, blue eyes and flaxen, curly hair which rose in a pyramid at the apex of his head. He was of middle age. His wife was rather younger, with the sharp, querulous expression of the tired housekeeper, and quick, critical eyes, which softened into something like adoration when she looked at her husband. Her role was to explain matters, and to guard his interests while he was unconscious.

“The sitters had better just take their own places,” said the medium. “If you can alternate the sexes it is as well. Don’t cross your knees, it breaks the current. If we have a materialisation, don’t grab at it. If you do, you are liable to injure me.”

The two sleuths of the Research Society looked at each other knowingly. Mailey observed it.

“Quite right,” he said. “I have seen two cases of dangerous haemorrhage in the medium brought on by that very cause.”

“Why?” asked Malone.

“Because the ectoplasm used is drawn from the medium. It recoils upon him like a snapped elastic band. Where it comes through the skin you get a bruise. Where it comes from mucous membrane you get bleeding.”

“And when it comes from nothing, you get nothing”“ said the researcher with a grin.

“I will explain the procedure in a few words,” said Mrs. Ogilvy, when everyone was seated. “Mr. Linden does not enter the cabinet at all. He sits outside it, and as he tolerates red light you will be able to satisfy yourselves that he does not leave his seat. Mrs. Linden sits on the other side. She is there to regulate and explain. In the first place we would wish you to examine the cabinet. One of you will also please lock the door on the inside and be responsible for the key."

The cabinet proved to be a mere tent of hangings, detached from the wall and standing on a solid platform. The researchers ferreted about inside it and stamped on the boards. All seemed solid.

"What is the use of it?" Malone whispered to Mailey.

"It serves as a reservoir and condensing place for the ectoplasmic vapour from the medium, which would otherwise diffuse over the room."

"It has been known to serve other purposes also," remarked one of the researchers, who overheard the conversation.

"That's true enough," said Mailey philosophically. "I am all in favour of caution and supervision."

"Well, it seems fraud-proof on this occasion, if the medium sits outside." The two researchers were agreed on this.

The medium was seated on one side of the little tent, his wife on the other. The light was out, and a small red lamp near the ceiling was just sufficient to enable outlines to be clearly seen. As the eyes became accustomed to it some detail could also be observed.

"Mr. Linden will begin by some clairvoyant readings" said Mrs. Linden. Her whole attitude, seated beside the cabinet with her hands on her lap and the air of a proprietor, made Enid smile, for she thought of Mrs. Jarley and her waxworks.

Linden, who was not in a trance, began to give clairvoyance. It was not very good. Possibly the mixed influence of so many sitters of various types at close quarters was too disturbing. That was the excuse which he gave himself when several of his descriptions were unrecognised. But Malone was more shocked by those which were recognised, since it was so clear that the word was put into the medium's mouth. It was the folly of the sitter rather than the fault of the medium, but it was disconcerting all the same.

"I see a young man with brown eyes and a rather drooping moustache."

"Oh, darling, darling, have you then come back!" cried Miss Badley. "Oh, has he a message?"

"He sends his love and does not forget."

"Oh, how evidential! It is so exactly what the dear boy would have said! My first lover, you know," she added, in a simpering voice to the company.

"He never fails to come. Mr. Linden has brought him again and again."

"There is a young fellow in khaki building up on the left. I see a symbol over his head. It might be a Greek cross."

"Jim — it is surely Jim!" cried Lady Smith.

"Yes. He nods his head."

"And the Greek cross is probably a propeller," said Sir James. "He was in the Air Service, you know." Malone and Enid were both rather shocked. Mailey was also uneasy.

"This is not good," he whispered to Enid. "Wait a bit! You will get something better."

There were several good recognitions, and then someone resembling Summerlee was described for Malone. This was wisely discounted by him, since Linden might have been in the audience on the former occasion. Mrs. Debbs' exhibition seemed to him far more convincing than that of Linden.

"Wait a bit!" Mailey repeated.

"The medium will now try for materialisations," said Mrs. Linden. "If the figures appear I would ask you not to touch them, save by request. Victor will tell you if you may do so. Victor is the medium's control."

The medium had settled down in his chair and he now began to draw long, whistling breaths with deep intakes, puffing the air out between his lips. Finally he steadied down and seemed to sink into a deep coma, his chin upon his breast. Suddenly he spoke, but it seemed that his voice was better modulated and more cultivated than before.

"Good evening, all!" said the voice.

There was a general murmur of "Good evening, Victor."

"I am afraid that the vibrations are not very harmonious. The sceptical element is present, but not, I think, predominant, so that we may hope for results. Martin Lightfoot is doing what he can."

"That is the Indian control" Mailey whispered.

"I think that if you would start the gramophone it would be helpful. A hymn is always best, though there is no real objection to secular music. Give us what you think best, Mrs. Ogilvy."

There was the rasping of a needle which had not yet found its grooves. Then "Lead, Kindly Light" was churned out. The audience joined in in a subdued fashion. Mrs. Ogilvy then changed it to "O, God, our help in ages past".

“They often change the records themselves,” said Mrs. Ogilvy, “but to-night there is not enough power.”

“Oh, yes,” said the voice. “There is enough power, Mrs. Ogilvy, but we are anxious to conserve it all for the materialisations. Martin says they are building up very well.”

At this moment the curtain in front of the cabinet began to sway. It bellied out as if a strong wind were behind it. At the same time a breeze was felt by all who were in the circle, together with a sensation of cold.

“It is quite chilly,” whispered Enid, with a shiver.

“It is not a subjective feeling,” Mailey answered. “Mr. Harry Price has tested it with thermometric readings. So did Professor Crawford.”

“My God!” cried a startled voice. It belonged to the pompous dabbler in mysteries, who was suddenly faced with a real mystery. The curtains of the cabinet had parted and a human figure had stolen noiselessly out. There was the medium clearly outlined on one side. There was Mrs. Linden, who had sprung to her feet, on the other. And, between them, the little black, hesitating figure, which seemed to be terrified at its own position. Mrs. Linden soothed and encouraged it.

“Don’t be alarmed, dear. It is all quite right. No one will hurt you.”

“It is someone who has never been through before,” she explained to the company. “Naturally it seems very strange to her. Just as strange as if we broke into their world. That’s right, dear. You are gaining strength, I can see. Well done!”

The figure was moving forward. Everyone sat spellbound, with staring eyes. Miss Badley began to giggle hysterically. Weatherby lay back in his chair, gasping with horror. Neither Malone nor Enid felt any fear, but were consumed with curiosity. How marvellous to hear the humdrum flow of life in the street outside and to be face to face with such a sight as that.

Slowly the figure moved round. Now it was close to Enid and between her and the red light. Stooping, she could get the silhouette sharply outlined. It was that of a little, elderly woman, with sharp, clear-cut features.

“It’s Susan!” cried Mrs. Bolsover. “Oh, Susan, don’t you know me?”

The figure turned and nodded her head.

“Yes, yes, dear, it is your sister Susie,” cried her husband. “I never saw her in anything but black. Susan, speak to us!”

The head was shaken.

“They seldom speak the first time they come,” said Mrs. Linden, whose rather blase, business-like air was in contrast to the intense emotion of the company. “I’m afraid she can’t hold together long. Ah, there! She has gone!”

The figure had disappeared. There had been some backward movement towards the cabinet, but it seemed to the observers that she sank into the ground before she reached it. At any rate, she was gone.

“Gramophone, please!” said Mrs. Linden. Everyone relaxed and sat back with a sigh. The gramophone struck up a lively air. Suddenly the curtains parted, and a second figure appeared.

It was a young girl, with flowing hair down her back. She came forward swiftly and with perfect assurance to the centre of the circle.

Mrs. Linden laughed in a satisfied way.

“Now you will get something good,” she said. “Here is Lucille.”

“Good evening, Lucille!” cried the Duchess. “I met you last month, you will remember, when your medium came to Maltraver Towers.”

“Yes, yes, lady, I remember you. You have a little boy, Tommy, on our side of life. No, no, not dead, lady! We are far more alive than you are. All the fun and frolic are with us!” She spoke in a high clear voice and perfect English.

“Shall I show you what we do over here?” She began a graceful, gliding dance, while she whistled as melodiously as a bird. “Poor Susan could not do that. Susan has had no practice. Lucille knows how to use a built-up body.”

“Do you remember me, Lucille?” asked Mailey.

“I remember you, Mr. Mailey. Big man with yellow beard.”

For the second time in her life Enid had to pinch herself hard to satisfy herself that she was not dreaming. Was this graceful creature, who had now sat down in the centre of the circle, a real materialisation of ectoplasm, used for the moment as a machine for expression by a soul that had passed, or was it an illusion of the senses, or was it a fraud? There were the three possibilities. An illusion was absurd when all had the same impression. Was it a fraud? But this was certainly not the little old woman. She was inches taller and fair, not dark. And the cabinet was fraud-proof. It had been meticulously examined. Then it was true. But if it were true, what a vista of possibilities opened out. Was it not far the greatest matter which could claim the attention of the world!

Meanwhile, Lucille had been so natural and the situation was so normal that even the most nervous had relaxed. The girl answered most cheerfully to every question, and they rained upon her from every side.

"Where did you live, Lucille?"

"Perhaps I had better answer that," interposed Mrs. Linden. "It will save the power. Lucille was bred in South Dakota in the United States, and passed over at the age of fourteen. We have verified some of her statements."

"Are you glad you died, Lucille?"

"Glad for my own sake. Sorry for mother."

"Has your mother seen you since?"

"Poor mother is a shut box. Lucille cannot open the lid."

"Are you happy?"

"Oh, yes, so gloriously happy."

"Is it right that you can come back?"

"Would God allow it if it were not right? What a wicked man you must be to ask!"

"What religion were you?"

"We were Roman Catholics."

"Is that the right religion?"

"All religions are right if they make you better."

"Then it does not matter."

"It is what people do in daily life, not what they believe."

"Tell us more, Lucille."

"Lucille has little time. There are others who wish to come. If Lucille uses too much power, the others have less. Oh, God is very good and kind! You poor people on earth do not know how good and kind He is because it is grey down there. But it is grey for your own good. It is to give you your chance to earn all the lovely things which wait for you. But you can only tell how wonderful He is when you get over here."

"Have you seen him?"

"Seen Him! How could you see God? No, no, He is all round us and in us and in everything, but we do not see Him. But I have seen the Christ. Oh, He was glorious, glorious! Now, good-bye — good-bye!" She backed towards the cabinet and sank into the shadows.

Now came a tremendous experience for Malone. A small, dark, rather broad figure of a woman appeared slowly from the cabinet. Mrs. Linden encouraged her, and then came across to the journalist.

"It is for you. You can break the circle. Come up to her."

Malone advanced and peered, awestruck, into the face of the apparition. There was not a foot between them. Surely that large head, that solid, square outline was familiar! He put his face still nearer — it was almost touching. He strained his eyes. It seemed to him that the features were semi-fluid, moulding themselves into a shape, as if some unseen hand was modelling them in putty. "Mother! " he cried. "Mother! "

Instantly the figure threw up both her hands in a wild gesture of joy. The motion seemed to destroy her equilibrium and she vanished.

"She had not been through before. She could not speak," said Mrs. Linden, in her business-like way. "It was your mother."

Malone went back half-stunned to his seat. It is only when these things come to one's own address that one understands their full force. His mother! Ten years in her grave and yet standing before him. Could he swear it was his mother? No, he could not. Was he morally certain that it was his mother? Yes, he was morally certain. He was shaken to the core.

But other wonders diverted his thoughts. A young man had emerged briskly from the cabinet and had advanced to the front of Mailey, where he had halted.

"Hullo, Jock! Dear old Jock!" said Mailey. "My nephew," he explained to the company. "He always comes when I am with Linden."

"The power is sinking," said the lad, in a clear voice. "I can't stay very long. I am so glad to see you, Uncle. You know, we can see quite clearly in this light, even if you can't."

"Yes, I know you can. I say, Jock. I wanted to tell you that I told your mother I had seen you. She said her Church taught her it was wrong."

"I know. And that I was a demon. Oh, it is rotten, rotten, rotten, and rotten things will fall!" His voice broke in a sob.

"Don't blame her Jock, she believes this."

"No, no, I don't blame her! She will know better some day. The day is coming soon when all truth will be manifest and all these corrupt Churches will be swept off the earth with their cruel doctrines and their caricatures of God."

"Why, Jock, you are becoming quite a heretic!"

"Love, Uncle! Love! That is all that counts. What matter what you believe if you are sweet and kind and unselfish as the Christ was of old?"

"Have you seen Christ?" asked someone.

"Not yet. Perhaps the time may come."

"Is he not in Heaven, then?"

"There are many heavens. I am in a very humble one. But it is glorious all the same."

Enid had thrust her head forward during this dialogue. Her eyes had got used to the light and she could see more clearly than before. The man who stood within a few feet of her was not human. Of that she had no doubt whatever, and yet the points were very subtle. Something in his strange, yellow-white colouring as contrasted with the faces of her neighbours. Something, also, in the curious stiffness of his carriage, as of a man in very rigid stays.

"Now, Jock," said Mailey, "give an address to the company. Tell them a few words about your life."

The figure hung his head, exactly as a shy youth would do in life.

"Oh, Uncle, I can't."

"Come, Jock, we love to listen to you."

"Teach the folk what death is," the figure began. "God wants them to know. That is why He lets us come back. It is nothing. You are no more changed than if you went into the next room. You can't believe you are dead. I didn't. It was only when I saw old Sam that I knew, for I was certain that he was dead, anyhow. Then I came back to mother. And" — his voice broke—"she would not receive me."

"Never mind, dear old Jock," said Mailey. "She will learn wisdom."

"Teach them the truth! Teach it to them! Oh, it u so much more important than all the things men talk about. If papers for one week gave as much attention to psychic things as they do to football, it would be known to all. It is ignorance which stands—"

The observers were conscious of a sort of flash towards the cabinet, but the youth had disappeared.

"Power run down," said Mailey. "Poor lad, he held on to the last. He always did. That was how he died.

There was a long pause. The gramophone started again. Then there was a movement of the curtains. Something was emerging. Mrs. Linden sprang up and waved the figure back. The medium for the first time stirred in his chair and groaned.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Linden?"

“Only half-formed,” she answered. “The lower face had not materialised. Some of you would have been alarmed. I think that we shall have no more to-night The power has sunk very low.”

So it proved. The lights were gradually turned on. The medium lay with a white face and a clammy brow in his chair, while his wife sedulously watched over him, unbuttoning his collar and bathing his face from a water-glass. The company broke into little groups, discussing what they had seen.

“Oh, wasn’t it thrilling?” cried Miss Badley. “It really was most exciting. But what a pity we could not see the one with the semi-materialised face.”

“Thanks, I have seen quite enough,” said the pompous mystic, all the pomposity shaken out of him. “I confess that it has been rather too much for my nerves.”

Mr. Atkinson found himself near the psychic researchers.

“Well, what do you make of it?” he asked.

“I have seen it better done at Maskelyne’s Hall,” said one.

“Oh, come, Scott!,” said the other. “You’ve no right to say that. You admitted that the cabinet was fraud-proof.”

“Well, so do the committees who go on the stage at Maskelyne’s.”

“Yes, but it is Maskelyne’s own stage. This is not Linden’s own stage. He has no machinery.”

“*Populus vult decepi,*” the other answered, shrugging his shoulders. “ I should certainly reserve judgment.” He moved away with the dignity of one who cannot be deceived, while his more rational companion still argued with him as they went.

“Did you hear that?” said Atkinson. “There is a certain class of psychic researcher who is absolutely incapable of receiving evidence. They misuse their brains by straining them to find a way round when the road is quite clear before them. When the human race advances into its new kingdom, these intellectual men will form the absolute rear.”

“No, no,” said Mailey, laughing. “The bishops are predestined to be the rearguard. I see them all marching in step, a solid body, with their gaiters and cassocks — the last in the whole world to reach spiritual truth.”

“Oh, come,” said Enid, “that is too severe. They are all good men.”

“Of course they are. It’s quite physiological. They are are a body of elderly men, and the elderly brain is sclerosed and cannot record new impressions. It’s not their fault, but the fact remains. You are very silent, Malone.” But Malone was thinking of a little, squat, dark figure which waved its hands in joy when he spoke to it. It was with that image in his mind that he turned from this room of wonders and passed down into the street.

6. In Which The Reader Is Shown The Habits Of A Notorious Criminal

WE will now leave that little group with whom we have made our first exploration of these grey and ill-defined, but immensely important, regions of human thought and experiences. From the researchers we will turn to the researched. Come with me and we will visit Mr. Linden at home, and will examine the lights and shades which make up the life of a professional medium.

To reach him we will pass down the crowded thoroughfare of Tottenham Court Road, where the huge furniture emporia flank the way, and we will turn into a small street of drab houses which leads eastwards towards the British Museum. Tullis Street is the name and 40 the number. Here it is, one of a row, flat-faced, dull-coloured and commonplace, with railed steps leading up to a discoloured door, and one front-room window, in which a huge gilt-edged Bible upon a small round table reassures the timid visitor. With the universal pass-key of imagination we open the dingy door, pass down a dark passage and up a narrow stair. It is nearly ten o’clock in the morning and yet it is in his bedroom that we must seek the famous worker of miracles. The fact us that he has had, as we have seen, an exhausting sitting the night before, and that he has to conserve his strength in the mornings.

At the moment of our inopportune, but invisible, visit he was sitting up, propped by the pillows, with a breakfast-tray upon his knees. The vision he presented would have amused those who have prayed with him in the bumble Spiritualist temples, or had sat with awe at the seances where he had exhibited the modern equivalents of the gifts of the Spirit. He looked unhealthily pallid in the dim morning light, and his curly hair rose up in a tangled pyramid above his broad, intellectual brow. The open collar of his nightshirt displayed a broad, bull’s neck, and the depth of his chest and spread of his shoulders showed that he was a man of considerable personal strength. He was eating his breakfast with avidity while he conversed with the little, eager, dark-eyed wife who was seated on the side of the bed.

“And you reckon it a good meeting, Mary?”

“Fair to middling, Tom. There was two of them researchers raking round with their feet and upsetting everybody. D’ye think those folk in the Bible would have got their phenomena if they had chaps of that sort on the premises? ‘Of one accord’, that’s what they say in the book.”

“Of course!” cried Linden heartily. “Was the Duchess pleased?”

“Yes, I think she was very pleased. So was Mr. Atkinson, the surgeon. There was a new man there called Malone of the Press. Then Lord and Lady Montnoir got evidence, and so did Sir James Smith and Mr. Mailey.”

“I wasn’t satisfied with the clairvoyance,” said the medium. “The silly idiots kept on putting things into my mind. ‘That’s surely my Uncle Sam’, and so forth. It blurs me so that I can see nothing clear.”

“Yes, and they think they are helping! Helping to muddle you and deceive themselves. I know the kind.”

“But I went under nicely and I am glad there were some fine materialisations. It took it out of me, though. I’m a rag this morning.”

“They work you too hard, dear. I’ll take you to Margate and build you up.”

“Well, maybe at Easter we could do a week. It would be fine. I don’t mind readings and clairvoyance, but the physicals do try you. I’m not as bad as Hallows. They say he just lies white and gasping on the floor after them.”

“Yes,” cried the woman bitterly. “And then they run to him with whisky, and so they teach him to rely on the bottle and you get another case of a drunken medium. I know them. You keep off it, Tom!”

“Yes, one of our trade should stick to soft drinks. If he can stick to vegetables, too, he’s all the better, but I can’t preach that while I am wolfin’ up ham and eggs. By Gosh, Mary! it’s past ten and I have a string of them comin’ this morning. I’m going to make a bit to-day.”

“You give it away as quick as you make it, Tom.”

“Well, some hard cases come my way. So long as we can make both ends meet what more do we want? I expect they will look after us all right.”“

“They have let down a lot of other poor mediums who did good work in their day.”

“It’s the rich folk that are to blame not the Spirit-people,” said Tom Linden hotly. “It makes me see red when I remember these folk, Lady This and Countess That, declaring all the comfort they have had, and then leaving those who gave it to die in the gutter or rot in the workhouse. Poor old Tweedy and Soames and the rest all living on old-age pensions and the papers talking of the money that mediums make, while some damned conjuror makes more than all of us put together by a rotten imitation with two tons of machinery to help him."

"Don't worry, dear," cried the medium's wife, putting her thin hand caressingly upon the tangled mane of her man. "It all comes level in time and everybody pays the price for what they have done."

Linden laughed loudly. "It's my Welsh half that comes out when I flare up. Let the conjurors take their dirty money and let the rich folk keep their purses shut. I wonder what they think money is for. Paying death duties is about the only fun some of them seem to get out of it. If I had their money . . ."

There was a knock at the door.

"Please, sir, your brother Silas is below." The two looked at each other with some dismay.

"More trouble," said Mrs. Linden sadly.

Linden shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Susan!" he cried. "Tell him I'll be down. Now, dear, you keep him going and I'll be with you in a quarter of an hour."

In less time than he named he was down in the front room — his consulting room — where his wife was evidently having some difficulty in making agreeable conversation with their visitor. He was a big, heavy man, not unlike his elder brother, but with all the genial chubbiness of the medium coarsened into pure brutality. He had the same pile of curly hair, but he was clean-shaven with a heavy, obstinate jowl. He sat by the window with his huge freckled hands upon his knees. A very important part of Mr. Silas Linden lay in those hands, for he had been a professional boxer, and at one time was fancied for the welter-weight honours of England. Now, as his stained tweed suit and frayed boots made clear, he had fallen on evil days, which he endeavoured to mitigate by cadging on his brother.

"Mornin', Tom," he said in a husky voice. Then as the wife left the room: "Got a drop of Scotch about? I've a head on me this morning. I met some of the old set last night down at 'The Admiral Vernon'. Quite a reunion it was — chaps I hadn't seen since my best ring days."

"Sorry, Silas," said the medium, seating himself behind his desk. "I keep nothing in the house."

"Spirits enough, but not the right sort," said Silas.

"Well, the price of a drink will do as well. If you've got a Bradbury about you I could do with it, for there's nothing coming my way."

Torn Linden took a pound note from his desk.

"Here you are, Silas. So long as I have any you have your share. But you had two pounds last week. Is it gone?"

"Gone! I should say so!" He put the note in his pocket. " Now, look here, Tom, I want to speak to you very serious as between man and man."

"Yes, Silas, what is it?"

"You see that!" He pointed to a lump on the back of his hand. " That's a bone! See? It will never be right. It was when I hit Curly Jenkins third round and outed him at the N.S.C. I outed myself for life that night. I can put up a show fight and exhibition bout, but I'm done for the real thing. My right has gone west."

"It's a hard case, Silas."

"Damned hard! But that's neither here nor there. What matters is that I've got to pick up a living and I want to know how to do it. An old scrapper don't find many openings. Chucker-out at a pub with free drinks. Nothing doing there. What I want to know' Tom, is what's the matter with my becoming a medium?"

"A medium?"

"Why the devil should you stare at me! If it's good enough for you it's good enough for me."

"But you are not a medium."

"Oh, come! Keep that for the newspapers. It's all in the family, and between you an' me, how d'ye do it?"

"I don't do it. I do nothing."

"And get four or five quid a week for it. That's a good yarn. Now you can't fool me. Tom, I'm not one o' those duds that pay you a thick 'un for an hour in the dark. We're on the square, you an' me. How d'ye do it?"

"Do what?"

"Well, them raps, for example. I've seen you sit there at your desk, as it might be, and raps come answerin' questions over yonder on the bookshelf. It's damned clever — fair puzzles 'em every time. How d'ye get them?"

"I tell you I don't. It's outside myself."

"Rats! You can tell me, Tom. I'm Griffiths, the safe man. It would set me up for life if I could do it."

For the second time in one morning the medium’s Welsh strain took control.

“You’re an impudent, blasphemous rascal, Silas Linden. It’s men like you who come into our movement and give it a bad name. You should know me better than to think that I am a cheat. Get out of my house, you ungrateful rascal!”

“Not too much of your lip,” growled the ruffian.

“Out you go, or I’ll put you out, brother or no brother.” Silas doubled his great fists and looked ugly for a moment. Then the anticipation of favours to come softened his mood.

“Well, well, no harm meant,” he growled, as he made for the door. “I expect I can make a shot at it without your help.” His grievance suddenly overcame his prudence as he stood in the doorway. “You damned, canting, hypocritical box-of-tricks. I’ll be even with you yet.”

The heavy door slammed behind him.

Mrs. Linden had rushed in to her husband.

“The hulking blackguard!” she cried. “I ‘eard ‘im. What did ‘e want?”

“Wanted me to put him wise to mediumship. Thinks it’s a trick of some sort that I could teach him.”

“The foolish lump! Well, it’s a good thing, for he won’t dare show his face here again.”

“Oh, won’t he?”

“If he does I’ll slap it for him. To think of his upsettin’ you like this. Why, you’re shakin’ all over!”

“I suppose I wouldn’t be a medium if I wasn’t high strung. Someone said we were poets, only more so. But it’s bad just when work is beginning.”

“I’ll give you healing.”

She put her little work-worn hands over his high forehead and held them there in silence.

“That’s better!” said he. “Well done, Mary. I’ll have a cigarette in the kitchen. That will finish it.”

“No, there’s someone here.” She had looked out of the window. “Are you fit to see her? It’s a woman.”

“Yes, yes. I am all right now. Show her in.”

An instant later a woman entered, a pale, tragic figure in black, whose appearance told its own tale. Linden motioned her to a chair away from the light. Then he looked through his papers.

"You are Mrs. Blount, are you not? You had an appointment?"

"Yes — I wanted to ask—"

"Please ask me nothing. It confuses me."

He was looking at her with the medium's gaze in his light grey eyes — that gaze which looks round and through a thing rather than at it.

"You have been wise to come, very wise. There is someone beside you who has an urgent message which could not be delayed. I get a name . . . Francis . . . yes, Francis." The woman clasped her hands.

"Yes, yes, it is the name."

"A dark man, very sad, very earnest — oh, so earnest. He will speak. He must speak! It is urgent. He says, 'Tink-a-bell'. Who is Tink-a-bell?"

"Yes, yes, he called me so. Oh, Frank, Frank, speak to me! Speak!"

"He is speaking. His hand is on your head. 'Tink-a-bell', he says, 'If you do what you purpose doing it will make a gap that it will take many years to cross'. Does that mean anything?"

She sprang from her chair. "It means everything. Oh, Mr. Linden, this was my last chance. If this had failed — if I found that I had really lost him I meant to go and seek him. I would have taken poison this night."

"Thank God that I have saved you. It is a terrible thing, madame, to take one's life. It breaks the law of Nature, and Nature's laws cannot be broken without punishment. I rejoice that he has been able to save you. He has more to say to you. His message is, 'If you will live and do your duty I will for ever be by your side, far closer to you than ever I was in life. My presence will surround you and guard both you and our three babes.'"

It was marvellous the change! The pale, worn woman who had entered the room was now standing with flushed cheeks and smiling lips. It is true that tears were pouring down her face' but they were tears of joy. She clapped her hands. She made little convulsive movements as if she would dance.

"He's not dead! He's not dead! How can he be dead if he can speak to me and be closer to me than ever? Oh, it's glorious! Oh, Mr. Linden, what can I do for you? You have saved me from shameful death! You have restored my husband to me! Oh, what a God-like power you have!"

The medium was an emotional man and his own tears were moist upon his cheeks.

"My dear lady, say no more. It is not I. I do nothing. You can thank God Who in His mercy permits some of His mortals to discern a spirit or to carry a message. Well, well, a guinea is my fee, if you can afford it. Come back to me if ever you are in trouble.”

“I am content now,” she cried, drying her eyes, “to await God’s will and to do my duty in the world until such time as it shall be ordained that we unite once more.”

The widow left the house walking on air. Tom Linden also felt that the clouds left by his brother’s visit had been blown away by this joyful incident, for there is no happiness like giving happiness and seeing the beneficient workings of one’s own power. He had hardly settled down in his chair, however, before another client was ushered in. This time it was a smartly-dressed, white-spatted, frock-coated man of the world, with a bustling air as of one to whom minutes are precious.

“Mr. Linden, I believe? I have heard, sir, of your powers. I am told that by handling an object you can often get some clue as to the person who owned it?”

“It happens sometimes. I cannot command it.”

“I should like to test you. I have a letter here which I received this morning. Would you try your powers upon that?”“

The medium took the folded letter, and, leaning back in his chair, he pressed it upon his forehead. He sat with his eyes closed for a minute or more. Then he returned the paper.

“I don’t like it” he said. “I get a feeling of evil. I see a man dressed all in white. He has a dark face. He writes at a bamboo table. I get a sensation of heat. The letter is from the tropics.”

“Yes, from Central America.”

“I can tell you no more.”

“Are the spirits so limited? I thought they knew everything.”

“They do not know everything. Their power and knowledge are as closely limited as ours. But this is not a matter for the spirit people. What I did then was psychometry, which, so far as we know, is a power of the human soul.”

“Well, you are right as far as you have gone. This man, my correspondent, wants me to put up the money for the half-share in an oil boring. Shall I do it?”

Tom Linden shook his head.

“These powers are given to some of us, sir, for the consolation of humanity and for a proof of immortality. They were never meant for worldly use. Trouble always comes of such use, trouble to the medium and trouble to the client. I will not go into the matter.”

“Money’s no object,” said the man, drawing a wallet from his inner pocket.

“No, sir, nor to me. I am poor, but I have never ill-used my gift.”

“A fat lot of use the gift is, then!” said the visitor, rising from his chair. “I can get all the rest from the parsons who are licensed, and you are not. There is your guinea, but I have not had the worth of it.”

“I am sorry, sir, but I cannot break a rule. There is a lady beside you — near your left shoulder — an elderly lady . . .”

“Tut! tut!”“ said the financier, turning towards the door.

“She wears a large gold locket with an emerald cross upon her breast.”

The man stopped, turned and stared.

“Where did you pick that up?”

“I see it before me, now.”

“Why, dash it, man, that is what my mother always wore! D’you tell me you can see her?”

“No, she is gone.”

“What was she like? What was she doing?”

“She was your mother. She said so. She was weeping.”

“Weeping! My mother! Why, she is in heaven if ever a woman was. They don’t weep in heaven!”

“Not in the imaginary heaven. They do in the real heaven. It is only we who ever make them weep. She left a message.”

“Give it to me!”

“The message was: ‘Oh, Jack! Jack! you are drifting ever further from my reach’”

The man made a contemptuous gesture.

“I was a damned fool to let you have my name when I made the appointment. You have been making inquiries. You don’t take me in with your tricks. I’ve had enough of it — more than enough!”

For the second time that morning the door was slammed by an angry visitor.

“He didn’t like his message.” Linden explained to his wife. “It was his poor mother. She is fretting over him. Lord! If folk only knew these things it would do them more good than all the forms and ceremonies.”

“Well, Tom, it’s not your fault if they don’t,” his wife answered. “ There are two women waiting to see you. They have not an introduction but they seem in great trouble.”

“I’ve a bit of a headache. I haven’t got over last night. Silas and I are the same in that. Our night’s work finds us out next morning. I’ll just take these and no more, for it is bad to send anyone sorrowin’ away if one can help it.”

The two women were shown in, both of them austere figures dressed in black, one a stern-looking person of fifty, the other about half that age.

“I believe your fee is a guinea,” said the elder, putting that sum upon the table.

“To those who can afford it,” Linden answered. As a matter of fact, the guinea often went the other way.

“Oh yes, I can afford it,” said the woman. “I am in sad trouble and they told me maybe you could help me.”

“Well, I will if I can. That’s what I am for.”

“I lost my poor husband in the war — killed at Ypres he was. Could I get in touch with him?”

“You don’t seem to bring any influence with you. I get no impression. I am sorry but we can’t command these things. I get the name Edmund. Was that his name?”

“No.”

“Or Albert?”

“No.”

“I am sorry, but it seems confused — cross vibrations, perhaps, and a mix-up of messages like crossed telegraph wires.”

“Does the name Pedro help you?”

“Pedro! Pedro! No, I get nothing. Was Pedro an elderly man?”

“No, not elderly.”

“I can get no impression.”

“It was about this girl of mine that I really wanted advice. My husband would have told me what to do. She has got engaged to a young man, a fitter by trade, but there are one or two things against it and I want to know what to do.”

“Do give us some advice,” said the young woman, looking at the medium with a hard eye.

“I would if I could, my dear. Do you love this man?”

“Oh yes, he’s all right.”

“Well, if you don’t feel more than that about him, I hould leave him alone. Nothing but unhappiness comes of such a marriage.”

“Then you see unhappiness waiting for her?”

“I see a good chance of it. I think she should be careful.”

“Do you see anyone else coming along?”

“Everyone, man or woman, meets their mate sometime somewhere.”

“Then she will get a mate?”

“Most certainly she will.”

“I wonder if I should have any family?” asked the girl.

“Nay, that’s more than I can say.”

“And money — will she have money? We are down hearted, Mr. Linden, and we want a little “

At this moment there came a most surprising interruption. The door flew open and little Mrs. Linden rushed into the room with pale face and blazing eyes.

“They are policewomen, Tom. I’ve had a warning about them. It’s only just come. Get out of this house, you pair of snivelling hypocrites. Oh, what a fool! What a fool I was not to recognise what you were.” The two women had risen.

“Yes, you are rather late, Mrs. Linden,” said the senior. “The money has passed.”

“Take it back! Take it back! It’s on the table.”

“No, no, the money has passed. We have had our fortune told. You will hear more of this, Mr. Linden.”

“You brace of frauds! You talk of frauds when it is you who are the frauds all the time! He would not have seen you if it had not been for compassion.”

“It is no use scolding us,” the woman answered. “We do our duty and we did not make the law. So long as it is on the Statute Book we have to enforce it. We must report the case at headquarters.”

Tom Linden seemed stunned by the blow, but, when the policewomen had disappeared, he put his arm round his weeping wife and consoled her as best he might.

“The typist at the police office sent down the warning,” she said. “Oh, Tom, it is the second time!” she cried. “It means gaol and hard labour for you.”

“Well, dear, so long as we are conscious of having done no wrong and of having done God’s work to the best of our power, we must take what comes with a good heart.”

“But where were they? How could they let you down so? Where was your guide?”

“Yes, Victor,” said Tom Linden, shaking his head at the air above him, “where were you? I’ve got a crow to pick with you. You know, dear,” he added, “just as a doctor can never treat his own case, a medium is very helpless when things come to his own address. That’s the law. And yet I should have known. I was feeling in the dark. I had no inspiration of any sort. It was just a foolish pity and sympathy that led me on when I had no sort of a real message. Well, dear Mary, we will take what’s coming to us with a brave heart. Maybe they have not enough to make a case, and maybe the beak is not as ignorant as most of them. We’ll hope for the best.”

In spite of his brave words the medium was shaking and quivering at the shock. His wife had put her hands upon him and was endeavouring to steady him, when Susan, the maid, who knew nothing of the trouble, admitted a fresh visitor into the room. It was none other than Edward Malone.

“He can’t see you,” said Mrs. Linden, “the medium is ill. He will see no one this morning.”

But Linden had recognised his visitor.

“This is Mr. Malone, my dear, of the *Daily Gazette*. He was with us last night. We had a good sitting, had we not, sir?”

“Marvellous!” said Malone. “But what is amiss?”

Both husband and wife poured out their sorrows.

“What a dirty business!” cried Malone, with disgust.

“I am sure the public does not realise how this law is enforced, or there would be a row. This agent-provocateur business is quite foreign to British justice. But in any case, Linden, you are a real medium. The law was made to suppress false ones.”

“There are no real mediums in British law,” said Linden, ruefully. “I expect the more real you are the greater the offence. If you are a medium at all and take money you are liable. But how can a medium live if he does not take money? It’s a man’s whole work and needs all his strength. You can’t be a carpenter all day and a first-class medium in the evening.”

"What a wicked law! It seems to be deliberately stifling all physical proofs of spiritual power."

"Yes, that is just what it is. If the Devil passed a law it would be just that. It is supposed to be for the protection of the public and yet no member of the public has ever been known to complain. Every case is a police trap. And yet the police know as well as you or I that every Church charity garden-party has got its clairvoyante or its fortune-teller."

"It does seem monstrous. What will happen now?"

"Well, I expect a summons will come along. Then a police court case. Then fine or imprisonment. It's the second time, you see."

"Well, your friends will give evidence for you and we will have a good man to defend you."

Linden shrugged his shoulders.

"You never know who are your friends. They slip away like water when it comes to the pinch."

"Well, I won't, for one," said Malone, heartily. "Keep me in touch with what is going on. But I called because I had something to ask you."

"I am sorry, but I am really not fit." Linden held out a quivering hand.

"No, no, nothing psychic. I simply wanted to ask you whether the presence of a strong sceptic would stop all your phenomena?"

"Not necessarily. But, of course, it makes everything more difficult. If they will be quiet and reasonable we can get results. But they know nothing, break every law, and ruin their own sittings. There was old Sherbank, the doctor, the other day. When the raps came on the table he jumped up, put his hand on the wall, and cried, 'Now then, put a rap on the palm of my hand within five seconds'. Because he did not get it he declared it was all humbug and stamped out of the room. They will not admit that there are fixed laws in this as in everything else."

"Well, I must confess that the man I am thinking of might be quite as unreasonable. It is the great Professor Challenger."

"Oh, yes, I've heard he is a hard case."

"Would you give him a sitting?"

"Yes, if you desired it."

"He won't come to you or to any place you name. He imagines all sorts of wires and contrivances. You might have to come down to his country house."

"I would not refuse if it might convert him."

“And when?”

“I can do nothing until this horrible affair is over. It will take a month or two.”

“Well, I will keep in touch with you till then. When all is well again we shall make our plans and see if we can bring these facts before him, as they have been brought before me. Meanwhile, let me say how much I sympathize. We will form a committee of your friends and all that can will surely be done.”

7. In Which The Notorious Criminal Gets What The British Law Considers To Be His Deserts

BEFORE we pursue further the psychic adventures of our hero and heroine, it would be well to see how the British law dealt with that wicked man, Mr. Tom Linden.

The two policewomen returned in triumph to Bardley Square Station where Inspector Murphy, who had sent them, was waiting for their report. Murphy was a jolly-looking, red-faced, black-moustached man who had a cheerful, fatherly way with women which was by no means justified by his age or virility. He sat behind his official table, his papers strewn in front of him.

"Well, girls," he said as the two women entered, "what luck?"

"I think it's a go, Mr. Murphy," said the elder policewoman. "We have the evidence you want."

The Inspector took up a written list of questions from his desk.

"You ran it on the general lines that I suggested?" he asked.

"Yes. I said my husband was killed at Ypres."

"What did he do?"

"Well, he seemed sorry for me."

"That, of course, is part of the game. He'll be sorry for himself before he is through with it. He didn't say, 'You are a single woman and never had a husband?'"

"No."

"Well, that's one up against his spirits, is it not? That should impress the Court. What more?"

"He felt round for names. They were all wrong."

"Good!"

"He believed me when I said that Miss Bellinger here was my daughter."

"Good again! Did you try the Pedro stunt?"

"Yes, he considered the name, but I got nothing."

"Ah, that's a pity. But, anyhow, he did not know that Pedro was your Alsatian dog. He considered the name. That's good enough. Make the jury laugh and you have your verdict. Now about fortune-telling? Did you do what I suggested?"

"Yes, I asked about Amy's young man. He did not give much that was definite."

"Cunning devil! He knows his business."

"But he did say that she would be unhappy if she married him."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, if we spread that a little we have got all we want. Now sit down and dictate your report while you have it fresh. Then we can go over it together and see how we can put it best. Amy must write one, also."

"Very good, Mr. Murphy."

"Then we shall apply for the warrant. You see, it all depends upon which magistrate it comes before. There was Mr. Dalleret who let a medium off last month. He is no we to us. And Mr. Lancing has been mixed up with these people. Mr. Melrose is a stiff materialist. We could depend on him, and have timed the arrest accordingly. It would never do to fail to get our conviction."

"Couldn't you get some of the public to corroborate?" The inspector laughed.

"We are supposed to be protecting the public, but between you and me none of the public have ever yet asked to be protected. There are no complaints. Therefore it is left to us to uphold the law as best we can. As long as it is there we have got to enforce it. Well, good-bye, girls! Let me have the report by four o'clock."

"Nothing for it, I suppose?" said the elder woman, with a smile.

"You wait, my dear. If we get twenty-five pounds fine it has got to go somewhere — Police Fund, of course, but there may be something over. Anyhow, you go and cough it up and then we shall see."

Next morning a scared maid broke into Linden's modest study. "Please sir, it's an officer."

The man in blue followed hard at her heels.

"Name of Linden?" said he, and handing a folded sheet of foolscap he departed.

The stricken couple who spent their lives in bringing comfort to others were sadly in need of comfort themselves. She put her arm round his neck while they read the cheerless document:

To THOMAS LINDEN of 40, Tullis Street, N.W.

Information has been laid this day by Patrick Murphy, Inspector Of Police, that you the said Thomas Linden on the 10th day of November at the above dwelling did profess to Henrietta Dresser and to Amy Bellinger to tell fortunes to deceive and impose on certain of His Majesty's subjects, to wit those above mentioned. You are therefore summoned to appear before the Magistrate of the Police Court in Bardsley Square on Wednesday next, the 17th, at the hour of 11 in the forenoon to answer to the said information.

Dated the 10th day of November.

(*signed*) B.J.WITHERS.

The same afternoon Mailey called upon Malone and they sat in consultation over this document. Then they went together to see Summerway Jones, an acute solicitor and an earnest student of psychic affairs. Incidentally, he was a hard rider to hounds, a good boxer, and a man who carried a fresh-air flavour into the mustiest law chambers. He arched his eyebrows over the summons.

"The poor devil has not an earthly!" said he. "He's lucky to have a summons. Usually they act on a warrant. Then the man is carted right off, kept in the cells all night, and tried next morning with no one to defend him. The police are cute enough, of course, to choose either a Roman Catholic or a materialist as the magistrate. Then, by the beautiful judgment of Chief Justice Lawrence — the first judgment, I believe, that he delivered in that high capacity — the profession of mediumship or wonder-working is in itself a legal crime, whether it be genuine or no, so that no defence founded upon good results has a look in. It's a mixture of religious persecution and police blackmail. As to the public, they don't care a damn! Why should they? If they don't want their fortune told, they don't go. The whole thing is the most absolute bilge and a disgrace to our legislature."

"I'll write it up," said Malone, glowing with Celtic fire.

"What do you call the Act?"

"Well, there are two Acts, each more putrid than the other, and both passed long before Spiritualism was ever heard of. There is the Witchcraft Act dating from George the Second. That has become too absurd, so they only use it as a second string. Then there is the Vagrancy Act of 1824. It was passed to control the wandering gipsy folk on the roadside, and was never intended, of course, to be used like this." He hunted among his papers. "Here is the beastly thing. 'Every person professing to tell fortunes or using any subtle craft, means or device to deceive and impose on any of His Majesty's subjects shall be deemed a rogue and a vagabond', and so on and so forth. The two Acts together would have roped in the whole Early Christian movement just as surely as the Roman persecution did."

"Lucky there are no lions now," said Malone.

"Jackasses!" said Mailey. "That's the modern substitute. But what are we to do?"

"I'm damned if I know!" said the solicitor, scratching his head. "It's perfectly hopeless!"

"Oh, dash it all!" cried Malone, "we can't give it up so easily. We know the man is an honest man."

Mailey turned and grasped Malone's hand.

"I don't know if you call yourself a Spiritualist yet," he said, "but you are the kind of chap we want. There are too many white-livered folk in our movement who fawn on a medium when all is well, and desert him at the first breath of an accusation But, thank God! there are a few stalwarts. There is Brookes and Rodwin and Sir James Smith. We can put up a hundred or two among us."

"Right-o!" said the solicitor, cheerily. "If you feel like that we will give you a run for your money."

"How about a K.C.?"

"Well, they don't plead in police courts. If you'll leave it in my hands I fancy I can do as well as anyone, for I've had a lot of these cases. It will keep the costs down, too."

"Well, we are with you. And we will have a few good men at our back."

"If we do nothing else we shall ventilate it," said Malone.

"I believe in the good old British public. Slow and stupid, but sound at the core. They will not stand for injustice if you can get the truth into their heads."

"They damned well need trepanning before you can get it there," said the solicitor. "Well, you do your bit and I'll do mine and we will see what comes of it."

The fateful morning arrived and Linden found himself in the dock facing a spruce, middle-aged man with rat-trap jaws, Mr. Melrose, the redoubtable police magistrate. Mr. Melrose had a reputation for severity with fortune-tellers and all who foretold the future, though he spent the intervals in his court by reading up the sporting prophets, for he was an ardent follower of the Turf, and his trim, fawn-coloured coat and rakish hat were familiar objects at every race meeting which was within his reach. He was in no particularly good humour this morning as he glanced at the charge-sheet and then surveyed the prisoner. Mrs. Linden had secured a position below the dock, and occasionally extended her hand to pat that of the prisoner which rested on the edge. The court was crowded and many of the prisoner’s clients had attended to show their sympathy.

“Is this case defended?” asked Mr. Melrose.

“Yes, your worship,” said Summerway Jones. “May I, before it opens, make an objection?”

“If you think it worth while, Mr. Jones.”

“I beg to respectfully request your ruling before the case is proceeded with. My client is not a vagrant, but a respectable member of the community, living in his own house, paying rates and taxes, and on the same footing as every other citizen. He is now prosecuted under the fourth section of the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which is styled, ‘An Act for punishing idle and disorderly persons, and rogues and vagabonds’. The Act was intended, as the words imply, to restrain lawless gipsies and others, who at that time infested the country. I ask your worship to rule that my client is clearly not a person within the purview of this Act or liable to its penalties.”

The magistrate shook his head.

“I fear, Mr. Jones, that there have been too many precedents for the Act to be now interpreted in this limited fashion. I will ask the solicitor prosecuting on behalf of the Commissioner of Police to put forward his evidence.” A little bull of a man with side-whiskers and a raucous voice sprang to his feet.

“I call Henrietta Dresser.”

The elder policewoman popped up in the box with the alacrity of one who is used to it. She held an open notebook in her hand.

“You are a policewoman, are you not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I understand that you watched the prisoner’s home the day before you called on him?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How many people went in?”

“Fourteen, sir.”

“Fourteen people. And I believe the prisoner’s average fee is ten and sixpence.”

“Yes.”

“Seven pounds in one day! Pretty good wages when many an honest man is content with five shillings.”

“These were the tradespeople!” cried Linden.

“I must ask you not to interrupt. You are already very efficiently represented” said the magistrate severely.

“Now, Henrietta Dresser,” continued the prosecutor, wagging his pince-nez. “Let’s hear what occurred when you and Amy Bellinger visited the prisoner.”

The policewoman gave an account which was in the main true, reading it from her book. She was not a married woman, but the medium had accepted her statement that she was. He had fumbled with several names and had seemed greatly confused. The name of a dog — Pedro had been submitted to him, but he had not recognised it as such. Finally, he had answered questions as to the future of her alleged daughter, who was, in fact, no relation to her, and had foretold that she would be unhappy in her marriage.

“Any questions, Mr. Jones?” asked the magistrate.

“Did you come to this man as one who needed consolation? And did he attempt to give it?”

“I suppose you might put it so.”

“You professed deep grief, I understand.”

“I tried to give that impression.”

“You do not consider that to be hypocrisy?”

“I did what was my duty.”

“You saw no signs of psychic power, or anything abnormal?” asked the prosecutor.

“No, he seemed a very nice, ordinary sort of man.”

Amy Bellinger was the next witness. She appeared with her notebook in her hand.

“May I ask, your worship, whether it is in order that these witnesses should read their evidence?” asked Mr. Jones.

“Why not?” queried the magistrate. “We desire the exact facts” do we not?”

“We do. Possibly Mr. Jones does not,” said the prosecuting solicitor.

"It is clearly a method of securing that the evidence of these two witnesses shall be in accord," said Jones. "I submit that these accounts are carefully prepared and collated."

"Naturally, the police prepare their case," said the magistrate. "I do not see that you have any grievance, Mr. Jones. Now, witness, let us hear your evidence."

It followed on the exact lines of the other.

"You asked questions about your fiance? You had no fiance," said Mr. Jones.

"That is so."

"In fact, you both told a long sequence of lies?"

"With a good object in view."

"You thought the end justified the means?"

"I carried out my instructions."

"Which were given you beforehand?"

"Yes, we were told what to ask."

"I think," said the magistrate, "that the policewomen have given their evidence very fairly and well. Have you any witnesses for the defence, Mr. Jones?"

"There are a number of people in court, your worship, who have received great benefit from the mediumship of the prisoner. I have subpoenaed one woman who was, by her own account, saved from suicide that very morning by what he told her. I have another man who was an atheist, and had lost all belief in future life. He was completely converted by his experience of psychic phenomena. I can produce men of the highest eminence in science and literature who will testify to the real nature of Mr. Linden's powers."

The magistrate shook his head.

"You must know, Mr. Jones, that such evidence would be quite beside the question. It has been clearly laid down by the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice and others that the law of this country does not recognise supernatural powers of any sort whatever, and that a pretence of such powers where payment is involved constitutes a crime in itself. Therefore your suggestion that you should call witnesses could not possibly lead to anything save a wasting of the time of the court. At the same time, I am, of course, ready to listen to any observations which you may care to make after the solicitor for the prosecution has spoken."

“Might I venture to point out, your worship,” said Jones, “that such a ruling would mean the condemnation of any sacred or holy person of whom we have any record, since even holy persons have to live, and have therefore to receive money.”

“If you refer to Apostolic times, Mr. Jones,” said the magistrate sharply, “I can only remind you that the Apostolic age is past and also that Queen Anne is dead. Such an argument is hardly worthy of your intelligence. Now, sir, if you have anything to add . . .”

Thus encouraged the prosecutor made a short address, stabbing the air at intervals with his pince-nez as if every stab punctured afresh all claims of the spirit. He pictured the destitution among the working-classes, and yet charlatans, by advancing wicked and blasphemous claims, were able to earn a rich living. That they had real powers was, as had been observed, beside the question, but even that excuse was shattered by the fact that these policewomen, who had discharged an unpleasant duty in a most exemplary way, had received nothing but nonsense in return for their money. Was it likely that other clients fared an better? These parasites were increasing in number, trading upon the finer feelings of bereaved parents, and it was high time that some exemplary punishment should warn them that they would be wise to turn their hands to some more honest trade.

Mr. Summerway Jones replied as best he might. He began by pointing out that the Acts were being used for a purpose for which they were never intended. (“That point has already been considered!” snapped the magistrate.) The whole position was open to criticism. The convictions were secured by evidence from agents-provocateurs, who, if any crime had been committed, were obviously inciters to it and also participants. The fines obtained were often deflected for purposes in which the police had a direct interest.

“Surely, Mr. Jones, you do not mean to cast a reflection upon the honesty of the police!”

The police were human, and were naturally inclined to stretch a point where there own interests were affected. All these cases were artificial. There was no record at any time of any real complaint from the public or any demand for protection. There were frauds in every profession, and if a man deliberately invested and lost a guinea in a false medium he had no more right to protection than the man who invested his money in a bad company on the stock market. Whilst the police were wasting time upon such cases, and their agents were weeping crocodile tears in the character of forlorn mourners, many of her branches of real crime received far less attention than they deserved. The law was quite arbitrary in its action. Every big garden-party, even, as he had been informed, every police fete was incomplete without its fortune-teller or palmist.

Some years ago the *Daily Mail* had raised an outcry against fortune-tellers. That great man, the late Lord Northcliffe, had been put in the box by the defence, and it had been shown that one of his other papers was running a palmistry column, and that the fees received were divided equally between the palmist and the proprietors. He mentioned this in no spirit which was derogatory to the memory of this great man, but merely as an example of the absurdity of the law as it was now administered. Whatever might be the individual opinion of members of that court, it was incontrovertible that a large number of intelligent and useful citizens regarded this power of mediumship as a remarkable manifestation of the power of spirit, making for the great improvement of the race. Was it not a most fatal policy in these days of materialism to crush down by law that which in its higher manifestation might work for the regeneration of mankind? As to the undoubted fact that information received by the policewomen was incorrect and that their lying statements were not detected by the medium, it was a psychic law that harmonious conditions were essential for true results, and that deceit on one side produced confusion on the other. If the court would for a moment adopt the Spiritualistic hypothesis, they would realise how absurd it would be to expect that angelic hosts would descend in order to answer the questions of two mercenary and hypocritical inquirers.

Such, in a short synopsis, was the general line of Mr. Summerway Jones’s defence which reduced Mrs. Linden to tears and threw the magistrate’s clerk into a deep slumber. The magistrate himself rapidly brought the matter to a conclusion.

“Your quarrel, Mr. Jones, seems to be with the law, and that is outside my competence. I administer it as I find it, though I may remark that I am entirely in agreement with it. Such men as the defendant are the noxious fungi which collect on a corrupt society, and the attempt to compare their vulgarities with the holy men of old, or to claim similar gifts, must be reprobated by all right-thinking men.

"As to you, Linden," he added, fixing his stern eyes upon the prisoner, "I fear that you are a hardened offender since a previous conviction has not altered your ways. I sentence you, therefore, to two months' hard labour without the option of a fine."

There was a scream from Mrs. Linden.

"Good-bye, dear, don't fret," said the medium, glancing over the side of the dock. An instant later he had been hurried down to the cell.

Summerway Jones, Mailey and Malone met in the hall, and Mailey volunteered to escort the poor stricken woman home.

"What had he ever done but bring comfort to all?" she moaned. "Is there a better man living in the whole great City of London?"

"I don't think there is a more useful one," said Mailey. "I'll venture to say that the whole of Crockford's Directory with the Archbishops at their head could not prove the things of religion as I have seen Tom Linden prove them, or convert an atheist as I have seen Linden convert him."

"It's a shame! A damned shame!" said Malone, hotly.

"The touch about vulgarity was funny," said Jones. "I wonder if he thinks the Apostles were very cultivated people. Well, I did my best. I had no hopes, and it has worked out as I thought. It is a pure waste of time."

"Not at all," Malone answered. "It has ventilated an evil. There were reporters in court. Surely some of them have some sense. They will note the injustice."

"Not they," said Mailey. "The Press is hopeless. My God, what a responsibility these people take on themselves, and how little they guess the price that each will pay! I know. I have spoken with them while they were paying it."

"Well, I for one will speak out," said Malone, "and I believe others will also. The Press is more independent and intelligent than you seem to think."

But Mailey was right, after all. When he had left Mrs. Linden in her lonely home and had reached Fleet Street once more, Malone bought a Planet. As he opened it a scare head-line met his eye:

IMPOSTOR IN THE POLICE COURT.

—— —— —— -

Dog Mistaken for Man.

WHO WAS PEDRO?

Exemplary Sentence.

He crumpled the paper up in his hand.

“No wonder these Spiritualists feel bitterly,” he thought “They have good cause.”

Yes, poor Tom Linden had a bad Press. He went down into his miserable cell amid universal objurgation. The *Planet*, an evening paper which depended for its circulation upon the sporting forecasts of Captain Touch-and-go, remarked upon the absurdity of forecasting the future. *Honest John*, a weekly journal which had been mixed up with some of the greatest frauds of the century, was of the opinion that the dishonesty of Linden was a public scandal. A rich country rector wrote to *The Times* to express his indignation that anyone should profess to sell the gifts of the spirit. The *Churchman* remarked that such incidents arose from the growing infidelity, while the *Freethinker* saw in them a reversion to superstition. Finally Mr. Maskelyne showed the public, to the great advantage of his box office, exactly how the swindle was perpetrated. So for a few days Tom Linden was what the French call a “succés d’execration.” Then the world moved on and he was left to his fate.

8. In Which Three Investigators Come Across A Dark Soul

LORD ROXTON had returned from a Central American heavy game shooting, and had at once carried out a series of Alpine ascents which had satisfied and surprised everyone except himself.

“Top of the Alps is becomin’ a perfect bear-garden,” said he. “Short of Everest there don’t seem to be any decent privacy left.”

His advent into London was acclaimed by a dinner given in his honour at the ‘Travellers’ by the Heavy Game Society. The occasion was private and there were no reporters, but Lord Roxton’s speech was fixed verbatim in the minds of all his audience and has been imperishably preserved. He writhed for twenty minutes under the flowery and eulogistic periods of the president, and rose himself in the state of confused indignation which the Briton feels when he is publicly approved. “Oh, I say! By Jove! What!” was his oration, after which he resumed his seat and perspired profusely.

Malone was first aware of Lord Roxton’s return through McArdle, the crabbed old red-headed news editor, whose bald dome projected further and further from its ruddy fringe as the years still found him slaving at the most grinding of tasks. He retained his keen scent of what was good copy, and it was this sense of his which caused him one winter morning to summon Malone to his presence. He removed the long glass tube which he used as a cigarette-holder from his lips, and he blinked through his big round glasses at his subordinate.

“You know that Lord Roxton is back in London?”

“I had not heard.”

“Aye, he’s back. Dootless you’ve heard that he was wounded in the war. He led a small column in East Africa and made a wee war of his own till he got an elephant bullet through his chest. Oh, he’s done fine since then, or he couldn’t be climbin’ these mountains. He’s a deevil of a man and aye stirring up something new.”

“What is the latest?” asked Malone, eyeing a slip of paper which McArdle was waving between his finger and thumb.

“Well, that’s where he impinges on you. I was thinking maybe you could hunt in couples and, there would be copy in it. There’s a leaderette in the *Evening Standard*” He handed it over. It ran thus:

“A quaint advertisement in the columns of a contemporary shows that the famous Lord John Roxton, third son of the Duke of Pomfret, is seeking fresh worlds to conquer. Having exhausted the sporting adventures of this terrestrial globe, he is now turning to those of the dim, dark and dubious regions of psychic research. He is in the market apparently for any genuine specimen of a haunted house, and is open to receive information as to any violent or dangerous manifestation which called for investigation. As Lord John Roxton is a man of resolute character and one of the best revolver shots in England, we would warn any practical joker that he would be well-advised to stand aside and leave this matter to those who are said to be as impervious to bullets as their supporters are to common sense.”

McArdle gave his dry chuckle at the concluding words.

“I’m thinking they are getting pairsonal there, friend Malone, for if you are no a supporter, you’re well on the way. But are you no of the opeenion that this chiel and you between you might put up a spook and get two racy columns off him?”

“Well, I can see Lord Roxton,” said Malone. “He’s still, I suppose, in his old rooms in the Albany. I would wish to call in any case, so I can open this up as well.”

Thus it was that in the late afternoon just as the murk of London broke into dim circles of silver, the pressman found himself once more walking down Vigo Street and accosting the porter at the dark entrance of the old-fashioned chambers. Yes, Lord John Roxton was in, but a gentleman was with him. He would take a card. Presently he returned with word that in spite of the previous visitor, Lord Roxton would see Malone at once. An instant later, he had been ushered into the old luxurious rooms with their trophies of war and of the chase. The owner of them with outstretched hand was standing at the door, long, thin, austere, with the same gaunt, whimsical, Don Quixote face as of old. There was no change save that he was more aquiline, and his eyebrows jutted more thickly over his reckless, restless eyes.

“Hullo, young fellah!” he cried. “I was hopin’ you’d draw this old covert once more. I was comin’ down to the office to look you up. Come in! Come in! Let me introduce you to the Reverend Charles Mason.”

A very tall, thin clergyman, who was coiled up in a large basket chair, gradually unwound himself and held out a bony hand to the newcomer. Malone was aware of two very earnest and human grey eyes looking searchingly into his, and of a broad, welcoming smile which disclosed a double row of excellent teeth. It was a worn and weary face, the tired face of the spiritual fighter, but it was very kindly and companionable, none the less. Malone had heard of the man, a Church of England vicar, who had left his model parish and the church which he had built himself in order to preach freely the doctrines of Christianity, with the new psychic knowledge super-added.

“Why, I never seem to get away from the Spiritualists!” he exclaimed.

“You never will, Mr. Malone,” said the lean clergyman, chuckling. “The world never will until it has absorbed this new knowledge which God has sent. You can’t get away from it. It is too big. At the present moment, in this great city there is not a place where men or women meet that it does not come up. And yet you would not know it from the Press.”

“Well, you can’t level that reproach at the *Daily Gazette*,” said Malone. “Possibly you may have read my own descriptive articles.”

“Yes, I read them. They are at least better than the awful sensational nonsense which the London Press usually serves up, save when they ignore it altogether. To read a paper like *The Times* you would never know that this vital movement existed at all. The only editorial allusion to it that I can ever remember was in a leading article when the great paper announced that it would believe in it when it found it could, by means of it, pick out more winners on a race-card than by other means.”

“Doosed useful, too,” said Lord Roxton. “It’s just what I should have said myself. What!”

The clergyman’s face was grave and he shook his head.

“That brings me back to the object of my visit,” he said. He turned to Malone. “I took the liberty of calling upon Lord Roxton in connection with his advertisement to say that if he went on such a quest with a good intention, no better work could be found in the world, but if he did it out of a love of sport, following some poor earth-bound soul in the same spirit as he followed the white rhinoceros of the Lido, he might be playing with fire.”

“Well, padre, I’ve been playin’ with fire all my life and that’s nothin’ new. What I mean — if you want me to look at this ghost business from the religious angle, there's nothin' doin', for the Church of England that I was brought up in fills my very modest need. But if it's got a spice of danger, as you say, then it's worth while. What!"

The Rev. Charles Mason smiled his kindly, toothsome grin.

"Incorrigible, is he not?" he said to Malone. "Well, I can only wish you a fuller comprehension of the subject." He rose as if to depart.

"Wait a bit, padre!" cried Lord Roxton, hurriedly. "When I'm explorin', I begin by ropin' in a friendly native. I expect you're just the man. Won't you come with me?"

"Where to?"

"Well, sit down and I'll tell you." He rummaged among a pile of letters on his desk. "Fine selection of spooks!" he said. "I got on the track of over twenty by the first post. This is an easy winner, though. Read it for yourself. Lonely house, man driven mad, tenants boltin' in the night, horrible spectre. Sounds all right — what!"

The clergyman read the letter with puckered brows.

"It seems a bad case," said he.

"Well, suppose you come along. What! Maybe you can help clear it up."

The Rev. Mason pulled out a pocket-almanac. "I have a service for ex-Service men on Wednesday, and a lecture the same evening."

"But we could start to-day."

"It's a long way."

"Only Dorsetshire. Three hours."

"What is your plan?"

"Well, I suppose a night in the house should do it."

"If there is any poor soul in trouble it becomes a duty. Very well, I will come."

"And surely there is room for me," pleaded Malone.

"Of course there is, young fellah! What I mean — I expect that old, red-headed bird at the office sent you round with no other purpose. Ah, I thought so. Well, you can write an adventure that is not perfect bilge for a change — what! There's a train from Victoria at eight o'clock. We can meet there, and I'll have a look in at old man Challenger as I pass."

They dined together in the train and after dinner reassembled in their first-class carriage, which is the snuggest mode of travel which the world can show. Roxton, behind a big black cigar, was full of his visit to Challenger.

“The old dear is the same as ever. Bit my head off once or twice in his own familiar way. Talked unadulterated tripe. Says I’ve got brain-softenin’, if I could think there was such a thing as a real spook. ‘When you’re dead you’re dead’”. That’s the old man’s cheery slogan. Surveyin’ his contemporaries’ he said, extinction was a doosed good thing! ‘It’s the only hope of the world’, said he. ‘Fancy the awful prospect if they survived’. Wanted to give me a bottle of chlorine to chuck at the ghost. I told him that if my automatic was not a spook-stopper, nothin’ else would serve. Tell me, padre, is this the first time you’ve been on safari after this kind of game?”

“You treat the matter too lightly, Lord John,” said the clergyman gravely. “You have clearly had no experience of it. In answer to your question I may say that I have several times tried to help in similar cases.”

“And you take it seriously?” asked Malone, making notes for his article.

“Very, very seriously.”

“What do you think these influences are?”

“I am no authority upon the general question. You know Algernon Mailey, the barrister, do you not? He could give you facts and figures. I approach the subject rather perhaps from the point of view of instinct and emotion. I remember Mailey lecturing on Professor Bozzano’s book on ghosts where over five hundred well-authenticated instances were given, every one of them sufficient to establish an a priori case. There is Flammarion, too. You can’t laugh away evidence of that kind.”

“I’ve read Bozzano and Flammarion, too,” said Malone, “but it is your own experience and conclusions that I want.”

“Well, if you quote me, remember that I do not look on myself as a great authority on psychic research. Wiser brains than mine may come along and give some other explanation. Still, what I have seen has led me to certain conclusions. One of them is to think that there is some truth in the theosophical idea of shells.”

“What is that?”

“They imagined that all spirit bodies near the earth were empty shells or husks from which the real entity had departed. Now, of course, we know that a general statement of that sort is nonsense, for we could not get the glorious communications which we do get from anything but high intelligences. But we also must beware of generalisations. They are not all high intelligences. Some are so low that I think the creature is purely external and is an appearance rather than a reality.”

“But why should it be there?”

“Yes, that is the question. It is usually allowed that there is the natural body, as St. Paul called it, which is dissolved at death, and the etheric or spiritual body which survives and functions upon an etheric plane. Those are the essential things. But we may really have as many coats as an onion and there may be a mental body which may shed itself at any spot where great mental or emotional strain has been experienced. It may be a dull automatic simulacrum and yet carry something of our appearance and thoughts.”

“Well” said Malone, “that would to some extent get over the difficulty, for I could never imagine that a murderer or his victim could spend whole centuries re-acting the old crime. What would be the sense of it?”

“Quite right, young fellah,” said Lord Roxton. “There was a pal of mine, Archie Soames, the gentleman Jock, who had an old place in Berkshire. Well, Nell Gwynne had lived there once, and he was ready to swear he met her a dozen times in the passage. Archie never flinched at the big jump at the Grand National, but, by Jove! he flinched at those passages after dark. Doosed fine woman she was and all that, but dash it all! What I mean — one has to draw the line — what!”

“Quite so!” the clergyman answered. “You can’t imagine that the real soul of a vivid personality like Nell could spend centuries walking those passages. But if by chance she had ate her heart out in that house, brooding and fretting, one could think that she might have cast a shell and left some thought-image of herself behind her.”

“You said you had experiences of your own.”

“I had one before ever I knew anything of Spiritualism. I hardly expect that you will believe me, but I assure you it is true. I was a very young curate up in the north. There was a house in the village which had a poltergeist, one of those very mischievous influences which cause so much trouble. I volunteered to exorcize it. We have an official form of exorcism in the Church, you know, so I thought that I was well-armed. I stood in the drawing-room which was the centre of the disturbances, with all the family on their knees beside me, and I read the service. What do you think happened?”

Mason’s gaunt face broke into a sweetly humorous laugh. “Just as I reached Amen, when the creature should have been slinking away abashed, the big bearskin hearthrug stood up on end and simply enveloped me. I am ashamed to say that I was out of that house in two jumps. It was then that I learned that no formal religious proceeding has any effect at all."

"Then what has?"

"Well, kindness and reason may do something. You see, they vary greatly. Some of these earthbound or earth-interested creatures are neutral, like these simulacra or shells that I speak of. Others are essentially good like these monks of Glastonbury, who have manifested so wonderfully of late years and are recorded by Bligh Bond. They are held to earth by a pious memory. Some are mischievous children like the poltergeists. And some — only a few, I hope — are deadly beyond words, strong, malevolent creatures too heavy with matter to rise above our earth plane — so heavy with matter that their vibrations may be low enough to affect the human retina and to become visible. If they have been cruel, cunning brutes in life, they are cruel and cunning still with more power to hurt. It is evil monsters of this kind who are let loose by our system of capital punishment, for they die with unused vitality which may be expended upon revenge."

"This Dryfont spook has a doosed bad record," said Lord Roxton.

"Exactly. That is why I disapprove of levity. He seems to me to be the very type of the creature I speak of. Just as an octopus may have his den in some ocean cave, and come floating out a silent image of horror to attack a swimmer, so I picture such a spirit lurking in the dark of the house which he curses by his presence, and ready to float out upon all whom he can injure."

Malone's jaw began to drop.

"I say!" he exclaimed, "have we no protection?"

"Yes, I think we have. If we had not, such a creature could devastate the earth. Our protection is that there are white forces as well as dark ones. We may call them 'guardian angels' as the Catholics do, or 'guides' or 'controls', but whatever you call them, they really do exist and they guard us from evil on the spiritual plane."

"What about the chap who was driven mad, padre? Where was your guide when the spook put the rug round you? What!"

"The power of our guides may depend upon our own worthiness. Evil may always win for a time. Good wins in the end. That's my experience in life."

Lord Roxton shook his head.

"If good wins, then it runs a doosed long waitin' race, and most of us never live to see the finish. Look at those rubber devils that I had a scrap with up the Putomayo River. Where are they? What! Mostly in Paris havin' a good time. And the poor niggers they murdered. What about them?"

"Yes, we need faith sometimes. We have to remember that we don't see the end. 'To be continued in our next' is the conclusion of every life-story. That's where the enormous value of the other world accounts come in. They give us at least one chapter more."

"Where can I get that chapter?" asked Malone.

"There are many wonderful books, though the world has not yet learned to appreciate them — records of the life beyond. I remember one incident — you may take it as a parable, if you like — but it is really more than that. The dead rich man pauses before the lovely dwelling. His sad guide draws him away. 'It is not for you. It is for your gardener'. He shows him a wretched shack. 'You gave us nothing to build with. It was the best that we could do'. That may be the next chapter in the story of our rubber millionaires."

Roxton laughed grimly.

"I gave some of them a shack that was six foot long and two foot deep," said he. "No good shakin' your head, padre. What I mean — I don't love my neighbour as myself, and never shall. I hate some of 'em like poison."

"Well, we should hate sin, and, for my own part, I have never been strong enough to separate sin from the sinner. How can I preach when I am as human and weak as anyone?"

"Why, that's the only preachin' I could listen to," said Lord Roxton. "The chap in the pulpit is over my head. If he comes down to my level I have some use for him. Well, it strikes me we won't get much sleep to-night. We've just an hour before we reach Dryfont. Maybe we had better use it."

It was past eleven o'clock of a cold, frosty night when the party reached their destination. The station of the little watering-place was almost deserted, but a small, fat man in a fur overcoat ran forward to meet them, and greeted them warmly.

"I am Mr. Belchamber, owner of the house. How do you do, gentlemen? I got your wire, Lord Roxton, and everything is in order. It is indeed kind of you to come down. If you can do anything to ease my burden I shall indeed be grateful."

Mr. Belchamber led them across to the little Station Hotel where they partook of sandwiches and coffee, which he had thoughtfully ordered. As they ate he told them something of his troubles. "It isn't as if I was a rich man, gentlemen. I am a retired grazier and all my savings are in three houses. That is one of them, the Villa Maggiore. Yes, I got it cheap, that’s true. But how could I think there was anything in this story of the mad doctor?”

“Let’s have the yarn,” said Lord Roxton, munching at a sandwich.

“He was there away back in Queen Victoria’s time. I’ve seen him myself. A long, stringy, dark-faced kind of man, with a round back and a queer, shuffling way of walking. They say he had been in India all his life, and some thought he was hiding from some crime, for he would never show his face in the village and seldom came out till after dark. He broke a dog’s leg with a stone, and there was some talk of having him up for it, but the people were afraid of him, and no one would prosecute. The little boys would run past, for he would sit glowering and glooming in the front window. Then one day he didn’t take the milk in, and the same the next day, and so they broke the door open, and he was dead in his bath — but it was a bath of blood, for he opened the veins of his arm. Tremayne was his name. No one here forgets it.”

“And you bought the house?”

“Well, it was re-papered and painted and fumigated, and done up outside. You’d have said it was a new house. Then, I let it to Mr. Jenkins of the Brewery. Three days he was in it. I lowered the rent, and Mr. Beale, the retired grocer, took it. It was he who went mad — clean mad — after a week of it. And I’ve had it on my hands ever since — sixty pounds out of my income, and taxes to pay on it, into the bargain. If you gentlemen can do anything, for God’s sake do it! If not, it would pay me to burn it down.”

The Villa Maggiore stood about half a mile from the town on the slope of a low hill. Mr. Belchamber conducted them so far, and even up to the hall door. It was certainly a depressing place, with a huge, gambrel roof which came down over the upper windows and nearly obscured them. There was a half-moon, and by its light they could see that the garden was a tangle of scraggy, winter vegetation, which had, in some places, almost overgrown the path. It was all very still, very gloomy and very ominous.

“The door is not locked,” said the owner. “You will find some chairs and a table in the sitting-room on the left of the hall. I had a fire lit there, and there is a bucketful of coals. You will be pretty comfortable, I hope. You won’t blame me for not coming in, but my nerves are not so good as they were.” With a few apologetic words, the owner slipped away, and they were alone with their task.

Lord Roxton had brought a strong electric torch. On opening the mildewed door, he flashed a tunnel of light down the passage, uncarpeted and dreary, which ended in a broad, straight, wooden staircase leading to the upper floor. There were doors on either side of the passage. That on the right led into a large, cheerless, empty room, with a derelict lawn-mower in one corner and a pile of old books and journals. There was a corresponding room upon the left which was a much more cheery apartment. A brisk fire burned in the grate, there were three comfortable chairs, and a deal table with a water carafe, a bucket of coals, and a few other amenities. It was lit by a large oil-lamp. The clergyman and Malone drew up to the fire, for it was very cold, but Lord Roxton completed his preparations. From a little hand-bag he extracted his automatic pistol, which he put upon the mantelpiece. Then he produced a packet of candles, placing two of them in the hall. Finally he took a ball of worsted and tied strings of it across the back passage and across the opposite door.

“We will have one look round,” said he, when his preparations were complete. “Then we can wait down here and take what comes.”

The upper passage led at right angles to left and right from the top of the straight staircase. On the right were two large, bare, dusty rooms, with the wallpaper hanging in strips and the floor littered with scattered plaster. On the left was a single large room in the same derelict condition. Out of it was the bathroom of tragic memory, with the high, zinc bath still in position. Great blotches of red lay within it, and though they were only rust stains, they seemed to be terrible reminders from the past. Malone was surprised to see the clergyman stagger and support himself against the door. His face was ghastly white and there was moisture on his brow. His two comrades supported him down the stairs, and he sat for a little, as one exhausted, before he spoke.

“Did you two really feel nothing?” he asked. “The fact is that I am mediumistic myself and very open to psychic impressions. This particular one was horrible beyond description.”

“What did you get, padre?”

“It is difficult to describe these things. It was a sinking of my heart, a feeling of utter desolation. All my senses were affected. My eyes went dim. I smelt a terrible odour of putrescence. The strength seemed to be sapped out of me. Believe me, Lord Roxton, it is no light thing which we are facing to-night.”

The sportsman was unusually grave. “So I begin to think,” said he. “Do you think you are fit for the job?”

“I am sorry to have been so weak,” Mr. Mason answered. “I shall certainly see the thing through. The worse the case, the more need for my help. I am all right now,” he added, with his cheery laugh, drawing an old charred briar from his pocket. “This is the best doctor for shaken nerves. I’ll sit here and smoke till I’m wanted.”

“What shape do you expect it to take?” asked Malone of Lord Roxton.

“Well, it is something you can see. That’s certain.”

“That’s what I cannot understand, in spite of all my reading,” said Malone. “These authorities are all agreed that there is a material basis, and that this material basis is drawn from the human body. Call it ectoplasm, or what you like, it is human in origin, is it not?”

“Certainly,” Mason answered.

“Well, then, are we to suppose that this Dr. Tremayne builds up his own appearance by drawing stuff from me and you?”

“I think, so far as I understand it, that in most cases a spirit does so. I believe that when the spectator feels that he goes cold, that his hair rises and the rest of it, he is really conscious of this draft upon his own vitality which may be enough to make him faint or even to kill him. Perhaps he was drawing on me then.”

“Suppose we are not mediumistic? Suppose we give out nothing?”

“There is a very full case that I read lately,” Mr. Mason answered. “It was closely observed — reported by Professor Neillson of Iceland. In that case the evil spirit used to go down to an unfortunate photographer in the town, draw his supplies from him, and then come back and use them. He would openly say, ‘Give me time to get down to So-and-so. Then I will show you what I can do’. He was a most formidable creature and they had great difficulty in mastering him.”

“Strikes me, young fellah, we have taken on a larger contract than we knew,” said Lord Roxton. “Well, we’ve done what we could. The passage is well lit. No one can come at us except down the stair without breaking the worsted. There is nothing more we can do except just to wait.”

So they waited. It was a weary time. A carriage clock had been placed on the discoloured wooden mantelpiece, and slowly its hands crept on from one to two and from two to three. Outside an owl was hooting most dismally in the darkness. The villa was on a by-road, and there was no human sound to link them up with life. The padre lay dozing in his chair. Malone smoked incessantly. Lord Roxton turned over the pages of a magazine. There were the occasional strange tappings and creakings which come in the silence of the night. Nothing else until . . .

Someone came down the stair.

There could not be a doubt of it. It was a furtive, and yet a clear footstep. Creak! Creak! Creak! Then it had reached the level. Then it had reached their door. They were all sitting erect in their chairs, Roxton grasping his automatic. Had it come in? The door was ajar, but had not further opened. Yet all were aware of a sense that they were not alone, that they were being observed. It seemed suddenly colder, and Malone was shivering. An instant later the steps were retreating. They were low and swift — much swifter than before. One could imagine that a messenger was speeding back with intelligence to some great master who lurked in the shadows above.

The three sat in silence, looking at each other.

“By Jove!” said Lord Roxton at last. His face was pale but firm. Malone scribbled some notes and the hour. The clergyman was praying.

“Well, we are up against it,” said Roxton after a pause. “We can’t leave it at that. We have to go through with it. I don’t mind tellin’ you, padre, that I’ve followed a wounded tiger in thick jungle and never had quite the feelin’ I’ve got now. If I’m out for sensations, I’ve got them. But I’m going upstairs.”

“We will go, too,” cried his comrades, rising from their chairs.

“Stay here, young fellah! And you, too, padre. Three of us make too much noise. I’ll call you if I want you. My idea is just to steal out and wait quiet on the stair. If that thing, whatever it was, comes again, it will have to pass me.”

All three went into the passage. The two candles were throwing out little circles of light, and the stair was deeply illuminated, with heavy shadows at the top. Roxton sat down half-way up the stair, pistol in hand. He put his finger to his lips and impatiently waved his companions back to the room. Then they sat by the fire, waiting, waiting.

Half an hour, three-quarters — and then, suddenly it came. There was a sound as of rushing feet, the reverberation of a shot, a scuffle and a heavy fall, with a loud cry for help. Shaking with horror, they rushed into the hall.

Lord Roxton was lying on his face amid a litter of plaster and rubbish. He seemed half dazed as they raised him, and was bleeding where the skin had been grazed from his cheek and hands. Looking up the stair, it seemed that the shadows were blacker and thicker at the top.

“I’m all right,” said Roxton, as they led him to his chair. “Just give me a minute to get my wind and I’ll have another round with the devil — for if this is not the devil, then none ever walked the earth.”

“You shan’t go alone this time,” said Malone.

“You never should,” added the clergyman. “But tell us what happened.”

“I hardly know myself. I sat, as you saw, with my back to the top landing. Suddenly I heard a rush. I was aware of something dark right on the top of me. I half-turned and fired. The next instant I was chucked down as if I had been a baby. All that plaster came showering down after me. That’s as much as I can tell you.”

“Why should we go further in the matter?” said Malone. “You are convinced that this is more than human, are you not?”

“There is no doubt of that.”

“Well, then, you have had your experience. What more can you want?”

“Well, I, at least, want something more,” said Mr. Mason. “I think our help is needed.”

“Strikes me that we shall need the help,” said Lord Roxton, rubbing his knee. “We shall want a doctor before we get through. But I’m with you, padre. I feel that we must see it through. If you don’t like it, young fellah —” The mere suggestion was too much for Malone’s Irish blood.

“I am going up alone!” he cried, making for the door.

“No, indeed. I am with you.” The clergyman hurried after him.

“And you don’t go without me!” cried Lord Roxton, limping in the rear.

They stood together in the candle-lit, shadow-draped passage. Malone had his hand on the balustrade and his foot on the lower step, when it happened.

What was it? They could not tell themselves. They only knew that the black shadows at the top of the staircase had thickened, had coalesced, had taken a definite, batlike shape. Great God! They were moving! They were rushing swiftly and noiselessly downwards! Black, black as night, huge, ill-defined, semi-human and altogether evil and damnable. All three men screamed and blundered for the door. Lord Roxton caught the handle and threw it open. It was too late; the thing was upon them. They were conscious of a warm, glutinous contact, of a purulent smell, of a half-formed, dreadful face and of entwining limbs. An instant later all three were lying half-dazed and horrified, hurled outwards on to the gravel of the drive. The door had shut with a crash.

Malone whimpered and Roxton swore, but the clergyman was silent as they gathered themselves together, each of them badly shaken and bruised, but with an inward horror which made all bodily ill seem insignificant. There they stood in a little group in the light of the sinking moon, their eyes turned upon the black square of the door.

"That's enough," said Roxton, at last.

"More than enough," said Malone. " I wouldn't enter that house again for anything Fleet Street could offer."

"Are you hurt?"

"Defiled, degraded — oh, it was loathsome!"

"Foul!" said Roxton! "Did you get the reek of it? And the purulent warmth?"

Malone gave a cry of disgust. "Featureless save for the dreadful eyes! Semi-materialised! Horrible!"

"What about the lights?"

"Oh, damn the lights! Let them burn. I am not going in again!"

"Well, Belchamber can come in the morning. Maybe he is waiting for us now at the inn."

"Yes, let us go to the inn. Let us get back to humanity." Malone and Roxton turned away, but the clergyman stood fast. He had drawn a crucifix from his pocket.

"You can go," said he. "I am going back."

"What! Into the house?"

"Yes, into the house."

"Padre, this is madness! It will break your neck. We were all like stuffed dolls in its clutch."

"Well, let it break my neck. I am going."

"You are not! Here, Malone, catch hold of him!"

But it was too late With a few quick steps, Mr. Mason had reached the door, flung it open, passed in and closed it behind him. As his comrades tried to follow, they heard a creaking clang upon the further side. The padre had bolted them out. There was a great slit where the letter-box had been. Through it Lord Roxton entreated him to return.

“Stay there!” said the quick, stern voice of the clergyman. “ I have my work to do. I will come when it is done.” A moment later he began to speak. His sweet, homely, affectionate accents rang through the hall. They could only hear snatches outside, bits of prayer, bits of exhortation, bits of kindly greeting. Looking through the narrow opening, Malone could see the straight, dark figure in the candlelight, its back to the door, its face to the shadows of the stair, the crucifix held aloft in its right hand.

His voice sank into silence and then there came one more of the miracles of this eventful night. A voice answered him. It was such a sound as neither of the auditors had heard before — a guttural, rasping, croaking utterance, indescribably menacing. What it said was short, but it was instantly answered by the clergyman, his tone sharpened to a fine edge by emotion. His utterance seemed to be exhortation and was at once answered by the ominous voice from beyond. Again and again, and yet again came the speech and the answer, sometimes shorter, sometimes longer, varying in every key of pleading, arguing, praying, soothing, and everything save upbraiding. Chilled to the marrow, Roxton and Malone crouched by the door, catching snatches of that inconceivable dialogue. Then, after what seemed a weary time, though it was less than an hour, Mr. Mason, in a loud, full, exultant tone, repeated the “ Our Father.” Was it fancy, or echo, or was there really some accompanying voice in the darkness beyond him? A moment later the light went out in the left-hand window, the bolt was drawn, and the clergyman emerged carrying Lord Roxton’s bag. His face looked ghastly in the moonlight, but his manner was brisk and happy.

“I think you will find everything here,” he said, handing over the bag.

Roxton and Malone took him by either arm and hurried him down to the road.

“By Jove! You don’t give us the slip again!” cried the nobleman. “ Padre, you should have a row of Victoria Crosses.”

“No, no, it was my duty. Poor fellow, he needed help so badly. I am but a fellow-sinner and yet I was able to give it.”

“You did him good?”

“I humbly hope so. I was but the instrument of the higher forces. The house is haunted no longer. He promised. But I will not speak of it now. It may be easier in days to come.”

The landlord and the maids stared at the three adventurers in amazement when, in the chill light of the winter dawn, they presented themselves at the inn once more. Each of them seemed to have aged five years in the night. Mr. Mason, with the reaction upon him, threw himself down upon the horsehair sofa in the humble coffee-room and was instantly asleep.

“Poor chap! He looks pretty bad!” said Malone. Indeed, his white, haggard face and long, limp limbs might have been those of a corpse.

“We will get a cup of hot tea into him,” Lord Roxton answered, warming his hands at the fire, which the maid had just lit. “ By Jove! We shall be none the worse for some ourselves. Well, young fellah, we’ve got what we came for. I’ve had my sensation, and you’ve had your copy.

“And he has had the saving of a soul. Well, we must admit that our objects seem very humble compared to his.”

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They caught the early train to London, and had a carriage to themselves. Mason had said little and seemed to be lost in thought. Suddenly he turned to his companions. “I say, you two, would you mind joining me in prayer?” Lord Roxton made a grimace. “ I warn you, padre, I am rather out of practice.”

“Please kneel down with me. I want your aid.”

They knelt down, side by side, the padre in the middle. Malone made a mental note of the prayer.

“Father, we are all Your children, poor, weak, helpless creatures, swayed by Fate and circumstance. I implore You that You will turn eyes of compassion upon the man, Rupert Tremayne, who wandered far from You, and is now in the dark. He has sunk deep, very deep, for he had a proud heart which would not soften, and a cruel mind, which was filled with hate. But now he would turn to the light, and so I beg help for him and for the woman, Emma, who, for the love of him, has gone down into the darkness. May she raise him, as she had tried to do. May they both break the bonds of evil memory which tie them to earth. May they, from to-night, move up towards that glorious light which sooner or later shines upon even the lowest.”

They rose from their knees.

“That’s better!” cried the padre, thumping his chest with his bony hand, and breaking out into his expansive, toothsome grin. “ What a night! Good Lord, what a night!” *

9. Which Introduces Some Very Physical Phenomena

MALONE seemed destined to be entangled in the affairs of the Linden family, for he had hardly seen the last of the unfortunate Tom before he became involved in a very much more unpleasant fashion with his unsavoury brother.

The episode began by a telephone ring in the morning and the voice of Algernon Mailey at the far end of the wire.

"Are you clear for this afternoon?"

"At your service."

"I say, Malone, you are a hefty man. You played Rugger for Ireland, did you not? You don't mind a possible rough-and-tumble, do you?"

Malone grinned over the receiver.

"You can count me in."

"It may be really rather formidable. We shall have possibly to tackle a prize-fighter."

"Right-o!" said Malone, cheerfully.

"And we want another man for the job. Do you know any fellow who would come along just for the sake of the adventure. If he knows anything about psychic matters, all the better."

Malone puzzled for a moment. Then he had an inspiration.

"There is Roxton," said he. " He's not a chicken, but he is a useful man in a row. I think I could get him. He has been keen on your subject since his Dorsetshire experience."

"Right! Bring him along! If he can't come, we shall have to tackle the job ourselves. Forty-one, Belshaw Gardens, S.W. Near Earl's Court Station. Three p.m. Right!"

Malone at once rang up Lord Roxton, and soon heard the familiar voice.

"What's that, young fellah? . . . A scrap? Why, certainly. What ... I mean I had a golf match at Richmond Deer Park, but this sounds more attractive.... What? Very good. I'll meet you there."

And so it came about that at the hour of three, Mailey, Lord Roxton and Malone found themselves seated round the fire in the comfortable drawing-room of the barrister. His wife, a sweet and beautiful woman, who was his helpmate in his spiritual as well as in his material life, was there to welcome them.

"Now, dear, you are not on in this act," said Mailey. "You will retire discreetly into the wings. Don't worry if you hear a row."

"But I do worry, dear. You'll get hurt."

Mailey laughed.

"I think your furniture may possibly get hurt. You have nothing else to fear, dear. And it's all for the good of the Cause. That always settles it," he explained, as his wife reluctantly left the room. " I really think she would go to the stake for the Cause. Her great, loving, womanly heart knows what it would mean for this grey earth if people could get away from the shadow of death, and realise the great happiness that is to come. By Jove! she is an inspiration to me.... Well," he went on with a laugh, " I must not get on to that subject. We have something very different to think of — something as hideous and vile as she is beautiful and good. It concerns Tom Linden's brother."

"I've heard of the fellow," said Malone. " I used to box a bit and I am still a member of the N.S.C. Silas Linden was very nearly champion in the Welters."

"That's the man. He is out of a job and thought he would take up mediumship. Naturally I and other Spiritualists took him seriously, for we all love his brother, and these powers often run in families, so that his claim seemed reasonable. So we gave him a trial last night."

"Well, what happened?"

"I suspected the fellow from the first. You understand that it is hardly possible for a medium to deceive an experienced Spiritualist. When there is deception it is at the expense of outsiders. I watched him carefully from the first, and I seated myself near the cabinet. Presently he emerged clad in white. I broke the contact by prearrangement with my wife who sat next me, and I felt him as he passed me. He was, of course, in white. I had a pair of scissors in my pocket and snipped off a bit from the edge."

Mailey drew a triangular piece of linen from his pocket.

"There it is, you see. Very ordinary linen. I have no doubt the fellow was wearing his night-gown."

"Why did you not have a show-up at once?" asked Lord Roxton.

“There were several ladies there, and I was the only really able-bodied man in the room.”

“Well, what do you propose?”

“I have appointed that he come here at three-thirty. He is due now. Unless he has noticed the small cut in his linen, I don’t think he has any suspicion why I want him.”

“What will you do?”

“Well, that depends on him. We have to stop him at any cost. That is the way our Cause gets bemired. Some villain who knows nothing about it comes into it for money and so the labours of the honest mediums get discounted. The public very naturally brackets them all together. With your help I can talk to this fellow on equal terms which I certainly could not do if I were alone. By Jove, here he is!”

There was a heavy step outside. The door was opened and Silas Linden, fake medium and ex-prize-fighter, walked in. His small, piggy grey eyes under their shaggy brows looked round with suspicion at the three men. Then he forced a smile and nodded to Mailey.

“Good day, Mr. Mailey. We had a good evening last night, had we not?”

“Sit down, Linden,” said Mailey, indicating a chair. “It’s about last night that I want to talk to you. You cheated us.”

Silas Linden’s heavy face flushed red with anger.

“What’s that?” he cried, sharply.

“You cheated us. You dressed up and pretended to be a spirit.”

“You are a damned liar!” cried Linden. “ I did nothing of the sort.”

Mailey took the rag of linen from his pocket and spread it on his knee.

“What about that?” he asked.

“Well, what about it?”

“It was cut out of the white gown you wore. I cut it out myself as you stood in front of me. If you examine the gown you will find the place. It’s no use, Linden. The game is up. You can’t deny it.”

For a moment the man was completely taken aback. Then he burst into a stream of horrible profanity.

“What’s the game?” he cried, glaring round him. “ Do you think I am easy and that you can play me for a sucker? Is it a frame-up, or what? You’ve chose the wrong man for a try-on of that sort.”

“There is no use being noisy or violent, Linden,” said Mailey quietly, “ I could bring you up in the police court to-morrow. I don’t want any public scandal, for your brother’s sake. But you don’t leave this room until you have signed a paper that I have here on my desk.”

“Oh, I don’t, don’t I? Who will stop me?”

“We will.”

The three men were between him and the door.

“You will! Well” try that!” He stood before them with rage in his eyes and his great hands knotted. “ Will you get out of the way?”

They did not answer, but they all three gave the fighting snarl which is perhaps the oldest of all human expressions. The next instant Linden was upon them, his fists flashing out with terrific force. Mailey, who had boxed in his youth, stopped one blow, but the next beat in his guard and he fell with a crash against the door. Lord Roxton was hurled to one side, but Malone, with a footballer’s instinct, ducked his head and caught the prize-fighter round the knees. If a man is too good for you on his feet, then put him on his back, for he cannot be scientific there. Over went Linden, crashing through an armchair before he reached the ground. He staggered to one knee and got in a short jolt to the chin, but Malone had him down again and Roxton’s bony hand had closed upon his throat. Silas Linden had a yellow streak in him and he was cowed.

“Let up!” he cried. “ That’s enough!”

He lay now spreadeagled upon his back. Malone and Roxton were bending over him. Mailey had gathered himself together, pale and shaken after his fall.

“I’m all right!” he cried, in answer to a feminine voice at the other side of the door. “ No, not yet, dear, but we shall soon be ready for you. Now, Linden, there’s no need for you to get up, for you can talk very nicely where you are. You’ve got to sign this paper before you leave the room.”

“What is the paper?” croaked Linden, as Roxton’s grip upon his throat relaxed.

“I’ll read it to you.”

Mailey took it from the desk and read aloud.

“I, Silas Linden, hereby admit that I have acted as a rogue and a scoundrel by simulating to be a spirit, and I swear that I will never again in my life pretend to be a medium. Should I break this oath, then this signed confession may be used for my conviction in the police court.”

“Will you sign that?”

“No, I am damned if I will!”

“Shall I give him another squeeze?” asked Lord Roxton. “ Perhaps I could choke some sense into him — what!”

“ Not at all,” said Mailey. “ I think that his case now would do good in the police court, for it would show the public that we are determined to keep our house clean. I’ll give you one minute for consideration, Linden, and then I ring up the police.”

But it did not take a minute for the impostor to make up his mind.

“All right,” said he in a sulky voice, “I’ll sign.” He was allowed to rise with a warning that if he played any tricks he would not get off so lightly the second time. But there was no kick left in him and he scrawled a big, coarse “ Silas Linden “ at the bottom of the paper without a word. The three men signed as witnesses.

“Now, get out!” said Mailey, sharply. “Find some honest trade in future and leave sacred things alone!”

“Keep your damned cant to yourself!” Linden answered, and so departed, grumbling and swearing, into the outer darkness from which he had come. He had hardly passed before Mrs. Mailey had rushed into the room to reassure herself as to her husband. Once satisfied as to this she mourned over her broken chair, for like all good women she took a personal pride and joy in every detail of her little menage.

“Never mind, dear. It’s a cheap price to pay in order to get that blackguard out of the movement. Don’t go away, you fellows. I want to talk to you.”

“And tea is just coming in.”

“Perhaps something stronger would be better,” said Mailey, and indeed, all three were rather exhausted, for it was sharp while it lasted. Roxton, who had enjoyed the whole thing immensely, was full of vitality, but Malone was shaken and Mailey had narrowly escaped serious injury from that ponderous blow.

“I have heard,” said Mailey, as they all settled down round the fire, “ that this blackguard has sweated money out of poor Tom Linden for years. It was a form of blackmail, for he was quite capable of denouncing him. By Jove!” he cried, with sudden inspiration, “that would account for the police raid. Why should they pick Linden out of all the mediums in London? I remember now that Tom told me the fellow had asked to be taught to be a medium, and that he had refused to teach him.”

“Could he teach him?” asked Malone. Mailey was thoughtful over this question. “ Well, perhaps he could,” he said at last. “ But Silas Linden as a false medium would be very much less dangerous than Silas Linden as a true medium.”

“I don’t follow you.”

“Mediumship can be developed” said Mrs. Mailey. “One might almost say it was catching.”

“That was what the laying-on of hands meant in the early Church,” Mailey explained. “ It was the conferring of thaumaturgic powers. We can’t do it now as rapidly as that. But if a man or woman sits with the desire of development, and especially if that sitting is in the presence of a real medium, the chance is that powers will come.”

“But why do you say that would be worse than false mediumship?”

“Because it could be used for evil. I assure you, Malone, that the talk of black magic and of evil entities is not an invention of the enemy. Such things do happen and centre round the wicked medium. You can get down into a region which is akin to the popular idea of witchcraft, It is dishonest to deny it.”

“Like attracts like,” explained Mrs. Mailey, who was quite as capable an exponent as her husband. “ You get what you deserve. If you sit with wicked people you get wicked visitors.”

“Then there is a dangerous side to it?”

“Do you know anything on earth which has not a dangerous side if it is mishandled and exaggerated? This dangerous side exists quite apart from orthodox Spiritualism, and our knowledge is the surest way to counteract it. I believe that the witchcraft of the Middle Ages was a very real thing, and that the best way to meet such practices is to cultivate the higher powers of the spirit. To leave the thing entirely alone is to abandon the field to the forces of evil.”

Lord Roxton interposed in an unexpected way.

“When I was in Paris last year,” said he, “there was a fellah called La Paix who dabbled in the black magic business. He held circles and the like. What I mean, there was no great harm in the thing, but it wasn’t what you would call very spiritual, either.”

“It’s a side that I as a journalist would like to see something of, if I am to report impartially upon the subject” said Malone.

“Quite right!” Mailey agreed. “We want all the cards on the table.”

“Well, young fellah, if you would give me a week of your time and come to Paris, I’ll introduce you to La Paix,” said Roxton.

“It is a curious thing, but I also had a Paris visit in my mind for our friend here,” said Mailey. “I have been asked over by Dr. Maupuis of the Institut Metapsychique to see some of the experiments which he is conducting upon a Galician medium. It is really the religious side of this matter which interests me, and that is conspicuously wanting in the minds of these scientific men of the Continent; but for accurate, careful examination of the psychic facts they are ahead of anyone except poor Crawford of Belfast, who stood in a class by himself. I promised Maupuis to run across and he has certainly been having some wonderful — in some respects, some rather alarming results.”

“Why alarming?”

“Well, his materialisations lately have not been human at all. That is confirmed by photographs. I won’t say more, for it is best that, if you go, you should approach it with an open mind.”

“I shall certainly go,” said Malone. “I am sure my chief would wish it.”

Tea had arrived to interrupt the conversation in the irritating way that our bodily needs intrude upon our higher pursuits. But Malone was too keen to be thrown off his scent.

“You speak of these evil forces. Have you ever come in contact with them?”

Mailey looked at his wife and smiled.

“Continually,” he said. “ It is part of our job. We specialise on it.”

“I understood that when there was an intrusion of that kind you drove it away.”

“Not necessarily. If we can help any lower spirit we do so, and we can only do it by encouraging it to tell us its troubles. Most of them are not wicked. They are poor, ignorant, stunted creatures who are suffering the effects of the narrow and false views which they have learned in this world. We try to help them — and we do.”

“How do you know that you do?”

“Because they report to us afterwards and register their progress. Such methods are often used by our people. They are called ‘rescue circles’.”

“I have heard of rescue circles. Where could I attend one? This thing attracts me more and more. Fresh gulfs seem always opening. I would take it as a great favour if you would help me to see this fresh side of it.” Mailey became thoughtful.

“We don’t want to make a spectacle of these poor creatures. On the other hand, though we can hardly claim you yet as a Spiritualist, you have treated the subject with some understanding and sympathy.” He looked enquiringly at his wife, who smiled and nodded.

“Ah, you have permission. Well then, you must know that we run our own little rescue circle, and that at five o’clock to-day we have our weekly sitting. Mr. Terbane is our medium. We don’t usually have anyone else except Mr. Charles Mason, the clergyman. But if you both care to have the experience, we shall be very happy if you will stay. Terbane should be here immediately after tea. He is a railway-porter, you know, so his time is not his own. Yes, psychic power in its varied manifestations is found in humble quarters, but surely that has been its main characteristic from the beginning — fishermen, carpenters, tent-makers, camel drivers, these were the prophets of old. At this moment some of the highest psychic gifts in England lie in a miner, a cotton operative, a railway-porter, a barge-man and a charwoman. Thus does history repeat itself, and that foolish beak, with Tom Linden before him, was but Felix judging Paul. The old wheel goes round.”

10. De Profundis

THEY were still having tea when Mr. Charles Mason was ushered in. Nothing draws people together into such intimate soul-to-soul relationship as psychic quest, and thus it was that Roxton and Malone, who had only known him in the one episode, felt more near to this man than to others with whom they had associated for years. This close vital comradeship is one of the out-standing features of such communion. When his loosely-built, straggling, lean clerical figure appeared, with that gaunt, worn face illuminated by its human grin and dignified by its earnest eyes, through the doorway, they both felt as if an old friend had entered. His own greeting was equally cordial.

“Still exploring!” he cried, as he shook them by the hand. “We will hope your new experiences will not be so nerve-racking as our last.”

“By Jove, padre!” said Roxton. “I’ve worn out the brim of my hat taking it off to you since then.”

“Why, what did he do?” asked Mrs. Mailey.

“No, no!” cried Mason. “I tried in my poor way to guide a darkened soul. Let us leave it at that. But that is exactly what we are here for now, and what these dear people do every week of their lives. It was from Mr. Mailey here that I learned how to attempt it.”

“Well, certainly we have plenty of practice,” said Mailey. “You have seen enough of it, Mason, to know that.”

“But I can’t get the focus of this at all!” cried Malone. “Could you clear my mind a little on the point? I accept, for the moment, your hypothesis that we are surrounded by material earth-bound spirits who find themselves under strange conditions which they don’t understand, and who want counsel and guidance. That more or less expresses it, does it not?”

The Maileys both nodded their agreement.

“Well, their dead friends and relatives are presumably on the other side and cognisant of their benighted condition They know the truth. Could they not minister to the wants of these afflicted ones far better than we can?”

“It is a most natural question,” Mailey answered. “Of course we put that objection to them and we can only accept their answer. They appear to be actually anchored to the surface of this earth, too heavy and gross to rise.

The others are, presumably, on a spiritual level and far separated from them. They explain that they are much nearer to us and that they are cognisant of us, but not of anything higher. Therefore it is we who can reach them best."

"There was one poor dear dark soul—"

"My wife loves everybody and everything," Mailey explained. "She is capable of talking of the poor dear devil."

"Well, surely they are to be pitied and loved!" cried the lady. "This poor fellow was nursed along by us, week by week. He had really come from the depths. Then one day he cried in rapture, 'My mother has come! My mother is here!' We naturally said, 'But why did she not come before?' 'How could she', said he, 'when I was in so dark a place that she could not see me?' "

"That's very well," said Malone, "but so far as I can follow your methods it is some guide or control or higher Spirit who regulates the whole matter and brings the sufferer to you. If he can be cognisant, one would think other higher spirits could also be."

"No, for it is his particular mission." said Mailey. "To show how marked the divisions are I can remember one occasion when we had a dark soul here. Our own people came through and did not know he was there until we called their attention to it. When we said to the dark soul, 'Don't you see our friends beside you?' he answered, 'I can see a light but nothing else'."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. John Terbane from Victoria Station, where his mundane duties lay. He was dressed now in civil garb and appeared as a pale, sad-faced, clean-shaven, plump-featured man with dreamy, thoughtful eyes, but no other indication of the remarkable uses to which he was put.

"Have you my record?" was his first question.

Mrs. Mailey, smiling, handed him an envelope. "We kept it all ready for you but you can read it at home. You see," she explained, "poor Mr. Terbane is in trance and knows nothing of the wonderful work of which he is the instrument, so after each sitting my husband and I draw up an account for him."

"Very much astonished I am when I read it," said Terbane.

"And very proud, I should think," added Mason.

"Well, I don't know about that," Terbane answered humbly. "I don't see that the tool need to be proud because the worker happens to use it. Yet it is a privilege, of course."

"Good old Terbane!," said Mailey, laying his hand affectionately on the railwayman's shoulder. "The better the medium the more unselfish. That is my experience. The whole conception of a medium is one who gives himself up for the use of others, and that is incompatible with selfishness. Well, I suppose we had better get to work or Mr. Chang will scold us."

"Who is he?" asked Malone.

"Oh, you will soon make the acquaintance of Mr. Chang! We need not sit round the table. A semi-circle round the fire does very well. Lights half-down. That is all right. You'll make yourself comfortable, Terbane. Snuggle among the cushions."

The medium was in the corner of a comfortable sofa, and had fallen at once into a doze. Both Mailey and Malone at with notebooks upon their knees awaiting developments.

They were not long in coming. Terbane suddenly sat up, his dreamy self transformed into a very alert and masterful individuality. A subtle change had passed over his ace. An ambiguous smile fluttered upon his lips, his eye seemed more oblique and less open, his face projected. The two hands were thrust into the sleeves of his blue lounge jacket.

"Good evening," said he, speaking crisply and in short staccato sentences. "New faces! Who these?"

"Good evening, Chang," said the master of the house.

"You know Mr. Mason. This is Mr. Malone who studies our subject. This is Lord Roxton who has helped me to-day."

As each name was mentioned, Terbane made a sweeping Oriental gesture of greeting, bringing his hand down from his forehead. His whole bearing was superbly dignified and very different from the humble little man who had sat down a few minutes before.

"Lord Roxton!" he repeated. "An English milord! I knew Lord — Lord Macart No — I — I cannot say it. Alas I I called him 'foreign devil' then. Chang, too, had much to learn."

"He is speaking of Lord Macartney. That would be over a hundred years ago. Chang was a great living philosopher then," Mailey explained.

"Not lose time!" cried the control. "Much to do to-day. Crowd waiting. Some new, some old. I gather strange folk in my net. Now I go." He sank back among the cushions. A minute elapsed, then he suddenly sat up.

"I want to thank you," he said, speaking perfect English. "I came two weeks ago. I have thought over all you said. The path is lighter."

“Were you the spirit who did not believe in God?”

“Yes, yes! I said so in my anger. I was so weary — so weary. Oh, the time, the endless time, the grey mist, the heavy weight of remorse! Hopeless! Hopeless! And you brought me comfort, you and this great Chinese spirit. You gave me the first kind words I have had since I died.”

“When was it that you died?”

“Oh! It seems an eternity. We do not measure as you do. It is a long, horrible dream without change or break.”

“Who was king in England?”

“Victoria was queen. I had attuned my mind to matter and so it clung to matter. I did not believe in a future life. Now I know that I was all wrong, but I could not adapt my mind to new conditions.”

“Is it bad where you are?”

“It is all — all grey. That is the awful part of it. One’s surroundings are so horrible.”

“But there are many more. You are not alone.”

“No, but they know no more than I. They, too, scoff and doubt and are miserable.”

“You will soon get out.”

“For God’s sake, help me to do so!”

“Poor soul!” said Mrs. Mailey in her sweet, caressing voice, a voice which could bring every animal to her side. “You have suffered much. But do not think of yourself. Think of these others. Try to bring one of them up and so you will best kelp yourself.”

“Thank you, lady, I will. There is one here whom I brought. He has heard you. We will go on together. Perhaps some day we may find the light.”

“Do you like to be prayed for?”

“Yes, yes, indeed I do!”

“I will pray for you,” said Mason. “Could you say the ‘Our Father’ now?” He uttered the old universal prayer, but before he had finished Terbane had collapsed again among the cushions. He sat up again as Chang.

“He come on well,” said the control. “He give up time for others who wait. That is good. Now I have hard case. Ow!”

He gave a comical cry of disapprobation and sank back. Next moment he was up, his face long and solemn, his hands palm to palm.

“What is this?” he asked in a precise and affected voice. “I am at a loss to know what right this Chinese person has to summon me here. Perhaps you can enlighten me."

"It is that we may perhaps help you."

"When I desire help, sir, I ask for it. At present I do not desire it. The whole proceeding seems to me to be a very great liberty. So far as this Chinaman can explain it, I gather that I am the involuntary spectator of some sort of religious service."

"We are a spiritualistic circle."

"A most pernicious sect. A most blasphemous proceeding. As a humble parish priest I protest against such desecrations."

"You are held back, friend, by those narrow views. It is you who suffer. We want to relieve you."

"Suffer? What do you mean, sir?"

"You realise that you have passed over?"

"You are talking nonsense!"

"Do you realise that you are dead?"

"How can I be dead when I am talking to you?"

"Because you are using this man's body."

"I have certainly wandered into an asylum."

"Yes, an asylum for bad cases. I fear you are one of them. Are you happy where you are?"

"Happy? No, sir. My present surroundings are perfectly inexplicable to me."

"Have you any recollection of being ill?"

"I was very ill indeed."

"So ill that you died."

"You are certainly out of your senses."

"How do you know you are not dead?"

"Sir, I must give you some religious instruction. When one dies and has led an honourable life, one assumes a glorified body and one associates with the angels. I am now in exactly the same body as in life, and I am in a very dull, drab place. Such companions as I have are not such as I have been accustomed to associate with in life, and certainly no one could describe them as angels. Therefore your absurd conjecture may be dismissed."

"Do not continue to deceive yourself. We wish to help you. You can never progress until you realise your position."

"Really, you try my patience too far. Have I not said — ?"

The medium fell back among the cushions. An instant later the Chinese control, with his whimsical smile and his hands tucked away in his sleeves, was talking to the circle.

"He good man — fool man — learn sense soon. Bring him again. Not waste more time. Oh, my God! My God! Help! Mercy! Help!"

He had fallen full length upon the sofa, face upwards, and his cries were so terrible that the little audience all sprang to their feet. "A saw! A saw! Fetch a saw!" yelled the medium. His voice sank into a moan.

Even Mailey was agitated. The rest were horrified.

"Someone has obsessed him. I can't understand it. It may be some strong evil entity."

"Shall I speak to him?" asked Mason.

"Wait a moment! Let it develop. We shall soon see."

The medium writhed in agony. "Oh, my God! Why don't you fetch a saw!" he cried. "It's here across my breast-bone. It is cracking! I feel it! Hawkin! Hawkin! Pull me from under! Hawkin! Push up the beam! No, no, that's worse! And it's on fire! Oh, horrible! Horrible!"

His cries were blood-curdling. They were all chilled with horror. Then in an instant the Chinaman was blinking at them with his slanting eyes.

"What you think of that, Mister Mailey?"

"It was terrible, Chang. What was it?"

"It was for him," nodding towards Malone. "He want newspaper story, I give him newspaper story. He will understand. No time 'splain now. Too many waiting. Sailor man come next. Here he come!"

The Chinaman was gone, and a jovial, puzzled grin passed over the face of the medium. He scratched his head.

"Well, damn me," said he. "I never thought I would take orders from a Chink, but he says 'hist!' and by crums you've got to hist and no back talk either. Well, here I am. What did you want?"

"We wanted nothing."

"Well, the Chink seemed to think you did, for he slung me in here."

"It was you that wanted something. You wanted knowledge."

"Well, I've lost my bearings, that's true. I know I am dead 'cause I've seen the gunnery lootenant, and he was blown to bits before my eyes. If he's dead I'm dead and all the rest of us, for we are over to the last man. But we've got the laugh on our sky-pilot, for he's as puzzled as the rest of us. Damned poor pilot, I call him. We’re all taking our own soundings now.”

“What was your ship?”

“The *Monmouth.*”

“She that went down in battle with the German?”

“That’s right. South American waters. It was clean hell. Yes, it was hell.” There was a world of emotion in his voice. “Well,” he added more cheerfully, “I’ve heard our mates got level with them later. That is so, sir, is it not?”

“Yes, they all went to the bottom.”

“We’ve seen nothing of them this side. Just as well, maybe. We don’t forget nothing.”

“But you must,” said Mailey. “That’s what is the matter with you. That is why the Chinese control brought you through. We are here to teach you. Carry our message to your mates.”

“Bless your heart, sir, they are all here behind me.”

“Well, then, I tell you and them that the time for hard thoughts and worldly strife is over. Your faces are to be turned forward, not back. Leave this earth which still holds you by the ties of thought and let all your desire be to make yourself unselfish and worthy of a higher, more peaceful, more beautiful life. Can you understand?”

“I hear you, sir. So do they. We want steering, sir, for, indeed, we’ve had wrong instructions, and we never expected to find ourselves cast away like this. We had heard of heaven and we had heard of hell, but this don’t seem to fit in with either. But this Chinese gent. says time is up, and we can report again next week. I thank you, sir, for self and company. I’ll come again.”

There was silence.

“What an incredible conversation!” gasped Malone.

“If I were to put down that man’s sailor talk and slang as emanating from a world of spirits, what would the public say?”

Mailey shrugged his shoulders.

“Does it matter what the public says? I started as a fairly sensitive person, and now a tank takes as much notice of small shot as I do of newspaper attacks. They honestly don’t even interest me. Let us just stick fast to truth as near as we can get it, and leave all else to find its own level.”

“I don’t pretend to know much of these things,” said Roxton, “but what strikes me most is that these folk are very decent ordinary people. What? Why should they be wanderin’ about in the dark, and hauled up here by this Chinaman when they’ve done no partic’lar harm in life?”

“It is the strong earth tie and the absence of any spiritual nexus in each case,” Mailey explained. “Here is a clergyman with his mind entangled with formulas and ritual. Here is a materialist who has deliberately attuned himself to matter. Here is a seaman brooding over revengeful thoughts. They are there by the million million.”

“Where?” asked Malone.

“Here,” Mailey answered. “Actually on the surface of the earth. Well, you saw it for yourself, I understand, when you went down to Dorsetshire. That was on the surface, was it not? That was a very gross case, and that made it more visible and obvious, but it did not change the general law. I believe that the whole globe is infested with the earth-bound, and that when a great cleansing comes, as is prophesied, it will be for their benefit as much as for that of the living.”

Malone thought of the strange visionary Miromar and his speech at the Spiritualistic Church on the first night of his quest.

“Do you, then, believe in some impending event?” he asked.

Mailey smiled. “That is rather a large subject to open up,” he said. “I believe — But here is Mr. Chang again!”

The control joined in the conversation.

“I heard you. I sit and listen,” said he. “You speak now of what is to come. Let it be! Let it be! The Time is not yet. You will be told when it is good that you know. Remember this. All is best. Whatever come all is best. God makes no mistakes. Now others here who wish your help, I leave you.”

Several spirits came through in quick succession. One was an architect who said that he had lived at Bristol. He had not been an evil man, but had simply banished all thoughts of the future. Now he was in the dark and needed guidance. Another had lived in Birmingham. He was an educated man but a materialist. He refused to accept the assurances of Mailey, and was by no means convinced that he was really dead. Then came a very noisy and violent man of a crudely-religious and narrow, intolerant type, who spoke repeatedly of “the blood “.

“What is this ribald nonsense?” he asked several times.

“It is not nonsense. We are here to help,” said Mailey.

“Who wants to be helped by the devil?”

“Is it likely that the devil would wish to help souls in trouble?”

“It is part of his deceit. I tell you it is of the devil! Be warned! I will take no further part in it.”

The placid, whimsical Chinaman was back like a flash.

“Good man. Foolish man,” he repeated once more. “Plenty time. He learn better some day. Now I bring bad case — very bad case. Ow!”

He reclined his head in the cushion and did not raise it as the voice, a feminine voice, broke out:

“Janet! Janet!”

There was a pause.

“Janet, I say! Where is the morning tea? Janet! This is intolerable! I have called you again and again I Janet!” The figure sat up, blinking and rubbing his eyes.

“What is this?” cried the voice. “Who are you? What right have you here? Are you aware that this is my house?”

“No, friend, this is my house.”

“Your house! How can it be your house when this is my bedroom? Go away this moment!”

“No, friend. You do not understand your position.”

“I will have you put out. What insolence! Janet! Janet! Will no one look after me this morning?”

“Look round you, lady. Is this your bedroom?”

Terbane looked round with a wild stare.

“It is a room I never saw in my life. Where am I? What is the meaning of it? You look like a kind lady. Tell me, for God’s sake, what is the meaning of it? Oh, I am so terrified, so terrified! Where are John and Janet?”

“What do you last remember?”

“I remember speaking severely to Janet. She is my maid, you know. She has become so very careless. Yes, I was very angry with her. I was so angry that I was ill. I went to bed feeling very ill. They told me that I should not get excited. How can one help getting excited? Yes, I remember being breathless. That was after the light was out. I tried to call Janet. But why should I be in another room?”

“You passed over in the night.”

“Passed over? Do you mean I died?”

“Yes, lady, you died.”

There was a long silence. Then there came a shrill scream. “No, no, no! It is a dream! A nightmare! Wake me! Wake me! How can I be dead? I was not ready to die? I never thought of such a thing. If I am dead, why am I not in heaven or hell? What is this room? This room is real room.”

“Yes, lady, you have been brought here and allowed to use this man’s body

“A man?” She convulsively felt the coat and passed her hand over the face. “Yes, it is a man. Oh, I am dead! I am dead! What shall I do?”

“You are here that we may explain to you. You have been, I judge, a worldly woman — a society woman. You have lived always for material things.”

“I went to church. I was at St. Saviour’s every Sunday.”

“That is nothing. It is the inner daily life that counts. You were material. Now you are held down to the world. When you leave this man’s body you will be in your own body once more and in your old surroundings. But no one will see you. You will remain there unable to show yourself. Your body of flesh will be buried. You will still persist, the same as ever.”

“What am I to do? Oh, what can I do?”

“You will take what comes in a good spirit and understand that it is for your cleansing. We only clear ourselves of matter by suffering. All will be well. We will pray for you.”

“Oh, do! I need it so! Oh my God! . . .” The voice trailed away.

“Bad case,” said the Chinaman, sitting up. “Selfish woman! Bad woman! Live for pleasure. Hard on those around her. She have much to suffer. But you put her feet on the path. Now my medium tired. Plenty waiting, but no more to-day.”

“Have we done good, Chang?”

“Plenty good. Plenty good.”

“Where are all these people, Chang?”

“I tell you before.”

“Yes but I want these gentlemen to hear.”

“Seven spheres round the world, heaviest below, lightest above. First sphere is on the earth. These people belong to that sphere. Each sphere is separate from the other. Therefore it is easier for you to speak with these people than for those in any other sphere.”

“And easier for them to speak to us?”

“Yes. That why you should be plenty careful when you do not know to whom you talk. Try the spirits.”

“What sphere do you belong to, Chang?”

“I come from Number Four sphere.”

“Which is the first really happy sphere?”

“Number Three. Summerland. Bible book called it the third heaven. Plenty sense in Bible book, but people do not understand.”

And the seventh heaven?”

“Ah! That is where the Christs are. All come there at last — you, me, everybody.”

“And after that?”

“Too much question, Mr. Mailey. Poor old Chang not know so much as that. Now good-bye! God bless you! I go.”

It was the end of the sitting of the rescue circle. A few minutes later Terbane was sitting up smiling and alert, but with no apparent recollection of anything which had occurred. He was pressed for time and lived afar, so that he had to make his departure, unpaid save by the blessing of those who he had helped. Modest little unvenal man, where will he stand when we all find our real places in the order of creation upon the further side?

The circle did not break up at once. The visitors wanted to talk, and the Maileys to listen.

“What I mean,” said Roxton, “it’s doosed interestin’ and all that, but there is a sort of variety-show element in it. What! difficult to be sure it’s really real, if you take what I mean.”

“That is what I feel also,” said Malone. “Of course on its face value it is simply unspeakable. It is a thing so great that all ordinary happenings become commonplace. That I grant. But the human mind is very strange. I’ve read that case Moreton Prince examined, and Miss Beauchamp and the rest; also the results of Charcot, the great Nancy hypnotic school. They could turn a man into anything. The mind seems to be like a rope which can be unravelled into its various threads. Then each thread is a different personality which may take dramatic form, and act and speak as such. That man is honest, and he could not normally produce these effects. But how do we know that he is not self-hypnotized, and that under those conditions one strand of him becomes Mr. Chang and another becomes a sailor and another a society lady, and so forth?”

Mailey laughed. “Every man his own Cinquevalli” said he, “but it is a rational objection and has to be met.”

“We have traced some of the cases,” said Mrs. Mailey. “There is not a doubt of it — names, addresses, everything.”

“Well, then, we have to consider the question of Terbane’s normal knowledge. How can you possibly know what he has learned? I should think a railway-porter is particularly able to pick up such information.”

“You have seen one sitting,” Mailey answered. “If you had been present at as many as we and noted the cumulative effect of the evidence you would not be sceptical.”

“That is very possible,” Malone answered. “And I daresay my doubts are very annoying to you. And yet one is bound to be brutally honest in a case like this. Anyhow, whatever the ultimate cause, I have seldom spent so thrilling an hour. Heavens! If it only is true, and if you had a thousand circles instead of one, what regeneration would result?”

“That will come,” said Mailey in his patient, determined fashion. “We shall live to see it. I am sorry the thing has not forced conviction upon you. However, you must come again.”

But it so chanced that a further experience became unnecessary. Conviction came in a full flood and in a strange fashion that very evening. Malone had hardly got back to the office, and was seated at his desk drawing up some sort of account from his notes of all that had happened in the afternoon, when Mailey burst into the room, his yellow beard bristling with excitement. He was waving an Evening News in his hand. Without a word he seated himself beside Malone and turned the paper over. Then he began to read:

ACCIDENT IN THE CITY.

This afternoon shortly after five o’clock, an old house, said to date from the fifteenth century, suddenly collapsed. It was situated between Lesser Colman Street and Elliot Square, and next door to the Veterinary Society’s Headquarters. Some preliminary cracking warned the occupants and most of them had time to escape. Three of them, however, James Beale William Moorson, and a woman whose name has not been ascertained, were caught by the falling rubbish. Two of these seem to have perished at once, but the third, James Beale, was pinned down by a large beam and loudly demanded help. A saw was brought, and one of the occupants of the house, Samuel Hawkin, showed great gallantry in an attempt to free the unfortunate man.

Whilst he was sawing the beam, however, a fire broke out among the debris around him, and though he persevered most manfully, and continued until he was himself badly scorched, it was impossible for him to save Beale, who probably died from suffocation. Hawkin was removed to the London Hospital, and it is reported to-night that he is in no immediate danger.

“That’s that!” said Mailey, folding up the paper. “Now, Mr. Thomas Didymus, I leave you to your conclusions,” and the enthusiast vanished out of the office as precipitately as he had entered.

11. Where Silas Linden Comes Into His Own

SILAS LINDEN, prize-fighter and fake-medium, had had some good days in his life — days crowded with incidents for good or evil. There was the time when he had backed Rosalind at 100 to 1 in the Oaks and had spent twenty-four hours of brutal debauchery on the strength of it. There was the day also when his favourite right uppercut had connected in most accurate and rhythmical fashion with the protruded chin of Bull Wardell of Whitechapel, whereby Silas put himself in the way of a Lonsdale Belt and a try for the championship. But never in all his varied career had he such a day as this supreme one, so it is worth our while to follow him to the end of it. Fanatical believers have urged that it is dangerous to cross the path of spiritual things when the heart is not clean. Silas Linden's name might be added to their list of examples, but his cup of sin was full and overflowing before the judgment fell.

He emerged from the room of Algernon Mailey with every reason to know that Lord Roxton's grip was as muscular as ever. In the excitement of the struggle he had hardly realised his injuries, but now he stood outside the door with his hand to his bruised throat and a hoarse stream of oaths pouring through it. His breast was aching also where Malone had planted his knee, and even the successful blow which had struck Mailey down had brought retribution, or it had jarred that injured hand of which he had complained to his brother. Altogether, if Silas Linden was in a most cursed temper, there was a very good reason for his mood.

"I'll get you one at a time," he growled, looking back with his angry pigs' eyes at the outer door of the flats. "You wait my lads, and see!" Then with sudden purpose he swung off down the street.

It was to the Bardsley Square Police Station that he made his way, and he found the jovial, rubicund, black-moustached Inspector Murphy seated at his desk.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the inspector in no very friendly voice.

"I hear you got that medium right and proper."

"Yes, we did. I learn he was your brother."

"That's neither here not there. I don't hold with such things in any man. But you got your conviction. What is there for me in it?"

"Not a shilling "

"What? Wasn't it I that gave the information? Where would you have been if I had not given you the office?"

"If there had been a fine we might have allowed you something We would have got something, too. Mr. Melrose sent him to gaol. There is nothing for anybody."

"So say you. I'm damned sure you and those two women got something out of it. Why the hell should I give away my own brother for the sake of the likes of you? You'll find your own bird next time."

Murphy was a choleric man with a sense of his own importance. He was not to be bearded thus in his own seat of office. He rose with a very red face.

"I'll tell you what, Silas Linden, I could find my own bird and never move out of this room. You had best get out of this quick, or you may chance to stay here longer than you like. We've had complaints of your treatment of those two children of yours, and the children's protection folk are taking an interest. Look out that we don't take an interest, too."

Silas Linden flung out of the room with his temper hotter than ever, and a couple of rum-and-waters on his way home did not help to appease him. On the contrary, he had always been a man who grew more dangerous in his cups. There were many of his trade who refused to drink with him.

Silas lived in one of a row of small brick houses named Bolton's Court, lying at the back of Tottenham Court Road. His was the end house of a cul-de-sac, with the side wall of a huge brewery beyond. These dwellings were very small, which was probably the reason why the inhabitants, both adults and children, spent most of their time in the street. Several of the elders were out now, and as Silas passed under the solitary lamp-post, they scowled at his thick-set figure, for though the morality of Bolton's Court was of no high order, it was none the less graduated and Silas was at zero. A tall Jewish woman, Rebecca Levi, thin, aquiline and fierce-eyed, lived next to the prizefighter. She was standing at her door now, with a child holding her apron.

"Mr. Linden," she said as he passed, "them children of yours want more care than they get. Little Margery was in here to-day. That child don't get enough to eat."

"You mind your own business, curse you!" growled Silas. "I've told you before now not to push that long, sheeny beak of yours into my affairs. If you was a man I'd know better how to speak to you."

"If I was a man maybe you wouldn't dare to speak to me so. I say it's a shame, Silas Linden, the way them children is treated. If it's a police-court case, I'll know what to say."

"Oh, go to hell!" said Silas, and kicked open his own unlatched door. A big, frowsy woman with a shock of dyed hair and some remains of a florid beauty, now long over-ripe, looked out from the sitting-room door.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said she.

"Who did you think it was? The Dook of Wellington?"

"I thought it was a mad bullock maybe got strayin' down the lane, and buttin' down our door."

"Funny, ain't you?"

"Maybe I am, but I hain't got much to be funny about. Not a shilling in the 'ouse, nor so much as a pint o' beer, and these damned children of yours for ever upsettin' me."

"What have they been a-doin' of?" asked Silas with a scowl. When this worthy pair could get no change out of each other, they usually united their forces against the children. He had entered the sitting-room and flung himself down in the wooden armchair.

"They've been seein' Number One again."

"How d'ye know that?"

"I 'eard 'im say somethin' to 'er about it. 'Mother was there', 'e says. Then afterwards 'e 'ad one 'o them sleepy fits."

"It's in the family."

"Yes, it is," retorted the woman. "If you 'adn't sleepy fits you'd get some work to do, like other men."

"Oh, shut it, woman! What I mean is, that my brother Tom gets them fits, and this lad o' mine is said to be the livin' image of his uncle. So he had a trance, had he? What did you do?"

The woman gave an evil grin.

"I did what you did."

"What, the sealin'-wax again?"

"Not much of it. Just enough to wake 'im. It's the only way to break 'im of it."

Silas shrugged his shoulders.

"'Ave a care, my lass! There is talk of the p'lice, and if they see those burns, you and I may be in the dock together."

"Silas Linden, you are a fool! Can't a parent c'rect 'is own child?"

"Yes, but it ain't your own child, and stepmothers has a bad name, see? There's that Jew woman next door. She saw you when you took the clothes' rope to little Margery last washin'-day. She spoke to me about it and again to-day about the food."

"What's the matter with the food? The greedy little bastards! They had a 'unch of bread each when I 'ad my dinner. A bit of real starvin' would do them no 'arm, and I would 'ave less sauce."

"What, has Willie sauced you?"

"Yes, when 'e woke up."

"After you'd dropped the hot sealin'-wax on him?"

"Well, I did it for 'is good, didn't I? It was to cure 'im of a bad 'abit."

"Wot did he say?"

"Cursed me good and proper, 'e did. All about his mother — wot 'is mother would do to me. I'm dam' well sick of 'is mother!"

"Don't say too much about Amy. She was a good woman."

"So you say now, Silas Linden, but by all accounts you 'ad a queer way of showin' it when she was alive."

"Hold your jaw, woman! I've had enough to vex me to-day without you startin' your tantrums. You're jealous of the grave. That's wot's the matter with you."

"And her brats can insult me as they like — me that 'as cared for you these five years."

"No, I didn't say that. If he insulted you, it's up to me to deal with him. Where's that strap? Go, fetch him in!"

The woman came across and kissed him.

"I've only you, Silas."

"Oh hell! don't muck me about. I'm not in the mood. Go and fetch Willie in. You can bring Margery also. It takes the sauce out of her also, for I think she feels it more than he does."

The woman left the room but was back, in a moment.

"'E's off again!" said she. "It fair gets on my nerves to see him. Come 'ere, Silas! 'Ave a look!"

They went together into the back kitchen. A small fire was smouldering in the grate. Beside it, huddled up in a chair, sat a fair-haired boy of ten. His delicate face was upturned to the ceiling. His eyes were half-closed, and only the whites visible. There was a look of great peace upon his thin, spiritual features. In the corner a poor little cowed mite of a girl, a year or two younger, was gazing with sad, frightened eyes at her brother.

"Looks awful, don't 'e?" said the woman. "Don't seem to belong to this world. I wish to God 'e'd make a move for the other. 'E don't do much good 'ere."

"Here, wake up!," cried Silas. "None of your foxin'! Wake up! D'ye hear?" He shook him roughly by the shoulder, but the boy still slumbered on. The backs of his hands, which lay upon his lap, were covered with bright scarlet blotches.

"My word, you've dropped enough hot wax on him. D'you mean to tell me, Sarah, it took all that to wake him?"

"Maybe I dropped one or two extra for luck. 'E does aggravate me so that I can 'ardly 'old myself. But you wouldn't believe 'ow little 'e can feel when 'e's like that. You can 'owl in 'is ear. - It's all lost on 'im. See 'ere!"

She caught the lad by the hair and shook him violently. He groaned and shivered. Then he sank back into his serene trance.

"Say!" cried Silas, stroking his stubbled chin as he looked thoughtfully at his son, "I think there is money in this if it is handled to rights. Wot about a turn on the halls, eh? 'The Boy Wonder or How is it Done?' There's a name for the bills. Then folk know his uncle's name, so they will be able to take him on trust."

"I thought you was going into the business yourself."

"That's a wash-out," snarled Silas. "Don't you talk of it. It's finished."

"Been caught out already?"

"I tell you not to talk about it, Woman!" the man shouted. "I'm just in the mood to give you the hidin' of your life, so don't you get my goat' or you'll be sorry." He stepped across and pinched the boy's arm with all his force. "By Cripes, he's a wonder! Let us see how far it will go."

He turned to the sinking fire and with the tongs he picked out a half-red ember. This he placed on the boy's head. There was a smell of burning hair, then of roasting flesh, and suddenly, with a scream of pain, the boy came back to his senses.

"Mother! Mother!" he cried. The girl in the corner took up the cry. They were like two lambs bleating together.

"Damn your mother!" cried the woman, shaking Margery by the collar of her frail black dress. "Stop squallin', you little stinker!" She struck the child with her open hand across the face. Little Willie ran at her and kicked her shins until a blow from Silas knocked him into the corner. The brute picked up a stick and lashed the two cowering children, while they screamed for mercy, and tried to cover their little bodies from the cruel blows.

"You stop that!" cried a voice in the passage.

"It's that blasted Jewess!" said the woman. She went to the kitchen door. "What the 'ell are you doing in our 'ouse? 'Op it, quick, or it will be the worse for you!"

"If I hear them children cry out once more, I'm off far the police."

"Get out of it! 'Op it, I tell you!" The frowsy stepmother bore down in full sail, but the lean, lank Jewess stood her ground. Next instant they met. Mrs. Silas Linden screamed, and staggered back with blood running down her face where four nails had left as many red furrows. Silas' with an oath, pushed his wife out of the way, seized the intruder round the waist, and slung her bodily through the door. She lay in the roadway with her long gaunt limbs sprawling about like some half-slain fowl. Without rising, she shook her clenched hands in the air and screamed curses at Silas, who slammed the door and left her, while neighbours ran from all sides to hear particulars of the fray. Mrs. Linden, staring through the front blind, saw with some relief that her enemy was able to rise and to limp back to her own door, whence she could be heard delivering a long shrill harangue as to her wrongs. The wrongs of a Jew are not lightly forgotten, for the race can both love and hate.

"She's all right, Silas. I thought maybe you 'ad killed 'er "

"It's what she wants, the damned canting sheeny. It's bad enough to have her in the street without her daring to set foot inside my door. I'll cut the hide off that young Willie. He's the cause of it all. Where is he?"

"They ran up to their room. I heard them lock the door."

"A lot of good that will do them."

"I wouldn't touch 'em now, Silas. The neighbours is all up and about and we needn't ask for trouble."

"You're right!" he grumbled. "It will keep till I come back."

"Where are you goin'?"

"Down to the 'Admiral Vernon'. There's a chance of a job as sparrin' partner to Long Davis. He goes into training on Monday and needs a man of my weight."

"Well, I'll expect you when I see you. I get too much of that pub of yours. I know what the 'Admiral Vernon' means."

“It means the only place in God’s earth where I get any peace or rest” said Silas.

“A fat lot I get — or ever ‘ave ‘ad since I married you.”

“That’s right. Grouse away!” he growled. “If grousin’ made a man happy, you’d be the champion.”

He picked up his hat and slouched off down the street, his heavy tread resounding upon the great wooden flap which covered the cellars of the brewery.

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Up in a dingy attic two little figures were seated on the side of a wretched straw-stuffed bed, their arms enlacing each other, their cheeks touching, their tears mingling. They had to cry in silence, for any sound might remind the ogre downstairs of their existence. Now and again one would break into an uncontrollable sob, and the other would whisper, “Hush! Hush! Oh hush!” Then suddenly they heard the slam of the outer door and that heavy tread booming over the wooden flap. They squeezed each other in their joy. Perhaps when he came back he might kill them, but for a few short hours at least they were safe from him. As to the woman, she was spiteful and vicious, but she did not seem so deadly as the man. In a dim way they felt that he had hunted their mother into her grave and might do as much for them.

The room was dark save for the light which came through the single dirty window. It cast a bar across the floor, but all round was black shadow. Suddenly the little boy stiffened, clasped his sister with a tighter grip, and stared rigidly into the darkness.

“She’s coming!” he muttered. “She’s coming!” Little Margery clung to him.

“Oh, Wiliie, is it mother?”

“It is a light — a beautiful yellow light. Can you not see it, Margery?”

But the little girl, like all the world, was without vision. To her all was darkness.

“Tell me, Willie,” she whispered, in a solemn voice. She was not really frightened, for many times before had the dead mother returned in the watches of the night to comfort her stricken children.

“Yes. Yes, she is coming now. Oh, mother! Mother!”

“What does she say, Willie?”

"Oh, she is beautiful. She is not crying. She is smiling. It is like the picture we saw of the angel. She looks so happy. Dear, dear mother! Now she is speaking. 'It is over', she says. 'It is all over'. She says it again. Now she beckons with her hand. We are to follow. She has moved to the door."

"Oh, Willie, I dare not."

"Yes, yes, she nods her head. She bids us fear nothing Now she has passed through the door. Come, Margery, come, or we shall lose her."

The two little mites crept across the room and Willie unlocked the door. The mother stood at the head of the stair beckoning them onwards. Step by step they followed her down into an empty kitchen. The woman seemed to have gone out. All was still in the house. The phantom still beckoned them on."

"We are to go out."

"Oh, Willie, we have no hats."

"We must follow, Madge. She is smiling and waving."

"Father will kill us for this."

"She shakes her head. She says we are to fear nothing. Come!"

They threw open the door and were in the street. Down the deserted court they followed the gleaming gracious presence, and through a tangle of low streets, and so out into the crowded rush of Tottenham Court Road. Once or twice amid all that blind torrent of humanity, some man or woman, blessed with the precious gift of discernment, would start and stare as if they were aware of an angel presence and of two little white-faced children who followed behind, the boy with fixed, absorbed gaze, the girl glancing ever in terror over her shoulder. Down the long street they passed, then again amid humbler dwellings, and so at last to a quiet drab line of brick houses. On the step of one the spirit had halted.

"We are to knock," said Willie.

"Oh, Willie, what shall we say? We don't know them."

"We are to knock," he repeated, stoutly. Rat-tat!

"It's all right, Madge. She is clapping her hands and laughing."

So it was that Mrs. Tom Linden, sitting lonely in her misery and brooding over her martyr in gaol, was summoned suddenly to the door, and found two little apologetic figures outside it. A few words, a rush of woman's instinct, and her arms were round the children. These battered little skiffs, who had started their life's voyage so sadly, had found a harbour of peace where no storm should vex them more.

.

There were some strange happenings in Bolton’s Court that night. Some folk thought they had no relation to each other. One or two thought they had. The British Law saw nothing and had nothing to say.

In the second last house, a keen, hawklike face peered from behind a window-blind into the darkened street. A shaded candle was behind that fearful face, dark as death, remorseless as the tomb. Behind Rebecca Levi stood a young man whose features showed that he sprang from the same Oriental race. For an hour — for a second hour — the woman had sat without a word, watching, watching . . . At the entrance to the court there was a hanging lamp which cast a circle of yellow light. It was on this pool of radiance that her brooding eyes were fixed.

Then suddenly she saw what she had waited for. She started and hissed out a word. The young man rushed from the room and into the street. He vanished through a side door into the brewery.

Drunken Silas Linden was coming home. He was in a gloomy, sulken state of befuddlement. A sense of injury filled his mind. He had not gained the billet he sought. His injured hand had been against him. He had hung about the bar waiting for drinks and had got some, but not enough. Now he was in a dangerous mood. Woe to the man, woman or child, who crossed his path! He thought savagely of the Jewess who lived in that darkened house. He thought savagely of all his neighbours. They would stand between him and his children, would they? He would show them. The very next morning he would take them both out into the street and strap them within an inch of their lives. That would show them all what Silas Linden thought of their opinions. Why should he not do it now? If he were to waken the neighbours up with the shrieks of his children, it would show them once for all that they could not defy him with impunity. The idea pleased him. He stepped more briskly out. He was almost at his door when . . .

It was never quite clear how it was that the cellar-flap was not securely fastened that night. The jury were inclined to blame the brewery, but the coroner pointed out that Linden was a heavy man, that he might have fallen on it if he were drunk, and that all reasonable care had been taken. It was an eighteen-foot fall upon jagged stones, and his back was broken. They did not find him till next morning, for, curiously enough, his neighbour, the Jewess, never heard the sound of the accident. The doctor seemed to think that death had not come quickly. There were horrible signs that he had lingered. Down in the darkness, vomiting blood and beer, the man ended his filthy life with a filthy death.

One need not waste words or pity over the woman whom he had left. Relieved from her terrible mate, she returned to that music-hall stage from which he, by force of his virility and bull-like strength, had lured her. She tried to regain her place with:

“Hi! Hi! Hi! I’m the *dernier cri*,
The girl with the cart-wheel hat.”

which was the ditty which had won her her name. But it became too painfully evident that she was anything but the *dernier cri*, and that she could never get back. Slowly she sank from big halls to small halls, from small halls to pubs, and so ever deeper and deeper, sucked into the awful silent quicksands of life which drew her down and down until that vacuous painted face and frowsy head were seen no more.

12. There Are Heights And There Are Depths

THE Institut Métapsychique was an imposing stone building in the Avenue Wagram with a door like a baronial castle. Here it was that the three friends presented themselves late in the evening. A footman showed them into a reception-room where they were presently welcomed by Dr. Maupuis in person. The famous authority on psychic science was a short, broad man with a large head, a clean-shaven face, and an expression in which worldly wisdom and kindly altruism were blended. His conversation was in French with Mailey and Roxton, who both spoke the language well, but he had to fall back upon broken English with Malone, who could only utter still more broken French in reply. He expressed his pleasure at their visit, as only a graceful Frenchman can, said a few words as to the wonderful qualities of Panbek, the Galician medium, and finally led the way downstairs to the room in which the experiments were to be conducted. His air of vivid intelligence and penetrating sagacity had already shown the strangers how preposterous were those theories which tried to explain away his wonderful results by the supposition that he was a man who was the easy victim of impostors.

Descending a winding stair they found themselves in a large chamber which looked at first glance like a chemical laboratory, for shelves full of bottles, retorts, test-tubes, scales and other apparatus lined the walls. It was more elegantly furnished, however, than a mere workshop, and a large massive oak table occupied the centre of the room with a fringe of comfortable chairs. At one end of the room was a large portrait of Professor Crookes, which was flanked by a second of Lombroso, while between them was a remarkable picture of one of Eusapia Palladino’s seances. Round the table there was gathered a group of men who were talking in low tones, too much absorbed in their own conversation to take much notice of the newcomers.

“Three of these are distinguished visitors like yourselves,” said Dr. Maupuis. “Two others are my laboratory assistants, Dr. Sauvage and Dr. Buisson. The others are Parisians of note. The Press is represented to-day by Mr. Forte, sub-editor of the *Matin*. The tall, dark man who looks like a retired general you probably know.... Not? That is Professor Charles Richet, our honoured doyen, who has shown great courage in this matter, though he has not quite reached the same conclusions as you, Monsieur Mailey. But that also may come. You must remember that we have to show policy, and that the less we mix this with religion, the less trouble we shall have with the Church, which is still very powerful in this country. The distinguished-looking man with the high forehead is the Count de Grammont. The gentleman with the head of a Jupiter and the white beard is Flammarion, the astronomer. Now, gentlemen," he added, in a louder voice, "if you will take your places we shall get to work."

They sat at random round the long table, the three Britons keeping together. At one end a large photographic camera was reared aloft. Two zinc buckets also occupied a prominent position upon a side table. The door was locked and the key given to Professor Richet. Dr. Maupuis sat at one end of the table with a small middle-aged man, moustached, bald-headed and intelligent, upon his right.

"Some of you have not met Monsieur Panbek," said the doctor. "Permit me to present him to you. Monsieur Panbek, gentlemen, has placed his remarkable powers at our disposal for scientific investigation, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude. He is now in his forty-seventh year, a man of normal health, of a neuro-arthritic disposition. Some hyper-excitability of his nervous system is indicated, and his reflexes arc exaggerated, but his blood-pressure is normal. The pulse is now at seventy-two, but rises to one hundred under trance conditions. There are zones of marked hyper-aesthesia on his limbs. His visual field and pupillary reaction is normal. I do not know that there is anything to add."

"I might say," remarked Professor Richet, "that the hyper-sensibility is moral as well as physical. Panbek is impressionable and full of emotion, with the temperament of the poet and all those little weaknesses, if we may call them so, which the poet pays as a ransom for his gifts. A great medium is a great artist and is to be judged by the same standards."

"He seems to me, gentlemen, to be preparing you for the worst," said the medium with a charming smile, while the company laughed in sympathy.

"We are sitting in the hopes that some remarkable materialisations which we have recently had may be renewed in such a form that we may get a permanent record of them." Dr. Maupuis was talking in his dry, unemotional voice. "These materialisations have taken very unexpected forms of late, and I would beg the company to repress any feelings of fear, however strange these forms may be, as a calm and judicial atmosphere is most necessary. We shall now turn out the white light and begin with the lowest degree of red light until the conditions will admit of further illumination.”

The lamps were controlled from Dr. Maupuis’ seat at the table. For a moment they were plunged in utter darkness. Then a dull red glow came in the corner, enough to show the dim outlines of the men round the table. There was no music and no religious atmosphere of any sort. The company conversed in whispers.

“This is different to your English procedure,” said Malone.

“Very,” Mailey answered. “It seems to me that we are wide open to anything which may come. It’s all wrong. They don’t realise the danger.”

“What danger can there be?”

“Well, from my point of view, it is like sitting at the edge of a pond which may have harmless frogs in it, or may have man-eating crocodiles. You can’t tell what may come.”

Professor Richet, who spoke excellent English, overheard the words.

“I know your views, Mr. Mailey,” said he. “Don’t think that I treat them lightly. Some things which I have seen make me appreciate your comparison of the frog and the crocodile. In this very room I have been conscious of the presence of creatures which could, if moved to anger, make our experiments seem rather hazardous. I believe with you that evil people here might bring an evil reflection into our circle.”

“I am glad, sir, that you are moving in our direction,” said Mailey, for like everyone else he regarded Richet as one of the world’s great men.

“Moving, perhaps, and yet I cannot claim to be altogether with you yet. The latent powers of the human incarnate spirit may be so wonderful that they may extend to regions which seem at present to be quite beyond their scope. As an old materialist, I fight every inch of the ground, though I admit that I have lost several lines of trenches. My illustrious friend Challenger still holds his front intact, as I understand.”

“Yes, sir” said Malone, “and yet I have some hopes—”

“Hush!” cried Maupuis in an eager voice. There was dead silence. Then there came a sound of uneasy movement with a strange flapping vibration.

“The bird!” said an awestruck whisper.

There was silence and then once again came the sound of movement and an impatient flap.

“Have you all ready, Rene?” asked the doctor.

“All is ready.”

“Then shoot!”

The flash of the luminant mixture filled the room, while the shutter of the camera fell. In that sudden glare of light the visitors had a momentary glimpse of a marvellous sight. The medium lay with his head upon his hands in apparent insensibility. Upon his rounded shoulders there was perched a huge bird of prey — a large falcon or an eagle. For one instant the strange picture was stamped upon their retinas even as it was upon the photographic plate. Then the darkness closed down again, save for the two red lamps, like the eyes of some baleful demon lurking in the corner.

“My word!” gasped Malone. “Did you see it?”

“A crocodile out of the pond,” said Mailey.

“But harmless,” added Professor Richet. “the bird has been with us several times. He moves his wings, as you have heard, but otherwise is inert. We may have another and a more dangerous visitor.”

The flash of the light had, of course, dispelled all ectoplasm. It was necessary to begin again The company may have sat for a quarter of an hour when Richet touched Mailey’s arm.

“Do you smell anything, Monsieur Mailey?”

Mailey sniffed the air.

“Yes, surely, it reminds me of our London Zoo.”

“There is another more ordinary analogy. Have you been in a warm room with a wet dog?”

“Exactly,” said Mailey. “That is a perfect description. But where is the dog?”

“It is not a dog. Wait a little! Wait!”

The animal smell became more pronounced. It was overpowering. Then suddenly Malone became conscious of something moving round the table. In the dim red light he was aware of a mis-shapen figure, crouching, ill-formed, with some resemblance to man. He silhouetted it against the dull radiance. It was bulky, broad, with a bullet-head, a short neck, heavy, clumsy shoulders. It slouched slowly round the circle. Then it stopped, and a cry of surprise, not unmixed with fear, came from one of the sitters.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Dr. Maupuis’ quiet voice. “It is the Pithecanthropus. He is harmless.” Had it been a cat which had strayed into the room the scientist could not have discussed it more calmly.

“It has long claws. It laid them on my neck,” cried a voice.

“Yes, yes. He means it as a caress.”

“You may have my share of his caresses!” cried the sitter in a quavering voice.

“Do not repulse him. It might be serious. He is well disposed. But he has his feelings, no doubt, like the rest of us.”

The creature had resumed its stealthy progress. Now it turned the end of the table and stood behind the three friends. Its breath came in quick puffs at the back of their necks. Suddenly Lord Roxton gave a loud exclamation of disgust.

“Quiet! Quiet! “ said Maupuis.

“It’s licking my hand!” cried Roxton.

An instant later Malone was aware of a shaggy head extended between Lord Roxton and himself. With his left hand he could feel long, coarse hair. It turned towards him, and it needed all his self-control to hold his hand still when a long soft tongue caressed it. Then it was gone.

“In heaven’s name, what is it?” he asked.

“We have been asked not to photograph it. Possibly the light would infuriate it. The command through the medium was definite. We can only say that it is either an apelike man or a man-like ape. We have seen it more clearly than to-night. The face is Simian, but the brow is straight; the arms long, the hands huge, the body covered with hair.”

“Tom Linden gave us something better than that,” whispered Mailey. He spoke low but Richet caught the words.

“All Nature is the field of our study, Mr. Mailey. It is not for us to choose. Shall we classify the flowers but neglect the fungi?”

“But you admit it is dangerous.”

“The X-rays were dangerous. How many martyrs lost their arms, joint by joint, before those dangers were realised? And yet it was necessary. So it is with us. We do not know yet what it is that we are doing. But if we can indeed show the world that this Pithecanthropus can come to us from the Invisible, and depart again as it came, then the knowledge is so tremendous that even if he tore us to pieces with those formidable claws it would none the less be our duty to go forward with our experiments.”

“Science can be heroic,” said Mailey. “Who can deny it? And yet I have heard these very scientific men tell us that we imperil our reason when we try to get in touch with spiritual forces. Gladly would we sacrifice our reason, or our lives, if we could help mankind. Should we not do as much for spiritual advance as they for material?”

The lights had been turned up and there was a pause for relaxation before the great experiment of the evening was attempted. The men broke into little groups, chatting in hushed tones over their recent experience. Looking round at the comfortable room with its up-to-date appliances, the strange bird and the stealthy monster seemed like dreams. And yet they had been very real as was shown presently by the photographer, who had been allowed to leave and now rushed excitedly from the adjacent dark room waving the plate which he had just developed and fixed. He held it up against the light, and there, sure enough, was the bald head of the medium sunk between his hands, and crouching closely over his shoulders the outline of that ominous figure. Dr. Maupuis rubbed his little fat hands with glee. Like all pioneers he had endured much persecution from the Parisian Press, and every fresh phenomenon was another weapon for his own defence.

“*Nous marchons! Hein! Nous Marchons!*” he kept on repeating while Richet, lost in thought, answered mechanically:

“*Oui, mon ami, vous marchez!*”

The little Galician was sitting nibbling a biscuit with a glass of red wine before him. Malone went round to him and found that he had been in America and could talk a little English.

“Are you tired? Does it exhaust you?”

“In moderation, no. Two sittings a week. Behold my allowance. The doctor will allow no more.”

“Do you remember anything?”

“It comes to me like dreams. A little here — a little there.”

“Has the power always been with you?”

“Yes, yes, ever since a child. And my father, and my uncle. Their talk was of visions. For me, I would go and sit in the woods and strange animals would come round me. It did me such a surprise when I found that the other children could not see them “

“*Est ce que vous êtes prêtes?*” asked Dr. Maupuis.

“*Parfaitment*,” answered the medium, brushing away the crumbs. The doctor lit a spirit-lamp under one of the zinc buckets.

“We are about to co-operate in an experiment, gentlemen, which should, once and for all, convince the world as to the existence of these ectoplasmic forms. Their nature may be disputed, but their objectivity will be beyond doubt from now onwards unless my plans miscarry. I would first explain these two buckets to you. This one, which I am warming, contains paraffin, which is now in process of liquefaction. This other contains water. Those who have not been present before must understand that Panbek's phenomena occur usually in the same order, and that at this stage of the evening we may expect the apparition of the old man. To-night we lie in wait for the old man, and we shall, I hope, immortalise him in the history of psychic research. I resume my seat, and I switch on the red light, Number Three, which allows of greater visibility."

The circle was now quite visible. The medium's head had fallen forward and his deep snoring showed that he was already in trance. Every face was turned towards him, for the wonderful process of materialisation was going on before their very eyes. At first it was a swirl of light, steam-like vapour which circled round his head. Then there was a waving, as of white diaphanous drapery, behind him. It thickened. It coalesced. It hardened in outline and took definite shape. There was a head. There were shoulders. Arms grew out from them. Yes, there could not be a doubt of it — there was a man, an old man, standing behind the chair. He moved his head slowly from side lo side. He seemed to be peering in indecision towards the company. One could imagine that he was asking himself, "Where am I, and what am I here for?"

"He does not speak, but he hears and has intelligence," said Dr. Maupuis, glancing over his shoulder at the apparition. "We are here, sir, in the hope that you will aid us in a very important experiment. May we count upon your co-operation?"

The figure bowed his head in assent.

"We thank you. When you have attained your full power you will, no doubt, move away from the medium." The figure again bowed, but remained motionless. It seemed to Malone that it was growing denser every moment. He caught glimpses of the face. It was certainly an old man, heavy-faced, long-nosed, with a curiously projecting lower lip. Suddenly with a brusque movement it stood clear from Panbeck and stepped out into the room.

"Now, sir," said Maupuis in his precise fashion. "You will perceive the zinc bucket upon the left. I would beg you to have the kindness to approach it and to plunge your right hand into it."

The figure moved across. He seemed interested in the buckets, for he examined them with some attention. Then he dipped one of his hands into that which the doctor had indicated.

“Excellent!” cried Maupuis, his voice shrill with excitement. “Now, sir, might I ask you to have the kindness to dip the same hand into the cold water of the other bucket.”

The form did so.

“Now, sir, you would bring our experiment to complete success if you would lay your hand upon the table, and while it is resting there you would yourself dematerialise and return into the medium.”

The figure bowed its comprehension and assent. Then it slowly advanced towards the table, stooped over it, extended its hand — and vanished. The heavy breathing of the medium ceased and he moved uneasily as if about to wake. Maupuis turned on the white light, and threw up his hands with a loud cry of wonder and joy which was echoed by the company.

On the shining wooden surface of the table there lay a delicate yellow-pink glove of paraffin, broad at the knuckles, thin at the wrist, two of the fingers bent down to the palm. Maupuis was beside himself with delight. He broke off a small bit of the wax from the wrist and handed it to an assistant, who hurried from the room.

“It is final!” he cried. “What can they say now? Gentlemen, I appeal to you. You have seen what occurred. Can any of you give any rational explanation of that paraffin mould, save that it was the result of dematerialisation of the hand within it?”

“I can see no other solution,” Richet answered. “But you have to do with very obstinate and very prejudiced people. If they cannot deny it, they will probably ignore it.”

“The Press is here and the Press represents the public,” said Maupuis. “For the Press Engleesh, Monsieur Malone,” he went on in his broken way. “Is it that you can see any answer?”

“I can see none,” Malone answered.

“And you, monsieur?” addressing the representative of the Matin.”

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

“For us who had the privilege of being present it was indeed convincing,” said he, “and yet you will certainly be met with objections. They will not realise how fragile this thing is. They will say that the medium brought it on his person and laid it upon the table.”

Maupuis clapped his hands triumphantly. His assistant had just brought him a slip of paper from the next room.

"Your objection is already answered," he cried, waving the paper in the air. "I had foreseen it and I had put some cholesterine among the paraffin in the zinc pail. You may have observed that I broke off a corner of the mould. It was for purpose of chemical analysis. This has now been done. It is here and cholesterine has been detected."

"Excellent!" said the French journalist. "You have closed the last hole. But what next?"

"What we have done once we can do again," Maupuis answered. "I will prepare a number of these moulds. In some cases I will have fists and hands. Then I will have plaster casts made from them. I will run the plaster inside the mould. It is delicate, but it can be done. I will have dozens of them so treated, and I will send them broadcast to every capital in the world that people may see with their own eyes. Will that not at last convince them of the reality of our conclusions?"

"Do not hope for too much, my poor friend," said Richet, with his hand upon the shoulder of the enthusiast. "You have not yet realised the enormous *vis inertioe of the world*. But as you have said, '*Vous marchez — vous marchez toujours'*."

"And our march is regulated," said Mailey. "There is a gradual release to accommodate it to the receptivity of mankind."

Richet smiled and shook his head.

"Always transcendental, Monsieur Mailey! Always seeing more than meets the eye and changing science into philosophy! I fear you are incorrigible. Is your position reasonable?"

"Professor Richet," said Mailey, very earnestly, "I would beg you to answer the same question. I have a deep respect for your talents and complete sympathy with your caution, but have you not come to the dividing of the ways? You are now in the position that you admit — you must admit — that an intelligent apparition in human form, built up from the substance which you have yourself named ectoplasm, can walk the room and carry out instructions while the medium lay senseless under our eyes, and yet you hesitate to assert that spirit has an independent existence. Is that reasonable?"

Richet smiled and shook his head. Without answering he turned and bid farewell to Dr. Maupuis, and to offer him his congratulations. A few minutes later the company had broken up and our friends were in a taxi speeding towards their hotel.

Malone was deeply impressed with what he had seen, and he sat up half the night drawing up a full account of it for the Central News, with the names of those who had endorsed the result — honourable names which no one in the world could associate with folly or deception.

“Surely, surely, this will be a turning point and an epoch.” So ran his dream. Two days later he opened the great London dailies one after the other. Columns about football. Columns about golf. A full page as to the value of shares. A long and earnest correspondence in *The Times* about the habits of the lapwing. Not one word in any of them as to the wonders which he had seen and reported. Mailey laughed at his dejected face.

“A mad world, my masters,” said he. “A crazy world! But the end is not yet!”

13. In Which Professor Challenger Goes Forth To Battle

PROFESSOR CHALLENGER was in a bad humour, and when that was so his household were made aware of it. Neither were the effects of his wrath confined to those around him, for most of those terrible letters which appeared from time to time in the Press, flaying and scarifying some unhappy opponent, were thunderbolt flashes from an offended Jove who sat in sombre majesty in his study-throne on the heights of a Victoria flat. Servants would hardly dare to enter the room where, glooming and glowering, the maned and bearded head looked up from his papers as a lion from a bone. Only Enid could dare him at such a time, and even she felt occasionally that sinking of the heart which the bravest of tamers may experience as he unbars the gate of the cage. She was not safe from the acridity of his tongue but at least she need not fear physical violence, which was well within the possibilities for others.

Sometimes these berserk fits of the famous Professor arose from material causes. “Hepatic, sir, hepatic!” he would explain in extenuation after some aggravated assault. But on this particular occasion he had a very definite cause for discontent. It was Spiritualism!

He never seemed to get away from the accursed superstition — a thing which ran counter to the whole work and philosophy of his lifetime. He attempted to pooh-pooh it, to laugh at it, to ignore it with contempt, but the confounded thing would insist upon obtruding itself once more. On Monday he would write it finally off his books, and before Saturday he would be up to his neck in it again. And the thing was so absurd! It seemed to him that his mind was being drawn from the great pressing material problems of the Universe in order to waste itself upon Grimm’s fairy tales or the ghosts of a sensational novelist.

Then things grew worse. First Malone, who had in his simple fashion been an index figure representing the normal clear-headed human being, had in some way been bedevilled by these people and had committed himself to their pernicious views. Then Enid, his wee-lamb, his one real link with humanity, had also been corrupted. She had agreed with Malone’s conclusions. She had even hunted up a good deal of evidence of her own. In vain he had himself investigated a case and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the medium was a designing villain who brought messages from a widow's dead husband in order to get the woman into his power. It was a clear case and Enid admitted it. But neither she nor Malone would allow any general application. "There are rogues in every line of life," they would say. "We must judge every movement by the best and not by the worst."

All this was bad enough, but worse still was in store. He had been publicly humiliated by the Spiritualists — and that by a man who admitted that he had had no education and would in any other subject in the world have been seated like a child at the Professor's feet. And yet in public debate . . . but the story must be told.

Be it known, then, that Challenger, greatly despising all opposition and with no knowledge of the real strength of the case to be answered, had, in a fatal moment, actually asserted that he would descend from Olympus and would meet in debate any representative whom the other party should select. "I am well aware," he wrote, " that by such condescension I, like any other man of science of equal standing, run the risk of giving a dignity to these absurd and grotesque aberrations of the human brain which they could otherwise not pretend to claim, but we must do our duty to the public, and we must occasionally turn from our serious work and spare a moment in order to sweep away those ephemeral cobwebs which might collect and become offensive if they were not dispersed by the broom of Science." Thus, in a most self-confident fashion, did Goliath go forth to meet his tiny antagonist, an ex-printer's assistant and now the editor of what Challenger would describe as an obscure print devoted to matters of the spirit.

The particulars of the debate are public property, and it is not necessary to tell in any great detail that painful event. It will be remembered that the great man of Science went down to the Queen's Hall accompanied by many rationalist sympathizers who desired to see the final destruction of the visionaries. A large number of these poor deluded creatures also attended, hoping against hope that their champion might not be entirely immolated upon the altar of outraged Science. Between them the two factions filled the hall, and glared at each other with as much enmity as did the Blues and the Greens a thousand years before in the Hippodrome of Constantinople. There on the left of the platform were the solid ranks of those hard and unbending rationalists who look upon the Victorian agnostics as credulous, and refresh their faith by the periodical perusal of the *Literary Gazette* and the *Freethinker*.

There, too, was Dr. Joseph Baumer, the famous lecturer upon the absurdities of religion, together with Mr. Edward Mould, who has insisted so eloquently upon man's claim to ultimate putridity of the body and extinction of the soul. On the other side Mailey's yellow beard flamed like an oriflamme. His wife sat on one side of him and Mervin, the journalist, on the other, while dense ranks of earnest men and women from the Queen Square Spiritual Alliance, from the Psychic College, from the Stead Bureau, and from the outlying churches, assembled in order to encourage their champion in his hopeless task. The genial faces of Bolsover, the grocer, with his Hammersmith friends, Terbane, the railway medium, the Reverend Charles Mason, with his ascetic features, Tom Linden, now happily released from bondage, Mrs. Linden, the Crewe circle, Dr. Atkinson, Lord Roxton, Malone, and many other familiar faces were to be picked out amid that dense wall of humanity. Between the two parties, solemn and stolid and fat, sat Judge Gaverson of the King's Bench, who had consented to preside. It was an interesting and suggestive fact that in this critical debate at which the very core or vital centre of real religion was the issue, the organized churches were entirely aloof and neutral. Drowsy and semi-conscious, they could not discern that the live intellect of the nation was really holding an inquisition upon their bodies to determine whether they were doomed to the extinction towards which they were rapidly drifting, or whether a resuscitation in other forms was among the possibilities of the future.

In front, on one side, with his broad-browed disciples behind him, sat Professor Challenger, portentous and threatening, his Assyrian beard projected in his most aggressive fashion, a half-smile upon his lips, and his eyelids drooping insolently over his intolerant grey eyes. On the corresponding position on the other side was perched a drab and unpretentious person over whose humble head Challenger's hat would have descended to the shoulders. He was pale and apprehensive, glancing across occasionally in apologetic and deprecating fashion at his leonine opponent. Yet those who knew James Smith best were the least alarmed, for they were aware that behind his commonplace and democratic appearance there lay a knowledge of his subject, practical and theoretical, such as few living men possessed. The wise men of the Psychical Research Society are but children in psychic knowledge when compared with such practising Spiritualists as

James Smith — men whose whole lives are spent in various forms of communion with the unseen. Such men often lose touch with the world in which they dwell and are useless for its everyday purposes, but the editorship of a live paper and the administration of a wide-spread, scattered community had kept Smith's feet solid upon earth, while his excellent natural faculties, uncorrupted by useless education, had enabled him to concentrate upon the one field of knowledge which offers in itself a sufficient scope for the greatest human intellect. Little as Challenger could appreciate it, the contest was really one between a brilliant discursive amateur and a concentrated highly-specialised professional.

It was admitted on all sides that Challenger's opening half-hour was a magnificent display of oratory and argument. His deep organ voice — such a voice as only a man with a fifty-inch chest can produce — rose and fell in a perfect cadence which enchanted his audience. He was born to sway an assembly — an obvious leader of mankind. In turn he was descriptive, humorous and convincing. He pictured the natural growth of animism among savages cowering under the naked sky, unable to account for the beat of the rain or the roar of the thunder, and seeing a benevolent or malicious intelligence behind those operations of Nature which Science had now classified and explained.

Hence on false premises was built up that belief in spirits or invisible beings outside ourselves, which by some curious atavism was re-emerging in modern days among the less educated strata of mankind. It was the duty of Science to resist retrogressive tendencies of the sort, and it was a sense of that duty which had reluctantly drawn him from the privacy of his study to the publicity of this platform. He rapidly sketched the movement as depicted by its maligners. It was a most unsavoury story as he told it, a story of cracking toe joints, of phosphorescent paint, of muslin ghosts, of a nauseous sordid commission trade betwixt dead men's bones on one side, and widow's tears upon the other. These people were the hyenas of the human race who battened upon the graves. (Cheers from the Rationalists and ironical laughter from the Spiritualists.) They were not all rogues. ("Thank you, Professor!" from a stentorian opponent) But the others were fools (laughter). Was it exaggeration to call man a fool who believed that his grandmother could rap out absurd messages with the leg of a dining-room table? Had any savages descended to so grotesque a superstition? These people had taken dignity from death and had brought their own vulgarity into the serene oblivion of the tomb. It was a hateful business. He was sorry to have to speak so strongly, but only the knife or the cautery could deal with so cancerous a growth. Surely man need not trouble himself with grotesque speculations as to the nature of life beyond the grave. We had enough to do in this world. Life was a beautiful thing. The man who appreciated its real duties and beauties would have sufficient to employ him without dabbling in pseudo sciences which had their roots in frauds, exposed already a hundred times and yet finding fresh crowds of foolish devotees whose insane credulity and irrational prejudice made them impervious to all argument.

Such is a most bald and crude summary of this powerful opening argument. The materialists roared their applause; the Spiritualists looked angry and uneasy, while their spokesman rose, pale but resolute, to answer the ponderous onslaught.

His voice and appearance had none of those qualities which made Challenger magnetic, but he was clearly audible and made his points in a precise fashion like a workman who is familiar with his tools. He was so polite and so apologetic at first that he gave the impression of having been cowed. He felt that it was almost presumptuous upon one who had so little advantage of education to measure mental swords for an instant with so renowned an antagonist, one whom he had long revered. It seemed to him, however, that in the long list of the Professor’s accomplishments — accomplishments which had made him a household word throughout the world — there was one missing, and unhappily it was just this one upon which he had been tempted to speak. He had listened to that speech with admiration so far as its eloquence was concerned, but with surprise, and he might almost say with contempt, when he analysed the assertions which were contained in it. It was clear that the Professor had prepared his case by reading all the anti-Spiritualist literature which he could lay his hands upon — a most tainted source of information — while neglecting the works of those who spoke from experience and conviction.

All this talk of cracking joints and other fraudulent tricks was mid-Victorian in its ignorance, and as to the grandmother talking through the leg of a table he, the speaker, could not recognise it as a fair description of Spiritualistic phenomena. Such comparisons reminded one of the jokes about the dancing frogs which impeded the recognition of Volta’s early electrical experiments. They were unworthy of Professor Challenger. He must surely be aware that the fraudulent medium was the worst enemy of Spiritualism, that he was denounced by name in the psychic journals whenever he was discovered, and that such exposures were usually made by the Spiritualists themselves who had spoken of “human hyenas “ as indignantly as his opponent had done. One did not condemn banks because forgers occasionally used them for nefarious purposes. It was wasting the time of so chosen an audience to descend to such a level of argument. Had Professor Challenger denied the religious implications of Spiritualism while admitting the phenomena, it might have been harder to answer him, but in denying everything he had placed himself in an absolutely impossible position. No doubt Professor Challenger had read the recent work of Professor Richet, the famous physiologist. That work had extended over thirty years. Richet had verified all the phenomena.

Perhaps Professor Challenger would inform the audience what personal experience he had himself had which gave him the right to talk of Richet, or Lombroso, or Crookes, as if they were superstitious savages. Possibly his opponent had conducted experiments in private of which the world knew nothing. In that case he should give them to the world. Until he did so it was unscientific and really indecent to deride men, hardly inferior in scientific reputation to himself, who actually had done such experiments and laid them before the public.

As to the self-sufficiency of this world, a successful Professor with a eupeptic body might take such a view, but if one found oneself with cancer of the stomach in a London garret, one might question the doctrine that there was no need to yearn for any state of being save that in which we found ourselves.

It was a workmanlike effort illustrated with facts, dates and figures. Though it rose to no height of eloquence it contained much which needed an answer. And the sad fact emerged that Challenger was not in a position to answer. He had read up his own case but had neglected that of his adversary, accepting too easily the facile and specious presumptions of incompetent writers who handled a matter which they had not themselves investigated. Instead of answering, Challenger lost his temper. The lion began to roar. He tossed his dark mane and his eyes glowed, while his deep voice reverberated through the hall. Who were these people who took refuge behind a few honoured but misguided names? What right had they to expect serious men of science to suspend their labours in order to waste time in examining their wild surmises? Some things were self-evident and did not require proof. The onus of proof lay with those who made the assertions. If this gentleman, whose name is unfamiliar, claims that he can raise spirits, let him call one up now before a sane and unprejudiced audience. If he says that he receives messages, let him give us the news in advance of the general agencies. ("It has often been done!" from the Spiritualists.) So you say, but I deny it. I am too accustomed to your wild assertions to take them seriously. (Uproar, and Judge Gaverson upon his feet.) If he claims that he has higher inspiration, let him solve the Peckham Rye murder. If he is in touch with angelic beings, let him give us a philosophy which is higher than mortal mind can evolve. This false show of science, this camouflage of ignorance, this babble about ectoplasm and other mythical products of the psychic imagination was mere obscurantism, the bastard offspring of superstition and darkness. Wherever the matter was probed one came upon corruption and mental putrescence. Every medium was a deliberate impostor. ("You are a liar!" in a woman's voice from the neighbourhood of the Lindens.) The voices of the dead had uttered nothing but childish twaddle. The asylums were full of the supporters of the cult and would be fuller still if everyone had his due.

It was a violent but not an effective speech. Evidently the great man was rattled. He realised that there was a case to be met and that he had not provided himself with the material wherewith to meet it. Therefore he had taken refuge in angry words and sweeping assertions which can only be safely made when there is no antagonist present to take advantage of them. The Spiritualists seemed more amused than angry. The materialists fidgeted uneasily in their seats. Then James Smith rose for his last innings. He wore a mischievous smile. There was quiet menace in his whole bearing.

He must ask, he said, for a more scientific attitude from his illustrious opponent. It was an extraordinary fact that many scientific men, when their passions and prejudices were excited, showed a ludicrous disregard for all their own tenets. Of these tenets there was none more rigid than that a subject should be examined before it was condemned. We have seen of late years, in such matters as wireless or heavier-than-air machines, that the most unlikely things may come to pass. It is most dangerous to say a priori that a thing is impossible. Yet this was the error into which Professor Challenger had fallen. He had used the fame which he had rightly won in subjects which he had mastered in order to cast discredit upon a subject which he had not mastered. The fact that a man was a great physiologist and physicist did not in itself make him an authority upon psychic science.

It was perfectly clear that Professor Challenger had not read the standard works upon the subject on which he posed as an authority. Could he tell the audience what the name of Schrenck Notzing's medium was? He paused for a reply. Could he then tell the name of Dr. Crawford's medium? Not? Could he tell them who had been the subject of Professor Zollner's experiments at Leipzig? What, still silent? But these were the essential points of the discussion. He had hesitated to be personal, but the Professor's robust language called for corresponding frankness upon his part. Was the Professor aware that this ectoplasm which he derided had been examined lately by twenty German professors — the names were here for reference — and that all had testified to its existence? How could Professor Challenger deny that which these gentlemen asserted? Would he contend that they also were criminals or fools? The fact was that the Professor had come to this hall entirely ignorant of the facts and was now learning them for the first time. He clearly had no perception that Psychic Science had any laws whatever, or he would not have formulated such childish requests as that an ectoplasmic figure should manifest in full light upon this platform when every student was aware that ectoplasm was soluble in light. As to the Peckham Rye murder it had never been claimed that the angel world was an annexe to Scotland Yard. It was mere throwing of dust in the eyes of the public for a man like Professor Challenger —

It was at this moment that the explosion occurred. Challenger had wriggled in his chair. Challenger had tugged at his beard. Challenger had glared at the speaker. Now he suddenly sprang to the side of the chairman's table with the bound of a wounded lion. That gentleman had been lying back half asleep with his fat hands clutched across his ample paunch, but at this sudden apparition he gave a convulsive start which nearly carried him into the orchestra.

"Sit down, sir! Sit down!" he cried

"I refuse to sit down," roared Challenger. "Sir, I appeal to you as chairman! Am I here to be insulted? These proceedings are intolerable. I will stand it no longer. If my private honour is touched I am justified in taking the matter into my own hands."

Like many men who override the opinions of others, Challenger was exceedingly sensitive when anyone took a liberty with his own. Each successive incisive sentence of his opponent had been like a barbed bandarillo in the flanks of a foaming bull. Now, in speechless fury, he was shaking his huge hairy fist over the chairman's head in the direction of his adversary, whose derisive smile stimulated him to more furious plunges with which he butted the fat president along the platform. The assembly had in an instant become a pandemonium. Half the rationalists were scandalised, while the other half shouted "Shame! Shame!" as a sign of sympathy with their champion. The Spiritualists had broken into derisive shouts, while some rushed forward to protect their champion from physical assault.

"We must get the old dear out," said Lord Roxton to Malone. "He'll be had for manslaughter if we don't. What I mean, he's not responsible — he'll sock someone and be lagged for it."

The platform had become a seething mob, while the auditorium was little better. Through the crush Malone and Roxton elbowed their way until they reached Challenger's side, and partly by judicious propulsion, partly by artful persuasion, they got him, still bellowing his grievances, out of the building. There was a perfunctory vote to the chairman, and the meeting broke up in riot and confusion. "The whole episode," remarked *The Times* next morning, "was a deplorable one, and forcibly illustrates the danger of public debates where the subjects are such as to inflame the prejudices of either speakers or audience. Such terms as 'Microcephalous idiot!' or 'Simian survival!' when applied by a world-renowned Professor to an opponent, illustrate the lengths to which such disputants may permit themselves to go."

Thus by a long interpolation we have got back to the fact that Professor Challenger was in the worst of humours as he sat with the above-mentioned copy of *The Times* in his hand and a heavy scowl upon his brow. And yet it was that very moment that the injudicious Malone had chosen in order to ask him the most intimate question which one man can address to another.

Yet perhaps it is hardly fair to our friend's diplomacy to say that he had "chosen" the moment. He had really called in order to see for himself that the man for whom, in spite of his eccentricities, he had a deep reverence and affection, had not suffered from the events of the night before. On that point he was speedily reassured.

"Intolerable!" roared the Professor, in a tone so unchanged that he might have been at it all night. "You were there yourself, Malone. In spite of your inexplicable and misguided sympathy for the fatuous views of these people, you must admit that the whole conduct of the proceedings was intolerable, and that my righteous protest was more than justified. It is possible that when I threw the chairman’s table at the President of the Psychic College I passed the bounds of decorum, but the provocation had been excessive. You will remember that this Smith or Brown person — his name is most immaterial — dared to accuse me of ignorance and of throwing dust in the eyes of the audience.”

“Quite so,” said Malone, soothingly. “Never mind, Professor. You got in one or two pretty hard knocks yourself.”

Challenger’s grim features unbent and he rubbed his hands with glee.

“Yes, yes, I fancy that some of my thrusts went home. I imagine that they will not be forgotten. When I said that the asylums would be full if every man of them had his due I could see them wince. They all yelped, I remember, like a kennelful of puppies. It was their preposterous claim that I should read their hare-brained literature which caused me to display some little heat. But I hope, my boy, that you have called round this morning in order to tell me that what I said last night has had some effect upon your own mind, and that you have reconsidered these views which are, I confess, a considerable tax upon our friendship.”

Malone took his plunge like a man.

“I had something else in my mind when I came here,” said he. “You must be aware that your daughter Enid and I have been thrown together a good deal of late. To me, sir, she has become the one woman in the world, and I shall never be happy until she is my wife. I am not rich, but a good sub-editorship has been offered to me and I could well afford to marry. You have known me for some time and I hope you have nothing against me. I trust, therefore, that I may count upon your approval in what I am about to do.”

Challenger stroked his beard and his eyelids drooped dangerously over his eyes.

“My perceptions,” said he, “are not so dull that I should have failed to observe the relations which have been established between my daughter and yourself. This question however, has become entangled with the other which we were discussing. You have both, I fear, imbibed this poisonous fallacy which I am more and more inclined to devote my life to extirpating. If only on the ground of eugenics, I could not give my sanction to a union which was built up on such a foundation, I must ask you, therefore, for a definite assurance that your views have become more sane. I shall ask the same from her."

And so Malone suddenly found himself also enrolled among the noble army of martyrs. It was a hard dilemma, but he faced it like the man that he was.

"I am sure, sir, that you would not think the better of me if I allowed my views as to truth, whether they be right or wrong, to be swayed by material considerations. I cannot change my opinions even to win Enid. I am sure that she would take the same view."

"Did you not think I had the better last night?"

"I thought your address was very eloquent."

"Did I not convince you?"

"Not in the face of the evidence of my own senses."

"Any conjuror could deceive your senses "

"I fear, sir, that my mind is made up on this point."

"Then my mind is made up also," roared Challenger, with a sudden glare. "You will leave this house, sir, and you will return when you have regained your sanity."

"One moment!" said Malone. "I beg, sir, that you will not be precipitate. I value your friendship too much to risk the loss of it if it can, in any way, be avoided. Possibly if I had your guidance I would better understand these things that puzzle me. If I should be able to arrange it would you mind being present personally at one of these demonstrations so that your own trained powers of observation may throw a light upon the things that have puzzled me."

Challenger was enormously open to flattery. He plumed and preened himself now like some great bird.

"If, my dear Malone, I can help you to get this taint — what shall we call it? — microbus spiritualensis — out of your system, I am at your service. I shall be happy to devote a little of my spare time to exposing those specious fallacies to which you have fallen so easy a victim. I would not say that you are entirely devoid of brains, but that your good nature is liable to be imposed upon. I warn you that I shall be an exacting inquirer and bring to the investigation those laboratory methods of which it is generally admitted that I am a master."

"That is what I desire."

“Then you will prepare the occasion and I shall be there. But meanwhile you will clearly understand that I insist upon a promise that this connection with my daughter shall go no further.”

Malone hesitated.

“I give my promise for six months,” he said at last.

“And what will you do at the end of that time?”

“I will decide when the time comes,” Malone answered diplomatically, and so escaped from a dangerous situation with more credit than at one time seemed probable.

It chanced that, as he emerged upon the landing, Enid who had been engaged in her morning’s shopping, appeared in the lift. Malone’s easy Irish conscience allowed him to think that the six months need not start on the instant, so he persuaded Enid to descend in the lift with him. It was one of those lifts which are handled by whoever uses them, and on this occasion it so happened that, in some way best known to Malone, it stuck between the landing stages, and in spite of several impatient rings it remained stuck for a good quarter of an hour. When the machinery resumed its functions, and when Enid was able at last to reach her home and Malone the street, the lovers had prepared themselves to wait for six months with every hope of a successful end to their experiment.

14. In Which Challenger Meets A Strange Colleague

PROFESSOR CHALLENGER was not a man who made friends easily. In order to be his friend you had also to be his dependant. He did not admit of equals. But as a patron he was superb. With his Jovian air, his colossal condescension, his amused smile, his general suggestion of the god descending to the mortal, he could be quite overpowering in his amiability. But he needed certain qualities in return. Stupidity disgusted him. Physical ugliness alienated him. Independence repulsed him. He coveted the man whom all the world would admire, but who in turn would admire the superman above him. Such a man was Dr. Ross Scotton, and for this reason he hat been Challenger's favourite pupil.

And now he was sick unto death. Dr. Atkinson of St. Mary's who had already played some minor part in this record, was attending him, and his reports were increasingly depressing. The illness was that dread disease disseminated sclerosis, and Challenger was aware that Atkinson was no alarmist when he said that a cure was a most remote and unlikely possibility. It seemed a terrible instance of the unreasonable nature of things that a young man of science, capable before he reached his prime of two such works as The Embryology of the Symibathetic Nervous System or The Fallacy of the Obsonic Index, should be dissolved into his chemical elements with no personal or spiritual residue whatever. And yet the Professor shrugged his huge shoulders, shook his massive head, and accepted the inevitable. Every fresh message was worse than the last, and, finally, there was an ominous silence. Challenger went down once to his young friend's lodging in Gower Street. It was a racking experience, and he did not repeat it. The muscular cramps which are characteristic of the complaint were tying the sufferer into knots, and he was biting his lips to shut down the screams which might have relieved his agony at the expense of his manhood. He seized his mentor by the hand as a drowning man seizes a plank.

"Is it really as you have said? Is there no hope beyond the six months of torture which I see lying before me? Can you with all your wisdom and knowledge see no spark of light or life in the dark shadow of eternal dissolution?”

“Face it, my boy, face it!” said Challenger. “Better to look fact in the face than to console oneself with fancies.”

Then the lips parted and the long-pent scream burst forth. Challenger rose and rushed from the room.

But now an amazing development occurred. It began by the appearance of Miss Delicia Freeman.

One morning there came a knock at the door of the Victoria flat. The austere and taciturn Austin looking out at the level of his eyes perceived nothing at all. On glancing downwards, however, he was aware of a small lady, whose delicate face and bright bird-like eyes were turned upwards to his own.

“I want to see the Professor,” said she, diving into her handbag for a card.

“Can’t see you,” said Austin.

“Oh, yes, he can,” the small lady answered serenely. There was not a newspaper office, a statesman’s sanctum, or a political chancellory which had ever presented a barrier strong enough to hold her back where she believed that there was good work to be done.

“Can’t see you,” repeated Austin.

“Oh, but really I must, you know,” said Miss Freeman, and made a sudden dive past the butler. With unerring instinct she made for the door of the sacred study, knocked, and forthwith entered.

The lion head looked up from behind a desk littered with papers. The lion eyes glared.

“What is the meaning of this intrusion?” the lion roared. The small lady was, however, entirely unabashed. She smiled sweetly at the glowering face.

“I am so glad to make your acquaintance,” she said. “My name is Delicia Freeman.”

“Austin!” shouted the Professor. The butler’s impassive face appeared round the angle of the door. “What is this, Austin. How did this person get here?”

“I couldn’t keep her out,” wailed Austin. “Come, miss, we’ve had enough of it.”

“No, no! You must not be angry — you really must not,” said the lady sweetly. “I was told that you were a perfectly terrible person, but really you are rather a dear."

"Who are you? What do you want? Are you aware that I am one of the most busy men in London?"

Miss Freeman fished about in her bag once more. She was always fishing in that bag, extracting sometimes a leaflet on Armenia, sometimes a pamphlet on Greece, sometimes a note on Zenana Missions, and sometimes a psychic manifesto. On this occasion it was a folded bit of writing-paper which emerged.

"From Dr. Ross Scotton," she said. It was hastily folded and roughly scribbled — so roughly as to be hardly legible. Challenger bent his heavy brows over it.

Please, dear friend and guide, listen to what this lady says. I know it is against all your views. And yet I had to do it. You s aid yourself that I had no hope. I have tested it and it works. I know it seems wild and crazy. But any hope is better than no hope. If you were in my place you would have done the same. Will you not cast out prejudice and see for yourself? Dr. Felkin comes at three.

J. Ross Scotton.

Challenger read it twice over and sighed. The brain was clearly involved in the lesion: "He says I am to listen to you. What is it? Cut it as short as you can."

"It's a spirit doctor," said the lady.

Challenger bounded in his chair.

"Good God, am I never to get away from this nonsense!" he cried. "Can they not let this poor devil lie quiet on his deathbed but they must play their tricks upon him?"

Miss Delicia clapped her hands and her quick little eyes twinkled with joy.

"It's not his deathbed. He is going to get well."

"Who said so?"

"Dr. Felkin. He never is wrong."

Challenger snorted.

"Have you seen him lately?" she asked.

"Not for some weeks."

"But you wouldn't recognise him. He is nearly cured."

"Cured! Cured of diffused sclerosis in a few weeks!"

"Come and see."

“You want me to aid and abet in some infernal quackery. The next thing, I should see my name on this rascal’s testimonials. I know the breed. If I did come I should probably take him by the collar and throw him down the stair.”

The lady laughed heartily.

“He would say with Aristides: ‘Strike, but hear me’. You will hear him first, however, I am sure. Your pupil is a real chip of yourself. He seems quite ashamed of getting well in such an unorthodox way. It was I who called Dr. Felkin in against his wish.”

“Oh, you did, did you? You took a great deal upon yourself.”

“I am prepared to take any responsibility, so long as I know I am right. I spoke to Dr. Atkinson. He knows a little of psychic matters. He is far less prejudiced than most of you scientific gentlemen. He took the view that when a man was dying, in any case it could matter little what you did. So Dr. Felkin came.”

“And pray how did this quack doctor proceed to treat the case?”

“That is what Dr. Ross Scotton wants you to see.” She looked at a watch which she dragged from the depths of the bag. “In an hour he will be there. I’ll tell your friend you are coming. I am sure you would not disappoint him. Oh!” She dived into the bag again. “Here is a recent note upon the Bessarabian question. It is much more serious than people think. You will just have time to read it before you come. So good-bye, dear Professor, and *au revoir*!”

She beamed at the scowling lion and departed.

But she had succeeded in her mission, which was a way she had. There was something compelling in the absolutely unselfish enthusiasm of this small person who would, at a moment’s notice, take on anyone from a Mormon Elder to an Albanian brigand, loving the culprit and mourning the sin. Challenger came under the spell, and shortly after three he stumped his way up the narrow stair and blocked the door of the humble bedroom where his favourite pupil lay stricken. Ross Scotton lay stretched upon the bed in a red dressing-gown, and his teacher saw, with a start of surprised joy, that his face had filled out and that the light of life and hope had come back into his eyes.

“Yes, I’m beating it!” he cried. “Ever since Felkin held his first consultation with Atkinson I have felt the life-force stealing back into me. Oh, chief, it is a fearful thing to lie awake at night and feel these cursed microbes nibbling away at the very roots of your life! I could almost hear them at it. And the cramps when my body — like a badly articulated skeleton — would all get twisted into one rigid tangle! But now, except some dyspepsia and urticaria of the palms, I am free from pain. And all on account of this dear fellow here who has helped me.”

He motioned with his hand as if alluding to someone present. Challenger looked round with a glare, expecting to find some smug charlatan behind him. But no doctor was there. A frail young woman, who seemed to be a nurse, quiet, unobtrusive, and with a wealth of brown hair, was dozing in a corner. Miss Delicia, smiling demurely, stood in the window.

“I am glad you are better, my dear boy,” said Challenger. “But do not tamper with your reason. Such a complaint has its natural systole and diastole.”

“Talk to him, Dr. Felkin. Clear his mind for him,” said the invalid.

Challenger looked up at the cornice and round at the skirting. His pupil was clearly addressing some doctor in the room and yet none was visible. Surely his aberration had not reached the point when he thought that actual floating apparitions were directing his cure.

“Indeed, it needs some clearing,” said a deep and virile voice at his elbow. He bounded round. It was the frail young woman who was talking.

“Let me introduce you to Dr. Felkin,” said Miss Delicia, with a mischievous laugh.

“What tomfoolery is this?” cried Challenger.

The young woman rose and fumbled at the side of her dress. Then she made an impatient gesture with her hand.

“Time was, my dear colleague, when a snuff-box was as much part of my equipment as my phlebotomy case. I lived before the days of Laennec, and we carried no stethoscope, but we had our little chirurgical battery, none the less. But the snuff-box was a peace-offering and I was about to offer it to you, but, alas! it has had its day.”

Challenger stood with staring eyes and dilated nostrils while this speech was delivered. Then he turned to the bed.

“Do you mean to say that this is your doctor — that you take the advice of this person?”

The young girl drew herself up very stiffly.

“Sir, I will not bandy words with you. I perceive very clearly that you are one of those who have been so immersed in material knowledge that you have had no time to devote to the possibilities of the spirit."

"I certainly have no time for nonsense," said Challenger.

"My dear chief!" cried a voice from the bed. "I beg you to bear in mind how much Dr. Felkin has already done for me. You saw how I was a month ago, and you see how I am now. You would not offend my best friend."

"I certainly think, Professor, that you owe dear Dr. Felkin an apology," said Miss Delicia.

"A private lunatic asylum!" snorted Challenger. Then, playing up to his part, he assumed the ponderous elephantine irony which was one of his most effective weapons in dealing with recalcitrant students.

"Perhaps, young lady — or shall I say elderly and most venerable Professor? — you will permit a mere raw earthly student, who has no more knowledge than this world can give, to sit humbly in a corner and possibly to learn a little from your methods and your teaching." This speech was delivered with his shoulders up to his ears, his eyelids over his eyes, and his palms extended in front — an alarming statue of sarcasm. Dr. Felkin, however, was striding with heavy and impatient steps about the room, and took little notice.

"Quite so! Quite so!" she said carelessly. "Get into the corner and stay there. Above all, stop talking, as this case calls for all my faculties." He turned with a masterful air towards the patient. "Well, well, you are coming along. In two months you will be in the class-room."

"Oh, it is impossible!" cried Ross Scotton, with a half sob.

"Not so. I guarantee it. I do not make false promises."

"I'll answer for that," said Miss Delicia. "I say, dear Doctor, do tell us who you were when you were alive."

"Tut I tut! The unchanging woman. They gossiped in my time and they gossip still. No! no! We will have a look at our young friend here. Pulse! The intermittent beat has gone. That is something gained. Temperature — obviously normal. Blood pressure — still higher than I like. Digestion — much to be desired. What you moderns call a hunger-strike would not be amiss. Well, the general conditions are tolerable. Let us see the local centre of the mischief. Pull your shirt down, sir! Lie on your face. Excellent!" She passed her fingers with great force and precision down the upper part of the spine, and then dug in her knuckles with a sudden force which made the sufferer yelp. That is better! There is — as I have explained — a slight want of alignment in the cervical vertibrae which has, as I perceive it, the effect of lessening the foramina through which the nerve roots emerge. This has caused compression, and as these nerves are really the conductors of vital force, it has upset the whole equilibrium of the parts supplied. My eyes are the same as your clumsy X-rays, and I clearly perceive that the position is almost restored, and the fatal constriction removed. I hope, sir," to Challenger, "that I make the pathology of this interesting case intelligible to you."

Challenger grunted his general hostility and disagreement.

"I will clear up any little difficulties which may linger in your mind. But, meantime, my dear lad, you are a credit to me, and I rejoice in your progress. You will present my compliments to my colleague of earth, Dr. Atkinson, and tell him that I can suggest nothing more. The medium is a little weary, poor girl, so I will not remain longer to-day."

"But you said you would tell us who you were."

"Indeed, there is little to say. I was a very undistinguished practitioner. I sat under the great Abernethy in my youth, and perhaps imbibed something of his methods. When I passed over in early middle age I continued my studies, and was permitted, if I could find some suitable means of expression, to do something to help humanity. You understand, of course, that it is only by serving and self-abnegation that we advance in the higher world. This is my service, and I can only thank kind Fate that I was able to find in this girl a being whose vibrations so correspond with my own that I can easily assume control of her body."

"And where is she?" asked the patient.

"She is waiting beside me and will presently re-enter her own frame. As to you, sir," turning to Challenger, "you are a man of character and learning, but you are clearly embedded in that materialism which is the special curse of your age. Let me assure you that the medical profession, which is supreme upon earth for the disinterested work of its members, has yielded too much to the dogmatism of such men as you, and has unduly neglected that spiritual element in man which is far more important than your herbs and your minerals. There is a life-force, sir, and it is in the control of this life force that the medicine of the future lies. If you shut your mind to it, it can only mean that the confidence of the public will turn to those who are ready to adopt every means of cure, whether they have the approval of your authorities or not."

Never could young Ross Scotton forget that scene. The Professor, the master, the supreme chief, he who had to be addressed with bated breath sat with half-opened mouth and staring eyes, leaning forward in his chair, while in front of him the slight young woman shaking her mop of brown hair and wagging an admonitory forefinger, spoke to him as a father speaks to a refractory child. So intense was her power that Challenger, for the instant, was constrained to accept the situation. He gasped and grunted, but no retort came to his lips. The girl turned away and sat down on a chair.

"He is going," said Miss Delicia.

"But not yet gone," replied the girl with a smile. "Yes, I must go, for I have much to do. This is not my only medium of expression, and I am due in Edinburgh in a few minutes. But be of good heart, young man. I will set my assistant with two extra batteries to increase your vitality so far as your system will permit. As to you, sir," to Challenger, "I would implore you to beware of the egotism of brain and the self-concentration of intellect. Store what is old, but be ever receptive to what is new, and judge it not as you may wish it, but as God has designed it."

She gave a deep sigh and sank back in her chair. There was a minute of dead silence while she lay with her head upon her breast. Then, with another sigh and a shiver, she opened a pair of very bewildered blue eyes.

"Well, has he been?" she asked in a gentle feminine voice.

"Indeed, yes!" cried the patient. "He was great. He says I shall be in the class-room in two months."

"Splendid! Any directions for me?"

"Just the special massage as before. But he is going to put on two new spirit batteries if I can stand it."

"My word, he won't be long now!" Suddenly the girl's eyes lit on Challenger and she stopped in confusion.

"This is Nurse Ursula," said Miss Delicia. "Nurse, let me present you to the famous Professor Challenger." Challenger was great in his manner towards women, especially if the particular woman happened to be a young and pretty girl. He advanced now as Solomon may have advanced to the Queen of Sheba, took her hand, and patted her hair with patriarchal assurance.

"My dear, you are far too young and charming for such deceit. Have done with it for ever. Be content to be a bewitching nurse and resign all claim to the higher functions of doctor. Where, may I ask, did you pick up all this jargon about cervical vertebrae and posterior foramina?"

Nurse Ursula looked helplessly round as one who finds herself suddenly in the clutches of a gorilla.

"She does not understand a word you say!" cried the man on the bed. "Oh, chief, you must make an effort to face the real situation! I know what a readjustment it means. In my small way I have had to undergo it myself. But, believe me, you see everything through a prism instead of through plate-glass until you understand the spiritual factor."

Challenger continued his paternal attentions, though the frightened lady had begun to shrink from him.

"Come now," said he, "who was the clever doctor with whom you acted as nurse — the man who taught you all these fine words? You must feel that it is hopeless to deceive me. You will be much happier, dear child, when you have made a clean breast of it all, and when we can laugh together over the lecture which you inflicted upon me."

An unexpected interruption came to check Challenger's exploration of the young woman's conscience or motives. The invalid was sitting up, a vivid red patch against his white pillows, and he was speaking with an energy which was in itself an indication of his coming cure.

"Professor Challenger!" he cried, "you are insulting my best friend. Under this roof at least she shall be safe from the sneers of scientific prejudice. I beg you to leave the room if you cannot address Nurse Ursula in a more respectful manner."

Challenger glared, but the peacemaking Delicia was at work in a moment.

"You are far too hasty, dear Dr. Ross Scotton!" she cried. "Professor Challenger has had no time to understand this. You were just as sceptical yourself at first. How can you blame him?"

"Yes, yes, that is true," said the young doctor. "It seemed to me to open the door to all the quackery in the Universe — indeed it does, but the fact remains."

"' One thing I know that whereas I was blind now I see'," quoted Miss Delicia. "Ah, Professor, you may raise your eyebrows and shrug your shoulders, but we've dropped something into your big mind this afternoon which will grow and grow until no man can see the end of it." She dived into the bag. “There is a little slip here ‘Brain versus Soul’. I do hope, dear Professor, that you will read it and then pass it on.”

15. In Which Traps Are Laid For A Great Quarry

MALONE was bound in honour not to speak of love to Enid Challenger, but looks can speak, and so their communications had not broken down completely. In all other ways he adhered closely to the agreement, though the situation was a difficult one. It was the more difficult since he was a constant visitor to the Professor, and now that the irritation of the debate was over, a very welcome one. The one object of Malone's life w as to get the great man's sympathetic consideration of those psychic subjects which had gained such a hold upon himself. This he pursued with assiduity, but also with great caution, for he knew that the lava was thin, and that a fiery explosion was always possible. Once or twice it came and caused Malone to drop the subject for a week or two, until the ground seemed a little more firm.

Malone developed a remarkable cunning in his approaches. One favourite device was to consult Challenger upon some scientific point — on the zoological importance of the Straits of Banda, for example, or the Insects of the Malay Archipelago, and lead him on until Challenger in due course would explain that our knowledge on the point was due to Alfred Russel Wallace. "Oh, really! To Wallace the Spiritualist!" Malone would say in an innocent voice, on which Challenger would glare and change the topic.

Sometimes it was Lodge that Malone would use as a trap. "I suppose you think highly of him."

"The first brain in Europe," said Challenger.

"He is the greatest authority on ether, is he not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Of course, I only know him by his psychic works."

Challenger would shut up like a clam. Then Malone would wait a few days and remark casually: "Have you ever met Lombroso!"

"Yes, at the Congress at Milan."

"I have been reading a book of his."

"Criminology, I presume?"

"No, it was called *After Death — What?*"

"I have not heard of it."

"It discusses the psychic question."

“Ah, a man of Lombroso’s penetrating brain would make short work of the fallacies of these charlatans.”

“No, it is written to support them.”

“Well, even the greatest mind has its inexplicable weakness.”

Thus,with infinite patience and cunning did Malone drop his little drops of reason in the hope of slowly wearing away the casing of prejudice, but no very visible effects could be seen. Some stronger measure must be adopted, and Malone determined upon direct demonstration. But how, when, and where? Those were the all-important points upon which he determined to consult Algernon Mailey. One spring afternoon found him back in that drawing-room where he had once rolled upon the carpet in the embrace of Silas Linden. He found the Reverend Charles Mason, and Smith, the hero of the Queen’s Hall debate, in deep consultation with Mailey upon a subject which may seem much more important to our descendants than those topics which now bulk large in the eyes of the public. It was no less than whether the psychic movement in Britain was destined to take a Unitarian or a Trinitarian course. Smith had always been in favour of the former, as had the old leaders of the movement and the present organized Spiritualist Churches. On the other hand, Charles Mason was a loyal son of the Anglican Church, and was the spokesman of a host of others, including such weighty names as Lodge and Barrett among the laymen, or Wilberforce, Haweis and Chambers among the clergy, who clung fast to the old teachings while admitting the fact of spirit communication. Mailey stood between the two parties, and, like the zealous referee in a boxing-match who separates the two combatants, he always took a chance of getting a knock from each. Malone was only too glad to listen, for now that he realised that the future of the world might be bound up in this movement, every phase of it was of intense interest to him. Mason was holding forth in his earnest but good-humoured way as he entered.

“The people are not ready for a great change. It is not necessary. We have only to add our living knowledge and direct communion of the saints to the splendid liturgy and traditions of the Church, and you will have a driving force which will revitalise all religion. You can’t pull a thing up from the roots like that. Even the early Christians found that they could not, and so they made all sorts of concessions to the religions around them.”

“Which was exactly what ruined them,” said Smith.

“That was the real end of the Church in its original strength and purity.”

“It lasted, anyhow.”

“But it was never the same from the time that villain Constantine laid his hands on it.”

“Oh, come!” said Mailey. “You must not write down the first Christian emperor as a villain.”

But Smith was a forthright, uncompromising, bull-doggy antagonist. “What other name will you give to a man who murdered half his own family?”

“Well, his personal character is not the question. We were talking of the organization of the Christian Church.”

“You don’t mind my frankness, Mr. Mason?”

Mason smiled his jolly smile. “So long as you grant me the existence of the New Testament I don’t care what you do. If you were to prove that our Lord was a myth, as that German Drews tried to do, it would not in the least affect me so long as I could point to that body of sublime teaching. It must have come from somewhere, and I adopt it and say, ‘That is my creed’.”

“Oh, well, there is not so much between us on that point,” said Smith. “If there is any better teaching I have not seen it. It is good enough to go on with, anyhow. But we want to cut out the frills and superfluities. Where did they all come from? They were compromises with many religions, so that our friend C. could get uniformity in his world-wide Empire. He made a patchwork quilt of it. He took an Egyptian ritual — vestments, mitre, crozier, tonsure, marriage ring — all Egyptian. The Easter ceremonies are pagan and refer to the vernal equinox. Confirmation is mithraism. So is baptism, only it was blood instead of water. As to the sacrificial meal . . .”

Mason put his fingers in his ears. “This is some old lecture of yours,” he laughed. “Hire a hall, but don’t obtrude it in a private house. But, seriously, Smith, all this is beside the question. If it is true it will not affect my position at all, which is that we have a great body of doctrine which is working well, and which is regarded with veneration by many people, your humble servant included, and that it would be wrong and foolish to scrap it. Surely you must agree.”

“No, I don’t,” Smith answered, setting his obstinate jaw. “You are thinking too much of the feelings of your blessed church-goers. But you have also to think of the nine people out of ten who never enter into a church. They have been choked off by what they, including your humble servant, consider to be unreasonable and fantastic. How will you gain them while you continue to offer them the same things, even though you mix spirit-teaching with it? If, however, you approach these agnostic or atheistic ones, and say to them: ‘I quite agree that all this is unreal and is tainted by a long history of violence and reaction. But here we have something pure and new. Come and examine it!’ In that way I could coax them back into a belief in God and in all the fundamentals of religion without their having to do violence to their reason by accepting your theology.”

Mailey had been tugging at his tawny beard while he listened to these conflicting counsels. Knowing the two men he was aware that there was not really much between them, when one got past mere words, for Smith revered the Christ as a God-like man, and Mason as a man-like God, and the upshot was much the same. At the same time he knew that their more extreme followers on either side were in very truth widely separated, so that compromise became impossible.

“What I can’t understand,” said Malone, “is why you don’t ask your spirit friends these questions and abide by their decisions.”

“It is not so simple as you think,” Mailey answered. “We all carry on our earthly prejudices after death, and we all find ourselves in an atmosphere which more or less represents them. Thus each would echo his old views at first. Then in time the spirit broadens out and it ends in a universal creed which includes only the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. But that takes time. I have heard most furious bigots talking through the veil.”

“So have I, for that matter,” said Malone, “and in this very room. But what about the materialists? They at least cannot remain unchanged.”

“I believe their mind influences their state and that they lie inert for ages sometimes, under their own obsession that nothing can occur. Then at last they wake, realise their own loss of time, and finally, in many cases, get to the head of the procession, since they are often men of fine character and influenced by lofty motives however mistaken in their views.”

“Yes, they are often among the salt of the earth,” said the clergyman heartily.

“And they offer the very best recruits for our movement,” said Smith. “There comes such a reaction when they find by the evidence of their own senses that there really is intelligent force outside themselves, that it gives them an enthusiasm that makes them ideal missionaries. You fellows who have a religion and then add to it cannot even imagine what it means to the man who has a complete vacuum and suddenly; finds something to fill it. When I meet some poor earnest chap feeling out into the darkness I just yearn to put it into his hand."

At this stage, tea and Mrs. Mailey appeared together. But the conversation did not flag. It is one of the characteristics of those who explore psychic possibilities that the subject is so many-sided and the interest so intense that when they meet together they plunge into the most fascinating exchange of views and experiences. It was with some difficulty that Malone got the conversation round to that which had been the particular object of his visit. He could have found no group of men more fit to advise him, and all were equally keen that so great a man as Challenger should have the best available.

Where should it be? On that they were unanimous. The large seance room of the Psychic College was the most select, the most comfortable, in every way the best appointed in London. When should it be? The sooner the better. Every spiritualist and every medium would surely put any engagement aside in order to help on such an occasion.

"Who should the medium be? Ah! There was the rub. Of course, the Bolsover circle would be ideal. It was private and unpaid, but Bolsover was a man of quick temper and Challenger was sure to be very insulting and annoying. The meeting might end in riot and fiasco. Such a chance should not be taken. Was it worth while to take him over to Paris? But who would take the responsibility of letting loose such a bull in Dr. Maupuis' china-shop?

"He would probably seize pithecanthropus by the throat and risk every life in the room," said Mailey. "No, no, it would never do."

"There is no doubt that Banderby is the strongest physical medium in England," said Smith. "But we all know what his personal character is. You could not rely upon him."

"Why not?" asked Malone. "What's the matter with him?"

Smith raised his hand to his lips.

"He has gone the way that many a medium has gone before him."

"But surely," said Malone, "that is a strong argument against our cause. How can a thing be good if it leads to such a result?"

"Do you consider poetry to be good?"

"Why, of course I do!"

“Yet Poe was a drunkard, and Coleridge an addict, and Byron a rake, and Verlaine a degenerate. You have to separate the man from the thing. The genius has to pay a ransom for his genius in the instability of his temperament. A great medium is even more sensitive than a genius. Many are beautiful in their lives. Some are not. The excuse for them is great. They practise a most exhausting profession and stimulants are needed. Then they lose control. But their physical mediumship carries on all the same.”

“Which reminds me of a story about Banderby,” said Mailey. “Perhaps you have not seen him, Malone. He is a funny figure at any time — a little, round, bouncing man who has not seen his own toes for years. When drunk he is funnier still. A few weeks ago I got an urgent message that he was in the bar of a certain hotel, and too far gone to get home unassisted. A friend and I set forth to rescue him. We got him home after some unsavoury adventures, and what would the man do but insist upon holding a seance. We tried to restrain him, but the trumpet was on a side-table, and he suddenly switched off the light. In an instant the phenomena began. Never were they more powerful. But they were interrupted by Princeps, his control, who seized the trumpet and began belabouring him with it. ‘You rascal! You drunken rascal! How dare you!’ The trumpet was all dinted with the blows. Banderby ran bellowing out of the room, and we took our departure.”

“Well, it wasn’t the medium that time, at any rate,” said Mason. “But about Professor Challenger — it would never do to risk the chance.”

“What about Tom Linden?” asked Mrs. Mailey. Mailey shook his head.

“Tom has never been quite the same since his imprisonment. These fools not only persecute our precious mediums, but they ruin their powers. It is like putting a razor into a damp place and then expecting it to have a fine edge.”

“What! Has he lost his powers?”

“Well, I would not go so far as that. But they are not so good as they were. He sees a disguised policeman in every sitter and it distracts him. Still, he is dependable so far as he goes. Yes, on the whole we had better have Tom.”

“And the sitters?”

“I expect Professor Challenger may wish to bring a friend or two of his own.”

“They will form a horrible block of vibrations! We must have some of our own sympathetic people to counteract it. There is Delicia Freeman. She would come. I could come myself. You would come, Mason?”

“Of course I would.”

“And you, Smith?”

“No, no! I have my paper to look after, three services, two burials, one marriage, and five meetings all next week.”

“Well, we can easily get one or two more. Eight is Linden’s favourite number. So now, Malone, you have only to get the great man’s consent and the date.”

“And the spirit of confirmation,” said Mason, seriously. “We must take our partners into consultation.”

“Of course we must, padre. That is the right note to strike. Well, that’s settled, Malone, and we can only await the event.”

As it chanced, a very different event was awaiting Malone that evening, and he came upon one of those chasms which unexpectedly open across the path of life. When, in his ordinary routine, he reached the office of the *Gazette*, he was informed by the commissionaire that Mr. Beaumont desired to see him. Malone’s immediate superior was the old Scotch sub-editor, Mr. McArdle, and it was rare indeed for the supreme editor to cast a glimpse down from that peak whence he surveyed the kingdoms of the world, or to show any cognisance of his humble fellow-workers upon the slopes beneath him. The great man, clean-shaven, prosperous and capable, sat in his palatial sanctum amid a rich assortment of old oak furniture and sealing-wax-red leather. He continued his letter when Malone entered, and only raised his shrewd, grey eyes after some minutes’ interval.

“Ah, Mr. Malone, good evening! I have wanted to see you for some little time. Won’t you sit down? It is in reference to these articles on psychic matters which you have been writing. You opened them in a tone of healthy scepticism, tempered by humour, which was very acceptable both to me and to our public. I regret, however, to observe that your view changed as you proceeded, and that you have now assumed a position in which you really seem to condone some of these practices. That, I need not say, is not the policy of the *Gazette*, and we should have discontinued the articles had it not been that we had announced a series by an impartial investigator. We have to continue but the tone must change.”

“What do you wish me to do, sir?”

“You must get the funny side of it again. That is what our public loves. Poke fun at it all. Call up the maiden aunt and make her talk in an amusing fashion. You grasp my meaning?”

“I am afraid, sir, it has ceased to seem funny in my eyes. On the contrary, I take it more and more seriously.”

Beaumont shook his solemn head.

“So, unfortunately, do our subscribers.” He had a small pile of letters upon the desk beside him and he took one up. “Look at this: ‘I had always regarded your paper as a God-fearing publication, and I would remind you that such practices as your correspondent seems to condone are expressly forbidden both in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. I should share your sin if I continued to be a subscriber’.”

“Bigoted ass!” muttered Malone.

“So he may be, but the penny of a bigoted ass is as good as any other penny. Here is another letter: ‘Surely in this age of free-thought and enlightenment you are not helping a movement which tries to lead us back to the exploded idea of angelic and diabolic intelligences outside ourselves. If so, I must ask you to cancel my subscription’.”

“It would be amusing, sir, to shut these various objectors up in a room and let them settle it among themselves.”

“That may be, Mr. Malone, but what I have to consider is the circulation of the *Gazette*.”

“Don’t you think, sir, that possibly you underrate the intelligence of the public, and that behind these extremists of various sorts there is a vast body of people who have been impressed by the utterances of so many great and honourable witnesses? Is it not our duty to keep these people abreast of the real facts without making fun of them?”

Mr. Beaumont shrugged his shoulders.

“The Spiritualists must fight their own battle. This is not a propaganda newspaper, and we make no pretence to lead the public on religious beliefs.”

“No, no, I only meant as to the actual facts. Look how systematically they are kept in the dark. When, for example, did one ever read an intelligent article upon ectoplasm in any London paper? Who would imagine that this all-important substance has been examined and described and endorsed by men of science with innumerable photographs to prove their words?”

"Well, well," said Beaumont, impatiently. "I am afraid I am too busy to argue the question. The point of this interview is that I have had a letter from Mr. Cornelius to say that we must at once take another line."

Mr. Cornelius was the owner of the *Gazette*, having become so, not from any personal merit, but because his father left him some millions, part of which he expended upon this purchase. He seldom was seen in the office himself, but occasionally a paragraph in the paper recorded that his yacht had touched at Mentone and that he had been seen at the Monte Carlo tables, or that he was expected in Leicestershire for the season. He was a man of no force of brain or character, though occasionally he swayed public affairs by a manifesto printed in larger type upon his own front page. Without being dissolute, he was a free liver, living in a constant luxury which placed him always on the edge of vice and occasionally over the border. Malone's hot blood flushed to his head as he thought of this trifler, this insect, coming between mankind and a message of instruction and consolation descending from above. And yet those clumsy, childish fingers could actually turn the tap and cut off the divine stream, however much it might break through in other quarters.

"So that is final, Mr. Malone," said Beaumont, with the manner of one who ends an argument.

"Quite final!" said Malone. "So final that it marks the end of my connection with your paper. I have a six months' contract. When it ends, I go!"

"Please yourself, Mr. Malone." Mr. Beaumont went on with his writing.

Malone, with the flush of battle still upon him, went into McArdle's room and told him what had happened. The old Scotch sub-editor was very perturbed.

"Eh, man, it's that Irish blood of yours. A drop o' Scotch is a good thing, either in your veins or at the bottom o' a glass. Go back, man, and say you have reconseedered!"

"Not I! The idea of this man Cornelius, with his pot-belly and red face, and — well, you know all about his private life — the idea of such a man dictating what folk are to believe, and asking me to make fun of the holiest thing on this earth!"

"Man, you'll be ruined!"

"Well, better men than I have been ruined over this cause. But I'll get another job."

“Not if Cornelius can stop you. If you get the name of an insubordinate dog there is no place for you in Fleet Street.”

“It’s a damned shame!” cried Malone. “The way this thing has been treated is a disgrace to journalism. It’s not Britain alone. America is worse. We seem to have the lowest, most soulless folk that ever lived on the Press — good-hearted fellows too, but material to a man. And these are the leaders of the people! It’s awful!”

McArdle put a fatherly hand upon the young man’s shoulder.

“Weel, weel, lad, we take the world as we find it. We didn’t make it and we’re no reesponsible. Give it time! Give it time! We’re a’ in such a hurry. Gang hame, now, think it over, remember your career, that young leddy of yours, and then come back and eat the old pie that all of us have to eat if we are to keep our places in the world.”

16. In Which Challenger Has The Experience Of His Life

So now the nets were set and the pit was dug and the hunters were all ready for the great quarry, but the question was whether the creature would allow himself to be driven in the right direction. Had Challenger been told that the meeting was really held in the hope of putting convincing evidence before him as to the truth of spirit intercourse with the aim of his eventual conversion, it would have roused mingled anger and derision in his breast. But the clever Malone, aided and abetted by Enid, still put forward the idea that his presence would be a protection against fraud, and that he would be able to point out to them how and why they had been deceived. With this thought in his mind, Challenger gave a contemptuous and condescending consent to the proposal that he should grace with his presence a proceeding which was, in his opinion, more fitted to the stone cabin of a neolithic savage than to the serious attention of one who represented the accumulated culture and wisdom of the human race.

Enid accompanied her father, and he also brought with him a curious companion who was strange both to Malone and to the rest of the company. This was a large, raw-boned Scottish youth, with a freckled face, a huge figure, and a taciturnity which nothing could penetrate. No question could discover where his interests in psychic research might lie, and the only positive thing obtained from him was that his name was Nicholl. Malone and Mailey went together to the rendezvous at Holland Park, where they found awaiting them Delicia Freeman, the Rev. Charles Mason, Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvy of the College, Mr. Bolsover of Hammersmith, and Lord Roxton, who had become assiduous in his psychic studies, and was rapidly progressing in knowledge. There were nine in all, a mixed, inharmonious assembly, from which no experienced investigator could expect great results. On entering the seance room Linden was found seated in the armchair, his wife beside him, and was introduced collectively to the company, most of whom were already his friends. Challenger took up the matter at once with the air of a man who will stand no nonsense.

“Is this the medium?” he asked, eyeing Linden with much disfavour.

"Yes."

"Has he been searched?"

"Not yet."

"Who will search him?"

"Two men of the company have been selected.'-

Challenger sniffed his suspicions.

"Which men?" he asked.

"It is suggested that you and your friend, Mr. Nicholl,shall do so. There is a bedroom next door."

Poor Linden was marched off between them in a manner which reminded him unpleasantly of his prison experiences. He had been nervous before, but this ordeal and the overpowering presence of Challenger made him still more. He shook his head mournfully at Mailey when he reappeared.

"I doubt we will get nothing to-day. Maybe it would be wise to postpone the sitting," said he.

Mailey came round and patted him on the shoulder, while Mrs. Linden took his hand.

"It's all right, Tom," said Mailey. "Remember that you have a bodyguard of friends round you who won't see you ill-used." Then Mailey spoke to Challenger in a sterner way than was his wont. "I beg you to remember, sir, that a medium is as delicate an instrument as any to be found in your laboratories. Do not abuse it. I presume that you found nothing compromising upon his person?"

"No, sir, I did not. And as a result he assures us that we will get nothing to-day."

"He says so because your manner has disturbed him. You must treat him more gently."

Challenger's expression did not promise any amendment. His eyes fell upon Mrs. Linden.

"I understand that this person is the medium's wife. She should also be searched."

"That is a matter of course," said the Scotsman Ogilvy. "My wife and your daughter will take her out. But I beg you, Professor Challenger, to be as harmonious as you can, and to remember that we are all as interested in the results as you are, so that the whole company will suffer if you should disturb the conditions."

Mr. Bolsover, the grocer, rose with as much dignity as if he were presiding at his favourite temple.

“I move,” said he, “that Professor Challenger be searched.”

Challenger’s beard bristled with anger.

“Search me! What do you mean, sir?”

Bolsover was not to be intimidated.

“You are here not as our friend but as our enemy. If you was to prove fraud it would be a personal triumph for you — see? Therefore I, for one, says as you should be searched.”

“Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that I am capable of cheating?” trumpeted Challenger.

“Well, Professor, we are all accused of it in turn,” said Mailey smiling. “We all feel as indignant as you are at first, but after a time you get used to it. I’ve been called a liar, a lunatic — goodness knows what. What does it matter?”

“It is a monstrous proposition,” said Challenger, glaring all round him.

“Well, sir,” said Ogilvy, who was a particularly pertinacious Scot. “Of course, it is open to you to walk out of the room and leave us. But if you sit, you must sit under what we consider to be scientific conditions. It is not scientific that a man who is known to be bitterly hostile to the movement should sit with us in the dark with no check as to what he may have in his pockets.”

“Come, come!” cried Malone. “Surely we can trust to the honour of Professor Challenger.”

“That’s all very well,” said Bolsover. “I did not observe that Professor Challenger trusted so very much to the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Linden.”

“We have cause to be careful,” said Ogilvy. “I can assure you that there are frauds practised on mediums just as there are frauds practised by mediums. I could give you plenty of examples. No, sir, you will have to be searched.”

“It won’t take a minute,” said Lord Roxton. “What I mean, young Malone here and I could give you a once over in no time.”

“Quite so, come on!” said Malone.

And so Challenger, like a red-eyed bull with dilating nostrils, was led from the room. A few minutes later, all preliminaries being completed, they were seated in the circle and the seance had begun.

But already the conditions had been destroyed. Those meticulous researchers who insist upon tying up a medium until the poor creature resembles a fowl trussed for roasting, or who glare their suspicions at him before the lights are lowered, do not realise that they are like people who add moisture to gunpowder and then expect to explode it. They ruin their own results, and then when those results do not occur imagine that their own astuteness, rather than their own lack of understanding, has been the cause.

Hence it is that at humble gatherings all over the land, in an atmosphere of sympathy and of reverence, there are such happenings as the cold man of "Science" is never privileged to see.

All the sitters felt churned up by the preliminary altercation, but how much more did it mean to the sensitive centre of it all! To him the room was filled with conflicting rushes and eddies of psychic power, whirling this way or that, and as difficult for him to navigate as the rapids below Niagara. He groaned in his despair. Everything was mixed and confused. He was beginning as usual with his clairvoyance, but names buzzed in his etheric ears without sequence or order. The word "John " seemed to predominate, so he said. Did "John " mean anything to anyone? A cavernous laugh from Challenger was the only reply. Then he had the surname of Chapman. Yes, Mailey had lost a friend named Chapman. But, it was years ago and there seemed no reason for his presence, nor could he furnish his Christian name. "Budworth " — no; no one would own to a friend named Budworth. Definite messages came across, but they seemed to have no reference to the present company. Everything was going amiss, and Malone's spirits sank to zero. Challenger sniffed so loudly that Ogilvy remonstrated.

"You make matters worse, sir, when you show your feelings," said he. "I can assure you that in ten years of constant experience I have never known the medium so far out, and I attribute it entirely to your own conduct."

"Quite so," said Challenger with satisfaction.

"I am afraid it is no use, Tom," said Mrs. Linden. "How are you feeling now, dear? Would you wish to stop?" But Linden under all his gentle exterior, was a fighter. He had in another form those same qualities which had brought his brother within an ace of the Lonsdale Belt.

"No, I think, maybe, it is only the mental part that is confused. If I am in trance I'll get past that. The physicals may be better. Anyhow I'll try."

The lights were turned lower until they were a mere crimson glimmer. The curtain of the cabinet was drawn. Outside it on the one side, dimly outlined to his audience, Tom Linden, breathing stertorously in his trance, lay back in a wooden armchair. His wife kept watch and ward at the other side of the cabinet.

But nothing happened.

Quarter of an hour passed. Then another quarter of an hour. The company was patient, but Challenger had begun to fidget in his seat. Everything seemed to have gone cold and dead. Not only was nothing happening, but somehow all expectation of anything happening seemed to have passed away.

"It's no use!" cried Mailey at last.

"I fear not," said Malone.

The medium stirred and groaned; he was waking up. Challenger gave an ostentatious yawn

"Is not this a waste of time?" he asked.

Mrs. Linden was passing her hand over the medium's head and brow. His eyes had opened.

"Any results?" he asked.

"It's no use, Tom. We shall have to postpone."

"I think so, too, " said Mailey.

"It is a great strain upon him under these adverse conditions," remarked Ogilvy, looking angrily at Challenger.

"I should think so," said the latter with a complacent smile.

But Linden was not to be beaten.

"The conditions are bad," said he. "The vibrations are all wrong. But I'll try inside the cabinet. It concentrates the force."

"Well, it's the last chance," said Mailey. "We may as well try it."

The armchair was lifted inside the cloth tent and the medium followed, drawing the curtain behind him.

"It condenses the ectoplasmic emanations," Ogilvy explained.

"No doubt," said Challenger. "At the same time in the interests of truth, I must point out that the disappearance of the medium is most regrettable."

"For goodness sake, don't start wrangling again," cried Mailey with impatience. "Let us get some results, and then it will be time enough to discuss their value."

Again there was a weary wait. Then came some hollow groanings from inside the cabinet. The Spiritualists sat up expectantly.

“That’s ectoplasm,” said Ogilvy. “It always causes pain on emission.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the curtains were torn open with sudden violence and a rattling of all the rings. In the dark aperture there was outlined a vague white figure. It advanced slowly and with hesitation into the centre of the room. In the red-tinted gloom all definite outline was lost, and it appeared simply as a moving white patch in the darkness. With the deliberation which suggested fear it came, step by step, until it was opposite the professor.

“Now!” he bellowed in his stentorian voice.

There was a shout, a scream, a crash. “I’ve got him!” roared someone. “Turn up the lights!” yelled another. “Be careful! You may kill the medium!” cried a third. The circle was broken. Challenger rushed to the switch and put on all the lights. The place was so flooded with radiance that it was some seconds before the bewildered and half-blinded spectators could see the details.

When they had recovered their sight and their balance, the spectacle was a deplorable one for the majority of the company. Tom Linden, looking white, dazed, and ill, was seated upon the ground. Over him stood the huge young Scotsman who had borne him to earth; while Mrs. Linden, kneeling beside her husband, was glaring up at his assailant. There was a silence as the company surveyed the scene. It was broken by Professor Challenger.

“Well, gentlemen, I presume that there is no more to be said. Your medium has been exposed as he deserved to be. You can see now the nature of your ghosts. I must thank Mr Nicholl, who, I may remark, is the famous football player of that name, for the prompt way in which he has carried out his instructions.”

“I collared him low,” said the tall youth. “He was easy.”

“You did it very effectively. You have done public service by helping to expose a heartless cheat. I need not say that a prosecution will follow.”

But Mailey now intervened and with such authority that Challenger was forced to listen.

“Your mistake is not unnatural, sir, though the course which you adopted in your ignorance is one which might well have been fatal to the medium.”

“My ignorance indeed! If you speak like that I warn you that I will look upon you not as dupes, but as accomplices. “

“One moment, Professor Challenger. I would ask you one direct question, and I ask for an equally direct reply. Was not the figure which we all saw before this painful episode a white figure?”

“Yes, it was.”

“You see now that the medium is entirely dressed in black. Where is the white garment?”

“It is immaterial to me where it is. No doubt his wife and himself are prepared for all eventualities. They have their own means of secreting the sheet, or whatever ii may have been. These details can be explained in the police court.”

“Examine now. Search the room for anything white.”

“I know nothing of the room. I can only use my common sense. The man is exposed masquerading as a spirit. Into what corner or crevice he has thrust his disguise is a matter of small importance.”

“On the contrary, it is a vital matter. What you have seen has not been an imposture, but has been a very real phenomenon.”

Challenger laughed.

“Yes, sir, a very real phenomenon. You have seen a transfiguration which is the half-way state of materialisation. You will kindly realise that spirit guides, who conduct such affairs, care nothing for your doubts and suspicions. They set themselves to get certain results, and if they are prevented by the infirmities of the circle from getting them one way they get them in another, without consulting your prejudice or convenience. In this case being unable, owing to the evil conditions which you have yourself created, to build up an ectoplasmic form they wrapped the unconscious medium in an ectoplasmic covering, and sent him forth from the cabinet. He is as innocent of imposture as you are.”

“I swear to God,” said Linden, “that from the time I entered the cabinet until I found myself upon the floor I knew nothing.” He had staggered to his feet and was shaking all over in his agitation, so that he could not hold the glass of water which his wife had brought him.

Challenger shrugged his shoulders.

“Your excuses,” he said, “only open up fresh abysses of credulity. My own duty is obvious, and it will be done to the uttermost. Whatever you have to say will, no doubt, receive such consideration as it deserves from the magistrate.” Then Professor Challenger turned to go as one who has triumphantly accomplished that for which he came. “Come, Enid!” said he.

And now occurred a development so sudden, so unexpected, so dramatic, that no one present will ever cease to have it in vivid memory.

No answer was returned to Challenger's call. Everyone else had risen to their feet. Only Enid remained in her chair. She sat with her head on one shoulder, her eyes closed, her hair partly loosened — a model for a sculptor.

"She is asleep," said Challenger. "Wake up, Enid. I am going."

There was no response from the girl. Mailey was bending over her.

"Hush! Don't disturb her! She is in trance."

Challenger rushed forward. "What have you done? Your infernal hankey-pankey has frightened her. She has fainted."

Mailey had raised her eyelid.

"No, no, her eyes are turned up. She is in trance. Your daughter, sir, is a powerful medium."

"A medium! You are raving. Wake up girl,! wake up!"

"For God's sake leave her! You may regret it all your life if you don't. It is not safe to break abruptly into the mediumistic trance."

Challenger stood in bewilderment. For once his presence of mind had deserted him. Was it possible that his child stood on the edge of some mysterious precipice and that he might push her over?

"What shall I do?" he asked helplessly.

"Have no fear. All will be well. Sit down! Sit down, all of you. Ah! she is about to speak."

The girl had stirred. She had sat straight in her chair. Her lips trembled. One hand was outstretched:

"For him!" she cried, pointing to Challenger. "He must not hurt my Medi. It is a message. For him."

There was breathless silence among the persons who had gathered round the girl.

"Who speaks?" asked Mailey.

"Victor speaks. Victor. He shall not hurt my Medi. I have a message. For him!"

"Yes, yes. What is the message?"

"His wife is here."

"Yes!"

"She says that she has been once before. That she came through this girl. It was after she was cremated. She knock and he hear her knocking, but not understand."

"Does this mean anything to you, Professor Challenger?"

His great eyebrows were bunched over his suspicious, questioning eyes, and he glared like a beast at bay from one to the other of the faces round him. There was a trick — a vile trick. They had suborned his own daughter. It was damnable. He would expose them, every one. No, he had no questions to ask. He could see through it all. She had been won over. He could not have believed it of her, and yet it must be so. She was doing it for Malone's sake. A woman would do anything for a man she loved. Yes, it was damnable. Far from being softened he was more vindictive than ever. His furious face, his broken words, expressed his convictions.

Again the girl's arm shot out, pointing in front of her.

"Another message!"

"To whom?"

"To him. The man who wanted to hurt my Medi. He must not hurt my Medi. A man here — two men — wish to give him a message."

"Yes, Victor, let us have it."

"First man's name is . . ." The girl's head slanted and her ear was upturned, as if listening. " Yes, yes, I have it! It is Al-Al-Aldridge."

"Does that mean anything to you?"

Challenger staggered. A look of absolute wonder had come upon his face.

"What is the second man?" he asked.

"Ware. Yes that is it. Ware."

Challenger sat down suddenly. He passed his hand over his brow. He was deadly pale. His face was clammy with sweat.

"Do you know them?"

"I knew two men of those names."

"They have message for you," said the girl.

Challenger seemed to brace himself for a blow.

"Well, what is it?"

"Too private. Not speak, all these people here."

"We shall wait outside," said Mailey. "Come, friends, let the Professor have his message."

They moved towards the door leaving the man seated in front of his daughter. An unwonted nervousness seemed suddenly to seize him. "Malone, stay with me!"

The door closed and the three were left together.

"What is the message?"

“It is about a powder.”

“Yes, yes.”

“A grey powder?”

“Yes.”

“The message that men want me to say is: ‘You did not kill us’.”

“Ask them then — ask them — how did they die?” His voice was broken and his great frame was quivering with his emotion.

“They die disease.”

“What disease?”

“New — new . . . What that? . . . Pneumonia.”

Challenger sank back in his chair with an immense sigh of relief. “My God!” he cried, wiping his brow. Then:

“Call in the others, Malone.”

They had waited on the landing and now streamed into the room. Challenger had risen to meet them. His first words were to Tom Linden. He spoke like a shaken man whose pride for the instant was broken.

“As to you, sir, I do not presume to judge you. A thing has occurred to me which is so strange, and also so certain, since my own trained senses have attested it, that I am not prepared to deny any explanation which has been offered of your previous conduct. I beg to withdraw any injurious expressions I may have used.”

Tom Linden was a true Christian in his character. His forgiveness was instant and sincere.

“I cannot doubt that my daughter has some strange power which bears out much which you, Mr. Mailey, have told me. I was justified in my scientific scepticism, but you have to-day offered me some incontrovertible evidence.”

“We all go through the same experience, Professor. We doubt, and then in turn we are doubted.”

“I can hardly conceive that my word will be doubted upon such a point,” said Challenger, with dignity. “I can truly say that I have had information to-night which no living person upon this earth was in a position to give. So much is beyond all question.”

“The young lady is better,” said Mrs. Linden.

Enid was sitting up and staring round her with bewildered eyes.

“What has happened, Father? I seem to have been asleep.”

“All right, dear. We will talk of that later. Come home with me now. I have much to think over. Perhaps you will come back with us, Malone. I feel that I owe you some explanation.”

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When Professor Challenger reached his flat, he gave Austin orders that he was on no account to be disturbed, and he led the way into his library, where he sat in his big armchair with Malone upon his left and his daughter upon his right. He had stretched out his great paw and enclosed Enid’s small hand.

“My dear,” he said, after a long silence, “I cannot doubt that you are possessed of a strange power, for it has been shown to me to-night with a fullness and a clearness which is final. Since you have it I cannot deny that others may have it also, and the general idea of mediumship has entered within my conceptions of what is possible. I will not discuss the question, for my thoughts are still confused upon the subject, and I will need to thrash the thing out with you, young Malone, and with your friends, before I can get a more definite idea. I will only say that my mind has received a shock, and that a new avenue of knowledge seems to have opened up before me.”

“We shall be proud indeed,” said Malone, “if we can help you.”

Challenger gave a wry smile.

“Yes, I have no doubt that a headline in your paper, ‘Conversion of Professor Challenger’ would be a triumph. I warn you that I have not got so far.”

“We certainly would do nothing premature and your opinions may remain entirely private.”

“I have never lacked the moral courage to proclaim my opinions when they are formed, but the time has not yet come. However, I have received two messages to-night, and I can only ascribe to them an extra-corporeal origin. I take it for granted, Enid, that you were indeed insensible.”

“I assure you, Father, that I knew nothing.”

“Quite so. You have always been incapable of deceit. First there came a message from your mother. She assured me that she had indeed produced those sounds which I heard and of which I have told you. It is clear now that you were the medium and that you were not in sleep but in trance. It is incredible, inconceivable, grotesquely wonderful — but it would seem to be true.”

“Crookes used almost those very words,” said Malone. He wrote that it was all ‘perfectly impossible and absolutely true’.”

“I owe him an apology. Perhaps I owe a good many people an apology.”

“None will ever be asked for,” said Malone. “These people are not made that way.”

“It is the second case which I would explain.” The Professor fidgeted uneasily in his chair. “It is a matter of great privacy — one to which I have never alluded, and which no one on earth could have known. Since you heard so much you may as well hear all.

“It happened when I was a young physician, and it is not too much to say that it cast a cloud over my life — a cloud which has only been raised to-night. Others may try to explain what has occurred by telepathy, by subconscious mind action, by what they will, but I cannot doubt — it is impossible to doubt — that a message has come to me from the dead.

“There was a new drug under discussion at that time. It is useless to enter into details which you would be incapable of appreciating. Suffice it that it was of the datura family which supplies deadly poisons as well as powerful medicines. I had received one of the earliest specimens, and I desired my name to be associated with the first exploration of its properties. I gave it to two men, Ware and Aldridge. I gave it in what I thought was a safe dose. They were patients, you understand, in my ward in a public hospital. Both were found dead in the morning.

“I had given it secretly. None knew of it. There was no scandal for they were both very ill, and their death seemed natural. But in my own heart I had fears. I believed that I had killed them. It has always been a dark background to my life. You heard yourselves to-night that it was from the disease, and not from the drug that they died.”

“Poor Dad!” whispered Enid patting the great hirsute hand. “Poor Dad! What you must have suffered!”

Challenger was too proud a man to stand pity, even from his own daughter. He pulled away his hand.

“I worked for science,” he said. “Science must take risks. I do not know that I am to blame. And yet — and yet — my heart is very light to-night.”

17. Where The Mists Clear Away

MALONE had lost his billet and had found his way in Fleet Street blocked by the rumour of his independence. His place upon the staff had been taken by a young and drunken Jew, who had at once won his spurs by a series of highly humorous articles upon psychic matters, peppered with assurances that he approached the subject with a perfectly open and impartial mind. His final device of offering five thousand pounds if the spirits of the dead would place the three first horses in the coming Derby, and his demonstration that ectoplasm was in truth the froth of bottle porter artfully concealed by the medium, are newspaper stunts, which are within the recollection of the reader.

But the path which closed on one side had opened on the other. Challenger, lost in his daring dreams and ingenious experiments, had long needed an active, clear-headed man to manage his business interests, and to control his world-wide patents. There were many devices, the fruits of his life's work, which brought in income, but had to be carefully watched and guarded. His automatic alarm for ships in shallow waters, his device for deflecting a torpedo, his new and economical method of separating nitrogen from the air, his radical improvements in wireless transmission and his novel treatment of pitch blend, were all moneymakers. Enraged by the attitude of Cornelius, the Professor placed the management of all these in the hands of his prospective son-in-law, who diligently guarded his interests.

Challenger had himself altered. His colleagues, and those about him, observed the change without clearly perceiving the cause. He was gentler, humbler, and more spiritual man. Deep in his soul was the conviction that he, the champion of scientific method and of truth, had, in fact, for many years been unscientific in his methods, and a formidable obstruction to the advance of the human soul through the jungle of the unknown. It was this self-condemnation which had wrought the change in his character. Also, with characteristic energy, he had plunged into the wonderful literature of the subject, and as, without the prejudice which had formerly darkened his brain, he read the illuminating testimony of Hare, de Morgan, Crookes, Lombroso, Barrett, Lodge, and so many other great men, he marvelled that he could ever for one instant have imagined that such a consensus of opinion could be founded upon error. His violent and whole-hearted nature made him take up the psychic cause with the same vehemence, and even occasionally the same intolerance with which he had once denounced it, and the old lion bared his teeth and roared back at those who had once been his associates.

His remarkable article in the *Spectator* began, “The obtuse incredulity and stubborn unreason of the prelates who refused to look through the telescope of Galileo and to observe the moons of Jupiter, has been far transcended in our own days by those noisy controversialists, who rashly express extreme opinions upon those psychic matters which they have never had either the time, or the inclination to examine “; while in a final sentence he expressed his conviction that his opponents “ did not in truth represent the thought of the twentieth century, but might rather be regarded as mental fossils dug from some early Pliocene horizon “. Critics raised their hands in horror, as is their wont, against the robust language of the article, though violence of attack has for so many years been condoned in the case of those who are in opposition. So we may leave Challenger, his black mane slowly turning to grey, but his great brain growing ever stronger and more virile as it faces such problems as the future had in store — a future which had ceased to be bounded by the narrow horizon of death, and which now stretches away into the infinite possibilities and developments of continued survival of personality, character and work.

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The marriage had taken place. It was a quiet function, but no prophet could ever have foretold the guests whom Enid’s father had assembled in the Whitehall Rooms. They were a happy crowd, all welded together by the opposition of the world, and united in one common knowledge. There was the Rev. Charles Mason, who had officiated at the ceremony, and if ever a saint’s blessing consecrated a union, so it had been that morning. Now in his black garb with his cheery toothsome smile, he was moving about among the crowd carrying peace and kindliness with him. The yellow-bearded Mailey, the old warrior, scarred with many combats and eager for more, stood beside his wife, the gentle squire who bore his weapons and nerved his arm. There was Dr. Maupuis from Paris, trying to make the waiter understand that he wanted coffee, and being presented with tooth-picks, while the gaunt Lord Roxton viewed his efforts with cynical amusement. There, too, was the good Bolsover with several of the Hammersmith circle, and Tom Linden with his wife, and Smith, the fighting bulldog from the north, and Dr. Atkinson, and Marvin the psychic editor with his kind wife, and the two Ogilvies, and little Miss Delicia with her bag and her tracts, and Dr. Ross Scotton, now successfully cured, and Dr. Felkin who had cured him so far as his earthly representative, Nurse Ursula, could fill his place. All these and many more were visible to our two-inch spectrum of colour, and audible to our four octaves of sound. How many others, outside those narrow limitations, may have added their presence and their blessing — who shall say?

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One last scene before we close the record. It was in a sitting-room of the Imperial Hotel at Folkestone. At the window sat Mr. and Mrs. Edward Malone gazing westwards down Channel at an angry evening sky. Great purple tentacles, threatening forerunners from what lay unseen and unknown beyond the horizon, were writhing up towards the zenith. Below, the little Dieppe boat was panting eagerly homewards. Far out the great ships were keeping mid-channel as scenting danger to come. The vague threat of that menacing sky acted subconsciously upon the minds of both of them.

“Tell me, Enid,” said Malone, “of all our wonderful psychic experiences, which is now most vivid in your mind?”

“It is curious that you should ask, Ned, for I was thinking of it at that moment. I suppose it was the association of ideas with that terrible sky. It was of Miromar I was thinking, the strange mystery man with his words of doom.”

“And so was I.”

“Have you heard of him since?”

“Once and once only. It was on a Sunday morning in Hyde Park. He was speaking to a little group of men. I mixed with the crowd and listened. It was the same warning.”

“How did they take it? Did they laugh?”

“Well, you have seen and heard him. You could not laugh, could you?”

“No, indeed. But you don’t take it seriously, Ned, do you? Look at the solid old earth of England. Look at our great hotel and the people on the Lees, and the stodgy morning papers and all the settled order of a civilised land. Do you really think that anything could come to destroy it all?”

“Who knows? Miromar is not the only one who says so.”

“Does he call it the end of the world?”

“No, no, it is the rebirth of the world — of the true world, the world as God meant it to he.”

“It is a tremendous message. But what is amiss? Why should so dreadful a Judgment fall?”

“It is the materialism, the wooden formalities of the churches, the alienation of all spiritual impulses, the denial of the Unseen, the ridicule of this new revelation — these are the causes according to him.”

“Surely the world has been worse before now?”

“But never with the same advantages — never with the education and knowledge and so-called civilization, which should have led it to higher things. Look how everything has been turned to evil. We got the knowledge of airships. We bomb cities with them. We learn how to steam under the sea. We murder seamen with our new knowledge. We gain command over chemicals. We turn them into explosives or poison gases. It goes from worse to worse. At the present moment every nation upon earth is plotting secretly how it can best poison the others. Did God create the planet for this end, and is it likely that He will allow it to go on from bad to worse?”

“Is it you or Miromar who is talking now?”

“Well, I have myself been brooding over the matter, and all my thoughts seem to justify his conclusions. I read a spirit message which Charles Mason wrote. It was: ‘The most dangerous condition for a man or a nation is when his intellectual side is more developed than his spiritual’. Is that not exactly the condition of the world to-day?”

“And how will it come?”

“Ah, there I can only take Miromar’s word for it. He speaks of a breaking of all the phials. There is war, famine, pestilence, earthquake, flood, tidal waves — all ending in peace and glory unutterable.”

The great purple streamers were right across the sky. A dull crimson glare, a lurid angry glow, was spreading in the west. Enid shuddered as she watched it.

“One thing we have learned,” said he. “It is that two souls, where real love exists, go on and on without a break through all the spheres. Why, then, should you and I fear death, or anything which life or death can bring?”

She smiled and put her hand in his.

“Why indeed?” said she.

THE END

WHEN THE WORLD SCREAMED

This Challenger short story was first published in *Liberty Magazine*, 25 February-3 March 1928.

WHEN THE WORLD SCREAMED

I had a vague recollection of having heard my friend Edward Malone, of the Gazette, speak of Professor Challenger, with whom he had been associated in some remarkable adventures. I am so busy, however, with my own profession, and my firm has been so overtaxed with orders, that I know little of what is going on in the world outside my own special interests. My general recollection was that Challenger has been depicted as a wild genius of a violent and intolerant disposition. I was greatly surprised to receive a business communication from him which was in the following terms:

'14 (Bis), Enmore Gardens, Kensington. 'Sir,—'I have occasion to engage the services of an expert in Artesian borings. I will not conceal from you that my opinion of experts is not a high one, and that I have usually found that a man who, like myself, has a well-equipped brain can take a sounder and broader view than the man who professes a special knowledge (which, alas, is so often a mere profession), and is therefore limited in his outlook. None the less, I am disposed to give you a trial. Looking down the list of Artesian authorities, a certain oddity — I had almost written absurdity — in your name attracted my attention, and I found upon inquiry that my young friend, Mr. Edward Malone, was actually acquainted with you. I am therefore writing to say that I should be glad to have an interview with you, and that if you satisfy my requirements, and my standard is no mean one, I may be inclined to put a most important matter into your hands. I can say no more at present as the matter is of extreme secrecy, which can only be discussed by word of mouth. I beg, therefore, that you will at once cancel any engagement which you may happen to have, and that you will call upon me at the above address at 10.30 in the morning of next Friday. There is a scraper as well as a mat, and Mrs. Challenger is most particular.

'I remain, Sir, as I began, 'George Edward Challenger.'

I handed this letter to my chief clerk to answer, and he informed the Professor that Mr. Peerless Jones would be glad to keep the appointment as arranged. It was a perfectly civil business note, but it began with the phrase: 'Your letter (undated) has been received.'

This drew a second epistle from the Professor:

‘Sir,’ he said and his writing looked like a barbed wire fence—’I observe that you animadvert upon the trifle that my letter was undated. Might I draw your attention to the fact that, as some return for a monstrous taxation, our Government is in the habit of affixing a small circular sign or stamp upon the outside on the envelope which notifies the date of posting? Should this sign be missing or illegible your remedy lies with the proper postal authorities. Meanwhile, I would ask you to confine your observations to matters which concern the business over which I consult you, and to cease to comment upon the form which my own letters may assume. ‘

It was clear to me that I was dealing with a lunatic, so I thought it well before I went any further in the matter to call upon my friend Malone, whom I had known since the old days when we both played Rugger for Richmond. I found him the same jolly Irishman as ever, and much amused at my first brush with Challenger.

‘That’s nothing, my boy,’ said he. ‘You’ll feel as if you had been skinned alive when you have been with him five minutes. He beats the world for offensiveness.’

‘But why should the world put up with it?’

‘They don’t. If you collected all the libel actions and all the rows and all the police-court assaults—’

‘Assaults!’

‘Bless you, he would think nothing of throwing you downstairs if you have a disagreement. He is a primitive cave-man in a lounge suit. I can see him with a club in one hand and a jagged bit of flint in the other. Some people are born out of their proper century, but he is born out of his millennium. He belongs to the early neolithic or thereabouts.’

‘And he a professor!’

‘There is the wonder of it! It’s the greatest brain in Europe, with a driving force behind it that can turn all his dreams into facts.

They do all they can to hold him back for his colleagues hate him like poison, but a lot of trawlers might as well try to hold back the Berengaria. He simply ignores them and steams on his way.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘one thing is clear. I don’t want to have anything to do with him. I’ll cancel that appointment.’

‘Not a bit of it. You will keep it to the minute — and mind that it is to the minute or you will hear of it.’

‘Why should I?’

‘Well, I’ll tell you. First of all, don’t take too seriously what I have said about old Challenger. Everyone who gets close to him learns to love him. There is no real harm in the old bear. Why, I remember how he carried an Indian baby with the smallpox on his back for a hundred miles from the back country down to the Madeira river. He is big every way. He won’t hurt if you get right with him.’

‘I won’t give him the chance.’

‘You will be a fool if you don’t. Have you ever heard of the Hengist Down Mystery — the shaft-sinking on the South Coast?’

‘Some secret coal-mining exploration, I understand.’

Malone winked. ‘Well, you can put it down as that if you like. You see, I am in the old man’s confidence, and I can’t say anything until he gives the word. But I may tell you this, for it has been in the Press. A man, Betterton, who made his money in rubber, left his whole estate to Challenger some years ago, with the provision that it should be used in the interests of science. It proved to be an enormous sum — several millions. Challenger then bought a property at Hengist Down, in Sussex. It was worthless land on the north edge of the chalk country, and he got a large tract of it, which he wired off. There was a deep gully in the middle of it. Here he began to make an excavation. He announced’ — here Malone winked again—’that there was petroleum in England and that he meant to prove it. He built a little model village with a colony of well-paid workers who are all sworn to keep their mouths shut. The gully is wired off as well as the estate, and the place is guarded by bloodhounds. Several pressmen have nearly lost their lives, to say nothing of the seats of their trousers, from these creatures. It’s a big operation, and Sir Thomas Morden’s firm has it in hand, but they also are sworn to secrecy. Clearly the time has come when Artesian help is needed. Now, would you not be foolish to refuse such a job as that, with all the interest and experience and a big fat cheque at the end of it — to say nothing of rubbing shoulders with the most wonderful man you have ever met or are ever likely to meet?’

Malone’s arguments prevailed, and Friday morning found me on my way to Enmore Gardens, I took such particular care to be in time that I found myself at the door twenty minutes too soon. I was waiting in the street when it struck me that I recognised the Rolls- Royce with the silver arrow mascot at the door. It was certainly that of Jack Devonshire, the junior partner of the great Morden firm. I had always known him as the most urbane of men, so that it was rather a shock to me when he suddenly appeared, and standing outside the door he raised both his hands, to heaven and said with great fervour: ‘Damn him! Oh, damn him!’

‘What is up, Jack? You seem peeved this morning.’

‘Hullo, Peerless! Are you in on this job, too?’

‘There seems a chance of it.’

‘Well, you find it chastening to the temper.’

‘Rather more so than yours can stand, apparently.’

‘Well, I should say so. The butler’s message to me was: “The Professor desired me to say, sir, that he was rather busy at present eating an egg, and that if you would call at some more convenient time he would very likely see you.” That was the message delivered by a servant. I may add that I had called to collect forty-two thousand pounds that he owes us.’

I whistled.

‘You can’t get your money?’

‘Oh, yes, he is all right about money. I’ll do the old gorilla the justice to say that he is open- handed with money. But he pays when he likes and how he likes, and he cares for nobody.

However, you go and try your luck and see how you like it.’ With that he flung himself into his motor and was off.

I waited with occasional glances at my watch until the zero hour should arrive. I am, if I may say so, a fairly hefty individual, and a runner-up for the Belsize Boxing Club middle-weights, but I have never faced an interview with such trepidation as this. It was not physical, for I was confident I could hold my own if this inspired lunatic should attack me, but it was a mixture of feelings in which fear of some public scandal and dread of losing a lucrative contract were mingled. However, things are always easier when imagination ceases and action begins. I snapped up my watch and made for the door.

It was opened by an old wooden-faced butler, a man who bore an expression, or an absence of expression, which gave the impression that he was so inured to shocks that nothing on earth would surprise him.

‘By appointment, sir?’ he asked.

‘Certainly.’

He glanced at a list in his hand.

‘Your name, sir?... Quite so, Mr. Peerless Jones.... Ten-thirty. Everything is in order. We have to be careful, Mr. Jones, for we are much annoyed by journalists. The Professor, as you may be aware, does not approve of the Press. This way, sir. Professor Challenger is now receiving.'

The next instant I found myself in the presence. I believe that my friend, Ted Malone, has described the man in his 'Lost World' yarn better than I can hope to do, so I'll leave it at that. All I was aware of was a huge trunk of a man behind a mahogany desk, with a great spade-shaped black beard and two large grey eyes half covered with insolent drooping eyelids. His big head sloped back, his beard bristled forward, and his whole appearance conveyed one single impression of arrogant intolerance. 'Well, what the devil do you want?' was written all over him. I laid my card on the table.

'Ah yes,' he said, picking it up and handling it as if he disliked the smell of it. 'Of course. You are the expert so-called. Mr. Jones — Mr. Peerless Jones. You may thank your godfather, Mr. Jones, for it was this ludicrous prefix which first drew my attention to you.'

'I am here, Professor Challenger, for a business interview and not to discuss my own name,' said I, with all the dignity I could master.

'Dear me, you seem to be a very touchy person, Mr. Jones. Your nerves are in a highly irritable condition. We must walk warily in dealing with you, Mr. Jones. Pray sit down and compose yourself. I have been reading your little brochure upon the reclaiming of the Sinai Peninsula. Did you write it yourself?'

'Naturally, sir. My name is on it.'

'Quite so! Quite so! But it does not always follow, does it? However, I am prepared to accept your assertion. The book is not without merit of a sort. Beneath the dullness of the diction one gets glimpses of an occasional idea. There are germs of thought here and there. Are you a married man?'

'No, sir. I am not. '

'Then there is some chance of your keeping a secret. '

'If I promised to do so, I would certainly keep my promise. 'So you say. My young friend, Malone' — he spoke as if Ted were ten years of age —'has a good opinion of you. He says that I may trust you. This trust is a very great one, for I am engaged just now in one of the greatest experiments — I may even say the greatest experiment — in the history of the world. I ask for your participation.'

'I shall be honoured.'

'It is indeed an honour. I will admit that I should have shared my labours with no one were it not that the gigantic nature of the undertaking calls for the highest technical skill. Now, Mr. Jones, having obtained your promise of inviolable secrecy, I come down to the essential point. It is this — that the world upon which we live is itself a living organism, endowed, as I believe, with a circulation, a respiration, and a nervous system of its own.' Clearly the man was a lunatic.

'Your brain, I observe,' he continued, 'fails to register. But it will gradually absorb the idea.

You will recall how a moor or heath resembles the hairy side of a giant animal. A certain analogy runs through all nature. You will then consider the secular rise and fall of land, which indicates the slow respiration of the creature. Finally, you will note the fidgetings and scratchings which appear to our Lilliputian perceptions as earthquakes and convulsions.'

'What about volcanoes?' I asked.

'Tut, tut! They correspond to the heat spots upon our own bodies.'

My brain whirled as I tried to find some answer to these monstrous contentions.

'The temperature!' I cried. 'Is it not a fact that it rises rapidly as one descends, and that the centre of the earth is liquid heat?'

He waved my assertion aside.

'You are probably aware, sir, since Council schools are now compulsory, that the earth is flattened at the poles. This means that the pole is nearer to the centre than any other point and would therefore be most affected by this heat of which you spoke. It is notorious, of course, that the conditions of the poles are tropical, is it not?'

'The whole idea is utterly new to me.'

'Of course it is. It is the privilege of the original thinker to put forward ideas which are new and usually unwelcome to the common clay. Now, sir, what is this?' He held up a small object which he had picked from the table.

'I should say it is a sea-urchin.'

'Exactly!' he cried, with an air of exaggerated surprise, as when an infant has done something clever. 'It is a sea-urchin — a common echinus. Nature repeats itself in many forms regardless of the size. This echinus is a model, a prototype, of the world. You perceive that it is roughly circular, but flattened at the poles. Let us then regard the world as a huge echinus. What are your objections?'

My chief objection was that the thing was too absurd for argument, but I did not dare to say so. I fished around for some less sweeping assertion.

‘A living creature needs food,’ I said. ‘Where could the world sustain its huge bulk?’

‘An excellent point — excellent!’ said the Professor, with a huge air of patronage. ‘You have a quick eye for the obvious, though you are slow in realising the more subtle implications. How does the world get nourishment? Again we turn to our little friend the echinus. The water which surrounds it flows through the tubes of this small creature and provides its nutrition.’

‘Then you think that the water—’

‘No, sir. The ether. The earth browses upon a circular path in the fields of space, and as it moves the ether is continually pouring through it and providing its vitality. Quite a flock of other little world-echini are doing the same thing, Venus, Mars, and the rest, each with its own field for grazing.’

The man was clearly mad, but there was no arguing with him. He accepted my silence as agreement and smiled at me in most beneficent fashion.

‘We are coming on, I perceive,’ said he. ‘Light is beginning to break in. A little dazzling at first, no doubt, but we will soon get used to it. Pray give me your attention while I found one or two more observations upon this little creature in my hand.

‘We will suppose that on this outer hard rind there were certain infinitely small insects which crawled upon the surface. Would the echinus ever be aware of their existence?’

‘I should say not.’

‘You can well imagine then, that the earth has not the least idea of the way in which it is utilized by the human race. It is quite unaware of this fungus growth of vegetation and evolution of tiny animalcules which has collected upon it during its travels round the sun as barnacles gather upon the ancient vessel. That is the present state of affairs, and that is what I propose to alter.’

I stared in amazement. ‘You propose to alter it?’

‘I propose to let the earth know that there is at least one person, George Edward Challenger, who calls for attention — who, indeed, insists upon attention. It is certainly the first intimation it has ever had of the sort.’

‘And how, sir, will you do this?’

‘Ah, there we get down to business.

You have touched the spot. I will again call your attention to this interesting little creature which I hold in my hand. It is all nerves and sensibility beneath that protective crust. Is it not evident that if a parasitic animalcule desired to call its attention it would sink a hole in its shell and so stimulate its sensory apparatus?'

'Certainly.'

'Or, again, we will take the case of the homely flea or a mosquito which explores the surface of the human body. We may be unaware of its presence. But presently, when it sinks its proboscis through the skin, which is our crust, we are disagreeably reminded that we are not altogether alone. My plans now will no doubt begin to dawn upon you. Light breaks in the darkness.'

'Good heavens! You propose to sink a shaft through the earth's crust?'

He closed his eyes with ineffable complacency.

'You see before you,' he said, 'the first who will ever pierce that horny hide. I may even put it in the present tense and say who has pierced it.'

'You have done it!'

'With the very efficient aid of Morden and think I may say that I have done it. Several years of constant work which has been carried on night and day, and conducted by every known species of drill, borer, crusher, and explosive, has at last brought us to our goal.'

'You don't mean to say you are through the crust!'

'If your expressions denote bewilderment they may pass. If they denote incredulity—'

'No, sir, nothing of the kind.'

'You will accept my statement without question. We are through the crust. It was exactly fourteen thousand four hundred and forty-two yards thick, or roughly eight miles. In the course of our sinking it may interest you to know that we have exposed a fortune in the matter of coal-beds which would probably in the long run defray the cost of the enterprise. Our chief difficulty has been the springs of water in the lower chalk and Hastings sands, but these we have overcome. The last stage has now been reached — and the last stage is none other than Mr. Peerless Jones. You, sir, represent the mosquito. Your Artesian borer takes the place of the stinging proboscis. The brain has done its work. Exit the thinker. Enter the mechanical one, the peerless one, with his rod of metal. Do I make myself clear?'

‘You talk of eight miles!’ I cried. ‘Are you aware, sir, that five thousand feet is considered nearly the limit for Artesian borings? I am acquainted with one in upper Silesia which is six thousand two hundred feet deep, but it is looked upon as a wonder.’

‘You misunderstand me, Mr. Peerless. Either my explanation or your brain is at fault, and I will not insist upon which. I am well aware of the limits of Artesian borings, and it is not likely that I would have spent millions of pounds upon my colossal tunnel if a six-inch boring would have met my needs. All that I ask you is to have a drill ready which shall be as sharp as possible, not more than a hundred feet in length, and operated by an electric motor. An ordinary percussion drill driven home by a weight will meet every requirement.

‘Why by an electric motor?’

‘I am here, Mr. Jones, to give orders, not reasons. Before we finish it may happen — it may, I say, happen — that your very life may depend upon this drill being started from a distance by electricity. It can, I presume, be done?’

‘Certainly it can be done.’

‘Then prepare to do it. The matter is not yet ready for your actual presence, but your preparations may now be made. I have nothing more to say.’

‘But it is essential,’ I expostulated, ‘that you should let me know what soil the drill is to penetrate. Sand, or clay, or chalk would each need different treatment.’

‘Let us say jelly,’ said Challenger. ‘Yes, we will for the present suppose that you have to sink your drill into jelly. And now, Mr. Jones, I have matters of some importance to engage my mind, so I will wish you good morning. You can draw up a formal contract with mention of your charges for my Head of Works.’

I bowed and turned, but before I reached the door my curiosity overcame me.

He was already writing furiously with a quill pen screeching over the paper, and he looked up angrily at my interruption.

‘Well, sir, what now? I had hoped you were gone.

‘I only wished to ask you, sir, what the object of so extraordinary an experiment can be?’

‘Away, sir, away!’ he cried, angrily. ‘Raise your mind above the base mercantile and utilitarian needs of commerce. Shake off your paltry standards of business. Science seeks knowledge. Let the knowledge lead us where it will, we still must seek it. To know once for all what we are, why we are, where we are, is that not in itself the greatest of all human aspirations? Away, sir, away!'

His great black head was bowed over his papers once more and blended with his beard. The quill pen screeched more shrilly than ever. So I left him, this extraordinary man, with my head in a whirl at the thought of the strange business in which I now found myself to be his partner.

When I got back to my office I found Ted Malone waiting with a broad grin upon his face to know the result of my interview.

'Well!' he cried. 'None the worse? No case of assault and battery? You must have handled him very tactfully. What do you think of the old boy?'

'The most aggravating, insolent, intolerant, self-opinionated man I have ever met, but—'

'Exactly!' cried Malone. 'We all come to that "but." Of course, he is all you say and a lot more, but one feels that so big a man is not to be measured in our scale, and that we can endure from him what we would not stand from any other living mortal. Is that not so?'

'Well, I don't know him well enough yet to say, but I will admit that if he is not a mere bullying megalomaniac, and if what he says is true, then he certainly is in a class by himself. But is it true?'

'Of course it is true. Challenger always delivers the goods. Now, where are you exactly in the matter? Has he told you about Hengist Down?'

'Yes, in a sketchy sort of way.'

'Well, you may take it from me that the whole thing is colossal colossal in conception and colossal in execution. He hates pressmen, but I am in his confidence, for he knows that I will publish no more than he authorizes. Therefore I have his plans, or some of his plans. He is such a deep old bird that one never is sure if one has really touched bottom. Anyhow, I know enough to assure you that Hengist Down is a practical proposition and nearly completed. My advice to you now is simply to await events, and meanwhile to get your gear all ready. You'll hear soon enough either from him or from me.'

As it happened, it was from Malone himself that I heard. He came round quite early to my office some weeks later, as the bearer of a message.

'I've come from Challenger' said he.

'You are like the pilot fish to the shark.'

‘I’m proud to be anything to him. He really is a wonder. He has done it all right. It’s your turn now, and then he is ready to ring up the curtain.’

‘Well, I can’t believe it until I see it, but I have everything ready and loaded on a lorry. I could start it off at any moment.’

‘Then do so at once. I’ve given you a tremendous character for energy and punctuality, so mind you don’t let me down. In the meantime, come down with me by rail and I will give you an idea of what has to be done.’

It was a lovely spring morning — May 22nd, to be exact — when we made that fateful journey which brought me on to a stage which is destined to be historical. On the way Malone handed me a note from Challenger which I was to accept as my instructions.

‘Sir,’ (it ran) —

‘Upon arriving at Hengist Down you will put yourself at the disposal of Mr. Barforth, the Chief Engineer, who is in possession of my plans. My young friend, Malone, the bearer of this, is also in touch with me and may protect me from any personal contact. We have now experienced certain phenomena in the shaft at and below the fourteen thousand-foot level which fully bear out my views as to the nature of a planetary body, but some more sensational proof is needed before I can hope to make an impression upon the torpid intelligence of the modern scientific world.

That proof you are destined to afford, and they to witness. As you descend in the lifts you will observe, presuming that you have the rare quality of observation, that you pass in succession the secondary chalk beds, the coal measures, some Devonian and Cambrian indications, and finally the granite, through which the greater part of our tunnel is conducted. The bottom is now covered with tarpaulin, which I order you not to tamper with, as any clumsy handling of the sensitive inner cuticle of the earth might bring about premature results. At my instruction, two strong beams have been laid across the shaft twenty feet above the bottom, with a space between them. This space will act as a clip to hold up your Artesian tube. Fifty feet of drill will suffice, twenty of which will project below the beams, so that the point of the drill comes nearly down to the tarpaulin. As you value your life do not let it go further. Thirty feet will then project upwards in the shaft, and when you have released it we may assume that not less than forty feet of drill will bury itself in the earth’s substance. As this substance is very soft I find that you will probably need no driving power, and that simply a release of the tube will suffice by its own weight to drive it into the layer which we have uncovered. These instructions would seem to be sufficient for any ordinary intelligence, but I have little doubt that you will need more, which can be referred to me through our young friend, Malone.

‘GEORGE EDWARD CHALLENGER.’

It can be imagined that when we arrived at the station of Storrington, near the northern foot of the South Downs, I was in a state of considerable nervous tension. A weather-worn Vauxhall thirty landaulette was awaiting us, and bumped us for six or seven miles over by-paths and lanes which, in spite of their natural seclusion, were deeply rutted and showed every sign of heavy traffic. A broken lorry lying in the grass at one point showed that others had found it rough going as well as we. Once a huge piece of machinery which seemed to be the valves and piston of a hydraulic pump projected itself, all rusted, from a clump of furze.

‘That’s Challenger’s doing,’ said Malone, grinning.

‘Said it was one-tenth of an inch out of estimate, so he simply chucked it by the wayside.’

‘With a lawsuit to follow, no doubt.’

‘A lawsuit! My dear chap, we should have a court of our own. We have enough to keep a judge busy for a year. Government too. The old devil cares for no one. Rex v. George Challenger and George Challenger v. Rex. A nice devil’s dance the two will have from one court to another. Well, here we are. All right, Jenkins, you can let us in!’

A huge man with a notable cauliflower ear was peering into the car, a scowl of suspicion upon his face. He relaxed and saluted as he recognised my companion.

‘All right, Mr. Malone. I thought it was the American Associated Press.’

‘Oh, they are on the track, are they?’

‘They to-day, and The Times yesterday. Oh, they are buzzing round proper. Look at that!’ He indicated a distant dot upon the sky-line.

‘See that glint! That’s the telescope of the Chicago Daily News. Yes, they are fair after us now. I’ve seen ‘em in rows, same as the crows, along the Beacon yonder.’

‘Poor old Press gang!’ said Malone, as we entered a gate in a formidable barbed wire fence. ‘I am one of them myself, and I know how it feels.

At this moment we heard a plaintive bleat behind us of ‘Malone! Ted Malone!’ It came from a fat little man who had just arrived upon a motor-bike and was at present struggling in the Herculean grasp of the gatekeeper.

‘Here, let me go!’ he sputtered. ‘Keep your hands off! Malone, call off this gorilla of yours.’

‘Let him go, Jenkins! He’s a friend of mine!’ cried Malone. ‘Well, old bean, what is it? What are you after in these parts? Fleet Street is your stamping ground — not the wilds of Sussex.’

‘You know what I am after perfectly well,’ said our visitor. ‘I’ve got the assignment to write a story about Hengist Down and I can’t go home without the copy.’

‘Sorry, Roy, but you can’t get anything here.

You’ll have to stay on that side of the wire. If you want more you must go and see Professor Challenger and get his leave.’

‘I’ve been,’ said the journalist, ruefully. ‘I went this morning.’

‘Well, what did he say?’

‘He said he would put me through the window.’

Malone laughed.

‘And what did you say?’

‘I said, “What’s wrong with the door?” and I skipped through it just to show there was nothing wrong with it. It was no time for argument. I just went. What with that bearded Assyrian bull in London, and this Thug down here, who has ruined my clean celluloid, you seem to be keeping queer company, Ted Malone.’

‘I can’t help you, Roy; I would if I could. They say in Fleet Street that you have never been beaten, but you are up against it this time. Get back to the office, and if you just wait a few days I’ll give you the news as soon as the old man allows.’

‘No chance of getting in?’

‘Not an earthly.’

‘Money no object?’

‘You should know better than to say that.’

‘They tell me it’s a short cut to New Zealand.’

‘It will be a short cut to the hospital if you butt in here, Roy. Good-bye, now. We have some work to do of our own.

‘That’s Roy Perkins, the war correspondent,’ said Malone as we walked across the compound. ‘We’ve broken his record, for he is supposed to be undefeatable. It’s his fat, little innocent face that carries him through everything. We were on the same staff once. Now there’ — he pointed to a cluster of pleasant red-roofed bungalows—'are the quarters of the men. They are a splendid lot of picked workers who are paid far above ordinary rates. They have to be bachelors and teetotallers, and under oath of secrecy. I don't think there has been any leakage up to now. That field is their football ground and the detached house is their library and recreation room. The old man is some organizer, I can assure you. This is Mr. Barforth, the head engineer-in-charge.'

A long, thin, melancholy man with deep lines of anxiety upon his face had appeared before us. 'I expect you are the Artesian engineer,' said he, in a gloomy voice. 'I was told to expect you. I am glad you've come, for I don't mind telling you that the responsibility of this thing is getting on my nerves. We work away, and I never know if it's a gush of chalk water, or a seam of coal, or a squirt of petroleum, or maybe a touch of hell fire that is coming next. We've been spared the last up to now, but you may make the connection for all I know.'

'Is it so hot down there?'

'Well, it's hot. There's no denying it. And yet maybe it is not hotter than the barometric pressure and the confined space might account for. Of course, the ventilation is awful. We pump the air down, but two-hour shifts are the most the men can do — and they are willing lads too. The Professor was down yesterday, and he was very pleased with it all. You had best join us at lunch, and then you will see it for yourself.'

After a hurried and frugal meal we were introduced with loving assiduity upon the part of the manager to the contents of his engine-house, and to the miscellaneous scrapheap of disused implements with which the grass was littered. On one side was a huge dismantled Arrol hydraulic shovel, with which the first excavations had been rapidly made. Beside it was a great engine which worked a continuous steel rope on which the skips were fastened which drew up the debris by successive stages from the bottom of the shaft. In the power-house were several Escher Wyss turbines of great horse-power running at one hundred and forty revolutions a minute and governing hydraulic accumulators which evolved a pressure of fourteen hundred pounds per square inch, passing in three-inch pipes down the shaft and operating four rock drills with hollow cutters of the Brandt type. Abutting upon the engine-house was the electric house supplying power for a very large lighting instalment, and next to that again was an extra turbine of two hundred horse-power, which drove a ten-foot fan forcing air down a twelve-inch pipe to the bottom of the workings.

All these wonders were shown with many technical explanations by their proud operator, who was well on his way to boring me stiff, as I may in turn have done my reader. There came a welcome interruption, however, when I heard the roar of wheels and rejoiced to see my Leyland three-tonner come rolling and heaving over the grass, heaped up with tools and sections of tubing, and bearing my foreman, Peters, and a very grimy assistant in front. The two of them set to work at once to unload my stuff and to carry it in. Leaving them at their work, the manager, with Malone and myself, approached the shaft.

It was a wondrous place, on a very much larger scale than I had imagined. The spoil banks, which represented the thousands of tons removed, had been built up into a great horseshoe around it, which now made a considerable hill. In the concavity of this horseshoe, composed of chalk, clay, coal, and granite, there rose up a bristle of iron pillars and wheels from which the pumps and the lifts were operated. They connected with the brick power building which filled up the gap in the horseshoe. Beyond it lay the open mouth of the shaft, a huge yawning pit, some thirty or forty feet in diameter, lined and topped with brick and cement. As I craned my neck over the side and gazed down into the dreadful abyss, which I had been assured was eight miles deep, my brain reeled at the thought of what it represented. The sunlight struck the mouth of it diagonally, and I could only see some hundreds of yards of dirty white chalk, bricked here and there where the surface had seemed unstable. Even as I looked, however, I saw, far, far down in the darkness, a tiny speck of light, the smallest possible dot, but clear and steady against the inky background.

‘What is that light?’ I asked.

Malone bent over the parapet beside me.

‘That’s one of the cages coming up,’ said he. ‘Rather wonderful, is it not? That is a mile or more from us, and that little gleam is a powerful arc lamp. It travels quickly, and will be here in a few minutes.’

Sure enough the pin-point of light came larger and larger, until it flooded the tube with its silvery radiance, and I had to turn away my eyes from its blinding glare. A moment later the iron cage clashed up to the landing stage, and four men crawled out of it and passed on to the entrance.

‘Nearly all in,’ said Malone. ‘It is no joke to do a two-hour shift at that depth. Well, some of your stuff is ready to hand here. I suppose the best thing we can do is to go down. Then you will be able to judge the situation for yourself.’

There was an annexe to the engine-house into which he led me. A number of baggy suits of the lightest tussore material were hanging from the wall. Following Malone’s example I took off every stitch of my clothes, and put on one of these suits, together with a pair of rubber-soled slippers. Malone finished before I did and left the dressing-room. A moment later I heard a noise like ten dog-fights rolled into one, and rushing out I found my friend rolling on the ground with his arms round the workman who was helping to stack my artesian tubing. He was endeavouring to tear something from him to which the other was most desperately clinging. But Malone was too strong for him, tore the object out of his grasp, and danced upon it until it was shattered to pieces. Only then did I recognise that it was a photographic camera. My grimy-faced artisan rose ruefully from the floor.

‘Confound you, Ted Malone!’ said he. ‘That was a new ten-guinea machine.’

‘Can’t help it, Roy. I saw you take the snap, and there was only one thing to do.’

‘How the devil did you get mixed up with my outfit?’ I asked, with righteous indignation.

The rascal winked and grinned. ‘There are always and means,’ said he.

‘But don’t blame your foreman. He thought it was just a rag. I swapped clothes with his assistant, and in I came.’

‘And out you go,’ said Malone. ‘No use arguing, Roy. If Challenger were here he would set the dogs on you. I’ve been in a hole myself so I won’t be hard, but I am watch-dog here, and I can bite as well as bark.

Come on! Out you march!’

So our enterprising visitor was marched by two grinning workmen out of the compound. So now the public will at last understand the genesis of that wonderful four-column article headed ‘Mad Dream of a Scientist’ with the subtitle. ‘A Bee-line to Australia,’ which appeared in The Adviser some days later and brought Challenger to the verge of apoplexy, and the editor of The Adviser to the most disagreeable and dangerous interview of his lifetime. The article was a highly coloured and exaggerated account of the adventure of Roy Perkins, ‘our experienced war correspondent’ and it contained such purple passages as ‘this hirsute bully of Enmore Gardens,’ ‘a compound guarded by barbed wire, plug-uglies, and bloodhounds,’ and finally, ‘I was dragged from the edge of the Anglo-Australian tunnel by two ruffians, the more savage being a jack-of-all trades whom I had previously known by sight as a hanger-on of the journalistic profession, while the other, a sinister figure in a strange tropical garb, was posing as an Artesian engineer, though his appearance was more reminiscent of Whitechapel.’ Having ticked us off in this way, the rascal had an elaborate description of rails at the pit mouth, and of a zigzag excavation by which funicular trains were to burrow into the earth.

The only practical inconvenience arising from the article was that it notably increased that line of loafers who sat upon the South Downs waiting for something to happen. The day came when it did happen and when they wished themselves elsewhere.

My foreman with his faked assistant had littered the place with all my apparatus, my bellbox, my crowsfoot, the V-drills, the rods, and the weight, but Malone insisted that we disregard all that and descend ourselves to the lowest level. To this end we entered the cage, which was of latticed steel, and in the company of the chief engineer we shot down into the bowels of the earth. There were a series of automatic lifts, each with its own operating station hollowed out in the side of the excavation. They operated with great speed, and the experience was more like a vertical railway journey than the deliberate fall which we associate with the British lift.

Since the cage was latticed and brightly illuminated, we had a clear view of the strata which we passed. I was conscious of each of them as we flashed past. There were the sallow lower chalk, the coffee-coloured Hastings beds, the lighter Ashburnham beds, the dark carboniferous clays, and then, gleaming in the electric light, band after band of jet-black, sparkling coal alternating with the rings of clay. Here and there brickwork had been inserted, but as a rule the shaft was self-supported, and one could but marvel at the immense labour and mechanical skill which it represented. Beneath the coal-beds I was conscious of jumbled strata of a concrete-like appearance, and then we shot down into the primitive granite, where the quartz crystals gleamed and twinkled as if the dark walls were sown with the dust of diamonds. Down we went and ever down — lower now than ever mortals had ever before penetrated. The archaic rocks varied wonderfully in colour, and I can never forget one broad belt of rose-coloured felspar, which shone with an unearthly beauty before our powerful lamps. Stage after stage, and lift after lift, the air getting ever closer and hotter until even the light tussore garments were intolerable and the sweat was pouring down into those rubber-soled slippers. At last, just as I was thinking that I could stand it no more, the last lift came to a stand and we stepped out upon a circular platform which had been cut in the rock. I noticed that Malone gave a curiously suspicious glance round at the walls as he did so. If I did not know him to be amongst the bravest of men, I should say that he was exceedingly nervous.

‘Funny-looking stuff,’ said the chief engineer, passing his hand over the nearest section of rock. He held it to the light and showed that it was glistening with a curious slimy scum.

‘There have been shiverings and tremblings down here. I don’t know what we are dealing with. The Professor seems pleased with it, but it’s all new to me.’

‘I am bound to say I’ve seen that wall fairly shake itself,’ said Malone. ‘Last time I was down here we fixed those two cross-beams for your drill, and when we cut into it for the supports it winced at every stroke. The old man’s theory seemed absurd in solid old London town, but down here, eight miles under the surface, I am not so sure about it.’

‘If you saw what was under that tarpaulin you would be even less sure,’ said the engineer. ‘All this lower rock cut like cheese, and when we were through it we came on a new formation like nothing on earth. “Cover it up! Don’t touch it!” said the Professor. So we tarpaulined it according to his instructions, and there it lies.

‘Could we not have a look?’

A frightened expression came over the engineer’s lugubrious countenance.

‘It’s no joke disobeying the Professor,’ said he. ‘He is so damn cunning, too, that you never know what check he has set on you. However, we’ll have a peep and chance it.’

He turned down our reflector lamp so that the light gleamed upon the black tarpaulin. Then he stooped and, seizing a rope which connected up with the corner of the covering, he disclosed half-a-dozen square yards of the surface beneath it.

It was a most extraordinary and terrifying sight. The floor consisted of some greyish material, glazed and shiny, which rose and fell in slow palpitation. The throbs were not direct, but gave the impression of a gentle ripple or rhythm, which ran across the surface. This surface itself was not entirely homogeneous, but beneath it, seen as through ground glass, there were dim whitish patches or vacuoles, which varied constantly in shape and size. We stood all three gazing spell-bound at this extraordinary sight.

‘Does look rather like a skinned animal,’ said Malone, in an awed whisper. ‘The old man may not be so far out with his blessed echinus.’

‘Good Lord!’ I cried. ‘And am I to plunge a harpoon into that beast!’

‘That’s your privilege, my son,’ said Malone, ‘and, sad to relate, unless I give it a miss in baulk, I shall have to be at your side when you do it.’

‘Well, I won’t,’ said the head engineer, with decision.

‘I was never clearer on anything than I am on that. If the old man insists, then I resign my portfolio. Good Lord, look at that!’

The grey surface gave a sudden heave upwards, welling towards us as a wave does when you look down from the bulwarks. Then it subsided and the dim beatings and throbbings continued as before. Barforth lowered the rope and replaced the tarpaulin.

‘Seemed almost as if it knew we were here,’ said he.

‘Why should it swell up towards us like that? I expect the light had some sort of effect upon it.’

‘What am I expected to do now?’ I asked. Mr. Barforth pointed to two beams which lay across the pit just under the stopping place of the lift. There was an interval of about nine inches between them.

‘That was the old man’s idea,’ said he. ‘I think I could have fixed it better, but you might as well try to argue with a mad buffalo. It is easier and safer just to do whatever he says. His idea is that you should use your six-inch bore and fasten it in some way between these supports. ‘

‘Well, I don’t think there would be much difficulty about that,’ I answered. ‘I’ll take the job over as from to-day.’

It was, as one might imagine, the strangest experience of my very varied life which has included well-sinking in every continent upon earth. As Professor Challenger was so insistent that the operation should be started from a distance, and as I began to see a good deal of sense in his contention, I had to plan some method of electric control, which was easy enough as the pit was wired from top to bottom. With infinite care my foreman, Peters, and I brought down our lengths of tubing and stacked them on the rocky ledge. Then we raised the stage of the lowest lift so as to give ourselves room.

As we proposed to use the percussion system, for it would not do to trust entirely to gravity, we hung our hundred-pound weight over a pulley beneath the lift, and ran our tubes down beneath it with a V-shaped terminal. Finally, the rope which held the weight was secured to the side of the shaft in such a way that an electrical discharge would release it. It was delicate and difficult work done in a more than tropical heat, and with the ever-present feeling that a slip of a foot or the dropping of a tool upon the tarpaulin beneath us might bring about some inconceivable catastrophe. We were awed, too, by our surroundings. Again and again I have seen a strange quiver and shiver pass down the walls, and have even felt a dull throb against my hands as I touched them. Neither Peters nor I were very sorry when we signalled for the last time that we were ready for the surface, and were able to report to Mr. Barforth that Professor Challenger could make his experiment as soon as he chose.

And it was not long that we had to wait. Only three days after my date of completion my notice arrived.

It was an ordinary invitation card such as one uses for ‘at homes,’ and it ran thus:

‘PROFESSOR G. E. CHALLENGER,

‘F.R.S. MD., D.Sc., etc.

‘(late President Zoological Institute and holder of so many honorary degrees and appointments that they overtax the capacity of this card)

‘requests the attendance of

‘MR. JONES (no lady)

‘at 11.30 a.m. of Tuesday, June 21st, to witness a

‘remarkable triumph of mind over matter

‘at

‘HENGIST DOWN, SUSSEX.

‘Special train Victoria 10.5. Passengers pay their own fares. Lunch after the experiment or not — according to circumstances. Station, Storrington.

‘R.S.V.P. (and at once with name in block letters), 14 (Bis), Enmore Gardens, S.W.’

I found that Malone had just received a similar missive over which he was chuckling.

‘It is mere swank sending it to us,’ said he. ‘We have to be there whatever happens, as the hangman said to the murderer. But I tell you this has set all London buzzing. The old man is where he likes to be, with a pin-point limelight right on his hairy old head.’

And so at last the great day came. Personally I thought it well to go down the night before so as to be sure that everything was in order. Our borer was fixed in position, the weight was adjusted, the electric contacts could be easily switched on, and I was satisfied that my own part in this strange experiment would be carried out without a hitch. The electric controls were operated at a point some five hundred yards from the mouth of the shaft, to minimize any personal danger. When on the fateful morning, an ideal English summer day, I came to the surface with my mind assured, I climbed half-way up the slope of the Down in order to have a general view of the proceedings.

All the world seemed to be coming to Hengist Down. As far as we could see the roads were dotted with people. Motor-cars came bumping and swaying down the lanes, and discharged their passengers at the gate of the compound. This was in most cases the end of their progress. A powerful band of janitors waited at the entrance, and no promises or bribes, but only the production of the coveted buff tickets, could get them any farther. They dispersed therefore and joined the vast crowd which was already assembling on the side of the hill and covering the ridge with a dense mass of spectators. The place was like Epsom Downs on the Derby Day. Inside the compound certain areas had been wired-off, and the various privileged people were conducted to the particular pen to which they had been allotted. There was one for peers, one for members of the House of Commons, and one for the heads of learned societies and the men of fame in the scientific world, including Le Pellier of the Sorbonne and Dr. Driesinger of the Berlin Academy. A special reserved enclosure with sandbags and a corrugated iron roof was set aside for three members of the Royal Family.

At a quarter past eleven a succession of chars-a-bancs brought up specially-invited guests from the station and I went down into the compound to assist at the reception.

Professor Challenger stood by the select enclosure, resplendent in frock-coat, white waistcoat, and burnished top-hat, his expression a blend of overpowering and almost offensive benevolence, mixed with most portentous self-importance.

‘Clearly a typical victim of the Jehovah complex,’ as one of his critics described him. He assisted in conducting and occasionally in propelling his guests into their proper places, and then, having gathered the elite of the company around him, he took his station upon the top of a convenient hillock and looked around him with the air of the chairman who expects some welcoming applause. As none was forthcoming, he plunged at once into his subject, his voice booming to the farthest extremities of the enclosure.

‘Gentlemen,’ he roared, ‘upon this occasion I have no need to include the ladies. If I have not invited them to be present with us this morning it is not, I can assure you, for want of appreciation, for I may say’ — with elephantine humour and mock modesty—’that the relations between us upon both sides have always been excellent, and indeed intimate. The real reason is that some small element of danger is involved in our experiment, though it is not sufficient to justify the discomposure which I see upon many of your faces. It will interest the members of the Press to know that I have reserved very special seats for them upon the spoil banks which immediately overlook the scene of the operation. They have shown an interest which is sometimes indistinguishable from impertinence in my affairs, so that on this occasion at least they cannot complain that I have been remiss in studying their convenience. If nothing happens, which is always possible, I have at least done my best for them. If, on the other hand, something does happen, they will be in an excellent position to experience and record it, should they ultimately feel equal to the task.

‘It is, as you will readily understand, impossible for a man of science to explain to what I may describe, without undue disrespect, as the common herd, the various reasons for his conclusions or his actions. I hear some unmannerly interruptions, and I will ask the gentleman with the horn spectacles to cease waving his umbrella. (A voice: “Your description of your guests, sir, is most offensive.”) Possibly it is my phrase, “the common herd,” which has ruffled the gentleman. Let us say, then, that my listeners are a most uncommon herd. We will not quibble over phrases. I was about to say, before I was interrupted by this unseemly remark, that the whole matter is very fully and lucidly discussed in my forthcoming volume upon the earth, which I may describe with all due modesty as one of the epoch-making books of the world’s history. (General interruption and cries of “Get down to the facts!” “What are we here for?” “Is this a practical joke?”) I was about to make the matter clear, and if I have any further interruption I shall be compelled to take means to preserve decency and order, the lack of which is so painfully obvious. The position is, then, that I have sunk a shaft through the crust of the earth and that I am about to try the effect of a vigorous stimulation of its sensory cortex, a delicate operation which will be carried out by my subordinates, Mr. Peerless Jones, a self-styled expert in Artesian borings, and Mr. Edward Malone, who represents myself upon this occasion. The exposed and sensitive substance will be pricked, and how it will react is a matter for conjecture. If you will now kindly take your seats these two gentlemen will descend into the pit and make the final adjustments. I will then press the electric button upon this table and the experiment will be complete.'

An audience after one of Challenger's harangues usually felt as if, like the earth, its protective epidermis had been pierced and its nerves laid bare. This assembly was no exception, and there was a dull murmur of criticism and resentment as they returned to their places.

Challenger sat alone on the top of the mound, a small table beside him, his black mane and beard vibrating with excitement, a most portentous figure.

Neither Malone nor I could admire the scene, however, for we hurried off upon our extraordinary errand. Twenty minutes later we were at the bottom of the shaft, and had pulled the tarpaulin from the exposed surface.

It was an amazing sight which lay before us. By some strange cosmic telepathy the old planet seemed to know that an unheard-of liberty was about to be attempted. The exposed surface was like a boiling pot. Great grey bubbles rose and burst with a crackling report. The air-spaces and vacuoles below the skin separated and coalesced in an agitated activity. The transverse ripples were stronger and faster in their rhythm than before. A dark purple fluid appeared to pulse in the tortuous anastomoses of channels which lay under the surface. The throb of life was in it all. A heavy smell made the air hardly fit for human lungs.

My gaze was fixed upon this strange spectacle when Malone at my elbow gave a sudden gasp of alarm. 'My God, Jones!' he cried. 'Look there!'

I gave one glance, and the next instant I released the electric connection and I sprang into the lift. 'Come on!' I cried. 'It may be a race for life!'

What we had seen was indeed alarming. The whole lower shaft, it would seem, had shared in the increased activity which we had observed below, and the walls were throbbing and pulsing in sympathy. This movement had reacted upon the holes in which the beams rested, and it was clear that a very little further retraction — a matter of inches — the beams would fall. If they did so then the sharp end of my rod would, of course, penetrate the earth quite independently of the electric release. Before that happened it was vital that Malone and I should be out of the shaft. To be eight miles down in the earth with the chance any instant of some extraordinary convulsion taking place was a terrible prospect. We fled wildly for the surface.

Shall either of us ever forget that nightmare journey? The lifts whizzed and buzzed and yet the minutes seemed to be hours. As we reached each stage we sprang out, jumped into the next lift, touched the release and flew onwards. Through the steel latticed roof we could see far away the little circle of light which marked the mouth of the shaft. Now it grew wider and wider, until it came full circle and our glad eyes rested upon the brickwork of the opening. Up we shot, and up — and then at last in a glad moment of joy and thankfulness we sprang out of our prison and had our feet upon the green sward once more. But it was touch and go. We had not gone thirty paces from the shaft when far down in the depths my iron dart shot into the nerve ganglion of old Mother Earth and the great moment had arrived.

What was it happened? Neither Malone nor I was in a position to say, for both of us were swept off our feet as by a cyclone and swirled along the grass, revolving round and round like two curling stones upon an ice rink. At the same time our ears were assailed by the most horrible yell that ever yet was heard. Who is there of all the hundreds who have attempted it who has ever yet described adequately that terrible cry? It was a howl in which pain, anger, menace, and the outraged majesty of Nature all blended into one hideous shriek. For a full minute it lasted, a thousand sirens in one, paralysing all the great multitude with its fierce insistence, and floating away through the still summer air until it went echoing along the whole South Coast and even reached our French neighbours across the Channel. No sound in history has ever equalled the cry of the injured Earth.

Dazed and deafened, Malone and I were aware of the shock and of the sound, but it is from the narrative of others that we learned the other details of that extraordinary scene.

The first emergence from the bowels of the earth consisted of the lift cages. The other machinery being against the walls escaped the blast, but the solid floors of the cages took the full force of the upward current. When several separate pellets are placed in a blow-pipe they still shoot forth in their order and separately from each other.

So the fourteen lift cages appeared one after the other in the air, each soaring after the other, and describing a glorious parabola which landed one of them in the sea near Worthing pier, and a second one in a field not far from Chichester. Spectators have averred that of all the strange sights that they had ever seen nothing could exceed that of the fourteen lift cages sailing serenely through the blue heavens.

Then came the geyser. It was an enormous spout of vile treacly substance of the consistence of tar, which shot up into the air to a height which has been computed at two thousand feet. An inquisitive aeroplane, which had been hovering over the scene, was picked off as by an Archie and made a forced landing, man and machine buried in filth. This horrible stuff, which had a most penetrating and nauseous odour, may have represented the life blood of the planet, or it may be, as Professor Driesinger and the Berlin School maintain, that it is a protective secretion, analogous to that of the skunk, which Nature has provided in order to defend Mother Earth from intrusive Challengers. If that were so the prime offender, seated on his throne upon the hillock, escaped untarnished, while the unfortunate Press were so soaked and saturated, being in the direct line of fire, that none of them was capable of entering decent society for many weeks. This gush of putridity was blown southwards by the breeze, and descended upon the unhappy crowd who had waited so long and so patiently upon the crest of the Downs to see what would happen. There were no casualties. No home was left desolate, but many were made odoriferous, and still carry within their walls some souvenir of that great occasion.

And then came the closing of the pit. As Nature slowly closes a wound from below upwards, so does the Earth with extreme rapidity mend any rent which is made in its vital substance. There was a prolonged high-pitched crash as the sides of the shaft came together, the sound, reverberating from the depths and then rising higher and higher until with a deafening bang the brick circle at the orifice flattened out and clashed together, while a tremor like a small earthquake shook down the spoil banks and piled a pyramid fifty feet high of debris and broken iron over the spot where the hole had been. Professor Challenger’s experiment was not only finished, it was buried from human sight for ever. If it were not for the obelisk which has now been erected by the Royal Society it is doubtful if our descendants would ever know the exact site of that remarkable occurrence.

And then came the grand finale. For a long period after these successive phenomena there was a hush and a tense stillness as folk reassembled their wits and tried to realise exactly what had occurred and how it had come about. And then suddenly the mighty achievement, the huge sweep of the conception, the genius and wonder of the execution, broke upon their minds. With one impulse they turned upon Challenger. From every part of the field there came the cries of admiration, and from his hillock he could look down upon the lake of upturned faces broken only by the rise and fall of the waving handkerchiefs. As I look back I see him best as I saw him then. He rose from his chair, his eyes half closed, a smile of conscious merit upon his face, his left hand upon his hip, his right buried in the breast of his frock-coat. Surely that picture will be fixed for ever, for I heard the cameras clicking round me like crickets in a field.

The June sun shone golden upon him as he turned gravely bowing to each quarter of the compass. Challenger the super scientist, Challenger the arch-pioneer, Challenger the first man of all men whom Mother Earth had been compelled to recognise.

Only a word by way of epilogue. It is of course well known that the effect of the experiment was a world-wide one. It is true that nowhere did the injured planet emit such a howl as at the actual point of penetration, but she showed that she was indeed one entity by her conduct elsewhere. Through every vent and every volcano she voiced her indignation. Hecla bellowed until the Icelanders feared a cataclysm. Vesuvius blew its head off. Etna spewed up a quantity of lava, and a suit of half-a-million lira damages has been decided against Challenger in the Italian Courts for the destruction of vineyards. Even in Mexico and in the belt of Central America there were signs of intense Plutonic indignation, and the howls of Stromboli filled the whole Eastern Mediterranean. It has been the common ambition of mankind to set the whole world talking. To set the whole world screaming was the privilege of Challenger alone.

THE END

THE DISINTEGRATION MACHINE

This Challenger short story was first published in the *Strand Magazine* in January 1929. The story centres around the discovery of a machine capable of disintegrating objects and reforming them as they were.

THE DISINTERGRATION MACHINE

PROFESSOR CHALLENGER was in the worst possible humour. As I stood at the door of his study, my hand upon the handle and my foot upon the mat, I heard a monologue which ran like this, the words booming and reverberating through the house:

‘Yes, I say it is the second wrong call. The second in one morning. Do you imagine that a man of science is to be distracted from essential work by the constant interference of some idiot at the end of a wire? I will not have it. Send this instant for the manager. Oh! you are the manager. Well, why don’t you manage? Yes, you certainly manage to distract me from work the importance of which your mind is incapable of understanding. I want the superintendent. He is away? So I should imagine. I will carry you to the law courts if this occurs again. Crowing cocks have been adjudicated upon. I myself have obtained a judgement. If crowing cocks, why not jangling bells? The case is clear. A written apology. Very good. I will consider it. Good morning.’

It was at this point that I ventured to make my entrance. It was certainly an unfortunate moment. I confronted him as he turned from the telephone — a lion in its wrath. His huge black beard was bristling, his great chest was heaving with indignation, and his arrogant grey eyes swept me up and down as the backwash of his anger fell upon me.

‘Infernal, idle, overpaid rascals!’ he boomed. ‘I could hear them laughing while I was making my just complaint. There is a conspiracy to annoy me. And now, young Malone, you arrive to complete a disastrous morning. Are you here, may I ask, on your own account, or has your rag commissioned you to obtain an interview? As a friend you are privileged — as a journalist you are outside the pale.’

I was hunting in my pocket for McArdle’s letter when suddenly some new grievance came to his memory. His great hairy hands fumbled about among the papers upon his desk and finally extracted a press cutting.

‘You have been good enough to allude to me in one of your recent lucubrations,’ he said, shaking the paper at me. ‘It was in the course of your somewhat fatuous remarks concerning the recent Saurian remains discovered in the Solenhofen Slates. You began a paragraph with the words: “Professor G. E. Challenger, who is among our greatest living scientists—”’

‘Well, sir?’ I asked.

‘Why these invidious qualifications and limitations? Perhaps you can mention who these other predominant scientific men may be to whom you impute equality, or possibly superiority to myself?’

‘It was badly worded. I should certainly have said: “Our greatest living scientist,”’ I admitted. It was after all my own honest belief. My words turned winter into summer.

‘My dear young friend, do not imagine that I am exacting, but surrounded as I am by pugnacious and unreasonable colleagues, one is forced to take one’s own part. Self-assertion is foreign to my nature, but I have to hold my ground against opposition. Come now! Sit here! What is the reason of your visit?’

I had to tread warily, for I knew how easy it was to set the lion roaring once again. I opened McArdle’s letter. ‘May I read you this, sir? It is from McArdle, my editor.’

‘I remember the man — not an unfavourable specimen of his class.’

‘He has, at least, a very high admiration for you. He has turned to you again and again when he needed the highest qualities in some investigation. That is the case now.’

‘What does he desire?’ Challenger plumed himself like some unwieldy bird under the influence of flattery. He sat down with his elbows upon the desk, his gorilla hands clasped together, his beard bristling forward, and his big grey eyes, half-covered by his drooping lids, fixed benignly upon me. He was huge in all that he did, and his benevolence was even more overpowering than his truculence.

‘I’ll read you his note to me. He says:

“Please call upon our esteemed friend, Professor Challenger, and ask for his co-operation in the following circumstances. There is a Latvian gentleman named Theodore Nemor living at White Friars Mansions, Hampstead, who claims to have invented a machine of a most extraordinary character which is capable of disintegrating any object placed within its sphere of influence. Matter dissolves and returns to its molecular or atomic condition. By reversing the process it can be reassembled. The claim seems to be an extravagant one, and yet there is solid evidence that there is some basis for it and that the man has stumbled upon some remarkable discovery.

"I need not enlarge upon the revolutionary character of such an invention, nor of its extreme importance as a potential weapon of war. A force which could disintegrate a battleship, or turn a battalion, if it were only for a time, into a collection of atoms, would dominate the world. For social and for political reasons not an instant is to be lost in getting to the bottom of the affair. The man courts publicity as he is anxious to sell his invention, so that there is no difficulty in approaching him. The enclosed card will open his doors. What I desire is that you and Professor Challenger shall call upon him, inspect his invention, and write for the Gazette a considered report upon the value of the discovery. I expect to hear from you to-night. — R. McARDLE."

'There are my instructions, Professor,' I added, as I refolded the letter. 'I sincerely hope that you will come with me, for how can I, with my limited capacities, act alone in such a matter?'

'True, Malone! True!' purred the great man. 'Though you are by no means destitute of natural intelligence, I agree with you that you would be somewhat overweighted in such a matter as you lay before me. These unutterable people upon the telephone have already ruined my morning's work, so that a little more can hardly matter. I am engaged in answering that Italian buffoon, Mazotti, whose views upon the larval development of the tropical termites have excited my derision and contempt, but I can leave the complete exposure of the impostor until evening. Meanwhile, I am at your service.'

And thus it came about that on that October morning I found myself in the deep level tube with the Professor speeding to the North of London in what proved to be one of the most singular experiences of my remarkable life.

I had, before leaving Enmore Gardens, ascertained by the much-abused telephone that our man was at home, and had warned him of our coming. He lived in a comfortable flat in Hampstead, and he kept us waiting for quite half an hour in his ante-room whilst he carried on an animated conversation with a group of visitors, whose voices, as they finally bade farewell in the hall, showed that they were Russians. I caught a glimpse of them through the half-opened door, and had a passing impression of prosperous and intelligent men, with astrakhan collars to their coats, glistening top-hats, and every appearance of that bourgeois well-being which the successful Communist so readily assumes. The hall door closed behind them, and the next instant Theodore Nemor entered our apartment. I can see him now as he stood with the sunlight full upon him, rubbing his long, thin hands together and surveying us with his broad smile and his cunning yellow eyes.

He was a short, thick man, with some suggestion of deformity in his body, though it was difficult to say where that suggestion lay. One might say that he was a hunchback without the hump. His large, soft face was like an underdone dumpling, of the same colour and moist consistency, while the pimples and blotches which adorned it stood out the more aggressively against the pallid background. His eyes were those of a cat, and catlike was the thin, long, bristling moustache above his loose, wet, slobbering mouth. It was all low and repulsive until one came to the sandy eyebrows. From these upwards there was a splendid cranial arch such as I have seldom seen. Even Challenger's hat might have fitted that magnificent head. One might read Theodore Nemor as a vile, crawling conspirator below, but above he might take rank with the great thinkers and philosophers of the world.

'Well, gentlemen,' said he, in a velvety voice with only the least trace of a foreign accent, 'you have come, as I understand from our short chat over the wires, in order to learn more of the Nemor Disintegrator. Is it so?'

'Exactly.'

'May I ask whether you represent the British Government?'

'Not at all. I am a correspondent of the Gazette, and this is Professor Challenger.'

'An honoured name — a European name.' His yellow fangs gleamed in obsequious amiability. 'I was about to say that the British Government has lost its chance. What else it has lost it may find out later. Possibly its Empire as well. I was prepared to sell to the first Government which gave me its price, and if it has now fallen into hands of which you may disapprove, you have only yourselves to blame.'

'Then you have sold your secret?'

'At my own price.'

'You think the purchaser will have a monopoly?'

'Undoubtedly he will.'

'But others know the secret as well as you.'

'No, sir.' He touched his great forehead.

'This is the safe in which the secret is securely locked — a better safe than any of steel, and secured by something better than a Yale key. Some may know one side of the matter: others may know another. No one in the world knows the whole matter save only I.'

'And these gentlemen to whom you have sold it.'

'No, sir; I am not so foolish as to hand over the knowledge until the price is paid. After that it is I whom they buy, and they move this safe' he again tapped his brow 'with all its contents to whatever point they desire. My part of the bargain will then be done — faithfully, ruthlessly done. After that, history will be made.' He rubbed his hands together and the fixed smile upon his face twisted itself into something like a snarl.

'You will excuse me, sir,' boomed Challenger, who had sat in silence up to now, but whose expressive face registered most complete disapproval of Theodore Nemor, 'we should wish before we discuss the matter to convince ourselves that there is something to discuss. We have not forgotten a recent case where an Italian, who proposed to explode mines from a distance, proved upon investigation to be an arrant impostor. History may well repeat itself. You will understand, sir, that I have a reputation to sustain as a man of science — a reputation which you have been good enough to describe as European, though I have every reason to believe that it is not less conspicuous in America. Caution is a scientific attribute, and you must show us your proofs before we can seriously consider your claims.'

Nemor cast a particularly malignant glance from the yellow eyes at my companion, but the smile of affected geniality broadened his face.

'You live up to your reputation, Professor. I had always heard that you were the last man in the world who could be deceived. I am prepared to give you an actual demonstration which cannot fail to convince you, but before we proceed to that I must say a few words upon the general principle.

'You will realise that the experimental plant which I have erected here in my laboratory is a mere model, though within its limits it acts most admirably. There would be no possible difficulty, for example, in disintegrating you and reassembling you, but it is not for such a purpose as that that a great Government is prepared to pay a price which runs into millions. My model is a mere scientific toy. It is only when the same force is invoked upon a large scale that enormous practical effects could be achieved.'

'May we see this model?'

‘You will not only see it, Professor Challenger, but you will have the most conclusive demonstration possible upon your own person, if you have the courage to submit to it.’

‘If!’ the lion began to roar. ‘Your “if,” sir, is in the highest degree offensive.’

‘Well, well. I had no intention to dispute your courage. I will only say that I will give you an opportunity to demonstrate It. But I would first say a few words upon the underlying laws which govern the matter.

‘When certain crystals, salt, for example, or sugar, are placed in water they dissolve and disappear. You would not know that they have ever been there. Then by evaporation or otherwise you lessen the amount of water, and lo! there are your crystals again, visible once more and the same as before. Can you conceive a process by which you, an organic being, are in the same way dissolved into the cosmos, and then by a subtle reversal of the conditions reassembled once more?’

‘The analogy is a false one,’ cried Challenger. ‘Even if I make so monstrous an admission as that our molecules could be dispersed by some disrupting power, why should they reassemble in exactly the same order as before?’

‘The objection is an obvious one, and I can only answer that they do so reassemble down to the last atom of the structure. There is an invisible framework and every brick flies into its true place. You may smile, Professor, but your incredulity and your smile may soon be replaced by quite another emotion.’

Challenger shrugged his shoulders. ‘I am quite ready to submit it to the test.’

‘There is another case which I would impress upon you, gentlemen, and which may help you to grasp the idea. You have heard both in Oriental magic and in Western occultism of the phenomenon of the apport when some object is suddenly brought from a distance and appears in a new place. How can such a thing be done save by the loosening of the molecules, their conveyance upon an etheric wave, and their reassembling, each exactly in its own place, drawn together by some irresistible law? That seems a fair analogy to that which is done by my machine.’

‘You cannot explain one incredible thing by quoting another incredible thing,’ said Challenger. ‘I do not believe in your apports, Mr. Nemor, and I do not believe in your machine. My time is valuable, and if we are to have any sort of demonstration I would beg you to proceed with it without further ceremony. ‘

‘Then you will be pleased to follow me,’ said the inventor. He led us down the stair of the flat and across a small garden which lay behind. There was a considerable outhouse, which he unlocked and we entered.

Inside was a large whitewashed room with innumerable copper wires hanging in festoons from the ceiling, and a huge magnet balanced upon a pedestal. In front of this was what looked like a prism of glass, three feet in length and about a foot in diameter. To the right of it was a chair which rested upon a platform of zinc, and which had a burnished copper cap suspended above it. Both the cap and the chair had heavy wires attached to them, and at the side was a sort of ratchet with numbered slots and a handle covered with indiarubber which lay at present in the slot marked zero.

‘Nemor’s Disintegrator,’ said this strange man, waving his hand towards the machine

‘This is the model which is destined to be famous, as altering the balance of power among the nations. Who holds this rules the world. Now, Professor Challenger, you have, if I may say so, treated me with some lack of courtesy and consideration in this matter. Will you dare to sit upon that chair and to allow me to demonstrate upon your own body the capabilities of the new force?’

Challenger had the courage of a lion, and anything in the nature of a defiance roused him in an instant to a frenzy He rushed at the machine, but I seized his arm and held him back.

‘You shall not go,’ I said. ‘Your life is too valuable. It is monstrous. What possible guarantee of safety have you? The nearest approach to that apparatus which I have ever seen was the electrocution chair at Sing Sing.’

‘My guarantee of safety,’ said Challenger, ‘is that you are a witness and that this person would certainly be held for manslaughter at the least should anything befall me.’

‘That would be a poor consolation to the world of science, when you would leave work unfinished which none but you can do. Let me, at least, go first, and then, when the experience proves to be harmless, you can follow.’

Personal danger would never have moved Challenger, but the idea that his scientific work might remain unfinished hit him hard. He hesitated, and before he could make up his mind I had dashed forward and jumped into the chair. I saw the inventor put his hand to the handle. I was aware of a click. Then for a moment there was a sensation of confusion and a mist before my eyes. When they cleared, the inventor with his odious smile was standing before me, and Challenger, with his apple-red cheeks drained of blood and colour, was staring over his shoulder.

‘Well, get on with it!’ said I.

‘It is all over. You responded admirably,’ Nemor replied. ‘Step out, and Professor Challenger will now, no doubt, be ready to take his turn.’

I have never seen my old friend so utterly upset. His iron nerve had for a moment completely failed him. He grasped my arm with a shaking hand.

‘My God, Malone, it is true,’ said he. ‘You vanished. There is not a doubt of it. There was a mist for an instant and then vacancy.’

‘How long was I away?’

‘Two or three minutes. I was, I confess, horrified. I could not imagine that you would return. Then he clicked this lever, if it is a lever, into a new slot and there you were upon the chair, looking a little bewildered but otherwise the same as ever. I thanked God at the sight of you!’ He mopped his moist brow with his big red handkerchief.

‘Now, sir,’ said the inventor. ‘Or perhaps your nerve has failed you?’

Challenger visibly braced himself. Then, pushing my protesting hand to one side, he seated himself upon the chair. The handle clicked into number three. He was gone.

I should have been horrified but for the perfect coolness of the operator. ‘It is an interesting process, is it not?’ he remarked. ‘When one considers the tremendous individuality of the Professor it is strange to think that he is at present a molecular cloud suspended in some portion of this building. He is now, of course, entirely at my mercy. If I choose to leave him in suspension there is nothing on earth to prevent me.’

‘I would very soon find means to prevent you.’

The smile once again became a snarl. ‘You cannot imagine that such a thought ever entered my mind. Good heavens! Think of the permanent dissolution of the great Professor Challenger vanished into cosmic space and left no trace! Terrible! Terrible! At the same time he has not been as courteous as he might. Don’t you think some small lesson — ?’

‘No, I do not.’

‘Well, we will call it a curious demonstration. Something that would make an interesting paragraph in your paper. For example, I have discovered that the hair of the body being on an entirely different vibration to the living organic tissues can be included or excluded at will. It would interest me to see the bear without his bristles. Behold him!'

There was the click of the lever. An instant later Challenger was seated upon the chair once more. But what a Challenger! What a shorn lion! Furious as I was at the trick that had been played upon him I could hardly keep from roaring with laughter.

His huge head was as bald as a baby's and his chin was as smooth as a girl's. Bereft of his glorious mane the lower part of his face was heavily jowled and ham-shaped, while his whole appearance was that of an old fighting gladiator, battered and bulging, with the jaws of a bulldog over a massive chin.

It may have been some look upon our faces — I have no doubt that the evil grin of my companion had widened at the sight — but, however that may be, Challenger's hand flew up to his head and he became conscious of his condition. The next instant he had sprung out of his chair, seized the inventor by the throat, and had hurled him to the ground. Knowing Challenger's immense strength I was convinced that the man would be killed.

'For God's sake be careful. If you kill him we can never get matters right again!' I cried.

That argument prevailed. Even in his maddest moments Challenger was always open to reason. He sprang up from the floor, dragging the trembling inventor with him. 'I give you five minutes,' he panted in his fury. 'If in five minutes I am not as I was, I will choke the life out of your wretched little body.'

Challenger in a fury was not a safe person to argue with. The bravest man might shrink from him, and there were no signs that Mr. Nemor was a particularly brave man. On the contrary, those blotches and warts upon his face had suddenly become much more conspicuous as the face behind them changed from the colour of putty, which was normal, to that of a fish's belly. His limbs were shaking and he could hardly articulate.

'Really, Professor!' he babbled, with his hand to his throat, 'this violence is quite unnecessary. Surely a harmless joke may pass among friends. It was my wish to demonstrate the powers of the machine. I had imagined that you wanted a full demonstration. No offence, I assure you. Professor, none in the world!'

For answer Challenger climbed back into the chair.

‘You will keep your eye upon him, Malone. Do not permit any liberties.’

‘I’ll see to it, sir.’

‘Now then, set that matter right or take the consequences.’

The terrified inventor approached his machine. The reuniting power was turned on to the full, and in an instant, there was the old lion with his tangled mane once more. He stroked his beard affectionately with his hands and passed them over his cranium to be sure that the restoration was complete. Then he descended solemnly from his perch.

‘You have taken a liberty, sir, which might have had very serious consequences to yourself. However, I am content to accept your explanation that you only did it for purposes of demonstration. Now, may I ask you a few direct questions upon this remarkable power which you claim to have discovered?’

‘I am ready to answer anything save what the source of the power is. That is my secret.’

‘And do you seriously inform us that no one in the world knows this except yourself?’

‘No one has the least inkling.’

‘No assistants?’

‘No, sir. I work alone.’

‘Dear me! That is most interesting. You have satisfied me as to the reality of the power, but I do not yet perceive its practical bearings.’

‘I have explained, sir, that this is a model. But it would be quite easy to erect a plant upon a large scale. You understand that this acts vertically. Certain currents above you, and certain others below you, set up vibrations which either disintegrate or reunite. But the process could be lateral. If it were so conducted it would have the same effect, and cover a space in proportion to the strength of the current.’

‘Give an example.’

‘We will suppose that one pole was in one small vessel and one in another; a battleship between them would simply vanish into molecules. So also with a column of troops.’

‘And you have sold this secret as a monopoly to a single European Power?’

‘Yes, sir, I have. When the money is paid over they shall have such power as no nation ever had yet. You don’t even now see the full possibilities if placed in capable hands hands which did not fear to wield the weapon which they held. They are immeasurable.’ A gloating smile passed over the man’s evil face. ‘Conceive a quarter of London in which such machines have been erected. Imagine the effect of such a current upon the scale which could easily be adopted. Why,’ he burst into laughter, ‘I could imagine the whole Thames valley being swept clean, and not one man, woman, or child left of all these teeming millions!’

The words filled me with horror — and even more the air of exultation with which they were pronounced. They seemed, however, to produce quite a different effect upon my companion. To my surprise he broke into a genial smile and held out his hand to the inventor.

‘Well, Mr. Nemor, we have to congratulate you,’ said he. ‘There is no doubt that you have come upon a remarkable property of nature which you have succeeded in harnessing for the use of man. That this use should be destructive is no doubt very deplorable, but Science knows no distinctions of the sort, but follows knowledge wherever it may lead. Apart from the principle involved you have, I suppose, no objection to my examining the construction of the machine?’

‘None in the least. The machine is merely the body. It is the soul of it, the animating principle, which you can never hope to capture.’

‘Exactly. But the mere mechanism seems to be a model of ingenuity.’ For some time he walked round it and fingered its several parts. Then he hoisted his unwieldy bulk into the insulated chair.

‘Would you like another excursion into the cosmos?’ asked the inventor.

‘Later, perhaps — later! But meanwhile there is, as no doubt you know, some leakage of electricity. I can distinctly feel a weak current passing through me.’

‘Impossible. It is quite insulated.’

‘But I assure you that I feel it.’ He levered himself down from his perch.

The inventor hastened to take his place.

‘I can feel nothing.’

‘Is there not a tingling down your spine?’

‘No, sir, I do not observe it.’

There was a sharp click and the man had disappeared. I looked with amazement at Challenger. ‘Good heavens! Did you touch the machine, Professor?’

He smiled at me benignly with an air of mild surprise.

‘Dear me! I may have inadvertently touched the handle,’ said he. ‘One is very liable to have awkward incidents with a rough model of this kind. This lever should certainly be guarded.’

‘It is in number three. That is the slot which causes disintegration.’

‘So I observed when you were operated upon.’

‘But I was so excited when he brought you back that I did not see which was the proper slot for the return. Did you notice it?’

‘I may have noticed it, young Malone, but I do not burden my mind with small details. There are many slots and we do not know their purpose. We may make the matter worse if we experiment with the unknown. Perhaps it is better to leave matters as they are.’

‘And you would—’

‘Exactly. It is better so. The interesting personality of Mr. Theodore Nemor has distributed itself throughout the cosmos, his machine is worthless, and a certain foreign Government has been deprived of knowledge by which much harm might have been wrought. Not a bad morning’s work, young Malone. Your rag will no doubt have an interesting column upon the inexplicable disappearance of a Latvian inventor shortly after the visit of its own special correspondent. I have enjoyed the experience. These are the lighter moments which come to brighten the dull routine of study. But life has its duties as well as its pleasures, and I now return to the Italian Mazotti and his preposterous views upon the larval development of the tropical termites.’

Looking back, it seemed to me that a slight oleaginous mist was still hovering round the chair. ‘But surely—’ I urged.

‘The first duty of the law-abiding citizen is to prevent murder,’ said Professor Challenger. ‘I have done so. Enough, Malone, enough! The theme will not bear discussion. It has already disengaged my thoughts too long from matters of more importance.’

THE END

Historical Novels

'Undershaw', an imposing red-brick villa, near Hindhead, south of London, which Conan Doyle built for his ailing wife Louise

MICAH CLARKE

This historical adventure is set during the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685 in England. The novel is a bildungsroman whose protagonist Clarke begins as a boy seeking adventure in a rather romantic and naive way, falls under the influence of an older and vastly experienced, world-weary soldier of fortune, and becomes a grown up after numerous experiences, some of them very harrowing. In the process the book also records much of the history of the Monmouth Rebellion, but from the point of view of someone living in 17th century England. Much of the focus is upon the religious dimension of the conflict. The Rebellion was prompted by the desire of many to replace the Catholic King James with a Protestant rival. Micah Clarke is the son of a committed Protestant father who sends of Micah to fight in the same cause which he himself had fought in during the English Civil War. Much is made of the role of Protestant ministers in recruiting the rebel army and in motivating it’s soldiers. Micah Clarke himself becomes increasingly disillusioned with religious extremism and ultimately expresses the view that toleration is a great good. Conan Doyle had himself been brought up as a Catholic and it is likely that Micah expresses his own thoughts on the subject.

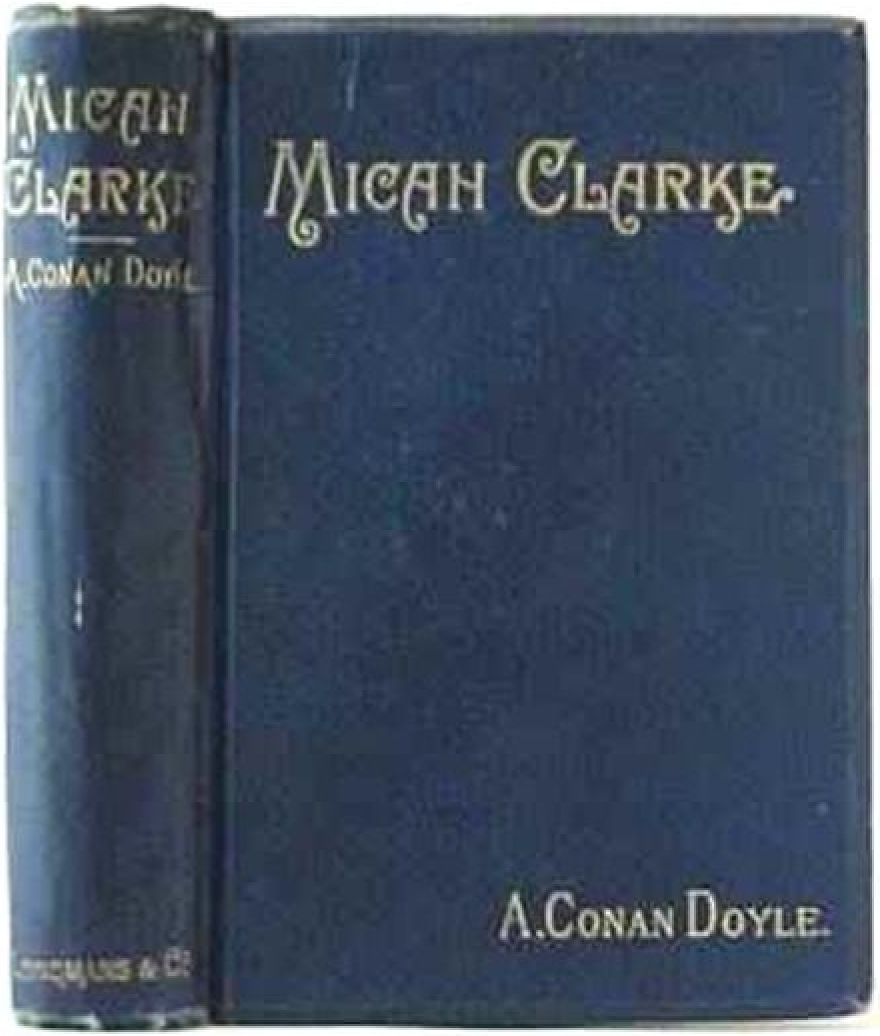
MICAH CLARKE
A. CONAN DOYLE
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The first edition

MICAH CLARKE

HIS STATEMENT AS MADE TO HIS THREE GRANDCHILDREN JOSEPH, GERVAS, AND REUBEN DURING THE HARD WINTER OF 1734

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CHAPTER I. Of Cornet Joseph Clarke of the Ironsides

It may be, my dear grandchildren, that at one time or another I have told you nearly all the incidents which have occurred during my adventurous life. To your father and to your mother, at least, I know that none of them are unfamiliar. Yet when I consider that time wears on, and that a grey head is apt to contain a failing memory, I am prompted to use these long winter evenings in putting it all before you from the beginning, that you may have it as one clear story in your minds, and pass it on as such to those who come after you. For now that the house of Brunswick is firmly established upon the throne and that peace prevails in the land, it will become less easy for you every year to understand how men felt when Englishmen were in arms against Englishmen, and when he who should have been the shield and the protector of his subjects had no thought but to force upon them what they most abhorred and detested.

My story is one which you may well treasure up in your memories, and tell again to others, for it is not likely that in this whole county of Hampshire, or even perhaps in all England, there is another left alive who is so well able to speak from his own knowledge of these events, or who has played a more forward part in them. All that I know I shall endeavour soberly and in due order to put before you. I shall try to make these dead men quicken into life for your behoof, and to call back out of the mists of the past those scenes which were brisk enough in the acting, though they read so dully and so heavily in the pages of the worthy men who have set themselves to record them. Perchance my words, too, might, in the ears of strangers, seem to be but an old man’s gossip. To you, however, who know that these eyes which are looking at you looked also at the things which I describe, and that this hand has struck in for a good cause, it will, I know, be different. Bear in mind as you listen that it was your quarrel as well as our own in which we fought, and that if now you grow up to be free men in a free land, privileged to think or to pray as your consciences shall direct, you may thank God that you are reaping the harvest which your fathers sowed in blood and suffering when the Stuarts were on the throne.

I was born then in the year 1664, at Havant, which is a flourishing village a few miles from Portsmouth off the main London road, and there it was that I spent the greater part of my youth. It is now as it was then, a pleasant, healthy spot, with a hundred or more brick cottages scattered along in a single irregular street, each with its little garden in front, and maybe a fruit tree or two at the back. In the middle of the village stood the old church with the square tower, and the great sun-dial like a wrinkle upon its grey weather-blotched face. On the outskirts the Presbyterians had their chapel; but when the Act of Uniformity was passed, their good minister, Master Breckinridge, whose discourses had often crowded his rude benches while the comfortable pews of the church were empty, was cast into gaol, and his flock dispersed. As to the Independents, of whom my father was one, they also were under the ban of the law, but they attended conventicle at Emsworth, whither we would trudge, rain or shine, on every Sabbath morning. These meetings were broken up more than once, but the congregation was composed of such harmless folk, so well beloved and respected by their neighbours, that the peace officers came after a time to ignore them, and to let them worship in their own fashion. There were Papists, too, amongst us, who were compelled to go as far as Portsmouth for their Mass. Thus, you see, small as was our village, we were a fair miniature of the whole country, for we had our sects and our factions, which were all the more bitter for being confined in so narrow a compass.

My father, Joseph Clarke, was better known over the countryside by the name of Ironside Joe, for he had served in his youth in the Yaxley troop of Oliver Cromwell’s famous regiment of horse, and had preached so lustily and fought so stoutly that old Noll himself called him out of the ranks after the fight at Dunbar, and raised him to a cornetcy. It chanced, however, that having some little time later fallen into an argument with one of his troopers concerning the mystery of the Trinity, the man, who was a half-crazy zealot, smote my father across the face, a favour which he returned by a thrust from his broadsword, which sent his adversary to test in person the truth of his beliefs. In most armies it would have been conceded that my father was within his rights in punishing promptly so rank an act of mutiny, but the soldiers of Cromwell had so high a notion of their own importance and privileges, that they resented this summary justice upon their companion. A court-martial sat upon my father, and it is likely that he would have been offered up as a sacrifice to appease the angry soldiery, had not the Lord

Protector interfered, and limited the punishment to dismissal from the army. Cornet Clarke was accordingly stripped of his buff coat and steel cap, and wandered down to Havant, where he settled into business as a leather merchant and tanner, thereby depriving Parliament of as trusty a soldier as ever drew blade in its service. Finding that he prospered in trade, he took as wife Mary Shepstone, a young Churchwoman, and I, Micah Clarke, was the first pledge of their union.

My father, as I remember him first, was tall and straight, with a great spread of shoulder and a mighty chest. His face was craggy and stern, with large harsh features, shaggy over-hanging brows, high-bridged fleshy nose, and a full-lipped mouth which tightened and set when he was angry. His grey eyes were piercing and soldier-like, yet I have seen them lighten up into a kindly and merry twinkle. His voice was the most tremendous and awe-inspiring that I have ever listened to. I can well believe what I have heard, that when he chanted the Hundredth Psalm as he rode down among the blue bonnets at Dunbar, the sound of him rose above the blare of trumpets and the crash of guns, like the deep roll of a breaking wave. Yet though he possessed every quality which was needed to raise him to distinction as an officer, he had thrown off his military habits when he returned to civil life. As he prospered and grew rich he might well have worn a sword, but instead he would ever bear a small copy of the Scriptures bound to his girdle, where other men hung their weapons. He was sober and measured in his speech, and it was seldom, even in the bosom of his own family, that he would speak of the scenes which he had taken part in, or of the great men, Fleetwood and Harrison, Blake and Ireton, Desborough and Lambert, some of whom had been simple troopers like himself when the troubles broke out. He was frugal in his eating, backward in drinking, and allowed himself no pleasures save three pipes a day of Oronooko tobacco, which he kept ever in a brown jar by the great wooden chair on the left-hand side of the mantelshelf.

Yet for all his self-restraint the old leaven would at times begin to work in him, and bring on fits of what his enemies would call fanaticism and his friends piety, though it must be confessed that this piety was prone to take a fierce and fiery shape. As I look back, one or two instances of that stand out so hard and clear in my recollection that they might be scenes which I had seen of late in the playhouse, instead of memories of my childhood more than threescore years ago, when the second Charles was on the throne.

The first of these occurred when I was so young that I can remember neither what went before nor what immediately after it. It stuck in my infant mind when other things slipped through it. We were all in the house one sultry summer evening, when there came a rattle of kettledrums and a clatter of hoofs, which brought my mother and my father to the door, she with me in her arms that I might have the better view. It was a regiment of horse on their way from Chichester to Portsmouth, with colours flying and band playing, making the bravest show that ever my youthful eyes had rested upon. With what wonder and admiration did I gaze at the sleek prancing steeds, the steel morions, the plumed hats of the officers, the scarfs and bandoliers. Never, I thought, had such a gallant company assembled, and I clapped my hands and cried out in my delight. My father smiled gravely, and took me from my mother's arms. 'Nay, lad,' he said, 'thou art a soldier's son, and should have more judgment than to commend such a rabble as this. Canst thou not, child as thou art, see that their arms are ill-found, their stirrup-irons rusted, and their ranks without order or cohesion? Neither have they thrown out a troop in advance, as should even in times of peace be done, and their rear is straggling from here to Bedhampton. Yea,' he continued, suddenly shaking his long arm at the troopers, and calling out to them, 'ye are corn ripe for the sickle and waiting only for the reapers!' Several of them reined up at this sudden out-flame. 'Hit the crop-eared rascal over the pate, Jack!' cried one to another, wheeling his horse round; but there was that in my father's face which caused him to fall back into the ranks again with his purpose unfulfilled. The regiment jingled on down the road, and my mother laid her thin hands upon my father's arm, and lulled with her pretty coaxing ways the sleeping devil which had stirred within him.

On another occasion which I can remember, about my seventh or eighth year, his wrath burst out with more dangerous effect. I was playing about him as he worked in the tanning-yard one spring afternoon, when in through the open doorway strutted two stately gentlemen, with gold facings to their coats and smart cockades at the side of their three-cornered hats. They were, as I afterwards understood, officers of the fleet who were passing through Havant, and seeing us at work in the yard, designed to ask us some question as to their route. The younger of the pair accosted my father and began his speech by a great clatter of words which were all High Dutch to me, though I now see that they were a string of such oaths as are common in the mouth of a sailor; though why the very men who are in most danger of appearing before the Almighty should go out of their way to insult Him, hath ever been a mystery to me. My father in a rough stern voice bade him speak with more reverence of sacred things, on which the pair of them gave tongue together, swearing tenfold worse than before, and calling my father a canting rogue and a smug-faced Presbytery Jack. What more they might have said I know not, for my father picked up the great roller wherewith he smoothed the leather, and dashing at them he brought it down on the side of one of their heads with such a swashing blow, that had it not been for his stiff hat the man would never have uttered oath again. As it was, he dropped like a log upon the stones of the yard, while his companion whipped out his rapier and made a vicious thrust; but my father, who was as active as he was strong, sprung aside, and bringing his cudgel down upon the outstretched arm of the officer, cracked it like the stem of a tobacco-pipe. This affair made no little stir, for it occurred at the time when those arch-liars, Oates, Bedloe, and Carstairs, were disturbing the public mind by their rumours of plots, and a rising of some sort was expected throughout the country. Within a few days all Hampshire was ringing with an account of the malcontent tanner of Havant, who had broken the head and the arm of two of his Majesty’s servants. An inquiry showed, however, that there was no treasonable meaning in the matter, and the officers having confessed that the first words came from them, the Justices contented themselves with imposing a fine upon my father, and binding him over to keep the peace for a period of six months.

I tell you these incidents that you may have an idea of the fierce and earnest religion which filled not only your own ancestor, but most of those men who were trained in the parliamentary armies. In many ways they were more like those fanatic Saracens, who believe in conversion by the sword, than the followers of a Christian creed. Yet they have this great merit, that their own lives were for the most part clean and commendable, for they rigidly adhered themselves to those laws which they would gladly have forced at the sword’s point upon others. It is true that among so many there were some whose piety was a shell for their ambition, and others who practised in secret what they denounced in public, but no cause however good is free from such hypocritical parasites. That the greater part of the saints, as they termed themselves, were men of sober and God-fearing lives, may be shown by the fact that, after the disbanding of the army of the

Commonwealth, the old soldiers flocked into trade throughout the country, and made their mark wherever they went by their industry and worth. There is many a wealthy business house now in England which can trace its rise to the thrift and honesty of some simple pikeman of Ireton or Cromwell.

But that I may help you to understand the character of your great-grandfather, I shall give an incident which shows how fervent and real were the emotions which prompted the violent moods which I have described. I was about twelve at the time, my brothers Hosea and Ephraim were respectively nine and seven, while little Ruth could scarce have been more than four. It chanced that a few days before a wandering preacher of the Independents had put up at our house, and his religious ministrations had left my father moody and excitable. One night I had gone to bed as usual, and was sound asleep with my two brothers beside me, when we were roused and ordered to come downstairs. Huddling on our clothes we followed him into the kitchen, where my mother was sitting pale and scared with Ruth upon her knee.

‘Gather round me, my children,’ he said, in a deep reverent voice, ‘that we may all appear before the throne together. The kingdom of the Lord is at hand-oh, be ye ready to receive Him! This very night, my loved ones, ye shall see Him in His splendour, with the angels and the archangels in their might and their glory. At the third hour shall He come-that very third hour which is now drawing upon us.’

‘Dear Joe,’ said my mother, in soothing tones, ‘thou art scaring thyself and the children to no avail. If the Son of Man be indeed coming, what matters it whether we be abed or afoot?’

‘Peace, woman,’ he answered sternly; ‘has He not said that He will come like a thief in the night, and that it is for us to await Him? Join with me, then, in prayerful outpourings that we may be found as those in bridal array. Let us offer up thanks that He has graciously vouchsafed to warn us through the words of His servant. Oh, great Lord, look down upon this small flock and lead it to the sheep fold! Mix not the little wheat with the great world of chaff. Oh, merciful Father! look graciously upon my wife, and forgive her the sin of Erastianism, she being but a woman and little fitted to cast off the bonds of antichrist wherein she was born. And these too, my little ones, Micah and Hosea, Ephraim and Ruth, all named after Thy faithful servants of old, oh let them stand upon Thy right hand this night!’ Thus he prayed on in a wild rush of burning, pleading words, writhing prostrate upon the floor in the vehemence of his supplication, while we, poor trembling mites, huddled round our mother's skirts and gazed with terror at the contorted figure seen by the dim light of the simple oil lamp. On a sudden the clang of the new church clock told that the hour had come. My father sprang from the floor, and rushing to the casement, stared up with wild expectant eyes at the starry heavens. Whether he conjured up some vision in his excited brain, or whether the rush of feeling on finding that his expectations were in vain, was too much for him, it is certain that he threw his long arms upwards, uttered a hoarse scream, and tumbled backwards with foaming lips and twitching limbs upon the ground. For an hour or more my poor mother and I did what we could to soothe him, while the children whimpered in a corner, until at last he staggered slowly to his feet, and in brief broken words ordered us to our rooms. From that time I have never heard him allude to the matter, nor did he ever give us any reason why he should so confidently have expected the second coming upon that particular night. I have learned since, however, that the preacher who visited us was what was called in those days a fifth-monarchy man, and that this particular sect was very liable to these premonitions. I have no doubt that something which he had said had put the thought into my father's head, and that the fiery nature of the man had done the rest.

So much for your great-grandfather, Ironside Joe. I have preferred to put these passages before you, for on the principle that actions speak louder than words, I find that in describing a man's character it is better to give examples of his ways than to speak in broad and general terms. Had I said that he was fierce in ins religion and subject to strange fits of piety, the words might have made little impression upon you; but when I tell you of his attack upon the officers in the tanning-yard, and his summoning us down in the dead of the night to await the second coming, you can judge for yourselves the lengths to which his belief would carry him. For the rest, he was an excellent man of business, fair and even generous in his dealings, respected by all and loved by few, for his nature was too self-contained to admit of much affection. To us he was a stern and rigid father, punishing us heavily for whatever he regarded as amiss in our conduct. He bad a store of such proverbs as 'Give a child its will and a whelp its fill, and neither will strive,' or 'Children are certain cares and uncertain comforts,' wherewith he would temper my mother's more kindly impulses. He could not bear that we should play trick-track upon the green, or dance with the other children upon the Saturday night.

As to my mother, dear soul, it was her calm, peaceful influence which kept my father within bounds, and softened his austere rule. Seldom indeed, even in his darkest moods, did the touch of her gentle hand and the sound of her voice fail to soothe his fiery spirit. She came of a Church stock, and held to her religion with a quiet grip which was proof against every attempt to turn her from it. I imagine that at one time her husband had argued much with her upon Arminianism and the sin of simony, but finding his exhortations useless, he had abandoned the subject save on very rare occasions. In spite of her Episcopacy, however, she remained a staunch Whig, and never allowed her loyalty to the throne to cloud her judgment as to the doings of the monarch who sat upon it.

Women were good housekeepers fitly years ago, but she was conspicuous among the best. To see her spotless cuffs and snowy kirtle one would scarce credit how hard she laboured. It was only the well ordered house and the dustless rooms which proclaimed her constant industry. She made salves and eyewaters, powders and confects, cordials and persico, orangeflower water and cherry brandy, each in its due season, and all of the best. She was wise, too, in herbs and simples. The villagers and the farm labourers would rather any day have her advice upon their ailments than that of Dr. Jackson of Purbrook, who never mixed a draught under a silver crown. Over the whole countryside there was no woman more deservedly respected and more esteemed both by those above her and by those beneath.

Such were my parents as I remember them in my childhood. As to myself, I shall let my story explain the growth of my own nature. My brothers and my sister were all brownfaced, sturdy little country children, with no very marked traits save a love of mischief controlled by the fear of their father. These, with Martha the serving-maid, formed our whole household during those boyish years when the pliant soul of the child is hardening into the settled character of the man. How these influences affected me I shall leave for a future sitting, and if I weary you by recording them, you must remember that I am telling these things rather for your profit than for your amusement; that it may assist you in your journey through life to know how another has picked out the path before you.

CHAPTER II. Of my going to school and of my coming thence.

With the home influences which I have described, it may be readily imagined that my young mind turned very much upon the subject of religion, the more so as my father and mother took different views upon it. The old Puritan soldier held that the bible alone contained all things essential to salvation, and that though it might be advisable that those who were gifted with wisdom or eloquence should expound the Scriptures to their brethren, it was by no means necessary, but rather hurtful and degrading, that any organised body of ministers or of bishops should claim special prerogatives, or take the place of mediators between the creature and the Creator. For the wealthy dignitaries of the Church, rolling in their carriages to their cathedrals, in order to preach the doctrines of their Master, who wore His sandals out in tramping over the countryside, he professed the most bitter contempt; nor was he more lenient to those poorer members of the clergy who winked at the vices of their patrons that they might secure a seat at their table, and who would sit through a long evening of profanity rather than bid good-bye to the cheesecakes and the wine flask. That such men represented religious truth was abhorrent to his mind, nor would he even give his adhesion to that form of church government dear to the Presbyterians, where a general council of the ministers directed the affairs of their church. Every man was, in his opinion, equal in the eyes of the Almighty, and none had a right to claim any precedence over his neighbour in matters of religion. The book was written for all, and all were equally able to read it, provided that their minds were enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

My mother, on the other hand, held that the very essence of a church was that it should have a hierarchy and a graduated government within itself, with the king at the apex, the archbishops beneath him, the bishops under their control, and so down through the ministry to the common folk. Such was, in her opinion, the Church as established in the beginning, and no religion without these characteristics could lay any claim to being the true one. Ritual was to her of as great importance as morality, and if every tradesman and farmer were allowed to invent prayers, and change the service as the fancy seized him, it would be impossible to preserve the purity of the Christian creed. She agreed that religion was based upon the Bible, but the Bible was a book which contained much that was obscure, and unless that obscurity were cleared away by a duly elected and consecrated servant of God, a lineal descendant of the Disciples, all human wisdom might not serve to interpret it aright. That was my mother's position, and neither argument nor entreaty could move her from it. The only question of belief on which my two parents were equally ardent was their mutual dislike and distrust of the Roman Catholic forms of worship, and in this the Churchwoman was every whit as decided as the fanatical Independent.

It may seem strange to you in these days of tolerance, that the adherents of this venerable creed should have met with such universal ill-will from successive generations of Englishmen. We recognise now that there are no more useful or loyal citizens in the state than our Catholic brethren, and Mr. Alexander Pope or any other leading Papist is no more looked down upon for his religion than was Mr. William Penn for his Quakerism in the reign of King James. We can scarce credit how noblemen like Lord Stafford, ecclesiastics like Archbishop Plunkett, and commoners like Langhorne and Pickering, were dragged to death on the testimony of the vilest of the vile, without a voice being raised in their behalf; or how it could be considered a patriotic act on the part of an English Protestant to carry a flail loaded with lead beneath his cloak as a menace against his harmless neighbours who differed from him on points of doctrine. It was a long madness which has now happily passed off, or at least shows itself in a milder and rarer form.

Foolish as it appears to us, there were some solid reasons to account for it. You have read doubtless how, a century before I was born, the great kingdom of Spain waxed and prospered. Her ships covered every sea. Her troops were victorious wherever they appeared. In letters, in learning, in all the arts of war and peace they were the foremost nation in Europe. You have heard also of the ill-blood which existed between this great nation and ourselves; how our adventurers harried their possessions across the Atlantic, while they retorted by burning such of our seamen as they could catch by their devilish Inquisition, and by threatening our coasts both from Cadiz and from their provinces in the Netherlands. At last so hot became the quarrel that the other nations stood off, as I have seen the folk clear a space for the sword-players at Hockley-in-the-Hole, so that the Spanish giant and tough little England were left face to face to fight the matter out. Throughout all that business it was as the emissary of the Pope, and as the avenger of the dishonoured Roman Church, that King Philip professed to come. It is true that Lord Howard and many another gentleman of the old religion fought stoutly against the Dons, but the people could never forget that the reformed faith had been the flag under which they had conquered, and that the blessing of the Pontiff had rested with their opponents. Then came the cruel and foolish attempt of Mary to force upon them a creed for which they had no sympathy, and at the heels of it another great Roman Catholic power menaced our liberty from the Continent. The growing strength of France promoted a corresponding distrust of Papistry in England, which reached a head when, at about the time of which I write, Louis XIV. threatened us with invasion at the very moment when, by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he showed his intolerant spirit towards the faith which we held dear. The narrow Protestantism of England was less a religious sentiment than a patriotic reply to the aggressive bigotry of her enemies. Our Catholic countrymen were unpopular, not so much because they believed in Transubstantiation, as because they were unjustly suspected of sympathising with the Emperor or with the King of France. Now that our military successes have secured us against all fear of attack, we have happily lost that bitter religious hatred but for which Oates and Dangerfield would have lied in vain.

In the days when I was young, special causes had inflamed this dislike and made it all the more bitter because there was a spice of fear mingled with it. As long as the Catholics were only an obscure faction they might be ignored, but when, towards the close of the reign of the second Charles, it appeared to be absolutely certain that a Catholic dynasty was about to fill the throne, and that Catholicism was to be the court religion and the stepping-stone to preferment, it was felt that a day of vengeance might be at hand for those who had trampled upon it when it was defenceless. There was alarm and uneasiness amongst all classes. The Church of England, which depends upon the monarch as an arch depends upon the keystone; the nobility, whose estates and coffers had been enriched by the plunder of the abbeys; the mob, whose ideas of Papistry were mixed up with thumbscrews and Fox’s Martyrology, were all equally disturbed. Nor was the prospect a hopeful one for their cause. Charles was a very lukewarm Protestant, and indeed showed upon his deathbed that he was no Protestant at all. There was no longer any chance of his having legitimate offspring. The Duke of York, his younger brother, was therefore heir to the throne, and he was known to be an austere and narrow Papist, while his spouse, Mary of Modena, was as bigoted as himself. Should they have children, there could be no question but that they would be brought up in the faith of their parents, and that a line of Catholic monarchs would occupy the throne of England. To the Church, as represented by my mother, and to Nonconformity, in the person of my father, this was an equally intolerable prospect.

I have been telling you all this old history because you will find, as I go on, that this state of things caused in the end such a seething and fermenting throughout the nation that even I, a simple village lad, was dragged into the whirl and had my whole life influenced by it. If I did not make the course of events clear to you, you would hardly understand the influences which had such an effect upon my whole history. In the meantime, I wish you to remember that when King James II. ascended the throne he did so amid a sullen silence on the part of a large class of his subjects, and that both my father and my mother were among those who were zealous for a Protestant succession.

My childhood was, as I have already said, a gloomy one. Now and again when there chanced to be a fair at Portsdown Hill, or when a passing raree showman set up his booth in the village, my dear mother would slip a penny or two from her housekeeping money into my hand, and with a warning finger upon her lip would send me off to see the sights. These treats were, however, rare events, and made such a mark upon my mind, that when I was sixteen years of age I could have checked off upon my fingers all that I had ever seen. There was William Harker the strong man, who lifted Farmer Alcott’s roan mare; and there was Tubby Lawson the dwarf, who could fit himself into a pickle jar — these two I well remember from the wonder wherewith they struck my youthful soul. Then there was the show of the playing dolls, and that of the enchanted island and Mynheer Munster from the Lowlands, who could turn himself round upon a tight-rope while playing most sweetly upon a virginal. Last, but far the best in my estimation, was the grand play at the Portsdown Fair, entitled ‘The true and ancient story of Maudlin, the merchant’s daughter of Bristol, and of her lover Antonio. How they were cast away on the shores of Barbary, where the mermaids are seen floating upon the sea and singing in the rocks, foretelling their danger.' This little piece gave me keener pleasure than ever in after years I received from the grandest comedies of Mr. Congreve and of Mr. Dryden, though acted by Kynaston, Betterton, and the whole strength of the King's own company. At Chichester once I remember that I paid a penny to see the left shoe of the youngest sister of Potiphar's wife, but as it looked much like any other old shoe, and was just about the size to have fitted the show-woman, I have often feared that my penny fell into the hands of rogues.

There were other shows, however, which I might see for nothing, and yet were more real and every whit as interesting as any for which I paid. Now and again upon a holiday I was permitted to walk down to Portsmouth — once I was even taken in front of my father upon his pad nag, and there I wandered with him through the streets with wondering eyes, marvelling over the strange sights around me. The walls and the moats, the gates and the sentinels, the long High Street with the great government buildings, and the constant rattle of drums and blare of trumpets; they made my little heart beat quicker beneath my sagathy stuff jacket. Here was the house in which some thirty years before the proud Duke of Buckingham had been struck down by the assassin's dagger. There, too, was the Governor's dwelling, and I remember that even as I looked he came riding up to it, red-faced and choleric, with a nose such as a Governor should have, and his breast all slashed with gold. 'Is he not a fine man?' I said, looking up at my father. He laughed and drew his hat down over his brows. 'It is the first time that I have seen Sir Ralph Lingard's face,' said he, 'but I saw his back at Preston fight. Ah, lad, proud as he looks, if he did but see old Noll coming in through the door he would not think it beneath him to climb out through the window!' The clank of steel or the sight of a buff-coat would always serve to stir up the old Roundhead bitterness in my father's breast.

But there were other sights in Portsmouth besides the red-coats and their Governor. The yard was the second in the kingdom, after Chatham, and there was ever some new war-ship ready upon the slips. Then there was a squadron of King's ships, and sometimes the whole fleet at Spithead, when the streets would be full of sailors, with their faces as brown as mahogany and pigtails as stiff and hard as their cutlasses. To watch their rolling gait, and to hear their strange, quaint talk, and their tales of the Dutch wars, was a rare treat to me; and I have sometimes when I was alone fastened myself on to a group of them, and passed the day in wandering from tavern to tavern. It chanced one day, however, that one of them insisted upon my sharing his glass of Canary wine, and afterwards out of roguishness persuaded me to take a second, with the result that I was sent home speechless in the carrier’s cart, and was never again allowed to go into Portsmouth alone. My father was less shocked at the incident than I should have expected, and reminded my mother that Noah had been overtaken in a similar manner. He also narrated how a certain field-chaplain Grant, of Desborough’s regiment, having after a hot and dusty day drunk sundry flagons of mum, had thereafter sung certain ungodly songs, and danced in a manner unbecoming to his sacred profession. Also, how he had afterwards explained that such backslidings were not to be regarded us faults of the individual, but rather as actual obsessions of the evil one, who contrived in this manner to give scandal to the faithful, and selected the most godly for his evil purpose. This ingenious defence of the field-chaplain was the saving of my back, for my father, who was a believer in Solomon’s axiom, had a stout ash stick and a strong arm for whatever seemed to him to be a falling away from the true path.

From the day that I first learned my letters from the horn-book at my mother’s knee I was always hungry to increase my knowledge, and never a piece of print came in my way that I did not eagerly master. My father pushed the sectarian hatred of learning to such a length that he was averse to having any worldly books within his doors. (Note A, Appendix) I was dependent therefore for my supply upon one or two of my friends in the village, who lent me a volume at a time from their small libraries. These I would carry inside my shirt, and would only dare to produce when I could slip away into the fields, and lie hid among the long grass, or at night when the rushlight was still burning, and my father’s snoring assured me that there was no danger of his detecting me. In this way I worked up from Don Bellianis of Greece and the ‘Seven Champions,’ through Tarleton’s ‘Jests’ and other such books, until I could take pleasure in the poetry of Waller and of Herrick, or in the plays of Massinger and Shakespeare. How sweet were the hours when I could lay aside all thought of freewill and of predestination, to lie with my heels in the air among the scented clover, and listen to old Chaucer telling the sweet story of Grisel the patient, or to weep for the chaste Desdemona, and mourn over the untimely end of her gallant spouse. There were times as I rose up with my mind full of the noble poetry, and glanced over the fair slope of the countryside, with the gleaming sea beyond it, and the purple outline of the Isle of Wight upon the horizon; when it would be borne in upon me that the Being who created all this, and who gave man the power of pouring out these beautiful thoughts, was not the possession of one sect or another, or of this nation or that, but was the kindly Father of every one of the little children whom He had let loose on this fair playground. It grieved me then, and it grieves me now, that a man of such sincerity and lofty purpose as your great grandfather should have been so tied down by iron doctrines, and should imagine his Creator to be so niggard of His mercy as to withhold it from nine-and-ninety in the hundred. Well, a man is as he is trained, and if my father bore a narrow mind upon his broad shoulders, he has at least the credit that he was ready to do and to suffer all things for what he conceived to be the truth. If you, my dears, have more enlightened views, take heed that they bring you to lead a more enlightened life.

When I was fourteen years of age, a yellow-haired, brown-faced lad, I was packed off to a small private school at Petersfield, and there I remained for a year, returning home for the last Saturday in each month. I took with me only a scanty outfit of schoolbooks, with Lilly's 'Latin Grammar,' and Rosse's 'View of all the Religions in the World from the Creation down to our own Times,' which was shoved into my hands by my good mother as a parting present. With this small stock of letters I might have fared badly, had it not happened that my master, Mr. Thomas Chillingfoot, had himself a good library, and took a pleasure in lending his books to any of his scholars who showed a desire to improve themselves. Under this good old man's care I not only picked up some smattering of Latin and Greek, but I found means to read good English translations of many of the classics, and to acquire a knowledge of the history of my own and other countries. I was rapidly growing in mind as well as in body, when my school career was cut short by no less an event than my summary and ignominious expulsion. How this unlooked-for ending to my studies came about I must now set before you.

Petersfield had always been a great stronghold of the Church, having hardly a Nonconformist within its bounds. The reason of this was that most of the house property was owned by zealous Churchmen, who refused to allow any one who differed from the Established Church to settle there. The Vicar, whose name was Pinfold, possessed in this manner great power in the town, and as he was a man with a high inflamed countenance and a pompous manner, he inspired no little awe among the quiet inhabitants. I can see him now with his beaked nose, his rounded waistcoat, and his bandy legs, which looked as if they had given way beneath the load of learning which they were compelled to carry. Walking slowly with right hand stiffly extended, tapping the pavement at every step with his metal-headed stick, he would pause as each person passed him, and wait to see that he was given the salute which he thought due to his dignity. This courtesy he never dreamed of returning, save in the case of some of his richer parishioners; but if by chance it were omitted, he would hurry after the culprit, and, shaking his stick in his face, insist upon his doffing his cap to him. We youngsters, if we met him on our walks, would scuttle by him like a brood of chickens passing an old turkey cock, and even our worthy master showed a disposition to turn down a side-street when the portly figure of the Vicar was seen rolling in our direction. This proud priest made a point of knowing the history of every one within his parish, and having learnt that I was the son of an Independent, he spoke severely to Mr. Chillingfoot upon the indiscretion which he had shown in admitting me to his school. Indeed, nothing but my mother's good name for orthodoxy prevented him from insisting upon my dismissal.

At the other end of the village there was a large day-school. A constant feud prevailed between the scholars who attended it and the lads who studied under our master. No one could tell how the war broke out, but for many years there had been a standing quarrel between the two, which resulted in skirmishes, sallies, and ambuscades, with now and then a pitched battle. No great harm was done in these encounters, for the weapons were usually snowballs in winter and pine-cones or clods of earth in the summer. Even when the contest got closer and we came to fisticuffs, a few bruises and a little blood was the worst that could come of it. Our opponents were more numerous than we, but we had the advantage of being always together and of having a secure asylum upon which to retreat, while they, living in scattered houses all over the parish, had no common rallying-point. A stream, crossed by two bridges, ran through the centre of the town, and this was the boundary which separated our territories from those of our enemies. The boy who crossed the bridge found himself in hostile country.

It chanced that in the first conflict which occurred after my arrival at the school I distinguished myself by singling out the most redoubtable of our foemen, and smiting him such a blow that he was knocked helpless and was carried off by our party as a prisoner. This feat of arms established my good name as a warrior, so I came at last to be regarded as the leader of our forces, and to be looked up to by bigger boys than myself. This promotion tickled my fancy so much, that I set to work to prove that I deserved it by devising fresh and ingenious schemes for the defeat of our enemies.

One winter's evening news reached us that our rivals were about to make a raid upon us under cover of night, and that they proposed coming by the little used plank bridge, so as to escape our notice. This bridge lay almost out of the town, and consisted of a single broad piece of wood without a rail, erected for the good of the town clerk, who lived, just opposite to it. We proposed to hide ourselves amongst the bushes on our side of the stream, and make an unexpected attack upon the invaders as they crossed. As we started, however, I bethought me of an ingenious stratagem which I had read of as being practised in the German wars, and having expounded it to the great delight of my companions, we took Mr. Chillingfoot's saw, and set off for the seat of action.

On reaching the bridge all was quiet and still. It was quite dark and very cold, for Christmas was approaching. There were no signs of our opponents. We exchanged a few whispers as to who should do the daring deed, but as the others shrank from it, and as I was too proud to propose what I dare not execute, I gripped the saw, and sitting astraddle upon the plank set to work upon the very centre of it.

My purpose was to weaken it in such a way that, though it would bear the weight of one, it would collapse when the main body of our foemen were upon it, and so precipitate them into the ice-cold stream. The water was but a couple of feet deep at the place, so that there was nothing for them but a fright and a ducking. So cool a reception ought to deter them from ever invading us again, and confirm my reputation as a daring leader. Reuben Lockarby, my lieutenant, son of old John Lockarby of the Wheatsheaf, marshalled our forces behind the hedgerow, whilst I sawed vigorously at the plank until I had nearly severed it across. I had no compunction about the destruction of the bridge, for I knew enough of carpentry to see that a skilful joiner could in an hour's work make it stronger than ever by putting a prop beneath the point where I had divided it. When at last I felt by the yielding of the plank that I had done enough, and that the least strain would snap it, I crawled quietly off, and taking up my position with my schoolfellows, awaited the coming of the enemy.

I had scarce concealed myself when we heard the steps of some one approaching down the footpath which led to the bridge. We crouched behind the cover, convinced that the sound must come from some scout whom our foemen had sent on in front — a big boy evidently, for his step was heavy and slow, with a clinking noise mingling with it, of which we could make nothing. Nearer came the sound and nearer, until a shadowy figure loomed out of the darkness upon the other side, and after pausing and peering for a moment, came straight for the bridge. It was only as he was setting foot upon the plank and beginning gingerly to pick his way across it, that we discerned the outlines of the familiar form, and realised the dreadful truth that the stranger whom we had taken for the advance guard of our enemy was in truth none other than Vicar Pinfold, and that it was the rhythmic pat of his stick which we heard mingling with his footfalls. Fascinated by the sight, we lay bereft of all power to warn him — a line of staring eyeballs. One step, two steps, three steps did the haughty Churchman take, when there was a rending crack, and he vanished with a mighty splash into the swift-flowing stream. He must have fallen upon his back, for we could see the curved outline of his portly figure standing out above the surface as he struggled desperately to regain his feet. At last he managed to get erect, and came spluttering for the bank with such a mixture of godly ejaculations and of profane oaths that, even in our terror, we could not keep from laughter. Rising from under his feet like a covey of wild-fowl, we scurried off across the fields and so back to the school, where, as you may imagine, we said nothing to our good master of what had occurred.

The matter was too serious, however, to be hushed up. The sudden chill set up some manner of disturbance in the bottle of sack which the Vicar had just been drinking with the town clerk, and an attack of gout set in which laid him on his back for a fortnight. Meanwhile an examination of the bridge had shown that it had been sawn across, and an inquiry traced the matter to Mr. Chillingfoot’s boarders. To save a wholesale expulsion of the school from the town, I was forced to acknowledge myself as both the inventor and perpetrator of the deed. Chillingfoot was entirely in the power of the Vicar, so he was forced to read me a long homily in public — which he balanced by an affectionate leave-taking in private — and to expel me solemnly from the school. I never saw my old master again, for he died not many years afterwards; but I hear that his second son William is still carrying on the business, which is larger and more prosperous than of old. His eldest son turned Quaker and went out to Penn's settlement, where he is reported to have been slain by the savages.

This adventure shocked my dear mother, but it found great favour in the eyes of my father, who laughed until the whole village resounded with his stentorian merriment. It reminded him, he said, of a similar stratagem executed at Market Drayton by that God-fearing soldier Colonel Pride, whereby a captain and three troopers of Lunsford's own regiment of horse had been drowned, and many others precipitated into a river, to the great glory of the true Church and to the satisfaction of the chosen people. Even of the Church folk many were secretly glad at the misfortune which had overtaken the Vicar, for his pretensions and his pride had made him hated throughout the district.

By this time I had grown into a sturdy, broad-shouldered lad, and every month added to my strength and my stature. When I was sixteen I could carry a bag of wheat or a cask of beer against any man in the village, and I could throw the fifteen-pound putting-stone to a distance of thirty-six feet, which was four feet further than could Ted Dawson, the blacksmith. Once when my father was unable to carry a bale of skins out of the yard, I whipped it up and bare it away upon my shoulders. The old man would often look gravely at me from under his heavy thatched eyebrows, and shake his grizzled head as he sat in his arm-chair puffing his pipe. 'You grow too big for the nest, lad,' he would say. 'I doubt some of these days you'll find your wings and away!' In my heart I longed that the time would come, for I was weary of the quiet life of the village, and was anxious to see the great world of which I had heard and read so much. I could not look southward without my spirit stirring within me as my eyes fell upon those dark waves, the white crests of which are like a fluttering signal ever waving to an English youth and beckoning him to some unknown but glorious goal.

CHAPTER III. Of Two Friends of my Youth

I fear, my children, that you will think that the prologue is over long for the play; but the foundations must be laid before the building is erected, and a statement of this sort is a sorry and a barren thing unless you have a knowledge of the folk concerned. Be patient, then, while I speak to you of the old friends of my youth, some of whom you may hear more of hereafter, while others remained behind in the country hamlet, and yet left traces of our early intercourse upon my character which might still be discerned there.

Foremost for good amongst all whom I knew was Zachary Palmer, the village carpenter, a man whose aged and labour-warped body contained the simplest and purest of spirits. Yet his simplicity was by no means the result of ignorance, for from the teachings of Plato to those of Hobbes there were few systems ever thought out by man which he had not studied and weighed. Books were far dearer in my boyhood than they are now, and carpenters were less well paid, but old Palmer had neither wife nor child, and spent little on food or raiment. Thus it came about that on the shelf over his bed he had a more choice collection of books — few as they were in number — than the squire or the parson, and these books he had read until he not only understood them himself, but could impart them to others.

This white-bearded and venerable village philosopher would sit by his cabin door upon a summer evening, and was never so pleased as when some of the young fellows would slip away from their bowls and their quoit-playing in order to lie in the grass at his feet, and ask him questions about the great men of old, their words and their deeds. But of all the youths I and Reuben Lockarby, the innkeeper’s son, were his two favourites, for we would come the earliest and stop the latest to hear the old man talk. No father could have loved his children better than he did us, and he would spare no pains to get at our callow thoughts, and to throw light upon whatever perplexed or troubled us. Like all growing things, we had run our heads against the problem of the universe. We had peeped and pryed with our boyish eyes into those profound depths in which the keenest-sighted of the human race had seen no bottom. Yet when we looked around us in our own village world, and saw the bitterness and rancour which pervaded every sect, we could not but think that a tree which bore such fruit must have something amiss with it. This was one of the thoughts unspoken to our parents which we carried to good old Zachary, and on which he had much to say which cheered and comforted us.

‘These janglings and wranglings,’ said he, ‘are but on the surface, and spring from the infinite variety of the human mind, which will ever adapt a creed to suit its own turn of thought. It is the solid core that underlies every Christian creed which is of importance. Could you but live among the Romans or the Greeks, in the days before this new doctrine was preached, you would then know the change that it has wrought in the world. How this or that text should be construed is a matter of no moment, however warm men may get over it. What is of the very greatest moment is, that every man should have a good and solid reason for living a simple, cleanly life. This the Christian creed has given us.’

‘I would not have you be virtuous out of fear,’ he said upon another occasion. ‘The experience of a long life has taught me, however, that sin is always punished in this world, whatever may come in the next. There is always some penalty in health, in comfort, or in peace of mind to be paid for every wrong. It is with nations as it is with individuals. A book of history is a book of sermons. See how the luxurious Babylonians were destroyed by the frugal Persians, and how these same Persians when they learned the vices of prosperity were put to the sword by the Greeks. Read on and mark how the sensual Greeks were trodden down by the more robust and hardier Romans, and finally how the Romans, having lost their manly virtues, were subdued by the nations of the north. Vice and destruction came ever hand in hand. Thus did Providence use each in turn as a scourge wherewith to chastise the follies of the other. These things do not come by chance. They are part of a great system which is at work in your own lives. The longer you live the more you will see that sin and sadness are never far apart, and that no true prosperity can exist away from virtue.’

A very different teacher was the sea-dog Solomon Sprent, who lived in the second last cottage on the left-hand side of the main street of the village. He was one of the old tarpaulin breed, who had fought under the red cross ensign against Frenchman, Don, Dutchman, and Moor, until a round shot carried off his foot and put an end to his battles for ever. In person he was thin, and hard, and brown, as lithe and active as a cat, with a short body and very long arms, each ending in a great hand which was ever half closed as though shutting on a rope. From head to foot he was covered with the most marvellous tattooings, done in blue, red, and green, beginning with the Creation upon his neck and winding up with the Ascension upon his left ankle. Never have I seen such a walking work of art. He was wont to say that had he been owned and his body cast up upon some savage land, the natives might have learned the whole of the blessed gospel from a contemplation of his carcass. Yet with sorrow I must say that the seaman's religion appeared to have all worked into his skin, so that very little was left for inner use. It had broken out upon the surface, like the spotted fever, but his system was clear of it elsewhere. He could swear in eleven languages and three-and-twenty dialects, nor did he ever let his great powers rust for want of practice. He would swear when he was happy or when he was sad, when he was angry or when he was loving, but this swearing was so mere a trick of speech, without malice or bitterness, that even my father could hardly deal harshly with the sinner. As time passed, however, the old man grew more sober and more thoughtful, until in his latter days he went back to the simple beliefs of his childhood, and learned to fight the devil with the same steady courage with which he had faced the enemies of his country.

Old Solomon was a never-failing source of amusement and of interest to my friend Lockarby and myself. On gala days he would have us in to dine with him, when he would regale us with lobscouse and salmagundi, or perhaps with an outland dish, a pillaw or olla podrida, or fish broiled after the fashion of the Azores, for he had a famous trick of cooking, and could produce the delicacies of all nations. And all the time that we were with him he would tell us the most marvellous stories of Rupert, under whom he served; how he would shout from the poop to his squadron to wheel to the right, or to charge, or to halt, as the case might be, as if he were still with his regiment of horse. Of Blake, too, he had many stories to tell. But even the name of Blake was not so dear to our old sailor as was that of Sir Christopher Mings. Solomon had at one time been his coxswain, and could talk by the hour of those gallant deeds which had distinguished him from the day that he entered the navy as a cabin boy until he fell upon his own quarter-deck, a full admiral of the red, and was borne by his weeping ship's company to his grave in Chatham churchyard. 'If so be as there's a jasper sea up aloft,' said the old seaman, 'I'll wager that Sir Christopher will see that the English flag has proper respect paid to it upon it, and that we are not fooled by foreigners. I've served under him in this world, and I ask nothing better than to be his coxswain in the next — if so be as he should chance to have a vacancy for such.' These remembrances would always end in the brewing of an extra bowl of punch, and the drinking of a solemn bumper to the memory of the departed hero.

Stirring as were Solomon Sprent's accounts of his old commanders, their effect upon us was not so great as when, about his second or third glass, the floodgates of his memory would be opened, and he would pour out long tales of the lands which he had visited, and the peoples which he had seen. Leaning forward in our seats with our chins resting upon our hands, we two youngsters would sit for hours, with our eyes fixed upon the old adventurer, drinking in his words, while he, pleased at the interest which he excited, would puff slowly at his pipe and reel off story after story of what he had seen or done. In those days, my dears, there was no Defoe to tell us the wonders of the world, no *Spectator* to lie upon our breakfast table, no Gulliver to satisfy our love of adventure by telling us of such adventures as never were. Not once in a month did a common newsletter fall into our hands. Personal hazards, therefore, were of more value then than they are now, and the talk of a man like old Solomon was a library in itself. To us it was all real. His husky tones and ill-chosen words were as the voice of an angel, and our eager minds filled in the details and supplied all that was wanting in his narratives. In one evening we have engaged a Sallee rover off the Pillars of Hercules; we have coasted down the shores of the African continent, and seen the great breakers of the Spanish Main foaming upon the yellow sand; we have passed the black ivory merchants with their human cargoes; we have faced the terrible storms which blow ever around the Cape de Boa Esperanza; and finally, we have sailed away out over the great ocean beyond, amid the palm-clad coral islands, with the knowledge that the realms of Prester John lie somewhere behind the golden haze which shimmers upon the horizon. After such a flight as that we would feel, as we came back to the Hampshire village and the dull realities of country life, like wild birds who had been snared by the fowler and clapped into narrow cages. Then it was that the words of my father, 'You will find your wings some day and fly away,' would come back to me, and set up such a restlessness as all the wise words of Zachary Palmer could not allay.

CHAPTER IV. Of the Strange Fish that we Caught at Spithead

One evening in the month of May 1685, about the end of the first week of the month, my friend Reuben Lockarby and I borrowed Ned Marley’s pleasure boat, and went a-fishing out of Langston Bay. At that time I was close on one-and-twenty years of age, while my companion was one year younger. A great intimacy had sprung up between us, founded on mutual esteem, for he being a little undergrown man was proud of my strength and stature, while my melancholy and somewhat heavy spirit took a pleasure in the energy and joviality which never deserted him, and in the wit which gleamed as bright and as innocent as summer lightning through all that he said. In person he was short and broad, round-faced, ruddy-cheeked, and in truth a little inclined to be fat, though he would never confess to more than a pleasing plumpness, which was held, he said, to be the acme of manly beauty amongst the ancients. The stern test of common danger and mutual hardship entitle me to say that no man could have desired a stauncher or more trusty comrade. As he was destined to be with me in the sequel, it was but fitting that he should have been at my side on that May evening which was the starting-point of our adventures.

We pulled out beyond the Warner Sands to a place half-way between them and the Nab, where we usually found bass in plenty. There we cast the heavy stone which served us as an anchor overboard, and proceeded to set our lines. The sun sinking slowly behind a fog-bank had slashed the whole western sky with scarlet streaks, against which the wooded slopes of the Isle of Wight stood out vaporous and purple. A fresh breeze was blowing from the south-east, flecking the long green waves with crests of foam, and filling our eyes and lips with the smack of the salt spray. Over near St. Helen’s Point a King’s ship was making her way down the channel, while a single large brig was tacking about a quarter of a mile or less from where we lay. So near were we that we could catch a glimpse of the figures upon her deck as she heeled over to the breeze, and could bear the creaking of her yards and the flapping of her weather-stained canvas as she prepared to go about.

‘Look ye, Micah,’ said my companion, looking up from his fishing-line. ‘That is a most weak-minded ship — a ship which will make no way in the world. See how she hangs in the wind, neither keeping on her course nor tacking. She is a trimmer of the seas — the Lord Halifax of the ocean.’

‘Why, there is something amiss with her,’ I replied, staring across with hand-shaded eyes. ‘She yaws about as though there were no one at the helm. Her main-yard goes aback! Now it is forward again! The folk on her deck seem to me to be either fighting or dancing. Up with the anchor, Reuben, and let us pull to her.’

‘Up with the anchor and let us get out of her way,’ he answered, still gazing at the stranger. ‘Why will you ever run that meddlesome head of yours into danger’s way? She flies Dutch colours, but who can say whence she really comes? A pretty thing if we were snapped up by a buccaneer and sold in the Plantations!’

‘A buccaneer in the Solent!’ cried I derisively. ‘We shall be seeing the black flag in Emsworth Creek next. But hark! What is that?’

The crack of a musket sounded from aboard the brig. Then came a moment’s silence and another musket shot rang out, followed by a chorus of shouts and cries. Simultaneously the yards swung round into position, the sails caught the breeze once more, and the vessel darted away on a course which would take her past Bembridge Point out to the English Channel. As she flew along her helm was put hard down, a puff of smoke shot out from her quarter, and a cannon ball came hopping and splashing over the waves, passing within a hundred yards of where we lay. With this farewell greeting she came up into the wind again and continued her course to the southward.

‘Heart o’ grace!’ ejaculated Reuben in loose lipped astonishment. ‘The murdering villains!’

‘I would to the Lord that King’s ship would snap them up!’ cried I savagely, for the attack was so unprovoked that it stirred my bile. ‘What could the rogues have meant? They are surely drunk or mad!’

‘Pull at the anchor, man, pull at the anchor!’ my companion shouted, springing up from the seat. ‘I understand it! Pull at the anchor!’

‘What then?’ I asked, helping him to haul the great stone up, hand over hand, until it came dripping over the side.

‘They were not firing at us, lad. They were aiming at some one in the water between us and them. Pull, Micah! Put your back into it! Some poor fellow may he drowning.’

‘Why, I declare!’ said I, looking over my shoulder as I rowed, ‘there is his head upon the crest of a wave. Easy, or we shall be over him! Two more strokes and be ready to seize him! Keep up, friend! There’s help at hand!’

‘Take help to those who need help’ said a voice out of the sea. ‘Zounds, man, keep a guard on your oar! I fear a pat from it very much more than I do the water.’

These words were delivered in so calm and self-possessed a tone that all concern for the swimmer was set at rest. Drawing in our oars we faced round to have a look at him. The drift of the boat had brought us so close that he could have grasped the gunwale had he been so minded.

‘Sapperment!’ he cried in a peevish voice; ‘to think of my brother Nonus serving me such a trick! What would our blessed mother have said could she have seen it? My whole kit gone, to say nothing of my venture in the voyage! And now I have kicked off a pair of new jack boots that cost sixteen rix-dollars at Vanseddar’s at Amsterdam. I can’t swim in jack-boots, nor can I walk without them.’

‘Won’t you come in out of the wet, sir?’ asked Reuben, who could scarce keep serious at the stranger’s appearance and address. A pair of long arms shot out of the water, and in a moment, with a lithe, snake-like motion, the man wound himself into the boat and coiled his great length upon the stern-sheets. Very lanky he was and very thin, with a craggy hard face, clean-shaven and sunburned, with a thousand little wrinkles intersecting it in every direction. He had lost his hat, and his short wiry hair, slightly flecked with grey, stood up in a bristle all over his head. It was hard to guess at his age, but he could scarce have been under his fiftieth year, though the ease with which he had boarded our boat proved that his strength and energy were unimpaired. Of all his characteristics, however, nothing attracted my attention so much as his eyes, which were almost covered by their drooping lids, and yet looked out through the thin slits which remained with marvellous brightness and keenness. A passing glance might give the idea that he was languid and half asleep, but a closer one would reveal those glittering, shifting lines of light, and warn the prudent man not to trust too much to his first impressions.

‘I could swim to Portsmouth,’ he remarked, rummaging in the pockets of his sodden jacket; ‘I could swim well-nigh anywhere. I once swam from Gran on the Danube to Buda, while a hundred thousand Janissaries danced with rage on the nether bank. I did, by the keys of St. Peter! Wessenburg’s

Pandours would tell you whether Decimus Saxon could swim. Take my advice, young men, and always carry your tobacco in a water-tight metal box.'

As he spoke he drew a flat box from his pocket, and several wooden tubes, which he screwed together to form a long pipe. This he stuffed with tobacco, and having lit it by means of a flint and steel with a piece of touch-paper from the inside of his box, he curled his legs under him in Eastern fashion, and settled down to enjoy a smoke. There was something so peculiar about the whole incident, and so preposterous about the man's appearance and actions, that we both broke into a roar of laughter, which lasted until for very exhaustion we were compelled to stop. He neither joined in our merriment nor expressed offence at it, but continued to suck away at his long wooden tube with a perfectly stolid and impassive face, save that the half-covered eyes glinted rapidly backwards and forwards from one to the other of us.

'You will excuse our laughter, sir,' I said at last; 'my friend and I are unused to such adventures, and are merry at the happy ending of it. May we ask whom it is that we have picked up?'

'Decimus Saxon is my name,' the stranger answered; 'I am the tenth child of a worthy father, as the Latin implies. There are but nine betwixt me and an inheritance. Who knows? Small-pox might do it, or the plague!'

'We heard a shot aboard of the brig,' said Reuben.

'That was my brother Nonus shooting at me,' the stranger observed, shaking his head sadly.

'But there was a second shot.'

'Ah, that was me shooting at my brother Nonus.'

'Good lack!' I cried. 'I trust that thou hast done him no hurt.'

'But a flesh wound, at the most,' he answered. 'I thought it best to come away, however, lest the affair grow into a quarrel. I am sure that it was he who trained the nine-pounder on me when I was in the water. It came near enough to part my hair. He was always a good shot with a falconet or a mortar-piece. He could not have been hurt, however, to get down from the poop to the main-deck in the time.'

There was a pause after this, while the stranger drew a long knife from his belt, and cleaned out his pipe with it. Reuben and I took up our oars, and having pulled up our tangled fishing-lines, which had been streaming behind the boat, we proceeded to pull in towards the land.

‘The question now is,’ said the stranger, ‘where we are to go to?’

‘We are going down Langston Bay,’ I answered.

‘Oh, we are, are we?’ he cried, in a mocking voice; ‘you are sure of it eh? You are certain we are not going to France? We have a mast and sail there, I see, and water in the beaker. All we want are a few fish, which I hear are plentiful in these waters, and we might make a push for Barfleur.’

‘We are going down Langston Bay,’ I repeated coldly.

‘You see might is right upon the waters,’ he explained, with a smile which broke his whole face up into crinkles. ‘I am an old soldier, a tough fighting man, and you are two raw lads. I have a knife, and you are unarmed. D’ye see the line of argument? The question now is, Where are we to go?’

I faced round upon him with the oar in my hand. ‘You boasted that you could swim to Portsmouth,’ said I, ‘and so you shall. Into the water with you, you sea-viper, or I’ll push you in as sure as my name is Micah Clarke.’

‘Throw your knife down, or I’ll drive the boat hook through you,’ cried Reuben, pushing it forward to within a few inches of the man’s throat.

‘Sink me, but this is most commendable!’ he said, sheathing his weapon, and laughing softly to himself. ‘I love to draw spirit out of the young fellows. I am the steel, d’ye see, which knocks the valour out of your flint. A notable simile, and one in every way worthy of that most witty of mankind, Samuel Butler. This,’ he continued, tapping a protuberance which I had remarked over his chest, ‘is not a natural deformity, but is a copy of that inestimable “Hudibras,” which combines the light touch of Horace with the broader mirth of Catullus. Heh! what think you of the criticism?’

‘Give up that knife,’ said I sternly.

‘Certainly,’ he replied, handing it over to me with a polite bow. ‘Is there any other reasonable matter in which I can oblige ye? I will give up anything to do ye pleasure-save only my good name and soldierly repute, or this same copy of “Hudibras,” which, together with a Latin treatise upon the usages of war, written by a Fleming and printed in Liege in the Lowlands, I do ever bear in my bosom.’

I sat down beside him with the knife in my hand. ‘You pull both oars,’ I said to Reuben; ‘I’ll keep guard over the fellow and see that he plays us no trick. I believe that you are right, and that he is nothing better than a pirate. He shall be given over to the justices when we get to Havant.’

I thought that our passenger’s coolness deserted him for a moment, and that a look of annoyance passed over his face.

‘Wait a bit!’ he said; ‘your name, I gather is Clarke, and your home is Havant. Are you a kinsman of Joseph Clarke, the old Roundhead of that town?’

‘He is my father,’ I answered.

‘Hark to that, now!’ he cried, with a throb of laughter; ‘I have a trick of falling on my feet. Look at this, lad! Look at this!’ He drew a packet of letters from his inside pocket, wrapped in a bit of tarred cloth, and opening it he picked one out and placed it upon my knee. ‘Read!’ said he, pointing at it with his long thin finger.

It was inscribed in large plain characters, ‘To Joseph Clarke, leather merchant of Havant, by the hand of Master Decimus Saxon, part-owner of the ship *Providence*, from Amsterdam to Portsmouth.’ At each side it was sealed with a massive red seal, and was additionally secured with a broad band of silk.

‘I have three-and-twenty of them to deliver in the neighbourhood,’ he remarked. ‘That shows what folk think of Decimus Saxon. Three-and-twenty lives and liberties are in my hands. Ah, lad, invoices and bills of lading are not done up in that fashion. It is not a cargo of Flemish skins that is coming for the old man. The skins have good English hearts in them; ay, and English swords in their fists to strike out for freedom and for conscience. I risk my life in carrying this letter to your father; and you, his son, threaten to hand me over to the justices! For shame! For shame! I blush for you!’

‘I don’t know what you are hinting at,’ I answered. ‘You must speak plainer if I am to understand you.’

‘Can we trust him?’ he asked, jerking his head in the direction of Reuben.

‘As myself.’

‘How very charming!’ said he, with something between a smile and a sneer. ‘David and Jonathan — or, to be more classical and less scriptural, Damon and Pythias — eh?’ These papers, then, are from the faithful abroad, the exiles in Holland, ye understand, who are thinking of making a move and of coming over to see King James in his own country with their swords strapped on their thighs. The letters are to those from whom they expect sympathy, and notify when and where they will make a landing. Now, my dear lad, you will perceive that instead of my being in your power, you are so completely in mine that it needs but a word from me to destroy your whole family. Decimus Saxon is staunch, though, and that word shall never be spoken.’

‘If all this be true,’ said I, ‘and if your mission is indeed as you have said, why did you even now propose to make for France?’

‘Aptly asked, and yet the answer is clear enough,’ he replied; ‘sweet and ingenuous as are your faces, I could not read upon them that ye would prove to be Whigs and friends of the good old cause. Ye might have taken me to where excisemen or others would have wanted to pry and peep, and so endangered my commission. Better a voyage to France in an open boat than that.’

‘I will take you to my father,’ said I, after a few moments’ thought. ‘You can deliver your letter and make good your story to him. If you are indeed a true man, you will meet with a warm welcome; but should you prove, as I shrewdly suspect, to be a rogue, you need expect no mercy.’

‘Bless the youngster! he speaks like the Lord High Chancellor of England! What is it the old man says?

“He could not ope
His mouth, but out there fell a trope.”

But it should be a threat, which is the ware in which you are fond of dealing.

“He could not let
A minute pass without a threat.”

How’s that, eh? Waller himself could not have capped the couplet neater.’

All this time Reuben had been swinging away at his oars, and we had made our way into Langston Bay, down the sheltered waters of which we were rapidly shooting. Sitting in the sheets, I turned over in my mind all that this waif had said. I had glanced over his shoulder at the addresses of some of the letters — Steadman of Basingstoke, Wintle of Alresford, Fortescue of Bognor, all well-known leaders of the Dissenters. If they were what he represented them to be, it was no exaggeration to say that he held the fortunes and fates of these men entirely in his hands. Government would be only too glad to have a valid reason for striking hard at the men whom they feared. On the whole it was well to tread carefully in the matter, so I restored our prisoner’s knife to him, and treated him with increased consideration. It was well-nigh dark when we beached the boat, and entirely so before we reached Havant, which was fortunate, as the bootless and hatless state of our dripping companion could not have failed to set tongues wagging, and perhaps to excite the inquiries of the authorities. As it was, we scarce met a soul before reaching my father’s door.

CHAPTER V. Of the Man with the Drooping Lids

My mother and my father were sitting in their high-backed chairs on either side of the empty fireplace when we arrived, he smoking his evening pipe of Oronooko, and she working at her embroidery. The moment that I opened the door the man whom I had brought stepped briskly in, and bowing to the old people began to make glib excuses for the lateness of his visit, and to explain the manner in which we had picked him up. I could not help smiling at the utter amazement expressed upon my mother's face as she gazed at him, for the loss of his jack-boots exposed a pair of interminable spindle-shanks which were in ludicrous contrast to the baggy low country knee-breeches which surmounted them. His tunic was made of coarse sad-coloured kersey stuff with flat new gilded brass buttons, beneath which was a whitish callamanca vest edged with silver. Round the neck of his coat was a broad white collar after the Dutch fashion, out of which his long scraggy throat shot upwards with his round head and bristle of hair balanced upon the top of it, like the turnip on a stick at which we used to throw at the fairs. In this guise he stood blinking and winking in the glare of light, and pattering out his excuses with as many bows and scrapes as Sir Peter Witling in the play. I was in the act of following him into the room, when Reuben plucked at my sleeve to detain me.

'Nay, I won't come in with you, Micah,' said he; 'there's mischief likely to come of all this. My father may grumble over his beer jugs, but he's a Churchman and a Tantivy for all that. I'd best keep out of it.'

'You are right,' I answered. 'There is no need for you to meddle in the business. Be mum as to all that you have heard.'

'Mum as a mouse,' said he, and pressing my hand turned away into the darkness. When I returned to the sitting-room I found that my mother had hurried into the kitchen, where the crackling of sticks showed that she was busy in building a fire. Decimus Saxon was seated at the edge of the iron-bound oak chest at the side of my father, and was watching him keenly with his little twinkling eyes, while the old man was fixing his horn glasses and breaking the seals of the packet which his strange visitor had just handed to him.

I saw that when my father looked at the signature at the end of the long, closely written letter he gave a whiff of surprise and sat motionless for a moment or so staring at it. Then he turned to the commencement and read it very carefully through, after which he turned it over and read it again. Clearly it brought no unwelcome news, for his eyes sparkled with joy when he looked up from his reading, and more than once he laughed aloud. Finally he asked the man Saxon how it had come into his possession, and whether he was aware of the contents.

‘Why, as to that,’ said the messenger, ‘it was handed to me by no less a person than Dicky Rumbold himself, and in the presence of others whom it’s not for me to name. As to the contents, your own sense will tell you that I would scarce risk my neck by bearing a message without I knew what the message was. I am no chicken at the trade, sir. Cartels, *pronunciamientos*, challenges, flags of truce, and proposals for waffenstillstands, as the Deutschers call it — they’ve all gone through my hands, and never one, gone awry.’

‘Indeed!’ quoth my father. ‘You are yourself one of the faithful?’

‘I trust that I am one of those who are on the narrow and thorny track,’ said he, speaking through his nose, as was the habit of the extreme sectaries.

‘A track upon which no prelate can guide us,’ said my father.

‘Where man is nought and the Lord is all,’ rejoined Saxon.

‘Good! good!’ cried my father. ‘Micah, you shall take this worthy man to my room, and see that he hath dry linen, and my second-best suit of Utrecht velvet. It may serve until his own are dried. My boots, too, may perchance be useful — my riding ones of untanned leather. A hat with silver braiding hangs above them in the cupboard. See that he lacks for nothing which the house can furnish. Supper will be ready when he hath changed his attire. I beg that you will go at once, good Master Saxon, lest you take a chill.’

‘There is but one thing that we have omitted,’ said our visitor, solemnly rising up from his chair and clasping his long nervous hands together. ‘Let us delay no longer to send up a word of praise to the Almighty for His manifold blessings, and for the mercy wherewith He plucked me and my letters out of the deep, even as Jonah was saved from the violence of the wicked ones who hurled him overboard, and it may be fired falconets at him, though we are not so informed in Holy Writ. Let us pray, my friends!’ Then in a high-toned chanting voice he offered up a long prayer of thanksgiving, winding up with a petition for grace and enlightenment for the house and all its inmates. Having concluded by a sonorous amen, he at last suffered himself to be led upstairs; while my mother, who had slipped in and listened with much edification to his words, hurried away to prepare him a bumper of green usquebaugh with ten drops of Daffy's Elixir therein, which was her sovereign recipe against the effects of a soaking. There was no event in life, from a christening to a marriage, but had some appropriate food or drink in my mother's vocabulary, and no ailment for which she had not some pleasant cure in her well-stocked cupboards.

Master Decimus Saxon in my father's black Utrecht velvet and untanned riding boots looked a very different man to the bedraggled castaway who had crawled like a conger eel into our fishing-boat. It seemed as if he had cast off his manner with his raiment, for he behaved to my mother during supper with an air of demure gallantry which sat upon him better than the pert and flippant carriage which he had shown towards us in the boat. Truth to say, if he was now more reserved, there was a very good reason for it, for he played such havoc amongst the eatables that there was little time for talk. At last, after passing from the round of cold beef to a capon pasty, and topping up with a two-pound perch, washed down by a great jug of ale, he smiled upon us all and told us that his fleshly necessities were satisfied for the nonce. 'It is my rule,' he remarked, 'to obey the wise precept which advises a man to rise from table feeling that he could yet eat as much as he has partaken of.'

'I gather from your words, sir, that you have yourself seen hard service,' my father remarked when the board had been cleared and my mother had retired for the night.

'I am an old fighting man,' our visitor answered, screwing his pipe together, 'a lean old dog of the hold-fast breed. This body of mine bears the mark of many a cut and slash received for the most part in the service of the Protestant faith, though some few were caught for the sake of Christendom in general when warring against the Turk. There is blood of mine, sir, Spotted all over the map of Europe. Some of it, I confess, was spilled in no public cause, but for the protection of mine own honour in the private duello or holmgang, as it was called among the nations of the north. It is necessary that a cavaliero of fortune, being for the greater part a stranger in a strange land, should be somewhat nice in matters of the sort, since he stands, as it were, as the representative of his country, whose good name should be more dear to him than his own.'

'Your weapon on such occasions was, I suppose, the sword?' my father asked, shifting uneasily in his seat, as he would do when his old instincts were waking up.

'Broadsword, rapier, Toledo, spontoon, battle-axe, pike or half-pike, morgenstiern, and halbert. I speak with all due modesty, but with backsword, sword and dagger, sword and buckler, single falchion, case of falchions, or any other such exercise, I will hold mine own against any man that ever wore neat's leather, save only my elder brother Quartus.'

'By my faith,' said my father with his eyes shining, 'were I twenty years younger I should have at you! My backsword play hath been thought well of by stout men of war. God forgive me that my heart should still turn to such vanities.'

'I have heard godly men speak well of it,' remarked Saxon. 'Master Richard Rumbold himself spake of your deeds of arms to the Duke of Argyle. Was there not a Scotsman, one Storr or Stour?'

'Ay, ay! Storr of Drumlithie. I cut him nigh to the saddle-bow in a skirmish on the eve of Dunbar. So Dicky Rumbold had not forgotten it, eh? He was a hard one both at praying and at fighting. We have ridden knee to knee in the field, and we have sought truth together in the chamber. So, Dick will be in harness once again! He could not be still if a blow were to be struck for the trampled faith. If the tide of war set in this direction, I too — who knows? who knows?'

'And here is a stout man-at-arms,' said Saxon, passing his hand down my arm.' He hath thew and sinew, and can use proud words too upon occasion, as I have good cause to know, even in our short acquaintance. Might it not be that he too should strike in this quarrel?'

'We shall discuss it,' my father answered, looking thoughtfully at me from under his heavy brows. 'But I pray you, friend Saxon, to give us some further account upon these matters. My son Micah, as I understand, hath picked you out of the waves. How came you there?'

Decimus Saxon puffed at his pipe for a minute or more in silence, as one who is marshalling facts each in its due order.

'It came about in this wise,' he said at last. 'When John of Poland chased the Turk from the gates of Vienna, peace broke out in the Principalities, and many a wandering cavaliero like myself found his occupation gone. There was no war waging save only some petty Italian skirmish, in which a soldier could scarce expect to reap either dollars or repute, so I wandered across the Continent, much cast down at the strange peace which prevailed in every quarter. At last, however, on reaching the Lowlands, I chanced to hear that the *Providence*, owned and commanded by my two brothers, Nonus and Quartus, was about to start from Amsterdam for an adventure to the Guinea coast. I proposed to them that I should join them, and was accordingly taken into partnership on condition that I paid one-third of the cost of the cargo. While waiting at the port I chanced to come across some of the exiles, who, having heard of my devotion to the Protestant cause, brought me to the Duke and to Master Rumbold, who committed these letters to my charge. This makes it clear how they came into my possession.’

‘But not how you and they came into the water,’ my father suggested.

‘Why, that was but the veriest chance,’ the adventurer answered with some little confusion of manner. ‘It was the *fortuna belli*, or more properly *pacis*. I had asked my brothers to put into Portsmouth that I might get rid of these letters, on which they replied in a boorish and unmannerly fashion that they were still waiting for the thousand guineas which represented my share of the venture. To this I answered with brotherly familiarity that it was a small thing, and should be paid for out of the profits of our enterprise. Their reply was I that I had promised to pay the money down, and that money down they must have. I then proceeded to prove, both by the Aristotelian and by the Platonic or deductive method, that having no guineas in my possession it was impossible for me to produce a thousand of them, at the same time pointing out that the association of an honest man in the business was in itself an ample return for the money, since their own reputations had been somewhat blown on. I further offered in the same frank and friendly spirit to meet either of them with sword or with pistol, a proposal which should have satisfied any honour-loving Cavaliero. Their base mercantile souls prompted them, however, to catch up two muskets, one of which Nonus discharged at me, and it is likely that Quartus would have followed suit had I not plucked the gun from his hand and unloaded it to prevent further mischief. In unloading it I fear that one of the slugs blew a hole in brother Nonus. Seeing that there was a chance of further disagreements aboard the vessel, I at once decided to leave her, in doing which I was forced to kick off my beautiful jack-boots, which were said by

Vanseddars himself to be he finest pair that ever went out of his shop, square-toed, double-soled — alas! alas!’

‘Strange that you should have been picked up by the son of the very man to whom you had a letter.’

‘The working of Providence,’ Saxon answered. ‘I have two-and-twenty other letters which must all be delivered by hand. If you will permit me to use your house for a while, I shall make it my headquarters.’

‘Use it as though it were your own,’ said my father.

‘Your most grateful servant, sir,’ he cried, jumping up and bowing with his hand over his heart. ‘This is indeed a haven of rest after the ungodly and profane company of my brothers. Shall we then put up a hymn, and retire from the business of the day?’

My father willingly agreed, and we sang ‘Oh, happy land!’ after which our visitor followed me to his room, bearing with him the unfinished bottle of usquebaugh which my mother had left on the table. He took it with him, he explained, as a precaution against Persian ague, contracted while battling against the Ottoman, and liable to recur at strange moments. I left him in our best spare bedroom, and returned to my father, who was still seated, heavy with thought, in his old corner.

‘What think you of my find, Dad?’ I asked.

‘A man of parts and of piety,’ he answered; ‘but in truth he has brought me news so much after my heart, that he could not be unwelcome were he the Pope of Rome.’

‘What news, then?’

‘This, this!’ he cried joyously, plucking the letter out of his bosom. ‘I will read it to you, lad. Nay, perhaps I had best sleep the night upon it, and read it to-morrow when our heads are clearer. May the Lord guide my path, and confound the tyrant! Pray for light, boy, for my life and yours may be equally at stake.’

CHAPTER VI. Of the Letter that came from the Lowlands

In the morning I was up betimes, and went forthwith, after the country fashion, to our quest's room to see if there was aught in which I could serve him. On pushing at his door, I found that it was fastened, which surprised me the more as I knew that there was neither key nor bolt upon the inside. On my pressing against it, however, it began to yield, and I could then see that a heavy chest which was used to stand near the window had been pulled round in order to shut out any intrusion. This precaution, taken under my father's roof, as though he were in a den of thieves, angered me, and I gave a butt with my shoulder which cleared the box out of the way, and enabled me to enter the room.

The man Saxon was sitting up in bed, staring about him as though he were not very certain for the moment where he was. He had tied a white kerchief round his head by way of night bonnet, and his hard-visaged, clean-shaven face, looking out through this, together with his bony figure, gave him some resemblance to a gigantic old woman. The bottle of usquebaugh stood empty by his bedside. Clearly his fears had been realised, and he had had an attack of the Persian ague.

'Ah, my young friend!' he said at last. 'Is it, then, the custom of this part of the country to carry your visitor's rooms by storm or escalado in the early hours of the morning?'

'Is it the custom,' I answered sternly, 'to barricade up your door when you are sleeping under the roof-tree of an honest man? What did you fear, that you should take such a precaution?'

'Nay, you are indeed a spitfire,' he replied, sinking back upon the pillow, and drawing the clothes round him, 'a feuerkopf as the Germans call it, or sometimes tollkopf, which in its literal significance meaneth a fool's head. Your father was, as I have heard, a strong and a fierce man when the blood of youth ran in his veins; but you, I should judge, are in no way behind him. Know, then, that the bearer of papers of import, *documenta preciosa sed periculosa*, is bound to leave nought to chance, but to guard in every way the charge which hath been committed to him. True it is that I am in the house of an honest man, but I know not who may come or who may go during the hours of the night. Indeed, for the matter of that — but enough is said. I shall be with you anon.'

'Your clothes are dry and are ready for you,' I remarked.

'Enough! enough!' he answered. 'I have no quarrel with the suit which your father has lent me. It may be that I have been used to better, but they will serve my turn. The camp is not the court.'

It was evident to me that my father's suit was infinitely better, both in texture and material, than that which our visitor had brought with him. As he had withdrawn his head, however, entirely beneath the bedclothes, there was nothing more to be said, so I descended to the lower room, where I found toy father busily engaged fastening a new buckle to his sword-belt while my mother and the maid were preparing the morning meal.

'Come into the yard with me, Micah,' quoth my father; 'I would have a word with you.' The workmen had not yet come to their work, so we strolled out into the sweet morning air, and seated ourselves on the low stone bankment on which the skins are dressed.

'I have been out here this morning trying my hand at the broadsword exercise, 'said he; 'I find that I am as quick as ever on a thrust, but my cuts are sadly stiff. I might be of use at a pinch, but, alas! I am not the same swordsman who led the left troop of the finest horse regiment that ever followed a kettledrum. The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away! Yet, if I am old and worn, there is the fruit of my loins to stand in my place and to wield the same sword in the same cause. You shall go in my place, Micah.'

'Go! Go whither?'

'Hush, lad, and listen! Let not your mother know too much, for the hearts of women are soft. When Abraham offered up his eldest born, I trow that he said little to Sarah on the matter. Here is the letter. Know you who this Dicky Rumbold is?'

'Surely I have heard you speak of him as an old companion of yours.'

'The same — a staunch man and true. So faithful was he — faithful even to slaying — that when the army of the righteous dispersed, he did not lay aside his zeal with his buff-coat. He took to business as a maltster at Hoddesdon, and in his house was planned the famous Rye House Plot, in which so many good men were involved.'

'Was it not a foul assassination plot?' I asked.

‘Nay, nay, be not led away by terms! It is a vile invention of the malignants that these men planned assassination. What they would do they purposed doing in broad daylight, thirty of them against fifty of the Royal Guard, when Charles and James passed on their way to Newmarket. If the royal brothers got pistol-bullet or sword-stab, it would be in open fight, and at the risk of their attackers. It was give and take, and no murder.’

He paused and looked inquiringly at me; but I could not truthfully say that I was satisfied, for an attack upon the lives of unarmed and unsuspecting men, even though surrounded by a bodyguard, could not, to my mind, be justified.

‘When the plot failed,’ my father continued, ‘Rumbold had to fly for his life, but he succeeded in giving his pursuers the slip and in making his way to the Lowlands. There he found that many enemies of the Government had gathered together. Repeated messages from England, especially from the western counties and from London, assured them that if they would but attempt an invasion they might rely upon help both in men and in money. They were, however, at fault for some time for want of a leader of sufficient weight to carry through so large a project; but now at last they have one, who is the best that could have been singled out — none other than the well-beloved Protestant chieftain James, Duke of Monnmouth, son of Charles II.’

‘Illegitimate son,’ I remarked.

‘That may or may not be. There are those who say that Lucy Walters was a lawful wife. Bastard or no, he holds the sound principles of the true Church, and he is beloved by the people. Let him appear in the West, and soldiers will rise up like the flowers in the spring time.’

He paused, and led me away to the farther end of the yard, for the workmen had begun to arrive and to cluster round the dipping trough.

‘Monmouth is coming over,’ he continued, ‘and he expects every brave Protestant man to rally to his standard. The Duke of Argyle is to command a separate expedition, which will set the Highlands of Scotland in a blaze. Between them they hope to bring the persecutor of the faithful on his knees. But I hear the voice of the man Saxon, and I must not let him say that I have treated him in a churlish fashion. Here is the letter, lad. Read it with care, and remember that when brave men are striving for their rights it is fitting that one of the old rebel house of Clarke should be among them.’

I took the letter, and wandering off into the fields, I settled myself under a convenient tree, and set myself to read it. This yellow sheet which I now hold in my hand is the very one which was brought by Decimus Saxon, and read by me that bright May morning under the hawthorn shade. I give it to you as it stands;

'To my friend and companion in the cause of the Lord, Joseph Clarke. — Know, friend, that aid and delivery is coming upon Israel, and that the wicked king and those who uphold him shall be smitten and entirely cast down, until their place in the land shall know them no more. Hasten, then, to testify to thy own faith, that in the day of trouble ye be not found wanting.

'It has chanced from time to time that many of the suffering Church, both from our own land and from among the Scots, have assembled in this good Lutheran town of Amsterdam, until enough are gathered together to take a good work in hand. For amongst our own folk there are my Lord Grey of Wark, Wade, Dare of Taunton, Ayloffe, Holmes, Hollis, Goodenough, and others whom thou shalt know. Of the Scots there are the Duke of Argyle, who has suffered sorely for the Covenant, Sir Patrick Hume, Fletcher of Saltoun, Sir John Cochrane, Dr. Ferguson, Major Elphinstone, and others. To these we would fain have added Locke and old Hal Ludlow, but they are, as those of the Laodicean Church, neither cold nor warm.

'It has now come to pass, however, that Monmouth, who has long lived in dalliance with the Midianitish woman known by the name of Wentworth, has at last turned him to higher things, and has consented to make a bid for the crown. It was found that the Scots preferred to follow a chieftain of their own, and it has therefore been determined that Argyle — M'Callum More, as the breechless savages of Inverary call him — shall command a separate expedition landing upon the western coast of Scotland. There he hopes to raise five thousand Campbells, and to be joined by all the Covenanters and Western Whigs, men who would make troops of the old breed had they but God-fearing officers with an experience of the chance of fields and the usages of war. With such a following he should be able to hold Glasgow, and to draw away the King's force to the north. Ayloffe and I go with Argyle. It is likely that our feet may be upon Scottish ground before thy eyes read these words.

'The stronger expedition starts with Monmouth, and lands at a fitting place in the West, where we are assured that we have many friends. I cannot name the spot lest this letter miscarry, but thou shalt hear anon. I have written to all good men along the coast, bidding them to be prepared to support the rising. The King is weak, and hated by the greater part of his subjects. It doth but need one good stroke to bring his crown in the dust. Monmouth will start in a few weeks, when his equipment is finished and the weather favourable. If thou canst come, mine old comrade, I know well that thou wilt need no bidding of mine to bring thee to our banner. Should perchance a peaceful life and waning strength forbid thy attendance, I trust that thou wilt wrestle for us in prayer, even as the holy prophet of old; and perchance, since I hear that thou hast prospered according to the things of this world, thou mayst be able to fit out a pikeman or two, or to send a gift towards the military chest, which will be none too plentifully lined. We trust not to gold, but to steel and to our own good cause, yet gold will be welcome none the less. Should we fall, we fall like men and Christians. Should we succeed, we shall see how the perjured James, the persecutor of the saints with the heart like a nether millstone, the man who smiled when the thumbs of the faithful were wrenched out of their sockets at Edinburgh — we shall see how manfully he can bear adversity when it falls to his lot. May the hand of the Almighty be over us!

‘I know little of the bearer of this, save that he professes to be of the elect. Shouldst thou go to Monmouth’s camp, see that thou take him with thee, for I hear that he hath had good experience in the German, Swedish, and Otttoman wars. — Yours in the faith of Christ, Richard Rumbold.

‘Present my services to thy spouse. Let her read Timothy chapter two, ninth to fifteenth verses.’

This long letter I read very carefully, and then putting it in my pocket returned indoors to my breakfast. My father looked at me, as I entered, with questioning eyes, but I had no answer to return him, for my own mind was clouded and uncertain.

That day Decimus Saxon left us, intending to make a round of the country and to deliver his letters, but promising to be back again ere long. We had a small mishap ere he went, for as we were talking of his journey my brother Hosea must needs start playing with my father’s powder-flask, which in some way went off with a sudden fluff, spattering the walls with fragments of metal. So unexpected and loud was the explosion, that both my father and I sprang to our feet; but Saxon, whose back was turned to my brother, sat four-square in his chair without a glance behind him or a shade of change in his rugged face. As luck would have it, no one was injured, not even Hosea, but the incident made me think more highly of our new acquaintance. As he started off down the village street, his long stringy figure and strange gnarled visage, with my father’s silver-braided hat cocked over his eye, attracted rather more attention than I cared to see, considering the importance of the missives which he bore, and the certainty of their discovery should he be arrested as a masterless man. Fortunately, however, the curiosity of the country folk did but lead them to cluster round their doors and windows, staring open-eyed, while he, pleased at the attention which he excited, strode along with his head in the air and a cudgel of mine twirling in his hand. He had left golden opinions behind him. My father’s good wishes had been won by his piety and by the sacrifices which he claimed to have made for the faith. My mother he had taught how wimples are worn amongst the Serbs, and had also demonstrated to her a new method of curing marigolds in use in some parts of Lithuania. For myself, I confess that I retained a vague distrust of the man, and was determined to avoid putting faith in him more than was needful. At present, however, we had no choice hut to treat him as an ambassador from friends.

And I? What was I to do? Should I follow my father’s wishes, and draw my maiden sword on behalf of the insurgents, or should I stand aside and see how events shaped themselves? It was more fitting that I should go than he. But, on the other hand, I was no keen religious zealot. Papistry, Church, Dissent, I believed that there was good in all of them, but that not one was worth the spilling of human blood. James might be a perjurer and a villain, but he was, as far as I could see, the rightful king of England, and no tales of secret marriages or black boxes could alter the fact that his rival was apparently an illegitimate son, and as such ineligible to the throne. Who could say what evil act upon the part of a monarch justified his people in setting him aside? Who was the judge in such a case? Yet, on the other hand, the man had notoriously broken his own pledges, and that surely should absolve his subjects from their allegiance. It was a weighty question for a country-bred lad to have to settle, and yet settled it must be, and that speedily. I took up my hat and wandered away down the village street, turning the matter over in my head.

But it was no easy thing for me to think seriously of anything in the hamlet; for I was in some way, my dear children, though I say it myself, a favourite with the young and with the old, so that I could not walk ten paces without some greeting or address. There were my own brothers trailing behind me, Baker Mitford's children tugging at my skirts, and the millwright's two little maidens one on either hand. Then, when I had persuaded these young rompers to leave me, out came Dame Fullarton the widow, with a sad tale about how her grindstone had fallen out of its frame, and neither she nor her household could lift it in again. That matter I set straight and proceeded on my way; but I could not pass the sign of the Wheatsheaf without John Lockarby, Reuben's father, plunging out at me and insisting upon my coming in with him for a morning cup.

'The best glass of mead in the countryside, and brewed under my own roof,' said he proudly, as he poured it into the flagon. 'Why, bless you, master Micah, a man with a frame like yours wants store o' good malt to keep it up wi'.'

'And malt like this is worthy of a good frame to contain it,' quoth Reuben, who was at work among the flasks.

'What think ye, Micah?' said the landlord. 'There was the Squire o' Milton over here yester morning wi' Johnny Ferneley o' the Bank side, and they will have it that there's a man in Fareham who could wrestle you, the best of three, and find your own grip, for a good round stake.'

'Tut! tut!' I answered; 'you would have me like a prize mastiff, showing my teeth to the whole countryside. What matter if the man can throw me, or I him?'

'What matter? Why, the honour of Havant,' quoth he. 'Is that no matter? But you are right,' he continued, draining off his horn. 'What is all this village life with its small successes to such as you? You are as much out of your place as a vintage wine at a harvest supper. The whole of broad England, and not the streets of Havant, is the fit stage for a man of your kidney. What have you to do with the beating of skins and the tanning of leather?'

'My father would have you go forth as a knight-errant, Micah,' said Reuben, laughing. 'You might chance to get your own skin beaten and your own leather tanned.'

'Who ever knew so long a tongue in so short a body?' cried the innkeeper. 'But in good sooth, Master Micah, I am in sober earnest when I say that you are indeed wasting the years of your youth, when life is sparkling and clear, and that you will regret it when you have come to the flat and flavourless dregs of old age.’

‘There spoke the brewer,’ said Reuben; ‘but indeed, Micah, my father is right, for all that he hath such a hops-and-water manner of putting it.’

‘I will think over it,’ I answered, and with a nod to the kindly couple proceeded on my way.

Zachariah Palmer was planing a plank as I passed. Looking up he bade me good-morrow.

‘I have a book for you, lad,’ he said.

‘I have but now finished the “Comus,”’ I answered, for he had lent me John Milton’s poem. ‘But what is this new book, daddy?’

‘It is by the learned Locke, and treateth of states and statecraft. It is but a small thing, but if wisdom could show in the scales it would weigh down many a library. You shall have it when I have finished it, to-morrow mayhap or the day after. A good man is Master Locke. Is he not at this moment a wanderer in the Lowlands, rather than bow his knee to what his conscience approved not of?’

‘There are many good men among the exiles, are there not?’ said I.

‘The pick of the country,’ he answered. ‘Ill fares the land that drives the highest and bravest of its citizens away from it. The day is coming, I fear, when every man will have to choose betwixt his beliefs and his freedom. I am an old man, Micah boy, but I may live long enough to see strange things in this once Protestant kingdom.’

‘But if these exiles had their way,’ I objected, ‘they would place Monmouth upon the throne, and so unjustly alter the succession.’

‘Nay, nay,’ old Zachary answered, laying down his plane. ‘If they use Monmouth’s name, it is but to strengthen their cause, and to show that they have a leader of repute. Were James driven from the throne, the Commons of England in Parliament assembled would be called upon to name his successor. There are men at Monmouth’s back who would not stir unless this were so.’

‘Then, daddy,’ said I, ‘since I can trust you, and since you will tell me what you do really think, would it be well, if Monmouth’s standard be raised, that I should join it?’

The carpenter stroked his white beard and pondered for a while. ‘It is a pregnant question,’ he said at last, ‘and yet methinks that there is but one answer to it, especially for your father’s son. Should an end be put to

James’s rule, it is not too late to preserve the nation in its old faith; but if the disease is allowed to spread, it may be that even the tyrant’s removal would not prevent his evil seed from sprouting. I hold, therefore, that should the exiles make such an attempt, it is the duty of every man who values liberty of conscience to rally round them. And you, my son, the pride of the village, what better use could you make of your strength than to devote it to helping to relieve your country of this insupportable yoke? It is treasonable and dangerous counsel — counsel which might lead to a short shrift and a bloody death — but, as the Lord liveth, if you were child of mine I should say the same.’

So spoke the old carpenter with a voice which trembled with earnestness, and went to work upon his plank once more, while I, with a few words of gratitude, went on my way pondering over what he had said to me. I had not gone far, however, before the hoarse voice of Solomon Sprent broke in upon my meditations.

‘Hoy there! Ahoy!’ he bellowed, though his mouth was but a few yards from my ear. ‘Would ye come across my hawse without slacking weigh? Clew up, d’ye see, clew up!’

‘Why, Captain,’ I said, ‘I did not see you. I was lost in thought.’

‘All adrift and without look-outs,’ quoth he, pushing his way through the break in the garden hedge. ‘Odd’s niggars, man! friends are not so plentiful, d’ye see, that ye need pass ‘em by without a dip o’ the ensign. So help me, if I had had a barker I’d have fired a shot across your bows.’

‘No offence, Captain,’ said I, for the veteran appeared to be nettled; ‘I have much to think of this morning.’

‘And so have I, mate,’ he answered, in a softer voice. ‘What think ye of my rig, eh?’ He turned himself slowly round in the sunlight as he spoke, and I perceived that he was dressed with unusual care. He had a blue suit of broadcloth trimmed with eight rows of buttons, and breeches of the same material with great bunches of ribbon at the knee. His vest was of lighter blue picked out with anchors in silver, and edged with a finger’s-breadth of lace. His boot was so wide that he might have had his foot in a bucket, and he wore a cutlass at his side suspended from a buff belt, which passed over his right shoulder.

‘I’ve had a new coat o’ paint all over,’ said he, with a wink. ‘Carramba! the old ship is water-tight yet. What would ye say, now, were I about to sling my hawser over a little scow, and take her in tow?’

‘A cow!’ I cried.

‘A cow! what d’ye take me for? A wench, man, and as tight a little craft as ever sailed into the port of wedlock.’

‘I have heard no better news for many a long day,’ said I; ‘I did not even know that you were betrothed. When thou is the wedding to be?’

‘Go slow, friend — go slow, and heave your lead-line! You have got out of your channel, and are in shoal water. I never said as how I was betrothed.’

‘What then?’ I asked.

‘I am getting up anchor now, to run down to her and summon her. Look ye, lad,’ he continued, plucking off his cap and scratching his ragged locks; ‘I’ve had to do wi’ wenches enow from the Levant to the Antilles — wenches such as a sailorman meets, who are all paint and pocket. It’s but the heaving of a hand grenade, and they strike their colours. This is a craft of another guess build, and unless I steer wi’ care she may put one in between wind and water before I so much as know that I am engaged. What think ye, heh? Should I lay myself boldly alongside, d’ye see, and ply her with small arms, or should I work myself clear and try a long range action? I am none of your slippery, grease-tongued, long-shore lawyers, but if so be as she’s willing for a mate, I’ll stand by her in wind and weather while my planks hold out.’

‘I can scarce give advice in such a case,’ said I, ‘for my experience is less than yours. I should say though that you had best speak to her from your heart, in plain sailor language.’

‘Aye, aye, she can take it or leave it. Phoebe Dawson it is, the sister of the blacksmith. Let us work back and have a drop of the right Nants before we go. I have an anker newly come, which never paid the King a groat.’

‘Nay, you had best leave it alone,’ I answered.

‘Say you so? Well, mayhap you are right. Throw off your moorings, then, and clap on sail, for we must go.’

‘But I am not concerned,’ said I.

‘Not concerned! Not—’ he was too much overcome to go on, and could but look at me with a face full of reproach. ‘I thought better of you, Micah. Would you let this crazy old hulk go into action, and not stand by to fire a broadside?’

‘What would you have me do then?’

‘Why, I would have you help me as the occasion may arise. If I start to board her, I would have you work across the bows so as to rake her. Should I range, up on the larboard quarter, do you lie, on the starboard. If I get crippled, do you draw her fire until I refit. What, man, you would not desert me!’

The old seaman’s tropes and maritime conceits were not always intelligible to me, but it was clear that he had set his heart upon my accompanying him, which I was equally determined not to do. At last by much reasoning I made him understand that my presence would be more hindrance than help, and would probably be fatal to his chances of success.

‘Well, well,’ he grumbled at last, ‘I’ve been concerned in no such expedition before. An’ it be the custom for single ships to engage, I’ll stand to it alone. You shall come with me as consort, though, and stand to and fro in the offing, or sink me if I stir a step.’

My mind was full of my father’s plans and of the courses which lay before me. There seemed to be no choice, however, as old Solomon was in dead earnest, but to lay the matter aside for the moment and see the upshot of this adventure.

‘Mind, Solomon,’ said I, ‘I don’t cross the threshold.’

‘Aye, aye, mate. You can please yourself. We have to beat up against the wind all the way. She’s on the look-out, for I hailed her yesternight, and let her know as how I should bear down on her about seven bells of the morning watch.’

I was thinking as we trudged down the road that Phoebe would need to be learned in sea terms to make out the old man’s meaning, when he pulled up short and clapped his hands to his pockets.

‘Zounds!’ he cried, ‘I have forgot to bring a pistol.’

‘In Heaven’s name!’ I said in amazement, ‘what could you want with a pistol?’

‘Why, to make signals with,’ said he. ‘Odds me that I should have forgot it! How is one’s consort to know what is going forward when the flagship carries no artillery? Had the lass been kind I should have fired one gun, that you might know it.’

‘Why,’ I answered, ‘if you come not out I shall judge that all is well. If things go amiss I shall see you soon.’

‘Aye — or stay! I’ll hoist a white jack at the port-hole. A white jack means that she hath hauled down her colours. Nombre de Dios, when I was a powder-boy in the old ship *Lion*, the day that we engaged the *Spiritus Sanctus* of two tier o' guns — the first time that ever I heard the screech of ball — my heart never thumped as it does now. What say ye if we run back with a fair wind and broach that anker of Nants?'

'Nay, stand to it, man,' said I; for by this time, we had come to the ivy-clad cottage behind which was the village smithy. 'What, Solomon! an English seaman never feared a foe, either with petticoats or without them.'

'No, curse me if he did!' quoth Solomon, squaring his shoulders, 'never a one, Don, Devil, or Dutchman; so here goes for her!' So saying he made his way into the cottage, leaving me standing by the garden wicket, half amused and half annoyed at this interruption to my musings.

As it proved, the sailor had no very great difficulty with his suit, and soon managed to capture his prize, to use his own language. I heard from the garden the growling of his gruff voice, and a good deal of shrill laughter ending in a small squeak, which meant, I suppose, that he was coming to close quarters. Then there was silence for a little while, and at last I saw a white kerchief waving from the window, and perceived, moreover, that it was Phoebe herself who was fluttering it. Well, she was a smart, kindly-hearted lass, and I was glad in my heart that the old seaman should have such a one to look after him.

Here, then, was one good friend settled down finally for life. Another warned me that I was wasting my best years in the hamlet. A third, the most respected of all, advised me openly to throw in my lot with the insurgents, should the occasion arise. If I refused, I should have the shame of seeing my aged father setting off for the wars, whilst I lingered at home. And why should I refuse? Had it not long been the secret wish of my heart to see something of the great world, and what fairer chance could present itself? My wishes, my friend's advice, and my father's hopes all pointed in the one direction.

'Father,' said I, when I returned home, 'I am ready to go where you will.'

'May the Lord be glorified!' he cried solemnly. 'May He watch over your young life, and keep your heart steadfast to the cause which is assuredly His!'

And so, my dear grandsons, the great resolution was taken, and I found myself committed to one side in the national quarrel.

CHAPTER VII. Of the Horseman who rode from the West

My father set to work forthwith preparing for our equipment, furnishing Saxon out as well as myself on the most liberal scale, for he was determined that the wealth of his age should be as devoted to the cause as was the strength of his youth. These arrangements had to be carried out with the most extreme caution, for there were many Prelatists in the village, and in the present disturbed state of the public mind any activity on the part of so well known a man would have at once attracted attention. So carefully did the wary old soldier manage matters, however, that we soon found ourselves in a position to start at an hour's notice, without any of our neighbours being a whit the wiser.

His first move was to purchase through an agent two suitable horses at Chichester fair, which were conveyed to the stables of a trusty Whig farmer living near Portchester, who was ordered to keep them until they were called for. Of these animals one was a mottled grey, of great mettle and power, standing seventeen and a half hands high, and well up to my weight, for in those days, my dears, I had not laid on flesh, and weighed a little under sixteen stone for all my height and strength. A critic might have said that Covenant, for so I named my steed, was a trifle heavy about the head and neck, but I found him a trusty, willing brute, with great power and endurance. Saxon, who when fully accoutred could scarce have weighed more than twelve stone, had a light bay Spanish jennet, of great speed and spirit. This mare he named Chloe, 'after a godly maiden of his acquaintance,' though, as my father remarked, there was a somewhat ungodly and heathenish smack about the appellation. These horses and their harness were bought and held ready without my father appearing in the matter in any way.

This important point having been settled, there was the further question of arms to be discussed, which gave rise to much weighty controversy between Decimus Saxon and my father, each citing many instances from their own experiences where the presence or absence of some taslet or arm-guard had been of the deepest import to the wearer. Your great-grandfather had set his heart upon my wearing the breastplate which still bore the dints of the Scottish spears at Dunbar, but on trying it on we found it was too small for me. I confess that this was a surprise, for when I looked back at the awe with which I had regarded my father's huge proportions, it was marvellous to me to have this convincing proof that I had outgrown him. By ripping down the side-leather and piercing holes through which a lace could be passed, my mother managed to arrange it so that I could wear it without discomfort. A pair of taslets or thigh-pieces, with guards for the upper arm and gauntlets, were all borrowed from the old Parliamentary equipment, together with the heavy straight sword and pair of horse pistols which formed the usual weapons of a cavalier. My father had chosen me a head-piece in Portsmouth, fluted, with good barrets, padded inside with soft leather, very light and yet very strong. When fully equipped, both Saxon and my father agreed that I had all that was requisite for a well-appointed soldier. Saxon had purchased a buff-coat, a steel cap, and a pair of jack-boots, so that with the rapier and pistols which my father had presented him with, he was ready to take the field at any time.

There would, we hoped, be no great difficulty in our reaching Monmouth's forces when the hour came. In those troublous times the main roads were so infested by highwaymen and footpads, that it was usual for travellers to carry weapons and even armour for their protection. There was no reason therefore why our appearance should excite suspicion. Should questions be asked, Saxon had a long story prepared, to the effect that we were travelling to join Henry Somerset, Duke of Beaufort, to whose household we belonged. This invention he explained to me, with many points of corroboration which I was to furnish, but when I said positively that I should rather be hanged as a rebel than speak a falsehood, he looked at me open-eyed, and shook his head as one much shocked. A few weeks of campaigning, he said, would soon cure me of my squeamishness. For himself, no more truthful child had ever carried a horn-book, but he had learned to lie upon the Danube, and looked upon it as a necessary part of the soldier's upbringing. 'For what are all stratagems, ambuscades, and outfalls but lying upon a large scale?' he argued. 'What is an adroit commander but one who hath a facility for disguising the truth? When, at the battle of Senlac, William the Norman ordered his men to feign flight in order that they might break his enemy's array, a wile much practised both by the Scythians of old and by the Croats of our own day, pray what is it but the acting of a lie? Or when Hannibal, having tied torches to the horns of great droves of oxen, caused the Roman Consuls to imagine that his army was in retreat, was it not a deception or infraction of the truth? — a point well brought out by a soldier of repute in the treatise “An in bello dolo uti liceat; an apud hostes falsiloquio uti liceat.” And so if, after these great models, I in order to gain mine ends do announce that we are bound to Beaufort when we are in truth making for Monmouth, is it not in accord with the usages of war and the customs of great commanders?’ All which specious argument I made no attempt to answer, beyond repeating that he might avail himself of the usage, but that he must not look to me for corroboration. On the other hand, I promised to hold my speech and to say nothing which might hamper him, with which pledge he was forced to be contented.

And now at last, my patient listeners, I shall be able to carry you out of the humble life of the village, and to cease my gossip of the men who were old when I was young, and who are now lying this many a year in the Bedhampton churchyard. You shall come with me now, and you shall see England as it was in those days, and you shall hear of how we set forth to the wars, and of all the adventures which overtook us. And if what I tell you should ever chance to differ from what you have read in the book of Mr. Coke or of Mr. Oldmixon, or of any one else who has set these matters down in print, do ye bear in mind that I am telling of what I saw with these very eyes, and that I have helped to make history, which is a higher thing than to write it.

It was, then, towards nightfall upon the twelfth day of June 1685 that the news reached our part of the country that Monmouth had landed the day before at Lyme, a small seaport on the boundary between Dorsetshire and Devonshire. A great beacon blaze upon Portsdown Hill was the first news that we had of it, and then came a rattling and a drumming from Portsmouth, where the troops were assembled under arms. Mounted messengers clattered through the village street with their heads low on their horses’ necks, for the great tidings must be carried to London, that the Governor of Portsmouth might know how to act. (Note B, Appendix.) We were standing at our doorway in the gloaming, watching the coming and the going, and the line of beacon fires which were lengthening away to the eastward, when a little man galloped up to the door and pulled his panting horse up.

‘Is Joseph Clarke here?’ he asked.

‘I am he,’ said my father.

‘Are these men true?’ he whispered, pointing with his whip at Saxon and myself. ‘Then the trysting-place is Taunton. Pass it on to all whom ye know. Give my horse a bait and a drink, I beg of ye, for I must get on my way.’

My young brother Hosea looked to the tired creature, while we brought the rider inside and drew him a stoup of beer. A wiry, sharp-faced man he was, with a birth-mark upon his temple. His face and clothes were caked with dust, and his limbs were so stiff from the saddle that he could scarce put one foot before another.

‘One horse hath died under me,’ he said, ‘and this can scarce last another twenty miles. I must be in London by morning, for we hope that Danvers and Wildman may be able to raise the city. Yester-evening I left Monmouth’s camp. His blue flag floats over Lyme.’

‘What force hath he?’ my father asked anxiously.

‘He hath but brought over leaders. The force must come from you folk at home. He has with him Lord Grey of Wark, with Wade, the German Buyse, and eighty or a hundred more. Alas! that two who came are already lost to us. It is an evil, evil omen.’

‘What is amiss, then?’

‘Dare, the goldsmith of Taunton, hath been slain by Fletcher of Saltoun in some child’s quarrel about a horse. The peasants cried out for the blood of the Scot, and he was forced to fly aboard the ships. A sad mishap it is, for he was a skilful leader and a veteran soldier.’

‘Aye, aye,’ cried Saxon impatiently, ‘there will be some more skilful leaders and veteran soldiers in the West presently to take his place. But if he knew the usages of war, how came it that he should fight upon a private quarrel at such a time?’ He drew a flat brown book from his bosom, and ran his long thin finger down the table of contents. ‘Subisectio nona’—’here is the very case set forth, “An in hello publico provocatus ad duellum privatae amicitiae causa declinare possit,” in which the learned Fleming layeth it down that a man’s private honour must give way to the good of the cause. Did it not happen in my own case that, on the eve of the raising of the Anlagerung of Vienna, we stranger officers having been invited to the tent of the General, it chanced that a red-headed Irisher, one O’Daffy, an ancient in the regiment of Pappenheimer, did claim precedence of me on the ground of superiority of blood? On this I drew my glove across his face, not, mark ye, in anger, but as showing that I differed in some degree from his opinion. At which dissent he did at once offer to sustain his contention, but I, having read this subsection to him, did make it clear to him that we could not in honour settle the point until the Turk was chased from the city. So after the onfall—'

'Nay, sir, I may hear the narrative some future day,' said the messenger, staggering to his feet. 'I hope to find a relay at Chichester, and time presses. Work for the cause now, or be slaves for ever. Farewell!' He clambered into his saddle, and we heard the clatter of his hoofs dying away down the London road.

'The time hath come for you to go, Micah,' said my father solemnly.' Nay, wife, do not weep, but rather hearten the lad on his way by a blithe word and a merry face. I need not tell you to fight manfully and fearlessly in this quarrel. Should the tide of war set in this direction, you may find your old father riding by your side. Let us now bow down and implore the favour of the Almighty upon this expedition.'

We all knelt down in the low-roofed, heavy-raftered room while the old man offered up an earnest, strenuous prayer for our success. Even now, as I speak to ye, that group rises up before mine eyes. I see once again your ancestor's stern, rugged face, with his brows knitted and his corded hands writhed together in the fervour of his supplication. My mother kneels beside him with the tears trickling down her sweet, placid face, stifling her sobs lest the sound of them make my leave-taking more bitter. The children are in the sleeping-room upstairs, and we hear the patter of their bare feet upon the floor. The man Saxon sprawls across one of the oaken chairs, half kneeling, half reclining, with his long legs trailing out behind, and his face buried in his hands. All round in the flickering light of the hanging lamp I see the objects which have been so familiar to me from childhood — the settle by the fireplace, the high-back stiff-elbowed chairs, the stuffed fox above the door, the picture of Christian viewing the Promised Land from the summit of the Delectable Mountains — all small trifles in themselves, but making up among them the marvellous thing we call home, the all-powerful lodestone which draws the wanderer's heart from the farther end of the earth. Should I ever see it again save in my dreams — I, who was leaving this sheltered cove to plunge into the heart of the storm?

The prayer finished, we all rose with the exception of Saxon, who remained with his face buried in his hands for a minute or so before starting to his feet. I shrewdly suspect that he had been fast asleep, though he explained that he had paused to offer up an additional supplication. My father placed his hands upon my head and invoked the blessing of Heaven upon me. He then drew my companion aside, and I heard the jingling of coin, from which I judge that he was giving him something wherewith to start upon his travels. My mother clasped me to her heart, and slipped a small square of paper into my hand, saying that I was to look at it at my leisure, and that I should make her happy if I would but conform to the instructions contained in it. This I promised to do, and tearing myself away I set off down the darkened village street, with my long-limbed companion striding by my side.

It was close upon one in the morning, and all the country folk had been long abed. Passing the Wheatsheaf and the house of old Solomon, I could not but wonder what they would think of my martial garb were they afoot. I had scarce time to form the same thought before Zachary Palmer’s cottage when his door flew open, and the carpenter came running out with his white hair streaming in the fresh night breeze.

‘I have been awaiting you, Micah,’ he cried. ‘I had heard that Monmouth was up, and I knew that you would not lose a night ere starting. God bless you, lad, God bless you! Strong of arm and soft of heart, tender to the weak and stern to the oppressor, you have the prayers and the love of all who know you.’ I pressed his extended hands, and the last I saw of my native hamlet was the shadowy figure of the carpenter as he waved his good wishes to me through the darkness.

We made our way across the fields to the house of Whittier, the Whig farmer, where Saxon got into his war harness. We found our horses ready saddled and bridled, for my father had at the first alarm sent a message across that we should need them. By two in the morning we were breasting Portsdown Hill, armed, mounted, and fairly started on our journey to the rebel camp.

CHAPTER VIII. Of our Start for the Wars

All along the ridge of Portsdown Hill we had the lights of Portsmouth and of the harbour ships twinkling beneath us on the left, while on the right the Forest of Bere was ablaze with the signal fires which proclaimed the landing of the invader. One great beacon throbbed upon the summit of Butser, while beyond that, as far as eye could reach, twinkling sparks of light showed how the tidings were being carried north into Berkshire and eastward into Sussex. Of these fires, some were composed of faggots piled into heaps, and others of tar barrels set upon poles. We passed one of these last just opposite to Portchester, and the watchers around it, hearing the tramp of our horses and the clank of our arms, set up a loud huzza, thinking doubtless that we were King's officers bound for the West.

Master Decimus Saxon had flung to the winds the precise demeanour which he had assumed in the presence of my father, and rattled away with many a jest and scrap of rhyme or song as we galloped through the darkness.

'Gadzooks!' said he frankly, 'it is good to be able to speak freely without being expected to tag every sentence with a hallelujah or an amen.'

'You were ever the leader in those pious exercises,' I remarked drily.

'Aye, indeed. You have nicked it there! If a thing must be done, then take a lead in it, whatever it may be. A plaguy good precept, which has stood me in excellent stead before now. I cannot bear in mind whether I told you how I was at one time taken prisoner by the Turks and conveyed to Stamboul. There were a hundred of us or more, but the others either perished under the bastinado, or are to this day chained to an oar in the Imperial Ottoman galleys, where they are like to remain until they die under the lash, or until some Venetian or Genoese bullet finds its way into their wretched carcasses. I alone came off with my freedom.'

'And pray, how did you make your escape?' I asked.

'By the use of the wit wherewith Providence hath endowed me,' he answered complacently; 'for, seeing that their accursed religion is the blind side of these infidels, I did set myself to work upon it. To this end I observed the fashion in which our guard performed their morning and evening exercises, and having transformed my doublet into a praying cloth, I did imitate them, save only that I prayed at greater length and with more fervour.’

‘What!’ I cried in horror. ‘You did pretend to be a Mussulman?’

‘Nay, there was no pretence. I became a Mussulman. That, however, betwixt ourselves, as it might not stand me in very good stead with some Reverend Aminadab Fount-of-Grace in the rebel camp, who is no admirer of Mahmoud.’

I was so astounded at the impudence of this confession, coming from the mouth of one who had been leading the exercises of a pious Christian family, that I was fairly bereft of speech. Decimus Saxon whistled a few bars of a sprightly tune, and then continued —

‘My perseverance in these exercises soon led to my being singled out from among the other prisoners, until I so prevailed upon my gaolers that the doors were opened for me, and I was allowed out on condition of presenting myself at the prison gates once a day. What use, think ye, did I make of my freedom?’

‘Nay, you are capable of anything,’ said I.

‘I set off forthwith to their chief mosque — that of St. Sophia. When the doors opened and the muezzin called, I was ever the first to hurry into devotions and the last to leave them. Did I see a Mussulman strike his head upon the pavement, I would strike mine twice. Did I see him bend and bow, I was ready to prostrate myself. In this way ere long the piety of the converted Giaour became the talk of the city, and I was provided with a hut in which to make my sacred meditations. Here I might have done well, and indeed I had well-nigh made up my mind to set up as a prophet and write an extra chapter to the Koran, when some foolish trifle made the faithful suspicious of my honesty. It was but some nonsense of a wench being found in my hut by some who came to consult me upon a point of faith, but it was enough to set their heathen tongues wagging; so I thought it wisest to give them the slip in a Levantine coaster and leave the Koran uncompleted. It is perhaps as well, for it would be a sore trial to have to give up Christian women and pork, for their garlic-breathing houris and accursed kybobs of sheep’s flesh.’

We had passed through Fareham and Botley during this conversation, and were now making our way down the Bishopstoke road. The soil changes about here from chalk to sand, so that our horses’ hoofs did but make a dull subdued rattle, which was no bar to our talk — or rather to my companion's, for I did little more than listen. In truth, my mind was so full of anticipations of what was before us, and of thoughts of the home behind, that I was in no humour for sprightly chatter. The sky was somewhat clouded, but the moon glinted out between the rifts, showing us the long road which wound away in front of us. On either side were scattered houses with gardens sloping down toward the road. The heavy, sickly scent of strawberries was in the air.

'Hast ever slain a man in anger?' asked Saxon, as we galloped along.

'Never,' I answered.

'Ha! You will find that when you hear the clink of steel against steel, and see your foeman's eyes, you will straightway forget all rules, maxims, and precepts of the fence which your father or others may have taught you.'

'I have learned little of the sort,' said I. My father did but teach me to strike an honest downright blow. This sword can shear through a square inch of iron bar.'

'Scanderbeg's sword must have Scanderbeg's arm,' he remarked. 'I have observed that it is a fine piece of steel. One of the real old text-compellers and psalm-expounders which the faithful drew in the days of yore, when they would:

"Prove their religion orthodox,
By Apostolic blows and knocks."

You have not fenced much, then?'

'Scarce at all,' said I.

'It is as well. With an old and tried swordsman like myself, knowledge of the use of his weapon is everything; but with a young Hotspur of your temper, strength and energy go for much. I have oft remarked that those who are most skilled at the shooting of the popinjay, the cleaving of the Turk's head, and other such sports, are ever laggards in the field. Had the popinjay a crossbow as well, and an arrow on the string, or had the Turk a fist as well as a head, our young gallant's nerves would scarce be as steady over the business. I make no doubt, Master Clarke, that we shall make trusty comrades. What saith old Butler?

"Never did trusty squire with knight,
Or knight with squire ere jump more right."

I have scarce dared to quote "Hudibras" for these weeks past, lest I should set the Covenant fermenting in the old man's veins.'

‘If we are indeed to be comrades,’ said I sternly, ‘you must learn to speak with more reverence and less flippancy of my father, who would assuredly never have harboured you had he heard the tale which you have told me even now.’

‘Belike not,’ the adventurer answered, chuckling to himself. ‘It is a long stride from a mosque to a conventicle. But be not so hot-headed, my friend. You lack that repose of character which will come to you, no doubt, in your more mature years. What, man! within five minutes of seeing me you would have smitten me on the head with an oar, and ever since you have been like a bandog at my heels, ready to hark if I do but set my foot over what you regard as the straight line. Remember that you go now among men who fight on small occasion of quarrel. A word awry may mean a rapier thrust.’

‘Do you bear the same in mind,’ I answered hotly; ‘my temper is peaceful, but covert threats and veiled menace I shall not abide.’

‘Odd’s mercy!’ he cried. ‘I see that you will start carving me anon, and take me to Monmouth’s camp in sections. Nay, nay, we shall have fighting enow without falling out among ourselves. What houses are those on the left?’

‘The village of Swathling,’ I replied. ‘The lights of Bishopstoke lie to the right, in the hollow.’

‘Then we are fifteen miles on our way, and methinks there is already some faint flush of dawn in the east. Hullo, what have we here? Beds must be scarce if folks sleep on the highways.’

A dark blur which I had remarked upon the roadway in front of us had resolved itself as we approached into the figure of a man, stretched at full length, with his face downwards, and his head resting upon his crossed arms.

‘Some reveler, mayhap, from the village inn,’ I remarked.

‘There’s blood in the air,’ said Saxon, raising up his beak-like nose like a vulture which scents carrion. ‘Methinks he sleeps the sleep which knows no waking.’

He sprang down from his saddle, and turned the figure over upon his back. The cold pale light of the early dawn shimmering upon his staring eyes and colourless face showed that the old soldier’s instinct was correct, and that he had indeed drawn his last breath.

‘Here’s a pretty piece of work,’ said Saxon, kneeling by the dead man’s side and passing his hands over his pockets. ‘Footpads, doubtless. Not a stiver in his pockets, nor as much as a sleeve-link to help pay for the burial.’

‘How was he slain!’ I asked in horror, looking down at the poor vacant face, the empty house from which the tenant had departed.

‘A stab from behind and a tap on the head from the butt of a pistol. He cannot have been dead long, and yet every groat is gone. A man of position, too, I should judge from his dress — broadcloth coat by the feel, satin breeches, and silver buckles on his shoes. The rogues must have had some plunder with him. Could we but run across them, Clarke, it would be a great and grand thing.’

‘It would indeed,’ said I heartily. ‘What greater privilege than to execute justice upon such cowardly murderers!’

‘Pooh! pooh!’ he cried. ‘Justice is a slippery dame, and hath a two-edged sword in her hand. We may have enough of justice in our character as rebels to give us a surfeit of it. I would fain overtake these robbers that we may relieve them of their *spolia opima*, together with any other wealth which they may have unlawfully amassed. My learned friend the Fleming layeth it down that it is no robbery to rob a robber. But where shall we conceal this body?’

‘Wherefore should we conceal it?’ I asked.

‘Why, man, unused to war or the precautions of a warrior, you must yet see that should this body be found here, there will be a hue and cry through the country, and that strangers like ourselves will be arrested on suspicion. Should we clear ourselves, which is no very easy matter, the justice will at least want to know whence we come and whither we go, which may lead to inquiries that may bode us little good. I shall therefore take the liberty, mine unknown and silent friend, of dragging you into yon bushes, where for a day or two at least you are like to lie unobserved, and so bring no harm upon honest men.’

‘For God’s sake do not treat it so unkindly,’ I cried, springing down from my horse and laying my hand upon my companion’s arm. ‘There is no need to trail it in so unseemly a fashion. If it must be moved hence, I shall carry it with all due reverence. ‘So saying, I picked the body up in my arms, and bearing it to a wayside clump of yellow gorse bushes, I laid it solemnly down and drew the branches over it to conceal it.

‘You have the thews of an ox and the heart of a woman, ‘muttered my companion. ‘By the Mass, that old white-headed psalm-singer was right; for if my memory serves me, he said words to that effect. A few handfuls of dust will hide the stains. Now we may jog upon our way without any fear of being called upon to answer for another man’s sins. Let me but get my girth tightened and we may soon be out of danger’s way.’

‘I have had to do,’ said Saxon, as we rode onwards, ‘with many gentry of this sort, with Albanian brigands, the banditti of Piedmont, the Lanzknechte and Freiritter of the Rhine, Algerine picaroons, and other such folk. Yet I cannot call to mind one who hath ever been able to retire in his old age on a sufficient competence. It is but a precarious trade, and must end sooner or later in a dance on nothing in a tight cravat, with some kind friend tugging at your legs to ease you of any breath that you might have left.’

‘Nor does that end all,’ I remarked.

‘No. There is Tophet behind and the flames of hell. So our good friends the parsons tell us. Well, if a man is to make no money in this world, be hanged at the end of it, and finally burn for ever, he hath assuredly wandered on to a thorny track. If, on the other hand, one could always lay one’s hands on a well-lined purse, as those rogues have done to-night, one might be content to risk something in the world to come.’

‘But what can the well-filled purse do for them?’ said I. ‘What will the few score pieces which these bloodthirsty wretches have filched from this poor creature avail them when their own hour of death comes round?’

‘True,’ said Saxon dryly; ‘they may, however, prove useful in the meantime. This you say is Bishopstoke. What are the lights over yonder?’

‘They come, I think, from Bishop’s Waltham,’ I answered.

‘We must press on, for I would fain be in Salisbury before it is broad day. There we shall put our horses up until evening and have some rest, for there is nothing gained by man or beast coming jaded to the wars. All this day the western roads will be crowded with couriers, and mayhap patrolled by cavalry as well, so that we cannot show our faces upon it without a risk of being stopped and examined. Now if we lie by all day, and push on at dusk, keeping off the main road and making our way across Salisbury Plain and the Somersetshire downs, we shall be less likely to come to harm.’

‘But what if Monmouth be engaged before we come up to him?’ I asked.

‘Then we shall have missed a chance of getting our throats cut. Why, man, supposing that he has been routed and entirely dispersed, would it not be a merry conceit for us to appear upon the scene as two loyal yeomen, who had ridden all the way from Hampshire to strike in against the King’s enemies? We might chance to get some reward in money or in land for our zeal. Nay, frown not, for I was but jesting. Breathe our horses by walking them up this hill. My jennet is as fresh as when we started, but those great limbs of thine are telling upon the grey.’

The patch of light in the east had increased and broadened, and the sky was mottled with little pink feathers of cloud. As we passed over the low hills by Chandler’s Ford and Romsey we could see the smoke of Southampton to the south-east, and the broad dark expanse of the New Forest with the haze of morning hanging over it. A few horsemen passed us, pricking along, too much engrossed in their own errand to inquire ours. A couple of carts and a long string of pack-horses, laden principally with bales of wool, came straggling along a byroad, and the drivers waved their broad hats to us and wished us God-speed. At Dunbridge the folk were just stirring, and paused in taking down the cottage shutters to come to the garden railings and watch us pass. As we entered Dean, the great red sun pushed its rosy rim over the edge of the horizon, and the air was filled with the buzz of insects and the sweet scent of the morning. We dismounted at this latter village, and had a cup of ale while resting and watering the horses. The landlord could tell us nothing about the insurgents, and indeed seemed to care very little about the matter one way or the other. ‘As long as brandy pays a duty of six shillings and eightpence a gallon, and freight and leakage comes to half a crown, while I am expected to sell it at twelve shillings, it matters little to me who is King of England. Give me a king that will prevent the hop-blight and I am his man.’ Those were the landlord’s politics, and I dare say a good many more were of his way of thinking.

From Dean to Salisbury is all straight road with moor, morass, and fenland on either side, broken only by the single hamlet of Aldersbury, just over the Wiltshire border. Our horses, refreshed by the short rest, stepped out gallantly, and the brisk motion, with the sunlight and the beauty of the morning, combined to raise our spirits and cheer us after the depression of the long ride through the darkness, and the incident of the murdered traveller. Wild duck, widgeon, and snipe flapped up from either side of the road at the sound of the horses’ hoofs, and once a herd of red deer sprang to their feet from among the ferns and scampered away in the direction of the forest. Once, too, when passing a dense clump of trees, we saw a shadowy white creature half hidden by the trunks, which must, I fancy, have been one of those wild cattle of which I have heard the peasants speak, who dwell in the recesses of the southern woods, and are so fierce and intractable that none dare approach them. The breadth of the view, the keenness of the air, and the novelty of the sense of having great work to do, all combined to send a flush of life through my veins such as the quiet village existence had never been able to give. My more experienced companion felt the influence too, for he lifted up a cracked voice and broke into a droning chant, which he assured me was an Eastern ode which had been taught him by the second sister of the Hospodar of Wallachia.

‘Anent Monmouth,’ he remarked, coming back suddenly to the realities of our position. ‘It is unlikely that he can take the field for some days, though much depends upon his striking a blow soon, and so raising the courage of his followers before the King’s troops can come down upon him. He has, mark ye, not only his troops to find, but their weapons, which is like to prove a more difficult matter. Suppose he can raise five thousand men — and he cannot stir with less — he will not have one musket in five, so the rest must do as they can with pikes and bills, or such other rude arms as they can find. All this takes time, and though there may be skirmishes, there can scarce be any engagement of import before we arrive.’

‘He will have been landed three or four days ere we reach him,’ said I.

‘Hardly time for him with his small staff of officers to enrol his men and divide them into regiments. I scarce expect to find him at Taunton, though we were so directed. Hast ever heard whether there are any rich Papists in those parts?’

‘I know not,’ I replied.

‘If so there might be plate chests and silver chargers, to say nothing of my lady’s jewels and other such trifles to reward a faithful soldier. What would war be without plunder! A bottle without the wine — a shell without the oyster. See the house yonder that peeps through the trees. I warrant there is a store of all good things under that roof, which you and I might have for the asking, did we but ask with our swords in our grip. You are my witness that your father did give and not lend me this horse.’

‘Why say you that, then?’

‘Lest he claim a half of whatever booty I may chance to gain. What saith my learned Fleming under the heading “an qui militi equum praebuit, praedae ab eo captae particeps esse debeat?” which signifieth “whether he who lendeth a horse hath a claim on the plunder of him who borroweth it." In this discourse he cites a case wherein a Spanish commander having lent a steed to one of his captains, and the said captain having captured the general of the enemy, the commander did sue him for a half share of the twenty thousand crowns which formed the ransom of the prisoner. A like case is noted by the famous Petrinus Bellus in his book "De Re Militari," much read by leaders of repute.' (Note C. Appendix.)

'I can promise you,' I answered, 'that no such claim shall ever be made by my father upon you. See yonder, over the brow of the hill, how the sun shines upon the high cathedral tower, which points upwards with its great stone finger to the road that every man must travel.'

'There is good store of silver and plate in these same churches,' quoth my companion. 'I remember that at Leipsic, when I was serving my first campaign, I got a candlestick, which I was forced to sell to a Jew broker for a fourth of its value; yet even at his price it sufficed to fill my haversack with broad pieces.'

It chanced that Saxon's mare had gained a stride or two upon mine whilst he spoke, so that I was able to get a good view of him without turning my head. I had scarce had light during our ride to see how his harness sat upon him, but now I was amazed on looking at him to mark the change which it had wrought in the man. In his civil dress his lankiness and length of limb gave him an awkward appearance, but on horse-back, with his lean, gaunt face looking out from his steel cap, his breastplate and buff jacket filling out his figure, and his high boots of untanned leather reaching to the centre of his thighs, he looked the veteran man-at-arms which he purported to be. The ease with which he sat his horse, the high, bold expression upon his face, and the great length of his arms, all marked him as one who could give a good account of himself in a fray. In his words alone I could have placed little trust, but there was that in his bearing which assured even a novice like myself that he was indeed a trained man of war.

'That is the Avon which glitters amongst the trees,' I remarked. 'We are about three miles from Salisbury town.'

'It is a noble spire,' said he, glancing at the great stone spire in front of us. 'The men of old would seem to have spent all their days in piling stones upon stones. And yet we read of tough battles and shrewd blows struck, showing that they had some time for soldierly relaxation, and were not always at this mason work.'

‘The Church was rich in those days,’ I answered, shaking my bridle, for Covenant was beginning to show signs of laziness. ‘But here comes one who might perhaps tell us something of the war.’

A horseman who bore traces of having ridden long and hard was rapidly approaching us. Both rider and steed were grey with dust and splashed with mire, yet he galloped with loosened rein and bent body, as one to whom every extra stride is of value.

‘What ho, friend!’ cried Saxon, reining his mare across the road so as to bar the man’s passage. ‘What news from the West?’

‘I must not tarry,’ the messenger gasped, slackening his speed for an instant. ‘I bear papers of import from Gregory Alford, Mayor of Lyme, to Ins Majesty’s Council. The rebels make great head, and gather together like bees in the swarming time. There are some thousands in arms already, and all Devonshire is on the move. The rebel horse under Lord Grey hath been beaten back from Bridport by the red militia of Dorset, but every prickeared Whig from the Channel to the Severn is making his way to Monmouth.’ With this brief summary of the news he pushed his way past us and clattered on in a cloud of dust upon his mission.

‘The broth is fairly on the fire, then,’ quoth Decimus Saxon, as we rode onwards. ‘Now that skins have been slit the rebels may draw their swords and fling away their scabbards, for it’s either victory for them or their quarters will be dangling in every market town of the county. Heh, lad? we throw a main for a brave stake.’

‘Marked ye that Lord Grey had met with a check,’ said I.

‘Pshaw! it is of no import. A cavalry skirmish at the most, for it is impossible that Monmouth could have brought his main forces to Bridport; nor would he if he could, for it is out of his track. It was one of those three-shots-and-a-gallop affrays, where each side runs away and each claims the victory. But here we are in the streets of Salisbury. Now leave the talking to me, or your wrong-headed truthfulness may lay us by the heels before our time.’

Passing down the broad High Street we dismounted in front of the Blue Boar inn, and handed our tired horses over to the ostler, to whom Saxon, in a loud voice, and with many rough military oaths, gave strict injunctions as to their treatment. He then clanked into the inn parlour, and throwing himself into one chair with his feet upon another, he summoned the landlord up before him, and explained our needs in a tone and manner which should give him a due sense of our quality.

‘Of your best, and at once,’ quoth he. ‘Have your largest double-couched chamber ready with your softest lavender-scented sheets, for we have had a weary ride and must rest. And hark ye, landlord, no palming off your stale, musty goods as fresh, or of your washy French wines for the true Hainault vintage. I would have you to understand that my friend here and I are men who meet with some consideration in the world, though we care not to speak our names to every underling. Deserve well of us, therefore, or it may be the worse for you.’

This speech, combined with my companion’s haughty manner and fierce face, had such an effect upon the landlord that he straightway sent us in the breakfast which had been prepared for three officers of the Blues, who were waiting for it in the next apartment. This kept them fasting for another half-hour, and we could hear their oaths and complaints through the partition while we were devouring their capon and venison pie. Having eaten a hearty meal and washed it down with a bottle of Burgundy we sought our room, and throwing our tired limbs upon the bed, were soon in a deep slumber.

CHAPTER IX. Of a Passage of Arms at the Blue Boar

I had slept several hours when I was suddenly aroused by a prodigious crash, followed by the clash of arms and shrill cries from the lower floor. Springing to my feet I found that the bed upon which my comrade had lain was vacant, and that the door of the apartment was opened. As the uproar still continued, and as I seemed to discern his voice in the midst of it, I caught up my sword, and without waiting to put on either head-piece, steel-breast, or arm-plates, I hurried to the scene of the commotion.

The hall and passage were filled with silly maids and staring drawers, attracted, like myself, by the uproar. Through these I pushed my way into the apartment where we had breakfasted in the morning, which was a scene of the wildest disorder. The round table in the centre had been tilted over upon its side, and three broken bottles of wine, with apples, pears, nuts, and the fragments of the dishes containing them, were littered over the floor. A couple of packs of cards and a dice-box lay amongst the scattered feast. Close by the door stood Decimus Saxon, with his drawn rapier in his hand and a second one beneath his feet, while facing him there was a young officer in a blue uniform, whose face was reddened with shame and anger, and who looked wildly about the room as though in search of some weapon to replace that of which he had been deprived. He might have served Cibber or Gibbons as a model for a statue of impotent rage. Two other officers dressed in the same blue uniform stood by their comrade, and as I observed that they had laid their hands upon the hilts of their swords, I took my place by Saxon’s side, and stood ready to strike in should the occasion arise.

‘What would the maitre d’armes say — the maitre d’escrime?’ cried my companion. ‘Methinks he should lose his place for not teaching you to make a better show. Out on him! Is this the way that he teaches the officers of his Majesty’s guard to use their weapons?’

‘This raillery, sir,’ said the elder of the three, a squat, brown, heavy-faced man, ‘is not undeserved, and yet might perchance be dispensed with. I am free to say that our friend attacked you somewhat hastily, and that a little more deference should have been shown by so young a soldier to a cavalier of your experience.’

The other officer, who was a fine-looking, noble-featured man, expressed himself in much the same manner. ‘If this apology will serve,’ said he, ‘I am prepared to join in it. If, however, more is required, I shall be happy to take the quarrel upon myself.’

‘Nay, nay, take your bradawl!’ Saxon answered good-humouredly, kicking the sword towards his youthful opponent. ‘But, mark you! when you would lunge, direct your point upwards rather than down, for otherwise you must throw your wrist open to your antagonist, who can scarce fail to disarm you. In quarte, tierce, or saccoon the same holds good.’

The youth sheathed his sword, but was so overcome by his own easy defeat and the contemptuous way in which his opponent had dismissed him, that he turned and hurried out of the room. Meanwhile Decimus Saxon and the two officers set to work getting the table upon its legs and restoring the room to some sort of order, in which I did what I could to assist them.

‘I held three queens for the first time to-day,’ grumbled the soldier of fortune. ‘I was about to declare them when this young bantam flew at my throat. He hath likewise been the cause of our losing three flasks of most excellent muscadine. When he hath drunk as much bad wine as I have been forced to do, he will not be so hasty in wasting the good.’

‘He is a hot-headed youngster,’ the older officer replied, ‘and a little solitary reflection added to the lesson which you have taught him may bring him profit. As for the muscadine, that loss will soon be repaired, the more gladly as your friend here will help us to drink it.’

‘I was roused by the crash of weapons,’ said I, ‘and I scarce know now what has occurred.’

‘Why, a mere tavern brawl, which your friend’s skill and judgment prevented from becoming serious. I prythee take the rush-bottomed chair, and do you, Jack, order the wine. If our comrade hath spilled the last it is for us to furnish this, and the best the cellars contain. We have been having a hand at basset, which Mr. Saxon here playeth as skilfully as he wields the small-sword. It chanced that the luck ran against young Horsford, which doubtless made him prone to be quick in taking offence. Your friend in conversation, when discoursing of his experiences in foreign countries, remarked that the French household troops were to his mind brought to a higher state of discipline than any of our own regiments, on which Horsford fired up, and after a hot word or two they found themselves, as you have seen, at drawn bilbo. The boy hath seen no service, and is therefore over-eager to give proof of his valour.’

‘Wherein,’ said the tall officer, ‘he showed a want of thought towards me, for had the words been offensive it was for me, who am a senior captain and brevet-major, to take it up, and not for a slip of a cornet, who scarce knows enough to put his troop through the exercise.’

‘You say right, Ogilvy,’ said the other, resuming his seat by the table and wiping the cards which had been splashed by the wine.’ Had the comparison been made by an officer of Louis’s guard for the purpose of contumely and braggadocio, it would then indeed have become us to venture a passado. But when spoken by an Englishman of ripe experience it becomes a matter of instructive criticism, which should profit rather than annoy.’

‘True, Ambrose,’ the other answered. ‘Without such criticism a force would become stagnant, and could never hope to keep level with those continental armies, which are ever striving amongst themselves for increased efficacy.’

So pleased was I at these sensible remarks on the part of the strangers, that I was right glad to have the opportunity of making their closer acquaintance over a flask of excellent wine. My father’s prejudices had led me to believe that a King’s officer was ever a compound of the coxcomb and the bully, but I found on testing it that this idea, like most others which a man takes upon trust, had very little foundation upon truth. As a matter of fact, had they been dressed in less warlike garb and deprived of their swords and jack-boots, they would have passed as particularly mild-mannered men, for their conversation ran in the learned channels, and they discussed Boyle’s researches in chemistry and the ponderation of air with much gravity and show of knowledge. At the same time, their brisk bearing and manly carriage showed that in cultivating the scholar they hail not sacrificed the soldier.

‘May I ask, sir,’ said one of them, addressing Saxon, ‘whether in your wide experiences you have ever met with any of those sages and philosophers who have conferred such honour and fame upon France and Germany?’

My companion looked ill at ease, as one who feels that he has been taken off his ground. ‘There was indeed one such at Nurnberg,’ he answered, ‘one

Gervinus or Gervanus, who, the folk said, could turn an ingot of iron into an ingot of gold as easily as I turn this tobacco into ashes. Old Pappenheimer shut him up with a ton of metal, and threatened to put the thumbikins upon him unless he changed it into gold pieces. I can vouch for it that there was not a yellow boy there, for I was captain of the guard and searched the whole dungeon through. To my sorrow I say it, for I had myself added a small iron brazier to the heap, thinking that if there should be any such change it would be as well that I should have some small share in the experiment.'

'Alchemy, transmutation of metals, and the like have been set aside by true science,' remarked the taller officer. 'Even old Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich, who is ever ready to plead the cause of the ancients, can find nothing to say in favour of it. From Trismegistus downwards through Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Raymond Lullius, Basil Valentine, Paracelsus, and the rest, there is not one who has left more than a cloud of words behind him.'

'Nor did the rogue I mention,' said Saxon. 'There was another, Van Helstatt, who was a man of learning, and cast horoscopes in consideration of some small fee or honorarium. I have never met so wise a man, for he would talk of the planets and constellations as though he kept them all in his own backyard. He made no more of a comet than if it were a mouldy china orange, and he explained their nature to us, saying that they were but common stars which had had a hole knocked in them, so that their insides or viscera protruded. He was indeed a philosopher!'

'And did you ever put his skill to the test?' asked one of the officers, with a smile.

'Not I, forsooth, for I have ever kept myself clear of black magic or diablerie of the sort. My comrade Pierce Scotton, who was an Oberst in the Imperial cavalry brigade, did pay him a rose noble to have his future expounded. If I remember aright, the stars said that he was over-fond of wine and women — he had a wicked eye and a nose like a carbuncle. 'They foretold also that he would attain a marshal's baton and die at a ripe age, which might well have come true had he not been unhorsed a month later at Ober-Graustock, and slain by the hoofs of his own troop. Neither the planets nor even the experienced farrier of the regiment could have told that the brute would have foundered so completely.'

The officers laughed heartily at my companion’s views, and rose from their chairs, for the bottle was empty and the evening beginning to draw in. ‘We have work to do here,’ said the one addressed as Ogilvy. ‘Besides, we must find this foolish boy of ours, and tell him that it is no disgrace to be disarmed by so expert a swordsman. We have to prepare the quarters for the regiment, who will be up to join Churchill’s forces not later than to-night. Ye are yourselves bound for the West, I understand?’

‘We belong to the Duke of Beaufort’s household,’ said Saxon.

‘Indeed! I thought ye might belong to Portman’s yellow regiment of militia. I trust that the Duke will muster every man he can, and make play until the royal forces come up.’

‘How many will Churchill bring?’ asked my companion carelessly.

‘Eight hundred horse at the most, but my Lord Feversham will follow after with close on four thousand foot.’

‘We may meet on the field of battle, if not before,’ said I, and we bade our friendly enemies a very cordial adieu.

‘A skilful equivoque that last of yours, Master Micah,’ quoth Decimus Saxon, ‘though smacking of double dealing in a truth-lover like yourself. If we meet them in battle I trust that it may be with chevaux-de-frise of pikes and morgenstierns before us, and a litter of caltrops in front of them, for Monmouth has no cavalry that could stand for a moment against the Royal Guards.’

‘How came you to make their acquaintance?’ I asked.

‘I slept a few hours, but I have learned in camps to do with little rest. Finding you in sound slumber, and hearing the rattle of the dice-box below, I came softly down and found means to join their party — whereby I am a richer man by fifteen guineas, and might have had more had that young fool not lugged out at me, or had the talk not turned afterwards upon such unseemly subjects as the laws of chemistry and the like. Prythee, what have the Horse Guards Blue to do with the laws of chemistry? Wessenburg of the Pandours would, even at his own mess table, suffer much free talk — more perhaps than fits in with the dignity of a leader. Had his officers ventured upon such matter as this, however, there would have been a drum-head court-martial, or a cashiering at the least.’

Without stopping to dispute either Master Saxon’s judgment or that of Wessenburg of the Pandours, I proposed that we should order an evening meal, and should employ the remaining hour or two of daylight in looking over the city. The principal sight is of course the noble cathedral, which is built in such exact proportion that one would fail to understand its great size did one not actually enter it and pace round the long dim aisles. So solemn were its sweeping arches and the long shafts of coloured light which shone through the stained-glass windows, throwing strange shadows amongst the pillars, that even my companion, albeit not readily impressed, was silent and subdued. It was a great prayer in stone.

On our way back to the inn we passed the town lock-up, with a railed space in front of it, in which three great black-muzzled bloodhounds were stalking about, with fierce crimsoned eyes and red tongues lolling out of their mouths. They were used, a bystander told us, for the hunting down of criminals upon Salisbury Plain, which had been a refuge for rogues and thieves, until this means had been adopted for following them to their hiding-places. It was well-nigh dark before we returned to the hostel, and entirely so by the time that we had eaten our suppers, paid our reckoning, and got ready for the road.

Before we set off I bethought me of the paper which my mother had slipped into my hand on parting, and drawing it from my pouch I read it by the rushlight in our chamber. It still bore the splotches of the tears which she had dropped on it, poor soul, and ran in this wise: —

‘Instructions from Mistress Mary Clarke to her son Micah, on the twelfth day of June in the year of our Lord sixteen hundred and eighty-five.

‘On occasion of his going forth, like David of old, to do battle with the Goliath of Papistry, which hath overshadowed and thrown into disrepute that true and reverent regard for ritual which should exist in the real Church of England, as ordained by law.

‘Let these points be observed by him, namely, to wit:

‘1. Change your hosen when the occasion serves. You have two pairs in your saddle-bag, and can buy more, for the wool work is good in the West.

‘2. A hare’s foot suspended round the neck driveth away colic.

‘3. Say the Lord’s Prayer night and morning. Also read the scriptures, especially Job, the Psalms, and the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

‘4. Daffy’s elixir possesses extraordinary powers in purifying the blood and working off all phlegms, humours, vapours, or rheums. The dose is five drops. A small phial of it will be found in the barrel of your left pistol, with wadding around it lest it come to harm.

‘5. Ten golden pieces are sewn into the hem of your under doublet. Touch them not, save as a last resource.

‘6. Fight stoutly for the Lord, and yet I pray you, Micah, be not too forward in battle, but let others do their turn also.

Press not into the heart of the fray, and yet flinch not from the standard of the Protestant faith.

‘And oh, Micah, my own bright boy, come back safe to your mother, or my very heart will break!

‘And the deponent will ever pray.’

The sudden gush of tenderness in the last few lines made the tears spring to my eyes, and yet I could scarce forbear from smiling at the whole composition, for my dear mother had little time to cultivate the graces of style, and it was evidently her thought that in order to make her instructions binding it was needful to express them in some sort of legal form. I had little time to think over her advice, however, for I had scarce finished reading it before the voice of Decimus Saxon, and the clink of the horses’ hoofs upon the cobble-stones of the yard, informed me that all was ready for our departure.

CHAPTER X. Of our Perilous Adventure on the Plain

We were not half a mile from the town before the roll of kettledrums and the blare of bugles swelling up musically through the darkness announced the arrival of the regiment of horse which our friends at the inn had been expecting.

'It is as well, perhaps,' said Saxon, 'that we gave them the slip, for that young springald might have smelled a rat and played us some ill-turn. Have you chanced to see my silken kerchief?'

'Not I,' I answered.

'Nay, then, it must have fallen from my bosom during our ruffle. I can ill afford to leave it, for I travel light in such matters. Eight hundred men, quoth the major, and three thousand to follow. Should I meet this same Oglethorpe or Ogilvy when the little business is over, I shall read him a lesson on thinking less of chemistry and more of the need of preserving military precautions. It is well always to be courteous to strangers and to give them information, but it is well also that the information should be false.'

'As his may have been,' I suggested.

'Nay, nay, the words came too glibly from his tongue. So ho, Chloe, so ho! She is full of oats and would fain gallop, but it is so plaguy dark that we can scarce see where we are going.'

We had been trotting down the broad high-road shimmering vaguely white in the gloom, with the shadowy trees dancing past us on either side, scarce outlined against the dark background of cloud. We were now coming upon the eastern edge of the great plain, which extends forty miles one way and twenty the other, over the greater part of Wiltshire and past the boundaries of Somersetshire. The main road to the West skirts this wilderness, but we had agreed to follow a less important track, which would lead us to our goal, though in a more tedious manner. Its insignificance would, we hoped, prevent it from being guarded by the King's horse. We had come to the point where this byroad branches off from the main highway when we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind us.

‘Here comes some one who is not afraid to gallop,’ I remarked.

‘Halt here in the shadow!’ cried Saxon, in a short, quick whisper. ‘Have your blade loose in the scabbard. He must have a set errand who rides so fast o’ nights.’

Looking down the road we could make out through the darkness a shadowy blur which soon resolved itself into man and horse. The rider was well-nigh abreast of us before he was aware of our presence, when he pulled up his steed in a strange, awkward fashion, and faced round in our direction.

‘Is Micah Clarke there?’ he said, in a voice which was strangely familiar to my ears.

‘I am Micah Clarke,’ said I.

‘And I am Reuben Lockarby,’ cried our pursuer, in a mock heroic voice. ‘Ah, Micah lad, I’d embrace you were it not that I should assuredly fall out of the saddle if I attempted it, and perchance drag you along. That sudden pull up well-nigh landed me on the roadway. I have been sliding off and clambering on ever since I bade goodbye to Havant. Sure, such a horse for slipping from under one was never bestridden by man.’

‘Good Heavens, Reuben!’ I cried in amazement, ‘what brings you all this way from home?’

‘The very same cause which brings you, Micah, and also Don Decimo Saxon, late of the Solent, whom methinks I see in the shadow behind you. How fares it, oh illustrious one?’

‘It is you, then, young cock of the woods!’ growled Saxon, in no very overjoyed voice.

‘No less a person,’ said Reuben. ‘And now, my gay cavalieros, round with your horses and trot on your way, for there is no time to be lost. We ought all to be at Taunton to-morrow.’

‘But, my dear Reuben,’ said I, ‘it cannot be that you are coming with us to join Monmouth. What would your father say? This is no holiday jaunt, but one that may have a sad and stern ending. At the best, victory can only come through much bloodshed and danger. At the worst, we are as like to wind up upon a scaffold as not.’

‘Forwards, lads, forwards!’ cried he, spurring on his horse, ‘it is all arranged and settled. I am about to offer my august person, together with a sword which I borrowed and a horse which I stole, to his most Protestant highness, James, Duke of Monmouth.’

‘But how comes it all?’ I asked, as we rode on together. ‘It warms my very heart to see you, but you were never concerned either in religion or in politics. Whence, then, this sudden resolution?’

‘Well, truth to tell,’ he replied, ‘I am neither a king’s man nor a duke’s man, nor would I give a button which sat upon the throne. I do not suppose that either one or the other would increase the custom of the Wheatsheaf, or want Reuben Lockarby for a councillor. I am a Micah Clarke man, though, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet; and if he rides to the wars, may the plague strike me if I don’t stick to his elbow!’ He raised his hand excitedly as he spoke, and instantly losing his balance, he shot into a dense clump of bushes by the roadside whence his legs flapped helplessly in the darkness.

‘That makes the tenth,’ said he, scrambling out and clambering into his saddle once more. ‘My father used to tell me not to sit a horse too closely. “A gentle rise and fall,” said the old man. Egad, there is more fall than rise, and it is anything but gentle.’

‘Odd’s truth!’ exclaimed Saxon. ‘How in the name of all the saints in the calendar do you expect to keep your seat in the presence of an enemy if you lose it on a peaceful high-road?’

‘I can but try, my illustrious,’ he answered, rearranging his ruffled clothing. ‘Perchance the sudden and unexpected character of my movements may disconcert the said enemy.’

‘Well, well, there may be more truth in that than you are aware of,’ quoth Saxon, riding upon Lockarby’s bridle arm, so that there was scarce room for him to fall between us. ‘I had sooner fight a man like that young fool at the inn, who knew a little of the use of his weapon, than one like Micah here, or yourself, who know nothing. You can tell what the one is after, but the other will invent a system of his own which will serve his turn for the nonce. Ober-hauptmann Muller was reckoned to be the finest player at the small-sword in the Kaiser’s army, and could for a wager snick any button from an opponent’s vest without cutting the cloth. Yet was he slain in an encounter with Fahnfuhrer Zollner, who was a cornet in our own Pandour corps, and who knew as much of the rapier as you do of horsemanship. For the rapier, be it understood, is designed to thrust and not to cut, so that no man wielding it ever thinks of guarding a side-stroke. But Zollner, being a long-armed man, smote his antagonist across the face with his weapon as though it had been a cane, and then, ere he had time to recover himself, fairly pinked him. Doubtless if the matter were to do again, the Oberhauptmann would have got his thrust in sooner, but as it was, no explanation or excuse could get over the fact that the man was dead.'

'If want of knowledge maketh a dangerous swordsman,' quoth Reuben, 'then am I even more deadly than the unpronounceable gentleman whom you have mentioned. To continue my story, however, which I broke off in order to step down from my horse, I found out early in the morning that ye were gone, and Zachary Palmer was able to tell me whither. I made up my mind, therefore, that I would out into the world also. To this end I borrowed a sword from Solomon Sprent, and my father having gone to Gosport, I helped myself to the best nag in his stables — for I have too much respect for the old man to allow one of his flesh and blood to go ill-provided to the wars. All day I have ridden, since early morning, being twice stopped on suspicion of being ill-affected, but having the good luck to get away each time. I knew that I was close at your heels, for I found them searching for you at the Salisbury Inn.'

Decimus whistled. 'Searching for us?' said he.

'Yes. It seems that they had some notion that ye were not what ye professed to be, so the inn was surrounded as I passed, but none knew which road ye had taken.'

'Said I not so?' cried Saxon. 'That young viper hath stirred up the regiment against us. We must push on, for they may send a party on our track.'

'We are off the main road now, 'I remarked; 'even should they pursue us, they would be unlikely to follow this side track.'

'Yet it would be wise to show them a clean pair of heels,' said Saxon, spurring his mare into a gallop. Lockarby and I followed his example, and we all three rode swiftly along the rough moorland track.

We passed through scattered belts of pinewood, where the wild cat howled and the owl screeched, and across broad stretches of fenland and moor, where the silence was only broken by the booming cry of the bittern or the fluttering of wild duck far above our heads. The road was in parts overgrown with brambles, and was so deeply rutted and so studded with sharp and dangerous hollows, that our horses came more than once upon their knees. In one place the wooden bridge which led over a stream had broken down, and no attempt had been made to repair it, so that we were compelled to ride our horses girth deep through the torrent. At first some scattered lights had shown that we were in the neighbourhood of human habitations, but these became fewer as we advanced, until the last died away and we found ourselves upon the desolate moor which stretched away in unbroken solitude to the shadowy horizon. The moon had broken through the clouds and now shone hazily through wreaths of mist, throwing a dim light over the wild scene, and enabling us to keep to the track, which was not fenced in in any way and could scarce be distinguished from the plain around it.

We had slackened our pace under the impression that all fear of pursuit was at an end, and Reuben was amazing us by an account of the excitement which had been caused in Havant by our disappearance, when through the stillness of the night a dull, muffled rat-tat-tat struck upon my ear. At the same moment Saxon sprang from his horse and listened intently with sidelong head.

‘Boot and saddle!’ he cried, springing into his seat again. ‘They are after us as sure as fate. A dozen troopers by the sound. We must shake them off, or goodbye to Monmouth.’

‘Give them their heads,’ I answered, and striking spurs into our steeds, we thundered on through the darkness. Covenant and Chloe were as fresh as could be wished, and soon settled down into a long springy gallop. Our friend’s horse however, had been travelling all day, and its long-drawn, laboured breathing showed that it could not hold out for long. Through the clatter of our horses’ hoofs I could still from time to time hear the ominous murmur from behind us.

‘This will never do, Reuben,’ said I anxiously, as the weary creature stumbled, and the rider came perilously near to shooting over its head.

‘The old horse is nearly foundered,’ he answered ruefully. ‘We are off the road now, and the rough ground is too much for her.’

‘Yes, we are off the track,’ cried Saxon over his shoulder — for he led us by a few paces. ‘Bear in mind that the Bluecoats have been on the march all day, so that their horses may also be blown. How in Himmel came they to know which road we took?’

As if in answer to his ejaculation, there rose out of the still night behind us a single, clear, bell-like note, swelling and increasing in volume until it seemed to fill the whole air with its harmony.

‘A bloodhound!’ cried Saxon.

A second sharper, keener note, ending in an unmistakable howl, answered the first.

‘Another of them,’ said he. ‘They have loosed the brutes that we saw near the Cathedral. Gad! we little thought when we peered over the rails at them, a few hours ago, that they would so soon be on our own track. Keep a firm knee and a steady seat, for a slip now would be your last.’

‘Holy mother!’ cried Reuben, ‘I had steeled myself to die in battle — but to be dogsmeat! It is something outside the contract.’

‘They hold them in leash,’ said Saxon, between his teeth, ‘else they would outstrip the horses and be lost in the darkness.

Could we but come on running water we might put them off our track.’

‘My horse cannot hold on at this pace for more than a very few minutes,’ Reuben cried. ‘If I break down, do ye go on, for ye must remember that they are upon your track and not mine. They have found cause for suspicion of the two strangers of the inn, but none of me.’

‘Nay, Reuben, we shall stand or fall together,’ said I sadly, for at every step his horse grew more and more feeble. ‘In this darkness they will make little distinction between persons.’

‘Keep a good heart,’ shouted the old soldier, who was now leading us by twenty yards or more. ‘We can hear them because the wind blows from that way, but it’s odds whether they have heard us. Methinks they slacken in their pursuit.’

‘The sound of their horses has indeed grown fainter,’ said I joyfully.

‘So faint that I can hear it no longer,’ my companion cried.

We reined up our panting steeds and strained our ears, but not a sound could we hear save the gentle murmur of the breeze amongst the whin-bushes, and the melancholy cry of the night-jar. Behind us the broad rolling plain, half light and half shadow, stretched away to the dim horizon without sign of life or movement. ‘We have either outstripped them completely, or else they have given up the chase,’ said I. ‘What ails the horses that they should tremble and snort?’

‘My poor beast is nearly done for,’ Reuben remarked, leaning forward and passing his hand down the creature’s reeking neck.

‘For all that we cannot rest,’ said Saxon. ‘We may not be out of danger yet. Another mile or two may shake us clear. But I like it not.’

‘Like not what?’

‘These horses and their terrors. The beasts can at times both see and hear more than we, as I could show by divers examples drawn from mine own experience on the Danube and in the Palatinate, were the time and place more fitting. Let us on, then, before we rest.’

The weary horses responded bravely to the call, and struggled onwards over the broken ground for a considerable time. At last we were thinking of pulling up in good earnest, and of congratulating ourselves upon having tired out our pursuers, when of a sudden the bell-like baying broke upon our ears far louder than it had been before — so loud, indeed, that it was evident that the dogs were close upon our heels.

‘The accursed hounds!’ cried Saxon, putting spurs to his horse and shooting ahead of us; ‘I feared as much. They have freed them from the leash. There is no escape from the devils, but we can choose the spot where we shall make our stand.’

‘Come on, Reuben,’ I shouted. ‘We have only to reckon with the dogs now. Their masters have let them loose, and turned back for Salisbury.’

‘Pray heaven they break their necks before they get there!’ he cried. ‘They set dogs on us as though we were rats in a cock-pit. Yet they call England a Christian country! It’s no use, Micah. Poor Dido can’t stir another step.’

As he spoke, the sharp fierce bay of the hounds rose again, clear and stern on the night air, swelling up from a low hoarse growl to a high angry yelp. There seemed to be a ring of exultation in their wild cry, as though they knew that their quarry was almost run to earth.

‘Not another step!’ said Reuben Lockarby, pulling up and drawing his sword. ‘If I must fight, I shall fight here.’

‘There could be no better place,’ I replied. Two great jagged rocks rose before us, jutting abruptly out of the ground, and leaving a space of twelve or fifteen feet between them. Through this gap we rode, and I shouted loudly for Saxon to join us. His horse, however, had been steadily gaining upon ours, and at the renewed alarm had darted off again, so that he was already some hundred yards from us. It was useless to summon him, even could he hear our voices, for the hounds would be upon us before he could return.

‘Never heed him,’ I said hurriedly. ‘Do you rein your steed behind that rock, and I behind this. They will serve to break the force of the attack. Dismount not, but strike down, and strike hard.’

On either side in the shadow of the rock we waited in silence for our terrible pursuers. Looking back at it, my dear children, I cannot but think that it was a great trial on such young soldiers as Reuben and myself to be put, on the first occasion of drawing our swords, into such a position. For I have found, and others have confirmed my opinion, that of all dangers that a man is called upon to face, that arising from savage and determined animals is the most unnerving. For with men there is ever the chance that some trait of weakness or of want of courage may give you an advantage over them, but with fierce beasts there is no such hope. We knew that the creatures to whom we were opposed could never be turned from our throats while there was breath in their bodies. One feels in one’s heart, too, that the combat is an unequal one, for your life is precious at least to your friends, while their lives, what are they? All this and a great deal more passed swiftly through our minds as we sat with drawn swords, soothing our trembling horses as best we might, and waiting for the coming of the hounds.

Nor had we long to wait. Another long, deep, thunderous bay sounded in our ears, followed by a profound silence, broken only by the quick shivering breathing of the horses. Then suddenly, and noiselessly, a great tawny brute, with its black muzzle to the earth, and its overhung cheeks napping on either side, sprang into the band of moonlight between the rocks, and on into the shadow beyond. It never paused or swerved for an instant, but pursued its course straight onwards without a glance to right or to left. Close behind it came a second, and behind that a third, all of enormous size, and looking even larger and more terrible than they were in the dim shifting light. Like the first, they took no notice of our presence, but bounded on along the trail left by Decimus Saxon.

The first and second I let pass, for I hardly realised that they so completely overlooked us. When the third, however, sprang out into the moonlight, I drew my right-hand pistol from its holster, and resting its long barrel across my left forearm, I fired at it as it passed. The bullet struck the mark, for the brute gave a fierce howl of rage and pain, but true to the scent it never turned or swerved. Lockarby fired also as it disappeared among the brushwood, but with no apparent effect. So swiftly and so noiselessly did the great hounds pass, that they might have been grim silent spirits of the night, the phantom dogs of Herne the hunter, but for that one fierce yelp which followed my shot.

‘What brutes!’ my companion ejaculated; ‘what shall we do, Micah?’

‘They have clearly been laid on Saxon’s trail,’ said I. ‘We must follow them up, or they will be too many for him. Can you hear anything of our pursuers?’

‘Nothing.’

‘They have given up the chase, then, and let the dogs loose as a last resource. Doubtless the creatures are trained to return to the town. But we must push on, Reuben, if we are to help our companion.’

‘One more spurt, then, little Dido,’ cried Reuben; ‘can you muster strength for one more? Nay, I have not the heart to put spurs to you. If you can do it, I know you will.’

The brave mare snorted, as though she understood her riders words, and stretched her weary limbs into a gallop. So stoutly did she answer the appeal that, though I pressed Covenant to his topmost speed, she was never more than a few strides behind him.

‘He took this direction,’ said I, peering anxiously out into the darkness. ‘He can scarce have gone far, for he spoke of making a stand. Or, perhaps, finding that we are not with him, he may trust to the speed of his horse.’

‘What chance hath a horse of outstripping these brutes?’ Reuben answered. ‘They must run him to earth, and he knows it. Hullo! what have we here?’

A dark dim form lay stretched in the moonlight in front of us. It was the dead body of a hound — the one evidently at which I had fired.

‘There is one of them disposed of, ‘I cried joyously; ‘we have but two to settle with now.’

‘As I spoke we heard the crack of two pistol-shots some little distance to the left. Heading our steeds in that direction, we pressed on at the top of our speed. Presently out of the darkness in front of us there arose such a roaring and a yelping as sent the hearts into our mouths. It was not a single cry, such as the hounds had uttered when they were on the scent, but a continuous deep-mouthed uproar, so fierce and so prolonged, that we could not doubt that they had come to the end of their run.

‘Pray God that they have not got him down!’ cried Reuben, in a faltering voice.

The same thought had crossed my own mind, for I have heard a similar though lesser din come from a pack of otter hounds when they had overtaken their prey and were tearing it to pieces. Sick at heart, I drew my sword with the determination that, if we were too late to save our companion, we should at least revenge him upon the four-footed fiends. Bursting through a thick belt of scrub and tangled gorse bushes, we came upon a scene so unlike what we had expected that we pulled up our horses in astonishment.

A circular clearing lay in front of us, brightly illuminated by the silvery moonshine. In the centre of this rose a giant stone, one of those high dark columns which are found all over the plain, and especially in the parts round Stonehenge. It could not have been less than fifteen feet in height, and had doubtless been originally straight, but wind and weather, or the crumbling of the soil, had gradually suffered it to tilt over until it inclined at such an angle that an active man might clamber up to the summit. On the top of this ancient stone, cross-legged and motionless, like some strange carved idol of former days, sat Decimus Saxon, puffing sedately at the long pipe which was ever his comfort in moments of difficulty. Beneath him, at the base of the monolith, as our learned men call them, the two great bloodhounds were rearing and springing, clambering over each other's backs in their frenzied and futile eagerness to reach the impassive figure perched above them, while they gave vent to their rage and disappointment in the hideous uproar which had suggested such terrible thoughts to our mind.

We had little time, however, to gaze at this strange scene, for upon our appearance the hounds abandoned their helpless attempts to reach Saxon, and flew, with a fierce snarl of satisfaction, at Reuben and myself. One great brute, with flaring eyes and yawning mouth, his white fangs glistening in the moonlight, sprang at my horse's neck; but I met him fair with a single sweeping cut, which shore away his muzzle, and left him wallowing and writhing in a pool of blood. Reuben, meanwhile, had spurred his horse forward to meet his assailant; but the poor tired steed flinched at the sight of the fierce hound, and pulled up suddenly, with the result that her rider rolled headlong into the very jaws of the animal. It might have gone ill with Reuben had he been left to his own resources. At the most he could only have kept the cruel teeth from his throat for a very few moments; but seeing the mischance, I drew my remaining pistol, and springing from my horse, discharged it full into the creature's flank while it struggled with my friend. With a last yell of rage and pain it brought its fierce jaws together in one wild impotent snap, and then sank slowly over upon its side, while Reuben crawled from beneath it, scared and bruised, but none the worse otherwise for his perilous adventure.

‘I owe you one for that, Micah,’ he said gratefully. ‘I may live to do as much for you.’

‘And I owe ye both one,’ said Saxon, who had scrambled down from his place of refuge. ‘I pay my debts, too, whether for good or evil. I might have stayed up there until I had eaten my jack-boots, for all the chance I had of ever getting down again. Sancta Maria! but that was a shrewd blow of yours, Clarke! The brute’s head flew in halves like a rotten pumpkin. No wonder that they stuck to my track, for I have left both my spare girth and my kerchief behind me, which would serve to put them on Chloe’s scent as well as mine own.’

‘And where is Chloe?’ I asked, wiping my sword.

‘Chloe had to look out for herself. I found the brutes gaining on me, you see, and I let drive at them with my barkers; but with a horse flying at twenty mile an hour, what chance is there for a single slug finding its way home?’ Things looked black then, for I had no time to reload, and the rapier, though the king of weapons in the duello, is scarce strong enough to rely upon on an occasion like this. As luck would have it, just as I was fairly puzzled, what should I come across but this handy stone, which the good priests of old did erect, as far as I can see, for no other purpose than to provide worthy cavalieros with an escape from such ignoble and scurvy enemies. I had no time to spare in clambering up it, for I had to tear my heel out of the mouth of the foremost of them, and might have been dragged down by it had he not found my spur too tough a morsel for his chewing. But surely one of my bullets must have readied its mark.’ Lighting the touch-paper in his tobacco-box, he passed it over the body of the hound which had attacked me, and then of the other.

‘Why, this one is riddled like a sieve,’ he cried. ‘What do you load your petronels with, good Master Clarke?’

‘With two leaden slugs.’

‘Yet two leaden slugs have made a score of holes at the least! And of all things in this world, here is the neck of a bottle stuck in the brute’s hide!’

‘Good heavens!’ I exclaimed. ‘I remember. My dear mother packed a bottle of Daffy’s elixir in the barrel of my pistol.’

‘And you have shot it into the bloodhound!’ roared Reuben. ‘Ho! ho! When they hear that tale at the tap of the Wheatsheaf, there will be some throats dry with laughter. Saved my life by shooting a dog with a bottle of Daffy's elixir!'

'And a bullet as well, Reuben, though I dare warrant the gossips will soon contrive to leave that detail out. It is a mercy the pistol did not burst. But what do you propose to do now, Master Saxon?'

'Why, to recover my mare if it can anywise be done,' said the adventurer.' Though on this vast moor, in the dark, she will be as difficult to find as a Scotsman's breeches or a flavourless line in "Hudibras."'

'And Reuben Lockarby's steed can go no further,' I remarked. 'But do mine eyes deceive me, or is there a glimmer of light over yonder?'

'A Will-o'-the-wisp,' said Saxon.

"An *ignis fatuus* that bewitches,
And leads men into pools and ditches."

Yet I confess that it burns steady and clear, as though it came from lamp, candle, rushlight, lanthorn, or other human agency.'

'Where there is light there is life,' cried Reuben. 'Let us make for it, and see what chance of shelter we may find there.'

'It cannot come from our dragoon friends,' remarked Decimus. 'A murrain on them! how came they to guess our true character; or was it on the score of some insult to the regiment that that young Fahnfuhrer has set them on our track? If I have him at my sword's point again, he shall not come off so free. Well, do ye lead your horses, and we shall explore this light, since no better course is open to us.'

Picking our way across the moor, we directed our course for the bright point which twinkled in the distance; and as we advanced we hazarded a thousand conjectures as to whence it could come. If it were a human dwelling, what sort of being could it be who, not content with living in the heart of this wilderness, had chosen a spot so far removed from the ordinary tracks which crossed it? The roadway was miles behind us, and it was probable that no one save those driven by such a necessity as that which had overtaken us would ever find themselves in that desolate region. No hermit could have desired an abode more completely isolated from all communion with his kind.

As we approached we saw that the light did indeed come from a small cottage, which was built in a hollow, so as to be invisible from any quarter save that from which we approached it. In front of this humble dwelling a small patch of ground had been cleared of shrub, and in the centre of this little piece of sward our missing steed stood grazing at her leisure upon the scanty herbage. The same light which had attracted us had doubtless caught her eye, and drawn her towards it by hopes of oats and of water. With a grunt of satisfaction Saxon resumed possession of his lost property, and leading her by the bridle, approached the door of the solitary cottage.

CHAPTER XI. Of the Lonely Man and the Gold Chest

The strong yellow glare which had attracted us across the moor found its way out through a single narrow slit alongside the door which served the purpose of a rude window. As we advanced towards it the light changed suddenly to red, and that again to green, throwing a ghastly pallor over our faces, and especially heightening the cadaverous effect of Saxon’s austere features. At the same time we became aware of a most subtle and noxious odour which poisoned the air all round the cottage. This combination of portents in so lonely a spot worked upon the old man-at-arms’ superstitious feelings to such an extent that he paused and looked back at us inquiringly. Both Reuben and I were determined, however, to carry the adventure through, so he contented himself with falling a little behind us, and pattering to himself some exorcism appropriate to the occasion. Walking up to the door, I rapped upon it with the hilt of my sword and announced that we were weary travellers who were seeking a night’s shelter.

The first result of my appeal was a sound as of some one bustling rapidly about, with the clinking of metal and noise of the turning of locks. This died away into a hush, and I was about to knock once more when a crackling voice greeted us from the other side of the door.

‘There is little shelter here, gentlemen, and less provisions,’ it said. ‘It is but six miles to Amesbury, where at the Cecil Arms ye shall find, I doubt not, all that is needful for man and for beast.’

‘Nay, nay, mine invisible friend,’ quoth Saxon, who was much reassured by the sound of a human voice, ‘this is surely but a scurvy reception. One of our horses is completely foundered, and none of them are in very good plight, so that we could no more make for the Cecil Arms at Amesbury than for the Gruner Mann at Lubeck. I prythee, therefore, that you will allow us to pass the remainder of the night under your roof.’

At this appeal there was much creaking of locks and rasping of bolts, which ended in the door swinging slowly open, and disclosing the person who had addressed us.

By the strong light which shone out from behind him we could see that he was a man of venerable aspect, with snow-white hair and a countenance which bespoke a thoughtful and yet fiery nature. The high pensive brow and flowing beard smacked of the philosopher, but the keen sparkling eye, the curved aquiline nose, and the lithe upright figure which the weight of years had been unable to bend, were all suggestive of the soldier. His lofty bearing, and his rich though severe costume of black velvet, were at strange variance with the humble nature of the abode which he had chosen for his dwelling-place.

‘Ho!’ said he, looking keenly at us. ‘Two of ye unused to war, and the other an old soldier. Ye have been pursued, I see!’

‘How did you know that, then?’ asked Decimus Saxon.

‘Ah, my friend, I too have served in my time. My eyes are not so old but that they can tell when horses have been spurred to the utmost, nor is it difficult to see that this young giant’s sword hath been employed in something less innocent than toasting bacon. Your story, however, can keep. Every true soldier thinks first of his horse, so I pray that you will tether yours without, since I have neither ostler nor serving man to whom I may entrust them.’

The strange dwelling into which we presently entered had been prolonged into the side of the little hill against which it had been built, so as to form a very long narrow hall. The ends of this great room, as we entered, were wrapped in shadow, but in the centre was a bright glare from a brazier full of coals, over which a brass pipkin was suspended. Beside the fire a long wooden table was plentifully covered with curved glass flasks, basins, tubings, and other instruments of which I knew neither the name nor the purpose. A long row of bottles containing various coloured liquids and powders were arranged along a shelf, whilst above it another shelf bore a goodly array of brown volumes. For the rest there was a second rough-hewn table, a pair of cupboards, three or four wooden settles, and several large screens pinned to the walls and covered all over with figures and symbols, of which I could make nothing. The vile smell which had greeted us outside was very much worse within the chamber, and arose apparently from the fumes of the boiling, bubbling contents of the brazen pot.

‘Ye behold in me,’ said our host, bowing courteously to us, ‘the last of an ancient family. I am Sir Jacob Clancing of Snellaby Hall.’

‘Smellaby it should be, methinks,’ whispered Reuben, in a voice which fortunately did not reach the ears of the old knight.

‘I pray that ye be seated,’ he continued, ‘and that ye lay aside your plates and headpieces, and remove your boots. Consider this to be your inn, and behave as freely. Ye will hold me excused if for a moment I turn my attention from you to this operation on which I am engaged, which will not brook delay.’

Saxon began forthwith to undo his buckles and to pull off his harness, while Reuben, throwing himself into a chair, appeared to be too weary to do more than unfasten his sword-belt. For my own part, I was glad to throw off my gear, but I kept my attention all the while upon the movements of our host, whose graceful manners and learned appearance had aroused my curiosity and admiration.

He approached the evil-smelling pot, and stirred it up with a face which indicated so much anxiety that it was clear that he had pushed his courtesy to us so far as to risk the ruin of some important experiment. Dipping his ladle into the compound, he scooped some up, and then poured it slowly back into the vessel, showing a yellow turbid fluid. The appearance of it evidently reassured him, for the look of anxiety cleared away from his features, and he uttered an exclamation of relief. Taking a handful of a whitish powder from a trencher at his side he threw it into the pipkin, the contents of which began immediately to seethe and froth over into the fire, causing the flames to assume the strange greenish hue which we had observed before entering. This treatment had the effect of clearing the fluid, for the chemist was enabled to pour off into a bottle a quantity of perfectly watery transparent liquid, while a brownish sediment remained in the vessel, and was emptied out upon a sheet of paper. This done, Sir Jacob Clancing pushed aside all his bottles, and turned towards us with a smiling face and a lighter air.

‘We shall see what my poor larder can furnish forth,’ said he. ‘Meanwhile, this odour may be offensive to your untrained nostrils, so we shall away with it. He threw a few grains of some balsamic resin into the brazier, which at once filled the chamber with a most agreeable perfume. He then laid a white cloth upon the table, and taking from a cupboard a dish of cold trout and a large meat pasty, he placed them upon it, and invited us to draw up our settles and set to work.

‘I would that I had more toothsome fare to offer ye,’ said he. ‘Were we at Snellaby Hall, ye should not be put off in this scurvy fashion, I promise ye. This may serve, however, for hungry men, and I can still lay my hands upon a brace of bottles of the old Alicant.’ So saying, he brought a pair of flasks out from a recess, and having seen us served and our glasses filled, he seated himself in a high-backed oaken chair and presided with old-fashioned courtesy over our feast. As we supped, I explained to him what our errand was, and narrated the adventures of the night, without making mention of our destination.

‘You are bound for Monmouth’s camp,’ he said quietly, when I had finished, looking me full in the face with his keen dark eyes. ‘I know it, but ye need not fear lest I betray you, even were it in my power. What chance, think ye, hath the Duke against the King’s forces?’

‘As much chance as a farmyard fowl against a spurred gamecock, did he rely only on those whom he hath with him,’ Saxon answered. ‘He hath reason to think, however, that all England is like a powder magazine, and he hopes to be the spark to set it alight.’

The old man shook his head sadly. ‘The King hath great resources,’ he remarked. ‘Where is Monmouth to get his trained soldiers?’

‘There is the militia,’ I suggested.

‘And there are many of the old parliamentary breed, who are not too far gone to strike a blow for their belief,’ said Saxon. ‘Do you but get half-a-dozen broad-brimmed, snuffle-nosed preachers into a camp, and the whole Presbytery tribe will swarm round them like flies on a honey-pot. No recruiting sergeants will ever raise such an army as did Noll’s preachers in the eastern counties, where the promise of a seat by the throne was thought of more value than a ten-pound bounty. I would I could pay mine own debts with these same promises.’

‘I should judge from your speech, sir,’ our host observed, ‘that you are not one of the sectaries. How comes it, then, that you are throwing the weight of your sword and your experience into the weaker scale?’

‘For the very reason that it is the weaker scale,’ said the soldier of fortune. ‘I should gladly have gone with my brother to the Guinea coast and had no say in the matter one way or the other, beyond delivering letters and such trifles. Since I must be doing something, I choose to fight for Protestantism and Monmouth. It is nothing to me whether James Stuart or James Walters sits upon the throne, but the court and army of the King are already made up. Now, since Monmouth hath both courtiers and soldiers to find, it may well happen that he may be glad of my services and reward them with honourable preferment.'

'Your logic is sound,' said our host, 'save only that you have omitted the very great chance which you will incur of losing your head if the Duke's party are borne down by the odds against them.'

'A man cannot throw a main without putting a stake on the board,' said Saxon.

'And you, young sir,' the old man asked, 'what has caused you to take a hand in so dangerous a game?'

'I come of a Roundhead stock,' I answered, 'and my folk have always fought for the liberty of the people and the humbling of tyranny. I come in the place of my father.'

'And you, sir?' our questioner continued, looking at Reuben.

'I have come to see something of the world, and to be with my friend and companion here,' he replied.

'And I have stronger reasons than any of ye,' Sir Jacob cried, 'for appearing in arms against any man who bears the name of Stuart. Had I not a mission here which cannot be neglected, I might myself be tempted to hie westward with ye, and put these grey hairs of mine once more into the rough clasp of a steel headpiece. For where now is the noble castle of Snellaby, and where those glades and woods amidst which the Clancings have grown up, and lived and died, ere ever Norman William set his foot on English soil? A man of trade — a man who, by the sweat of his half-starved workers, had laid by ill-gotten wealth, is now the owner of all that fair property. Should I, the last of the Clancings, show my face upon it, I might be handed over to the village beadle as a trespasser, or scourged off it perhaps by the bowstrings of insolent huntsmen.'

'And how comes so sudden a reverse of fortune?' I asked.

'Fill up your glasses!' cried the old man, suiting the action to the word. 'Here's a toast for you! Perdition to all faithless princes! How came it about, ye ask? Why, when the troubles came upon the first Charles, I stood by him as though he had been mine own brother. At Edgehill, at Naseby, in twenty skirmishes and battles, I fought stoutly in his cause, maintaining a troop of horse at my own expense, formed from among my own gardeners, grooms, and attendants. Then the military chest ran low, and money must be had to carry on the contest. My silver chargers and candlesticks were thrown into the melting-pot, as were those of many another cavalier. They went in metal and they came out as troopers and pikemen. So we tided over a few months until again the purse was empty, and again we filled it amongst us. This time it was the home farm and the oak trees that went. Then came Marston Moor, and every penny and man was needed to repair that great disaster. I flinched not, but gave everything. This boiler of soap, a prudent, fat-cheeked man, had kept himself free from civil broils, and had long had a covetous eye upon the castle. It was his ambition, poor worm, to be a gentleman, as though a gabled roof and a crumbling house could ever make him that. I let him have his way, however, and threw the sum received, every guinea of it, into the King's coffers. And so I held out until the final ruin of Worcester, when I covered the retreat of the young prince, and may indeed say that save in the Isle of Man I was the last Royalist who upheld the authority of the crown. The Commonwealth had set a price upon my head as a dangerous malignant, so I was forced to take my passage in a Harwich ketch, and arrived in the Lowlands with nothing save my sword and a few broad pieces in my pocket.'

'A cavalier might do well even then,' remarked Saxon. 'There are ever wars in Germany where a man is worth his hire. When the North Germans are not in arms against the Swedes or French, the South Germans are sure to be having a turn with the janissaries.'

'I did indeed take arms for a time in the employ of the United Provinces, by which means I came face to face once more with mine old foes, the Roundheads. Oliver had lent Reynolds's brigade to the French, and right glad was Louis to have the service of such seasoned troops. 'Fore God, I stood on the counterscarp at Dunkirk, and I found myself, when I should have been helping the defence, actually cheering on the attack. My very heart rose when I saw the bull-dog fellows clambering up the breach with their pikes at the trail, and never quavering in their psalm-tune, though the bullets sung around them as thick as bees in the hiving time. And when they did come to close hugs with the Flemings, I tell you they set up such a rough cry of soldierly joy that my pride in them as Englishmen overtopped my hatred of them as foes. However, my soldiering was of no great duration, for peace was soon declared, and I then pursued the study of chemistry, for which I had a strong turn, first with Vorhaager of Leyden, and later with De Huy of Strasburg, though I fear that these weighty names are but sounds to your ears.'

‘Truly,’ said Saxon, ‘there seemeth to be some fatal attraction in this same chemistry, for we met two officers of the Blue Guards in Salisbury, who, though they were stout soldierly men in other respects, had also a weakness in that direction.’

‘Ha!’ cried Sir Jacob, with interest. ‘To what school did they belong?’

‘Nay, I know nothing of the matter,’ Saxon answered, ‘save that they denied that Gervinus of Nurnberg, whom I guarded in prison, or any other man, could transmute metals.’

‘For Gervinus I cannot answer,’ said our host, ‘but for the possibility of it I can pledge my knightly word. However, of that anon. The time came at last when the second Charles was invited back to his throne, and all of us, from Jeffrey Hudson, the court dwarf, up to my Lord Clarendon, were in high feather at the hope of regaining our own once more. For my own claim, I let it stand for some time, thinking that it would be a more graceful act for the King to help a poor cavalier who had ruined himself for the sake of his family without solicitation on his part. I waited and waited, but no word came, so at last I betook myself to the levee and was duly presented to him. “Ah,” said he, greeting me with the cordiality which he could assume so well, “you are, if I mistake not, Sir Jasper Killigrew?” “Nay, your Majesty,” I answered, “I am Sir Jacob Clancing, formerly of Snellaby Hall, in Staffordshire;” and with that I reminded him of Worcester fight and of many passages which had occurred to us in common. “Od’s fish!” he cried, “how could I be so forgetful! And how are all at Snellaby?” I then explained to him that the Hall had passed out of my hands, and told him in a few words the state to which I had been reduced. His face clouded over and his manner chilled to me at once. “They are all on to me for money and for places,” he said, “and truly the Commons are so niggardly to me that I can scarce be generous to others. However, Sir Jacob, we shall see what can be done for thee,” and with that he dismissed me. That same night the secretary of my Lord Clarendon came to me, and announced with much form and show that, in consideration of my long devotion and the losses which I had sustained, the King was graciously pleased to make me a lottery cavalier.’

‘And pray, sir, what is a lottery cavalier?’ I asked.

‘It is nothing else than a licensed keeper of a gambling-house. This was his reward to me. I was to be allowed to have a den in the piazza of Covent Garden, and there to decoy the young sparks of the town and fleece them at ombre. To restore my own fortunes I was to ruin others. My honour, my family, my reputation, they were all to weigh for nothing so long as I had the means of bubbling a few fools out of their guineas.'

'I have heard that some of the lottery cavaliers did well,' remarked Saxon reflectively.

'Well or ill, it way no employment for me. I waited upon the King and implored that his bounty would take another form. His only reply was that for one so poor I was strangely fastidious. For weeks I hung about the court — I and other poor cavaliers like myself, watching the royal brothers squandering upon their gaming and their harlots sums which would have restored us to our patrimonies. I have seen Charles put upon one turn of a card as much as would have satisfied the most exacting of us. In the parks of St. James, or in the Gallery at Whitehall, I still endeavoured to keep myself before his eyes, in the hope that some provision would be made for me. At last I received a second message from him. It was that unless I could dress more in the mode he could dispense with my attendance. That was his message to the old broken soldier who had sacrificed health, wealth, position, everything in the service of his father and himself.'

'Shameful!' we cried, all three.

'Can you wonder, then, that I cursed the whole Stuart race, false-hearted, lecherous, and cruel? For the Hall, I could buy it back to-morrow if I chose, but why should I do so when I have no heir?'

'Ho, you have prospered then!' said Decimus Saxon, with one of his shrewd sidelong looks. 'Perhaps you have yourself found out how to convert pots and pans into gold in the way you have spoken of. But that cannot be, for I see iron and brass in this room which would hardly remain there could you convert it to gold.'

'Gold has its uses, and iron has its uses,' said Sir Jacob oracularly. 'The one can never supplant the other.'

'Yet these officers,' I remarked, 'did declare to us that it was but a superstition of the vulgar.'

'Then these officers did show that their knowledge was less than their prejudice. Alexander Setonius, a Scot, was first of the moderns to achieve it. In the month of March 1602 he did change a bar of lead into gold in the house of a certain Hansen, at Rotterdam, who hath testified to it. He then not only repeated the same process before three learned men sent by the Kaiser Rudolph, but he taught Johann Wolfgang Dienheim of Freibourg, and Gustenhofer of Strasburg, which latter taught it to my own illustrious master—'

'Who in turn taught it to you,' cried Saxon triumphantly. 'I have no great store of metal with me, good sir, but there are my head-piece, back and breast-plate, taslets and thigh-pieces, together with my sword, spurs, and the buckles of my harness. I pray you to use your most excellent and praiseworthy art upon these, and I will promise within a few days to bring round a mass of metal which shall be more worthy of your skill.'

'Nay, nay,' said the alchemist, smiling and shaking his head. 'It can indeed be done, but only slowly and in order, small pieces at a time, and with much expenditure of work and patience. For a man to enrich himself at it he must labour hard and long; yet in the end I will not deny that he may compass it. And now, since the flasks are empty and your young comrade is nodding in his chair, it will perhaps be as well for you to spend as much of the night as is left in repose.' He drew several blankets and rugs from a corner and scattered them over the floor. 'It is a soldier's couch,' he remarked; 'but ye may sleep on worse before ye put Monmouth on the English throne. For myself, it is my custom to sleep in an inside chamber, which is hollowed out of the hill.' With a few last words and precautions for our comfort he withdrew with the lamp, passing through a door which had escaped our notice at the further end of the apartment.

Reuben, having had no rest since he left Havant, had already dropped upon the rugs, and was fast asleep, with a saddle for a pillow. Saxon and I sat for a few minutes longer by the light of the burning brazier.

'One might do worse than take to this same chemical business,' my companion remarked, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. 'See you yon iron-bound chest in the corner?'

'What of it?'

'It is two thirds full of gold, which this worthy gentleman hath manufactured.'

'How know you that?' I asked incredulously.

'When you did strike the door panel with the hilt of your sword, as though you would drive it in, you may have heard some scuttling about, and the turning of a lock. Well, thanks to my inches, I was able to look through yon slit in the wall, and I saw our friend throw something into the chest with a chink, and then lock it. It was but a glance at the contents, yet I could swear that that dull yellow light could come from no metal but gold. Let us see if it be indeed locked.’ Rising from his seat he walked over to the box and pulled vigorously at the lid.

‘Forbear, Saxon, forbear!’ I cried angrily. ‘What would our host say, should he come upon you?’

‘Nay, then, he should not keep such things beneath his roof. With a chisel or a dagger now, this might be prized open.’

‘By Heaven!’ I whispered, ‘if you should attempt it I shall lay you on your back.’

‘Well, well, young Anak! it was but a passing fancy to see the treasure again. Now, if he were but well favoured to the King, this would be fair prize of war. Marked ye not that he claimed to have been the last Royalist who drew sword in England? and he confessed that he had been proscribed as a malignant. Your father, godly as he is, would have little compunction in despoiling such an Amalekite. Besides, bethink you, he can make more as easily as your good mother maketh cranberry dumplings.’

‘Enough said!’ I answered sternly. ‘It will not bear discussion. Get ye to your couch, lest I summon our host and tell him what manner of man he hath entertained.’

With many grumbles Saxon consented at last to curl his long limbs up upon a mat, whilst I lay by his side and remained awake until the mellow light of morning streamed through the chinks between the ill-covered rafters. Truth to tell, I feared to sleep, lest the freebooting habits of the soldier of fortune should be too strong for him, and he should disgrace us in the eyes of our kindly and generous entertainer. At last, however, his long-drawn breathing assured me that he was asleep, and I was able to settle down to a few hours of welcome rest.

CHAPTER XII. Of certain Passages upon the Moor

In the morning, after a breakfast furnished by the remains of our supper, we looked to our horses and prepared for our departure. Ere we could mount, however, our kindly host came running out to us with a load of armour in his arms.

‘Come hither,’ said he, beckoning to Reuben. ‘It is not meet, lad, that you should go bare-breasted against the enemy when your comrades are girt with steel. I have here mine own old breastplate and head-piece, which should, methinks, fit you, for if you have more flesh than I, I am a larger framework of a man. Ah, said I not so! Were’t measured for you by Silas Thomson, the court armourer, it could not grip better. Now on with the head-piece. A close fit again. You are now a cavalier whom Monmouth or any other leader might be proud to see ride beneath his banner.’

Both helmet and body-plates were of the finest Milan steel, richly inlaid with silver and with gold, and carved all over in rare and curious devices. So stern and soldierly was the effect, that the ruddy, kindly visage of our friend staring out of such a panoply had an ill-matched and somewhat ludicrous appearance.

‘Nay, nay,’ cried the old cavalier, seeing a smile upon our features, ‘it is but right that so precious a jewel as a faithful heart should have a fitting casket to protect it.’

‘I am truly beholden to you, sir,’ said Reuben; ‘I can scarce find words to express my thanks. Holy mother! I have a mind to ride straight back to Havant, to show them how stout a man-at-arms hath been reared amongst them.’

‘It is steel of proof,’ Sir Jacob remarked; ‘a pistol-bullet might glance from it. And you,’ he continued, turning to me, ‘here is a small gift by which you shall remember this meeting. I did observe that you did cast a wistful eye upon my bookshelf. It is Plutarch’s lives of the ancient worthies, done into English by the ingenious Mr. Latimer. Carry this volume with you, and shape your life after the example of the giant men whose deeds are here set forth. In your saddle-bag I place a small but weighty packet, which

I desire you to hand over to Monmouth upon the day of your arrival in his camp. As to you, sir,' addressing Decimus Saxon, 'here is a slug of virgin gold for you, which may fashion into a pin or such like ornament. You may wear it with a quiet conscience, for it is fairly given to you and not filched from your entertainer whilst he slept.'

Saxon and I shot a sharp glance of surprise at each other at this speech, which showed that our words of the night before were not unknown to him. Sir Jacob, however, showed no signs of anger, but proceeded to point out our road and to advise us as to our journey.

'You must follow this sheep-track until you come on another and broader pathway which makes for the West,' said he. 'It is little used, and there is small chance of your falling in with any of your enemies upon it. This path will lead you between the villages of Fovant and Hindon, and soon to Mere, which is no great distance from Bruton, upon the Somersetshire border.'

Thanking our venerable host for his great kindness towards us we gave rein to our horses, and left him once more to the strange solitary existence in which we had found him. So artfully had the site of his cottage been chosen, that when we looked back to give him a last greeting both he and his dwelling had disappeared already from our view, nor could we, among the many mounds and hollows, determine where the cottage lay which had given us such welcome shelter. In front of us and on either side the great uneven dun-coloured plain stretched away to the horizon, without a break in its barren gorse-covered surface. Over the whole expanse there was no sign of life, save for an occasional rabbit which whisked into its burrow on hearing our approach, or a few thin and hungry sheep, who could scarce sustain life by feeding on the coarse and wiry grass which sprang from the unfruitful soil.

The pathway was so narrow that only one of us could ride upon it at a time, but we presently abandoned it altogether, using it simply as a guide, and galloping along side by side over the rolling plain. We were all silent, Reuben meditating upon his new corslet, as I could see from his frequent glances at it; while Saxon, with his eyes half closed, was brooding over some matter of his own. For my own part, my thoughts ran upon the ignominy of the old soldier's designs upon the gold chest, and the additional shame which rose from the knowledge that our host had in some way divined his intention. No good could come of an alliance with a man so devoid of all feelings of honour or of gratitude. So strongly did I feel upon it that I at last broke the silence by pointing to a cross path, which turned away from the one which we were pursuing, and recommending him to follow it, since he had proved that he was no fit company for honest men.

‘By the living rood!’ he cried, laying his hand upon the hilt of his rapier,’ have you taken leave of your senses? These are words such as no honourable cavaliero can abide.’

‘They are none the less words of truth,’ I answered.

His blade flashed out in an instant, while his mare bounded twice her length under the sharp dig of his spurs.

‘We have here,’ he cried, reining her round, with his fierce lean face all of a quiver with passion, ‘an excellent level stretch on which to discuss the matter. Out with your bilbo and maintain your words.’

‘I shall not stir a hair’s-breadth to attack you,’ I answered. ‘Why should I, when I bear you no ill-will? If you come against me, however, I will assuredly beat you out of your saddle, for all your tricky sword play.’ I drew my broadsword as I spoke, and stood upon my guard, for I guessed that with so old a soldier the onset would be sharp and sudden.

‘By all the saints in heaven!’ cried Reuben, ‘which ever of ye strikes first at the other I’ll snap this pistol at his head. None of your jokes, Don Decimo, for by the Lord I’ll let drive at you if you were my own mother’s son. Put up your sword, for the trigger falls easy, and my finger is a twitching.’

‘Curse you for a spoil-sport!’ growled Saxon, sulkily sheathing his weapon. ‘Nay, Clarke,’ he added, after a few moments of reflection, ‘this is but child’s play, that two camarados with a purpose in view should fall out over such a trifle. I, who am old enough to be your father, should have known better than to have drawn upon you, for a boy’s tongue wags on impulse and without due thought. Do but say that you have said more than you meant.’

‘My way of saying it may have been over plain and rough,’ I answered, for I saw that he did but want a little salve where my short words had galled him. ‘At the same time, our ways differ from your ways, and that difference must be mended, or you can be no true comrade of ours.’

‘All right, Master Morality,’ quoth he, ‘I must e’en unlearn some of the tricks of my trade. Od’s feet, man, if ye object to me, what the henker would ye think of some whom I have known? However, let that pass. It is time that we were at the wars, for our good swords will not bide in their scabbards.

“The trenchant blade, Toledo trusty,
For want of fighting was grown rusty,
And ate into itself for lack
Of somebody to hew and hack.”

You cannot think a thought but old Samuel hath been before you.’

‘Surely we shall be at the end of this dreary plain presently,’ Reuben cried. ‘Its insipid flatness is enough to set the best of friends by the ears. We might be in the deserts of Libya instead of his most graceless Majesty’s county of Wiltshire.’

‘There is smoke over yonder, upon the side of that hill,’ said Saxon, pointing to the southward.

‘Methinks I see one straight line of houses there,’ I observed, shading my eyes with my hand. ‘But it is distant, and the shimmer of the sun disturbs the sight.’

‘It must be the hamlet of Hindon,’ said Reuben. ‘Oh, the heat of this steel coat! I wonder if it were very un-soldierly to slip it off and tie it about Dido’s neck. I shall be baked alive else, like a crab in its shell. How say you, illustrious, is it contravened by any of those thirty-nine articles of war which you bear about in your bosom?’

‘The bearing of the weight of your harness, young man,’ Saxon answered gravely, ‘is one of the exercises of war, and as such only attainable by such practice as you are now undergoing. You have many things to learn, and one of them is not to present petronels too readily at folk’s heads when you are on horseback. The jerk of your charger’s movement even now might have drawn your trigger, and so deprived Monmouth of an old and tried soldier.’

‘There would be much weight in your contention,’ my friend answered, ‘were it not that I now bethink me that I had forgot to recharge my pistol since discharging it at that great yellow beast yesternight.’

Decimus Saxon shook his head sadly. ‘I doubt we shall never make a soldier of you,’ he remarked. ‘You fall from your horse if the brute does bit change his step, you show a levity which will not jump with the gravity of the true soldado, you present empty petronels as a menace, and finally, you crave permission to tie your armour — armour which the Cid himself might be proud to wear — around the neck of your horse. Yet you have heart and mettle, I believe, else you would not be here.’

‘Gracias, Signor!’ cried Reuben, with a bow which nearly unhorsed him; ‘the last remark makes up for all the rest, else had I been forced to cross blades with you, to maintain my soldierly repute.’

‘Touching that same incident last night,’ said Saxon, ‘of the chest filled, as I surmise, with gold, which I was inclined to take as lawful plunder, I am now ready to admit that I may have shown an undue haste and precipitance, considering that the old man treated us fairly.’

‘Say no more of it,’ I answered, ‘if you will but guard against such impulses for the future.’

‘They do not properly come from me,’ he replied, ‘but from Will Spotterbridge, who was a man of no character at all.’

‘And how comes he to be mixed up in the matter?’ I asked curiously.

‘Why, marry, in this wise. My father married the daughter of this same Will Spotterbridge, and so weakened a good old stock by an unhealthy strain. Will was a rake-hell of Fleet Street in the days of James, a chosen light of Alsatia, the home of bullies and of brawlers. His blood hath through his daughter been transmitted to the ten of us, though I rejoice to say that I, being the tenth, it had by that time lost much of its virulence, and indeed amounts to little more than a proper pride, and a laudable desire to prosper.’

‘How, then, has it affected the race?’ I asked.

‘Why,’ he answered, ‘the Saxons of old were a round-faced, contented generation, with their ledgers in their hands for six days and their bibles on the seventh. If my father did but drink a cup of small beer more than his wont, or did break out upon provocation into any fond oath, as “Od’s niggers!” or “Heart alive!” he would mourn over it as though it were the seven deadly sins. Was this a man, think ye, in the ordinary course of nature to beget ten long lanky children, nine of whom might have been first cousins of Lucifer, and foster-brothers of Beelzebub?’

‘It was hard upon him,’ remarked Reuben.

‘On him! Nay, the hardship was all with us. If he with his eyes open chose to marry the daughter of an incarnate devil like Will Spotterbridge, because she chanced to be powdered and patched to his liking, what reason hath he for complaint? It is we, who have the blood of this Hector of the taverns grafted upon our own good honest stream, who have most reason to lift up our voices.’

‘Faith, by the same chain of reasoning,’ said Reuben, ‘one of my ancestors must have married a woman with a plaguy dry throat, for both my father and I are much troubled with the complaint.’

‘You have assuredly inherited a plaguy pert tongue,’ growled Saxon. ‘From what I have told you, you will see that our whole life is a conflict between our natural Saxon virtue and the ungodly impulses of the Spotterbridge taint. That of which you have had cause to complain yesternight is but an example of the evil to which I am subjected.’

‘And your brothers and sisters?’ I asked; ‘how hath this circumstance affected them?’ The road was bleak and long, so that the old soldier’s gossip was a welcome break to the tedium of the journey.

‘They have all succumbed,’ said Saxon, with a groan. ‘Alas, alas! they were a goodly company could they have turned their talents to better uses. Prima was our eldest born. She did well until she attained womanhood. Secundus was a stout seaman, and owned his own vessel when he was yet a young man. It was remarked, however, that he started on a voyage in a schooner and came back in a brig, which gave rise to some inquiry. It may be, as he said, that he found it drifting about in the North Sea, and abandoned his own vessel in favour of it, but they hung him before he could prove it. Tertia ran away with a north-country drover, and hath been on the run ever since. Quartus and Nonus have been long engaged in busying themselves over the rescue of the black folk from their own benighted and heathen country, conveying them over by the shipload to the plantations, where they may learn the beauties of the Christian religion. They are, however, men of violent temper and profane speech, who cherish no affection for their younger brother. Quintus was a lad of promise, but he found a hogshead of rumbo which was thrown up from a wreck, and he died soon afterwards. Sextus might have done well, for he became clerk to Johnny Tranter the attorney; but he was of an enterprising turn, and he shifted the whole business, papers, cash, and all to the Lowlands, to the no small inconvenience of his employer, who hath never been able to lay hands either on one or the other from that day to this. Septimus died young. As to Octavius, Will Spotterbridge broke out early in him, and he was slain in a quarrel over some dice, which were said by his enemies to be so weighted that the six must ever come upwards. Let this moving recital be a warning to ye, if ye are fools enough to saddle yourselves with a wife, to see that she hath no vice in her, for a fair face is a sorry make-weight against a foul mind.'

Reuben and I could not but laugh over this frank family confession, which our companion delivered without a sign of shame or embarrassment. 'Ye have paid a heavy price for your father's want of discretion,' I remarked. 'But what in the name of fate is this upon our left?'

'A gibbet, by the look of it,' said Saxon, peering across at the gaunt framework of wood, which rose up from a little knoll. 'Let us ride past it, for it is little out of our way. They are rare things in England, though by my faith there were more gallows than milestones when Turenne was in the Palatinate. What between the spies and traitors who were bred by the war, the rascally Schwartzritter and Lanzknechte, the Bohemian vagabonds, and an occasional countryman who was put out of the way lest he do something amiss, there was never such a brave time for the crows.'

As we approached this lonely gibbet we saw that a dried-up wisp of a thing which could hardly be recognised as having once been a human being was dangling from the centre of it. This wretched relic of mortality was secured to the cross-bar by an iron chain, and flapped drearily backwards and forwards in the summer breeze. We had pulled up our horses, and were gazing in silence at this sign-post of death, when what had seemed to us to be a bundle of rags thrown down at the foot of the gallows began suddenly to move, and turned towards us the wizened face of an aged woman, so marked with evil passions and so malignant in its expression that it inspired us with even more horror than the unclean thing which dangled above her head.

'Gott in Himmel!' cried Saxon, 'it is ever thus! A gibbet draws witches as a magnet draws needles. All the hexerei of the country side will sit round one, like cats round a milk-pail. Beware of her! she hath the evil eye!'

'Poor soul! It is the evil stomach that she hath,' said Reuben, walking his horse up to her. 'Whoever saw such a bag of bones! I warrant that she is pining away for want of a crust of bread.'

The creature whined, and thrust out two skinny claws to grab the piece of silver which our friend had thrown down to her. Her fierce dark eyes and beak-like nose, with the gaunt bones over which the yellow parchment-like skin was stretched tightly, gave her a fear-inspiring aspect, like some foul bird of prey, or one of those vampires of whom the story-tellers write.

‘What use is money in the wilderness?’ I remarked; ‘she cannot feed herself upon a silver piece.’

She tied the coin hurriedly into the corner of her rags, as though she feared that I might try to wrest it from her. ‘It will buy bread,’ she croaked.

‘But who is there to sell it, good mistress?’ I asked.

‘They sell it at Fovant, and they sell it at Hindon,’ she answered. ‘I bide here o’ days, but I travel at night.’

‘I warrant she does, and on a broomstick,’ quoth Saxon; ‘but tell us, mother, who is it who hangs above your head?’

‘It is he who slew my youngest born,’ cried the old woman, casting a malignant look at the mummy above her, and shaking a clenched hand at it which was hardly more fleshy than its own. ‘It is he who slew my bonny boy. Out here upon the wide moor he met him, and he took his young life from him when no kind hand was near to stop the blow. On that ground there my lad’s blood was shed, and from that watering hath grown this goodly gallows-tree with its fine ripe fruit upon it. And here, come rain, come shine, shall I, his mother, sit while two bones hang together of the man who slow my heart’s darling.’ She nestled down in her rags as she spoke, and leaning her chin upon her hands stared up with an intensity of hatred at the hideous remnant.

‘Come away, Reuben,’ I cried, for the sight was enough to make one loathe one’s kind. ‘She is a ghoul, not a woman.’

‘Pah! it gives one a foul taste in the mouth,’ quoth Saxon. ‘Who is for a fresh gallop over the Downs? Away with care and carrion!

“Sir John got on his bonny brown steed,
To Monmouth for to ride — a.
A brave buff coat upon his back,
A broadsword by his side — a.
Ha, ha, young man, we rebels can
Pull down King James’s pride — a!”

Hark away, lads, with a loose rein and a bloody heel!’

We spurred our steeds and galloped from the unholy spot as fast as our brave beasts could carry us. To all of us the air had a purer flavour and the heath a sweeter scent by contrast with the grim couple whom we had left behind us. What a sweet world would this be, my children, were it not for man and his cruel ways!

When we at last pulled up we had set some three or four miles between the gibbet and ourselves. Right over against us, on the side of a gentle slope, stood a bright little village, with a red-roofed church rising up from amidst a clump of trees. To our eyes, after the dull sward of the plain, it was a glad sight to see the green spread of the branches and the pleasant gardens which girt the hamlet round. All morning we had seen no sight of a human being, save the old hag upon the moor and a few peat-cutters in the distance. Our belts, too, were beginning to be loose upon us, and the remembrance of our breakfast more faint.

‘This,’ said I, ‘must be the village of Mere, which we were to pass before coming to Bruton. We shall soon be over the Somersetshire border.’

‘I trust that we shall soon be over a dish of beefsteaks,’ groaned Reuben. ‘I am well-nigh famished. So fair a village must needs have a passable inn, though I have not seen one yet upon my travels which would compare with the old Wheatsheaf.’

‘Neither inn nor dinner for us just yet,’ said Saxon. ‘Look yonder to the north, and tell me what you see.’

On the extreme horizon there was visible a long line of gleaming, glittering points, which shone and sparkled like a string of diamonds. These brilliant specks were all in rapid motion, and yet kept their positions to each other.

‘What is it, then?’ we both cried.

‘Horse upon the march,’ quoth Saxon. ‘It may be our friends of Salisbury, who have made a long day’s journey; or, as I am inclined to think, it may be some other body of the King’s horse. They are far distant, and what we see is but the sun shining on their casques; yet they are bound for this very village, if I mistake not. It would be wisest to avoid entering it, lest the rustics set them upon our track. Let us skirt it and push on for Bruton, where we may spare time for bite and sup.’

‘Alas, alas! for our dinners!’ cried Reuben ruefully. ‘I have fallen away until my body rattles about, inside this shell of armour, like a pea in a pod. However, lads, it is all for the Protestant faith.’

‘One more good stretch to Bruton, and we may rest in peace,’ said Saxon. ‘It is ill dining when a dragoon may be served up as a grace after meat. Our horses are still fresh, and we should be there in little over an hour.’

We pushed on our way accordingly, passing at a safe distance from Mere, which is the village where the second Charles did conceal himself after the battle of Worcester. The road beyond was much crowded by peasants, who were making their way out of Somersetshire, and by farmers' waggons, which were taking loads of food to the West, ready to turn a few guineas either from the King's men or from the rebels. We questioned many as to the news from the war, but though we were now on the outskirts of the disturbed country, we could gain no clear account of how matters stood, save that all agreed that the rising was on the increase. The country through which we rode was a beautiful one, consisting of low swelling hills, well tilled and watered by numerous streamlets. Crossing over the river Brue by a good stone bridge, we at last reached the small country town for which we had been making, which lies embowered in the midst of a broad expanse of fertile meadows, orchards, and sheep-walks. From the rising ground by the town we looked back over the plain without seeing any traces of the troopers. We learned, too, from an old woman of the place, that though a troop of the Wiltshire Yeomanry had passed through the day before, there were no soldiers quartered at present in the neighbourhood. Thus assured we rode boldly into the town, and soon found our way to the principal inn. I have some dim remembrance of an ancient church upon an eminence, and of a quaint stone cross within the market-place, but assuredly, of all the recollections which I retain of Bruton there is none so pleasing as that of the buxom landlady's face, and of the steaming dishes which she lost no time in setting before us.

CHAPTER XIII. Of Sir Gervas Jerome, Knight Banneret of the County of Surrey

The inn was very full of company, being occupied not only by many Government agents and couriers on their way to and from the seat of the rising, but also by all the local gossips, who gathered there to exchange news and consume Dame Hobson the landlady's home-brewed. In spite, however, of this stress of custom and the consequent uproar, the hostess conducted us into her own private room, where we could consume her excellent cheer in peace and quietness. This favour was due, I think, to a little sly manoeuvring and a few whispered words from Saxon, who amongst other accomplishments which he had picked up during his chequered career had a pleasing knack of establishing friendly relations with the fair sex, irrespective of age, size, or character. Gentle and simple, Church and Dissent, Whig and Tory, if they did but wear a petticoat our comrade never failed, in spite of his fifty years, to make his way into their good graces by the help of his voluble tongue mid assured manner.

'We are your grateful servants, mistress,' said he, when the smoking joint and the batter pudding had been placed upon the table. 'We have robbed you of your room. Will you not honour us so far as to sit down with us and share our repast?'

'Nay, kind sir,' said the portly dame, much flattered by the proposal; 'it is not for me to sit with gentles like yourselves.'

'Beauty has a claim which persons of quality, and above all cavalieros of the sword, are the first to acknowledge,' cried Saxon, with his little twinkling eyes fixed in admiration upon her buxom countenance. 'Nay, by my troth, you shall not leave us. I shall lock the door first. If you will not eat, you shall at least drink a cup of Alicant with me.'

'Nay, sir, it is too much honour,' cried Dame Hobson, with a simper. 'I shall go down into the cellars and bring a flask of the best.'

'Nay, by my manhood, you shall not,' said Saxon, springing up from his seat. 'What are all these infernal lazy drawers here for if you are to descend to menial offices?' Handing the widow to a chair he clanked away into the tap-room, where we heard him swearing at the men-servants, and cursing them for a droning set of rascals who had taken advantage of the angelic goodness of their mistress and her incomparable sweetness of temper.

‘Here is the wine, fair mistress,’ said he, returning presently with a bottle in either hand. ‘Let me fill your glass. Ha! it flows clear and yellow like a prime vintage. These rogues can stir their limbs when they find that there is a man to command them.’

‘Would that there were ever such,’ said the widow meaningly, with a languishing look at our companion. ‘Here is to you, sir — and to ye, too, young sirs,’ she added, sipping at her wine. ‘May there be a speedy end to the insurrection, for I judge, from your gallant equipment, that ye be serving the King.’

‘His business takes us to the West,’ said Reuben, ‘and we have every reason to hope that there will be a speedy end to the insurrection.’

‘Aye, aye, though blood will be shed first,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘They tell me that the rebels are as many as seven thousand, and that they swear to give an’ take no quarter, the murderous villains! Alas! how any gentleman can fall to such bloody work when he might have a clean honourable occupation, such as innkeeping or the like, is more than my poor mind can understand. There is a sad difference betwixt the man who lieth on the cold ground, not knowing how long it may be before he is three feet deep in it, and he who passeth his nights upon a warm feather bed, with mayhap a cellar beneath it stocked with even such wines as we are now drinking.’ She again looked hard at Saxon as she spoke, while Reuben and I nudged each other beneath the table.

‘This business hath doubtless increased your trade, fair mistress,’ quoth Saxon.

‘Aye, and in the way that payeth best,’ said she. ‘The few kilderkins of beer which are drunk by the common folk make little difference one way or the other. But now, when we have lieutenants of counties, officers, mayors, and gentry spurring it for very life down the highways, I have sold more of my rare old wines in three days than ever I did before in a calendar month. It is not ale, or strong waters, I promise you, that those gentles drink, but Priniac, Languedoc, Tent, Muscadine, Chiante, and Tokay — never a flask under the half-guinea.’

‘So indeed!’ quoth Saxon thoughtfully. ‘A snug home and a steady income.’

‘Would that my poor Peter had lived to share it with me,’ said Dame Hobson, laying down her glass, and rubbing her eyes with a corner of her kerchief. ‘He was a good man, poor soul, though in very truth and between friends he did at last become as broad and as thick as one of his own puncheons. All well, the heart is the thing! Marry come up! if a woman were ever to wait until her own fancy came her way, there would be more maids than mothers in the land.’

‘Prythee, good dame, how runs your own fancy?’ asked Reuben mischievously.

‘Not in the direction of fat, young man,’ she answered smartly, with a merry glance at our plump companion.

‘She has hit you there, Reuben,’ said I.

‘I would have no pert young springald,’ she continued, ‘but one who hath knowledge of the world, and ripe experience. Tall he should be, and of sinewy build, free of speech that he might lighten the weary hours, and help entertain the gentles when they crack a flagon of wine. Of business habits he must be, too, forsooth, for is there not a busy hostel and two hundred good pounds a year to pass through his fingers? If Jane Hobson is to be led to the altar again it must be by such a man as this.’

Saxon had listened with much attention to the widow’s words, and had just opened his mouth to make some reply to her when a clattering and bustle outside announced the arrival of some traveller. Our hostess drank off her wine and pricked up her ears, but when a loud authoritative voice was heard in the passage, demanding a private room and a draught of sack, her call to duty overcame her private concerns, and she bustled off with a few words of apology to take the measure of the new-comer.

‘Body o’ me, lads!’ quoth Decimus Saxon the moment that she disappeared, ‘ye can see how the land lies. I have half a mind to let Monmouth carve his own road, and to pitch my tent in this quiet English township.’

‘Your tent, indeed!’ cried Reuben; ‘it is a brave tent that is furnished with cellars of such wine as we are drinking. And as to the quiet, my illustrious, if you take up your residence here I’ll warrant that the quiet soon comes to an end.’

‘You have seen the woman,’ said Saxon, with his brow all in a wrinkle with thought. ‘She hath much to commend her. A man must look to himself. Two hundred pounds a year are not to be picked off the roadside every June morning. It is not princely, but it is something for an old soldier of fortune who hath been in the wars for five-and-thirty years, and foresees the time when his limbs will grow stiff in his harness. What sayeth our learned Fleming—"an mulier—" but what in the name of the devil have we here?'

Our companion's ejaculation was called forth by a noise as of a slight scuffle outside the door, with a smothered 'Oh, sir!' and 'What will the maids think?' The contest was terminated by the door being opened, and Dame Hobson re-entering the room with her face in a glow, and a slim young man dressed in the height of fashion at her heels.

'I am sure, good gentlemen,' said she, 'that ye will not object to this young nobleman drinking his wine in the same room with ye, since all the others are filled with the townsfolk and commonalty.'

'Faith! I must needs be mine own usher,' said the stranger, sticking his gold-laced cap under his left arm and laying his hand upon his heart, while he bowed until his forehead nearly struck the edge of the table. 'Your very humble servant, gentlemen, Sir Gervas Jerome, knight banneret of his Majesty's county of Surrey, and at one time custos rotulorum of the district of Beacham Ford.'

'Welcome, sir,' quoth Reuben, with a merry twinkle in his eye. 'You have before you Don Decimo Saxon of the Spanish nobility, together with Sir Micah Clarke and Sir Reuben Lockarby, both of his Majesty's county of Hampshire.'

'Proud and glad to meet ye, gentlemen!' cried the newcomer, with a flourish. 'But what is this upon the table? Alicant? Fie, fie, it is a drink for boys. Let us have some good sack with plenty of body in it. Claret for youth, say I, sack for maturity, and strong waters in old age. Fly, my sweetest, move those dainty feet of thine, for egad! my throat is like leather. Od's 'oons, I drank deep last night, and yet it is clear that I could not have drunk enough, for I was as dry as a concordance when I awoke.'

Saxon sat silently at the table, looking so viciously at the stranger out of his half-closed glittering eyes that I feared that we should have another such brawl as occurred at Salisbury, with perhaps a more unpleasant ending. Finally, however, his ill-humour at the gallant's free and easy attention to our hostess spent itself in a few muttered oaths, and he lit his long pipe, the never-failing remedy of a ruffled spirit. As to Reuben and myself, we watched our new companion half in wonder and half in amusement, for his appearance and manners were novel enough to raise the interest of inexperienced youngsters like ourselves.

I have said that he was dressed in the height of fashion, and such indeed was the impression which a glance would give. His face was thin and aristocratic, with a well-marked nose, delicate features, and gay careless expression. Some little paleness of the cheeks and darkness under the eyes, the result of hard travel or dissipation, did but add a chastening grace to his appearance. His white periwig, velvet and silver riding coat, lavender vest and red satin knee-breeches were all of the best style and cut, but when looked at closely, each and all of these articles of attire bore evidence of having seen better days. Beside the dust and stains of travel, there was a shininess or a fading of colour here and there which scarce accorded with the costliness of their material or the bearing of their wearer. His long riding-boots had a gaping seam in the side of one of them, whilst his toe was pushing its way through the end of the other. For the rest, he wore a handsome silver-hilted rapier at his side, and had a frilled cambric shirt somewhat the worse for wear and open at the front, as was the mode with the gallants of those days. All the time he was speaking he mumbled a toothpick, which together with his constant habit of pronouncing his o's as a's made his conversation sound strange to our ears. (Note D Appendix) Whilst we were noting these peculiarities he was reclining upon Dame Hobson's best taffatta-covered settee, tranquilly combing his wig with a delicate ivory comb which he had taken from a small satin bag which hung upon the right of his sword-belt.

'Lard preserve us from country inns!' he remarked. 'What with the boors that swarm in every chamber, and the want of mirrors, and jasmine water, and other necessaries, blister me if one has not to do one's toilet in the common room. 'Oons! I'd as soon travel in the land of the Great Mogul!'

'When you shall come to be my age, young sir,' Saxon answered, 'you may know better than to decry a comfortable country hostel.'

'Very like, sir, very like!' the gallant answered, with a careless laugh. 'For all that, being mine own age, I feel the wilds of Wiltshire and the inns of Bruton to be a sorry change after the Mall, and the fare of Pontack's or the Coca Tree. Ah, Lud! here comes the sack! Open it, my pretty Hebe, and send a drawer with fresh glasses, for these gentlemen must do me the honour of drinking with me. A pinch of snuff, sirs? Aye, ye may well look hard at the box. A pretty little thing, sirs, from a certain lady of title, who shall be nameless; though, if I were to say that her title begins with a D and her name with a C, a gentleman of the Court might hazard a guess.'

Our hostess, having brought fresh glasses, withdrew, and Decimus Saxon soon found an opportunity for following her. Sir Gervas Jerome continued, however, to chatter freely to Reuben and myself over the wine, rattling along as gaily and airily as though we were old acquaintances.

'Sink me, if I have not frighted your comrade away!' he remarked, 'Or is it possible that he hath gone on the slot of the plump widow? Methought he looked in no very good temper when I kissed her at the door. Yet it is a civility which I seldom refuse to anything which wears a cap. Your friend's appearance smacked more of Mars than of Venus, though, indeed, those who worship the god are wont to be on good terms with the goddess. A hardy old soldier, I should judge, from his feature and attire.'

'One who hath seen much service abroad,' I answered.

'Ha! ye are lucky to ride to the wars in the company of so accomplished a cavalier. For I presume that it is to the wars that ye are riding, since ye are all so armed and accoutred.'

'We are indeed bound for the West,' I replied, with some reserve, for in Saxon's absence I did not care to be too loose-tongued.

'And in what capacity?' he persisted. 'Will ye risk your crowns in defence of King James's one, or will ye strike in, hit or miss, with these rogues of Devon and Somerset? Stop my vital breath, if I would not as soon side with the clown as with the crown, with all due respect to your own principles!'

'You are a daring man,' said I, 'if you air your opinions thus in every inn parlour. Dost not know that a word of what you have said, whispered to the nearest justice of the peace, might mean your liberty, if not your life?'

'I don't care the rind of a rotten orange for life or liberty either,' cried our acquaintance, snapping his finger and thumb. 'Burn me if it wouldn't be a new sensation to bandy words with some heavy-chopped country justice, with the Popish plot still stuck in his gizzard, and be thereafter consigned to a dungeon, like the hero in John Dryden's latest. I have been round-housed many a time by the watch in the old Hawkubite days; but this would be a more dramatic matter, with high treason, block, and axe all looming in the background.'

'And rack and pincers for a prologue,' said Reuben. 'This ambition is the strangest that I have ever heard tell of.'

‘Anything for a change,’ cried Sir Gervas, filling up a bumper. ‘Here’s to the maid that’s next our heart, and here’s to the heart that loves the maids! War, wine, and women, ‘twould be a dull world without them. But you have not answered my question.’

‘Why truly, sir,’ said I, ‘frank as you have been with us, I can scarce be equally so with you, without the permission of the gentleman who has just left the room. He is the leader of our party. Pleasant as our short intercourse has been, these are parlous times, and hasty confidences are apt to lead to repentance.’

‘A Daniel come to judgment!’ cried our new acquaintance. ‘What ancient, ancient words from so young a head! You are, I’ll warrant, five years younger than a scatterbrain like myself, and yet you talk like the seven wise men of Greece. Wilt take me as a valet?’

‘A valet!’ I exclaimed.

‘Aye, a valet, a man-servant. I have been waited upon so long that it is my turn to wait now, and I would not wish a more likely master. By the Lard! I must, in applying for a place, give an account of my character and a list of my accomplishments. So my rascals ever did with me, though in good truth I seldom listened to their recital. Honesty — there I score a trick. Sober — Ananias himself could scarce say that I am that. Trustworthy — indifferently so. Steady — hum! about as much so as Garraway’s weathercock. Hang it, man, I am choke full of good resolutions, but a sparkling glass or a roguish eye will deflect me, as the mariners say of the compass. So much for my weaknesses. Now let me see what qualifications I can produce. A steady nerve, save only when I have my morning qualms, and a cheerful heart; I score two on that. I can dance saraband, minuet, or corranto; fence, ride, and sing French chansons. Good Lard! who ever heard a valet urge such accomplishments? I can play the best game of piquet in London. So said Sir George Etherege when I won a cool thousand off him at the Groom Parter. But that won’t advance me much, either. What is there, then, to commend me? Why, marry, I can brew a bowl of punch, and I can broil a devilled fowl. It is not much, but I can do it well.’

‘Truly, good sir,’ I said, with a smile, ‘neither of these accomplishments is like to prove of much use to us on our present errand. You do, however, but jest, no doubt, when you talk of descending to such a position.’

‘Not a whit! not a whit!’ he replied earnestly. ‘“To such base uses do we come,” as Will Shakespeare has it. If you would be able to say that you have in your service Sir Gervas Jerome, knight banneret, and sole owner of Beacham Ford Park, with a rent-roll of four thousand good pounds a year, he is now up for sale, and will be knocked down to the bidder who pleases him best. Say but the word, and we'll have another flagon of sack to clinch the bargain.'

'But,' said I, 'if you are indeed owner of this fair property, why should you descend to so menial an occupation?'

'The Jews, the Jews, oh most astute and yet most slow-witted master! The ten tribes have been upon me, and I have been harried and wasted, bound, ravished, and despoiled. Never was Agag, king of Amalek, more completely in the hands of the chosen, and the sole difference is that they have hewed into pieces mine estate instead of myself.'

'Have you lost all, then?' Reuben asked, open-eyed.

'Why no — not all — by no means all!' he answered, with a merry laugh; 'I have a gold Jacobus and a guinea or two in my purse. 'Twill serve for a flask or so yet. There is my silver-hilted rapier, my rings, my gold snuff-box, and my watch by Tompion at the sign of the Three Crowns. It was never bought under a hundred, I'll warrant. Then there are such relics of grandeur as you see upon my person, though they begin to look as frail and worn as a waiting-woman's virtue. In this bag, too, I retain the means for preserving that niceness and elegance of person which made me, though I say it, as well groomed a man as ever set foot in St. James's Park. Here are French scissors, eyebrow brush, toothpick case, patch-box, powder-bag, comb, puff, and my pair of red-heeled shoes. What could a man wish for more? These, with a dry throat, a cheerful heart, and a ready hand, are my whole stock in trade.'

Reuben and I could not forbear from laughing at the curious inventory of articles which Sir Gervas had saved from the wreck of his fortunes. He upon seeing our mirth was so tickled at his own misfortunes, that he laughed in a high treble key until the whole house resounded with his merriment. 'By the Mass,' he cried at last, 'I have never had so much honest amusement out of my prosperity as hath been caused in me by my downfall. Fill up your glasses!'

'We have still some distance to travel this evening, and must not drink more,' I observed, for prudence told me that it was dangerous work for two sober country lads to keep pace with an experienced toper.

‘So!’ said he in surprise. ‘I should have thought that would be a “raison de plus,” as the French say. But I wish your long-legged friend would come back, even if he were intent upon slitting my weazand for my attention to the widow. He is not a man to flinch from his liquor, I’ll warrant. Curse this Wiltshire dust that clings to my periwig!’

‘Until my comrade returns, Sir Gervas,’ said I, ‘you might, since the subject does not appear to be a painful one to you, let us know how these evil times, which you bear with such philosophy, came upon you.’

‘The old story!’ he answered, flicking away a few grains of snuff with his deeply-laced cambric handkerchief. ‘The old, old story! My father, a good, easy country baronet, finding the family purse somewhat full, must needs carry me up to town to make a man of me. There as a young lad I was presented at Court, and being a slim active youngster with a pert tongue and assured manner, I caught the notice of the Queen, who made me one of her pages of honour. This post I held until I grew out of it, when I withdrew from town, but egad! I found I must get back to it again, for Beacham Ford Park was as dull as a monastery after the life which I had been living. In town I stayed then with such boon companions as Tommy Lawson, my Lord Halifax, Sir Jasper Lemarck, little Geordie Chichester, aye, and old Sidney Godolphin of the Treasury; for with all his staid ways and long-winded budgets he could drain a cup with the best of us, and was as keen on a main of cocks as on a committee of ways and means. Well, it was rare sport while it lasted, and sink me if I wouldn’t do the same again if I had my time once more. It is like sliding down a greased plank though, for at first a man goes slow enough, and thinks he can pull himself up, but presently he goes faster and faster, until he comes with a crash on to the rocks of ruin at the bottom.’

‘And did you run through four thousand pounds a year?’ I exclaimed.

‘Od’s bodikins, man, you speak as if this paltry sum were all the wealth of the Indies. Why, from Ormonde or Buckingham, with their twenty thousand, down to ranting Dicky Talbot, there was not one of my set who could not have bought me out. Yet I must have my coach and four, my town house, my liveried servants, and my stable full of horses. To be in the mode I must have my poet, and throw him a handful of guineas for his dedication. Well, poor devil, he is one who will miss me. I warrant his heart was as heavy as his verses when he found me gone, though perchance he has turned a few guineas by this time by writing a satire upon me. It would have a ready sale among my friends. Gad’s life! I wonder how my levees get on, and whom all my suitors have fastened on to now. There they were morning after morning, the French pimp, the English bully, the needy man o’ letters, the neglected inventor — I never thought to have got rid of them, but indeed I have shaken them off very effectually now. When the honey-pot is broken it is farewell to the flies.’

‘And your noble friends?’ I asked. ‘Did none of them stand by you in your adversity?’

‘Well, well, I have nought to complain of!’ exclaimed Sir Gervas. ‘They were brave-hearted boys for the most part. I might have had their names on my bills as long as their fingers could hold a pen, but slit me if I like bleeding my own companions. They might have found a place for me, too, had I consented to play second-fiddle where I had been used to lead the band. I’ faith, I care not what I turn my hand to amongst strangers, but I would fain leave my memory sweet in town.’

‘As to what you proposed, of serving us as a valet,’ said I, ‘it is not to be thought of. We are, in spite of my friend’s waggishness, but two plain blunt countrymen, and have no more need of a valet than one of those poets which you have spoken of. On the other hand, if you should care to attach yourself to our party, we shall take you where you will see service which shall be more to your taste than the curling of periwigs or the brushing of eyebrows.’

‘Nay, nay, my friend. Speak not with unseemly levity of the mysteries of the toilet,’ he cried. ‘Ye would yourselves be none the worse for a touch of mine ivory comb, and a closer acquaintance with the famous skin-purifying wash of Murphy which I am myself in the habit of using.’

‘I am beholden to you, sir,’ said Reuben, ‘but the famous spring water wash by Providence is quite good enough for the purpose.’

‘And Dame Nature hath placed a wig of her own upon me,’ I added, ‘which I should be very loth to change.’

‘Goths! Perfect Goths!’ cried the exquisite, throwing up his white hands. ‘But here comes a heavy tread and the clink of armour in the passage. ‘Tis our friend the knight of the wrathful countenance, if I mistake not.’

It was indeed Saxon, who strode into the room to tell us that our horses were at the door, and that all was ready for our departure. Taking him aside I explained to him in a whisper what had passed between the stranger and ourselves, with the circumstances which had led me to suggest that he should join our party. The old soldier frowned at the news.

‘What have we to do with such a coxcomb?’ he said. ‘We have hard fare and harder blows before us. He is not fit for the work.’

‘You said yourself that Monmouth will be weak in horse,’ I answered. ‘Here is a well-appointed cavalier, who is to all appearance a desperate man and ready for anything. Why should we not enrol him?’

‘I fear,’ said Saxon, ‘that his body may prove to be like the bran of a fine cushion, of value only for what it has around it. However, it is perhaps for the best. The handle to his name may make him welcome in the camp, for from what I hear there is some dissatisfaction at the way in which the gentry stand aloof from the enterprise.’

‘I had feared,’ I remarked, still speaking in a whisper, ‘that we were about to lose one of our party instead of gaining one in this Bruton inn.’

‘I have thought better of it,’ he answered, with a smile. ‘Nay, I’ll tell you of it anon. Well, Sir Gervas Jerome,’ he added aloud, turning to our new associate, ‘I hear that you are coming with us. For a day you must be content to follow without question or remark. Is that agreed!’

‘With all my heart,’ cried Sir Gervas.

‘Then here’s a bumper to our better acquaintance,’ cried Saxon, raising his glass.

‘I pledge ye all,’ quoth the gallant. ‘Here’s to a fair fight, and may the best men win.’

‘Donnerblitz, man!’ said Saxon. ‘I believe there’s mettle in you for all your gay plumes. I do conceive a liking for you. Give me your hand!’

The soldier of fortune’s great brown grip enclosed the delicate hand of our new friend in a pledge of comradeship. Then, having paid our reckoning and bade a cordial adieu to Dame Hobson, who glanced methought somewhat reproachfully or expectantly at Saxon, we sprang on our steeds and continued our journey amidst a crowd of staring villagers, who huzzaed lustily as we rode out from amongst them.

CHAPTER XIV. Of the Stiff-legged Parson and his Flock

Our road lay through Castle Carey and Somerton, which are small towns lying in the midst of a most beautiful pastoral country, well wooded and watered by many streams. The valleys along the centre of which the road lies are rich and luxuriant, sheltered from the winds by long rolling hills, which are themselves highly cultivated. Here and there we passed the ivy-clad turret of an old castle or the peaked gables of a rambling country house, protruding from amongst the trees and marking the country seat of some family of repute. More than once, when these mansions were not far from the road, we were able to perceive the unrepaired dints and fractures on the walls received during the stormy period of the civil troubles. Fairfax it seems had been down that way, and had left abundant traces of his visit. I have no doubt that my father would have had much to say of these signs of Puritan wrath had he been riding at our side.

The road was crowded with peasants who were travelling in two strong currents, the one setting from east to west, and the other from west to east. The latter consisted principally of aged people and of children, who were being sent out of harm’s way to reside in the less disturbed counties until the troubles should be over. Many of these poor folk were pushing barrows in front of them, in which a few bedclothes and some cracked utensils represented the whole of their worldly goods. Others more prosperous had small carts, drawn by the wild shaggy colts which are bred on the Somerset moors. What with the spirit of the half-tamed beasts and the feebleness of the drivers, accidents were not uncommon, and we passed several unhappy groups who had been tumbled with their property into a ditch, or who were standing in anxious debate round a cracked shaft or a broken axle.

The countrymen who were making for the West were upon the other hand men in the prime of life, with little or no baggage. Their brown faces, heavy boots, and smockfrocks proclaimed most of them to be mere hinds, though here and there we overtook men who, by their top-boots and corduroys, may have been small farmers or yeomen. These fellows walked in gangs, and were armed for the most part with stout oak cudgels, which were carried as an aid to their journey, but which in the hands of powerful men might become formidable weapons. From time to time one of these travellers would strike up a psalm tune, when all the others within earshot would join in, until the melody rippled away down the road. As we passed some scowled angrily at us, while others whispered together and shook their heads, in evident doubt as to our character and aims. Now and again among the people we marked the tall broad-brimmed hat and Geneva mantle which were the badges of the Puritan clergy.

‘We are in Monmouth’s country at last,’ said Saxon to me, for Reuben Lockarby and Sir Gervas Jerome had ridden on ahead. ‘This is the raw material which we shall have to lick into soldiership.’

‘And no bad material either,’ I replied, taking note of the sturdy figures and bold hearty faces of the men. ‘Think ye that they are bound for Monmouth’s camp, then?’

‘Aye, are they. See you yon long-limbed parson on the left — him with the pent-house hat. Markest thou not the stiffness wherewith he moves his left leg!’

‘Why, yes; he is travel-worn doubtless.’

‘Ho! ho!’ laughed my companion. ‘I have seen such a stiffness before now. The man hath a straight sword within he leg of his breeches. A regular Parliamentary tuck, I’ll warrant. When he is on safe ground he will produce it, aye, and use it too, but until he is out of all danger of falling in with the King’s horse he is shy of strapping it to his belt. He is one of the old breed by his cut, who:

“Call fire and sword and desolation,
A godly thorough reformation.”

Old Samuel hath them to a penstroke! There is another ahead of him there, with the head of a scythe inside his smock. Can you not see the outline? I warrant there is not one of the rascals but hath a pike-head or sickle-blade concealed somewhere about him. I begin to feel the breath of war once more, and to grow younger with it. Hark ye, lad! I am glad that I did not tarry at the inn.’

‘You seemed to be in two minds about it,’ said I.

‘Aye, aye. She was a fine woman, and the quarters were comfortable. I do not gainsay it. But marriage, d’ye see, is a citadel that it is plaguy easy to find one’s way into, but once in old Tilly himself could not bring one out again with credit, I have known such a device on the Danube, where at the first onfall the Mamelukes have abandoned the breach for the very purpose of ensnaring the Imperial troops in the narrow streets beyond, from which few ever returned. Old birds are not caught with such wiles. I did succeed in gaining the ear of one of the gossips, and asking him what he could tell me of the good dame and her inn. It seemeth that she is somewhat of a shrew upon occasion, and that her tongue had more to do with her husband's death than the dropsy which the leech put it down to. Again, a new inn hath been started in the village, which is well-managed, and is like to draw the custom from her. It is, too, as you have said, a dull sleepy spot. All these reasons weighed with me, and I decided that it would be best to raise my siege of the widow, and to retreat whilst I could yet do so with the credit and honours of war.'

''Tis best so,' said I; 'you could not have settled down to a life of toping and ease. But our new comrade, what think you of him?'

'Faith!' Saxon answered, 'we shall extend into a troop of horse if we add to our number every gallant who is in want of a job. As to this Sir Gervas, however, I think, as I said at the inn, that he hath more mettle in him than one would judge at first sight. These young sprigs of the gentry will always fight, but I doubt if he is hardened enough or hath constancy enough for such a campaign as this is like to be. His appearance, too, will be against him in the eyes of the saints; and though Monmouth is a man of easy virtue, the saints are like to have the chief voice in his councils. Now do but look at him as he reins up that showy grey stallion and gazes back at us. Mark his riding-hat tilted over his eye, his open bosom, his whip dangling from his button-hole, his hand on his hip, and as many oaths in his mouth as there are ribbons to his doublet. Above all, mark the air with which he looks down upon the peasants beside him. He will have to change his style if he is to fight by the side of the fanatics. But hark! I am much mistaken if they have not already got themselves into trouble.'

Our friends had pulled up their horses to await our coming. They had scarce halted, however, before the stream of peasants who had been moving along abreast of them slackened their pace, and gathered round them with a deep ominous murmur and threatening gestures. Other rustics, seeing that there was something afoot, hurried up to help their companions. Saxon and I put spurs to our horses, and pushing through the throng, which was becoming every instant larger and more menacing, made our way to the aid of our friends, who were hemmed in on every side by the rabble. Reuben had laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, while Sir Gervas was placidly chewing his toothpick and looking down at the angry mob with an air of amused contempt.

‘A flask or two of scent amongst them would not be amiss,’ he remarked; ‘I would I had a casting bottle.’

‘Stand on your guard, but do not draw,’ cried Saxon. ‘What the henker hath come over the chaw-bacons? They mean mischief. How now, friends, why this uproar?’

This question instead of allaying the tumult appeared to make it tenfold worse. All round us twenty deep were savage faces and angry eyes, with the glint here and there of a weapon half drawn from its place of concealment. The uproar, which had been a mere hoarse growl, began to take shape and form. ‘Down with the Papists!’ was the cry. ‘Down with the Prelatists!’ ‘Smite the Erastian butchers!’ ‘Smite the Philistine horsemen!’ ‘Down with them!’

A stone or two had already whistled past our ears, and we had been forced in self-defence to draw our swords, when the tall minister whom we had already observed shoved his way through the crowd, and by dint of his lofty stature and commanding voice prevailed upon them to be silent.

‘How say ye,’ he asked, turning upon us, ‘fight ye for Baal or for the Lord? He who is not with us is against us.’

‘Which is the side of Baal, most reverend sir, and which of the Lord?’ asked Sir Gervas Jerome. ‘Methinks if you were to speak plain English instead of Hebrew we might come to an understanding sooner.’

‘This is no time for light words,’ the minister cried, with a flush of anger upon his face. ‘If ye would keep your skins whole, tell me, are ye for the bloody usurper James Stuart, or are ye for his most Protestant Majesty King Monmouth?’

‘What! He hath come to the title already!’ exclaimed Saxon. ‘Know then that we are four unworthy vessels upon our way to offer our services to the Protestant cause.’

‘He lies, good Master Pettigrue, he lies most foully,’ shouted a burly fellow from the edge of the crowd. ‘Who ever saw a good Protestant in such a Punchinello dress as yonder? Is not Amalekite written upon his raiment? Is he not attired as becometh the bridegroom of the harlot of Rome? Why then should we not smite him?’

‘I thank you, my worthy friend,’ said Sir Gervas, whose attire had moved this champion’s wrath. ‘If I were nearer I should give you some return for the notice which you have taken of me.’

‘What proof have we that ye are not in the pay of the usurper, and on your way to oppress the faithful?’ asked the Puritan divine.

‘I tell you, man,’ said Saxon impatiently, ‘that we have travelled all the way from Hampshire to fight against James Stuart. We will ride with ye to Monmouth’s camp, and what better proof could ye desire than that?’

‘It may be that ye do but seek an opportunity of escaping from our bondage,’ the minister observed, after conferring with one or two of the leading peasants. ‘It is our opinion, therefore, that before coming with us ye must deliver unto us your swords, pistols, and other carnal weapons.’

‘Nay, good sir, that cannot be,’ our leader answered. ‘A cavalier may not with honour surrender his blade or his liberty in the manner ye demand. Keep close to my bridle-arm, Clarke, and strike home at any rogue who lays hands on you.’

A hum of anger rose from the crowd, and a score of sticks and scythe-blades were raised against us, when the minister again interposed and silenced his noisy following.

‘Did I hear aright?’ he asked. ‘Is your name Clarke?’

‘It is,’ I answered.

‘Your Christian name?’

‘Micah.’

‘Living at?’

‘Havant.’

The clergyman conferred for a few moments with a grizzly-bearded, harsh-faced man dressed in black buckram who stood at his elbow.

‘If you are really Micah Clarke of Havant,’ quoth he, ‘you will be able to tell us the name of an old soldier, skilled in the German wars, who was to have come with ye to the camp of the faithful.’

‘Why, this is he,’ I answered; ‘Decimus Saxon is his name.’

‘Aye, aye, Master Pettigrue,’ cried the old man. ‘The very name given by Dicky Rumbold. He said that either the old Roundhead Clarke or his son would go with him. But who are these?’

‘This is Master Reuben Lockarby, also of Havant, and Sir Gervas Jerome of Surrey,’ I replied. ‘They are both here as volunteers desiring to serve under the Duke of Monmouth.’

‘Right glad I am to see ye, then,’ said the stalwart minister heartily. ‘Friends, I can answer for these gentlemen that they favour the honest folk and the old cause.’

At these words the rage of the mob turned in an instant into the most extravagant adulation and delight. They crowded round us, patting our riding-boots, pulling at the skirts of our dress, pressing our hands and calling down blessings upon our heads, until their pastor succeeded at last in rescuing us from their attentions and in persuading them to resume their journey. We walked our horses in the midst of them whilst the clergyman strode along betwixt Saxon and myself. He was, as Reuben remarked, well fitted to be an intermediary between us, for he was taller though not so broad as I was, and broader though not so tall as the adventurer. His face was long, thin, and hollow-cheeked, with a pair of great thatched eyebrows and deep sunken melancholy eyes, which lit up upon occasion with a sudden quick flash of fiery enthusiasm.

‘Joshua Pettigrue is my name, gentlemen,’ said he; ‘I am an unworthy worker in the Lord’s vineyard, testifying with voice and with arm to His holy covenant. These are my faithful flock, whom I am bringing westward that they may be ready for the reaping when it pleases the Almighty to gather them in.’

‘And why have you not brought them into some show of order or formation?’ asked Saxon. ‘They are straggling along the road like a line of geese upon a common when Michaelmas is nigh. Have you no fears? Is it not written that your calamity cometh suddenly — suddenly shall you be broken down without remedy?’

‘Aye, friend, but is it not also written, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding!” Mark ye, if I were to draw up my men in military fashion it would invite attention and attack from any of James Stuart’s horse who may come our way. It is my desire to bring my flock to the camp and obtain pieces for them before exposing them to so unequal a contest.’

‘Truly, sir, it is a wise resolution,’ said Saxon grimly, ‘for if a troop of horse came down upon these good people the pastor would find himself without his flock.’

‘Nay, that could never be!’ cried Master Pettigrue with fervour. ‘Say rather that pastor, flock, and all would find their way along the thorny track of martyrdom to the new Jerusalem. Know, friend, that I have come from

Monmouth in order to conduct these men to his standard. I received from him, or rather from Master Ferguson, instructions to be on the lookout for ye and for several others of the faithful we expect to join us from the East. By what route came ye?'

'Over Salisbury Plain and so through Bruton.'

'And saw ye or met ye any of our people upon the way?'

'None,' Saxon answered. 'We left the Blue Guards at Salisbury, however, and we saw either them or some other horse regiment near this side of the Plain at the village of Mere.'

'Ah, there is a gathering of the eagles,' cried Master Joshua Pettigrue, shaking his head. 'They are men of fine raiment, with war-horses and chariots and trappings, like the Assyrians of old, yet shall the angel of the Lord breathe upon them in the night. Yea, He shall cut them off utterly in His wrath, and they shall be destroyed.'

'Amen! Amen!' cried as many of the peasants as were within earshot.

'They have elevated their horn, Master Pettigrue,' said the grizzly-haired Puritan. 'They have set up their candlestick on high — the candlestick of a perverse ritual and of an idolatrous service. Shall it not be dashed down by the hands of the righteous?'

'Lo, this same candle waxed big and burned sooty, even as an offence to the nostrils, in the days of our fathers,' cried a burly red-faced man, whose dress proclaimed him to be one of the yeoman class. 'So was it when Old Noll did get his snuffing shears to work upon it. It is a wick which can only be trimmed by the sword of the faithful.' A grim laugh from the whole party proclaimed their appreciation of the pious waggery of their companion.

'Ah, Brother Sandcroft,' cried the pastor, 'there is much sweetness and manna hidden in thy conversation. But the way is long and dreary. Shall we not lighten it by a song of praise? Where is Brother Thistlethwaite, whose voice is as the cymbal, the tabor, and the dulcimer?'

'Lo, most pious Master Pettigrue,' said Saxon, 'I have myself at times ventured to lift up my voice before the Lord.' Without any further apology he broke out in stentorian tones into the following hymn, the refrain of which was caught up by pastor and congregation.

The Lord He is a morion
 That guards me from all wound;
The Lord He is a coat of mail

That circles me all round.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

The Lord He is the buckler true
That swings on my left arm;
The Lord He is the plate of proof
That shieldeth me from harm.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

Who then dreads the violent,
Or fears the man of pride?
Or shall I flee from two or three
If He be by my side?
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord!

My faith is like a citadel
Girt round with moat and wall,
No mine, or sap, or breach, or gap
Can ere prevail at all.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

Saxon ceased, but the Reverend Joshua Pettigrue waved his long arms and repeated the refrain, which was taken up again and again by the long column of marching peasants.

‘It is a godly hymn,’ said our companion, who had, to my disgust and to the evident astonishment of Reuben and Sir Gervas, resumed the snuffling, whining voice which he had used in the presence of my father. ‘It hath availed much on the field of battle.’

‘Truly,’ returned the clergyman, ‘if your comrades are of as sweet a savour as yourself, ye will be worth a brigade of pikes to the faithful,’ a sentiment which raised a murmur of assent from the Puritans around. ‘Since, sir,’ he continued, ‘you have had much experience in the wiles of war, I shall be glad to hand over to you the command of this small body of the faithful, until such time as we reach the army.’

‘It is time, too, in good faith, that ye had a soldier at your head,’ Decimus Saxon answered quietly. ‘My eyes deceive me strangely if I do not see the gleam of sword and cuirass upon the brow of yonder declivity. Methinks our pious exercises have brought the enemy upon us.’

CHAPTER XV. Of our Brush with the King’s Dragoons

Some little distance from us a branch road ran into that along which we and our motley assemblage of companions-in-arms were travelling. This road curved down the side of a well-wooded hill, and then over the level for a quarter of a mile or so before opening on the other. Just at the brow of the rising ground there stood a thick bristle of trees, amid the trunks of which there came and went a bright shimmer of sparkling steel, which proclaimed the presence of armed men. Farther back, where the road took a sudden turn and ran along the ridge of the hill, several horsemen could be plainly seen outlined against the evening sky. So peaceful, however, was the long sweep of countryside, mellowed by the golden light of the setting sun, with a score of village steeples and manor-houses peeping out from amongst the woods, that it was hard to think that the thundercloud of war was really lowering over that fair valley, and that at any instant the lightning might break from it.

The country folk, however, appeared to have no difficulty at all in understanding the danger to which they were exposed. The fugitives from the West gave a yell of consternation, and ran wildly down the road or whipped up their beasts of burden in the endeavour to place as safe a distance as possible between themselves and the threatened attack. The chorus of shrill cries and shouts, with the cracking of whips, creaking of wheels, and the occasional crash when some cart load of goods came to grief, made up a most deafening uproar, above which our leader’s voice resounded in sharp, eager exhortation and command. When, however, the loud brazen shriek from a bugle broke from the wood, and the head of a troop of horse began to descend the slope, the panic became greater still, and it was difficult for us to preserve any order at all amidst the wild rush of the terrified fugitives.

‘Stop that cart, Clarke,’ cried Saxon vehemently, pointing with his sword to an old waggon, piled high with furniture and bedding, which was lumbering along drawn by two raw-boned colts. At the same moment I saw him drive his horse into the crowd and catch at the reins of another similar one.

Giving Covenant’s bridle a shake I was soon abreast of the cart which he had indicated, and managed to bring the furious young horses to a standstill.

‘Bring it up!’ cried our leader, working with the coolness which only a long apprenticeship to war can give. ‘Now, friends, cut the traces!’ A dozen knives were at work in a moment, and the kicking, struggling animals scampered off, leaving their burdens behind them. Saxon sprang off his horse and set the example in dragging the waggon across the roadway, while some of the peasants, under the direction of Reuben Lockarby and of Master Joshua Pettigrue, arranged a couple of other carts to block the way fifty yards further down. The latter precaution was to guard against the chance of the royal horse riding through the fields and attacking us from behind. So speedily was the scheme conceived and carried out, that within a very few minutes of the first alarm we found ourselves protected front and rear by a lofty barricade, while within this improvised fortress was a garrison of a hundred and fifty men.

‘What firearms have we amongst us?’ asked Saxon hurriedly.

‘A dozen pistols at the most,’ replied the elderly Puritan, who was addressed by his companions as Hope-above Williams. ‘John Rodway, the coachman, hath his blunderbuss. There are also two godly men from Hungerford, who are keepers of game, and who have brought their pieces with them.’

‘They are here, sir,’ cried another, pointing to two stout, bearded fellows, who were ramming charges into their long-barrelled muskets. ‘Their names are Wat and Nat Millman.’

‘Two who can hit their mark are worth a battalion who shoot wide,’ our leader remarked, ‘Get under the waggon, my friends, and rest your pieces upon the spokes. Never draw trigger until the sons of Belial are within three pikes’ length of ye.’

‘My brother and I,’ quoth one of them, ‘can hit a running doe at two hundred paces. Our lives are in the hands of the Lord, but two, at least, of these hired butchers we shall send before us.’

‘As gladly as ever we slew stoat or wild-cat,’ cried the other, slipping under the waggon. ‘We are keeping the Lord’s preserves now, brother Wat, and truly these are some of the vermin that infest them.’

‘Let all who have pistols line the waggon,’ said Saxon, tying his mare to the hedge — an example which we all followed. ‘Clarke, do you take charge upon the right with Sir Gervas, while Lockarby assists Master Pettigrue upon the left. Ye others shall stand behind with stones. Should they break through our barricades, slash at the horses with your scythes. Once down, the riders are no match for ye.’

A low sullen murmur of determined resolution rose from the peasants, mingled with pious ejaculations and little scraps of hymn or of prayer. They had all produced from under their smocks rustic weapons of some sort. Ten or twelve had petronels, which, from their antique look and rusty condition, threatened to be more dangerous to their possessors than to the enemy. Others had sickles, scythe-blades, flails, half-pikes, or hammers, while the remainder carried long knives and oaken clubs. Simple as were these weapons, history has proved that in the hands of men who are deeply stirred by religious fanaticism they are by no means to be despised. One had but to look at the stern, set faces of our followers, and the gleam of exultation and expectancy which shone from their eyes, to see that they were not the men to quail, either from superior numbers or equipment.

‘By the Mass!’ whispered Sir Gervas, ‘it is magnificent! An hour of this is worth a year in the Mall. The old Puritan bull is fairly at bay. Let us see what sort of sport the bull-pups make in the baiting of him! I’ll lay five pieces to four on the chaw-bacons!’

‘Nay, it’s no matter for idle betting,’ said I shortly, for his light-hearted chatter annoyed me at so solemn a moment.

‘Five to four on the soldiers, then!’ he persisted. ‘It is too good a match not to have a stake on it one way or the other.’

‘Our lives are the stake,’ said I.

‘Faith, I had forgot it!’ he replied, still mumbling his toothpick. ‘“To be or not to be?” as Will of Stratford says. Kynaston was great on the passage. But here is the bell that rings the curtain up.’

Whilst we had been making our dispositions the troop of horse — for there appeared to be but one — had trotted down the cross-road, and had drawn up across the main highway. They numbered, as far as I could judge, about ninety troopers, and it was evident from their three-cornered hats, steel plates, red sleeves, and bandoliers, that they were dragoons of the regular army. The main body halted a quarter of a mile from us, while three officers rode to the front and held a short consultation, which ended in one of them setting spurs to his horse and cantering down in our direction. A bugler followed a few paces behind him, waving a white kerchief and blowing an occasional blast upon his trumpet.

‘Here comes an envoy,’ cried Saxon, who was standing up in the waggon. ‘Now, my brethren, we have neither kettle-drum nor tinkling brass, but we have the instrument wherewith Providence hath endowed us. Let us show the redcoats that we know how to use it.

“Who then dreads the violent,
Or fears the man of pride?
Or shall I flee from two or three
If He be by my side?”’

Seven score voices broke in, in a hoarse roar, upon the chorus —

‘Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?’

I could well believe at that moment that the Spartans had found the lame singer Tyrtaeus the most successful of their generals, for the sound of their own voices increased the confidence of the country folk, while the martial words of the old hymn roused the dogged spirit in their breasts. So high did their courage run that they broke off their song with a loud warlike shout, waving their weapons above their heads, and ready I verily believe to march out from their barricades and make straight for the horsemen. In the midst of this clamour and turmoil the young dragoon officer, a handsome, olive-faced lad, rode fearlessly up to the barrier, and pulling up his beautiful roan steed, held up his hand with an imperious gesture which demanded silence.

‘Who is the leader of this conventicle?’ he asked.

‘Address your message to me, sir,’ said our leader from the top of the waggon, ‘but understand that your white flag will only protect you whilst you use such language as may come from one courteous adversary to another. Say your say or retire.’

‘Courtesy and honour,’ said the officer, with a sneer, ‘are not extended to rebels who are in arms against their lawful sovereign. If you are the leader of this rabble, I warn you if they are not dispersed within five minutes by this watch’ — he pulled out an elegant gold time-piece—’we shall ride down upon them and cut them to pieces.’

‘The Lord can protect His own,’ Saxon answered, amid a fierce hum of approval from the crowd. ‘Is this all thy message?’

‘It is all, and you will find it enough, you Presbyterian traitor,’ cried the dragoon cornet. ‘Listen to me, misguided fools,’ he continued, standing up upon his stirrups and speaking to the peasants at the other side of the waggon. ‘What chance have ye with your whittles and cheese-scrapers? Ye may yet save your skins if ye will but deliver up your leaders, throw down what ye are pleased to call your arms, and trust to the King’s mercy.’

‘This exceedeth the limitations of your privileges,’ said Saxon, drawing a pistol from his belt and cocking it. ‘If you say another word to seduce these people from their allegiance, I fire.’

‘Hope not to benefit Monmouth,’ cried the young officer, disregarding the threat, and still addressing his words to the peasants. ‘The whole royal army is drawing round him and—’

‘Have a care!’ shouted our leader, in a deep harsh voice.

‘His head within a month shall roll upon the scaffold.’

‘But you shall never live to see it,’ said Saxon, and stooping over he fired straight at the cornet’s head. At the flash of the pistol the trumpeter wheeled round and galloped for his life, while the roan horse turned and followed with its master still seated firmly in the saddle.

‘Verily you have missed the Midianite!’ cried Hope-above Williams.

‘He is dead,’ said our leader, pouring a fresh charge into his pistol. ‘It is the law of war, Clarke,’ he added, looking round at me. ‘He hath chosen to break it, and must pay forfeit.’

As he spoke I saw the young officer lean gradually over in his saddle, until, when about half-way back to his friends, he lost his balance and fell heavily in the roadway, turning over two or three times with the force of his fall, and lying at last still and motionless, a dust-coloured heap. A loud yell of rage broke from the troopers at the sight, which was answered by a shout of defiance from the Puritan peasantry.

‘Down on your faces!’ cried Saxon; ‘they are about to fire.’

The crackle of musketry and a storm of bullets, pinging on the hard ground, or cutting twigs from the hedges on either side of us, lent emphasis to our leader’s order. Many of the peasants crouched behind the feather beds and tables which had been pulled out of the cart. Some lay in the waggon itself, and some sheltered themselves behind or underneath it. Others again lined the ditches on either side or lay flat upon the roadway, while a few showed their belief in the workings of Providence by standing upright without flinching from the bullets. Amongst these latter were Saxon and Sir Gervas, the former to set an example to his raw troops, and the latter out of pure laziness and indifference. Reuben and I sat together in the ditch, and I can assure you, my dear grandchildren, that we felt very much inclined to bob our heads when we heard the bullets piping all around them. If any soldier ever told you that he did not the first time that he was under fire, then that soldier is not a man to trust. After sitting rigid and silent, however, as if we had both stiff necks, for a very few minutes, the feeling passed completely away, and from that day to this it has never returned to me. You see familiarity breeds contempt with bullets as with other things, and though it is no easy matter to come to like them, like the King of Sweden or my Lord Cutts, it is not so very hard to become indifferent to them.

The cornet’s death did not remain long unavenged. A little old man with a sickle, who had been standing near Sir Gervas, gave a sudden sharp cry, and springing up into the air with a loud ‘Glory to God!’ fell flat upon his face dead. A bullet had struck him just over the right eye. Almost at the same moment one of the peasants in the waggon was shot through the chest, and sat up coughing blood all over the wheel. I saw Master Joshua Pettigrue catch him in his long arms, and settle some bedding under his head, so that he lay breathing heavily and pattering forth prayers. The minister showed himself a man that day, for amid the fierce carbine fire he walked boldly up and down, with a drawn rapier in his left hand — for he was a left-handed man — and his Bible in the other. ‘This is what you are dying for, dear brothers,’ he cried continually, holding the brown volume up in the air; ‘are ye not ready to die for this?’ And every time he asked the question a low eager murmur of assent rose from the ditches, the waggon, and the road.

‘They aim like yokels at a Wappenschaw,’ said Saxon, seating himself on the side of the waggon. ‘Like all young soldiers they fire too high. When I was an adjutant it was my custom to press down the barrels of the muskets until my eye told me that they were level. These rogues think that they have done their part if they do but let the gun off, though they are as like to hit the plovers above us as ourselves.’

‘Five of the faithful have fallen,’ said Hope-above Williams. ‘Shall we not sally forth and do battle with the children of Antichrist? Are we to lie here like so many popinjays at a fair for the troopers to practise upon?’

‘There is a stone barn over yonder on the hill-side,’ I remarked. ‘If we who have horses, and a few others, were to keep the dragoons in play, the people might be able to reach it, and so be sheltered from the fire.'

'At least let my brother and me have a shot or two back at them,' cried one of the marksmen beside the wheel.

To all our entreaties and suggestions, however, our leader only replied by a shake of the head, and continued to swing his long legs over the side of the waggon with his eyes fixed intently upon the horsemen, many of whom had dismounted and were leaning their carbines over the cruppers of their chargers.

'This cannot go on, sir,' said the pastor, in a low earnest voice; 'two more men have just been hit.'

'If fifty more men are hit we must wait until they charge,' Saxon answered. 'What would you do, man? If you leave this shelter you will be cut off and utterly destroyed. When you have seen as much of war as I have done, you will learn to put up quietly with what is not to be avoided. I remember on such another occasion when the rearguard or nachhut of the Imperial troops was followed by Croats, who were in the pay of the Grand Turk, I lost half my company before the mercenary renegades came to close fighting. Ha, my brave boys, they are mounting! We shall not have to wait long now.'

The dragoons were indeed climbing into their saddles again, and forming across the road, with the evident intention of charging down upon us. At the same time about thirty men detached themselves from the main body and trotted away into the fields upon our right. Saxon growled a hearty oath under his breath as he observed them.

'They have some knowledge of warfare after all,' said he. 'They mean to charge us flank and front. Master Joshua, see that your scythesmen line the quickset hedge upon the right. Stand well up, my brothers, and flinch not from the horses. You men with the sickles, lie in the ditch there, and cut at the legs of the brutes. A line of stone throwers behind that. A heavy stone is as sure as a bullet at close quarters. If ye would see your wives and children again, make that hedge good against the horsemen. Now for the front attack. Let the men who carry petronels come into the waggon. Two of yours, Clarke, and two of yours, Lockarby. I can spare one also. That makes five. Now here are ten others of a sort and three muskets. Twenty shots in all. Have you no pistols, Sir Gervas?

'No, but I can get a pair,' said our companion, and springing upon his horse he forced his way through the ditch, past the barrier, and so down the road in the direction of the dragoons.

The movement was so sudden and so unexpected that there was a dead silence for a few seconds, which was broken by a general howl of hatred and execration from the peasants. ‘Shoot upon him! Shoot down the false Amalekite!’ they shrieked. ‘He hath gone to join his kind! He hath delivered us up into the hands of the enemy! Judas! Judas!’ As to the horsemen, who were still forming up for a charge and waiting for the flanking party to get into position, they sat still and silent, not knowing what to make of the gaily-dressed cavalier who was speeding towards them.

We were not left long in doubt, however. He had no sooner reached the spot where the cornet had fallen than he sprang from his horse and helped himself to the dead man’s pistols, and to the belt which contained his powder and ball. Mounting at his leisure, amid a shower of bullets which puffed up the white dust all around him, he rode onwards towards the dragoons and discharged one of his pistols at them. Wheeling round he politely raised his cap, and galloped back to us, none the worse for his adventure, though a ball had grazed his horse’s fetlock and another had left a hole in the skirt of his riding-coat. The peasants raised a shout of jubilation as he rode in, and from that day forward our friend was permitted to wear his gay trappings and to bear himself as he would, without being suspected of having mounted the livery of Satan or of being wanting in zeal for the cause of the saints.

‘They are coming,’ cried Saxon. ‘Let no man draw trigger until he sees me shoot. If any does, I shall send a bullet through him, though it was my last shot and the troopers were amongst us.’

As our leader uttered this threat and looked grimly round upon us with an evident intention of executing it, a shrill blare of a bugle burst from the horsemen in front of us, and was answered by those upon our flank. At the signal both bodies set spurs to their horses and dashed down upon us at the top of their speed. Those in the field were delayed for a few moments, and thrown into some disorder, by finding that the ground immediately in front of them was soft and boggy, but having made their way through it they re-formed upon the other side and rode gallantly at the hedge. Our own opponents, having a clear course before them, never slackened for an instant, but came thundering down with a jingling of harness and a tempest of oaths upon our rude barricades.

Ah, my children! when a man in his age tries to describe such things as these, and to make others see what he has seen, it is only then that he understands what a small stock of language a plain man keeps by him for his ordinary use in the world, and how unfit it is to meet any call upon it. For though at this very moment I can myself see that white Somersetshire road, with the wild whirling charge of the horsemen, the red angry faces of the men, and the gaping nostrils of the horses all wreathed and framed in clouds of dust, I cannot hope to make it clear to your young eyes, which never have looked, and, I trust, never shall look, upon such a scene. When, too, I think of the sound, a mere rattle and jingle at first, but growing in strength and volume with every step, until it came upon us with a thunderous rush and roar which gave the impression of irresistible power, I feel that that too is beyond the power of my feeble words to express. To inexperienced soldiers like ourselves it seemed impossible that our frail defence and our feeble weapons could check for an instant the impetus and weight of the dragoons. To right and left I saw white set faces, open-eyed and rigid, unflinching, with a stubbornness which rose less from hope than from despair. All round rose exclamations and prayers. ‘Lord, save Thy people!’ ‘Mercy, Lord, mercy!’ ‘Be with us this day!’ ‘Receive our souls, O merciful Father!’ Saxon lay across the waggon with his eyes glinting like diamonds and his petronel presented at the full length of his rigid arm. Following his example we all took aim as steadily as possible at the first rank of the enemy. Our only hope of safety lay in making that one discharge so deadly that our opponents should be too much shaken to continue their attack.

Would the man never fire? They could not be more than ten paces from us. I could see the buckles of the men’s plates and the powder charges in their bandoliers. One more stride yet, and at last our leader’s pistol flashed and we poured in a close volley, supported by a shower of heavy stones from the sturdy peasants behind. I could hear them splintering against casque and cuirass like hail upon a casement. The cloud of smoke veiling for an instant the line of galloping steeds and gallant riders drifted slowly aside to show a very different scene. A dozen men and horses were rolling in one wild blood-spurting heap, the unwounded falling over those whom our balls and stones had brought down. Struggling, snorting chargers, iron-shod feet, staggering figures rising and falling, wild, hatless, bewildered men half stunned by a fall, and not knowing which way to turn — that was the foreground of the picture, while behind them the remainder of the troop were riding furiously back, wounded and hale, all driven by the one desire of getting to a place of safety where they might rally their shattered formation. A great shout of praise and thanksgiving rose from the delighted peasants, and surging over the barricade they struck down or secured the few uninjured troopers who had boon unable or unwilling to join their companions in their flight. The carbines, swords, and bandoliers were eagerly pounced upon by the victors, some of whom had served in the militia, and knew well how to handle the weapons which they had won.

The victory, however, was by no means completed. The flanking squadron had ridden boldly at the hedge, and a dozen or more had forced their way through, in spite of the showers of stones and the desperate thrusts of the pikemen and scythemen. Once amongst the peasants, the long swords and the armour of the dragoons gave them a great advantage, and though the sickles brought several of the horses to the ground the soldiers continued to lay about them freely, and to beat back the fierce but ill-armed resistance of their opponents. A dragoon sergeant, a man of great resolution and of prodigious strength, appeared to be the leader of the party, and encouraged his followers both by word and example. A stab from a half-pike brought his horse to the ground, but he sprang from the saddle as it fell, and avenged its death by a sweeping back-handed cut from his broadsword. Waving his hat in his left hand he continued to rally his men, and to strike down every Puritan who came against him, until a blow from a hatchet brought him on his knees and a flail stroke broke his sword close by the hilt. At the fall of their leader his comrades turned and fled through the hedge, but the gallant fellow, wounded and bleeding, still showed fight, and would assuredly have been knocked upon the head for his pains had I not picked him up and thrown him into the waggon, where he had the good sense to lie quiet until the skirmish was at an end. Of the dozen who broke through, not more than four escaped, and several others lay dead or wounded upon the other side of the hedge, impaled by scythe-blades or knocked off their horses by stones. Altogether nine of the dragoons were slain and fourteen wounded, while we retained seven unscathed prisoners, ten horses fit for service, and a score or so of carbines, with good store of match, powder, and ball. The remainder of the troop fired a single, straggling, irregular volley, and then galloped away down the cross-road, disappearing amongst the trees from which they had emerged.

All this, however, had not been accomplished without severe loss upon our side. Three men had been killed and six wounded, one of them very seriously, by the musketry fire. Five had been cut down when the flanking party broke their way in, and only one of these could be expected to recover. In addition to this, one man had lost his life through the bursting of an ancient petronel, and another had his arm broken by the kick of a horse. Our total losses, therefore, were eight killed and the same wounded, which could not but be regarded as a very moderate number when we consider the fierceness of the skirmish, and the superiority of our enemy both in discipline and in equipment.

So elated were the peasants by their victory, that those who had secured horses were clamorous to be allowed to follow the dragoons, the more so as Sir Gervas Jerome and Reuben were both eager to lead them. Decimus Saxon refused, however, to listen to any such scheme, nor did he show more favour to the Reverend Joshua Pettigrue's proposal, that he should in his capacity as pastor mount immediately upon the waggon, and improve the occasion by a few words of healing and unction.

'It is true, good Master Pettigrue, that we owe much praise and much outpouring, and much sweet and holy contending, for this blessing which hath come upon Israel,' said he, 'but the time hath not yet arrived. There is an hour for prayer and an hour for labour. Hark ye, friend' — to one of the prisoners—'to what regiment do you belong?'

'It is not for me to reply to your questions,' the man answered sulkily.

Nay, then, we'll try if a string round your scalp and a few twists of a drumstick will make you find your tongue,' said Saxon, pushing his face up to that of the prisoner, and staring into his eyes with so savage an expression that the man shrank away affrighted.

'It is a troop of the second dragoon regiment,' he said.

'Where is the regiment itself?'

'We left it on the Ilchester and Langport road.'

'You hear,' said our leader. 'We have not a moment to spare, or we may have the whole crew about our ears. Put our dead and wounded in the carts, and we can harness two of these chargers to them. We shall not be in safety until we are in Taunton town.'

Even Master Joshua saw that the matter was too pressing to permit of any spiritual exercises. The wounded men were lifted into the waggon and laid upon the bedding, while our dead were placed in the cart which had defended our rear. The peasants who owned these, far from making any objection to this disposal of their property, assisted us in every way, tightening girths and buckling traces. Within an hour of the ending of the skirmish we found ourselves pursuing our way once more, and looking back through the twilight at the scattered black dots upon the white road, where the bodies of the dragoons marked the scene of our victory.

CHAPTER XVI. Of our Coming to Taunton

The purple shadows of evening had fallen over the countryside, and the sun had sunk behind the distant Quantock and Brendon Hills, as our rude column of rustic infantry plodded through Curry Rivell, Wrantage, and Henlade. At every wayside cottage and red-tiled farmhouse the people swarmed out us we passed, with jugs full of milk or beer, shaking hands with our yokels, and pressing food and drink upon them. In the little villages old and young came buzzing to greet us, and cheered long and loud for King Monmouth and the Protestant cause. The stay-at-homes were mostly elderly folks and children, but here and there a young labourer, whom hesitation or duties had kept back, was so carried away by our martial appearance, and by the visible trophies of our victory, that he snatched up a weapon and joined our ranks.

The skirmish had reduced our numbers, but it had done much to turn our rabble of peasants into a real military force. The leadership of Saxon, and his stern, short words of praise or of censure had done even more. The men kept some sort of formation, and stepped together briskly in a compact body. The old soldier and I rode at the head of the column, with Master Pettigrue still walking between us. Then came the cartful of our dead, whom we were carrying with us to insure their decent burial. Behind this walked two score of scythe and sickle men, with their rude weapons over their shoulders, preceding the waggon in which the wounded were carried. This was followed by the main body of the peasants, and the rear was brought up by ten or twelve men under the command of Lockarby and Sir Gervas, mounted upon captured chargers, and wearing the breastplates, swords, and carbines of the dragoons.

I observed that Saxon rode with his chin upon his shoulder, casting continual uneasy glances behind him, and halting at every piece of rising ground to make sure that there were no pursuers at our heels. It was not until, after many weary miles of marching, the lights of Taunton could be seen twinkling far off in the valley beneath us that he at last heaved a deep sigh of relief, and expressed his belief that all danger was over.

‘I am not prone to be fearful upon small occasion,’ he remarked, ‘but hampered as we are with wounded men and prisoners, it might have puzzled Petrinus himself to know what we should have done had the cavalry overtaken us. I can now, Master Pettigrue, smoke my pipe in peace, without pricking up my ears at every chance rumble of a wheel or shout of a village roisterer.'

'Even had they pursued us,' said the minister stoutly, 'as long as the hand of the Lord shall shield us, why should we fear them?'

'Aye, aye!' Saxon answered impatiently, 'but the devil prevaileth at times. Were not the chosen people themselves overthrown and led into captivity? How say you, Clarke?'

'One such skirmish is enough for a day,' I remarked. 'Faith! if instead of charging us they had continued that carbine fire, we must either have come forth or been shot where we lay.'

'For that reason I forbade our friends with the muskets to answer it,' said Saxon. 'Our silence led them to think that we had but a pistol or two among us, and so brought them to charge us. Thus our volley became the more terrifying since it was unexpected. I'll wager there was not a man amongst them who did not feel that he had been led into a trap. Mark you how the rogues wheeled and fled with one accord, as though it had been part of their daily drill!'

'The peasants stood to it like men,' I remarked.

'There is nothing like a tincture of Calvinism for stiffening a line of battle,' said Saxon. 'Look at the Swede when he is at home. What more honest, simple-hearted fellow could you find, with no single soldierly virtue, save that he could put away more spruce beer than you would care to pay for. Yet if you do but cram him with a few strong, homely texts, place a pike in his hand, and give him a Gustavus to lead him, there is no infantry in the world that can stand against him. On the other hand, I have seen young Turks, untrained to arms, strike in on behalf of the Koran as lustily as these brave fellows behind us did for the Bible which Master Pettigrue held up in front of them.'

'I trust, sir,' said the minister gravely, 'that you do not, by these remarks, intend to institute any comparison between our sacred scriptures and the writings of the impostor Mahomet, or to infer that there is any similarity between the devil-inspired fury of the infidel Saracens and the Christian fortitude of the struggling faithful!'

'By no means,' Saxon answered, grinning at me over the minister's head. 'I was but showing how closely the Evil One can imitate the workings of the Spirit.’

‘Too true, Master Saxon, too true!’ the clergyman answered sadly. ‘Amid the conflict and discord it is hard to pick out the true path. But I marvel much that amidst the snares and temptations that beset a soldier’s life you have kept yourself unsullied, with your heart still set upon the true faith.’

‘It was through no strength of mine own,’ said Saxon piously.

‘In very truth, such men as you are much needed in Monmouth’s army,’ Master Joshua exclaimed. ‘They have there several, as I understand, from Holland, Brandenburg, and Scotland, who have been trained in arms, but who care so little for the cause which we uphold that they curse and swear in a manner that affrights the peasants, and threatens to call down a judgment upon the army. Others there are who cling close to the true faith, and have been born again among the righteous; but alas! they have had no experience of camps and fields. Our blessed Master can work by means of weak instruments, yet the fact remains that a man may be a chosen light in a pulpit, and yet be of little avail in an onslaught such as we have seen this day. I can myself arrange my discourse to the satisfaction of my flock, so that they grieve when the sand is run out; (Note E. Appendix) but I am aware that this power would stand me in little stead when it came to the raising of barricades and the use of carnal weapons. In this way it comes about, in the army of the faithful, that those who are fit to lead are hateful to the people, while those to whose words the people will hearken know little of war. Now we have this day seen that you are ready of head and of hand, of much experience of battle, and yet of demure and sober life, full of yearnings after the word, and strivings against Apollyon. I therefore repeat that you shall be as a very Joshua amongst them, or as a Samson, destined to tear down the twin pillars of Prelacy and Popery, so as to bury this corrupt government in its fall.’

Decimus Saxon’s only reply to this eulogy was one of those groans which were supposed, among the zealots, to be the symbol of intense inner conflict and emotion. So austere and holy was his expression, so solemn his demeanour, and so frequent the upturnings of his eyes, clasping of his hands, and other signs which marked the extreme sectary, that I could not but marvel at the depths and completeness of the hypocrisy which had cast so complete a cloak over his rapacious self. For very mischief’s sake I could not refrain from reminding him that there was one at least who valued his professions at their real value.

‘Have you told the worthy minister,’ said I, ‘of your captivity amongst the Mussulmans, and of the noble way in which you did uphold the Christian faith at Stamboul?’

‘Nay,’ cried our companion, ‘I would fain hear the tale. I marvel much that one so faithful and unbending as thyself was ever let loose by the unclean and bloodthirsty followers of Mahomet.’

‘It does not become me to tell the tale,’ Saxon answered with great presence of mind, casting at the same time a most venomous sidelong glance at me. ‘It is for my comrades in misfortune and not for me to describe what I endured for the faith. I have little doubt, Master Pettigrue, that you would have done as much had you been there. The town of Taunton lies very quiet beneath us, and there are few lights for so early an hour, seeing that it has not yet gone ten. It is clear that Monmouth’s forces have not reached it yet, else had there been some show of camp-fires in the valley; for though it is warm enough to lie out in the open, the men must have fires to cook their victual.’

‘The army could scarce have come so far,’ said the pastor. ‘They have, I hear, been much delayed by the want of arms and by the need of discipline. Bethink ye, it was on the eleventh day of the month that Monmouth landed at Lyme, and it is now but the night of the fourteenth. There was much to be done in the time.’

‘Four whole days!’ growled the old soldier. ‘Yet I expected no better, seeing that they have, so far as I can hear, no tried soldiers amongst them. By my sword, Tilly or Wallenstein would not have taken four days to come from Lyme to Taunton, though all James Stuart’s cavalry barred the way. Great enterprises are not pushed through in this halting fashion. The blow should be sharp and sudden. But tell me, worthy sir, all that you know about the matter, for we have heard little upon the road save rumour and surmise. Was there not some fashion of onfall at Bridport?’

‘There was indeed some shedding of blood at that place. The first two days were consumed, as I understand, in the enrolling of the faithful and the search for arms wherewith to equip them. You may well shake your head, for the hours were precious. At last five hundred men were broken into some sort of order, and marched along the coast under command of Lord Grey of Wark and Wade the lawyer. At Bridport they were opposed by the red Dorset militia and part of Portman’s yellow coats. If all be true that is said, neither side had much to boast of. Grey and his cavalry never tightened bridle until they were back in Lyme once more, though it is said their flight had more to do with the hard mouths of their horses than with the soft hearts of the riders. Wade and his footmen did bravely, and had the best of it against the King’s troops. There was much outcry against Grey in the camp, but Monmouth can scarce afford to be severe upon the only nobleman who hath joined his standard.’

‘Pshaw!’ cried Saxon peevishly. ‘There was no great stock of noblemen in Cromwell’s army, I trow, and yet they held their own against the King, who had as many lords by him as there are haws in a thicket. If ye have the people on your side, why should ye crave for these bewigged fine gentlemen, whose white hands and delicate rapiers are of as much service as so many ladies’ bodkins?’

‘Faith!’ said I, ‘if all the fops are as careless for their lives as our friend Sir Gervas, I could wish no better comrades in the field.’

‘In good sooth, yes!’ cried Master Pettigrue heartily. ‘What though he be clothed in a Joseph’s coat of many colours, and hath strange turns of speech! No man could have fought more stoutly or shown a bolder front against the enemies of Israel. Surely the youth hath good in his heart, and will become a seat of grace and a vessel of the Spirit, though at present he be entangled in the net of worldly follies and carnal vanities.’

‘It is to be hoped so,’ quoth Saxon devoutly. ‘And what else can you tell us of the revolt, worthy sir?’

‘Very little, save that the peasants have flocked in in such numbers that many have had to be turned away for want of arms. Every tithing-man in Somersetshire is searching for axes and scythes. There is not a blacksmith but is at his forge from morn to night at work upon pike-heads. There are six thousand men of a sort in the camp, but not one in five carries a musket. They have advanced, I hear, upon Axminster, where they must meet the Duke of Albemarle, who hath set out from Exeter with four thousand of the train bands.’

‘Then we shall be too late, after all,’ I exclaimed.

‘You will have enough of battles before Monmouth exchanges his riding-hat for a crown, and his laced roquelaure for the royal purple,’ quoth Saxon. ‘Should our worthy friend here be correctly informed and such an engagement take place, it will but be the prologue to the play. When Feversham and Churchill come up with the King’s own troops, it is then that Monmouth takes the last spring, that lands him either on the throne or the scaffold.’

Whilst this conversation had been proceeding we had been walking our horses down the winding track which leads along the eastern slope of Taunton Deane. For some time past we had been able to see in the valley beneath us the lights of Taunton town and the long silver strip of the river Tone. The moon was shining brightly in a cloudless heaven, throwing a still and peaceful radiance over the fairest and richest of English valleys. Lordly manorial houses, pinnacled towers, clusters of nestling thatch-roofed cottages, broad silent stretches of cornland, dark groves with the glint of lamp-lit windows shining from their recesses — it all lay around us like the shadowy, voiceless landscapes which stretch before us in our dreams. So calm and so beautiful was the scene that we reined up our horses at the bend of the pathway, the tired and footsore peasants came to a halt, while even the wounded raised themselves in the waggon in order to feast their eyes upon this land of promise. Suddenly, in the stillness, a strong fervent voice was heard calling upon the source of all life to guard and preserve that which He had created. It was Joshua Pettigrue, who had flung himself upon his knees, and who, while asking for future guidance, was returning thanks for the safe deliverance which his flock had experienced from the many perils which had beset them upon their journey. I would, my children, that I had one of those magic crystals of which we have read, that I might show you that scene. The dark figures of the horsemen, the grave, earnest bearing of the rustics as they knelt in prayer or leaned upon their rude weapons, the half-cowed, half-sneering expression of the captive dragoons, the line of white pain-drawn faces that peeped over the side of the waggon, and the chorus of groans, cries, and ejaculations which broke in upon the steady earnest voice of the pastor. Above us the brilliant heavens, beneath us the beautiful sloping valley, stretching away in the white moonlight as far as the eye could reach. Could I but paint such a scene with the brush of a Verrio or Laguerre, I should have no need to describe it in these halting and feeble words.

Master Pettigrue had concluded his thanksgiving, and was in the act of rising to his feet, when the musical peal of a bell rose up from the sleeping town before us. For a minute or more it rose and fell in its sweet clear cadence. Then a second with a deeper, harsher note joined in, and then a third, until he air was filled with the merry jangling. At the same time a buzz of shouting or huzzaing could be heard, which increased and spread until it swelled into a mighty uproar. Lights flashed in the windows, drums beat, and the whole place was astir. These sudden signs of rejoicing coming at the heels of the minister's prayer were seized upon as a happy omen by the superstitious peasants, who set up a glad cry, and pushing onwards were soon within the outskirts of the town.

The footpaths and causeway were black with throngs of the townsfolk, men, women, and children, many of whom were bearing torches and lanthorns, all flocking in the same direction. Following them we found ourselves in the market-place, where crowds of apprentice lads were piling up faggots for a bonfire, while others were broaching two or three great puncheons of ale. The cause of this sudden outbreak of rejoicing was, we learned, that news had just come in that Albemarle's Devonshire militia had partly deserted and partly been defeated at Axminster that very morning. On hearing of our own successful skirmish the joy of the people became more tumultuous than ever. They rushed in amongst us, pouring blessings on our heads, in their strange burring west-country speech, and embracing our horses as well as ourselves. Preparations were soon made for our weary companions. A long empty wool warehouse, thickly littered with straw, was put at their disposal, with a tub of ale and a plentiful supply of cold meats and wheaten bread. For our own part we made our way down East Street through the clamorous hand-shaking crowd to the White Hart Inn, where after a hasty meal we were right glad to seek our couches. Late into the night, however, our slumbers were disturbed by the rejoicings of the mob, who, having burned the effigies of Lord Sunderland and of Gregory Alford, Mayor of Lyme, continued to sing west-country songs and Puritan hymns into the small hours of the morning.

CHAPTER XVII. Of the Gathering in the Market-square

The fair town in which we now found ourselves was, although Monmouth had not yet reached it, the real centre of the rebellion. It was a prosperous place, with a great woollen and kersey trade, which gave occupation to as many as seven thousand inhabitants. It stood high, therefore, amongst English boroughs, being inferior only to Bristol, Norwich, Bath, Exeter, York, Worcester, and Nottingham amongst the country towns. Taunton had long been famous not only for its own resources and for the spirit of its inhabitants, but also for the beautiful and highly cultivated country which spread around it, and gave rise to a gallant breed of yeomen. From time immemorial the town had been a rallying-point for the party of liberty, and for many years it had leaned to the side of Republicanism in politics and of Puritanism in religion. No place in the kingdom had fought more stoutly for the Parliament, and though it had been twice besieged by Goring, the burghers, headed by the brave Robert Blake, had fought so desperately, that the Royalists had been compelled each time to retire discomfited. On the second occasion the garrison had been reduced to dog’s-flesh and horse-flesh, but no word of surrender had come either from them or their heroic commander, who was the same Blake under whom the old seaman Solomon Sprent had fought against the Dutch. After the Restoration the Privy Council had shown their recollection of the part played by the Somersetshire town, by issuing a special order that the battlements which fenced round the maiden stronghold should be destroyed. Thus, at the time of which I speak, nothing but a line of ruins and a few unsightly mounds represented the massive line of wall which had been so bravely defended by the last generation of townsmen. There were not wanting, however, many other relics of those stormy times. The houses on the outskirts were still scarred and splintered from the effects of the bombs and grenades of the Cavaliers. Indeed, the whole town bore a grimly martial appearance, as though she were a veteran among boroughs who had served in the past, and was not averse to seeing the flash of guns and hearing the screech of shot once more.

Charles’s Council might destroy the battlements which his soldiers had been unable to take, but no royal edict could do away with the resolute spirit and strong opinions of the burghers. Many of them, born and bred amidst the clash of civil strife, had been fired from their infancy by the tales of the old war, and by reminiscences of the great assault when Lunsford’s babe-eaters were hurled down the main breach by the strong arms of their fathers. In this way there was bred in Taunton a fiercer and more soldierly spirit than is usual in an English country town, and this flame was fanned by the unwearied ministerings of a chosen band of Nonconformist clergymen, amongst whom Joseph Alleine was the most conspicuous. No better focus for a revolt could have been chosen, for no city valued so highly those liberties and that creed which was in jeopardy.

A large body of the burghers had already set out to join the rebel army, but a good number had remained behind to guard the city, and these were reinforced by gangs of peasants, like the one to which we had attached ourselves, who had trooped in from the surrounding country, and now divided their time between listening to their favourite preachers and learning to step in line and to handle their weapons. In yard, street, and market-square there was marching and drilling, night, morning, and noon. As we rode out after breakfast the whole town was ringing with the shouting of orders and the clatter of arms. Our own friends of yesterday marched into the market-place at the moment we entered it, and no sooner did they catch sight of us than they plucked off their hats and cheered lustily, nor would they desist until we cantered over to them and took our places at their head.

‘They have vowed that none other should lead them,’ said the minister, standing by Saxon’s stirrup.

‘I could not wish to lead stouter fellows,’ said he. ‘Let them deploy into double line in front of the town-hall. So, so, smartly there, rear rank!’ he shouted, facing his horse towards them. ‘Now swing round into position. Keep your ground, left flank, and let the others pivot upon you. So — as hard and as straight as an Andrea Ferrara. I prythee, friend, do not carry your pike as though it were a hoe, though I trust you will do some weeding in the Lord’s vineyard with it. And you, sir, your musquetoon should be sloped upon your shoulder, and not borne under your arm like a dandy’s cane. Did ever an unhappy soldier find himself called upon to make order among so motley a crew! Even my good friend the Fleming cannot so avail here, nor does Petrinus, in his “De re militari,” lay down any injunctions as to the method of drilling a man who is armed with a sickle or a scythe.’

‘Shoulder scythe, port scythe, present scythe — mow!’ whispered Reuben to Sir Gervas, and the pair began to laugh, heedless of the angry frowns of Saxon.

‘Let us divide them,’ he said, ‘into three companies of eighty men. Or stay — how many musketeers have we in all? Five-and-fifty. Let them stand forward, and form the first line or company. Sir Gervas Jerome, you have officered the militia of your county, and have doubtless some knowledge of the manual exercise. If I am commandant of this force I hand over the captaincy of this company to you. It shall be the first line in battle, a position which I know you will not be averse to.’

‘Gad, they’ll have to powder their heads,’ said Sir Gervas, with decision.

‘You shall have the entire ordering of them,’ Saxon answered. ‘Let the first company take six paces to the front — so! Now let the pikemen stand out. Eighty-seven, a serviceable company! Lockarby, do you take these men in hand, and never forget that the German wars have proved that the best of horse has no more chance against steady pikemen than the waves against a crag. Take the captaincy of the second company, and ride at their head.’

‘Faith! If they don’t fight better than their captain rides,’ whispered Reuben, ‘it will be an evil business. I trust they will be firmer in the field than I am in the saddle.’

‘The third company of scythesmen I commit to your charge, Captain Micah Clarke,’ continued Saxon. ‘Good Master Joshua Pettigrue will be our field-chaplain. Shall not his voice and his presence be to us as manna in the wilderness, and as springs of water in dry places? The under-officers I see that you have yourselves chosen, and your captains shall have power to add to the number from those who smite boldly and spare not. Now one thing I have to say to you, and I speak it that all may hear, and that none may hereafter complain that the rules he serves under were not made clear to him. For I tell you now that when the evening bugle calls, and the helm and pike are laid aside, I am as you and you as I, fellow-workers in the same field, and drinkers from the same wells of life. Lo, I will pray with you, or preach with you, or hearken with you, or expound to you, or do aught that may become a brother pilgrim upon the weary road. But hark you, friends! when we are in arms and the good work is to be done, on the march, in the field, or on parade, then let your bearing be strict, soldierly, and scrupulous, quick to hear and alert to obey, for I shall have no sluggards or laggards, and if there be any such my hand shall be heavy upon them, yea, even to the cutting of them off. I say there shall be no mercy for such,’ here he paused and surveyed his force with a set face and his eyelids drawn low over his glinting, shifting eyes. ‘If, then,’ he continued, ‘there is any man among you who fears to serve under a hard discipline, let him stand forth now, and let him betake him to some easier leader, for I say to you that whilst I command this corps, Saxon’s regiment of Wiltshire foot shall be worthy to testify in this great and soul-raising cause.’

The Colonel stopped and sat silent upon his mare. The long lines of rustic faces looked up, some stolidly, some admiringly, some with an expression of fear at his stern, gaunt face and baneful eyes. None moved, however, so he continued.

‘Worthy Master Timewell, the Mayor of this fair town of Taunton, who has been a tower of strength to the faithful during these long and spirit-trying times, is about to inspect us when the others shall have assembled. Captains, to your companies then! Close up there on the musqueteers, with three paces between each line. Scythesmen, take ground to your left. Let the under-officers stand on the flanks and rear. So! ‘tis smartly done for a first venture, though a good adjutant with a prugel after the Imperial fashion might find work to do.’

Whilst we were thus rapidly and effectively organising ourselves into a regiment, other bodies of peasantry more or less disciplined had marched into the market-square, and had taken up their position there. Those on our right had come from Frome and Radstock, in the north of Somersetshire, and were a mere rabble armed with flails, hammers, and other such weapons, with no common sign of order or cohesion save the green boughs which waved in their hat-bands. The body upon our left, who bore a banner amongst them announcing that they were men of Dorset, were fewer in number but better equipped, having a front rank, like our own, entirely armed with muskets.

The good townsmen of Taunton, with their wives and their daughters, had meanwhile been assembling on the balconies and at the windows which overlooked the square, whence they might have a view of the pageant. The grave, square-bearded, broadclothed burghers, and their portly dames in velvet and three-piled taffeta, looked down from every post of vantage, while here and there a pretty, timid face peeping out from a Puritan coif made good the old claim, that Taunton excelled in beautiful women as well as in gallant men. The side-walks were crowded with the commoner folk — old white-bearded wool-workers, stern-faced matrons, country lasses with their shawls over their heads, and swarms of children, who cried out with their treble voices for King Monmouth and the Protestant succession.

‘By my faith!’ said Sir Gervas, reining back his steed until he was abreast of me, ‘our square-toed friends need not be in such post-haste to get to heaven when they have so many angels among them on earth. Gad’s wounds, are they not beautiful? Never a patch or a diamond amongst them, and yet what would not our faded belles of the Mall or the Piazza give for their innocence and freshness?’

‘Nay, for Heaven’s sake do not smile and bow at them,’ said I. ‘These courtesies may pass in London, but they may be misunderstood among simple Somerset maidens and their hot-headed, hard-handed kinsfolk.’

I had hardly spoken before the folding-doors of the town-hall were thrown open, and a procession of the city fathers emerged into the market-place. Two trumpeters in parti-coloured jerkins preceded them, who blew a flourish upon their instruments as they advanced. Behind came the aldermen and councilmen, grave and reverend elders, clad in their sweeping gowns of black silk, trimmed and tippeted with costly furs. In rear of these walked a pursy little red-faced man, the town clerk, bearing a staff of office in his hand, while the line of dignitaries was closed by the tall and stately figure of Stephen Timewell, Mayor of Taunton.

There was much in this magistrate’s appearance to attract attention, for all the characteristics of the Puritan party to which he belonged were embodied and exaggerated in his person. Of great height he was and very thin, with a long-drawn, heavy eyelidded expression, which spoke of fasts and vigils. The bent shoulders and the head sunk upon the breast proclaimed the advances of age, but his bright steel-grey eyes and the animation of his eager face showed how the enthusiasm of religion could rise superior to bodily weakness. A peaked, straggling grey beard descended half-way to his waist, and his long snow-white hairs fluttered out from under a velvet skull-cap. The latter was drawn tightly down upon his head, so as to make his ears protrude in an unnatural manner on either side, a custom which had earned for his party the title of ‘prickeared,’ so often applied to them by their opponents. His attire was of studious plainness and sombre in colour, consisting of his black mantle, dark velvet breeches, and silk hosen, with velvet bows upon his shoes instead of the silver buckles then in vogue. A broad chain of gold around his neck formed the badge of his office. In front of him strutted the fat red-vested town clerk, one hand upon his hip, the other extended and bearing his wand of office, looking pompously to right and left, and occasionally bowing as though the plaudits were entirely on his own behalf. This little man had tied a huge broadsword to his girdle, which clanked along the cobble stones when he walked and occasionally inserted itself between his legs, when he would gravely cock his foot over it again and walk on without any abatement of his dignity. At last, finding these interruptions become rather too frequent, he depressed the hilt of his great sword in order to elevate the point, and so strutted onwards like a bantam cock with a tingle straight feather in its tail.

Having passed round the front and rear of the various bodies, and inspected them with a minuteness and attention which showed that his years had not dulled his soldier’s faculties, the Mayor faced round with the evident intention of addressing us. His clerk instantly darted in front of him, and waving his arms began to shout ‘Silence, good people! Silence for his most worshipful the Mayor of Taunton! Silence for the worthy Master Stephen Timewell!’ until in the midst of his gesticulations and cries he got entangled once more with his overgrown weapon, and went sprawling on his hands and knees in the kennel.

‘Silence yourself, Master Tetheridge,’ said the chief magistrate severely. ‘If your sword and your tongue were both clipped, it would be as well for yourself and us. Shall I not speak a few words in season to these good people but you must interrupt with your discordant bellowings?’

The busybody gathered himself together and slunk behind the group of councilmen, while the Mayor slowly ascended the steps of the market cross. From this position he addressed us, speaking in a high piping voice which gathered strength as he proceeded, until it was audible at the remotest corners of the square.

‘Friends in the faith,’ he said, ‘I thank the Lord that I have been spared in my old age to look down upon this goodly assembly. For we of Taunton have ever kept the flame of the Covenant burning amongst us, obscured it may be at times by time-servers and Laodiceans, but none the less burning in the hearts of our people. All round us, however, there was a worse than Egyptian darkness, where Popery and Prelacy, Arminianism, Erastianism, and Simony might rage and riot unchecked and unconfined. But what do I see now? Do I see the faithful cowering in their hiding-places and straining their ears for the sound of the horsehoof's of their oppressors? Do I see a time-serving generation, with lies on their lips and truth buried in their hearts? No! I see before me godly men, not from this fair city only, but from the broad country round, and from Dorset, and from Wiltshire, and some even as I hear from Hampshire, all ready and eager to do mighty work in the cause of the Lord. And when I see these faithful men, and when I think that every broad piece in the strong boxes of my townsmen is ready to support them, and when I know that the persecuted remnant throughout the country is wrestling hard in prayer for us, then a voice speaks within me and tells me that we shall tear down the idols of Dagon, and build up in this England of ours such a temple of the true faith that not Popery, nor Prelacy, nor idolatry, nor any other device of the Evil One shall ever prevail against it.'

A deep irrepressible hum of approval burst from the close ranks of the insurgent infantry, with a clang of arms as musquetoon or pike was grounded upon the stone pavement.

Saxon half-turned his fierce face, raising an impatient hand, and the hoarse murmur died away among our men, though our less-disciplined companions to right and left continued to wave their green boughs and to clatter their arms. The Taunton men opposite stood grim and silent, but their set faces and bent brows showed that their townsman's oratory had stirred the deep fanatic spirit which distinguished them.

'In my hands,' continued the Mayor, drawing a roll of paper from his bosom, 'is the proclamation which our royal leader hath sent in advance of him. In his great goodness and self-abnegation he had, in his early declaration given forth at Lyme, declared that he should leave the choice of a monarch to the Commons of England, but having found that his enemies did most scandalously and basely make use of this his self-denial, and did assert that he had so little confidence in his own cause that he dared not take publicly the title which is due to him, he hath determined that this should have an end. Know, therefore, that it is hereby proclaimed that James, Duke of Monmouth, is now and henceforth rightful King of England; that James Stuart, the Papist and fratricide, is a wicked usurper, upon whose head, dead or alive, a price of five thousand guineas is affixed; and that the assembly now sitting at Westminster, and calling itself the Commons of England, is an illegal assembly, and its acts are null and void in the sight of the law. God bless King Monmouth and the Protestant religion!'

The trumpeters struck up a flourish and the people huzzaed, but the Mayor raised his thin white hands as a signal for silence. 'A messenger hath reached me this morning from the King,' he continued. 'He sends a greeting to all his faithful Protestant subjects, and having halted at Axminster to rest after his victory, he will advance presently and be with ye in two days at the latest.

'Ye will grieve to hear that good Alderman Rider was struck down in the thick of the fray. He hath died like a man and a Christian, leaving all his worldly goods, together with his cloth-works and household property, to the carrying on of the war. Of the other slain there are not more than ten of Taunton birth. Two gallant young brothers have been cut off, Oliver and Ephraim Hollis, whose poor mother—'

'Grieve not for me, good Master Timewell,' cried a female voice from the crowd. 'I have three others as stout, who shall all be offered in the same quarrel.'

'You are a worthy woman, Mistress Hollis,' the Mayor answered, 'and your children shall not be lost to you. The next name upon my list is Jesse Trefail, then come Joseph Millar, and Aminadab Holt—'

An elderly musqueteer in the first line of the Taunton foot pulled his hat down over his brows and cried out in a loud steady voice, 'The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

'It is your only son, Master Holt,' said the Mayor, 'but the Lord also sacrificed His only Son that you and I might drink the waters of eternal life. The others are Path of Light Regan, James Fletcher, Salvation Smith, and Robert Johnstone.'

The old Puritan gravely rolled up his papers, and having stood for a few moments with his hands folded across his breast in silent prayer, he descended from the market cross, and moved off, followed by the aldermen and councilmen. The crowd began likewise to disperse in sedate and sober fashion, with grave earnest faces and downcast eyes. A large number of the countryfolk, however, more curious or less devout than the citizens, gathered round our regiment to see the men who had beaten off the dragoons.

'See the mon wi' a face like a gerfalcon,' cried one, pointing to Saxon; ''tis he that slew the Philistine officer yestreen, an' brought the faithful off victorious.’

‘Mark ye yon other one,’ cried an old dame, ‘him wi’ the white face an’ the clothes like a prince. He’s one o’ the Quality, what’s come a’ the way froe Lunnon to testify to the Protestant creed. He’s a main pious gentleman, he is, an’ if he had bided in the wicked city they’d ha’ had his head off, like they did the good Lord Roossell, or put him in chains wi’ the worthy Maister Baxter.’

‘Marry come up, gossip,’ cried a third. ‘The girt mun on the grey horse is the soldier for me. He has the smooth cheeks o’ a wench, an’ limbs like Goliath o’ Gath. I’ll war’nt he could pick up my old gaffer Jones an’ awa’ wi’ him at his saddle-bow, as easy as Towser does a rotten! But here’s good Maister Tetheridge, the clerk, and on great business too, for he’s a mun that spares ne time ne trooble in the great cause.’

‘Room, good people, room! ‘cried the little clerk, bustling up with an air of authority. ‘Hinder not the high officials of the Corporation in the discharge of their functions. Neither should ye hamper the flanks of fighting men, seeing that you thereby prevent that deploying and extending of the line which is now advocated by many high commanders. I prythee, who commands this cohort, or legion rather, seeing that you have auxiliary horse attached to it?’

‘‘Tis a regiment, sirrah,’ said Saxon sternly. ‘Colonel Saxon’s regiment of Wiltshire foot, which I have the honour to command.’

‘I beg your Colonelship’s pardon, ‘cried the clerk nervously, edging away from the swarthy-faced soldier. ‘I have heard speak of your Colonelship, and of your doings in the German wars. I have myself trailed a pike in my youth and have broken a head or two, aye, and a heart or two also, when I wore buff and bandolier.’

‘Discharge your message,’ said our Colonel shortly.

‘‘Tis from his most worshipful the Mayor, and is addressed to yourself and to your captains, who are doubtless these tall cavaliers whom I see on either side of me. Pretty fellows, by my faith! but you and I know well, Colonel, that a little trick of fence will set the smallest of us on a level with the brawniest. Now I warrant that you and I, being old soldiers, could, back to back, make it good against these three gallants.’

‘Speak, fellow,’ snarled Saxon, and reaching out a long sinewy arm he seized the loquacious clerk by the lappet of his gown, and shook him until his long sword clattered again.

‘How, Colonel, how?’ cried Master Tetheridge, while his vest seemed to acquire a deeper tint from the sudden pallor of his face. ‘Would you lay an angry hand upon the Mayor’s representative? I wear a bilbo by my side, as you can see. I am also somewhat quick and choleric, and warn you therefore not to do aught which I might perchance construe into a personal slight. As to my message, it was that his most worshipful the Mayor did desire to have word with you and your captains in the town-hall.’

‘We shall be there anon,’ said Saxon, and turning to the regiment he set himself to explain some of the simpler movements and exercises, teaching his officers as well as his men, for though Sir Gervas knew something of the manual, Lockarby and I brought little but our good-will to the task. When the order to dismiss was at last given, our companies marched back to their barracks in the wool warehouse, while we handed over our horses to the grooms from the White Hart, and set off to pay our respects to the Mayor.

CHAPTER XVIII. Of Master Stephen Timewell, Mayor of Taunton

Within the town-hall all was bustle and turmoil. At one side behind a low table covered with green baize sat two scriveners with great rolls of paper in front of them. A long line of citizens passed slowly before them, each in turn putting down a roll or bag of coins which was duly noted by the receivers. A square iron-bound chest stood by their side, into which the money was thrown, and we noted as we passed that it was half full of gold pieces. We could not but mark that many of the givers were men whose threadbare doublets and pinched faces showed that the wealth which they were dashing down so readily must have been hoarded up for such a purpose, at the cost of scanty fare and hard living. Most of them accompanied their gift by a few words of prayer, or by some pithy text anent the treasure which rusteth not, or the lending to the Lord. The town clerk stood by the table giving forth the vouchers for each sum, and the constant clack of his tongue filled the hall, as he read aloud the names and amounts, with his own remarks between.

‘Abraham Willis,’ he shouted as we entered; ‘put him down twenty-six pounds and ten shillings. You shall receive ten per centum upon this earth, Master Willis, and I warrant that it shall not be forgotten hereafter. John Standish, two pounds. William Simons, two guineas. Stand-fast Healing, forty-five pounds. That is a rare blow which you have struck into the ribs of Prelacy, good Master Healing. Solomon Warren, five guineas. James White, five shillings — the widow’s mite, James! Thomas Bakewell, ten pounds. Nay, Master Bakewell, surely out of three farms on the banks of Tone, and grazing land in the fattest part of Athelney, you can spare more than this for the good cause. We shall doubtless see you again. Alderman Smithson, ninety pounds. Aha! There is a slap for the scarlet woman! A few more such and her throne shall be a ducking-stool. We shall break her down, worthy Master Smithson, even as Jehu, the son of Nimshi, broke down the house of Baal.’ So he babbled on with praise, precept, and rebuke, though the grave and solemn burghers took little notice of his empty clamour.

At the other side of the hall were several long wooden drinking-troughs, which were used for the storing of pikes and scythes. Special messengers and tithing-men had been sent out to scour the country for arms, who, as they returned, placed their prizes here under the care of the armourer-general. Besides the common weapons of the peasants there was a puncheon half full of pistols and petronels, together with a good number of muskets, screw-guns, snaphances, birding-pieces, and carbines, with a dozen bell-mouthed brass blunderbusses, and a few old-fashioned wall-pieces, such as sakers and culverins taken from the manor-houses of the county. From the walls and the lumber-rooms of these old dwellings many other arms had been brought to light which were doubtless esteemed as things of price by our forefathers, but which would seem strange to your eyes in these days, when a musket may be fired once in every two minutes, and will carry a ball to a distance of four hundred paces. There were halberds, battle-axes, morning stars, brown bills, maces, and ancient coats of chain mail, which might even now save a man from sword stroke or pike thrust.

In the midst of the coming and the going stood Master Timewell, the Mayor, ordering all things like a skilful and provident commander. I could understand the trust and love which his townsmen had for him, as I watched him labouring with all the wisdom of an old man and the blithesomeness of a young one. He was hard at work as we approached in trying the lock of a falconet; but perceiving us, he came forward and saluted us with much kindliness.

‘I have heard much of ye,’ said he; ‘how ye caused the faithful to gather to a head, and so beat off the horsemen of the usurper. It will not be the last time, I trust, that ye shall see their backs. I hear, Colonel Saxon, that ye have seen much service abroad.’

‘I have been the humble tool of Providence in much good work,’ said Saxon, with a bow. ‘I have fought with the Swedes against the Brandenburgers, and again with the Brandenburgers against the Swedes, my time and conditions with the latter having been duly carried out. I have afterwards in the Bavarian service fought against Swedes and Brandenburgers combined, besides having undergone the great wars on the Danube against the Turk, and two campaigns with the Messieurs in the Palatinate, which latter might be better termed holiday-making than fighting.’

‘A soldierly record in very truth,’ cried the Mayor, stroking his white beard. ‘I hear that you are also powerfully borne onwards in prayer and song. You are, I perceive, one of the old breed of ‘44, Colonel — the men who were in the saddle all day, and on their knees half the night. When shall we see the like of them again? A few such broken wrecks as I are left, with the fire of our youth all burned out and nought left but the ashes of lethargy and lukewarmness.’

‘Nay, nay,’ said Saxon, ‘your position and present business will scarce jump with the modesty of your words. But here are young men who will find the fire if their elders bring the brains. This is Captain Micah Clarke, and Captain Lockarby, and Captain the Honourable Sir Gervas Jerome, who have all come far to draw their swords for the downtrodden faith.’

‘Taunton welcomes ye, young sirs,’ said the Mayor, looking a trifle askance, as I thought, at the baronet, who had drawn out his pocket-mirror, and was engaged in the brushing of his eyebrows. ‘I trust that during your stay in this town ye will all four take up your abode with me. ‘Tis a homely roof and simple fare, but a soldier’s wants are few. And now, Colonel, I would fain have your advice as to these three drakes, whether if rehooped they may be deemed fit for service; and also as to these demi-cannons, which were used in the old Parliamentary days, and may yet have a word to say in the people’s cause.’

The old soldier and the Puritan instantly plunged into a deep and learned disquisition upon the merits of wall-pieces, drakes, demi-culverins, sakers, minions, mortar-pieces, falcons, and pattereroes, concerning all which pieces of ordnance Saxon had strong opinions to offer, fortified by many personal hazards and experiences. He then dwelt upon the merits of fire-arrows and fire-pikes in the attack or defence of places of strength, and had finally begun to descant upon sconces, ‘directis lateribus,’ and upon works, semilunar, rectilineal, horizontal, or orbicular, with so many references to his Imperial Majesty’s lines at Gran, that it seemed that his discourse would never find an end. We slipped away at last, leaving him still discussing the effects produced by the Austrian grenadoes upon a Bavarian brigade of pikes at the battle of Ober-Graustock.

‘Curse me if I like accepting this old fellow’s offer,’ said Sir Gervas, in an undertone. ‘I have heard of these Puritan households. Much grace to little sack, and texts flying about as hard and as jagged as flint stones. To bed at sundown, and a sermon ready if ye do but look kindly at the waiting-wench or hum the refrain of a ditty.'

'His home may be larger, but it could scarce be stricter than that of my own father,' I remarked.

'I'll warrant that,' cried Reuben. 'When we have been a morris-dancing, or having a Saturday night game of "kiss-in-the-ring," or "parson-has-lost-his-coat," I have seen Ironside Joe stride past us, and cast a glance at us which hath frozen the smile upon our lips. I warrant that he would have aided Colonel Pride to shoot the bears and hack down the maypoles.'

''Twere fratricide for such a man to shoot a bear,' quoth Sir Gervas, 'with all respect, friend Clarke, for your honoured progenitor.'

'No more than for you to shoot at a popinjay,' I answered, laughing; 'but as to the Mayor's offer, we can but go to meat with him now, and should it prove irksome it will be easy for you to plead some excuse, and so get honourably quit of it. But bear in mind, Sir Gervas, that such households are in very truth different to any with which you are acquainted, so curb your tongue or offence may come of it. Should I cry "hem!" or cough, it will be a sign to you that you had best beware.'

'Agreed, young Solomon!' cried he. 'It is, indeed, well to have a pilot like yourself who knows these godly waters. For my own part, I should never know how near I was to the shoals. But our friends have finished the battle of Ober what's its name, and are coming towards us. I trust, worthy Mr. Mayor, that your difficulties have been resolved?'

'They are, sir,' replied the Puritan. 'I have been much edified by your Colonel's discourse, and I have little doubt that by serving under him ye will profit much by his ripe experience.'

'Very like, sir, very like,' said Sir Gervas carelessly.

'But it is nigh one o'clock,' the Mayor continued, 'our frail flesh cries aloud for meat and drink. I beg that ye will do me the favour to accompany me to my humble dwelling, where we shall find the household board already dressed.'

With these words he led the way out of the hall and paced slowly down Fore Street, the people falling back to right and to left as he passed, and raising their caps to do him reverence. Here and there, as he pointed out to us, arrangements had been made for barring the road with strong chains to prevent any sudden rush of cavalry. In places, too, at the corner of a house, a hole had been knocked in the masonry through which peeped the dark muzzle of a carronade or wall-piece. These precautions were the more necessary as several bodies of the Royal Horse, besides the one which we had repulsed, were known to be within the Deane, and the town, deprived of its ramparts, was open to an incursion from any daring commander.

The chief magistrate’s house was a squat square-faced stone building within a court which opened on to East Street. The peaked oak door, spangled with broad iron nails, had a gloomy and surly aspect, but the hall within was lightful and airy, with a bright polished cedar planking, and high panelling of some dark-grained wood which gave forth a pleasant smell as of violets. A broad night of steps rose up from the farther end of the hall, down which as we entered a young sweet-faced maid came tripping, with an old dame behind her, who bore in her hands a pile of fresh napery. At the sight of us the elder one retreated up the stairs again, whilst the younger came flying down three steps at a time, threw her arms round the old Mayor’s neck, and kissed him fondly, looking hard into his face the while, as a mother gazes into that of a child with whom she fears that aught may have gone amiss.

‘Weary again, daddy, weary again,’ she said, shaking her head anxiously, with a small white hand upon each of his shoulders. ‘Indeed, and indeed, thy spirit is greater than thy strength.’

‘Nay, nay, lass,’ said he, passing his hand fondly over her rich brown hair. The workman must toil until the hour of rest is rung. This, gentlemen, is my granddaughter Ruth, the sole relic of my family and the light of mine old age. The whole grove hath been cut down, and only the oldest oak and the youngest sapling left. These cavaliers, little one, have come from afar to serve the cause, and they have done us the honour to accept of our poor hospitality.’

‘Ye are come in good time, gentlemen,’ she answered, looking us straight in the eyes with a kindly smile as a sister might greet her brothers. ‘The household is gathered round the table and the meal is ready.’

‘But not more ready than we,’ cried the stout old burgher. ‘Do thou conduct our guests to their places, whilst I seek my room and doff these robes of office, with my chain and tippet, ere I break my fast.’

Following our fair guide we passed into a very large and lofty room, the walls of which were wainscoted with carved oak, and hung at either end with tapestry. The floor was tesselated after the French fashion, and plentifully strewn with skins and rugs. At one end of the apartment stood a great white marble fireplace, like a small room in itself, fitted up, as was the ancient custom, with an iron stand in the centre, and with broad stone benches in the recess on either side. Lines of hooks above the chimneypiece had been used, as I surmise, to support arms, for the wealthy merchants of England were wont to keep enough in their houses to at least equip their apprentices and craftsmen. They had now, however, been removed, nor was there any token of the troublous times save a single heap of pikes and halberds piled together in a corner.

Down the centre of this room there ran a long and massive table, which was surrounded by thirty or forty people, the greater part of whom were men. They were on their feet as we entered, and a grave-faced man at the farther end was drawling forth an interminable grace, which began as a thanksgiving for food, but wandered away into questions of Church and State, and finally ended in a supplication for Israel now in arms to do battle for the Lord. While this was proceeding we stood in a group by the door with our caps doffed, and spent our time in observing the company more closely than we could have done with courtesy had their eyes not been cast down and their thoughts elsewhere.

They were of all ages, from greybeards down to lads scarce out of their teens, all with the same solemn and austere expression of countenance, and clad in the same homely and sombre garb. Save their wide white collars and cuffs, not a string of any colour lessened the sad severity of their attire. Their black coats and doublets were cut straight and close, and their cordovan leather shoes, which in the days of our youth were usually the seat of some little ornament, were uniformly square toed and tied with sad-coloured ribbon. Most of them wore plain sword-belts of untanned hide, but the weapons themselves, with their broad felt hats and black cloaks, were laid under the benches or placed upon the settles which lined the walls. They stood with their hands clasped and their heads bent, listening to the untimely address, and occasionally by some groan or exclamation testifying that the preacher’s words had moved them.

The overgrown grace came at last to an end, when the company sat silently down, and proceeded without pause or ceremony to attack the great joints which smoked before them. Our young hostess led us to the end of the table, where a high carded chair with a black cushion upon it marked the position of the master of the house. Mistress Timewell seated herself upon the right of the Mayor’s place, with Sir Gervas beside her, while the post of honour upon the left was assigned to Saxon. On my left sat Lockarby, whose eyes I observed had been fixed in undisguised and all-absorbing admiration upon the Puritan maiden from the first moment that he had seen her. The table was of no great breadth, so that we could talk across in spite of the clatter of plates and dishes, the bustle of servants, and the deep murmur of voices.

‘This is my father’s household,’ said our hostess, addressing herself to Saxon. ‘There is not one of them who is not in his employ. He hath many apprentices in the wool trade. We sit down forty to meat every day in the year.’

‘And to right good fare, too,’ quoth Saxon, glancing down the table. ‘Salmon, ribs of beef, loin of mutton, veal, pasties — what could man wish for more? Plenty of good home-brewed, too, to wash it down. If worthy Master Timewell can arrange that the army be victualled after the same fashion, I for one shell be beholden to him. A cup of dirty water and a charred morsel cooked on a ramrod over the camp fire are like to take the place of these toothsome dainties.’

‘Is it not best to have faith?’ said the Puritan maiden. ‘Shall not the Almighty feed His soldiers even as Elisha was fed in the wilderness and Hagar in the desert?’

‘Aye,’ exclaimed a lanky-haired, swarthy young man who sat upon the right of Sir Gervas, ‘he will provide for us, even as the stream of water gushed forth out of dry places, even as the quails and the manna lay thick upon barren soil.’

‘So I trust, young sir,’ quoth Saxon, ‘but we must none the less arrange a victual-train, with a staff of wains, duly numbered, and an intendant over each, after the German fashion. Such things should not be left to chance.’

Pretty Mistress Timewell glanced up with a half startled look at this remark, as though shocked at the want of faith implied in it. Her thoughts might have taken the form of words had not her father entered the room at the moment, the whole company rising and bowing to him as he advanced to his seat.

‘Be seated, friends,’ said he, with a wave of his hand; ‘we are a homely folk, Colonel Saxon, and the old-time virtue of respect for our elders has not entirely forsaken us. I trust, Ruth,’ he continued, ‘that thou hast seen to the wants of our guests.’

We all protested that we had never received such attention and hospitality.

‘‘Tis well, ‘tis well,’ said the good wool-worker. ‘But your plates are clear and your glasses empty. William, look to it! A good workman is ever a good trencherman. If a ‘prentice of mine cannot clean his platter, I know that I shall get little from him with carder and teazel. Thew and sinew need building up. A slice from that round of beef, William! Touching that same battle of Ober-Graustock, Colonel, what part was played in the fray by that regiment of Pandour horse, in which, as I understand, thou didst hold a commission?’

This was a question on which, as may be imagined, Saxon had much to say, and the pair were soon involved in a heated discussion, in which the experiences of Roundway Down and Marston Moor were balanced against the results of a score of unpronounceable fights in the Styrian Alps and along the Danube. Stephen Timewell in his lusty youth had led first a troop and then a regiment through the wars of the Parliament, from Chalgrove Field to the final battle at Worcester, so that his warlike passages, though less varied and extensive than those of our companion, were enough to enable him to form and hold strong opinions. These were in the main the same as those of the soldier of fortune, but when their ideas differed upon any point, there arose forthwith such a cross-fire of military jargon, such speech of estacados and palisados, such comparisons of light horse and heavy, of pikemen and musqueteers, of Lanzknechte, Leaguers, and on-falls, that the unused ear became bewildered with the babble. At last, on some question of fortification, the Mayor drew his outworks with the spoons and knives, on which Saxon opened his parallels with lines of bread, and pushing them rapidly up with traverses and covered ways, he established himself upon the re-entering angle of the Mayor’s redoubt. This opened up a fresh question as to counter-mines, with the result that the dispute raged with renewed vigour.

Whilst this friendly strife was proceeding between the elders, Sir Gervas Jerome and Mistress Ruth had fallen into conversation at the other side of the table. I have seldom seen, my dear children, so beautiful a face as that of this Puritan damsel; and it was beautiful with that sort of modest and maidenly comeliness where the features derive their sweetness from the sweet soul which shines through them. The perfectly-moulded body appeared to be but the outer expression of the perfect spirit within. Her dark-brown hair swept back from a broad and white forehead, which surmounted a pair of well-marked eyebrows and large blue thoughtful eyes. The whole cast of her features was gentle and dove-like, yet there was a firmness in the mouth and delicate prominence of the chin which might indicate that in times of trouble and danger the little maid would prove to be no unworthy descendant of the Roundhead soldier and Puritan magistrate. I doubt not that where more loud-tongued and assertive dames might be cowed, the Mayor's soft-voiced daughter would begin to cast off her gentler disposition, and to show the stronger nature which underlay it. It amused me much to listen to the efforts which Sir Gervas made to converse with her, for the damsel and he lived so entirely in two different worlds, that it took all his gallantry and ready wit to keep on ground which would be intelligible to her.

'No doubt you spend much of your time in reading, Mistress Ruth,' he remarked. 'It puzzles me to think what else you can do so far from town?'

'Town!' said she in surprise. 'What is Taunton but a town?'

'Heaven forbid that I should deny it,' replied Sir Gervas, 'more especially in the presence of so many worthy burghers, who have the name of being somewhat jealous of the honour of their native city. Yet the fact remains, fair mistress, that the town of London so far transcends all other towns that it is called, even as I called it just now, *the* town.'

'Is it so very large, then?' she cried, with pretty wonder. 'But new louses are building in Taunton, outside the old walls, and beyond Shuttern, and some even at the other side of the river. Perhaps in time it may be as large.'

'If all the folks in Taunton were to be added to London,' said Sir Gervas, 'no one there would observe that there had been any increase.'

'Nay, there you are laughing at me. That is against all reason,' cried the country maiden.

'Your grandfather will bear out my words,' said Sir Gervas. 'But to return to your reading, I'll warrant that there is not a page of Scudery and her "Grand Cyrus" which you have not read. You are familiar, doubtless, with every sentiment in Cowley, or Waller, or Dryden?'

'Who are these?' she asked. 'At what church do they preach?'

'Faith!' cried the baronet, with a laugh, 'honest John preaches at the church of Will Unwin, commonly known as Will's, where many a time it is two in the morning before he comes to the end of his sermon. But why this question? Do you think that no one may put pen to paper unless they have also a right to wear a gown and climb up to a pulpit? I had thought that all of your sex had read Dryden. Pray, what are your own favourite books?'

'There is Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted,"' said she. 'It is a stirring work, and one which hath wrought much good. Hast thou not found it to fructify within thee?'

'I have not read the book you name,' Sir Gervas confessed.

'Not read it?' she cried, with raised eyebrows. 'Truly I had thought that every one had read the "Alarm." What dost thou think, then, of "Faithful Contendings"?'

'I have not read it.'

'Or of Baxter's Sermons?' she asked.

'I have not read them.'

'Of Bull's "Spirit Cordial," then?'

'I have not read it.'

Mistress Ruth Timewell stared at him in undisguised wonder. 'You may think me ill-bred to say it, sir,' she remarked, 'but I cannot but marvel where you have been, or what you have done all your life. Why, the very children in the street have read these books.'

'In truth, such works come little in our way in London,' Sir Gervas answered. 'A play of George Etherege's, or a jingle of Sir John Suckling's is lighter, though mayhap less wholesome food for the mind. A man in London may keep pace with the world of letters without much reading, for what with the gossip of the coffee-houses and the news-letters that fall in his way, and the babble of poets or wits at the assemblies, with mayhap an evening or two in the week at the playhouse, with Vanbrugh or Farquhar, one can never part company for long with the muses. Then, after the play, if a man is in no humour for a turn of luck at the green table at the Groom Porter's, he may stroll down to the Coca Tree if he be a Tory, or to St. James's if he be a Whig, and it is ten to one if the talk turn not upon the turning of alcaics, or the contest between blank verse or rhyme. Then one may, after an arriere supper, drop into Will's or Slaughter's and find Old John, with Tickell and Congreve and the rest of them, hard at work on the dramatic unities, or poetical justice, or some such matter. I confess that my own tastes lay little in that line, for about that hour I was likely to be worse employed with wine-flask, dice-box, or—'

'Hem! hem!' cried I warningly, for several of the Puritans were listening with faces which expressed anything but approval.

‘What you say of London is of much interest to me,’ said the Puritan maiden, ‘though these names and places have little meaning to my ignorant ears. You did speak, however, of the playhouse. Surely no worthy man goes near those sinks of iniquity, the baited traps of the Evil One? Has not the good and sanctified Master Bull declared from the pulpit that they are the gathering-place of the froward, the chosen haunts of the perverse Assyrians, as dangerous to the soul as any of those Papal steeple-houses wherein the creature is sacrilegiously confounded with the Creator?’

‘Well and truly spoken, Mistress Timewell,’ cried the lean young Puritan upon the right, who had been an attentive listener to the whole conversation. ‘There is more evil in such houses than even in the cities of the plain. I doubt not that the wrath of the Lord will descend upon them, and destroy them, and wreck them utterly, together with the dissolute men and abandoned women who frequent them.’

‘Your strong opinions, friend,’ said Sir Gervas quietly, ‘are borne out doubtless by your full knowledge of the subject. How often, prythee, have you been in these playhouses which you are so ready to decry?’

‘I thank the Lord that I have never been so far tempted from the straight path as to set foot within one,’ the Puritan answered, ‘nor have I ever been in that great sewer which is called London. I trust, however, that I with others of the faithful may find our way thither with our tucks at our sides ere this business is finished, when we shall not be content, I’ll warrant, with shutting these homes of vice, as Cromwell did, but we shall not leave one stone upon another, and shall sow the spot with salt, that it may be a hissing and a byword amongst the people.’

‘You are right, John Derrick,’ said the Mayor, who had overheard the latter part of his remarks. ‘Yet methinks that a lower tone and a more backward manner would become you better when you are speaking with your master’s guests. Touching these same playhouses, Colonel, when we have carried the upper hand this time, we shall not allow the old tares to check the new wheat. We know what fruit these places have borne in the days of Charles, the Gwynnes, the Palmers, and the whole base crew of foul lecherous parasites. Have you ever been in London, Captain Clarke?’

‘Nay, sir; I am country born and bred.’

‘The better man you,’ said our host. ‘I have been there twice. The first time was in the days of the Rump, when Lambert brought in his division to overawe the Commons. I was then quartered at the sign of the Four Crosses in Southwark, then kept by a worthy man, one John Dolman, with whom I had much edifying speech concerning predestination. All was quiet and sober then, I promise you, and you might have walked from Westminster to the Tower in the dead of the night without hearing aught save the murmur of prayer and the chanting of hymns. Not a ruffler or a wench was in the streets after dark, nor any one save staid citizens upon their business, or the halberdiers of the watch. The second visit which I made was over this business of the levelling of the ramparts, when I and neighbour Foster, the glover, were sent at the head of a deputation from this town to the Privy Council of Charles. Who could have credited that a few years would have made such a change? Every evil thing that had been stamped underground had spawned and festered until its vermin brood flooded the streets, and the godly wore themselves driven to shun the light of day. Apollyon had indeed triumphed for a while. A quiet man could not walk the highways without being elbowed into the kennel by swaggering swashbucklers, or accosted by painted hussies. Padders and michers, laced cloaks, jingling spurs, slashed boots, tall plumes, bullies and pimps, oaths and blasphemies — I promise you hell was waxing fat. Even in the solitude of one’s coach one was not free from the robber.’

‘How that, sir?’ asked Reuben.

‘Why marry, in this wise. As I was the sufferer I have the best right to tell the tale. Ye must know that after our reception — which was cold enough, for we were about as welcome to the Privy Council as the hearth-tax man is to the village housewife — we were asked, more as I guess from derision than from courtesy, to the evening levee at Buckingham Palace. We would both fain have been excused from going but we feared that our refusal might give undue offence, and so hinder the success of our mission. My homespun garments ware somewhat rough for such an occasion, yet I determined to appear in them, with the addition of a new black baize waistcoat faced with silk, and a good periwig, for which I gave three pounds ten shillings in the Haymarket.’

The young Puritan opposite turned up his eyes and murmured something about ‘sacrificing to Dagon,’ which fortunately for him was inaudible to the high-spirited old man.

‘It was but a worldly vanity,’ quoth the Mayor; ‘for, with all deference, Sir Gervas Jerome, a man’s own hair arranged with some taste, and with perhaps a sprinkling of powder, is to my mind the fittest ornament to his head. It is the contents and not the case which availeth. Having donned this frippery, good Master Foster and I hired a calash and drove to the Palace. We were deep in grave and, I trust, profitable converse speeding through the endless streets, when of a sudden I felt a sharp tug at my head, and my hat fluttered down on to my knees. I raised my hands, and lo! they came upon my bare pate. The wig had vanished. We were rolling down Fleet Street at the moment, and there was no one in the calash save neighbour Foster, who sat as astounded as I. We looked high and low, on the seats and beneath them, but not a sign of the periwig was there. It was gone utterly and without a trace.'

'Whither then?' we asked with one voice.

'That was the question which we set ourselves to solve. For a moment I do assure ye that we bethought us that it might be a judgment upon us for our attention to such carnal follies. Then it crossed my mind that it might be the doing of some malicious sprite, as the Drummer of Tedworth, or those who occasioned the disturbances no very long time since at the old Gast House at Little Burton here in Somersetshire. (Note F. Appendix.) With this thought we hallooed to the coachman, and told him what had occurred to us. The fellow came down from his perch, and having heard our story, he burst straightway into much foul language, and walking round to the back of his calash, showed us that a slit had been made in the leather wherewith it was fashioned. Through this the thief had thrust his hand and had drawn my wig through the hole, resting the while on the crossbar of the coach. It was no uncommon thing, he said, and the wig-snatchers were a numerous body who waited beside the peruke-maker's shops, and when they saw a customer come forth with a purchase which was worth their pains they would follow him, and, should he chance to drive, deprive him of it in this fashion. Be that as it may, I never saw my wig again, and had to purchase another before I could venture into the royal presence.'

'A strange adventure truly,' exclaimed Saxon. 'How fared it with you for the remainder of the evening?'

'But scurvily, for Charles's face, which was black enough at all times, was blackest of all to us; nor was his brother the Papist more complaisant. They had but brought us there that they might dazzle us with their glitter and gee-gaws, in order that we might bear a fine report of them back to the West with us. There were supple-backed courtiers, and strutting nobles, and hussies with their shoulders bare, who should for all their high birth have been sent to Bridewell as readily as any poor girl who ever walked at the cart’s tail. Then there were the gentlemen of the chamber, with cinnamon and plum-coloured coats, and a brave show of gold lace and silk and ostrich feather. Neighbour Foster and I felt as two crows might do who have wandered among the peacocks. Yet we bare in mind in whose image we were fashioned, and we carried ourselves, I trust, as independent English burghers. His Grace of Buckingham had his flout at us, and Rochester sneered, and the women simpered; but we stood four square, my friend and I, discussing, as I well remember, the most precious doctrines of election and reprobation, without giving much heed either to those who mocked us, or to the gamesters upon our left, or to the dancers upon our right. So we stood throughout the evening, until, finding that they could get little sport from us, my Lord Clarendon, the Chancellor, gave us the word to retire, which we did at our leisure after saluting the King and the company.’

‘Nay, that I should never have done!’ cried the young Puritan, who had listened intently to his elder’s narrative. ‘Would it not have been more fitting to have raised up your hands and called down vengeance upon them, as the holy man of old did upon the wicked cities?’

‘More fitting, quotha!’ said the Mayor impatiently. ‘It is most fitting that youth should be silent until his opinion is asked on such matters. God’s wrath comes with leaden feet, but it strikes with iron hands. In His own good time He has judged when the cup of these men’s iniquities is overflowing. It is not for us to instruct Him. Curses have, as the wise man said, a habit of coming home to roost. Bear that in mind, Master John Derrick, and be not too liberal with them.’

The young apprentice, for such he was, bowed his head sullenly to the rebuke, whilst the Mayor, after a short pause, resumed his story.

‘Being a fine night,’ said he, ‘we chose to walk back to our lodgings; but never shall I forget the wicked scenes wherewith we were encountered on the way. Good Master Bunyan, of Elstow, might have added some pages to his account of Vanity Fair had he been with us. The women, be-patched, be-ruddled, and brazen; the men swaggering, roistering, cursing — the brawling, the drabbing, and the drunkenness! It was a fit kingdom to be ruled over by such a court. At last we had made our way to more quiet streets, and were hoping that our adventures were at an end, when of a sudden there came a rush of half-drunken cavaliers from a side street, who set upon the passers-by with their swords, as though we had fallen into an ambuscade of savages in some Paynim country. They were, as I surmise, of the same breed as those of whom the excellent John Milton wrote: “The sons of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.” Alas! my memory is not what it was, for at one time I could say by rote whole books of that noble and godly poem.’

‘And, pray, how fared ye with these rufflers, sir?’ I asked.

‘They beset us, and some few other honest citizens who were wending their ways homewards, and waving their naked swords they called upon us to lay down our arms and pay homage. “To whom?” I asked. They pointed to one of their number who was more gaudily dressed and somewhat drunker than the rest. “This is our most sovereign liege,” they cried. “Sovereign over whom?” I asked. “Over the Tityre Tus,” they answered. “Oh, most barbarous and cuckoldy citizen, do you not recognise that you have fallen into the hands of that most noble order?” “This is not your real monarch,” said I, “for he is down beneath us chained in the pit, where some day he will gather his dutiful subjects around him.” “Lo, he hath spoken treason!” they cried, on which, without much more ado, they set upon us with sword and dagger. Neighbour Foster and I placed our backs against a wall, and with our cloaks round our left arms we made play with our tucks, and managed to put in one or two of the old Wigan Lane raspers. In particular, friend Foster pinked the King in such wise that his Majesty ran howling down the street like a gored bull-pup. We were beset by numbers, however, and might have ended our mission then and there had not the watch appeared upon the scene, struck up our weapons with their halberds, and so arrested the whole party. Whilst the fray lasted the burghers from the adjoining houses were pouring water upon us, as though we were cats on the tiles, which, though it did not cool our ardour in the fight, left us in a scurvy and unsavoury condition. In this guise we were dragged to the round-house, where we spent the night amidst bullies, thieves, and orange wenches, to whom I am proud to say that both neighbour Foster and myself spoke some words of joy and comfort. In the morning we were released, and forthwith shook the dust of London from our feet; nor do I ever wish to return thither, unless it be at the head of our Somersetshire regiments, to see King Monmouth don the crown which he had wrested in fair fight from the Popish perverter.’

As Master Stephen Timewell ended his tale a general shuffling and rising announced the conclusion of the meal. The company filed slowly out in order of seniority, all wearing the same gloomy and earnest expression, with grave gait and downcast eyes. These Puritan ways were, it is true, familiar to me from childhood, yet I had never before seen a large household conforming to them, or marked their effect upon so many young men.

‘You shall bide behind for a while,’ said the Mayor, as we were about to follow the others. ‘William, do you bring a flask of the old green sealed sack. These creature comforts I do not produce before my lads, for beef and honest malt is the fittest food for such. On occasion, however, I am of Paul’s opinion, that a flagon of wine among friends is no bad thing for mind or for body. You can away now, sweetheart, if you have aught to engage you.’

‘Do you go out again?’ asked Mistress Ruth.

‘Presently, to the town-hall. The survey of arms is not yet complete.’

‘I shall have your robes ready, and also the rooms of our guests,’ she answered, and so, with a bright smile to us, tripped away upon her duty.

‘I would that I could order our town as that maiden orders this house,’ said the Mayor. ‘There is not a want that is not supplied before it is felt. She reads my thoughts and acts upon them ere my lips have time to form them. If I have still strength to spend in the public service, it is because my private life is full of restful peace. Do not fear the sack, sirs. It cometh from Brooke and Hellier’s of Abchurch Lane, and may be relied upon.’

‘Which showeth that one good thing cometh out of London,’ remarked Sir Gervas.

‘Aye, truly,’ said the old man, smiling. ‘But what think ye of my young men, sir? They must needs be of a very different class to any with whom you are acquainted, if, as I understand, you have frequented court circles.’

‘Why, marry, they are good enough young men, no doubt,’ Sir Gervas answered lightly. ‘Methinks, however, that there is a want of sap about them. It is not blood, but sour buttermilk that flows in their veins.’

‘Nay, nay,’ the Mayor responded warmly. ‘There you do them an injustice. Their passions and feelings are under control, as the skilful rider keeps his horse in hand; but they are as surely there as is the speed and endurance of the animal. Did you observe the godly youth who sat upon your right, whom I had occasion to reprove more than once for over-zeal? He is a fit example of how a man may take the upper hand of his feelings, and keep them in control.’

‘And how has he done so?’ I asked.

‘Why, between friends,’ quoth the Mayor, ‘it was but last Lady-day that he asked the hand of my granddaughter Ruth in marriage. His time is nearly served, and his father, Sam Derrick, is an honourable craftsman, so that the match would have been no unfitting one. The maiden turned against him, however — young girls will have their fancies — and the matter came to an end. Yet here he dwells under the same roof-tree, at her elbow from morn to night, with never a sign of that passion which can scarce have died out so soon. Twice my wool warehouse hath been nigh burned to the ground since then, and twice he hath headed those who fought the flames. There are not many whose suit hath been rejected who would bear themselves in so resigned and patient a fashion.’

‘I am prepared to find that your judgment is the correct one,’ said Sir Gervas Jerome. ‘I have learned to distrust too hasty dislikes, and bear in mind that couplet of John Dryden —

“Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow.
He who would search for pearls must dive below.”’

‘Or worthy Dr. Samuel Butler,’ said Saxon, ‘who, in his immortal poem of “Hudibras,” says —

“The fool can only see the skin:
The wise man tries to peep within.”’

‘I wonder, Colonel Saxon,’ said our host severely, ‘that you should speak favourably of that licentious poem, which is composed, as I have heard, for the sole purpose of casting ridicule upon the godly. I should as soon have expected to hear you praise the wicked and foolish work of Hobbes, with his mischievous thesis, “A Deo rex, a rege lex.”’

‘It is true that I contemn and despise the use which Butler hath made of his satire,’ said Saxon adroitly; ‘yet I may admire the satire itself, just as one may admire a damascened blade without approving of the quarrel in which it is drawn.’

‘These distinctions are, I fear, too subtle for my old brain,’ said the stout old Puritan. ‘This England of ours is divided into two camps, that of God and that of Antichrist. He who is not with us is against us, nor shall any who serve under the devil’s banner have anything from me save my scorn and the sharp edge of my sword.’

‘Well, well,’ said Saxon, filling up his glass, ‘I am no Laodicean or time-server. The cause shall not find me wanting with tongue or with sword.’

‘Of that I am well convinced, my worthy friend,’ the Mayor answered, ‘and if I have spoken over sharply you will hold me excused. But I regret to have evil tidings to announce to you. I have not told the commonalty lest it cast them down, but I know that adversity will be but the whetstone to give your ardour a finer edge. Argyle’s rising has failed, and he and his companions are prisoners in the hands of the man who never knew what pity was.’

We all started in our chairs at this, and looked at one another aghast, save only Sir Gervas Jerome, whose natural serenity was, I am well convinced, proof against any disturbance. For you may remember, my children, that I stated when I first took it in hand to narrate to you these passages of my life, that the hopes of Monmouth’s party rested very much upon the raid which Argyle and the Scottish exiles had made upon Ayrshire, where it was hoped that they would create such a disturbance as would divert a good share of King James’s forces, and so make our march to London less difficult. This was the more confidently expected since Argyle’s own estates lay upon that side of Scotland, where he could raise five thousand swordsmen among his own clansmen. The western counties abounded, too, in fierce zealots who were ready to assert the cause of the Covenant, and who had proved themselves in many a skirmish to be valiant warriors. With the help of the Highlanders and of the Covenanters it seemed certain that Argyle would be able to hold his own, the more so since he took with him to Scotland the English Puritan Rumbold, and many others skilled in warfare. This sudden news of his total defeat and downfall was therefore a heavy blow, since it turned the whole forces of the Government upon ourselves.

‘Have you the news from a trusty source?’ asked Decimus Saxon, after a long silence.

‘It is beyond all doubt or question,’ Master Stephen Timewell answered. ‘Yet I can well understand your surprise, for the Duke had trusty councillors with him. There was Sir Patrick Hume of Polwarth—’

‘All talk and no fight,’ said Saxon.

‘And Richard Rumbold.’

‘All fight and no talk,’ quoth our companion. ‘He should, methinks, have rendered a better account of himself.’

‘Then there was Major Elphinstone.’

‘A bragging fool!’ cried Saxon.’

‘And Sir John Cochrane.’

‘A captious, long-tongued, short-witted sluggard,’ said the soldier of fortune. ‘The expedition was doomed from the first with such men at its head. Yet I had thought that could they have done nought else, they might at least have flung themselves into the mountain country, where these bare-legged caterans could have held their own amid their native clouds and mists. All taken, you say! It is a lesson and a warning to us. I tell you that unless Monmouth infuses more energy into his councils, and thrusts straight for the heart instead of fencing and foining at the extremities, we shall find ourselves as Argyle and Rumbold. What mean these two days wasted at Axminster at a time when every hour is of import? Is he, every time that he brushes a party of militia aside, to stop forty-eight hours and chant “Te Deums” when Churchill and Feversham are, as I know, pushing for the West with every available man, and the Dutch grenadiers are swarming over like rats into a granary?’

‘You are very right, Colonel Saxon,’ the Mayor answered. ‘And I trust that when the King comes here we may stir him up to more prompt action. He has much need of more soldierly advisers, for since Fletcher hath gone there is hardly a man about him who hath been trained to arms.’

‘Well,’ said Saxon moodily, ‘now that Argyle hath gone under we are face to face with James, with nothing but our own good swords to trust to.’

‘To them and to the justice of our cause. How like ye the news, young sirs? Has the wine lost its smack on account of it? Are ye disposed to flinch from the standard of the Lord?’

‘For my own part I shall see the matter through,’ said I.

‘And I shall bide where Micah Clarke bides,’ quoth Reuben Lockarby.

‘And to me,’ said Sir Gervas, ‘it is a matter of indifference, so long as I am in good company and there is something stirring.’

‘In that case,’ said the Mayor, ‘we had best each turn to his own work, and have all ready for the King’s arrival. Until then I trust that ye will honour my humble roof.’

‘I fear that I cannot accept your kindness,’ Saxon answered. ‘When I am in harness I come and go early and late. I shall therefore take up my quarters in the inn, which is not very well furnished with victual, and yet can supply me with the simple fare, which with a black Jack of October and a pipe of Trinidado is all I require.’

As Saxon was firm in this resolution the Mayor forbore to press it upon him, but my two friends gladly joined with me in accepting the worthy wool-worker’s offer, and took up our quarters for the time under his hospitable roof.

CHAPTER XIX. Of a Brawl in the Night

Decimus Saxon refused to avail himself of Master Timewell’s house and table for the reason, as I afterwards learned, that, the Mayor being a firm Presbyterian, he thought it might stand him in ill stead with the Independents and other zealots were he to allow too great an intimacy to spring up between them. Indeed, my dears, from this time onward this cunning man framed his whole life and actions in such a way as to make friends of the sectaries, and to cause them to look upon him as their leader. For he had a firm belief that in all such outbreaks as that in which we were engaged, the most extreme party is sure in the end to gain the upper hand. ‘Fanatics,’ he said to me one day, ‘mean fervour, and fervour means hard work, and hard work means power.’ That was the centre point of all his plotting and scheming.

And first of all he set himself to show how excellent a soldier he was, and he spared neither time nor work to make this apparent. From morn till midday, and from afternoon till night, we drilled and drilled until in very truth the shouting of the orders and the clatter of the arms became wearisome to our ears. The good burghers may well have thought that Colonel Saxon’s Wiltshire foot were as much part of the market-place as the town cross or the parish stocks. There was much to be done in very little time, so much that many would have thought it hopeless to attempt it. Not only was there the general muster of the regiment, but we had each to practise our own companies in their several drills, and to learn as best we could the names and the wants of the men. Yet our work was made easier to us by the assurance that it was not thrown away, for at every gathering our bumpkins stood more erect, and handled their weapons more deftly. From cock-crow to sun-down the streets resounded with ‘Poise your muskets! Order your muskets! Rest your muskets! Handle your primers!’ and all the other orders of the old manual exercise.

As we became more soldierly we increased in numbers, for our smart appearance drew the pick of the new-comers into our ranks. My own company swelled until it had to be divided, and others enlarged in proportion. The baronet’s musqueteers mustered a full hundred, skilled for the most part in the use of the gun. Altogether we sprang from three hundred to four hundred and fifty, and our drill improved until we received praise from all sides on the state of our men.

Late in the evening I was riding slowly back to the house of Master Timewell when Reuben clattered after me, and besought me to turn back with him to see a noteworthy sight. Though feeling little in the mood for such things, I turned Covenant and rode with him down the length of High Street, and into the suburb which is known as Shuttern, where my companion pulled up at a bare barn-like building, and bade me look in through the window.

The interior, which consisted of a single great hall, the empty warehouse in which wool had used to be stored, was all alight with lamps and candles. A great throng of men, whom I recognised as belonging to my own company, or that of my companion, lay about on either side, some smoking, some praying, and some burnishing their arms. Down the middle a line of benches had been drawn up, on which there were seated astraddle the whole hundred of the baronet’s musqueteers, each engaged in plaiting into a queue the hair of the man who sat in front of him. A boy walked up and down with a pot of grease, by the aid of which with some whipcord the work was going forward merrily. Sir Gervas himself with a great flour dredger sat perched upon a bale of wool at the head of the line, and as quickly as any queue was finished he examined it through his quizzing glass, and if it found favour in his eyes, daintily powdered it from his dredger, with as much care and reverence as though it were some service of the Church. No cook seasoning a dish could have added his spices with more nicety of judgment than our friend displayed in whitening the pates of his company. Glancing up from his labours he saw our two smiling faces looking in at him through the window, but his work was too engrossing to allow him to leave it, and we rode off at last without having speech with him.

By this time the town was very quiet and still, for the folk in those parts were early bed-goers, save when some special occasion kept them afoot. We rode slowly together through the silent streets, our horses’ hoofs ringing out sharp against the cobble stones, talking about such light matters as engage the mind of youth. The moon was shining very brightly above us, silvering the broad streets, and casting a fretwork of shadows from the peaks and pinnacles of the churches. At Master Timewell’s courtyard I sprang from my saddle, but Reuben, attracted by the peace and beauty of the scene, rode onwards with the intention of going as far as the town gate.

I was still at work upon my girth buckles, undoing my harness, when of a sudden there came from the street a shouting and a rushing, with the clinking of blades, and my comrade's voice calling upon me for help. Drawing my sword I ran out. Some little way down there was a clear space, white with the moonshine, in the centre of which I caught a glimpse of the sturdy figure of my friend springing about with an activity for which I had never given him credit, and exchanging sword thrusts with three or four men who were pressing him closely. On the ground there lay a dark figure, and behind the struggling group Reuben's mare reared and plunged in sympathy with her master's peril. As I rushed down, shouting and waving my sword, the assailants took flight down a side street, save one, a tall sinewy swordsman, who rushed in upon Reuben, stabbing furiously at him, and cursing him the while for a spoil-sport. To my horror I saw, as I ran, the fellow's blade slip inside my friend's guard, who threw up his arms and fell prostrate, while the other with a final thrust dashed off down one of the narrow winding lanes which lead from East Street to the banks of the Tone.

'For Heaven's sake where are you hurt?' I cried, throwing myself upon my knees beside his prostrate body. 'Where is your injury, Reuben?'

'In the wind, mostly,' quoth he, blowing like a smithy bellows; 'likewise on the back of my pate. Give me your hand, I pray.'

'And are you indeed scathless?' I cried, with a great lightening of the heart as I helped him to his feet. 'I thought that the villain had stabbed you.'

'As well stab a Warsash crab with a bodkin,' said he. 'Thanks to good Sir Jacob Clancing, once of Snellaby Hall and now of Salisbury Plain, their rapiers did no more than scratch my plate of proof. But how is it with the maid?'

'The maid?' said I.

'Aye, it was to save her that I drew. She was beset by these night walkers. See, she rises! They threw her down when I set upon them.'

'How is it with you, Mistress?' I asked; for the prostrate figure had arisen and taken the form of a woman, young and graceful to all appearance, with her face muffled in a mantle. 'I trust that you have met with no hurt.'

'None, sir,' she answered, in a low, sweet voice, 'but that I have escaped is due to the ready valour of your friend, and the guiding wisdom of Him who confutes the plots of the wicked. Doubtless a true man would have rendered this help to any damsel in distress, and yet it may add to your satisfaction to know that she whom you have served is no stranger to you.'

With these words she dropped her mantle and turned her face towards us in the moonlight.

‘Good lack! it is Mistress Timewell!’ I cried, in amazement.

‘Let us homewards,’ she said, in firm, quick tones. ‘The neighbours are alarmed, and there will be a rabble collected anon. Let us escape from the babblement.’

Windows had indeed begun to clatter up in every direction, and loud voices to demand what was amiss. Far away down the street we could see the glint of lanthorns swinging to and fro as the watch hurried thitherwards. We slipped along in the shadow, however, and found ourselves safe within the Mayor’s courtyard without let or hindrance.

‘I trust, sir, that you have really met with no hurt,’ said the maiden to my companion.

Reuben had said not a word since she had uncovered her face, and bore the face of a man who finds himself in some pleasant dream and is vexed only by the fear lest he wake up from it. ‘Nay, I am not hurt,’ he answered, ‘but I would that you could tell us who these roving blades may be, and where they may be found.’

‘Nay, nay,’ said she, with uplifted finger, ‘you shall not follow the matter further. As to the men, I cannot say with certainty who they may have been. I had gone forth to visit Dame Clatworthy, who hath the tertian ague, and they did beset me on my return. Perchance they are some who are not of my grandfather’s way of thinking in affairs of State, and who struck at him through me. But ye have both been so kind that ye will not refuse me one other favour which I shall ask ye?’

We protested that we could not, with our hands upon our sword-hilts.

‘Nay, keep them for the Lord’s quarrel,’ said she, smiling at the action. ‘All that I ask is that ye will say nothing if this matter to my grandsire. He is choleric, and a little matter doth set him in a flame, so old as he is. I would not have his mind turned from the public needs to a private trifle of this sort. Have I your promises?’

‘Mine,’ said I, bowing.

‘And mine,’ said Lockarby.

‘Thanks, good friends. Alack! I have dropped my gauntlet in the street. But it is of no import. I thank God that no harm has come to any one. My thanks once more, and may pleasant dreams await ye.’ She sprang up the steps and was gone in an instant.

Reuben and I unharnessed our horses and saw them cared for in silence. We then entered the house and ascended to our chambers, still without a word. Outside his room door my friend paused.

‘I have heard that long man’s voice before, Micah,’ said he.

‘And so have I,’ I answered. ‘The old man must beware of his ‘prentices. I have half a mind to go back for the little maiden’s gauntlet.’

A merry twinkle shot through the cloud which hid gathered on Reuben’s brow. He opened his left hand and showed me the doe-skin glove crumpled up in his palm.

‘I would not barter it for all the gold in her grandsire’s coffers,’ said he, with a sudden outflame, and then half-laughing, half-blushing at his own heat, he whisked in and left me to my thoughts.

And so I learned for the first time, my dears, that my good comrade had been struck by the little god’s arrows. When a man’s years number one score, love springs up in him, as the gourd grew in the Scriptures, in a single night. I have told my story ill if I have not made you understand that my friend was a frank, warm-hearted lad of impulse, whose reason seldom stood sentry over his inclinations. Such a man can no more draw away from a winning maid than the needle can shun the magnet. He loves as the mavis sings or the kitten plays. Now, a slow-witted, heavy fellow like myself, in whose veins the blood has always flowed somewhat coolly and temperately, may go into love as a horse goes into a shelving stream, step by step, but a man like Reuben is kicking his heels upon the bank one moment, and is over ears in the deepest pool the nest.

Heaven only knows what match it was that had set the tow alight. I can but say that from that day on my comrade was sad and cloudy one hour, gay and blithesome the next. His even flow of good spirits had deserted him, and he became as dismal as a moulting chicken, which has ever seemed to me to be one of the strangest outcomes of what poets have called the joyous state of love. But, indeed, pain and pleasure are so very nearly akin in this world, that it is as if they were tethered in neighbouring stalls, and a kick would at any time bring down the partition. Here is a man who is as full of sighs as a grenade is of powder, his face is sad, his brow is downcast, his wits are wandering; yet if you remark to him that it is an ill thing that he should be in this state, he will answer you, as like as not, that he would not exchange it for all the powers and principalities. Tears to him are golden, and laughter is but base coin. Well, my dears, it is useless for me to expound to you that which I cannot myself understand. If, as I have heard, it is impossible to get the thumb-marks of any two men to be alike, how can we expect their inmost thoughts and feelings to tally? Yet this I can say with all truth, that when I asked your grandmother's hand I did not demean myself as if I were chief mourner at a funeral. She will bear me out that I walked up to her with a smile upon my face, though mayhap there was a little flutter at my heart, and I took her hand and I said — but, lack-a-day, whither have I wandered? What has all this to do with Taunton town and the rising of 1685?

On the night of Wednesday, June 17, we learned that the King, as Monmouth was called throughout the West, was lying less than ten miles off with his forces, and that he would make his entry into the loyal town of Taunton the next morning. Every effort was made, as ye may well guess, to give him a welcome which should be worthy of the most Whiggish and Protestant town in England. An arch of evergreens had already been built up at the western gate, bearing the motto, 'Welcome to King Monmouth!' and another spanned the entrance to the market-place from the upper window of the White Hart Inn, with 'Hail to the Protestant Chief!' in great scarlet letters. A third, if I remember right, bridged the entrance to the Castle yard, but the motto on it has escaped me. The cloth and wool industry is, as I have told you, the staple trade of the town, and the merchants had no mercy on their wares, but used them freely to beautify the streets. Rich tapestries, glossy velvets, and costly brocades fluttered from the windows or lined the balconies. East Street, High Street, and Fore Street were draped from garret to basement with rare and beautiful fabrics, while gay flags hung from the roofs on either side, or fluttered in long festoons from house to house. The royal banner of England floated from the lofty tower of St. Mary Magdalene, while the blue ensign of Monmouth waved from the sister turret of St. James. Late into the night there was planing and hammering, working and devising, until when the sun rose upon Thursday, June 18, it shone on as brave a show of bunting and evergreen as ever graced a town. Taunton had changed as by magic from a city into a flower garden.

Master Stephen Timewell had busied himself in these preparations, but he had borne in mind at the same time that the most welcome sight which he could present to Monmouth's eyes was the large body of armed men who were prepared to follow his fortunes. There were sixteen hundred in the town, two hundred of which were horse, mostly well armed and equipped. These were disposed in such a way that the King should pass them in his progress. The townsmen lined the market-place three deep from the Castle gate to the entrance to the High Street; from thence to Shuttern, Dorsetshire, and Frome peasants were drawn up on either side of the street; while our own regiment was stationed at the western gate. With arms well burnished, serried ranks, and fresh sprigs of green in every bonnet, no leader could desire a better addition to his army. When all were in their places, and the burghers and their wives had arrayed themselves in their holiday gear, with gladsome faces and baskets of new-cut flowers, all was ready for the royal visitor's reception.

'My orders are,' said Saxon, riding up to us as we sat our horses reside our companions, 'that I and my captains should fall in with the King's escort as he passes, and so accompany him to the market-place. Your men shall present arms, and shall then stand their ground until we return.'

We all three drew our swords and saluted.

'If ye will come with me, gentlemen, and take position to the right of the gate here,' said he, 'I may be able to tell ye something of these folk as they pass. Thirty years of war in many climes should give me the master craftsman's right to expound to his apprentices.'

We all very gladly followed his advice, and passed out through the gate, which was now nothing more than a broad gap amongst the mounds which marked the lines of the old walls. 'There is no sign of them yet,' I remarked, as we pulled up upon a convenient hillock. 'I suppose that they must come by this road which winds through the valley before us.'

'There are two sorts of bad general,' quoth Saxon, 'the man who is too fast and the man who is too slow. His Majesty's advisers will never be accused of the former failing, whatever other mistakes they may fall into. There was old Marshal Grunberg, with whom I did twenty-six months' soldiering in Bohemia. He would fly through the country pell-mell, horse, foot, and artillery, as if the devil were at his heels. He might make fifty blunders, but the enemy had never time to take advantage. I call to mind a raid which we made into Silesia, when, after two days or so of mountain roads, his Oberhauptmann of the staff told him that it was impossible for the artillery to keep up. "Lass es hinter!" says he. So the guns were left, and by the evening of the next day the foot were dead-beat. "They cannot walk another mile!" says the Oberhauptmann. "Lassen Sie hinter!" says he. So on we went with the horse — I was in his Pandour regiment, worse luck! But after a skirmish or two, what with the roads and what with the enemy, our horses were foundered and useless. “The horses are used up!” says the Oberhauptmann. “Lassen Sie hinter!” he cries; and I warrant that he would have pushed on to Prague with his staff, had they allowed him. “General Hinterlassen” we called him after that.’

‘A dashing commander, too,’ cried Sir Gervas. ‘I would fain have served under him.’

‘Aye, and he had a way of knocking his recruits into shape which would scarce be relished by our good friends here in the west country,’ said Saxon. ‘I remember that after the leaguer of Salzburg, when we had taken the castle or fortalice of that name, we were joined by some thousand untrained foot, which had been raised in Dalmatia in the Emperor’s employ. As they approached our lines with waving of hands and blowing of bugles, old Marshal Hinterlassen discharged a volley of all the cannon upon the walls at them, killing three score and striking great panic into the others. “The rogues must get used to standing fire sooner or later,” said he, “so they may as well commence their education at once.”’

‘He was a rough schoolmaster,’ I remarked. ‘He might have left that part of the drill to the enemy.’

‘Yet his soldiers loved him,’ said Saxon. ‘He was not a man, when a city had been forced, to inquire into every squawk of a woman, or give ear to every burgess who chanced to find his strong-box a trifle the lighter. But as to the slow commanders, I have known none to equal Brigadier Baumgarten, also of the Imperial service. He would break up his winter-quarters and sit down before some place of strength, where he would raise a sconce here, and sink a sap there, until his soldiers were sick of the very sight of the place. So he would play with it, as a cat with a mouse, until at last it was about to open its gates, when, as like as not, he would raise the leaguer and march back into his winter-quarters. I served two campaigns under him without honour, sack, plunder, or emolument, save a beggarly stipend of three gulden a day, paid in clipped money, six months in arrear. But mark ye the folk upon yonder tower! They are waving their kerchiefs as though something were visible to them.’

‘I can see nothing,’ I answered, shading my eyes and gazing down the tree-sprinkled valley which rose slowly in green uplands to the grassy Blackdown hills.

‘Those on the housetops are waving and pointing,’ said Reuben. ‘Methinks I can myself see the flash of steel among yonder woods.’

‘There it is,’ cried Saxon, extending his gauntleted hand, ‘on the western bank of the Tone, hard by the wooden bridge. Follow my finger, Clarke, and see if you cannot distinguish it.’

‘Yes, truly,’ I exclaimed, ‘I see a bright shimmer coming and going. And there to the left, where the road curves over the hill, mark you that dense mass of men! Ha! the head of the column begins to emerge from the trees.’

There was not a cloud in the sky, but the great heat had caused a haze to overlie the valley, gathering thickly along the winding course of the river, and hanging in little sprays and feathers over the woodlands which clothe its banks. Through this filmy vapour there broke from time to time fierce sparkles of brilliant light as the sun’s rays fell upon breastplate or headpiece. Now and again the gentle summer breeze wafted up sudden pulses of martial music to our ears, with the blare of trumpets and the long deep snarl of the drums. As we gazed, the van of the army began to roll out from the cover of the trees and to darken the white dusty roads. The long line slowly extended itself, writhing out of the forest land like a dark snake with sparkling scales, until the whole rebel army — horse, foot, and ordnance — were visible beneath us. The gleam of the weapons, the waving of numerous banners, the plumes of the leaders, and the deep columns of marching men, made up a picture which stirred the very hearts of the citizens, who, from the housetops and from the ruinous summit of the dismantled walls, were enabled to gaze down upon the champions of their faith. If the mere sight of a passing regiment will cause a thrill in your bosoms, you can fancy how it is when the soldiers upon whom you look are in actual arms for your own dearest and most cherished interests, and have just come out victorious from a bloody struggle. If every other man’s hand was against us, these at least were on our side, and our hearts went out to them as to friends and brothers. Of all the ties that unite men in this world, that of a common danger is the strongest.

It all appeared to be most warlike and most imposing to my inexperienced eyes, and I thought as I looked at the long array that our cause was as good as won. To my surprise, however, Saxon pished and pshawed under his breath, until at last, unable to contain his impatience, he broke out in hot discontent.

‘Do but look at that vanguard as they breast the slope,’ he cried. ‘Where is the advance party, or Vorreiter, as the Germans call them? Where, too, is the space which should be left between the fore-guard and the main battle? By the sword of Scanderbeg, they remind me more of a drove of pilgrims, as I have seen them approaching the shrine of St. Sebaldus of Nurnberg with their banners and streamers. There in the centre, amid that cavalcade of cavaliers, rides our new monarch doubtless. Pity he hath not a man by him who can put this swarm of peasants into something like campaign order. Now do but look at those four pieces of ordnance trailing along like lame sheep behind the flock. Caracco, I would that I were a young King’s officer with a troop of light horse on the ridge yonder! My faith, how I should sweep down yon cross road like a kestrel on a brood of young plover! Then heh for cut and thrust, down with the skulking cannoniers, a carbine fire to cover us, round with the horses, and away go the rebel guns in a cloud of dust! How’s that, Sir Gervas?’

‘Good sport, Colonel,’ said the baronet, with a touch of colour in his white cheeks. ‘I warrant that you did keep your Pandours on the trot.’

‘Aye, the rogues had to work or hang — one or t’other. But methinks our friends here are scarce as numerous as reported. I reckon them to be a thousand horse, and mayhap five thousand two hundred foot. I have been thought a good tally-man on such occasions. With fifteen hundred in the town that would bring us to close on eight thousand men, which is no great force to invade a kingdom and dispute a crown.’

‘If the West can give eight thousand, how many can all the counties of England afford?’ I asked. ‘Is not that the fairer way to look at it?’

‘Monmouth’s popularity lies mostly in the West,’ Saxon answered. ‘It was the memory of that which prompted him to raise his standard in these counties.’

‘His standards, rather,’ quoth Reuben. ‘Why, it looks as though they had hung their linen up to dry all down the line.’

‘True! They have more ensigns than ever I saw with so small a force,’ Saxon answered, rising in his stirrups. ‘One or two are blue, and the rest, as far as I can see for the sun shining upon them, are white, with some motto or device.’

Whilst we had been conversing, the body of horse which formed the vanguard of the Protestant army had approached within a quarter of a mile or less of the town, when a loud, clear bugle-call brought them to a halt. In each successive regiment or squadron the signal was repeated, so that the sound passed swiftly down the long array until it died away in the distance. As the coil of men formed up upon the white road, with just a tremulous shifting motion along the curved and undulating line, its likeness to a giant serpent occurred again to my mind.

‘I could fancy it a great boa,’ I remarked, ‘which was drawing its coils round the town.’

‘A rattlesnake, rather,’ said Reuben, pointing to the guns in the rear. ‘It keeps all its noise in its tail.’

‘Here comes its head, if I mistake not,’ quoth Saxon. ‘It were best perhaps that we stand at the side of the gate.’

As he spoke a group of gaily dressed cavaliers broke away from the main body and rode straight for the town. Their leader was a tall, slim, elegant young man, who sat his horse with the grace of a skilled rider, and who was remarkable amongst those around him for the gallantry of his bearing and the richness of his trappings. As he galloped towards the gate a roar of welcome burst from the assembled multitude, which was taken up and prolonged by the crowds behind, who, though unable to see what was going forward, gathered from the shouting that the King was approaching.

CHAPTER XX. Of the Muster of the Men of the West

Monmouth was at that time in his thirty-sixth year, and was remarkable for those superficial graces which please the multitude and fit a man to lead in a popular cause. He was young, well-spoken, witty, and skilled in all martial and manly exercises. On his progress in the West he had not thought it beneath him to kiss the village maidens, to offer prizes at the rural sports, and to run races in his boots against the fleetest of the barefooted countrymen. (Note G., Appendix) His nature was vain and prodigal, but he excelled in that showy magnificence and careless generosity which wins the hearts of the people. Both on the Continent and at Bothwell Bridge, in Scotland, he had led armies with success, and his kindness and mercy to the Covenanters after his victory had caused him to be as much esteemed amongst the Whigs as Dalzell and Claverhouse were hated. As he reined up his beautiful black horse at the gate of the city, and raised his plumed montero cap to the shouting crowd, the grace and dignity of his bearing were such as might befit the knight-errant in a Romance who is fighting at long odds for a crown which a tyrant has filched from him.

He was reckoned well-favoured, but I cannot say that I found him so. His face was, I thought, too long and white for comeliness, yet his features were high and noble, with well-marked nose and clear, searching eyes. In his mouth might perchance be noticed some trace of that weakness which marred his character, though the expression was sweet and amiable. He wore a dark purple roquelaure riding-jacket, faced and lapelled with gold lace, through the open front of which shone a silver breastplate. A velvet suit of a lighter shade than the jacket, a pair of high yellow Cordovan boots, with a gold-hilted rapier on one side, and a poniard of Parma on the other, each hung from the morocco-leather sword-belt, completed his attire. A broad collar of Mechlin lace flowed over his shoulders, while wristbands of the same costly material dangled from his sleeves. Again and again he raised his cap and bent to the saddle-bow in response to the storm of cheering. ‘A Monmouth! A Monmouth!’ cried the people; ‘Hail to the Protestant chief!’ ‘Long live the noble King Monmouth!’ while from every window, and roof, and balcony fluttering kerchief or waving hat brightened the joyous scene. The rebel van caught fire at the sight and raised a great deep-chested shout, which was taken up again and again by the rest of the army, until the whole countryside was sonorous.

In the meanwhile the city elders, headed by our friend the Mayor, advanced from the gate in all the dignity of silk and fur to pay homage to the King. Sinking upon one knee by Monmouth’s stirrup, he kissed the hand which was graciously extended to him.

‘Nay, good Master Mayor,’ said the King, in a clear, strong voice, ‘it is for my enemies to sink before me, and not for my friends. Prythee, what is this scroll which you do unroll?’

‘It is an address of welcome and of allegiance, your Majesty, from your loyal town of Taunton.’

‘I need no such address,’ said King Monmouth, looking round. ‘It is written all around me in fairer characters than ever found themselves upon parchment. My good friends have made me feel that I was welcome without the aid of clerk or scrivener. Your name, good Master Mayor, is Stephen Timewell, as I understand?’

‘The same, your Majesty.’

‘Too curt a name for so trusty a man,’ said the King, drawing his sword and touching him upon the shoulder with it. ‘I shall make it longer by three letters. Rise up, Sir Stephen, and may I find that there are many other knights in my dominions as loyal and as stout.’

Amidst the huzzahs which broke out afresh at this honour done to the town, the Mayor withdrew with the councilmen to the left side of the gate, whilst Monmouth with his staff gathered upon the right. At a signal a trumpeter blew a fanfare, the drums struck up a point of war, and the insurgent army, with serried ranks and waving banners, resumed its advance upon the town. As it approached, Saxon pointed out to us the various leaders and men of note who surrounded the King, giving us their names and some few words as to their characters.

‘That is Lord Grey of Wark,’ said he; ‘the little middle-aged lean man at the King’s bridle arm. He hath been in the Tower once for treason. ‘Twas he who fled with the Lady Henrietta Berkeley, his wife’s sister. A fine leader truly for a godly cause! The man upon his left, with the red swollen face and the white feather in his cap, is Colonel Holmes. I trust that he will never show the white feather save on his head. The other upon the high chestnut horse is a lawyer, though, by my soul, he is a better man at ordering a battalion than at drawing a bill of costs. He is the republican Wade who led the foot at the skirmish at Bridport, and brought them off with safety. The tall heavy-faced soldier in the steel bonnet is Anthony Buyse, the Brandenburger, a soldado of fortune, and a man of high heart, as are most of his countrymen. I have fought both with him and against him ere now.'

'Mark ye the long thin man behind him?' cried Reuben. 'He hath drawn his sword, and waves it over his head. 'Tis a strange time and place for the broadsword exercise. He is surely mad.'

'Perhaps you are not far amiss,' said Saxon. 'Yet, by my hilt, were it not for that man there would be no Protestant army advancing upon us down yonder road. 'Tis he who by dangling the crown before Monmouth's eyes beguiled him away from his snug retreat in Brabant. There is not one of these men whom he hath not tempted into this affair by some bait or other. With Grey it was a dukedom, with Wade the woolsack, with Buyse the plunder of Cheapside. Every one hath his own motive, but the clues to them all are in the hands of yonder crazy fanatic, who makes the puppets dance as he will. He hath plotted more, lied more, and suffered less than any Whig in the party.'

'It must be that Dr. Robert Ferguson of whom I have heard my father speak,' said I.

'You are right. 'Tis he. I have but seen him once in Amsterdam, and yet I know him by his shock wig and crooked shoulders. It is whispered that of late his overweening conceit hath unseated his reason. See, the German places his hand upon his shoulder and persuades him to sheathe his weapon. King Monmouth glances round too, and smiles as though he were the Court buffoon with a Geneva cloak instead of the motley. But the van is upon us. To your companies, and mind that ye raise your swords to the salute while the colours of each troop go by.'

Whilst our companion had been talking, the whole Protestant army had been streaming towards the town, and the head of the fore-guard was abreast with the gateway. Four troops of horse led the way, badly equipped and mounted, with ropes instead of bridles, and in some cases squares of sacking in place of saddles. The men were armed for the most part with sword and pistol, while a few had the buff-coats, plates, and headpieces taken at Axminster, still stained sometimes with the blood of the last wearer. In the midst of them rode a banner-bearer, who carried a great square ensign hung upon a pole, which was supported upon a socket let into the side of the girth. Upon it was printed in golden letters the legend, ‘Pro libertate et religione nostra.’ These horse-soldiers were made up of yeomen’s and farmers’ sons, unused to discipline, and having a high regard for themselves as volunteers, which caused them to cavil and argue over every order. For this cause, though not wanting in natural courage, they did little service during the war, and were a hindrance rather than a help to the army.

Behind the horse came the foot, walking six abreast, divided into companies of varying size, each company bearing a banner which gave the name of the town or village from which it had been raised. This manner of arranging the troops had been chosen because it had been found to be impossible to separate men who were akin and neighbours to each other. They would fight, they said, side by side, or they would not fight at all. For my own part, I think that it is no bad plan, for when it comes to push of pike, a man stands all the faster when he knows that he hath old and tried friends on either side of him. Many of these country places I came to know afterwards from the talk of the men, and many others I have travelled through, so that the names upon the banners have come to have a real meaning with me. Homer hath, I remember, a chapter or book wherein he records the names of all the Grecian chiefs and whence they came, and how many men they brought to the common muster. It is pity that there is not some Western Homer who could record the names of these brave peasants and artisans, and recount what each did or suffered in upholding a noble though disastrous cause. Their places of birth at least shall not be lost as far as mine own feeble memory can carry me.

The first foot regiment, if so rudely formed a band could be so called, consisted of men of the sea, fishers and coastmen, clad in the heavy blue jerkins and rude garb of their class. They were bronzed, weather-beaten tarpaulins, with hard mahogany faces, variously armed with birding pieces, cutlasses, or pistols. I have a notion that it was not the first time that those weapons had been turned against King James’s servants, for the Somerset and Devon coasts were famous breeding-places for smugglers, and many a saucy lugger was doubtless lying up in creek or in bay whilst her crew had gone a-soldiering to Taunton. As to discipline, they had no notion of it, but rolled along in true blue-water style, with many a shout and halloo to each other or to the crowd. From Star Point to Portland Roads there would be few nets for many weeks to come, and fish would swim the narrow seas which should have been heaped on Lyme Cobb or exposed for sale in Plymouth market. Each group, or band, of these men of the sea bore with it its own banner, that of Lyme in the front, followed by Topsham, Colyford, Bridport, Sidmouth, Otterton, Abbotsbury, and Charmouth, all southern towns, which are on or near the coast. So they trooped past us, rough and careless, with caps cocked, and the reek of their tobacco rising up from them like the steam from a tired horse. In number they may have been four hundred or thereabouts.

The peasants of Rockbere, with flail and scythe, led the next column, followed by the banner of Honiton, which was supported by two hundred stout lacemakers from the banks of the Otter. These men showed by the colour of their faces that their work kept them within four walls, yet they excelled their peasant companions in their alert and soldierly bearing. Indeed, with all the troops, we observed that, though the countrymen were the stouter and heartier, the craftsmen were the most ready to catch the air and spirit of the camp. Behind the men of Honiton came the Puritan clothworkers of Wellington, with their mayor upon a white horse beside their standard-bearer, and a band of twenty instruments before him. Grim-visaged, thoughtful, sober men, they were for the most part clad in grey suits and wearing broad-brimmed hats. ‘For God and faith’ was the motto of a streamer which floated from amongst them. The clothworkers formed three strong companies, and the whole regiment may have numbered close on six hundred men.

The third regiment was headed by five hundred foot from Taunton, men of peaceful and industrious life, but deeply imbued with those great principles of civil and religious liberty which were three years later to carry all before them in England. As they passed the gates they were greeted by a thunderous welcome from their townsmen upon the walls and at the windows. Their steady, solid ranks, and broad, honest burgher faces, seemed to me to smack of discipline and of work well done. Behind them came the musters of Winterbourne, Ilminster, Chard, Yeovil, and Collumpton, a hundred or more pikesmen to each, bringing the tally of the regiment to a thousand men.

A squadron of horse trotted by, closely followed by the fourth regiment, bearing in its van the standards of Beaminster, Crewkerne, Langport, and Chidiock, all quiet Somersetshire villages, which had sent out their manhood to strike a blow for the old cause. Puritan ministers, with their steeple hats and Geneva gowns, once black, but now white with dust, marched sturdily along beside their flocks. Then came a strong company of wild half-armed shepherds from the great plains which extend from the Blackdowns on the south to the Mendips on the north — very different fellows, I promise you, from the Corydons and Strephons of Master Waller or Master Dryden, who have depicted the shepherd as ever shedding tears of love, and tootling upon a plaintive pipe. I fear that Chloe or Phyllis would have met with rough wooing at the hands of these Western savages. Behind them were musqueteers from Dorchester, pikemen from Newton Poppleford, and a body of stout infantry from among the serge workers of Ottery St. Mary. This fourth regiment numbered rather better than eight hundred, but was inferior in arms and in discipline to that which preceded it.

The fifth regiment was headed by a column of fen men from the dreary marches which stretch round Athelney. These men, in their sad and sordid dwellings, had retained the same free and bold spirit which had made them in past days the last resource of the good King Alfred and the protectors of the Western shires from the inroads of the Danes, who were never able to force their way into their watery strongholds. Two companies of them, towsy-headed and bare-legged, but loud in hymn and prayer, had come out from their fastnesses to help the Protestant cause. At their heels came the woodmen and lumberers of Bishop’s Lidiard, big, sturdy men in green jerkins, and the white-smocked villagers of Huish Champflower. The rear of the regiment was formed by four hundred men in scarlet coats, with white cross-belts and well-burnished muskets. These were deserters from the Devonshire Militia, who had marched with Albemarle from Exeter, and who had come over to Monmouth on the field at Axminster. These kept together in a body, but there were many other militiamen, both in red and in yellow coats, amongst the various bodies which I have set forth. This regiment may have numbered seven hundred men.

The sixth and last column of foot was headed by a body of peasants bearing ‘Minehead’ upon their banner, and the ensign of the three wool-bales and the sailing ship, which is the sign of that ancient borough. They had come for the most part from the wild country which lies to the north of Dunster Castle and skirts the shores of the Bristol Channel. Behind them were the poachers and huntsmen of Porlock Quay, who had left the red deer of Exmoor to graze in peace whilst they followed a nobler quarry. They were followed by men from Dulverton, men from Milverton, men from Wiveliscombe and the sunny slopes of the Quantocks, swart, fierce men from the bleak moors of Dunkerry Beacon, and tall, stalwart pony rearers and graziers from Bampton. The banners of Bridgewater, of Shepton Mallet, and of Nether Stowey swept past us, with that of the fishers of Clovelly and the quarrymen of the Blackdowns. In the rear were three companies of strange men, giants in stature, though somewhat bowed with labour, with long tangled beards, and unkempt hair hanging over their eyes. These were the miners from the Mendip hills and from the Oare and Bagworthy valleys, rough, half-savage men, whose eyes rolled up at the velvets and brocades of the shouting citizens, or fixed themselves upon their smiling dames with a fierce intensity which scared the peaceful burghers. So the long line rolled in until three squadrons of horse and four small cannon, with the blue-coated Dutch cannoniers as stiff as their own ramrods, brought up the rear. A long train of carts and of waggons which had followed the army were led into the fields outside the walls and there quartered.

When the last soldier had passed through the Shuttern Gate, Monmouth and his leaders rode slowly in, the Mayor walking by the King's charger. As we saluted they all faced round to us, and I saw a quick flush of surprise and pleasure come over Monmouth's pale face as he noted our close lines and soldierly bearing.

'By my faith, gentlemen,' he said, glancing round at his staff, 'our worthy friend the Mayor must have inherited Cadmus's dragon teeth. Where raised ye this pretty crop, Sir Stephen? How came ye to bring them to such perfection too, even, I declare, to the hair powder of the grenadiers?'

'I have fifteen hundred in the town,' the old wool-worker answered proudly; 'though some are scarce as disciplined.

These men come from Wiltshire, and the officers from Hampshire. As to their order, the credit is due not to me, but to the old soldier Colonel Decimus Saxon, whom they have chosen as their commander, as well as to the captains who serve under him.'

'My thanks are due to you, Colonel,' said the King, turning to Saxon, who bowed and sank the point of his sword to the earth, 'and to you also, gentlemen. I shall not forget the warm loyalty which brought you from

Hampshire in so short a time. Would that I could find the same virtue in higher places! But, Colonel Saxon, you have, I gather, seen much service abroad. What think you of the army which hath just passed before you?'

'If it please your Majesty,' Saxon answered, 'it is like so much uncarded wool, which is rough enough in itself, and yet may in time come to be woven into a noble garment.'

'Hem! There is not much leisure for the weaving,' said Monmouth. 'But they fight well. You should have seen them fall on at Axminster! We hope to see you and to hear your views at the council table. But how is this? Have I not seen this gentleman's face before?'

'It is the Honourable Sir Gervas Jerome of the county of Surrey,' quoth Saxon.

'Your Majesty may have seen me at St. James's,' said the baronet, raising his hat, 'or in the balcony at Whitehall. I was much at Court during the latter years of the late king.'

'Yes, yes. I remember the name as well as the face,' cried Monmouth. 'You see, gentlemen,' he continued, turning to his staff, 'the courtiers begin to come in at last. Were you not the man who did fight Sir Thomas Killigrew behind Dunkirk House? I thought as much. Will you not attach yourself to my personal attendants?'

'If it please your Majesty,' Sir Gervas answered, 'I am of opinion that I could do your royal cause better service at the head of my musqueteers.'

'So be it! So be it!' said King Monmouth. Setting spurs to his horse, he raised his hat in response to the cheers of the troops and cantered down the High Street under a rain of flowers, which showered from roof and window upon him, his staff, and his escort. We had joined in his train, as commanded, so that we came in for our share of this merry crossfire. One rose as it fluttered down was caught by Reuben, who, I observed, pressed it to his lips, and then pushed it inside his breastplate. Glancing up, I caught sight, of the smiling face of our host's daughter peeping down at us from a casement.

'Well caught, Reuben!' I whispered. 'At trick-track or trap and ball you were ever our best player.'

'Ah, Micah,' said he, 'I bless the day that ever I followed you to the wars. I would not change places with Monmouth this day.'

'Has it gone so far then!' I exclaimed. 'Why, lad, I thought that you were but opening your trenches, and you speak as though you had carried the city.’

‘Perhaps I am over-hopeful,’ he cried, turning from hot to cold, as a man doth when he is in love, or hath the tertian ague, or other bodily trouble. ‘God knows that I am little worthy of her, and yet—’

‘Set not your heart too firmly upon that which may prove to be beyond your reach,’ said I. ‘The old man is rich, and will look higher.’

‘I would he were poor!’ sighed Reuben, with all the selfishness of a lover. ‘If this war last I may win myself some honour or title. Who knows? Others have done it, and why not I!’

‘Of our three from Havant,’ I remarked, ‘one is spurred onwards by ambition, and one by love. Now, what am I to do who care neither for high office nor for the face of a maid? What is to carry me into the fight?’

‘Our motives come and go, but yours is ever with you,’ said Reuben. ‘Honour and duty are the two stars, Micah, by which you have ever steered your course.’

‘Faith, Mistress Ruth has taught you to make pretty speeches,’ said I, ‘but methinks she ought to be here amid the beauty of Taunton.’

As I spoke we were riding into the market-place, which was now crowded with our troops. Round the cross were grouped a score of maidens clad in white muslin dresses with blue scarfs around their waists. As the King approached, these little maids, with much pretty nervousness, advanced to meet him, and handed him a banner which they had worked for him, and also a dainty gold-clasped Bible. Monmouth handed the flag to one of his captains, but he raised the book above his head, exclaiming that he had come there to defend the truths contained within it, at which the cheerings and acclamations broke forth with redoubled vigour. It had been expected that he might address the people from the cross, but he contented himself with waiting while the heralds proclaimed his titles to the Crown, when he gave the word to disperse, and the troops marched off to the different centres where food had been provided for them. The King and his chief officers took up their quarters in the Castle, while the Mayor and richer burgesses found bed and board for the rest. As to the common soldiers, many were billeted among the townsfolk, many others encamped in the streets and Castle grounds, while the remainder took up their dwelling among the waggons in the fields outside the city, where they lit up great fires, and had sheep roasting and beer flowing as merrily as though a march on London were but a holiday outing.

CHAPTER XXI. Of my Hand-grips with the Brandenburger

King Monmouth had called a council meeting for the evening, and summoned Colonel Decimus Saxon to attend it, with whom I went, bearing with me the small package which Sir Jacob Clancing had given over to my keeping. On arriving at the Castle we found that the King had not yet come out from his chamber, but we were shown into the great hall to await him, a fine room with lofty windows and a noble ceiling of carved woodwork. At the further end the royal arms had been erected without the bar sinister which Monmouth had formerly worn. Here were assembled the principal chiefs of the army, with many of the inferior commanders, town officers, and others who had petitions to offer. Lord Grey of Wark stood silently by the window, looking out over the countryside with a gloomy face. Wade and Holmes shook their heads and whispered in a corner. Ferguson strode about with his wig awry, shouting out exhortations and prayers in a broad Scottish accent. A few of the more gaily dressed gathered round the empty fireplace, and listened to a tale from one of their number which appeared to be shrouded in many oaths, and which was greeted with shouts of laughter. In another corner a numerous group of zealots, clad in black or russet gowns, with broad white bands and hanging mantles, stood round some favourite preacher, and discussed in an undertone Calvinistic philosophy and its relation to statecraft. A few plain homely soldiers, who were neither sectaries nor courtiers, wandered up and down, or stared out through the windows at the busy encampment upon the Castle Green. To one of these, remarkable for his great size and breadth of shoulder, Saxon led me, and touching him on the sleeve, he held out his hand as to an old friend. ‘Mein Gott!’ cried the German soldier of fortune, for it was the same man whom my companion had pointed out in the morning, ‘I thought it was you, Saxon, when I saw you by the gate, though you are even thinner than of old. How a man could suck up so much good Bavarian beer as you have done, and yet make so little flesh upon it, is more than I can verstehen. How have all things gone with you?’

‘As of old,’ said Saxon. ‘More blows than thalers, and greater need of a surgeon than of a strong-box. When did I see you last, friend? Was it not at the onfall at Nurnberg, when I led the right and you the left wing of the heavy horse?’

‘Nay,’ said Buyse. ‘I have met you in the way of business since then. Have you forgot the skirmish on the Rhine bank, when you did flash your snapphahn at me? Sapperment! Had some rascally schelm not stabbed my horse I should have swept your head off as a boy cuts thistles mit a stick.’

‘Aye, aye,’ Saxon answered composedly, ‘I had forgot it. You were taken, if I remember aright, but did afterwards brain the sentry with your fetters, and swam the Rhine under the fire of a regiment. Yet, I think that we did offer you the same terms that you were having with the others.’

‘Some such base offer was indeed made me,’ said the German sternly. ‘To which I answered that, though I sold my sword, I did not sell my honour. It is well that cavaliers of fortune should show that an engagement is with them — how do ye say it? — unbreakable until the war is over. Then by all means let him change his paymaster. Warum nicht?’

‘True, friend, true!’ replied Saxon. ‘These beggarly Italians and Swiss have made such a trade of the matter, and sold themselves so freely, body and soul, to the longest purse, that it is well that we should be nice upon points of honour. But you remember the old hand-grip which no man in the Palatinate could exchange with you? Here is my captain, Micah Clarke. Let him see how warm a North German welcome may be.’

The Brandenburger showed his white teeth in a grin as he held out his broad brown hand to me. The instant that mine was enclosed in it he suddenly bent his whole strength upon it, and squeezed my fingers together until the blood tingled in the nails, and the whole hand was limp and powerless.

‘Donnerwetter!’ he cried, laughing heartily at my start of pain and surprise. ‘It is a rough Prussian game, and the English lads have not much stomach for it.’

‘Truly, sir,’ said I, ‘it is the first time that I have seen the pastime, and I would fain practise it under so able a master.’

‘What, another!’ he cried. ‘Why, you must be still pringling from the first. Nay, if you will I shall not refuse you, though I fear it may weaken your hold upon your sword-hilt.’

He held out his hand as he spoke, and I grasped it firmly, thumb to thumb, keeping my elbow high so as to bear all my force upon it. His own trick was, as I observed, to gain command of the other hand by a great output of strength at the onset. This I prevented by myself putting out all my power. For a minute or more we stood motionless, gazing into each other's faces. Then I saw a bead of sweat trickle down his forehead, and I knew that he was beaten. Slowly his grip relaxed, and his hand grew limp and slack while my own tightened ever upon it, until he was forced in a surly, muttering voice to request that I should unhand him.

'Teufel und hexerei!' he cried, wiping away the blood which oozed from under his nails, 'I might as well put my fingers in a rat-trap. You are the first man that ever yet exchanged fair hand-grips with Anthony Buyse.'

'We breed brawn in England as well as in Brandenburg,' said Saxon, who was shaking with laughter over the German soldier's discomfiture. 'Why, I have seen that lad pick up a full-size sergeant of dragoons and throw him into a cart as though he had been a clod of earth.'

'Strong he is,' grumbled Buyse, still wringing his injured hand, 'strong as old Gotz mit de iron grip. But what good is strength alone in the handling of a weapon? It is not the force of a blow, but the way in which it is geschlagen, that makes the effect. Your sword now is heavier than mine, by the look of it, and yet my blade would bite deeper. Eh? Is not that a more soldierly sport than kinderspiel such as hand-grasping and the like?'

'He is a modest youth,' said Saxon. 'Yet I would match his stroke against yours.'

'For what?' snarled the German.

'For as much wine as we can take at a sitting.

'No small amount, either,' said Buyse; 'a brace of gallons at the least. Well, be it so. Do you accept the contest?'

'I shall do what I may,' I answered, 'though I can scarce hope to strike as heavy a blow as so old and tried a soldier.'

'Henker take your compliments,' he cried gruffly. 'It was with sweet words that you did coax my fingers into that fool-catcher of yours. Now, here is my old headpiece of Spanish steel. It has, as you can see, one or two dints of blows, and a fresh one will not hurt it. I place it here upon this oaken stool high enough to be within fair sword-sweep. Have at it, Junker, and let us see if you can leave your mark upon it!'

'Do you strike first, sir,' said I, 'since the challenge is yours.'

‘I must bruise my own headpiece to regain my soldierly credit,’ he grumbled. ‘Well, well, it has stood a cut or two in its day.’ Drawing his broadsword, he waved back the crowd who had gathered around us, while he swung the great weapon with tremendous force round his head, and brought it down with a full, clean sweep on to the smooth cap of steel. The headpiece sprang high into the air and then clattered down upon the oaken floor with a long, deep line bitten into the solid metal.

‘Well struck!’ ‘A brave stroke!’ cried the spectators. ‘It is proof steel thrice welded, and warranted to turn a sword-blade,’ one remarked, raising up the helmet to examine it, and then replacing it upon the stool.

‘I have seen my father cut through proof steel with this very sword,’ said I, drawing the fifty-year-old weapon. ‘He put rather more of his weight into it than you have done. I have heard him say that a good stroke should come from the back and loins rather than from the mere muscles of the arm.’

‘It is not a lecture we want, but a beispiel or example,’ sneered the German. ‘It is with your stroke that we have to do, and not with the teaching of your father.’

‘My stroke,’ said I, ‘is in accordance with his teaching;’ and, whistling round the sword, I brought it down with all my might and strength upon the German’s helmet. The good old Commonwealth blade shore through the plate of steel, cut the stool asunder, and buried its point two inches deep in the oaken floor. ‘It is but a trick,’ I explained. ‘I have practised it in the winter evenings at home.’

‘It is not a trick that I should care to have played upon me,’ said Lord Grey, amid a general murmur of applause and surprise. ‘Od’s bud, man, you have lived two centuries too late. What would not your thews have been worth before gunpowder put all men upon a level!’

‘Wunderbar!’ growled Buyse, ‘wunderbar! I am past my prime, young sir, and may well resign the palm of strength to you. It was a right noble stroke. It hath cost me a runlet or two of canary, and a good old helmet; but I grudge it not, for it was fairly done. I am thankful that my head was not darin. Saxon, here, used to show us some brave schwertspielerei, but he hath not the weight for such smashing blows as this.’

‘My eye is still true and my hand firm, though both are perhaps a trifle the worse for want of use,’ said Saxon, only too glad at the chance of drawing the eyes of the chiefs upon him. ‘At backsword, sword and dagger, sword and buckler, single falchion and case of falchions, mine old challenge still holds good against any comer, save only my brother Quartus, who plays as well as I do, but hath an extra half-inch in reach which gives him the vantage.’

‘I studied sword-play under Signor Contarini of Paris,’ said Lord Grey. ‘Who was your master?’

‘I have studied, my lord, under Signer Stern Necessity of Europe,’ quoth Saxon. ‘For five-and-thirty years my life has depended from day to day upon being able to cover myself with this slip of steel. Here is a small trick which showeth some nicety of eye: to throw this ring to the ceiling and catch it upon a rapier point. It seems simple, perchance, and yet is only to be attained by some practice.’

‘Simple!’ cried Wade the lawyer, a square-faced, bold-eyed man. ‘Why, the ring is but the girth of your little finger. A man might do it once by good luck, but none could ensure it.’

‘I will lay a guinea a thrust on it,’ said Saxon; and tossing the little gold circlet up into the air, he flashed out his rapier and made a pass at it. The ring rasped down the steel blade and tinkled against the hilt, fairly impaled. By a sharp motion of the wrist he shot it up to the ceiling again, where it struck a carved rafter and altered its course; but again, with a quick step forward, he got beneath it and received it on his sword-point. ‘Surely there is some cavalier present who is as apt at the trick as I am,’ he said, replacing the ring upon his finger.

‘I think, Colonel, that I could venture upon it,’ said a voice; and looking round, we found that Monmouth had entered the room and was standing quietly on the outskirts of the throng, unperceived in the general interest which our contention had excited. ‘Nay, nay, gentlemen,’ he continued pleasantly, as we uncovered and bowed with some little embarrassment; ‘how could my faithful followers be better employed than by breathing themselves in a little sword-play? I prythee lend me your rapier, Colonel.’ He drew a diamond ring from his finger, and spinning it up into the air, he transfixed it as deftly as Saxon had done. ‘I practised the trick at The Hague, where, by my faith, I had only too many hours to devote to such trifles. But how come these steel links and splinters of wood to be littered over the floor?’

‘A son of Anak hath appaired amang us,’ said Ferguson, turning his face, all scarred and reddened with the king’s evil, in my direction. ‘A Goliath o’

Gath, wha hath a stroke like untae a weaver’s beam. Hath he no the smooth face o’ a bairn and the thews’ o’ Behemoth?’

‘A shrewd blow indeed,’ King Monmouth remarked, picking up half the stool. ‘How is our champion named?’

‘He is my captain, your Majesty,’ Saxon answered, resheathing the sword which the King had handed to him; ‘Micah Clarke, a man of Hampshire birth.’

‘They breed a good old English stock in those parts,’ said Monmouth; ‘but how comes it that you are here, sir? I summoned this meeting for my own immediate household, and for the colonels of the regiments. If every captain is to be admitted into our councils, we must hold our meetings on the Castle Green, for no apartment could contain us.’

‘I ventured to come here, your Majesty,’ I replied, ‘because on my way hither I received a commission, which was that I should deliver this small but weighty package into your hands. I therefore thought it my duty to lose no time in fulfilling my errand.’

‘What is in it?’ he asked.

‘I know not,’ I answered.

Doctor Ferguson whispered a few words into the King’s ear, who laughed and held out his hand for the packet.

‘Tut! tut!’ said he. ‘The days of the Borgias and the Medicis are over, Doctor. Besides, the lad is no Italian conspirator, but hath honest blue eyes and flaxen hair as Nature’s certificate to his character. This is passing heavy — an ingot of lead, by the feel. Lend me your dagger, Colonel Holmes. It is stitched round with packthread. Ha! it is a bar of gold — solid virgin gold by all that is wonderful. Take charge of it, Wade, and see that it is added to the common fund. This little piece of metal may furnish ten pikemen. What have we here? A letter and an enclosure. “To James, Duke of Monmouth” — hum! It was written before we assumed our royal state. “Sir Jacob Glancing, late of Snellaby Hall, sends greeting and a pledge of affection. Carry out the good work. A hundred more such ingots await you when you have crossed Salisbury Plain.” Bravely promised, Sir Jacob! I would that you had sent them. Well, gentlemen, ye see how support and tokens of goodwill come pouring in upon us. Is not the tide upon the turn? Can the usurper hope to hold his own? Will his men stand by him? Within a month or less I shall see ye all gathered round me at Westminster, and no duty will then be so pleasing to me as to see that ye are all, from the highest to the lowest, rewarded for your loyalty to your monarch in this the hour of his darkness and his danger.’

A murmur of thanks rose up from the courtiers at this gracious speech, but the German plucked at Saxon’s sleeve and whispered, ‘He hath his warm fit upon him. You shall see him cold anon.’

‘Fifteen hundred men have joined me here where I did but expect a thousand at the most,’ the King continued. ‘If we had high hopes when we landed at Lyme Cobb with eighty at our back, what should we think now when we find ourselves in the chief city of Somerset with eight thousand brave men around us? ‘Tis but one other affair like that at Axminster, and my uncle’s power will go down like a house of cards. But gather round the table, gentlemen, and we shall discuss matters in due form.’

‘There is yet a scrap of paper which you have not read, sire,’ said Wade, picking up a little slip which had been enclosed in the note.

‘It is a rhyming catch or the posy of a ring,’ said Monmouth, glancing at it. ‘What are we to make of this?

“When thy star is in trine,
Between darkness and shine,
Duke Monmouth, Duke Monmouth,
Beware of the Rhine!”

Thy star in trine! What tomfoolery is this?’

‘If it please your Majesty,’ said I, ‘I have reason to believe that the man who sent you this message is one of those who are deeply skilled in the arts of divination, and who pretend from the motions of the celestial bodies to foretell the fates of men.’

‘This gentleman is right, sir,’ remarked Lord Grey. ‘“Thy star in trine” is an astrological term, which signifieth when your natal planet shall be in a certain quarter of the heavens. The verse is of the nature of a prophecy. The Chaldeans and Egyptians of old are said to have attained much skill in the art, but I confess that I have no great opinion of those latter-day prophets who busy themselves in answering the foolish questions of every housewife.’

‘And tell by Venus and the moon,
Who stole a thimble or a spoon.’

muttered Saxon, quoting from his favourite poem.

‘Why, here are our Colonels catching the rhyming complaint,’ said the King, laughing. ‘We shall be dropping the sword and taking to the harp anon, as Alfred did in these very parts. Or I shall become a king of bards and trouveurs, like good King Rene of Provence. But, gentlemen, if this be indeed a prophecy, it should, methinks, bode well for our enterprise. It is true that I am warned against the Rhine, but there is little prospect of our fighting this quarrel upon its banks.'

'Worse luck!' murmured the German, under his breath.

'We may, therefore, thank this Sir Jacob and his giant messenger for his forecast as well as for his gold. But here comes the worthy Mayor of Taunton, the oldest of our councillors and the youngest of our knights. Captain Clarke, I desire you to stand at the inside of the door and to prevent intrusion. What passes amongst us will, I am well convinced, be safe in your keeping.'

I bowed and took up my post as ordered, while the council-men and commanders gathered round the great oaken table which ran down the centre of the hall. The mellow evening light was streaming through the three western windows, while the distant babble of the soldiers upon the Castle Green sounded like the sleepy drone of insects. Monmouth paced with quick uneasy steps up and down the further end of the room until all were seated, when he turned towards them and addressed them.

'You will have surmised, gentlemen,' he said, 'that I have called you together to-day that I might have the benefit of your collective wisdom in determining what our next steps should be. We have now marched some forty miles into our kingdom, and we have met wherever we have gone with the warm welcome which we expected. Close upon eight thousand men follow our standards, and as many more have been turned away for want of arms. We have twice met the enemy, with the effect that we have armed ourselves with their muskets and field-pieces. From first to last there hath been nothing which has not prospered with us. We must look to it that the future be as successful as the past. To insure this I have called ye together, and I now ask ye to give me your opinions of our situation, leaving me after I have listened to your views to form our plan of action. There are statesmen among ye, and there are soldiers among ye, and there are godly men among ye who may chance to get a flash of light when statesman and soldier are in the dark. Speak fearlessly, then, and let me know what is in your minds.'

From my central post by the door I could see the lines of faces on either side of the board, the solemn close-shaven Puritans, sunburned soldiers, and white-wigged moustachioed courtiers. My eyes rested particularly upon Ferguson's scorbutic features, Saxon's hard aquiline profile, the German's burly face, and the peaky thoughtful countenance of the Lord of Wark.

'If naebody else will gie an opeenion,' cried the fanatical Doctor, 'I'll een speak mysel' as led by the inward voice. For have I no worked in the cause and slaved in it, much enduring and suffering mony things at the honds o' the froward, whereby my ain speerit hath plentifully fructified? Have I no been bruised as in a wine-press, and cast oot wi' hissing and scorning into waste places?'

'We know your merits and your sufferings, Doctor,' said the King. 'The question before us is as to our course of action.'

'Was there no a voice heard in the East?' cried the old Whig. 'Was there no a soond as o' a great crying, the crying for a broken covenant and a sinful generation? Whence came the cry? Wha's was the voice? Was it no that o' the man Robert Ferguson, wha raised himsel' up against the great ones in the land, and wouldna be appeased?'

'Aye, aye, Doctor,' said Monmouth impatiently. 'Speak to the point, or give place to another.'

'I shall mak' mysel' clear, your Majesty. Have we no heard that Argyle is cutten off? And why was he cutten off? Because he hadna due faith in the workings o' the Almighty, and must needs reject the help o' the children o' light in favour o' the bare-legged spawn o' Prelacy, wha are half Pagan, half Popish. Had he walked in the path o' the Lord he wudna be lying in the Tolbooth o' Edinburgh wi' the tow or the axe before him. Why did he no gird up his loins and march straight onwards wi' the banner o' light, instead o' dallying here and biding there like a half-hairted Didymus? And the same or waur will fa' upon us if we dinna march on intae the land and plant our ensigns afore the wicked toun o' London — the toun where the Lord's wark is tae be done, and the tares tae be separated frae the wheat, and piled up for the burning.'

'Your advice, in short, is that we march on!' said Monmouth.

'That we march on, your Majesty, and that we prepare oorselves tae be the vessels o' grace, and forbear frae polluting the cause o' the Gospel by wearing the livery o' the devil' — here he glared at a gaily attired cavalier at the other side of the table—'or by the playing o' cairds, the singing o' profane songs and the swearing o' oaths, all which are nichtly done by members o' this army, wi' the effect o' giving much scandal tae God's ain folk.'

A hum of assent and approval rose up from the more Puritan members of the council at this expression of opinion, while the courtiers glanced at each other and curled their lips in derision. Monmouth took two or three turns and then called for another opinion.

'You, Lord Grey,' he said, 'are a soldier and a man of experience. What is your advice? Should we halt here or push forward towards London?'

'To advance to the East would, in my humble judgment, be fatal to us,' Grey answered, speaking slowly, with the manner of a man who has thought long and deeply before delivering an opinion. 'James Stuart is strong in horse, and we have none. We can hold our own amongst hedgerows or in broken country, but what chance could we have in the middle of Salisbury Plain? With the dragoons round us we should be like a flock of sheep amid a pack of wolves. Again, every step which we take towards London removes us from our natural vantage ground, and from the fertile country which supplies our necessities, while it strengthens our enemy by shortening the distance he has to convey his troops and his victuals. Unless, therefore, we hear of some great outbreak elsewhere, or of some general movement in London in our favour, we would do best to hold our ground and wait an attack.'

'You argue shrewdly and well, my Lord Grey,' said the King. 'But how long are we to wait for this outbreak which never comes, and for this support which is ever promised and never provided? We have now been seven long days in England, and during that time of all the House of Commons no single man hath come over to us, and of the lords none gave my Lord Grey, who was himself an exile. Not a baron or an earl, and only one baronet, hath taken up arms for me. Where are the men whom Danvers and Wildman promised me from London? Where are the brisk boys of the City who were said to be longing for me? Where are the breakings out from Berwick to Portland which they foretold? Not a man hath moved save only these good peasants. I have been deluded, ensnared, trapped — trapped by vile agents who have led me into the shambles.' He paced up and down, wringing his hands and biting his lips, with despair stamped upon his face. I observed that Buyse smiled and whispered something to Saxon — a hint, I suppose, that this was the cold fit of which he spoke.

‘Tell me, Colonel Buyse,’ said the King, mastering his emotion by a strong effort. ‘Do you, as a soldier, agree with my Lord Grey?’

‘Ask Saxon, your Majesty,’ the German answered. ‘My opinion in a Raths-Versammlung is, I have observed, ever the same as his.’

‘Then we turn to you, Colonel Saxon,’ said Monmouth. ‘We have in this council a party who are in favour of an advance and a party who wish to stand their ground. Their weight and numbers are, methinks, nearly equal. If you had the casting vote how would you decide?’ All eyes were bent upon our leader, for his martial bearing, and the respect shown to him by the veteran Buyse, made it likely that his opinion might really turn the scale. He sat for a few moments in silence with his hands before his face.

‘I will give my opinion, your Majesty,’ he said at last. ‘Feversham and Churchill are making for Salisbury with three thousand foot, and they have pushed on eight hundred of the Blue Guards, and two or three dragoon regiments. We should, therefore, as Lord Grey says, have to fight on Salisbury Plain, and our foot armed with a medley of weapons could scarce make head against their horse. All is possible to the Lord, as Dr. Ferguson wisely says. We are as grains of dust in the hollow of His hand. Yet He hath given us brains wherewith to choose the better course, and if we neglect it we must suffer the consequence of our folly.’

Ferguson laughed contemptuously, and breathed out a prayer, but many of the other Puritans nodded their heads to acknowledge that this was not an unreasonable view to take of it.

‘On the other hand, sire,’ Saxon continued, ‘it appears to me that to remain here is equally impossible. Your Majesty’s friends throughout England would lose all heart if the army lay motionless and struck no blow. The rustics would flock off to their wives and homes. Such an example is catching. I have seen a great army thaw away like an icicle in the sunshine. Once gone, it is no easy matter to collect them again. To keep them we must employ them. Never let them have an idle minute. Drill them. March them. Exercise them. Work them. Preach to them. Make them obey God and their Colonel. This cannot be done in snug quarters. They must travel. We cannot hope to end this business until we get to London. London, then, must be our goal. But there are many ways of reaching it. You have, sire, as I have heard, many friends at Bristol and in the Midlands. If I might advise, I should say let us march round in that direction. Every day that passes will serve to swell your forces and improve your troops, while all will feel something is astirring. Should we take Bristol — and I hear that the works are not very strong — it would give us a very good command of shipping, and a rare centre from which to act. If all goes well with us, we could make our way to London through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. In the meantime I might suggest that a day of fast and humiliation be called to bring down a blessing on the cause.'

This address, skilfully compounded of worldly wisdom and of spiritual zeal, won the applause of the whole council, and especially that of King Monmouth, whose melancholy vanished as if by magic.

'By my faith, Colonel,' said he, 'you make it all as clear as day. Of course, if we make ourselves strong in the West, and my uncle is threatened with disaffection elsewhere, he will have no chance to hold out against us. Should he wish to fight us upon our own ground, he must needs drain his troops from north, south, and east, which is not to be thought of. We may very well march to London by way of Bristol.'

'I think that the advice is good,' Lord Grey observed; 'but I should like to ask Colonel Saxon what warrant he hath for saying that Churchill and Feversham are on their way, with three thousand regular foot and several regiments of horse?'

'The word of an officer of the Blues with whom I conversed at Salisbury,' Saxon answered. 'He confided in me, believing me to be one of the Duke of Beaufort's household. As to the horse, one party pursued us on Salisbury Plain with bloodhounds, and another attacked us not twenty miles from here and lost a score of troopers and a cornet.'

'We heard something of the brush,' said the King. 'It was bravely done. But if these men are so close we have no great time for preparation.'

'Their foot cannot be here before a week,' said the Mayor. 'By that time we might be behind the walls of Bristol.'

'There is one point which might be urged,' observed Wade the lawyer. 'We have, as your Majesty most truly says, met with heavy discouragement in the fact that no noblemen and few commoners of repute have declared for us. The reason is, I opine, that each doth wait for his neighbour to make a move. Should one or two come over the others would soon follow. How, then, are we to bring a duke or two to our standards?'

'There's the question, Master Wade,' said Monmouth, shaking his head despondently.

‘I think that it might be done,’ continued the Whig lawyer. ‘Mere proclamations addressed to the commonalty will not catch these gold fish. They are not to be angled for with a naked hook. I should recommend that some form of summons or writ be served upon each of them, calling upon them to appear in our camp within a certain date under pain of high treason.’

‘There spake the legal mind,’ quoth King Monmouth, with a laugh. ‘But you have omitted to tell us how the said writ or summons is to be conveyed to these same delinquents.’

‘There is the Duke of Beaufort,’ continued Wade, disregarding the King’s objection. ‘He is President of Wales, and he is, as your Majesty knows, lieutenant of four English counties. His influence overshadows the whole West. He hath two hundred horses in his stables at Badminton, and a thousand men, as I have heard, sit down at his tables every day. Why should not a special effort be made to gain over such a one, the more so as we intend to march in his direction?’

‘Henry, Duke of Beaufort, is unfortunately already in arms against his sovereign,’ said Monmouth gloomily.

‘He is, sire, but he may be induced to turn in your favour the weapon which he hath raised against you. He is a Protestant. He is said to be a Whig. Why should we not send a message to him? Flatter his pride. Appeal to his religion. Coax and threaten him. Who knows? He may have private grievances of which we know nothing, and may be ripe for such a move.’

‘Your counsel is good, Wade,’ said Lord Grey, ‘but methinks his Majesty hath asked a pertinent question. Your messenger would, I fear, find himself swinging upon one of the Badminton oaks if the Duke desired to show his loyalty to James Stuart. Where are we to find a man who is wary enough and bold enough for such a mission, without risking one of our leaders, who could be ill-spared at such a time?’

‘It is true,’ said the King. ‘It were better not to venture it at all than to do it in a clumsy and halting fashion. Beaufort would think that it was a plot not to gain him over, but to throw discredit upon him. But what means our giant at the door by signing to us?’

‘If it please your Majesty,’ I asked, ‘have I permission to speak?’

‘We would fain hear you, Captain,’ he answered graciously. ‘If your understanding is in any degree correspondent to your strength, your opinion should be of weight.’

‘Then, your Majesty,’ said I, ‘I would offer myself as a fitting messenger in this matter. My father bid me spare neither life nor limb in this quarrel, and if this honourable council thinks that the Duke may be gained over, I am ready to guarantee that the message shall be conveyed to him if man and horse can do it.’

‘I’ll warrant that no better herald could be found,’ cried Saxon. ‘The lad hath a cool head and a staunch heart.’

‘Then, young sir, we shall accept your loyal and gallant offer,’ said Monmouth. ‘Are ye all agreed, gentlemen, upon the point?’ A murmur of assent rose from the company.

‘You shall draw up the paper, Wade. Offer him money, a seniority amongst the dukes, the perpetual Presidentship of Wales — what you will, if you can but shake him. If not, sequestration, exile, and everlasting infamy. And, hark ye! you can enclose a copy of the papers drawn up by Van Brunow, which prove the marriage of my mother, together with the attestations of the witnesses. Have them ready by to-morrow at daybreak, when the messenger may start.’ (Note H, Appendix.)

‘They shall be ready, your Majesty,’ said Wade.

‘In that case, gentlemen,’ continued King Monmouth, ‘I may now dismiss ye to your posts. Should anything fresh arise I shall summon ye again, that I may profit by your wisdom. Here we shall stay, if Sir Stephen Timewell will have us, until the men are refreshed and the recruits enrolled. We shall then make our way Bristolwards, and see what luck awaits us in the North. If Beaufort comes over all will be well. Farewell, my kind friends! I need not tell ye to be diligent and faithful.’

The council rose at the King’s salutation, and bowing to him they began to file out of the Castle hall. Several of the members clustered round me with hints for my journey or suggestions as to my conduct.

‘He is a proud, froward man,’ said one. ‘Speak humbly to him or he will never hearken to your message, but will order you to be scourged out of his presence.’

‘Nay, nay!’ cried another. ‘He is hot, but he loves a man that is a man. Speak boldly and honestly to him, and he is more like to listen to reason.’

‘Speak as the Lord shall direct you,’ said a Puritan. ‘It is His message which you bear as well as the King’s.’

‘Entice him out alone upon some excuse,’ said Buyse, ‘then up and away mit him upon your crupper. Hagelsturm! that would be a proper game.’

‘Leave him alone,’ cried Saxon. ‘The lad hath as much sense as any of ye. He will see which way the cat jumps. Come, friend, let us make our way back to our men.’

‘I am sorry, indeed, to lose you,’ he said, as we threaded our way through the throng of peasants and soldiers upon the Castle Green. ‘Your company will miss you sorely. Lockarby must see to the two. If all goes well you should be back in three or four days. I need not tell you that there is a real danger. If the Duke wishes to prove to James that he would not allow himself to be tampered with, he can only do it by punishing the messenger, which as lieutenant of a county he hath power to do in times of civil commotion. He is a hard man if all reports be true. On the other hand, if you should chance to succeed it may lay the foundations of your fortunes and be the means of saving Monmouth. He needs help, by the Lord Harry! Never have I seen such a rabble as this army of his. Buyse says that they fought lustily at this ruffle at Axminster, but he is of one mind with me, that a few whiffs of shot and cavalry charges would scatter them over the countryside. Have you any message to leave?’

‘None, save my love to my mother,’ said I.

‘It is well. Should you fall in any unfair way, I shall not forget his Grace of Beaufort, and the next of his gentlemen who comes in my way shall hang as high as Haman. And now you had best make for your chamber, and have as good a slumber as you may, since to-morrow at cock-crow begins your new mission.’

CHAPTER XXII. Of the News from Havant

Having given my orders that Covenant should be saddled and bridled by daybreak, I had gone to my room and was preparing for a long night's rest, when Sir Gervas, who slept in the same apartment, came dancing in with a bundle of papers waving over his head.

'Three guesses, Clarke!' he cried. 'What would you most desire?'

'Letters from Havant,' said I eagerly.

'Right,' he answered, throwing them into my lap. 'Three of them, and not a woman's hand among them. Sink me, if I can understand what you have been doing all your life.

"How can youthful heart resign
Lovely woman, sparkling wine?"

But you are so lost in your news that you have not observed my transformation.'

'Why, wherever did you get these?' I asked in astonishment, for he was attired in a delicate plum-coloured suit with gold buttons and trimmings, set off by silken hosen and Spanish leather shoes with roses on the instep.

'It smacks more of the court than of the camp,' quoth Sir Gervas, rubbing his hands and glancing down at himself with some satisfaction. 'I am also revictualled in the matter of ratafia and orange-flower water, together with two new wigs, a bob and a court, a pound of the Imperial snuff from the sign of the Black Man, a box of De Crepigny's hair powder, my foxskin muff, and several other necessaries. But I hinder you in your reading.'

'I have seen enough to tell me that all is well at home,' I answered, glancing over my father's letter. 'But how came these things?'

'Some horsemen have come in from Petersfield, bearing them with them. As to my little box, which a fair friend of mine in town packed for me, it was to be forwarded to Bristol, where I am now supposed to be, and should be were it not for my good fortune in meeting your party. It chanced to find its way, however, to the Bruton inn, and the good woman there, whom I had conciliated, found means to send it after me. It is a good rule to go upon, Clarke, in this earthly pilgrimage, always to kiss the landlady. It may seem a small thing, and yet life is made up of small things. I have few fixed principles, I fear, but two there are which I can say from my heart that I never transgress. I always carry a corkscrew, and I never forget to kiss the landlady.'

'From what I have seen of you,' said I, laughing, 'I could be warranty that those two duties are ever fulfilled.'

'I have letters, too,' said he, sitting on the side of the bed and turning over a sheaf of papers. '"Your broken-hearted Araminta." Hum! The wench cannot know that I am ruined or her heart would speedily be restored. What's this? A challenge to match my bird Julius against my Lord Dorchester's cockerel for a hundred guineas. Faith! I am too busy backing the Monmouth rooster for the champion stakes. Another asking me to chase the stag at Epping. Zounds! had I not cleared off I should have been run down myself, with a pack of bandog bailiffs at my heels. A dunning letter from my clothier. He can afford to lose this bill. He hath had many a long one out of me. An offer of three thousand from little Dicky Chichester. No, no, Dicky, it won't do. A gentleman can't live upon his friends. None the less grateful. How now? From Mrs. Butterworth! No money for three weeks! Bailiffs in the house! Now, curse me, if this is not too bad!'

'What is the matter?' I asked, glancing up from my own letters. The baronet's pale face had taken a tinge of red, and he was striding furiously up and down the bedroom with a letter crumpled up in his hand.

'It is a burning shame, Clarke,' he cried. 'Hang it, she shall have my watch. It is by Tompion, of the sign of the Three Crowns in Paul's Yard, and cost a hundred when new. It should keep her for a few months. Mortimer shall measure swords with me for this. I shall write villain upon him with my rapier's point.'

'I have never seen you ruffled before,' said I.

'No,' he answered, laughing. 'Many have lived with me for years and would give me a certificate for temper. But this is too much. Sir Edward Mortimer is my mother's younger brother, Clarke, but he is not many years older than myself. A proper, strait-laced, soft-voiced lad he has ever been, and, as a consequence, he throve in the world, and joined land to land after the scriptural fashion. I had befriended him from my purse in the old days, but he soon came to be a richer man than I, for all that he gained he kept, whereas all I got — well, it went off like the smoke of the pipe which you are lighting. When I found that all was up with me I received from Mortimer an advance, which was sufficient to take me according to my wish over to Virginia, together with a horse and a personal outfit. There was some chance, Clarke, of the Jerome acres going to him should aught befall me, so that he was not averse to helping me off to a land of fevers and scalping knives. Nay, never shake your head, my dear country lad, you little know the wiles of the world.'

'Give him credit for the best until the worst is proved,' said I, sitting up in bed smoking, with my letters littered about in front of me.

'The worst *is* proved,' said Sir Gervas, with a darkening face. 'I have, as I said, done Mortimer some turns which he might remember, though it did not become me to remind him of them. This Mistress Butterworth is mine old wet-nurse, and it hath been the custom of the family to provide for her. I could not bear the thought that in the ruin of my fortune she should lose the paltry guinea or so a week which stood between her and hunger. My only request to Mortimer, therefore, made on the score of old friendship, was that he should continue this pittance, I promising that should I prosper I would return whatever he should disburse. The mean-hearted villain wrung my hand and swore that it should be so. How vile a thing is human nature, Clarke! For the sake of this paltry sum he, a rich man, hath broken his pledge, and left this poor woman to starve. But he shall answer to me for it. He thinks that I am on the Atlantic. If I march back to London with these brave boys I shall disturb the tenor of his sainted existence. Meanwhile I shall trust to sun-dials, and off goes my watch to Mother Butterworth. Bless her ample bosoms! I have tried many liquors, but I dare bet that the first was the most healthy. But how of your own letters? You have been frowning and smiling like an April day.'

'There is one from my father, with a few words attached from my mother,' said I. 'The second is from an old friend of mine, Zachariah Palmer, the village carpenter. The third is from Solomon Sprent, a retired seaman, for whom I have an affection and respect.'

'You have a rare trio of newsmen. I would I knew your father, Clarke, he must, from what you say, be a stout bit of British oak. I spoke even now of your knowing little of the world, but indeed it may be that in your village you can see mankind without the varnish, and so come to learn more of the good of human nature. Varnish or none, the bad will ever peep through. Now this carpenter and seaman show themselves no doubt for what they are. A man might know my friends of the court for a lifetime, and never come upon their real selves, nor would it perhaps repay the search when you had come across it. Sink me, but I wax philosophical, which is the old refuge of the ruined man. Give me a tub, and I shall set up in the Piazza of Covent Garden, and be the Diogenes of London. I would not be wealthy again, Micah! How goes the old lilt? —

“Our money shall never indite us
Or drag us to Goldsmith Hall,
No pirates or wrecks can affright us.
We that have no estates
Fear no plunder or rates,
Nor care to lock gates.
He that lies on the ground cannot fall!”

That last would make a good motto for an almshouse.’

‘You will have Sir Stephen up,’ said I warningly, for he was carolling away at the pitch of his lungs.

‘Never fear! He and his ‘prentices were all at the broad-sword exercise in the hall as I came by. It is worth something to see the old fellow stamp, and swing his sword, and cry, “Ha!” on the down-cut. Mistress Ruth and friend Lockarby are in the tapestried room, she spinning and he reading aloud one of those entertaining volumes which she would have me read. Methinks she hath taken his conversion in hand, which may end in his converting her from a maid into a wife. And so you go to the Duke of Beaufort! Well, I would that I could travel with you, but Saxon will not hear of it, and my musqueteers must be my first care. God send you safe back! Where is my jasmine powder and the patch-box? Read me your letters if there be aught in them of interest. I have been splitting a flask with our gallant Colonel at his inn, and he hath told me enough of your home at Havant to make me wish to know more.’

‘This one is somewhat grave,’ said I.

‘Nay, I am in the humour for grave things. Have at it, if it contain the whole Platonic philosophy.’

‘‘Tis from the venerable carpenter who hath for many years been my adviser and friend. He is one who is religious without being sectarian, philosophic without being a partisan, and loving without being weak.’

‘A paragon, truly!’ exclaimed Sir Gervas, who was busy with his eyebrow brush.

‘This is what he saith,’ I continued, and proceeded to read the very letter which I now read to you.

'"Having heard from your father, my dear lad, that there was some chance of being able to send a letter to you, I have written this, and am now sending it under the charge of the worthy John Packingham, of Chichester, who is bound for the West. I trust that you are now safe with Monmouth's army, and that you have received honourable appointment therein. I doubt not that you will find among your comrades some who are extreme sectaries, and others who are scoffers and disbelievers. Be advised by me, friend, and avoid both the one and the other. For the zealot is a man who not only defends his own right of worship, wherein he hath justice, but wishes to impose upon the consciences of others, by which he falls into the very error against which he fights. The mere brainless scoffer is, on the other hand, lower than the beast of the field, since he lacks the animal's self-respect and humble resignation."'

'My faith!' cried the Baronet, 'the old gentleman hath a rough side to his tongue.'

'"Let us take religion upon its broadest base, for the truth must be broader than aught which we can conceive. The presence of a table doth prove the existence of a carpenter, and so the presence of a universe proves the existence of a universe Maker, call Him by what name you will. So far the ground is very firm beneath us, without either inspiration, teaching, or any aid whatever. Since, then, there *must* be a world Maker, let us judge of His nature by His work. We cannot observe the glories of the firmament, its infinite extent, its beauty, and the Divine skill wherewith every plant and animal hath its wants cared for, without seeing that He is full of wisdom, intelligence, and power. We are still, you will perceive, upon solid ground, without having to call to our aid aught save pure reason."'

'"Having got so far, let us inquire to what end the universe was made, and we put upon it. The teaching of all nature shows that it must be to the end of improvement and upward growth, the increase in real virtue, in knowledge, and in wisdom. Nature is a silent preacher which holds forth upon week-days as on Sabbaths. We see the acorn grow into the oak, the egg into the bird, the maggot into the butterfly. Shall we doubt, then, that the human soul, the most precious of all things, is also upon the upward path? And how can the soul progress save through the cultivation of virtue and self-mastery? What other way is there? There is none. We may say with confidence, then, that we are placed here to increase in knowledge and in virtue."'

'"This is the core of all religion, and this much needs no faith in the acceptance. It is as true and as capable of proof as one of those exercises of Euclid which we have gone over together. On this common ground men have raised many different buildings. Christianity, the creed of Mahomet, the creed of the Easterns, have all the same essence. The difference lies in the forms and the details. Let us hold to our own Christian creed, the beautiful, often-professed, and seldom-practised doctrine of love, but let us not despise our fellow-men, for we are all branches from the common root of truth."'

'"Man comes out of darkness into light. He tarries awhile and then passes into darkness again. Micah, lad, the days are passing, mine as well as thine. Let them not be wasted. They are few in number. What says Petrarch?' To him that enters, life seems infinite; to him that departs, nothing.' Let every day, every hour, be spent in furthering the Creator's end — in getting out whatever power for good there is in you. What is pain, or work, or trouble? The cloud that passes over the sun. But the result of work well done is everything. It is eternal. It lives and waxes stronger through the centuries. Pause not for rest. The rest will come when the hour of work is past."'

'"May God protect and guard you! There is no great news. The Portsmouth garrison hath marched to the West. Sir John Lawson, the magistrate, hath been down here threatening your father and others, but he can do little for want of proofs. Church and Dissent are at each other's throats as ever. Truly the stern law of Moses is more enduring than the sweet words of Christ. Adieu, my dear lad! All good wishes from your grey-headed friend, ZACHARIAH PALMER."'

'Od's fish!' cried Sir Gervas, as I folded up the letter, 'I have heard Stillingfleet and Tenison, but I never listened to a better sermon. This is a bishop disguised as a carpenter. The crozier would suit his hand better than the plane. But how of our seaman friend? Is he a tarpaulin theologian — a divine among the tarry-breeks?'

'Solomon Sprent is a very different man, though good enough in his way,' said I. 'But you shall judge him from his letter.'

'"Master Clarke. Sir, — When last we was in company I had run in under the batteries on cutting-out service, while you did stand on and off in the channel and wait signals. Having stopped to refit and to overhaul my prize, which proved to be in proper trim alow and aloft—"'

'What the devil doth he mean?' asked Sir Gervas.

‘It is a maid of whom he talks — Phoebe Dawson, the sister of the blacksmith. He hath scarce put foot on land for nigh forty years, and can as a consequence only speak in this sea jargon, though he fancies that he uses as pure King’s English as any man in Hampshire.’

‘Proceed, then,’ quoth the Baronet.

‘“Having also read her the articles of war, I explained to her the conditions under which we were to sail in company on life’s voyage, namely:”’

‘“First. She to obey signals without question as soon as received.”’

‘“Second. She to steer by my reckoning.”’

‘“Third. She to stand by me as true consort in foul weather, battle, or shipwreck.”’

‘“Fourth. She to run under my guns if assailed by picaroons, privateeros, or garda-costas.”’

‘“Fifth. Me to keep her in due repair, dry-dock her at intervals, and see that she hath her allowance of coats of paint, streamers, and bunting, as befits a saucy pleasure boat.”’

‘“Sixth. Me to take no other craft in tow, and if any be now attached, to cut their hawsers.”’

‘“Seventh. Me to revictual her day by day.”’

‘“Eighth. Should she chance to spring a leak, or be blown on her beam ends by the winds of misfortune, to stand by her and see her pumped out or righted.”’

‘“Ninth. To fly the Protestant ensign at the peak during life’s voyage, and to lay our course for the great harbour, in the hope that moorings and ground to swing may be found for two British-built crafts when laid up for eternity.”’

‘“‘Twas close on eight-bells before these articles were signed and sealed. When I headed after you I could not so much as catch a glimpse of your topsail. Soon after I heard as you had gone a-soldiering, together with that lean, rakish, long-sparred, picaroon-like craft which I have seen of late in the village. I take it unkind of you that you have not so much as dipped ensign to me on leaving. But perchance the tide was favourable, and you could not tarry. Had I not been jury-rigged, with one of my spars shot away, I should have dearly loved to have strapped on my hanger and come with you to smell gunpowder once more. I would do it now, timber-toe and all, were it not for my consort, who might claim it as a breach of the articles, and so sheer off. I must follow the light on her poop until we are fairly joined."'

'"Farewell, mate! In action, take an old sailor's advice. Keep the weather-gauge and board! Tell that to your admiral on the day of battle. Whisper it in his ear. Say to him, 'Keep the weather-gauge and board!' Tell him also to strike quick, strike hard, and keep on striking. That's the word of Christopher Mings, and a better man has not been launched, though he did climb in through the hawse-pipe. — Yours to command, SOLOMON SPRENT."'

Sir Gervas had been chuckling to himself during the reading of this epistle, but at the last part we both broke out a-laughing.

'Land or sea, he will have it that battles are fought in ships,' said the Baronet. 'You should have had that sage piece of advice for Monmouth's council to-day. Should he ever ask your opinion it must be, "Keep the weather-gauge and board!"'

'I must to sleep,' said I, laying aside my pipe. 'I should be on the road by daybreak.'

'Nay, I prythee, complete your kindness by letting me have a glimpse of your respected parent, the Roundhead.'

''Tis but a few lines,' I answered. 'He was ever short of speech. But if they interest you, you shall hear them. "I am sending this by a godly man, my dear son, to say that I trust that you are bearing yourself as becomes you. In all danger and difficulty trust not to yourself, but ask help from on high. If you are in authority, teach your men to sing psalms when they fall on, as is the good old custom. In action give point rather than edge. A thrust must beat a cut. Your mother and the others send their affection to you. Sir John Lawson hath been down here like a ravening wolf, but could find no proof against me. John Marchbank, of Bedhampton, is cast into prison. Truly Antichrist reigns in the land, but the kingdom of light is at hand. Strike lustily for truth and conscience. — Your loving father, JOSEPH CLARKE."'

'"Postscriptum (from my mother). — I trust that you will remember what I have said concerning your hosen and also the broad linen collars, which you will find in the bag. It is little over a week since you left, yet it seems a year. When cold or wet, take ten drops of Daffy's elixir in a small glass of strong waters. Should your feet chafe, rub tallow on the inside of your boots. Commend me to Master Saxon and to Master Lockarby, if he be with you. His father was mad at his going, for he hath a great brewing going forward, and none to mind the mash-tub. Ruth hath baked a cake, but the oven hath played her false, and it is lumpy in the inside. A thousand kisses, dear heart, from your loving mother, M. C.”’

‘A right sensible couple,’ quoth Sir Gervas, who, having completed his toilet, had betaken him to his couch. ‘I now begin to understand your manufacture, Clarke. I see the threads that are used in the weaving of you. Your father looks to your spiritual wants. Your mother concerns herself with the material. Yet the old carpenter’s preaching is, methinks, more to your taste. You are a rank latitudinarian, man. Sir Stephen would cry fie upon you, and Joshua Pettigrue abjure you! Well, out with the light, for we should both be stirring at cock-crow. That is our religion at present.’

‘Early Christians,’ I suggested, and we both laughed as we settled down to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII. Of the Snare on the Weston Road

Just after sunrise I was awoke by one of the Mayor’s servants, who brought word that the Honourable Master Wade was awaiting me downstairs. Having dressed and descended, I found him seated by the table in the sitting-room with papers and wafer-box, sealing up the missive which I was to carry. He was a small, worn, grey-faced man, very erect in his bearing and sudden in his speech, with more of the soldier than of the lawyer in his appearance.

‘So,’ said he, pressing his seal above the fastening of the string, ‘I see that your horse is ready for you outside. You had best make your way round by Nether Stowey and the Bristol Channel, for we have heard that the enemy’s horse guard the roads on the far side of Wells. Here is your packet.’

I bowed and placed it in the inside of my tunic.

‘It is a written order as suggested in the council. The Duke’s reply may be written, or it may be by word of mouth. In either case guard it well. This packet contains also a copy of the depositions of the clergyman at The Hague, and of the other witnesses who saw Charles of England marry Lucy Walters, the mother of his Majesty. Your mission is one of such importance that the whole success of our enterprise may turn upon it. See that you serve the paper upon Beaufort in person, and not through any intermediary, or it might not stand in a court of law.’

I promised to do so if possible.

‘I should advise you also,’ he continued, ‘to carry sword and pistol as a protection against the chance dangers of the road, but to discard your head-piece and steel-front as giving you too warlike an aspect for a peaceful messenger.’

‘I had already come to that resolve,’ said I.

‘There is nothing more to be said, Captain,’ said the lawyer, giving me his hand. ‘May all good fortune go with you. Keep a still tongue and a quick ear. Watch keenly how all things go. Mark whose face is gloomy and whose content. The Duke may be at Bristol, but you had best make for his seat at Badminton. Our sign of the day is Tewkesbury.’

Thanking my instructor for his advice I went out and mounted Covenant, who pawed and champed at his bit in his delight at getting started once more. Few of the townsmen were stirring, though here and there a night-bonneted head stared out at me through a casement. I took the precaution of walking the horse very quietly until we were some distance from the house, for I had told Reuben nothing of my intended journey, and I was convinced that if he knew of it neither discipline, nor even his new ties of love, would prevent him from coming with me. Covenant’s iron-shod feet rang sharply, in spite of my care, upon the cobblestones, but looking back I saw that the blinds of my faithful friend’s room were undrawn, and that all seemed quiet in the house. I shook my bridle, therefore, and rode at a brisk trot through the silent streets, which were still strewn with faded flowers and gay with streamers. At the north gate a guard of half a company was stationed, who let me pass upon hearing the word. Once beyond the old walls I found myself out on the country side, with my face to the north and a clear road in front of me.

It was a blithesome morning. The sun was rising over the distant hills, and heaven and earth were ruddy and golden. The trees in the wayside orchards were full of swarms of birds, who chattered and sang until the air was full of their piping. There was lightsomeness and gladness in every breath. The wistful-eyed red Somerset kine stood along by the hedgerows, casting great shadows down the fields and gazing at me as I passed. Farm horses leaned over wooden gates, and snorted a word of greeting to their glossy-coated brother. A great herd of snowy-fleeced sheep streamed towards us over the hillside and frisked and gambolled in the sunshine. All was innocent life, from the lark which sang on high to the little shrew-mouse which ran amongst the ripening corn, or the martin which dashed away at the sound of my approach. All alive and all innocent. What are we to think, my dear children, when we see the beasts of the field full of kindness and virtue and gratitude? Where is this superiority of which we talk?

From the high ground to the north I looked back upon the sleeping town, with the broad edging of tents and waggons, which showed how suddenly its population had outgrown it. The Royal Standard still fluttered from the tower of St. Mary Magdalene, while close by its beautiful brother-turret of

St. James bore aloft the blue flag of Monmouth. As I gazed the quick petulant roll of a drum rose up on the still morning air, with the clear ringing call of the bugles summoning the troops from their slumbers. Beyond the town, and on either side of it, stretched a glorious view of the Somersetshire downs, rolling away to the distant sea, with town and hamlet, castle turret and church tower, wooded coombe and stretch of grain-land — as fair a scene as the eye could wish to rest upon. As I wheeled my horse and sped upon my way I felt, my dears, that this was a land worth fighting for, and that a man's life was a small thing if he could but aid, in however trifling a degree, in working out its freedom and its happiness. At a little village over the hill I fell in with an outpost of horse, the commander of which rode some distance with me, and set me on my road to Nether Stowey. It seemed strange to my Hampshire eyes to note that the earth is all red in these parts — very different to the chalk and gravel of Havant. The cows, too, are mostly red. The cottages are built neither of brick nor of wood, but of some form of plaster, which they call cob, which is strong and smooth so long as no water comes near it. They shelter the walls from the rain, therefore, by great overhanging thatches. There is scarcely a steeple in the whole country-side, which also seems strange to a man from any other part of England. Every church hath a square tower, with pinnacles upon the top, and they are mostly very large, with fine peals of bells.

My course ran along by the foot of the beautiful Quantock Hills, where heavy-wooded coombes are scattered over the broad heathery downs, deep with bracken and whortle-bushes. On either side of the track steep winding glens sloped downwards, lined with yellow gorse, which blazed out from the deep-red soil like a flame from embers. Peat-coloured streams splashed down these valleys and over the road, through which Covenant ploughed fetlock deep, and shied to see the broad-backed trout darting from between his fore feet.

All day I rode through this beautiful country, meeting few folk, for I kept away from the main roads. A few shepherds and farmers, a long-legged clergyman, a packman with his mule, and a horseman with a great bag, whom I took to be a buyer of hair, are all that I can recall. A black jack of ale and the heel of a loaf at a wayside inn were all my refreshments. Near Combwich, Covenant cast a shoe, and two hours were wasted before I found a smithy in the town and had the matter set right. It was not until evening that I at last came out upon the banks of the Bristol Channel, at a place called Shurton Bars, where the muddy Parret makes its way into the sea. At this point the channel is so broad that the Welsh mountains can scarcely be distinguished. The shore is flat and black and oozy, flecked over with white patches of sea-birds, but further to the east there rises a line of hills, very wild and rugged, rising in places into steep precipices. These cliffs run out into the sea, and numerous little harbours and bays are formed in their broken surface, which are dry half the day, but can float a good-sized boat at half-tide. The road wound over these bleak and rocky hills, which are sparsely inhabited by a wild race of fishermen, or shepherds, who came to their cabin doors on hearing the clatter of my horse's hoofs, and shot some rough West-country jest at me as I passed. As the night drew in the country became bleaker and more deserted. An occasional light twinkling in the distance from some lonely hillside cottage was the only sign of the presence of man. The rough track still skirted the sea, and high as it was, the spray from the breakers drifted across it. The salt prinkled on my lips, and the air was filled with the hoarse roar of the surge and the thin piping of curlews, who flitted past in the darkness like white, shadowy, sad-voiced creatures from some other world. The wind blew in short, quick, angry puffs from the westward, and far out on the black waters a single glimmer of light rising and falling, tossing up, and then sinking out of sight, showed how fierce a sea had risen in the channel.

Riding through the gloaming in this strange wild scenery my mind naturally turned towards the past. I thought of my father and my mother, of the old carpenter and of Solomon Sprent. Then I pondered over Decimus Saxon, his many-faced character having in it so much to be admired and so much to be abhorred. Did I like him or no? It was more than I could say. From him I wandered off to my faithful Reuben, and to his love passage with the pretty Puritan, which in turn brought me to Sir Gervas and the wreck of his fortunes. My mind then wandered to the state of the army and the prospects of the rising, which led me to my present mission with its perils and its difficulties. Having turned over all these things in my mind I began to doze upon my horse's back, overcome by the fatigue of the journey and the drowsy lullaby of the waves. I had just fallen into a dream in which I saw Reuben Lockarby crowned King of England by Mistress Ruth Timewell, while Decimus Saxon endeavoured to shoot him with a bottle of Daffy's elixir, when in an instant, without warning, I was dashed violently from my horse, and left lying half-conscious on the stony track.

So stunned and shaken was I by the sudden fall, that though I had a dim knowledge of shadowy figures bending over me, and of hoarse laughter sounding in my ears, I could not tell for a few minutes where I was nor what had befallen me. When at last I did make an attempt to recover my feet I found that a loop of rope had been slipped round my arms and my legs so as to secure them. With a hard struggle I got one hand free, and dashed it in the face of one of the men who were holding me down; but the whole gang of a dozen or more set upon me at once, and while some thumped and kicked at me, others tied a fresh cord round my elbows, and deftly fastened it in such a way as to pinion me completely. Finding that in my weak and dazed state all efforts were of no avail, I lay sullen and watchful, taking no heed of the random blows which were still showered upon me. So dark was it that I could neither see the faces of my attackers, nor form any guess as to who they might be, or how they had hurled me from my saddle. The champing and stamping of a horse hard by showed me that Covenant was a prisoner as well as his master.

‘Dutch Pete’s got as much as he can carry,’ said a rough, harsh voice. ‘He lies on the track as limp as a conger.’

‘Ah, poor Pete!’ muttered another. ‘He’ll never deal a card or drain a glass of the right Cognac again.’

‘There you lie, mine goot vriend,’ said the injured man, in weak, quavering tones. ‘And I will prove that you lie if you have a flaschen in your pocket.’

‘If Pete were dead and buried,’ the first speaker said, ‘a word about strong waters would bring him to. Give him a sup from your bottle, Dicon.’

There was a great gurgling and sucking in the darkness, followed by a gasp from the drinker. ‘Gott sei gelobt,’ he exclaimed in a stronger voice, ‘I have seen more stars than ever were made. Had my kopf not been well hooped he would have knocked it in like an ill-staved cask. He shlags like the kick of a horse.’

As he spoke the edge of the moon peeped over a cliff and threw a flood of cold clear light upon the scene. Looking up I saw that a strong rope had been tied across the road from one tree trunk to another about eight feet above the ground. This could not be seen by me, even had I been fully awake, in the dusk; but catching me across the breast as Covenant trotted under it, it had swept me off and dashed me with great force to the ground. Either the fall or the blows which I had received had cut me badly, for I could feel the blood trickling in a warm stream past my ear and down my neck. I made no attempt to move, however, but waited in silence to find out who these men were into whose hands I had fallen. My one fear was lest my letters should be taken away from me, and my mission rendered of no avail. That in this, my first trust, I should be disarmed without a blow and lose the papers which had been confided to me, was a chance which made me flush and tingle with shame at the very thought.

The gang who had seized me were rough-bearded fellows in fur caps and fustian jackets, with buff belts round their waists, from which hung short straight whinyards. Their dark sun-dried faces and their great boots marked them as fishermen or seamen, as might be guessed from their rude sailor speech. A pair knelt on either side with their hands upon my arms, a third stood behind with a cocked pistol pointed at my head, while the others, seven or eight in number, were helping to his feet the man whom I had struck, who was bleeding freely from a cut over the eye.

‘Take the horse up to Daddy Mycroft’s,’ said a stout, black-bearded man, who seemed to be their leader. ‘It is no mere dragooner hack,(Note I. Appendix) but a comely, full-blooded brute, which will fetch sixty pieces at the least. Your share of that, Peter, will buy salve and plaster for your cut.’

‘Ha, houndsfoot!’ cried the Dutchman, shaking his fist at me. ‘You would strike Peter, would you? You would draw Peter’s blood, would you? Tausend Teufel, man! if you and I were together upon the hillside we should see vich vas the petter man.’

‘Slack your jaw tackle, Pete,’ growled one of his comrades. ‘This fellow is a limb of Satan for sure, and doth follow a calling that none but a mean, snivelling, baseborn son of a gun would take to. Yet I warrant, from the look of him, that he could truss you like a woodcock if he had his great hands upon you. And you would howl for help as you did last Martinmas, when you did mistake Cooper Dick’s wife for a gauger.’

‘Truss me, would he? Todt und Holle!’ cried the other, whom the blow and the brandy had driven to madness. ‘We shall see. Take that, thou deyvil’s spawn, take that!’ He ran at me, and kicked me as hard as he could with his heavy sea-boots.

Some of the gang laughed, but the man who had spoken before gave the Dutchman a shove that sent him whirling. ‘None of that,’ he said sternly. ‘We’ll have British fair-play on British soil, and none of your cursed longshore tricks. I won’t stand by and see an Englishman kicked, d’ye see, by a tub-bellied, round-starned, schnapps-swilling, chicken-hearted son of an Amsterdam lust-vrouw. Hang him, if the skipper likes. That’s all above board, but by thunder, if it’s a fight that you will have, touch that man again.’

‘All right, Dicon,’ said their leader soothingly. ‘We all know that Pete’s not a fighting man, but he’s the best cooper on the coast, eh, Pete? There is not his equal at staving, hooping, and bumping. He’ll take a plank of wood and turn it into a keg while another man would be thinking of it.’

‘Oh, you remember that, Captain Murgatroyd,’ said the Dutchman sulkily. ‘But you see me knocked about and shlagged, and bullied, and called names, and what help have I? So help me, when the *Maria* is in the Texel next, I’ll take to my old trade, I will, and never set foot on her again.’

‘No fear,’ the Captain answered, laughing. ‘While the *Maria* brings in five thousand good pieces a year, and can show her heels to any cutter on the coast, there is no fear of greedy Pete losing his share of her. Why, man, at this rate you may have a lust-haus of your own in a year or two, with a trimmed lawn, and the trees all clipped like peacocks, and the flowers in pattern, and a canal by the door, and a great bouncing house-wife just like any Burgomeister. There’s many such a fortune been made out of Mechlin and Cognac.’

‘Aye, and there’s many a broken kopf got over Mechlin and Cognac,’ grumbled my enemy. ‘Donner! There are other things beside lust-houses and flower-beds. There are lee-shores and nor’-westers, beaks and preventives.’

‘And there’s where the smart seaman has the pull over the herring buss, or the skulking coaster that works from Christmas to Christmas with all the danger and none of the little pickings. But enough said! Up with the prisoner, and let us get him safely into the bilboes.’

I was raised to my feet and half carried, half dragged along in the midst of the gang. My horse had already been led away in the opposite direction. Our course lay off the road, down a very rocky and rugged ravine which sloped away towards the sea. There seemed to be no trace of a path, and I could only stumble along over rocks and bushes as best I might in my fettered and crippled state. The blood, however, had dried over my wounds, and the cool sea breeze playing upon my forehead refreshed me, and helped me to take a clearer view of my position.

It was plain from their talk that these men were smugglers. As such, they were not likely to have any great love for the Government, or desire to uphold King James in any way. On the contrary, their goodwill would probably be with Monmouth, for had I not seen the day before a whole regiment of foot in his army, raised from among the coaster folk? On the other hand, their greed might be stronger than their loyalty, and might lead them to hand me over to justice in the hope of reward. On the whole it would be best, I thought, to say nothing of my mission, and to keep my papers secret as long as possible.

But I could not but wonder, as I was dragged along, what had led these men to lie in wait for me as they had done. The road along which I had travelled was a lonely one, and yet a fair number of travellers bound from the West through Weston to Bristol must use it. The gang could not lie in perpetual guard over it. Why had they set a trap on this particular night, then? The smugglers were a lawless and desperate body, but they did not, as a rule, descend to foot-paddery or robbery. As long as no one interfered with them they were seldom the first to break the peace. Then, why had they lain in wait for me, who had never injured them? Could it possibly be that I had been betrayed? I was still turning over these questions in my mind when we all came to a halt, and the Captain blew a shrill note on a whistle which hung round his neck.

The place where we found ourselves was the darkest and most rugged spot in the whole wild gorge. On either side great cliffs shot up, which arched over our heads, with a fringe of ferns and bracken on either lip, so that the dark sky and the few twinkling stars were well-nigh hid. Great black rocks loomed vaguely out in the shadowy light, while in front a high tangle of what seemed to be brushwood barred our road. At a second whistle, however, a glint of light was seen through the branches, and the whole mass was swung to one side as though it moved upon a hinge. Beyond it a dark winding passage opened into the side of the hill, down which we went with our backs bowed, for the rock ceiling was of no great height. On every side of us sounded the throbbing of the sea.

Passing through the entrance, which must have been dug with great labour through the solid rock, we came out into a lofty and roomy cave, lit up by a fire at one end, and by several torches. By their smoky yellow glare I could see that the roof was, at least, fifty feet above us, and was hung by long lime-crystals, which sparkled and gleamed with great brightness. The floor of the cave was formed of fine sand, as soft and velvety as a Wilton carpet, sloping down in a way which showed that the cave must at its mouth open upon the sea, which was confirmed by the booming and splashing of the waves, and by the fresh salt air which filled the whole cavern. No water could be seen, however, as a sharp turn cut off our view of the outlet.

In this rock-girt space, which may have been sixty paces long and thirty across, there were gathered great piles of casks, kegs and cases; muskets, cutlasses, staves, cudgels, and straw were littered about upon the floor. At one end a high wood fire blazed merrily, casting strange shadows along the walls, and sparkling like a thousand diamonds among the crystals on the roof. The smoke was carried away through a great cleft in the rocks. Seated on boxes, or stretched on the sand round the fire, there were seven or eight more of the band, who sprang to their feet and ran eagerly towards us as we entered.

Have ye got him?' they cried. 'Did he indeed come? Had he attendants?'

'He is here, and he is alone,' the Captain answered. 'Our hawser fetched him off his horse as neatly as ever a gull was netted by a cragsman. What have ye done in our absence, Silas!'

'We have the packs ready for carriage,' said the man addressed, a sturdy, weather-beaten seaman of middle age. 'The silk and lace are done in these squares covered over with sacking. The one I have marked "yarn" and the other "jute" — a thousand of Mechlin to a hundred of the shiny. They will sling over a mule's back. Brandy, schnapps, Schiedam, and Hamburg Goldwasser are all set out in due order. The 'baccy is in the flat cases over by the Black Drop there. A plaguey job we had carrying it all out, but here it is ship-shape at last, and the lugger floats like a skimming dish, with scarce ballast enough to stand up to a five-knot breeze.'

'Any signs of the *Fairy Queen*?' asked the smuggler.

'None. Long John is down at the water's edge looking out for her flash-light. This wind should bring her up if she has rounded Combe-Martin Point. There was a sail about ten miles to the east-nor'-east at sundown. She might have been a Bristol schooner, or she might have been a King's fly-boat.'

'A King's crawl-boat,' said Captain Murgatroyd, with a sneer. 'We cannot hang the gauger until Venables brings up the *Fairy Queen*, for after all it was one of his hands that was snackled. Let him do his own dirty work.'

‘Tausend Blitzen!’ cried the ruffian Dutchman, ‘would it not be a kindly grass to Captain Venables to chuck the gauger down the Black Drop ere he come? He may have such another job to do for us some day.’

‘Zounds, man, are you in command or am I?’ said the leader angrily. ‘Bring the prisoner forward to the fire! Now, hark ye, dog of a land-shark; you are as surely a dead man as though you were laid out with the tapers burning. See here’ — he lifted a torch, and showed by its red light a great crack in the floor across the far end of the cave—’you can judge of the Black Drop’s depth!’ he said, raising an empty keg and tossing it over into the yawning gulf. For ten seconds we stood silent before a dull distant clatter told that it had at last reached the bottom.

‘It will carry him half-way to hell before the breath leaves him,’ said one.

‘It’s an easier death than the Devizes gallows!’ cried a second.

‘Nay, he shall have the gallows first!’ a third shouted. ‘It is but his burial that we are arranging.’

‘He hath not opened his mouth since we took him,’ said the man who was called Dicon. ‘Is he a mute, then? Find your tongue, my fine fellow, and let us hear what your name is. It would have been well for you if you had been born dumb, so that you could not have sworn our comrade’s life away.’

‘I have been waiting for a civil question after all this brawling and brabbling,’ said I. ‘My name is Micah Clarke. Now, pray inform me who ye may be, and by what warrant ye stop peaceful travellers upon the public highway?’

‘This is our warrant,’ Murgatroyd answered, touching the hilt of his cutlass. ‘As to who we are, ye know that well enough. Your name is not Clarke, but Westhouse, or Waterhouse, and you are the same cursed exciseman who snackled our poor comrade, Cooper Dick, and swore away his life at Ilchester.’

‘I swear that you are mistaken,’ I replied. ‘I have never in my life been in these parts before.’

‘Fine words! Fine words!’ cried another smuggler. ‘Gauger or no, you must jump for it, since you know the secret of our cave.’

‘Your secret is safe with me,’ I answered. ‘But if ye wish to murder me, I shall meet my fate as a soldier should. I should have chosen to die on the field of battle, rather than to lie at the mercy of such a pack of water-rats in their burrow.’

‘My faith!’ said Murgatroyd. ‘This is too tall talk for a gauger. He bears himself like a soldier, too. It is possible that in snaring the owl we have caught the falcon. Yet we had certain token that he would come this way, and on such another horse.’

‘Call up Long John,’ suggested the Dutchman. ‘I vould not give a plug of Trinidado for the Schelm’s word. Long John was with Cooper Dick when he was taken.’

‘Aye,’ growled the mate Silas. ‘He got a wipe over the arm from the gauger’s whinyard. He’ll know his face, if any will.’

‘Call him, then,’ said Murgatroyd, and presently a long, loose-limbed seaman came up from the mouth of the cave, where he had been on watch. He wore a red kerchief round his forehead, and a blue jerkin, the sleeve of which he slowly rolled up as he came nigh.

‘Where is Gauger Westhouse?’ he cried; ‘he has left his mark on my arm. Rat me, if the scar is healed yet. The sun is on our side of the wall now, gauger. But hullo, mates! Who be this that ye have clapped into irons? This is not our man!’

‘Not our man!’ they cried, with a volley of curses.

‘Why, this fellow would make two of the gauger, and leave enough over to fashion a magistrate’s clerk. Ye may hang him to make sure, but still he’s not the man.’

‘Yes, hang him!’ said Dutch Pete. ‘Sapperment! is our cave to be the talk of all the country? Vere is the pretty *Maria* to go then, vid her silks and her satins, her kegs and her cases’? Are we to risk our cave for the sake of this fellow? Besides, has he not schlagged my kopf — schlagged your cooper’s kopf — as if he had hit me mit mine own mallet? Is that not vorth a hemp cravat?’

‘Worth a jorum of rumbo,’ cried Dicon. ‘By your leave, Captain, I would say that we are not a gang of padders and michers, but a crew of honest seamen, who harm none but those who harm us. Exciseman Westhouse hath slain Cooper Dick, and it is just that he should die for it; but as to taking this young soldier’s life, I’d as soon think of scuttling the saucy *Maria*, or of mounting the Jolly Roger at her peak.’

What answer would have been given to this speech I cannot tell, for at that moment a shrill whistle resounded outside the cave, and two smugglers appeared bearing between them the body of a man. It hung so limp that I thought at first that he might be dead, but when they threw him on the sand he moved, and at last sat up like one who is but half awoken from a swoon. He was a square dogged-faced fellow, with a long white scar down his cheek, and a close-fitting blue coat with brass buttons.

‘It’s Gauger Westhouse!’ cried a chorus of voices. ‘Yes, it is Gauger Westhouse,’ said the man calmly, giving his neck a wriggle as though he were in pain. ‘I represent the King’s law, and in its name I arrest ye all, and declare all the contraband goods which I see around me to be confiscate and forfeited, according to the second section of the first clause of the statute upon illegal dealing. If there are any honest men in this company, they will assist me in the execution of my duty.’ He staggered to his feet as he spoke, but his spirit was greater than his strength, and he sank back upon the sand amid a roar of laughter from the rough seamen.

‘We found him lying on the road when we came from Daddy Mycroft’s,’ said one of the new-comers, who were the same men who had led away my horse. ‘He must have passed just after you left, and the rope caught him under the chin and threw him a dozen paces. We saw the revenue button on his coat, so we brought him down. Body o’ me, but he kicked and plunged for all that he was three-quarters stunned.’

‘Have ye slacked the hawser?’ the Captain asked.

‘We cast one end loose and let it hang.’

‘’Tis well. We must keep him for Captain Venables. But now, as to our other prisoner: we must overhaul him and examine his papers, for so many craft are sailing under false colours that we must needs be careful. Hark ye, Mister Soldier! What brings you to these parts, and what king do you serve? for I hear there’s a mutiny broke out, and two skippers claim equal rating in the old British ship.’

‘I am serving under King Monmouth,’ I answered, seeing that the proposed search must end in the finding of my papers.

‘Under King Monmouth!’ cried the smuggler. ‘Nay, friend, that rings somewhat false. The good King hath, I hear, too much need of his friends in the south to let an able soldier go wandering along the sea coast like a Cornish wrecker in a sou’-wester.’

‘I bear despatches,’ said I, ‘from the King’s own hand to Henry Duke of Beaufort, at his castle at Badminton. Ye can find them in my inner pocket, but I pray ye not to break the seal, lest it bring discredit upon my mission.’

‘Sir,’ cried the gauger, raising himself upon his elbow, ‘I do hereby arrest you on the charge of being a traitor, a promoter of treason, a vagrant, and a masterless man within the meaning of the fourth statute of the Act. As an officer of the law I call upon you to submit to my warrant.'

'Brace up his jaw with your scarf, Jim,' said Murgatroyd. 'When Venables comes he will soon find a way to check his gab. Yes,' he continued, looking at the back of my papers, 'it is marked, as you say, "From James the Second of England, known lately as the Duke of Monmouth, to Henry Duke of Beaufort, President of Wales, by the hand of Captain Micah Clarke, of Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire foot." Cast off the lashings, Dicon. So, Captain, you are a free man once more, and I grieve that we should have unwittingly harmed you. We are good Lutherans to a man, and would rather speed you than hinder you on this mission.'

'Could we not indeed help him on his way!' said the mate Silas. 'For myself, I don't fear a wet jacket or a tarry hand for the cause, and I doubt not ye are all of my way of thinking. Now with this breeze we could run up to Bristol and drop the Captain by morning, which would save him from being snapped up by any land-sharks on the road.'

'Aye, aye,' cried Long John. 'The King's horse are out beyond Weston, but he could give them the slip if he had the *Maria* under him.'

'Well,' said Murgatroyd, 'we could get back by three long tacks. Venables will need a day or so to get his goods ashore. If we are to sail back in company we shall have time on our hands. How would the plan suit you, Captain?'

'My horse!' I objected.

'It need not stop us. I can rig up a handy horse-stall with my spare spars and the grating. The wind has died down. The lugger could be brought to Dead Man's Edge, and the horse led down to it. Run up to Daddy's, Jim; and you, Silas, see to the boat. Here is some cold junk and biscuit — seaman's fare, Captain — and a glass o' the real Jamaica to wash it down an' thy stomach be not too dainty for rough living.'

I seated myself on a barrel by the fire, and stretched my limbs, which were cramped and stiffened by their confinement, while one of the seamen bathed the cut on my head with a wet kerchief, and another laid out some food on a case in front of me. The rest of the gang had trooped away to the mouth of the cave to prepare the lugger, save only two or three who stood on guard round the ill-fated gauger. He lay with his back resting against the wall of the cave, and his arms crossed over his breast, glancing round from time to time at the smugglers with menacing eyes, as a staunch old hound might gaze at a pack of wolves who had overmatched him. I was turning it over in my own mind whether aught could be done to help him, when Murgatroyd came over, and dipping a tin pannikin into the open rum tub, drained it to the success of my mission.

‘I shall send Silas Bolitho with you,’ said he, ‘while I bide here to meet Venables, who commands my consort. If there is aught that I can do to repay you for your ill usage—’

‘There is but one thing, Captain,’ I broke in eagerly. ‘It is as much, or more, for your own sake than mine that I ask it. Do not allow this unhappy man to be murdered.’

Murgatroyd’s face flushed with anger. ‘You are a plain speaker, Captain Clarke,’ said he. ‘This is no murder. It is justice. What harm do we here? There is not an old housewife over the whole countryside who does not bless us. Where is she to buy her souchong, or her strong waters, except from us! We charge little, and force our goods on no one. We are peaceful traders. Yet this man and his fellows are ever yelping at our heels, like so many dogfish on a cod bank. We have been harried, and chivied, and shot at until we are driven into such dens as this. A month ago, four of our men were bearing a keg up the hillside to Farmer Black, who hath dealt with us these five years back. Of a sudden, down came half a score of horse, led by this gauger, hacked and slashed with their broad-swords, cut Long John’s arm open, and took Cooper Dick prisoner. Dick was haled to Ilchester Gaol, and hung up after the assizes like a stoat on a gamekeeper’s door. This night we had news that this very gauger was coming this way, little knowing that we should be on the look-out for him. Is it a wonder that we should lay a trap for him, and that, having caught him, we should give him the same justice as he gave our comrades?’

‘He is but a servant, I argued. ‘He hath not made the law. It is his duty to enforce it. It is with the law itself that your quarrel is.’

‘You are right,’ said the smuggler gloomily. ‘It is with Judge Moorcroft that we have our chief account to square. He may pass this road upon his circuit. Heaven send he does! But we shall hang the gauger too. He knows our cave now, and it would be madness to let him go.’

I saw that it was useless to argue longer, so I contented myself with dropping my pocket-knife on the sand within reach of the prisoner, in the hope that it might prove to be of some service to him. His guards were laughing and joking together, and giving little heed to their charge, but the gauger was keen enough, for I saw his hand close over it.

I had walked and smoked for an hour or more, when Silas the mate appeared, and said that the lugger was ready and the horse aboard. Bidding Murgatroyd farewell, I ventured a few more words in favour of the gauger, which were received with a frown and an angry shake of the head. A boat was drawn up on the sand, inside the cave, at the water’s edge. Into this I stepped, as directed, with my sword and pistols, which had been given back to me, while the crew pushed her off and sprang in as she glided into deep water.

I could see by the dim light of the single torch which Murgatroyd held upon the margin, that the roof of the cave sloped sheer down upon us as we sculled slowly out towards the entrance. So low did it come at last that there was only a space of a few feet between it and the water, and we had to bend our heads to avoid the rocks above us. The boatmen gave two strong strokes, and we shot out from under the overhanging ledge, and found ourselves in the open with the stars shining murkily above us, and the moon showing herself dimly and cloudily through a gathering haze. Right in front of us was a dark blur, which, as we pulled towards it, took the outline of a large lugger rising and falling with the pulse of the sea. Her tall thin spars and delicate network of cordage towered above us as we glided under the counter, while the creaking of blocks and rattle of ropes showed that she was all ready to glide off upon her journey. Lightly and daintily she rode upon the waters, like some giant seafowl, spreading one white pinion after another in preparation for her flight. The boatmen ran us alongside and steadied the dinghy while I climbed over the bulwarks on to the deck.

She was a roomy vessel, very broad in the beam, with a graceful curve in her bows, and masts which were taller than any that I had seen on such a boat on the Solent. She was decked over in front, but very deep in the after part, with ropes fixed all round the sides to secure kegs when the hold should be full. In the midst of this after-deck the mariners had built a strong stall, in which my good steed was standing, with a bucket full of oats in front of him. My old friend shoved his nose against my face as I came aboard, and neighed his pleasure at finding his master once more. We were still exchanging caresses when the grizzled head of Silas Bolitho the mate popped out of the cabin hatchway.

‘We are fairly on our way now, Captain Clarke,’ said he. ‘The breeze has fallen away to nothing, as you can see, and we may be some time in running down to our port. Are you not aweary?’

‘I am a little tired,’ I confessed. ‘My head is throbbing from the crack I got when that hawser of yours dashed me from my saddle.’

‘An hour or two of sleep will make you as fresh as a Mother Carey’s chicken,’ said the smuggler. ‘Your horse is well cared for, and you can leave him without fear. I will set a man to tend him, though, truth to say, the rogues know more about studding-sails and halliards than they do of steeds and their requirements. Yet no harm can come to him, so you had best come down and turn in.’

I descended the steep stairs which led down into the low-roofed cabin of the lugger. On either side a recess in the wall had been fitted up as a couch.

‘This is your bed,’ said he, pointing to one of them. ‘We shall call you if there be aught to report.’ I needed no second invitation, but flinging myself down without undressing, I sank in a few minutes into a dreamless sleep, which neither the gentle motion of the boat nor the clank of feet above my head could break off.

CHAPTER XXIV. Of the Welcome that met me at Badminton

When I opened my eyes I had some ado to recall where I was, but on sitting up it was brought home to me by my head striking the low ceiling with a sharp rap. On the other side of the cabin Silas Bolitho was stretched at full length with a red woollen nightcap upon his head, fast asleep and snoring. In the centre of the cabin hung a swing-table, much worn, and stained all over with the marks of countless glasses and pannikins. A wooden bench, screwed to the floor, completed the furniture, with the exception of a stand of muskets along one side. Above and below the berths in which we lay were rows of lockers, in which, doubtless, some of the more choice laces and silks were stowed. The vessel was rising and falling with a gentle motion, but from the flapping of canvas I judged that there was little wind. Slipping quietly from my couch, so as not to wake the mate, I stole upon deck.

We were, I found, not only becalmed, but hemmed in by a dense fog-bank which rolled in thick, choking wreaths all round us, and hid the very water beneath us. We might have been a ship of the air riding upon a white cloud-bank. Now and anon a little puff of breeze caught the foresail and bellied it out for a moment, only to let it flap back against the mast, limp and slack, once more. A sunbeam would at times break through the dense cloud, and would spangle the dead grey wall with a streak of rainbow colour, but the haze would gather in again and shut off the bright invader. Covenant was staring right and left with great questioning eyes. The crew were gathered along the bulwarks and smoking their pipes while they peered out into the dense fog.

‘God den, Captain,’ said Dicon, touching his fur cap. ‘We have had a rare run while the breeze lasted, and the mate reckoned before he turned in that we were not many miles from Bristol town.’

‘In that case, my good fellow,’ I answered, ‘ye can set me ashore, for I have not far to go.’

‘We must e’en wait till the fog lifts,’ said Long John. ‘There’s only one place along here, d’ye see, where we can land cargoes unquestioned. When it clears we shall turn her head for it, but until we can take our bearings it is anxious work wi' the sands under our lee.'

'Keep a look-out there, Tom Baldock!' cried Dicon to a man in the bows. 'We are in the track of every Bristol ship, and though there's so little wind, a high-sparred craft might catch a breeze which we miss.'

'Sh!' said Long John suddenly, holding up his hand in warning. 'Sh!'

We listened with all our ears, but there was no sound, save the gentle wash of the unseen waves against our sides.

'Call the mate!' whispered the seaman. 'There's a craft close by us. I heard the rattle of a rope upon her deck.'

Silas Bolitho was up in an instant, and we all stood straining our ears, and peering through the dense fog-bank. We had well-nigh made up our minds that it was a false alarm, and the mate was turning back in no very good humour, when a clear loud bell sounded seven times quite close to us, followed by a shrill whistle and a confused shouting and stamping.

'It's a King's ship,' growled the mate. 'That's seven bells, and the bo'sun is turning out the watch below.'

'It was on our quarter,' whispered one.

'Nay, I think it was on our larboard bow,' said another.

The mate held up his hand, and we all listened for some fresh sign of the whereabouts of our scurvy neighbour. The wind had freshened a little, and we were slipping through the water at four or five knots an hour. Of a sudden a hoarse voice was heard roaring at our very side. ''Bout ship!' it shouted. 'Bear a hand on the lee-braces, there! Stand by the halliards! Bear a hand, ye lazy rogues, or I'll be among ye with my cane, with a wannion to ye!'

'It is a King's ship, sure enough, and she lies just there,' said Long John, pointing out over the quarter. 'Merchant adventurers have civil tongues. It's your blue-coated, gold-braided, swivel-eyed, quarter-deckers that talk of canes. Ha! did I not tell ye!'

As he spoke, the white screen of vapour rolled up like the curtain in a playhouse, and uncovered a stately war-ship, lying so close that we could have thrown a biscuit aboard. Her long, lean, black hull rose and fell with a slow, graceful rhythm, while her beautiful spars and snow-white sails shot aloft until they were lost in the wreaths of fog which still hung around her. Nine bright brass cannons peeped out at us from her portholes. Above the line of hammocks, which hung like carded wool along her bulwarks, we could see the heads of the seamen staring down at us, and pointing us out to each other. On the high poop stood an elderly officer with cocked hat and trim white wig, who at once whipped up his glass and gazed at us through it.

‘Ahoy, there!’ he shouted, leaning over the taffrail. ‘What lugger is that?’

‘The *Lucy*,’ answered the mate, ‘bound from Porlock Quay to Bristol with hides and tallow. Stand ready to tack!’ he added in a lower voice, ‘the fog is coming down again.’

‘Ye have one of the hides with the horse still in it,’ cried the officer. ‘Run down under our counter. We must have a closer look at ye.’

‘Aye, aye, sir!’ said the mate, and putting his helm hard down the boom swung across, and the *Maria* darted off like a scared seabird into the fog. Looking back there was nothing but a dim loom to show where we had left the great vessel. We could hear, however, the hoarse shouting of orders and the bustle of men.

‘Look out for squalls, lads!’ cried the mate. ‘He’ll let us have it now.’

He had scarcely spoken before there were half-a-dozen throbs of flame in the mist behind, and as many balls sung among our rigging. One cut away the end of the yard, and left it dangling; another grazed the bowsprit, and sent a puff of white splinters into the air.

‘Warm work, Captain, eh?’ said old Silas, rubbing his hands. ‘Zounds, they shoot better in the dark than ever they did in the light. There have been more shots fired at this lugger than she could carry wore she loaded with them. And yet they never so much as knocked the paint off her before. There they go again!’

A fresh discharge burst from the man-of-war, but this time they had lost all trace of us, and were firing by guess.

‘That is their last bark, sir,’ said Dicon.

‘No fear. They’ll blaze away for the rest of the day,’ growled another of the smugglers. ‘Why, Lor’ bless ye, it’s good exercise for the crew, and the ‘munition is the King’s, so it don’t cost nobody a groat.’

‘It’s well the breeze freshened,’ said Long John. ‘I heard the creak o’ davits just after the first discharge. She was lowering her boats, or I’m a Dutchman.’

‘The petter for you if you vas, you seven-foot stock-fish,’ cried my enemy the cooper, whose aspect was not improved by a great strip of plaster over his eye. ‘You might have learned something petter than to pull on a rope, or to swab decks like a vrouw all your life.’

‘I’ll set you adrift in one of your own barrels, you skin of lard,’ said the seaman. ‘How often are we to trounce you before we knock the sauce out of you?’

‘The fog lifts a little towards the land,’ Silas remarked. ‘Methinks I see the loom of St. Austin’s Point. It rises there upon the starboard bow.’

‘There it is, sure enough, sir!’ cried one of the seamen, pointing to a dark cape which cut into the mist.

‘Steer for the three-fathom creek then,’ said the mate. ‘When we are on the other side of the point, Captain Clarke, we shall be able to land your horse and yourself. You will then be within a few hours’ ride of your destination.’

I led the old seaman aside, and having thanked him for the kindness which he had shown me, I spoke to him of the gauger, and implored him to use his influence to save the man.

‘It rests with Captain Venables,’ said he gloomily. ‘If we let him go what becomes of our cave?’

‘Is there no way of insuring his silence?’ I asked. ‘Well, we might ship him to the Plantations,’ said the mate. ‘We could take him to the Texel with us, and get Captain Donders or some other to give him a lift across the western ocean.’

‘Do so,’ said I, ‘and I shall take care that King Monmouth shall hear of the help which ye have given his messenger.’

‘Well, we shall be there in a brace of shakes,’ he remarked. ‘Let us go below and load your ground tier, for there is nothing like starting well trimmed with plenty of ballast in the hold.’

Following the sailor’s advice I went down with him and enjoyed a rude but plentiful meal. By the time that we had finished, the lugger had been run into a narrow creek, with shelving sandy banks on either side. The district was wild and marshy, with few signs of any inhabitants. With much coaxing and pushing Covenant was induced to take to the water, and swam easily ashore, while I followed in the smuggler’s dinghy. A few words of rough, kindly leave-taking were shouted after me; I saw the dinghy return, and the beautiful craft glided out to sea and faded away once more into the mists which still hung over the face of the waters.

Truly Providence works in strange ways, my children, and until a man comes to the autumn of his days he can scarce say what hath been ill-luck and what hath been good. For of all the seeming misfortunes which have befallen me during my wandering life, there is not one which I have not come to look upon as a blessing. And if you once take this into your hearts, it is a mighty help in enabling you to meet all troubles with a stiff lip; for why should a man grieve when he hath not yet determined whether what hath chanced may not prove to be a cause of rejoicing. Now here ye will perceive that I began by being dashed upon a stony road, beaten, kicked, and finally well-nigh put to death in mistake for another. Yet it ended in my being safely carried to my journey's end, whereas, had I gone by land, it is more than likely that I should have been cut off at Weston; for, as I heard afterwards, a troop of horse were making themselves very active in those parts by blocking the roads and seizing all who came that way.

Being now alone, my first care was to bathe my face and hands in a stream which ran down to the sea, and to wipe away any trace of my adventures of the night before. My cut was but a small one, and was concealed by my hair. Having reduced myself to some sort of order I next rubbed down my horse as best I could, and rearranged his girth and his saddle. I then led him by the bridle to the top of a sandhill hard by, whence I might gain some idea as to my position.

The fog lay thick upon the Channel, but all inland was very clear and bright. Along the coast the country was dreary and marshy, but at the other side a goodly extent of fertile plain lay before me, well tilled and cared for. A range of lofty hills, which I guessed to be the Mendips, bordered the whole skyline, and further north there lay a second chain in the blue distance. The glittering Avon wound its way over the country-side like a silver snake in a flower-bed. Close to its mouth, and not more than two leagues from where I stood, rose the spires and towers of stately Bristol, the Queen of the West, which was and still may be the second city in the kingdom. The forests of masts which shot up like a pinegrove above the roofs of the houses bore witness to the great trade both with Ireland and with the Plantations which had built up so flourishing a city.

As I knew that the Duke's seat was miles on the Gloucestershire side of the city, and as I feared lest I might be arrested and examined should I attempt to pass the gates, I struck inland with intent to ride round the walls and so avoid the peril. The path which I followed led me into a country lane, which in turn opened into a broad highway crowded with travellers, both on horseback and on foot. As the troublous times required that a man should journey with his arms, there was naught in my outfit to excite remark, and I was able to jog on among the other horsemen without question or suspicion. From their appearance they were, I judged, country farmers or squires for the most part, who were riding into Bristol to hear the news, and to store away their things of price in a place of safety.

‘By your leave, zur!’ said a burly, heavy-faced man in a velveteen jacket, riding up upon my bridle-arm. ‘Can you tell me whether his Grace of Beaufort is in Bristol or at his house o’ Badminton?’

I answered that I could not tell, but that I was myself bound for his presence.

‘He was in Bristol yestreen a-drilling o’ the train-bands,’ said the stranger; ‘but, indeed, his Grace be that loyal, and works that hard for his Majesty’s cause, that he’s a’ ower the county, and it is but chance work for to try and to catch him. But if you are about to zeek him, whither shall you go?’

‘I will to Badminton,’ I answered, ‘and await him there. Can you tell me the way?’

‘What! Not know the way to Badminton!’ he cried, with a blank stare of wonder. ‘Whoy, I thought all the warld knew that. You’re not fra Wales or the border counties, zur, that be very clear.’

‘I am a Hampshire man,’ said I. ‘I have come some distance to see the Duke.’

‘Aye, so I should think!’ he cried, laughing loudly. ‘If you doan’t know the way to Badminton you doan’t know much! But I’ll go with you, danged if I doan’t, and I’ll show you your road, and run my chance o’ finding the Duke there. What be your name?’

‘Micah Clarke is my name.’

‘And Vairmer Brown is mine — John Brown by the register, but better knowed as the Vairmer. Tak’ this turn to the right off the high-road. Now we can trot our beasts and not be smothered in other folk’s dust. And what be you going to Beaufort for?’

‘On private matters which will not brook discussion,’ I answered.

‘Lor’, now! Affairs o’ State belike,’ said he, with a whistle. ‘Well, a still tongue saves many a neck. I’m a cautious man myself, and these be times when I wouldna whisper some o’ my thoughts — no, not into the ears o’ my old brown mare here — for fear I'd see her some day standing over against me in the witness-box.'

'They seem very busy over there,' I remarked, for we were now in full sight of the walls of Bristol, where gangs of men were working hard with pick and shovel improving the defences.

'Aye, they be busy sure enough, makin' ready in case the rebels come this road. Cromwell and his tawnies found it a rasper in my vather's time, and Monmouth is like to do the same.'

'It hath a strong garrison, too,' said I, bethinking me of Saxon's advice at Salisbury. 'I see two or three regiments out yonder on the bare open space.'

'They have four thousand foot and a thousand horse,' the farmer answered. 'But the foot are only train-bands, and there's no trusting them after Axminster. They say up here that the rebels run to nigh twenty thousand, and that they give no quarter. Well, if we must have civil war, I hope it may be hot and sudden, not spun out for a dozen years like the last one. If our throats are to be cut, let it be with a shairp knife, and not with a blunt hedge shears.'

'What say you to a stoup of cider?' I asked, for we were passing an ivy-clad inn, with 'The Beaufort Arms' printed upon the sign.

'With all my heart, lad,' my companion answered. 'Ho, there! two pints of the old hard-brewed! That will serve to wash the dust down. The real Beaufort Arms is up yonder at Badminton, for at the buttery hatch one may call for what one will in reason and never put hand to pocket.'

'You speak of the house as though you knew it well,' said I.

'And who should know it better?' asked the sturdy farmer, wiping his lips, as we resumed our journey. 'Why, it seems but yesterday that I played hide-and-seek wi' my brothers in the old Boteler Castle, that stood where the new house o' Badminton, or Acton Turville, as some calls it, now stands. The Duke hath built it but a few years, and, indeed, his Dukedom itself is scarce older. There are some who think that he would have done better to stick by the old name that his forebears bore.'

'What manner of man is the Duke?' I asked.

'Hot and hasty, like all of his blood. Yet when he hath time to think, and hath cooled down, he is just in the main. Your horse hath been in the water this morning, vriend.'

'Yes,' said I shortly, 'he hath had a bath.'

‘I am going to his Grace on the business of a horse,’ quoth my companion. ‘His officers have pressed my piebald four-year-old, and taken it without a “With your leave,” or “By your leave,” for the use of the King. I would have them know that there is something higher than the Duke, or even than the King. There is the English law, which will preserve a man’s goods and his chattels. I would do aught in reason for King James’s service, but my piebald four-year-old is too much.’

‘I fear that the needs of the public service will override your objection,’ said I.

‘Why it is enough to make a man a Whig,’ he cried. ‘Even the Roundheads always paid their vair penny for every pennyworth they had, though they wanted a vair pennyworth for each penny. I have heard my father say that trade was never so brisk as in ‘forty-six, when they were down this way. Old Noll had a noose of hemp ready for horse-stealers, were they for King or for Parliament. But here comes his Grace’s carriage, if I mistake not.’

As he spoke a great heavy yellow coach, drawn by six cream-coloured Flemish mares, dashed down the road, and came swiftly towards us. Two mounted lackeys galloped in front, and two others all in light blue and silver liveries rode on either side.

‘His Grace is not within, else there had been an escort behind,’ said the farmer, as we reined our horses aside to let the carriage pass. As they swept by he shouted out a question as to whether the Duke was at Badminton, and received a nod from the stately bewigged coachman in reply.

‘We are in luck to catch him,’ said Farmer Brown. ‘He’s as hard to find these days as a crake in a wheatfield. We should be there in an hour or less. I must thank you that I did not take a fruitless journey into Bristol. What did you say your errand was?’

I was again compelled to assure him that the matter was not one of which I could speak with a stranger, on which he appeared to be huffed, and rode for some miles without opening his mouth. Groves of trees lined the road on either side, and the sweet smell of pines was in our nostrils. Far away the musical pealing of a bell rose and fell on the hot, close summer air. The shelter of the branches was pleasant, for the sun was very strong, blazing down out of a cloudless heaven, and raising a haze from the fields and valleys.

‘‘Tis the bell from Chipping Sodbury,’ said my companion at last, wiping his ruddy face. ‘That’s Sodbury Church yonder over the brow of the hill, and here on the right is the entrance of Badminton Park.’

High iron gates, with the leopard and griffin, which are the supporters of the Beaufort arms, fixed on the pillars which flanked them, opened into a beautiful domain of lawn and grass land with clumps of trees scattered over it, and broad sheets of water, thick with wild fowl. At every turn as we rode up the winding avenue some new beauty caught our eyes, all of which were pointed out and expounded by Farmer Brown, who seemed to take as much pride in the place as though it belonged to him. Here it was a rockery where a thousand bright-coloured stones shone out through the ferns and creepers which had been trained over them. There it was a pretty prattling brook, the channel of which had been turned so as to make it come foaming down over a steep ledge of rocks. Or perhaps it was some statue of nymph or sylvan god, or some artfully built arbour overgrown with roses or honeysuckle. I have never seen grounds so tastefully laid out, and it was done, as all good work in art must be done, by following Nature so closely that it only differed from her handiwork in its profusion in so narrow a compass. A few years later our healthy English taste was spoiled by the pedant gardening of the Dutch with their straight flat ponds, and their trees all clipped and in a line like vegetable grenadiers. In truth, I think that the Prince of Orange and Sir William Temple had much to answer for in working this change, but things have now come round again, I understand, and we have ceased to be wiser than Nature in our pleasure-grounds.

As we drew near the house we came on a large extent of level sward on which a troop of horse were exercising, who were raised, as my companion informed me, entirely from the Duke’s own personal attendants. Passing them we rode through a grove of rare trees and came out on a broad space of gravel which lay in front of the house. The building itself was of great extent, built after the new Italian fashion, rather for comfort than for defence; but on one wing there remained, as my companion pointed out, a portion of the old keep and battlements of the feudal castle of the Botelers, looking as out of place as a farthingale of Queen Elizabeth joined to a court dress fresh from Paris. The main doorway was led up to by lines of columns and a broad flight of marble steps, on which stood a group of footmen and grooms, who took our horses when we dismounted. A grey-haired steward or major-domo inquired our business, and on learning that we wished to see the Duke in person, he told us that his Grace would give audience to strangers in the afternoon at half after three by the clock. In the meantime he said that the guests' dinner had just been laid in the hall, and it was his master's wish that none who came to Badminton should depart hungry. My companion and I were but too glad to accept the steward's invitation, so having visited the bath-room and attended to the needs of the toilet, we followed a footman, who ushered us into a great room where the company had already assembled.

The guests may have numbered fifty or sixty, old and young, gentle and simple, of the most varied types and appearance. I observed that many of them cast haughty and inquiring glances round them, in the pauses between the dishes, as though each marvelled how he came to be a member of so motley a crew. Their only common feature appeared to be the devotion which they showed to the platter and the wine flagon. There was little talking, for there were few who knew their neighbours. Some were soldiers who had come to offer their swords and their services to the King's lieutenant; others were merchants from Bristol, with some proposal or suggestion anent the safety of their property. There were two or three officials of the city, who had come out to receive instructions as to its defence, while here and there I marked the child of Israel, who had found his way there in the hope that in times of trouble he might find high interest and noble borrowers. Horse-dealers, saddlers, armourers, surgeons, and clergymen completed the company, who were waited upon by a staff of powdered and liveried servants, who brought and removed the dishes with the silence and deftness of long training.

The room was a contrast to the bare plainness of Sir Stephen Timewell's dining-hall at Taunton, for it was richly panelled and highly decorated all round. The floor was formed of black and white marble, set in squares, and the walls were of polished oak, and bore a long line of paintings of the Somerset family, from John of Gaunt downwards. The ceiling, too, was tastefully painted with flowers and nymphs, so that a man's neck was stiff ere he had done admiring it. At the further end of the hall yawned a great fireplace of white marble, with the lions and lilies of the Somerset arms carved in oak above it, and a long gilt scroll bearing the family motto, "Mutare vel timere sperno." The massive tables at which we sat were loaded with silver chargers and candelabra, and bright with the rich plate for which Badminton was famous. I could not but think that, if Saxon could clap eyes upon it, he would not be long in urging that the war be carried on in this direction.

After dinner we were all shown into a small ante-chamber, set round with velvet settees, where we were to wait till the Duke was ready to see us. In the centre of this room there stood several cases, glass-topped and lined with silk, wherein were little steel and iron rods, with brass tubes and divers other things, very bright and ingenious, though I could not devise for what end they had been put together. A gentleman-in-waiting came round with paper and ink-horn, making notes of our names and of our business. Him I asked whether it might not be possible for me to have an entirely private audience.

‘His Grace never sees in private,’ he replied. ‘He has ever his chosen councillors and officers in attendance.’

‘But the business is one which is only fit for his own ear,’ I urged.

‘His Grace holds that there is no business fit only for his own ear,’ said the gentleman. ‘You must arrange matters as best you can when you are shown in to him. I will promise, however, that your request be carried to him, though I warn you that it cannot be granted.’

I thanked him for his good offices, and turned away with the farmer to look at the strange little engines within the cases.

‘What is it?’ I asked. ‘I have never seen aught that was like it.’

‘It is the work of the mad Marquis of Worcester,’ quoth he. ‘He was the Duke’s grandfather. He was ever making and devising such toys, but they were never of any service to himself or to others. Now, look ye here! This wi’ the wheels were called the water-engine, and it was his crazy thought that, by heating the water in that ere kettle, ye might make the wheels go round, and thereby travel along iron bars quicker nor a horse could run. ‘Oons! I’d match my old brown mare against all such contrivances to the end o’ time. But to our places, for the Duke is coming.’

We had scarce taken our seats with the other suitors, when the folding-doors were flung open, and a stout, thick, short man of fifty, or thereabouts, came bustling into the room, and strode down it between two lines of bowing clients. He had large projecting blue eyes, with great pouches of skin beneath them, and a yellow, sallow visage. At his heels walked a dozen officers and men of rank, with flowing wigs and clanking swords. They had hardly passed through the opposite door into the Duke’s own room, when the gentleman with the list called out a name, and the guests began one after the other to file into the great man’s presence.

‘Methinks his Grace is in no very gentle temper,’ quoth Farmer Brown. ‘Did you not mark how he gnawed his nether lip as he passed?’

‘He seemed a quiet gentleman enough,’ I answered. ‘It would try Job himself to see all these folk of an afternoon.’

‘Hark at that!’ he whispered, raising his finger. As he spoke the sound of the Duke’s voice in a storm of wrath was heard from the inner chamber, and a little sharp-faced man came out and flew through the ante-chamber as though fright had turned his head.

‘He is an armourer of Bristol,’ whispered one of my neighbours. ‘It is likely that the Duke cannot come to terms with him over a contract.’

‘Nay,’ said another. ‘He supplied Sir Marmaduke Hyson’s troop with sabres, and it is said that the blades will bend as though they were lead. Once used they can never be fitted back into the scabbard again.’

‘The tall man who goes in now is an inventor,’ quoth the first. ‘He hath the secret of some very grievous fire, such as hath been used by the Greeks against the Turks in the Levant, which he desires to sell for the better fortifying of Bristol.’

The Greek fire seemed to be in no great request with the Duke, for the inventor came out presently with his face as red as though it had been touched by his own compound. The next upon the list was my honest friend the farmer. The angry tones which greeted him promised badly for the fate of the four-year-old, but a lull ensued, and the farmer came out and resumed his seat, rubbing his great red hands with satisfaction.

‘Ecod!’ he whispered. ‘He was plaguy hot at first, but he soon came round, and he hath promised that if I pay for the hire of a dragooner as long as the war shall last I shall have back the piebald.’

I had been sitting all this time wondering how in the world I was to conduct my business amid the swarm of suppliants and the crowd of officers who were attending the Duke. Had there been any likelihood of my gaining audience with him in any other way I should gladly have adopted it, but all my endeavours to that end had been useless. Unless I took this occasion I might never come face to face with him at all. But how could he give due thought or discussion to such a matter before others? What chance was there of his weighing it as it should be weighed? Even if his feelings inclined him that way, he dared not show any sign of wavering when so many eyes were upon him. I was tempted to feign some other reason for my coming, and trust to fortune to give me some more favourable chance for handing him my papers. But then that chance might never arrive, and time was pressing. It was said that he would return to Bristol next morning. On the whole, it seemed best that I should make the fittest use I could of my present position in the hope that the Duke’s own discretion and self-command might, when he saw the address upon my despatches, lead to a more private interview.

I had just come to this resolution when my name was read out, on which I rose and advanced into the inner chamber. It was a small but lofty room, hung in blue silk with a broad gold cornice. In the centre was a square table littered over with piles of papers, and behind this sat his Grace with full-bottomed wig rolling down to his shoulders, very stately and imposing. He had the same subtle air of the court which I had observed both in Monmouth and in Sir Gervas, which, with his high bold features and large piercing eyes, marked him as a leader of men. His private scrivener sat beside him, taking notes of his directions, while the others stood behind in a half circle, or took snuff together in the deep recess of the window.

‘Make a note of Smithson’s order,’ he said, as I entered. ‘A hundred pots and as many fronts and backs to be ready by Tuesday; also six score snaphances for the musqueteers, and two hundred extra spades for the workers. Mark that the order be declared null and void unless fulfilled within the time appointed.’

‘It is so marked, your Grace.’

‘Captain Micah Clarke,’ said the Duke, reading from the list in front of him. ‘What is your wish, Captain?’

‘One which it would be better if I could deliver privately to your Grace,’ I answered.

‘Ah, you are he who desired private audience? Well, Captain, these are my council and they are as myself. So we may look upon ourselves as alone. What I may hear they may hear. Zounds, man, never stammer and boggle, but out with it!’

My request had roused the interest of the company, and those who were in the window came over to the table. Nothing could have been worse for the success of my mission, and yet there was no help for it but to deliver my despatches. I can say with a clear conscience, without any vainglory, that I had no fears for myself. The doing of my duty was the one thought in my mind. And here I may say once for all, my dear children, that I am speaking of myself all through this statement with the same freedom as though it were another man. In very truth the strong active lad of one-and-twenty *was* another man from the grey-headed old fellow who sits in the chimney corner and can do naught better than tell old tales to the youngsters. Shallow water gives a great splash, and so a braggart has ever been contemptible in my eyes. I trust, therefore, that ye will never think that your grandad is singing his own praises, or setting himself up as better than his neighbours. I do but lay the facts, as far as I can recall them, before ye with all freedom and with all truth.

My short delay and hesitation had sent a hot flush of anger into the Duke's face, so I drew the packet of papers from my inner pocket and handed them to him with a respectful bow. As his eyes fell upon the superscription, he gave a sudden start of surprise and agitation, making a motion as though to hide them in his bosom. If this were his impulse he overcame it, and sat lost in thought for a minute or more with the papers in his hand. Then with a quick toss of the head, like a man who hath formed his resolution, he broke the seals and cast his eyes over the contents, which he then threw down upon the table with a bitter laugh.

'What think ye, gentlemen!' he cried, looking round with scornful eyes; 'what think ye this private message hath proved to be? It is a letter from the traitor Monmouth, calling upon me to resign the allegiance of my natural sovereign and to draw my sword in his behalf! If I do this I am to have his gracious favour and protection. If not, I incur sequestration, banishment, and ruin. He thinks Beaufort's loyalty is to be bought like a packman's ware, or bullied out of him by ruffling words. The descendant of John of Gaunt is to render fealty to the brat of a wandering playwoman!'

Several of the company sprang to their feet, and a general buzz of surprise and anger greeted the Duke's words. He sat with bent brows, beating his foot against the ground, and turning over the papers upon the table.

'What hath raised his hopes to such mad heights?' he cried. 'How doth he presume to send such a missive to one of my quality? Is it because he hath seen the backs of a parcel of rascally militiamen, and because he hath drawn a few hundred chawbacons from the plough's tail to his standard, that he ventures to hold such language to the President of Wales? But ye will be my witnesses as to the spirit in which I received it?'

‘We can preserve your Grace from all danger of slander on that point,’ said an elderly officer, while a murmur of assent from the others greeted the remark.

‘And you!’ cried Beaufort, raising his voice and turning his flashing eyes upon me; ‘who are you that dare to bring such a message to Badminton? You had surely taken leave of your senses ere you did set out upon such an errand!’

‘I am in the hands of God here as elsewhere,’ I answered, with some flash of my father’s fatalism. ‘I have done what I promised to do, and the rest is no concern of mine.’

‘You shall find it a very close concern of thine,’ he shouted, springing from his chair and pacing up and down the room; ‘so close as to put an end to all thy other concerns in this life. Call in the halberdiers from the outer hall! Now, fellow, what have you to say for yourself?’

‘There is naught to be said,’ I answered.

‘But something to be done,’ he retorted in a fury. ‘Seize this man and secure his hands!’

Four halberdiers who had answered the summons closed in upon me and laid hands on me. Resistance would have been folly, for I had no wish to harm the men in the doing of their duty. I had come to take my chance, and if that chance should prove to be death, as seemed likely enough at present, it must be met as a thing foreseen. I thought of those old-time lines which Master Chillingfoot, of Petersfield, had ever held up to our admiration —

> Non civium ardor prava jubentium
> Non vultus instantis tyranni
> Mente quatit solida.

Here was the ‘vultus instantis tyranni,’ in this stout, be-wigged, lace-covered, yellow-faced man in front of me. I had obeyed the poet in so far that my courage had not been shaken. I confess that this spinning dust-heap of a world has never had such attractions for me that it would be a pang to leave it. Never, at least, until my marriage — and that, you will find, alters your thoughts about the value of your life, and many other of your thoughts as well. This being so, I stood erect, with my eyes fixed upon the angry nobleman, while his soldiers were putting the gyves about my wrists.

CHAPTER XXV. Of Strange Doings in the Boteler Dungeon

‘Take down this fellow’s statement,’ said the Duke to his scrivener. ‘Now, sirrah, it may not be known to you that his gracious Majesty the King hath conferred plenary powers upon me during these troubled times, and that I have his warrant to deal with all traitors without either jury or judge. You do bear a commission, I understand, in the rebellious body which is here described as Saxon’s regiment of Wiltshire Foot? Speak the truth for your neck’s sake.’

‘I will speak the truth for the sake of something higher than that, your Grace,’ I answered. ‘I command a company in that regiment.’

‘And who is this Saxon?’

‘I will answer all that I may concerning myself,’ said I, ‘but not a word which may reflect upon others.’

‘Ha!’ he roared, hot with anger. ‘Our pretty gentleman must needs stand upon the niceties of honour after taking up arms against his King. I tell you, sir, that your honour is in such a parlous state already that you may well throw it over and look to your safety. The sun is sinking in the west. Ere it set your life, too, may have set for ever.’

‘I am the keeper of my own honour, your Grace,’ I answered. ‘As to my life, I should not be standing here this moment if I had any great dread of losing it. It is right that I should tell you that my Colonel hath sworn to exact a return for any evil that may befall me, on you or any of your household who may come into his power. This I say, not as a threat, but as a warning, for I know him to be a man who is like to be as good as his word.’

‘Your Colonel, as you call him, may find it hard enough to save himself soon,’ the Duke answered with a sneer. ‘How many men hath Monmouth with him?’

I smiled and shook my head.

‘How shall we make this traitor find his tongue?’ he asked furiously, turning to his council.

‘I should clap on the thumbikins,’ said one fierce-faced old soldier.

‘I have known a lighted match between the fingers work wonders,’ another suggested. ‘Sir Thomas Dalzell hath in the Scottish war been able to win over several of that most stubborn and hardened race, the Western Covenanters, by such persuasion.’

‘Sir Thomas Dalzell,’ said a grey-haired gentleman, clad in black velvet, ‘hath studied the art of war among the Muscovites, in their barbarous and bloody encounters with the Turks. God forbid that we Christians of England should seek our examples among the skin-clad idolaters of a savage country.’

‘Sir William would like to see war carried out on truly courteous principles,’ said the first speaker. ‘A battle should be like a stately minuet, with no loss of dignity or of etiquette.’

‘Sir,’ the other answered hotly, ‘I have been in battles when you were in your baby-linen, and I handled a battoon when you could scarce shake a rattle. In leaguer or onfall a soldier’s work is sharp and stern, but I say that the use of torture, which the law of England hath abolished, should also be laid aside by the law of nations.’

‘Enough, gentlemen, enough!’ cried the Duke, seeing that the dispute was like to wax warm. ‘Your opinion, Sir William, hath much weight with us, and yours also, Colonel Hearn. We shall discuss this at greater length in privacy. Halberdiers, remove the prisoner, and let a clergyman be sent to look to his spiritual needs!’

‘Shall we take him to the strong room, your Grace?’ asked the Captain of the guard.

‘No, to the old Boteler dungeon,’ he replied; and I heard the next name upon the list called out, while I was led through a side door with a guard in front and behind me. We passed through endless passages and corridors, with heavy stop and clank of arms, until we reached the ancient wing. Here, in the corner turret, was a small, bare room, mouldy and damp, with a high, arched roof, and a single long slit in the outer wall to admit light. A small wooden couch and a rude chair formed the whole of the furniture. Into this I was shown by the Captain, who stationed a guard at the door, and then came in after me and loosened my wrists. He was a sad-faced man, with solemn sunken eyes and a dreary expression, which matched ill with his bright trappings and gay sword-knot.

‘Keep your heart up, friend,’ said he, in a hollow voice. ‘It is but a choke and a struggle. A day or two since we had the same job to do, and the man scarcely groaned. Old Spender, the Duke’s marshal, hath as sure a trick of tying and as good judgment in arranging a drop as hath Dun of Tyburn. Be of good heart, therefore, for you shall not fall into the hands of a bungler.’

‘I would that I could let Monmouth know that his letters were delivered,’ I exclaimed, seating myself on the side of the bed.

‘I’ faith, they were delivered. Had you been the penny postman of Mr. Robert Murray, of whom we heard so much in London last spring, you could not have handed it in more directly. Why did you not talk the Duke fair? He is a gracious nobleman, and kind of heart, save when he is thwarted or angered. Some little talk as to the rebels’ numbers and dispositions might have saved you.’

‘I wonder that you, as a soldier, should speak or think of such a thing,’ said I coldly.

‘Well, well! Your neck is your own. If it please you to take a leap into nothing it were pity to thwart you. But his Grace commanded that you should have the chaplain. I must away to him.’

‘I prythee do not bring him,’ said I. ‘I am one of a dissenting stock, and I see that there is a Bible in yonder recess. No man can aid me in making my peace with God.’

‘It is well,’ he answered, ‘for Dean Hewby hath come over from Chippenham, and he is discoursing with our good chaplain on the need of self-denial, moistening his throat the while with a flask of the prime Tokay. At dinner I heard him put up thanks for what he was to receive, and in the same breath ask the butler how he dared to serve a deacon of the Church with a pullet without truffle dressing. But, perhaps, you would desire Dean Hewby’s spiritual help? No? Well, what I can do for you in reason shall be done, since you will not be long upon our hands. Above all, keep a cheery heart.’

He left the cell, but presently unlocked the door and pushed his dismal face round the corner. ‘I am Captain Sinclair, of the Duke’s household,’ he said, ‘should you have occasion to ask for me. You had best have spiritual help, for I do assure you that there hath been something worse than either warder or prisoner in this cell.’

‘What then?’ I asked.

‘Why, marry, nothing less than the Devil,’ he answered, coming in and closing the door. ‘It was in this way,’ he went on, sinking his voice: ‘Two years agone Hector Marot, the highwayman, was shut up in this very

Boteler dungeon. I was myself on guard in the corridor that night, and saw the prisoner at ten o'clock sitting on that bed even as you are now. At twelve I had occasion to look in, as my custom is, with the hope of cheering his lonely hours, when lo, he was gone! Yes, you may well stare. Mine eyes had never been off the door, and you can judge what chance there was of his getting through the windows. Walls and floor are both solid stone, which might be solid rock for the thickness. When I entered there was a plaguy smell of brimstone, and the flame of my lanthorn burned blue. Nay, it is no smiling matter. If the Devil did not run away with Hector Marot, pray who did? for sure I am that no angel of grace could come to him as to Peter of old. Perchance the Evil One may desire a second bird out of the same cage, and so I tell you this that you may be on your guard against his assaults.'

'Nay, I fear him not,' I answered.

'It is well,' croaked the Captain. 'Be not cast down!' His head vanished, and the key turned in the creaking lock. So thick were the walls that I could hear no sound after the door was closed. Save for the sighing of the wind in the branches of the trees outside the narrow window, all was as silent as the grave within the dungeon.

Thus left to myself I tried to follow Captain Sinclair's advice as to the keeping up of my heart, though his talk was far from being of a cheering nature. In my young days, more particularly among the sectaries with whom I had been brought most in contact, a belief in the occasional appearance of the Prince of Darkness, and his interference in bodily form with the affairs of men, was widespread and unquestioning. Philosophers in their own quiet chambers may argue learnedly on the absurdity of such things, but in a dim-lit dungeon, cut off from the world, with the grey gloaming creeping down, and one's own fate hanging in the balance, it becomes a very different matter. The escape, if the Captain's story were true, appeared to border upon the miraculous. I examined the walls of the cell very carefully. They were formed of great square stones cunningly fitted together. The thin slit or window was cut through the centre of a single large block. All over, as high as the hand could reach, the face of the walls was covered with letters and legends cut by many generations of captives. The floor was composed of old foot-worn slabs, firmly cemented together. The closest search failed to show any hole or cranny where a rat could have escaped, far less a man.

It is a very strange thing, my dears, to sit down in cold blood, and think that the chances are that within a few hours your pulses will have given their last throb, and your soul have sped away upon its final errand. Strange and very awesome! The man who rideth down into the press of the battle with his jaw set and his grip tight upon reign and sword-hilt cannot feel this, for the human mind is such that one emotion will ever push out another. Neither can the man who draws slow and catching breaths upon the bed of deadly sickness be said to have experience of it, for the mind weakened with disease can but submit without examining too closely that which it submits to. When, however, a young and hale man sits alone in quiet, and sees present death hanging over him, he hath such food for thought that, should he survive and live to be grey-headed, his whole life will be marked and altered by those solemn hours, as a stream is changed in its course by some rough bank against which it hath struck. Every little fault and blemish stands out clear in the presence of death, as the dust specks appear when the sunbeam shines into the darkened room. I noted them then, and I have, I trust, noted them ever since.

I was seated with my head bowed upon my breast, deeply buried in this solemn train of thoughts, when I was startled by hearing a sharp click, such as a man might give who wished to attract attention. I sprang to my feet and gazed round in the gathering gloom without being able to tell whence it came. I had well-nigh persuaded myself that my senses had deceived me, when the sound was repeated louder than before, and casting my eyes upwards I saw a face peering in at me through the slit, or part of a face rather, for I could but see the eye and corner of the cheek. Standing on my chair I made out that it was none other than the farmer who had been my companion upon the road.

‘Hush, lad!’ he whispered, with a warning forefinger pushed through the narrow crack. ‘Speak low, or the guard may chance to hear. What can I do for you?’

‘How did you come to know where I was?’ I asked in astonishment.

‘Whoy, mun,’ he answered, ‘I know as much of this ‘ere house as Beaufort does himsel’. Afore Badminton was built, me and my brothers has spent many a day in climbing over the old Boteler tower. It’s not the first time that I have spoke through this window. But, quick; what can I do for you?’

‘I am much beholden to you, sir,’ I answered, ‘but I fear that there is no help which you can give me, unless, indeed, you could convey news to my friends in the army of what hath befallen me.’

‘I might do that,’ whispered Farmer Brown. ‘Hark ye in your ear, lad, what I never breathed to man yet. Mine own conscience pricks me at times over this bolstering up of a Papist to rule over a Protestant nation. Let like rule like, say I. At the ‘lections I rode to Sudbury, and I put in my vote for Maister Evans, of Turnford, who was in favour o’ the Exclusionists. Sure enough, if that same Bill had been carried, the Duke would be sitting on his father’s throne. The law would have said yes. Now, it says nay. A wonderful thing is the law with its yea, yea, and nay, nay, like Barclay, the Quaker man, that came down here in a leather suit, and ca’d the parson a steepleman. There’s the law. It’s no use shootin’ at it, or passin’ pikes through it, no, nor chargin’ at it wi’ a troop of horse. If it begins by saying “nay” it will say “nay” to the end of the chapter. Ye might as well fight wi’ the book o’ Genesis. Let Monmouth get the law changed, and it will do more for him than all the dukes in England. For all that he’s a Protestant, and I would do what I might to serve him.’

‘There is a Captain Lockarby, who is serving in Colonel Saxon’s regiment, in Monmouth’s army,’ said I. ‘Should things go wrong with me, I would take it as a great kindness if you would bear him my love, and ask him to break it gently, by word or by letter, to those at Havant. If I were sure that this would be done, it would be a great ease to my mind.’

‘It shall be done, lad,’ said the good farmer. ‘I shall send my best man and fleetest horse this very night, that they may know the straits in which you are. I have a file here if it would help you.’

‘Nay,’ I answered, ‘human aid can do little to help me here.’

‘There used to be a hole in the roof. Look up and see if you can see aught of it.’

‘It arches high above my head,’ I answered, looking upwards; ‘but there is no sign of any opening.’

‘There was one,’ he repeated. ‘My brother Roger hath swung himself down wi’ a rope. In the old time the prisoners were put in so, like Joseph into the pit. The door is but a new thing.’

‘Hole or no hole, it cannot help me,’ I answered. ‘I have no means of climbing to it. Do not wait longer, kind friend, or you may find yourself in trouble.’

‘Good-bye then, my brave heart,’ he whispered, and the honest grey eye and corner of ruddy cheek disappeared from the casement. Many a time during the course of the long evening I glanced up with some wild hope that he might return, and every creak of the branches outside brought me on to the chair, but it was the last that I saw of Farmer Brown.

This kindly visit, short as it was, relieved my mind greatly, for I had a trusty man’s word that, come what might, my friends should, at least, have some news of my fate. It was now quite dark, and I was pacing up and down the little chamber, when the key turned in the door, and the Captain entered with a rushlight and a great bowl of bread and milk.

‘Here is your supper, friend,’ said he. ‘Take it down, appetite or no, for it will give you strength to play the man at the time ye wot of. They say it was beautiful to see my Lord Russell die upon Tower Hill. Be of good cheer! Folk may say as much of you. His Grace is in a terrible way. He walketh up and down, and biteth his lip, and clencheth his hands like one who can scarce contain his wrath. It may not be against you, but I know not what else can have angered him.’

I made no answer to this Job’s comforter, so he presently left me, placing the bowl upon the chair, with the rushlight beside it. I finished the food, and feeling the better for it, stretched myself upon the couch, and fell into a heavy and dreamless sleep. This may have lasted three or four hours, when I was suddenly awoken by a sound like the creaking of hinges. Sitting up on the pallet I gazed around me. The rushlight had burned out and the cell was impenetrably dark. A greyish glimmer at one end showed dimly the position of the aperture, but all else was thick and black. I strained my ears, but no further sound fell upon them. Yet I was certain that I had not been deceived, and that the noise which had aroused me was within my very chamber. I rose and felt my way slowly round the room, passing my hand over the walls and door. Then I paced backwards and forwards to test the flooring. Neither around me nor beneath me was there any change. Whence did the sound come from, then? I sat down upon the side of the bed and waited patiently in the hope of hearing it once again.

Presently it was repeated, a low groaning and creaking as though a door or shutter long disused was being slowly and stealthily opened. At the same time a dull yellow light streamed down from above, issuing from a thin slit in the centre of the arched roof above me. Slowly as I watched it this slit widened and extended as if a sliding panel were being pulled out, until a good-sized hole was left, through which I saw a head, looking down at me, outlined against the misty light behind it. The knotted end of a rope was passed through this aperture, and came dangling down to the dungeon floor.

It was a good stout piece of hemp, strong enough to bear the weight of a heavy man, and I found, upon pulling at it, that it was firmly secured above. Clearly it was the desire of my unknown benefactor that I should ascend by it, so I went up hand over hand, and after some difficulty in squeezing my shoulders through the hole I succeeded in reaching the room above. While I was still rubbing my eyes after the sudden change from darkness into light, the rope was swiftly whisked up and the sliding shutter closed once more. To those who were not in the secret there was nothing to throw light upon my disappearance.

I found myself in the presence of a stout short man clad in a rude jerkin and leather breeches, which gave him somewhat the appearance of a groom. He wore a broad felt hat drawn down very low over his eyes, while the lower part of his face was swathed round with a broad cravat. In his hand he bore a horn lanthorn, by the light of which I saw that the room in which we were was of the same size as the dungeon beneath, and differed from it only in having a broad casement which looked out upon the park. There was no furniture in the chamber, but a great beam ran across it, to which the rope had been fastened by which I ascended.

'Speak low, friend,' said the stranger. 'The walls are thick and the doors are close, yet I would not have your guardians know by what means you have been spirited away.'

'Truly, sir,' I answered, 'I can scarce credit that it is other than a dream. It is wondrous that my dungeon should be so easily broken into, and more wondrous still that I should find a friend who would be willing to risk so much for my sake.'

'Look there!' quoth he, holding down his lanthorn so as to cast its light on the part of the floor where the panel was fitted. Can you not see how old and crumbled is the stone-work which surrounds it? This opening in the roof is as old as the dungeon itself, and older far than the door by which you were led into it. For this was one of those bottle-shaped cells or oubliettes which hard men of old devised for the safe keeping of their captives. Once lowered through this hole into the stone-girt pit a man might eat his heart out, for his fate was sealed. Yet you see that the very device which once hindered escape has now brought freedom within your reach.'

'Thanks to your clemency, your Grace,' I answered, looking keenly at my companion.

‘Now out on these disguises!’ he cried, peevishly pushing back the broad-edged hat and disclosing, as I expected, the features of the Duke. ‘Even a blunt soldier lad can see through my attempts at concealment. I fear, Captain, that I should make a bad plotter, for my nature is as open — well, as thine is. I cannot better the simile.’

‘Your Grace’s voice once heard is not easily forgot,’ said I.

‘Especially when it talks of hemp and dungeons,’ he answered, with a smile. ‘But if I clapped you into prison, you must confess that I have made you amends by pulling you out again at the end of my line, like a minnow out of a bottle. But how came you to deliver such papers in the presence of my council?’

‘I did what I could to deliver them in private,’ said I. ‘I sent you a message to that effect.’

‘It is true,’ he answered; ‘but such messages come in to me from every soldier who wishes to sell his sword, and every inventor who hath a long tongue and a short purse. How could I tell that the matter was of real import?’

‘I feared to let the chance slip lest it might never return,’ said I. ‘I hear that your Grace hath little leisure during these times.’

‘I cannot blame you,’ he answered, pacing up and down the room. ‘But it was untoward. I might have hid the despatches, yet it would have roused suspicions. Your errand would have leaked out. There are many who envy my lofty fortunes, and who would seize upon a chance of injuring me with King James. Sunderland or Somers would either of them blow the least rumour into a flame which might prove unquenchable. There was naught for it, therefore, but to show the papers and to turn a harsh face on the messenger. The most venomous tongue could not find fault in my conduct. What course would you have advised under such circumstances?’ ‘The most direct,’ I answered. ‘Aye, aye, Sir. Honesty. Public men have, however, to pick their steps as best they may, for the straight path would lead too often to the cliff-edge. The Tower would be too scanty for its guests were we all to wear our hearts upon our sleeves. But to you in this privacy I can tell my real thoughts without fear of betrayal or misconstruction. On paper I will not write one word. Your memory must be the sheet which bears my answer to Monmouth. And first of all, erase from it all that you have heard me say in the council-room. Let it be as though it never were spoken. Is that done?’

'I understand that it did not really represent your Grace's thoughts.'

'Very far from it, Captain. But prythee tell me what expectation of success is there among the rebels themselves? You must have heard your Colonel and others discuss the question, or noted by their bearing which way their thoughts lay. Have they good hopes of holding out against the King's troops?'

'They have met with naught but success hitherto,' I answered.

'Against the militia. But they will find it another thing when they have trained troops to deal with. And yet — and yet! — One thing I know, that any defeat of Feversham's army would cause a general rising throughout the country. On the other hand, the King's party are active. Every post brings news of some fresh levy. Albemarle still holds the militia together in the west. The Earl of Pembroke is in arms in Wiltshire. Lord Lumley is moving from the east with the Sussex forces. The Earl of Abingdon is up in Oxfordshire. At the university the caps and gowns are all turning into head-pieces and steel fronts. James's Dutch regiments have sailed from Amsterdam. Yet Monmouth hath gained two fights, and why not a third? They are troubled waters — troubled waters!' The Duke paced backwards and forwards with brows drawn down, muttering all this to himself rather than to me, and shaking his head like one in the sorest perplexity.

'I would have you tell Monmouth,' he said at last, 'that I thank him for the papers which he hath sent me, and that I will duly read and weigh them. Tell him also that I wish him well in his enterprise, and would help him were it not that I am hemmed in by those who watch me closely, and who would denounce me were I to show my true thoughts. Tell him that, should he move his army into these parts, I may then openly declare myself; but to do so now would be to ruin the fortunes of my house, without in any way helping him. Can you bear him that message?'

'I shall do so, your Grace.

'Tell me,' he asked, 'how doth Monmouth bear himself in this enterprise?'

'Like a wise and gallant leader,' I answered.

'Strange,' he murmured; 'it was ever the jest at court that he had scarce energy or constancy enough to finish a game at ball, but would ever throw his racquet down ere the winning point was scored. His plans were like a weather-vane, altered by every breeze. He was constant only in his inconstancy. It is true that he led the King's troops in Scotland, but all men knew that Claverhouse and Dalzell were the real conquerors at Bothwell Bridge. Methinks he resembles that Brutus in Roman history who feigned weakness of mind as a cover to his ambitions.'

The Duke was once again conversing with himself rather than with me, so that I made no remark, save to observe that Monmouth had won the hearts of the lower people.

'There lies his strength,' said Beaufort. 'The blood of his mother runs in his veins. He doth not think it beneath him to shake the dirty paw of Jerry the tinker, or to run a race against a bumpkin on the village green. Well, events have shown that he hath been right. These same bumpkins have stood by him when nobler friends have held aloof. I would I could see into the future. But you have my message, Captain, and I trust that, if you change it in the delivery, it will be in the direction of greater warmth and kindliness. It is time now that you depart, for within three hours the guard is changed, and your escape will be discovered.'

'But how depart?' I asked.

'Through here,' he answered, pushing open the casement, and sliding the rope along the beam in that direction. 'The rope may be a foot or two short, but you have extra inches to make matters even. When you have reached the ground, take the gravel path which turns to the right, and follow it until it leads you to the high trees which skirt the park. The seventh of these hath a bough which shoots over the boundary wall. Climb along the bough, drop over upon the other side, and you will find my own valet waiting with your horse. Up with you, and ride, haste, haste, post-haste, for the south. By morn you should be well out of danger's way.'

'My sword?' I asked.

'All your property is there. Tell Monmouth what I have said, and let him know that I have used you as kindly as was possible.'

'But what will your Grace's council say when they find that I am gone?' I asked.

'Pshaw, man! Never fret about that! I will off to Bristol at daybreak, and give my council enough to think of without their having time to devote to your fate. The soldiers will but have another instance of the working of the Father of Evil, who hath long been thought to have a weakness for that cell beneath us. Faith, if all we hear be true, there have been horrors enough acted there to call up every devil out of the pit. But time presses. Gently through the casement! So! Remember the message.'

‘Adieu, your Grace!’ I answered, and seizing the rope slipped rapidly and noiselessly to the ground, upon which he drew it up and closed the casement. As I looked round, my eye fell upon the dark narrow slit which opened into my cell, and through which honest Farmer Brown had held converse with me. Half-an-hour ago I had been stretched upon the prison pallet without a hope or a thought of escape. Now I was out in the open with no hand to stay me, breathing the air of freedom with the prison and the gallows cast off from me, as the waking man casts off his evil dreams. Such changes shake a man’s soul, my children. The heart that can steel itself against death is softened by the assurance of safety. So I have known a worthy trader bear up manfully when convinced that his fortunes had been engulfed in the ocean, but lose all philosophy on finding that the alarm was false, and that they had come safely through the danger. For my own part, believing as I do that there is nothing of chance in the affairs of this world, I felt that I had been exposed to this trial in order to dispose me to serious thought, and that I had been saved that I might put those thoughts into effect. As an earnest of my endeavour to do so I knelt down on the green sward, in the shadow of the Boteler turret, and I prayed that I might come to be of use on the earth, and that I might be helped to rise above my own wants and interests, to aid forward whatever of good or noble might be stirring in my days. It is well-nigh fifty years, my dears, since I bowed my spirit before the Great Unknown in the moon-tinted park of Badminton, but I can truly say that from that day to this the aims which I laid down for myself have served me as a compass over the dark waters of life — a compass which I may perchance not always follow — for flesh is weak and frail, but which hath, at least, been ever present, that I might turn to it in seasons of doubt and of danger.

The path to the right led through groves and past carp ponds for a mile or more, until I reached the line of trees which skirted the boundary wall. Not a living thing did I see upon my way, save a herd of fallow-deer, which scudded away like swift shadows through the shimmering moonshine. Looking back, the high turrets and gables of the Boteler wing stood out dark and threatening against the starlit sky. Having reached the seventh tree, I clambered along the projecting bough which shot over the park wall, and dropped down upon the other side, where I found my good old dapple-grey awaiting me in the charge of a groom. Springing to my saddle, I strapped my sword once more to my side, and galloped off as fast as the four willing feet could carry me on my return journey.

All that night I rode hard without drawing bridle, through sleeping hamlets, by moon-bathed farmhouses, past shining stealthy rivers, and over birch-clad hills. When the eastern sky deepened from pink into scarlet, and the great sun pushed his rim over the blue north Somerset hills, I was already far upon my journey. It was a Sabbath morning, and from every village rose the sweet tinkling and calling of the bells. I bore no dangerous papers with me now, and might therefore be more careless as to my route. At one point I was questioned by a keen-eyed toll-keeper as to whence I came, but my reply that I was riding direct from his Grace of Beaufort put an end to his suspicions. Further down, near Axbridge, I overtook a grazier who was jogging into Wells upon his sleek cob. With him I rode for some time, and learned that the whole of North Somerset, as well as south, was now in open revolt, and that Wells, Shepton Mallet, and Glastonbury were held by armed volunteers for King Monmouth. The royal forces had all retired west, or east, until help should come. As I rode through the villages I marked the blue flag upon the church towers, and the rustics drilling upon the green, without any sign of trooper or dragoon to uphold the authority of the Stuarts.

My road lay through Shepton Mallet, Piper’s Inn, Bridgewater, and North Petherton, until in the cool of the evening I pulled up my weary horse at the Cross Hands, and saw the towers of Taunton in the valley beneath me. A flagon of beer for the rider, and a sieveful of oats for the steed, put fresh mettle into both of us, and we were jogging on our way once more, when there came galloping down the side of the hill about forty cavaliers, as hard as their horses could carry them. So wild was their riding that I pulled up, uncertain whether they were friend or foe, until, as they came whirling towards me, I recognised that the two officers who rode in front of them were none other than Reuben Lockarby and Sir Gervas Jerome. At the sight of me they flung up their hands, and Reuben shot on to his horse’s neck, where he sat for a moment astride of the mane, until the brute tossed him back into the saddle.

‘It’s Micah! It’s Micah!’ he gasped, with his mouth open, and the tears hopping down his honest face.

‘Od’s pitlikins, man, how did you come here?’ asked Sir Gervas, poking me with his forefinger as though to see if I were really of flesh and blood.

‘We were leading a forlorn of horse into Beaufort’s country to beat him up, and to burn his fine house about his ears if you had come to harm. There has just come a groom from some farmer in those parts who hath brought us news that you were under sentence of death, on which I came away with my wig half frizzled, and found that friend Lockarby had leave from Lord Grey to go north with these troopers. But how have you fared?’

‘Well and ill,’ I answered, wringing their kindly hands. ‘I had not thought last night to see another sun rise, and yet ye see that I am here, sound in life and limb. But all these things will take some time in the telling.’

‘Aye, and King Monmouth will be on thorns to see you. Right about, my lads, and back for the camp. Never was errand so rapidly and happily finished as this of ours. It would have fared ill with Badminton had you been hurt.’

The troopers turned their horses and trotted slowly back to Taunton, while I rode behind them between my two faithful friends, hearing from them all that had occurred in my absence, and telling my own adventures in return. The night had fallen ere we rode through the gates, where I handed Covenant over to the Mayor’s groom, and went direct to the castle to deliver an account of my mission.

CHAPTER XXVI. Of the Strife in the Council

King Monmouth’s council was assembled at the time of my coming, and my entrance caused the utmost surprise and joy, as they had just heard news of my sore danger. Even the royal presence could not prevent several members, among whom were the old Mayor and the two soldiers of fortune, from springing to their feet and shaking me warmly by the hand. Monmouth himself said a few gracious words, and requested that I should be seated at the board with the others.

‘You have earned the right to be of our council,’ said he; ‘and lest there should be a jealousy amongst other captains that you should come among us, I do hereby confer upon you the special title of Scout-master, which, though it entail few if any duties in the present state of our force, will yet give you precedence over your fellows. We had heard that your greeting from Beaufort was of the roughest, and that you were in sore straits in his dungeons. But you have happily come yourself on the very heels of him who bore the tidings. Tell us then from the beginning how things have fared with you.’

I should have wished to have limited my story to Beaufort and his message, but as the council seemed to be intent upon hearing a full account of my journey, I told in as short and simple speech as I could the various passages which had befallen me — the ambuscado of the smugglers, the cave, the capture of the gauger, the journey in the lugger, the acquaintance with Farmer Brown, my being cast into prison, with the manner of my release and the message wherewith I had been commissioned. To all of this the council hearkened with the uttermost attention, while a muttered oath ever and anon from a courtier or a groan and prayer from a Puritan showed how keenly they followed the various phases of my fortunes. Above all, they gave the greatest heed to Beaufort’s words, and stopped me more than once when I appeared to be passing over any saying or event before they had due time to weigh it. When I at last finished they all sat speechless, looking into each other’s faces and waiting for an expression of opinion.

‘On my word,’ said Monmouth at last, ‘this is a young Ulysses, though his Odyssey doth but take three days in the acting. Scudery might not be so dull were she to take a hint from these smugglers’ caves and sliding panels. How say you, Grey?’

‘He hath indeed had his share of adventure,’ the nobleman answered, ‘and hath also performed his mission like a fearless and zealous messenger. You say that Beaufort gave you nought in writing?’

‘Not a word, my lord,’ I replied.

‘And his private message was that he wished us well, and would join us if we were in his country?’

‘That was the effect, my lord.’

‘Yet in his council, as I understand, he did utter bitter things against us, putting affronts upon the King, and making light of his just claims upon the fealty of his nobility?’

‘He did,’ I answered.

‘He would fain stand upon both sides of the hedge at once,’ said King Monmouth. ‘Such a man is very like to find himself on neither side, but in the very heart of the briars. It may be as well, however, that we should move his way, so as to give him the chance of declaring himself.’

‘In any case, as your Majesty remembers,’ said Saxon, ‘we had determined to march Bristolwards and attempt the town.’

‘The works are being strengthened,’ said I, ‘and there are five thousand of the Gloucestershire train-bands assembled within. I saw the labourers at work upon the ramparts as I passed.’

‘If we gain Beaufort we shall gain the town,’ quoth Sir Stephen Timewell. ‘There are already a strong body of godly and honest folk therein, who would rejoice to see a Protestant army within their gates. Should we have to beleaguer it we may count upon some help from within.’

‘Hegel und blitzen!’ exclaimed the German soldier, with an impatience which even the presence of the King could not keep in bounds; ‘how can we talk of sieges and leaguers when we have not a breaching-piece in the army?’

‘The Lard will find us the breaching-pieces,’ cried Ferguson, in his strange, nasal voice. ‘Did the Lard no breach the too’ers o’ Jericho withoot the aid o’ gunpooder? Did the Lard no raise up the man Robert Ferguson and presairve him through five-and-thairty indictments and twa-and-twenty proclamations o’ the godless? What is there He canna do? Hosannah! Hosannah!’

‘The Doctor is right,’ said a square-faced, leather-skinned English Independent. ‘We talk too much o’ carnal means and worldly chances, without leaning upon that heavenly goodwill which should be to us as a staff on stony and broken paths. Yes, gentlemen,’ he continued, raising his voice and glancing across the table at some of the courtiers, ‘ye may sneer at words of piety, but I say that it is you and those like you who will bring down God’s anger upon this army.’

‘And I say so too,’ cried another sectary fiercely.

‘And I,’ ‘And I,’ shouted several, with Saxon, I think, among them.

‘Is it your wish, your Majesty, that we should be insulted at your very council board?’ cried one of the courtiers, springing to his feet with a flushed face. ‘How long are we to be subject to this insolence because we have the religion of a gentleman, and prefer to practise it in the privacy of our hearts rather than at the street corners with these pharisees?’

‘Speak not against God’s saints,’ cried a Puritan, in a loud stern voice. ‘There is a voice within me which tells me that it were better to strike thee dead — yea, even in the presence of the King — than to allow thee to revile those who have been born again.’

Several had sprung to their feet on either side. Hands were laid upon sword-hilts, and glances as stern and as deadly as rapier thrusts were flashing backwards and forwards; but the more neutral and reasonable members of the council succeeded in restoring peace, and in persuading the angry disputants to resume their seats.

‘How now, gentlemen?’ cried the King, his face dark with anger, when silence was at last restored. ‘Is this the extent of my authority that ye should babble and brawl as though my council-chamber were a Fleet Street pot-house? Is this your respect for my person? I tell ye that I would forfeit my just claims for ever, and return to Holland, or devote my sword to the cause of Christianity against the Turk, rather than submit to such indignity. If any man he proved to have stirred up strife amongst the soldiers or commonalty on the score of religion I shall know how to deal with him. Let each preach to his own, but let him not interfere with the flock of his neighbour. As to you, Mr. Bramwell, and you, Mr. Joyce, and you also, Sir Henry Nuttall, we shall hold ye excused from attending these meetings until ye have further notice from us. Ye may now separate, each to your quarters, and to-morrow morning we shall, with the blessing of God, start for the north to see what luck may await our enterprise in those parts.’

The King bowed as a sign that the formal meeting was over, and taking Lord Grey aside, he conversed with him anxiously in a recess. The courtiers, who numbered in their party several English and foreign gentlemen, who had come over together with some Devonshire and Somerset country squires, swaggered out of the room in a body, with much clinking of spurs and clanking of swords. The Puritans drew gravely together and followed after them, walking not with demure and downcast looks, as was their common use, but with grim faces and knitted brows, as the Jews of old may have appeared when, ‘To your tents, O Israel!’ was still ringing in their ears.

Indeed, religious dissension and sectarian heat were in the very air. Outside, on the Castle Green, the voices of preachers rose up like the drone of insects. Every waggon or barrel or chance provision case had been converted into a pulpit, each with its own orator and little knot of eager hearkeners. Here was a russet-coated Taunton volunteer in jackboots and bandolier, holding forth on the justification by works. Further on a grenadier of the militia, with blazing red coat and white cross-belt, was deep in the mystery of the Trinity. In one or two places, where the rude pulpits were too near to each other, the sermons had changed into a hot discussion between the two preachers, in which the audience took part by hums or groans, each applauding the champion whose creed was most in accordance with his own. Through this wild scene, made more striking by the ruddy flickering glare of the camp-fires, I picked my way with a weight at my heart, for I felt how vain it must be to hope for success where such division reigned, Saxon looked on, however, with glistening eyes, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

‘The leaven is working,’ quoth he. ‘Something will come of all this ferment.’

‘I see not what can come of it save disorder and weakness,’ I answered.

‘Good soldiers will come of it, lad,’ said he. ‘They are all sharpening themselves, each after his own fashion, on the whetstone of religion. This arguing breedeth fanatics, and fanatics are the stuff out of which conquerors are fashioned. Have you not heard how Old Noll’s army divided into Presbyterians, Independents, Ranters, Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy men, Brownists, and a score of other sects, out of whose strife rose the finest regiments that ever formed line upon a field of battle?

> “Such as do build their faith upon

The holy text of sword and gun.”

You know old Samuel’s couplet. I tell you, I would rather see them thus employed than at their drill, for all their wrangling and jangling.’

‘But how of this split in the council?’ I asked.

‘Ah, that is indeed a graver matter. All creeds may be welded together, but the Puritan and the scoffer are like oil and water. Yet the Puritan is the oil, for he will be ever atop. These courtiers do but stand for themselves, while the others are backed up by the pith and marrow of the army. It is well that we are afoot to-morrow. The King’s troops are, I hear, pouring across Salisbury Plain, but their ordnance and stores are delaying them, for they know well that they must bring all they need, since they can expect little from the goodwill of the country folk. Ah, friend Buyse, wie geht es?’

‘Ganz gut,’ said the big German, looming up before us through the darkness. ‘But, sapperment, what a cawing and croaking, like a rookery at sunset! You English are a strange people — yes, donnerwetter, a very strange people! There are no two of you who think alike upon any subject under Himmel! The Cavalier will have his gay coat and his loose word. The Puritan will cut your throat rather than give up his sad-coloured dress and his Bible. “King James!” cry some, “King Monmouth!” say the peasants. “King Jesus!” says the Fifth Monarchy man. “No King at all!” cry Master Wade and a few others who are for a Commonwealth. Since I set foot on the Helderenbergh at Amsterdam, my head hath been in a whirl with trying to understand what it is that ye desire, for before I have got to the end of one man’s tale, and begin to see a little through the finsterniss, another will come with another story, and I am in as evil a case as ever. But, my young Hercules, I am right glad to see you back in safety. I am half in fear to give you my hand now, after your recent treatment of it. I trust that you are none the worse for the danger that you have gone through.’

‘Mine eyelids are in truth a little heavy,’ I answered. ‘Save for an hour or two aboard the lugger, and about as long on a prison couch, I have not closed eye since I left the camp.’

‘We shall fall in at the second bugle call, about eight of the clock,’ said Saxon. ‘We shall leave you, therefore, that you may restore yourself after your fatigues. ‘With a parting nod the two old soldiers strode off together down the crowded Fore Street, while I made the best of my way back to the Mayor’s hospitable dwelling, where I had to repeat my story all over again to the assembled household before I was at last suffered to seek my room.

CHAPTER XXVII. Of the Affair near Keynsham Bridge

Monday, June 21, 1685, broke very dark and windy, with dull clouds moving heavily across the sky and a constant sputter of rain. Yet a little after daybreak Monmouth's bugles were blowing in every quarter of the town, from Tone Bridge to Shuttern, and by the hour appointed the regiments had mustered, the roll had been called, and the vanguard was marching briskly out through the eastern gate. It went forth in the same order as it entered, our own regiment and the Taunton burghers bringing up the rear. Mayor Timewell and Saxon had the ordering of this part of the army between them, and being men who had seen much service, they drew the ordnance into a less hazardous position, and placed a strong guard of horse, a cannon's shot in the rear, to meet any attempt of the Royal dragoons.

It was remarked on all sides that the army had improved in order and discipline during the three days' halt, owing perchance to the example of our own unceasing drill and soldierly bearing. In numbers it had increased to nigh eight thousand, and the men were well fed and light of heart. With sturdy close-locked ranks they splashed their way through mud and puddle, with many a rough country joke and many a lusty stave from song or hymn. Sir Gervas rode at the head of his musqueteers, whose befloured tails hung limp and lank with the water dripping from them. Lockarby's pikemen and my own company of scythesmen were mostly labourers from the country, who were hardened against all weathers, and plodded patiently along with the rain-drops glistening upon their ruddy faces. In front were the Taunton foot; behind, the lumbering train of baggage waggons, with the horse in the rear of them. So the long line wound its way over the hills.

At the summit, where the road begins to dip down upon the other side, a halt was called to enable the regiments to close up, and we looked back at the fair town which many of us were never to see again. From the dark walls and house roofs we could still mark the flapping and flutter of white kerchiefs from those whom we left behind. Reuben sat his horse beside me, with his spare shirt streaming in the wind and his great pikemen all agrin behind him, though his thoughts and his eyes were too far away to note them. As we gazed, a long thin quiver of sunshine slipped out between two cloud banks and gilded the summit of the Magdalene tower, with the Royal standard which still waved from it. The incident was hailed as a happy augury, and a great shout spread from rank to rank at the sight of it, with a waving of hats and a clattering of weapons. Then the bugles blew a fanfare, the drums struck up a point of war, Reuben thrust his shirt into his haversack, and on we marched through mud and slush, with the dreary clouds bending low over us, and buttressed by the no less dreary hills on either side. A seeker for omens might have said that the heavens were weeping over our ill-fated venture.

All day we trudged along roads which were quagmires, over our ankles in mud, until in the evening we made our way to Bridgewater, where we gained some recruits, and also some hundred pounds for our military chest, for it was a well-to-do place, with a thriving coast trade carried on down the River Parret. After a night in snug quarters we set off again in even worse weather than before. The country in these parts is a quagmire in the driest season, but the heavy rains had caused the fens to overflow, and turned them into broad lakes on either side of the road. This may have been to some degree in our favour, as shielding us from the raids of the King’s cavalry, but it made our march very slow. All day it was splashing and swashing through mud and mire, the rain-drops shining on the gun-barrels and dripping from the heavy-footed horses. Past the swollen Parret, through Eastover, by the peaceful village of Bawdrip, and over Polden Hill we made our way, until the bugles sounded a halt under the groves of Ashcot, and a rude meal was served out to the men. Then on again, through the pitiless rain, past the wooded park of Piper’s Inn, through Walton, where the floods were threatening the cottages, past the orchards of Street, and so in the dusk of the evening into the grey old town of Glastonbury, where the good folk did their best by the warmth of their welcome to atone for the bitterness of the weather.

The next morning was wet still and inclement, so the army made a short march to Wells, which is a good-sized town, well laid out, with a fine cathedral, which hath a great number of figures carved in stone and placed in niches on the outer side, like that which we saw at Salisbury. The townsfolk were strong for the Protestant cause, and the army was so well received that their victual cost little from the military chest. On this march we first began to come into touch with the Royal horse. More than once when the rain mist cleared we saw the gleam of arms upon the low hills which overlook the road, and our scouts came in with reports of strong bodies of dragoons on either flank. At one time they massed heavily upon our rear, as though planning a descent upon the baggage. Saxon, however, planted a regiment of pikes on either side, so that they broke up again and glinted off over the hills.

From Wells we marched upon the twenty-fourth to Shepton Mallet, with the ominous sabres and helmets still twinkling behind and on either side of us.

That evening we were at Keynsham Bridge, less than two leagues from Bristol as the crow flies, and some of our horse forded the river and pushed on almost to the walls.

By morning the rain clouds had at last cleared, so Reuben and I rode slowly up one of the sloping green hills which rose behind the camp, in the hope of gaining some sight of the enemy. Our men we left littered about upon the grass, trying to light fires with the damp sticks, or laying out their clothes to dry in the sunshine. A strange-looking band they were, coated and splashed with mud from head to heel, their hats all limp and draggled, their arms rusted, and their boots so worn that many walked barefoot, and others had swathed their kerchiefs round their feet. Yet their short spell of soldiering had changed them from honest-faced yokels into fierce-eyed, half-shaven, gaunt-cheeked fellows, who could carry arms or port pikes as though they had done nought else since childhood.

The plight of the officers was no better than that of the men, nor should an officer, my dears, when he is upon service, ever demean himself by partaking of any comfort which all cannot share with him. Let him lie by a soldier’s fire and eat a soldier’s fare, or let him hence, for he is a hindrance and a stumbling-block. Our clothes were pulp, our steel fronts red with rust, and our chargers as stained and splashed as though they had rolled in the mire. Our very swords and pistols were in such a plight that we could scarce draw the one or snap the other. Sir Gervas alone succeeded in keeping his attire and his person as neat and as dainty as ever. What he did in the watches of the night, and how he gained his sleep, hath ever been a mystery to me, for day after day he turned out at the bugle call, washed, scented, brushed, with wig in order, and clothes from which every speck of mud had been carefully removed. At his saddle-bow he bore with him the great flour dredger which we saw him use at Taunton, and his honest musqueteers had their heads duly dusted every morning, though in an hour their tails would be as brown as nature made them, while the flour would be trickling in little milky streams down their broad backs, or forming in cakes upon the skirts of their coats. It was a long contest between the weather and the Baronet, but our comrade proved the victor.

‘There was a time when I was called plump Reuben,’ quoth my friend, as we rode together up the winding track. ‘What with too little that is solid and too much that is liquid I am like to be skeleton Reuben ere I see Havant again. I am as full of rain-water as my father’s casks are of October. I would, Micah, that you would wring me out and hang me to dry upon one of these bushes.’

‘If we are wet, King James’s men must be wetter,’ said I, ‘for at least we have had such shelter as there was.’

‘It is poor comfort when you are starved to know that another is in the same plight. I give you my word, Micah, I took in one hole of my sword-belt on Monday, two on Tuesday, one yesterday, and one to-day. I tell you, I am thawing like an icicle in the sun.’

‘If you should chance to dwindle to nought,’ said I, laughing, ‘what account are we to give of you in Taunton? Since you have donned armour and taken to winning the hearts of fair maidens, you have outstripped us all in importance, and become a man of weight and substance.’

‘I had more substance and weight ere I began trailing over the countryside like a Hambledon packman,’ quoth he. ‘But in very truth and with all gravity, Micah, it is a strange thing to feel that the whole world for you, your hopes, your ambitions, your all, are gathered into so small a compass that a hood might cover it, and two little pattens support it. I feel as if she were my own higher self, my loftier part, and that I, should I be torn from her, would remain for ever an incomplete and half-formed being. With her, I ask nothing else. Without her, all else is nothing.’

‘But have you spoken to the old man?’ I asked. ‘Are you indeed betrothed?’

‘I have spoken to him,’ my friend answered, ‘but he was so busy in filling ammunition cases that I could not gain his attention. When I tried once more he was counting the spare pikes in the Castle armoury with a tally and an ink-horn. I told him that I had come to crave his granddaughter’s hand, on which he turned to me and asked, “which hand?”

with so blank a stare that it was clear that his mind was elsewhere. On the third trial, though, the day that you did come back from Badminton, I did at last prefer my request, but he flashed out at me that this was no time for such fooleries, and he bade me wait until King Monmouth was on the throne, when I might ask him again. I warrant that he did not call such things fooleries fifty years ago, when he went a-courting himself.'

'At least he did not refuse you,' said I. 'It is as good as a promise that; should the cause be successful, you shall be so too.'

'By my faith,' cried Reuben, 'if a man could by his own single blade bring that about, there is none who hath so strong an interest in it as I. No, not Monmouth himself! The apprentice Derrick hath for a long time raised his eyes to his master's daughter, and the old man was ready to have him as a son, so much was he taken by his godliness and zeal. Yet I have learned from a side-wind that he is but a debauched and low-living man, though he covers his pleasures with a mask of piety. I thought as you did think that he was at the head of the roisterers who tried to bear Mistress Ruth away, though, i' faith, I can scarce think harshly of them, since they did me the greatest service that ever men did yet. Meanwhile I have taken occasion, ere we left Wells two nights ago, to speak to Master Derrick on the matter, and to warn him as he loved his life to plan no treachery against her.

'And how took he this mild intimation?' I asked.

'As a rat takes a rat trap. Snarled out some few words of godly hatred, and so slunk away.'

'On my life, lad,' said I, 'you have been having as many adventures in your own way as I in mine. But here we are upon the hill-top, with as fair an outlook as man could wish to have.'

Just beneath us ran the Avon, curving in long bends through the woodlands, with the gleam of the sun striking back from it here and there, as though a row of baby suns had been set upon a silver string. On the further side the peaceful, many-hued country, rising and falling in a swell of cornfields and orchards, swept away to break in a fringe of forest upon the distant Malverns. On our right were the green hills near Bath and on our left the rugged Mendips, with queenly Bristol crouching behind her forts, and the grey channel behind flecked with snow-white sails. At our very feet lay Keynsham Bridge, and our army spotted in dark patches over the green fields, the smoke of their fires and the babble of their voices floating up in the still summer air.

A road ran along the Somersetshire bank of the Avon, and down this two troops of our horse were advancing, with intent to establish outposts upon our eastern flank. As they jangled past in somewhat loose order, their course lay through a pine-wood, into which the road takes a sharp bend. We were gazing down at the scene when, like lightning from a cloud, a troop of the Horse Guards wheeled out into the open, and breaking from trot to canter, and from canter to gallop, dashed down in a whirlwind of blue and steel upon our unprepared squadrons. A crackle of hastily unslung carbines broke from the leading ranks, but in an instant the Guards burst through them and plunged on into the second troop. For a space the gallant rustics held their own, and the dense mass of men and horses swayed backwards and forwards, with the swirling sword-blades playing above them in flashes of angry light. Then blue coats began to break from among the russet, the fight rolled wildly back for a hundred paces, the dense throng was split asunder, and the Royal Guards came pouring through the rent, and swerved off to right and left through hedges and over ditches, stabbing and hacking at the fleeing horsemen. The whole scene, with the stamping horses, tossing manes, shouts of triumph or despair, gasping of hard-drawn breath and musical clink and clatter of steel, was to us upon the hill like some wild vision, so swiftly did it come and so swiftly go. A sharp, stern bugle-call summoned the Blues back into the road, where they formed up and trotted slowly away before fresh squadrons could come up from the camp. The sun gleamed and the river rippled as ever, and there was nothing save the long litter of men and horses to mark the course of the hell blast which had broken so suddenly upon us.

As the Blues retired we observed that a single officer brought up the rear, riding very slowly, as though it went much against his mood to turn his back even to an army. The space betwixt the troop and him was steadily growing greater, yet he made no effort to quicken his pace, but jogged quietly on, looking back from time to time to see if he were followed. The same thought sprang into my comrade’s mind and my own at the same instant, and we read it in each other’s faces.

‘This path,’ cried he eagerly. ‘It brings us out beyond the grove, and is in the hollow all the way.’

‘Lead the horses until we get on better ground,’ I answered. ‘We may just cut him off if we are lucky.’

There was no time for another word, for we hurried off down the uneven track, sliding and slipping on the rain-soaked turf. Springing into our saddles we dashed down the gorge, through the grove, and so out on to the road in time to see the troop disappear in the distance, and to meet the solitary officer face to face.

He was a sun-burned, high-featured man, with black mustachios, mounted on a great raw-boned chestnut charger. As we broke out on to the road he pulled up to have a good look at us. Then, having fully made up his mind as to our hostile intent, he drew his sword, plucked a pistol out of his holster with his left hand, and gripping the bridle between his teeth, dug his spurs into his horse’s flanks and charged down upon us at the top of his speed. As we dashed at him, Reuben on his bridle arm and I on the other, he cut fiercely at me, and at the same moment fired at my companion. The ball grazed Reuben’s cheek, leaving a red weal behind it like a lash from a whip, and blackening his face with the powder. His cut, however, fell short, and throwing my arm round his waist as the two horses dashed past each other, I plucked him from the saddle and drew him face upwards across my saddlebow. Brave Covenant lumbered on with his double burden, and before the Guards had learned that they had lost their officer, we had brought him safe, in spite of his struggles and writhings, to within sight of Monmouth’s camp.

‘A narrow shave, friend,’ quoth Reuben, with his hand to his cheek. ‘He hath tattooed my face with powder until I shall be taken for Solomon Sprent’s younger brother.’

‘Thank God that you are unhurt,’ said I. ‘See, our horse are advancing along the upper road. Lord Grey himself rides at their head. We had best take our prisoner into camp, since we can do nought here.’

‘For Christ’s sake, either slay me or set me down!’ he cried. ‘I cannot bear to be carried in this plight, like a half-weaned infant, through your campful of grinning yokels.’

‘I would not make sport of a brave man,’ I answered. ‘If you will give your word to stay with us, you shall walk between us.’

‘Willingly,’ said he, scrambling down and arranging his ruffled attire. ‘By my faith, sirs, ye have taught me a lesson not to think too meanly of mine enemies. I should have ridden with my troop had I thought that there was a chance of falling in with outposts or videttes.’

‘We were upon the hill before we cut you off,’ quoth Reuben. ‘Had that pistol ball been a thought straighter, it is I that should have been truly the cut-off one. Zounds, Micah! I was grumbling even now that I had fallen away, but had my cheek been as round as of old the slug had been through it.’

‘Where have I seen you before?’ asked our captive, bending his dark eyes upon me. ‘Aye, I have it! It was in the inn at Salisbury, where my light-headed comrade Horsford did draw upon an old soldier who was riding with you. Mine own name is Ogilvy — Major Ogilvy of the Horse Guards Blue. I was right glad that ye did come off safely from the hounds. Some word had come of your errand after your departure, so this same Horsford with the Mayor and one or two other Tantivies, whose zeal methinks outran their humanity, slipped the dogs upon your trail.’

‘I remember you well,’ I answered. ‘You will find Colonel Decimus Saxon, my former companion, in the camp. No doubt you will be shortly exchanged for some prisoner of ours.’

‘Much more likely to have my throat cut,’ said he, with a smile. ‘I fear that Feversham in his present temper will scarce pause to make prisoners, and Monmouth may be tempted to pay him back in his own coin. Yet it is the fortune of war, and I should pay for my want of all soldierly caution. Truth to tell, my mind was far from battles and ruses at the moment, for it had wandered away to aqua-regia and its action upon the metals, until your appearance brought me back to soldiership.’

‘The horse are out of sight,’ said Reuben, looking backwards, ‘ours as well as theirs. Yet I see a clump of men over yonder at the other side of the Avon, and there on the hillside can you not see the gleam of steel?’

‘There are foot there,’ I answered, puckering my eyes. ‘It seems to me that I can discern four or five regiments and as many colours of horse. King Monmouth should know of this with all speed.’

‘He does know of it,’ said Reuben. ‘Yonder he stands under the trees with his council about him. See, one of them rides this way!’

A trooper had indeed detached himself from the group and galloped towards us. ‘If you are Captain Clarke, sir,’ he said, with a salute, ‘the King orders you to join his council.’

‘Then I leave the Major in your keeping, Reuben,’ I cried. ‘See that he hath what our means allow.’ So saying I spurred my horse, and soon joined the group who were gathered round the King. There were Grey, Wade, Buyse, Ferguson, Saxon, Hollis, and a score more, all looking very grave, and peering down the valley with their glasses. Monmouth himself had dismounted, and was leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his arms folded upon his breast, and a look of white despair upon his face. Behind the tree a lackey paced up and down leading his glossy black charger, who pranced and tossed his lordly mane, a very king among horses.

‘You see, friends,’ said Monmouth, turning lack-lustre eyes from one leader to another, ‘Providence would seem to be against us. Some new mishap is ever at our heels.’

‘Not Providence, your Majesty, but our own negligence,’ cried Saxon boldly. ‘Had we advanced on Bristol last night, we might have been on the right side of the ramparts by now.’

‘But we had no thought that the enemy’s foot was so near!’ exclaimed Wade.

‘I told ye what would come of it, and so did Oberst Buyse and the worthy Mayor of Taunton,’ Saxon answered. ‘However, there is nought to be gained by mourning over a broken pipkin. We must e’en piece it together as best we may.’

‘Let us advance on Bristol, and put oor trust in the Highest,’ quoth Ferguson. ‘If it be His mighty will that we should tak’ it, then shall we enter into it, yea, though drakes and sakers lay as thick as cobblestanes in the streets.’

‘Aye! aye! On to Bristol! God with us!’ cried several of the Puritans excitedly.

‘But it is madness — dummheit — utter foolishness,’ Buyse broke in hotly. ‘You have the chance and you will not take it. Now the chance is gone and you are all eager to go. Here is an army of, as near as I can judge, five thousand men on the right side of the river. We are on the wrong side, and yet you talk of crossing and making a beleaguering of Bristol without breaching-pieces or spades, and with this force in our rear. Will the town make terms when they can see from their ramparts the van of the army which comes to help them? Or does it assist us in fighting the army to have a strong town beside us, from which horse and foot can make an outfall upon our flank? I say again that it is madness.’

What the German soldier said was so clearly the truth that even the fanatics were silenced. Away in the east the long shimmering lines of steel, and the patches of scarlet upon the green hillside, were arguments which the most thoughtless could not overlook.

‘What would you advise, then?’ asked Monmouth moodily, tapping his jewelled riding-whip against his high boots.

‘To cross the river and come to hand-grips with them ere they can get help from the town,’ the burly German answered bluntly. ‘I cannot understand what we are here for if it be not to fight. If we win, the town must fall. If we lose, We have had a bold stroke for it, and can do no more.’

‘Is that your opinion, too, Colonel Saxon?’ the King asked.

‘Assuredly, your Majesty, if we can fight to advantage. We can scarce do that, however, by crossing the river on a single narrow bridge in the face of such a force. I should advise that we destroy this Keynsham Bridge, and march down this southern bank in the hope of forcing a fight in a position which we may choose.’

‘We have not yet summoned Bath,’ said Wade. ‘Let us do as Colonel Saxon proposes, and let us in the meantime march in that direction and send a trumpet to the governor.’

‘There is yet another plan,’ quoth Sir Stephen Timewell, ‘which is to hasten to Gloucester, to cross the Severn there, and so march through Worcestershire into Shropshire and Cheshire. Your Majesty has many friends in those parts.’

Monmouth paced up and down with his hand to his forehead like one distrait. ‘What am I to do,’ he cried at last, ‘in the midst of all this conflicting advice, when I know that not only my own success, but the lives of these poor faithful peasants and craftsmen depend upon my resolution?’

‘With all humbleness, your Majesty,’ said Lord Grey, who had just returned with the horse, ‘I should suggest, since there are only a few troops of their cavalry on this side of the Avon, that we blow up the bridge and move onwards to Bath, whence we can pass into Wiltshire, which we know to be friendly.’

‘So be it!’ cried the King, with the reckless air of one who accepts a plan, not because it is the best, but because he feels that all are equally hopeless. ‘What think you, gentlemen?’ he added, with a bitter smile. ‘I have heard news from London this morning, that my uncle has clapped two hundred merchants and others who are suspected of being true to their creed into the Tower and the Fleet. He will have one half of the nation mounting guard over the other half ere long.’

‘Or the whole, your Majesty, mounting guard over him,’ suggested Wade. ‘He may himself see the Traitor’s Gate some of these mornings.’

‘Ha, ha! Think ye so? think ye so!’ cried Monmouth, rubbing his hands and brightening into a smile. ‘Well, mayhap you have nicked the truth. Who knows? Henry’s cause seemed a losing one until Bosworth Field settled the contention. To your charges, gentlemen. We shall march in half-an-hour. Colonel Saxon and you, Sir Stephen, shall cover the rear and guard the baggage — a service of honour with this fringe of horse upon our skirts.’

The council broke up forthwith, every man riding off to his own regiment. The whole camp was in a stir, bugles blowing and drums rattling, until in a very short time the army was drawn up in order, and the forlorn of cavalry had already started along the road which leads to Bath. Five hundred horse with the Devonshire militiamen were in the van. After them in order came the sailor regiment, the North Somerset men, the first Taunton regiment of burghers, the Mendip and Bagworthy miners, the lace and wool-workers of Honiton, Wellington, and Ottery St. Mary; the woodmen, the graziers, the marsh-men, and the men from the Quantock district. Behind were the guns and the baggage, with our own brigade and four colours of horse as a rearguard. On our march we could see the red coats of Feversham keeping pace with us upon the other side of the Avon. A large body of his horse and dragoons had forded the stream and hovered upon our skirts, but Saxon and Sir Stephen covered the baggage so skilfully, and faced round so fiercely with such a snarl of musketry whenever they came too nigh, that they never ventured to charge home.

CHAPTER XXVIII. Of the Fight in Wells Cathedral

I am fairly tied to the chariot-wheels of history now, my dear children, and must follow on with name and place and date, whether my tale suffer by it or no. With such a drama as this afoot it were impertinent to speak of myself, save in so far as I saw or heard what may make these old scenes more vivid to you. It is no pleasant matter for me to dwell upon, yet, convinced as I am that there is no such thing as chance either in the great or the little things of this world, I am very sure that the sacrifices of these brave men were not thrown away, and that their strivings were not as profitless as might at first sight appear. If the perfidious race of Stuart is not now seated upon the throne, and if religion in England is still a thing of free growth, we may, to my thinking, thank these Somerset yokels for it, who first showed how small a thing would shake the throne of an unpopular monarch. Monmouth’s army was but the vanguard of that which marched throe years later into London, when James and his cruel ministers were flying as outcasts over the face of the earth.

On the night of June 27, or rather early in the morning of June 28, we reached the town of Frome, very wet and miserable, for the rain had come on again, and all the roads were quagmires. From this next day we pushed on once more to Wells, where we spent the night and the whole of the next day, to give the men time to get their clothes dry, and to recover themselves after their privations.

In the forenoon a parade of our Wiltshire regiment was held in the Cathedral Close, when Monmouth praised it, as it well deserved, for the soldierly progress made in so short a time.

As we returned to our quarters after dismissing our men we came upon a great throng of the rough Bagworthy and Oare miners, who were assembled in the open space in front of the Cathedral, listening to one of their own number, who was addressing them from a cart. The wild and frenzied gestures of the man showed us that he was one of those extreme sectaries whose religion runs perilously near to madness. The hums and groans which rose from the crowd proved, however, that his fiery words were well suited to his hearers, so we halted on the verge of the multitude and hearkened to his address. A red-bearded, fierce-faced man he was, with tangled shaggy hair tumbling over his gleaming eyes, and a hoarse voice which resounded over the whole square.

'What shall we not do for the Lord?' he cried; 'what shall we not do for the Holy of Holies? Why is it that His hand is heavy upon us? Why is it that we have not freed this land, even as Judith freed Bethulia? Behold, we have looked for peace but no good came, and for a time of health, and behold trouble! Why is this, I say? Truly, brothers, it is because we have slighted the Lord, because we have not been wholehearted towards Him. Lo! we have praised Him with our breath, but in our deeds we have been cold towards Him. Ye know well that Prelacy is an accursed thing — a hissing and an abomination in the eyes of the Almighty! Yet what have we, His servants, wrought for Him in this matter? Have we not seen Prelatist churches, churches of form and of show, where the creature is confounded with the Creator — have we not seen them, I say, and have we not forborne to sweep them away, and so lent our sanction to them? There is the sin of a lukewarm and back-sliding generation! There is the cause why the Lord should look coldly upon His people! Lo! at Shepton and at Frome we have left such churches behind us. At Glastonbury, too, we have spared those wicked walls which were reared by idolatrous hands of old. Woe unto ye, if, after having put your hands to God's plough, ye turn back from the work! See there!' he howled, facing round to the beautiful Cathedral, 'what means this great heap of stones? Is it not an altar of Baal? Is it not built for man-worship rather than God-worship? Is it not there that the man Ken, tricked out in his foolish rochet and baubles, may preach his soulless and lying doctrines, which are but the old dish of Popery served up under a new cover? And shall we suffer this thing? Shall we, the chosen children of the Great One, allow this plague-spot to remain? Can we expect the Almighty to help us when we will not stretch out a hand to help Him? We have left the other temples of Prelacy behind us. Shall we leave this one, too, my brothers?'

'No, no!' yelled the crowd, tossing and swaying.

'Shall we pluck it down, then, until no one stone is left upon another?'

'Yes, yes!' they shouted.

'Now, at once?'

'Yes, yes!'

‘Then to work!’ he cried, and springing from the cart he rushed towards the Cathedral, with the whole mob of wild fanatics at his heels. Some crowded in, shouting and yelling, through the open doors, while others swarmed up the pillars and pedestals of the front, hacking at the sculptured ornaments, and tugging at the grey old images which filled every niche.

‘This must be stopped,’ said Saxon curtly. ‘We cannot afford to insult and estray the whole Church of England to please a few hot-headed ranters. The pillage of this Cathedral would do our cause more harm than a pitched battle lost. Do you bring up your company, Sir Gervas, and we shall do what we can to hold them in check until they come.’

‘Hi, Masterton!’ cried the Baronet, spying one of his under-officers among the crowd who were looking on, neither assisting nor opposing the rioters. ‘Do you hasten to the quarters, and tell Barker to bring up the company with their matches burning. I may be of use here.’

‘Ha, here is Buyse!’ cried Saxon joyously, as the huge German ploughed his way through the crowd. ‘And Lord Grey, too! We must save the Cathedral, my lord! They would sack and burn it.’

‘This way, gentlemen,’ cried an old grey-haired man, running out towards us with hands outspread, and a bunch of keys clanking at his girdle. ‘Oh hasten, gentlemen, if ye can indeed prevail over these lawless men! They have pulled down Saint Peter, and they will have Paul down too unless help comes. There will not be an apostle left. The east window is broken. They have brought a hogshead of beer, and are broaching it upon the high altar. Oh, alas, alas! That such things should be in a Christian land!’ He sobbed aloud and stamped about in a very frenzy of grief.

‘It is the verger, sirs,’ said one of the townsfolk. ‘He hath grown grey in the Cathedral.’

‘This way to the vestry door, my lords and gentlemen,’ cried the old man, pushing a way strenuously through the crowd. ‘Now, lack-a-day, the sainted Paul hath gone too!’

As he spoke a splintering crash from inside the Cathedral announced some fresh outrage on the part of the zealots. Our guide hastened on with renewed speed, until he came to a low oaken door heavily arched, which he unlocked with much rasping of wards and creaking of hinges. Through this we sidled as best we might, and hurried after the old man down a stone-flagged corridor, which led through a wicket into the Cathedral close by the high altar.

The great building was full of the rioters, who were rushing hither and thither, destroying and breaking everything which they could lay their hands on. A good number of these were genuine zealots, the followers of the preacher whom we had listened to outside. Others, however, were on the face of them mere rogues and thieves, such as gather round every army upon the march. While the former were tearing down images from the walls, or hurling the books of common prayer through the stained-glass windows, the others were rooting up the massive brass candlesticks, and carrying away everything which promised to be of value. One ragged fellow was in the pulpit, tearing off the crimson velvet and hurling it down among the crowd. Another had upset the reading-desk, and was busily engaged in wrenching off the brazen fastenings. In the centre of the side aisle a small group had a rope round the neck of Mark the Evangelist, and were dragging lustily upon it, until, even as we entered, the statue, after tottering for a few moments, came crashing down upon the marble floor. The shouts which greeted every fresh outrage, with the splintering of woodwork, the smashing of windows, and the clatter of falling masonry, made up a most deafening uproar, which was increased by the droning of the organ, until some of the rioters silenced it by slitting up the bellows.

What more immediately concerned ourselves was the scene which was being enacted just in front of us at the high altar. A barrel of beer had been placed upon it, and a dozen ruffians gathered round it, one of whom with many ribald jests had climbed up, and was engaged in knocking in the top of the cask with a hatchet. As we entered he had just succeeded in broaching it, and the brown mead was foaming over, while the mob with roars of laughter were passing up their dippers and pannikins. The German soldier rapped out a rough jagged oath at this spectacle, and shouldering his way through the roisterers he sprang upon the altar. The ringleader was bending over his cask, black-jack in hand, when the soldier’s iron grip fell upon his collar, and in a moment his heels were flapping in the air, and his head three feet deep in the cask, while the beer splashed and foamed in every direction. With a mighty heave Buyse picked up the barrel with the half-drowned miner inside, and hurled it clattering down the broad marble steps which led from the body of the church. At the same time, with the aid of a dozen of our men who had followed us into the Cathedral, we drove back the fellow’s comrades, and thrust them out beyond the rails which divided the choir from the nave.

Our inroad had the effect of checking the riot, but it simply did so by turning the fury of the zealots from the walls and windows to ourselves. Images, stone-work, and wood-carvings were all abandoned, and the whole swarm came rushing up with a hoarse buzz of rage, all discipline and order completely lost in their religious frenzy. ‘Smite the Prelatists!’ they howled. ‘Down with the friends of Antichrist! Cut them off even at the horns of the altar! Down with them!’ On either side they massed, a wild, half-demented crowd, some with arms and some without, but filled to a man with the very spirit of murder.

‘This is a civil war within a civil war,’ said Lord Grey, with a quiet smile. ‘We had best draw, gentlemen, and defend the gap in the rails, if we may hold it good until help arrives.’ He flashed out his rapier as he spoke, and took his stand on the top of the steps, with Saxon and Sir Gervas upon one side of him, Buyse, Reuben, and myself upon the other. There was only room for six to wield their weapons with effect, so our scanty band of followers scattered themselves along the line of the rails, which were luckily so high and strong as to make an escalado difficult in the face of any opposition.

The riot had now changed into open mutiny among these marshmen and miners. Pikes, scythes, and knives glimmered through the dim light, while their wild cries re-echoed from the high arched roof like the howling of a pack of wolves. ‘Go forward, my brothers,’ cried the fanatic preacher, who had been the cause of the outbreak—’go forward against them! What though they be in high places! There is One who is higher than they. Shall we shrink from His work because of a naked sword? Shall we suffer the Prelatist altar to be preserved by these sons of Amalek? On, on! In the name of the Lord!’

‘In the name of the Lord!’ cried the crowd, with a sort of hissing gasp, like one who is about to plunge into an icy bath. ‘In the name of the Lord!’ From either side they came on, gathering speed and volume, until at last with a wild cry they surged right down upon our sword-points.

I can say nothing of what took place to right or left of me during the ruffle, for indeed there were so many pressing upon us, and the fight was so hot, that it was all that each of us could do to hold our own. The very number of our assailants was in our favour, by hampering their sword-arms. One burly miner cut fiercely at me with his scythe, but missing me he swung half round with the force of the blow, and I passed my sword through his body before he could recover himself. It was the first time that I had ever slain a man in anger, my dear children, and I shall never forget his white startled face as he looked over his shoulder at me ere he fell. Another closed in with me before I could get my weapon disengaged, but I struck him out with my left hand, and then brought the flat of my sword upon his head, laying him senseless upon the pavement. God knows, I did not wish to take the lives of the misguided and ignorant zealots, but our own were at stake. A marshman, looking more like a shaggy wild beast than a human being, darted under my weapon and caught me round the knees, while another brought a flail down upon my head-piece, from which it glanced on to my shoulder. A third thrust at me with a pike, and pricked me on the thigh, but I shore his weapon in two with one blow, and split his head with the next. The man with the flail gave back at sight of this, and a kick freed me from the unarmed ape-like creature at my feet, so that I found myself clear of my assailants, and none the worse for my encounter, save for a touch on the leg and some stiffness of the neck and shoulder.

Looking round I found that my comrades had also beaten off those who were opposed to them. Saxon was holding his bloody rapier in his left hand, while the blood was trickling from a slight wound upon his right. Two miners lay across each other in front of him, but at the feet of Sir Gervas Jerome no fewer than four bodies were piled together. He had plucked out his snuff-box as I glanced at him, and was offering it with a bow and a flourish to Lord Grey, as unconcernedly as though he were back once more in his London coffee-house. Buyse leaned upon his long broadsword, and looked gloomily at a headless trunk in front of him, which I recognised from the dress as being that of the preacher. As to Reuben, he was unhurt himself, but in sore distress over my own trifling scar, though I assured the faithful lad that it was a less thing than many a tear from branch or thorn which we had had when blackberrying together.

The fanatics, though driven back, were not men to be content with a single repulse. They had lost ten of their number, including their leader, without being able to break our line, but the failure only served to increase their fury. For a minute or so they gathered panting in the aisle. Then with a mad yell they dashed in once more, and made a desperate effort to cut a way through to the altar. It was a fiercer and more prolonged struggle than before. One of our followers was stabbed to the heart over the rails, and fell without a groan. Another was stunned by a mass of masonry hurled at him by a giant cragsman. Reuben was felled by a club, and would have been dragged out and hacked to pieces had I not stood over him and beaten off his assailants. Sir Gervas was borne off his legs by the rush, but lay like a wounded wildcat, striking out furiously at everything which came within his reach. Buyse and Saxon, back to back, stood firm amidst the seething, rushing crowd, cutting down every man within sweep of their swords. Yet in such a struggle numbers must in the end prevail, and I confess that I for one had begun to have fears for the upshot of our contest, when the heavy tramp of disciplined feet rang through the Cathedral, and the Baronet's musqueteers came at a quick run up the central aisle. The fanatics did not await their charge, but darted off over benches and pews, followed by our allies, who were furious on seeing their beloved Captain upon the ground. There was a wild minute or two, with confused shuffling of feet, stabs, groans, and the clatter of musket butts on the marble floor. Of the rioters some were slain, but the greater part threw down their arms and were arrested at the command of Lord Grey, while a strong guard was placed at the gates to prevent any fresh outburst of sectarian fury.

When at last the Cathedral was cleared and order restored, we had time to look around us and to reckon our own injuries. In all my wanderings, and the many wars in which I afterwards fought — wars compared to which this affair of Monmouth's was but the merest skirmish — I have never seen a stranger or more impressive scene. In the dim, solemn light the pile of bodies in front of the rails, with their twisted limbs and white-set faces, had a most sad and ghost-like aspect. The evening light, shining through one of the few unbroken stained-glass windows, cast great splotches of vivid crimson and of sickly green upon the heap of motionless figures. A few wounded men sat about in the front pews or lay upon the steps moaning for water. Of our own small company not one had escaped unscathed. Three of our followers had been slain outright, while a fourth was lying stunned from a blow. Buyse and Sir Gervas were much bruised. Saxon was cut on the right arm. Reuben had been felled by a bludgeon stroke, and would certainly have been slain but for the fine temper of Sir Jacob Clancing's breastplate, which had turned a fierce pike-thrust. As to myself it is scarce worth the mention, but my head sang for some hours like a good wife's kettle, and my boot was full of blood, which may have been a blessing in disguise, for Sneckson, our Havant barber, was ever dinning into my ears how much the better I should be for a phlebotomy.

In the meantime all the troops had assembled and the mutiny been swiftly stamped out. There were doubtless many among the Puritans who had no love for the Prelatists, but none save the most crack-brained fanatics could fail to see that the sacking of the Cathedral would set the whole Church of England in arms, and ruin the cause for which they were fighting. As it was, much damage had been done; for whilst the gang within had been smashing all which they could lay their hands upon, others outside had chipped off cornices and gargoyles, and had even dragged the lead covering from the roof and hurled it down in great sheets to their companions beneath. This last led to some profit, for the army had no great store of ammunition, so the lead was gathered up by Monmouth's orders and recast into bullets. The prisoners were held in custody for a time, but it was deemed unwise to punish them, so that they were finally pardoned and dismissed from the army.

A parade of our whole force was held in the fields outside the town upon the second day of our stay at Wells, the weather having at last become warm and sunny. The foot was then found to muster six regiments of nine hundred men, or five thousand four hundred in all. Of these fifteen hundred were musqueteers, two thousand were pikemen, and the rest were scythesmen or peasants with flails and hammers. A few bodies, such as our own or those from Taunton, might fairly lay claim to be soldiers, but the most of them were still labourers and craftsmen with weapons in their hands. Yet, ill-armed and ill-drilled as they were, they were still strong robust Englishmen, full of native courage and of religious zeal. The light and fickle Monmouth began to take heart once more at the sight of their sturdy bearing, and at the sound of their hearty cheers. I heard him as I sat my horse beside his staff speak exultantly to those around him, and ask whether these fine fellows could possibly be beaten by mercenary half-hearted hirelings.

'What say you, Wade!' he cried. 'Are we never to see a smile on that sad face of yours? Do you not see a woolsack in store for you as you look upon these brave fellows?'

'God forbid that I should say a word to damp your Majesty's ardour,' the lawyer answered; 'yet I cannot but remember that there was a time when your Majesty, at the head of these same hirelings, did drive men as brave as these in headlong rout from Bothwell Bridge.'

‘True, true!’ said the King, passing his hand over his forehead — a favourite motion when he was worried and annoyed. ‘They were bold men, the western Covenanters, yet they could not stand against the rush of our battalions. But they had had no training, whereas these can fight in line and fire a platoon as well as one would wish to see.’

‘If we hadna a gun nor a patronal among us,’ said Ferguson, ‘if we hadna sae muckle as a sword, but just oor ain honds, yet would the Lard gie us the victory, if it seemed good in His a’ seeing een.’

‘All battles are but chance work, your Majesty,’ remarked Saxon, whose sword-arm was bound round with his kerchief. ‘Some lucky turn, some slip or chance which none can foresee, is ever likely to turn the scale. I have lost when I have looked to win, and I have won when I have looked to lose. It is an uncertain game, and one never knows the finish till the last card is played.’

‘Not till the stakes are drawn,’ said Buyse, in his deep guttural voice. ‘There is many a leader that wins what you call the trick, and yet loses the game.’

‘The trick being the battle and the game the campaign,’ quoth the King, with a smile. ‘Our German friend is a master of camp-fire metaphors. But methinks our poor horses are in a sorry state. What would cousin William over at The Hague, with his spruce guards, think of such a show as this?’

During this talk the long column of foot had tramped past, still bearing the banners which they had brought with them to the wars, though much the worse for wind and weather. Monmouth’s remarks had been drawn forth by the aspect of the ten troops of horse which followed. The chargers had been sadly worn by the continued work and constant rain, while the riders, having allowed their caps and fronts to get coated with rust, appeared to be in as bad a plight as their steeds. It was clear to the least experienced of us that if we were to hold our own it was upon our foot that we must rely. On the tops of the low hills all round the frequent shimmer of arms, glancing here and there when the sun’s rays struck upon them, showed how strong our enemies were in the very point in which we were so weak. Yet in the main this Wells review was cheering to us, as showing that the men kept in good heart, and that there was no ill-feeling at the rough handling of the zealots upon the day before.

The enemy’s horse hovered about us during these days, but the foot had been delayed through the heavy weather and the swollen streams. On the last day of June we marched out of Wells, and made our way across flat sedgy plains and over the low Polden Hills to Bridgewater, where we found some few recruits awaiting us. Here Monmouth had some thoughts of making a stand, and even set to work raising earthworks, but it was pointed out to him that, even could he hold the town, there was not more than a few days' provisions within it, while the country round had been already swept so bare that little more could be expected from it. The works were therefore abandoned, and, fairly driven to bay, without a loophole of escape left, we awaited the approach of the enemy.

CHAPTER XXIX. Of the Great Cry from the Lonely House

And so our weary marching and counter-marching came at last to an end, and we found ourselves with our backs fairly against the wall, and the whole strength of the Government turned against us. Not a word came to us of a rising or movement in our favour in any part of England. Everywhere the Dissenters were cast into prison and the Church dominant. From north and east and west the militia of the counties was on its march against us. In London six regiments of Dutch troops had arrived as a loan from the Prince of Orange. Others were said to be on their way. The City had enrolled ten thousand men. Everywhere there was mustering and marching to succour the flower of the English army, which was already in Somersetshire. And all for the purpose of crushing some five or six thousand clodhoppers and fishermen, half-armed and penniless, who were ready to throw their lives away for a man and for an idea.

But this idea, my dear children, was a noble one, and one which a man might very well sacrifice all for, and yet feel that all was well spent. For though these poor peasants, in their dumb, blundering fashion, would have found it hard to give all their reasons in words, yet in the inmost heart of them they knew and felt that it was England's cause which they were fighting for, and that they were upholding their country's true self against those who would alter the old systems under which she had led the nations. Three more years made all this very plain, and showed that our simple unlettered followers had seen and judged the signs of the times more correctly than those who called themselves their betters. There are, to my thinking, stages of human progress for which the Church of Rome is admirably suited. Where the mind of a nation is young, it may be best that it should not concern itself with spiritual affairs, but should lean upon the old staff of custom and authority. But England had cast off her swaddling-clothes, and was a nursery of strong, thinking men, who would bow to no authority save that which their reason and conscience approved. It was hopeless, useless, foolish, to try to drive such men back into a creed which they had outgrown. Such an attempt was, however, being made, backed by all the weight of a bigoted king with a powerful and wealthy Church as his ally. In three years the nation would understand it, and the King would be flying from his angry people; but at present, sunk in a torpor after the long civil wars and the corrupt reign of Charles, they failed to see what was at stake, and turned against those who would warn them, as a hasty man turns on the messenger who is the bearer of evil tidings. Is it not strange, my dears, how quickly a mere shadowy thought comes to take living form, and grow into a very tragic reality? At one end of the chain is a king brooding over a point of doctrine; at the other are six thousand desperate men, chivied and chased from shire to shire, standing to bay at last amid the bleak Bridgewater marshes, with their hearts as bitter and as hopeless as those of hunted beasts of prey. A king's theology is a dangerous thing for his subjects.

But if the idea for which these poor men fought was a worthy one, what shall we say of the man who had been chosen as the champion of their cause? Alas, that such men should have had such a leader! Swinging from the heights of confidence to the depths of despair, choosing his future council of state one day and proposing to fly from the army on the next, he appeared from the start to be possessed by the very spirit of fickleness. Yet he had borne a fair name before this enterprise. In Scotland he had won golden opinions, not only for his success, but for the moderation and mercy with which he treated the vanquished. On the Continent he had commanded an English brigade in a way that earned praise from old soldiers of Louis and the Empire. Yet now, when his own head and his own fortunes were at stake, he was feeble, irresolute, and cowardly. In my father's phrase, 'all the virtue had gone out of him.' I declare when I have seen him riding among his troops, with his head bowed upon his breast and a face like a mute at a burying, casting an air of gloom and of despair all round him, I have felt that, even in case of success, such a man could never wear the crown of the Tudors and the Plantagenets, but that some stronger hand, were it that of one of his own generals, would wrest it from him.

I will do Monmouth the justice to say that from the time when it was at last decided to fight — for the very good reason that no other course was open — he showed up in a more soldierly and manlier spirit. For the first few days in July no means were neglected to hearten our troops and to nerve them for the coming battle. From morning to night we were at work, teaching our foot how to form up in dense groups to meet the charge of horse, and how to depend upon each other, and look to their officers for orders. At night the streets of the little town from the Castle Field to the Parret Bridge resounded with the praying and the preaching. There was no need for the officers to quell irregularities, for the troops punished them amongst themselves. One man who came out on the streets hot with wine was well-nigh hanged by his companions, who finally cast him out of the town as being unworthy to fight in what they looked upon as a sacred quarrel. As to their courage, there was no occasion to quicken that, for they were as fearless as lions, and the only danger was lest their fiery daring should lead them into foolhardiness. Their desire was to hurl themselves upon the enemy like a horde of Moslem fanatics, and it was no easy matter to drill such hot-headed fellows into the steadiness and caution which war demands.

Provisions ran low upon the third day of our stay in Bridgewater, which was due to our having exhausted that part of the country before, and also to the vigilance of the Royal Horse, who scoured the district round and cut off our supplies. Lord Grey determined, therefore, to send out two troops of horse under cover of night, to do what they could to refill the larder. The command of the small expedition was given over to Major Martin Hooker, an old Lifeguardsman of rough speech and curt manners, who had done good service in drilling the headstrong farmers and yeomen into some sort of order. Sir Gervas Jerome and I asked leave from Lord Grey to join the foray — a favour which was readily granted, since there was little stirring in the town.

It was about eleven o’clock on a moonless night that we sallied out of Bridgewater, intending to explore the country in the direction of Boroughbridge and Athelney. We had word that there was no large body of the enemy in that quarter, and it was a fertile district where good store of supplies might be hoped for. We took with us four empty waggons, to carry whatever we might have the luck to find. Our commander arranged that one troop should ride before these and one behind, while a small advance party, under the charge of Sir Gervas, kept some hundreds of paces in front. In this order we clattered out of the town just as the late bugles were blowing, and swept away down the quiet shadowy roads, bringing anxious peering faces to the casements of the wayside cottages as we whirled past in the darkness.

That ride comes very clearly before me as I think of it. The dark loom of the club-headed willows flitting by us, the moaning of the breeze among the withies, the vague, blurred figures of the troopers, the dull thud of the hoofs, and the jingling of scabbard against stirrup — eye and ear can both conjure up those old-time memories. The Baronet and I rode in front, knee against knee, and his light-hearted chatter of life in town, with his little snatches of verse or song from Cowley or Waller, were a very balm of Gilead to my sombre and somewhat heavy spirit.

‘Life is indeed life on such a night as this,’ quoth he, as we breathed in the fresh country air with the reeks of crops and of kine. ‘Rabbit me! but you are to be envied, Clarke, for having been born and bred in the country! What pleasures has the town to offer compared to the free gifts of nature, provided always that there be a perruquier’s and a snuff merchant’s, and a scent vendor’s, and one or two tolerable outfitters within reach? With these and a good coffee-house and a playhouse, I think I could make shift to lead a simple pastoral life for some months.’

‘In the country,’ said I, laughing, ‘we have ever the feeling that the true life of mankind, with the growth of knowledge and wisdom, are being wrought out in the towns.’

‘Ventre Saint-Gris! It was little knowledge or wisdom that I acquired there,’ he answered. ‘Truth to tell, I have lived more and learned more during these few weeks that we have been sliding about in the rain with our ragged lads, than ever I did when I was page of the court, with the ball of fortune at my feet. It is a sorry thing for a man’s mind to have nothing higher to dwell upon than the turning of a compliment or the dancing of a corranto. Zounds, lad! I have your friend the carpenter to thank for much. As he says in his letter, unless a man can get the good that is in him out, he is of loss value in the world than one of those fowls that we hear cackling, for they at least fulfill their mission, if it be only to lay eggs. Ged, it is a new creed for me to be preaching!’

‘But,’ said I, ‘when you were a wealthy man you must have been of service to some one, for how could one spend so much money and yet none be the better?’

‘You dear bucolic Micah!’ he cried, with a gay laugh. ‘You will ever speak of my poor fortune with bated breath and in an awestruck voice, as though it were the wealth of the Indies. You cannot think, lad, how easy it is for a money-bag to take unto itself wings and fly. It is true that the man who spends it doth not consume the money, but passes it on to some one who profits thereby. Yet the fault lies in the fact that it was to the wrong folk that we passed our money, thereby breeding a useless and debauched class at the expense of honest callings. Od’s fish, lad! when I think of the swarms of needy beggars, the lecherous pimps, the nose-slitting bullies, the toadies and the flatterers who were reared by us, I feel that in hatching such a poisonous brood our money hath done what no money can undo. Have I not seen them thirty deep of a morning when I have held my levee, cringing up to my bedside—’

‘Your bedside!’ I exclaimed.

‘Aye! it was the mode to receive in bed, attired in laced cambric shirt and periwig, though afterwards it was permitted to sit up in your chamber, but dressed *a la negligence*, in gown and slippers. The mode is a terrible tyrant, Clarke, though its arm may not extend as far as Havant. The idle man of the town must have some rule of life, so he becomes a slave to the law of the fashions. No man in London was more subject to it than myself. I was regular in my irregularities, and orderly in my disorders. At eleven o’clock to the stroke, up came my valet with the morning cup of hippocras, an excellent thing for the qualms, and some slight refection, as the breast of an ortolan or wing of a widgeon. Then came the levee, twenty, thirty, or forty of the class I have spoken of, though now and then perhaps there might be some honest case of want among them, some needy man-of-letters in quest of a guinea, or pupil-less pedant with much ancient learning in his head and very little modern coinage in his pocket. It was not only that I had some power of mine own, but I was known to have the ear of my Lord Halifax, Sidney Godolphin, Lawrence Hyde, and others whose will might make or mar a man. Mark you those lights upon the left! Would it not be well to see if there is not something to be had there?’

‘Hooker hath orders to proceed to a certain farm,’ I answered. ‘This we could take upon our return should we still have space. We shall be back here before morning.’

‘We must get supplies, if I have to ride back to Surrey for them,’ said he. ‘Rat me, if I dare look my musqueteers in the face again unless I bring them something to toast upon the end of their ramrods! They had little more savoury than their own bullets to put in their mouths when I left them. But I was speaking of old days in London. Our time was well filled. Should a man of quality incline to sport there was ever something to attract him. He might see sword-playing at Hockley, or cocking at Shoe Lane, or baiting at Southwark, or shooting at Tothill Fields. Again, he might walk in the physic gardens of St. James’s, or go down the river with the ebb tide to the cherry orchards at Rotherhithe, or drive to Islington to drink the cream, or, above all, walk in the Park, which is most modish for a gentleman who dresses in the fashion. You see, Clarke, that we were active in our idleness, and that there was no lack of employment. Then as evening came on there were the playhouses to draw us, Dorset Gardens, Lincoln’s Inn, Drury Lane, and the Queen’s — among the four there was ever some amusement to be found.’

‘There, at least, your time was well employed,’ said I; ‘you could not hearken to the grand thoughts or lofty words of Shakespeare or of Massinger without feeling some image of them in your own soul.’

Sir Gervas chuckled quietly. ‘You are as fresh to me, Micah, as this sweet country air,’ said he. ‘Know, thou dear babe, that it was not to see the play that we frequented the playhouse.’

‘Then why, in Heaven’s name?’ I asked.

‘To see each other,’ he answered. ‘It was the mode, I assure you, for a man of fashion to stand with his back turned to the stage from the rise of the curtain to the fall of it. There were the orange wenches to quiz — plaguey sharp of tongue the hussies are, too — and there were the vizards of the pit, whose little black masks did invite inquiry, and there were the beauties of the town and the toasts of the Court, all fair mark for our quizzing-glasses. Play, indeed! S’bud, we had something better to do than to listen to alexandrines or weigh the merits of hexameters! ‘Tis true that if La Jeune were dancing, or if Mrs. Bracegirdle or Mrs. Oldfield came upon the boards, we would hum and clap, but it was the fine woman that we applauded rather than the actress.’

‘And when the play was over you went doubtless to supper and so to bed?’

‘To supper, certainly. Sometimes to the Rhenish House, sometimes to Pontack’s in Abchurch Lane. Every one had his own taste in that matter. Then there were dice and cards at the Groom Porter’s or under the arches at Covent Garden, piquet, passage, hazard, primero — what you choose. After that you could find all the world at the coffee-houses, where an arriere supper was often served with devilled bones and prunes, to drive the fumes of wine from the head. Zounds, Micah! If the Jews should relax their pressure, or if this war brings us any luck, you shall come to town with me and shall see all these things for yourself.’

‘Truth to tell, it doth not tempt me much,’ I answered. ‘Slow and solemn I am by nature, and in such scenes as you have described I should feel a very death’s head at a banquet.’

Sir Gervas was about to reply, when of a sudden out of the silence of the night there rose a long-drawn piercing scream, which thrilled through every nerve of our bodies. I have never heard such a wail of despair. We pulled up our horses, as did the troopers behind us, and strained our ears for some sign as to whence the sound proceeded, for some were of opinion that it came from our right and some from our left. The main body with the waggons had come up, and we all listened intently for any return of the terrible cry. Presently it broke upon us again, wild, shrill, and agonised: the scream of a woman in mortal distress.

‘Tis over there, Major Hooker,’ cried Sir Gervas, standing up in his stirrups and peering through the darkness. ‘There is a house about two fields off. I can see some glimmer, as from a window with the blind drawn.’

‘Shall we not make for it at once?’ I asked impatiently, for our commander sat stolidly upon his horse as though by no means sure what course he should pursue.

‘I am here, Captain Clarke,’ said he, ‘to convey supplies to the army, and I am by no means justified in turning from my course to pursue other adventures.’

‘Death, man! there is a woman in distress,’ cried Sir Gervas. ‘Why, Major, you would not ride past and let her call in vain for help? Hark, there she is again!’ As he spoke the wild scream rang out once more from the lonely house.

‘Nay, I can abide this no longer,’ I cried, my blood boiling in my veins; ‘do you go on your errand, Major Hooker, and my friend and I shall leave you here. We shall know how to justify our action to the King. Come, Sir Gervas!’

‘Mark ye, this is flat mutiny, Captain Clarke,’ said Hooker; ‘you are under my orders, and should you desert me you do so at your peril.’

‘In such a case I care not a groat for thy orders,’ I answered hotly. Turning Covenant I spurred down a narrow, deeply-rutted lane which led towards the house, followed by Sir Gervas and two or three of the troopers. At the same moment I heard a sharp word of command from Hooker and the creaking of wheels, showing that he had indeed abandoned us and proceeded on his mission.

‘He is right,’ quoth the Baronet, as we rode down the lane; ‘Saxon or any other old soldier would commend his discipline.’

‘There are things which are higher than discipline,’ I muttered. ‘I could not pass on and leave this poor soul in her distress. But see — what have we here?’

A dark mass loomed in front of us, which proved as we approached to be four horses fastened by their bridles to the hedge.

‘Cavalry horses, Captain Clarke!’ cried one of the troopers who had sprung down to examine them. ‘They have the Government saddle and holsters. Here is a wooden gate which opens on a pathway leading to the house.’

‘We had best dismount, then,’ said Sir Gervas, jumping down and tying his horse beside the others. ‘Do you, lads, stay by the horses, and if we call for ye come to our aid. Sergeant Holloway, you can come with us. Bring your pistols with you!’

CHAPTER XXX. Of the Swordsman with the Brown Jacket

The sergeant, who was a great raw-boned west-countryman, pushed the gate open, and we were advancing up the winding pathway, when a stream of yellow light flooded out from a suddenly opened door, and we saw a dark squat figure dart through it into the inside of the house. At the same moment there rose up a babel of sounds, followed by two pistol shots, and a roaring, gasping hubbub, with clash of swords and storm of oaths. At this sudden uproar we all three ran at our topmost speed up the pathway and peered in through the open door, where we saw a scene such as I shall never forget while this old memory of mine can conjure up any picture of the past.

The room was large and lofty, with long rows of hams and salted meats dangling from the smoke-browned rafters, as is usual in Somersetshire farmhouses. A high black clock ticked in a corner, and a rude table, with plates and dishes laid out as for a meal, stood in the centre. Right in front of the door a great fire of wood faggots was blazing, and before this, to our unutterable horror, there hung a man head downwards, suspended by a rope which was knotted round his ankles, and which, passing over a hook in a beam, had been made fast to a ring in the floor. The struggles of this unhappy man had caused the rope to whirl round, so that he was spinning in front of the blaze like a joint of meat. Across the threshold lay a woman, the one whose cries had attracted us, but her rigid face and twisted body showed that our aid had come too late to save her from the fate which she had seen impending. Close by her two swarthy dragoons in the glaring red coats of the Royal army lay stretched across each other upon the floor, dark and scowling even in death. In the centre of the room two other dragoons were cutting and stabbing with their broad-swords at a thick, short, heavy-shouldered man, clad in coarse brown kersey stuff, who sprang about among the chairs and round the table with a long basket-hilted rapier in his hand, parrying or dodging their blows with wonderful adroitness, and every now and then putting in a thrust in return. Hard pressed as he was, his set resolute face, firm mouth, and bright well-opened eyes spoke of a bold spirit within, while the blood which dripped from the sleeve of one of his opponents proved that the contest was not so unequal as it might appear. Even as we gazed he sprang back to avoid a fierce rush of the furious soldiers, and by a quick sharp side stroke he severed the rope by which the victim was hung. The body fell with a heavy thud upon the brick floor, while the little swordsman danced off in a moment into another quarter of the room, still stopping or avoiding with the utmost ease and skill the shower of blows which rained upon him.

This strange scene held us spell-bound for a few seconds, but there was no time for delay, for a slip or trip would prove fatal to the gallant stranger. Rushing into the chamber, sword in hand, we fell upon the dragoons, who, outnumbered as they were, backed into a corner and struck out fiercely, knowing that they need expect no mercy after the devil's work in which they had been engaged. Holloway, our sergeant of horse, springing furiously in, laid himself open to a thrust which stretched him dead upon the ground. Before the dragoon could disengage his weapon, Sir Gervas cut him down, while at the same moment the stranger got past the guard of his antagonist, and wounded him mortally in the throat. Of the four red-coats not one escaped alive, while the bodies of our sergeant and of the old couple who had been the first victims increased the horror of the scene.

'Poor Holloway is gone,' said I, placing my hand over his heart. 'Who ever saw such a shambles? I feel sick and ill.'

'Here is eau-de-vie, if I mistake not,' cried the stranger, clambering up on a chair and reaching a bottle from the shelf. 'Good, too, by the smell. Take a sup, for you are as white as a new-bleached sheet.'

'Honest warfare I can abide, but scenes like this make my blood run cold,' I answered, taking a gulp from the flask. I was a very young soldier then, my dears, but I confess that to the end of my campaigns any form of cruelty had the same effect upon me. I give you my word that when I went to London last fall the sight of an overworked, raw-backed cart-horse straining with its load, and flogged for not doing that which it could not do, gave me greater qualms than did the field of Sedgemoor, or that greater day when ten thousand of the flower of France lay stretched before the earthworks of Landen.

'The woman is dead,' said Sir Gervas, 'and the man is also, I fear, past recovery. He is not burned, but suffers, I should judge, poor devil! from the rush of blood to the head.'

‘If that be all it may well be cured, ‘remarked the stranger; and taking a small knife from his pocket, he rolled up the old man’s sleeve and opened one of his veins. At first only a few sluggish black drops oozed from the wound, but presently the blood began to flow more freely, and the injured man showed signs of returning sense.

‘He will live,’ said the little swordsman, putting his lancet back in his pocket. ‘And now, who may you be to whom I owe this interference which shortened the affair, though mayhap the result would have been the same had you left us to settle it amongst ourselves?’

‘We are from Monmouth’s army,’ I answered. ‘He lies at Bridgewater, and we are scouting and seeking supplies.’

‘And who are you?’ asked Sir Gervas. ‘And how came you into this ruffle? S’bud, you are a game little rooster to fight four such great cockerels!’

‘My name is Hector Marot,’ the man answered, cleaning out his empty pistols and very carefully reloading them. ‘As to who I am, it is a matter of small moment. Suffice it that I have helped to lessen Kirk’s horse by four of his rogues. Mark their faces, so dusky and sun-dried even in death. These men have learned warfare fighting against the heathen in Africa, and now they practise on poor harmless English folk the devil’s tricks which they have picked up amongst the savages. The Lord help Monmouth’s men should they be beaten! These vermin are more to be feared than hangman’s cord or headsman’s axe.’

‘But how did you chance upon the spot at the very nick of time?’ I asked.

‘Why, marry, I was jogging down the road on my mare when I heard the clatter of hoofs behind me, and concealing myself in a field, as a prudent man would while the country is in its present state, I saw these four rogues gallop past. They made their way up to the farmhouse here, and presently from cries and other tokens I knew what manner of hell-fire business they had on hand. On that I left my mare in the field and ran up, when I saw them through the casement, tricing the good man up in front of his fire to make him confess where his wealth lay hidden, though indeed it is my own belief that neither he nor any other farmer in these parts hath any wealth left to hide, after two armies have been quartered in turn upon them. Finding that his mouth remained closed, they ran him up, as you saw, and would assuredly have toasted him like a snipe, had I not stepped in and winged two of them with my barkers. The others set upon me, but I pinked one through the forearm, and should doubtless have given a good account of both of them but for your incoming.'

'Right gallantly done!' I exclaimed. 'But where have I heard your name before, Mr. Hector Marot?'

'Nay,' he answered, with a sharp, sidelong look, 'I cannot tell that.'

'It is familiar to mine ear,' said I.

He shrugged his broad shoulders, and continued to look to the priming of his pistols, with a half-defiant and half-uneasy expression. He was a very sturdy, deep-chested man, with a stern, square-jawed face, and a white seam across his bronzed forehead as from a slash with a knife. He wore a gold-edged riding-cap, a jacket of brown sad-coloured stuff much stained by the weather, a pair of high rusty jack-boots, and a small bob-wig.

Sir Gervas, who had been staring very hard at the man, suddenly gave a start, and slapped his hand against his leg.

'Of course!' he cried. 'Sink me, if I could remember where I had seen your face, but now it comes back to me very clearly.'

The man glanced doggedly from under his bent brows at each of us in turn. 'It seems that I have fallen among acquaintances,' he said gruffly; 'yet I have no memory of ye. Methinks, young sirs, that your fancy doth play ye false.'

'Not a whit,' the Baronet answered quietly, and, bending forward, he whispered a few words into the man's ear, which caused him to spring from his seat and take a couple of quick strides forward, as though to escape from the house.

'Nay, nay!' cried Sir Gervas, springing between him and the door, 'you shall not run away from us. Pshaw, man! never lay your hand upon your sword. We have had bloody work enough for one night. Besides, we would not harm you.'

'What mean ye, then? What would ye have?' he asked, glancing about like some fierce wild beast in a trap.

'I have a most kindly feeling to you, man, after this night's work,' cried Sir Gervas. 'What is it to me how ye pick up a living, as long as you are a true man at heart? Let me perish if I ever forget a face which I have once seen, and your bonne mine, with the trade-mark upon your forehead, is especially hard to overlook.'

'Suppose I be the same? What then?' the man asked sullenly.

‘There is no suppose in the matter. I could swear to you. But I would not, lad — not if I caught you red-handed. You must know, Clarke, since there is none to overhear us, that in the old days I was a Justice of the Peace in Surrey, and that our friend here was brought up before me on a charge of riding somewhat late o’ night, and of being plaguey short with travellers. You will understand me. He was referred to assizes, but got away in the meanwhile, and so saved his neck. Right glad I am of it, for you will agree with me that he is too proper a man to give a tight-rope dance at Tyburn.’

‘And I remember well now where I have heard your name,’ said I. ‘Were you not a captive in the Duke of Beaufort’s prison at Badminton, and did you not succeed in escaping from the old Boteler dungeon?’

‘Nay, gentlemen,’ he replied, seating himself on the edge of the table, and carelessly swinging his legs, ‘since ye know so much it would be folly for me to attempt to deceive ye. I am indeed the same Hector Marot who hath made his name a terror on the great Western road, and who hath seen the inside of more prisons than any man in the south. With truth, however, I can say that though I have been ten years upon the roads, I have never yet taken a groat from the poor, or injured any man who did not wish to injure me. On the contrary, I have often risked life and limb to save those who were in trouble.’

‘We can bear you out in that,’ I answered, ‘for if these four red-coat devils have paid the price of their crimes, it is your doing rather than ours.’

‘Nay, I can take little credit for that,’ our new acquaintance answered. ‘Indeed, I had other scores to settle with Colonel Kirke’s horse, and was but too glad to have this breather with them.’

Whilst we were talking the men whom we had left with the horses had come up, together with some of the neighbouring farmers and cottagers, who were aghast at the scene of slaughter, and much troubled in their minds over the vengeance which might be exacted by the Royal troops next day.

‘For Christ’s zake, zur,’ cried one of them, an old ruddy-faced countryman, ‘move the bodies o’ these soldier rogues into the road, and let it zeem as how they have perished in a chance fight wi’ your own troopers loike. Should it be known as they have met their end within a varmhouse, there will not be a thatch left unlighted over t’ whole country side; as it is, us can scarce keep these murthering Tangiers devils from oor throats.’

‘His request is in reason,’ said the highwayman bluntly. ‘We have no right to have our fun, and then go our way leaving others to pay the score.’

‘Well, hark ye,’ said Sir Gervas, turning to the group of frightened rustics. ‘I’ll strike a bargain with ye over the matter. We have come out for supplies, and can scarce go back empty-handed. If ye will among ye provide us with a cart, filling it with such breadstuffs and greens as ye may, with a dozen bullocks as well, we shall not only screen ye in this matter, but I shall promise payment at fair market rates if ye will come to the Protestant camp for the money.’

‘I’ll spare the bullocks,’ quoth the old man whom we had rescued, who was now sufficiently recovered to sit up. ‘Zince my poor dame is foully murthered it matters little to me what becomes o’ the stock. I shall zee her laid in Durston graveyard, and shall then vollow you to t’ camp, where I shall die happy if I can but rid the earth o’ one more o’ these incarnate devils.’

‘You say well, gaffer!’ cried Hector Marot; ‘you show the true spirit. Methinks I see an old birding-piece on yonder hooks, which, with a brace of slugs in it and a bold man behind it, might bring down one of these fine birds for all their gay feathers.’

‘Her’s been a true mate to me for more’n thirty year,’ said the old man, the tears coursing down his wrinkled cheeks. ‘Thirty zeed-toimes and thirty harvests we’ve worked together. But this is a zeed-toime which shall have a harvest o’ blood if my right hand can compass it.’

‘If you go to t’ wars, Gaffer Swain, we’ll look to your homestead,’ said the farmer who had spoken before. ‘As to t’ greenstuffs as this gentleman asks for he shall have not one wainload but three, if he will but gi’ us half-an-hour to fill them up. If he does not tak them t’ others will, so we had raither that they go to the good cause. Here, Miles, do you wak the labourers, and zee that they throw the potato store wi’ the spinach and the dried meats into the waggons wi’ all speed.’

‘Then we had best set about our part of the contract,’ said Hector Marot. With the aid of our troopers he carried out the four dragoons and our dead sergeant, and laid them on the ground some way down the lane, leading the horses all round and between their bodies, so as to trample the earth, and bear out the idea of a cavalry skirmish. While this was doing, some of the labourers had washed down the brick floor of the kitchen and removed all traces of the tragedy. The murdered woman had been carried up to her own chamber, so that nothing was left to recall what had occurred, save the unhappy farmer, who sat moodily in the same place, with his chin resting upon his stringy work-worn hands, staring out in front of him with a stony, empty gaze, unconscious apparently of all that was going on around him.

The loading of the waggons had been quickly accomplished, and the little drove of oxen gathered from a neighbouring field. We were just starting upon our return journey when a young countryman rode up, with the news that a troop of the Royal Horse were between the camp and ourselves. This was grave tidings, for we were but seven all told, and our pace was necessarily slow whilst we were hampered with the supplies.

‘How about Hooker?’ I suggested. ‘Should we not send after him and give him warning?’

‘I’ll goo at once,’ said the countryman. ‘I’m bound to zee him if he be on the Athelney road.’ So saying he set spurs to his horse and galloped off through the darkness.

‘While we have such volunteer scouts as this,’ I remarked, ‘it is easy to see which side the country folk have in their hearts. Hooker hath still the better part of two troops with him, so surely he can hold his own. But how are we to make our way back?’

‘Zounds, Clarke! let us extemporise a fortress,’ suggested Sir Gervas. ‘We could hold this farmhouse against all comers until Hooker returns, and then join our forces to his. Now would our redoubtable Colonel be in his glory, to have a chance of devising cross-fires, and flanking-fires, with all the other refinements of a well-conducted leaguer.’

‘Nay,’ I answered, ‘after leaving Major Hooker in a somewhat cavalier fashion, it would be a bitter thing to have to ask his help now that there is danger.’

‘Ho, ho!’ cried the Baronet. ‘It does not take a very deep lead-line to come to the bottom of your stoical philosophy, friend Micah. For all your cold-blooded stolidity you are keen enough where pride or honour is concerned. Shall we then ride onwards, and chance it? I’ll lay an even crown that we never as much as see a red coat.’

‘If you will take my advice, gentlemen,’ said the highwayman, trotting up upon a beautiful bay mare, ‘I should say that your best course is to allow me to act as guide to you as far as the camp. It will be strange if I cannot find roads which shall baffle these blundering soldiers.’

‘A very wise and seasonable proposition,’ cried Sir Gervas. ‘Master Marot, a pinch from my snuff-box, which is ever a covenant of friendship with its owner. Adslidikins, man! though our acquaintance at present is limited to my having nearly hanged you on one occasion, yet I have a kindly feeling towards you, though I wish you had some more savoury trade.’

‘So do many who ride o’ night,’ Marot answered, with a chuckle. ‘But we had best start, for the east is whitening, and it will be daylight ere we come to Bridgewater.’

Leaving the ill-omened farmhouse behind us we set off with all military precautions, Marot riding with me some distance in front, while two of the troopers covered the rear. It was still very dark, though a thin grey line on the horizon showed that the dawn was not far off. In spite of the gloom, however, our new acquaintance guided us without a moment’s halt or hesitation through a network of lanes and bypaths, across fields and over bogs, where the waggons were sometimes up to their axles in bog, and sometimes were groaning and straining over rocks and stones. So frequent were our turnings, and so often did we change the direction of our advance, that I feared more than once that our guide was at fault; yet, when at last the first rays of the sun brightened the landscape we saw the steeple of Bridgewater parish church shooting up right in front of us.

‘Zounds, man! you must have something of the cat in you to pick your way so in the dark,’ cried Sir Gervas, riding up to us. ‘I am right glad to see the town, for my poor waggons have been creaking and straining until my ears are weary with listening for the snap of the axle-bar. Master Marot, we owe you something for this.’

‘Is this your own particular district?’ I asked, ‘or have you a like knowledge of every part of the south?’

‘My range,’ said he, lighting his short, black pipe, ‘is from Kent to Cornwall, though never north of the Thames or Bristol Channel. Through that district there is no road which is not familiar to me, nor as much as a break in the hedge which I could not find in blackest midnight. It is my calling. But the trade is not what it was. If I had a son I should not bring him up to it. It hath been spoiled by the armed guards to the mail-coaches, and by the accursed goldsmiths, who have opened their banks and so taken the hard money into their strong boxes, giving out instead slips of paper, which are as useless to us as an old newsletter. I give ye my word that only a week gone last Friday I stopped a grazier coming from Blandford fair, and I took seven hundred guineas off him in these paper cheques, as they call them — enough, had it been in gold, to have lasted me for a three month rouse. Truly the country is coming to a pretty pass when such trash as that is allowed to take the place of the King’s coinage.’

‘Why should you persevere in such a trade?’ said I. ‘Your own knowledge must tell you that it can only lead to ruin and the gallows. Have you ever known one who has thriven at it?’

‘That have I,’ he answered readily. ‘There was Kingston Jones, who worked Hounslow for many a year. He took ten thousand yellow boys on one job, and, like a wise man, he vowed never to risk his neck again. He went into Cheshire, with some tale of having newly arrived from the Indies, bought an estate, and is now a flourishing country gentleman of good repute, and a Justice of the Peace into the bargain. Zounds, man! to see him on the bench, condemning some poor devil for stealing a dozen eggs, is as good as a comedy in the playhouse.’

‘Nay! but,’ I persisted, ‘you are a man, judging from what we have seen of your courage and skill in the use of your weapons, who would gain speedy preferment in any army. Surely it were better to use your gifts to the gaining of honour and credit, than to make them a stepping-stone to disgrace and the gallows?’

‘For the gallows I care not a clipped shilling,’ the highwayman answered, sending up thick blue curls of smoke into the morning air. ‘We have all to pay nature’s debt, and whether I do it in my boots or on a feather bed, in one year or in ten, matters as little to me as to any soldier among you. As to disgrace, it is a matter of opinion. I see no shame myself in taking a toll upon the wealth of the rich, since I freely expose my own skin in the doing of it.’

‘There is a right and there is a wrong,’ I answered, ‘which no words can do away with, and it is a dangerous and unprofitable trick to juggle with them.’

‘Besides, even if what you have said were true as to property,’ Sir Gervas remarked, ‘it would not hold you excused for that recklessness of human life which your trade begets.’

‘Nay! it is but hunting, save that your quarry may at any time turn round upon you, and become in turn the hunter. It is, as you say, a dangerous game, but two can play at it, and each has an equal chance. There is no loading of the dice, or throwing of fulhams. Now it was but a few days back that, riding down the high-road, I perceived three jolly farmers at full gallop across the fields with a leash of dogs yelping in front of them, and all in pursuit of one little harmless bunny. It was a bare and unpeopled countryside on the border of Exmoor, so I bethought me that I could not employ my leisure better than by chasing the chasers. Odd's wouns! it was a proper hunt. Away went my gentlemen, whooping like madmen, with their coat skirts flapping in the breeze, chivying on the dogs, and having a rare morning's sport. They never marked the quiet horseman who rode behind them, and who without a "yoick!" or "hark-a-way!" was relishing his chase with the loudest of them. It needed but a posse of peace officers at my heels to make up a brave string of us, catch-who-catch-can, like the game the lads play on the village green.'

'And what came of it?' I asked, for our new acquaintance was laughing silently to himself.

'Well, my three friends ran down their hare, and pulled out their flasks, as men who had done a good stroke of work. They were still hobnobbing and laughing over the slaughtered bunny, and one had dismounted to cut off its ears as the prize of their chase, when I came up at a hand-gallop. "Good-morrow, gentlemen," said I, "we have had rare sport." They looked at me blankly enough, I promise you, and one of them asked me what the devil I did there, and how I dared to join in a private sport. "Nay, I was not chasing your hare, gentlemen," said I. "What then, fellow?" asked one of them. "Why, marry, I was chasing you," I answered, "and a better run I have not had for years." With that I lugged out my persuaders, and made the thing clear in a few words, and I'll warrant you would have laughed could you have seen their faces as they slowly dragged the fat leather purses from their fobs. Seventy-one pounds was my prize that morning, which was better worth riding for than a hare's ears.'

'Did they not raise the country on your track?' I asked.

'Nay! When Brown Alice is given her head she flies faster than the news. Rumour spreads quick, but the good mare's stride is quicker still.'

'And here we are within our own outposts,' quoth Sir Gervas. 'Now, mine honest friend — for honest you have been to us, whatever others may say of you — will you not come with us, and strike in for a good cause? Zounds, man! you have many an ill deed to atone for, I'll warrant. Why not add one good one to your account, by risking your life for the reformed faith?'

'Not I,' the highwayman answered, reining up his horse. 'My own skin is nothing, but why should I risk my mare in such a fool's quarrel? Should she come to harm in the ruffle, where could I get such another? Besides, it matters nothing to her whether Papist or Protestant sits on the throne of England — does it, my beauty?'

'But you might chance to gain preferment,' I said. 'Our Colonel, Decimus Saxon, is one who loves a good swordsman, and his word hath power with King Monmouth and the council.'

'Nay, nay!' cried Hector Marot gruffly. 'Let every man stick to his own trade. Kirke's Horse I am ever ready to have a brush with, for a party of them hung old blind Jim Houston of Milverton, who was a friend of mine. I have sent seven of the red-handed rogues to their last account for it, and might work through the whole regiment had I time. But I will not fight against King James, nor will I risk the mare, so let me hear no more of it. And now I must leave ye, for I have much to do. Farewell to you!'

'Farewell, farewell!' we cried, pressing his brown horny hands; 'our thanks to you for your guidance.' Raising his hat, he shook his bridle and galloped off down the road in a rolling cloud of dust.

'Rat me, if I ever say a word against the thieves again!' said Sir Gervas. 'I never saw a man wield sword more deftly in my life, and he must be a rare hand with a pistol to bring those two tall fellows down with two shots. But look over there, Clarke! Can you not see bodies of red-coats?'

'Surely I can,' I answered, gazing out over the broad, reedy, dead-coloured plain, which extended from the other side of the winding Parret to the distant Polden Hills. 'I can see them over yonder in the direction of Westonzoyland, as bright as the poppies among corn.'

'There are more upon the left, near Chedzoy,' quoth Sir Gervas. 'One, two, three, and one yonder, and two others behind — six regiments of foot in all. Methinks I see the breastplates of horse over there, and some sign of ordnance too. Faith! Monmouth must fight now, if he ever hopes to feel the gold rim upon his temples. The whole of King James's army hath closed upon him.'

'We must get back to our command, then,' I answered. 'If I mistake not, I see the flutter of our standards in the market-place.' We spurred our weary steeds forward, and made our way with our little party and the supplies which we had collected, until we found ourselves back in our quarters, where we were hailed by the lusty cheers of our hungry comrades. Before noon the drove of bullocks had been changed into joints and steaks, while our green stuff and other victuals had helped to furnish the last dinner which many of our men were ever destined to eat. Major Hooker came in shortly after with a good store of provisions, but in no very good case, for he had had a skirmish with the dragoons, and had lost eight or ten of his men. He bore a complaint straightway to the council concerning the manner in which we had deserted him; but great events were coming fast upon us now, and there was small time to inquire into petty matters of discipline. For myself, I freely confess, looking back on it, that as a soldier he was entirely in the right, and that from a strict military point of view our conduct was not to be excused. Yet I trust, my dears, even now, when years have weighed me down, that the scream of a woman in distress would be a signal which would draw me to her aid while these old limbs could bear me. For the duty which we owe to the weak overrides all other duties and is superior to all circumstances, and I for one cannot see why the coat of the soldier should harden the heart of the man.

CHAPTER XXXI. Of the Maid of the Marsh and the Bubble which rose from the Bog

All Bridgewater was in a ferment as we rode in, for King James's forces were within four miles, on the Sedgemoor Plain, and it was likely that they would push on at once and storm the town. Some rude works had been thrown up on the Eastover side, behind which two brigades were drawn up in arms, while the rest of the army was held in reserve in the market-place and Castle Field. Towards afternoon, however, parties of our horse and peasants from the fen country came in with the news that there was no fear of an assault being attempted. The Royal troops had quartered themselves snugly in the little villages of the neighbourhood, and having levied contributions of cider and of beer from the farmers, they showed no sign of any wish to advance.

The town was full of women, the wives, mothers, and sisters of our peasants, who had come in from far and near to see their loved ones once more. Fleet Street or Cheapside upon a busy day are not more crowded than were the narrow streets and lanes of the Somersetshire town. Jack-booted, buff-coated troopers; scarlet militiamen; brown, stern-faced Tauntonians; serge-clad pikemen; wild, ragged miners; smockfrocked yokels; reckless, weather-tanned seamen; gaunt cragsmen from the northern coast — all pushed and jostled each other in a thick, many-coloured crowd. Everywhere among them were the country women, straw-bonneted and loud-tongued, weeping, embracing, and exhorting. Here and there amid the motley dresses and gleam of arms moved the dark, sombre figure of a Puritan minister, with sweeping sad-coloured mantle and penthouse hat, scattering abroad short fiery ejaculations and stern pithy texts of the old fighting order, which warmed the men's blood like liquor. Ever and anon a sharp, fierce shout would rise from the people, like the yelp of a high-spirited hound which is straining at its leash and hot to be at the throat of its enemy.

Our regiment had been taken off duty whenever it was clear that Feversham did not mean to advance, and they were now busy upon the victuals which our night-foray had furnished. It was a Sunday, fresh and warm, with a clear, unclouded sky, and a gentle breeze, sweet with the smack of the country. All day the bells of the neighbouring villages rang out their alarm, pealing their music over the sunlit countryside. The upper windows and red-tiled roofs of the houses were crowded with pale-faced women and children, who peered out to eastward, where the splotches of crimson upon the dun-coloured moor marked the position of our enemies.

At four o'clock Monmouth held a last council of war upon the square tower out of which springs the steeple of Bridgewater parish church, whence a good view can be obtained of all the country round. Since my ride to Beaufort I had always been honoured with a summons to attend, in spite of my humble rank in the army. There were some thirty councillors in all, as many as the space would hold, soldiers and courtiers, Cavaliers and Puritans, all drawn together now by the bond of a common danger. Indeed, the near approach of a crisis in their fortunes had broken down much of the distinction of manner which had served to separate them. The sectary had lost something of his austerity and become flushed and eager at the prospect of battle, while the giddy man of fashion was hushed into unwonted gravity as he considered the danger of his position. Their old feuds were forgotten as they gathered on the parapet and gazed with set faces at the thick columns of smoke which rose along the sky-line.

King Monmouth stood among his chiefs, pale and haggard, with the dishevelled, unkempt look of a man whose distress of mind has made him forgetful of the care of his person. He held a pair of ivory glasses, and as he raised them to his eyes his thin white hands shook and twitched until it was grievous to watch him. Lord Grey handed his own glasses to Saxon, who leaned his elbows upon the rough stone breastwork and stared long and earnestly at the enemy.

'They are the very men I have myself led,' said Monmouth at last, in a low voice, as though uttering his thoughts aloud. 'Over yonder at the right I see Dumbarton's foot. I know these men well. They will fight. Had we them with us all would be well.'

'Nay, your Majesty,' Lord Grey answered with spirit, 'you do your brave followers an injustice. They, too, will fight to the last drop of their blood in your quarrel.'

'Look down at them!' said Monmouth sadly, pointing at the swarming streets beneath us. 'Braver hearts never beat in English breasts, yet do but mark how they brabble and clamour like clowns on a Saturday night. Compare them with the stern, orderly array of the trained battalions. Alas!

that I should have dragged these honest souls from their little homes to fight so hopeless a battle!’

‘Hark at that!’ cried Wade. ‘They do not think it hopeless, nor do we.’ As he spoke a wild shout rose from the dense crowd beneath, who were listening to a preacher who was holding forth from a window.

‘It is worthy Doctor Ferguson,’ said Sir Stephen Timewell, who had just come up. ‘He is as one inspired, powerfully borne onwards in his discourse. Verily he is even as one of the prophets of old. He has chosen for his text, “The Lord God of gods he knoweth and Israel he shall know. If it be in rebellion or if in transgression against the Lord, save us not this day.”’

‘Amen, amen!’ cried several of the Puritan soldiers devoutly, while another hoarse burst of shouting from below, with the clashing of scythe-blades and the clatter of arms, showed how deeply the people were moved by the burning words of the fanatic.

‘They do indeed seem to be hot for battle,’ said Monmouth, with a more sprightly look. ‘It may be that one who has commanded regular troops, as I have done, is prone to lay too much weight upon the difference which discipline and training make. These brave lads seem high of heart. What think you of the enemy’s dispositions, Colonel Saxon?’

‘By my faith, I think very little of them, your Majesty,’ Saxon answered bluntly. ‘I have seen armies drawn up in array in many different parts of the world and under many commanders. I have likewise read the section which treats of the matter in the “De re militari” of Petrinus Bellus, and in the works of a Fleming of repute, yet I have neither seen nor heard anything which can commend the arrangements which we see before us.’

‘How call you the hamlet on the left — that with the square ivy-clad church tower?’ asked Monmouth, turning to the Mayor of Bridgewater, a small, anxious-faced man, who was evidently far from easy at the prominence which his office had brought upon him.

‘Westonzoyland, your Honour — that is, your Grace — I mean, your Majesty,’ he stammered. ‘The other, two miles farther off, is Middlezoy, and away to the left, just on the far side of the rhine, is Chedzoy.’

‘The rhine, sir! What do you mean?’ asked the King, starting violently, and turning so fiercely upon the timid burgher, that he lost the little balance of wits which was left to him.

‘Why, the rhine, your Grace, your Majesty,’ he quavered. ‘The rhine, which, as your Majesty’s Grace cannot but perceive, is what the country folk call the rhine.’

‘It is a name, your Majesty, for the deep and broad ditches which drain off the water from the great morass of Sedgemoor,’ said Sir Stephen Timewell.

Monmouth turned white to his very lips, and several of the council exchanged significant glances, recalling the strange prophetic jingle which I had been the means of bringing to the camp. The silence was broken, however, by an old Cromwellian Major named Hollis, who had been drawing upon paper the position of the villages in which the enemy was quartered.

‘If it please your Majesty, there is something in their order which recalls to my mind that of the army of the Scots upon the occasion of the battle of Dunbar. Cromwell lay in Dunbar even as we lie in Bridgewater. The ground around, which was boggy and treacherous, was held by the enemy. There was not a man in the army who would not own that, had old Leslie held his position, we should, as far as human wisdom could see, have had to betake us to our ships, leave our stores and ordnance, and so make the best of our way to Newcastle. He moved, however, through the blessing of Providence, in such a manner that a quagmire intervened between his right wing and the rest of his army, on which Cromwell fell upon that wing in the early dawn, and dashed it to pieces, with such effect that the whole army fled, and we had the execution of them to the very gates of Leith. Seven thousand Scots lost their lives, but not more than a hundred or so of the honest folk. Now, your Majesty will see through your glass that a mile of bogland intervenes between these villages, and that the nearest one, Chedzoy, as I think they call it, might be approached without ourselves entering the morass. Very sure I am that were the Lord-General with us now he would counsel us to venture some such attack.’

‘It is a bold thing with raw peasants to attack old soldiers,’ quoth Sir Stephen Timewell. ‘Yet if it is to be done, I know well that there is not a man born within sound of the bells of St. Mary Magdalene who will flinch from it.’

‘You say well, Sir Stephen,’ said Monmouth. ‘At Dunbar Cromwell had veterans at his back, and was opposed to troops who had small experience of war.’

‘Yet there is much good sense in what Major Hollis has said,’ remarked Lord Grey. ‘We must either fall on, or be gradually girt round and starved out. That being so, why not take advantage at once of the chance which Feversham's ignorance or carelessness hath given us? To-morrow, if Churchill can prevail over his chief, I have little doubt that we shall find their camp rearranged, and so have cause to regret our lost opportunity.'

'Their horse lie at Westonzoyland,' said Wade. 'The sun is so fierce now that we can scarce see for its glare and the haze which rises up from the marshes. Yet a little while ago I could make out through my glasses the long lines of horses picketed on the moor beyond the village. Behind, in Middlezoy, are two thousand militia, while in Chedzoy, where our attack would fall, there are five regiments of regular foot.'

'If we could break those all would be well,' cried Monmouth. 'What is your advice, Colonel Buyse?'

'My advice is ever the same,' the German answered. 'We are here to fight, and the sooner we get to work at it the better.'

'And yours, Colonel Saxon? Do you agree with the opinion of your friend?'

'I think with Major Hollis, your Majesty, that Feversham by his dispositions hath laid himself open to attack, and that we should take advantage of it forthwith. Yet, considering that trained men and a numerous horse have great advantage by daylight, I should be in favour of a camisado or night onfall.'

'The same thought was in my mind,' said Grey. 'Our friends here know every inch of the ground, and could guide us to Chedzoy as surely in the darkness as in the day.'

'I have heard,' said Saxon, 'that much beer and cider, with wine and strong waters, have found their way into their camp. If this be so we may give them a rouse while their heads are still buzzing with the liquor, when they shall scarce know whether it is ourselves or the blue devils which have come upon them.'

A general chorus of approval from the whole council showed that the prospect of at last coming to an engagement was welcome, after the weary marchings and delays of the last few weeks.

'Has any cavalier anything to say against this plan?' asked the King.

We all looked from one to the other, but though many faces were doubtful or desponding, none had a word to say against the night attack, for it was clear that our action in any case must be hazardous, and this had at least the merit of promising a better chance of success than any other. Yet, my dears, I dare say the boldest of us felt a sinking at the heart as we looked at our downcast, sad-faced leader, and asked ourselves whether this was a likely man to bring so desperate an enterprise to a success.

‘If all are agreed,’ said he, ‘let our word be “Soho,” and let us come upon them as soon after midnight as may be. What remains to be settled as to the order of battle may be left for the meantime. You will now, gentlemen, return to your regiments, and you will remember that be the upshot of this what it may, whether Monmouth be the crowned King of England or a hunted fugitive, his heart, while it can still beat, will ever bear in memory the brave friends who stood at his side in the hour of his trouble.’

At this simple and kindly speech a flush of devotion, mingled in my own case at least with a heart-whole pity for the poor, weak gentleman, swept over us. We pressed round him with our hands upon the hilts of our swords, swearing that we would stand by him, though all the world stood between him and his rights. Even the rigid and impassive Puritans were moved to a show of loyalty; while the courtiers, carried away by zeal, drew their rapiers and shouted until the crowd beneath caught the enthusiasm, and the air was full of the cheering. The light returned to Monmouth’s eye and the colour to his cheek as he listened to the clamour. For a moment at least he looked like the King which he aspired to be.

‘My thanks to ye, dear friends and subjects,’ he cried. ‘The issue rests with the Almighty, but what men can do will, I know well, be done by you this night. If Monmouth cannot have all England, six feet of her shall at least be his. Meanwhile, to your regiments, and may God defend the right!’

‘May God defend the right! cried the council solemnly, and separated, leaving the King with Grey to make the final dispositions for the attack.

‘These popinjays of the Court are ready enough to wave their rapiers and shout when there are four good miles between them and the foe,’ said Saxon, as we made our way through the crowd. ‘I fear that they will scarce be as forward when there is a line of musqueteers to be faced, and a brigade of horse perhaps charging down upon their flank. But here comes friend Lockarby, with news written upon his face.’

‘I have a report to make, Colonel,’ said Reuben, hurrying breathlessly up to us. ‘You may remember that I and my company were placed on guard this day at the eastern gates?’

Saxon nodded.

‘Being desirous of seeing all that I could of the enemy, I clambered up a lofty tree which stands just without the town. From this post, by the aid of a glass, I was able to make out their lines and camp. Whilst I was gazing I chanced to observe a man slinking along under cover of the birch-trees half-way between their lines and the town. Watching him, I found that he was indeed moving in our direction. Presently he came so near that I was able to distinguish who it was — for it was one whom I know — but instead of entering the town by my gate he walked round under cover of the peat cuttings, and so made his way doubtless to some other entrance. He is a man, however, who I have reason to believe has no true love for the cause, and it is my belief that he hath been to the Royal camp with news of our doings, and hath now come back for further information.’

‘Aye!’ said Saxon, raising his eyebrows. ‘And what is the man’s name?’

‘His name is Derrick, one time chief apprentice to Master Timewell at Taunton, and now an officer in the Taunton foot.’

‘What, the young springald who had his eye upon pretty Mistress Ruth! Now, out on love, if it is to turn a true man into a traitor! But methought he was one of the elect? I have heard him hold forth to the pikemen. How comes it that one of his kidney should lend help to the Prelatist cause?’

‘Love again,’ quoth I. ‘This same love is a pretty flower when it grows unchecked, but a sorry weed if thwarted.’

‘He hath an ill-feeling towards many in the camp,’ said Reuben, ‘and he would ruin the army to avenge himself on them, as a rogue might sink a ship in the hope of drowning one enemy. Sir Stephen himself hath incurred his hatred for refusing to force his daughter into accepting his suit. He has now returned into the camp, and I have reported the matter to you, that you may judge whether it would not be well to send a file of pikemen and lay him by the heels lest he play the spy once more.’

‘Perhaps it would be best so,’ Saxon answered, full of thought, ‘and yet no doubt the fellow would have some tale prepared which would outweigh our mere suspicions. Could we not take him in the very act?’

A thought slipped into my head. I had observed from the tower that there was a single lonely cottage about a third of the way to the enemy’s camp, standing by the road at a place where there were marshes on either side. Any one journeying that way must pass it. If Derrick tried to carry our plans to Feversham he might be cut off at this point by a party placed to lie in wait for him.

‘Most excellent!’ Saxon exclaimed, when I had explained the project. ‘My learned Fleming himself could not have devised a better rusus belli. Do ye convey as many files as ye may think fit to this point, and I shall see that Master Derrick is primed up with some fresh news for my Lord Feversham.’

‘Nay, a body of troops marching out would set tongues wagging,’ said Reuben. ‘Why should not Micah and I go ourselves?’

‘That would indeed be better.’ Saxon answered. ‘But ye must pledge your words, come what may, to be back at sundown, for your companies must stand to arms an hour before the advance.’

We both gladly gave the desired promise; and having learned for certain that Derrick had indeed returned to the camp, Saxon undertook to let drop in his presence some words as to the plans for the night, while we set off at once for our post. Our horses we left behind, and slipping out through the eastern gate we made our way over bog and moor, concealing ourselves as best we could, until we came out upon the lonely roadway, and found ourselves in front of the house.

It was a plain, whitewashed, thatch-roofed cottage, with a small board above the door, whereon was written a notice that the occupier sold milk and butter. No smoke reeked up from the chimney, and the shutters of the window were closed, from which we gathered that the folk who owned it had fled away from their perilous position. On either side the marsh extended, reedy and shallow at the edge, but deeper at a distance, with a bright green scum which covered its treacherous surface. We knocked at the weather-blotched door, but receiving, as we expected, no reply, I presently put my shoulder against it and forced the staple from its fastenings.

There was but a single chamber within, with a straight ladder in the corner, leading through a square hole in the ceiling to the sleeping chamber under the roof. Three or four chairs and stools were scattered over the earthen floor, and at the side a deal table with the broad brown milk basins upon it. Green blotches upon the wall and a sinking in of one side of the cottage showed the effect of its damp, marsh-girt position.

To our surprise it had still one inmate within its walls. In the centre of the room, facing the door as we entered, stood a little bright, golden-haired maid, five or six years of age. She was clad in a clean white smock, with trim leather belt and shining buckle about her waist. Two plump little legs with socks and leathern boots peeped out from under the dress, stoutly planted with right foot in advance as one who was bent upon holding her ground. Her tiny head was thrown back, and her large blue eyes were full of mingled wonder and defiance. As we entered the little witch flapped her kerchief at us, and shooed as though we were two of the intrusive fowl whom she was wont to chevy out of the house. Reuben and I stood on the threshold, uncertain, and awkward, like a pair of overgrown school lads, looking down at this fairy queen whose realms we had invaded, in two minds whether to beat a retreat or to appease her wrath by soft and coaxing words.

‘Go ‘way!’ she cried, still waving her hands and shaking her kerchief. ‘Go ‘way! Granny told me to tell any one that came to go ‘way!’

‘But if they would not go away, little mistress,’ asked Reuben, ‘what were you to do then?’

‘I was to drive them ‘way,’ she answered, advancing boldly against us with many flaps. ‘You bad man!’ she continued, flashing out at me, ‘you have broken granny’s bolt.’

‘Nay, I’ll mend it again,’ I answered penitently, and catching up a stone I soon fastened the injured staple. ‘There, mistress, your granddam will never tell the difference.’

‘Ye must go ‘way all the same,’ she persisted; ‘this is granny’s house, not yours.’

What were we to do with this resolute little dame of the marshes? That we should stay in the house was a crying need, for there was no other cover or shelter among the dreary bogs where we could hide ourselves. Yet she was bent upon driving us out with a decision and fearlessness which might have put Monmouth to shame.

‘You sell milk,’ said Reuben. ‘We are tired and thirsty, so we have come to have a horn of it.’

‘Nay,’ she cried, breaking into smiles, ‘will ye pay me just as the folk pay granny? Oh, heart alive! but that will be fine!’ She skipped up on to a stool and filled a pair of deep mugs from the basins upon the table. ‘A penny, please!’ said she.

It was strange to see the little wife hide the coin away in her smock, with pride and joy in her innocent face at this rare stroke of business which she had done for her absent granny. We bore our milk away to the window, and having loosed the shutters we seated ourselves so as to have an outlook down the road.

‘For the Lord’s sake, drink slow!’ whispered Reuben, under his breath. ‘We must keep on swilling milk or she will want to turn us out.’

‘We have paid toll now,’ I answered; ‘surely she will let us bide.’

‘If you have done you must go ‘way,’ she said firmly.

‘Were ever two men-at-arms so tyrannised over by a little dolly such as this!’ said I, laughing. ‘Nay, little one, we shall compound with you by paying you this shilling, which will buy all your milk. We can stay here and drink it at our ease.’

‘Jinny, the cow, is just across the marsh,’ quoth she. ‘It is nigh milking time, and I shall fetch her round if ye wish more.’

‘Now, God forbid!’ cried Reuben. ‘It will end in our having to buy the cow. Where is your granny, little maid?’

‘She hath gone into the town,’ the child answered. ‘There are bad men with red coats and guns coming to steal and to fight, but granny will soon make them go ‘way. Granny has gone to set it all right.’

‘We are fighting against the men with the red coats, my chuck,’ said I; ‘we shall take care of your house with you, and let no one steal anything.’

‘Nay, then ye may stay,’ quoth she, climbing up upon my knee as grave as a sparrow upon a bough. ‘What a great boy you are!’

‘And why not a man?’ I asked.

‘Because you have no beard upon your face. Why, granny hath more hair upon her chin than you. Besides, only boys drink milk. Men drink cider.’

‘Then if I am a boy I shall be your sweetheart,’ said I.

‘Nay, indeed!’ she cried, with a toss of her golden locks. ‘I have no mind to wed for a while, but Giles Martin of Gommatch is my sweetheart. What a pretty shining tin smock you have, and what a great sword! Why should people have these things to harm each other with when they are in truth all brothers?’

‘Why are they all brothers, little mistress?’ asked Reuben.

‘Because granny says that they are all the children of the great Father,’ she answered. ‘If they have all one father they must be brothers, mustn’t they?’

‘Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, Micah,’ quoth Reuben, staring out of the window.

‘You are a rare little marsh flower,’ I said, as she clambered up to grasp at my steel cap. ‘Is it not strange to think, Reuben, that there should be thousands of Christian men upon either side of us, athirst for each other’s lives, and here between them is a blue-eyed cherub who lisps out the blessed philosophy which would send us all to our homes with softened hearts and hale bodies?’

‘A day of this child would sicken me for over of soldiering,’ Reuben answered. ‘The cavalier and the butcher become too near of kin, as I listen to her.’

‘Perhaps both are equally needful,’ said I, shrugging my shoulders. ‘We have put our hands to the plough. But methinks I see the man for whom we wait coming down under the shadow of yonder line of pollard willows.’

‘It is he, sure enough,’ cried Reuben, peeping through the diamond-paned window.

‘Then, little one, you must sit here,’ said I, raising her up from my knee and placing her on a chair in a corner. ‘You must be a brave lass and sit still, whatever may chance. Will you do so?’

She pursed up her rosy lips and nodded her head.

‘He comes on apace, Micah,’ quoth my comrade, who was still standing by the casement. ‘Is he not like some treacherous fox or other beast of prey?’

There was indeed something in his lean, black-clothed figure and swift furtive movements which was like some cruel and cunning animal. He stole along under shadow of the stunted trees and withies, with bent body and gliding gait, so that from Bridgewater it would be no easy matter for the most keen-sighted to see him. Indeed, he was so far from the town that he might safely have come out from his concealment and struck across the moor, but the deep morass on either side prevented him from leaving the road until he had passed the cottage.

As he came abreast of our ambush we both sprang out from the open door and barred his way. I have heard the Independent minister at Emsworth give an account of Satan’s appearance, but if the worthy man had been with us that day, he need not have drawn upon his fancy. The man’s dark face whitened into a sickly and mottled pallor, while he drew back with a long sharp intaking of the breath and a venomous flash from his black eyes, glancing swiftly from right to left for some means of escape. For an instant his hand shot towards his sword-hilt, but his reason told him that he could scarce expect to fight his way past us. Then he glanced round, but any retreat would lead him back to the men whom he had betrayed. So he stood sullen and stolid, with heavy, downcast face and shifting, restless eye, the very type and symbol of treachery.

'We have waited some time for you, Master John Derrick,' said I. 'You must now return with us to the town.'

'On what grounds do you arrest me?' he asked, in hoarse, broken tones. 'Where is your warranty? Who hath given you a commission to molest travellers upon the King's highway?'

'I have my Colonel's commission,' I answered shortly. 'You have been once already to Feversham's camp this morning.'

'It is a lie,' he snarled fiercely. 'I do but take a stroll to enjoy the air.'

'It is the truth,' said Reuben. 'I saw you myself on your return. Let us see that paper which peeps from your doublet.'

'We all know why you should set this trap for me,' Derrick cried bitterly. 'You have set evil reports afloat against me, lest I stand in your light with the Mayor's daughter. What are you that you should dare to raise your eyes to her! A mere vagrant and masterless man, coming none know whence. Why should you aspire to pluck the flower which has grown up amongst us? What had you to do with her or with us? Answer me!'

'It is not a matter which I shall discuss, save at a more fitting time and place,' Reuben answered quietly. 'Do you give over your sword and come back with us. For my part, I promise to do what I can to save your life. Should we win this night, your poor efforts can do little to harm us. Should we lose, there may be few of us left to harm.'

'I thank you for your kindly protection,' he replied, in the same white, cold, bitter manner, unbuckling his sword as he spoke, and walking slowly up to my companion. 'You can take this as a gift to Mistress Ruth,' he said, presenting the weapon in his left hand, 'and this!' he added, plucking a knife from his belt and burying it in my poor friend's side.

It was done in an instant — so suddenly that I had neither time to spring between, nor to grasp his intention before the wounded man sank gasping on the ground, and the knife tinkled upon the pathway at my feet. The villain set up a shrill cry of triumph, and bounding back in time to avoid the savage sword thrust which I made at him, he turned and fled down the road at the top of his speed. He was a far lighter man than I, and more scantily clad, yet I had, from my long wind and length of limb, been the best runner of my district, and he soon learned by the sound of my feet that he had no chance of shaking me off. Twice he doubled as a hare does when the hound is upon him, and twice my sword passed within a foot of him, for in very truth I had no more thought of mercy than if he had been a poisonous snake who had fastened his fangs into my friend before my eyes. I never dreamed of giving nor did he of claiming it. At last, hearing my steps close upon him and my breathing at his very shoulder, he sprang wildly through the reeds and dashed into the treacherous morass. Ankle-deep, knee-deep, thigh-deep, waist-deep, we struggled and staggered, I still gaining upon him, until I was within arm's-reach of him, and had whirled up my sword to strike. It had been ordained, however, my dear children, that he should die not the death of a man, but that of the reptile which he was, for even as I closed upon him he sank of a sudden with a gurgling sound, and the green marsh scum met above his head. No ripple was there and no splash to mark the spot. It was sudden and silent, as though some strange monster of the marshes had seized him and dragged him down into the depths. As I stood with upraised sword still gazing upon the spot, one single great bubble rose and burst upon the surface, and then all was still once more, and the dreary fens lay stretched before me, the very home of death and of desolation. I know not whether he had indeed come upon some sudden pit which had engulfed him, or whether in his despair he had cast himself down of set purpose. I do but know that there in the great Sedgemoor morass are buried the bones of the traitor and the spy.

I made my way as best I could through the oozy clinging mud to the margin, and hastened back to where Reuben was lying. Bending over him I found that the knife had pierced through the side leather which connected his back and front plates, and that the blood was not only pouring out of the wound, but was trickling from the corner of his mouth. With trembling fingers I undid the straps and buckles, loosened the armour, and pressed my kerchief to his side to staunch the flow.

'I trust that you have not slain him, Micah,' he said of a sudden, opening his eyes.

'A higher power than ours has judged him, Reuben,' I answered.

'Poor devil! He has had much to embitter him,' he murmured, and straightway fainted again. As I knelt over him, marking the lad's white face and laboured breathing, and bethought me of his simple, kindly nature and of the affection which I had done so little to deserve, I am not ashamed to say, my dears, albeit I am a man somewhat backward in my emotions, that my tears were mingled with his blood.

As it chanced, Decimus Saxon had found time to ascend the church tower for the purpose of watching us through his glass and seeing how we fared. Noting that there was something amiss, he had hurried down for a skilled chirurgeon, whom he brought out to us under an escort of scythesmen. I was still kneeling by my senseless friend, doing what an ignorant man might to assist him, when the party arrived and helped me to bear him into the cottage, out of the glare of the sun. The minutes were as hours while the man of physic with a grave face examined and probed the wound.

'It will scarce prove fatal,' he said at last, and I could have embraced him for the words. 'The blade has glanced on a rib, though the lung is slightly torn. We shall hear him back with us to the town.'

'You hear what he says,' said Saxon kindly. 'He is a man whose opinion is of weight —

"A skilful leach is better far,
 Than half a hundred men of war."

Cheer up, man! You are as white as though it were your blood and not his which was drained away. Where is Derrick?'

'Drowned in the marshes,' I answered.

''Tis well! It will save us six feet of good hemp. But our position here is somewhat exposed, since the Royal Horse might make a dash at us. Who is this little maid who sits so white and still in the corner.'

''Tis the guardian of the house. Her granny has left her here.'

'You had better come with us. There may be rough work here ere all is over.'

'Nay, I must wait for granny,' she answered, with the tears running down her cheeks.

'But how if I take you to granny, little one,' said I. 'We cannot leave you here. 'I held out my arms, and the child sprang into them and nestled up against my bosom, sobbing as though her heart would break. 'Take me away,' she cried; 'I'se frightened.'

I soothed the little trembling thing as best I might, and bore her off with me upon my shoulder. The scythesmen had passed the handles of their long weapons through the sleeves of their jerkins in such a way as to form a couch or litter, upon which poor Reuben was laid. A slight dash of colour had come back to his cheeks in answer to some cordial given him by the chirurgeon, and he nodded and smiled at Saxon. Thus, pacing slowly, we returned to Bridgewater, where Reuben was carried to our quarters, and I bore the little maid of the marshes to kind townsfolk, who promised to restore her to her home when the troubles were over.

CHAPTER XXXII. Of the Onfall at Sedgemoor

However pressing our own private griefs and needs, we had little time now to dwell upon them, for the moment was at hand which was to decide for the time not only our own fates, but that of the Protestant cause in England. None of us made light of the danger. Nothing less than a miracle could preserve us from defeat, and most of us were of opinion that the days of the miracles were past. Others, however, thought otherwise. I believe that many of our Puritans, had they seen the heavens open that night, and the armies of the Seraphim and the Cherubim descending to our aid, would have looked upon it as by no means a wonderful or unexpected occurrence.

The whole town was loud with the preaching. Every troop or company had its own chosen orator, and sometimes more than one, who held forth and expounded. From barrels, from waggons, from windows, and even from housetops, they addressed the crowds beneath; nor was their eloquence in vain. Hoarse, fierce shouts rose up from the streets, with broken prayers and ejaculations. Men were drunk with religion as with wine. Their faces were flushed, their speech thick, their gestures wild. Sir Stephen and Saxon smiled at each other as they watched them, for they knew, as old soldiers, that of all causes which make a man valiant in deed and careless of life, this religious fit is the strongest and the most enduring.

In the evening I found time to look in upon my wounded friend, and found him propped up with cushions upon his couch, breathing with some pain, but as bright and merry as ever. Our prisoner, Major Ogilvy, who had conceived a warm affection for us, sat by his side and read aloud to him out of an old book of plays.

‘This wound hath come at an evil moment,’ said Reuben impatiently. ‘Is it not too much that a little prick like this should send my men captainless into battle, after all our marching and drilling? I have been present at the grace, and am cut off from the dinner.’

‘Your company hath been joined to mine,’ I answered, ‘though, indeed, the honest fellows are cast down at not having their own captain. Has the physician been to see you?’

‘He has left even now,’ said Major Ogilvy. ‘He pronounces our friend to be doing right well, but hath warned me against allowing him to talk.’

‘Hark to that, lad!’ said I, shaking my finger at him. ‘If I hear a word from you I go. You will escape a rough waking this night, Major. What think you of our chance?’

‘I have thought little of your chance from the first,’ he replied frankly. ‘Monmouth is like a ruined gamester, who is now putting his last piece upon the board. He cannot win much, and he may lose all.’

‘Nay, that is a hard saying,’ said I. ‘A success might set the whole of the Midlands in arms.’

‘England is not ripe for it,’ the Major answered, with a shake of his head. ‘It is true that it has no fancy either for Papistry or for a Papist King, but we know that it is but a passing evil, since the next in succession, the Prince of Orange, is a Protestant. Why, then, should we risk so many evils to bring that about which time and patience must, perforce, accomplish between them? Besides, the man whom ye support has shown that he is unworthy of confidence. Did he not in his declaration promise to leave the choice of a monarch to the Commons? And yet, in less than a week, he proclaimed himself at Taunton Market Cross! Who could believe one who has so little regard for truth?’

‘Treason, Major, rank treason,’ I answered, laughing. ‘Yet if we could order a leader as one does a coat we might, perchance, have chosen one of a stronger texture. We are in arms not for him, but for the old liberties and rights of Englishmen. Have you seen Sir Gervas?’

Major Ogilvy, and even Reuben, burst out laughing. ‘You will find him in the room above,’ said our prisoner. ‘Never did a famous toast prepare herself for a court ball as he is preparing for his battle. If the King’s troops take him they will assuredly think that they have the Duke. He hath been in here to consult us as to his patches, hosen, and I know not what beside. You had best go up to him.’

‘Adieu, then, Reuben!’ I said, grasping his hand in mine.

‘Adieu, Micah! God shield you from harm,’ said he.

‘Can I speak to you aside, Major?’ I whispered. ‘I think,’ I went on, as he followed me into the passage, ‘that you will not say that your captivity hath been made very harsh for you. May I ask, therefore, that you will keep an eye upon my friend should we be indeed defeated this night? No doubt if Feversham gains the upper hand there will be bloody work. The hale can look after themselves, but he is helpless, and will need a friend.’

The Major pressed my hand. ‘I swear to God,’ he said, ‘that no harm shall befall him.’

‘You have taken a load from my heart,’ I answered; ‘I know that I leave him in safety. ‘I can now ride to battle with an easy mind.’ With a friendly smile the soldier returned to the sick-room, whilst I ascended the stair and entered the quarters of Sir Gervas Jerome.

He was standing before a table which was littered all over with pots, brushes, boxes, and a score of the like trifles, which he had either bought or borrowed for the occasion. A large hand-mirror was balanced against the wall, with rush-lights on either side of it. In front of this, with a most solemn and serious expression upon his pale, handsome face, the Baronet was arranging and re-arranging a white berdash cravat. His riding-boots were brightly polished, and the broken seam repaired. His sword-sheath, breastplate, and trappings were clear and bright. He wore his gayest and newest suit, and above all he had donned a most noble and impressive full-bottomed periwig, which drooped down to his shoulders, as white as powder could make it. From his dainty riding-hat to his shining spur there was no speck or stain upon him — a sad set-off to my own state, plastered as I was with a thick crust of the Sedgemoor mud, and disordered from having ridden and worked for two days without rest or repose.

‘Split me, but you have come in good time!’ he exclaimed, as I entered. ‘I have even now sent down for a flask of canary. Ah, and here it comes!’ as a maid from the inn tripped upstairs with the bottle and glasses. ‘Here is a gold piece, my pretty dear, the very last that I have in the whole world. It is the only survivor of a goodly family. Pay mine host for the wine, little one, and keep the change for thyself, to buy ribbons for the next holiday. Now, curse me if I can get this cravat to fit unwrinkled!’

‘There is nought amiss with it,’ I answered. ‘How can such trifles occupy you at such a time?’

‘Trifles!’ he cried angrily. ‘Trifles! Well, there, it boots not to argue with you. Your bucolic mind would never rise to the subtle import which may lie in such matters — the rest of mind which it is to have them right, and the plaguey uneasiness when aught is wrong. It comes, doubtless, from training, and it may be that I have it more than others of my class. I feel as a cat who would lick all day to take the least speck from her fur. Is not the patch over the eyebrow happily chosen? Nay, you cannot even offer an opinion; I would as soon ask friend Marot, the knight of the pistol. Fill up your glass!'

'Your company awaits you by the church,' I remarked; 'I saw them as I passed.'

'How looked they?' he asked. 'Were they powdered and clean?'

'Nay, I had little leisure to observe. I saw that they were cutting their matches and arranging their priming.'

'I would that they had all snaphances,' he answered, sprinkling himself with scented water; 'the matchlocks are slow and cumbersome. Have you had wine enough?'

'I will take no more,' I answered.

'Then mayhap the Major may care to finish it. It is not often I ask help with a bottle, but I would keep my head cool this night. Let us go down and see to our men.'

It was ten o'clock when we descended into the street. The hubbub of the preachers and the shouting of the people had died away, for the regiments had fallen into their places, and stood silent and stern, with the faint light from the lamps and windows playing over their dark serried ranks. A cool, clear moon shone down upon us from amidst fleecy clouds, which drifted ever and anon across her face. Away in the north tremulous rays of light flickered up into the heavens, coming and going like long, quivering fingers. They were the northern lights, a sight rarely seen in the southland counties. It is little wonder that, coming at such a time, the fanatics should have pointed to them as signals from another world, and should have compared them to that pillar of fire which guided Israel through the dangers of the desert. The footpaths and the windows were crowded with women and children, who broke into shrill cries of fear or of wonder as the strange light waxed and waned.

'It is half after ten by St. Mary's clock,' said Saxon, as we rode up to the regiment. 'Have we nothing to give the men?'

'There is a hogshead of Zoyland cider in the yard of yonder inn,' said Sir Gervas. 'Here, Dawson, do you take those gold sleeve links and give them to mine host in exchange. Broach the barrel, and let each man have his horn full. Sink me, if they shall fight with nought but cold water in them.'

'They will feel the need of it ere morning,' said Saxon, as a score of pikemen hastened off to the inn. 'The marsh air is chilling to the blood.'

‘I feel cold already, and Covenant is stamping with it,’ said I. ‘Might we not, if we have time upon our hands, canter our horses down the line?’

‘Of a surety,’ Saxon answered gladly, ‘we could not do better;’ so shaking our bridles we rode off, our horses’ hoofs striking fire from the flint-paved streets as we passed.

Behind the horse, in a long line which stretched from the Eastover gate, across the bridge, along the High Street, up the Cornhill, and so past the church to the Pig Cross, stood our foot, silent and grim, save when some woman’s voice from the windows called forth a deep, short answer from the ranks. The fitful light gleamed on scythes-blade or gun-barrel, and showed up the lines of rugged, hard set faces, some of mere children with never a hair upon their cheeks, others of old men whose grey beards swept down to their cross-belts, but all bearing the same stamp of a dogged courage and a fierce self-contained resolution. Here were still the fisher folk of the south. Here, too, were the fierce men from the Mendips, the wild hunters from Porlock Quay and Minehead, the poachers of Exmoor, the shaggy marshmen of Axbridge, the mountain men from the Quantocks, the serge and wool-workers of Devonshire, the graziers of Bampton, the red-coats from the Militia, the stout burghers of Taunton, and then, as the very bone and sinew of all, the brave smockfrocked peasants of the plains, who had turned up their jackets to the elbow, and exposed their brown and corded arms, as was their wont when good work had to be done. As I speak to you, dear children, fifty years rolls by like a mist in the morning, and I am riding once more down the winding street, and see again the serried ranks of my gallant companions. Brave hearts! They showed to all time how little training it takes to turn an Englishman into a soldier, and what manner of men are bred in those quiet, peaceful hamlets which dot the sunny slopes of the Somerset and Devon downs. If ever it should be that England should be struck upon her knees, if those who fight her battles should have deserted her, and she should find herself unarmed in the presence of her enemy, let her take heart and remember that every village in the realm is a barrack, and that her real standing army is the hardy courage and simple virtue which stand ever in the breast of the humblest of her peasants.

As we rode down the long line a buzz of greeting and welcome rose now and again from the ranks as they recognised through the gloom Saxon’s tall, gaunt figure. The clock was on the stroke of eleven as we returned to our own men, and at that very moment King Monmouth rode out from the inn where he was quartered, and trotted with his staff down the High Street. All cheering had been forbidden, but waving caps and brandished arms spoke the ardour of his devoted followers. No bugle was to sound the march, but as each received the word the one in its rear followed its movements. The clatter and shuffle of hundreds of moving feet came nearer and nearer, until the Frome men in front of us began to march, and we found ourselves fairly started upon the last journey which many of us were ever to take in this world.

Our road lay across the Parret, through Eastover, and so along the winding track past the spot where Derrick met his fate, and the lonely cottage of the little maid. At the other side of this the road becomes a mere pathway over the plain. A dense haze lay over the moor, gathering thickly in the hollows, and veiling both the town which we had left and the villages which we were approaching. Now and again it would lift for a few moments, and then I could see in the moonlight the long black writhing line of the army, with the shimmer of steel playing over it, and the rude white standards flapping in the night breeze. Far on the right a great fire was blazing — some farmhouse, doubtless, which the Tangiers devils had made spoil of. Very slow our march was, and very careful, for the plain was, as Sir Stephen Timewell had told us, cut across by great ditches or rhines, which could not be passed save at some few places. These ditches were cut for the purpose of draining the marshes, and were many feet deep of water and of mud, so that even the horse could not cross them. The bridges were narrow, and some time passed before the army could get over. At last, however, the two main ones, the Black Ditch and the Langmoor Rhine, were safely traversed and a halt was called while the foot was formed in line, for we had reason to believe that no other force lay between the Royal camp and ourselves. So far our enterprise had succeeded admirably. We were within half a mile of the camp without mistake or accident, and none of the enemy’s scouts had shown sign of their presence. Clearly they held us in such contempt that it had never occurred to them that we might open the attack. If ever a general deserved a beating it was Feversham that night. As he drew up upon the moor the clock of Chedzoy struck one.

‘Is it not glorious?’ whispered Sir Gervas, as we reined up upon the further side of the Langmoor Rhine. ‘What is there on earth to compare with the excitement of this?’

‘You speak as though it wore a cocking-match or a bull-baiting, ‘I answered, with some little coldness. ‘It is a solemn and a sad occasion. Win who will, English blood must soak the soil of England this night.’

‘The more room for those who are left,’ said he lightly. ‘Mark over yonder the glow of their camp-fires amidst the fog. What was it that your seaman friend did recommend? Get the weather-gauge of them and board — eh? Have you told that to the Colonel?’

‘Nay, this is no time for quips and cranks,’ I answered gravely; ‘the chances are that few of us will ever see to-morrow’s sun rise.’

‘I have no great curiosity to see it,’ he remarked, with a laugh. ‘It will be much as yesterday’s. Zounds! though I have never risen to see one in my life, I have looked on many a hundred ere I went to bed.’

‘I have told friend Reuben such few things as I should desire to be done in case I should fall,’ said I. ‘It has eased my mind much to know that I leave behind some word of farewell, and little remembrance to all whom I have known. Is there no service of the sort which I can do for you?’

‘Hum!’ said he, musing. ‘If I go under, you can tell Araminta — nay, let the poor wench alone! Why should I send her messages which may plague her! Should you be in town, little Tommy Chichester would be glad to hear of the fun which we have had in Somerset. You will find him at the Coca Tree every day of the week between two and four of the clock. There is Mother Butterworth, too, whom I might commend to your notice. She was the queen of wet-nurses, but alas! cruel time hath dried up her business, and she hath need of some little nursing herself.’

‘If I live and you should fall, I shall do what may be done for her,’ said I. ‘Have you aught else to say?’

‘Only that Hacker of Paul’s Yard is the best for vests,’ he answered. ‘It is a small piece of knowledge, yet like most other knowledge it hath been bought and paid for. One other thing! I have a trinket or two left which might serve as a gift for the pretty Puritan maid, should our friend lead her to the altar. Od’s my life, but she will make him read some queer books! How now, Colonel, why are we stuck out on the moor like a row of herons among the sedges?’

‘They are ordering the line for the attack,’ said Saxon, who had ridden up during our conversation. ‘Donnerblitz! Who ever saw a camp so exposed to an onfall? Oh for twelve hundred good horse — for an hour of

Wessenburg’s Pandours! Would I not trample them down until their camp was like a field of young corn after a hail-storm!’

‘May not our horse advance?’ I asked.

The old soldier gave a deep snort of disdain. ‘If this fight is to be won it must be by our foot,’ said he; ‘what can we hope for from such cavalry? Keep your men well in hand, for we may have to bear the brunt of the King’s dragoons. A flank attack would fall upon us, for we are in the post of honour.’

‘There are troops to the right of us,’ I answered, peering through the darkness.

‘Aye! the Taunton burghers and the Frome peasants. Our brigade covers the right flank. Next us are the Mendip miners, nor could I wish for better comrades, if their zeal do not outrun their discretion. They are on their knees in the mud at this moment.’

‘They will fight none the worse for that,’ I remarked; ‘but surely the troops are advancing!’

‘Aye, aye!’ cried Saxon joyously, plucking out his sword, and tying his handkerchief round the handle to strengthen his grip. ‘The hour has come! Forwards!’

Very slowly and silently we crept on through the dense fog, our feet splashing and slipping in the sodden soil. With all the care which we could take, the advance of so great a number of men could not be conducted without a deep sonorous sound from the thousands of marching feet. Ahead of us were splotches of ruddy light twinkling through the fog which marked the Royal watch-fires. Immediately in front in a dense column our own horse moved forwards. Of a sudden out of the darkness there came a sharp challenge and a shout, with the discharge of a carbine and the sound of galloping hoofs. Away down the line we heard a ripple of shots. The first line of outposts had been reached. At the alarm our horse charged forward with a huzza, and we followed them as fast as our men could run. We had crossed two or three hundred yards of moor, and could hear the blowing of the Royal bugles quite close to us, when our horse came to a sudden halt, and our whole advance was at a standstill.

‘Sancta Maria!’ cried Saxon, dashing forward with the rest of us to find out the cause of the delay. ‘We must on at any cost! A halt now will ruin our camisado.’

‘Forwards, forwards!’ cried Sir Gervas and I, waving our swords.

‘It is no use, gentlemen,’ cried a cornet of horse, wringing his hands; ‘we are undone and betrayed. There is a broad ditch without a ford in front of us, full twenty feet across!’

‘Give me room for my horse, and I shall show ye the way across!’ cried the Baronet, backing his steed. ‘Now, lads, who’s for a jump?’

‘Nay, sir, for God’s sake!’ said a trooper, laying his hand upon his bridle. ‘Sergeant Sexton hath sprung in even now, and horse and man have gone to the bottom!’

‘Let us see it, then!’ cried Saxon, pushing his way through the crowd of horsemen. We followed close at his heels, until we found ourselves on the borders of the vast trench which impeded our advance.

To this day I have never been able to make up my mind whether it was by chance or by treachery on the part of our guides that this fosse was overlooked until we stumbled upon it in the dark. There are some who say that the Bussex Rhine, as it is called, is not either deep or broad, and was, therefore, unmentioned by the moorsmen, but that the recent constant rains had swollen it to an extent never before known. Others say that the guides had been deceived by the fog, and taken a wrong course, whereas, had we followed another track, we might have been able to come upon the camp without crossing the ditch. However that may be, it is certain that we found it stretching in front of us, broad, black, and forbidding, full twenty feet from bank to bank, with the cap of the ill-fated sergeant just visible in the centre as a mute warning to all who might attempt to ford it.

‘There must be a passage somewhere,’ cried Saxon furiously. ‘Every moment is worth a troop of horse to them. Where is my Lord Grey? Hath the guide met with his deserts?’

‘Major Hollis hath hurled the guide into the ditch,’ the young cornet answered. ‘My Lord Grey hath ridden along the bank seeking for a ford.’

I caught a pike out of a footman’s hand, and probed into the black oozy mud, standing myself up to the waist in it, and holding Covenant’s bridle in my left hand. Nowhere could I touch bottom or find any hope of solid foothold.

‘Here, fellow!’ cried Saxon, seizing a trooper by the arm. ‘Make for the rear! Gallop as though the devil were behind you! Bring up a pair of ammunition waggons, and we shall see whether we cannot bridge this infernal puddle.’

‘If a few of us could make a lodgment upon the other side we might make it good until help came,’ said Sir Gervas, as the horseman galloped off upon his mission.

All down the rebel line a fierce low roar of disappointment and rage showed that the whole army had met the same obstacle which hindered our attack. On the other side of the ditch the drums beat, the bugles screamed, and the shouts and oaths of the officers could be heard as they marshalled their men. Glancing lights in Chedzoy, Westonzoyland, and the other hamlets to left and right, showed how fast the alarm was extending. Decimus Saxon rode up and down the edge of the fosse, pattering forth foreign oaths, grinding his teeth in his fury, and rising now and again in his stirrups to shake his gauntleted hands at the enemy.

‘For whom are ye?’ shouted a hoarse voice out of the haze.

‘For the King!’ roared the peasants in answer.

‘For which King?’ cried the voice.

‘For King Monmouth!’

‘Let them have it, lads!’ and instantly a storm of musket bullets whistled and sung about our ears. As the sheet of flame sprang out of the darkness the maddened, half-broken horses dashed wildly away across the plain, resisting the efforts of the riders to pull them up. There are some, indeed, who say that those efforts were not very strong, and that our troopers, disheartened at the check at the ditch, were not sorry to show their heels to the enemy. As to my Lord Grey, I can say truly that I saw him in the dim light among the flying squadrons, doing all that a brave cavalier could do to bring them to a stand. Away they went, however, thundering through the ranks of the foot and out over the moor, leaving their companions to bear the whole brunt of the battle.

‘On to your faces, men!’ shouted Saxon, in a voice which rose high above the crash of the musketry and the cries of the wounded. The pikemen and scythesmen threw themselves down at his command, while the musqueteers knelt in front of them, loading and firing, with nothing to aim at save the burning matches of the enemy’s pieces, which could be seen twinkling through the darkness. All along, both to the right and the left, a rolling fire had broken out, coming in short, quick volleys from the soldiers, and in a continuous confused rattle from the peasants. On the further wing our four guns had been brought into play, and we could hear their dull growling in the distance.

‘Sing, brothers, sing!’ cried our stout-hearted chaplain, Master Joshua Pettigrue, bustling backwards and forwards among the prostrate ranks. ‘Let us call upon the Lord in our day of trial!’ The men raised a loud hymn of praise, which swelled into a great chorus as it was taken up by the Taunton burghers upon our right and the miners upon our left. At the sound the soldiers on the other side raised a fierce huzza, and the whole air was full of clamour.

Our musqueteers had been brought to the very edge of the Bussex Rhine, and the Royal troops had also advanced as far as they were able, so that there were not five pikes’-lengths between the lines. Yet that short distance was so impassable that, save for the more deadly fire, a quarter of a mile might have divided us. So near were we that the burning wads from the enemy’s muskets flew in flakes of fire over our heads, and we felt upon our faces the hot, quick flush of their discharges. Yet though the air was alive with bullets, the aim of the soldiers was too high for our kneeling ranks, and very few of the men were struck. For our part, we did what we could to keep the barrels of our muskets from inclining upwards. Saxon, Sir Gervas, and I walked our horses up and down without ceasing, pushing them level with our sword-blades, and calling on the men to aim steadily and slowly. The groans and cries from the other side of the ditch showed that some, at least, of our bullets had not been fired in vain.

‘We hold our own in this quarter,’ said I to Saxon. ‘It seems to me that their fire slackens.’

‘It is their horse that I fear,’ he answered. ‘They can avoid the ditch, since they come from the hamlets on the flank. They may be upon us at any time.’

‘Hullo, sir!’ shouted Sir Gervas, reining up his steed upon the very brink of the ditch, and raising his cap in salute to a mounted officer upon the other side. ‘Can you tell me if we have the honour to be opposed to the foot guards?’

‘We are Dumbarton’s regiment, sir,’ cried the other. ‘We shall give ye good cause to remember having met us.’

‘We shall be across presently to make your further acquaintance,’ Sir Gervas answered, and at the same moment rolled, horse and all, into the ditch, amid a roar of exultation from the soldiers. Half-a-dozen of his musqueteers sprang instantly, waist deep, into the mud, and dragged our friend out of danger, but the charger, which had been shot through the heart, sank without a struggle.

‘There is no harm!’ cried the Baronet, springing to his feet, ‘I would rather fight on foot like my brave musqueteers.’ The men broke out a-cheering at his words, and the fire on both sides became hotter than ever. It was a marvel to me, and to many more, to see these brave peasants with their mouths full of bullets, loading, priming, and firing as steadily as though they had been at it all their lives, and holding their own against a veteran regiment which has proved itself in other fields to be second to none in the army of England.

The grey light of morning was stealing over the moor, and still the fight was undecided. The fog hung about us in feathery streaks, and the smoke from our guns drifted across in a dun-coloured cloud, through which the long lines of red coats upon the other side of the rhine loomed up like a battalion of giants. My eyes ached and my lips prinkled with the smack of the powder. On every side of me men were falling fast, for the increased light had improved the aim of the soldiers. Our good chaplain, in the very midst of a psalm, had uttered a great shout of praise and thanksgiving, and so passed on to join those of his parishioners who were scattered round him upon the moor. Hope-above Williams and Keeper Milson, under-officers, and among the stoutest men in the company, were both down, the one dead and the other sorely wounded, but still ramming down charges, and spitting bullets into his gun-barrel. The two Stukeleys of Somerton, twins, and lads of great promise, lay silently with grey faces turned to the grey sky, united in death as they had been in birth. Everywhere the dead lay thick amid the living. Yet no man flinched from his place, and Saxon still walked his horse among them with words of hope and praise, while his stern, deep-lined face and tall sinewy figure were a very beacon of hope to the simple rustics. Such of my scythesmen as could handle a musket were thrown forward into the fighting line, and furnished with the arms and pouches of those who had fallen.

Ever and anon as the light waxed I could note through the rifts in the smoke and the fog how the fight was progressing in other parts of the field. On the right the heath was brown with the Taunton and Frome men, who, like ourselves, were lying down to avoid the fire. Along the borders of the Bussex Rhine a deep fringe of their musqueteers were exchanging murderous volleys, almost muzzle to muzzle, with the left wing of the same regiment with which we were engaged, which was supported by a second regiment in broad white facings, which I believe to have belonged to the Wiltshire Militia. On either bank of the black trench a thick line of dead, brown on the one side, and scarlet on the other, served as a screen to their companions, who sheltered themselves behind them and rested their musket-barrels upon their prostrate bodies. To the left amongst the withies lay five hundred Mendip and Bagworthy miners, singing lustily, but so ill-armed that they had scarce one gun among ten wherewith to reply to the fire which was poured into them. They could not advance, and they would not retreat, so they sheltered themselves as best they might, and waited patiently until their leaders might decide what was to be done. Further down for half a mile or more the long rolling cloud of smoke, with petulant flashes of flame spurting out through it, showed that every one of our raw regiments was bearing its part manfully. The cannon on the left had ceased firing. The Dutch gunners had left the Islanders to settle their own quarrels, and were scampering back to Bridgewater, leaving their silent pieces to the Royal Horse.

The battle was in this state when there rose a cry of ‘The King, the King!’ and Monmouth rode through our ranks, bare-headed and wild-eyed, with Buyse, Wade, and a dozen more beside him. They pulled up within a spear’s-length of me, and Saxon, spurring forward to meet them, raised his sword to the salute. I could not but mark the contrast between the calm, grave face of the veteran, composed yet alert, and the half frantic bearing of the man whom we were compelled to look upon as our leader.

‘How think ye, Colonel Saxon?’ he cried wildly. ‘How goes the fight? Is all well with ye? What an error, alas! what an error! Shall we draw off, eh? How say you?’

‘We hold our own here, your Majesty,’ Saxon answered. ‘Methinks had we something after the nature of palisados or stockados, after the Swedish fashion, we might even make it good against the horse.’

‘Ah, the horse!’ cried the unhappy Monmouth. ‘If we get over this, my Lord Grey shall answer for it. They ran like a flock of sheep. What leader could do anything with such troops? Oh, lack-a-day, lack-a-day! Shall we not advance?’

‘There is no reason to advance, your Majesty, now that the surprise has failed,’ said Saxon. ‘I had sent for carts to bridge over the trench, according to the plan which is commended in the treatise, “De vallis et fossis,” but they are useless now. We can but fight it out as we are.’

‘To throw troops across would be to sacrifice them,’ said Wade. ‘We have lost heavily, Colonel Saxon, but I think from the look of yonder bank that ye have given a good account of the red-coats.’

‘Stand firm! For God’s sake, stand firm!’ cried Monmouth distractedly. ‘The horse have fled, and the cannoniers also. Oh! what can I do with such men? What shall I do? Alas, alas!’ He set spurs to his horse and galloped off down the line, still ringing his hands and uttering his dismal wailings. Oh, my children, how small, how very small a thing is death when weighed in the balance with dishonour! Had this man but borne his fate silently, as did the meanest footman who followed his banners, how proud and glad would we have been to have discoursed of him, our princely leader. But let him rest. The fears and agitations and petty fond emotions, which showed upon him as the breeze shows upon the water, are all stilled now for many a long year. Let us think of the kind heart and forget the feeble spirit.

As his escort trooped after him, the great German man-at-arms separated from them and turned back to us. ‘I am weary of trotting up and down like a lust-ritter at a fair,’ said he. ‘If I bide with ye I am like to have my share of any fighting which is going. So, steady, mein Liebchen. That ball grazed her tail, but she is too old a soldier to wince at trifles. Hullo, friend, where is your horse?’

‘At the bottom of the ditch,’ said Sir Gervas, scraping the mud off his dress with his sword-blade. ‘’Tis now half-past two,’ he continued, ‘and we have been at this child’s-play for an hour and more. With a line regiment, too! It is not what I had looked forward to!’

‘You shall have something to console you anon,’ cried the German, with his eyes shining. ‘Mein Gott! Is it not splendid? Look to it, friend Saxon, look to it!’

It was no light matter which had so roused the soldier’s admiration. Out of the haze which still lay thick upon our right there twinkled here and there a bright gleam of silvery light, while a dull, thundering noise broke upon our ears like that of the surf upon a rocky shore. More and more frequent came the fitful flashes of steel, louder and yet louder grew the hoarse gathering tumult, until of a sudden the fog was rent, and the long lines of the Royal cavalry broke out from it, wave after wave, rich in scarlet and blue and gold, as grand a sight as ever the eye rested upon. There was something in the smooth, steady sweep of so great a body of horsemen which gave the feeling of irresistible power. Rank after rank, and line after line, with waving standards, tossing manes, and gleaming steel, they poured onwards, an army in themselves, with either flank still shrouded in the mist. As they thundered along, knee to knee and bridle to bridle, there came from them such a gust of deep-chested oaths with the jangle of harness, the clash of steel, and the measured beat of multitudinous hoofs, that no man who hath not stood up against such a whirlwind, with nothing but a seven-foot pike in his hand, can know how hard it is to face it with a steady lip and a firm grip.

But wonderful as was the sight, there was, as ye may guess, my dears, little time for us to gaze upon it. Saxon and the German flung themselves among the pikemen and did all that men could do to thicken their array. Sir Gervas and I did the same with the scythesmen, who had been trained to form a triple front after the German fashion, one rank kneeling, one stooping, and one standing erect, with weapons advanced. Close to us the Taunton men had hardened into a dark sullen ring, bristling with steel, in the centre of which might be seen and heard their venerable Mayor, his long beard fluttering in the breeze, and his strident voice clanging over the field. Louder and louder grew the roar of the horse. ‘Steady, my brave lads,’ cried Saxon, in trumpet tones. ‘Dig the pike-butt into the earth! Best it on the right foot! Give not an inch! Steady!’ A great shout went up from either side, and then the living wave broke over us.

What hope is there to describe such a scene as that — the crashing of wood, the sharp gasping cries, the snorting of horses, the jar when the push of pike met with the sweep of sword! Who can hope to make another see that of which he himself carries away so vague and dim an impression? One who has acted in such a scene gathers no general sense of the whole combat, such as might be gained by a mere onlooker, but he has stamped for ever upon his mind just the few incidents which may chance to occur before his own eyes. Thus my memories are confined to a swirl of smoke with steel caps and fierce, eager faces breaking through it, with the red gaping nostrils of horses and their pawing fore-feet as they recoiled from the hedge of steel. I see, too, a young beardless lad, an officer of dragoons, crawling on hands and knees under the scythes, and I hear his groan as one of the peasants pinned him to the ground. I see a bearded, broad-faced trooper riding a grey horse just outside the fringe of the scythes, seeking for some entrance, and screaming the while with rage. Small things imprint themselves upon a man’s notice at such a time. I even marked the man’s strong white teeth and pink gums. At the same time I see a white-faced, thin-lipped man leaning far forward over his horse’s neck and driving at me with his sword point, cursing the while as only a dragoon can curse. All these images start up as I think of that fierce rally, during which I hacked and cut and thrust at man and horse without a thought of parry or of guard. All round rose a fierce babel of shouts and cries, godly ejaculations from the peasants and oaths from the horsemen, with Saxon’s voice above all imploring his pikemen to stand firm. Then the cloud of horse-men recoiled, circling off over the plain, and the shout of triumph from my comrades, and an open snuff-box thrust out in front of me, proclaimed that we had seen the back of as stout a squadron as ever followed a kettledrum.

But if we could claim it as a victory, the army in general could scarce say as much. None but the very pick of the troops could stand against the flood of heavy horses and steel-clad men. The Frome peasants were gone, swept utterly from the field. Many had been driven by pure weight and pressure into the fatal mud which had checked our advance. Many others, sorely cut and slashed, lay in ghastly heaps all over the ground which they had held. A few by joining our ranks had saved themselves from the fate of their companions. Further off the men of Taunton still stood fast, though in sadly diminished numbers. A long ridge of horses and cavaliers in front of them showed how stern had been the attack and how fierce the resistance. On our left the wild miners had been broken at the first rush, but had fought so savagely, throwing themselves upon the ground and stabbing upwards at the stomachs of the horses, that they had at last beaten off the dragoons. The Devonshire militiamen, however, had been scattered, and shared the fate of the men of Frome. During the whole of the struggle the foot upon the further bank of the Bussex Rhine were pouring in a hail of bullets, which our musqueteers, having to defend themselves against the horse, were unable to reply to.

It needed no great amount of soldierly experience to see that the battle was lost, and that Monmouth’s cause was doomed. It was broad daylight now, though the sun had not yet risen. Our cavalry was gone, our ordnance was silent, our line was pierced in many places, and more than one of our regiments had been destroyed. On the right flank the Horse Guards Blue, the Tangiers Horse, and two dragoon regiments were forming up for a fresh attack. On the left the foot-guards had bridged the ditch and were fighting hand to hand with the men from North Somerset. In front a steady fire was being poured into us, to which our reply was feeble and uncertain, for the powder carts had gone astray in the dark, and many were calling hoarsely for ammunition, while others were loading with pebbles instead of ball. Add to this that the regiments which still held their ground had all been badly shaken by the charge, and had lost a third of their number. Yet the brave clowns sent up cheer after cheer, and shouted words of encouragement and homely jests to each other, as though a battle were but some rough game which must as a matter of course be played out while there was a player left to join in it.

‘Is Captain Clarke there?’ cried Decimus Saxon, riding up with his sword-arm flecked with blood. ‘Ride over to Sir Stephen Timewell and tell him to join his men to ours. Apart we shall be broken — together we may stand another charge.’

Setting spurs to Covenant I rode over to our companions and delivered the message. Sir Stephen, who had been struck by a petronel bullet, and wore a crimsoned kerchief bound round his snow-white head, saw the wisdom of the advice, and moved his townsmen as directed. His musqueteers being better provided with powder than ours did good service by keeping down for a time the deadly fire from across the fosse.

‘Who would have thought it of him?’ cried Sir Stephen, with flashing eyes, as Buyse and Saxon rode out to meet him. ‘What think ye now of our noble monarch, our champion of the Protestant cause?’

‘He is no very great Krieger,’ said Buyse. ‘Yet perhaps it may be from want of habit as much as from want of courage.’

‘Courage!’ cried the old Mayor, in a voice of scorn. ‘Look over yonder and behold your King.’ He pointed out over the moor with a finger which shook as much from anger as from age. There, far away, showing up against the dark peat-coloured soil, rode a gaily-dressed cavalier, followed by a knot of attendants, galloping as fast as his horse would carry him from the field of battle. There was no mistaking the fugitive. It was the recreant Monmouth.

‘Hush!’ cried Saxon, as we all gave a cry of horror and execration; ‘do not dishearten our brave lads! Cowardice is catching and will run through an army like the putrid fever.’

‘Der Feigherzige!’ cried Buyse, grinding his teeth. ‘And the brave country folk! It is too much.’

‘Stand to your pikes, men!’ roared Saxon, in a voice of thunder, and we had scarce time to form our square and throw ourselves inside of it, before the whirlwind of horse was upon us once more. When the Taunton men had joined us a weak spot had been left in our ranks, and through this in an instant the Blue Guards smashed their way, pouring through the opening, and cutting fiercely to right and left. The burghers on the one side and our own men on the other replied by savage stabs from their pikes and scythes, which emptied many a saddle, but while the struggle was at its hottest the King’s cannon opened for the first time with a deafening roar upon the other side of the rhine, and a storm of balls ploughed their way through our dense ranks, leaving furrows of dead and wounded behind them. At the same moment a great cry of ‘Powder! For Christ’s sake, powder!’ arose from the musqueteers whose last charge had been fired. Again the cannon roared, and again our men were mowed down as though Death himself with his scythe were amongst us. At last our ranks were breaking. In the very centre of the pikemen steel caps were gleaming, and broadswords rising and falling. The whole body was swept back two hundred paces or more, struggling furiously the while, and was there mixed with other like bodies which had been dashed out of all semblance of military order, and yet refused to fly. Men of Devon, of Dorset, of Wiltshire, and of Somerset, trodden down by horse, slashed by dragoons, dropping by scores under the rain of bullets, still fought on with a dogged, desperate courage for a ruined cause and a man who had deserted them. Everywhere as I glanced around me were set faces, clenched teeth, yells of rage and defiance, but never a sound of fear or of submission. Some clambered up upon the cruppers of the riders and dragged them backwards from their saddles. Others lay upon their faces and hamstrung the chargers with their scythe-blades, stabbing the horsemen before they could disengage themselves. Again and again the guards crashed through them from side to side, and yet the shattered ranks closed up behind them and continued the long-drawn struggle. So hopeless was it and so pitiable that I could have found it in my heart to wish that they would break and fly, were it not that on the broad moor there was no refuge which they could make for. And all this time, while they struggled and fought, blackened with powder and parched with thirst, spilling their blood as though it were water, the man who called himself their King was spurring over the countryside with a loose rein and a quaking heart, his thoughts centred upon saving his own neck, come what might to his gallant followers.

Large numbers of the foot fought to the death, neither giving nor receiving quarter; but at last, scattered, broken, and without ammunition, the main body of the peasants dispersed and fled across the moor, closely followed by the horse. Saxon, Buyse, and I had done all that we could to rally them once more, and had cut down some of the foremost of the pursuers, when my eye fell suddenly upon Sir Gervas, standing hatless with a few of his musqueteers in the midst of a swarm of dragoons. Spurring our horses we cut a way to his rescue, and laid our swords about us until we had cleared off his assailants for the moment.

‘Jump up behind me!’ I cried. ‘We can make good our escape.’

He looked up smiling and shook his head. ‘I stay with my company,’ said he.

‘Your company!’ Saxon cried. ‘Why, man, you are mad! Your company is cut off to the last man.’

‘That’s what I mean,’ he answered, flicking some dirt from his cravat. ‘Don’t ye mind! Look out for yourselves. Goodbye, Clarke! Present my compliments to—’ The dragoons charged down upon us again. We were all borne backwards, fighting desperately, and when we could look round the Baronet was gone for ever. We heard afterwards that the King’s troops found upon the field a body which they mistook for that of Monmouth, on account of the effeminate grace of the features and the richness of the attire. No doubt it was that of our undaunted friend, Sir Gervas Jerome, a name which shall ever be dear to my heart. When, ten years afterwards, we heard much of the gallantry of the young courtiers of the household of the French King, and of the sprightly courage with which they fought against us in the Lowlands at Steinkirk and elsewhere, I have always thought, from my recollection of Sir Gervas, that I knew what manner of men they were.

And now it was every man for himself. In no part of the field did the insurgents continue to resist. The first rays of the sun shining slantwise across the great dreary plain lit up the long line of the scarlet battalions, and glittered upon the cruel swords which rose and fell among the struggling drove of resistless fugitives. The German had become separated from us in the tumult, and we knew not whether he lived or was slain, though long afterwards we learned that he made good his escape, only to be captured with the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth. Grey, Wade, Ferguson, and others had contrived also to save themselves, while Stephen Timewell lay in the midst of a stern ring of his hard-faced burghers, dying as he had lived, a gallant Puritan Englishman. All this we learned afterwards. At present we rode for our lives across the moor, followed by a few scattered bodies of horse, who soon abandoned their pursuit in order to fasten upon some more easy prey.

We were passing a small clump of alder bushes when a loud manly voice raised in prayer attracted our attention. Pushing aside the branches, we came upon a man, seated with his back up against a great stone, cutting at his own arm with a broad-bladed knife, and giving forth the Lord's prayer the while, without a pause or a quiver in his tone. As he glanced up from his terrible task we both recognised him as one Hollis, whom I have mentioned as having been with Cromwell at Dunbar. His arm had been half severed by a cannon-ball, and he was quietly completing the separation in order to free himself from the dangling and useless limb. Even Saxon, used as he was to all the forms and incidents of war, stared open-eyed and aghast at this strange surgery; but the man, with a short nod of recognition, went grimly forward with his task, until, even as we gazed, he separated the last shred which held it, and lay over with blanched lips which still murmured the prayer. (1) We could do little to help him, and, indeed, might by our halt attract his pursuers to his hiding-place; so, throwing him down my flask half filled with water, we hastened on upon our way. Oh, war, my children, what a terrible thing it is! How are men cozened and cheated by the rare trappings and prancing steeds, by the empty terms of honour and of glory, until they forget in the outward tinsel and show the real ghastly horror of the accursed thing! Think not of the dazzling squadrons, nor of the spirit-stirring blare of the trumpets, but think of that lonely man under the shadow of the alders, and of what he was doing in a Christian age and a Christian land. Surely I, who have grown grey in harness, and who have seen as many fields as I have years of my life, should be the last to preach upon this subject, and yet I can clearly see that, in honesty, men must either give up war, or else they must confess that the words of the Redeemer are too lofty for them, and that there is no longer any use in pretending that His teaching can be reduced to practice. I have seen a Christian minister blessing a cannon which had just been founded, and another blessing a war-ship as it glided from the slips. They, the so-called representatives of Christ, blessed these engines of destruction which cruel man has devised to destroy and tear his fellow-worms. What would we say if we read in Holy Writ of our Lord having blessed the battering-rams and the catapults of the legions? Would we think that it was in agreement with His teaching? But there! As long as the heads of the Church wander away so far from the spirit of its teaching as to live in palaces and drive in carriages, what wonder if, with such examples before them, the lower clergy overstep at times the lines laid down by their great Master?

Looking back from the summit of the low hills which lie to the westward of the moor, we could see the cloud of horse-men streaming over the bridge of the Parret and into the town of Bridgewater, with the helpless drove of fugitives still flying in front of them. We had pulled up our horses, and were looking sadly and silently back at the fatal plain, when the thud of hoofs fell upon our ears, and, turning round, we found two horsemen in the dress of the guards riding towards us. They had made a circuit to cut us off, for they were riding straight for us with drawn swords and eager gestures.

‘More slaughter,’ I said wearily. ‘Why will they force us to it?’

Saxon glanced keenly from beneath his drooping lids at the approaching horsemen, and a grim smile wreathed his face in a thousand lines and wrinkles.

‘It is our friend who set the hounds upon our track at Salisbury,’ he said. ‘This is a happy meeting. I have a score to settle with him.’

It was, indeed, the hot-headed young comet whom we had met at the outset of our adventures. Some evil chance had led him to recognise the tall figure of my companion as we rode from the field, and to follow him, in the hope of obtaining revenge for the humiliation which he had met with at his hands. The other was a lance-corporal, a man of square soldierly build, riding a heavy black horse with a white blaze upon its forehead.

Saxon rode slowly towards the officer, while the trooper and I fixed our eyes upon each other.

‘Well, boy,’ I heard my companion say, ‘I trust that you have learned to fence since we met last.’

The young guardsman gave a snarl of rage at the taunt, and an instant afterwards the clink of their sword-blades showed that they had met. For my own part I dared not spare a glance upon them, for my opponent attacked me with such fury that it was all that I could do to keep him off. No pistol was drawn upon either side. It was an honest contest of steel against steel. So constant were the corporal's thrusts, now at my face, now at my body, that I had never an opening for one of the heavy cuts which might have ended the matter. Our horses spun round each other, biting and pawing, while we thrust and parried, until at last, coming together knee to knee, we found ourselves within sword-point, and grasped each other by the throat. He plucked a dagger from his belt and struck it into my left arm, but I dealt him a blow with my gauntleted hand, which smote him off his horse and stretched him speechless upon the plain. Almost at the same moment the cornet dropped from his horse, wounded in several places. Saxon sprang from his saddle, and picking the soldier's dagger from the ground, would have finished them both had I not jumped down also and restrained him. He flashed round upon me with so savage a face that I could see that the wild-beast nature within him was fairly roused.

'What hast thou to do?' he snarled. 'Let go!'

'Nay, nay! Blood enough hath been shed,' said I. 'Let them lie.'

'What mercy would they have had upon us?' he cried passionately, struggling to get his wrist free. 'They have lost, and must pay forfeit.'

'Not in cold blood,' I said firmly. 'I shall not abide it.'

'Indeed, your lordship,' he sneered, with the devil peeping out through his eyes. With a violent wrench he freed himself from my grasp, and springing back, picked up the sword which he had dropped.

'What then?' I asked, standing on my guard astride of the wounded man.

He stood for a minute or more looking at me from under his heavy-hung brows, with his whole face writhing with passion. Every instant I expected that he would fly at me, but at last, with a gulp in his throat, he sheathed his rapier with a sharp clang, and sprang back into the saddle.

'We part here,' he said coldly. 'I have twice been on the verge of slaying you, and the third time might be too much for my patience. You are no fit companion for a cavalier of fortune. Join the clergy, lad; it is your vocation.'

'Is this Decimus Saxon who speaks, or is it Will Spotterbridge?' I asked, remembering his jest concerning his ancestry, but no answering smile came upon his rugged face. Gathering up his bridle in his left hand, he shot one last malignant glance at the bleeding officer, and galloped off along one of the tracks which lead to the southward. I stood gazing after him, but he never sent so much as a hand-wave back, riding on with a rigid neck until he vanished in a dip in the moor.

‘There goes one friend,’ thought I sadly, ‘and all forsooth because I will not stand by and see a helpless man’s throat cut. Another friend is dead on the field. A third, the oldest and dearest of all, lies wounded at Bridgewater, at the mercy of a brutal soldiery. If I return to my home I do but bring trouble and danger to those whom I love. Whither shall I turn?’ For some minutes I stood irresolute beside the prostrate guardsmen, while Covenant strolled slowly along cropping the scanty herbage, and turning his dark full eyes towards me from time to time, as though to assure me that one friend at least was steadfast. Northward I looked at the Polden Hills, southwards, at the Blackdowns, westward at the long blue range of the Quantocks, and eastward at the broad fen country; but nowhere could I see any hope of safety. Truth to say, I felt sick at heart and cared little for the time whether I escaped or no.

A muttered oath followed by a groan roused me from my meditations. The corporal was sitting up rubbing his head with a look of stupid astonishment upon his face, as though he were not very sure either of where he was or how he came there. The officer, too, had opened his eyes and shown other signs of returning consciousness. His wounds were clearly of no very serious nature. There was no danger of their pursuing me even should they wish to do so, for their horses had trotted off to join the numerous other riderless steeds who were wandering all over the moorlands. I mounted, therefore, and rode slowly away, saving my good charger as much as possible, for the morning’s work had already told somewhat heavily upon him.

There were many scattered bodies of horse riding hither and thither over the marshes, but I was able to avoid them, and trotted onwards, keeping to the waste country until I found myself eight or ten miles from the battlefield. The few cottages and houses which I passed wore deserted, and many of them bore signs of having been plundered. Not a peasant was to be seen. The evil fame of Kirke’s lambs had chased away all those who had not actually taken arms. At last, after riding for three hours, I bethought me that I was far enough from the main line of pursuit to be free from danger, so I chose out a sheltered spot where a clump of bushes overhung a little brook. There, seated upon a bank of velvet moss, I rested my weary limbs, and tried to wash the stains of battle from my person.

It was only now when I could look quietly at my own attire that it was brought home to me how terrible the encounter must have been in which I had been engaged, and how wonderful it was that I had come off so scatheless. Of the blows which I had struck in the fight I had faint remembrance, yet they must have been many and terrible, for my sword edge was as jagged and turned as though I had hacked for an hour at an iron bar. From head to foot I was splashed and crimsoned with blood, partly my own, but mostly that of others. My headpiece was dinted with blows. A petronel bullet had glanced off my front plate, striking it at an angle, and had left a broad groove across it. Two or three other cracks and stars showed where the good sheet of proof steel had saved me. My left arm was stiff and well-nigh powerless from the corporal’s stab, but on stripping off my doublet and examining the place, I found that though there had been much bleeding the wound was on the outer side of the bone, and was therefore of no great import. A kerchief dipped in water and bound tightly round it eased the smart and stanched the blood. Beyond this scratch I had no injuries, though from my own efforts I felt as stiff and sore all over as though I had been well cudgelled, and the slight wound got in Wells Cathedral had reopened and was bleeding. With a little patience and cold water, however, I was able to dress it and to tie myself up as well as any chirurgeon in the kingdom.

Having seen to my injuries I had now to attend to my appearance, for in truth I might have stood for one of those gory giants with whom the worthy Don Bellianis of Greece and other stout champions were wont to contend. No woman or child but would have fled at the sight of me, for I was as red as the parish butcher when Martinmas is nigh. A good wash, however, in the brook soon removed those traces of war, and I was able to get the marks off my breastplate and boots. In the case of my clothes, however, it was so hopeless to clean them that I gave it up in despair. My good old horse had been never so much as grazed by steel or bullet, so that with a little watering and tending he was soon as fresh as ever, and we turned our backs on the streamlet a better-favoured pair than we had approached it.

It was now going on to mid-day, and I began to feel very hungry, for I had tasted nothing since the evening before. Two or three houses stood in a cluster upon the moor, but the blackened walls and scorched thatch showed that it was hopeless to expect anything from them. Once or twice I spied folk in the fields or on the roadway; but at sight of an armed horseman they ran for their lives, diving into the brushwood like wild animals. At one place, where a high oak tree marked the meeting of three roads, two bodies dangling from one of the branches showed that the fears of the villagers were based upon experience. These poor men had in all likelihood been hanged because the amount of their little hoardings had not come up to the expectations of their plunderers; or because, having given all to one band of robbers, they had nothing with which to appease the next. At last, when I was fairly weary of my fruitless search for food, I espied a windmill standing upon a green hill at the other side of some fields. Judging from its appearance that it had escaped the general pillage, I took the pathway which branched away to it from the high-road. (Note J, Appendix)

1. The incident is historically true, and may serve to show what sort of men they were who had learned their soldiering under Cromwell.

CHAPTER XXXIII. Of my Perilous Adventure at the Mill

At the base of the mill there stood a shed which was evidently used to stall the horses which brought the farmers’ grain. Some grass was heaped up inside it, so I loosened Covenant’s girths and left him to have a hearty meal. The mill itself appeared to be silent and empty. I climbed the steep wood ladder, and pushing the door open, walked into a round stone-flagged room, from which a second ladder led to the loft above. On one side of this chamber was a long wooden box, and all round the walls were ranged rows of sacks full of flour. In the fireplace stood a pile of faggots ready for lighting, so with the aid of my tinder-box I soon had a cheerful blaze. Taking a large handful of flour from the nearest bag I moistened it with water from a pitcher, and having rolled it out into a flat cake, proceeded to bake it, smiling the while to think of what my mother would say to such rough cookery. Very sure I am that Patrick Lamb himself, whose book, the ‘Complete Court Cook,’ was ever in the dear soul’s left hand while she stirred and basted with her right, could not have turned out a dish which was more to my taste at the moment, for I had not even patience to wait for the browning of it, but snapped it up and devoured it half hot. I then rolled a second one, and having placed it before the fire, and drawn my pipe from my pocket, I set myself to smoke, waiting with all the philosophy which I could muster until it should be ready.

I was lost in thought, brooding sadly over the blow which the news would be to my father, when I was startled by a loud sneeze, which sounded as though it were delivered in my very ear. I started to my feet and gazed all round me, but there was nothing save the solid wall behind and the empty chamber before. I had almost come to persuade myself that I had been the creature of some delusion, when again a crashing sneeze, louder and more prolonged than the last, broke upon the silence. Could some one be hid in one of the bags? Drawing my sword I walked round pricking the great flour sacks, but without being able to find cause for the sound. I was still marvelling over the matter when a most extraordinary chorus of gasps, snorts, and whistles broke out, with cries of ‘Oh, holy mother!’ ‘Blessed

Redeemer!’ and other such exclamations. This time there could be no doubt as to whence the uproar came. Rushing up to the great chest upon which I had been seated, I threw back the heavy lid and gazed in.

It was more than half full of flour, in the midst of which was floundering some creature, which was so coated and caked with the white powder, that it would have been hard to say that it was human were it not for the pitiable cries which it was uttering. Stooping down I dragged the man from his hiding-place, when he dropped upon his knees upon the floor and yelled for mercy, raising such a cloud of dust from every wriggle of his body that I began to cough and to sneeze. As the skin of powder began to scale off from him, I saw to my surprise that he was no miller or peasant, but was a man-at-arms, with a huge sword girt to his side, looking at present not unlike a frosted icicle, and a great steel-faced breastplate. His steel cap had remained behind in the flour-bin, and his bright red hair, the only touch of colour about him, stood straight up in the air with terror, as he implored me to spare his life. Thinking that there was something familiar about his voice, I drew my hand across his face, which set him yelling as though I had slain him. There was no mistaking the heavy cheeks and the little greedy eyes. It was none other than Master Tetheridge, the noisy town-clerk of Taunton.

But how much changed from the town-clerk whom we had seen strutting, in all the pomp and bravery of his office, before the good Mayor on the day of our coming to Somersetshire! Where now was the ruddy colour like a pippin in September? Where was the assured manner and the manly port? As he knelt his great jack-boots clicked together with apprehension, and he poured forth in a piping voice, like that of a Lincoln’s Inn mumper, a string of pleadings, excuses, and entreaties, as though I were Feversham in person, and was about to order him to instant execution.

‘I am but a poor scrivener man, your serene Highness,’ he bawled. ‘Indeed, I am a most unhappy clerk, your Honour, who has been driven into these courses by the tyranny of those above him. A more loyal man, your Grace, never wore neat’s leather, but when the mayor says “Yes,” can the clerk say “No”? Spare me, your lordship; spare a most penitent wretch, whose only prayer is that he may be allowed to serve King James to the last drop of his blood!’

‘Do you renounce the Duke of Monmouth?’ I asked, in a stern voice.

‘I do — from my heart!’ said he fervently.

‘Then prepare to die!’ I roared, whipping out my sword, ‘for I am one of his officers.’

At the sight of the steel the wretched clerk gave a perfect bellow of terror, and falling upon his face he wriggled and twisted, until looking up he perceived that I was laughing. On that he crawled up on to his knees once more, and from that to his feet, glancing at me askance, as though by no means assured of my intentions.

‘You must remember me, Master Tetheridge,’ I said. ‘I am Captain Clarke, of Saxon’s regiment of Wiltshire foot. I am surprised, indeed, that you should have fallen away from that allegiance to which you did not only swear yourself, but did administer the oath to so many others.’

‘Not a whit, Captain, not a whit!’ he answered, resuming his old bantam-cock manner as soon as he saw that there was no danger. ‘I am upon oath as true and as leal a man as ever I was.’

‘That I can fully believe,’ I answered.

‘I did but dissimulate,’ he continued, brushing the flour from his person. ‘I did but practise that cunning of the serpent which should in every warrior accompany the courage of the lion. You have read your Homer, doubtless. Eh? I too have had a touch of the humanities. I am no mere rough soldier, however stoutly I can hold mine own at sword-play. Master Ulysses is my type, even as thine, I take it, is Master Ajax.’

‘Methinks that Master Jack-in-the-box would fit you better,’ said I. ‘Wilt have a half of this cake? How came you in the flour-bin?’

‘Why, marry, in this wise,’ he answered, with his mouth full of dough. ‘It was a wile or ruse, after the fashion of the greatest commanders, who have always been famous for concealing their movements, and lurking where they were least expected. For when the fight was lost, and I had cut and hacked until my arm was weary and my edge blunted, I found that I was left alone alive of all the Taunton men. Were we on the field you could see where I had stood by the ring of slain which would be found within the sweep of my sword-arm. Finding that all was lost and that our rogues were fled, I mounted our worthy Mayor’s charger, seeing that the gallant gentleman had no further need for it, and rode slowly from the field. I promise you that there was that in my eye and bearing which prevented their horse from making too close a pursuit of me. One trooper did indeed throw himself across my path, but mine old back-handed cut was too much for him. Alas, I have much upon my conscience? I have made both widows and orphans. Why will they brave me when — God of mercy, what is that?'

''Tis but my horse in the stall below,' I answered.

'I thought it was the dragoons,' quoth the clerk, wiping away the drops which had started out upon his brow. 'You and I would have gone forth and smitten them.'

'Or climbed into the flour-bin,' said I.

'I have not yet made clear to you how I came there,' he continued. 'Having ridden, then, some leagues from the field, and noting this windmill, it did occur to me that a stout man might single-handed make it good against a troop of horse. We have no great love of flight, we Tetheridges. It may be mere empty pride, and yet the feeling runs strong in the family. We have a fighting strain in us ever since my kinsman followed Ireton's army as a sutler. I pulled up, therefore, and had dismounted to take my observations, when my brute of a charger gave the bridle a twitch, jerked itself free, and was off in an instant over hedges and ditches. I had, therefore, only my good sword left to trust to. I climbed up the ladder, and was engaged in planning how the defence could best be conducted, when I heard the clank of hoofs, and on the top of it you did ascend from below. I retired at once into ambush, from which I should assuredly have made a sudden outfall or sally, had the flour not so choked my breathing that I felt as though I had a two-pound loaf stuck in my gizzard. For myself, I am glad that it has so come about, for in my blind wrath I might unwittingly have done you an injury. Hearing the clank of your sword as you did come up the ladder, I did opine that you were one of King James's minions, the captain, perchance, of some troop in the fields below.'

'All very clear and explicit, Master Tetheridge,' said I, re-lighting my pipe. 'No doubt your demeanour when I did draw you from your hiding-place was also a mere cloak for your valour. But enough of that. It is to the future that we have to look. What are your intentions?'

'To remain with you, Captain,' said he.

'Nay, that you shall not,' I answered; 'I have no great fancy for your companionship. Your overflowing valour may bring me into ruffles which I had otherwise avoided.'

'Nay, nay! I shall moderate my spirit,' he cried. 'In such troublous times you will find yourself none the worse for the company of a tried fighting man.'

‘Tried and found wanting,’ said I, weary of the man’s braggart talk. ‘I tell you I will go alone.’

‘Nay, you need not be so hot about it,’ he exclaimed, shrinking away from me. ‘In any case, we had best stay here until nightfall, when we may make our way to the coast.’

‘That is the first mark of sense that you have shown,’ said I. ‘The King’s horse will find enough to do with the Zoyland cider and the Bridgewater ale. If we can pass through, I have friends on the north coast who would give us a lift in their lugger as far as Holland. This help I will not refuse to give you, since you are my fellow in misfortune. I would that Saxon had stayed with me! I fear he will be taken!’

‘If you mean Colonel Saxon,’ said the clerk, ‘I think that he also is one who hath much guile as well as valour. A stern, fierce soldier he was, as I know well, having fought back to back with him for forty minutes by the clock, against a troop of Sarsfield’s horse. Plain of speech he was, and perhaps a trifle inconsiderate of the honour of a cavalier, but in the field it would have been well for the army had they had more such commanders.’

‘You say truly,’ I answered; ‘but now that we have refreshed ourselves it is time that we bethought us of taking some rest, since we may have far to travel this night. I would that I could lay my hand upon a flagon of ale.’

‘I would gladly drink to our further acquaintanceship in the same,’ said my companion, ‘but as to the matter of slumber that may be readily arranged. If you ascend that ladder you will find in the loft a litter of empty sacks, upon which you can repose. For myself, I will stay down here for a while and cook myself another cake.’

‘Do you remain on watch for two hours and then arouse me,’ I replied. ‘I shall then keep guard whilst you sleep.’ He touched the hilt of his sword as a sign that he would be true to his post, so not without some misgivings I climbed up into the loft, and throwing myself upon the rude couch was soon in a deep and dreamless slumber, lulled by the low, mournful groaning and creaking of the sails.

I was awoken by steps beside me, and found that the little clerk had come up the ladder and was bending over me. I asked him if the time had come for me to rouse, on which he answered in a strange quavering voice that I had yet an hour, and that he had come up to see if there was any service which he could render me. I was too weary to take much note of his slinking manner and pallid cheeks, so thanking him for his attention, I turned over and was soon asleep once more.

My next waking was a rougher and a sterner one. There came a sudden rush of heavy feet up the ladder, and a dozen red-coats swarmed into the room. Springing on to my feet I put out my hand for the sword which I had laid all ready by my side, but the trusty weapon had gone. It had been stolen whilst I slumbered. Unarmed and taken at a vantage, I was struck down and pinioned in a moment. One held a pistol to my head, and swore that he would blow my brains out if I stirred, while the others wound a coil of rope round my body and arms, until Samson himself could scarce have got free. Feeling that my struggles were of no possible avail, I lay silent and waited for whatever was to come. Neither now nor at any time, dear children, have I laid great store upon my life, but far less then than now, for each of you are tiny tendrils which bind me to this world. Yet, when I think of the other dear ones who are waiting for me on the further shore, I do not think that even now death would seem an evil thing in my eyes. What a hopeless and empty thing would life be without it!

Having lashed my arms, the soldiers dragged me down the ladder, as though I had been a truss of hay, into the room beneath, which was also crowded with troopers. In one corner was the wretched scrivener, a picture of abject terror, with chattering teeth and trembling knees, only prevented from falling upon the floor by the grasp of a stalwart corporal. In front of him stood two officers, one a little hard brown man with dark twinkling eyes and an alert manner, the other tall and slender, with a long golden moustache, which drooped down half-way to his shoulders. The former had my sword in his hand, and they were both examining the blade curiously.

‘It is a good bit of steel, Dick,’ said one, putting the point against the stone floor, and pressing down until he touched it with the handle. ‘See, with what a snap it rebounds! No maker’s name, but the date 1638 is stamped upon the pommel. Where did you get it, fellow?’ he asked, fixing his keen gaze upon my face.

‘It was my father’s before me,’ I answered.

‘Then I trust that he drew it in a better quarrel than his son hath done,’ said the taller officer, with a sneer.

‘In as good, though not in a better,’ I returned. ‘That sword hath always been drawn for the rights and liberties of Englishmen, and against the tyranny of kings and the bigotry of priests.’

‘What a tag for a playhouse, Dick,’ cried the officer. ‘How doth it run? “The bigotry of kings and the tyranny of priests.” Why, if well delivered by Betterton close up to the footlights, with one hand upon his heart and the other pointing to the sky, I warrant the pit would rise at it.’

‘Very like,’ said the other, twirling his moustache. ‘But we have no time for fine speeches now. What are we to do with the little one?’

‘Hang him,’ the other answered carelessly.

‘No, no, your most gracious honours,’ howled Master Tetheridge, suddenly writhing out of the corporal’s grip and flinging himself upon the floor at their feet. ‘Did I not tell ye where ye could find one of the stoutest soldiers of the rebel army? Did not I guide ye to him? Did not I even creep up and remove his sword lest any of the King’s subjects be slain in the taking of him? Surely, surely, ye would not use me so scurvily when I have done ye these services? Have I not made good my words? Is he not as I described him, a giant in stature and of wondrous strength? The whole army will bear me out in it, that he was worth any two in single fight. I have given him over to ye. Surely ye will let me go!’

‘Very well delivered — plaguily so!’ quoth the little officer, clapping the palm of one hand softly against the back of the other. ‘The emphasis was just, and the enunciation clear. A little further back towards the wings, corporal, if you please. Thank you! Now, Dick, it is your cue.’

‘Nay, John, you are too absurd!’ cried the other impatiently. ‘The mask and the buskins are well enough in their place, but you look upon the play as a reality and upon the reality as but a play. What this reptile hath said is true. We must keep faith with him if we wish that others of the country folk should give up the fugitives. There is no help for it!’

‘For myself I believe in Jeddart law,’ his companion answered. ‘I would hang the man first and then discuss the question of our promise. However, pink me if I will obtrude my opinion on any man!’

‘Nay, it cannot be,’ the taller said. ‘Corporal, do you take him down. Henderson will go with you. Take from him that plate and sword, which his mother would wear with as good a grace. And hark ye, corporal, a few touches of thy stirrup leathers across his fat shoulders might not be amiss, as helping him to remember the King’s dragoons.’

My treacherous companion was dragged off, struggling and yelping, and presently a series of piercing howls, growing fainter and fainter as he fled before his tormentors, announced that the hint had been taken. The two officers rushed to the little window of the mill and roared with laughter, while the troopers, peeping furtively over their shoulders, could not restrain themselves from joining in their mirth, from which I gathered that Master Tetheridge, as, spurred on by fear, he hurled his fat body through hedges and into ditches, was a somewhat comical sight.

‘And now for the other,’ said the little officer, turning away from the window and wiping the tears of laughter from his face. ‘That beam over yonder would serve our purpose. Where is Hangman Broderick, the Jack Ketch of the Royals?’

‘Here I am, sir,’ responded a sullen, heavy-faced trooper, shuffling forward; ‘I have a rope here with a noose.’

‘Throw it over the beam, then. What is amiss with your hand, you clumsy rogue, that you should wear linen round it?’

‘May it please you, sir,’ the man answered, ‘it was all through an ungrateful, prick-eared Presbyterian knave whom I hung at Gommatch. I had done all that could be done for him. Had he been at Tyburn he could scarce have met with more attention. Yet when I did put my hand to his neck to see that all was as it should be, he did fix me with his teeth, and hath gnawed a great piece from my thumb.’

‘I am sorry for you,’ said the officer. ‘You know, no doubt, that the human bite under such circumstances is as deadly as that of the mad dog, so that you may find yourself snapping and barking one of these fine mornings. Nay, turn not pale! I have heard you preach patience and courage to your victims. You are not afraid of death?’

‘Not of any Christian death, your Honour. Yet, ten shillings a week is scarce enough to pay a man for an end like that!’

‘Nay, it is all a lottery,’ remarked the Captain cheerily. ‘I have heard that in these cases a man is so drawn up that his heels do beat a tattoo against the back of his head. But, mayhap, it is not as painful as it would appear. Meanwhile, do you proceed to do your office.’

Three or four troopers caught me by the arms, but I shook them off as best I might, and walked with, as I trust, a steady step and a cheerful face under the beam, which was a great smoke-blackened rafter passing from one side of the chamber to the other. The rope was thrown over this, and the noose placed round my neck with trembling fingers by the hangman, who took particular care to keep beyond the range of my teeth. Half-a-dozen dragoons seized the further end of the coil, and stood ready to swing me into eternity. Through all my adventurous life I have never been so close upon the threshold of death as at that moment, and yet I declare to you that, terrible as my position was, I could think of nothing but the tattoo marks upon old Solomon Sprent's arm, and the cunning fashion in which he had interwoven the red and the blue. Yet I was keenly alive to all that was going on around me. The scene of the bleak stone-floored room, the single narrow window, the two lounging elegant officers, the pile of arms in the corner, and even the texture of the coarse red serge and the patterns of the great brass buttons upon the sleeve of the man who held me, are all stamped clearly upon my mind.

'We must do our work with order,' remarked the taller Captain, taking a note-book from his pocket. 'Colonel Sarsfield may desire some details. Let me see! This is the seventeenth, is it not?'

'Four at the farm and five at the cross-roads,' the other answered, counting upon his fingers. 'Then there was the one whom we shot in the hedge, and the wounded one who nearly saved himself by dying, and the two in the grove under the hill. I can remember no more, save those who were strung up in 'Bridgewater immediately after the action.'

'It is well to do it in an orderly fashion,' quoth the other, scribbling in his book. 'It is very well for Kirke and his men, who are half Moors themselves, to hang and to slaughter without discrimination or ceremony, but we should set them a better example. What is your name, sirrah?'

'My name is Captain Micah Clarke,' I answered.

The two officers looked at each other, and the smaller one gave a long whistle. 'It is the very man!' said he. 'This comes of asking questions! Rat me, if I had not misgivings that it might prove to be so. They said that he was large of limb.'

'Tell me, sirrah, have you ever known one Major Ogilvy of the Horse Guards Blue?' asked the Captain.

'Seeing that I had the honour of taking him prisoner,' I replied, 'and seeing also that he hath shared soldier's fare and quarters with me ever since, I think I may fairly say that I do know him.'

'Cast loose the cord!' said the officer, and the hangman reluctantly slipped the cord over my head once more. 'Young man, you are surely reserved for something great, for you will never be nearer your grave until you do actually step into it. This Major Ogilvy hath made great interest both for you and for a wounded comrade of yours who lies at Bridgewater. Your name hath been given to the commanders of horse, with orders to bring you in unscathed should you be taken. Yet it is but fair to tell you that though the Major's good word may save you from martial law, it will stand you in small stead before a civil judge, before whom ye must in the end take your trial.'

'I desire to share the same lot and fortune as has befallen my companions-in-arms,' I answered.

'Nay, that is but a sullen way to take your deliverance,' cried the smaller officer. 'The situation is as flat as sutler's beer. Otway would have made a bettor thing of it. Can you not rise to the occasion? Where is she?'

'She! Who?' I asked.

'She. The she. The woman. Your wife, sweetheart, betrothed, what you will.'

'There is none such,' I answered.

'There now! What can be done in a case like that?' cried he despairingly. 'She should have rushed in from the wings and thrown herself upon your bosom. I have seen such a situation earn three rounds from the pit. There is good material spoiling here for want of some one to work it up.'

'We have something else to work up, Jack,' exclaimed his companion impatiently. 'Sergeant Gredder, do you with two troopers conduct the prisoner to Gommatch Church. It is time that we were once more upon our way, for in a few hours the darkness will hinder the pursuit.'

At the word of command the troopers descended into the field where their horses were picketed, and were speedily on the march once more, the tall Captain leading them, and the stage-struck cornet bringing up the rear. The sergeant to whose care I had been committed — a great square-shouldered, dark-browed man — ordered my own horse to be brought out, and helped me to mount it. He removed the pistols from the holsters, however, and hung them with my sword at his own saddle-bow.

'Shall I tie his feet under the horse's belly?' asked one of the dragoons.

'Nay, the lad hath an honest face,' the sergeant answered. 'If he promises to be quiet we shall cast free his arms.'

'I have no desire to escape,' said I.

'Then untie the rope. A brave man in misfortune hath ever my goodwill, strike me dumb else! Sergeant Gredder is my name, formerly of Mackay's and now of the Royals — as hard-worked and badly-paid a man as any in his Majesty's service. Right wheel, and down the pathway! Do ye ride on either side, and I behind! Our carbines are primed, friend, so stand true to your promise!'

'Nay, you can rely upon it,' I answered.

'Your little comrade did play you a scurvy trick,' said the sergeant, 'for seeing us ride down the road he did make across to us, and bargained with the Captain that his life should be spared, on condition that he should deliver into our hands what he described as one of the stoutest soldiers in the rebel army. Truly you have thews and sinews enough, though you are surely too young to have seen much service.'

'This hath been my first campaign,' I answered.

'And is like to be your last,' he remarked, with soldierly frankness. 'I hear that the Privy Council intend to make such an example as will take the heart out of the Whigs for twenty years to come. They have a lawyer coming from London whose wig is more to be feared than our helmets. He will slay more men in a day than a troop of horse in a ten-mile chase. Faith! I would sooner they took this butcher-work into their own hands. See those bodies on yonder tree. It is an evil season when such acorns grow upon English oaks.'

'It is an evil season,' said I, 'when men who call themselves Christians inflict such vengeance upon poor simple peasants, who have done no more than their conscience urged them. That the leaders and officers should suffer is but fair. They stood to win in case of success, and should pay forfeit now that they have lost. But it goes to my heart to see those poor godly country folk so treated.'

'Aye, there is truth in that,' said the sergeant. 'Now if it were some of these snuffle-nosed preachers, the old lank-haired bell-wethers who have led their flocks to the devil, it would be another thing. Why can they not conform to the Church, and be plagued to them? It is good enough for the King, so surely it is good enough for them; or are their souls so delicate that they cannot satisfy themselves with that on which every honest Englishman thrives? The main road to Heaven is too common for them. They must needs have each a by-path of their own, and cry out against all who will not follow it.'

'Why,' said I, 'there are pious men of all creeds. If a man lead a life of virtue, what matter what he believes?

'Let a man keep his virtue in his heart,' quoth Sergeant Gredder. 'Let him pack it deep in the knapsack of his soul. I suspect godliness which shows upon the surface, the snuffling talk, the rolling eyes, the groaning and the hawking. It is like the forged money, which can be told by its being more bright and more showy than the real.'

'An apt comparison!' said I. 'But how comes it, sergeant, that you have given attention to these matters? Unless they are much belied, the Royal Dragoons find other things to think of.'

'I was one of Mackay's foot,' he answered shortly. 'I have heard of him,' said I. 'A man, I believe, both of parts and of piety.'

'That, indeed, he is,' cried Sergeant Gredder warmly. 'He is a man stern and soldierly to the outer eye, but with the heart of a saint within him. I promise you there was little need of the strapado in his regiment, for there was not a man who did not fear the look of sorrow in his Colonel's eyes far more than he did the provost-marshal.'

During the whole of our long ride I found the worthy sergeant a true follower of the excellent Colonel Mackay, for he proved to be a man of more than ordinary intelligence, and of serious and thoughtful habit. As to the two troopers, they rode on either side of me as silent as statues; for the common dragoons of those days could but talk of wine and women, and were helpless and speechless when aught else was to the fore. When we at last rode into the little village of Gommatch, which overlooks the plain of Sedgemoor, it was with regret on each side that I bade my guardian adieu. As a parting favour I begged him to take charge of Covenant for me, promising to pay a certain sum by the month for his keep, and commissioning him to retain the horse for his own use should I fail to claim him within the year. It was a load off my mind when I saw my trusty companion led away, staring back at me with questioning eyes, as though unable to understand the separation. Come what might, I knew now that, he was in the keeping of a good man who would see that no harm befell him.

CHAPTER XXXIV. Of the Coming of Solomon Sprent

The church of Gommatch was a small ivy-clad building with a square Norman tower, standing in the centre of the hamlet of that name. Its great oaken doors, studded with iron, and high narrow windows, fitted it well for the use to which it was now turned. Two companies of Dumbarton's Foot had been quartered in the village, with a portly Major at their head, to whom I was handed over by Sergeant Gredder, with some account of my capture, and of the reasons which had prevented my summary execution.

Night was now drawing in, but a few dim lamps, hung here and there upon the walls, cast an uncertain, flickering light over the scene. A hundred or more prisoners were scattered about upon the stone floor, many of them wounded, and some evidently dying. The hale had gathered in silent, subdued groups round their stricken friends, and were doing what they could to lessen their sufferings. Some had even removed the greater part of their clothing in order to furnish head-rests and pallets for the wounded. Here and there in the shadows dark kneeling figures might be seen, and the measured sound of their prayers rang through the aisles, with a groan now and again, or a choking gasp as some poor sufferer battled for breath. The dim, yellow light streaming over the earnest pain-drawn faces, and the tattered mud-coloured figures, would have made it a fitting study for any of those Low Country painters whose pictures I saw long afterwards at The Hague.

On Thursday morning, the third day after the battle, we were all conveyed into Bridgewater, where we were confined for the remainder of the week in St. Mary's Church, the very one from the tower of which Monmouth and his commanders had inspected Feversham's position. The more we heard of the fight from the soldiers and others, the more clear it became that, but for the most unfortunate accidents, there was every chance that our night attack might have succeeded. There was scarcely a fault which a General could commit which Feversham had not been guilty of. He had thought too lightly of his enemy, and left his camp entirely open to a surprise. When the firing broke out he sprang from his couch, but failing to find his wig, he had groped about his tent while the battle was being decided, and only came out when it was well-nigh over. All were agreed that had it not been for the chance of the Bussex Rhine having been overlooked by our guides and scouts, we should have been among the tents before the men could have been called to arms. Only this and the fiery energy of John Churchill, the second in command, afterwards better known under a higher name, both to French and to English history, prevented the Royal army from meeting with a reverse which might have altered the result of the campaign.(Note K, Appendix.) Should ye hear or read, then, my dear children, that Monmouth's rising was easily put down, or that it was hopeless from the first, remember that I, who was concerned in it, say confidently that it really trembled in the balance, and that this handful of resolute peasants with their pikes and their scythes were within an ace of altering the whole course of English history. The ferocity of the Privy Council, after the rebellion was quelled, arose from their knowledge of how very close it had been to success.

I do not wish to say too much of the cruelty and barbarity of the victors, for it is not good for your childish ears to hear of such doings. The sluggard Feversham and the brutal Kirke have earned themselves a name in the West, which is second only to that of the arch villain who came after them. As for their victims, when they had hanged and quartered and done their wicked worst upon them, at least they left their names in their own little villages, to be treasured up and handed from generation to generation, as brave men and true who had died for a noble cause. Go now to Milverton, or to Wiveliscombe, or to Minehead, or to Colyford, or to any village through the whole breadth and length of Somersetshire, and you will find that they have not forgotten what they proudly call their martyrs. But where now is Kirke and where is Feversham? Their names are preserved, it is true, but preserved in a county's hatred. Who can fail to see now that these men in punishing others brought a far heavier punishment upon themselves? Their sin hath indeed found them out.

They did all that wicked and callous-hearted men could do, knowing well that such deeds were acceptable to the cold-blooded, bigoted hypocrite who sat upon the throne. They worked to win his favour, and they won it. Men were hanged and cut down and hanged again. Every cross-road in the country was ghastly with gibbets. There was not an insult or a contumely which might make the pangs of death more unendurable, which was not heaped upon these long-suffering men; yet it is proudly recounted in their native shire that of all the host of victims there was not one who did not meet his end with a firm lip, protesting that if the thing were to do again he was ready to do it.

At the end of a week or two news came of the fugitives. Monmouth, it seems, had been captured by Portman’s yellow coats when trying to make his way to the New Forest, whence he hoped to escape to the Continent. He was dragged, gaunt, unshaven, and trembling, out of a bean-field in which he had taken refuge, and was carried to Ringwood, in Hampshire. Strange rumours reached us concerning his behaviour — rumours which came to our ears through the coarse jests of our guards. Some said that he had gone on his knees to the yokels who had seized him. Others that he had written to the King offering to do anything, even to throw over the Protestant cause, to save his head from the scaffold.(Note L, Appendix.) We laughed at these stories at the time, and set them down as inventions of our enemies. It seemed too impossible that at a time when his supporters were so sternly and so loyally standing true to him, he, their leader, with the eyes of all men upon him, should be showing less courage than every little drummer-boy displays, who trips along at the head of his regiment upon the field of battle. Alas! time showed that the stories were indeed true, and that there was no depth of infamy to which this unhappy man would not descend, in the hope of prolonging for a few years that existence which had proved a curse to so many who trusted him.

Of Saxon no news had come, good or bad, which encouraged me to hope that he had found a hiding-place for himself. Reuben was still confined to his couch by his wound, and was under the care and protection of Major Ogilvy. The good gentleman came to see me more than once, and endeavoured to add to my comfort, until I made him understand that it pained me to find myself upon a different footing to the brave fellows with whom I had shared the perils of the campaign. One great favour he did me in writing to my father, and informing him that I was well and in no pressing danger. In reply to this letter I had a stout Christian answer from the old man, bidding me to be of good courage, and quoting largely from a sermon on patience by the Reverend Josiah Seaton of Petersfield. My mother, he said, was in deep distress at my position, but was held up by her confidence in the decrees of Providence. He enclosed a draft for Major Ogilvy, commissioning him to use it in whatever way I should suggest. This money, together with the small hoard which my mother had sewed into my collar, proved to be invaluable, for when the gaol fever broke out amongst us I was able to get fitting food for the sick, and also to pay for the services of physicians, so that the disease was stamped out ere it had time to spread.

Early in August we were brought from Bridgewater to Taunton, where we were thrown with hundreds of others into the same wool storehouse where our regiment had been quartered in the early days of the campaign. We gained little by the change, save that we found that our new guards were somewhat more satiated with cruelty than our old ones, and were therefore less exacting upon their prisoners. Not only were friends allowed in occasionally to see us, but books and papers could be obtained by the aid of a small present to the sergeant on duty. We were able, therefore, to spend our time with some degree of comfort during the month or more which passed before our trial.

One evening I was standing listlessly with my back against the wall, looking up at a thin slit of blue sky which showed itself through the narrow window, and fancying myself back in the meadows of Havant once more, when a voice fell upon my ear which did, indeed, recall me to my Hampshire home. Those deep, husky tones, rising at times into an angry roar, could belong to none other than my old friend the seaman. I approached the door from which the uproar came, and all doubt vanished as I listened to the conversation.

‘Won’t let me pass, won’t ye?’ he was shouting. ‘Let me tell you I’ve held on my course when better men than you have asked me to veil topsails. I tell you I have the admiral’s permit, and I won’t clew up for a bit of a red-painted cock-boat; so move from athwart my hawse, or I may chance to run you down.’

‘We don’t know nothing about admirals here,’ said the sergeant of the guard. ‘The time for seeing prisoners is over for the day, and if you do not take your ill-favoured body out of this I may try the weight o’ my halberd on your back.’

‘I have taken blows and given them ere you were ever thought of, you land-swab,’ roared old Solomon. ‘I was yardarm and yardarm with De Ruyter when you were learning to suck milk; but, old as I am, I would have you know that I am not condemned yet, and that I am fit to exchange broadsides with any lobster-tailed piccaroon that ever was triced up to a triangle and had the King’s diamonds cut in his back. If I tack back to

Major Ogilvy and signal him the way that I have been welcomed, he'll make your hide redder than ever your coat was.'

'Major Ogilvy!' exclaimed the sergeant, in a more respectful voice. 'If you had said that your permit was from Major Ogilvy it would have been another thing, but you did rave of admirals and commodores, and God knows what other outlandish talk!'

'Shame on your parents that they should have reared you with so slight a knowledge o' the King's English!' grumbled Solomon. 'In truth, friend, it is a marvel to me why sailor men should be able to show a lead to those on shore in the matter of lingo. For out of seven hundred men in the ship *Worcester* — the same that sank in the Bay of Funchal — there was not so much as a powder-boy but could understand every word that I said, whereas on shore there is many a great jolterhead, like thyself, who might be a Portugee for all the English that he knows, and who stares at me like a pig in a hurricane if I do lint ask him what he makes the reckoning, or how many bells have gone.'

'Whom is it that you would see?' asked the sergeant gruffly. 'You have a most infernally long tongue.'

'Aye, and a rough one, too, when I have fools to deal with,' returned the seaman. 'If I had you in my watch, lad, for a three years' cruise, I would make a man of you yet.'

'Pass the old man through!' cried the sergeant furiously, and the sailor came stumping in, with his bronzed face all screwed up and twisted, partly with amusement at his victory over the sergeant, and partly from a great chunk of tobacco which he was wont to stow within his cheek. Having glanced round without perceiving me, he put his hands to his mouth and bellowed out my name, with a string of 'Ahoys!' which rang through the building.

'Here I am, Solomon,' said I, touching him on the shoulder.

'God bless you, lad! God bless you!' he cried, wringing my hand. 'I could not see you, for my port eye is as foggy as the Newfoundland banks, and has been ever since Long Sue Williams of the Point hove a quart pot at it in the Tiger inn nigh thirty year agone. How are you? All sound, alow and aloft?'

'As well as might be,' I answered. 'I have little to complain of.'

'None of your standing rigging shot away!' said he. 'No spars crippled? No shots between wind and water, eh? You have not been hulled, nor raked, nor laid aboard of?’

‘None of these things,’ said I, laughing.

‘Faith! you are leaner than of old, and have aged ten years in two months. You did go forth as smart and trim a fighting ship as over answered helm, and now you are like the same ship when the battle and the storm have taken the gloss from her sides and torn the love-pennants from her peak. Yet am I right glad to see you sound in wind and limb.’

‘I have looked upon sights,’ said I, ‘which might well add ten years to a man’s age.’

‘Aye, aye!’ he answered, with a hollow groan, shaking his head from side to side. ‘It is a most accursed affair. Yet, bad as the tempest is, the calm will ever come afterwards if you will but ride it out with your anchor placed deep in Providence. Ah, lad, that is good holding ground! But if I know you aright, your grief is more for these poor wretches around you than for yourself.’

‘It is, indeed, a sore sight to see them suffer so patiently and uncomplainingly,’ I answered, ‘and for such a man, too!’

‘Aye, the chicken-livered swab!’ growled the seaman, grinding his teeth.

‘How are my mother and my father,’ I asked, ‘and how came you so far from home?’

‘Nay, I should have grounded on my beef bones had I waited longer at my moorings. I cut my cable, therefore, and, making a northerly tack as far as Salisbury, I run down with a fair wind. Thy father hath set his face hard, and goes about his work as usual, though much troubled by the Justices, who have twice had him up to Winchester for examination, but have found his papers all right and no charge to be brought against him. Your mother, poor soul, hath little time to mope or to pipe her eye, for she hath such a sense of duty that, were the ship to founder under her, it is a plate galleon to a china orange that she would stand fast in the caboose curing marigolds or rolling pastry. They have taken to prayer as some would to rum, and warm their hearts with it when the wind of misfortune blows chill. They were right glad that I should come down to you, and I gave them the word of a sailor that I would get you out of the bilboes if it might anyhow be done.’

‘Get me out, Solomon!’ said I; ‘nay, that may be put outside the question. How could you get me out?’

‘There are many ways,’ he answered, sinking his voice to a whisper, and nodding his grizzled head as one who talks upon what has cost him much time and thought. ‘There is scuttling.’

‘Scuttling?’

‘Aye, lad! When I was quartermaster of the galley *Providence* in the second Dutch war, we were caught betwixt a lee shore and Van Tromp’s squadron, so that after fighting until our sticks were shot away and our scuppers were arun with blood, we were carried by boarding and sent as prisoners to the Texel. We were stowed away in irons in the afterhold, amongst the bilge water and the rats, with hatches battened down and guards atop, but even then they could not keep us, for the irons got adrift, and Will Adams, the carpenter’s mate, picked a hole in the seams so that the vessel nearly foundered, and in the confusion we fell upon the prize crew, and, using our fetters as cudgels, regained possession of the vessel. But you smile, as though there were little hopes from any such plan!’

‘If this wool-house were the galley *Providence* and Taunton Deane were the Bay of Biscay, it might be attempted,’ I said.

‘I have indeed got out o’ the channel,’ he answered, with a wrinkled brow. ‘There is, however, another most excellent plan which I have conceived, which is to blow up the building.’

‘To blow it up!’ I cried.

‘Aye! A brace of kegs and a slow match would do it any dark night. Then where would be these walls which now shut ye in?’

‘Where would be the folk that are now inside them!’ I asked. ‘Would you not blow them up as well?’

‘Plague take it, I had forgot that,’ cried Solomon. ‘Nay, then, I leave it with you. What have you to propose? Do but give your sailing orders, and, with or without a consort, you will find that I will steer by them as long as this old hulk can answer to her helm.’

‘Then my advice is, my dear old friend,’ said I, ‘that you leave matters to take their course, and hie back to Havant with a message from me to those who know me, telling them to be of good cheer, and to hope for the best. Neither you nor any other man can help me now, for I have thrown in my lot with these poor folk, and I would not leave them if I could. Do what you can to cheer my mother’s heart, and commend me to Zachary Palmer. Your visit hath been a joy to me, and your return will be the same to them. You can serve me better so than by biding here.’

‘Sink me if I like going back without a blow struck,’ he growled. ‘Yet if it is your will there is an end of the matter. Tell me, lad. Has that lanksparred, slab-sided, herring-gutted friend of yours played you false? for if he has, by the eternal, old as I am, my hanger shall scrape acquaintance with the longshore tuck which hangs at his girdle. I know where he hath laid himself up, moored stem and stern, all snug and shipshape, waiting for the turn of the tide.'

'What, Saxon!' I cried. 'Do you indeed know where he is? For God's sake speak low, for it would mean a commission and five hundred good pounds to any one of these soldiers could he lay hands upon him.'

'They are scarce like to do that,' said Solomon. 'On my journey hither I chanced to put into port at a place called Bruton, where there is an inn that will compare with most, and the skipper is a wench with a glib tongue and a merry eye. I was drinking a glass of spiced ale, as is my custom about six bells of the middle watch, when I chanced to notice a great lanky carter, who was loading up a waggon in the yard with a cargo o' beer casks. Looking closer it seemed to me that the man's nose, like the beak of a goshawk, and his glinting eyes with the lids only half-reefed, were known to me, but when I overheard him swearing to himself in good High Dutch, then his figurehead came back to me in a moment. I put out into the yard, and touched him on the shoulder. Zounds, lad! you should have seen him spring back and spit at me like a wildcat with every hair of his head in a bristle. He whipped a knife from under his smock, for he thought, doubtless, that I was about to earn the reward by handing him over to the red-coats. I told him that his secret was safe with me, and I asked him if he had heard that you were laid by the heels. He answered that he knew it, and that he would be answerable that no harm befell you, though in truth it seemed to me that he had his hands full in trimming his own sails, without acting as pilot to another. However, there I left him, and there I shall find him again if so be as he has done you an injury.'

'Nay,' I answered, 'I am right glad that he has found this refuge. We did separate upon a difference of opinion, but I have no cause to complain of him. In many ways he hath shown me both kindness and goodwill.'

'He is as crafty as a purser's clerk,' quoth Solomon. 'I have seen Reuben Lockarby, who sends his love to you. He is still kept in his bunk from his wound, but he meets with good treatment. Major Ogilvy tells me that he has made such interest for him that there is every chance that he will gain his discharge, the more particularly since he was not present at the battle. Your own chance of pardon would, he thinks, be greater if you had fought less stoutly, but you have marked yourself as a dangerous man, more especially as you have the love of many of the common folk among the rebels.'

The good old seaman stayed with me until late in the night, listening to my adventures, and narrating in return the simple gossip of the village, which is of more interest to the absent wanderer than the rise and fall of empires. Before he left he drew a great handful of silver pieces from his pouch, and went round amongst the prisoners, listening to their wants, and doing what he could with rough sailor talk and dropping coins to lighten their troubles. There is a language in the kindly eye and the honest brow which all men may understand; and though the seaman's speeches might have been in Greek, for all that they conveyed to the Somersetshire peasants, yet they crowded round him as he departed and called blessings upon his head. I felt as though he had brought a whiff of his own pure ocean breezes into our close and noisome prison, and left us the sweeter and the healthier.

Late in August the judges started from London upon that wicked journey which blighted the lives and the homes of so many, and hath left a memory in the counties through which they passed which shall never fade while a father can speak to a son. We heard reports of them from day to day, for the guards took pleasure in detailing them with many coarse and foul jests, that we might know what was in store for us, and lose none of what they called the pleasures of anticipation. At Winchester the sainted and honoured Lady Alice Lisle was sentenced by Chief Justice Jeffreys to be burned alive, and the exertions and prayers of her friends could scarce prevail upon him to allow her the small boon of the axe instead of the faggot. Her graceful head was hewn from her body amidst the groans and the cries of a weeping multitude in the market-place of the town. At Dorchester the slaughter was wholesale. Three hundred were condemned to death, and seventy-four were actually executed, until the most loyal and Tory of the country squires had to complain of the universal presence of the dangling bodies. Thence the judges proceeded to Exeter and thence to Taunton, which they reached in the first week of September, more like furious and ravenous beasts which have tasted blood and cannot quench their cravings for slaughter, than just-minded men, trained to distinguish the various degrees of guilt, or to pick out the innocent and screen him from injustice. A rare field was open for their cruelty, for in Taunton alone there lay a thousand hapless prisoners, many of whom were so little trained to express their thoughts, and so hampered by the strange dialect in which they spoke, that they might have been born dumb for all the chance they had of making either judge or counsel understand the pleadings which they wished to lay before them.

It was on a Monday evening that the Lord Chief Justice made his entry. From one of the windows of the room in which we were confined I saw him pass. First rode the dragoons with their standards and kettledrums, then the javelin-men with their halberds, and behind them the line of coaches full of the high dignitaries of the law. Last of all, drawn by six long-tailed Flemish mares, came a great open coach, thickly crusted with gold, in which, reclining amidst velvet cushions, sat the infamous Judge, wrapped in a cloak of crimson plush with a heavy white periwig upon his head, which was so long that it dropped down over his shoulders. They say that he wore scarlet in order to strike terror into the hearts of the people, and that his courts were for the same reason draped in the colour of blood. As for himself, it hath ever been the custom, since his wickedness hath come to be known to all men, to picture him as a man whose expression and features were as monstrous and as hideous as was the mind behind them. This is by no means the case. On the contrary, he was a man who, in his younger days, must have been remarkable for his extreme beauty.(1) He was not, it is true, very old, as years go, when I saw him, but debauchery and low living had left their traces upon his countenance, without, however entirely destroying the regularity and the beauty of his features. He was dark, more like a Spaniard than an Englishman, with black eyes and olive complexion. His expression was lofty and noble, but his temper was so easily aflame that the slightest cross or annoyance would set him raving like a madman, with blazing eyes and foaming mouth. I have seen him myself with the froth upon his lips and his whole face twitching with passion, like one who hath the falling sickness. Yet his other emotions were under as little control, for I have heard say that a very little would cause him to sob and to weep, more especially when he had himself been slighted by those who were above him. He was, I believe, a man who had great powers either for good or for evil, but by pandering to the darker side of his nature and neglecting the other, he brought himself to be as near a fiend as it is possible for a man to be. It must indeed have been an evil government where so vile and foul-mouthed a wretch was chosen out to hold the scales of justice. As he drove past, a Tory gentleman riding by the side of his coach drew his attention to the faces of the prisoners looking out at him. He glanced up at them with a quick, malicious gleam of his white teeth, then settled down again amongst the cushions. I observed that as he passed not a hat was raised among the crowd, and that even the rude soldiers appeared to look upon him half in terror, half in disgust, as a lion might look upon some foul, blood-sucking bat which battened upon the prey which he had himself struck down.

(1) The painting of Jeffreys in the National Portrait Gallery more than bears out Micah Clarke’s remarks. He is the handsomest man in the collection.

CHAPTER XXXV. Of the Devil in Wig and Gown

There was no delay in the work of slaughter. That very night the great gallows was erected outside the White Hart inn. Hour after hour we could hear the blows of mallets and the sawing of beams, mingled with the shoutings and the ribald choruses of the Chief Justice’s suite, who were carousing with the officers of the Tangiers regiment in the front room, which overlooked the gibbet. Amongst the prisoners the night was passed in prayer and meditation, the stout-hearted holding forth to their weaker brethren, and exhorting them to play the man, and to go to their death in a fashion which should be an example to true Protestants throughout the world. The Puritan divines had been mostly strung up off-hand immediately after the battle, but a few were left to sustain the courage of their flocks, and to show them the way upon the scaffold. Never have I seen anything so admirable as the cool and cheerful bravery wherewith these poor clowns faced their fate. Their courage on the battlefield paled before that which they showed in the shambles of the law. So amid the low murmur of prayer and appeals for mercy to God from tongues which never yet asked mercy from man, the morning broke, the last morning which many of us were to spend upon earth.

The court should have opened at nine, but my Lord Chief Justice was indisposed, having sat up somewhat late with Colonel Kirke. It was nearly eleven before the trumpeters and criers announced that he had taken his seat. One by one my fellow-prisoners were called out by name, the more prominent being chosen first. They went out from amongst us amid hand-shakings and blessings, but we saw and heard no more of them, save that a sudden fierce rattle of kettledrums would rise up now and again, which was, as our guards told us, to drown any dying words which might fall from the sufferers and bear fruit in the breasts of those who heard them. With firm steps and smiling faces the roll of martyrs went forth to their fate during the whole of that long autumn day, until the rough soldiers of the guard stood silent and awed in the presence of a courage which they could not but recognise as higher and nobler than their own. Folk may call it a trial that they received, and a trial it really was, but not in the sense that we Englishmen use it. It was but being haled before a Judge, and insulted before being dragged to the gibbet. The court-house was the thorny path which led to the scaffold. What use to put a witness up, when he was shouted down, cursed at, and threatened by the Chief Justice, who bellowed and swore until the frightened burghers in Fore Street could hear him? I have heard from those who were there that day that he raved like a demoniac, and that his black eyes shone with a vivid vindictive brightness which was scarce human. The jury shrank from him as from a venomous thing when he turned his baleful glance upon them. At times, as I have been told, his sternness gave place to a still more terrible merriment, and he would lean back in his seat of justice and laugh until the tears hopped down upon his ermine. Nearly a hundred were either executed or condemned to death upon that opening day.

I had expected to be amongst the first of those called, and no doubt I should have been so but for the exertions of Major Ogilvy. As it was, the second day passed, but I still found myself overlooked. On the third and fourth days the slaughter was slackened, not on account of any awakening grace on the part of the Judge, but because the great Tory landowners, and the chief supporters of the Government, had still some bowels of compassion, which revolted at this butchery of defenceless men. Had it not been for the influence which these gentlemen brought to bear upon the Judge, I have no doubt at all that Jeffreys would have hung the whole eleven hundred prisoners then confined in Taunton. As it was, two hundred and fifty fell victims to this accursed monster’s thirst for human blood.

On the eighth day of the assizes there were but fifty of us left in the wool warehouse. For the last few days prisoners had been tried in batches of ten and twenty, but now the whole of us were taken in a drove, under escort, to the court-house, where as many as could be squeezed in were ranged in the dock, while the rest were penned, like calves in the market, in the body of the hall. The Judge reclined in a high chair, with a scarlet dais above him, while two other Judges, in less elevated seats, were stationed on either side of him. On the right hand was the jury-box, containing twelve carefully picked men — Tories of the old school — firm upholders of the doctrines of non-resistance and the divine right of kings. Much care had been taken by the Crown in the choice of these men, and there was not one of them but would have sentenced his own father had there been so much as a suspicion that he leaned to Presbyterianism or to Whiggery. Just under the Judge was a broad table, covered with green cloth and strewn with papers. On the right hand of this were a long array of Crown lawyers, grim, ferret-faced men, each with a sheaf of papers in his hands, which they sniffed through again and again, as though they were so many bloodhounds picking up the trail along which they were to hunt us down. On the other side of the table sat a single fresh-faced young man, in silk gown and wig, with a nervous, shuffling manner. This was the barrister, Master Helstrop, whom the Crown in its clemency had allowed us for our defence, lest any should be bold enough to say that we had not had every fairness in our trial. The remainder of the court was filled with the servants of the Justices' retinue and the soldiers of the garrison, who used the place as their common lounge, looking on the whole thing as a mighty cheap form of sport, and roaring with laughter at the rude banter and coarse pleasantries of his Lordship.

The clerk having gabbled through the usual form that we, the prisoners at the bar, having shaken off the fear of God, had unlawfully and traitorously assembled, and so onwards, the Lord Justice proceeded to take matters into his own hands, as was his wont.

'I trust that we shall come well out of this!' he broke out. 'I trust that no judgment will fall upon this building! Was ever so much wickedness fitted into one court-house before? Who ever saw such an array of villainous faces? Ah, rogues, I see a rope ready for every one of ye! Art not afraid of judgment? Art not afraid of hell-fire? You grey-bearded rascal in the corner, how comes it that you have not had more of the grace of God in you than to take up arms against your most gracious and loving sovereign?'

'I have followed the guidance of my conscience, my Lord,' said the venerable cloth-worker of Wellington, to whom he spoke.

'Ha, your conscience!' howled Jeffreys. 'A ranter with a conscience! Where has your conscience been these two months back, you villain and rogue? Your conscience will stand you in little stead, sirrah, when you are dancing on nothing with a rope round your neck. Was ever such wickedness? Who ever heard such effrontery? And you, you great hulking rebel, have you not grace enough to cast your eyes down, but must needs look justice in the face as though you were an honest man? Are you not afeared, sirrah? Do you not see death close upon you?'

'I have seen that before now, my Lord, and I was not afeared,' I answered.

'Generation of vipers!' he cried, throwing up his hands. 'The best of fathers! The kindest of kings! See that my words are placed upon the record, clerk! The most indulgent of parents! But wayward children must, with all kindness, be flogged into obedience. Here he broke into a savage grin. ‘The King will save your own natural parents all further care on your account. If they had wished to keep ye, they should have brought ye up in better principles. Rogues, we shall be merciful to ye — oh, merciful, merciful! How many are here, recorder?’

‘Fifty and one, my Lord.’

‘Oh, sink of villainy! Fifty and one as arrant knaves as ever lay on a hurdle! Oh, what a mass of corruption have we here! Who defends the villains?’

‘I defend the prisoners, your Lordship,’ replied the young lawyer.

‘Master Helstrop, Master Helstrop!’ cried Jeffreys, shaking his great wig until the powder flew out of it; ‘you are in all these dirty cases, Master Helstrop. You might find yourself in a parlous condition, Master Helstrop. I think sometimes that I see you yourself in the dock, Master Helstrop. You may yourself soon need the help of a gentleman of the long robe, Master Helstrop. Oh, have a care! Have a care!’

‘The brief is from the Crown, your Lordship,’ the lawyer answered, in a quavering voice.

‘Must I be answered back, then!’ roared Jeffreys, his black eyes blazing with the rage of a demon. ‘Am I to be insulted in my own court? Is every five-groat piece of a pleader, because he chance to have a wig and a gown, to browbeat the Lord Justice, and to fly in the face of the ruling of the Court? Oh, Master Helstrop, I fear that I shall live to see some evil come upon you!’

‘I crave your Lordship’s pardon!’ cried the faint-hearted barrister, with his face the colour of his brief.

‘Keep a guard upon your words and upon your actions?’ Jeffreys answered, in a menacing voice. ‘See that you are not too zealous in the cause of the scum of the earth. How now, then? What do these one and fifty villains desire to say for themselves? What is their lie? Gentlemen of the jury, I beg that ye will take particular notice of the cut-throat faces of these men. ‘Tis well that Colonel Kirke hath afforded the Court a sufficient guard, for neither justice nor the Church is safe at their hands.’

‘Forty of them desire to plead guilty to the charge of taking up arms against the King,’ replied our barrister.

‘Ah!’ roared the Judge. ‘Was ever such unparalleled impudence? Was there ever such brazen effrontery? Guilty, quotha! Have they expressed their repentance for this sin against a most kind and long-suffering monarch! Put down those words on the record, clerk!’

‘They have refused to express repentance, your Lordship!’ replied the counsel for the defence.

‘Oh, the parricides! Oh, the shameless rogues!’ cried the Judge. ‘Put the forty together on this side of the enclosure. Oh, gentlemen, have ye ever seen such a concentration of vice? See how baseness and wickedness can stand with head erect! Oh, hardened monsters! But the other eleven. How can they expect us to believe this transparent falsehood — this palpable device? How can they foist it upon the Court?’

‘My Lord, their defence hath not yet been advanced!’ stammered Master Helstrop.

‘I can sniff a lie before it is uttered,’ roared the Judge, by no means abashed. ‘I can read it as quick as ye can think it. Come, come, the Court’s time is precious. Put forward a defence, or seat yourself, and let judgment be passed.’

‘These men, my Lord,’ said the counsel, who was trembling until the parchment rattled in his hand. ‘These eleven men, my Lord—’

‘Eleven devils, my Lord,’ interrupted Jeffreys.

‘They are innocent peasants, my Lord, who love God and the King, and have in no wise mingled themselves in this recent business. They have been dragged from their homes, my Lord, not because there was suspicion against them, but because they could not satisfy the greed of certain common soldiers who were balked of plunder in—’

‘Oh, shame, shame!’ cried Jeffreys, in a voice of thunder. ‘Oh, threefold shame, Master Helstrop! Are you not content with bolstering up rebels, but you must go out of your way to slander the King’s troops? What is this world coming to? What, in a word, is the defence of these rogues?’

‘An alibi, your Lordship.’

‘Ha! The common plea of every scoundrel. Have they witnesses?’

‘We have here a list of forty witnesses, your Lordship. They are waiting below, many of them having come great distances, and with much toil and trouble.’

‘Who are they? What are they?’ cried Jeffreys.

‘They are country folk, your Lordship. Cottagers and farmers, the neighbours of these poor men, who knew them well, and can speak as to their doings.’

‘Cottagers and farmers!’ the Judge shouted. ‘Why, then, they are drawn from the very class from which these men come. Would you have us believe the oath of those who are themselves Whigs, Presbyterians, Somersetshire ranters, the pothouse companions of the men whom we are trying? I warrant they have arranged it all snugly over their beer — snugly, snugly, the rogues!’

‘Will you not hear the witnesses, your Lordship?’ cried our counsel, shamed into some little sense of manhood by this outrage.

‘Not a word from them, sirrah,’ said Jeffreys. ‘It is a question whether my duty towards my kind master the King — write down “kind master,” clerk — doth not warrant me in placing all your witnesses in the dock as the aiders and abettors of treason.’

‘If it please your Lordship,’ cried one of the prisoners, ‘I have for witnesses Mr. Johnson, of Nether Stowey, who is a good Tory, and also Mr. Shepperton, the clergyman.’

‘The more shame to them to appear in such a cause,’ replied Jeffreys. ‘What are we to say, gentlemen of the jury, when we see county gentry and the clergy of the Established Church supporting treason and rebellion in this fashion? Surely the last days are at hand! You are a most malignant and dangerous Whig to have so far drawn them from their duty.’

‘But hear me, my Lord!’ cried one of the prisoners.

‘Hear you, you bellowing calf!’ shouted the Judge. ‘We can hear naught else. Do you think that you are back in your conventicle, that you should dare to raise your voice in such a fashion? Hear you, quotha! We shall hear you at the end of a rope, ere many days.’

‘We scarce think, your Lordship,’ said one of the Crown lawyers, springing to his feet amid a great rustling of papers, ‘we scarce think that it is necessary for the Crown to state any case. We have already heard the whole tale of this most damnable and execrable attempt many times over. The men in the dock before your Lordship have for the most part confessed to their guilt, and of those who hold out there is not one who has given us any reason to believe that he is innocent of the foul crime laid to his charge. The gentlemen of the long robe are therefore unanimously of opinion that the jury may at once be required to pronounce a single verdict upon the whole of the prisoners.'

'Which is — ?' asked Jeffreys, glancing round at the foreman —

'Guilty, your Lordship,' said he, with a grin, while his brother jurymen nodded their heads and laughed to one another.

'Of course, of course! guilty as Judas Iscariot!' cried the Judge, looking down with exultant eyes at the throng of peasants and burghers before him. 'Move them a little forwards, ushers, that I may see them to more advantage. Oh, ye cunning ones! Are ye not taken? Are ye not compassed around? Where now can ye fly? Do ye not see hell opening at your feet? Eh? Are ye not afraid? Oh, short, short shall be your shrift!' The very devil seemed to be in the man, for as he spoke he writhed with unholy laughter, and drummed his hand upon the red cushion in front of him. I glanced round at my companions, but their faces were all as though they had been chiselled out of marble. If he had hoped to see a moist eye or a quivering lip, the satisfaction was denied him.

'Had I my way,' said he, 'there is not one of ye but should swing for it. Aye, and if I had my way, some of those whose stomachs are too nice for this work, and who profess to serve the King with their lips while they intercede for his worst enemies, should themselves have cause to remember Taunton assizes. Oh, most ungrateful rebels! Have ye not heard how your most soft-hearted and compassionate monarch, the best of men — put it down in the record, clerk — on the intercession of that great and charitable statesman, Lord Sunderland — mark it down, clerk — hath had pity on ye? Hath it not melted ye? Hath it not made ye loathe yourselves? I declare, when I think of it' — here, with a sudden catching of the breath, he burst out a-sobbing, the tears running down his cheeks—'when I think of it, the Christian forbearance, the ineffable mercy, it doth bring forcibly to my mind that great Judge before whom all of us — even I — shall one day have to render an account. Shall I repeat it, clerk, or have you it down?'

'I have it down, your Lordship.'

'Then write "sobs" in the margin. 'Tis well that the King should know our opinion on such matters. Know, then, you most traitorous and unnatural rebels, that this good father whom ye have spurned has stepped in between yourselves and the laws which ye have offended. At his command we withhold from ye the chastisement which ye have merited. If ye can indeed pray, and if your soul-cursing conventicles have not driven all grace out of ye, drop on your knees and offer up thanks when I tell ye that he hath ordained that ye shall all have a free pardon.’ Here the Judge rose from his seat as though about to descend from the tribunal, and we gazed upon each other in the utmost astonishment at this most unlooked-for end to the trial. The soldiers and lawyers were equally amazed, while a hum of joy and applause rose up from the few country folk who had dared to venture within the accursed precincts.

‘This pardon, however,’ continued Jeffreys, turning round with a malicious smile upon his face, ‘is coupled with certain conditions and limitations. Ye shall all be removed from here to Poole, in chains, where ye shall find a vessel awaiting ye. With others ye shall be stowed away in the hold of the said vessel, and conveyed at the King’s expense to the Plantations, there to be sold as slaves. God send ye masters who will know by the free use of wood and leather to soften your stubborn thoughts and incline your mind to better things.’ He was again about to withdraw, when one of the Crown lawyers whispered something across to him.

‘Well thought of, coz,’ cried the Judge. ‘I had forgot. Bring back the prisoners, ushers! Perhaps ye think that by the Plantations I mean his Majesty’s American dominions. Unhappily, there are too many of your breed in that part already. Ye would fall among friends who might strengthen ye in your evil courses, and so risk your salvation. To send ye there would be to add one brand to another and yet hope to put out the fire. By the Plantations, therefore, I mean Barbadoes and the Indies, where ye shall live with the other slaves, whose skins may be blacker than yours, but I dare warrant that their souls are more white.’ With this concluding speech the trial ended, and we were led back through the crowded streets to the prison from which we had been brought. On either side of the street, as we passed, we could see the limbs of former companions dangling in the wind, and their heads grinning at us from the tops of poles and pikes. No savage country in the heart of heathen Africa could have presented a more dreadful sight than did the old English town of Taunton when Jeffreys and Kirke had the ordering of it. There was death in the air, and the townsfolk crept silently about, scarcely daring to wear black for those whom they had loved and lost, lest it should be twisted into an act of treason.

We were scarce back in the wool-house once more when a file of guards with a sergeant entered, escorting a long, pale-faced man with protruding teeth, whose bright blue coat and white silk breeches, gold-headed sword, and glancing shoe-buckles, proclaimed him to be one of those London exquisites whom interest or curiosity had brought down to the scene of the rebellion. He tripped along upon his tiptoes like a French dancing-master, waving his scented kerchief in front of his thin high nose, and inhaling aromatic salts from a blue phial which he carried in his left hand.

‘By the Lard!’ he cried, ‘but the stench of these filthy wretches is enough to stap one’s breath. It is, by the Lard! Smite my vitals if I would venture among them if I were not a very rake hell. Is there a danger of prison fever, sergeant? Heh?’

‘They are all sound as roaches, your honour,’ said the under-officer, touching his cap.

‘Heh, heh!’ cried the exquisite, with a shrill treble laugh. ‘It is not often ye have a visit from a person of quality, I’ll warrant. It is business, sergeant, business! “Auri sacra fames” — you remember what Virgilius Maro says, sergeant?’

‘Never heard the gentleman speak, sir — at least not to my knowledge, sir,’ said the sergeant.

‘Heh, heh! Never heard him speak, heh? That will do for Slaughter’s, sergeant. That will set them all in a titter at Slaughter’s. Pink my soul! but when I venture on a story the folk complain that they can’t get served, for the drawers laugh until there is no work to be got out of them. Oh, lay me bleeding, but these are a filthy and most ungodly crew! Let the musqueteers stand close, sergeant, lest they fly at me.’

‘We shall see to that, your honour.’

‘I have a grant of a dozen of them, and Captain Pogram hath offered me twelve pounds a head. But they must be brawny rogues — strong and brawny, for the voyage kills many, sergeant, and the climate doth also tell upon them. Now here is one whom I must have. Yes, in very truth he is a young man, and hath much life in him and much strength. Tick him off, sergeant, tick him off!’

‘His name is Clarke,’ said the soldier. ‘I have marked him down.’

‘If this is the clerk I would I had a parson to match him,’ cried the fop, sniffing at his bottle. ‘Do you see the pleasantry, sergeant. Heh, heh! Does your sluggish mind rise to the occasion? Strike me purple, but I am in excellent fettle! There is yonder man with the brown face, you can mark him down. And the young man beside him, also. Tick him off. Ha, he waves his hand towards me! Stand firm, sergeant! Where are my salts? What is it, man, what is it?'

'If it plaize your han'r,' said the young peasant, 'if so be as you have chose me to be of a pairty, I trust that you will allow my vaither yander to go with us also.'

'Pshaw, pshaw!' cried the fop, 'you are beyond reason, you are indeed! Who ever heard of such a thing? Honour forbids it! How could I foist an old man upon mine honest friend, Captain Pogram. Fie, fie! Split me asunder if he would not say that I had choused him! There is yonder lusty fellow with the red head, sergeant! The blacks will think he is a-fire. Those, and these six stout yokels, will make up my dozen.'

'You have indeed the pick of them,' said the sergeant.

'Aye, sink me, but I have a quick eye for horse, man, or woman! I'll pick the best of a batch with most. Twelve twelves, close on a hundred and fifty pieces, sergeant, and all for a few words, my friend, all for a few words. I did but send my wife, a demmed handsome woman, mark you, and dresses in the mode, to my good friend the secretary to ask for some rebels. "How many?" says he. "A dozen will do," says she. It was all done in a penstroke. What a cursed fool she was not to have asked for a hundred! But what is this, sergeant, what is this?'

A small, brisk, pippin-faced fellow in a riding-coat and high boots had come clanking into the wool-house with much assurance and authority, with a great old-fashioned sword trailing behind him, and a riding-whip switching in his hand.

'Morning, sergeant!' said he, in a loud, overbearing voice. 'You may have heard my name? I am Master John Wooton, of Langmere House, near Dulverton, who bestirred himself so for the King, and hath been termed by Mr. Godolphin, in the House of Commons, one of the local pillars of the State. Those were his words. Fine, were they not? Pillars, mark ye, the conceit being that the State was, as it were, a palace or a temple, and the loyal men so many pillars, amongst whom I also was one. I am a local pillar. I have received a Royal permit, sergeant, to choose from amongst your prisoners ten sturdy rogues whom I may sell as a reward to me for my exertions. Draw them up, therefore, that I may make my choice!'

'Then, sir, we are upon the same errand,' quoth the Londoner, bowing with his hand over his heart, until his sword seemed to point straight up to the ceiling. 'The Honourable George Dawnish, at your service! Your very humble and devoted servant, sir! Yours to command in any or all ways. It is a real joy and privilege to me, sir, to make your distinguished acquaintance. Hem!’

The country squire appeared to be somewhat taken aback at this shower of London compliments. ‘Ahem, sir! Yes, sir!’ said he, bobbing his head. ‘Glad to see you, sir! Most damnably so! But these men, sergeant? Time presses, for to-morrow is Shepton market, and I would fain see my old twenty-score boar once more before he is sold. There is a beefy one. I’ll have him.’

‘Ged, I’ve forestalled you,’ cried the courtier. ‘Sink me, but it gives me real pain. He is mine.’

‘Then this,’ said the other, pointing with his whip.

‘He is mine, too. Heh, heh, heh! Strike me stiff, but this is too funny!’

‘Od’s wounds! How many are yours!’ cried the Dulverton squire.

‘A dozen. Heh, heh! A round dozen. All those who stand upon this side. Pink me, but I have got the best of you there! The early bird — you know the old saw!’

‘It is a disgrace,’ the squire cried hotly. ‘A shame and a disgrace. We must needs fight for the King and risk our skins, and then when all is done, down come a drove of lacqueys in waiting, and snap up the pickings before their betters are served.’

‘Lacqueys in waiting, sir!’ shrieked the exquisite. ‘S’death, sir! This toucheth mine honour very nearly! I have seen blood flow, yes, sir, and wounds gape on less provocation. Retract, sir, retract!’

‘Away, you clothes-pole!’ cried the other contemptuously. ‘You are come like the other birds of carrion when the fight is o’er. Have you been named in full Parliament? Are you a local pillar? Away, away, you tailor’s dummy!’

‘You insolent clodhopper!’ cried the fop. ‘You most foul-mouthed bumpkin! The only local pillar that you have ever deserved to make acquaintance with is the whipping-post. Ha, sergeant, he lays his hand upon his sword! Stop him, sergeant, stop him, or I may do him an injury.’

‘Nay, gentlemen,’ cried the under officer. ‘This quarrel must not continue here. We must have no brawling within the prison. Yet there is a level turf without, and as fine elbow-room as a gentleman could wish for a breather.’

This proposal did not appear to commend itself to either of the angry gentlemen, who proceeded to exchange the length of their swords, and to promise that each should hear from the other before sunset. Our owner, as I may call him, the fop, took his departure at last, and the country squire having chosen the next ton swaggered off, cursing the courtiers, the Londoners, the sergeant, the prisoners, and above all, the ingratitude of the Government which had made him so small a return for his exertions. This was but the first of many such scenes, for the Government, in endeavouring to satisfy the claims of its supporters, had promised many more than there were prisoners. I am grieved to say that I have seen not only men, but even my own countrywomen, and ladies of title to boot, wringing their hands and bewailing themselves because they were unable to get any of the poor Somersetshire folk to sell as slaves. Indeed, it was only with difficulty that they could be made to see that their claim upon Government did not give them the right of seizing any burgher or peasant who might come in their way, and shipping him right off for the Plantations.

Well, my dear grandchildren, from night to night through this long and weary winter I have taken you back with me into the past, and made you see scenes the players in which are all beneath the turf, save that perhaps here and there some greybeard like myself may have a recollection of them. I understand that you, Joseph, have every morning set down upon paper that which I have narrated the night before. It is as well that you should do so, for your own children and your children’s children may find it of interest, and even perhaps take a pride in hearing that their ancestors played a part in such scenes. But now the spring is coming, and the green is bare of snow, so that there are better things for you to do than to sit listening to the stories of a garrulous old man. Nay, nay, you shake your heads, but indeed those young limbs want exercising and strengthening and knitting together, which can never come from sitting toasting round the blaze. Besides, my story draws quickly to an end now, for I had never intended to tell you more than the events connected with the Western rising. If the closing part hath been of the dreariest, and if all doth not wind up with the ringing of bells and the joining of hands, like the tales in the chap-books, you must blame history and not me. For Truth is a stern mistress, and when one hath once started off with her one must follow on after the jade, though she lead in flat defiance of all the rules and conditions which would fain turn that tangled wilderness the world into the trim Dutch garden of the story-tellers.

Three days after our trial we were drawn up in North Street in front of the Castle with others from the other prisons who were to share our fate. We were placed four abreast, with a rope connecting each rank, and of these ranks I counted fifty, which would bring our total to two hundred. On each side of us rode dragoons, and in front and behind were companies of musqueteers to prevent any attempt at rescue or escape. In this order we set off upon the tenth day of September, amidst the weeping and wailing of the townsfolk, many of whom saw their sons or brothers marching off into exile without their being able to exchange a last word or embrace with them. Some of these poor folk, doddering old men and wrinkled, decrepit women, toiled for miles after us down the high-road, until the rearguard of foot faced round upon them, and drove them away with curses and blows from their ramrods.

That day we made our way through Yeovil and Sherborne, and on the morrow proceeded over the North Downs as far as Blandford, where we were penned together like cattle and left for the night. On the third day we resumed our march through Wimbourne and a line of pretty Dorsetshire villages — the last English villages which most of us were destined to see for many a long year to come. Late in the afternoon the spars and rigging of the shipping in Poole Harbour rose up before us, and in another hour we had descended the steep and craggy path which leads to the town. Here we were drawn up upon the quay opposite the broad-decked, heavy-sparred brig which was destined to carry us into slavery. Through all this march we met with the greatest kindness from the common people, who flocked out from their cottages with fruit and with milk, which they divided amongst us. At other places, at, the risk of their lives, Dissenting ministers came forth and stood by the wayside, blessing us as we passed, in spite of the rough jeers and oaths of the soldiers.

We were marched aboard and led below by the mate of the vessel, a tall red-faced seaman with ear-rings in his ears, while the captain stood on the poop with his legs apart and a pipe in his mouth, checking us off one by one by means of a list which he held in his hand. As he looked at the sturdy build and rustic health of the peasants, which even their long confinement had been unable to break down, his eyes glistened, and he rubbed his big red hands together with delight.

‘Show them down, Jem!’ he kept shouting to the mate. ‘Stow them safe, Jem! There’s lodgings for a duchess down there, s’help me, there’s lodgings for a duchess! Pack ‘em away!’

One by one we passed before the delighted captain, and down the steep ladder which led into the hold. Here we were led along a narrow passage, on either side of which opened the stalls which were prepared for us. As each man came opposite to the one set aside for him he was thrown into it by the brawny mate, and fastened down with anklets of iron by the seaman armourer in attendance. It was dark before we were all secured, but the captain came round with a lanthorn to satisfy himself that all his property was really safe. I could hear the mate and him reckoning the value of each prisoner, and counting what he would fetch in the Barbadoes market.

'Have you served out their fodder, Jem?' he asked, flashing his light into each stall in turn. 'Have you seen that they had their rations?'

'A rye bread loaf and a pint o' water,' answered the mate.

'Fit for a duchess, s'help me!' cried the captain. 'Look to this one, Jem. He is a lusty rogue. Look to his great hands. He might work for years in the rice-swamps ere the land crabs have the picking of him.'

'Aye, we'll have smart bidding amid the settlers for this lot. 'Cod, captain, but you have made a bargain of it! Od's bud! you have done these London fools to some purpose.'

'What is this?' roared the captain. 'Here is one who hath not touched his allowance. How now, sirrah, art too dainty in the stomach to eat what your betters have eaten before you?'

'I have no hairt for food, zur,' the prisoner answered.

'What, you must have your whims and fancies! You must pick and you must choose! I tell you, sirrah, that you are mine, body and soul! Twelve good pieces I paid for you, and now, forsooth, I am to be told that you will not eat! Turn to it at this instant, you saucy rogue, or I shall have you triced to the triangles!'

'Here is another,' said the mate, 'who sits ever with his head sunk upon his breast without spirit or life.'

'Mutinous, obstinate dog!' cried the captain. 'What ails you then? Why have you a face like an underwriter in a tempest?'

'If it plaize you, zur,' the prisoner answered, 'Oi do but think o' m' ould mother at Wellington, and woonder who will kape her now that Oi'm gone!'

'And what is that to me?' shouted the brutal seaman. 'How can you arrive at your journey's end sound and hearty if you sit like a sick fowl upon a perch? Laugh, man, and be merry, or I will give you something to weep for. Out on you, you chicken-hearted swab, to sulk and fret like a babe new weaned! Have you not all that heart could desire? Give him a touch with the rope’s-end, Jem, if ever you do observe him fretting. It is but to spite us that he doth it.’

‘If it please your honour,’ said a seaman, coming hurriedly down from the deck, ‘there is a stranger upon the poop who will have speech with your honour.’

‘What manner of man, sirrah?’

‘Surely he is a person of quality, your honour. He is as free wi’ his words as though he were the captain o’ the ship. The boatswain did but jog against him, and he swore so woundily at him and stared at him so, wi’ een like a tiger-cat, that Job Harrison says we have shipped the devil himsel.’ The men don’t like the look of him, your honour!’

‘Who the plague can this spark be?’ said the skipper. ‘Go on deck, Jem, and tell him that I am counting my live stock, and that I shall be with him anon.’

‘Nay, your honour! There will trouble come of it unless you come up. He swears that he will not bear to be put off, and that he must see you on the instant.’

‘Curse his blood, whoever he be!’ growled the seaman. ‘Every cock on his own dunghill. What doth the rogue mean? Were he the Lord High Privy Seal, I would have him to know that I am lord of my own quarter-deck!’ So saying, with many snorts of indignation, the mate and the captain withdrew together up the ladder, banging the heavy hatchways down as they passed through.

A single oil-lamp swinging from a beam in the centre of the gangway which led between the rows of cells was the only light which was vouchsafed us. By its yellow, murky glimmer we could dimly see the great wooden ribs of the vessel, arching up on either side of us, and crossed by the huge beams which held the deck. A grievous stench from foul bilge water poisoned the close, heavy air. Every now and then, with a squeak and a clutter, a rat would dart across the little zone of light and vanish in the gloom upon the further side. Heavy breathing all round me showed that my companions, wearied out by their journey and their sufferings, had dropped into a slumber. From time to time one could hear the dismal clank of fetters, and the start and incatching of the breath, as some poor peasant, fresh from dreams of his humble homestead amid the groves of the Mendips, awoke of a sudden to see the great wooden coffin around him, and to breathe the venomous air of the prison ship.

I lay long awake full of thought both for myself and for the poor souls around me. At last, however, the measured swash of the water against the side of the vessel and the slight rise and fall had lulled me into a sleep, from which I was suddenly aroused by the flashing of a light in my eyes. Sitting up, I found several sailors gathered about me, and a tall man with a black cloak swathed round him swinging a lanthorn over me.

‘That is the man,’ he said.

‘Come, mate, you are to come on deck!’ said the seaman armourer. With a few blows from his hammer he knocked the irons from my feet.

‘Follow me!’ said the tall stranger, and led the way up the hatchway ladder. It was heavenly to come out into the pure air once more. The stars were shining brightly overhead. A fresh breeze blew from the shore, and hummed a pleasant tune among the cordage. Close beside us the lights of the town gleamed yellow and cheery. Beyond, the moon was peeping over the Bournemouth hills.

‘This way, sir,’ said the sailor, ‘right aft into the cabin, sir.’

Still following my guide, I found myself in the low cabin of the brig. A square shining table stood in the centre, with a bright swinging lamp above it. At the further end in the glare of the light sat the captain — his face shining with greed and expectation. On the table stood a small pile of gold pieces, a rum-flask, glasses, a tobacco-box, and two long pipes.

‘My compliments to you, Captain Clarke,’ said the skipper, bobbing his round bristling head. ‘An honest seaman’s compliments to you. It seems that we are not to be shipmates this voyage, after all.’

‘Captain Micah Clarke must do a voyage of his own,’ said the stranger.

At the sound of his voice I sprang round in amazement. ‘Good Heavens!’ I cried, ‘Saxon!’

‘You have nicked it,’ said he, throwing down his mantle and showing the well-known face and figure of the soldier of fortune. ‘Zounds, man! if you can pick me out of the Solent, I suppose that I may pick you out of this accursed rat-trap in which I find you. Tie and tie, as we say at the green table. In truth, I was huffed with you when last we parted, but I have had you in my mind for all that.’

‘A seat and a glass, Captain Clarke,’ cried the skipper. ‘Od’s bud! I should think that you would be glad to raise your little finger and wet your whistle after what you have gone through.'

I seated myself by the table with my brain in a whirl. 'This is more than I can fathom,' said I. 'What is the meaning of it, and how comes it about?'

'For my own part, the meaning is as clear as the glass of my binnacle,' quoth the seaman. 'Your good friend Colonel Saxon, as I understand his name to be, has offered me as much as I could hope to gain by selling you in the Indies. Sink it, I may be rough and ready, but my heart is in the right place! Aye, aye! I would not maroon a man if I could set him free. But we have all to look for ourselves, and trade is dull.'

'Then I am free!' said I.

'You are free,' he answered. 'There is your purchase-money upon the table. You can go where you will, save only upon the land of England, where you are still an outlaw under sentence.'

'How have you done this, Saxon?' I asked. 'Are you not afraid for yourself?'

'Ho, ho!' laughed the old soldier. 'I am a free man, my lad! I hold my pardon, and care not a maravedi for spy or informer. Who should I meet but Colonel Kirke a day or so back. Yes, lad! I met him in the street, and I cocked my hat in his face. The villain laid his hand upon his hilt, and I should have out bilbo and sent his soul to hell had they not come between us. I care not the ashes of this pipe for Jeffreys or any other of them. I can snap this finger and thumb at them, so! They would rather see Decimus Saxon's back than his face, I promise ye!'

'But how comes this about?' I asked.

'Why, marry, it is no mystery. Cunning old birds are not to be caught with chaff. When I left you I made for a certain inn where I could count upon finding a friend. There I lay by for a while, en cachette, as the Messieurs call it, while I could work out the plan that was in my head. Donner wetter! but I got a fright from that old seaman friend of yours, who should be sold as a picture, for he is of little use as a man. Well, I bethought me early in the affair of your visit to Badminton, and of the Duke of B. We shall mention no names, but you can follow my meaning. To him I sent a messenger, to the effect that I purposed to purchase my own pardon by letting out all that I knew concerning his double dealing with the rebels. The message was carried to him secretly, and his answer was that I should meet him at a certain spot by night. I sent my messenger instead of myself, and he was found in the morning stiff and stark, with more holes in his doublet than ever the tailor made. On this I sent again, raising my demands, and insisting upon a speedy settlement. He asked my conditions. I replied, a free pardon and a command for myself. For you, money enough to land you safely in some foreign country where you can pursue the noble profession of arms. I got them both, though it was like drawing teeth from his head. His name hath much power at Court just now, and the King can refuse him nothing. I have my pardon and a command of troops in New England. For you I have two hundred pieces, of which thirty have been paid in ransom to the captain, while twenty are due to me for my disbursements over the matter. In this bag you will find the odd hundred and fifty, of which you will pay fifteen to the fishermen who have promised to see you safe to Flushing.'

I was, as you may readily believe, my dear children, bewildered by this sudden and most unlooked-for turn which events had taken. When Saxon had ceased to speak I sat as one stunned, trying to realise what he had said to me. There came a thought into my head, however, which chilled the glow of hope and of happiness which had sprung up in me at the thought of recovering my freedom. My presence had been a support and a comfort to my unhappy companions. Would it not be a cruel thing to leave them in their distress? There was not one of them who did not look to me in his trouble, and to the best of my poor power I had befriended and consoled them. How could I desert them now?

'I am much beholden to you, Saxon,' I said at last, speaking slowly and with some difficulty, for the words were hard to utter. 'But I fear that your pains have been thrown away. These poor country folk have none to look after or assist them. They are as simple as babes, and as little fitted to be landed in a strange country. I cannot find it in my heart to leave them!'

Saxon burst out laughing, and leaned back in his seat with his long legs stretched straight out and his hands in his breeches pockets.

'This is too much!' he said at last. 'I saw many difficulties in my way, yet I did not foresee this one. You are in very truth the most contrary man that ever stood in neat's leather. You have ever some outlandish reason for jibbing and shying like a hot-blooded, half-broken colt. Yet I think that I can overcome these strange scruples of yours by a little persuasion.'

'As to the prisoners, Captain Clarke,' said the seaman, 'I'll be as good as a father to them. S'help me, I will, on the word of an honest sailor! If you should choose to lay out a trifle of twenty pieces upon their comfort, I shall see that their food is such as mayhap many of them never got at their own tables. They shall come on deck, too, in watches, and have an hour or two o’ fresh air in the day. I can’t say fairer!’

‘A word or two with you on deck!’ said Saxon. He walked out of the cabin and I followed him to the far end of the poop, where we stood leaning against the bulwarks. One by one the lights had gone out in the town, until the black ocean beat against a blacker shore.

‘You need not have any fear of the future of the prisoners,’ he said, in a low whisper. ‘They are not bound for the Barbadoes, nor will this skinflint of a captain have the selling of them, for all that he is so cocksure. If he can bring his own skin out of the business, it will be more than I expect. He hath a man aboard his ship who would think no more of giving him a tilt over the side than I should.’

‘What mean you, Saxon?’ I cried.

‘Hast ever heard of a man named Marot?’

‘Hector Marot! Yes, surely I knew him well. A highwayman he was, but a mighty stout man with a kind heart beneath a thief’s jacket.’

‘The same. He is as you say a stout man and a resolute swordsman, though from what I have seen of his play he is weak in stoccado, and perhaps somewhat too much attached to the edge, and doth not give prominence enough to the point, in which respect he neglects the advice and teaching of the most noteworthy fencers in Europe. Well, well, folk differ on this as on every other subject! Yet it seems to me that I would sooner be carried off the field after using my weapon secundum artem, than walk off unscathed after breaking the laws d’escrime. Quarte, tierce, and saccoon, say I, and the devil take your estramacons and passados!’

‘But what of Marot?’ I asked impatiently.

‘He is aboard,’ said Saxon. ‘It appears that he was much disturbed in his mind over the cruelties which were inflicted on the country folk after the battle at Bridgewater. Being a man of a somewhat stern and fierce turn of mind, his disapproval did vent itself in actions rather than words. Soldiers were found here and there over the countryside pistolled or stabbed, and no trace left of their assailant. A dozen or more were cut off in this way, and soon it came to be whispered about that Marot the highwayman was the man that did it, and the chase became hot at his heels.’

‘Well, and what then?’ I asked, for Saxon had stopped to light his pipe at the same old metal tinder-box which he had used when first I met him. When I picture Saxon to myself it is usually of that moment that I think, when the red glow beat upon his hard, eager, hawk-like face, and showed up the thousand little seams and wrinkles which time and care had imprinted upon his brown, weather-beaten skin. Sometimes in my dreams that face in the darkness comes back to me, and his half-closed eyelids and shifting, blinky eyes are turned towards me in his sidelong fashion, until I find myself sitting up and holding out my hand into empty space, half expecting to feel another thin sinewy hand close round it. A bad man he was in many ways, my dears, cunning and wily, with little scruple or conscience; and yet so strange a thing is human nature, and so difficult is it for us to control our feelings, that my heart warms when I think of him, and that fifty years have increased rather than weakened the kindliness which I hear to him.

‘I had heard,’ quoth he, puffing slowly at his pipe, ‘that Marot was a man of this kidney, and also that he was so compassed round that he was in peril of capture. I sought him out, therefore, and held council with him. His mare, it seems, had been slain by some chance shot, and as he was much attached to the brute, the accident made him more savage and more dangerous than ever. He had no heart, he said, to continue in his old trade. Indeed, he was ripe for anything — the very stuff out of which useful tools are made. I found that in his youth he had had a training for the sea. When I heard that, I saw my way in the snap of a petronel.’

‘What then?’ I asked. ‘I am still in the dark.’

‘Nay, it is surely plain enough to you now. Marot’s end was to baffle his pursuers and to benefit the exiles. How could he do this better than by engaging as a seaman aboard this brig, the *Dorothy Fox*, and sailing away from England in her? There are but thirty of a crew. Below hatches are close on two hundred men, who, simple as they may be, are, as you and I know, second to none in the cut-and-thrust work, without order or discipline, which will be needed in such an affair. Marot has but to go down amongst them some dark night, knock off their anklets, and fit them up with a few stanchions or cudgels. Ho, ho, Micah! what think you? The planters may dig their plantations themselves for all the help they are like to get from West countrymen this bout.’

‘It is, indeed, a well-conceived plan,’ said I. ‘It is a pity, Saxon, that your ready wit and quick invention hath not had a fair field. You are, us I know well, as fit to command armies and to order campaigns as any man that ever bore a truncheon.’

‘Mark ye there!’ whispered Saxon, grasping me by the arm. ‘See where the moonlight falls beside the hatchway! Do you not see that short squat seaman who stands alone, lost in thought, with his head sunk upon his breast? It is Marot! I tell you that if I were Captain Pogram I would rather have the devil himself, horns, hoofs, and tail, for my first mate and bunk companion, than have that man aboard my ship. You need not concern yourself about the prisoners, Micah. Their future is decided.’

‘Then, Saxon,’ I answered, ‘it only remains for me to thank you, and to accept the means of safety which you have placed within my reach.’

‘Spoken like a man,’ said he; ‘is there aught which I may do for thee in England? though, by the Mass, I may not be here very long myself, for, as I understand, I am to be entrusted with the command of an expedition that is fitting out against the Indians, who have ravaged the plantations of our settlers. It will be good to get to some profitable employment, for such a war, without either fighting or plunder, I have never seen. I give you my word that I have scarce fingered silver since the beginning of it. I would not for the sacking of London go through with it again.’

‘There is a friend whom Sir Gervas Jerome did commend to my care,’ I remarked; ‘I have, however, already taken measures to have his wishes carried out. There is naught else save to assure all in Havant that a King who hath battened upon his subjects, as this one of ours hath done, is not one who is like to keep his seat very long upon the throne of England. When he falls I shall return, and perhaps it may be sooner than folk think.’

‘These doings in the West have indeed stirred up much ill-feeling all over the country,’ said my companion. ‘On all hands I hear that there is more hatred of the King and of his ministers than before the outbreak. What ho, Captain Pogram, this way! We have settled the matter, and my friend is willing to go.’

‘I thought he would tack round,’ the captain said, staggering towards us with a gait which showed that he had made the rum bottle his companion since we had left him. ‘S’help me, I was sure of it! Though, by the Mass, I don’t wonder that he thought twice before leaving the *Dorothy Fox*, for she is fitted up fit for a duchess, s’help me! Where is your boat?’

‘Alongside,’ replied Saxon; ‘my friend joins with me in hoping that you, Captain Pogram, will have a pleasant and profitable voyage.’

‘I am cursedly beholden to him,’ said the captain, with a flourish of his three-cornered hat.

‘Also that you will reach Barbadoes in safety.’

‘Little doubt of that!’ quoth the captain.

‘And that you will dispose of your wares in a manner which will repay you for your charity and humanity.’

‘Nay, these are handsome words,’ cried the captain. ‘Sir, I am your debtor.’

A fishing-boat was lying alongside the brig. By the murky light of the poop lanterns I could see the figures upon her deck, and the great brown sail all ready for hoisting. I climbed the bulwark and set my foot upon the rope-ladder which led down to her.

‘Good-bye, Decimus!’ said I.

‘Good-bye, my lad! You have your pieces all safe?’

‘I have them.’

‘Then I have one other present to make you. It was brought to me by a sergeant of the Royal Horse. It is that, Micah, on which you must now depend for food, lodging, raiment, and all which you would have. It is that to which a brave man can always look for his living. It is the knife wherewith you can open the world’s oyster. See, lad, it is your sword!’

‘The old sword! My father’s sword!’ I cried in delight, as Saxon drew from under his mantle and handed to me the discoloured, old-fashioned leathern sheath with the heavy brass hilt which I knew so well.

‘You are now,’ said he, ‘one of the old and honourable guild of soldiers of fortune. While the Turk is still snarling at the gates of Vienna there will ever be work for strong arms and brave hearts. You will find that among these wandering, fighting men, drawn from all climes and nations, the name of Englishman stands high. Well I know that it will stand none the lower for your having joined the brotherhood. I would that I could come with you, but I am promised pay and position which it would be ill to set aside. Farewell, lad, and may fortune go with you!’

I pressed the rough soldier’s horny hand, and descended into the fishing-boat. The rope that held us was cast off, the sail mounted up, and the boat shot out across the bay. Onward she went and on, through the gathering gloom — a gloom as dark and impenetrable as the future towards which my life’s bark was driving. Soon the long rise and fall told us that we were over the harbour bar and out in the open channel. On the land, scattered twinkling lights at long stretches marked the line of the coast. As I gazed backwards a cloud trailed off from the moon, and I saw the hard lines of the brig’s rigging stand out against the white cold disk. By the shrouds stood the veteran, holding to a rope with one hand, and waving the other in farewell and encouragement. Another groat cloud blurred out the light, and that lean sinewy figure with its long extended arm was the last which I saw for a weary time of the dear country where I was born and bred.

CHAPTER XXXVI. Of the End of it All

And so, my dear children, I come to the end of the history of a failure — a brave failure and a noble one, but a failure none the less. In three more years England was to come to herself, to tear the fetters from her free limbs, and to send James and his poisonous brood flying from her shores even as I was flying then. We had made the error of being before our time. Yet there came days when folk thought kindly of the lads who had fought so stoutly in the West, and when their limbs, gathered from many a hangman's pit and waste place, were borne amid the silent sorrow of a nation to the pretty country burial-grounds where they would have chosen to lie. There, within the sound of the bell which from infancy had called them to prayer, beneath the turf over which they had wandered, under the shadow of those Mendip and Quantock Hills which they loved so well, these brave hearts lie still and peaceful, like tired children in the bosom of their mother. Requiescant-requiescant in pace!

Not another word about myself, dear children. This narrative doth already bristle with I's, as though it were an Argus which is a flash of wit, though I doubt if ye will understand it. I set myself to tell ye the tale of the war in the West, and that tale ye have heard, nor will I be coaxed or cajoled into one word further. Ah! ye know well how garrulous the old man is, and that if you could but get to Flushing with him he would take ye to the wars of the Empire, to William's Court, and to the second invasion of the West, which had a better outcome than the first. But not an inch further will I budge. On to the green, ye young rogues! Have ye not other limbs to exercise besides your ears, that ye should be so fond of squatting round grandad's chair? If I am spared to next winter, and if the rheumatiz keeps away, it is like that I may take up once more the broken thread of my story.

Of the others I can only tell ye what I know. Some slipped out of my ken entirely. Of others I have heard vague and incomplete accounts. The leaders of the insurrection got off much more lightly than their followers, for they found that the passion of greed was even stronger than the passion of cruelty. Grey, Buyse, Wade, and others bought themselves free at the price of all their possessions. Ferguson escaped. Monmouth was executed on Tower Hill, and showed in his last moments some faint traces of that spirit which spurted up now and again from his feeble nature, like the momentary flash of an expiring fire.

My father and my mother lived to see the Protestant religion regain its place once more, and to see England become the champion of the reformed faith upon the Continent. Three years later I found them in Havant much as I had left them, save that there were more silver hairs amongst the brown braided tresses of my mother, and that my father's great shoulders were a trifle bowed and his brow furrowed with the lines of care. Hand in hand they passed onwards down life's journey, the Puritan and the Church woman, and I have never despaired of the healing of religious feud in England since I have seen how easy it is for two folks to retain the strongest belief in their own creeds, and yet to bear the heartiest love and respect for the professor of another. The days may come when the Church and the Chapel may be as a younger and an elder brother, each working to one end, and each joying in the other's success. Let the contest between them be not with pike and pistol, not with court and prison; but let the strife be which shall lead the higher life, which shall take the broader view, which shall boast the happiest and best cared-for poor. Then their rivalry shall be not a curse, but a blessing to this land of England.

Reuben Lockarby was ill for many months, but when he at last recovered he found a pardon awaiting him through the interest of Major Ogilvy. After a time, when the troubles were all blown over, he married the daughter of Mayor Timewell, and he still lives in Taunton, a well-to-do and prosperous citizen. Thirty years ago there was a little Micah Lockarby, and now I am told that there is another, the son of the first, who promises to be as arrant a little Roundhead as ever marched to the tuck of drum.

Of Saxon I have heard more than once. So skilfully did he use his hold over the Duke of Beaufort, that he was appointed through his interest to the command of an expedition which had been sent to chastise the savages of Virginia, who had wrought great cruelties upon the settlers. There he did so out-ambush their ambushes, and out-trick their most cunning warriors, that he hath left a great name among them, and is still remembered there by an Indian word which signifieth 'The long-legged wily one with the eye of a rat.' Having at last driven the tribes far into the wilderness he was presented with a tract of country for his services, where he settled down. There he married, and spent the rest of his days in rearing tobacco and in teaching the principles of war to a long line of gaunt and slab-sided children. They tell me that a great nation of exceeding strength and of wondrous size promises some day to rise up on the other side of the water. If this should indeed come to pass, it may perhaps happen that these young Saxons or their children may have a hand in the building of it. God grant that they may never let their hearts harden to the little isle of the sea, which is and must ever be the cradle of their race.

Solomon Sprent married and lived for many years as happily as his friends could wish. I had a letter from him when I was abroad, in which he said that though his consort and he had started alone on the voyage of wedlock, they were now accompanied by a jolly-boat and a gig. One winter’s night when the snow was on the ground he sent down for my father, who hurried up to his house. He found the old man sitting up in bed, with his flask of rumbo within reach, his tobacco-box beside him, and a great brown Bible balanced against his updrawn knees. He was breathing heavily, and was in sore distress.

‘I’ve strained a plank, and have nine feet in the well,’ said he. ‘It comes in quicker than I can put it out. In truth, friend, I have not been seaworthy this many a day, and it is time that I was condemned and broken up.’

My father shook his head sadly as he marked his dusky face and laboured breathing. ‘How of your soul?’ he asked.

‘Aye!’ said Solomon, ‘that’s a cargo that we carry under our hatches, though we can’t see it, and had no hand in the stowing of it. I’ve been overhauling the sailing orders here, and the ten articles of war, but I can’t find that I’ve gone so far out of my course that I may not hope to come into the channel again.’

‘Trust not in yourself, but in Christ,’ said my father.

‘He is the pilot, in course,’ replied the old seaman. ‘When I had a pilot aboard o’ my ship, however, it was my way always to keep my own weather eye open, d’ye see, and so I’ll do now. The pilot don’t think none the worse of ye for it. So I’ll throw my own lead line, though I hear as how there are no soundings in the ocean of God’s mercy. Say, friend, d’ye think this very body, this same hull o’ mine, will rise again?’

‘So we are taught,’ my father answered.

‘I’d know it anywhere from the tattoo marks,’ said Solomon. ‘They was done when I was with Sir Christopher in the West Indies, and I’d be sorry to part with them. For myself, d’ye see, I’ve never borne ill-will to any one, not even to the Dutch lubbers, though I fought three wars wi’ them, and they carried off one of my spars, and be hanged to them! If I've let daylight into a few of them, d'ye see, it's all in good part and by way of duty. I've drunk my share — enough to sweeten my bilge-water — but there are few that have seen me cranky in the upper rigging or refusing to answer to my helm. I never drew pay or prize-money that my mate in distress was not welcome to the half of it. As to the Polls, the less said the better. I've been a true consort to my Phoebe since she agreed to look to me for signals. Those are my papers, all clear and aboveboard. If I'm summoned aft this very night by the great Lord High Admiral of all, I ain't afeared that He'll clap me into the bilboes, for though I'm only a poor sailor man, I've got His promise in this here book, and I'm not afraid of His going back from it.'

My father sat with the old man for some hours and did all that he could to comfort and assist him, for it was clear that he was sinking rapidly. When he at last left him, with his faithful wife beside him, he grasped the brown but wasted hand which lay above the clothes.

'I'll see you again soon,' he said.

'Yes. In the latitude of heaven,' replied the dying seaman. His foreboding was right, for in the early hours of the morning his wife, bending over him, saw a bright smile upon his tanned, weather-beaten face. Raising himself upon his pillow he touched his forelock, as is the habit of sailor-men, and so sank slowly and peacefully back into the long sleep which wakes when the night has ceased to be.

You will ask me doubtless what became of Hector Marot and of the strange shipload which had set sail from Poole Harbour. There was never a word heard of them again, unless indeed a story which was spread some months afterwards by Captain Elias Hopkins, of the Bristol ship *Caroline*, may be taken as bearing upon their fate. For Captain Hopkins relates that, being on his homeward voyage from our settlements, he chanced to meet with thick fogs and a head wind in the neighbourhood of the great cod banks. One night as he was beating about, with the weather so thick that he could scarce see the truck of his own mast, a most strange passage befell him. For as he and others stood upon the deck, they heard to their astonishment the sound of many voices joined in a great chorus, which was at first faint and distant, but which presently waxed and increased until it appeared to pass within a stone-throw of his vessel, when it slowly died away once more and was lost in the distance. There were some among the crew who set the matter down as the doing of the evil one, but, as Captain

Elias Hopkins was wont to remark, it was a strange thing that the foul fiend should choose West-country hymns for his nightly exercise, and stranger still that the dwellers in the pit should sing with a strong Somersetshire burr. For myself, I have little doubt that it was indeed the *Dorothy Fox* which had swept past in the fog, and that the prisoners, having won their freedom, were celebrating their delivery in true Puritan style. Whether they were driven on to the rocky coast of Labrador, or whether they found a home in some desolate land whence no kingly cruelty could harry them, is what must remain for ever unknown.

Zachariah Palmer lived for many years, a venerable and honoured old man, before he, too, was called to his fathers. A sweet and simple village philosopher he was, with a child's heart in his aged breast. The very thought of him is to me as the smell of violets; for if in my views of life and in my hopes of the future I differ somewhat from the hard and gloomy teaching of my father, I know that I owe it to the wise words and kindly training of the carpenter. If, as he was himself wont to say, deeds are everything in this world and dogma is nothing, then his sinless, blameless life might be a pattern to you and to all. May the dust lie light upon him!

One word of another friend — the last mentioned, but not the least valued. When Dutch William had been ten years upon the English throne there was still to be seen in the field by my father's house a tall, strong-boned horse, whose grey skin was flecked with dashes of white. And it was ever observed that, should the soldiers be passing from Portsmouth, or should the clank of trumpet or the rattle of drum break upon his ear, he would arch his old neck, throw out his grey-streaked tail, and raise his stiff knees in a pompous and pedantic canter. The country folk would stop to watch these antics of the old horse, and then the chances are that one of them would tell the rest how that charger had borne one of their own village lads to the wars, and how, when the rider had to fly the country, a kindly sergeant in the King's troops had brought the steed as a remembrance of him to his father at home. So Covenant passed the last years of his life, a veteran among steeds, well fed and cared for, and much given, mayhap, to telling in equine language to all the poor, silly country steeds the wonderful passages which had befallen him in the West.

APPENDIX

Note A. — Hatred of Learning among the Puritans.

In spite of the presence in their ranks of such ripe scholars as John Milton, Colonel Hutchinson, and others, there was among the Independents and Anabaptists a profound distrust of learning, which is commented upon by writers of all shades of politics. Dr. South in his sermons remarks that ‘All learning was cried down, so that with them the best preachers were such as could not read, and the best divines such as could not write. In all their preachments they so highly pretended to the Spirit, that some of them could hardly spell a letter. To be blind with them was a proper qualification of a spiritual guide, and to be book-learned, as they called it, and to be irreligious, were almost convertible terms. None save tradesmen and mechanics were allowed to have the Spirit, and those only were accounted like St. Paul who could work with their hands, and were able to make a pulpit before preaching in it.’

In the collection of loyal ballads reprinted in 1731, the Royalist bard harps upon the same characteristic:

‘We’ll down with universities
 Where learning is professed,
Because they practise and maintain
 The language of the beast.
We’ll drive the doctors out of doors,
 And parts, whate’er they be,
We’ll cry all parts and learning down,
 And heigh, then up go we!’

Note B. — On the Speed of Couriers.

It is difficult for us in these days of steam and electricity to realise how long it took to despatch a message in the seventeenth century, even when the occasion was most pressing. Thus, Monmouth landed at Lyme on the morning of Thursday, the 11th of June. Gregory Alford, the Tory mayor of Lyme, instantly fled to Honiton, whence he despatched a messenger to the Privy Council. Yet it was five o’clock in the morning of Saturday, the 13th, before the news reached London, though the distance is but 156 miles.

Note C. — On the Claims of the Lender of a Horse.

The difficulty touched upon by Decimus Saxon, as to the claim of the lender of a horse upon the booty gained by the rider, is one frequently discussed by writers of that date upon the usages of war. One distinguished

authority says: Praefectus turmae equitum Hispanorum, cum proelio tuba caneret, unum ex equitibus suae turmae obvium habuit; qui questus est quod paucis ante diebus equum suum in certamine amiserat, propter quod non poterat imminenti proelio interesse; unde jussit Praefectus ut unum ex suis equis conscenderet et ipsum comitaretur. Miles, equo conscenso, inter fugandum hostes, incidit in ipsum ducem hostilis exercitus, quem cepit et consignavit Duci exercitus Hispani, qui a captivo vicena aureorum millia est consequutus. Dicebat Praefectus partem pretii hujus redemptionis sibi debere, quod miles equo suo dimicaverat, qui alias proelio interesse non potuit. Petrinus Bellus affirmat se, cum esset Bruxellis in curia Hispaniarum Regis de hac quaestione consultum, et censuisse, pro Praefecto facere aequitatem quae praecipue respicitur inter milites, quorum controversiae ex aequo et bono dirimendae sunt; unde ultra conventa quis obligatur ad id quod alterum alteri prasstare oportet.’ The case, it appears, ultimately went against the horse-lending praefect.

Note D. — On the Pronunciation of Exquisites.

The substitution of the a for the o was a common affectation in the speech of the fops of the period, as may be found in Vanbrugh’s *Relapse*. The notorious Titus Oates, in his efforts to be in the mode, pushed this trick to excess, and his cries of ‘Oh Lard! Oh Lard!’ were familiar sounds in Westminster Hall at the time when the Salamanca doctor was at the flood of his fortune.

Note E. — Hour-glasses in Pulpits.

In those days it was customary to have an hour-glass stationed in a frame of iron at the side of the pulpit, and visible to the whole congregation. It was turned up as soon as the text was announced, and a minister earned a name as a lazy preacher if he did not hold out until the sand had ceased to run. If, on the other hand, he exceeded that limit, his audience would signify by gapes and yawns that they had had as much spiritual food as they could digest. Sir Roger L’Estrange (*Fables*, Part II. Fab. 262) tells of a notorious spin-text who, having exhausted his glass and being half-way through a second one, was at last arrested in his career by a valiant sexton, who rose and departed, remarking as he did so, ‘Pray, sir, be pleased when you have done to leave the key under the door.’

Note F. — Disturbances at the old Gast House of Little Burton.

The circumstances referred to by the Mayor of Taunton in his allusion to the Drummer of Tedsworth are probably too well known to require elucidation. The haunting of the old Gast House at Burton would, however, be fresh at that time in the minds of Somersetshire folk, occurring as it did in 1677. Some short account from documents of that date may be of interest.

‘The first night that I was there, with Hugh Mellmore and Edward Smith, they heard as it were the washing of water over their heads. Then, taking the candle and going up the stairs, there was a wet cloth thrown at them, but it fell on the stairs. They, going up further, there was another thrown as before. And when they were come up into the chamber there stood a bowl of water, looking white, as though soap had been used in it. The bowl just before was in the kitchen, and could not be carried up but through the room where they were. The next thing was a terrible noise, like a clap of thunder, and shortly afterwards they heard a great scratching about the bedstead, and after that great knocking with a hammer against the bed’s-head, so that the two maids that were in bed cried out for help. Then they ran up the stairs, and there lay the hammer on the bed, and on the bed’s-head there were near a thousand prints of the hammer. The maids said that they were scratched and pinched with a hand which had exceeding long nails.

‘The second night that James Sherring and Thomas Hillary were there, James Sherring sat down in the chimney to fill a pipe of tobacco. He used the tongs to lift a coal to light his pipe, and by-and-by the tongs were drawn up the stairs and were cast upon the bed. The same night one of the maids left her shoes by the fire, and they were carried up into the chamber, and the old man’s brought down and set in their places. As they were going upstairs there were many things thrown at them which were just before in the low room, and when they went down the stairs the old man’s breeches were thrown down after them.

‘On another night a saddle did come into the house from a pin in the entry, and did hop about the place from table to table. It was very troublesome to them, until they broke it into small pieces and threw it out into the roadway. So for some weeks the haunting continued, with rappings, scratching, movements of heavy articles, and many other strange things, as are attested by all who were in the village, until at last they ceased as suddenly as they had begun.’

Note G. — Monmouth’s Progress in the West.

During his triumphal progress through the western shires, some years before the rebellion, Monmouth first ventured to exhibit upon his escutcheon the lions of England and the lilies of France, without the baton sinister. A still more ominous sign was that he ventured to touch for the king’s evil. The appended letter, extracted from the collection of tracts in the British Museum, may be of interest as first-hand evidence of the occasional efficacy of that curious ceremony.

‘His Grace the Duke of Monmouth honoured in his progress in the West of England, in an account of an extraordinary cure of the king’s evil.

‘Given in a letter from Crewkhorn, in Somerset, from the minister of the parish and many others.

‘We, whose names are underwritten, do certify the miraculous cure of a girl of this town, about twenty, by name Elizabeth Parcet, a poor widow’s daughter, who hath languished under sad affliction from that distemper of the king’s evil termed the joint evil, being said to be the worst evil. For about ten or twelve years’ time she had in her right hand four running wounds, one on the inside, three on the back of her hand, as well as two more in the same arm, one above her hand-wrist, the other above the bending of her arm. She had betwixt her arm-pits a swollen bunch, which the doctors said fed those six running wounds. She had the same distemper also on her left eye, so she was almost blind. Her mother, despairing of preserving her sight, and being not of ability to send her to London to be touched by the king, being miserably poor, having many poor children, and this girl not being able to work, her mother, desirous to have her daughter cured, sent to the chirurgeons for help, who tampered with it for some time, but could do no good. She went likewise ten or eleven miles to a seventh son, but all in vain. No visible hopes remained, and she expected nothing but the grave.

‘But now, in this the girl’s great extremity, God, the great physician, dictates to her, then languishing in her miserable, hopeless condition, what course to take and what to do for a cure, which was to go and touch the Duke of Monmouth. The girl told her mother that, if she could but touch the Duke she would be well. The mother reproved her for her foolish conceit, but the girl did often persuade her mother to go to Lackington to the Duke, who then lay with Mr. Speaks. “Certainly,” said she, “I should be well if I could touch him.” The mother slighted these pressing requests, but the more she slighted and reproved, the more earnest the girl was for it. A few days after, the girl having noticed that Sir John Sydenham intended to treat the Duke at White Lodge in Henton Park, this girl with many of her neighbours went to the said park. She being there timely waited the Duke's coming. When first she observed the Duke she pressed in among a crowd of people and caught him by the hand, his glove being on, and she likewise having a glove to cover her wounds. She not being herewith satisfied at the first attempt of touching his glove only, but her mind was she must touch some part of his bare skin, she, weighing his coming forth, intended a second attempt. The poor girl, thus between hope and fear, waited his motion. On a sudden there was news of the Duke's coming on, which she to be prepared rent off her glove, that was clung to the sores, in such haste that she broke her glove, and brought away not only the sores but the skin. The Duke's glove, as Providence would have it, the upper part hung down, so that his hand-wrist was bare. She pressed on, and caught him by the bare hand-wrist with her running hand, crying, "God bless your highness!" and the Duke said "God bless you!" The girl, not a little transported at her good success, came and assured her friends that she would now be well. She came home to her mother in great joy, and told her that she had touched the Duke's hand. The mother, hearing what she had done, reproved her sharply for her boldness, asked how she durst do such a thing, and threatened to beat her for it. She cried out, "Oh, mother, I shall be well again, and healed of my wounds!" And as God Almighty would have it, to the wonder and admiration of all, the six wounds were speedily dried up, the eye became perfectly well, and the girl was in good health. All which has been discovered to us by the mother and daughter, and by neighbours that know her.

'Henry Clark, minister; Captain James Bale, &c &c. Whoever doubts the truth of this relation may see the original under the hands of the persons mentioned at the Amsterdam Coffee House, Bartholomew Lane, Royal Exchange.'

In spite of the uncouth verbiage of the old narrative, there is a touch of human pathos about it which makes it worthy of reproduction.

Note H. — Monmouth's Contention of Legitimacy.

Sir Patrick Hume, relating a talk with Monmouth before his expedition, says: 'I urged if he considered himself as lawful son of King Charles, late deceased. He said he did. I asked him if he were able to make out and prove the marriage of his mother to King Charles, and whether he intended to lay claim to the crown. He answered that he had been able lately to prove the marriage, and if some persons are not lately dead, of which he would inform himself, he would yet be able to prove it. As for his claiming the crown, he intended not to do it unless it were advised to be done by those who should concern themselves and join for the delivery of the nations.’

It may be remarked that in Monmouth’s commission to be general, dated April 1668, he is styled ‘our most entirely beloved and natural son.’ Again, in a commission for the government of Hull, April 1673, he is ‘our well-beloved natural son.’

Note I. — Dragooners and Chargers.

The dragoons, being really mounted infantry, were provided with very inferior animals to the real cavalry. From a letter of Cromwell’s (‘Squire Correspondence,’ April 3, 1643), it will be seen that a dragooner was worth twenty pieces, while a charger could not be obtained under sixty.

Note J. — Battle of Sedgemoor.

A curious little sidelight upon the battle is afforded by the two following letters exhibited to the Royal Archaeological Institute by the Rev. C. W. Bingham.

‘To Mrs. Chaffin at Chettle House.’

‘Monday, about ye forenoon, July 6, 1685.’

‘My dearest creature, — This morning about one o’clock the rebbells fell upon us whilest we were in our tents in King’s Sedgemoor, with their whole army.... We have killed and taken at least 1000 of them. They are fled into Bridgewater. It is said that we have taken all their cannon, but sure it is that most are, if all be not. A coat with stars on ‘t is taken. ‘‘Tis run through the back. By some ‘tis thought that the Duke rebbell had it on and is killed, but most doe think that a servant wore it. I wish he were called, that the wars may be ended. It’s thought he’ll never be able to make his men fight again. I thank God I am very well without the least hurt, soe are our Dorsetshire friends. Prythee let Biddy know this by the first opportunity. I am thyne onely deare, TOSSEY.’

BRIDGEWATER: July 7, 1685.

‘We have totally routed the enemies of God and the King, and can’t hear of fifty men together of the whole rebel army. We pick them up every houre in cornfields and ditches. Williams, the late Duke’s valet de chambre, is taken, who gives a very ingenious account of the whole affair, which is too long to write. The last word that he said to him was at the time when his army fled, that he was undone and must shift for himself. We think to march with the General this day to Wells, on his way homeward. At present he is 3 miles off at the camp, soe I can’t certainly tell whether he intends for Wells. I shall be home certainly on Saturday at farthest. I believe my deare Nan would for 500 pounds that her Tossey had served the King to the end of the war.

I am thyne, my deare childe, for ever.’

Note K. — Lord Grey and the Horse at Sedgemoor.

It is only fair to state that Ferguson is held by many to have been as doughty a soldier as he was zealous in religion. His own account of Sedgemoor is interesting, as showing what was thought by those who were actually engaged on the causes of their failure.

‘Now besides these two troops, whose officers though they had no great skill yet had courage enough to have done something honourably, had they not for want of a guide met with the aforesaid obstruction, there was no one of all the rest of our troops that ever advanced to charge or approached as near to the enemy as to give or receive a wound. Mr. Hacker, one of our captains, came no sooner within view of their camp than he villainously fired a pistol to give them notice of our approach, and then forsook his charge and rode oft with all the speed he could, to take the benefit of a proclamation emitted by the King, offering pardon to all such as should return home within such a time. And this he pleaded at his tryal, but was answered by Jeffreys “that he above all other men deserved to be hanged, and that for his treachery to Monmouth as well as his treason to the King.” And though no other of our officers acted so villainously, yet they were useless and unserviceable, as never once attempting to charge, nor so much as keeping their men in a body. And I dare affirm that if our horse had never fired a pistol, but only stood in a posture to have given jealousy and apprehension to the enemy, our foot alone would have carried the day and been triumphant. But our horse standing scattered and disunited, and flying upon every approach of a squadron of theirs, commanded by Oglethorpe, gave that body of their cavalry an advantage, after they had hovered up and down in the field without thinking it necessary to attack those whom their own fears had dispersed, to fall in at last in the rear of our battalions, and to wrest that victory out of their hands which they were grasping at, and stood almost possessed of. Nor was that party of their horse above three hundred at most, whereas we had more than enough had they had any courage, and been commanded by a gallant man, to have attacked them with ease both in front and flank. These things I can declare with more certainty, because I was a doleful spectator of them; for having contrary to my custom left attending upon the Duke, who advanced with the foot, I betook myself to the horse, because the first of that morning's action was expected from them, which was to break in and disorder the enemy's camp. Against the time that our battalions should come up, I endeavoured whatsoever I was capable of performing, for I not only struck at several troopers who had forsaken their station, but upbraided divers of the captains for being wanting in their duty. But I spoke with great warmth to my Lord Grey, and conjured him to charge, and not suffer the victory, which our foot had in a manner taken hold of, to be ravished from us. But instead of hearkening, he not only as an unworthy man and cowardly poltroon deserted that part of the field and forsook his command, but rode with the utmost speed to the Duke, telling him that all was lost and it was more than time to shift for himself. Wherebye, as an addition to all the mischief he had been the occasion of before, he drew the easy and unfortunate gentleman to leave the battalions while they were courageously disputing on which side the victory should fall. And this fell most unhappily out, while a certain person was endeavouring to find out the Duke to have begged of him to come and charge at the head of his own troops. However, this I dare affirm, that if the Duke had been but master of two hundred horse, well mounted, completely armed, personally valiant, and commanded by experienced officers, they would have been victorious. This is acknowledged by our enemies, who have often confessed they were ready to fly through the impressions made upon them by our foot, and must have been beaten had our horse done their part, and not tamely looked on till their cavalry retrieved the day by falling into the rear of our battalions. Nor was the fault in the private men, who had courage to have followed their leaders, but it was in those who led them, particularly my Lord Grey, in whom, if cowardice may be called treachery, we may safely charge him with betraying our cause.'

Extract from MS. of Dr. Ferguson, quoted in 'Ferguson the Plotter,' an interesting work by his immediate descendant, an advocate of Edinburgh.

Note L. — Monmouth's Attitude after Capture.

The following letter, written by Monmouth to the Queen from the Tower, is indicative of his abject state of mind.

'Madam, — I would not take the boldness of writing to your Majesty till I had shown the King how I do abhor the thing that I have done, and how much I desire to live to serve him. I hope, madam, by what I have said to the King to-day will satisfy how sincere I am, and how much I detest all those people who have brought me to this. Having done this, madam, I thought I was in a fitt condition to beg your intercession, which I am sure you never refuse to the distressed, and I am sure, madam, that I am an object of your pity, having been cousened and cheated into this horrid business. Did I wish, madam, to live for living sake I would never give you this trouble, but it is to have life to serve the King, which I am able to doe, and will doe beyond what I can express. Therefore, madam, upon such an account as I may take the boldness to press you and beg of you to intersaid for me, for I am sure, madam, the King will hearken to you. Your prairs can never be refused, especially when it is begging for a life only to serve the King. I hope, madam, by the King's generosity and goodness, and your intercession, I may hope for my life which if I have shall be ever employed in showing to your Majesty all the sense immaginable of gratitude, and in serving of the King like a true subject. And ever be your Majesty's most dutiful and obedient servant, MONMOUTH.'

THE END

THE WHITE COMPANY

This historical adventure novel is set during the Hundred Years’ War, in England, France, and Spain, during the years 1366 and 1367, against the background of the campaign of Edward, the Black Prince to restore Peter of Castile to the throne of the Kingdom of Castile. The climax of the novel occurs at the Battle of Nájera. Doyle became inspired to write the novel after attending a lecture on medieval times in 1889. After extensive research, *The White Company* was published in serialised form in 1891 in the *Cornhill Magazine*.

Conan Doyle, 1915

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CHAPTER I. HOW THE BLACK SHEEP CAME FORTH FROM THE FOLD.

The great bell of Beaulieu was ringing. Far away through the forest might be heard its musical clangor and swell. Peat-cutters on Blackdown and fishers upon the Exe heard the distant throbbing rising and falling upon the sultry summer air. It was a common sound in those parts — as common as the chatter of the jays and the booming of the bittern. Yet the fishers and the peasants raised their heads and looked questions at each other, for the angelus had already gone and vespers was still far off. Why should the great bell of Beaulieu toll when the shadows were neither short nor long?

All round the Abbey the monks were trooping in. Under the long green-paved avenues of gnarled oaks and of lichened beeches the white-robed brothers gathered to the sound. From the vine-yard and the vine-press, from the bouvary or ox-farm, from the marl-pits and salterns, even from the distant iron-works of Sowley and the outlying grange of St. Leonard’s, they had all turned their steps homewards. It had been no sudden call. A swift messenger had the night before sped round to the outlying dependencies of the Abbey, and had left the summons for every monk to be back in the cloisters by the third hour after noontide. So urgent a message had not been issued within the memory of old lay-brother Athanasius, who had cleaned the Abbey knocker since the year after the Battle of Bannockburn.

A stranger who knew nothing either of the Abbey or of its immense resources might have gathered from the appearance of the brothers some conception of the varied duties which they were called upon to perform, and of the busy, wide-spread life which centred in the old monastery. As they swept gravely in by twos and by threes, with bended heads and muttering lips there were few who did not bear upon them some signs of their daily toil. Here were two with wrists and sleeves all spotted with the ruddy grape juice. There again was a bearded brother with a broad-headed axe and a bundle of faggots upon his shoulders, while beside him walked another with the shears under his arm and the white wool still clinging to his whiter gown. A long, straggling troop bore spades and mattocks while the two rearmost of all staggered along under a huge basket o’ fresh-caught carp, for the morrow was Friday, and there were fifty platters to be filled and as many sturdy trenchermen behind them. Of all the throng there was scarce one who was not labor-stained and weary, for Abbot Berghersh was a hard man to himself and to others.

Meanwhile, in the broad and lofty chamber set apart for occasions of import, the Abbot himself was pacing impatiently backwards and forwards, with his long white nervous hands clasped in front of him. His thin, thought-worn features and sunken, haggard cheeks bespoke one who had indeed beaten down that inner foe whom every man must face, but had none the less suffered sorely in the contest. In crushing his passions he had well-nigh crushed himself. Yet, frail as was his person there gleamed out ever and anon from under his drooping brows a flash of fierce energy, which recalled to men's minds that he came of a fighting stock, and that even now his twin-brother, Sir Bartholomew Berghersh, was one of the most famous of those stern warriors who had planted the Cross of St. George before the gates of Paris. With lips compressed and clouded brow, he strode up and down the oaken floor, the very genius and impersonation of asceticism, while the great bell still thundered and clanged above his head. At last the uproar died away in three last, measured throbs, and ere their echo had ceased the Abbot struck a small gong which summoned a lay-brother to his presence.

“Have the brethren come?” he asked, in the Anglo-French dialect used in religious houses.

“They are here,” the other answered, with his eyes cast down and his hands crossed upon his chest.

“All?”

“Two and thirty of the seniors and fifteen of the novices, most holy father. Brother Mark of the Spicarium is sore smitten with a fever and could not come. He said that—”

“It boots not what he said. Fever or no, he should have come at my call. His spirit must be chastened, as must that of many more in this Abbey. You yourself, brother Francis, have twice raised your voice, so it hath come to my ears, when the reader in the refectory hath been dealing with the lives of God's most blessed saints. What hast thou to say?”

The lay-brother stood meek and silent, with his arms still crossed in front of him.

"One thousand Aves and as many Credos, said standing with arms outstretched before the shrine of the Virgin, may help thee to remember that the Creator hath given us two ears and but one mouth, as a token that there is twice the work for the one as for the other. Where is the master of the novices?"

"He is without, most holy father."

"Send him hither."

The sandalled feet clattered over the wooden floor, and the iron-bound door creaked upon its hinges. In a few moments it opened again to admit a short square monk with a heavy, composed face and an authoritative manner.

"You have sent for me, holy father?"

"Yes, brother Jerome, I wish that this matter be disposed of with as little scandal as may be, and yet it is needful that the example should be a public one." The Abbot spoke in Latin now, as a language which was more fitted by its age and solemnity to convey the thoughts of two high dignitaries of the order.

"It would, perchance, be best that the novices be not admitted," suggested the master. "This mention of a woman may turn their minds from their pious meditations to worldly and evil thoughts."

"Woman! woman!" groaned the Abbot. "Well has the holy Chrysostom termed them *radix malorum*. From Eve downwards, what good hath come from any of them? Who brings the plaint?"

"It is brother Ambrose."

"A holy and devout young man."

"A light and a pattern to every novice."

"Let the matter be brought to an issue then according to our old-time monastic habit. Bid the chancellor and the sub-chancellor lead in the brothers according to age, together with brother John, the accused, and brother Ambrose, the accuser."

"And the novices?"

"Let them bide in the north alley of the cloisters. Stay! Bid the sub-chancellor send out to them Thomas the lector to read unto them from the 'Gesta beati Benedicti.' It may save them from foolish and pernicious babbling."

The Abbot was left to himself once more, and bent his thin gray face over his illuminated breviary. So he remained while the senior monks filed slowly and sedately into the chamber seating themselves upon the long oaken benches which lined the wall on either side. At the further end, in two high chairs as large as that of the Abbot, though hardly as elaborately carved, sat the master of the novices and the chancellor, the latter a broad and portly priest, with dark mirthful eyes and a thick outgrowth of crisp black hair all round his tonsured head. Between them stood a lean, white-faced brother who appeared to be ill at ease, shifting his feet from side to side and tapping his chin nervously with the long parchment roll which he held in his hand. The Abbot, from his point of vantage, looked down on the two long lines of faces, placid and sun-browned for the most part, with the large bovine eyes and unlined features which told of their easy, unchanging existence. Then he turned his eager fiery gaze upon the pale-faced monk who faced him.

“This plaint is thine, as I learn, brother Ambrose,” said he. “May the holy Benedict, patron of our house, be present this day and aid us in our findings! How many counts are there?”

“Three, most holy father,” the brother answered in a low and quavering voice.

“Have you set them forth according to rule?”

“They are here set down, most holy father, upon a cantle of sheep-skin.”

“Let the sheep-skin be handed to the chancellor. Bring in brother John, and let him hear the plaints which have been urged against him.”

At this order a lay-brother swung open the door, and two other lay-brothers entered leading between them a young novice of the order. He was a man of huge stature, dark-eyed and red-headed, with a peculiar half-humorous, half-defiant expression upon his bold, well-marked features. His cowl was thrown back upon his shoulders, and his gown, unfastened at the top, disclosed a round, sinewy neck, ruddy and corded like the bark of the fir. Thick, muscular arms, covered with a reddish down, protruded from the wide sleeves of his habit, while his white shirt, looped up upon one side, gave a glimpse of a huge knotty leg, scarred and torn with the scratches of brambles. With a bow to the Abbot, which had in it perhaps more pleasantry than reverence, the novice strode across to the carved prie-dieu which had been set apart for him, and stood silent and erect with his hand upon the gold bell which was used in the private orisons of the Abbot’s own household. His dark eyes glanced rapidly over the assembly, and finally settled with a grim and menacing twinkle upon the face of his accuser.

The chancellor rose, and having slowly unrolled the parchment-scroll, proceeded to read it out in a thick and pompous voice, while a subdued rustle and movement among the brothers bespoke the interest with which they followed the proceedings.

"Charges brought upon the second Thursday after the Feast of the Assumption, in the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and sixty-six, against brother John, formerly known as Hordle John, or John of Hordle, but now a novice in the holy monastic order of the Cistercians. Read upon the same day at the Abbey of Beaulieu in the presence of the most reverend Abbot Berghersh and of the assembled order.

"The charges against the said brother John are the following, namely, to wit:

"First, that on the above-mentioned Feast of the Assumption, small beer having been served to the novices in the proportion of one quart to each four, the said brother John did drain the pot at one draught to the detriment of brother Paul, brother Porphyry and brother Ambrose, who could scarce eat their none-meat of salted stock-fish on account of their exceeding dryness."

At this solemn indictment the novice raised his hand and twitched his lip, while even the placid senior brothers glanced across at each other and coughed to cover their amusement. The Abbot alone sat gray and immutable, with a drawn face and a brooding eye.

"Item, that having been told by the master of the novices that he should restrict his food for two days to a single three-pound loaf of bran and beans, for the greater honoring and glorifying of St. Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, he was heard by brother Ambrose and others to say that he wished twenty thousand devils would fly away with the said Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, or any other saint who came between a man and his meat. Item, that upon brother Ambrose reproving him for this blasphemous wish, he did hold the said brother face downwards over the piscatorium or fish-pond for a space during which the said brother was able to repeat a pater and four aves for the better fortifying of his soul against impending death."

There was a buzz and murmur among the white-frocked brethren at this grave charge; but the Abbot held up his long quivering hand. "What then?" said he.

“Item, that between nones and vespers on the feast of James the Less the said brother John was observed upon the Brockenhurst road, near the spot which is known as Hatchett’s Pond in converse with a person of the other sex, being a maiden of the name of Mary Sowley, the daughter of the King’s verderer. Item, that after sundry japes and jokes the said brother John did lift up the said Mary Sowley and did take, carry, and convey her across a stream, to the infinite relish of the devil and the exceeding detriment of his own soul, which scandalous and wilful falling away was witnessed by three members of our order.”

A dead silence throughout the room, with a rolling of heads and upturning of eyes, bespoke the pious horror of the community.

The Abbot drew his gray brows low over his fiercely questioning eyes.

“Who can vouch for this thing?” he asked.

“That can I,” answered the accuser. “So too can brother Porphyry, who was with me, and brother Mark of the Spicarium, who hath been so much stirred and inwardly troubled by the sight that he now lies in a fever through it.”

“And the woman?” asked the Abbot. “Did she not break into lamentation and woe that a brother should so demean himself?”

“Nay, she smiled sweetly upon him and thanked him. I can vouch it and so can brother Porphyry.”

“Canst thou?” cried the Abbot, in a high, tempestuous tone. “Canst thou so? Hast forgotten that the five-and-thirtieth rule of the order is that in the presence of a woman the face should be ever averted and the eyes cast down? Hast forgot it, I say? If your eyes were upon your sandals, how came ye to see this smile of which ye prate? A week in your cells, false brethren, a week of rye-bread and lentils, with double lauds and double matins, may help ye to remembrance of the laws under which ye live.”

At this sudden outflame of wrath the two witnesses sank their faces on to their chests, and sat as men crushed. The Abbot turned his angry eyes away from them and bent them upon the accused, who met his searching gaze with a firm and composed face.

“What hast thou to say, brother John, upon these weighty things which are urged against you?”

“Little enough, good father, little enough,” said the novice, speaking English with a broad West Saxon drawl. The brothers, who were English to a man, pricked up their ears at the sound of the homely and yet unfamiliar speech; but the Abbot flushed red with anger, and struck his hand upon the oaken arm of his chair.

"What talk is this?" he cried. "Is this a tongue to be used within the walls of an old and well-famed monastery? But grace and learning have ever gone hand in hand, and when one is lost it is needless to look for the other."

"I know not about that," said brother John. "I know only that the words come kindly to my mouth, for it was the speech of my fathers before me. Under your favor, I shall either use it now or hold my peace."

The Abbot patted his foot and nodded his head, as one who passes a point but does not forget it.

"For the matter of the ale," continued brother John, "I had come in hot from the fields and had scarce got the taste of the thing before mine eye lit upon the bottom of the pot. It may be, too, that I spoke somewhat shortly concerning the bran and the beans, the same being poor provender and unfitted for a man of my inches. It is true also that I did lay my hands upon this jack-fool of a brother Ambrose, though, as you can see, I did him little scathe. As regards the maid, too, it is true that I did heft her over the stream, she having on her hosen and shoon, whilst I had but my wooden sandals, which could take no hurt from the water. I should have thought shame upon my manhood, as well as my monkhood, if I had held back my hand from her." He glanced around as he spoke with the half-amused look which he had worn during the whole proceedings.

"There is no need to go further," said the Abbot. "He has confessed to all. It only remains for me to portion out the punishment which is due to his evil conduct."

He rose, and the two long lines of brothers followed his example, looking sideways with scared faces at the angry prelate.

"John of Hordle," he thundered, "you have shown yourself during the two months of your novitiate to be a recreant monk, and one who is unworthy to wear the white garb which is the outer symbol of the spotless spirit. That dress shall therefore be stripped from thee, and thou shalt be cast into the outer world without benefit of clerkship, and without lot or part in the graces and blessings of those who dwell under the care of the Blessed Benedict. Thou shalt come back neither to Beaulieu nor to any of the granges of Beaulieu, and thy name shall be struck off the scrolls of the order."

The sentence appeared a terrible one to the older monks, who had become so used to the safe and regular life of the Abbey that they would have been as helpless as children in the outer world. From their pious oasis they looked dreamily out at the desert of life, a place full of stormings and strivings — comfortless, restless, and overshadowed by evil. The young novice, however, appeared to have other thoughts, for his eyes sparkled and his smile broadened. It needed but that to add fresh fuel to the fiery mood of the prelate.

"So much for thy spiritual punishment," he cried. "But it is to thy grosser feelings that we must turn in such natures as thine, and as thou art no longer under the shield of holy church there is the less difficulty. Ho there! lay-brothers — Francis, Naomi, Joseph — seize him and bind his arms! Drag him forth, and let the foresters and the porters scourge him from the precincts!"

As these three brothers advanced towards him to carry out the Abbot's direction, the smile faded from the novice's face, and he glanced right and left with his fierce brown eyes, like a bull at a baiting. Then, with a sudden deep-chested shout, he tore up the heavy oaken prie-dieu and poised it to strike, taking two steps backward the while, that none might take him at a vantage.

"By the black rood of Waltham!" he roared, "if any knave among you lays a finger-end upon the edge of my gown, I will crush his skull like a filbert!" With his thick knotted arms, his thundering voice, and his bristle of red hair, there was something so repellent in the man that the three brothers flew back at the very glare of him; and the two rows of white monks strained away from him like poplars in a tempest. The Abbot only sprang forward with shining eyes; but the chancellor and the master hung upon either arm and wrested him back out of danger's way.

"He is possessed of a devil!" they shouted. "Run, brother Ambrose, brother Joachim! Call Hugh of the Mill, and Woodman Wat, and Raoul with his arbalest and bolts. Tell them that we are in fear of our lives! Run, run! for the love of the Virgin!"

But the novice was a strategist as well as a man of action. Springing forward, he hurled his unwieldy weapon at brother Ambrose, and, as desk and monk clattered on to the floor together, he sprang through the open door and down the winding stair. Sleepy old brother Athanasius, at the porter's cell, had a fleeting vision of twinkling feet and flying skirts; but before he had time to rub his eyes the recreant had passed the lodge, and was speeding as fast as his sandals could patter along the Lyndhurst Road.

CHAPTER II. HOW ALLEYNE EDRICSON CAME OUT INTO THE WORLD.

Never had the peaceful atmosphere of the old Cistercian house been so rudely ruffled. Never had there been insurrection so sudden, so short, and so successful. Yet the Abbot Berghersh was a man of too firm a grain to allow one bold outbreak to imperil the settled order of his great household. In a few hot and bitter words, he compared their false brother's exit to the expulsion of our first parents from the garden, and more than hinted that unless a reformation occurred some others of the community might find themselves in the same evil and perilous case. Having thus pointed the moral and reduced his flock to a fitting state of docility, he dismissed them once more to their labors and withdrew himself to his own private chamber, there to seek spiritual aid in the discharge of the duties of his high office.

The Abbot was still on his knees, when a gentle tapping at the door of his cell broke in upon his orisons.

Rising in no very good humor at the interruption, he gave the word to enter; but his look of impatience softened down into a pleasant and paternal smile as his eyes fell upon his visitor.

He was a thin-faced, yellow-haired youth, rather above the middle size, comely and well shapen, with straight, lithe figure and eager, boyish features. His clear, pensive gray eyes, and quick, delicate expression, spoke of a nature which had unfolded far from the boisterous joys and sorrows of the world. Yet there was a set of the mouth and a prominence of the chin which relieved him of any trace of effeminacy. Impulsive he might be, enthusiastic, sensitive, with something sympathetic and adaptive in his disposition; but an observer of nature's tokens would have confidently pledged himself that there was native firmness and strength underlying his gentle, monk-bred ways.

The youth was not clad in monastic garb, but in lay attire, though his jerkin, cloak and hose were all of a sombre hue, as befitted one who dwelt in sacred precincts. A broad leather strap hanging from his shoulder supported a scrip or satchel such as travellers were wont to carry. In one hand he grasped a thick staff pointed and shod with metal, while in the other he held his coif or bonnet, which bore in its front a broad pewter medal stamped with the image of Our Lady of Rocamadour.

“Art ready, then, fair son?” said the Abbot. “This is indeed a day of comings and of goings. It is strange that in one twelve hours the Abbey should have cast off its foulest weed and should now lose what we are fain to look upon as our choicest blossom.”

“You speak too kindly, father,” the youth answered. “If I had my will I should never go forth, but should end my days here in Beaulieu. It hath been my home as far back as my mind can carry me, and it is a sore thing for me to have to leave it.”

“Life brings many a cross,” said the Abbot gently. “Who is without them? Your going forth is a grief to us as well as to yourself. But there is no help. I had given my foreword and sacred promise to your father, Edric the Franklin, that at the age of twenty you should be sent out into the world to see for yourself how you liked the savor of it. Seat thee upon the settle, Alleyne, for you may need rest ere long.”

The youth sat down as directed, but reluctantly and with diffidence. The Abbot stood by the narrow window, and his long black shadow fell slantwise across the rush-strewn floor.

“Twenty years ago,” he said, “your father, the Franklin of Minstead, died, leaving to the Abbey three hides of rich land in the hundred of Malwood, and leaving to us also his infant son on condition that we should rear him until he came to man’s estate. This he did partly because your mother was dead, and partly because your elder brother, now Socman of Minstead, had already given sign of that fierce and rude nature which would make him no fit companion for you. It was his desire and request, however, that you should not remain in the cloisters, but should at a ripe age return into the world.”

“But, father,” interrupted the young man “it is surely true that I am already advanced several degrees in clerkship?”

“Yes, fair son, but not so far as to bar you from the garb you now wear or the life which you must now lead. You have been porter?”

“Yes, father.”

“Exorcist?”

“Yes, father.”

“Reader?”

“Yes, father.”

"Acolyte?"

"Yes, father."

"But have sworn no vow of constancy or chastity?"

"No, father."

"Then you are free to follow a worldly life. But let me hear, ere you start, what gifts you take away with you from Beaulieu? Some I already know. There is the playing of the citole and the rebeck. Our choir will be dumb without you. You carve too?"

The youth's pale face flushed with the pride of the skilled workman. "Yes, holy father," he answered. "Thanks to good brother Bartholomew, I carve in wood and in ivory, and can do something also in silver and in bronze. From brother Francis I have learned to paint on vellum, on glass, and on metal, with a knowledge of those pigments and essences which can preserve the colour against damp or a biting air. Brother Luke hath given me some skill in damask work, and in the enamelling of shrines, tabernacles, diptychs and triptychs. For the rest, I know a little of the making of covers, the cutting of precious stones, and the fashioning of instruments."

"A goodly list, truly," cried the superior with a smile. "What clerk of Cambrig or of Oxenford could say as much? But of thy reading — hast not so much to show there, I fear?"

"No, father, it hath been slight enough. Yet, thanks to our good chancellor, I am not wholly unlettered. I have read Ockham, Bradwardine, and other of the schoolmen, together with the learned Duns Scotus and the book of the holy Aquinas."

"But of the things of this world, what have you gathered from your reading? From this high window you may catch a glimpse over the wooden point and the smoke of Bucklershard of the mouth of the Exe, and the shining sea. Now, I pray you Alleyne, if a man were to take a ship and spread sail across yonder waters, where might he hope to arrive?"

The youth pondered, and drew a plan amongst the rushes with the point of his staff. "Holy father," said he, "he would come upon those parts of France which are held by the King's Majesty. But if he trended to the south he might reach Spain and the Barbary States. To his north would be Flanders and the country of the Eastlanders and of the Muscovites."

"True. And how if, after reaching the King's possessions, he still journeyed on to the eastward?"

"He would then come upon that part of France which is still in dispute, and he might hope to reach the famous city of Avignon, where dwells our blessed father, the prop of Christendom."

"And then?"

"Then he would pass through the land of the Almains and the great Roman Empire, and so to the country of the Huns and of the Lithuanian pagans, beyond which lies the great city of Constantine and the kingdom of the unclean followers of Mahmoud."

"And beyond that, fair son?"

"Beyond that is Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and the great river which hath its source in the Garden of Eden."

"And then?"

"Nay, good father, I cannot tell. Methinks the end of the world is not far from there."

"Then we can still find something to teach thee, Alleyne," said the Abbot complaisantly. "Know that many strange nations lie betwixt there and the end of the world. There is the country of the Amazons, and the country of the dwarfs, and the country of the fair but evil women who slay with beholding, like the basilisk. Beyond that again is the kingdom of Prester John and of the great Cham. These things I know for very sooth, for I had them from that pious Christian and valiant knight, Sir John de Mandeville, who stopped twice at Beaulieu on his way to and from Southampton, and discoursed to us concerning what he had seen from the reader's desk in the refectory, until there was many a good brother who got neither bit nor sup, so stricken were they by his strange tales."

"I would fain know, father," asked the young man, "what there may be at the end of the world?"

"There are some things," replied the Abbot gravely, "into which it was never intended that we should inquire. But you have a long road before you. Whither will you first turn?"

"To my brother's at Minstead. If he be indeed an ungodly and violent man, there is the more need that I should seek him out and see whether I cannot turn him to better ways."

The Abbot shook his head. "The Socman of Minstead hath earned an evil name over the country side," he said. "If you must go to him, see at least that he doth not turn you from the narrow path upon which you have learned to tread. But you are in God's keeping, and Godward should you ever look in danger and in trouble. Above all, shun the snares of women, for they are ever set for the foolish feet of the young. Kneel down, my child, and take an old man's blessing."

Alleyne Edricson bent his head while the Abbot poured out his heartfelt supplication that Heaven would watch over this young soul, now going forth into the darkness and danger of the world. It was no mere form for either of them. To them the outside life of mankind did indeed seem to be one of violence and of sin, beset with physical and still more with spiritual danger. Heaven, too, was very near to them in those days. God's direct agency was to be seen in the thunder and the rainbow, the whirlwind and the lightning. To the believer, clouds of angels and confessors, and martyrs, armies of the sainted and the saved, were ever stooping over their struggling brethren upon earth, raising, encouraging, and supporting them. It was then with a lighter heart and a stouter courage that the young man turned from the Abbot's room, while the latter, following him to the stair-head, finally commended him to the protection of the holy Julian, patron of travellers.

Underneath, in the porch of the Abbey, the monks had gathered to give him a last God-speed. Many had brought some parting token by which he should remember them. There was brother Bartholomew with a crucifix of rare carved ivory, and brother Luke with a white-backed psalter adorned with golden bees, and brother Francis with the "Slaying of the Innocents" most daintily set forth upon vellum. All these were duly packed away deep in the traveller's scrip, and above them old pippin-faced brother Athanasius had placed a parcel of simnel bread and rammel cheese, with a small flask of the famous blue-sealed Abbey wine. So, amid hand-shakings and laughings and blessings, Alleyne Edricson turned his back upon Beaulieu.

At the turn of the road he stopped and gazed back. There was the wide-spread building which he knew so well, the Abbot's house, the long church, the cloisters with their line of arches, all bathed and mellowed in the evening sun. There too was the broad sweep of the river Exe, the old stone well, the canopied niche of the Virgin, and in the centre of all the cluster of white-robed figures who waved their hands to him. A sudden mist swam up before the young man's eyes, and he turned away upon his journey with a heavy heart and a choking throat.

CHAPTER III. HOW HORDLE JOHN COZENED THE FULLER OF LYMINGTON.

It is not, however, in the nature of things that a lad of twenty, with young life glowing in his veins and all the wide world before him, should spend his first hours of freedom in mourning for what he had left. Long ere Alleyne was out of sound of the Beaulieu bells he was striding sturdily along, swinging his staff and whistling as merrily as the birds in the thicket. It was an evening to raise a man's heart. The sun shining slantwise through the trees threw delicate traceries across the road, with bars of golden light between. Away in the distance before and behind, the green boughs, now turning in places to a coppery redness, shot their broad arches across the track. The still summer air was heavy with the resinous smell of the great forest. Here and there a tawny brook prattled out from among the underwood and lost itself again in the ferns and brambles upon the further side. Save the dull piping of insects and the sough of the leaves, there was silence everywhere — the sweet restful silence of nature.

And yet there was no want of life — the whole wide wood was full of it. Now it was a lithe, furtive stoat which shot across the path upon some fell errand of its own; then it was a wild cat which squatted upon the outlying branch of an oak and peeped at the traveller with a yellow and dubious eye. Once it was a wild sow which scuttled out of the bracken, with two young sounders at her heels, and once a lordly red staggard walked daintily out from among the tree trunks, and looked around him with the fearless gaze of one who lived under the King's own high protection. Alleyne gave his staff a merry flourish, however, and the red deer bethought him that the King was far off, so streaked away from whence he came.

The youth had now journeyed considerably beyond the furthest domains of the Abbey. He was the more surprised therefore when, on coming round a turn in the path, he perceived a man clad in the familiar garb of the order, and seated in a clump of heather by the roadside. Alleyne had known every brother well, but this was a face which was new to him — a face which was very red and puffed, working this way and that, as though the man were sore perplexed in his mind. Once he shook both hands furiously in the air, and twice he sprang from his seat and hurried down the road. When he rose, however, Alleyne observed that his robe was much too long and loose for him in every direction, trailing upon the ground and bagging about his ankles, so that even with trussed-up skirts he could make little progress. He ran once, but the long gown clogged him so that he slowed down into a shambling walk, and finally plumped into the heather once more.

“Young friend,” said he, when Alleyne was abreast of him, “I fear from thy garb that thou canst know little of the Abbey of Beaulieu.”

“Then you are in error, friend,” the clerk answered, “for I have spent all my days within its walls.”

“Hast so indeed?” cried he. “Then perhaps canst tell me the name of a great loathly lump of a brother wi’ freckled face an’ a hand like a spade. His eyes were black an’ his hair was red an’ his voice like the parish bull. I trow that there cannot be two alike in the same cloisters.”

“That surely can be no other than brother John,” said Alleyne. “I trust he has done you no wrong, that you should be so hot against him.”

“Wrong, quotha?” cried the other, jumping out of the heather. “Wrong! why he hath stolen every plack of clothing off my back, if that be a wrong, and hath left me here in this sorry frock of white falding, so that I have shame to go back to my wife, lest she think that I have donned her old kirtle. Harrow and alas that ever I should have met him!”

“But how came this?” asked the young clerk, who could scarce keep from laughter at the sight of the hot little man so swathed in the great white cloak.

“It came in this way,” he said, sitting down once more: “I was passing this way, hoping to reach Lymington ere nightfall when I came on this red-headed knave seated even where we are sitting now. I uncovered and louted as I passed thinking that he might be a holy man at his orisons, but he called to me and asked me if I had heard speak of the new indulgence in favor of the Cistercians. ‘Not I,’ I answered. ‘Then the worse for thy soul!’ said he; and with that he broke into a long tale how that on account of the virtues of the Abbot Berghersh it had been decreed by the Pope that whoever should wear the habit of a monk of Beaulieu for as long as he might say the seven psalms of David should be assured of the kingdom of Heaven. When I heard this I prayed him on my knees that he would give me the use of his gown, which after many contentions he at last agreed to do, on my paying him three marks towards the regilding of the image of Laurence the martyr.

Having stripped his robe, I had no choice but to let him have the wearing of my good leathern jerkin and hose, for, as he said, it was chilling to the blood and unseemly to the eye to stand frockless whilst I made my orisons. He had scarce got them on, and it was a sore labor, seeing that my inches will scarce match my girth — he had scarce got them on, I say, and I not yet at the end of the second psalm, when he bade me do honor to my new dress, and with that set off down the road as fast as feet would carry him. For myself, I could no more run than if I had been sown in a sack; so here I sit, and here I am like to sit, before I set eyes upon my clothes again."

"Nay, friend, take it not so sadly," said Alleyne, clapping the disconsolate one upon the shoulder. "Canst change thy robe for a jerkin once more at the Abbey, unless perchance you have a friend near at hand."

"That have I," he answered, "and close; but I care not to go nigh him in this plight, for his wife hath a gibing tongue, and will spread the tale until I could not show my face in any market from Fordingbridge to Southampton. But if you, fair sir, out of your kind charity would be pleased to go a matter of two bow-shots out of your way, you would do me such a service as I could scarce repay."

"With all my heart," said Alleyne readily.

"Then take this pathway on the left, I pray thee, and then the deer-track which passes on the right. You will then see under a great beech-tree the hut of a charcoal-burner. Give him my name, good sir, the name of Peter the fuller, of Lymington, and ask him for a change of raiment, that I may pursue my journey without delay. There are reasons why he would be loth to refuse me."

Alleyne started off along the path indicated, and soon found the log-hut where the burner dwelt. He was away faggot-cutting in the forest, but his wife, a ruddy bustling dame, found the needful garments and tied them into a bundle. While she busied herself in finding and folding them, Alleyne Edricson stood by the open door looking in at her with much interest and some distrust, for he had never been so nigh to a woman before. She had round red arms, a dress of some sober woollen stuff, and a brass brooch the size of a cheese-cake stuck in the front of it.

"Peter the fuller!" she kept repeating. "Marry come up! if I were Peter the fuller's wife I would teach him better than to give his clothes to the first knave who asks for them. But he was always a poor, fond, silly creature, was Peter, though we are beholden to him for helping to bury our second son Wat, who was a ‘prentice to him at Lymington in the year of the Black Death. But who are you, young sir?”

“I am a clerk on my road from Beaulieu to Minstead.”

“Aye, indeed! Hast been brought up at the Abbey then. I could read it from thy reddened cheek and downcast eye. Hast learned from the monks, I trow, to fear a woman as thou wouldst a lazar-house. Out upon them! that they should dishonor their own mothers by such teaching. A pretty world it would be with all the women out of it.”

“Heaven forfend that such a thing should come to pass!” said Alleyne.

“Amen and amen! But thou art a pretty lad, and the prettier for thy modest ways. It is easy to see from thy cheek that thou hast not spent thy days in the rain and the heat and the wind, as my poor Wat hath been forced to do.”

“I have indeed seen little of life, good dame.”

“Wilt find nothing in it to pay for the loss of thy own freshness. Here are the clothes, and Peter can leave them when next he comes this way. Holy Virgin! see the dust upon thy doublet! It were easy to see that there is no woman to tend to thee. So! — that is better. Now buss me, boy.”

Alleyne stooped and kissed her, for the kiss was the common salutation of the age, and, as Erasmus long afterwards remarked, more used in England than in any other country. Yet it sent the blood to his temples again, and he wondered, as he turned away, what the Abbot Berghersh would have answered to so frank an invitation. He was still tingling from this new experience when he came out upon the high-road and saw a sight which drove all other thoughts from his mind.

Some way down from where he had left him the unfortunate Peter was stamping and raving tenfold worse than before. Now, however, instead of the great white cloak, he had no clothes on at all, save a short woollen shirt and a pair of leather shoes. Far down the road a long-legged figure was running, with a bundle under one arm and the other hand to his side, like a man who laughs until he is sore.

“See him!” yelled Peter. “Look to him! You shall be my witness. He shall see Winchester jail for this. See where he goes with my cloak under his arm!”

“Who then?” cried Alleyne.

“Who but that cursed brother John. He hath not left me clothes enough to make a gallybagger. The double thief hath cozened me out of my gown.”

“Stay though, my friend, it was his gown,” objected Alleyne.

“It boots not. He hath them all — gown, jerkin, hosen and all. Gramercy to him that he left me the shirt and the shoon. I doubt not that he will be back for them anon.”

“But how came this?” asked Alleyne, open-eyed with astonishment.

“Are those the clothes? For dear charity’s sake give them to me. Not the Pope himself shall have these from me, though he sent the whole college of cardinals to ask it. How came it? Why, you had scarce gone ere this loathly John came running back again, and, when I oped mouth to reproach him, he asked me whether it was indeed likely that a man of prayer would leave his own godly raiment in order to take a layman’s jerkin. He had, he said, but gone for a while that I might be the freer for my devotions. On this I plucked off the gown, and he with much show of haste did begin to undo his points; but when I threw his frock down he clipped it up and ran off all untrussed, leaving me in this sorry plight. He laughed so the while, like a great croaking frog, that I might have caught him had my breath not been as short as his legs were long.”

The young man listened to this tale of wrong with all the seriousness that he could maintain; but at the sight of the pursy red-faced man and the dignity with which he bore him, the laughter came so thick upon him that he had to lean up against a tree-trunk. The fuller looked sadly and gravely at him; but finding that he still laughed, he bowed with much mock politeness and stalked onwards in his borrowed clothes. Alleyne watched him until he was small in the distance, and then, wiping the tears from his eyes, he set off briskly once more upon his journey.

CHAPTER IV. HOW THE BAILIFF OF SOUTHAMPTON SLEW THE TWO MASTERLESS MEN.

The road along which he travelled was scarce as populous as most other roads in the kingdom, and far less so than those which lie between the larger towns. Yet from time to time Alleyne met other wayfarers, and more than once was overtaken by strings of pack mules and horsemen journeying in the same direction as himself. Once a begging friar came limping along in a brown habit, imploring in a most dolorous voice to give him a single groat to buy bread wherewith to save himself from impending death. Alleyne passed him swiftly by, for he had learned from the monks to have no love for the wandering friars, and, besides, there was a great half-gnawed mutton bone sticking out of his pouch to prove him a liar. Swiftly as he went, however, he could not escape the curse of the four blessed evangelists which the mendicant howled behind him. So dreadful are his execrations that the frightened lad thrust his fingers into his ear-holes, and ran until the fellow was but a brown smirch upon the yellow road.

Further on, at the edge of the woodland, he came upon a chapman and his wife, who sat upon a fallen tree. He had put his pack down as a table, and the two of them were devouring a great pasty, and washing it down with some drink from a stone jar. The chapman broke a rough jest as he passed, and the woman called shrilly to Alleyne to come and join them, on which the man, turning suddenly from mirth to wrath, began to belabor her with his cudgel. Alleyne hastened on, lest he make more mischief, and his heart was heavy as lead within him. Look where he would, he seemed to see nothing but injustice and violence and the hardness of man to man.

But even as he brooded sadly over it and pined for the sweet peace of the Abbey, he came on an open space dotted with holly bushes, where was the strangest sight that he had yet chanced upon. Near to the pathway lay a long clump of greenery, and from behind this there stuck straight up into the air four human legs clad in parti-coloured hosen, yellow and black. Strangest of all was when a brisk tune struck suddenly up and the four legs began to kick and twitter in time to the music. Walking on tiptoe round the bushes, he stood in amazement to see two men bounding about on their heads, while they played, the one a viol and the other a pipe, as merrily and as truly as though they were seated in a choir. Alleyne crossed himself as he gazed at this unnatural sight, and could scarce hold his ground with a steady face, when the two dancers, catching sight of him, came bouncing in his direction. A spear's length from him, they each threw a somersault into the air, and came down upon their feet with smirking faces and their hands over their hearts.

"A guerdon — a guerdon, my knight of the staring eyes!" cried one.

"A gift, my prince!" shouted the other. "Any trifle will serve — a purse of gold, or even a jewelled goblet."

Alleyne thought of what he had read of demoniac possession — the jumpings, the twitchings, the wild talk. It was in his mind to repeat over the exorcism proper to such attacks; but the two burst out a-laughing at his scared face, and turning on to their heads once more, clapped their heels in derision.

"Hast never seen tumblers before?" asked the elder, a black-browed, swarthy man, as brown and supple as a hazel twig. "Why shrink from us, then, as though we were the spawn of the Evil One?"

"Why shrink, my honey-bird? Why so afeard, my sweet cinnamon?" exclaimed the other, a loose-jointed lanky youth with a dancing, roguish eye.

"Truly, sirs, it is a new sight to me," the clerk answered. "When I saw your four legs above the bush I could scarce credit my own eyes. Why is it that you do this thing?"

"A dry question to answer," cried the younger, coming back on to his feet. "A most husky question, my fair bird! But how? A flask, a flask! — by all that is wonderful!" He shot out his hand as he spoke, and plucking Alleyne's bottle out of his scrip, he deftly knocked the neck off, and poured the half of it down his throat. The rest he handed to his comrade, who drank the wine, and then, to the clerk's increasing amazement, made a show of swallowing the bottle, with such skill that Alleyne seemed to see it vanish down his throat. A moment later, however, he flung it over his head, and caught it bottom downwards upon the calf of his left leg.

"We thank you for the wine, kind sir," said he, "and for the ready courtesy wherewith you offered it. Touching your question, we may tell you that we are strollers and jugglers, who, having performed with much applause at Winchester fair, are now on our way to the great Michaelmas market at Ringwood. As our art is a very fine and delicate one, however, we cannot let a day go by without exercising ourselves in it, to which end we choose some quiet and sheltered spot where we may break our journey. Here you find us; and we cannot wonder that you, who are new to tumbling, should be astounded, since many great barons, earls, marshals and knight, who have wandered as far as the Holy Land, are of one mind in saying that they have never seen a more noble or gracious performance. If you will be pleased to sit upon that stump, we will now continue our exercise."

Alleyne sat down willingly as directed with two great bundles on either side of him which contained the strollers' dresses — doublets of flame-coloured silk and girdles of leather, spangled with brass and tin. The jugglers were on their heads once more, bounding about with rigid necks, playing the while in perfect time and tune. It chanced that out of one of the bundles there stuck the end of what the clerk saw to be a cittern, so drawing it forth, he tuned it up and twanged a harmony to the merry lilt which the dancers played. On that they dropped their own instruments, and putting their hands to the ground they hopped about faster and faster, ever shouting to him to play more briskly, until at last for very weariness all three had to stop.

"Well played, sweet poppet!" cried the younger. "Hast a rare touch on the strings."

"How knew you the tune?" asked the other.

"I knew it not. I did but follow the notes I heard."

Both opened their eyes at this, and stared at Alleyne with as much amazement as he had shown at them.

"You have a fine trick of ear then," said one. "We have long wished to meet such a man. Wilt join us and jog on to Ringwood? Thy duties shall be light, and thou shalt have two-pence a day and meat for supper every night."

"With as much beer as you can put away," said the other "and a flask of Gascon wine on Sabbaths."

"Nay, it may not be. I have other work to do. I have tarried with you over long," quoth Alleyne, and resolutely set forth upon his journey once more. They ran behind him some little way, offering him first fourpence and then sixpence a day, but he only smiled and shook his head, until at last they fell away from him. Looking back, he saw that the smaller had mounted on the younger’s shoulders, and that they stood so, some ten feet high, waving their adieus to him. He waved back to them, and then hastened on, the lighter of heart for having fallen in with these strange men of pleasure.

Alleyne had gone no great distance for all the many small passages that had befallen him. Yet to him, used as he was to a life of such quiet that the failure of a brewing or the altering of an anthem had seemed to be of the deepest import, the quick changing play of the lights and shadows of life was strangely startling and interesting. A gulf seemed to divide this brisk uncertain existence from the old steady round of work and of prayer which he had left behind him. The few hours that had passed since he saw the Abbey tower stretched out in his memory until they outgrew whole months of the stagnant life of the cloister. As he walked and munched the soft bread from his scrip, it seemed strange to him to feel that it was still warm from the ovens of Beaulieu.

When he passed Penerley, where were three cottages and a barn, he reached the edge of the tree country, and found the great barren heath of Blackdown stretching in front of him, all pink with heather and bronzed with the fading ferns. On the left the woods were still thick, but the road edged away from them and wound over the open. The sun lay low in the west upon a purple cloud, whence it threw a mild, chastening light over the wild moorland and glittered on the fringe of forest turning the withered leaves into flakes of dead gold, the brighter for the black depths behind them. To the seeing eye decay is as fair as growth, and death as life. The thought stole into Alleyne’s heart as he looked upon the autumnal country side and marvelled at its beauty. He had little time to dwell upon it however, for there were still six good miles between him and the nearest inn. He sat down by the roadside to partake of his bread and cheese, and then with a lighter scrip he hastened upon his way.

There appeared to be more wayfarers on the down than in the forest. First he passed two Dominicans in their long black dresses, who swept by him with downcast looks and pattering lips, without so much as a glance at him. Then there came a gray friar, or minorite, with a good paunch upon him, walking slowly and looking about him with the air of a man who was at peace with himself and with all men. He stopped Alleyne to ask him whether it was not true that there was a hostel somewhere in those parts which was especially famous for the stewing of eels. The clerk having made answer that he had heard the eels of Sowley well spoken of, the friar sucked in his lips and hurried forward. Close at his heels came three laborers walking abreast, with spade and mattock over their shoulders. They sang some rude chorus right tunefully as they walked, but their English was so coarse and rough that to the ears of a cloister-bred man it sounded like a foreign and barbarous tongue. One of them carried a young bittern which they had caught upon the moor, and they offered it to Alleyne for a silver groat. Very glad he was to get safely past them, for, with their bristling red beards and their fierce blue eyes, they were uneasy men to bargain with upon a lonely moor.

Yet it is not always the burliest and the wildest who are the most to be dreaded. The workers looked hungrily at him, and then jogged onwards upon their way in slow, lumbering Saxon style. A worse man to deal with was a wooden-legged cripple who came hobbling down the path, so weak and so old to all appearance that a child need not stand in fear of him. Yet when Alleyne had passed him, of a sudden, out of pure devilment, he screamed out a curse at him, and sent a jagged flint stone hurtling past his ear. So horrid was the causeless rage of the crooked creature, that the clerk came over a cold thrill, and took to his heels until he was out of shot from stone or word. It seemed to him that in this country of England there was no protection for a man save that which lay in the strength of his own arm and the speed of his own foot. In the cloisters he had heard vague talk of the law — the mighty law which was higher than prelate or baron, yet no sign could he see of it. What was the benefit of a law written fair upon parchment, he wondered, if there were no officers to enforce it. As it fell out, however, he had that very evening, ere the sun had set, a chance of seeing how stern was the grip of the English law when it did happen to seize the offender.

A mile or so out upon the moor the road takes a very sudden dip into a hollow, with a peat-coloured stream running swiftly down the centre of it. To the right of this stood, and stands to this day, an ancient barrow, or burying mound, covered deeply in a bristle of heather and bracken. Alleyne was plodding down the slope upon one side, when he saw an old dame coming towards him upon the other, limping with weariness and leaning heavily upon a stick. When she reached the edge of the stream she stood helpless, looking to right and to left for some ford. Where the path ran down a great stone had been fixed in the centre of the brook, but it was too far from the bank for her aged and uncertain feet. Twice she thrust forward at it, and twice she drew back, until at last, giving up in despair, she sat herself down by the brink and wrung her hands wearily. There she still sat when Alleyne reached the crossing.

"Come, mother," quoth he, "it is not so very perilous a passage."

"Alas! good youth," she answered, "I have a humor in the eyes, and though I can see that there is a stone there I can by no means be sure as to where it lies."

"That is easily amended," said he cheerily, and picking her lightly up, for she was much worn with time, he passed across with her. He could not but observe, however, that as he placed her down her knees seemed to fail her, and she could scarcely prop herself up with her staff.

"You are weak, mother," said he. "Hast journeyed far, I wot."

"From Wiltshire, friend," said she, in a quavering voice; "three days have I been on the road. I go to my son, who is one of the King's regarders at Brockenhurst. He has ever said that he would care for me in mine old age."

"And rightly too, mother, since you cared for him in his youth. But when have you broken fast?"

"At Lyndenhurst; but alas! my money is at an end, and I could but get a dish of bran-porridge from the nunnery. Yet I trust that I may be able to reach Brockenhurst to-night, where I may have all that heart can desire; for oh! sir, but my son is a fine man, with a kindly heart of his own, and it is as good as food to me to think that he should have a doublet of Lincoln green to his back and be the King's own paid man."

"It is a long road yet to Brockenhurst," said Alleyne; "but here is such bread and cheese as I have left, and here, too, is a penny which may help you to supper. May God be with you!"

"May God be with you, young man!" she cried. "May He make your heart as glad as you have made mine!" She turned away, still mumbling blessings, and Alleyne saw her short figure and her long shadow stumbling slowly up the slope.

He was moving away himself, when his eyes lit upon a strange sight, and one which sent a tingling through his skin. Out of the tangled scrub on the old overgrown barrow two human faces were looking out at him; the sinking sun glimmered full upon them, showing up every line and feature. The one was an oldish man with a thin beard, a crooked nose, and a broad red smudge from a birth-mark over his temple; the other was a negro, a thing rarely met in England at that day, and rarer still in the quiet southland parts. Alleyne had read of such folk, but had never seen one before, and could scarce take his eyes from the fellow’s broad pouting lip and shining teeth. Even as he gazed, however, the two came writhing out from among the heather, and came down towards him with such a guilty, slinking carriage, that the clerk felt that there was no good in them, and hastened onwards upon his way.

He had not gained the crown of the slope, when he heard a sudden scuffle behind him and a feeble voice bleating for help. Looking round, there was the old dame down upon the roadway, with her red whimple flying on the breeze, while the two rogues, black and white, stooped over her, wresting away from her the penny and such other poor trifles as were worth the taking. At the sight of her thin limbs struggling in weak resistance, such a glow of fierce anger passed over Alleyne as set his head in a whirl. Dropping his scrip, he bounded over the stream once more, and made for the two villains, with his staff whirled over his shoulder and his gray eyes blazing with fury.

The robbers, however, were not disposed to leave their victim until they had worked their wicked will upon her. The black man, with the woman’s crimson scarf tied round his swarthy head, stood forward in the centre of the path, with a long dull-coloured knife in his hand, while the other, waving a ragged cudgel, cursed at Alleyne and dared him to come on. His blood was fairly aflame, however, and he needed no such challenge. Dashing at the black man, he smote at him with such good will that the other let his knife tinkle into the roadway, and hopped howling to a safer distance. The second rogue, however, made of sterner stuff, rushed in upon the clerk, and clipped him round the waist with a grip like a bear, shouting the while to his comrade to come round and stab him in the back. At this the negro took heart of grace, and picking up his dagger again he came stealing with prowling step and murderous eye, while the two swayed backwards and forwards, staggering this way and that. In the very midst of the scuffle, however, whilst Alleyne braced himself to feel the cold blade between his shoulders, there came a sudden scurry of hoofs, and the black man yelled with terror and ran for his life through the heather. The man with the birth-mark, too, struggled to break away, and Alleyne heard his teeth chatter and felt his limbs grow limp to his hand. At this sign of coming aid the clerk held on the tighter, and at last was able to pin his man down and glanced behind him to see where all the noise was coming from.

Down the slanting road there was riding a big, burly man, clad in a tunic of purple velvet and driving a great black horse as hard as it could gallop. He leaned well over its neck as he rode, and made a heaving with his shoulders at every bound as though he were lifting the steed instead of it carrying him. In the rapid glance Alleyne saw that he had white doeskin gloves, a curling white feather in his flat velvet cap, and a broad gold, embroidered baldric across his bosom. Behind him rode six others, two and two, clad in sober brown jerkins, with the long yellow staves of their bows thrusting out from behind their right shoulders. Down the hill they thundered, over the brook and up to the scene of the contest.

"Here is one!" said the leader, springing down from his reeking horse, and seizing the white rogue by the edge of his jerkin. "This is one of them. I know him by that devil's touch upon his brow. Where are your cords, Peterkin? So! Bind him hand and foot. His last hour has come. And you, young man, who may you be?"

"I am a clerk, sir, travelling from Beaulieu."

"A clerk!" cried the other. "Art from Oxenford or from Cambridge? Hast thou a letter from the chancellor of thy college giving thee a permit to beg? Let me see thy letter." He had a stern, square face, with bushy side whiskers and a very questioning eye.

"I am from Beaulieu Abbey, and I have no need to beg," said Alleyne, who was all of a tremble now that the ruffle was over.

"The better for thee," the other answered. "Dost know who I am?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"I am the law!" — nodding his head solemnly. "I am the law of England and the mouthpiece of his most gracious and royal majesty, Edward the Third."

Alleyne louted low to the King's representative. "Truly you came in good time, honored sir," said he. "A moment later and they would have slain me."

"But there should be another one," cried the man in the purple coat. "There should be a black man. A shipman with St. Anthony's fire, and a black man who had served him as cook — those are the pair that we are in chase of."

"The black man fled over to that side," said Alleyne, pointing towards the barrow.

“He could not have gone far, sir bailiff,” cried one of the archers, unslinging his bow. “He is in hiding somewhere, for he knew well, black paynim as he is, that our horses’ four legs could outstrip his two.”

“Then we shall have him,” said the other. “It shall never be said, whilst I am bailiff of Southampton, that any waster, riever, draw-latch or murtherer came scathless away from me and my posse. Leave that rogue lying. Now stretch out in line, my merry ones, with arrow on string, and I shall show you such sport as only the King can give. You on the left, Howett, and Thomas of Redbridge upon the right. So! Beat high and low among the heather, and a pot of wine to the lucky marksman.”

As it chanced, however, the searchers had not far to seek. The negro had burrowed down into his hiding-place upon the barrow, where he might have lain snug enough, had it not been for the red gear upon his head. As he raised himself to look over the bracken at his enemies, the staring colour caught the eye of the bailiff, who broke into a long screeching whoop and spurred forward sword in hand. Seeing himself discovered, the man rushed out from his hiding-place, and bounded at the top of his speed down the line of archers, keeping a good hundred paces to the front of them. The two who were on either side of Alleyne bent their bows as calmly as though they were shooting at the popinjay at the village fair.

“Seven yards windage, Hal,” said one, whose hair was streaked with gray.

“Five,” replied the other, letting loose his string. Alleyne gave a gulp in his throat, for the yellow streak seemed to pass through the man; but he still ran forward.

“Seven, you jack-fool,” growled the first speaker, and his bow twanged like a harp-string. The black man sprang high up into the air, and shot out both his arms and his legs, coming down all a-sprawl among the heather. “Right under the blade bone!” quoth the archer, sauntering forward for his arrow.

“The old hound is the best when all is said,” quoth the bailiff of Southampton, as they made back for the roadway. “That means a quart of the best malmsey in Southampton this very night, Matthew Atwood. Art sure that he is dead?”

“Dead as Pontius Pilate, worshipful sir.”

“It is well. Now, as to the other knave. There are trees and to spare over yonder, but we have scarce leisure to make for them. Draw thy sword, Thomas of Redbridge, and hew me his head from his shoulders.”

“A boon, gracious sir, a boon!” cried the condemned man.

“What then?” asked the bailiff.

“I will confess to my crime. It was indeed I and the black cook, both from the ship ‘La Rose de Gloire,’ of Southampton, who did set upon the Flanders merchant and rob him of his spicery and his mercery, for which, as we well know, you hold a warrant against us.”

“There is little merit in this confession,” quoth the bailiff sternly. “Thou hast done evil within my bailiwick, and must die.”

“But, sir,” urged Alleyne, who was white to the lips at these bloody doings, “he hath not yet come to trial.”

“Young clerk,” said the bailiff, “you speak of that of which you know nothing. It is true that he hath not come to trial, but the trial hath come to him. He hath fled the law and is beyond its pale. Touch not that which is no concern of thine. But what is this boon, rogue, which you would crave?”

“I have in my shoe, most worshipful sir, a strip of wood which belonged once to the bark wherein the blessed Paul was dashed up against the island of Melita. I bought it for two rose nobles from a shipman who came from the Levant. The boon I crave is that you will place it in my hands and let me die still grasping it. In this manner, not only shall my own eternal salvation be secured, but thine also, for I shall never cease to intercede for thee.”

At the command of the bailiff they plucked off the fellow’s shoe, and there sure enough at the side of the instep, wrapped in a piece of fine sendall, lay a long, dark splinter of wood. The archers doffed caps at the sight of it, and the bailiff crossed himself devoutly as he handed it to the robber.

“If it should chance,” he said, “that through the surpassing merits of the blessed Paul your sin-stained soul should gain a way into paradise, I trust that you will not forget that intercession which you have promised. Bear in mind too, that it is Herward the bailiff for whom you pray, and not Herward the sheriff, who is my uncle’s son. Now, Thomas, I pray you dispatch, for we have a long ride before us and sun has already set.”

Alleyne gazed upon the scene — the portly velvet-clad official, the knot of hard-faced archers with their hands to the bridles of their horses, the thief with his arms trussed back and his doublet turned down upon his shoulders. By the side of the track the old dame was standing, fastening her red whimple once more round her head. Even as he looked one of the archers drew his sword with a sharp whirr of steel and stept up to the lost man. The clerk hurried away in horror; but, ere he had gone many paces, he heard a sudden, sullen thump, with a choking, whistling sound at the end of it. A minute later the bailiff and four of his men rode past him on their journey back to Southampton, the other two having been chosen as grave-diggers. As they passed Alleyne saw that one of the men was wiping his sword-blade upon the mane of his horse. A deadly sickness came over him at the sight, and sitting down by the wayside he burst out weeping, with his nerves all in a jangle. It was a terrible world thought he, and it was hard to know which were the most to be dreaded, the knaves or the men of the law.

CHAPTER V. HOW A STRANGE COMPANY GATHERED AT THE “PIED MERLIN.”

The night had already fallen, and the moon was shining between the rifts of ragged, drifting clouds, before Alleyne Edricson, footsore and weary from the unwonted exercise, found himself in front of the forest inn which stood upon the outskirts of Lyndhurst. The building was long and low, standing back a little from the road, with two flambeaux blazing on either side of the door as a welcome to the traveller. From one window there thrust forth a long pole with a bunch of greenery tied to the end of it — a sign that liquor was to be sold within. As Alleyne walked up to it he perceived that it was rudely fashioned out of beams of wood, with twinkling lights all over where the glow from within shone through the chinks. The roof was poor and thatched; but in strange contrast to it there ran all along under the eaves a line of wooden shields, most gorgeously painted with chevron, bend, and saltire, and every heraldic device. By the door a horse stood tethered, the ruddy glow beating strongly upon his brown head and patient eyes, while his body stood back in the shadow.

Alleyne stood still in the roadway for a few minutes reflecting upon what he should do. It was, he knew, only a few miles further to Minstead, where his brother dwelt. On the other hand, he had never seen this brother since childhood, and the reports which had come to his ears concerning him were seldom to his advantage. By all accounts he was a hard and a bitter man.

It might be an evil start to come to his door so late and claim the shelter of his roof. Better to sleep here at this inn, and then travel on to Minstead in the morning. If his brother would take him in, well and good.

He would bide with him for a time and do what he might to serve him. If, on the other hand, he should have hardened his heart against him, he could only go on his way and do the best he might by his skill as a craftsman and a scrivener. At the end of a year he would be free to return to the cloisters, for such had been his father’s bequest. A monkish upbringing, one year in the world after the age of twenty, and then a free selection one way or the other — it was a strange course which had been marked out for him. Such as it was, however, he had no choice but to follow it, and if he were to begin by making a friend of his brother he had best wait until morning before he knocked at his dwelling.

The rude plank door was ajar, but as Alleyne approached it there came from within such a gust of rough laughter and clatter of tongues that he stood irresolute upon the threshold. Summoning courage, however, and reflecting that it was a public dwelling, in which he had as much right as any other man, he pushed it open and stepped into the common room.

Though it was an autumn evening and somewhat warm, a huge fire of heaped billets of wood crackled and sparkled in a broad, open grate, some of the smoke escaping up a rude chimney, but the greater part rolling out into the room, so that the air was thick with it, and a man coming from without could scarce catch his breath. On this fire a great cauldron bubbled and simmered, giving forth a rich and promising smell. Seated round it were a dozen or so folk, of all ages and conditions, who set up such a shout as Alleyne entered that he stood peering at them through the smoke, uncertain what this riotous greeting might portend.

“A rouse! A rouse!” cried one rough looking fellow in a tattered jerkin. “One more round of mead or ale and the score to the last comer.”

“‘Tis the law of the ‘Pied Merlin,’” shouted another. “Ho there, Dame Eliza! Here is fresh custom come to the house, and not a drain for the company.”

“I will take your orders, gentles; I will assuredly take your orders,” the landlady answered, bustling in with her hands full of leathern drinking-cups. “What is it that you drink, then? Beer for the lads of the forest, mead for the gleeman, strong waters for the tinker, and wine for the rest. It is an old custom of the house, young sir. It has been the use at the ‘Pied Merlin’ this many a year back that the company should drink to the health of the last comer. Is it your pleasure to humor it?”

“Why, good dame,” said Alleyne, “I would not offend the customs of your house, but it is only sooth when I say that my purse is a thin one. As far as two pence will go, however, I shall be right glad to do my part.”

“Plainly said and bravely spoken, my suckling friar,” roared a deep voice, and a heavy hand fell upon Alleyne’s shoulder. Looking up, he saw beside him his former cloister companion the renegade monk, Hordle John.

“By the thorn of Glastonbury! ill days are coming upon Beaulieu,” said he. “Here they have got rid in one day of the only two men within their walls — for I have had mine eyes upon thee, youngster, and I know that for all thy baby-face there is the making of a man in thee. Then there is the Abbot, too. I am no friend of his, nor he of mine; but he has warm blood in his veins. He is the only man left among them. The others, what are they?"

"They are holy men," Alleyne answered gravely.

"Holy men? Holy cabbages! Holy bean-pods! What do they do but live and suck in sustenance and grow fat? If that be holiness, I could show you hogs in this forest who are fit to head the calendar. Think you it was for such a life that this good arm was fixed upon my shoulder, or that head placed upon your neck? There is work in the world, man, and it is not by hiding behind stone walls that we shall do it."

"Why, then, did you join the brothers?" asked Alleyne.

"A fair enough question; but it is as fairly answered. I joined them because Margery Alspaye, of Bolder, married Crooked Thomas of Ringwood, and left a certain John of Hordle in the cold, for that he was a ranting, roving blade who was not to be trusted in wedlock. That was why, being fond and hot-headed, I left the world; and that is why, having had time to take thought, I am right glad to find myself back in it once more. Ill betide the day that ever I took off my yeoman's jerkin to put on the white gown!"

Whilst he was speaking the landlady came in again, bearing a broad platter, upon which stood all the beakers and flagons charged to the brim with the brown ale or the ruby wine. Behind her came a maid with a high pile of wooden plates, and a great sheaf of spoons, one of which she handed round to each of the travellers. Two of the company, who were dressed in the weather-stained green doublet of foresters, lifted the big pot off the fire, and a third, with a huge pewter ladle, served out a portion of steaming collops to each guest. Alleyne bore his share and his ale-mug away with him to a retired trestle in the corner, where he could sup in peace and watch the strange scene, which was so different to those silent and well-ordered meals to which he was accustomed.

The room was not unlike a stable. The low ceiling, smoke-blackened and dingy, was pierced by several square trap-doors with rough-hewn ladders leading up to them. The walls of bare unpainted planks were studded here and there with great wooden pins, placed at irregular intervals and heights, from which hung over-tunics, wallets, whips, bridles, and saddles. Over the fireplace were suspended six or seven shields of wood, with coats-of-arms rudely daubed upon them, which showed by their varying degrees of smokiness and dirt that they had been placed there at different periods. There was no furniture, save a single long dresser covered with coarse crockery, and a number of wooden benches and trestles, the legs of which sank deeply into the soft clay floor, while the only light, save that of the fire, was furnished by three torches stuck in sockets on the wall, which flickered and crackled, giving forth a strong resinous odor. All this was novel and strange to the cloister-bred youth; but most interesting of all was the motley circle of guests who sat eating their collops round the blaze. They were a humble group of wayfarers, such as might have been found that night in any inn through the length and breadth of England; but to him they represented that vague world against which he had been so frequently and so earnestly warned. It did not seem to him from what he could see of it to be such a very wicked place after all.

Three or four of the men round the fire were evidently underkeepers and verderers from the forest, sunburned and bearded, with the quick restless eye and lithe movements of the deer among which they lived. Close to the corner of the chimney sat a middle-aged gleeman, clad in a faded garb of Norwich cloth, the tunic of which was so outgrown that it did not fasten at the neck and at the waist. His face was swollen and coarse, and his watery protruding eyes spoke of a life which never wandered very far from the wine-pot. A gilt harp, blotched with many stains and with two of its strings missing, was tucked under one of his arms, while with the other he scooped greedily at his platter. Next to him sat two other men of about the same age, one with a trimming of fur to his coat, which gave him a dignity which was evidently dearer to him than his comfort, for he still drew it round him in spite of the hot glare of the faggots. The other, clad in a dirty russet suit with a long sweeping doublet, had a cunning, foxy face with keen, twinkling eyes and a peaky beard. Next to him sat Hordle John, and beside him three other rough unkempt fellows with tangled beards and matted hair — free laborers from the adjoining farms, where small patches of freehold property had been suffered to remain scattered about in the heart of the royal demesne. The company was completed by a peasant in a rude dress of undyed sheepskin, with the old-fashioned galligaskins about his legs, and a gayly dressed young man with striped cloak jagged at the edges and parti-coloured hosen, who looked about him with high disdain upon his face, and held a blue smelling-flask to his nose with one hand, while he brandished a busy spoon with the other. In the corner a very fat man was lying all asprawl upon a truss, snoring stertorously, and evidently in the last stage of drunkenness.

"That is Wat the limner," quoth the landlady, sitting down beside Alleyne, and pointing with the ladle to the sleeping man. "That is he who paints the signs and the tokens. Alack and alas that ever I should have been fool enough to trust him! Now, young man, what manner of a bird would you suppose a pied merlin to be — that being the proper sign of my hostel?"

"Why," said Alleyne, "a merlin is a bird of the same form as an eagle or a falcon. I can well remember that learned brother Bartholomew, who is deep in all the secrets of nature, pointed one out to me as we walked together near Vinney Ridge."

"A falcon or an eagle, quotha? And pied, that is of two several colours. So any man would say except this barrel of lies. He came to me, look you, saying that if I would furnish him with a gallon of ale, wherewith to strengthen himself as he worked, and also the pigments and a board, he would paint for me a noble pied merlin which I might hang along with the blazonry over my door. I, poor simple fool, gave him the ale and all that he craved, leaving him alone too, because he said that a man's mind must be left untroubled when he had great work to do. When I came back the gallon jar was empty, and he lay as you see him, with the board in front of him with this sorry device." She raised up a panel which was leaning against the wall, and showed a rude painting of a scraggy and angular fowl, with very long legs and a spotted body.

"Was that," she asked, "like the bird which thou hast seen?"

Alleyne shook his head, smiling.

"No, nor any other bird that ever wagged a feather. It is most like a plucked pullet which has died of the spotted fever. And scarlet too! What would the gentles Sir Nicholas Boarhunte, or Sir Bernard Brocas, of Roche Court, say if they saw such a thing — or, perhaps, even the King's own Majesty himself, who often has ridden past this way, and who loves his falcons as he loves his sons? It would be the downfall of my house."

"The matter is not past mending," said Alleyne. "I pray you, good dame, to give me those three pigment-pots and the brush, and I shall try whether I cannot better this painting."

Dame Eliza looked doubtfully at him, as though fearing some other stratagem, but, as he made no demand for ale, she finally brought the paints, and watched him as he smeared on his background, talking the while about the folk round the fire.

“The four forest lads must be jogging soon,” she said. “They bide at Emery Down, a mile or more from here. Yeomen prickers they are, who tend to the King’s hunt. The gleeman is called Floyting Will. He comes from the north country, but for many years he hath gone the round of the forest from Southampton to Christchurch. He drinks much and pays little but it would make your ribs crackle to hear him sing the ‘Jest of Hendy Tobias.’ Mayhap he will sing it when the ale has warmed him.”

“Who are those next to him?” asked Alleyne, much interested. “He of the fur mantle has a wise and reverent face.”

“He is a seller of pills and salves, very learned in humors, and rheums, and fluxes, and all manner of ailments. He wears, as you perceive, the vernicle of Sainted Luke, the first physician, upon his sleeve. May good St. Thomas of Kent grant that it may be long before either I or mine need his help! He is here to-night for herbergage, as are the others except the foresters. His neighbour is a tooth-drawer. That bag at his girdle is full of the teeth that he drew at Winchester fair. I warrant that there are more sound ones than sorry, for he is quick at his work and a trifle dim in the eye. The lusty man next him with the red head I have not seen before. The four on this side are all workers, three of them in the service of the bailiff of Sir Baldwin Redvers, and the other, he with the sheepskin, is, as I hear, a villein from the midlands who hath run from his master. His year and day are well-nigh up, when he will be a free man.”

“And the other?” asked Alleyne in a whisper. “He is surely some very great man, for he looks as though he scorned those who were about him.”

The landlady looked at him in a motherly way and shook her head. “You have had no great truck with the world,” she said, “or you would have learned that it is the small men and not the great who hold their noses in the air. Look at those shields upon my wall and under my eaves. Each of them is the device of some noble lord or gallant knight who hath slept under my roof at one time or another. Yet milder men or easier to please I have never seen: eating my bacon and drinking my wine with a merry face, and paying my score with some courteous word or jest which was dearer to me than my profit. Those are the true gentles. But your chapman or your bearward will swear that there is a lime in the wine, and water in the ale, and fling off at the last with a curse instead of a blessing. This youth is a scholar from

Cambrig, where men are wont to be blown out by a little knowledge, and lose the use of their hands in learning the laws of the Romans. But I must away to lay down the beds. So may the saints keep you and prosper you in your undertaking!”

Thus left to himself, Alleyne drew his panel of wood where the light of one of the torches would strike full upon it, and worked away with all the pleasure of the trained craftsman, listening the while to the talk which went on round the fire. The peasant in the sheepskins, who had sat glum and silent all evening, had been so heated by his flagon of ale that he was talking loudly and angrily with clenched hands and flashing eyes.

“Sir Humphrey Tennant of Ashby may till his own fields for me,” he cried. “The castle has thrown its shadow upon the cottage over long. For three hundred years my folk have swinked and sweated, day in and day out, to keep the wine on the lord’s table and the harness on the lord’s back. Let him take off his plates and delve himself, if delving must be done.”

“A proper spirit, my fair son!” said one of the free laborers. “I would that all men were of thy way of thinking.”

“He would have sold me with his acres,” the other cried, in a voice which was hoarse with passion. “‘The man, the woman and their litter’ — so ran the words of the dotard bailiff. Never a bullock on the farm was sold more lightly. Ha! he may wake some black night to find the flames licking about his ears — for fire is a good friend to the poor man, and I have seen a smoking heap of ashes where over night there stood just such another castlewick as Ashby.”

“This is a lad of mettle!” shouted another of the laborers. “He dares to give tongue to what all men think. Are we not all from Adam’s loins, all with flesh and blood, and with the same mouth that must needs have food and drink? Where all this difference then between the ermine cloak and the leathern tunic, if what they cover is the same?”

“Aye, Jenkin,” said another, “our foeman is under the stole and the vestment as much as under the helmet and plate of proof. We have as much to fear from the tonsure as from the hauberk. Strike at the noble and the priest shrieks, strike at priest and the noble lays his hand upon glaive. They are twin thieves who live upon our labor.”

“It would take a clever man to live upon thy labor, Hugh,” remarked one of the foresters, “seeing that the half of thy time is spent in swilling mead at the ‘Pied Merlin.’”

"Better that than stealing the deer that thou art placed to guard, like some folk I know."

"If you dare open that swine's mouth against me," shouted the woodman, "I'll crop your ears for you before the hangman has the doing of it, thou long-jawed lackbrain."

"Nay, gentles, gentles!" cried Dame Eliza, in a singsong heedless voice, which showed that such bickerings were nightly things among her guests. "No brawling or brabbling, gentles! Take heed to the good name of the house."

"Besides, if it comes to the cropping of ears, there are other folk who may say their say," quoth the third laborer. "We are all freemen, and I trow that a yeoman's cudgel is as good as a forester's knife. By St. Anselm! it would be an evil day if we had to bend to our master's servants as well as to our masters."

"No man is my master save the King," the woodman answered. "Who is there, save a false traitor, who would refuse to serve the English king?"

"I know not about the English king," said the man Jenkin. "What sort of English king is it who cannot lay his tongue to a word of English? You mind last year when he came down to Malwood, with his inner marshal and his outer marshal, his justiciar, his seneschal, and his four and twenty guardsmen. One noontide I was by Franklin Swinton's gate, when up he rides with a yeoman pricker at his heels. 'Ouvre,' he cried, 'ouvre,' or some such word, making signs for me to open the gate; and then 'Merci,' as though he were adrad of me. And you talk of an English king?"

"I do not marvel at it," cried the Cambrig scholar, speaking in the high drawling voice which was common among his class. "It is not a tongue for men of sweet birth and delicate upbringing. It is a foul, snorting, snarling manner of speech. For myself, I swear by the learned Polycarp that I have most ease with Hebrew, and after that perchance with Arabian."

"I will not hear a word said against old King Ned," cried Hordle John in a voice like a bull. "What if he is fond of a bright eye and a saucy face. I know one of his subjects who could match him at that. If he cannot speak like an Englishman I trow that he can fight like an Englishman, and he was hammering at the gates of Paris while ale-house topers were grutching and grumbling at home."

This loud speech, coming from a man of so formidable an appearance, somewhat daunted the disloyal party, and they fell into a sullen silence, which enabled Alleyne to hear something of the talk which was going on in the further corner between the physician, the tooth-drawer and the gleeman.

"A raw rat," the man of drugs was saying, "that is what it is ever my use to order for the plague — a raw rat with its paunch cut open."

"Might it not be broiled, most learned sir?" asked the tooth-drawer. "A raw rat sounds a most sorry and cheerless dish."

"Not to be eaten," cried the physician, in high disdain. "Why should any man eat such a thing?"

"Why indeed?" asked the gleeman, taking a long drain at his tankard.

"It is to be placed on the sore or swelling. For the rat, mark you, being a foul-living creature, hath a natural drawing or affinity for all foul things, so that the noxious humors pass from the man into the unclean beast."

"Would that cure the black death, master?" asked Jenkin.

"Aye, truly would it, my fair son."

"Then I am right glad that there were none who knew of it. The black death is the best friend that ever the common folk had in England."

"How that then?" asked Hordle John.

"Why, friend, it is easy to see that you have not worked with your hands or you would not need to ask. When half the folk in the country were dead it was then that the other half could pick and choose who they would work for, and for what wage. That is why I say that the murrain was the best friend that the borel folk ever had."

"True, Jenkin," said another workman; "but it is not all good that is brought by it either. We well know that through it corn-land has been turned into pasture, so that flocks of sheep with perchance a single shepherd wander now where once a hundred men had work and wage."

"There is no great harm in that," remarked the tooth-drawer, "for the sheep give many folk their living. There is not only the herd, but the shearer and brander, and then the dresser, the curer, the dyer, the fuller, the webster, the merchant, and a score of others."

"If it come to that." said one of the foresters, "the tough meat of them will wear folks teeth out, and there is a trade for the man who can draw them."

A general laugh followed this sally at the dentist's expense, in the midst of which the gleeman placed his battered harp upon his knee, and began to pick out a melody upon the frayed strings.

"Elbow room for Floyting Will!" cried the woodmen. "Twang us a merry lilt."

"Aye, aye, the 'Lasses of Lancaster,'" one suggested.

"Or 'St. Simeon and the Devil.'"

"Or the 'Jest of Hendy Tobias.'"

To all these suggestions the jongleur made no response, but sat with his eye fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, as one who calls words to his mind. Then, with a sudden sweep across the strings, he broke out into a song so gross and so foul that ere he had finished a verse the pure-minded lad sprang to his feet with the blood tingling in his face.

"How can you sing such things?" he cried. "You, too, an old man who should be an example to others."

The wayfarers all gazed in the utmost astonishment at the interruption.

"By the holy Dicon of Hampole! our silent clerk has found his tongue," said one of the woodmen. "What is amiss with the song then? How has it offended your babyship?"

"A milder and better mannered song hath never been heard within these walls," cried another. "What sort of talk is this for a public inn?"

"Shall it be a litany, my good clerk?" shouted a third; "or would a hymn be good enough to serve?"

The jongleur had put down his harp in high dudgeon. "Am I to be preached to by a child?" he cried, staring across at Alleyne with an inflamed and angry countenance. "Is a hairless infant to raise his tongue against me, when I have sung in every fair from Tweed to Trent, and have twice been named aloud by the High Court of the Minstrels at Beverley? I shall sing no more to-night."

"Nay, but you will so," said one of the laborers. "Hi, Dame Eliza, bring a stoup of your best to Will to clear his throat. Go forward with thy song, and if our girl-faced clerk does not love it he can take to the road and go whence he came."

"Nay, but not too last," broke in Hordle John. "There are two words in this matter. It may be that my little comrade has been over quick in reproof, he having gone early into the cloisters and seen little of the rough ways and words of the world. Yet there is truth in what he says, for, as you know well, the song was not of the cleanest. I shall stand by him, therefore, and he shall neither be put out on the road, nor shall his ears be offended indoors."

"Indeed, your high and mighty grace," sneered one of the yeomen, "have you in sooth so ordained?"

"By the Virgin!" said a second, "I think that you may both chance to find yourselves upon the road before long."

"And so belabored as to be scarce able to crawl along it," cried a third.

"Nay, I shall go! I shall go!" said Alleyne hurriedly, as Hordle John began to slowly roll up his sleeve, and bare an arm like a leg of mutton. "I would not have you brawl about me."

"Hush! lad," he whispered, "I count them not a fly. They may find they have more tow on their distaff than they know how to spin. Stand thou clear and give me space."

Both the foresters and the laborers had risen from their bench, and Dame Eliza and the travelling doctor had flung themselves between the two parties with soft words and soothing gestures, when the door of the "Pied Merlin" was flung violently open, and the attention of the company was drawn from their own quarrel to the new-comer who had burst so unceremoniously upon them.

CHAPTER VI. HOW SAMKIN AYLWARD WAGERED HIS FEATHER-BED.

He was a middle-sized man, of most massive and robust build, with an arching chest and extraordinary breadth of shoulder. His shaven face was as brown as a hazel-nut, tanned and dried by the weather, with harsh, well-marked features, which were not improved by a long white scar which stretched from the corner of his left nostril to the angle of the jaw. His eyes were bright and searching, with something of menace and of authority in their quick glitter, and his mouth was firm-set and hard, as befitted one who was wont to set his face against danger. A straight sword by his side and a painted long-bow jutting over his shoulder proclaimed his profession, while his scarred brigandine of chain-mail and his dinted steel cap showed that he was no holiday soldier, but one who was even now fresh from the wars. A white surcoat with the lion of St. George in red upon the centre covered his broad breast, while a sprig of new-plucked broom at the side of his head-gear gave a touch of gayety and grace to his grim, war-worn equipment.

“Ha!” he cried, blinking like an owl in the sudden glare. “Good even to you, comrades! Hola! a woman, by my soul!” and in an instant he had clipped Dame Eliza round the waist and was kissing her violently. His eye happening to wander upon the maid, however, he instantly abandoned the mistress and danced off after the other, who scurried in confusion up one of the ladders, and dropped the heavy trap-door upon her pursuer. He then turned back and saluted the landlady once more with the utmost relish and satisfaction.

“La petite is frightened,” said he. “Ah, c’est l’amour, l’amour! Curse this trick of French, which will stick to my throat. I must wash it out with some good English ale. By my hilt! camarades, there is no drop of French blood in my body, and I am a true English bowman, Samkin Aylward by name; and I tell you, mes amis, that it warms my very heart-roots to set my feet on the dear old land once more. When I came off the galley at Hythe, this very day, I down on my bones, and I kissed the good brown earth, as I kiss thee now, ma belle, for it was eight long years since I had seen it. The very smell of it seemed life to me. But where are my six rascals? Hola, there! En avant!"

At the order, six men, dressed as common drudges, marched solemnly into the room, each bearing a huge bundle upon his head. They formed in military line, while the soldier stood in front of them with stern eyes, checking off their several packages.

"Number one — a French feather-bed with the two counter-panes of white sendall," said he.

"Here, worthy sir," answered the first of the bearers, laying a great package down in the corner.

"Number two — seven ells of red Turkey cloth and nine ells of cloth of gold. Put it down by the other. Good dame, I prythee give each of these men a bottrine of wine or a jack of ale. Three — a full piece of white Genoan velvet with twelve ells of purple silk. Thou rascal, there is dirt on the hem! Thou hast brushed it against some wall, coquin!"

"Not I, most worthy sir," cried the carrier, shrinking away from the fierce eyes of the bowman.

"I say yes, dog! By the three kings! I have seen a man gasp out his last breath for less. Had you gone through the pain and unease that I have done to earn these things you would be at more care. I swear by my ten finger-bones that there is not one of them that hath not cost its weight in French blood! Four — an incense-boat, a ewer of silver, a gold buckle and a cope worked in pearls. I found them, camarades, at the Church of St. Denis in the harrying of Narbonne, and I took them away with me lest they fall into the hands of the wicked. Five — a cloak of fur turned up with minever, a gold goblet with stand and cover, and a box of rose-coloured sugar. See that you lay them together. Six — a box of monies, three pounds of Limousine gold-work, a pair of boots, silver tagged, and, lastly, a store of naping linen. So, the tally is complete! Here is a groat apiece, and you may go."

"Go whither, worthy sir?" asked one of the carriers.

"Whither? To the devil if ye will. What is it to me? Now, ma belle, to supper. A pair of cold capons, a mortress of brawn, or what you will, with a flask or two of the right Gascony. I have crowns in my pouch, my sweet, and I mean to spend them. Bring in wine while the food is dressing. Buvons my brave lads; you shall each empty a stoup with me."

Here was an offer which the company in an English inn at that or any other date are slow to refuse. The flagons were re-gathered and came back with the white foam dripping over their edges. Two of the woodmen and three of the laborers drank their portions off hurriedly and trooped off together, for their homes were distant and the hour late. The others, however, drew closer, leaving the place of honor to the right of the gleeman to the free-handed new-comer. He had thrown off his steel cap and his brigandine, and had placed them with his sword, his quiver and his painted long-bow, on the top of his varied heap of plunder in the corner. Now, with his thick and somewhat bowed legs stretched in front of the blaze, his green jerkin thrown open, and a great quart pot held in his corded fist, he looked the picture of comfort and of good-fellowship. His hard-set face had softened, and the thick crop of crisp brown curls which had been hidden by his helmet grew low upon his massive neck. He might have been forty years of age, though hard toil and harder pleasure had left their grim marks upon his features. Alleyne had ceased painting his pied merlin, and sat, brush in hand, staring with open eyes at a type of man so strange and so unlike any whom he had met. Men had been good or had been bad in his catalogue, but here was a man who was fierce one instant and gentle the next, with a curse on his lips and a smile in his eye. What was to be made of such a man as that?

It chanced that the soldier looked up and saw the questioning glance which the young clerk threw upon him. He raised his flagon and drank to him, with a merry flash of his white teeth.

“A toi, mon garcon,” he cried. “Hast surely never seen a man-at-arms, that thou shouldst stare so?”

“I never have,” said Alleyne frankly, “though I have oft heard talk of their deeds.”

“By my hilt!” cried the other, “if you were to cross the narrow sea you would find them as thick as bees at a tee-hole. Couldst not shoot a bolt down any street of Bordeaux, I warrant, but you would pink archer, squire, or knight. There are more breastplates than gaberdines to be seen, I promise you.”

“And where got you all these pretty things?” asked Hordle John, pointing at the heap in the corner.

“Where there is as much more waiting for any brave lad to pick it up. Where a good man can always earn a good wage, and where he need look upon no man as his paymaster, but just reach his hand out and help himself. Aye, it is a goodly and a proper life. And here I drink to mine old comrades, and the saints be with them! Arouse all together, me, enfants, under pain of my displeasure. To Sir Claude Latour and the White Company!"

"Sir Claude Latour and the White Company!" shouted the travellers, draining off their goblets.

"Well quaffed, mes braves! It is for me to fill your cups again, since you have drained them to my dear lads of the white jerkin. Hola! mon ange, bring wine and ale. How runs the old stave? —

We'll drink all together
To the gray goose feather
And the land where the gray goose flew."

He roared out the catch in a harsh, unmusical voice, and ended with a shout of laughter. "I trust that I am a better bowman than a minstrel," said he.

"Methinks I have some remembrance of the lilt," remarked the gleeman, running his fingers over the strings, "Hoping that it will give thee no offence, most holy sir" — with a vicious snap at Alleyne—"and with the kind permit of the company, I will even venture upon it."

Many a time in the after days Alleyne Edricson seemed to see that scene, for all that so many which were stranger and more stirring were soon to crowd upon him. The fat, red-faced gleeman, the listening group, the archer with upraised finger beating in time to the music, and the huge sprawling figure of Hordle John, all thrown into red light and black shadow by the flickering fire in the centre — memory was to come often lovingly back to it. At the time he was lost in admiration at the deft way in which the jongleur disguised the loss of his two missing strings, and the lusty, hearty fashion in which he trolled out his little ballad of the outland bowmen, which ran in some such fashion as this:

 What of the bow?
  The bow was made in England:
Of true wood, of yew wood,
 The wood of English bows;
  So men who are free
  Love the old yew tree
And the land where the yew tree grows.

 What of the cord?
  The cord was made in England:

A rough cord, a tough cord,
  A cord that bowmen love;
    So we'll drain our jacks
    To the English flax
And the land where the hemp was wove.

  What of the shaft?
    The shaft was cut in England:
A long shaft, a strong shaft,
  Barbed and trim and true;
    So we'll drink all together
    To the gray goose feather
And the land where the gray goose flew.

  What of the men?
    The men were bred in England:
The bowman — the yeoman —
  The lads of dale and fell
    Here's to you — and to you;
    To the hearts that are true
And the land where the true hearts dwell.

"Well sung, by my hilt!" shouted the archer in high delight. "Many a night have I heard that song, both in the old war-time and after in the days of the White Company, when Black Simon of Norwich would lead the stave, and four hundred of the best bowmen that ever drew string would come roaring in upon the chorus. I have seen old John Hawkwood, the same who has led half the Company into Italy, stand laughing in his beard as he heard it, until his plates rattled again. But to get the full smack of it ye must yourselves be English bowmen, and be far off upon an outland soil."

Whilst the song had been singing Dame Eliza and the maid had placed a board across two trestles, and had laid upon it the knife, the spoon, the salt, the tranchoir of bread, and finally the smoking dish which held the savory supper. The archer settled himself to it like one who had known what it was to find good food scarce; but his tongue still went as merrily as his teeth.

"It passes me," he cried, "how all you lusty fellows can bide scratching your backs at home when there are such doings over the seas. Look at me — what have I to do? It is but the eye to the cord, the cord to the shaft, and the shaft to the mark. There is the whole song of it. It is but what you do yourselves for pleasure upon a Sunday evening at the parish village butts."

"And the wage?" asked a laborer.

"You see what the wage brings," he answered. "I eat of the best, and I drink deep. I treat my friend, and I ask no friend to treat me. I clap a silk gown on my girl's back. Never a knight's lady shall be better betrimmed and betrinketed. How of all that, mon garcon? And how of the heap of trifles that you can see for yourselves in yonder corner? They are from the South French, every one, upon whom I have been making war. By my hilt! camarades, I think that I may let my plunder speak for itself."

"It seems indeed to be a goodly service," said the tooth-drawer.

"Tete bleu! yes, indeed. Then there is the chance of a ransom. Why, look you, in the affair at Brignais some four years back, when the companies slew James of Bourbon, and put his army to the sword, there was scarce a man of ours who had not count, baron, or knight. Peter Karsdale, who was but a common country lout newly brought over, with the English fleas still hopping under his doublet, laid his great hands upon the Sieur Amaury de Chatonville, who owns half Picardy, and had five thousand crowns out of him, with his horse and harness. 'Tis true that a French wench took it all off Peter as quick as the Frenchman paid it; but what then? By the twang of string! it would be a bad thing if money was not made to be spent; and how better than on woman — eh, ma belle?"

"It would indeed be a bad thing if we had not our brave archers to bring wealth and kindly customs into the country," quoth Dame Eliza, on whom the soldier's free and open ways had made a deep impression.

"A toi, ma cherie!" said he, with his hand over his heart. "Hola! there is la petite peeping from behind the door. A toi, aussi, ma petite! Mon Dieu! but the lass has a good colour!"

"There is one thing, fair sir," said the Cambridge student in his piping voice, "which I would fain that you would make more clear. As I understand it, there was peace made at the town of Bretigny some six years back between our most gracious monarch and the King of the French. This being so, it seems most passing strange that you should talk so loudly of war and of companies when there is no quarrel between the French and us."

"Meaning that I lie," said the archer, laying down his knife.

"May heaven forfend!" cried the student hastily. "*Magna est veritas sed rara*, which means in the Latin tongue that archers are all honorable men. I come to you seeking knowledge, for it is my trade to learn."

"I fear that you are yet a 'prentice to that trade," quoth the soldier; "for there is no child over the water but could answer what you ask. Know then that though there may be peace between our own provinces and the French, yet within the marches of France there is always war, for the country is much divided against itself, and is furthermore harried by bands of flayers, skinners, Brabacons, tardvenus, and the rest of them. When every man's grip is on his neighbour's throat, and every five-sous-piece of a baron is marching with tuck of drum to fight whom he will, it would be a strange thing if five hundred brave English boys could not pick up a living. Now that Sir John Hawkwood hath gone with the East Anglian lads and the Nottingham woodmen into the service of the Marquis of Montferrat to fight against the Lord of Milan, there are but ten score of us left, yet I trust that I may be able to bring some back with me to fill the ranks of the White Company. By the tooth of Peter! it would be a bad thing if I could not muster many a Hamptonshire man who would be ready to strike in under the red flag of St. George, and the more so if Sir Nigel Loring, of Christchurch, should don hauberk once more and take the lead of us."

"Ah, you would indeed be in luck then," quoth a woodman; "for it is said that, setting aside the prince, and mayhap good old Sir John Chandos, there was not in the whole army a man of such tried courage."

"It is sooth, every word of it," the archer answered. "I have seen him with these two eyes in a stricken field, and never did man carry himself better. Mon Dieu! yes, ye would not credit it to look at him, or to hearken to his soft voice, but from the sailing from Orwell down to the foray to Paris, and that is clear twenty years, there was not a skirmish, onfall, sally, bushment, escalado or battle, but Sir Nigel was in the heart of it. I go now to Christchurch with a letter to him from Sir Claude Latour to ask him if he will take the place of Sir John Hawkwood; and there is the more chance that he will if I bring one or two likely men at my heels. What say you, woodman: wilt leave the bucks to loose a shaft at a nobler mark?"

The forester shook his head. "I have wife and child at Emery Down," quoth he; "I would not leave them for such a venture."

"You, then, young sir?" asked the archer.

"Nay, I am a man of peace," said Alleyne Edricson. "Besides, I have other work to do."

"Peste!" growled the soldier, striking his flagon on the board until the dishes danced again. "What, in the name of the devil, hath come over the folk? Why sit ye all moping by the fireside, like crows round a dead horse, when there is man's work to be done within a few short leagues of ye? Out upon you all, as a set of laggards and hang-backs! By my hilt I believe that the men of England are all in France already, and that what is left behind are in sooth the women dressed up in their paltocks and hosen."

"Archer," quoth Hordle John, "you have lied more than once and more than twice; for which, and also because I see much in you to dislike, I am sorely tempted to lay you upon your back."

"By my hilt! then, I have found a man at last!" shouted the bowman. "And, 'fore God, you are a better man than I take you for if you can lay me on my back, mon garcon. I have won the ram more times than there are toes to my feet, and for seven long years I have found no man in the Company who could make my jerkin dusty."

"We have had enough bobance and boasting," said Hordle John, rising and throwing off his doublet. "I will show you that there are better men left in England than ever went thieving to France."

"Pasques Dieu!" cried the archer, loosening his jerkin, and eyeing his foeman over with the keen glance of one who is a judge of manhood. "I have only once before seen such a body of a man. By your leave, my red-headed friend, I should be right sorry to exchange buffets with you; and I will allow that there is no man in the Company who would pull against you on a rope; so let that be a salve to your pride. On the other hand I should judge that you have led a life of ease for some months back, and that my muscle is harder than your own. I am ready to wager upon myself against you if you are not afeard."

"Afeard, thou lurden!" growled big John. "I never saw the face yet of the man that I was afeard of. Come out, and we shall see who is the better man."

"But the wager?"

"I have nought to wager. Come out for the love and the lust of the thing."

"Nought to wager!" cried the soldier. "Why, you have that which I covet above all things. It is that big body of thine that I am after. See, now, mon garcon. I have a French feather-bed there, which I have been at pains to keep these years back. I had it at the sacking of Issodun, and the King himself hath not such a bed. If you throw me, it is thine; but, if I throw you, then you are under a vow to take bow and bill and hie with me to France, there to serve in the White Company as long as we be enrolled."

"A fair wager!" cried all the travellers, moving back their benches and trestles, so as to give fair field for the wrestlers.

"Then you may bid farewell to your bed, soldier," said Hordle John.

"Nay; I shall keep the bed, and I shall have you to France in spite of your teeth, and you shall live to thank me for it. How shall it be, then, mon enfant? Collar and elbow, or close-lock, or catch how you can?"

"To the devil with your tricks," said John, opening and shutting his great red hands. "Stand forth, and let me clip thee."

"Shalt clip me as best you can then," quoth the archer, moving out into the open space, and keeping a most wary eye upon his opponent. He had thrown off his green jerkin, and his chest was covered only by a pink silk jupon, or undershirt, cut low in the neck and sleeveless. Hordle John was stripped from his waist upwards, and his huge body, with his great muscles swelling out like the gnarled roots of an oak, towered high above the soldier. The other, however, though near a foot shorter, was a man of great strength; and there was a gloss upon his white skin which was wanting in the heavier limbs of the renegade monk. He was quick on his feet, too, and skilled at the game; so that it was clear, from the poise of head and shine of eye, that he counted the chances to be in his favor. It would have been hard that night, through the whole length of England, to set up a finer pair in face of each other.

Big John stood waiting in the centre with a sullen, menacing eye, and his red hair in a bristle, while the archer paced lightly and swiftly to the right and the left with crooked knee and hands advanced. Then with a sudden dash, so swift and fierce that the eye could scarce follow it, he flew in upon his man and locked his leg round him. It was a grip that, between men of equal strength, would mean a fall; but Hordle John tore him off from him as he might a rat, and hurled him across the room, so that his head cracked up against the wooden wall.

"Ma foi!" cried the bowman, passing his fingers through his curls, "you were not far from the feather-bed then, mon gar. A little more and this good hostel would have a new window."

Nothing daunted, he approached his man once more, but this time with more caution than before. With a quick feint he threw the other off his guard, and then, bounding upon him, threw his legs round his waist and his arms round his bull-neck, in the hope of bearing him to the ground with the sudden shock. With a bellow of rage, Hordle John squeezed him limp in his huge arms; and then, picking him up, cast him down upon the floor with a force which might well have splintered a bone or two, had not the archer with the most perfect coolness clung to the other's forearms to break his fall. As it was, he dropped upon his feet and kept his balance, though it sent a jar through his frame which set every joint a-creaking. He bounded back from his perilous foeman; but the other, heated by the bout, rushed madly after him, and so gave the practised wrestler the very vantage for which he had planned. As big John flung himself upon him, the archer ducked under the great red hands that clutched for him, and, catching his man round the thighs, hurled him over his shoulder — helped as much by his own mad rush as by the trained strength of the heave. To Alleyne's eye, it was as if John had taken unto himself wings and flown. As he hurtled through the air, with giant limbs revolving, the lad's heart was in his mouth; for surely no man ever yet had such a fall and came scathless out of it. In truth, hardy as the man was, his neck had been assuredly broken had he not pitched head first on the very midriff of the drunken artist, who was slumbering so peacefully in the corner, all unaware of these stirring doings. The luckless limner, thus suddenly brought out from his dreams, sat up with a piercing yell, while Hordle John bounded back into the circle almost as rapidly as he had left it.

"One more fall, by all the saints!" he cried, throwing out his arms.

"Not I," quoth the archer, pulling on his clothes, "I have come well out of the business. I would sooner wrestle with the great bear of Navarre."

"It was a trick," cried John.

"Aye was it. By my ten finger-bones! it is a trick that will add a proper man to the ranks of the Company."

"Oh, for that," said the other, "I count it not a fly; for I had promised myself a good hour ago that I should go with thee, since the life seems to be a goodly and proper one. Yet I would fain have had the feather-bed."

"I doubt it not, mon ami," quoth the archer, going back to his tankard. "Here is to thee, lad, and may we be good comrades to each other! But, hola! what is it that ails our friend of the wrathful face?"

The unfortunate limner had been sitting up rubbing himself ruefully and staring about with a vacant gaze, which showed that he knew neither where he was nor what had occurred to him. Suddenly, however, a flash of intelligence had come over his sodden features, and he rose and staggered for the door. "'Ware the ale!" he said in a hoarse whisper, shaking a warning finger at the company. "Oh, holy Virgin, 'ware the ale!" and slapping his hands to his injury, he flitted off into the darkness, amid a shout of laughter, in which the vanquished joined as merrily as the victor. The remaining forester and the two laborers were also ready for the road, and the rest of the company turned to the blankets which Dame Eliza and the maid had laid out for them upon the floor. Alleyne, weary with the unwonted excitements of the day, was soon in a deep slumber broken only by fleeting visions of twittering legs, cursing beggars, black robbers, and the many strange folk whom he had met at the "Pied Merlin."

CHAPTER VII. HOW THE THREE COMRADES JOURNEYED THROUGH THE WOODLANDS.

At early dawn the country inn was all alive, for it was rare indeed that an hour of daylight would be wasted at a time when lighting was so scarce and dear. Indeed, early as it was when Dame Eliza began to stir, it seemed that others could be earlier still, for the door was ajar, and the learned student of Cambridge had taken himself off, with a mind which was too intent upon the high things of antiquity to stoop to consider the four-pence which he owed for bed and board. It was the shrill out-cry of the landlady when she found her loss, and the clucking of the hens, which had streamed in through the open door, that first broke in upon the slumbers of the tired wayfarers.

Once afoot, it was not long before the company began to disperse. A sleek mule with red trappings was brought round from some neighbouring shed for the physician, and he ambled away with much dignity upon his road to Southampton. The tooth-drawer and the gleeman called for a cup of small ale apiece, and started off together for Ringwood fair, the old jongleur looking very yellow in the eye and swollen in the face after his overnight potations. The archer, however, who had drunk more than any man in the room, was as merry as a grig, and having kissed the matron and chased the maid up the ladder once more, he went out to the brook, and came back with the water dripping from his face and hair.

“Hola! my man of peace,” he cried to Alleyne, “whither are you bent this morning?”

“To Minstead,” quoth he. “My brother Simon Edricson is socman there, and I go to bide with him for a while. I prythee, let me have my score, good dame.”

“Score, indeed!” cried she, standing with upraised hands in front of the panel on which Alleyne had worked the night before. “Say, rather what it is that I owe to thee, good youth. Aye, this is indeed a pied merlin, and with a leveret under its claws, as I am a living woman. By the rood of Waltham! but thy touch is deft and dainty.”

“And see the red eye of it!” cried the maid.

"Aye, and the open beak."

"And the ruffled wing," added Hordle John.

"By my hilt!" cried the archer, "it is the very bird itself."

The young clerk flushed with pleasure at this chorus of praise, rude and indiscriminate indeed, and yet so much heartier and less grudging than any which he had ever heard from the critical brother Jerome, or the short-spoken Abbot. There was, it would seem, great kindness as well as great wickedness in this world, of which he had heard so little that was good. His hostess would hear nothing of his paying either for bed or for board, while the archer and Hordle John placed a hand upon either shoulder and led him off to the board, where some smoking fish, a dish of spinach, and a jug of milk were laid out for their breakfast.

"I should not be surprised to learn, mon camarade," said the soldier, as he heaped a slice of fish upon Alleyne's tranchoir of bread, "that you could read written things, since you are so ready with your brushes and pigments."

"It would be shame to the good brothers of Beaulieu if I could not," he answered, "seeing that I have been their clerk this ten years back."

The bowman looked at him with great respect. "Think of that!" said he. "And you with not a hair to your face, and a skin like a girl. I can shoot three hundred and fifty paces with my little popper there, and four hundred and twenty with the great war-bow; yet I can make nothing of this, nor read my own name if you were to set 'Sam Aylward' up against me. In the whole Company there was only one man who could read, and he fell down a well at the taking of Ventadour, which proves what the thing is not suited to a soldier, though most needful to a clerk."

"I can make some show at it," said big John; "though I was scarce long enough among the monks to catch the whole trick of it.

"Here, then, is something to try upon," quoth the archer, pulling a square of parchment from the inside of his tunic. It was tied securely with a broad band of purple silk, and firmly sealed at either end with a large red seal. John pored long and earnestly over the inscription upon the back, with his brows bent as one who bears up against great mental strain.

"Not having read much of late," he said, "I am loth to say too much about what this may be. Some might say one thing and some another, just as one bowman loves the yew, and a second will not shoot save with the ash. To me, by the length and the look of it, I should judge this to be a verse from one of the Psalms."

The bowman shook his head. "It is scarce likely," he said, "that Sir Claude Latour should send me all the way across seas with nought more weighty than a psalm-verse. You have clean overshot the butts this time, mon camarade. Give it to the little one. I will wager my feather-bed that he makes more sense of it."

"Why, it is written in the French tongue," said Alleyne, "and in a right clerkly hand. This is how it runs: 'A le moult puissant et moult honorable chevalier, Sir Nigel Loring de Christchurch, de son tres fidele ami Sir Claude Latour, capitaine de la Compagnie blanche, chatelain de Biscar, grand seigneur de Montchateau, vavaseur de le renomme Gaston, Comte de Foix, tenant les droits de la haute justice, de la milieu, et de la basse.' Which signifies in our speech: 'To the very powerful and very honorable knight, Sir Nigel Loring of Christchurch, from his very faithful friend Sir Claude Latour, captain of the White Company, chatelain of Biscar, grand lord of Montchateau and vassal to the renowned Gaston, Count of Foix, who holds the rights of the high justice, the middle and the low.'"

"Look at that now!" cried the bowman in triumph. "That is just what he would have said."

"I can see now that it is even so," said John, examining the parchment again. "Though I scarce understand this high, middle and low."

"By my hilt! you would understand it if you were Jacques Bonhomme. The low justice means that you may fleece him, and the middle that you may torture him, and the high that you may slay him. That is about the truth of it. But this is the letter which I am to take; and since the platter is clean it is time that we trussed up and were afoot. You come with me, mon gros Jean; and as to you, little one, where did you say that you journeyed?"

"To Minstead."

"Ah, yes. I know this forest country well, though I was born myself in the Hundred of Easebourne, in the Rape of Chichester, hard by the village of Midhurst. Yet I have not a word to say against the Hampton men, for there are no better comrades or truer archers in the whole Company than some who learned to loose the string in these very parts. We shall travel round with you to Minstead lad, seeing that it is little out of our way."

"I am ready," said Alleyne, right pleased at the thought of such company upon the road.

“So am not I. I must store my plunder at this inn, since the hostess is an honest woman. Hola! ma cherie, I wish to leave with you my gold-work, my velvet, my silk, my feather bed, my incense-boat, my ewer, my naping linen, and all the rest of it. I take only the money in a linen bag, and the box of rose coloured sugar which is a gift from my captain to the Lady Loring. Wilt guard my treasure for me?”

“It shall be put in the safest loft, good archer. Come when you may, you shall find it ready for you.”

“Now, there is a true friend!” cried the bowman, taking her hand. “There is a bonne amie! English land and English women, say I, and French wine and French plunder. I shall be back anon, mon ange. I am a lonely man, my sweeting, and I must settle some day when the wars are over and done. Mayhap you and I —— Ah, mechante, mechante! There is la petite peeping from behind the door. Now, John, the sun is over the trees; you must be brisker than this when the bugleman blows ‘Bows and Bills.’”

“I have been waiting this time back,” said Hordle John gruffly.

“Then we must be off. Adieu, ma vie! The two livres shall settle the score and buy some ribbons against the next kermesse. Do not forget Sam Aylward, for his heart shall ever be thine alone — and thine, ma petite! So, marchons, and may St. Julian grant us as good quarters elsewhere!”

The sun had risen over Ashurst and Denny woods, and was shining brightly, though the eastern wind had a sharp flavor to it, and the leaves were flickering thickly from the trees. In the High Street of Lyndhurst the wayfarers had to pick their way, for the little town was crowded with the guardsmen, grooms, and yeomen prickers who were attached to the King’s hunt. The King himself was staying at Castle Malwood, but several of his suite had been compelled to seek such quarters as they might find in the wooden or wattle-and-daub cottages of the village. Here and there a small escutcheon, peeping from a glassless window, marked the night’s lodging of knight or baron. These coats-of-arms could be read, where a scroll would be meaningless, and the bowman, like most men of his age, was well versed in the common symbols of heraldry.

“There is the Saracen’s head of Sir Bernard Brocas,” quoth he. “I saw him last at the ruffle at Poictiers some ten years back, when he bore himself like a man. He is the master of the King’s horse, and can sing a right jovial stave, though in that he cannot come nigh to Sir John Chandos, who is first at the board or in the saddle. Three martlets on a field azure, that must be one of the Luttrells. By the crescent upon it, it should be the second son of old Sir Hugh, who had a bolt through his ankle at the intaking of Romorantin, he having rushed into the fray ere his squire had time to clasp his solleret to his greave. There too is the hackle which is the old device of the De Brays. I have served under Sir Thomas de Bray, who was as jolly as a pie, and a lusty swordsman until he got too fat for his harness."

So the archer gossiped as the three wayfarers threaded their way among the stamping horses, the busy grooms, and the knots of pages and squires who disputed over the merits of their masters' horses and deer-hounds. As they passed the old church, which stood upon a mound at the left-hand side of the village street the door was flung open, and a stream of worshippers wound down the sloping path, coming from the morning mass, all chattering like a cloud of jays. Alleyne bent knee and doffed hat at the sight of the open door; but ere he had finished an ave his comrades were out of sight round the curve of the path, and he had to run to overtake them.

"What!" he said, "not one word of prayer before God's own open house? How can ye hope for His blessing upon the day?"

"My friend," said Hordle John, "I have prayed so much during the last two months, not only during the day, but at matins, lauds, and the like, when I could scarce keep my head upon my shoulders for nodding, that I feel that I have somewhat over-prayed myself."

"How can a man have too much religion?" cried Alleyne earnestly. "It is the one thing that availeth. A man is but a beast as he lives from day to day, eating and drinking, breathing and sleeping. It is only when he raises himself, and concerns himself with the immortal spirit within him, that he becomes in very truth a man. Bethink ye how sad a thing it would be that the blood of the Redeemer should be spilled to no purpose."

"Bless the lad, if he doth not blush like any girl, and yet preach like the whole College of Cardinals," cried the archer.

"In truth I blush that any one so weak and so unworthy as I should try to teach another that which he finds it so passing hard to follow himself."

"Prettily said, mon garcon. Touching that same slaying of the Redeemer, it was a bad business. A good padre in France read to us from a scroll the whole truth of the matter. The soldiers came upon him in the garden. In truth, these Apostles of His may have been holy men, but they were of no great account as men-at-arms. There was one, indeed, Sir Peter, who smote out like a true man; but, unless he is belied, he did but clip a varlet's ear, which was no very knightly deed. By these ten finger-bones! had I been there with Black Simon of Norwich, and but one score picked men of the Company, we had held them in play. Could we do no more, we had at least filled the false knight, Sir Judas, so full of English arrows that he would curse the day that ever he came on such an errand."

The young clerk smiled at his companion's earnestness. "Had He wished help," he said, "He could have summoned legions of archangels from heaven, so what need had He of your poor bow and arrow? Besides, bethink you of His own words — that those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword."

"And how could man die better?" asked the archer. "If I had my wish, it would be to fall so — not, mark you, in any mere skirmish of the Company, but in a stricken field, with the great lion banner waving over us and the red oriflamme in front, amid the shouting of my fellows and the twanging of the strings. But let it be sword, lance, or bolt that strikes me down: for I should think it shame to die from an iron ball from the fire-crake or bombard or any such unsoldierly weapon, which is only fitted to scare babes with its foolish noise and smoke."

"I have heard much even in the quiet cloisters of these new and dreadful engines," quoth Alleyne. "It is said, though I can scarce bring myself to believe it, that they will send a ball twice as far as a bowman can shoot his shaft, and with such force as to break through armor of proof."

"True enough, my lad. But while the armorer is thrusting in his devil's-dust, and dropping his ball, and lighting his flambeau, I can very easily loose six shafts, or eight maybe, so he hath no great vantage after all. Yet I will not deny that at the intaking of a town it is well to have good store of bombards. I am told that at Calais they made dints in the wall that a man might put his head into. But surely, comrades, some one who is grievously hurt hath passed along this road before us."

All along the woodland track there did indeed run a scattered straggling trail of blood-marks, sometimes in single drops, and in other places in broad, ruddy gouts, smudged over the dead leaves or crimsoning the white flint stones.

"It must be a stricken deer," said John.

"Nay, I am woodman enough to see that no deer hath passed this way this morning; and yet the blood is fresh. But hark to the sound!"

They stood listening all three with sidelong heads. Through the silence of the great forest there came a swishing, whistling sound, mingled with the most dolorous groans, and the voice of a man raised in a high quavering kind of song. The comrades hurried onwards eagerly, and topping the brow of a small rising they saw upon the other side the source from which these strange noises arose.

A tall man, much stooped in the shoulders, was walking slowly with bended head and clasped hands in the centre of the path. He was dressed from head to foot in a long white linen cloth, and a high white cap with a red cross printed upon it. His gown was turned back from his shoulders, and the flesh there was a sight to make a man wince, for it was all beaten to a pulp, and the blood was soaking into his gown and trickling down upon the ground. Behind him walked a smaller man with his hair touched with gray, who was clad in the same white garb. He intoned a long whining rhyme in the French tongue, and at the end of every line he raised a thick cord, all jagged with pellets of lead, and smote his companion across the shoulders until the blood spurted again. Even as the three wayfarers stared, however, there was a sudden change, for the smaller man, having finished his song, loosened his own gown and handed the scourge to the other, who took up the stave once more and lashed his companion with all the strength of his bare and sinewy arm. So, alternately beating and beaten, they made their dolorous way through the beautiful woods and under the amber arches of the fading beech-trees, where the calm strength and majesty of Nature might serve to rebuke the foolish energies and misspent strivings of mankind.

Such a spectacle was new to Hordle John or to Alleyne Edricson; but the archer treated it lightly, as a common matter enough.

“These are the Beating Friars, otherwise called the Flagellants,” quoth he. “I marvel that ye should have come upon none of them before, for across the water they are as common as gallybaggers. I have heard that there are no English among them, but that they are from France, Italy and Bohemia. En avant, camarades! that we may have speech with them.”

As they came up to them, Alleyne could hear the doleful dirge which the beater was chanting, bringing down his heavy whip at the end of each line, while the groans of the sufferer formed a sort of dismal chorus. It was in old French, and ran somewhat in this way:

Or avant, entre nous tous freres

Battons nos charognes bien fort
En remembrant la grant misere
De Dieu et sa piteuse mort
Qui fut pris en la gent amere
Et vendus et trais a tort
Et bastu sa chair, vierge et dere
Au nom de ce battons plus fort.

Then at the end of the verse the scourge changed hands and the chanting began anew.

"Truly, holy fathers," said the archer in French as they came abreast of them, "you have beaten enough for to-day. The road is all spotted like a shambles at Martinmas. Why should ye mishandle yourselves thus?"

"C'est pour vos peches — pour vos peches," they droned, looking at the travellers with sad lack-lustre eyes, and then bent to their bloody work once more without heed to the prayers and persuasions which were addressed to them. Finding all remonstrance useless, the three comrades hastened on their way, leaving these strange travellers to their dreary task.

"Mort Dieu!" cried the bowman, "there is a bucketful or more of my blood over in France, but it was all spilled in hot fight, and I should think twice before I drew it drop by drop as these friars are doing. By my hilt! our young one here is as white as a Picardy cheese. What is amiss then, mon cher?"

"It is nothing," Alleyne answered. "My life has been too quiet, I am not used to such sights."

"Ma foi!" the other cried, "I have never yet seen a man who was so stout of speech and yet so weak of heart."

"Not so, friend," quoth big John; "it is not weakness of heart for I know the lad well. His heart is as good as thine or mine but he hath more in his pate than ever you will carry under that tin pot of thine, and as a consequence he can see farther into things, so that they weigh upon him more."

"Surely to any man it is a sad sight," said Alleyne, "to see these holy men, who have done no sin themselves, suffering so for the sins of others. Saints are they, if in this age any may merit so high a name."

"I count them not a fly," cried Hordle John; "for who is the better for all their whipping and yowling? They are like other friars, I trow, when all is done. Let them leave their backs alone, and beat the pride out of their hearts."

"By the three kings! there is sooth in what you say," remarked the archer. "Besides, methinks if I were le bon Dieu, it would bring me little joy to see a poor devil cutting the flesh off his bones; and I should think that he had but a small opinion of me, that he should hope to please me by such provost-marshal work. No, by my hilt! I should look with a more loving eye upon a jolly archer who never harmed a fallen foe and never feared a hale one."

"Doubtless you mean no sin," said Alleyne. "If your words are wild, it is not for me to judge them. Can you not see that there are other foes in this world besides Frenchmen, and as much glory to be gained in conquering them? Would it not be a proud day for knight or squire if he could overthrow seven adversaries in the lists? Yet here are we in the lists of life, and there come the seven black champions against us Sir Pride, Sir Covetousness, Sir Lust, Sir Anger, Sir Gluttony, Sir Envy, and Sir Sloth. Let a man lay those seven low, and he shall have the prize of the day, from the hands of the fairest queen of beauty, even from the Virgin-Mother herself. It is for this that these men mortify their flesh, and to set us an example, who would pamper ourselves overmuch. I say again that they are God's own saints, and I bow my head to them."

"And so you shall, mon petit," replied the archer. "I have not heard a man speak better since old Dom Bertrand died, who was at one time chaplain to the White Company. He was a very valiant man, but at the battle of Brignais he was spitted through the body by a Hainault man-at-arms. For this we had an excommunication read against the man, when next we saw our holy father at Avignon; but as we had not his name, and knew nothing of him, save that he rode a dapple-gray roussin, I have feared sometimes that the blight may have settled upon the wrong man."

"Your Company has been, then, to bow knee before our holy father, the Pope Urban, the prop and centre of Christendom?" asked Alleyne, much interested. "Perchance you have yourself set eyes upon his august face?"

"Twice I saw him," said the archer. "He was a lean little rat of a man, with a scab on his chin. The first time we had five thousand crowns out of him, though he made much ado about it. The second time we asked ten thousand, but it was three days before we could come to terms, and I am of opinion myself that we might have done better by plundering the palace.

His chamberlain and cardinals came forth, as I remember, to ask whether we would take seven thousand crowns with his blessing and a plenary absolution, or the ten thousand with his solemn ban by bell, book and candle. We were all of one mind that it was best to have the ten thousand with the curse; but in some way they prevailed upon Sir John, so that we were blest and shriven against our will. Perchance it is as well, for the Company were in need of it about that time."

The pious Alleyne was deeply shocked by this reminiscence. Involuntarily he glanced up and around to see if there were any trace of those opportune levin-flashes and thunderbolts which, in the "Acta Sanctorum," were wont so often to cut short the loose talk of the scoffer. The autumn sun streamed down as brightly as ever, and the peaceful red path still wound in front of them through the rustling, yellow-tinted forest, Nature seemed to be too busy with her own concerns to heed the dignity of an outraged pontiff. Yet he felt a sense of weight and reproach within his breast, as though he had sinned himself in giving ear to such words. The teachings of twenty years cried out against such license. It was not until he had thrown himself down before one of the many wayside crosses, and had prayed from his heart both for the archer and for himself, that the dark cloud rolled back again from his spirit.

CHAPTER VIII. THE THREE FRIENDS.

His companions had passed on whilst he was at his orisons; but his young blood and the fresh morning air both invited him to a scamper. His staff in one hand and his scrip in the other, with springy step and floating locks, he raced along the forest path, as active and as graceful as a young deer. He had not far to go, however; for, on turning a corner, he came on a roadside cottage with a wooden fence-work around it, where stood big John and Aylward the bowman, staring at something within. As he came up with them, he saw that two little lads, the one about nine years of age and the other somewhat older, were standing on the plot in front of the cottage, each holding out a round stick in their left hands, with their arms stiff and straight from the shoulder, as silent and still as two small statues. They were pretty, blue-eyed, yellow-haired lads, well made and sturdy, with bronzed skins, which spoke of a woodland life.

"Here are young chips from an old bow stave!" cried the soldier in great delight. "This is the proper way to raise children. By my hilt! I could not have trained them better had I the ordering of it myself."

"What is it then?" asked Hordle John. "They stand very stiff, and I trust that they have not been struck so."

"Nay, they are training their left arms, that they may have a steady grasp of the bow. So my own father trained me, and six days a week I held out his walking-staff till my arm was heavy as lead. Hola, mes enfants! how long will you hold out?"

"Until the sun is over the great lime-tree, good master," the elder answered.

"What would ye be, then? Woodmen? Verderers?"

"Nay, soldiers," they cried both together.

"By the beard of my father! but ye are whelps of the true breed. Why so keen, then, to be soldiers?"

"That we may fight the Scots," they answered. "Daddy will send us to fight the Scots."

"And why the Scots, my pretty lads? We have seen French and Spanish galleys no further away than Southampton, but I doubt that it will be some time before the Scots find their way to these parts."

“Our business is with the Scots,” quoth the elder; “for it was the Scots who cut off daddy’s string fingers and his thumbs.”

“Aye, lads, it was that,” said a deep voice from behind Alleyne’s shoulder. Looking round, the wayfarers saw a gaunt, big-boned man, with sunken cheeks and a sallow face, who had come up behind them. He held up his two hands as he spoke, and showed that the thumbs and two first fingers had been torn away from each of them.

“Ma foi, camarade!” cried Aylward. “Who hath served thee in so shameful a fashion?”

“It is easy to see, friend, that you were born far from the marches of Scotland,” quoth the stranger, with a bitter smile. “North of Humber there is no man who would not know the handiwork of Devil Douglas, the black Lord James.”

“And how fell you into his hands?” asked John.

“I am a man of the north country, from the town of Beverley and the wapentake of Holderness,” he answered. “There was a day when, from Trent to Tweed, there was no better marksman than Robin Heathcot. Yet, as you see, he hath left me, as he hath left many another poor border archer, with no grip for bill or bow. Yet the king hath given me a living here in the southlands, and please God these two lads of mine will pay off a debt that hath been owing over long. What is the price of daddy’s thumbs, boys?”

“Twenty Scottish lives,” they answered together.

“And for the fingers?”

“Half a score.”

“When they can bend my war-bow, and bring down a squirrel at a hundred paces, I send them to take service under Johnny Copeland, the Lord of the Marches and Governor of Carlisle. By my soul! I would give the rest of my fingers to see the Douglas within arrow-flight of them.”

“May you live to see it,” quoth the bowman. “And hark ye, mes enfants, take an old soldier’s rede and lay your bodies to the bow, drawing from hip and thigh as much as from arm. Learn also, I pray you, to shoot with a dropping shaft; for though a bowman may at times be called upon to shoot straight and fast, yet it is more often that he has to do with a town-guard behind a wall, or an arbalestier with his mantlet raised when you cannot hope to do him scathe unless your shaft fall straight upon him from the clouds. I have not drawn string for two weeks, but I may be able to show ye how such shots should be made.” He loosened his long-bow, slung his quiver round to the front, and then glanced keenly round for a fitting mark. There was a yellow and withered stump some way off, seen under the drooping branches of a lofty oak. The archer measured the distance with his eye; and then, drawing three shafts, he shot them off with such speed that the first had not reached the mark ere the last was on the string. Each arrow passed high over the oak; and, of the three, two stuck fair into the stump; while the third, caught in some wandering puff of wind, was driven a foot or two to one side.

"Good!" cried the north countryman. "Hearken to him lads! He is a master bowman. Your dad says amen to every word he says."

"By my hilt!" said Aylward, "if I am to preach on bowmanship, the whole long day would scarce give me time for my sermon. We have marksmen in the Company who will notch with a shaft every crevice and joint of a man-at-arm's harness, from the clasp of his bassinet to the hinge of his greave. But, with your favor, friend, I must gather my arrows again, for while a shaft costs a penny a poor man can scarce leave them sticking in wayside stumps. We must, then, on our road again, and I hope from my heart that you may train these two young goshawks here until they are ready for a cast even at such a quarry as you speak of."

Leaving the thumbless archer and his brood, the wayfarers struck through the scattered huts of Emery Down, and out on to the broad rolling heath covered deep in ferns and in heather, where droves of the half-wild black forest pigs were rooting about amongst the hillocks. The woods about this point fall away to the left and the right, while the road curves upwards and the wind sweeps keenly over the swelling uplands. The broad strips of bracken glowed red and yellow against the black peaty soil, and a queenly doe who grazed among them turned her white front and her great questioning eyes towards the wayfarers. Alleyne gazed in admiration at the supple beauty of the creature; but the archer's fingers played with his quiver, and his eyes glistened with the fell instinct which urges a man to slaughter.

"Tete Dieu!" he growled, "were this France, or even Guienne, we should have a fresh haunch for our none-meat. Law or no law, I have a mind to loose a bolt at her."

"I would break your stave across my knee first," cried John, laying his great hand upon the bow. "What! man, I am forest-born, and I know what comes of it. In our own township of Hordle two have lost their eyes and one his skin for this very thing. On my troth, I felt no great love when I first saw you, but since then I have conceived over much regard for you to wish to see the verderer’s flayer at work upon you.”

“It is my trade to risk my skin,” growled the archer; but none the less he thrust his quiver over his hip again and turned his face for the west.

As they advanced, the path still tended upwards, running from heath into copses of holly and yew, and so back into heath again. It was joyful to hear the merry whistle of blackbirds as they darted from one clump of greenery to the other. Now and again a peaty amber coloured stream rippled across their way, with ferny over-grown banks, where the blue kingfisher flitted busily from side to side, or the gray and pensive heron, swollen with trout and dignity, stood ankle-deep among the sedges. Chattering jays and loud wood-pigeons flapped thickly overhead, while ever and anon the measured tapping of Nature’s carpenter, the great green woodpecker, sounded from each wayside grove. On either side, as the path mounted, the long sweep of country broadened and expanded, sloping down on the one side through yellow forest and brown moor to the distant smoke of Lymington and the blue misty channel which lay alongside the sky-line, while to the north the woods rolled away, grove topping grove, to where in the furthest distance the white spire of Salisbury stood out hard and clear against the cloudless sky. To Alleyne whose days had been spent in the low-lying coastland, the eager upland air and the wide free country-side gave a sense of life and of the joy of living which made his young blood tingle in his veins. Even the heavy John was not unmoved by the beauty of their road, while the bowman whistled lustily or sang snatches of French love songs in a voice which might have scared the most stout-hearted maiden that ever hearkened to serenade.

“I have a liking for that north countryman,” he remarked presently. “He hath good power of hatred. Couldst see by his cheek and eye that he is as bitter as verjuice. I warm to a man who hath some gall in his liver.”

“Ah me!” sighed Alleyne. “Would it not be better if he had some love in his heart?”

“I would not say nay to that. By my hilt! I shall never be said to be traitor to the little king. Let a man love the sex. Pasques Dieu! they are made to be loved, les petites, from whimple down to shoe-string! I am right glad, mon garcon, to see that the good monks have trained thee so wisely and so well.”

"Nay, I meant not worldly love, but rather that his heart should soften towards those who have wronged him."

The archer shook his head. "A man should love those of his own breed," said he. "But it is not nature that an English-born man should love a Scot or a Frenchman. Ma foi! you have not seen a drove of Nithsdale raiders on their Galloway nags, or you would not speak of loving them. I would as soon take Beelzebub himself to my arms. I fear, mon gar., that they have taught thee but badly at Beaulieu, for surely a bishop knows more of what is right and what is ill than an abbot can do, and I myself with these very eyes saw the Bishop of Lincoln hew into a Scottish hobeler with a battle-axe, which was a passing strange way of showing him that he loved him."

Alleyne scarce saw his way to argue in the face of so decided an opinion on the part of a high dignitary of the Church. "You have borne arms against the Scots, then?" he asked.

"Why, man, I first loosed string in battle when I was but a lad, younger by two years than you, at Neville's Cross, under the Lord Mowbray. Later, I served under the Warden of Berwick, that very John Copeland of whom our friend spake, the same who held the King of Scots to ransom. Ma foi! it is rough soldiering, and a good school for one who would learn to be hardy and war-wise."

"I have heard that the Scots are good men of war," said Hordle John.

"For axemen and for spearmen I have not seen their match," the archer answered. "They can travel, too, with bag of meal and gridiron slung to their sword-belt, so that it is ill to follow them. There are scant crops and few beeves in the borderland, where a man must reap his grain with sickle in one fist and brown bill in the other. On the other hand, they are the sorriest archers that I have ever seen, and cannot so much as aim with the arbalest, to say nought of the long-bow. Again, they are mostly poor folk, even the nobles among them, so that there are few who can buy as good a brigandine of chain-mail as that which I am wearing, and it is ill for them to stand up against our own knights, who carry the price of five Scotch farms upon their chest and shoulders. Man for man, with equal weapons, they are as worthy and valiant men as could be found in the whole of Christendom."

"And the French?" asked Alleyne, to whom the archer's light gossip had all the relish that the words of the man of action have for the recluse.

"The French are also very worthy men. We have had great good fortune in France, and it hath led to much bobance and camp-fire talk, but I have ever noticed that those who know the most have the least to say about it. I have seen Frenchmen fight both in open field, in the intaking and the defending of towns or castlewicks, in escalados, camisades, night forays, bushments, sallies, outfalls, and knightly spear-runnings. Their knights and squires, lad, are every whit as good as ours, and I could pick out a score of those who ride behind Du Guesclin who would hold the lists with sharpened lances against the best men in the army of England. On the other hand, their common folk are so crushed down with gabelle, and poll-tax, and every manner of cursed tallage, that the spirit has passed right out of them. It is a fool's plan to teach a man to be a cur in peace, and think that he will be a lion in war. Fleece them like sheep and sheep they will remain. If the nobles had not conquered the poor folk it is like enough that we should not have conquered the nobles."

"But they must be sorry folk to bow down to the rich in such a fashion," said big John. "I am but a poor commoner of England myself, and yet I know something of charters, liberties franchises, usages, privileges, customs, and the like. If these be broken, then all men know that it is time to buy arrow-heads."

"Aye, but the men of the law are strong in France as well as the men of war. By my hilt! I hold that a man has more to fear there from the ink-pot of the one than from the iron of the other. There is ever some cursed sheepskin in their strong boxes to prove that the rich man should be richer and the poor man poorer. It would scarce pass in England, but they are quiet folk over the water."

"And what other nations have you seen in your travels, good sir?" asked Alleyne Edricson. His young mind hungered for plain facts of life, after the long course of speculation and of mysticism on which he had been trained.

"I have seen the low countryman in arms, and I have nought to say against him. Heavy and slow is he by nature, and is not to be brought into battle for the sake of a lady's eyelash or the twang of a minstrel's string, like the hotter blood of the south. But ma foi! lay hand on his wool-bales, or trifle with his velvet of Bruges, and out buzzes every stout burgher, like bees from the tee-hole, ready to lay on as though it were his one business in life. By our lady! they have shown the French at Courtrai and elsewhere that they are as deft in wielding steel as in welding it."

"And the men of Spain?"

“They too are very hardy soldiers, the more so as for many hundred years they have had to fight hard against the cursed followers of the black Mahound, who have pressed upon them from the south, and still, as I understand, hold the fairer half of the country. I had a turn with them upon the sea when they came over to Winchelsea and the good queen with her ladies sat upon the cliffs looking down at us, as if it had been joust or tourney. By my hilt! it was a sight that was worth the seeing, for all that was best in England was out on the water that day. We went forth in little ships and came back in great galleys — for of fifty tall ships of Spain, over two score flew the Cross of St. George ere the sun had set. But now, youngster, I have answered you freely, and I trow it is time what you answered me. Let things be plat and plain between us. I am a man who shoots straight at his mark. You saw the things I had with me at yonder hostel: name which you will, save only the box of rose-coloured sugar which I take to the Lady Loring, and you shall have it if you will but come with me to France.”

“Nay,” said Alleyne, “I would gladly come with ye to France or where else ye will, just to list to your talk, and because ye are the only two friends that I have in the whole wide world outside of the cloisters; but, indeed, it may not be, for my duty is towards my brother, seeing that father and mother are dead, and he my elder. Besides, when ye talk of taking me to France, ye do not conceive how useless I should be to you, seeing that neither by training nor by nature am I fitted for the wars, and there seems to be nought but strife in those parts.”

“That comes from my fool’s talk,” cried the archer; “for being a man of no learning myself, my tongue turns to blades and targets, even as my hand does. Know then that for every parchment in England there are twenty in France. For every statue, cut gem, shrine, carven screen, or what else might please the eye of a learned clerk, there are a good hundred to our one. At the spoiling of Carcasonne I have seen chambers stored with writing, though not one man in our Company could read them. Again, in Arles and Nimes, and other towns that I could name, there are the great arches and fortalices still standing which were built of old by giant men who came from the south. Can I not see by your brightened eye how you would love to look upon these things? Come then with me, and, by these ten finger-bones! there is not one of them which you shall not see.”

“I should indeed love to look upon them,” Alleyne answered; “but I have come from Beaulieu for a purpose, and I must be true to my service, even as thou art true to thine.”

“Bethink you again, mon ami,” quoth Aylward, “that you might do much good yonder, since there are three hundred men in the Company, and none who has ever a word of grace for them, and yet the Virgin knows that there was never a set of men who were in more need of it. Sickerly the one duty may balance the other. Your brother hath done without you this many a year, and, as I gather, he hath never walked as far as Beaulieu to see you during all that time, so he cannot be in any great need of you.”

“Besides,” said John, “the Socman of Minstead is a by-word through the forest, from Bramshaw Hill to Holmesley Walk. He is a drunken, brawling, perilous churl, as you may find to your cost.”

“The more reason that I should strive to mend him,” quoth Alleyne. “There is no need to urge me, friends, for my own wishes would draw me to France, and it would be a joy to me if I could go with you. But indeed and indeed it cannot be, so here I take my leave of you, for yonder square tower amongst the trees upon the right must surely be the church of Minstead, and I may reach it by this path through the woods.”

“Well, God be with thee, lad!” cried the archer, pressing Alleyne to his heart. “I am quick to love, and quick to hate and ‘fore God I am loth to part.”

“Would it not be well,” said John, “that we should wait here, and see what manner of greeting you have from your brother. You may prove to be as welcome as the king’s purveyor to the village dame.”

“Nay, nay,” he answered; “ye must not bide for me, for where I go I stay.”

“Yet it may be as well that you should know whither we go,” said the archer. “We shall now journey south through the woods until we come out upon the Christchurch road, and so onwards, hoping to-night to reach the castle of Sir William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, of which Sir Nigel Loring is constable. There we shall bide, and it is like enough that for a month or more you may find us there, ere we are ready for our viage back to France.”

It was hard indeed for Alleyne to break away from these two new but hearty friends, and so strong was the combat between his conscience and his inclinations that he dared not look round, lest his resolution should slip away from him. It was not until he was deep among the tree trunks that he cast a glance backwards, when he found that he could still see them through the branches on the road above him. The archer was standing with folded arms, his bow jutting from over his shoulder, and the sun gleaming brightly upon his head-piece and the links of his chain-mail. Beside him stood his giant recruit, still clad in the home-spun and ill-fitting garments of the fuller of Lymington, with arms and legs shooting out of his scanty garb. Even as Alleyne watched them they turned upon their heels and plodded off together upon their way.

CHAPTER IX. HOW STRANGE THINGS BEFELL IN MINSTEAD WOOD.

The path which the young clerk had now to follow lay through a magnificent forest of the very heaviest timber, where the giant bowls of oak and of beech formed long aisles in every direction, shooting up their huge branches to build the majestic arches of Nature’s own cathedral. Beneath lay a broad carpet of the softest and greenest moss, flecked over with fallen leaves, but yielding pleasantly to the foot of the traveller. The track which guided him was one so seldom used that in places it lost itself entirely among the grass, to reappear as a reddish rut between the distant tree trunks. It was very still here in the heart of the woodlands. The gentle rustle of the branches and the distant cooing of pigeons were the only sounds which broke in upon the silence, save that once Alleyne heard afar off a merry call upon a hunting bugle and the shrill yapping of the hounds.

It was not without some emotion that he looked upon the scene around him, for, in spite of his secluded life, he knew enough of the ancient greatness of his own family to be aware that the time had been when they had held undisputed and paramount sway over all that tract of country. His father could trace his pure Saxon lineage back to that Godfrey Malf who had held the manors of Bisterne and of Minstead at the time when the Norman first set mailed foot upon English soil. The afforestation of the district, however, and its conversion into a royal demesne had clipped off a large section of his estate, while other parts had been confiscated as a punishment for his supposed complicity in an abortive Saxon rising. The fate of the ancestor had been typical of that of his descendants. During three hundred years their domains had gradually contracted, sometimes through royal or feudal encroachment, and sometimes through such gifts to the Church as that with which Alleyne’s father had opened the doors of Beaulieu Abbey to his younger son. The importance of the family had thus dwindled, but they still retained the old Saxon manor-house, with a couple of farms and a grove large enough to afford pannage to a hundred pigs—”sylva de centum porcis,” as the old family parchments describe it. Above all, the owner of the soil could still hold his head high as the veritable Socman of Minstead — that is, as holding the land in free socage, with no feudal superior, and answerable to no man lower than the king. Knowing this, Alleyne felt some little glow of worldly pride as he looked for the first time upon the land with which so many generations of his ancestors had been associated. He pushed on the quicker, twirling his staff merrily, and looking out at every turn of the path for some sign of the old Saxon residence. He was suddenly arrested, however, by the appearance of a wild-looking fellow armed with a club, who sprang out from behind a tree and barred his passage. He was a rough, powerful peasant, with cap and tunic of untanned sheepskin, leather breeches, and galligaskins round legs and feet.

"Stand!" he shouted, raising his heavy cudgel to enforce the order. "Who are you who walk so freely through the wood? Whither would you go, and what is your errand?"

"Why should I answer your questions, my friend?" said Alleyne, standing on his guard.

"Because your tongue may save your pate. But where have I looked upon your face before?"

"No longer ago than last night at the 'Pied Merlin,'" the clerk answered, recognising the escaped serf who had been so outspoken as to his wrongs.

"By the Virgin! yes. You were the little clerk who sat so mum in the corner, and then cried fy on the gleeman. What hast in the scrip?"

"Naught of any price."

"How can I tell that, clerk? Let me see."

"Not I."

"Fool! I could pull you limb from limb like a pullet. What would you have? Hast forgot that we are alone far from all men? How can your clerkship help you? Wouldst lose scrip and life too?"

"I will part with neither without fight."

"A fight, quotha? A fight betwixt spurred cock and new hatched chicken! Thy fighting days may soon be over."

"Hadst asked me in the name of charity I would have given freely," cried Alleyne. "As it stands, not one farthing shall you have with my free will, and when I see my brother, the Socman of Minstead, he will raise hue and cry from vill to vill, from hundred to hundred, until you are taken as a common robber and a scourge to the country."

The outlaw sank his club. “The Socman’s brother!” he gasped. “Now, by the keys of Peter! I had rather that hand withered and tongue was palsied ere I had struck or miscalled you. If you are the Socman’s brother you are one of the right side, I warrant, for all your clerkly dress.”

“His brother I am,” said Alleyne. “But if I were not, is that reason why you should molest me on the king’s ground?”

“I give not the pip of an apple for king or for noble,” cried the serf passionately. “Ill have I had from them, and ill I shall repay them. I am a good friend to my friends, and, by the Virgin! an evil foeman to my foes.”

“And therefore the worst of foemen to thyself,” said Alleyne. “But I pray you, since you seem to know him, to point out to me the shortest path to my brother’s house.”

The serf was about to reply, when the clear ringing call of a bugle burst from the wood close behind them, and Alleyne caught sight for an instant of the dun side and white breast of a lordly stag glancing swiftly betwixt the distant tree trunks. A minute later came the shaggy deer-hounds, a dozen or fourteen of them, running on a hot scent, with nose to earth and tail in air. As they streamed past the silent forest around broke suddenly into loud life, with galloping of hoofs, crackling of brushwood, and the short, sharp cries of the hunters. Close behind the pack rode a fourrier and a yeoman-pricker, whooping on the laggards and encouraging the leaders, in the shrill half-French jargon which was the language of venery and woodcraft. Alleyne was still gazing after them, listening to the loud “Hyke-a-Bayard! Hyke-a-Pomers! Hyke-a-Lebryt!” with which they called upon their favorite hounds, when a group of horsemen crashed out through the underwood at the very spot where the serf and he were standing.

The one who led was a man between fifty and sixty years of age, war-worn and weather-beaten, with a broad, thoughtful forehead and eyes which shone brightly from under his fierce and overhung brows. His beard, streaked thickly with gray, bristled forward from his chin, and spoke of a passionate nature, while the long, finely cut face and firm mouth marked the leader of men. His figure was erect and soldierly, and he rode his horse with the careless grace of a man whose life had been spent in the saddle. In common garb, his masterful face and flashing eye would have marked him as one who was born to rule; but now, with his silken tunic powdered with golden fleurs-de-lis, his velvet mantle lined with the royal minever, and the lions of England stamped in silver upon his harness, none could fail to recognise the noble Edward, most warlike and powerful of all the long line of fighting monarchs who had ruled the Anglo-Norman race. Alleyne doffed hat and bowed head at the sight of him, but the serf folded his hands and leaned them upon his cudgel, looking with little love at the knot of nobles and knights-in-waiting who rode behind the king.

"Ha!" cried Edward, reining up for an instant his powerful black steed. "Le cerf est passe? Non? Ici, Brocas; tu parles Anglais."

"The deer, clowns?" said a hard-visaged, swarthy-faced man, who rode at the king's elbow. "If ye have headed it back it is as much as your ears are worth."

"It passed by the blighted beech there," said Alleyne, pointing, "and the hounds were hard at its heels."

"It is well," cried Edward, still speaking in French: for, though he could understand English, he had never learned to express himself in so barbarous and unpolished a tongue. "By my faith, sirs," he continued, half turning in his saddle to address his escort, "unless my woodcraft is sadly at fault, it is a stag of six tines and the finest that we have roused this journey. A golden St. Hubert to the man who is the first to sound the mort." He shook his bridle as he spoke, and thundered away, his knights lying low upon their horses and galloping as hard as whip and spur would drive them, in the hope of winning the king's prize. Away they drove down the long green glade — bay horses, black and gray, riders clad in every shade of velvet, fur, or silk, with glint of brazen horn and flash of knife and spear. One only lingered, the black-browed Baron Brocas, who, making a gambade which brought him within arm-sweep of the serf, slashed him across the face with his riding-whip. "Doff, dog, doff," he hissed, "when a monarch deigns to lower his eyes to such as you!" — then spurred through the underwood and was gone, with a gleam of steel shoes and flutter of dead leaves.

The villein took the cruel blow without wince or cry, as one to whom stripes are a birthright and an inheritance. His eyes flashed, however, and he shook his bony hand with a fierce wild gesture after the retreating figure.

"Black hound of Gascony," he muttered, "evil the day that you and those like you set foot in free England! I know thy kennel of Rochecourt. The night will come when I may do to thee and thine what you and your class have wrought upon mine and me. May God smite me if I fail to smite thee, thou French robber, with thy wife and thy child and all that is under thy castle roof!"

"Forbear!" cried Alleyne. "Mix not God's name with these unhallowed threats! And yet it was a coward's blow, and one to stir the blood and loose the tongue of the most peaceful. Let me find some soothing simples and lay them on the weal to draw the sting."

"Nay, there is but one thing that can draw the sting, and that the future may bring to me. But, clerk, if you would see your brother you must on, for there is a meeting to-day, and his merry men will await him ere the shadows turn from west to east. I pray you not to hold him back, for it would be an evil thing if all the stout lads were there and the leader a-missing. I would come with you, but sooth to say I am stationed here and may not move. The path over yonder, betwixt the oak and the thorn, should bring you out into his nether field."

Alleyne lost no time in following the directions of the wild, masterless man, whom he left among the trees where he had found him. His heart was the heavier for the encounter, not only because all bitterness and wrath were abhorrent to his gentle nature, but also because it disturbed him to hear his brother spoken of as though he were a chief of outlaws or the leader of a party against the state. Indeed, of all the things which he had seen yet in the world to surprise him there was none more strange than the hate which class appeared to bear to class. The talk of laborer, woodman and villein in the inn had all pointed to the wide-spread mutiny, and now his brother's name was spoken as though he were the very centre of the universal discontent. In good truth, the commons throughout the length and breadth of the land were heart-weary of this fine game of chivalry which had been played so long at their expense. So long as knight and baron were a strength and a guard to the kingdom they might be endured, but now, when all men knew that the great battles in France had been won by English yeomen and Welsh stabbers, warlike fame, the only fame to which his class had ever aspired, appeared to have deserted the plate-clad horsemen. The sports of the lists had done much in days gone by to impress the minds of the people, but the plumed and unwieldy champion was no longer an object either of fear or of reverence to men whose fathers and brothers had shot into the press at Crecy or Poitiers, and seen the proudest chivalry in the world unable to make head against the weapons of disciplined peasants. Power had changed hands. The protector had become the protected, and the whole fabric of the feudal system was tottering to a fall. Hence the fierce mutterings of the lower classes and the constant discontent, breaking out into local tumult and outrage, and culminating some years later in the great rising of Tyler. What Alleyne saw and wondered at in Hampshire would have appealed equally to the traveller in any other English county from the Channel to the marches of Scotland.

He was following the track, his misgivings increasing with every step which took him nearer to that home which he had never seen, when of a sudden the trees began to thin and the sward to spread out onto a broad, green lawn, where five cows lay in the sunshine and droves of black swine wandered unchecked. A brown forest stream swirled down the centre of this clearing, with a rude bridge flung across it, and on the other side was a second field sloping up to a long, low-lying wooden house, with thatched roof and open squares for windows. Alleyne gazed across at it with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes — for this, he knew, must be the home of his fathers. A wreath of blue smoke floated up through a hole in the thatch, and was the only sign of life in the place, save a great black hound which lay sleeping chained to the door-post. In the yellow shimmer of the autumn sunshine it lay as peacefully and as still as he had oft pictured it to himself in his dreams.

He was roused, however, from his pleasant reverie by the sound of voices, and two people emerged from the forest some little way to his right and moved across the field in the direction of the bridge. The one was a man with yellow flowing beard and very long hair of the same tint drooping over his shoulders; his dress of good Norwich cloth and his assured bearing marked him as a man of position, while the sombre hue of his clothes and the absence of all ornament contrasted with the flash and glitter which had marked the king’s retinue. By his side walked a woman, tall and slight and dark, with lithe, graceful figure and clear-cut, composed features. Her jet-black hair was gathered back under a light pink coif, her head poised proudly upon her neck, and her step long and springy, like that of some wild, tireless woodland creature. She held her left hand in front of her, covered with a red velvet glove, and on the wrist a little brown falcon, very fluffy and bedraggled, which she smoothed and fondled as she walked. As she came out into the sunshine, Alleyne noticed that her light gown, slashed with pink, was all stained with earth and with moss upon one side from shoulder to hem. He stood in the shadow of an oak staring at her with parted lips, for this woman seemed to him to be the most beautiful and graceful creature that mind could conceive of. Such had he imagined the angels, and such he had tried to paint them in the Beaulieu missals; but here there was something human, were it only in the battered hawk and discoloured dress, which sent a tingle and thrill through his nerves such as no dream of radiant and stainless spirit had ever yet been able to conjure up. Good, quiet, uncomplaining mother Nature, long slighted and miscalled, still bides her time and draws to her bosom the most errant of her children.

The two walked swiftly across the meadow to the narrow bridge, he in front and she a pace or two behind. There they paused, and stood for a few minutes face to face talking earnestly. Alleyne had read and had heard of love and of lovers. Such were these, doubtless — this golden-bearded man and the fair damsel with the cold, proud face. Why else should they wander together in the woods, or be so lost in talk by rustic streams? And yet as he watched, uncertain whether to advance from the cover or to choose some other path to the house, he soon came to doubt the truth of this first conjecture. The man stood, tall and square, blocking the entrance to the bridge, and throwing out his hands as he spoke in a wild eager fashion, while the deep tones of his stormy voice rose at times into accents of menace and of anger. She stood fearlessly in front of him, still stroking her bird; but twice she threw a swift questioning glance over her shoulder, as one who is in search of aid. So moved was the young clerk by these mute appeals, that he came forth from the trees and crossed the meadow, uncertain what to do, and yet loth to hold back from one who might need his aid. So intent were they upon each other that neither took note of his approach; until, when he was close upon them, the man threw his arm roughly round the damsel's waist and drew her towards him, she straining her lithe, supple figure away and striking fiercely at him, while the hooded hawk screamed with ruffled wings and pecked blindly in its mistress's defence. Bird and maid, however, had but little chance against their assailant who, laughing loudly, caught her wrist in one hand while he drew her towards him with the other.

"The best rose has ever the longest thorns," said he. "Quiet, little one, or you may do yourself a hurt. Must pay Saxon toll on Saxon land, my proud Maude, for all your airs and graces."

"You boor!" she hissed. "You base underbred clod! Is this your care and your hospitality? I would rather wed a branded serf from my father's fields. Leave go, I say —— Ah! good youth, Heaven has sent you. Make him loose me! By the honor of your mother, I pray you to stand by me and to make this knave loose me."

"Stand by you I will, and that blithely." said Alleyne. "Surely, sir, you should take shame to hold the damsel against her will."

The man turned a face upon him which was lion-like in its strength and in its wrath. With his tangle of golden hair, his fierce blue eyes, and his large, well-marked features, he was the most comely man whom Alleyne had ever seen, and yet there was something so sinister and so fell in his expression that child or beast might well have shrunk from him. His brows were drawn, his cheek flushed, and there was a mad sparkle in his eyes which spoke of a wild, untamable nature.

"Young fool!" he cried, holding the woman still to his side, though every line of her shrinking figure spoke her abhorrence. "Do you keep your spoon in your own broth. I rede you to go on your way, lest worse befall you. This little wench has come with me and with me she shall bide."

"Liar!" cried the woman; and, stooping her head, she suddenly bit fiercely into the broad brown hand which held her. He whipped it back with an oath, while she tore herself free and slipped behind Alleyne, cowering up against him like the trembling leveret who sees the falcon poising for the swoop above him.

"Stand off my land!" the man said fiercely, heedless of the blood which trickled freely from his fingers. "What have you to do here? By your dress you should be one of those cursed clerks who overrun the land like vile rats, poking and prying into other men's concerns, too caitiff to fight and too lazy to work. By the rood! if I had my will upon ye, I should nail you upon the abbey doors, as they hang vermin before their holes. Art neither man nor woman, young shaveling. Get thee back to thy fellows ere I lay hands upon you: for your foot is on my land, and I may slay you as a common draw-latch."

"Is this your land, then?" gasped Alleyne.

"Would you dispute it, dog? Would you wish by trick or quibble to juggle me out of these last acres? Know, base-born knave, that you have dared this day to stand in the path of one whose race have been the advisers of kings and the leaders of hosts, ere ever this vile crew of Norman robbers came into the land, or such half-blood hounds as you were let loose to preach that the thief should have his booty and the honest man should sin if he strove to win back his own."

"You are the Socman of Minstead?"

"That am I; and the son of Edric the Socman, of the pure blood of Godfrey the thane, by the only daughter of the house of Aluric, whose forefathers held the white-horse banner at the fatal fight where our shield was broken and our sword shivered. I tell you, clerk, that my folk held this land from Bramshaw Wood to the Ringwood road; and, by the soul of my father! it will be a strange thing if I am to be bearded upon the little that is left of it. Begone, I say, and meddle not with my affair."

"If you leave me now," whispered the woman, "then shame forever upon your manhood."

"Surely, sir," said Alleyne, speaking in as persuasive and soothing a way as he could, "if your birth is gentle, there is the more reason that your manners should be gentle too. I am well persuaded that you did but jest with this lady, and that you will now permit her to leave your land either alone or with me as a guide, if she should need one, through the wood. As to birth, it does not become me to boast, and there is sooth in what you say as to the unworthiness of clerks, but it is none the less true that I am as well born as you."

"Dog!" cried the furious Socman, "there is no man in the south who can say as much."

"Yet can I," said Alleyne smiling; "for indeed I also am the son of Edric the Socman, of the pure blood of Godfrey the thane, by the only daughter of Aluric of Brockenhurst. Surely, dear brother," he continued, holding out his hand, "you have a warmer greeting than this for me. There are but two boughs left upon this old, old Saxon trunk."

His elder brother dashed his hand aside with an oath, while an expression of malignant hatred passed over his passion-drawn features. "You are the young cub of Beaulieu, then," said he. "I might have known it by the sleek face and the slavish manner too monk-ridden and craven in spirit to answer back a rough word. Thy father, shaveling, with all his faults, had a man's heart; and there were few who could look him in the eyes on the day of his anger. But you! Look there, rat, on yonder field where the cows graze, and on that other beyond, and on the orchard hard by the church. Do you know that all these were squeezed out of your dying father by greedy priests, to pay for your upbringing in the cloisters? I, the Socman, am shorn of my lands that you may snivel Latin and eat bread for which you never did hand's turn. You rob me first, and now you would come preaching and whining, in search mayhap of another field or two for your priestly friends. Knave! my dogs shall be set upon you; but, meanwhile, stand out of my path, and stop me at your peril!” As he spoke he rushed forward, and, throwing the lad to one side, caught the woman’s wrist. Alleyne, however, as active as a young deer-hound, sprang to her aid and seized her by the other arm, raising his iron-shod staff as he did so.

“You may say what you will to me,” he said between his clenched teeth —”it may be no better than I deserve; but, brother or no, I swear by my hopes of salvation that I will break your arm if you do not leave hold of the maid.”

There was a ring in his voice and a flash in his eyes which promised that the blow would follow quick at the heels of the word. For a moment the blood of the long line of hot-headed thanes was too strong for the soft whisperings of the doctrine of meekness and mercy. He was conscious of a fierce wild thrill through his nerves and a throb of mad gladness at his heart, as his real human self burst for an instant the bonds of custom and of teaching which had held it so long. The socman sprang back, looking to left and to right for some stick or stone which might serve him for weapon; but finding none, he turned and ran at the top of his speed for the house, blowing the while upon a shrill whistle.

“Come!” gasped the woman. “Fly, friend, ere he come back.”

“Nay, let him come!” cried Alleyne. “I shall not budge a foot for him or his dogs.”

“Come, come!” she cried, tugging at his arm. “I know the man: he will kill you. Come, for the Virgin’s sake, or for my sake, for I cannot go and leave you here.”

“Come, then,” said he; and they ran together to the cover of the woods. As they gained the edge of the brushwood, Alleyne, looking back, saw his brother come running out of the house again, with the sun gleaming upon his hair and his beard. He held something which flashed in his right hand, and he stooped at the threshold to unloose the black hound.

“This way!” the woman whispered, in a low eager voice. “Through the bushes to that forked ash. Do not heed me; I can run as fast as you, I trow. Now into the stream — right in, over ankles, to throw the dog off, though I think it is but a common cur, like its master.” As she spoke, she sprang herself into the shallow stream and ran swiftly up the centre of it, with the brown water bubbling over her feet and her hand out-stretched toward the clinging branches of bramble or sapling. Alleyne followed close at her heels, with his mind in a whirl at this black welcome and sudden shifting of all his plans and hopes. Yet, grave as were his thoughts, they would still turn to wonder as he looked at the twinkling feet of his guide and saw her lithe figure bend this way and that, dipping under boughs, springing over stones, with a lightness and ease which made it no small task for him to keep up with her. At last, when he was almost out of breath, she suddenly threw herself down upon a mossy bank, between two holly-bushes, and looked ruefully at her own dripping feet and bedraggled skirt.

"Holy Mary!" said she, "what shall I do? Mother will keep me to my chamber for a month, and make me work at the tapestry of the nine bold knights. She promised as much last week, when I fell into Wilverley bog, and yet she knows that I cannot abide needle-work."

Alleyne, still standing in the stream, glanced down at the graceful pink-and-white figure, the curve of raven-black hair, and the proud, sensitive face which looked up frankly and confidingly at his own.

"We had best on," he said. "He may yet overtake us."

"Not so. We are well off his land now, nor can he tell in this great wood which way we have taken. But you — you had him at your mercy. Why did you not kill him?"

"Kill him! My brother!"

"And why not?" — with a quick gleam of her white teeth. "He would have killed you. I know him, and I read it in his eyes. Had I had your staff I would have tried — aye, and done it, too." She shook her clenched white hand as she spoke, and her lips tightened ominously.

"I am already sad in heart for what I have done," said he, sitting down on the bank, and sinking his face into his hands. "God help me! — all that is worst in me seemed to come uppermost. Another instant, and I had smitten him: the son of my own mother, the man whom I have longed to take to my heart. Alas! that I should still be so weak."

"Weak!" she exclaimed, raising her black eyebrows. "I do not think that even my father himself, who is a hard judge of manhood, would call you that. But it is, as you may think, sir, a very pleasant thing for me to hear that you are grieved at what you have done, and I can but rede that we should go back together, and you should make your peace with the Socman by handing back your prisoner. It is a sad thing that so small a thing as a woman should come between two who are of one blood."

Simple Alleyne opened his eyes at this little spurt of feminine bitterness. "Nay, lady," said he, "that were worst of all. What man would be so caitiff and thrall as to fail you at your need? I have turned my brother against me, and now, alas! I appear to have given you offence also with my clumsy tongue. But, indeed, lady, I am torn both ways, and can scarce grasp in my mind what it is that has befallen."

"Nor can I marvel at that," said she, with a little tinkling laugh. "You came in as the knight does in the jongleur's romances, between dragon and damsel, with small time for the asking of questions. Come," she went on, springing to her feet, and smoothing down her rumpled frock, "let us walk through the shaw together, and we may come upon Bertrand with the horses. If poor Troubadour had not cast a shoe, we should not have had this trouble. Nay, I must have your arm: for, though I speak lightly, now that all is happily over I am as frightened as my brave Roland. See how his chest heaves, and his dear feathers all awry — the little knight who would not have his lady mishandled." So she prattled on to her hawk, while Alleyne walked by her side, stealing a glance from time to time at this queenly and wayward woman. In silence they wandered together over the velvet turf and on through the broad Minstead woods, where the old lichen-draped beeches threw their circles of black shadow upon the sunlit sward.

"You have no wish, then, to hear my story?" said she, at last.

"If it pleases you to tell it me," he answered.

"Oh!" she cried tossing her head, "if it is of so little interest to you, we had best let it bide."

"Nay," said he eagerly, "I would fain hear it."

"You have a right to know it, if you have lost a brother's favor through it. And yet —— Ah well, you are, as I understand, a clerk, so I must think of you as one step further in orders, and make you my father-confessor. Know then that this man has been a suitor for my hand, less as I think for my own sweet sake than because he hath ambition and had it on his mind that he might improve his fortunes by dipping into my father's strong box — though the Virgin knows that he would have found little enough therein. My father, however, is a proud man, a gallant knight and tried soldier of the oldest blood, to whom this man's churlish birth and low descent —— Oh, lackaday! I had forgot that he was of the same strain as yourself."

"Nay, trouble not for that," said Alleyne, "we are all from good mother Eve."

“Streams may spring from one source, and yet some be clear and some be foul,” quoth she quickly. “But, to be brief over the matter, my father would have none of his wooing, nor in sooth would I. On that he swore a vow against us, and as he is known to be a perilous man, with many outlaws and others at his back, my father forbade that I should hawk or hunt in any part of the wood to the north of the Christchurch road. As it chanced, however, this morning my little Roland here was loosed at a strong-winged heron, and page Bertrand and I rode on, with no thoughts but for the sport, until we found ourselves in Minstead woods. Small harm then, but that my horse Troubadour trod with a tender foot upon a sharp stick, rearing and throwing me to the ground. See to my gown, the third that I have befouled within the week. Woe worth me when Agatha the tire-woman sets eyes upon it!”

“And what then, lady?” asked Alleyne.

“Why, then away ran Troubadour, for belike I spurred him in falling, and Bertrand rode after him as hard as hoofs could bear him. When I rose there was the Socman himself by my side, with the news that I was on his land, but with so many courteous words besides, and such gallant bearing, that he prevailed upon me to come to his house for shelter, there to wait until the page return. By the grace of the Virgin and the help of my patron St. Magdalen, I stopped short ere I reached his door, though, as you saw, he strove to hale me up to it. And then — ah-h-h-h!” — she shivered and chattered like one in an ague-fit.

“What is it?” cried Alleyne, looking about in alarm.

“Nothing, friend, nothing! I was but thinking how I bit into his hand. Sooner would I bite living toad or poisoned snake. Oh, I shall loathe my lips forever! But you — how brave you were, and how quick! How meek for yourself, and how bold for a stranger! If I were a man, I should wish to do what you have done.”

“It was a small thing,” he answered, with a tingle of pleasure at these sweet words of praise. “But you — what will you do?”

“There is a great oak near here, and I think that Bertrand will bring the horses there, for it is an old hunting-tryst of ours. Then hey for home, and no more hawking to-day! A twelve-mile gallop will dry feet and skirt.”

“But your father?”

“Not one word shall I tell him. You do not know him; but I can tell you he is not a man to disobey as I have disobeyed him. He would avenge me, it is true, but it is not to him that I shall look for vengeance. Some day, perchance, in joust or in tourney, knight may wish to wear my colours, and then I shall tell him that if he does indeed crave my favor there is wrong unredressed, and the wronger the Socman of Minstead. So my knight shall find a venture such as bold knights love, and my debt shall be paid, and my father none the wiser, and one rogue the less in the world. Say, is not that a brave plan?"

"Nay, lady, it is a thought which is unworthy of you. How can such as you speak of violence and of vengeance. Are none to be gentle and kind, none to be piteous and forgiving? Alas! it is a hard, cruel world, and I would that I had never left my abbey cell. To hear such words from your lips is as though I heard an angel of grace preaching the devil's own creed."

She started from him as a young colt who first feels the bit. "Gramercy for your rede, young sir!" she said, with a little curtsey. "As I understand your words, you are grieved that you ever met me, and look upon me as a preaching devil. Why, my father is a bitter man when he is wroth, but hath never called me such a name as that. It may be his right and duty, but certes it is none of thine. So it would be best, since you think so lowly of me, that you should take this path to the left while I keep on upon this one; for it is clear that I can be no fit companion for you." So saying, with downcast lids and a dignity which was somewhat marred by her bedraggled skirt, she swept off down the muddy track, leaving Alleyne standing staring ruefully after her. He waited in vain for some backward glance or sign of relenting, but she walked on with a rigid neck until her dress was only a white flutter among the leaves. Then, with a sunken head and a heavy heart, he plodded wearily down the other path, wroth with himself for the rude and uncouth tongue which had given offence where so little was intended.

He had gone some way, lost in doubt and in self-reproach, his mind all tremulous with a thousand new-found thoughts and fears and wonderments, when of a sudden there was a light rustle of the leaves behind him, and, glancing round, there was this graceful, swift-footed creature, treading in his very shadow, with her proud head bowed, even as his was — the picture of humility and repentance.

"I shall not vex you, nor even speak," she said; "but I would fain keep with you while we are in the wood."

"Nay, you cannot vex me," he answered, all warm again at the very sight of her. "It was my rough words which vexed you; but I have been thrown among men all my life, and indeed, with all the will, I scarce know how to temper my speech to a lady's ear."

"Then unsay it," cried she quickly; "say that I was right to wish to have vengeance on the Socman."

"Nay, I cannot do that," he answered gravely.

"Then who is ungentle and unkind now?" she cried in triumph. "How stern and cold you are for one so young! Art surely no mere clerk, but bishop or cardinal at the least. Shouldst have crozier for staff and mitre for cap. Well, well, for your sake I will forgive the Socman and take vengeance on none but on my own wilful self who must needs run into danger's path. So will that please you, sir?"

"There spoke your true self," said he; "and you will find more pleasure in such forgiveness than in any vengeance."

She shook her head, as if by no means assured of it, and then with a sudden little cry, which had more of surprise than of joy in it, "Here is Bertrand with the horses!"

Down the glade there came a little green-clad page with laughing eyes, and long curls floating behind him. He sat perched on a high bay horse, and held on to the bridle of a spirited black palfrey, the hides of both glistening from a long run.

"I have sought you everywhere, dear Lady Maude," said he in a piping voice, springing down from his horse and holding the stirrup. "Troubadour galloped as far as Holmhill ere I could catch him. I trust that you have had no hurt or scath?" He shot a questioning glance at Alleyne as he spoke.

"No, Bertrand," said she, "thanks to this courteous stranger. And now, sir," she continued, springing into her saddle, "it is not fit that I leave you without a word more. Clerk or no, you have acted this day as becomes a true knight. King Arthur and all his table could not have done more. It may be that, as some small return, my father or his kin may have power to advance your interest. He is not rich, but he is honored and hath great friends. Tell me what is your purpose, and see if he may not aid it."

"Alas! lady, I have now no purpose. I have but two friends in the world, and they have gone to Christchurch, where it is likely I shall join them."

"And where is Christchurch?"

"At the castle which is held by the brave knight, Sir Nigel Loring, constable to the Earl of Salisbury."

To his surprise she burst out a-laughing, and, spurring her palfrey, dashed off down the glade, with her page riding behind her. Not one word did she say, but as she vanished amid the trees she half turned in her saddle and waved a last greeting. Long time he stood, half hoping that she might again come back to him; but the thud of the hoofs had died away, and there was no sound in all the woods but the gentle rustle and dropping of the leaves. At last he turned away and made his way back to the high-road — another person from the light-hearted boy who had left it a short three hours before.

CHAPTER X. HOW HORDLE JOHN FOUND A MAN WHOM HE MIGHT FOLLOW.

If he might not return to Beaulieu within the year, and if his brother’s dogs were to be set upon him if he showed face upon Minstead land, then indeed he was adrift upon earth. North, south, east, and west — he might turn where he would, but all was equally chill and cheerless. The Abbot had rolled ten silver crowns in a lettuce-leaf and hid them away in the bottom of his scrip, but that would be a sorry support for twelve long months. In all the darkness there was but the one bright spot of the sturdy comrades whom he had left that morning; if he could find them again all would be well. The afternoon was not very advanced, for all that had befallen him. When a man is afoot at cock-crow much may be done in the day. If he walked fast he might yet overtake his friends ere they reached their destination. He pushed on therefore, now walking and now running. As he journeyed he bit into a crust which remained from his Beaulieu bread, and he washed it down by a draught from a woodland stream.

It was no easy or light thing to journey through this great forest, which was some twenty miles from east to west and a good sixteen from Bramshaw Woods in the north to Lymington in the south. Alleyne, however, had the good fortune to fall in with a woodman, axe upon shoulder, trudging along in the very direction that he wished to go. With his guidance he passed the fringe of Bolderwood Walk, famous for old ash and yew, through Mark Ash with its giant beech-trees, and on through the Knightwood groves, where the giant oak was already a great tree, but only one of many comely brothers. They plodded along together, the woodman and Alleyne, with little talk on either side, for their thoughts were as far asunder as the poles. The peasant’s gossip had been of the hunt, of the bracken, of the gray-headed kites that had nested in Wood Fidley, and of the great catch of herring brought back by the boats of Pitt’s Deep. The clerk’s mind was on his brother, on his future — above all on this strange, fierce, melting, beautiful woman who had broken so suddenly into his life, and as suddenly passed out of it again. So *distrait* was he and so random his answers, that the woodman took to whistling, and soon branched off upon the track to Burley, leaving Alleyne upon the main Christchurch road.

Down this he pushed as fast as he might, hoping at every turn and rise to catch sight of his companions of the morning. From Vinney Ridge to Rhinefield Walk the woods grow thick and dense up to the very edges of the track, but beyond the country opens up into broad dun-coloured moors, flecked with clumps of trees, and topping each other in long, low curves up to the dark lines of forest in the furthest distance. Clouds of insects danced and buzzed in the golden autumn light, and the air was full of the piping of the song-birds. Long, glinting dragonflies shot across the path, or hung tremulous with gauzy wings and gleaming bodies. Once a white-necked sea eagle soared screaming high over the traveller's head, and again a flock of brown bustards popped up from among the bracken, and blundered away in their clumsy fashion, half running, half flying, with strident cry and whirr of wings.

There were folk, too, to be met upon the road — beggars and couriers, chapmen and tinkers — cheery fellows for the most part, with a rough jest and homely greeting for each other and for Alleyne. Near Shotwood he came upon five seamen, on their way from Poole to Southampton — rude red-faced men, who shouted at him in a jargon which he could scarce understand, and held out to him a great pot from which they had been drinking — nor would they let him pass until he had dipped pannikin in and taken a mouthful, which set him coughing and choking, with the tears running down his cheeks. Further on he met a sturdy black-bearded man, mounted on a brown horse, with a rosary in his right hand and a long two-handed sword jangling against his stirrup-iron. By his black robe and the eight-pointed cross upon his sleeve, Alleyne recognised him as one of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, whose presbytery was at Baddesley. He held up two fingers as he passed, with a "*Benedic, fili mi!*" whereat Alleyne doffed hat and bent knee, looking with much reverence at one who had devoted his life to the overthrow of the infidel. Poor simple lad! he had not learned yet that what men are and what men profess to be are very wide asunder, and that the Knights of St. John, having come into large part of the riches of the ill-fated Templars, were very much too comfortable to think of exchanging their palace for a tent, or the cellars of England for the thirsty deserts of Syria. Yet ignorance may be more precious than wisdom, for Alleyne as he walked on braced himself to a higher life by the thought of this other’s sacrifice, and strengthened himself by his example which he could scarce have done had he known that the Hospitaller’s mind ran more upon malmsey than on Mamelukes, and on venison rather than victories.

As he pressed on the plain turned to woods once more in the region of Wilverley Walk, and a cloud swept up from the south with the sun shining through the chinks of it. A few great drops came pattering loudly down, and then in a moment the steady swish of a brisk shower, with the dripping and dropping of the leaves. Alleyne, glancing round for shelter, saw a thick and lofty holly-bush, so hollowed out beneath that no house could have been drier. Under this canopy of green two men were already squatted, who waved their hands to Alleyne that he should join them. As he approached he saw that they had five dried herrings laid out in front of them, with a great hunch of wheaten bread and a leathern flask full of milk, but instead of setting to at their food they appeared to have forgot all about it, and were disputing together with flushed faces and angry gestures. It was easy to see by their dress and manner that they were two of those wandering students who formed about this time so enormous a multitude in every country in Europe. The one was long and thin, with melancholy features, while the other was fat and sleek, with a loud voice and the air of a man who is not to be gainsaid.

“Come hither, good youth,” he cried, “come hither! *Vultus ingenui puer*. Heed not the face of my good coz here. *Foenum habet in cornu*, as Don Horace has it; but I warrant him harmless for all that.”

“Stint your bull’s bellowing!” exclaimed the other. “If it come to Horace, I have a line in my mind: *Loquaces si sapiat* —— How doth it run? The English o’t being that a man of sense should ever avoid a great talker. That being so, if all were men of sense then thou wouldst be a lonesome man, coz.”

“Alas! Dicon, I fear that your logic is as bad as your philosophy or your divinity — and God wot it would be hard to say a worse word than that for it. For, hark ye: granting, *propter argumentum*, that I am a talker, then the true reasoning runs that since all men of sense should avoid me, and thou hast not avoided me, but art at the present moment eating herrings with me under a holly-bush, ergo you are no man of sense, which is exactly what I have been dinning into your long ears ever since I first clapped eyes on your sunken chops.”

“Tut, tut!” cried the other. “Your tongue goes like the clapper of a mill-wheel. Sit down here, friend, and partake of this herring. Understand first, however, that there are certain conditions attached to it.”

“I had hoped,” said Alleyne, falling into the humor of the twain, “that a tranchoir of bread and a draught of milk might be attached to it.”

“Hark to him, hark to him!” cried the little fat man. “It is even thus, Dicon! Wit, lad, is a catching thing, like the itch or the sweating sickness. I exude it round me; it is an aura. I tell you, coz, that no man can come within seventeen feet of me without catching a spark. Look at your own case. A duller man never stepped, and yet within the week you have said three things which might pass, and one thing the day we left Fordingbridge which I should not have been ashamed of myself.”

“Enough, rattle-pate, enough!” said the other. “The milk you shall have and the bread also, friend, together with the herring, but you must hold the scales between us.”

“If he hold the herring he holds the scales, my sapient brother,” cried the fat man. “But I pray you, good youth, to tell us whether you are a learned clerk, and, if so, whether you have studied at Oxenford or at Paris.”

“I have some small stock of learning,” Alleyne answered, picking at his herring, “but I have been at neither of these places. I was bred amongst the Cistercian monks at Beaulieu Abbey.”

“Pooh, pooh!” they cried both together. “What sort of an upbringing is that?”

“*Non cuivis contingit adire Corinthum*,” quoth Alleyne.

“Come, brother Stephen, he hath some tincture of letters,” said the melancholy man more hopefully. “He may be the better judge, since he hath no call to side with either of us. Now, attention, friend, and let your ears work as well as your nether jaw. *Judex damnatur* — you know the old saw. Here am I upholding the good fame of the learned Duns Scotus against the foolish quibblings and poor silly reasonings of Willie Ockham.”

“While I,” quoth the other loudly, “do maintain the good sense and extraordinary wisdom of that most learned William against the crack-brained fantasies of the muddy Scotchman, who hath hid such little wit as he has under so vast a pile of words, that it is like one drop of Gascony in a firkin of ditch-water. Solomon his wisdom would not suffice to say what the rogue means.”

"Certes, Stephen Hapgood, his wisdom doth not suffice," cried the other. "It is as though a mole cried out against the morning star, because he could not see it. But our dispute, friend, is concerning the nature of that subtle essence which we call thought. For I hold with the learned Scotus that thought is in very truth a thing, even as vapor or fumes, or many other substances which our gross bodily eyes are blind to. For, look you, that which produces a thing must be itself a thing, and if a man's thought may produce a written book, then must thought itself be a material thing, even as the book is. Have I expressed it? Do I make it plain?"

"Whereas I hold," shouted the other, "with my revered preceptor, *doctor, praeclarus et excellentissimus*, that all things are but thought; for when thought is gone I prythee where are the things then? Here are trees about us, and I see them because I think I see them, but if I have swooned, or sleep, or am in wine, then, my thought having gone forth from me, lo the trees go forth also. How now, coz, have I touched thee on the raw?"

Alleyne sat between them munching his bread, while the twain disputed across his knees, leaning forward with flushed faces and darting hands, in all the heat of argument. Never had he heard such jargon of scholastic philosophy, such fine-drawn distinctions, such cross-fire of major and minor, proposition, syllogism, attack and refutation. Question clattered upon answer like a sword on a buckler. The ancients, the fathers of the Church, the moderns, the Scriptures, the Arabians, were each sent hurtling against the other, while the rain still dripped and the dark holly-leaves glistened with the moisture. At last the fat man seemed to weary of it, for he set to work quietly upon his meal, while his opponent, as proud as the rooster who is left unchallenged upon the midden, crowed away in a last long burst of quotation and deduction. Suddenly, however, his eyes dropped upon his food, and he gave a howl of dismay.

"You double thief!" he cried, "you have eaten my herrings, and I without bite or sup since morning."

"That," quoth the other complacently, "was my final argument, my crowning effort, or *peroratio*, as the orators have it. For, coz, since all thoughts are things, you have but to think a pair of herrings, and then conjure up a pottle of milk wherewith to wash them down."

"A brave piece of reasoning," cried the other, "and I know of but one reply to it." On which, leaning forward, he caught his comrade a rousing smack across his rosy cheek. "Nay, take it not amiss," he said, "since all things are but thoughts, then that also is but a thought and may be disregarded.”

This last argument, however, by no means commended itself to the pupil of Ockham, who plucked a great stick from the ground and signified his dissent by smiting the realist over the pate with it. By good fortune, the wood was so light and rotten that it went to a thousand splinters, but Alleyne thought it best to leave the twain to settle the matter at their leisure, the more so as the sun was shining brightly once more. Looking back down the pool-strewn road, he saw the two excited philosophers waving their hands and shouting at each other, but their babble soon became a mere drone in the distance, and a turn in the road hid them from his sight.

And now after passing Holmesley Walk and the Wooton Heath, the forest began to shred out into scattered belts of trees, with gleam of corn-field and stretch of pasture-land between. Here and there by the wayside stood little knots of wattle-and-daub huts with shock-haired laborers lounging by the doors and red-cheeked children sprawling in the roadway. Back among the groves he could see the high gable ends and thatched roofs of the franklins’ houses, on whose fields these men found employment, or more often a thick dark column of smoke marked their position and hinted at the coarse plenty within. By these signs Alleyne knew that he was on the very fringe of the forest, and therefore no great way from Christchurch. The sun was lying low in the west and shooting its level rays across the long sweep of rich green country, glinting on the white-fleeced sheep and throwing long shadows from the red kine who waded knee-deep in the juicy clover. Right glad was the traveller to see the high tower of Christchurch Priory gleaming in the mellow evening light, and gladder still when, on rounding a corner, he came upon his comrades of the morning seated astraddle upon a fallen tree. They had a flat space before them, on which they alternately threw little square pieces of bone, and were so intent upon their occupation that they never raised eye as he approached them. He observed with astonishment, as he drew near, that the archer’s bow was on John’s back, the archer’s sword by John’s side, and the steel cap laid upon the tree-trunk between them.

“Mort de ma vie!” Aylward shouted, looking down at the dice. “Never had I such cursed luck. A murrain on the bones! I have not thrown a good main since I left Navarre. A one and a three! En avant, camarade!”

“Four and three,” cried Hordle John, counting on his great fingers, “that makes seven. Ho, archer, I have thy cap! Now have at thee for thy jerkin!”

“Mon Dieu!” he growled, “I am like to reach Christchurch in my shirt.” Then suddenly glancing up, “Hola, by the splendor of heaven, here is our cher petit! Now, by my ten finger bones! this is a rare sight to mine eyes.” He sprang up and threw his arms round Alleyne’s neck, while John, no less pleased, but more backward and Saxon in his habits, stood grinning and bobbing by the wayside, with his newly won steel cap stuck wrong side foremost upon his tangle of red hair.

“Hast come to stop?” cried the bowman, patting Alleyne all over in his delight. “Shall not get away from us again!”

“I wish no better,” said he, with a pringling in the eyes at this hearty greeting.

“Well said, lad!” cried big John. “We three shall to the wars together, and the devil may fly away with the Abbot of Beaulieu! But your feet and hosen are all besmudged. Hast been in the water, or I am the more mistaken.”

“I have in good sooth,” Alleyne answered, and then as they journeyed on their way he told them the many things that had befallen him, his meeting with the villein, his sight of the king, his coming upon his brother, with all the tale of the black welcome and of the fair damsel. They strode on either side, each with an ear slanting towards him, but ere he had come to the end of his story the bowman had spun round upon his heel, and was hastening back the way they had come, breathing loudly through his nose.

“What then?” asked Alleyne, trotting after him and gripping at his jerkin.

“I am back for Minstead, lad.”

“And why, in the name of sense?”

“To thrust a handful of steel into the Socman. What! hale a demoiselle against her will, and then loose dogs at his own brother! Let me go!”

“Nenny, nenny!” cried Alleyne, laughing. “There was no scath done. Come back, friend” — and so, by mingled pushing and entreaties, they got his head round for Christchurch once more. Yet he walked with his chin upon his shoulder, until, catching sight of a maiden by a wayside well, the smiles came back to his face and peace to his heart.

“But you,” said Alleyne, “there have been changes with you also. Why should not the workman carry his tools? Where are bow and sword and cap — and why so warlike, John?”

“It is a game which friend Aylward hath been a-teaching of me.”

“And I found him an over-apt pupil,” grumbled the bowman. “He hath stripped me as though I had fallen into the hands of the tardvenus. But, by my hilt! you must render them back to me, camarade, lest you bring discredit upon my mission, and I will pay you for them at armorers’ prices.”

“Take them back, man, and never heed the pay,” said John. “I did but wish to learn the feel of them, since I am like to have such trinkets hung to my own girdle for some years to come.”

“Ma foi, he was born for a free companion!” cried Aylward, “He hath the very trick of speech and turn of thought. I take them back then, and indeed it gives me unease not to feel my yew-stave tapping against my leg bone. But see, mes garcons, on this side of the church rises the square and darkling tower of Earl Salisbury’s castle, and even from here I seem to see on yonder banner the red roebuck of the Montacutes.”

“Red upon white,” said Alleyne, shading his eyes; “but whether roebuck or no is more than I could vouch. How black is the great tower, and how bright the gleam of arms upon the wall! See below the flag, how it twinkles like a star!”

“Aye, it is the steel head-piece of the watchman,” remarked the archer. “But we must on, if we are to be there before the drawbridge rises at the vespers bugle; for it is likely that sir Nigel, being so renowned a soldier, may keep hard discipline within the walls, and let no man enter after sundown.” So saying, he quickened his pace, and the three comrades were soon close to the straggling and broad-spread town which centered round the noble church and the frowning castle.

It chanced on that very evening that Sir Nigel Loring, having supped before sunset, as was his custom, and having himself seen that Pommers and Cadsand, his two war-horses, with the thirteen hacks, the five jennets, my lady’s three palfreys, and the great dapple-gray roussin, had all their needs supplied, had taken his dogs for an evening breather. Sixty or seventy of them, large and small, smooth and shaggy — deer-hound, boar-hound, blood-hound, wolf-hound, mastiff, alaun, talbot, lurcher, terrier, spaniel — snapping, yelling and whining, with score of lolling tongues and waving tails, came surging down the narrow lane which leads from the Twynham kennels to the bank of Avon. Two russet-clad varlets, with loud halloo and cracking whips, walked thigh-deep amid the swarm, guiding, controlling, and urging. Behind came Sir Nigel himself, with Lady Loring upon his arm, the pair walking slowly and sedately, as befitted both their age and their condition, while they watched with a smile in their eyes the scrambling crowd in front of them. They paused, however, at the bridge, and, leaning their elbows upon the stonework, they stood looking down at their own faces in the glassy stream, and at the swift flash of speckled trout against the tawny gravel.

Sir Nigel was a slight man of poor stature, with soft lisping voice and gentle ways. So short was he that his wife, who was no very tall woman, had the better of him by the breadth of three fingers. His sight having been injured in his early wars by a basketful of lime which had been emptied over him when he led the Earl of Derby’s stormers up the breach at Bergerac, he had contracted something of a stoop, with a blinking, peering expression of face. His age was six and forty, but the constant practice of arms, together with a cleanly life, had preserved his activity and endurance unimpaired, so that from a distance he seemed to have the slight limbs and swift grace of a boy. His face, however, was tanned of a dull yellow tint, with a leathery, poreless look, which spoke of rough outdoor doings, and the little pointed beard which he wore, in deference to the prevailing fashion, was streaked and shot with gray. His features were small, delicate, and regular, with clear-cut, curving nose, and eyes which jutted forward from the lids. His dress was simple and yet spruce. A Flandrish hat of beevor, bearing in the band the token of Our Lady of Embrun, was drawn low upon the left side to hide that ear which had been partly shorn from his head by a Flemish man-at-arms in a camp broil before Tournay. His cote-hardie, or tunic, and trunk-hosen were of a purple plum colour, with long weepers which hung from either sleeve to below his knees. His shoes were of red leather, daintily pointed at the toes, but not yet prolonged to the extravagant lengths which the succeeding reign was to bring into fashion. A gold-embroidered belt of knighthood encircled his loins, with his arms, five roses gules on a field argent, cunningly worked upon the clasp. So stood Sir Nigel Loring upon the bridge of Avon, and talked lightly with his lady.

And, certes, had the two visages alone been seen, and the stranger been asked which were the more likely to belong to the bold warrior whose name was loved by the roughest soldiery of Europe, he had assuredly selected the lady’s. Her face was large and square and red, with fierce, thick brows, and the eyes of one who was accustomed to rule. Taller and broader than her husband, her flowing gown of sendall, and fur-lined tippet, could not conceal the gaunt and ungraceful outlines of her figure. It was the age of martial women. The deeds of black Agnes of Dunbar, of Lady Salisbury and of the Countess of Montfort, were still fresh in the public minds. With such examples before them the wives of the English captains had become as warlike as their mates, and ordered their castles in their absence with the prudence and discipline of veteran seneschals. Right easy were the Montacutes of their Castle of Twynham, and little had they to dread from roving galley or French squadron, while Lady Mary Loring had the ordering of it. Yet even in that age it was thought that, though a lady might have a soldier's heart, it was scarce as well that she should have a soldier's face. There were men who said that of all the stern passages and daring deeds by which Sir Nigel Loring had proved the true temper of his courage, not the least was his wooing and winning of so forbidding a dame.

"I tell you, my fair lord," she was saying, "that it is no fit training for a demoiselle: hawks and hounds, rotes and citoles singing a French rondel, or reading the Gestes de Doon de Mayence, as I found her yesternight, pretending sleep, the artful, with the corner of the scroll thrusting forth from under her pillow. Lent her by Father Christopher of the priory, forsooth — that is ever her answer. How shall all this help her when she has castle of her own to keep, with a hundred mouths all agape for beef and beer?"

"True, my sweet bird, true," answered the knight, picking a comfit from his gold drageoir. "The maid is like the young filly, which kicks heels and plunges for very lust of life. Give her time, dame, give her time."

"Well, I know that my father would have given me, not time, but a good hazel-stick across my shoulders. Ma foi! I know not what the world is coming to, when young maids may flout their elders. I wonder that you do not correct her, my fair lord."

"Nay, my heart's comfort, I never raised hand to woman yet, and it would be a passing strange thing if I began on my own flesh and blood. It was a woman's hand which cast this lime into mine eyes, and though I saw her stoop, and might well have stopped her ere she threw, I deemed it unworthy of my knighthood to hinder or balk one of her sex."

"The hussy!" cried Lady Loring clenching her broad right hand. "I would I had been at the side of her!"

"And so would I, since you would have been the nearer me my own. But I doubt not that you are right, and that Maude's wings need clipping, which I may leave in your hands when I am gone, for, in sooth, this peaceful life is not for me, and were it not for your gracious kindness and loving care I could not abide it a week. I hear that there is talk of warlike muster at Bordeaux once more, and by St. Paul! it would be a new thing if the lions of England and the red pile of Chandos were to be seen in the field, and the roses of Loring were not waving by their side."

"Now woe worth me but I feared it!" cried she, with the colour all struck from her face. "I have noted your absent mind, your kindling eye, your trying and riveting of old harness. Consider my sweet lord, that you have already won much honor, that we have seen but little of each other, that you bear upon your body the scar of over twenty wounds received in I know not how many bloody encounters. Have you not done enough for honor and the public cause?"

"My lady, when our liege lord, the king, at three score years, and my Lord Chandos at three-score and ten, are blithe and ready to lay lance in rest for England's cause, it would ill be-seem me to prate of service done. It is sooth that I have received seven and twenty wounds. There is the more reason that I should be thankful that I am still long of breath and sound in limb. I have also seen some bickering and scuffling. Six great land battles I count, with four upon sea, and seven and fifty onfalls, skirmishes and bushments. I have held two and twenty towns, and I have been at the intaking of thirty-one. Surely then it would be bitter shame to me, and also to you, since my fame is yours, that I should now hold back if a man's work is to be done. Besides, bethink you how low is our purse, with bailiff and reeve ever croaking of empty farms and wasting lands. Were it not for this constableship which the Earl of Salisbury hath bestowed upon us we could scarce uphold the state which is fitting to our degree. Therefore, my sweeting, there is the more need that I should turn to where there is good pay to be earned and brave ransoms to be won."

"Ah, my dear lord," quoth she, with sad, weary eyes. "I thought that at last I had you to mine own self, even though your youth had been spent afar from my side. Yet my voice, as I know well, should speed you on to glory and renown, not hold you back when fame is to be won. Yet what can I say, for all men know that your valor needs the curb and not the spur. It goes to my heart that you should ride forth now a mere knight bachelor, when there is no noble in the land who hath so good a claim to the square pennon, save only that you have not the money to uphold it."

"And whose fault that, my sweet bird?" said he.

"No fault, my fair lord, but a virtue: for how many rich ransoms have you won, and yet have scattered the crowns among page and archer and varlet, until in a week you had not as much as would buy food and forage. It is a most knightly largesse, and yet withouten money how can man rise?"

"Dirt and dross!" cried he.

"What matter rise or fall, so that duty be done and honor gained. Banneret or bachelor, square pennon or forked, I would not give a denier for the difference, and the less since Sir John Chandos, chosen flower of English chivalry, is himself but a humble knight. But meanwhile fret not thyself, my heart's dove, for it is like that there may be no war waged, and we must await the news. But here are three strangers, and one, as I take it, a soldier fresh from service. It is likely that he may give us word of what is stirring over the water."

Lady Loring, glancing up, saw in the fading light three companions walking abreast down the road, all gray with dust, and stained with travel, yet chattering merrily between themselves. He in the midst was young and comely, with boyish open face and bright gray eyes, which glanced from right to left as though he found the world around him both new and pleasing. To his right walked a huge red-headed man, with broad smile and merry twinkle, whose clothes seemed to be bursting and splitting at every seam, as though he were some lusty chick who was breaking bravely from his shell. On the other side, with his knotted hand upon the young man's shoulder, came a stout and burly archer, brown and fierce eyed, with sword at belt and long yellow yew-stave peeping over his shoulder. Hard face, battered head piece, dinted brigandine, with faded red lion of St. George ramping on a discoloured ground, all proclaimed as plainly as words that he was indeed from the land of war. He looked keenly at Sir Nigel as he approached, and then, plunging his hand under his breastplate, he stepped up to him with a rough, uncouth bow to the lady.

"Your pardon, fair sir," said he, "but I know you the moment I clap eyes on you, though in sooth I have seen you oftener in steel than in velvet. I have drawn string besides you at La Roche-d'Errien, Romorantin, Maupertuis, Nogent, Auray, and other places."

"Then, good archer, I am right glad to welcome you to Twynham Castle, and in the steward's room you will find provant for yourself and comrades. To me also your face is known, though mine eyes play such tricks with me that I can scarce be sure of my own squire. Rest awhile, and you shall come to the hall anon and tell us what is passing in France, for I have heard that it is likely that our pennons may flutter to the south of the great Spanish mountains ere another year be passed."

"There was talk of it in Bordeaux," answered the archer, "and I saw myself that the armorers and smiths were as busy as rats in a wheat-rick. But I bring you this letter from the valiant Gascon knight, Sir Claude Latour. And to you, Lady," he added after a pause, "I bring from him this box of red sugar of Narbonne, with every courteous and knightly greeting which a gallant cavalier may make to a fair and noble dame."

This little speech had cost the blunt bowman much pains and planning; but he might have spared his breath, for the lady was quite as much absorbed as her lord in the letter, which they held between them, a hand on either corner, spelling it out very slowly, with drawn brows and muttering lips. As they read it, Alleyne, who stood with Hordle John a few paces back from their comrade, saw the lady catch her breath, while the knight laughed softly to himself.

"You see, dear heart," said he, "that they will not leave the old dog in his kennel when the game is afoot. And what of this White Company, archer?"

"Ah, sir, you speak of dogs," cried Aylward; "but there are a pack of lusty hounds who are ready for any quarry, if they have but a good huntsman to halloo them on. Sir, we have been in the wars together, and I have seen many a brave following but never such a set of woodland boys as this. They do but want you at their head, and who will bar the way to them!"

"Pardieu!" said Sir Nigel, "if they are all like their messenger, they are indeed men of whom a leader may be proud. Your name, good archer?"

"Sam Aylward, sir, of the Hundred of Easebourne and the Rape of Chichester."

"And this giant behind you?"

"He is big John, of Hordle, a forest man, who hath now taken service in the Company."

"A proper figure of a man at-arms," said the little knight. "Why, man, you are no chicken, yet I warrant him the stronger man. See to that great stone from the coping which hath fallen upon the bridge. Four of my lazy varlets strove this day to carry it hence. I would that you two could put them to shame by budging it, though I fear that I overtask you, for it is of a grievous weight."

He pointed as he spoke to a huge rough-hewn block which lay by the roadside, deep sunken from its own weight in the reddish earth. The archer approached it, rolling back the sleeves of his jerkin, but with no very hopeful countenance, for indeed it was a mighty rock. John, however, put him aside with his left hand, and, stooping over the stone, he plucked it single-handed from its soft bed and swung it far into the stream. There it fell with mighty splash, one jagged end peaking out above the surface, while the waters bubbled and foamed with far-circling eddy.

"Good lack!" cried Sir Nigel, and "Good lack!" cried his lady, while John stood laughing and wiping the caked dirt from his fingers.

"I have felt his arms round my ribs," said the bowman, "and they crackle yet at the thought of it. This other comrade of mine is a right learned clerk, for all that he is so young, hight Alleyne, the son of Edric, brother to the Socman of Minstead."

"Young man," quoth Sir Nigel, sternly, "if you are of the same way of thought as your brother, you may not pass under portcullis of mine."

"Nay, fair sir," cried Aylward hastily, "I will be pledge for it that they have no thought in common; for this very day his brother hath set his dogs upon him, and driven him from his lands."

"And are you, too, of the White Company?" asked Sir Nigel. "Hast had small experience of war, if I may judge by your looks and bearing."

"I would fain to France with my friends here," Alleyne answered; "but I am a man of peace — a reader, exorcist, acolyte, and clerk."

"That need not hinder," quoth Sir Nigel.

"No, fair sir," cried the bowman joyously. "Why, I myself have served two terms with Arnold de Cervolles, he whom they called the archpriest. By my hilt! I have seen him ere now, with monk's gown trussed to his knees, over his sandals in blood in the fore-front of the battle. Yet, ere the last string had twanged, he would be down on his four bones among the stricken, and have them all houseled and shriven, as quick as shelling peas. Ma foi! there were those who wished that he would have less care for their souls and a little more for their bodies!"

"It is well to have a learned clerk in every troop," said Sir Nigel. "By St. Paul, there are men so caitiff that they think more of a scrivener's pen than of their lady's smile, and do their devoir in hopes that they may fill a line in a chronicle or make a tag to a jongleur's romance. I remember well that, at the siege of Retters, there was a little, sleek, fat clerk of the name of

Chaucer, who was so apt at rondel, sirvente, or tonson, that no man dare give back a foot from the walls, lest he find it all set down in his rhymes and sung by every underling and varlet in the camp. But, my soul's bird, you hear me prate as though all were decided, when I have not yet taken counsel either with you or with my lady mother. Let us to the chamber, while these strangers find such fare as pantry and cellar may furnish."

"The night air strikes chill," said the lady, and turned down the road with her hand upon her lord's arm. The three comrades dropped behind and followed: Aylward much the lighter for having accomplished his mission, Alleyne full of wonderment at the humble bearing of so renowned a captain, and John loud with snorts and sneers, which spoke his disappointment and contempt.

"What ails the man?" asked Aylward in surprise.

"I have been cozened and bejaped," quoth he gruffly.

"By whom, Sir Samson the strong?"

"By thee, Sir Balaam the false prophet."

"By my hilt!" cried the archer, "I though I be not Balaam, yet I hold converse with the very creature that spake to him. What is amiss, then, and how have I played you false?"

"Why, marry, did you not say, and Alleyne here will be my witness, that, if I would hie to the wars with you, you would place me under a leader who was second to none in all England for valor? Yet here you bring me to a shred of a man, peaky and ill-nourished, with eyes like a moulting owl, who must needs, forsooth, take counsel with his mother ere he buckle sword to girdle."

"Is that where the shoe galls?" cried the bowman, and laughed aloud. "I will ask you what you think of him three months hence, if we be all alive; for sure I am that — —"

Aylward's words were interrupted by an extraordinary hubbub which broke out that instant some little way down the street in the direction of the Priory. There was deep-mouthed shouting of men, frightened shrieks of women, howling and barking of curs, and over all a sullen, thunderous rumble, indescribably menacing and terrible. Round the corner of the narrow street there came rushing a brace of whining dogs with tails tucked under their legs, and after them a white-faced burgher, with outstretched hands and wide-spread fingers, his hair all abristle and his eyes glinting back from one shoulder to the other, as though some great terror were at his very heels. “Fly, my lady, fly!” he screeched, and whizzed past them like bolt from bow; while close behind came lumbering a huge black bear, with red tongue lolling from his mouth, and a broken chain jangling behind him. To right and left the folk flew for arch and doorway. Hordle John caught up the Lady Loring as though she had been a feather, and sprang with her into an open porch; while Aylward, with a whirl of French oaths, plucked at his quiver and tried to unsling his bow. Alleyne, all unnerved at so strange and unwonted a sight, shrunk up against the wall with his eyes fixed upon the frenzied creature, which came bounding along with ungainly speed, looking the larger in the uncertain light, its huge jaws agape, with blood and slaver trickling to the ground. Sir Nigel alone, unconscious to all appearance of the universal panic, walked with unfaltering step up the centre of the road, a silken handkerchief in one hand and his gold comfit-box in the other. It sent the blood cold through Alleyne’s veins to see that as they came together — the man and the beast — the creature reared up, with eyes ablaze with fear and hate, and whirled its great paws above the knight to smite him to the earth. He, however, blinking with puckered eyes, reached up his kerchief, and flicked the beast twice across the snout with it. “Ah, saucy! saucy,” quoth he, with gentle chiding; on which the bear, uncertain and puzzled, dropped its four legs to earth again, and, waddling back, was soon swathed in ropes by the bear-ward and a crowd of peasants who had been in close pursuit.

A scared man was the keeper; for, having chained the brute to a stake while he drank a stoup of ale at the inn, it had been baited by stray curs, until, in wrath and madness, it had plucked loose the chain, and smitten or bitten all who came in its path. Most scared of all was he to find that the creature had come nigh to harm the Lord and Lady of the castle, who had power to place him in the stretch-neck or to have the skin scourged from his shoulders. Yet, when he came with bowed head and humble entreaty for forgiveness, he was met with a handful of small silver from Sir Nigel, whose dame, however, was less charitably disposed, being much ruffled in her dignity by the manner in which she had been hustled from her lord’s side.

As they passed through the castle gate, John plucked at Aylward’s sleeve, and the two fell behind.

“I must crave your pardon, comrade,” said he, bluntly. “I was a fool not to know that a little rooster may be the gamest. I believe that this man is indeed a leader whom we may follow.”

CHAPTER XI. HOW A YOUNG SHEPHERD HAD A PERILOUS FLOCK.

Black was the mouth of Twynham Castle, though a pair of torches burning at the further end of the gateway cast a red glare over the outer bailey, and sent a dim, ruddy flicker through the rough-hewn arch, rising and falling with fitful brightness. Over the door the travellers could discern the escutcheon of the Montacutes, a roebuck gules on a field argent, flanked on either side by smaller shields which bore the red roses of the veteran constable. As they passed over the drawbridge, Alleyne marked the gleam of arms in the embrasures to right and left, and they had scarce set foot upon the causeway ere a hoarse blare burst from a bugle, and, with screech of hinge and clank of chain, the ponderous bridge swung up into the air, drawn by unseen hands. At the same instant the huge portcullis came rattling down from above, and shut off the last fading light of day. Sir Nigel and his lady walked on in deep talk, while a fat under-steward took charge of the three comrades, and led them to the buttery, where beef, bread, and beer were kept ever in readiness for the wayfarer. After a hearty meal and a dip in the trough to wash the dust from them, they strolled forth into the bailey, where the bowman peered about through the darkness at wall and at keep, with the carping eyes of one who has seen something of sieges, and is not likely to be satisfied. To Alleyne and to John, however, it appeared to be as great and as stout a fortress as could be built by the hands of man.

Erected by Sir Balwin de Redvers in the old fighting days of the twelfth century, when men thought much of war and little of comfort, Castle Twynham had been designed as a stronghold pure and simple, unlike those later and more magnificent structures where warlike strength had been combined with the magnificence of a palace. From the time of the Edwards such buildings as Conway or Caernarvon castles, to say nothing of Royal Windsor, had shown that it was possible to secure luxury in peace as well as security in times of trouble. Sir Nigel’s trust, however, still frowned above the smooth-flowing waters of the Avon, very much as the stern race of early Anglo-Normans had designed it. There were the broad outer and inner bailies, not paved, but sown with grass to nourish the sheep and cattle which might be driven in on sign of danger. All round were high and turreted walls, with at the corner a bare square-faced keep, gaunt and windowless, rearing up from a lofty mound, which made it almost inaccessible to an assailant. Against the bailey-walls were rows of frail wooden houses and leaning sheds, which gave shelter to the archers and men-at-arms who formed the garrison. The doors of these humble dwellings were mostly open, and against the yellow glare from within Alleyne could see the bearded fellows cleaning their harness, while their wives would come out for a gossip, with their needlework in their hands, and their long black shadows streaming across the yard. The air was full of the clack of their voices and the merry prattling of children, in strange contrast to the flash of arms and constant warlike challenge from the walls above.

"Methinks a company of school lads could hold this place against an army," quoth John.

"And so say I," said Alleyne.

"Nay, there you are wide of the clout," the bowman said gravely. "By my hilt! I have seen a stronger fortalice carried in a summer evening. I remember such a one in Picardy, with a name as long as a Gascon's pedigree. It was when I served under Sir Robert Knolles, before the days of the Company; and we came by good plunder at the sacking of it. I had myself a great silver bowl, with two goblets, and a plastron of Spanish steel. Pasques Dieu! there are some fine women over yonder! Mort de ma vie! see to that one in the doorway! I will go speak to her. But whom have we here?"

"Is there an archer here hight Sam Aylward?" asked a gaunt man-at-arms, clanking up to them across the courtyard.

"My name, friend," quoth the bowman.

"Then sure I have no need to tell thee mine," said the other.

"By the rood! if it is not Black Simon of Norwich!" cried Aylward. "A mon coeur, camarade, a mon coeur! Ah, but I am blithe to see thee!" The two fell upon each other and hugged like bears.

"And where from, old blood and bones?" asked the bowman.

"I am in service here. Tell me, comrade, is it sooth that we shall have another fling at these Frenchmen? It is so rumored in the guard-room, and that Sir Nigel will take the field once more."

"It is like enough, mon gar., as things go."

“Now may the Lord be praised!” cried the other. “This very night will I set apart a golden ouche to be offered on the shrine of my name-saint. I have pined for this, Aylward, as a young maid pines for her lover.”

“Art so set on plunder then? Is the purse so light that there is not enough for a rouse? I have a bag at my belt, camarade, and you have but to put your fist into it for what you want. It was ever share and share between us.”

“Nay, friend, it is not the Frenchman’s gold, but the Frenchman’s blood that I would have. I should not rest quiet in the grave, coz, if I had not another turn at them. For with us in France it has ever been fair and honest war — a shut fist for the man, but a bended knee for the woman. But how was it at Winchelsea when their galleys came down upon it some few years back? I had an old mother there, lad, who had come down thither from the Midlands to be the nearer her son. They found her afterwards by her own hearthstone, thrust through by a Frenchman’s bill. My second sister, my brother’s wife, and her two children, they were but ash-heaps in the smoking ruins of their house. I will not say that we have not wrought great scath upon France, but women and children have been safe from us. And so, old friend, my heart is hot within me, and I long to hear the old battle-cry again, and, by God’s truth! if Sir Nigel unfurls his pennon, here is one who will be right glad to feel the saddle-flaps under his knees.”

“We have seen good work together, old war-dog,” quoth Aylward; “and, by my hilt! we may hope to see more ere we die. But we are more like to hawk at the Spanish woodcock than at the French heron, though certes it is rumored that Du Guesclin with all the best lances of France have taken service under the lions and towers of Castile. But, comrade, it is in my mind that there is some small matter of dispute still open between us.”

“‘Fore God, it is sooth!” cried the other; “I had forgot it. The provost-marshal and his men tore us apart when last we met.”

“On which, friend, we vowed that we should settle the point when next we came together. Hast thy sword, I see, and the moon throws glimmer enough for such old night-birds as we. On guard, mon gar.! I have not heard clink of steel this month or more.”

“Out from the shadow then,” said the other, drawing his sword. “A vow is a vow, and not lightly to be broken.”

“A vow to the saints,” cried Alleyne, “is indeed not to be set aside; but this is a devil’s vow, and, simple clerk as I am, I am yet the mouthpiece of the true church when I say that it were mortal sin to fight on such a quarrel.

What! shall two grown men carry malice for years, and fly like snarling curs at each other's throats?"

"No malice, my young clerk, no malice," quoth Black Simon, "I have not a bitter drop in my heart for mine old comrade; but the quarrel, as he hath told you, is still open and unsettled. Fall on, Aylward!"

"Not whilst I can stand between you," cried Alleyne, springing before the bowman. "It is shame and sin to see two Christian Englishmen turn swords against each other like the frenzied bloodthirsty paynim."

"And, what is more," said Hordle John, suddenly appearing out of the buttery with the huge board upon which the pastry was rolled, "if either raise sword I shall flatten him like a Shrovetide pancake. By the black rood! I shall drive him into the earth, like a nail into a door, rather than see you do scath to each other."

"'Fore God, this is a strange way of preaching peace," cried Black Simon. "You may find the scath yourself, my lusty friend, if you raise your great cudgel to me. I had as lief have the castle drawbridge drop upon my pate."

"Tell me, Aylward," said Alleyne earnestly, with his hands outstretched to keep the pair asunder, "what is the cause of quarrel, that we may see whether honorable settlement may not be arrived at?"

The bowman looked down at his feet and then up at the moons "Parbleu!" he cried, "the cause of quarrel? Why, mon petit, it was years ago in Limousin, and how can I bear in mind what was the cause of it? Simon there hath it at the end of his tongue."

"Not I, in troth," replied the other; "I have had other things to think of. There was some sort of bickering over dice, or wine, or was it a woman, coz?"

"Pasques Dieu! but you have nicked it," cried Aylward. "It was indeed about a woman; and the quarrel must go forward, for I am still of the same mind as before."

"What of the woman, then?" asked Simon. "May the murrain strike me if I can call to mind aught about her."

"It was La Blanche Rose, maid at the sign of the 'Trois Corbeaux' at Limoges. Bless her pretty heart! Why, mon gar., I loved her."

"So did a many," quoth Simon. "I call her to mind now. On the very day that we fought over the little hussy, she went off with Evan ap Price, a long-legged Welsh dagsman. They have a hostel of their own now, somewhere on the banks of the Garonne, where the landlord drinks so much of the liquor that there is little left for the customers."

"So ends our quarrel, then," said Aylward, sheathing his sword. "A Welsh dagsman, i' faith! C'etait mauvais gout, camarade, and the more so when she had a jolly archer and a lusty man-at-arms to choose from."

"True, old lad. And it is as well that we can compose our differences honorably, for Sir Nigel had been out at the first clash of steel; and he hath sworn that if there be quarrelling in the garrison he would smite the right hand from the broilers. You know him of old, and that he is like to be as good as his word."

"Mort-Dieu! yes. But there are ale, mead, and wine in the buttery, and the steward a merry rogue, who will not haggle over a quart or two. Buvons, mon gar., for it is not every day that two old friends come together."

The old soldiers and Hordle John strode off together in all good fellowship. Alleyne had turned to follow them, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and found a young page by his side.

"The Lord Loring commands," said the boy, "that you will follow me to the great chamber, and await him there."

"But my comrades?"

"His commands were for you alone."

Alleyne followed the messenger to the east end of the courtyard, where a broad flight of steps led up to the doorway of the main hall, the outer wall of which is washed by the waters of the Avon. As designed at first, no dwelling had been allotted to the lord of the castle and his family but the dark and dismal basement story of the keep. A more civilised or more effeminate generation, however, had refused to be pent up in such a cellar, and the hall with its neighbouring chambers had been added for their accommodation. Up the broad steps Alleyne went, still following his boyish guide, until at the folding oak doors the latter paused, and ushered him into the main hall of the castle.

On entering the room the clerk looked round; but, seeing no one, he continued to stand, his cap in his hand, examining with the greatest interest a chamber which was so different to any to which he was accustomed. The days had gone by when a nobleman's hall was but a barn-like, rush-strewn enclosure, the common lounge and eating-room of every inmate of the castle. The Crusaders had brought back with them experiences of domestic luxuries, of Damascus carpets and rugs of Aleppo, which made them impatient of the hideous bareness and want of privacy which they found in their ancestral strongholds. Still stronger, however, had been the influence of the great French war; for, however well matched the nations might be in martial exercises, there could be no question but that our neighbours were infinitely superior to us in the arts of peace. A stream of returning knights, of wounded soldiers, and of unransomed French noblemen, had been for a quarter of a century continually pouring into England, every one of whom exerted an influence in the direction of greater domestic refinement, while shiploads of French furniture from Calais, Rouen, and other plundered towns, had supplied our own artisans with models on which to shape their work. Hence, in most English castles, and in Castle Twynham among the rest, chambers were to be found which would seem to be not wanting either in beauty or in comfort.

In the great stone fireplace a log fire was spurting and crackling, throwing out a ruddy glare which, with the four bracket-lamps which stood at each corner of the room, gave a bright and lightsome air to the whole apartment. Above was a wreath-work of blazonry, extending up to the carved and corniced oaken roof; while on either side stood the high canopied chairs placed for the master of the house and for his most honored guest. The walls were hung all round with most elaborate and brightly coloured tapestry, representing the achievements of Sir Bevis of Hampton, and behind this convenient screen were stored the tables dormant and benches which would be needed for banquet or high festivity. The floor was of polished tiles, with a square of red and black diapered Flemish carpet in the centre; and many settees, cushions, folding chairs, and carved bancals littered all over it. At the further end was a long black buffet or dresser, thickly covered with gold cups, silver salvers, and other such valuables. All this Alleyne examined with curious eyes; but most interesting of all to him was a small ebony table at his very side, on which, by the side of a chess-board and the scattered chessmen, there lay an open manuscript written in a right clerkly hand, and set forth with brave flourishes and devices along the margins. In vain Alleyne bethought him of where he was, and of those laws of good breeding and decorum which should restrain him: those coloured capitals and black even lines drew his hand down to them, as the loadstone draws the needle, until, almost before he knew it, he was standing with the romance of Garin de Montglane before his eyes, so absorbed in its contents as to be completely oblivious both of where he was and why he had come there.

He was brought back to himself, however, by a sudden little ripple of quick feminine laughter. Aghast, he dropped the manuscript among the chessmen and stared in bewilderment round the room. It was as empty and as still as ever. Again he stretched his hand out to the romance, and again came that roguish burst of merriment. He looked up at the ceiling, back at the closed door, and round at the stiff folds of motionless tapestry. Of a sudden, however, he caught a quick shimmer from the corner of a high-backed bancal in front of him, and, shifting a pace or two to the side, saw a white slender hand, which held a mirror of polished silver in such a way that the concealed observer could see without being seen. He stood irresolute, uncertain whether to advance or to take no notice; but, even as he hesitated, the mirror was whipped in, and a tall and stately young lady swept out from behind the oaken screen, with a dancing light of mischief in her eyes. Alleyne started with astonishment as he recognised the very maiden who had suffered from his brother’s violence in the forest. She no longer wore her gay riding-dress, however, but was attired in a long sweeping robe of black velvet of Bruges, with delicate tracery of white lace at neck and at wrist, scarce to be seen against her ivory skin. Beautiful as she had seemed to him before, the lithe charm of her figure and the proud, free grace of her bearing were enhanced now by the rich simplicity of her attire.

“Ah, you start,” said she, with the same sidelong look of mischief, “and I cannot marvel at it. Didst not look to see the distressed damosel again. Oh that I were a minstrel, that I might put it into rhyme, with the whole romance — the luckless maid, the wicked socman, and the virtuous clerk! So might our fame have gone down together for all time, and you be numbered with Sir Percival or Sir Galahad, or all the other rescuers of oppressed ladies.”

“What I did,” said Alleyne, “was too small a thing for thanks; and yet, if I may say it without offence, it was too grave and near a matter for mirth and raillery. I had counted on my brother’s love, but God has willed that it should be otherwise. It is a joy to me to see you again, lady, and to know that you have reached home in safety, if this be indeed your home.”

“Yes, in sooth, Castle Twynham is my home, and Sir Nigel Loring my father, I should have told you so this morning, but you said that you were coming thither, so I bethought me that I might hold it back as a surprise to you. Oh dear, but it was brave to see you!” she cried, bursting out a-laughing once more, and standing with her hand pressed to her side, and her half-closed eyes twinkling with amusement. “You drew back and came forward with your eyes upon my book there, like the mouse who sniffs the cheese and yet dreads the trap.”

“I take shame,” said Alleyne, “that I should have touched it.”

“Nay, it warmed my very heart to see it. So glad was I, that I laughed for very pleasure. My fine preacher can himself be tempted then, thought I; he is not made of another clay to the rest of us.”

“God help me! I am the weakest of the weak,” groaned Alleyne. “I pray that I may have more strength.”

“And to what end?” she asked sharply. “If you are, as I understand, to shut yourself forever in your cell within the four walls of an abbey, then of what use would it be were your prayer to be answered?”

“The use of my own salvation.”

She turned from him with a pretty shrug and wave. “Is that all?” she said. “Then you are no better than Father Christopher and the rest of them. Your own, your own, ever your own! My father is the king’s man, and when he rides into the press of fight he is not thinking ever of the saving of his own poor body; he recks little enough if he leave it on the field. Why then should you, who are soldiers of the Spirit, be ever moping or hiding in cell or in cave, with minds full of your own concerns, while the world, which you should be mending, is going on its way, and neither sees nor hears you? Were ye all as thoughtless of your own souls as the soldier is of his body, ye would be of more avail to the souls of others.”

“There is sooth in what you say, lady,” Alleyne answered; “and yet I scarce can see what you would have the clergy and the church to do.”

“I would have them live as others and do men’s work in the world, preaching by their lives rather than their words. I would have them come forth from their lonely places, mix with the borel folks, feel the pains and the pleasures, the cares and the rewards, the temptings and the stirrings of the common people. Let them toil and swinken, and labor, and plough the land, and take wives to themselves — —”

“Alas! alas!” cried Alleyne aghast, “you have surely sucked this poison from the man Wicliffe, of whom I have heard such evil things.”

"Nay, I know him not. I have learned it by looking from my own chamber window and marking these poor monks of the priory, their weary life, their profitless round. I have asked myself if the best which can be done with virtue is to shut it within high walls as though it were some savage creature. If the good will lock themselves up, and if the wicked will still wander free, then alas for the world!"

Alleyne looked at her in astonishment, for her cheek was flushed, her eyes gleaming, and her whole pose full of eloquence and conviction. Yet in an instant she had changed again to her old expression of merriment leavened with mischief.

"Wilt do what I ask?" said she.

"What is it, lady?"

"Oh, most ungallant clerk! A true knight would never have asked, but would have vowed upon the instant. 'Tis but to bear me out in what I say to my father."

"In what?"

"In saying, if he ask, that it was south of the Christchurch road that I met you. I shall be shut up with the tire-women else, and have a week of spindle and bodkin, when I would fain be galloping Troubadour up Wilverley Walk, or loosing little Roland at the Vinney Ridge herons."

"I shall not answer him if he ask."

"Not answer! But he will have an answer. Nay, but you must not fail me, or it will go ill with me."

"But, lady," cried poor Alleyne in great distress, "how can I say that it was to the south of the road when I know well that it was four miles to the north."

"You will not say it?"

"Surely you will not, too, when you know that it is not so?"

"Oh, I weary of your preaching!" she cried, and swept away with a toss of her beautiful head, leaving Alleyne as cast down and ashamed as though he had himself proposed some infamous thing. She was back again in an instant, however, in another of her varying moods.

"Look at that, my friend!" said she. "If you had been shut up in abbey or in cell this day you could not have taught a wayward maiden to abide by the truth. Is it not so? What avail is the shepherd if he leaves his sheep."

"A sorry shepherd!" said Alleyne humbly. "But here is your noble father."

“And you shall see how worthy a pupil I am. Father, I am much beholden to this young clerk, who was of service to me and helped me this very morning in Minstead Woods, four miles to the north of the Christchurch road, where I had no call to be, you having ordered it otherwise.” All this she reeled off in a loud voice, and then glanced with sidelong, questioning eyes at Alleyne for his approval.

Sir Nigel, who had entered the room with a silvery-haired old lady upon his arm, stared aghast at this sudden outburst of candor.

“Maude, Maude!” said he, shaking his head, “it is more hard for me to gain obedience from you than from the ten score drunken archers who followed me to Guienne. Yet, hush! little one, for your fair lady-mother will be here anon, and there is no need that she should know it. We will keep you from the provost-marshal this journey. Away to your chamber, sweeting, and keep a blithe face, for she who confesses is shriven. And now, fair mother,” he continued, when his daughter had gone, “sit you here by the fire, for your blood runs colder than it did. Alleyne Edricson, I would have a word with you, for I would fain that you should take service under me. And here in good time comes my lady, without whose counsel it is not my wont to decide aught of import; but, indeed, it was her own thought that you should come.”

“For I have formed a good opinion of you, and can see that you are one who may be trusted,” said the Lady Loring. “And in good sooth my dear lord hath need of such a one by his side, for he recks so little of himself that there should be one there to look to his needs and meet his wants. You have seen the cloisters; it were well that you should see the world too, ere you make choice for life between them.”

“It was for that very reason that my father willed that I should come forth into the world at my twentieth year,” said Alleyne.

“Then your father was a man of good counsel,” said she, “and you cannot carry out his will better than by going on this path, where all that is noble and gallant in England will be your companions.”

“You can ride?” asked Sir Nigel, looking at the youth with puckered eyes.

“Yes, I have ridden much at the abbey.”

“Yet there is a difference betwixt a friar’s hack and a warrior’s destrier. You can sing and play?”

“On citole, flute and rebeck.”

“Good! You can read blazonry?”

“Indifferent well.”

“Then read this,” quoth Sir Nigel, pointing upwards to one of the many quarterings which adorned the wall over the fireplace.

“Argent,” Alleyne answered, “a fess azure charged with three lozenges dividing three mullets sable. Over all, on an escutcheon of the first, a jambe gules.”

“A jambe gules erased,” said Sir Nigel, shaking his head solemnly. “Yet it is not amiss for a monk-bred man. I trust that you are lowly and serviceable?”

“I have served all my life, my lord.”

“Canst carve too?”

“I have carved two days a week for the brethren.”

“A model truly! Wilt make a squire of squires. But tell me, I pray, canst curl hair?”

“No, my lord, but I could learn.”

“It is of import,” said he, “for I love to keep my hair well ordered, seeing that the weight of my helmet for thirty years hath in some degree frayed it upon the top.” He pulled off his velvet cap of maintenance as he spoke, and displayed a pate which was as bald as an egg, and shone bravely in the firelight. “You see,” said he, whisking round, and showing one little strip where a line of scattered hairs, like the last survivors in some fatal field, still barely held their own against the fate which had fallen upon their comrades; “these locks need some little oiling and curling, for I doubt not that if you look slantwise at my head, when the light is good, you will yourself perceive that there are places where the hair is sparse.”

“It is for you also to bear the purse,” said the lady; “for my sweet lord is of so free and gracious a temper that he would give it gayly to the first who asked alms of him. All these things, with some knowledge of venerie, and of the management of horse, hawk and hound, with the grace and hardihood and courtesy which are proper to your age, will make you a fit squire for Sir Nigel Loring.”

“Alas! lady,” Alleyne answered, “I know well the great honor that you have done me in deeming me worthy to wait upon so renowned a knight, yet I am so conscious of my own weakness that I scarce dare incur duties which I might be so ill-fitted to fulfil.”

“Modesty and a humble mind,” said she, “are the very first and rarest gifts in page or squire. Your words prove that you have these, and all the rest is but the work of use and time. But there is no call for haste. Rest upon it for the night, and let your orisons ask for guidance in the matter. We knew your father well, and would fain help his son, though we have small cause to love your brother the Socman, who is forever stirring up strife in the county.”

“We can scare hope,” said Nigel, “to have all ready for our start before the feast of St. Luke, for there is much to be done in the time. You will have leisure, therefore, if it please you to take service under me, in which to learn your devoir. Bertrand, my daughter’s page, is hot to go; but in sooth he is over young for such rough work as may be before us.”

“And I have one favor to crave from you,” added the lady of the castle, as Alleyne turned to leave their presence. “You have, as I understand, much learning which you have acquired at Beaulieu.”

“Little enough, lady, compared with those who were my teachers.”

“Yet enough for my purpose, I doubt not. For I would have you give an hour or two a day whilst you are with us in discoursing with my daughter, the Lady Maude; for she is somewhat backward, I fear, and hath no love for letters, save for these poor fond romances, which do but fill her empty head with dreams of enchanted maidens and of errant cavaliers. Father Christopher comes over after nones from the priory, but he is stricken with years and slow of speech, so that she gets small profit from his teaching. I would have you do what you can with her, and with Agatha my young tire-woman, and with Dorothy Pierpont.”

And so Alleyne found himself not only chosen as squire to a knight but also as squire to three damosels, which was even further from the part which he had thought to play in the world. Yet he could but agree to do what he might, and so went forth from the castle hall with his face flushed and his head in a whirl at the thought of the strange and perilous paths which his feet were destined to tread.

CHAPTER XII. HOW ALLEYNE LEARNED MORE THAN HE COULD TEACH.

And now there came a time of stir and bustle, of furbishing of arms and clang of hammer from all the southland counties. Fast spread the tidings from thorpe to thorpe and from castle to castle, that the old game was afoot once more, and the lions and lilies to be in the field with the early spring. Great news this for that fierce old country, whose trade for a generation had been war, her exports archers and her imports prisoners. For six years her sons had chafed under an unwonted peace. Now they flew to their arms as to their birthright. The old soldiers of Crecy, of Nogent, and of Poictiers were glad to think that they might hear the war-trumpet once more, and gladder still were the hot youth who had chafed for years under the martial tales of their sires. To pierce the great mountains of the south, to fight the tamers of the fiery Moors, to follow the greatest captain of the age, to find sunny cornfields and vineyards, when the marches of Picardy and Normandy were as rare and bleak as the Jedburgh forests — here was a golden prospect for a race of warriors. From sea to sea there was stringing of bows in the cottage and clang of steel in the castle.

Nor did it take long for every stronghold to pour forth its cavalry, and every hamlet its footmen. Through the late autumn and the early winter every road and country lane resounded with nakir and trumpet, with the neigh of the war-horse and the clatter of marching men. From the Wrekin in the Welsh marches to the Cotswolds in the west or Butser in the south, there was no hill-top from which the peasant might not have seen the bright shimmer of arms, the toss and flutter of plume and of pensil. From bye-path, from woodland clearing, or from winding moor-side track these little rivulets of steel united in the larger roads to form a broader stream, growing ever fuller and larger as it approached the nearest or most commodious seaport. And there all day, and day after day, there was bustle and crowding and labor, while the great ships loaded up, and one after the other spread their white pinions and darted off to the open sea, amid the clash of cymbals and rolling of drums and lusty shouts of those who went and of those who waited. From Orwell to the Dart there was no port which did not send forth its little fleet, gay with streamer and bunting, as for a joyous festival. Thus in the season of the waning days the might of England put forth on to the waters.

In the ancient and populous county of Hampshire there was no lack of leaders or of soldiers for a service which promised either honor or profit. In the north the Saracen's head of the Brocas and the scarlet fish of the De Roches were waving over a strong body of archers from Holt, Woolmer, and Harewood forests. De Borhunte was up in the east, and Sir John de Montague in the west. Sir Luke de Ponynges, Sir Thomas West, Sir Maurice de Bruin, Sir Arthur Lipscombe, Sir Walter Ramsey, and stout Sir Oliver Buttesthorn were all marching south with levies from Andover, Arlesford, Odiham and Winchester, while from Sussex came Sir John Clinton, Sir Thomas Cheyne, and Sir John Fallislee, with a troop of picked men-at-arms, making for their port at Southampton. Greatest of all the musters, however, was that of Twynham Castle, for the name and the fame of Sir Nigel Loring drew towards him the keenest and boldest spirits, all eager to serve under so valiant a leader. Archers from the New Forest and the Forest of Bere, billmen from the pleasant country which is watered by the Stour, the Avon, and the Itchen, young cavaliers from the ancient Hampshire houses, all were pushing for Christchurch to take service under the banner of the five scarlet roses.

And now, could Sir Nigel have shown the bachelles of land which the laws of rank required, he might well have cut his forked pennon into a square banner, and taken such a following into the field as would have supported the dignity of a banneret. But poverty was heavy upon him, his land was scant, his coffers empty, and the very castle which covered him the holding of another. Sore was his heart when he saw rare bowmen and war-hardened spearmen turned away from his gates, for the lack of the money which might equip and pay them. Yet the letter which Aylward had brought him gave him powers which he was not slow to use. In it Sir Claude Latour, the Gascon lieutenant of the White Company, assured him that there remained in his keeping enough to fit out a hundred archers and twenty men-at-arms, which, joined to the three hundred veteran companions already in France, would make a force which any leader might be proud to command. Carefully and sagaciously the veteran knight chose out his men from the swarm of volunteers. Many an anxious consultation he held with Black Simon, Sam Aylward, and other of his more experienced followers, as to who should come and who should stay. By All Saints' day, however ere the last leaves had fluttered to earth in the Wilverley and Holmesley glades, he had filled up his full numbers, and mustered under his banner as stout a following of Hampshire foresters as ever twanged their war-bows. Twenty men-at-arms, too, well mounted and equipped, formed the cavalry of the party, while young Peter Terlake of Fareham, and Walter Ford of Botley, the martial sons of martial sires, came at their own cost to wait upon Sir Nigel and to share with Alleyne Edricson the duties of his squireship.

Yet, even after the enrolment, there was much to be done ere the party could proceed upon its way. For armor, swords, and lances, there was no need to take much forethought, for they were to be had both better and cheaper in Bordeaux than in England. With the long-bow, however, it was different. Yew staves indeed might be got in Spain, but it was well to take enough and to spare with them. Then three spare cords should be carried for each bow, with a great store of arrow-heads, besides the brigandines of chain mail, the wadded steel caps, and the brassarts or arm-guards, which were the proper equipment of the archer. Above all, the women for miles round were hard at work cutting the white surcoats which were the badge of the Company, and adorning them with the red lion of St. George upon the centre of the breast. When all was completed and the muster called in the castle yard the oldest soldier of the French wars was fain to confess that he had never looked upon a better equipped or more warlike body of men, from the old knight with his silk jupon, sitting his great black war-horse in the front of them, to Hordle John, the giant recruit, who leaned carelessly upon a huge black bow-stave in the rear. Of the six score, fully half had seen service before, while a fair sprinkling were men who had followed the wars all their lives, and had a hand in those battles which had made the whole world ring with the fame and the wonder of the island infantry.

Six long weeks were taken in these preparations, and it was close on Martinmas ere all was ready for a start. Nigh two months had Alleyne Edricson been in Castle Twynham — months which were fated to turn the whole current of his life, to divert it from that dark and lonely bourne towards which it tended, and to guide it into freer and more sunlit channels. Already he had learned to bless his father for that wise provision which had made him seek to know the world ere he had ventured to renounce it.

For it was a different place from that which he had pictured — very different from that which he had heard described when the master of the novices held forth to his charges upon the ravening wolves who lurked for them beyond the peaceful folds of Beaulieu. There was cruelty in it, doubtless, and lust and sin and sorrow; but were there not virtues to atone, robust positive virtues which did not shrink from temptation, which held their own in all the rough blasts of the work-a-day world? How colourless by contrast appeared the sinlessness which came from inability to sin, the conquest which was attained by flying from the enemy! Monk-bred as he was, Alleyne had native shrewdness and a mind which was young enough to form new conclusions and to outgrow old ones. He could not fail to see that the men with whom he was thrown in contact, rough-tongued, fierce and quarrelsome as they were, were yet of deeper nature and of more service in the world than the ox-eyed brethren who rose and ate and slept from year's end to year's end in their own narrow, stagnant circle of existence. Abbot Berghersh was a good man, but how was he better than this kindly knight, who lived as simple a life, held as lofty and inflexible an ideal of duty, and did with all his fearless heart whatever came to his hand to do? In turning from the service of the one to that of the other, Alleyne could not feel that he was lowering his aims in life. True that his gentle and thoughtful nature recoiled from the grim work of war, yet in those days of martial orders and militant brotherhoods there was no gulf fixed betwixt the priest and the soldier. The man of God and the man of the sword might without scandal be united in the same individual. Why then should he, a mere clerk, have scruples when so fair a chance lay in his way of carrying out the spirit as well as the letter of his father's provision. Much struggle it cost him, anxious spirit-questionings and midnight prayings, with many a doubt and a misgiving; but the issue was that ere he had been three days in Castle Twynham he had taken service under Sir Nigel, and had accepted horse and harness, the same to be paid for out of his share of the profits of the expedition. Henceforth for seven hours a day he strove in the tilt-yard to qualify himself to be a worthy squire to so worthy a knight. Young, supple and active, with all the pent energies from years of pure and healthy living, it was not long before he could manage his horse and his weapon well enough to earn an approving nod from critical men-at-arms, or to hold his own against Terlake and Ford, his fellow-servitors.

But were there no other considerations which swayed him from the cloisters towards the world? So complex is the human spirit that it can itself scarce discern the deep springs which impel it to action. Yet to Alleyne had been opened now a side of life of which he had been as innocent as a child, but one which was of such deep import that it could not fail to influence him in choosing his path. A woman, in monkish precepts, had been the embodiment and concentration of what was dangerous and evil — a focus whence spread all that was to be dreaded and avoided. So defiling was their presence that a true Cistercian might not raise his eyes to their face or touch their finger-tips under ban of church and fear of deadly sin. Yet here, day after day for an hour after nones, and for an hour before vespers, he found himself in close communion with three maidens, all young, all fair, and all therefore doubly dangerous from the monkish standpoint. Yet he found that in their presence he was conscious of a quick sympathy, a pleasant ease, a ready response to all that was most gentle and best in himself, which filled his soul with a vague and new-found joy.

And yet the Lady Maude Loring was no easy pupil to handle. An older and more world-wise man might have been puzzled by her varying moods, her sudden prejudices, her quick resentment at all constraint and authority. Did a subject interest her, was there space in it for either romance or imagination, she would fly through it with her subtle, active mind, leaving her two fellow-students and even her teacher toiling behind her. On the other hand, were there dull patience needed with steady toil and strain of memory, no single fact could by any driving be fixed in her mind. Alleyne might talk to her of the stories of old gods and heroes, of gallant deeds and lofty aims, or he might hold forth upon moon and stars, and let his fancy wander over the hidden secrets of the universe, and he would have a rapt listener with flushed cheeks and eloquent eyes, who could repeat after him the very words which had fallen from his lips. But when it came to almagest and astrolabe, the counting of figures and reckoning of epicycles, away would go her thoughts to horse and hound, and a vacant eye and listless face would warn the teacher that he had lost his hold upon his scholar. Then he had but to bring out the old romance book from the priory, with befingered cover of sheepskin and gold letters upon a purple ground, to entice her wayward mind back to the paths of learning.

At times, too, when the wild fit was upon her, she would break into pertness and rebel openly against Alleyne’s gentle firmness. Yet he would jog quietly on with his teachings, taking no heed to her mutiny, until suddenly she would be conquered by his patience, and break into self-revilings a hundred times stronger than her fault demanded. It chanced however that, on one of these mornings when the evil mood was upon her, Agatha the young tire-woman, thinking to please her mistress, began also to toss her head and make tart rejoinder to the teacher’s questions. In an instant the Lady Maude had turned upon her two blazing eyes and a face which was blanched with anger.

“You would dare!” said she. “You would dare!” The frightened tire-woman tried to excuse herself. “But my fair lady,” she stammered, “what have I done? I have said no more than I heard.”

“You would dare!” repeated the lady in a choking voice. “You, a graceless baggage, a foolish lack-brain, with no thought above the hemming of shifts. And he so kindly and hendy and long-suffering! You would — ha, you may well flee the room!”

She had spoken with a rising voice, and a clasping and opening of her long white fingers, so that it was no marvel that ere the speech was over the skirts of Agatha were whisking round the door and the click of her sobs to be heard dying swiftly away down the corridor.

Alleyne stared open-eyed at this tigress who had sprung so suddenly to his rescue. “There is no need for such anger,” he said mildly. “The maid’s words have done me no scath. It is you yourself who have erred.”

“I know it,” she cried, “I am a most wicked woman. But it is bad enough that one should misuse you. Ma foi! I will see that there is not a second one.”

“Nay, nay, no one has misused me,” he answered. “But the fault lies in your hot and bitter words. You have called her a baggage and a lack-brain, and I know not what.”

“And you are he who taught me to speak the truth,” she cried. “Now I have spoken it, and yet I cannot please you. Lack-brain she is, and lack-brain I shall call her.”

Such was a sample of the sudden janglings which marred the peace of that little class. As the weeks passed, however, they became fewer and less violent, as Alleyne’s firm and constant nature gained sway and influence over the Lady Maude. And yet, sooth to say, there were times when he had to ask himself whether it was not the Lady Maude who was gaining sway and influence over him. If she were changing, so was he. In drawing her up from the world, he was day by day being himself dragged down towards it. In vain he strove and reasoned with himself as to the madness of letting his mind rest upon Sir Nigel’s daughter. What was he — a younger son, a penniless clerk, a squire unable to pay for his own harness — that he should dare to raise his eyes to the fairest maid in Hampshire? So spake reason; but, in spite of all, her voice was ever in his ears and her image in his heart. Stronger than reason, stronger than cloister teachings, stronger than all that might hold him back, was that old, old tyrant who will brook no rival in the kingdom of youth.

And yet it was a surprise and a shock to himself to find how deeply she had entered into his life; how completely those vague ambitions and yearnings which had filled his spiritual nature centred themselves now upon this thing of earth. He had scarce dared to face the change which had come upon him, when a few sudden chance words showed it all up hard and clear, like a lightning flash in the darkness.

He had ridden over to Poole, one November day, with his fellow-squire, Peter Terlake, in quest of certain yew-staves from Wat Swathling, the Dorsetshire armorer. The day for their departure had almost come, and the two youths spurred it over the lonely downs at the top of their speed on their homeward course, for evening had fallen and there was much to be done. Peter was a hard, wiry, brown faced, country-bred lad who looked on the coming war as the schoolboy looks on his holidays. This day, however, he had been sombre and mute, with scarce a word a mile to bestow upon his comrade.

“Tell me Alleyne Edricson,” he broke out, suddenly, as they clattered along the winding track which leads over the Bournemouth hills, “has it not seemed to you that of late the Lady Maude is paler and more silent than is her wont?”

“It may be so,” the other answered shortly.

“And would rather sit distrait by her oriel than ride gayly to the chase as of old. Methinks, Alleyne, it is this learning which you have taught her that has taken all the life and sap from her. It is more than she can master, like a heavy spear to a light rider.”

“Her lady-mother has so ordered it,” said Alleyne.

“By our Lady! and withouten disrespect,” quoth Terlake, “it is in my mind that her lady-mother is more fitted to lead a company to a storming than to have the upbringing of this tender and milk-white maid. Hark ye, lad Alleyne, to what I never told man or woman yet. I love the fair Lady Maude, and would give the last drop of my heart’s blood to serve her.” He spoke with a gasping voice, and his face flushed crimson in the moonlight.

Alleyne said nothing, but his heart seemed to turn to a lump of ice in his bosom.

“My father has broad acres,” the other continued, “from Fareham Creek to the slope of the Portsdown Hill. There is filling of granges, hewing of wood, malting of grain, and herding of sheep as much as heart could wish, and I the only son. Sure am I that Sir Nigel would be blithe at such a match.”

“But how of the lady?” asked Alleyne, with dry lips.

“Ah, lad, there lies my trouble. It is a toss of the head and a droop of the eyes if I say one word of what is in my mind. ‘Twere as easy to woo the snow-dame that we shaped last winter in our castle yard. I did but ask her yesternight for her green veil, that I might bear it as a token or lambrequin upon my helm; but she flashed out at me that she kept it for a better man, and then all in a breath asked pardon for that she had spoke so rudely. Yet she would not take back the words either, nor would she grant the veil. Has it seemed to thee, Alleyne, that she loves any one?”

“Nay, I cannot say,” said Alleyne, with a wild throb of sudden hope in his heart.

“I have thought so, and yet I cannot name the man. Indeed, save myself, and Walter Ford, and you, who are half a clerk, and Father Christopher of the Priory, and Bertrand the page, who is there whom she sees?”

“I cannot tell,” quoth Alleyne shortly; and the two squires rode on again, each intent upon his own thoughts.

Next day at morning lesson the teacher observed that his pupil was indeed looking pale and jaded, with listless eyes and a weary manner. He was heavy-hearted to note the grievous change in her.

“Your mistress, I fear, is ill, Agatha,” he said to the tire-woman, when the Lady Maude had sought her chamber.

The maid looked aslant at him with laughing eyes. “It is not an illness that kills,” quoth she.

“Pray God not!” he cried. “But tell me, Agatha, what it is that ails her?”

“Methinks that I could lay my hand upon another who is smitten with the same trouble,” said she, with the same sidelong look. “Canst not give a name to it, and thou so skilled in leech-craft?”

“Nay, save that she seems aweary.”

“Well, bethink you that it is but three days ere you will all be gone, and Castle Twynham be as dull as the Priory. Is there not enough there to cloud a lady’s brow?”

“In sooth, yes,” he answered; “I had forgot that she is about to lose her father.”

“Her father!” cried the tire-woman, with a little trill of laughter. “Oh simple, simple!” And she was off down the passage like arrow from bow, while Alleyne stood gazing after her, betwixt hope and doubt, scarce daring to put faith in the meaning which seemed to underlie her words.

CHAPTER XIII. HOW THE WHITE COMPANY SET FORTH TO THE WARS.

St. Luke’s day had come and had gone, and it was in the season of Martinmas, when the oxen are driven in to the slaughter, that the White Company was ready for its journey. Loud shrieked the brazen bugles from keep and from gateway, and merry was the rattle of the war-drum, as the men gathered in the outer bailey, with torches to light them, for the morn had not yet broken. Alleyne, from the window of the armory, looked down upon the strange scene — the circles of yellow flickering light, the lines of stern and bearded faces, the quick shimmer of arms, and the lean heads of the horses. In front stood the bow-men, ten deep, with a fringe of under-officers, who paced hither and thither marshalling the ranks with curt precept or short rebuke. Behind were the little clump of steel-clad horsemen, their lances raised, with long pensils drooping down the oaken shafts. So silent and still were they, that they might have been metal-sheathed statues, were it not for the occasional quick, impatient stamp of their chargers, or the rattle of chamfron against neck-plates as they tossed and strained. A spear’s length in front of them sat the spare and long-limbed figure of Black Simon, the Norwich fighting man, his fierce, deep-lined face framed in steel, and the silk guidon marked with the five scarlet roses slanting over his right shoulder. All round, in the edge of the circle of the light, stood the castle servants, the soldiers who were to form the garrison, and little knots of women, who sobbed in their aprons and called shrilly to their name-saints to watch over the Wat, or Will, or Peterkin who had turned his hand to the work of war.

The young squire was leaning forward, gazing at the stirring and martial scene, when he heard a short, quick gasp at his shoulder, and there was the Lady Maude, with her hand to her heart, leaning up against the wall, slender and fair, like a half-plucked lily. Her face was turned away from him, but he could see, by the sharp intake of her breath, that she was weeping bitterly.

“Alas! alas!” he cried, all unnerved at the sight, “why is it that you are so sad, lady?”

"It is the sight of these brave men," she answered; "and to think how many of them go and how few are like to find their way back. I have seen it before, when I was a little maid, in the year of the Prince's great battle. I remember then how they mustered in the bailey, even as they do now, and my lady-mother holding me in her arms at this very window that I might see the show."

"Please God, you will see them all back ere another year be out," said he.

She shook her head, looking round at him with flushed cheeks and eyes that sparkled in the lamp-light. "Oh, but I hate myself for being a woman!" she cried, with a stamp of her little foot. "What can I do that is good? Here I must bide, and talk and sew and spin, and spin and sew and talk. Ever the same dull round, with nothing at the end of it. And now you are going too, who could carry my thoughts out of these gray walls, and raise my mind above tapestry and distaffs. What can I do? I am of no more use or value than that broken bowstave."

"You are of such value to me," he cried, in a whirl of hot, passionate words, "that all else has become nought. You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought. Oh, Maude, I cannot live without you, I cannot leave you without a word of love. All is changed to me since I have known you. I am poor and lowly and all unworthy of you; but if great love may weigh down such defects, then mine may do it. Give me but one word of hope to take to the wars with me — but one. Ah, you shrink, you shudder! My wild words have frightened you."

Twice she opened her lips, and twice no sound came from them. At last she spoke in a hard and measured voice, as one who dare not trust herself to speak too freely.

"This is over sudden," she said; "it is not so long since the world was nothing to you. You have changed once; perchance you may change again."

"Cruel!" he cried, "who hath changed me?"

"And then your brother," she continued with a little laugh, disregarding his question. "Methinks this hath become a family custom amongst the Edricsons. Nay, I am sorry; I did not mean a jibe. But, indeed, Alleyne, this hath come suddenly upon me, and I scarce know what to say."

"Say some word of hope, however distant — some kind word that I may cherish in my heart."

"Nay, Alleyne, it were a cruel kindness, and you have been too good and true a friend to me that I should use you despitefully. There cannot be a closer link between us. It is madness to think of it. Were there no other reasons, it is enough that my father and your brother would both cry out against it.”

“My brother, what has he to do with it? And your father — —”

“Come, Alleyne, was it not you who would have me act fairly to all men, and, certes, to my father amongst them?”

“You say truly,” he cried, “you say truly. But you do not reject me, Maude? You give me some ray of hope? I do not ask pledge or promise. Say only that I am not hateful to you — that on some happier day I may hear kinder words from you.”

Her eyes softened upon him, and a kind answer was on her lips, when a hoarse shout, with the clatter of arms and stamping of steeds, rose up from the bailey below. At the sound her face set her eyes sparkled, and she stood with flushed cheek and head thrown back — a woman’s body, with a soul of fire.

“My father hath gone down,” she cried. “Your place is by his side. Nay, look not at me, Alleyne. It is no time for dallying. Win my father’s love, and all may follow. It is when the brave soldier hath done his devoir that he hopes for his reward, Farewell, and may God be with you!” She held out her white, slim hand to him, but as he bent his lips over it she whisked away and was gone, leaving in his outstretched hand the very green veil for which poor Peter Terlake had craved in vain. Again the hoarse cheering burst out from below, and he heard the clang of the rising portcullis. Pressing the veil to his lips, he thrust it into the bosom of his tunic, and rushed as fast as feet could bear him to arm himself and join the muster.

The raw morning had broken ere the hot spiced ale had been served round and the last farewell spoken. A cold wind blew up from the sea and ragged clouds drifted swiftly across the sky.

The Christchurch townsfolk stood huddled about the Bridge of Avon, the women pulling tight their shawls and the men swathing themselves in their gaberdines, while down the winding path from the castle came the van of the little army, their feet clanging on the hard, frozen road. First came Black Simon with his banner, bestriding a lean and powerful dapple-gray charger, as hard and wiry and warwise as himself. After him, riding three abreast, were nine men-at-arms, all picked soldiers, who had followed the French wars before, and knew the marches of Picardy as they knew the downs of their native Hampshire. They were armed to the teeth with lance, sword, and mace, with square shields notched at the upper right-hand corner to serve as a spear-rest. For defence each man wore a coat of interlaced leathern thongs, strengthened at the shoulder, elbow, and upper arm with slips of steel. Greaves and knee-pieces were also of leather backed by steel, and their gauntlets and shoes were of iron plates, craftily jointed. So, with jingle of arms and clatter of hoofs, they rode across the Bridge of Avon, while the burghers shouted lustily for the flag of the five roses and its gallant guard.

Close at the heels of the horses came two-score archers bearded and burly, their round targets on their backs and their long yellow bows, the most deadly weapon that the wit of man had yet devised, thrusting forth from behind their shoulders. From each man's girdle hung sword or axe, according to his humor, and over the right hip there jutted out the leathern quiver with its bristle of goose, pigeon, and peacock feathers. Behind the bowmen strode two trumpeters blowing upon nakirs, and two drummers in parti-coloured clothes. After them came twenty-seven sumpter horses carrying tent-poles, cloth, spare arms, spurs, wedges, cooking kettles, horse-shoes, bags of nails and the hundred other things which experience had shown to be needful in a harried and hostile country. A white mule with red trappings, led by a varlet, carried Sir Nigel's own napery and table comforts. Then came two-score more archers, ten more men-at-arms, and finally a rear guard of twenty bowmen, with big John towering in the front rank and the veteran Aylward marching by the side, his battered harness and faded surcoat in strange contrast with the snow-white jupons and shining brigandines of his companions. A quick cross-fire of greetings and questions and rough West Saxon jests flew from rank to rank, or were bandied about betwixt the marching archers and the gazing crowd.

"Hola, Gaffer Higginson!" cried Aylward, as he spied the portly figure of the village innkeeper. "No more of thy nut-brown, mon gar. We leave it behind us."

"By St. Paul, no!" cried the other. "You take it with you. Devil a drop have you left in the great kilderkin. It was time for you to go."

"If your cask is leer, I warrant your purse is full, gaffer," shouted Hordle John. "See that you lay in good store of the best for our home-coming."

"See that you keep your throat whole for the drinking of it archer," cried a voice, and the crowd laughed at the rough pleasantry.

"If you will warrant the beer, I will warrant the throat," said John composedly.

"Close up the ranks!" cried Aylward. "En avant, mes enfants! Ah, by my finger bones, there is my sweet Mary from the Priory Mill! Ma foi, but she is beautiful! Adieu, Mary ma cherie! Mon coeur est toujours a toi. Brace your belt, Watkins, man, and swing your shoulders as a free companion should. By my hilt! your jerkins will be as dirty as mine ere you clap eyes on Hengistbury Head again."

The Company had marched to the turn of the road ere Sir Nigel Loring rode out from the gateway, mounted on Pommers, his great black war-horse, whose ponderous footfall on the wooden drawbridge echoed loudly from the gloomy arch which spanned it. Sir Nigel was still in his velvet dress of peace, with flat velvet cap of maintenance, and curling ostrich feather clasped in a golden brooch. To his three squires riding behind him it looked as though he bore the bird's egg as well as its feather, for the back of his bald pate shone like a globe of ivory. He bore no arms save the long and heavy sword which hung at his saddle-bow; but Terlake carried in front of him the high wivern-crested bassinet, Ford the heavy ash spear with swallow-tail pennon, while Alleyne was entrusted with the emblazoned shield. The Lady Loring rode her palfrey at her lord's bridle-arm, for she would see him as far as the edge of the forest, and ever and anon she turned her hard-lined face up wistfully to him and ran a questioning eye over his apparel and appointments.

"I trust that there is nothing forgot," she said, beckoning to Alleyne to ride on her further side. "I trust him to you, Edricson. Hosen, shirts, cyclas, and under-jupons are in the brown basket on the left side of the mule. His wine he takes hot when the nights are cold, malvoisie or vernage, with as much spice as would cover the thumb-nail. See that he hath a change if he come back hot from the tilting. There is goose-grease in a box, if the old scars ache at the turn of the weather. Let his blankets be dry and — —"

"Nay, my heart's life," the little knight interrupted, "trouble not now about such matters. Why so pale and wan, Edricson? Is it not enow to make a man's heart dance to see this noble Company, such valiant men-at-arms, such lusty archers? By St. Paul! I would be ill to please if I were not blithe to see the red roses flying at the head of so noble a following!"

"The purse I have already given you, Edricson," continue the lady. "There are in it twenty-three marks, one noble, three shillings and fourpence, which is a great treasure for one man to carry. And I pray you to bear in mind, Edricson, that he hath two pair of shoes, those of red leather for common use, and the others with golden toe-chains, which he may wear should he chance to drink wine with the Prince or with Chandos."

"My sweet bird," said Sir Nigel, "I am right loth to part from you, but we are now at the fringe of the forest, and it is not right that I should take the chatelaine too far from her trust."

"But oh, my dear lord," she cried with a trembling lip, "let me bide with you for one furlong further — or one and a half perhaps. You may spare me this out of the weary miles that you will journey along."

"Come, then, my heart's comfort," he answered. "But I must crave a gage from thee. It is my custom, dearling, and hath been since I have first known thee, to proclaim by herald in such camps, townships, or fortalices as I may chance to visit, that my lady-love, being beyond compare the fairest and sweetest in Christendom, I should deem it great honor and kindly condescension if any cavalier would run three courses against me with sharpened lances, should he chance to have a lady whose claim he was willing to advance. I pray you then my fair dove, that you will vouchsafe to me one of those doeskin gloves, that I may wear it as the badge of her whose servant I shall ever be."

"Alack and alas for the fairest and sweetest!" she cried. "Fair and sweet I would fain be for your dear sake, my lord, but old I am and ugly, and the knights would laugh should you lay lance in rest in such a cause."

"Edricson," quoth Sir Nigel, "you have young eyes, and mine are somewhat bedimmed. Should you chance to see a knight laugh, or smile, or even, look you, arch his brows, or purse his mouth, or in any way show surprise that I should uphold the Lady Mary, you will take particular note of his name, his coat-armor, and his lodging. Your glove, my life's desire!"

The Lady Mary Loring slipped her hand from her yellow leather gauntlet, and he, lifting it with dainty reverence, bound it to the front of his velvet cap.

"It is with mine other guardian angels," quoth he, pointing at the saints' medals which hung beside it. "And now, my dearest, you have come far enow. May the Virgin guard and prosper thee! One kiss!" He bent down from his saddle, and then, striking spurs into his horse's sides, he galloped at top speed after his men, with his three squires at his heels. Half a mile further, where the road topped a hill, they looked back, and the Lady Mary on her white palfrey was still where they had left her. A moment later they were on the downward slope, and she had vanished from their view.

CHAPTER XIV. HOW SIR NIGEL SOUGHT FOR A WAYSIDE VENTURE.

For a time Sir Nigel was very moody and downcast, with bent brows and eyes upon the pommel of his saddle. Edricson and Terlake rode behind him in little better case, while Ford, a careless and light-hearted youth, grinned at the melancholy of his companions, and flourished his lord’s heavy spear, making a point to right and a point to left, as though he were a paladin contending against a host of assailants. Sir Nigel happened, however, to turn himself in his saddle-Ford instantly became as stiff and as rigid as though he had been struck with a palsy. The four rode alone, for the archers had passed a curve in the road, though Alleyne could still hear the heavy clump, clump of their marching, or catch a glimpse of the sparkle of steel through the tangle of leafless branches.

“Ride by my side, friends, I entreat of you,” said the knight, reining in his steed that they might come abreast of him. “For, since it hath pleased you to follow me to the wars, it were well that you should know how you may best serve me. I doubt not, Terlake, that you will show yourself a worthy son of a valiant father; and you, Ford, of yours; and you, Edricson, that you are mindful of the old-time house from which all men know that you are sprung. And first I would have you bear very steadfastly in mind that our setting forth is by no means for the purpose of gaining spoil or exacting ransom, though it may well happen that such may come to us also. We go to France, and from thence I trust to Spain, in humble search of a field in which we may win advancement and perchance some small share of glory. For this purpose I would have you know that it is not my wont to let any occasion pass where it is in any way possible that honor may be gained. I would have you bear this in mind, and give great heed to it that you may bring me word of all cartels, challenges, wrongs, tyrannies, infamies, and wronging of damsels. Nor is any occasion too small to take note of, for I have known such trifles as the dropping of a gauntlet, or the flicking of a breadcrumb, when well and properly followed up, lead to a most noble spear-running. But, Edricson, do I not see a cavalier who rides down yonder road amongst the nether shaw? It would be well, perchance, that you should give him greeting from me. And, should he be of gentle blood it may be that he would care to exchange thrusts with me."

"Why, my lord," quoth Ford, standing in his stirrups and shading his eyes, "it is old Hob Davidson, the fat miller of Milton!"

"Ah, so it is, indeed," said Sir Nigel, puckering his cheeks; "but wayside ventures are not to be scorned, for I have seen no finer passages than are to be had from such chance meetings, when cavaliers are willing to advance themselves. I can well remember that two leagues from the town of Rheims I met a very valiant and courteous cavalier of France, with whom I had gentle and most honorable contention for upwards of an hour. It hath ever grieved me that I had not his name, for he smote upon me with a mace and went upon his way ere I was in condition to have much speech with him; but his arms were an allurion in chief above a fess azure. I was also on such an occasion thrust through the shoulder by Lyon de Montcourt, whom I met on the high road betwixt Libourne and Bordeaux. I met him but the once, but I have never seen a man for whom I bear a greater love and esteem. And so also with the squire Le Bourg Capillet, who would have been a very valiant captain had he lived."

"He is dead then?" asked Alleyne Edricson.

"Alas! it was my ill fate to slay him in a bickering which broke out in a field near the township of Tarbes. I cannot call to mind how the thing came about, for it was in the year of the Prince's ride through Languedoc, when there was much fine skirmishing to be had at barriers. By St. Paul! I do not think that any honorable cavalier could ask for better chance of advancement than might be had by spurring forth before the army and riding to the gateways of Narbonne, or Bergerac or Mont Giscar, where some courteous gentleman would ever be at wait to do what he might to meet your wish or ease you of your vow. Such a one at Ventadour ran three courses with me betwixt daybreak and sunrise, to the great exaltation of his lady."

"And did you slay him also, my lord?" asked Ford with reverence.

"I could never learn, for he was carried within the barrier, and as I had chanced to break the bone of my leg it was a great unease for me to ride or even to stand. Yet, by the goodness of heaven and the pious intercession of the valiant St. George, I was able to sit my charger in the ruffle of Poictiers, which was no very long time afterwards. But what have we here? A very fair and courtly maiden, or I mistake."

It was indeed a tall and buxom country lass, with a basket of spinach-leaves upon her head, and a great slab of bacon tucked under one arm. She bobbed a frightened curtsey as Sir Nigel swept his velvet hat from his head and reined up his great charger.

“God be with thee, fair maiden!” said he.

“God guard thee, my lord!” she answered, speaking in the broadest West Saxon speech, and balancing herself first on one foot and then on the other in her bashfulness.

“Fear not, my fair damsel,” said Sir Nigel, “but tell me if perchance a poor and most unworthy knight can in any wise be of service to you. Should it chance that you have been used despitefully, it may be that I may obtain justice for you.”

“Lawk no, kind sir,” she answered, clutching her bacon the tighter, as though some design upon it might be hid under this knightly offer. “I be the milking wench o’ fairmer Arnold, and he be as kind a maister as heart could wish.”

“It is well,” said he, and with a shake of the bridle rode on down the woodland path. “I would have you bear in mind,” he continued to his squires, “that gentle courtesy is not, as is the base use of so many false knights, to be shown only to maidens of high degree, for there is no woman so humble that a true knight may not listen to her tale of wrong. But here comes a cavalier who is indeed in haste. Perchance it would be well that we should ask him whither he rides, for it may be that he is one who desires to advance himself in chivalry.”

The bleak, hard, wind-swept road dipped down in front of them into a little valley, and then, writhing up the heathy slope upon the other side, lost itself among the gaunt pine-trees. Far away between the black lines of trunks the quick glitter of steel marked where the Company pursued its way. To the north stretched the tree country, but to the south, between two swelling downs, a glimpse might be caught of the cold gray shimmer of the sea, with the white fleck of a galley sail upon the distant sky-line. Just in front of the travellers a horseman was urging his steed up the slope, driving it on with whip and spur as one who rides for a set purpose. As he clattered up, Alleyne could see that the roan horse was gray with dust and flecked with foam, as though it had left many a mile behind it. The rider was a stern-faced man, hard of mouth and dry of eye, with a heavy sword clanking at his side, and a stiff white bundle swathed in linen balanced across the pommel of his saddle.

"The king's messenger," he bawled as he came up to them. "The messenger of the king. Clear the causeway for the king's own man."

"Not so loudly, friend," quoth the little knight, reining his horse half round to bar the path. "I have myself been the king's man for thirty years or more, but I have not been wont to halloo about it on a peaceful highway."

"I ride in his service," cried the other, "and I carry that which belongs to him. You bar my path at your peril."

"Yet I have known the king's enemies claim to ride in his same," said Sir Nigel. "The foul fiend may lurk beneath a garment of light. We must have some sign or warrant of your mission."

"Then must I hew a passage," cried the stranger, with his shoulder braced round and his hand upon his hilt. "I am not to be stopped on the king's service by every gadabout."

"Should you be a gentleman of quarterings and coat-armor," lisped Sir Nigel, "I shall be very blithe to go further into the matter with you. If not, I have three very worthy squires, any one of whom would take the thing upon himself, and debate it with you in a very honorable way."

The man scowled from one to the other, and his hand stole away from his sword.

"You ask me for a sign," he said. "Here is a sign for you, since you must have one." As he spoke he whirled the covering from the object in front of him and showed to their horror that it was a newly-severed human leg. "By God's tooth!" he continued, with a brutal laugh, "you ask me if I am a man of quarterings, and it is even so, for I am officer to the verderer's court at Lyndhurst. This thievish leg is to hang at Milton, and the other is already at Brockenhurst, as a sign to all men of what comes of being over-fond of venison pasty."

"Faugh!" cried Sir Nigel. "Pass on the other side of the road, fellow, and let us have the wind of you. We shall trot our horses, my friends, across this pleasant valley, for, by Our Lady! a breath of God's fresh air is right welcome after such a sight."

"We hoped to snare a falcon," said he presently, "but we netted a carrion-crow. Ma foi! but there are men whose hearts are tougher than a boar's hide. For me, I have played the old game of war since ever I had hair on my chin, and I have seen ten thousand brave men in one day with their faces to the sky, but I swear by Him who made me that I cannot abide the work of the butcher."

"And yet, my fair lord," said Edricson, "there has, from what I hear, been much of such devil's work in France."

"Too much, too much," he answered. "But I have ever observed that the foremost in the field are they who would scorn to mishandle a prisoner. By St. Paul! it is not they who carry the breach who are wont to sack the town, but the laggard knaves who come crowding in when a way has been cleared for them. But what is this among the trees?"

"It is a shrine of Our Lady," said Terlake, "and a blind beggar who lives by the alms of those who worship there."

"A shrine!" cried the knight. "Then let us put up an orison." Pulling off his cap, and clasping his hands, he chanted in a shrill voice: "Benedictus dominus Deus meus, qui docet manus meas ad proelium, et digitos meos ad bellum." A strange figure he seemed to his three squires, perched on his huge horse, with his eyes upturned and the wintry sun shimmering upon his bald head. "It is a noble prayer," he remarked, putting on his hat again, "and it was taught to me by the noble Chandos himself. But how fares it with you, father? Methinks that I should have ruth upon you, seeing that I am myself like one who looks through a horn window while his neighbours have the clear crystal. Yet, by St. Paul! there is a long stride between the man who hath a horn casement and him who is walled in on every hand."

"Alas! fair sir," cried the blind old man, "I have not seen the blessed blue of heaven this two-score years, since a levin flash burned the sight out of my head."

"You have been blind to much that is goodly and fair," quoth Sir Nigel, "but you have also been spared much that is sorry and foul. This very hour our eyes have been shocked with that which would have left you unmoved. But, by St. Paul! we must on, or our Company will think that they have lost their captain somewhat early in the venture. Throw the man my purse, Edricson, and let us go."

Alleyne, lingering behind, bethought him of the Lady Loring's counsel, and reduced the noble gift which the knight had so freely bestowed to a single penny, which the beggar with many mumbled blessings thrust away into his wallet. Then, spurring his steed, the young squire rode at the top of his speed after his companions, and overtook them just at the spot where the trees fringe off into the moor and the straggling hamlet of Hordle lies scattered on either side of the winding and deeply-rutted track. The Company was already well-nigh through the village; but, as the knight and his squires closed up upon them, they heard the clamor of a strident voice, followed by a roar of deep-chested laughter from the ranks of the archers. Another minute brought them up with the rear-guard, where every man marched with his beard on his shoulder and a face which was agrin with merriment. By the side of the column walked a huge red-headed bowman, with his hands thrown out in argument and expostulation, while close at his heels followed a little wrinkled woman who poured forth a shrill volley of abuse, varied by an occasional thwack from her stick, given with all the force of her body, though she might have been beating one of the forest trees for all the effect that she seemed likely to produce.

"I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel gravely, as he rode up, "that this doth not mean that any violence hath been offered to women. If such a thing happened, I tell you that the man shall hang, though he were the best archer that ever wore brassart."

"Nay, my fair lord," Aylward answered with a grin, "it is violence which is offered to a man. He comes from Hordle, and this is his mother who hath come forth to welcome him."

"You rammucky lurden," she was howling, with a blow between each catch of her breath, "you shammocking, yaping, over-long good-for-nought. I will teach thee! I will baste thee! Aye, by my faith!"

"Whist, mother," said John, looking back at her from the tail of his eye, "I go to France as an archer to give blows and to take them."

"To France, quotha?" cried the old dame. "Bide here with me, and I shall warrant you more blows than you are like to get in France. If blows be what you seek, you need not go further than Hordle."

"By my hilt! the good dame speaks truth," said Aylward. "It seems to be the very home of them."

"What have you to say, you clean-shaved galley-beggar?" cried the fiery dame, turning upon the archer. "Can I not speak with my own son but you must let your tongue clack? A soldier, quotha, and never a hair on his face. I have seen a better soldier with pap for food and swaddling clothes for harness."

"Stand to it, Aylward," cried the archers, amid a fresh burst of laughter.

"Do not thwart her, comrade," said big John. "She hath a proper spirit for her years and cannot abide to be thwarted. It is kindly and homely to me to hear her voice and to feel that she is behind me. But I must leave you now, mother, for the way is over-rough for your feet; but I will bring you back a silken gown, if there be one in France or Spain, and I will bring Jinny a silver penny; so good-bye to you, and God have you in His keeping!" Whipping up the little woman, he lifted her lightly to his lips, and then, taking his place in the ranks again, marched on with the laughing Company.

"That was ever his way," she cried, appealing to Sir Nigel, who reined up his horse and listened with the greatest courtesy. "He would jog on his own road for all that I could do to change him. First he must be a monk forsooth, and all because a wench was wise enough to turn her back on him. Then he joins a rascally crew and must needs trapse off to the wars, and me with no one to bait the fire if I be out, or tend the cow if I be home. Yet I have been a good mother to him. Three hazel switches a day have I broke across his shoulders, and he takes no more notice than you have seen him to-day."

"Doubt not that he will come back to you both safe and prosperous, my fair dame," quoth Sir Nigel. "Meanwhile it grieves me that as I have already given my purse to a beggar up the road I — —"

"Nay, my lord," said Alleyne, "I still have some moneys remaining."

"Then I pray you to give them to this very worthy woman." He cantered on as he spoke, while Alleyne, having dispensed two more pence, left the old dame standing by the furthest cottage of Hordle, with her shrill voice raised in blessings instead of revilings.

There were two cross-roads before they reached the Lymington Ford, and at each of then Sir Nigel pulled up his horse, and waited with many a curvet and gambade, craning his neck this way and that to see if fortune would send him a venture. Crossroads had, as he explained, been rare places for knightly spear-runnings, and in his youth it was no uncommon thing for a cavalier to abide for weeks at such a point, holding gentle debate with all comers, to his own advancement and the great honor of his lady. The times were changed, however, and the forest tracks wound away from them deserted and silent, with no trample of war-horse or clang of armor which might herald the approach of an adversary — so that Sir Nigel rode on his way disconsolate. At the Lymington River they splashed through the ford, and lay in the meadows on the further side to eat the bread and salt meat which they carried upon the sumpter horses. Then, ere the sun was on the slope of the heavens, they had deftly trussed up again, and were swinging merrily upon their way, two hundred feet moving like two.

There is a third cross-road where the track from Boldre runs down to the old fishing village of Pitt’s Deep. Down this, as they came abreast of it, there walked two men, the one a pace or two behind the other. The cavaliers could not but pull up their horses to look at them, for a stranger pair were never seen journeying together. The first was a misshapen, squalid man with cruel, cunning eyes and a shock of tangled red hair, bearing in his hands a small unpainted cross, which he held high so that all men might see it. He seemed to be in the last extremity of fright, with a face the colour of clay and his limbs all ashake as one who hath an ague. Behind him, with his toe ever rasping upon the other’s heels, there walked a very stern, black-bearded man with a hard eye and a set mouth. He bore over his shoulder a great knotted stick with three jagged nails stuck in the head of it, and from time to time he whirled it up in the air with a quivering arm, as though he could scarce hold back from dashing his companion’s brains out. So in silence they walked under the spread of the branches on the grass-grown path from Boldre.

“By St. Paul!” quoth the knight, “but this is a passing strange sight, and perchance some very perilous and honorable venture may arise from it. I pray you, Edricson, to ride up to them and to ask them the cause of it.”

There was no need, however, for him to move, for the twain came swiftly towards them until they were within a spear’s length, when the man with the cross sat himself down sullenly upon a tussock of grass by the wayside, while the other stood beside him with his great cudgel still hanging over his head. So intent was he that he raised his eyes neither to knight nor squires, but kept them ever fixed with a savage glare upon his comrade.

“I pray you, friend,” said Sir Nigel, “to tell us truthfully who you are, and why you follow this man with such bitter enmity?

“So long as I am within the pale of the king’s law,” the stranger answered, “I cannot see why I should render account to every passing wayfarer.”

“You are no very shrewd reasoner, fellow,” quoth the knight; “for if it be within the law for you to threaten him with your club, then it is also lawful for me to threaten you with my sword.”

The man with the cross was down in an instant on his knees upon the ground, with hands clasped above him and his face shining with hope. “For dear Christ’s sake, my fair lord,” he cried in a crackling voice, “I have at my belt a bag with a hundred rose nobles, and I will give it to you freely if you will but pass your sword through this man’s body.”

“How, you foul knave?” exclaimed Sir Nigel hotly. “Do you think that a cavalier’s arm is to be bought like a packman’s ware. By St. Paul! I have little doubt that this fellow hath some very good cause to hold you in hatred.”

“Indeed, my fair sir, you speak sooth,” quoth he with the club, while the other seated himself once more by the wayside. “For this man is Peter Peterson, a very noted rieve, draw-latch, and murtherer, who has wrought much evil for many years in the parts about Winchester. It was but the other day, upon the feasts of the blessed Simon and Jude, that he slew my younger brother William in Bere Forest — for which, by the black thorn of Glastonbury! I shall have his heart’s blood, though I walk behind him to the further end of earth.”

“But if this be indeed so,” asked Sir Nigel, “why is it that you have come with him so far through the forest?”

“Because I am an honest Englishman, and will take no more than the law allows. For when the deed was done this foul and base wretch fled to sanctuary at St. Cross, and I, as you may think, after him with all the posse. The prior, however, hath so ordered that while he holds this cross no man may lay hand upon him without the ban of church, which heaven forfend from me or mine. Yet, if for an instant he lay the cross aside, or if he fail to journey to Pitt’s Deep, where it is ordered that he shall take ship to outland parts, or if he take not the first ship, or if until the ship be ready he walk not every day into the sea as far as his loins, then he becomes outlaw, and I shall forthwith dash out his brains.”

At this the man on the ground snarled up at him like a rat, while the other clenched his teeth, and shook his club, and looked down at him with murder in his eyes. Knight and squire gazed from rogue to avenger, but as it was a matter which none could mend they tarried no longer, but rode upon their way. Alleyne, looking back, saw that the murderer had drawn bread and cheese from his scrip, and was silently munching it, with the protecting cross still hugged to his breast, while the other, black and grim, stood in the sunlit road and threw his dark shadow athwart him.

CHAPTER XV. HOW THE YELLOW COG SAILED FORTH FROM LEPE.

That night the Company slept at St. Leonard’s, in the great monastic barns and spicarium — ground well known both to Alleyne and to John, for they were almost within sight of the Abbey of Beaulieu. A strange thrill it gave to the young squire to see the well-remembered white dress once more, and to hear the measured tolling of the deep vespers bell. At early dawn they passed across the broad, sluggish, reed-girt stream — men, horses, and baggage in the flat ferry barges — and so journeyed on through the fresh morning air past Exbury to Lepe. Topping the heathy down, they came of a sudden full in sight of the old sea-port — a cluster of houses, a trail of blue smoke, and a bristle of masts. To right and left the long blue curve of the Solent lapped in a fringe of foam upon the yellow beach. Some way out from the town a line of pessoners, creyers, and other small craft were rolling lazily on the gentle swell. Further out still lay a great merchant-ship, high ended, deep waisted, painted of a canary yellow, and towering above the fishing-boats like a swan among ducklings.

“By St. Paul!” said the knight, “our good merchant of Southampton hath not played us false, for methinks I can see our ship down yonder. He said that she would be of great size and of a yellow shade.”

“By my hilt, yes!” muttered Aylward; “she is yellow as a kite’s claw, and would carry as many men as there are pips in a pomegranate.”

“It is as well,” remarked Terlake; “for methinks, my fair lord, that we are not the only ones who are waiting a passage to Gascony. Mine eye catches at times a flash and sparkle among yonder houses which assuredly never came from shipman’s jacket or the gaberdine of a burgher.”

“I can also see it,” said Alleyne, shading his eyes with his hand. “And I can see men-at-arms in yonder boats which ply betwixt the vessel and the shore. But methinks that we are very welcome here, for already they come forth to meet us.”

A tumultuous crowd of fishermen, citizens, and women had indeed swarmed out from the northern gate, and approached them up the side of the moor, waving their hands and dancing with joy, as though a great fear had been rolled back from their minds. At their head rode a very large and solemn man with a long chin and a drooping lip. He wore a fur tippet round his neck and a heavy gold chain over it, with a medallion which dangled in front of him.

"Welcome, most puissant and noble lord," he cried, doffing his bonnet to Black Simon. "I have heard of your lordship's valiant deeds, and in sooth they might be expected from your lordship's face and bearing. Is there any small matter in which I may oblige you?"

"Since you ask me," said the man-at-arms, "I would take it kindly if you could spare a link or two of the chain which hangs round your neck."

"What, the corporation chain!" cried the other in horror. "The ancient chain of the township of Lepe! This is but a sorry jest, Sir Nigel."

"What the plague did you ask me for then?" said Simon. "But if it is Sir Nigel Loring with whom you would speak, that is he upon the black horse."

The Mayor of Lepe gazed with amazement on the mild face and slender frame of the famous warrior.

"Your pardon, my gracious lord," he cried. "You see in me the mayor and chief magistrate of the ancient and powerful town of Lepe. I bid you very heartily welcome, and the more so as you are come at a moment when we are sore put to it for means of defence.'

"Ha!" cried Sir Nigel, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, my lord, for the town being very ancient and the walls as old as the town, it follows that they are very ancient too. But there is a certain villainous and bloodthirsty Norman pirate hight Tete-noire, who, with a Genoan called Tito Caracci, commonly known as Spade-beard, hath been a mighty scourge upon these coasts. Indeed, my lord, they are very cruel and black-hearted men, graceless and ruthless, and if they should come to the ancient and powerful town of Lepe then—"

"Then good-bye to the ancient and powerful town of Lepe," quoth Ford, whose lightness of tongue could at times rise above his awe of Sir Nigel.

The knight, however, was too much intent upon the matter in hand to give heed to the flippancy of his squire. "Have you then cause," he asked, "to think that these men are about to venture an attempt upon you?"

"They have come in two great galleys," answered the mayor, "with two bank of oars on either side, and great store of engines of war and of men-at-arms. At Weymouth and at Portland they have murdered and ravished. Yesterday morning they were at Cowes, and we saw the smoke from the burning crofts. To-day they lie at their ease near Freshwater, and we fear much lest they come upon us and do us a mischief."

"We cannot tarry," said Sir Nigel, riding towards the town, with the mayor upon his left side; "the Prince awaits us at Bordeaux, and we may not be behind the general muster. Yet I will promise you that on our way we shall find time to pass Freshwater and to prevail upon these rovers to leave you in peace."

"We are much beholden to you!" cried the mayor "But I cannot see, my lord, how, without a war-ship, you may venture against these men. With your archers, however, you might well hold the town and do them great scath if they attempt to land."

"There is a very proper cog out yonder," said Sir Nigel, "it would be a very strange thing if any ship were not a war-ship when it had such men as these upon her decks. Certes, we shall do as I say, and that no later than this very day."

"My lord," said a rough-haired, dark-faced man, who walked by the knight's other stirrup, with his head sloped to catch all that he was saying. "By your leave, I have no doubt that you are skilled in land fighting and the marshalling of lances, but, by my soul! you will find it another thing upon the sea. I am the master-shipman of this yellow cog, and my name is Goodwin Hawtayne. I have sailed since I was as high as this staff, and I have fought against these Normans and against the Genoese, as well as the Scotch, the Bretons, the Spanish, and the Moors. I tell you, sir, that my ship is over light and over frail for such work, and it will but end in our having our throats cut, or being sold as slaves to the Barbary heathen."

"I also have experienced one or two gentle and honorable ventures upon the sea," quoth Sir Nigel, "and I am right blithe to have so fair a task before us. I think, good master-shipman, that you and I may win great honor in this matter, and I can see very readily that you are a brave and stout man."

"I like it not," said the other sturdily. "In God's name, I like it not. And yet Goodwin Hawtayne is not the man to stand back when his fellows are for pressing forward. By my soul! be it sink or swim, I shall turn her beak into Freshwater Bay, and if good Master Witherton, of Southampton, like not my handling of his ship then he may find another master-shipman."

They were close by the old north gate of the little town, and Alleyne, half turning in his saddle, looked back at the motley crowd who followed. The bowmen and men-at-arms had broken their ranks and were intermingled with the fishermen and citizens, whose laughing faces and hearty gestures bespoke the weight of care from which this welcome arrival had relieved them. Here and there among the moving throng of dark jerkins and of white surcoats were scattered dashes of scarlet and blue, the whimples or shawls of the women. Aylward, with a fishing lass on either arm, was vowing constancy alternately to her on the right and her on the left, while big John towered in the rear with a little chubby maiden enthroned upon his great shoulder, her soft white arm curled round his shining headpiece. So the throng moved on, until at the very gate it was brought to a stand by a wondrously fat man, who came darting forth from the town with rage in every feature of his rubicund face.

"How now, Sir Mayor?" he roared, in a voice like a bull. "How now, Sir Mayor? How of the clams and the scallops?"

"By Our Lady! my sweet Sir Oliver," cried the mayor. "I have had so much to think of, with these wicked villains so close upon us, that it had quite gone out of my head."

"Words, words!" shouted the other furiously. "Am I to be put off with words? I say to you again, how of the clams and scallops?"

"My fair sir, you flatter me," cried the mayor. "I am a peaceful trader, and I am not wont to be so shouted at upon so small a matter."

"Small!" shrieked the other. "Small! Clams and scallops! Ask me to your table to partake of the dainty of the town, and when I come a barren welcome and a bare board! Where is my spear-bearer?"

"Nay, Sir Oliver, Sir Oliver!" cried Sir Nigel, laughing.

"Let your anger be appeased, since instead of this dish you come upon an old friend and comrade."

"By St. Martin of Tours!" shouted the fat knight, his wrath all changed in an instant to joy, "if it is not my dear little game rooster of the Garonne. Ah, my sweet coz, I am right glad to see you. What days we have seen together!"

"Aye, by my faith," cried Sir Nigel, with sparkling eyes, "we have seen some valiant men, and we have shown our pennons in some noble skirmishes. By St. Paul! we have had great joys in France."

"And sorrows also," quoth the other. "I have some sad memories of the land. Can you recall that which befell us at Libourne?"

"Nay, I cannot call to mind that we ever so much as drew sword at the place."

“Man, man,” cried Sir Oliver, “your mind still runs on nought but blades and bassinets. Hast no space in thy frame for the softer joys. Ah, even now I can scarce speak of it unmoved. So noble a pie, such tender pigeons, and sugar in the gravy instead of salt! You were by my side that day, as were Sir Claude Latour and the Lord of Pommers.”

“I remember it,” said Sir Nigel, laughing, “and how you harried the cook down the street, and spoke of setting fire to the inn. By St. Paul! most worthy mayor, my old friend is a perilous man, and I rede you that you compose your difference with him on such terms as you may.”

“The clams and scallops shall be ready within the hour,” the mayor answered. “I had asked Sir Oliver Buttesthorn to do my humble board the honor to partake at it of the dainty upon which we take some little pride, but in sooth this alarm of pirates hath cast such a shadow on my wits that I am like one distrait. But I trust, Sir Nigel, that you will also partake of none-meat with me?”

“I have overmuch to do,” Sir Nigel answered, “for we must be aboard, horse and man, as early as we may. How many do you muster, Sir Oliver?”

“Three and forty. The forty are drunk, and the three are but indifferent sober. I have them all safe upon the ship.”

“They had best find their wits again, for I shall have work for every man of them ere the sun set. It is my intention, if it seems good to you, to try a venture against these Norman and Genoese rovers.”

“They carry caviare and certain very noble spices from the Levant aboard of ships from Genoa,” quoth Sir Oliver. “We may come to great profit through the business. I pray you, master-shipman, that when you go on board you pour a helmetful of sea-water over any of my rogues whom you may see there.”

Leaving the lusty knight and the Mayor of Lepe, Sir Nigel led the Company straight down to the water’s edge, where long lines of flat lighters swiftly bore them to their vessel. Horse after horse was slung by main force up from the barges, and after kicking and plunging in empty air was dropped into the deep waist of the yellow cog, where rows of stalls stood ready for their safe keeping. Englishmen in those days were skilled and prompt in such matters, for it was so not long before that Edward had embarked as many as fifty thousand men in the port of Orwell, with their horses and their baggage, all in the space of four-and-twenty hours. So urgent was Sir Nigel on the shore, and so prompt was Goodwin Hawtayne on the cog, that Sir Oliver Buttesthorn had scarce swallowed his last scallop ere the peal of the trumpet and clang of nakir announced that all was ready and the anchor drawn. In the last boat which left the shore the two commanders sat together in the sheets, a strange contrast to one another, while under the feet of the rowers was a litter of huge stones which Sir Nigel had ordered to be carried to the cog. These once aboard, the ship set her broad mainsail, purple in colour, and with a golden St. Christopher bearing Christ upon his shoulder in the centre of it. The breeze blew, the sail bellied, over heeled the portly vessel, and away she plunged through the smooth blue rollers, amid the clang of the minstrels on her poop and the shouting of the black crowd who fringed the yellow beach. To the left lay the green Island of Wight, with its long, low, curving hills peeping over each other's shoulders to the sky-line; to the right the wooded Hampshire coast as far as eye could reach; above a steel-blue heaven, with a wintry sun shimmering down upon them, and enough of frost to set the breath a-smoking.

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel gayly, as he stood upon the poop and looked on either side of him, "it is a land which is very well worth fighting for, and it were pity to go to France for what may be had at home. Did you not spy a crooked man upon the beach?"

"Nay, I spied nothing," grumbled Sir Oliver, "for I was hurried down with a clam stuck in my gizzard and an untasted goblet of Cyprus on the board behind me."

"I saw him, my fair lord," said Terlake, "an old man with one shoulder higher than the other."

"'Tis a sign of good fortune," quoth Sir Nigel. "Our path was also crossed by a woman and by a priest, so all should be well with us. What say you, Edricson?"

"I cannot tell, my fair lord. The Romans of old were a very wise people, yet, certes, they placed their faith in such matters. So, too, did the Greeks, and divers other ancient peoples who were famed for their learning. Yet of the moderns there are many who scoff at all omens."

"There can be no manner of doubt about it," said Sir Oliver Buttesthorn, "I can well remember that in Navarre one day it thundered on the left out of a cloudless sky. We knew that ill would come of it, nor had we long to wait. Only thirteen days after, a haunch of prime venison was carried from my very tent door by the wolves, and on the same day two flasks of old vernage turned sour and muddy.”

“You may bring my harness from below,” said Sir Nigel to his squires, “and also, I pray you, bring up Sir Oliver’s and we shall don it here. Ye may then see to your own gear; for this day you will, I hope, make a very honorable entrance into the field of chivalry, and prove yourselves to be very worthy and valiant squires. And now, Sir Oliver, as to our dispositions: would it please you that I should order them or will you?”

“You, my cockerel, you. By Our Lady! I am no chicken, but I cannot claim to know as much of war as the squire of Sir Walter Manny. Settle the matter to your own liking.”

“You shall fly your pennon upon the fore part, then, and I upon the poop. For foreguard I shall give you your own forty men, with two-score archers. Two-score men, with my own men-at-arms and squires, will serve as a poop-guard. Ten archers, with thirty shipmen, under the master, may hold the waist while ten lie aloft with stones and arbalests. How like you that?”

“Good, by my faith, good! But here comes my harness, and I must to work, for I cannot slip into it as I was wont when first I set my face to the wars.”

Meanwhile there had been bustle and preparation in all parts of the great vessel. The archers stood in groups about the decks, new-stringing their bows, and testing that they were firm at the nocks. Among them moved Aylward and other of the older soldiers, with a few whispered words of precept here and of warning there.

“Stand to it, my hearts of gold,” said the old bowman as he passed from knot to knot. “By my hilt! we are in luck this journey. Bear in mind the old saying of the Company.”

“What is that, Aylward?” cried several, leaning on their bows and laughing at him.

“‘Tis the master-bowyer’s rede: ‘Every bow well bent. Every shaft well sent. Every stave well nocked. Every string well locked.’ There, with that jingle in his head, a bracer on his left hand, a shooting glove on his right, and a farthing’s-worth of wax in his girdle, what more doth a bowman need?”

“It would not be amiss,” said Hordle John, “if under his girdle he had tour farthings’-worth of wine.”

"Work first, wine afterwards, mon camarade. But it is time that we took our order, for methinks that between the Needle rocks and the Alum cliffs yonder I can catch a glimpse of the topmasts of the galleys. Hewett, Cook, Johnson, Cunningham, your men are of the poop-guard. Thornbury, Walters, Hackett, Baddlesmere, you are with Sir Oliver on the forecastle. Simon, you bide with your lord's banner; but ten men must go forward."

Quietly and promptly the men took their places, lying flat upon their faces on the deck, for such was Sir Nigel's order. Near the prow was planted Sir Oliver's spear, with his arms — a boar's head gules upon a field of gold. Close by the stern stood Black Simon with the pennon of the house of Loring. In the waist gathered the Southampton mariners, hairy and burly men, with their jerkins thrown off, their waists braced tight, swords, mallets, and pole-axes in their hands. Their leader, Goodwin Hawtayne, stood upon the poop and talked with Sir Nigel, casting his eye up sometimes at the swelling sail, and then glancing back at the two seamen who held the tiller.

"Pass the word," said Sir Nigel, "that no man shall stand to arms or draw his bow-string until my trumpeter shall sound. It would be well that we should seem to be a merchant-ship from Southampton and appear to flee from them."

"We shall see them anon," said the master-shipman. "Ha, said I not so? There they lie, the water-snakes, in Freshwater Bay; and mark the reek of smoke from yonder point, where they have been at their devil's work. See how their shallops pull from the land! They have seen us and called their men aboard. Now they draw upon the anchor. See them like ants upon the forecastle! They stoop and heave like handy ship men. But, my fair lord, these are no niefs. I doubt but we have taken in hand more than we can do. Each of these ships is a galeasse, and of the largest and swiftest make."

"I would I had your eyes," said Sir Nigel, blinking at the pirate galleys. "They seem very gallant ships, and I trust that we shall have much pleasance from our meeting with them. It would be well to pass the word that we should neither give nor take quarter this day. Have you perchance a priest or friar aboard this ship, Master Hawtayne?"

"No, my fair lord."

"Well, well, it is no great matter for my Company, for they were all houseled and shriven ere we left Twynham Castle; and Father Christopher of the Priory gave me his word that they were as fit to march to heaven as to

Gascony. But my mind misdoubts me as to these Winchester men who have come with Sir Oliver, for they appear to be a very ungodly crew. Pass the word that the men kneel, and that the under-officers repeat to them the pater, the ave, and the credo."

With a clank of arms, the rough archers and seamen took to their knees, with bent heads and crossed hands, listening to the hoarse mutter from the file-leaders. It was strange to mark the hush; so that the lapping of the water, the straining of the sail, and the creaking of the timbers grew louder of a sudden upon the ear. Many of the bowmen had drawn amulets and relics from their bosoms, while he who possessed some more than usually sanctified treasure passed it down the line of his comrades, that all might kiss and reap the virtue.

The yellow cog had now shot out from the narrow waters of the Solent, and was plunging and rolling on the long heave of the open channel. The wind blew freshly from the east, with a very keen edge to it; and the great sail bellied roundly out, laying the vessel over until the water hissed beneath her lee bulwarks. Broad and ungainly, she floundered from wave to wave, dipping her round bows deeply into the blue rollers, and sending the white flakes of foam in a spatter over her decks. On her larboard quarter lay the two dark galleys, which had already hoisted sail, and were shooting out from Freshwater Bay in swift pursuit, their double line of oars giving them a vantage which could not fail to bring them up with any vessel which trusted to sails alone. High and bluff the English cog; long, black and swift the pirate galleys, like two fierce lean wolves which have seen a lordly and unsuspecting stag walk past their forest lair.

"Shall we turn, my fair lord, or shall we carry on?" asked the master-shipman, looking behind him with anxious eyes.

"Nay, we must carry on and play the part of the helpless merchant."

"But your pennons? They will see that we have two knights with us."

"Yet it would not be to a knight's honor or good name to lower his pennon. Let them be, and they will think that we are a wine-ship for Gascony, or that we bear the wool-bales of some mercer of the Staple. Ma foi, but they are very swift! They swoop upon us like two goshawks on a heron. Is there not some symbol or device upon their sails?"

"That on the right," said Edricson, "appears to have the head of an Ethiop upon it."

"'Tis the badge of Tete-noire, the Norman," cried a seaman-mariner. "I have seen it before, when he harried us at Winchelsea. He is a wondrous large and strong man, with no ruth for man, woman, or beast. They say that he hath the strength of six; and, certes, he hath the crimes of six upon his soul. See, now, to the poor souls who swing at either end of his yard-arm!"

At each end of the yard there did indeed hang the dark figure of a man, jolting and lurching with hideous jerkings of its limbs at every plunge and swoop of the galley.

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "and by the help of St. George and Our Lady, it will be a very strange thing if our black-headed friend does not himself swing thence ere he be many hours older. But what is that upon the other galley?"

"It is the red cross of Genoa. This Spade-beard is a very noted captain, and it is his boast that there are no seamen and no archers in the world who can compare with those who serve the Doge Boccanegra."

"That we shall prove," said Goodwin Hawtayne; "but it would be well, ere they close with us, to raise up the mantlets and pavises as a screen against their bolts." He shouted a hoarse order, and his seamen worked swiftly and silently, heightening the bulwarks and strengthening them. The three ship's anchors were at Sir Nigel's command carried into the waist, and tied to the mast, with twenty feet of cable between, each under the care of four seamen. Eight others were stationed with leather water-bags to quench any fire-arrows which might come aboard, while others were sent up the mast, to lie along the yard and drop stones or shoot arrows as the occasion served.

"Let them be supplied with all that is heavy and weighty in the ship," said Sir Nigel.

"Then we must send them up Sir Oliver Buttesthorn," quoth Ford.

The knight looked at him with a face which struck the smile from his lips. "No squire of mine," he said, "shall ever make jest of a belted knight. And yet," he added, his eyes softening, "I know that it is but a boy's mirth, with no sting in it. Yet I should ill do my part towards your father if I did not teach you to curb your tongue-play."

"They will lay us aboard on either quarter, my lord," cried the master. "See how they stretch out from each other! The Norman hath a mangonel or a trabuch upon the forecastle. See, they bend to the levers! They are about to loose it."

“Aylward,” cried the knight, “pick your three trustiest archers, and see if you cannot do something to hinder their aim. Methinks they are within long arrow flight.”

“Seventeen score paces,” said the archer, running his eye backwards and forwards. “By my ten finger-bones! it would be a strange thing if we could not notch a mark at that distance. Here, Watkin of Sowley, Arnold, Long Williams, let us show the rogues that they have English bowmen to deal with.”

The three archers named stood at the further end of the poop, balancing themselves with feet widely spread and bows drawn, until the heads of the cloth-yard arrows were level with the centre of the stave. “You are the surer, Watkin,” said Aylward, standing by them with shaft upon string. “Do you take the rogue with the red coif. You two bring down the man with the head-piece, and I will hold myself ready if you miss. Ma foi! they are about to loose her. Shoot, mes garcons, or you will be too late.”

The throng of pirates had cleared away from the great wooden catapult, leaving two of their number to discharge it. One in a scarlet cap bent over it, steadying the jagged rock which was balanced on the spoon-shaped end of the long wooden lever. The other held the loop of the rope which would release the catch and send the unwieldy missile hurtling through the air. So for an instant they stood, showing hard and clear against the white sail behind them. The next, redcap had fallen across the stone with an arrow between his ribs; and the other, struck in the leg and in the throat, was writhing and spluttering upon the ground. As he toppled backwards he had loosed the spring, and the huge beam of wood, swinging round with tremendous force, cast the corpse of his comrade so close to the English ship that its mangled and distorted limbs grazed their very stern. As to the stone, it glanced off obliquely and fell midway between the vessels. A roar of cheering and of laughter broke from the rough archers and seamen at the sight, answered by a yell of rage from their pursuers.

“Lie low, mes enfants,” cried Aylward, motioning with his left hand. “They will learn wisdom. They are bringing forward shield and mantlet. We shall have some pebbles about our ears ere long.”

CHAPTER XVI. HOW THE YELLOW COG FOUGHT THE TWO ROVER GALLEYS.

The three vessels had been sweeping swiftly westwards, the cog still well to the front, although the galleys were slowly drawing in upon either quarter. To the left was a hard skyline unbroken by a sail. The island already lay like a cloud behind them, while right in front was St. Alban’s Head, with Portland looming mistily in the farthest distance. Alleyne stood by the tiller, looking backwards, the fresh wind full in his teeth, the crisp winter air tingling on his face and blowing his yellow curls from under his bassinet. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining, for the blood of a hundred fighting Saxon ancestors was beginning to stir in his veins.

“What was that?” he asked, as a hissing, sharp-drawn voice seemed to whisper in his ear. The steersman smiled, and pointed with his foot to where a short heavy cross-bow quarrel stuck quivering in the boards. At the same instant the man stumbled forward upon his knees, and lay lifeless upon the deck, a blood-stained feather jutting out from his back. As Alleyne stooped to raise him, the air seemed to be alive with the sharp zip-zip of the bolts, and he could hear them pattering on the deck like apples at a tree-shaking.

“Raise two more mantlets by the poop-lanthorn,” said Sir Nigel quietly.

“And another man to the tiller,” cried the master-shipman.

“Keep them in play, Aylward, with ten of your men,” the knight continued. “And let ten of Sir Oliver’s bowmen do as much for the Genoese. I have no mind as yet to show them how much they have to fear from us.”

Ten picked shots under Aylward stood in line across the broad deck, and it was a lesson to the young squires who had seen nothing of war to note how orderly and how cool were these old soldiers, how quick the command, and how prompt the carrying out, ten moving like one. Their comrades crouched beneath the bulwarks, with many a rough jest and many a scrap of criticism or advice. “Higher, Wat, higher!” “Put thy body into it, Will!” “Forget not the wind, Hal!” So ran the muttered chorus, while high above it rose the sharp twanging of the strings, the hiss of the shafts, and the short

“Draw your arrow! Nick your arrow! Shoot wholly together!” from the master-bowman.

And now both mangonels were at work from the galleys, but so covered and protected that, save at the moment of discharge, no glimpse could be caught of them. A huge brown rock from the Genoese sang over their heads, and plunged sullenly into the slope of a wave. Another from the Norman whizzed into the waist, broke the back of a horse, and crashed its way through the side of the vessel. Two others, flying together, tore a great gap in the St. Christopher upon the sail, and brushed three of Sir Oliver’s men-at-arms from the forecastle. The master-shipman looked at the knight with a troubled face.

“They keep their distance from us,” said he. “Our archery is over-good, and they will not close. What defence can we make against the stones?”

“I think I may trick them,” the knight answered cheerfully, and passed his order to the archers. Instantly five of them threw up their hands and fell prostrate upon the deck. One had already been slain by a bolt, so that there were but four upon their feet.

“That should give them heart,” said Sir Nigel, eyeing the galleys, which crept along on either side, with a slow, measured swing of their great oars, the water swirling and foaming under their sharp stems.

“They still hold aloof,” cried Hawtayne.

“Then down with two more,” shouted their leader. “That will do. Ma foi! but they come to our lure like chicks to the fowler. To your arms, men! The pennon behind me, and the squires round the pennon. Stand fast with the anchors in the waist, and be ready for a cast. Now blow out the trumpets, and may God’s benison be with the honest men!”

As he spoke a roar of voices and a roll of drums came from either galley, and the water was lashed into spray by the hurried beat of a hundred oars. Down they swooped, one on the right, one on the left, the sides and shrouds black with men and bristling with weapons. In heavy clusters they hung upon the forecastle all ready for a spring-faces white, faces brown, faces yellow, and faces black, fair Norsemen, swarthy Italians, fierce rovers from the Levant, and fiery Moors from the Barbary States, of all hues and countries, and marked solely by the common stamp of a wild-beast ferocity. Rasping up on either side, with oars trailing to save them from snapping, they poured in a living torrent with horrid yell and shrill whoop upon the defenceless merchantman.

But wilder yet was the cry, and shriller still the scream, when there rose up from the shadow of those silent bulwarks the long lines of the English bowmen, and the arrows whizzed in a deadly sleet among the unprepared masses upon the pirate decks. From the higher sides of the cog the bowmen could shoot straight down, at a range which was so short as to enable a cloth-yard shaft to pierce through mail-coats or to transfix a shield, though it were an inch thick of toughened wood. One moment Alleyne saw the galley’s poop crowded with rushing figures, waving arms, exultant faces; the next it was a blood-smeared shambles, with bodies piled three deep upon each other, the living cowering behind the dead to shelter themselves from that sudden storm-blast of death. On either side the seamen whom Sir Nigel had chosen for the purpose had cast their anchors over the side of the galleys, so that the three vessels, locked in an iron grip, lurched heavily forward upon the swell.

And now set in a fell and fierce fight, one of a thousand of which no chronicler has spoken and no poet sung. Through all the centuries and over all those southern waters nameless men have fought in nameless places, their sole monuments a protected coast and an unravaged country-side.

Fore and aft the archers had cleared the galleys’ decks, but from either side the rovers had poured down into the waist, where the seamen and bowmen were pushed back and so mingled with their foes that it was impossible for their comrades above to draw string to help them. It was a wild chaos where axe and sword rose and fell, while Englishman, Norman, and Italian staggered and reeled on a deck which was cumbered with bodies and slippery with blood. The clang of blows, the cries of the stricken, the short, deep shout of the islanders, and the fierce whoops of the rovers, rose together in a deafening tumult, while the breath of the panting men went up in the wintry air like the smoke from a furnace. The giant Tete-noire, towering above his fellows and clad from head to foot in plate of proof, led on his boarders, waving a huge mace in the air, with which he struck to the deck every man who approached him. On the other side, Spade-beard, a dwarf in height, but of great breadth of shoulder and length of arm, had cut a road almost to the mast, with three-score Genoese men-at-arms close at his heels. Between these two formidable assailants the seamen were being slowly wedged more closely together, until they stood back to back under the mast with the rovers raging upon every side of them.

But help was close at hand. Sir Oliver Buttesthorn with his men-at-arms had swarmed down from the forecastle, while Sir Nigel, with his three squires, Black Simon, Aylward, Hordle John, and a score more, threw themselves from the poop and hurled themselves into the thickest of the fight. Alleyne, as in duty bound, kept his eyes fixed ever on his lord and pressed forward close at his heels. Often had he heard of Sir Nigel's prowess and skill with all knightly weapons, but all the tales that had reached his ears fell far short of the real quickness and coolness of the man. It was as if the devil was in him, for he sprang here and sprang there, now thrusting and now cutting, catching blows on his shield, turning them with his blade, stooping under the swing of an axe, springing over the sweep of a sword, so swift and so erratic that the man who braced himself for a blow at him might find him six paces off ere he could bring it down. Three pirates had fallen before him, and he had wounded Spade-beard in the neck, when the Norman giant sprang at him from the side with a slashing blow from his deadly mace. Sir Nigel stooped to avoid it, and at the same instant turned a thrust from the Genoese swordsman, but, his foot slipping in a pool of blood, he fell heavily to the ground. Alleyne sprang in front of the Norman, but his sword was shattered and he himself beaten to the ground by a second blow from the ponderous weapon. Ere the pirate chief could repeat it, however, John's iron grip fell upon his wrist, and he found that for once he was in the hands of a stronger man than himself.

Fiercely he strove to disengage his weapon, but Hordle John bent his arm slowly back until, with a sharp crack, like a breaking stave, it turned limp in his grasp, and the mace dropped from the nerveless fingers. In vain he tried to pluck it up with the other hand. Back and back still his foeman bent him, until, with a roar of pain and of fury, the giant clanged his full length upon the boards, while the glimmer of a knife before the bars of his helmet warned him that short would be his shrift if he moved.

Cowed and disheartened by the loss of their leader, the Normans had given back and were now streaming over the bulwarks on to their own galley, dropping a dozen at a time on to her deck. But the anchor still held them in its crooked claw, and Sir Oliver with fifty men was hard upon their heels. Now, too, the archers had room to draw their bows once more, and great stones from the yard of the cog came thundering and crashing among the flying rovers. Here and there they rushed with wild screams and curses, diving under the sail, crouching behind booms, huddling into corners like rabbits when the ferrets are upon them, as helpless and as hopeless. They were stern days, and if the honest soldier, too poor for a ransom, had no prospect of mercy upon the battle-field, what ruth was there for sea robbers, the enemies of humankind, taken in the very deed, with proofs of their crimes still swinging upon their yard-arm.

But the fight had taken a new and a strange turn upon the other side. Spade-beard and his men had given slowly back, hard pressed by Sir Nigel, Aylward, Black Simon, and the poop-guard. Foot by foot the Italian had retreated, his armor running blood at every joint, his shield split, his crest shorn, his voice fallen away to a mere gasping and croaking. Yet he faced his foemen with dauntless courage, dashing in, springing back, sure-footed, steady-handed, with a point which seemed to menace three at once. Beaten back on to the deck of his own vessel, and closely followed by a dozen Englishmen, he disengaged himself from them, ran swiftly down the deck, sprang back into the cog once more, cut the rope which held the anchor, and was back in an instant among his crossbow-men. At the same time the Genoese sailors thrust with their oars against the side of the cog, and a rapidly widening rift appeared between the two vessels.

“By St. George!” cried Ford, “we are cut off from Sir Nigel.”

“He is lost,” gasped Terlake. “Come, let us spring for it.” The two youths jumped with all their strength to reach the departing galley. Ford’s feet reached the edge of the bulwarks, and his hand clutching a rope he swung himself on board. Terlake fell short, crashed in among the oars, and bounded off into the sea. Alleyne, staggering to the side, was about to hurl himself after him, but Hordle John dragged him back by the girdle.

“You can scarce stand, lad, far less jump,” said he. “See how the blood rips from your bassinet.”

“My place is by the flag,” cried Alleyne, vainly struggling to break from the other’s hold.

“Bide here, man. You would need wings ere you could reach Sir Nigel’s side.”

The vessels were indeed so far apart now that the Genoese could use the full sweep of their oars, and draw away rapidly from the cog.

“My God, but it is a noble fight!” shouted big John, clapping his hands. “They have cleared the poop, and they spring into the waist. Well struck, my lord! Well struck, Aylward! See to Black Simon, how he storms among the shipmen! But this Spade-beard is a gallant warrior. He rallies his men upon the forecastle. He hath slain an archer. Ha! my lord is upon him. Look to it, Alleyne! See to the whirl and glitter of it!"

"By heaven, Sir Nigel is down!" cried the squire.

"Up!" roared John. "It was but a feint. He bears him back. He drives him to the side. Ah, by Our Lady, his sword is through him! They cry for mercy. Down goes the red cross, and up springs Simon with the scarlet roses!"

The death of the Genoese leader did indeed bring the resistance to an end. Amid a thunder of cheering from cog and from galleys the forked pennon fluttered upon the forecastle, and the galley, sweeping round, came slowly back, as the slaves who rowed it learned the wishes of their new masters.

The two knights had come aboard the cog, and the grapplings having been thrown off, the three vessels now moved abreast through all the storm and rush of the fight Alleyne had been aware of the voice of Goodwin Hawtayne, the master-shipman, with his constant "Hale the bowline! Veer the sheet!" and strange it was to him to see how swiftly the blood-stained sailors turned from the strife to the ropes and back. Now the cog's head was turned Francewards, and the shipman walked the deck, a peaceful master-mariner once more.

"There is sad scath done to the cog, Sir Nigel," said he. "Here is a hole in the side two ells across, the sail split through the centre, and the wood as bare as a friar's poll. In good sooth, I know not what I shall say to Master Witherton when I see the Itchen once more."

"By St. Paul! it would be a very sorry thing if we suffered you to be the worse of this day's work," said Sir Nigel. "You shall take these galleys back with you, and Master Witherton may sell them. Then from the moneys he shall take as much as may make good the damage, and the rest he shall keep until our home-coming, when every man shall have his share. An image of silver fifteen inches high I have vowed to the Virgin, to be placed in her chapel within the Priory, for that she was pleased to allow me to come upon this Spade-beard, who seemed to me from what I have seen of him to be a very sprightly and valiant gentleman. But how fares it with you, Edricson?"

"It is nothing, my fair lord," said Alleyne, who had now loosened his bassinet, which was cracked across by the Norman's blow. Even as he spoke, however, his head swirled round, and he fell to the deck with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

"He will come to anon," said the knight, stooping over him and passing his fingers through his hair. "I have lost one very valiant and gentle squire this day. I can ill afford to lose another. How many men have fallen?”

“I have pricked off the tally,” said Aylward, who had come aboard with his lord. “There are seven of the Winchester men, eleven seamen, your squire, young Master Terlake, and nine archers.”

“And of the others?”

“They are all dead — save only the Norman knight who stands behind you. What would you that we should do with him?”

“He must hang on his own yard,” said Sir Nigel. “It was my vow and must be done.”

The pirate leader had stood by the bulwarks, a cord round his arms, and two stout archers on either side. At Sir Nigel’s words he started violently, and his swarthy features blanched to a livid gray.

“How, Sir Knight?” he cried in broken English. “Que dites vous? To hang, le mort du chien! To hang!”

“It is my vow,” said Sir Nigel shortly. “From what I hear, you thought little enough of hanging others.”

“Peasants, base roturiers,” cried the other. “It is their fitting death. Mais Le Seigneur d’Andelys, avec le sang des rois dans ses veins! C’est incroyable!”

Sir Nigel turned upon his heel, while two seamen cast a noose over the pirate’s neck. At the touch of the cord he snapped the bonds which bound him, dashed one of the archers to the deck, and seizing the other round the waist sprang with him into the sea.

“By my hilt, he is gone!” cried Aylward, rushing to the side. “They have sunk together like a stone.”

“I am right glad of it,” answered Sir Nigel; “for though it was against my vow to loose him, I deem that he has carried himself like a very gentle and debonnaire cavalier.”

CHAPTER XVII. HOW THE YELLOW COG CROSSED THE BAR OF GIRONDE.

For two days the yellow cog ran swiftly before a northeasterly wind, and on the dawn of the third the high land of Ushant lay like a mist upon the shimmering sky-line. There came a plump of rain towards mid-day and the breeze died down, but it freshened again before nightfall, and Goodwin Hawtayne veered his sheet and held head for the south. Next morning they had passed Belle Isle, and ran through the midst of a fleet of transports returning from Guienne. Sir Nigel Loring and Sir Oliver Buttesthorn at once hung their shields over the side, and displayed their pennons as was the custom, noting with the keenest interest the answering symbols which told the names of the cavaliers who had been constrained by ill health or wounds to leave the prince at so critical a time.

That evening a great dun-coloured cloud banked up in the west, and an anxious man was Goodwin Hawtayne, for a third part of his crew had been slain, and half the remainder were aboard the galleys, so that, with an injured ship, he was little fit to meet such a storm as sweeps over those waters. All night it blew in short fitful puffs, heeling the great cog over until the water curled over her lee bulwarks. As the wind still freshened the yard was lowered half way down the mast in the morning. Alleyne, wretchedly ill and weak, with his head still ringing from the blow which he had received, crawled up upon deck. Water-swept and aslant, it was preferable to the noisome, rat-haunted dungeons which served as cabins. There, clinging to the stout halliards of the sheet, he gazed with amazement at the long lines of black waves, each with its curling ridge of foam, racing in endless succession from out the inexhaustible west. A huge sombre cloud, flecked with livid blotches, stretched over the whole seaward sky-line, with long ragged streamers whirled out in front of it. Far behind them the two galleys labored heavily, now sinking between the rollers until their yards were level with the waves, and again shooting up with a reeling, scooping motion until every spar and rope stood out hard against the sky. On the left the low-lying land stretched in a dim haze, rising here and there into a darker blur which marked the higher capes and headlands. The land of

France! Alleyne's eyes shone as he gazed upon it. The land of France! — the very words sounded as the call of a bugle in the ears of the youth of England. The land where their fathers had bled, the home of chivalry and of knightly deeds, the country of gallant men, of courtly women, of princely buildings, of the wise, the polished and the sainted. There it lay, so still and gray beneath the drifting wrack — the home of things noble and of things shameful — the theatre where a new name might be made or an old one marred. From his bosom to his lips came the crumpled veil, and he breathed a vow that if valor and goodwill could raise him to his lady's side, then death alone should hold him back from her. His thoughts were still in the woods of Minstead and the old armory of Twynham Castle, when the hoarse voice of the master-shipman brought them back once more to the Bay of Biscay.

"By my troth, young sir," he said, "you are as long in the face as the devil at a christening, and I cannot marvel at it, for I have sailed these waters since I was as high as this whinyard, and yet I never saw more sure promise of an evil night."

"Nay, I had other things upon my mind," the squire answered.

"And so has every man," cried Hawtayne in an injured voice. "Let the shipman see to it. It is the master-shipman's affair. Put it all upon good Master Hawtayne! Never had I so much care since first I blew trumpet and showed cartel at the west gate of Southampton."

"What is amiss then?" asked Alleyne, for the man's words were as gusty as the weather.

"Amiss, quotha? Here am I with but half my mariners, and a hole in the ship where that twenty-devil stone struck us big enough to fit the fat widow of Northam through. It is well enough on this tack, but I would have you tell me what I am to do on the other. We are like to have salt water upon us until we be found pickled like the herrings in an Easterling's barrels."

"What says Sir Nigel to it?"

"He is below pricking out the coat-armor of his mother's uncle. 'Pester me not with such small matters!' was all that I could get from him. Then there is Sir Oliver. 'Fry them in oil with a dressing of Gascony,' quoth he, and then swore at me because I had not been the cook. 'Walawa,' thought I, 'mad master, sober man' — so away forward to the archers. Harrow and alas! but they were worse than the others."

"Would they not help you then?"

“Nay, they sat tway and tway at a board, him that they call Aylward and the great red-headed man who snapped the Norman’s arm-bone, and the black man from Norwich, and a score of others, rattling their dice in an archer’s gauntlet for want of a box. ‘The ship can scarce last much longer, my masters,’ quoth I. ‘That is your business, old swine’s-head,’ cried the black galliard. ‘Le diable t’emporte,’ says Aylward. ‘A five, a four and the main,’ shouted the big man, with a voice like the flap of a sail. Hark to them now, young sir, and say if I speak not sooth.”

As he spoke, there sounded high above the shriek of the gale and the straining of the timbers a gust of oaths with a roar of deep-chested mirth from the gamblers in the forecastle.

“Can I be of avail?” asked Alleyne. “Say the word and the thing is done, if two hands may do it.”

“Nay, nay, your head I can see is still totty, and i’ faith little head would you have, had your bassinet not stood your friend. All that may be done is already carried out, for we have stuffed the gape with sails and corded it without and within. Yet when we bale our bowline and veer the sheet our lives will hang upon the breach remaining blocked. See how yonder headland looms upon us through the mist! We must tack within three arrow flights, or we may find a rock through our timbers. Now, St. Christopher be praised! here is Sir Nigel, with whom I may confer.”

“I prythee that you will pardon me,” said the knight, clutching his way along the bulwark. “I would not show lack of courtesy toward a worthy man, but I was deep in a matter of some weight, concerning which, Alleyne, I should be glad of your rede. It touches the question of dimidiation or impalement in the coat of mine uncle, Sir John Leighton of Shropshire, who took unto wife the widow of Sir Henry Oglander of Nunwell. The case has been much debated by pursuivants and kings-of-arms. But how is it with you, master shipman?”

“Ill enough, my fair lord. The cog must go about anon, and I know not how we may keep the water out of her.”

“Go call Sir Oliver!” said Sir Nigel, and presently the portly knight made his way all astraddle down the slippery deck.

“By my soul, master-shipman, this passes all patience!” he cried wrathfully. “If this ship of yours must needs dance and skip like a clown at a kermesse, then I pray you that you will put me into one of these galeasses. I had but sat down to a flask of malvoisie and a mortress of brawn, as is my use about this hour, when there comes a cherking, and I find my wine over my legs and the flask in my lap, and then as I stoop to clip it there comes another cursed cherk, and there is a mortress of brawn stuck fast to the nape of my neck. At this moment I have two pages coursing after it from side to side, like hounds behind a leveret. Never did living pig gambol more lightly. But you have sent for me, Sir Nigel?"

"I would fain have your rede, Sir Oliver, for Master Hawtayne hath fears that when we veer there may come danger from the hole in our side."

"Then do not veer," quoth Sir Oliver hastily. "And now, fair sir, I must hasten back to see how my rogues have fared with the brawn."

"Nay, but this will scarce suffice," cried the shipman. "If we do not veer we will be upon the rocks within the hour."

"Then veer," said Sir Oliver. "There is my rede; and now, Sir Nigel, I must crave — —"

At this instant, however, a startled shout rang out from two seamen upon the forecastle. "Rocks!" they yelled, stabbing into the air with their forefingers. "Rocks beneath our very bows!" Through the belly of a great black wave, not one hundred paces to the front of them, there thrust forth a huge jagged mass of brown stone, which spouted spray as though it were some crouching monster, while a dull menacing boom and roar filled the air.

"Yare! yare!" screamed Goodwin Hawtayne, flinging himself upon the long pole which served as a tiller. "Cut the halliard! Haul her over! Lay her two courses to the wind!"

Over swung the great boom, and the cog trembled and quivered within five spear-lengths of the breakers.

"She can scarce draw clear," cried Hawtayne, with his eyes from the sail to the seething line of foam. "May the holy Julian stand by us and the thrice-sainted Christopher!"

"If there be such peril, Sir Oliver," quoth Sir Nigel, "it would be very knightly and fitting that we should show our pennons. I pray you. Edricson, that you will command my guidon-bearer to put forward my banner."

"And sound the trumpets!" cried Sir Oliver. "In manus tuas, Domine! I am in the keeping of James of Compostella, to whose shrine I shall make pilgrimage, and in whose honor I vow that I will eat a carp each year upon his feast-day. Mon Dieu, but the waves roar! How is it with us now, master-shipman?"

“We draw! We draw!” cried Hawtayne, with his eyes still fixed upon the foam which hissed under the very bulge of the side. “Ah, Holy Mother, be with us now!”

As he spoke the cog rasped along the edge of the reef, and a long white curling sheet of wood was planed off from her side from waist to poop by a jutting horn of the rock. At the same instant she lay suddenly over, the sail drew full, and she plunged seawards amid the shoutings of the seamen and the archers.

“The Virgin be praised!” cried the shipman, wiping his brow. “For this shall bell swing and candle burn when I see Southampton Water once more. Cheerily, my hearts! Pull yarely on the bowline!”

“By my soul! I would rather have a dry death,” quoth Sir Oliver. “Though, Mort Dieu! I have eaten so many fish that it were but justice that the fish should eat me. Now I must back to the cabin, for I have matters there which crave my attention.”

“Nay, Sir Oliver, you had best bide with us, and still show your ensign,” Sir Nigel answered; “for, if I understand the matter aright, we have but turned from one danger to the other.”

“Good Master Hawtayne,” cried the boatswain, rushing aft, “the water comes in upon us apace. The waves have driven in the sail wherewith we strove to stop the hole.” As he spoke the seamen came swarming on to the poop and the forecastle to avoid the torrent which poured through the huge leak into the waist. High above the roar of the wind and the clash of the sea rose the shrill half-human cries of the horses, as they found the water rising rapidly around them.

“Stop it from without!” cried Hawtayne, seizing the end of the wet sail with which the gap had been plugged. “Speedily, my hearts, or we are gone!” Swiftly they rove ropes to the corners, and then, rushing forward to the bows, they lowered them under the keel, and drew them tight in such a way that the sail should cover the outer face of the gap. The force of the rush of water was checked by this obstacle, but it still squirted plentifully from every side of it. At the sides the horses were above the belly, and in the centre a man from the poop could scarce touch the deck with a seven-foot spear. The cog lay lower in the water and the waves splashed freely over the weather bulwark.

“I fear that we can scarce bide upon this tack,” cried Hawtayne; “and yet the other will drive us on the rocks.”

"Might we not haul down sail and wait for better times?" suggested Sir Nigel.

"Nay, we should drift upon the rocks. Thirty years have I been on the sea, and never yet in greater straits. Yet we are in the hands of the Saints."

"Of whom," cried Sir Oliver, "I look more particularly to St. James of Compostella, who hath already befriended us this day, and on whose feast I hereby vow that I shall eat a second carp, if he will but interpose a second time."

The wrack had thickened to seaward, and the coast was but a blurred line. Two vague shadows in the offing showed where the galeasses rolled and tossed upon the great Atlantic rollers, Hawtayne looked wistfully in their direction.

"If they would but lie closer we might find safety, even should the cog founder. You will bear me out with good Master Witherton of Southampton that I have done all that a shipman might. It would be well that you should doff camail and greaves, Sir Nigel, for, by the black rood! it is like enough that we shall have to swim for it."

"Nay," said the little knight, "it would be scarce fitting that a cavalier should throw off his harness for the fear of every puff of wind and puddle of water. I would rather that my Company should gather round me here on the poop, where we might abide together whatever God may be pleased to send. But, certes, Master Hawtayne, for all that my sight is none of the best, it is not the first time that I have seen that headland upon the left."

The seaman shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed earnestly through the haze and spray. Suddenly he threw up his arms and shouted aloud in his joy.

"'Tis the point of La Tremblade!" he cried. "I had not thought that we were as far as Oleron. The Gironde lies before us, and once over the bar, and under shelter of the Tour de Cordouan, all will be well with us. Veer again, my hearts, and bring her to try with the main course!"

The sail swung round once more, and the cog, battered and torn and well-nigh water-logged, staggered in for this haven of refuge. A bluff cape to the north and a long spit to the south marked the mouth of the noble river, with a low-lying island of silted sand in the centre, all shrouded and curtained by the spume of the breakers. A line of broken water traced the dangerous bar, which in clear day and balmy weather has cracked the back of many a tall ship.

“There is a channel,” said Hawtayne, “which was shown to me by the Prince’s own pilot. Mark yonder tree upon the bank, and see the tower which rises behind it. If these two be held in a line, even as we hold them now, it may be done, though our ship draws two good ells more than when she put forth.”

“God speed you, Master Hawtayne!” cried Sir Oliver. “Twice have we come scathless out of peril, and now for the third time I commend me to the blessed James of Compostella, to whom I vow — —”

“Nay, nay, old friend,” whispered Sir Nigel. “You are like to bring a judgment upon us with these vows, which no living man could accomplish. Have I not already heard you vow to eat two carp in one day, and now you would venture upon a third?”

“I pray you that you will order the Company to lie down,” cried Hawtayne, who had taken the tiller and was gazing ahead with a fixed eye. “In three minutes we shall either be lost or in safety.”

Archers and seamen lay flat upon the deck, waiting in stolid silence for whatever fate might come. Hawtayne bent his weight upon the tiller, and crouched to see under the bellying sail. Sir Oliver and Sir Nigel stood erect with hands crossed in front of the poop. Down swooped the great cog into the narrow channel which was the portal to safety. On either bow roared the shallow bar. Right ahead one small lane of black swirling water marked the pilot’s course. But true was the eye and firm the hand which guided. A dull scraping came from beneath, the vessel quivered and shook, at the waist, at the quarter, and behind sounded that grim roaring of the waters, and with a plunge the yellow cog was over the bar and speeding swiftly up the broad and tranquil estuary of the Gironde.

CHAPTER XVIII. HOW SIR NIGEL LORING PUT A PATCH UPON HIS EYE.

It was on the morning of Friday, the eight-and-twentieth day of November, two days before the feast of St. Andrew, that the cog and her two prisoners, after a weary tacking up the Gironde and the Garonne, dropped anchor at last in front of the noble city of Bordeaux. With wonder and admiration, Alleyne, leaning over the bulwarks, gazed at the forest of masts, the swarm of boats darting hither and thither on the bosom of the broad curving stream, and the gray crescent-shaped city which stretched with many a tower and minaret along the western shore. Never had he in his quiet life seen so great a town, nor was there in the whole of England, save London alone, one which might match it in size or in wealth. Here came the merchandise of all the fair countries which are watered by the Garonne and the Dordogne — the cloths of the south, the skins of Guienne, the wines of the Medoc — to be borne away to Hull, Exeter, Dartmouth, Bristol or Chester, in exchange for the wools and woolfels of England. Here too dwelt those famous smelters and welders who had made the Bordeaux steel the most trusty upon earth, and could give a temper to lance or to sword which might mean dear life to its owner. Alleyne could see the smoke of their forges reeking up in the clear morning air. The storm had died down now to a gentle breeze, which wafted to his ears the long-drawn stirring bugle-calls which sounded from the ancient ramparts.

“Hola, mon petit!” said Aylward, coming up to where he stood. “Thou art a squire now, and like enough to win the golden spurs, while I am still the master-bowman, and master-bowman I shall bide. I dare scarce wag my tongue so freely with you as when we tramped together past Wilverley Chase, else I might be your guide now, for indeed I know every house in Bordeaux as a friar knows the beads on his rosary.”

“Nay, Aylward,” said Alleyne, laying his hand upon the sleeve of his companion’s frayed jerkin, “you cannot think me so thrall as to throw aside an old friend because I have had some small share of good fortune. I take it unkind that you should have thought such evil of me.”

“Nay, mon gar. ‘Twas but a flight shot to see if the wind blew steady, though I were a rogue to doubt it.”

“Why, had I not met you, Aylward, at the Lynhurst inn, who can say where I had now been! Certes, I had not gone to Twynham Castle, nor become squire to Sir Nigel, nor met — —” He paused abruptly and flushed to his hair, but the bowman was too busy with his own thoughts to notice his young companion’s embarrassment.

“It was a good hostel, that of the ‘Pied Merlin,’” he remarked. “By my ten finger bones! when I hang bow on nail and change my brigandine for a tunic, I might do worse than take over the dame and her business.”

“I thought,” said Alleyne, “that you were betrothed to some one at Christchurch.”

“To three,” Aylward answered moodily, “to three. I fear I may not go back to Christchurch. I might chance to see hotter service in Hampshire than I have ever done in Gascony. But mark you now yonder lofty turret in the centre, which stands back from the river and hath a broad banner upon the summit. See the rising sun flashes full upon it and sparkles on the golden lions. ‘Tis the royal banner of England, crossed by the prince’s label. There he dwells in the Abbey of St. Andrew, where he hath kept his court these years back. Beside it is the minster of the same saint, who hath the town under his very special care.”

“And how of yon gray turret on the left?”

“‘Tis the fane of St. Michael, as that upon the right is of St. Remi. There, too, above the poop of yonder nief, you see the towers of Saint Croix and of Pey Berland. Mark also the mighty ramparts which are pierced by the three water-gates, and sixteen others to the landward side.”

“And how is it, good Aylward, that there comes so much music from the town? I seem to hear a hundred trumpets, all calling in chorus.”

“It would be strange else, seeing that all the great lords of England and of Gascony are within the walls, and each would have his trumpeter blow as loud as his neighbour, lest it might be thought that his dignity had been abated. Ma foi! they make as much louster as a Scotch army, where every man fills himself with girdle-cakes, and sits up all night to blow upon the toodle-pipe. See all along the banks how the pages water the horses, and there beyond the town how they gallop them over the plain! For every horse you see a belted knight hath herbergage in the town, for, as I learn, the men-at-arms and archers have already gone forward to Dax.”

"I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel, coming upon deck, "that the men are ready for the land. Go tell them that the boats will be for them within the hour."

The archer raised his hand in salute, and hastened forward. In the meantime Sir Oliver had followed his brother knight, and the two paced the poop together, Sir Nigel in his plum-coloured velvet suit with flat cap of the same, adorned in front with the Lady Loring's glove and girt round with a curling ostrich feather. The lusty knight, on the other hand, was clad in the very latest mode, with cote-hardie, doublet, pourpoint, court-pie, and paltock of olive-green, picked out with pink and jagged at the edges. A red chaperon or cap, with long hanging cornette, sat daintily on the back of his black-curled head, while his gold-hued shoes were twisted up *a la poulaine*, as though the toes were shooting forth a tendril which might hope in time to entwine itself around his massive leg.

"Once more, Sir Oliver," said Sir Nigel, looking shorewards with sparkling eyes, "do we find ourselves at the gate of honor, the door which hath so often led us to all that is knightly and worthy. There flies the prince's banner, and it would be well that we haste ashore and pay our obeisance to him. The boats already swarm from the bank."

"There is a goodly hostel near the west gate, which is famed for the stewing of spiced pullets," remarked Sir Oliver. "We might take the edge of our hunger off ere we seek the prince, for though his tables are gay with damask and silver he is no trencherman himself, and hath no sympathy for those who are his betters."

"His betters!"

"His betters before the tranchoir, lad. Sniff not treason where none is meant. I have seen him smile in his quiet way because I had looked for the fourth time towards the carving squire. And indeed to watch him dallying with a little gobbet of bread, or sipping his cup of thrice-watered wine, is enough to make a man feel shame at his own hunger. Yet war and glory, my good friend, though well enough in their way, will not serve to tighten such a belt as clasps my waist."

"How read you that coat which hangs over yonder galley, Alleyne?" asked Sir Nigel.

"Argent, a bend vert between cotises dancette gules."

"It is a northern coat. I have seen it in the train of the Percies. From the shields, there is not one of these vessels which hath not knight or baron aboard. I would mine eyes were better. How read you this upon the left?”

“Argent and azure, a barry wavy of six.”

“Ha, it is the sign of the Wiltshire Stourtons! And there beyond I see the red and silver of the Worsleys of Apuldercombe, who like myself are of Hampshire lineage. Close behind us is the moline cross of the gallant William Molyneux, and beside it the bloody chevrons of the Norfork Woodhouses, with the amulets of the Musgraves of Westmoreland. By St. Paul! it would be a very strange thing if so noble a company were to gather without some notable deed of arms arising from it. And here is our boat, Sir Oliver, so it seems best to me that we should go to the abbey with our squires, leaving Master Hawtayne to have his own way in the unloading.”

The horses both of knights and squires were speedily lowered into a broad lighter, and reached the shore almost as soon as their masters. Sir Nigel bent his knee devoutly as he put foot on land, and taking a small black patch from his bosom he bound it tightly over his left eye.

“May the blessed George and the memory of my sweet lady-love raise high my heart!” quoth he. “And as a token I vow that I will not take this patch from my eye until I have seen something of this country of Spain, and done such a small deed as it lies in me to do. And this I swear upon the cross of my sword and upon the glove of my lady.”

“In truth, you take me back twenty years, Nigel,” quoth Sir Oliver, as they mounted and rode slowly through the water-gate. “After Cadsand, I deem that the French thought that we were an army of the blind, for there was scarce a man who had not closed an eye for the greater love and honor of his lady. Yet it goes hard with you that you should darken one side, when with both open you can scarce tell a horse from a mule. In truth, friend, I think that you step over the line of reason in this matter.”

“Sir Oliver Buttesthorn,” said the little knight shortly, “I would have you to understand that, blind as I am, I can yet see the path of honor very clearly, and that that is the road upon which I do not crave another man’s guidance.”

“By my soul,” said Sir Oliver, “you are as tart as verjuice this morning! If you are bent upon a quarrel with me I must leave you to your humor and drop into the ‘Tete d’Or’ here, for I marked a varlet pass the door who bare a smoking dish, which had, methought, a most excellent smell.”

“Nenny, nenny,” cried his comrade, laying his hand upon his knee; “we have known each other over long to fall out, Oliver, like two raw pages at their first epreuves. You must come with me first to the prince, and then back to the hostel; though sure I am that it would grieve his heart that any gentle cavalier should turn from his board to a common tavern. But is not that my Lord Delewar who waves to us? Ha! my fair lord, God and Our Lady be with you! And there is Sir Robert Cheney. Good-morrow, Robert! I am right glad to see you."

The two knights walked their horses abreast, while Alleyne and Ford, with John Norbury, who was squire to Sir Oliver, kept some paces behind them, a spear's-length in front of Black Simon and of the Winchester guidon-bearer. Norbury, a lean, silent man, had been to those parts before, and sat his horse with a rigid neck; but the two young squires gazed eagerly to right or left, and plucked each other's sleeves to call attention to the many strange things on every side of them.

"See to the brave stalls!" cried Alleyne. "See to the noble armor set forth, and the costly taffeta — and oh, Ford, see to where the scrivener sits with the pigments and the ink-horns, and the rolls of sheepskin as white as the Beaulieu napery! Saw man ever the like before?"

"Nay, man, there are finer stalls in Cheapside," answered Ford, whose father had taken him to London on occasion of one of the Smithfield joustings. "I have seen a silversmith's booth there which would serve to buy either side of this street. But mark these houses, Alleyne, how they thrust forth upon the top. And see to the coats-of-arms at every window, and banner or pensil on the roof."

"And the churches!" cried Alleyne. "The Priory at Christ church was a noble pile, but it was cold and bare, methinks, by one of these, with their frettings, and their carvings, and their traceries, as though some great ivy-plant of stone had curled and wantoned over the walls."

"And hark to the speech of the folk!" said Ford. "Was ever such a hissing and clacking? I wonder that they have not wit to learn English now that they have come under the English crown. By Richard of Hampole! there are fair faces amongst them. See the wench with the brown whimple! Out on you, Alleyne, that you would rather gaze upon dead stone than on living flesh!"

It was little wonder that the richness and ornament, not only of church and of stall, but of every private house as well, should have impressed itself upon the young squires. The town was now at the height of its fortunes. Besides its trade and its armorers, other causes had combined to pour wealth into it. War, which had wrought evil upon so many fair cities around, had brought nought but good to this one. As her French sisters decayed she increased, for here, from north, and from east, and from south, came the plunder to be sold and the ransom money to be spent. Through all her sixteen landward gates there had set for many years a double tide of empty-handed soldiers hurrying Francewards, and of enriched and laden bands who brought their spoils home. The prince's court, too, with its swarm of noble barons and wealthy knights, many of whom, in imitation of their master, had brought their ladies and their children from England, all helped to swell the coffers of the burghers. Now, with this fresh influx of noblemen and cavaliers, food and lodging were scarce to be had, and the prince was hurrying forward his forces to Dax in Gascony to relieve the overcrowding of his capital.

In front of the minster and abbey of St. Andrew's was a large square crowded with priests, soldiers, women, friars, and burghers, who made it their common centre for sight-seeing and gossip. Amid the knot of noisy and gesticulating townsfolk, many small parties of mounted knights and squires threaded their way towards the prince's quarters, where the huge iron-clamped doors were thrown back to show that he held audience within. Two-score archers stood about the gateway, and beat back from time to time with their bow-staves the inquisitive and chattering crowd who swarmed round the portal. Two knights in full armor, with lances raised and closed visors, sat their horses on either side, while in the centre, with two pages to tend upon him, there stood a noble-faced man in flowing purple gown, who pricked off upon a sheet of parchment the style and title of each applicant, marshalling them in their due order, and giving to each the place and facility which his rank demanded. His long white beard and searching eyes imparted to him an air of masterful dignity, which was increased by his tabardlike vesture and the heraldic barret cap with triple plume which bespoke his office.

"It is Sir William de Pakington, the prince's own herald and scrivener," whispered Sir Nigel, as they pulled up amid the line of knights who waited admission. "Ill fares it with the man who would venture to deceive him. He hath by rote the name of every knight of France or of England; and all the tree of his family, with his kinships, coat-armor, marriages, augmentations, abatements, and I know not what beside. We may leave our horses here with the varlets, and push forward with our squires."

Following Sir Nigel's counsel, they pressed on upon foot until they were close to the prince's secretary, who was in high debate with a young and foppish knight, who was bent upon making his way past him.

"Mackworth!" said the king-at-arms. "It is in my mind, young sir, that you have not been presented before."

"Nay, it is but a day since I set foot in Bordeaux, but I feared lest the prince should think it strange that I had not waited upon him."

"The prince hath other things to think upon," quoth Sir William de Pakington; "but if you be a Mackworth you must be a Mackworth of Normanton, and indeed I see now that your coat is sable and ermine."

"I am a Mackworth of Normanton," the other answered, with some uneasiness of manner.

"Then you must be Sir Stephen Mackworth, for I learn that when old Sir Guy died he came in for the arms and the name, the war-cry and the profit."

"Sir Stephen is my elder brother, and I am Arthur, the second son," said the youth.

"In sooth and in sooth!" cried the king-at-arms with scornful eyes. "And pray, sir second son, where is the cadency mark which should mark your rank. Dare you to wear your brother's coat without the crescent which should stamp you as his cadet. Away to your lodgings, and come not nigh the prince until the armorer hath placed the true charge upon your shield." As the youth withdrew in confusion, Sir William's keen eye singled out the five red roses from amid the overlapping shields and cloud of pennons which faced him.

"Ha!" he cried, "there are charges here which are above counterfeit. The roses of Loring and the boar's head of Buttesthorn may stand back in peace, but by my faith! they are not to be held back in war. Welcome, Sir Oliver, Sir Nigel! Chandos will be glad to his very heart-roots when he sees you. This way, my fair sirs. Your squires are doubtless worthy the fame of their masters. Down this passage, Sir Oliver! Edricson! Ha! one of the old strain of Hampshire Edricsons, I doubt not. And Ford, they are of a south Saxon stock, and of good repute. There are Norburys in Cheshire and in Wiltshire, and also, as I have heard, upon the borders. So, my fair sirs, and I shall see that you are shortly admitted."

He had finished his professional commentary by flinging open a folding door, and ushering the party into a broad hall, which was filled with a great number of people who were waiting, like themselves, for an audience. The room was very spacious, lighted on one side by three arched and mullioned windows, while opposite was a huge fireplace in which a pile of faggots was blazing merrily. Many of the company had crowded round the flames, for the weather was bitterly cold; but the two knights seated themselves upon a bancal, with their squires standing behind them. Looking down the room, Alleyne marked that both floor and ceiling were of the richest oak, the latter spanned by twelve arching beams, which were adorned at either end by the lilies and the lions of the royal arms. On the further side was a small door, on each side of which stood men-at-arms. From time to time an elderly man in black with rounded shoulders and a long white wand in his hand came softly forth from this inner room, and beckoned to one or other of the company, who doffed cap and followed him.

The two knights were deep in talk, when Alleyne became aware of a remarkable individual who was walking round the room in their direction. As he passed each knot of cavaliers every head turned to look after him, and it was evident, from the bows and respectful salutations on all sides, that the interest which he excited was not due merely to his strange personal appearance. He was tall and straight as a lance, though of a great age, for his hair, which curled from under his velvet cap of maintenance, was as white as the new-fallen snow. Yet, from the swing of his stride and the spring of his step, it was clear that he had not yet lost the fire and activity of his youth. His fierce hawk-like face was clean shaven like that of a priest, save for a long thin wisp of white moustache which drooped down half way to his shoulder. That he had been handsome might be easily judged from his high aquiline nose and clear-cut chin; but his features had been so distorted by the seams and scars of old wounds, and by the loss of one eye which had been torn from the socket, that there was little left to remind one of the dashing young knight who had been fifty years ago the fairest as well as the boldest of the English chivalry. Yet what knight was there in that hall of St. Andrew’s who would not have gladly laid down youth, beauty, and all that he possessed to win the fame of this man? For who could be named with Chandos, the stainless knight, the wise councillor, the valiant warrior, the hero of Crecy, of Winchelsea, of Poictiers, of Auray, and of as many other battles as there were years to his life?

“Ha, my little heart of gold!” he cried, darting forward suddenly and throwing his arms round Sir Nigel. “I heard that you were here and have been seeking you.”

“My fair and dear lord,” said the knight, returning the warrior’s embrace, “I have indeed come back to you, for where else shall I go that I may learn to be a gentle and a hardy knight?”

“By my troth!” said Chandos with a smile, “it is very fitting that we should be companions, Nigel, for since you have tied up one of your eyes, and I have had the mischance to lose one of mine, we have but a pair between us. Ah, Sir Oliver! you were on the blind side of me and I saw you not. A wise woman hath made prophecy that this blind side will one day be the death of me. We shall go in to the prince anon; but in truth he hath much upon his hands, for what with Pedro, and the King of Majorca, and the King of Navarre, who is no two days of the same mind, and the Gascon barons who are all chaffering for terms like so many hucksters, he hath an uneasy part to play. But how left you the Lady Loring?”

“She was well, my fair lord, and sent her service and greetings to you.”

“I am ever her knight and slave. And your journey, I trust that it was pleasant?”

“As heart could wish. We had sight of two rover galleys, and even came to have some slight bickering with them.”

“Ever in luck’s way, Nigel!” quoth Sir John. “We must hear the tale anon. But I deem it best that ye should leave your squires and come with me, for, howsoe’er pressed the prince may be, I am very sure that he would be loth to keep two old comrades-in-arms upon the further side of the door. Follow close behind me, and I will forestall old Sir William, though I can scarce promise to roll forth your style and rank as is his wont.” So saying, he led the way to the inner chamber, the two companions treading close at his heels, and nodding to right and left as they caught sight of familiar faces among the crowd.

CHAPTER XIX. HOW THERE WAS STIR AT THE ABBEY OF ST. ANDREW’S.

The prince’s reception-room, although of no great size, was fitted up with all the state and luxury which the fame and power of its owner demanded. A high dais at the further end was roofed in by a broad canopy of scarlet velvet spangled with silver fleurs-de-lis, and supported at either corner by silver rods. This was approached by four steps carpeted with the same material, while all round were scattered rich cushions, oriental mats and costly rugs of fur. The choicest tapestries which the looms of Arras could furnish draped the walls, whereon the battles of Judas Maccabaeus were set forth, with the Jewish warriors in plate of proof, with crest and lance and banderole, as the naive artists of the day were wont to depict them. A few rich settles and bancals, choicely carved and decorated with glazed leather hangings of the sort termed *or basane*, completed the furniture of the apartment, save that at one side of the dais there stood a lofty perch, upon which a cast of three solemn Prussian gerfalcons sat, hooded and jesseled, as silent and motionless as the royal fowler who stood beside them.

In the centre of the dais were two very high chairs with dorserets, which arched forwards over the heads of the occupants, the whole covered with light-blue silk thickly powdered with golden stars. On that to the right sat a very tall and well formed man with red hair, a livid face, and a cold blue eye, which had in it something peculiarly sinister and menacing. He lounged back in a careless position, and yawned repeatedly as though heartily weary of the proceedings, stooping from time to time to fondle a shaggy Spanish greyhound which lay stretched at his feet. On the other throne there was perched bolt upright, with prim demeanor, as though he felt himself to be upon his good behavior, a little, round, pippin faced person, who smiled and bobbed to every one whose eye he chanced to meet. Between and a little in front of them on a humble charette or stool, sat a slim, dark young man, whose quiet attire and modest manner would scarce proclaim him to be the most noted prince in Europe. A jupon of dark blue cloth, tagged with buckles and pendants of gold, seemed but a sombre and plain attire amidst the wealth of silk and ermine and gilt tissue of fustian with which he was surrounded. He sat with his two hands clasped round his knee, his head slightly bent, and an expression of impatience and of trouble upon his clear, well-chiselled features. Behind the thrones there stood two men in purple gowns, with ascetic, clean-shaven faces, and half a dozen other high dignitaries and office-holders of Aquitaine. Below on either side of the steps were forty or fifty barons, knights, and courtiers, ranged in a triple row to the right and the left, with a clear passage in the centre.

“There sits the prince,” whispered Sir John Chandos, as they entered. “He on the right is Pedro, whom we are about to put upon the Spanish throne. The other is Don James, whom we purpose with the aid of God to help to his throne in Majorca. Now follow me, and take it not to heart if he be a little short in his speech, for indeed his mind is full of many very weighty concerns.”

The prince, however, had already observed their entrance, and, springing to his feet, he had advanced with a winning smile and the light of welcome in his eyes.

“We do not need your good offices as herald here, Sir John,” said he in a low but clear voice; “these valiant knights are very well known to me. Welcome to Aquitaine, Sir Nigel Loring and Sir Oliver Buttesthorn. Nay, keep your knee for my sweet father at Windsor. I would have your hands, my friends. We are like to give you some work to do ere you see the downs of Hampshire once more. Know you aught of Spain, Sir Oliver?”

“Nought, my sire, save that I have heard men say that there is a dish named an olla which is prepared there, though I have never been clear in my mind as to whether it was but a ragout such as is to be found in the south, or whether there is some seasoning such as fennel or garlic which is peculiar to Spain.”

“Your doubts, Sir Oliver, shall soon be resolved,” answered the prince, laughing heartily, as did many of the barons who surrounded them. “His majesty here will doubtless order that you have this dish hotly seasoned when we are all safely in Castile.”

“I will have a hotly seasoned dish for some folk I know of,” answered Don Pedro with a cold smile.

“But my friend Sir Oliver can fight right hardily without either bite or sup,” remarked the prince. “Did I not see him at Poictiers, when for two days we had not more than a crust of bread and a cup of foul water, yet carrying himself most valiantly. With my own eyes I saw him in the rout sweep the head from a knight of Picardy with one blow of his sword."

"The rogue got between me and the nearest French victual wain," muttered Sir Oliver, amid a fresh titter from those who were near enough to catch his words.

"How many have you in your train?" asked the prince, assuming a graver mien.

"I have forty men-at-arms, sire," said Sir Oliver.

"And I have one hundred archers and a score of lancers, but there are two hundred men who wait for me on this side of the water upon the borders of Navarre."

"And who are they, Sir Nigel?"

"They are a free company, sire, and they are called the White Company."

To the astonishment of the knight, his words provoked a burst of merriment from the barons round, in which the two kings and the prince were fain to join. Sir Nigel blinked mildly from one to the other, until at last perceiving a stout black-bearded knight at his elbow, whose laugh rang somewhat louder than the others, he touched him lightly upon the sleeve.

"Perchance, my fair sir," he whispered, "there is some small vow of which I may relieve you. Might we not have some honorable debate upon the matter. Your gentle courtesy may perhaps grant me an exchange of thrusts."

"Nay, nay, Sir Nigel," cried the prince, "fasten not the offence upon Sir Robert Briquet, for we are one and all bogged in the same mire. Truth to say, our ears have just been vexed by the doings of the same company, and I have even now made vow to hang the man who held the rank of captain over it. I little thought to find him among the bravest of my own chosen chieftains. But the vow is now nought, for, as you have never seen your company, it would be a fool's act to blame you for their doings."

"My liege," said Sir Nigel, "it is a very small matter that I should be hanged, albeit the manner of death is somewhat more ignoble than I had hoped for. On the other hand, it would be a very grievous thing that you, the Prince of England and the flower of knighthood, should make a vow, whether in ignorance or no, and fail to bring it to fulfilment."

"Vex not your mind on that," the prince answered, smiling. "We have had a citizen from Montauban here this very day, who told us such a tale of sack and murder and pillage that it moved our blood; but our wrath was turned upon the man who was in authority over them."

"My dear and honored master," cried Nigel, in great anxiety, "I fear me much that in your gentleness of heart you are straining this vow which you have taken. If there be so much as a shadow of a doubt as to the form of it, it were a thousand times best — —"

"Peace! peace!" cried the prince impatiently. "I am very well able to look to my own vows and their performance. We hope to see you both in the banquet-hall anon. Meanwhile you will attend upon us with our train." He bowed, and Chandos, plucking Sir Oliver by the sleeve, led them both away to the back of the press of courtiers.

"Why, little coz," he whispered, "you are very eager to have your neck in a noose. By my soul! had you asked as much from our new ally Don Pedro, he had not baulked you. Between friends, there is overmuch of the hangman in him, and too little of the prince. But indeed this White Company is a rough band, and may take some handling ere you find yourself safe in your captaincy."

"I doubt not, with the help of St. Paul, that I shall bring them to some order," Sir Nigel answered. "But there are many faces here which are new to me, though others have been before me since first I waited upon my dear master, Sir Walter. I pray you to tell me, Sir John, who are these priests upon the dais?"

"The one is the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Nigel, and the other the Bishop of Agen."

"And the dark knight with gray-streaked beard? By my troth, he seems to be a man of much wisdom and valor."

"He is Sir William Felton, who, with my unworthy self, is the chief counsellor of the prince, he being high steward and I the seneschal of Aquitaine."

"And the knights upon the right, beside Don Pedro?"

"They are cavaliers of Spain who have followed him in his exile. The one at his elbow is Fernando de Castro, who is as brave and true a man as heart could wish. In front to the right are the Gascon lords. You may well tell them by their clouded brows, for there hath been some ill-will of late betwixt the prince and them. The tall and burly man is the Captal de Buch, whom I doubt not that you know, for a braver knight never laid lance in rest. That heavy-faced cavalier who plucks his skirts and whispers in his ear is Lord Oliver de Clisson, known also as the butcher. He it is who stirs up strife, and forever blows the dying embers into flame. The man with the mole upon his cheek is the Lord Pommers, and his two brothers stand behind him, with the Lord Lesparre, Lord de Rosem, Lord de Mucident, Sir Perducas d'Albret, the Souldich de la Trane, and others. Further back are knights from Quercy, Limousin, Saintonge, Poitou, and Aquitaine, with the valiant Sir Guiscard d'Angle. That is he in the rose-coloured doublet with the ermine."

"And the knights upon this side?"

"They are all Englishmen, some of the household and others who like yourself, are captains of companies. There is Lord Neville, Sir Stephen Cossington, and Sir Matthew Gourney, with Sir Walter Huet, Sir Thomas Banaster, and Sir Thomas Felton, who is the brother of the high steward. Mark well the man with the high nose and flaxen beard who hath placed his hand upon the shoulder of the dark hard-faced cavalier in the rust-stained jupon."

"Aye, by St. Paul!" observed Sir Nigel, "they both bear the print of their armor upon their cotes-hardies. Methinks they are men who breathe freer in a camp than a court."

"There are many of us who do that, Nigel," said Chandos, "and the head of the court is, I dare warrant, among them. But of these two men the one is Sir Hugh Calverley, and the other is Sir Robert Knolles."

Sir Nigel and Sir Oliver craned their necks to have the clearer view of these famous warriors, the one a chosen leader of free companies, the other a man who by his fierce valor and energy had raised himself from the lowest ranks until he was second only to Chandos himself in the esteem of the army.

"He hath no light hand in war, hath Sir Robert," said Chandos. "If he passes through a country you may tell it for some years to come. I have heard that in the north it is still the use to call a house which hath but the two gable ends left, without walls or roof, a Knolles' mitre."

"I have often heard of him," said Nigel, "and I have hoped to be so far honored as to run a course with him. But hark, Sir John, what is amiss with the prince?"

Whilst Chandos had been conversing with the two knights a continuous stream of suitors had been ushered in, adventurers seeking to sell their swords and merchants clamoring over some grievance, a ship detained for the carriage of troops, or a tun of sweet wine which had the bottom knocked out by a troop of thirsty archers. A few words from the prince disposed of each case, and, if the applicant liked not the judgment, a quick glance from the prince's dark eyes sent him to the door with the grievance all gone out of him. The younger ruler had sat listlessly upon his stool with the two puppet monarchs enthroned behind him, but of a sudden a dark shadow passed over his face, and he sprang to his feet in one of those gusts of passion which were the single blot upon his noble and generous character.

"How now, Don Martin de la Carra?" he cried. "How now, sirrah? What message do you bring to us from our brother of Navarre?"

The new-comer to whom this abrupt query had been addressed was a tall and exceedingly handsome cavalier who had just been ushered into the apartment. His swarthy cheek and raven black hair spoke of the fiery south, and he wore his long black cloak swathed across his chest and over his shoulders in a graceful sweeping fashion, which was neither English nor French. With stately steps and many profound bows, he advanced to the foot of the dais before replying to the prince's question.

"My powerful and illustrious master," he began, "Charles, King of Navarre, Earl of Evreux, Count of Champagne, who also writeth himself Overlord of Bearn, hereby sends his love and greetings to his dear cousin Edward, the Prince of Wales, Governor of Aquitaine, Grand Commander of — —"

"Tush! tush! Don Martin!" interrupted the prince, who had been beating the ground with his foot impatiently during this stately preamble. "We already know our cousin's titles and style, and, certes, we know our own. To the point, man, and at once. Are the passes open to us, or does your master go back from his word pledged to me at Libourne no later than last Michaelmas?"

"It would ill become my gracious master, sire, to go back from promise given. He does but ask some delay and certain conditions and hostages — —"

"Conditions! Hostages! Is he speaking to the Prince of England, or is it to the bourgeois provost of some half-captured town! Conditions, quotha? He may find much to mend in his own condition ere long. The passes are, then, closed to us?"

"Nay, sire — —"

"They are open, then?"

“Nay, sire, if you would but — —”

“Enough, enough, Don Martin,” cried the prince. “It is a sorry sight to see so true a knight pleading in so false a cause. We know the doings of our cousin Charles. We know that while with the right hand he takes our fifty thousand crowns for the holding of the passes open, he hath his left outstretched to Henry of Trastamare, or to the King of France, all ready to take as many more for the keeping them closed. I know our good Charles, and, by my blessed name-saint the Confessor, he shall learn that I know him. He sets his kingdom up to the best bidder, like some scullion farrier selling a glandered horse. He is — —”

“My lord,” cried Don Martin, “I cannot stand there to hear such words of my master. Did they come from other lips, I should know better how to answer them.”

Don Pedro frowned and curled his lip, but the prince smiled and nodded his approbation.

“Your bearing and your words, Don Martin, are such I should have looked for in you,” he remarked. “You will tell the king, your master, that he hath been paid his price and that if he holds to his promise he hath my word for it that no scath shall come to his people, nor to their houses or gear. If, however, we have not his leave, I shall come close at the heels of this message without his leave, and bearing a key with me which shall open all that he may close.” He stooped and whispered to Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Huge Calverley, who smiled as men well pleased, and hastened from the room.

“Our cousin Charles has had experience of our friendship,” the prince continued, “and now, by the Saints! he shall feel a touch of our displeasure. I send now a message to our cousin Charles which his whole kingdom may read. Let him take heed lest worse befall him. Where is my Lord Chandos? Ha, Sir John, I commend this worthy knight to your care. You will see that he hath refection, and such a purse of gold as may defray his charges, for indeed it is great honor to any court to have within it so noble and gentle a cavalier. How say you, sire?” he asked, turning to the Spanish refugee, while the herald of Navarre was conducted from the chamber by the old warrior.

“It is not our custom in Spain to reward pertness in a messenger,” Don Pedro answered, patting the head of his greyhound. “Yet we have all heard the lengths to which your royal generosity runs.”

“In sooth, yes,” cried the King of Majorca.

“Who should know it better than we?” said Don Pedro bitterly, “since we have had to fly to you in our trouble as to the natural protector of all who are weak.”

“Nay, nay, as brothers to a brother,” cried the prince, with sparkling eyes. “We doubt not, with the help of God, to see you very soon restored to those thrones from which you have been so traitorously thrust.”

“When that happy day comes,” said Pedro, “then Spain shall be to you as Aquitaine, and, be your project what it may, you may ever count on every troop and every ship over which flies the banner of Castile.”

“And,” added the other, “upon every aid which the wealth and power of Majorca can bestow.”

“Touching the hundred thousand crowns in which I stand your debtor,” continued Pedro carelessly, “it can no doubt — —”

“Not a word, sire, not a word!” cried the prince. “It is not now when you are in grief that I would vex your mind with such base and sordid matters. I have said once and forever that I am yours with every bow-string of my army and every florin in my coffers.”

“Ah! here is indeed a mirror of chivalry,” said Don Pedro. “I think, Sir Fernando, since the prince’s bounty is stretched so far, that we may make further use of his gracious goodness to the extent of fifty thousand crowns. Good Sir William Felton, here, will doubtless settle the matter with you.”

The stout old English counsellor looked somewhat blank at this prompt acceptance of his master’s bounty.

“If it please you, sire,” he said, “the public funds are at their lowest, seeing that I have paid twelve thousand men of the companies, and the new taxes — the hearth-tax and the wine-tax — not yet come in. If you could wait until the promised help from England comes — —”

“Nay, nay, my sweet cousin,” cried Don Pedro. “Had we known that your own coffers were so low, or that this sorry sum could have weighed one way or the other, we had been loth indeed — —”

“Enough, sire, enough!” said the prince, flushing with vexation. “If the public funds be, indeed, so backward, Sir William, there is still, I trust, my own private credit, which hath never been drawn upon for my own uses, but is now ready in the cause of a friend in adversity. Go, raise this money upon our own jewels, if nought else may serve, and see that it be paid over to Don Fernando.”

“In security I offer — —” cried Don Pedro.

“Tush! tush!” said the prince. “I am not a Lombard, sire. Your kingly pledge is my security, without bond or seal. But I have tidings for you, my lords and lieges, that our brother of Lancaster is on his way for our capital with four hundred lances and as many archers to aid us in our venture. When he hath come, and when our fair consort is recovered in her health, which I trust by the grace of God may be ere many weeks be past, we shall then join the army at Dax, and set our banners to the breeze once more.”

A buzz of joy at the prospect of immediate action rose up from the group of warriors. The prince smiled at the martial ardor which shone upon every face around him.

“It will hearten you to know,” he continued, “that I have sure advices that this Henry is a very valiant leader, and that he has it in his power to make such a stand against us as promises to give us much honor and pleasure. Of his own people he hath brought together, as I learn, some fifty thousand, with twelve thousand of the French free companies, who are, as you know very valiant and expert men-at-arms. It is certain also, that the brave and worthy Bertrand de Guesclin hath ridden into France to the Duke of Anjou, and purposes to take back with him great levies from Picardy and Brittany. We hold Bertrand in high esteem, for he has oft before been at great pains to furnish us with an honorable encounter. What think you of it, my worthy Captal? He took you at Cocherel, and, by my soul I you will have the chance now to pay that score.”

The Gascon warrior winced a little at the allusion, nor were his countrymen around him better pleased, for on the only occasion when they had encountered the arms of France without English aid they had met with a heavy defeat.

“There are some who say, sire,” said the burly De Clisson, “that the score is already overpaid, for that without Gascon help Bertrand had not been taken at Auray, nor had King John been overborne at Poictiers.”

“By heaven! but this is too much,” cried an English nobleman. “Methinks that Gascony is too small a cock to crow so lustily.”

“The smaller cock, my Lord Audley, may have the longer spur,” remarked the Captal de Buch.

“May have its comb clipped if it make over-much noise,” broke in an Englishman.

“By our Lady of Rocamadour!” cried the Lord of Mucident, “this is more than I can abide. Sir John Charnell, you shall answer to me for those words!”

“Freely, my lord, and when you will,” returned the Englishman carelessly.

“My Lord de Clisson,” cried Lord Audley, “you look some, what fixedly in my direction. By God’s soul! I should be right glad to go further into the matter with you.”

“And you, my Lord of Pommers,” said Sir Nigel, pushing his way to the front, “it is in my mind that we might break a lance in gentle and honorable debate over the question.”

For a moment a dozen challenges flashed backwards and forwards at this sudden bursting of the cloud which had lowered so long between the knights of the two nations. Furious and gesticulating the Gascons, white and cold and sneering the English, while the prince with a half smile glanced from one party to the other, like a man who loved to dwell upon a fiery scene, and yet dreaded least the mischief go so far that he might find it beyond his control.

“Friends, friends!” he cried at last, “this quarrel must go no further. The man shall answer to me, be he Gascon or English, who carries it beyond this room. I have overmuch need for your swords that you should turn them upon each other. Sir John Charnell, Lord Audley, you do not doubt the courage of our friends of Gascony?”

“Not I, sire,” Lord Audley answered. “I have seen them fight too often not to know that they are very hardy and valiant gentlemen.”

“And so say I,” quoth the other Englishman; “but, certes, there is no fear of our forgetting it while they have a tongue in their heads.”

“Nay, Sir John,” said the prince reprovingly, “all peoples have their own use and customs. There are some who might call us cold and dull and silent. But you hear, my lords of Gascony, that these gentlemen had no thought to throw a slur upon your honor or your valor, so let all anger fade from your mind. Clisson, Captal, De Pommers, I have your word?”

“We are your subjects, sire,” said the Gascon barons, though with no very good grace. “Your words are our law.”

“Then shall we bury all cause of unkindness in a flagon of Malvoisie,” said the prince, cheerily. “Ho, there! the doors of the banquet-hall! I have been over long from my sweet spouse but I shall be back with you anon.

Let the sewers serve and the minstrels play, while we drain a cup to the brave days that are before us in the south!” He turned away, accompanied by the two monarchs, while the rest of the company, with many a compressed lip and menacing eye, filed slowly through the side-door to the great chamber in which the royal tables were set forth.

CHAPTER XX. HOW ALLEYNE WON HIS PLACE IN AN HONORABLE GUILD.

Whilst the prince’s council was sitting, Alleyne and Ford had remained in the outer hall, where they were soon surrounded by a noisy group of young Englishmen of their own rank, all eager to hear the latest news from England.

“How is it with the old man at Windsor?” asked one.

“And how with the good Queen Philippa?”

“And how with Dame Alice Perrers?” cried a third.

“The devil take your tongue, Wat!” shouted a tall young man, seizing the last speaker by the collar and giving him an admonitory shake. “The prince would take your head off for those words.”

“By God’s coif! Wat would miss it but little,” said another. “It is as empty as a beggar’s wallet.”

“As empty as an English squire, coz,” cried the first speaker. “What a devil has become of the maitre-des-tables and his sewers? They have not put forth the trestles yet.”

“Mon Dieu! if a man could eat himself into knighthood, Humphrey, you had been a banneret at the least,” observed another, amid a burst of laughter.

“And if you could drink yourself in, old leather-head, you had been first baron of the realm,” cried the aggrieved Humphrey. “But how of England, my lads of Loring?”

“I take it,” said Ford, “that it is much as it was when you were there last, save that perchance there is a little less noise there.”

“And why less noise, young Solomon?”

“Ah, that is for your wit to discover.”

“Pardieu! here is a paladin come over, with the Hampshire mud still sticking to his shoes. He means that the noise is less for our being out of the country.”

“They are very quick in these parts,” said Ford, turning to Alleyne.

“How are we to take this, sir?” asked the ruffling squire.

“You may take it as it comes,” said Ford carelessly.

“Here is pertness!” cried the other.

“Sir, I honor your truthfulness,” said Ford.

“Stint it, Humphrey,” said the tall squire, with a burst of laughter. “You will have little credit from this gentleman, I perceive. Tongues are sharp in Hampshire, sir.”

“And swords?”

“Hum! we may prove that. In two days’ time is the vepres du tournoi, when we may see if your lance is as quick as your wit.”

“All very well, Roger Harcomb,” cried a burly, bull-necked young man, whose square shoulders and massive limbs told of exceptional personal strength. “You pass too lightly over the matter. We are not to be so easily overcrowed. The Lord Loring hath given his proofs; but we know nothing of his squires, save that one of them hath a railing tongue. And how of you, young sir?” bringing his heavy hand down on Alleyne’s shoulder.

“And what of me, young sir?”

“Ma foi! this is my lady’s page come over. Your cheek will be browner and your hand harder ere you see your mother again.”

“If my hand is not hard, it is ready.”

“Ready? Ready for what? For the hem of my lady’s train?”

“Ready to chastise insolence, sir,” cried Alleyne with hashing eyes.

“Sweet little coz!” answered the burly squire. “Such a dainty colour! Such a mellow voice! Eyes of a bashful maid, and hair like a three years’ babe! Voila!” He passed his thick fingers roughly through the youth’s crisp golden curls.

“You seek to force a quarrel, sir,” said the young man, white with anger.

“And what then?”

“Why, you do it like a country boor, and not like a gentle squire. Hast been ill bred and as ill taught. I serve a master who could show you how such things should be done.”

“And how would he do it, O pink of squires?”

“He would neither be loud nor would he be unmannerly, but rather more gentle than is his wont. He would say, ‘Sir, I should take it as an honor to do some small deed of arms against you, not for mine own glory or advancement, but rather for the fame of my lady and for the upholding of chivalry.’ Then he would draw his glove, thus, and throw it on the ground; or, if he had cause to think that he had to deal with a churl, he might throw it in his face — as I do now!”

A buzz of excitement went up from the knot of squires as Alleyne, his gentle nature turned by this causeless attack into fiery resolution, dashed his glove with all his strength into the sneering face of his antagonist. From all parts of the hall squires and pages came running, until a dense, swaying crowd surrounded the disputants.

“Your life for this!” said the bully, with a face which was distorted with rage.

“If you can take it,” returned Alleyne.

“Good lad!” whispered Ford. “Stick to it close as wax.”

“I shall see justice,” cried Norbury, Sir Oliver’s silent attendant.

“You brought it upon yourself, John Tranter,” said the tall squire, who had been addressed as Roger Harcomb. “You must ever plague the new-comers. But it were shame if this went further. The lad hath shown a proper spirit.”

“But a blow! a blow!” cried several of the older squires. “There must be a finish to this.”

“Nay; Tranter first laid hand upon his head,” said Harcomb. “How say you, Tranter? The matter may rest where it stands?”

“My name is known in these parts,” said Tranter, proudly, “I can let pass what might leave a stain upon another. Let him pick up his glove and say that he has done amiss.”

“I would see him in the claws of the devil first,” whispered Ford.

“You hear, young sir?” said the peacemaker. “Our friend will overlook the matter if you do but say that you have acted in heat and haste.”

“I cannot say that,” answered Alleyne.

“It is our custom, young sir, when new squires come amongst us from England, to test them in some such way. Bethink you that if a man have a destrier or a new lance he will ever try it in time of peace, lest in days of need it may fail him. How much more then is it proper to test those who are our comrades in arms.”

“I would draw out if it may honorably be done,” murmured Norbury in Alleyne’s ear. “The man is a noted swordsman and far above your strength.”

Edricson came, however, of that sturdy Saxon blood which is very slowly heated, but once up not easily to be cooled. The hint of danger which Norbury threw out was the one thing needed to harden his resolution.

"I came here at the back of my master," he said, "and I looked on every man here as an Englishman and a friend. This gentleman hath shown me a rough welcome, and if I have answered him in the same spirit he has but himself to thank. I will pick the glove up; but, certes, I shall abide what I have done unless he first crave my pardon for what he hath said and done."

Tranter shrugged his shoulders. "You have done what you could to save him, Harcomb," said he. "We had best settle at once."

"So say I," cried Alleyne.

"The council will not break up until the banquet," remarked a gray-haired squire. "You have a clear two hours."

"And the place?"

"The tilting-yard is empty at this hour."

"Nay; it must not be within the grounds of the court, or it may go hard with all concerned if it come to the ears of the prince."

"But there is a quiet spot near the river," said one youth. "We have but to pass through the abbey grounds, along the armory wall, past the church of St. Remi, and so down the Rue des Apotres."

"En avant, then!" cried Tranter shortly, and the whole assembly flocked out into the open air, save only those whom the special orders of their masters held to their posts. These unfortunates crowded to the small casements, and craned their necks after the throng as far as they could catch a glimpse of them.

Close to the banks of the Garonne there lay a little tract of green sward, with the high wall of a prior's garden upon one side and an orchard with a thick bristle of leafless apple-trees upon the other. The river ran deep and swift up to the steep bank; but there were few boats upon it, and the ships were moored far out in the centre of the stream. Here the two combatants drew their swords and threw off their doublets, for neither had any defensive armor. The duello with its stately etiquette had not yet come into vogue, but rough and sudden encounters were as common as they must ever be when hot-headed youth goes abroad with a weapon strapped to its waist. In such combats, as well as in the more formal sports of the tilting-yard, Tranter had won a name for strength and dexterity which had caused Norbury to utter his well-meant warning. On the other hand, Alleyne had used his weapons in constant exercise and practice for every day for many months, and being by nature quick of eye and prompt of hand, he might pass now as no mean swordsman. A strangely opposed pair they appeared as they approached each other: Tranter dark and stout and stiff, with hairy chest and corded arms, Alleyne a model of comeliness and grace, with his golden hair and his skin as fair as a woman’s. An unequal fight it seemed to most; but there were a few, and they the most experienced, who saw something in the youth’s steady gray eye and wary step which left the issue open to doubt.

“Hold, sirs, hold!” cried Norbury, ere a blow had been struck. “This gentleman hath a two-handed sword, a good foot longer than that of our friend.”

“Take mine, Alleyne,” said Ford.

“Nay, friends,” he answered, “I understand the weight and balance of mine own. To work, sir, for our lord may need us at the abbey!”

Tranter’s great sword was indeed a mighty vantage in his favor. He stood with his feet close together, his knees bent outwards, ready for a dash inwards or a spring out. The weapon he held straight up in front of him with blade erect, so that he might either bring it down with a swinging blow, or by a turn of the heavy blade he might guard his own head and body. A further protection lay in the broad and powerful guard which crossed the hilt, and which was furnished with a deep and narrow notch, in which an expert swordsman might catch his foeman’s blade, and by a quick turn of his wrist might snap it across. Alleyne, on the other hand, must trust for his defence to his quick eye and active foot — for his sword, though keen as a whetstone could make it, was of a light and graceful build with a narrow, sloping pommel and a tapering steel.

Tranter well knew his advantage and lost no time in putting it to use. As his opponent walked towards him he suddenly bounded forward and sent in a whistling cut which would have severed the other in twain had he not sprung lightly back from it. So close was it that the point ripped a gash in the jutting edge of his linen cyclas. Quick as a panther, Alleyne sprang in with a thrust, but Tranter, who was as active as he was strong, had already recovered himself and turned it aside with a movement of his heavy blade. Again he whizzed in a blow which made the spectators hold their breath, and again Alleyne very quickly and swiftly slipped from under it, and sent back two lightning thrusts which the other could scarce parry. So close were they to each other that Alleyne had no time to spring back from the next cut, which beat down his sword and grazed his forehead, sending the blood streaming into his eyes and down his cheeks. He sprang out beyond sword sweep, and the pair stood breathing heavily, while the crowd of young squires buzzed their applause.

“Bravely struck on both sides!” cried Roger Harcomb. “You have both won honor from this meeting, and it would be sin and shame to let it go further.”

“You have done enough, Edricson,” said Norbury.

“You have carried yourself well,” cried several of the older squires.

“For my part, I have no wish to slay this young man,” said Tranter, wiping his heated brow.

“Does this gentleman crave my pardon for having used me despitefully?” asked Alleyne.

“Nay, not I.”

“Then stand on your guard, sir!” With a clatter and dash the two blades met once more, Alleyne pressing in so as to keep within the full sweep of the heavy blade, while Tranter as continually sprang back to have space for one of his fatal cuts. A three-parts-parried blow drew blood from Alleyne’s left shoulder, but at the same moment he wounded Tranter slightly upon the thigh. Next instant, however, his blade had slipped into the fatal notch, there was a sharp cracking sound with a tinkling upon the ground, and he found a splintered piece of steel fifteen inches long was all that remained to him of his weapon.

“Your life is in my hands!” cried Tranter, with a bitter smile.

“Nay, nay, he makes submission!” broke in several squires.

“Another sword!” cried Ford.

“Nay, sir,” said Harcomb, “that is not the custom.”

“Throw down your hilt, Edricson,” cried Norbury.

“Never!” said Alleyne. “Do you crave my pardon, sir?”

“You are mad to ask it.”

“Then on guard again!” cried the young squire, and sprang in with a fire and a fury which more than made up for the shortness of his weapon. It had not escaped him that his opponent was breathing in short, hoarse gasps, like a man who is dizzy with fatigue. Now was the time for the purer living and the more agile limb to show their value. Back and back gave Tranter, ever seeking time for a last cut. On and on came Alleyne, his jagged point now at his foeman’s face, now at his throat, now at his chest, still stabbing and thrusting to pass the line of steel which covered him. Yet his experienced foeman knew well that such efforts could not be long sustained. Let him relax for one instant, and his death-blow had come. Relax he must! Flesh and blood could not stand the strain. Already the thrusts were less fierce, the foot less ready, although there was no abatement of the spirit in the steady gray eyes. Tranter, cunning and wary from years of fighting, knew that his chance had come. He brushed aside the frail weapon which was opposed to him, whirled up his great blade, sprang back to get the fairer sweep — and vanished into the waters of the Garonne.

So intent had the squires, both combatants and spectators, been on the matter in hand, that all thought of the steep bank and swift still stream had gone from their minds. It was not until Tranter, giving back before the other's fiery rush, was upon the very brink, that a general cry warned him of his danger. That last spring, which he hoped would have brought the fight to a bloody end, carried him clear of the edge, and he found himself in an instant eight feet deep in the ice-cold stream. Once and twice his gasping face and clutching fingers broke up through the still green water, sweeping outwards in the swirl of the current. In vain were sword-sheaths, apple-branches and belts linked together thrown out to him by his companions. Alleyne had dropped his shattered sword and was standing, trembling in every limb, with his rage all changed in an instant to pity. For the third time the drowning man came to the surface, his hands full of green slimy water-plants, his eyes turned in despair to the shore. Their glance fell upon Alleyne, and he could not withstand the mute appeal which he read in them. In an instant he, too, was in the Garonne, striking out with powerful strokes for his late foeman.

Yet the current was swift and strong, and, good swimmer as he was, it was no easy task which Alleyne had set himself. To clutch at Tranter and to seize him by the hair was the work of a few seconds, but to hold his head above water and to make their way out of the current was another matter. For a hundred strokes he did not seem to gain an inch. Then at last, amid a shout of joy and praise from the bank, they slowly drew clear into more stagnant water, at the instant that a rope, made of a dozen sword-belts linked together by the buckles, was thrown by Ford into their very hands. Three pulls from eager arms, and the two combatants, dripping and pale, were dragged up the bank, and lay panting upon the grass.

John Tranter was the first to come to himself, for although he had been longer in the water, he had done nothing during that fierce battle with the current. He staggered to his feet and looked down upon his rescuer, who had raised himself upon his elbow, and was smiling faintly at the buzz of congratulation and of praise which broke from the squires around him.

"I am much beholden to you, sir," said Tranter, though in no very friendly voice. "Certes, I should have been in the river now but for you, for I was born in Warwickshire, which is but a dry county, and there are few who swim in those parts."

"I ask no thanks," Alleyne answered shortly. "Give me your hand to rise, Ford."

"The river has been my enemy," said Tranter, "but it hath been a good friend to you, for it has saved your life this day."

"That is as it may be," returned Alleyne.

"But all is now well over," quoth Harcomb, "and no scath come of it, which is more than I had at one time hoped for. Our young friend here hath very fairly and honestly earned his right to be craftsman of the Honorable Guild of the Squires of Bordeaux. Here is your doublet, Tranter."

"Alas for my poor sword which lies at the bottom of the Garonne!" said the squire.

"Here is your pourpoint, Edricson," cried Norbury. "Throw it over your shoulders, that you may have at least one dry garment."

"And now away back to the abbey!" said several.

"One moment, sirs," cried Alleyne, who was leaning on Ford's shoulder, with the broken sword, which he had picked up, still clutched in his right hand. "My ears may be somewhat dulled by the water, and perchance what has been said has escaped me, but I have not yet heard this gentleman crave pardon for the insults which he put upon me in the hall."

"What! do you still pursue the quarrel?" asked Tranter.

"And why not, sir? I am slow to take up such things, but once afoot I shall follow it while I have life or breath."

"Ma foi! you have not too much of either, for you are as white as marble," said Harcomb bluntly. "Take my rede, sir, and let it drop, for you have come very well out from it."

"Nay," said Alleyne, "this quarrel is none of my making; but, now that I am here, I swear to you that I shall never leave this spot until I have that which I have come for: so ask my pardon, sir, or choose another glaive and to it again."

The young squire was deadly white from his exertions, both on the land and in the water. Soaking and stained, with a smear of blood on his white shoulder and another on his brow, there was still in his whole pose and set of face the trace of an inflexible resolution. His opponent’s duller and more material mind quailed before the fire and intensity of a higher spiritual nature.

“I had not thought that you had taken it so amiss,” said he awkwardly. “It was but such a jest as we play upon each other, and, if you must have it so, I am sorry for it.”

“Then I am sorry too,” quoth Alleyne warmly, “and here is my hand upon it.”

“And the none-meat horn has blown three times,” quoth Harcomb, as they all streamed in chattering groups from the ground. “I know not what the prince’s maitre-de-cuisine will say or think. By my troth! master Ford, your friend here is in need of a cup of wine, for he hath drunk deeply of Garonne water. I had not thought from his fair face that he had stood to this matter so shrewdly.”

“Faith,” said Ford, “this air of Bordeaux hath turned our turtle-dove into a game-cock. A milder or more courteous youth never came out of Hampshire.”

“His master also, as I understand, is a very mild and courteous gentleman,” remarked Harcomb; “yet I do not think that they are either of them men with whom it is very safe to trifle.”

CHAPTER XXI. HOW AGOSTINO PISANO RISKED HIS HEAD.

Even the squires’ table at the Abbey of St. Andrew’s at Bordeaux was on a very sumptuous scale while the prince held his court there. Here first, after the meagre fare of Beaulieu and the stinted board of the Lady Loring, Alleyne learned the lengths to which luxury and refinement might be pushed. Roasted peacocks, with the feathers all carefully replaced, so that the bird lay upon the dish even as it had strutted in life, boars’ heads with the tusks gilded and the mouth lined with silver foil, jellies in the shape of the Twelve Apostles, and a great pasty which formed an exact model of the king’s new castle at Windsor — these were a few of the strange dishes which faced him. An archer had brought him a change of clothes from the cog, and he had already, with the elasticity of youth, shaken off the troubles and fatigues of the morning. A page from the inner banqueting-hall had come with word that their master intended to drink wine at the lodgings of the Lord Chandos that night, and that he desired his squires to sleep at the hotel of the “Half Moon” on the Rue des Apotres. Thither then they both set out in the twilight after the long course of juggling tricks and glee-singing with which the principal meal was concluded.

A thin rain was falling as the two youths, with their cloaks over their heads, made their way on foot through the streets of the old town, leaving their horses in the royal stables. An occasional oil lamp at the corner of a street, or in the portico of some wealthy burgher, threw a faint glimmer over the shining cobblestones, and the varied motley crowd who, in spite of the weather, ebbed and flowed along every highway. In those scattered circles of dim radiance might be seen the whole busy panorama of life in a wealthy and martial city. Here passed the round-faced burgher, swollen with prosperity, his sweeping dark-clothed gaberdine, flat velvet cap, broad leather belt and dangling pouch all speaking of comfort and of wealth. Behind him his serving wench, her blue whimple over her head, and one hand thrust forth to bear the lanthorn which threw a golden bar of light along her master’s path. Behind them a group of swaggering, half-drunken Yorkshire dalesmen, speaking a dialect which their own southland countrymen could scarce comprehend, their jerkins marked with the pelican, which showed that they had come over in the train of the north-country Stapletons. The burgher glanced back at their fierce faces and quickened his step, while the girl pulled her whimple closer round her, for there was a meaning in their wild eyes, as they stared at the purse and the maiden, which men of all tongues could understand. Then came archers of the guard, shrill-voiced women of the camp, English pages with their fair skins and blue wondering eyes, dark-robed friars, lounging men-at-arms, swarthy loud-tongued Gascon serving-men, seamen from the river, rude peasants of the Medoc, and becloaked and befeathered squires of the court, all jostling and pushing in an ever-changing, many-coloured stream, while English, French, Welsh, Basque, and the varied dialects of Gascony and Guienne filled the air with their babel. From time to time the throng would be burst asunder and a lady's horse-litter would trot past tow torch-bearing archers walking in front of Gascon baron or English knight, as he sought his lodgings after the palace revels. Clatter of hoofs, clinking of weapons, shouts from the drunken brawlers, and high laughter of women, they all rose up, like the mist from a marsh, out of the crowded streets of the dim-lit city.

One couple out of the moving throng especially engaged the attention of the two young squires, the more so as they were going in their own direction and immediately in front of them. They consisted of a man and a girl, the former very tall with rounded shoulders, a limp of one foot, and a large flat object covered with dark cloth under his arm. His companion was young and straight, with a quick, elastic step and graceful bearing, though so swathed in a black mantle that little could be seen of her face save a flash of dark eyes and a curve of raven hair. The tall man leaned heavily upon her to take the weight off his tender foot, while he held his burden betwixt himself and the wall, cuddling it jealously to his side, and thrusting forward his young companion to act as a buttress whenever the pressure of the crowd threatened to bear him away. The evident anxiety of the man, the appearance of his attendant, and the joint care with which they defended their concealed possession, excited the interest of the two young Englishmen who walked within hand-touch of them.

“Courage, child!” they heard the tall man exclaim in strange hybrid French. “If we can win another sixty paces we are safe.”

“Hold it safe, father,” the other answered, in the same soft, mincing dialect. “We have no cause for fear.”

“Verily, they are heathens and barbarians,” cried the man; “mad, howling, drunken barbarians! Forty more paces, Tita mia, and I swear to the holy Eloi, patron of all learned craftsmen, that I will never set foot over my door again until the whole swarm are safely hived in their camp of Dax, or wherever else they curse with their presence. Twenty more paces, my treasure: Ah, my God! how they push and brawl! Get in their way, Tita mia! Put your little elbow bravely out! Set your shoulders squarely against them, girl! Why should you give way to these mad islanders? Ah, cospetto! we are ruined and destroyed!”

The crowd had thickened in front, so that the lame man and the girl had come to a stand. Several half-drunken English archers, attracted, as the squires had been, by their singular appearance, were facing towards them, and peering at them through the dim light.

“By the three kings!” cried one, “here is an old dotard shrew to have so goodly a crutch! Use the leg that God hath given you, man, and do not bear so heavily upon the wench.”

“Twenty devils fly away with him!” shouted another. “What, how, man! are brave archers to go maidless while an old man uses one as a walking-staff?”

“Come with me, my honey-bird!” cried a third, plucking at the girl’s mantle.

“Nay, with me, my heart’s desire!” said the first. “By St. George! our life is short, and we should be merry while we may. May I never see Chester Bridge again, if she is not a right winsome lass!”

“What hath the old toad under his arm?” cried one of the others. “He hugs it to him as the devil hugged the pardoner.”

“Let us see, old bag of bones; let us see what it is that you have under your arm!” They crowded in upon him, while he, ignorant of their language, could but clutch the girl with one hand and the parcel with the other, looking wildly about in search of help.

“Nay, lads, nay!” cried Ford, pushing back the nearest archer. “This is but scurvy conduct. Keep your hands off, or it will be the worse for you.”

“Keep your tongue still, or it will be the worse for you,” shouted the most drunken of the archers. “Who are you to spoil sport?”

“A raw squire, new landed,” said another. “By St. Thomas of Kent! we are at the beck of our master, but we are not to be ordered by every babe whose mother hath sent him as far as Aquitaine.”

“Oh, gentlemen,” cried the girl in broken French, “for dear Christ’s sake stand by us, and do not let these terrible men do us an injury.”

“Have no fears, lady,” Alleyne answered. “We shall see that all is well with you. Take your hand from the girl’s wrist, you north-country rogue!”

“Hold to her, Wat!” said a great black-bearded man-at-arms, whose steel breast-plate glimmered in the dusk. “Keep your hands from your bodkins, you two, for that was my trade before you were born, and, by God’s soul! I will drive a handful of steel through you if you move a finger.”

“Thank God!” said Alleyne suddenly, as he spied in the lamp-light a shock of blazing red hair which fringed a steel cap high above the heads of the crowd. “Here is John, and Aylward, too! Help us, comrades, for there is wrong being done to this maid and to the old man.”

“Hola, mon petit,” said the old bowman, pushing his way through the crowd, with the huge forester at his heels. “What is all this, then? By the twang of string! I think that you will have some work upon your hands if you are to right all the wrongs that you may see upon this side of the water. It is not to be thought that a troop of bowmen, with the wine buzzing in their ears, will be as soft-spoken as so many young clerks in an orchard. When you have been a year with the Company you will think less of such matters. But what is amiss here? The provost-marshal with his archers is coming this way, and some of you may find yourselves in the stretch-neck, if you take not heed.”

“Why, it is old Sam Aylward of the White Company!” shouted the man-at-arms. “Why, Samkin, what hath come upon thee? I can call to mind the day when you were as roaring a blade as ever called himself a free companion. By my soul! from Limoges to Navarre, who was there who would kiss a wench or cut a throat as readily as bowman Aylward of Hawkwood’s company?”

“Like enough, Peter,” said Aylward, “and, by my hilt! I may not have changed so much. But it was ever a fair loose and a clear mark with me. The wench must be willing, or the man must be standing up against me, else, by these ten finger bones I either were safe enough for me.”

A glance at Aylward’s resolute face, and at the huge shoulders of Hordle John, had convinced the archers that there was little to be got by violence.

The girl and the old man began to shuffle on in the crowd without their tormentors venturing to stop them. Ford and Alleyne followed slowly behind them, but Aylward caught the latter by the shoulder.

“By my hilt! camarade,” said he, “I hear that you have done great things at the Abbey to-day, but I pray you to have a care, for it was I who brought you into the Company, and it would be a black day for me if aught were to befall you.”

“Nay, Aylward, I will have a care.”

“Thrust not forward into danger too much, mon petit. In a little time your wrist will be stronger and your cut more shrewd. There will be some of us at the ‘Rose de Guienne’ to-night, which is two doors from the hotel of the ‘Half Moon,’ so if you would drain a cup with a few simple archers you will be right welcome.”

Alleyne promised to be there if his duties would allow, and then, slipping through the crowd, he rejoined Ford, who was standing in talk with the two strangers, who had now reached their own doorstep.

“Brave young signor,” cried the tall man, throwing his arms round Alleyne, “how can we thank you enough for taking our parts against those horrible drunken barbarians. What should we have done without you? My Tita would have been dragged away, and my head would have been shivered into a thousand fragments.”

“Nay, I scarce think that they would have mishandled you so,” said Alleyne in surprise.

“Ho, ho!” cried he with a high crowing laugh, “it is not the head upon my shoulders that I think of. Cospetto! no. It is the head under my arm which you have preserved.”

“Perhaps the signori would deign to come under our roof, father,” said the maiden. “If we bide here, who knows that some fresh tumult may not break out.”

“Well said, Tita! Well said, my girl! I pray you, sirs, to honor my unworthy roof so far. A light, Giacomo! There are five steps up. Now two more. So! Here we are at last in safety. Corpo di Bacco! I would not have given ten maravedi for my head when those children of the devil were pushing us against the wall. Tita mia, you have been a brave girl, and it was better that you should be pulled and pushed than that my head should be broken.”

“Yes indeed, father,” said she earnestly.

“But those English! Ach! Take a Goth, a Hun, and a Vandal, mix them together and add a Barbary rover; then take this creature and make him drunk — and you have an Englishman. My God I were ever such people upon earth! What place is free from them? I hear that they swarm in Italy even as they swarm here. Everywhere you will find them, except in heaven.”

“Dear father,” cried Tita, still supporting the angry old man, as he limped up the curved oaken stair. “You must not forget that these good signori who have preserved us are also English.”

“Ah, yes. My pardon, sirs! Come into my rooms here. There are some who might find some pleasure in these paintings, but I learn the art of war is the only art which is held in honor in your island.”

The low-roofed, oak-panelled room into which he conducted them was brilliantly lit by four scented oil lamps. Against the walls, upon the table, on the floor, and in every part of the chamber were great sheets of glass painted in the most brilliant colours. Ford and Edricson gazed around them in amazement, for never had they seen such magnificent works of art.

“You like them then,” the lame artist cried, in answer to the look of pleasure and of surprise in their faces. “There are then some of you who have a taste for such trifling.”

“I could not have believed it,” exclaimed Alleyne. “What colour! What outlines! See to this martyrdom of the holy Stephen, Ford. Could you not yourself pick up one of these stones which lie to the hand of the wicked murtherers?”

“And see this stag, Alleyne, with the cross betwixt its horns. By my faith! I have never seen a better one at the Forest of Bere.”

“And the green of this grass — how bright and clear! Why all the painting that I have seen is but child’s play beside this. This worthy gentleman must be one of those great painters of whom I have oft heard brother Bartholomew speak in the old days at Beaulieu.”

The dark mobile face of the artist shone with pleasure at the unaffected delight of the two young Englishmen. His daughter had thrown off her mantle and disclosed a face of the finest and most delicate Italian beauty, which soon drew Ford’s eyes from the pictures in front of him. Alleyne, however, continued with little cries of admiration and of wonderment to turn from the walls to the table and yet again to the walls.

“What think you of this, young sir?” asked the painter, tearing off the cloth which concealed the flat object which he had borne beneath his arm. It was a leaf-shaped sheet of glass bearing upon it a face with a halo round it, so delicately outlined, and of so perfect a tint, that it might have been indeed a human face which gazed with sad and thoughtful eyes upon the young squire. He clapped his hands, with that thrill of joy which true art will ever give to a true artist.

“It is great!” he cried. “It is wonderful! But I marvel, sir, that you should have risked a work of such beauty and value by bearing it at night through so unruly a crowd.”

“I have indeed been rash,” said the artist. “Some wine, Tita, from the Florence flask! Had it not been for you, I tremble to think of what might have come of it. See to the skin tint: it is not to be replaced, for paint as you will, it is not once in a hundred times that it is not either burned too brown in the furnace or else the colour will not hold, and you get but a sickly white. There you can see the very veins and the throb of thee blood. Yes, diavolo! if it had broken, my heart would have broken too. It is for the choir window in the church of St. Remi, and we had gone, my little helper and I, to see if it was indeed of the size for the stonework. Night had fallen ere we finished, and what could we do save carry it home as best we might? But you, young sir, you speak as if you too knew something of the art.”

“So little that I scarce dare speak of it in your presence,” Alleyne answered. “I have been cloister-bred, and it was no very great matter to handle the brush better than my brother novices.”

“There are pigments, brush, and paper,” said the old artist. “I do not give you glass, for that is another matter, and takes much skill in the mixing of colours. Now I pray you to show me a touch of your art. I thank you, Tita! The Venetian glasses, cara mia, and fill them to the brim. A seat, signor!”

While Ford, in his English-French, was conversing with Tita in her Italian French, the old man was carefully examining his precious head to see that no scratch had been left upon its surface. When he glanced up again, Alleyne had, with a few bold strokes of the brush, tinted in a woman’s face and neck upon the white sheet in front of him.

“Diavolo!” exclaimed the old artist, standing with his head on one side, “you have power; yes, cospetto! you have power, it is the face of an angel!”

“It is the face of the Lady Maude Loring!” cried Ford, even more astonished.

“Why, on my faith, it is not unlike her!” said Alleyne, in some confusion.

“Ah! a portrait! So much the better. Young man, I am Agostino Pisano, the son of Andrea Pisano, and I say again that you have power. Further, I say, that, if you will stay with me, I will teach you all the secrets of the glass-stainers’ mystery: the pigments and their thickening, which will fuse into the glass and which will not, the furnace and the glazing — every trick and method you shall know.”

“I would be right glad to study under such a master,” said Alleyne; “but I am sworn to follow my lord whilst this war lasts.”

“War! war!” cried the old Italian. “Ever this talk of war. And the men that you hold to be great — what are they? Have I not heard their names? Soldiers, butchers, destroyers! Ah, per Bacco! we have men in Italy who are in very truth great. You pull down, you despoil; but they build up, they restore. Ah, if you could but see my own dear Pisa, the Duomo, the cloisters of Campo Santo, the high Campanile, with the mellow throb of her bells upon the warm Italian air! Those are the works of great men. And I have seen them with my own eyes, these very eyes which look upon you. I have seen Andrea Orcagna, Taddeo Gaddi, Giottino, Stefano, Simone Memmi — men whose very colours I am not worthy to mix. And I have seen the aged Giotto, and he in turn was pupil to Cimabue, before whom there was no art in Italy, for the Greeks were brought to paint the chapel of the Gondi at Florence. Ah, signori, there are the real great men whose names will be held in honor when your soldiers are shown to have been the enemies of humankind.”

“Faith, sir,” said Ford, “there is something to say for the soldiers also, for, unless they be defended, how are all these gentlemen whom you have mentioned to preserve the pictures which they have painted?”

“And all these!” said Alleyne. “Have you indeed done them all? — and where are they to go?”

“Yes, signor, they are all from my hand. Some are, as you see, upon one sheet, and some are in many pieces which may fasten together. There are some who do but paint upon the glass, and then, by placing another sheet of glass upon the top and fastening it, they keep the air from their painting. Yet I hold that the true art of my craft lies as much in the furnace as in the brush. See this rose window, which is from the model of the Church of the Holy Trinity at Vendome, and this other of the ‘Finding of the Grail,’ which is for the apse of the Abbey church. Time was when none but my countrymen could do these things; but there is Clement of Chartres and others in France who are very worthy workmen. But, ah! there is that ever shrieking brazen tongue which will not let us forget for one short hour that it is the arm of the savage, and not the hand of the master, which rules over the world."

A stern, clear bugle call had sounded close at hand to summon some following together for the night.

"It is a sign to us as well," said Ford. "I would fain stay here forever amid all these beautiful things—" staring hard at the blushing Tita as he spoke —"but we must be back at our lord's hostel ere he reach it." Amid renewed thanks and with promises to come again, the two squires bade their leave of the old Italian glass-stainer and his daughter. The streets were clearer now, and the rain had stopped, so they made their way quickly from the Rue du Roi, in which their new friends dwelt, to the Rue des Apotres, where the hostel of the "Half Moon" was situated.

CHAPTER XXII. HOW THE BOWMEN HELD WASSAIL AT THE “ROSE DE GUIENNE.”

“Mon Dieu! Alleyne, saw you ever so lovely a face?” cried Ford as they hurried along together. “So pure, so peaceful, and so beautiful!”

“In sooth, yes. And the hue of the skin the most perfect that ever I saw. Marked you also how the hair curled round the brow? It was wonder fine.”

“Those eyes, too!” cried Ford. “How clear and how tender — simple, and yet so full of thought!”

“If there was a weakness it was in the chin,” said Alleyne.

“Nay. I saw none.”

“It was well curved, it is true.”

“Most daintily so.”

“And yet — —”

“What then, Alleyne? Wouldst find flaw in the sun?”

“Well, bethink you, Ford, would not more power and expression have been put into the face by a long and noble beard?”

“Holy Virgin!” cried Ford, “the man is mad. A beard on the face of little Tita!”

“Tita! Who spoke of Tita?”

“Who spoke of aught else?”

“It was the picture of St. Remi, man, of which I have been discoursing.”

“You are indeed,” cried Ford, laughing, “a Goth, Hun, and Vandal, with all the other hard names which the old man called us. How could you think so much of a smear of pigments, when there was such a picture painted by the good God himself in the very room with you? But who is this?”

“If it please you, sirs,” said an archer, running across to them, “Aylward and others would be right glad to see you. They are within here. He bade me say to you that the Lord Loring will not need your service to-night, as he sleeps with the Lord Chandos.”

“By my faith!” said Ford, “we do not need a guide to lead us to their presence.” As he spoke there came a roar of singing from the tavern upon the right, with shouts of laughter and stamping of feet. Passing under a low door, and down a stone-flagged passage, they found themselves in a long narrow hall lit up by a pair of blazing torches, one at either end. Trusses of straw had been thrown down along the walls, and reclining on them were some twenty or thirty archers, all of the Company, their steel caps and jacks thrown off, their tunics open and their great limbs sprawling upon the clay floor. At every man's elbow stood his leathern blackjack of beer, while at the further end a hogshead with its end knocked in promised an abundant supply for the future. Behind the hogshead, on a half circle of kegs, boxes, and rude settles, sat Aylward, John, Black Simon and three or four other leading men of the archers, together with Goodwin Hawtayne, the master-shipman, who had left his yellow cog in the river to have a last rouse with his friends of the Company. Ford and Alleyne took their seats between Aylward and Black Simon, without their entrance checking in any degree the hubbub which was going on.

"Ale, mes camarades?" cried the bowman, "or shall it be wine? Nay, but ye must have the one or the other. Here, Jacques, thou limb of the devil, bring a bottrine of the oldest vernage, and see that you do not shake it. Hast heard the news?"

"Nay," cried both the squires.

"That we are to have a brave tourney."

"A tourney?"

"Aye, lads. For the Captal du Buch hath sworn that he will find five knights from this side of the water who will ride over any five Englishmen who ever threw leg over saddle; and Chandos hath taken up the challenge, and the prince hath promised a golden vase for the man who carries himself best, and all the court is in a buzz over it."

"Why should the knights have all the sport?" growled Hordle John. "Could they not set up five archers for the honor of Aquitaine and of Gascony?"

"Or five men-at-arms," said Black Simon.

"But who are the English knights?" asked Hawtayne.

"There are three hundred and forty-one in the town," said Aylward, "and I hear that three hundred and forty cartels and defiances have already been sent in, the only one missing being Sir John Ravensholme, who is in his bed with the sweating sickness, and cannot set foot to ground."

"I have heard of it from one of the archers of the guard," cried a bowman from among the straw; "I hear that the prince wished to break a lance, but that Chandos would not hear of it, for the game is likely to be a rough one."

“Then there is Chandos.”

“Nay, the prince would not permit it. He is to be marshal of the lists, with Sir William Felton and the Duc d’Armagnac. The English will be the Lord Audley, Sir Thomas Percy, Sir Thomas Wake, Sir William Beauchamp, and our own very good lord and leader.”

“Hurrah for him, and God be with him!” cried several. “It is honor to draw string in his service.”

“So you may well say,” said Aylward. “By my ten finger-bones! if you march behind the pennon of the five roses you are like to see all that a good bowman would wish to see. Ha! yes, mes garcons, you laugh, but, by my hilt! you may not laugh when you find yourselves where he will take you, for you can never tell what strange vow he may not have sworn to. I see that he has a patch over his eye, even as he had at Poictiers. There will come bloodshed of that patch, or I am the more mistaken.”

“How chanced it at Poictiers, good Master Aylward?” asked one of the young archers, leaning upon his elbows, with his eyes fixed respectfully upon the old bowman’s rugged face.

“Aye, Aylward, tell us of it,” cried Hordle John.

“Here is to old Samkin Aylward!” shouted several at the further end of the room, waving their blackjacks in the air.

“Ask him!” said Aylward modestly, nodding towards Black Simon. “He saw more than I did. And yet, by the holy nails! there was not very much that I did not see either.”

“Ah, yes,” said Simon, shaking his head, “it was a great day. I never hope to see such another. There were some fine archers who drew their last shaft that day. We shall never see better men, Aylward.”

“By my hilt! no. There was little Robby Withstaff, and Andrew Salblaster, and Wat Alspaye, who broke the neck of the German. Mon Dieu! what men they were! Take them how you would, at long butts or short, hoyles, rounds, or rovers, better bowmen never twirled a shaft over their thumb-nails.”

“But the fight, Aylward, the fight!” cried several impatiently.

“Let me fill my jack first, boys, for it is a thirsty tale. It was at the first fall of the leaf that the prince set forth, and he passed through Auvergne, and Berry, and Anjou, and Touraine. In Auvergne the maids are kind, but the wines are sour. In Berry it is the women that are sour, but the wines are rich. Anjou, however, is a very good land for bowmen, for wine and women are all that heart could wish. In Touraine I got nothing save a broken pate, but at Vierzon I had a great good fortune, for I had a golden pyx from the minster, for which I afterwards got nine Genoan janes from the goldsmith in the Rue Mont Olive. From thence we went to Bourges, were I had a tunic of flame-coloured silk and a very fine pair of shoes with tassels of silk and drops of silver."

"From a stall, Aylward?" asked one of the young archers.

"Nay, from a man's feet, lad. I had reason to think that he might not need them again, seeing that a thirty-inch shaft had feathered in his back."

"And what then, Aylward?"

"On we went, coz, some six thousand of us, until we came to Issodun, and there again a very great thing befell."

"A battle, Aylward?"

"Nay, nay; a greater thing than that. There is little to be gained out of a battle, unless one have the fortune to win a ransom. At Issodun I and three Welshmen came upon a house which all others had passed, and we had the profit of it to ourselves. For myself, I had a fine feather-bed — a thing which you will not see in a long day's journey in England. You have seen it, Alleyne, and you, John. You will bear me out that it is a noble bed. We put it on a sutler's mule, and bore it after the army. It was on my mind that I would lay it by until I came to start house of mine own, and I have it now in a very safe place near Lyndhurst."

"And what then, master-bowman?" asked Hawtayne. "By St. Christopher! it is indeed a fair and goodly life which you have chosen, for you gather up the spoil as a Warsash man gathers lobsters, without grace or favor from any man."

"You are right, master-shipman," said another of the older archers. "It is an old bowyer's rede that the second feather of a fenny goose is better than the pinion of a tame one. Draw on old lad, for I have come between you and the clout."

"On we went then," said Aylward, after a long pull at his blackjack. "There were some six thousand of us, with the prince and his knights, and the feather-bed upon a sutler's mule in the centre. We made great havoc in Touraine, until we came into Romorantin, where I chanced upon a gold chain and two bracelets of jasper, which were stolen from me the same day by a black-eyed wench from the Ardennes. Mon Dieu! there are some folk who have no fear of Domesday in them, and no sign of grace in their souls, for ever clutching and clawing at another man's chattels."

"But the battle, Aylward, the battle!" cried several, amid a burst of laughter.

"I come to it, my young war-pups. Well, then, the King of France had followed us with fifty thousand men, and he made great haste to catch us, but when he had us he scarce knew what to do with us, for we were so drawn up among hedges and vineyards that they could not come nigh us, save by one lane. On both sides were archers, men-at-arms and knights behind, and in the centre the baggage, with my feather-bed upon a sutler's mule. Three hundred chosen knights came straight for it, and, indeed, they were very brave men, but such a drift of arrows met them that few came back. Then came the Germans, and they also fought very bravely, so that one or two broke through the archers and came as far as the feather-bed, but all to no purpose. Then out rides our own little hothead with the patch over his eye, and my Lord Audley with his four Cheshire squires, and a few others of like kidney, and after them went the prince and Chandos, and then the whole throng of us, with axe and sword, for we had shot away our arrows. Ma foi! it was a foolish thing, for we came forth from the hedges, and there was naught to guard the baggage had they ridden round behind us. But all went well with us, and the king was taken, and little Robby Withstaff and I fell in with a wain with twelve firkins of wine for the king's own table, and, by my hilt! if you ask me what happened after that, I cannot answer you, nor can little Robby Withstaff either."

"And next day?"

"By my faith! we did not tarry long, but we hied back to Bordeaux, where we came in safety with the King of France and also the feather-bed. I sold my spoil, mes garcons, for as many gold-pieces as I could hold in my hufken, and for seven days I lit twelve wax candles upon the altar of St. Andrew; for if you forget the blessed when things are well with you, they are very likely to forget you when you have need of them. I have a score of one hundred and nineteen pounds of wax against the holy Andrew, and, as he was a very just man, I doubt not that I shall have full weigh and measure when I have most need of it."

"Tell me, master Aylward," cried a young fresh-faced archer at the further end of the room, "what was this great battle about?"

“Why, you jack-fool, what would it be about save who should wear the crown of France?”

“I thought that mayhap it might be as to who should have this feather-bed of thine.”

“If I come down to you, Silas, I may lay my belt across your shoulders,” Aylward answered, amid a general shout of laughter. “But it is time young chickens went to roost when they dare cackle against their elders. It is late, Simon.”

“Nay, let us have another song.”

“Here is Arnold of Sowley will troll as good a stave as any man in the Company.”

“Nay, we have one here who is second to none,” said Hawtayne, laying his hand upon big John’s shoulder. “I have heard him on the cog with a voice like the wave upon the shore. I pray you, friend, to give us ‘The Bells of Milton,’ or, if you will, ‘The Franklin’s Maid.’”

Hordle John drew the back of his hand across his mouth, fixed his eyes upon the corner of the ceiling, and bellowed forth, in a voice which made the torches flicker, the southland ballad for which he had been asked: —

The franklin he hath gone to roam,
The franklin’s maid she bides at home,
But she is cold and coy and staid,
And who may win the franklin’s maid?

There came a knight of high renown
In bassinet and ciclatoun;
On bended knee full long he prayed,
He might not win the franklin’s maid.

There came a squire so debonair
His dress was rich, his words were fair,
He sweetly sang, he deftly played:
He could not win the franklin’s maid.

There came a mercer wonder-fine
With velvet cap and gaberdine;
For all his ships, for all his trade
He could not buy the franklin’s maid.

There came an archer bold and true,
With bracer guard and stave of yew;
His purse was light, his jerkin frayed;
Haro, alas! the franklin's maid!

Oh, some have laughed and some have cried
And some have scoured the country-side!
But off they ride through wood and glade,
The bowman and the franklin's maid.

A roar of delight from his audience, with stamping of feet and beating of blackjacks against the ground, showed how thoroughly the song was to their taste, while John modestly retired into a quart pot, which he drained in four giant gulps. "I sang that ditty in Hordle ale-house ere I ever thought to be an archer myself," quoth he.

"Fill up your stoups!" cried Black Simon, thrusting his own goblet into the open hogshead in front of him. "Here is a last cup to the White Company, and every brave boy who walks behind the roses of Loring!"

"To the wood, the flax, and the gander's wing!" said an old gray-headed archer on the right.

"To a gentle loose, and the King of Spain for a mark at fourteen score!" cried another.

"To a bloody war!" shouted a fourth. "Many to go and few to come!"

"With the most gold to the best steel!" added a fifth.

"And a last cup to the maids of our heart!" cried Aylward. "A steady hand and a true eye, boys; so let two quarts be a bowman's portion." With shout and jest and snatch of song they streamed from the room, and all was peaceful once more in the "Rose de Guienne."

CHAPTER XXIII. HOW ENGLAND HELD THE LISTS AT BORDEAUX.

So used were the good burghers of Bordeaux to martial display and knightly sport, that an ordinary joust or tournament was an everyday matter with them. The fame and brilliancy of the prince’s court had drawn the knights-errant and pursuivants-of-arms from every part of Europe. In the long lists by the Garonne on the landward side of the northern gate there had been many a strange combat, when the Teutonic knight, fresh from the conquest of the Prussian heathen, ran a course against the knight of Calatrava, hardened by continual struggle against the Moors, or cavaliers from Portugal broke a lance with Scandinavian warriors from the further shore of the great Northern Ocean. Here fluttered many an outland pennon, bearing symbol and blazonry from the banks of the Danube, the wilds of Lithuania and the mountain strongholds of Hungary; for chivalry was of no clime and of no race, nor was any land so wild that the fame and name of the prince had not sounded through it from border to border.

Great, however, was the excitement through town and district when it was learned that on the third Wednesday in Advent there would be held a passage-at-arms in which five knights of England would hold the lists against all comers. The great concourse of noblemen and famous soldiers, the national character of the contest, and the fact that this was a last trial of arms before what promised to be an arduous and bloody war, all united to make the event one of the most notable and brilliant that Bordeaux had ever seen. On the eve of the contest the peasants flocked in from the whole district of the Medoc, and the fields beyond the walls were whitened with the tents of those who could find no warmer lodging. From the distant camp of Dax, too, and from Blaye, Bourge, Libourne, St. Emilion, Castillon, St. Macaire, Cardillac, Ryons, and all the cluster of flourishing towns which look upon Bordeaux as their mother, there thronged an unceasing stream of horsemen and of footmen, all converging upon the great city. By the morning of the day on which the courses were to be run, not less than eighty people had assembled round the lists and along the low grassy ridge which looks down upon the scene of the encounter.

It was, as may well be imagined, no easy matter among so many noted cavaliers to choose out five on either side who should have precedence over their fellows. A score of secondary combats had nearly arisen from the rivalries and bad blood created by the selection, and it was only the influence of the prince and the efforts of the older barons which kept the peace among so many eager and fiery soldiers. Not till the day before the courses were the shields finally hung out for the inspection of the ladies and the heralds, so that all men might know the names of the champions and have the opportunity to prefer any charge against them, should there be stain upon them which should disqualify them from taking part in so noble and honorable a ceremony.

Sir Hugh Calverley and Sir Robert Knolles had not yet returned from their raid into the marches of the Navarre, so that the English party were deprived of two of their most famous lances. Yet there remained so many good names that Chandos and Felton, to whom the selection had been referred, had many an earnest consultation, in which every feat of arms and failure or success of each candidate was weighed and balanced against the rival claims of his companions. Lord Audley of Cheshire, the hero of Poictiers, and Loring of Hampshire, who was held to be the second lance in the army, were easily fixed upon. Then, of the younger men, Sir Thomas Percy of Northumberland, Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire, and Sir William Beauchamp of Gloucestershire, were finally selected to uphold the honor of England. On the other side were the veteran Captal de Buch and the brawny Olivier de Clisson, with the free companion Sir Perducas d’Albret, the valiant Lord of Mucident, and Sigismond von Altenstadt, of the Teutonic Order. The older soldiers among the English shook their heads as they looked upon the escutcheons of these famous warriors, for they were all men who had spent their lives upon the saddle, and bravery and strength can avail little against experience and wisdom of war.

“By my faith! Sir John,” said the prince as he rode through the winding streets on his way to the list, “I should have been glad to have splintered a lance to-day. You have seen me hold a spear since I had strength to lift one, and should know best whether I do not merit a place among this honorable company.”

“There is no better seat and no truer lance, sire,” said Chandos; “but, if I may say so without fear of offence, it were not fitting that you should join in this debate.”

“And why, Sir John?”

“Because, sire, it is not for you to take part with Gascons against English, or with English against Gascons, seeing that you are lord of both. We are not too well loved by the Gascons now, and it is but the golden link of your princely coronet which holds us together. If that be snapped I know not what would follow.”

“Snapped, Sir John!” cried the prince, with an angry sparkle in his dark eyes. “What manner of talk is this? You speak as though the allegiance of our people were a thing which might be thrown off or on like a falcon’s jessel.”

“With a sorry hack one uses whip and spur, sire,” said Chandos; “but with a horse of blood and spirit a good cavalier is gentle and soothing, coaxing rather than forcing. These folk are strange people, and you must hold their love, even as you have it now, for you will get from their kindness what all the pennons in your army could not wring from them.”

“You are over-grave to-day, John,” the prince answered. “We may keep such questions for our council-chamber. But how now, my brothers of Spain, and of Majorca, what think you of this challenge?”

“I look to see some handsome joisting,” said Don Pedro, who rode with the King of Majorca upon the right of the prince, while Chandos was on the left. “By St. James of Compostella! but these burghers would bear some taxing. See to the broadcloth and velvet that the rogues bear upon their backs! By my troth! if they were my subjects they would be glad enough to wear falding and leather ere I had done with them. But mayhap it is best to let the wool grow long ere you clip it.”

“It is our pride,” the prince answered coldly, “that we rule over freemen and not slaves.”

“Every man to his own humor,” said Pedro carelessly. “Carajo! there is a sweet face at yonder window! Don Fernando, I pray you to mark the house, and to have the maid brought to us at the abbey.”

“Nay, brother, nay!” cried the prince impatiently. “I have had occasion to tell you more than once that things are not ordered in this way in Aquitaine.”

“A thousand pardons, dear friend,” the Spaniard answered quickly, for a flush of anger had sprung to the dark cheek of the English prince. “You make my exile so like a home that I forget at times that I am not in very truth back in Castile. Every land hath indeed its ways and manners; but I promise you, Edward, that when you are my guest in Toledo or Madrid you shall not yearn in vain for any commoner’s daughter on whom you may deign to cast your eye.”

“Your talk, sire,” said the prince still more coldly, “is not such as I love to hear from your lips. I have no taste for such amours as you speak of, and I have sworn that my name shall be coupled with that of no woman save my ever dear wife.”

“Ever the mirror of true chivalry!” exclaimed Pedro, while James of Majorca, frightened at the stern countenance of their all-powerful protector, plucked hard at the mantle of his brother exile.

“Have a care, cousin,” he whispered; “for the sake of the Virgin have a care, for you have angered him.”

“Pshaw! fear not,” the other answered in the same low tone. “If I miss one stoop I will strike him on the next. Mark me else. Fair cousin,” he continued, turning to the prince, “these be rare men-at-arms and lusty bowmen. It would be hard indeed to match them.”

“They have Journeyed far, sire, but they have never yet found their match.”

“Nor ever will, I doubt not. I feel myself to be back upon my throne when I look at them. But tell me, dear coz, what shall we do next, when we have driven this bastard Henry from the kingdom which he hath filched?”

“We shall then compel the King of Aragon to place our good friend and brother James of Majorca upon the throne.”

“Noble and generous prince!” cried the little monarch.

“That done,” said King Pedro, glancing out of the corners of his eyes at the young conqueror, “we shall unite the forces of England, of Aquitaine, of Spain and of Majorca. It would be shame to us if we did not do some great deed with such forces ready to our hand.”

“You say truly, brother,” cried the prince, his eyes kindling at the thought. “Methinks that we could not do anything more pleasing to Our Lady than to drive the heathen Moors out of the country.”

“I am with you, Edward, as true as hilt to blade. But, by St. James! we shall not let these Moors make mock at us from over the sea. We must take ship and thrust them from Africa.”

“By heaven, yes!” cried the prince. “And it is the dream of my heart that our English pennons shall wave upon the Mount of Olives, and the lions and lilies float over the holy city.”

"And why not, dear coz? Your bowmen have cleared a path to Paris, and why not to Jerusalem? Once there, your arms might rest."

"Nay, there is more to be done," cried the prince, carried away by the ambitious dream. "There is still the city of Constantine to be taken, and war to be waged against the Soldan of Damascus. And beyond him again there is tribute to be levied from the Cham of Tartary and from the kingdom of Cathay. Ha! John, what say you? Can we not go as far eastward as Richard of the Lion Heart?"

"Old John will bide at home, sire," said the rugged soldier. "By my soul! as long as I am seneschal of Aquitaine I will find enough to do in guarding the marches which you have entrusted to me. It would be a blithe day for the King of France when he heard that the seas lay between him and us."

"By my soul! John," said the prince, "I have never known you turn laggard before."

"The babbling hound, sire, is not always the first at the mort," the old knight answered.

"Nay, my true-heart! I have tried you too often not to know. But, by my soul! I have not seen so dense a throng since the day that we brought King John down Cheapside."

It was indeed an enormous crowd which covered the whole vast plain from the line of vineyards to the river bank. From the northern gate the prince and his companions looked down at a dark sea of heads, brightened here and there by the coloured hoods of the women, or by the sparkling head-pieces of archers and men-at-arms. In the centre of this vast assemblage the lists seemed but a narrow strip of green marked out with banners and streamers, while a gleam of white with a flutter of pennons at either end showed where the marquees were pitched which served as the dressing-rooms of the combatants. A path had been staked off from the city gate to the stands which had been erected for the court and the nobility. Down this, amid the shouts of the enormous multitude, the prince cantered with his two attendant kings, his high officers of state, and his long train of lords and ladies, courtiers, counsellors, and soldiers, with toss of plume and flash of jewel, sheen of silk and glint of gold — as rich and gallant a show as heart could wish. The head of the cavalcade had reached the lists ere the rear had come clear of the city gate, for the fairest and the bravest had assembled from all the broad lands which are watered by the Dordogne and the Garonne. Here rode dark-browed cavaliers from the sunny south, fiery soldiers from Gascony, graceful courtiers of Limousin or Saintonge, and gallant young Englishmen from beyond the seas. Here too were the beautiful brunettes of the Gironde, with eyes which out-flashed their jewels, while beside them rode their blonde sisters of England, clear cut and aquiline, swathed in swans'-down and in ermine, for the air was biting though the sun was bright. Slowly the long and glittering train wound into the lists, until every horse had been tethered by the varlets in waiting, and every lord and lady seated in the long stands which stretched, rich in tapestry and velvet and blazoned arms, on either side of the centre of the arena.

The holders of the lists occupied the end which was nearest to the city gate. There, in front of their respective pavilions, flew the martlets of Audley, the roses of Loring, the scarlet bars of Wake, the lion of the Percies and the silver wings of the Beauchamps, each supported by a squire clad in hanging green stuff to represent so many Tritons, and bearing a huge conch-shell in their left hands. Behind the tents the great war-horses, armed at all points, champed and reared, while their masters sat at the doors of their pavilions, with their helmets upon their knees, chatting as to the order of the day's doings. The English archers and men-at-arms had mustered at that end of the lists, but the vast majority of the spectators were in favor of the attacking party, for the English had declined in popularity ever since the bitter dispute as to the disposal of the royal captive after the battle of Poictiers. Hence the applause was by no means general when the herald-at-arms proclaimed, after a flourish of trumpets, the names and styles of the knights who were prepared, for the honor of their country and for the love of their ladies, to hold the field against all who might do them the favor to run a course with them. On the other hand, a deafening burst of cheering greeted the rival herald, who, advancing from the other end of the lists, rolled forth the well-known titles of the five famous warriors who had accepted the defiance.

"Faith, John," said the prince, "it sounds as though you were right. Ha! my grace D'Armagnac, it seems that our friends on this side will not grieve if our English champions lose the day."

"It may be so, sire," the Gascon nobleman answered. "I have little doubt that in Smithfield or at Windsor an English crowd would favor their own countrymen."

“By my faith! that’s easily seen,” said the prince, laughing, “for a few score English archers at yonder end are bellowing as though they would out-shout the mighty multitude. I fear that they will have little to shout over this tourney, for my gold vase has small prospect of crossing the water. What are the conditions, John?”

“They are to tilt singly not less than three courses, sire, and the victory to rest with that party which shall have won the greater number of courses, each pair continuing till one or other have the vantage. He who carries himself best of the victors hath the prize, and he who is judged best of the other party hath a jewelled clasp. Shall I order that the nakirs sound, sire?”

The prince nodded, and the trumpets rang out, while the champions rode forth one after the other, each meeting his opponent in the centre of the lists. Sir William Beauchamp went down before the practiced lance of the Captal de Buch. Sir Thomas Percy won the vantage over the Lord of Mucident, and the Lord Audley struck Sir Perducas d’Albret from the saddle. The burly De Clisson, however, restored the hopes of the attackers by beating to the ground Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire. So far, there was little to choose betwixt challengers and challenged.

“By Saint James of Santiago!” cried Don Pedro, with a tinge of colour upon his pale cheeks, “win who will, this has been a most notable contest.”

“Who comes next for England, John?” asked the prince in a voice which quivered with excitement.

“Sir Nigel Loring of Hampshire, sire.”

“Ha! he is a man of good courage, and skilled in the use of all weapons.”

“He is indeed, sire. But his eyes, like my own, are the worse for wars. Yet he can tilt or play his part at hand-strokes as merrily as ever. It was he, sire, who won the golden crown which Queen Philippa, your royal mother, gave to be jousted for by all the knights of England after the harrying of Calais. I have heard that at Twynham Castle there is a buffet which groans beneath the weight of his prizes.”

“I pray that my vase may join them,” said the prince. “But here is the cavalier of Germany, and by my soul! he looks like a man of great valor and hardiness. Let them run their full three courses, for the issue is over-great to hang upon one.”

As the prince spoke, amid a loud flourish of trumpets and the shouting of the Gascon party, the last of the assailants rode gallantly into the lists. He was a man of great size, clad in black armor without blazonry or ornament of any kind, for all worldly display was forbidden by the rules of the military brotherhood to which he belonged. No plume or nobloy fluttered from his plain tilting salade, and even his lance was devoid of the customary banderole. A white mantle fluttered behind him, upon the left side of which was marked the broad black cross picked out with silver which was the well-known badge of the Teutonic Order. Mounted upon a horse as large, as black, and as forbidding as himself, he cantered slowly forward, with none of those prancings and gambades with which a cavalier was accustomed to show his command over his charger. Gravely and sternly he inclined his head to the prince, and took his place at the further end of the arena.

He had scarce done so before Sir Nigel rode out from the holders' enclosure, and galloping at full speed down the lists, drew his charger up before the prince's stand with a jerk which threw it back upon its haunches. With white armor, blazoned shield, and plume of ostrich-feathers from his helmet, he carried himself in so jaunty and joyous a fashion, with tossing pennon and curveting charger, that a shout of applause ran the full circle of the arena. With the air of a man who hastes to a joyous festival, he waved his lance in salute, and reining the pawing horse round without permitting its fore-feet to touch the ground, he hastened back to his station.

A great hush fell over the huge multitude as the two last champions faced each other. A double issue seemed to rest upon their contest, for their personal fame was at stake as well as their party's honor. Both were famous warriors, but as their exploits had been performed in widely sundered countries, they had never before been able to cross lances. A course between such men would have been enough in itself to cause the keenest interest, apart from its being the crisis which would decide who should be the victors of the day. For a moment they waited — the German sombre and collected, Sir Nigel quivering in every fibre with eagerness and fiery resolution. Then, amid a long-drawn breath from the spectators, the glove fell from the marshal's hand, and the two steel-clad horsemen met like a thunderclap in front of the royal stand. The German, though he reeled for an instant before the thrust of the Englishman, struck his opponent so fairly upon the vizor that the laces burst, the plumed helmet flew to pieces, and Sir Nigel galloped on down the lists with his bald head shimmering in the sunshine. A thousand waving scarves and tossing caps announced that the first bout had fallen to the popular party.

The Hampshire knight was not a man to be disheartened by a reverse. He spurred back to the pavilion, and was out in a few instants with another helmet. The second course was so equal that the keenest judges could not discern any vantage. Each struck fire from the other’s shield, and each endured the jarring shock as though welded to the horse beneath him. In the final bout, however, Sir Nigel struck his opponent with so true an aim that the point of the lance caught between the bars of his vizor and tore the front of his helmet out, while the German, aiming somewhat low, and half stunned by the shock, had the misfortune to strike his adversary upon the thigh, a breach of the rules of the tilting-yard, by which he not only sacrificed his chances of success, but would also have forfeited his horse and his armor, had the English knight chosen to claim them. A roar of applause from the English soldiers, with an ominous silence from the vast crowd who pressed round the barriers, announced that the balance of victory lay with the holders. Already the ten champions had assembled in front of the prince to receive his award, when a harsh bugle call from the further end of the lists drew all eyes to a new and unexpected arrival.

CHAPTER XXIV. HOW A CHAMPION CAME FORTH FROM THE EAST.

The Bordeaux lists were, as has already been explained, situated upon the plain near the river upon those great occasions when the tilting-ground in front of the Abbey of St. Andrew’s was deemed to be too small to contain the crowd. On the eastern side of this plain the country-side sloped upwards, thick with vines in summer, but now ridged with the brown bare enclosures. Over the gently rising plain curved the white road which leads inland, usually flecked with travellers, but now with scarce a living form upon it, so completely had the lists drained all the district of its inhabitants. Strange it was to see such a vast concourse of people, and then to look upon that broad, white, empty highway which wound away, bleak and deserted, until it narrowed itself to a bare streak against the distant uplands.

Shortly after the contest had begun, any one looking from the lists along this road might have remarked, far away in the extreme distance, two brilliant and sparkling points which glittered and twinkled in the bright shimmer of the winter sun. Within an hour these had become clearer and nearer, until they might be seen to come from the reflection from the head-pieces of two horsemen who were riding at the top of their speed in the direction of Bordeaux. Another half-hour had brought them so close that every point of their bearing and equipment could be discerned. The first was a knight in full armor, mounted upon a brown horse with a white blaze upon breast and forehead. He was a short man of great breadth of shoulder, with vizor closed, and no blazonry upon his simple white surcoat or plain black shield. The other, who was evidently his squire and attendant, was unarmed save for the helmet upon his head, but bore in his right hand a very long and heavy oaken spear which belonged to his master. In his left hand the squire held not only the reins of his own horse but those of a great black war-horse, fully harnessed, which trotted along at his side. Thus the three horses and their two riders rode swiftly to the lists, and it was the blare of the trumpet sounded by the squire as his lord rode into the arena which had broken in upon the prize-giving and drawn away the attention and interest of the spectators.

"Ha, John!" cried the prince, craning his neck, "who is this cavalier, and what is it that he desires?"

"On my word, sire," replied Chandos, with the utmost surprise upon his face, "it is my opinion that he is a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman!" repeated Don Pedro. "And how can you tell that, my Lord Chandos, when he has neither coat-armor, crest, or blazonry?"

"By his armor, sire, which is rounder at elbow and at shoulder than any of Bordeaux or of England. Italian he might be were his bassinet more sloped, but I will swear that those plates were welded betwixt this and Rhine. Here comes his squire, however, and we shall hear what strange fortune hath brought him over the marches."

As he spoke the attendant cantered up the grassy enclosure, and pulling up his steed in front of the royal stand, blew a second fanfare upon his bugle. He was a raw-boned, swarthy-cheeked man, with black bristling beard and a swaggering bearing.

Having sounded his call, he thrust the bugle into his belt, and, pushing his way betwixt the groups of English and of Gascon knights, he reined up within a spear's length of the royal party.

"I come," he shouted in a hoarse, thick voice, with a strong Breton accent, "as squire and herald from my master, who is a very valiant pursuivant-of-arms, and a liegeman to the great and powerful monarch, Charles, king of the French. My master has heard that there is jousting here, and prospect of honorable advancement, so he has come to ask that some English cavalier will vouchsafe for the love of his lady to run a course with sharpened lances with him, or to meet him with sword, mace, battle-axe, or dagger. He bade me say, however, that he would fight only with a true Englishman, and not with any mongrel who is neither English nor French, but speaks with the tongue of the one, and fights under the banner of the other."

"Sir!" cried De Clisson, with a voice of thunder, while his countrymen clapped their hands to their swords. The squire, however, took no notice of their angry faces, but continued with his master's message.

"He is now ready, sire," he said, "albeit his destrier has travelled many miles this day, and fast, for we were in fear lest we come too late for the jousting."

"Ye have indeed come too late," said the prince, "seeing that the prize is about to be awarded; yet I doubt not that one of these gentlemen will run a course for the sake of honor with this cavalier of France."

"And as to the prize, sire," quoth Sir Nigel, "I am sure that I speak for all when I say this French knight hath our leave to bear it away with him if he can fairly win it."

"Bear word of this to your master," said the prince, "and ask him which of these five Englishmen he would desire to meet. But stay; your master bears no coat-armor, and we have not yet heard his name."

"My master, sire, is under vow to the Virgin neither to reveal his name nor to open his vizor until he is back upon French ground once more."

"Yet what assurance have we," said the prince, "that this is not some varlet masquerading in his master's harness, or some caitiff knight, the very touch of whose lance might bring infamy upon an honorable gentleman?"

"It is not so, sire," cried the squire earnestly. "There is no man upon earth who would demean himself by breaking a lance with my master."

"You speak out boldly, squire," the prince answered; "but unless I have some further assurance of your master's noble birth and gentle name I cannot match the choicest lances of my court against him."

"You refuse, sire?"

"I do refuse."

"Then, sire, I was bidden to ask you from my master whether you would consent if Sir John Chandos, upon hearing my master's name, should assure you that he was indeed a man with whom you might yourself cross swords without indignity."

"I ask no better," said the prince.

"Then I must ask, Lord Chandos, that you will step forth. I have your pledge that the name shall remain ever a secret, and that you will neither say nor write one word which might betray it. The name is — —" He stooped down from his horse and whispered something into the old knight's ear which made him start with surprise, and stare with much curiosity at the distant Knight, who was sitting his charger at the further end of the arena.

"Is this indeed sooth?" he exclaimed.

"It is, my lord, and I swear it by St. Ives of Brittany."

"I might have known it," said Chandos, twisting his moustache, and still looking thoughtfully at the cavalier.

"What then, Sir John?" asked the prince.

"Sire, this is a knight whom it is indeed great honor to meet, and I would that your grace would grant me leave to send my squire for my harness, for

I would dearly love to run a course with him.

"Nay, nay, Sir John, you have gained as much honor as one man can bear, and it were hard if you could not rest now. But I pray you, squire, to tell your master that he is very welcome to our court, and that wines and spices will be served him, if he would refresh himself before jousting."

"My master will not drink," said the squire.

"Let him then name the gentleman with whom he would break a spear."

"He would contend with these five knights, each to choose such weapons as suit him best."

"I perceive," said the prince, "that your master is a man of great heart and high of enterprise. But the sun already is low in the west, and there will scarce be light for these courses. I pray you, gentlemen, to take your places, that we may see whether this stranger's deeds are as bold as his words."

The unknown knight had sat like a statue of steel, looking neither to the right nor to the left during these preliminaries. He had changed from the horse upon which he had ridden, and bestrode the black charger which his squire had led beside him. His immense breadth, his stern composed appearance, and the mode in which he handled his shield and his lance, were enough in themselves to convince the thousands of critical spectators that he was a dangerous opponent. Aylward, who stood in the front row of the archers with Simon, big John, and others of the Company, had been criticising the proceedings from the commencement with the ease and freedom of a man who had spent his life under arms and had learned in a hard school to know at a glance the points of a horse and his rider. He stared now at the stranger with a wrinkled brow and the air of a man who is striving to stir his memory.

"By my hilt! I have seen the thick body of him before to-day. Yet I cannot call to mind where it could have been. At Nogent belike, or was it at Auray? Mark me, lads, this man will prove to be one of the best lances of France, and there are no better in the world."

"It is but child's play, this poking game," said John. "I would fain try my hand at it, for, by the black rood! I think that it might be amended."

"What then would you do, John?" asked several.

"There are many things which might be done," said the forester thoughtfully. "Methinks that I would begin by breaking my spear."

"So they all strive to do."

“Nay, but not upon another man’s shield. I would break it over my own knee.”

“And what the better for that, old beef and bones?” asked Black Simon.

“So I would turn what is but a lady’s bodkin of a weapon into a very handsome club.”

“And then, John?”

“Then I would take the other’s spear into my arm or my leg, or where it pleased him best to put it, and I would dash out his brains with my club.”

“By my ten finger-bones! old John,” said Aylward, “I would give my feather-bed to see you at a spear-running. This is a most courtly and gentle sport which you have devised.”

“So it seems to me,” said John seriously. “Or, again, one might seize the other round the middle, pluck him off his horse and bear him to the pavilion, there to hold him to ransom.”

“Good!” cried Simon, amid a roar of laughter from all the archers round. “By Thomas of Kent I we shall make a camp-marshal of thee, and thou shalt draw up rules for our jousting. But, John, who is it that you would uphold in this knightly and pleasing fashion?”

“What mean you?”

“Why, John, so strong and strange a tilter must fight for the brightness of his lady’s eyes or the curve of her eyelash, even as Sir Nigel does for the Lady Loring.”

“I know not about that,” said the big archer, scratching his head in perplexity. “Since Mary hath played me false, I can scarce fight for her.”

“Yet any woman will serve.”

“There is my mother then,” said John. “She was at much pains at my upbringing, and, by my soul! I will uphold the curve of her eyelashes, for it tickleth my very heart-root to think of her. But who is here?”

“It is Sir William Beauchamp. He is a valiant man, but I fear that he is scarce firm enough upon the saddle to bear the thrust of such a tilter as this stranger promises to be.”

Aylward’s words were speedily justified, for even as he spoke the two knights met in the centre of the lists. Beauchamp struck his opponent a shrewd blow upon the helmet, but was met with so frightful a thrust that he whirled out of his saddle and rolled over and over upon the ground. Sir Thomas Percy met with little better success, for his shield was split, his vambrace torn and he himself wounded slightly in the side. Lord Audley and the unknown knight struck each other fairly upon the helmet; but, while the stranger sat as firm and rigid as ever upon his charger, the Englishman was bent back to his horse's cropper by the weight of the blow, and had galloped half-way down the lists ere he could recover himself. Sir Thomas Wake was beaten to the ground with a battle-axe — that being the weapon which he had selected — and had to be carried to his pavilion. These rapid successes, gained one after the other over four celebrated warriors, worked the crowd up to a pitch of wonder and admiration. Thunders of applause from the English soldiers, as well as from the citizens and peasants, showed how far the love of brave and knightly deeds could rise above the rivalries of race.

"By my soul! John," cried the prince, with his cheek flushed and his eyes shining, "this is a man of good courage and great hardiness. I could not have thought that there was any single arm upon earth which could have overthrown these four champions."

"He is indeed, as I have said, sire, a knight from whom much honor is to be gained. But the lower edge of the sun is wet, and it will be beneath the sea ere long."

"Here is Sir Nigel Loring, on foot and with his sword," said the prince. "I have heard that he is a fine swordsman."

"The finest in your army, sire," Chandos answered. "Yet I doubt not that he will need all his skill this day."

As he spoke, the two combatants advanced from either end in full armor with their two-handed swords sloping over their shoulders. The stranger walked heavily and with a measured stride, while the English knight advanced as briskly as though there was no iron shell to weigh down the freedom of his limbs. At four paces distance they stopped, eyed each other for a moment, and then in an instant fell to work with a clatter and clang as though two sturdy smiths were busy upon their anvils. Up and down went the long, shining blades, round and round they circled in curves of glimmering light, crossing, meeting, disengaging, with flash of sparks at every parry. Here and there bounded Sir Nigel, his head erect, his jaunty plume fluttering in the air, while his dark opponent sent in crashing blow upon blow, following fiercely up with cut and with thrust, but never once getting past the practised blade of the skilled swordsman. The crowd roared with delight as Sir Nigel would stoop his head to avoid a blow, or by some slight movement of his body allow some terrible thrust to glance harmlessly past him. Suddenly, however, his time came. The Frenchman, whirling up his sword, showed for an instant a chink betwixt his shoulder piece and the rerebrace which guarded his upper arm. In dashed Sir Nigel, and out again so swiftly that the eye could not follow the quick play of his blade, but a trickle of blood from the stranger's shoulder, and a rapidly widening red smudge upon his white surcoat, showed where the thrust had taken effect. The wound was, however, but a slight one, and the Frenchman was about to renew his onset, when, at a sign from the prince, Chandos threw down his baton, and the marshals of the lists struck up the weapons and brought the contest to an end.

"It were time to check it," said the prince, smiling, "for Sir Nigel is too good a man for me to lose, and, by the five holy wounds! if one of those cuts came home I should have fears for our champion. What think you, Pedro?"

"I think, Edward, that the little man was very well able to take care of himself. For my part, I should wish to see so well matched a pair fight on while a drop of blood remained in their veins."

"We must have speech with him. Such a man must not go from my court without rest or sup. Bring him hither, Chandos, and, certes, if the Lord Loring hath resigned his claim upon this goblet, it is right and proper that this cavalier should carry it to France with him as a sign of the prowess that he has shown this day."

As he spoke, the knight-errant, who had remounted his warhorse, galloped forward to the royal stand, with a silken kerchief bound round his wounded arm. The setting sun cast a ruddy glare upon his burnished arms, and sent his long black shadow streaming behind him up the level clearing. Pulling up his steed, he slightly inclined his head, and sat in the stern and composed fashion with which he had borne himself throughout, heedless of the applauding shouts and the flutter of kerchiefs from the long lines of brave men and of fair women who were looking down upon him.

"Sir knight," said the prince, "we have all marvelled this day at this great skill and valor with which God has been pleased to endow you. I would fain that you should tarry at our court, for a time at least, until your hurt is healed and your horses rested.."

"My hurt is nothing, sire, nor are my horses weary," returned the stranger in a deep, stern voice.

“Will you not at least hie back to Bordeaux with us, that you may drain a cup of muscadine and sup at our table?”

“I will neither drink your wine nor sit at your table,” returned the other. “I bear no love for you or for your race, and there is nought that I wish at your hands until the day when I see the last sail which bears you back to your island vanishing away against the western sky.”

“These are bitter words, sir knight,” said Prince Edward, with an angry frown.

“And they come from a bitter heart,” answered the unknown knight. “How long is it since there has been peace in my hapless country? Where are the steadings, and orchards, and vineyards, which made France fair? Where are the cities which made her great? From Providence to Burgundy we are beset by every prowling hireling in Christendom, who rend and tear the country which you have left too weak to guard her own marches. Is it not a by-word that a man may ride all day in that unhappy land without seeing thatch upon roof or hearing the crow of cock? Does not one fair kingdom content you, that you should strive so for this other one which has no love for you? Pardieu! a true Frenchman’s words may well be bitter, for bitter is his lot and bitter his thoughts as he rides through his thrice unhappy country.”

“Sir knight,” said the prince, “you speak like a brave man, and our cousin of France is happy in having a cavalier who is so fit to uphold his cause either with tongue or with sword. But if you think such evil of us, how comes it that you have trusted yourselves to us without warranty or safe-conduct?”

“Because I knew that you would be here, sire. Had the man who sits upon your right been ruler of this land, I had indeed thought twice before I looked to him for aught that was knightly or generous.” With a soldierly salute, he wheeled round his horse, and, galloping down the lists, disappeared amid the dense crowd of footmen and of horsemen who were streaming away from the scene of the tournament.

“The insolent villain!” cried Pedro, glaring furiously after him. “I have seen a man’s tongue torn from his jaws for less. Would it not be well even now, Edward, to send horsemen to hale him back? Bethink you that it may be one of the royal house of France, or at least some knight whose loss would be a heavy blow to his master. Sir William Felton, you are well mounted, gallop after the caitiff, I pray you.”

“Do so, Sir William,” said the prince, “and give him this purse of a hundred nobles as a sign of the respect which I bear for him; for, by St. George! he has served his master this day even as I would wish liegeman of mine to serve me.” So saying, the prince turned his back upon the King of Spain, and springing upon his horse, rode slowly homewards to the Abbey of Saint Andrew’s.

CHAPTER XXV. HOW SIR NIGEL WROTE TO TWYNHAM CASTLE.

On the morning after the jousting, when Alleyne Edricson went, as was his custom, into his master's chamber to wait upon him in his dressing and to curl his hair, he found him already up and very busily at work. He sat at a table by the window, a deer-hound on one side of him and a lurcher on the other, his feet tucked away under the trestle on which he sat, and his tongue in his cheek, with the air of a man who is much perplexed. A sheet of vellum lay upon the board in front of him, and he held a pen in his hand, with which he had been scribbling in a rude schoolboy hand. So many were the blots, however, and so numerous the scratches and erasures, that he had at last given it up in despair, and sat with his single uncovered eye cocked upwards at the ceiling, as one who waits upon inspiration.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, as Alleyne entered, "you are the man who will stand by me in this matter. I have been in sore need of you, Alleyne."

"God be with you, my fair lord!" the squire answered. "I trust that you have taken no hurt from all that you have gone through yesterday."

"Nay; I feel the fresher for it, Alleyne. It has eased my joints, which were somewhat stiff from these years of peace. I trust, Alleyne, that thou didst very carefully note and mark the bearing and carriage of this knight of France; for it is time, now when you are young, that you should see all that is best, and mould your own actions in accordance. This was a man from whom much honor might be gained, and I have seldom met any one for whom I have conceived so much love and esteem. Could I but learn his name, I should send you to him with my cartel, that we might have further occasion to watch his goodly feats of arms."

"It is said, my fair lord, that none know his name save only the Lord Chandos, and that he is under vow not to speak it. So ran the gossip at the squires' table."

"Be he who he might, he was a very hardy gentleman. But I have a task here, Alleyne, which is harder to me than aught that was set before me yesterday."

"Can I help you, my lord?"

"That indeed you can. I have been writing my greetings to my sweet wife; for I hear that a messenger goes from the prince to Southampton within the week, and he would gladly take a packet for me. I pray you, Alleyne, to cast your eyes upon what I have written, and see it they are such words as my lady will understand. My fingers, as you can see, are more used to iron and leather than to the drawing of strokes and turning of letters. What then? Is there aught amiss, that you should stare so?"

"It is this first word, my lord. In what tongue were you pleased to write?"

"In English; for my lady talks it more than she doth French.

"Yet this is no English word, my sweet lord. Here are four t's and never a letter betwixt them."

"By St. Paul! it seemed strange to my eye when I wrote it," said Sir Nigel. "They bristle up together like a clump of lances. We must break their ranks and set them farther apart. The word is 'that.' Now I will read it to you, Alleyne, and you shall write it out fair; for we leave Bordeaux this day, and it would be great joy to me to think that the Lady Loring had word from me."

Alleyne sat down as ordered, with a pen in his hand and a fresh sheet of parchment before him, while Sir Nigel slowly spelled out his letter, running his forefinger on from word to word.

"That my heart is with thee, my dear sweeting, is what thine own heart will assure thee of. All is well with us here, save that Pepin hath the mange on his back, and Pommers hath scarce yet got clear of his stiffness from being four days on ship-board, and the more so because the sea was very high, and we were like to founder on account of a hole in her side, which was made by a stone cast at us by certain sea-rovers, who may the saints have in their keeping, for they have gone from amongst us, as has young Terlake, and two-score mariners and archers, who would be the more welcome here as there is like to be a very fine war, with much honor and all hopes of advancement, for which I go to gather my Company together, who are now at Montaubon, where they pillage and destroy; yet I hope that, by God's help, I may be able to show that I am their master, even as, my sweet lady, I am thy servant."

"How of that, Alleyne?" continued Sir Nigel, blinking at his squire, with an expression of some pride upon his face. "Have I not told her all that hath befallen us?"

“You have said much, my fair lord; and yet, if I may say so, it is somewhat crowded together, so that my Lady Loring can, mayhap, scarce follow it. Were it in shorter periods — —”

“Nay, it boots me not how you marshal them, as long as they are all there at the muster. Let my lady have the words, and she will place them in such order as pleases her best. But I would have you add what it would please her to know.”

“That will I,” said Alleyne, blithely, and bent to the task.

“My fair lady and mistress,” he wrote, “God hath had us in His keeping, and my lord is well and in good cheer. He hath won much honor at the jousting before the prince, when he alone was able to make it good against a very valiant man from France. Touching the moneys, there is enough and to spare until we reach Montaubon. Herewith, my fair lady, I send my humble regards, entreating you that you will give the same to your daughter, the Lady Maude. May the holy saints have you both in their keeping is ever the prayer of thy servant,

“ALLEYNE EDRICSON.”

“That is very fairly set forth,” said Sir Nigel, nodding his bald head as each sentence was read to him. “And for thyself, Alleyne, if there be any dear friend to whom you would fain give greeting, I can send it for thee within this packet.”

“There is none,” said Alleyne, sadly.

“Have you no kinsfolk, then?”

“None, save my brother.”

“Ha! I had forgotten that there was ill blood betwixt you. But are there none in all England who love thee?”

“None that I dare say so.”

“And none whom you love?”

“Nay, I will not say that,” said Alleyne.

Sir Nigel shook his head and laughed softly to himself, “I see how it is with you,” he said. “Have I not noted your frequent sighs and vacant eye? Is she fair?”

“She is indeed,” cried Alleyne from his heart, all tingling at this sudden turn of the talk.

“And good?”

“As an angel.”

“And yet she loves you not?”

"Nay, I cannot say that she loves another."

"Then you have hopes?"

"I could not live else."

"Then must you strive to be worthy of her love. Be brave and pure, fearless to the strong and humble to the weak; and so, whether this love prosper or no, you will have fitted yourself to be honored by a maiden's love, which is, in sooth, the highest guerdon which a true knight can hope for."

"Indeed, my lord, I do so strive," said Alleyne; "but she is so sweet, so dainty, and of so noble a spirit, that I fear me that I shall never be worthy of her."

"By thinking so you become worthy. Is she then of noble birth?"

"She is, my lord," faltered Alleyne.

"Of a knightly house?"

"Yes."

"Have a care, Alleyne, have a care!" said Sir Nigel, kindly. "The higher the steed the greater the fall. Hawk not at that which may be beyond thy flight."

"My lord, I know little of the ways and usages of the world," cried Alleyne, "but I would fain ask your rede upon the matter. You have known my father and my kin: is not my family one of good standing and repute?"

"Beyond all question."

"And yet you warn me that I must not place my love too high."

"Were Minstead yours, Alleyne, then, by St. Paul! I cannot think that any family in the land would not be proud to take you among them, seeing that you come of so old a strain. But while the Socman lives —— Ha, by my soul! if this is not Sir Oliver's step I am the more mistaken."

As he spoke, a heavy footfall was heard without, and the portly knight flung open the door and strode into the room.

"Why, my little coz," said he, "I have come across to tell you that I live above the barber's in the Rue de la Tour, and that there is a venison pasty in the oven and two flasks of the right vintage on the table. By St. James! a blind man might find the place, for one has but to get in the wind from it, and follow the savory smell. Put on your cloak, then, and come, for Sir Walter Hewett and Sir Robert Briquet, with one or two others, are awaiting us."

"Nay, Oliver, I cannot be with you, for I must to Montaubon this day."

“To Montaubon? But I have heard that your Company is to come with my forty Winchester rascals to Dax.”

“If you will take charge of them, Oliver. For I will go to Montaubon with none save my two squires and two archers. Then, when I have found the rest of my Company I shall lead them to Dax. We set forth this morning.”

“Then I must back to my pasty,” said Sir Oliver. “You will find us at Dax, I doubt not, unless the prince throw me into prison, for he is very wroth against me.”

“And why, Oliver?”

“Pardieu! because I have sent my cartel, gauntlet, and defiance to Sir John Chandos and to Sir William Felton.”

“To Chandos? In God’s name, Oliver, why have you done this?”

“Because he and the other have used me despitefully.”

“And how?”

“Because they have passed me over in choosing those who should joust for England. Yourself and Audley I could pass, coz, for you are mature men; but who are Wake, and Percy, and Beauchamp? By my soul! I was prodding for my food into a camp-kettle when they were howling for their pap. Is a man of my weight and substance to be thrown aside for the first three half-grown lads who have learned the trick of the tilt-yard? But hark ye, coz, I think of sending my cartel also to the prince.”

“Oliver! Oliver! You are mad!”

“Not I, i’ faith! I care not a denier whether he be prince or no. By Saint James! I see that your squire’s eyes are starting from his head like a trussed crab. Well, friend, we are all three men of Hampshire, and not lightly to be jeered at.”

“Has he jeered at you than?”

“Pardieu! yes, ‘Old Sir Oliver’s heart is still stout,’ said one of his court. ‘Else had it been out of keeping with the rest of him,’ quoth the prince. ‘And his arm is strong,’ said another. ‘So is the backbone of his horse,’ quoth the prince. This very day I will send him my cartel and defiance.”

“Nay, nay, my dear Oliver,” said Sir Nigel, laying his hand upon his angry friend’s arm. “There is naught in this, for it was but saying that you were a strong and robust man, who had need of a good destrier. And as to Chandos and Felton, bethink you that if when you yourself were young the older lances had ever been preferred, how would you then have had the chance to earn the good name and fame which you now bear? You do not ride as light as you did, Oliver, and I ride lighter by the weight of my hair, but it would be an ill thing if in the evening of our lives we showed that our hearts were less true and loyal than of old. If such a knight as Sir Oliver Buttesthorn may turn against his own prince for the sake of a light word, then where are we to look for steadfast faith and constancy?"

"Ah! my dear little coz, it is easy to sit in the sunshine and preach to the man in the shadow. Yet you could ever win me over to your side with that soft voice of yours. Let us think no more of it then. But, holy Mother! I had forgot the pasty, and it will be as scorched as Judas Iscariot! Come, Nigel, lest the foul fiend get the better of me again."

"For one hour, then; for we march at mid-day. Tell Aylward, Alleyne, that he is to come with me to Montaubon, and to choose one archer for his comrade. The rest will to Dax when the prince starts, which will be before the feast of the Epiphany. Have Pommers ready at mid-day with my sycamore lance, and place my harness on the sumpter mule."

With these brief directions, the two old soldiers strode off together, while Alleyne hastened to get all in order for their journey.

CHAPTER XXVI. HOW THE THREE COMRADES GAINED A MIGHTY TREASURE

It was a bright, crisp winter's day when the little party set off from Bordeaux on their journey to Montaubon, where the missing half of their Company had last been heard of. Sir Nigel and Ford had ridden on in advance, the knight upon his hackney, while his great war-horse trotted beside his squire. Two hours later Alleyne Edricson followed; for he had the tavern reckoning to settle, and many other duties which fell to him as squire of the body. With him came Aylward and Hordle John, armed as of old, but mounted for their journey upon a pair of clumsy Landes horses, heavy-headed and shambling, but of great endurance, and capable of jogging along all day, even when between the knees of the huge archer, who turned the scale at two hundred and seventy pounds. They took with them the sumpter mules, which carried in panniers the wardrobe and table furniture of Sir Nigel; for the knight, though neither fop nor epicure, was very dainty in small matters, and loved, however bare the board or hard the life, that his napery should still be white and his spoon of silver.

There had been frost during the night, and the white hard road rang loud under their horses' irons as they spurred through the east gate of the town, along the same broad highway which the unknown French champion had traversed on the day of the jousts. The three rode abreast, Alleyne Edricson with his eyes cast down and his mind distrait, for his thoughts were busy with the conversation which he had had with Sir Nigel in the morning. Had he done well to say so much, or had he not done better to have said more? What would the knight have said had he confessed to his love for the Lady Maude? Would he cast him off in disgrace, or might he chide him as having abused the shelter of his roof? It had been ready upon his tongue to tell him all when Sir Oliver had broken in upon them. Perchance Sir Nigel, with his love of all the dying usages of chivalry, might have contrived some strange ordeal or feat of arms by which his love should be put to the test. Alleyne smiled as he wondered what fantastic and wondrous deed would be exacted from him. Whatever it was, he was ready for it, whether it were to hold the lists in the court of the King of Tartary, to carry a cartel to the Sultan of

Baghdad, or to serve a term against the wild heathen of Prussia. Sir Nigel had said that his birth was high enough for any lady, if his fortune could but be amended. Often had Alleyne curled his lip at the beggarly craving for land or for gold which blinded man to the higher and more lasting issues of life. Now it seemed as though it were only by this same land and gold that he might hope to reach his heart's desire. But then, again, the Socman of Minstead was no friend to the Constable of Twynham Castle. It might happen that, should he amass riches by some happy fortune of war, this feud might hold the two families aloof. Even if Maude loved him, he knew her too well to think that she would wed him without the blessing of her father. Dark and murky was it all, but hope mounts high in youth, and it ever fluttered over all the turmoil of his thoughts like a white plume amid the shock of horsemen.

If Alleyne Edricson had enough to ponder over as he rode through the bare plains of Guienne, his two companions were more busy with the present and less thoughtful of the future. Aylward rode for half a mile with his chin upon his shoulder, looking back at a white kerchief which fluttered out of the gable window of a high house which peeped over the corner of the battlements. When at last a dip of the road hid it from his view, he cocked his steel cap, shrugged his broad shoulders, and rode on with laughter in his eyes, and his weather-beaten face all ashine with pleasant memories. John also rode in silence, but his eyes wandered slowly from one side of the road to the other, and he stared and pondered and nodded his head like a traveller who makes his notes and saves them up for the re-telling.

"By the rood!" he broke out suddenly, slapping his thigh with his great red hand, "I knew that there was something a-missing, but I could not bring to my mind what it was."

"What was it then?" asked Alleyne, coming with a start out of his reverie.

"Why, it is the hedgerows," roared John, with a shout of laughter. "The country is all scraped as clear as a friar's poll. But indeed I cannot think much of the folk in these parts. Why do they not get to work and dig up these long rows of black and crooked stumps which I see on every hand? A franklin of Hampshire would think shame to have such litter upon his soil."

"Thou foolish old John!" quoth Aylward. "You should know better, since I have heard that the monks of Beaulieu could squeeze a good cup of wine from their own grapes. Know then that if these rows were dug up the wealth of the country would be gone, and mayhap there would be dry throats and gaping mouths in England, for in three months' time these black roots will blossom and snoot and burgeon, and from them will come many a good ship-load of Medoc and Gascony which will cross the narrow seas. But see the church in the hollow, and the folk who cluster in the churchyard! By my hilt! it is a burial, and there is a passing bell!" He pulled off his steel cap as he spoke and crossed himself, with a muttered prayer for the repose of the dead.

"There too," remarked Alleyne, as they rode on again, "that which seems to the eye to be dead is still full of the sap of life, even as the vines were. Thus God hath written Himself and His laws very broadly on all that is around us, if our poor dull eyes and duller souls could but read what He hath set before us."

"Ha! mon petit," cried the bowman, "you take me back to the days when you were new fledged, as sweet a little chick as ever pecked his way out of a monkish egg. I had feared that in gaining our debonair young man-at-arms we had lost our soft-spoken clerk. In truth, I have noted much change in you since we came from Twynham Castle."

"Surely it would be strange else, seeing that I have lived in a world so new to me. Yet I trust that there are many things in which I have not changed. If I have turned to serve an earthly master, and to carry arms for an earthly king, it would be an ill thing if I were to lose all thought of the great high King and Master of all, whose humble and unworthy servant I was ere ever I left Beaulieu. You, John, are also from the cloisters, but I trow that you do not feel that you have deserted the old service in taking on the new."

"I am a slow-witted man," said John, "and, in sooth, when I try to think about such matters it casts a gloom upon me. Yet I do not look upon myself as a worse man in an archer's jerkin than I was in a white cowl, if that be what you mean."

"You have but changed from one white company to the other," quoth Aylward. "But, by these ten finger-bones! it is a passing strange thing to me to think that it was but in the last fall of the leaf that we walked from Lyndhurst together, he so gentle and maidenly, and you, John, like a great red-limbed overgrown moon-calf; and now here you are as sprack a squire and as lusty an archer as ever passed down the highway from Bordeaux, while I am still the same old Samkin Aylward, with never a change, save that I have a few more sins on my soul and a few less crowns in my pouch. But I have never yet heard, John, what the reason was why you should come out of Beaulieu."

"There were seven reasons," said John thoughtfully. "The first of them was that they threw me out."

"Ma foi! camarade, to the devil with the other six! That is enough for me and for thee also. I can see that they are very wise and discreet folk at Beaulieu. Ah! mon ange, what have you in the pipkin?"

"It is milk, worthy sir," answered the peasant-maid, who stood by the door of a cottage with a jug in her hand. "Would it please you, gentles, that I should bring you out three horns of it?"

"Nay, ma petite, but here is a two-sous piece for thy kindly tongue and for the sight of thy pretty face. Ma foi! but she has a bonne mine. I have a mind to bide and speak with her."

"Nay, nay, Aylward," cried Alleyne. "Sir Nigel will await us, and he in haste."

"True, true, camarade! Adieu, ma cherie! mon coeur est toujours a toi. Her mother is a well-grown woman also. See where she digs by the wayside. Ma foi! the riper fruit is ever the sweeter. Bon jour, ma belle dame! God have you in his keeping! Said Sir Nigel where he would await us?"

"At Marmande or Aiguillon. He said that we could not pass him, seeing that there is but the one road."

"Aye, and it is a road that I know as I know the Midhurst parish butts," quoth the bowman. "Thirty times have I journeyed it, forward and backward, and, by the twang of string! I am wont to come back this way more laden than I went. I have carried all that I had into France in a wallet, and it hath taken four sumpter-mules to carry it back again. God's benison on the man who first turned his hand to the making of war! But there, down in the dingle, is the church of Cardillac, and you may see the inn where three poplars grow beyond the village. Let us on, for a stoup of wine would hearten us upon our way."

The highway had lain through the swelling vineyard country, which stretched away to the north and east in gentle curves, with many a peeping spire and feudal tower, and cluster of village houses, all clear cut and hard in the bright wintry air. To their right stretched the blue Garonne, running swiftly seawards, with boats and barges dotted over its broad bosom. On the other side lay a strip of vineyard, and beyond it the desolate and sandy region of the Landes, all tangled with faded gorse and heath and broom, stretching away in unbroken gloom to the blue hills which lay low upon the furthest sky-line. Behind them might still be seen the broad estuary of the Gironde, with the high towers of Saint Andre and Saint Remi shooting up from the plain. In front, amid radiating lines of poplars, lay the riverside townlet of Cardillac — gray walls, white houses, and a feather of blue smoke.

"This is the 'Mouton d'Or,'" said Aylward, as they pulled up their horses at a whitewashed straggling hostel. "What ho there!" he continued, beating upon the door with the hilt of his sword. "Tapster, ostler, varlet, hark hither, and a wannion on your lazy limbs! Ha! Michel, as red in the nose as ever! Three jacks of the wine of the country, Michel — for the air bites shrewdly. I pray you, Alleyne, to take note of this door, for I have a tale concerning it."

"Tell me, friend," said Alleyne to the portly red-faced inn-keeper, "has a knight and a squire passed this way within the hour?"

"Nay, sir, it would be two hours back. Was he a small man, weak in the eyes, with a want of hair, and speaks very quiet when he is most to be feared?"

"The same," the squire answered. "But I marvel how you should know how he speaks when he is in wrath, for he is very gentle-minded with those who are beneath him."

"Praise to the saints! it was not I who angered him," said the fat Michel.

"Who, then?"

"It was young Sieur de Crespigny of Saintonge, who chanced to be here, and made game of the Englishman, seeing that he was but a small man and hath a face which is full of peace. But indeed this good knight was a very quiet and patient man, for he saw that the Sieur de Crespigny was still young and spoke from an empty head, so he sat his horse and quaffed his wine, even as you are doing now, all heedless of the clacking tongue."

"And what then, Michel?"

"Well, messieurs, it chanced that the Sieur de Crespigny, having said this and that, for the laughter of the varlets, cried out at last about the glove that the knight wore in his coif, asking if it was the custom in England for a man to wear a great archer's glove in his cap. Pardieu! I have never seen a man get off his horse as quick as did that stranger Englishman. Ere the words were past the other’s lips he was beside him, his face nigh touching, and his breath hot upon his cheeks. ‘I think, young sir,’ quoth he softly, looking into the other’s eyes, ‘that now that I am nearer you will very clearly see that the glove is not an archer’s glove.’ ‘Perchance not,’ said the Sieur de Crespigny with a twitching lip. ‘Nor is it large, but very small,’ quoth the Englishman. ‘Less large than I had thought,’ said the other, looking down, for the knight’s gaze was heavy upon his eyelids. ‘And in every way such a glove as might be worn by the fairest and sweetest lady in England,’ quoth the Englishman. ‘It may be so,’ said the Sieur de Crespigny, turning his face from him. ‘I am myself weak in the eyes, and have often taken one thing for another,’ quoth the knight, as he sprang back into his saddle and rode off, leaving the Sieur de Crespigny biting his nails before the door. Ha! by the five wounds, many men of war have drunk my wine, but never one was more to my fancy than this little Englishman.”

“By my hilt! he is our master, Michel,” quoth Aylward, “and such men as we do not serve under a laggart. But here are four deniers, Michel, and God be with you! En avant, camarades! for we have a long road before us.”

At a brisk trot the three friends left Cardillac and its wine-house behind them, riding without a halt past St. Macaire, and on by ferry over the river Dorpt. At the further side the road winds through La Reolle, Bazaille, and Marmande, with the sunlit river still gleaming upon the right, and the bare poplars bristling up upon either side. John and Alleyne rode silent on either side, but every inn, farm-steading, or castle brought back to Aylward some remembrance of love, foray, or plunder, with which to beguile the way.

“There is the smoke from Bazas, on the further side of Garonne,” quoth he. “There were three sisters yonder, the daughters of a farrier, and, by these ten finger-bones! a man might ride for a long June day and never set eyes upon such maidens. There was Marie, tall and grave, and Blanche petite and gay, and the dark Agnes, with eyes that went through you like a waxed arrow. I lingered there as long as four days, and was betrothed to them all; for it seemed shame to set one above her sisters, and might make ill blood in the family. Yet, for all my care, things were not merry in the house, and I thought it well to come away. There, too, is the mill of Le Souris. Old Pierre Le Caron, who owned it, was a right good comrade, and had ever a seat and a crust for a weary archer. He was a man who wrought hard at all that he turned his hand to; but he heated himself in grinding bones to mix with his flour, and so through over-diligence he brought a fever upon himself and died."

"Tell me, Aylward," said Alleyne, "what was amiss with the door of yonder inn that you should ask me to observe it."

"Pardieu! yes, I had well-nigh forgot. What saw you on yonder door?"

"I saw a square hole, through which doubtless the host may peep when he is not too sure of those who knock."

"And saw you naught else?"

"I marked that beneath this hole there was a deep cut in the door, as though a great nail had been driven in."

"And naught else?"

"No."

"Had you looked more closely you might have seen that there was a stain upon the wood. The first time that I ever heard my comrade Black Simon laugh was in front of that door. I heard him once again when he slew a French squire with his teeth, he being unarmed and the Frenchman having a dagger."

"And why did Simon laugh in front of the inn-door!" asked John.

"Simon is a hard and perilous man when he hath the bitter drop in him; and, by my hilt! he was born for war, for there is little sweetness or rest in him. This inn, the 'Mouton d'Or,' was kept in the old days by one Francois Gourval, who had a hard fist and a harder heart. It was said that many and many an archer coming from the wars had been served with wine with simples in it, until he slept, and had then been stripped of all by this Gourval. Then on the morrow, if he made complaint, this wicked Gourval would throw him out upon the road or beat him, for he was a very lusty man, and had many stout varlets in his service. This chanced to come to Simon's ears when we were at Bordeaux together, and he would have it that we should ride to Cardillac with a good hempen cord, and give this Gourval such a scourging as he merited. Forth we rode then, but when we came to the Mouton d'Or,' Gourval had had word of our coming and its purpose, so that the door was barred, nor was there any way into the house. 'Let us in, good Master Gourval!' cried Simon, and 'Let us in, good Master Gourval!' cried I, but no word could we get through the hole in the door, save that he would draw an arrow upon us unless we went on our way. 'Well, Master Gourval,' quoth Simon at last, 'this is but a sorry welcome, seeing that we have ridden so far just to shake you by the hand.' 'Canst shake me by the hand without coming in,’ said Gourval. ‘And how that?’ asked Simon. ‘By passing in your hand through the hole,’ said he. ‘Nay, my hand is wounded,’ quoth Simon, ‘and of such a size that I cannot pass it in.’ ‘That need not hinder,’ said Gourval, who was hot to be rid of us, ‘pass in your left hand.’ ‘But I have something for thee, Gourval,’ said Simon. ‘What then?’ he asked. ‘There was an English archer who slept here last week of the name of Hugh of Nutbourne.’ ‘We have had many rogues here,’ said Gourval. ‘His conscience hath been heavy within him because he owes you a debt of fourteen deniers, having drunk wine for which he hath never paid. For the easing of his soul, he asked me to pay the money to you as I passed.’ Now this Gourval was very greedy for money, so he thrust forth his hand for the fourteen deniers, but Simon had his dagger ready and he pinned his hand to the door. ‘I have paid the Englishman’s debt, Gourval!’ quoth he, and so rode away, laughing so that he could scarce sit his horse, leaving mine host still nailed to his door. Such is the story of the hole which you have marked, and of the smudge upon the wood. I have heard that from that time English archers have been better treated in the auberge of Cardillac. But what have we here by the wayside?”

“It appears to be a very holy man,” said Alleyne.

“And, by the rood! he hath some strange wares,” cried John. “What are these bits of stone, and of wood, and rusted nails, which are set out in front of him?”

The man whom they had remarked sat with his back against a cherry-tree, and his legs shooting out in front of him, like one who is greatly at his ease. Across his thighs was a wooden board, and scattered over it all manner of slips of wood and knobs of brick and stone, each laid separate from the other, as a huckster places his wares. He was dressed in a long gray gown, and wore a broad hat of the same colour, much weather-stained, with three scallop-shells dangling from the brim. As they approached, the travellers observed that he was advanced in years, and that his eyes were upturned and yellow.

“Dear knights and gentlemen,” he cried in a high crackling voice, “worthy Christian cavaliers, will ye ride past and leave an aged pilgrim to die of hunger? The sight hast been burned from mine eyes by the sands of the Holy Land, and I have had neither crust of bread nor cup of wine these two days past.”

“By my hilt! father,” said Aylward, looking keenly at him, “it is a marvel to me that thy girdle should have so goodly a span and clip thee so closely, if you have in sooth had so little to place within it.”

“Kind stranger,” answered the pilgrim, “you have unwittingly spoken words which are very grievous to me to listen to. Yet I should be loth to blame you, for I doubt not that what you said was not meant to sadden me, nor to bring my sore affliction back to my mind. It ill becomes me to prate too much of what I have endured for the faith, and yet, since you have observed it, I must tell you that this thickness and roundness of the waist is caused by a dropsy brought on by over-haste in journeying from the house of Pilate to the Mount of Olives.”

“There, Aylward,” said Alleyne, with a reddened cheek, “let that curb your blunt tongue. How could you bring a fresh pang to this holy man, who hath endured so much and hath journeyed as far as Christ’s own blessed tomb?”

“May the foul fiend strike me dumb!” cried the bowman in hot repentance; but both the palmer and Alleyne threw up their hands to stop him.

“I forgive thee from my heart, dear brother,” piped the blind man. “But, oh, these wild words of thine are worse to mine ears than aught which you could say of me.”

“Not another word shall I speak,” said Aylward; “but here is a franc for thee and I crave thy blessing.”

“And here is another,” said Alleyne.

“And another,” cried Hordle John.

But the blind palmer would have none of their alms. “Foolish, foolish pride!” he cried, beating upon his chest with his large brown hand. “Foolish, foolish pride! How long then will it be ere I can scourge it forth? Am I then never to conquer it? Oh, strong, strong are the ties of flesh, and hard it is to subdue the spirit! I come, friends, of a noble house, and I cannot bring myself to touch this money, even though it be to save me from the grave.”

“Alas! father,” said Alleyne, “how then can we be of help to thee?”

“I had sat down here to die,” quoth the palmer; “but for many years I have carried in my wallet these precious things which you see set forth now before me. It were sin, thought I, that my secret should perish with me. I shall therefore sell these things to the first worthy passers-by, and from them I shall have money enough to take me to the shrine of Our Lady at Rocamadour, where I hope to lay these old bones."

"What are these treasures, then, father?" asked Hordle John. "I can but see an old rusty nail, with bits of stone and slips of wood."

"My friend," answered the palmer, "not all the money that is in this country could pay a just price for these wares of mine. This nail," he continued, pulling off his hat and turning up his sightless orbs, "is one of those wherewith man's salvation was secured. I had it, together with this piece of the true rood, from the five-and-twentieth descendant of Joseph of Arimathea, who still lives in Jerusalem alive and well, though latterly much afflicted by boils. Aye, you may well cross yourselves, and I beg that you will not breathe upon it or touch it with your fingers."

"And the wood and stone, holy father?" asked Alleyne, with bated breath, as he stared awe-struck at his precious relics.

"This cantle of wood is from the true cross, this other from Noah his ark, and the third is from the door-post of the temple of the wise King Solomon. This stone was thrown at the sainted Stephen, and the other two are from the Tower of Babel. Here, too, is part of Aaron's rod, and a lock of hair from Elisha the prophet."

"But, father," quoth Alleyne, "the holy Elisha was bald, which brought down upon him the revilements of the wicked children."

"It is very true that he had not much hair," said the palmer quickly, "and it is this which makes this relic so exceeding precious. Take now your choice of these, my worthy gentlemen, and pay such a price as your consciences will suffer you to offer; for I am not a chapman nor a huckster, and I would never part with them, did I not know that I am very near to my reward."

"Aylward," said Alleyne excitedly, "This is such a chance as few folk have twice in one life. The nail I must have, and I will give it to the abbey of Beaulieu, so that all the folk in England may go thither to wonder and to pray."

"And I will have the stone from the temple," cried Hordle John. "What would not my old mother give to have it hung over her bed?"

"And I will have Aaron's rod," quoth Aylward. "I have but five florins in the world, and here are four of them."

"Here are three more," said John.

"And here are five more," added Alleyne. "Holy father, I hand you twelve florins, which is all that we can give, though we well know how poor a pay it is for the wondrous things which you sell us."

"Down, pride, down!" cried the pilgrim, still beating upon his chest. "Can I not bend myself then to take this sorry sum which is offered me for that which has cost me the labors of a life. Give me the dross! Here are the precious relics, and, oh, I pray you that you will handle them softly and with reverence, else had I rather left my unworthy bones here by the wayside."

With doffed caps and eager hands, the comrades took their new and precious possessions, and pressed onwards upon their journey, leaving the aged palmer still seated under the cherry-tree. They rode in silence, each with his treasure in his hand, glancing at it from time to time, and scarce able to believe that chance had made them sole owners of relics of such holiness and worth that every abbey and church in Christendom would have bid eagerly for their possession. So they journeyed, full of this good fortune, until opposite the town of Le Mas, where John's horse cast a shoe, and they were glad to find a wayside smith who might set the matter to rights. To him Aylward narrated the good hap which had befallen them; but the smith, when his eyes lit upon the relics, leaned up against his anvil and laughed, with his hand to his side, until the tears hopped down his sooty cheeks.

"Why, masters," quoth he, "this man is a coquillart, or seller of false relics, and was here in the smithy not two hours ago. This nail that he hath sold you was taken from my nail-box, and as to the wood and the stones, you will see a heap of both outside from which he hath filled his scrip."

"Nay, nay," cried Alleyne, "this was a holy man who had journeyed to Jerusalem, and acquired a dropsy by running from the house of Pilate to the Mount of Olives."

"I know not about that," said the smith; "but I know that a man with a gray palmer's hat and gown was here no very long time ago, and that he sat on yonder stump and ate a cold pullet and drank a flask of wine. Then he begged from me one of my nails, and filling his scrip with stones, he went upon his way. Look at these nails, and see if they are not the same as that which he has sold you."

"Now may God save us!" cried Alleyne, all aghast. "Is there no end then to the wickedness of humankind? He so humble, so aged, so loth to take our money — and yet a villain and a cheat. Whom can we trust or believe in?"

"I will after him," said Aylward, flinging himself into the saddle. "Come, Alleyne, we may catch him ere John's horse be shod."

Away they galloped together, and ere long they saw the old gray palmer walking slowly along in front of them. He turned, however, at the sound of their hoofs, and it was clear that his blindness was a cheat like all the rest of him, for he ran swiftly through a field and so into a wood, where none could follow him. They hurled their relics after him, and so rode back to the blacksmith's the poorer both in pocket and in faith.

CHAPTER XXVII. HOW ROGER CLUB-FOOT WAS PASSED INTO PARADISE.

It was evening before the three comrades came into Aiguillon, There they found Sir Nigel Loring and Ford safely lodged at the sign of the “Baton Rouge,” where they supped on good fare and slept between lavender-scented sheets. It chanced, however, that a knight of Poitou, Sir Gaston d’Estelle, was staying there on his way back from Lithuania, where he had served a term with the Teutonic knights under the land-master of the presbytery of Marienberg. He and Sir Nigel sat late in high converse as to bushments, outfalls, and the intaking of cities, with many tales of warlike men and valiant deeds. Then their talk turned to minstrelsy, and the stranger knight drew forth a cittern, upon which he played the minne-lieder of the north, singing the while in a high cracked voice of Hildebrand and Brunhild and Siegfried, and all the strength and beauty of the land of Almain. To this Sir Nigel answered with the romances of Sir Eglamour, and of Sir Isumbras, and so through the long winter night they sat by the crackling wood-fire answering each other’s songs until the crowing cocks joined in their concert. Yet, with scarce an hour of rest, Sir Nigel was as blithe and bright as ever as they set forth after breakfast upon their way.

“This Sir Gaston is a very worthy man,” said he to his squires as they rode from the “Baton Rouge.” “He hath a very strong desire to advance himself, and would have entered upon some small knightly debate with me, had he not chanced to have his arm-bone broken by the kick of a horse. I have conceived a great love for him, and I have promised him that when his bone is mended I will exchange thrusts with him. But we must keep to this road upon the left.”

“Nay, my fair lord,” quoth Aylward. “The road to Montaubon is over the river, and so through Quercy and the Agenois.”

“True, my good Aylward; but I have learned from this worthy knight, who hath come over the French marches, that there is a company of Englishmen who are burning and plundering in the country round Villefranche. I have little doubt, from what he says, that they are those whom we seek.”

“By my hilt! it is like enough,” said Aylward. “By all accounts they had been so long at Montaubon, that there would be little there worth the taking. Then as they have already been in the south, they would come north to the country of the Aveyron.”

“We shall follow the Lot until we come to Cahors, and then cross the marches into Villefranche,” said Sir Nigel. “By St. Paul! as we are but a small band, it is very likely that we may have some very honorable and pleasing adventure, for I hear that there is little peace upon the French border.”

All morning they rode down a broad and winding road, barred with the shadows of poplars. Sir Nigel rode in front with his squires, while the two archers followed behind with the sumpter mule between them. They had left Aiguillon and the Garonne far to the south, and rode now by the tranquil Lot, which curves blue and placid through a gently rolling country. Alleyne could not but mark that, whereas in Guienne there had been many townlets and few castles, there were now many castles and few houses. On either hand gray walls and square grim keeps peeped out at every few miles from amid the forests while the few villages which they passed were all ringed round with rude walls, which spoke of the constant fear and sudden foray of a wild frontier land. Twice during the morning there came bands of horsemen swooping down upon them from the black gateways of wayside strongholds, with short, stern questions as to whence they came and what their errand. Bands of armed men clanked along the highway, and the few lines of laden mules which carried the merchandise of the trader were guarded by armed varlets, or by archers hired for the service.

“The peace of Bretigny hath not made much change in these parts,” quoth Sir Nigel, “for the country is overrun with free companions and masterless men. Yonder towers, between the wood and the hill, mark the town of Cahors, and beyond it is the land of France. But here is a man by the wayside, and as he hath two horses and a squire I make little doubt that he is a knight. I pray you, Alleyne, to give him greeting from me, and to ask him for his titles and coat-armor. It may be that I can relieve him of some vow, or perchance he hath a lady whom he would wish to advance.”

“Nay, my fair lord,” said Alleyne, “these are not horses and a squire, but mules and a varlet. The man is a mercer, for he hath a great bundle beside him.”

“Now, God’s blessing on your honest English voice!” cried the stranger, pricking up his ears at the sound of Alleyne’s words. “Never have I heard music that was so sweet to mine ear. Come, Watkin lad, throw the bales over Laura’s back! My heart was nigh broke, for it seemed that I had left all that was English behind me, and that I would never set eyes upon Norwich market square again.” He was a tall, lusty, middle-aged man with a ruddy face, a brown forked beard shot with gray, and a broad Flanders hat set at the back of his head. His servant, as tall as himself, but gaunt and raw-boned, had swung the bales on the back of one mule, while the merchant mounted upon the other and rode to join the party. It was easy to see, as he approached, from the quality of his dress and the richness of his trappings, that he was a man of some wealth and position.

“Sir knight,” said he, “my name is David Micheldene, and I am a burgher and alderman of the good town of Norwich, where I live five doors from the church of Our Lady, as all men know on the banks of Yare. I have here my bales of cloth which I carry to Cahors — woe worth the day that ever I started on such an errand! I crave your gracious protection upon the way for me, my servant, and my mercery; for I have already had many perilous passages, and have now learned that Roger Club-foot, the robber-knight of Quercy, is out upon the road in front of me. I hereby agree to give you one rose-noble if you bring me safe to the inn of the ‘Angel’ in Cahors, the same to be repaid to me or my heirs if any harm come to me or my goods.”

“By Saint Paul!” answered Sir Nigel, “I should be a sorry knight if I ask pay for standing by a countryman in a strange land. You may ride with me and welcome, Master Micheldene, and your varlet may follow with my archers.”

“God’s benison upon thy bounty!” cried the stranger. “Should you come to Norwich you may have cause to remember that you have been of service to Alderman Micheldene. It is not very far to Cahors, for surely I see the cathedral towers against the sky-line; but I have heard much of this Roger Clubfoot, and the more I hear the less do I wish to look upon his face. Oh, but I am sick and weary of it all, and I would give half that I am worth to see my good dame sitting in peace beside me, and to hear the bells of Norwich town.”

“Your words are strange to me,” quoth Sir Nigel, “for you have the appearance of a stout man, and I see that you wear a sword by your side.”

“Yet it is not my trade,” answered the merchant. “I doubt not that if I set you down in my shop at Norwich you might scarce tell fustian from falding, and know little difference between the velvet of Genoa and the three-piled cloth of Bruges. There you might well turn to me for help. But here on a lone roadside, with thick woods and robber-knights, I turn to you, for it is the business to which you have been reared.”

“There is sooth in what you say, Master Micheldene,” said Sir Nigel, “and I trust that we may come upon this Roger Clubfoot, for I have heard that he is a very stout and skilful soldier, and a man from whom much honor is to be gained.”

“He is a bloody robber,” said the trader, curtly, “and I wish I saw him kicking at the end of a halter.”

“It is such men as he,” Sir Nigel remarked, “who give the true knight honorable deeds to do, whereby he may advance himself.”

“It is such men as he,” retorted Micheldene, “who are like rats in a wheat-rick or moths in a woolfels, a harm and a hindrance to all peaceful and honest men.”

“Yet, if the dangers of the road weigh so heavily upon you, master alderman, it is a great marvel to me that you should venture so far from home.”

“And sometimes, sir knight, it is a marvel to myself. But I am a man who may grutch and grumble, but when I have set my face to do a thing I will not turn my back upon it until it be done. There is one, Francois Villet, at Cahors, who will send me wine-casks for my cloth-bales, so to Cahors I will go, though all the robber-knights of Christendom were to line the roads like yonder poplars.”

“Stoutly spoken, master alderman! But how have you fared hitherto?”

“As a lamb fares in a land of wolves. Five times we have had to beg and pray ere we could pass. Twice I have paid toll to the wardens of the road. Three times we have had to draw, and once at La Reolle we stood seer our wool-bales, Watkin and I, and we laid about us for as long as a man might chant a litany, slaying one rogue and wounding two others. By God’s coif! we are men of peace, but we are free English burghers, not to be mishandled either in our country or abroad. Neither lord, baron, knight, or commoner shall have as much as a strike of flax of mine whilst I have strength to wag this sword.”

"And a passing strange sword it is," quoth Sir Nigel. "What make you, Alleyne, of these black lines which are drawn across the sheath?"

"I cannot tell what they are, my fair lord."

"Nor can I," said Ford.

The merchant chuckled to himself. "It was a thought of mine own," said he; "for the sword was made by Thomas Wilson, the armorer, who is betrothed to my second daughter Margery. Know then that the sheath is one cloth-yard, in length, marked off according to feet and inches to serve me as a measuring wand. It is also of the exact weight of two pounds, so that I may use it in the balance."

"By Saint Paul!" quoth Sir Nigel, "it is very clear to me that the sword is like thyself, good alderman, apt either for war or for peace. But I doubt not that even in England you have had much to suffer from the hands of robbers and outlaws."

"It was only last Lammastide, sir knight, that I was left for dead near Reading as I journeyed to Winchester fair. Yet I had the rogues up at the court of pie-powder, and they will harm no more peaceful traders."

"You travel much then!"

"To Winchester, Linn mart, Bristol fair, Stourbridge, and Bartholomew's in London Town. The rest of the year you may ever find me five doors from the church of Our Lady, where I would from my heart that I was at this moment, for there is no air like Norwich air, and no water like the Yare, nor can all the wines of France compare with the beer of old Sam Yelverton who keeps the 'Dun Cow.' But, out and alack, here is an evil fruit which hangs upon this chestnut-tree!"

As he spoke they had ridden round a curve of the road and come upon a great tree which shot one strong brown branch across their path. From the centre of this branch there hung a man, with his head at a horrid slant to his body and his toes just touching the ground. He was naked save for a linen under shirt and pair of woollen drawers. Beside him on a green bank there sat a small man with a solemn face, and a great bundle of papers of all colours thrusting forth from the scrip which lay beside him. He was very richly dressed, with furred robes, a scarlet hood, and wide hanging sleeves lined with flame-coloured silk. A great gold chain hung round his neck, and rings glittered from every finger of his hands. On his lap he had a little pile of gold and of silver, which he was dropping, coin by coin, into a plump pouch which hung from his girdle.

"May the saints be with you, good travellers!" he shouted, as the party rode up. "May the four Evangelists watch over you! May the twelve Apostles bear you up! May the blessed army of martyrs direct your feet and lead you to eternal bliss!"

"Gramercy for these good wishes!" said Sir Nigel. "But I perceive, master alderman, that this man who hangs here is, by mark of foot, the very robber-knight of whom we have spoken. But there is a cartel pinned upon his breast, and I pray you, Alleyne, to read it to me."

The dead robber swung slowly to and fro in the wintry wind, a fixed smile upon his swarthy face, and his bulging eyes still glaring down the highway of which he had so long been the terror; on a sheet of parchment upon his breast was printed in rude characters;

ROGER PIED-BOT.

Par l'ordre du Senechal de
Castelnau, et de l'Echevin de
Cahors, servantes fideles du
tres vaillant et tres puissant
Edouard, Prince de Galles et
d'Aquitaine.
Ne touchez pas,
Ne coutez pas,
Ne depechez pas

"He took a sorry time in dying," said the man who sat beside him. "He could stretch one toe to the ground and bear him self up, so that I thought he would never have done. Now at last, however, he is safely in paradise, and so I may jog on upon my earthly way." He mounted, as he spoke, a white mule which had been grazing by the wayside, all gay with fustian of gold and silver bells, and rode onward with Sir Nigel's party.

"How know you then that he is in paradise?" asked Sir Nigel. "All things are possible to God, but, certes, without a miracle, I should scarce expect to find the soul of Roger Clubfoot amongst the just."

"I know that he is there because I have just passed him in there," answered the stranger, rubbing his bejewelled hands together in placid satisfaction. "It is my holy mission to be a sompnour or pardoner. I am the unworthy servant and delegate of him who holds the keys. A contrite heart and ten nobles to holy mother Church may stave off perdition; but he hath a pardon of the first degree, with a twenty-five livre benison, so that I doubt if he will so much as feel a twinge of purgatory. I came up even as the seneschal's archers were tying him up, and I gave him my fore-word that I would bide with him until he had passed. There were two leaden crowns among the silver, but I would not for that stand in the way of his salvation."

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "if you have indeed this power to open and to shut the gates of hope, then indeed you stand high above mankind. But if you do but claim to have it, and yet have it not, then it seems to me, master clerk, that you may yourself find the gate barred when you shall ask admittance."

"Small of faith! Small of faith!" cried the sompnour. "Ah, Sir Didymus yet walks upon earth! And yet no words of doubt can bring anger to mine heart, or a bitter word to my lip, for am I not a poor unworthy worker in the cause of gentleness and peace? Of all these pardons which I bear every one is stamped and signed by our holy father, the prop and centre of Christendom."

"Which of them?" asked Sir Nigel.

"Ha, ha!" cried the pardoner, shaking a jewelled forefinger. "Thou wouldst be deep in the secrets of mother Church? Know then that I have both in my scrip. Those who hold with Urban shall have Urban's pardon, while I have Clement's for the Clementist — or he who is in doubt may have both, so that come what may he shall be secure. I pray you that you will buy one, for war is bloody work, and the end is sudden with little time for thought or shrift. Or you, sir, for you seem to me to be a man who would do ill to trust to your own merits." This to the alderman of Norwich, who had listened to him with a frowning brow and a sneering lip.

"When I sell my cloth," quoth he, "he who buys may weigh and feel and handle. These goods which you sell are not to be seen, nor is there any proof that you hold them. Certes, if mortal man might control God's mercy, it would be one of a lofty and God-like life, and not one who is decked out with rings and chains and silks, like a pleasure-wench at a kermesse.

"Thou wicked and shameless man!" cried the clerk. "Dost thou dare to raise thy voice against the unworthy servant of mother Church?"

"Unworthy enough!" quoth David Micheldene. "I would have you to know, clerk, that I am a free English burgher, and that I dare say my mind to our father the Pope himself, let alone such a lacquey's lacquey as you!"

“Base-born and foul-mouthed knave!” cried the sompnour. “You prate of holy things, to which your hog’s mind can never rise. Keep silence, lest I call a curse upon you!”

“Silence yourself!” roared the other. “Foul bird! we found thee by the gallows like a carrion-crow. A fine life thou hast of it with thy silks and thy baubles, cozening the last few shillings from the pouches of dying men. A fig for thy curse! Bide here, if you will take my rede, for we will make England too hot for such as you, when Master Wicliff has the ordering of it. Thou vile thief! it is you, and such as you, who bring an evil name upon the many churchmen who lead a pure and a holy life. Thou outside the door of heaven! Art more like to be inside the door of hell.”

At this crowning insult the sompnour, with a face ashen with rage, raised up a quivering hand and began pouring Latin imprecations upon the angry alderman. The latter, however, was not a man to be quelled by words, for he caught up his ell-measure sword-sheath and belabored the cursing clerk with it. The latter, unable to escape from the shower of blows, set spurs to his mule and rode for his life, with his enemy thundering behind him. At sight of his master’s sudden departure, the varlet Watkin set off after him, with the pack-mule beside him, so that the four clattered away down the road together, until they swept round a curve and their babble was but a drone in the distance. Sir Nigel and Alleyne gazed in astonishment at one another, while Ford burst out a-laughing.

“Pardieu!” said the knight, “this David Micheldene must be one of those Lollards about whom Father Christopher of the priory had so much to say. Yet he seemed to be no bad man from what I have seen of him.”

“I have heard that Wicliff hath many followers in Norwich,” answered Alleyne.

“By St. Paul! I have no great love for them,” quoth Sir Nigel. “I am a man who am slow to change; and, if you take away from me the faith that I have been taught, it would be long ere I could learn one to set in its place. It is but a chip here and a chip there, yet it may bring the tree down in time. Yet, on the other hand, I cannot but think it shame that a man should turn God’s mercy on and off, as a cellarman doth wine with a spigot.”

“Nor is it,” said Alleyne, “part of the teachings of that mother Church of which he had so much to say. There was sooth in what the alderman said of it.”

“Then, by St. Paul! they may settle it betwixt them,” quoth Sir Nigel. “For me, I serve God, the king and my lady; and so long as I can keep the path of honor I am well content. My creed shall ever be that of Chandos:

“Fais ce que dois — adviegne que peut,
C’est commande au chevalier.”

CHAPTER XXVIII. HOW THE COMRADES CAME OVER THE MARCHES OF FRANCE

After passing Cahors, the party branched away from the main road, and leaving the river to the north of them, followed a smaller track which wound over a vast and desolate plain. This path led them amid marshes and woods, until it brought them out into a glade with a broad stream swirling swiftly down the centre of it. Through this the horses splashed their way, and on the farther shore Sir Nigel announced to them that they were now within the borders of the land of France. For some miles they still followed the same lonely track, which led them through a dense wood, and then widening out, curved down to an open rolling country, such as they had traversed between Aiguillon and Cahors.

If it were grim and desolate upon the English border, however, what can describe the hideous barrenness of this ten times harried tract of France? The whole face of the country was scarred and disfigured, mottled over with the black blotches of burned farm-steadings, and the gray, gaunt gable-ends of what had been chateaux. Broken fences, crumbling walls, vineyards littered with stones, the shattered arches of bridges — look where you might, the signs of ruin and rapine met the eye. Here and there only, on the farthest sky-line, the gnarled turrets of a castle, or the graceful pinnacles of church or of monastery showed where the forces of the sword or of the spirit had preserved some small islet of security in this universal flood of misery. Moodily and in silence the little party rode along the narrow and irregular track, their hearts weighed down by this far-stretching land of despair. It was indeed a stricken and a blighted country, and a man might have ridden from Auvergne in the north to the marches of Foix, nor ever seen a smiling village or a thriving homestead.

From time to time as they advanced they saw strange lean figures scraping and scratching amid the weeds and thistles, who, on sight of the band of horsemen, threw up their arms and dived in among the brushwood, as shy and as swift as wild animals. More than once, however, they came on families by the wayside, who were too weak from hunger and disease to fly, so that they could but sit like hares on a tussock, with panting chests and terror in their eyes. So gaunt were these poor folk, so worn and spent — with bent and knotted frames, and sullen, hopeless, mutinous faces — that it made the young Englishman heart-sick to look upon them. Indeed, it seemed as though all hope and light had gone so far from them that it was not to be brought back; for when Sir Nigel threw down a handful of silver among them there came no softening of their lined faces, but they clutched greedily at the coins, peering questioningly at him, and champing with their animal jaws. Here and there amid the brushwood the travellers saw the rude bundle of sticks which served them as a home — more like a fowl's nest than the dwelling-place of man. Yet why should they build and strive, when the first adventurer who passed would set torch to their thatch, and when their own feudal lord would wring from them with blows and curses the last fruits of their toil? They sat at the lowest depth of human misery, and hugged a bitter comfort to their souls as they realised that they could go no lower. Yet they had still the human gift of speech, and would take council among themselves in their brushwood hovels, glaring with bleared eyes and pointing with thin fingers at the great widespread chateaux which ate like a cancer into the life of the country-side. When such men, who are beyond hope and fear, begin in their dim minds to see the source their woes, it may be an evil time for those who have wronged them. The weak man becomes strong when he has nothing, for then only can he feel the wild, mad thrill of despair. High and strong the chateaux, lowly and weak the brushwood hut; but God help the seigneur and his lady when the men of the brushwood set their hands to the work of revenge!

Through such country did the party ride for eight or it might be nine miles, until the sun began to slope down in the west and their shadows to stream down the road in front of them. Wary and careful they must be, with watchful eyes to the right and the left, for this was no man's land, and their only passports were those which hung from their belts. Frenchmen and Englishmen, Gascon and Provencal, Brabanter, Tardvenu, Scorcher, Flayer, and Free Companion, wandered and struggled over the whole of this accursed district. So bare and cheerless was the outlook, and so few and poor the dwellings, that Sir Nigel began to have fears as to whether he might find food and quarters for his little troop. It was a relief to him, therefore, when their narrow track opened out upon a larger road, and they saw some little way down it a square white house with a great bunch of holly hung out at the end of a stick from one of the upper windows.

"By St. Paul!" said he, "I am right glad; for I had feared that we might have neither provant nor herbergage. Ride on, Alleyne, and tell this innkeeper that an English knight with his party will lodge with him this night."

Alleyne set spurs to his horse and reached the inn door a long bow-shot before his companions. Neither varlet nor ostler could be seen, so he pushed open the door and called loudly for the landlord. Three times he shouted, but, receiving no reply, he opened an inner door and advanced into the chief guest-room of the hostel.

A very cheerful wood-fire was sputtering and cracking in an open grate at the further end of the apartment. At one side of this fire, in a high-backed oak chair, sat a lady, her face turned towards the door. The firelight played over her features, and Alleyne thought that he had never seen such queenly power, such dignity and strength, upon a woman's face. She might have been five-and-thirty years of age, with aquiline nose, firm yet sensitive mouth, dark curving brows, and deep-set eyes which shone and sparkled with a shifting brilliancy. Beautiful as she was, it was not her beauty which impressed itself upon the beholder; it was her strength, her power, the sense of wisdom which hung over the broad white brow, the decision which lay in the square jaw and delicately moulded chin. A chaplet of pearls sparkled amid her black hair, with a gauze of silver network flowing back from it over her shoulders; a black mantle was swathed round her, and she leaned back in her chair as one who is fresh from a journey.

In the opposite corner there sat a very burly and broad-shouldered man, clad in a black jerkin trimmed with sable, with a black velvet cap with curling white feather cocked upon the side of his head. A flask of red wine stood at his elbow, and he seemed to be very much at his ease, for his feet were stuck up on a stool, and between his thighs he held a dish full of nuts. These he cracked between his strong white teeth and chewed in a leisurely way, casting the shells into the blaze. As Alleyne gazed in at him he turned his face half round and cocked an eye at him over his shoulder. It seemed to the young Englishman that he had never seen so hideous a face, for the eyes were of the lightest green, the nose was broken and driven inwards, while the whole countenance was seared and puckered with wounds. The voice, too, when he spoke, was as deep and as fierce as the growl of a beast of prey.

"Young man," said he, "I know not who you may be, and I am not much inclined to bestir myself, but if it were not that I am bent upon taking my ease, I swear, by the sword of Joshua! that I would lay my dog-whip across your shoulders for daring to fill the air with these discordant bellowings."

Taken aback at this ungentle speech, and scarce knowing how to answer it fitly in the presence of the lady, Alleyne stood with his hand upon the handle of the door, while Sir Nigel and his companions dismounted. At the sound of these fresh voices, and of the tongue in which they spoke, the stranger crashed his dish of nuts down upon the floor, and began himself to call for the landlord until the whole house re-echoed with his roarings. With an ashen face the white-aproned host came running at his call, his hands shaking and his very hair bristling with apprehension. "For the sake of God, sirs," he whispered as he passed, "speak him fair and do not rouse him! For the love of the Virgin, be mild with him!"

"Who is this, then?" asked Sir Nigel.

Alleyne was about to explain, when a fresh roar from the stranger interrupted him.

"Thou villain inn-keeper," he shouted, "did I not ask you when I brought my lady here whether your inn was clean?"

"You did, sire."

"Did I not very particularly ask you whether there were any vermin in it?"

"You did, sire."

"And you answered me?"

"That there were not, sire."

"And yet ere I have been here an hour I find Englishmen crawling about within it. Where are we to be free from this pestilent race? Can a Frenchman upon French land not sit down in a French auberge without having his ears pained by the clack of their hideous talk? Send them packing, inn-keeper, or it may be the worse for them and for you."

"I will, sire, I will!" cried the frightened host, and bustled from the room, while the soft, soothing voice of the woman was heard remonstrating with her furious companion.

"Indeed, gentlemen, you had best go," said mine host. "It is but six miles to Villefranche, where there are very good quarters at the sign of the 'Lion Rouge.'"

"Nay," answered Sir Nigel, "I cannot go until I have seen more of this person, for he appears to be a man from whom much is to be hoped. What is his name and title?"

“It is not for my lips to name it unless by his desire. But I beg and pray you, gentlemen, that you will go from my house, for I know not what may come of it if his rage should gain the mastery of him.”

“By Saint Paul!” lisped Sir Nigel, “this is certainly a man whom it is worth journeying far to know. Go tell him that a humble knight of England would make his further honorable acquaintance, not from any presumption, pride, or ill-will, but for the advancement of chivalry and the glory of our ladies. Give him greeting from Sir Nigel Loring, and say that the glove which I bear in my cap belongs to the most peerless and lovely of her sex, whom I am now ready to uphold against any lady whose claim he might be desirous of advancing.”

The landlord was hesitating whether to carry this message or no, when the door of the inner room was flung open, and the stranger bounded out like a panther from its den, his hair bristling and his deformed face convulsed with anger.

“Still here!” he snarled. “Dogs of England, must ye be lashed hence? Tiphaine, my sword!” He turned to seize his weapon, but as he did so his gaze fell upon the blazonry of sir Nigel’s shield, and he stood staring, while the fire in his strange green eyes softened into a sly and humorous twinkle.

“Mort Dieu!” cried he, “it is my little swordsman of Bordeaux. I should remember that coat-armor, seeing that it is but three days since I looked upon it in the lists by Garonne. Ah! Sir Nigel, Sir Nigel! you owe me a return for this,” and he touched his right arm, which was girt round just under the shoulder with a silken kerchief.

But the surprise of the stranger at the sight of Sir Nigel was as nothing compared with the astonishment and the delight which shone upon the face of the knight of Hampshire as he looked upon the strange face of the Frenchman. Twice he opened his mouth and twice he peered again, as though to assure himself that his eyes had not played him a trick.

“Bertrand!” he gasped at last. “Bertrand du Guesclin!”

“By Saint Ives!” shouted the French soldier, with a hoarse roar of laughter, “it is well that I should ride with my vizor down, for he that has once seen my face does not need to be told my name. It is indeed I, Sir Nigel, and here is my hand! I give you my word that there are but three Englishmen in this world whom I would touch save with the sharp edge of the sword: the prince is one, Chandos the second, and you the third; for I have heard much that is good of you.”

"I am growing aged, and am somewhat spent in the wars," quoth Sir Nigel; "but I can lay by my sword now with an easy mind, for I can say that I have crossed swords with him who hath the bravest heart and the strongest arm of all this great kingdom of France. I have longed for it, I have dreamed of it, and now I can scarce bring my mind to understand that this great honor hath indeed been mine."

"By the Virgin of Rennes! you have given me cause to be very certain of it," said Du Guesclin, with a gleam of his broad white teeth.

"And perhaps, most honored sir, it would please you to continue the debate. Perhaps you would condescend to go farther into the matter. God He knows that I am unworthy of such honor, yet I can show my four-and-sixty quarterings, and I have been present at some bickerings and scufflings during these twenty years."

"Your fame is very well known to me, and I shall ask my lady to enter your name upon my tablets," said Sir Bertrand. "There are many who wish to advance themselves, and who bide their turn, for I refuse no man who comes on such an errand. At present it may not be, for mine arm is stiff from this small touch, and I would fain do you full honor when we cross swords again. Come in with me, and let your squires come also, that my sweet spouse, the Lady Tiphaine, may say that she hath seen so famed and gentle a knight."

Into the chamber they went in all peace and concord, where the Lady Tiphaine sat like queen on throne for each in turn to be presented to her. Sooth to say, the stout heart of Sir Nigel, which cared little for the wrath of her lion-like spouse, was somewhat shaken by the calm, cold face of this stately dame, for twenty years of camp-life had left him more at ease in the lists than in a lady's boudoir. He bethought him, too, as he looked at her set lips and deep-set questioning eyes, that he had heard strange tales of this same Lady Tiphaine du Guesclin. Was it not she who was said to lay hands upon the sick and raise them from their couches when the leeches had spent their last nostrums? Had she not forecast the future, and were there not times when in the loneliness of her chamber she was heard to hold converse with some being upon whom mortal eye never rested — some dark familiar who passed where doors were barred and windows high? Sir Nigel sunk his eye and marked a cross on the side of his leg as he greeted this dangerous dame, and yet ere five minutes had passed he was hers, and not he only but his two young squires as well. The mind had gone out of them, and they could but look at this woman and listen to the words which fell from her lips — words which thrilled through their nerves and stirred their souls like the battle-call of a bugle.

Often in peaceful after-days was Alleyne to think of that scene of the wayside inn of Auvergne. The shadows of evening had fallen, and the corners of the long, low, wood-panelled room were draped in darkness. The sputtering wood fire threw out a circle of red flickering light which played over the little group of wayfarers, and showed up every line and shadow upon their faces. Sir Nigel sat with elbows upon knees, and chin upon hands, his patch still covering one eye, but his other shining like a star, while the ruddy light gleamed upon his smooth white head. Ford was seated at his left, his lips parted, his eyes staring, and a fleck of deep colour on either cheek, his limbs all rigid as one who fears to move. On the other side the famous French captain leaned back in his chair, a litter of nut-shells upon his lap, his huge head half buried in a cushion, while his eyes wandered with an amused gleam from his dame to the staring, enraptured Englishmen. Then, last of all, that pale clear-cut face, that sweet clear voice, with its high thrilling talk of the deathlessness of glory, of the worthlessness of life, of the pain of ignoble joys, and of the joy which lies in all pains which lead to a noble end. Still, as the shadows deepened, she spoke of valor and virtue, of loyalty, honor, and fame, and still they sat drinking in her words while the fire burned down and the red ash turned to gray.

“By the sainted Ives!” cried Du Guesclin at last, “it is time that we spoke of what we are to do this night, for I cannot think that in this wayside auberge there are fit quarters for an honorable company.”

Sir Nigel gave a long sigh as he came back from the dreams of chivalry and hardihood into which this strange woman’s words had wafted him. “I care not where I sleep,” said he; “but these are indeed somewhat rude lodgings for this fair lady.”

“What contents my lord contents me,” quoth she. “I perceive, Sir Nigel, that you are under vow,” she added, glancing at his covered eye.

“It is my purpose to attempt some small deed,” he answered.

“And the glove — is it your lady’s?”

“It is indeed my sweet wife’s.”

“Who is doubtless proud of you.”

“Say rather I of her,” quoth he quickly. “God He knows that I am not worthy to be her humble servant. It is easy, lady, for a man to ride forth in the light of day, and do his devoir when all men have eyes for him. But in a woman’s heart there is a strength and truth which asks no praise, and can but be known to him whose treasure it is.”

The Lady Tiphaine smiled across at her husband. “You have often told me, Bertrand, that there were very gentle knights amongst the English,” quoth she.

“Aye, aye,” said he moodily. “But to horse, Sir Nigel, you and yours and we shall seek the chateau of Sir Tristram de Rochefort, which is two miles on this side of Villefranche. He is Seneschal of Auvergne, and mine old war companion.”

“Certes, he would have a welcome for you,” quoth Sir Nigel; “but indeed he might look askance at one who comes without permit over the marches.”

“By the Virgin! when he learns that you have come to draw away these rascals he will be very blithe to look upon your face. Inn-keeper, here are ten gold pieces. What is over and above your reckoning you may take off from your charges to the next needy knight who comes this way. Come then, for it grows late and the horses are stamping in the roadway.”

The Lady Tiphaine and her spouse sprang upon their steeds without setting feet to stirrup, and away they jingled down the white moonlit highway, with Sir Nigel at the lady’s bridle-arm, and Ford a spear’s length behind them. Alleyne had lingered for an instant in the passage, and as he did so there came a wild outcry from a chamber upon the left, and out there ran Aylward and John, laughing together like two schoolboys who are bent upon a prank. At sight of Alleyne they slunk past him with somewhat of a shame-faced air, and springing upon their horses galloped after their party. The hubbub within the chamber did not cease, however, but rather increased, with yells of: “A moi, mes amis! A moi, camarades! A moi, l’honorable champion de l’Eveque de Montaubon! A la recousse de l’eglise sainte!” So shrill was the outcry that both the inn-keeper and Alleyne, with every varlet within hearing, rushed wildly to the scene of the uproar.

It was indeed a singular scene which met their eyes. The room was a long and lofty one, stone floored and bare, with a fire at the further end upon which a great pot was boiling. A deal table ran down the centre, with a wooden wine-pitcher upon it and two horn cups. Some way from it was a smaller table with a single beaker and a broken wine-bottle. From the heavy wooden rafters which formed the roof there hung rows of hooks which held up sides of bacon, joints of smoked beef, and strings of onions for winter use. In the very centre of all these, upon the largest hook of all, there hung a fat little red-faced man with enormous whiskers, kicking madly in the air and clawing at rafters, hams, and all else that was within hand-grasp. The huge steel hook had been passed through the collar of his leather jerkin, and there he hung like a fish on a line, writhing, twisting, and screaming, but utterly unable to free himself from his extraordinary position. It was not until Alleyne and the landlord had mounted on the table that they were able to lift him down, when he sank gasping with rage into a seat, and rolled his eyes round in every direction.

"Has he gone?" quoth he.

"Gone? Who?"

"He, the man with the red head, the giant man."

"Yes," said Alleyne, "he hath gone."

"And comes not back?"

"No."

"The better for him!" cried the little man, with a long sigh of relief. "Mon Dieu! What! am I not the champion of the Bishop of Montaubon? Ah, could I have descended, could I have come down, ere he fled! Then you would have seen. You would have beheld a spectacle then. There would have been one rascal the less upon earth. Ma, foi, yes!"

"Good master Pelligny," said the landlord, "these gentlemen have not gone very fast, and I have a horse in the stable at your disposal, for I would rather have such bloody doings as you threaten outside the four walls of mine auberge."

"I hurt my leg and cannot ride," quoth the bishop's champion. "I strained a sinew on the day that I slew the three men at Castelnau."

"God save you, master Pelligny!" cried the landlord. "It must be an awesome thing to have so much blood upon one's soul. And yet I do not wish to see so valiant a man mishandled, and so I will, for friendship's sake, ride after this Englishman and bring him back to you."

"You shall not stir," cried the champion, seizing the inn-keeper in a convulsive grasp. "I have a love for you, Gaston, and I would not bring your house into ill repute, nor do such scath to these walls and chattels as must befall if two such men as this Englishman and I fall to work here."

"Nay, think not of me!" cried the inn-keeper. "What are my walls when set against the honor of Francois Poursuivant d'Amour Pelligny, champion of the Bishop of Montaubon. My horse, Andre!"

"By the saints, no! Gaston, I will not have it! You have said truly that it is an awesome thing to have such rough work upon one's soul. I am but a rude soldier, yet I have a mind. Mon Dieu! I reflect, I weigh, I balance. Shall I not meet this man again? Shall I not bear him in mind? Shall I not know him by his great paws and his red head? Ma foi, yes!"

"And may I ask, sir," said Alleyne, "why it is that you call yourself champion of the Bishop of Montaubon?"

"You may ask aught which it is becoming to me to answer. The bishop hath need of a champion, because, if any cause be set to test of combat, it would scarce become his office to go down into the lists with leather and shield and cudgel to exchange blows with any varlet. He looks around him then for some tried fighting man, some honest smiter who can give a blow or take one. It is not for me to say how far he hath succeeded, but it is sooth that he who thinks that he hath but to do with the Bishop of Montaubon, finds himself face to face with Francois Poursuivant d'Amour Pelligny."

At this moment there was a clatter of hoofs upon the road, and a varlet by the door cried out that one of the Englishmen was coming back. The champion looked wildly about for some corner of safety, and was clambering up towards the window, when Ford's voice sounded from without, calling upon Alleyne to hasten, or he might scarce find his way. Bidding adieu to landlord and to champion, therefore, he set off at a gallop, and soon overtook the two archers.

"A pretty thing this, John," said he. "Thou wilt have holy Church upon you if you hang her champions upon iron hooks in an inn kitchen."

"It was done without thinking," he answered apologetically, while Aylward burst into a shout of laughter.

"By my hilt! mon petit," said he, "you would have laughed also could you have seen it. For this man was so swollen with pride that he would neither drink with us, nor sit at the same table with us, nor as much as answer a question, but must needs talk to the varlet all the time that it was well there was peace, and that he had slain more Englishmen than there were tags to his doublet. Our good old John could scarce lay his tongue to French enough to answer him, so he must needs reach out his great hand to him and place him very gently where you saw him. But we must on, for I can scarce hear their hoofs upon the road."

"I think that I can see them yet," said Ford, peering down the moonlit road.

“Pardieu! yes. Now they ride forth from the shadow. And yonder dark clump is the Castle of Villefranche. En avant camarades! or Sir Nigel may reach the gates before us. But hark, mes amis, what sound is that?”

As he spoke the hoarse blast of a horn was heard from some woods upon the right. An answering call rung forth upon their left, and hard upon it two others from behind them.

“They are the horns of swine-herds,” quoth Aylward. “Though why they blow them so late I cannot tell.”

“Let us on, then,” said Ford, and the whole party, setting their spurs to their horses, soon found themselves at the Castle of Villefranche, where the drawbridge had already been lowered and the portcullis raised in response to the summons of Du Guesclin.

CHAPTER XXIX. HOW THE BLESSED HOUR OF SIGHT CAME TO THE LADY TIPHAINE.

Sir Tristram de Rochefort, Seneschal of Auvergne and Lord of Villefranche, was a fierce and renowned soldier who had grown gray in the English wars. As lord of the marches and guardian of an exposed country-side, there was little rest for him even in times of so-called peace, and his whole life was spent in raids and outfalls upon the Brabanters, late-comers, flayers, free companions, and roving archers who wandered over his province. At times he would come back in triumph, and a dozen corpses swinging from the summit of his keep would warn evil-doers that there was still a law in the land. At others his ventures were not so happy, and he and his troop would spur it over the drawbridge with clatter of hoofs hard at their heels and whistle of arrows about their ears. Hard he was of hand and harder of heart, hated by his foes, and yet not loved by those whom he protected, for twice he had been taken prisoner, and twice his ransom had been wrung by dint of blows and tortures out of the starving peasants and ruined farmers. Wolves or watch-dogs, it was hard to say from which the sheep had most to fear.

The Castle of Villefranche was harsh and stern as its master. A broad moat, a high outer wall turreted at the corners, with a great black keep towering above all — so it lay before them in the moonlight. By the light of two flambeaux, protruded through the narrow slit-shaped openings at either side of the ponderous gate, they caught a glimpse of the glitter of fierce eyes and of the gleam of the weapons of the guard. The sight of the two-headed eagle of Du Guesclin, however, was a passport into any fortalice in France, and ere they had passed the gate the old border knight came running forwards with hands out-thrown to greet his famous countryman. Nor was he less glad to see Sir Nigel, when the Englishman's errand was explained to him, for these archers had been a sore thorn in his side and had routed two expeditions which he had sent against them. A happy day it would be for the Seneschal of Auvergne when they should learn that the last yew bow was over the marches.

The material for a feast was ever at hand in days when, if there was grim want in the cottage, there was at least rude plenty in the castle. Within an hour the guests were seated around a board which creaked under the great pasties and joints of meat, varied by those more dainty dishes in which the French excelled, the spiced ortolan and the truffled beccaficoes. The Lady Rochefort, a bright and laughter-loving dame, sat upon the left of her warlike spouse, with Lady Tiphaine upon the right. Beneath sat Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel, with Sir Amory Monticourt, of the order of the Hospitallers, and Sir Otto Harnit, a wandering knight from the kingdom of Bohemia. These with Alleyne and Ford, four French squires, and the castle chaplain, made the company who sat together that night and made good cheer in the Castle of Villefranche. The great fire crackled in the grate, the hooded hawks slept upon their perches, the rough deer-hounds with expectant eyes crouched upon the tiled floor; close at the elbows of the guests stood the dapper little lilac-coated pages; the laugh and jest circled round and all was harmony and comfort. Little they recked of the brushwood men who crouched in their rags along the fringe of the forest and looked with wild and haggard eyes at the rich, warm glow which shot a golden bar of light from the high arched windows of the castle.

Supper over, the tables dormant were cleared away as by magic and trestles and bancals arranged around the blazing fire, for there was a bitter nip in the air. The Lady Tiphaine had sunk back in her cushioned chair, and her long dark lashes drooped low over her sparkling eyes. Alleyne, glancing at her, noted that her breath came quick and short, and that her cheeks had blanched to a lily white. Du Guesclin eyed her keenly from time to time, and passed his broad brown fingers through his crisp, curly black hair with the air of a man who is perplexed in his mind.

“These folk here,” said the knight of Bohemia, “they do not seem too well fed.”

“Ah, canaille!” cried the Lord of Villefranche. “You would scarce credit it, and yet it is sooth that when I was taken at Poictiers it was all that my wife and foster-brother could do to raise the money from them for my ransom. The sulky dogs would rather have three twists of a rack, or the thumbikins for an hour, than pay out a denier for their own feudal father and liege lord. Yet there is not one of them but hath an old stocking full of gold pieces hid away in a snug corner.”

“Why do they not buy food then?” asked Sir Nigel. “By St. Paul! it seemed to me their bones were breaking through their skin.”

"It is their grutching and grumbling which makes them thin. We have a saying here, Sir Nigel, that if you pummel Jacques Bonhomme he will pat you, but if you pat him he will pummel you. Doubtless you find it so in England."

"Ma foi, no!" said Sir Nigel. "I have two Englishmen of this class in my train, who are at this instant, I make little doubt, as full of your wine as any cask in your cellar. He who pummelled them might come by such a pat as he would be likely to remember."

"I cannot understand it," quoth the seneschal, "for the English knights and nobles whom I have met were not men to brook the insolence of the base born."

"Perchance, my fair lord, the poor folk are sweeter and of a better countenance in England," laughed the Lady Rochefort. "Mon Dieu! you cannot conceive to yourself how ugly they are! Without hair, without teeth, all twisted and bent; for me, I cannot think how the good God ever came to make such people. I cannot bear it, I, and so my trusty Raoul goes ever before me with a cudgel to drive them from my path."

"Yet they have souls, fair lady, they have souls!" murmured the chaplain, a white-haired man with a weary, patient face.

"So I have heard you tell them," said the lord of the castle; "and for myself, father, though I am a true son of holy Church, yet I think that you were better employed in saying your mass and in teaching the children of my men-at-arms, than in going over the country-side to put ideas in these folks' heads which would never have been there but for you. I have heard that you have said to them that their souls are as good as ours, and that it is likely that in another life they may stand as high as the oldest blood of Auvergne. For my part, I believe that there are so many worthy knights and gallant gentlemen in heaven who know how such things should be arranged, that there is little fear that we shall find ourselves mixed up with base roturiers and swine-herds. Tell your beads, father, and con your psalter, but do not come between me and those whom the king has given to me!"

"God help them!" cried the old priest. "A higher King than yours has given them to me, and I tell you here in your own castle hall, Sir Tristram de Rochefort, that you have sinned deeply in your dealings with these poor folk, and that the hour will come, and may even now be at hand, when God's hand will be heavy upon you for what you have done." He rose as he spoke, and walked slowly from the room.

"Pest take him!" cried the French knight. "Now, what is a man to do with a priest, Sir Bertrand? — for one can neither fight him like a man nor coax him like a woman."

"Ah, Sir Bertrand knows, the naughty one!" cried the Lady Rochefort. "Have we not all heard how he went to Avignon and squeezed fifty thousand crowns out of the Pope."

"Ma foi!" said Sir Nigel, looking with a mixture of horror and admiration at Du Guesclin. "Did not your heart sink within you? Were you not smitten with fears? Have you not felt a curse hang over you?"

"I have not observed it," said the Frenchman carelessly. "But by Saint Ives! Tristram, this chaplain of yours seems to me to be a worthy man, and you should give heed to his words, for though I care nothing for the curse of a bad pope, it would be a grief to me to have aught but a blessing from a good priest."

"Hark to that, my fair lord," cried the Lady Rochefort. "Take heed, I pray thee, for I do not wish to have a blight cast over me, nor a palsy of the limbs. I remember that once before you angered Father Stephen, and my tire-woman said that I lost more hair in seven days than ever before in a month."

"If that be sign of sin, then, by Saint Paul! I have much upon my soul," said Sir Nigel, amid a general laugh. "But in very truth, Sir Tristram, if I may venture a word of counsel, I should advise that you make your peace with this good man."

"He shall have four silver candlesticks," said the seneschal moodily. "And yet I would that he would leave the folk alone. You cannot conceive in your mind how stubborn and brainless they are. Mules and pigs are full of reason beside them. God He knows that I have had great patience with them. It was but last week that, having to raise some money, I called up to the castle Jean Goubert, who, as all men know, has a casketful of gold pieces hidden away in some hollow tree. I give you my word that I did not so much as lay a stripe upon his fool's back, but after speaking with him, and telling him how needful the money was to me, I left him for the night to think over the matter in my dungeon. What think you that the dog did? Why, in the morning we found that he had made a rope from strips of his leathern jerkin, and had hung himself to the bar of the window."

"For me, I cannot conceive such wickedness!" cried the lady.

“And there was Gertrude Le Boeuf, as fair a maiden as eye could see, but as bad and bitter as the rest of them. When young Amory de Valance was here last Lammastide he looked kindly upon the girl, and even spoke of taking her into his service. What does she do, with her dog of a father? Why, they tie themselves together and leap into the Linden Pool, where the water is five spears’-lengths deep. I give you my word that it was a great grief to young Amory, and it was days ere he could cast it from his mind. But how can one serve people who are so foolish and so ungrateful?”

Whilst the Seneschal of Villefranche had been detailing the evil doings of his tenants, Alleyne had been unable to take his eyes from the face of Lady Tiphaine. She had lain back in her chair, with drooping eyelids and bloodless face, so that he had feared at first her journey had weighed heavily upon her, and that the strength was ebbing out of her. Of a sudden, however, there came a change, for a dash of bright colour flickered up on to either cheek, and her lids were slowly raised again upon eyes which sparkled with such lustre as Alleyne had never seen in human eyes before, while their gaze was fixed intently, not on the company, but on the dark tapestry which draped the wall. So transformed and so ethereal was her expression, that Alleyne, in his loftiest dream of archangel or of seraph, had never pictured so sweet, so womanly, and yet so wise a face. Glancing at Du Guesclin, Alleyne saw that he also was watching his wife closely, and from the twitching of his features, and the beads upon his brick-coloured brow, it was easy to see that he was deeply agitated by the change which he marked in her.

“How is it with you, lady?” he asked at last, in a tremulous voice.

Her eyes remained fixed intently upon the wall, and there was a long pause ere she answered him. Her voice, too, which had been so clear and ringing, was now low and muffled as that of one who speaks from a distance.

“All is very well with me, Bertrand,” said she. “The blessed hour of sight has come round to me again.”

“I could see it come! I could see it come!” he exclaimed, passing his fingers through his hair with the same perplexed expression as before.

“This is untoward, Sir Tristram,” he said at last. “And I scarce know in what words to make it clear to you, and to your fair wife, and to Sir Nigel Loring, and to these other stranger knights. My tongue is a blunt one, and fitter to shout word of command than to clear up such a matter as this, of which I can myself understand little. This, however, I know, that my wife is come of a very sainted race, whom God hath in His wisdom endowed with wondrous powers, so that Tiphaine Raquenel was known throughout Brittany ere ever I first saw her at Dinan. Yet these powers are ever used for good, and they are the gift of God and not of the devil, which is the difference betwixt white magic and black."

"Perchance it would be as well that we should send for Father Stephen," said Sir Tristram.

"It would be best that he should come," cried the Hospitaller.

"And bring with him a flask of holy water," added the knight of Bohemia.

"Not so, gentlemen," answered Sir Bertrand. "It is not needful that this priest should be called, and it is in my mind that in asking for this ye cast some slight shadow or slur upon the good name of my wife, as though it were still doubtful whether her power came to her from above or below. If ye have indeed such a doubt I pray that you will say so, that we may discuss the matter in a fitting way."

"For myself," said Sir Nigel, "I have heard such words fall from the lips of this lady that I am of the opinion that there is no woman, save only one, who can be in any way compared to her in beauty and in goodness. Should any gentleman think otherwise, I should deem it great honor to run a small course with him, or debate the matter in whatever way might be most pleasing to him."

"Nay, it would ill become me to cast a slur upon a lady who is both my guest and the wife of my comrade-in-arms," said the Seneschal of Villefranche. "I have perceived also that on her mantle there is marked a silver cross, which is surely sign enough that there is nought of evil in these strange powers which you say that she possesses."

This argument of the seneschal's appealed so powerfully to the Bohemian and to the Hospitaller that they at once intimated that their objections had been entirely overcome, while even the Lady Rochefort, who had sat shivering and crossing herself, ceased to cast glances at the door, and allowed her fears to turn to curiosity.

"Among the gifts which have been vouchsafed to my wife," said Du Guesclin, "there is the wondrous one of seeing into the future; but it comes very seldom upon her, and goes as quickly, for none can command it. The blessed hour of sight, as she hath named it, has come but twice since I have known her, and I can vouch for it that all that she hath told me was true, for on the evening of the Battle of Auray she said that the morrow would be an ill day for me and for Charles of Blois. Ere the sun had sunk again he was dead, and I the prisoner of Sir John Chandos. Yet it is not every question that she can answer, but only those — —"

"Bertrand, Bertrand!" cried the lady in the same mutterings far-away voice, "the blessed hour passes. Use it, Bertrand, while you may."

"I will, my sweet. Tell me, then, what fortune comes upon me?"

"Danger, Bertrand — deadly, pressing danger — which creeps upon you and you know it not."

The French soldier burst into a thunderous laugh, and his green eyes twinkled with amusement. "At what time during these twenty years would not that have been a true word?" he cried. "Danger is in the air that I breathe. But is this so very close, Tiphaine?"

"Here — now — close upon you!" The words came out in broken, strenuous speech, while the lady's fair face was writhed and drawn like that of one who looks upon a horror which strikes, the words from her lips. Du Guesclin gazed round the tapestried room, at the screens, the tables, the abace, the credence, the buffet with its silver salver, and the half-circle of friendly, wondering faces. There was an utter stillness, save for the sharp breathing of the Lady Tiphaine and for the gentle soughing of the wind outside, which wafted to their ears the distant call upon a swine-herd's horn.

"The danger may bide," said he, shrugging his broad shoulders. "And now, Tiphaine, tell us what will come of this war in Spain."

"I can see little," she answered, straining her eyes and puckering her brow, as one who would fain clear her sight. "There are mountains, and dry plains, and flash of arms and shouting of battle-cries. Yet it is whispered to me that by failure you will succeed."

"Ha! Sir Nigel, how like you that?" quoth Bertrand, shaking his head. "It is like mead and vinegar, half sweet, half sour. And is there no question which you would ask my lady?"

"Certes there is. I would fain know, fair lady, how all things are at Twynham Castle, and above all how my sweet lady employs herself."

"To answer this I would fain lay hand upon one whose thoughts turn strongly to this castle which you have named. Nay, my Lord Loring, it is whispered to me that there is another here who hath thought more deeply of it than you."

"Thought more of mine own home?" cried Sir Nigel. "Lady, I fear that in this matter at least you are mistaken."

"Not so, Sir Nigel. Come hither, young man, young English squire with the gray eyes! Now give me your hand, and place it here across my brow, that I may see that which you have seen. What is this that rises before me? Mist, mist, rolling mist with a square black tower above it. See it shreds out, it thins, it rises, and there lies a castle in green plain, with the sea beneath it, and a great church within a bow-shot. There are two rivers which run through the meadows, and between them lie the tents of the besiegers."

"The besiegers!" cried Alleyne, Ford, and Sir Nigel, all three in a breath.

"Yes, truly, and they press hard upon the castle, for they are an exceeding multitude and full of courage. See how they storm and rage against the gate, while some rear ladders, and others, line after line, sweep the walls with their arrows. They are many leaders who shout and beckon, and one, a tall man with a golden beard, who stands before the gate stamping his foot and hallooing them on, as a pricker doth the hounds. But those in the castle fight bravely. There is a woman, two women, who stand upon the walls, and give heart to the men-at-arms. They shower down arrows, darts and great stones. Ah! they have struck down the tall leader, and the others give back. The mist thickens and I can see no more."

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "I do not think that there can be any such doings at Christchurch, and I am very easy of the fortalice so long as my sweet wife hangs the key of the outer bailey at the head of her bed. Yet I will not deny that you have pictured the castle as well as I could have done myself, and I am full of wonderment at all that I have heard and seen."

"I would, Lady Tiphaine," cried the Lady Rochefort, "that you would use your power to tell me what hath befallen my golden bracelet which I wore when hawking upon the second Sunday of Advent, and have never set eyes upon since."

"Nay, lady," said du Guesclin, "it does not befit so great and wondrous a power to pry and search and play the varlet even to the beautiful chatelaine of Villefranche. Ask a worthy question, and, with the blessing of God, you shall have a worthy answer."

"Then I would fain ask," cried one of the French squires, "as to which may hope to conquer in these wars betwixt the English and ourselves."

"Both will conquer and each will hold its own," answered the Lady Tiphaine.

“Then we shall still hold Gascony and Guienne?” cried Sir Nigel.

The lady shook her head. “French land, French blood, French speech,” she answered. “They are French, and France shall have them.”

“But not Bordeaux?” cried Sir Nigel excitedly.

“Bordeaux also is for France.”

“But Calais?”

“Calais too.”

“Woe worth me then, and ill hail to these evil words! If Bordeaux and Calais be gone, then what is left for England?”

“It seems indeed that there are evil times coming upon your country,” said Du Guesclin. “In our fondest hopes we never thought to hold Bordeaux. By Saint Ives! this news hath warmed the heart within me. Our dear country will then be very great in the future, Tiphaine?”

“Great, and rich, and beautiful,” she cried. “Far down the course of time I can see her still leading the nations, a wayward queen among the peoples, great in war, but greater in peace, quick in thought, deft in action, with her people’s will for her sole monarch, from the sands of Calais to the blue seas of the south.”

“Ha!” cried Du Guesclin, with his eyes flashing in triumph, “you hear her, Sir Nigel? — and she never yet said word which was not sooth.”

The English knight shook his head moodily. “What of my own poor country?” said he. “I fear, lady, that what you have said bodes but small good for her.”

The lady sat with parted lips, and her breath came quick and fast. “My God!” she cried, “what is this that is shown me? Whence come they, these peoples, these lordly nations, these mighty countries which rise up before me? I look beyond, and others rise, and yet others, far and farther to the shores of the uttermost waters. They crowd! They swarm! The world is given to them, and it resounds with the clang of their hammers and the ringing of their church bells. They call them many names, and they rule them this way or that but they are all English, for I can hear the voices of the people. On I go, and onwards over seas where man hath never yet sailed, and I see a great land under new stars and a stranger sky, and still the land is England. Where have her children not gone? What have they not done? Her banner is planted on ice. Her banner is scorched in the sun. She lies athwart the lands, and her shadow is over the seas. Bertrand, Bertrand! we are undone for the buds of her bud are even as our choicest flower!” Her voice rose into a wild cry, and throwing up her arms she sank back white and nerveless into the deep oaken chair.

“It is over,” said Du Guesclin moodily, as he raised her drooping head with his strong brown hand. “Wine for the lady, squire! The blessed hour of sight hath passed.”

CHAPTER XXX. HOW THE BRUSHWOOD MEN CAME TO THE CHATEAU OF VILLEFRANCHE.

It was late ere Alleyne Edricson, having carried Sir Nigel the goblet of spiced wine which it was his custom to drink after the curling of his hair, was able at last to seek his chamber. It was a stone-flagged room upon the second floor, with a bed in a recess for him, and two smaller pallets on the other side, on which Aylward and Hordle John were already snoring. Alleyne had knelt down to his evening orisons, when there came a tap at his door, and Ford entered with a small lamp in his hand. His face was deadly pale, and his hand shook until the shadows flickered up and down the wall.

"What is it, Ford?" cried Alleyne, springing to his feet.

"I can scarce tell you," said he, sitting down on the side of the couch, and resting his chin upon his hand. "I know not what to say or what to think."

"Has aught befallen you, then?"

"Yes, or I have been slave to my own fancy. I tell you, lad, that I am all undone, like a fretted bow-string. Hark hither, Alleyne! it cannot be that you have forgotten little Tita, the daughter of the old glass-stainer at Bordeaux?"

"I remember her well."

"She and I, Alleyne, broke the lucky groat together ere we parted, and she wears my ring upon her finger. 'Caro mio,' quoth she when last we parted, 'I shall be near thee in the wars, and thy danger will be my danger.' Alleyne, as God is my help, as I came up the stairs this night I saw her stand before me, her face in tears, her hands out as though in warning — I saw it, Alleyne, even as I see those two archers upon their couches. Our very finger-tips seemed to meet, ere she thinned away like a mist in the sunshine."

"I would not give overmuch thought to it," answered Alleyne. "Our minds will play us strange pranks, and bethink you that these words of the Lady Tiphaine Du Guesclin have wrought upon us and shaken us."

Ford shook his head. "I saw little Tita as clearly as though I were back at the Rue des Apotres at Bordeaux," said he.

"But the hour is late, and I must go."

“Where do you sleep, then?”

“In the chamber above you. May the saints be with us all!” He rose from the couch and left the chamber, while Alleyne could hear his feet sounding upon the winding stair. The young squire walked across to the window and gazed out at the moonlit landscape, his mind absorbed by the thought of the Lady Tiphaine, and of the strange words that she had spoken as to what was going forward at Castle Twynham. Leaning his elbows upon the stonework, he was deeply plunged in reverie, when in a moment his thoughts were brought back to Villefranche and to the scene before him.

The window at which he stood was in the second floor of that portion of the castle which was nearest to the keep. In front lay the broad moat, with the moon lying upon its surface, now clear and round, now drawn lengthwise as the breeze stirred the waters. Beyond, the plain sloped down to a thick wood, while further to the left a second wood shut out the view. Between the two an open glade stretched, silvered in the moonshine, with the river curving across the lower end of it.

As he gazed, he saw of a sudden a man steal forth from the wood into the open clearing. He walked with his head sunk, his shoulders curved, and his knees bent, as one who strives hard to remain unseen. Ten paces from the fringe of trees he glanced around, and waving his hand he crouched down, and was lost to sight among a belt of furze-bushes. After him there came a second man, and after him a third, a fourth, and a fifth stealing across the narrow open space and darting into the shelter of the brushwood. Nine-and-seventy Alleyne counted of these dark figures flitting across the line of the moonlight. Many bore huge burdens upon their backs, though what it was that they carried he could not tell at the distance. Out of the one wood and into the other they passed, all with the same crouching, furtive gait, until the black bristle of trees had swallowed up the last of them.

For a moment Alleyne stood in the window, still staring down at the silent forest, uncertain as to what he should think of these midnight walkers. Then he bethought him that there was one beside him who was fitter to judge on such a matter. His fingers had scarce rested upon Aylward’s shoulder ere the bowman was on his feet, with his hand outstretched to his sword.

“Qui va?” he cried. “Hola! mon petit. By my hilt! I thought there had been a camisade. What then, mon gar.?”

“Come hither by the window, Aylward,” said Alleyne. “I have seen fourscore men pass from yonder shaw across the glade, and nigh every man of them had a great burden on his back. What think you of it?”

“I think nothing of it, mon camarade! There are as many masterless folk in this country as there are rabbits on Cowdray Down, and there are many who show their faces by night but would dance in a hempen collar if they stirred forth in the day. On all the French marches are droves of outcasts, reivers, spoilers, and draw-latches, of whom I judge that these are some, though I marvel that they should dare to come so nigh to the castle of the seneschal. All seems very quiet now,” he added, peering out of the window.

“They are in the further wood,” said Alleyne.

“And there they may bide. Back to rest, mon petit; for, by my hilt! each day now will bring its own work. Yet it would be well to shoot the bolt in yonder door when one is in strange quarters. So!” He threw himself down upon his pallet and in an instant was fast asleep.

It might have been about three o’clock in the morning when Alleyne was aroused from a troubled sleep by a low cry or exclamation. He listened, but, as he heard no more, he set it down as the challenge of the guard upon the walls, and dropped off to sleep once more. A few minutes later he was disturbed by a gentle creaking of his own door, as though some one were pushing cautiously against it, and immediately afterwards he heard the soft thud of cautious footsteps upon the stair which led to the room above, followed by a confused noise and a muffled groan. Alleyne sat up on his couch with all his nerves in a tingle, uncertain whether these sounds might come from a simple cause — some sick archer and visiting leech perhaps — or whether they might have a more sinister meaning. But what danger could threaten them here in this strong castle, under the care of famous warriors, with high walls and a broad moat around them? Who was there that could injure them? He had well-nigh persuaded himself that his fears were a foolish fancy, when his eyes fell upon that which sent the blood cold to his heart and left him gasping, with hands clutching at the counterpane.

Right in front of him was the broad window of the chamber, with the moon shining brightly through it. For an instant something had obscured the light, and now a head was bobbing up and down outside, the face looking in at him, and swinging slowly from one side of the window to the other. Even in that dim light there could be no mistaking those features. Drawn, distorted and blood-stained, they were still those of the young fellow-squire who had sat so recently upon his own couch. With a cry of horror Alleyne sprang from his bed and rushed to the casement, while the two archers, aroused by the sound, seized their weapons and stared about them in bewilderment. One glance was enough to show Edricson that his fears were but too true. Foully murdered, with a score of wounds upon him and a rope round his neck, his poor friend had been cast from the upper window and swung slowly in the night wind, his body rasping against the wall and his disfigured face upon a level with the casement.

"My God!" cried Alleyne, shaking in every limb. "What has come upon us? What devil's deed is this?"

"Here is flint and steel," said John stolidly. "The lamp, Aylward! This moonshine softens a man's heart. Now we may use the eyes which God hath given us."

"By my hilt!" cried Aylward, as the yellow flame flickered up, "it is indeed young master Ford, and I think that this seneschal is a black villain, who dare not face us in the day but would murther us in our sleep. By the twang of string! if I do not soak a goose's feather with his heart's blood, it will be no fault of Samkin Aylward of the White Company."

"But, Aylward, think of the men whom I saw yesternight," said Alleyne. "It may not be the seneschal. It may be that others have come into the castle. I must to Sir Nigel ere it be too late. Let me go, Aylward, for my place is by his side."

"One moment, mon gar. Put that steel head-piece on the end of my yew-stave. So! I will put it first through the door; for it is ill to come out when you can neither see nor guard yourself. Now, camarades, out swords and stand ready! Hola, by my hilt! it is time that we were stirring!"

As he spoke, a sudden shouting broke forth in the castle, with the scream of a woman and the rush of many feet. Then came the sharp clink of clashing steel, and a roar like that of an angry lion—"Notre Dame Du Guesclin! St. Ives! St. Ives!" The bow-man pulled back the bolt of the door, and thrust out the headpiece at the end of the bow. A clash, the clatter of the steel-cap upon the ground, and, ere the man who struck could heave up for another blow, the archer had passed his sword through his body. "On, camarades, on!" he cried; and, breaking fiercely past two men who threw themselves in his way, he sped down the broad corridor in the direction of the shouting.

A sharp turning, and then a second one, brought them to the head of a short stair, from which they looked straight down upon the scene of the uproar. A square oak-floored hall lay beneath them, from which opened the doors of the principal guest-chambers. This hall was as light as day, for torches burned in numerous sconces upon the walls, throwing strange shadows from the tusked or antlered heads which ornamented them. At the very foot of the stair, close to the open door of their chamber, lay the seneschal and his wife: she with her head shorn from her shoulders, he thrust through with a sharpened stake, which still protruded from either side of his body. Three servants of the castle lay dead beside them, all torn and draggled, as though a pack of wolves had been upon them. In front of the central guest-chamber stood Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel, half-clad and unarmored, with the mad joy of battle gleaming in their eyes. Their heads were thrown back, their lips compressed, their blood-stained swords poised over their right shoulders, and their left feet thrown out. Three dead men lay huddled together in front of them: while a fourth, with the blood squirting from a severed vessel, lay back with updrawn knees, breathing in wheezy gasps. Further back — all panting together, like the wind in a tree — there stood a group of fierce, wild creatures, bare-armed and bare-legged, gaunt, unshaven, with deep-set murderous eyes and wild beast faces. With their flashing teeth, their bristling hair, their mad leapings and screamings, they seemed to Alleyne more like fiends from the pit than men of flesh and blood. Even as he looked, they broke into a hoarse yell and dashed once more upon the two knights, hurling themselves madly upon their sword-points; clutching, scrambling, biting, tearing, careless of wounds if they could but drag the two soldiers to earth. Sir Nigel was thrown down by the sheer weight of them, and Sir Bertrand with his thunderous war-cry was swinging round his heavy sword to clear a space for him to rise, when the whistle of two long English arrows, and the rush of the squire and the two English archers down the stairs, turned the tide of the combat. The assailants gave back, the knights rushed forward, and in a very few moments the hall was cleared, and Hordle John had hurled the last of the wild men down the steep steps which led from the end of it.

“Do not follow them,” cried Du Guesclin. “We are lost if we scatter. For myself I care not a denier, though it is a poor thing to meet one’s end at the hands of such scum; but I have my dear lady here, who must by no means be risked. We have breathing-space now, and I would ask you, Sir Nigel, what it is that you would counsel?"

"By St. Paul!" answered Sir Nigel, "I can by no means understand what hath befallen us, save that I have been woken up by your battle-cry, and, rushing forth, found myself in the midst of this small bickering. Harrow and alas for the lady and the seneschal! What dogs are they who have done this bloody deed?"

"They are the Jacks, the men of the brushwood. They have the castle, though I know not how it hath come to pass. Look from this window into the bailey."

"By heaven!" cried Sir Nigel, "it is as bright as day with the torches. The gates stand open, and there are three thousand of them within the walls. See how they rush and scream and wave! What is it that they thrust out through the postern door? My God! it is a man-at-arms, and they pluck him limb from limb like hounds on a wolf. Now another, and yet another. They hold the whole castle, for I see their faces at the windows. See, there are some with great bundles on their backs."

"It is dried wood from the forest. They pile them against the walls and set them in a blaze. Who is this who tries to check them? By St. Ives! it is the good priest who spake for them in the hall. He kneels, he prays, he implores! What! villains, would ye raise hands against those who have befriended you? Ah, the butcher has struck him! He is down! They stamp him under their feet! They tear off his gown and wave it in the air! See now, how the flames lick up the walls! Are there none left to rally round us? With a hundred men we might hold our own."

"Oh, for my Company!" cried Sir Nigel. "But where is Ford, Alleyne?"

"He is foully murdered, my fair lord."

"The saints receive him! May he rest in peace! But here come some at last who may give us counsel, for amid these passages it is ill to stir without a guide."

As he spoke, a French squire and the Bohemian knight came rushing down the steps, the latter bleeding from a slash across his forehead.

"All is lost!" he cried. "The castle is taken and on fire, the seneschal is slain, and there is nought left for us."

"On the contrary," quoth Sir Nigel, "there is much left to us, for there is a very honorable contention before us, and a fair lady for whom to give our lives. There are many ways in which a man might die, but none better than this."

"You can tell us, Godfrey," said Du Guesclin to the French squire: "how came these men into the castle, and what succors can we count upon? By St. Ives! if we come not quickly to some counsel we shall be burned like young rooks in a nest."

The squire, a dark, slender stripling, spoke firmly and quickly, as one who was trained to swift action. "There is a passage under the earth into the castle," said he, "and through it some of the Jacks made their way, casting open the gates for the others. They have had help from within the walls, and the men-at-arms were heavy with wine: they must have been slain in their beds, for these devils crept from room to room with soft step and ready knife. Sir Amory the Hospitaller was struck down with an axe as he rushed before us from his sleeping-chamber. Save only ourselves, I do not think that there are any left alive."

"What, then, would you counsel?"

"That we make for the keep. It is unused, save in time of war, and the key hangs from my poor lord and master's belt."

"There are two keys there."

"It is the larger. Once there, we might hold the narrow stair; and at least, as the walls are of a greater thickness, it would be longer ere they could burn them. Could we but carry the lady across the bailey, all might be well with us."

"Nay; the lady hath seen something of the work of war," said Tiphaine coming forth, as white, as grave, and as unmoved as ever. "I would not be a hamper to you, my dear spouse and gallant friend. Rest assured of this, that if all else fail I have always a safeguard here" — drawing a small silver-hilted poniard from her bosom—"which sets me beyond the fear of these vile and blood-stained wretches."

"Tiphaine," cried Du Guesclin, "I have always loved you; and now, by Our Lady of Rennes! I love you more than ever. Did I not know that your hand will be as ready as your words I would myself turn my last blow upon you, ere you should fall into their hands. Lead on, Godfrey! A new golden pyx will shine in the minster of Dinan if we come safely through with it."

The attention of the insurgents had been drawn away from murder to plunder, and all over the castle might be heard their cries and whoops of delight as they dragged forth the rich tapestries, the silver flagons, and the carved furniture. Down in the courtyard half-clad wretches, their bare limbs all mottled with blood-stains, strutted about with plumed helmets upon their heads, or with the Lady Rochefort’s silken gowns girt round their loins and trailing on the ground behind them. Casks of choice wine had been rolled out from the cellars, and starving peasants squatted, goblet in hand, draining off vintages which De Rochefort had set aside for noble and royal guests. Others, with slabs of bacon and joints of dried meat upon the ends of their pikes, held them up to the blaze or tore at them ravenously with their teeth. Yet all order had not been lost amongst them, for some hundreds of the better armed stood together in a silent group, leaning upon their rude weapons and looking up at the fire, which had spread so rapidly as to involve one whole side of the castle. Already Alleyne could hear the crackling and roaring of the flames, while the air was heavy with heat and full of the pungent whiff of burning wood.

CHAPTER XXXI. HOW FIVE MEN HELD THE KEEP OF VILLEFRANCHE

Under the guidance of the French squire the party passed down two narrow corridors. The first was empty, but at the head of the second stood a peasant sentry, who started off at the sight of them, yelling loudly to his comrades. “Stop him, or we are undone!” cried Du Guesclin, and had started to run, when Aylward’s great war-bow twanged like a harp-string, and the man fell forward upon his face, with twitching limbs and clutching fingers. Within five paces of where he lay a narrow and little-used door led out into the bailey. From beyond it came such a Babel of hooting and screaming, horrible oaths and yet more horrible laughter, that the stoutest heart might have shrunk from casting down the frail barrier which faced them.

“Make straight for the keep!” said Du Guesclin, in a sharp, stern whisper. “The two archers in front, the lady in the centre, a squire on either side, while we three knights shall bide behind and beat back those who press upon us. So! Now open the door, and God have us in his holy keeping!”

For a few moments it seemed that their object would be attained without danger, so swift and so silent had been their movements. They were half-way across the bailey ere the frantic, howling peasants made a movement to stop them. The few who threw themselves in their way were overpowered or brushed aside, while the pursuers were beaten back by the ready weapons of the three cavaliers. Unscathed they fought their way to the door of the keep, and faced round upon the swarming mob, while the squire thrust the great key into the lock.

“My God!” he cried, “it is the wrong key.”

“The wrong key!”

“Dolt, fool that I am! This is the key of the castle gate; the other opens the keep. I must back for it!” He turned, with some wild intention of retracing his steps, but at the instant a great jagged rock, hurled by a brawny peasant, struck him full upon the ear, and he dropped senseless to the ground.

“This is key enough for me!” quoth Hordle John, picking up the huge stone, and hurling it against the door with all the strength of his enormous body. The lock shivered, the wood smashed, the stone flew into five pieces, but the iron clamps still held the door in its position. Bending down, he thrust his great fingers under it, and with a heave raised the whole mass of wood and iron from its hinges. For a moment it tottered and swayed, and then, falling outward, buried him in its ruin, while his comrades rushed into the dark archway which led to safety.

"Up the steps, Tiphaine!" cried Du Guesclin. "Now round, friends, and beat them back!" The mob of peasants had surged in upon their heels, but the two trustiest blades in Europe gleamed upon that narrow stair, and four of their number dropped upon the threshold. The others gave back, and gathered in a half circle round the open door, gnashing their teeth and shaking their clenched hands at the defenders. The body of the French squire had been dragged out by them and hacked to pieces. Three or four others had pulled John from under the door, when he suddenly bounded to his feet, and clutching one in either hand dashed them together with such force that they fell senseless across each other upon the ground. With a kick and a blow he freed himself from two others who clung to him, and in a moment he was within the portal with his comrades.

Yet their position was a desperate one. The peasants from far and near had been assembled for this deed of vengeance, and not less than six thousand were within or around the walls of the Chateau of Villefranche. Ill armed and half starved, they were still desperate men, to whom danger had lost all fears: for what was death that they should shun it to cling to such a life as theirs? The castle was theirs, and the roaring flames were spurting through the windows and flickering high above the turrets on two sides of the quadrangle. From either side they were sweeping down from room to room and from bastion to bastion in the direction of the keep. Faced by an army, and girt in by fire, were six men and one woman; but some of them were men so trained to danger and so wise in war that even now the combat was less unequal than it seemed. Courage and resource were penned in by desperation and numbers, while the great yellow sheets of flame threw their lurid glare over the scene of death.

"There is but space for two upon a step to give free play to our sword-arms," said Du Guesclin. "Do you stand with me, Nigel, upon the lowest. France and England will fight together this night. Sir Otto, I pray you to stand behind us with this young squire. The archers may go higher yet and shoot over our heads. I would that we had our harness, Nigel."

“Often have I heard my dear Sir John Chandos say that a knight should never, even when a guest, be parted from it. Yet it will be more honor to us if we come well out of it. We have a vantage, since we see them against the light and they can scarce see us. It seems to me that they muster for an onslaught.”

“If we can but keep them in play,” said the Bohemian, “it is likely that these flames may bring us succor if there be any true men in the country.”

“Bethink you, my fair lord,” said Alleyne to Sir Nigel, “that we have never injured these men, nor have we cause of quarrel against them. Would it not be well, if but for the lady’s sake, to speak them fair and see if we may not come to honorable terms with them?”

“Not so, by St. Paul!” cried Sir Nigel. “It does not accord with mine honor, nor shall it ever be said that I, a knight of England, was ready to hold parley with men who have slain a fair lady and a holy priest.”

“As well hold parley with a pack of ravening wolves,” said the French captain. “Ha! Notre Dame Du Guesclin! Saint Ives! Saint Ives!”

As he thundered forth his war-cry, the Jacks who had been gathering before the black arch of the gateway rushed in madly in a desperate effort to carry the staircase. Their leaders were a small man, dark in the face, with his beard done up in two plaits, and another larger man, very bowed in the shoulders, with a huge club studded with sharp nails in his hand. The first had not taken three steps ere an arrow from Aylward’s bow struck him full in the chest, and he fell coughing and spluttering across the threshold. The other rushed onwards, and breaking between Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel he dashed out the brains of the Bohemian with a single blow of his clumsy weapon. With three swords through him he still struggled on, and had almost won his way through them ere he fell dead upon the stair. Close at his heels came a hundred furious peasants, who flung themselves again and again against the five swords which confronted them. It was cut and parry and stab as quick as eye could see or hand act. The door was piled with bodies, and the stone floor was slippery with blood. The deep shout of Du Guesclin, the hard, hissing breath of the pressing multitude, the clatter of steel, the thud of falling bodies, and the screams of the stricken, made up such a medley as came often in after years to break upon Alleyne’s sleep. Slowly and sullenly at last the throng drew off, with many a fierce backward glance, while eleven of their number lay huddled in front of the stair which they had failed to win.

“The dogs have had enough,” said Du Guesclin.

“By Saint Paul! there appear to be some very worthy and valiant persons among them,” observed Sir Nigel. “They are men from whom, had they been of better birth, much honor and advancement might be gained. Even as it is, it is a great pleasure to have seen them. But what is this that they are bringing forward?”

“It is as I feared,” growled Du Guesclin. “They will burn us out, since they cannot win their way past us. Shoot straight and hard, archers; for, by St. Ives! our good swords are of little use to us.”

As he spoke, a dozen men rushed forward, each screening himself behind a huge fardel of brushwood. Hurling their burdens in one vast heap within the portal, they threw burning torches upon the top of it. The wood had been soaked in oil, for in an instant it was ablaze, and a long, hissing, yellow flame licked over the heads of the defenders, and drove them further up to the first floor of the keep. They had scarce reached it, however, ere they found that the wooden joists and planks of the flooring were already on fire. Dry and worm-eaten, a spark upon them became a smoulder, and a smoulder a blaze. A choking smoke filled the air, and the five could scarce grope their way to the staircase which led up to the very summit of the square tower.

Strange was the scene which met their eyes from this eminence. Beneath them on every side stretched the long sweep of peaceful country, rolling plain, and tangled wood, all softened and mellowed in the silver moonshine. No light, nor movement, nor any sign of human aid could be seen, but far away the hoarse clangor of a heavy bell rose and fell upon the wintry air. Beneath and around them blazed the huge fire, roaring and crackling on every side of the bailey, and even as they looked the two corner turrets fell in with a deafening crash, and the whole castle was but a shapeless mass, spouting flames and smoke from every window and embrasure. The great black tower upon which they stood rose like a last island of refuge amid this sea of fire but the ominous crackling and roaring below showed that it would not be long ere it was engulfed also in the common ruin. At their very feet was the square courtyard, crowded with the howling and dancing peasants, their fierce faces upturned, their clenched hands waving, all drunk with bloodshed and with vengeance. A yell of execration and a scream of hideous laughter burst from the vast throng, as they saw the faces of the last survivors of their enemies peering down at them from the height of the keep. They still piled the brushwood round the base of the tower, and gambolled hand in hand around the blaze, screaming out the doggerel lines which had long been the watchword of the Jacquerie:

Cessez, cessez, gens d’armes et pietons,
De piller et manger le bonhomme
Qui de longtemps Jacques Bonhomme
Se nomme.

Their thin, shrill voices rose high above the roar of the flames and the crash of the masonry, like the yelping of a pack of wolves who see their quarry before them and know that they have well-nigh run him down.

“By my hilt!” said Aylward to John, “it is in my mind that we shall not see Spain this journey. It is a great joy to me that I have placed my feather-bed and other things of price with that worthy woman at Lyndhurst, who will now have the use of them. I have thirteen arrows yet, and if one of them fly unfleshed, then, by the twang of string! I shall deserve my doom. First at him who flaunts with my lady’s silken frock. Clap in the clout, by God! though a hand’s-breadth lower than I had meant. Now for the rogue with the head upon his pike. Ha! to the inch, John. When my eye is true, I am better at rovers than at long-butts or hoyles. A good shoot for you also, John! The villain hath fallen forward into the fire. But I pray you, John, to loose gently, and not to pluck with the drawing-hand, for it is a trick that hath marred many a fine bowman.”

Whilst the two archers were keeping up a brisk fire upon the mob beneath them, Du Guesclin and his lady were consulting with Sir Nigel upon their desperate situation.

“‘Tis a strange end for one who has seen so many stricken fields,” said the French chieftain. “For me one death is as another, but it is the thought of my sweet lady which goes to my heart.”

“Nay, Bertrand, I fear it as little as you,” said she. “Had I my dearest wish, it would be that we should go together.”

“Well answered, fair lady!” cried Sir Nigel. “And very sure I am that my own sweet wife would have said the same. If the end be now come, I have had great good fortune in having lived in times when so much glory was to be won, and in knowing so many valiant gentlemen and knights. But why do you pluck my sleeve, Alleyne?”

“If it please you, my fair lord, there are in this corner two great tubes of iron, with many heavy balls, which may perchance be those bombards and shot of which I have heard."

"By Saint Ives! it is true," cried Sir Bertrand, striding across to the recess where the ungainly, funnel-shaped, thick-ribbed engines were standing. "Bombards they are, and of good size. We may shoot down upon them."

"Shoot with them, quotha?" cried Aylward in high disdain, for pressing danger is the great leveller of classes. "How is a man to take aim with these fool's toys, and how can he hope to do scath with them?"

"I will show you," answered Sir Nigel; "for here is the great box of powder, and if you will raise it for me, John, I will show you how it may be used. Come hither, where the folk are thickest round the fire. Now, Aylward, crane thy neck and see what would have been deemed an old wife's tale when we first turned our faces to the wars. Throw back the lid, John, and drop the box into the fire!"

A deafening roar, a fluff of bluish light, and the great square tower rocked and trembled from its very foundations, swaying this way and that like a reed in the wind. Amazed and dizzy, the defenders, clutching at the cracking parapets for support, saw great stones, burning beams of wood, and mangled bodies hurtling past them through the air. When they staggered to their feet once more, the whole keep had settled down upon one side, so that they could scarce keep their footing upon the sloping platform. Gazing over the edge, they looked down upon the horrible destruction which had been caused by the explosion. For forty yards round the portal the ground was black with writhing, screaming figures, who struggled up and hurled themselves down again, tossing this way and that, sightless, scorched, with fire bursting from their tattered clothing. Beyond this circle of death their comrades, bewildered and amazed, cowered away from this black tower and from these invincible men, who were most to be dreaded when hope was furthest from their hearts.

"A sally, Du Guesclin, a sally!" cried Sir Nigel. "By Saint Paul! they are in two minds, and a bold rush may turn them." He drew his sword as he spoke and darted down the winding stairs, closely followed by his four comrades. Ere he was at the first floor, however, he threw up his arms and stopped. "Mon Dieu!" he said, "we are lost men!"

"What then?" cried those behind him.

"The wail hath fallen in, the stair is blocked, and the fire still rages below. By Saint Paul! friends, we have fought a very honorable fight, and may say in all humbleness that we have done our devoir, but I think that we may now go back to the Lady Tiphaine and say our orisons, for we have played our parts in this world, and it is time that we made ready for another."

The narrow pass was blocked by huge stones littered in wild confusion over each other, with the blue choking smoke reeking up through the crevices. The explosion had blown in the wall and cut off the only path by which they could descend. Pent in, a hundred feet from earth, with a furnace raging under them and a ravening multitude all round who thirsted for their blood, it seemed indeed as though no men had ever come through such peril with their lives. Slowly they made their way back to the summit, but as they came out upon it the Lady Tiphaine darted forward and caught her husband by the wrist.

"Bertrand," said she, "hush and listen! I have heard the voices of men all singing together in a strange tongue."

Breathless they stood and silent, but no sound came up to them, save the roar of the flames and the clamor of their enemies.

"It cannot be, lady," said Du Guesclin. "This night hath over wrought you, and your senses play you false. What men ere there in this country who would sing in a strange tongue?"

"Hola!" yelled Aylward, leaping suddenly into the air with waving hands and joyous face. "I thought I heard it ere we went down, and now I hear it again. We are saved, comrades! By these ten finger-bones, we are saved! It is the marching song of the White Company. Hush!"

With upraised forefinger and slanting head, he stood listening. Suddenly there came swelling up a deep-voiced, rollicking chorus from somewhere out of the darkness. Never did choice or dainty ditty of Provence or Languedoc sound more sweetly in the ears than did the rough-tongued Saxon to the six who strained their ears from the blazing keep:

We'll drink all together
To the gray goose feather
  And the land where the gray goose flew.

"Ha, by my hilt!" shouted Aylward, "it is the dear old bow song of the Company. Here come two hundred as tight lads as ever twirled a shaft over their thumbnails. Hark to the dogs, how lustily they sing!"

Nearer and clearer, swelling up out of the night, came the gay marching lilt:

What of the bow?
  The bow was made in England.

Of true wood, of yew wood,
   The wood of English bows;
For men who are free
Love the old yew-tree
   And the land where the yew tree grows.

What of the men?
   The men were bred in England,
The bowmen, the yeomen,
   The lads of the dale and fell,
Here's to you and to you,
To the hearts that are true,
   And the land where the true hearts dwell.

"They sing very joyfully," said Du Guesclin, "as though they were going to a festival."

"It is their wont when there is work to be done."

"By Saint Paul!" quoth Sir Nigel, "it is in my mind that they come too late, for I cannot see how we are to come down from this tower."

"There they come, the hearts of gold!" cried Aylward. "See, they move out from the shadow. Now they cross the meadow. They are on the further side of the moat. Hola camarades, hola! Johnston, Eccles, Cooke, Harward, Bligh! Would ye see a fair lady and two gallant knights done foully to death?"

"Who is there?" shouted a deep voice from below. "Who is this who speaks with an English tongue?"

"It is I, old lad. It is Sam Aylward of the Company; and here is your captain, Sir Nigel Loring, and four others, all laid out to be grilled like an Easterling's herrings."

"Curse me if I did not think that it was the style of speech of old Samkin Aylward," said the voice, amid a buzz from the ranks. "Wherever there are knocks going there is Sammy in the heart of it. But who are these ill-faced rogues who block the path? To your kennels, canaille! What! you dare look us in the eyes? Out swords, lads, and give them the flat of them! Waste not your shafts upon such runagate knaves."

There was little fight left in the peasants, however, still dazed by the explosion, amazed at their own losses and disheartened by the arrival of the disciplined archers. In a very few minutes they were in full flight for their brushwood homes, leaving the morning sun to rise upon a blackened and blood-stained ruin, where it had left the night before the magnificent castle of the Seneschal of Auvergne. Already the white lines in the east were deepening into pink as the archers gathered round the keep and took counsel how to rescue the survivors.

“Had we a rope,” said Alleyne, “there is one side which is not yet on fire, down which we might slip.”

“But how to get a rope?”

“It is an old trick,” quoth Aylward. “Hola! Johnston, cast me up a rope, even as you did at Maupertuis in the war time.”

The grizzled archer thus addressed took several lengths of rope from his comrades, and knotting them firmly together, he stretched them out in the long shadow which the rising sun threw from the frowning keep. Then he fixed the yew-stave of his bow upon end and measured the long, thin, black line which it threw upon the turf.

“A six-foot stave throws a twelve-foot shadow,” he muttered. “The keep throws a shadow of sixty paces. Thirty paces of rope will be enow and to spare. Another strand, Watkin! Now pull at the end that all may be safe. So! It is ready for them.’

“But how are they to reach it?” asked the young archer beside him.

“Watch and see, young fool’s-head,” growled the old bowman. He took a long string from his pouch and fastened one end to an arrow.

“All ready, Samkin?”

“Ready, camarade.”

“Close to your hand then.” With an easy pull he sent the shaft flickering gently up, falling upon the stonework within a foot of where Aylward was standing. The other end was secured to the rope, so that in a minute a good strong cord was dangling from the only sound side of the blazing and shattered tower. The Lady Tiphaine was lowered with a noose drawn fast under the arms, and the other five slid swiftly down, amid the cheers and joyous outcry of their rescuers.

CHAPTER XXXII. HOW THE COMPANY TOOK COUNSEL ROUND THE FALLEN TREE.

“Where is Sir Claude Latour?” asked Sir Nigel, as his feet touched ground.

“He is in camp, near Montpezat, two hours’ march from here, my fair lord,” said Johnston, the grizzled bowman who commanded the archers.

“Then we shall march thither, for I would fain have you all back at Dax in time to be in the prince’s vanguard.”

“My lord,” cried Alleyne, joyfully, “here are our chargers in the field, and I see your harness amid the plunder which these rogues have left behind them.”

“By Saint Ives! you speak sooth, young squire,” said Du Guesclin. “There is my horse and my lady’s jennet. The knaves led them from the stables, but fled without them. Now, Nigel, it is great joy to me to have seen one of whom I have often heard. Yet we must leave you now, for I must be with the King of Spain ere your army crosses the mountains.”

“I had thought that you were in Spain with the valiant Henry of Trastamare.”

“I have been there, but I came to France to raise succor for him. I shall ride back, Nigel, with four thousand of the best lances of France at my back, so that your prince may find he hath a task which is worthy of him. God be with you, friend, and may we meet again in better times!”

“I do not think,” said Sir Nigel, as he stood by Alleyne’s side looking after the French knight and his lady, “that in all Christendom you will meet with a more stout-hearted man or a fairer and sweeter dame. But your face is pale and sad, Alleyne! Have you perchance met with some hurt during the ruffle?”

“Nay, my fair lord, I was but thinking of my friend Ford, and how he sat upon my couch no later than yesternight.”

Sir Nigel shook his head sadly. “Two brave squires have I lost,” said he. “I know not why the young shoots should be plucked, and an old weed left standing, yet certes there must be come good reason, since God hath so planned it. Did you not note, Alleyne, that the Lady Tiphaine did give us warning last night that danger was coming upon us?”

“She did, my lord.”

“By Saint Paul! my mind misgives me as to what she saw at Twynham Castle. And yet I cannot think that any Scottish or French rovers could land in such force as to beleaguer the fortalice. Call the Company together, Aylward; and let us on, for it will be shame to us if we are not at Dax upon the trysting day.”

The archers had spread themselves over the ruins, but a blast upon a bugle brought them all back to muster, with such booty as they could bear with them stuffed into their pouches or slung over their shoulders. As they formed into ranks, each man dropping silently into his place, Sir Nigel ran a questioning eye over them, and a smile of pleasure played over his face. Tall and sinewy, and brown, clear-eyed, hard-featured, with the stern and prompt bearing of experienced soldiers, it would be hard indeed for a leader to seek for a choicer following. Here and there in the ranks were old soldiers of the French wars, grizzled and lean, with fierce, puckered features and shaggy, bristling brows. The most, however, were young and dandy archers, with fresh English faces, their beards combed out, their hair curling from under their close steel hufkens, with gold or jewelled earrings gleaming in their ears, while their gold-spangled baldrics, their silken belts, and the chains which many of them wore round their thick brown necks, all spoke of the brave times which they had had as free companions. Each had a yew or hazel stave slung over his shoulder, plain and serviceable with the older men, but gaudily painted and carved at either end with the others. Steel caps, mail brigandines, white surcoats with the red lion of St. George, and sword or battle-axe swinging from their belts, completed this equipment, while in some cases the murderous maule or five-foot mallet was hung across the bowstave, being fastened to their leathern shoulder-belt by a hook in the centre of the handle. Sir Nigel’s heart beat high as he looked upon their free bearing and fearless faces.

For two hours they marched through forest and marshland, along the left bank of the river Aveyron; Sir Nigel riding behind his Company, with Alleyne at his right hand, and Johnston, the old master bowman, walking by his left stirrup. Ere they had reached their journey’s end the knight had learned all that he would know of his men, their doings and their intentions.

Once, as they marched, they saw upon the further bank of the river a body of French men-at-arms, riding very swiftly in the direction of Villefranche.

“It is the Seneschal of Toulouse, with his following,” said Johnston, shading his eyes with his hand. “Had he been on this side of the water he might have attempted something upon us.”

“I think that it would be well that we should cross,” said Sir Nigel. “It were pity to balk this worthy seneschal, should he desire to try some small feat of arms.”

“Nay, there is no ford nearer than Tourville,” answered the old archer. “He is on his way to Villefranche, and short will be the shrift of any Jacks who come into his hands, for he is a man of short speech. It was he and the Seneschal of Beaucaire who hung Peter Wilkins, of the Company, last Lammastide; for which, by the black rood of Waltham! they shall hang themselves, if ever they come into our power. But here are our comrades, Sir Nigel, and here is our camp.”

As he spoke, the forest pathway along which they marched opened out into a green glade, which sloped down towards the river. High, leafless trees girt it in on three sides, with a thick undergrowth of holly between their trunks. At the farther end of this forest clearing there stood forty or fifty huts, built very neatly from wood and clay, with the blue smoke curling out from the roofs. A dozen tethered horses and mules grazed around the encampment, while a number of archers lounged about: some shooting at marks, while others built up great wooden fires in the open, and hung their cooking kettles above them. At the sight of their returning comrades there was a shout of welcome, and a horseman, who had been exercising his charger behind the camp, came cantering down to them. He was a dapper, brisk man, very richly clad, with a round, clean-shaven face, and very bright black eyes, which danced and sparkled with excitement.

“Sir Nigel!” he cried. “Sir Nigel Loring, at last! By my soul we have awaited you this month past. Right welcome, Sir Nigel! You have had my letter?”

“It was that which brought me here,” said Sir Nigel. “But indeed, Sir Claude Latour, it is a great wonder to me that you did not yourself lead these bowmen, for surely they could have found no better leader?”

“None, none, by the Virgin of L’Esparre!” he cried, speaking in the strange, thick Gascon speech which turns every *v* into a *b*. “But you know what these islanders of yours are, Sir Nigel. They will not be led by any save their own blood and race. There is no persuading them. Not even I, Claude Latour Seigneur of Montchateau, master of the high justice, the middle and the low, could gain their favor. They must needs hold a council and put their two hundred thick heads together, and then there comes this fellow Aylward and another, as their spokesmen, to say that they will disband unless an Englishman of good name be set over them. There are many of them, as I understand, who come from some great forest which lies in Hampi, or Hampti — I cannot lay my tongue to the name. Your dwelling is in those parts, and so their thoughts turned to you as their leader. But we had hoped that you would bring a hundred men with you."

"They are already at Dax, where we shall join them," said Sir Nigel. "But let the men break their fast, and we shall then take counsel what to do."

"Come into my hut," said Sir Claude. "It is but poor fare that I can lay before you — milk, cheese, wine, and bacon — yet your squire and yourself will doubtless excuse it. This is my house where the pennon flies before the door — a small residence to contain the Lord of Montchateau."

Sir Nigel sat silent and distrait at his meal, while Alleyne hearkened to the clattering tongue of the Gascon, and to his talk of the glories of his own estate, his successes in love, and his triumphs in war.

"And now that you are here, Sir Nigel," he said at last, "I have many fine ventures all ready for us. I have heard that Montpezat is of no great strength, and that there are two hundred thousand crowns in the castle. At Castelnau also there is a cobbler who is in my pay, and who will throw us a rope any dark night from his house by the town wall. I promise you that you shall thrust your arms elbow-deep among good silver pieces ere the nights are moonless again; for on every hand of us are fair women, rich wine, and good plunder, as much as heart could wish."

"I have other plans," answered Sir Nigel curtly; "for I have come hither to lead these bowmen to the help of the prince, our master, who may have sore need of them ere he set Pedro upon the throne of Spain. It is my purpose to start this very day for Dax upon the Adour, where he hath now pitched his camp."

The face of the Gascon darkened, and his eyes flashed with resentment, "For me," he said, "I care little for this war, and I find the life which I lead a very joyous and pleasant one. I will not go to Dax."

"Nay, think again, Sir Claude," said Sir Nigel gently; "for you have ever had the name of a true and loyal knight. Surely you will not hold back now when your master hath need of you."

"I will not go to Dax," the other shouted.

"But your devoir — your oath of fealty?"

"I say that I will not go."

"Then, Sir Claude, I must lead the Company without you."

"If they will follow," cried the Gascon with a sneer. "These are not hired slaves, but free companions, who will do nothing save by their own good wills. In very sooth, my Lord Loring, they are ill men to trifle with, and it were easier to pluck a bone from a hungry bear than to lead a bowman out of a land of plenty and of pleasure."

"Then I pray you to gather them together," said Sir Nigel, "and I will tell them what is in my mind; for if I am their leader they must to Dax, and if I am not then I know not what I am doing in Auvergne. Have my horse ready, Alleyne; for, by St. Paul! come what may, I must be upon the homeward road ere mid-day."

A blast upon the bugle summoned the bowmen to counsel, and they gathered in little knots and groups around a great fallen tree which lay athwart the glade. Sir Nigel sprang lightly upon the trunk, and stood with blinking eye and firm lips looking down at the ring of upturned warlike faces.

"They tell me, bowmen," said he, "that ye have grown so fond of ease and plunder and high living that ye are not to be moved from this pleasant country. But, by Saint Paul! I will believe no such thing of you, for I can readily see that you are all very valiant men, who would scorn to live here in peace when your prince hath so great a venture before him. Ye have chosen me as a leader, and a leader I will be if ye come with me to Spain; and I vow to you that my pennon of the five roses shall, if God give me strength and life, be ever where there is most honor to be gained. But if it be your wish to loll and loiter in these glades, bartering glory and renown for vile gold and ill-gotten riches, then ye must find another leader; for I have lived in honor, and in honor I trust that I shall die. If there be forest men or Hampshire men amongst ye, I call upon them to say whether they will follow the banner of Loring."

"Here's a Romsey man for you!" cried a young bowman with a sprig of evergreen set in his helmet.

"And a lad from Alresford!" shouted another.

"And from Milton!"

"And from Burley!"

"And from Lymington!"

"And a little one from Brockenhurst!" shouted a huge-limbed fellow who sprawled beneath a tree.

"By my hilt! lads," cried Aylward, jumping upon the fallen trunk, "I think that we could not look the girls in the eyes if we let the prince cross the mountains and did not pull string to clear a path for him. It is very well in time of peace to lead such a life as we have had together, but now the war-banner is in the wind once more, and, by these ten finger-bones! if he go alone, old Samkin Aylward will walk beside it."

These words from a man as popular as Aylward decided many of the waverers, and a shout of approval burst from his audience.

"Far be it from me," said Sir Claude Latour suavely, "to persuade you against this worthy archer, or against Sir Nigel Loring; yet we have been together in many ventures, and perchance it may not be amiss if I say to you what I think upon the matter."

"Peace for the little Gascon!" cried the archers. "Let every man have his word. Shoot straight for the mark, lad, and fair play for all."

"Bethink you, then," said Sir Claude, "that you go under a hard rule, with neither freedom nor pleasure — and for what? For sixpence a day, at the most; while now you may walk across the country and stretch out either hand to gather in whatever you have a mind for. What do we not hear of our comrades who have gone with Sir John Hawkwood to Italy? In one night they have held to ransom six hundred of the richest noblemen of Mantua. They camp before a great city, and the base burghers come forth with the keys, and then they make great spoil; or, if it please them better, they take so many horse-loads of silver as a composition; and so they journey on from state to state, rich and free and feared by all. Now, is not that the proper life for a soldier?"

"The proper life for a robber!" roared Hordle John, in his thundering voice.

"And yet there is much in what the Gascon says," said a swarthy fellow in a weather-stained doublet; "and I for one would rather prosper in Italy than starve in Spain."

"You were always a cur and a traitor, Mark Shaw," cried Aylward. "By my hilt! if you will stand forth and draw your sword I will warrant you that you will see neither one nor the other."

“Nay, Aylward,” said Sir Nigel, “we cannot mend the matter by broiling. Sir Claude, I think that what you have said does you little honor, and if my words aggrieve you I am ever ready to go deeper into the matter with you. But you shall have such men as will follow you, and you may go where you will, so that you come not with us. Let all who love their prince and country stand fast, while those who think more of a well-lined purse step forth upon the farther side.”

Thirteen bowmen, with hung heads and sheepish faces, stepped forward with Mark Shaw and ranged themselves behind Sir Claude. Amid the hootings and hissings of their comrades, they marched off together to the Gascon’s hut, while the main body broke up their meeting and set cheerily to work packing their possessions, furbishing their weapons, and preparing for the march which lay before them. Over the Tarn and the Garonne, through the vast quagmires of Armagnac, past the swift-flowing Losse, and so down the long valley of the Adour, there was many a long league to be crossed ere they could join themselves to that dark war-cloud which was drifting slowly southwards to the line of the snowy peaks, beyond which the banner of England had never yet been seen.

CHAPTER XXXIII. HOW THE ARMY MADE THE PASSAGE OF RONCESVALLES.

The whole vast plain of Gascony and of Languedoc is an arid and profitless expanse in winter save where the swift-flowing Adour and her snow-fed tributaries, the Louts, the Oloron and the Pau, run down to the sea of Biscay. South of the Adour the jagged line of mountains which fringe the sky-line send out long granite claws, running down into the lowlands and dividing them into “gaves” or stretches of valley. Hillocks grow into hills, and hills into mountains, each range overlying its neighbour, until they soar up in the giant chain which raises its spotless and untrodden peaks, white and dazzling, against the pale blue wintry sky.

A quiet land is this — a land where the slow-moving Basque, with his flat biretta-cap, his red sash and his hempen sandals, tills his scanty farm or drives his lean flock to their hill-side pastures. It is the country of the wolf and the isard, of the brown bear and the mountain-goat, a land of bare rock and of rushing water. Yet here it was that the will of a great prince had now assembled a gallant army; so that from the Adour to the passes of Navarre the barren valleys and wind-swept wastes were populous with soldiers and loud with the shouting of orders and the neighing of horses. For the banners of war had been flung to the wind once more, and over those glistening peaks was the highway along which Honor pointed in an age when men had chosen her as their guide.

And now all was ready for the enterprise. From Dax to St. Jean Pied-du-Port the country was mottled with the white tents of Gascons, Aquitanians and English, all eager for the advance. From all sides the free companions had trooped in, until not less than twelve thousand of these veteran troops were cantoned along the frontiers of Navarre. From England had arrived the prince’s brother, the Duke of Lancaster, with four hundred knights in his train and a strong company of archers. Above all, an heir to the throne had been born in Bordeaux, and the prince might leave his spouse with an easy mind, for all was well with mother and with child.

The keys of the mountain passes still lay in the hands of the shifty and ignoble Charles of Navarre, who had chaffered and bargained both with the

English and with the Spanish, taking money from the one side to hold them open and from the other to keep them sealed. The mallet hand of Edward, however, had shattered all the schemes and wiles of the plotter. Neither entreaty nor courtly remonstrance came from the English prince; but Sir Hugh Calverley passed silently over the border with his company, and the blazing walls of the two cities of Miranda and Puenta de la Reyna warned the unfaithful monarch that there were other metals besides gold, and that he was dealing with a man to whom it was unsafe to lie. His price was paid, his objections silenced, and the mountain gorges lay open to the invaders. From the Feast of the Epiphany there was mustering and massing, until, in the first week of February — three days after the White Company joined the army — the word was given for a general advance through the defile of Roncesvalles. At five in the cold winter's morning the bugles were blowing in the hamlet of St. Jean Pied-du-Port, and by six Sir Nigel's Company, three hundred strong, were on their way for the defile, pushing swiftly in the dim light up the steep curving road; for it was the prince's order that they should be the first to pass through, and that they should remain on guard at the further end until the whole army had emerged from the mountains. Day was already breaking in the east, and the summits of the great peaks had turned rosy red, while the valleys still lay in the shadow, when they found themselves with the cliffs on either hand and the long, rugged pass stretching away before them.

Sir Nigel rode his great black war-horse at the head of his archers, dressed in full armor, with Black Simon bearing his banner behind him, while Alleyne at his bridle-arm carried his blazoned shield and his well-steeled ashen spear. A proud and happy man was the knight, and many a time he turned in his saddle to look at the long column of bowmen who swung swiftly along behind him.

"By Saint Paul! Alleyne," said he, "this pass is a very perilous place, and I would that the King of Navarre had held it against us, for it would have been a very honorable venture had it fallen to us to win a passage. I have heard the minstrels sing of one Sir Roland who was slain by the infidels in these very parts."

"If it please you, my fair lord," said Black Simon, "I know something of these parts, for I have twice served a term with the King of Navarre. There is a hospice of monks yonder, where you may see the roof among the trees, and there it was that Sir Roland was slain. The village upon the left is

Orbaiceta, and I know a house therein where the right wine of Jurancon is to be bought, if it would please you to quaff a morning cup."

"There is smoke yonder upon the right."

"That is a village named Les Aldudes, and I know a hostel there also where the wine is of the best. It is said that the inn-keeper hath a buried treasure, and I doubt not, my fair lord, that if you grant me leave I could prevail upon him to tell us where he hath hid it."

"Nay, nay, Simon," said Sir Nigel curtly, "I pray you to forget these free companion tricks. Ha! Edricson, I see that you stare about you, and in good sooth these mountains must seem wondrous indeed to one who hath but seen Butser or the Portsdown hill."

The broken and rugged road had wound along the crests of low hills, with wooded ridges on either side of it over which peeped the loftier mountains, the distant Peak of the South and the vast Altabisca, which towered high above them and cast its black shadow from left to right across the valley. From where they now stood they could look forward down a long vista of beech woods and jagged rock-strewn wilderness, all white with snow, to where the pass opened out upon the uplands beyond. Behind them they could still catch a glimpse of the gray plains of Gascony, and could see her rivers gleaming like coils of silver in the sunshine. As far as eye could see from among the rocky gorges and the bristles of the pine woods there came the quick twinkle and glitter of steel, while the wind brought with it sudden distant bursts of martial music from the great host which rolled by every road and by-path towards the narrow pass of Roncesvalles. On the cliffs on either side might also be seen the flash of arms and the waving of pennons where the force of Navarre looked down upon the army of strangers who passed through their territories.

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, blinking up at them, "I think that we have much to hope for from these cavaliers, for they cluster very thickly upon our flanks. Pass word to the men, Aylward, that they unsling their bows, for I have no doubt that there are some very worthy gentlemen yonder who may give us some opportunity for honorable advancement."

"I hear that the prince hath the King of Navarre as hostage," said Alleyne, "and it is said that he hath sworn to put him to death if there be any attack upon us."

"It was not so that war was made when good King Edward first turned his hand to it," said Sir Nigel sadly. "Ah! Alleyne, I fear that you will never live to see such things, for the minds of men are more set upon money and gain than of old. By Saint Paul! it was a noble sight when two great armies would draw together upon a certain day, and all who had a vow would ride forth to discharge themselves of it. What noble spear-runnings have I not seen, and even in an humble way had a part in, when cavaliers would run a course for the easing of their souls and for the love of their ladies! Never a bad word have I for the French, for, though I have ridden twenty times up to their array, I have never yet failed to find some very gentle and worthy knight or squire who was willing to do what he might to enable me to attempt some small feat of arms. Then, when all cavaliers had been satisfied, the two armies would come to hand-strokes, and fight right merrily until one or other had the vantage. By Saint Paul! it was not our wont in those days to pay gold for the opening of passes, nor would we hold a king as hostage lest his people come to thrusts with us. In good sooth, if the war is to be carried out in such a fashion, then it is grief to me that I ever came away from Castle Twynham, for I would not have left my sweet lady had I not thought that there were deeds of arms to be done."

"But surely, my fair lord," said Alleyne, "you have done some great feats of arms since we left the Lady Loring."

"I cannot call any to mind," answered Sir Nigel.

"There was the taking of the sea-rovers, and the holding of the keep against the Jacks."

"Nay, nay," said the knight, "these were not feats of arms, but mere wayside ventures and the chances of travel. By Saint Paul! if it were not that these hills are over-steep for Pommers, I would ride to these cavaliers of Navarre and see if there were not some among them who would help me to take this patch from mine eye. It is a sad sight to see this very fine pass, which my own Company here could hold against an army, and yet to ride through it with as little profit as though it were the lane from my kennels to the Avon."

All morning Sir Nigel rode in a very ill-humor, with his Company tramping behind him. It was a toilsome march over broken ground and through snow, which came often as high as the knee, yet ere the sun had begun to sink they had reached the spot where the gorge opens out on to the uplands of Navarre, and could see the towers of Pampeluna jutting up against the southern sky-line. Here the Company were quartered in a scattered mountain hamlet, and Alleyne spent the day looking down upon the swarming army which poured with gleam of spears and flaunt of standards through the narrow pass.

"Hola, mon gar.," said Aylward, seating himself upon a boulder by his side. "This is indeed a fine sight upon which it is good to look, and a man might go far ere he would see so many brave men and fine horses. By my hilt! our little lord is wroth because we have come peacefully through the passes, but I will warrant him that we have fighting enow ere we turn our faces northward again. It is said that there are four-score thousand men behind the King of Spain, with Du Guesclin and all the best lances of France, who have sworn to shed their heart's blood ere this Pedro come again to the throne."

"Yet our own army is a great one," said Alleyne.

"Nay, there are but seven-and-twenty thousand men. Chandos hath persuaded the prince to leave many behind, and indeed I think that he is right, for there is little food and less water in these parts for which we are bound. A man without his meat or a horse without his fodder is like a wet bow-string, fit for little. But voila, mon petit, here comes Chandos and his company, and there is many a pensil and banderole among yonder squadrons which show that the best blood of England is riding under his banners."

Whilst Aylward had been speaking, a strong column of archers had defiled through the pass beneath them. They were followed by a banner-bearer who held high the scarlet wedge upon a silver field which proclaimed the presence of the famous warrior. He rode himself within a spear's-length of his standard, clad from neck to foot in steel, but draped in the long linen gown or parement which was destined to be the cause of his death. His plumed helmet was carried behind him by his body-squire, and his head was covered by a small purple cap, from under which his snow-white hair curled downwards to his shoulders. With his long beak-like nose and his single gleaming eye, which shone brightly from under a thick tuft of grizzled brow, he seemed to Alleyne to have something of the look of some fierce old bird of prey. For a moment he smiled, as his eye lit upon the banner of the five roses waving from the hamlet; but his course lay for Pampeluna, and he rode on after the archers.

Close at his heels came sixteen squires, all chosen from the highest families, and behind them rode twelve hundred English knights, with gleam of steel and tossing of plumes, their harness jingling, their long straight swords clanking against their stirrup-irons, and the beat of their chargers' hoofs like the low deep roar of the sea upon the shore. Behind them marched six hundred Cheshire and Lancashire archers, bearing the badge of the Audleys, followed by the famous Lord Audley himself, with the four valiant squires, Dutton of Dutton, Delves of Doddington, Fowlehurst of Crewe, and Hawkestone of Wainehill, who had all won such glory at Poictiers. Two hundred heavily-armed cavalry rode behind the Audley standard, while close at their heels came the Duke of Lancaster with a glittering train, heralds tabarded with the royal arms riding three deep upon cream-coloured chargers in front of him. On either side of the young prince rode the two seneschals of Aquitaine, Sir Guiscard d'Angle and Sir Stephen Cossington, the one bearing the banner of the province and the other that of Saint George. Away behind him as far as eye could reach rolled the far-stretching, unbroken river of steel — rank after rank and column after column, with waving of plumes, glitter of arms, tossing of guidons, and flash and flutter of countless armorial devices. All day Alleyne looked down upon the changing scene, and all day the old bowman stood by his elbow, pointing out the crests of famous warriors and the arms of noble houses. Here were the gold mullets of the Pakingtons, the sable and ermine of the Mackworths, the scarlet bars of the Wakes, the gold and blue of the Grosvenors, the cinque-foils of the Cliftons, the annulets of the Musgraves, the silver pinions of the Beauchamps, the crosses of the Molineaux, the bloody chevron of the Woodhouses, the red and silver of the Worsleys, the swords of the Clarks, the boars'-heads of the Lucies, the crescents of the Boyntons, and the wolf and dagger of the Lipscombs. So through the sunny winter day the chivalry of England poured down through the dark pass of Roncesvalles to the plains of Spain.

It was on a Monday that the Duke of Lancaster's division passed safely through the Pyrenees. On the Tuesday there was a bitter frost, and the ground rung like iron beneath the feet of the horses; yet ere evening the prince himself, with the main battle of his army, had passed the gorge and united with his vanguard at Pampeluna. With him rode the King of Majorca, the hostage King of Navarre, and the fierce Don Pedro of Spain, whose pale blue eyes gleamed with a sinister light as they rested once more upon the distant peaks of the land which had disowned him. Under the royal banners rode many a bold Gascon baron and many a hot-blooded islander. Here were the high stewards of Aquitaine, of Saintonge, of La Rochelle, of

Quercy, of Limousin, of Agenois, of Poitou, and of Bigorre, with the banners and musters of their provinces. Here also were the valiant Earl of Angus, Sir Thomas Banaster with his garter over his greave, Sir Nele Loring, second cousin to Sir Nigel, and a long column of Welsh footmen who marched under the red banner of Merlin. From dawn to sundown the long train wound through the pass, their breath reeking up upon the frosty air like the steam from a cauldron.

The weather was less keen upon the Wednesday, and the rear-guard made good their passage, with the bombards and the wagon-train. Free companions and Gascons made up this portion of the army to the number of ten thousand men. The fierce Sir Hugh Calverley, with his yellow mane, and the rugged Sir Robert Knolles, with their war-hardened and veteran companies of English bowmen, headed the long column; while behind them came the turbulent bands of the Bastard of Breteuil, Nandon de Bagerant, one-eyed Camus, Black Ortingo, La Nuit and others whose very names seem to smack of hard hands and ruthless deeds. With them also were the pick of the Gascon chivalry — the old Duc d’Armagnac, his nephew Lord d’Albret, brooding and scowling over his wrongs, the giant Oliver de Clisson, the Captal de Buch, pink of knighthood, the sprightly Sir Perducas d’Albret, the red-bearded Lord d’Esparre, and a long train of needy and grasping border nobles, with long pedigrees and short purses, who had come down from their hill-side strongholds, all hungering for the spoils and the ransoms of Spain. By the Thursday morning the whole army was encamped in the Vale of Pampeluna, and the prince had called his council to meet him in the old palace of the ancient city of Navarre.

CHAPTER XXXIV. HOW THE COMPANY MADE SPORT IN THE VALE OF PAMPELUNA.

Whilst the council was sitting in Pampeluna the White Company, having encamped in a neighbouring valley, close to the companies of La Nuit and of Black Ortingo, were amusing themselves with sword-play, wrestling, and shooting at the shields, which they had placed upon the hillside to serve them as butts. The younger archers, with their coats of mail thrown aside, their brown or flaxen hair tossing in the wind, and their jerkins turned back to give free play to their brawny chests and arms, stood in lines, each loosing his shaft in turn, while Johnston, Aylward, Black Simon, and half-a-score of the elders lounged up and down with critical eyes, and a word of rough praise or of curt censure for the marksmen. Behind stood knots of Gascon and Brabant crossbowmen from the companies of Ortingo and of La Nuit, leaning upon their unsightly weapons and watching the practice of the Englishmen.

“A good shot, Hewett, a good shot!” said old Johnston to a young bowman, who stood with his bow in his left hand, gazing with parted lips after his flying shaft. “You see, she finds the ring, as I knew she would from the moment that your string twanged.”

“Loose it easy, steady, and yet sharp,” said Aylward. “By my hilt! mon gar., it is very well when you do but shoot at a shield, but when there is a man behind the shield, and he rides at you with wave of sword and glint of eyes from behind his vizor, you may find him a less easy mark.”

“It is a mark that I have found before now,” answered the young bowman.

“And shall again, camarade, I doubt not. But hola! Johnston, who is this who holds his bow like a crow-keeper?”

“It is Silas Peterson, of Horsham. Do not wink with one eye and look with the other, Silas, and do not hop and dance after you shoot, with your tongue out, for that will not speed it upon its way. Stand straight and firm, as God made you. Move not the bow arm, and steady with the drawing hand!”

"I' faith," said Black Simon, "I am a spearman myself, and am more fitted for hand-strokes than for such work as this. Yet I have spent my days among bowmen, and I have seen many a brave shaft sped. I will not say but that we have some good marksmen here, and that this Company would be accounted a fine body of archers at any time or place. Yet I do not see any men who bend so strong a bow or shoot as true a shaft as those whom I have known."

"You say sooth," said Johnston, turning his seamed and grizzled face upon the man-at-arms. "See yonder," he added, pointing to a bombard which lay within the camp: "there is what hath done scath to good bowmanship, with its filthy soot and foolish roaring mouth. I wonder that a true knight, like our prince, should carry such a scurvy thing in his train. Robin, thou red-headed lurden, how oft must I tell thee not to shoot straight with a quarter-wind blowing across the mark?"

"By these ten finger-bones! there were some fine bowmen at the intaking of Calais," said Aylward. "I well remember that, on occasion of an outfall, a Genoan raised his arm over his mantlet, and shook it at us, a hundred paces from our line. There were twenty who loosed shafts at him, and when the man was afterwards slain it was found that he had taken eighteen through his forearm."

"And I can call to mind," remarked Johnston, "that when the great cog 'Christopher,' which the French had taken from us, was moored two hundred paces from the shore, two archers, little Robin Withstaff and Elias Baddlesmere, in four shots each cut every strand of her hempen anchor-cord, so that she well-nigh came upon the rocks."

"Good shooting, i' faith rare shooting!" said Black Simon. "But I have seen you, Johnston, and you, Samkin Aylward, and one or two others who are still with us, shoot as well as the best. Was it not you, Johnston, who took the fat ox at Finsbury butts against the pick of London town?"

A sunburnt and black-eyed Brabanter had stood near the old archers, leaning upon a large crossbow and listening to their talk, which had been carried on in that hybrid camp dialect which both nations could understand. He was a squat, bull-necked man, clad in the iron helmet, mail tunic, and woollen gambesson of his class. A jacket with hanging sleeves, slashed with velvet at the neck and wrists, showed that he was a man of some consideration, an under-officer, or file-leader of his company.

“I cannot think,” said he, “why you English should be so fond of your six-foot stick. If it amuse you to bend it, well and good; but why should I strain and pull, when my little moulinet will do all for me, and better than I can do it for myself?”

“I have seen good shooting with the prod and with the latch,” said Aylward, “but, by my hilt! camarade, with all respect to you and to your bow, I think that is but a woman’s weapon, which a woman can point and loose as easily as a man.”

“I know not about that,” answered the Brabanter, “but this I know, that though I have served for fourteen years, I have never yet seen an Englishman do aught with the long-bow which I could not do better with my arbalest. By the three kings! I would even go further, and say that I have done things with my arbalest which no Englishman could do with his long-bow.”

“Well said, mon gar.,” cried Aylward. “A good cock has ever a brave call. Now, I have shot little of late, but there is Johnston here who will try a round with you for the honor of the Company.”

“And I will lay a gallon of Jurancon wine upon the long-bow,” said Black Simon, “though I had rather, for my own drinking, that it were a quart of Twynham ale.”

“I take both your challenge and your wager,” said the man of Brabant, throwing off his jacket and glancing keenly about him with his black, twinkling eyes. “I cannot see any fitting mark, for I care not to waste a bolt upon these shields, which a drunken boor could not miss at a village kermesse.”

“This is a perilous man,” whispered an English man-at-arms, plucking at Aylward’s sleeve. “He is the best marksman of all the crossbow companies and it was he who brought down the Constable de Bourbon at Brignais, I fear that your man will come by little honor with him.”

“Yet I have seen Johnston shoot these twenty years, and I will not flinch from it. How say you, old war-hound, will you not have a flight shot or two with this springald?”

“Tut, tut, Aylward,” said the old bowman. “My day is past, and it is for the younger ones to hold what we have gained. I take it unkindly of thee, Samkin, that thou shouldst call all eyes thus upon a broken bowman who could once shoot a fair shaft. Let me feel that bow, Wilkins! It is a Scotch bow, I see, for the upper nock is without and the lower within. By the black rood! it is a good piece of yew, well nocked, well strung, well waxed, and very joyful to the feel. I think even now that I might hit any large and goodly mark with a bow like this. Turn thy quiver to me, Aylward. I love an ash arrow pierced with cornel-wood for a roving shaft."

"By my hilt! and so do I," cried Aylward. "These three gander-winged shafts are such."

"So I see, comrade. It has been my wont to choose a saddle-backed feather for a dead shaft, and a swine-backed for a smooth flier. I will take the two of them. Ah! Samkin, lad, the eye grows dim and the hand less firm as the years pass."

"Come then, are you not ready?" said the Brabanter, who had watched with ill-concealed impatience the slow and methodic movements of his antagonist.

"I will venture a rover with you, or try long-butts or hoyles," said old Johnston. "To my mind the long-bow is a better weapon than the arbalest, but it may be ill for me to prove it."

"So I think," quoth the other with a sneer. He drew his moulinet from his girdle, and fixing it to the windlass, he drew back the powerful double cord until it had clicked into the catch. Then from his quiver he drew a short, thick quarrel, which he placed with the utmost care upon the groove. Word had spread of what was going forward, and the rivals were already surrounded, not only by the English archers of the Company, but by hundreds of arbalestiers and men-at-arms from the bands of Ortingo and La Nuit, to the latter of which the Brabanter belonged.

"There is a mark yonder on the hill," said he; "mayhap you can discern it."

"I see something," answered Johnston, shading his eyes with his hand; "but it is a very long shoot."

"A fair shoot — a fair shoot! Stand aside, Arnaud, lest you find a bolt through your gizzard. Now, comrade, I take no flight shot, and I give you the vantage of watching my shaft."

As he spoke he raised his arbalest to his shoulder and was about to pull the trigger, when a large gray stork flapped heavily into view skimming over the brow of the hill, and then soaring up into the air to pass the valley. Its shrill and piercing cries drew all eyes upon it, and, as it came nearer, a dark spot which circled above it resolved itself into a peregrine falcon, which hovered over its head, poising itself from time to time, and watching its chance of closing with its clumsy quarry. Nearer and nearer came the two birds, all absorbed in their own contest, the stork wheeling upwards, the hawk still fluttering above it, until they were not a hundred paces from the camp. The Brabanter raised his weapon to the sky, and there came the short, deep twang of his powerful string. His bolt struck the stork just where its wing meets the body, and the bird whirled aloft in a last convulsive flutter before falling wounded and flapping to the earth. A roar of applause burst from the crossbowmen; but at the instant that the bolt struck its mark old Johnston, who had stood listlessly with arrow on string, bent his bow and sped a shaft through the body of the falcon. Whipping the other from his belt, he sent it skimming some few feet from the earth with so true an aim that it struck and transfixed the stork for the second time ere it could reach the ground. A deep-chested shout of delight burst from the archers at the sight of this double feat, and Aylward, dancing with joy, threw his arms round the old marksman and embraced him with such vigor that their mail tunics clanged again.

"Ah! camarade," he cried, "you shall have a stoup with me for this! What then, old dog, would not the hawk please thee, but thou must have the stork as well. Oh, to my heart again!"

"It is a pretty piece of yew, and well strung," said Johnston with a twinkle in his deep-set gray eyes. "Even an old broken bowman might find the clout with a bow like this."

"You have done very well," remarked the Brabanter in a surly voice. "But it seems to me that you have not yet shown yourself to be a better marksman than I, for I have struck that at which I aimed, and, by the three kings! no man can do more."

"It would ill beseem me to claim to be a better marksman," answered Johnston, "for I have heard great things of your skill. I did but wish to show that the long-bow could do that which an arbalest could not do, for you could not with your moulinet have your string ready to speed another shaft ere the bird drop to the earth."

"In that you have vantage," said the crossbowman. "By Saint James! it is now my turn to show you where my weapon has the better of you. I pray you to draw a flight shaft with all your strength down the valley, that we may see the length of your shoot."

"That is a very strong prod of yours," said Johnston, shaking his grizzled head as he glanced at the thick arch and powerful strings of his rival's arbalest. “I have little doubt that you can overshoot me, and yet I have seen bowmen who could send a cloth-yard arrow further than you could speed a quarrel.”

“So I have heard,” remarked the Brabanter; “and yet it is a strange thing that these wondrous bowmen are never where I chance to be. Pace out the distances with a wand at every five score, and do you, Arnaud, stand at the fifth wand to carry back my bolts to me.”

A line was measured down the valley, and Johnston, drawing an arrow to the very head, sent it whistling over the row of wands.

“Bravely drawn! A rare shoot!” shouted the bystanders.

“It is well up to the fourth mark.”

“By my hilt! it is over it,” cried Aylward. “I can see where they have stooped to gather up the shaft.”

“We shall hear anon,” said Johnston quietly, and presently a young archer came running to say that the arrow had fallen twenty paces beyond the fourth wand.

“Four hundred paces and a score,” cried Black Simon. “I’ faith, it is a very long flight. Yet wood and steel may do more than flesh and blood.”

The Brabanter stepped forward with a smile of conscious triumph, and loosed the cord of his weapon. A shout burst from his comrades as they watched the swift and lofty flight of the heavy bolt.

“Over the fourth!” groaned Aylward. “By my hilt! I think that it is well up to the fifth.”

“It is over the fifth!” cried a Gascon loudly, and a comrade came running with waving arms to say that the bolt had pitched eight paces beyond the mark of the five hundred.

“Which weapon hath the vantage now?” cried the Brabanter, Strutting proudly about with shouldered arbalest, amid the applause of his companions.

“You can overshoot me,” said Johnston gently.

“Or any other man who ever bent a long-bow,” cried his victorious adversary.

“Nay, not so fast,” said a huge archer, whose mighty shoulders and red head towered high above the throng of his comrades. “I must have a word with you ere you crow so loudly. Where is my little popper? By sainted Dick of Hampole! it will be a strange thing if I cannot outshoot that thing of thine, which to my eyes is more like a rat-trap than a bow. Will you try another flight, or do you stand by your last?"

"Five hundred and eight paces will serve my turn," answered the Brabanter, looking askance at this new opponent.

"Tut, John," whispered Aylward, "you never were a marksman. Why must you thrust your spoon into this dish?"

"Easy and slow, Aylward. There are very many things which I cannot do, but there are also one or two which I have the trick of. It is in my mind that I can beat this shoot, if my bow will but hold together."

"Go on, old babe of the woods!" "Have at it, Hampshire!" cried the archers laughing.

"By my soul! you may grin," cried John. "But I learned how to make the long shoot from old Hob Miller of Milford." He took up a great black bow, as he spoke, and sitting down upon the ground he placed his two feet on either end of the stave. With an arrow fitted, he then pulled the string towards him with both hands until the head of the shaft was level with the wood. The great bow creaked and groaned and the cord vibrated with the tension.

"Who is this fool's-head who stands in the way of my shoot?" said he, craning up his neck from the ground.

"He stands on the further side of my mark," answered the Brabanter, "so he has little to fear from you."

"Well, the saints assoil him!" cried John. "Though I think he is over-near to be scathed." As he spoke he raised his two feet, with the bow-stave upon their soles, and his cord twanged with a deep rich hum which might be heard across the valley. The measurer in the distance fell flat upon his face, and then jumping up again, he began to run in the opposite direction.

"Well shot, old lad! It is indeed over his head," cried the bowmen.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Brabanter, "who ever saw such a shoot?"

"It is but a trick," quoth John. "Many a time have I won a gallon of ale by covering a mile in three flights down Wilverley Chase."

"It fell a hundred and thirty paces beyond the fifth mark," shouted an archer in the distance.

"Six hundred and thirty paces! Mon Dieu! but that is a shoot! And yet it says nothing for your weapon, mon gros camarade, for it was by turning yourself into a crossbow that you did it."

“By my hilt! there is truth in that,” cried Aylward. “And now, friend, I will myself show you a vantage of the long-bow. I pray you to speed a bolt against yonder shield with all your force. It is an inch of elm with bull’s hide over it.”

“I scarce shot as many shafts at Brignais,” growled the man of Brabant; “though I found a better mark there than a cantle of bull’s hide. But what is this, Englishman? The shield hangs not one hundred paces from me, and a blind man could strike it.” He screwed up his string to the furthest pitch, and shot his quarrel at the dangling shield. Aylward, who had drawn an arrow from his quiver, carefully greased the head of it, and sped it at the same mark.

“Run, Wilkins,” quoth he, “and fetch me the shield.”

Long were the faces of the Englishmen and broad the laugh of the crossbowmen as the heavy mantlet was carried towards them, for there in the centre was the thick Brabant bolt driven deeply into the wood, while there was neither sign nor trace of the cloth-yard shaft.

“By the three kings!” cried the Brabanter, “this time at least there is no gainsaying which is the better weapon, or which the truer hand that held it. You have missed the shield, Englishman.”

“Tarry a bit! tarry a bit, mon gar.!” quoth Aylward, and turning round the shield he showed a round clear hole in the wood at the back of it. “My shaft has passed through it, camarade, and I trow the one which goes through is more to be feared than that which bides on the way.”

The Brabanter stamped his foot with mortification, and was about to make some angry reply, when Alleyne Edricson came riding up to the crowds of archers.

“Sir Nigel will be here anon,” said he, “and it is his wish to speak with the Company.”

In an instant order and method took the place of general confusion. Bows, steel caps, and jacks were caught up from the grass. A long cordon cleared the camp of all strangers, while the main body fell into four lines with under-officers and file-leaders in front and on either flank. So they stood, silent and motionless, when their leader came riding towards them, his face shining and his whole small figure swelling with the news which he bore.

“Great honor has been done to us, men,” cried he: “for, of all the army, the prince has chosen us out that we should ride onwards into the lands of

Spain to spy upon our enemies. Yet, as there are many of us, and as the service may not be to the liking of all, I pray that those will step forward from the ranks who have the will to follow me."

There was a rustle among the bowmen, but when Sir Nigel looked up at them no man stood forward from his fellows, but the four lines of men stretched unbroken as before. Sir Nigel blinked at them in amazement, and a look of the deepest sorrow shadowed his face.

"That I should live to see the day!" he cried, "What! not one — —"

"My fair lord," whispered Alleyne, "they have all stepped forward."

"Ah, by Saint Paul! I see how it is with them. I could not think that they would desert me. We start at dawn to-morrow, and ye are to have the horses of Sir Robert Cheney's company. Be ready, I pray ye, at early cock-crow."

A buzz of delight burst from the archers, as they broke their ranks and ran hither and thither, whooping and cheering like boys who have news of a holiday. Sir Nigel gazed after them with a smiling face, when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"What ho! my knight-errant of Twynham!" said a voice, "You are off to Ebro, I hear; and, by the holy fish of Tobias! you must take me under your banner."

"What! Sir Oliver Buttesthorn!" cried Sir Nigel. "I had heard that you were come into camp, and had hoped to see you. Glad and proud shall I be to have you with me."

"I have a most particular and weighty reason for wishing to go," said the sturdy knight.

"I can well believe it," returned Sir Nigel; "I have met no man who is quicker to follow where honor leads."

"Nay, it is not for honor that I go, Nigel."

"For what then?"

"For pullets."

"Pullets?"

"Yes, for the rascal vanguard have cleared every hen from the country-side. It was this very morning that Norbury, my squire, lamed his horse in riding round in quest of one, for we have a bag of truffles, and nought to eat with them. Never have I seen such locusts as this vanguard of ours. Not a pullet shall we see until we are in front of them; so I shall leave my Winchester runagates to the care of the provost-marshal, and I shall hie south with you, Nigel, with my truffles at my saddle-bow."

“Oliver, Oliver, I know you over-well,” said Sir Nigel, shaking his head, and the two old soldiers rode off together to their pavilion.

CHAPTER XXXV. HOW SIR NIGEL HAWKED AT AN EAGLE.

To the south of Pampeluna in the kingdom of Navarre there stretched a high table-land, rising into bare, sterile hills, brown or gray in colour, and strewn with huge boulders of granite. On the Gascon side of the great mountains there had been running streams, meadows, forests, and little nestling villages. Here, on the contrary, were nothing but naked rocks, poor pasture, and savage, stone-strewn wastes. Gloomy defiles or barrancas intersected this wild country with mountain torrents dashing and foaming between their rugged sides. The clatter of waters, the scream of the eagle, and the howling of wolves the only sounds which broke upon the silence in that dreary and inhospitable region.

Through this wild country it was that Sir Nigel and his Company pushed their way, riding at times through vast defiles where the brown, gnarled cliffs shot up on either side of them, and the sky was but a long winding blue slit between the clustering lines of box which fringed the lips of the precipices; or, again leading their horses along the narrow and rocky paths worn by the muleteers upon the edges of the chasm, where under their very elbows they could see the white streak which marked the *gave* which foamed a thousand feet below them. So for two days they pushed their way through the wild places of Navarre, past Fuente, over the rapid Ega, through Estella, until upon a winter’s evening the mountains fell away from in front of them, and they saw the broad blue Ebro curving betwixt its double line or homesteads and of villages. The fishers of Viana were aroused that night by rough voices speaking in a strange tongue, and ere morning Sir Nigel and his men had ferried the river and were safe upon the land of Spain.

All the next day they lay in a pine wood near to the town of Logrono, resting their horses and taking counsel as to what they should do. Sir Nigel had with him Sir William Felton, Sir Oliver Buttesthorn, stout old Sir Simon Burley, the Scotch knight-errant, the Earl of Angus, and Sir Richard Causton, all accounted among the bravest knights in the army, together with sixty veteran men-at-arms, and three hundred and twenty archers. Spies had been sent out in the morning, and returned after nightfall to say that the

King of Spain was encamped some fourteen miles off in the direction of Burgos, having with him twenty thousand horse and forty-five thousand foot.

A dry-wood fire had been lit, and round this the leaders crouched, the glare beating upon their rugged faces, while the hardy archers lounged and chatted amid the tethered horses, while they munched their scanty provisions.

"For my part," said Sir Simon Burley, "I am of opinion that we have already done that which we have come for. For do we not now know where the king is, and how great a following he hath, which was the end of our journey."

"True," answered Sir William Felton, "but I have come on this venture because it is a long time since I have broken a spear in war, and, certes, I shall not go back until I have run a course with some cavalier of Spain. Let those go back who will, but I must see more of these Spaniards ere I turn."

"I will not leave you, Sir William," returned Sir Simon Burley; "and yet, as an old soldier and one who hath seen much of war, I cannot but think that it is an ill thing for four hundred men to find themselves between an army of sixty thousand on the one side and a broad river on the other."

"Yet," said Sir Richard Causton, "we cannot for the honor of England go back without a blow struck."

"Nor for the honor of Scotland either," cried the Earl of Angus. "By Saint Andrew! I wish that I may never set eyes upon the water of Leith again, if I pluck my horse's bridle ere I have seen this camp of theirs."

"By Saint Paul! you have spoken very well," said Sir Nigel, "and I have always heard that there were very worthy gentlemen among the Scots, and fine skirmishing to be had upon their border. Bethink you, Sir Simon, that we have this news from the lips of common spies, who can scarce tell us as much of the enemy and of his forces as the prince would wish to hear."

"You are the leader in this venture, Sir Nigel," the other answered, "and I do but ride under your banner."

"Yet I would fain have your rede and counsel, Sir Simon. But, touching what you say of the river, we can take heed that we shall not have it at the back of us, for the prince hath now advanced to Salvatierra, and thence to Vittoria, so that if we come upon their camp from the further side we can make good our retreat."

“What then would you propose?” asked Sir Simon, shaking his grizzled head as one who is but half convinced.

“That we ride forward ere the news reach them that we have crossed the river. In this way we may have sight of their army, and perchance even find occasion for some small deed against them.”

“So be it, then,” said Sir Simon Burley; and the rest of the council having approved, a scanty meal was hurriedly snatched, and the advance resumed under the cover of the darkness. All night they led their horses, stumbling and groping through wild defiles and rugged valleys, following the guidance of a frightened peasant who was strapped by the wrist to Black Simon’s stirrup-leather. With the early dawn they found themselves in a black ravine, with others sloping away from it on either side, and the bare brown crags rising in long bleak terraces all round them.

“If it please you, fair lord,” said Black Simon, “this man hath misled us, and since there is no tree upon which we may hang him, it might be well to hurl him over yonder cliff.”

The peasant, reading the soldier’s meaning in his fierce eyes and harsh accents dropped upon his knees, screaming loudly for mercy.

“How comes it, dog?” asked Sir William Felton in Spanish. “Where is this camp to which you swore that you would lead us?”

“By the sweet Virgin! By the blessed Mother of God!” cried the trembling peasant, “I swear to you that in the darkness I have myself lost the path.”

“Over the cliff with him!” shouted half a dozen voices; but ere the archers could drag him from the rocks to which he clung Sir Nigel had ridden up and called upon them to stop.

“How is this, sirs?” said he. “As long as the prince doth me the honor to entrust this venture to me, it is for me only to give orders; and, by Saint Paul! I shall be right blithe to go very deeply into the matter with any one to whom my words may give offence. How say you, Sir William? Or you, my Lord of Angus? Or you, Sir Richard?”

“Nay, nay, Nigel!” cried Sir William. “This base peasant is too small a matter for old comrades to quarrel over. But he hath betrayed us, and certes he hath merited a dog’s death.”

“Hark ye, fellow,” said Sir Nigel. “We give you one more chance to find the path. We are about to gain much honor, Sir William, in this enterprise, and it would be a sorry thing if the first blood shed were that of an unworthy boor. Let us say our morning orisons, and it may chance that ere we finish he may strike upon the track."

With bowed heads and steel caps in hand, the archers stood at their horse's heads, while Sir Simon Burley repeated the Pater, the Ave, and the Credo. Long did Alleyne bear the scene in mind — the knot of knights in their dull leaden-hued armor, the ruddy visage of Sir Oliver, the craggy features of the Scottish earl, the shining scalp of Sir Nigel, with the dense ring of hard, bearded faces and the long brown heads of the horses, all topped and circled by the beetling cliffs. Scarce had the last deep "amen" broken from the Company, when, in an instant, there rose the scream of a hundred bugles, with the deep rolling of drums and the clashing of cymbals, all sounding together in one deafening uproar. Knights and archers sprang to arms, convinced that some great host was upon them; but the guide dropped upon his knees and thanked Heaven for its mercies.

"We have found them, caballeros!" he cried. "This is their morning call. If ye will but deign to follow me, I will set them before you ere a man might tell his beads."

As he spoke he scrambled down one of the narrow ravines, and, climbing over a low ridge at the further end, he led them into a short valley with a stream purling down the centre of it and a very thick growth of elder and of box upon either side. Pushing their way through the dense brushwood, they looked out upon a scene which made their hearts beat harder and their breath come faster.

In front of them there lay a broad plain, watered by two winding streams and covered with grass, stretching away to where, in the furthest distance, the towers of Burgos bristled up against the light blue morning sky. Over all this vast meadow there lay a great city of tents — thousands upon thousands of them, laid out in streets and in squares like a well-ordered town. High silken pavilions or coloured marquees, shooting up from among the crowd of meaner dwellings, marked where the great lords and barons of Leon and Castile displayed their standards, while over the white roofs, as far as eye could reach, the waving of ancients, pavons, pensils, and banderoles, with flash of gold and glow of colours, proclaimed that all the chivalry of Iberia were mustered in the plain beneath them. Far off, in the centre of the camp, a huge palace of red and white silk, with the royal arms of Castile waiving from the summit, announced that the gallant Henry lay there in the midst of his warriors.

As the English adventurers, peeping out from behind their brushwood screen, looked down upon this wondrous sight they could see that the vast army in front of them was already afoot. The first pink light of the rising sun glittered upon the steel caps and breastplates of dense masses of slingers and of crossbowmen, who drilled and marched in the spaces which had been left for their exercise. A thousand columns of smoke reeked up into the pure morning air where the faggots were piled and the camp-kettles already simmering. In the open plain clouds of light horse galloped and swooped with swaying bodies and waving javelins, after the fashion which the Spanish had adopted from their Moorish enemies. All along by the sedgy banks of the rivers long lines of pages led their masters' chargers down to water, while the knights themselves lounged in gayly-dressed groups about the doors of their pavilions, or rode out, with their falcons upon their wrists and their greyhounds behind them, in quest of quail or of leveret.

"By my hilt! mon gar.!" whispered Aylward to Alleyne, as the young squire stood with parted lips and wondering eyes, gazing down at the novel scene before him, "we have been seeking them all night, but now that we have found them I know not what we are to do with them."

"You say sooth, Samkin," quoth old Johnston. "I would that we were upon the far side of Ebro again, for there is neither honor nor profit to be gained here. What say you, Simon?"

"By the rood!" cried the fierce man-at-arms, "I will see the colour of their blood ere I turn my mare's head for the mountains. Am I a child, that I should ride for three days and nought but words at the end of it?"

"Well said, my sweet honeysuckle!" cried Hordle John. "I am with you, like hilt to blade. Could I but lay hands upon one of those gay prancers yonder, I doubt not that I should have ransom enough from him to buy my mother a new cow."

"A cow!" said Aylward. "Say rather ten acres and a homestead on the banks of Avon."

"Say you so? Then, by our Lady! here is for yonder one in the red jerkin!"

He was about to push recklessly forward into the open, when Sir Nigel himself darted in front of him, with his hand upon his breast.

"Back!" said he. "Our time is not yet come, and we must lie here until evening. Throw off your jacks and headpieces, least their eyes catch the shine, and tether the horses among the rocks."

The order was swiftly obeyed, and in ten minutes the archers were stretched along by the side of the brook, munching the bread and the bacon which they had brought in their bags, and craning their necks to watch the ever-changing scene beneath them. Very quiet and still they lay, save for a muttered jest or whispered order, for twice during the long morning they heard bugle-calls from amid the hills on either side of them, which showed that they had thrust themselves in between the outposts of the enemy. The leaders sat amongst the box-wood, and took counsel together as to what they should do; while from below there surged up the buzz of voices, the shouting, the neighing of horses, and all the uproar of a great camp.

"What boots it to wait?" said Sir William Felton. "Let us ride down upon their camp ere they discover us."

"And so say I," cried the Scottish earl; "for they do not know that there is any enemy within thirty long leagues of them."

"For my part," said Sir Simon Burley, "I think that it is madness, for you cannot hope to rout this great army; and where are you to go and what are you to do when they have turned upon you? How say you, Sir Oliver Buttesthorn?"

"By the apple of Eve!" cried the fat knight, "it appears to me that this wind brings a very savory smell of garlic and of onions from their cooking-kettles. I am in favor of riding down upon them at once, if my old friend and comrade here is of the same mind."

"Nay," said Sir Nigel, "I have a plan by which we may attempt some small deed upon them, and yet, by the help of God, may be able to draw off again; which, as Sir Simon Burley hath said, would be scarce possible in any other way."

"How then, Sir Nigel?" asked several voices.

"We shall lie here all day; for amid this brushwood it is ill for them to see us. Then when evening comes we shall sally out upon them and see if we may not gain some honorable advancement from them."

"But why then rather than now?"

"Because we shall have nightfall to cover us when we draw off, so that we may make our way back through the mountains. I would station a score of archers here in the pass, with all our pennons jutting forth from the rocks, and as many nakirs and drums and bugles as we have with us, so that those who follow us in the fading light may think that the whole army of the prince is upon them, and fear to go further. What think you of my plan, Sir Simon?"

"By my troth! I think very well of it," cried the prudent old commander. "If four hundred men must needs run a tilt against sixty thousand, I cannot see how they can do it better or more safely."

"And so say I," cried Felton, heartily. "But I wish the day were over, for it will be an ill thing for us if they chance to light upon us."

The words were scarce out of his mouth when there came a clatter of loose stones, the sharp clink of trotting hoofs, and a dark-faced cavalier, mounted upon a white horse, burst through the bushes and rode swiftly down the valley from the end which was farthest from the Spanish camp. Lightly armed, with his vizor open and a hawk perched upon his left wrist, he looked about him with the careless air of a man who is bent wholly upon pleasure, and unconscious of the possibility of danger. Suddenly, however, his eyes lit upon the fierce faces which glared out at him from the brushwood. With a cry of terror, he thrust his spurs into his horse's sides and dashed for the narrow opening of the gorge. For a moment it seemed as though he would have reached it, for he had trampled over or dashed aside the archers who threw themselves in his way; but Hordle John seized him by the foot in his grasp of iron and dragged him from the saddle, while two others caught the frightened horse.

"Ho, ho!" roared the great archer. "How many cows wilt buy my mother, if I set thee free?"

"Hush that bull's bellowing!" cried Sir Nigel impatiently. "Bring the man here. By St. Paul! it is not the first time that we have met; for, if I mistake not, it is Don Diego Alvarez, who was once at the prince's court."

"It is indeed I," said the Spanish knight, speaking in the French tongue, "and I pray you to pass your sword through my heart, for how can I live — I, a caballero of Castile — after being dragged from my horse by the base hands of a common archer?"

"Fret not for that," answered Sir Nigel. "For, in sooth, had he not pulled you down, a dozen cloth-yard shafts had crossed each other in your body."

"By St. James! it were better so than to be polluted by his touch," answered the Spaniard, with his black eyes sparkling with rage and hatred. "I trust that I am now the prisoner of some honorable knight or gentleman."

"You are the prisoner of the man who took you, Sir Diego," answered Sir Nigel. "And I may tell you that better men than either you or I have found themselves before now prisoners in the hands of archers of England."

"What ransom, then, does he demand?" asked the Spaniard.

Big John scratched his red head and grinned in high delight when the question was propounded to him. "Tell him," said he, "that I shall have ten cows and a bull too, if it be but a little one. Also a dress of blue sendall for mother and a red one for Joan; with five acres of pasture-land, two scythes, and a fine new grindstone. Likewise a small house, with stalls for the cows, and thirty-six gallons of beer for the thirsty weather."

"Tut, tut!" cried Sir Nigel, laughing. "All these things may be had for money; and I think, Don Diego, that five thousand crowns is not too much for so renowned a knight."

"It shall be duly paid him."

"For some days we must keep you with us; and I must crave leave also to use your shield, your armor, and your horse."

"My harness is yours by the law of arms," said the Spaniard, gloomily.

"I do but ask the loan of it. I have need of it this day, but it shall be duly returned to you. Set guards, Aylward, with arrow on string, at either end of the pass; for it may happen that some other cavaliers may visit us ere the time be come." All day the little band of Englishmen lay in the sheltered gorge, looking down upon the vast host of their unconscious enemies. Shortly after mid-day, a great uproar of shouting and cheering broke out in the camp, with mustering of men and calling of bugles. Clambering up among the rocks, the companions saw a long rolling cloud of dust along the whole eastern sky-line, with the glint of spears and the flutter of pennons, which announced the approach of a large body of cavalry. For a moment a wild hope came upon them that perhaps the prince had moved more swiftly than had been planned, that he had crossed the Ebro, and that this was his vanguard sweeping to the attack.

"Surely I see the red pile of Chandos at the head of yonder squadron!" cried Sir Richard Causton, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Not so," answered Sir Simon Burley, who had watched the approaching host with a darkening face. "It is even as I feared. That is the double eagle of Du Guesclin."

"You say very truly," cried the Earl of Angus. "These are the levies of France, for I can see the ensigns of the Marshal d'Andreghen, with that of the Lord of Antoing and of Briseuil, and of many another from Brittany and Anjou."

“By St. Paul! I am very glad of it,” said Sir Nigel. “Of these Spaniards I know nothing; but the French are very worthy gentlemen, and will do what they can for our advancement.”

“There are at the least four thousand of them, and all men-at-arms,” cried Sir William Felton. “See, there is Bertrand himself, beside his banner, and there is King Henry, who rides to welcome him. Now they all turn and come into the camp together.”

As he spoke, the vast throng of Spaniards and of Frenchmen trooped across the plain, with brandished arms and tossing banners. All day long the sound of revelry and of rejoicing from the crowded camp swelled up to the ears of the Englishmen, and they could see the soldiers of the two nations throwing themselves into each other’s arms and dancing hand-in-hand round the blazing fires. The sun had sunk behind a cloud-bank in the west before Sir Nigel at last gave word that the men should resume their arms and have their horses ready. He had himself thrown off his armor, and had dressed himself from head to foot in the harness of the captured Spaniard.

“Sir William,” said he, “it is my intention to attempt a small deed, and I ask you therefore that you will lead this outfall upon the camp. For me, I will ride into their camp with my squire and two archers. I pray you to watch me, and to ride forth when I am come among the tents. You will leave twenty men behind here, as we planned this morning, and you will ride back here after you have ventured as far as seems good to you.”

“I will do as you order, Nigel; but what is it that you propose to do?”

“You will see anon, and indeed it is but a trifling matter. Alleyne, you will come with me, and lead a spare horse by the bridle. I will have the two archers who rode with us through France, for they are trusty men and of stout heart. Let them ride behind us, and let them leave their bows here among the bushes for it is not my wish that they should know that we are Englishmen. Say no word to any whom we may meet, and, if any speak to you, pass on as though you heard them not. Are you ready?”

“I am ready, my fair lord,” said Alleyne.

“And I,” “And I,” cried Aylward and John.

“Then the rest I leave to your wisdom, Sir William; and if God sends us fortune we shall meet you again in this gorge ere it be dark.”

So saying, Sir Nigel mounted the white horse of the Spanish cavalier, and rode quietly forth from his concealment with his three companions behind him, Alleyne leading his master’s own steed by the bridle. So many small parties of French and Spanish horse were sweeping hither and thither that the small band attracted little notice, and making its way at a gentle trot across the plain, they came as far as the camp without challenge or hindrance. On and on they pushed past the endless lines of tents, amid the dense swarms of horsemen and of footmen, until the huge royal pavilion stretched in front of them. They were close upon it when of a sudden there broke out a wild hubbub from a distant portion of the camp, with screams and war-cries and all the wild tumult of battle. At the sound soldiers came rushing from their tents, knights shouted loudly for their squires, and there was mad turmoil on every hand of bewildered men and plunging horses. At the royal tent a crowd of gorgeously dressed servants ran hither and thither in helpless panic for the guard of soldiers who were stationed there had already ridden off in the direction of the alarm. A man-at-arms on either side of the doorway were the sole protectors of the royal dwelling.

"I have come for the king," whispered Sir Nigel; "and, by Saint Paul! he must back with us or I must bide here."

Alleyne and Aylward sprang from their horses, and flew at the two sentries, who were disarmed and beaten down in an instant by so furious and unexpected an attack. Sir Nigel dashed into the royal tent, and was followed by Hordle John as soon as the horses had been secured. From within came wild screamings and the clash of steel, and then the two emerged once more, their swords and forearms reddened with blood, while John bore over his shoulder the senseless body of a man whose gay surcoat, adorned with the lions and towers of Castile, proclaimed him to belong to the royal house. A crowd of white-faced sewers and pages swarmed at their heels, those behind pushing forwards, while the foremost shrank back from the fierce faces and reeking weapons of the adventurers. The senseless body was thrown across the spare horse, the four sprang to their saddles, and away they thundered with loose reins and busy spurs through the swarming camp.

But confusion and disorder still reigned among the Spaniards for Sir William Felton and his men had swept through half their camp, leaving a long litter of the dead and the dying to mark their course. Uncertain who were their attackers, and unable to tell their English enemies from their newly-arrived Breton allies, the Spanish knights rode wildly hither and thither in aimless fury. The mad turmoil, the mixture of races, and the fading light, were all in favor of the four who alone knew their own purpose among the vast uncertain multitude. Twice ere they reached open ground they had to break their way through small bodies of horses, and once there came a whistle of arrows and singing of stones about their ears; but, still dashing onwards, they shot out from among the tents and found their own comrades retreating for the mountains at no very great distance from them. Another five minutes of wild galloping over the plain, and they were all back in their gorge, while their pursuers fell back before the rolling of drums and blare of trumpets, which seemed to proclaim that the whole army of the prince was about to emerge from the mountain passes.

"By my soul! Nigel," cried Sir Oliver, waving a great boiled ham over his head, "I have come by something which I may eat with my truffles! I had a hard fight for it, for there were three of them with their mouths open and the knives in their hands, all sitting agape round the table, when I rushed in upon them. How say you, Sir William, will you not try the smack of the famed Spanish swine, though we have but the brook water to wash it down?"

"Later, Sir Oliver," answered the old soldier, wiping his grimed face. "We must further into the mountains ere we be in safety. But what have we here, Nigel?"

"It is a prisoner whom I have taken, and in sooth, as he came from the royal tent and wears the royal arms upon his jupon, I trust that he is the King of Spain."

"The King of Spain!" cried the companions, crowding round in amazement.

"Nay, Sir Nigel," said Felton, peering at the prisoner through the uncertain light, "I have twice seen Henry of Transtamare, and certes this man in no way resembles him."

"Then, by the light of heaven! I will ride back for him," cried Sir Nigel.

"Nay, nay, the camp is in arms, and it would be rank madness. Who are you, fellow?" he added in Spanish, "and how is it that you dare to wear the arms of Castile?"

The prisoner was bent recovering the consciousness which had been squeezed from him by the grip of Hordle John. "If it please you," he answered, "I and nine others are the body-squires of the king, and must ever wear his arms, so as to shield him from even such perils as have threatened him this night. The king is at the tent of the brave Du Guesclin, where he will sup to night. But I am a caballero of Aragon, Don Sancho Penelosa, and, though I be no king, I am yet ready to pay a fitting price for my ransom."

"By Saint Paul! I will not touch your gold," cried Sir Nigel. "Go back to your master and give him greeting from Sir Nigel Loring of Twynham Castle, telling him that I had hoped to make his better acquaintance this night, and that, if I have disordered his tent, it was but in my eagerness to know so famed and courteous a knight. Spur on, comrades! for we must cover many a league ere we can venture to light fire or to loosen girth. I had hoped to ride without this patch to-night, but it seems that I must carry it yet a little longer."

CHAPTER XXXVI. HOW SIR NIGEL TOOK THE PATCH FROM HIS EYE.

It was a cold, bleak morning in the beginning of March, and the mist was drifting in dense rolling clouds through the passes of the Cantabrian mountains. The Company, who had passed the night in a sheltered gully, were already astir, some crowding round the blazing fires and others romping or leaping over each other's backs for their limbs were chilled and the air biting. Here and there, through the dense haze which surrounded them, there loomed out huge pinnacles and jutting boulders of rock: while high above the sea of vapor there towered up one gigantic peak, with the pink glow of the early sunshine upon its snow-capped head. The ground was wet, the rocks dripping, the grass and ever-greens sparkling with beads of moisture; yet the camp was loud with laughter and merriment, for a messenger had ridden in from the prince with words of heart-stirring praise for what they had done, and with orders that they should still abide in the forefront of the army.

Round one of the fires were clustered four or five of the leading men of the archers, cleaning the rust from their weapons, and glancing impatiently from time to time at a great pot which smoked over the blaze. There was Aylward squatting cross-legged in his shirt, while he scrubbed away at his chain-mail brigandine, whistling loudly the while. On one side of him sat old Johnston, who was busy in trimming the feathers of some arrows to his liking; and on the other Hordle John, who lay with his great limbs all asprawl, and his headpiece balanced upon his uplifted foot. Black Simon of Norwich crouched amid the rocks, crooning an Eastland ballad to himself, while he whetted his sword upon a flat stone which lay across his knees; while beside him sat Alleyne Edricson, and Norbury, the silent squire of Sir Oliver, holding out their chilled hands towards the crackling faggots.

"Cast on another culpon, John, and stir the broth with thy sword-sheath," growled Johnston, looking anxiously for the twentieth time at the reeking pot.

"By my hilt!" cried Aylward, "now that John hath come by this great ransom, he will scarce abide the fare of poor archer lads. How say you, camarade? When you see Hordle once more, there will be no penny ale and fat bacon, but Gascon wines and baked meats every day of the seven.”

“I know not about that,” said John, kicking his helmet up into the air and catching it in his hand. “I do but know that whether the broth be ready or no, I am about to dip this into it.”

“It simmers and it boils,” cried Johnston, pushing his hard-lined face through the smoke. In an instant the pot had been plucked from the blaze, and its contents had been scooped up in half a dozen steel head-pieces, which were balanced betwixt their owners’ knees, while, with spoon and gobbet of bread, they devoured their morning meal.

“It is ill weather for bows,” remarked John at last, when, with a long sigh, he drained the last drop from his helmet. “My strings are as limp as a cow’s tail this morning.”

“You should rub them with water glue,” quoth Johnston. “You remember, Samkin, that it was wetter than this on the morning of Crecy, and yet I cannot call to mind that there was aught amiss with our strings.”

“It is in my thoughts,” said Black Simon, still pensively grinding his sword, “that we may have need of your strings ere sundown. I dreamed of the red cow last night.”

“And what is this red cow, Simon?” asked Alleyne.

“I know not, young sir; but I can only say that on the eve of Cadsand, and on the eve of Crecy, and on the eve of Nogent, I dreamed of a red cow; and now the dream has come upon me again, so I am now setting a very keen edge to my blade.”

“Well said, old war-dog!” cried Aylward. “By my hilt! I pray that your dream may come true, for the prince hath not set us out here to drink broth or to gather whortle-berries. One more fight, and I am ready to hang up my bow, marry a wife, and take to the fire corner. But how now, Robin? Whom is it that you seek?”

“The Lord Loring craves your attendance in his tent,” said a young archer to Alleyne.

The squire rose and proceeded to the pavilion, where he found the knight seated upon a cushion, with his legs crossed in front of him and a broad ribbon of parchment laid across his knees, over which he was poring with frowning brows and pursed lips.

“It came this morning by the prince’s messenger,” said he, “and was brought from England by Sir John Fallislee, who is new come from Sussex.

What make you of this upon the outer side?”

“It is fairly and clearly written,” Alleyne answered, “and it signifies To Sir Nigel Loring, Knight Constable of Twynham Castle, by the hand of Christopher, the servant of God at the Priory of Christchurch.”

“So I read it,” said Sir Nigel. “Now I pray you to read what is set forth within.”

Alleyne turned to the letter, and, as his eyes rested upon it, his face turned pale and a cry of surprise and grief burst from his lips.

“What then?” asked the knight, peering up at him anxiously. “There is nought amiss with the Lady Mary or with the Lady Maude?”

“It is my brother — my poor unhappy brother!” cried Alleyne, with his hand to his brow. “He is dead.”

“By Saint Paul! I have never heard that he had shown so much love for you that you should mourn him so.”

“Yet he was my brother — the only kith or kin that I had upon earth. Mayhap he had cause to be bitter against me, for his land was given to the abbey for my upbringing. Alas! alas! and I raised my staff against him when last we met! He has been slain — and slain, I fear, amidst crime and violence.”

“Ha!” said Sir Nigel. “Read on, I pray you.”

“‘God be with thee, my honored lord, and have thee in his holy keeping. The Lady Loring hath asked me to set down in writing what hath befallen at Twynham, and all that concerns the death of thy ill neighbour the Socman of Minstead. For when ye had left us, this evil man gathered around him all outlaws, villeins, and masterless men, until they were come to such a force that they slew and scattered the king’s men who went against them. Then, coming forth from the woods, they laid siege to thy castle, and for two days they girt us in and shot hard against us, with such numbers as were a marvel to see. Yet the Lady Loring held the place stoutly, and on the second day the Socman was slain — by his own men, as some think — so that we were delivered from their hands; for which praise be to all the saints, and more especially to the holy Anselm, upon whose feast it came to pass. The Lady Loring, and the Lady Maude, thy fair daughter, are in good health; and so also am I, save for an imposthume of the toe-joint, which hath been sent me for my sins. May all the saints preserve thee!’”

“It was the vision of the Lady Tiphaine,” said Sir Nigel, after a pause. “Marked you not how she said that the leader was one with a yellow beard, and how he fell before the gate. But how came it, Alleyne, that this woman, to whom all things are as crystal, and who hath not said one word which has not come to pass, was yet so led astray as to say that your thoughts turned to Twynham Castle even more than my own?"

"My fair lord," said Alleyne, with a flush on his weather-stained cheeks, "the Lady Tiphaine may have spoken sooth when she said it; for Twynham Castle is in my heart by day and in my dreams by night."

"Ha!" cried Sir Nigel, with a sidelong glance.

"Yes, my fair lord; for indeed I love your daughter, the Lady Maude; and, unworthy as I am, I would give my heart's blood to serve her."

"By St. Paul! Edricson," said the knight coldly, arching his eyebrows, "you aim high in this matter. Our blood is very old."

"And mine also is very old," answered the squire.

"And the Lady Maude is our single child. All our name and lands centre upon her."

"Alas! that I should say it, but I also am now the only Edricson."

"And why have I not heard this from you before, Alleyne? In sooth, I think that you have used me ill."

"Nay, my fair lord, say not so; for I know not whether your daughter loves me, and there is no pledge between us."

Sir Nigel pondered for a few moments, and then burst out a-laughing. "By St. Paul!" said he, "I know not why I should mix in the matter; for I h look to her own affairs. Since first she could stamp her little foot, she hath ever been able to get that for which she craved; and if she set her heart on thee, Alleyne, and thou on her, I do not think that this Spanish king, with his three-score thousand men, could hold you apart. Yet this I will say, that I would see you a full knight ere you go to my daughter with words of love. I have ever said that a brave lance should wed her; and, by my soul! Edricson, if God spare you, I think that you will acquit yourself well. But enough of such trifles, for we have our work before us, and it will be time to speak of this matter when we see the white cliffs of England once more. Go to Sir William Felton, I pray you, and ask him to come hither, for it is time that we were marching. There is no pass at the further end of the valley, and it is a perilous place should an enemy come upon us."

Alleyne delivered his message, and then wandered forth from the camp, for his mind was all in a whirl with this unexpected news, and with his talk with Sir Nigel. Sitting upon a rock, with his burning brow resting upon his hands, he thought of his brother, of their quarrel, of the Lady Maude in her bedraggled riding-dress, of the gray old castle, of the proud pale face in the armory, and of the last fiery words with which she had sped him on his way. Then he was but a penniless, monk-bred lad, unknown and unfriended. Now he was himself Socman of Minstead, the head of an old stock, and the lord of an estate which, if reduced from its former size, was still ample to preserve the dignity of his family. Further, he had become a man of experience, was counted brave among brave men, had won the esteem and confidence of her father, and, above all, had been listened to by him when he told him the secret of his love. As to the gaining of knighthood, in such stirring times it was no great matter for a brave squire of gentle birth to aspire to that honor. He would leave his bones among these Spanish ravines, or he would do some deed which would call the eyes of men upon him.

Alleyne was still seated on the rock, his griefs and his joys drifting swiftly over his mind like the shadow of clouds upon a sunlit meadow, when of a sudden he became conscious of a low, deep sound which came booming up to him through the fog. Close behind him he could hear the murmur of the bowmen, the occasional bursts of hoarse laughter, and the champing and stamping of their horses. Behind it all, however, came that low-pitched, deep-toned hum, which seemed to come from every quarter and to fill the whole air. In the old monastic days he remembered to have heard such a sound when he had walked out one windy night at Bucklershard, and had listened to the long waves breaking upon the shingly shore. Here, however, was neither wind nor sea, and yet the dull murmur rose ever louder and stronger out of the heart of the rolling sea of vapor. He turned and ran to the camp, shouting an alarm at the top of his voice.

It was but a hundred paces, and yet ere he had crossed it every bowman was ready at his horse’s head, and the group of knights were out and listening intently to the ominous sound.

“It is a great body of horse,” said Sir William Felton, “and they are riding very swiftly hitherwards.”

“Yet they must be from the prince’s army,” remarked Sir Richard Causton, “for they come from the north.”

“Nay,” said the Earl of Angus, “it is not so certain; for the peasant with whom we spoke last night said that it was rumored that Don Tello, the Spanish king’s brother, had ridden with six thousand chosen men to beat up the prince’s camp. It may be that on their backward road they have come this way.”

“By St. Paul!” cried Sir Nigel, “I think that it is even as you say, for that same peasant had a sour face and a shifting eye, as one who bore us little good will. I doubt not that he has brought these cavaliers upon us.”

“But the mist covers us,” said Sir Simon Burley. “We have yet time to ride through the further end of the pass.”

“Were we a troop of mountain goats we might do so,” answered Sir William Felton, “but it is not to be passed by a company of horsemen. If these be indeed Don Tello and his men, then we must bide where we are, and do what we can to make them rue the day that they found us in their path.”

“Well spoken, William!” cried Sir Nigel, in high delight. “If there be so many as has been said, then there will be much honor to be gained from them and every hope of advancement. But the sound has ceased, and I fear that they have gone some other way.”

“Or mayhap they have come to the mouth of the gorge, and are marshalling their ranks. Hush and hearken! for they are no great way from us.”

The Company stood peering into the dense fog-wreath, amidst a silence so profound that the dripping of the water from the rocks and the breathing of the horses grew loud upon the ear. Suddenly from out the sea of mist came the shrill sound of a neigh, followed by a long blast upon a bugle.

“It is a Spanish call, my fair lord,” said Black Simon. “It is used by their prickers and huntsmen when the beast hath not fled, but is still in its lair.”

“By my faith!” said Sir Nigel, smiling, “if they are in a humor for venerie we may promise them some sport ere they sound the mort over us. But there is a hill in the centre of the gorge on which we might take our stand.”

“I marked it yester-night,” said Felton, “and no better spot could be found for our purpose, for it is very steep at the back. It is but a bow-shot to the left, and, indeed, I can see the shadow of it.”

The whole Company, leading their horses, passed across to the small hill which loomed in front of them out of the mist. It was indeed admirably designed for defence, for it sloped down in front, all jagged and boulder-strewn, while it fell away in a sheer cliff of a hundred feet or more. On the summit was a small uneven plateau, with a stretch across of a hundred paces, and a depth of half as much again.

"Unloose the horses!" said Sir Nigel. "We have no space for them, and if we hold our own we shall have horses and to spare when this day's work is done. Nay, keep yours, my fair sirs, for we may have work for them. Aylward, Johnston, let your men form a harrow on either side of the ridge. Sir Oliver and you, my Lord Angus, I give you the right wing, and the left to you, Sir Simon, and to you, Sir Richard Causton. I and Sir William Felton will hold the centre with our men-at-arms. Now order the ranks, and fling wide the banners, for our souls are God's and our bodies the king's, and our swords for Saint George and for England!"

Sir Nigel had scarcely spoken when the mist seemed to thin in the valley, and to shred away into long ragged clouds which trailed from the edges of the cliffs. The gorge in which they had camped was a mere wedge-shaped cleft among the hills, three-quarters of a mile deep, with the small rugged rising upon which they stood at the further end, and the brown crags walling it in on three sides. As the mist parted, and the sun broke through, it gleamed and shimmered with dazzling brightness upon the armor and headpieces of a vast body of horsemen who stretched across the barranca from one cliff to the other, and extended backwards until their rear guard were far out upon the plain beyond. Line after line, and rank after rank, they choked the neck of the valley with a long vista of tossing pennons, twinkling lances, waving plumes and streaming banderoles, while the curvets and gambades of the chargers lent a constant motion and shimmer to the glittering, many-coloured mass. A yell of exultation, and a forest of waving steel through the length and breadth of their column, announced that they could at last see their entrapped enemies, while the swelling notes of a hundred bugles and drums, mixed with the clash of Moorish cymbals, broke forth into a proud peal of martial triumph. Strange it was to these gallant and sparkling cavaliers of Spain to look upon this handful of men upon the hill, the thin lines of bowmen, the knots of knights and men-at-arms with armor rusted and discoloured from long service, and to learn that these were indeed the soldiers whose fame and prowess had been the camp-fire talk of every army in Christendom. Very still and silent they stood, leaning upon their bows, while their leaders took counsel together in front of them. No clang of bugle rose from their stern ranks, but in the centre waved the leopards of England, on the right the ensign of their Company with the roses of Loring, and on the left, over three score of Welsh bowmen, there floated the red banner of Merlin with the boars’-heads of the Buttesthorns. Gravely and sedately they stood beneath the morning sun waiting for the onslaught of their foemen.

“By Saint Paul!” said Sir Nigel, gazing with puckered eye down the valley, “there appear to be some very worthy people among them. What is this golden banner which waves upon the left?”

“It is the ensign of the Knights of Calatrava,” answered Felton.

“And the other upon the right?”

“It marks the Knights of Santiago, and I see by his flag that their grand-master rides at their head. There too is the banner of Castile amid yonder sparkling squadron which heads the main battle. There are six thousand men-at-arms with ten squadrons of slingers as far as I may judge their numbers.”

“There are Frenchmen among them, my fair lord,” remarked Black Simon. “I can see the pennons of De Couvette, De Brieux, Saint Pol, and many others who struck in against us for Charles of Blois.”

“You are right,” said Sir William, “for I can also see them. There is much Spanish blazonry also, if I could but read it. Don Diego, you know the arms of your own land. Who are they who have done us this honor?”

The Spanish prisoner looked with exultant eyes upon the deep and serried ranks of his countrymen.

“By Saint James!” said he, “if ye fall this day ye fall by no mean hands, for the flower of the knighthood of Castile ride under the banner of Don Tello, with the chivalry of Asturias, Toledo, Leon, Cordova, Galicia, and Seville. I see the guidons of Albornez, Cacorla, Rodriguez, Tavora, with the two great orders, and the knights of France and of Aragon. If you will take my rede you will come to a composition with them, for they will give you such terms as you have given me.”

“Nay, by Saint Paul! it were pity if so many brave men were drawn together, and no little deed of arms to come of it. Ha! William, they advance upon us; and, by my soul! it is a sight that is worth coming over the seas to see.”

As he spoke, the two wings of the Spanish host, consisting of the Knights of Calatrava on the one side and of Santiago upon the other, came swooping swiftly down the valley, while the main body followed more slowly behind.

Five hundred paces from the English the two great bodies of horse crossed each other, and, sweeping round in a curve, retired in feigned confusion towards their centre. Often in bygone wars had the Moors tempted the hot-blooded Spaniards from their places of strength by such pretended flights, but there were men upon the hill to whom every ruse an trick of war were as their daily trade and practice. Again and even nearer came the rallying Spaniards, and again with cry of fear and stooping bodies they swerved off to right and left, but the English still stood stolid and observant among their rocks. The vanguard halted a long bow shot from the hill, and with waving spears and vaunting shouts challenged their enemies to come forth, while two cavaliers, pricking forward from the glittering ranks, walked their horses slowly between the two arrays with targets braced and lances in rest like the challengers in a tourney.

“By Saint Paul!” cried Sir Nigel, with his one eye glowing like an ember, “these appear to be two very worthy and debonair gentlemen. I do not call to mind when I have seen any people who seemed of so great a heart and so high of enterprise. We have our horses, Sir William: shall we not relieve them of any vow which they may have upon their souls?”

Felton’s reply was to bound upon his charger, and to urge it down the slope, while Sir Nigel followed not three spears’-lengths behind him. It was a rugged course, rocky and uneven, yet the two knights, choosing their men, dashed onwards at the top of their speed, while the gallant Spaniards flew as swiftly to meet them. The one to whom Felton found himself opposed was a tall stripling with a stag’s head upon his shield, while Sir Nigel’s man was broad and squat with plain steel harness, and a pink and white torse bound round his helmet. The first struck Felton on the target with such force as to split it from side to side, but Sir William’s lance crashed through the camail which shielded the Spaniard’s throat, and he fell, screaming hoarsely, to the ground. Carried away by the heat and madness of fight, the English knight never drew rein, but charged straight on into the array of the knights of Calatrava. Long time the silent ranks upon the hill could see a swirl and eddy deep down in the heart of the Spanish column, with a circle of rearing chargers and flashing blades. Here and there tossed the white plume of the English helmet, rising and falling like the foam upon a wave, with the fierce gleam and sparkle ever circling round it until at last it had sunk from view, and another brave man had turned from war to peace.

Sir Nigel, meanwhile, had found a foeman worthy of his steel for his opponent was none other than Sebastian Gomez, the picked lance of the monkish Knights of Santiago, who had won fame in a hundred bloody combats with the Moors of Andalusia. So fierce was their meeting that their spears shivered up to the very grasp, and the horses reared backwards until it seemed that they must crash down upon their riders. Yet with consummate horsemanship they both swung round in a long curvet, and then plucking out their swords they lashed at each other like two lusty smiths hammering upon an anvil. The chargers spun round each other, biting and striking, while the two blades wheeled and whizzed and circled in gleams of dazzling light. Cut, parry, and thrust followed so swiftly upon each other that the eye could not follow them, until at last coming thigh to thigh, they cast their arms around each other and rolled off their saddles to the ground. The heavier Spaniard threw himself upon his enemy, and pinning him down beneath him raised his sword to slay him, while a shout of triumph rose from the ranks of his countrymen. But the fatal blow never fell, for even as his arm quivered before descending, the Spaniard gave a shudder, and stiffening himself rolled heavily over upon his side, with the blood gushing from his armpit and from the slit of his vizor. Sir Nigel sprang to his feet with his bloody dagger in his left hand and gazed down upon his adversary, but that fatal and sudden stab in the vital spot, which the Spaniard had exposed by raising his arm, had proved instantly mortal. The Englishman leaped upon his horse and made for the hill, at the very instant that a yell of rage from a thousand voices and the clang of a score of bugles announced the Spanish onset.

But the islanders were ready and eager for the encounter. With feet firmly planted, their sleeves rolled back to give free play to their muscles, their long yellow bow-staves in their left hands, and their quivers slung to the front, they had waited in the four-deep harrow formation which gave strength to their array, and yet permitted every man to draw his arrow freely without harm to those in front. Aylward and Johnston had been engaged in throwing light tufts of grass into the air to gauge the wind force, and a hoarse whisper passed down the ranks from the file-leaders to the men, with scraps of advice and admonition.

“Do not shoot outside the fifteen-score paces,” cried Johnston. “We may need all our shafts ere we have done with them.”

“Better to overshoot than to undershoot,” added Aylward. “Better to strike the rear guard than to feather a shaft in the earth.”

“Loose quick and sharp when they come,” added another. “Let it be the eye to the string, the string to the shaft, and the shaft to the mark. By Our Lady! their banners advance, and we must hold our ground now if ever we are to see Southampton Water again.”

Alleyne, standing with his sword drawn amidst the archers, saw a long toss and heave of the glittering squadrons. Then the front ranks began to surge slowly forward, to trot, to canter, to gallop, and in an instant the whole vast array was hurtling onward, line after line, the air full of the thunder of their cries, the ground shaking with the beat of their hoots, the valley choked with the rushing torrent of steel, topped by the waving plumes, the slanting spears and the fluttering banderoles. On they swept over the level and up to the slope, ere they met the blinding storm of the English arrows. Down went the whole ranks in a whirl of mad confusion, horses plunging and kicking, bewildered men falling, rising, staggering on or back, while ever new lines of horsemen came spurring through the gaps and urged their chargers up the fatal slope. All around him Alleyne could hear the stern, short orders of the master-bowmen, while the air was filled with the keen twanging of the strings and the swish and patter of the shafts. Right across the foot of the hill there had sprung up a long wall of struggling horses and stricken men, which ever grew and heightened as fresh squadrons poured on the attack. One young knight on a gray jennet leaped over his fallen comrades and galloped swiftly up the hill, shrieking loudly upon Saint James, ere he fell within a spear-length of the English line, with the feathers of arrows thrusting out from every crevice and joint of his armor. So for five long minutes the gallant horsemen of Spain and of France strove ever and again to force a passage, until the wailing note of a bugle called them back, and they rode slowly out of bow-shot, leaving their best and their bravest in the ghastly, blood-mottled heap behind them.

But there was little rest for the victors. Whilst the knights had charged them in front the slingers had crept round upon either flank and had gained a footing upon the cliffs and behind the outlying rocks. A storm of stones broke suddenly upon the defenders, who, drawn up in lines upon the exposed summit, offered a fair mark to their hidden foes. Johnston, the old archer, was struck upon the temple and fell dead without a groan, while fifteen of his bowmen and six of the men-at-arms were struck down at the same moment. The others lay on their faces to avoid the deadly hail, while at each side of the plateau a fringe of bowmen exchanged shots with the slingers and crossbowmen among the rocks, aiming mainly at those who had swarmed up the cliffs, and bursting into laughter and cheers when a well-aimed shaft brought one of their opponents toppling down from his lofty perch.

"I think, Nigel," said Sir Oliver, striding across to the little knight, "that we should all acquit ourselves better had we our none-meat, for the sun is high in the heaven."

"By Saint Paul!" quoth Sir Nigel, plucking the patch from his eye, "I think that I am now clear of my vow, for this Spanish knight was a person from whom much honor might be won. Indeed, he was a very worthy gentleman, of good courage, and great hardiness, and it grieves me that he should have come by such a hurt. As to what you say of food, Oliver, it is not to be thought of, for we have nothing with us upon the hill."

"Nigel!" cried Sir Simon Burley, hurrying up with consternation upon his face, "Aylward tells me that there are not ten-score arrows left in all their sheaves. See! they are springing from their horses, and cutting their sollerets that they may rush upon us. Might we not even now make a retreat?"

"My soul will retreat from my body first!" cried the little knight. "Here I am, and here I bide, while God gives me strength to lift a sword."

"And so say I!" shouted Sir Oliver, throwing his mace high into the air and catching it again by the handle.

"To your arms, men!" roared Sir Nigel. "Shoot while you may, and then out sword, and let us live or die together!"

CHAPTER XXXVII. HOW THE WHITE COMPANY CAME TO BE DISBANDED.

Then up rose from the hill in the rugged Cantabrian valley a sound such as had not been heard in those parts before, nor was again, until the streams which rippled amid the rocks had been frozen by over four hundred winters and thawed by as many returning springs. Deep and full and strong it thundered down the ravine, the fierce battle-call of a warrior race, the last stern welcome to whoso should join with them in that world-old game where the stake is death. Thrice it swelled forth and thrice it sank away, echoing and reverberating amidst the crags. Then, with set faces, the Company rose up among the storm of stones, and looked down upon the thousands who sped swiftly up the slope against them. Horse and spear had been set aside, but on foot, with sword and battle-axe, their broad shields slung in front of them, the chivalry of Spain rushed to the attack.

And now arose a struggle so fell, so long, so evenly sustained, that even now the memory of it is handed down amongst the Cantabrian mountaineers and the ill-omened knoll is still pointed out by fathers to their children as the “Altura de los Inglesos,” where the men from across the sea fought the great fight with the knights of the south. The last arrow was quickly shot, nor could the slingers hurl their stones, so close were friend and foe. From side to side stretched the thin line of the English, lightly armed and quick-footed, while against it stormed and raged the pressing throng of fiery Spaniards and of gallant Bretons. The clink of crossing sword-blades, the dull thudding of heavy blows, the panting and gasping of weary and wounded men, all rose together in a wild, long-drawn note, which swelled upwards to the ears of the wondering peasants who looked down from the edges of the cliffs upon the swaying turmoil of the battle beneath them. Back and forward reeled the leopard banner, now borne up the slope by the rush and weight of the onslaught, now pushing downwards again as Sir Nigel, Burley, and Black Simon with their veteran men-at arms, flung themselves madly into the fray. Alleyne, at his lord’s right hand, found himself swept hither and thither in the desperate struggle, exchanging savage thrusts one instant with a Spanish cavalier, and the next torn away by the whirl of men and dashed up against some new antagonist. To the right Sir Oliver, Aylward, Hordle John, and the bowmen of the Company fought furiously against the monkish Knights of Santiago, who were led up the hill by their prior — a great, deep-chested man, who wore a brown monastic habit over his suit of mail. Three archers he slew in three giant strokes, but Sir Oliver flung his arms round him, and the two, staggering and straining, reeled backwards and fell, locked in each other’s grasp, over the edge of the steep cliff which flanked the hill. In vain his knights stormed and raved against the thin line which barred their path: the sword of Aylward and the great axe of John gleamed in the forefront of the battle and huge jagged pieces of rock, hurled by the strong arms of the bowmen, crashed and hurtled amid their ranks. Slowly they gave back down the hill, the archers still hanging upon their skirts, with a long litter of writhing and twisted figures to mark the course which they had taken. At the same instant the Welshmen upon the left, led on by the Scotch earl, had charged out from among the rocks which sheltered them, and by the fury of their outfall had driven the Spaniards in front of them in headlong flight down the hill. In the centre only things seemed to be going ill with the defenders. Black Simon was down — dying, as he would wish to have died, like a grim old wolf in its lair with a ring of his slain around him. Twice Sir Nigel had been overborne, and twice Alleyne had fought over him until he had staggered to his feet once more. Burley lay senseless, stunned by a blow from a mace, and half of the men-at-arms lay littered upon the ground around him. Sir Nigel’s shield was broken, his crest shorn, his armor cut and smashed, and the vizor torn from his helmet; yet he sprang hither and thither with light foot and ready hand, engaging two Bretons and a Spaniard at the same instant — thrusting, stooping, dashing in, springing out — while Alleyne still fought by his side, stemming with a handful of men the fierce tide which surged up against them. Yet it would have fared ill with them had not the archers from either side closed in upon the flanks of the attackers, and pressed them very slowly and foot by foot down the long slope, until they were on the plain once more, where their fellows were already rallying for a fresh assault.

But terrible indeed was the cost at which the last had been repelled. Of the three hundred and seventy men who had held the crest, one hundred and seventy-two were left standing, many of whom were sorely wounded and weak from loss of blood. Sir Oliver Buttesthorn, Sir Richard Causton, Sir

Simon Burley, Black Simon, Johnston, a hundred and fifty archers, and forty-seven men-at-arms had fallen, while the pitiless hail of stones was already whizzing and piping once more about their ears, threatening every instant to further reduce their numbers.

Sir Nigel looked about him at his shattered ranks, and his face flushed with a soldier’s pride.

“By St. Paul!” he cried, “I have fought in many a little bickering, but never one that I would be more loth to have missed than this. But you are wounded, Alleyne?”

“It is nought,” answered his squire, stanching the blood which dripped from a sword-cut across his forehead.

“These gentlemen of Spain seem to be most courteous and worthy people. I see that they are already forming to continue this debate with us. Form up the bowmen two deep instead of four. By my faith! some very brave men have gone from among us. Aylward, you are a trusty soldier, for all that your shoulder has never felt accolade, nor your heels worn the gold spurs. Do you take charge of the right; I will hold the centre, and you, my Lord of Angus, the left.”

“Ho! for Sir Samkin Aylward!” cried a rough voice among the archers, and a roar of laughter greeted their new leader.

“By my hilt!” said the old bowman, “I never thought to lead a wing in a stricken field. Stand close, camarades, for, by these finger-bones! we must play the man this day.”

“Come hither, Alleyne,” said Sir Nigel, walking back to the edge of the cliff which formed the rear of their position. “And you, Norbury,” he continued, beckoning to the squire of Sir Oliver, “do you also come here.”

The two squires hurried across to him, and the three stood looking down into the rocky ravine which lay a hundred and fifty feet beneath them.

“The prince must hear of how things are with us,” said the knight. “Another onfall we may withstand, but they are many and we are few, so that the time must come when we can no longer form line across the hill. Yet if help were brought us we might hold the crest until it comes. See yonder horses which stray among the rocks beneath us?”

“I see them, my fair lord.”

“And see yonder path which winds along the hill upon the further end of the valley?”

“I see it.”

“Were you on those horses, and riding up yonder track, steep and rough as it is, I think that ye might gain the valley beyond. Then on to the prince, and tell him how we fare.”

“But, my fair lord, how can we hope to reach the horses?” asked Norbury.

“Ye cannot go round to them, for they would be upon ye ere ye could come to them. Think ye that ye have heart enough to clamber down this cliff?”

“Had we but a rope.”

“There is one here. It is but one hundred feet long, and for the rest ye must trust to God and to your fingers. Can you try it, Alleyne?”

“With all my heart, my dear lord, but how can I leave you in such a strait?”

“Nay, it is to serve me that ye go. And you, Norbury?”

The silent squire said nothing, but he took up the rope, and, having examined it, he tied one end firmly round a projecting rock. Then he cast off his breast-plate, thigh pieces, and greaves, while Alleyne followed his example.

“Tell Chandos, or Calverley, or Knolles, should the prince have gone forward,” cried Sir Nigel. “Now may God speed ye, for ye are brave and worthy men.”

It was, indeed, a task which might make the heart of the bravest sink within him. The thin cord dangling down the face of the brown cliff seemed from above to reach little more than half-way down it. Beyond stretched the rugged rock, wet and shining, with a green tuft here and there thrusting out from it, but little sign of ridge or foothold. Far below the jagged points of the boulders bristled up, dark and menacing. Norbury tugged thrice with all his strength upon the cord, and then lowered himself over the edge, while a hundred anxious faces peered over at him as he slowly clambered downwards to the end of the rope. Twice he stretched out his foot, and twice he failed to reach the point at which he aimed, but even as he swung himself for a third effort a stone from a sling buzzed like a wasp from amid the rocks and struck him full upon the side of his head. His grasp relaxed, his feet slipped, and in an instant he was a crushed and mangled corpse upon the sharp ridges beneath him.

“If I have no better fortune,” said Alleyne, leading Sir Nigel aside. “I pray you, my dear lord, that you will give my humble service to the Lady

Maude, and say to her that I was ever her true servant and most unworthy cavalier.”

The old knight said no word, but he put a hand on either shoulder, and kissed his squire, with the tears shining in his eyes. Alleyne sprang to the rope, and sliding swiftly down, soon found himself at its extremity. From above it seemed as though rope and cliff were well-nigh touching, but now, when swinging a hundred feet down, the squire found that he could scarce reach the face of the rock with his foot, and that it was as smooth as glass, with no resting-place where a mouse could stand. Some three feet lower, however, his eye lit upon a long jagged crack which slanted downwards, and this he must reach if he would save not only his own poor life, but that of the eight-score men above him. Yet it were madness to spring for that narrow slit with nought but the wet, smooth rock to cling to. He swung for a moment, full of thought, and even as he hung there another of the hellish stones sang through his curls, and struck a chip from the face of the cliff. Up he clambered a few feet, drew up the loose end after him, unslung his belt, held on with knee and with elbow while he spliced the long, tough leathern belt to the end of the cord: then lowering himself as far as he could go, he swung backwards and forwards until his hand reached the crack, when he left the rope and clung to the face of the cliff. Another stone struck him on the side, and he heard a sound like a breaking stick, with a keen stabbing pain which shot through his chest. Yet it was no time now to think of pain or ache. There was his lord and his eight-score comrades, and they must be plucked from the jaws of death. On he clambered, with his hand shuffling down the long sloping crack, sometimes bearing all his weight upon his arms, at others finding some small shelf or tuft on which to rest his foot. Would he never pass over that fifty feet? He dared not look down and could but grope slowly onwards, his face to the cliff, his fingers clutching, his feet scraping and feeling for a support. Every vein and crack and mottling of that face of rock remained forever stamped upon his memory. At last, however, his foot came upon a broad resting-place and he ventured to cast a glance downwards. Thank God! he had reached the highest of those fatal pinnacles upon which his comrade had fallen. Quickly now he sprang from rock to rock until his feet were on the ground, and he had his hand stretched out for the horse’s rein, when a sling-stone struck him on the head, and he dropped senseless upon the ground.

An evil blow it was for Alleyne, but a worse one still for him who struck it. The Spanish slinger, seeing the youth lie slain, and judging from his dress that he was no common man, rushed forward to plunder him, knowing well that the bowmen above him had expended their last shaft. He was still three paces, however, from his victim’s side when John upon the cliff above plucked up a huge boulder, and, poising it for an instant, dropped it with fatal aim upon the slinger beneath him. It struck upon his shoulder, and hurled him, crushed and screaming, to the ground, while Alleyne, recalled to his senses by these shrill cries in his very ear, staggered on to his feet, and gazed wildly about him. His eyes fell upon the horses, grazing upon the scanty pasture, and in an instant all had come back to him — his mission, his comrades, the need for haste. He was dizzy, sick, faint, but he must not die, and he must not tarry, for his life meant many lives that day. In an instant he was in his saddle and spurring down the valley. Loud rang the swift charger’s hoofs over rock and reef, while the fire flew from the stroke of iron, and the loose stones showered up behind him. But his head was whirling round, the blood was gushing from his brow, his temple, his mouth. Ever keener and sharper was the deadly pain which shot like a red-hot arrow through his side. He felt that his eye was glazing, his senses slipping from him, his grasp upon the reins relaxing. Then with one mighty effort, he called up all his strength for a single minute. Stooping down, he loosened the stirrup-straps, bound his knees tightly to his saddle-flaps, twisted his hands in the bridle, and then, putting the gallant horse’s head for the mountain path, he dashed the spurs in and fell forward fainting with his face buried in the coarse, black mane.

Little could he ever remember of that wild ride. Half conscious, but ever with the one thought beating in his mind, he goaded the horse onwards, rushing swiftly down steep ravines over huge boulders, along the edges of black abysses. Dim memories he had of beetling cliffs, of a group of huts with wondering faces at the doors, of foaming, clattering water, and of a bristle of mountain beeches. Once, ere he had ridden far, he heard behind him three deep, sullen shouts, which told him that his comrades had set their faces to the foe once more. Then all was blank, until he woke to find kindly blue English eyes peering down upon him and to hear the blessed sound of his country’s speech. They were but a foraging party — a hundred archers and as many men-at-arms — but their leader was Sir Hugh Calverley, and he was not a man to bide idle when good blows were to be had not three leagues from him. A scout was sent flying with a message to the camp, and Sir Hugh, with his two hundred men, thundered off to the rescue. With them went Alleyne, still bound to his saddle, still dripping with blood, and swooning and recovering, and swooning once again. On they rode, and on, until, at last, topping a ridge, they looked down upon the fateful valley. Alas! and alas! for the sight that met their eyes.

There, beneath them, was the blood-bathed hill, and from the highest pinnacle there flaunted the yellow and white banner with the lions and the towers of the royal house of Castile. Up the long slope rushed ranks and ranks of men exultant, shouting, with waving pennons and brandished arms. Over the whole summit were dense throngs of knights, with no enemy that could be seen to face them, save only that at one corner of the plateau an eddy and swirl amid the crowded mass seemed to show that all resistance was not yet at an end. At the sight a deep groan of rage and of despair went up from the baffled rescuers, and, spurring on their horses, they clattered down the long and winding path which led to the valley beneath.

But they were too late to avenge, as they had been too late to save. Long ere they could gain the level ground, the Spaniards, seeing them riding swiftly amid the rocks, and being ignorant of their numbers, drew off from the captured hill, and, having secured their few prisoners, rode slowly in a long column, with drum-beating and cymbal-clashing, out of the valley. Their rear ranks were already passing out of sight ere the new-comers were urging their panting, foaming horses up the slope which had been the scene of that long drawn and bloody fight.

And a fearsome sight it was that met their eyes! Across the lower end lay the dense heap of men and horses where the first arrow-storm had burst. Above, the bodies of the dead and the dying — French, Spanish, and Aragonese — lay thick and thicker, until they covered the whole ground two and three deep in one dreadful tangle of slaughter. Above them lay the Englishmen in their lines, even as they had stood, and higher yet upon the plateau a wild medley of the dead of all nations, where the last deadly grapple had left them. In the further corner, under the shadow of a great rock, there crouched seven bowmen, with great John in the centre of them — all wounded, weary, and in sorry case, but still unconquered, with their blood-stained weapons waving and their voices ringing a welcome to their countrymen. Alleyne rode across to John, while Sir Hugh Calverley followed close behind him.

"By Saint George!" cried Sir Hugh, "I have never seen signs of so stern a fight, and I am right glad that we have been in time to save you."

"You have saved more than us," said John, pointing to the banner which leaned against the rock behind him.

"You have done nobly," cried the old free companion, gazing with a soldier's admiration at the huge frame and bold face of the archer. "But why is it, my good fellow, that you sit upon this man."

"By the rood! I had forgot him," John answered, rising and dragging from under him no less a person than the Spanish caballero, Don Diego Alvarez. "This man, my fair lord, means to me a new house, ten cows, one bull — if it be but a little one — a grindstone, and I know not what besides; so that I thought it well to sit upon him, lest he should take a fancy to leave me."

"Tell me, John," cried Alleyne faintly: "where is my dear lord, Sir Nigel Loring?"

"He is dead, I fear. I saw them throw his body across a horse and ride away with it, but I fear the life had gone from him."

"Now woe worth me! And where is Aylward?"

"He sprang upon a riderless horse and rode after Sir Nigel to save him. I saw them throng around him, and he is either taken or slain."

"Blow the bugles!" cried Sir Hugh, with a scowling brow. "We must back to camp, and ere three days I trust that we may see these Spaniards again. I would fain have ye all in my company."

"We are of the White Company, my fair lord," said John.

"Nay, the White Company is here disbanded," answered Sir Hugh solemnly, looking round him at the lines of silent figures, "Look to the brave squire, for I fear that he will never see the sun rise again."

CHAPTER XXXVIII. OF THE HOME-COMING TO HAMPSHIRE.

It was a bright July morning four months after that fatal fight in the Spanish barranca. A blue heaven stretched above, a green rolling plain undulated below, intersected with hedge-rows and flecked with grazing sheep. The sun was yet low in the heaven, and the red cows stood in the long shadow of the elms, chewing the cud and gazing with great vacant eyes at two horsemen who were spurring it down the long white road which dipped and curved away back to where the towers and pinnacles beneath the flat-topped hill marked the old town of Winchester.

Of the riders one was young, graceful, and fair, clad in plain doublet and hosen of blue Brussels cloth, which served to show his active and well-knit figure. A flat velvet cap was drawn forward to keep the glare from his eyes, and he rode with lips compressed and anxious face, as one who has much care upon his mind. Young as he was, and peaceful as was his dress, the dainty golden spurs which twinkled upon his heels proclaimed his knighthood, while a long seam upon his brow and a scar upon his temple gave a manly grace to his refined and delicate countenance. His comrade was a large, red-headed man upon a great black horse, with a huge canvas bag slung from his saddle-bow, which jingled and clinked with every movement of his steed. His broad, brown face was lighted up by a continual smile, and he looked slowly from side to side with eyes which twinkled and shone with delight. Well might John rejoice, for was he not back in his native Hampshire, had he not Don Diego’s five thousand crowns rasping against his knee, and above all was he not himself squire now to Sir Alleyne Edricson, the young Socman of Minstead lately knighted by the sword of the Black Prince himself, and esteemed by the whole army as one of the most rising of the soldiers of England.

For the last stand of the Company had been told throughout Christendom wherever a brave deed of arms was loved, and honors had flowed in upon the few who had survived it. For two months Alleyne had wavered betwixt death and life, with a broken rib and a shattered head; yet youth and strength and a cleanly life were all upon his side, and he awoke from his long delirium to find that the war was over, that the Spaniards and their allies had been crushed at Navaretta, and that the prince had himself heard the tale of his ride for succor and had come in person to his bedside to touch his shoulder with his sword and to insure that so brave and true a man should die, if he could not live, within the order of chivalry. The instant that he could set foot to ground Alleyne had started in search of his lord, but no word could he hear of him, dead or alive, and he had come home now sad-hearted, in the hope of raising money upon his estates and so starting upon his quest once more. Landing at London, he had hurried on with a mind full of care, for he had heard no word from Hampshire since the short note which had announced his brother's death.

"By the rood!" cried John, looking around him exultantly, "where have we seen since we left such noble cows, such fleecy sheep, grass so green, or a man so drunk as yonder rogue who lies in the gap of the hedge?"

"Ah, John," Alleyne answered wearily, "it is well for you, but I never thought that my home-coming would be so sad a one. My heart is heavy for my dear lord and for Aylward, and I know not how I may break the news to the Lady Mary and to the Lady Maude, if they have not yet had tidings of it."

John gave a groan which made the horses shy. "It is indeed a black business," said he. "But be not sad, for I shall give half these crowns to my old mother, and half will I add to the money which you may have, and so we shall buy that yellow cog wherein we sailed to Bordeaux, and in it we shall go forth and seek Sir Nigel."

Alleyne smiled, but shook his head. "Were he alive we should have had word of him ere now," said he. "But what is this town before us?"

"Why, it is Romsey!" cried John. "See the tower of the old gray church, and the long stretch of the nunnery. But here sits a very holy man, and I shall give him a crown for his prayers."

Three large stones formed a rough cot by the roadside, and beside it, basking in the sun, sat the hermit, with clay-coloured face, dull eyes, and long withered hands. With crossed ankles and sunken head, he sat as though all his life had passed out of him, with the beads slipping slowly through his thin, yellow fingers. Behind him lay the narrow cell, clay-floored and damp, comfortless, profitless and sordid. Beyond it there lay amid the trees the wattle-and-daub hut of a laborer, the door open, and the single room exposed to the view. The man ruddy and yellow-haired, stood leaning upon the spade wherewith he had been at work upon the garden patch. From behind him came the ripple of a happy woman's laughter, and two young urchins darted forth from the hut, bare-legged and towsy, while the mother, stepping out, laid her hand upon her husband's arm and watched the gambols of the children. The hermit frowned at the untoward noise which broke upon his prayers, but his brow relaxed as he looked upon the broad silver piece which John held out to him.

"There lies the image of our past and of our future," cried Alleyne, as they rode on upon their way. "Now, which is better, to till God's earth, to have happy faces round one's knee, and to love and be loved, or to sit forever moaning over one's own soul, like a mother over a sick babe?"

"I know not about that," said John, "for it casts a great cloud over me when I think of such matters. But I know that my crown was well spent, for the man had the look of a very holy person. As to the other, there was nought holy about him that I could see, and it would be cheaper for me to pray for myself than to give a crown to one who spent his days in digging for lettuces."

Ere Alleyne could answer there swung round the curve of the road a lady's carriage drawn by three horses abreast with a postilion upon the outer one. Very fine and rich it was, with beams painted and gilt, wheels and spokes carved in strange figures, and over all an arched cover of red and white tapestry. Beneath its shade there sat a stout and elderly lady in a pink cote-hardie, leaning back among a pile of cushions, and plucking out her eyebrows with a small pair of silver tweezers. None could seem more safe and secure and at her ease than this lady, yet here also was a symbol of human life, for in an instant, even as Alleyne reined aside to let the carriage pass, a wheel flew out from among its fellows, and over it all toppled — carving, tapestry and gilt — in one wild heap, with the horses plunging, the postilion shouting, and the lady screaming from within. In an instant Alleyne and John were on foot, and had lifted her forth all in a shake with fear, but little the worse for her mischance.

"Now woe worth me!" she cried, "and ill fall on Michael Easover of Romsey! for I told him that the pin was loose, and yet he must needs gainsay me, like the foolish daffe that he is."

"I trust that you have taken no hurt, my fair lady," said Alleyne, conducting her to the bank, upon which John had already placed a cushion.

“Nay, I have had no scath, though I have lost my silver tweezers. Now, lack-a-day! did God ever put breath into such a fool as Michael Easover of Romsey? But I am much beholden to you, gentle sirs. Soldiers ye are, as one may readily see. I am myself a soldier’s daughter,” she added, casting a somewhat languishing glance at John, “and my heart ever goes out to a brave man.”

“We are indeed fresh from Spain,” quoth Alleyne.

“From Spain, say you? Ah! it was an ill and sorry thing that so many should throw away the lives that Heaven gave them. In sooth, it is bad for those who fall, but worse for those who bide behind. I have but now bid farewell to one who hath lost all in this cruel war.”

“And how that, lady?”

“She is a young damsel of these parts, and she goes now into a nunnery. Alack! it is not a year since she was the fairest maid from Avon to Itchen, and now it was more than I could abide to wait at Romsey Nunnery to see her put the white veil upon her face, for she was made for a wife and not for the cloister. Did you ever, gentle sir, hear of a body of men called ‘The White Company’ over yonder?”

“Surely so,” cried both the comrades.

“Her father was the leader of it, and her lover served under him as squire. News hath come that not one of the Company was left alive, and so, poor lamb, she hath — —”

“Lady!” cried Alleyne, with catching breath, “is it the Lady Maude Loring of whom you speak?”

“It is, in sooth.”

“Maude! And in a nunnery! Did, then, the thought of her father’s death so move her?”

“Her father!” cried the lady, smiling. “Nay; Maude is a good daughter, but I think it was this young golden-haired squire of whom I have heard who has made her turn her back upon the world.”

“And I stand talking here!” cried Alleyne wildly. “Come, John, come!”

Rushing to his horse, he swung himself into the saddle, and was off down the road in a rolling cloud of dust as fast as his good steed could bear him.

Great had been the rejoicing amid the Romsey nuns when the Lady Maude Loring had craved admission into their order — for was she not sole child and heiress of the old knight, with farms and fiefs which she could bring to the great nunnery? Long and earnest had been the talks of the gaunt lady abbess, in which she had conjured the young novice to turn forever from the world, and to rest her bruised heart under the broad and peaceful shelter of the church. And now, when all was settled, and when abbess and lady superior had had their will, it was but fitting that some pomp and show should mark the glad occasion. Hence was it that the good burghers of Romsey were all in the streets, that gay flags and flowers brightened the path from the nunnery to the church, and that a long procession wound up to the old arched door leading up the bride to these spiritual nuptials. There was lay-sister Agatha with the high gold crucifix, and the three incense-bearers, and the two-and-twenty garbed in white, who cast flowers upon either side of them and sang sweetly the while. Then, with four attendants, came the novice, her drooping head wreathed with white blossoms, and, behind, the abbess and her council of older nuns, who were already counting in their minds whether their own bailiff could manage the farms of Twynham, or whether a reeve would be needed beneath him, to draw the utmost from these new possessions which this young novice was about to bring them.

But alas! for plots and plans when love and youth and nature, and above all, fortune are arrayed against them. Who is this travel-stained youth who dares to ride so madly through the lines of staring burghers? Why does he fling himself from his horse and stare so strangely about him? See how he has rushed through the incense-bearers, thrust aside lay-sister Agatha, scattered the two-and-twenty damosels who sang so sweetly — and he stands before the novice with his hands out-stretched, and his face shining, and the light of love in his gray eyes. Her foot is on the very lintel of the church, and yet he bars the way — and she, she thinks no more of the wise words and holy rede of the lady abbess, but she hath given a sobbing cry and hath fallen forward with his arms around her drooping body and her wet cheek upon his breast. A sorry sight this for the gaunt abbess, an ill lesson too for the stainless two-and-twenty who have ever been taught that the way of nature is the way of sin. But Maude and Alleyne care little for this. A dank, cold air comes out from the black arch before them. Without, the sun shines bright and the birds are singing amid the ivy on the drooping beeches. Their choice is made, and they turn away hand-in-hand, with their backs to the darkness and their faces to the light.

Very quiet was the wedding in the old priory church at Christchurch, where Father Christopher read the service, and there were few to see save the Lady Loring and John, and a dozen bowmen from the castle. The Lady of Twynham had drooped and pined for weary months, so that her face was harsher and less comely than before, yet she still hoped on, for her lord had come through so many dangers that she could scarce believe that he might be stricken down at last. It had been her wish to start for Spain and to search for him, but Alleyne had persuaded her to let him go in her place. There was much to look after, now that the lands of Minstead were joined to those of Twynham, and Alleyne had promised her that if she would but bide with his wife he would never come back to Hampshire again until he had gained some news, good or ill, of her lord and lover.

The yellow cog had been engaged, with Goodwin Hawtayne in command, and a month after the wedding Alleyne rode down to Bucklershard to see if she had come round yet from Southampton. On the way he passed the fishing village of Pitt’s Deep, and marked that a little creyer or brig was tacking off the land, as though about to anchor there. On his way back, as he rode towards the village, he saw that she had indeed anchored, and that many boats were round her, bearing cargo to the shore.

A bow-shot from Pitt’s Deep there was an inn a little back from the road, very large and wide-spread, with a great green bush hung upon a pole from one of the upper windows. At this window he marked, as he rode up, that a man was seated who appeared to be craning his neck in his direction. Alleyne was still looking up at him, when a woman came rushing from the open door of the inn, and made as though she would climb a tree, looking back the while with a laughing face. Wondering what these doings might mean, Alleyne tied his horse to a tree, and was walking amid the trunks towards the inn, when there shot from the entrance a second woman who made also for the trees. Close at her heels came a burly, brown-faced man, who leaned against the door-post and laughed loudly with his hand to his side, “Ah, mes belles!” he cried, “and is it thus you treat me? Ah, mes petites! I swear by these finger-bones that I would not hurt a hair of your pretty heads; but I have been among the black paynim, and, by my hilt! it does me good to look at your English cheeks. Come, drink a stoup of muscadine with me, mes anges, for my heart is warm to be among ye again.”

At the sight of the man Alleyne had stood staring, but at the sound of his voice such a thrill of joy bubbled up in his heart that he had to bite his lip to keep himself from shouting outright. But a deeper pleasure yet was in store.

Even as he looked, the window above was pushed outwards, and the voice of the man whom he had seen there came out from it. “Aylward,” cried the voice, “I have seen just now a very worthy person come down the road, though my eyes could scarce discern whether he carried coat-armor. I pray you to wait upon him and tell him that a very humble knight of England abides here, so that if he be in need of advancement, or have any small vow upon his soul, or desire to exalt his lady, I may help him to accomplish it.”

Aylward at this order came shuffling forward amid the trees, and in an instant the two men were clinging in each other’s arms, laughing and shouting and patting each other in their delight; while old Sir Nigel came running with his sword, under the impression that some small bickering had broken out, only to embrace and be embraced himself, until all three were hoarse with their questions and outcries and congratulations.

On their journey home through the woods Alleyne learnt their wondrous story: how, when Sir Nigel came to his senses, he with his fellow-captive had been hurried to the coast, and conveyed by sea to their captor’s castle; how upon the way they had been taken by a Barbary rover, and how they exchanged their light captivity for a seat on a galley bench and hard labor at the pirate’s oars; how, in the port at Barbary, Sir Nigel had slain the Moorish captain, and had swum with Aylward to a small coaster which they had taken, and so made their way to England with a rich cargo to reward them for their toils. All this Alleyne listened to, until the dark keep of Twynham towered above them in the gloaming, and they saw the red sun lying athwart the rippling Avon. No need to speak of the glad hearts at Twynham Castle that night, nor of the rich offerings from out that Moorish cargo which found their way to the chapel of Father Christopher.

Sir Nigel Loring lived for many years, full of honor and laden with every blessing. He rode no more to the wars, but he found his way to every jousting within thirty miles; and the Hampshire youth treasured it as the highest honor when a word of praise fell from him as to their management of their horses, or their breaking of their lances. So he lived and so he died, the most revered and the happiest man in all his native shire.

For Sir Alleyne Edricson and for his beautiful bride the future had also naught but what was good. Twice he fought in France, and came back each time laden with honors. A high place at court was given to him, and he spent many years at Windsor under the second Richard and the fourth Henry — where he received the honor of the Garter, and won the name of being a brave soldier, a true-hearted gentleman, and a great lover and patron of every art and science which refines or ennobles life.

As to John, he took unto himself a village maid, and settled in Lyndhurst, where his five thousand crowns made him the richest franklin for many miles around. For many years he drank his ale every night at the “Pied Merlin,” which was now kept by his friend Aylward, who had wedded the good widow to whom he had committed his plunder. The strong men and the bowmen of the country round used to drop in there of an evening to wrestle a fall with John or to shoot a round with Aylward; but, though a silver shilling was to be the prize of the victory, it has never been reported that any man earned much money in that fashion. So they lived, these men, in their own lusty, cheery fashion — rude and rough, but honest, kindly and true. Let us thank God if we have outgrown their vices. Let us pray to God that we may ever hold their virtues. The sky may darken, and the clouds may gather, and again the day may come when Britain may have sore need of her children, on whatever shore of the sea they be found. Shall they not muster at her call?

THE GREAT SHADOW

AND OTHER NAPOLEONIC TALES

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THE GREAT SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT OF THE BEACONS.

It is strange to me, Jock Calder of West Inch, to feel that though now, in the very centre of the nineteenth century, I am but five-and-fifty years of age, and though it is only once in a week perhaps that my wife can pluck out a little grey bristle from over my ear, yet I have lived in a time when the thoughts and the ways of men were as different as though it were another planet from this. For when I walk in my fields I can see, down Berwick way, the little fluffs of white smoke which tell me of this strange new hundred-legged beast, with coals for food and a thousand men in its belly, for ever crawling over the border. On a shiny day I can see the glint of the brass work as it takes the curve near Corriemuir; and then, as I look out to sea, there is the same beast again, or a dozen of them maybe, leaving a trail of black in the air and of white in the water, and swimming in the face of the wind as easily as a salmon up the Tweed. Such a sight as that would have struck my good old father speechless with wrath as well as surprise; for he was so stricken with the fear of offending the Creator that he was chary of contradicting Nature, and always held the new thing to be nearly akin to the blasphemous. As long as God made the horse, and a man down Birmingham way the engine, my good old dad would have stuck by the saddle and the spurs.

But he would have been still more surprised had he seen the peace and kindliness which reigns now in the hearts of men, and the talk in the papers and at the meetings that there is to be no more war — save, of course, with blacks and such like. For when he died we had been fighting with scarce a break, save only during two short years, for very nearly a quarter of a century. Think of it, you who live so quietly and peacefully now! Babies who were born in the war grew to be bearded men with babies of their own, and still the war continued. Those who had served and fought in their stalwart prime grew stiff and bent, and yet the ships and the armies were struggling. It was no wonder that folk came at last to look upon it as the natural state, and thought how queer it must seem to be at peace. During that long time we fought the Dutch, we fought the Danes, we fought the

Spanish, we fought the Turks, we fought the Americans, we fought the Monte-Videans, until it seemed that in this universal struggle no race was too near of kin, or too far away, to be drawn into the quarrel. But most of all it was the French whom we fought, and the man whom of all others we loathed and feared and admired was the great Captain who ruled them.

It was very well to draw pictures of him, and sing songs about him, and make as though he were an impostor; but I can tell you that the fear of that man hung like a black shadow over all Europe, and that there was a time when the glint of a fire at night upon the coast would set every woman upon her knees and every man gripping for his musket. He had always won: that was the terror of it. The Fates seemed to be behind him. And now we knew that he lay upon the northern coast with a hundred and fifty thousand veterans, and the boats for their passage. But it is an old story, how a third of the grown folk of our country took up arms, and how our little one-eyed, one-armed man crushed their fleet. There was still to be a land of free thinking and free speaking in Europe.

There was a great beacon ready on the hill by Tweedmouth, built up of logs and tar-barrels; and I can well remember how, night after night, I strained my eyes to see if it were ablaze. I was only eight at the time, but it is an age when one takes a grief to heart, and I felt as though the fate of the country hung in some fashion upon me and my vigilance. And then one night as I looked I suddenly saw a little flicker on the beacon hill — a single red tongue of flame in the darkness. I remember how I rubbed my eyes, and pinched myself, and rapped my knuckles against the stone window-sill, to make sure that I was indeed awake. And then the flame shot higher, and I saw the red quivering line upon the water between; and I dashed into the kitchen, screeching to my father that the French had crossed and the Tweedmouth light was aflame. He had been talking to Mr. Mitchell, the law student from Edinburgh; and I can see him now as he knocked his pipe out at the side of the fire, and looked at me from over the top of his horn spectacles.

“Are you sure, Jock?” says he.

“Sure as death!” I gasped.

He reached out his hand for the Bible upon the table, and opened it upon his knee as though he meant to read to us; but he shut it again in silence, and hurried out. We went too, the law student and I, and followed him down to the gate which opens out upon the highway. From there we could see the red light of the big beacon, and the glimmer of a smaller one to the north of us at Ayton. My mother came down with two plaids to keep the chill from us, and we all stood there until morning, speaking little to each other, and that little in a whisper. The road had more folk on it than ever passed along it at night before; for many of the yeomen up our way had enrolled themselves in the Berwick volunteer regiments, and were riding now as fast as hoof could carry them for the muster. Some had a stirrup cup or two before parting, and I cannot forget one who tore past on a huge white horse, brandishing a great rusty sword in the moonlight. They shouted to us as they passed that the North Berwick Law fire was blazing, and that it was thought that the alarm had come from Edinburgh Castle. There were a few who galloped the other way, couriers for Edinburgh, and the laird's son, and Master Clayton, the deputy sheriff, and such like. And among others there was one a fine built, heavy man on a roan horse, who pulled up at our gate and asked some question about the road. He took off his hat to ease himself, and I saw that he had a kindly long-drawn face, and a great high brow that shot away up into tufts of sandy hair.

"I doubt it's a false alarm," said he. "Maybe I'd ha' done well to bide where I was; but now I've come so far, I'll break my fast with the regiment."

He clapped spurs to his horse, and away he went down the brae.

"I ken him weel," said our student, nodding after him. "He's a lawyer in Edinburgh, and a braw hand at the stringin' of verses. Wattie Scott is his name."

None of us had heard of it then; but it was not long before it was the best known name in Scotland, and many a time we thought of how he speered his way of us on the night of the terror.

But early in the morning we had our minds set at ease. It was grey and cold, and my mother had gone up to the house to make a pot of tea for us, when there came a gig down the road with Dr. Horscroft of Ayton in it and his son Jim. The collar of the doctor's brown coat came over his ears, and he looked in a deadly black humour; for Jim, who was but fifteen years of age, had trooped off to Berwick at the first alarm with his father's new fowling piece. All night his dad had chased him, and now there he was, a prisoner, with the barrel of the stolen gun sticking out from behind the seat. He looked as sulky as his father, with his hands thrust into his side-pockets, his brows drawn down, and his lower lip thrusting out.

"It's all a lie!" shouted the doctor as he passed. "There has been no landing, and all the fools in Scotland have been gadding about the roads for nothing."

His son Jim snarled something up at him on this, and his father struck him a blow with his clenched fist on the side of his head, which sent the boy's chin forward upon his breast as though he had been stunned. My father shook his head, for he had a liking for Jim; but we all walked up to the house again, nodding and blinking, and hardly able to keep our eyes open now that we knew that all was safe, but with a thrill of joy at our hearts such as I have only matched once or twice in my lifetime.

Now all this has little enough to do with what I took my pen up to tell about; but when a man has a good memory and little skill, he cannot draw one thought from his mind without a dozen others trailing out behind it. And yet, now that I come to think of it, this had something to do with it after all; for Jim Horscroft had so deadly a quarrel with his father, that he was packed off to the Berwick Academy, and as my father had long wished me to go there, he took advantage of this chance to send me also.

But before I say a word about this school, I shall go back to where I should have begun, and give you a hint as to who I am; for it may be that these words of mine may be read by some folk beyond the border country who never heard of the Calders of West Inch.

It has a brave sound, West Inch, but it is not a fine estate with a braw house upon it, but only a great hard-bitten, wind-swept sheep run, fringing off into links along the sea-shore, where a frugal man might with hard work just pay his rent and have butter instead of treacle on Sundays. In the centre there is a grey-stoned slate-roofed house with a byre behind it, and "1703" scrawled in stonework over the lintel of the door. There for more than a hundred years our folk have lived, until, for all their poverty, they came to take a good place among the people; for in the country parts the old yeoman is often better thought of than the new laird.

There was one queer thing about the house of West Inch. It has been reckoned by engineers and other knowing folk that the boundary line between the two countries ran right through the middle of it, splitting our second-best bedroom into an English half and a Scotch half. Now the cot in which I always slept was so placed that my head was to the north of the line and my feet to the south of it. My friends say that if I had chanced to lie the other way my hair might not have been so sandy, nor my mind of so solemn a cast. This I know, that more than once in my life, when my Scotch head could see no way out of a danger, my good thick English legs have come to my help, and carried me clear away. But at school I never heard the end of this, for they would call me “Half-and-half” and “The Great Britain,” and sometimes “Union Jack.” When there was a battle between the Scotch and English boys, one side would kick my shins and the other cuff my ears, and then they would both stop and laugh as though it were something funny.

At first I was very miserable at the Berwick Academy. Birtwhistle was the first master, and Adams the second, and I had no love for either of them. I was shy and backward by nature, and slow at making a friend either among masters or boys. It was nine miles as the crow flies, and eleven and a half by road, from Berwick to West Inch, and my heart grew heavy at the weary distance that separated me from my mother; for, mark you, a lad of that age pretends that he has no need of his mother’s caresses, but ah, how sad he is when he is taken at his word! At last I could stand it no longer, and I determined to run away from the school and make my way home as fast as I might. At the very last moment, however, I had the good fortune to win the praise and admiration of every one, from the headmaster downwards, and to find my school life made very pleasant and easy to me. And all this came of my falling by accident out of a second-floor window.

This was how it happened. One evening I had been kicked by Ned Barton, who was the bully of the school; and this injury coming on the top of all my other grievances, caused my little cup to overflow. I vowed that night, as I buried my tear-stained face beneath the blankets, that the next morning would either find me at West Inch or well on the way to it. Our dormitory was on the second floor, but I was a famous climber, and had a fine head for heights. I used to think little, young as I was, of swinging myself with a rope round my thigh off the West Inch gable, and that stood three-and-fifty feet above the ground. There was not much fear then but that I could make my way out of Birtwhistle’s dormitory. I waited a weary while until the coughing and tossing had died away, and there was no sound of wakefulness from the long line of wooden cots; then I very softly rose, slipped on my clothes, took my shoes in my hand, and walked tiptoe to the window. I opened the casement and looked out. Underneath me lay the garden, and close by my hand was the stout branch of a pear tree. An active lad could ask no better ladder. Once in the garden I had but a five-foot wall to get over, and then there was nothing but distance between me and home.

I took a firm grip of a branch with one hand, placed my knee upon another one, and was about to swing myself out of the window, when in a moment I was as silent and as still as though I had been turned to stone.

There was a face looking at me from over the coping of the wall. A chill of fear struck to my heart at its whiteness and its stillness. The moon shimmered upon it, and the eyeballs moved slowly from side to side, though I was hid from them behind the screen of the pear tree. Then in a jerky fashion this white face ascended, until the neck, shoulders, waist, and knees of a man became visible. He sat himself down on the top of the wall, and with a great heave he pulled up after him a boy about my own size, who caught his breath from time to time as though to choke down a sob. The man gave him a shake, with a few rough whispered words, and then the two dropped together down into the garden. I was still standing balanced with one foot upon the bough and one upon the casement, not daring to budge for fear of attracting their attention, for I could hear them moving stealthily about in the long shadow of the house. Suddenly, from immediately beneath my feet, I heard a low grating noise and the sharp tinkle of falling glass.

“That’s done it,” said the man’s eager whisper. “There is room for you.”

“But the edge is all jagged!” cried the other in a weak quaver.

The fellow burst out into an oath that made my skin pringle.

“In with you, you cub,” he snarled, “or—”

I could not see what he did, but there was a short, quick gasp of pain.

“I’ll go! I’ll go!” cried the little lad.

But I heard no more, for my head suddenly swam, my heel shot off the branch, I gave a dreadful yell, and came down, with my ninety-five pounds of weight, right upon the bent back of the burglar. If you ask me, I can only say that to this day I am not quite certain whether it was an accident or whether I designed it. It may be that while I was thinking of doing it Chance settled the matter for me. The fellow was stooping with his head forward thrusting the boy through a tiny window, when I came down upon him just where the neck joins the spine. He gave a kind of whistling cry, dropped upon his face, and rolled three times over, drumming on the grass with his heels. His little companion flashed off in the moonlight, and was over the wall in a trice. As for me, I sat yelling at the pitch of my lungs and nursing one of my legs, which felt as if a red-hot ring were welded round it.

It was not long, as may be imagined, before the whole household, from the headmaster to the stable boy, were out in the garden with lamps and lanterns. The matter was soon cleared: the man carried off upon a shutter, and I borne in much state and solemnity to a special bedroom, where the small bone of my leg was set by Surgeon Purdie, the younger of the two brothers of that name. As to the robber, it was found that his legs were palsied, and the doctors were of two minds as to whether he would recover the use of them or no; but the Law never gave them a chance of settling the matter, for he was hanged after Carlisle assizes, some six weeks later. It was proved that he was the most desperate rogue in the North of England, for he had done three murders at the least, and there were charges enough against him upon the sheet to have hanged him ten times over.

Well now, I could not pass over my boyhood without telling you about this, which was the most important thing that happened to me. But I will go off upon no more side tracks; for when I think of all that is coming, I can see very well that I shall have more than enough to do before I have finished. For when a man has only his own little private tale to tell, it often takes him all his time; but when he gets mixed up in such great matters as I shall have to speak about, then it is hard on him, if he has not been brought up to it, to get it all set down to his liking. But my memory is as good as ever, thank God, and I shall try to get it all straight before I finish.

It was this business of the burglar that first made a friendship between Jim Horscroft, the doctor’s son, and me. He was cock boy of the school from the day he came; for within the hour he had thrown Barton, who had been cock before him, right through the big blackboard in the class-room. Jim always ran to muscle and bone, and even then he was square and tall, short of speech and long in the arm, much given to lounging with his broad back against walls, and his hands deep in his breeches pockets. I can even recall that he had a trick of keeping a straw in the corner of his mouth, just where he used afterwards to hold his pipe. Jim was always the same for good and for bad since first I knew him.

Heavens, how we all looked up to him! We were but young savages, and had a savage’s respect for power. There was Tom Carndale of Appleby, who could write alcaics as well as mere pentameters and hexameters, yet nobody would give a snap for Tom; and there was Willie Earnshaw, who had every date, from the killing of Abel, on the tip of his tongue, so that the masters themselves would turn to him if they were in doubt, yet he was but a narrow-chested lad, over long for his breadth; and what did his dates help him when Jack Simons of the lower third chivied him down the passage with the buckle end of a strap? But you didn’t do things like that with Jim Horscroft. What tales we used to whisper about his strength! How he put his fist through the oak-panel of the game-room door; how, when Long Merridew was carrying the ball, he caught up Merridew, ball and all, and ran swiftly past every opponent to the goal. It did not seem fit to us that such a one as he should trouble his head about spondees and dactyls, or care to know who signed the Magna Charta. When he said in open class that King Alfred was the man, we little boys all felt that very likely it was so, and that perhaps Jim knew more about it than the man who wrote the book.

Well, it was this business of the burglar that drew his attention to me; for he patted me on my head, and said that I was a spunky little devil, which blew me out with pride for a week on end. For two years we were close friends, for all the gap that the years had made between us, and though in passion or in want of thought he did many a thing that galled me, yet I loved him like a brother, and wept as much as would have filled an ink bottle when at last he went off to Edinburgh to study his father’s profession. Five years after that did I tide at Birtwhistle’s, and when I left had become cock myself, for I was wiry and as tough as whalebone, though I never ran to weight and sinew like my great predecessor. It was in Jubilee Year that I left Birtwhistle’s, and then for three years I stayed at home learning the ways of the cattle; but still the ships and the armies were wrestling, and still the great shadow of Bonaparte lay across the country. How could I guess that I too should have a hand in lifting that shadow for ever from our people?

CHAPTER II.

COUSIN EDIE OF EYEMOUTH.

Some years before, when I was still but a lad, there had come over to us upon a five weeks’ visit the only daughter of my father’s brother. Willie Calder had settled at Eyemouth as a maker of fishing nets, and he had made more out of twine than ever we were like to do out of the whin-bushes and sand-links of West Inch. So his daughter, Edie Calder, came over with a braw red frock and a five shilling bonnet, and a kist full of things that brought my dear mother’s eyes out like a partan’s. It was wonderful to see her so free with money, and she but a slip of a girl, paying the carrier man all that he asked and a whole twopence over, to which he had no claim. She made no more of drinking ginger-beer than we did of water, and she would have her sugar in her tea and butter with her bread just as if she had been English.

I took no great stock of girls at that time, for it was hard for me to see what they had been made for. There were none of us at Birtwhistle’s that thought very much of them; but the smallest laddies seemed to have the most sense, for after they began to grow bigger they were not so sure about it. We little ones were all of one mind: that a creature that couldn’t fight and was aye carrying tales, and couldn’t so much as shy a stone without flapping its arm like a rag in the wind, was no use for anything. And then the airs that they would put on, as if they were mother and father rolled into one; for ever breaking into a game with “Jimmy, your toe’s come through your boot,” or “Go home, you dirty boy, and clean yourself,” until the very sight of them was weariness.

So when this one came to the steading at West Inch I was not best pleased to see her. I was twelve at the time (it was in the holidays) and she eleven, a thin, tallish girl with black eyes and the queerest ways. She was for ever staring out in front of her with her lips parted, as if she saw something wonderful; but when I came behind her and looked the same way, I could see nothing but the sheep’s trough or the midden, or father’s breeches hanging on a clothes-line. And then if she saw a lump of heather or bracken, or any common stuff of that sort, she would mope over it, as if it had struck her sick, and cry, “How sweet! how perfect!” just as though it had been a painted picture. She didn’t like games, but I used to make her play “tig” and such like; but it was no fun, for I could always catch her in three jumps, and she could never catch me, though she would come with as much rustle and flutter as ten boys would make. When I used to tell her that she was good for nothing, and that her father was a fool to bring her up like that, she would begin to cry, and say that I was a rude boy, and that she would go home that very night, and never forgive me as long as she lived. But in five minutes she had forgot all about it. What was strange was that she liked me a deal better than I did her, and she would never leave me alone; but she was always watching me and running after me, and then saying, “Oh, here you are!” as if it were a surprise.

But soon I found that there was good in her too. She used sometimes to give me pennies, so that once I had four in my pocket all at the same time; but the best part of her was the stories that she could tell. She was sore frightened of frogs, so I would bring one to her, and tell her that I would put it down her neck unless she told a story. That always helped her to begin; but when once she was started it was wonderful how she would carry on. And the things that had happened to her, they were enough to take your breath away. There was a Barbary rover that had been at Eyemouth, and he was coming back in five years in a ship full of gold to make her his wife; and then there was a wandering knight who had been there also, and he had given her a ring which he said he would redeem when the time came. She showed me the ring, which was very like the ones upon my bed curtain; but she said that this one was virgin gold. I asked her what the knight would do if he met the Barbary rover, and she told me that he would sweep his head from his shoulders. What they could all see in her was more than I could think. And then she told me that she had been followed on her way to West Inch by a disguised prince. I asked her how she knew it was a prince, and she said by his disguise. Another day she said that her father was preparing a riddle, and that when it was ready it would be put in the papers, and anyone who guessed it would have half his fortune and his daughter. I said that I was good at riddles, and that she must send it to me when it was ready. She said it would be in the *Berwick Gazette*, and wanted to know what I would do with her when I won her. I said I would sell her by public roup for what she would fetch; but she would tell no more stories that evening, for she was very techy about some things.

Jim Horscroft was away when Cousin Edie was with us, but he came back the very week she went; and I mind how surprised I was that he should ask any questions or take any interest in a mere lassie. He asked me if she were pretty; and when I said I hadn’t noticed, he laughed and called me a mole, and said my eyes would be opened some day. But very soon he came to be interested in something else, and I never gave Edie another thought until one day she just took my life in her hands and twisted it as I could twist this quill.

That was in 1813, after I had left school, when I was already eighteen years of age, with a good forty hairs on my upper lip and every hope of more. I had changed since I left school, and was not so keen on games as I had been, but found myself instead lying about on the sunny side of the braes, with my own lips parted and my eyes staring just the same as Cousin Edie’s used to do. It had satisfied me and filled my whole life that I could run faster and jump higher than my neighbour; but now all that seemed such a little thing, and I yearned, and yearned, and looked up at the big arching sky, and down at the flat blue sea, and felt that there was something wanting, but could never lay my tongue to what that something was. And I became quick of temper too, for my nerves seemed all of a fret, and when my mother would ask me what ailed me, or my father would speak of my turning my hand to work, I would break into such sharp bitter answers as I have often grieved over since. Ah! a man may have more than one wife, and more than one child, and more than one friend; but he can never have but the one mother, so let him cherish her while he may.

One day when I came in from the sheep, there was my father sitting with a letter in his hands, which was a very rare thing with us, except when the factor wrote for the rent. Then as I came nearer to him I saw that he was crying, and I stood staring, for I had always thought that it was not a thing that a man could do. I can see him now, for he had so deep a crease across his brown cheek that no tear could pass it, but must trickle away sideways and so down to his ear, hopping off on to the sheet of paper. My mother sat beside him and stroked his hands like she did the cat’s back when she would soothe it.

“Aye, Jeannie,” said he, “poor Willie’s gone. It’s from the lawyer, and it was sudden or they’d ha’ sent word of it. Carbuncle, he says, and a flush o’ blood to the head.”

“Ah! well, his trouble’s over,” said my mother.

My father rubbed his ears with the tablecloth.

“He’s left a’ his savings to his lassie,” said he, “and by gom if she’s not changed from what she promised to be she’ll soon gar them flee. You mind what she said of weak tea under this very roof, and it at seven shillings the pound!”

My mother shook her head, and looked up at the flitches of bacon that hung from the ceiling.

“He doesn’t say how much, but she’ll have enough and to spare, he says.

And she’s to come and bide with us, for that was his last wish.”

“To pay for her keep!” cried my mother sharply. I was sorry that she should have spoken of money at that moment, but then if she had not been sharp we would all have been on the roadside in a twelvemonth.

“Aye, she’ll pay, and she’s coming this very day. Jock lad, I’ll want you to drive to Ayton and meet the evening coach. Your Cousin Edie will be in it, and you can fetch her over to West Inch.”

And so off I started at quarter past five with Souter Johnnie, the long-haired fifteen-year-old, and our cart with the new-painted tail-board that we only used on great days. The coach was in just as I came, and I, like a foolish country lad, taking no heed to the years that had passed, was looking about among the folk in the Inn front for a slip of a girl with her petticoats just under her knees. And as I slouched past and craned my neck there came a touch to my elbow, and there was a lady dressed all in black standing by the steps, and I knew that it was my cousin Edie.

I knew it, I say, and yet had she not touched me I might have passed her a score of times and never known it. My word, if Jim Horscroft had asked me then if she were pretty or no, I should have known how to answer him! She was dark, much darker than is common among our border lasses, and yet with such a faint blush of pink breaking through her dainty colour, like the deeper flush at the heart of a sulphur rose. Her lips were red, and kindly, and firm; and even then, at the first glance, I saw that light of mischief and mockery that danced away at the back of her great dark eyes. She took me then and there as though I had been her heritage, put out her hand and plucked me. She was, as I have said, in black, dressed in what seemed to me to be a wondrous fashion, with a black veil pushed up from her brow.

“Ah! Jack,” said she, in a mincing English fashion, that she had learned at the boarding school. “No, no, we are rather old for that” — this because I in my awkward fashion was pushing my foolish brown face forward to kiss her, as I had done when I saw her last. “Just hurry up like a good fellow and give a shilling to the conductor, who has been exceedingly civil to me during the journey.”

I flushed up red to the ears, for I had only a silver fourpenny piece in my pocket. Never had my lack of pence weighed so heavily upon me as just at that moment. But she read me at a glance, and there in an instant was a little moleskin purse with a silver clasp thrust into my hand. I paid the man, and would have given it back, but she still would have me keep it.

“You shall be my factor, Jack,” said she, laughing. “Is this our carriage? How funny it looks! And where am I to sit?”

“On the sacking,” said I.

“And how am I to get there?”

“Put your foot on the hub,” said I. “I’ll help you.”

I sprang up and took her two little gloved hands in my own. As she came over the side her breath blew in my face, sweet and warm, and all that vagueness and unrest seemed in a moment to have been shredded away from my soul. I felt as if that instant had taken me out from myself, and made me one of the race. It took but the time of the flicking of the horse’s tail, and yet something had happened, a barrier had gone down somewhere, and I was leading a wider and a wiser life. I felt it all in a flush, but shy and backward as I was, I could do nothing but flatten out the sacking for her. Her eyes were after the coach which was rattling away to Berwick, and suddenly she shook her handkerchief in the air.

“He took off his hat,” said she. “I think he must have been an officer. He was very distinguished looking. Perhaps you noticed him — a gentleman on the outside, very handsome, with a brown overcoat.”

I shook my head, with all my flush of joy changed to foolish resentment.

“Ah! well, I shall never see him again. Here are all the green braes and the brown winding road just the same as ever. And you, Jack, I don’t see any great change in you either. I hope your manners are better than they used to be. You won’t try to put any frogs down my back, will you?”

I crept all over when I thought of such a thing.

“We’ll do all we can to make you happy at West Inch,” said I, playing with the whip.

“I’m sure it’s very kind of you to take a poor lonely girl in,” said she.

“It’s very kind of you to come, Cousin Edie,” I stammered. “You’ll find it very dull, I fear.”

"I suppose it is a little quiet, Jack, eh? Not many men about, as I remember it."

"There is Major Elliott, up at Corriemuir. He comes down of an evening, a real brave old soldier who had a ball in his knee under Wellington."

"Ah, when I speak of men. Jack, I don't mean old folk with balls in their knees. I meant people of our own age that we could make friends of. By the way, that crabbed old doctor had a son, had he not?"

"Oh yes, that's Jim Horscroft, my best friend."

"Is he at home?"

"No. He'll be home soon. He's still at Edinburgh studying."

"Ah! then we'll keep each other company until he comes, Jack. And I'm very tired and I wish I was at West Inch."

I made old Souter Johnnie cover the ground as he has never done before or since, and in an hour she was seated at the supper table, where my mother had laid out not only butter, but a glass dish of gooseberry jam, which sparkled and looked fine in the candle-light. I could see that my parents were as overcome as I was at the difference in her, though not in the same way. My mother was so set back by the feather thing that she had round her neck that she called her Miss Calder instead of Edie, until my cousin in her pretty flighty way would lift her forefinger to her whenever she did it. After supper, when she had gone to bed, they could talk of nothing but her looks and her breeding.

"By the way, though," says my father, "it does not look as if she were heart-broke about my brother's death."

And then for the first time I remembered that she had never said a word about the matter since I had met her.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW ON THE WATERS.

It was not very long before Cousin Edie was queen of West Inch, and we all her devoted subjects from my father down. She had money and to spare, though none of us knew how much. When my mother said that four shillings the week would cover all that she would cost, she fixed on seven shillings and sixpence of her own free will. The south room, which was the sunniest and had the honeysuckle round the window, was for her; and it was a marvel to see the things that she brought from Berwick to put into it. Twice a week she would drive over, and the cart would not do for her, for she hired a gig from Angus Whitehead, whose farm lay over the hill. And it was seldom that she went without bringing something back for one or other of us. It was a wooden pipe for my father, or a Shetland plaid for my mother, or a book for me, or a brass collar for Rob the collie. There was never a woman more free-handed.

But the best thing that she gave us was just her own presence. To me it changed the whole country-side, and the sun was brighter and the braes greener and the air sweeter from the day she came. Our lives were common no longer now that we spent them with such a one as she, and the old dull grey house was another place in my eyes since she had set her foot across the door-mat. It was not her face, though that was winsome enough, nor her form, though I never saw the lass that could match her; but it was her spirit, her queer mocking ways, her fresh new fashion of talk, her proud whisk of the dress and toss of the head, which made one feel like the ground beneath her feet, and then the quick challenge in her eye, and the kindly word that brought one up to her level again.

But never quite to her level either. To me she was always something above and beyond. I might brace myself and blame myself, and do what I would, but still I could not feel that the same blood ran in our veins, and that she was but a country lassie, as I was a country lad. The more I loved her the more frightened I was at her, and she could see the fright long before she knew the love. I was uneasy to be away from her, and yet when I was with her I was in a shiver all the time for fear my stumbling talk might weary her or give her offence. Had I known more of the ways of women I might have taken less pains.

“You’re a deal changed from what you used to be, Jack,” said she, looking at me sideways from under her dark lashes.

“You said not when first we met,” says I.

“Ah! I was speaking of your looks then, and of your ways now. You used to be so rough to me, and so masterful, and would have your own way, like the little man that you were. I can see you now with your touzled brown hair and your mischievous eyes. And now you are so gentle and quiet and soft-spoken.”

“One learns to behave,” says I.

“Ah, but, Jack, I liked you so much better as you were!”

Well, when she said that I fairly stared at her, for I had thought that she could never have quite forgiven me for the way I used to carry on. That anyone out of a daft house could have liked it, was clean beyond my understanding. I thought of how when she was reading by the door I would go up on the moor with a hazel switch and fix little clay balls at the end of it, and sling them at her until I made her cry. And then I thought of how I caught an eel in the Corriemuir burn and chivied her about with it, until she ran screaming under my mother’s apron half mad with fright, and my father gave me one on the ear-hole with the porridge stick which knocked me and my eel under the kitchen dresser. And these were the things that she missed! Well, she must miss them, for my hand would wither before I could do them now. But for the first time I began to understand the queerness that lies in a woman, and that a man must not reason about one, but just watch and try to learn.

We found our level after a time, when she saw that she had just to do what she liked and how she liked, and that I was as much at her beck and call as old Rob was at mine. You’ll think I was a fool to have had my head so turned, and maybe I was; but then you must think how little I was used to women, and how much we were thrown together. Besides she was a woman in a million, and I can tell you that it was a strong head that would not be turned by her.

Why, there was Major Elliott, a man that had buried three wives, and had twelve pitched battles to his name, Edie could have turned him round her finger like a damp rag — she, only new from the boarding school. I met him hobbling from West Inch the first time after she came, with pink in his cheeks and a shine in his eye that took ten years from him. He was cocking up his grey moustaches at either end and curling them into his eyes, and strutting out with his sound leg as proud as a piper. What she had said to him the Lord knows, but it was like old wine in his veins.

"I've been up to see you, laddie," said he, "but I must home again now. My visit has not been wasted, however, as I had an opportunity of seeing *la belle cousine*. A most charming and engaging young lady, laddie."

He had a formal stiff way of talking, and was fond of jerking in a bit of the French, for he had picked some up in the Peninsula. He would have gone on talking of Cousin Edie, but I saw the corner of a newspaper thrusting out of his pocket, and I knew that he had come over, as was his way, to give me some news, for we heard little enough at West Inch.

"What is fresh, Major?" I asked. He pulled the paper out with a flourish.

"The allies have won a great battle, my lad," says he. "I don't think Nap can stand up long against this. The Saxons have thrown him over, and he's been badly beat at Leipzig. Wellington is past the Pyrenees, and Graham's folk will be at Bayonne before long."

I chucked up my hat.

"Then the war will come to an end at last," I cried.

"Aye, and time too," said he, shaking his head gravely. "It's been a bloody business. But it is hardly worth while for me to say now what was in my mind about you."

"What was that?"

"Well, laddie, you are doing no good here, and now that my knee is getting more limber I was hoping that I might get on active service again. I wondered whether maybe you might like to do a little soldiering under me."

My heart jumped at the thought.

"Aye, would I!" I cried.

"But it'll be clear six months before I'll be fit to pass a board, and it's long odds that Boney will be under lock and key before that."

"And there's my mother," said I, "I doubt she'd never let me go."

"Ah! well, she'll never be asked to now," he answered, and hobbled on upon his way.

I sat down among the heather with my chin on my hand, turning the thing over in my mind, and watching him in his old brown clothes, with the end of a grey plaid flapping over his shoulder, as he picked his way up the swell of the hill. It was a poor life this, at West Inch, waiting to fill my father's shoes, with the same heath, and the same burn, and the same sheep, and the same grey house for ever before me. But over there, over the blue sea, ah! there was a life fit for a man. There was the Major, a man past his prime, wounded and spent, and yet planning to get to work again, whilst I, with all the strength of my youth, was wasting it upon these hillsides. A hot wave of shame flushed over me, and I sprang up all in a tingle to be off and playing a man's part in the world.

For two days I turned it over in my mind, and on the third there came something which first brought all my resolutions to a head, and then blew them all to nothing like a puff of smoke in the wind.

I had strolled out in 'the afternoon with Cousin Edie and Rob, until we found ourselves upon the brow of the slope which dips away down to the beach. It was late in the fall, and the links were all bronzed and faded; but the sun still shone warmly, and a south breeze came in little hot pants, rippling the broad blue sea with white curling lines. I pulled an armful of bracken to make a couch for Edie, and there she lay in her listless fashion, happy and contented; for of all folk that I have ever met, she had the most joy from warmth and light. I leaned on a tussock of grass, with Rob's head upon my knee, and there as we sat alone in peace in the wilderness, even there we saw suddenly thrown upon the waters in front of us the shadow of that great man over yonder, who had scrawled his name in red letters across the map of Europe. There was a ship coming up with the wind, a black sedate old merchant-man, bound for Leith as likely as not. Her yards were square and she was running with all sail set. On the other tack, coming from the north-east, were two great ugly lugger-like craft, with one high mast each, and a big square brown sail. A prettier sight one would not wish than to see the three craft dipping along upon so fair a day. But of a sudden there came a spurt of flame and a whirl of blue smoke from one lugger, then the same from the second, and a rap, rap, rap, from the ship. In a twinkling hell had elbowed out heaven, and there on the waters was hatred and savagery and the lust for blood.

We had sprung to our feet at the outburst, and Edie put her hand all in a tremble upon my arm.

"They are fighting, Jack!" she cried. "What are they? Who are they?"

My heart was thudding with the guns, and it was all that I could do to answer her for the catch of my breath.

"It's two French privateers, Edie," said I, "Chasse-marries, they call them, and yon's one of our merchant ships, and they'll take her as sure as death; for the Major says they've always got heavy guns, and are as full of men as an egg is full of meat. Why doesn't the fool make back for Tweedmouth bar?"

But not an inch of canvas did she lower, but floundered on in her stolid fashion, while a little black ball ran up to her peak, and the rare old flag streamed suddenly out from the halliard. Then again came the rap, rap, rap, of her little guns, and the boom, boom of the big carronades in the bows of the lugger. An instant later the three ships met, and the merchant-man staggered on like a stag with two wolves hanging to its haunches. The three became but a dark blurr amid the smoke, with the top spars thrusting out in a bristle, and from the heart of that cloud came the quick red flashes of flame, and such a devils' racket of big guns and small, cheering and screaming, as was to din in my head for many a week. For a stricken hour the hell-cloud moved slowly across the face of the water, and still with our hearts in our mouths we watched the flap of the flag, straining to see if it were yet there. And then suddenly, the ship, as proud and black and high as ever, shot on upon her way; and as the smoke cleared we saw one of the luggers squattering like a broken winged duck upon the water, and the other working hard to get the crew from her before she sank.

For all that hour I had lived for nothing but the fight. My cap had been whisked away by the wind, but I had never given it a thought. Now with my heart full I turned upon my Cousin Edie, and the sight of her took me back six years. There was the vacant staring eye and the parted lips, just as I had seen them in her girlhood, and her little hands were clenched until the knuckles gleamed like ivory.

"Ah, that captain!" said she, talking to the heath and the whin-bushes. "There is a man so strong, so resolute! What woman would not be proud of a man like that?"

"Aye, he did well!" I cried with enthusiasm.

She looked at me as if she had forgotten my existence.

"I would give a year of my life to meet such a man," said she. "But that is what living in the country means. One never sees anybody but just those who are fit for nothing better."

I do not know that she meant to hurt me, though she was never very backward at that; but whatever her intention, her words seemed to strike straight upon a naked nerve.

"Very well, Cousin Edie," I said, trying to speak calmly, "that puts the cap on it. I'll take the bounty in Berwick to-night."

"What, Jack! you be a soldier!"

"Yes, if you think that every man that bides in the country must be a coward."

"Oh, you'd look so handsome in a red coat, Jack, and it improves you vastly when you are in a temper. I wish your eyes would always flash like that, for it looks so nice and manly. But I am sure that you are joking about the soldiering."

"I'll let you see if I am joking."

Then and there I set off running over the moor, until I burst into the kitchen where my mother and father were sitting on either side of the ingle.

"Mother," I cried, "I'm off for a soldier!"

Had I said I was off for a burglar they could not have looked worse over it, for in those days among the decent canny country folks it was mostly the black sheep that were herded by the sergeant. But, my word, those same black sheep did their country some rare service too. My mother put up her mittens to her eyes, and my father looked as black as a peat hole.

"Hoots, Jock, you're daft," says he.

"Daft or no, I'm going."

"Then you'll have no blessing from me."

"Then I'll go without."

At this my mother gives a screech and throws her arms about my neck. I saw her hand, all hard and worn and knuckly with the work she had done for my up-bringing, and it pleaded with me as words could not have done. My heart was soft for her, but my will was as hard as a flint-edge. I put her back in her chair with a kiss, and then ran to my room to pack my bundle. It was already growing dark, and I had a long walk before me, so I thrust a few things together and hastened out. As I came through the side door someone touched my shoulder, and there was Edie in the gloaming.

"Silly boy," said she, "you are not really going."

"Am I not? You'll see."

"But your father does not wish it, nor your mother."

"I know that."

"Then why go?"

"You ought to know."

“Why, then?”

“Because you make me!”

“I don’t want you to go, Jack.”

“You said it. You said that the folk in the country were fit for nothing better. You always speak like that. You think no more of me than of those doos in the cot. You think I am nobody at all. I’ll show you different.”

All my troubles came out in hot little spurts of speech. She coloured up as I spoke, and looked at me in her queer half-mocking, half-petting fashion.

“Oh, I think so little of you as that?” said she. “And that is the reason why you are going away? Well then, Jack, will you stay if I am — if I am kind to you?”

We were face to face and close together, and in an instant the thing was done. My arms were round her, and I was kissing her, and kissing her, and kissing her, on her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, and pressing her to my heart, and whispering to her that she was all, all, to me, and that I could not be without her. She said nothing, but it was long before she turned her face aside, and when she pushed me back it was not very hard.

“Why, you are quite your rude, old, impudent self!” said she, patting her hair with her two hands. “You have tossed me, Jack; I had no idea that you would be so forward!”

But all my fear of her was gone, and a love tenfold hotter than ever was boiling in my veins. I took her up again, and kissed her as if it were my right.

“You are my very own now!” I cried. “I shall not go to Berwick, but

I’ll stay and marry you.”

But she laughed when I spoke of marriage.

“Silly boy! Silly boy!” said she, with her forefinger up; and then when I tried to lay hands on her again, she gave a little dainty curtsy, and was off into the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHOOSING OF JIM.

And then there came those ten weeks which were like a dream, and are so now to look back upon. I would weary you were I to tell you what passed between us; but oh, how earnest and fateful and all-important it was at the time! Her waywardness; her ever-varying moods, now bright, now dark, like a meadow under drifting clouds; her causeless angers; her sudden repentances, each in turn filling me with joy or sorrow: these were my life, and all the rest was but emptiness. But ever deep down behind all my other feelings was a vague disquiet, a fear that I was like the man who set forth to lay hands upon the rainbow, and that the real Edie Calder, however near she might seem, was in truth for ever beyond my reach.

For she was so hard to understand, or, at least, she was so for a dull-witted country lad like me. For if I would talk to her of my real prospects, and how by taking in the whole of Corriemuir we might earn a hundred good pounds over the extra rent, and maybe be able to build out the parlour at West Inch, so as to make it fine for her when we married, she would pout her lips and droop her eyes, as though she scarce had patience to listen to me. But if I would let her build up dreams about what I might become, how I might find a paper which proved me to be the true heir of the laird, or how, without joining the army, which she would by no means hear of, I showed myself to be a great warrior until my name was in all folks' mouths, then she would be as blithe as the May. I would keep up the play as well as I could, but soon some luckless word would show that I was only plain Jock Calder of West Inch, and out would come her lip again in scorn of me. So we moved on, she in the air and I on the ground; and if the rift had not come in one way, it must in another.

It was after Christmas, but the winter had been mild, with just frost enough to make it safe walking over the peat bogs. One fresh morning Edie had been out early, and she came back to breakfast with a fleck of colour on her cheeks.

"Has your friend the doctor's son come home, Jack?" says she.

"I heard that it was expected."

"Ah! then it must have been him that I met on the muir."

"What! you met Jim Horscroft?"

"I am sure it must be he. A splendid-looking man — a hero, with curly black hair, a short, straight nose, and grey eyes. He had shoulders like a statue, and as to height, why, I suppose that your head, Jack, would come up to his scarf-pin."

"Up to his ear, Edie!" said I indignantly. "That is, if it was Jim. But tell me. Had he a brown wooden pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth?"

"Yes, he was smoking. He was dressed in grey, and he has a grand deep strong voice."

"Ho, ho! you spoke to him!" said I.

She coloured a little, as if she had said more than she meant.

"I was going where the ground was a little soft, and he warned me of it," she said.

"Ah! it must have been dear old Jim," said I. "He should have been a doctor years back, if his brains had been as strong as his arm. Why, heart alive, here is the very man himself!"

I had seen him through the kitchen window, and now I rushed out with my half-eaten bannock in my hand to greet him. He ran forward too, with his great hand out and his eyes shining.

"Ah! Jock," he cried, "it's good to see you again. There are no friends like the old ones."

Then suddenly he stuck in his speech, and stared with his mouth open over my shoulder. I turned, and there was Edie, with such a merry, roguish smile, standing in the door. How proud I felt of her, and of myself too, as I looked at her!

"This is my cousin, Miss Edie Calder, Jim," said I.

"Do you often take walks before breakfast, Mr. Horscroft?" she asked, still with that roguish smile.

"Yes," said he, staring at her with all his eyes.

"So do I, and generally over yonder," said she. "But you are not very hospitable to your friend, Jack. If you do not do the honours, I shall have to take your place for the credit of West Inch."

Well, in another minute we were in with the old folk, and Jim had his plate of porridge ladled out for him; but hardly a word would he speak, but sat with his spoon in his hand staring at Cousin Edie. She shot little twinkling glances across at him all the time, and it seemed to me that she was amused at his backwardness, and that she tried by what she said to give him heart.

“Jack was telling me that you were studying to be a doctor,” said she. “But oh, how hard it must be, and how long it must take before one can gather so much learning as that!”

“It takes me long enough,” Jim answered ruefully; “but I’ll beat it yet.”

“Ah! but you are brave. You are resolute. You fix your eyes on a point and you move on towards it, and nothing can stop you.”

“Indeed, I’ve little to boast of,” said he. “Many a one who began with me has put up his plate years ago, and here am I but a student still.”

“That is your modesty, Mr. Horscroft. They say that the bravest are always humble. But then, when you have gained your end, what a glorious career — to carry healing in your hands, to raise up the suffering, to have for one’s sole end the good of humanity!”

Honest Jim wriggled in his chair at this.

“I’m afraid I have no such very high motives, Miss Calder,” said he. “It’s to earn a living, and to take over my father’s business, that I do it. If I carry healing in one hand, I have the other out for a crown-piece.”

“How candid and truthful you are!” she cried; and so they went on, she decking him with every virtue, and twisting his words to make him play the part, in the way that I knew so well. Before he was done I could see that his head was buzzing with her beauty and her kindly words. I thrilled with pride to think that he should think so well of my kin.

“Isn’t she fine, Jim?” I could not help saying when we stood outside the door, he lighting his pipe before he set off home.

“Fine!” he cried; “I never saw her match!”

“We’re going to be married,” said I.

The pipe fell out of his mouth, and he stood staring at me. Then he picked it up and walked off without a word. I thought that he would likely come back, but he never did; and I saw him far off up the brae, with his chin on his chest.

But I was not to forget him, for Cousin Edie had a hundred questions to ask me about his boyhood, about his strength, about the women that he was likely to know; there was no satisfying her. And then again, later in the day, I heard of him, but in a less pleasant fashion.

It was my father who came home in the evening with his mouth full of poor Jim. He had been deadly drunk since midday, had been down to

Westhouse Links to fight the gipsy champion, and it was not certain that the man would live through the night. My father had met Jim on the highroad, dour as a thunder-cloud, and with an insult in his eye for every man that passed him. “Guid sakes!” said the old man. “He’ll make a fine practice for himsel’, if breaking banes will do it.”

Cousin Edie laughed at all this, and I laughed because she did; but I was not so sure that it was funny.

On the third day afterwards, I was going up Corriemuir by the sheep-track, when who should I see striding down but Jim himself. But he was a different man from the big, kindly fellow who had supped his porridge with us the other morning. He had no collar nor tie, his vest was open, his hair matted, and his face mottled, like a man who has drunk heavily overnight. He carried an ash stick, and he slashed at the whin-bushes on either side of the path.

“Why, Jim!” said I.

But he looked at me in the way that I had often seen at school when the devil was strong in him, and when he knew that he was in the wrong, and yet set his will to brazen it out. Not a word did he say, but he brushed past me on the narrow path and swaggered on, still brandishing his ash-plant and cutting at the bushes.

Ah well, I was not angry with him. I was sorry, very sorry, and that was all. Of course I was not so blind but that I could see how the matter stood. He was in love with Edie, and he could not bear to think that I should have her. Poor devil, how could he help it? Maybe I should have been the same. There was a time when I should have wondered that a girl could have turned a strong man’s head like that, but I knew more about it now.

For a fortnight I saw nothing of Jim Horscroft, and then came the

Thursday which was to change the whole current of my life.

I had woke early that day, and with a little thrill of joy which is a rare thing to feel when a man first opens his eyes. Edie had been kinder than usual the night before, and I had fallen asleep with the thought that maybe at last I had caught the rainbow, and that without any imaginings or make-believes she was learning to love plain, rough Jock Calder of West Inch. It was this thought, still at my heart, which had given me that little morning chirrup of joy. And then I remembered that if I hastened I might be in time for her, for it was her custom to go out with the sunrise.

But I was too late. When I came to her door it was half-open and the room empty. Well, thought I, at least I may meet her and have the homeward walk with her. From the top of Corriemuir hill you may see all the country round; so, catching up my stick, I swung off in that direction. It was bright, but cold, and the surf, I remember, was booming loudly, though there had been no wind in our parts for days. I zigzagged up the steep pathway, breathing in the thin, keen morning air, and humming a lilt as I went, until I came out, a little short of breath, among the whins upon the top. Looking down the long slope of the farther side, I saw Cousin Edie, as I had expected; and I saw Jim Horscroft walking by her side.

They were not far away, but too taken up with each other to see me. She was walking slowly, with the little petulant cock of her dainty head which I knew so well, casting her eyes away from him, and shooting out a word from time to time. He paced along beside her, looking down at her and bending his head in the eagerness of his talk. Then as he said something, she placed her hand with a caress upon his arm, and he, carried off his feet, plucked her up and kissed her again and again. At the sight I could neither cry out nor move, but stood, with a heart of lead and the face of a dead man, staring down at them. I saw her hand passed over his shoulder, and that his kisses were as welcome to her as ever mine had been.

Then he set her down again, and I found that this had been their parting; for, indeed, in another hundred paces they would have come in view of the upper windows of the house. She walked slowly away, with a wave back once or twice, and he stood looking after her. I waited until she was some way off, and then down I came, but so taken up was he, that I was within a hand’s-touch of him before he whisked round upon me. He tried to smile as is eye met mine.

“Ah, Jock,” says he, “early afoot!”

“I saw you!” I gasped; and my throat had turned so dry that I spoke like a man with a quinsy.

“Did you so?” said he, and gave a little whistle. “Well, on my life, Jock, I’m not sorry. I was thinking of coming up to West Inch this very day, and having it out with you. Maybe it’s better as it is.”

“You’ve been a fine friend!” said I.

“Well now, be reasonable, Jock,” said he, sticking his hands into his pockets and rocking to and fro as he stood. “Let me show you how it stands. Look me in the eye, and you’ll see that I don’t lie. It’s this Way. I had met

Edi — Miss Calder that is — before I came that morning, and there were things which made me look upon her as free; and, thinking that, I let my mind dwell on her. Then you said she wasn’t free, but was promised to you, and that was the worst knock I’ve had for a time. It clean put me off, and I made a fool of myself for some days, and it’s a mercy I’m not in Berwick gaol. Then by chance I met her again — on my soul, Jock, it was chance for me — and when I spoke of you she laughed at the thought. It was cousin and cousin, she said; but as for her not being free, or you being more to her than a friend, it was fool’s talk. So you see, Jock, I was not so much to blame, after all: the more so as she promised that she would let you see by her conduct that you were mistaken in thinking that you had any claim upon her. You must have noticed that she has hardly had a word for you for these last two weeks.”

I laughed bitterly.

“It was only last night,” said I, “that she told me that I was the only man in all this earth that she could ever bring herself to love.”

Jim Horscroft put out a shaking hand and laid it on my shoulder, while he pushed his face forward to look into my eyes.

“Jock Calder,” said he, “I never knew you tell a lie. You are not trying to score trick against trick, are you? Honest now, between man and man.”

“It’s God’s truth,” said I.

He stood looking at me, and his face had set like that of a man who is having a hard fight with himself. It was a long two minutes before he spoke.

“See here, Jock!” said he. “This woman is fooling us both. D’you hear, man? she’s fooling us both! She loves you at West Inch, and she loves me on the braeside; and in her devil’s heart she cares a whin-blossom for neither of us. Let’s join hands, man, and send the hellfire hussy to the right-about!”

But this was too much. I could not curse her in my own heart, and still less could I stand by and hear another man do it; not though it was my oldest friend.

“Don’t you call names!” I cried.

“Ach! you sicken me with your soft talk! I’ll call her what she should be called!”

“Will you, though?” said I, lugging off my coat. “Look you here, Jim Horscroft, if you say another word against her, I’ll lick it down your throat, if you were as big as Berwick Castle! Try me and see!”

He peeled off his coat down to the elbows, and then he slowly put it on again.

"Don't be such a fool, Jock!" said he. "Four stone and five inches is more than mortal man can give. Two old friends mustn't fall out over such a — well, there, I won't say it. Well, by the Lord, if she hasn't nerve for ten!"

I looked round, and there she was, not twenty yards from us, looking as cool and easy and placid as we were hot and fevered.

"I was nearly home," said she, "when I saw you two boys very busy talking, so I came all the way back to know what it was about."

Horscroft took a run forward and caught her by the wrist. She gave a little squeal at the sight of his face, but he pulled her towards where I was standing.

"Now, Jock, we've had tomfoolery enough," said he. "Here she is. Shall we take her word as to which she likes? She can't trick us now that we're both together."

"I am willing," said I.

"And so am I. If she goes for you, I swear I'll never so much as turn an eye on her again. Will you do as much for me?"

"Yes, I will."

"Well then, look here, you! We're both honest men, and friends, and we tell each other no lies; and so we know your double ways. I know what you said last night. Jock knows what you said to-day. D'you see? Now then, fair and square! Here we are before you; once and have done. Which is it to be, Jock or me?"

You would have thought that the woman would have been overwhelmed with shame, but instead of that her eyes were shining with delight; and I dare wager that it was the proudest moment of her life. As she looked from one to the other of us, with the cold morning sun glittering on her face, I had never seen her look so lovely. Jim felt it also, I am sure; for he dropped her wrist, and the harsh lines were softened upon his face.

"Come, Edie! which is it to be?" he asked.

"Naughty boys, to fall out like this!" she cried. "Cousin Jack, you know how fond I am of you."

"Oh, then go to him!" said Horscroft.

"But I love nobody but Jim. There is nobody that I love like Jim."

She snuggled up to him, and laid her cheek against his breast.

"You see, Jock!" said he, looking over her shoulder.

I did see; and away I went for West Inch, another man from the time that I left it.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN FROM THE SEA.

Well, I was never one to sit groaning over a cracked pot. If it could not be mended, then it is the part of a man to say no more of it. For weeks I had an aching heart; indeed, it is a little sore now, after all these years and a happy marriage, when I think of it. But I kept a brave face on me; and, above all, I did as I had promised that day on the hillside. I was as a brother to her, and no more: though there were times when I had to put a hard curb upon myself; for even now she would come to me with her coaxing ways, and with tales about how rough Jim was, and how happy she had been when I was kind to her; for it was in her blood to speak like that, and she could not help it.

But for the most part Jim and she were happy enough. It was all over the countryside that they were to be married when he had passed his degree, and he would come up to West Inch four nights a week to sit with us. My folk were pleased about it, and I tried to be pleased too.

Maybe at first there was a little coolness between him and me: there was not quite the old schoolboy trust between us. But then, when the first smart was passed, it seemed to me that he had acted openly, and that I had no just cause for complaint against him. So we were friendly, in a way; and as for her, he had forgotten all his anger, and would have kissed the print of her shoe in the mud. We used to take long rambles together, he and I; and it is about one of these that I now want to tell you.

We had passed over Bramston Heath and round the clump of firs which screens the house of Major Elliott from the sea wind. It was spring now, and the year was a forward one, so that the trees were well leaved by the end of April. It was as warm as a summer day, and we were the more surprised when we saw a huge fire roaring upon the grass-plot before the Major’s door. There was half a fir-tree in it, and the flames were spouting up as high as the bedroom windows. Jim and I stood staring, but we stared the more when out came the Major, with a great quart pot in his hand, and at his heels his old sister who kept house for him, and two of the maids, and all four began capering about round the fire. He was a douce, quiet man, as all the country knew, and here he was like old Nick at the carlin's dance, hobbling around and waving his drink above his head. We both set off running, and he waved the more when he saw us coming.

"Peace!" he roared. "Huzza, boys! Peace!"

And at that we both fell to dancing and shouting too; for it had been such a weary war as far back as we could remember, and the shadow had lain so long over us, that it was wondrous to feel that it was lifted. Indeed it was too much to believe, but the Major laughed our doubts to scorn.

"Aye, aye, it is true," he cried, stopping with his hand to his side. "The Allies have got Paris, Boney has thrown up the sponge, and his people are all swearing allegiance to Louis XVIII."

"And the Emperor?" I asked. "Will they spare him?"

"There's talk of sending him to Elba, where he'll be out of mischief's way. But his officers, there are some of them who will not get off so lightly. Deeds have been done during these last twenty years that have not been forgotten. There are a few old scores to be settled. But it's Peace! Peace!"

And away he went once more with his great tankard hopping round his bonfire.

Well, we stayed some time with the Major, and then away we went down to the beach, Jim and I, talking about this great news, and all that would come of it. He knew a little, and I knew less, but we pieced it all together and talked about how the prices would come down, how our brave fellows would return home, how the ships could go where they would in peace, and how we could pull all the coast beacons down, for there was no enemy now to fear. So we chatted as we walked along the clean, hard sand, and looked out at the old North Sea. How little did Jim know at that moment, as he strode along by my side so full of health and of spirits, that he had reached the extreme summit of his life, and that from that hour all would, in truth, be upon the downward slope!

There was a little haze out to sea; for it had been very misty in the early morning, though the sun had thinned it. As we looked seawards we suddenly saw the sail of a small boat break out through the fog, and come bobbing along towards the land. A single man was seated in the sheets, and she yawed about as she ran, as though he were of two minds whether to beach her or no. At last, determined it may be by our presence, he made straight for us, and her keel grated upon the shingle at our very feet. He dropped his sail, sprang out, and pulled her bows up on the beach.

“Great Britain, I believe?” said he, turning briskly round and facing us.

He was a man somewhat above middle height, but exceedingly thin. His eyes were piercing and set close together, a long sharp nose jutted out from between them, and beneath them was a bristle of brown moustache as wiry and stiff as a cat’s whiskers. He was well dressed in a suit of brown with brass buttons, and he wore high boots which were all roughened and dulled by the sea water. His face and hands were so dark that he might have been a Spaniard, but as he raised his hat to us we saw that the upper part of his brow was quite white and that it was from without that he had his swarthiness. He looked from one to the other of us, and his grey eyes had something in them which I had never seen before. You could read the question; but there seemed to be a menace at the back of it, as if the answer were a right and not a favour.

“Great Britain?” he asked again, with a quick tap of his foot on the shingle.

“Yes,” said I, while Jim burst out laughing.

“England? Scotland?”

“Scotland. But it’s England past yonder trees.”

“*Bon!* I know where I am now. I’ve been in a fog without a compass for nearly three days, and I didn’t thought I was ever to see land again.”

He spoke English glibly enough, but with some strange turn of speech from time to time.

“Where did you come from then?” asked Jim.

“I was in a ship that was wrecked,” said he shortly. “What is the town down yonder?”

“It is Berwick.”

“Ah! well, I must get stronger before I can go further.”

He turned towards the boat, and as he did so he gave a lurch, and would have fallen had he not caught the prow. On this he seated himself and looked round with a face that was flushed, and two eyes that blazed like a wild beast’s.

“*Voltigeurs de la Garde*,” he roared in a voice like a trumpet call, and then again “*Voltigeurs de la Garde!*”

He waved his hat above is head, and suddenly pitching forwards upon his face on the sand, he lay all huddled into a little brown heap.

Jim Horscroft and I stood and stared at each other. The coming of the man had been so strange, and his questions, and now this sudden turn. We took him by a shoulder each and turned him upon his back. There he lay with his jutting nose and his cat's whiskers, but his lips were bloodless, and his breath would scarce shake a feather.

"He's dying, Jim!" I cried.

"Aye, for want of food and water. There's not a drop or crumb in the boat. Maybe there's something in the bag."

He sprang and brought out a black leather bag, which with a large blue coat was the only thing in the boat. It was locked, but Jim had it open in an instant. It was half full of gold pieces.

Neither of us had ever seen so much before — no, nor a tenth part of it. There must have been hundreds of them, all bright new British sovereigns. Indeed, so taken up were we that we had forgotten all about their owner until a groan took our thoughts back to him. His lips were bluer than ever, and his jaw had dropped. I can see his open mouth now, with its row of white wolfish teeth.

"My God, he's off!" cried Jim. "Here, run to the burn. Jock, for a hatful of water. Quick, man, or he's gone! I'll loosen his things the while." Away I tore, and was back in a minute with as much water as would Stay in my Glengarry. Jim had pulled open the man's coat and shirt, and we doused the water over him, and forced some between his lips. It had a good effect; for after a gasp or two he sat up and rubbed his eyes slowly, like a man who is waking from a deep sleep. But neither Jim nor I were looking at his face now, for our eyes were fixed upon his uncovered chest.

There were two deep red puckers in it, one just below the collar bone, and the other about half-way down on the right side. The skin of his body was extremely white up to the brown line of his neck, and the angry crinkled spots looked the more vivid against it. From above I could see that there was a corresponding pucker in the back at one place, but not at the other. Inexperienced as I was, I could tell what that meant. Two bullets had pierced his chest; one had passed through it, and the other had remained inside.

But suddenly he staggered up to his feet, and pulled his shirt to, with a quick suspicious glance at us.

"What have I been doing?" he asked. "I've been off my head. Take no notice of anything I may have said. Have I been shouting?"

"You shouted just before you fell."

"What did I shout?"

I told him, though it bore little meaning to my mind. He looked sharply at us, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's the words of a song," said he. "Well, the question is, What am I to do now? I didn't thought I was so weak. Where did you get the water?"

I pointed towards the burn, and he staggered off to the bank. There he lay down upon his face, and he drank until I thought he would never have done. His long skinny neck was outstretched like a horse's, and he made a loud supping noise with his lips. At last he got up with a long sigh, and wiped his moustache with his sleeve.

"That's better," said he. "Have you any food?"

I had crammed two bits of oat-cake into my pocket when I left home, and these he crushed into his mouth and swallowed. Then he squared his shoulders, puffed out his chest, and patted his ribs with the flat of his hands.

"I am sure that I owe you exceedingly well," said he. "You have been very kind to a stranger. But I see that you have had occasion to open my bag."

"We hoped that we might find wine or brandy there when you fainted."

"Ah! I have nothing there but just a little — how do you say it? — my savings. They are not much, but I must live quietly upon them until I find something to do. Now one could live quietly here, I should say. I could not have come upon a more peaceful place, without perhaps so much as a *gendarme* nearer than that town."

"You haven't told us yet who you are, where you come from, nor what you have been," said Jim bluntly.

The stranger looked him up and down with a critical eye:

"My word, but you would make a grenadier for a flank company," said he. "As to what you ask, I might take offence at it from other lips; but you have a right to know, since you have received me with so great courtesy. My name is Bonaventure de Lapp. I am a soldier and a wanderer by trade, and I have come from Dunkirk, as you may see printed upon the boat."

"I thought that you had been shipwrecked!" said I.

But he looked at me with the straight gaze of an honest man.

"That is right," said he, "but the ship went from Dunkirk, and this is one of her boats. The crew got away in the long boat, and she went down so quickly that I had no time to put anything into her. That was on Monday."

"And to-day's Thursday. You have been three days without bite or sup."

"It is too long," said he. "Twice before I have been for two days, but never quite so long as this. Well, I shall leave my boat here, and see whether I can get lodgings in any of these little grey houses upon the hillsides. Why is that great fire burning over yonder?"

"It is one of our neighbours who has served against the French. He is rejoicing because peace has been declared."

"Oh, you have a neighbour who has served then! I am glad; for I, too, have seen a little soldiering here and there."

He did not look glad, but he drew his brows down over his keen eyes.

"You are French, are you not?" I asked, as we all walked up the hill together, he with his black bag in his hand and his long blue cloak slung over his shoulder.

"Well, I am of Alsace," said he; "and, you know, they are more German than French. For myself, I have been in so many lands that I feel at home in all. I have been a great traveller; and where do you think that I might find a lodging?"

I can scarcely tell now, on looking back with the great gap of five-and-thirty years between, what impression this singular man had made upon me. I distrusted him, I think, and yet I was fascinated by him also; for there was something in his bearing, in his look, and his whole fashion of speech which was entirely unlike anything that I had ever seen. Jim Horscroft was a fine man, and Major Elliott was a brave one, but they both lacked something that this wanderer had. It was the quick alert look, the flash of the eye, the nameless distinction which is so hard to fix. And then we had saved him when he lay gasping upon the shingle, and one's heart always softens towards what one has once helped.

"If you will come with me," said I, "I have little doubt that I can find you a bed for a night or two, and by that time you will be better able to make your own arrangements."

He pulled off his hat, and bowed with all the grace imaginable.

But Jim Horscroft pulled me by the sleeve, and led me aside.

"You're mad, Jock," he whispered. "The fellow's a common adventurer.

What do you want to get mixed up with him for?"

But I was as obstinate a man as ever laced his boots, and if you jerked me back it was the finest way of sending me to the front.

"He's a stranger, and it's our part to look after him," said I.

"You'll be sorry for it," Said he.

“Maybe so.”

“If you don’t think of yourself, you might think of your cousin.”

“Edie can take very good care of herself.”

“Well, then, the devil take you, and you may do what you like!” he cried, in one of his sudden flushes of anger. Without a word of farewell to either of us, he turned off upon the track that led up towards his father’s house. Bonaventure de Lapp smiled at me as we walked on together.

“I didn’t thought he liked me very much,” said he. “I can see very well that he has made a quarrel with you because you are taking me to your home. What does he think of me then? Does he think perhaps that I have stole the gold in my bag, or what is it that he fears?”

“Tut, I neither know nor care,” said I. “No stranger shall pass our door without a crust and a bed.”

With my head cocked and feeling as if I was doing something very fine, instead of being the most egregious fool south of Edinburgh, I marched on down the path with my new acquaintance at my elbow.

CHAPTER VI.

A WANDERING EAGLE.

My father seemed to be much of Jim Horscroft's opinion; for he was not over warm to this new guest and looked him up and down with a very questioning eye. He set a dish of vinegared herrings before him, however, and I noticed that he looked more askance than ever when my companion ate nine of them, for two were always our portion. When at last he had finished Bonaventure de Lapp's lids were drooping over his eyes, for I doubt that he had been sleepless as well as foodless for these three days. It was but a poor room to which I had led him, but he threw himself down upon the couch, wrapped his big blue cloak around him, and was asleep in an instant. He was a very high and strong snorer, and, as my room was next to his, I had reason to remember that we had a stranger within our gates.

When I came down in the morning, I found that he had been beforehand with me; for he was seated opposite my father at the window-table in the kitchen, their heads almost touching, and a little roll of gold pieces between them. As I came in my father looked up at me, and I saw a light of greed in his eyes such as I had never seen before. He caught up the money with an eager clutch and swept it into his pocket.

"Very good, mister," said he; "the room's yours, and you pay always on the third of the month."

"Ah! and here is my first friend," cried de Lapp, holding out his hand to me with a smile which was kindly enough, and yet had that touch of patronage which a man uses when he smiles to his dog. "I am myself again now, thanks to my excellent supper and good night's rest. Ah! it is hunger that takes the courage from a man. That most, and cold next."

"Aye, that's right," said my father; "I've been out on the moors in a snow-drift for six-and-thirty hours, and ken what it's like."

"I once saw three thousand men starve to death," remarked de Lapp, putting out his hands to the fire. "Day by day they got thinner and more like apes, and they did come down to the edge of the pontoons where we did keep them, and they howled with rage and pain. The first few days their howls went over the whole city, but after a week our sentries on the bank could not hear them, so weak they had fallen."

"And they died!" I exclaimed.

"They held out a very long time. Austrian Grenadiers they were, of the corps of Starowitz, fine stout men as big as your friend of yesterday; but when the town fell there were but four hundred alive, and a man could lift them three at a time as if they were little monkeys. It was a pity. Ah! my friend, you will do me the honours with madame and with mademoiselle."

It was my mother and Edie who had come into the kitchen. He had not seen them the night before, but now it was all I could do to keep my face as I watched him; for instead of our homely Scottish nod, he bent up his back like a louping trout, and slid his foot, and clapped his hand over his heart in the queerest way. My mother stared, for she thought he was making fun of her; but Cousin Edie fell into it in an instant, as though it had been a game, and away she went in a great curtsy until I thought she would have had to give it up, and sit down right there in the middle of the kitchen floor. But no, she up again as light as a piece of fluff, and we all drew up our stools and started on the scones and milk and porridge.

He had a wonderful way with women, that man. Now if I were to do it, or Jim Horscroft, it would look as if we were playing the fool, and the girls would have laughed at us; but with him it seemed to go with his style of face and fashion of speech, so that one came at last to look for it: for when he spoke to my mother or Cousin Edie — and he was never backward in speaking — it would always be with a bow and a look as if it would hardly be worth their while to listen to what he had to say, and when they answered he would put on a face as though every word they said was to be treasured up and remembered for ever. And yet, even while he humbled himself to a woman, there was always a proud sort of look at the back of his eye as if he meant to say that it was only to them that he was so meek, and that he could be stiff enough upon occasion. As to my mother, it was wonderful the way she softened to him, and in half-an-hour she had told him all about her uncle, who was a surgeon in Carlisle, and the highest of any upon her side of the house. She spoke to him about my brother Rob's death, which I had never heard her mention to a soul before, and he looked as if the tears were in his eyes over it — he, who had just told us how he had seen three thousand men starved to death! As to Edie, she did not say much, but she kept shooting little glances at our visitor, and once or twice he looked very hard at her.

When he had gone to his room after breakfast, my father pulled out eight golden pounds and laid them on the table. “What think ye of that, Martha?” said he.

“You’ve sold the twa black tups after all.”

“No, but it’s a month’s pay for board and lodging from Jock’s friend, and as much to come every four weeks.”

But my mother shook her head when she heard it.

“Two pounds a week is over much,” said she; “and it is not when the poor gentleman is in distress that we should put such a price on his bit food.”

“Tut!” cried my father, “he can very well afford it, and he with a bag full of gold. Besides, it’s his own proposing.”

“No blessing will come from that money,” said she.

“Why, woman, he’s turned your head wi’ his foreign ways of speech!” cried my father.

“Aye, and it would be a good thing if Scottish men had a little more of that kindly way,” she said, and that was the first time in all my life that I had heard her answer him back.

He came down soon and asked me whether I would come out with him. When we were in the sunshine he held out a little cross made of red stones, one of the bonniest things that ever I had set eyes upon.

“These are rubies,” said he, “and I got it at Tudela, in Spain.

There were two of them, but I gave the other to a Lithuanian girl.

I pray that you will take this as a memory of your exceedingly kindness to me yesterday. It will fashion into a pin for your cravat.”

I could but thank him for the present, which was of more value than anything I had ever owned in my life.

“I am off to the upper muir to count the lambs,” said I; “maybe you would care to come up with me and see something of the country?”

He hesitated for a moment, and then he shook his head.

“I have some letters,” he said, “which I ought to write as soon as possible. I think that I will stay at quiet this morning and get them written.”

All forenoon I was wandering over the links, and you may imagine that my mind was turning all the time upon this strange man whom chance had drifted to our doors. Where did he gain that style of his, that manner of command, that haughty menacing glint of the eye? And his experiences to which he referred so lightly, how wonderful the life must have been which had put him in the way of them! He had been kind to us, and gracious of speech, but still I could not quite shake myself clear of the distrust with which I had regarded him. Perhaps, after all, Jim Horscroft had been right and I had been wrong about taking him to West Inch.

When I got back he looked as though he had been born and bred in the steading. He sat in the big wooden-armed ingle-chair, with the black cat on his knee. His arms were out, and he held a skein of worsted from hand to hand which my mother was busily rolling into a ball. Cousin Edie was sitting near, and I could see by her eyes that she had been crying.

“Hullo, Edie!” said I, “what’s the trouble?”

“Ah! mademoiselle, like all good and true women, has a soft heart,” said he. “I didn’t thought it would have moved her, or I should have been silent. I have been talking of the suffering of some troops of which I knew something when they were crossing the Guadarama mountains in the winter of 1808. Ah! yes, it was very bad, for they were fine men and fine horses. It is strange to see men blown by the wind over the precipices, but the ground was so slippery and there was nothing to which they could hold. So companies all linked arms, and they did better in that fashion; but one artilleryman’s hand came off as I held it, for he had had the frost-bite for three days.”

I stood staring with my mouth open.

“And the old Grenadiers, too, who were not so active as they used to be, they could not keep up; and yet if they lingered the peasants would catch them and crucify them to the barn doors with their feet up and a fire under their heads, which was a pity for these fine old soldiers. So when they could go no further, it was interesting to see what they would do; for they would sit down and say their prayers, sitting on an old saddle, or their knapsacks, maybe, and then take off their boots and their stockings, and lean their chin on the barrel of their musket. Then they would put their toe on the trigger, and *pouf!* it was all over, and there was no more marching for those fine old Grenadiers. Oh, it was very rough work up there on these Guadarama mountains!”

“And what army was this?” I asked.

“Oh, I have served in so many armies that I mix them up sometimes. Yes, I have seen much of war. Apropos I have seen your Scotchmen fight, and very stout fantassins they make, but I thought from them, that the folk over here all wore — how do you say it? — petticoats.”

“Those are the kilts, and they wear them only in the Highlands.”

“Ah! on the mountains. But there is a man out yonder. Maybe he is the one who your father said would carry my letters to the post.”

“Yes, he is Farmer Whitehead’s man. Shall I give them to him?”

“Well, he would be more careful of them if he had them from your hand.”

He took them from his pocket and gave them over to me. I hurried out with them, and as I did so my eyes fell upon the address of the topmost one. It was written very large and clear:

A SON MAJESTE,
LE ROI DE SUEDE,
STOCKHOLM.

I did not know very much French, but I had enough to make that out.

What sort of eagle was this which had flown into our humble little nest?

CHAPTER VII.

THE CORRIEMUIR PEEL TOWER.

Well, it would weary me, and I am very sure that it would weary you also, if I were to attempt to tell you how life went with us after this man came under our roof, or the way in which he gradually came to win the affections of every one of us. With the women it was quick work enough; but soon he had thawed my father too, which was no such easy matter, and had gained Jim Horscroft's goodwill as well as my own. Indeed, we were but two great boys beside him, for he had been everywhere and seen everything; and of an evening he would chatter away in his limping English until he took us clean from the plain kitchen and the little farm steading, to plunge us into courts and camps and battlefields and all the wonders of the world. Horscroft had been sulky enough with him at first; but de Lapp, with his tact and his easy ways, soon drew him round, until he had quite won his heart, and Jim would sit with Cousin Edie's hand in his, and the two be quite lost in listening to all that he had to tell us. I will not tell you all this; but even now, after so long an interval, I can trace how, week by week and month by month, by this word and that deed, he moulded us all as he wished.

One of his first acts was to give my father the boat in which he had come, reserving only the right to have it back in case he should have need of it. The herring were down on the coast that autumn, and my uncle before he died had given us a fine set of nets, so the gift was worth many a pound to us. Sometimes de Lapp would go out in the boat alone, and I have seen him for a whole summer day rowing slowly along and stopping every half-dozen strokes to throw over a stone at the end of a string. I could not think what he was doing until he told me of his own freewill.

"I am fond of studying all that has to do with the military," said he, "and I never lose a chance. I was wondering if it would be a difficult matter for the commander of an army corps to throw his men ashore here."

"If the wind were not from the east," said I.

"Ah! quite so, if the wind were not from the east. Have you taken soundings here?"

“No.”

“Your line of battleships would have to lie outside; but there is water enough for a forty-gun frigate right up within musket range. Cram your boats with tirailleurs, deploy them behind these sandhills, then back with the launches for more, and a stream of grape over their heads from the frigates. It could be done! it could be done!”

His moustaches bristled out more like a cat’s than ever, and I could see by the flash of his eyes that he was carried away by his dream.

“You forget that our soldiers would be upon the beach,” said I indignantly.

“Ta, ta, ta!” he cried. “Of course it takes two sides to make a battle. Let us see now; let us work it out. What could you get together? Shall we say twenty, thirty thousand. A few regiments of good troops: the rest, *pouf!* — conscripts, bourgeois with arms. How do you call them — volunteers?”

“Brave men!” I shouted.

“Oh yes, very brave men, but imbecile. Ah, *mon Dieu*, it is incredible how imbecile they would be! Not they alone, I mean, but all young troops. They are so afraid of being afraid that they would take no precaution. Ah, I have seen it! In Spain I have seen a battalion of conscripts attack a battery of ten pieces. Up they went, ah, so gallantly! and presently the hillside looked, from where I stood, like — how do you say it in English? — a raspberry tart. And where was our fine battalion of conscripts? Then another battalion of young troops tried it, all together in a rush, shouting and yelling; but what will shouting do against a mitraille of grape? And there was our second battalion laid out on the hillside. And then the foot chasseurs of the Guard, old soldiers, were told to take the battery; and there was nothing fine about their advance — no column, no shouting, nobody killed — just a few scattered lines of tirailleurs and pelotons of support; but in ten minutes the guns were silenced, and the Spanish gunners cut to pieces. War must be learned, my young friend, just the same as the farming of sheep.”

“Pooh!” said I, not to be out-crowed by a foreigner. “If we had thirty thousand men on the line of the hill yonder, you would come to be very glad that you had your boats behind you.”

“On the line of the hill?” said he, with a flash of his eyes along the ridge. “Yes, if your man knew his business he would have his left about your house, his centre on Corriemuir, and his right over near the doctor’s house, with his tirailleurs pushed out thickly in front. His horse, of course, would try to cut us up as we deployed on the beach. But once let us form, and we should soon know what to do. There's the weak point, there at the gap. I would sweep it with my guns, then roll in my cavalry, push the infantry on in grand columns, and that wing would find itself up in the air. Eh, Jack, where would your volunteers be?"

"Close at the heels of your hindmost man," said I; and we both burst out into the hearty laugh with which such discussions usually ended.

Sometimes when he talked I thought he was joking, and at other times it was not quite so easy to say. I well remember one evening that summer, when he was sitting in the kitchen with my father, Jim, and me, after the women had gone to bed, he began about Scotland and its relation to England.

"You used to have your own king and your own laws made at Edinburgh," said he. "Does it not fill you with rage and despair when you think that it all comes to you from London now?"

Jim took his pipe out of his mouth.

"It was we who put our king over the English; so if there's any rage, it should have been over yonder," said he.

This was clearly news to the stranger, and it silenced him for the moment.

"Well, but your laws are made down there, and surely that is not good," he said at last.

"No, it would be well to have a Parliament back in Edinburgh," said my father; "but I am kept so busy with the sheep that I have little enough time to think of such things."

"It is for fine young men like you two to think of it," said de Lapp. "When a country is injured, it is to its young men that it looks to avenge it."

"Aye! the English take too much upon themselves sometimes," said Jim.

"Well, if there are many of that way of thinking about, why should we not form them into battalions and march them upon London?" cried de Lapp.

"That would be a rare little picnic," said I, laughing. "And who would lead us?"

He jumped up, bowing, with his hand on his heart, in his queer fashion.

"If you will allow me to have the honour!" he cried; and then seeing that we were all laughing, he began to laugh also, but I am sure that there was really no thought of a joke in his mind.

I could never make out what his age could be, nor could Jim Horscroft either. Sometimes we thought that he was an oldish man that looked young, and at others that he was a youngish man who looked old. His brown, stiff, close-cropped hair needed no cropping at the top, where it thinned away to a shining curve. His skin too was intersected by a thousand fine wrinkles, lacing and interlacing, and was all burned, as I have already said, by the sun. Yet he was as lithe as a boy, and he was as tough as whalebone, walking all day over the hills or rowing on the sea without turning a hair. On the whole we thought that he might be about forty or forty-five, though it was hard to see how he could have seen so much of life in the time. But one day we got talking of ages, and then he surprised us.

I had been saying that I was just twenty, and Jim said that he was twenty-seven.

“Then I am the most old of the three,” said de Lapp.

We laughed at this, for by our reckoning he might almost have been our father.

“But not by so much,” said he, arching his brows. “I was nine-and-twenty in December.”

And it was this even more than his talk which made us understand what an extraordinary life it must have been that he had led. He saw our astonishment, and laughed at it.

“I have lived! I have lived!” he cried. “I have spent my days and my nights. I led a company in a battle where five nations were engaged when I was but fourteen. I made a king turn pale at the words I whispered in his ear when I was twenty. I had a hand in remaking a kingdom and putting a fresh king upon a great throne the very year that I came of age. *Mon Dieu,* I have lived my life!”

That was the most that I ever heard him confess of his past life, and he only shook his head and laughed when we tried to get something more out of him. There were times when we thought that he was but a clever impostor; for what could a man of such influence and talents be loitering here in Berwickshire for? But one day there came an incident which showed us that he had indeed a history in the past.

You will remember that there was an old officer of the Peninsula who lived no great way from us, the same who danced round the bonfire with his sister and the two maids. He had gone up to London on some business about his pension and his wound money, and the chance of having some work given him, so that he did not come back until late in the autumn. One of the first days after his return he came down to see us, and there for the first time he clapped eyes upon de Lapp. Never in my life did I look upon so astonished a face, and he stared at our friend for a long minute without so much as a word. De Lapp looked back at him equally hard, but there was no recognition in his eyes.

"I do not know who you are, sir," he said at last; "but you look at me as if you had seen me before."

"So I have," answered the Major.

"Never to my knowledge."

"But I'll swear it!"

"Where then?"

"At the village of Astorga, in the year '8."

De Lapp started, and stared again at our neighbour.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a chance!" he cried. "And you were the English parlementaire? I remember you very well indeed, sir. Let me have a whisper in your ear."

He took him aside and talked very earnestly with him in French for a quarter of an hour, gesticulating with his hands, and explaining something, while the Major nodded his old grizzled head from time to time. At last they seemed to come to some agreement, and I heard the Major say "*Parole a'honneur*" several times, and afterwards "*Fortune de la guerre*," which I could very well understand, for they gave you a fine upbringing at Birtwhistle's. But after that I always noticed that the Major never used the same free fashion of speech that we did towards our lodger, but bowed when he addressed him, and treated him with a wonderful deal of respect. I asked the Major more than once what he knew about him, but he always put it off, and I could get no answer out of him.

Jim Horscroft was at home all that summer, but late in the autumn he went back to Edinburgh again for the winter session, and as he intended to work very hard and get his degree next spring if he could, he said that he would bide up there for the Christmas. So there was a great leave-taking between him and Cousin Edie; and he was to put up his plate and to marry her as soon as he had the right to practise. I never knew a man love a woman more fondly than he did her, and she liked him well enough in a way — for, indeed, in the whole of Scotland she would not find a finer looking man — but when it came to marriage, I think she winced a little at the thought that all her wonderful dreams should end in nothing more than in being the wife of a country surgeon. Still there was only me and Jim to choose out of, and she took the best of us.

Of course there was de Lapp also; but we always felt that he was of an altogether different class to us, and so he didn't count. I was never very sure at that time whether Edie cared for him or not. When Jim was at home they took little notice of each other. After he was gone they were thrown more together, which was natural enough, as he had taken up so much of her time before. Once or twice she spoke to me about de Lapp as though she did not like him, and yet she was uneasy if he were not in in the evening; and there was no one so fond of his talk, or with so many questions to ask him, as she. She made him describe what queens wore, and what sort of carpets they walked on, and whether they had hairpins in their hair, and how many feathers they had in their hats, until it was a wonder to me how he could find an answer to it all. And yet an answer he always had; and was so ready and quick with his tongue, and so anxious to amuse her, that I wondered how it was that she did not like him better.

Well, the summer and the autumn and the best part of the winter passed away, and we were still all very happy together. We got well into the year 1815, and the great Emperor was still eating his heart out at Elba; and all the ambassadors were wrangling together at Vienna as to what they should do with the lion's skin, now that they had so fairly hunted him down. And we in our little corner of Europe went on with our petty peaceful business, looking after the sheep, attending the Berwick cattle fairs, and chatting at night round the blazing peat fire. We never thought that what all these high and mighty people were doing could have any bearing upon us; and as to war, why everybody was agreed that the great shadow was lifted from us for ever, and that, unless the Allies quarrelled among themselves, there would not be a shot fired in Europe for another fifty years.

There was one incident, however, that stands out very clearly in my memory. I think that it must have happened about the February of this year, and I will tell it to you before I go any further.

You know what the border peel castles are like, I have no doubt. They were just square heaps built every here and there along the line, so that the folk might have some place of protection against raiders and mosstroopers. When Percy and his men were over the Marches, then the people would drive some of their cattle into the yard of the tower, shut up the big gate, and light a fire in the brazier at the top, which would be answered by all the other Peel towers, until the lights would go twinkling up to the Lammermuir Hills, and so carry the news on to the Pentlands and to Edinburgh. But now, of course, all these old keeps were warped and crumbling, and made fine nesting places for the wild birds. Many a good egg have I had for my collection out of the Corriemuir Peel Tower.

One day I had been a very long walk, away over to leave a message at the Laidlaw Armstrongs, who live two miles on this side of Ayton. About five o'clock, just before the sun set, I found myself on the brae path with the gable end of West Inch peeping up in front of me and the old Peel tower lying on my left. I turned my eyes on the keep, for it looked so fine with the flush of the level sun beating full upon it and the blue sea stretching out behind; and as I stared, I suddenly saw the face of a man twinkle for a moment in one of the holes in the wall.

Well I stood and wondered over this, for what could anybody be doing in such a place now that it was too early for the nesting season? It was so queer that I was determined to come to the bottom of it; so, tired as I was, I turned my shoulder on home, and walked swiftly towards the tower. The grass stretches right up to the very base of the wall, and my feet made little noise until I reached the crumbling arch where the old gate used to be. I peeped through, and there was Bonaventure de Lapp standing inside the keep, and peeping out through the very hole at which I had seen his face. He was turned half away from me, and it was clear that he had not seen me at all, for he was staring with all his eyes over in the direction of West Inch. As I advanced my foot rattled the rubble that lay in the gateway, and he turned round with a start and faced me.

He was not a man whom you could put out of countenance, and his face changed no more than if he had been expecting me there for a twelvemonth; but there was something in his eyes which let me know that he would have paid a good price to have me back on the brae path again.

“Hullo!” said I, “what are you doing here?”

“I may ask you that,” said he.

“I came up because I saw your face at the window.”

“And I because, as you may well have observed, I have very much interest for all that has to do with the military, and, of course, castles are among them. You will excuse me for one moment, my dear Jack.”

And he stepped out suddenly through the hole in the wall, so as to be out of my sight.

But I was very much too curious to excuse him so easily. I shifted my ground swiftly to see what it was that he was after. He was standing outside, and waving his hand frantically, as in a signal.

“What are you doing?” I cried; and then, running out to his side, I looked across the moors to see whom he was beckoning to.

“You go too far, sir,” said he, angrily; “I didn’t thought you would have gone so far. A gentleman has the freedom to act as he choose without your being the spy upon him. If we are to be friends, you must not interfere in my affairs.”

“I don’t like these secret doings,” said I, “and my father would not like them either.”

“Your father can speak for himself, and there is no secret,” said he, curtly. “It is you with your imaginings that make a secret. Ta, ta, ta! I have no patience with such foolishness.”

And without as much as a nod, he turned his back upon me, and started walking swiftly to West Inch.

Well, I followed him, and in the worst of tempers; for I had a feeling that there was some mischief in the wind, and yet I could not for the life of me think what it all meant. Again I found myself puzzling over the whole mystery of this man’s coming, and of his long residence among us. And whom could he have expected to meet at the Peel Tower? Was the fellow a spy, and was it some brother spy who came to speak with him there? But that was absurd. What could there be to spy about in Berwickshire? And besides, Major Elliott knew all about him, and he would not show him such respect if there were anything amiss.

I had just got as far as this in my thoughts when I heard a cheery hail, and there was the Major himself coming down the hill from his house, with his big bulldog Bounder held in leash. This dog was a savage creature, and had caused more than one accident on the countryside; but the Major was very fond of it, and would never go out without it, though he kept it tied with a good thick thong of leather. Well, just as I was looking at the Major, waiting for him to come up, he stumbled with his lame leg over a branch of gorse, and in recovering himself he let go his hold of the leash, and in an instant there was the beast of a dog flying down the hillside in my direction.

I did not like it, I can tell you; for there was neither stick nor stone about, and I knew that the brute was dangerous. The Major was shrieking to it from behind, and I think that the creature thought that he was hallooing it on, so furiously did it rush. But I knew its name, and I thought that maybe that might give me the privileges of acquaintanceship; so as it came at me with bristling hair and its nose screwed back between its two red eyes, I cried out “Bounder! Bounder!” at the pitch of my lungs. It had its effect, for the beast passed me with a snarl, and flew along the path on the traces of Bonaventure de Lapp.

He turned at the shouting, and seemed to take in the whole thing at a glance; but he strolled along as slowly as ever. My heart was in my mouth for him, for the dog had never seen him before; and I ran as fast as my feet would carry me to drag it away from him. But somehow, as it bounded up and saw the twittering finger and thumb which de Lapp held out behind him, its fury died suddenly away, and we saw it wagging its thumb of a tail and clawing at his knee.

“Your dog then, Major?” said he, as its owner came hobbling up. “Ah, it is a fine beast — a fine, pretty thing!”

The Major was blowing hard, for he had covered the ground nearly as fast as I.

“I was afraid lest he might have hurt you,” he panted.

“Ta, ta, ta!” cried de Lapp. “He is a pretty, gentle thing; I always love the dogs. But I am glad that I have met you, Major; for here is this young gentleman, to whom I owe very much, who has begun to think that I am a spy. Is it not so, Jack?”

I was so taken aback by his words that I could not lay my tongue to an answer, but coloured up and looked askance, like the awkward country lad that I was.

“You know me, Major,” said de Lapp, “and I am sure that you will tell him that this could not be.”

“No, no, Jack! Certainly not! certainly not!” cried the Major.

“Thank you,” said de Lapp. “You know me, and you do me justice. And yourself, I hope that your knee is better, and that you will soon have your regiment given you.”

“I am well enough,” answered the Major; “but they will never give me a place unless there is war, and there will be no more war in my time.”

“Oh, you think that!” said de Lapp with a smile. “Well, *nous verrons!* We shall see, my friend!”

He whisked off his hat, and turning briskly he walked off in the direction of West Inch. The Major stood looking after him with thoughtful eyes, and then asked me what it was that had made me think that he was a spy. When I told him he said nothing, but he shook his head, and looked like a man who was ill at ease in his mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMING OF THE CUTTER.

I never felt quite the same to our lodger after that little business at the Peel Castle. It was always in my mind that he was holding a secret from me — indeed, that he was all a secret together, seeing that he always hung a veil over his past. And when by chance that veil was for an instant whisked away, we always caught just a glimpse of something bloody and violent and dreadful upon the other side. The very look of his body was terrible. I bathed with him once in the summer, and I saw then that he was haggled with wounds all over. Besides seven or eight scars and slashes, his ribs on one side were all twisted out of shape, and a part of one of his calves had been torn away. He laughed in his merry way when he saw my face of wonder.

“Cossacks! Cossacks!” said he, running his hand over his scars. “And the ribs were broke by an artillery tumbril. It is very bad to have the guns pass over one. Now with cavalry it is nothing. A horse will pick its steps however fast it may go. I have been ridden over by fifteen hundred cuirassiers A and by the Russian hussars of Grodno, and I had no harm from that. But guns are very bad.”

“And the calf?” I asked.

“*Pouf!* It is only a wolf bite,” said he. “You would not think how I came by it! You will understand that my horse and I had been struck, the horse killed, and I with my ribs broken by the tumbril. Well, it was cold — oh, bitter, bitter! — the ground like iron, and no one to help the wounded, so that they froze into such shapes as would make you smile. I too felt that I was freezing, so what did I do? I took my sword, and I opened my dead horse, so well as I could, and I made space in him for me to lie, with one little hole for my mouth. *Sapristi!* It was warm enough there. But there was not room for the entire of me, so my feet and part of my legs stuck out. Then in the night, when I slept, there came the wolves to eat the horse, and they had a little pinch of me also, as you can see; but after that I was on guard with my pistols, and they had no more of me. There I lived, very warm and nice, for ten days.”

“Ten days!” I cried. “What did you eat?”

“Why, I ate the horse. It was what you call board and lodging to me. But of course I have sense to eat the legs, and live in the body. There were many dead about who had all their water bottles, so I had all I could wish. And on the eleventh day there came a patrol of light cavalry, and all was well.”

It was by such chance chats as these — hardly worth repeating in themselves — that there came light upon himself and his past. But the day was coming when we should know all; and how it came I shall try now to tell you.

The winter had been a dreary one, but with March came the first signs of spring, and for a week on end we had sunshine and winds from the south. On the 7th Jim Horscroft was to come back from Edinburgh; for though the session ended with the 1st, his examination would take him a week. Edie and I were out walking on the sea beach on the 6th, and I could talk of nothing but my old friend — for, indeed, he was the only friend of my own age that I had at that time. Edie was very silent, which was a rare thing with her; but she listened smiling to all that I had to say.

“Poor old Jim!” said she once or twice under her breath. “Poor old Jim!”

“And if he has passed,” said I, “why, then of course he will put up his plate and have his own house, and we shall be losing our Edie.”

I tried to make a jest of it and to speak lightly, but the words still stuck in my throat.

“Poor old Jim!” said she again, and there were tears in her eyes as she said it. “And poor old Jock!” she added, slipping her hand into mine as we walked. “You cared for me a little bit once also, didn’t you, Jock? Oh, is not that a sweet little ship out yonder!”

It was a dainty cutter of about thirty tons, very swift by the rake of her masts and the lines of her bow. She was coming up from the south under jib, foresail, and mainsail; but even as we watched her all her white canvas shut suddenly in, like a kittiwake closing her wings, and we saw the splash of her anchor just under her bowsprit. She may have been rather less than a quarter of a mile from the shore — so near that I could see a tall man with a peaked cap, who stood at the quarter with a telescope to his eye, sweeping it backwards and forwards along the coast.

“What can they want here?” asked Edie.

“They are rich English from London,” said I; for that was how we explained everything that was above our comprehension in the border counties. We stood for the best part of an hour watching the bonny craft, and then, as the sun was lying low on a cloudbank and there was a nip in the evening air, we turned back to West Inch.

As you come to the farmhouse from the front, you pass up a garden, with little enough in it, which leads out by a wicket-gate to the road; the same gate at which we stood on the night when the beacons were lit, the night that we saw Walter Scott ride past on his way to Edinburgh. On the right of this gate, on the garden side, was a bit of a rockery which was said to have been made by my father’s mother many years before. She had fashioned it out of water-worn stones and sea shells, with mosses and ferns in the chinks. Well, as we came in through the gates my eyes fell upon this stone heap, and there was a letter stuck in a cleft stick upon the top of it. I took a step forward to see what it was, but Edie sprang in front of me, and plucking it off she thrust it into her pocket.

“That’s for me,” said she, laughing. But I stood looking at her with a face which drove the laugh from her lips.

“Who is it from, Edie?” I asked.

She pouted, but made no answer.

“Who is it from, woman?” I cried. “Is it possible that you have been as false to Jim as you were to me?”

“How rude you are, Jock!” she cried. “I do wish that you would mind your own business.”

“There is only one person that it could be from,” I cried. “It is from this man de Lapp!”

“And suppose that you are right, Jock?”

The coolness of the woman amazed and enraged me.

“You confess it!” I cried. “Have you, then, no shame left?”

“Why should I not receive letters from this gentleman?”

“Because it is infamous.”

“And why?”

“Because he is a stranger.”

“On the contrary,” said she, “he is my husband!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOINGS AT WEST INCH.

I can remember that moment so well. I have heard from others that a great, sudden blow has dulled their senses. It was not so with me. On the contrary, I saw and heard and thought more clearly than I had ever done before. I can remember that my eyes caught a little knob of marble as broad as my palm, which was imbedded in one of the grey stones of the rockery, and I found time to admire its delicate mottling. And yet the look upon my face must have been strange, for Cousin Edie screamed, and leaving me she ran off to the house. I followed her and tapped at the window of her room, for I could see that she was there.

"Go away, Jock, go away!" she cried. "You are going to scold me!

I won't be scolded! I won't open the window! Go away!"

But I continued to tap.

"I must have a word with you!"

"What is it, then?" she cried, raising the sash about three inches.

"The moment you begin to scold I shall close it."

"Are you really married, Edie?"

"Yes, I am married."

"Who married you?"

"Father Brennan, at the Roman Catholic Chapel at Berwick."

"And you a Presbyterian?"

"He wished it to be in a Catholic Church."

"When was it?"

"On Wednesday week."

I remembered then that on that day she had driven over to Berwick, while de Lapp had been away on a long walk, as he said, among the hills.

"What about Jim?" I asked.

"Oh, Jim will forgive me!"

"You will break his heart and ruin his life."

"No, no; he will forgive me."

"He will murder de Lapp! Oh, Edie, how could you bring such disgrace and misery upon us?"

"Ah, now you are scolding!" she cried, and down came the window.

I waited some little time, and tapped, for I had much still to ask her; but she would return no answer, and I thought that I could hear her sobbing. At last I gave it up; and I was about to go into the house, for it was nearly dark now, when I heard the click of the garden gate. It was de Lapp himself.

But as he came up the path he seemed to me to be either mad or drunk. He danced as he walked, cracked his fingers in the air, and his eyes blazed like two will-o'-the-wisps. "*Voltigeurs!*" he shouted; "*Voltigeurs de la Garde!*" just as he had done when he was off his head; and then suddenly, "*En avant! en avant!*" and up he came, waving his walking-cane over his head. He stopped short when he saw me looking at him, and I daresay he felt a bit ashamed of himself.

"Hola, Jock!" he cried. "I didn't thought anybody was there. I am in what you call the high spirits to-night."

"So it seems!" said I, in my blunt fashion. "You may not feel so merry when my friend Jim Horscroft comes back to-morrow."

"Ah! he comes back to-morrow, does he? And why should I not feel merry?

"Because, if I know the man, he will kill you."

"Ta, ta, ta!" cried de Lapp. "I see that you know of our marriage.

Edie has told you. Jim may do what he likes."

"You have given us a nice return for having taken you in."

"My good fellow," said he, "I have, as you say, given you a very nice return. I have taken Edie from a life which is unworthy of her, and I have connected you by marriage with a noble family. However, I have some letters which I must write to-night, and the rest we can talk over to-morrow, when your friend Jim is here to help us."

He stepped towards the door.

"And this was whom you were awaiting at the peel tower!" I cried, seeing light suddenly.

"Why, Jock, you are becoming quite sharp," said he, in a mocking tone; and an instant later I heard the door of his room close and the key turn in the lock.

I thought that I should see him no more that night; but a few minutes later he came into the kitchen, where I was sitting with the old folk.

"Madame," said he, bowing down with his hand over his heart, in his own queer fashion, "I have met with much kindness in your hands, and it shall always be in my heart. I didn't thought I could have been so happy in the quiet country as you have made me. You will accept this small souvenir; and you also, sir, you will take this little gift, which I have the honour to make to you."

He put two little paper packets down upon the table at their elbows, and then, with three more bows to my mother, he walked from the room.

Her present was a brooch, with a green stone set in the middle and a dozen little shining white ones all round it. We had never seen such things before, and did not know how to set a name to them; but they told us afterwards at Berwick that the big one was an emerald and the others were diamonds, and that they were worth much more than all the lambs we had that spring. My dear old mother has been gone now this many a year, but that bonny brooch sparkles at the neck of my eldest daughter when she goes out into company; and I never look at it that I do not see the keen eyes and the long thin nose and the cat's whiskers of our lodger at West Inch. As to my father, he had a fine gold watch with a double case; and a proud man was he as he sat with it in the palm of his hand, his ear stooping to hearken to the tick. I do not know which was best pleased, and they would talk of nothing but what de Lapp had given them.

"He's given you something more," said I at last.

"What then, Jock?" asked father.

"A husband for Cousin Edie," said I.

They thought I was daffing when I said that; but when they came to understand that it was the real truth, they were as proud and as pleased as if I had told them that she had married the laird. Indeed, poor Jim, with his hard drinking and his fighting, had not a very bright name on the country-side, and my mother had often said that no good could come of such a match. Now, de Lapp was, for all we knew, steady and quiet and well-to-do. And as to the secrecy of it, secret marriages were very common in Scotland at that time, when only a few words were needed to make man and wife, so nobody thought much of that. The old folk were as pleased, then, as if their rent had been lowered; but I was still sore at heart, for it seemed to me that my friend had been cruelly dealt with, and I knew well that he was not a man who would easily put up with it.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN OF THE SHADOW.

I woke with a heavy heart the next morning, for I knew that Jim would be home before long, and that it would be a day of trouble. But how much trouble that day was to bring, or how far it would alter the lives of us, was more than I had ever thought in my darkest moments. But let me tell you it all, just in the order that it happened.

I had to get up early that morning; for it was just the first flush of the lambing, and my father and I were out on the moors as soon as it was fairly light. As I came out into the passage a wind struck upon my face, and there was the house door wide open, and the grey light drawing another door upon the inner wall. And when I looked again there was Edie's room open also, and de Lapp's too; and I saw in a flash what that giving of presents meant upon the evening before. It was a leave-taking, and they were gone.

My heart was bitter against Cousin Edie as I stood looking into her room. To think that for the sake of a newcomer she could leave us all without one kindly word, or as much as a hand-shake. And he, too! I had been afraid of what would happen when Jim met him; but now there seemed to be something cowardly in this avoidance of him. I was angry and hurt and sore, and I went out into the open without a word to my father, and climbed up on to the moors to cool my flushed face.

When I got up to Corriemuir I caught my last glimpse of Cousin Edie. The little cutter still lay where she had anchored, but a rowboat was pulling out to her from the shore. In the stern I saw a flutter of red, and I knew that it came from her shawl. I watched the boat reach the yacht and the folk climb on to her deck. Then the anchor came up, the white wings spread once more, and away she dipped right out to sea. I still saw that little red spot on the deck, and de Lapp standing beside her. They could see me also, for I was outlined against the sky, and they both waved their hands for a long time, but gave it up at last when they found that I would give them no answer.

I stood with my arms folded, feeling as glum as ever I did in my life, until their cutter was only a square hickering patch of white among the mists of the morning. It was breakfast time and the porridge upon the table before I got back, but I had no heart for the food. The old folk had taken the matter coolly enough, though my mother had no word too hard for Edie; for the two had never had much love for each other, and less of late than ever.

"There's a letter here from him," said my father, pointing to a note folded up on the table; "it was in his room. Maybe you would read it to us."

They had not even opened it; for, truth to tell, neither of the good folk were very clever at reading ink, though they could do well with a fine large print.

It was addressed in big letters to "The good people of West Inch;" and this was the note, which lies before me all stained and faded as I write:

> ”My friends, —
>
> I didn't thought to have left you so suddenly, but the matter was in other hands than mine. Duty and honour have called me back to my old comrades. This you will doubtless understand before many days are past. I take your Edie with me as my wife; and it may be that in some more peaceful time you will see us again at West Inch. Meanwhile, accept the assurance of my affection, and believe me that I shall never forget the quiet months which I spent with you, at the time when my life would have been worth a week at the utmost had I been taken by the Allies. But the reason of this you may also learn some day."
>
> ”Yours,"
> ”BONAVENTURE DE LISSAC"
> ”(Colonel des Voltigeurs de la Garde, et
> aide-de-camp de S.M.I. L'Empereur Napoleon.")

I whistled when I came to those words written under his name; for though I had long made up my mind that our lodger could be none other than one of those wonderful soldiers of whom we had heard so much, who had forced their way into every capital of Europe, save only our own, still I had little thought that our roof covered Napoleon's own aide-de-camp and a colonel of his Guard.

"So," said I, "de Lissac is his name, and not de Lapp. Well, colonel or no, it is as well for him that he got away from here before Jim laid hands upon him. And time enough, too," I added, peeping out at the kitchen window, "for here is the man himself coming through the garden."

I ran to the door to meet him, feeling that I would have given a deal to have him back in Edinburgh again. He came running, waving a paper over his head; and I thought that maybe he had a note from Edie, and that it was all known to him. But as he came up I saw that it was a big, stiff, yellow paper which crackled as he waved it, and that his eyes were dancing with happiness.

"Hurrah, Jock!" he shouted. "Where is Edie? Where is Edie?"

"What is it, man?" I asked.

"Where is Edie?"

"What have you there?"

"It's my diploma, Jock. I can practise when I like. It's all right.

I want to show it to Edie."

"The best you can do is to forget all about Edie," said I.

Never have I seen a man's face change as his did when I said those words.

"What! What d'ye mean, Jock Calder?" he stammered.

He let go his hold of the precious diploma as he spoke, and away it went over the hedge and across the moor, where it stuck flapping on a whin-bush; but he never so much as glanced at it. His eyes were bent upon me, and I saw the devil's spark glimmer up in the depths of them.

"She is not worthy of you," said I.

He gripped me by the shoulder.

"What have you done?" he whispered. "This is some of your hanky-panky! Where is she?"

"She's off with that Frenchman who lodged here."

I had been casting about in my mind how I could break it gently to him; but I was always backward in speech, and I could think of nothing better than this.

"Oh!" said he, and stood nodding his head and looking at me, though I knew very well that he could neither see me, nor the steading, nor anything else. So he stood for a minute or more, with his hands clenched and his head still nodding. Then he gave a gulp in his throat, and spoke in a queer dry, rasping voice.

"When was this?" said he.

"This morning."

"Were they married?"

"Yes."

He put his hand against the door-post to steady himself.

"Any message for me?"

"She said that you would forgive her."

"May God blast my soul on the day I do! Where have they gone to?"

"To France, I should judge."

"His name was de Lapp, I think?"

"His real name is de Lissac; and he is no less than a colonel in Boney's Guards."

"Ah! he would be in Paris, likely. That is well! That is well!"

"Hold up!" I shouted. "Father! Father! Bring the brandy!"

His knees had given way for an instant, but he was himself again before the old man came running with the bottle.

"Take it away!" said he.

"Have a soop, Mister Horscroft," cried my father, pressing it upon him.

"It will give you fresh heart!"

He caught hold of the bottle and sent it flying over the garden hedge.

"It's very good for those who wish to forget," said he; "I am going to remember!"

"May God forgive you for sinfu' waste!" cried my father aloud.

"And for well-nigh braining an officer of his Majesty's infantry!" said old Major Elliott, putting his head over the hedge. "I could have done with a nip after a morning's walk, but it is something new to have a whole bottle whizz past my ear. But what is amiss, that you all stand round like mutes at a burying?"

In a few words I told him our trouble, while Jim, with a grey face and his brows drawn down, stood leaning against the door-post. The Major was as glum as we by the time I had finished, for he was fond both of Jim and of Edie.

"Tut, tut!" said he. "I feared something of the kind ever since that business of the peel tower. It's the way with the French. They can't leave the women alone. But, at least, de Lissac has married her, and that's a comfort. But it's no time now to think of our own little troubles, with all Europe in a roar again, and another twenty years' war before us, as like as not."

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Why, man, Napoleon's back from Elba, his troops have flocked to him, and Louis has run for his life. The news was in Berwick this morning."

“Great Lord!” cried my father. “Then the weary business is all to do over again!”

“Aye, we thought we were out from the shadow, but it’s still there. Wellington is ordered from Vienna to the Low Countries, and it is thought that the Emperor will break out first on that side. Well, it’s a bad wind that blows nobody any good. I’ve just had news that I am to join the 71st as senior major.”

I shook hands with our good neighbour on this, for I knew how it had lain upon his mind that he should be a cripple, with no part to play in the world.

“I am to join my regiment as soon as I can; and we shall be over yonder in a month, and in Paris, maybe, before another one is over.”

“By the Lord, then, I’m with you, Major!” cried Jim Horscroft. “I’m not too proud to carry a musket, if you will put me in front of this Frenchman.”

“My lad, I’d be proud to have you serve under me,” said the Major. “And as to de Lissac, where the Emperor is he will be.”

“You know the man,” said I. “What can you tell us of him?”

“There is no better officer in the French army, and that is a big word to say. They say that he would have been a marshal, but he preferred to stay at the Emperor’s elbow. I met him two days before Corunna, when I was sent with a flag to speak about our wounded. He was with Soult then. I knew him again when I saw him.”

“And I will know him again when I see him!” said Horscroft, with the old dour look on his face.

And then at that instant, as I stood there, it was suddenly driven home to me how poor and purposeless a life I should lead while this crippled friend of ours and the companion of my boyhood were away in the forefront of the storm. Quick as a flash my resolution was taken.

“I’ll come with you too, Major,” I cried.

“Jock! Jock!” said my father, wringing his hands.

Jim said nothing, but put his arm half round me and hugged me.

The Major’s eyes shone and he flourished his cane in the air.

“My word, but I shall have two good recruits at my heels,” said he. “Well, there’s no time to be lost, so you must both be ready for the evening coach.”

And this was what a single day brought about; and yet years pass away so often without a change. Just think of the alteration in that four-and-twenty hours. De Lissac was gone. Edie was gone. Napoleon had escaped. War had broken out. Jim Horscroft had lost everything, and he and I were setting out to fight against the French. It was all like a dream, until I tramped off to the coach that evening, and looked back at the grey farm steading and at the two little dark figures: my mother with her face sunk in her Shetland shawl, and my father waving his drover's stick to hearten me upon my way.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GATHERING OF THE NATIONS.

And now I come to a bit of my story that clean takes my breath away as I think of it, and makes me wish that I had never taken the job of telling it in hand. For when I write I like things to come slow and orderly and in their turn, like sheep coming out of a paddock. So it was at West Inch. But now that we were drawn into a larger life, like wee bits of straw that float slowly down some lazy ditch, until they suddenly find themselves in the dash and swirl of a great river; then it is very hard for me with my simple words to keep pace with it all. But you can find the cause and reason of everything in the books about history, and so I shall just leave that alone and talk about what I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears.

The regiment to which our friend had been appointed was the 71st Highland Light Infantry, which wore the red coat and the trews, and had its depot in Glasgow town. There we went, all three, by coach: the Major in great spirits and full of stories about the Duke and the Peninsula, while Jim sat in the corner with his lips set and his arms folded, and I knew that he killed de Lissac three times an hour in his heart. I could tell it by the sudden glint of his eyes and grip of his hand. As to me, I did not know whether to be glad or sorry; for home is home, and it is a weary thing, however you may brazen it out, to feel that half Scotland is between you and your mother.

We were in Glasgow next day, and the Major took us down to the depot, where a soldier with three stripes on his arm and a fistful of ribbons from his cap, showed every tooth he had in his head at the sight of Jim, and walked three times round him to have the view of him, as if he had been Carlisle Castle. Then he came over to me and punched me in the ribs and felt my muscle, and was nigh as pleased as with Jim.

“These are the sort, Major, these are the sort,” he kept saying.

“With a thousand of these we could stand up to Boney’s best.”

“How do they run?” asked the Major.

“A poor show,” said he, “but they may lick into shape. The best men have been drafted to America, and we are full of Militiamen and recruities.”

“Tut, tut!” said the Major. “We’ll have old soldiers and good ones against us. Come to me if you need any help, you two.”

And so with a nod he left us, and we began to understand that a Major who is your officer is a very different person from a Major who happens to be your neighbour in the country.

Well, well, why should I trouble you with these things? I could wear out a good quill-pen just writing about what we did, Jim and I, at the depot in Glasgow; and how we came to know our officers and our comrades, and how they came to know us. Soon came the news that the folk of Vienna, who had been cutting up Europe as if it had been a jigget of mutton, had flown back, each to his own country, and that every man and horse in their armies had their faces towards France. We heard of great reviews and musterings in Paris too, and then that Wellington was in the Low Countries, and that on us and on the Prussians would fall the first blow. The Government was shipping men over to him as fast as they could, and every port along the east coast was choked with guns and horses and stores. On the third of June we had our marching orders also, and on the same night we took ship from Leith, reaching Ostend the night after. It was my first sight of a foreign land, and indeed most of my comrades were the same, for we were very young in the ranks. I can see the blue waters now, and the curling surf line, and the long yellow beach, and queer windmills twisting and turning — a thing that a man would not see from one end of Scotland to the other. It was a clean, well-kept town, but the folk were undersized, and there was neither ale nor oatmeal cakes to be bought amongst them.

From there we went on to a place called Bruges; and from there to Ghent, where we picked up with the 52nd and the 95th, which were the two regiments that we were brigaded with. It’s a wonderful place for churches and stonework is Ghent, and indeed of all the towns we were in there was scarce one but had a finer kirk than any in Glasgow. From there we pushed on to Ath, which is a little village on a river, or a burn rather, called the Dender. There we were quartered — in tents mostly, for it was fine sunny weather — and the whole brigade set to work at its drill from morning till evening. General Adams was our chief, and Reynell was our colonel, and they were both fine old soldiers; but what put heart into us most was to think that we were under the Duke, for his name was like a bugle call. He was at Brussels with the bulk of the army, but we knew that we should see him quick enough if he were needed.

I had never seen so many English together, and indeed I had a kind of contempt for them, as folk always have if they live near a border. But the two regiments that were with us now were as good comrades as could be wished. The 52nd had a thousand men in the ranks, and there were many old soldiers of the Peninsula among them. They came from Oxfordshire for the most part. The 95th were a rifle regiment, and had dark green coats instead of red. It was strange to see them loading, for they would put the ball into a greasy rag and then hammer it down with a mallet, but they could fire both further and straighter than we. All that part of Belgium was covered with British troops at that time; for the Guards were over near Enghien, and there were cavalry regiments on the further side of us. You see, it was very necessary that Wellington should spread out all his force, for Boney was behind the screen of his fortresses, and of course we had no means of saying on what side he might pop out, except that he was pretty sure to come the way that we least expected him. On the one side he might get between us and the sea, and so cut us off from England; and on the other he might shove in between the Prussians and ourselves. But the Duke was as clever as he, for he had his horse and his light troops all round him, like a great spider's web, so that the moment a French foot stepped across the border he could close up all his men at the right place.

For myself, I was very happy at Ath, and I found the folk very kindly and homely. There was a farmer of the name of Bois, in whose fields we were quartered, and who was a real good friend to many of us. We built him a wooden barn among us in our spare time, and many a time I and Jeb Seaton, my rear-rank man, have hung out his washing, for the smell of the wet linen seemed to take us both straight home as nothing else could do. I have often wondered whether that good man and his wife are still living, though I think it hardly likely, for they were of a hale middle-age at the time. Jim would come with us too, sometimes, and would sit with us smoking in the big Flemish kitchen, but he was a different Jim now to the old one. He had always had a hard touch in him, but now his trouble seemed to have turned him to flint, and I never saw a smile upon his face, and seldom heard a word from his lips. His whole mind was set on revenging himself upon de Lissac for having taken Edie from him, and he would sit for hours with his chin upon his hands glaring and frowning, all wrapped in the one idea. This made him a bit of a butt among the men at first, and they laughed at him for it; but when they came to know him better they found that he was not a good man to laugh at, and then they dropped it.

We were early risers at that time, and the whole brigade was usually under arms at the flush of dawn. One morning — it was the sixteenth of June — we had just formed up, and General Adams had ridden up to give some order to Colonel Reynell within a musket-length of where I stood, when suddenly they both stood staring along the Brussels road. None of us dared move our heads, but every eye in the regiment whisked round, and there we saw an officer with the cockade of a general's aide-de-camp thundering down the road as hard as a great dapple-grey horse could carry him. He bent his face over its mane and flogged at its neck with the slack of the bridle, as though he rode for very life.

"Hullo, Reynell!" says the general. "This begins to look like business.

What do you make of it?"

They both cantered their horses forward, and Adams tore open the dispatch which the messenger handed to him. The wrapper had not touched the ground before he turned, waving the letter over his head as if it had been a sabre.

"Dismiss!" he cried. "General parade and march in half-an-hour."

Then in an instant all was buzz and bustle, and the news on every lip. Napoleon had crossed the frontier the day before, had pushed the Prussians before him, and was already deep in the country to the east of us with a hundred and fifty thousand men. Away we scuttled to gather our things together and have our breakfast, and in an hour we had marched off and left Ath and the Dender behind us for ever. There was good need for haste, for the Prussians had sent no news to Wellington of what was doing, and though he had rushed from Brussels at the first whisper of it, like a good old mastiff from its kennel, it was hard to see how he could come up in time to help the Prussians.

It was a bright warm morning, and as the brigade tramped down the broad Belgian road the dust rolled up from it like the smoke of a battery. I tell you that we blessed the man that planted the poplars along the sides, for their shadow was better than drink to us. Over across the fields, both to the right and the left, were other roads, one quite close, and the other a mile or more from us. A column of infantry was marching down the near one, and it was a fair race between us, for we were each walking for all we were worth. There was such a wreath of dust round them that we could only see the gun-barrels and the bearskins breaking out here and there, with the head and shoulders of a mounted officer coming out above the cloud, and the flutter of the colours. It was a brigade of the Guards, but we could not tell which, for we had two of them with us in the campaign. On the far road there was also dust and to spare, but through it there flashed every now and then a long twinkle of brightness, like a hundred silver beads threaded in a line; and the breeze brought down such a snarling, clanging, clashing kind of music as I had never listened to. If I had been left to myself it would have been long before I knew what it was; but our corporals and sergeants were all old soldiers, and I had one trudging along with his halbert at my elbow, who was full of precept and advice.

"That's heavy horse," said he. "You see that double twinkle? That means they have helmet as well as cuirass. It's the Royals, or the Enniskillens, or the Household. You can hear their cymbals and kettles. The French heavies are too good for us. They have ten to our one, and good men too. You've got to shoot at their faces or else at their horses. Mind you that when you see them coming, or else you'll find a four-foot sword stuck through your liver to teach you better. Hark! Hark! Hark! There's the old music again!"

And as he spoke there came the low grumbling of a cannonade away somewhere to the east of us, deep and hoarse, like the roar of some blood-daubed beast that thrives on the lives of men. At the same instant there was a shouting of "Heh! heh! heh!" from behind, and somebody roared, "Let the guns get through!" Looking back, I saw the rear companies split suddenly in two and hurl themselves down on either side into the ditch, while six cream-coloured horses, galloping two and two with their bellies to the ground, came thundering through the gap with a fine twelve-pound gun whirling and creaking behind them. Behind were another, and another, four-and-twenty in all, flying past us with such a din and clatter, the blue-coated men clinging on to the gun and the tumbrils, the drivers cursing and cracking their whips, the manes flying, the mops and buckets clanking, and the whole air filled with the heavy rumble and the jingling of chains. There was a roar from the ditches, and a shout from the gunners, and we saw a rolling grey cloud before us, with a score of busbies breaking through the shadow. Then we closed up again, while the growling ahead of us grew louder and deeper than ever.

"There's three batteries there," said the sergeant. "There's Bull's and Webber Smith's, but the other is new. There's some more on ahead of us, for here is the track of a nine-pounder, and the others were all twelves. Choose a twelve if you want to get hit; for a nine mashes you up, but a twelve snaps you like a carrot.” And then he went on to tell about the dreadful wounds that he had seen, until my blood ran like iced water in my veins, and you might have rubbed all our faces in pipeclay and we should have been no whiter. “Aye, you’ll look sicklier yet, when you get a hatful of grape into your tripes,” said he.

And then, as I saw some of the old soldiers laughing, I began to understand that this man was trying to frighten us; so I began to laugh also, and the others as well, but it was not a very hearty laugh either.

The sun was almost above us when we stopped at a little place called Hal, where there is an old pump from which I drew and drank a shako full of water — and never did a mug of Scotch ale taste as sweet. More guns passed us here, and Vivian’s Hussars, three regiments of them, smart men with bonny brown horses, a treat to the eye. The noise of the cannons was louder than ever now, and it tingled through my nerves just as it had done years before, when, with Edie by my side, I had seen the merchant-ship fight with the privateers. It was so loud now that it seemed to me that the battle must be going on just beyond the nearest wood, but my friend the sergeant knew better.

“It’s twelve to fifteen mile off,” said he. “You may be sure the general knows we are not wanted, or we should not be resting here at Hal.”

What he said proved to be true, for a minute later down came the colonel with orders that we should pile arms and bivouac where we were; and there we stayed all day, while horse and foot and guns, English, Dutch, and Hanoverians, were streaming through. The devil’s music went on till evening, sometimes rising into a roar, sometimes sinking into a grumble, until about eight o’clock in the evening it stopped altogether. We were eating our hearts out, as you may think, to know what it all meant, but we knew that what the Duke did would be for the best, so we just waited in patience.

Next day the brigade remained at Hal in the morning, but about mid-day came an orderly from the Duke, and we pushed on once more until we came to a little village called Braine something, and there we stopped; and time too, for a sudden thunderstorm broke over us, and a plump of rain that turned all the roads and the fields into bog and mire. We got into the barns at this village for shelter, and there we found two stragglers — one from a kilted regiment, and the other a man of the German Legion, who had a tale to tell that was as dreary as the weather.

Boney had thrashed the Prussians the day before, and our fellows had been sore put to it to hold their own against Ney, but had beaten him off at last. It seems an old stale story to you now, but you cannot think how we scrambled round those two men in the barn, and pushed and fought, just to catch a word of what they said, and how those who had heard were in turn mobbed by those who had not. We laughed and cheered and groaned all in turn as we heard how the 44th had received cavalry in line, how the Dutch-Belgians had fled, and how the Black Watch had taken the Lancers into their square, and then had killed them at their leisure. But the Lancers had had the laugh on their side when they crumpled up the 69th and carried off one of the colours. To wind it all up, the Duke was in retreat in order to keep in touch with the Prussians, and it was rumoured that he would take up his ground and fight a big battle just at the very place where we had been halted.

And soon we saw that this rumour was true; for the weather cleared towards evening, and we were all out on the ridge to see what we could see. It was such a bonny stretch of corn and grazing land, with the crops just half green and half yellow, and fine rye as high as a man’s shoulder. A scene more full of peace you could not think of, and look where you would over the low curving corn-covered hills, you could see the little village steeples pricking up their spires among the poplars. But slashed right across this pretty picture was a long trail of marching men — some red, some green, some blue, some black — zigzagging over the plain and choking the roads, one end so close that we could shout to them, as they stacked their muskets on the ridge at our left, and the other end lost among the woods as far as we could see. And then on other roads we saw the teams of horses toiling and the dull gleam of the guns, and the men straining and swaying as they helped to turn the spokes in the deep, deep mud. As we stood there, regiment after regiment and brigade after brigade took position on the ridge, and ere the sun had set we lay in a line of over sixty thousand men, blocking Napoleon’s way to Brussels. But the rain had come swishing down again, and we of the 71st rushed off to our barn once more, where we had better quarters than the greater part of our comrades, who lay stretched in the mud with the storm beating upon them until the first peep of day.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW ON THE LAND.

It was still drizzling in the morning, with brown drifting clouds and a damp chilly wind. It was a queer thing for me as I opened my eyes to think that I should be in a battle that day, though none of us ever thought it would be such a one as it proved to be. We were up and ready, however, with the first light, and as we threw open the doors of our barn we heard the most lovely music that I had ever listened to playing somewhere in the distance. We all stood in clusters hearkening to it, it was so sweet and innocent and sad-like. But our sergeant laughed when he saw how it pleased us all.

“Them are the French bands,” said he; “and if you come out here you’ll see what some of you may not live to see again.”

Out we went, the beautiful music still sounding in our ears, and stood on a rise just outside the barn. Down below at the bottom of the slope, about half a musket-shot from us, was a snug tiled farm with a hedge and a bit of an apple orchard. All round it a line of men in red coats and high fur hats were working like bees, knocking holes in the wall and barring up the doors.

“Them’s the light companies of the Guards,” said the sergeant. “They’ll hold that farm while one of them can wag a finger. But look over yonder and you’ll see the camp fires of the French.”

We looked across the valley at the low ridge upon the further side, and saw a thousand little yellow points of flame with the dark smoke wreathing up in the heavy air. There was another farm-house on the further side of the valley, and as we looked we suddenly saw a little group of horsemen appear on a knoll beside it and stare across at us. There were a dozen Hussars behind, and in front five men, three with helmets, one with a long straight red feather in his hat, and the last with a low cap.

“By God!” cried the sergeant, “that’s him! That’s Boney, the one with the grey horse. Aye, I’ll lay a month’s pay on it.”

I strained my eyes to see him, this man who had cast that great shadow over Europe, which darkened the nations for five-and-twenty years, and which had even fallen across our out-of-the-world little sheep-farm, and had dragged us all — myself, Edie, and Jim — out of the lives that our folk had lived before us. As far as I could see, he was a dumpy square-shouldered kind of man, and he held his double glasses to his eyes with his elbows spread very wide out on each side. I was still staring when I heard the catch of a man's breath by my side, and there was Jim with his eyes glowing like two coals, and his face thrust over my shoulder.

"That's he, Jock," he whispered.

"Yes, that's Boney," said I.

"No, no, it's he. This de Lapp or de Lissac, or whatever his devil's name is. It is he."

Then I saw him at once. It was the horseman with the high red feather in his hat. Even at that distance I could have sworn to the slope of his shoulders and the way he carried his head. I clapped my hands upon Jim's sleeve, for I could see that his blood was boiling at the sight of the man, and that he was ready for any madness. But at that moment Bonaparte seemed to lean over and say something to de Lissac, and the party wheeled and dashed away, while there came the bang of a gun and a white spray of smoke from a battery along the ridge. At the same instant the assembly was blown in our village, and we rushed for our arms and fell in. There was a burst of firing all along the line, and we thought that the battle had begun; but it came really from our fellows cleaning their pieces, for their priming was in some danger of being wet from the damp night.

From where we stood it was a sight now that was worth coming over the seas to see. On our own ridge was the chequer of red and blue stretching right away to a village over two miles from us. It was whispered from man to man in the ranks, however, that there was too much of the blue and too little of the red; for the Belgians had shown on the day before that their hearts were too soft for the work, and we had twenty thousand of them for comrades. Then, even our British troops were half made up of militiamen and recruits; for the pick of the old Peninsular regiments were on the ocean in transports, coming back from some fool's quarrel with our kinsfolk of America. But for all that we could see the bearskins of the Guards, two strong brigades of them, and the bonnets of the Highlanders, and the blue of the old German Legion, and the red lines of Pack's brigade, and Kempt's brigade and the green dotted riflemen in front, and we knew that come what might these were men who would bide where they were placed, and that they had a man to lead them who would place them where they should bide.

Of the French we had seen little save the twinkle of their fires, and a few horsemen here and there upon the curves of the ridge; but as we stood and waited there came suddenly a grand blare from their bands, and their whole army came flooding over the low hill which had hid them, brigade after brigade and division after division, until the broad slope in its whole length and depth was blue with their uniforms and bright with the glint of their weapons. It seemed that they would never have done, still pouring over and pouring over, while our men leaned on their muskets and smoked their pipes looking down at this grand gathering and listening to what the old soldiers who had fought the French before had to say about them. Then when the infantry had formed in long deep masses their guns came whirling and bounding down the slope, and it was pretty to see how smartly they unlimbered and were ready for action. And then at a stately trot down came the cavalry, thirty regiments at the least, with plume and breastplate, twinkling sword and fluttering lance, forming up at the flanks and rear, in long shifting, glimmering lines.

“Them’s the chaps!” cried our old sergeant. “They’re gluttons to fight, they are. And you see them regiments with the great high hats in the middle, a bit behind the farm? That’s the Guard, twenty thousand of them, my sons, and all picked men — grey-headed devils that have done nothing but fight since they were as high as my gaiters. They’ve three men to our two, and two guns to our one, and, by God! they’ll make you recruities wish you were back in Argyle Street before they have finished with you.”

He was not a cheering man, our sergeant; but then he had been in every fight since Corunna, and had a medal with seven clasps upon his breast, so that he had a right to talk in his own fashion.

When the Frenchmen had all arranged themselves just out of cannon-shot we saw a small group of horsemen, all in a blaze with silver and scarlet and gold, ride swiftly between the divisions, and as they went a roar of cheering burst out from either side of them, and we could see arms outstretched to them and hands waving. An instant later the noise had died away, and the two armies stood facing each other in absolute deadly silence — a sight which often comes back to me in my dreams. Then, of a sudden, there was a lurch among the men just in front of us; a thin column wheeled off from the dense blue clump, and came swinging up towards the farm-house which lay below us. It had not taken fifty paces before a gun banged out from an English battery on our left, and the battle of Waterloo had begun.

It is not for me to try to tell you the story of that battle, and, indeed, I should have kept far enough away from such a thing had it not happened that our own fates, those of the three simple folk who came from the border country, were all just as much mixed up in it as those of any king or emperor of them all. To tell the honest truth, I have learned more about that battle from what I have read than from what I saw, for how much could I see with a comrade on either side, and a great white cloud-bank at the very end of my firelock? It was from books and the talk of others that I learned how the heavy cavalry charged, how they rode over the famous cuirassiers, and how they were cut to pieces before they could get back. From them, too, I learned all about the successive assaults, and how the Belgians fled, and how Pack and Kempt stood firm. But of my own knowledge I can only speak of what we saw during that long day in the rifts of the smoke and the lulls of the firing, and it is just of that that I will tell you.

We were on the right of the line and in reserve, for the Duke was afraid that Boney might work round on that side and get at him from behind; so our three regiments, with another British brigade and the Hanoverians, were placed there to be ready for anything. There were two brigades of light cavalry, too; but the French attack was all from the front, so it was late in the day before we were really wanted.

The English battery which fired the first gun was still banging away on our left, and a German one was hard at work upon our right, so that we were wrapped round with the smoke; but we were not so hidden as to screen us from a line of French guns opposite, for a score of round shot came piping through the air and plumped right into the heart of us. As I heard the scream of them past my ear my head went down like a diver, but our sergeant gave me a prod in the back with the handle of his halbert.

“Don’t be so blasted polite,” said he; “when you’re hit, you can bow once and for all.”

There was one of those balls that knocked five men into a bloody mash, and I saw it lying on the ground afterwards like a crimson football. Another went through the adjutant’s horse with a plop like a stone in the mud, broke its back and left it lying like a burst gooseberry. Three more fell further to the right, and by the stir and cries we could tell that they had all told.

“Ah! James, you’ve lost a good mount,” says Major Reed, just in front of me, looking down at the adjutant, whose boots and breeches were all running with blood.

“I gave a cool fifty for him in Glasgow,” said the other. “Don’t you think, major, that the men had better lie down now that the guns have got our range?”

“Tut!” said the other; “they are young, James, and it will do them good.”

“They’ll get enough of it before the day’s done,” grumbled the other; but at that moment Colonel Reynell saw that the Rifles and the 52nd were down on either side of us, so we had the order to stretch ourselves out too. Precious glad we were when we could hear the shot whining like hungry dogs within a few feet of our backs. Even now a thud and a splash every minute or so, with a yelp of pain and a drumming of boots upon the ground, told us that we were still losing heavily.

A thin rain was falling and the damp air held the smoke low, so that we could only catch glimpses of what was doing just in front of us, though the roar of the guns told us that the battle was general all along the lines. Four hundred of them were all crashing at once now, and the noise was enough to split the drum of your ear. Indeed, there was not one of us but had a singing in his head for many a long day afterwards. Just opposite us on the slope of the hill was a French gun, and we could see the men serving her quite plainly. They were small active men, with very tight breeches and high hats with great straight plumes sticking up from them; but they worked like sheep-shearers, ramming and sponging and training. There were fourteen when I saw them first, and only four left standing at the last, but they were working away just as hard as ever.

The farm that they called Hougoumont was down in front of us, and all the morning we could see that a terrible fight was going on there, for the walls and the windows and the orchard hedges were all flame and smoke, and there rose such shrieking and crying from it as I never heard before. It was half burned down, and shattered with balls, and ten thousand men were hammering at the gates; but four hundred guardsmen held it in the morning and two hundred held it in the evening, and no French foot was ever set within its threshold. But how they fought, those Frenchmen! Their lives were no more to them than the mud under their feet. There was one — I can see him now — a stoutish ruddy man on a crutch. He hobbled up alone in a lull of the firing to the side gate of Hougoumont and he beat upon it, screaming to his men to come after him. For five minutes he stood there, strolling about in front of the gun-barrels which spared him, but at last a Brunswick skirmisher in the orchard flicked out his brains with a rifle shot.

And he was only one of many, for all day when they did not come in masses they came in twos and threes with as brave a face as if the whole army were at their heels.

So we lay all morning, looking down at the fight at Hougoumont; but soon the Duke saw that there was nothing to fear upon his right, and so he began to use us in another way.

The French had pushed their skirmishers past the farm, and they lay among the young corn in front of us popping at the gunners, so that three pieces out of six on our left were lying with their men strewed in the mud all round them. But the Duke had his eyes everywhere, and up he galloped at that moment — a thin, dark, wiry man with very bright eyes, a hooked nose, and big cockade on his cap. There were a dozen officers at his heels, all as merry as if it were a foxhunt, but of the dozen there was not one left in the evening.

“Warm work, Adams,” said he as he rode up.

“Very warm, your grace,” said our general.

“But we can outstay them at it, I think. Tut, tut, we cannot let skirmishers silence a battery! Just drive those fellows out of that, Adams.”

Then first I knew what a devil’s thrill runs through a man when he is given a bit of fighting to do. Up to now we had just lain and been killed, which is the weariest kind of work. Now it was our turn, and, my word, we were ready for it. Up we jumped, the whole brigade, in a four-deep line, and rushed at the cornfield as hard as we could tear. The skirmishers snapped at us as we came, and then away they bolted like corncrakes, their heads down, their backs rounded, and their muskets at the trail. Half of them got away; but we caught up the others, the officer first, for he was a very fat man who could not run fast. It gave me quite a turn when I saw Rob Stewart, on my right, stick his bayonet into the man’s broad back and heard him howl like a damned soul. There was no quarter in that field, and it was butt or point for all of them. The men’s blood was aflame, and little wonder, for these wasps had been stinging all morning without our being able so much as to see them.

And now, as we broke through the further edge of the cornfield, we got in front of the smoke, and there was the whole French army in position before us, with only two meadows and a narrow lane between us. We set up a yell as we saw them, and away we should have gone slap at them if we had been left to ourselves; for silly young soldiers never think that harm can come to them until it is there in their midst. But the Duke had cantered his horse beside us as we advanced, and now he roared something to the general, and the officers all rode in front of our line holding out their arms for us to stop. There was a blowing of bugles, a pushing and a shoving, with the sergeants cursing and digging us with their halberts; and in less time than it takes me to write it, there was the brigade in three neat little squares, all bristling with bayonets and in echelon, as they call it, so that each could fire across the face of the other.

It was the saving of us, as even so young a soldier as I was could very easily see; and we had none too much time either. There was a low rolling hill on our right flank, and from behind this there came a sound like nothing on this earth so much as the beat of the waves on the Berwick coast when the wind blows from the east. The earth was all shaking with that dull roaring sound, and the air was full of it.

“Steady, 71st! for God’s sake, steady!” shrieked the voice of our colonel behind us; but in front was nothing but the green gentle slope of the grassland, all mottled with daisies and dandelions.

And then suddenly over the curve we saw eight hundred brass helmets rise up, all in a moment, each with a long tag of horsehair flying from its crest; and then eight hundred fierce brown faces all pushed forward, and glaring out from between the ears of as many horses. There was an instant of gleaming breastplates, waving swords, tossing manes, fierce red nostrils opening and shutting, and hoofs pawing the air before us; and then down came the line of muskets, and our bullets smacked up against their armour like the clatter of a hailstorm upon a window. I fired with the rest, and then rammed down another charge as fast as I could, staring out through the smoke in front of me, where I could see some long, thin thing which napped slowly backwards and forwards. A bugle sounded for us to cease firing, and a whiff of wind came to clear the curtain from in front of us, and then we could see what had happened.

I had expected to see half that regiment of horse lying on the ground; but whether it was that their breastplates had shielded them, or whether, being young and a little shaken at their coming, we had fired high, our volley had done no very great harm. About thirty horses lay about, three of them together within ten yards of me, the middle one right on its back with its four legs in the air, and it was one of these that I had seen flapping through the smoke. Then there were eight or ten dead men and about as many wounded, sitting dazed on the grass for the most part, though one was shouting “*Vive l’Empereur!*” at the top of his voice. Another fellow who had been shot in the thigh — a great black-moustached chap he was too — leaned his back against his dead horse and, picking up his carbine, fired as coolly as if he had been shooting for a prize, and hit Angus Myres, who was only two from me, right through the forehead. Then he out with his hand to get another carbine that lay near, but before he could reach it big Hodgson, who was the pivot man of the Grenadier company, ran out and passed his bayonet through his throat, which was a pity, for he seemed to be a very fine man.

At first I thought that the cuirassiers had run away in the smoke; but they were not men who did that very easily. Their horses had swerved at our volley, and they had raced past our square and taken the fire of the two other ones beyond. Then they broke through a hedge, and coming on a regiment of Hanoverians who were in line, they treated them as they would have treated us if we had not been so quick, and cut them to pieces in an instant. It was dreadful to see the big Germans running and screaming while the cuirassiers stood up in their stirrups to have a better sweep for their long, heavy swords, and cut and stabbed without mercy. I do not believe that a hundred men of that regiment were left alive; and the Frenchmen came back across our front, shouting at us and waving their weapons, which were crimson down to the hilts. This they did to draw our fire, but the colonel was too old a soldier; for we could have done little harm at the distance, and they would have been among us before we could reload.

These horsemen got behind the ridge on our right again, and we knew very well that if we opened up from the squares they would be down upon us in a twinkle. On the other hand, it was hard to bide as we were; for they had passed the word to a battery of twelve guns, which formed up a few hundred yards away from us, but out of our sight, sending their balls just over the brow and down into the midst of us, which is called a plunging fire. And one of their gunners ran up on to the top of the slope and stuck a handspike into the wet earth to give them a guide, under the very muzzles of the whole brigade, none of whom fired a shot at him, each leaving him to the other. Ensign Samson, who was the youngest subaltern in the regiment, ran out from the square and pulled down the hand-spike; but quick as a jack after a minnow, a lancer came flying over the ridge, and he made such a thrust from behind that not only his point but his pennon too came out between the second and third buttons of the lad’s tunic. “Helen! Helen!” he shouted, and fell dead on his face, while the lancer, blown half to pieces with musket balls, toppled over beside him, still holding on to his weapon, so that they lay together with that dreadful bond still connecting them.

But when the battery opened there was no time for us to think of anything else. A square is a very good way of meeting a horseman, but there is no worse one of taking a cannon ball, as we soon learned when they began to cut red seams through us, until our ears were weary of the slosh and splash when hard iron met living flesh and blood. After ten minutes of it we moved our square a hundred paces to the right; but we left another square behind us, for a hundred and twenty men and seven officers showed where we had been standing. Then the guns found us out again, and we tried to open out into line; but in an instant the horsemen — lancers they were this time — were upon us from over the brae.

I tell you we were glad to hear the thud of their hoofs, for we knew that that must stop the cannon for a minute and give us a chance of hitting back. And we hit back pretty hard too that time, for we were cold and vicious and savage, and I for one felt that I cared no more for the horsemen than if they had been so many sheep on Corriemuir. One gets past being afraid or thinking of one’s own skin after a while, and you just feel that you want to make some one pay for all you have gone through. We took our change out of the lancers that time; for they had no breastplates to shield them, and we cleared seventy of them out of their saddles at a volley. Maybe, if we could have seen seventy mothers weeping for their lads, we should not have felt so pleased over it; but then, men are just brutes when they are fighting, and have as much thought as two bull pups when they’ve got one another by the throttle.

Then the colonel did a wise stroke; for he reckoned that this would stave off the cavalry for five minutes, so he wheeled us into line, and got us back into a deeper hollow out of reach of the guns before they could open again. This gave us time to breathe, and we wanted it too, for the regiment had been melting away like an icicle in the sun. But bad as it was for us, it was a deal worse for some of the others. The whole of the Dutch Belgians were off by this time helter-skelter, fifteen thousand of them, and there were great gaps left in our line through which the French cavalry rode as pleased them best. Then the French guns had been too many and too good for ours, and our heavy horse had been cut to bits, so that things were none too merry with us. On the other hand, Hougoumont, a blood-soaked ruin, was still ours, and every British regiment was firm; though, to tell the honest truth, as a man is bound to do, there were a sprinkling of red coats among the blue ones who made for the rear. But these were lads and stragglers, the faint hearts that are found everywhere, and I say again that no regiment flinched. It was little we could see of the battle; but a man would be blind not to know that all the fields behind us were covered with flying men. But then, though we on the right wing knew nothing of it, the Prussians had begun to show, and Napoleon had set 20,000 of his men to face them, which made up for ours that had bolted, and left us much as we began. That was all dark to us, however; and there was a time, when the French horsemen had flooded in between us and the rest of the army, that we thought we were the only brigade left standing, and had set our teeth with the intention of selling our lives as dearly as we could.

At that time it was between four and five in the afternoon, and we had had nothing to eat, the most of us, since the night before, and were soaked with rain into the bargain. It had drizzled off and on all day, but for the last few hours we had not had a thought to spare either upon the weather or our hunger. Now we began to look round and tighten our waist-belts, and ask who was hit and who was spared. I was glad to see Jim, with his face all blackened with powder, standing on my right rear, leaning on his firelock. He saw me looking at him, and shouted out to know if I were hurt.

“All right, Jim,” I answered.

“I fear I’m here on a wild-goose chase,” said he gloomily, “but it’s not over yet. By God, I’ll have him, or he’ll have me!”

He had brooded so much on his wrong, had poor Jim, that I really believe that it had turned his head; for he had a glare in his eyes as he spoke that was hardly human. He was always a man that took even a little thing to heart, and since Edie had left him I am sure that he was no longer his own master.

It was at this time of the fight that we saw two single fights, which they tell me were common enough in the battles of old, before men were trained in masses. As we lay in the hollow two horsemen came spurring along the ridge right in front of us, riding as hard as hoof could rattle. The first was an English dragoon, his face right down on his horse’s mane, with a French cuirassier, an old, grey-headed fellow, thundering behind him, on a big black mare. Our chaps set up a hooting as they came flying on, for it seemed shame to see an Englishman run like that; but as they swept across our front we saw where the trouble lay. The dragoon had dropped his sword, and was unarmed, while the other was pressing him so close that he could not get a weapon. At last, stung maybe by our hooting, he made up his mind to chance it. His eye fell on a lance beside a dead Frenchman, so he swerved his horse to let the other pass, and hopping off cleverly enough, he gripped hold of it. But the other was too tricky for him, and was on him like a shot. The dragoon thrust up with the lance, but the other turned it, and sliced him through the shoulder-blade. It was all done in an instant, and the Frenchman cantering his horse up the brae, showing his teeth at us over his shoulder like a snarling dog.

That was one to them, but we scored one for us presently. They had pushed forward a skirmish line, whose fire was towards the batteries on our right and left rather than on us; but we sent out two companies of the 95th to keep them in check. It was strange to hear the crackling kind of noise that they made, for both sides were using the rifle. An officer stood among the French skirmishers — a tall, lean man with a mantle over his shoulders — and as our fellows came forward he ran out midway between the two parties and stood as a fencer would, with his sword up and his head back. I can see him now, with his lowered eyelids and the kind of sneer that he had upon his face. On this the subaltern of the Rifles, who was a fine well-grown lad, ran forward and drove full tilt at him with one of the queer crooked swords that the rifle-men carry. They came together like two rams — for each ran for the other — and down they tumbled at the shock, but the Frenchman was below. Our man broke his sword short off, and took the other’s blade through his left arm; but he was the stronger man, and he managed to let the life out of his enemy with the jagged stump of his blade. I thought that the French skirmishers would have shot him down, but not a trigger was drawn, and he got back to his company with one sword through his arm and half of another in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF THE STORM.

Of all the things that seem strange in that battle, now that I look back upon it, there is nothing that was queerer than the way in which it acted on my comrades; for some took it as though it had been their daily meat without question or change, and others pattered out prayers from the first gunfire to the last, and others again cursed and swore in a way that was creepy to listen to. There was one, my own left-hand man, Mike Threadingham, who kept telling about his maiden aunt, Sarah, and how she had left the money which had been promised to him to a home for the children of drowned sailors. Again and again he told me this story, and yet when the battle was over he took his oath that he had never opened his lips all day. As to me, I cannot say whether I spoke or not, but I know that my mind and my memory were clearer than I can ever remember them, and I was thinking all the time about the old folk at home, and about Cousin Edie with her saucy, dancing eyes, and de Lissac with his cat’s whiskers, and all the doings at West Inch, which had ended by bringing us here on the plains of Belgium as a cockshot for two hundred and fifty cannons.

During all this time the roaring of those guns had been something dreadful to listen to, but now they suddenly died away, though it was like the lull in a thunderstorm when one feels that a worse crash is coming hard at the fringe of it. There was still a mighty noise on the distant wing, where the Prussians were pushing their way onwards, but that was two miles away. The other batteries, both French and English, were silent, and the smoke cleared so that the armies could see a little of each other. It was a dreary sight along our ridge, for there seemed to be just a few scattered knots of red and the lines of green where the German Legion stood, while the masses of the French appeared to be as thick as ever, though of course we knew that they must have lost many thousands in these attacks. We heard a great cheering and shouting from among them, and then suddenly all their batteries opened together with a roar which made the din of the earlier part seem nothing in comparison. It might well be twice as loud, for every battery was twice as near, being moved right up to point blank range, with huge masses of horse between and behind them to guard them from attack.

When that devil's roar burst upon our ears there was not a man, down to the drummer boys, who did not understand what it meant. It was Napoleon's last great effort to crush us. There were but two more hours of light, and if we could hold our own for those all would be well. Starved and weary and spent, we prayed that we might have strength to load and stab and fire while one of us stood upon his feet.

His cannon could do us no great hurt now, for we were on our faces, and in an instant we could turn into a huddle of bayonets if his horse came down again. But behind the thunder of the guns there rose a sharper, shriller noise, whirring and rattling, the wildest, jauntiest, most stirring kind of sound.

"It's the *pas-de-charge!*" cried an officer. "They mean business this time!"

And as he spoke we saw a strange thing. A Frenchman, dressed as an officer of hussars, came galloping towards us on a little bay horse. He was screeching "*Vive le roi! Vive le roi!*" at the pitch of his lungs, which was as much as to say that he was a deserter, since we were for the king and they for the emperor. As he passed us he roared out in English, "The Guard is coming! The Guard is coming!" and so vanished away to the rear like a leaf blown before a storm. At the same instant up there rode an aide-de-camp, with the reddest face that ever I saw upon mortal man.

"You must stop 'em, or we are done!" he cried to General Adams, so that all our company could hear him.

"How is it going?" asked the general.

"Two weak squadrons left out of six regiments of heavies," said he, and began to laugh like a man whose nerves are overstrung.

"Perhaps you would care to join in our advance? Pray consider yourself quite one of us," said the general, bowing and smiling as if he were asking him to a dish of tea.

"I shall have much pleasure," said the other, taking off his hat; and a moment afterwards our three regiments closed up, and the brigade advanced in four lines over the hollow where we had lain in square, and out beyond to the point whence we had seen the French army.

There was little of it to be seen now, only the red belching of the guns flashing quickly out of the cloudbank, and the black figures — stooping, straining, mopping, sponging — working like devils, and at devilish work.

But through the cloud that rattle and whirr rose ever louder and louder, with a deep-mouthed shouting and the stamping of thousands of feet. Then there came a broad black blurr through the haze, which darkened and hardened until we could see that it was a hundred men abreast, marching swiftly towards us, with high fur hats upon their heads and a gleam of brasswork over their brows. And behind that hundred came another hundred, and behind that another, and on and on, coiling and writhing out of the cannon-smoke like a monstrous snake, until there seemed to be no end to the mighty column. In front ran a spray of skirmishers, and behind them the drummers, and up they all came together at a kind of tripping step, with the officers clustering thickly at the sides and waving their swords and cheering. There were a dozen mounted men too at their front, all shouting together, and one with his hat held aloft upon his swordpoint. I say again, that no men upon this earth could have fought more manfully than the French did upon that day.

It was wonderful to see them; for as they came onwards they got ahead of their own guns, so that they had no longer any help from them, while they got in front of the two batteries which had been on either side of us all day. Every gun had their range to a foot, and we saw long red lines scored right down the dark column as it advanced. So near were they, and so closely did they march, that every shot ploughed through ten files of them, and yet they closed up and came on with a swing and dash that was fine to see. Their head was turned straight for ourselves, while the 95th overlapped them on one side and the 52nd on the other.

I shall always think that if we had waited so the Guard would have broken us; for how could a four-deep line stand against such a column? But at that moment Colburne, the colonel of the 52nd, swung his right flank round so as to bring it on the side of the column, which brought the Frenchmen to a halt. Their front line was forty paces from us at the moment, and we had a good look at them. It was funny to me to remember that I had always thought of Frenchmen as small men; for there was not one of that first company who could not have picked me up as if I had been a child, and their great hats made them look taller yet. They were hard, wizened, wiry fellows too, with fierce puckered eyes and bristling moustaches, old soldiers who had fought and fought, week in, week out, for many a year. And then, as I stood with my finger upon the trigger waiting for the word to fire, my eye fell full upon the mounted officer with his hat upon his sword, and I saw that it was de Lissac.

I saw it, and Jim did too. I heard a shout, and saw him rush forward madly at the French column; and, as quick as thought, the whole brigade took their cue from him, officers and all, and flung themselves upon the Guard in front, while our comrades charged them on the flanks. We had been waiting for the order, and they all thought now that it had been given; but you may take my word for it, that Jim Horscroft was the real leader of the brigade when we charged the Old Guard.

God knows what happened during that mad five minutes. I remember putting my musket against a blue coat and pulling the trigger, and that the man could not fall because he was so wedged in the crowd; but I saw a horrid blotch upon the cloth, and a thin curl of smoke from it as if it had taken fire. Then I found myself thrown up against two big Frenchmen, and so squeezed together, the three of us, that we could not raise a weapon. One of them, a fellow with a very large nose, got his hand up to my throat, and I felt that I was a chicken in his grasp. "*Rendez-vous, coqin; rendez-vous!*" said he, and then suddenly doubled up with a scream, for someone had stabbed him in the bowels with a bayonet. There was very little firing after the first sputter; but there was the crash of butt against barrel, the short cries of stricken men, and the roaring of the officers. And then, suddenly, they began to give ground — slowly, sullenly, step by step, but still to give ground. Ah! it was worth all that we had gone through, the thrill of that moment, when we felt that they were going to break. There was one Frenchman before me, a sharp-faced, dark-eyed man, who was loading and firing as quietly as if he were at practice, dwelling upon his aim, and looking round first to try and pick off an officer. I remember that it struck me that to kill so cool a man as that would be a good service, and I rushed at him and drove my bayonet into him. He turned as I struck him and fired full into my face, and the bullet left a weal across my cheek which will mark me to my dying day. I tripped over him as he fell, and two others tumbling over me I was half smothered in the heap. When at last I struggled out, and cleared my eyes, which were half full of powder, I saw that the column had fairly broken, and was shredding into groups of men, who were either running for their lives or were fighting back to back in a vain attempt to check the brigade, which was still sweeping onwards. My face felt as if a red-hot iron had been laid across it; but I had the use of my limbs, so jumping over the litter of dead and mangled men, I scampered after my regiment, and fell in upon the right flank.

Old Major Elliott was there, limping along, for his horse had been shot, but none the worse in himself. He saw me come up, and nodded, but it was too busy a time for words. The brigade was still advancing, but the general rode in front of me with his chin upon his shoulder, looking back at the British position.

“There is no general advance,” said he; “but I’m not going back.”

“The Duke of Wellington has won a great victory,” cried the aide-de-camp, in a solemn voice; and then, his feelings getting the better of him, he added, “if the damned fool would only push on!” — which set us all laughing in the flank company.

But now anyone could see that the French army was breaking up. The columns and squadrons which had stood so squarely all day were now all ragged at the edges; and where there had been thick fringes of skirmishers in front, there were now a spray of stragglers in the rear. The Guard thinned out in front of us as we pushed on, and we found twelve guns looking us in the face, but we were over them in a moment; and I saw our youngest subaltern, next to him who had been killed by the lancer, scribbling great 71’s with a lump of chalk upon them, like the schoolboy that he was. It was at that moment that we heard a roar of cheering behind us, and saw the whole British army flood over the crest of the ridge, and come pouring down upon the remains of their enemies. The guns, too, came bounding and rattling forward, and our light cavalry — as much as was left of it — kept pace with our brigade upon the right. There was no battle after that. The advance went on without a check, until our army stood lined upon the very ground which the French had held in the morning. Their guns were ours, their foot were a rabble spread over the face of the country, and their gallant cavalry alone was able to preserve some sort of order and to draw off unbroken from the field. Then at last, just as the night began to gather, our weary and starving men were able to let the Prussians take the job over, and to pile their arms upon the ground that they had won. That was as much as I saw or can tell you about the Battle of Waterloo, except that I ate a two-pound rye loaf for my supper that night, with as much salt meat as they would let me have, and a good pitcher of red wine, until I had to bore a new hole at the end of my belt, and then it fitted me as tight as a hoop to a barrel.

After that I lay down in the straw where the rest of the company were sprawling, and in less than a minute I was in a dead sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TALLY OF DEATH.

Day was breaking, and the first grey light had just begun to steal through the long thin slits in the walls of our barn, when someone shook me hard by the shoulder, and up I jumped. I had the thought in my stupid, sleepy brain that the cuirassiers were upon us, and I gripped hold of a halbert that was leaning against the wall; but then, as I saw the long lines of sleepers, I remembered where I was. But I can tell you that I stared when I saw that it was none other than Major Elliott that had roused me up. His face was very grave, and behind him stood two sergeants, with long slips of paper and pencils in their hands.

"Wake up, laddie," said the Major, quite in his old easy fashion, as if we were back on Corriemuir again.

"Yes, Major?" I stammered.

"I want you to come with me. I feel that I owe something to you two lads, for it was I that took you from your homes. Jim Horscroft is missing."

I gave a start at that, for what with the rush and the hunger and the weariness I had never given a thought to my friend since the time that he had rushed at the French Guards with the whole regiment at his heels.

"I am going out now to take a tally of our losses," said the Major; "and if you cared to come with me, I should be very glad to have you."

So off we set, the Major, the two sergeants, and I; and oh! but it was a dreadful, dreadful sight! — so much so, that even now, after so many years, I had rather say as little of it as possible. It was bad to see in the heat of fight; but now in the cold morning, with no cheer or drum-tap or bugle blare, all the glory had gone out of it, and it was just one huge butcher's shop, where poor devils had been ripped and burst and smashed, as though we had tried to make a mock of God's image. There on the ground one could read every stage of yesterday's fight — the dead footmen that lay in squares and the fringe of dead horsemen that had charged them, and above on the slope the dead gunners, who lay round their broken piece. The Guards' column had left a streak right up the field like the trail of a snail, and at the head of it the blue coats were lying heaped upon the red ones where that fierce tug had been before they took their backward step.

And the very first thing that I saw when I got there was Jim himself. He was lying on the broad of his back, his face turned up towards the sky, and all the passion and the trouble seemed to have passed clean away from him, so that he looked just like the old Jim as I had seen him in his cot a hundred times when we were schoolmates together. I had given a cry of grief at the sight of him; but when I came to look upon his face, and to see how much happier he looked in death than I could ever have hoped to see him in life, it was hard to mourn for him. Two French bayonets had passed through his chest, and he had died in an instant, and without pain, if one could believe the smile upon his lips.

The Major and I were raising his head in the hope that some flutter of life might remain, when I heard a well-remembered voice at my side, and there was de Lissac leaning upon his elbow among a litter of dead guardsmen. He had a great blue coat muffled round him, and the hat with the high red plume was lying on the ground beside him. He was very pale, and had dark blotches under his eyes, but otherwise he was as he had ever been, with the keen, hungry nose, the wiry moustache, and the close-cropped head thinning away to baldness upon the top. His eyelids had always drooped, but now one could hardly see the glint of his eyes from beneath them.

“Hola, Jock!” he cried. “I didn’t thought to have seen you here, and yet I might have known it, too, when I saw friend Jim.”

“It is you that has brought all this trouble,” said I.

“Ta, ta, ta!” he cried, in his old impatient fashion. “It is all arranged for us. When I was in Spain I learned to believe in Fate. It is Fate which has sent you here this morning.”

“This man’s blood lies at your door,” said I, with my hand on poor Jim’s shoulder.

“And mine on his, so we have paid our debts.”

He flung open his mantle as he spoke, and I saw with horror that a great black lump of clotted blood was hanging out of his side.

“This is my thirteenth and last,” said he, with a smile. “They say that thirteen is an unlucky number. Could you spare me a drink from your flask?”

The Major had some brandy and water. De Lissac supped it up eagerly. His eyes brightened, and a little fleck of colour came back in each of his haggard cheeks.

“It was Jim did this,” said he. “I heard someone calling my name, and there he was with his gun against my tunic. Two of my men cut him down just as he fired. Well, well, Edie was worth it all! You will be in Paris in less than a month, Jock, and you will see her. You will find her at No. 11 of the Rue Miromesnil, which is near to the Madeleine. Break it very gently to her, Jock, for you cannot think how she loved me. Tell her that all I have are in the two black trunks, and that Antoine has the keys. You will not forget?”

“I will remember.”

“And madame, your mother? I trust that you have left her very well.

And monsieur, too, your father? Bear them my distinguished regards!”

Even now as death closed in upon him, he gave the old bow and wave as he sent his greetings to my mother.

“Surely,” said I, “your wound may not be so serious as you think.

I could bring the surgeon of our regiment to you.”

“My dear Jock, I have not been giving and taking wounds this fifteen years without knowing when one has come home. But it is as well, for I know that all is ended for my little man, and I had rather go with my Voltigeurs than remain to be an exile and a beggar. Besides, it is quite certain that the Allies would have shot me, so I have saved myself from that humiliation.”

“The Allies, sir,” said the Major, with some heat, “would be guilty of no such barbarous action.”

But de Lissac shook his head, with the same sad smile.

“You do not know, Major,” said he. “Do you suppose that I should have fled to Scotland and changed my name if I had not more to fear than my comrades who remained in Paris? I was anxious to live, for I was sure that my little man would come back. Now I had rather die, for he will never lead an army again. But I have done things that could not be forgiven. It was I that led the party which took and shot the Duc d’Enghien. It was I — Ah, *mon Dieu!* Edie, Edie, *ma cherie!*”

He threw out both his hands, with all the fingers feeling and quivering in the air. Then he let them drop heavily in front of him, and his chin fell forward upon his chest. One of our sergeants laid him gently down, and the other stretched the big blue mantle over him; and so we left those two whom Fate had so strangely brought together, the Scotchman and the

Frenchman, lying silently and peacefully within hand’s touch of each other, upon the blood-soaked hillside near Hougoumont.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF IT.

And now I have very nearly come to the end of it all, and precious glad I shall be to find myself there; for I began this old memory with a light heart, thinking that it would give me some work for the long summer evenings, but as I went on I wakened a thousand sleeping sorrows and half-forgotten griefs, and now my soul is all as raw as the hide of an ill-sheared sheep. If I come safely out of it I will swear never to set pen to paper again, for it is so easy at first, like walking into a shelving stream, and then before you can look round you are off your feet and down in a hole, and can struggle out as best you may.

We buried Jim and de Lissac with four hundred and thirty-one others of the French Guards and our own Light Infantry in a single trench. Ah! if you could sow a brave man as you sow a seed, there should be a fine crop of heroes coming up there some day! Then we left that bloody battle-field behind us for ever, and with our brigade we marched on over the French border on our way to Paris.

I had always been brought up during all these years to look upon the French as very evil folk, and as we only heard of them in connection with fightings and slaughterings, by land and by sea, it was natural enough to think that they were vicious by nature and ill to meet with. But then, after all, they had only heard of us in the same fashion, and so, no doubt, they had just the same idea of us. But when we came to go through their country, and to see their bonny little steadings, and the douce quiet folk at work in the fields, and the women knitting by the roadside, and the old granny with a big white mutch smacking the baby to teach it manners, it was all so home-like that I could not think why it was that we had been hating and fearing these good people for so long. But I suppose that in truth it was really the man who was over them that we hated, and now that he was gone and his great shadow cleared from the land, all was brightness once more.

We jogged along happily enough through the loveliest country that ever I set my eyes on, until we came to the great city, where we thought that maybe there would be a battle, for there are so many folk in it that if only one in twenty comes out it would make a fine army. But by that time they had seen that it was a pity to spoil the whole country just for the sake of one man, and so they had told him that he must shift for himself in the future. The next we heard was that he had surrendered to the British, and that the gates of Paris were opened to us, which was very good news to me, for I could get along very well just on the one battle that I had had.

But there were plenty of folk in Paris now who loved Boney; and that was natural when you think of the glory that he had brought them, and how he had never asked his army to go where he would not go himself. They had stern enough faces for us, I can tell you, when we marched in, and we of Adams' brigade were the very first who set foot in the city. We passed over a bridge which they call Neuilly, which is easier to write than to say, and through a fine park — the Bois de Boulogne, and so into the Champs d'Elysees. There we bivouacked, and pretty soon the streets were so full of Prussians and English that it became more like a camp than a city.

The very first time that I could get away I went with Rob Stewart, of my company — for we were only allowed to go about in couples — to the Rue Miromesnil. Rob waited in the hall, and I was shown upstairs; and as I put my foot over the mat, there was Cousin Edie, just the same as ever, staring at me with those wild eyes of hers. For a moment she did not recognise me, but when she did she just took three steps forward and sprang at me, with her two arms round my neck.

"Oh, my dear old Jock," she cried, "how fine you look in a red coat!"

"Yes, I am a soldier now, Edie," said I, very stiffly; for as I looked at her pretty face, I seemed to see behind it that other face which had looked up to the morning sky on the Belgium battle-field.

"Fancy that!" she cried. "What are you, then, Jock? A general?

A captain?"

"No, I am a private."

"What! Not one of the common people who carry guns?"

"Yes, I carry a gun."

"Oh, that is not nearly so interesting," said she. And she went back to the sofa from which she had risen. It was a wonderful room, all silk and velvet and shiny things, and I felt inclined to go back to give my boots another rub. As Edie sat down again, I saw that she was all in black, and so I knew that she had heard of de Lissac's death.

"I am glad to see that you know all," said I, for I am a clumsy hand at breaking things. "He said that you were to keep whatever was in the boxes, and that Antoine had the keys."

"Thank you, Jock, thank you," said she. "It was like your kindness to bring the message. I heard of it nearly a week ago. I was mad for the time — quite mad. I shall wear mourning all my days, although you can see what a fright it makes me look. Ah! I shall never get over it. I shall take the veil and die in a convent."

"If you please, madame," said a maid, looking in, "the Count de Beton wishes to see you."

"My dear Jock," said Edie, jumping up, "this is very important. I am sorry to cut our chat short, but I am sure that you will come to see me again, will you not, when I am less desolate? And would you mind going out by the side door instead of the main one? Thank you, you dear old Jock; you were always such a good boy, and did exactly what you were told."

And that was the last that I was ever to see of Cousin Edie. She stood in the sunlight with the old challenge in her eyes, and flash of her teeth; and so I shall always remember her, shining and unstable, like a drop of quicksilver. As I joined my comrade in the street below, I saw a grand carriage and pair at the door, and I knew that she had asked me to slip out so that her grand new friends might never know what common people she had been associated with in her childhood. She had never asked for Jim, nor for my father and mother who had been so kind to her. Well, it was just her way, and she could no more help it than a rabbit can help wagging its scut, and yet it made me heavy-hearted to think of it. Two months later I heard that she had married this same Count de Beton, and she died in child-bed a year or two later.

And as for us, our work was done, for the great shadow had been cleared away from Europe, and should no longer be thrown across the breadth of the lands, over peaceful farms and little villages, darkening the lives which should have been so happy. I came back to Corriemuir after I had bought my discharge, and there, when my father died, I took over the sheep-farm, and married Lucy Deane, of Berwick, and have brought up seven children, who are all taller than their father, and take mighty good care that he shall not forget it. But in the quiet, peaceful days that pass now, each as like the other as so many Scotch tups, I can hardly get the young folks to believe that even here we have had our romance, when Jim and I went a-wooing, and the man with the cat’s whiskers came up from the sea.

THE CRIME OF THE BRIGADIER.

In all the great hosts of France there was only one officer towards whom the English of Wellington's army retained a deep, steady, and unchangeable hatred. There were plunderers among the French, and men of violence, gamblers, duellists, and *roues*. All these could be forgiven, for others of their kidney were to be found among the ranks of the English. But one officer of Massena's force had committed a crime which was unspeakable, unheard of, abominable; only to be alluded to with curses late in the evening, when a second bottle had loosened the tongues of men. The news of it was carried back to England, and country gentlemen who knew little of the details of the war grew crimson with passion when they heard of it, and yeomen of the shires raised freckled fists to Heaven and swore. And yet who should be the doer of this dreadful deed but our friend the Brigadier, Etienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans, gay-riding, plume-tossing, debonnaire, the darling of the ladies and of the six brigades of light cavalry.

But the strange part of it is that this gallant gentleman did this hateful thing, and made himself the most unpopular man in the Peninsula, without ever knowing that he had done a crime for which there is hardly a name amid all the resources of our language. He died of old age, and never once in that imperturbable self-confidence which adorned or disfigured his character knew that so many thousand Englishmen would gladly have hanged him with their own hands. On the contrary, he numbered this adventure among those other exploits which he has given to the world, and many a time he chuckled and hugged himself as he narrated it to the eager circle who gathered round him in that humble cafe where, between his dinner and his dominoes, he would tell, amid tears and laughter, of that inconceivable Napoleonic past when France, like an angel of wrath, rose up, splendid and terrible, before a cowering continent. Let us listen to him as he tells the story in his own way and from his own point of view.

You must know, my friends, said he, that it was towards the end of the year eighteen hundred and ten that I and Massena and the others pushed Wellington backwards until we had hoped to drive him and his army into the Tagus. But when we were still twenty-five miles from Lisbon we found that we were betrayed, for what had this Englishman done but build an enormous line of works and forts at a place called Torres Vedras, so that even we were unable to get through them! They lay across the whole Peninsula, and our army was so far from home that we did not dare to risk a reverse, and we had already learned at Busaco that it was no child’s play to fight against these people. What could we do, then, but sit down in front of these lines and blockade them to the best of our power? There we remained for six months, amid such anxieties that Massena said afterwards that he had not one hair which was not white upon his body. For my own part, I did not worry much about our situation, but I looked after our horses, who were in great need of rest and green fodder. For the rest, we drank the wine of the country and passed the time as best we might. There was a lady at Santarem — but my lips are sealed. It is the part of a gallant man to say nothing, though he may indicate that he could say a great deal.

One day Massena sent for me, and I found him in his tent with a great plan pinned upon the table. He looked at me in silence with that single piercing eye of his, and I felt by his expression that the matter was serious. He was nervous and ill at ease, but my bearing seemed to reassure him. It is good to be in contact with brave men.

“Colonel Etienne Gerard,” said he, “I have always heard that you are a very gallant and enterprising officer.”

It was not for me to confirm such a report, and yet it would be folly to deny it, so I clinked my spurs together and saluted.

“You are also an excellent rider.”

I admitted it.

“And the best swordsman in the six brigades of light cavalry.”

Massena was famous for the accuracy of his information.

“Now,” said he, “if you will look at this plan you will have no difficulty in understanding what it is that I wish you to do. These are the lines of Torres Vedras. You will perceive that they cover a vast space, and you will realise that the English can only hold a position here and there. Once through the lines you have twenty-five miles of open country which lie between them and Lisbon. It is very important to me to learn how Wellington’s troops are distributed throughout that space, and it is my wish that you should go and ascertain.”

His words turned me cold.

“Sir,” said I, “it is impossible that a colonel of light cavalry should condescend to act as a spy.”

He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

"You would not be a Hussar if you were not a hothead," said he. "If you will listen you will understand that I have not asked you to act as a spy. What do you think of that horse?"

He had conducted me to the opening of his tent, and there was a Chasseur who led up and down a most admirable creature. He was a dapple grey, not very tall — a little over fifteen hands perhaps — but with the short head and splendid arch of the neck which comes with the Arab blood. His shoulders and haunches were so muscular, and yet his legs so fine, that it thrilled me with joy just to gaze upon him. A fine horse or a beautiful woman, I cannot look at them unmoved, even now when seventy winters have chilled my blood. You can think how it was in the year '10.

"This," said Massena, "is Voltigeur, the swiftest horse in our army. What I desire is that you should start to-night, ride round the lines upon the flank, make your way across the enemy's rear, and return upon the other flank, bringing me news of his dispositions. You will wear a uniform, and will, therefore, if captured, be safe from the death of a spy. It is probable that you will get through the lines unchallenged, for the posts are very scattered. Once through, in daylight you can outride anything which you meet, and if you keep off the roads you may escape entirely unnoticed. If you have not reported yourself by tomorrow night, I will understand that you are taken, and I will offer them Colonel Petrie in exchange."

Ah, how my heart swelled with pride and joy as I sprang into the saddle and galloped this grand horse up and down to show the Marshal the mastery which I had of him! He was magnificent — we were both magnificent, for Massena clapped his hands and cried out in his delight. It was not I, but he, who said that a gallant beast deserves a gallant rider. Then, when for the third time, with my panache flying and my dolman streaming behind me, I thundered past him, I saw upon his hard old face that he had no longer any doubt that he had chosen the man for his purpose. I drew my sabre, raised the hilt to my lips in salute, and galloped on to my own quarters. Already the news had spread that I had been chosen for a mission, and my little rascals came swarming out of their tents to cheer me. Ah! it brings the tears to my old eyes when I think how proud they were of their Colonel. And I was proud of them also. They deserved a dashing leader.

The night promised to be a stormy one, which was very much to my liking. It was my desire to keep my departure most secret, for it was evident that if the English heard that I had been detached from the army they would naturally conclude that something important was about to happen. My horse was taken, therefore, beyond the picket line, as if for watering, and I followed and mounted him there. I had a map, a compass, and a paper of instructions from the Marshal, and with these in the bosom of my tunic and my sabre at my side, I set out upon my adventure.

A thin rain was falling and there was no moon, so you may imagine that it was not very cheerful. But my heart was light at the thought of the honour which had been done me and the glory which awaited me. This exploit should be one more in that brilliant series which was to change my sabre into a baton. Ah, how we dreamed, we foolish fellows, young, and drunk with success! Could I have foreseen that night as I rode, the chosen man of sixty thousand, that I should spend my life planting cabbages on a hundred francs a month! Oh, my youth, my hopes, my comrades! But the wheel turns and never stops. Forgive me, my friends, for an old man has his weakness.

My route, then, lay across the face of the high ground of Torres Vedras, then over a streamlet, past a farmhouse which had been burned down and was now only a landmark, then through a forest of young cork oaks, and so to the monastery of San Antonio, which marked the left of the English position. Here I turned south and rode quietly over the downs, for it was at this point that Massena thought that it would be most easy for me to find my way unobserved through the position. I went very slowly, for it was so dark that I could not see my hand in front of me. In such cases I leave my bridle loose and let my horse pick its own way. Voltigeur went confidently forward, and I was very content to sit upon his back and to peer about me, avoiding every light. For three hours we advanced in this cautious way, until it seemed to me that I must have left all danger behind me. I then pushed on more briskly, for I wished to be in the rear of the whole army by daybreak. There are many vineyards in these parts which in winter become open plains, and a horseman finds few difficulties in his way.

But Massena had underrated the cunning of these English, for it appears that there was not one line of defence, but three, and it was the third, which was the most formidable, through which I was at that instant passing. As I rode, elated at my own success, a lantern flashed suddenly before me, and I saw the glint of polished gun-barrels and the gleam of a red coat.

“Who goes there?” cried a voice — such a voice! I swerved to the right and rode like a madman, but a dozen squirts of fire came out of the darkness, and the bullets whizzed all round my ears. That was no new sound to me, my friends, though I will not talk like a foolish conscript and say that I have ever liked it. But at least it had never kept me from thinking clearly, and so I knew that there was nothing for it but to gallop hard and try my luck elsewhere. I rode round the English picket, and then, as I heard nothing more of them, I concluded rightly that I had at last come through their defences. For five miles I rode south, striking a tinder from time to time to look at my pocket compass. And then in an instant — I feel the pang once more as my memory brings back the moment — my horse, without a sob or stagger, fell stone dead beneath me!

I had not known it, but one of the bullets from that infernal picket had passed through his body. The gallant creature had never winced nor weakened, but had gone while life was in him. One instant I was secure on the swiftest, most graceful horse in Massena's army. The next he lay upon his side, worth only the price of his hide, and I stood there that most helpless, most ungainly of creatures, a dismounted Hussar. What could I do with my boots, my spurs, my trailing sabre? I was far inside the enemy's lines. How could I hope to get back again? I am not ashamed to say that I, Etienne Gerard, sat upon my dead horse and sank my face in my hands in my despair. Already the first streaks were whitening the east. In half an hour it would be light. That I should have won my way past every obstacle and then at this last instant be left at the mercy of my enemies, my mission ruined, and myself a prisoner — was it not enough to break a soldier's heart?

But courage, my friends! We have these moments of weakness, the bravest of us; but I have a spirit like a slip of steel, for the more you bend it the higher it springs. One spasm of despair, and then a brain of ice and a heart of fire. All was not yet lost. I who had come through so many hazards would come through this one also. I rose from my horse and considered what had best be done.

And first of all it was certain that I could not get back. Long before I could pass the lines it would be broad daylight. I must hide myself for the day, and then devote the next night to my escape. I took the saddle, holsters, and bridle from poor Voltigeur, and I concealed them among some bushes, so that no one finding him could know that he was a French horse. Then, leaving him lying there, I wandered on in search of some place where I might be safe for the day. In every direction I could see camp fires upon the sides of the hills, and already figures had begun to move around them. I must hide quickly, or I was lost.

But where was I to hide? It was a vineyard in which I found myself, the poles of the vines still standing, but the plants gone. There was no cover there. Besides, I should want some food and water before another night had come. I hurried wildly onwards through the waning darkness, trusting that chance would be my friend. And I was not disappointed. Chance is a woman, my friends, and she has her eye always upon a gallant Hussar.

Well, then, as I stumbled through the vineyard, something loomed in front of me, and I came upon a great square house with another long, low building upon one side of it. Three roads met there, and it was easy to see that this was the posada, or wine-shop. There was no light in the windows, and everything was dark and silent, but, of course, I knew that such comfortable quarters were certainly occupied, and probably by some one of importance. I have learned, however, that the nearer the danger may really be the safer the place, and so I was by no means inclined to trust myself away from this shelter. The low building was evidently the stable, and into this I crept, for the door was unlatched. The place was full of bullocks and sheep, gathered there, no doubt, to be out of the clutches of marauders. A ladder led to a loft, and up this I climbed, and concealed myself very snugly among some bales of hay upon the top. This loft had a small open window, and I was able to look down upon the front of the inn and also upon the road. There I crouched and waited to see what would happen.

It was soon evident that I had not been mistaken when I had thought that this might be the quarters of some person of importance. Shortly after daybreak an English light dragoon arrived with a despatch, and from then onwards the place was in a turmoil, officers continually riding up and away. Always the same name was upon their lips: “Sir Stapleton — Sir Stapleton.” It was hard for me to lie there with a dry moustache and watch the great flagons which were brought out by the landlord to these English officers. But it amused me to look at their fresh-coloured, clean-shaven, careless faces, and to wonder what they would think if they knew that so celebrated a person was lying so near to them. And then, as I lay and watched, I saw a sight which filled me with surprise.

It is incredible the insolence of these English! What do you suppose Milord Wellington had done when he found that Massena had blockaded him and that he could not move his army? I might give you many guesses.

You might say that he had raged, that he had despaired, that he had brought his troops together and spoken to them about glory and the fatherland before leading them to one last battle. No, Milord did none of these things. But he sent a fleet ship to England to bring him a number of fox-dogs, and he with his officers settled himself down to chase the fox. It is true what I tell you. Behind the lines of Torres Vedras these mad Englishmen made the fox-chase three days in the week. We had heard of it in the camp, and now I was myself to see that it was true.

For, along the road which I have described, there came these very dogs, thirty or forty of them, white and brown, each with its tail at the same angle, like the bayonets of the Old Guard. My faith, but it was a pretty sight! And behind and amidst them there rode three men with peaked caps and red coats, whom I understood to be the hunters. After them came many horsemen with uniforms of various kinds, stringing along the roads in twos and threes, talking together and laughing. They did not seem to be going above a trot, and it appeared to me that it must indeed be a slow fox which they hoped to catch. However, it was their affair, not mine, and soon they had all passed my window and were out of sight. I waited and I watched, ready for any chance which might offer.

Presently an officer, in a blue uniform not unlike that of our flying artillery, came cantering down the road — an elderly, stout man he was, with grey side-whiskers. He stopped and began to talk with an orderly officer of dragoons, who waited outside the inn, and it was then that I learned the advantage of the English which had been taught me. I could hear and understand all that was said.

“Where is the meet?” said the officer, and I thought that he was hungering for his bifstek. But the other answered him that it was near Altara, so I saw that it was a place of which he spoke.

“You are late, Sir George,” said the orderly.

“Yes, I had a court-martial. Has Sir Stapleton Cotton gone?”

At this moment a window opened, and a handsome young man in a very splendid uniform looked out of it.

“Halloa, Murray!” said he. “These cursed papers keep me, but I will be at your heels.”

“Very good, Cotton. I am late already, so I will ride on.”

“You might order my groom to bring round my horse,” said the young general at the window to the orderly below, while the other went on down the road. The orderly rode away to some outlying stable, and then in a few minutes there came a smart English groom with a cockade in his hat, leading by the bridle a horse — and, oh, my friends, you have never known the perfection to which a horse can attain until you have seen a first-class English hunter. He was superb: tall, broad, strong, and yet as graceful and agile as a deer. Coal black he was in colour, and his neck, and his shoulder, and his quarters, and his fetlocks — how can I describe him all to you? The sun shone upon him as on polished ebony, and he raised his hoofs in a little, playful dance so lightly and prettily, while he tossed his mane and whinnied with impatience. Never have I seen such a mixture of strength and beauty and grace. I had often wondered how the English Hussars had managed to ride over the Chasseurs of the Guards in the affair at Astorga, but I wondered no longer when I saw the English horses.

There was a ring for fastening bridles at the door of the inn, and the groom tied the horse there while he entered the house. In an instant I had seen the chance which Fate had brought to me. Were I in that saddle I should be better off than when I started. Even Voltigeur could not compare with this magnificent creature. To think is to act with me. In one instant I was down the ladder and at the door of the stable. The next I was out and the bridle was in my hand. I bounded into the saddle. Somebody, the master or the man, shouted wildly behind me. What cared I for his shouts! I touched the horse with my spurs, and he bounded forward with such a spring that only a rider like myself could have sat him. I gave him his head and let him go — it did not matter to me where, so long as we left this inn far behind us. He thundered away across the vineyards, and in a very few minutes I had placed miles between myself and my pursuers. They could no longer tell, in that wild country, in which direction I had gone. I knew that I was safe, and so, riding to the top of a small hill, I drew my pencil and note-book from my pocket and proceeded to make plans of those camps which I could see, and to draw the outline of the country.

He was a dear creature upon whom I sat, but it was not easy to draw upon his back, for every now and then his two ears would cock, and he would start and quiver with impatience. At first I could not understand this trick of his, but soon I observed that he only did it when a peculiar noise—”yoy, yoy, yoy” — came from somewhere among the oak woods beneath us. And then suddenly this strange cry changed into a most terrible screaming, with the frantic blowing of a horn. Instantly he went mad — this horse. His eyes blazed. His mane bristled. He bounded from the earth and bounded again, twisting and turning in a frenzy. My pencil flew one way and my notebook another. And then, as I looked down into the valley, an extraordinary sight met my eyes. The hunt was streaming down it. The fox I could not see, but the dogs were in full cry, their noses down, their tails up, so close together that they might have been one great yellow and white moving carpet. And behind them rode the horsemen — my faith, what a sight! Consider every type which a great army could show: some in hunting dress, but the most in uniforms; blue dragoons, red dragoons, red-trousered hussars, green riflemen, artillerymen, gold-slashed lancers, and most of all red, red, red, for the infantry officers ride as hard as the cavalry. Such a crowd, some well mounted, some ill, but all flying along as best they might, the subaltern as good as the general, jostling and pushing, spurring and driving, with every thought thrown to the winds save that they should have the blood of this absurd fox! Truly, they are an extraordinary people, the English!

But I had little time to watch the hunt or to marvel at these islanders, for of all these mad creatures the very horse upon which I sat was the maddest. You understand that he was himself a hunter, and that the crying of these dogs was to him what the call of a cavalry trumpet in the street yonder would be to me. It thrilled him. It drove him wild. Again and again he bounded into the air, and then, seizing the bit between his teeth, he plunged down the slope and galloped after the dogs. I swore, and tugged, and pulled, but I was powerless. This English General rode his horse with a snaffle only, and the beast had a mouth of iron. It was useless to pull him back. One might as well try to keep a Grenadier from a wine bottle. I gave it up in despair, and, settling down in the saddle, I prepared for the worst which could befall.

What a creature he was! Never have I felt such a horse between my knees. His great haunches gathered under him with every stride, and he shot forward ever faster and faster, stretched like a greyhound, while the wind beat in my face and whistled past my ears. I was wearing our undress jacket, a uniform simple and dark in itself — though some figures give distinction to any uniform — and I had taken the precaution to remove the long panache from my busby. The result was that, amidst the mixture of costumes in the hunt, there was no reason why mine should attract attention, or why these men, whose thoughts were all with the chase, should give any heed to me. The idea that a French officer might be riding with them was too absurd to enter their minds. I laughed as I rode, for, indeed, amid all the danger, there was something of comic in the situation.

I have said that the hunters were very unequally mounted, and so, at the end of a few miles, instead of being one body of men, like a charging regiment, they were scattered over a considerable space, the better riders well up to the dogs and the others trailing away behind. Now, I was as good a rider as any, and my horse was the best of them all, and so you can imagine that it was not long before he carried me to the front. And when I saw the dogs streaming over the open, and the red-coated huntsman behind them, and only seven or eight horsemen between us, then it was that the strangest thing of all happened, for I, too, went mad — I, Etienne Gerard! In a moment it came upon me, this spirit of sport, this desire to excel, this hatred of the fox. Accursed animal, should he then defy us? Vile robber, his hour was come! Ah, it is a great feeling, this feeling of sport, my friends, this desire to trample the fox under the hoofs of your horse. I have made the fox-chase with the English. I have also, as I may tell you some day, fought the box-fight with the Bustler, of Bristol. And I say to you that this sport is a wonderful thing — full of interest as well as madness.

The farther we went the faster galloped my horse, and soon there were but three men as near the dogs as I was. All thought of fear of discovery had vanished. My brain throbbed, my blood ran hot — only one thing upon earth seemed worth living for, and that was to overtake this infernal fox. I passed one of the horsemen — a Hussar like myself. There were only two in front of me now: the one in a black coat, the other the blue artilleryman whom I had seen at the inn. His grey whiskers streamed in the wind, but he rode magnificently. For a mile or more we kept in this order, and then, as we galloped up a steep slope, my lighter weight brought me to the front. I passed them both, and when I reached the crown I was riding level with the little, hard-faced English huntsman. In front of us were the dogs, and then, a hundred paces beyond them, was a brown wisp of a thing, the fox itself, stretched to the uttermost. The sight of him fired my blood. “Aha, we have you then, assassin!” I cried, and shouted my encouragement to the huntsman. I waved my hand to show him that there was one upon whom he could rely.

And now there were only the dogs between me and my prey. These dogs, whose duty it is to point out the game, were now rather a hindrance than a help to us, for it was hard to know how to pass them. The huntsman felt the difficulty as much as I, for he rode behind them, and could make no progress towards the fox. He was a swift rider, but wanting in enterprise. For my part, I felt that it would be unworthy of the Hussars of Conflans if I could not overcome such a difficulty as this. Was Etienne Gerard to be stopped by a herd of fox-dogs? It was absurd. I gave a shout and spurred my horse.

“Hold hard, sir! Hold hard!” cried the huntsman.

He was uneasy for me, this good old man, but I reassured him by a wave and a smile. The dogs opened in front of me. One or two may have been hurt, but what would you have? The egg must be broken for the omelette. I could hear the huntsman shouting his congratulations behind me. One more effort, and the dogs were all behind me. Only the fox was in front.

Ah, the joy and pride of that moment! To know that I had beaten the English at their own sport. Here were three hundred all thirsting for the life of this animal, and yet it was I who was about to take it. I thought of my comrades of the light cavalry brigade, of my mother, of the Emperor, of France. I had brought honour to each and all. Every instant brought me nearer to the fox. The moment for action had arrived, so I unsheathed my sabre. I waved it in the air, and the brave English all shouted behind me.

Only then did I understand how difficult is this fox-chase, for one may cut again and again at the creature and never strike him once. He is small, and turns quickly from a blow. At every cut I heard those shouts of encouragement from behind me, and they spurred me to yet another effort. And then, at last, the supreme moment of my triumph arrived. In the very act of turning I caught him fair with such another back-handed cut as that with which I killed the aide-de-camp of the Emperor of Russia. He flew into two pieces, his head one way and his tail another. I looked back and waved the blood-stained sabre in the air. For the moment I was exalted — superb.

Ah! how I should have loved to have waited to have received the congratulations of these generous enemies. There were fifty of them in sight, and not one who was not waving his hand and shouting. They are not really such a phlegmatic race, the English. A gallant deed in war or in sport will always warm their hearts. As to the old huntsman, he was the nearest to me, and I could see with my own eyes how overcome he was by what he had seen. He was like a man paralyzed — his mouth open, his hand, with outspread fingers, raised in the air. For a moment my inclination was to return and to embrace him. But already the call of duty was sounding in my ears, and these English, in spite of all the fraternity which exists among sportsmen, would certainly have made me prisoner. There was no hope for my mission now, and I had done all that I could do. I could see the lines of Massena’s camp no very great distance off, for, by a lucky chance, the chase had taken us in that direction. I turned from the dead fox, saluted with my sabre, and galloped away.

But they would not leave me so easily, these gallant huntsmen. I was the fox now, and the chase swept bravely over the plain. It was only at the moment when I started for the camp that they could have known that I was a Frenchman, and now the whole swarm of them were at my heels. We were within gunshot of our pickets before they would halt, and then they stood in knots and would not go away, but shouted and waved their hands at me. No, I will not think that it was in enmity. Rather would I fancy that a glow of admiration filled their breasts, and that their one desire was to embrace the stranger who had carried himself so gallantly and well.

THE “SLAPPING SAL.”

It was in the days when France’s power was already broken upon the seas, and when more of her three-deckers lay rotting in the Medway than were to be found in Brest harbour. But her frigates and corvettes still scoured the ocean, closely followed ever by those of her rival. At the uttermost ends of the earth these dainty vessels, with sweet names of girls or of flowers, mangled and shattered each other for the honour of the four yards of bunting which flapped from the end of their gaffs.

It had blown hard in the night, but the wind had dropped with the dawning, and now the rising sun tinted the fringe of the storm-wrack as it dwindled into the west and glinted on the endless crests of the long, green waves. To north and south and west lay a skyline which was unbroken save by the spout of foam when two of the great Atlantic seas dashed each other into spray. To the east was a rocky island, jutting out into craggy points, with a few scattered clumps of palm trees and a pennant of mist streaming out from the bare, conical hill which capped it. A heavy surf beat upon the shore, and, at a safe distance from it, the British 32-gun frigate *Leda*, Captain A. P. Johnson, raised her black, glistening side upon the crest of a wave, or swooped down into an emerald valley, dipping away to the nor’ard under easy sail. On her snow-white quarter-deck stood a stiff little brown-faced man, who swept the horizon with his glass.

“Mr. Wharton!” he cried, with a voice like a rusty hinge.

A thin, knock-kneed officer shambled across the poop to him.

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ve opened the sealed orders, Mr. Wharton.”

A glimmer of curiosity shone upon the meagre features of the first lieutenant. The *Leda* had sailed with her consort, the *Dido*, from Antigua the week before, and the admiral’s orders had been contained in a sealed envelope.

“We were to open them on reaching the deserted island of Sombriero, lying in north latitude eighteen, thirty-six, west longitude sixty-three, twenty-eight. Sombriero bore four miles to the north-east from our port-bow when the gale cleared, Mr. Wharton.”

The lieutenant bowed stiffly. He and the captain had been bosom friends from childhood. They had gone to school together, joined the navy together, fought again and again together, and married into each other's families, but so long as their feet were on the poop the iron discipline of the service struck all that was human out of them and left only the superior and the subordinate. Captain Johnson took from his pocket a blue paper, which crackled as he unfolded it.

"The 32-gun frigates *Leda* and *Dido* (Captains A. P. Johnson and James Munro) are to cruise from the point at which these instructions are read to the mouth of the Caribbean Sea, in the hope of encountering the French frigate *La Gloire* (48), which has recently harassed our merchant ships in that quarter. H.M. frigates are also directed to hunt down the piratical craft known sometimes as the *Slapping Sal* and sometimes as the *Hairy Hudson*, which has plundered the British ships as per margin, inflicting barbarities upon their crews. She is a small brig, carrying ten light guns, with one twenty-four pound carronade forward. She was last seen upon the 23rd ult. to the north-east of the island of Sombriero."

"(Signed) JAMES MONTGOMERY,"

"(*Rear-Admiral*). H.M.S. *Colossus*, Antigua."

"We appear to have lost our consort," said Captain Johnson, folding up his instructions and again sweeping the horizon with his glass. "She drew away after we reefed down. It would be a pity if we met this heavy Frenchman without the *Dido*, Mr. Wharton. Eh?"

The lieutenant twinkled and smiled.

"She has eighteen-pounders on the main and twelves on the poop, sir," said the captain. "She carries four hundred to our two hundred and thirty-one. Captain de Milon is the smartest man in the French service. Oh, Bobby boy, I'd give my hopes of my flag to rub my side up against her!" He turned on his heel, ashamed of his momentary lapse. "Mr. Wharton," said he, looking back sternly over his shoulder, "get those square sails shaken out and bear away a point more to the west."

"A brig on the port-bow," came a voice from the forecastle.

"A brig on the port-bow," said the lieutenant.

The captain sprang upon the bulwarks and held on by the mizzen-shrouds, a strange little figure with flying skirts and puckered eyes. The lean lieutenant craned his neck and whispered to Smeaton, the second, while officers and men came popping up from below and clustered along the weather-rail, shading their eyes with their hands — for the tropical sun was already clear of the palm trees. The strange brig lay at anchor in the throat of a curving estuary, and it was already obvious that she could not get out without passing under the guns of the frigate. A long, rocky point to the north of her held her in.

"Keep her as she goes, Mr. Wharton," said the captain. "Hardly worth while our clearing for action, Mr. Smeaton, but the men can stand by the guns in case she tries to pass us. Cast loose the bow-chasers and send the small-arm men to the forecastle."

A British crew went to its quarters in those days with the quiet serenity of men on their daily routine. In a few minutes, without fuss or sound, the sailors were knotted round their guns, the marines were drawn up and leaning on their muskets, and the frigate's bowsprit pointed straight for her little victim.

"Is it the *Slapping Sal*, sir?"

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Wharton."

"They don't seem to like the look of us, sir. They've cut their cable and are clapping on sail."

It was evident that the brig meant struggling for her freedom. One little patch of canvas fluttered out above another, and her people could be seen working like madmen in the rigging. She made no attempt to pass her antagonist, but headed up the estuary. The captain rubbed his hands.

"She's making for shoal water, Mr. Wharton, and we shall have to cut her out, sir. She's a footy little brig, but I should have thought a fore-and-after would have been more handy."

"It was a mutiny, sir."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, sir, I heard of it at Manilla: a bad business, sir. Captain and two mates murdered. This Hudson, or Hairy Hudson as they call him, led the mutiny. He's a Londoner, sir, and a cruel villain as ever walked."

"His next walk will be to Execution Dock, Mr. Wharton. She seems heavily manned. I wish I could take twenty topmen out of her, but they would be enough to corrupt the crew of the ark, Mr. Wharton."

Both officers were looking through their glasses at the brig. Suddenly the lieutenant showed his teeth in a grin, while the captain flushed a deeper red.

"That's Hairy Hudson on the after-rail, sir."

"The low, impertinent blackguard! He'll play some other antics before we are done with him. Could you reach him with the long eighteen, Mr. Smeaton?"

“Another cable length will do it, sir.”

The brig yawed as they spoke, and as she came round a spurt of smoke whiffed out from her quarter. It was a pure piece of bravado, for the gun could scarce carry halfway. Then with a jaunty swing the little ship came into the wind again, and shot round a fresh curve in the winding channel.

“The water’s shoaling rapidly, sir,” repeated the second lieutenant.

“There’s six fathoms by the chart.”

“Four by the lead, sir.”

“When we clear this point we shall see how we lie. Ha! I thought as much! Lay her to, Mr. Wharton. Now we have got her at our mercy!”

The frigate was quite out of sight of the sea now at the head of this river-like estuary. As she came round the curve the two shores were seen to converge at a point about a mile distant. In the angle, as near shore as she could get, the brig was lying with her broadside towards her pursuer and a wisp of black cloth streaming from her mizzen. The lean lieutenant, who had reappeared upon deck with a cutlass strapped to his side and two pistols rammed into his belt, peered curiously at the ensign.

“Is it the Jolly Rodger, sir?” he asked.

But the captain was furious.

“He may hang where his breeches are hanging before I have done with him!” said he. “What boats will you want, Mr. Wharton?”

“We should do it with the launch and the jolly-boat.”

“Take four and make a clean job of it. Pipe away the crews at once, and

I’ll work her in and help you with the long eighteens.”

With a rattle of ropes and a creaking of blocks the four boats splashed into the water. Their crews clustered thickly into them: bare-footed sailors, stolid marines, laughing middies, and in the sheets of each the senior officers with their stern schoolmaster faces. The captain, his elbows on the binnacle, still watched the distant brig. Her crew were tricing up the boarding-netting, dragging round the starboard guns, knocking new portholes for them, and making every preparation for a desperate resistance. In the thick of it all a huge man, bearded to the eyes, with a red nightcap upon his head, was straining and stooping and hauling. The captain watched him with a sour smile, and then snapping up his glass he turned upon his heel. For an instant he stood staring.

“Call back the boats!” he cried in his thin, creaking voice.

“Clear away for action there! Cast loose those main-deck guns.

Brace back the yards, Mr. Smeaton, and stand by to go about when she has

weigh enough.”

Round the curve of the estuary was coming a huge vessel. Her great yellow bowsprit and white-winged figure-head were jutting out from the cluster of palm trees, while high above them towered three immense masts with the tricolour flag floating superbly from the mizzen. Round she came, the deep-blue water creaming under her fore foot, until her long, curving, black side, her line of shining copper beneath and of snow-white hammocks above, and the thick clusters of men who peered over her bulwarks were all in full view. Her lower yards were slung, her ports triced up, and her guns run out all ready for action. Lying behind one of the promontories of the island, the lookout men of the *Gloire* upon the shore had seen the *cul de sac* into which the British frigate was headed, so that Captain de Milon had served the *Leda* as Captain Johnson had the *Slapping Sal*.

But the splendid discipline of the British service was at its best in such a crisis. The boats flew back; their crews clustered aboard; they were swung up at the davits and the fall-ropes made fast. Hammocks were brought up and stowed, bulkheads sent down, ports and magazines opened, the fires put out in the galley, and the drums beat to quarters. Swarms of men set the head-sails and brought the frigate round, while the gun-crews threw off their jackets and shirts, tightened their belts, and ran out their eighteen-pounders, peering through the open portholes at the stately French man. The wind was very light. Hardly a ripple showed itself upon the clear blue water, but the sails blew gently out as the breeze came over the wooded banks. The Frenchman had gone about also, and both ships were now heading slowly for the sea under fore-and-aft canvas, the *Gloire* a hundred yards in advance. She luffed up to cross the *Leda’s* bows, but the British ship came round also, and the two rippled slowly on in such a silence that the ringing of the ramrods as the French marines drove home their charges clanged quite loudly upon the ear.

“Not much sea-room, Mr. Wharton,” remarked the captain.

“I have fought actions in less, sir.”

“We must keep our distance and trust to our gunnery. She is very heavily manned, and if she got alongside we might find ourselves in trouble.”

“I see the shakoes of soldiers aboard other.”

“Two companies of light infantry from Martinique. Now we have her!

Hard-a-port, and let her have it as we cross her stern!”

The keen eye of the little commander had seen the surface ripple, which told of a passing breeze. He had used it to dart across the big Frenchman and to rake her with every gun as he passed. But, once past her, the *Leda* had to come back into the wind to keep out of shoal water. The manoeuvre brought her on to the starboard side of the Frenchman, and the trim little frigate seemed to heel right over under the crashing broadside which burst from the gaping ports. A moment later her topmen were swarming aloft to set her top-sails and royals, and she strove to cross the *Gloire’s* bows and rake her again. The French captain, however, brought his frigate’s head round, and the two rode side by side within easy pistol-shot, pouring broadsides into each other in one of those murderous duels which, could they all be recorded, would mottle our charts with blood.

In that heavy tropical air, with so faint a breeze, the smoke formed a thick bank round the two vessels, from which the topmasts only protruded. Neither could see anything of its enemy save the throbs of fire in the darkness, and the guns were sponged and trained and fired into a dense wall of vapour. On the poop and the forecastle the marines, in two little red lines, were pouring in their volleys, but neither they nor the seamen-gunners could see what effect their fire was having. Nor, indeed, could they tell how far they were suffering themselves, for, standing at a gun, one could but hazily see that upon the right and the left. But above the roar of the cannon came the sharper sound of the piping shot, the crashing of riven planks, and the occasional heavy thud as spar or block came hurtling on to the deck. The lieutenants paced up and down the line of guns, while Captain Johnson fanned the smoke away with his cocked-hat and peered eagerly out.

“This is rare, Bobby!” said he, as the lieutenant joined him.

Then, suddenly restraining himself, “What have we lost, Mr. Wharton?”

“Our maintopsail yard and our gaff, sir.”

“Where’s the flag?”

“Gone overboard, sir.”

“They’ll think we’ve struck! Lash a boat’s ensign on the starboard arm of the mizzen cross-jack-yard.”

“Yes, sir.”

A round-shot dashed the binnacle to pieces between them. A second knocked two marines into a bloody palpitating mash. For a moment the smoke rose, and the English captain saw that his adversary’s heavier metal was producing a horrible effect. The *Leda* was a shattered wreck. Her deck was strewed with corpses. Several of her portholes were knocked into one, and one of her eighteen-pounder guns had been thrown right back on to her breech, and pointed straight up to the sky. The thin line of marines still loaded and fired, but half the guns were silent, and their crews were piled thickly round them.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" yelled the captain.

"Cutlasses, lads, cutlasses!" roared Wharton.

"Hold your volley till they touch!" cried the captain of marines.

The huge loom of the Frenchman was seen bursting through the smoke. Thick clusters of boarders hung upon her sides and shrouds. A final broadside leapt from her ports, and the main-mast of the *Leda,* snapping short off a few feet above the deck, spun into the air and crashed down upon the port guns, killing ten men and putting the whole battery out of action. An instant later the two ships scraped together, and the starboard bower anchor of the *Gloire* caught the mizzen-chains of the *Leda* upon the port side. With a yell the black swarm of boarders steadied themselves for a spring.

But their feet were never to reach that blood-stained deck. From some where there came a well-aimed whiff of grape, and another, and another. The English marines and seamen, waiting with cutlass and musket behind the silent guns, saw with amazement the dark masses thinning and shredding away. At the same time the port broadside of the Frenchman burst into a roar.

"Clear away the wreck!" roared the captain. "What the devil are they firing at?"

"Get the guns clear!" panted the lieutenant. "We'll do them yet, boys!"

The wreckage was torn and hacked and splintered until first one gun and then another roared into action again. The Frenchman's anchor had been cut away, and the *Leda* had worked herself free from that fatal hug. But now, suddenly, there was a scurry up the shrouds of the *Gloire,* and a hundred Englishmen were shouting themselves hoarse: "They're running! They're running! They're running!"

And it was true. The Frenchman had ceased to fire, and was intent only upon clapping on every sail that he could carry. But that shouting hundred could not claim it all as their own. As the smoke cleared it was not difficult to see the reason. The ships had gained the mouth of the estuary during the fight, and there, about four miles out to sea, was the *Leda's* consort bearing down under full sail to the sound of the guns. Captain de Milon had done his part for one day, and presently the *Gloire* was drawing off swiftly to the north, while the *Dido* was bowling along at her skirts, rattling away with her bow-chasers, until a headland hid them both from view.

But the Leda lay sorely stricken, with her mainmast gone, her bulwarks shattered, her mizzen-topmast and gaff shot away, her sails like a beggar's rags, and a hundred of her crew dead and wounded. Close beside her a mass of wreckage floated upon the waves. It was the stern-post of a mangled vessel, and across it, in white letters on a black ground, was printed, "*The Slapping Sal*."

"By the Lord! it was the brig that saved us!" cried Mr. Wharton. "Hudson brought her into action with the Frenchman, and was blown out of the water by a broadside!"

The little captain turned on his heel and paced up and down the deck.

Already his crew were plugging the shot-holes, knotting and splicing and mending. When he came back, the lieutenant saw a softening of the stern lines about his eyes and mouth.

"Are they all gone?"

"Every man. They must have sunk with the wreck."

The two officers looked down at the sinister name, and at the stump of wreckage which floated in the discoloured water. Something black washed to and fro beside a splintered gaff and a tangle of halliards. It was the outrageous ensign, and near it a scarlet cap was floating.

"He was a villain, but he was a Briton!" said the captain at last.

"He lived like a dog, but, by God, he died like a man!"

THE END

THE REFUGEES

This 1893 historical novel revolves around Amory de Catinat, a Huguenot guardsman of Louis XIV, and Amos Green, an American who comes to visit France. Major themes include Louis XIV’s marriage to Madame de Maintenon, retirement from court of Madame de Montespan, the revoking of the Edict of Nantes and the subsequent emigration of the Huguenot de Catinats to America.

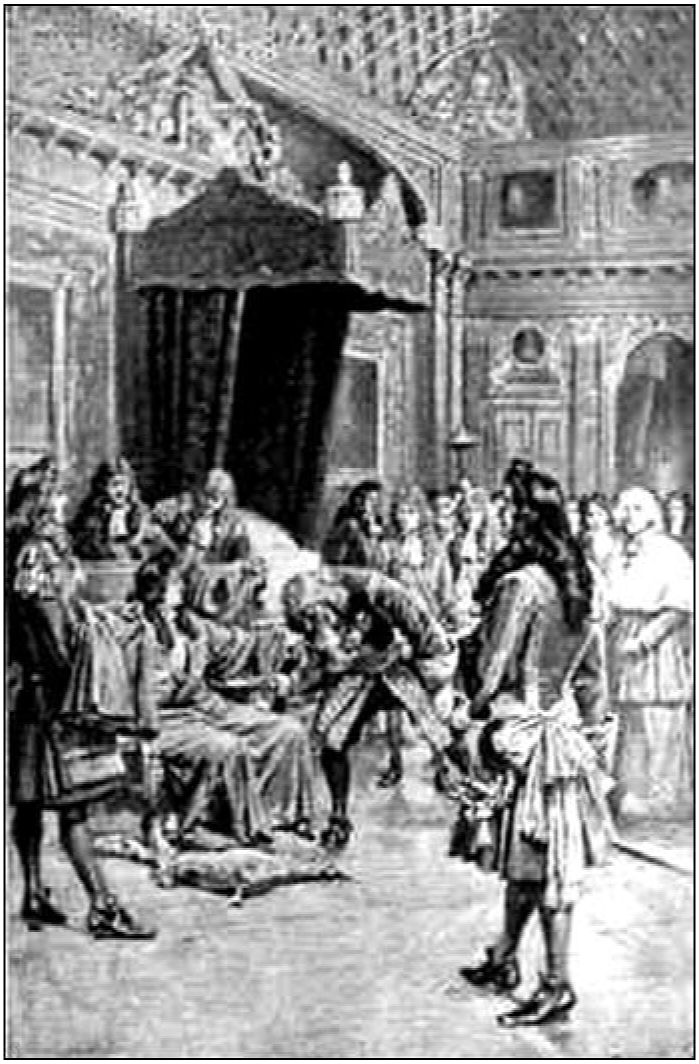

One of the original illustrations

THE REFUGEES

A TALE OF TWO CONTINENTS

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN FROM AMERICA.

It was the sort of window which was common in Paris about the end of the seventeenth century. It was high, mullioned, with a broad transom across the centre, and above the middle of the transom a tiny coat of arms — three caltrops gules upon a field argent — let into the diamond-paned glass. Outside there projected a stout iron rod, from which hung a gilded miniature of a bale of wool which swung and squeaked with every puff of wind. Beyond that again were the houses of the other side, high, narrow, and prim, slashed with diagonal wood-work in front, and topped with a bristle of sharp gables and corner turrets. Between were the cobble-stones of the Rue St. Martin and the clatter of innumerable feet.

Inside, the window was furnished with a broad bancal of brown stamped Spanish leather, where the family might recline and have an eye from behind the curtains on all that was going forward in the busy world beneath them. Two of them sat there now, a man and a woman, but their backs were turned to the spectacle, and their faces to the large and richly furnished room. From time to time they stole a glance at each other, and their eyes told that they needed no other sight to make them happy.

Nor was it to be wondered at, for they were a well-favoured pair. She was very young, twenty at the most, with a face which was pale, indeed, and yet of a brilliant pallor, which was so clear and fresh, and carried with it such a suggestion of purity and innocence, that one would not wish its maiden grace to be marred by an intrusion of colour. Her features were delicate and sweet, and her blue-black hair and long dark eyelashes formed a piquant contrast to her dreamy gray eyes and her ivory skin. In her whole expression there was something quiet and subdued, which was accentuated by her simple dress of black taffeta, and by the little jet brooch and bracelet which were her sole ornaments. Such was Adele Catinat, the only daughter of the famous Huguenot cloth-merchant.

But if her dress was sombre, it was atoned for by the magnificence of her companion. He was a man who might have been ten years her senior, with a keen soldier face, small well-marked features, a carefully trimmed black moustache, and a dark hazel eye which might harden to command a man, or soften to supplicate a woman, and be successful at either. His coat was of sky-blue, slashed across with silver braidings, and with broad silver shoulder-straps on either side. A vest of white calamanca peeped out from beneath it, and knee-breeches of the same disappeared into high polished boots with gilt spurs upon the heels. A silver-hilted rapier and a plumed cap lying upon a settle beside him completed a costume which was a badge of honour to the wearer, for any Frenchman would have recognised it as being that of an officer in the famous Blue Guard of Louis the Fourteenth. A trim, dashing soldier he looked, with his curling black hair and well-poised head. Such he had proved himself before now in the field, too, until the name of Amory de Catinat had become conspicuous among the thousands of the valiant lesser noblesse who had flocked into the service of the king.

They were first cousins, these two, and there was just sufficient resemblance in the clear-cut features to recall the relationship. De Catinat was sprung from a noble Huguenot family, but having lost his parents early he had joined the army, and had worked his way without influence and against all odds to his present position. His father's younger brother, however, finding every path to fortune barred to him through the persecution to which men of his faith were already subjected, had dropped the "de" which implied his noble descent, and he had taken to trade in the city of Paris, with such success that he was now one of the richest and most prominent citizens of the town. It was under his roof that the guardsman now sat, and it was his only daughter whose white hand he held in his own.

"Tell me, Adele," said he, "why do you look troubled?"

"I am not troubled, Amory,"

"Come, there is just one little line between those curving brows. Ah, I can read you, you see, as a shepherd reads the sky."

"It is nothing, Amory, but—"

"But what?"

"You leave me this evening."

"But only to return to-morrow."

"And must you really, really go to-night?"

"It would be as much as my commission is worth to be absent. Why, I am on duty to-morrow morning outside the king's bedroom! After chapel-time Major de Brissac will take my place, and then I am free once more."

"Ah, Amory, when you talk of the king and the court and the grand ladies, you fill me with wonder."

"And why with wonder?"

"To think that you who live amid such splendour should stoop to the humble room of a mercer."

"Ah, but what does the room contain?"

"There is the greatest wonder of all. That you who pass your days amid such people, so beautiful, so witty, should think me worthy of your love, me, who am such a quiet little mouse, all alone in this great house, so shy and so backward! It is wonderful!"

"Every man has his own taste," said her cousin, stroking the tiny hand. "It is with women as with flowers. Some may prefer the great brilliant sunflower, or the rose, which is so bright and large that it must ever catch the eye. But give me the little violet which hides among the mosses, and yet is so sweet to look upon, and sheds its fragrance round it. But still that line upon your brow, dearest."

"I was wishing that father would return."

"And why? Are you so lonely, then?"

Her pale face lit up with a quick smile. "I shall not be lonely until to-night. But I am always uneasy when he is away. One hears so much now of the persecution of our poor brethren."

"Tut! my uncle can defy them."

"He has gone to the provost of the Mercer Guild about this notice of the quartering of the dragoons."

"Ah, you have not told me of that."

"Here it is." She rose and took up a slip of blue paper with a red seal dangling from it which lay upon the table. His strong, black brows knitted together as he glanced at it.

"Take notice," it ran, "that you, Theophile Catinat, cloth-mercer of the Rue St. Martin, are hereby required to give shelter and rations to twenty men of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons under Captain Dalbert, until such time as you receive a further notice. [Signed] De Beaupre (Commissioner of the King)."

De Catinat knew well how this method of annoying Huguenots had been practised all over France, but he had flattered himself that his own position at court would have insured his kinsman from such an outrage. He threw the paper down with an exclamation of anger.

“When do they come?”

“Father said to-night.”

“Then they shall not be here long. To-morrow I shall have an order to remove them. But the sun has sunk behind St. Martin’s Church, and I should already be upon my way.”

“No, no; you must not go yet.”

“I would that I could give you into your father’s charge first, for I fear to leave you alone when these troopers may come. And yet no excuse will avail me if I am not at Versailles. But see, a horseman has stopped before the door. He is not in uniform. Perhaps he is a messenger from your father.”

The girl ran eagerly to the window, and peered out, with her hand resting upon her cousin’s silver-corded shoulder.

“Ah!” she cried, “I had forgotten. It is the man from America.

Father said that he would come to-day.”

“The man from America!” repeated the soldier, in a tone of surprise, and they both craned their necks from the window. The horseman, a sturdy, broad-shouldered young man, clean-shaven and crop-haired, turned his long, swarthy face and his bold features in their direction as he ran his eyes over the front of the house. He had a soft-brimmed gray hat of a shape which was strange to Parisian eyes, but his sombre clothes and high boots were such as any citizen might have worn. Yet his general appearance was so unusual that a group of townsfolk had already assembled round him, staring with open mouth at his horse and himself. A battered gun with an extremely long barrel was fastened by the stock to his stirrup, while the muzzle stuck up into the air behind him. At each holster was a large dangling black bag, and a gaily coloured red-slashed blanket was rolled up at the back of his saddle. His horse, a strong-limbed dapple-gray, all shiny with sweat above, and all caked with mud beneath, bent its fore knees as it stood, as though it were overspent. The rider, however, having satisfied himself as to the house, sprang lightly out of his saddle, and disengaging his gun, his blanket, and his bags, pushed his way unconcernedly through the gaping crowd and knocked loudly at the door.

“Who is he, then?” asked De Catinat. “A Canadian? I am almost one myself. I had as many friends on one side of the sea as on the other. Perchance I know him. There are not so many white faces yonder, and in two years there was scarce one from the Saguenay to Nipissing that I had not seen."

"Nay, he is from the English provinces, Amory. But he speaks our tongue. His mother was of our blood."

"And his name?"

"Is Amos — Amos — ah, those names! Yes, Green, that was it — Amos Green. His father and mine have done much trade together, and now his son, who, as I understand, has lived ever in the woods, is sent here to see something of men and cities. Ah, my God! what can have happened now?"

A sudden chorus of screams and cries had broken out from the passage beneath, with the shouting of a man and the sound of rushing steps. In an instant De Catinat was half-way down the stairs, and was staring in amazement at the scene in the hall beneath.

Two maids stood, screaming at the pitch of their lungs, at either side. In the centre the aged man-servant Pierre, a stern old Calvinist, whose dignity had never before been shaken, was spinning round, waving his arms, and roaring so that he might have been heard at the Louvre. Attached to the gray worsted stocking which covered his fleshless calf was a fluffy black hairy ball, with one little red eye glancing up, and the gleam of two white teeth where it held its grip. At the shrieks, the young stranger, who had gone out to his horse, came rushing back, and plucking the creature off, he slapped it twice across the snout, and plunged it head-foremost back into the leather bag from which it had emerged.

"It is nothing," said he, speaking in excellent French; "it is only a bear."

"Ah, my God!" cried Pierre, wiping the drops from his brow. "Ah, it has aged me five years! I was at the door, bowing to monsieur, and in a moment it had me from behind."

"It was my fault for leaving the bag loose. The creature was but pupped the day we left New York, six weeks come Tuesday. Do I speak with my father's friend, Monsieur Catinat?"

"No, monsieur," said the guardsman, from the staircase. "My uncle is out, but I am Captain de Catinat, at your service, and here is Mademoiselle Catinat, who is your hostess."

The stranger ascended the stair, and paid his greetings to them both with the air of a man who was as shy as a wild deer, and yet who had steeled himself to carry a thing through. He walked with them to the sitting-room, and then in an instant was gone again, and they heard his feet thudding upon the stairs. Presently he was back, with a lovely glossy skin in his hands. “The bear is for your father, mademoiselle,” said he. “This little skin I have brought from America for you. It is but a trifle, and yet it may serve to make a pair of mocassins or a pouch.”

Adele gave a cry of delight as her hands sank into the depths of its softness. She might well admire it, for no king in the world could have had a finer skin. “Ah, it is beautiful, monsieur,” she cried; “and what creature is it? and where did it come from?”

“It is a black fox. I shot it myself last fall up near the Iroquois villages at Lake Oneida.”

She pressed it to her cheek, her white face showing up like marble against its absolute blackness. “I am sorry my father is not here to welcome you, monsieur,” she said; “but I do so very heartily in his place. Your room is above. Pierre will show you to it, if you wish.”

“My room? For what?”

“Why, monsieur, to sleep in!”

“And must I sleep in a room?”

De Catinat laughed at the gloomy face of the American.

“You shall not sleep there if you do not wish,” said he.

The other brightened at once and stepped across to the further window, which looked down upon the court-yard. “Ah,” he cried. “There is a beech-tree there, mademoiselle, and if I might take my blanket out yonder, I should like it better than any room. In winter, indeed, one must do it, but in summer I am smothered with a ceiling pressing down upon me.”

“You are not from a town then?” said De Catinat.

“My father lives in New York — two doors from the house of Peter Stuyvesant, of whom you must have heard. He is a very hardy man, and he can do it, but I — even a few days of Albany or of Schenectady are enough for me. My life has been in the woods.”

“I am sure my father would wish you to sleep where you like and to do what you like, as long as it makes you happy.”

“I thank you, mademoiselle. Then I shall take my things out there, and I shall groom my horse.”

“Nay, there is Pierre.”

“I am used to doing it myself.”

“Then I will come with you,” said De Catinat, “for I would have a word with you. Until to-morrow, then, Adele, farewell!”

“Until to-morrow, Amory.”

The two young men passed downstairs together, and the guardsman followed the American out into the yard.

“You have had a long journey,” he said.

“Yes; from Rouen.”

“Are you tired?”

“No; I am seldom tired.”

“Remain with the lady, then, until her father comes back.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I have to go, and she might need a protector.”

The stranger said nothing, but he nodded, and throwing off his black coat, set to work vigorously rubbing down his travel-stained horse.

CHAPTER II.

A MONARCH IN DESHABILLE.

It was the morning after the guardsman had returned to his duties. Eight o'clock had struck on the great clock of Versailles, and it was almost time for the monarch to rise. Through all the long corridors and frescoed passages of the monster palace there was a subdued hum and rustle, with a low muffled stir of preparation, for the rising of the king was a great state function in which many had a part to play. A servant with a steaming silver saucer hurried past, bearing it to Monsieur de St. Quentin, the state barber. Others, with clothes thrown over their arms, bustled down the passage which led to the ante-chamber. The knot of guardsmen in their gorgeous blue and silver coats straightened themselves up and brought their halberds to attention, while the young officer, who had been looking wistfully out of the window at some courtiers who were laughing and chatting on the terraces, turned sharply upon his heel, and strode over to the white and gold door of the royal bedroom.

He had hardly taken his stand there before the handle was very gently turned from within, the door revolved noiselessly upon its hinges, and a man slid silently through the aperture, closing it again behind him.

"Hush!" said he, with his finger to his thin, precise lips, while his whole clean-shaven face and high-arched brows were an entreaty and a warning. "The king still sleeps."

The words were whispered from one to another among the group who had assembled outside the door. The speaker, who was Monsieur Bontems, head valet de Chambre, gave a sign to the officer of the guard, and led him into the window alcove from which he had lately come.

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat," said he, with a mixture of familiarity and respect in his manner.

"Good-morning, Bontems. How has the king slept?"

"Admirably."

"But it is his time."

"Hardly."

"You will not rouse him yet?"

"In seven and a half minutes." The valet pulled out the little round watch which gave the law to the man who was the law to twenty millions of people.

"Who commands at the main guard?"

"Major de Brissac."

"And you will be here?"

"For four hours I attend the king."

"Very good. He gave me some instructions for the officer of the guard, when he was alone last night after the petit coucher. He bade me to say that Monsieur de Vivonne was not to be admitted to the grand lever. You are to tell him so."

"I shall do so."

"Then, should a note come from her — you understand me, the new one —"

"Madame de Maintenon?"

"Precisely. But it is more discreet not to mention names. Should she send a note, you will take it and deliver it quietly when the king gives you an opportunity."

"It shall be done."

"But if the other should come, as is possible enough — the other, you understand me, the former—"

"Madame de Montespan."

"Ah, that soldierly tongue of yours, captain! Should she come, I say, you will gently bar her way, with courteous words, you understand, but on no account is she to be permitted to enter the royal room."

"Very good, Bontems."

"And now we have but three minutes."

He strode through the rapidly increasing group of people in the corridor with an air of proud humility as befitted a man who, if he was a valet, was at least the king of valets, by being the valet of the king. Close by the door stood a line of footmen, resplendent in their powdered wigs, red plush coats, and silver shoulder knots.

"Is the officer of the oven here?" asked Bontems.

"Yes, sir," replied a functionary who bore in front of him an enamelled tray heaped with pine shavings.

"The opener of the shutters?"

“Here, sir.”

“The remover of the taper?”

“Here, sir.”

“Be ready for the word.” He turned the handle once more, and slipped into the darkened room.

It was a large square apartment, with two high windows upon the further side, curtained across with priceless velvet hangings. Through the chinks the morning sun shot a few little gleams, which widened as they crossed the room to break in bright blurs of light upon the primrose-tinted wall. A large arm-chair stood by the side of the burnt-out fire, shadowed over by the huge marble mantel-piece, the back of which was carried up twining and curving into a thousand arabesque and armorial devices until it blended with the richly painted ceiling. In one corner a narrow couch with a rug thrown across it showed where the faithful Bontems had spent the night.

In the very centre of the chamber there stood a large four-post bed, with curtains of Gobelin tapestry looped back from the pillow. A square of polished rails surrounded it, leaving a space some five feet in width all round between the enclosure and the bedside. Within this enclosure, or ruelle, stood a small round table, covered over with a white napkin, upon which lay a silver platter and an enamelled cup, the one containing a little Frontiniac wine and water, the other bearing three slices of the breast of a chicken, in case the king should hunger during the night.

As Bontems passed noiselessly across the room, his feet sinking into the moss-like carpet, there was the heavy close smell of sleep in the air, and he could near the long thin breathing of the sleeper. He passed through the opening in the rails, and stood, watch in hand, waiting for the exact instant when the iron routine of the court demanded that the monarch should be roused. Beneath him, from under the costly green coverlet of Oriental silk, half buried in the fluffy Valenciennes lace which edged the pillow, there protruded a round black bristle of close-cropped hair, with the profile of a curving nose and petulant lip outlined against the white background. The valet snapped his watch, and bent over the sleeper.

“I have the honour to inform your Majesty that it is half-past eight,” said he.

“Ah!” The king slowly opened his large dark-brown eyes, made the sign of the cross, and kissed a little dark reliquary which he drew from under his night-dress. Then he sat up in bed, and blinked about him with the air of a man who is collecting his thoughts.

"Did you give my orders to the officer of the guard, Bontems?" he asked.

"Yes, sire."

"Who is on duty?"

"Major de Brissac at the main guard, and Captain de Catinat in the corridor."

"De Catinat! Ah, the young man who stopped my horse at Fontainebleau.

I remember him. You may give the signal, Bontems."

The chief valet walked swiftly across to the door and threw it open. In rushed the officer of the ovens and the four red-coated, white-wigged footmen, ready-handed, silent-footed, each intent upon his own duties. The one seized upon Bontem's rug and couch, and in an instant had whipped them off into an ante-chamber, another had carried away the en cas meal and the silver taper-stand; while a third drew back the great curtains of stamped velvet and let a flood of light into the apartment. Then, as the flames were already flickering among the pine shavings in the fireplace, the officer of the ovens placed two round logs crosswise above them, for the morning air was chilly, and withdrew with his fellow-servants.

They were hardly gone before a more august group entered the bed-chamber. Two walked together in front, the one a youth little over twenty years of age, middle-sized, inclining to stoutness, with a slow, pompous bearing, a well-turned leg, and a face which was comely enough in a mask-like fashion, but which was devoid of any shadow of expression, except perhaps of an occasional lurking gleam of mischievous humour. He was richly clad in plum-coloured velvet, with a broad band of blue silk; across his breast, and the glittering edge of the order of St. Louis protruding from under it. His companion was a man of forty, swarthy, dignified, and solemn, in a plain but rich dress of black silk, with slashes of gold at the neck and sleeves. As the pair faced the king there was sufficient resemblance between the three faces to show that they were of one blood, and to enable a stranger to guess that the older was Monsieur, the younger brother of the king, while the other was Louis the Dauphin, his only legitimate child, and heir to a throne to which in the strange workings of Providence neither he nor his sons were destined to ascend.

Strong as was the likeness between the three faces, each with the curving Bourbon nose, the large full eye, and the thick Hapsburg under-lip, their common heritage from Anne of Austria, there was still a vast difference of temperament and character stamped upon their features. The king was now in his six-and-fortieth year, and the cropped black head was already thinning a little on the top, and shading away to gray over the temples. He still, however, retained much of the beauty of his youth, tempered by the dignity and sternness which increased with his years. His dark eyes were full of expression, and his clear-cut features were the delight of the sculptor and the painter. His firm and yet sensitive mouth and his thick, well-arched brows gave an air of authority and power to his face, while the more subdued expression which was habitual to his brother marked the man whose whole life had been spent in one long exercise of deference and self-effacement. The dauphin, on the other hand, with a more regular face than his father, had none of that quick play of feature when excited, or that kingly serenity when composed, which had made a shrewd observer say that Louis, if he were not the greatest monarch that ever lived, was at least the best fitted to act the part.

Behind the king's son and the king's brother there entered a little group of notables and of officials whom duty had called to this daily ceremony. There was the grand master of the robes, the first lord of the bed-chamber, the Duc du Maine, a pale youth clad in black velvet, limping heavily with his left leg, and his little brother, the young Comte de Toulouse, both of them the illegitimate sons of Madame de Montespan and the king. Behind them, again, was the first valet of the wardrobe, followed by Fagon, the first physician, Telier, the head surgeon, and three pages in scarlet and gold who bore the royal clothes. Such were the partakers in the family entry, the highest honour which the court of France could aspire to.

Bontems had poured on the king's hands a few drops of spirits of wine, catching them again in a silver dish; and the first lord of the bedchamber had presented the bowl of holy water with which he made the sign of the cross, muttering to himself the short office of the Holy Ghost. Then, with a nod to his brother and a short word of greeting to the dauphin and to the Due du Maine, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat in his long silken night-dress, his little white feet dangling from beneath it — a perilous position for any man to assume, were it not that he had so heart-felt a sense of his own dignity that he could not realise that under any circumstances it might be compromised in the eyes of others. So he sat, the master of France, yet the slave to every puff of wind, for a wandering draught had set him shivering and shaking. Monsieur de St. Quentin, the noble barber, flung a purple dressing-gown over the royal shoulders, and placed a long many-curled court wig upon his head, while Bontems drew on his red stockings and laid before him his slippers of embroidered velvet. The monarch thrust his feet into them, tied his dressing-gown, and passed out to the fireplace, where he settled himself down in his easy-chair, holding out his thin delicate hands towards the blazing logs, while the others stood round in a semicircle, waiting for the grand lever which was to follow.

"How is this, messieurs?" the king asked suddenly, glancing round him with a petulant face. "I am conscious of a smell of scent. Surely none of you would venture to bring perfume into the presence, knowing, as you must all do, how offensive it is to me."

The little group glanced from one to the other with protestations of innocence. The faithful Bontems, however, with his stealthy step, had passed along behind them, and had detected the offender.

"My lord of Toulouse, the smell comes from you," he said.

The Comte de Toulouse, a little ruddy-cheeked lad, flushed up at the detection.

"If you please, sire, it is possible that Mademoiselle de Grammont may have wet my coat with her casting-bottle when we all played together at Marly yesterday," he stammered. "I had not observed it, but if it offends your Majesty—"

"Take it away! take it away!" cried the king. "Pah! it chokes and stifles me! Open the lower casement, Bontems. No; never heed, now that he is gone. Monsieur de St. Quentin, is not this our shaving morning?"

"Yes, sire; all is ready."

"Then why not proceed? It is three minutes after the accustomed time.

To work, sir; and you, Bontems, give word for the grand lever."

It was obvious that the king was not in a very good humour that morning. He darted little quick questioning glances at his brother and at his sons, but whatever complaint or sarcasm may have trembled upon his lips, was effectually stifled by De St. Quentin's ministrations. With the nonchalance born of long custom, the official covered the royal chin with soap, drew the razor swiftly round it, and sponged over the surface with spirits of wine. A nobleman then helped to draw on the king's black velvet haut-de-chausses, a second assisted in arranging them, while a third drew the night-gown over the shoulders, and handed the royal shirt, which had been warming before the fire. His diamond-buckled shoes, his gaiters, and his scarlet inner vest were successively fastened by noble courtiers, each keenly jealous of his own privilege, and over the vest was placed the blue ribbon with the cross of the Holy Ghost in diamonds, and that of St. Louis tied with red. To one to whom the sight was new, it might have seemed strange to see the little man, listless, passive, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the burning logs, while this group of men, each with a historic name, bustled round him, adding a touch here and a touch there, like a knot of children with a favourite doll. The black undercoat was drawn on, the cravat of rich lace adjusted, the loose overcoat secured, two handkerchiefs of costly point carried forward upon an enamelled saucer, and thrust by separate officials into each side pocket, the silver and ebony cane laid to hand, and the monarch was ready for the labours of the day.

During the half-hour or so which had been occupied in this manner there had been a constant opening and closing of the chamber door, and a muttering of names from the captain of the guard to the attendant in charge, and from the attendant in charge to the first gentleman of the chamber, ending always in the admission of some new visitor. Each as he entered bowed profoundly three times, as a salute to majesty, and then attached himself to his own little clique or coterie, to gossip in a low voice over the news, the weather, and the plans of the day. Gradually the numbers increased, until by the time the king’s frugal first breakfast of bread and twice watered wine had been carried in, the large square chamber was quite filled with a throng of men many of whom had helped to make the epoch the most illustrious of French history. Here, close by the king, was the harsh but energetic Louvois, all-powerful now since the death of his rival Colbert, discussing a question of military organisation with two officers, the one a tall and stately soldier, the other a strange little figure, undersized and misshapen, but bearing the insignia of a marshal of France, and owning a name which was of evil omen over the Dutch frontier, for Luxembourg was looked upon already as the successor of Conde, even as his companion Vauban was of Turenne. Beside them, a small white-haired clerical with a kindly face, Pere la Chaise, confessor to the king, was whispering his views upon Jansenism to the portly Bossuet, the eloquent Bishop of Meaux, and to the tall thin young Abbe de Fenelon, who listened with a clouded brow, for it was suspected that his own opinions were tainted with the heresy in question. There, too, was Le Brun, the painter, discussing art in a small circle which contained his fellow-workers Verrio and Laguerre, the architects Blondel and Le Notre, and sculptors Girardon, Puget, Desjardins, and Coysevox, whose works had done so much to beautify the new palace of the king. Close to the door, Racine, with his handsome face wreathed in smiles, was chatting with the poet Boileau and the architect Mansard, the three laughing and jesting with the freedom which was natural to the favourite servants of the king, the only subjects who might walk unannounced and without ceremony into and out of his chamber.

"What is amiss with him this morning?" asked Boileau in a whisper, nodding his head in the direction of the royal group. "I fear that his sleep has not improved his temper."

"He becomes harder and harder to amuse," said Racine, shaking his head. "I am to be at Madame De Maintenon's room at three to see whether a page or two of the Phedre may not work a change."

"My friend," said the architect, "do you not think that madame herself might be a better consoler than your Phedre?"

"Madame is a wonderful woman. She has brains, she has heart, she has tact — she is admirable."

"And yet she has one gift too many."

"And that is?"

"Age."

"Pooh! What matter her years when she can carry them like thirty? What an eye! What an arm! And besides, my friends, he is not himself a boy any longer."

"Ah, but that is another thing."

"A man's age is an incident, a woman's a calamity."

"Very true. But a young man consults his eye, and an older man his ear. Over forty, it is the clever tongue which wins; under it, the pretty face."

"Ah, you rascal! Then you have made up your mind that five-and-forty years with tact will hold the field against nine-and-thirty with beauty. Well, when your lady has won, she will doubtless remember who were the first to pay court to her."

"But I think that you are wrong, Racine."

"Well, we shall see."

"And if you are wrong—"

"Well, what then?"

"Then it may be a little serious for you."

"And why?"

"The Marquise de Montespan has a memory."

"Her influence may soon be nothing more."

"Do not rely too much upon it, my friend. When the Fontanges came up from Provence, with her blue eyes and her copper hair, it was in every man's mouth that Montespan had had her day. Yet Fontanges is six feet under a church crypt, and the marquise spent two hours with the king last week. She has won once, and may again."

"Ah, but this is a very different rival. This is no slip of a country girl, but the cleverest woman in France."

"Pshaw, Racine, you know our good master well, or you should, for you seem to have been at his elbow since the days of the Fronde. Is he a man, think you, to be amused forever by sermons, or to spend his days at the feet of a lady of that age, watching her at her tapestry-work, and fondling her poodle, when all the fairest faces and brightest eyes of France are as thick in his salons as the tulips in a Dutch flower-bed? No, no, it will be the Montespan, or if not she, some younger beauty."

"My dear Boileau, I say again that her sun is setting. Have you not heard the news?"

"Not a word."

"Her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, has been refused the entre."

"Impossible!"

"But it is a fact."

"And when?"

"This very morning."

"From whom had you it?"

"From De Catinat, the captain of the guard. He had his orders to bar the way to him."

"Ha! then the king does indeed mean mischief. That is why his brow is so cloudy this morning, then. By my faith, if the marquise has the spirit with which folk credit her, he may find that it was easier to win her than to slight her."

"Ay; the Mortemarts are no easy race to handle."

"Well, heaven send him a safe way out of it! But who is this gentleman? His face is somewhat grimmer than those to which the court is accustomed. Ha! the king catches sight of him, and Louvois beckons to him to advance.

By my faith, he is one who would be more at his ease in a tent than under a painted ceiling.”

The stranger who had attracted Racine’s attention was a tall thin man, with a high aquiline nose, stern fierce gray eyes, peeping out from under tufted brows, and a countenance so lined and marked by age, care, and stress of weather that it stood out amid the prim courtier faces which surrounded it as an old hawk might in a cage of birds of gay plumage. He was clad in a sombre-coloured suit which had become usual at court since the king had put aside frivolity and Fontanges, but the sword which hung from his waist was no fancy rapier, but a good brass-hilted blade in a stained leather-sheath, which showed every sign of having seen hard service. He had been standing near the door, his black-feathered beaver in his hand, glancing with a half-amused, half-disdainful expression at the groups of gossips around him, but at the sign from the minister of war he began to elbow his way forward, pushing aside in no very ceremonious fashion all who barred his passage.

Louis possessed in a high degree the royal faculty of recognition. “It is years since I have seen him, but I remember his face well,” said he, turning to his minister. “It is the Comte de Frontenac, is it not?”

“Yes, sire,” answered Louvois; “it is indeed Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, and formerly governor of Canada.”

“We are glad to see you once more at our lever,” said the monarch, as the old nobleman stooped his head, and kissed the white hand which was extended to him. “I hope that the cold of Canada has not chilled the warmth of your loyalty.”

“Only death itself, sire, would be cold enough for that.”

“Then I trust that it may remain to us for many long years. We would thank you for the care and pains which you have spent upon our province, and if we have recalled you, it is chiefly that we would fain hear from your own lips how all things go there. And first, as the affairs of God take precedence of those of France, how does the conversion of the heathen prosper?”

“We cannot complain, sire. The good fathers, both Jesuits and Recollets, have done their best, though indeed they are both rather ready to abandon the affairs of the next world in order to meddle with those of this.”

“What say you to that, father?” asked Louis, glancing, with a twinkle of the eyes, at his Jesuit confessor.

"I say, sire, that when the affairs of this world have a bearing upon those of the next, it is indeed the duty of a good priest, as of every other good Catholic, to guide them right."

"That is very true, sire," said De Frontenac, with an angry flush upon his swarthy cheek; "but as long as your Majesty did me the honour to intrust those affairs no my own guidance, I would brook no interference in the performance of my duties, whether the meddler were clad in coat or cassock."

"Enough, sir, enough!" said Louis sharply. "I had asked you about the missions."

"They prosper, sire. There are Iroquois at the Sault and the mountain, Hurons at Lorette, and Algonquins along the whole river cotes from Tadousac in the East to Sault la Marie, and even the great plains of the Dakotas, who have all taken the cross as their token. Marquette has passed down the river of the West to preach among the Illinois, and Jesuits have carried the Gospel to the warriors of the Long House in their wigwams at Onondaga."

"I may add, your Majesty," said Pere la Chaise, "that in leaving the truth there, they have too often left their lives with it."

"Yes, sire, it is very true," cried De Frontenac cordially. "Your Majesty has many brave men within your domains, but none braver than these. They have come back up the Richelieu River from the Iroquois villages with their nails gone, their fingers torn out, a cinder where their eye should be, and the scars of the pine splinters as thick upon their bodies as the fleurs-de-lis on yonder curtain. Yet, with a month of nursing from the good Ursulines, they have used their remaining eye to guide them back to the Indian country once more, where even the dogs have been frightened at their haggled faces and twisted limbs."

"And you have suffered this?" cried Louis hotly. "You allow these infamous assassins to live?"

"I have asked for troops, sire."

"And I have sent some."

"One regiment."

"The Carignan-Saliere. I have no better in my service.

"But more is needed, sire."

"There are the Canadians themselves. Have you not a militia? Could you not raise force enough to punish these rascally murderers of God's priests? I had always understood that you were a soldier.”

De Frontenac’s eyes flashed, and a quick answer seemed for an instant to tremble upon his lips, but with an effort the fiery old man restrained himself. “Your Majesty will learn best whether I am a soldier or not,” said he, “by asking those who have seen me at Seneffe, Mulhausen, Salzbach, and half a score of other places where I had the honour of upholding your Majesty’s cause.”

“Your services have not been forgotten.”

“It is just because I am a soldier and have seen something of war that I know how hard it is to penetrate into a country much larger than the Lowlands, all thick with forest and bog, with a savage lurking behind every tree, who, if he has not learned to step in time or to form line, can at least bring down the running caribou at two hundred paces, and travel three leagues to your one. And then when you have at last reached their villages, and burned their empty wigwams and a few acres of maize fields, what the better are you then? You can but travel back again to your own land with a cloud of unseen men lurking behind you, and a scalp-yell for every straggler. You are a soldier yourself, sire. I ask you if such a war is an easy task for a handful of soldiers, with a few censitaires straight from the plough, and a troop of coureurs-de-bois whose hearts are all the time are with their traps and their beaver-skins.”

“No, no; I am sorry if I spoke too hastily,” said Louis. “We shall look into the matter at our council.”

“Then it warms my heart to hear you say so,” cried the old governor. “There will be joy down the long St. Lawrence, in white hearts and in red, when it is known that their great father over the waters has turned his mind towards them.”

“And yet you must not look for too much, for Canada has been a heavy cost to us, and we have many calls in Europe.”

“Ah, sire, I would that you could see that great land. When your Majesty has won a campaign over here, what may come of it? Glory, a few miles of land Luxembourg, Strassburg, one more city in the kingdom; but over there, with a tenth of the cost and a hundredth part of the force, there is a world ready to your hand. It is so vast, sire, so rich, so beautiful! Where are there such hills, such forests, such rivers? And it is all for us if we will but take it. Who is there to stand in our way? A few nations of scattered Indians and a thin strip of English farmers and fishermen. Turn your thoughts there, sire, and in a few years you would be able to stand upon your citadel at Quebec, and to say there is one great empire here from the snows of the North to the warm Southern Gulf, and from the waves of the ocean to the great plains beyond Marquette's river, and the name of this empire is France, and her king is Louis, and her flag is the fleurs-de-lis."

Louis's cheek had flushed at this ambitious picture, and he had leaned forward in his chair, with flashing eyes, but he sank back again as the governor concluded.

"On my word, count," said he, "you have caught something of this gift of Indian eloquence of which we have heard. But about these English folk. They are Huguenots, are they not?"

"For the most part. Especially in the North."

"Then it might be a service to Holy Church to send them packing. They have a city there, I am told. New — New — How do they call it?"

"New York, sire. They took it from the Dutch."

"Ah, New York. And have I not heard of another? Bos — Bos—"

"Boston, sire."

"That is the name. The harbours might be of service to us. Tell me, now, Frontenac," lowering his voice so that his words might be audible only to the count, Louvois, and the royal circle, "what force would you need to clear these people out? One regiment, two regiments, and perhaps a frigate or two?"

But the ex-governor shook his grizzled head. "You do not know them, sire," said he. "They are stern folk, these. We in Canada, with all your gracious help, have found it hard to hold our own. Yet these men have had no help, but only hindrance, with cold and disease, and barren lands, and Indian wars, but they have thriven and multiplied until the woods thin away in front of them like ice in the sun, and their church bells are heard where but yesterday the wolves were howling. They are peaceful folk, and slow to war, but when they have set their hands to it, though they may be slack to begin, they are slacker still to cease. To put New England into your Majesty's hands, I would ask fifteen thousand of your best troops and twenty ships of the line."

Louis sprang impatiently from his chair, and caught up his cane. "I wish," said he, "that you would imitate these people who seem to you to be so formidable, in their excellent habit of doing things for themselves. The matter may stand until our council. Reverend father, it has struck the hour of chapel, and all else may wait until we have paid out duties to heaven.” Taking a missal from the hands of an attendant, he walked as fast as his very high heels would permit him, towards the door, the court forming a lane through which he might pass, and then closing up behind to follow him in order of precedence.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOLDING OF THE DOOR.

Whilst Louis had been affording his court that which he had openly stated to be the highest of human pleasures — the sight of the royal face — the young officer of the guard outside had been very busy passing on the titles of the numerous applicants for admission, and exchanging usually a smile or a few words of greeting with them, for his frank, handsome face was a well-known one at the court. With his merry eyes and his brisk bearing, he looked like a man who was on good terms with Fortune. Indeed, he had good cause to be so, for she had used him well. Three years ago he had been an unknown subaltern bush-fighting with Algonquins and Iroquois in the wilds of Canada. An exchange had brought him back to France and into the regiment of Picardy, but the lucky chance of having seized the bridle of the king’s horse one winter’s day in Fontainebleau when the creature was plunging within a few yards of a deep gravel-pit had done for him what ten campaigns might have failed to accomplish. Now as a trusted officer of the king’s guard, young, gallant, and popular, his lot was indeed an enviable one. And yet, with the strange perversity of human nature, he was already surfeited with the dull if magnificent routine of the king’s household, and looked back with regret to the rougher and freer days of his early service. Even there at the royal door his mind had turned away from the frescoed passage and the groups of courtiers to the wild ravines and foaming rivers of the West, when suddenly his eyes lit upon a face which he had last seen among those very scenes.

“Ah, Monsieur de Frontenac!” he cried. “You cannot have forgotten me.”

“What! De Catinat! Ah, it is a joy indeed to see a face from over the water! But there is a long step between a subaltern in the Carignan and a captain in the guards. You have risen rapidly.”

“Yes; and yet I may be none the happier for it. There are times when I would give it all to be dancing down the Lachine Rapids in a birch canoe, or to see the red and the yellow on those hill-sides once more at the fall of the leaf.”

"Ay," sighed De Frontenac. "You know that my fortunes have sunk as yours have risen. I have been recalled, and De la Barre is in my place. But there will be a storm there which such a man as he can never stand against. With the Iroquois all dancing the scalp-dance, and Dongan behind them in New York to whoop them on, they will need me, and they will find me waiting when they send. I will see the king now, and try if I cannot rouse him to play the great monarch there as well as here. Had I but his power in my hands, I should change the world's history."

"Hush! No treason to the captain of the guard," cried De Catinat, laughing, while the stern old soldier strode past him into the king's presence.

A gentleman very richly dressed in black and silver had come up during this short conversation, and advanced, as the door opened, with the assured air of a man whose rights are beyond dispute. Captain de Catinat, however, took a quick step forward, and barred him off from the door.

"I am very sorry, Monsieur de Vivonne," said he, "but you are forbidden the presence."

"Forbidden the presence! I? You are mad!" He stepped back with gray face and staring eyes, one shaking hand half raised in protest,

"I assure you that it is his order."

"But it is incredible. It is a mistake."

"Very possibly."

"Then you will let me past."

"My orders leave me no discretion."

"If I could have one word with the king."

"Unfortunately, monsieur, it is impossible."

"Only one word."

"It really does not rest with me, monsieur."

The angry nobleman stamped his foot, and stared at the door as though he had some thoughts of forcing a passage. Then turning on his heel, he hastened away down the corridor with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"There, now," grumbled De Catinat to himself, as he pulled at his thick dark moustache, "he is off to make some fresh mischief. I'll have his sister here presently, as like as not, and a pleasant little choice between breaking my orders and making an enemy of her for life. I'd rather hold Fort Richelieu against the Iroquois than the king's door against an angry woman.

By my faith, here is a lady, as I feared! Ah, Heaven be praised! it is a friend, and not a foe. Good-morning, Mademoiselle Nanon."

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat."

The new-comer was a tall, graceful brunette, her fresh face and sparkling black eyes the brighter in contrast with her plain dress.

"I am on guard, you see. I cannot talk with you."

"I cannot remember having asked monsieur to talk with me."

"Ah, but you must not pout in that pretty way, or else I cannot help talking to you," whispered the captain. "What is this in your hand, then?"

"A note from Madame de Maintenon to the king. You will hand it to him, will you not?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle. And how is Madame, your mistress?"

"Oh, her director has been with her all the morning, and his talk is very, very good; but it is also very, very sad. We are not very cheerful when Monsieur Godet has been to see us. But I forget monsieur is a Huguenot, and knows nothing of directors."

"Oh, but I do not trouble about such differences. I let the Sorbonne and Geneva fight it out between them. Yet a man must stand by his family, you know."

"Ah! if Monsieur could talk to Madame de Maintenon a little! She would convert him."

"I would rather talk to Mademoiselle Nanon, but if—"

"Oh!" There was an exclamation, a whisk of dark skirts, and the soubrette had disappeared down a side passage.

Along the broad, lighted corridor was gliding a very stately and beautiful lady, tall, graceful, and exceedingly haughty. She was richly clad in a bodice of gold-coloured camlet and a skirt of gray silk trimmed with gold and silver lace. A handkerchief of priceless Genoa point half hid and half revealed her beautiful throat, and was fastened in front by a cluster of pearls, while a rope of the same, each one worth a bourgeois' income, was coiled in and out through her luxuriant hair. The lady was past her first youth, it is true, but the magnificent curves of her queenly figure, the purity of her complexion, the brightness of her deep-lashed blue eyes and the clear regularity of her features enabled her still to claim to be the most handsome as well as the most sharp-tongued woman in the court of France. So beautiful was her bearing, the carriage of her dainty head upon her proud white neck, and the sweep of her stately walk, that the young officer's fears were overpowered in his admiration, and he found it hard, as he raised his hand in salute, to retain the firm countenance which his duties demanded.

“Ah, it is Captain de Catinat,” said Madame de Montespan, with a smile which was more embarrassing to him than any frown could have been.

“Your humble servant, marquise.”

“I am fortunate in finding a friend here, for there has been some ridiculous mistake this morning.”

“I am concerned to hear it.”

“It was about my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne. It is almost too laughable to mention, but he was actually refused admission to the lever.”

“It was my misfortune to have to refuse him, madame.”

“You, Captain de Catinat? And by what right?” She had drawn up her superb figure, and her large blue eyes were blazing with indignant astonishment.

“The king’s order, madame.”

“The king! Is it likely that the king would cast a public slight upon my family? From whom had you this preposterous order?”

“Direct from the king through Bontems.”

“Absurd! Do you think that the king would venture to exclude a Mortemart through the mouth of a valet? You have been dreaming, captain.”

“I trust that it may prove so, madame.”

“But such dreams are not very fortunate to the dreamer. Go, tell the king that I am here, and would have a word with him.”

“Impossible, madame.”

“And why?”

“I have been forbidden to carry a message.”

“To carry any message?”

“Any from you, madame.”

“Come, captain, you improve. It only needed this insult to make the thing complete. You may carry a message to the king from any adventuress, from any decayed governess” — she laughed shrilly at her description of her rival—”but none from Francoise de Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan?”

“Such are my orders, madame. It pains me deeply to be compelled to carry them out.”

“You may spare your protestations, captain. You may yet find that you have every reason to be deeply pained. For the last time, do you refuse to carry my message to the king?"

"I must, madame."

"Then I carry it myself."

She sprang forward at the door, but he slipped in front of her with outstretched arms.

"For God's sake, consider yourself, madame!" he entreated. "Other eyes are upon you."

"Pah! Canaille!" She glanced at the knot of Switzers, whose sergeant had drawn them off a few paces, and who stood open-eyed, staring at the scene.

"I tell you that I will see the king."

"No lady has ever been at the morning lever."

"Then I shall be the first."

"You will ruin me if you pass."

"And none the less, I shall do so."

The matter looked serious. De Catinat was a man of resource, but for once he was at his wits' end. Madame de Montespan's resolution, as it was called in her presence, or effrontery, as it was termed behind her back, was proverbial. If she attempted to force her way, would he venture to use violence upon one who only yesterday had held the fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand, and who, with her beauty, her wit, and her energy, might very well be in the same position to-morrow? If she passed him, then his future was ruined with the king, who never brooked the smallest deviation from his orders. On the other hand, if he thrust her back, he did that which could never be forgiven, and which would entail some deadly vengeance should she return to power. It was an unpleasant dilemma. But a happy thought flashed into his mind at the very moment when she, with clenched hand and flashing eyes, was on the point of making a fresh attempt to pass him.

"If madame would deign to wait," said he soothingly, "the king will be on his way to the chapel in an instant."

"It is not yet time."

"I think the hour has just gone."

"And why should I wait, like a lackey?"

"It is but a moment, madame."

"No, I shall not wait." She took a step forward towards the door.

But the guardsman's quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet from within, and he knew that he was master of the situation.

“I will take Madame’s message,” said he.

“Ah, you have recovered your senses! Go, tell the king that I wish to speak with him.”

He must gain a little time yet. “Shall I say it through the lord in waiting?”

“No; yourself.”

“Publicly?”

“No, no; for his private ear.”

“Shall I give a reason for your request?”

“Oh, you madden me! Say what I have told you, and at once.”

But the young officer’s dilemma was happily over.

At that instant the double doors were swung open, and Louis appeared in the opening, strutting forwards on his high-heeled shoes, his stick tapping, his broad skirts flapping, and his courtiers spreading out behind him. He stopped as he came out, and turned to the captain of the guard.

“You have a note for me?”

“Yes, sire.”

The monarch slipped it into the pocket of his scarlet undervest, and was advancing once more when his eyes fell upon Madame de Montespan standing very stiff and erect in the middle of the passage. A dark flush of anger shot to his brow, and he walked swiftly past her without a word; but she turned and kept pace with him down the corridor.

“I had not expected this honour, madame,” said he.

“Nor had I expected this insult, sire.”

“An insult, madame? You forget yourself.”

“No; it is you who have forgotten me, sire.”

“You intrude upon me.”

“I wished to hear my fate from your own lips,” she whispered. “I can bear to be struck myself, sire, even by him who has my heart. But it is hard to hear that one’s brother has been wounded through the mouths of valets and Huguenot soldiers for no fault of his, save that his sister has loved too fondly.”

“It is no time to speak of such things.”

“When can I see you, then, sire?”

“In your chamber.”

“At what hour?”

“At four.”

“Then I shall trouble your Majesty no further.” She swept him one of the graceful courtesies for which she was famous, and turned away down a side passage with triumph shining in her eyes. Her beauty and her spirit had never failed her yet, and now that she had the monarch’s promise of an interview she never doubted that she could do as she had done before, and win back the heart of the man, however much against the conscience of the king.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE.

Louis had walked on to his devotions in no very charitable frame of mind, as was easily to be seen from his clouded brow and compressed lips. He knew his late favourite well, her impulsiveness, her audacity, her lack of all restraint when thwarted or opposed. She was capable of making a hideous scandal, of turning against him that bitter tongue which had so often made him laugh at the expense of others, perhaps even of making some public exposure which would leave him the butt and gossip of Europe. He shuddered at the thought. At all costs such a catastrophe must be averted. And yet how could he cut the tie which bound them? He had broken other such bonds as these; but the gentle La Valliere had shrunk into a convent at the very first glance which had told her of waning love. That was true affection. But this woman would struggle hard, fight to the bitter end, before she would quit the position which was so dear to her. She spoke of her wrongs. What were her wrongs? In his intense selfishness, nurtured by the eternal flattery which was the very air he breathed, he could not see that the fifteen years of her life which he had absorbed, or the loss of the husband whom he had supplanted, gave her any claim upon him. In his view he had raised her to the highest position which a subject could occupy. Now he was weary of her, and it was her duty to retire with resignation, nay, even with gratitude for past favours. She should have a pension, and the children should be cared for. What could a reasonable woman ask for more?

And then his motives for discarding her were so excellent. He turned them over in his mind as he knelt listening to the Archbishop of Paris reciting the Mass, and the more he thought, the more he approved. His conception of the deity was as a larger Louis, and of heaven as a more gorgeous Versailles. If he exacted obedience from his twenty millions, then he must show it also to this one who had a right to demand it of him. On the whole, his conscience acquitted him. But in this one matter he had been lax. From the first coming of his gentle and forgiving young wife from Spain, he had never once permitted her to be without a rival. Now that she was dead, the matter was no better. One favourite had succeeded another, and if De Montespan had held her own so long, it was rather from her audacity than from his affection. But now Father La Chaise and Bossuet were ever reminding him that he had topped the summit of his life, and was already upon that downward path which leads to the grave. His wild outburst over the unhappy Fontanges had represented the last flicker of his passions. The time had come for gravity and for calm, neither of which was to be expected in the company of Madame de Montespan.

But he had found out where they were to be enjoyed. From the day when De Montespan had introduced the stately and silent widow as a governess for his children, he had found a never-failing and ever-increasing pleasure in her society. In the early days of her coming he had sat for hours in the rooms of his favourite, watching the tact and sweetness of temper with which her dependent controlled the mutinous spirits of the petulant young Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse. He had been there nominally for the purpose of superintending the teaching, but he had confined himself to admiring the teacher. And then in time he too had been drawn into the attraction of that strong sweet nature, and had found himself consulting her upon points of conduct, and acting upon her advice with a docility which he had never shown before to minister or mistress. For a time he had thought that her piety and her talk of principle might be a mere mask, for he was accustomed to hypocrisy all round him. It was surely unlikely that a woman who was still beautiful, with as bright an eye and as graceful a figure as any in his court, could, after a life spent in the gayest circles, preserve the spirit of a nun. But on this point he was soon undeceived, for when his own language had become warmer than that of friendship, he had been met by an iciness of manner and a brevity of speech which had shown him that there was one woman at least in his dominions who had a higher respect for herself than for him. And perhaps it was better so. The placid pleasures of friendship were very soothing after the storms of passion. To sit in her room every afternoon, to listen to talk which was not tainted with flattery, and to hear opinions which were not framed to please his ear, were the occupations now of his happiest hours. And then her influence over him was all so good! She spoke of his kingly duties, of his example to his subjects, of his preparation for the World beyond, and of the need for an effort to snap the guilty ties which he had formed. She was as good as a confessor — a confessor with a lovely face and a perfect arm.

And now he knew that the time had come when he must choose between her and De Montespan. Their influences were antagonistic. They could not continue together. He stood between virtue and vice, and he must choose. Vice was very attractive too, very comely, very witty, and holding him by that chain of custom which is so hard to shake off. There were hours when his nature swayed strongly over to that side, and when he was tempted to fall back into his old life. But Bossuet and Pere la Chaise were ever at his elbows to whisper encouragement, and, above all, there was Madame de Maintenon to remind him of what was due to his position and to his six-and-forty years. Now at last he had braced himself for a supreme effort. There was no safety for him while his old favourite was at court. He knew himself too well to have any faith in a lasting change so long as she was there ever waiting for his moment of weakness. She must be persuaded to leave Versailles, if without a scandal it could be done. He would be firm when he met her in the afternoon, and make her understand once for all that her reign was forever over.

Such were the thoughts which ran through the king’s head as he bent over the rich crimson cushion which topped his prie-dieu of carved oak. He knelt in his own enclosure to the right of the altar, with his guards and his immediate household around him, while the court, ladies and cavaliers, filled the chapel. Piety was a fashion now, like dark overcoats and lace cravats, and no courtier was so worldly-minded as not to have had a touch of grace since the king had taken to religion. Yet they looked very bored, these soldiers and seigneurs, yawning and blinking over the missals, while some who seemed more intent upon their devotions were really dipping into the latest romance of Scudery or Calpernedi, cunningly bound up in a sombre cover. The ladies, indeed, were more devout, and were determined that all should see it, for each had lit a tiny taper, which she held in front of her on the plea of lighting up her missal, but really that her face might be visible to the king, and inform him that hers was a kindred spirit. A few there may have been, here and there, whose prayers rose from their hearts, and who were there of their own free will; but the policy of Louis had changed his noblemen into courtiers and his men of the world into hypocrites, until the whole court was like one gigantic mirror which reflected his own likeness a hundredfold.

It was the habit of Louis, as he walked back from the chapel, to receive petitions or to listen to any tales of wrong which his subjects might bring to him. His way, as he returned to his rooms, lay partly across an open space, and here it was that the suppliants were wont to assemble. On this particular morning there were but two or three — a Parisian, who conceived himself injured by the provost of his guild, a peasant whose cow had been torn by a huntsman's dog, and a farmer who had had hard usage from his feudal lord. A few questions and then a hurried order to his secretary disposed of each case, for if Louis was a tyrant himself, he had at least the merit that he insisted upon being the only one within his kingdom. He was about to resume his way again, when an elderly man, clad in the garb of a respectable citizen, and with a strong deep-lined face which marked him as a man of character, darted forward, and threw himself down upon one knee in front of the monarch.

"Justice, sire, justice!" he cried.

"What is this, then?" asked Louis. "Who are you, and what is it that you want?"

"I am a citizen of Paris, and I have been cruelly wronged."

"You seem a very worthy person. If you have indeed been wronged you shall have redress. What have you to complain of?"

"Twenty of the Blue Dragoons of Languedoc are quartered in my house, with Captain Dalbert at their head. They have devoured my food, stolen my property, and beaten my servants, yet the magistrates will give me no redress.'

"On my life, justice seems to be administered in a strange fashion in our city of Paris!" exclaimed the king wrathfully.

"It is indeed a shameful case," said Bossuet.

"And yet there may be a very good reason for it," suggested Pere la Chaise. "I would suggest that your Majesty should ask this man his name, his business, and why it was that the dragoons were quartered upon him."

"You hear the reverend father's question."

"My name, sire, is Catinat, by trade I am a merchant in cloth, and I am treated in this fashion because I am of the Reformed Church."

"I thought as much!" cried the confessor.

"That alters matters," said Bossuet.

The king shook his head and his brow darkened. "You have only yourself to thank, then. The remedy is in your hands."

"And how, sire?"

"By embracing the only true faith."

"I am already a member of it, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily. "I can see that you are a very insolent heretic," said he. "There is but one Church in France, and that is my Church. If you are outside that, you cannot look to me for aid."

"My creed is that of my father, sire, and of my grandfather."

"If they have sinned it is no reason why you should. My own grandfather erred also before his eyes were opened."

"But he nobly atoned for his error," murmured the Jesuit.

"Then you will not help me, sire?"

"You must first help yourself."

The old Huguenot stood up with a gesture of despair, while the king continued on his way, the two ecclesiastics, on either side of him, murmuring their approval into his ears.

"You have done nobly, sire."

"You are truly the first son of the Church."

"You are the worthy successor of St. Louis."

But the king bore the face of a man who was not absolutely satisfied with his own action.

"You do not think, then, that these people have too hard a measure?" said he.

"Too hard? Nay, your Majesty errs on the side of mercy."

"I hear that they are leaving my kingdom in great numbers."

"And surely it is better so, sire; for what blessing can come upon a country which has such stubborn infidels within its boundaries?"

"Those who are traitors to God can scarce be loyal to the king," remarked Bossuet. "Your Majesty's power would be greater if there were no temple, as they call their dens of heresy, within your dominions."

"My grandfather promised them protection. They are shielded, as you well know, by the edict which be gave at Nantes."

"But it lies with your Majesty to undo the mischief that has been done."

"And how?"

"By recalling the edict."

"And driving into the open arms of my enemies two millions of my best artisans and of my bravest servants. No, no, father, I have, I trust, every zeal for Mother-Church, but there is some truth in what De Frontenac said this morning of the evil which comes from mixing the affairs of this world with those of the next. How say you, Louvois?”

“With all respect to the Church, sire, I would say that the devil has given these men such cunning of hand and of brain that they are the best workers and traders in your Majesty’s kingdom. I know not how the state coffers are to be filled if such tax-payers go from among us. Already many have left the country and taken their trades with them. If all were to go, it would be worse for us than a lost campaign.”

“But,” remarked Bossuet, “if it were once known that the king’s will had been expressed, your Majesty may rest assured that even the worst of his subjects bear him such love that they would hasten to come within the pale of Holy Church. As long as the edict stands, it seems to them that the king is lukewarm, and that they may abide in their error.”

The king shook his head. “They have always been stubborn folk,” said he.

“Perhaps,” remarked Louvois, glancing maliciously at Bossuet, “were the bishops of France to make an offering to the state of the treasures of their sees, we might then do without these Huguenot taxes.”

“All that the Church has is at the king’s service,” answered Bossuet curtly.

“The kingdom is mine and all that is in it,” remarked Louis, as they entered the Grand Salon, in which the court assembled after chapel, “yet I trust that it may be long before I have to claim the wealth of the Church.”

“We trust so, sire,” echoed the ecclesiastics.

“But we may reserve such topics for our council-chamber. Where is Mansard? I must see his plans for the new wing at Marly.” He crossed to a side table, and was buried in an instant in his favourite pursuit, inspecting the gigantic plans of the great architect, and inquiring eagerly as to the progress of the work.

“I think,” said Pere la Chaise, drawing Bossuet aside, “that your Grace has made some impression upon the king’s mind.”

“With your powerful assistance, father.”

“Oh, you may rest assured that I shall lose no opportunity of pushing on the good work.”

“If you take it in hand, it is done.”

“But there is another who has more weight than I.”

“The favourite, De Montespan?”

“No, no; her day is gone. It is Madame de Maintenon.”

“I hear that she is very devout.”

“Very. But she has no love for my Order. She is a Sulpitian. Yet we may all work to one end. Now if you were to speak to her, your Grace.”

“With all my heart.”

“Show her how good a service it would be could she bring about the banishment of the Huguenots.”

“I shall do so.”

“And offer her in return that we will promote—” he bent forward and whispered into the prelate’s ear.

“What! He would not do it!”

“And why? The queen is dead.”

“The widow of the poet Scarron!”

“She is of good birth. Her grandfather and his were dear friends.”

“It is impossible.”

“But I know his heart, and I say it is possible.”

“You certainly know his heart, father, if any can. But such a thought had never entered my head.”

“Then let it enter and remain there. If she will serve the Church, the
Church will serve her. But the king beckons, and I must go.”

The thin dark figure hastened off through the throng of courtiers, and the great Bishop of Meaux remained standing with his chin upon his breast, sunk in reflection.

By this time all the court was assembled in the Grand Salon, and the huge room was gay from end to end with the silks, the velvets, and the brocades of the ladies, the glitter of jewels, the flirt of painted fans, and the sweep of plume or aigrette. The grays, blacks, and browns of the men’s coats toned down the mass of colour, for all must be dark when the king was dark, and only the blues of the officers’ uniforms, and the pearl and gray of the musketeers of the guard, remained to call back those early days of the reign when the men had vied with the women in the costliness and brilliancy of their wardrobes. And if dresses had changed, manners had done so even more. The old levity and the old passions lay doubtless very near the surface, but grave faces and serious talk were the fashion of the hour. It was no longer the lucky coup at the lansquenet table, the last comedy of Moliere, or the new opera of Lully about which they gossiped, but it was on the evils of Jansenism, on the expulsion of Arnauld from the Sorbonne, on the insolence of Pascal, or on the comparative merits of two such popular preachers as Bourdaloue and Massilon. So, under a radiant ceiling and over a many-coloured floor, surrounded by immortal paintings, set thickly in gold and ornament, there moved these nobles and ladies of France, all moulding themselves upon the one little dark figure in their midst, who was himself so far from being his own master that he hung balanced even now between two rival women, who were playing a game in which the future of France and his own destiny were the stakes.

CHAPTER V.

CHILDREN OF BELIAL.

The elderly Huguenot had stood silent after his repulse by the king, with his eyes cast moodily downwards, and a face in which doubt, sorrow, and anger contended for the mastery. He was a very large, gaunt man, raw-boned and haggard, with a wide forehead, a large, fleshy nose, and a powerful chin. He wore neither wig nor powder, but Nature had put her own silvering upon his thick grizzled locks, and the thousand puckers which clustered round the edges of his eyes, or drew at the corners of his mouth, gave a set gravity to his face which needed no device of the barber to increase it. Yet in spite of his mature years, the swift anger with which he had sprung up when the king refused his plaint, and the keen fiery glance which he had shot at the royal court as they filed past him with many a scornful smile and whispered gibe at his expense, all showed that he had still preserved something of the strength and of the spirit of his youth. He was dressed as became his rank, plainly and yet well, in a sad-coloured brown kersey coat with silver-plated buttons, knee-breeches of the same, and white woollen stockings, ending in broad-toed black leather shoes cut across with a great steel buckle. In one hand he carried his low felt hat, trimmed with gold edging, and in the other a little cylinder of paper containing a recital of his wrongs, which he had hoped to leave in the hands of the king’s secretary.

His doubts as to what his next step should be were soon resolved for him in a very summary fashion. These were days when, if the Huguenot was not absolutely forbidden in France, he was at least looked upon as a man who existed upon sufferance, and who was unshielded by the laws which protected his Catholic fellow-subjects. For twenty years the stringency of the persecution had increased until there was no weapon which bigotry could employ, short of absolute expulsion, which had not been turned against him. He was impeded in his business, elbowed out of all public employment, his house filled with troops, his children encouraged to rebel against him, and all redress refused him for the insults and assaults to which he was subjected. Every rascal who wished to gratify his personal spite, or to gain favour with his bigoted superiors, might do his worst upon him without fear of the law. Yet, in spite of all, these men clung to the land which disowned them, and, full of the love for their native soil which lies so deep in a Frenchman's heart, preferred insult and contumely at home to the welcome which would await them beyond the seas. Already, however, the shadow of those days was falling upon them when the choice should no longer be theirs.

Two of the king's big blue-coated guardsmen were on duty at that side of the palace, and had been witnesses to his unsuccessful appeal. Now they tramped across together to where he was standing, and broke brutally into the current of his thoughts.

"Now, Hymn-books," said one gruffly, "get off again about your business."

"You're not a very pretty ornament to the king's pathway," cried the other, with a hideous oath. "Who are you, to turn up your nose at the king's religion, curse you?"

The old Huguenot shot a glance of anger and contempt at them, and was turning to go, when one of them thrust at his ribs with the butt end of his halberd.

"Take that, you dog!" he cried. "Would you dare to look like that at the king's guard?"

"Children of Belial," cried the old man, with his hand pressed to his side, "were I twenty years younger you would not have dared to use me so."

"Ha! you would still spit your venom, would you? That is enough, Andre! He has threatened the king's guard. Let us seize him and drag him to the guard-room."

The two soldiers dropped their halberds and rushed upon the old man, but, tall and strong as they were, they found it no easy matter to secure him. With his long sinewy arms and his wiry frame, he shook himself clear of them again and again, and it was only when his breath had failed him that the two, torn and panting, were able to twist round his wrists, and so secure him. They had hardly won their pitiful victory, however, before a stern voice and a sword flashing before their eyes, compelled them to release their prisoner once more.

It was Captain de Catinat, who, his morning duties over, had strolled out on to the terrace, and had come upon this sudden scene of outrage. At the sight of the old man's face he gave a violent start, and drawing his sword, had rushed forward with such fury that the two guardsmen not only dropped their victim, but, staggering back from the threatening sword-point, one of them slipped and the other rolled over him, a revolving mass of blue coat and white kersey.

"Villains!" roared De Catinat. "What is the meaning of this?"

The two had stumbled on to their feet again, very shamefaced and ruffled.

"If you please, captain," said one, saluting, "this is a Huguenot who abused the royal guard."

"His petition had been rejected by the king, captain, and yet he refused to go."

De Catinat was white with fury. "And so, when a French citizen has come to have a word with the great master of his country, he must be harassed by two Swiss dogs like you?" he cried. "By my faith, we shall soon see about that!"

He drew a little silver whistle from his pocket, and at the shrill summons an old sergeant and half a dozen soldiers came running from the guard-room.

"Your names?" asked the captain sternly.

"Andre Meunier."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Klopper."

"Sergeant, you will arrest these men, Meunier and Klopper."

"Certainly, captain," said the sergeant, a dark grizzled old soldier of Conde and Turenne.

"See that they are tried to-day."

"And on what charge, captain?"

"For assaulting an aged and respected citizen who had come on business to the king."

"He was a Huguenot on his own confession," cried the culprits together.

"Hum!" The sergeant pulled doubtfully at his long moustache. "Shall we put the charge in that form, captain? Just as the captain pleases." He gave a little shrug of his epauletted shoulders to signify his doubt whether any good could arise from it.

"No," said De Catinat, with a sudden happy thought. "I charge them with laying their halberds down while on duty, and with having their uniforms dirty and disarranged."

“That is better,” answered the sergeant, with the freedom of a privileged veteran. “Thunder of God, but you have disgraced the guards! An hour on the wooden horse with a musket at either foot may teach you that halberds were made for a soldier’s hand, and not for the king’s grass-plot. Seize them! Attention! Right half turn! March!”

And away went the little clump of guardsmen with the sergeant in the rear.

The Huguenot had stood in the background, grave and composed, without any sign of exultation, during this sudden reversal of fortune; but when the soldiers were gone, he and the young officer turned warmly upon each other.

“Amory, I had not hoped to see you!”

“Nor I you, uncle. What, in the name of wonder, brings you to Versailles?”

“My wrongs, Amory. The hand of the wicked is heavy upon us, and whom can we turn to save only the king?”

The young officer shook his head. “The king is at heart a good man,” said he. “But he can only see the world through the glasses which are held before him. You have nothing to hope from him.”

“He spurned me from his presence.”

“Did he ask your name?”

“He did, and I gave it.”

The young guardsman whistled. “Let us walk to the gate,” said he. “By my faith, if my kinsmen are to come and bandy arguments with the king, it may not be long before my company finds itself without its captain.”

“The king would not couple us together. But indeed, nephew, it is strange to me how you can live in this house of Baal and yet bow down to no false gods.”

“I keep my belief in my own heart.”

The older man shook his head gravely.

“Your ways lie along a very narrow path,” said he, “with temptation and danger ever at your feet. It is hard for you to walk with the Lord, Amory, and yet go hand in hand with the persecutors of His people.”

“Tut, uncle!” said the young man impatiently. “I am a soldier of the king’s, and I am willing to let the black gown and the white surplice settle these matters between them. Let me live in honour and die in my duty, and I am content to wait to know the rest.”

“Content, too, to live in palaces, and eat from fine linen,” said the Huguenot bitterly, “when the hands of the wicked are heavy upon your kinsfolk, and there is a breaking of phials, and a pouring forth of tribulation, and a wailing and a weeping throughout the land.”

“What is amiss, then?” asked the young soldier, who was somewhat mystified by the scriptural language in use among the French Calvinists of the day.

“Twenty men of Moab have been quartered upon me, with one Dalbert, their captain, who has long been a scourge to Israel.”

“Captain Claude Dalbert, of the Languedoc Dragoons? I have already some small score to settle with him.”

“Ay, and the scattered remnant has also a score against this murderous dog and self-seeking Ziphite.”

“What has he done, then?”

“His men are over my house like moths in a cloth bale. No place is free from them. He sits in the room which should be mine, his great boots on my Spanish leather chairs, his pipe in his mouth, his wine-pot at his elbow, and his talk a hissing and an abomination. He has beaten old Pierre of the warehouse.”

“Ha!”

“And thrust me into the cellar.”

“Ha!”

“Because I have dragged him back when in his drunken love he would have thrown his arms about your cousin Adele.”

“Oh!” The young man’s colour had been rising and his brows knitted at each successive charge, but at this last his anger boiled over, and he hurried forward with fury in his face, dragging his elderly companion by the elbow. They had been passing through one of those winding paths, bordered by high hedges, which thinned away every here and there to give a glimpse of some prowling faun or weary nymph who slumbered in marble amid the foliage. The few courtiers who met them gazed with surprise at so ill-assorted a pair of companions. But the young soldier was too full of his own plans to waste a thought upon their speculations. Still hurrying on, he followed a crescent path which led past a dozen stone dolphins shooting water out of their mouths over a group of Tritons, and so through an avenue of great trees which looked as if they had grown there for centuries, and yet had in truth been carried over that very year by incredible labour from St.

Germain and Fontainebleau. Beyond this point a small gate led out of the grounds, and it was through it that the two passed, the elder man puffing and panting with this unusual haste.

"How did you come, uncle?"

"In a caleche."

"Where is it?"

"That is it, beyond the auberge."

"Come, let us make for it."

"And you, Amory, are you coming?"

"My faith, it is time that I came, from what you tell me. There is room for a man with a sword at his side in this establishment of yours."

"But what would you do?"

"I would have a word with this Captain Dalbert."

"Then I have wronged you, nephew, when I said even now that you were not whole-hearted towards Israel."

"I know not about Israel," cried De Catinat impatiently. "I only know that if my Adele chose to worship the thunder like an Abenaqui squaw, or turned her innocent prayers to the Mitche Manitou, I should like to set eyes upon the man who would dare to lay a hand upon her. Ha, here comes our caleche! Whip up, driver, and five livres to you if you pass the gate of the Invalides within the hour."

It was no light matter to drive fast in an age of springless carriages and deeply rutted roads, but the driver lashed at his two rough unclipped horses, and the caleche jolted and clattered upon its way. As they sped on, with the road-side trees dancing past the narrow windows, and the white dust streaming behind them, the guardsman drummed his fingers upon his knees, and fidgeted in his seat with impatience, shooting an occasional question across at his grim companion.

"When was all this, then?"

"It was yesterday night."

"And where is Adele now?"

"She is at home."

"And this Dalbert?"

"Oh, he is there also!"

"What! you have left her in his power while you came away to Versailles?"

"She is locked in her room."

"Pah! what is a lock?" The young man raved with his hands in the air at the thought of his own impotence.

"And Pierre is there?"

"He is useless."

"And Amos Green."

"Ah, that is better. He is a man, by the look of him."

"His mother was one of our own folk from Staten Island, near Manhattan. She was one of those scattered lambs who fled early before the wolves, when first it was seen that the king's hand waxed heavy upon Israel. He speaks French, and yet he is neither French to the eye, nor are his ways like our ways."

"He has chosen an evil time for his visit."

"Some wise purpose may lie hid in it."

"And you have left him in the house?"

"Yes; he was sat with this Dalbert, smoking with him, and telling him strange tales."

"What guard could he be? He is a stranger in a strange land. You did ill to leave Adele thus, uncle."

"She is in God's hands, Amory."

"I trust so. Oh, I am on fire to be there!"

He thrust his head through the cloud of dust which rose from the wheels, and craned his neck to look upon the long curving river and broad-spread city, which was already visible before them, half hid by a thin blue haze, through which shot the double tower of Notre Dame, with the high spire of St. Jacques and a forest of other steeples and minarets, the monuments of eight hundred years of devotion. Soon, as the road curved down to the river-bank, the city wall grew nearer and nearer, until they had passed the southern gate, and were rattling over the stony causeway, leaving the broad Luxembourg upon their right, and Colbert's last work, the Invalides, upon their left. A sharp turn brought them on to the river quays, and crossing over the Pont Neuf, they skirted the stately Louvre, and plunged into the labyrinth of narrow but important streets which extended to the northward. The young officer had his head still thrust out of the window, but his view was obscured by a broad gilded carriage which lumbered heavily along in front of them. As the road broadened, however, it swerved to one side, and he was able to catch a glimpse of the house to which they were making.

It was surrounded on every side by an immense crowd.

CHAPTER VI.

A HOUSE OF STRIFE.

The house of the Huguenot merchant was a tall, narrow building standing at the corner of the Rue St. Martin and the Rue de Biron. It was four stories in height, grim and grave like its owner, with high peaked roof, long diamond-paned windows, a frame-work of black wood, with gray plaster filling the interstices, and five stone steps which led up to the narrow and sombre door. The upper story was but a warehouse in which the trader kept his stock, but the second and third were furnished with balconies edged with stout wooden balustrades. As the uncle and the nephew sprang out of the caleche, they found themselves upon the outskirts of a dense crowd of people, who were swaying and tossing with excitement, their chins all thrown forwards and their gaze directed upwards. Following their eyes, the young officer saw a sight which left him standing bereft of every sensation save amazement.

From the upper balcony there was hanging head downwards a man clad in the bright blue coat and white breeches of one of the king's dragoons. His hat and wig had dropped off, and his close-cropped head swung slowly backwards and forwards a good fifty feet above the pavement. His face was turned towards the street, and was of a deadly whiteness, while his eyes were screwed up as though he dared not open them upon the horror which faced them. His voice, however, resounded over the whole place until the air was filled with his screams for mercy.

Above him, at the corner of the balcony, there stood a young man who leaned with a bent back over the balustrades, and who held the dangling dragoon by either ankle. His face, however, was not directed towards his victim, but was half turned over his shoulder to confront a group of soldiers who were clustering at the long, open window which led out into the balcony. His head, as he glanced at them, was poised with a proud air of defiance, while they surged and oscillated in the opening, uncertain whether to rush on or to retire.

Suddenly the crowd gave a groan of excitement. The young man had released his grip upon one of the ankles, and the dragoon hung now by one only, his other leg flapping helplessly in the air. He grabbed aimlessly with his hands at the wall and the wood-work behind him, still yelling at the pitch of his lungs.

“Pull me up, son of the devil, pull me up!” he screamed. “Would you murder me, then? Help, good people, help!”

“Do you want to come up, captain?” said the strong clear voice of the young man above him, speaking excellent French, but in an accent which fell strangely upon the ears of the crowd beneath.

“Yes, sacred name of God, yes!”

“Order off your men, then.”

“Away, you dolts, you imbeciles! Do you wish to see me dashed to pieces? Away, I say! Off with you!”

“That is better,” said the youth, when the soldiers had vanished from the window. He gave a tug at the dragoon’s leg as he spoke, which jerked him up so far that he could twist round and catch hold of the lower edge of the balcony. “How do you find yourself now?” he asked.

“Hold me, for heaven’s sake, hold me!”

“I have you quite secure.”

“Then pull me up!”

“Not so fast, captain. You can talk very well where you are.”

“Let me up, sir, let me up!”

“All in good time. I fear that it is inconvenient to you to talk with your heels in the air.”

“Ah, you would murder me!”

“On the contrary, I am going to pull you up.”

“Heaven bless you!”

“But only on conditions.”

“Oh, they are granted! I am slipping!”

“You will leave this house — you and your men. You will not trouble this old man or this young girl any further. Do you promise?”

“Oh yes; we shall go.”

“Word of honour?”

“Certainly. Only pull me up!”

“Not so fast. It may be easier to talk to you like this. I do not know how the laws are over here. Maybe this sort of thing is not permitted. You will promise me that I shall have no trouble over the matter."

"None, none. Only pull me up!"

"Very good. Come along!"

He dragged at the dragoon's leg while the other gripped his way up the balustrade until, amid a buzz of congratulation from the crowd, he tumbled all in a heap over the rail on to the balcony, where he lay for a few moments as he had fallen. Then staggering to his feet, without a glance at his opponent, he rushed, with a bellow of rage, through the open window.

While this little drama had been enacted overhead, the young guardsman had shaken off his first stupor of amazement, and had pushed his way through the crowd with such vigour that he and his companion had nearly reached the bottom of the steps. The uniform of the king's guard was in itself a passport anywhere, and the face of old Catinat was so well known in the district that everyone drew back to clear a path for him towards his house. The door was flung open for them, and an old servant stood wringing his hands in the dark passage.

"Oh, master! Oh, master!" he cried.

"Such doings, such infamy! They will murder him!"

"Whom, then?"

"This brave monsieur from America. Oh, my God, hark to them now!"

As he spoke, a clatter and shouting which had burst out again upstairs ended suddenly in a tremendous crash, with volleys of oaths and a prolonged bumping and smashing, which shook the old house to its foundations. The soldier and the Huguenot rushed swiftly up the first flight of stairs, and were about to ascend the second one, from the head of which the uproar seemed to proceed, when a great eight-day clock came hurtling down, springing four steps at a time, and ending with a leap across the landing and a crash against the wall, which left it a shattered heap of metal wheels and wooden splinters. An instant afterwards four men, so locked together that they formed but one rolling bundle, came thudding down amid a debris of splintered stair-rails, and writhed and struggled upon the landing, staggering up, falling down, and all breathing together like the wind in a chimney. So twisted and twined were they that it was hard to pick one from the other, save that the innermost was clad in black Flemish cloth, while the three who clung to him were soldiers of the king. Yet so strong and vigorous was the man whom they tried to hold that as often as he could find his feet he dragged them after him from end to end of the passage, as a boar might pull the curs which had fastened on to his haunches. An officer, who had rushed down at the heels of the brawlers, thrust his hands in to catch the civilian by the throat, but he whipped them back again with an oath as the man’s strong white teeth met in his left thumb. Clapping the wound to his mouth, he flashed out his sword and was about to drive it through the body of his unarmed opponent, when De Catinat sprang forward and caught him by the wrist.

“You villain, Dalbert!” he cried.

The sudden appearance of one of the king’s own bodyguard had a magic effect upon the brawlers. Dalbert sprang back, with his thumb still in his mouth, and his sword drooping, scowling darkly at the new-comer. His long sallow face was distorted with anger, and his small black eyes blazed with passion and with the hell-fire light of unsatisfied vengeance. His troopers had released their victim, and stood panting in a line, while the young man leaned against the wall, brushing the dust from his black coat, and looking from his rescuer to his antagonists.

“I had a little account to settle with you before, Dalbert,” said De Catinat, unsheathing his rapier.

“I am on the king’s errand,” snarled the other.

“No doubt. On guard, sir!”

“I am here on duty, I tell you!”

“Very good. Your sword, sir!”

“I have no quarrel with you.”

“No?” De Catinat stepped forward and struck him across the face with his open hand. “It seems to me that you have one now,” said he.

“Hell and furies!” screamed the captain. “To your arms, men! Hola, there, from above! Cut down this fellow, and seize your prisoner! Hola! In the king’s name!”

At his call a dozen more troopers came hurrying down the stairs, while the three upon the landing advanced upon their former antagonist. He slipped by them, however, and caught out of the old merchant’s hand the thick oak stick which he carried.

“I am with you, sir,” said he, taking his place beside the guardsman.

“Call off your canaille, and fight me like a gentleman,” cried De Catinat.

“A gentleman! Hark to the bourgeois Huguenot, whose family peddles cloth!”

"You coward! I will write liar on you with my sword-point!"

He sprang forward, and sent in a thrust which might have found its way to Dalbert's heart had the heavy sabre of a dragoon not descended from the side and shorn his more delicate weapon short off close to the hilt. With a shout of triumph, his enemy sprang furiously upon him with his rapier shortened, but was met by a sharp blow from the cudgel of the young stranger which sent his weapon tinkling on to the ground. A trooper, however, on the stair had pulled out a pistol, and clapping it within a foot of the guardsman's head, was about to settle the combat, once and forever, when a little old gentleman, who had quietly ascended from the street, and who had been looking on with an amused and interested smile at this fiery sequence of events, took a sudden step forward, and ordered all parties to drop their weapons with a voice so decided, so stern, and so full of authority, that the sabre points all clinked down together upon the parquet flooring as though it were a part of their daily drill.

"Upon my word, gentlemen, upon my word!" said he, looking sternly from one to the other. He was a very small, dapper man, as thin as a herring, with projecting teeth and a huge drooping many-curled wig, which cut off the line of his skinny neck and the slope of his narrow shoulders. His dress was a long overcoat of mouse-coloured velvet slashed with gold, beneath which were high leather boots, which, with his little gold-laced, three-cornered hat, gave a military tinge to his appearance. In his gait and bearing he had a dainty strut and backward cock of the head, which, taken with his sharp black eyes, his high thin features, and his assured manner, would impress a stranger with the feeling that this was a man of power. And, indeed, in France or out of it there were few to whom this man's name was not familiar, for in all France the only figure which loomed up as large as that of the king was this very little gentleman who stood now, with gold snuff-box in one hand, and deep-laced handkerchief in the other, upon the landing of the Huguenot's house. For who was there who did not know the last of the great French nobles, the bravest of French captains, the beloved Conde, victor of Recroy and hero of the Fronde? At the sight of his pinched, sallow face the dragoons and their leader had stood staring, while De Catinat raised the stump of his sword in a salute.

"Heh, heh!" cried the old soldier, peering at him.

"You were with me on the Rhine — heh? I know your face, captain.

But the household was with Turenne."

"I was in the regiment of Picardy, your Highness. De Catinat is my name."

"Yes, yes. But you, sir, who the devil are you?"

"Captain Dalbert, your Highness, of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons."

"Heh! I was passing in my carriage, and I saw you standing on your head in the air. The young man let you up on conditions, as I understood."

"He swore he would go from the house," cried the young stranger. "Yet when I had let him up, he set his men upon me, and we all came downstairs together."

"My faith, you seem to have left little behind you," said Conde, smiling, as he glanced at the litter which was strewed all over the floor. "And so you broke your parole, Captain Dalbert?"

"I could not hold treaty with a Huguenot and an enemy of the king," said the dragoon sulkily.

"You could hold treaty, it appears, but not keep it. And why did you let him go, sir, when you had him at such a vantage?"

"I believed his promise."

"You must be of a trusting nature."

"I have been used to deal with Indians."

"Heh! And you think an Indian's word is better than that of an officer in the king's dragoons?"

"I did not think so an hour ago."

"Hem!" Conde took a large pinch of snuff, and brushed the wandering grains from his velvet coat with his handkerchief of point.

"You are very strong, monsieur," said he, glancing keenly at the broad shoulders and arching chest of the young stranger. "You are from Canada, I presume?"

"I have been there, sir. But I am from New York."

Conde shook his head. "An island?"

"No, sir; a town."

"In what province?"

"The province of New York."

"The chief town, then?"

"Nay; Albany is the chief town."

"And how came you to speak French?"

"My mother was of French blood."

"And how long have you been in Paris?"

"A day."

"Heh! And you already begin to throw your mother's country-folk out of windows!"

"He was annoying a young maid, sir, and I asked him to stop, whereon he whipped out his sword, and would have slain me had I not closed with him, upon which he called upon his fellows to aid him. To keep them off, I swore that I would drop him over if they moved a step. Yet when I let him go, they set upon me again, and I know not what the end might have been had this gentleman not stood my friend."

"Hem! You did very well. You are young, but you have resource."

"I was reared in the woods, sir."

"If there are many of your kidney, you may give my friend De Frontenac some work ere he found this empire of which he talks. But how is this, Captain Dalbert? What have you to say?"

"The king's orders, your Highness."

"Heh! Did he order you to molest the girl? I have never yet heard that his Majesty erred by being too harsh with a woman." He gave a little dry chuckle in his throat, and took another pinch of snuff.

"The orders are, your Highness, to use every means which may drive these people into the true Church."

"On my word, you look a very fine apostle and a pretty champion for a holy cause," said Conde, glancing sardonically out of his twinkling black eyes at the brutal face of the dragoon. "Take your men out of this, sir, and never venture to set your foot again across this threshold."

"But the king's command, your Highness."

"I will tell the king when I see him that I left soldiers and that I find brigands. Not a word, sir! Away! You take your shame with you, and you leave your honour behind." He had turned in an instant from the sneering, strutting old beau to the fierce soldier with set face and eye of fire. Dalbert shrank back from his baleful gaze, and muttering an order to his men, they filed off down the stair with clattering feet and clank of sabres.

"Your Highness," said the old Huguenot, coming forward and throwing open one of the doors which led from the landing, "you have indeed been a saviour of Israel and a stumbling-block to the froward this day. Will you not deign to rest under my roof, and even to take a cup of wine ere you go onwards?"

Conde raised his thick eyebrows at the scriptural fashion of the merchant’s speech, but he bowed courteously to the invitation, and entered the chamber, looking around him in surprise and admiration at its magnificence. With its panelling of dark shining oak, its polished floor, its stately marble chimney-piece, and its beautifully moulded ceiling, it was indeed a room which might have graced a palace.

“My carriage waits below,” said he, “and I must not delay longer. It is not often that I leave my castle of Chantilly to come to Paris, and it was a fortunate chance which made me pass in time to be of service to honest men. When a house hangs out such a sign as an officer of dragoons with his heels in the air, it is hard to drive past without a question. But I fear that as long as you are a Huguenot, there will be no peace for you in France, monsieur.”

“The law is indeed heavy upon us.”

“And will be heavier if what I hear from court is correct. I wonder that you do not fly the country.”

“My business and my duty lie here.”

“Well, every man knows his own affairs best. Would it not be wise to bend to the storm, heh?”

The Huguenot gave a gesture of horror.

“Well, well, I meant no harm. And where is this fair maid who has been the cause of the broil?”

“Where is Adele, Pierre?” asked the merchant of the old servant, who had carried in the silver tray with a squat flask and tinted Venetian glasses.

“I locked her in my room, master.”

“And where is she now?”

“I am here, father.” The young girl sprang into the room, and threw her arms round the old merchant’s neck. “Oh, I trust these wicked men have not hurt you, love!”

“No, no, dear child; none of us have been hurt, thanks to his Highness the Prince of Conde here.”

Adele raised her eyes, and quickly drooped them again before the keen questioning gaze of the old soldier. “May God reward your Highness!” she stammered. In her confusion the blood rushed to her face, which was perfect in feature and expression. With her sweet delicate contour, her large gray eyes, and the sweep of the lustrous hair, setting off with its rich tint the little shell-like ears and the alabaster whiteness of the neck and throat, even

Conde, who had seen all the beauties of three courts and of sixty years defile before him, stood staring in admiration at the Huguenot maiden.

"Heh! On my word, mademoiselle, you make me wish that I could wipe forty years from my account." He bowed, and sighed in the fashion that was in vogue when Buckingham came to the wooing of Anne of Austria, and the dynasty of cardinals was at its height.

"France could ill spare those forty years, your Highness."

"Heh, heh! So quick of tongue too? Your daughter has a courtly wit, monsieur."

"God forbid, your Highness! She is as pure and good—"

"Nay, that is but a sorry compliment to the court. Surely, mademoiselle, you would love to go out into the great world, to hear sweet music, see all that is lovely, and wear all that is costly, rather than look out ever upon the Rue St. Martin, and bide in this great dark house until the roses wither upon your cheeks."

"Where my father is, I am happy at his side," said she, putting her two hands upon his sleeve. "I ask nothing more than I have got."

"And I think it best that you go up to your room again," said the old merchant shortly, for the prince, in spite of his age, bore an evil name among women. He had come close to her as he spoke, and had even placed one yellow hand upon her shrinking arm, while his little dark eyes twinkled with an ominous light.

"Tut, tut!" said he, as she hastened to obey. "You need not fear for your little dove. This hawk, at least, is far past the stoop, however tempting the quarry. But indeed, I can see that she is as good as she is fair, and one could not say more than that if she were from heaven direct. My carriage waits, gentlemen, and I wish you all a very good day!" He inclined his be-wigged head, and strutted off in his dainty, dandified fashion. From the window De Catinat could see him slip into the same gilded chariot which had stood in his way as he drove from Versailles.

"By my faith," said he, turning to the young American, "we all owe thanks to the prince, but it seems to me, sir, that we are your debtors even more. You have risked your life for my cousin, and but for your cudgel, Dalbert would have had his blade through me when he had me at a vantage. Your hand, sir! These are things which a man cannot forget."

"Ay, you may well thank him, Amory," broke in the old Huguenot, who had returned after escorting his illustrious guest to the carriage. "He has been raised up as a champion for the afflicted, and as a helper for those who are in need. An old man’s blessing upon you, Amos Green, for my own son could not have done for me more than you, a stranger.”

But their young visitor appeared to be more embarrassed by their thanks than by any of his preceding adventures. The blood flushed to his weather-tanned, clear-cut face, as smooth as that of a boy, and yet marked by a firmness of lip and a shrewdness in the keen blue eyes which spoke of a strong and self-reliant nature.

“I have a mother and two sisters over the water,” said he diffidently.

“And you honour women for their sake?”

“We always honour women over there. Perhaps it is that we have so few. Over in these old countries you have not learned what it is to be without them. I have been away up the lakes for furs, living for months on end the life of a savage among the wigwams of the Sacs and the Foxes, foul livers and foul talkers, ever squatting like toads around their fires. Then when I have come back to Albany where my folk then dwelt, and have heard my sisters play upon the spinet and sing, and my mother talk to us of the France of her younger days and of her childhood, and of all that they had suffered for what they thought was right, then I have felt what a good woman is, and how, like the sunshine, she draws out of one’s soul all that is purest and best.”

“Indeed, the ladies should be very much obliged to monsieur, who is as eloquent as he is brave,” said Adele Catinat, who, standing in the open door, had listened to the latter part of his remarks.

He had forgotten himself for the instant, and had spoken freely and with energy. At the sight of the girl, however, he coloured up again, and cast down his eyes.

“Much of my life has been spent in the woods,” said he, “and one speaks so little there that one comes to forget how to do it. It was for this that my father wished me to stay some time in France, for he would not have me grow up a mere trapper and trader.”

“And how long do you stop in Paris?” asked the guardsman.

“Until Ephraim Savage comes for me.”

“And who is he?”

“The master of the Golden Rod.”

“And that is your ship?”

“My father’s ship. She has been to Bristol, is now at Rouen, and then must go to Bristol again. When she comes back once more, Ephraim comes to Paris for me, and it will be time for me to go.”

“And how like you Paris?”

The young man smiled. “They told me ere I came that it was a very lively place, and truly from the little that I have seen this morning, I think that it is the liveliest place that I have seen.”

“By my faith,” said De Catinat, “you came down those stairs in a very lively fashion, four of you together with a Dutch clock as an avant-courier, and a whole train of wood-work at your heels. And you have not seen the city yet?”

“Only as I journeyed through it yester-evening on my way to this house. It is a wondrous place, but I was pent in for lack of air as I passed through it. New York is a great city. There are said to be as many as three thousand folk living there, and they say that they could send out four hundred fighting-men, though I can scarce bring myself to believe it. Yet from all parts of the city one may see something of God’s handiwork — the trees, the green of the grass, and the shine of the sun upon the bay and the rivers. But here it is stone and wood, and wood and stone, look where you will. In truth, you must be very hardy people to keep your health in such a place.”

“And to us it is you who seem so hardy, with your life in the forest and on the river,” cried the young girl. “And then the wonder that you can find your path through those great wildernesses, where there is naught to guide you.”

“Well, there again! I marvel how you can find your way among these thousands of houses. For myself, I trust that it will be a clear night to-night.”

“And why?”

“That I may see the stars.”

“But you will find no change in them.”

“That is it. If I can but see the stars, it will be easy for me to know how to walk when I would find this house again. In the daytime I can carry a knife and notch the door-posts as I pass, for it might be hard to pick up one’s trail again, with so many folk ever passing over it.”

De Catinat burst out laughing again. “By my faith, you will find Paris livelier than ever,” said he, “if you blaze your way through on the door-posts as you would on the trees of a forest. But perchance it would be as well that you should have a guide at first; so, if you have two horses ready in your stables, uncle, our friend and I might shortly ride back to Versailles together, for I have a spell of guard again before many hours are over. Then for some days he might bide with me there, if he will share a soldier's quarters, and so see more than the Rue St. Martin can offer. How would that suit you, Monsieur Green?"

"I should be right glad to come out with you, if we may leave all here in safety."

"Oh, fear not for that," said the Huguenot. "The order of the Prince of Conde will be as a shield and a buckler to us for many a day. I will order Pierre to saddle the horses."

"And I must use the little time I have," said the guardsman, as he turned away to where Adele waited for him in the window.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW WORLD AND THE OLD.

The young American was soon ready for the expedition, but De Catinat lingered until the last possible minute. When at last he was able to tear himself away, he adjusted his cravat, brushed his brilliant coat, and looked very critically over the sombre suit of his companion.

"Where got you those?" he asked.

"In New York, ere I left."

"Hem! There is naught amiss with the cloth, and indeed the sombre colour is the mode, but the cut is strange to our eyes."

"I only know that I wish that I had my fringed hunting tunic and leggings on once more."

"This hat, now. We do not wear our brims flat like that. See if I cannot mend it." He took the beaver, and looping up one side of the brim, he fastened it with a golden brooch taken from his own shirt front. "There is a martial cock," said he, laughing, "and would do credit to the King's Own Musketeers. The black broad-cloth and silk hose will pass, but why have you not a sword at your side?"

"I carry a gun when I ride out."

"Mon Dieu, you will be laid by the heels as a bandit!"

"I have a knife, too."

"Worse and worse! Well, we must dispense with the sword, and with the gun too, I pray! Let me re-tie your cravat. So! Now if you are in the mood for a ten-mile gallop, I am at your service."

They were indeed a singular contrast as they walked their horses together through the narrow and crowded causeways of the Parisian streets. De Catinat, who was the older by five years, with his delicate small-featured face, his sharply trimmed moustache, his small but well-set and dainty figure, and his brilliant dress, looked the very type of the great nation to which he belonged.

His companion, however, large-limbed and strong, turning his bold and yet thoughtful face from side to side, and eagerly taking in all the strange, new life amidst which he found himself, was also a type, unfinished, it is true, but bidding fair to be the higher of the two. His close yellow hair, blue eyes, and heavy build showed that it was the blood of his father, rather than that of his mother, which ran in his veins; and even the sombre coat and swordless belt, if less pleasing to the eye, were true badges of a race which found its fiercest battles and its most glorious victories in bending nature to its will upon the seas and in the waste places of the earth.

“What is yonder great building?” he asked, as they emerged into a broader square.

“It is the Louvre, one of the palaces of the king.”

“And is he there?”

“Nay; he lives at Versailles.”

“What! Fancy that a man should have two such houses!”

“Two! He has many more — St. Germain, Marly, Fontainebleau, Clugny.”

“But to what end? A man can but live at one at a time.”

“Nay; he can now come or go as the fancy takes him.”

“It is a wondrous building. I have seen the Seminary of St. Sulpice at Montreal, and thought that it was the greatest of all houses, and yet what is it beside this?”

“You have been to Montreal, then? You remember the fort?”

“Yes, and the Hotel Dieu, and the wooden houses in a row, and eastward the great mill with the wall; but what do you know of Montreal?”

“I have soldiered there, and at Quebec, too. Why, my friend, you are not the only man of the woods in Paris, for I give you my word that I have worn the caribou mocassins, the leather jacket, and the fur cap with the eagle feather for six months at a stretch, and I care not how soon I do it again,”

Amos Green’s eyes shone with delight at finding that his companion and he had so much in common, and he plunged into a series of questions which lasted until they had crossed the river and reached the south-westerly gate of the city. By the moat and walls long lines of men were busy at their drill.

“Who are those, then?” he asked, gazing at them with curiosity.

“They are some of the king’s soldiers.”

“But why so many of them? Do they await some enemy?”

“Nay; we are at peace with all the world. Worse luck!”

“At peace. Why then all these men?”

“That they may be ready.”

The young man shook his head in bewilderment. “They might be as ready in their own homes surely. In our country every man has his musket in his chimney corner, and is ready enough, yet he does not waste his time when all is at peace.”

“Our king is very great, and he has many enemies.”

“And who made the enemies?”

“Why, the king, to be sure.”

“Then would it not be better to be without him?”

The guardsman shrugged his epaulettes in despair. “We shall both wind up in the Bastille or Vincennes at this rate,” said he. “You must know that it is in serving the country that he has made these enemies. It is but five years since he made a peace at Nimeguen, by which he tore away sixteen fortresses from the Spanish Lowlands. Then, also, he had laid his hands upon Strassburg and upon Luxembourg, and has chastised the Genoans, so that there are many who would fall upon him if they thought that he was weak.”

“And why has he done all this?”

“Because he is a great king, and for the glory of France.”

The stranger pondered over this answer for some time as they rode on between the high, thin poplars, which threw bars across the sunlit road.

“There was a great man in Schenectady once,” said he at last. “They are simple folk up yonder, and they all had great trust in each other. But after this man came among them they began to miss — one a beaver-skin and one a bag of ginseng, and one a belt of wampum, until at last old Pete Hendricks lost his chestnut three-year-old. Then there was a search and a fuss until they found all that had been lost in the stable of the new-comer, so we took him, I and some others, and we hung him up on a tree, without ever thinking what a great man he had been.”

De Catinat shot an angry glance at his companion. “Your parable, my friend, is scarce polite,” said he. “If you and I are to travel in peace you must keep a closer guard upon your tongue.”

“I would not give you offence, and it may be that I am wrong,” answered the American, “but I speak as the matter seems to me, and it is the right of a free man to do that.”

De Catinat’s frown relaxed as the other turned his earnest blue eyes upon him. “By my soul, where would the court be if every man did that?” said he. “But what in the name of heaven is amiss now?”

His companion had hurled himself off his horse, and was stooping low over the ground, with his eyes bent upon the dust. Then, with quick, noiseless steps, he zigzagged along the road, ran swiftly across a grassy bank, and stood peering at the gap of a fence, with his nostrils dilated, his eyes shining, and his whole face aglow with eagerness.

“The fellow’s brain is gone,” muttered De Catinat, as he caught at the bridle of the riderless horse. “The sight of Paris has shaken his wits. What in the name of the devil ails you, that you should stand glaring there?”

“A deer has passed,” whispered the other, pointing down at the grass. “Its trail lies along there and into the wood. It could not have been long ago, and there is no slur to the track, so that it was not going fast. Had we but fetched my gun, we might have followed it, and brought the old man back a side of venison.”

“For God’s sake get on your horse again!” cried De Catinat distractedly.

“I fear that some evil will come upon you ere I get you safe to the Rue St. Martin again!”

“And what is wrong now?” asked Amos Green, swinging himself into the saddle.

“Why, man, these woods are the king’s preserves and you speak as coolly of slaying his deer as though you were on the shores of Michigan!”

“Preserves! They are tame deer!” An expression of deep disgust passed over his face, and spurring his horse, he galloped onwards at such a pace that De Catinat, after vainly endeavouring to keep up, had to shriek to him to stop.

“It is not usual in this country to ride so madly along the roads,” he panted.

“It is a very strange country,” cried the stranger, in perplexity. “Maybe it would be easier for me to remember what is allowed. It was but this morning that I took my gun to shoot a pigeon that was flying over the roofs in yonder street, and old Pierre caught my arm with a face as though it were the minister that I was aiming at. And then there is that old man — why, they will not even let him say his prayers.”

De Catinat laughed. “You will come to know our ways soon,” said he. “This is a crowded land, and if all men rode and shot as they listed, much harm would come from it. But let us talk rather of your own country. You have lived much in the woods from what you tell me.”

"I was but ten when first I journeyed with my uncle to Sault la Marie, where the three great lakes meet, to trade with the Chippewas and the tribes of the west."

"I know not what La Salle or De Frontenac would have said to that. The trade in those parts belongs to France."

"We were taken prisoners, and so it was that I came to see Montreal and afterwards Quebec. In the end we were sent back because they did not know what they could do with us."

"It was a good journey for a first."

"And ever since I have been trading — first, on the Kennebec with the Abenaquis, in the great forests of Maine, and with the Micmac fish-eaters over the Penobscot. Then later with the Iroquois, as far west as the country of the Senecas. At Albany and Schenectady we stored our pelts, and so on to New York, where my father shipped them over the sea."

"But he could ill spare you surely?"

"Very ill. But as he was rich, he thought it best that I should learn some things that are not to be found in the woods. And so he sent me in the Golden Rod, under the care of Ephraim Savage."

"Who is also of New York?"

"Nay; he is the first man that ever was born at Boston."

"I cannot remember the names of all these villages."

"And yet there may come a day when their names shall be as well known as that of Paris."

De Catinat laughed heartily. "The woods may have given you much, but not the gift of prophecy, my friend. Well, my heart is often over the water even as yours is, and I would ask nothing better than to see the palisades of Point Levi again, even if all the Five Nations were raving upon the other side of them. But now, if you will look there in the gap of the trees, you will see the king's new palace."

The two young men pulled up their horses, and looked down at the wide-spreading building in all the beauty of its dazzling whiteness, and at the lovely grounds, dotted with fountain and with statue, and barred with hedge and with walk, stretching away to the dense woods which clustered round them. It amused De Catinat to watch the swift play of wonder and admiration which flashed over his companion's features.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked at last.

"I think that God's best work is in America, and man's in Europe."

"Ay, and in all Europe there is no such palace as that, even as there is no such king as he who dwells within it."

"Can I see him, think you?"

"Who, the king? No, no; I fear that you are scarce made for a court."

"Nay, I should show him all honour."

"How, then? What greeting would you give him?"

"I would shake him respectfully by the hand, and ask as to his health and that of his family."

"On my word, I think that such a greeting might please him more than the bent knee and the rounded back, and yet, I think, my son of the woods, that it were best not to lead you into paths where you would be lost, as would any of the courtiers if you dropped them in the gorge of the Saguenay. But hola! what comes here? It looks like one of the carriages of the court."

A white cloud of dust, which had rolled towards them down the road, was now so near that the glint of gilding and the red coat of the coachman could be seen breaking out through it. As the two cavaliers reined their horses aside to leave the roadway clear, the coach rumbled heavily past them, drawn by two dapple grays, and the Horsemen caught a glimpse, as it passed, of a beautiful but haughty face which looked out at them. An instant afterwards a sharp cry had caused the driver to pull up his horses, and a white hand beckoned to them through the carriage window.

"It is Madame de Montespan, the proudest woman in France," whispered De Catinat. "She would speak with us, so do as I do."

He touched his horse with the spur, gave a gambade which took him across to the carriage, and then, sweeping off his hat, he bowed to his horse's neck; a salute in which he was imitated, though in a somewhat ungainly fashion, by his companion.

"Ha, captain!" said the lady, with no very pleasant face, "we meet again."

"Fortune has ever been good to me, madame."

"It was not so this morning."

"You say truly. It gave me a hateful duty to perform."

"And you performed it in a hateful fashion."

"Nay, madame, what could I do more?"

The lady sneered, and her beautiful face turned as bitter as it could upon occasion.

"You thought that I had no more power with the king. You thought that my day was past. No doubt it seemed to you that you might reap favour with the new by being the first to cast a slight upon the old.”

“But, madame—”

“You may spare your protestations. I am one who judges by deeds and not by words. Did you, then, think that my charm had so faded, that any beauty which I ever have had is so withered?”

“Nay, madame, I were blind to think that.”

“Blind as a noontide owl,” said Amos Green with emphasis.

Madame de Montespan arched her eyebrows and glanced at her singular admirer. “Your friend at least speaks that which he really feels,” said she. “At four o’clock to-day we shall see whether others are of the same mind; and if they are, then it may be ill for those who mistook what was but a passing shadow for a lasting cloud.” She cast another vindictive glance at the young guardsman, and rattled on once more upon her way.

“Come on!” cried De Catinat curtly, for his companion was staring open-mouthed after the carriage. “Have you never seen a woman before?”

“Never such a one as that.”

“Never one with so railing a tongue, I dare swear,” said De Catinat.

“Never one with so lovely a face. And yet there is a lovely face at the Rue St. Martin also.”

“You seem to have a nice taste in beauty, for all your woodland training.”

“Yes, for I have been cut away from women so much that when I stand before one I feel that she is something tender and sweet and holy.”

“You may find dames at the court who are both tender and sweet, but you will look long, my friend, before you find the holy one. This one would ruin me if she can, and only because I have done what it was my duty to do. To keep oneself in this court is like coming down the La Chine Rapids where there is a rock to right, and a rock to left, and another perchance in front, and if you so much as graze one, where are you and your birch canoe? But our rocks are women, and in our canoe we bear all our worldly fortunes. Now here is another who would sway me over to her side, and indeed I think it may prove to be the better side too.”

They had passed through the gateway of the palace, and the broad sweeping drive lay in front of them, dotted with carriages and horsemen. On the gravel walks were many gaily dressed ladies, who strolled among the flower-beds or watched the fountains with the sunlight glinting upon their high water sprays. One of these, who had kept her eyes turned upon the gate, came hastening forward the instant that De Catinat appeared. It was Mademoiselle Nanon, the confidante of Madame de Maintenon.

“I am so pleased to see you, captain,” she cried, “and I have waited so patiently. Madame would speak with you. The king comes to her at three, and we have but twenty minutes. I heard that you had gone to Paris, and so I stationed myself here. Madame has something which she would ask you.”

“Then I will come at once. Ah, De Brissac, it is well met!”

A tall, burly officer was passing in the same uniform which De Catinat wore. He turned at once, and came smiling towards his comrade.

“Ah, Amory, you have covered a league or two from the dust on your coat!”

“We are fresh from Paris. But I am called on business. This is my friend, Monsieur Amos Green. I leave him in your hands, for he is a stranger from America, and would fain see all that you can show. He stays with me at my quarters. And my horse, too, De Brissac. You can give it to the groom.”

Throwing the bridle to his brother officer, and pressing the hand of Amos Green, De Catinat sprang from his horse, and followed at the top of his speed in the direction which the young lady had already taken.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RISING SUN.

The rooms which were inhabited by the lady who had already taken so marked a position at the court of France were as humble as were her fortunes at the time when they were allotted to her, but with that rare tact and self-restraint which were the leading features in her remarkable character, she had made no change in her living with the increase of her prosperity, and forbore from provoking envy and jealousy by any display of wealth or of power. In a side wing of the palace, far from the central salons, and only to be reached by long corridors and stairs, were the two or three small chambers upon which the eyes, first of the court, then of France, and finally of the world, were destined to be turned. In such rooms had the destitute widow of the poet Scarron been housed when she had first been brought to court by Madame de Montespan as the governess of the royal children, and in such rooms she still dwelt, now that she had added to her maiden Francoise d’Aubigny the title of Marquise de Maintenon, with the pension and estate which the king’s favour had awarded her. Here it was that every day the king would lounge, finding in the conversation of a clever and virtuous woman a charm and a pleasure which none of the professed wits of his sparkling court had ever been able to give to him, and here, too, the more sagacious of the courtiers were beginning to understand, was the point, formerly to be found in the magnificent salons of De Montespan, whence flowed those impulses and tendencies which were so eagerly studied, and so keenly followed up by all who wished to keep the favour of the king. It was a simple creed, that of the court. Were the king pious, then let all turn to their missals and their rosaries. Were he rakish, then who so rakish as his devoted followers? But woe to the man who was rakish when he should be praying, or who pulled a long face when the king wore a laughing one! And thus it was that keen eyes were ever fixed upon him, and upon every influence that came near him, so that the wary courtier, watching the first subtle signs of a coming change, might so order his conduct as to seem to lead rather than to follow.

The young guardsman had scarce ever exchanged a word with this powerful lady, for it was her taste to isolate herself, and to appear with the court only at the hours of devotion. It was therefore with some feelings both of nervousness and of curiosity that he followed his guide down the gorgeous corridors, where art and wealth had been strewn with so lavish a hand. The lady paused in front of the chamber door, and turned to her companion.

“Madame wishes to speak to you of what occurred this morning,” said she. “I should advise you to say nothing to madame about your creed, for it is the only thing upon which her heart can be hard.” She raised her finger to emphasise the warning, and tapping at the door, she pushed it open. “I have brought Captain de Catinat, madame,” said she.

“Then let the captain step in.” The voice was firm, and yet sweetly musical.

Obeying the command, De Catinat found himself in a room which was no larger and but little better furnished than that which was allotted to his own use. Yet, though simple, everything in the chamber was scrupulously neat and clean, betraying the dainty taste of a refined woman. The stamped-leather furniture, the La Savonniere carpet, the pictures of sacred subjects, exquisite from an artist’s point of view, the plain but tasteful curtains, all left an impression half religious and half feminine but wholly soothing. Indeed, the soft light, the high white statue of the Virgin in a canopied niche, with a perfumed red lamp burning before it, and the wooden prie-dieu with the red-edged prayer-book upon the top of it, made the apartment look more like a private chapel than a fair lady’s boudoir.

On each side of the empty fireplace was a little green-covered arm-chair, the one for madame and the other reserved for the use of the king. A small three-legged stool between them was heaped with her work-basket and her tapestry. On the chair which was furthest from the door, with her back turned to the light, madame was sitting as the young officer entered. It was her favourite position, and yet there were few women of her years who had so little reason to fear the sun, for a healthy life and active habits had left her with a clear skin and delicate bloom which any young beauty of the court might have envied. Her figure was graceful and queenly, her gestures and pose full of a natural dignity, and her voice, as he had already remarked, most sweet and melodious. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful, set in a statuesque classical mould, with broad white forehead, firm, delicately sensitive mouth, and a pair of large serene gray eyes, earnest and placid in repose, but capable of reflecting the whole play of her soul, from the merry gleam of humour to the quick flash of righteous anger. An elevating serenity was, however, the leading expression of her features, and in that she presented the strongest contrast to her rival, whose beautiful face was ever swept by the emotion of the moment, and who gleamed one hour and shadowed over the next like a corn-field in the wind. In wit and quickness of tongue it is true that De Montespan had the advantage, but the strong common-sense and the deeper nature of the elder woman might prove in the end to be the better weapon. De Catinat, at the moment, without having time to notice details, was simply conscious that he was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that her large pensive eyes were fixed critically upon him, and seemed to be reading his thoughts as they had never been read before.

"I think that I have already seen you, sir, have I not?"

"Yes, madame, I have once or twice had the honour of attending upon you though it may not have been my good fortune to address you."

"My life is so quiet and retired that I fear that much of what is best and worthiest at the court is unknown to me. It is the curse of such places that evil flaunts itself before the eye and cannot be overlooked, while the good retires in its modesty, so that at times we scarce dare hope that it is there. You have served, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame. In the Lowlands, on the Rhine, and in Canada."

"In Canada! Ah! What nobler ambition could woman have than to be a member of that sweet sisterhood which was founded by the holy Marie de l'Incarnation and the sainted Jeanne le Ber at Montreal? It was but the other day that I had an account of them from Father Godet des Marais. What joy to be one of such a body, and to turn from the blessed work of converting the heathen to the even more precious task of nursing back health and strength into those of God's warriors who have been struck down in the fight with Satan!"

It was strange to De Catinat, who knew well the sordid and dreadful existence led by these same sisters, threatened ever with misery, hunger, and the scalping-knife, to hear this lady at whose feet lay all the good things of this earth speaking enviously of their lot.

"They are very good women," said he shortly, remembering Mademoiselle

Nanon's warning, and fearing to trench upon the dangerous subject.

"And doubtless you have had the privilege also of seeing the holy Bishop Laval?"

"Yes, madame, I have seen Bishop Laval."

"And I trust that the Sulpitians still hold their own against the Jesuits?"

"I have heard, madame, that the Jesuits are the stronger at Quebec, and the others at Montreal."

"And who is your own director, monsieur?"

De Catinat felt that the worst had come upon him. "I have none, madame."

"Ah, it is too common to dispense with a director, and yet I know not how I could guide my steps in the difficult path which I tread if it were not for mine. Who is your confessor, then?"

"I have none. I am of the Reformed Church, madame."

The lady gave a gesture of horror, and a sudden hardening showed itself in mouth and eye. "What, in the court itself," she cried, "and in the neighbourhood of the king's own person!"

De Catinat was lax enough in matters of faith, and held his creed rather as a family tradition than from any strong conviction, but it hurt his self-esteem to see himself regarded as though he had confessed to something that was loathsome and unclean. "You will find, madame," said he sternly, "that members of my faith have not only stood around the throne of France, but have even seated themselves upon it."

"God has for His own all-wise purposes permitted it, and none should know it better than I, whose grandsire, Theodore d'Aubigny, did so much to place a crown upon the head of the great Henry. But Henry's eyes were opened ere his end came, and I pray — oh, from my heart I pray — that yours may be also."

She rose, and throwing herself down upon the prie-dieu sunk her face in her hands for some few minutes, during which the object of her devotions stood in some perplexity in the middle of the room, hardly knowing whether such an attention should be regarded as an insult or as a favour. A tap at the door brought the lady back to this world again, and her devoted attendant answered her summons to enter.

"The king is in the Hall of Victories, madame," said she. "He will be here in five minutes."

"Very well. Stand outside, and let me know when he comes. Now, sir," she continued, when they were alone once more, "you gave a note of mine to the king this morning?"

"I did, madame."

"And, as I understand, Madame de Montespan was refused admittance to the grand lever?"

"She was, madame."

"But she waited for the king in the passage?"

"She did."

"And wrung from him a promise that he would see her to-day?"

"Yes, madame."

"I would not have you tell me that which it may seem to you a breach of your duty to tell. But I am fighting now against a terrible foe, and for a great stake. Do you understand me?"

De Catinat bowed.

"Then what do I mean?"

"I presume that what madame means is that she is fighting for the king's favour with the lady you mentioned."

"As heaven is my judge, I have no thought of myself. I am fighting with the devil for the king's soul."

"'Tis the same thing, madame."

The lady smiled. "If the king's body were in peril, I could call on the aid of his faithful guards, and not less so now, surely, when so much more is at stake. Tell me, then, at what hour was the king to meet the marquise in her room?"

"At four, madame."

"I thank you. You have done me a service, and I shall not forget it."

"The king comes, madame," said Mademoiselle Nanon, again protruding her head.

"Then you must go, captain. Pass through the other room, and so into the outer passage. And take this. It is Bossuet's statement of the Catholic faith. It has softened the hearts of others, and may yours. Now, adieu!"

De Catinat passed out through another door, and as he did so he glanced back. The lady had her back to him, and her hand was raised to the mantelpiece. At the instant that he looked she moved her neck, and he could see what she was doing. She was pushing back the long hand of the clock.

CHAPTER IX.

LE ROI S’AMUSE.

Captain de Catinat had hardly vanished through the one door before the other was thrown open by Mademoiselle Nanon, and the king entered the room. Madame de Maintenon rose with a pleasant smile and curtsied deeply, but there was no answering light upon her visitor’s face, and he threw himself down upon the vacant arm-chair with a pouting lip and a frown upon his forehead.

“Nay, now this is a very bad compliment,” she cried, with the gaiety which she could assume whenever it was necessary to draw the king from his blacker humours. “My poor little dark room has already cast a shadow over you.”

“Nay; it is Father la Chaise and the Bishop of Meaux who have been after me all day like two hounds on a stag, with talk of my duty and my position and my sins, with judgment and hell-fire ever at the end of their exhortations.”

“And what would they have your Majesty do?”

“Break the promise which I made when I came upon the throne, and which my grandfather made before me. They wish me to recall the Edict of Nantes, and drive the Huguenots from the kingdom.”

“Oh, but your Majesty must not trouble your mind about such matters.”

“You would not have me do it, madame?”

“Not if it is to be a grief to your Majesty.”

“You have, perchance, some soft feeling for the religion of your youth?”

“Nay, sire; I have nothing but hatred for heresy.”

“And yet you would not have them thrust out?”

“Bethink you, sire, that the Almighty can Himself incline their hearts to better things if He is so minded, even as mine was inclined. May you not leave it in His hands?”

“On my word,” said Louis, brightening, “it is well put. I shall see if Father la Chaise can find an answer to that. It is hard to be threatened with eternal flames because one will not ruin one’s kingdom. Eternal torment! I have seen the face of a man who had been in the Bastille, for fifteen years. It was like a dreadful book, with a scar or a wrinkle to mark every hour of that death in life. But Eternity!" He shuddered, and his eyes were filled with the horror of his thought. The higher motives had but little power over his soul, as those about him had long discovered, but he was ever ready to wince at the image of the terrors to come.

"Why should you think of such things, sire?" said the lady, in her rich, soothing voice. "What have you to fear, you who have been the first son of the Church?"

"You think that I am safe, then?"

"Surely, sire."

"But I have erred, and erred deeply. You have yourself said as much."

"But that is all over, sire. Who is there who is without stain? You have turned away from temptation. Surely, then, you have earned your forgiveness."

"I would that the queen were living once more. She would find me a better man."

"I would that she were, sire."

"And she should know that it was to you that she owed the change. Oh, Francoise, you are surely my guardian angel, who has taken bodily form! How can I thank you for what you have done for me?" He leaned forward and took her hand, but at the touch a sudden fire sprang into his eyes, and he would have passed his other arm round her had she not risen hurriedly to avoid the embrace.

"Sire!" said she, with a rigid face and one finger upraised.

"You are right, you are right, Francoise. Sit down, and I will control myself. Still at the same tapestry, then! My workers at the Gobelins must look to their laurels." He raised one border of the glossy roll, while she, having reseated herself, though not without a quick questioning glance at her companion, took the other end into her lap and continued her work.

"Yes, sire. It is a hunting scene in your forests at Fontainebleau. A stag of ten tines, you see, and the hounds in full cry, and a gallant band of cavaliers and ladies. Has your Majesty ridden to-day?"

"No. How is it, Francoise, that you have such a heart of ice?"

"I would it were so, sire. Perhaps you have hawked, then?"

"No. But surely no man's love has ever stirred you! And yet you have been a wife."

“A nurse, sire, but never a wife. See the lady in the park! It is surely mademoiselle. I did not know that she had come up from Choisy.”

But the king was not to be distracted from his subject.

“You did not love this Scarron, then?” he persisted. “He was old, I have heard, and as lame as some of his verses.”

“Do not speak lightly of him, sire. I was grateful to him; I honoured him; I liked him.”

“But you did not love him.”

“Why should you seek to read the secrets of a woman’s heart?”

“You did not love him, Francoise?”

“At least I did my duty towards him.”

“Has that nun’s heart never yet been touched by love then?”

“Sire, do not question me.”

“Has it never—”

“Spare me, sire, I beg of you!”

“But I must ask, for my own peace hangs upon your answer.”

“Your words pain me to the soul.”

“Have you never, Francoise, felt in your heart some little flicker of the love which glows in mine?” He rose with his hands outstretched, a pleading monarch, but she, with half-turned bead, still shrank away from him.

“Be assured of one thing, sire,” said she, “that even if I loved you as no woman ever loved a man yet, I should rather spring from that window on to the stone terraces beneath than ever by word or sign confess as much to you.”

“And why, Francoise?”

“Because, sire, it is my highest hope upon earth that I have been chosen to lift up your mind towards loftier things — that mind the greatness and nobility of which none know more than I.”

“And is my love so base, then?”

“You have wasted too much of your life and of your thoughts upon woman’s love. And now, sire, the years steal on and the day is coming when even you will be called upon to give an account of your actions, and of the innermost thoughts of your heart. I would see you spend the time that is left to you, sire, in building up the Church, in showing a noble example to your subjects, and in repairing any evil which that example may have done in the past.”

The king sank back into his chair with a groan. “Forever the same,” said he. “Why, you are worse than Father la Chaise and Bossuet.”

“Nay, nay,” said she gaily, with the quick tact in which she never failed. “I have wearied you, when you have stooped to honour my little room with your presence. That is indeed ingratitude, and it were a just punishment if you were to leave me in solitude to-morrow, and so cut off all the light of my day. But tell me, sire, how go the works at Marly? I am all on fire to know whether the great fountain will work.”

“Yes, the fountain plays well, but Mansard has thrown the right wing too far back. I have made him a good architect, but I have still much to teach him. I showed him his fault on the plan this morning, and he promised to amend it.”

“And what will the change cost, sire?”

“Some millions of livres, but then the view will be much improved from the south side. I have taken in another mile of ground in that direction, for there were a number of poor folk living there, and their hovels were far from pretty.”

“And why have you not ridden to-day, sire?”

“Pah! it brings me no pleasure. There was a time when my blood was stirred by the blare of the horn and the rush of the hoofs, but now it is all wearisome to me.”

“And hawking too?”

“Yes; I shall hawk no more.”

“But, sire, you must have amusement.”

“What is so dull as an amusement which has ceased to amuse? I know not how it is. When I was but a lad, and my mother and I were driven from place to place, with the Fronde at war with us and Paris in revolt, with our throne and even our lives in danger, all life seemed to be so bright, so new, and so full of interest. Now that there is no shadow, and that my voice is the first in France, as France’s is in Europe, all is dull and lacking in flavour. What use is it to have all pleasure before me, when it turns to wormwood when it is tasted?”

“True pleasure, sire, lies rather in the inward life, the serene mind, the easy conscience. And then, as we grow older, is it not natural that our minds should take a graver bent? We might well reproach ourselves if it were not so, for it would show that we had not learned the lesson of life.”

“It may be so, and yet it is sad and weary when nothing amuses. But who is there?”

“It is my companion knocking. What is it, mademoiselle?”

“Monsieur Corneille, to read to the king,” said the young lady, opening the door.

“Ah, yes, sire; I know how foolish is a woman’s tongue, and so I have brought a wiser one than mine here to charm you. Monsieur Racine was to have come, but I hear that he has had a fall from his horse, and he sends his friend in his place. Shall I admit him?”

“Oh, as you like, madame, as you like,” said the king listlessly. At a sign from Mademoiselle Nanon a little peaky man with a shrewd petulant face, and long gray hair falling back over his shoulders, entered the room. He bowed profoundly three times, and then seated himself nervously on the very edge of the stool, from which the lady had removed her work-basket. She smiled and nodded to encourage the poet, while the monarch leaned back in his chair with an air of resignation.

“Shall it be a comedy, or a tragedy, or a burlesque pastoral?” Corneille asked timidly.

“Not the burlesque pastoral,” said the king with decision. “Such things may be played, but cannot be read, since they are for the eye rather than the ear.”

The poet bowed his acquiescence.

“And not the tragedy, monsieur,” said Madame de Maintenon, glancing up from her tapestry. “The king has enough that is serious in his graver hours, and so I trust that you will use your talent to amuse him.”

“Ay, let it be a comedy,” said Louis; “I have not had a good laugh since poor Moliere passed away.”

“Ah, your Majesty has indeed a fine taste,” cried the courtier poet. “Had you condescended to turn your own attention to poetry, where should we all have been then?”

Louis smiled, for no flattery was too gross to please him.

“Even as you have taught our generals war and our builders art, so you would have set your poor singers a loftier strain. But Mars would hardly deign to share the humbler laurels of Apollo.”

“I have sometimes thought that I had some such power,” answered the king complacently; “though amid my toils and the burdens of state I have had, as you say, little time for the softer arts.”

“But you have encouraged others to do what you could so well have done yourself, sire. You have brought out poets as the sun brings out flowers. How many have we not seen — Moliere, Boileau, Racine, one greater than the other? And the others, too, the smaller ones — Scarron, so scurrilous and yet so witty — Oh, holy Virgin! what have I said?”

Madame had laid down her tapestry, and was staring in intense indignation at the poet, who writhed on his stool under the stern rebuke of those cold gray eyes.

“I think, Monsieur Corneille, that you had better go on with your reading,” said the king dryly.

“Assuredly, sire. Shall I read my play about Darius?”

“And who was Darius?” asked the king, whose education had been so neglected by the crafty policy of Cardinal Mazarin that he was ignorant of everything save what had come under his own personal observation.

“Darius was King of Persia, sire.”

“And where is Persia?”

“It is a kingdom of Asia.”

“Is Darius still king there?”

“Nay, sire; he fought against Alexander the Great.”

“Ah, I have heard of Alexander. He was a famous king and general, was he not?”

“Like your Majesty, he both ruled wisely and led his armies victoriously.”

“And was King of Persia, you say?”

“No, sire; of Macedonia. It was Darius who was King of Persia.”

The king frowned, for the slightest correction was offensive to him.

“You do not seem very clear about the matter, and I confess that it does not interest me deeply,” said he. “Pray turn to something else.”

“There is my Pretended Astrologer.”

“Yes, that will do.”

Corneille commenced to read his comedy, while Madame de Maintenon’s white and delicate fingers picked among the many-coloured silks which she was weaving into her tapestry. From time to time she glanced across, first at the clock and then at the king, who was leaning back, with his lace handkerchief thrown over his face. It was twenty minutes to four now, but she knew that she had put it back half an hour, and that the true time was ten minutes past.

“Tut! tut!” cried the king suddenly. “There is something amiss there. The second last line has a limp in it, surely.” It was one of his foibles to pose as a critic, and the wise poet would fall in with his corrections, however unreasonable they might be.

“Which line, sire? It is indeed an advantage to have one’s faults made clear.”

“Read the passage again.”

“Et si, quand je lui dis le secret de mon ame,
Avec moins de rigueur elle eut traite ma flamme,
Dans ma fayon de vivre, et suivant mon humeur,
Une autre eut bientot le present de mon coeur.”

“Yes, the third line has a foot too many. Do you not remark it, madame?”

“No; but I fear that I should make a poor critic.”

“Your Majesty is perfectly right,” said Corneille unblushingly.

“I shall mark the passage, and see that it is corrected.”

“I thought that it was wrong. If I do not write myself, you can see that I have at least got the correct ear. A false quantity jars upon me. It is the same in music. Although I know little of the matter, I can tell a discord where Lully himself would miss it. I have often shown him errors of the sort in his operas, and I have always convinced him that I was right.”

“I can readily believe it, your Majesty.” Corneille had picked up his book again, and was about to resume his reading when there came a sharp tap at the door.

“It is his Highness the minister, Monsieur de Louvois,” said
Mademoiselle Nanon.

“Admit him,” answered Louis. “Monsieur Corneille, I am obliged to you for what you have read, and I regret that an affair of state will now interrupt your comedy. Some other day perhaps I may have the pleasure of hearing the rest of it.” He smiled in the gracious fashion which made all who came within his personal influence forget his faults and remember him only as the impersonation of dignity and of courtesy.

The poet, with his book under his arm, slipped out, while the famous minister, tall, heavily wigged, eagle-nosed, and commanding, came bowing into the little room. His manner was that of exaggerated politeness, but his haughty face marked only too plainly his contempt for such a chamber and for the lady who dwelt there. She was well aware of the feeling with which he regarded her, but her perfect self-command prevented her from ever by word or look returning his dislike.

"My apartments are indeed honoured to-day," said she, rising with outstretched hand. "Can monsieur condescend to a stool, since I have no fitter seat to offer you in this little doll's house? But perhaps I am in the way, if you wish to talk of state affairs to the king. I can easily withdraw into my boudoir."

"No, no, nothing of the kind, madame," cried Louis. "It is my wish that you should remain here. What is it, Louvois?"

"A messenger arrived from England with despatches, your Majesty," answered the minister, his ponderous figure balanced upon the three-legged stool. "There is very ill feeling there, and there is some talk of a rising. The letter from Lord Sunderland wished to know whether, in case the Dutch took the side of the malcontents, the king might look to France for help. Of course, knowing your Majesty's mind, I answered unhesitatingly that he might."

"You did what?"

"I answered, sire, that he might."

King Louis flushed with anger, and he caught up the tongs from the grate with a motion as though he would have struck his minister with them. Madame sprang from her chair, and laid her hand upon his arm with a soothing gesture. He threw down the tongs again, but his eyes still flashed with passion as he turned them upon Louvois.

"How dared you?" he cried.

"But, sire—"

"How dared you, I say? What! You venture to answer such a message without consulting me! How often am I to tell you that I am the state — I alone; that all is to come from me; and that I am answerable to God only? What are you? My instrument! my tool! And you venture to act without my authority!"

"I thought that I knew your wishes, sire," stammered Louvois, whose haughty manner had quite deserted him, and whose face was as white as the ruffles of his shirt.

"You are not there to think about my wishes, sir. You are there to consult them and to obey them. Why is it that I have turned away from my old nobility, and have committed the affairs of my kingdom to men whose names have never been heard of in the history of France, such men as

Colbert and yourself? I have been blamed for it. There was the Duc de St. Simon, who said, the last time that he was at the court, that it was a bourgeois government. So it is. But I wished it to be so, because I knew that the nobles have a way of thinking for themselves, and I ask for no thought but mine in the governing of France. But if my bourgeois are to receive messages and give answers to embassies, then indeed I am to be pitied. I have marked you of late, Louvois. You have grown beyond your station. You take too much upon yourself. See to it that I have not again to complain to you upon this matter."

The humiliated minister sat as one crushed, with his chin sunk upon his breast. The king muttered and frowned for a few minutes, but the cloud cleared gradually from his face, for his fits of anger were usually as short as they were fierce and sudden.

"You will detain that messenger, Louvois," he said at last, in a calm voice.

"Yes, sire."

"And we shall see at the council meeting to-morrow that a fitting reply be sent to Lord Sunderland. It would be best perhaps not to be too free with our promises in the matter. These English have ever been a thorn in our sides. If we could leave them among their own fogs with such a quarrel as would keep them busy for a few years, then indeed we might crush this Dutch prince at our leisure. Their last civil war lasted ten years, and their next may do as much. We could carry our frontier to the Rhine long ere that. Eh, Louvois?"

"Your armies are ready, sire, on the day that you give the word."

"But war is a costly business. I do not wish to have to sell the court plate, as we did the other day. How are the public funds?"

"We are not very rich, sire. But there is one way in which money may very readily be gained. There was some talk this morning about the Huguenots, and whether they should dwell any longer in this Catholic kingdom. Now, if they are driven out, and if their property were taken by the state, then indeed your Majesty would at once become the richest monarch in Christendom."

"But you were against it this morning, Louvois?"

"I had not had time to think of it, sire."

"You mean that Father la Chaise and the bishop had not had time to get at you," said Louis sharply. "Ah, Louvois, I have not lived with a court round me all these years without learning how things are done. It is a word to him, and so on to another, and so to a third, and so to the king. When my good fathers of the Church have set themselves to bring anything to pass, I see traces of them at every turn, as one traces a mole by the dirt which it has thrown up. But I will not be moved against my own reason to do wrong to those who, however mistaken they may be, are still the subjects whom God has given me."

"I would not have you do so, sire," cried Louvois in confusion. The king's accusation had been so true that he had been unable at the moment even to protest.

"I know but one person," continued Louis, glancing across at Madame de Maintenon, "who has no ambitions, who desires neither wealth nor preferment, and who can therefore never be bribed to sacrifice my interests. That is why I value that person's opinion so highly." He smiled at the lady as he spoke, while his minister cast a glance at her which showed the jealousy which ate into his soul.

"It was my duty to point this out to you, sire, not as a suggestion, but as a possibility," said he, rising. "I fear that I have already taken up too much of your Majesty's time, and I shall now withdraw." Bowing slightly to the lady, and profoundly to the monarch, he walked from the room.

"Louvois grows intolerable," said the king. "I know not where his insolence will end. Were it not that he is an excellent servant, I should have sent him from the court before this. He has his own opinions upon everything. It was but the other day that he would have it that I was wrong when I said that one of the windows in the Trianon was smaller than any of the others. It was the same size, said he. I brought Le Metre with his measures, and of course the window was, as I had said, too small. But I see by your clock that it is four o'clock. I must go."

"My clock, sire, is half an hour slow."

"Half an hour!" The king looked dismayed for an instant, and then began to laugh. "Nay, in that case," said he, "I had best remain where I am, for it is too late to go, and I can say with a clear conscience that it was the clock's fault rather than mine."

"I trust that it was nothing of very great importance, sire," said the lady, with a look of demure triumph in her eyes.

"By no means."

“No state affair?”

“No, no; it was only that it was the hour at which I had intended to rebuke the conduct of a presumptuous person. But perhaps it is better as it is. My absence will in itself convey my message, and in such a sort that I trust I may never see that person’s face more at my court. But, ah, what is this?”

The door had been flung open, and Madame de Montespan, beautiful and furious, was standing before them.

CHAPTER X.

AN ECLIPSE AT VERSAILLES.

Madame de Maintenon was a woman who was always full of self-restraint and of cool resource. She had risen in an instant, with an air as if she had at last seen the welcome guest for whom she had pined in vain. With a frank smile of greeting, she advanced with outstretched hand.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said she.

But Madame de Montespan was very angry, so angry that she was evidently making strong efforts to keep herself within control, and to avoid breaking into a furious outburst. Her face was very pale, her lips compressed, and her blue eyes had the set stare and the cold glitter of a furious woman. So for an instant they faced each other, the one frowning, the other smiling, two of the most beautiful and queenly women in France. Then De Montespan, disregarding her rival's outstretched hand, turned towards the king, who had been looking at her with a darkening face.

"I fear that I intrude, sire."

"Your entrance, madame, is certainly somewhat abrupt."

"I must crave pardon if it is so. Since this lady has been the governess of my children I have been in the habit of coming into her room unannounced."

"As far as I am concerned, you are most welcome to do so," said her rival, with perfect composure.

"I confess that I had not even thought it necessary to ask your permission, madame," the other answered coldly.

"Then you shall certainly do so in the future, madame," said the king sternly. "It is my express order to you that every possible respect is to be shown in every way to this lady."

"Oh, to this lady!" with a wave of her hand in her direction. "Your Majesty's commands are of course our laws. But I must remember that it is this lady, for sometimes one may get confused as to which name it is that your Majesty has picked out for honour. To-day it is De Maintenon;

yesterday it was Fontanges; to-morrow — Ah, well, who can say who it may be to-morrow?"

She was superb in her pride and her fearlessness as she stood, with her sparkling blue eyes and her heaving bosom, looking down upon her royal lover. Angry as he was, his gaze lost something of its sternness as it rested upon her round full throat and the delicate lines of her shapely shoulders. There was something very becoming in her passion, in the defiant pose of her dainty head, and the magnificent scorn with which she glanced at her rival.

"There is nothing to be gained, madame, by being insolent," said he.

"Nor is it my custom, sire."

"And yet I find your words so."

"Truth is always mistaken for insolence, sire, at the court of France."

"We have had enough of this."

"A very little truth is enough."

"You forget yourself, madame. I beg that you will leave the room."

"I must first remind your Majesty that I was so far honoured as to have an appointment this afternoon. At four o'clock I had your royal promise that you would come to me. I cannot doubt that your Majesty will keep that promise in spite of the fascinations which you may find here."

"I should have come, madame, but the clock, as you may observe, is half an hour slow, and the time had passed before I was aware of it."

I beg, sire, that you will not let that distress you. I am returning to my chamber, and five o'clock will suit me as well as four."

"I thank you, madame, but I have not found this interview so pleasant that I should seek another."

"Then your Majesty will not come?"

"I should prefer not."

"In spite of your promise!"

"Madame!"

"You will break your word!"

"Silence, madame; this is intolerable."

"It is indeed intolerable!" cried the angry lady, throwing all discretion to the winds. "Oh, I am not afraid of you, sire. I have loved you, but I have never feared you. I leave you here. I leave you with your conscience and your — your lady confessor. But one word of truth you shall hear before I go. You have been false to your wife, and you have been false to your mistress, but it is only now that I find that you can be false also to your word.” She swept him an indignant courtesy, and glided, with head erect, out of the room.

The king sprang from his chair as if he had been stung. Accustomed as he was to his gentle little wife, and the even gentler La Valliere, such language as this had never before intruded itself upon the royal ears. It was like a physical blow to him. He felt stunned, humiliated, bewildered, by so unwonted a sensation. What odour was this which mingled for the first time with the incense amid which he lived? And then his whole soul rose up in anger at her, at the woman who had dared to raise her voice against him. That she should be jealous of and insult another woman, that was excusable. It was, in fact, an indirect compliment to himself. But that she should turn upon him, as if they were merely man and woman, instead of monarch and subject, that was too much. He gave an inarticulate cry of rage, and rushed to the door.

“Sire!” Madame de Maintenon, who had watched keenly the swift play of his emotions over his expressive face, took two quick steps forward, and laid her hand upon his arm.

“I will go after her.”

“And why, sire?”

To forbid her the court.”

“But, sire—”

“You heard her! It is infamous! I shall go.”

“But, sire, could you not write?”

“No, no; I shall see her.” He pulled open the door.

“Oh, sire, be firm, then!” It was with an anxious face that she watched him start off, walking rapidly, with angry gestures, down the corridor. Then she turned back, and dropping upon her knees on the prie-dieu, bowed her head in prayer for the king, for herself, and for France.

De Catinat, the guardsman, had employed himself in showing his young friend from over the water all the wonders of the great palace, which the other had examined keenly, and had criticised or admired with an independence of judgment and a native correctness of taste natural to a man whose life had been spent in freedom amid the noblest works of nature. Grand as were the mighty fountains and the artificial cascades, they had no overwhelming effect on one who had travelled up from Erie to Ontario, and had seen the Niagara River hurl itself over its precipice, nor were the long level swards so very large to eyes which had rested upon the great plains of the Dakotas. The building itself, however, its extent, its height, and the beauty of its stone, filled him with astonishment.

“I must bring Ephraim Savage here,” he kept repeating. “He Would never believe else that there was one house in the world which would weigh more than all Boston and New York put together.”

De Catinat had arranged that the American should remain with his friend Major de Brissac, as the time had come round for his own second turn of guard. He had hardly stationed himself in the corridor when he was astonished to see the King, without escort or attendants, walking swiftly down the passage. His delicate face was disfigured with anger, and his mouth was set grimly, like that of a man who had taken a momentous resolution.

“Officer of the guard,” said he shortly.

“Yes, sire.”

“What! You again, Captain de Catinat? You have not been on duty since morning?”

“No, sire. It is my second guard.”

“Very good. I wish your assistance.”

“I am at your command, sire.”

“Is there a subaltern here?”

“Lieutenant de la Tremouille is at the side guard.”

“Very well. You will place him in command.”

“Yes, sire.”

“You will yourself go to Monsieur de Vivonne. You know his apartments?”

“Yes, sire.”

“If he is not there, you must go and seek him. Wherever he is, you must find him within the hour.”

“Yes, sire.”

“You will give him an order from me. At six o’clock he is to be in his carriage at the east gate of the palace. His sister, Madame de Montespan, will await him there, and he is charged by me to drive her to the Chateau of Petit Bourg. You will tell him that he is answerable to me for her arrival there.”

“Yes, sire.” De Catinat raised his sword in salute, and started upon his mission.

The king passed on down the corridor, and opened a door which led him into a magnificent ante-room, all one blaze of mirrors and gold, furnished to a marvel with the most delicate ebony and silver suite, on a deep red carpet of Aleppo, as soft and yielding as the moss of a forest. In keeping with the furniture was the sole occupant of this stately chamber — a little negro boy in a livery of velvet picked out with silver tinsel, who stood as motionless as a small swart statuette against the door which faced that through which the king entered.

“Is your mistress there?”

“She has just returned, sire.”

“I wish to see her.”

“Pardon, sire, but she—”

“Is everyone to thwart me to-day?” snarled the king, and taking the little page by his velvet collar, he hurled him to the other side of the room. Then, without knocking, he opened the door, and passed on into the lady’s boudoir.

It was a large and lofty room, very different to that from which he had just come. Three long windows from ceiling to floor took up one side, and through the delicate pink-tinted blinds the evening sun cast a subdued and dainty light. Great gold candelabra glittered between the mirrors upon the wall, and Le Brun had expended all his wealth of colouring upon the ceiling, where Louis himself, in the character of Jove, hurled down his thunder-bolts upon a writhing heap of Dutch and Palatine Titans. Pink was the prevailing tone in tapestry, carpet, and furniture, so that the whole room seemed to shine with the sweet tints of the inner side of a shell, and when lit up, as it was then, formed such a chamber as some fairy hero might have built up for his princess. At the further side, prone upon an ottoman, her face buried in the cushion, her beautiful white arms thrown over it, the rich coils of her brown hair hanging in disorder across the long curve of her ivory neck, lay, like a drooping flower, the woman whom he had come to discard.

At the sound of the closing door she had glanced up, and then, at the sight of the king, she sprang to her feet and ran towards him, her hands out, her blue eyes bedimmed with tears, her whole beautiful figure softening into womanliness and humility.

“Ah, sire,” she cried, with a pretty little sunburst of joy through her tears, “then I have wronged you! I have wronged you cruelly! You have kept your promise. You were but trying my faith! Oh, how could I have said such words to you — how could I pain that noble heart! But you have come after me to tell me that you have forgiven me!” She put her arms forward with the trusting air of a pretty child who claims an embrace as her due, but the king stepped swiftly back from her, and warned her away from him with an angry gesture.

“All is over forever between us,” he cried harshly. “Your brother will await you at the east gate at six o’clock, and it is my command that you wait there until you receive my further orders.”

She staggered back as if he had struck her.

“Leave you!” she cried.

“You must leave the court.”

“The court! Ay, willingly, this instant! But you! Ah, sire, you ask what is impossible.”

“I do not ask, madame; I order. Since you have learned to abuse your position, your presence has become intolerable. The united kings of Europe have never dared to speak to me as you have spoken to-day. You have insulted me in my own palace — me, Louis, the king. Such things are not done twice, madame. Your insolence has carried you too far this time. You thought that because I was forbearing, I was therefore weak. It appeared to you that if you only humoured me one moment, you might treat me as if I were your equal the next, for that this poor puppet of a king could always be bent this way or that. You see your mistake now. At six o’clock you leave Versailles forever.” His eyes flashed, and his small upright figure seemed to swell in the violence of his indignation, while she leaned away from him, one hand across her eyes and one thrown forward, as if to screen her from that angry gaze.

“Oh, I have been wicked!” she cried. “I know it, I know it!”

“I am glad, madame, that you have the grace to acknowledge it.”

“How could I speak to you so! How could I! Oh, that some blight may come upon this unhappy tongue! I, who have had nothing but good from you! I to insult you, who are the author of all my happiness! Oh, sire, forgive me, forgive me! for pity’s sake forgive me!”

Louis was by nature a kind-hearted man. His feelings were touched, and his pride also was flattered by the abasement of this beautiful and haughty woman. His other favourites had been amiable to all, but this one was so proud, so unyielding, until she felt his master-hand. His face softened somewhat in its expression as he glanced at her, but he shook his head, and his voice was as firm as ever as he answered.

"It is useless, madame," said he. "I have thought this matter over for a long time, and your madness to-day has only hurried what must in any case have taken place. You must leave the palace."

"I will leave the palace. Say only that you forgive me. Oh, sire, I cannot bear your anger. It crushes me down. I am not strong enough. It is not banishment, it is death to which you sentence me. Think of our long years of love, sire, and say that you forgive me. I have given up all for your sake — husband, honour, everything. Oh, will you not give your anger up for mine? My God, he weeps! Oh, I am saved, I am saved!"

"No, no, madame," cried the king, dashing his hand across his eyes. "You see the weakness of the man, but you shall also see the firmness of the king. As to your insults to-day, I forgive them freely, if that will make you more happy in your retirement. But I owe a duty to my subjects also, and that duty is to set them an example. We have thought too little of such things. But a time has come when it is necessary to review our past life, and to prepare for that which is to come."

"Ah, sire, you pain me. You are not yet in the prime of your years, and you speak as though old age were upon you. In a score of years from now it may be time for folk to say that age has made a change in your life."

The king winced. "Who says so?" he cried angrily.

"Oh, sire, it slipped from me unawares. Think no more of it. Nobody says so. Nobody."

"You are hiding something from me. Who is it who says this?"

"Oh, do not ask me, sire."

"You said that it was reported that I had changed my life not through religion, but through stress of years. Who said so?"

"Oh, sire, it was but foolish court gossip, all unworthy of your attention. It was but the empty common talk of cavaliers who had nothing else to say to gain a smile from their ladies."

"The common talk?" Louis flushed crimson.

"Have I, then, grown so aged? You have known me for nearly twenty years. Do you see such changes in me?"

"To me, sire, you are as pleasing and as gracious as when you first won the heart of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente."

The king smiled as he looked at the beautiful woman before him.

“In very truth,” said he, “I can say that there has been no such great change in Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente either. But still it is best that we should part, Francoise.”

“If it will add aught to your happiness, sire, I shall go through it, be it to my death.”

“Now that is the proper spirit.”

“You have but to name the place, sire — Petit Bourg, Chargny, or my own convent of St. Joseph in the Faubourg St. Germain. What matter where the flower withers, when once the sun has forever turned from it? At least, the past is my own, and I shall live in the remembrance of the days when none had come between us, and when your sweet love was all my own. Be happy, sire, be happy, and think no more of what I said about the foolish gossip of the court. Your life lies in the future. Mine is in the past. Adieu, dear sire, adieu!” She threw forward her hands, her eyes dimmed over, and she would have fallen had Louis not sprung forward and caught her in his arms. Her beautiful head drooped upon his shoulder, her breath was warm upon his cheek, and the subtle scent of her hair was in his nostrils. His arm, as he held her, rose and fell with her bosom, and he felt her heart, beneath his hand, fluttering like a caged bird. Her broad white throat was thrown back, her eyes almost closed, her lips just parted enough to show the line of pearly teeth, her beautiful face not three inches from his own. And then suddenly the eyelids quivered, and the great blue eyes looked up at him, lovingly, appealingly, half deprecating, half challenging, her whole soul in a glance. Did he move? or was it she? Who could tell? But their lips had met in a long kiss, and then in another, and plans and resolutions were streaming away from Louis like autumn leaves in the west wind.

“Then I am not to go? You would not have the heart to send me away, would you?”

“No, no; but you must not annoy me, Francoise.”

“I had rather die than cause you an instant of grief. Oh, sire, I have seen so little of you lately! And I love you so! It has maddened me. And then that dreadful woman—”

“Who, then?”

“Oh, I must not speak against her. I will be civil for your sake even to her, the widow of old Scarron.”

“Yes, yes, you must be civil. I cannot have any unpleasantness.”

“But you will stay with me, sire?” Her supple arms coiled themselves round his neck. Then she held him for an instant at arm’s length to feast her eyes upon his face, and then drew him once more towards her. “You will not leave me, dear sire. It is so long since you have been here.”

The sweet face, the pink glow in the room, the hush of the evening, all seemed to join in their sensuous influence. Louis sank down upon the settee.

“I will stay,” said he.

“And that carriage, dear sire, at the east door?”

“I have been very harsh with you, Francoise. You will forgive me.

Have you paper and pencil, that I may countermand the order?”

“They are here, sire, upon the side table. I have also a note which, if

I may leave you for an instant, I will write in the anteroom.”

She swept out with triumph in her eyes. It had been a terrible fight, but all the greater the credit of her victory. She took a little pink slip of paper from an inlaid desk, and dashed off a few words upon it. They were: “Should Madame de Maintenon have any message for his Majesty, he will be for the next few hours in the room of Madame de Montespan.” This she addressed to her rival, and it was sent on the spot, together with the king’s order, by the hands of the little black page.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUN REAPPEARS.

For nearly a week the king was constant to his new humour. The routine of his life remained unchanged, save that it was the room of the frail beauty, rather than of Madame de Maintenon, which attracted him in the afternoon. And in sympathy with this sudden relapse into his old life, his coats lost something of their sombre hue, and fawn-colour, buff-colour, and lilac began to replace the blacks and the blues. A little gold lace budded out upon his hats also and at the trimmings of his pockets, while for three days on end his prie-dieu at the royal chapel had been unoccupied. His walk was brisker, and he gave a youthful flourish to his cane as a defiance to those who had seen in his reformation the first symptoms of age. Madame had known her man well when she threw out that artful insinuation.

And as the king brightened, so all the great court brightened too. The salons began to resume their former splendour, and gay coats and glittering embroidery which had lain in drawers for years were seen once more in the halls of the palace. In the chapel, Bourdaloue preached in vain to empty benches, but a ballet in the grounds was attended by the whole court, and received with a frenzy of enthusiasm. The Montespan ante-room was crowded every morning with men and women who had some suit to be urged, while her rival’s chambers were as deserted as they had been before the king first turned a gracious look upon her. Faces which had been long banished the court began to reappear in the corridors and gardens unchecked and unrebuked, while the black cassock of the Jesuit and the purple soutane of the bishop were less frequent colours in the royal circle.

But the Church party, who, if they were the champions of bigotry, were also those of virtue, were never seriously alarmed at this relapse. The grave eyes of priest or of prelate followed Louis in his escapade as wary huntsmen might watch a young deer which gambols about in the meadow under the impression that it is masterless, when every gap and path is netted, and it is in truth as much in their hands as though it were lying bound before them. They knew how short a time it would be before some ache, some pain, some chance word, would bring his mortality home to him again, and envelop him once more in those superstitious terrors which took the place of religion in his mind. They waited, therefore, and they silently planned how the prodigal might best be dealt with on his return.

To this end it was that his confessor, Pere la Chaise, and Bossuet, the great Bishop of Meaux, waited one morning upon Madame de Maintenon in her chamber. With a globe beside her, she was endeavouring to teach geography to the lame Due du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse, who had enough of their father's disposition to make them averse to learning, and of their mother's to cause them to hate any discipline or restraint. Her wonderful tact, however, and her unwearying patience had won the love and confidence even of these little perverse princes, and it was one of Madame de Montespan's most bitter griefs that not only her royal lover, but even her own children, turned away from the brilliancy and riches of her salon to pass their time in the modest apartment of her rival.

Madame de Maintenon dismissed her two pupils, and received the ecclesiastics with the mixture of affection and respect which was due to those who were not only personal friends, but great lights of the Gallican Church. She had suffered the minister Louvois to sit upon a stool in her presence, but the two chairs were allotted to the priests now, and she insisted upon reserving the humbler seat for herself. The last few days had cast a pallor over her face which spiritualised and refined the features, but she wore unimpaired the expression of sweet serenity which was habitual to her.

"I see, my dear daughter, that you have sorrowed," said Bossuet, glancing at her with a kindly and yet searching eye.

"I have indeed, your Grace. All last night I spent in prayer that this trial may pass away from us."

"And yet you have no need for fear, madame — none, I assure you. Others may think that your influence has ceased; but we, who know the king's heart, we think otherwise. A few days may pass, a few weeks at the most, and once more it will be upon your rising fortunes that every eye in France will turn."

The lady's brow clouded, and she glanced at the prelate as though his speech were not altogether to her taste. "I trust that pride does not lead me astray," she said. "But if I can read my own soul aright, there is no thought of myself in the grief which now tears my heart. What is power to me?

What do I desire? A little room, leisure for my devotions, a pittance to save me from want — what more can I ask for? Why, then, should I covet power? If I am sore at heart, it is not for any poor loss which I have sustained. I think no more of it than of the snapping of one of the threads on yonder tapestry frame. It is for the king I grieve — for the noble heart, the kindly soul, which might rise so high, and which is dragged so low, like a royal eagle with some foul weight which ever hampers its flight. It is for him and for France that my days are spent in sorrow and my nights upon my knees."

"For all that, my daughter, you are ambitious."

It was the Jesuit who had spoken. His voice was clear and cold, and his piercing gray eyes seemed to read into the depths of her soul.

"You may be right, father. God guard me from self-esteem. And yet I do not think that I am. The king, in his goodness, has offered me titles — I have refused them; money — I have returned it. He has deigned to ask my advice in matters of state, and I have withheld it. Where, then, is my ambition?"

"In your heart, my daughter. But it is not a sinful ambition. It is not an ambition of this world. Would you not love to turn the king towards good?"

"I would give my life for it."

"And there is your ambition. Ah, can I not read your noble soul? Would you not love to see the Church reign pure and serene over all this realm — to see the poor housed, the needy helped, the wicked turned from their ways, and the king ever the leader in all that is noble and good? Would you not love that, my daughter?"

Her cheeks had flushed, and her eyes shone as she looked at the gray face of the Jesuit, and saw the picture which his words had conjured up before her. "Ah, that would be joy indeed!" she cried.

"And greater joy still to know, not from the mouths of the people, but from the voice of your own heart in the privacy of your chamber, that you had been the cause of it, that your influence had brought this blessing upon the king and upon the country."

"I would die to do it."

"We wish you to do what may be harder. We wish you to live to do it."

"Ah!" She glanced from one to the other with questioning eyes.

"My daughter," said Bossuet solemnly, leaning forward, with his broad white hand outstretched and his purple pastoral ring sparkling in the sunlight, “it is time for plain speaking. It is in the interests of the Church that we do it. None hear, and none shall ever hear, what passes between us now. Regard us, if you will, as two confessors, with whom your secret is inviolable. I call it a secret, and yet it is none to us, for it is our mission to read the human heart. You love the king.”

“Your Grace!” She started, and a warm blush, mantling up in her pale cheeks, deepened and spread until it tinted her white forehead and her queenly neck.

“You love the king.”

“Your Grace — father!” She turned in confusion from one to the other.

“There is no shame in loving, my daughter. The shame lies only in yielding to love. I say again that you love the king.”

“At least I have never told him so,” she faltered.

“And will you never?”

“May heaven wither my tongue first!”

“But consider, my daughter. Such love in a soul like yours is heaven’s gift, and sent for some wise purpose. This human love is too often but a noxious weed which blights the soil it grows in, but here it is a gracious flower, all fragrant with humility and virtue.”

“Alas! I have tried to tear it from my heart.”

“Nay; rather hold it firmly rooted there. Did the king but meet with some tenderness from you, some sign that his own affection met with an answer from your heart, it might be that this ambition which you profess would be secured, and that Louis, strengthened by the intimate companionship of your noble nature, might live in the spirit as well as in the forms of the Church. All this might spring from the love which you hide away as though it bore the brand of shame.”

The lady half rose, glancing from the prelate to the priest with eyes which had a lurking horror in their depths.

“Can I have understood you!” she gasped. “What meaning lies behind these words? You cannot counsel me to—”

The Jesuit had risen, and his spare figure towered above her.

“My daughter, we give no counsel which is unworthy of our office. We speak for the interests of Holy Church, and those interests demand that you should marry the king.”

“Marry the king!” The little room swam round her. “Marry the king!”

“There lies the best hope for the future. We see in you a second Jeanne d’Arc, who will save both France and France’s king.”

Madame sat silent for a few moments. Her face had regained its composure, and her eyes were bent vacantly upon her tapestry frame as she turned over in her mind all that was involved in the suggestion.

“But surely — surely this could never be,” she said at last, “Why should we plan that which can never come to pass?”

“And why?”

“What King of France has married a subject? See how every princess of Europe stretches out her hand to him. The Queen of France must be of queenly blood, even as the last was.”

“All this may be overcome.”

“And then there are the reasons of state. If the king marry, it should be to form a powerful alliance, to cement a friendship with a neighbour nation, or to gain some province which may be the bride’s dowry. What is my dowry? A widow’s pension and a work-box.” She laughed bitterly, and yet glanced eagerly at her companions, as one who wished to be confuted.

“Your dowry, my daughter, would be those gifts of body and of mind with which heaven has endowed you. The king has money enough, and the king has provinces enough. As to the state, how can the state be better served than by the assurance that the king will be saved in future from such sights as are to be seen in this palace to-day?”

“Oh, if it could be so! But think, father, think of those about him — the dauphin, monsieur his brother, his ministers. You know how little this would please them, and how easy it is for them to sway his mind. No, no; it is a dream, father, and it can never be.”

The faces of the two ecclesiastics, who had dismissed her other objections with a smile and a wave, clouded over at this, as though she had at last touched upon the real obstacle.

“My daughter,” said the Jesuit gravely, “that is a matter which you may leave to the Church. It may be that we, too, have some power over the king’s mind, and that we may lead him in the right path, even though those of his own blood would fain have it otherwise. The future only can show with whom the power lies. But you? Love and duty both draw you one way now, and the Church may count upon you.”

“To my last breath, father.”

“And you upon the Church. It will serve you, if you in turn will but serve it.”

“What higher wish could I have?”

“You will be our daughter, our queen, our champion, and you will heal the wounds of the suffering Church.”

“Ah! if I could!”

“But you can. While there is heresy within the land there can be no peace or rest for the faithful. It is the speck of mould which will in time, if it be not pared off, corrupt the whole fruit.”

“What would you have, then, father?”

“The Huguenots must go. They must be driven forth. The goats must be divided from the sheep. The king is already in two minds. Louvois is our friend now. If you are with us, then all will be well.”

“But, father, think how many there are!”

“The more reason that they should be dealt with.”

“And think, too, of their sufferings should they be driven forth.”

“Their cure lies in their own hands.”

“That is true. And yet my heart softens for them.”

Pere la Chaise and the bishop shook their heads. Nature had made them both kind and charitable men, but the heart turns to flint when the blessing of religion is changed to the curse of sect.

“You would befriend God’s enemies then?”

“No, no; not if they are indeed so.”

“Can you doubt it? Is it possible that your heart still turns towards the heresy of your youth?”

“No, father; but it is not in nature to forget that my father and my grandfather—”

“Nay, they have answered for their own sins. Is it possible that the Church has been mistaken in you? Do you then refuse the first favour which she asks of you? You would accept her aid, and yet you would give none in return.”

Madame de Maintenon rose with the air of one who has made her resolution. “You are wiser than I,” said she, “and to you have been committed the interests of the Church. I will do what you advise.”

“You promise it?”

“I do.”

Her two visitors threw up their hands together. “It is a blessed day,” they cried, “and generations yet unborn will learn to deem it so.”

She sat half stunned by the prospect which was opening out in front of her. Ambitious she had, as the Jesuit had surmised, always been — ambitious for the power which would enable her to leave the world better than she found it. And this ambition she had already to some extent been able to satisfy, for more than once she had swayed both king and kingdom. But to marry the king — to marry the man for whom she would gladly lay down her life, whom in the depths of her heart she loved in as pure and as noble a fashion as woman ever yet loved man — that was indeed a thing above her utmost hopes. She knew her own mind, and she knew his. Once his wife, she could hold him to good, and keep every evil influence away from him. She was sure of it. She should be no weak Maria Theresa, but rather, as the priest had said, a new Jeanne d’Arc, come to lead France and France’s king into better ways. And if, to gain this aim, she had to harden her heart against the Huguenots, at least the fault, if there were one, lay with those who made this condition rather than with herself. The king’s wife! The heart of the woman and the soul of the enthusiast both leaped at the thought.

But close at the heels of her joy there came a sudden revulsion to doubt and despondency. Was not all this fine prospect a mere day-dream? and how could these men be so sure that they held the king in the hollow of their hand? The Jesuit read the fears which dulled the sparkle of her eyes, and answered her thoughts before she had time to put them into words.

“The Church redeems its pledges swiftly,” said he. “And you, my daughter, you must be as prompt when your own turn comes.”

“I have promised, father.”

“Then it is for us to perform. You will remain in your room all evening.”

“Yes, father.”

“The king already hesitates. I spoke with him this morning, and his mind was full of blackness and despair. His better self turns in disgust from his sins, and it is now when the first hot fit of repentance is just coming upon him that he may best be moulded to our ends. I have to see and speak with him once more, and I go from your room to his. And when I have spoken, he will come from his room to yours, or I have studied his heart for twenty years in vain. We leave you now, and you will not see us, but you will see the effects of what we do, and you will remember your pledge to us.” They bowed low to her both together, and left her to her thoughts.

An hour passed, and then a second one, as she sat in her fauteuil, her tapestry before her, but her hands listless upon her lap, waiting for her fate. Her life’s future was now being settled for her, and she was powerless to turn it in one way or the other. Daylight turned to the pearly light of evening, and that again to dusk, but she still sat waiting in the shadow. Sometimes as a step passed in the corridor she would glance expectantly towards the door, and the light of welcome would spring up in her gray eyes, only to die away again into disappointment. At last, however, there came a quick sharp tread, crisp and authoritative, which brought her to her feet with flushed cheeks and her heart beating wildly. The door opened, and she saw outlined against the gray light of the outer passage the erect and graceful figure of the king.

“Sire! One instant, and mademoiselle will light the lamp.”

“Do not call her.” He entered and closed the door behind him. “Francoise, the dusk is welcome to me, because it screens me from the reproaches which must lie in your glance, even if your tongue be too kindly to speak them.”

“Reproaches, sire! God forbid that I should utter them!”

“When I last left you, Francoise, it was with a good resolution in my mind. I tried to carry it out, and I failed — I failed. I remember that you warned me. Fool that I was not to follow your advice!”

“We are all weak and mortal, sire. Who has not fallen? Nay, sire, it goes to my heart to see you thus.”

He was standing by the fireplace, his face buried in his hands, and she could tell by the catch of his breath that he was weeping. All the pity of her woman’s nature went out to that silent and repenting figure dimly seen in the failing light. She put out her hand with a gesture of sympathy, and it rested for an instant upon his velvet sleeve. The next he had clasped it between his own, and she made no effort to release it.

“I cannot do without you, Francoise,” he cried. “I am the loneliest man in all this world, like one who lives on a great mountain-peak, with none to bear him company. Who have I for a friend? Whom can I rely upon? Some are for the Church; some are for their families; most are for themselves. But who of them all is single-minded? You are my better self, Francoise; you are my guardian angel. What the good father says is true, and the nearer I am to you the further am I from all that is evil. Tell me, Francoise, do you love me?”

“I have loved you for years, sire.” Her voice was low but clear — the voice of a woman to whom coquetry was abhorrent.

“I had hoped it, Francoise, and yet it thrills me to hear you say it. I know that wealth and title have no attraction for you, and that your heart turns rather towards the convent than the palace. Yet I ask you to remain in the palace, and to reign there. Will you be my wife, Francoise?”

And so the moment had in very truth come. She paused for an instant, only an instant, before taking this last great step; but even that was too long for the patience of the king.

“Will you not, Francoise?” he cried, with a ring of fear in his voice.

“May God make me worthy of such an honour, sire!” said she. “And here I swear that if heaven double my life, every hour shall be spent in the one endeavour to make you a happier man!”

She had knelt down, and the king, still holding her hand, knelt down beside her.

“And I swear too,” he cried, “that if my days also are doubled, you will now and forever be the one and only woman for me.”

And so their double oath was taken, an oath which was to be tested in the future, for each did live almost double their years, and yet neither broke the promise made hand in hand on that evening in the shadow-girt chamber.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING RECEIVES.

It may have been that Mademoiselle Nanon, the faithful confidante of Madame de Maintenon, had learned something of this interview, or it may be that Pere la Chaise, with the shrewdness for which his Order is famous, had come to the conclusion that publicity was the best means of holding the king to his present intention; but whatever the source, it was known all over the court next day that the old favourite was again in disgrace, and that there was talk of a marriage between the king and the governess of his children. It was whispered at the petit lever, confirmed at the grand entree, and was common gossip by the time that the king had returned from chapel. Back into wardrobe and drawer went the flaring silks and the feathered hats, and out once more came the sombre coat and the matronly dress. Scudery and Calpernedi gave place to the missal and St. Thomas a Kempis, while Bourdaloue, after preaching for a week to empty benches, found his chapel packed to the last seat with weary gentlemen and taper-bearing ladies. By midday there was none in the court who had not heard the tidings, save only Madame de Montespan, who, alarmed by her lover’s absence, had remained in haughty seclusion in her room, and knew nothing of what had passed. Many there were who would have loved to carry her the tidings; but the king’s changes had been frequent of late, and who would dare to make a mortal enemy of one who might, ere many weeks were past, have the lives and fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand?

Louis, in his innate selfishness, had been so accustomed to regard every event entirely from the side of how it would affect himself, that it had never struck him that his long-suffering family, who had always yielded to him the absolute obedience which he claimed as his right, would venture to offer any opposition to his new resolution. He was surprised, therefore, when his brother demanded a private interview that afternoon, and entered his presence without the complaisant smile and humble air with which he was wont to appear before him.

Monsieur was a curious travesty of his elder brother. He was shorter, but he wore enormously high boot-heels, which brought him to a fair stature. In figure he had none of that grace which marked the king, nor had he the elegant hand and foot which had been the delight of sculptors. He was fat, waddled somewhat in his walk, and wore an enormous black wig, which rolled down in rows and rows of curls over his shoulders. His face was longer and darker than the king's, and his nose more prominent, though he shared with his brother the large brown eyes which each had inherited from Anne of Austria. He had none of the simple and yet stately taste which marked the dress of the monarch, but his clothes were all tagged over with fluttering ribbons, which rustled behind him as he walked, and clustered so thickly over his feet as to conceal them from view. Crosses, stars, jewels, and insignia were scattered broadcast over his person, and the broad blue ribbon of the Order of the Holy Ghost was slashed across his coat, and was gathered at the end into a great bow, which formed the incongruous support of a diamond-hilted sword. Such was the figure which rolled towards the king, bearing in his right hand his many-feathered beaver, and appearing in his person, as he was in his mind, an absurd burlesque of the monarch.

"Why, monsieur, you seem less gay than usual to-day," said the king, with a smile. "Your dress, indeed, is bright, but your brow is clouded. I trust that all is well with Madame and with the Duc de Chartres?"

"Yes, sire, they are well; but they are sad like myself, and from the same cause."

"Indeed! and why?"

"Have I ever failed in my duty as your younger brother, sire?"

"Never, Philippe, never!" said the king, laying his hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder. "You have set an excellent example to my subjects."

"Then why set a slight upon me?"

"Philippe!"

"Yes, sire, I say it is a slight. We are of royal blood, and our wives are of royal blood also. You married the Princess of Spain; I married the Princess of Bavaria. It was a condescension, but still I did it. My first wife was the Princess of England. How can we admit into a house which has formed such alliances as these a woman who is the widow of a hunchback singer, a mere lampooner, a man whose name is a byword through Europe?"

The king had stared in amazement at his brother, but his anger now overcame his astonishment.

"Upon my word!" he cried; "upon my word! I have said just now that you have been an excellent brother, but I fear that I spoke a little prematurely. And so you take upon yourself to object to the lady whom I select as my wife!"

"I do, sire."

"And by what right?"

"By the right of the family honour, sire, which is as much mine as yours."

"Man," cried the king furiously, "have you not yet learned that within this kingdom I am the fountain of honour, and that whomsoever I may honour becomes by that very fact honourable? Were I to take a cinder-wench out of the Rue Poissonniere, I could at my will raise her up until the highest in France would be proud to bow down before her. Do you not know this?"

"No, I do not," cried his brother, with all the obstinacy of a weak man who has at last been driven to bay. "I look upon it as a slight upon me and a slight upon my wife."

"Your wife! I have every respect for Charlotte Elizabeth of Bavaria, but how is she superior to one whose grandfather was the dear friend and comrade in arms of Henry the Great? Enough! I will not condescend to argue such a matter with you! Begone, and do not return to my presence until you have learned not to interfere in my affairs."

"For all that, my wife shall not know her!" snarled monsieur; and then, as his brother took a fiery step or two towards him, he turned and scuttled out of the room as fast as his awkward gait and high heels would allow him.

But the king was to have no quiet that day. If Madame de Maintenon's friends had rallied to her yesterday, her enemies were active to-day. Monsieur had hardly disappeared before there rushed into the room a youth who bore upon his rich attire every sign of having just arrived from a dusty journey. He was pale-faced and auburn-haired, with features which would have been strikingly like the king's if it were not that his nose had been disfigured in his youth. The king's face had lighted up at the sight of him, but it darkened again as he hurried forward and threw himself down at his feet.

"Oh, sire," he cried, "spare us this grief — spare us this humiliation! I implore you to pause before you do what will bring dishonour upon yourself and upon us!"

The king started back from him, and paced angrily up and down the room.

"This is intolerable!" he cried. "It was bad from my brother, but worse from my son. You are in a conspiracy with him, Louis. Monsieur has told you to act this part."

The dauphin rose to his feet and looked steadfastly at his angry father.

"I have not seen my uncle," he said. "I was at Meudon when I heard this news — this dreadful news — and I sprang upon my horse, sire, and galloped over to implore you to think again before you drag our royal house so low."

"You are insolent, Louis."

"I do not mean to be so, sire. But consider, sire, that my mother was a queen, and that it would be strange indeed if for a step-mother I had a—"

The king raised his hand with a gesture of authority which checked the word upon his lips.

"Silence!" he cried, "or you may say that which would for ever set a gulf between us. Am I to be treated worse than my humblest subject, who is allowed to follow his own bent in his private affairs?"

"This is not your own private affair, sire; all that you do reflects upon your family. The great deeds of your reign have given a new glory to the name of Bourbon. Oh, do not mar it now, sire! I implore it of you upon my bended knees!"

"You talk like a fool!" cried his father roughly. "I propose to marry a virtuous and charming lady of one of the oldest noble families of France, and you talk as if I were doing something degrading and unheard of. What is your objection to this lady?"

"That she is the daughter of a man whose vices were well known, that her brother is of the worst repute, that she has led the life of an adventuress, is the widow of a deformed scribbler, and that she occupies a menial position in the palace."

The king had stamped with his foot upon the carpet more than once during this frank address, but his anger blazed into a fury at its conclusion.

"Do you dare," he cried, with flashing eyes, "to call the charge of my children a menial position? I say that there is no higher in the kingdom. Go back to Meudon, sir, this instant, and never dare to open your mouth again on the subject. Away, I say! When, in God's good time, you are king of this country, you may claim your own way, but until then do not venture to cross the plans of one who is both your parent and your monarch.”

The young man bowed low, and walked with dignity from the chamber; but he turned with his hand upon the door.

“The Abbe Fenelon came with me, sire. Is it your pleasure to see him?”

“Away! away!” cried the king furiously, still striding up and down the room with angry face and flashing eyes. The dauphin left the cabinet, and was instantly succeeded by a tall thin priest, some forty years of age, strikingly handsome, with a pale refined face, large well-marked features, and the easy deferential bearing of one who has had a long training in courts. The king turned sharply upon him, and looked hard at him with a distrustful eye.

“Good-day, Abbe Fenelon,” said he. “May I ask what the object of this interview is?”

“You have had the condescension, sire, on more than one occasion, to ask my humble advice, and even to express yourself afterwards as being pleased that you had acted upon it.”

“Well? Well? Well?” growled the monarch.

“If rumour says truly, sire, you are now at a crisis when a word of impartial counsel might be of value to you. Need I say that it would—”

“Tut! tut! Why all these words?” cried the king. “You have been sent here by others to try and influence me against Madame de Maintenon.”

“Sire, I have had nothing but kindness from that lady. I esteem and honour her more than any lady in France.”

“In that case, abbe, you will, I am sure, be glad to hear that I am about to marry her. Good-day, abbe. I regret that I have not longer time to devote to this very interesting conversation.”

“But, sire—”

“When my mind is in doubt, abbe, I value your advice very highly. On this occasion my mind is happily not in doubt. I have the honour to wish you a very good-day.”

The king’s first hot anger had died away by now, and had left behind it a cold, bitter spirit which was even more formidable to his antagonists. The abbe, glib of tongue and fertile of resource as he was, felt himself to be silenced and overmatched. He walked backwards, with three long bows, as was the custom of the court, and departed.

But the king had little breathing space. His assailants knew that with persistence they had bent his will before, and they trusted that they might do so again. It was Louvois, the minister, now who entered the room, with his majestic port, his lofty bearing, his huge wig, and his aristocratic face, which, however, showed some signs of trepidation as it met the baleful eye of the king.

“Well, Louvois, what now?” he asked impatiently. “Has some new state matter arisen?”

“There is but one new state matter which has arisen, sire, but it is of such importance as to banish all others from our mind.”

“What then?”

“Your marriage, sire.”

“You disapprove of it?”

“Oh, sire, can I help it?”

“Out of my room, sir! Am I to be tormented to death by your importunities? What! You dare to linger when I order you to go!” The king advanced angrily upon the minister, but Louvois suddenly flashed out his rapier. Louis sprang back with alarm and amazement upon his face, but it was the hilt and not the point which was presented to him.

“Pass it through my heart, sire!” the minister cried, falling upon his knees, his whole great frame in a quiver with emotion. “I will not live to see your glory fade!”

“Great heaven!” shrieked Louis, throwing the sword down upon the ground, and raising his hands to his temples, “I believe that this is a conspiracy to drive me mad. Was ever a man so tormented in his life? This will be a private marriage, man, and it will not affect the state in the least degree. Do you hear me? Have you understood me? What more do you want?”

Louvois gathered himself up, and shot his rapier back into its sheath.

“Your Majesty is determined?” he asked.

“Absolutely.”

“Then I say no more. I have done my duty.” He bowed his head as one in deep dejection when he departed, but in truth his heart was lightened within him, for he had the king’s assurance that the woman whom he hated would, even though his wife, not sit on the throne of the Queens of France.

These repeated attacks, if they had not shaken the king’s resolution, had at least irritated and exasperated him to the utmost. Such a blast of opposition was a new thing to a man whose will had been the one law of the land. It left him ruffled and disturbed, and without regretting his resolution, he still, with unreasoning petulance, felt inclined to visit the inconvenience to which he had been put upon those whose advice he had followed. He wore accordingly no very cordial face when the usher in attendance admitted the venerable figure of Father la Chaise, his confessor.

“I wish you all happiness, sire,” said the Jesuit, “and I congratulate you from my heart that you have taken the great step which must lead to content both in this world and the next.”

“I have had neither happiness nor contentment yet, father,” answered the king peevishly. “I have never been so pestered in my life. The whole court has been on its knees to me to entreat me to change my intention.”

The Jesuit looked at him anxiously out of his keen gray eyes.

“Fortunately, your Majesty is a man of strong will,” said he, “and not to be so easily swayed as they think.”

“No, no, I did not give an inch. But still, it must be confessed that it is very unpleasant to have so many against one. I think that most men would have been shaken.”

“Now is the time to stand firm, sire; Satan rages to see you passing out of his power, and he stirs up all his friends and sends all his emissaries to endeavour to detain you.”

But the king was not in a humour to be easily consoled.

“Upon my word, father,” said he, “you do not seem to have much respect for my family. My brother and my son, with the Abbe Fenelon and the Minister of War, are the emissaries to whom you allude.”

“Then there is the more credit to your Majesty for having resisted them. You have done nobly, sire. You have earned the praise and blessing of Holy Church.”

“I trust that what I have done is right, father,” said the king gravely.

“I should be glad to see you again later in the evening, but at present I desire a little leisure for solitary thought.”

Father la Chaise left the cabinet with a deep distrust of the king’s intentions. It was obvious that the powerful appeals which had been made to him had shaken if they had failed to alter his resolution. What would be the result if more were made? And more would be made; that was as certain as that darkness follows light. Some master-card must be played now which would bring the matter to a crisis at once, for every day of delay was in favour of their opponents. To hesitate was to lose. All must be staked upon one final throw.

The Bishop of Meaux was waiting in the ante-room, and Father la Chaise in a few brief words let him see the danger of the situation and the means by which they should meet it. Together they sought Madame de Maintenon in her room. She had discarded the sombre widow's dress which she had chosen since her first coming to court, and wore now, as more in keeping with her lofty prospects, a rich yet simple costume of white satin with bows of silver serge. A single diamond sparkled in the thick coils of her dark tresses. The change had taken years from a face and figure which had always looked much younger than her age, and as the two plotters looked upon her perfect complexion, her regular features, so calm and yet so full of refinement, and the exquisite grace of her figure and bearing, they could not but feel that if they failed in their ends, it was not for want of having a perfect tool at their command.

She had risen at their entrance, and her expression showed that she had read upon their faces something of the anxiety which filled their minds.

"You have evil news!" she cried.

"No, no, my daughter." It was the bishop who spoke. "But we must be on our guard against our enemies, who would turn the king away from you if they could."

Her face shone at the mention of her lover.

"Ah, you do not know!" she cried. "He has made a vow. I would trust him as I would trust myself. I know that he will be true."

But the Jesuit's intellect was arrayed against the intuition of the woman.

"Our opponents are many and strong," said he shaking his head. "Even if the king remain firm, he will be annoyed at every turn, so that he will feel his life is darker instead of lighter, save, of course, madame, for that brightness which you cannot fail to bring with you. We must bring the matter to an end."

"And how, father?"

"The marriage must be at once!"

"At once!"

"Yes. This very night, if possible."

"Oh, father, you ask too much. The king would never consent to such a proposal."

"It is he that will propose it."

“And why?”

“Because we shall force him to. It is only thus that all the opposition can be stopped. When it is done, the court will accept it. Until it is done, they will resist it.”

“What would you have me do, then, father?”

“Resign the king.”

“Resign him!” She turned as pale as a lily, and looked at him in bewilderment.

“It is the best course, madame.”

“Ah, father, I might have done it last month, last week, even yesterday morning. But now — oh, it would break my heart!”

“Fear not, madame. We advise you for the best. Go to the king now, at once. Say to him that you have heard that he has been subjected to much annoyance upon your account, that you cannot bear to think that you should be a cause of dissension in his own family, and therefore you will release him from his promise, and will withdraw yourself from the court forever.”

“Go now? At once?”

“Yes, without loss of an instant.”

She cast a light mantle about her shoulders.

“I follow your advice,” she said. “I believe that you are wiser than I.

But, oh, if he should take me at my word!”

“He will not take you at your word.”

“It is a terrible risk.”

“But such an end as this cannot be gained without risks. Go, my child, and may heaven’s blessing go with you!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING HAS IDEAS.

The king had remained alone in his cabinet, wrapped in somewhat gloomy thoughts, and pondering over the means by which he might carry out his purpose and yet smooth away the opposition which seemed to be so strenuous and so universal. Suddenly there came a gentle tap at the door, and there was the woman who was in his thoughts, standing in the twilight before him. He sprang to his feet and held out his hands with a smile which would have reassured her had she doubted his constancy.

“Francoise! You here! Then I have at last a welcome visitor, and it is the first one to-day.”

“Sire, I fear that you have been troubled.”

“I have indeed, Francoise.”

“But I have a remedy for it.”

“And what is that?”

“I shall leave the court, sire, and you shall think no more of what has passed between us. I have brought discord where I meant to bring peace. Let me retire to St. Cyr, or to the Abbey of Fontevrault, and you will no longer be called upon to make such sacrifices for my sake.”

The king turned deathly pale, and clutched at her shawl with a trembling hand, as though he feared that she was about to put her resolution into effect that very instant. For years his mind had accustomed itself to lean upon hers. He had turned to her whenever he needed support, and even when, as in the last week, he had broken away from her for a time, it was still all-important to him to know that she was there, the faithful friend, ever forgiving, ever soothing, waiting for him with her ready counsel and sympathy. But that she should leave him now, leave him altogether, such a thought had never occurred to him, and it struck him with a chill of surprised alarm.

“You cannot mean it, Francoise,” he cried, in a trembling voice.

“No, no, it is impossible that you are in earnest.”

“It would break my heart to leave you, sire, but it breaks it also to think that for my sake you are estranged from your own family and ministers.”

“Tut! Am I not the king? Shall I not take my own course without heed to them? No, no, Francoise, you must not leave me! You must stay with me and be my wife.” He could hardly speak for agitation, and he still grasped at her dress to detain her. She had been precious to him before, but was far more so now that there seemed to be a possibility of his losing her. She felt the strength of her position, and used it to the utmost.

“Some time must elapse before our wedding, sire. Yet during all that interval you will be exposed to these annoyances. How can I be happy when I feel that I have brought upon you so long a period of discomfort?”

“And why should it be so long, Francoise?”

“A day would be too long, sire, for you to be unhappy through my fault. It is a misery to me to think of it. Believe me, it would be better that I should leave you.”

“Never! You shall not! Why should we even wait a day, Francoise? I am ready. You are ready. Why should we not be married now?”

“At once! Oh, sire!”

“We shall. It is my wish. It is my order. That is my answer to those who would drive me. They shall know nothing of it until it is done, and then let us see which of them will dare to treat my wife with anything but respect. Let it be done secretly, Francoise. I will send in a trusty messenger this very night for the Archbishop of Paris, and I swear that, if all France stand in the way, he shall make us man and wife before he departs.”

“Is it your will, sire?”

“It is; and ah, I can see by your eyes that it is yours also! We shall not lose a moment, Francoise. What a blessed thought of mine, which will silence their tongues forever! When it is ready they may know, but not before. To your room, then, dearest of friends and truest of women! When we meet again, it will be to form a bond which all this court and all this kingdom shall not be able to loose.”

The king was all on fire with the excitement of this new resolution. He had lost his air of doubt and discontent, and he paced swiftly about the room with a smiling face and shining eyes. Then he touched a small gold bell, which summoned Bontems, his private body-servant.

“What o’clock is it, Bontems?”

“It is nearly six, sire.”

“Hum!” The king considered for some moments. “Do you know where Captain de Catinat is, Bontems?”

“He was in the grounds, sire, but I heard that he would ride back to Paris to-night.”

“Does he ride alone?”

“He has one friend with him.”

“Who is this friend? An officer of the guards?”

“No, sire; it is a stranger from over the seas, from America, as I understand, who has stayed with him of late, and to whom Monsieur de Catinat has been showing the wonders of your Majesty’s palace.”

“A stranger! So much the better. Go, Bontems, and bring them both to me.”

“I trust that they have not started, sire. I will see.” He hurried off, and was back in ten minutes in the cabinet once more.

“Well?”

“I have been fortunate, sire. Their horses had been led out and their feet were in the stirrups when I reached them.”

“Where are they, then?”

“They await your Majesty’s orders in the ante-room.”

“Show them in, Bontems, and give admission to none, not even to the minister, until they have left me.”

To De Catinat an audience with the monarch was a common incident of his duties, but it was with profound astonishment that he learned from Bontems that his friend and companion was included in the order. He was eagerly endeavouring to whisper into the young American’s ear some precepts and warnings as to what to do and what to avoid, when Bontems reappeared and ushered them into the presence.

It was with a feeling of curiosity, not unmixed with awe, that Amos Green, to whom Governor Dongan, of New York, had been the highest embodiment of human power, entered the private chamber of the greatest monarch in Christendom. The magnificence of the ante-chamber in which he had waited, the velvets, the paintings, the gildings, with the throng of gaily dressed officials and of magnificent guardsmen, had all impressed his imagination, and had prepared him for some wondrous figure robed and crowned, a fit centre for such a scene. As his eyes fell upon a quietly dressed, bright-eyed man, half a head shorter than himself, with a trim dapper figure, and an erect carriage, he could not help glancing round the room to see if this were indeed the monarch, or if it were some other of those endless officials who interposed themselves between him and the other world. The reverent salute of his companion, however, showed him that this must indeed be the king, so he bowed and then drew himself erect with the simple dignity of a man who has been trained in Nature's school.

"Good-evening, Captain de Catinat," said the king, with a pleasant smile. "Your friend, as I understand, is a stranger to this country. I trust, sir, that you have found something here to interest and to amuse you?"

"Yes, your Majesty. I have seen your great city, and it is a wonderful one. And my friend has shown me this palace, with its woods and its grounds. When I go back to my own country I will have much to say of what I have seen in your beautiful land."

"You speak French, and yet you are not a Canadian."

"No, sire; I am from the English provinces."

The king looked with interest at the powerful figure, the bold features, and the free bearing of the young foreigner, and his mind flashed back to the dangers which the Comte de Frontenac had foretold from these same colonies. If this were indeed a type of his race, they must in truth be a people whom it would be better to have as friends than as enemies. His mind, however, ran at present on other things than statecraft, and he hastened to give De Catinat his orders for the night.

"You will ride into Paris on my service. Your friend can go with you. Two are safer than one when they bear a message of state. I wish you, however, to wait until nightfall before you start."

"Yes, sire."

"Let none know your errand, and see that none follow you. You know the house of Archbishop Harlay, prelate of Paris?"

"Yes, sire."

"You will bid him drive out hither and be at the north-west side postern by midnight. Let nothing hold him back. Storm or fine, he must he here to-night. It is of the first importance."

"He shall have your order, sire."

"Very good. Adieu, captain. Adieu, monsieur. I trust that your stay in France may be a pleasant one." He waved his hand, smiling with the fascinating grace which had won so many hearts, and so dismissed the two friends to their new mission.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST CARD.

Madame de Montespan still kept to her rooms, uneasy in mind at the king’s disappearance, but unwilling to show her anxiety to the court by appearing among them or by making any inquiry as to what had occurred. While she thus remained in ignorance of the sudden and complete collapse of her fortunes, she had one active and energetic agent who had lost no incident of what had occurred, and who watched her interests with as much zeal as if they were his own. And indeed they were his own; for her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, had gained everything for which he yearned, money, lands, and preferment, through his sister’s notoriety, and he well knew that the fall of her fortunes must be very rapidly followed by that of his own. By nature bold, unscrupulous, and resourceful, he was not a man to lose the game without playing it out to the very end with all the energy and cunning of which he was capable. Keenly alert to all that passed, he had, from the time that he first heard the rumour of the king’s intention, haunted the antechamber and drawn his own conclusions from what he had seen. Nothing had escaped him — the disconsolate faces of monsieur and of the dauphin, the visit of Pere la Chaise and Bossuet to the lady’s room, her return, the triumph which shone in her eyes as she came away from the interview. He had seen Bontems hurry off and summon the guardsman and his friend. He had heard them order their horses to be brought out in a couple of hours’ time, and finally, from a spy whom he employed among the servants, he learned that an unwonted bustle was going forward in Madame de Maintenon’s room, that Mademoiselle Nanon was half wild with excitement, and that two court milliners had been hastily summoned to madame’s apartment. It was only, however, when he heard from the same servant that a chamber was to be prepared for the reception that night of the Archbishop of Paris that he understood how urgent was the danger.

Madame de Montespan had spent the evening stretched upon a sofa, in the worst possible humour with everyone around her. She had read, but had tossed aside the book. She had written, but had torn up the paper. A thousand fears and suspicions chased each other through her head. What had become of the king, then? He had seemed cold yesterday, and his eyes had been for ever sliding round to the clock. And to-day he had not come at all. Was it his gout, perhaps? Or was it possible that she was again losing her hold upon him? Surely it could not be that! She turned upon her couch and faced the mirror which flanked the door. The candles had just been lit in her chamber, two score of them, each with silver backs which reflected their light until the room was as bright as day. There in the mirror was the brilliant chamber, the deep red ottoman, and the single figure in its gauzy dress of white and silver. She leaned upon her elbow, admiring the deep tint of her own eyes with their long dark lashes, the white curve of her throat, and the perfect oval of her face. She examined it all carefully, keenly, as though it were her rival that lay before her, but nowhere could she see a scratch of Time's malicious nails. She still had her beauty, then. And if it had once won the king, why should it not suffice to hold him? Of course it would do so. She reproached herself for her fears. Doubtless he was indisposed, or perhaps he would come still. Ha! there was the sound of an opening door and of a quick step in her ante-room. Was it he, or at least his messenger with a note from him?

But no, it was her brother, with the haggard eyes and drawn face of a man who is weighed down with his own evil tidings. He turned as he entered, fastened the door, and then striding across the room, locked the other one which led to her boudoir.

"We are safe from interruption," he panted. "I have hastened here, for every second may be invaluable. Have you heard anything from the king?"

"Nothing." She had sprung to her feet, and was gazing at him with a face which was as pale as his own.

"The hour has come for action, Francoise. It is the hour at which the Mortemarts have always shown at their best. Do not yield to the blow, then, but gather yourself to meet it."

"What is it?" She tried to speak in her natural tone, but only a whisper came to her dry lips.

"The king is about to marry Madame de Maintenon."

"The gouvernante! The widow Scarron! It is impossible!"

"It is certain."

"To marry? Did you say to marry?"

"Yes, he will marry her."

The woman flung out her hands in a gesture of contempt, and laughed loud and bitterly.

"You are easily frightened, brother," said she. "Ah, you do not know your little sister. Perchance if you were not my brother you might rate my powers more highly. Give me a day, only one little day, and you will see Louis, the proud Louis, down at the hem of my dress to ask my pardon for this slight. I tell you that he cannot break the bonds that hold him. One day is all I ask to bring him back."

"But you cannot have it."

"What?"

"The marriage is to-night."

"You are mad, Charles."

"I am certain of it." In a few broken sentences he shot out all that he had seen and heard. She listened with a grim face, and hands which closed ever tighter and tighter as he proceeded. But he had said the truth about the Mortemarts. They came of a contentious blood, and were ever at their best at a moment of action. Hate rather than dismay filled her heart as she listened, and the whole energy of her nature gathered and quickened to meet the crisis.

"I shall go and see him," she cried, sweeping towards the door.

"No, no, Francoise. Believe me, you will ruin everything if you do.

Strict orders have been given to the guard to admit no one to the king."

"But I shall insist upon passing them."

"Believe me, sister, it is worse than useless. I have spoken with the officer of the guard, and the command is a stringent one."

"Ah, I shall manage."

"No, you shall not." He put his back against the door. "I know that it is useless, and I will not have my sister make herself the laughing-stock of the court, trying to force her way into the room of a man who repulses her."

His sister's cheeks flushed at the words, and she paused irresolute.

"Had I only a day, Charles, I am sure that I could bring him back to me. There has been some other influence here, that meddlesome Jesuit or the pompous Bossuet, perhaps. Only one day to counteract their wiles! Can I not see them waving hell-fire before his foolish eyes, as one swings a torch before a bull to turn it? Oh, if I could but baulk them to-night! That woman! that cursed woman! The foul viper which I nursed in my bosom! Oh, I had rather see Louis in his grave than married to her! Charles, Charles, it must be stopped; I say it must be stopped! I will give anything, everything, to prevent it!"

"What will you give, my sister?"

She looked at him aghast. "What! you do not wish me to buy you?" she said.

"No; but I wish to buy others."

"Ha! You see a chance, then?"

"One, and one only. But time presses. I want money."

"How much?"

"I cannot have too much. All that you can spare."

With hands which trembled with eagerness she unlocked a secret cupboard in the wall in which she concealed her valuables. A blaze of jewellery met her brother's eyes as he peered over her shoulder. Great rubies, costly emeralds, deep ruddy beryls, glimmering diamonds, were scattered there in one brilliant shimmering many-coloured heap, the harvest which she had reaped from the king's generosity during more than fifteen years. At one side were three drawers, the one over the other. She drew out the lowest one. It was full to the brim of glittering louis d'ors.

"Take what you will!" she said. "And now your plan! Quick!"

He stuffed the money in handfuls into the side pockets of his coat. Coins slipped between his fingers and tinkled and wheeled over the floor, but neither cast a glance at them.

"Your plan?" she repeated.

"We must prevent the Archbishop from arriving here. Then the marriage would be postponed until to-morrow night, and you would have time to act."

"But how prevent it?"

"There are a dozen good rapiers about the court which are to be bought for less than I carry in one pocket. There is De la Touche, young Turberville, old Major Despard, Raymond de Carnac, and the four Latours. I will gather them together, and wait on the road."

"And waylay the archbishop?"

"No; the messengers."

"Oh, excellent! You are a prince of brothers! If no message reaches Paris, we are saved. Go; go; do not lose a moment, my dear Charles."

"It is very well, Francoise; but what are we to do with them when we get them? We may lose our heads over the matter, it seems to me. After all, they are the king's messengers, and we can scarce pass our swords through them."

"No?"

"There would be no forgiveness for that."

"But consider that before the matter is looked into I shall have regained my influence with the king."

"All very fine, my little sister, but how long is your influence to last? A pleasant life for us if at every change of favour we have to fly the country! No, no, Francoise; the most that we can do is to detain the messengers."

"Where can you detain them?"

"I have an idea. There is the castle of the Marquis de Montespan at

Portillac."

"Of my husband!"

"Precisely."

"Of my most bitter enemy! Oh, Charles, you are not serious."

"On the contrary, I was never more so. The marquis was away in Paris yesterday, and has not yet returned. Where is the ring with his arms?"

She hunted among her jewels and picked out a gold ring with a broad engraved face.

"This will be our key. When good Marceau, the steward, sees it, every dungeon in the castle will be at our disposal. It is that or nothing. There is no other place where we can hold them safe."

"But when my husband returns?"

"Ah, he may be a little puzzled as to his captives. And the complaisant Marceau may have an evil quarter of an hour. But that may not be for a week, and by that time, my little sister, I have confidence enough in you to think that you really may have finished the campaign. Not another word, for every moment is of value. Adieu, Francoise! We shall not be conquered without a struggle. I will send a message to you to-night to let you know how fortune uses us." He took her fondly in his arms, kissed her, and then hurried from the room.

For hours after his departure she paced up and down with noiseless steps upon the deep soft carpet, her hand still clenched, her eyes flaming, her whole soul wrapped and consumed with jealousy and hatred of her rival. Ten struck, and eleven, and midnight, but still she waited, fierce and eager, straining her ears for every foot-fall which might be the herald of news. At last it came. She heard the quick step in the passage, the tap at the ante-room door, and the whispering of her black page. Quivering with impatience, she rushed in and took the note herself from the dusty cavalier who had brought it. It was but six words scrawled roughly upon a wisp of dirty paper, but it brought the colour back to her cheeks and the smile to her lips. It was her brother’s writing, and it ran: “The archbishop will not come to-night.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE MIDNIGHT MISSION.

De Catinat in the meanwhile was perfectly aware of the importance of the mission which had been assigned to him. The secrecy which had been enjoined by the king, his evident excitement, and the nature of his orders, all confirmed the rumours which were already beginning to buzz round the court. He knew enough of the intrigues and antagonisms with which the court was full to understand that every precaution was necessary in carrying out his instructions. He waited, therefore, until night had fallen before ordering his soldier-servant to bring round the two horses to one of the less public gates of the grounds. As he and his friend walked together to the spot, he gave the young American a rapid sketch of the situation at the court, and of the chance that this nocturnal ride might be an event which would affect the future history of France.

"I like your king," said Amos Green, "and I am glad to ride in his service. He is a slip of a man to be the head of a great nation, but he has the eye of a chief. If one met him alone in a Maine forest, one would know him as a man who was different to his fellows. Well, I am glad that he is going to marry again, though it's a great house for any woman to have to look after."

De Catinat smiled at his comrade's idea of a queen's duties.

"Are you armed?" he asked. "You have no sword or pistols?"

"No; if I may not carry my gun, I had rather not be troubled by tools that I have never learned to use. I have my knife. But why do you ask?"

"Because there may be danger."

"And how?"

"Many have an interest in stopping this marriage. All the first men of the kingdom are bitterly against it. If they could stop us, they would stop it, for to-night at least."

"But I thought it was a secret?"

"There is no such thing at a court. There is the dauphin, or the king's brother, either of them, or any of their friends, would be right glad that we should be in the Seine before we reach the archbishop’s house this night. But who is this?”

A burly figure had loomed up through the gloom on the path upon which they were going. As it approached, a coloured lamp dangling from one of the trees shone upon the blue and silver of an officer of the guards. It was Major de Brissac, of De Catinat’s own regiment.

“Hullo! Whither away?” he asked.

“To Paris, major.”

“I go there myself within an hour. Will you not wait, that we may go together?”

“I am sorry, but I ride on a matter of urgency. I must not lose a minute.”

“Very good. Good-night, and a pleasant ride.”

“Is he a trusty man, our friend the major?” asked Amos Green, glancing back.

“True as steel.”

“Then I would have a word with him.” The American hurried back along the way they had come, while De Catinat stood chafing at this unnecessary delay. It was a full five minutes before his companion joined him, and the fiery blood of the French soldier was hot with impatience and anger.

“I think that perhaps you had best ride into Paris at your leisure, my friend,” said he. “If I go upon the king’s service I cannot be delayed whenever the whim takes you.”

“I am sorry,” answered the other quietly. “I had something to say to your major, and I thought that maybe I might not see him again.”

“Well, here are the horses,” said the guardsman as he pushed open the postern-gate. “Have you fed an watered them, Jacques?”

“Yes, my captain,” answered the man who stood at their head.

“Boot and saddle, then, friend Green, and we shall not draw rein again until we see the lights of Paris in front of us.”

The soldier-groom peered through the darkness after them with a sardonic smile upon his face. “You won’t draw rein, won’t you?” he muttered as he turned away. “Well, we shall see about that, my captain; we shall see about that.”

For a mile or more the comrades galloped along, neck to neck and knee to knee. A wind had sprung up from the westward, and the heavens were covered with heavy gray clouds, which drifted swiftly across, a crescent moon peeping fitfully from time to time between the rifts. Even during these moments of brightness the road, shadowed as it was by heavy trees, was very dark, but when the light was shut off it was hard, but for the loom upon either side, to tell where it lay. De Catinat at least found it so, and he peered anxiously over his horse’s ears, and stooped his face to the mane in his efforts to see his way.

“What do you make of the road?” he asked at last.

“It looks as if a good many carriage wheels had passed over it to-day.”

“What! Mon Dieu! Do you mean to say that you can see carriage wheels there?”

“Certainly. Why not?”

“Why, man, I cannot see the road at all.”

Amos Green laughed heartily. “When you have travelled in the woods by night as often as I have,” said he, “when to show a light may mean to lose your hair, one comes to learn to use one’s eyes.”

“Then you had best ride on, and I shall keep just behind you.

So! Hola! What is the matter now?”

There had been the sudden sharp snap of something breaking, and the American had reeled for an instant in the saddle.

“It’s one of my stirrup leathers. It has fallen.”

“Can you find it?”

“Yes; but I can ride as well without it. Let us push on.”

“Very good. I can just see you now.”

They had galloped for about five minutes in this fashion, De Catinat’s horse’s head within a few feet of the other’s tail, when there was a second snap, and the guardsman rolled out of the saddle on to the ground. He kept his grip of the reins, however, and was up in an instant at his horse’s head, sputtering out oaths as only an angry Frenchman can.

“A thousand thunders of heaven!” he cried. “What was it that happened then?”

“Your leather has gone too.”

“Two stirrup leathers in five minutes? It is not possible.”

“It is not possible that it should be chance,” said the American gravely, swinging himself off his horse. “Why, what is this? My other leather is cut, and hangs only by a thread.”

“And so does mine. I can feel it when I pass my hand along. Have you a tinder-box? Let us strike a light.”

“No, no; the man who is in the dark is in safety. I let the other folk strike lights. We can see all that is needful to us.”

“My rein is cut also.”

“And so is mine.”

“And the girth of my saddle.”

“It is a wonder that we came so far with whole bones. Now, who has played us this little trick?”

“Who could it be but that rogue Jacques! He has had the horses in his charge. By my faith, he shall know what the strappado means when I see Versailles again.”

“But why should he do it?”

“Ah, he has been set on to it. He has been a tool in the hands of those who wished to hinder our journey.”

“Very like. But they must have had some reason behind. They knew well that to cut our straps would not prevent us from reaching Paris, since we could ride bareback, or, for that matter, could run it if need be.”

“They hoped to break our necks.”

“One neck they might break, but scarce those of two, since the fate of the one would warn the other.”

“Well, then, what do you think that they meant?” cried De Catinat impatiently. “For heaven’s sake, let us come to some conclusion, for every minute is of importance.”

But the other was not to be hurried out of his cool, methodical fashion of speech and of thought.

“They could not have thought to stop us,” said he.

“What did they mean, then? They could only have meant to delay us.
And why should they wish to delay us? What could it matter to them if
we gave our message an hour or two sooner or an hour or two later?
It could not matter.”

“For heaven’s sake—” broke in De Catinat impetuously.

But Amos Green went on hammering the matter slowly out.

“Why should they wish to delay us, then? There’s only one reason that I can see. In order to give other folk time to get in front of us and stop us. That is it, captain. I’d lay you a beaver-skin to a rabbit-pelt that I’m on the track. There’s been a party of a dozen horsemen along this ground since the dew began to fall. If they were delayed, they would have time to form their plans before we came.”

“By my faith, you may be right,” said De Catinat thoughtfully. “What would you propose?”

“That we ride back, and go by some less direct way.”

“It is impossible. We should have to ride back to Meudon cross-roads, and then it would add ten miles to our journey.”

“It is better to get there an hour later than not to get there at all.”

“Pshaw! we are surely not to be turned from our path by a mere guess. There is the St. Germain cross-road about a mile below. When we reach it we can strike to the right along the south side of the river, and so change our course.”

“But we may not reach it.”

“If anyone bars our way we shall know how to treat with them.”

“You would fight, then?”

“Yes.”

“What! with a dozen of them?”

“A hundred, if we are on the king’s errand.”

Amos Green shrugged his shoulders.

“You are surely not afraid?”

“Yes, I am, mighty afraid. Fighting’s good enough when there’s no help for it. But I call it a fool’s plan to ride straight into a trap when you might go round it.”

“You may do what you like,” said De Catinat angrily.

“My father was a gentleman, the owner of a thousand arpents of land, and his son is not going to flinch in the king’s service.”

“My father,” answered Amos Green, “was a merchant, the owner of a thousand skunk-skins, and his son knows a fool when he sees one.”

“You are insolent, sir,” cried the guardsman. “We can settle this matter at some more fitting opportunity. At present I continue my mission, and you are very welcome to turn back to Versailles if you are so inclined.” He raised his hat with punctilious politeness, sprang on to his horse, and rode on down the road.

Amos Green hesitated a little, and then mounting, he soon overtook his companion. The latter, however, was still in no very sweet temper, and rode with a rigid neck, without a glance or a word for his comrade. Suddenly his eyes caught something in the gloom which brought a smile back to his face. Away in front of them, between two dark tree clumps, lay a vast number of shimmering, glittering yellow points, as thick as flowers in a garden. They were the lights of Paris.

“See!” he cried, pointing. “There is the city, and close here must be the St. Germain road. We shall take it, so as to avoid any danger.”

“Very good! But you should not ride too fast, when your girth may break at any moment.”

“Nay, come on; we are close to our journey’s end. The St. Germain road opens just round this corner, and then we shall see our way, for the lights will guide us.”

He cut his horse with his whip, and they galloped together round the curve. Next instant they were both down in one wild heap of tossing heads and struggling hoofs, De Catinat partly covered by his horse, and his comrade hurled twenty paces, where he lay silent and motionless in the centre of the road.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHEN THE DEVIL DRIVES."

Monsieur de Vivonne had laid his ambuscade with discretion. With a closed carriage and a band of chosen ruffians he had left the palace a good half-hour before the king's messengers, and by the aid of his sister's gold he had managed that their journey should not be a very rapid one. On reaching the branch road he had ordered the coachman to drive some little distance along it, and had tethered all the horses to a fence under his charge. He had then stationed one of the band as a sentinel some distance up the main highway to flash a light when the two courtiers were approaching. A stout cord had been fastened eighteen inches from the ground to the trunk of a wayside sapling, and on receiving the signal the other end was tied to a gate-post upon the further side. The two cavaliers could not possibly see it, coming as it did at the very curve of the road, and as a consequence their horses fell heavily to the ground, and brought them down with them. In an instant the dozen ruffians who had lurked in the shadow of the trees sprang out upon them, sword in hand; but there was no movement from either of their victims. De Catinat lay breathing heavily, one leg under his horse's neck, and the blood trickling in a thin stream down his pale face, and falling, drop by drop, on to his silver shoulder-straps. Amos Green was unwounded, but his injured girth had given way in the fall, and he had been hurled from his horse on to the hard road with a violence which had driven every particle of breath from his body.

Monsieur de Vivonne lit a lantern, and flashed it upon the faces of the two unconscious men. "This is a bad business, Major Despard," said he to the man next him. "I believe that they are both gone."

"Tut! tut! By my soul, men did not die like that when I was young!" answered the other, leaning forward his fierce grizzled face into the light of the lantern. "I've been cast from my horse as often as there are tags to my doublet, but, save for the snap of a bone or two, I never had any harm from it. Pass your rapier under the third rib of the horses, De la Touche; they will never be fit to set hoof to ground again." Two sobbing gasps and the thud of their straining necks falling back to earth told that the two steeds had come to the end of their troubles.

"Where is Latour?" asked Monsieur de Vivonne. "Achille Latour has studied medicine at Montpellier. Where is he?"

"Here I am, your excellency. It is not for me to boast, but I am as handy a man with a lancet as with a rapier, and it was an evil day for some sick folk when I first took to buff and bandolier. Which would you have me look to?"

"This one in the road."

The trooper bent over Amos Green. "He is not long for this world," said he. "I can tell it by the catch of his breath."

"And what is his injury?"

"A subluxation of the epigastrium. Ah, the words of learning will still come to my tongue, but it is hard to put into common terms. Methinks that it were well for me to pass my dagger through his throat, for his end is very near."

"Not for your life!" cried the leader. "If he die without wound, they cannot lay it to our charge. Turn now to the other."

The man bent over De Catinat, and placed his hand upon his heart. As he did so the soldier heaved a long sigh, opened his eyes, and gazed about him with the face of one who knows neither where he is nor how he came there. De Vivonne, who had drawn his hat down over his eyes, and muffled the lower part of his face in his mantle, took out his flask, and poured a little of the contents down the injured man's throat. In an instant a dash of colour had come back into the guardsman's bloodless cheeks, and the light of memory into his eyes. He struggled up on to his feet, and strove furiously to push away those who held him. But his head still swam, and he could scarce hold himself erect.

"I must to Paris!" he gasped; "I must to Paris! It is the king's mission. You stop me at your peril!"

"He has no hurt save a scratch," said the ex-doctor.

"Then hold him fast. And first carry the dying man to the carriage."

The lantern threw but a small ring of yellow light, so that when it had been carried over to De Catinat, Amos Green was left lying in the shadow. Now they brought the light back to where the young man lay. But there was no sign of him. He was gone.

For a moment the little group of ruffians stood staring, the light of their lantern streaming up upon their plumed hats, their fierce eyes, and savage faces. Then a burst of oaths broke from them, and De Vivonne caught the false doctor by the throat, and hurling him down, would have choked him upon the spot, had the others not dragged them apart.

"You lying dog!" he cried. "Is this your skill? The man has fled, and we are ruined!"

"He has done it in his death-struggle," gasped the other hoarsely, sitting up and rubbing his throat. "I tell you that he was in extremis. He cannot be far off."

"That is true. He cannot be far off," cried De Vivonne. "He has neither horse nor arms. You, Despard and Raymond de Carnac, guard the other, that he play us no trick. Do you, Latour, and you, Turberville, ride down the road, and wait by the south gate. If he enter Paris at all, he must come in that way. If you get him, tie him before you on your horse, and bring him to the rendezvous. In any case, it matters little, for he is a stranger, this fellow, and only here by chance. Now lead the other to the carriage, and we shall get away before an alarm is given."

The two horsemen rode off in pursuit of the fugitive, and De Catinat, still struggling desperately to escape, was dragged down the St. Germain road and thrust into the carriage, which had waited at some distance while these incidents were being enacted. Three of the horsemen rode ahead, the coachman was curtly ordered to follow them, and De Vivonne, having despatched one of the band with a note to his sister, followed after the coach with the remainder of his desperadoes.

The unfortunate guardsman had now entirely recovered his senses, and found himself with a strap round his ankles, and another round his wrists, a captive inside a moving prison which lumbered heavily along the country road. He had been stunned by the shock of his fall, and his leg was badly bruised by the weight of his horse; but the cut on his forehead was a mere trifle, and the bleeding had already ceased. His mind, however, pained him more than his body. He sank his head into his pinioned hands, and stamped madly with his feet, rocking himself to and fro in his despair. What a fool, a treble fool, he had been! He, an old soldier, who had seen something of war, to walk with open eyes into such a trap! The king had chosen him of all men, as a trusty messenger, and yet he had failed him — and failed him so ignominiously, without shot fired or sword drawn. He was warned, too, warned by a young man who knew nothing of court intrigue, and who was guided only by the wits which Nature had given him. De Catinat dashed himself down upon the leather cushion in the agony of his thoughts.

But then came a return of that common-sense which lies so very closely beneath the impetuosity of the Celt. The matter was done now, and he must see if it could not be mended. Amos Green had escaped. That was one grand point in his favour. And Amos Green had heard the king’s message, and realised its importance. It was true that he knew nothing of Paris, but surely a man who could pick his way at night through the forests of Maine would not be baulked in finding so well-known a house as that of the Archbishop of Paris. But then there came a sudden thought which turned De Catinat’s heart to lead. The city gates were locked at eight o’clock in the evening. It was now nearly nine. It would have been easy for him, whose uniform was a voucher for his message, to gain his way through. But how could Amos Green, a foreigner and a civilian, hope to pass? It was impossible, clearly impossible. And yet, somehow, in spite of the impossibility, he still clung to a vague hope that a man so full of energy and resource might find some way out of the difficulty.

And then the thought of escape occurred to his mind. Might he not even now be in time, perhaps, to carry his own message? Who were these men who had seized him? They had said nothing to give him a hint as to whose tools they were. Monsieur and the dauphin occurred to his mind. Probably one or the other. He had only recognised one of them, old Major Despard, a man who frequented the low wine-shops of Versailles, and whose sword was ever at the disposal of the longest purse. And where were these people taking him to? It might be to his death. But if they wished to do away with him, why should they have brought him back to consciousness? and why this carriage and drive? Full of curiosity, he peered out of the windows.

A horseman was riding close up on either side; but there was glass in front of the carriage, and through this he could gain some idea as to his whereabouts. The clouds had cleared now, and the moon was shining brightly, bathing the whole wide landscape in its shimmering light. To the right lay the open country, broad plains with clumps of woodland, and the towers of castles pricking out from above the groves. A heavy bell was ringing in some monastery, and its dull booming came and went with the breeze. On the left, but far away, lay the glimmer of Paris. They were leaving it rapidly behind. Whatever his destination, it was neither the capital nor Versailles. Then he began to count the chances of escape. His sword had been removed, and his pistols were still in the holsters beside his unfortunate horse. He was unarmed, then, even if he could free himself, and his captors were at least a dozen in number. There were three on ahead, riding abreast along the white, moonlit road. Then there was one on each side, and he should judge by the clatter of hoofs that there could not be fewer than half a dozen behind. That would make exactly twelve, including the coachman, too many, surely, for an unarmed man to hope to baffle. At the thought of the coachman he had glanced through the glass front at the broad back of the man, and he had suddenly, in the glimmer of the carriage lamp, observed something which struck him with horror.

The man was evidently desperately wounded. It was strange indeed that he could still sit there and flick his whip with so terrible an injury. In the back of his great red coat, just under the left shoulder-blade, was a gash in the cloth, where some weapon had passed, and all round was a wide patch of dark scarlet which told its own tale. Nor was this all. As he raised his whip, the moonlight shone upon his hand, and De Catinat saw with a shudder that it also was splashed and clogged with blood. The guardsman craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the man’s face; but his broad-brimmed hat was drawn low, and the high collar of his driving-coat was raised, so that his features were in the shadow. This silent man in front of him, with the horrible marks upon his person, sent a chill to De Catinat’s valiant heart, and he muttered over one of Marot’s Huguenot psalms; for who but the foul fiend himself would drive a coach with those crimsoned hands and with a sword driven through his body?

And now they had come to a spot where the main road ran onwards, but a smaller side track wound away down the steep slope of a hill, and so in the direction of the Seine. The advance-guard had kept to the main road, and the two horsemen on either side were trotting in the same direction, when, to De Catinat’s amazement, the carriage suddenly swerved to one side, and in an instant plunged down the steep incline, the two stout horses galloping at their topmost speed, the coachman standing up and lashing furiously at them, and the clumsy old vehicle bounding along in a way which threw him backwards and forwards from one seat to the other. Behind him he could hear a shout of consternation from the escort, and then the rush of galloping hoofs. Away they flew, the roadside poplars dancing past at either window, the horses thundering along with their stomachs to the earth, and that demon driver still waving those horrible red hands in the moonlight and screaming out to the maddened steeds. Sometimes the carriage jolted one way, sometimes another, swaying furiously, and running on two side wheels as though it must every instant go over. And yet, fast as they went, their pursuers went faster still. The rattle of their hoofs was at their very backs, and suddenly at one of the windows there came into view the red, distended nostrils of a horse. Slowly it drew forward, the muzzle, the eye, the ears, the mane, coming into sight as the rider still gained upon them, and then above them the fierce face of Despard and the gleam of a brass pistol barrel.

"At the horse, Despard, at the horse!" cried an authoritative voice from behind.

The pistol flashed, and the coach lurched over as one of the horses gave a convulsive spring. But the driver still shrieked and lashed with his whip, while the carriage bounded onwards.

But now the road turned a sudden curve, and there, right in front of them, not a hundred paces away, was the Seine, running cold and still in the moonshine. The bank on either side of the highway ran straight down without any break to the water's edge. There was no sign of a bridge, and a black shadow in the centre of the stream showed where the ferry-boat was returning after conveying some belated travellers across. The driver never hesitated, but gathering up the reins, he urged the frightened creatures into the river. They hesitated, however, when they first felt the cold water about their hocks, and even as they did so one of them, with a low moan, fell over upon her side. Despard's bullet had found its mark. Like a flash the coachman hurled himself from the box and plunged into the stream; but the pursuing horsemen were all round him before this, and half-a-dozen hands had seized him ere he could reach deep water, and had dragged him to the bank. His broad hat had been struck off in the struggle, and De Catinat saw his face in the moonshine. Great heavens! It was Amos Green.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUNGEON OF PORTILLAC.

The desperadoes were as much astonished as was De Catinat when they found that they had recaptured in this extraordinary manner the messenger whom they had given up for lost. A volley of oaths and exclamations broke from them, as, on tearing off the huge red coat of the coachman, they disclosed the sombre dress of the young American.

“A thousand thunders!” cried one. “And this is the man whom that devil’s brat Latour would make out to be dead!”

“And how came he here?”

“And where is Etienne Arnaud?”

“He has stabbed Etienne. See the great cut in the coat!”

“Ay; and see the colour of his hand! He has stabbed him, and taken his coat and hat.”

“What! while we were all within stone’s cast!”

“Ay; there is no other way out of it.”

“By my soul!” cried old Despard, “I had never much love for old Etienne, but I have emptied a cup of wine with him before now, and I shall see that he has justice. Let us cast these reins round the fellow’s neck and hang him upon this tree.”

Several pairs of hands were already unbuckling the harness of the dead horse, when De Vivonne pushed his way into the little group, and with a few curt words checked their intended violence.

“It is as much as your lives are worth to touch him,” said he.

“But he has slain Etienne Arnaud.”

“That score may be settled afterwards. To-night he is the king’s messenger. Is the other all safe?”

“Yes, he is here.”

“Tie this man, and put him in beside him. Unbuckle the traces of the dead horse. So! Now, De Carnac, put your own into the harness. You can mount the box and drive, for we have not very far to go.”

The changes were rapidly made; Amos Green was thrust in beside De Catinat, and the carriage was soon toiling up the steep incline which it had come down so precipitately. The American had said not a word since his capture, and had remained absolutely stolid, with his hands crossed over his chest whilst his fate was under discussion. Now that he was alone once more with his comrade, however, he frowned and muttered like a man who feels that fortune has used him badly.

"Those infernal horses!" he grumbled. "Why, an American horse would have taken to the water like a duck. Many a time have I swum my old stallion Sagamore across the Hudson. Once over the river, we should have had a clear lead to Paris."

"My dear friend," cried De Catinat, laying his manacled hands upon those of his comrade, "can you forgive me for speaking as I did upon the way from Versailles?"

"Tut, man! I never gave it a thought."

"You were right a thousand times, and I was, as you said, a fool — a blind, obstinate fool. How nobly you have stood by me! But how came you there? Never in my life have I been so astonished as when I saw your face."

Amos Green chuckled to himself. "I thought that maybe it would be a surprise to you if you knew who was driving you," said he. "When I was thrown from my horse I lay quiet, partly because I wanted to get a grip of my breath, and partly because it seemed to me to be more healthy to lie than to stand with all those swords clinking in my ears. Then they all got round you, and I rolled into the ditch, crept along it, got on the cross-road in the shadow of the trees, and was beside the carriage before ever they knew that I was gone. I saw in a flash that there was only one way by which I could be of use to you. The coachman was leaning round with his head turned to see what was going on behind him. I out with my knife, sprang up on the front wheel, and stopped his tongue forever."

"What! without a sound!"

"I have not lived among the Indians for nothing."

"And then?"

"I pulled him down into the ditch, and I got into his coat and his hat.

I did not scalp him."

"Scalp him? Great heavens! Such things are only done among savages."

"Ah! I thought that maybe it was not the custom of the country. I am glad now that I did not do it. I had hardly got the reins before they were all back and bundled you into the coach. I was not afraid of their seeing me, but I was scared lest I should not know which road to take, and so set them on the trail. But they made it easy to me by sending some of their riders in front, so I did well until I saw that by-track and made a run for it. We'd have got away, too, if that rogue hadn't shot the horse, and if the beasts had faced the water."

The guardsman again pressed his comrade's hands. "You have been as true to me as hilt to blade," said he. "It was a bold thought and a bold deed."

"And what now?" asked the American.

"I do not know who these men are, and I do not know whither they are taking us."

"To their villages, likely, to burn us."

De Catinat laughed in spite of his anxiety. "You will have it that we are back in America again," said he. "They don't do things in that way in France."

"They seem free enough with hanging in France. I tell you, I felt like a smoked-out 'coon when that trace was round my neck."

"I fancy that they are taking us to some place where they can shut us up until this business blows over."

"Well, they'll need to be smart about it."

"Why?"

"Else maybe they won't find us when they want us."

"What do you mean?"

For answer, the American, with a twist and a wriggle, drew his two hands apart, and held them in front of his comrade's face.

"Bless you, it is the first thing they teach the papooses in an Indian wigwam. I've got out of a Huron's thongs of raw hide before now, and it ain't very likely that a stiff stirrup leather will hold me. Put your hands out." With a few dexterous twists he loosened De Catinat's bonds, until he also was able to slip his hands free. "Now for your feet, if you'll put them up. They'll find that we are easier to catch than to hold."

But at that moment the carriage began to slow down, and the clank of the hoofs of the riders in front of them died suddenly away. Peeping through the windows, the prisoners saw a huge dark building stretching in front of them, so high and so broad that the night shrouded it in upon every side. A great archway hung above them, and the lamps shone on the rude wooden gate, studded with ponderous clamps and nails. In the upper part of the door was a small square iron grating, and through this they could catch a glimpse of the gleam of a lantern and of a bearded face which looked out at them. De Vivonne, standing in his stirrups, craned his neck up towards the grating, so that the two men most interested could hear little of the conversation which followed. They saw only that the horseman held a gold ring up in the air, and that the face above, which had begun by shaking and frowning, was now nodding and smiling. An instant later the head disappeared, the door swung open upon screaming hinges, and the carriage drove on into the courtyard beyond, leaving the escort, with the exception of De Vivonne, outside. As the horses pulled up, a knot of rough fellows clustered round, and the two prisoners were dragged roughly out. In the light of the torches which flared around them they could see that they were hemmed in by high turreted walls upon every side. A bulky man with a bearded face, the same whom they had seen at the grating, was standing in the centre of the group of armed men issuing his orders.

"To the upper dungeon, Simon!" he cried. "And see that they have two bundles of straw and a loaf of bread until we learn our master's will."

"I know not who your master may be," said De Catinat, "but I would ask you by what warrant he dares to stop two messengers of the king while travelling in his service?"

"By St. Denis, if my master play the king a trick, it will be but tie and tie," the stout man answered, with a grin. "But no more talk! Away with them, Simon, and you answer to me for their safe-keeping."

It was in vain that De Catinat raved and threatened, invoking the most terrible menaces upon all who were concerned in detaining him. Two stout knaves thrusting him from behind and one dragging in front forced him through a narrow gate and along a stone-flagged passage, a small man in black buckram with a bunch of keys in one hand and a swinging lantern in the other leading the way. Their ankles had been so tied that they could but take steps of a foot in length. Shuffling along, they made their way down three successive corridors and through three doors, each of which was locked and barred behind them. Then they ascended a winding stone stair, hollowed out in the centre by the feet of generations of prisoners and of jailers, and finally they were thrust into a small square dungeon, and two trusses of straw were thrown in after them. An instant later a heavy key turned in the lock, and they were left to their own meditations.

Very grim and dark those meditations were in the case of De Catinat. A stroke of good luck had made him at court, and now this other of ill fortune had destroyed him. It would be in vain that he should plead his own powerlessness. He knew his royal master well. He was a man who was munificent when his orders were obeyed, and inexorable when they miscarried. No excuse availed with him. An unlucky man was as abhorrent to him as a negligent one. In this great crisis the king had trusted him with an all-important message, and that message had not been delivered. What could save him now from disgrace and from ruin? He cared nothing for the dim dungeon in which he found himself, nor for the uncertain fate which hung over his head, but his heart turned to lead when he thought of his blasted career, and of the triumph of those whose jealousy had been aroused by his rapid promotion. There were his people in Paris, too — his sweet Adele, his old uncle, who had been as good as a father to him. What protector would they have in their troubles now that he had lost the power that might have shielded them? How long would it be before they were exposed once more to the brutalities of Dalbert and his dragoons? He clenched his teeth at the thought, and threw himself down with a groan upon the litter of straw dimly visible in the faint light which streamed through the single window.

But his energetic comrade had yielded to no feeling of despondency. The instant that the clang of the prison door had assured him that he was safe from interruption he had slipped off the bonds which held him and had felt all round the walls and flooring to see what manner of place this might be. His search had ended in the discovery of a small fireplace at one corner, and of two great clumsy billets of wood, which seemed to have been left there to serve as pillows for the prisoners. Having satisfied himself that the chimney was so small that it was utterly impossible to pass even his head up it, he drew the two blocks of wood over to the window, and was able, by placing one above the other and standing on tiptoe on the highest, to reach the bars which guarded it. Drawing himself up, and fixing one toe in an inequality of the wall, he managed to look out on to the courtyard which they had just quitted. The carriage and De Vivonne were passing out through the gate as he looked, and he heard a moment later the slam of the heavy door and the clatter of hoofs from the troop of horsemen outside. The seneschal and his retainers had disappeared; the torches, too, were gone, and, save for the measured tread of a pair of sentinels in the yard twenty feet beneath him, all was silent throughout the great castle.

And a very great castle it was. Even as he hung there with straining hands his eyes were running in admiration and amazement over the huge wall in front of him, with its fringe of turrets and pinnacles and battlements all lying so still and cold in the moonlight. Strange thoughts will slip into a man's head at the most unlikely moments. He remembered suddenly a bright summer day over the water when first he had come down from Albany, and how his father had met him on the wharf by the Hudson, and had taken him through the water-gate to see Peter Stuyvesant's house, as a sign of how great this city was which had passed from the Dutch to the English. Why, Peter Stuyvesant's house and Peter Stuyvesant's Bowery villa put together would not make one wing of this huge pile, which was itself a mere dog-kennel beside the mighty palace at Versailles. He would that his father were here now; and then, on second thoughts, he would not, for it came back to him that he was a prisoner in a far land, and that his sight-seeing was being done through the bars of a dungeon window.

The window was large enough to pass his body through if it were not for those bars. He shook them and hung his weight upon them, but they were as thick as his thumb and firmly welded. Then, getting some strong hold for his other foot, he supported himself by one hand while he picked with his knife at the setting of the iron. It was cement, as smooth as glass and as hard as marble. His knife turned when he tried to loosen it. But there was still the stone. It was sandstone, not so very hard. If he could cut grooves in it, he might be able to draw out bars, cement, and all. He sprang down to the floor again, and was thinking how he should best set to work, when a groan drew his attention to his companion.

"You seem sick, friend," said he.

"Sick in mind," moaned the other. "Oh, the cursed fool that I have been! It maddens me!"

"Something on your mind?" said Amos Green, sitting down upon his billets of wood. "What was it, then?"

The guardsman made a movement of impatience. "What was it? How can you ask me, when you know as well as I do the wretched failure of my mission. It was the king's wish that the archbishop should marry them. The king's wish is the law. It must be the archbishop or none. He should have been at the palace by now. Ah, my God! I can see the king's cabinet, I can see him waiting, I can see madame waiting, I can hear them speak of the unhappy De Catinat—" He buried his face in his hands once more.

"I see all that," said the American stolidly, "and I see something more."

"What then?"

"I see the archbishop tying them up together."

"The archbishop! You are raving."

"Maybe. But I see him."

"He could not be at the palace."

"On the contrary, he reached the palace about half an hour ago."

De Catinat sprang to his feet. "At the palace!" he screamed. "Then who gave him the message?"

"I did," said Amos Green.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT OF SURPRISES.

If the American had expected to surprise or delight his companion by this curt announcement he was woefully disappointed, for De Catinat approached him with a face which was full of sympathy and trouble, and laid his hand caressingly upon his shoulder.

"My dear friend," said he, "I have been selfish and thoughtless. I have made too much of my own little troubles and too little of what you have gone through for me. That fall from your horse has shaken you more than you think. Lie down upon this straw, and see if a little sleep may not—"

"I tell you that the bishop is there!" cried Amos Green impatiently.

"Quite so. There is water in this jug, and if I dip my scarf into it and tie it round your brow—"

"Man alive! Don't you hear me! The bishop is there."

"He is, he is," said De Catinat soothingly. "He is most certainly there. I trust that you have no pain?"

The American waved in the air with his knotted fists. "You think that I am crazed," he cried, "and, by the eternal, you are enough to make me so! When I say that I sent the bishop, I mean that I saw to the job. You remember when I stepped back to your friend the major?"

It was the soldier's turn to grow excited now. "Well?" he cried, gripping the other's arm.

"Well, when we send a scout into the woods, if the matter is worth it, we send a second one at another hour, and so one or other comes back with his hair on. That's the Iroquois fashion, and a good fashion too."

"My God! I believe that you have saved me!"

"You needn't grip on to my arm like a fish-eagle on a trout! I went back to the major, then, and I asked him when he was in Paris to pass by the archbishop's door."

"Well? Well?"

"I showed him this lump of chalk. 'If we've been there,' said I, 'you'll see a great cross on the left side of the door-post. If there's no cross, then pull the latch and ask the bishop if he’ll come up to the palace as quick as his horses can bring him.’ The major started an hour after us; he would be in Paris by half-past ten; the bishop would be in his carriage by eleven, and he would reach Versailles half an hour ago, that is to say, about half-past twelve. By the Lord, I think I’ve driven him off his head!”

It was no wonder that the young woodsman was alarmed at the effect of his own announcement. His slow and steady nature was incapable of the quick, violent variations of the fiery Frenchman. De Catinat, who had thrown off his bonds before he had lain down, spun round the cell now, waving his arms and his legs, with his shadow capering up the wall behind him, all distorted in the moonlight. Finally he threw himself into his comrade’s arms with a torrent of thanks and ejaculations and praises and promises, patting him with his hands and hugging him to his breast.

“Oh, if I could but do something for you!” he exclaimed. “If I could do something for you!”

“You can, then. Lie down on that straw and go to sleep.”

“And to think that I sneered at you! I! Oh, you have had your revenge!”

“For the Lord’s sake, lie down and go to sleep!” By persuasions and a little pushing he got his delighted companion on to his couch again, and heaped the straw over him to serve as a blanket. De Catinat was wearied out by the excitements of the day, and this last great reaction seemed to have absorbed all his remaining strength. His lids drooped heavily over his eyes, his head sank deeper into the soft straw, and his last remembrance was that the tireless American was seated cross-legged in the moonlight, working furiously with his long knife upon one of the billets of wood.

So weary was the young guardsman that it was long past noon, and the sun was shining out of a cloudless blue sky, before he awoke. For a moment, enveloped as he was in straw, and with the rude arch of the dungeon meeting in four rough-hewn groinings above his head, he stared about him in bewilderment. Then in an instant the doings of the day before, his mission, the ambuscade, his imprisonment, all flashed back to him, and he sprang to his feet. His comrade, who had been dozing in the corner, jumped up also at the first movement, with his hand on his knife, and a sinister glance directed towards the door.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” said he, “I thought it was the man.”

“Has some one been in, then?”

"Yes; they brought those two loaves and a jug of water, just about dawn, when I was settling down for a rest."

"And did he say anything?"

"No; it was the little black one."

"Simon, they called him."

"The same. He laid the things down and was gone. I thought that maybe if he came again we might get him to stop."

"How, then?"

"Maybe if we got these stirrup leathers round his ankles he would not get them off quite as easy as we have done."

"And what then?"

"Well, he would tell us where we are, and what is to be done with us."

"Pshaw! what does it matter since our mission is done?"

"It may not matter to you — there's no accounting for tastes — but it matters a good deal to me. I'm not used to sitting in a hole, like a bear in a trap, waiting for what other folks choose to do with me. It's new to me. I found Paris a pretty close sort of place, but it's a prairie compared to this. It don't suit a man of my habits, and I am going to come out of it."

"There's no help but patience, my friend."

"I don't know that. I'd get more help out of a bar and a few pegs." He opened his coat, and took out a short piece of rusted iron, and three small thick pieces of wood, sharpened at one end.

"Where did you get those, then?"

"These are my night's work. The bar is the top one of the grate. I had a job to loosen it, but there it is. The pegs I whittled out of that log."

"And what are they for?"

"Well, you see, peg number one goes in here, where I have picked a hole between the stones. Then I've made this other log into a mallet, and with two cracks there it is firm fixed, so that you can put your weight on it. Now these two go in the same way into the holes above here. So! Now, you see, you can stand up there and look out of that window without asking too much of your toe joint. Try it."

De Catinat sprang up and looked eagerly out between the bars.

"I do not know the place," said he, shaking his head.

"It may be any one of thirty castles which lie upon the south side of Paris, and within six or seven leagues of it. Which can it be? And who has any interest in treating us so? I would that I could see a coat of arms, which might help us. Ah! there is one yonder in the centre of the mullion of the window. But I can scarce read it at the distance. I warrant that your eyes are better than mine, Amos, and that you can read what is on yonder escutcheon."

"On what?"

"On the stone slab in the centre window."

"Yes, I see it plain enough. It looks to me like three turkey-buzzards sitting on a barrel of molasses."

"Three allurions in chief over a tower proper, maybe. Those are the arms of the Provence De Hautevilles. But it cannot be that. They have no chateau within a hundred leagues. No, I cannot tell where we are."

He was dropping back to the floor, and put his weight upon the bar.

To his amazement, it came away in his hand.

"Look, Amos, look!" he cried.

"Ah, you've found it out! Well, I did that during the night."

"And how? With your knife?"

"No; I could make no way with my knife; but when I got the bar out of the grate, I managed faster. I'll put this one back now, or some of those folks down below may notice that we have got it loose."

"Are they all loose?"

"Only the one at present, but we'll get the other two out during the night. You can take that bar out and work with it, while I use my own picker at the other. You see, the stone is soft, and by grinding it you soon make a groove along which you can slip the bar. It will be mighty queer if we can't clear a road for ourselves before morning."

"Well, but even if we could get out into the courtyard, where could we turn to then?"

"One thing at a time, friend. You might as well stick at the Kennebec because you could not see how you would cross the Penobscot. Anyway, there is more air in the yard than in here, and when the window is clear we shall soon plan out the rest."

The two comrades did not dare to do any work during the day, for fear they should be surprised by the jailer, or observed from without. No one came near them, but they ate their loaves and drank their water with the appetite of men who had often known what it was to be without even such simple food as that. The instant that night fell they were both up upon the pegs, grinding away at the hard stone and tugging at the bars. It was a rainy night, and there was a sharp thunder-storm, but they could see very well, while the shadow of the arched window prevented their being seen. Before midnight they had loosened one bar, and the other was just beginning to give, when some slight noise made them turn their heads, and there was their jailer standing, open-mouthed in the middle of the cell, staring up at them.

It was De Catinat who observed him first, and he sprang down at him in an instant with his bar; but at his movement the man rushed for the door, and drew it after him just as the American's tool whizzed past his ear and down the passage. As the door slammed, the two comrades looked at each other. The guardsman shrugged his shoulders and the other whistled.

"It is scarce worth while to go on," said De Catinat.

"We may as well be doing that as anything else. If my picker had been an inch lower I'd have had him. Well, maybe he'll get a stroke, or break his neck down those stairs. I've nothing to work with now, but a few rubs with your bar will finish the job. Ah, dear! You are right, and we are fairly treed!"

A great bell had begun to ring in the chateau, and there was a loud buzz of voices and a clatter of feet upon the stones. Hoarse orders were shouted, and there was the sound of turning keys. All this coming suddenly in the midst of the stillness of the night showed only too certainly that the alarm had been given. Amos Green threw himself down in the straw, with his hands in his pockets, and De Catinat leaned sulkily against the wall, waiting for whatever might come to him. Five minutes passed, however, and yet another five minutes, without anyone appearing. The hubbub in the courtyard continued, but there was no sound in the corridor which led to their cell.

"Well, I'll have that bar out, after all," said the American at last, rising and stepping over to the window. "Anyhow, we'll see what all this caterwauling is about." He climbed up on his pegs as he spoke, and peeped out.

"Come up!" he cried excitedly to his comrade. "They've got some other game going on here, and they are all a deal too busy to bother their heads about us."

De Catinat clambered up beside him, and the two stood staring down into the courtyard. A brazier had been lit at each corner, and the place was thronged with men, many of whom carried torches. The yellow glare played fitfully over the grim gray walls, flickering up sometimes until the highest turrets shone golden against the black sky, and then, as the wind caught them, dying away until they scarce threw a glow upon the cheek of their bearer. The main gate was open, and a carriage, which had apparently just driven in, was standing at a small door immediately in front of their window. The wheels and sides were brown with mud, and the two horses were reeking and heavy-headed, as though their journey had been both swift and long. A man wearing a plumed hat and enveloped in a riding-coat had stepped from the carriage, and then, turning round, had dragged a second person out after him. There was a scuffle, a cry, a push, and the two figures had vanished through the door. As it closed, the carriage drove away, the torches and braziers were extinguished, the main gate was closed once more, and all was as quiet as before this sudden interruption.

"Well!" gasped De Catinat. "Is this another king's messenger they've got?"

"There will be lodgings for two more here in a short time," said Amos Green. "If they only leave us alone, this cell won't hold us long."

"I wonder where that jailer has gone?"

"He may go where he likes, as long as he keeps away from here. Give me your bar again. This thing is giving. It won't take us long to have it out." He set to work furiously, trying to deepen the groove in the stone, through which he hoped to drag the staple. Suddenly he ceased, and strained his ears.

"By thunder!" said he, "there's some one working on the other side."

They both stood listening. There were the thud of hammers, the rasping of a saw, and the clatter of wood from the other side of the wall.

"What can they be doing?"

"I can't think."

"Can you see them?"

"They are too near the wall."

"I think I can manage," said De Catinat. "I am slighter than you." He pushed his head and neck and half of one shoulder through the gap between the bars, and there he remained until his friend thought that perhaps he had stuck, and pulled at his legs to extricate him. He writhed back, however, without any difficulty.

"They are building something," he whispered.

"Building!"

“Yes; there are four of them, with a lantern.”

“What can they be building, then?”

“It’s a shed, I think. I can see four sockets in the ground, and they are fixing four uprights into them.”

“Well, we can’t get away as long as there are four men just under our window.”

“Impossible.”

“But we may as well finish our work, for all that.” The gentle scrapings of his iron were drowned amid the noise which swelled ever louder from without. The bar loosened at the end, and he drew it slowly towards him. At that instant, however, just as he was disengaging it, a round head appeared between him and the moonlight, a head with a great shock of tangled hair and a woollen cap upon the top of it. So astonished was Amos Green at the sudden apparition that he let go his grip upon the bar, which, falling outwards, toppled over the edge of the window-sill.

“You great fool!” shrieked a voice from below, “are your fingers ever to be thumbs, then, that you should fumble your tools so? A thousand thunders of heaven! You have broken my shoulder.”

“What is it, then?” cried the other. “My faith, Pierre, if your fingers went as fast as your tongue, you would be the first joiner in France.”

“What is it, you ape! You have dropped your tool upon me.”

“I! I have dropped nothing.”

“Idiot! Would you have me believe that iron falls from the sky? I say that you have struck me, you foolish, clumsy-fingered lout.”

“I have not struck you yet,” cried the other, “but, by the Virgin, if I have more of this I will come down the ladder to you!”

“Silence, you good-for-naughts!” said a third voice sternly. “If the work be not done by daybreak, there will be a heavy reckoning for somebody.”

And again the steady hammering and sawing went forward. The head still passed and repassed, its owner walking apparently upon some platform which they had constructed beneath their window, but never giving a glance or a thought to the black square opening beside him. It was early morning, and the first cold light was beginning to steal over the courtyard, before the work was at last finished and the workmen had left. Then at last the prisoners dared to climb up and to see what it was which had been constructed during the night. It gave them a catch of the breath as they looked at it. It was a scaffold.

There it lay, the ill-omened platform of dark greasy boards newly fastened together, but evidently used often before for the same purpose. It was buttressed up against their wall, and extended a clear twenty feet out, with a broad wooden stair leading down from the further side. In the centre stood a headsman's block, all haggled at the top, and smeared with rust-coloured stains.

"I think it is time that we left," said Amos Green.

"Our work is all in vain, Amos," said De Catinat sadly.

"Whatever our fate may be — and this looks ill enough — we can but submit to it like brave men."

"Tut, man; the window is clear! Let us make a rush for it."

"It is useless. I can see a line of armed men along the further side of the yard."

"A line! At this hour!"

"Yes; and here come more. See, at the centre gate! Now what in the name of heaven is this?"

As he spoke the door which faced them opened and a singular procession filed out. First came two dozen footmen, walking in pairs, all carrying halberds, and clad in the same maroon-coloured liveries. After them a huge bearded man, with his tunic off, and the sleeves of his coarse shirt rolled up over his elbows, strode along with a great axe over his left shoulder. Behind him, a priest with an open missal pattered forth prayers, and in his shadow was a woman, clad in black, her neck bared, and a black shawl cast over her head and drooping in front of her bowed face. Within grip of her walked a tall, thin, fierce-faced man, with harsh red features, and a great jutting nose. He wore a flat velvet cap with a single eagle feather fastened into it by a diamond clasp, which gleamed in the morning light. But bright as was his gem, his dark eyes were brighter still, and sparkled from under his bushy brows with a mad brilliancy which bore with it something of menace and of terror. His limbs jerked as he walked, his features twisted, and he carried himself like a man who strives hard to hold himself in when his whole soul is aflame with exultation. Behind him again twelve more maroon-clad retainers brought up the rear of this singular procession.

The woman had faltered at the foot of the scaffold, but the man behind her had thrust her forward with such force that she stumbled over the lower step, and would have fallen had she not clutched at the arm of the priest. At the top of the ladder her eyes met the dreadful block, and she burst into a scream, and shrunk backwards. But again the man thrust her on, and two of the followers caught her by either wrist and dragged her forwards.

"Oh, Maurice! Maurice!" she screamed. "I am not fit to die! Oh, forgive me, Maurice, as you hope for forgiveness yourself! Maurice! Maurice!" She strove to get towards him, to clutch at his wrist, at his sleeve, but he stood with his hand on his sword, gazing at her with a face which was all wreathed and contorted with merriment. At the sight of that dreadful mocking face the prayers froze upon her lips. As well pray for mercy to the dropping stone or to the rushing stream. She turned away, and threw back the mantle which had shrouded her features.

"Ah, sire!" she cried. "Sire! If you could see me now!"

And at the cry and at the sight of that fair pale face, De Catinat, looking down from the window, was stricken as though by a dagger; for there, standing beside the headsman's block, was she who had been the most powerful, as well as the wittiest and the fairest, of the women of France — none other than Francoise de Montespan, so lately the favourite of the king.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE KING’S CABINET.

On the night upon which such strange chances had befallen his messengers, the king sat alone in his cabinet. Over his head a perfumed lamp, held up by four little flying Cupids of crystal, who dangled by golden chains from the painted ceiling, cast a brilliant light upon the chamber, which was flashed back twenty-fold by the mirrors upon the wall. The ebony and silver furniture, the dainty carpet of La Savonniere, the silks of Tours, the tapestries of the Gobelins, the gold-work and the delicate chinaware of Sevres — the best of all that France could produce was centred between these four walls. Nothing had ever passed through that door which was not a masterpiece of its kind. And amid all this brilliance the master of it sat, his chin resting upon his hands, his elbows upon the table, with eyes which stared vacantly at the wall, a moody and a solemn man.

But though his dark eyes were fixed upon the wall, they saw nothing of it. They looked rather down the long vista of his own life, away to those early years when what we dream and what we do shade so mistily into one another. Was it a dream or was it a fact, those two men who used to stoop over his baby crib, the one with the dark coat and the star upon his breast, whom he had been taught to call father, and the other one with the long red gown and the little twinkling eyes? Even now, after more than forty years, that wicked, astute, powerful face flashed up, and he saw once more old Richelieu, the great unanointed king of France. And then the other cardinal, the long lean one who had taken his pocket-money, and had grudged him his food, and had dressed him in old clothes. How well he could recall the day when Mazarin had rouged himself for the last time, and how the court had danced with joy at the news that he was no more! And his mother, too, how beautiful she was, and how masterful! Could he not remember how bravely she had borne herself during that war in which the power of the great nobles had been broken, and how she had at last lain down to die, imploring the priests not to stain her cap-strings with their holy oils! And then he thought of what he had done himself, how he had shorn down his great subjects until, instead of being like a tree among saplings, he had been alone, far above all others, with his shadow covering the whole land. Then there were his wars and his laws and his treaties. Under his care France had overflowed her frontiers both on the north and on the east, and yet had been so welded together internally that she had but one voice, with which she spoke through him. And then there was that line of beautiful faces which wavered up in front of him. There was Olympe de Mancini, whose Italian eyes had first taught him that there is a power which can rule over a king; her sister, too, Marie de Mancini; his wife, with her dark little sun-browned face; Henrietta of England, whose death had first shown him the horrors which lie in life; La Valliere, Montespan, Fontanges. Some were dead; some were in convents. Some who had been wicked and beautiful were now only wicked. And what had been the outcome of all this troubled, striving life of his? He was already at the outer verge of his middle years; he had lost his taste for the pleasures of his youth; gout and vertigo were ever at his foot and at his head to remind him that between them lay a kingdom which he could not hope to govern. And after all these years he had not won a single true friend, not one, in his family, in his court, in his country, save only this woman whom he was to wed that night. And she, how patient she was, how good, how lofty! With her he might hope to wipe off by the true glory of his remaining years all the sin and the folly of the past. Would that the archbishop might come, that he might feel that she was indeed his, that he held her with hooks of steel which would bind them as long as life should last!

There came a tap at the door. He sprang up eagerly, thinking that the ecclesiastic might have arrived. It was, however, only his personal attendant, to say that Louvois would crave an interview. Close at his heels came the minister himself, high-nosed and heavy-chinned. Two leather bags were dangling from his hand.

“Sire,” said he, when Bontems had retired, “I trust that I do not intrude upon you.”

“No, no, Louvois. My thoughts were in truth beginning to be very indifferent company, and I am glad to be rid of them.”

“Your Majesty’s thoughts can never, I am sure, be anything but pleasant,” said the courtier. “But I have brought you here something which I trust may make them even more so.”

“Ah! What is that?”

“When so many of our young nobles went into Germany and Hungary, you were pleased in your wisdom to say that you would like well to see what reports they sent home to their friends; also what news was sent out from the court to them.”

“Yes.”

“I have them here — all that the courier has brought in, and all that are gathered to go out, each in its own bag. The wax has been softened in spirit, the fastenings have been steamed, and they are now open.”

The king took out a handful of the letters and glanced at the addresses.

“I should indeed like to read the hearts of these people,” said he. “Thus only can I tell the true thoughts of those who bow and simper before my face. I suppose,” with a sudden flash of suspicion from his eyes, “that you have not yourself looked into these?”

“Oh, sire, I had rather die!”

“You swear it?”

“As I hope for salvation!”

“Hum! There is one among these which I see is from your own son.”

Louvois changed colour, and stammered as he looked at the envelope. “Your Majesty will find that he is as loyal out of your presence as in it, else he is no son of mine,” said he.

“Then we shall begin with his. Ha! it is but ten lines long. ‘Dearest Achille, how I long for you to come back! The court is as dull as a cloister now that you are gone. My ridiculous father still struts about like a turkey-cock, as if all his medals and crosses could cover the fact that he is but a head lackey, with no more real power than I have. He wheedles a good deal out of the king, but what he does with it I cannot imagine, for little comes my way. I still owe those ten thousand livres to the man in the Rue Orfevre. Unless I have some luck at lansquenet, I shall have to come out soon and join you.’ Hem! I did you an injustice, Louvois. I see that you have not looked over these letters.”

The minister had sat with a face which was the colour of beetroot, and eyes which projected from his head, while this epistle was being read. It was with relief that he came to the end of it, for at least there was nothing which compromised him seriously with the king; but every nerve in his great body tingled with rage as he thought of the way in which his young scape-grace had alluded to him. “The viper!” he cried. “Oh, the foul snake in the grass! I will make him curse the day that he was born.”

“Tut, tut, Louvois!” said the king. “You are a man who has seen much of life, and you should be a philosopher. Hot-headed youth says ever more than it means. Think no more of the matter. But what have we here? A letter from my dearest girl to her husband, the Prince de Conti. I would pick her writing out of a thousand. Ah, dear soul, she little thought that my eyes would see her artless prattle! Why should I read it, since I already know every thought of her innocent heart?” He unfolded the sheet of pink scented paper with a fond smile upon his face, but it faded away as his eyes glanced down the page, and he Sprang to his feet with a snarl of anger, his hand over his heart and his eyes still glued to the paper. “Minx!” he cried, in a choking voice. “Impertinent, heartless minx! Louvois, you know what I have done for the princess. You know she has been the apple of my eye. What have I ever grudged her? What have I ever denied her?”

“You have been goodness itself, sire,” said Louvois, whose own wounds smarted less now that he saw his master writhing.

“Hear what she says of me: ‘Old Father Grumpy is much as usual, save that he gives a little at the knees. You remember how we used to laugh at his airs and graces! Well, he has given up all that, and though he still struts about on great high heels, like a Landes peasant on his stilts, he has no brightness at all in his clothes. Of course, all the court follow his example, so you can imagine what a nightmare place this is. Then this woman still keeps in favour, and her frocks are as dismal as Grumpy’s coats; so when you come back we shall go into the country together, and you shall dress in red velvet, and I shall wear blue silk, and we shall have a little coloured court of our own in spite of my majestic papa.’”

Louis sank his face in his hands.

“You hear how she speaks of me, Louvois.”

“It is infamous, sire; infamous!”

“She calls me names — me, Louvois!”

“Atrocious, sire.”

“And my knees! one would think that I was an old man!”

“Scandalous. But, sire, I would beg to say that it is a case in which your Majesty’s philosophy may well soften your anger. Youth is ever hot-headed, and says more than it means. Think no more of the matter.”

“You speak like a fool, Louvois. The child that I have loved turns upon me, and you ask me to think no more of it. Ah, it is one more lesson that a king can trust least of all those who have his own blood in their veins. What writing is this? It is the good Cardinal de Bouillon. One may not have faith in one's own kin, but this sainted man loves me, not only because I have placed him where he is, but because it is his nature to look up to and love those whom God has placed above him. I will read you his letter, Louvois, to show you that there is still such a thing as loyalty and gratitude in France. 'My dear Prince de la Roche-sur-Yon.' Ah, it is to him he writes. 'I promised when you left that I would let you know from time to time how things were going at court, as you consulted me about bringing your daughter up from Anjou, in the hope that she might catch the king's fancy.' What! What! Louvois! What villainy is this? 'The sultan goes from bad to worse. The Fontanges was at least the prettiest woman in France, though between ourselves there was just a shade too much of the red in her hair — an excellent colour in a cardinal's gown, my dear duke, but nothing brighter than chestnut is permissible in a lady. The Montespan, too, was a fine woman in her day, but fancy his picking up now with a widow who is older than himself, a woman, too, who does not even try to make herself attractive, but kneels at her prie-dieu or works at her tapestry from morning to night. They say that December and May make a bad match, but my own opinion is that two Novembers make an even worse one.' Louvois! Louvois! I can read no more! Have you a lettre de cachet?"

"There is one here, sire."

"For the Bastille?"

"No; for Vincennes."

"That will do very well. Fill it up, Louvois! Put this villain's name in it! Let him be arrested to-night, and taken there in his own caleche. The shameless, ungrateful, foul-mouthed villain! Why did you bring me these letters, Louvois? Oh, why did you yield to my foolish whim? My God, is there no truth, or honour, or loyalty in the world?" He stamped his feet, and shook his clenched hands in the air in the frenzy of his anger and disappointment.

"Shall I, then, put back the others?" asked Louvois eagerly. He had been on thorns since the king had begun to read them, not knowing what disclosures might come next.

"Put them back, but keep the bag."

"Both bags?"

"Ah! I had forgot the other one. Perhaps if I have hypocrites around me, I have at least some honest subjects at a distance. Let us take one haphazard.

Who is this from? Ah! it is from the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. He has ever seemed to be a modest and dutiful young man. What has he to say? The Danube — Belgrade — the grand vizier — Ah!" He gave a cry as if he had been stabbed.

"What, then, sire?" The minister had taken a step forward, for he was frightened by the expression upon the king's face.

"Take them away, Louvois! Take them away!" he cried, pushing the pile of papers away from him. "I would that I had never seen them! I will look at them no more! He gibes even at my courage, I who was in the trenches when he was in his cradle! 'This war would not suit the king,' he says. 'For there are battles, and none of the nice little safe sieges which are so dear to him.' By God, he shall pay to me with his head for that jest! Ay, Louvois, it will be a dear gibe to him. But take them away. I have seen as much as I can bear."

The minister was thrusting them back into the bag when suddenly his eye caught the bold, clear writing of Madame de Maintenon upon one of the letters. Some demon whispered to him that here was a weapon which had been placed in his hands, with which he might strike one whose very name filled him with jealousy and hatred. Had she been guilty of some indiscretion in this note, then he might even now, at this last hour, turn the king's heart against her. He was an astute man, and in an instant he had seen his chance and grasped it.

"Ha!" said he, "it was hardly necessary to open this one."

"Which, Louvois? Whose is it?"

The minister pushed forward the letter, and Louis started as his eyes fell upon it.

"Madame's writing!" he gasped.

"Yes; it is to her nephew in Germany."

Louis took it in his hand. Then, with a sudden motion, he threw it down among the others, and then yet again his hand stole towards it. His face was gray and haggard, and beads of moisture had broken out upon his brow. If this too were to prove to be as the others! He was shaken to the soul at the very thought. Twice he tried to pluck it out, and twice his trembling fingers fumbled with the paper. Then he tossed it over to Louvois. "Read it to me," said he.

The minister opened the letter out and flattened it upon the table, with a malicious light dancing in his eyes, which might have cost him his position had the king but read it aright.

"'My dear nephew,'" he read, "'what you ask me in your last is absolutely impossible. I have never abused the king's favour so far as to ask for any profit for myself, and I should be equally sorry to solicit any advance for my relatives. No one would rejoice more than I to see you rise to be major in your regiment, but your valour and your loyalty must be the cause, and you must not hope to do it through any word of mine. To serve such a man as the king is its own reward, and I am sure that whether you remain a cornet or rise to some higher rank, you will be equally zealous in his cause. He is surrounded, unhappily, by many base parasites. Some of these are mere fools, like Lauzun; others are knaves, like the late Fouquet; and some seem to be both fools and knaves, like Louvois, the minister of war.'" Here the reader choked with rage, and sat gurgling and drumming his fingers upon the table.

"Go on, Louvois, go on," said Louis, smiling up at the ceiling.

"'These are the clouds which surround the sun, my dear nephew; but the sun is, believe me, shining brightly behind them. For years I have known that noble nature as few others can know it, and I can tell you that his virtues are his own, but that if ever his glory is for an instant dimmed over, it is because his kindness of heart has allowed him to be swayed by those who are about him. We hope soon to see you back at Versailles, staggering under the weight of your laurels. Meanwhile accept my love and every wish for your speedy promotion, although it cannot be obtained in the way which you suggest.'"

"Ah," cried the king, his love shining in his eyes, "how could I for an instant doubt her! And yet I had been so shaken by the others! Francoise is as true as steel. Was it not a beautiful letter, Louvois?"

"Madame is a very clever woman," said the minister evasively.

"And such a reader of hearts! Has she not seen my character aright?"

"At least she has not read mine, sire."

There was a tap at the door, and Bontems peeped in. "The archbishop has arrived, sire."

"Very well, Bontems. Ask madame to be so good as to step this way.

And order the witnesses to assemble in the ante-room."

As the valet hastened away, Louis turned to his minister: "I wish you to be one of the witnesses, Louvois."

"To what, sire?"

“To my marriage.”

The minister started. “What, sire! Already?”

“Now, Louvois; within five minutes.”

“Very good, sire.” The unhappy courtier strove hard to assume a more festive manner; but the night had been full of vexation to him, and to be condemned to assist in making this woman the king’s wife was the most bitter drop of all.

“Put these letters away, Louvois. The last one has made up for all the rest. But these rascals shall smart for it, all the same. By-the-way, there is that young nephew to whom madame wrote. Gerard d’Aubigny is his name, is it not?”

“Yes, sire.”

“Make him out a colonel’s commission, and give him the next vacancy,

Louvois.”

“A colonel, sire! Why, he is not yet twenty.”

“Ay, Louvois. Pray, am I the chief of the army, or are you? Take care, Louvois! I have warned you once before. I tell you, man, that if I choose to promote one of my jack-boots to be the head of a brigade, you shall not hesitate to make out the papers. Now go into the ante-room, and wait with the other witnesses until you are wanted.”

There had meanwhile been busy goings-on in the small room where the red lamp burned in front of the Virgin. Francoise de Maintenon stood in the centre, a little flush of excitement on her cheeks, and an unwonted light in her placid gray eyes. She was clad in a dress of shining white brocade, trimmed and slashed with silver serge, and fringed at the throat and arms with costly point lace. Three women, grouped around her, rose and stooped and swayed, putting a touch here and a touch there, gathering in, looping up, and altering until all was to their taste.

“There!” said the head dressmaker, giving a final pat to a rosette of gray silk; “I think that will do, your Majes — that is to say, madame.”

The lady smiled at the adroit slip of the courtier dressmaker.

“My tastes lean little towards dress,” said she, “yet I would fain look as he would wish me to look.”

“Ah, it is easy to dress madame. Madame has a figure. Madame has a carriage. What costume would not look well with such a neck and waist and arm to set it off? But, ah, madame, what are we to do when we have to make the figure as well as the dress? There was the Princess Charlotte

Elizabeth. It was but yesterday that we cut her gown. She was short, madame, but thick. Oh, it is incredible how thick she was! She uses more cloth than madame, though she is two hand-breadths shorter. Ah, I am sure that the good God never meant people to be as thick as that. But then, of course, she is Bavarian and not French."

But madame was paying little heed to the gossip of the dressmaker. Her eyes were fixed upon the statue in the corner, and her lips were moving in prayer — prayer that she might be worthy of this great destiny which had come so suddenly upon her, a poor governess; that she might walk straight among the pitfalls which surrounded her upon every side; that this night's work might bring a blessing upon France and upon the man whom she loved. There came a discreet tap at the door to break in upon her prayer.

"It is Bontems, madame," said Mademoiselle Nanon. "He says that the king is ready."

"Then we shall not keep him waiting. Come, mademoiselle, and may God shed His blessing upon what we are about to do!"

The little party assembled in the king's ante-room, and started from there to the private chapel. In front walked the portly bishop, clad in a green vestment, puffed out with the importance of the function, his missal in his hand, and his fingers between the pages at the service de matrimoniis. Beside him strode his almoner, and two little servitors of the court in crimson cassocks bearing lighted torches. The king and Madame de Maintenon walked side by side, she quiet and composed, with gentle bearing and downcast eyes, he with a flush on his dark cheeks, and a nervous, furtive look in his eyes, like a man who knows that he is in the midst of one of the great crises of his life. Behind them, in solemn silence, followed a little group of chosen witnesses, the lean, silent Pere la Chaise, Louvois, scowling heavily at the bride, the Marquis de Charmarante, Bontems, and Mademoiselle Nanon.

The torches shed a strong yellow light upon this small band as they advanced slowly through the corridors and salons which led to the chapel, and they threw a garish glare upon the painted walls and ceilings, flashing back from gold-work and from mirror, but leaving long trailing shadows in the corners. The king glanced nervously at these black recesses, and at the portraits of his ancestors and relations which lined the walls. As he passed that of his late queen, Maria Theresa, he started and gasped with horror.

"My God!" he whispered; "she frowned and spat at me!"

Madame laid her cool hand upon his wrist. “It is nothing, sire,” she murmured, in her soothing voice. “It was but the light flickering over the picture.”

Her words had their usual effect upon him. The startled look died away from his eyes, and taking her hand in his he walked resolutely forwards. A minute later they were before the altar, and the words were being read which should bind them forever together. As they turned away again, her new ring blazing upon her finger, there was a buzz of congratulation around her. The king only said nothing, but he looked at her, and she had no wish that he should say more. She was still calm and pale, but the blood throbbed in her temples. “You are Queen of France now,” it seemed to be humming—”queen, queen, queen!”

But a sudden shadow had fallen across her, and a low voice was in her ear. “Remember your promise to the Church,” it whispered. She started, and turned to see the pale, eager face of the Jesuit beside her.

“Your hand has turned cold, Francoise,” said Louis. “Let us go, dearest. We have been too long in this dismal church.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO FRANCOISES.

Madame de Montespan had retired to rest, easy in her mind, after receiving the message from her brother. She knew Louis as few others knew him, and she was well aware of that obstinacy in trifles which was one of his characteristics. If he had said that he would be married by the archbishop, then the archbishop it must be; to-night, at least, there should be no marriage. To-morrow was a new day, and if it did not shake the king’s plans, then indeed she must have lost her wit as well as her beauty.

She dressed herself with care in the morning, putting on her powder, her little touch of rouge, her one patch near the dimple of her cheek, her loose robe of violet velvet, and her casconet of pearls with all the solicitude of a warrior, who is bracing on his arms for a life and death contest. No news had come to her of the great event of the previous night, although the court already rang with it, for her haughtiness and her bitter tongue had left her without a friend or intimate. She rose, therefore, in the best of spirits, with her mind set on the one question as to how best she could gain an audience with the king.

She was still in her boudoir putting the last touches to her toilet when her page announced to her that the king was waiting in her salon. Madame de Montespan could hardly believe in such good fortune. She had racked her brain all morning as to how she should win her way to him, and here he was waiting for her. With a last glance at the mirror, she hastened to meet him.

He was standing with his back turned, looking up at one of Snyders’s paintings, when she entered; but as she closed the door, he turned and took two steps towards her. She had run forward with a pretty little cry of joy, her white arms outstretched, and love shining on her face; but he put out his hand, gently and yet with decision, with a gesture which checked her approach. Her hands dropped to her side, her lip trembled, and she stood looking at him with her grief and her fears all speaking loudly from her eyes. There was a look upon his features which she had never seen before, and already something was whispering at the back of her soul that to-day at least his spirit was stronger than her own.

"You are angry with me again," she cried.

He had come with every intention of beginning the interview by telling her bluntly of his marriage; but now, as he looked upon her beauty and her love, he felt that it would have been less brutal to strike her down at his feet. Let some one else tell her, then. She would know soon enough. Besides, there would be less chance then of a scene, which was a thing abhorrent to his soul. His task was, in any case, quite difficult enough. All this ran swiftly through his mind, and she as swiftly read it off in the brown eyes which gazed at her.

"You have something you came to say, and now you have not the heart to say it. God bless the kindly heart which checks the cruel tongue."

"No, no, madame," said Louis; "I would not be cruel. I cannot forget that my life has been brightened and my court made brilliant during all these years by your wit and your beauty. But times change, madame, and I owe a duty to the world which overrides my own personal inclinations. For every reason I think that it is best that we should arrange in the way which we discussed the other day, and that you should withdraw yourself from the court."

"Withdraw, sire! For how long?"

"It must be a permanent withdrawal, madame."

She stood with clenched hands and a pale face staring at him.

"I need not say that I shall make your retirement a happy one as far as in me lies. Your allowance shall be fixed by yourself; a palace shall be erected for you in whatever part of France you may prefer, provided that it is twenty miles from Paris. An estate also—"

"Oh, sire, how can you think that such things as these would compensate me for the loss of your love?" Her heart had turned to lead within her breast. Had he spoken hotly and angrily she might have hoped to turn him as she had done before; but this gentle and yet firm bearing was new to him, and she felt that all her arts were vain against it. His coolness enraged her, and yet she strove to choke down her passion and to preserve the humble attitude which was least natural to her haughty and vehement spirit; but soon the effort became too much for her.

"Madame," said he, "I have thought well over this matter, and it must be as I say. There is no other way at all. Since we must part, the parting had best be short and sharp. Believe me, it is no pleasant matter for me either. I have ordered your brother to have his carriage at the postern at nine o'clock, for I thought that perhaps you would wish to retire after nightfall."

"To hide my shame from a laughing court! It was thoughtful of you, sire. And yet, perhaps, this too was a duty, since we hear so much of duties nowadays, for who was it but you—"

"I know, madame, I know. I confess it. I have wronged you deeply.

Believe me that every atonement which is in my power shall be made.

Nay, do not look so angrily at me, I beg. Let our last sight of each

other be one which may leave a pleasant memory behind it."

"A pleasant memory!" All the gentleness and humility had fallen from her now, and her voice had the hard ring of contempt and of anger. "A pleasant memory! It may well be pleasant to you, who are released from the woman whom you ruined, who can turn now to another without any pale face to be seen within the salons of your court to remind you of your perfidy. But to me, pining in some lonely country house, spurned by my husband, despised by my family, the scorn and jest of France, far from all which gave a charm to life, far from the man for whose love I have sacrificed everything — this will be a very pleasant memory to me, you may be sure!"

The king's eyes had caught the angry gleam which shot from hers, and yet he strove hard to set a curb upon his temper. When such a matter had to be discussed between the proudest man and the haughtiest woman in all France, one or the other must yield a point. He felt that it was for him to do so, and yet it did not come kindly to his imperious nature.

"There is nothing to be gained, madame," said he, "by using words which are neither seemly for your tongue nor for my ears. You will do me the justice to confess that where I might command I am now entreating, and that instead of ordering you as my subject, I am persuading you as my friend."

"Oh, you show too much consideration, sire! Our relations of twenty years or so can scarce suffice to explain such forbearance from you. I should indeed be grateful that you have not set your archers of the guard upon me, or marched me from the palace between a file of your musketeers. Sire, how can I thank you for this forbearance?" She curtsied low, with her face set in a mocking smile.

"Your words are bitter, madame."

“My heart is bitter, sire.”

“Nay, Francoise, be reasonable, I implore you. We have both left our youth behind.”

“The allusion to my years comes gratefully from your lips.”

“Ah, you distort my words. Then I shall say no more. You may not see me again, madame. Is there no question which you would wish to ask me before I go?”

“Good God!” she cried; “is this a man? Has it a heart? Are these the lips which have told me so often that he loved me? Are these the eyes which have looked so fondly into mine? Can you then thrust away a woman whose life has been yours as you put away the St. Germain palace when a more showy one was ready for you? And this is the end of all those vows, those sweet whispers, those persuasions, those promises — This!”

“Nay, madame, this is painful to both of us.”

“Pain! Where is the pain in your face? I see anger in it because I have dared to speak truth; I see joy in it because you feel that your vile task is done. But where is the pain? Ah, when I am gone all will be so easy to you — will it not? You can go back then to your governess—”

“Madame!”

“Yes, yes, you cannot frighten me! What do I care for all that you can do! But I know all. Do not think that I am blind. And so you would even have married her! You, the descendant of St. Louis, and she the Scarron widow, the poor drudge whom in charity I took into my household! Ah, how your courtiers will smile! how the little poets will scribble! how the wits will whisper! You do not hear of these things, of course, but they are a little painful for your friends.”

“My patience can bear no more,” cried the king furiously. “I leave you, madame, and forever.”

But her fury had swept all fear and discretion from her mind. She stepped between the door and him, her face flushed, her eyes blazing, her face thrust a little forward, one small white satin slipper tapping upon the carpet.

“You are in haste, sire! She is waiting for you, doubtless.”

“Let me pass, madame.”

“But it was a disappointment last night, was it not, my poor sire?
Ah, and for the governess, what a blow! Great heaven, what a blow!
No archbishop! No marriage! All the pretty plan gone wrong! Was it
not cruel?”

Louis gazed at the beautiful furious face in bewilderment, and it flashed across his mind that perhaps her grief had turned her brain. What else could be the meaning of this wild talk of the archbishop and the disappointment? It would be unworthy of him to speak harshly to one who was so afflicted. He must soothe her, and, above all, he must get away from her.

"You have had the keeping of a good many of my family jewels," said he.

"I beg that you will still retain them as a small sign of my regard."

He had hoped to please her and to calm her, but in an instant she was over at her treasure-cupboard hurling double handfuls of precious stones down at his feet. They clinked and rattled, the little pellets of red and yellow and green, rolling, glinting over the floor and rapping up against the oak panels at the base of the walls.

"They will do for the governess if the archbishop comes at last," she cried.

He was more convinced than ever that she had lost her wits. A thought struck him by which he might appeal to all that was softer and more gentle in her nature. He stepped swiftly to the door, pushed it half open, and gave a whispered order. A youth with long golden hair waving down over his black velvet doublet entered the room. It was her youngest son, the Count of Toulouse.

"I thought that you would wish to bid him farewell," said Louis.

She stood staring as though unable to realise the significance of his words. Then it was borne suddenly in upon her that her children as well as her lover were to be taken from her, that this other woman should see them and speak with them and win their love while she was far away. All that was evil and bitter in the woman flashed suddenly up in her, until for the instant she was what the king had thought her. If her son was not for her, then he should be for none. A jewelled knife lay among her treasures, ready to her hand. She caught it up and rushed at the cowering lad. Louis screamed and ran forward to stop her; but another had been swifter than he. A woman had darted through the open door, and had caught the upraised wrist. There was a moment's struggle, two queenly figures swayed and strained, and the knife dropped between their feet. The frightened Louis caught it up, and seizing his little son by the wrist, he rushed from the apartment. Francoise de Montespan staggered back against the ottoman to find herself confronted by the steady eyes and set face of that other

Francoise, the woman whose presence fell like a shadow at every turn of her life.

"I have saved you, madame, from doing that which you would have been the first to bewail."

"Saved me! It is you who have driven me to this!"

The fallen favourite leaned against the high back of the ottoman, her hands resting behind her upon the curve of the velvet. Her lids were half closed on her flashing eyes, and her lips just parted to show a gleam of her white teeth. Here was the true Francoise de Montespan, a feline creature crouching for a spring, very far from that humble and soft-spoken Francoise who had won the king back by her gentle words. Madame de Maintenon's hand had been cut in the struggle, and the blood was dripping down from the end of her fingers, but neither woman had time to spare a thought upon that. Her firm gray eyes were fixed upon her former rival as one fixes them upon some weak and treacherous creature who may be dominated by a stronger will.

"Yes, it is you who have driven me to this — you, whom I picked up when you were hard pressed for a crust of bread or a cup of sour wine. What had you? You had nothing — nothing except a name which was a laughing-stock. And what did I give you? I gave you everything. You know that I gave you everything. Money, position, the entrance to the court. You had them all from me. And now you mock me!"

"Madame, I do not mock you. I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

"Pity? Ha! ha! A Mortemart is pitied by the widow Scarron!

Your pity may go where your gratitude is, and where your character is.

We shall be troubled with it no longer then."

"Your words do not pain me."

"I can believe that you are not sensitive."

"Not when my conscience is at ease."

"Ah! it has not troubled you, then?"

"Not upon this point, madame."

"My God! How terrible must those other points have been!"

"I have never had an evil thought towards you."

"None towards me? Oh, woman, woman!"

"What have I done, then? The king came to my room to see the children taught. He stayed. He talked. He asked my opinion on this and that. Could I be silent? or could I say other than what I thought?"

"You turned him against me!"

"I should be proud indeed if I thought that I had turned him to virtue."

"The word comes well from your lips."

"I would that I heard it upon yours."

"And so, by your own confession, you stole the king's love from me, most virtuous of widows!"

"I had all gratitude and kindly thought for you. You have, as you have so often reminded me, been my benefactress. It was not necessary for you to say it, for I had never for an instant forgotten it. Yet if the king has asked me what I thought, I will not deny to you that I have said that sin is sin, and that he would be a worthier man if he shook off the guilty bonds which held him."

"Or exchanged them for others."

"For those of duty."

"Pah! Your hypocrisy sickens me! If you pretend to be a nun, why are you not where the nuns are? You would have the best of two worlds — would you not? — have all that the court can give, and yet ape the manners of the cloister. But you need not do it with me! I know you as your inmost heart knows you. I was honest, and what I did, I did before the world. You, behind your priests and your directors and your prie-dieus and your missals — do you think that you deceive me, as you deceive others?"

Her antagonist's gray eyes sparkled for the first time, and she took a quick step forward, with one white hand half lifted in rebuke.

"You may speak as you will of me," said she. "To me it is no more than the foolish paroquet that chatters in your ante-room. But do not touch upon things which are sacred. Ah, if you would but raise your own thoughts to such things — if you would but turn them inwards, and see, before it is too late, how vile and foul is this life which you have led! What might you not have done? His soul was in your hands like clay for the potter. If you had raised him up, if you had led him on the higher path, if you had brought out all that was noble and good within him, how your name would have been loved and blessed, from the chateau to the cottage! But no; you dragged him down; you wasted his youth; you drew him from his wife; you marred his manhood. A crime in one so high begets a thousand others in those who look to him for an example; and all, all are upon your soul. Take heed, madame, for God's sake take heed ere it be too late! For all your beauty, there can be for you, as for me, a few short years of life. Then, when that brown hair is white, when that white cheek is sunken, when that bright eye is dimmed — ah, then God pity the sin-stained soul of Francoise de Montespan!”

Her rival had sunk her head for the moment before the solemn words and the beautiful eyes. For an instant she stood silent, cowed for the first time in all her life; but then the mocking, defiant spirit came back to her, and she glanced up with a curling lip.

“I am already provided with a spiritual director, thank you,” said she. “Oh, madame, you must not think to throw dust in my eyes! I know you, and know you well!”

“On the contrary, you seem to know less than I had expected. If you know me so well, pray what am I?”

All her rival’s bitterness and hatred rang in the tones of her answer. “You are,” said she, “the governess of my children, and the secret mistress of the king.”

“You are mistaken,” answered Madame de Maintenon serenely. “I am the governess of your children, and I am the king’s wife.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN IN THE CALECHE.

Often had De Montespan feigned a faint in the days when she wished to disarm the anger of the king. So she had drawn his arms round her, and won the pity which is the twin sister of love. But now she knew what it was to have the senses struck out of her by a word. She could not doubt the truth of what she heard. There was that in her rival's face, in her steady eye, in her quiet voice, which carried absolute conviction with it. She stood stunned for an instant, panting, her outstretched hands feeling at the air, her defiant eyes dulling and glazing. Then, with a short sharp cry, the wail of one who has fought hard and yet knows that she can fight no more, her proud head drooped, and she fell forward senseless at the feet of her rival. Madame de Maintenon stooped and raised her up in her strong white arms. There was true grief and pity in her eyes as she looked down at the snow-pale face which lay against her bosom, all the bitterness and pride gone out of it, and nothing left save the tear which sparkled under the dark lashes, and the petulant droop of the lip, like that of a child which had wept itself to sleep. She laid her on the ottoman and placed a silken cushion under her head. Then she gathered together and put back into the open cupboard all the jewels which were scattered about the carpet. Having locked it, and placed the key on the table where its owner's eye would readily fall upon it, she struck a gong, which summoned the little black page.

"Your mistress is indisposed," said she. "Go and bring her maids to her." And so, having done all that lay with her to do, she turned away from the great silent room, where, amid the velvet and the gilding, her beautiful rival lay like a crushed flower, helpless and hopeless.

Helpless enough, for what could she do? and hopeless too, for how could fortune aid her? The instant that her senses had come back to her she had sent away her waiting women, and lay with clasped hands and a drawn face planning out her own weary future. She must go; that was certain. Not merely because it was the king's order, but because only misery and mockery remained for her now in the palace where she had reigned supreme. It was true that she had held her position against the queen before, but all her hatred could not blind her to the fact that her rival was a very different woman to poor meek little Maria Theresa. No; her spirit was broken at last. She must accept defeat, and she must go.

She rose from the couch, feeling that she had aged ten years in an hour. There was much to be done, and little time in which to do it. She had cast down her jewels when the king had spoken as though they would atone for the loss of his love; but now that the love was gone there was no reason why the jewels should be lost too. If she had ceased to be the most powerful, she might still be the richest woman in France. There was her pension, of course. That would be a munificent one, for Louis was always generous. And then there was all the spoil which she had collected during these long years — the jewels the pearls, the gold, the vases, the pictures, the crucifixes, the watches, the trinkets — together they represented many millions of livres. With her own hands she packed away the more precious and portable of them, while she arranged with her brother for the safe-keeping of the others. All day she was at work in a mood of feverish energy, doing anything and everything which might distract her thoughts from her own defeat and her rival's victory. By evening all was ready, and she had arranged that her property should be sent after her to Petit Bourg, to which castle she intended to retire.

It wanted half an hour of the time fixed for her departure, when a young cavalier, whose face was strange to her, was ushered into the room.

He came with a message from her brother.

"Monsieur de Vivonne regrets, madame, that the rumour of your departure has got abroad among the court."

"What do I care for that, monsieur?" she retorted, with all her old spirit.

"He says, madame, that the courtiers may assemble at the west gate to see you go; that Madame de Neuilly will be there, and the Duchesse de Chambord, and Mademoiselle de Rohan, and—"

The lady shrank with horror at the thought of such an ordeal. To drive away from the palace, where she had been more than queen, under the scornful eyes and bitter gibes of so many personal enemies! After all the humiliations of the day, that would be the crowning cup of sorrow. Her nerve was broken. She could not face it.

"Tell my brother, monsieur, that I should be much obliged if he would make fresh arrangements, by which my departure might be private."

“He bade me say that he had done so, madame.”

“Ah! at what hour then?”

“Now. As soon as possible.”

“I am ready. At the west gate then?”

“No; at the east. The carriage waits.”

“And where is my brother?”

“We are to pick him up at the park gate.”

“And why that?”

“Because he is watched; and were he seen beside the carriage, all would be known.”

“Very good. Then, monsieur, if you will take my cloak and this casket we may start at once.”

They made their way by a circuitous route through the less-used corridors, she hurrying on like a guilty creature, a hood drawn over her face, and her heart in a flutter at every stray footfall. But fortune stood her friend. She met no one, and soon found herself at the eastern postern gate. A couple of phlegmatic Swiss guardsmen leaned upon their muskets upon either side, and the lamp above shone upon the carriage which awaited her. The door was open, and a tall cavalier swathed in a black cloak handed her into it. He then took the seat opposite to her, slammed the door, and the caleche rattled away down the main drive.

It had not surprised her that this man should join her inside the coach, for it was usual to have a guard there, and he was doubtless taking the place which her brother would afterwards occupy. That was all natural enough. But when ten minutes passed by, and he had neither moved nor spoken, she peered at him through the gloom with some curiosity. In the glance which she had of him, as he handed her in, she had seen that he was dressed like a gentleman, and there was that in his bow and wave as he did it which told her experienced senses that he was a man of courtly manners. But courtiers, as she had known them, were gallant and garrulous, and this man was so very quiet and still. Again she strained her eyes through the gloom. His hat was pulled down and his cloak was still drawn across his mouth, but from out of the shadow she seemed to get a glimpse of two eyes which peered at her even as she did at him.

At last the silence impressed her with a vague uneasiness. It was time to bring it to an end.

“Surely, monsieur, we have passed the park gate where we were to pick up my brother.”

Her companion neither answered nor moved. She thought that perhaps the rumble of the heavy caleche had drowned her voice.

“I say, monsieur,” she repeated, leaning forwards, “that we have passed the place where we were to meet Monsieur de Vivonne.”

He took no notice.

“Monsieur,” she cried, “I again remark that we have passed the gates.”

There was no answer.

A thrill ran through her nerves. Who or what could he be, this silent man? Then suddenly it struck her that he might be dumb.

“Perhaps monsieur is afflicted,” she said. “Perhaps monsieur cannot speak. If that be the cause of your silence, will you raise your hand, and I shall understand.” He sat rigid and silent.

Then a sudden mad fear came upon her, shut up in the dark with this dreadful voiceless thing. She screamed in her terror, and strove to pull down the window and open the door. But a grip of steel closed suddenly round her wrist and forced her back into her seat. And yet the man’s body had not moved, and there was no sound save the lurching and rasping of the carriage and the clatter of the flying horses. They were already out on the country roads far beyond Versailles. It was darker than before, heavy clouds had banked over the heavens, and the rumbling of thunder was heard low down on the horizon.

The lady lay back panting upon the leather cushions of the carriage. She was a brave woman, and yet this sudden strange horror coming upon her at the moment when she was weakest had shaken her to the soul. She crouched in the corner, staring across with eyes which were dilated with terror at the figure on the other side. If he would but say something! Any revelation, any menace, was better than this silence. It was so dark now that she could hardly see his vague outline, and every instant, as the storm gathered, it became still darker. The wind was blowing in little short angry puffs, and still there was that far-off rattle and rumble. Again the strain of the silence was unbearable. She must break it at any cost.

“Sir,” said she, “there is some mistake here. I do not know by what right you prevent me from pulling down the window and giving my directions to the coachman.”

He said nothing.

“I repeat, sir, that there is some mistake. This is the carriage of my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, and he is not a man who will allow his sister to be treated uncourteously.”

A few heavy drops of rain splashed against one window. The clouds were lower and denser. She had quite lost sight of that motionless figure, but it was all the more terrible to her now that it was unseen. She screamed with sheer terror, but her scream availed no more than her words.

“Sir,” she cried, clutching forward with her hands and grasping his sleeve, “you frighten me. You terrify me. I have never harmed you. Why should you wish to hurt an unfortunate woman? Oh, speak to me; for God’s sake, speak!”

Still the patter of rain upon the window, and no other sound save her own sharp breathing.

“Perhaps you do not know who I am!” she continued, endeavouring to assume her usual tone of command, and talking now to an absolute and impenetrable darkness. “You may learn when it is too late that you have chosen the wrong person for this pleasantry. I am the Marquise de Montespan, and I am not one who forgets a slight. If you know anything of the court, you must know that my word has some weight with the king. You may carry me away in this carriage, but I am not a person who can disappear without speedy inquiry, and speedy vengeance if I have been wronged. If you would — Oh, Jesus! Have mercy!”

A livid flash of lightning had burst from the heart of the cloud, and, for an instant, the whole country-side and the interior of the caleche were as light as day. The man’s face was within a hand’s breadth of her own, his mouth wide open, his eyes mere shining slits, convulsed with silent merriment. Every detail flashed out clear in that vivid light — his red quivering tongue, the lighter pink beneath it, the broad white teeth, the short brown beard cut into a peak and bristling forward.

But it was not the sudden flash, it was not the laughing, cruel face, which shot an ice-cold shudder through Francoise de Montespan. It was that, of all men upon earth, this was he whom she most dreaded, and whom she had least thought to see.

“Maurice!” she screamed. “Maurice! it is you!”

“Yes, little wifie, it is I. We are restored to each other’s arms, you see, after this interval.”

“Oh, Maurice, how you have frightened me! How could you be so cruel? Why would you not speak to me?”

“Because it was so sweet to sit in silence and to think that I really had you to myself after all these years, with none to come between. Ah, little wifie, I have often longed for this hour.”

“I have wronged you, Maurice; I have wronged you! Forgive me!”

“We do not forgive in our family, my darling Francoise. Is it not like old days to find ourselves driving together? And in this carriage, too. It is the very one which bore us back from the cathedral where you made your vows so prettily. I sat as I sit now, and you sat there, and I took your hand like this, and I pressed it, and—”

“Oh, villain, you have twisted my wrist! You have broken my arm!”

“Oh, surely not, my little wifie! And then you remember that, as you told me how truly you would love me, I leaned forward to your lips, and—”

“Oh, help! Brute, you have cut my mouth! You have struck me with your ring.”

“Struck you! Now who would have thought that spring day when we planned out our future, that this also was in the future waiting for me and you? And this! and this!”

He struck savagely at her face in the darkness. She threw herself down, her head pressed against the cushions. With the strength and fury of a maniac he showered his blows above her, thudding upon the leather or crashing upon the woodwork, heedless of his own splintered hands.

“So I have silenced you,” said he at last. “I have stopped your words with my kisses before now. But the world goes on, Francoise, and times change, and women grow false, and men grow stern.”

“You may kill me if you will,” she moaned.

“I will,” he said simply.

Still the carriage flew along, jolting and staggering in the deeply-rutted country roads. The storm had passed, but the growl of the thunder and the far-off glint of a lightning-flash were to be heard and seen on the other side of the heavens. The moon shone out with its clear cold light, silvering the broad, hedgeless, poplar-fringed plains, and shining through the window of the carriage upon the crouching figure and her terrible companion. He leaned back now, his arms folded upon his chest, his eyes gloating upon the abject misery of the woman who had wronged him.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked at last.

"To Portillac, my little wifie."

"And why there? What would you do to me?"

"I would silence that little lying tongue forever. It shall deceive no more men."

"You would murder me?"

"If you call it that."

"You have a stone for a heart."

"My other was given to a woman."

"Oh, my sins are indeed punished."

"Rest assured that they will be."

"Can I do nothing to atone?"

"I will see that you atone."

"You have a sword by your side, Maurice. Why do you not kill me, then, if you are so bitter against me? Why do you not pass it through my heart?"

"Rest assured that I would have done so had I not an excellent reason."

"Why, then?"

"I will tell you. At Portillac I have the right of the high justice, the middle, and the low. I am seigneur there, and can try, condemn, and execute. It is my lawful privilege. This pitiful king will not even know how to avenge you, for the right is mine, and he cannot gainsay it without making an enemy of every seigneur in France."

He opened his mouth again and laughed at his own device, while she, shivering in every limb, turned away from his cruel face and glowing eyes, and buried her face in her hands. Once more she prayed God to forgive her for her poor sinful life. So they whirled through the night behind the clattering horses, the husband and the wife, saying nothing, but with hatred and fear raging in their hearts, until a brazier fire shone down upon them from the angle of a keep, and the shadow of the huge pile loomed vaguely up in front of them in the darkness. It was the Castle of Portillac.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SCAFFOLD OF PORTILLAC.

And thus it was that Amory de Catinat and Amos Green saw from their dungeon window the midnight carriage which discharged its prisoner before their eyes. Hence, too, came that ominous planking and that strange procession in the early morning. And thus it also happened that they found themselves looking down upon Francoise de Montespan as she was led to her death, and that they heard that last piteous cry for aid at the instant when the heavy hand of the ruffian with the axe fell upon her shoulder, and she was forced down upon her knees beside the block. She shrank screaming from the dreadful, red-stained, greasy billet of wood, but the butcher heaved up his weapon, and the seigneur had taken a step forward with hand outstretched to seize the long auburn hair and to drag the dainty head down with it when suddenly he was struck motionless with astonishment, and stood with his foot advanced and his hand still out, his mouth half open, and his eyes fixed in front of him.

And, indeed, what he had seen was enough to fill any man with amazement. Out of the small square window which faced him a man had suddenly shot head-foremost, pitching on to his outstretched hands and then bounding to his feet. Within a foot of his heels came the head of a second one, who fell more heavily than the first, and yet recovered himself as quickly. The one wore the blue coat with silver facings of the king’s guard; the second had the dark coat and clean-shaven face of a man of peace; but each carried a short rusty iron bar in his hand. Not a word did either of them say, but the soldier took two quick steps forward and struck at the headsman while he was still poising himself for a blow at the victim. There was a thud, with a crackle like a breaking egg, and the bar flew into pieces. The heads-man gave a dreadful cry, and dropped his axe, clapped his two hands to his head, and running zigzag across the scaffold, fell over, a dead man, into the courtyard beneath.

Quick as a flash De Catinat had caught up the axe, and faced De Montespan with the heavy weapon slung over his shoulder and a challenge in his eyes.

"Now!" said he.

The seigneur had for the instant been too astounded to speak. Now he understood at least that these strangers had come between him and his prey.

"Seize these men!" he shrieked, turning to his followers.

"One moment!" cried De Catinat, with a voice and manner which commanded attention. "You see by my coat what I am. I am the body-servant of the king. Who touches me touches him. Have a care for yourselves. It is a dangerous game!"

"On, you cowards!" roared De Montespan.

But the men-at-arms hesitated, for the fear of the king was as a great shadow which hung over all France. De Catinat saw their indecision, and he followed up his advantage.

"This woman," he cried, "is the king's own favourite, and if any harm come to a lock of her hair, I tell you that there is not a living soul within this portcullis who will not die a death of torture. Fools, will you gasp out your lives upon the rack, or writhe in boiling oil, at the bidding of this madman?"

"Who are these men, Marceau?" cried the seigneur furiously.

"They are prisoners, your excellency."

"Prisoners! Whose prisoners?"

"Yours, your excellency."

"Who ordered you to detain them?"

"You did. The escort brought your signet-ring."

"I never saw the men. There is devilry in this. But they shall not beard me in my own castle, nor stand between me and my own wife. No, par dieu! they shall not and live! You men, Marceau, Etienne, Gilbert, Jean, Pierre, all you who have eaten my bread, on to them, I say!"

He glanced round with furious eyes, but they fell only upon hung heads and averted faces. With a hideous curse he flashed out his sword and rushed at his wife, who knelt half insensible beside the block. De Catinat sprang between them to protect her; but Marceau, the bearded seneschal, had already seized his master round the waist. With the strength of a maniac, his teeth clenched and the foam churning from the corners of his lips, De Montespan writhed round in the man's grasp, and shortening his sword, he thrust it through the brown beard and deep into the throat behind it. Marceau fell back with a choking cry, the blood bubbling from his mouth and his wound; but before his murderer could disengage his weapon, De

Catinat and the American, aided by a dozen of the retainers, had dragged him down on to the scaffold, and Amos Green had pinioned him so securely that he could but move his eyes and his lips, with which he lay glaring and spitting at them. So savage were his own followers against him — for Marceau was well loved amongst them — that, with axe and block so ready, justice might very swiftly have had her way, had not a long clear bugle-call, rising and falling in a thousand little twirls and flourishes, clanged out suddenly in the still morning air. De Catinat pricked up his ears at the sound of it like a hound at the huntsman's call.

"Did you hear, Amos?"

"It was a trumpet."

"It was the guards' bugle-call. You, there, hasten to the gate! Throw up the portcullis and drop the drawbridge! Stir yourselves, or even now you may suffer for your master's sins! It has been a narrow escape, Amos!"

"You may say so, friend. I saw him put out his hand to her hair, even as you sprang from the window. Another instant and he would have had her scalped. But she is a fair woman, the fairest that ever my eyes rested upon, and it is not fit that she should kneel here upon these boards." He dragged her husband's long black cloak from him, and made a pillow for the senseless woman with a tenderness and delicacy which came strangely from a man of his build and bearing.

He was still stooping over her when there came the clang of the falling bridge, and an instant later the clatter of the hoofs of a troop of cavalry, who swept with wave of plumes, toss of manes, and jingle of steel into the courtyard. At the head was a tall horseman in the full dress of the guards, with a curling feather in his hat, high buff gloves, and his sword gleaming in the sunlight. He cantered forward towards the scaffold, his keen dark eyes taking in every detail of the group which awaited him there. De Catinat's face brightened at the sight of him, and he was down in an instant beside his stirrup.

"De Brissac!"

"De Catinat! Now where in the name of wonder did you come from?"

"I have been a prisoner. Tell me, De Brissac, did you leave the message in Paris?"

"Certainly I did."

"And the archbishop came?"

"He did."

"And the marriage?"

"Took place as arranged. That is why this poor woman whom I see yonder has had to leave the palace."

"I thought as much."

"I trust that no harm has come to her?"

"My friend and I were just in time to save her. Her husband lies there.

He is a fiend, De Brissac."

"Very likely; but an angel might have grown bitter had he had the same treatment."

"We have him pinioned here. He has slain a man, and I have slain another."

"On my word, you have been busy."

"How did you know that we were here?"

"Nay, that is an unexpected pleasure."

"You did not come for us, then?"

"No; we came for the lady."

"And how did this fellow get hold of her?"

"Her brother was to have taken her in his carriage. Her husband learned it, and by a lying message he coaxed her into his own, which was at another door. When De Vivonne found that she did not come, and that her rooms were empty, he made inquiries, and soon learned how she had gone. De Montespan's arms had been seen on the panel, and so the king sent me here with my troop as fast as we could gallop."

"Ah, and you would have come too late had a strange chance not brought us here. I know not who it was who waylaid us, for this man seemed to know nothing of the matter. However, all that will be clearer afterwards. What is to be done now?"

"I have my own orders. Madame is to be sent to Petit Bourg, and any who are concerned in offering her violence are to be kept until the king's pleasure is known. The castle, too, must be held for the king. But you, De Catinat, you have nothing to do now?"

"Nothing, save that I would like well to ride into Paris to see that all is right with my uncle and his daughter."

"Ah, that sweet little cousin of thine! By my soul, I do not wonder that the folk know you well in the Rue St. Martin. Well, I have carried a message for you once, and you shall do as much for me now."

“With all my heart. And whither?”

“To Versailles. The king will be on fire to know how we have fared. You have the best right to tell him, since without you and your friend yonder it would have been but a sorry tale.”

“I will be there in two hours.”

“Have you horses?”

“Ours were slain.”

“You will find some in the stables here. Pick the best, since you have lost your own in the king’s service.”

The advice was too good to be overlooked. De Catinat, beckoning to Amos Green, hurried away with him to the stables, while De Brissac, with a few short sharp orders, disarmed the retainers, stationed his guardsmen all over the castle, and arranged for the removal of the lady, and for the custody of her husband. An hour later the two friends were riding swiftly down the country road, inhaling the sweet air, which seemed the fresher for their late experience of the dank, foul vapours of their dungeon. Far behind them a little dark pinnacle jutting over a grove of trees marked the chateau which they had left, while on the extreme horizon to the west there came a quick shimmer and sparkle where the level rays of the early sun gleamed upon the magnificent palace which was their goal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FALL OF THE CATINATS.

Two days after Madame de Maintenon's marriage to the king there was held within the humble walls of her little room a meeting which was destined to cause untold misery to many hundreds of thousands of people, and yet, in the wisdom of Providence, to be an instrument in carrying French arts and French ingenuity and French sprightliness among those heavier Teutonic peoples who have been the stronger and the better ever since for the leaven which they then received. For in history great evils have sometimes arisen from a virtue, and most beneficent results have often followed hard upon a crime.

The time had come when the Church was to claim her promise from madame, and her pale cheek and sad eyes showed how vain it had been for her to try and drown the pleadings of her tender heart by the arguments of the bigots around her. She knew the Huguenots of France. Who could know them better, seeing that she was herself from their stock, and had been brought up in their faith? She knew their patience, their nobility, their independence, their tenacity. What chance was there that they would conform to the king's wish? A few great nobles might, but the others would laugh at the galleys, the jail, or even the gallows when the faith of their fathers was at stake. If their creed were no longer tolerated, then, and if they remained true to it, they must either fly from the country or spend a living death tugging at an oar or working in a chain-gang upon the roads. It was a dreadful alternative to present to a people who were so numerous that they made a small nation in themselves. And most dreadful of all, that she who was of their own blood should cast her voice against them. And yet her promise had been given, and now the time had come when it must be redeemed.

The eloquent Bishop Bossuet was there, with Louvois, the minister of war, and the famous Jesuit, Father la Chaise, each piling argument upon argument to overcome the reluctance of the king. Beside them stood another priest, so thin and so pale that he might have risen from his bed of death, but with a fierce light burning in his large dark eyes, and with a terrible resolution in his drawn brows and in the set of his grim, lanky jaw. Madame bent over her tapestry and weaved her coloured silks in silence, while the king leaned upon his hand and listened with the face of a man who knows that he is driven, and yet can hardly turn against the goads. On the low table lay a paper, with pen and ink beside it. It was the order for the revocation, and it only needed the king's signature to make it the law of the land.

"And so, father, you are of opinion that if I stamp out heresy in this fashion I shall assure my own salvation in the next world?" he asked.

"You will have merited a reward."

"And you think so too, Monsieur Bishop?"

"Assuredly, sire."

"And you. Abbe du Chayla?"

The emaciated priest spoke for the first time, a tinge of colour creeping into his corpse-like cheeks, and a more lurid light in his deep-set eyes.

"I know not about assuring your salvation, sire. I think it would take very much more to do that. But there cannot be a doubt as to your damnation if you do not do it."

The king started angrily, and frowned at the speaker.

"Your words are somewhat more curt than I am accustomed to," he remarked.

"In such a matter it were cruel indeed to leave you in doubt. I say again that your soul's fate hangs upon the balance. Heresy is a mortal sin. Thousands of heretics would turn to the Church if you did but give the word. Therefore these thousands of mortal sins are all upon your soul. What hope for it then, if you do not amend?"

"My father and my grandfather tolerated them."

"Then, without some special extension of the grace of God, your father and your grandfather are burning in hell."

"Insolent!" The king sprang from his seat.

"Sire, I will say what I hold to be the truth were you fifty times a king. What care I for any man when I know that I speak for the King of kings? See; are these the limbs of one who would shrink from testifying to truth?" With a sudden movement he threw back the long sleeves of his gown and shot out his white fleshless arms. The bones were all knotted and bent and screwed into the most fantastic shapes. Even Louvois, the hardened man of the court, and his two brother priests, shuddered at the sight of those dreadful limbs. He raised them above his head and turned his burning eyes upwards.

"Heaven has chosen me to testify for the faith before now," said he. "I heard that blood was wanted to nourish the young Church of Siam, and so to Siam I journeyed. They tore me open; they crucified me; they wrenched and split my bones. I was left as a dead man, yet God has breathed the breath of life back into me that I may help in this great work of the regeneration of France."

"Your sufferings, father," said Louis, resuming his seat, "give you every claim, both upon the Church and upon me, who am its special champion and protector. What would you counsel, then, father, in the case of those Huguenots who refuse to change?"

"They would change," cried Du Chayla, with a drawn smile upon his ghastly face. "They must bend or they must break. What matter if they be ground to powder, if we can but build up a complete Church in the land?" His deep-set eyes glowed with ferocity, and be shook one bony hand in savage wrath above his head.

"The cruelty with which you have been used, then, has not taught you to be more tender to others."

"Tender! To heretics! No, sire, my own pains have taught me that the world and the flesh are as nothing, and that the truest charity to another is to capture his soul at all risks to his vile body. I should have these Huguenot souls, sire, though I turned France into a shambles to gain them."

Louis was evidently deeply impressed by the fearless words and the wild earnestness of the speaker. He leaned his head upon his hand for a little time, and remained sunk in the deepest thought.

"Besides, sire," said Pere la Chaise softly, "there would be little need for these stronger measures of which the good abbe speaks. As I have already remarked to you, you are so beloved in your kingdom that the mere assurance that you had expressed your will upon the subject would be enough to turn them all to the true faith."

"I wish that I could think so, father; I wish that I could think so.

But what is this?"

It was his valet who had half opened the door.

"Captain de Catinat is here, who desires to see you at once, sire."

"Ask the captain to enter. Ah!" A happy thought seemed to have struck him. "We shall see what love for me will do in such a matter, for if it is anywhere to be found it must be among my own body-servants."

The guardsman had arrived that instant from his long ride, and leaving Amos Green with the horses, he had come on at once, all dusty and travel-stained, to carry his message to the king. He entered now, and stood with the quiet ease of a man who is used to such scenes, his hand raised in a salute.

"What news, captain?"

"Major de Brissac bade me tell you, sire, that he held the Castle of Portillac, that the lady is safe, and that her husband is a prisoner."

Louis and his wife exchanged a quick glance of relief.

"That is well," said he. "By the way, captain, you have served me in many ways of late, and always with success. I hear, Louvois, that De la Salle is dead of the small-pox."

"He died yesterday, sire."

"Then I desire that you make out the vacant commission of major to Monsieur de Catinat. Let me be the first to congratulate you, major, upon your promotion, though you will need to exchange the blue coat for the pearl and gray of the mousquetaires. We cannot spare you from the household, you see."

De Catinat kissed the hand which the monarch held out to him.

"May I be worthy of your kindness, sire!"

"You would do what you could to serve me, would you not?"

"My life is yours, sire."

"Very good. Then I shall put your fidelity to the proof."

"I am ready for any proof."

"It is not a very severe one. You see this paper upon the table. It is an order that all the Huguenots in my dominions shall give up their errors, under pain of banishment or captivity. Now I have hopes that there are many of my faithful subjects who are at fault in this matter, but who will abjure it when they learn that it is my clearly expressed wish that they should do so. It would be a great joy to me to find that it was so, for it would be a pain to me to use force against any man who bears the name of Frenchman. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sire." The young man had turned deadly pale, and he shifted his feet, and opened and clasped his hands. He had faced death a dozen times and under many different forms, but never had he felt such a sinking of the heart as came over him now.

“You are yourself a Huguenot, I understand. I would gladly have you, then, as the first-fruit of this great measure. Let us hear from your own lips that you, for one, are ready to follow the lead of your king in this as in other things.”

The young guardsman still hesitated, though his doubts were rather as to how he should frame his reply than as to what its substance should be. He felt that in an instant Fortune had wiped out all the good turns which she had done him during his past life, and that now, far from being in her debt, he held a heavy score against her. The king arched his eyebrows and drummed his fingers impatiently as he glanced at the downcast face and dejected bearing.

“Why all this thought?” he cried. “You are a man whom I have raised and whom I will raise. He who has a major’s epaulettes at thirty may carry a marshal’s baton at fifty. Your past is mine, and your future shall be no less so. What other hopes have you?”

“I have none, sire, outside your service.”

“Why this silence, then? Why do you not give the assurance which I demand?”

“I cannot do it, sire.”

“You cannot do it!”

“It is impossible. I should have no more peace in my mind, or respect for myself, if I knew that for the sake of position or wealth I had given up the faith of my fathers.”

“Man, you are surely mad! There is all that a man could covet upon one side, and what is there upon the other?”

“There is my honour.”

“And is it, then, a dishonour to embrace my religion?”

“It would be a dishonour to me to embrace it for the sake of gain without believing in it.”

“Then believe it.”

“Alas, sire, a man cannot force himself to believe. Belief is a thing which must come to him, not he to it.”

“On my word, father,” said Louis, glancing with a bitter smile at his Jesuit confessor, “I shall have to pick the cadets of the household from your seminary, since my officers have turned casuists and theologians. So, for the last time, you refuse to obey my request?”

"Oh, sire—" De Catinat took a step forward with outstretched hands and tears in his eyes.

But the king checked him with a gesture. "I desire no protestations," said he. "I judge a man by his acts. Do you abjure or not?"

"I cannot, sire."

"You see," said Louis, turning again to the Jesuit, "it will not be as easy as you think."

"This man is obstinate, it is true, but many others will be more yielding."

The king shook his head. "I would that I knew what to do," said he.

"Madame, I know that you, at least, will ever give me the best advice.

You have heard all that has been said. What do you recommend?"

She kept her eyes still fixed upon her tapestry, but her voice was firm and clear as she answered: —

"You have yourself said that you are the eldest son of the Church. If the eldest son desert her, then who will do her bidding? And there is truth, too, in what the holy abbe has said. You may imperil your own soul by condoning this sin of heresy. It grows and flourishes, and if it be not rooted out now, it may choke the truth as weeds and briers choke the wheat."

"There are districts in France now," said Bossuet, "where a church is not to be seen in a day's journey, and where all the folk, from the nobles to the peasants, are of the same accursed faith. So it is in the Cevennes, where the people are as fierce and rugged as their own mountains. Heaven guard the priests who have to bring them back from their errors."

"Whom should I send on so perilous a task?" asked Louis.

The Abbe du Chayla was down in a instant upon his knees with his gaunt hands outstretched. "Send me, sire! Me!" he cried. "I have never asked a favour of you, and never will again. But I am the man who could break this people. Send me with your message to the people of the Cevennes."

"God help the people of the Cevennes!" muttered Louis, as he looked with mingled respect and loathing at the emaciated face and fiery eyes of the fanatic. "Very well, abbe," he added aloud; "you shall go to the Cevennes."

Perhaps for an instant there came upon the stern priest some premonition of that dreadful morning when, as he crouched in a corner of 'his burning home, fifty daggers were to rasp against each other in his body. He sunk his face in his hands, and a shudder passed over his gaunt frame. Then he rose, and folding his arms, he resumed his impassive attitude. Louis took up the pen from the table, and drew the paper towards him.

"I have the same counsel, then, from all of you," said he,—"from you, bishop; from you, father; from you, madame; from you, abbe; and from you, Louvois. Well, if ill come from it, may it not be visited upon me! But what is this?"

De Catinat had taken a step forward with his hand outstretched. His ardent, impetuous nature had suddenly broken down all the barriers of caution, and he seemed for the instant to see that countless throng of men, women, and children of his own faith, all unable to say a word for themselves, and all looking to him as their champion and spokesman. He had thought little of such matters when all was well, but now, when danger threatened, the deeper side of his nature was moved, and he felt how light a thing is life and fortune when weighed against a great abiding cause and principle.

"Do not sign it, sire," he cried. "You will live to wish that your hand had withered ere it grasped that pen. I know it, sire. I am sure of it. Consider all these helpless folk — the little children, the young girls, the old and the feeble. Their creed is themselves. As well ask the leaves to change the twigs on which they grow. They could not change. At most you could but hope to turn them from honest folk into hypocrites. And why should you do it? They honour you. They love you. They harm none. They are proud to serve in your armies, to fight for you, to work for you, to build up the greatness of your kingdom. I implore you, sire, to think again before you sign an order which will bring misery and desolation to so many."

For a moment the king had hesitated as he listened to the short abrupt sentences in which the soldier pleaded for his fellows, but his face hardened again as he remembered how even his own personal entreaty had been unable to prevail with this young dandy of the court.

"France's religion should be that of France's king," said he, "and if my own guardsmen thwart me in such a matter, I must find others who will be more faithful. That major's commission in the mousquetaires must go to Captain de Belmont, Louvois."

"Very good, sire."

"And De Catinat's commission may be transferred to Lieutenant Labadoyere."

"Very good, sire."

“And I am to serve you no longer?”

“You are too dainty for my service.”

De Catinat’s arms fell listlessly to his side, and his head sunk forward upon his breast. Then, as he realised the ruin of all the hopes of his life, and the cruel injustice with which he had been treated, he broke into a cry of despair, and rushed from the room with the hot tears of impotent anger running down his face. So, sobbing, gesticulating, with coat unbuttoned and hat awry, he burst into the stable where placid Amos Green was smoking his pipe and watching with critical eyes the grooming of the horses.

“What in thunder is the matter now?” he asked, holding his pipe by the bowl, while the blue wreaths curled up from his lips.

“This sword,” cried the Frenchman—”I have no right to wear it! I shall break it!”

“Well, and I’ll break my knife too if it will hearten you up.”

“And these,” cried De Catinat, tugging at his silver shoulder-straps, “they must go.”

“Ah, you draw ahead of me there, for I never had any. But come, friend, let me know the trouble, that I may see if it may not be mended.”

“To Paris! to Paris!” shouted the guardsman frantically. “If I am ruined, I may yet be in time to save them. The horses, quick!”

It was clear to the American that some sudden calamity had befallen, so he aided his comrade and the grooms to saddle and bridle.

Five minutes later they were flying on their way, and in little more than an hour their steeds, all reeking and foam-flecked, were pulled up outside the high house in the Rue St. Martin. De Catinat sprang from his saddle and rushed upstairs, while Amos followed in his own leisurely fashion.

The old Huguenot and his beautiful daughter were seated at one side of the great fireplace, her hand in his, and they sprang up together, she to throw herself with a glad cry into the arms of her lover, and he to grasp the hand which his nephew held out to him.

At the other side of the fireplace, with a very long pipe in his mouth and a cup of wine upon a settle beside him, sat a strange-looking man, with grizzled hair and beard, a fleshy red projecting nose, and two little gray eyes, which twinkled out from under huge brindled brows. His long thin face was laced and seamed with wrinkles, crossing and recrossing everywhere, but fanning out in hundreds from the corners of his eyes. It was set in an unchanging expression, and as it was of the same colour all over, as dark as the darkest walnut, it might have been some quaint figure-head cut out of a coarse-grained wood. He was clad in a blue serge jacket, a pair of red breeches smeared at the knees with tar, clean gray worsted stockings, large steel buckles over his coarse square-toed shoes, and beside him, balanced upon the top of a thick oaken cudgel, was a weather-stained silver-laced hat. His gray-shot hair was gathered up behind into a short stiff tail, and a seaman's hanger, with a brass handle, was girded to his waist by a tarnished leather belt.

De Catinat had been too occupied to take notice of this singular individual, but Amos Green gave a shout of delight at the sight of him, and ran forward to greet him. The other's wooden face relaxed so far as to show two tobacco-stained fangs, and, without rising, he held out a great red hand, of the size and shape of a moderate spade.

“Why, Captain Ephraim,” cried Amos in English, “who ever would have thought of finding you here? De Catinat, this is my old friend Ephraim Savage, under whose charge I came here.”

“Anchor's apeak, lad, and the hatches down,” said the stranger, in the peculiar drawling voice which the New Englanders had retained from their ancestors, the English Puritans.

“And when do you sail?”

“As soon as your foot is on her deck, if Providence serve us with wind and tide. And how has all gone with thee, Amos?”

“Right well. I have much to tell you of.”

“I trust that you have held yourself apart from all their popish devilry.”

“Yes, yes, Ephraim.”

“And have had no truck with the scarlet woman.”

“No, no; but what is it now?”

The grizzled hair was bristling with rage, and the little gray eyes were gleaming from under the heavy tufts. Amos, following their gaze, saw that De Catinat was seated with his arm round Adele, while her head rested upon his shoulder.

“Ah, if I but knew their snip-snap, lippetty-chippetty lingo! Saw one ever such a sight! Amos, lad, what is the French for ‘a shameless hussy’?”

“Nay, nay, Ephraim. Surely one may see such a sight, and think no harm of it, on our side of the water.

“Never, Amos. In no godly country.”

“Tut! I have seen folks courting in New York.”

"Ah, New York! I said in no godly country. I cannot answer for New York or Virginia. South of Cape Cod, or of New Haven at the furthest, there is no saying what folk will do. Very sure I am that in Boston or Salem or Plymouth she would see the bridewell and he the stocks for half as much. Ah!" He shook his head and bent his brows at the guilty couple.

But they and their old relative were far too engrossed with their own affairs to give a thought to the Puritan seaman. De Catinat had told his tale in a few short, bitter sentences, the injustice that had been done to him, his dismissal from the king's service, and the ruin which had come upon the Huguenots of France. Adele, as is the angel instinct of woman, thought only of her lover and his misfortunes as she listened to his story, but the old merchant tottered to his feet when he heard of the revocation of the Edict, and stood with shaking limbs, staring about him in bewilderment.

"What am I to do?" he cried. "What am I to do? I am too old to begin my life again."

"Never fear, uncle," said De Catinat heartily. "There are other lands beyond France."

"But not for me. No, no; I am too old. Lord, but Thy hand is heavy upon Thy servants. Now is the vial opened, and the carved work of the sanctuary thrown down. Ah, what shall I do, and whither shall I turn?" He wrung his hands in his perplexity.

"What is amiss with him, then, Amos?" asked the seaman. "Though I know nothing of what he says, yet I can see that he flies a distress signal."

"He and his must leave the country, Ephraim."

"And why?"

"Because they are Protestants, and the king will not abide their creed."

Ephraim Savage was across the room in an instant, and had enclosed the old merchant's thin hand in his own great knotted fist. There was a brotherly sympathy in his strong grip and rugged weather-stained face which held up the other's courage as no words could have done.

"What is the French for 'the scarlet woman,' Amos?" he asked, glancing over his shoulder. "Tell this man that we shall see him through. Tell him that we've got a country where he'll just fit in like a bung in a barrel. Tell him that religion is free to all there, and not a papist nearer than Baltimore or the Capuchins of the Penobscot. Tell him that if he wants to come, the Golden Rod is waiting with her anchor apeak and her cargo aboard. Tell him what you like, so long as you make him come."

“Then we must come at once,” said De Catinat, as he listened to the cordial message which was conveyed to his uncle. “To-night the orders will be out, and to-morrow it may be too late.”

“But my business!” cried the merchant.

“Take what valuables you can, and leave the rest. Better that than lose all, and liberty into the bargain.”

And so at last it was arranged. That very night, within five minutes of the closing of the gates, there passed out of Paris a small party of five, three upon horseback, and two in a closed carriage which bore several weighty boxes upon the top. They were the first leaves flying before the hurricane, the earliest of that great multitude who were within the next few months to stream along every road which led from France, finding their journey’s end too often in galley, dungeon and torture chamber, and yet flooding over the frontiers in numbers sufficient to change the industries and modify the characters of all the neighbouring peoples. Like the Israelites of old, they had been driven from their homes at the bidding of an angry king, who, even while he exiled them, threw every difficulty in the way of their departure. Like them, too, there were none of them who could hope to reach their promised land without grievous wanderings, penniless, friendless, and destitute. What passages befell these pilgrims in their travels, what dangers they met, and overcame in the land of the Swiss, on the Rhine, among the Walloons, in England, in Ireland, in Berlin, and even in far-off Russia, has still to be written. This one little group, however, whom we know, we may follow in their venturesome journey, and see the chances which befell them upon that great continent which had lain fallow for so long, sown only with the weeds of humanity, but which was now at last about to quicken into such glorious life.

PART II.

IN THE NEW WORLD.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE START OF THE “GOLDEN ROD.”

Thanks to the early tidings which the guardsman had brought with him, his little party was now ahead of the news. As they passed through the village of Louvier in the early morning they caught a glimpse of a naked corpse upon a dunghill, and were told by a grinning watchman that it was that of a Huguenot who had died impenitent, but that was a common enough occurrence already, and did not mean that there had been any change in the law. At Rouen all was quiet, and Captain Ephraim Savage before evening had brought both them and such property as they had saved aboard of his brigantine, the Golden Rod. It was but a little craft, some seventy tons burden, but at a time when so many were putting out to sea in open boats, preferring the wrath of Nature to that of the king, it was a refuge indeed. The same night the seaman drew up his anchor and began to slowly make his way down the winding river.

And very slow work it was. There was half a moon shining and a breeze from the east, but the stream writhed and twisted and turned until sometimes they seemed to be sailing up rather than down. In the long reaches they set the yard square and ran, but often they had to lower their two boats and warp her painfully along, Tomlinson of Salem, the mate, and six grave, tobacco-chewing, New England seamen with their broad palmetto hats, tugging and straining at the oars. Amos Green, De Catinat, and even the old merchant had to take their spell ere morning, when the sailors were needed aboard for the handling of the canvas. At last, however, with the early dawn the river broadened out and each bank trended away, leaving a long funnel-shaped estuary between. Ephraim Savage snuffed the air and paced the deck briskly with a twinkle in his keen gray eyes. The wind had fallen away, but there was still enough to drive them slowly upon their course.

“Where’s the gal?” he asked.

“She is in my cabin,” said Amos Green. “I thought that maybe she could manage there until we got across.”

“Where will you sleep yourself, then?”

“Tut, a litter of spruce boughs and a sheet of birch bark over me have been enough all these years. What would I ask better than this deck of soft white pine and my blanket?”

“Very good. The old man and his nephew, him with the blue coat, can have the two empty bunks. But you must speak to that man, Amos. I’ll have no philandering aboard my ship, lad — no whispering or cuddling or any such foolishness. Tell him that this ship is just a bit broke off from Boston, and he’ll have to put up with Boston ways until he gets off her. They’ve been good enough for better men than him. You give me the French for ‘no philandering,’ and I’ll bring him up with a round turn when he drifts.”

“It’s a pity we left so quick or they might have been married before we started. She’s a good girl, Ephraim, and he is a fine man, for all that their ways are not the same as ours. They don’t seem to take life so hard as we, and maybe they get more pleasure out of it.”

“I never heard tell that we were put here to get pleasure out of it,” said the old Puritan, shaking his head. “The valley of the shadow of death don’t seem to me to be the kind o’ name one would give to a play-ground. It is a trial and a chastening, that’s what it is, the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. We’re bad from the beginning, like a stream that runs from a tamarack swamp, and we’ve enough to do to get ourselves to rights without any fool’s talk about pleasure.”

“It seems to me to be all mixed up,” said Amos. “like the fat and the lean in a bag of pemmican. Look at that sun just pushing its edge over the trees, and see the pink flush on the clouds and the river like a rosy ribbon behind us. It’s mighty pretty to our eyes, and very pleasing to us, and it wouldn’t be so to my mind if the Creator hadn’t wanted it to be. Many a time when I have lain in the woods in the fall and smoked my pipe, and felt how good the tobacco was, and how bright the yellow maples were, and the purple ash, and the red tupelo blazing among the bushwood, I’ve felt that the real fool’s talk was with the man who could doubt that all this was meant to make the world happier for us.”

“You’ve been thinking too much in them woods,” said Ephraim Savage, gazing at him uneasily. “Don’t let your sail be too great for your boat, lad, nor trust to your own wisdom. Your father was from the Bay, and you were raised from a stock that cast the dust of England from their feet rather than bow down to Baal. Keep a grip on the word and don't think beyond it. But what is the matter with the old man? He don't seem easy in his mind."

The old merchant had been leaning over the bulwarks, looking back with a drawn face and weary eyes at the red curving track behind them which marked the path to Paris. Adele had come up now, with not a thought to spare upon the dangers and troubles which lay in front of her as she chafed the old man's thin cold hands, and whispered words of love and comfort into his ears. But they had come to the point where the gentle still-flowing river began for the first time to throb to the beat of the sea. The old man gazed forward with horror at the bowsprit as he saw it rise slowly upwards into the air, and clung frantically at the rail as it seemed to slip away from beneath him.

"We are always in the hollow of God's hand," he whispered, "but oh,

Adele, it is a dreadful thing to feel His fingers moving under us."

"Come with me, uncle," said De Catinat, passing his arm under that of the old man. "It is long since you have rested. And you, Adele, I pray that you will go and sleep, my poor darling, for it has been a weary journey. Go now, to please me, and when you wake, both France and your troubles will lie behind you."

When father and daughter had left the deck, De Catinat made his way aft again to where Amos Green and the captain were standing.

"I am glad to get them below, Amos," said he, "for I fear that we may have trouble yet."

"And how?"

"You see the white road which runs by the southern bank of the river. Twice within the last half-hour I have seen horsemen spurring for dear life along it. Where the spires and smoke are yonder is Honfleur, and thither it was that these men went. I know not who could ride so madly at such an hour unless they were the messengers of the king. Oh, see, there is a third one!"

On the white band which wound among the green meadows a black dot could be seen which moved along with great rapidity, vanished behind a clump of trees, and then reappeared again, making for the distant city. Captain Savage drew out his glass and gazed at the rider.

"Ay, ay," said he, as he snapped it up again. "It is a soldier, sure enough. I can see the glint of the scabbard which he carries on his larboard side. I think we shall have more wind soon. With a breeze we can show our heels to anything in French waters, but a galley or an armed boat would overhaul us now."

De Catinat, who, though he could speak little English, had learned in America to understand it pretty well, looked anxiously at Amos Green. "I fear that we shall bring trouble on this good captain," said he, "and that the loss of his cargo and ship may be his reward for having befriended us. Ask him whether he would not prefer to land us on the north bank. With our money we might make our way into the Lowlands."

Ephraim Savage looked at his passenger with eyes which had lost something of their sternness. "Young man," said he, "I see that you can understand something of my talk."

De Catinat nodded.

"I tell you then that I am a bad man to beat. Any man that was ever shipmates with me would tell you as much. I just jam my helm and keep my course as long as God will let me. D'ye see?"

De Catinat again nodded, though in truth the seaman's metaphors left him with but a very general sense of his meaning.

"We're comin' abreast of that there town, and in ten minutes we shall know if there is any trouble waiting for us. But I'll tell you a story as we go that'll show you what kind o' man you've shipped with. It was ten years ago that I speak of, when I was in the Speedwell, sixty-ton brig, tradin' betwixt Boston and Jamestown, goin' south with lumber and skins and fixin's, d'ye see, and north again with tobacco and molasses. One night, blowin' half a gale from the south'ard, we ran on a reef two miles to the east of Cape May, and down we went with a hole in our bottom like as if she'd been spitted on the steeple o' one o' them Honfleur churches. Well, in the morning there I was washin' about, nigh out of sight of land, clingin' on to half the foreyard, without a sign either of my mates or of wreckage. I wasn't so cold, for it was early fall, and I could get three parts of my body on to the spar, but I was hungry and thirsty and bruised, so I just took in two holes of my waist-belt, and put up a hymn, and had a look round for what I could see. Well, I saw more than I cared for. Within five paces of me there was a great fish, as long pretty nigh as the spar that I was grippin'. It's a mighty pleasant thing to have your legs in the water and a beast like that all ready for a nibble at your toes."

"Mon Dieu!" cried the French soldier. "And he have not eat you?"

Ephraim Savage's little eyes twinkled at the reminiscence.

"I ate him," said he.

"What!" cried Amos.

"It's a mortal fact. I'd a jack-knife in my pocket, Same as this one, and I kicked my legs to keep the brute off, and I whittled away at the spar until I'd got a good jagged bit off, sharp at each end, same as a nigger told me once down Delaware way. Then I waited for him, and stopped kicking, so he came at me like a hawk on a chick-a-dee. When he turned up his belly I jammed my left hand with the wood right into his great grinnin' mouth, and I let him have it with my knife between the gills. He tried to break away then, but I held on, d'ye see, though he took me so deep I thought I'd never come up again. I was nigh gone when we got to the surface, but he was floatin' with the white up, and twenty holes in his shirt front. Then I got back to my spar, for we'd gone a long fifty fathoms under water, and when I reached it I fainted dead away."

"And then?"

"Well, when I came to, it was calm, and there was the dead shark floatin' beside me. I paddled my spar over to him and I got loose a few yards of halliard that were hangin' from one end of it. I made a clove-hitch round his tail, d'ye see, and got the end of it slung over the spar and fastened, so as I couldn't lose him. Then I set to work and I ate him in a week right up to his back fin, and I drank the rain that fell on my coat, and when I was picked up by the Gracie of Gloucester, I was that fat that I could scarce climb aboard. That's what Ephraim Savage means, my lad, when he says that he is a baddish man to beat."

Whilst the Puritan seaman had been detailing his reminiscence, his eyes had kept wandering from the clouds to the flapping sails and back. Such wind as there was came in little short puffs, and the canvas either drew full or was absolutely slack. The fleecy shreds of cloud above, however, travelled swiftly across the blue sky. It was on these that the captain fixed his gaze, and he watched them like a man who is working out a problem in his mind. They were abreast of Honfleur now, and about half a mile out from it. Several sloops and brigs were lying there in a cluster, and a whole fleet of brown-sailed fishing-boats were tacking slowly in. Yet all was quiet on the curving quay and on the half-moon fort over which floated the white flag with the golden fleur-de-lis. The port lay on their quarter now and they were drawing away more quickly as the breeze freshened. De Catinat glancing back had almost made up his mind that their fears were quite groundless when they were brought back in an instant and more urgently than ever.

Round the corner of the mole a great dark boat had dashed into view, ringed round with foam from her flying prow, and from the ten pairs of oars which swung from either side of her. A dainty white ensign drooped over her stern, and in her bows the sun's light was caught by a heavy brass carronade. She was packed with men, and the gleam which twinkled every now and again from amongst them told that they were armed to the teeth. The captain brought his glass to bear upon them and whistled. Then he glanced up at the clouds once more.

"Thirty men," said he, "and they go three paces to our two. You, sir, take your blue coat off this deck or you'll bring trouble upon us. The Lord will look after His own if they'll only keep from foolishness. Get these hatches off, Tomlinson. So! Where's Jim Sturt and Hiram Jefferson? Let them stand by to clap them on again when I whistle. Starboard! Starboard! Keep her as full as she'll draw. Now, Amos, and you, Tomlinson, come here until I have a word with you."

The three stood in consultation upon the poop, glancing back at their pursuers. There could be no doubt that the wind was freshening; it blew briskly in their faces as they looked back, but it was not steady yet, and the boat was rapidly overhauling them. Already they could see the faces of the marines who sat in the stern, and the gleam of the lighted linstock which the gunner held in his hand.

"Hola!" cried an officer in excellent English. "Lay her to or we fire"

"Who are you, and what do you want?" shouted Ephraim Savage, in a voice that might have been heard from the bank.

"We come in the king's name, and we want a party of Huguenots from Paris who came on board of your vessel at Rouen."

"Brace back the foreyard and lay her to," shouted the captain. "Drop a ladder over the side there and look smart! So! Now we are ready for them."

The yard was swung round and the vessel lay quietly rising and falling on the waves. The boat dashed alongside, her brass cannon trained upon the brigantine, and her squad of marines with their fingers upon their triggers ready to open fire. They grinned and shrugged their shoulders when they saw that their sole opponents were three unarmed men upon the poop. The officer, a young active fellow with a bristling moustache, like the whiskers of a cat, was on deck in an instant with his drawn sword in his hand.

“Come up, two of you!” he cried. “You stand here at the head of the ladder, sergeant. Throw up a rope and you can fix it to this stanchion. Keep awake down there and be all ready to fire! You come with me, Corporal Lemoine. Who is captain of this ship?”

“I am, sir,” said Ephraim Savage submissively.

“You have three Huguenots aboard?”

“Tut! tut! Huguenots, are they? I thought they were very anxious to get away, but as long as they paid their passage it was no business of mine. An old man, his daughter, and a young fellow about your age in some sort of livery.”

“In uniform, sir! The uniform of the king’s guard. Those are the folk I have come for.”

“And you wish to take them back?”

“Most certainly.”

“Poor folk! I am sorry for them.”

“And so am I, but orders are orders and must be done.”

“Quite so. Well, the old man is in his bunk asleep. The maid is in a cabin below. And the other is sleeping down the hold there where we had to put him, for there is no room elsewhere.”

“Sleeping, you say? We had best surprise him.”

“But think you that you dare do it alone! He has no arms, it is true, but he is a well-grown young fellow. Will you not have twenty men up from the boat?”

Some such thought had passed through the officer’s head, but the captain’s remark put him upon his mettle.

“Come with me, corporal,” said he. “Down this ladder, you say?”

“Yes, down the ladder and straight on. He lies between those two cloth bales.” Ephraim Savage looked up with a smile playing about the corners of his grim mouth. The wind was whistling now in the rigging, and the stays of the mast were humming like two harp strings. Amos Green lounged beside the French sergeant who guarded the end of the rope ladder, while Tomlinson, the mate, stood with a bucket of water in his hand exchanging remarks in very bad French with the crew of the boat beneath him.

The officer made his way slowly down the ladder which led into the hold, and the corporal followed him, and had his chest level with the deck when the other had reached the bottom. It may have been something in Ephraim

Savage’s face, or it may have been the gloom around him which startled the young Frenchman, but a sudden suspicion flashed into his mind.

“Up again, corporal!” he shouted, “I think that you are best at the top.”

“And I think that you are best down below, my friend,” said the Puritan, who gathered the officer’s meaning from his gesture. Putting the sole of his boot against the man’s chest he gave a shove which sent both him and the ladder crashing down on to the officer beneath him. As he did so he blew his whistle, and in a moment the hatch was back in its place and clamped down on each side with iron bars.

The sergeant had swung round at the sound of the crash, but Amos Green, who had waited for the movement, threw his arms about him and hurled him overboard into the sea. At the same instant the connecting rope was severed, the foreyard creaked back into position again, and the bucketful of salt water soused down over the gunner and his gun, putting out his linstock and wetting his priming. A shower of balls from the marines piped through the air or rapped up against the planks, but the boat was tossing and jerking in the short choppy waves and to aim was impossible. In vain the men tugged and strained at their oars while the gunner worked like a maniac to relight his linstock and to replace his priming. The boat had lost its weigh, while the brigantine was flying along now with every sail bulging and swelling to bursting-point. Crack! went the carronade at last, and five little slits in the mainsail showed that her charge of grape had flown high. Her second shot left no trace behind it, and at the third she was at the limit of her range. Half an hour afterwards a little dark dot upon the horizon with a golden speck at one end of it was all that could be seen of the Honfleur guard-boat. Wider and wider grew the low-lying shores, broader and broader was the vast spread of blue waters ahead, the smoke of Havre lay like a little cloud upon the northern horizon, and Captain Ephraim Savage paced his deck with his face as grim as ever, but with a dancing light in his gray eyes.

“I knew that the Lord would look after His own,” said he complacently. “We’ve got her beak straight now, and there’s not as much as a dab of mud betwixt this and the three hills of Boston. You’ve had too much of these French wines of late, Amos, lad. Come down and try a real Boston brewing with a double stroke of malt in the mash tub.”

CHAPTER XXV.

A BOAT OF THE DEAD.

For two days the Golden Rod lay becalmed close to the Cape La Hague, with the Breton coast extending along the whole of the southern horizon. On the third morning, however, came a sharp breeze, and they drew rapidly away from land, until it was but a vague dim line which blended with the cloud banks. Out there on the wide free ocean, with the wind on their cheeks and the salt spray pringling upon their lips, these hunted folk might well throw off their sorrows and believe that they had left for ever behind them all tokens of those strenuous men whose earnest piety had done more harm than frivolity and wickedness could have accomplished. And yet even now they could not shake off their traces, for the sin of the cottage is bounded by the cottage door, but that of the palace spreads its evil over land and sea.

"I am frightened about my father, Amory," said Adele, as they stood together by the shrouds and looked back at the dim cloud upon the horizon which marked the position of that France which they were never to see again.

"But he is out of danger now."

"Out of danger from cruel laws, but I fear that he will never see the promised land."

"What do you mean, Adele? My uncle is hale and hearty."

"Ah, Amory, his very heart-roots were fastened in the Rue St. Martin, and when they were torn his life was torn also. Paris and his business, they were the world to him."

"But he will accustom himself to this new life."

"If it only could be so! But I fear, I fear, that he is over old for such a change. He says not a word of complaint. But I read upon his face that he is stricken to the heart. For hours together he will gaze back at France, with the tears running silently down his cheeks. And his hair has turned from gray to white within the week."

De Catinat also had noticed that the gaunt old Huguenot had grown gaunter, that the lines upon his stern face were deeper, and that his head fell forward upon his breast as he walked. He was about, however, to suggest that the voyage might restore the merchant’s health, when Adele gave a cry of surprise and pointed out over the port quarter. So beautiful was she at the instant with her raven hair blown back by the wind, a glow of colour struck into her pale cheeks by the driving spray, her lips parted in her excitement, and one white hand shading her eyes, that he stood beside her with all his thoughts bent upon her grace and her sweetness.

“Look!” she cried. “There is something floating upon the sea. I saw it upon the crest of a wave.”

He looked in the direction in which she pointed, but at first he saw nothing. The wind was still behind them, and a brisk sea was running of a deep rich green colour, with long creamy curling caps to the larger waves. The breeze would catch these foam-crests from time to time, and then there would be a sharp spatter upon the decks, with a salt smack upon the lips, and a pringling in the eyes. Suddenly as he gazed, however, something black was tilted up upon the sharp summit of one of the seas, and swooped out of view again upon the further side. It was so far from him that he could make nothing of it, but sharper eyes than his had caught a glance of it. Amos Green had seen the girl point and observed what it was which had attracted her attention.

“Captain Ephraim,” cried he, “there’s a boat on the starboard quarter.”

The New England seaman whipped up his glass and steadied it upon the bulwark.

“Ay, it’s a boat,” said he, “but an empty one. Maybe it’s been washed off from some ship, or gone adrift from shore. Put her hard down, Mr. Tomlinson, for it just so happens that I am in need of a boat at present.”

Half a minute later the Golden Rod had swung round and was running swiftly down towards the black spot which still bobbed and danced upon the waves. As they neared her they could see that something was projecting over her side.

“It’s a man’s head!” cried Amos Green.

But Ephraim Savage’s grim face grew grimmer. “It’s a man’s foot,” said he. “I think that you had best take the gal below to the cabin.”

Amid a solemn hush they ran alongside this lonely craft which hung out so sinister a signal. Within ten yards of her the foreyard was hauled aback and they gazed down upon her terrible crew.

She was a little thirteen-foot cockle-shell, very broad for her length and so flat in the bottom that she had been meant evidently for river or lake work. Huddled together beneath the seats were three folk, a man in the dress of a respectable artisan, a woman of the same class, and a little child about a year old. The boat was half full of water and the woman and child were stretched with their faces downwards, the fair curls of the infant and the dark locks of the mother washing to and fro like water-weeds upon the surface. The man lay with a slate-coloured face, his chin cocking up towards the sky, his eyes turned upwards to the whites, and his mouth wide open showing a leathern crinkled tongue like a rotting leaf. In the bows, all huddled in a heap, and with a single paddle still grasped in his hand, there crouched a very small man clad in black, an open book lying across his face, and one stiff leg jutting upwards with the heel of the foot resting between the rowlocks. So this strange company swooped and tossed upon the long green Atlantic rollers.

A boat had been lowered by the Golden Rod, and the unfortunates were soon conveyed upon deck. No particle of either food or drink was to be found, nor anything save the single paddle and the open Bible which lay across the small man’s face. Man, woman, and child had all been dead a day at the least, and so with the short prayers used upon the seas they were buried from the vessel’s side. The small man had at first seemed also to be lifeless, but Amos had detected some slight flutter of his heart, and the faintest haze was left upon the watch glass which was held before his mouth. Wrapped in a dry blanket he was laid beside the mast, and the mate forced a few drops of rum every few minutes between his lips until the little spark of life which still lingered in him might be fanned to a flame. Meanwhile Ephraim Savage had ordered up the two prisoners whom he had entrapped at Honfleur. Very foolish they looked as they stood blinking and winking in the daylight from which they had been so long cut off.

“Very sorry, captain,” said the seaman, “but either you had to come with us, d’ye see, or we had to stay with you. They’re waiting for me over at Boston, and in truth I really couldn’t tarry.”

The French soldier shrugged his shoulders and looked around him with a lengthening face. He and his corporal were limp with sea-sickness, and as miserable as a Frenchman is when first he finds that France has vanished from his view.

“Which would you prefer, to go on with us to America, or go back to France?”

“Back to France, if I can find my way. Oh, I must get to France again if only to have a word with that fool of a gunner.”

“Well, we emptied a bucket of water over his linstock and priming, d’ye see, so maybe he did all he could. But there’s France, where that thickening is over yonder.”

“I see it! I see it! Ah, if my feet were only upon it once more.”

“There is a boat beside us, and you may take it.”

“My God, what happiness! Corporal Lemoine, the boat! Let us push off at once.”

“But you need a few things first. Good Lord, who ever heard of a man pushing off like that! Mr. Tomlinson, just sling a keg of water and a barrel of meat and of biscuit into this boat. Hiram Jefferson, bring two oars aft. It’s a long pull with the wind in your teeth, but you’ll be there by to-morrow night, and the weather is set fair.”

The two Frenchmen were soon provided with all that they were likely to require, and pushed off with a waving of hats and a shouting of bon voyage. The foreyard was swung round again and the Golden Rod turned her bowsprit for the west. For hours a glimpse could be caught of the boat, dwindling away on the wave-tops, until at last it vanished into the haze, and with it vanished the very last link which connected them with the great world which they were leaving behind them.

But whilst these things had been done, the senseless man beneath the mast had twitched his eyelids, had drawn a little gasping breath, and then finally had opened his eyes. His skin was like gray parchment drawn tightly over his bones, and the limbs which thrust out from his clothes were those of a sickly child. Yet, weak as he was, the large black eyes with which he looked about him were full of dignity and power. Old Catinat had come upon deck, and at the sight of the man and of his dress he had run forward, and had raised his head reverently and rested it in his own arms.

“He is one of the faithful,” he cried, “he is one of our pastors. Ah, now indeed a blessing will be upon our journey!”

But the man smiled gently and shook his head. “I fear that I may not come this journey with you,” said he, “for the Lord has called me upon a further journey of my own. I have had my summons and I am ready. I am indeed the pastor of the temple at Isigny, and when we heard the orders of the wicked king, I and two of the faithful with their little one put forth in the hope that we might come to England. But on the first day there came a wave which swept away one of our oars and all that was in the boat, our bread, our keg, and we were left with no hope save in Him. And then He began to call us to Him one at a time, first the child, and then the woman, and then the man, until I only am left, though I feel that my own time is not long. But since ye are also of the faithful, may I not serve you in any way before I go?"

The merchant shook his head, and then suddenly a thought flashed upon him, and he ran with joy upon his face and whispered eagerly to Amos Green. Amos laughed, and strode across to the captain.

"It's time," said Ephraim Savage grimly.

Then the whisperers went to De Catinat. He sprang in the air and his eyes shone with delight. And then they went down to Adele in her cabin, and she started and blushed, and turned her sweet face away, and patted her hair with her hands as woman will when a sudden call is made upon her. And so, since haste was needful, and since even there upon the lonely sea there was one coming who might at any moment snap their purpose, they found themselves in a few minutes, this gallant man and this pure woman, kneeling hand in hand before the dying pastor, who raised his thin arm feebly in benediction as he muttered the words which should make them forever one.

Adele had often pictured her wedding to herself, as what young girl has not? Often in her dreams she had knelt before the altar with Amory in the temple of the Rue St. Martin. Or sometimes her fancy had taken her to some of those smaller churches in the provinces, those little refuges where a handful of believers gathered together, and it was there that her thoughts had placed the crowning act of a woman's life. But when had she thought of such a marriage as this, with the white deck swaying beneath them, the ropes humming above, their only choristers the gulls which screamed around them, and their wedding hymn the world-old anthem which is struck from the waves by the wind? And when could she forget the scene? The yellow masts and the bellying sails, the gray drawn face and the cracked lips of the castaway, her father's gaunt earnest features as he knelt to support the dying minister, De Catinat in his blue coat, already faded and weather-stained. Captain Savage with his wooden face turned towards the clouds, and Amos Green with his hands in his pockets and a quiet twinkle in his blue eyes! Then behind all the lanky mate and the little group of New England seamen with their palmetto hats and their serious faces!

And so it was done amid kindly words in a harsh foreign tongue, and the shaking of rude hands hardened by the rope and the oar. De Catinat and his wife leaned together by the shrouds when all was over and watched the black side as it rose and fell, and the green water which raced past them.

"It is all so strange and so new," she said. "Our future seems as vague and dark as yonder cloud-banks which gather in front of us."

"If it rest with me," he answered, "your future will be as merry and bright as the sunlight that glints on the crest of these waves. The country that drove us forth lies far behind us, but out there is another and a fairer country, and every breath of wind wafts us nearer to it. Freedom awaits us there, and we bear with us youth and love, and what could man or woman ask for more?"

So they stood and talked while the shadows deepened into twilight and the first faint gleam of the stars broke out in the darkening heavens above them. But ere those stars had waned again one more toiler had found rest aboard the Golden Rod, and the scattered flock from Isigny had found their little pastor once more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST PORT.

For three weeks the wind kept at east or north-east, always at a brisk breeze and freshening sometimes into half a gale. The Golden Rod sped merrily upon her way with every sail drawing, alow and aloft, so that by the end of the third week Amos and Ephraim Savage were reckoning out the hours before they would look upon their native land once more. To the old seaman who was used to meeting and to parting it was a small matter, but Amos, who had never been away before, was on fire with impatience, and would sit smoking for hours with his legs astride the shank of the bowsprit, staring ahead at the skyline, in the hope that his friend's reckoning had been wrong, and that at any moment he might see the beloved coast line looming up in front of him.

"It's no use, lad," said Captain Ephraim, laying his great red hand upon his shoulder. "They that go down to the sea in ships need a power of patience, and there's no good eatin' your heart out for what you can't get."

"There's a feel of home about the air, though," Amos answered. "It seems to whistle through your teeth with a bite to it that I never felt over yonder. Ah, it will take three months of the Mohawk Valley before I feel myself to rights."

"Well," said his friend, thrusting a plug of Trinidado tobacco into the corner of his cheek, "I've been on the sea since I had hair to my face, mostly in the coast trade, d'ye see, but over the water as well, as far as those navigation laws would let me. Except the two years that I came ashore for the King Philip business, when every man that could carry a gun was needed on the border, I've never been three casts of a biscuit from salt water, and I tell you that I never knew a better crossing than the one we have just made."

"Ay, we have come along like a buck before a forest fire. But it is strange to me how you find your way so clearly out here with never track nor trail to guide you. It would puzzle me, Ephraim, to find America, to say nought of the Narrows of New York."

“I am somewhat too far to the north, Amos. We have been on or about the fiftieth since we sighted Cape La Hague. To-morrow we should make land, by my reckonin’.”

“Ah, to-morrow! And what will it be? Mount Desert? Cape Cod?

Long Island?”

“Nay, lad, we are in the latitude of the St. Lawrence, and are more like to see the Arcadia coast. Then with this wind a day should carry us south, or two at the most. A few more such voyages and I shall buy myself a fair brick house in Green Lane of North Boston, where I can look down on the bay, or on the Charles or the Mystic, and see the ships comin’ and goin’. So I would end my life in peace and quiet.”

All day Amos Green, in spite of his friend’s assurance, strained his eyes in the fruitless search for land, and when at last the darkness fell he went below and laid out his fringed hunting tunic, his leather gaiters, and his raccoon-skin cap, which were very much more to his taste than the broadcloth coat in which the Dutch mercer of New York had clad him. De Catinat had also put on the dark coat of civil life, and he and Adele were busy preparing all things for the old man, who had fallen so weak that there was little which he could do for himself. A fiddle was screaming in the forecastle, and half the night through hoarse bursts of homely song mingled with the dash of the waves and the whistle of the wind, as the New England men in their own grave and stolid fashion made merry over their home-coming.

The mate’s watch that night was from twelve to four, and the moon was shining brightly for the first hour of it. In the early morning, however, it clouded over, and the Golden Rod plunged into one of those dim clammy mists which lie on all that tract of ocean. So thick was it that from the poop one could just make out the loom of the foresail, but could see nothing of the fore-topmast-stay sail or the jib. The wind was north-east with a very keen edge to it, and the dainty brigantine lay over, scudding along with her lee rails within hand’s touch of the water. It had suddenly turned very cold — so cold that the mate stamped up and down the poop, and his four seamen shivered together under the shelter of the bulwarks. And then in a moment one of them was up, thrusting with his forefinger into the air and screaming, while a huge white wall sprang out of the darkness at the very end of the bowsprit, and the ship struck with a force which snapped her two masts like dried reeds in a wind, and changed her in an instant to a crushed and shapeless heap of spars and wreckage.

The mate had shot the length of the poop at the shock, and had narrowly escaped from the falling mast, while of his four men two had been hurled through the huge gap which yawned in the bows, while a third had dashed his head to pieces against the stock of the anchor. Tomlinson staggered forwards to find the whole front part of the vessel driven inwards, and a single seaman sitting dazed amid splintered spars, flapping sails, and writhing, lashing cordage. It was still as dark as pitch, and save the white crest of a leaping wave nothing was to be seen beyond the side of the vessel. The mate was peering round him in despair at the ruin which had come so suddenly upon them when he found Captain Ephraim at his elbow, half clad, but as wooden and as serene as ever.

“An iceberg,” said he, sniffing at the chill air. “Did you not smell it, friend Tomlinson?”

“Truly I found it cold, Captain Savage, but I set it down to the mist.”

“There is a mist ever set around them, though the Lord in His wisdom knows best why, for it is a sore trial to poor sailor men. She makes water fast, Mr. Tomlinson. She is down by the bows already.”

The other watch had swarmed upon deck and one of them was measuring the well. “There is three feet of water,” he cried, “and the pumps sucked dry yesterday at sundown.”

“Hiram Jefferson and John Moreton to the pumps!” cried the captain. “Mr. Tomlinson, clear away the long-boat and let us see if we may set her right, though I fear that she is past mending.”

“The long-boat has stove two planks,” cried a seaman.

“The jolly-boat, then?”

“She is in three pieces.”

The mate tore his hair, but Ephraim Savage smiled like a man who is gently tickled by some coincidence.

“Where is Amos Green?”

“Here, Captain Ephraim. What can I do?”

“And I?” asked De Catinat eagerly. Adele and her father had been wrapped in mantles and placed for shelter in the lee of the round house.

“Tell him he can take his spell at the pumps,” said the Captain to Amos. “And you, Amos, you are a handy man with a tool. Get into yonder long-boat with a lantern and see if you cannot patch her up.”

For half an hour Amos Green hammered and trimmed and caulked, while the sharp measured clanking of the pumps sounded above the dash of the seas. Slowly, very slowly, the bows of the brigantine were settling down, and her stern cocking up.

“You’ve not much time, Amos, lad,” said the captain quietly.

“She’ll float now, though she’s not quite water-tight.”

“Very good. Lower away! Keep up the pump in there! Mr. Tomlinson, see that provisions and water are ready, as much as she will hold. Come with me, Hiram Jefferson.”

The seaman and the captain swung themselves down into the tossing boat, the latter with a lantern strapped to his waist. Together they made their way until they were under her mangled bows. The captain shook his head when he saw the extent of the damage.

“Cut away the foresail and pass it over,” said he.

Tomlinson and Amos Green cut away the lashings with their knives and lowered the corner of the sail. Captain Ephraim and the seaman seized it, and dragged it across the mouth of the huge gaping leak. As he stooped to do it, however, the ship heaved up upon a swell, and the captain saw in the yellow light of his lantern sinuous black cracks which radiated away backwards from the central hole.

“How much in the well?” he asked.

“Five and a half feet.”

“Then the ship is lost. I could put my finger between her planks as far as I can see back. Keep the pumps going there! Have you the food and water, Mr. Tomlinson?”

“Here, sir.”

“Lower them over the bows. This boat cannot live more than an hour or two. Can you see anything of the berg?”

“The fog is lifting on the starboard quarter,” cried one of the men.

“Yes, there is the berg, quarter of a mile to leeward!”

The mist had thinned away suddenly, and the moon glimmered through once more upon the great lonely sea and the stricken ship. There, like a huge sail, was the monster piece of ice upon which they had shattered themselves, rocking slowly to and fro with the wash of the waves.

“You must make for her,” said Captain Ephraim. “There is no other chance. Lower the gal over the bows! Well, then, her father first, if she likes it better. Tell them to sit still, Amos, and that the Lord will bear us up if we keep clear of foolishness. So! You're a brave lass for all your niminy-piminy lingo. Now the keg and the barrel, and all the wraps and cloaks you can find. Now the other man, the Frenchman. Ay, ay, passengers first, and you have got to come. Now, Amos! Now the seamen, and you last, friend Tomlinson."

It was well that they had not very far to go, for the boat was weighed down almost to the edge, and it took the baling of two men to keep in check the water which leaked in between the shattered planks. When all were safely in their places. Captain Ephraim Savage swung himself aboard again, which was but too easy now that every minute brought the bows nearer to the water. He came back with a bundle of clothing which he threw into the boat.

"Push off!" he cried.

"Jump in, then."

"Ephraim Savage goes down with his ship," said he quietly. "Friend Tomlinson, it is not my way to give my orders more than once. Push off, I say!"

The mate thrust her out with a boat-hook. Amos and De Catinat gave a cry of dismay, but the stolid New Englanders settled down to their oars and pulled off for the iceberg.

"Amos! Amos! Will you suffer it?" cried the guardsman in French. "My honour will not permit me to leave him thus. I should feel it a stain for ever."

"Tomlinson, you would not leave him! Go on board and force him to come."

"The man is not living who could force him to do what he had no mind for."

"He may change his purpose."

"He never changes his purpose."

"But you cannot leave him, man! You must at least lie by and pick him up."

"The boat leaks like a sieve," said the mate. "I will take her to the berg, leave you all there, if we can find footing, and go back for the captain. Put your heart into it, my lads, for the sooner we are there the sooner we shall get back."

But they had not taken fifty strokes before Adele gave a sudden scream.

"My God!" she cried, "the ship is going down!"

She had settled lower and lower in the water, and suddenly with a sound of rending planks she thrust down her bows like a diving water-fowl, her stern flew up into the air, and with a long sucking noise she shot down swifter and swifter until the leaping waves closed over her high poop lantern. With one impulse the boat swept round again and made backwards as fast as willing arms could pull it. But all was quiet at the scene of the disaster. Not even a fragment of wreckage was left upon the surface to show where the Golden Rod had found her last harbour. For a long quarter of an hour they pulled round and round in the moonlight, but not a glimpse could they see of the Puritan seaman, and at last, when in spite of the balers the water was washing round their ankles, they put her head about once more, and made their way in silence and with heavy hearts to their dreary island of refuge.

Desolate as it was, it was their only hope now, for the leak was increasing and it was evident that the boat could not be kept afloat long. As they drew nearer they saw with dismay that the side which faced them was a solid wall of ice sixty feet high without a flaw or crevice in its whole extent. The berg was a large one, fifty paces at least each way, and there was a hope that the other side might be more favourable. Baling hard, they paddled round the corner, but only to find themselves faced by another gloomy ice-crag. Again they went round, and again they found that the berg increased rather than diminished in height. There remained only one other side, and they knew as they rowed round to it that their lives hung upon the result, for the boat was almost settling down beneath them. They shot out from the shadow into the full moonlight and looked upon a sight which none of them would forget until their dying day.

The cliff which faced them was as precipitous as any of the others, and it glimmered and sparkled all over where the silver light fell upon the thousand facets of ice. Right in the centre, however, on a level with the water’s edge, there was what appeared to be a huge hollowed-out cave which marked the spot where the Golden Rod had, in shattering herself, dislodged a huge boulder, and so amid her own ruin prepared a refuge for those who had trusted themselves to her. This cavern was of the richest emerald green, light and clear at the edges, but toning away into the deepest purples and blues at the back. But it was not the beauty of this grotto, nor was it the assurance of rescue which brought a cry of joy and of wonder from every lip, but it was that, seated upon an ice boulder and placidly smoking a long corn-cob pipe, there was perched in front of them no less a person than Captain Ephraim Savage of Boston. For a moment the castaways could almost have believed that it was his wraith, were wraiths ever seen in so homely an attitude, but the tones of his voice very soon showed that it was indeed he, and in no very Christian temper either.

“Friend Tomlinson,” said he, “when I tell you to row for an iceberg I mean you to row right away there, d’ye see, and not to go philandering about over the ocean. It’s not your fault that I’m not froze, and so I would have been if I hadn’t some dry tobacco and my tinder-box to keep myself warm.”

Without stopping to answer his commander’s reproaches, the mate headed for the ledge, which had been cut into a slope by the bows of the brigantine, so that the boat was run up easily on to the ice. Captain Savage seized his dry clothes and vanished into the back of the cave, to return presently warmer in body, and more contented in mind. The long-boat had been turned upside down for a seat, the gratings and thwarts taken out and covered with wraps to make a couch for the lady, and the head knocked out of the keg of biscuits.

“We were frightened for you, Ephraim,” said Amos Green. “I had a heavy heart this night when I thought that I should never see you more.”

“Tut, Amos, you should have known me better.”

“But how came you here, captain?” asked Tomlinson. “I thought that maybe you had been taken down by the suck of the ship.”

“And so I was. It is the third ship in which I have gone down, but they have never kept me down yet. I went deeper to-night than when the Speedwell sank, but not so deep as in the Governor Winthrop. When I came up I swam to the berg, found this nook, and crawled in. Glad I was to see you, for I feared that you had foundered.”

“We put back to pick you up and we passed you in the darkness. And what should we do now?”

“Rig up that boat-sail and make quarters for the gal. Then get our supper and such rest as we can, for there is nothing to be done to-night, and there may be much in the morning.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DWINDLING ISLAND.

Amos Green was aroused in the morning by a hand upon his shoulder, and springing to his feet, found De Catinat standing beside him. The survivors of the crew were grouped about the upturned boat, slumbering heavily after their labours of the night. The red rim of the sun had just pushed itself above the water-line, and sky and sea were one blaze of scarlet and orange from the dazzling gold of the horizon to the lightest pink at the zenith. The first rays flashed directly into their cave, sparkling and glimmering upon the ice crystals and tingeing the whole grotto with a rich warm light. Never was a fairy's palace more lovely than this floating refuge which Nature had provided for them.

But neither the American nor the Frenchman had time now to give a thought to the novelty and beauty of their situation. The latter's face was grave, and his friend read danger in his eyes.

"What is it, then?"

"The berg. It is coming to pieces."

"Tut, man, it is as solid as an island."

"I have been watching it. You see that crack which extends backwards from the end of our grotto. Two hours ago I could scarce put my hand into it. Now I can slip through it with ease. I tell you that she is splitting across."

Amos Green walked to the end of the funnel-shaped recess and found, as his friend had said, that a green sinuous crack extended away backwards into the iceberg, caused either by the tossing of the waves, or by the terrific impact of their vessel. He roused Captain Ephraim and pointed out the danger to him.

"Well, if she springs a leak we are gone," said he. "She's been thawing pretty fast as it is."

They could see now that what had seemed in the moonlight to be smooth walls of ice were really furrowed and wrinkled like an old man's face by the streams of melted water which were continually running down them. The whole huge mass was brittle and honeycombed and rotten. Already they could hear all round them the ominous drip, drip, and the splash and tinkle of the little rivulets as they fell into the ocean.

"Hullo!" cried Amos Green, "what's that?"

"What then?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"I could have sworn that I heard a voice."

"Impossible. We are all here."

"It must have been my fancy then."

Captain Ephraim walked to the seaward face of the cave and swept the ocean with his eyes. The wind had quite fallen away now, and the sea stretched away to the eastward, smooth and unbroken save for a single great black spar which floated near the spot where the Golden Rod had foundered.

"We should lie in the track of some ships," said the captain thoughtfully. "There's the codders and the herring-busses. We're over far south for them, I reckon. But we can't be more'n two hundred mile from Port Royal in Arcadia, and we're in the line of the St. Lawrence trade. If I had three white mountain pines, Amos, and a hundred yards of stout canvas I'd get up on the top of this thing, d'ye see, and I'd rig such a jury-mast as would send her humming into Boston Bay. Then I'd break her up and sell her for what she was worth, and turn a few pieces over the business. But she's a heavy old craft, and that's a fact, though even now she might do a knot or two an hour if she had a hurricane behind her. But what is it, Amos?"

The young hunter was standing with his ear slanting, his head bent forwards, and his eyes glancing sideways like a man who listens intently. He was about to answer when De Catinat gave a cry and pointed to the back of the cave.

"Look at the crack now."

It had widened by a foot since they had noticed it last, until it was now no longer a crack. It was a pass.

"Let us go through," said the captain.

"It can but come out on the other side."

"Then let us see the other side."

He led the way and the other two followed him. It was very dark as they advanced, with high dripping ice walls on either side and one little zigzagging slit of blue sky above their heads. Tripping and groping their way, they stumbled along until suddenly the passage grew wider and opened out into a large square of flat ice. The berg was level in the centre and sloped upwards from that point to the high cliffs which bounded it on each side. In three directions this slope was very steep, but in one it slanted up quite gradually, and the constant thawing had grooved the surface with a thousand irregularities by which an active man could ascend. With one impulse they began all three to clamber up until a minute later they were standing not far from the edge of the summit, seventy feet above the sea, with a view which took in a good fifty miles of water. In all that fifty miles there was no sign of life, nothing but the endless glint of the sun upon the waves.

Captain Ephraim whistled. “We are out of luck,” said he.

Amos Green looked about him with startled eyes. “I cannot understand it,” said he. “I could have sworn — By the eternal, listen to that!” The clear call of a military bugle rang out in the morning air. With a cry of amazement they all three craned forward and peered over the edge.

A large ship was lying under the very shadow of the iceberg. They looked straight down upon her snow-white decks, fringed with shining brass cannon, and dotted with seamen. A little clump of soldiers stood upon the poop going through the manual exercise, and it was from them that the call had come which had sounded so unexpectedly in the ears of the castaways. Standing back from the edge, they had not only looked over the top-masts of this welcome neighbour, but they had themselves been invisible from her decks. Now the discovery was mutual, as was shown by a chorus of shouts and cries from beneath them.

But the three did not wait an instant. Sliding and scrambling down the wet, slippery incline, they rushed shouting through the crack and into the cave where their comrades had just been startled by the bugle-call while in the middle of their cheerless breakfast. A few hurried words and the leaky long-boat had been launched, their possessions had been bundled in, and they were afloat once more. Pulling round a promontory of the berg, they found themselves under the stern of a fine corvette, the sides of which were lined with friendly faces, while from the peak there drooped a huge white banner mottled over with the golden lilies of France. In a very few minutes their boat had been hauled up and they found themselves on board the St. Christophe man-of-war, conveying Marquis de Denonville, the new Governor-General of Canada, to take over his duties.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE POOL OF QUEBEC.

A singular colony it was of which the shipwrecked party found themselves now to be members. The St. Christophe had left Rochelle three weeks before with four small consorts conveying five hundred soldiers to help the struggling colony on the St. Lawrence. The squadron had become separated, however, and the governor was pursuing his way alone in the hope of picking up the others in the river. Aboard he had a company of the regiment of Quercy, the staff of his own household, Saint Vallier, the new Bishop of Canada, with several of his attendants, three Recollet friars, and five Jesuits bound for the fatal Iroquois mission, half-a-dozen ladies on their way out to join their husbands, two Ursuline nuns, ten or twelve gallants whom love of adventure and the hope of bettering their fortunes had drawn across the seas, and lastly some twenty peasant maidens of Anjou who were secure of finding husbands waiting for them upon the beach, if only for the sake of the sheets, the pot, the tin plates and the kettle which the king would provide for each of his humble wards.

To add a handful of New England Independents, a Puritan of Boston, and three Huguenots to such a gathering, was indeed to bring fire-brand and powder-barrel together. And yet all aboard were so busy with their own concerns that the castaways were left very much to themselves. Thirty of the soldiers were down with fever and scurvy, and both priests and nuns were fully taken up in nursing them. Denonville, the governor, a pious-minded dragoon, walked the deck all day reading the Psalms of David, and sat up half the night with maps and charts laid out before him, planning out the destruction of the Iroquois who were ravaging his dominions. The gallants and the ladies flirted, the maidens of Anjou made eyes at the soldiers of Quercy, and the bishop Saint Vallier read his offices and lectured his clergy. Ephraim Savage used to stand all day glaring at the good man as he paced the deck with his red-edged missal in his hand, and muttering about the “abomination of desolation,” but his little ways were put down to his exposure upon the iceberg, and to the fixed idea in the French mind that men of the Anglo-Saxon stock are not to be held accountable for their actions.

There was peace between England and France at present, though feeling ran high between Canada and New York, the French believing, and with some justice, that the English colonists were whooping on the demons who attacked them. Ephraim and his men were therefore received hospitably on board, though the ship was so crowded that they had to sleep wherever they could find cover and space for their bodies. The Catinats, too, had been treated in an even more kindly fashion, the weak old man and the beauty of his daughter arousing the interest of the governor himself. De Catinat had, during the voyage, exchanged his uniform for a plain sombre suit, so that, except for his military bearing, there was nothing to show that he was a fugitive from the army. Old Catinat was now so weak that he was past the answering of questions, his daughter was forever at his side, and the soldier was diplomatist enough, after a training at Versailles, to say much without saying anything, and so their secret was still preserved. De Catinat had known what it was to be a Huguenot in Canada before the law was altered. He had no wish to try it after.

On the day after the rescue they sighted Cape Breton in the south, and soon running swiftly before an easterly wind, saw the loom of the east end of Anticosti. Then they sailed up the mighty river, though from mid-channel the banks upon either side were hardly to be seen. As the shores narrowed in, they saw the wild gorge of the Saguenay River upon the right, with the smoke from the little fishing and trading station of Tadousac streaming up above the pine trees. Naked Indians with their faces daubed with red clay, Algonquins and Abenakis, clustered round the ship in their birchen canoes with fruit and vegetables from the land, which brought fresh life to the scurvy-stricken soldiers. Thence the ship tacked on up the river past Mal Bay, the Ravine of the Eboulements and the Bay of St. Paul with its broad valley and wooded mountains all in a blaze with their beautiful autumn dress, their scarlets, their purples, and their golds, from the maple, the ash, the young oak, and the saplings of the birch. Amos Green, leaning on the bulwarks, stared with longing eyes at these vast expanses of virgin woodland, hardly traversed save by an occasional wandering savage or hardy coureur-de-bois. Then the bold outline of Cape Tourmente loomed up in front of them; they passed the rich placid meadows of Laval’s seigneury of Beaupre, and, skirting the settlements of the Island of Orleans, they saw the broad pool stretch out in front of them, the falls of Montmorenci, the high palisades of Cape Levi, the cluster of vessels, and upon the right that wonderful rock with its diadem of towers and its township huddled round its base, the centre and stronghold of French power in America. Cannon thundered from the bastions above, and were echoed back by the warship, while ensigns dipped, hats waved, and a swarm of boats and canoes shot out to welcome the new governor, and to convey the soldiers and passengers to shore.

The old merchant had pined away since he had left French soil, like a plant which has been plucked from its roots. The shock of the shipwreck and the night spent in their bleak refuge upon the iceberg had been too much for his years and strength. Since they had been picked up he had lain amid the scurvy-stricken soldiers with hardly a sign of life save for his thin breathing and the twitching of his scraggy throat. Now, however, at the sound of the cannon and the shouting he opened his eyes, and raised himself slowly and painfully upon his pillow. “What is it, father? What can we do for you?” cried Adele. “We are in America, and here is Amory and here am I, your children.”

But the old man shook his head. “The Lord has brought me to the promised land, but He has not willed that I should enter into it,” said he. “May His will be done, and blessed be His name forever! But at least I should wish, like Moses, to gaze upon it, if I cannot set foot upon it. Think you, Amory, that you could lend me your arm and lead me on to the deck?”

“If I have another to help me,” said De Catinat, and ascending to the deck, he brought Amos Green back with him. “Now, father, if you will lay a hand upon the shoulder of each, you need scarce put your feet to the boards.”

A minute later the old merchant was on the deck, and the two young men had seated him upon a coil of rope with his back against the mast, where he should be away from the crush. The soldiers were already crowding down into the boats, and all were so busy over their own affairs that they paid no heed to the little group of refugees who gathered round the stricken man. He turned his head painfully from side to side, but his eyes brightened as they fell upon the broad blue stretch of water, the flash of the distant falls, the high castle, and the long line of purple mountains away to the north-west.

“It is not like France,” said he. “It is not green and peaceful and smiling, but it is grand and strong and stern like Him who made it. As I have weakened, Adele, my soul has been less clogged by my body, and I have seen clearly much that has been dim to me. And it has seemed to me, my children, that all this country of America, not Canada alone, but the land where you were born also, Amos Green, and all that stretches away towards yonder setting sun, will be the best gift of God to man. For this has He held it concealed through all the ages, that now His own high purpose may be wrought upon it. For here is a land which is innocent, which has no past guilt to atone for, no feud, nor ill custom, nor evil of any kind. And as the years roll on all the weary and homeless ones, all who are stricken and landless and wronged, will turn their faces to it, even as we have done. And hence will come a nation which will surely take all that is good and leave all that is bad, moulding and fashioning itself into the highest. Do I not see such a mighty people, a people who will care more to raise their lowest than to exalt their richest — who will understand that there is more bravery in peace than in war, who will see that all men are brothers, and whose hearts will not narrow themselves down to their own frontiers, but will warm in sympathy with every noble cause the whole world through? That is what I see, Adele, as I lie here beside a shore upon which I shall never set my feet, and I say to you that if you and Amory go to the building of such a nation then indeed your lives are not misspent. It will come, and when it comes, may God guard it, may God watch over it and direct it!” His head had sunk gradually lower upon his breast and his lids had fallen slowly over his eyes which had been looking away out past Point Levi at the rolling woods and the far-off mountains. Adele gave a quick cry of despair and threw her arms round the old man’s neck.

“He is dying, Amory, he is dying!” she cried.

A stern Franciscan friar, who had been telling his beads within a few paces of them, heard the cry and was beside them in an instant.

“He is indeed dying,” he said, as he gazed down at the ashen face.

“Has the old man had the sacraments of the Church?”

“I do not think that he needs them,” answered De Catinat evasively.

“Which of us do not need them, young man!” said the friar sternly. “And how can a man hope for salvation without them? I shall myself administer them without delay.”

But the old Huguenot had opened his eyes, and with a last flicker of strength he pushed away the gray-hooded figure which bent over him.

“I left all that I love rather than yield to you,” he cried, “and think you that you can overcome me now?”

The Franciscan started back at the words, and his hard suspicious eyes shot from De Catinat to the weeping girl.

“So!” said he. “You are Huguenots, then!”

“Hush! Do not wrangle before a man who is dying!” cried De Catinat in a voice as fierce as his own.

“Before a man who is dead,” said Amos Green solemnly.

As he spoke the old man’s face had relaxed, his thousand wrinkles had been smoothed suddenly out, as though an invisible hand had passed over them, and his head fell back against the mast. Adele remained motionless with her arms still clasped round his neck and her cheek pressed against his shoulder. She had fainted.

De Catinat raised his wife and bore her down to the cabin of one of the ladies who had already shown them some kindness. Deaths were no new thing aboard the ship, for they had lost ten soldiers upon the outward passage, so that amid the joy and bustle of the disembarking there were few who had a thought to spare upon the dead pilgrim, and the less so when it was whispered abroad that he had been a Huguenot. A brief order was given that he should be buried in the river that very night, and then, save for a sailmaker who fastened the canvas round him, mankind had done its last for Theophile Catinat. With the survivors, however, it was different, and when the troops were all disembarked, they were mustered in a little group upon the deck, and an officer of the governor’s suite decided upon what should be done with them. He was a portly, good-humoured, ruddy-cheeked man, but De Catinat saw with apprehension that the friar walked by his side as he advanced along the deck, and exchanged a few whispered remarks with him. There was a bitter smile upon the monk’s dark face which boded little good for the heretics.

“It shall be seen to, good father, it shall be seen to,” said the officer impatiently, in answer to one of these whispered injunctions. “I am as zealous a servant of Holy Church as you are.”

“I trust that you are, Monsieur de Bonneville. With so devout a governor as Monsieur de Denonville, it might be an ill thing even in this world for the officers of his household to be lax.”

The soldier glanced angrily at his companion, for he saw the threat which lurked under the words.

“I would have you remember, father,” said he, “that if faith is a virtue, charity is no less so.” Then, speaking in English: “Which is Captain Savage?”

“Ephraim Savage of Boston.”

“And Master Amos Green?”

“Amos Green of New York.”

“And Master Tomlinson?”

“John Tomlinson of Salem.”

“And master mariners Hiram Jefferson, Joseph Cooper, Seek-grace Spalding, and Paul Cushing, all of Massachusetts Bay?”

“We are all here.”

“It is the governor’s order that all whom I have named shall be conveyed at once to the trading brig Hope, which is yonder ship with the white paint line. She sails within the hour for the English provinces.”

A buzz of joy broke from the castaway mariners at the prospect of being so speedily restored to their homes, and they hurried away to gather together the few possessions which they had saved from the wreck. The officer put his list in his pocket and stepped across to where De Catinat leaned moodily against the bulwarks.

“Surely you remember me,” he said. “I could not forget your face, even though you have exchanged a blue coat for a black one.”

De Catinat grasped the hand which was held out to him.

“I remember you well, De Bonneville, and the journey that we made together to Fort Frontenac, but it was not for me to claim your friendship, now that things have gone amiss with me.”

“Tut, man; once my friend always my friend.”

“I feared, too, that my acquaintance would do you little good with yonder dark-cowled friar who is glowering behind you.”

“Well, well, you know how it is with us here. Frontenac could keep them in their place, but De la Barre was as clay in their hands, and this new one promises to follow in his steps. What with the Sulpitians at Montreal and the Jesuits here, we poor devils are between the upper and the nether stones. But I am grieved from my heart to give such a welcome as this to an old comrade, and still more to his wife.”

“What is to be done, then?”

"You are to be confined to the ship until she sails, which will be in a week at the furthest."

"And then?"

"You are to be carried home in her and handed over to the Governor of Rochelle to be sent back to Paris. Those are Monsieur de Denonville's orders, and if they be not carried out to the letter, then we shall have the whole hornet's nest about our ears."

De Catinat groaned as he listened. After all their strivings and trials and efforts, to return to Paris, the scorn of his enemies, and an object of pity to his friends, was too deep a humiliation. He flushed with shame at the very thought. To be led back like the home-sick peasant who has deserted from his regiment! Better one spring into the broad blue river beneath him, were it not for little pale-faced Adele who had none but him to look to. It was so tame! So ignominious! And yet in this floating prison, with a woman whose fate was linked with his own, what hope was there of escape?

De Bonneville had left him, with a few blunt words of sympathy, but the friar still paced the deck with a furtive glance at him from time to time, and two soldiers who were stationed upon the poop passed and repassed within a few yards of him. They had orders evidently to mark his movements. Heart-sick he leaned over the side watching the Indians in their paint and feathers shooting backwards and forwards in their canoes, and staring across at the town where the gaunt gable ends of houses and charred walls marked the effect of the terrible fire which a few years before had completely destroyed the lower part.

As he stood gazing, his attention was drawn away by the swish of oars, and a large boat full of men passed immediately underneath where he stood.

It held the New Englanders, who were being conveyed to the ship which was to take them home. There were the four seamen huddled together, and there in the sheets were Captain Ephraim Savage and Amos Green, conversing together and pointing to the shipping. The grizzled face of the old Puritan and the bold features of the woodsman were turned more than once in his direction, but no word of farewell and no kindly wave of the hand came back to the lonely exile. They were so full of their own future and their own happiness, that they had not a thought to spare upon his misery. He could have borne anything from his enemies, but this sudden neglect from his friends came too heavily after his other troubles. He stooped his face to his arms and burst in an instant into a passion of sobs.

Before he raised his eyes again the brig had hoisted her anchor, and was tacking under full canvas out of the Quebec basin.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE VOICE AT THE PORT-HOLE.

That night old Theophile Catinat was buried from the ship’s side, his sole mourners the two who bore his own blood in their veins. The next day De Catinat spent upon deck, amid the bustle and confusion of the unlading, endeavouring to cheer Adele by light chatter which came from a heavy heart. He pointed out to her the places which he had known so well, the citadel where he had been quartered, the college of the Jesuits, the cathedral of Bishop Laval, the magazine of the old company, dismantled by the great fire, and the house of Aubert de la Chesnaye, the only private one which had remained standing in the lower part. From where they lay they could see not only the places of interest, but something also of that motley population which made the town so different to all others save only its younger sister, Montreal. Passing and repassing along the steep path with the picket fence which connected the two quarters, they saw the whole panorama of Canadian life moving before their eyes, the soldiers with their slouched hats, their plumes, and their bandoleers, habitants from the river cotes in their rude peasant dresses, little changed from their forefathers of Brittany or Normandy, and young rufflers from France or from the seigneuries, who cocked their hats and swaggered in what they thought to be the true Versailles fashion. There, too, might be seen little knots of the men of the woods, coureurs-de-bois or voyageurs, with leathern hunting tunics, fringed leggings, and fur cap with eagle feather, who came back once a year to the cities, leaving their Indian wives and children in some up-country wigwam. Redskins, too, were there, leather-faced Algonquin fishers and hunters, wild Micmacs from the east, and savage Abenakis from the south, while everywhere were the dark habits of the Franciscans, and the black cassocks and broad hats of the Recollets, and Jesuits, the moving spirits of the whole.

Such were the folk who crowded the streets of the capital of this strange offshoot of France which had been planted along the line of the great river, a thousand leagues from the parent country. And it was a singular settlement, the most singular perhaps that has ever been made. For a long twelve hundred miles it extended, from Tadousac in the east, away to the trading stations upon the borders of the great lakes, limiting itself for the most part to narrow cultivated strips upon the margins of the river, banked in behind by wild forests and unexplored mountains, which forever tempted the peasant from his hoe and his plough to the freer life of the paddle and the musket. Thin scattered clearings, alternating with little palisaded clumps of log-hewn houses, marked the line where civilisation was forcing itself in upon the huge continent, and barely holding its own against the rigour of a northern climate and the ferocity of merciless enemies. The whole white population of this mighty district, including soldiers, priests, and woodmen, with all women and children, was very far short of twenty thousand souls, and yet so great was their energy, and such the advantage of the central government under which they lived, that they had left their trace upon the whole continent. When the prosperous English settlers were content to live upon their acres, and when no axe had rung upon the further side of the Alleghanies, the French had pushed their daring pioneers, some in the black robe of the missionary, and some in the fringed tunic of the hunter, to the uttermost ends of the continent. They had mapped out the lakes and had bartered with the fierce Sioux on the great plains where the wooden wigwam gave place to the hide tee-pee. Marquette had followed the Illinois down to the Mississippi, and had traced the course of the great river until, first of all white men, he looked upon the turbid flood of the rushing Missouri. La Salle had ventured even further, and had passed the Ohio, and had made his way to the Mexican Gulf, raising the French arms where the city of New Orleans was afterwards to stand. Others had pushed on to the Rocky Mountains, and to the huge wilderness of the north-west, preaching, bartering, cheating, baptising, swayed by many motives and holding only in common a courage which never faltered and a fertility of resource which took them in safety past every danger. Frenchmen were to the north of the British settlements, Frenchmen were to the west of them, and Frenchmen were to the south of them, and if all the continent is not now French, the fault assuredly did not rest with that iron race of early Canadians.

All this De Catinat explained to Adele during the autumn day, trying to draw her thoughts away from the troubles of the past, and from the long dreary voyage which lay before her. She, fresh from the staid life of the Parisian street and from the tame scenery of the Seine, gazed with amazement at the river, the woods and the mountains, and clutched her husband's arm in horror when a canoeful of wild skin-clad Algonquins, their faces striped with white and red paint, came flying past with the foam dashing from their paddles. Again the river turned from blue to pink, again the old citadel was bathed in the evening glow, and again the two exiles descended to their cabins with cheering words for each other and heavy thoughts in their own hearts.

De Catinat's bunk was next to a port-hole, and it was his custom to keep this open, as the caboose was close to him in which the cooking was done for the crew, and the air was hot and heavy. That night he found it impossible to sleep, and he lay tossing under his blanket, thinking over every possible means by which they might be able to get away from this cursed ship. But even if they got away, where could they go to then? All Canada was sealed to them. The woods to the south were full of ferocious Indians. The English settlements would, it was true, grant them freedom to use their own religion, but what would his wife and he do, without a friend, strangers among folk who spoke another tongue? Had Amos Green remained true to them, then, indeed, all would have been well. But he had deserted them. Of course there was no reason why he should not. He was no blood relation of theirs. He had already benefited them many times. His own people and the life that he loved were waiting for him at home. Why should he linger here for the sake of folk whom he had known but a few months? It was not to be expected, and yet De Catinat could not realise it, could not understand it.

But what was that? Above the gentle lapping of the river he had suddenly heard a sharp clear "Hist!" Perhaps it was some passing boatman or Indian. Then it came again, that eager, urgent summons. He sat up and stared about him. It certainly must have come from the open port-hole. He looked out, but only to see the broad basin, with the loom of the shipping, and the distant twinkle from the lights on Point Levi. As his head dropped back upon the pillow something fell upon his chest with a little tap, and rolling off, rattled along the boards. He sprang up, caught a lantern from a hook, and flashed it upon the floor. There was the missile which had struck him — a little golden brooch. As he lifted it up and looked closer at it, a thrill passed through him. It had been his own, and he had given it to Amos Green upon the second day that he had met him, when they were starting together for Versailles.

This was a signal then, and Amos Green had not deserted them after all. He dressed himself, all in a tremble with excitement, and went upon deck. It was pitch dark, and he could see no one, but the sound of regular footfalls somewhere in the fore part of the ship showed that the sentinels were still there. The guardsman walked over to the side and peered down into the darkness. He could see the loom of a boat.

“Who is there?” he whispered.

“Is that you, De Catinat?

“Yes.”

“We have come for you.”

“God bless you, Amos.”

“Is your wife there?”

“No, but I can rouse her.”

“Good! But first catch this cord. Now pull up the ladder!”

De Catinat gripped the line which was thrown to him, and on drawing it up found that it was attached to a rope ladder furnished at the top with two steel hooks to catch on to the bulwarks. He placed them in position, and then made his way very softly to the cabin amidships in the ladies’ quarters which had been allotted to his wife. She was the only woman aboard the ship now, so that he was able to tap at her door in safety, and to explain in a few words the need for haste and for secrecy. In ten minutes Adele had dressed, and with her valuables in a little bundle, had slipped out from her cabin. Together they made their way upon deck once more, and crept aft under the shadow of the bulwarks. They were almost there when De Catinat stopped suddenly and ground out an oath through his clenched teeth. Between them and the rope ladder there was standing in a dim patch of murky light the grim figure of a Franciscan friar. He was peering through the darkness, his heavy cowl shadowing his face, and he advanced slowly as if he had caught a glimpse of them. A lantern hung from the mizzen shrouds above him. He unfastened it and held it up to cast its light upon them.

But De Catinat was not a man with whom it was safe to trifle. His life had been one of quick resolve and prompt action. Was this vindictive friar at the last moment to stand between him and freedom? It was a dangerous position to take. The guardsman pulled Adele into the shadow of the mast, and then, as the monk advanced, he sprang out upon him and seized him by the gown. As he did so the other’s cowl was pushed back, and instead of the harsh features of the ecclesiastic, De Catinat saw with amazement in the glimmer of the lantern the shrewd gray eyes and strong tern face of Ephraim Savage. At the same instant mother figure appeared over the side, and the warm-hearted Frenchman threw himself into the arms of Amos Green.

"It's all right," said the young hunter, disengaging himself with some embarrassment from the other's embrace.

"We've got him in the boat with a buckskin glove jammed into his gullet!"

"Who then?"

"The man whose cloak Captain Ephraim there has put round him. He came on us when you were away rousing your lady, but we got him to be quiet between us. Is the lady there?"

"Here she is."

"As quick as you can, then, for some one may come along."

Adele was helped over the side, and seated in the stern of a birch-bark canoe. The three men unhooked the ladder, and swung themselves down by a rope, while two Indians, who held the paddles, pushed silently off from the ship's side, and shot swiftly up the stream. A minute later a dim loom behind them, and the glimmer of two yellow lights, was all that they could see of the St. Christophe.

"Take a paddle, Amos, and I'll take one," said Captain Savage, stripping off his monk's gown. "I felt safer in this on the deck of yon ship, but it don't help in a boat. I believe we might have fastened the hatches and taken her, brass guns and all, had we been so minded."

"And been hanged as pirates at the yard-arm next morning," said Amos.

"I think we have done better to take the honey and leave the tree.

I hope, madame, that all is well with you."

"Nay, I can hardly understand what has happened, or where we are."

"Nor can I, Amos."

"Did you not expect us to come back for you, then?"

"I did not know what to expect."

"Well, now, but surely you could not think that we would leave you without a word."

"I confess that I was cut to the heart by it."

"I feared that you were when I looked at you with the tail of my eye, and saw you staring so blackly over the bulwarks at us. But if we had been seen talking or planning they would have been upon our trail at once. As it was they had not a thought of suspicion, save only this fellow whom we have in the bottom of the boat here."

"And what did you do?"

"We left the brig last night, got ashore on the Beaupre side, arranged for this canoe, and lay dark all day. Then to-night we got alongside and I roused you easily, for I knew where you slept. The friar nearly spoiled all when you were below, but we gagged him and passed him over the side. Ephraim popped on his gown so that he might go forward to help you without danger, for we were scared at the delay."

"Ah! it is glorious to be free once more. What do I not owe you, Amos?"

"Well, you looked after me when I was in your country, and I am going to look after you now."

"And where are we going?"

"Ah! there you have me. It is this way or none, for we can't get down to the sea. We must make our way over land as best we can, and we must leave a good stretch between Quebec citadel and us before the day breaks, for from what I hear they would rather have a Huguenot prisoner than an Iroquois sagamore. By the eternal, I cannot see why they should make such a fuss over how a man chooses to save his own soul, though here is old Ephraim just as fierce upon the other side, so all the folly is not one way."

"What are you saying about me?" asked the seaman, pricking up his ears at the mention of his own name.

"Only that you are a good stiff old Protestant."

"Yes, thank God. My motto is freedom to conscience, d'ye see, except just for Quakers, and Papists, and — and I wouldn't stand Anne Hutchinsons and women testifying, and suchlike foolishness."

Amos Green laughed. "The Almighty seems to pass it over, so why should you take it to heart?" said he.

"Ah, you're young and callow yet. You'll live to know better. Why, I shall hear you saying a good word soon even for such unclean spawn as this," prodding the prostrate friar with the handle of his paddle.

"I daresay he's a good man, accordin' to his lights."

"And I daresay a shark is a good fish accordin' to its lights. No, lad, you won't mix up light and dark for me in that sort of fashion. You may talk until you unship your jaw, d'ye see, but you will never talk a foul wind into a fair one. Pass over the pouch and the tinder-box, and maybe our friend here will take a turn at my paddle."

All night they toiled up the great river, straining every nerve to place themselves beyond the reach of pursuit. By keeping well into the southern bank, and so avoiding the force of the current, they sped swiftly along, for both Amos and De Catinat were practised hands with the paddle, and the two Indians worked as though they were wire and whipcord instead of flesh and blood. An utter silence reigned over all the broad stream, broken only by the lap-lap of the water against their curving bow, the whirring of the night hawk above them, and the sharp high barking of foxes away in the woods. When at last morning broke, and the black shaded imperceptibly into gray, they were far out of sight of the citadel and of all trace of man's handiwork. Virgin woods in their wonderful many-coloured autumn dress flowed right down to the river edge on either side, and in the centre was a little island with a rim of yellow sand and an out-flame of scarlet tupelo and sumach in one bright tangle of colour in the centre.

"I've passed here before," said De Catinat. "I remember marking that great maple with the blaze on its trunk, when last I went with the governor to Montreal. That was in Frontenac's day, when the king was first and the bishop second."

The Redskins, who had sat like terra-cotta figures, without a trace of expression upon their set hard faces, pricked up their ears at the sound of that name.

"My brother has spoken of the great Onontio," said one of them, glancing round. "We have listened to the whistling of evil birds who tell us that he will never come back to his children across the seas."

"He is with the great white father," answered De Catinat. "I have myself seen him in his council, and he will assuredly come across the great water if his people have need of him."

The Indian shook his shaven head.

"The rutting month is past, my brother," said he, speaking in broken French, "but ere the month of the bird-laying has come there will be no white man upon this river save only behind stone walls."

"What, then? We have heard little! Have the Iroquois broken out so fiercely?"

"My brother, they said they would eat up the Hurons, and where are the Hurons now? They turned their faces upon the Eries, and where are the

Eries now? They went westward against the Illinois, and who can find an Illinois village? They raised the hatchet against the Andastes, and their name is blotted from the earth. And now they have danced a dance and sung a song which will bring little good to my white brothers.”

“Where are they, then?”

The Indian waved his hand along the whole southern and western horizon.

“Where are they not? The woods are rustling with them. They are like a fire among dry grass, so swift and so terrible!”

“On my life,” said De Catinat, “if these devils are indeed unchained, they will need old Frontenac back if they are not to be swept into the river.”

“Ay,” said Amos, “I saw him once, when I was brought before him with the others for trading on what he called French ground. His mouth set like a skunk trap and he looked at us as if he would have liked our scalps for his leggings. But I could see that he was a chief and a brave man.”

“He was an enemy of the Church, and the right hand of the foul fiend in this country,” said a voice from the bottom of the canoe.

It was the friar who had succeeded in getting rid of the buckskin glove and belt with which the two Americans had gagged him. He was lying huddled up now glaring savagely at the party with his fiery dark eyes.

“His jaw-tackle has come adrift,” said the seaman. “Let me brace it up again.”

“Nay, why should we take him farther?” asked Amos. “He is but weight for us to carry, and I cannot see that we profit by his company. Let us put him out.”

“Ay, sink or swim,” cried old Ephraim with enthusiasm.

“Nay, upon the bank.”

“And have him maybe in front of us warning the black jackets.”

“On that island, then.”

“Very good. He can hail the first of his folk who pass.”

They shot over to the island and landed the friar, who said nothing, but cursed them with his eye. They left with him a small supply of biscuit and of flour to last him until he should be picked up. Then, having passed a bend in the river, they ran their canoe ashore in a little cove where the whortleberry and cranberry bushes grew right down to the water’s edge, and the sward was bright with the white euphorbia, the blue gentian, and the purple balm. There they laid out their small stock of provisions, and ate a hearty breakfast while discussing what their plans should be for the future.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE INLAND WATERS.

They were not badly provided for their journey. The captain of the Gloucester brig in which the Americans had started from Quebec knew Ephraim Savage well, as who did not upon the New England coast? He had accepted his bill therefore at three months' date, at as high a rate of interest as he could screw out of him, and he had let him have in return three excellent guns, a good supply of ammunition, and enough money to provide for all his wants. In this way he had hired the canoe and the Indians, and had fitted her with meat and biscuit to last them for ten days at the least.

"It's like the breath of life to me to feel the heft of a gun and to smell the trees round me," said Amos. "Why, it cannot be more than a hundred leagues from here to Albany or Schenectady, right through the forest."

"Ay, lad, but how is the gal to walk a hundred leagues through a forest?

No, no, let us keep water under our keel, and lean on the Lord."

"Then there is only one way for it. We must make the Richelieu River, and keep right along to Lake Champlain and Lake St. Sacrament. There we should be close by the headwaters of the Hudson."

"It is a dangerous road," said De Catinat, who understood the conversation of his companions, even when he was unable to join in it. "We should need to skirt the country of the Mohawks."

"It's the only way, I guess. It's that or nothing."

"And I have a friend upon the Richelieu River who, I am sure, would help us on our way," said De Catinat with a smile. "Adele, you have heard me talk of Charles de la Noue, seigneur de Sainte Marie?"

"He whom you used to call the Canadian duke, Amory?"

"Precisely. His seigneury lies on the Richelieu, a little south of Fort

St. Louis, and I am sure that he would speed us upon our way."

"Good!" cried Amos. "If we have a friend there we shall do well. That clenches it then, and we shall hold fast by the river. Let's get to our paddles then, for that friar will make mischief for us if he can."

And so for a long week the little party toiled up the great waterway, keeping ever to the southern bank, where there were fewer clearings. On both sides of the stream the woods were thick, but every here and there they would curve away, and a narrow strip of cultivated land would skirt the bank, with the yellow stubble to mark where the wheat had grown. Adele looked with interest at the wooden houses with their jutting stories and quaint gable-ends, at the solid, stone-built manor-houses of the seigneurs, and at the mills in every hamlet, which served the double purpose of grinding flour and of a loop-holed place of retreat in case of attack. Horrible experience had taught the Canadians what the English settlers had yet to learn, that in a land of savages it is a folly to place isolated farmhouses in the centre of their own fields. The clearings then radiated out from the villages, and every cottage was built with an eye to the military necessities of the whole, so that the defence might make a stand at all points, and might finally centre upon the stone manor-house and the mill. Now at every bluff and hill near the villages might be seen the gleam of the muskets of the watchers, for it was known that the scalping parties of the Five Nations were out, and none could tell where the blow would fall, save that it must come where they were least prepared to meet it.

Indeed, at every step in this country, whether the traveller were on the St. Lawrence, or west upon the lakes, or down upon the banks of the Mississippi, or south in the country of the Cherokees and of the Creeks, he would still find the inhabitants in the same state of dreadful expectancy, and from the same cause. The Iroquois, as they were named by the French, or the Five Nations as they called themselves, hung like a cloud over the whole great continent. Their confederation was a natural one, for they were of the same stock and spoke the same language, and all attempts to separate them had been in vain. Mohawks, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Senecas were each proud of their own totems and their own chiefs, but in war they were Iroquois, and the enemy of one was the enemy of all. Their numbers were small, for they were never able to put two thousand warriors in the field, and their country was limited, for their villages were scattered over the tract which lies between Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario. But they were united, they were cunning, they were desperately brave, and they were fiercely aggressive and energetic. Holding a central position, they struck out upon each side in turn, never content with simply defeating an adversary, but absolutely annihilating and destroying him, while holding all the others in check by their diplomacy. War was their business, and cruelty their amusement. One by one they had turned their arms against the various nations, until, for a space of over a thousand square miles, none existed save by sufferance. They had swept away Hurons and Huron missions in one fearful massacre. They had destroyed the tribes of the north-west, until even the distant Sacs and Foxes trembled at their name. They had scoured the whole country to westward until their scalping parties had come into touch with their kinsmen the Sioux, who were lords of the great plains, even as they were of the great forests. The New England Indians in the east, and the Shawnees and Delawares farther south, paid tribute to them, and the terror of their arms had extended over the borders of Maryland and Virginia. Never, perhaps, in the world’s history has so small a body of men dominated so large a district and for so long a time.

For half a century these tribes had nursed a grudge wards the French since Champlain and some of his followers had taken part with their enemies against them. During all these years they had brooded in their forest villages, flashing out now and again in some border outrage, but waiting for the most part until their chance should come. And now it seemed to them that it had come. They had destroyed all the tribes who might have allied themselves with the white men. They had isolated them. They had supplied themselves with good guns and plenty of ammunition from the Dutch and English of New York. The long thin line of French settlements lay naked before them. They were gathered in the woods, like hounds in leash, waiting for the orders of their chiefs, which should precipitate them with torch and with tomahawk upon the belt of villages.

Such was the situation as the little party of refugees paddled along the bank of the river, seeking the only path which could lead them to peace and to freedom. Yet it was, as they well knew, a dangerous road to follow. All down the Richelieu River were the outposts and blockhouses of the French, for when the feudal system was grafted upon Canada the various seigneurs or native noblesse were assigned their estates in the positions which would be of most benefit to the settlement. Each seigneur with his tenants under him, trained as they were in the use of arms, formed a military force exactly as they had done in the middle ages, the farmer holding his fief upon condition that he mustered when called upon to do so. Hence the old officers of the regiment of Carignan, and the more hardy of the settlers, had been placed along the line of the Richelieu, which runs at right angles to the

St. Lawrence towards the Mohawk country. The blockhouses themselves might hold their own, but to the little party who had to travel down from one to the other the situation was full of deadly peril. It was true that the Iroquois were not at war with the English, but they would discriminate little when on the warpath, and the Americans, even had they wished to do so, could not separate their fate from that of their two French companions.

As they ascended the St. Lawrence they met many canoes coming down. Sometimes it was an officer or an official on his way to the capital from Three Rivers or Montreal, sometimes it was a load of skins, with Indians or coureurs-de-bois conveying them down to be shipped to Europe, and sometimes it was a small canoe which bore a sunburned grizzly-haired man, with rusty weather-stained black cassock, who zigzagged from bank to bank, stopping at every Indian hut upon his way. If aught were amiss with the Church in Canada the fault lay not with men like these village priests, who toiled and worked and spent their very lives in bearing comfort and hope, and a little touch of refinement too, through all those wilds. More than once these wayfarers wished to have speech with the fugitives, but they pushed onwards, disregarding their signs and hails. From below nothing overtook them, for they paddled from early morning until late at night, drawing up the canoe when they halted, and building a fire of dry wood, for already the nip of the coming winter was in the air.

It was not only the people and their dwellings which were stretched out before the wondering eyes of the French girl as she sat day after day in the stern of the canoe. Her husband and Amos Green taught her also to take notice of the sights of the woodlands, and as they skirted the bank, they pointed out a thousand things which her own senses would never have discerned. Sometimes it was the furry face of a raccoon peeping out from some tree-cleft, or an otter swimming under the overhanging brushwood with the gleam of a white fish in its mouth. Or, perhaps, it was the wild cat crouching along a branch with its wicked yellow eyes fixed upon the squirrels which played at the farther end, or else with a scuttle and rush the Canadian porcupine would thrust its way among the yellow blossoms of the resin weed and the tangle of the whortleberry bushes. She learned, too, to recognise the pert sharp cry of the tiny chick-a-dee, the call of the blue-bird, and the flash of its wings amid the foliage, the sweet chirpy note of the black and white bobolink, and the long-drawn mewing of the cat-bird. On the breast of the broad blue river, with Nature’s sweet concert ever sounding from the bank, and with every colour that artist could devise spread out before her eyes on the foliage of the dying woods, the smile came back to her lips, and her cheeks took a glow of health which France had never been able to give. De Catinat saw the change in her, but her presence weighed him down with fear, for he knew that while Nature had made these woods a heaven, man had changed it into a hell, and that a nameless horror lurked behind all the beauty of the fading leaves and of the woodland flowers. Often as he lay at night beside the smouldering fire upon his couch of spruce, and looked at the little figure muffled in the blanket and slumbering peacefully by his side, he felt that he had no right to expose her to such peril, and that in the morning they should turn the canoe eastward again and take what fate might bring them at Quebec. But ever with the daybreak there came the thought of the humiliation, the dreary homeward voyage, the separation which would await them in galley and dungeon, to turn him from his purpose.

On the seventh day they rested at a point but a few miles from the mouth of the Richelieu River, where a large blockhouse, Fort Richelieu, had been built by M. de Saurel. Once past this they had no great distance to go to reach the seigneury of De Catinat's friend of the noblesse who would help them upon their way. They had spent the night upon a little island in midstream, and at early dawn they were about to thrust the canoe out again from the sand-lined cove in which she lay, when Ephraim Savage growled in his throat and pointed Out across the water.

A large canoe was coming up the river, flying along as quick as a dozen arms could drive it. In the stern sat a dark figure which bent forward with every swing of the paddles, as though consumed by eagerness to push onwards. Even at that distance there was no mistaking it. It was the fanatical monk whom they had left behind them.

Concealed among the brushwood, they watched their pursuers fly past and vanish round a curve in the stream. Then they looked at one another in perplexity.

“We'd have done better either to put him overboard or to take him as ballast,” said Ephraim. “He's hull down in front of us now, and drawing full.”

“Well, we can't take the back track anyhow,” remarked Amos.

“And yet how can we go on?” said De Catinat despondently. “This vindictive devil will give word at the fort and at every other point along the river. He has been back to Quebec. It is one of the governor's own canoes, and goes three paces to our two."

"Let me cipher it out." Amos Green sat on a fallen maple with his head sunk upon his hands. "Well," said he presently, "if it's no good going on, and no good going back, there's only one way, and that is to go to one side. That's so, Ephraim, is it not?"

"Ay, ay, lad, if you can't run you must tack, but it seems shoal water on either bow."

"We can't go to the north, so it follows that we must go to the south."

"Leave the canoe?"

"It's our only chance. We can cut through the woods and come out near this friendly house on the Richelieu. The friar will lose our trail then, and we'll have no more trouble with him, if he stays on the St. Lawrence."

"There's nothing else for it," said Captain Ephraim ruefully. "It's not my way to go by land if I can get by water, and I have not been a fathom deep in a wood since King Philip came down on the province, so you must lay the course and keep her straight, Amos."

"It is not far, and it will not take us long. Let us get over to the southern bank and we shall make a start. If madame tires, De Catinat, we shall take turns to carry her."

"Ah, monsieur, you cannot think what a good walker I am. In this splendid air one might go on forever."

"We will cross then."

In a very few minutes they were at the other side and had landed at the edge of the forest. There the guns and ammunition were allotted to each man, and his share of the provisions and of the scanty baggage. Then having paid the Indians, and having instructed them to say nothing of their movements, they turned their backs upon the river and plunged into the silent woods.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HAIRLESS MAN.

All day they pushed on through the woodlands, walking in single file, Amos Green first, then the seaman, then the lady, and De Catinat bringing up the rear. The young woodsman advanced cautiously, seeing and hearing much that was lost to his companions, stopping continually and examining the signs of leaf and moss and twig. Their route lay for the most part through open glades amid a huge pine forest, with a green sward beneath their feet, made beautiful by the white euphorbia, the golden rod, and the purple aster. Sometimes, however, the great trunks closed in upon them, and they had to grope their way in a dim twilight, or push a path through the tangled brushwood of green sassafras or scarlet sumach. And then again the woods would shred suddenly away in front of them, and they would skirt marshes, overgrown with wild rice and dotted with little dark clumps of alder bushes, or make their way past silent woodland lakes, all streaked and barred with the tree shadows which threw their crimsons and clarets and bronzes upon the fringe of the deep blue sheet of water. There were streams, too, some clear and rippling where the trout flashed and the king-fisher gleamed, others dark and poisonous from the tamarack swamps, where the wanderers had to wade over their knees and carry Adele in their arms. So all day they journeyed ‘mid the great forests, with never a hint or token of their fellow-man.

But if man were absent, there was at least no want of life. It buzzed and chirped and chattered all round them from marsh and stream and brushwood. Sometimes it was the dun coat of a deer which glanced between the distant trunks, sometimes the badger which scuttled for its hole at their approach. Once the long in-toed track of a bear lay marked in the soft earth before them, and once Amos picked a great horn from amid the bushes which some moose had shed the month before. Little red squirrels danced and clattered above their heads, and every oak was a choir with a hundred tiny voices piping from the shadow of its foliage. As they passed the lakes the heavy gray stork flapped up in front of them, and they saw the wild duck whirring off in a long V against the blue sky, or heard the quavering cry of the loon from amid the reeds.

That night they slept in the woods, Amos Green lighting a dry wood fire in a thick copse where at a dozen paces it was invisible. A few drops of rain had fallen, so with the quick skill of the practised woodsman he made two little sheds of elm and basswood bark, one to shelter the two refugees, and the other for Ephraim and himself. He had shot a wild goose, and this, with the remains of their biscuit, served them both for supper and for breakfast. Next day at noon they passed a little clearing, in the centre of which were the charred embers of a fire. Amos spent half an hour in reading all that sticks and ground could tell him. Then, as they resumed their way, he explained to his companions that the fire had been lit three weeks before, that a white man and two Indians had camped there, that they had been journeying from west to east, and that one of the Indians had been a squaw. No other traces of their fellow-mortals did they come across, until late in the afternoon Amos halted suddenly in the heart of a thick grove, and raised his hand to his ear.

“Listen!” he cried.

“I hear nothing,” said Ephraim.

“Nor I,” added De Catinat.

“Ah, but I do!” cried Adele gleefully. “It is a bell — and at the very time of day when the bells all sound in Paris!”

“You are right, madame. It is what they call the Angelus bell.”

“Ah, yes, I hear it now!” cried De Catinat. “It was drowned by the chirping of the birds. But whence comes a bell in the heart of a Canadian forest?”

“We are near the settlements on the Richelieu. It must be the bell of the chapel at the fort.”

“Fort St. Louis! Ah, then, we are no great way from my friend’s seigneury.”

“Then we may sleep there to-night, if you think that he is indeed to be trusted.”

“Yes. He is a strange man, with ways of his own, but I would trust him with my life.”

“Very good. We shall keep to the south of the fort and make for his house. But something is putting up the birds over yonder. Ah, I hear the sound of steps! Crouch down here among the sumach, until we see who it is who walks so boldly through the woods.”

They stooped all four among the brushwood, peeping out between the tree trunks at a little glade towards which Amos was looking. For a long time the sound which the quick ears of the woodsman had detected was inaudible to the others, but at last they too heard the sharp snapping of twigs as some one forced his passage through the undergrowth. A moment later a man pushed his way into the open, whose appearance was so strange and so ill-suited to the spot, that even Amos gazed upon him with amazement.

He was a very small man, so dark and weather-stained that he might have passed for an Indian were it not that he walked and was clad as no Indian had ever been. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, frayed at the edges, and so discoloured that it was hard to say what its original tint had been. His dress was of skins, rudely cut and dangling loosely from his body, and he wore the high boots of a dragoon, as tattered and stained as the rest of his raiment. On his back he bore a huge bundle of canvas with two long sticks projecting from it, and under each arm he carried what appeared to be a large square painting.

“He’s no Injun,” whispered Amos, “and he’s no Woodsman either. Blessed if I ever saw the match of him!”

“He’s neither voyageur, nor soldier, nor coureur-de-bois,” said De Catinat.

“‘Pears to me to have a jurymast rigged upon his back, and fore and main staysails set under each of his arms,” said Captain Ephraim.

“Well, he seems to have no consorts, so we may hail him without fear.”

They rose from their ambush, and as they did so the stranger caught sight of them. Instead of showing the uneasiness which any man might be expected to feel at suddenly finding himself in the presence of strangers in such a country, he promptly altered his course and came towards them. As he crossed the glade, however, the sounds of the distant bell fell upon his ears, and he instantly whipped off his hat and sunk his head in prayer. A cry of horror rose, not only from Adele but from everyone of the party, at the sight which met their eyes.

The top of the man’s head was gone. Not a vestige of hair or of white skin remained, but in place of it was a dreadful crinkled discoloured surface with a sharp red line running across his brow and round over his ears.

“By the eternal!” cried Amos, “the man has lost his scalp!”

“My God!” said De Catinat. “Look at his hands!”

He had raised them in prayer. Two or three little stumps projecting upwards showed where the fingers had been.

“I’ve seen some queer figure-heads in my life, but never one like that,” said Captain Ephraim.

It was indeed a most extraordinary face which confronted them as they advanced. It was that of a man who might have been of any age and of any nation, for the features were so distorted that nothing could be learned from them. One eyelid was drooping with a puckering and flatness which showed that the ball was gone. The other, however, shot as bright and merry and kindly a glance as ever came from a chosen favourite of fortune. His face was flecked over with peculiar brown spots which had a most hideous appearance, and his nose had been burst and shattered by some terrific blow. And yet, in spite of this dreadful appearance, there was something so noble in the carriage of the man, in the pose of his head and in the expression which still hung, like the scent from a crushed flower, round his distorted features, that even the blunt Puritan seaman was awed by it.

“Good-evening, my children,” said the stranger, picking up his pictures again and advancing towards them. “I presume that you are from the fort, though I may be permitted to observe that the woods are not very safe for ladies at present.”

“We are going to the manor-house of Charles de la Noue at Sainte Marie,” said De Catinat, “and we hope soon to be in a place of safety. But I grieve, sir, to see how terribly you have been mishandled.”

“Ah, you have observed my little injuries, then! They know no better, poor souls. They are but mischievous children — merry-hearted but mischievous. Tut, tut, it is laughable indeed that a man’s vile body should ever clog his spirit, and yet here am I full of the will to push forward, and yet I must even seat myself on this log and rest myself, for the rogues have blown the calves of my legs off.”

“My God! Blown them off! The devils!”

“Ah, but they are not to be blamed. No, no, it would be uncharitable to blame them. They are ignorant poor folk, and the prince of darkness is behind them to urge them on. They sank little charges of powder into my legs and then they exploded them, which makes me a slower walker than ever, though I was never very brisk. ‘The Snail’ was what I was called at school in Tours, yes, and afterwards at the seminary I was always ‘the Snail.’”

“Who are you then, sir, and who is it who has used you so shamefully?” asked De Catinat.

“Oh, I am a very humble person. I am Ignatius Morat, of the Society of Jesus, and as to the people who have used me a little roughly, why, if you are sent upon the Iroquois mission, of course you know what to expect. I have nothing at all to complain of. Why, they have used me very much better than they did Father Jogues, Father Breboeuf, and a good many others whom I could mention. There were times, it is true, when I was quite hopeful of martyrdom, especially when they thought my tonsure was too small, which was their merry way of putting it. But I suppose I was not worthy of it; indeed I know that I was not, so it only ended in just a little roughness.”

“Where are you going then?” asked Amos, who had listened in amazement to the man’s words.

“I am going to Quebec. You see I am such a useless person that, until I have seen the bishop, I can really do no good at all.”

“You mean that you will resign your mission into the bishop’s hands?” said De Catinat.

“Oh, no. That would be quite the sort of thing which I should do if I were left to myself, for it is incredible how cowardly I am. You would not think it possible that a priest of God could be so frightened as I am sometimes. The mere sight of a fire makes me shrink all into myself ever since I went through the ordeal of the lighted pine splinters, which have left all these ugly stains upon my face. But then, of course, there is the Order to be thought of, and members of the Order do not leave their posts for trifling causes. But it is against the rules of Holy Church that a maimed man should perform the rites, and so, until I have seen the bishop and had his dispensation, I shall be even more useless than ever.”

“And what will you do then?”

“Oh, then, of course, I will go back to my flock.”

“To the Iroquois!”

“That is where I am stationed.”

“Amos,” said De Catinat, “I have spent my life among brave men, but I think that this is the bravest man that I have ever met!”

"On my word," said Amos, "I have seen some good men, too, but never one that I thought was better than this. You are weary, father. Have some of our cold goose, and there is still a drop of cognac in my flask."

"Tut, tut, my son, if I take anything but the very simplest living it makes me so lazy that I become a snail indeed."

"But you have no gun and no food. How do you live?"

"Oh, the good God has placed plenty of food in these forests for a traveller who dare not eat very much. I have had wild plums, and wild grapes, and nuts and cranberries, and a nice little dish of tripe-de-mere from the rocks."

The woodsman made a wry face at the mention of this delicacy.

"I had as soon eat a pot of glue," said he. "But what is this which you carry on your back?"

"It is my church. Ah, I have everything here, tent, altar, surplice, everything. I cannot venture to celebrate service myself without the dispensation, but surely this venerable man is himself in orders and will solemnise the most blessed function."

Amos, with a sly twinkle of the eyes, translated the proposal to Ephraim, who stood with his huge red hands clenched, mumbling about the saltless pottage of papacy. De Catinat replied briefly, however, that they were all of the laity, and that if they were to reach their destination before nightfall, it was necessary that they should push on.

"You are right, my son," said the little Jesuit. "These poor people have already left their villages, and in a few days the woods will be full of them, though I do not think that any have crossed the Richelieu yet. There is one thing, however, which I would have you do for me."

"And what is that?"

"It is but to remember that I have left with Father Lamberville at Onondaga the dictionary which I have made of the Iroquois and French languages. There also is my account of the copper mines of the Great Lakes which I visited two years ago, and also an orrery which I have made to show the northern heavens with the stars of each month as they are seen from this meridian. If aught were to go amiss with Father Lamberville or with me, and we do not live very long on the Iroquois mission, it would be well that some one else should profit from my work."

"I will tell my friend to-night. But what are these great pictures, father, and why do you bear them through the wood?" He turned them over as he spoke, and the whole party gathered round them, staring in amazement.

They were very rough daubs, crudely coloured and gaudy. In the first, a red man was reposing serenely upon what appeared to be a range of mountains, with a musical instrument in his hand, a crown upon his head, and a smile upon his face. In the second, a similar man was screaming at the pitch of his lungs, while half-a-dozen black creatures were battering him with poles and prodding him with lances.

“It is a damned soul and a saved soul,” said Father Ignatius Morat, looking at his pictures with some satisfaction. “These are clouds upon which the blessed spirit reclines, basking in all the joys of paradise. It is well done this picture, but it has had no good effect, because there are no beaver in it, and they have not painted in a tobacco-pipe. You see they have little reason, these poor folk, and so we have to teach them as best we can through their eyes and their foolish senses. This other is better. It has converted several squaws and more than one Indian. I shall not bring back the saved soul when I come in the spring, but I shall bring five damned souls, which will be one for each nation. We must fight Satan with such weapons as we can get, you see. And now, my children, if you must go, let me first call down a blessing upon you!”

And then occurred a strange thing, for the beauty of this man’s soul shone through all the wretched clouds of sect, and, as he raised his hand to bless them, down went those Protestant knees to earth, and even old Ephraim found himself with a softened heart and a bent head listening to the half-understood words of this crippled, half-blinded, little stranger.

“Farewell, then,” said he, when they had risen. “May the sunshine of Saint Eulalie be upon you, and may Saint Anne of Beaupre shield you at the moment of your danger.”

And so they left him, a grotesque and yet heroic figure, staggering along through the woods with his tent, his pictures, and his mutilation. If the Church of Rome should ever be wrecked it may come from her weakness in high places, where all Churches are at their weakest, or it may be because with what is very narrow she tries to explain that which is very broad, but assuredly it will never be through the fault of her rank and file, for never upon earth have men and women spent themselves more lavishly and more splendidly than in her service.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LORD OF SAINTE MARIE.

Leaving Fort St. Louis, whence the bells had sounded, upon their right, they pushed onwards as swiftly as they could, for the sun was so low in the heavens that the bushes in the clearings threw shadows like trees. Then suddenly, as they peered in front of them between the trunks, the green of the sward turned to the blue of the water, and they saw a broad river running swiftly before them. In France it would have seemed a mighty stream, but, coming fresh from the vastness of the St. Lawrence, their eyes were used to great sheets of water. But Amos and De Catinat had both been upon the bosom of the Richelieu before, and their hearts bounded as they looked upon it, for they knew that this was the straight path which led them, the one to home, and the other to peace and freedom. A few days' journeying down there, a few more along the lovely island-studded lakes of Champlain and Saint Sacrament, under the shadow of the tree-clad Adirondacks, and they would be at the headquarters of the Hudson, and their toils and their dangers be but a thing of gossip for the winter evenings.

Across the river was the terrible Iroquois country, and at two points they could see the smoke of fires curling up into the evening air. They had the Jesuit's word for it that none of the war-parties had crossed yet, so they followed the track which led down the eastern bank. As they pushed onwards, however, a stern military challenge suddenly brought them to a stand, and they saw the gleam of two musket barrels which covered them from a thicket overlooking the path.

"We are friends," cried De Catinat.

"Whence come you, then?" asked an invisible sentinel.

"From Quebec."

"And whither are you going?"

"To visit Monsieur Charles de la Noue, seigneur of Sainte Marie."

"Very good. It is quite safe, Du Lhut. They have a lady with them, too. I greet you, madame, in the name of my father."

Two men had emerged from the bushes, one of whom might have passed as a full-blooded Indian, had it not been for these courteous words which he uttered in excellent French. He was a tall slight young man, very dark, with piercing black eyes, and a grim square relentless mouth which could only have come with Indian descent. His coarse flowing hair was gathered up into a scalp-lock, and the eagle feather which he wore in it was his only headgear. A rude suit of fringed hide with caribou-skin mocassins might have been the fellow to the one which Amos Green was wearing, but the gleam of a gold chain from his belt, the sparkle of a costly ring upon his finger, and the delicate richly-inlaid musket which he carried, all gave a touch of grace to his equipment. A broad band of yellow ochre across his forehead and a tomahawk at his belt added to the strange inconsistency of his appearance.

The other was undoubtedly a pure Frenchman, elderly, dark and wiry, with a bristling black beard and a fierce eager face. He, too, was clad in hunter's dress, but he wore a gaudy striped sash round his waist, into which a brace of long pistols had been thrust. His buckskin tunic had been ornamented over the front with dyed porcupine quills and Indian bead-work, while his leggings were scarlet with a fringe of raccoon tails hanging down from them. Leaning upon his long brown gun he stood watching the party, while his companion advanced towards them.

"You will excuse our precautions," said he. "We never know what device these rascals may adopt to entrap us. I fear, madame, that you have had a long and very tiring journey."

Poor Adele, who had been famed for neatness even among housekeepers of the Rue St. Martin, hardly dared to look down at her own stained and tattered dress. Fatigue and danger she had endured with a smiling face, but her patience almost gave way at the thought of facing strangers in this attire.

"My mother will be very glad to welcome you, and to see to every want," said he quickly, as though he had read her thoughts. "But you, sir, I have surely seen you before."

"And I you," cried the guardsman. "My name is Amory de Catinat, once of the regiment of Picardy. Surely you are Achille de la Noue de Sainte Marie, whom I remember when you came with your father to the government levees at Quebec."

“Yes, it is I,” the young man answered, holding out his hand and smiling in a somewhat constrained fashion. “I do not wonder that you should hesitate, for when you saw me last I was in a very different dress to this.”

De Catinat did indeed remember him as one of the band of the young noblesse who used to come up to the capital once a year, where they inquired about the latest modes, chatted over the year-old gossip of Versailles, and for a few weeks at least lived a life which was in keeping with the traditions of their order. Very different was he now, with scalp-lock and war-paint, under the shadow of the great oaks, his musket in his hand and his tomahawk at his belt.

“We have one life for the forest and one for the cities,” said he, “though indeed my good father will not have it so, and carries Versailles with him wherever he goes. You know him of old, monsieur, and I need not explain my words. But it is time for our relief, and so we may guide you home.”

Two men in the rude dress of Canadian censitaires or farmers, but carrying their muskets in a fashion which told De Catinat’s trained senses that they were disciplined soldiers, had suddenly appeared upon the scene. Young De la Noue gave them a few curt injunctions, and then accompanied the refugees along the path.

“You may not know my friend here,” said he, pointing to the other sentinel, “but I am quite sure that his name is not unfamiliar to you. This is Greysolon du Lhut.”

Both Amos and De Catinat looked with the deepest curiosity and interest at the famous leader of coureurs-de-bois, a man whose whole life had been spent in pushing westward, ever westward, saying little, writing nothing, but always the first wherever there was danger to meet or difficulty to overcome. It was not religion and it was not hope of gain which led him away into those western wildernesses, but pure love of nature and of adventure, with so little ambition that he had never cared to describe his own travels, and none knew where he had been or where he had stopped. For years he would vanish from the settlements away into the vast plains of the Dacotah, or into the huge wilderness of the north-west, and then at last some day would walk back into Sault La Marie, or any other outpost of civilisation, a little leaner, a little browner, and as taciturn as ever. Indians from the furthest corners of the continent knew him as they knew their own sachem. He could raise tribes and bring a thousand painted cannibals to the help of the French who spoke a tongue which none knew, and came from the shores of rivers which no one else had visited. The most daring French explorers, when, after a thousand dangers, they had reached some country which they believed to be new, were as likely as not to find Du Lhut sitting by his camp fire there, some new squaw by his side, and his pipe between his teeth. Or again, when in doubt and danger, with no friends within a thousand miles, the traveller might suddenly meet this silent man, with one or two tattered wanderers of his own kidney, who would help him from his peril, and then vanish as unexpectedly as he came. Such was the man who now walked by their sides along the bank of the Richelieu, and both Amos and De Catinat knew that his presence there had a sinister meaning, and that the place which Greysolon du Lhut had chosen was the place where the danger threatened.

"What do you think of those fires over yonder, Du Lhut?" asked young De la Noue.

The adventurer was stuffing his pipe with rank Indian tobacco, which he pared from a plug with a scalping knife. He glanced over at the two little plumes of smoke which stood straight up against the red evening sky.

"I don't like them," said he.

"They are Iroquois then?"

"Yes."

"Well, at least it proves that they are on the other side of the river."

"It proves that they are on this side."

"What!"

Du Lhut lit his pipe from a tinder paper. "The Iroquois are on this side," said he. "They crossed to the south of us."

"And you never told us. How do you know that they crossed, and why did you not tell us?"

"I did not know until I saw the fires over yonder."

"And how did they tell you?"

"Tut, an Indian papoose could have told," said Du Lhut impatiently. "Iroquois on the trail do nothing without an object. They have an object then in showing that smoke. If their war-parties were over yonder there would be no object. Therefore their braves must have crossed the river. And they could not get over to the north without being seen from the fort. They have got over on the south then."

Amos nodded with intense appreciation. "That's it!" said he, "that's Injun ways. I'll lay that he is right."

“Then they may be in the woods round us. We may be in danger,” cried De la Noue.

Du Lhut nodded and sucked at his pipe.

De Catinat cast a glance round him at the grand tree trunks, the fading foliage, the smooth sward underneath with the long evening shadows barred across it. How difficult it was to realise that behind all this beauty there lurked a danger so deadly and horrible that a man alone might well shrink from it, far less one who had the woman whom he loved walking within hand’s touch of him. It was with a long heart-felt sigh of relief that he saw a wall of stockade in the midst of a large clearing in front of him, with the stone manor house rising above it. In a line from the stockade were a dozen cottages with cedar-shingled roofs turned up in the Norman fashion, in which dwelt the habitants under the protection of the seigneur’s chateau — a strange little graft of the feudal system in the heart of an American forest. Above the main gate as they approached was a huge shield of wood with a coat of arms painted upon it, a silver ground with a chevron ermine between three coronets gules. At either corner a small brass cannon peeped through an embrasure. As they passed the gate the guard inside closed it and placed the huge wooden bars into position. A little crowd of men, women, and children were gathered round the door of the chateau, and a man appeared to be seated on a high-backed chair upon the threshold.

“You know my father,” said the young man with a shrug of his shoulders. “He will have it that he has never left his Norman castle, and that he is still the Seigneur de la Noue, the greatest man within a day’s ride of Rouen, and of the richest blood of Normandy. He is now taking his dues and his yearly oaths from his tenants, and he would not think it becoming, if the governor himself were to visit him, to pause in the middle of so august a ceremony. But if it would interest you, you may step this way and wait until he has finished. You, madame, I will take at once to my mother, if you will be so kind as to follow me.”

The sight was, to the Americans at least, a novel one. A triple row of men, women, and children were standing round in a semicircle, the men rough and sunburned, the women homely and clean, with white caps upon their heads, the children open-mouthed and round-eyed, awed into an unusual quiet by the reverent bearing of their elders. In the centre, on his high-backed carved chair, there sat an elderly man very stiff and erect, with an exceedingly solemn face. He was a fine figure of a man, tall and broad, with large strong features, clean-shaven and deeply-lined, a huge beak of a nose, and strong shaggy eyebrows which arched right up to the great wig, which he wore full and long as it had been worn in France in his youth. On his wig was placed a white hat cocked jauntily at one side with a red feather streaming round it, and he wore a coat of cinnamon-coloured cloth with silver at the neck and pockets, which was still very handsome, though it bore signs of having been frayed and mended more than once. This, with black velvet knee-breeches and high well-polished boots, made a costume such as De Catinat had never before seen in the wilds of Canada.

As they watched, a rude husbandman walked forwards from the crowd, and kneeling down upon a square of carpet placed his hands between those of the seigneur.

“Monsieur de Sainte Marie, Monsieur de Sainte Marie, Monsieur de Sainte Marie,” said he three times, “I bring you the faith and homage which I am bound to bring you on account of my fief Herbert, which I hold as a man of faith of your seigneury.”

“Be true, my son. Be valiant and true!” said the old nobleman solemnly, and then with a sudden change of tone: “What in the name of the devil has your daughter got there?”

A girl had advanced from the crowd with a large strip of bark in front of her on which was heaped a pile of dead fish.

“It is your eleventh fish which I am bound by my oath to render to you,” said the censitaire. “There are seventy-three in the heap, and I have caught eight hundred in the month.”

“Peste!” cried the nobleman. “Do you think, Andre Dubois, that I will disorder my health by eating three-and-seventy fish in this fashion? Do you think that I and my body-servants and my personal retainers and the other members of my household have nothing to do but to eat your fish? In future, you will pay your tribute not more than five at a time. Where is the major-domo? Theuriet, remove the fish to our central store-house, and be careful that the smell does not penetrate to the blue tapestry chamber or to my lady’s suite.”

A man in very shabby black livery, all stained and faded, advanced with a large tin platter and carried off the pile of white fish. Then, as each of the tenants stepped forward to pay their old-world homage, they all left some share of their industry for their lord’s maintenance. With some it was a bundle of wheat, with some a barrel of potatoes, while others had brought skins of deer or of beaver. All these were carried off by the major-domo, until each had paid his tribute, and the singular ceremony was brought to a conclusion. As the seigneur rose, his son, who had returned, took De Catinat by the sleeve and led him through the throng.

"Father," said he, "this is Monsieur de Catinat, whom you may remember some years ago at Quebec."

The seigneur bowed with much condescension, and shook the guardsman by the hand.

"You are extremely welcome to my estates, both you and your body-servants—"

"They are my friends, monsieur. This is Monsieur Amos Green and Captain Ephraim Savage. My wife is travelling with me, but your courteous son has kindly taken her to your lady."

"I am honoured — honoured indeed!" cried the old man, with a bow and a flourish. "I remember you very well, sir, for it is not so common to meet men of quality in this country. I remember your father also, for he served with me at Rocroy, though he was in the Foot, and I in the Red Dragoons of Grissot. Your arms are a martlet in fess upon a field azure, and now that I think of it, the second daughter of your great-grand-father married the son of one of the La Noues of Andelys, which is one of our cadet branches. Kinsman, you are welcome!" He threw his arms suddenly round De Catinat and slapped him three times on the back.

The young guardsman was only too delighted to find himself admitted to such an intimacy.

"I will not intrude long upon your hospitality," said he. "We are journeying down to Lake Champlain, and we hope in a day or two to be ready to go on."

"A suite of rooms shall be laid at your disposal as long as you do me the honour to remain here. Peste! It is not every day that I can open my gates to a man with good blood in his veins! Ah, sir, that is what I feel most in my exile, for who is there with whom I can talk as equal to equal? There is the governor, the intendant, perhaps, one or two priests, three or four officers, but how many of the noblesse? Scarcely one. They buy their titles over here as they buy their pelts, and it is better to have a canoe-load of beaver skins than a pedigree from Roland. But I forget my duties. You are weary and hungry, you and your friends. Come up with me to the tapestried salon, and we shall see if my stewards can find anything for your refreshment. You play piquet, if I remember right? Ah, my skill is leaving me, and I should be glad to try a hand with you."

The manor-house was high and strong, built of gray stone in a framework of wood. The large iron-clamped door through which they entered was pierced for musketry fire, and led into a succession of cellars and storehouses in which the beets, carrots, potatoes, cabbages, cured meat, dried eels, and other winter supplies were placed. A winding stone staircase led them through a huge kitchen, flagged and lofty, from which branched the rooms of the servants or retainers as the old nobleman preferred to call them. Above this again was the principal suite, centering in the dining-hall with its huge fireplace and rude home-made furniture. Rich rugs formed of bear or deer-skin were littered thickly over the brown-stained floor, and antlered heads bristled out from among the rows of muskets which were arranged along the wall. A broad rough-hewn maple table ran down the centre of this apartment, and on this there was soon set a venison pie, a side of calvered salmon, and a huge cranberry tart, to which the hungry travellers did full justice. The seigneur explained that he had already supped, but having allowed himself to be persuaded into joining them, he ended by eating more than Ephraim Savage, drinking more than Du Lhut, and finally by singing a very amorous little French chanson with a tra-le-ra chorus, the words of which, fortunately for the peace of the company, were entirely unintelligible to the Bostonian.

"Madame is taking her refection in my lady's boudoir," he remarked, when the dishes had been removed. "You may bring up a bottle of Frontiniac from bin thirteen, Theuriet. Oh, you will see, gentlemen, that even in the wilds we have a little, a very little, which is perhaps not altogether bad. And so you come from Versailles, De Catinat? It was built since my day, but how I remember the old life of the court at St. Germain, before Louis turned serious! Ah, what innocent happy days they were when Madame de Nevailles had to bar the windows of the maids of honour to keep out the king, and we all turned out eight deep on to the grass plot for our morning duel! By Saint Denis, I have not quite forgotten the trick of the wrist yet, and, old as I am, I should be none the worse for a little breather." He strutted in his stately fashion over to where a rapier and dagger hung upon the wall, and began to make passes at the door, darting in and out, warding off imaginary blows with his poniard, and stamping his feet with little cries of "Punto! reverso! stoccata! dritta! mandritta!" and all the jargon of the fencing schools. Finally he rejoined them, breathing heavily and with his wig awry.

"That was our old exercise," said he. "Doubtless you young bloods have improved upon it, and yet it was good enough for the Spaniards at Rocroy and at one or two other places which I could mention. But they still see life at the court, I understand. There are still love passages and blood lettings. How has Lauzun prospered in his wooing of Mademoiselle de Montpensier? Was it proved that Madame de Clermont had bought a phial from Le Vie, the poison woman, two days before the soup disagreed so violently with monsieur? What did the Due de Biron do when his nephew ran away with the duchess? Is it true that he raised his allowance to fifty thousand livres for having done it?" Such were the two-year-old questions which had not been answered yet upon the banks of the Richelieu River. Long into the hours of the night, when his comrades were already snoring under their blankets, De Catinat, blinking and yawning, was still engaged in trying to satisfy the curiosity of the old courtier, and to bring him up to date in all the most minute gossip of Versailles.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SLAYING OF BROWN MOOSE.

Two days were spent by the travellers at the seigneury of Sainte Marie, and they would very willingly have spent longer, for the quarters were comfortable and the welcome warm, but already the reds of autumn were turning to brown, and they knew how suddenly the ice and snow come in those northern lands, and how impossible it would be to finish their journey if winter were once fairly upon them. The old nobleman had sent his scouts by land and by water, but there were no signs of the Iroquois upon the eastern banks, so that it was clear that De Lhut had been mistaken. Over on the other side, however, the high gray plumes of smoke still streamed up above the trees as a sign that their enemies were not very far off. All day from the manor-house windows and from the stockade they could see those danger signals which reminded them that a horrible death lurked ever at their elbow.

The refugees were rested now and refreshed, and of one mind about pushing on.

“If the snow comes, it will be a thousand times more dangerous,” said Amos, “for we shall leave a track then that a papoose could follow.”

“And why should we fear?” urged old Ephraim.

“Truly this is a desert of salt, even though it lead to the vale of Hinnom, but we shall be borne up against these sons of Jeroboam. Steer a straight course, lad, and jam your helm, for the pilot will see you safe.”

“And I am not frightened, Amory, and I am quite rested now,” said Adele. “We shall be so much more happy when we are in the English Provinces, for even now, how do we know that that dreadful monk may not come with orders to drag us back to Quebec and Paris?”

It was indeed very possible that the vindictive Franciscan, when satisfied that they had not ascended to Montreal, or remained at Three Rivers, might seek them on the banks of the Richelieu. When De Catinat thought of how he passed them in his great canoe that morning, his eager face protruded, and his dark body swinging in time to the paddles, he felt that the danger which his wife suggested was not only possible but imminent. The seigneur was his friend, but the seigneur could not disobey the governor's orders. A great hand, stretching all the way from Versailles, seemed to hang over them, even here in the heart of the virgin forest, ready to snatch them up and carry them back into degradation and misery. Better all the perils of the woods than that!

But the seigneur and his son, who knew nothing of their pressing reasons for haste, were strenuous in urging De Catinat the other way, and in this they were supported by the silent Du Lhut, whose few muttered words were always more weighty than the longest speech, for he never spoke save about that of which he was a master.

"You have seen my little place," said the old nobleman, with a wave of his beruffled ring-covered hand. "It is not what I should wish it, but such as it is, it is most heartily yours for the winter, if you and your comrades would honour me by remaining. As to madame, I doubt not that my own dame and she will find plenty to amuse and occupy them, which reminds me, De Catinat, that you have not yet been presented. Theuriet, go to your mistress and inform her that I request her to be so good as to come to us in the hall of the dais."

De Catinat was too seasoned to be easily startled, but he was somewhat taken aback when the lady, to whom the old nobleman always referred in terms of exaggerated respect, proved to be as like a full-blooded Indian squaw as the hall of the dais was to a French barn. She was dressed, it was true, in a bodice of scarlet taffeta with a black skirt, silver-buckled shoes, and a scented pomander ball dangling by a silver chain from her girdle, but her face was of the colour of the bark of the Scotch fir, while her strong nose and harsh mouth, with the two plaits of coarse black hair which dangled down her back, left no possible doubt as to her origin.

"Allow me to present you, Monsieur de Catinat," said the Seigneur de Sainte Marie solemnly, "to my wife, Onega de la Noue de Sainte Marie, chatelaine by right of marriage to this seigneury, and also to the Chateau d'Andelys in Normandy, and to the estate of Varennes in Provence, while retaining in her own right the hereditary chieftainship on the distaff side of the nation of the Onondagas. My angel, I have been endeavouring to persuade our friends to remain with us at Sainte Marie instead of journeying on to Lake Champlain."

“At least leave your White Lily at Sainte Marie,” said the dusky princess, speaking in excellent French, and clasping with her ruddy fingers the ivory hand of Adele. “We will hold her safe for you until the ice softens, and the leaves and the partridge berries come once more. I know my people, monsieur, and I tell you that the woods are full of murder, and that it is not for nothing that the leaves are the colour of blood, for death lurks behind every tree.”

De Catinat was more moved by the impressive manner of his hostess than by any of the other warnings which he had received. Surely she, if anyone, must be able to read the signs of the times.

“I know not what to do!” he cried in despair. “I must go on, and yet how can I expose her to these perils? I would fain stay the winter, but you must take my word for it, sir, that it is not possible.”

“Du Lhut, you know how things should be ordered,” said the seigneur. “What should you advise my friend to do, since he is so set upon getting to the English Provinces before the winter comes?”

The dark silent pioneer stroked his beard with his hand as he pondered over the question.

“There is but one way,” said he at last, “though even in it there is danger. The woods are safer than the river, for the reeds are full of cached canoes. Five leagues from here is the blockhouse of Poitou, and fifteen miles beyond, that of Auvergne. We will go to-morrow to Poitou through the woods and see if all be safe. I will go with you, and I give you my word that if the Iroquois are there, Greysolon du Lhut will know it. The lady we shall leave here, and if we find that all is safe we shall come back for her. Then in the same fashion we shall advance to Auvergne, and there you must wait until you hear where their war-parties are. It is in my mind that it will not be very long before we know.”

“What! You would part us!” cried Adele aghast.

“It is best, my sister,” said Onega, passing her arm caressingly round her. “You cannot know the danger, but we know it, and we will not let our White Lily run into it. You will stay here to gladden us, while the great chief Du Lhut, and the French soldier, your husband, and the old warrior who seems so wary, and the other chief with limbs like the wild deer, go forward through the woods and see that all is well before you venture.”

And so it was at last agreed, and Adele, still protesting, was consigned to the care of the lady of Sainte Marie, while De Catinat swore that without a pause he would return from Poitou to fetch her. The old nobleman and his son would fain have joined them in their adventure, but they had their own charge to watch and the lives of many in their keeping, while a small party were safer in the woods than a larger one would be. The seigneur provided them with a letter for De Lannes, the governor of the Poitou blockhouse, and so in the early dawn the four of them crept like shadows from the stockade-gate, amid the muttered good wishes of the guard within, and were lost in an instant in the blackness of the vast forest.

From La Noue to Poitou was but twelve miles down the river, but by the woodland route where creeks were to be crossed, reed-girt lakes to be avoided, and paths to be picked among swamps where the wild rice grew higher than their heads, and the alder bushes lay in dense clumps before them, the distance was more than doubled. They walked in single file, Du Lhut leading, with the swift silent tread of some wild creature, his body bent forward, his gun ready in the bend of his arm, and his keen dark eyes shooting little glances to right and left, observing everything from the tiniest mark upon the ground or tree trunk to the motion of every beast and bird of the brushwood. De Catinat walked behind, then Ephraim Savage, and then Amos, all with their weapons ready and with every sense upon the alert. By midday they were more than half-way, and halted in a thicket for a scanty meal of bread and cheese, for De Lhut would not permit them to light a fire.

“They have not come as far as this,” he whispered, “and yet I am sure that they have crossed the river. Ah, Governor de la Barre did not know what he did when he stirred these men up, and this good dragoon whom the king has sent us now knows even less.”

“I have seen them in peace,” remarked Amos. “I have traded to Onondaga and to the country of the Senecas. I know them as fine hunters and brave men.”

“They are fine hunters, but the game that they hunt best are their fellow-men. I have myself led their scalping parties, and I have fought against them, and I tell you that when a general comes out from France who hardly knows enough to get the sun behind him in a fight, he will find that there is little credit to be gained from them. They talk of burning their villages! It would be as wise to kick over the wasps’ nest, and think that you have done with the wasps. You are from New England, monsieur?”

“My comrade is from New England; I am from New York.”

“Ah, yes. I could see from your step and your eye that the woods were as a home to you. The New England man goes on the waters and he slays the cod with more pleasure than the caribou. Perhaps that is why his face is so sad. I have been on the great water, and I remember that my face was sad also. There is little wind, and so I think that we may light our pipes without danger. With a good breeze I have known a burning pipe fetch up a scalping party from two miles’ distance, but the trees stop scent, and the Iroquois noses are less keen than the Sioux and the Dacotah. God help you, monsieur, if you should ever have an Indian war. It is bad for us, but it would be a thousand times worse for you.”

“And why?”

“Because we have fought the Indians from the first, and we have them always in our mind when we build. You see how along this river every house and every hamlet supports its neighbour? But you, by Saint Anne of Beaupre, it made my scalp tingle when I came on your frontiers and saw the lonely farm-houses and little clearings out in the woods with no help for twenty leagues around. An Indian war is a purgatory for Canada, but it would be a hell for the English Provinces!”

“We are good friends with the Indians,” said Amos. “We do not wish to conquer.”

“Your people have a way of conquering although they say that they do not wish to do it,” remarked Du Lhut. “Now, with us, we bang our drums, and wave our flags, and make a stir, but no very big thing has come of it yet. We have never had but two great men in Canada. One was Monsieur de la Salle, who was shot last year by his own men down the great river, and the other, old Frontenac, will have to come back again if New France is not to be turned into a desert by the Five Nations. It would surprise me little if by this time two years the white and gold flag flew only over the rock of Quebec. But I see that you look at me impatiently, Monsieur de Catinat, and I know that you count the hours until we are back at Sainte Marie again. Forward, then, and may the second part of our journey be as peaceful as the first.”

For an hour or more they picked their way through the woods, following in the steps of the old French pioneer. It was a lovely day with hardly a cloud in the heavens, and the sun streaming down through the thick foliage covered the shaded sward with a delicate network of gold. Sometimes where the woods opened they came out into the pure sunlight, but only to pass into thick glades beyond, where a single ray, here and there, was all that could break its way through the vast leafy covering. It would have been beautiful, these sudden transitions from light to shade, but with the feeling of impending danger, and of a horror ever lurking in these shadows, the mind was tinged with awe rather than admiration. Silently, lightly, the four men picked their steps among the great tree trunks.

Suddenly Du Lhut dropped upon his knees and stooped his ear to the ground. He rose, shook his head, and walked on with a grave face, casting quick little glances into the shadows in every direction.

“Did you hear something?” whispered Amos.

Du Lhut put his finger to his lips, and then in an instant was down again upon his face with his ear fixed to the ground. He sprang up with the look of a man who has heard what he expected to hear.

“Walk on,” said he quietly, “and behave exactly as you have done all day.”

“What is it, then?”

“Indians.”

“In front of us?”

“No, behind us.”

“What are they doing?”

“They are following us.”

“How many of them?”

“Two, I think.”

The friends glanced back involuntarily over their shoulders into the dense blackness of the forest. At one point a single broad shaft of light slid down between two pines and cast a golden blotch upon their track. Save for this one vivid spot all was sombre and silent.

“Do not look round,” whispered Du Lhut sharply. “Walk on as before.”

“Are they enemies?”

“They are Iroquois.”

“And pursuing us?”

“No, we are now pursuing them.”

“Shall we turn, then?”

“No, they would vanish like shadows,”

“How far off are they?”

“About two hundred paces, I think.”

“They cannot see us, then?”

“I think not, but I cannot be sure. They are following our trail, I think.”

“What shall we do, then?”

“Let us make a circle and get behind them.”

Turning sharp to the left he led them in a long curve through the woods, hurrying swiftly and yet silently under the darkest shadows of the trees. Then he turned again, and presently halted.

“This is our own track,” said he.

“Ay, and two Redskins have passed over it,” cried Amos, bending down, and pointing to marks which were entirely invisible to Ephraim Savage or De Catinat.

“A full-grown warrior and a lad on his first warpath,” said Du Lhut. “They were moving fast, you see, for you can hardly see the heel marks of their moccasins. They walked one behind the other. Now let us follow them as they followed us, and see if we have better luck.”

He sped swiftly along the trail with his musket cocked in his hand, the others following hard upon his heels, but there was no sound, and no sign of life from the shadowy woods in front of them. Suddenly Du Lhut stopped and grounded his weapon.

“They are still behind us,” he said.

“Still behind us?”

“Yes. This is the point where we branched off. They have hesitated a moment, as you can see by their footmarks, and then they have followed on.”

“If we go round again and quicken our pace we may overtake them.”

“No, they are on their guard now. They must know that it could only be on their account that we went back on our tracks. Lie here behind the fallen log and we shall see if we can catch a glimpse of them.”

A great rotten trunk, all green with mould and blotched with pink and purple fungi, lay to one side of where they stood. Behind this the Frenchman crouched, and his three companions followed his example, peering through the brushwood screen in front of them. Still the one broad sheet of sunshine poured down between the two pines, but all else was as dim and as silent as a vast cathedral with pillars of wood and roof of leaf. Not a branch that creaked, nor a twig that snapped, nor any sound at all save the sharp barking of a fox somewhere in the heart of the forest. A thrill of excitement ran through the nerves of De Catinat. It was like one of those games of hide-and-seek which the court used to play, when Louis was in a sportive mood, among the oaks and yew hedges of Versailles. But the forfeit there was a carved fan, or a box of bonbons, and here it was death.

Ten minutes passed and there was no sign of any living thing behind them.

“They are over in yonder thicket,” whispered Du Lhut, nodding his head towards a dense clump of brushwood, two hundred paces away.

“Have you seen them?”

“No.”

“How do you know, then?”

“I saw a squirrel come from his hole in the great white beech-tree yonder. He scuttled back again as if something had scared him. From his hole he can see down into that brushwood.”

“Do you think that they know that we are here?”

“They cannot see us. But they are suspicious. They fear a trap.”

“Shall we rush for the brushwood?”

“They would pick two of us off, and be gone like shadows through the woods. No, we had best go on our way.”

“But they will follow us.”

“I hardly think that they will. We are four and they are only two, and they know now that we are on our guard and that we can pick up a trail as quickly as they can themselves. Get behind these trunks where they cannot see us. So! Now stoop until you are past the belt of alder bushes. We must push on fast now, for where there are two Iroquois there are likely to be two hundred not very far off.”

“Thank God that I did not bring Adele!” cried De Catinat.

“Yes, monsieur, it is well for a man to make a comrade of his wife, but not on the borders of the Iroquois country, nor of any other Indian country either.”

“You do not take your own wife with you when you travel, then?” asked the soldier.

“Yes, but I do not let her travel from village to village. She remains in the wigwam.”

“Then you leave her behind?”

“On the contrary, she is always there to welcome me. By Saint Anne, I should be heavy-hearted if I came to any village between this and the Bluffs of the Illinois, and did not find my wife waiting to greet me.”

“Then she must travel before you.”

Du Lhut laughed heartily, without, however, emitting a sound.

“A fresh village, a fresh wife,” said he. “But I never have more than one in each, for it is a shame for a Frenchman to set an evil example when the good fathers are spending their lives so freely in preaching virtue to them. Ah, here is the Ajidaumo Creek, where the Indians set the sturgeon nets. It is still seven miles to Poitou.”

“We shall be there before nightfall, then?”

“I think that we had best wait for nightfall before we make our way in. Since the Iroquois scouts are out as far as this, it is likely that they lie thick round Poitou, and we may find the last step the worst unless we have a care, the more so if these two get in front of us to warn the others.” He paused a moment with slanting head and sidelong ear. “By Saint Anne,” he muttered, “we have not shaken them off. They are still upon our trail!”

“You hear them?”

“Yes, they are no great way from us. They will find that they have followed us once too often this time. Now, I will show you a little bit of woodcraft which may be new to you. Slip off your moccasins, monsieur.”

De Catinat pulled off his shoes as directed, and Du Lhut did the same.

“Put them on as if they were gloves,” said the pioneer, and an instant later Ephraim Savage and Amos had their comrades’ shoes upon their hands.

“You can sling your muskets over your back. So! Now down on all fours, bending yourselves double, with your hands pressing hard upon the earth. That is excellent. Two men can leave the trail of four! Now come with me, monsieur.”

He flitted from tree to tree on a line which was parallel to, but a few yards distant from, that of their comrades. Then suddenly he crouched behind a bush and pulled De Catinat down beside him.

“They must pass us in a few minutes,” he whispered. “Do not fire if you can help it.” Something gleamed in Du Lhut’s hand, and his comrade, glancing down, saw that he had drawn a keen little tomahawk from his belt. Again the mad wild thrill ran through the soldier’s blood, as he peered through the tangled branches and waited for whatever might come out of the dim silent aisles of tree-boles.

And suddenly he saw something move. It flitted like a shadow from one trunk to the other so swiftly that De Catinat could not have told whether it were beast or human. And then again he saw it, and yet again, sometimes one shadow, sometimes two shadows, silent, furtive, like the loup-garou with which his nurse had scared him in his childhood. Then for a few moments all was still once more, and then in an instant there crept out from among the bushes the most terrible-looking creature that ever walked the earth, an Iroquois chief upon the war-trail.

He was a tall powerful man, and his bristle of scalp-locks and eagle feathers made him look a giant in the dim light, for a good eight feet lay between his beaded moccasin and the topmost plume of his headgear. One side of his face was painted in soot, ochre, and vermilion to resemble a dog, and the other half as a fowl, so that the front view was indescribably grotesque and strange. A belt of wampum was braced round his loin-cloth, and a dozen scalp-locks fluttered out as he moved from the fringe of his leggings. His head was sunk forward, his eyes gleamed with a sinister light, and his nostrils dilated and contracted like those of an excited animal. His gun was thrown forward, and he crept along with bended knees, peering, listening, pausing, hurrying on, a breathing image of caution. Two paces behind him walked a lad of fourteen, clad and armed in the same fashion, but without the painted face and without the horrid dried trophies upon the leggings. It was his first campaign, and already his eyes shone and his nostrils twitched with the same lust for murder which burned within his elder. So they advanced, silent, terrible, creeping out of the shadows of the wood, as their race had come out of the shadows of history, with bodies of iron and tiger souls.

They were just abreast of the bush when something caught the eye of the younger warrior, some displaced twig or fluttering leaf, and he paused with suspicion in every feature. Another instant and he had warned his companion, but Du Lhut sprang out and buried his little hatchet in the skull of the older warrior. De Catinat heard a dull crash, as when an axe splinters its way into a rotten tree, and the man fell like a log, laughing horribly, and kicking and striking with his powerful limbs. The younger warrior sprang like a deer over his fallen comrade and dashed on into the wood, but an instant later there was a gunshot among the trees in front, followed by a faint wailing cry.

“That is his death-whoop,” said Du Lhut composedly. “It was a pity to fire, and yet it was better than letting him go.”

As he spoke the two others came back, Ephraim ramming a fresh charge into his musket.

“Who was laughing?” asked Amos.

"It was he," said Du Lhut, nodding towards the dying warrior, who lay with his head in a horrible puddle, and his grotesque features contorted into a fixed smile. "It's a custom they have when they get their death-blow. I've known a Seneca chief laugh for six hours on end at the torture-stake. Ah, he's gone!"

As he spoke the Indian gave a last spasm with his hands and feet, and lay rigid, grinning up at the slit of blue sky above him.

"He's a great chief," said Du Lhut. "He is Brown Moose of the Mohawks, and the other is his second son. We have drawn first blood, but I do not think that it will be the last, for the Iroquois do not allow their war-chiefs to die unavenged. He was a mighty fighter, as you may see by looking at his neck."

He wore a peculiar necklace which seemed to De Catinat to consist of blackened bean pods set upon a string. As he stooped over it he saw to his horror that they were not bean pods, but withered human fingers.

"They are all right fore-fingers," said Du Lhut, "so everyone represents a life. There are forty-two in all. Eighteen are of men whom he has slain in battle, and the other twenty-four have been taken and tortured."

"How do you know that?"

"Because only eighteen have their nails on. If the prisoner of an Iroquois be alive, he begins always by biting his nails off. You see that they are missing from four-and-twenty."

De Catinat shuddered. What demons were these amongst whom an evil fate had drifted him? And was it possible that his Adele should fall into the hands of such fiends? No, no, surely the good God, for whose sake they had suffered so much, would not permit such an infamy! And yet as evil a fate had come upon other women as tender as Adele — upon other men as loving as he. What hamlet was there in Canada which had not such stories in their record? A vague horror seized him as he stood there. We know more of the future than we are willing to admit, away down in those dim recesses of the soul where there is no reason, but only instincts and impressions. Now some impending terror cast its cloud over him. The trees around, with their great protruding limbs, were like shadowy demons thrusting out their gaunt arms to seize him. The sweat burst from his forehead, and he leaned heavily upon his musket.

"By Saint Eulalie," said Du Lhut, "for an old soldier you turn very pale, monsieur, at a little bloodshed."

“I am not well. I should be glad of a sup from your cognac bottle.”

“Here it is, comrade, and welcome! Well, I may as well have this fine scalp that we may have something to show for our walk.” He held the Indian’s head between his knees, and in an instant, with a sweep of his knife, had torn off the hideous dripping trophy.

“Let us go!” cried De Catinat, turning away in disgust.

“Yes, we shall go! But I shall also have this wampum belt marked with the totem of the Bear. So! And the gun too. Look at the ‘London’ printed upon the lock. Ah, Monsieur Green, Monsieur Green, it is not hard to see where the enemies of France get their arms.”

So at last they turned away, Du Lhut bearing his spoils, leaving the red grinning figure stretched under the silent trees. As they passed on they caught a glimpse of the lad lying doubled up among the bushes where he had fallen. The pioneer walked very swiftly until he came to a little stream which prattled down to the big river. Here he slipped off his boots and leggings, and waded down it with his companions for half a mile or so.

“They will follow our tracks when they find him,” said he, “but this will throw them off, for it is only on running water that an Iroquois can find no trace. And now we shall lie in this clump until nightfall, for we are little over a mile from Port Poitou, and it is dangerous to go forward, for the ground becomes more open.”

And so they remained concealed among the alders whilst the shadows turned from short to long, and the white drifting clouds above them were tinged with the pink of the setting sun. Du Lhut coiled himself into a ball with his pipe between his teeth and dropped into a light sleep, pricking up his ears and starting at the slightest sound from the woods around them. The two Americans whispered together for a long time, Ephraim telling some long story about the cruise of the brig Industry, bound to Jamestown for sugar and molasses, but at last the soothing hum of a gentle breeze through the branches lulled them off also, and they slept. De Catinat alone remained awake, his nerves still in a tingle from that strange sudden shadow which had fallen upon his soul. What could it mean? Not surely that Adele was in danger? He had heard of such warnings, but had he not left her in safety behind cannons and stockades? By the next evening at latest he would see her again. As he lay looking up through the tangle of copper leaves at the sky beyond, his mind drifted like the clouds above him, and he was back once more in the jutting window in the Rue St. Martin, sitting on the broad bancal, with its Spanish leather covering, with the gilt wool-bale creaking outside, and his arm round shrinking, timid Adele, she who had compared herself to a little mouse in an old house, and who yet had courage to stay by his side through all this wild journey. And then again he was back at Versailles. Once more he saw the brown eyes of the king, the fair bold face of De Montespan, the serene features of De Maintenon — once more he rode on his midnight mission, was driven by the demon coachman, and sprang with Amos upon the scaffold to rescue the most beautiful woman in France. So clear it was and so vivid that it was with a start that he came suddenly to himself, and found that the night was creeping on in an American forest, and that Du Lhut had roused himself and was ready for a start.

"Have you been awake?" asked the pioneer.

"Yes."

"Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing but the hooting of the owl."

"It seemed to me that in my sleep I heard a gunshot in the distance."

"In your sleep?"

"Yes, I hear as well asleep as awake and remember what I hear. But now you must follow me close, and we shall be in the fort soon."

"You have wonderful ears, indeed," said De Catinat, as they picked their way through the tangled wood. "How could you hear that these men were following us to-day? I could make out no sound when they were within hand-touch of us."

"I did not hear them at first."

"You saw them?"

"No, nor that either."

"Then how could you know that they were there?"

"I heard a frightened jay flutter among the trees after we were past it. Then ten minutes later I heard the same thing. I knew then that there was some one on our trail, and I listened."

"Peste! you are a woodsman indeed!"

"I believe that these woods are swarming with Iroquois, although we have had the good fortune to miss them. So great a chief as Brown Moose would not start on the path with a small following nor for a small object. They must mean mischief upon the Richelieu. You are not sorry now that you did not bring madame?"

“I thank God for it!”

“The woods will not be safe, I fear, until the partridge berries are out once more. You must stay at Sainte Marie until then, unless the seigneur can spare men to guard you.”

“I had rather stay there forever than expose my wife to such devils.”

“Ay, devils they are, if ever devils walked upon earth. You winced, monsieur, when I took Brown Moose’s scalp, but when you have seen as much of the Indians as I have done your heart will be as hardened as mine. And now we are on the very borders of the clearing, and the blockhouse lies yonder among the clump of maples. They do not keep very good watch, for I have been expecting during these last ten minutes to hear the qui vive. You did not come as near to Sainte Marie unchallenged, and yet De Lannes is as old a soldier as La Noue. We can scarce see now, but yonder, near the river, is where he exercises his men.”

“He does so now,” said Amos. “I see a dozen of them drawn up in a line at their drill.”

“No sentinels, and all the men at drill!” cried Du Lhut in contempt. “It is as you say, however, for I can see them myself with their ranks open, and each as stiff and straight as a pine stump. One would think to see them stand so still that there was not an Indian nearer than Orange. We shall go across to them, and by Saint Anne, I shall tell their commander what I think of his arrangements.”

Du Lhut advanced from the bushes as he spoke, and the four men crossed the open ground in the direction of the line of men who waited silently for them in the dim twilight. They were within fifty paces, and yet none of them had raised hand or voice to challenge their approach. There was something uncanny in the silence, and a change came over Du Lhut’s face as he peered in front of him. He craned his head round and looked up the river.

“My God!” he screamed. “Look at the fort!” They had cleared the clump of trees, and the outline of the blockhouse should have shown up in front of them. There was no sign of it. It was gone!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MEN OF BLOOD.

So unexpected was the blow that even De Lhut, hardened from his childhood to every shock and danger, stood shaken and dismayed. Then, with an oath, he ran at the top of his speed towards the line of figures, his companions following at his heels.

As they drew nearer they could see through the dusk that it was not indeed a line. A silent and motionless officer stood out some twenty paces in front of his silent and motionless men. Further, they could see that he wore a very high and singular head-dress. They were still rushing forward, breathless with apprehension, when to their horror this head-dress began to lengthen and broaden, and a great bird flapped heavily up and dropped down again on the nearest tree-trunk. Then they knew that their worst fears were true, and that it was the garrison of Poitou which stood before them.

They were lashed to low posts with willow withies, some twenty of them, naked all, and twisted and screwed into every strange shape which an agonised body could assume. In front where the buzzard had perched was the gray-headed commandant, with two cinders thrust into his sockets and his flesh hanging from him like a beggar’s rags. Behind was the line of men, each with his legs charred off to the knees, and his body so haggled and scorched and burst that the willow bands alone seemed to hold it together. For a moment the four comrades stared in silent horror at the dreadful group. Then each acted as his nature bade him. De Catinat staggered up against a tree-trunk and leaned his head upon his arm, deadly sick. Du Lhut fell down upon his knees and said something to heaven, with his two clenched hands shaking up at the darkening sky. Ephraim Savage examined the priming of his gun with a tightened lip and a gleaming eye, while Amos Green, without a word, began to cast round in circles in search of a trail.

But Du Lhut was on his feet again in a moment, and running up and down like a sleuth-hound, noting a hundred things which even Amos would have overlooked. He circled round the bodies again and again. Then he ran a little way towards the edge of the woods, and then came back to the charred ruins of the blockhouse, from some of which a thin reek of smoke was still rising.

“There is no sign of the women and children,” said he.

“My God! There were women and children?”

“They are keeping the children to burn at their leisure in their villages. The women they may torture or may adopt as the humour takes them. But what does the old man want?”

“I want you to ask him, Amos,” said the seaman, “why we are yawing and tacking here when we should be cracking on all sail to stand after them?”

Du Lhut smiled and shook his head. “Your friend is a brave man,” said he, “if he thinks that with four men we can follow a hundred and fifty.”

“Tell him, Amos, that the Lord will bear us up,” said the other excitedly. “Say that He will be with us against the children of Jeroboam, and we will cut them off utterly, and they shall be destroyed. What is the French for ‘slay and spare not’? I had as soon go about with my jaw braced up, as with folk who cannot understand a plain language.”

But Du Lhut waved aside the seaman’s suggestions. “We must have a care now,” said he, “or we shall lose our own scalps, and be the cause of those at Sainte Marie losing theirs as well.”

“Sainte Marie!” cried De Catinat. “Is there then danger at Sainte Marie?”

“Ay, they are in the wolf’s mouth now. This business was done last night. The place was stormed by a war-party of a hundred and fifty men. This morning they left and went north upon foot. They have been cached among the woods all day between Poitou and Sainte Marie.”

“Then we have come through them?”

“Yes, we have come through them. They would keep their camp to-day and send out scouts. Brown Moose and his son were among them and struck our trail. To-night—”

“To-night they will attack Sainte Marie?”

“It is possible. And yet with so small a party I should scarce have thought that they would have dared. Well, we can but hasten back as quickly as we can, and give them warning of what is hanging over them.”

And so they turned for their weary backward journey, though their minds were too full to spare a thought upon the leagues which lay behind them or those which were before. Old Ephraim, less accustomed to walking than his younger comrades, was already limping and footsore, but, for all his age, he was as tough as hickory, and full of endurance. Du Lhut took the lead again and they turned their faces once more towards the north.

The moon was shining brightly in the sky, but it was little aid to the travellers in the depths of the forest. Where it had been shadowy in the daytime it was now so absolutely dark that De Catinat could not see the tree-trunks against which he brushed. Here and there they came upon an open glade bathed in the moonshine, or perhaps a thin shaft of silver light broke through between the branches, and cast a great white patch upon the ground, but Du Lhut preferred to avoid these more open spaces, and to skirt the glades rather than to cross them. The breeze had freshened a little, and the whole air was filled with the rustle and sough of the leaves. Save for this dull never-ceasing sound all would have been silent had not the owl hooted sometimes from among the tree-tops, and the night-jar whirred above their heads.

Dark as it was, Du Lhut walked as swiftly as during the sunlight, and never hesitated about the track. His comrades could see, however, that he was taking them a different way to that which they had gone in the morning, for twice they caught a sight of the glimmer of the broad river upon their left, while before they had only seen the streams which flowed into it. On the second occasion he pointed to where, on the farther side, they could see dark shadows flitting over the water.

“Iroquois canoes,” he whispered. “There are ten of them with eight men in each. They are another party, and they are also going north.”

“How do you know that they are another party?”

“Because we have crossed the trail of the first within the hour.”

De Catinat was filled with amazement at this marvellous man who could hear in his sleep and could detect a trail when the very tree-trunks were invisible to ordinary eyes. Du Lhut halted a little to watch the canoes, and then turned his back to the river, and plunged into the woods once more. They had gone a mile or two when suddenly he came to a dead stop, snuffing at the air like a hound on a scent.

“I smell burning wood,” said he. “There is a fire within a mile of us in that direction.”

“I smell it too,” said Amos. “Let us creep up that way and see their camp.”

“Be careful, then,” whispered Du Lhut, “for your lives may hang from a cracking twig.”

They advanced very slowly and cautiously until suddenly the red flare of a leaping fire twinkled between the distant trunks. Still slipping through the brushwood, they worked round until they had found a point from which they could see without a risk of being seen.

A great blaze of dry logs crackled and spurtled in the centre of a small clearing. The ruddy flames roared upwards, and the smoke spread out above it until it looked like a strange tree with gray foliage and trunk of fire. But no living being was in sight and the huge fire roared and swayed in absolute solitude in the midst of the silent woodlands. Nearer they crept and nearer, but there was no movement save the rush of the flames, and no sound but the snapping of the sticks.

“Shall we go up to it?” whispered De Catinat. The wary old pioneer shook his head. “It may be a trap,” said he.

“Or an abandoned camp?”

“No, it has not been lit more than an hour.”

“Besides, it is far too great for a camp fire,” said Amos.

“What do you make of it?” asked Du Lhut.

“A signal.”

“Yes, I daresay that you are right. This light is not a safe neighbour, so we shall edge away from it and then make a straight line for Sainte Marie.”

The flames were soon but a twinkling point behind them, and at last vanished behind the trees. Du Lhut pushed on rapidly until they came to the edge of a moonlit clearing. He was about to skirt this, as he had done others, when suddenly he caught De Catinat by the shoulder and pushed him down behind a clump of sumach, while Amos did the same with Ephraim Savage.

A man was walking down the other side of the open space. He had just emerged, and was crossing it diagonally, making in the direction of the river. His body was bent double, but as he came out from the shadow of the trees they could see that he was an Indian brave in full war-paint, with leggings, loin-cloth, and musket. Close at his heels came a second, and then a third and a fourth, on and on until it seemed as if the wood were full of men, and that the line would never come to an end. They flitted past like shadows in the moonlight, in absolute silence, all crouching and running in the same swift stealthy fashion. Last of all came a man in the fringed tunic of a hunter, with a cap and feather upon his head. He passed across like the others, and they vanished into the shadows as silently as they had appeared. It was five minutes before Du Lhut thought it safe to rise from their shelter.

“By Saint Anne,” he whispered, “did you count them?”

“Three hundred and ninety-six,” said Amos.

“I made it four hundred and two.”

“And you thought that there were only a hundred and fifty of them!” cried De Catinat.

“Ah, you do not understand. This is a fresh band. The others who took the blockhouse must be over there, for their trail lies between us and the river.”

“They could not be the same,” said Amos, “for there was not a fresh scalp among them.”

Du Lhut gave the young hunter a glance of approval. “On my word,” said

he, “I did not know that your woodsmen are as good as they seem to be.

You have eyes, monsieur, and it may please you some day to remember that

Greysolon du Lhut told you so.”

Amos felt a flush of pride at these words from a man whose name was honoured wherever trader or trapper smoked round a camp fire. He was about to make some answer when a dreadful cry broke suddenly out of the woods, a horrible screech, as from some one who was goaded to the very last pitch of human misery. Again and again, as they stood with blanched cheeks in the darkness, they heard that awful cry swelling up from the night and ringing drearily through the forest.

“They are torturing the women,” said Du Lhut.

“Their camp lies over there.”

“Can we do nothing to aid them?” cried Amos.

“Ay, ay, lad,” said the captain in English. “We can’t pass distress signals without going out of our course. Let us put about and run down yonder.”

“In that camp,” said Du Lhut slowly, “there are now nearly six hundred warriors. We are four. What you say has no sense. Unless we warn them at Sainte Marie, these devils will lay some trap for them. Their parties are assembling by land and by water, and there may be a thousand before daybreak. Our duty is to push on and give our warning.”

“He speaks the truth,” said Amos to Ephraim. “Nay, but you must not go alone!” He seized the stout old seaman by the arm and held him by main force to prevent him from breaking off through the woods.

"There is one thing which we can do to spoil their night's amusement," said Du Lhut. "The woods are as dry as powder, and there has been no drop of rain for a long three months."

"Yes?"

"And the wind blows straight for their camp, with the river on the other side of it."

"We should fire the woods!"

"We cannot do better."

In an instant Du Lhut had scraped together a little bundle of dry twigs, and had heaped them up against a withered beech tree which was as dry as tinder. A stroke of flint and steel was enough to start a little smoulder of flame, which lengthened and spread until it was leaping along the white strips of hanging bark. A quarter of a mile farther on Du Lhut did the same again, and once more beyond that, until at three different points the forest was in a blaze. As they hurried onwards they could hear the dull roaring of the flames behind them, and at last, as they neared Sainte Marie, they could see, looking back, the long rolling wave of fire travelling ever westward towards the Richelieu, and flashing up into great spouts of flame as it licked up a clump of pines as if it were a bundle of faggots. Du Lhut chuckled in his silent way as he looked back at the long orange glare in the sky.

"They will need to swim for it, some of them," said he. "They have not canoes to take them all off. Ah, if I had but two hundred of my coureurs-de-bois on the river at the farther side of them not one would have got away."

"They had one who was dressed like a white man," remarked Amos.

"Ay, and the most deadly of the lot. His father was a Dutch trader, his mother an Iroquois, and he goes by the name of the Flemish Bastard. Ah, I know him well, and I tell you that if they want a king in hell, they will find one all ready in his wigwam. By Saint Anne, I have a score to settle with him, and I may pay it before this business is over. Well, there are the lights of Sainte Marie shining down below there. I can understand that sigh of relief, monsieur, for, on my word, after what we found at Poitou, I was uneasy myself until I should see them."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TAPPING OF DEATH.

Day was just breaking as the four comrades entered the gate of the stockade, but early as it was the censitaires and their families were all afoot staring at the prodigious fire which raged to the south of them. De Catinat burst through the throng and rushed upstairs to Adele, who had herself flown down to meet him, so that they met in each other's arms half-way up the great stone staircase with a burst of those little inarticulate cries which are the true unwritten language of love. Together, with his arm round her, they ascended to the great hall where old De la Noue with his son were peering out of the window at the wonderful spectacle.

"Ah, monsieur," said the old nobleman, with his courtly bow, "I am indeed rejoiced to see you safe under my roof again, not only for your own sake, but for that of madame's eyes, which, if she will permit an old man to say so, are much too pretty to spoil by straining them all day in the hopes of seeing some one coming out of the forest. You have done forty miles, Monsieur de Catinat, and are doubtless hungry and weary. When you are yourself again I must claim my revenge in piquet, for the cards lay against me the other night."

But Du Lhut had entered at De Catinat's heels with his tidings of disaster.

"You will have another game to play, Monsieur de Sainte-Marie," said he. "There are six hundred Iroquois in the woods and they are preparing to attack."

"Tut, tut, we cannot allow our arrangements to be altered by a handful of savages," said the seigneur. "I must apologise to you, my dear De Catinat, that you should be annoyed by such people while you are upon my estate. As regards the piquet, I cannot but think that your play from king and knave is more brilliant than safe. Now when I played piquet last with De Lannes of Poitou—"

"De Lannes of Poitou is dead, and all his people," said Du Lhut.

"The blockhouse is a heap of smoking ashes."

The seigneur raised his eyebrows and took a pinch of snuff, tapping the lid of his little round gold box.

"I always told him that his fort would be taken unless he cleared away those maple trees which grew up to the very walls. They are all dead, you say?"

"Every man."

"And the fort burned?"

"Not a stick was left standing."

"Have you seen these rascals?"

"We saw the trail of a hundred and fifty. Then there were a hundred in canoes, and a war-party of four hundred passed us under the Flemish Bastard. Their camp is five miles down the river, and there cannot be less than six hundred."

"You were fortunate in escaping them."

"But they were not so fortunate in escaping us. We killed Brown Moose and his son, and we fired the woods so as to drive them out of their camp."

"Excellent! Excellent!" said the seigneur, clapping gently with his dainty hands. "You have done very well indeed, Du Lhut! You are, I presume, very tired?"

"I am not often tired. I am quite ready to do the journey again."

"Then perhaps you would pick a few men and go back into the woods to see what these villains are doing?"

"I shall be ready in five minutes."

"Perhaps you would like to go also, Achille?" His son's dark eyes and

Indian face lit up with a fierce joy.

"Yes, I shall go also," he answered.

"Very good, and we shall make all ready in your absence. Madame, you will excuse these little annoyances which mar the pleasure of your visit. Next time that you do me the honour to come here I trust that we shall have cleared all these vermin from my estate. We have our advantages. The Richelieu is a better fish pond, and these forests are a finer deer preserve than any of which the king can boast. But on the other hand we have, as you see, our little troubles. You will excuse me now, as there are one or two things which demand my attention. De Catinat, you are a tried soldier and I should be glad of your advice. Onega, give me my lace handkerchief and my cane of clouded amber, and take care of madame until her husband and I return."

It was bright daylight now, and the square enclosure within the stockade was filled with an anxious crowd who had just learned the evil tidings. Most of the censitaires were old soldiers and trappers who had served in many Indian wars, and whose swarthy faces and bold bearing told their own story. They were sons of a race which with better fortune or with worse has burned more powder than any other nation upon earth, and as they stood in little groups discussing the situation and examining their arms, a leader could have asked for no more hardy or more war-like following. The women, however, pale and breathless, were hurrying in from the outlying cottages, dragging their children with them, and bearing over their shoulders the more precious of their household goods. The confusion, the hurry, the cries of the children, the throwing down of bundles and the rushing back for more, contrasted sharply with the quiet and the beauty of the woods which encircled them, all bathed in the bright morning sunlight. It was strange to look upon the fairy loveliness of their many-tinted foliage, and to know that the spirit of murder and cruelty was roaming unchained behind that lovely screen.

The scouting party under Du Lhut and Achille de la Noue had already left, and at the order of the seigneur the two gates were now secured with huge bars of oak fitted into iron staples on either side. The children were placed in the lower store-room with a few women to watch them, while the others were told off to attend to the fire buckets, and to reload the muskets. The men had been paraded, fifty-two of them in all, and they were divided into parties now for the defence of each part of the stockade. On one side it had been built up to within a few yards of the river, which not only relieved them from the defence of that face, but enabled them to get fresh water by throwing a bucket at the end of a rope from the stockade. The boats and canoes of Sainte Marie were drawn up on the bank just under the wall, and were precious now as offering a last means of escape should all else fail. The next fort, St. Louis, was but a few leagues up the river, and De la Noue had already sent a swift messenger to them with news of the danger. At least it would be a point on which they might retreat should the worst come to the worst. And that the worst might come to the worst was very evident to so experienced a woodsman as Amos Green. He had left Ephraim Savage snoring in a deep sleep upon the floor, and was now walking round the defences with his pipe in his mouth, examining with a critical eye every detail in connection with them. The stockade was very strong, nine feet high and closely built of oak stakes which were thick enough to turn a bullet. Half-way up it was loop-holed in long narrow slits for the fire of the defenders. But on the other hand the trees grew up to within a hundred yards of it, and formed a screen for the attack, while the garrison was so scanty that it could not spare more than twenty men at the utmost for each face. Amos knew how daring and dashing were the Iroquois warriors, how cunning and fertile of resource, and his face darkened as he thought of the young wife who had come so far in their safe-keeping, and of the women and children whom he had seen crowding into the fort.

"Would it not be better if you could send them up the river?" he suggested to the seigneur.

"I should very gladly do so, monsieur, and perhaps if we are all alive we may manage it to-night if the weather should be cloudy. But I cannot spare the men to guard them, and I cannot send them without a guard when we know that Iroquois canoes are on the river and their scouts are swarming on the banks."

"You are right. It would be madness."

"I have stationed you on this eastern face with your friends and with fifteen men. Monsieur de Catinat, will you command the party?"

"Willingly."

"I will take the south face as it seems to be the point of danger. Du Lhut can take the north, and five men should be enough to watch the river side."

"Have we food and powder?"

"I have flour and smoked eels enough to see this matter through. Poor fare, my dear sir, but I daresay you learned in Holland that a cup of ditch water after a brush may have a better smack than the blue-sealed Frontiniac which you helped me to finish the other night. As to powder, we have all our trading stores to draw upon."

"We have not time to clear any of these trees?" asked the soldier.

"Impossible. They would make better shelter down than up."

"But at least I might clear that patch of brushwood round the birch sapling which lies between the east face and the edge of the forest. It is good cover for their skirmishers."

"Yes, that should be fired without delay."

"Nay, I think that I might do better," said Amos. "We might bait a trap for them there. Where is this powder of which you spoke?"

"Theuriet, the major-domo, is giving out powder in the main store-house."

"Very good." Amos vanished upstairs, and returned with a large linen bag in his hand. This he filled with powder, and then, slinging it over his shoulder, he carried it out to the clump of bushes and placed it at the base of the sapling, cutting a strip out of the bark immediately above the spot. Then with a few leafy branches and fallen leaves he covered the powder bag very carefully over so that it looked like a little hillock of earth. Having arranged all to his satisfaction he returned, clambering over the stockade, and dropping down upon the other side.

"I think that we are all ready for them now," said the seigneur. "I would that the women and children were in a safe place, but we may send them down the river to-night if all goes well. Has anyone heard anything of Du Lhut?"

"Jean has the best ears of any of us, your excellency," said one man from beside the brass corner cannon. "He thought that he heard shots a few minutes ago."

"Then he has come into touch with them. Etienne, take ten men and go to the withered oak to cover them if they are retreating, but do not go another yard on any pretext. I am too short-handed already. Perhaps, De Catinat, you wish to sleep?"

"No, I could not sleep."

"We can do no more down here. What do you say to a round or two of piquet? A little turn of the cards will help us to pass the time."

They ascended to the upper hall, where Adele came and sat by her husband, while the swarthy Onega crouched by the window looking keenly out into the forest. De Catinat had little thought to spare upon the cards, as his mind wandered to the danger which threatened them and to the woman whose hand rested upon his own. The old nobleman, on the other hand, was engrossed by the play, and cursed under his breath, or chuckled and grinned as the luck swayed one way or the other. Suddenly as they played there came two sharp raps from without.

"Some one is tapping," cried Adele.

"It is death that is tapping," said the Indian woman at the window.

"Ay, ay, it was the patter of two spent balls against the woodwork.

The wind is against our hearing the report. The cards are shuffled.

It is my cut and your deal. The capot, I think, was mine."

“Men are rushing from the woods,” cried Onega.

“Tut! It grows serious!” said the nobleman. “We can finish the game later. Remember that the deal lies with you. Let us see what it all means.”

De Catinat had already rushed to the window. Du Lhut, young Achille de la Noue, and eight of the covering party were running with their heads bent towards the stockade, the door of which had been opened to admit them. Here and there from behind the trees came little blue puffs of smoke, and one of the fugitives who wore white calico breeches began suddenly to hop instead of running and a red splotch showed upon the white cloth. Two others threw their arms round him and the three rushed in abreast while the gate swung into its place behind them. An instant later the brass cannon at the corner gave a flash and a roar while the whole outline of the wood was traced in a rolling cloud, and the shower of bullets rapped up against the wooden wall like sleet on a window.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TAKING OF THE STOCKADE.

Having left Adele to the care of her Indian hostess, and warned her for her life to keep from the windows, De Catinat seized his musket and rushed downstairs. As he passed a bullet came piping through one of the narrow embrasures and starred itself in a little blotch of lead upon the opposite wall. The seigneur had already descended and was conversing with Du Lhut beside the door.

"A thousand of them, you say?"

"Yes, we came on a fresh trail of a large war-party, three hundred at the least. They are all Mohawks and Cayugas with a sprinkling of Oneidas. We had a running fight for a few miles, and we have lost five men."

"All dead, I trust."

"I hope so, but we were hard pressed to keep from being cut off.

Jean Mance is shot through the leg."

"I saw that he was hit."

"We had best have all ready to retire to the house if they carry the stockade. We can scarce hope to hold it when they are twenty to one."

"All is ready."

"And with our cannon we can keep their canoes from passing, so we might send our women away to-night."

"I had intended to do so. Will you take charge of the north side? You might come across to me with ten of your men now, and I shall go back to you if they change their attack."

The firing came in one continuous rattle now from the edges of the wood, and the air was full of bullets. The assailants were all trained shots, men who lived by their guns, and to whom a shaking hand or a dim eye meant poverty and hunger. Every slit and crack and loop-hole was marked, and a cap held above the stockade was blown in an instant from the gun barrel which supported it. On the other hand, the defenders were also skilled in Indian fighting, and wise in every trick and lure which could protect themselves or tempt their enemies to show. They kept well to the sides of the loop-holes, watching through little crevices of the wood, and firing swiftly when a chance offered. A red leg sticking straight up into the air from behind a log showed where one bullet at least had gone home, but there was little to aim at save a puff and flash from among the leaves, or the shadowy figure of a warrior seen for an instant as he darted from one tree-trunk to the other. Seven of the Canadians had already been hit, but only three were mortally wounded, and the other four still kept manfully to their loop-holes, though one who had been struck through the jaw was spitting his teeth with his bullets down into his gun-barrel. The women sat in a line upon the ground, beneath the level of the loop-holes, each with a saucerful of bullets and a canister of powder, passing up the loaded guns to the fighting men at the points where a quick fire was most needful.

At first the attack had been all upon the south face, but as fresh bodies of the Iroquois came up their line spread and lengthened until the whole east face was girt with fire, which gradually enveloped the north also. The fort was ringed in by a great loop of smoke, save only where the broad river flowed past them. Over near the further bank the canoes were lurking, and one, manned by ten warriors, attempted to pass up the stream, but a good shot from the brass gun dashed in her side and sank her, while a second of grape left only four of the swimmers whose high scalp-locks stood out above the water like the back-fins of some strange fish. On the inland side, however, the seigneur had ordered the cannon to be served no more, for the broad embrasures drew the enemy’s fire, and of the men who had been struck half were among those who worked the guns.

The old nobleman strutted about with his white ruffles and his clouded cane behind the line of parched smoke-grimed men, tapping his snuff-box, shooting out his little jests, and looking very much less concerned than he had done over his piquet.

“What do you think of it, Du Lhut?” he asked.

“I think very badly of it. We are losing men much too fast.”

“Well, my friend, what can you expect? When a thousand muskets are all turned upon a little place like this, some one must suffer for it. Ah, my poor fellow, so you are done for too!”

The man nearest him had suddenly fallen with a crash, lying quite still with his face in a platter of the sagamite which had been brought out by the women. Du Lhut glanced at him and then looked round.

“He is in a line with no loop-hole, and it took him in the shoulder,” said he. “Where did it come from then? Ah, by Saint Anne, look there!” He pointed upwards to a little mist of smoke which hung round the summit of a high oak.

“The rascal overlooks the stockade. But the trunk is hardly thick enough to shield him at that height. This poor fellow will not need his musket again, and I see that it is ready primed.” De la Noue laid down his cane, turned back his ruffles, picked up the dead man’s gun, and fired at the lurking warrior. Two leaves fluttered out from the tree and a grinning vermilion face appeared for an instant with a yell of derision. Quick as a flash Du Lhut brought his musket to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. The man gave a tremendous spring and crashed down through the thick foliage. Some seventy or eighty feet below him a single stout branch shot out, and on to this he fell with the sound of a great stone dropping into a bog, and hung there doubled over it, swinging slowly from side to side like a red rag, his scalp-lock streaming down between his feet. A shout of exultation rose from the Canadians at the sight, which was drowned in the murderous yell of the savages.

“His limbs twitch. He is not dead,” cried De la Noue.

“Let him die there,” said the old pioneer callously, ramming a fresh charge into his gun. “Ah, there is the gray hat again. It comes ever when I am unloaded.”

“I saw a plumed hat among the brushwood.”

“It is the Flemish Bastard. I had rather have his scalp than those of his hundred best warriors.”

“Is he so brave then?”

“Yes, he is brave enough. There is no denying it, for how else could he be an Iroquois war-chief? But he is clever and cunning, and cruel — Ah, my God, if all the stories told are true, his cruelty is past believing. I should fear that my tongue would wither if I did but name the things which this man has done. Ah, he is there again.”

The gray hat with the plume had shown itself once more in a rift of the smoke. De la Noue and Du Lhut both fired together, and the cap fluttered up into the air. At the same instant the bushes parted, and a tall warrior sprang out into full view of the defenders. His face was that of an Indian, but a shade or two lighter, and a pointed black beard hung down over his hunting tunic. He threw out his hands with a gesture of disdain, stood for an instant looking steadfastly at the fort, and then sprang back into cover amid a shower of bullets which chipped away the twigs all round him.

"Yes, he is brave enough," Du Lhut repeated with an oath. "Your censitaires have had their hoes in their hands more often than their muskets, I should judge from their shooting. But they seem to be drawing closer upon the east face, and I think that they will make a rush there before long."

The fire had indeed grown very much fiercer upon the side which was defended by De Catinat, and it was plain that the main force of the Iroquois were gathered at that point. From every log, and trunk, and cleft, and bush came the red flash with the gray halo, and the bullets sang in a continuous stream through the loop-holes. Amos had whittled a little hole for himself about a foot above the ground, and lay upon his face loading and firing in his own quiet methodical fashion. Beside him stood Ephraim Savage, his mouth set grimly, his eyes flashing from under his down-drawn brows, and his whole soul absorbed in the smiting of the Amalekites. His hat was gone, his grizzled hair flying in the breeze, great splotches of powder mottled his mahogany face, and a weal across his right cheek showed where an Indian bullet had grazed him. De Catinat was bearing himself like an experienced soldier, walking up and down among his men with short words of praise or of precept, those fire-words rough and blunt which bring a glow to the heart and a flush to the cheek. Seven of his men were down, but as the attack grew fiercer upon his side it slackened upon the others, and the seigneur with his son and Du Lhut brought ten men to reinforce them. De la Noue was holding out his snuff-box to De Catinat when a shrill scream from behind them made them both look round. Onega, the Indian wife, was wringing her hands over the body of her son. A glance showed that the bullet had pierced his heart and that he was dead.

For an instant the old nobleman's thin face grew a shade paler, and the hand which held out the little gold box shook like a branch in the wind. Then he thrust it into his pocket again and mastered the spasm which had convulsed his features.

"The De la Noues always die upon the field of honour," he remarked.

"I think that we should have some more men in the angle by the gun."

And now it became clear why it was that the Iroquois had chosen the eastern face for their main attack. It was there that the clump of cover lay midway between the edge of the forest and the stockade. A storming party could creep as far as that and gather there for the final rush. First one crouching warrior, and then a second, and then a third darted across the little belt of open space, and threw themselves down among the bushes. The fourth was hit, and lay with his back broken a few paces out from the edge of the wood, but a stream of warriors continued to venture the passage, until thirty-six had got across, and the little patch of underwood was full of lurking savages. Amos Green’s time had come.

From where he lay he could see the white patch where he had cut the bark from the birch sapling, and he knew that immediately underneath it lay the powder bag. He sighted the mark, and then slowly lowered his barrel until he had got to the base of the little trees as nearly as he could guess it among the tangle of bushes. The first shot produced no result, however, and the second was aimed a foot lower. The bullet penetrated the bag, and there was an explosion which shook the manor-house and swayed the whole line of stout stockades as though they were corn-stalks in a breeze. Up to the highest summits of the trees went the huge column of blue smoke, and after the first roar there was a deathly silence which was broken by the patter and thud of falling bodies. Then came a wild cheer from the defenders, and a furious answering whoop from the Indians, while the fire from the woods burst out with greater fury than ever.

But the blow had been a heavy one. Of the thirty-six warriors, all picked for their valour, only four regained the shelter of the woods, and those so torn and shattered that they were spent men. Already the Indians had lost heavily, and this fresh disaster made them reconsider their plan of attack, for the Iroquois were as wary as they were brave, and he was esteemed the best war-chief who was most chary of the lives of his followers. Their fire gradually slackened, and at last, save for a dropping shot here and there, it died away altogether.

“Is it possible that they are going to abandon the attack?” cried De Catinat joyously. “Amos, I believe that you have saved us.”

But the wily Du Lhut shook his head. “A wolf would as soon leave a half-gnawed bone as an Iroquois such a prize as this.”

“But they have lost heavily.”

“Ay, but not so heavily as ourselves in proportion to our numbers. They have fifty out of a thousand, and we twenty out of threescore. No, no, they are holding a council, and we shall soon hear from them again. But it may be some hours first, and if you will take my advice you will have an hour’s sleep, for you are not, as I can see by your eyes, as used to doing without it as I am, and there may be little rest for any of us this night."

De Catinat was indeed weary to the last pitch of human endurance. Amos Green and the seaman had already wrapped themselves in their blankets and sunk to sleep under the shelter of the stockade. The soldier rushed upstairs to say a few words of comfort to the trembling Adele, and then throwing himself down upon a couch he slept the dreamless sleep of an exhausted man. When at last he was roused by a fresh sputter of musketry fire from the woods the sun was already low in the heavens, and the mellow light of evening tinged the bare walls of the room. He sprang from his couch, seized his musket, and rushed downstairs. The defenders were gathered at their loop-holes once more, while Du Lhut, the seigneur, and Amos Green were whispering eagerly together. He noticed as he passed that Onega still sat crooning by the body of her son, without having changed her position since morning.

"What is it, then? Are they coming on?" he asked.

"They are up to some devilry," said Du Lhut, peering out at the corner of the embrasure. "They are gathering thickly at the east fringe, and yet the firing comes from the south. It is not the Indian way to attack across the open, and yet if they think help is coming from the fort they might venture it."

"The wood in front of us is alive with them," said Amos. "They are as busy as beavers among the underwood."

"Perhaps they are going to attack from this side, and cover the attack by a fire from the flank."

"That is what I think," cried the seigneur. "Bring the spare guns up here and all the men except five for each side."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shrill yell burst from the wood, and in an instant a cloud of warriors dashed out and charged across the open, howling, springing, and waving their guns or tomahawks in the air. With their painted faces, smeared and striped with every vivid colour, their streaming scalp-locks, their waving arms, their open mouths, and their writhings and contortions, no more fiendish crew ever burst into a sleeper's nightmare. Some of those in front bore canoes between them, and as they reached the stockade they planted them against it and swarmed up them as if they had been scaling-ladders. Others fired through the embrasures and loop-holes, the muzzles of their muskets touching those of the defenders, while others again sprang unaided on to the tops of the palisades and jumped fearlessly down upon the inner side. The Canadians, however, made such a resistance as might be expected from men who knew that no mercy awaited them. They fired whilst they had time to load, and then, clubbing their muskets, they smashed furiously at every red head which showed above the rails. The din within the stockade was infernal, the shouts and cries of the French, the whooping of the savages, and the terrified screaming of the frightened women blending into one dreadful uproar, above which could be heard the high shrill voice of the old seigneur imploring his censitaires to stand fast. With his rapier in his hand, his hat lost, his wig awry, and his dignity all thrown to the winds, the old nobleman showed them that day how a soldier of Rocroy could carry himself, and with Du Lhut, Amos, De Catinat and Ephraim Savage, was ever in the forefront of the defence. So desperately did they fight, the sword and musket-butt outreaching the tomahawk, that though at one time fifty Iroquois were over the palisades, they had slain or driven back nearly all of them when a fresh wave burst suddenly over the south face which had been stripped of its defenders. Du Lhut saw in an instant that the enclosure was lost and that only one thing could save the house.

“Hold them for an instant,” he screamed, and rushing at the brass gun he struck his flint and steel and fired it straight into the thick of the savages. Then as they recoiled for an instant he stuck a nail into the touch-hole and drove it home with a blow from the butt of his gun. Darting across the yard he spiked the gun at the other corner, and was back at the door as the remnants of the garrison were hurled towards it by the rush of the assailants. The Canadians darted in, and swung the ponderous mass of wood into position, breaking the leg of the foremost warrior who had striven to follow them. Then for an instant they had time for breathing and for council.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COMING OF THE FRIAR.

But their case was a very evil one. Had the guns been lost so that they might be turned upon the door, all further resistance would have been vain, but Du Lhut's presence of mind had saved them from that danger. The two guns upon the river face and the canoes were safe, for they were commanded by the windows of the house. But their numbers were terribly reduced, and those who were left were weary and wounded and spent. Nineteen had gained the house, but one had been shot through the body and lay groaning in the hall, while a second had his shoulder cleft by a tomahawk and could no longer raise his musket. Du Lhut, De la Noue, and De Catinat were uninjured, but Ephraim Savage had a bullet-hole in his forearm, and Amos was bleeding from a cut upon the face. Of the others hardly one was without injury, and yet they had no time to think of their hurts for the danger still pressed and they were lost unless they acted. A few shots from the barricaded windows sufficed to clear the enclosure, for it was all exposed to their aim; but on the other hand they had the shelter of the stockade now, and from the further side of it they kept up a fierce fire upon the windows. Half-a-dozen of the censitaires returned the fusillade, while the leaders consulted as to what had best be done.

"We have twenty-five women and fourteen children," said the seigneur. "I am sure that you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our first duty is towards them. Some of you, like myself, have lost sons or brothers this day. Let us at least save our wives and sisters."

"No Iroquois canoes have passed up the river," said one of the Canadians. "If the women start in the darkness they can get away to the fort."

"By Saint Anne of Beaupre," exclaimed Du Lhut, "I think it would be well if you could get your men out of this also, for I cannot see how it is to be held until morning."

A murmur of assent broke from the other Canadians, but the old nobleman shook his bewigged head with decision.

“Tut! Tut! What nonsense is this!” he cried. “Are we to abandon the manor-house of Sainte Marie to the first gang of savages who choose to make an attack upon it? No, no, gentlemen, there are still nearly a score of us, and when the garrison learn that we are so pressed, which will be by to-morrow morning at the latest, they will certainly send us relief.”

Du Lhut shook his head moodily.

“If you stand by the fort I will not desert you,” said he, “and yet it is a pity to sacrifice brave men for nothing.”

“The canoes will hardly hold the women and children as it is,” cried Theuriet. “There are but two large and four small. There is not space for a single man.”

“Then that decides it,” said De Catinat. “But who are to row the women?”

“It is but a few leagues with the current in their favour, and there are none of our women who do not know how to handle a paddle.”

The Iroquois were very quiet now, and an occasional dropping shot from the trees or the stockade was the only sign of their presence. Their losses had been heavy, and they were either engaged in collecting their dead, or in holding a council as to their next move. The twilight was gathering in, and the sun had already sunk beneath the tree-tops. Leaving a watchman at each window, the leaders went round to the back of the house where the canoes were lying upon the bank. There were no signs of the enemy upon the river to the north of them.

“We are in luck,” said Amos. “The clouds are gathering and there will be little light.”

“It is luck indeed, since the moon is only three days past the full,” answered Du Lhut. “I wonder that the Iroquois have not cut us off upon the water, but it is likely that their canoes have gone south to bring up another war-party. They may be back soon, and we had best not lose a moment.”

“In an hour it might be dark enough to start.”

“I think that there is rain in those clouds, and that will make it darker still.”

The women and children were assembled and their places in each boat were assigned to them. The wives of the censitaires, rough hardy women whose lives had been spent under the shadow of a constant danger, were for the most part quiet and collected, though a few of the younger ones whimpered a little. A woman is always braver when she has a child to draw her thoughts from herself, and each married woman had one now allotted to her as her own special charge until they should reach the fort. To Onega, the Indian wife of the seigneur, who was as wary and as experienced as a war sachem of her people, the command of the women was entrusted.

"It is not very far, Adele," said De Catinat, as his wife clung to his arm. "You remember how we heard the Angelus bells as we journeyed through the woods. That was Fort St. Louis, and it is but a league or two."

"But I do not wish to leave you, Amory. We have been together in all our troubles. Oh, Amory, why should we be divided now?"

"My dear love, you will tell them at the fort how things are with us, and they will bring us help."

"Let the others do that, and I will stay. I will not be useless, Amory. Onega has taught me to load a gun. I will not be afraid, indeed I will not, if you will only let me stay."

"You must not ask it, Adele. It is impossible, child I could not let you stay."

"But I feel so sure that it would be best."

The coarser reason of man has not yet learned to value those subtle instincts which guide a woman. De Catinat argued and exhorted until he had silenced if he had not convinced her.

"It is for my sake, dear. You do not know what a load it will be from my heart when I know that you are safe. And you need not be afraid for me. We can easily hold the place until morning. Then the people from the fort will come, for I hear that they have plenty of canoes, and we shall all meet again."

Adele was silent, but her hands tightened upon his arm. Her husband was still endeavouring to reassure her when a groan burst from the watcher at the window which overlooked the stream.

"There is a canoe on the river to the north of us," he cried.

The besieged looked at each other in dismay. The Iroquois had then cut off their retreat after all.

"How many warriors are in it?" asked the seigneur.

"I cannot see. The light is not very good, and it is in the shadow of the bank."

"Which way is it coming?"

"It is coming this way. Ah, it shoots out into the open now, and I can see it. May the good Lord be praised! A dozen candles shall burn in Quebec

Cathedral if I live till next summer!"

"What is it then?" cried De la Noue impatiently.

"It is not an Iroquois canoe. There is but one man in it. He is a Canadian."

"A Canadian!" cried Du Lhut, springing up to the window. "Who but a madman would venture into such a hornet's nest alone! Ah, yes, I can see him now. He keeps well out from the bank to avoid their fire. Now he is in mid-stream and he turns towards us. By my faith, it is not the first time that the good father has handled a paddle."

"It is a Jesuit!" said one, craning his neck. "They are ever where there is most danger."

"No, I can see his capote," cried another. "It is a Franciscan friar!"

An instant later there was the sound of a canoe grounding upon the pebbles, the door was unbarred, and a man strode in, attired in the long brown gown of the Franciscans. He cast a rapid glance around, and then, stepping up to De Catinat, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"So, you have not escaped me!" said he. "We have caught the evil seed before it has had time to root."

"What do you mean, father?" asked the seigneur. "You have made some mistake. This is my good friend Amory de Catinat, of a noble French family."

"This is Amory de Catinat, the heretic and Huguenot," cried the monk.

"I have followed him up the St. Lawrence, and I have followed him up the Richelieu, and I would have followed him to the world's end if I could but bring him back with me."

"Tut, father, your zeal carries you too far," said the seigneur.

"Whither would you take my friend, then?"

"He shall go back to France with his wife. There is no place in Canada for heretics."

Du Lhut burst out laughing. "By Saint Anne, father," said he, "if you could take us all back to France at present we should be very much your debtors."

"And you will remember," said De la Noue sternly, "that you are under my roof and that you are speaking of my guest."

But the friar was not to be abashed by the frown of the old nobleman.

"Look at this," said he, whipping a paper out of his bosom. "It is signed by the governor, and calls upon you, under pain of the king's displeasure, to return this man to Quebec. Ah, monsieur, when you left me upon the island that morning you little thought that I would return to Quebec for this, and then hunt you down so many hundreds of miles of river. But I have you now, and I shall never leave you until I see you on board the ship which will carry you and your wife back to France."

For all the bitter vindictiveness which gleamed in the monk's eyes, De Catinat could not but admire the energy and tenacity of the man.

"It seems to me, father, that you would have shone more as a soldier than as a follower of Christ," said he; "but, since you have followed us here, and since there is no getting away, we may settle this question at some later time."

But the two Americans were less inclined to take so peaceful a view. Ephraim Savage's beard bristled with anger, and he whispered something into Amos Green's ear.

"The captain and I could easily get rid of him," said the young woodsman, drawing De Catinat aside. "If he will cross our path he must pay for it."

"No, no, not for the world, Amos! Let him alone. He does what he thinks to be his duty, though his faith is stronger than his charity, I think. But here comes the rain, and surely it is dark enough now for the boats."

A great brown cloud had overspread the heavens, and the night had fallen so rapidly that they could hardly see the gleam of the river in front of them. The savages in the woods and behind the captured stockade were quiet, save for an occasional shot, but the yells and whoops from the cottages of the censitaires showed that they were being plundered by their captors. Suddenly a dull red glow began to show above one of the roofs.

"They have set it on fire," cried Du Lhut. "The canoes must go at once, for the river will soon be as light as day. In! In! There is not an instant to lose!"

There was no time for leave-taking. One impassioned kiss and Adele was torn away and thrust into the smallest canoe, which she shared with Onega, two children, and an unmarried girl. The others rushed into their places, and in a few moments they had pushed off, and had vanished into the drift and the darkness. The great cloud had broken and the rain pattered heavily upon the roof, and splashed upon their faces as they strained their eyes after the vanishing boats.

"Thank God for this storm!" murmured Du Lhut. "It will prevent the cottages from blazing up too quickly."

But he had forgotten that though the roofs might be wet the interior was as dry as tinder. He had hardly spoken before a great yellow tongue of flame licked out of one of the windows, and again and again, until suddenly half of the roof fell in, and the cottage was blazing like a pitch-bucket. The flames hissed and sputtered in the pouring rain, but, fed from below, they grew still higher and fiercer, flashing redly upon the great trees, and turning their trunks to burnished brass. Their light made the enclosure and the manor-house as clear as day, and exposed the whole long stretch of the river. A fearful yell from the woods announced that the savages had seen the canoes, which were plainly visible from the windows not more than a quarter of a mile away.

"They are rushing through the woods. They are making for the water's edge," cried De Catinat.

"They have some canoes down there," said Du Lhut.

"But they must pass us!" cried the Seigneur of Sainte Marie. "Get down to the cannon and see if you cannot stop them."

They had hardly reached the guns when two large canoes filled with warriors shot out from among the reeds below the fort, and steering out into mid-stream began to paddle furiously after the fugitives.

"Jean, you are our best shot," cried De la Noue. "Lay for her as she passes the great pine tree. Lambert, do you take the other gun. The lives of all whom you love may hang upon the shot!"

The two wrinkled old artillerymen glanced along their guns and waited for the canoes to come abreast of them. The fire still blazed higher and higher, and the broad river lay like a sheet of dull metal with two dark lines, which marked the canoes, sweeping swiftly down the centre. One was fifty yards in front of the other, but in each the Indians were bending to their paddles and pulling frantically, while their comrades from the wooded shores whooped them on to fresh exertions. The fugitives had already disappeared round the bend of the river.

As the first canoe came abreast of the lower of the two guns, the Canadian made the sign of the cross over the touch-hole and fired. A cheer and then a groan went up from the eager watchers. The discharge had struck the surface close to the mark, and dashed such a shower of water over it that for an instant it looked as if it had been sunk. The next moment, however, the splash subsided, and the canoe shot away uninjured, save that one of the rowers had dropped his paddle while his head fell forward upon the back of the man in front of him. The second gunner sighted the same canoe as it came abreast of him, but at the very instant when he stretched out his match to fire a bullet came humming from the stockade and he fell forward dead without a groan.

“This is work that I know something of, lad,” said old Ephraim, springing suddenly forward. “But when I fire a gun I like to train it myself. Give me a help with the handspike and get her straight for the island. So! A little lower for an even keel! Now we have them!” He clapped down his match and fired.

It was a beautiful shot. The whole charge took the canoe about six feet behind the bow, and doubled her up like an eggshell. Before the smoke had cleared she had foundered, and the second canoe had paused to pick up some of the wounded men. The others, as much at home in the water as in the woods, were already striking out for the shore.

“Quick! Quick!” cried the seigneur. “Load the gun! We may get the second one yet!”

But it was not to be. Long before they could get it ready the Iroquois had picked up their wounded warriors and were pulling madly up-stream once more. As they shot away the fire died suddenly down in the burning cottages and the rain and the darkness closed in upon them.

“My God!” cried De Catinat furiously, “they will be taken. Let us abandon this place, take a boat, and follow them. Come! Come! Not an instant is to be lost!”

“Monsieur, you go too far in your very natural anxiety,” said the seigneur coldly. “I am not inclined to leave my post so easily!”

“Ah, what is it? Only wood and stone, which can be built again. But to think of the women in the hands of these devils! Oh, I am going mad! Come! Come! For Christ’s sake come!” His face was deadly pale, and he raved with his clenched hands in the air.

“I do not think that they will be caught,” said Du Lhut, laying his hand soothingly upon his shoulder. “Do not fear. They had a long start and the women here can paddle as well as the men. Again, the Iroquois canoe was overloaded at the start, and has the wounded men aboard as well now.

Besides, these oak canoes of the Mohawks are not as swift as the Algonquin birch barks which we use. In any case it is impossible to follow, for we have no boat."

"There is one lying there."

"Ah, it will but hold a single man. It is that in which the friar came."

"Then I am going in that! My place is with Adele!" He flung open the door, rushed out, and was about to push off the frail skiff, when some one sprang past him, and with a blow from a hatchet stove in the side of the boat.

"It is my boat," said the friar, throwing down the axe and folding his arms. "I can do what I like with it."

"You fiend! You have ruined us!"

"I have found you and you shall not escape me again."

The hot blood flushed to the soldier's head, and picking up the axe, he took a quick step forward. The light from the open door shone upon the grave, harsh face of the friar, but not a muscle twitched nor a feature changed as he saw the axe whirl up in the hands of a furious man. He only signed himself with the cross, and muttered a Latin prayer under his breath. It was that composure which saved his life. De Catinat hurled down the axe again with a bitter curse, and was turning away from the shattered boat, when in an instant, without a warning, the great door of the manor-house crashed inwards, and a flood of whooping savages burst into the house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DINING HALL OF SAINTE MARIE.

What had occurred is easily explained. The watchers in the windows at the front found that it was more than flesh and blood could endure to remain waiting at their posts while the fates of their wives and children were being decided at the back. All was quiet at the stockade, and the Indians appeared to be as absorbed as the Canadians in what was passing upon the river. One by one, therefore, the men on guard had crept away and had assembled at the back to cheer the seaman’s shot and to groan as the remaining canoe sped like a bloodhound down the river in the wake of the fugitives. But the savages had one at their head who was as full of wiles and resource as Du Lhut himself. The Flemish Bastard had watched the house from behind the stockade as a dog watches a rat-hole, and he had instantly discovered that the defenders had left their post. With a score of other warriors he raised a great log from the edge of the forest, and crossing the open space unchallenged, he and his men rushed it against the door with such violence as to crack the bar across and tear the wood from the hinges. The first intimation which the survivors had of the attack was the crash of the door, and the screams of two of the negligent watchmen who had been seized and scalped in the hall. The whole basement floor was in the hands of the Indians, and De Catinat and his enemy the friar were cut off from the foot of the stairs.

Fortunately, however, the manor-houses of Canada were built with the one idea of defence against Indians, and even now there were hopes for the defenders. A wooden ladder which could be drawn up in case of need hung down from the upper windows to the ground upon the river-side. De Catinat rushed round to this, followed by the friar. He felt about for the ladder in the darkness. It was gone.

Then indeed his heart sank in despair. Where could he fly to? The boat was destroyed. The stockades lay between him and the forest, and they were in the hands of the Iroquois. Their yells were ringing in his ears. They had not seen him yet, but in a few minutes they must come upon him. Suddenly he heard a voice from somewhere in the darkness above him.

“Give me your gun, lad,” it said. “I see the loom of some of the heathen down by the wall.”

“It is I. It is I, Amos,” cried De Catinat. “Down with the ladder or I am a dead man.”

“Have a care. It may be a ruse,” said the voice of Du Lhut.

“No, no, I’ll answer for it,” cried Amos, and an instant later down came the ladder. De Catinat and the friar rushed up it, and they hardly had their feet upon the rungs when a swarm of warriors burst out from the door and poured along the river bank. Two muskets flashed from above, something plopped like a salmon in the water, and next instant the two were among their comrades and the ladder had been drawn up once more.

But it was a very small band who now held the last point to which they could retreat. Only nine of them remained, the seigneur, Du Lhut, the two Americans, the friar, De Catinat, Theuriet the major-domo, and two of the censitaires. Wounded, parched, and powder-blackened, they were still filled with the mad courage of desperate men who knew that death could come in no more terrible form than through surrender. The stone staircase ran straight up from the kitchen to the main hall, and the door, which had been barricaded across the lower part by two mattresses, commanded the whole flight. Hoarse whisperings and the click of the cocking of guns from below told that the Iroquois were mustering for a rush.

“Put the lantern by the door,” said Du Lhut, “so that it may throw the light upon the stair. There is only room for three to fire, but you can all load and pass the guns. Monsieur Green, will you kneel with me, and you, Jean Duval? If one of us is hit let another take his place at once. Now be ready, for they are coming!”

As he spoke there was a shrill whistle from below, and in an instant the stair was filled with rushing red figures and waving weapons. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the three guns, and then again and again Bang! Bang! Bang! The smoke was so thick in the low-roofed room that they could hardly see to pass the muskets to the eager hands which grasped for them. But no Iroquois had reached the barricade, and there was no patter of their feet now upon the stair. Nothing but an angry snarling and an occasional groan from below. The marksmen were uninjured, but they ceased to fire and waited for the smoke to clear.

And when it cleared they saw how deadly their aim had been at those close quarters. Only nine shots had been fired, and seven Indians were littered up and down on the straight stone stair. Five of them lay motionless, but two tried to crawl slowly back to their friends. Du Lhut and the censitaire raised their muskets, and the two crippled men lay still.

“By Saint Anne!” said the old pioneer, as he rammed home another bullet. “If they have our scalps we have sold them at a great price. A hundred squaws will be howling in their villages when they hear of this day’s work.”

“Ay, they will not forget their welcome at Sainte Marie,” said the old nobleman. “I must again express my deep regret, my dear De Catinat, that you and your wife should have been put to such inconvenience when you have been good enough to visit me. I trust that she and the others are safe at the fort by this time.”

“May God grant that they are! Oh, I shall never have an easy moment until I see her once more.”

“If they are safe we may expect help in the morning, if we can hold out so long. Chambly, the commandant, is not a man to leave a comrade at a pinch.”

The cards were still laid out at one end of the table, with the tricks overlapping each other, as they had left them on the previous morning. But there was something else there of more interest to them, for the breakfast had not been cleared away, and they had been fighting all day with hardly bite or sup. Even when face to face with death, Nature still cries out for her dues, and the hungry men turned savagely upon the loaf, the ham, and the cold wild duck. A little cluster of wine bottles stood upon the buffet, and these had their necks knocked off, and were emptied down parched throats. Three men still took their turn, however, to hold the barricade, for they were not to be caught napping again. The yells and screeches of the savages came up to them as though all the wolves of the forest were cooped up in the basement, but the stair was deserted save for the seven motionless figures.

“They will not try to rush us again,” said Du Lhut with confidence.

“We have taught them too severe a lesson.”

“They will set fire to the house.”

“It will puzzle them to do that,” said the major-domo. “It is solid stone, walls and stair, save only for a few beams of wood, very different from those other cottages.”

“Hush!” cried Amos Green, and raised his hand. The yells had died away, and they heard the heavy thud of a mallet beating upon wood.

“What can it be?”

“Some fresh devilry, no doubt.”

“I regret to say, messieurs,” observed the seigneur, with no abatement of his courtly manner, “that it is my belief that they have learned a lesson from our young friend here, and that they are knocking out the heads of the powder-barrels in the store-room.”

But Du Lhut shook his head at the suggestion. “It is not in a Redskin to waste powder,” said he. “It is a deal too precious for them to do that. Ah, listen to that!”

The yellings and screechings had begun again, but there was a wilder, madder ring in their shrillness, and they were mingled with snatches of song and bursts of laughter.

“Ha! It is the brandy casks which they have opened,” cried Du Lhut.

“They were bad before, but they will be fiends out of hell now.”

As he spoke there came another burst of whoops, and high above them a voice calling for mercy. With horror in their eyes the survivors glanced from one to the other. A heavy smell of burning flesh rose from below, and still that dreadful voice shrieking and pleading. Then slowly it quavered away and was silent forever.

“Who was it?” whispered De Catinat, his blood running cold in his veins.

“It was Jean Corbeil, I think.”

“May God rest his soul! His troubles are over. Would that we were as peaceful as he! Ah, shoot him! Shoot!”

A man had suddenly sprung out at the foot of the stair and had swung his arm as though throwing something. It was the Flemish Bastard. Amos Green’s musket flashed, but the savage had sprung back again as rapidly as he appeared. Something splashed down amongst them and rolled across the floor in the lamp-light.

“Down! Down! It is a bomb!” cried De Catinat

But it lay at Du Lhut’s feet, and he had seen it clearly. He took a cloth from the table and dropped it over it.

“It is not a bomb,” said he quietly, “and it was Jean Corbeil who died.”

For four hours sounds of riot, of dancing and of revelling rose up from the store-house, and the smell of the open brandy casks filled the whole air.

More than once the savages quarrelled and fought among themselves, and it seemed as if they had forgotten their enemies above, but the besieged soon found that if they attempted to presume upon this they were as closely watched as ever. The major-domo, Theuriet, passing between a loop-hole and a light, was killed instantly by a bullet from the stockade, and both Amos and the old seigneur had narrow escapes until they blocked all the windows save that which overlooked the river. There was no danger from this one, and, as day was already breaking once more, one or other of the party was forever straining their eyes down the stream in search of the expected succour.

Slowly the light crept up the eastern sky, a little line of pearl, then a band of pink, broadening, stretching, spreading, until it shot its warm colour across the heavens, tinging the edges of the drifting clouds. Over the woodlands lay a thin gray vapour, the tops of the high oaks jutting out like dim islands from the sea of haze. Gradually as the light increased the mist shredded off into little ragged wisps, which thinned and drifted away, until at last, as the sun pushed its glowing edge over the eastern forests, it gleamed upon the reds and oranges and purples of the fading leaves, and upon the broad blue river which curled away to the northward. De Catinat, as he stood at the window looking out, was breathing in the healthy resinous scent of the trees, mingled with the damp heavy odour of the wet earth, when suddenly his eyes fell upon a dark spot upon the river to the north of them. “There is a canoe coming down!” he cried. In an instant they had all rushed to the opening, but Du Lhut sprang after them, and pulled them angrily towards the door.

“Do you wish to die before your time?” he cried.

“Ay, ay!” said Captain Ephraim, who understood the gesture if not the words. “We must leave a watch on deck. Amos, lad, lie here with me and be ready if they show.”

The two Americans and the old pioneer held the barricade, while the eyes of all the others were turned upon the approaching boat. A groan broke suddenly from the only surviving censitaire.

“It is an Iroquois canoe!” he cried.

“Impossible!”

“Alas, your excellency, it is so, and it is the same one which passed us last night.”

“Ah, then the women have escaped them.”

"I trust so. But alas, seigneur, I fear that there are more in the canoe now than when they passed us."

The little group of survivors waited in breathless anxiety while the canoe sped swiftly up the river, with a line of foam on either side of her, and a long forked swirl in the waters behind. They could see that she appeared to be very crowded, but they remembered that the wounded of the other boat were aboard her. On she shot and on, until as she came abreast of the fort she swung round, and the rowers raised their paddles and burst into a shrill yell of derision. The stern of the canoe was turned towards them now, and they saw that two women were seated in it. Even at that distance there was no mistaking the sweet pale face or the dark queenly one beside it. The one was Onega and the other was Adele.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TWO SWIMMERS.

Charles de la Noue, Seigneur de Sainte Marie, was a hard and self-contained man, but a groan and a bitter curse burst from him when he saw his Indian wife in the hands of her kinsmen, from whom she could hope for little mercy. Yet even now his old-fashioned courtesy to his guest had made him turn to De Catinat with some words of sympathy, when there was a clatter of wood, something darkened the light of the window, and the young soldier was gone. Without a word he had lowered the ladder and was clambering down it with frantic haste. Then as his feet touched the ground he signalled to his comrades to draw it up again, and dashing into the river he swam towards the canoe. Without arms and without a plan he had but the one thought that his place was by the side of his wife in this, the hour of her danger. Fate should bring him what it brought her, and he swore to himself, as he clove a way with his strong arms, that whether it were life or death they should still share it together.

But there was another whose view of duty led him from safety into the face of danger. All night the Franciscan had watched De Catinat as a miser watches his treasure, filled with the thought that this heretic was the one little seed which might spread and spread until it choked the chosen vineyard of the Church. Now when he saw him rush so suddenly down the ladder, every fear was banished from his mind save the overpowering one that he was about to lose his precious charge. He, too, clambered down at the very heels of his prisoner, and rushed into the stream not ten paces behind him.

And so the watchers at the window saw the strangest of sights. There, in mid-stream, lay the canoe, with a ring of dark warriors clustering in the stern, and the two women crouching in the midst of them. Swimming madly towards them was De Catinat, rising to the shoulders with the strength of every stroke, and behind him again was the tonsured head of the friar, with his brown capote and long trailing gown floating upon the surface of the water behind him. But in his zeal he had thought too little of his own powers. He was a good swimmer, but he was weighted and hampered by his unwieldy clothes. Slower and slower grew his stroke, lower and lower his head, until at last with a great shriek of In manus tuas, Domine! he threw up his hands, and vanished in the swirl of the river. A minute later the watchers, hoarse with screaming to him to return, saw De Catinat pulled aboard the Iroquois canoe, which was instantly turned and continued its course up the river.

"My God!" cried Amos hoarsely. "They have taken him. He is lost."

"I have seen some strange things in these forty years, but never the like of that!" said Du Lhut.

The seigneur took a little pinch of snuff from his gold box, and flicked the wandering grains from his shirt-front with his dainty lace handkerchief.

"Monsieur de Catinat has acted like a gentleman of France," said he. "If I could swim now as I did thirty years ago, I should be by his side."

Du Lhut glanced round him and shook his head. "We are only six now," said he. "I fear they are up to some devilry because they are so very still."

"They are leaving the house!" cried the censitaire, who was peeping through one of the side windows. "What can it mean? Holy Virgin, is it possible that we are saved? See how they throng through the trees. They are making for the canoe. Now they are waving their arms and pointing."

"There is the gray hat of that mongrel devil amongst them," said the captain. "I would try a shot upon him were it not a waste of powder and lead."

"I have hit the mark at as long a range," said Amos, pushing his long brown gun through a chink in the barricade which they had thrown across the lower half of the window. "I would give my next year's trade to bring him down."

"It is forty paces further than my musket would carry," remarked Du Lhut, "but I have seen the English shoot a great way with those long guns."

Amos took a steady aim, resting his gun upon the window sill, and fired.

A shout of delight burst from the little knot of survivors. The Flemish Bastard had fallen. But he was on his feet again in an instant and shook his hand defiantly at the window.

"Curse it!" cried Amos bitterly, in English. "I have hit him with a spent ball. As well strike him with a pebble."

"Nay, curse not, Amos, lad, but try him again with another pinch of powder if your gun will stand it."

The woodsman thrust in a full charge, and chose a well-rounded bullet from his bag, but when he looked again both the Bastard and his warriors had disappeared. On the river the single Iroquois canoe which held the captives was speeding south as swiftly as twenty paddles could drive it, but save this one dark streak upon the blue stream, not a sign was to be seen of their enemies. They had vanished as if they had been an evil dream. There was the bullet-spotted stockade, the litter of dead bodies inside it, the burned and roofless cottages, but the silent woods lay gleaming in the morning sunshine as quiet and peaceful as if no hell-burst of fiends had ever broken out from them.

"By my faith, I believe that they have gone!" cried the seigneur.

"Take care that it is not a ruse," said Du Lhut. "Why should they fly before six men when they have conquered sixty?"

But the censitaire had looked out of the other window, and in an instant he was down upon his knees with his hands in the air, and his powder blackened face turned upwards, pattering out prayers and thanksgivings. His five comrades rushed across the room and burst into a shriek of joy. The upper reach of the river was covered with a flotilla of canoes from which the sun struck quick flashes as it shone upon the musket-barrels and trappings of the crews. Already they could see the white coats of the regulars, the brown tunics of the coureurs-de-bois, and the gaudy colours of the Hurons and Algonquins. On they swept, dotting the whole breadth of the river, and growing larger every instant, while far away on the southern bend, the Iroquois canoe was a mere moving dot which had shot away to the farther side and lost itself presently under the shadow of the trees. Another minute and the survivors were out upon the bank, waving their caps in the air, while the prows of the first of their rescuers were already grating upon the pebbles. In the stern of the very foremost canoe sat a wizened little man with a large brown wig, and a gilt-headed rapier laid across his knees. He sprang out as the keel touched bottom, splashing through the shallow water with his high leather boots, and rushing up to the seigneur, he flung himself into his arms.

"My dear Charles," he cried, "you have held your house like a hero.

What, only six of you! Tut, tut, this has been a bloody business!"

"I knew that you would not desert a comrade, Chambly. We have saved the house, but our losses have been terrible. My son is dead. My wife is in that Iroquois canoe in front of you."

The commandant of Fort St. Louis pressed his friend's hand in silent sympathy.

"The others arrived all safe," he said at last. "Only that one was taken, on account of the breaking of a paddle. Three were drowned and two captured. There was a French lady in it, I understand, as well as madame."

"Yes, and they have taken her husband as well."

"Ah, poor souls! Well, if you are strong enough to join us, you and your friends, we shall follow after them without the loss of an instant. Ten of my men will remain to guard the house, and you can have their canoe. Jump in then, and forward, for life and death may hang upon our speed!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE END

The Iroquois had not treated De Catinat harshly when they dragged him from the water into their canoe. So incomprehensible was it to them why any man should voluntarily leave a place of safety in order to put himself in their power that they could only set it down to madness, a malady which inspires awe and respect among the Indians. They did not even tie his wrists, for why should he attempt to escape when he had come of his own free will? Two warriors passed their hands over him, to be sure that he was unarmed, and he was then thrust down between the two women, while the canoe darted in towards the bank to tell the others that the St. Louis garrison was coming up the stream. Then it steered out again, and made its way swiftly up the centre of the river. Adele was deadly pale and her hand, as her husband laid his upon it, was as cold as marble.

“My darling,” he whispered, “tell me that all is well with you — that you are unhurt!”

“Oh, Amory, why did you come? Why did you come, Amory? Oh, I think I could have borne anything, but if they hurt you I could not bear that.”

“How could I stay behind when I knew that you were in their hands?

I should have gone mad!”

“Ah, it was my one consolation to think that you were safe.”

“No, no, we have gone through so much together that we cannot part now.

What is death, Adele? Why should we be afraid of it?”

“I am not afraid of it.”

“And I am not afraid of it. Things will come about as God wills it, and what He wills must in the end be the best. If we live, then we have this memory in common. If we die, then we go hand-in-hand into another life. Courage, my own, all will be well with us.”

“Tell me, monsieur,” said Onega, “is my lord still living?”

“Yes, he is alive and well.”

"It is good. He is a great chief, and I have never been sorry, not even now, that I have wedded with one who was not of my own people. But ah, my son! Who shall give my son back to me? He was like the young sapling, so straight and so strong! Who could run with him, or leap with him, or swim with him? Ere that sun shines again we shall all be dead, and my heart is glad, for I shall see my boy once more."

The Iroquois paddles had bent to their work until a good ten miles lay between them and Sainte Marie. Then they ran the canoe into a little creek upon their own side of the river, and sprang out of her, dragging the prisoners after them. The canoe was carried on the shoulders of eight men some distance into the wood, where they concealed it between two fallen trees, heaping a litter of branches over it to screen it from view. Then, after a short council, they started through the forest, walking in single file, with their three prisoners in the middle. There were fifteen warriors in all, eight in front and seven behind, all armed with muskets and as swift-footed as deer, so that escape was out of the question. They could but follow on, and wait in patience for whatever might befall them.

All day they pursued their dreary march, picking their way through vast morasses, skirting the borders of blue woodland lakes where the gray stork flapped heavily up from the reeds at their approach, or plunging into dark belts of woodland where it is always twilight, and where the falling of the wild chestnuts and the chatter of the squirrels a hundred feet above their heads were the only sounds which broke the silence. Onega had the endurance of the Indians themselves, but Adele, in spite of her former journeys, was footsore and weary before evening. It was a relief to De Catinat, therefore, when the red glow of a great fire beat suddenly through the tree-trunks, and they came upon an Indian camp in which was assembled the greater part of the war-party which had been driven from Sainte Marie. Here, too, were a number of the squaws who had come from the Mohawk and Cayuga villages in order to be nearer to the warriors. Wigwams had been erected all round in a circle, and before each of them were the fires with kettles slung upon a tripod of sticks in which the evening meal was being cooked. In the centre of all was a very fierce fire which had been made of brushwood placed in a circle, so as to leave a clear space of twelve feet in the middle. A pole stood up in the centre of this clearing, and something all mottled with red and black was tied up against it. De Catinat stepped swiftly in front of Adele that she might not see the dreadful thing, but he was too late. She shuddered, and drew a quick breath between her pale lips, but no sound escaped her.

"They have begun already, then," said Onega composedly. "Well, it will be our turn next, and we shall show them that we know how to die."

"They have not ill-used us yet," said De Catinat. "Perhaps they will keep us for ransom or exchange."

The Indian woman shook her head. "Do not deceive yourself by any such hope," said she. "When they are as gentle as they have been with you it is ever a sign that you are reserved for the torture. Your wife will be married to one of their chiefs, but you and I must die, for you are a warrior, and I am too old for a squaw."

Married to an Iroquois! Those dreadful words shot a pang through both their hearts which no thought of death could have done. De Catinat's head dropped forward upon his chest, and he staggered and would have fallen had Adele not caught him by the arm.

"Do not fear, dear Amory," she whispered. "Other things may happen but not that, for I swear to you that I shall not survive you. No, it may be sin or it may not, but if death will not come to me, I will go to it."

De Catinat looked down at the gentle face which had set now into the hard lines of an immutable resolve. He knew that it would be as she had said, and that, come what might, that last outrage would not befall them. Could he ever have believed that the time would come when it would send a thrill of joy through his heart to know that his wife would die?

As they entered the Iroquois village the squaws and warriors had rushed towards them, and they passed through a double line of hideous faces which jeered and jibed and howled at them as they passed. Their escort led them through this rabble and conducted them to a hut which stood apart. It was empty, save for some willow fishing-nets hanging at the side, and a heap of pumpkins stored in the corner.

"The chiefs will come and will decide upon what is to be done with us," said Onega. "Here they are coming now, and you will soon see that I am right, for I know the ways of my own people."

An instant later an old war-chief, accompanied by two younger braves and by the bearded half-Dutch Iroquois who had led the attack upon the manor-house, strolled over and stood in the doorway, looking in at the prisoners, and shooting little guttural sentences at each other. The totems of the Hawk, the Wolf, the Bear, and the Snake showed that they each represented one of the great families of the Nation. The Bastard was smoking a stone pipe, and yet it was he who talked the most, arguing apparently with one of the younger savages, who seemed to come round at last to his opinion. Finally the old chief said a few short stern words, and the matter appeared to be settled.

"And you, you beldame," said the Bastard in French to the Iroquois woman, "you will have a lesson this night which will teach you to side against your own people."

"You half-bred mongrel," replied the fearless old woman, "you should take that hat from your head when you speak to one in whose veins runs the best blood of the Onondagas. You a warrior? You who, with a thousand at your back, could not make your way into a little house with a few poor husbandmen within it! It is no wonder that your father's people have cast you out! Go back and work at the beads, or play at the game of plum-stones, for some day in the woods you might meet with a man, and so bring disgrace upon the nation which has taken you in!"

The evil face of the Bastard grew livid as he listened to the scornful words which were hissed at him by the captive. He strode across to her, and taking her hand he thrust her forefinger into the burning bowl of his pipe. She made no effort to remove it, but sat with a perfectly set face for a minute or more, looking out through the open door at the evening sunlight and the little groups of chattering Indians. He had watched her keenly in the hope of hearing a cry, or seeing some spasm of agony upon her face, but at last, with a curse, he dashed down her hand and strode from the hut. She thrust her charred finger into her bosom and laughed.

"He is a good-for-nought!" she cried. "He does not even know how to torture. Now, I could have got a cry out of him. I am sure of it. But you — monsieur, you are very white!"

"It was the sight of such a hellish deed. Ah, if we were but set face to face, I with my sword, he with what weapon he chose, by God, he should pay for it with his heart's blood."

The Indian woman seemed surprised. "It is strange to me," she said, "that you should think of what befalls me when you are yourselves under the same shadow. But our fate will be as I said."

"Ah!"

"You and I are to die at the stake. She is to be given to the dog who has left us."

“Ah!”

“Adele! Adele! What shall I do!” He tore his hair in his helplessness and distraction.

“No, no, fear not, Amory, for my heart will not fail me. What is the pang of death if it binds us together?”

“The younger chief pleaded for you, saying that the Mitche Manitou had stricken you with madness, as could be seen by your swimming to their canoe, and that a blight would fall upon the nation if you were led to the stake. But this Bastard said that love came often like madness among the pale-faces, and that it was that alone which had driven you. Then it was agreed that you should die and that she should go to his wigwam, since he had led the war-party. As for me, their hearts were bitter against me, and I also am to die by the pine splinters.”

De Catinat breathed a prayer that he might meet his fate like a soldier and a gentleman.

“When is it to be?” he asked.

“Now! At once! They have gone to make all ready! But you have time yet, for I am to go first.”

“Amory, Amory, could we not die together now?” cried Adele, throwing her arms round her husband. “If it be sin, it is surely a sin which will be forgiven us. Let us go, dear. Let us leave these dreadful people and this cruel world and turn where we shall find peace.”

The Indian woman’s eyes flashed with satisfaction.

“You have spoken well, White Lily,” said she. “Why should you wait until it is their pleasure to pluck you. See, already the glare of their fire beats upon the tree-trunks, and you can hear the howlings of those who thirst for your blood. If you die by your own hands, they will be robbed of their spectacle, and their chief will have lost his bride. So you will be the victors in the end, and they the vanquished. You have said rightly, White Lily. There lies the only path for you!”

“But how to take it?”

Onega glanced keenly at the two warriors who stood as sentinels at the door of the hut. They had turned away, absorbed in the horrible preparations which were going on. Then she rummaged deeply within the folds of her loose gown and pulled out a small pistol with two brass barrels and double triggers in the form of winged dragons. It was only a toy to look at, all carved and scrolled and graven with the choicest work of the Paris gunsmith. For its beauty the seigneur had bought it at his last visit to Quebec, and yet it might be useful, too, and it was loaded in both barrels.

"I meant to use it on myself," said she, as she slipped it into the hand of De Catinat. "But now I am minded to show them that I can die as an Onondaga should die, and that I am worthy to have the blood of their chiefs in my veins. Take it, for I swear that I will not use it myself, unless it be to fire both bullets into that Bastard's heart."

A flush of joy shot over De Catinat as his fingers closed round the pistol. Here was indeed a key to unlock the gates of peace. Adele laid her cheek against his shoulder and laughed with pleasure.

"You will forgive me, dear," he whispered.

"Forgive you! I bless you, and love you with my whole heart and soul.

Clasp me close, darling, and say one prayer before you do it."

They had sunk on their knees together when three warriors entered the hut and said a few abrupt words to their country-woman. She rose with a smile.

"They are waiting for me," said she. "You shall see, White Lily, and you also, monsieur, how well I know what is due to my position. Farewell, and remember Onega!"

She smiled again, and walked from the hut amidst the warriors with the quick firm step of a queen who sweeps to a throne.

"Now, Amory!" whispered Adele, closing her eyes, and nestling still closer to him.

He raised the pistol, and then, with a quick sudden intaking of the breath, he dropped it, and knelt with glaring eyes looking up at a tree which faced the open door of the hut.

It was a beech-tree, exceedingly old and gnarled, with its bark hanging down in strips and its whole trunk spotted with moss and mould. Some ten feet above the ground the main trunk divided into two, and in the fork thus formed a hand had suddenly appeared, a large reddish hand, which shook frantically from side to side in passionate dissuasion. The next instant, as the two captives still stared in amazement, the hand disappeared behind the trunk again and a face appeared in its place, which still shook from side to side as resolutely as its forerunner. It was impossible to mistake that mahogany, wrinkled skin, the huge bristling eyebrows, or the little glistening eyes. It was Captain Ephraim Savage of Boston!

And even as they stared and wondered a sudden shrill whistle burst out from the depths of the forest, and in a moment every bush and thicket and patch of brushwood were spouting fire and smoke, while the snarl of the musketry ran round the whole glade, and the storm of bullets whizzed and pelted among the yelling savages. The Iroquois' sentinels had been drawn in by their bloodthirsty craving to see the prisoners die, and now the Canadians were upon them, and they were hemmed in by a ring of fire. First one way and then another they rushed, to be met always by the same blast of death, until finding at last some gap in the attack they streamed through, like sheep through a broken fence, and rushed madly away through the forest, with the bullets of their pursuers still singing about their ears, until the whistle sounded again to recall the woodsmen from the chase.

But there was one savage who had found work to do before he fled. The Flemish Bastard had preferred his vengeance to his safety! Rushing at Onega, he buried his tomahawk in her brain, and then, yelling his war-cry, he waved the blood-stained weapon above his head, and flew into the hut where the prisoners still knelt. De Catinat saw him coming, and a mad joy glistened in his eyes. He rose to meet him, and as he rushed in he fired both barrels of his pistol into the Bastard's face. An instant later a swarm of Canadians had rushed over the writhing bodies, the captives felt warm friendly hands which grasped their own, and looking upon the smiling, well-known faces of Amos Green, Savage, and Du Lhut, they knew that peace had come to them at last.

And so the refugees came to the end of the toils of their journey, for that winter was spent by them in peace at Fort St. Louis, and in the spring, the Iroquois having carried the war to the Upper St. Lawrence, the travellers were able to descend into the English provinces, and so to make their way down the Hudson to New York, where a warm welcome awaited them from the family of Amos Green. The friendship between the two men was now so cemented together by common memories and common danger that they soon became partners in fur-trading, and the name of the Frenchman came at last to be as familiar in the mountains of Maine and on the slopes of the Alleghanies as it had once been in the salons and corridors of Versailles. In time De Catinat built a house on Staten Island, where many of his fellow-refugees had settled, and much of what he won from his fur-trading was spent in the endeavour to help his struggling Huguenot brothers. Amos Green had married a Dutch maiden of Schenectady, and as Adele and she became inseparable friends, the marriage served to draw closer the ties of love which held the two families together.

As to Captain Ephraim Savage, he returned safely to his beloved Boston, where he fulfilled his ambition by building himself a fair brick house upon the rising ground in the northern part of the city, whence he could look down both upon the shipping in the river and the bay. There he lived, much respected by his townsfolk, who made him selectman and alderman, and gave him the command of a goodly ship when Sir William Phips made his attack upon Quebec, and found that the old Lion Frontenac was not to be driven from his lair. So, honoured by all, the old seaman lived to an age which carried him deep into the next century, when he could already see with his dim eyes something of the growing greatness of his country.

The manor-house of Sainte Marie was soon restored to its former prosperity, but its seigneur was from the day that he lost his wife and son a changed man. He grew leaner, fiercer, less human, forever heading parties which made their way into the Iroquois woods and which outrivalled the savages themselves in the terrible nature of their deeds. A day came at last when he sallied out upon one of these expeditions, from which neither he nor any of his men ever returned. Many a terrible secret is hid by those silent woods, and the fate of Charles de la Noue, Seigneur de Sainte Marie, is among them.

NOTE ON THE HUGUENOTS AND THEIR DISPERSION.

Towards the latter quarter of the seventeenth century there was hardly an important industry in France which was not controlled by the Huguenots, so that, numerous as they were, their importance was out of all proportion to their numbers. The cloth trade of the north and the south-east, the manufacture of serges and light stuffs in Languedoc, the linen trade of Normandy and Brittany, the silk and velvet industry of Tours and Lyons, the glass of Normandy, the paper of Auvergne and Angoumois, the jewellery of the Isle of France, the tan yards of Touraine, the iron and tin work of the Sedanais — all these were largely owned and managed by Huguenots. The numerous Saint days of the Catholic Calendar handicapped their rivals, and it was computed that the Protestant worked 310 days in the year to his fellow-countryman's 260.

A very large number of the Huguenot refugees were brought back, and the jails and galleys of France were crowded with them. One hundred thousand settled in Friesland and Holland, 25,000 in Switzerland, 75,000 in Germany, and 50,000 in England. Some made their way even to the distant Cape of Good Hope, where they remained in the Paarl district.

In war, as in industry, the exiles were a source of strength to the countries which received them. Frenchmen drilled the Russian armies of Peter the Great, a Huguenot Count became commander-in-chief in Denmark, and Schomberg led the army of Brandenburg, and afterwards that of England.

In England three Huguenot regiments were formed for the service of William. The exiles established themselves as silk workers in Spitalfields, cotton spinners at Bideford, tapestry weavers at Exeter, wool carders at Taunton, kersey makers at Norwich, weavers at Canterbury, bat makers at Wandsworth, sailcloth makers at Ipswich, workers in calico in Bromley, glass in Sussex, paper at Laverstock, cambric at Edinburgh.

Early Protestant refugees had taken refuge in America twenty years before the revocation, where they formed a colony at Staten Island. A body came to Boston in 1684, and were given 11,000 acres at Oxford, by order of the General Court at Massachusetts. In New York and Long Island colonies sprang up, and later in Virginia (the Monacan Settlement), in Maryland, and in South Carolina (French Santee and Orange Quarter).

NOTE ON THE FUTURE OF LOUIS, MADAMS DE MAINTENON, AND MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

It has been left to our own century to clear the fair fame of Madame de Maintenon of all reproach, and to show her as what she was, a pure woman and a devoted wife. She has received little justice from the memoir writers of the seventeenth century, most of whom, the Duc de St. Simon, for example, and the Princess Elizabeth of Bavaria, had their own private reasons for disliking her. An admirable epitome of her character and influence will be found in Dr. Dollinger's Historical Studies. She made Louis an excellent wife, waited upon him assiduously for thirty years of married life, influenced him constantly towards good — save only in the one instance of the Huguenots, and finally died very shortly after her husband.

Madame de Montespan lived in great magnificence after the triumph of her rival, and spent freely the vast sums which the king's generosity had furnished her with. Eventually, having exhausted all that this world could offer, she took to hair-shirts and nail-studded girdles, in the hope of securing a good position in the next. Her horror of death was excessive. In thunderstorms she sat with a little child in her lap, in the hope that its innocence might shield her from the lightning. She slept always with her room ablaze with tapers, and with several women watching by the side of her couch. When at last the inevitable arrived she left her body for the family tomb, her heart to the convent of La Fleche, and her entrails to the priory of Menoux near Bourbon. These latter were thrust into a box and given to a peasant to convey to the priory. Curiosity induced him to look into the box upon the way, and, seeing the contents, he supposed himself to be the victim of a practical joke, and emptied them out into a ditch. A swineherd was passing at the moment with his pigs, and so it happened that, in the words of Mrs. Julia Pardoe, "in a few minutes the most filthy animals in creation had devoured portions of the remains of one of the haughtiest women who ever trod the earth."

Louis, after a reign of more than fifty years, which comprised the most brilliant epoch of French history, died at last in 1715 amidst the saddest surroundings.

One by one those whom he loved had preceded him to the grave, his brother, his son, the two sons of his son, their wives, and finally his favourite great-grandson, until he, the old dying monarch, with his rouge and his stays, was left with only a little infant in arms, the Duc D’Anjou, three generations away from him, to perpetuate his line. On 20th August, 1715, he was attacked by senile gangrene, which gradually spread up the leg until on the 30th it became fatal. His dying words were worthy of his better self. “Gentlemen, I desire your pardon for the bad example which I have set you. I have greatly to thank you fur the manner in which you have served me, as well as for the attachment and fidelity which I have always experienced at your hands. I request from you the same zeal and fidelity for my grandson. Farewell, gentlemen. I feel that this parting has affected not only myself but you also. Forgive me! I trust that you will sometimes think of me when I am gone.”

RODNEY STONE

This Gothic mystery and boxing novel features the eponymous narrator - a Sussex country boy, who is taken to London by his uncle Sir Charles Tregellis, a highly respected gentleman and arbiter of fashion who is on familiar terms with the most important people of Great Britain. The novel interweaves Rodney's coming-of-age story with that of his friend Boy Jim's boxing endeavors, and a large portion of it deals with the famous bare-knuckle bruisers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, such as Jem Belcher, John Jackson, Daniel Mendoza and others. The novel includes vignettes of a number of historical personages, notably the Prince Regent, Lord Nelson, Sir John Lade, Lord Cochrane and Beau Brummell.

RODNEY STONE

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PREFACE

Amongst the books to which I am indebted for my material in my endeavour to draw various phases of life and character in England at the beginning of the century, I would particularly mention Ashton's "Dawn of the Nineteenth Century;" Gronow's "Reminiscences;" Fitzgerald's "Life and Times of George IV.;" Jesse's "Life of Brummell;" "Boxiana;" "Pugilistica;" Harper's "Brighton Road;" Robinson's "Last Earl of Barrymore" and "Old Q.;" Rice's "History of the Turf;" Tristram's "Coaching Days;" James's "Naval History;" Clark Russell's "Collingwood" and "Nelson."

I am also much indebted to my friends Mr. J. C. Parkinson and Robert Barr for information upon the subject of the ring.

A. CONAN DOYLE.
HASLEMERE,
September 1, 1896.

CHAPTER I - FRIAR’S OAK

On this, the first of January of the year 1851, the nineteenth century has reached its midway term, and many of us who shared its youth have already warnings which tell us that it has outworn us. We put our grizzled heads together, we older ones, and we talk of the great days that we have known; but we find that when it is with our children that we talk it is a hard matter to make them understand. We and our fathers before us lived much the same life, but they with their railway trains and their steamboats belong to a different age. It is true that we can put history-books into their hands, and they can read from them of our weary struggle of two and twenty years with that great and evil man. They can learn how Freedom fled from the whole broad continent, and how Nelson’s blood was shed, and Pitt’s noble heart was broken in striving that she should not pass us for ever to take refuge with our brothers across the Atlantic. All this they can read, with the date of this treaty or that battle, but I do not know where they are to read of ourselves, of the folk we were, and the lives we led, and how the world seemed to our eyes when they were young as theirs are now.

If I take up my pen to tell you about this, you must not look for any story at my hands, for I was only in my earliest manhood when these things befell; and although I saw something of the stories of other lives, I could scarce claim one of my own. It is the love of a woman that makes the story of a man, and many a year was to pass before I first looked into the eyes of the mother of my children. To us it seems but an affair of yesterday, and yet those children can now reach the plums in the garden whilst we are seeking for a ladder, and where we once walked with their little hands in ours, we are glad now to lean upon their arms. But I shall speak of a time when the love of a mother was the only love I knew, and if you seek for something more, then it is not for you that I write. But if you would come out with me into that forgotten world; if you would know Boy Jim and Champion Harrison; if you would meet my father, one of Nelson’s own men; if you would catch a glimpse of that great seaman himself, and of George, afterwards the unworthy King of England; if, above all, you would see my famous uncle, Sir Charles Tregellis, the King of the Bucks, and the great fighting men whose names are still household words amongst you, then give me your hand and let us start.

But I must warn you also that, if you think you will find much that is of interest in your guide, you are destined to disappointment. When I look over my bookshelves, I can see that it is only the wise and witty and valiant who have ventured to write down their experiences. For my own part, if I were only assured that I was as clever and brave as the average man about me, I should be well satisfied. Men of their hands have thought well of my brains, and men of brains of my hands, and that is the best that I can say of myself. Save in the one matter of having an inborn readiness for music, so that the mastery of any instrument comes very easily and naturally to me, I cannot recall any single advantage which I can boast over my fellows. In all things I have been a half-way man, for I am of middle height, my eyes are neither blue nor grey, and my hair, before Nature dusted it with her powder, was betwixt flaxen and brown. I may, perhaps, claim this: that through life I have never felt a touch of jealousy as I have admired a better man than myself, and that I have always seen all things as they are, myself included, which should count in my favour now that I sit down in my mature age to write my memories. With your permission, then, we will push my own personality as far as possible out of the picture. If you can conceive me as a thin and colourless cord upon which my would-be pearls are strung, you will be accepting me upon the terms which I should wish.

Our family, the Stones, have for many generations belonged to the navy, and it has been a custom among us for the eldest son to take the name of his father’s favourite commander. Thus we can trace our lineage back to old Vernon Stone, who commanded a high-sterned, peak-nosed, fifty-gun ship against the Dutch. Through Hawke Stone and Benbow Stone we came down to my father, Anson Stone, who in his turn christened me Rodney, at the parish church of St. Thomas at Portsmouth in the year of grace 1786.

Out of my window as I write I can see my own great lad in the garden, and if I were to call out “Nelson!” you would see that I have been true to the traditions of our family.

My dear mother, the best that ever a man had, was the second daughter of the Reverend John Tregellis, Vicar of Milton, which is a small parish upon the borders of the marshes of Langstone. She came of a poor family, but one of some position, for her elder brother was the famous Sir Charles Tregellis, who, having inherited the money of a wealthy East Indian merchant, became in time the talk of the town and the very particular friend of the Prince of Wales. Of him I shall have more to say hereafter; but you will note now that he was my own uncle, and brother to my mother.

I can remember her all through her beautiful life for she was but a girl when she married, and little more when I can first recall her busy fingers and her gentle voice. I see her as a lovely woman with kind, dove's eyes, somewhat short of stature it is true, but carrying herself very bravely. In my memories of those days she is clad always in some purple shimmering stuff, with a white kerchief round her long white neck, and I see her fingers turning and darting as she works at her knitting. I see her again in her middle years, sweet and loving, planning, contriving, achieving, with the few shillings a day of a lieutenant's pay on which to support the cottage at Friar's Oak, and to keep a fair face to the world. And now, if I do but step into the parlour, I can see her once more, with over eighty years of saintly life behind her, silver-haired, placid-faced, with her dainty ribboned cap, her gold-rimmed glasses, and her woolly shawl with the blue border. I loved her young and I love her old, and when she goes she will take something with her which nothing in the world can ever make good to me again. You may have many friends, you who read this, and you may chance to marry more than once, but your mother is your first and your last. Cherish her, then, whilst you may, for the day will come when every hasty deed or heedless word will come back with its sting to hive in your own heart.

Such, then, was my mother; and as to my father, I can describe him best when I come to the time when he returned to us from the Mediterranean. During all my childhood he was only a name to me, and a face in a miniature hung round my mother's neck. At first they told me he was fighting the French, and then after some years one heard less about the French and more about General Buonaparte. I remember the awe with which one day in Thomas Street, Portsmouth, I saw a print of the great Corsican in a bookseller's window. This, then, was the arch enemy with whom my father spent his life in terrible and ceaseless contest. To my childish imagination it was a personal affair, and I for ever saw my father and this clean-shaven, thin-lipped man swaying and reeling in a deadly, year-long grapple. It was not until I went to the Grammar School that I understood how many other little boys there were whose fathers were in the same case.

Only once in those long years did my father return home, which will show you what it meant to be the wife of a sailor in those days. It was just after we had moved from Portsmouth to Friar’s Oak, whither he came for a week before he set sail with Admiral Jervis to help him to turn his name into Lord St. Vincent. I remember that he frightened as well as fascinated me with his talk of battles, and I can recall as if it were yesterday the horror with which I gazed upon a spot of blood upon his shirt ruffle, which had come, as I have no doubt, from a mischance in shaving. At the time I never questioned that it had spurted from some stricken Frenchman or Spaniard, and I shrank from him in terror when he laid his horny hand upon my head. My mother wept bitterly when he was gone, but for my own part I was not sorry to see his blue back and white shorts going down the garden walk, for I felt, with the heedless selfishness of a child, that we were closer together, she and I, when we were alone.

I was in my eleventh year when we moved from Portsmouth to Friar’s Oak, a little Sussex village to the north of Brighton, which was recommended to us by my uncle, Sir Charles Tregellis, one of whose grand friends, Lord Avon, had had his seat near there. The reason of our moving was that living was cheaper in the country, and that it was easier for my mother to keep up the appearance of a gentlewoman when away from the circle of those to whom she could not refuse hospitality. They were trying times those to all save the farmers, who made such profits that they could, as I have heard, afford to let half their land lie fallow, while living like gentlemen upon the rest. Wheat was at a hundred and ten shillings a quarter, and the quartern loaf at one and ninepence. Even in the quiet of the cottage of Friar’s Oak we could scarce have lived, were it not that in the blockading squadron in which my father was stationed there was the occasional chance of a little prize-money. The line-of-battle ships themselves, tacking on and off outside Brest, could earn nothing save honour; but the frigates in attendance made prizes of many coasters, and these, as is the rule of the service, were counted as belonging to the fleet, and their produce divided into head-money. In this manner my father was able to send home enough to keep the cottage and to pay for me at the day school of Mr. Joshua Allen, where for four years I learned all that he had to teach. It was at Allen’s school that I first knew Jim Harrison, Boy Jim as he has always been called, the nephew of Champion Harrison of the village smithy. I can see him as he was in those days with great, floundering, half-formed limbs like a Newfoundland puppy, and a face that set every woman’s head round as he passed her. It was in those days that we began our lifelong friendship, a friendship which still in our waning years binds us closely as two brothers. I taught him his exercises, for he never loved the sight of a book, and he in turn made me box and wrestle, tickle trout on the Adur, and snare rabbits on Ditching Down, for his hands were as active as his brain was slow. He was two years my elder, however, so that, long before I had finished my schooling, he had gone to help his uncle at the smithy.

Friar’s Oak is in a dip of the Downs, and the forty-third milestone between London and Brighton lies on the skirt of the village. It is but a small place, with an ivied church, a fine vicarage, and a row of red-brick cottages each in its own little garden. At one end was the forge of Champion Harrison, with his house behind it, and at the other was Mr. Allen’s school. The yellow cottage, standing back a little from the road, with its upper story bulging forward and a crisscross of black woodwork let into the plaster, is the one in which we lived. I do not know if it is still standing, but I should think it likely, for it was not a place much given to change.

Just opposite to us, at the other side of the broad, white road, was the Friar’s Oak Inn, which was kept in my day by John Cummings, a man of excellent repute at home, but liable to strange outbreaks when he travelled, as will afterwards become apparent. Though there was a stream of traffic upon the road, the coaches from Brighton were too fresh to stop, and those from London too eager to reach their journey’s end, so that if it had not been for an occasional broken trace or loosened wheel, the landlord would have had only the thirsty throats of the village to trust to. Those were the days when the Prince of Wales had just built his singular palace by the sea, and so from May to September, which was the Brighton season, there was never a day that from one to two hundred curricles, chaises, and phaetons did not rattle past our doors. Many a summer evening have Boy Jim and I lain upon the grass, watching all these grand folk, and cheering the London coaches as they came roaring through the dust clouds, leaders and wheelers stretched to their work, the bugles screaming and the coachmen with their low-crowned, curly-brimmed hats, and their faces as scarlet as their coats. The passengers used to laugh when Boy Jim shouted at them, but if they could have read his big, half-set limbs and his loose shoulders aright, they would have looked a little harder at him, perhaps, and given him back his cheer.

Boy Jim had never known a father or a mother, and his whole life had been spent with his uncle, Champion Harrison. Harrison was the Friar's Oak blacksmith, and he had his nickname because he fought Tom Johnson when he held the English belt, and would most certainly have beaten him had the Bedfordshire magistrates not appeared to break up the fight. For years there was no such glutton to take punishment and no more finishing hitter than Harrison, though he was always, as I understand, a slow one upon his feet. At last, in a fight with Black Baruk the Jew, he finished the battle with such a lashing hit that he not only knocked his opponent over the inner ropes, but he left him betwixt life and death for long three weeks. During all this time Harrison lived half demented, expecting every hour to feel the hand of a Bow Street runner upon his collar, and to be tried for his life. This experience, with the prayers of his wife, made him forswear the ring for ever, and carry his great muscles into the one trade in which they seemed to give him an advantage. There was a good business to be done at Friar's Oak from the passing traffic and the Sussex farmers, so that he soon became the richest of the villagers; and he came to church on a Sunday with his wife and his nephew, looking as respectable a family man as one would wish to see.

He was not a tall man, not more than five feet seven inches, and it was often said that if he had had an extra inch of reach he would have been a match for Jackson or Belcher at their best. His chest was like a barrel, and his forearms were the most powerful that I have ever seen, with deep groves between the smooth-swelling muscles like a piece of water-worn rock. In spite of his strength, however, he was of a slow, orderly, and kindly disposition, so that there was no man more beloved over the whole country side. His heavy, placid, clean-shaven face could set very sternly, as I have seen upon occasion; but for me and every child in the village there was ever a smile upon his lips and a greeting in his eyes. There was not a beggar upon the country side who did not know that his heart was as soft as his muscles were hard.

There was nothing that he liked to talk of more than his old battles, but he would stop if he saw his little wife coming, for the one great shadow in her life was the ever-present fear that some day he would throw down sledge and rasp and be off to the ring once more. And you must be reminded here once for all that that former calling of his was by no means at that time in the debased condition to which it afterwards fell. Public opinion has gradually become opposed to it, for the reason that it came largely into the hands of rogues, and because it fostered ringside ruffianism. Even the honest and brave pugilist was found to draw villainy round him, just as the pure and noble racehorse does. For this reason the Ring is dying in England, and we may hope that when Caunt and Bendigo have passed away, they may have none to succeed them. But it was different in the days of which I speak. Public opinion was then largely in its favour, and there were good reasons why it should be so. It was a time of war, when England with an army and navy composed only of those who volunteered to fight because they had fighting blood in them, had to encounter, as they would now have to encounter, a power which could by despotic law turn every citizen into a soldier. If the people had not been full of this lust for combat, it is certain that England must have been overborne. And it was thought, and is, on the face of it, reasonable, that a struggle between two indomitable men, with thirty thousand to view it and three million to discuss it, did help to set a standard of hardihood and endurance. Brutal it was, no doubt, and its brutality is the end of it; but it is not so brutal as war, which will survive it. Whether it is logical now to teach the people to be peaceful in an age when their very existence may come to depend upon their being warlike, is a question for wiser heads than mine. But that was what we thought of it in the days of your grandfathers, and that is why you might find statesmen and philanthropists like Windham, Fox, and Althorp at the side of the Ring.

The mere fact that solid men should patronize it was enough in itself to prevent the villainy which afterwards crept in. For over twenty years, in the days of Jackson, Brain, Cribb, the Belchers, Pearce, Gully, and the rest, the leaders of the Ring were men whose honesty was above suspicion; and those were just the twenty years when the Ring may, as I have said, have served a national purpose. You have heard how Pearce saved the Bristol girl from the burning house, how Jackson won the respect and friendship of the best men of his age, and how Gully rose to a seat in the first Reformed Parliament. These were the men who set the standard, and their trade carried with it this obvious recommendation, that it is one in which no drunken or foul-living man could long succeed. There were exceptions among them, no doubt - bullies like Hickman and brutes like Berks; in the main, I say again that they were honest men, brave and enduring to an incredible degree, and a credit to the country which produced them. It was, as you will see, my fate to see something of them, and I speak of what I know.

In our own village, I can assure you that we were very proud of the presence of such a man as Champion Harrison, and if folks stayed at the inn, they would walk down as far as the smithy just to have the sight of him. And he was worth seeing, too, especially on a winter's night when the red glare of the forge would beat upon his great muscles and upon the proud, hawk-face of Boy Jim as they heaved and swayed over some glowing plough coulter, framing themselves in sparks with every blow. He would strike once with his thirty-pound swing sledge, and Jim twice with his hand hammer; and the "Clunk - clink, clink! clunk - clink, clink!" would bring me flying down the village street, on the chance that, since they were both at the anvil, there might be a place for me at the bellows.

Only once during those village years can I remember Champion Harrison showing me for an instant the sort of man that he had been. It chanced one summer morning, when Boy Jim and I were standing by the smithy door, that there came a private coach from Brighton, with its four fresh horses, and its brass-work shining, flying along with such a merry rattle and jingling, that the Champion came running out with a hall-fullered shoe in his tongs to have a look at it. A gentleman in a white coachman's cape - a Corinthian, as we would call him in those days - was driving, and half a dozen of his fellows, laughing and shouting, were on the top behind him. It may have been that the bulk of the smith caught his eye, and that he acted in pure wantonness, or it may possibly have been an accident, but, as he swung past, the twenty-foot thong of the driver's whip hissed round, and we heard the sharp snap of it across Harrison's leather apron.

"Halloa, master!" shouted the smith, looking after him. "You're not to be trusted on the box until you can handle your whip better'n that."

"What's that?" cried the driver, pulling up his team.

"I bid you have a care, master, or there will be some one-eyed folk along the road you drive."

"Oh, you say that, do you?" said the driver, putting his whip into its socket and pulling off his driving-gloves. "I'll have a little talk with you, my fine fellow."

The sporting gentlemen of those days were very fine boxers for the most part, for it was the mode to take a course of Mendoza, just as a few years afterwards there was no man about town who had not had the mufflers on with Jackson. Knowing their own prowess, they never refused the chance of a wayside adventure, and it was seldom indeed that the bargee or the navigator had much to boast of after a young blood had taken off his coat to him.

This one swung himself off the box-seat with the alacrity of a man who has no doubts about the upshot of the quarrel, and after hanging his caped coat upon the swingle-bar, he daintily turned up the ruffled cuffs of his white cambric shirt.

"I'll pay you for your advice, my man," said he.

I am sure that the men upon the coach knew who the burly smith was, and looked upon it as a prime joke to see their companion walk into such a trap. They roared with delight, and bellowed out scraps of advice to him.

"Knock some of the soot off him, Lord Frederick!" they shouted. "Give the Johnny Raw his breakfast. Chuck him in among his own cinders! Sharp's the word, or you'll see the back of him."

Encouraged by these cries, the young aristocrat advanced upon his man. The smith never moved, but his mouth set grim and hard, while his tufted brows came down over his keen, grey eyes. The tongs had fallen, and his hands were hanging free.

"Have a care, master," said he. "You'll get pepper if you don't."

Something in the assured voice, and something also in the quiet pose, warned the young lord of his danger. I saw him look hard at his antagonist, and as he did so, his hands and his jaw dropped together.

"By Gad!" he cried, "it's Jack Harrison!"

"My name, master!"

"And I thought you were some Essex chaw-bacon! Why, man, I haven't seen you since the day you nearly killed Black Baruk, and cost me a cool hundred by doing it."

How they roared on the coach.

"Smoked! Smoked, by Gad!" they yelled. "It's Jack Harrison the bruiser! Lord Frederick was going to take on the ex-champion. Give him one on the apron, Fred, and see what happens."

But the driver had already climbed back into his perch, laughing as loudly as any of his companions.

"We'll let you off this time, Harrison," said he. "Are those your sons down there?"

“This is my nephew, master.”

“Here’s a guinea for him! He shall never say I robbed him of his uncle.” And so, having turned the laugh in his favour by his merry way of taking it, he cracked his whip, and away they flew to make London under the five hours; while Jack Harrison, with his half-fullered shoe in his hand, went whistling back to the forge.

CHAPTER II - THE WALKER OF CLIFFE ROYAL

So much for Champion Harrison! Now, I wish to say something more about Boy Jim, not only because he was the comrade of my youth, but because you will find as you go on that this book is his story rather than mine, and that there came a time when his name and his fame were in the mouths of all England. You will bear with me, therefore, while I tell you of his character as it was in those days, and especially of one very singular adventure which neither of us are likely to forget.

It was strange to see Jim with his uncle and his aunt, for he seemed to be of another race and breed to them. Often I have watched them come up the aisle upon a Sunday, first the square, thick-set man, and then the little, worn, anxious-eyed woman, and last this glorious lad with his clear-cut face, his black curls, and his step so springy and light that it seemed as if he were bound to earth by some lesser tie than the heavy-footed villagers round him. He had not yet attained his full six foot of stature, but no judge of a man (and every woman, at least, is one) could look at his perfect shoulders, his narrow loins, and his proud head that sat upon his neck like an eagle upon its perch, without feeling that sober joy which all that is beautiful in Nature gives to us - a vague self-content, as though in some way we also had a hand in the making of it.

But we are used to associate beauty with softness in a man. I do not know why they should be so coupled, and they never were with Jim. Of all men that I have known, he was the most iron-hard in body and in mind. Who was there among us who could walk with him, or run with him, or swim with him? Who on all the country side, save only Boy Jim, would have swung himself over Wolstonbury Cliff, and clambered down a hundred feet with the mother hawk flapping at his ears in the vain struggle to hold him from her nest? He was but sixteen, with his gristle not yet all set into bone, when he fought and beat Gipsy Lee, of Burgess Hill, who called himself the “Cock of the South Downs.” It was after this that Champion Harrison took his training as a boxer in hand.

"I'd rather you left millin' alone, Boy Jim," said he, "and so had the missus; but if mill you must, it will not be my fault if you cannot hold up your hands to anything in the south country."

And it was not long before he made good his promise.

I have said already that Boy Jim had no love for his books, but by that I meant school-books, for when it came to the reading of romances or of anything which had a touch of gallantry or adventure, there was no tearing him away from it until it was finished. When such a book came into his hands, Friar's Oak and the smithy became a dream to him, and his life was spent out upon the ocean or wandering over the broad continents with his heroes. And he would draw me into his enthusiasms also, so that I was glad to play Friday to his Crusoe when he proclaimed that the Clump at Clayton was a desert island, and that we were cast upon it for a week. But when I found that we were actually to sleep out there without covering every night, and that he proposed that our food should be the sheep of the Downs (wild goats he called them) cooked upon a fire, which was to be made by the rubbing together of two sticks, my heart failed me, and on the very first night I crept away to my mother. But Jim stayed out there for the whole weary week - a wet week it was, too! - and came back at the end of it looking a deal wilder and dirtier than his hero does in the picture-books. It is well that he had only promised to stay a week, for, if it had been a month, he would have died of cold and hunger before his pride would have let him come home.

His pride! - that was the deepest thing in all Jim's nature. It is a mixed quality to my mind, half a virtue and half a vice: a virtue in holding a man out of the dirt; a vice in making it hard for him to rise when once he has fallen. Jim was proud down to the very marrow of his bones. You remember the guinea that the young lord had thrown him from the box of the coach? Two days later somebody picked it from the roadside mud. Jim only had seen where it had fallen, and he would not deign even to point it out to a beggar. Nor would he stoop to give a reason in such a case, but would answer all remonstrances with a curl of his lip and a flash of his dark eyes. Even at school he was the same, with such a sense of his own dignity, that other folk had to think of it too. He might say, as he did say, that a right angle was a proper sort of angle, or put Panama in Sicily, but old Joshua Allen would as soon have thought of raising his cane against him as he would of letting me off if I had said as much. And so it was that, although

Jim was the son of nobody, and I of a King’s officer, it always seemed to me to have been a condescension on his part that he should have chosen me as his friend.

It was this pride of Boy Jim’s which led to an adventure which makes me shiver now when I think of it.

It happened in the August of ‘99, or it may have been in the early days of September; but I remember that we heard the cuckoo in Patcham Wood, and that Jim said that perhaps it was the last of him. I was still at school, but Jim had left, he being nigh sixteen and I thirteen. It was my Saturday half-holiday, and we spent it, as we often did, out upon the Downs. Our favourite place was beyond Wolstonbury, where we could stretch ourselves upon the soft, springy, chalk grass among the plump little Southdown sheep, chatting with the shepherds, as they leaned upon their queer old Pyecombe crooks, made in the days when Sussex turned out more iron than all the counties of England.

It was there that we lay upon that glorious afternoon. If we chose to roll upon our right sides, the whole weald lay in front of us, with the North Downs curving away in olive-green folds, with here and there the snow-white rift of a chalk-pit; if we turned upon our left, we overlooked the huge blue stretch of the Channel. A convoy, as I can well remember, was coming up it that day, the timid flock of merchantmen in front; the frigates, like well-trained dogs, upon the skirts; and two burly drover line-of-battle ships rolling along behind them. My fancy was soaring out to my father upon the waters, when a word from Jim brought it back on to the grass like a broken-winged gull.

“Roddy,” said he, “have you heard that Cliffe Royal is haunted?”

Had I heard it? Of course I had heard it. Who was there in all the Down country who had not heard of the Walker of Cliffe Royal?

“Do you know the story of it, Roddy?”

“Why,” said I, with some pride, “I ought to know it, seeing that my mother’s brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, was the nearest friend of Lord Avon, and was at this card-party when the thing happened. I heard the vicar and my mother talking about it last week, and it was all so clear to me that I might have been there when the murder was done.”

“It is a strange story,” said Jim, thoughtfully; “but when I asked my aunt about it, she would give me no answer; and as to my uncle, he cut me short at the very mention of it.”

"There is a good reason for that," said I, "for Lord Avon was, as I have heard, your uncle's best friend; and it is but natural that he would not wish to speak of his disgrace."

"Tell me the story, Roddy."

"It is an old one now - fourteen years old - and yet they have not got to the end of it. There were four of them who had come down from London to spend a few days in Lord Avon's old house. One was his own young brother, Captain Barrington; another was his cousin, Sir Lothian Hume; Sir Charles Tregellis, my uncle, was the third; and Lord Avon the fourth. They are fond of playing cards for money, these great people, and they played and played for two days and a night. Lord Avon lost, and Sir Lothian lost, and my uncle lost, and Captain Barrington won until he could win no more. He won their money, but above all he won papers from his elder brother which meant a great deal to him. It was late on a Monday night that they stopped playing. On the Tuesday morning Captain Barrington was found dead beside his bed with his throat cut.

"And Lord Avon did it?"

"His papers were found burned in the grate, his wristband was clutched in the dead man's hand, and his knife lay beside the body."

"Did they hang him, then?"

"They were too slow in laying hands upon him. He waited until he saw that they had brought it home to him, and then he fled. He has never been seen since, but it is said that he reached America."

"And the ghost walks?"

"There are many who have seen it."

"Why is the house still empty?"

"Because it is in the keeping of the law. Lord Avon had no children, and Sir Lothian Hume - the same who was at the card-party - is his nephew and heir. But he can touch nothing until he can prove Lord Avon to be dead."

Jim lay silent for a bit, plucking at the short grass with his fingers.

"Roddy," said he at last, "will you come with me to-night and look for the ghost?"

It turned me cold, the very thought of it.

"My mother would not let me."

"Slip out when she's abed. I'll wait for you at the smithy."

"Cliffe Royal is locked."

"I'll open a window easy enough."

"I'm afraid, Jim."

"But you are not afraid if you are with me, Roddy. I'll promise you that no ghost shall hurt you."

So I gave him my word that I would come, and then all the rest of the day I went about the most sad-faced lad in Sussex. It was all very well for Boy Jim! It was that pride of his which was taking him there. He would go because there was no one else on the country side that would dare. But I had no pride of that sort. I was quite of the same way of thinking as the others, and would as soon have thought of passing my night at Jacob's gibbet on Ditchling Common as in the haunted house of Cliffe Royal. Still, I could not bring myself to desert Jim; and so, as I say, I slunk about the house with so pale and peaky a face that my dear mother would have it that I had been at the green apples, and sent me to bed early with a dish of camomile tea for my supper.

England went to rest betimes in those days, for there were few who could afford the price of candles. When I looked out of my window just after the clock had gone ten, there was not a light in the village save only at the inn. It was but a few feet from the ground, so I slipped out, and there was Jim waiting for me at the smithy corner. We crossed John's Common together, and so past Ridden's Farm, meeting only one or two riding officers upon the way. There was a brisk wind blowing, and the moon kept peeping through the rifts of the scud, so that our road was sometimes silver-clear, and sometimes so black that we found ourselves among the brambles and gorse-bushes which lined it. We came at last to the wooden gate with the high stone pillars by the roadside, and, looking through between the rails, we saw the long avenue of oaks, and at the end of this ill-boding tunnel, the pale face of the house glimmered in the moonshine.

That would have been enough for me, that one glimpse of it, and the sound of the night wind sighing and groaning among the branches. But Jim swung the gate open, and up we went, the gravel squeaking beneath our tread. It towered high, the old house, with many little windows in which the moon glinted, and with a strip of water running round three sides of it. The arched door stood right in the face of us, and on one side a lattice hung open upon its hinges.

"We're in luck, Roddy," whispered Jim. "Here's one of the windows open."

"Don't you think we've gone far enough, Jim?" said I, with my teeth chattering.

"I'll lift you in first."

"No, no, I'll not go first."

"Then I will." He gripped the sill, and had his knee on it in an instant. "Now, Roddy, give me your hands." With a pull he had me up beside him, and a moment later we were both in the haunted house.

How hollow it sounded when we jumped down on to the wooden floor! There was such a sudden boom and reverberation that we both stood silent for a moment. Then Jim burst out laughing.

"What an old drum of a place it is!" he cried; "we'll strike a light, Roddy, and see where we are."

He had brought a candle and a tinder-box in his pocket. When the flame burned up, we saw an arched stone roof above our heads, and broad deal shelves all round us covered with dusty dishes. It was the pantry.

"I'll show you round," said Jim, merrily; and, pushing the door open, he led the way into the hall. I remember the high, oak-panelled walls, with the heads of deer jutting out, and a single white bust, which sent my heart into my mouth, in the corner. Many rooms opened out of this, and we wandered from one to the other - the kitchens, the still-room, the morning-room, the dining-room, all filled with the same choking smell of dust and of mildew.

"This is where they played the cards, Jim," said I, in a hushed voice. "It was on that very table."

"Why, here are the cards themselves!" cried he; and he pulled a brown towel from something in the centre of the sideboard. Sure enough it was a pile of playing-cards - forty packs, I should think, at the least - which had lain there ever since that tragic game which was played before I was born.

"I wonder whence that stair leads?" said Jim.

"Don't go up there, Jim!" I cried, clutching at his arm. "That must lead to the room of the murder."

"How do you know that?"

"The vicar said that they saw on the ceiling - Oh, Jim, you can see it even now!"

He held up his candle, and there was a great, dark smudge upon the white plaster above us.

"I believe you're right," said he; "but anyhow I'm going to have a look at it."

“Don’t, Jim, don’t!” I cried.

“Tut, Roddy! you can stay here if you are afraid. I won’t be more than a minute. There’s no use going on a ghost hunt unless - Great Lord, there’s something coming down the stairs!”

I heard it too - a shuffling footstep in the room above, and then a creak from the steps, and then another creak, and another. I saw Jim’s face as if it had been carved out of ivory, with his parted lips and his staring eyes fixed upon the black square of the stair opening. He still held the light, but his fingers twitched, and with every twitch the shadows sprang from the walls to the ceiling. As to myself, my knees gave way under me, and I found myself on the floor crouching down behind Jim, with a scream frozen in my throat. And still the step came slowly from stair to stair.

Then, hardly daring to look and yet unable to turn away my eyes, I saw a figure dimly outlined in the corner upon which the stair opened. There was a silence in which I could hear my poor heart thumping, and then when I looked again the figure was gone, and the low creak, creak was heard once more upon the stairs. Jim sprang after it, and I was left half-fainting in the moonlight.

But it was not for long. He was down again in a minute, and, passing his hand under my arm, he half led and half carried me out of the house. It was not until we were in the fresh night air again that he opened his mouth.

“Can you stand, Roddy?”

“Yes, but I’m shaking.”

“So am I,” said he, passing his hand over his forehead. “I ask your pardon, Roddy. I was a fool to bring you on such an errand. But I never believed in such things. I know better now.”

“Could it have been a man, Jim?” I asked, plucking up my courage now that I could hear the dogs barking on the farms.

“It was a spirit, Rodney.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I followed it and saw it vanish into a wall, as easily as an eel into sand. Why, Roddy, what’s amiss now?”

My fears were all back upon me, and every nerve creeping with horror.

“Take me away, Jim! Take me away!” I cried.

I was glaring down the avenue, and his eyes followed mine. Amid the gloom of the oak trees something was coming towards us.

"Quiet, Roddy!" whispered Jim. "By heavens, come what may, my arms are going round it this time."

We crouched as motionless as the trunks behind us. Heavy steps ploughed their way through the soft gravel, and a broad figure loomed upon us in the darkness.

Jim sprang upon it like a tiger.

"*You're* not a spirit, anyway!" he cried.

The man gave a shout of surprise, and then a growl of rage.

"What the deuce!" he roared, and then, "I'll break your neck if you don't let go."

The threat might not have loosened Jim's grip, but the voice did.

"Why, uncle!" he cried.

"Well, I'm blessed if it isn't Boy Jim! And what's this? Why, it's young Master Rodney Stone, as I'm a living sinner! What in the world are you two doing up at Cliffe Royal at this time of night?"

We had all moved out into the moonlight, and there was Champion Harrison with a big bundle on his arm, - and such a look of amazement upon his face as would have brought a smile back on to mine had my heart not still been cramped with fear.

"We're exploring," said Jim.

"Exploring, are you? Well, I don't think you were meant to be Captain Cooks, either of you, for I never saw such a pair of peeled-turnip faces. Why, Jim, what are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid, uncle. I never was afraid; but spirits are new to me, and - "

"Spirits?"

"I've been in Cliffe Royal, and we've seen the ghost."

The Champion gave a whistle.

"That's the game, is it?" said he. "Did you have speech with it?"

"It vanished first."

The Champion whistled once more.

"I've heard there is something of the sort up yonder," said he; "but it's not a thing as I would advise you to meddle with. There's enough trouble with the folk of this world, Boy Jim, without going out of your way to mix up with those of another. As to young Master Rodney Stone, if his good mother saw that white face of his, she'd never let him come to the smithy more. Walk slowly on, and I'll see you back to Friar's Oak."

We had gone half a mile, perhaps, when the Champion overtook us, and I could not but observe that the bundle was no longer under his arm. We were nearly at the smithy before Jim asked the question which was already in my mind.

“What took *you* up to Cliffe Royal, uncle?”

“Well, as a man gets on in years,” said the Champion, “there’s many a duty turns up that the likes of you have no idea of. When you’re near forty yourself, you’ll maybe know the truth of what I say.”

So that was all we could draw from him; but, young as I was, I had heard of coast smuggling and of packages carried to lonely places at night, so that from that time on, if I had heard that the preventives had made a capture, I was never easy until I saw the jolly face of Champion Harrison looking out of his smithy door.

CHAPTER III - THE PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS

I have told you something about Friar’s Oak, and about the life that we led there. Now that my memory goes back to the old place it would gladly linger, for every thread which I draw from the skein of the past brings out half a dozen others that were entangled with it. I was in two minds when I began whether I had enough in me to make a book of, and now I know that I could write one about Friar’s Oak alone, and the folk whom I knew in my childhood. They were hard and uncouth, some of them, I doubt not; and yet, seen through the golden haze of time, they all seem sweet and lovable. There was our good vicar, Mr. Jefferson, who loved the whole world save only Mr. Slack, the Baptist minister of Clayton; and there was kindly Mr. Slack, who was all men’s brother save only of Mr. Jefferson, the vicar of Friar’s Oak. Then there was Monsieur Rudin, the French Royalist refugee who lived over on the Pangdean road, and who, when the news of a victory came in, was convulsed with joy because we had beaten Buonaparte, and shaken with rage because we had beaten the French, so that after the Nile he wept for a whole day out of delight and then for another one out of fury, alternately clapping his hands and stamping his feet. Well I remember his thin, upright figure and the way in which he jauntily twirled his little cane; for cold and hunger could not cast him down, though we knew that he had his share of both. Yet he was so proud and had such a grand manner of talking, that no one dared to offer him a cloak or a meal. I can see his face now, with a flush over each craggy cheek-bone when the butcher made him the present of some ribs of beef. He could not but take it, and yet whilst he was stalking off he threw a proud glance over his shoulder at the butcher, and he said, “Monsieur, I have a dog!” Yet it was Monsieur Rudin and not his dog who looked plumper for a week to come.

Then I remember Mr. Paterson, the farmer, who was what you would now call a Radical, though at that time some called him a Priestley-ite, and some a Fox-ite, and nearly everybody a traitor. It certainly seemed to me at the time to be very wicked that a man should look glum when he heard of a British victory; and when they burned his straw image at the gate of his farm, Boy Jim and I were among those who lent a hand. But we were bound to confess that he was game, though he might be a traitor, for down he came, striding into the midst of us with his brown coat and his buckled shoes, and the fire beating upon his grim, schoolmaster face. My word, how he rated us, and how glad we were at last to sneak quietly away.

"You livers of a lie!" said he. "You and those like you have been preaching peace for nigh two thousand years, and cutting throats the whole time. If the money that is lost in taking French lives were spent in saving English ones, you would have more right to burn candles in your windows. Who are you that dare to come here to insult a law-abiding man?"

"We are the people of England!" cried young Master Ovington, the son of the Tory Squire.

"You! you horse-racing, cock-fighting ne'er-do-weel! Do you presume to talk for the people of England? They are a deep, strong, silent stream, and you are the scum, the bubbles, the poor, silly froth that floats upon the surface."

We thought him very wicked then, but, looking back, I am not sure that we were not very wicked ourselves.

And then there were the smugglers! The Downs swarmed with them, for since there might be no lawful trade betwixt France and England, it had all to run in that channel. I have been up on St. John's Common upon a dark night, and, lying among the bracken, I have seen as many as seventy mules and a man at the head of each go flitting past me as silently as trout in a stream. Not one of them but bore its two ankers of the right French cognac, or its bale of silk of Lyons and lace of Valenciennes. I knew Dan Scales, the head of them, and I knew Tom Hislop, the riding officer, and I remember the night they met.

"Do you fight, Dan?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Tom; thou must fight for it."

On which Tom drew his pistol, and blew Dan's brains out.

"It was a sad thing to do," he said afterwards, "but I knew Dan was too good a man for me, for we tried it out before."

It was Tom who paid a poet from Brighton to write the lines for the tombstone, which we all thought were very true and good, beginning -

"Alas! Swift flew the fatal lead
Which piercéd through the young man's head.

He instantly fell, resigned his breath,
And closed his languid eyes in death."

There was more of it, and I dare say it is all still to be read in Patcham Churchyard.

One day, about the time of our Cliffe Royal adventure, I was seated in the cottage looking round at the curios which my father had fastened on to the walls, and wishing, like the lazy lad that I was, that Mr. Lilly had died before ever he wrote his Latin grammar, when my mother, who was sitting knitting in the window, gave a little cry of surprise.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "What a vulgar-looking woman!"

It was so rare to hear my mother say a hard word against anybody (unless it were General Buonaparte) that I was across the room and at the window in a jump. A pony-chaise was coming slowly down the village street, and in it was the queerest-looking person that I had ever seen. She was very stout, with a face that was of so dark a red that it shaded away into purple over the nose and cheeks. She wore a great hat with a white curling ostrich feather, and from under its brim her two bold, black eyes stared out with a look of anger and defiance as if to tell the folk that she thought less of them than they could do of her. She had some sort of scarlet pelisse with white swans-down about her neck, and she held the reins slack in her hands, while the pony wandered from side to side of the road as the fancy took him. Each time the chaise swayed, her head with the great hat swayed also, so that sometimes we saw the crown of it and sometimes the brim.

"What a dreadful sight!" cried my mother.

"What is amiss with her, mother?"

"Heaven forgive me if I misjudge her, Rodney, but I think that the unfortunate woman has been drinking."

"Why," I cried, "she has pulled the chaise up at the smithy. I'll find out all the news for you;" and, catching up my cap, away I scampered.

Champion Harrison had been shoeing a horse at the forge door, and when I got into the street I could see him with the creature's hoof still under his arm, and the rasp in his hand, kneeling down amid the white parings. The woman was beckoning him from the chaise, and he staring up at her with the queerest expression upon his face. Presently he threw down his rasp and went across to her, standing by the wheel and shaking his head as he talked to her. For my part, I slipped into the smithy, where Boy Jim was finishing the shoe, and I watched the neatness of his work and the deft way in which he turned up the caulkens. When he had done with it he carried it out, and there was the strange woman still talking with his uncle.

"Is that he?" I heard her ask.

Champion Harrison nodded.

She looked at Jim, and I never saw such eyes in a human head, so large, and black, and wonderful. Boy as I was, I knew that, in spite of that bloated face, this woman had once been very beautiful. She put out a hand, with all the fingers going as if she were playing on the harpsichord, and she touched Jim on the shoulder.

"I hope - I hope you're well," she stammered.

"Very well, ma'am," said Jim, staring from her to his uncle.

"And happy too?"

"Yes, ma'am, I thank you."

"Nothing that you crave for?"

"Why, no, ma'am, I have all that I lack."

"That will do, Jim," said his uncle, in a stern voice. "Blow up the forge again, for that shoe wants reheating."

But it seemed as if the woman had something else that she would say, for she was angry that he should be sent away. Her eyes gleamed, and her head tossed, while the smith with his two big hands outspread seemed to be soothing her as best he could. For a long time they whispered until at last she appeared to be satisfied.

"To-morrow, then?" she cried loud out.

"To-morrow," he answered.

"You keep your word and I'll keep mine," said she, and dropped the lash on the pony's back. The smith stood with the rasp in his hand, looking after her until she was just a little red spot on the white road. Then he turned, and I never saw his face so grave.

"Jim," said he, "that's Miss Hinton, who has come to live at The Maples, out Anstey Cross way. She's taken a kind of a fancy to you, Jim, and maybe she can help you on a bit. I promised her that you would go over and see her to-morrow."

"I don't want her help, uncle, and I don't want to see her."

"But I've promised, Jim, and you wouldn't make me out a liar. She does but want to talk with you, for it is a lonely life she leads."

"What would she want to talk with such as me about?"

"Why, I cannot say that, but she seemed very set upon it, and women have their fancies. There's young Master Stone here who wouldn't refuse to go and see a good lady, I'll warrant, if he thought he might better his fortune by doing so."

"Well, uncle, I'll go if Roddy Stone will go with me," said Jim.

"Of course he'll go. Won't you, Master Rodney?"

So it ended in my saying "yes," and back I went with all my news to my mother, who dearly loved a little bit of gossip. She shook her head when she heard where I was going, but she did not say nay, and so it was settled.

It was a good four miles of a walk, but when we reached it you would not wish to see a more cosy little house: all honeysuckle and creepers, with a wooden porch and lattice windows. A common-looking woman opened the door for us.

"Miss Hinton cannot see you," said she.

"But she asked us to come," said Jim.

"I can't help that," cried the woman, in a rude voice. "I tell you that she can't see you."

We stood irresolute for a minute.

"Maybe you would just tell her I am here," said Jim, at last.

"Tell her! How am I to tell her when she couldn't so much as hear a pistol in her ears? Try and tell her yourself, if you have a mind to."

She threw open a door as she spoke, and there, in a reclining chair at the further end of the room, we caught a glimpse of a figure all lumped together, huge and shapeless, with tails of black hair hanging down.

The sound of dreadful, swine-like breathing fell upon our ears. It was but a glance, and then we were off hot-foot for home. As for me, I was so young that I was not sure whether this was funny or terrible; but when I looked at Jim to see how he took it, he was looking quite white and ill.

"You'll not tell any one, Roddy," said he.

"Not unless it's my mother."

"I won't even tell my uncle. I'll say she was ill, the poor lady! it's enough that we should have seen her in her shame, without its being the gossip of the village. It makes me feel sick and heavy at heart."

"She was so yesterday, Jim."

"Was she? I never marked it. But I know that she has kind eyes and a kind heart, for I saw the one in the other when she looked at me. Maybe it's the want of a friend that has driven her to this."

It blighted his spirits for days, and when it had all gone from my mind it was brought back to me by his manner. But it was not to be our last memory of the lady with the scarlet pelisse, for before the week was out Jim came round to ask me if I would again go up with him.

“My uncle has had a letter,” said he. “She would speak with me, and I would be easier if you came with me, Rod.”

For me it was only a pleasure outing, but I could see, as we drew near the house, that Jim was troubling in his mind lest we should find that things were amiss.

His fears were soon set at rest, however, for we had scarce clicked the garden gate before the woman was out of the door of the cottage and running down the path to meet us. She was so strange a figure, with some sort of purple wrapper on, and her big, flushed face smiling out of it, that I might, if I had been alone, have taken to my heels at the sight of her. Even Jim stopped for a moment as if he were not very sure of himself, but her hearty ways soon set us at our ease.

“It is indeed good of you to come and see an old, lonely woman,” said she, “and I owe you an apology that I should give you a fruitless journey on Tuesday, but in a sense you were yourselves the cause of it, since the thought of your coming had excited me, and any excitement throws me into a nervous fever. My poor nerves! You can see for yourselves how they serve me.”

She held out her twitching hands as she spoke. Then she passed one of them through Jim’s arm, and walked with him up the path.

“You must let me know you, and know you well,” said she. “Your uncle and aunt are quite old acquaintances of mine, and though you cannot remember me, I have held you in my arms when you were an infant. Tell me, little man,” she added, turning to me, “what do you call your friend?”

“Boy Jim, ma’am,” said I.

“Then if you will not think me forward, I will call you Boy Jim also. We elderly people have our privileges, you know. And now you shall come in with me, and we will take a dish of tea together.”

She led the way into a cosy room - the same which we had caught a glimpse of when last we came - and there, in the middle, was a table with white napery, and shining glass, and gleaming china, and red-cheeked apples piled upon a centre-dish, and a great plateful of smoking muffins which the cross-faced maid had just carried in. You can think that we did justice to all the good things, and Miss Hinton would ever keep pressing us to pass our cup and to fill our plate. Twice during our meal she rose from her chair and withdrew into a cupboard at the end of the room, and each time I saw Jim's face cloud, for we heard a gentle clink of glass against glass.

"Come now, little man," said she to me, when the table had been cleared. "Why are you looking round so much?"

"Because there are so many pretty things upon the walls."

"And which do you think the prettiest of them?"

"Why, that!" said I, pointing to a picture which hung opposite to me. It was of a tall and slender girl, with the rosiest cheeks and the tenderest eyes - so daintily dressed, too, that I had never seen anything more perfect. She had a posy of flowers in her hand and another one was lying upon the planks of wood upon which she was standing.

"Oh, that's the prettiest, is it?" said she, laughing. "Well, now, walk up to it, and let us hear what is writ beneath it."

I did as she asked, and read out: "Miss Polly Hinton, as 'Peggy,' in *The Country Wife*, played for her benefit at the Haymarket Theatre, September 14th, 1782."

"It's a play-actress," said I.

"Oh, you rude little boy, to say it in such a tone," said she; "as if a play-actress wasn't as good as any one else. Why, 'twas but the other day that the Duke of Clarence, who may come to call himself King of England, married Mrs. Jordan, who is herself only a play-actress. And whom think you that this one is?"

She stood under the picture with her arms folded across her great body, and her big black eyes looking from one to the other of us.

"Why, where are your eyes?" she cried at last. "*I* was Miss Polly Hinton of the Haymarket Theatre. And perhaps you never heard the name before?"

We were compelled to confess that we never had. And the very name of play-actress had filled us both with a kind of vague horror, like the country-bred folk that we were. To us they were a class apart, to be hinted at rather than named, with the wrath of the Almighty hanging over them like a thundercloud. Indeed, His judgments seemed to be in visible operation before us when we looked upon what this woman was, and what she had been.

"Well," said she, laughing like one who is hurt, "you have no cause to say anything, for I read on your face what you have been taught to think of me. So this is the upbringing that you have had, Jim - to think evil of that which you do not understand! I wish you had been in the theatre that very night with Prince Florizel and four Dukes in the boxes, and all the wits and macaronis of London rising at me in the pit. If Lord Avon had not given me a cast in his carriage, I had never got my flowers back to my lodgings in York Street, Westminster. And now two little country lads are sitting in judgment upon me!"

Jim's pride brought a flush on to his cheeks, for he did not like to be called a country lad, or to have it supposed that he was so far behind the grand folk in London.

"I have never been inside a play-house," said he; "I know nothing of them."

"Nor I either."

"Well," said she, "I am not in voice, and it is ill to play in a little room with but two to listen, but you must conceive me to be the Queen of the Peruvians, who is exhorting her countrymen to rise up against the Spaniards, who are oppressing them."

And straightway that coarse, swollen woman became a queen - the grandest, haughtiest queen that you could dream of - and she turned upon us with such words of fire, such lightning eyes and sweeping of her white hand, that she held us spellbound in our chairs. Her voice was soft and sweet, and persuasive at the first, but louder it rang and louder as it spoke of wrongs and freedom and the joys of death in a good cause, until it thrilled into my every nerve, and I asked nothing more than to run out of the cottage and to die then and there in the cause of my country. And then in an instant she changed. She was a poor woman now, who had lost her only child, and who was bewailing it. Her voice was full of tears, and what she said was so simple, so true, that we both seemed to see the dead babe stretched there on the carpet before us, and we could have joined in with words of pity and of grief. And then, before our cheeks were dry, she was back into her old self again.

"How like you that, then?" she cried. "That was my way in the days when Sally Siddons would turn green at the name of Polly Hinton. It's a fine play, is *Pizarro*."

"And who wrote it, ma'am?"

"Who wrote it? I never heard. What matter who did the writing of it! But there are some great lines for one who knows how they should be spoken."

"And you play no longer, ma'am?"

"No, Jim, I left the boards when - when I was weary of them. But my heart goes back to them sometimes. It seems to me there is no smell like that of the hot oil in the footlights and of the oranges in the pit. But you are sad, Jim."

"It was but the thought of that poor woman and her child."

"Tut, never think about her! I will soon wipe her from your mind. This is 'Miss Priscilla Tomboy,' from *The Romp*. You must conceive that the mother is speaking, and that the forward young minx is answering.

And she began a scene between the two of them, so exact in voice and manner that it seemed to us as if there were really two folk before us: the stern old mother with her hand up like an ear-trumpet, and her flouncing, bouncing daughter. Her great figure danced about with a wonderful lightness, and she tossed her head and pouted her lips as she answered back to the old, bent figure that addressed her. Jim and I had forgotten our tears, and were holding our ribs before she came to the end of it.

"That is better," said she, smiling at our laughter. "I would not have you go back to Friar's Oak with long faces, or maybe they would not let you come to me again."

She vanished into her cupboard, and came out with a bottle and glass, which she placed upon the table.

"You are too young for strong waters," she said, "but this talking gives one a dryness, and - "

Then it was that Boy Jim did a wonderful thing. He rose from his chair, and he laid his hand upon the bottle.

"Don't!" said he.

She looked him in the face, and I can still see those black eyes of hers softening before the gaze.

"Am I to have none?"

"Please, don't."

With a quick movement she wrested the bottle out of his hand and raised it up so that for a moment it entered my head that she was about to drink it off. Then she flung it through the open lattice, and we heard the crash of it on the path outside.

"There, Jim!" said she; "does that satisfy you? It's long since any one cared whether I drank or no."

"You are too good and kind for that," said he.

"Good!" she cried. "Well, I love that you should think me so. And it would make you happier if I kept from the brandy, Jim? Well, then, I'll make you a promise, if you'll make me one in return."

"What's that, miss?"

"No drop shall pass my lips, Jim, if you will swear, wet or shine, blow or snow, to come up here twice in every week, that I may see you and speak with you, for, indeed, there are times when I am very lonesome."

So the promise was made, and very faithfully did Jim keep it, for many a time when I have wanted him to go fishing or rabbit-snaring, he has remembered that it was his day for Miss Hinton, and has tramped off to Anstey Cross. At first I think that she found her share of the bargain hard to keep, and I have seen Jim come back with a black face on him, as if things were going amiss. But after a time the fight was won - as all fights are won if one does but fight long enough - and in the year before my father came back Miss Hinton had become another woman. And it was not her ways only, but herself as well, for from being the person that I have described, she became in one twelve-month as fine a looking lady as there was in the whole country-side. Jim was prouder of it by far than of anything he had had a hand in in his life, but it was only to me that he ever spoke about it, for he had that tenderness towards her that one has for those whom one has helped. And she helped him also, for by her talk of the world and of what she had seen, she took his mind away from the Sussex country-side and prepared it for a broader life beyond. So matters stood between them at the time when peace was made and my father came home from the sea.

CHAPTER IV - THE PEACE OF AMIENS

Many a woman’s knee was on the ground, and many a woman’s soul spent itself in joy and thankfulness when the news came with the fall of the leaf in 1801 that the preliminaries of peace had been settled. All England waved her gladness by day and twinkled it by night. Even in little Friar’s Oak we had our flags flying bravely, and a candle in every window, with a big G.R. guttering in the wind over the door of the inn. Folk were weary of the war, for we had been at it for eight years, taking Holland, and Spain, and France each in turn and all together. All that we had learned during that time was that our little army was no match for the French on land, and that our large navy was more than a match for them upon the water. We had gained some credit, which we were sorely in need of after the American business; and a few Colonies, which were welcome also for the same reason; but our debt had gone on rising and our consols sinking, until even Pitt stood aghast. Still, if we had known that there never could be peace between Napoleon and ourselves, and that this was only the end of a round and not of the battle, we should have been better advised had we fought it out without a break. As it was, the French got back the twenty thousand good seamen whom we had captured, and a fine dance they led us with their Boulogne flotillas and fleets of invasion before we were able to catch them again.

My father, as I remember him best, was a tough, strong little man, of no great breadth, but solid and well put together. His face was burned of a reddish colour, as bright as a flower-pot, and in spite of his age (for he was only forty at the time of which I speak) it was shot with lines, which deepened if he were in any way perturbed, so that I have seen him turn on the instant from a youngish man to an elderly. His eyes especially were meshed round with wrinkles, as is natural for one who had puckered them all his life in facing foul wind and bitter weather. These eyes were, perhaps, his strangest feature, for they were of a very clear and beautiful blue, which shone the brighter out of that ruddy setting. By nature he must have been a fair-skinned man, for his upper brow, where his cap came over it, was as white as mine, and his close-cropped hair was tawny.

He had served, as he was proud to say, in the last of our ships which had been chased out of the Mediterranean in ‘97, and in the first which had re-entered it in ‘98. He was under Miller, as third lieutenant of the *Theseus*, when our fleet, like a pack of eager fox hounds in a covert, was dashing from Sicily to Syria and back again to Naples, trying to pick up the lost scent. With the same good fighting man he served at the Nile, where the men of his command sponged and rammed and trained until, when the last tricolour had come down, they hove up the sheet anchor and fell dead asleep upon the top of each other under the capstan bars. Then, as a second lieutenant, he was in one of those grim three-deckers with powder-blackened hulls and crimson scupper-holes, their spare cables tied round their keels and over their bulwarks to hold them together, which carried the news into the Bay of Naples. From thence, as a reward for his services, he was transferred as first lieutenant to the *Aurora* frigate, engaged in cutting off supplies from Genoa, and in her he still remained until long after peace was declared.

How well I can remember his home-coming! Though it is now eight-and-forty years ago, it is clearer to me than the doings of last week, for the memory of an old man is like one of those glasses which shows out what is at a distance and blurs all that is near.

My mother had been in a tremble ever since the first rumour of the preliminaries came to our ears, for she knew that he might come as soon as his message. She said little, but she saddened my life by insisting that I should be for ever clean and tidy. With every rumble of wheels, too, her eyes would glance towards the door, and her hands steal up to smooth her pretty black hair. She had embroidered a white “Welcome” upon a blue ground, with an anchor in red upon each side, and a border of laurel leaves; and this was to hang upon the two lilac bushes which flanked the cottage door. He could not have left the Mediterranean before we had this finished, and every morning she looked to see if it were in its place and ready to be hanged.

But it was a weary time before the peace was ratified, and it was April of next year before our great day came round to us. It had been raining all morning, I remember - a soft spring rain, which sent up a rich smell from the brown earth and pattered pleasantly upon the budding chestnuts behind our cottage. The sun had shone out in the evening, and I had come down with my fishing-rod (for I had promised Boy Jim to go with him to the mill-stream), when what should I see but a post-chaise with two smoking horses at the gate, and there in the open door of it were my mother’s black skirt and her little feet jutting out, with two blue arms for a waist-belt, and all the rest of her buried in the chaise. Away I ran for the motto, and I pinned it up on the bushes as we had agreed, but when I had finished there were the skirts and the feet and the blue arms just the same as before.

"Here's Rod," said my mother at last, struggling down on to the ground again. "Roddy, darling, here's your father!"

I saw the red face and the kindly, light-blue eyes looking out at me.

"Why, Roddy, lad, you were but a child and we kissed good-bye when last we met; but I suppose we must put you on a different rating now. I'm right glad from my heart to see you, dear lad; and as to you, sweetheart - "

The blue arms flew out, and there were the skirt and the two feet fixed in the door again.

"Here are the folk coming, Anson," said my mother, blushing. "Won't you get out and come in with us?"

And then suddenly it came home to us both that for all his cheery face he had never moved more than his arms, and that his leg was resting on the opposite seat of the chaise.

"Oh, Anson, Anson!" she cried.

"Tut, 'tis but the bone of my leg," said he, taking his knee between his hands and lifting it round. "I got it broke in the Bay, but the surgeon has fished it and spliced it, though it's a bit crank yet. Why, bless her kindly heart, if I haven't turned her from pink to white. You can see for yourself that it's nothing."

He sprang out as he spoke, and with one leg and a staff he hopped swiftly up the path, and under the laurel-bordered motto, and so over his own threshold for the first time for five years. When the post-boy and I had carried up the sea-chest and the two canvas bags, there he was sitting in his armchair by the window in his old weather-stained blue coat. My mother was weeping over his poor leg, and he patting her hair with one brown hand. His other he threw round my waist, and drew me to the side of his chair.

"Now that we have peace, I can lie up and refit until King George needs me again," said he. "'Twas a carronade that came adrift in the Bay when it was blowing a top-gallant breeze with a beam sea. Ere we could make it fast it had me jammed against the mast. Well, well," he added, looking round at the walls of the room, "here are all my old curios, the same as ever: the narwhal's horn from the Arctic, and the blowfish from the

Moluccas, and the paddles from Fiji, and the picture of the *Ca Ira* with Lord Hotham in chase. And here you are, Mary, and you also, Roddy, and good luck to the carronade which has sent me into so snug a harbour without fear of sailing orders."

My mother had his long pipe and his tobacco all ready for him, so that he was able now to light it and to sit looking from one of us to the other and then back again, as if he could never see enough of us. Young as I was, I could still understand that this was the moment which he had thought of during many a lonely watch, and that the expectation of it had cheered his heart in many a dark hour. Sometimes he would touch one of us with his hand, and sometimes the other, and so he sat, with his soul too satiated for words, whilst the shadows gathered in the little room and the lights of the inn windows glimmered through the gloom. And then, after my mother had lit our own lamp, she slipped suddenly down upon her knees, and he got one knee to the ground also, so that, hand-in-hand, they joined their thanks to Heaven for manifold mercies. When I look back at my parents as they were in those days, it is at that very moment that I can picture them most clearly: her sweet face with the wet shining upon her cheeks, and his blue eyes upturned to the smoke-blackened ceiling. I remember that he swayed his reeking pipe in the earnestness of his prayer, so that I was half tears and half smiles as I watched him.

"Roddy, lad," said he, after supper was over, "you're getting a man now, and I suppose you will go afloat like the rest of us. You're old enough to strap a dirk to your thigh."

"And leave me without a child as well as without a husband!" cried my mother.

"Well, there's time enough yet," said he, "for they are more inclined to empty berths than to fill them, now that peace has come. But I've never tried what all this schooling has done for you, Rodney. You have had a great deal more than ever I had, but I dare say I can make shift to test it. Have you learned history?"

"Yes, father," said I, with some confidence.

"Then how many sail of the line were at the Battle of Camperdown?"

He shook his head gravely when he found that I could not answer him.

"Why, there are men in the fleet who never had any schooling at all who could tell you that we had seven 74's, seven 64's, and two 50-gun ships in the action. There's a picture on the wall of the chase of the *Ca Ira*. Which were the ships that laid her aboard?"

Again I had to confess that he had beaten me.

"Well, your dad can teach you something in history yet," he cried, looking in triumph at my mother. "Have you learned geography?"

"Yes, father," said I, though with less confidence than before.

"Well, how far is it from Port Mahon to Algeciras?"

I could only shake my head.

"If Ushant lay three leagues upon your starboard quarter, what would be your nearest English port?"

Again I had to give it up.

"Well, I don't see that your geography is much better than your history," said he. "You'd never get your certificate at this rate. Can you do addition? Well, then, let us see if you can tot up my prize-money."

He shot a mischievous glance at my mother as he spoke, and she laid down her knitting on her lap and looked very earnestly at him.

"You never asked me about that, Mary," said he.

"The Mediterranean is not the station for it, Anson. I have heard you say that it is the Atlantic for prize-money, and the Mediterranean for honour."

"I had a share of both last cruise, which comes from changing a line-of-battleship for a frigate. Now, Rodney, there are two pounds in every hundred due to me when the prize-courts have done with them. When we were watching Massena, off Genoa, we got a matter of seventy schooners, brigs, and tartans, with wine, food, and powder. Lord Keith will want his finger in the pie, but that's for the Courts to settle. Put them at four pounds apiece to me, and what will the seventy bring?"

"Two hundred and eighty pounds," I answered.

"Why, Anson, it is a fortune!" cried my mother, clapping her hands.

"Try you again, Roddy!" said he, shaking his pipe at me. "There was the *Xebec* frigate out of Barcelona with twenty thousand Spanish dollars aboard, which make four thousand of our pounds. Her hull should be worth another thousand. What's my share of that?"

"A hundred pounds."

"Why, the purser couldn't work it out quicker," he cried in his delight. "Here's for you again! We passed the Straits and worked up to the Azores, where we fell in with the *La Sabina* from the Mauritius with sugar and spices. Twelve hundred pounds she's worth to me, Mary, my darling, and never again shall you soil your pretty fingers or pinch upon my beggarly pay.

My dear mother had borne her long struggle without a sign all these years, but now that she was so suddenly eased of it she fell sobbing upon his neck. It was a long time before my father had a thought to spare upon my examination in arithmetic.

"It's all in your lap, Mary," said he, dashing his own hand across his eyes. "By George, lass, when this leg of mine is sound we'll bear down for a spell to Brighton, and if there is a smarter frock than yours upon the Steyne, may I never tread a poop again. But how is it that you are so quick at figures, Rodney, when you know nothing of history or geography?"

I tried to explain that addition was the same upon sea or land, but that history and geography were not.

"Well," he concluded, "you need figures to take a reckoning, and you need nothing else save what your mother wit will teach you. There never was one of our breed who did not take to salt water like a young gull. Lord Nelson has promised me a vacancy for you, and he'll be as good as his word."

So it was that my father came home to us, and a better or kinder no lad could wish for. Though my parents had been married so long, they had really seen very little of each other, and their affection was as warm and as fresh as if they were two newly-wedded lovers. I have learned since that sailors can be coarse and foul, but never did I know it from my father; for, although he had seen as much rough work as the wildest could wish for, he was always the same patient, good-humoured man, with a smile and a jolly word for all the village. He could suit himself to his company, too, for on the one hand he could take his wine with the vicar, or with Sir James Ovington, the squire of the parish; while on the other he would sit by the hour amongst my humble friends down in the smithy, with Champion Harrison, Boy Jim, and the rest of them, telling them such stories of Nelson and his men that I have seen the Champion knot his great hands together, while Jim's eyes have smouldered like the forge embers as he listened.

My father had been placed on half-pay, like so many others of the old war officers, and so, for nearly two years, he was able to remain with us. During all this time I can only once remember that there was the slightest disagreement between him and my mother. It chanced that I was the cause of it, and as great events sprang out of it, I must tell you how it came about.

It was indeed the first of a series of events which affected not only my fortunes, but those of very much more important people.

The spring of 1803 was an early one, and the middle of April saw the leaves thick upon the chestnut trees. One evening we were all seated together over a dish of tea when we heard the scrunch of steps outside our door, and there was the postman with a letter in his hand.

“I think it is for me,” said my mother, and sure enough it was addressed in the most beautiful writing to Mrs. Mary Stone, of Friar’s Oak, and there was a red seal the size of a half-crown upon the outside of it with a flying dragon in the middle.

“Whom think you that it is from, Anson?” she asked.

“I had hoped that it was from Lord Nelson,” answered my father. “It is time the boy had his commission. But if it be for you, then it cannot be from any one of much importance.”

“Can it not!” she cried, pretending to be offended. “You will ask my pardon for that speech, sir, for it is from no less a person than Sir Charles Tregellis, my own brother.”

My mother seemed to speak with a hushed voice when she mentioned this wonderful brother of hers, and always had done as long as I can remember, so that I had learned also to have a subdued and reverent feeling when I heard his name. And indeed it was no wonder, for that name was never mentioned unless it were in connection with something brilliant and extraordinary. Once we heard that he was at Windsor with the King. Often he was at Brighton with the Prince. Sometimes it was as a sportsman that his reputation reached us, as when his Meteor beat the Duke of Queensberry’s Egham, at Newmarket, or when he brought Jim Belcher up from Bristol, and sprang him upon the London fancy. But usually it was as the friend of the great, the arbiter of fashions, the king of bucks, and the best-dressed man in town that his reputation reached us. My father, however, did not appear to be elated at my mother’s triumphant rejoinder.

“Ay, and what does he want?” asked he, in no very amiable voice.

“I wrote to him, Anson, and told him that Rodney was growing a man now, thinking, since he had no wife or child of his own, he might be disposed to advance him.”

“We can do very well without him,” growled my father. “He sheered off from us when the weather was foul, and we have no need of him now that the sun is shining.”

"Nay, you misjudge him, Anson," said my mother, warmly. "There is no one with a better heart than Charles; but his own life moves so smoothly that he cannot understand that others may have trouble. During all these years I have known that I had but to say the word to receive as much as I wished from him."

"Thank God that you never had to stoop to it, Mary. I want none of his help."

"But we must think of Rodney."

"Rodney has enough for his sea-chest and kit. He needs no more."

"But Charles has great power and influence in London. He could make Rodney known to all the great people. Surely you would not stand in the way of his advancement."

"Let us hear what he says, then," said my father; and this was the letter which she read to him -

14, Jermyn Street, St. James's,

"April 15th, 1803.

"MY DEAR SISTER MARY,

"In answer to your letter, I can assure you that you must not conceive me to be wanting in those finer feelings which are the chief adornment of humanity. It is true that for some years, absorbed as I have been in affairs of the highest importance, I have seldom taken a pen in hand, for which I can assure you that I have been reproached by many *des plus charmantes* of your charming sex. At the present moment I lie abed (having stayed late in order to pay a compliment to the Marchioness of Dover at her ball last night), and this is writ to my dictation by Ambrose, my clever rascal of a valet. I am interested to hear of my nephew Rodney (*Mon dieu, quel nom*!), and as I shall be on my way to visit the Prince at Brighton next week, I shall break my journey at Friar's Oak for the sake of seeing both you and him. Make my compliments to your husband.

"I am ever, my dear sister Mary,

"Your brother,

"CHARLES TREGELLIS."

"What do you think of that?" cried my mother in triumph when she had finished.

"I think it is the letter of a fop," said my father, bluntly.

“You are too hard on him, Anson. You will think better of him when you know him. But he says that he will be here next week, and this is Thursday, and the best curtains unhung, and no lavender in the sheets!”

Away she bustled, half distracted, while my father sat moody, with his chin upon his hands, and I remained lost in wonder at the thought of this grand new relative from London, and of all that his coming might mean to us.

CHAPTER V - BUCK TREGELLIS

Now that I was in my seventeenth year, and had already some need for a razor, I had begun to weary of the narrow life of the village, and to long to see something of the great world beyond. The craving was all the stronger because I durst not speak openly about it, for the least hint of it brought the tears into my mother's eyes. But now there was the less reason that I should stay at home, since my father was at her side, and so my mind was all filled by this prospect of my uncle's visit, and of the chance that he might set my feet moving at last upon the road of life.

As you may think, it was towards my father's profession that my thoughts and my hopes turned, for from my childhood I have never seen the heave of the sea or tasted the salt upon my lips without feeling the blood of five generations of seamen thrill within my veins. And think of the challenge which was ever waving in those days before the eyes of a coast-living lad! I had but to walk up to Wolstonbury in the war time to see the sails of the French chasse-marées and privateers. Again and again I have heard the roar of the guns coming from far out over the waters. Seamen would tell us how they had left London and been engaged ere nightfall, or sailed out of Portsmouth and been yard-arm to yard-arm before they had lost sight of St. Helen's light. It was this imminence of the danger which warmed our hearts to our sailors, and made us talk, round the winter fires, of our little Nelson, and Cuddie Collingwood, and Johnnie Jarvis, and the rest of them, not as being great High Admirals with titles and dignities, but as good friends whom we loved and honoured above all others. What boy was there through the length and breadth of Britain who did not long to be out with them under the red-cross flag?

But now that peace had come, and the fleets which had swept the Channel and the Mediterranean were lying dismantled in our harbours, there was less to draw one's fancy seawards. It was London now of which I thought by day and brooded by night: the huge city, the home of the wise and the great, from which came this constant stream of carriages, and those crowds of dusty people who were for ever flashing past our window-pane. It was this one side of life which first presented itself to me, and so, as a boy, I used to picture the City as a gigantic stable with a huge huddle of coaches, which were for ever streaming off down the country roads. But, then, Champion Harrison told me how the fighting-men lived there, and my father how the heads of the Navy lived there, and my mother how her brother and his grand friends were there, until at last I was consumed with impatience to see this marvellous heart of England. This coming of my uncle, then, was the breaking of light through the darkness, though I hardly dared to hope that he would take me with him into those high circles in which he lived. My mother, however, had such confidence either in his good nature or in her own powers of persuasion, that she already began to make furtive preparations for my departure.

But if the narrowness of the village life chafed my easy spirit, it was a torture to the keen and ardent mind of Boy Jim. It was but a few days after the coming of my uncle's letter that we walked over the Downs together, and I had a peep of the bitterness of his heart.

"What is there for me to do, Rodney?" he cried. "I forge a shoe, and I fuller it, and I clip it, and I caulken it, and I knock five holes in it, and there it is finished. Then I do it again and again, and blow up the bellows and feed the forge, and rasp a hoof or two, and there is a day's work done, and every day the same as the other. Was it for this only, do you think, that I was born into the world?"

I looked at him, his proud, eagle face, and his tall, sinewy figure, and I wondered whether in the whole land there was a finer, handsomer man.

"The Army or the Navy is the place for you, Jim," said I.

"That is very well," he cried. "If you go into the Navy, as you are likely to do, you go as an officer, and it is you who do the ordering. If I go in, it is as one who was born to receive orders."

"An officer gets his orders from those above him."

"But an officer does not have the lash hung over his head. I saw a poor fellow at the inn here - it was some years ago - who showed us his back in the tap-room, all cut into red diamonds with the boat-swain's whip. 'Who ordered that?' I asked. 'The captain,' said he. 'And what would you have had if you had struck him dead?' said I. 'The yard-arm,' he answered. 'Then if I had been you that's where I should have been,' said I, and I spoke the truth. I can't help it, Rod! There's something here in my heart, something that is as much a part of myself as this hand is, which holds me to it."

"I know that you are as proud as Lucifer," said I.

"It was born with me, Roddy, and I can't help it. Life would be easier if I could. I was made to be my own master, and there's only one place where I can hope to be so."

"Where is that, Jim?"

"In London. Miss Hinton has told me of it, until I feel as if I could find my way through it from end to end. She loves to talk of it as well as I do to listen. I have it all laid out in my mind, and I can see where the playhouses are, and how the river runs, and where the King's house is, and the Prince's, and the place where the fighting-men live. I could make my name known in London."

"How?"

"Never mind how, Rod. I could do it, and I will do it, too. 'Wait!' says my uncle - 'wait, and it will all come right for you.' That is what he always says, and my aunt the same. Why should I wait? What am I to wait for? No, Roddy, I'll stay no longer eating my heart out in this little village, but I'll leave my apron behind me and I'll seek my fortune in London, and when I come back to Friar's Oak, it will be in such style as that gentleman yonder."

He pointed as he spoke, and there was a high crimson curricle coming down the London road, with two bay mares harnessed tandem fashion before it. The reins and fittings were of a light fawn colour, and the gentleman had a driving-coat to match, with a servant in dark livery behind. They flashed past us in a rolling cloud of dust, and I had just a glimpse of the pale, handsome face of the master, and of the dark, shrivelled features of the man. I should never have given them another thought had it not chanced that when the village came into view there was the curricle again, standing at the door of the inn, and the grooms busy taking out the horses.

"Jim," I cried, "I believe it is my uncle!" and taking to my heels I ran for home at the top of my speed. At the door was standing the dark-faced servant. He carried a cushion, upon which lay a small and fluffy lapdog.

"You will excuse me, young sir," said he, in the suavest, most soothing of voices, "but am I right in supposing that this is the house of Lieutenant Stone? In that case you will, perhaps, do me the favour to hand to Mrs. Stone this note which her brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, has just committed to my care."

I was quite abashed by the man’s flowery way of talking - so unlike anything which I had ever heard. He had a wizened face, and sharp little dark eyes, which took in me and the house and my mother’s startled face at the window all in the instant. My parents were together, the two of them, in the sitting-room, and my mother read the note to us.

“My dear Mary,” it ran, “I have stopped at the inn, because I am somewhat *ravagé* by the dust of your Sussex roads. A lavender-water bath may restore me to a condition in which I may fitly pay my compliments to a lady. Meantime, I send you Fidelio as a hostage. Pray give him a half-pint of warmish milk with six drops of pure brandy in it. A better or more faithful creature never lived. *Toujours à toi.* - Charles.”

“Have him in! Have him in!” cried my father, heartily, running to the door. “Come in, Mr. Fidelio. Every man to his own taste, and six drops to the half-pint seems a sinful watering of grog - but if you like it so, you shall have it.”

A smile flickered over the dark face of the servant, but his features reset themselves instantly into their usual mask of respectful observance.

“You are labouring under a slight error, sir, if you will permit me to say so. My name is Ambrose, and I have the honour to be the valet of Sir Charles Tregellis. This is Fidelio upon the cushion.”

“Tut, the dog!” cried my father, in disgust. “Heave him down by the fireside. Why should he have brandy, when many a Christian has to go without?”

“Hush, Anson!” said my mother, taking the cushion. “You will tell Sir Charles that his wishes shall be carried out, and that we shall expect him at his own convenience.”

The man went off noiselessly and swiftly, but was back in a few minutes with a flat brown basket.

“It is the refection, madam,” said he. “Will you permit me to lay the table? Sir Charles is accustomed to partake of certain dishes and to drink certain wines, so that we usually bring them with us when we visit.” He opened the basket, and in a minute he had the table all shining with silver and glass, and studded with dainty dishes. So quick and neat and silent was he in all he did, that my father was as taken with him as I was.

“You’d have made a right good foretopman if your heart is as stout as your fingers are quick,” said he. “Did you never wish to have the honour of serving your country?”

"It is my honour, sir, to serve Sir Charles Tregellis, and I desire no other master," he answered. "But I will convey his dressing-case from the inn, and then all will be ready."

He came back with a great silver-mounted box under his arm, and close at his heels was the gentleman whose coming had made such a disturbance.

My first impression of my uncle as he entered the room was that one of his eyes was swollen to the size of an apple. It caught the breath from my lips - that monstrous, glistening eye. But the next instant I perceived that he held a round glass in the front of it, which magnified it in this fashion. He looked at us each in turn, and then he bowed very gracefully to my mother and kissed her upon either cheek.

"You will permit me to compliment you, my dear Mary," said he, in a voice which was the most mellow and beautiful that I have ever heard. "I can assure you that the country air has used you wondrous well, and that I should be proud to see my pretty sister in the Mall. I am your servant, sir," he continued, holding out his hand to my father. "It was but last week that I had the honour of dining with my friend, Lord St. Vincent, and I took occasion to mention you to him. I may tell you that your name is not forgotten at the Admiralty, sir, and I hope that I may see you soon walking the poop of a 74-gun ship of your own. So this is my nephew, is it?" He put a hand upon each of my shoulders in a very friendly way and looked me up and down.

"How old are you, nephew?" he asked.

"Seventeen, sir."

"You look older. You look eighteen, at the least. I find him very passable, Mary - very passable, indeed. He has not the *bel* air, the *tournure* - in our uncouth English we have no word for it. But he is as healthy as a May-hedge in bloom."

So within a minute of his entering our door he had got himself upon terms with all of us, and with so easy and graceful a manner that it seemed as if he had known us all for years. I had a good look at him now as he stood upon the hearthrug with my mother upon one side and my father on the other. He was a very large man, with noble shoulders, small waist, broad hips, well-turned legs, and the smallest of hands and feet. His face was pale and handsome, with a prominent chin, a jutting nose, and large blue staring eyes, in which a sort of dancing, mischievous light was for ever playing. He wore a deep brown coat with a collar as high as his ears and tails as low as his knees. His black breeches and silk stockings ended in very small pointed shoes, so highly polished that they twinkled with every movement. His vest was of black velvet, open at the top to show an embroidered shirt-front, with a high, smooth, white cravat above it, which kept his neck for ever on the stretch. He stood easily, with one thumb in the arm-pit, and two fingers of the other hand in his vest pocket. It made me proud as I watched him to think that so magnificent a man, with such easy, masterful ways, should be my own blood relation, and I could see from my mother's eyes as they turned towards him that the same thought was in her mind.

All this time Ambrose had been standing like a dark-clothed, bronze-faced image by the door, with the big silver-bound box under his arm. He stepped forward now into the room.

"Shall I convey it to your bedchamber, Sir Charles?" he asked.

"Ah, pardon me, sister Mary," cried my uncle, "I am old-fashioned enough to have principles - an anachronism, I know, in this lax age. One of them is never to allow my *batterie de toilette* out of my sight when I am travelling. I cannot readily forget the agonies which I endured some years ago through neglecting this precaution. I will do Ambrose the justice to say that it was before he took charge of my affairs. I was compelled to wear the same ruffles upon two consecutive days. On the third morning my fellow was so affected by the sight of my condition, that he burst into tears and laid out a pair which he had stolen from me."

As he spoke his face was very grave, but the light in his eyes danced and gleamed. He handed his open snuff-box to my father, as Ambrose followed my mother out of the room.

"You number yourself in an illustrious company by upping your finger and thumb into it," said he.

"Indeed, sir!" said my father, shortly.

"You are free of my box, as being a relative by marriage. You are free also, nephew, and I pray you to take a pinch. It is the most intimate sign of my goodwill. Outside ourselves there are four, I think, who have had access to it - the Prince, of course; Mr Pitt; Monsieur Otto, the French Ambassador; and Lord Hawkesbury. I have sometimes thought that I was premature with Lord Hawkesbury."

"I am vastly honoured, sir," said my father, looking suspiciously at his guest from under his shaggy eyebrows, for with that grave face and those twinkling eyes it was hard to know how to take him.

"A woman, sir, has her love to bestow," said my uncle. "A man has his snuff-box. Neither is to be lightly offered. It is a lapse of taste; nay, more, it is a breach of morals. Only the other day, as I was seated in Watier's, my box of prime macouba open upon the table beside me, an Irish bishop thrust in his intrusive fingers. 'Waiter,' I cried, 'my box has been soiled! Remove it!' The man meant no insult, you understand, but that class of people must be kept in their proper sphere.'

"A bishop!" cried my father. "You draw your line very high, sir."

"Yes, sir," said my uncle; "I wish no better epitaph upon my tombstone."

My mother had in the meanwhile descended, and we all drew up to the table.

"You will excuse my apparent grossness, Mary, in venturing to bring my own larder with me. Abernethy has me under his orders, and I must eschew your rich country dainties. A little white wine and a cold bird - it is as much as the niggardly Scotchman will allow me."

"We should have you on blockading service when the levanters are blowing," said my father. "Salt junk and weevilly biscuits, with a rib of a tough Barbary ox when the tenders come in. You would have your spare diet there, sir."

Straightway my uncle began to question him about the sea service, and for the whole meal my father was telling him of the Nile and of the Toulon blockade, and the siege of Genoa, and all that he had seen and done. But whenever he faltered for a word, my uncle always had it ready for him, and it was hard to say which knew most about the business.

"No, I read little or nothing," said he, when my father marvelled where he got his knowledge. "The fact is that I can hardly pick up a print without seeing some allusion to myself: 'Sir C. T. does this,' or 'Sir C. T. says the other,' so I take them no longer. But if a man is in my position all knowledge comes to him. The Duke of York tells me of the Army in the morning, and Lord Spencer chats with me of the Navy in the afternoon, and Dundas whispers me what is going forward in the Cabinet, so that I have little need of the *Times* or the *Morning Chronicle.*"

This set him talking of the great world of London, telling my father about the men who were his masters at the Admiralty, and my mother about the beauties of the town, and the great ladies at Almack's, but all in the same light, fanciful way, so that one never knew whether to laugh or to take him gravely. I think it flattered him to see the way in which we all three hung upon his words. Of some he thought highly and of some lowly, but he made no secret that the highest of all, and the one against whom all others should be measured, was Sir Charles Tregellis himself.

"As to the King," said he, "of course, I am *l'ami de famille* there; and even with you I can scarce speak freely, as my relations are confidential."

"God bless him and keep him from ill!" cried my father.

"It is pleasant to hear you say so," said my uncle. "One has to come into the country to hear honest loyalty, for a sneer and a gibe are more the fashions in town. The King is grateful to me for the interest which I have ever shown in his son. He likes to think that the Prince has a man of taste in his circle."

"And the Prince?" asked my mother. "Is he well-favoured?"

"He is a fine figure of a man. At a distance he has been mistaken for me. And he has some taste in dress, though he gets slovenly if I am too long away from him. I warrant you that I find a crease in his coat to-morrow."

We were all seated round the fire by this time, for the evening had turned chilly. The lamp was lighted and so also was my father's pipe.

"I suppose," said he, "that this is your first visit to Friar's Oak?"

My uncle's face turned suddenly very grave and stern.

"It is my first visit for many years," said he. "I was but one-and-twenty years of age when last I came here. I am not likely to forget it."

I knew that he spoke of his visit to Cliffe Royal at the time of the murder, and I saw by her face that my mother knew it also. My father, however, had either never heard of it, or had forgotten the circumstance.

"Was it at the inn you stayed?" he asked.

"I stayed with the unfortunate Lord Avon. It was the occasion when he was accused of slaying his younger brother and fled from the country."

We all fell silent, and my uncle leaned his chin upon his hand, looking thoughtfully into the fire. If I do but close my eyes now, I can see the light upon his proud, handsome face, and see also my dear father, concerned at having touched upon so terrible a memory, shooting little slanting glances at him betwixt the puffs of his pipe.

"I dare say that it has happened with you, sir," said my uncle at last, "that you have lost some dear messmate, in battle or wreck, and that you have put him out of your mind in the routine of your daily life, until suddenly some word or some scene brings him back to your memory, and you find your sorrow as raw as upon the first day of your loss."

My father nodded.

"So it is with me to-night. I never formed a close friendship with a man - I say nothing of women - save only the once. That was with Lord Avon. We were of an age, he a few years perhaps my senior, but our tastes, our judgments, and our characters were alike, save only that he had in him a touch of pride such as I have never known in any other man. Putting aside the little foibles of a rich young man of fashion, *les indescrétions d'une jeunesse dorée*, I could have sworn that he was as good a man as I have ever known."

"How came he, then, to such a crime?" asked my father.

My uncle shook his head.

"Many a time have I asked myself that question, and it comes home to me more to-night than ever."

All the jauntiness had gone out of his manner, and he had turned suddenly into a sad and serious man.

"Was it certain that he did it, Charles?" asked my mother.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could think it were not so. I have thought sometimes that it was this very pride, turning suddenly to madness, which drove him to it. You have heard how he returned the money which we had lost?"

"Nay, I have heard nothing of it," my father answered.

"It is a very old story now, though we have not yet found an end to it. We had played for two days, the four of us: Lord Avon, his brother Captain Barrington, Sir Lothian Hume, and myself. Of the Captain I knew little, save that he was not of the best repute, and was deep in the hands of the Jews. Sir Lothian has made an evil name for himself since - 'tis the same Sir Lothian who shot Lord Carton in the affair at Chalk Farm - but in those days there was nothing against him. The oldest of us was but twenty-four, and we gamed on, as I say, until the Captain had cleared the board. We were all hit, but our host far the hardest.

"That night - I tell you now what it would be a bitter thing for me to tell in a court of law - I was restless and sleepless, as often happens when a man has kept awake over long. My mind would dwell upon the fall of the cards, and I was tossing and turning in my bed, when suddenly a cry fell upon my ears, and then a second louder one, coming from the direction of Captain

Barrington’s room. Five minutes later I heard steps passing down the passage, and, without striking a light, I opened my door and peeped out, thinking that some one was taken unwell. There was Lord Avon walking towards me. In one hand he held a guttering candle and in the other a brown bag, which chinked as he moved. His face was all drawn and distorted - so much so that my question was frozen upon my lips. Before I could utter it he turned into his chamber and softly closed the door.

“Next morning I was awakened by finding him at my bedside.

“‘Charles,’ said he, ‘I cannot abide to think that you should have lost this money in my house. You will find it here upon your table.’

“It was in vain that I laughed at his squeamishness, telling him that I should most certainly have claimed my money had I won, so that it would be strange indeed if I were not permitted to pay it when I lost.

“‘Neither I nor my brother will touch it,’ said he. ‘There it lies, and you may do what you like about it.’

“He would listen to no argument, but dashed out of the room like a madman. But perhaps these details are familiar to you, and God knows they are painful to me to tell.”

My father was sitting with staring eyes, and his forgotten pipe reeking in his hand.

“Pray let us hear the end of it, sir,” he cried.

“Well, then, I had finished my toilet in an hour or so - for I was less exigeant in those days than now - and I met Sir Lothian Hume at breakfast. His experience had been the same as my own, and he was eager to see Captain Barrington; and to ascertain why he had directed his brother to return the money to us. We were talking the matter over when suddenly I raised my eyes to the corner of the ceiling, and I saw - I saw - “

My uncle had turned quite pale with the vividness of the memory, and he passed his hand over his eyes.

“It was crimson,” said he, with a shudder - “crimson with black cracks, and from every crack - but I will give you dreams, sister Mary. Suffice it that we rushed up the stair which led direct to the Captain’s room, and there we found him lying with the bone gleaming white through his throat. A hunting-knife lay in the room - and the knife was Lord Avon’s. A lace ruffle was found in the dead man’s grasp - and the ruffle was Lord Avon’s. Some papers were found charred in the grate - and the papers were Lord

Avon's. Oh, my poor friend, in what moment of madness did you come to do such a deed?"

The light had gone out of my uncle's eyes and the extravagance from his manner. His speech was clear and plain, with none of those strange London ways which had so amazed me. Here was a second uncle, a man of heart and a man of brains, and I liked him better than the first.

"And what said Lord Avon?" cried my father.

"He said nothing. He went about like one who walks in his sleep, with horror-stricken eyes. None dared arrest him until there should be due inquiry, but when the coroner's court brought wilful murder against him, the constables came for him in full cry. But they found him fled. There was a rumour that he had been seen in Westminster in the next week, and then that he had escaped for America, but nothing more is known. It will be a bright day for Sir Lothian Hume when they can prove him dead, for he is next of kin, and till then he can touch neither title nor estate."

The telling of this grim story had cast a chill upon all of us. My uncle held out his hands towards the blaze, and I noticed that they were as white as the ruffles which fringed them.

"I know not how things are at Cliffe Royal now," said he, thoughtfully. "It was not a cheery house, even before this shadow fell upon it. A fitter stage was never set forth for such a tragedy. But seventeen years have passed, and perhaps even that horrible ceiling - "

"It still bears the stain," said I.

I know not which of the three was the more astonished, for my mother had not heard of my adventures of the night. They never took their wondering eyes off me as I told my story, and my heart swelled with pride when my uncle said that we had carried ourselves well, and that he did not think that many of our age would have stood it as stoutly.

"But as to this ghost, it must have been the creature of your own minds," said he. "Imagination plays us strange tricks, and though I have as steady a nerve as a man might wish, I cannot answer for what I might see if I were to stand under that blood-stained ceiling at midnight."

"Uncle," said I, "I saw a figure as plainly as I see that fire, and I heard the steps as clearly as I hear the crackle of the fagots. Besides, we could not both be deceived."

"There is truth in that," said be, thoughtfully. "You saw no features, you say?"

“It was too dark.”

“But only a figure?”

“The dark outline of one.”

“And it retreated up the stairs?”

“Yes.”

“And vanished into the wall?”

“Yes.”

“What part of the wall?” cried a voice from behind us.

My mother screamed, and down came my father’s pipe on to the hearthrug. I had sprung round with a catch of my breath, and there was the valet, Ambrose, his body in the shadow of the doorway, his dark face protruded into the light, and two burning eyes fixed upon mine.

“What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?” cried my uncle.

It was strange to see the gleam and passion fade out of the man’s face, and the demure mask of the valet replace it. His eyes still smouldered, but his features regained their prim composure in an instant.

“I beg your pardon, Sir Charles,” said he. “I had come in to ask you if you had any orders for me, and I did not like to interrupt the young gentleman’s story. I am afraid that I have been somewhat carried away by it.”

“I never knew you forget yourself before,” said my uncle.

“You will, I am sure, forgive me, Sir Charles, if you will call to mind the relation in which I stood to Lord Avon.” He spoke with some dignity of manner, and with a bow he left the room.

“We must make some little allowance,” said my uncle, with a sudden return to his jaunty manner. “When a man can brew a dish of chocolate, or tie a cravat, as Ambrose does, he may claim consideration. The fact is that the poor fellow was valet to Lord Avon, that he was at Cliffe Royal upon the fatal night of which I have spoken, and that he is most devoted to his old master. But my talk has been somewhat *triste*, sister Mary, and now we shall return, if you please, to the dresses of the Countess Lieven, and the gossip of St. James.”

CHAPTER VI - ON THE THRESHOLD

My father sent me to bed early that night, though I was very eager to stay up, for every word which this man said held my attention. His face, his manner, the large waves and sweeps of his white hands, his easy air of superiority, his fantastic fashion of talk, all filled me with interest and wonder. But, as I afterwards learned, their conversation was to be about myself and my own prospects, so I was despatched to my room, whence far into the night I could hear the deep growl of my father and the rich tones of my uncle, with an occasional gentle murmur from my mother, as they talked in the room beneath.

I had dropped asleep at last, when I was awakened suddenly by something wet being pressed against my face, and by two warm arms which were cast round me. My mother's cheek was against my own, and I could hear the click of her sobs, and feel her quiver and shake in the darkness. A faint light stole through the latticed window, and I could dimly see that she was in white, with her black hair loose upon her shoulders.

"You won't forget us, Roddy? You won't forget us?"

"Why, mother, what is it?"

"Your uncle, Roddy - he is going to take you away from us."

"When, mother?"

"To-morrow."

God forgive me, how my heart bounded for joy, when hers, which was within touch of it, was breaking with sorrow!

"Oh, mother!" I cried. "To London?"

"First to Brighton, that he may present you to the Prince. Next day to London, where you will meet the great people, Roddy, and learn to look down upon - to look down upon your poor, simple, old-fashioned father and mother."

I put my arms about her to console her, but she wept so that, for all my seventeen years and pride of manhood, it set me weeping also, and with such a hiccoughing noise, since I had not a woman's knack of quiet tears, that it finally turned her own grief to laughter.

"Charles would be flattered if he could see the gracious way in which we receive his kindness," said she. "Be still, Roddy dear, or you will certainly wake him."

"I'll not go if it is to grieve you," I cried.

"Nay, dear, you must go, for it may be the one great chance of your life. And think how proud it will make us all when we hear of you in the company of Charles's grand friends. But you will promise me not to gamble, Roddy? You heard to-night of the dreadful things which come from it."

"I promise you, mother."

"And you will be careful of wine, Roddy? You are young and unused to it."

"Yes, mother."

"And play-actresses also, Roddy. And you will not cast your underclothing until June is in. Young Master Overton came by his death through it. Think well of your dress, Roddy, so as to do your uncle credit, for it is the thing for which he is himself most famed. You have but to do what he will direct. But if there is a time when you are not meeting grand people, you can wear out your country things, for your brown coat is as good as new, and the blue one, if it were ironed and relined, would take you through the summer. I have put out your Sunday clothes with the nankeen vest, since you are to see the Prince to-morrow, and you will wear your brown silk stockings and buckle shoes. Be guarded in crossing the London streets, for I am told that the hackney coaches are past all imagining. Fold your clothes when you go to bed, Roddy, and do not forget your evening prayers, for, oh, my dear boy, the days of temptation are at hand, when I will no longer be with you to help you."

So with advice and guidance both for this world and the next did my mother, with her soft, warm arms around me, prepare me for the great step which lay before me.

My uncle did not appear at breakfast in the morning, but Ambrose brewed him a dish of chocolate and took it to his room. When at last, about midday, he did descend, he was so fine with his curled hair, his shining teeth, his quizzing glass, his snow-white ruffles, and his laughing eyes, that I could not take my gaze from him.

"Well, nephew," he cried, "what do you think of the prospect of coming to town with me?"

"I thank you, sir, for the kind interest which you take in me," said I.

"But you must be a credit to me. My nephew must be of the best if he is to be in keeping with the rest of me."

"You'll find him a chip of good wood, sir," said my father.

"We must make him a polished chip before we have done with him. Your aim, my dear nephew, must always be to be in *bon ton*. It is not a case of wealth, you understand. Mere riches cannot do it. Golden Price has forty thousand a year, but his clothes are disastrous. I assure you that I saw him come down St. James's Street the other day, and I was so shocked at his appearance that I had to step into Vernet's for a glass of orange brandy. No, it is a question of natural taste, and of following the advice and example of those who are more experienced than yourself."

"I fear, Charles, that Roddy's wardrobe is country-made," said my mother.

"We shall soon set that right when we get to town. We shall see what Stultz or Weston can do for him," my uncle answered. "We must keep him quiet until he has some clothes to wear."

This slight upon my best Sunday suit brought a flush to my mother's cheeks, which my uncle instantly observed, for he was quick in noticing trifles.

"The clothes are very well for Friar's Oak, sister Mary," said he. "And yet you can understand that they might seem *rococo* in the Mall. If you leave him in my hands I shall see to the matter."

"On how much, sir," asked my father, "can a young man dress in town?"

"With prudence and reasonable care, a young man of fashion can dress upon eight hundred a year," my uncle answered.

I saw my poor father's face grow longer.

"I fear, sir, that Roddy must keep his country clothes," said he. "Even with my prize-money - "

"Tut, sir!" cried my uncle. "I already owe Weston something over a thousand, so how can a few odd hundreds affect it? If my nephew comes with me, my nephew is my care. The point is settled, and I must refuse to argue upon it." He waved his white hands as if to brush aside all opposition.

My parents tried to thank him, but he cut them short.

"By the way, now that I am in Friar's Oak, there is another small piece of business which I have to perform," said he. "I believe that there is a fighting-man named Harrison here, who at one time might have held the championship. In those days poor Avon and I were his principal backers. I should like to have a word with him."

You may think how proud I was to walk down the village street with my magnificent relative, and to note out of the corner of my eye how the folk came to the doors and windows to see us pass. Champion Harrison was standing outside the smithy, and he pulled his cap off when he saw my uncle.

"God bless me, sir! Who'd ha' thought of seem' you at Friar's Oak? Why, Sir Charles, it brings old memories back to look at your face again."

"Glad to see you looking so fit, Harrison," said my uncle, running his eyes over him. "Why, with a week's training you would be as good a man as ever. I don't suppose you scale more than thirteen and a half?"

"Thirteen ten, Sir Charles. I'm in my fortieth year, but I am sound in wind and limb, and if my old woman would have let me off my promise, I'd ha' had a try with some of these young ones before now. I hear that they've got some amazin' good stuff up from Bristol of late."

"Yes, the Bristol yellowman has been the winning colour of late. How d'ye do, Mrs. Harrison? I don't suppose you remember me?"

She had come out from the house, and I noticed that her worn face - on which some past terror seemed to have left its shadow - hardened into stern lines as she looked at my uncle.

"I remember you too well, Sir Charles Tregellis," said she. "I trust that you have not come here to-day to try to draw my husband back into the ways that he has forsaken."

"That's the way with her, Sir Charles," said Harrison, resting his great hand upon the woman's shoulder. "She's got my promise, and she holds me to it! There was never a better or more hard-working wife, but she ain't what you'd call a patron of sport, and that's a fact."

"Sport!" cried the woman, bitterly. "A fine sport for you, Sir Charles, with your pleasant twenty-mile drive into the country and your luncheon-basket and your wines, and so merrily back to London in the cool of the evening, with a well-fought battle to talk over. Think of the sport that it was to me to sit through the long hours, listening for the wheels of the chaise which would bring my man back to me. Sometimes he could walk in, and sometimes he was led in, and sometimes he was carried in, and it was only by his clothes that I could know him - "

"Come, wifie," said Harrison, patting her on the shoulder. "I've been cut up in my time, but never as bad as that."

"And then to live for weeks afterwards with the fear that every knock at the door may be to tell us that the other is dead, and that my man may have to stand in the dock and take his trial for murder."

"No, she hasn't got a sportin' drop in her veins," said Harrison. "She'd never make a patron, never! It's Black Baruk's business that did it, when we thought he'd napped it once too often. Well, she has my promise, and I'll never sling my hat over the ropes unless she gives me leave."

"You'll keep your hat on your head like an honest, God-fearing man, John," said his wife, turning back into the house.

"I wouldn't for the world say anything to make you change your resolutions," said my uncle. "At the same time, if you had wished to take a turn at the old sport, I had a good thing to put in your way."

"Well, it's no use, sir," said Harrison, "but I'd be glad to hear about it all the same."

"They have a very good bit of stuff at thirteen stone down Gloucester way. Wilson is his name, and they call him Crab on account of his style."

Harrison shook his head. "Never heard of him, sir."

"Very likely not, for he has never shown in the P.R. But they think great things of him in the West, and he can hold his own with either of the Belchers with the mufflers."

"Sparrin' ain't fightin'," said the smith

"I am told that he had the best of it in a by-battle with Noah James, of Cheshire."

"There's no gamer man on the list, sir, than Noah James, the guardsman," said Harrison. "I saw him myself fight fifty rounds after his jaw had been cracked in three places. If Wilson could beat him, Wilson will go far."

"So they think in the West, and they mean to spring him on the London talent. Sir Lothian Hume is his patron, and to make a long story short, he lays me odds that I won't find a young one of his weight to meet him. I told him that I had not heard of any good young ones, but that I had an old one who had not put his foot into a ring for many years, who would make his man wish he had never come to London.

"'Young or old, under twenty or over thirty-five, you may bring whom you will at the weight, and I shall lay two to one on Wilson,' said he. I took him in thousands, and here I am."

"It won't do, Sir Charles," said the smith, shaking his head. "There's nothing would please me better, but you heard for yourself."

"Well, if you won't fight, Harrison, I must try to get some promising colt. I'd be glad of your advice in the matter. By the way, I take the chair at a supper of the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses in St. Martin's Lane next Friday. I should be very glad if you will make one of my guests. Halloa, who's this?" Up flew his glass to his eye.

Boy Jim had come out from the forge with his hammer in his hand. He had, I remember, a grey flannel shirt, which was open at the neck and turned up at the sleeves. My uncle ran his eyes over the fine lines of his magnificent figure with the glance of a connoisseur.

"That's my nephew, Sir Charles."

"Is he living with you?"

"His parents are dead."

"Has he ever been in London?"

"No, Sir Charles. He's been with me here since he was as high as that hammer."

My uncle turned to Boy Jim.

"I hear that you have never been in London," said he. "Your uncle is coming up to a supper which I am giving to the Fancy next Friday. Would you care to make one of us?"

Boy Jim's dark eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"I should be glad to come, sir."

"No, no, Jim," cried the smith, abruptly. "I'm sorry to gainsay you, lad, but there are reasons why I had rather you stayed down here with your aunt."

"Tut, Harrison, let the lad come!" cried my uncle.

"No, no, Sir Charles. It's dangerous company for a lad of his mettle. There's plenty for him to do when I'm away."

Poor Jim turned away with a clouded brow and strode into the smithy again. For my part, I slipped after him to try to console him, and to tell him all the wonderful changes which had come so suddenly into my life. But I had not got half through my story, and Jim, like the good fellow that he was, had just begun to forget his own troubles in his delight at my good fortune, when my uncle called to me from without. The curricle with its tandem mares was waiting for us outside the cottage, and Ambrose had placed the refection-basket, the lap-dog, and the precious toilet-box inside of it. He had himself climbed up behind, and I, after a hearty handshake from my father, and a last sobbing embrace from my mother, took my place beside my uncle in the front.

"Let go her head!" cried he to the ostler, and with a snap, a crack, and a jingle, away we went upon our journey.

Across all the years how clearly I can see that spring day, with the green English fields, the windy English sky, and the yellow, beetle-browed cottage in which I had grown from a child to a man. I see, too, the figures at the garden gate: my mother, with her face turned away and her handkerchief waving; my father, with his blue coat and his white shorts, leaning upon his stick with his hand shading his eyes as he peered after us. All the village was out to see young Roddy Stone go off with his grand relative from London to call upon the Prince in his own palace. The Harrisons were waving to me from the smithy, and John Cummings from the steps of the inn, and I saw Joshua Allen, my old schoolmaster, pointing me out to the people, as if he were showing what came from his teaching. To make it complete, who should drive past just as we cleared the village but Miss Hinton, the play-actress, the pony and phaeton the same as when first I saw her, but she herself another woman; and I thought to myself that if Boy Jim had done nothing but that one thing, he need not think that his youth had been wasted in the country. She was driving to see him, I have no doubt, for they were closer than ever, and she never looked up nor saw the hand that I waved to her. So as we took the curve of the road the little village vanished, and there in the dip of the Downs, past the spires of Patcham and of Preston, lay the broad blue sea and the grey houses of Brighton, with the strange Eastern domes and minarets of the Prince's Pavilion shooting out from the centre of it.

To every traveller it was a sight of beauty, but to me it was the world - the great wide free world - and my heart thrilled and fluttered as the young bird's may when it first hears the whirr of its own flight, and skims along with the blue heaven above it and the green fields beneath. The day may come when it may look back regretfully to the snug nest in the thornbush, but what does it reck of that when spring is in the air and youth in its blood, and the old hawk of trouble has not yet darkened the sunshine with the ill-boding shadow of its wings?

CHAPTER VII - THE HOPE OF ENGLAND

My uncle drove for some time in silence, but I was conscious that his eye was always coming round to me, and I had an uneasy conviction that he was already beginning to ask himself whether he could make anything of me, or whether he had been betrayed into an indiscretion when he had allowed his sister to persuade him to show her son something of the grand world in which he lived.

“You sing, don’t you, nephew?” he asked, suddenly.

“Yes, sir, a little.”

“A baritone, I should fancy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And your mother tells me that you play the fiddle. These things will be of service to you with the Prince. Music runs in his family. Your education has been what you could get at a village school. Well, you are not examined in Greek roots in polite society, which is lucky for some of us. It is as well just to have a tag or two of Horace or Virgil: ‘sub tegmine fagi,’ or ‘habet fœnum in cornu,’ which gives a flavour to one’s conversation like the touch of garlic in a salad. It is not *bon ton* to be learned, but it is a graceful thing to indicate that you have forgotten a good deal. Can you write verse?”

“I fear not, sir.”

“A small book of rhymes may be had for half a crown. Vers de Société are a great assistance to a young man. If you have the ladies on your side, it does not matter whom you have against you. You must learn to open a door, to enter a room, to present a snuff-box, raising the lid with the forefinger of the hand in which you hold it. You must acquire the bow for a man, with its necessary touch of dignity, and that for a lady, which cannot be too humble, and should still contain the least suspicion of abandon. You must cultivate a manner with women which shall be deprecating and yet audacious. Have you any eccentricity?”

It made me laugh, the easy way in which he asked the question, as if it were a most natural thing to possess.

“You have a pleasant, catching laugh, at all events,” said he. “But an eccentricity is very *bon ton* at present, and if you feel any leaning towards one, I should certainly advise you to let it run its course. Petersham would have remained a mere peer all his life had it not come out that he had a snuff-box for every day in the year, and that he had caught cold through a mistake of his valet, who sent him out on a bitter winter day with a thin Sèvres china box instead of a thick tortoiseshell. That brought him out of the ruck, you see, and people remember him. Even some small characteristic, such as having an apricot tart on your sideboard all the year round, or putting your candle out at night by stuffing it under your pillow, serves to separate you from your neighbour. In my own case, it is my precise judgment upon matter of dress and decorum which has placed me where I am. I do not profess to follow a law. I set one. For example, I am taking you to-day to see the Prince in a nankeen vest. What do you think will be the consequence of that?"

My fears told me that it might be my own very great discomfiture, but I did not say so.

"Why, the night coach will carry the news to London. It will be in Brookes's and White's to-morrow morning. Within, a week St. James's Street and the Mall will be full of nankeen waistcoats. A most painful incident happened to me once. My cravat came undone in the street, and I actually walked from Carlton House to Watier's in Bruton Street with the two ends hanging loose. Do you suppose it shook my position? The same evening there were dozens of young bloods walking the streets of London with their cravats loose. If I had not rearranged mine there would not be one tied in the whole kingdom now, and a great art would have been prematurely lost. You have not yet began to practise it?"

I confessed that I had not.

"You should begin now in your youth. I will myself teach you the *coup d'archet*. By using a few hours in each day, which would otherwise be wasted, you may hope to have excellent cravats in middle life. The whole knack lies in pointing your chin to the sky, and then arranging your folds by the gradual descent of your lower jaw."

When my uncle spoke like this there was always that dancing, mischievous light in his dark blue eyes, which showed me that this humour of his was a conscious eccentricity, depending, as I believe, upon a natural fastidiousness of taste, but wilfully driven to grotesque lengths for the very reason which made him recommend me also to develop some peculiarity of my own. When I thought of the way in which he had spoken of his unhappy friend, Lord Avon, upon the evening before, and of the emotion which he showed as he told the horrible story, I was glad to think that there was the heart of a man there, however much it might please him to conceal it.

And, as it happened, I was very soon to have another peep at it, for a most unexpected event befell us as we drew up in front of the Crown hotel. A swarm of ostlers and grooms had rushed out to us, and my uncle, throwing down the reins, gathered Fidelio on his cushion from under the seat.

“Ambrose,” he cried, “you may take Fidelio.”

But there came no answer. The seat behind was unoccupied. Ambrose was gone.

We could hardly believe our eyes when we alighted and found that it was really so. He had most certainly taken his seat there at Friar’s Oak, and from there on we had come without a break as fast as the mares could travel. Whither, then, could he have vanished to?

“He’s fallen off in a fit!” cried my uncle. “I’d drive back, but the Prince is expecting us. Where’s the landlord? Here, Coppinger, send your best man back to Friar’s Oak as fast as his horse can go, to find news of my valet, Ambrose. See that no pains be spared. Now, nephew, we shall lunch, and then go up to the Pavilion.”

My uncle was much disturbed by the strange loss of his valet, the more so as it was his custom to go through a whole series of washings and changings after even the shortest journey. For my own part, mindful of my mother’s advice, I carefully brushed the dust from my clothes and made myself as neat as possible. My heart was down in the soles of my little silver-buckled shoes now that I had the immediate prospect of meeting so great and terrible a person as the Prince of Wales. I had seen his flaring yellow barouche flying through Friar’s Oak many a time, and had halloaed and waved my hat with the others as it passed, but never in my wildest dreams had it entered my head that I should ever be called upon to look him in the face and answer his questions. My mother had taught me to regard him with reverence, as one of those whom God had placed to rule over us; but my uncle smiled when I told him of her teaching.

“You are old enough to see things as they are, nephew,” said he, “and your knowledge of them is the badge that you are in that inner circle where I mean to place you. There is no one who knows the Prince better than I do, and there is no one who trusts him less. A stranger contradiction of qualities was never gathered under one hat. He is a man who is always in a hurry, and yet has never anything to do. He fusses about things with which he has no concern, and he neglects every obvious duty. He is generous to those who have no claim upon him, but he has ruined his tradesmen by refusing to pay his just debts. He is affectionate to casual acquaintances, but he dislikes his father, loathes his mother, and is not on speaking terms with his wife. He claims to be the first gentleman of England, but the gentlemen of England have responded by blackballing his friends at their clubs, and by warning him off from Newmarket under suspicion of having tampered with a horse. He spends his days in uttering noble sentiments, and contradicting them by ignoble actions. He tells stories of his own doings which are so grotesque that they can only be explained by the madness which runs in his blood. And yet, with all this, he can be courteous, dignified, and kindly upon occasion, and I have seen an impulsive good-heartedness in the man which has made me overlook faults which come mainly from his being placed in a position which no one upon this earth was ever less fitted to fill. But this is between ourselves, nephew; and now you will come with me and you will form an opinion for yourself."

It was but a short walk, and yet it took us some time, for my uncle stalked along with great dignity, his lace-bordered handkerchief in one hand, and his cane with the clouded amber head dangling from the other. Every one that we met seemed to know him, and their hats flew from their heads as we passed. He took little notice of these greetings, save to give a nod to one, or to slightly raise his forefinger to another. It chanced, however, that as we turned into the Pavilion Grounds, we met a magnificent team of four coal-black horses, driven by a rough-looking, middle-aged fellow in an old weather-stained cape. There was nothing that I could see to distinguish him from any professional driver, save that he was chatting very freely with a dainty little woman who was perched on the box beside him.

"Halloa, Charlie! Good drive down?" he cried.

My uncle bowed and smiled to the lady.

"Broke it at Friar's Oak," said he. "I've my light curricle and two new mares - half thorough-bred, half Cleveland bay."

"What d'you think of my team of blacks?" asked the other.

"Yes, Sir Charles, what d'you think of them? Ain't they damnation smart?" cried the little woman.

"Plenty of power. Good horses for the Sussex clay. Too thick about the fetlocks for me. I like to travel."

"Travel!" cried the woman, with extraordinary vehemence. "Why, what the - " and she broke into such language as I had never heard from a man's lips before. "We'd start with our swingle-bars touching, and we'd have your dinner ordered, cooked, laid, and eaten before you were there to claim it."

"By George, yes, Letty is right!" cried the man. "D'you start to-morrow?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Well, I'll make you an offer. Look ye here, Charlie! I'll spring my cattle from the Castle Square at quarter before nine. You can follow as the clock strikes. I've double the horses and double the weight. If you so much as see me before we cross Westminster Bridge, I'll pay you a cool hundred. If not, it's my money - play or pay. Is it a match?"

"Very good," said my uncle, and, raising his hat, he led the way into the grounds. As I followed, I saw the woman take the reins, while the man looked after us, and squirted a jet of tobacco-juice from between his teeth in coachman fashion.

"That's Sir John Lade," said my uncle, "one of the richest men and best whips in England. There isn't a professional on the road that can handle either his tongue or his ribbons better; but his wife, Lady Letty, is his match with the one or the other."

"It was dreadful to hear her," said I.

"Oh, it's her eccentricity. We all have them; and she amuses the Prince. Now, nephew, keep close at my elbow, and have your eyes open and your mouth shut."

Two lines of magnificent red and gold footmen who guarded the door bowed deeply as my uncle and I passed between them, he with his head in the air and a manner as if he entered into his own, whilst I tried to look assured, though my heart was beating thin and fast. Within there was a high and large hall, ornamented with Eastern decorations, which harmonized with the domes and minarets of the exterior. A number of people were moving quietly about, forming into groups and whispering to each other. One of these, a short, burly, red-faced man, full of fuss and self-importance, came hurrying up to my uncle.

“I have de goot news, Sir Charles,” said he, sinking his voice as one who speaks of weighty measures. “*Es ist vollendet* - dat is, I have it at last thoroughly done.”

“Well, serve it hot,” said my uncle, coldly, “and see that the sauces are a little better than when last I dined at Carlton House.”

“Ah, mine Gott, you tink I talk of de cuisine. It is de affair of de Prince dat I speak of. Dat is one little *vol-au-vent* dat is worth one hundred tousand pound. Ten per cent., and double to be repaid when de Royal pappa die. *Alles ist fertig.* Goldshmidt of de Hague have took it up, and de Dutch public has subscribe de money.”

“God help the Dutch public!” muttered my uncle, as the fat little man bustled off with his news to some new-comer. “That’s the Prince’s famous cook, nephew. He has not his equal in England for a *filet sauté aux champignons*. He manages his master’s money affairs.”

“The cook!” I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

“You look surprised, nephew.”

“I should have thought that some respectable banking firm - “

My uncle inclined his lips to my ear.

“No respectable house would touch them,” he whispered. “Ah, Mellish, is the Prince within?”

“In the private saloon, Sir Charles,” said the gentleman addressed.

“Any one with him?”

“Sheridan and Francis. He said he expected you.”

“Then we shall go through.”

I followed him through the strangest succession of rooms, full of curious barbaric splendour which impressed me as being very rich and wonderful, though perhaps I should think differently now. Gold and scarlet in arabesque designs gleamed upon the walls, with gilt dragons and monsters writhing along cornices and out of corners. Look where I would, on panel or ceiling, a score of mirrors flashed back the picture of the tall, proud, white-faced man, and the youth who walked so demurely at his elbow. Finally, a footman opened a door, and we found ourselves in the Prince’s own private apartment.

Two gentlemen were lounging in a very easy fashion upon luxurious fauteuils at the further end of the room and a third stood between them, his thick, well-formed legs somewhat apart and his hands clasped behind him. The sun was shining in upon them through a side-window, and I can see the three faces now - one in the dusk, one in the light, and one cut across by the shadow. Of those at the sides, I recall the reddish nose and dark, flashing eyes of the one, and the hard, austere face of the other, with the high coat-collars and many-wreathed cravats. These I took in at a glance, but it was upon the man in the centre that my gaze was fixed, for this I knew must be the Prince of Wales.

George was then in his forty-first year, and with the help of his tailor and his hairdresser, he might have passed as somewhat less. The sight of him put me at my ease, for he was a merry-looking man, handsome too in a portly, full-blooded way, with laughing eyes and pouting, sensitive lips. His nose was turned upwards, which increased the good-humoured effect of his countenance at the expense of its dignity. His cheeks were pale and sodden, like those of a man who lived too well and took too little exercise. He was dressed in a single-breasted black coat buttoned up, a pair of leather pantaloons stretched tightly across his broad thighs, polished Hessian boots, and a huge white neckcloth.

“Halloa, Tregellis!” he cried, in the cheeriest fashion, as my uncle crossed the threshold, and then suddenly the smile faded from his face, and his eyes gleamed with resentment. “What the deuce is this?” he shouted, angrily.

A thrill of fear passed through me as I thought that it was my appearance which had produced this outburst. But his eyes were gazing past us, and glancing round we saw that a man in a brown coat and scratch wig had followed so closely at our heels, that the footmen had let him pass under the impression that he was of our party. His face was very red, and the folded blue paper which he carried in his hand shook and crackled in his excitement.

“Why, it’s Vuillamy, the furniture man,” cried the Prince. “What, am I to be dunned in my own private room? Where’s Mellish? Where’s Townshend? What the deuce is Tom Tring doing?”

“I wouldn’t have intruded, your Royal Highness, but I must have the money - or even a thousand on account would do.”

“Must have it, must you, Vuillamy? That’s a fine word to use. I pay my debts in my own time, and I’m not to be bullied. Turn him out, footman! Take him away!”

“If I don’t get it by Monday, I shall be in your papa’s Bench,” wailed the little man, and as the footman led him out we could hear him, amidst shouts of laughter, still protesting that he would wind up in “papa’s Bench.”

“That’s the very place for a furniture man,” said the man with the red nose.

“It should be the longest bench in the world, Sherry,” answered the Prince, “for a good many of his subjects will want seats on it. Very glad to see you back, Tregellis, but you must really be more careful what you bring in upon your skirts. It was only yesterday that we had an infernal Dutchman here howling about some arrears of interest and the deuce knows what. ‘My good fellow,’ said I, ‘as long as the Commons starve me, I have to starve you,’ and so the matter ended.”

“I think, sir, that the Commons would respond now if the matter were fairly put before them by Charlie Fox or myself,” said Sheridan.

The Prince burst out against the Commons with an energy of hatred that one would scarce expect from that chubby, good-humoured face.

“Why, curse them!” he cried. “After all their preaching and throwing my father’s model life, as they called it, in my teeth, they had to pay *his* debts to the tune of nearly a million, whilst I can’t get a hundred thousand out of them. And look at all they’ve done for my brothers! York is Commander-in-Chief. Clarence is Admiral. What am I? Colonel of a damned dragoon regiment under the orders of my own younger brother. It’s my mother that’s at the bottom of it all. She always tried to hold me back. But what’s this you’ve brought, Tregellis, eh?”

My uncle put his hand on my sleeve and led me forward.

“This is my sister’s son, sir; Rodney Stone by name,” said he. “He is coming with me to London, and I thought it right to begin by presenting him to your Royal Highness.”

“Quite right! Quite right!” said the Prince, with a good-natured smile, patting me in a friendly way upon the shoulder. “Is your mother living?”

“Yes, sir,” said I.

“If you are a good son to her you will never go wrong. And, mark my words, Mr. Rodney Stone, you should honour the King, love your country, and uphold the glorious British Constitution.”

When I thought of the energy with which he had just been cursing the House of Commons, I could scarce keep from smiling, and I saw Sheridan put his hand up to his lips.

“You have only to do this, to show a regard for your word, and to keep out of debt in order to insure a happy and respected life. What is your father, Mr. Stone? Royal Navy! Well, it is a glorious service. I have had a touch of it myself. Did I ever tell you how we laid aboard the French sloop of war *Minerve* - hey, Tregellis?"

"No, sir," said my uncle. Sheridan and Francis exchanged glances behind the Prince's back.

"She was flying her tricolour out there within sight of my pavilion windows. Never saw such monstrous impudence in my life! It would take a man of less mettle than me to stand it. Out I went in my little cock-boat - you know my sixty-ton yawl, Charlie? - with two four-pounders on each side, and a six-pounder in the bows."

"Well, sir! Well, sir! And what then, sir?" cried Francis, who appeared to be an irascible, rough-tongued man.

"You will permit me to tell the story in my own way, Sir Philip," said the Prince, with dignity. "I was about to say that our metal was so light that I give you my word, gentlemen, that I carried my port broadside in one coat pocket, and my starboard in the other. Up we came to the big Frenchman, took her fire, and scraped the paint off her before we let drive. But it was no use. By George, gentlemen, our balls just stuck in her timbers like stones in a mud wall. She had her nettings up, but we scrambled aboard, and at it we went hammer and anvil. It was a sharp twenty minutes, but we beat her people down below, made the hatches fast on them, and towed her into Seaham. Surely you were with us, Sherry?"

"I was in London at the time," said Sheridan, gravely.

"You can vouch for it, Francis!"

"I can vouch to having heard your Highness tell the story."

"It was a rough little bit of cutlass and pistol work. But, for my own part, I like the rapier. It's a gentleman's weapon. You heard of my bout with the Chevalier d'Eon? I had him at my sword-point for forty minutes at Angelo's. He was one of the best blades in Europe, but I was a little too supple in the wrist for him. 'I thank God there was a button on your Highness's foil,' said he, when we had finished our breather. By the way, you're a bit of a duellist yourself, Tregellis. How often have you been out?"

"I used to go when I needed exercise," said my uncle, carelessly. "But I have taken to tennis now instead. A painful incident happened the last time that I was out, and it sickened me of it."

"You killed your man -?"

“No, no, sir, it was worse than that. I had a coat that Weston has never equalled. To say that it fitted me is not to express it. It *was* me - like the hide on a horse. I’ve had sixty from him since, but he could never approach it. The sit of the collar brought tears into my eyes, sir, when first I saw it; and as to the waist - “

“But the duel, Tregellis!” cried the Prince.

“Well, sir, I wore it at the duel, like the thoughtless fool that I was. It was Major Hunter, of the Guards, with whom I had had a little *tracasserie,* because I hinted that he should not come into Brookes’s smelling of the stables. I fired first, and missed. He fired, and I shrieked in despair. ‘He’s hit! A surgeon! A surgeon!’ they cried. ‘A tailor! A tailor!’ said I, for there was a double hole through the tails of my masterpiece. No, it was past all repair. You may laugh, sir, but I’ll never see the like of it again.”

I had seated myself on a settee in the corner, upon the Prince’s invitation, and very glad I was to remain quiet and unnoticed, listening to the talk of these men. It was all in the same extravagant vein, garnished with many senseless oaths; but I observed this difference, that, whereas my uncle and Sheridan had something of humour in their exaggeration, Francis tended always to ill-nature, and the Prince to self-glorification. Finally, the conversation turned to music - I am not sure that my uncle did not artfully bring it there, and the Prince, hearing from him of my tastes, would have it that I should then and there sit down at the wonderful little piano, all inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which stood in the corner, and play him the accompaniment to his song. It was called, as I remember, “The Briton Conquers but to Save,” and he rolled it out in a very fair bass voice, the others joining in the chorus, and clapping vigorously when he finished.

“Bravo, Mr. Stone!” said he. “You have an excellent touch; and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music. Cramer, of the Opera, said only the other day that he had rather hand his bâton to me than to any amateur in England. Halloa, it’s Charlie Fox, by all that’s wonderful!”

He had run forward with much warmth, and was shaking the hand of a singular-looking person who had just entered the room. The new-comer was a stout, square-built man, plainly and almost carelessly dressed, with an uncouth manner and a rolling gait. His age might have been something over fifty, and his swarthy, harshly-featured face was already deeply lined either by his years or by his excesses. I have never seen a countenance in which the angel and the devil were more obviously wedded. Above, was the high, broad forehead of the philosopher, with keen, humorous eyes looking out from under thick, strong brows. Below, was the heavy jowl of the sensualist curving in a broad crease over his cravat. That brow was the brow of the public Charles Fox, the thinker, the philanthropist, the man who rallied and led the Liberal party during the twenty most hazardous years of its existence. That jaw was the jaw of the private Charles Fox, the gambler, the libertine, the drunkard. Yet to his sins he never added the crowning one of hypocrisy. His vices were as open as his virtues. In some quaint freak of Nature, two spirits seemed to have been joined in one body, and the same frame to contain the best and the worst man of his age.

"I've run down from Chertsey, sir, just to shake you by the hand, and to make sure that the Tories have not carried you off."

"Hang it, Charlie, you know that I sink or swim with my friends! A Whig I started, and a Whig I shall remain."

I thought that I could read upon Fox's dark face that he was by no means so confident about the Prince's principles.

"Pitt has been at you, sir, I understand?"

"Yes, confound him! I hate the sight of that sharp-pointed snout of his, which he wants to be ever poking into my affairs. He and Addington have been boggling about the debts again. Why, look ye, Charlie, if Pitt held me in contempt he could not behave different."

I gathered from the smile which flitted over Sheridan's expressive face that this was exactly what Pitt did do. But straightway they all plunged into politics, varied by the drinking of sweet maraschino, which a footman brought round upon a salver. The King, the Queen, the Lords, and the Commons were each in succession cursed by the Prince, in spite of the excellent advice which he had given me about the British Constitution.

"Why, they allow me so little that I can't look after my own people. There are a dozen annuities to old servants and the like, and it's all I can do to scrape the money together to pay them. However, my" - he pulled himself up and coughed in a consequential way - "my financial agent has arranged for a loan, repayable upon the King's death. This liqueur isn't good for either of us, Charlie. We're both getting monstrous stout."

"I can't get any exercise for the gout," said Fox.

"I am blooded fifty ounces a month, but the more I take the more I make. You wouldn't think, to look at us, Tregellis, that we could do what we have done. We've had some days and nights together, Charlie!"

Fox smiled and shook his head.

“You remember how we posted to Newmarket before the races. We took a public coach, Tregellis, clapped the postillions into the rumble, and jumped on to their places. Charlie rode the leader and I the wheeler. One fellow wouldn’t let us through his turnpike, and Charlie hopped off and had his coat off in a minute. The fellow thought he had to do with a fighting man, and soon cleared the way for us.”

“By the way, sir, speaking of fighting men, I give a supper to the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses on Friday next,” said my uncle. “If you should chance to be in town, they would think it a great honour if you should condescend to look in upon us.”

“I’ve not seen a fight since I saw Tom Tyne, the tailor, kill Earl fourteen years ago. I swore off then, and you know me as a man of my word, Tregellis. Of course, I’ve been at the ringside *incog.* many a time, but never as the Prince of Wales.”

“We should be vastly honoured if you would come *incog.* to our supper, sir.”

“Well, well, Sherry, make a note of it. We’ll be at Carlton House on Friday. The Prince can’t come, you know, Tregellis, but you might reserve a chair for the Earl of Chester.”

“Sir, we shall be proud to see the Earl of Chester there,” said my uncle.

“By the way, Tregellis,” said Fox, “there’s some rumour about your having a sporting bet with Sir Lothian Hume. What’s the truth of it?”

“Only a small matter of a couple of thous to a thou, he giving the odds. He has a fancy to this new Gloucester man, Crab Wilson, and I’m to find a man to beat him. Anything under twenty or over thirty-five, at or about thirteen stone.”

“You take Charlie Fox’s advice, then,” cried the Prince. “When it comes to handicapping a horse, playing a hand, matching a cock, or picking a man, he has the best judgment in England. Now, Charlie, whom have we upon the list who can beat Crab Wilson, of Gloucester?”

I was amazed at the interest and knowledge which all these great people showed about the ring, for they not only had the deeds of the principal men of the time - Belcher, Mendoza, Jackson, or Dutch Sam - at their fingers’ ends, but there was no fighting man so obscure that they did not know the details of his deeds and prospects. The old ones and then the young were discussed - their weight, their gameness, their hitting power, and their constitution. Who, as he saw Sheridan and Fox eagerly arguing as to whether Caleb Baldwin, the Westminster costermonger, could hold his own with Isaac Bittoon, the Jew, would have guessed that the one was the deepest political philosopher in Europe, and that the other would be remembered as the author of the wittiest comedy and of the finest speech of his generation?

The name of Champion Harrison came very early into the discussion, and Fox, who had a high idea of Crab Wilson's powers, was of opinion that my uncle's only chance lay in the veteran taking the field again. "He may be slow on his pins, but he fights with his head, and he hits like the kick of a horse. When he finished Black Baruk the man flew across the outer ring as well as the inner, and fell among the spectators. If he isn't absolutely stale, Tregellis, he is your best chance."

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"If poor Avon were here we might do something with him, for he was Harrison's first patron, and the man was devoted to him. But his wife is too strong for me. And now, sir, I must leave you, for I have had the misfortune to-day to lose the best valet in England, and I must make inquiry for him. I thank your Royal Highness for your kindness in receiving my nephew in so gracious a fashion."

"Till Friday, then," said the Prince, holding out his hand. "I have to go up to town in any case, for there is a poor devil of an East India Company's officer who has written to me in his distress. If I can raise a few hundreds, I shall see him and set things right for him. Now, Mr. Stone, you have your life before you, and I hope it will be one which your uncle may be proud of. You will honour the King, and show respect for the Constitution, Mr. Stone. And, hark ye, you will avoid debt, and bear in mind that your honour is a sacred thing."

So I carried away a last impression of his sensual, good-humoured face, his high cravat, and his broad leather thighs. Again we passed the strange rooms, the gilded monsters, and the gorgeous footmen, and it was with relief that I found myself out in the open air once more, with the broad blue sea in front of us, and the fresh evening breeze upon our faces.

CHAPTER VIII - THE BRIGHTON ROAD

My uncle and I were up betimes next morning, but he was much out of temper, for no news had been heard of his valet Ambrose. He had indeed become like one of those ants of which I have read, who are so accustomed to be fed by smaller ants that when they are left to themselves they die of hunger. It was only by the aid of a man whom the landlord procured, and of Fox's valet, who had been sent expressly across, that his toilet was at last performed.

"I must win this race, nephew," said he, when he had finished breakfast; "I can't afford to be beat. Look out of the window and see if the Lades are there."

"I see a red four-in-hand in the square, and there is a crowd round it. Yes, I see the lady upon the box seat."

"Is our tandem out?"

"It is at the door."

"Come, then, and you shall have such a drive as you never had before."

He stood at the door pulling on his long brown driving-gauntlets and giving his orders to the ostlers.

"Every ounce will tell," said he. "We'll leave that dinner-basket behind. And you can keep my dog for me, Coppinger. You know him and understand him. Let him have his warm milk and curaçoa the same as usual. Whoa, my darlings, you'll have your fill of it before you reach Westminster Bridge."

"Shall I put in the toilet-case?" asked the landlord. I saw the struggle upon my uncle's face, but he was true to his principles.

"Put it under the seat - the front seat," said he. "Nephew, you must keep your weight as far forward as possible. Can you do anything on a yard of tin? Well, if you can't, we'll leave the trumpet. Buckle that girth up, Thomas. Have you greased the hubs, as I told you? Well, jump up, nephew, and we'll see them off."

Quite a crowd had gathered in the Old Square: men and women, dark-coated tradesmen, bucks from the Prince's Court, and officers from Hove, all in a buzz of excitement; for Sir John Lade and my uncle were two of the most famous whips of the time, and a match between them was a thing to talk of for many a long day.

“The Prince will be sorry to have missed the start,” said my uncle. “He doesn’t show before midday. Ah, Jack, good morning! Your servant, madam! It’s a fine day for a little bit of waggoning.”

As our tandem came alongside of the four-in-hand, with the two bonny bay mares gleaming like shot-silk in the sunshine, a murmur of admiration rose from the crowd. My uncle, in his fawn-coloured driving-coat, with all his harness of the same tint, looked the ideal of a Corinthian whip; while Sir John Lade, with his many-caped coat, his white hat, and his rough, weather-beaten face, might have taken his seat with a line of professionals upon any ale-house bench without any one being able to pick him out as one of the wealthiest landowners in England. It was an age of eccentricity, but he had carried his peculiarities to a length which surprised even the out-and-outers by marrying the sweetheart of a famous highwayman when the gallows had come between her and her lover. She was perched by his side, looking very smart in a flowered bonnet and grey travelling-dress, while in front of them the four splendid coal-black horses, with a flickering touch of gold upon their powerful, well-curved quarters, were pawing the dust in their eagerness to be off.

“It’s a hundred that you don’t see us before Westminster with a quarter of an hour’s start,” said Sir John.

“I’ll take you another hundred that we pass you,” answered my uncle.

“Very good. Time’s up. Good-bye!” He gave a *tchk* of the tongue, shook his reins, saluted with his whip; in true coachman’s style, and away he went, taking the curve out of the square in a workmanlike fashion that fetched a cheer from the crowd. We heard the dwindling roar of the wheels upon the cobblestones until they died away in the distance.

It seemed one of the longest quarters of an hour that I had ever known before the first stroke of nine boomed from the parish clock. For my part, I was fidgeting in my seat in my impatience, but my uncle’s calm, pale face and large blue eyes were as tranquil and demure as those of the most unconcerned spectator. He was keenly on the alert, however, and it seemed to me that the stroke of the clock and the thong of his whip fell together - not in a blow, but in a sharp snap over the leader, which sent us flying with a jingle and a rattle upon our fifty miles’ journey. I heard a roar from behind us, saw the gliding lines of windows with staring faces and waving handkerchiefs, and then we were off the stones and on to the good white road which curved away in front of us, with the sweep of the green downs upon either side.

I had been provided with shillings that the turnpike-gate might not stop us, but my uncle reined in the mares and took them at a very easy trot up all the heavy stretch which ends in Clayton Hill. He let them go then, and we flashed through Friar's Oak and across St. John's Common without more than catching a glimpse of the yellow cottage which contained all that I loved best. Never have I travelled at such a pace, and never have I felt such a sense of exhilaration from the rush of keen upland air upon our faces, and from the sight of those two glorious creatures stretched to their utmost, with the roar of their hoofs and the rattle of our wheels as the light curricle bounded and swayed behind them.

"It's a long four miles uphill from here to Hand Cross," said my uncle, as we flew through Cuckfield. "I must ease them a bit, for I cannot afford to break the hearts of my cattle. They have the right blood in them, and they would gallop until they dropped if I were brute enough to let them. Stand up on the seat, nephew, and see if you can get a glimpse of them."

I stood up, steadying myself upon my uncle's shoulder, but though I could see for a mile, or perhaps a quarter more, there was not a sign of the four-in-hand.

"If he has sprung his cattle up all these hills they'll be spent ere they see Croydon," said he.

"They have four to two," said I.

"*J'en suis bien sûr*. Sir John's black strain makes a good, honest creature, but not fliers like these. There lies Cuckfield Place, where the towers are, yonder. Get your weight right forward on the splashboard now that we are going uphill, nephew. Look at the action of that leader: did ever you see anything more easy and more beautiful?"

We were taking the hill at a quiet trot, but even so, we made the carrier, walking in the shadow of his huge, broad-wheeled, canvas-covered waggon, stare at us in amazement. Close to Hand Cross we passed the Royal Brighton stage, which had left at half-past seven, dragging heavily up the slope, and its passengers, toiling along through the dust behind, gave us a cheer as we whirled by. At Hand Cross we caught a glimpse of the old landlord, hurrying out with his gin and his gingerbread; but the dip of the ground was downwards now, and away we flew as fast as eight gallant hoofs could take us.

"Do you drive, nephew?"

"Very little, sir."

"There is no driving on the Brighton Road."

"How is that, sir?"

"Too good a road, nephew. I have only to give them their heads, and they will race me into Westminster. It wasn't always so. When I was a very young man one might learn to handle his twenty yards of tape here as well as elsewhere. There's not much really good waggoning now south of Leicestershire. Show me a man who can hit 'em and hold 'em on a Yorkshire dale-side, and that's the man who comes from the right school."

We had raced over Crawley Down and into the broad main street of Crawley village, flying between two country waggons in a way which showed me that even now a driver might do something on the road. With every turn I peered ahead, looking for our opponents, but my uncle seemed to concern himself very little about them, and occupied himself in giving me advice, mixed up with so many phrases of the craft, that it was all that I could do to follow him.

"Keep a finger for each, or you will have your reins clubbed," said he. "As to the whip, the less fanning the better if you have willing cattle; but when you want to put a little life into a coach, see that you get your thong on to the one that needs it, and don't let it fly round after you've hit. I've seen a driver warm up the off-side passenger on the roof behind him every time he tried to cut his off-side wheeler. I believe that is their dust over yonder."

A long stretch of road lay before us, barred with the shadows of wayside trees. Through the green fields a lazy blue river was drawing itself slowly along, passing under a bridge in front of us. Beyond was a young fir plantation, and over its olive line there rose a white whirl which drifted swiftly, like a cloud-scud on a breezy day.

"Yes, yes, it's they!" cried my uncle. "No one else would travel as fast. Come, nephew, we're half-way when we cross the mole at Kimberham Bridge, and we've done it in two hours and fourteen minutes. The Prince drove to Carlton House with a three tandem in four hours and a half. The first half is the worst half, and we might cut his time if all goes well. We should make up between this and Reigate."

And we flew. The bay mares seemed to know what that white puff in front of us signified, and they stretched themselves like greyhounds. We passed a phaeton and pair London-bound, and we left it behind as if it had been standing still. Trees, gates, cottages went dancing by. We heard the folks shouting from the fields, under the impression that we were a runaway. Faster and faster yet they raced, the hoofs rattling like castanets, the yellow manes flying, the wheels buzzing, and every joint and rivet creaking and groaning, while the curricle swung and swayed until I found myself clutching to the side-rail. My uncle eased them and glanced at his watch as we saw the grey tiles and dingy red houses of Reigate in the hollow beneath us.

"We did the last six well under twenty minutes," said he. "We've time in hand now, and a little water at the Red Lion will do them no harm. Red four-in-hand passed, ostler?"

"Just gone, sir."

"Going hard?"

"Galloping full split, sir! Took the wheel off a butcher's cart at the corner of the High Street, and was out o' sight before the butcher's boy could see what had hurt him."

Z-z-z-z-ack! went the long thong, and away we flew once more. It was market day at Redhill, and the road was crowded with carts of produce, droves of bullocks, and farmers' gigs. It was a sight to see how my uncle threaded his way amongst them all. Through the market-place we dashed amidst the shouting of men, the screaming of women, and the scuttling of poultry, and then we were out in the country again, with the long, steep incline of the Redhill Road before us. My uncle waved his whip in the air with a shrill view-halloa.

There was the dust-cloud rolling up the hill in front of us, and through it we had a shadowy peep of the backs of our opponents, with a flash of brass-work and a gleam of scarlet.

"There's half the game won, nephew. Now we must pass them. Hark forrard, my beauties! By George, if Kitty isn't foundered!"

The leader had suddenly gone dead lame. In an instant we were both out of the curricle and on our knees beside her. It was but a stone, wedged between frog and shoe in the off fore-foot, but it was a minute or two before we could wrench it out. When we had regained our places the Lades were round the curve of the hill and out of sight.

“Bad luck!” growled my uncle. “But they can’t get away from us!” For the first time he touched the mares up, for he had but cracked the whip over their heads before. “If we catch them in the next few miles we can spare them for the rest of the way.”

They were beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Their breath came quick and hoarse, and their beautiful coats were matted with moisture. At the top of the hill, however, they settled down into their swing once more.

“Where on earth have they got to?” cried my uncle. “Can you make them out on the road, nephew?”

We could see a long white ribbon of it, all dotted with carts and waggons coming from Croydon to Redhill, but there was no sign of the big red four-in-hand.

“There they are! Stole away! Stole away!” he cried, wheeling the mares round into a side road which struck to the right out of that which we had travelled. “There they are, nephew! On the brow of the hill!”

Sure enough, on the rise of a curve upon our right the four-in-hand had appeared, the horses stretched to the utmost. Our mares laid themselves out gallantly, and the distance between us began slowly to decrease. I found that I could see the black band upon Sir John’s white hat, then that I could count the folds of his cape; finally, that I could see the pretty features of his wife as she looked back at us.

“We’re on the side road to Godstone and Warlingham,” said my uncle. “I suppose he thought that he could make better time by getting out of the way of the market carts. But we’ve got the deuce of a hill to come down. You’ll see some fun, nephew, or I am mistaken.”

As he spoke I suddenly saw the wheels of the four-in-hand disappear, then the body of it, and then the two figures upon the box, as suddenly and abruptly as if it had bumped down the first three steps of some gigantic stairs. An instant later we had reached the same spot, and there was the road beneath us, steep and narrow, winding in long curves into the valley. The four-in-hand was swishing down it as hard as the horses could gallop.

“Thought so!” cried my uncle. “If he doesn’t brake, why should I? Now, my darlings, one good spurt, and we’ll show them the colour of our tailboard.”

We shot over the brow and flew madly down the hill with the great red coach roaring and thundering before us. Already we were in her dust, so that we could see nothing but the dim scarlet blur in the heart of it, rocking and rolling, with its outline hardening at every stride. We could hear the crack of the whip in front of us, and the shrill voice of Lady Lade as she screamed to the horses. My uncle was very quiet, but when I glanced up at him I saw that his lips were set and his eyes shining, with just a little flush upon each pale cheek. There was no need to urge on the mares, for they were already flying at a pace which could neither be stopped nor controlled. Our leader's head came abreast of the off hind wheel, then of the off front one - then for a hundred yards we did not gain an inch, and then with a spurt the bay leader was neck to neck with the black wheeler, and our fore wheel within an inch of their hind one.

"Dusty work!" said my uncle, quietly.

"Fan 'em, Jack! Fan 'em!" shrieked the lady.

He sprang up and lashed at his horses.

"Look out, Tregellis!" he shouted. "There's a damnation spill coming for somebody."

We had got fairly abreast of them now, the rumps of the horses exactly a-line and the fore wheels whizzing together. There was not six inches to spare in the breadth of the road, and every instant I expected to feel the jar of a locking wheel. But now, as we came out from the dust, we could see what was ahead, and my uncle whistled between his teeth at the sight.

Two hundred yards or so in front of us there was a bridge, with wooden posts and rails upon either side. The road narrowed down at the point, so that it was obvious that the two carriages abreast could not possibly get over. One must give way to the other. Already our wheels were abreast of their wheelers.

"I lead!" shouted my uncle. "You must pull them, Lade!"

"Not I!" he roared.

"No, by George!" shrieked her ladyship. "Fan 'em, Jack; keep on fanning 'em!"

It seemed to me that we were all going to eternity together. But my uncle did the only thing that could have saved us. By a desperate effort we might just clear the coach before reaching the mouth of the bridge. He sprang up, and lashed right and left at the mares, who, maddened by the unaccustomed pain, hurled themselves on in a frenzy. Down we thundered together, all shouting, I believe, at the top of our voices in the madness of the moment; but still we were drawing steadily away, and we were almost clear of the leaders when we flew on to the bridge. I glanced back at the coach, and I saw Lady Lade, with her savage little white teeth clenched together, throw herself forward and tug with both hands at the off-side reins.

"Jam them, Jack!" she cried. "Jam the - before they can pass."

Had she done it an instant sooner we should have crashed against the wood-work, carried it away, and been hurled into the deep gully below. As it was, it was not the powerful haunch of the black leader which caught our wheel, but the forequarter, which had not weight enough to turn us from our course. I saw a red wet seam gape suddenly through the black hair, and next instant we were flying alone down the road, whilst the four-in-hand had halted, and Sir John and his lady were down in the road together tending to the wounded horse.

"Easy now, my beauties!" cried my uncle, settling down into his seat again, and looking back over his shoulder. "I could not have believed that Sir John Lade would have been guilty of such a trick as pulling that leader across. I do not permit a *mauvaise plaisanterie* of that sort. He shall hear from me to-night."

"It was the lady," said I.

My uncle's brow cleared, and he began to laugh.

"It was little Letty, was it?" said he. "I might have known it. There's a touch of the late lamented Sixteen-string Jack about the trick. Well, it is only messages of another kind that I send to a lady, so we'll just drive on our way, nephew, and thank our stars that we bring whole bones over the Thames."

We stopped at the Greyhound, at Croydon, where the two good little mares were sponged and petted and fed, after which, at an easier pace, we made our way through Norbury and Streatham. At last the fields grew fewer and the walls longer. The outlying villas closed up thicker and thicker, until their shoulders met, and we were driving between a double line of houses with garish shops at the corners, and such a stream of traffic as I had never seen, roaring down the centre. Then suddenly we were on a broad bridge with a dark coffee-brown river flowing sulkily beneath it, and bluff-bowed barges drifting down upon its bosom. To right and left stretched a broken, irregular line of many-coloured houses winding along either bank as far as I could see.

"That's the House of Parliament, nephew," said my uncle, pointing with his whip, "and the black towers are Westminster Abbey. How do, your Grace? How do? That's the Duke of Norfolk - the stout man in blue upon the swish-tailed mare. Now we are in Whitehall. There’s the Treasury on the left, and the Horse Guards, and the Admiralty, where the stone dolphins are carved above the gate.”

I had the idea, which a country-bred lad brings up with him, that London was merely a wilderness of houses, but I was astonished now to see the green slopes and the lovely spring trees showing between.

“Yes, those are the Privy Gardens,” said my uncle, “and there is the window out of which Charles took his last step on to the scaffold. You wouldn’t think the mares had come fifty miles, would you? See how *les petites cheries* step out for the credit of their master. Look at the barouche, with the sharp-featured man peeping out of the window. That’s Pitt, going down to the House. We are coming into Pall Mall now, and this great building on the left is Carlton House, the Prince’s Palace. There’s St. James’s, the big, dingy place with the clock, and the two red-coated sentries before it. And here’s the famous street of the same name, nephew, which is the very centre of the world, and here’s Jermyn Street opening out of it, and finally, here’s my own little box, and we are well under the five hours from Brighton Old Square.”

CHAPTER IX - WATIER'S

My uncle's house in Jermyn Street was quite a small one - five rooms and an attic. "A man-cook and a cottage," he said, "are all that a wise man requires." On the other hand, it was furnished with the neatness and taste which belonged to his character, so that his most luxurious friends found something in the tiny rooms which made them discontented with their own sumptuous mansions. Even the attic, which had been converted into my bedroom, was the most perfect little bijou attic that could possibly be imagined. Beautiful and valuable knick-knacks filled every corner of every apartment, and the house had become a perfect miniature museum which would have delighted a virtuoso. My uncle explained the presence of all these pretty things with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hands. "They are *des petites cadeaux*," said he, "but it would be an indiscretion for me to say more."

We found a note from Ambrose waiting for us which increased rather than explained the mystery of his disappearance.

"My dear Sir Charles Tregellis," it ran, "it will ever be a subject of regret to me that the force of circumstances should have compelled me to leave your service in so abrupt a fashion, but something occurred during our journey from Friar's Oak to Brighton which left me without any possible alternative. I trust, however, that my absence may prove to be but a temporary one. The isinglass recipe for the shirt-fronts is in the strong-box at Drummond's Bank. - Yours obediently, AMBROSE."

"Well, I suppose I must fill his place as best I can," said my uncle, moodily. "But how on earth could something have occurred to make him leave me at a time when we were going full-trot down hill in my curricle? I shall never find his match again either for chocolate or cravats. *Je suis desolé*! But now, nephew, we must send to Weston and have you fitted up. It is not for a gentleman to go to a shop, but for the shop to come to the gentleman. Until you have your clothes you must remain *en retraite*."

The measuring was a most solemn and serious function, though it was nothing to the trying-on two days later, when my uncle stood by in an agony of apprehension as each garment was adjusted, he and Weston arguing over every seam and lapel and skirt until I was dizzy with turning round in front of them. Then, just as I had hoped that all was settled, in came young Mr. Brummell, who promised to be an even greater exquisite than my uncle, and the whole matter had to be thrashed out between them. He was a good-sized man, this Brummell, with a long, fair face, light brown hair, and slight sandy side-whiskers. His manner was languid, his voice drawling, and while he eclipsed my uncle in the extravagance of his speech, he had not the air of manliness and decision which underlay all my kinsman's affectations.

"Why, George," cried my uncle, "I thought you were with your regiment."

"I've sent in my papers," drawled the other.

"I thought it would come to that."

"Yes. The Tenth was ordered to Manchester, and they could hardly expect me to go to a place like that. Besides, I found the major monstrous rude."

"How was that?"

"He expected me to know about his absurd drill, Tregellis, and I had other things to think of, as you may suppose. I had no difficulty in taking my right place on parade, for there was a trooper with a red nose on a flea-bitten grey, and I had observed that my post was always immediately in front of him. This saved a great deal of trouble. The other day, however, when I came on parade, I galloped up one line and down the other, but the deuce a glimpse could I get of that long nose of his! Then, just as I was at my wits' end, I caught sight of him, alone at one side; so I formed up in front. It seems he had been put there to keep the ground, and the major so far forgot himself as to say that I knew nothing of my duties."

My uncle laughed, and Brummell looked me up and down with his large, intolerant eyes.

"These will do very passably," said he. "Buff and blue are always very gentlemanlike. But a sprigged waistcoat would have been better."

"I think not," said my uncle, warmly.

"My dear Tregellis, you are infallible upon a cravat, but you must allow me the right of my own judgment upon vests. I like it vastly as it stands, but a touch of red sprig would give it the finish that it needs."

They argued with many examples and analogies for a good ten minutes, revolving round me at the same time with their heads on one side and their glasses to their eyes. It was a relief to me when they at last agreed upon a compromise.

“You must not let anything I have said shake your faith in Sir Charles’s judgment, Mr. Stone,” said Brummell, very earnestly.

I assured him that I should not.

“If you were my nephew, I should expect you to follow my taste. But you will cut a very good figure as it is. I had a young cousin who came up to town last year with a recommendation to my care. But he would take no advice. At the end of the second week I met him coming down St. James’s Street in a snuff-coloured coat cut by a country tailor. He bowed to me. Of course I knew what was due to myself. I looked all round him, and there was an end to his career in town. You are from the country, Mr. Stone?”

“From Sussex, sir.”

“Sussex! Why, that is where I send my washing to. There is an excellent clear-starcher living near Hayward’s Heath. I send my shirts two at a time, for if you send more it excites the woman and diverts her attention. I cannot abide anything but country washing. But I should be vastly sorry to have to live there. What can a man find to do?”

“You don’t hunt, George?”

“When I do, it’s a woman. But surely you don’t go to hounds, Charles?”

“I was out with the Belvoir last winter.”

“The Belvoir! Did you hear how I smoked Rutland? The story has been in the clubs this month past. I bet him that my bag would weigh more than his. He got three and a half brace, but I shot his liver-coloured pointer, so he had to pay. But as to hunting, what amusement can there be in flying about among a crowd of greasy, galloping farmers? Every man to his own taste, but Brookes’s window by day and a snug corner of the macao table at Watier’s by night, give me all I want for mind and body. You heard how I plucked Montague the brewer!”

“I have been out of town.”

“I had eight thousand from him at a sitting. ‘I shall drink your beer in future, Mr. Brewer,’ said I. ‘Every blackguard in London does,’ said he. It was monstrous impolite of him, but some people cannot lose with grace. Well, I am going down to Clarges Street to pay Jew King a little of my interest. Are you bound that way? Well, good-bye, then! I’ll see you and your young friend at the club or in the Mall, no doubt,” and he sauntered off upon his way.

“That young man is destined to take my place,” said my uncle, gravely, when Brummell had departed. “He is quite young and of no descent, but he has made his way by his cool effrontery, his natural taste, and his extravagance of speech. There is no man who can be impolite in so polished a fashion. He has a half-smile, and a way of raising his eyebrows, for which he will be shot one of these mornings. Already his opinion is quoted in the clubs as a rival to my own. Well, every man has his day, and when I am convinced that mine is past, St. James’s Street shall know me no more, for it is not in my nature to be second to any man. But now, nephew, in that buff and blue suit you may pass anywhere; so, if you please, we will step into my *vis-à-vis*, and I will show you something of the town.”

How can I describe all that we saw and all that we did upon that lovely spring day? To me it was as if I had been wafted to a fairy world, and my uncle might have been some benevolent enchanter in a high-collared, long-tailed coat, who was guiding me about in it. He showed me the West-end streets, with the bright carriages and the gaily dressed ladies and sombre-clad men, all crossing and hurrying and recrossing like an ants’ nest when you turn it over with a stick. Never had I formed a conception of such endless banks of houses, and such a ceaseless stream of life flowing between. Then we passed down the Strand, where the crowd was thicker than ever, and even penetrated beyond Temple Bar and into the City, though my uncle begged me not to mention it, for he would not wish it to be generally known. There I saw the Exchange and the Bank and Lloyd’s Coffee House, with the brown-coated, sharp-faced merchants and the hurrying clerks, the huge horses and the busy draymen. It was a very different world this from that which we had left in the West - a world of energy and of strength, where there was no place for the listless and the idle. Young as I was, I knew that it was here, in the forest of merchant shipping, in the bales which swung up to the warehouse windows, in the loaded waggons which roared over the cobblestones, that the power of Britain lay. Here, in the City of London, was the taproot from which Empire and wealth and so many other fine leaves had sprouted. Fashion and speech and manners may change, but the spirit of enterprise within that square mile or two of land must not change, for when it withers all that has grown from it must wither also.

We lunched at Stephen’s, the fashionable inn in Bond Street, where I saw a line of tilburys and saddle-horses, which stretched from the door to the further end of the street. And thence we went to the Mail in St. James's Park, and thence to Brookes's, the great Whig club, and thence again to Watier's, where the men of fashion used to gamble. Everywhere I met the same sort of men, with their stiff figures and small waists, all showing the utmost deference to my uncle, and for his sake an easy tolerance of me. The talk was always such as I had already heard at the Pavilion: talk of politics, talk of the King's health, talk of the Prince's extravagance, of the expected renewal of war, of horse-racing, and of the ring. I saw, too, that eccentricity was, as my uncle had told me, the fashion; and if the folk upon the Continent look upon us even to this day as being a nation of lunatics, it is no doubt a tradition handed down from the time when the only travellers whom they were likely to see were drawn from the class which I was now meeting.

It was an age of heroism and of folly. On the one hand soldiers, sailors, and statesmen of the quality of Pitt, Nelson, and afterwards Wellington, had been forced to the front by the imminent menace of Buonaparte. We were great in arms, and were soon also to be great in literature, for Scott and Byron were in their day the strongest forces in Europe. On the other hand, a touch of madness, real or assumed, was a passport through doors which were closed to wisdom and to virtue. The man who could enter a drawing-room walking upon his hands, the man who had filed his teeth that he might whistle like a coachman, the man who always spoke his thoughts aloud and so kept his guests in a quiver of apprehension, these were the people who found it easy to come to the front in London society. Nor could the heroism and the folly be kept apart, for there were few who could quite escape the contagion of the times. In an age when the Premier was a heavy drinker, the Leader of the Opposition a libertine, and the Prince of Wales a combination of the two, it was hard to know where to look for a man whose private and public characters were equally lofty. At the same time, with all its faults it was a *strong* age, and you will be fortunate if in your time the country produces five such names as Pitt, Fox, Scott, Nelson, and Wellington.

It was in Watier's that night, seated by my uncle on one of the red velvet settees at the side of the room, that I had pointed out to me some of those singular characters whose fame and eccentricities are even now not wholly forgotten in the world. The long, many-pillared room, with its mirrors and chandeliers, was crowded with full-blooded, loud-voiced men-about-town, all in the same dark evening dress with white silk stockings, cambric shirt-fronts, and little, flat chapeau-bras under their arms.

"The acid-faced old gentleman with the thin legs is the Marquis of Queensberry," said my uncle. "His chaise was driven nineteen miles in an hour in a match against the Count Taafe, and he sent a message fifty miles in thirty minutes by throwing it from hand to hand in a cricket-ball. The man he is talking to is Sir Charles Bunbury, of the Jockey Club, who had the Prince warned off the Heath at Newmarket on account of the in-and-out riding of Sam Chifney, his jockey. There's Captain Barclay going up to them now. He knows more about training than any man alive, and he has walked ninety miles in twenty-one hours. You have only to look at his calves to see that Nature built him for it. There's another walker there, the man with a flowered vest standing near the fireplace. That is Buck Whalley, who walked to Jerusalem in a long blue coat, top-boots, and buckskins."

"Why did he do that, sir?" I asked, in astonishment.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"It was his humour," said he. "He walked into society through it, and that was better worth reaching than Jerusalem. There's Lord Petersham, the man with the beaky nose. He always rises at six in the evening, and he has laid down the finest cellar of snuff in Europe. It was he who ordered his valet to put half a dozen of sherry by his bed and call him the day after to-morrow. He's talking to Lord Panmure, who can take his six bottles of claret and argue with a bishop after it. The lean man with the weak knees is General Scott who lives upon toast and water and has won £200,000 at whist. He is talking to young Lord Blandford who gave £1800 for a Boccaccio the other day. Evening, Dudley!"

"Evening, Tregellis!" An elderly, vacant-looking man had stopped before us and was looking me up and down.

"Some young cub Charlie Tregellis has caught in the country," he murmured. "He doesn't look as if he would be much credit to him. Been out of town, Tregellis?"

"For a few days."

"Hem!" said the man, transferring his sleepy gaze to my uncle. "He's looking pretty bad. He'll be going into the country feet foremost some of these days if he doesn't pull up!" He nodded, and passed on.

"You mustn't look so mortified, nephew," said my uncle, smiling. "That's old Lord Dudley, and he has a trick of thinking aloud. People used to be offended, but they take no notice of him now. It was only last week, when he was dining at Lord Elgin's, that he apologized to the company for the shocking bad cooking. He thought he was at his own table, you see. It gives him a place of his own in society. That's Lord Harewood he has fastened on to now. Harewood's peculiarity is to mimic the Prince in everything. One day the Prince hid his queue behind the collar of his coat, so Harewood cut his off, thinking that they were going out of fashion. Here's Lumley, the ugly man. '*L'homme laid*' they called him in Paris. The other one is Lord Foley - they call him No. 11, on account of his thin legs."

"There is Mr. Brummell, sir," said I.

"Yes, he'll come to us presently. That young man has certainly a future before him. Do you observe the way in which he looks round the room from under his drooping eyelids, as though it were a condescension that he should have entered it? Small conceits are intolerable, but when they are pushed to the uttermost they become respectable. How do, George?"

"Have you heard about Vereker Merton?" asked Brummell, strolling up with one or two other exquisites at his heels. "He has run away with his father's woman-cook, and actually married her."

"What did Lord Merton do?"

"He congratulated him warmly, and confessed that he had always underrated his intelligence. He is to live with the young couple, and make a handsome allowance on condition that the bride sticks to her old duties. By the way, there was a rumour that you were about to marry, Tregellis."

"I think not," answered my uncle. "It would be a mistake to overwhelm one by attentions which are a pleasure to many."

"My view, exactly, and very neatly expressed," cried Brummell. "Is it fair to break a dozen hearts in order to intoxicate one with rapture? I'm off to the Continent next week."

"Bailiffs?" asked one of his companions.

"Too bad, Pierrepoint. No, no; it is pleasure and instruction combined. Besides, it is necessary to go to Paris for your little things, and if there is a chance of the war breaking out again, it would be well to lay in a supply."

"Quite right," said my uncle, who seemed to have made up his mind to outdo Brummell in extravagance. "I used to get my sulphur-coloured gloves from the Palais Royal. When the war broke out in '93 I was cut off from them for nine years. Had it not been for a lugger which I specially hired to smuggle them, I might have been reduced to English tan."

"The English are excellent at a flat-iron or a kitchen poker, but anything more delicate is beyond them."

"Our tailors are good," cried my uncle, "but our stuffs lack taste and variety. The war has made us more *rococo* than ever. It has cut us off from travel, and there is nothing to match travel for expanding the mind. Last year, for example, I came upon some new waist-coating in the Square of San Marco, at Venice. It was yellow, with the prettiest little twill of pink running through it. How could I have seen it had I not travelled? I brought it back with me, and for a time it was all the rage."

"The Prince took it up."

"Yes, he usually follows my lead. We dressed so alike last year that we were frequently mistaken for each other. It tells against me, but so it was. He often complains that things do not look as well upon him as upon me, but how can I make the obvious reply? By the way, George, I did not see you at the Marchioness of Dover's ball."

"Yes, I was there, and lingered for a quarter of an hour or so. I am surprised that you did not see me. I did not go past the doorway, however, for undue preference gives rise to jealousy."

"I went early," said my uncle, "for I had heard that there were to be some tolerable *débutantes*. It always pleases me vastly when I am able to pass a compliment to any of them. It has happened, but not often, for I keep to my own standard."

So they talked, these singular men, and I, looking from one to the other, could not imagine how they could help bursting out a-laughing in each other's faces. But, on the contrary, their conversation was very grave, and filled out with many little bows, and opening and shutting of snuff-boxes, and flickings of laced handkerchiefs. Quite a crowd had gathered silently around, and I could see that the talk had been regarded as a contest between two men who were looked upon as rival arbiters of fashion. It was finished by the Marquis of Queensberry passing his arm through Brummell's and leading him off, while my uncle threw out his laced cambric shirt-front and shot his ruffles as if he were well satisfied with his share in the encounter. It is seven-and-forty years since I looked upon that circle of dandies, and where, now, are their dainty little hats, their wonderful waistcoats, and their boots, in which one could arrange one's cravat? They lived strange lives, these men, and they died strange deaths - some by their own hands, some as beggars, some in a debtor's gaol, some, like the most brilliant of them all, in a madhouse in a foreign land.

"There is the card-room, Rodney," said my uncle, as we passed an open door on our way out. Glancing in, I saw a line of little green baize tables with small groups of men sitting round, while at one side was a longer one, from which there came a continuous murmur of voices. "You may lose what you like in there, save only your nerve or your temper," my uncle continued. "Ah, Sir Lothian, I trust that the luck was with you?"

A tall, thin man, with a hard, austere face, had stepped out of the open doorway. His heavily thatched eyebrows covered quick, furtive grey eyes, and his gaunt features were hollowed at the cheek and temple like water-grooved flint. He was dressed entirely in black, and I noticed that his shoulders swayed a little as if he had been drinking.

"Lost like the deuce," he snapped.

"Dice?"

"No, whist."

"You couldn't get very hard hit over that."

"Couldn't you?" he snarled. "Play a hundred a trick and a thousand on the rub, losing steadily for five hours, and see what you think of it."

My uncle was evidently struck by the haggard look upon the other's face.

"I hope it's not very bad," he said.

"Bad enough. It won't bear talking about. By the way, Tregellis, have you got your man for this fight yet?"

"No."

"You seem to be hanging in the wind a long time. It's play or pay, you know. I shall claim forfeit if you don't come to scratch."

"If you will name your day I shall produce my man, Sir Lothian," said my uncle, coldly.

"This day four weeks, if you like."

"Very good. The 18th of May."

"I hope to have changed my name by then!"

"How is that?" asked my uncle, in surprise.

"It is just possible that I may be Lord Avon."

"What, you have had some news?" cried my uncle, and I noticed a tremor in his voice.

"I've had my agent over at Monte Video, and he believes he has proof that Avon died there. Anyhow, it is absurd to suppose that because a murderer chooses to fly from justice - "

"I won't have you use that word, Sir Lothian," cried my uncle, sharply.

"You were there as I was. You know that he was a murderer."

"I tell you that you shall not say so."

Sir Lothian's fierce little grey eyes had to lower themselves before the imperious anger which shone in my uncle's.

"Well, to let that point pass, it is monstrous to suppose that the title and the estates can remain hung up in this way for ever. I'm the heir, Tregellis, and I'm going to have my rights."

"I am, as you are aware, Lord Avon's dearest friend," said my uncle, sternly. "His disappearance has not affected my love for him, and until his fate is finally ascertained, I shall exert myself to see that *his* rights also are respected."

"His rights would be a long drop and a cracked spine," Sir Lothian answered, and then, changing his manner suddenly, he laid his hand upon my uncle's sleeve.

"Come, come, Tregellis, I was his friend as well as you," said he. "But we cannot alter the facts, and it is rather late in the day for us to fall out over them. Your invitation holds good for Friday night?"

"Certainly."

"I shall bring Crab Wilson with me, and finally arrange the conditions of our little wager."

"Very good, Sir Lothian: I shall hope to see you." They bowed, and my uncle stood a little time looking after him as he made his way amidst the crowd.

"A good sportsman, nephew," said he. "A bold rider, the best pistol-shot in England, but . . . a dangerous man!"

CHAPTER X - THE MEN OF THE RING

It was at the end of my first week in London that my uncle gave a supper to the fancy, as was usual for gentlemen of that time if they wished to figure before the public as Corinthians and patrons of sport. He had invited not only the chief fighting-men of the day, but also those men of fashion who were most interested in the ring: Mr. Fletcher Reid, Lord Say and Sele, Sir Lothian Hume, Sir John Lade, Colonel Montgomery, Sir Thomas Apreece, the Hon. Berkeley Craven, and many more. The rumour that the Prince was to be present had already spread through the clubs, and invitations were eagerly sought after.

The Waggon and Horses was a well-known sporting house, with an old prize-fighter for landlord. And the arrangements were as primitive as the most Bohemian could wish. It was one of the many curious fashions which have now died out, that men who were *blasé* from luxury and high living seemed to find a fresh piquancy in life by descending to the lowest resorts, so that the night-houses and gambling-dens in Covent Garden or the Haymarket often gathered illustrious company under their smoke-blackened ceilings. It was a change for them to turn their backs upon the cooking of Weltjie and of Ude, or the chambertin of old Q., and to dine upon a porter-house steak washed down by a pint of ale from a pewter pot.

A rough crowd had assembled in the street to see the fighting-men go in, and my uncle warned me to look to my pockets as we pushed our way through it. Within was a large room with faded red curtains, a sanded floor, and walls which were covered with prints of pugilists and race-horses. Brown liquor-stained tables were dotted about in it, and round one of these half a dozen formidable-looking men were seated, while one, the roughest of all, was perched upon the table itself, swinging his legs to and fro. A tray of small glasses and pewter mugs stood beside them.

“The boys were thirsty, sir, so I brought up some ale and some liptrap,” whispered the landlord; “I thought you would have no objection, sir.”

“Quite right, Bob! How are you all? How are you, Maddox? How are you, Baldwin? Ah, Belcher, I am very glad to see you.”

The fighting-men rose and took their hats off, except the fellow on the table, who continued to swing his legs and to look my uncle very coolly in the face.

"How are you, Berks?"

"Pretty tidy. 'Ow are you?"

"Say 'sir' when you speak to a genelman," said Belcher, and with a sudden tilt of the table he sent Berks flying almost into my uncle's arms.

"See now, Jem, none o' that!" said Berks, sulkily.

"I'll learn you manners, Joe, which is more than ever your father did. You're not drinkin' black-jack in a boozin' ken, but you are meetin' noble, slap-up Corinthians, and it's for you to behave as such."

"I've always been reckoned a genelman-like sort of man," said Berks, thickly, "but if so be as I've said or done what I 'adn't ought to - "

"There, there, Berks, that's all right!" cried my uncle, only too anxious to smooth things over and to prevent a quarrel at the outset of the evening. "Here are some more of our friends. How are you, Apreece? How are you, Colonel? Well, Jackson, you are looking vastly better. Good evening, Lade. I trust Lady Lade was none the worse for our pleasant drive. Ah, Mendoza, you look fit enough to throw your hat over the ropes this instant. Sir Lothian, I am glad to see you. You will find some old friends here."

Amid the stream of Corinthians and fighting-men who were thronging into the room I had caught a glimpse of the sturdy figure and broad, good-humoured face of Champion Harrison. The sight of him was like a whiff of South Down air coming into that low-roofed, oil-smelling room, and I ran forward to shake him by the hand.

"Why, Master Rodney - or I should say Mr. Stone, I suppose - you've changed out of all knowledge. I can't hardly believe that it was really you that used to come down to blow the bellows when Boy Jim and I were at the anvil. Well, you are fine, to be sure!"

"What's the news of Friar's Oak?" I asked eagerly.

"Your father was down to chat with me, Master Rodney, and he tells me that the war is going to break out again, and that he hopes to see you here in London before many days are past; for he is coming up to see Lord Nelson and to make inquiry about a ship. Your mother is well, and I saw her in church on Sunday."

"And Boy Jim?"

Champion Harrison's good-humoured face clouded over.

"He'd set his heart very much on comin' here to-night, but there were reasons why I didn't wish him to, and so there's a shadow betwixt us. It's the first that ever was, and I feel it, Master Rodney. Between ourselves, I have very good reason to wish him to stay with me, and I am sure that, with his high spirit and his ideas, he would never settle down again after once he had a taste o' London. I left him behind me with enough work to keep him busy until I get back to him."

A tall and beautifully proportioned man, very elegantly dressed, was strolling towards us. He stared in surprise and held out his hand to my companion.

"Why, Jack Harrison!" he cried. "This is a resurrection. Where in the world did you come from?"

"Glad to see you, Jackson," said my companion. "You look as well and as young as ever."

"Thank you, yes. I resigned the belt when I could get no one to fight me for it, and I took to teaching."

"I'm doing smith's work down Sussex way."

"I've often wondered why you never had a shy at my belt. I tell you honestly, between man and man, I'm very glad you didn't."

"Well, it's real good of you to say that, Jackson. I might ha' done it, perhaps, but the old woman was against it. She's been a good wife to me and I can't go against her. But I feel a bit lonesome here, for these boys are since my time."

"You could do some of them over now," said Jackson, feeling my friend's upper arm. "No better bit of stuff was ever seen in a twenty-four foot ring. It would be a rare treat to see you take some of these young ones on. Won't you let me spring you on them?"

Harrison's eyes glistened at the idea, but he shook his head.

"It won't do, Jackson. My old woman holds my promise. That's Belcher, ain't it - the good lookin' young chap with the flash coat?"

"Yes, that's Jem. You've not seen him! He's a jewel."

"So I've heard. Who's the youngster beside him? He looks a tidy chap."

"That's a new man from the West. Crab Wilson's his name."

Harrison looked at him with interest. "I've heard of him," said he. "They are getting a match on for him, ain't they?"

"Yes. Sir Lothian Hume, the thin-faced gentleman over yonder, has backed him against Sir Charles Tregellis's man. We're to hear about the match to-night, I understand. Jem Belcher thinks great things of Crab Wilson. There's Belcher's young brother, Tom. He's looking out for a match, too. They say he's quicker than Jem with the mufflers, but he can't hit as hard. I was speaking of your brother, Jem."

"The young 'un will make his way," said Belcher, who had come across to us. "He's more a sparrer than a fighter just at present, but when his gristle sets he'll take on anything on the list. Bristol's as full o' young fightin'-men now as a bin is of bottles. We've got two more comin' up - Gully and Pearce - who'll make you London milling coves wish they was back in the west country again."

"Here's the Prince," said Jackson, as a hum and bustle rose from the door.

I saw George come bustling in, with a good-humoured smile upon his comely face. My uncle welcomed him, and led some of the Corinthians up to be presented.

"We'll have trouble, gov'nor," said Belcher to Jackson. "Here's Joe Berks drinkin' gin out of a mug, and you know what a swine he is when he's drunk."

"You must put a stopper on 'im gov'nor," said several of the other prize-fighters. "'E ain't what you'd call a charmer when 'e's sober, but there's no standing 'im when 'e's fresh."

Jackson, on account of his prowess and of the tact which he possessed, had been chosen as general regulator of the whole prize-fighting body, by whom he was usually alluded to as the Commander-in-Chief. He and Belcher went across now to the table upon which Berks was still perched. The ruffian's face was already flushed, and his eyes heavy and bloodshot.

"You must keep yourself in hand to-night, Berks," said Jackson. "The Prince is here, and - "

"I never set eyes on 'im yet," cried Berks, lurching off the table. "Where is 'e, gov'nor? Tell 'im Joe Berks would like to do 'isself proud by shakin' 'im by the 'and."

"No, you don't, Joe," said Jackson, laying his hand upon Berks's chest, as he tried to push his way through the crowd. "You've got to keep your place, Joe, or we'll put you where you can make all the noise you like."

"Where's that, gov'nor?"

"Into the street, through the window. We're going to have a peaceful evening, as Jem Belcher and I will show you if you get up to any of your Whitechapel games."

"No 'arm, gov'nor," grumbled Berks. "I'm sure I've always 'ad the name of bein' a very genelman-like man."

"So I've always said, Joe Berks, and mind you prove yourself such. But the supper is ready for us, and there's the Prince and Lord Sole going in. Two and two, lads, and don't forget whose company you are in."

The supper was laid in a large room, with Union Jacks and mottoes hung thickly upon the walls. The tables were arranged in three sides of a square, my uncle occupying the centre of the principal one, with the Prince upon his right and Lord Sele upon his left. By his wise precaution the seats had been allotted beforehand, so that the gentlemen might be scattered among the professionals and no risk run of two enemies finding themselves together, or a man who had been recently beaten falling into the company of his conqueror. For my own part, I had Champion Harrison upon one side of me and a stout, florid-faced man upon the other, who whispered to me that he was "Bill Warr, landlord of the One Tun public-house, of Jermyn Street, and one of the gamest men upon the list."

"It's my flesh that's beat me, sir," said he. "It creeps over me amazin' fast. I should fight at thirteen-eight, and 'ere I am nearly seventeen. It's the business that does it, what with loflin' about behind the bar all day, and bein' afraid to refuse a wet for fear of offendin' a customer. It's been the ruin of many a good fightin'-man before me."

"You should take to my job," said Harrison. "I'm a smith by trade, and I've not put on half a stone in fifteen years."

"Some take to one thing and some to another, but the most of us try to 'ave a bar-parlour of our own. There's Will Wood, that I beat in forty rounds in the thick of a snowstorm down Navestock way, 'e drives a 'ackney. Young Firby, the ruffian, 'e's a waiter now. Dick 'Umphries sells coals - 'e was always of a genelmanly disposition. George Ingleston is a brewer's drayman. We all find our own cribs. But there's one thing you are saved by livin' in the country, and that is 'avin' the young Corinthians and bloods about town smackin' you eternally in the face."

This was the last inconvenience which I should have expected a famous prize-fighter to be subjected to, but several bull-faced fellows at the other side of the table nodded their concurrence.

"You're right, Bill," said one of them. "There's no one has had more trouble with them than I have. In they come of an evenin' into my bar, with the wine in their heads. 'Are you Tom Owen the bruiser?' says one o' them. 'At your service, sir,' says I. 'Take that, then,' says he, and it's a clip on the nose, or a backhanded slap across the chops as likely as not. Then they can brag all their lives that they had hit Tom Owen."

"D'you draw their cork in return?" asked Harrison.

"I argey it out with them. I say to them, 'Now, gents, fightin' is my profession, and I don't fight for love any more than a doctor doctors for love, or a butcher gives away a loin chop. Put up a small purse, master, and I'll do you over and proud. But don't expect that you're goin' to come here and get glutted by a middle-weight champion for nothing."

"That's my way too, Tom," said my burly neighbour. "If they put down a guinea on the counter - which they do if they 'ave been drinkin' very 'eavy - I give them what I think is about a guinea's worth and take the money."

"But if they don't?"

"Why, then, it's a common assault, d'ye see, against the body of 'is Majesty's liege, William Warr, and I 'as 'em before the beak next mornin', and it's a week or twenty shillin's."

Meanwhile the supper was in full swing - one of those solid and uncompromising meals which prevailed in the days of your grandfathers, and which may explain to some of you why you never set eyes upon that relative.

Great rounds of beef, saddles of mutton, smoking tongues, veal and ham pies, turkeys and chickens, and geese, with every variety of vegetables, and a succession of fiery cherries and heavy ales were the main staple of the feast. It was the same meal and the same cooking as their Norse or German ancestors might have sat down to fourteen centuries before, and, indeed, as I looked through the steam of the dishes at the lines of fierce and rugged faces, and the mighty shoulders which rounded themselves over the board, I could have imagined myself at one of those old-world carousals of which I had read, where the savage company gnawed the joints to the bone, and then, with murderous horseplay, hurled the remains at their prisoners. Here and there the pale, aquiline features of a sporting Corinthian recalled rather the Norman type, but in the main these stolid, heavy-jowled faces, belonging to men whose whole life was a battle, were the nearest suggestion which we have had in modern times of those fierce pirates and rovers from whose loins we have sprung.

And yet, as I looked carefully from man to man in the line which faced me, I could see that the English, although they were ten to one, had not the game entirely to themselves, but that other races had shown that they could produce fighting-men worthy to rank with the best.

There were, it is true, no finer or braver men in the room than Jackson and Jem Belcher, the one with his magnificent figure, his small waist and Herculean shoulders; the other as graceful as an old Grecian statue, with a head whose beauty many a sculptor had wished to copy, and with those long, delicate lines in shoulder and loins and limbs, which gave him the litheness and activity of a panther. Already, as I looked at him, it seemed to me that there was a shadow of tragedy upon his face, a forecast of the day then but a few months distant when a blow from a racquet ball darkened the sight of one eye for ever. Had he stopped there, with his unbeaten career behind him, then indeed the evening of his life might have been as glorious as its dawn. But his proud heart could not permit his title to be torn from him without a struggle. If even now you can read how the gallant fellow, unable with his one eye to judge his distances, fought for thirty-five minutes against his young and formidable opponent, and how, in the bitterness of defeat, he was heard only to express his sorrow for a friend who had backed him with all he possessed, and if you are not touched by the story there must be something wanting in you which should go to the making of a man.

But if there were no men at the tables who could have held their own against Jackson or Jem Belcher, there were others of a different race and type who had qualities which made them dangerous bruisers. A little way down the room I saw the black face and woolly head of Bill Richmond, in a purple-and-gold footman’s livery - destined to be the predecessor of Molineaux, Sutton, and all that line of black boxers who have shown that the muscular power and insensibility to pain which distinguish the African give him a peculiar advantage in the sports of the ring. He could boast also of the higher honour of having been the first born American to win laurels in the British ring. There also I saw the keen features of Dada Mendoza, the Jew, just retired from active work, and leaving behind him a reputation for elegance and perfect science which has, to this day, never been exceeded. The worst fault that the critics could find with him was that there was a want of power in his blows - a remark which certainly could not have been made about his neighbour, whose long face, curved nose, and dark, flashing eyes proclaimed him as a member of the same ancient race. This was the formidable Dutch Sam, who fought at nine stone six, and yet possessed such hitting powers, that his admirers, in after years, were willing to back him against the fourteen-stone Tom Cribb, if each were strapped a-straddle to a bench. Half a dozen other sallow Hebrew faces showed how energetically the Jews of Houndsditch and Whitechapel had taken to the sport of the land of their adoption, and that in this, as in more serious fields of human effort, they could hold their own with the best.

It was my neighbour Warr who very good-humouredly pointed out to me all these celebrities, the echoes of whose fame had been wafted down even to our little Sussex village.

“There’s Andrew Gamble, the Irish champion,” said he. “It was ‘e that beat Noah James, the Guardsman, and was afterwards nearly killed by Jem Belcher, in the ‘ollow of Wimbledon Common by Abbershaw’s gibbet. The two that are next ‘im are Irish also, Jack O’Donnell and Bill Ryan. When you get a good Irishman you can’t better ‘em, but they’re dreadful ‘asty. That little cove with the leery face is Caleb Baldwin the Coster, ‘im that they call the Pride of Westminster. ‘E’s but five foot seven, and nine stone five, but ‘e’s got the ‘eart of a giant. ‘E’s never been beat, and there ain’t a man within a stone of ‘im that could beat ‘im, except only Dutch Sam. There’s George Maddox, too, another o’ the same breed, and as good a man as ever pulled his coat off. The genelmanly man that eats with a fork, ‘im what looks like a Corinthian, only that the bridge of ‘is nose ain’t quite as it ought to be, that’s Dick ‘Umphries, the same that was cock of the middle-weights until Mendoza cut his comb for ‘im. You see the other with the grey ‘ead and the scars on his face?”

“Why, it’s old Tom Faulkner the cricketer!” cried Harrison, following the line of Bill Warr’s stubby forefinger. “He’s the fastest bowler in the Midlands, and at his best there weren’t many boxers in England that could stand up against him.”

“You’re right there, Jack ‘Arrison. ‘E was one of the three who came up to fight when the best men of Birmingham challenged the best men of London. ‘E’s an evergreen, is Tom. Why, he was turned five-and-fifty when he challenged and beat, after fifty minutes of it, Jack Thornhill, who was tough enough to take it out of many a youngster. It’s better to give odds in weight than in years.”

“Youth will be served,” said a crooning voice from the other side of the table. “Ay, masters, youth will be served.”

The man who had spoken was the most extraordinary of all the many curious figures in the room. He was very, very old, so old that he was past all comparison, and no one by looking at his mummy skin and fish-like eyes could give a guess at his years. A few scanty grey hairs still hung about his yellow scalp. As to his features, they were scarcely human in their disfigurement, for the deep wrinkles and pouchings of extreme age had been added to a face which had always been grotesquely ugly, and had been crushed and smashed in addition by many a blow. I had noticed this creature at the beginning of the meal, leaning his chest against the edge of the table as if its support was a welcome one, and feebly picking at the food which was placed before him. Gradually, however, as his neighbours plied him with drink, his shoulders grew squarer, his back stiffened, his eyes brightened, and he looked about him, with an air of surprise at first, as if he had no clear recollection of how he came there, and afterwards with an expression of deepening interest, as he listened, with his ear scooped up in his hand, to the conversation around him.

"That's old Buckhorse," whispered Champion Harrison. "He was just the same as that when I joined the ring twenty years ago. Time was when he was the terror of London."

"'E was so," said Bill Warr. "'E would fight like a stag, and 'e was that 'ard that 'e would let any swell knock 'im down for 'alf-a-crown. 'E 'ad no face to spoil, d'ye see, for 'e was always the ugliest man in England. But 'e's been on the shelf now for near sixty years, and it cost 'im many a beatin' before 'e could understand that 'is strength was slippin' away from 'im."

"Youth will be served, masters," droned the old man, shaking his head miserably.

"Fill up 'is glass," said Warr. "'Ere, Tom, give old Buckhorse a sup o' liptrap. Warm his 'eart for 'im."

The old man poured a glass of neat gin down his shrivelled throat, and the effect upon him was extraordinary. A light glimmered in each of his dull eyes, a tinge of colour came into his wax-like cheeks, and, opening his toothless mouth, he suddenly emitted a peculiar, bell-like, and most musical cry. A hoarse roar of laughter from all the company answered it, and flushed faces craned over each other to catch a glimpse of the veteran.

"There's Buckhorse!" they cried. "Buckhorse is comin' round again."

"You can laugh if you vill, masters," he cried, in his Lewkner Lane dialect, holding up his two thin, vein-covered hands. "It von't be long that you'll be able to see my crooks vich 'ave been on Figg's conk, and on Jack

Broughton’s, and on ‘Arry Gray’s, and many another good fightin’ man that was millin’ for a livin’ before your fathers could eat pap.”

The company laughed again, and encouraged the old man by half-derisive and half-affectionate cries.

“Let ‘em ‘ave it, Buckhorse! Give it ‘em straight! Tell us how the millin’ coves did it in your time.”

The old gladiator looked round him in great contempt.

“Vy, from vot I see,” he cried, in his high, broken treble, “there’s some on you that ain’t fit to flick a fly from a joint o’ meat. You’d make werry good ladies’ maids, the most of you, but you took the wrong turnin’ ven you came into the ring.”

“Give ‘im a wipe over the mouth,” said a hoarse voice.

“Joe Berks,” said Jackson, “I’d save the hangman the job of breaking your neck if His Royal Highness wasn’t in the room.”

“That’s as it may be, guv’nor,” said the half-drunken ruffian, staggering to his feet. “If I’ve said anything wot isn’t genelmanlike - “

“Sit down, Berks!” cried my uncle, with such a tone of command that the fellow collapsed into his chair.

“Vy, vitch of you would look Tom Slack in the face?” piped the old fellow; “or Jack Broughton? - him vot told the old Dook of Cumberland that all he vanted vas to fight the King o’ Proosia’s guard, day by day, year in, year out, until ‘e ‘ad worked out the whole regiment of ‘em - and the smallest of ‘em six foot long. There’s not more’n a few of you could ‘it a dint in a pat o’ butter, and if you gets a smack or two it’s all over vith you. Vich among you could get up again after such a vipe as the Eytalian Gondoleery cove gave to Bob Vittaker?”

“What was that, Buckhorse?” cried several voices.

“‘E came over ‘ere from voreign parts, and ‘e was so broad ‘e ‘ad to come edgewise through the doors. ‘E ‘ad so, upon my davy! ‘E was that strong that wherever ‘e ‘it the bone had got to go; and when ‘e’d cracked a jaw or two it looked as though nothing in the country could stan’ against him. So the King ‘e sent one of his genelmen down to Figg and he said to him: ‘‘Ere’s a cove vot cracks a bone every time ‘e lets vly, and it’ll be little credit to the Lunnon boys if they lets ‘im get avay vithout a vacking.’ So Figg he ups, and he says, ‘I do not know, master, but he may break one of ‘is countrymen’s jawbones vid ‘is vist, but I’ll bring ‘im a Cockney lad and ‘e shall not be able to break ‘is jawbone with a sledge ‘ammer.’ I was with

Figg in Slaughter’s coffee-’ouse, as then vas, ven ‘e says this to the King’s genelman, and I goes so, I does!” Again he emitted the curious bell-like cry, and again the Corinthians and the fighting-men laughed and applauded him.

“His Royal Highness - that is, the Earl of Chester - would be glad to hear the end of your story, Buckhorse,” said my uncle, to whom the Prince had been whispering.

“Vell, your R’yal ‘Ighness, it vas like this. Ven the day came round, all the volk came to Figg’s Amphitheatre, the same that vos in Tottenham Court, an’ Bob Vittaker ‘e vos there, and the Eytalian Gondoleery cove ‘e vas there, and all the purlitest, genteelest crowd that ever vos, twenty thousand of ‘em, all sittin’ with their ‘eads like purtaties on a barrer, banked right up round the stage, and me there to pick up Bob, d’ye see, and Jack Figg ‘imself just for fair play to do vot was right by the cove from voreign parts. They vas packed all round, the folks was, but down through the middle of ‘em was a passage just so as the gentry could come through to their seats, and the stage it vas of wood, as the custom then vas, and a man’s ‘eight above the ‘eads of the people. Vell, then, ven Bob was put up opposite this great Eytalian man I says ‘Slap ‘im in the vind, Bob,’ ‘cos I could see vid ‘alf an eye that he vas as puffy as a cheesecake; so Bob he goes in, and as he comes the vorriner let ‘im ‘ave it amazin’ on the conk. I ‘eard the thump of it, and I kind o’ velt somethin’ vistle past me, but ven I looked there vas the Eytalian a feelin’ of ‘is muscles in the middle o’ the stage, and as to Bob, there vern’t no sign’ of ‘im at all no more’n if ‘e’d never been.”

His audience was riveted by the old prize-fighter’s story. “Well,” cried a dozen voices, “what then, Buckhorse: ‘ad ‘e swallowed ‘im, or what?”

“Yell, boys, that vas vat *I* wondered, when sudden I seed two legs a-stickin’ up out o’ the crowd a long vay off, just like these two vingers, d’ye see, and I knewed they vas Bob’s legs, seein’ that ‘e ‘ad kind o’ yellow small clothes vid blue ribbons - vich blue vas ‘is colour - at the knee. So they up-ended ‘im, they did, an’ they made a lane for ‘im an’ cheered ‘im to give ‘im ‘eart, though ‘e never lacked for that. At virst ‘e vas that dazed that ‘e didn’t know if ‘e vas in church or in ‘Orsemonger Gaol; but ven I’d bit ‘is two ears ‘e shook ‘isself together. ‘Ve’ll try it again, Buck,’ says ‘e. ‘The mark!’ says I. And ‘e vinked all that vas left o’ one eye. So the Eytalian ‘e lets swing again, but Bob ‘e jumps inside an’ ‘e lets ‘im ‘ave it plumb square on the meat safe as ‘ard as ever the Lord would let ‘im put it in.”

“Well? Well?”

“Vell, the Eytalian ‘e got a touch of the gurgles, an’ ‘e shut ‘imself right up like a two-foot rule. Then ‘e pulled ‘imself straight, an’ ‘e gave the most awful Glory Allelujah screech as ever you ‘eard. Off ‘e jumps from the stage an’ down the passage as ‘ard as ‘is ‘oofs would carry ‘im. Up jumps the ‘ole crowd, and after ‘im as ‘ard as they could move for laughin’. They vas lyin’ in the kennel three deep all down Tottenham Court road wid their ‘ands to their sides just vit to break themselves in two. Vell, ve chased ‘im down ‘Olburn, an’ down Fleet Street, an’ down Cheapside, an’ past the ‘Change, and on all the vay to Voppin’ an’ we only catched ‘im in the shippin’ office, vere ‘e vas askin’ ‘ow soon ‘e could get a passage to voreign parts.”

There was much laughter and clapping of glasses upon the table at the conclusion of old Buckhorse’s story, and I saw the Prince of Wales hand something to the waiter, who brought it round and slipped it into the skinny hand of the veteran, who spat upon it before thrusting it into his pocket. The table had in the meanwhile been cleared, and was now studded with bottles and glasses, while long clay pipes and tobacco-boxes were handed round. My uncle never smoked, thinking that the habit might darken his teeth, but many of the Corinthians, and the Prince amongst the first of them, set the example of lighting up. All restraint had been done away with, and the prize-fighters, flushed with wine, roared across the tables to each other, or shouted their greetings to friends at the other end of the room. The amateurs, falling into the humour of their company, were hardly less noisy, and loudly debated the merits of the different men, criticizing their styles of fighting before their faces, and making bets upon the results of future matches.

In the midst of the uproar there was an imperative rap upon the table, and my uncle rose to speak. As he stood with his pale, calm face and fine figure, I had never seen him to greater advantage, for he seemed, with all his elegance, to have a quiet air of domination amongst these fierce fellows, like a huntsman walking carelessly through a springing and yapping pack. He expressed his pleasure at seeing so many good sportsmen under one roof, and acknowledged the honour which had been done both to his guests and himself by the presence there that night of the illustrious personage whom he should refer to as the Earl of Chester. He was sorry that the season prevented him from placing game upon the table, but there was so much sitting round it that it would perhaps be hardly missed (cheers and laughter). The sports of the ring had, in his opinion, tended to that contempt of pain and of danger which had contributed so much in the past to the safety of the country, and which might, if what he heard was true, be very quickly needed once more. If an enemy landed upon our shores it was then that, with our small army, we should be forced to fall back upon native valour trained into hardihood by the practice and contemplation of manly sports. In time of peace also the rules of the ring had been of service in enforcing the principles of fair play, and in turning public opinion against that use of the knife or of the boot which was so common in foreign countries. He begged, therefore, to drink "Success to the Fancy," coupled with the name of John Jackson, who might stand as a type of all that was most admirable in British boxing.

Jackson having replied with a readiness which many a public man might have envied, my uncle rose once more.

"We are here to-night," said he, "not only to celebrate the past glories of the prize ring, but also to arrange some sport for the future. It should be easy, now that backers and fighting men are gathered together under one roof, to come to terms with each other. I have myself set an example by making a match with Sir Lothian Hume, the terms of which will be communicated to you by that gentleman."

Sir Lothian rose with a paper in his hand.

"The terms, your Royal Highness and gentlemen, are briefly these," said he. "My man, Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, having never yet fought a prize battle, is prepared to meet, upon May the 18th of this year, any man of any weight who may be selected by Sir Charles Tregellis. Sir Charles Tregellis's selection is limited to men below twenty or above thirty-five years of age, so as to exclude Belcher and the other candidates for championship honours. The stakes are two thousand pounds against a thousand, two hundred to be paid by the winner to his man; play or pay."

It was curious to see the intense gravity of them all, fighters and backers, as they bent their brows and weighed the conditions of the match.

"I am informed," said Sir John Lade, "that Crab Wilson's age is twenty-three, and that, although he has never fought a regular P.R. battle, he has none the less fought within ropes for a stake on many occasions."

"I've seen him half a dozen times at the least," said Belcher.

"It is precisely for that reason, Sir John, that I am laying odds of two to one in his favour."

"May I ask," said the Prince, "what the exact height and weight of Wilson may be?"

"Five foot eleven and thirteen-ten, your Royal Highness."

"Long enough and heavy enough for anything on two legs," said Jackson, and the professionals all murmured their assent.

"Read the rules of the fight, Sir Lothian."

"The battle to take place on Tuesday, May the 18th, at the hour of ten in the morning, at a spot to be afterwards named. The ring to be twenty foot square. Neither to fall without a knock-down blow, subject to the decision of the umpires. Three umpires to be chosen upon the ground, namely, two in ordinary and one in reference. Does that meet your wishes, Sir Charles?"

My uncle bowed.

"Have you anything to say, Wilson?"

The young pugilist, who had a curious, lanky figure, and a craggy, bony face, passed his fingers through his close-cropped hair.

"If you please, zir," said he, with a slight west-country burr, "a twenty-voot ring is too small for a thirteen-stone man."

There was another murmur of professional agreement.

"What would you have it, Wilson?"

"Vour-an'-twenty, Sir Lothian."

"Have you any objection, Sir Charles?"

"Not the slightest."

"Anything else, Wilson?"

"If you please, zir, I'd like to know whom I'm vighting with."

"I understand that you have not publicly nominated your man, Sir Charles?"

"I do not intend to do so until the very morning of the fight. I believe I have that right within the terms of our wager."

"Certainly, if you choose to exercise it."

"I do so intend. And I should be vastly pleased if Mr. Berkeley Craven will consent to be stake-holder."

That gentleman having willingly given his consent, the final formalities which led up to these humble tournaments were concluded.

And then, as these full-blooded, powerful men became heated with their wine, angry eyes began to glare across the table, and amid the grey swirls of tobacco-smoke the lamp-light gleamed upon the fierce, hawk-like Jews, and the flushed, savage Saxons. The old quarrel as to whether Jackson had or had not committed a foul by seizing Mendoza by the hair on the occasion of their battle at Hornchurch, eight years before, came to the front once more. Dutch Sam hurled a shilling down upon the table, and offered to fight the Pride of Westminster for it if he ventured to say that Mendoza had been fairly beaten. Joe Berks, who had grown noisier and more quarrelsome as the evening went on, tried to clamber across the table, with horrible blasphemies, to come to blows with an old Jew named Fighting Yussef, who had plunged into the discussion. It needed very little more to finish the supper by a general and ferocious battle, and it was only the exertions of Jackson, Belcher, Harrison, and others of the cooler and steadier men, which saved us from a riot.

And then, when at last this question was set aside, that of the rival claims to championships at different weights came on in its stead, and again angry words flew about and challenges were in the air. There was no exact limit between the light, middle, and heavyweights, and yet it would make a very great difference to the standing of a boxer whether he should be regarded as the heaviest of the light-weights, or the lightest of the heavy-weights. One claimed to be ten-stone champion, another was ready to take on anything at eleven, but would not run to twelve, which would have brought the invincible Jem Belcher down upon him. Faulkner claimed to be champion of the seniors, and even old Buckhorse's curious call rang out above the tumult as he turned the whole company to laughter and good humour again by challenging anything over eighty and under seven stone.

But in spite of gleams of sunshine, there was thunder in the air, and Champion Harrison had just whispered in my ear that he was quite sure that we should never get through the night without trouble, and was advising me, if it got very bad, to take refuge under the table, when the landlord entered the room hurriedly and handed a note to my uncle.

He read it, and then passed it to the Prince, who returned it with raised eyebrows and a gesture of surprise. Then my uncle rose with the scrap of paper in his hand and a smile upon his lips.

"Gentlemen," said he, "there is a stranger waiting below who desires a fight to a finish with the best men in the room."

CHAPTER XI - THE FIGHT IN THE COACH-HOUSE

The curt announcement was followed by a moment of silent surprise, and then by a general shout of laughter. There might be argument as to who was champion at each weight; but there could be no question that all the champions of all the weights were seated round the tables. An audacious challenge which embraced them one and all, without regard to size or age, could hardly be regarded otherwise than as a joke - but it was a joke which might be a dear one for the joker.

"Is this genuine?" asked my uncle.

"Yes, Sir Charles," answered the landlord; "the man is waiting below."

"It's a kid!" cried several of the fighting-men. "Some cove is a gammonin' us."

"Don't you believe it," answered the landlord. "He's a real slap-up Corinthian, by his dress; and he means what he says, or else I ain't no judge of a man."

My uncle whispered for a few moments with the Prince of Wales. "Well, gentlemen," said he, at last, "the night is still young, and if any of you should wish to show the company a little of your skill, you could not ask a better opportunity."

"What weight is he, Bill?" asked Jem Belcher.

"He's close on six foot, and I should put him well into the thirteen stones when he's buffed."

"Heavy metal!" cried Jackson. "Who takes him on?"

They all wanted to, from nine-stone Dutch Sam upwards. The air was filled with their hoarse shouts and their arguments why each should be the chosen one. To fight when they were flushed with wine and ripe for mischief - above all, to fight before so select a company with the Prince at the ringside, was a chance which did not often come in their way. Only Jackson, Belcher, Mendoza, and one or two others of the senior and more famous men remained silent, thinking it beneath their dignity that they should condescend to so irregular a bye-battle.

"Well, you can't all fight him," remarked Jackson, when the babel had died away. "It's for the chairman to choose."

"Perhaps your Royal Highness has a preference," said my uncle.

"By Jove, I'd take him on myself if my position was different," said the Prince, whose face was growing redder and his eyes more glazed. "You've seen me with the mufflers, Jackson! You know my form!"

"I've seen your Royal Highness, and I have felt your Royal Highness," said the courtly Jackson.

"Perhaps Jem Belcher would give us an exhibition," said my uncle.

Belcher smiled and shook his handsome head.

"There's my brother Tom here has never been blooded in London yet, sir. He might make a fairer match of it."

"Give him over to me!" roared Joe Berks. "I've been waitin' for a turn all evenin', an' I'll fight any man that tries to take my place. 'E's my meat, my masters. Leave 'im to me if you want to see 'ow a calf's 'ead should be dressed. If you put Tom Belcher before me I'll fight Tom Belcher, an' for that matter I'll fight Jem Belcher, or Bill Belcher, or any other Belcher that ever came out of Bristol."

It was clear that Berks had got to the stage when he must fight some one. His heavy face was gorged and the veins stood out on his low forehead, while his fierce grey eyes looked viciously from man to man in quest of a quarrel. His great red hands were bunched into huge, gnarled fists, and he shook one of them menacingly as his drunken gaze swept round the tables.

"I think you'll agree with me, gentlemen, that Joe Berks would be all the better for some fresh air and exercise," said my uncle. "With the concurrence of His Royal Highness and of the company, I shall select him as our champion on this occasion."

"You do me proud," cried the fellow, staggering to his feet and pulling at his coat. "If I don't glut him within the five minutes, may I never see Shropshire again."

"Wait a bit, Berks," cried several of the amateurs. "Where's it going to be held?"

"Where you like, masters. I'll fight him in a sawpit, or on the outside of a coach if it please you. Put us toe to toe, and leave the rest with me."

"They can't fight here with all this litter," said my uncle. "Where shall it be?"

"'Pon my soul, Tregellis," cried the Prince, "I think our unknown friend might have a word to say upon that matter. He'll be vastly ill-used if you don't let him have his own choice of conditions."

"You are right, sir. We must have him up."

"That's easy enough," said the landlord, "for here he comes through the doorway."

I glanced round and had a side view of a tall and well-dressed young man in a long, brown travelling coat and a black felt hat. The next instant he had turned and I had clutched with both my hands on to Champion Harrison's arm.

"Harrison!" I gasped. "It's Boy Jim!"

And yet somehow the possibility and even the probability of it had occurred to me from the beginning, and I believe that it had to Harrison also, for I had noticed that his face grew grave and troubled from the very moment that there was talk of the stranger below. Now, the instant that the buzz of surprise and admiration caused by Jim's face and figure had died away, Harrison was on his feet, gesticulating in his excitement.

"It's my nephew Jim, gentlemen," he cried. "He's not twenty yet, and it's no doing of mine that he should be here."

"Let him alone, Harrison," cried Jackson. "He's big enough to take care of himself."

"This matter has gone rather far," said my uncle. "I think, Harrison, that you are too good a sportsman to prevent your nephew from showing whether he takes after his uncle."

"It's very different from me," cried Harrison, in great distress. "But I'll tell you what I'll do, gentlemen. I never thought to stand up in a ring again, but I'll take on Joe Berks with pleasure, just to give a bit o' sport to this company."

Boy Jim stepped across and laid his hand upon the prize-fighter's shoulder.

"It must be so, uncle," I heard him whisper. "I am sorry to go against your wishes, but I have made up my mind, and I must carry it through."

Harrison shrugged his huge shoulders.

"Jim, Jim, you don't know what you are doing! But I've heard you speak like that before, boy, and I know that it ends in your getting your way."

"I trust, Harrison, that your opposition is withdrawn?" said my uncle.

"Can I not take his place?"

“You would not have it said that I gave a challenge and let another carry it out?” whispered Jim. “This is my one chance. For Heaven’s sake don’t stand in my way.”

The smith’s broad and usually stolid face was all working with his conflicting emotions. At last he banged his fist down upon the table.

“It’s no fault of mine!” he cried. “It was to be and it is. Jim, boy, for the Lord’s sake remember your distances, and stick to out-fightin’ with a man that could give you a stone.”

“I was sure that Harrison would not stand in the way of sport,” said my uncle. “We are glad that you have stepped up, that we might consult you as to the arrangements for giving effect to your very sporting challenge.”

“Whom am I to fight?” asked Jim, looking round at the company, who were now all upon their feet.

“Young man, you’ll know enough of who you ‘ave to fight before you are through with it,” cried Berks, lurching heavily through the crowd. “You’ll need a friend to swear to you before I’ve finished, d’ye see?”

Jim looked at him with disgust in every line of his face.

“Surely you are not going to set me to fight a drunken man!” said he. “Where is Jem Belcher?”

“My name, young man.”

“I should be glad to try you, if I may.”

“You must work up to me, my lad. You don’t take a ladder at one jump, but you do it rung by rung. Show yourself to be a match for me, and I’ll give you a turn.”

“I’m much obliged to you.”

“And I like the look of you, and wish you well,” said Belcher, holding out his hand. They were not unlike each other, either in face or figure, though the Bristol man was a few years the older, and a murmur of critical admiration was heard as the two tall, lithe figures, and keen, clean-cut faces were contrasted.

“Have you any choice where the fight takes place?” asked my uncle.

“I am in your hands, sir,” said Jim.

“Why not go round to the Five’s Court?” suggested Sir John Lade.

“Yes, let us go to the Five’s Court.”

But this did not at all suit the views of the landlord, who saw in this lucky incident a chance of reaping a fresh harvest from his spendthrift company.

"If it please you," he cried, "there is no need to go so far. My coach-house at the back of the yard is empty, and a better place for a mill you'll never find."

There was a general shout in favour of the coach-house, and those who were nearest the door began to slip through, in the hope of scouring the best places. My stout neighbour, Bill Warr, pulled Harrison to one side.

"I'd stop it if I were you," he whispered.

"I would if I could. It's no wish of mine that he should fight. But there's no turning him when once his mind is made up." All his own fights put together had never reduced the pugilist to such a state of agitation.

"Wait on 'im yourself, then, and chuck up the sponge when things begin to go wrong. You know Joe Berks's record?"

"He's since my time."

"Well, 'e's a terror, that's all. It's only Belcher that can master 'im. You see the man for yourself, six foot, fourteen stone, and full of the devil. Belcher's beat 'im twice, but the second time 'e 'ad all 'is work to do it."

"Well, well, we've got to go through with it. You've not seen Boy Jim put his mawleys up, or maybe you'd think better of his chances. When he was short of sixteen he licked the Cock of the South Downs, and he's come on a long way since then."

The company was swarming through the door and clattering down the stair, so we followed in the stream. A fine rain was falling, and the yellow lights from the windows glistened upon the wet cobblestones of the yard. How welcome was that breath of sweet, damp air after the fetid atmosphere of the supper-room. At the other end of the yard was an open door sharply outlined by the gleam of lanterns within, and through this they poured, amateurs and fighting-men jostling each other in their eagerness to get to the front. For my own part, being a smallish man, I should have seen nothing had I not found an upturned bucket in a corner, upon which I perched myself with the wall at my back.

It was a large room with a wooden floor and an open square in the ceiling, which was fringed with the heads of the ostlers and stable boys who were looking down from the harness-room above. A carriage-lamp was slung in each corner, and a very large stable-lantern hung from a rafter in the centre. A coil of rope had been brought in, and under the direction of Jackson four men had been stationed to hold it.

"What space do you give them?" asked my uncle.

“Twenty-four, as they are both big ones, sir.”

“Very good, and half-minutes between rounds, I suppose? I’ll umpire if Sir Lothian Hume will do the same, and you can hold the watch and referee, Jackson.”

With great speed and exactness every preparation was rapidly made by these experienced men. Mendoza and Dutch Sam were commissioned to attend to Berks, while Belcher and Jack Harrison did the same for Boy Jim. Sponges, towels, and some brandy in a bladder were passed over the heads of the crowd for the use of the seconds.

“Here’s our man,” cried Belcher. “Come along, Berks, or we’ll go to fetch you.”

Jim appeared in the ring stripped to the waist, with a coloured handkerchief tied round his middle. A shout of admiration came from the spectators as they looked upon the fine lines of his figure, and I found myself roaring with the rest. His shoulders were sloping rather than bulky, and his chest was deep rather than broad, but the muscle was all in the right place, rippling down in long, low curves from neck to shoulder, and from shoulder to elbow. His work at the anvil had developed his arms to their utmost, and his healthy country living gave a sleek gloss to his ivory skin, which shone in the lamplight. His expression was full of spirit and confidence, and he wore a grim sort of half-smile which I had seen many a time in our boyhood, and which meant, I knew, that his pride had set iron hard, and that his senses would fail him long before his courage.

Joe Berks in the meanwhile had swaggered in and stood with folded arms between his seconds in the opposite corner. His face had none of the eager alertness of his opponent, and his skin, of a dead white, with heavy folds about the chest and ribs, showed, even to my inexperienced eyes, that he was not a man who should fight without training. A life of toping and ease had left him flabby and gross. On the other hand, he was famous for his mettle and for his hitting power, so that, even in the face of the advantages of youth and condition, the betting was three to one in his favour. His heavy-jowled, clean-shaven face expressed ferocity as well as courage, and he stood with his small, blood-shot eyes fixed viciously upon Jim, and his lumpy shoulders stooping a little forwards, like a fierce hound training on a leash.

The hubbub of the betting had risen until it drowned all other sounds, men shouting their opinions from one side of the coach-house to the other, and waving their hands to attract attention, or as a sign that they had accepted a wager. Sir John Lade, standing just in front of me, was roaring out the odds against Jim, and laying them freely with those who fancied the appearance of the unknown.

“I’ve seen Berks fight,” said he to the Honourable Berkeley Craven. “No country hawbuck is going to knock out a man with such a record.”

“He may be a country hawbuck,” the other answered, “but I have been reckoned a judge of anything either on two legs or four, and I tell you, Sir John, that I never saw a man who looked better bred in my life. Are you still laying against him?”

“Three to one.”

“Have you once in hundreds.”

“Very good, Craven! There they go! Berks! Berks! Bravo! Berks! Bravo! I think, Craven, that I shall trouble you for that hundred.”

The two men had stood up to each other, Jim as light upon his feet as a goat, with his left well out and his right thrown across the lower part of his chest, while Berks held both arms half extended and his feet almost level, so that he might lead off with either side. For an instant they looked each other over, and then Berks, ducking his head and rushing in with a handover-hand style of hitting, bored Jim down into his corner. It was a backward slip rather than a knockdown, but a thin trickle of blood was seen at the corner of Jim’s mouth. In an instant the seconds had seized their men and carried them back into their corners.

“Do you mind doubling our bet?” said Berkeley Craven, who was craning his neck to get a glimpse of Jim.

“Four to one on Berks! Four to one on Berks!” cried the ringsiders.

“The odds have gone up, you see. Will you have four to one in hundreds?”

“Very good, Sir John.”

“You seem to fancy him more for having been knocked down.”

“He was pushed down, but he stopped every blow, and I liked the look on his face as he got up again.”

“Well, it’s the old stager for me. Here they come again! He’s got a pretty style, and he covers his points well, but it isn’t the best looking that wins.”

They were at it again, and I was jumping about upon my bucket in my excitement. It was evident that Berks meant to finish the battle off-hand, whilst Jim, with two of the most experienced men in England to advise him, was quite aware that his correct tactics were to allow the ruffian to expend his strength and wind in vain. There was something horrible in the ferocious energy of Berks's hitting, every blow fetching a grunt from him as he smashed it in, and after each I gazed at Jim, as I have gazed at a stranded vessel upon the Sussex beach when wave after wave has roared over it, fearing each time that I should find it miserably mangled. But still the lamplight shone upon the lad's clear, alert face, upon his well-opened eyes and his firm-set mouth, while the blows were taken upon his forearm or allowed, by a quick duck of the head, to whistle over his shoulder. But Berks was artful as well as violent. Gradually he worked Jim back into an angle of the ropes from which there was no escape, and then, when he had him fairly penned, he sprang upon him like a tiger. What happened was so quick that I cannot set its sequence down in words, but I saw Jim make a quick stoop under the swinging arms, and at the same instant I heard a sharp, ringing smack, and there was Jim dancing about in the middle of the ring, and Berks lying upon his side on the floor, with his hand to his eye.

How they roared! Prize-fighters, Corinthians, Prince, stable-boy, and landlord were all shouting at the top of their lungs. Old Buckhorse was skipping about on a box beside me, shrieking out criticisms and advice in strange, obsolete ring-jargon, which no one could understand. His dull eyes were shining, his parchment face was quivering with excitement, and his strange musical call rang out above all the hubbub. The two men were hurried to their corners, one second sponging them down and the other flapping a towel in front of their face; whilst they, with arms hanging down and legs extended, tried to draw all the air they could into their lungs in the brief space allowed them.

"Where's your country hawbuck now?" cried Craven, triumphantly. "Did ever you witness anything more masterly?"

"He's no Johnny Raw, certainly," said Sir John, shaking his head. "What odds are you giving on Berks, Lord Sole?"

"Two to one."

"I take you twice in hundreds."

"Here's Sir John Lade hedging!" cried my uncle, smiling back at us over his shoulder.

"Time!" said Jackson, and the two men sprang forward to the mark again.

This round was a good deal shorter than that which had preceded it. Berks's orders evidently were to close at any cost, and so make use of his extra weight and strength before the superior condition of his antagonist could have time to tell. On the other hand, Jim, after his experience in the last round, was less disposed to make any great exertion to keep him at arms' length. He led at Berks's head, as he came rushing in, and missed him, receiving a severe body blow in return, which left the imprint of four angry knuckles above his ribs. As they closed Jim caught his opponent's bullet head under his arm for an instant, and put a couple of half-arm blows in; but the prize-fighter pulled him over by his weight, and the two fell panting side by side upon the ground. Jim sprang up, however, and walked over to his corner, while Berks, distressed by his evening's dissipation, leaned one arm upon Mendoza and the other upon Dutch Sam as he made for his seat.

"Bellows to mend!" cried Jem Belcher. "Where's the four to one now?"

"Give us time to get the lid off our pepper-box," said Mendoza. "We mean to make a night of it."

"Looks like it," said Jack Harrison. "He's shut one of his eyes already. Even money that my boy wins it!"

"How much?" asked several voices.

"Two pound four and threepence," cried Harrison, counting out all his worldly wealth.

"Time!" said Jackson once more.

They were both at the mark in an instant, Jim as full of sprightly confidence as ever, and Berks with a fixed grin upon his bull-dog face and a most vicious gleam in the only eye which was of use to him. His half-minute had not enabled him to recover his breath, and his huge, hairy chest was rising and falling with a quick, loud panting like a spent hound. "Go in, boy! Bustle him!" roared Harrison and Belcher. "Get your wind, Joe; get your wind!" cried the Jews. So now we had a reversal of tactics, for it was Jim who went in to hit with all the vigour of his young strength and unimpaired energy, while it was the savage Berks who was paying his debt to Nature for the many injuries which he had done her. He gasped, he gurgled, his face grew purple in his attempts to get his breath, while with his long left arm extended and his right thrown across, he tried to screen himself from the attack of his wiry antagonist. "Drop when he hits!" cried Mendoza. "Drop and have a rest!"

But there was no shyness or shiftiness about Berks's fighting. He was always a gallant ruffian, who disdained to go down before an antagonist as long as his legs would sustain him. He propped Jim off with his long arm, and though the lad sprang lightly round him looking for an opening, he was held off as if a forty-inch bar of iron were between them. Every instant now was in favour of Berks, and already his breathing was easier and the bluish tinge fading from his face. Jim knew that his chance of a speedy victory was slipping away from him, and he came back again and again as swift as a flash to the attack without being able to get past the passive defence of the trained fighting-man. It was at such a moment that ringcraft was needed, and luckily for Jim two masters of it were at his back.

"Get your left on his mark, boy," they shouted, "then go to his head with the right."

Jim heard and acted on the instant. Plunk! came his left just where his antagonist's ribs curved from his breast-bone. The force of the blow was half broken by Berks's elbow, but it served its purpose of bringing forward his head. Spank! went the right, with the clear, crisp sound of two billiard balls clapping together, and Berks reeled, flung up his arms, spun round, and fell in a huge, fleshy heap upon the floor. His seconds were on him instantly, and propped him up in a sitting position, his head rolling helplessly from one shoulder to the other, and finally toppling backwards with his chin pointed to the ceiling. Dutch Sam thrust the brandy-bladder between his teeth, while Mendoza shook him savagely and howled insults in his ear, but neither the spirits nor the sense of injury could break into that serene insensibility. "Time!" was duly called, and the Jews, seeing that the affair was over, let their man's head fall back with a crack upon the floor, and there he lay, his huge arms and legs asprawl, whilst the Corinthians and fighting-men crowded past him to shake the hand of his conqueror.

For my part, I tried also to press through the throng, but it was no easy task for one of the smallest and weakest men in the room. On all sides of me I heard a brisk discussion from amateurs and professionals of Jim's performance and of his prospects.

"He's the best bit of new stuff that I've seen since Jem Belcher fought his first fight with Paddington Jones at Wormwood Scrubbs four years ago last April," said Berkeley Craven. "You'll see him with the belt round his waist before he's five-and-twenty, or I am no judge of a man."

"That handsome face of his has cost me a cool five hundred," grumbled Sir John Lade. "Who'd have thought he was such a punishing hitter?"

“For all that,” said another, “I am confident that if Joe Berks had been sober he would have eaten him. Besides, the lad was in training, and the other would burst like an overdone potato if he were hit. I never saw a man so soft, or with his wind in such condition. Put the men in training, and it’s a horse to a hen on the bruiser.”

Some agreed with the last speaker and some were against him, so that a brisk argument was being carried on around me. In the midst of it the Prince took his departure, which was the signal for the greater part of the company to make for the door. In this way I was able at last to reach the corner where Jim had just finished his dressing, while Champion Harrison, with tears of joy still shining upon his cheeks, was helping him on with his overcoat.

“In four rounds!” he kept repeating in a sort of an ecstasy. “Joe Berks in four rounds! And it took Jem Belcher fourteen!”

“Well, Roddy,” cried Jim, holding out his hand, “I told you that I would come to London and make my name known.”

“It was splendid, Jim!”

“Dear old Roddy! I saw your white face staring at me from the corner. You are not changed, for all your grand clothes and your London friends.”

“It is you who are changed, Jim,” said I; “I hardly knew you when you came into the room.”

“Nor I,” cried the smith. “Where got you all these fine feathers, Jim? Sure I am that it was not your aunt who helped you to the first step towards the prize-ring.”

“Miss Hinton has been my friend - the best friend I ever had.”

“Humph! I thought as much,” grumbled the smith. “Well, it is no doing of mine, Jim, and you must bear witness to that when we go home again. I don’t know what - but, there, it is done, and it can’t be helped. After all, she’s - Now, the deuce take my clumsy tongue!”

I could not tell whether it was the wine which he had taken at supper or the excitement of Boy Jim’s victory which was affecting Harrison, but his usually placid face wore a most disturbed expression, and his manner seemed to betray an alternation of exultation and embarrassment. Jim looked curiously at him, wondering evidently what it was that lay behind these abrupt sentences and sudden silences. The coach-house had in the mean time been cleared; Berks with many curses had staggered at last to his feet, and had gone off in company with two other bruisers, while Jem Belcher alone remained chatting very earnestly with my uncle.

“Very good, Belcher,” I heard my uncle say.

“It would be a real pleasure to me to do it, sir,” and the famous prize-fighter, as the two walked towards us.

“I wished to ask you, Jim Harrison, whether you would undertake to be my champion in the fight against Crab Wilson of Gloucester?” said my uncle.

“That is what I want, Sir Charles - to have a chance of fighting my way upwards.”

“There are heavy stakes upon the event - very heavy stakes,” said my uncle. “You will receive two hundred pounds, if you win. Does that satisfy you?”

“I shall fight for the honour, and because I wish to be thought worthy of being matched against Jem Belcher.”

Belcher laughed good-humouredly.

“You are going the right way about it, lad,” said he. “But you had a soft thing on to-night with a drunken man who was out of condition.”

“I did not wish to fight him,” said Jim, flushing.

“Oh, I know you have spirit enough to fight anything on two legs. I knew that the instant I clapped eyes on you; but I want you to remember that when you fight Crab Wilson, you will fight the most promising man from the west, and that the best man of the west is likely to be the best man in England. He’s as quick and as long in the reach as you are, and he’ll train himself to the last half-ounce of tallow. I tell you this now, d’ye see, because if I’m to have the charge of you - “

“Charge of me!”

“Yes,” said my uncle. “Belcher has consented to train you for the coming battle if you are willing to enter.”

“I am sure I am very much obliged to you,” cried Jim, heartily. “Unless my uncle should wish to train me, there is no one I would rather have.”

“Nay, Jim; I’ll stay with you a few days, but Belcher knows a deal more about training than I do. Where will the quarters be?”

“I thought it would be handy for you if we fixed it at the George, at Crawley. Then, if we have choice of place, we might choose Crawley Down, for, except Molesey Hurst, and, maybe, Smitham Bottom, there isn’t a spot in the country that would compare with it for a mill. Do you agree with that?"

"With all my heart," said Jim.

"Then you're my man from this hour on, d'ye see?" said Belcher. "Your food is mine, and your drink is mine, and your sleep is mine, and all you've to do is just what you are told. We haven't an hour to lose, for Wilson has been in half-training this month back. You saw his empty glass to-night."

"Jim's fit to fight for his life at the present moment," said Harrison. "But we'll both come down to Crawley to-morrow. So good night, Sir Charles."

"Good night, Roddy," said Jim. "You'll come down to Crawley and see me at my training quarters, will you not?"

And I heartily promised that I would.

"You must be more careful, nephew," said my uncle, as we rattled home in his model *vis-à-vis*. "*En première jeunesse* one is a little inclined to be ruled by one's heart rather than by one's reason. Jim Harrison seems to be a most respectable young fellow, but after all he is a blacksmith's apprentice, and a candidate for the prize-ring. There is a vast gap between his position and that of my own blood relation, and you must let him feel that you are his superior."

"He is the oldest and dearest friend that I have in the world, sir," I answered. "We were boys together, and have never had a secret from each other. As to showing him that I am his superior, I don't know how I can do that, for I know very well that he is mine."

"Hum!" said my uncle, drily, and it was the last word that he addressed to me that night.

CHAPTER XII - THE COFFEE-ROOM OF FLADONG’S

So Boy Jim went down to the George, at Crawley, under the charge of Jim Belcher and Champion Harrison, to train for his great fight with Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, whilst every club and bar parlour of London rang with the account of how he had appeared at a supper of Corinthians, and beaten the formidable Joe Berks in four rounds. I remembered that afternoon at Friar’s Oak when Jim had told me that he would make his name known, and his words had come true sooner than he could have expected it, for, go where one might, one heard of nothing but the match between Sir Lothian Hume and Sir Charles Tregellis, and the points of the two probable combatants. The betting was still steadily in favour of Wilson, for he had a number of bye-battles to set against this single victory of Jim’s, and it was thought by connoisseurs who had seen him spar that the singular defensive tactics which had given him his nickname would prove very puzzling to a raw antagonist. In height, strength, and reputation for gameness there was very little to choose between them, but Wilson had been the more severely tested.

It was but a few days before the battle that my father made his promised visit to London. The seaman had no love of cities, and was happier wandering over the Downs, and turning his glass upon every topsail which showed above the horizon, than when finding his way among crowded streets, where, as he complained, it was impossible to keep a course by the sun, and hard enough by dead reckoning. Rumours of war were in the air, however, and it was necessary that he should use his influence with Lord Nelson if a vacancy were to be found either for himself or for me.

My uncle had just set forth, as was his custom of an evening, clad in his green riding-frock, his plate buttons, his Cordovan boots, and his round hat, to show himself upon his crop-tailed tit in the Mall. I had remained behind, for, indeed, I had already made up my mind that I had no calling for this fashionable life. These men, with their small waists, their gestures, and their unnatural ways, had become wearisome to me, and even my uncle, with his cold and patronizing manner, filled me with very mixed feelings.

My thoughts were back in Sussex, and I was dreaming of the kindly, simple ways of the country, when there came a rat-tat at the knocker, the ring of a hearty voice, and there, in the doorway, was the smiling, weather-beaten face, with the puckered eyelids and the light blue eyes.

"Why, Roddy, you are grand indeed!" he cried. "But I had rather see you with the King's blue coat upon your back than with all these frills and ruffles."

"And I had rather wear it, father."

"It warms my heart to hear you say so. Lord Nelson has promised me that he would find a berth for you, and to-morrow we shall seek him out and remind him of it. But where is your uncle?"

"He is riding in the Mall."

A look of relief passed over my father's honest face, for he was never very easy in his brother-in-law's company. "I have been to the Admiralty," said he, "and I trust that I shall have a ship when war breaks out; by all accounts it will not be long first. Lord St. Vincent told me so with his own lips. But I am at Fladong's, Rodney, where, if you will come and sup with me, you will see some of my messmates from the Mediterranean."

When you think that in the last year of the war we had 140,000 seamen and mariners afloat, commanded by 4000 officers, and that half of these had been turned adrift when the Peace of Amiens laid their ships up in the Hamoaze or Portsdown creek, you will understand that London, as well as the dockyard towns, was full of seafarers. You could not walk the streets without catching sight of the gipsy-faced, keen-eyed men whose plain clothes told of their thin purses as plainly as their listless air showed their weariness of a life of forced and unaccustomed inaction. Amid the dark streets and brick houses there was something out of place in their appearance, as when the sea-gulls, driven by stress of weather, are seen in the Midland shires. Yet while prize-courts procrastinated, or there was a chance of an appointment by showing their sunburned faces at the Admiralty, so long they would continue to pace with their quarter-deck strut down Whitehall, or to gather of an evening to discuss the events of the last war or the chances of the next at Fladong's, in Oxford Street, which was reserved as entirely for the Navy as Slaughter's was for the Army, or Ibbetson's for the Church of England.

It did not surprise me, therefore, that we should find the large room in which we supped crowded with naval men, but I remember that what did cause me some astonishment was to observe that all these sailors, who had served under the most varying conditions in all quarters of the globe, from the Baltic to the East Indies, should have been moulded into so uniform a type that they were more like each other than brother is commonly to brother. The rules of the service insured that every face should be clean-shaven, every head powdered, and every neck covered by the little queue of natural hair tied with a black silk ribbon. Biting winds and tropical suns had combined to darken them, whilst the habit of command and the menace of ever-recurring dangers had stamped them all with the same expression of authority and of alertness. There were some jovial faces amongst them, but the older officers, with their deep-lined cheeks and their masterful noses, were, for the most part, as austere as so many weather-beaten ascetics from the desert. Lonely watches, and a discipline which cut them off from all companionship, had left their mark upon those Red Indian faces. For my part, I could hardly eat my supper for watching them. Young as I was, I knew that if there were any freedom left in Europe it was to these men that we owed it; and I seemed to read upon their grim, harsh features the record of that long ten years of struggle which had swept the tricolour from the seas.

When we had finished our supper, my father led me into the great coffee-room, where a hundred or more officers may have been assembled, drinking their wine and smoking their long clay pipes, until the air was as thick as the main-deck in a close-fought action. As we entered we found ourselves face to face with an elderly officer who was coming out. He was a man with large, thoughtful eyes, and a full, placid face - such a face as one would expect from a philosopher and a philanthropist, rather than from a fighting seaman.

“Here’s Cuddie Collingwood,” whispered my father.

“Halloa, Lieutenant Stone!” cried the famous admiral very cheerily. “I have scarce caught a glimpse of you since you came aboard the *Excellent* after St. Vincent. You had the luck to be at the Nile also, I understand?”

“I was third of the *Theseus*, under Millar, sir.”

“It nearly broke my heart to have missed it. I have not yet outlived it. To think of such a gallant service, and I engaged in harassing the market-boats, the miserable cabbage-carriers of St. Luccars!”

“Your plight was better than mine, Sir Cuthbert,” said a voice from behind us, and a large man in the full uniform of a post-captain took a step forward to include himself in our circle. His mastiff face was heavy with emotion, and he shook his head miserably as he spoke.

"Yes, yes, Troubridge, I can understand and sympathize with your feelings."

"I passed through torment that night, Collingwood. It left a mark on me that I shall never lose until I go over the ship's side in a canvas cover. To have my beautiful *Culloden* laid on a sandbank just out of gunshot. To hear and see the fight the whole night through, and never to pull a lanyard or take the tompions out of my guns. Twice I opened my pistol-case to blow out my brains, and it was but the thought that Nelson might have a use for me that held me back."

Collingwood shook the hand of the unfortunate captain.

"Admiral Nelson was not long in finding a use for you, Troubridge," said he. "We have all heard of your siege of Capua, and how you ran up your ship's guns without trenches or parallels, and fired point-blank through the embrasures."

The melancholy cleared away from the massive face of the big seaman, and his deep laughter filled the room.

"I'm not clever enough or slow enough for their Z-Z fashions," said he. "We got alongside and slapped it in through their port-holes until they struck their colours. But where have you been, Sir Cuthbert?"

"With my wife and my two little lasses at Morpeth in the North Country. I have but seen them this once in ten years, and it may be ten more, for all I know, ere I see them again. I have been doing good work for the fleet up yonder."

"I had thought, sir, that it was inland," said my father.

Collingwood took a little black bag out of his pocket and shook it.

"Inland it is," said he, "and yet I have done good work for the fleet there. What do you suppose I hold in this bag?"

"Bullets," said Troubridge.

"Something that a sailor needs even more than that," answered the admiral, and turning it over he tilted a pile of acorns on to his palm. "I carry them with me in my country walks, and where I see a fruitful nook I thrust one deep with the end of my cane. My oak trees may fight those rascals over the water when I am long forgotten. Do you know, lieutenant, how many oaks go to make an eighty-gun ship?"

My father shook his head.

“Two thousand, no less. For every two-decked ship that carries the white ensign there is a grove the less in England. So how are our grandsons to beat the French if we do not give them the trees with which to build their ships?”

He replaced his bag in his pocket, and then, passing his arm through Troubridge’s, they went through the door together.

“There’s a man whose life might help you to trim your own course,” said my father, as we took our seats at a vacant table. “He is ever the same quiet gentleman, with his thoughts busy for the comfort of his ship’s company, and his heart with his wife and children whom he has so seldom seen. It is said in the fleet that an oath has never passed his lips, Rodney, though how he managed when he was first lieutenant of a raw crew is more than I can conceive. But they all love Cuddie, for they know he’s an angel to fight. How d’ye do, Captain Foley? My respects, Sir Ed’ard! Why, if they could but press the company, they would man a corvette with flag officers.”

“There’s many a man here, Rodney,” continued my father, as he glanced about him, “whose name may never find its way into any book save his own ship’s log, but who in his own way has set as fine an example as any admiral of them all. We know them, and talk of them in the fleet, though they may never be bawled in the streets of London. There’s as much seamanship and pluck in a good cutter action as in a line-o’-battleship fight, though you may not come by a title nor the thanks of Parliament for it. There’s Hamilton, for example, the quiet, pale-faced man who is learning against the pillar. It was he who, with six rowing-boats, cut out the 44-gun frigate *Hermione* from under the muzzles of two hundred shore-guns in the harbour of Puerto Cabello. No finer action was done in the whole war. There’s Jaheel Brenton, with the whiskers. It was he who attacked twelve Spanish gunboats in his one little brig, and made four of them strike to him. There’s Walker, of the *Rose* cutter, who, with thirteen men, engaged three French privateers with crews of a hundred and forty-six. He sank one, captured one, and chased the third. How are you, Captain Ball? I hope I see you well?”

Two or three of my father’s acquaintances who had been sitting close by drew up their chairs to us, and soon quite a circle had formed, all talking loudly and arguing upon sea matters, shaking their long, red-tipped pipes at each other as they spoke. My father whispered in my ear that his neighbour was Captain Foley, of the *Goliath*, who led the van at the Nile, and that the tall, thin, foxy-haired man opposite was Lord Cochrane, the most dashing frigate captain in the Service. Even at Friar's Oak we had heard how, in the little *Speedy,* of fourteen small guns with fifty-four men, he had carried by boarding the Spanish frigate *Gamo* with her crew of three hundred. It was easy to see that he was a quick, irascible, high-blooded man, for he was talking hotly about his grievances with a flush of anger upon his freckled cheeks.

"We shall never do any good upon the ocean until we have hanged the dockyard contractors," he cried. "I'd have a dead dockyard contractor as a figure-head for every first-rate in the fleet, and a provision dealer for every frigate. I know them with their puttied seams and their devil bolts, risking five hundred lives that they may steal a few pounds' worth of copper. What became of the *Chance,* and of the *Martin,* and of the *Orestes*? They foundered at sea, and were never heard of more, and I say that the crews of them were murdered men."

Lord Cochrane seemed to be expressing the views of all, for a murmur of assent, with a mutter of hearty, deep-sea curses, ran round the circle.

"Those rascals over yonder manage things better," said an old one-eyed captain, with the blue-and-white riband for St. Vincent peeping out of his third buttonhole. "They sheer away their heads if they get up to any foolery. Did ever a vessel come out of Toulon as my 38-gun frigate did from Plymouth last year, with her masts rolling about until her shrouds were like iron bars on one side and hanging in festoons upon the other? The meanest sloop that ever sailed out of France would have overmatched her, and then it would be on me, and not on this Devonport bungler, that a court-martial would be called."

They loved to grumble, those old salts, for as soon as one had shot off his grievance his neighbour would follow with another, each more bitter than the last.

"Look at our sails!" cried Captain Foley. "Put a French and a British ship at anchor together, and how can you tell which is which?"

"Frenchy has his fore and maintop-gallant masts about equal," said my father.

"In the old ships, maybe, but how many of the new are laid down on the French model? No, there's no way of telling them at anchor. But let them hoist sail, and how d'you tell them then?"

"Frenchy has white sails," cried several.

"And ours are black and rotten. That's the difference. No wonder they outsail us when the wind can blow through our canvas."

"In the *Speedy*," said Cochrane, "the sailcloth was so thin that, when I made my observation, I always took my meridian through the foretopsail and my horizon through the foresail."

There was a general laugh at this, and then at it they all went again, letting off into speech all those weary broodings and silent troubles which had rankled during long years of service, for an iron discipline prevented them from speaking when their feet were upon their own quarter-decks. One told of his powder, six pounds of which were needed to throw a ball a thousand yards. Another cursed the Admiralty Courts, where a prize goes in as a full-rigged ship and comes out as a schooner. The old captain spoke of the promotions by Parliamentary interest which had put many a youngster into the captain's cabin when he should have been in the gun-room. And then they came back to the difficulty of finding crews for their vessels, and they all together raised up their voices and wailed.

"What is the use of building fresh ships," cried Foley, "when even with a ten-pound bounty you can't man the ships that you have got?"

But Lord Cochrane was on the other side in this question.

"You'd have the men, sir, if you treated them well when you got them," said he. "Admiral Nelson can get his ships manned. So can Admiral Collingwood. Why? Because he has thought for the men, and so the men have thought for him. Let men and officers know and respect each other, and there's no difficulty in keeping a ship's company. It's the infernal plan of turning a crew over from ship to ship and leaving the officers behind that rots the Navy. But I have never found a difficulty, and I dare swear that if I hoist my pennant to-morrow I shall have all my old *Speedies* back, and as many volunteers as I care to take."

"That is very well, my lord," said the old captain, with some warmth; "when the Jacks hear that the *Speedy* took fifty vessels in thirteen months, they are sure to volunteer to serve with her commander. Every good cruiser can fill her complement quickly enough. But it is not the cruisers that fight the country's battles and blockade the enemy's ports. I say that all prize-money should be divided equally among the whole fleet, and until you have such a rule, the smartest men will always be found where they are of least service to any one but themselves."

This speech produced a chorus of protests from the cruiser officers and a hearty agreement from the line-of-battleship men, who seemed to be in the majority in the circle which had gathered round. From the flushed faces and angry glances it was evident that the question was one upon which there was strong feeling upon both sides.

"What the cruiser gets the cruiser earns," cried a frigate captain.

"Do you mean to say, sir," said Captain Foley, "that the duties of an officer upon a cruiser demand more care or higher professional ability than those of one who is employed upon blockade service, with a lee coast under him whenever the wind shifts to the west, and the topmasts of an enemy's squadron for ever in his sight?"

"I do not claim higher ability, sir."

"Then why should you claim higher pay? Can you deny that a seaman before the mast makes more in a fast frigate than a lieutenant can in a battleship?"

"It was only last year," said a very gentlemanly-looking officer, who might have passed for a buck upon town had his skin not been burned to copper in such sunshine as never bursts upon London - "it was only last year that I brought the old *Alexander* back from the Mediterranean, floating like an empty barrel and carrying nothing but honour for her cargo. In the Channel we fell in with the frigate *Minerva* from the Western Ocean, with her lee ports under water and her hatches bursting with the plunder which had been too valuable to trust to the prize crews. She had ingots of silver along her yards and bowsprit, and a bit of silver plate at the truck of the masts. My Jacks could have fired into her, and would, too, if they had not been held back. It made them mad to think of all they had done in the south, and then to see this saucy frigate flashing her money before their eyes."

"I cannot see their grievance, Captain Ball," said Cochrane.

"When you are promoted to a two-decker, my lord, it will possibly become clearer to you."

"You speak as if a cruiser had nothing to do but take prizes. If that is your view, you will permit me to say that you know very little of the matter. I have handled a sloop, a corvette, and a frigate, and I have found a great variety of duties in each of them. I have had to avoid the enemy's battleships and to fight his cruisers. I have had to chase and capture his privateers, and to cut them out when they run under his batteries. I have had to engage his forts, to take my men ashore, and to destroy his guns and his signal stations. All this, with convoying, reconnoitring, and risking one's own ship in order to gain a knowledge of the enemy's movements, comes under the duties of the commander of a cruiser. I make bold to say that the man who can carry these objects out with success has deserved better of the country than the officer of a battleship, tacking from Ushant to the Black Rocks and back again until she builds up a reef with her beef-bones."

"Sir," said the angry old sailor, "such an officer is at least in no danger of being mistaken for a privateersman."

"I am surprised, Captain Bulkeley," Cochran retorted hotly, "that you should venture to couple the names of privateersman and King's officer."

There was mischief brewing among these hot-headed, short-spoken salts, but Captain Foley changed the subject to discuss the new ships which were being built in the French ports. It was of interest to me to hear these men, who were spending their lives in fighting against our neighbours, discussing their character and ways. You cannot conceive - you who live in times of peace and charity - how fierce the hatred was in England at that time against the French, and above all against their great leader. It was more than a mere prejudice or dislike. It was a deep, aggressive loathing of which you may even now form some conception if you examine the papers or caricatures of the day. The word "Frenchman" was hardly spoken without "rascal" or "scoundrel" slipping in before it. In all ranks of life and in every part of the country the feeling was the same. Even the Jacks aboard our ships fought with a viciousness against a French vessel which they would never show to Dane, Dutchman, or Spaniard.

If you ask me now, after fifty years, why it was that there should have been this virulent feeling against them, so foreign to the easy-going and tolerant British nature, I would confess that I think the real reason was fear. Not fear of them individually, of course - our foulest detractors have never called us faint-hearted - but fear of their star, fear of their future, fear of the subtle brain whose plans always seemed to go aright, and of the heavy hand which had struck nation after nation to the ground. We were but a small country, with a population which, when the war began, was not much more than half that of France. And then, France had increased by leaps and bounds, reaching out to the north into Belgium and Holland, and to the south into Italy, whilst we were weakened by deep-lying disaffection among both Catholics and Presbyterians in Ireland. The danger was imminent and plain to the least thoughtful. One could not walk the Kent coast without seeing the beacons heaped up to tell the country of the enemy's landing, and if the sun were shining on the uplands near Boulogne, one might catch the flash of its gleam upon the bayonets of manoeuvring veterans. No wonder that a fear of the French power lay deeply in the hearts of the most gallant men, and that fear should, as it always does, beget a bitter and rancorous hatred.

The seamen did not speak kindly then of their recent enemies. Their hearts loathed them, and in the fashion of our country their lips said what the heart felt. Of the French officers they could not have spoken with more chivalry, as of worthy foemen, but the nation was an abomination to them. The older men had fought against them in the American War, they had fought again for the last ten years, and the dearest wish of their hearts seemed to be that they might be called upon to do the same for the remainder of their days. Yet if I was surprised by the virulence of their animosity against the French, I was even more so to hear how highly they rated them as antagonists. The long succession of British victories which had finally made the French take to their ports and resign the struggle in despair had given all of us the idea that for some reason a Briton on the water must, in the nature of things, always have the best of it against a Frenchman. But these men who had done the fighting did not think so. They were loud in their praise of their foemen's gallantry, and precise in their reasons for his defeat. They showed how the officers of the old French Navy had nearly all been aristocrats. How the Revolution had swept them out of their ships, and the force been left with insubordinate seamen and no competent leaders. This ill-directed fleet had been hustled into port by the pressure of the well-manned and well-commanded British, who had pinned them there ever since, so that they had never had an opportunity of learning seamanship. Their harbour drill and their harbour gunnery had been of no service when sails had to be trimmed and broadsides fired on the heave of an Atlantic swell. Let one of their frigates get to sea and have a couple of years' free run in which the crew might learn their duties, and then it would be a feather in the cap of a British officer if with a ship of equal force he could bring down her colours.

Such were the views of these experienced officers, fortified by many reminiscences and examples of French gallantry, such as the way in which the crew of the *L'Orient* had fought her quarter-deck guns when the main-deck was in a blaze beneath them, and when they must have known that they were standing over an exploding magazine. The general hope was that the West Indian expedition since the peace might have given many of their fleet an ocean training, and that they might be tempted out into mid-Channel if the war were to break out afresh. But would it break out afresh? We had spent gigantic sums and made enormous exertions to curb the power of Napoleon and to prevent him from becoming the universal despot of Europe. Would the Government try it again? Or were they appalled by the gigantic load of debt which must bend the backs of many generations unborn? Pitt was there, and surely he was not a man to leave his work half done.

And then suddenly there was a bustle at the door. Amid the grey swirl of the tobacco-smoke I could catch a glimpse of a blue coat and gold epaulettes, with a crowd gathering thickly round them, while a hoarse murmur rose from the group which thickened into a deep-chested cheer. Every one was on his feet, peering and asking each other what it might mean. And still the crowd seethed and the cheering swelled.

"What is it? What has happened?" cried a score of voices.

"Put him up! Hoist him up!" shouted somebody, and an instant later I saw Captain Troubridge appear above the shoulders of the crowd. His face was flushed, as if he were in wine, and he was waving what seemed to be a letter in the air. The cheering died away, and there was such a hush that I could hear the crackle of the paper in his hand.

"Great news, gentlemen!" he roared. "Glorious news! Rear-Admiral Collingwood has directed me to communicate it to you. The French Ambassador has received his papers to-night. Every ship on the list is to go into commission. Admiral Cornwallis is ordered out of Cawsand Bay to cruise off Ushant. A squadron is starting for the North Sea and another for the Irish Channel."

He may have had more to say, but his audience could wait no longer. How they shouted and stamped and raved in their delight! Harsh old flag-officers, grave post-captains, young lieutenants, all were roaring like schoolboys breaking up for the holidays. There was no thought now of those manifold and weary grievances to which I had listened. The foul weather was passed, and the landlocked sea-birds would be out on the foam once more. The rhythm of "God Save the King" swelled through the babel, and I heard the old lines sung in a way that made you forget their bad rhymes and their bald sentiments. I trust that you will never hear them so sung, with tears upon rugged cheeks, and catchings of the breath from strong men. Dark days will have come again before you hear such a song or see such a sight as that. Let those talk of the phlegm of our countrymen who have never seen them when the lava crust of restraint is broken, and when for an instant the strong, enduring fires of the North glow upon the surface. I saw them then, and if I do not see them now, I am not so old or so foolish as to doubt that they are there.

CHAPTER XIII - LORD NELSON

My father's appointment with Lord Nelson was an early one, and he was the more anxious to be punctual as he knew how much the Admiral's movements must be affected by the news which we had heard the night before. I had hardly breakfasted then, and my uncle had not rung for his chocolate, when he called for me at Jermyn Street. A walk of a few hundred yards brought us to the high building of discoloured brick in Piccadilly, which served the Hamiltons as a town house, and which Nelson used as his head-quarters when business or pleasure called him from Merton. A footman answered our knock, and we were ushered into a large drawing-room with sombre furniture and melancholy curtains. My father sent in his name, and there we sat, looking at the white Italian statuettes in the corners, and the picture of Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples which hung over the harpsichord. I can remember that a black clock was ticking loudly upon the mantelpiece, and that every now and then, amid the rumble of the hackney coaches, we could hear boisterous laughter from some inner chamber.

When at last the door opened, both my father and I sprang to our feet, expecting to find ourselves face to face with the greatest living Englishman. It was a very different person, however, who swept into the room.

She was a lady, tall, and, as it seemed to me, exceedingly beautiful, though, perhaps, one who was more experienced and more critical might have thought that her charm lay in the past rather than the present. Her queenly figure was moulded upon large and noble lines, while her face, though already tending to become somewhat heavy and coarse, was still remarkable for the brilliancy of the complexion, the beauty of the large, light blue eyes, and the tinge of the dark hair which curled over the low white forehead. She carried herself in the most stately fashion, so that as I looked at her majestic entrance, and at the pose which she struck as she glanced at my father, I was reminded of the Queen of the Peruvians as, in the person of Miss Polly Hinton, she incited Boy Jim and myself to insurrection.

"Lieutenant Anson Stone?" she asked.

“Yes, your ladyship,” answered my father.

“Ah,” she cried, with an affected and exaggerated start, “you know me, then?”

“I have seen your ladyship at Naples.”

“Then you have doubtless seen my poor Sir William also - my poor, poor Sir William!” She touched her dress with her white, ring-covered fingers, as if to draw our attention to the fact that she was in the deepest mourning.

“I heard of your ladyship’s sad loss,” said my father.

“We died together,” she cried. “What can my life be now save a long-drawn living death?”

She spoke in a beautiful, rich voice, with the most heart-broken thrill in it, but I could not conceal from myself that she appeared to be one of the most robust persons that I had ever seen, and I was surprised to notice that she shot arch little questioning glances at me, as if the admiration even of so insignificant a person were of some interest to her. My father, in his blunt, sailor fashion, tried to stammer out some commonplace condolence, but her eyes swept past his rude, weather-beaten face to ask and reask what effect she had made upon me.

“There he hangs, the tutelary angel of this house,” she cried, pointing with a grand sweeping gesture to a painting upon the wall, which represented a very thin-faced, high-nosed gentleman with several orders upon his coat. “But enough of my private sorrow!” She dashed invisible tears from her eyes. “You have come to see Lord Nelson. He bid me say that he would be with you in an instant. You have doubtless heard that hostilities are about to reopen?”

“We heard the news last night.”

“Lord Nelson is under orders to take command of the Mediterranean Fleet. You can think at such a moment - But, ah, is it not his lordship’s step that I hear?”

My attention was so riveted by the lady’s curious manner and by the gestures and attitudes with which she accompanied every remark, that I did not see the great admiral enter the room. When I turned he was standing close by my elbow, a small, brown man with the lithe, slim figure of a boy. He was not clad in uniform, but he wore a high-collared brown coat, with the right sleeve hanging limp and empty by his side. The expression of his face was, as I remember it, exceedingly sad and gentle, with the deep lines upon it which told of the chafing of his urgent and fiery soul. One eye was disfigured and sightless from a wound, but the other looked from my father to myself with the quickest and shrewdest of expressions. Indeed, his whole manner, with his short, sharp glance and the fine poise of the head, spoke of energy and alertness, so that he reminded me, if I may compare great things with small, of a well-bred fighting terrier, gentle and slim, but keen and ready for whatever chance might send.

"Why, Lieutenant Stone," said he, with great cordiality, holding out his left hand to my father, "I am very glad to see you. London is full of Mediterranean men, but I trust that in a week there will not be an officer amongst you all with his feet on dry land."

"I had come to ask you, sir, if you could assist me to a ship."

"You shall have one, Stone, if my word goes for anything at the Admiralty. I shall want all my old Nile men at my back. I cannot promise you a first-rate, but at least it shall be a 64-gun ship, and I can tell you that there is much to be done with a handy, well-manned, well-found 64-gun ship."

"Who could doubt it who has heard of the *Agamemnon*?" cried Lady Hamilton, and straightway she began to talk of the admiral and of his doings with such extravagance of praise and such a shower of compliments and of epithets, that my father and I did not know which way to look, feeling shame and sorrow for a man who was compelled to listen to such things said in his own presence. But when I ventured to glance at Lord Nelson I found, to my surprise, that, far from showing any embarrassment, he was smiling with pleasure, as if this gross flattery of her ladyship's were the dearest thing in all the world to him.

"Come, come, my dear lady," said he, "you speak vastly beyond my merits;" upon which encouragement she started again in a theatrical apostrophe to Britain's darling and Neptune's eldest son, which he endured with the same signs of gratitude and pleasure. That a man of the world, five-and-forty years of age, shrewd, honest, and acquainted with Courts, should be beguiled by such crude and coarse homage, amazed me, as it did all who knew him; but you who have seen much of life do not need to be told how often the strongest and noblest nature has its one inexplicable weakness, showing up the more obviously in contrast to the rest, as the dark stain looks the fouler upon the whitest sheet.

"You are a sea-officer of my own heart, Stone," said he, when her ladyship had exhausted her panegyric. "You are one of the old breed!" He walked up and down the room with little, impatient steps as he talked, turning with a whisk upon his heel every now and then, as if some invisible rail had brought him up. “We are getting too fine for our work with these new-fangled epaulettes and quarter-deck trimmings. When I joined the Service, you would find a lieutenant gammoning and rigging his own bowsprit, or aloft, maybe, with a marlinspike slung round his neck, showing an example to his men. Now, it’s as much as he’ll do to carry his own sextant up the companion. When could you join?”

“To-night, my lord.”

“Right, Stone, right! That is the true spirit. They are working double tides in the yards, but I do not know when the ships will be ready. I hoist my flag on the *Victory* on Wednesday, and we sail at once.”

“No, no; not so soon! She cannot be ready for sea,” said Lady Hamilton, in a wailing voice, clasping her hands and turning up her eyes as she spoke.

“She must and she shall be ready,” cried Nelson, with extraordinary vehemence. “By Heaven! if the devil stands at the door, I sail on Wednesday. Who knows what these rascals may be doing in my absence? It maddens me to think of the deviltries which they may be devising. At this very instant, dear lady, the Queen, *our* Queen, may be straining her eyes for the topsails of Nelson’s ships.”

Thinking, as I did, that he was speaking of our own old Queen Charlotte, I could make no meaning out of this; but my father told me afterwards that both Nelson and Lady Hamilton had conceived an extraordinary affection for the Queen of Naples, and that it was the interests of her little kingdom which he had so strenuously at heart. It may have been my expression of bewilderment which attracted Nelson’s attention to me, for he suddenly stopped in his quick quarter-deck walk, and looked me up and down with a severe eye.

“Well, young gentleman!” said he, sharply.

“This is my only son, sir,” said my father. “It is my wish that he should join the Service, if a berth can be found for him; for we have all been King’s officers for many generations.”

“So, you wish to come and have your bones broken?” cried Nelson, roughly, looking with much disfavour at the fine clothes which had cost my uncle and Mr. Brummel such a debate. “You will have to change that grand coat for a tarry jacket if you serve under me, sir.”

I was so embarrassed by the abruptness of his manner that I could but stammer out that I hoped I should do my duty, on which his stern mouth relaxed into a good-humoured smile, and he laid his little brown hand for an instant upon my shoulder.

"I dare say that you will do very well," said he. "I can see that you have the stuff in you. But do not imagine that it is a light service which you undertake, young gentleman, when you enter His Majesty's Navy. It is a hard profession. You hear of the few who succeed, but what do you know of the hundreds who never find their way? Look at my own luck! Out of 200 who were with me in the San Juan expedition, 145 died in a single night. I have been in 180 engagements, and I have, as you see, lost my eye and my arm, and been sorely wounded besides. It chanced that I came through, and here I am flying my admiral's flag; but I remember many a man as good as me who did not come through. Yes," he added, as her ladyship broke in with a voluble protest, "many and many as good a man who has gone to the sharks or the land-crabs. But it is a useless sailor who does not risk himself every day, and the lives of all of us are in the hands of Him who best knows when to claim them."

For an instant, in his earnest gaze and reverent manner, we seemed to catch a glimpse of the deeper, truer Nelson, the man of the Eastern counties, steeped in the virile Puritanism which sent from that district the Ironsides to fashion England within, and the Pilgrim Fathers to spread it without. Here was the Nelson who declared that he saw the hand of God pressing upon the French, and who waited on his knees in the cabin of his flag-ship while she bore down upon the enemy's line. There was a human tenderness, too, in his way of speaking of his dead comrades, which made me understand why it was that he was so beloved by all who served with him, for, iron-hard as he was as seaman and fighter, there ran through his complex nature a sweet and un-English power of affectionate emotion, showing itself in tears if he were moved, and in such tender impulses as led him afterwards to ask his flag-captain to kiss him as he lay dying in the cockpit of the *Victory.*

My father had risen to depart, but the admiral, with that kindliness which he ever showed to the young, and which had been momentarily chilled by the unfortunate splendour of my clothes, still paced up and down in front of us, shooting out crisp little sentences of exhortation and advice.

"It is ardour that we need in the Service, young gentleman," said he. "We need red-hot men who will never rest satisfied. We had them in the

Mediterranean, and we shall have them again. There was a band of brothers! When I was asked to recommend one for special service, I told the Admiralty they might take the names as they came, for the same spirit animated them all. Had we taken nineteen vessels, we should never have said it was well done while the twentieth sailed the seas. You know how it was with us, Stone. You are too old a Mediterranean man for me to tell you anything."

"I trust, my lord, that I shall be with you when next we meet them," said my father.

"Meet them we shall and must. By Heaven, I shall never rest until I have given them a shaking. The scoundrel Buonaparte wishes to humble us. Let him try, and God help the better cause!"

He spoke with such extraordinary animation that the empty sleeve flapped about in the air, giving him the strangest appearance. Seeing my eyes fixed upon it, he turned with a smile to my father.

"I can still work my fin, Stone," said he, putting his hand across to the stump of his arm. "What used they to say in the fleet about it?"

"That it was a sign, sir, that it was a bad hour to cross your hawse."

"They knew me, the rascals. You can see, young gentleman, that not a scrap of the ardour with which I serve my country has been shot away. Some day you may find that you are flying your own flag, and when that time comes you may remember that my advice to an officer is that he should have nothing to do with tame, slow measures. Lay all your stake, and if you lose through no fault of your own, the country will find you another stake as large. Never mind manoeuvres! Go for them! The only manoeuvre you need is that which will place you alongside your enemy. Always fight, and you will always be right. Give not a thought to your own ease or your own life, for from the day that you draw the blue coat over your back you have no life of your own. It is the country's, to be most freely spent if the smallest gain can come from it. How is the wind this morning, Stone?"

"East-south-east," my father answered, readily.

"Then Cornwallis is, doubtless, keeping well up to Brest, though, for my own part, I had rather tempt them out into the open sea."

"That is what every officer and man in the fleet would prefer, your lordship," said my father.

"They do not love the blockading service, and it is little wonder, since neither money nor honour is to be gained at it. You can remember how it was in the winter months before Toulon, Stone, when we had neither firing, wine, beef, pork, nor flour aboard the ships, nor a spare piece of rope, canvas, or twine. We braced the old hulks with our spare cables, and God knows there was never a Levanter that I did not expect it to send us to the bottom. But we held our grip all the same. Yet I fear that we do not get much credit for it here in England, Stone, where they light the windows for a great battle, but they do not understand that it is easier for us to fight the Nile six times over, than to keep our station all winter in the blockade. But I pray God that we may meet this new fleet of theirs and settle the matter by a pell-mell battle."

"May I be with you, my lord!" said my father, earnestly. "But we have already taken too much of your time, and so I beg to thank you for your kindness and to wish you good morning."

"Good morning, Stone!" said Nelson. "You shall have your ship, and if I can make this young gentleman one of my officers it shall be done. But I gather from his dress," he continued, running his eye over me, "that you have been more fortunate in prize-money than most of your comrades. For my own part, I never did nor could turn my thoughts to money-making."

My father explained that I had been under the charge of the famous Sir Charles Tregellis, who was my uncle, and with whom I was now residing.

"Then you need no help from me," said Nelson, with some bitterness. "If you have either guineas or interest you can climb over the heads of old sea-officers, though you may not know the poop from the galley, or a carronade from a long nine. Nevertheless - But what the deuce have we here?"

The footman had suddenly precipitated himself into the room, but stood abashed before the fierce glare of the admiral's eye.

"Your lordship told me to rush to you if it should come," he explained, holding out a large blue envelope.

"By Heaven, it is my orders!" cried Nelson, snatching it up and fumbling with it in his awkward, one-handed attempt to break the seals. Lady Hamilton ran to his assistance, but no sooner had she glanced at the paper inclosed than she burst into a shrill scream, and throwing up her hands and her eyes, she sank backwards in a swoon. I could not but observe, however, that her fall was very carefully executed, and that she was fortunate enough, in spite of her insensibility, to arrange her drapery and attitude into a graceful and classical design. But he, the honest seaman, so incapable of deceit or affectation that he could not suspect it in others, ran madly to the bell, shouting for the maid, the doctor, and the smelling-salts, with incoherent words of grief, and such passionate terms of emotion that my father thought it more discreet to twitch me by the sleeve as a signal that we should steal from the room. There we left him then in the dim-lit London drawing-room, beside himself with pity for this shallow and most artificial woman, while without, at the edge of the Piccadilly curb, there stood the high dark berline ready to start him upon that long journey which was to end in his chase of the French fleet over seven thousand miles of ocean, his meeting with it, his victory, which confined Napoleon's ambition for ever to the land, and his death, coming, as I would it might come to all of us, at the crowning moment of his life.

CHAPTER XIV - ON THE ROAD

And now the day of the great fight began to approach. Even the imminent outbreak of war and the renewed threats of Napoleon were secondary things in the eyes of the sportsmen - and the sportsmen in those days made a large half of the population. In the club of the patrician and the plebeian gin-shop, in the coffee-house of the merchant or the barrack of the soldier, in London or the provinces, the same question was interesting the whole nation. Every west-country coach brought up word of the fine condition of Crab Wilson, who had returned to his own native air for his training, and was known to be under the immediate care of Captain Barclay, the expert. On the other hand, although my uncle had not yet named his man, there was no doubt amongst the public that Jim was to be his nominee, and the report of his physique and of his performance found him many backers. On the whole, however, the betting was in favour of Wilson, for Bristol and the west country stood by him to a man, whilst London opinion was divided. Three to two were to be had on Wilson at any West End club two days before the battle.

I had twice been down to Crawley to see Jim in his training quarters, where I found him undergoing the severe regimen which was usual. From early dawn until nightfall he was running, jumping, striking a bladder which swung upon a bar, or sparring with his formidable trainer. His eyes shone and his skin glowed with exuberent health, and he was so confident of success that my own misgivings vanished as I watched his gallant bearing and listened to his quiet and cheerful words.

“But I wonder that you should come and see me now, Rodney,” said he, when we parted, trying to laugh as he spoke. “I have become a bruiser and your uncle’s paid man, whilst you are a Corinthian upon town. If you had not been the best and truest little gentleman in the world, you would have been my patron instead of my friend before now.”

When I looked at this splendid fellow, with his high-bred, clean-cut face, and thought of the fine qualities and gentle, generous impulses which I knew to lie within him, it seemed so absurd that he should speak as though my friendship towards him were a condescension, that I could not help laughing aloud.

“That is all very well, Rodney,” said he, looking hard into my eyes. “But what does your uncle think about it?”

This was a poser, and I could only answer lamely enough that, much as I was indebted to my uncle, I had known Jim first, and that I was surely old enough to choose my own friends.

Jim’s misgivings were so far correct that my uncle did very strongly object to any intimacy between us; but there were so many other points in which he disapproved of my conduct, that it made the less difference. I fear that he was already disappointed in me. I would not develop an eccentricity, although he was good enough to point out several by which I might “come out of the ruck,” as he expressed it, and so catch the attention of the strange world in which he lived.

“You are an active young fellow, nephew,” said he. “Do you not think that you could engage to climb round the furniture of an ordinary room without setting foot upon the ground? Some little *tour-de-force* of the sort is in excellent taste. There was a captain in the Guards who attained considerable social success by doing it for a small wager. Lady Lieven, who is exceedingly exigeant, used to invite him to her evenings merely that he might exhibit it.”

I had to assure him that the feat would be beyond me.

“You are just a little *difficile*,” said he, shrugging his shoulders. “As my nephew, you might have taken your position by perpetuating my own delicacy of taste. If you had made bad taste your enemy, the world of fashion would willingly have looked upon you as an arbiter by virtue of your family traditions, and you might without a struggle have stepped into the position to which this young upstart Brummell aspires. But you have no instinct in that direction. You are incapable of minute attention to detail. Look at your shoes! Look at your cravat! Look at your watch-chain! Two links are enough to show. I *have* shown three, but it was an indiscretion. At this moment I can see no less than five of yours. I regret it, nephew, but I do not think that you are destined to attain that position which I have a right to expect from my blood relation.”

“I am sorry to be a disappointment to you, sir,” said I.

“It is your misfortune not to have come under my influence earlier,” said he. “I might then have moulded you so as to have satisfied even my own aspirations. I had a younger brother whose case was a similar one. I did what I could for him, but he would wear ribbons in his shoes, and he publicly mistook white Burgundy for Rhine wine. Eventually the poor fellow took to books, and lived and died in a country vicarage. He was a good man, but he was commonplace, and there is no place in society for commonplace people."

"Then I fear, sir, that there is none for me," said I. "But my father has every hope that Lord Nelson will find me a position in the fleet. If I have been a failure in town, I am none the less conscious of your kindness in trying to advance my interests, and I hope that, should I receive my commission, I may be a credit to you yet."

"It is possible that you may attain the very spot which I had marked out for you, but by another road," said my uncle. "There are many men in town, such as Lord St. Vincent, Lord Hood, and others, who move in the most respectable circles, although they have nothing but their services in the Navy to recommend them."

It was on the afternoon of the day before the fight that this conversation took place between my uncle and myself in the dainty sanctum of his Jermyn-Street house. He was clad, I remember, in his flowing brocade dressing-gown, as was his custom before he set off for his club, and his foot was extended upon a stool - for Abernethy had just been in to treat him for an incipient attack of the gout. It may have been the pain, or it may have been his disappointment at my career, but his manner was more testy than was usual with him, and I fear that there was something of a sneer in his smile as he spoke of my deficiencies. For my own part I was relieved at the explanation, for my father had left London in the full conviction that a vacancy would speedily be found for us both, and the one thing which had weighed upon my mind was that I might have found it hard to leave my uncle without interfering with the plans which he had formed. I was heart-weary of this empty life, for which I was so ill-fashioned, and weary also of that intolerant talk which would make a coterie of frivolous women and foolish fops the central point of the universe. Something of my uncle's sneer may have flickered upon my lips as I heard him allude with supercilious surprise to the presence in those sacrosanct circles of the men who had stood between the country and destruction.

"By the way, nephew," said he, "gout or no gout, and whether Abernethy likes it or not, we must be down at Crawley to-night. The battle will take place upon Crawley Downs. Sir Lothian Hume and his man are at Reigate. I have reserved beds at the George for both of us. The crush will, it is said, exceed anything ever known. The smell of these country inns is always most offensive to me - *mais que voulez-vous*? Berkeley Craven was saying in the club last night that there is not a bed within twenty miles of Crawley which is not bespoke, and that they are charging three guineas for the night. I hope that your young friend, if I must describe him as such, will fulfil the promise which he has shown, for I have rather more upon the event than I care to lose. Sir Lothian has been plunging also - he made a single bye-bet of five thousand to three upon Wilson in Limmer's yesterday. From what I hear of his affairs it will be a serious matter for him if we should pull it off. Well, Lorimer?"

"A person to see you, Sir Charles," said the new valet.

"You know that I never see any one until my dressing is complete."

"He insists upon seeing you, sir. He pushed open the door."

"Pushed it open! What d'you mean, Lorimer? Why didn't you put him out?"

A smile passed over the servant's face. At the same moment there came a deep voice from the passage.

"You show me in this instant, young man, d'ye 'ear? Let me see your master, or it'll be the worse for you."

I thought that I had heard the voice before, but when, over the shoulder of the valet, I caught a glimpse of a large, fleshy, bull-face, with a flattened Michael Angelo nose in the centre of it, I knew at once that it was my neighbour at the supper party.

"It's Warr, the prizefighter, sir," said I.

"Yes, sir," said our visitor, pushing his huge form into the room. "It's Bill Warr, landlord of the One Ton public-'ouse, Jermyn Street, and the gamest man upon the list. There's only one thing that ever beat me, Sir Charles, and that was my flesh, which creeps over me that amazin' fast that I've always got four stone that 'as no business there. Why, sir, I've got enough to spare to make a feather-weight champion out of. You'd 'ardly think, to look at me, that even after Mendoza fought me I was able to jump the four-foot ropes at the ring-side just as light as a little kiddy; but if I was to chuck my castor into the ring now I'd never get it till the wind blew it out again, for blow my dicky if I could climb after. My respec's to you, young sir, and I 'ope I see you well."

My uncle's face had expressed considerable disgust at this invasion of his privacy, but it was part of his position to be on good terms with the fighting-men, so he contented himself with asking curtly what business had brought him there. For answer the huge prizefighter looked meaningly at the valet.

"It's important, Sir Charles, and between man and man," said he.

"You may go, Lorimer. Now, Warr, what is the matter?"

The bruiser very calmly seated himself astride of a chair with his arms resting upon the back of it.

"I've got information, Sir Charles," said he.

"Well, what is it?" cried my uncle, impatiently.

"Information of value."

"Out with it, then!"

"Information that's worth money," said Warr, and pursed up his lips.

"I see. You want to be paid for what you know?"

The prizefighter smiled an affirmative.

"Well, I don't buy things on trust. You should know me better than to try on such a game with me."

"I know you for what you are, Sir Charles, and that is a noble, slap-up Corinthian. But if I was to use this against you, d'ye see, it would be worth 'undreds in my pocket. But my 'eart won't let me do it, for Bill Warr's always been on the side o' good sport and fair play. If I use it for you, then I expect that you won't see me the loser."

"You can do what you like," said my uncle. "If your news is of service to me, I shall know how to treat you."

"You can't say fairer than that. We'll let it stand there, gov'nor, and you'll do the 'andsome thing, as you 'ave always 'ad the name for doin'. Well, then, your man, Jim 'Arisen, fights Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, at Crawley Down to-morrow mornin' for a stake."

"What of that?"

"Did you 'appen to know what the bettin' was yesterday?"

"It was three to two on Wilson."

"Right you are, gov'nor. Three to two was offered in my own bar-parlour. D'you know what the bettin' is to-day?"

"I have not been out yet."

"Then I'll tell you. It's seven to one against your man."

"What?"

"Seven to one, gov'nor, no less."

“You’re talking nonsense, Warr! How could the betting change from three to two to seven to one?”

“Ive been to Tom Owen’s, and I’ve been to the ‘Ole in the Wall, and I’ve been to the Waggon and ‘Orses, and you can get seven to one in any of them. There’s tons of money being laid against your man. It’s a ‘orse to a ‘en in every sportin’ ‘ouse and boozin’ ken from ‘ere to Stepney.”

For a moment the expression upon my uncle’s face made me realise that this match was really a serious matter to him. Then he shrugged his shoulders with an incredulous smile.

“All the worse for the fools who give the odds,” said he. “My man is all right. You saw him yesterday, nephew?”

“He was all right yesterday, sir.”

“If anything had gone wrong I should have heard.”

“But perhaps,” said Warr, “it ‘as not gone wrong with ‘im *yet*.”

“What d’you mean?”

“I’ll tell you what I mean, sir. You remember Berks? You know that ‘e ain’t to be overmuch depended on at any time, and that ‘e ‘ad a grudge against your man ‘cause ‘e laid ‘im out in the coach-’ouse. Well, last night about ten o’clock in ‘e comes into my bar, and the three bloodiest rogues in London at ‘is ‘eels. There was Red Ike, ‘im that was warned off the ring ‘cause ‘e fought a cross with Bittoon; and there was Fightin’ Yussef, who would sell ‘is mother for a seven-shillin’-bit; the third was Chris McCarthy, who is a fogle-snatcher by trade, with a pitch outside the ‘Aymarket Theatre. You don’t often see four such beauties together, and all with as much as they could carry, save only Chris, who is too leary a cove to drink when there’s somethin’ goin’ forward. For my part, I showed ‘em into the parlour, not ‘cos they was worthy of it, but ‘cos I knew right well they would start bashin’ some of my customers, and maybe get my license into trouble if I left ‘em in the bar. I served ‘em with drink, and stayed with ‘em just to see that they didn’t lay their ‘ands on the stuffed parroquet and the pictures.

“Well, gov’nor, to cut it short, they began to talk about the fight, and they all laughed at the idea that young Jim ‘Arrison could win it - all except Chris, and e’ kept a-nudging and a-twitchin’ at the others until Joe Berks nearly gave him a wipe across the face for ‘is trouble. I saw somethin’ was in the wind, and it wasn’t very ‘ard to guess what it was - especially when Red Ike was ready to put up a fiver that Jim ‘Arrison would never fight at all. So I up to get another bottle of liptrap, and I slipped round to the shutter that we pass the liquor through from the private bar into the parlour. I drew it an inch open, and I might ‘ave been at the table with them, I could ‘ear every word that clearly.

“There was Chris McCarthy growlin’ at them for not keepin’ their tongues still, and there was Joe Berks swearin’ that ‘e would knock ‘is face in if ‘e dared give ‘im any of ‘is lip. So Chris ‘e sort of argued with them, for ‘e was frightened of Berks, and ‘e put it to them whether they would be fit for the job in the mornin’, and whether the gov’nor would pay the money if ‘e found they ‘ad been drinkin’ and were not to be trusted. This struck them sober, all three, an’ Fighting Yussef asked what time they were to start. Chris said that as long as they were at Crawley before the George shut up they could work it. ‘It’s poor pay for a chance of a rope,’ said Red Ike. ‘Rope be damned!’ cried Chris, takin’ a little loaded stick out of his side pocket. ‘If three of you ‘old him down and I break his arm-bone with this, we’ve earned our money, and we don’t risk more’n six months’ jug.’ ‘‘E’ll fight,’ said Berks. ‘Well, it’s the only fight ‘e’ll get,’ answered Chris, and that was all I ‘eard of it. This mornin’ out I went, and I found as I told you afore that the money is goin’ on to Wilson by the ton, and that no odds are too long for the layers. So it stands, gov’nor, and you know what the meanin’ of it may be better than Bill Warr can tell you.”

“Very good, Warr,” said my uncle, rising. “I am very much obliged to you for telling me this, and I will see that you are not a loser by it. I put it down as the gossip of drunken ruffians, but none the less you have served me vastly by calling my attention to it. I suppose I shall see you at the Downs to-morrow?”

“Mr. Jackson ‘as asked me to be one o’ the beaters-out, sir.”

“Very good. I hope that we shall have a fair and good fight. Good day to you, and thank you.”

My uncle had preserved his jaunty demeanour as long as Warr was in the room, but the door had hardly closed upon him before he turned to me with a face which was more agitated than I had ever seen it.

“We must be off for Crawley at once, nephew,” said he, ringing the bell. “There’s not a moment to be lost. Lorimer, order the bays to be harnessed in the curricle. Put the toilet things in, and tell William to have it round at the door as soon as possible.”

“I’ll see to it, sir,” said I, and away I ran to the mews in Little Ryder Street, where my uncle stabled his horses. The groom was away, and I had to send a lad in search of him, while with the help of the livery-man I dragged the curricle from the coach-house and brought the two mares out of their stalls. It was half an hour, or possibly three-quarters, before everything had been found, and Lorimer was already waiting in Jermyn Street with the inevitable baskets, whilst my uncle stood in the open door of his house, clad in his long fawn-coloured driving-coat, with no sign upon his calm pale face of the tumult of impatience which must, I was sure, be raging within.

“We shall leave you, Lorimer,” said he. “We might find it hard to get a bed for you. Keep at her head, William! Jump in, nephew. Halloa, Warr, what is the matter now?”

The prizefighter was hastening towards us as fast as his bulk would allow.

“Just one word before you go, Sir Charles,” he panted. “I’ve just ‘eard in my taproom that the four men I spoke of left for Crawley at one o’clock.”

“Very good, Warr,” said my uncle, with his foot upon the step.

“And the odds ‘ave risen to ten to one.”

“Let go her head, William!”

“Just one more word, gov’nor. You’ll excuse the liberty, but if I was you I’d take my pistols with me.”

“Thank you; I have them.”

The long thong cracked between the ears of the leader, the groom sprang for the pavement, and Jermyn Street had changed for St. James’s, and that again for Whitehall with a swiftness which showed that the gallant mares were as impatient as their master. It was half-past four by the Parliament clock as we flew on to Westminster Bridge. There was the flash of water beneath us, and then we were between those two long dun-coloured lines of houses which had been the avenue which had led us to London. My uncle sat with tightened lips and a brooding brow. We had reached Streatham before he broke the silence.

“I have a good deal at stake, nephew,” said he.

“So have I, sir,” I answered.

“You!” he cried, in surprise.

“My friend, sir.”

"Ah, yes, I had forgot. You have some eccentricities, after all, nephew. You are a faithful friend, which is a rare enough thing in our circles. I never had but one friend of my own position, and he - but you've heard me tell the story. I fear it will be dark before we reach Crawley."

"I fear that it will."

"In that case we may be too late."

"Pray God not, sir!"

"We sit behind the best cattle in England, but I fear lest we find the roads blocked before we get to Crawley. Did you observe, nephew, that these four villains spoke in Warr's hearing of the master who was behind them, and who was paying them for their infamy? Did you not understand that they were hired to cripple my man? Who, then, could have hired them? Who had an interest unless it was - I know Sir Lothian Hume to be a desperate man. I know that he has had heavy card losses at Watier's and White's. I know also that he has much at stake upon this event, and that he has plunged upon it with a rashness which made his friends think that he had some private reason for being satisfied as to the result. By Heaven, it all hangs together! If it should be so -!" He relapsed into silence, but I saw the same look of cold fierceness settle upon his features which I had marked there when he and Sir John Lade had raced wheel to wheel down the Godstone road.

The sun sank slowly towards the low Surrey hills, and the shadows crept steadily eastwards, but the whirr of the wheels and the roar of the hoofs never slackened. A fresh wind blew upon our faces, while the young leaves drooped motionless from the wayside branches. The golden edge of the sun was just sinking behind the oaks of Reigate Hill when the dripping mares drew up before the Crown at Redhill. The landlord, an old sportsman and ringsider, ran out to greet so well-known a Corinthian as Sir Charles Tregellis.

"You know Berks, the bruiser?" asked my uncle.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Has he passed?"

"Yes, Sir Charles. It may have been about four o'clock, though with this crowd of folk and carriages it's hard to swear to it. There was him, and Red Ike, and Fighting Yussef the Jew, and another, with a good bit of blood betwixt the shafts. They'd been driving her hard, too, for she was all in a lather."

“That’s ugly, nephew,” said my uncle, when we were flying onwards towards Reigate. “If they drove so hard, it looks as though they wished to get early to work.”

“Jim and Belcher would surely be a match for the four of them,” I suggested.

“If Belcher were with him I should have no fear. But you cannot tell what *diablerie* they may be up to. Let us only find him safe and sound, and I’ll never lose sight of him until I see him in the ring. We’ll sit up on guard with our pistols, nephew, and I only trust that these villains may be indiscreet enough to attempt it. But they must have been very sure of success before they put the odds up to such a figure, and it is that which alarms me.”

“But surely they have nothing to win by such villainy, sir? If they were to hurt Jim Harrison the battle could not be fought, and the bets would not be decided.”

“So it would be in an ordinary prize-battle, nephew; and it is fortunate that it should be so, or the rascals who infest the ring would soon make all sport impossible. But here it is different. On the terms of the wager I lose unless I can produce a man, within the prescribed ages, who can beat Crab Wilson. You must remember that I have never named my man. *C’est dommage*, but so it is! We know who it is and so do our opponents, but the referees and stakeholder would take no notice of that. If we complain that Jim Harrison has been crippled, they would answer that they have no official knowledge that Jim Harrison was our nominee. It’s play or pay, and the villains are taking advantage of it.”

My uncle’s fears as to our being blocked upon the road were only too well founded, for after we passed Reigate there was such a procession of every sort of vehicle, that I believe for the whole eight miles there was not a horse whose nose was further than a few feet from the back of the curricle or barouche in front. Every road leading from London, as well as those from Guildford in the west and Tunbridge in the east, had contributed their stream of four-in-hands, gigs, and mounted sportsmen, until the whole broad Brighton highway was choked from ditch to ditch with a laughing, singing, shouting throng, all flowing in the same direction. No man who looked upon that motley crowd could deny that, for good or evil, the love of the ring was confined to no class, but was a national peculiarity, deeply seated in the English nature, and a common heritage of the young aristocrat in his drag and of the rough costers sitting six deep in their pony cart. There I saw statesmen and soldiers, noblemen and lawyers, farmers and squires, with roughs of the East End and yokels of the shires, all toiling along with the prospect of a night of discomfort before them, on the chance of seeing a fight which might, for all that they knew, be decided in a single round. A more cheery and hearty set of people could not be imagined, and the chaff flew about as thick as the dust clouds, while at every wayside inn the landlord and the drawers would be out with trays of foam-headed tankards to moisten those importunate throats. The ale-drinking, the rude good-fellowship, the heartiness, the laughter at discomforts, the craving to see the fight - all these may be set down as vulgar and trivial by those to whom they are distasteful; but to me, listening to the far-off and uncertain echoes of our distant past, they seem to have been the very bones upon which much that is most solid and virile in this ancient race was moulded.

But, alas for our chance of hastening onwards! Even my uncle’s skill could not pick a passage through that moving mass. We could but fall into our places and be content to snail along from Reigate to Horley and on to Povey Cross and over Lowfield Heath, while day shaded away into twilight, and that deepened into night. At Kimberham Bridge the carriage-lamps were all lit, and it was wonderful, where the road curved downwards before us, to see this writhing serpent with the golden scales crawling before us in the darkness. And then, at last, we saw the formless mass of the huge Crawley elm looming before us in the gloom, and there was the broad village street with the glimmer of the cottage windows, and the high front of the old George Inn, glowing from every door and pane and crevice, in honour of the noble company who were to sleep within that night.

CHAPTER XV - FOUL PLAY

My uncle’s impatience would not suffer him to wait for the slow rotation which would bring us to the door, but he flung the reins and a crown-piece to one of the rough fellows who thronged the side-walk, and pushing his way vigorously through the crowd, he made for the entrance. As he came within the circle of light thrown by the windows, a whisper ran round as to who this masterful gentleman with the pale face and the driving-coat might be, and a lane was formed to admit us. I had never before understood the popularity of my uncle in the sporting world, for the folk began to huzza as we passed with cries of “Hurrah for Buck Tregellis! Good luck to you and your man, Sir Charles! Clear a path for a bang-up noble Corinthian!” whilst the landlord, attracted by the shouting, came running out to greet us.

“Good evening, Sir Charles!” he cried. “I hope I see you well, sir, and I trust that you will find that your man does credit to the George.”

“How is he?” asked my uncle, quickly.

“Never better, sir. Looks a picture, he does - and fit to fight for a kingdom.”

My uncle gave a sigh of relief.

“Where is he?” he asked.

“He’s gone to his room early, sir, seein’ that he had some very partic’lar business to-morrow mornin’,” said the landlord, grinning.

“Where is Belcher?”

“Here he is, in the bar parlour.”

He opened a door as he spoke, and looking in we saw a score of well-dressed men, some of whose faces had become familiar to me during my short West End career, seated round a table upon which stood a steaming soup-tureen filled with punch. At the further end, very much at his ease amongst the aristocrats and exquisites who surrounded him, sat the Champion of England, his superb figure thrown back in his chair, a flush upon his handsome face, and a loose red handkerchief knotted carelessly round his throat in the picturesque fashion which was long known by his name. Half a century has passed since then, and I have seen my share of fine men. Perhaps it is because I am a slight creature myself, but it is my peculiarity that I had rather look upon a splendid man than upon any work of Nature. Yet during all that time I have never seen a finer man than Jim Belcher, and if I wish to match him in my memory, I can only turn to that other Jim whose fate and fortunes I am trying to lay before you.

There was a shout of jovial greeting when my uncle’s face was seen in the doorway.

“Come in, Tregellis!” “We were expecting you!” “There’s a devilled bladebone ordered.” “What’s the latest from London?” “What is the meaning of the long odds against your man?” “Have the folk gone mad?” “What the devil is it all about?” They were all talking at once.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” my uncle answered. “I shall be happy to give you any information in my power a little later. I have a matter of some slight importance to decide. Belcher, I would have a word with you!”

The Champion came out with us into the passage.

“Where is your man, Belcher?”

“He has gone to his room, sir. I believe that he should have a clear twelve hours’ sleep before fighting.”

“What sort of day has he had?”

“I did him lightly in the matter of exercise. Clubs, dumbbells, walking, and a half-hour with the mufflers. He’ll do us all proud, sir, or I’m a Dutchman! But what in the world’s amiss with the betting? If I didn’t know that he was as straight as a line, I’d ha’ thought he was planning a cross and laying against himself.”

“It’s about that I’ve hurried down. I have good information, Belcher, that there has been a plot to cripple him, and that the rogues are so sure of success that they are prepared to lay anything against his appearance.”

Belcher whistled between his teeth.

“I’ve seen no sign of anything of the kind, sir. No one has been near him or had speech with him, except only your nephew there and myself.”

“Four villains, with Berks at their head, got the start of us by several hours. It was Warr who told me.”

“What Bill Warr says is straight, and what Joe Berks does is crooked. Who were the others, sir?”

“Red Ike, Fighting Yussef, and Chris McCarthy.”

“A pretty gang, too! Well, sir, the lad is safe, but it would be as well, perhaps, for one or other of us to stay in his room with him. For my own part, as long as he’s my charge I’m never very far away.”

“It is a pity to wake him.”

“He can hardly be asleep with all this racket in the house. This way, sir, and down the passage!”

We passed along the low-roofed, devious corridors of the old-fashioned inn to the back of the house.

“This is my room, sir,” said Belcher, nodding to a door upon the right. “This one upon the left is his.” He threw it open as he spoke. “Here’s Sir Charles Tregellis come to see you, Jim,” said he; and then, “Good Lord, what is the meaning of this?”

The little chamber lay before us brightly illuminated by a brass lamp which stood upon the table. The bedclothes had not been turned down, but there was an indentation upon the counterpane which showed that some one had lain there. One-half of the lattice window was swinging on its hinge, and a cloth cap lying upon the table was the only sign of the occupant. My uncle looked round him and shook his head.

“It seems that we are too late,” said he.

“That’s his cap, sir. Where in the world can he have gone to with his head bare? I thought he was safe in his bed an hour ago. Jim! Jim!” he shouted.

“He has certainly gone through the window,” cried my uncle. “I believe these villains have enticed him out by some devilish device of their own. Hold the lamp, nephew. Ha! I thought so. Here are his footmarks upon the flower-bed outside.”

The landlord, and one or two of the Corinthians from the bar-parlour, had followed us to the back of the house. Some one had opened the side door, and we found ourselves in the kitchen garden, where, clustering upon the gravel path, we were able to hold the lamp over the soft, newly turned earth which lay between us and the window.

“That’s his footmark!” said Belcher. “He wore his running boots this evening, and you can see the nails. But what’s this? Some one else has been here.”

“A woman!” I cried.

“By Heaven, you’re right, nephew,” said my uncle.

Belcher gave a hearty curse.

“He never had a word to say to any girl in the village. I took partic’lar notice of that. And to think of them coming in like this at the last moment!”

“It’s clear as possible, Tregellis,” said the Hon. Berkeley Craven, who was one of the company from the bar-parlour. “Whoever it was came outside the window and tapped. You see here, and here, the small feet have their toes to the house, while the others are all leading away. She came to summon him, and he followed her."

"That is perfectly certain," said my uncle. "There's not a moment to be lost. We must divide and search in different directions, unless we can get some clue as to where they have gone."

"There's only the one path out of the garden," cried the landlord, leading the way. "It opens out into this back lane, which leads up to the stables. The other end of the lane goes out into the side road."

The bright yellow glare from a stable lantern cut a ring suddenly from the darkness, and an ostler came lounging out of the yard.

"Who's that?" cried the landlord.

"It's me, master! Bill Shields."

"How long have you been there, Bill?"

"Well, master, I've been in an' out of the stables this hour back. We can't pack in another 'orse, and there's no use tryin'. I daren't 'ardly give them their feed, for, if they was to thicken out just ever so little - "

"See here, Bill. Be careful how you answer, for a mistake may cost you your place. Have you seen any one pass down the lane?"

"There was a feller in a rabbit-skin cap some time ago. 'E was loiterin' about until I asked 'im what 'is business was, for I didn't care about the looks of 'im, or the way that 'e was peepin' in at the windows. I turned the stable lantern on to 'im, but 'e ducked 'is face, an' I could only swear to 'is red 'ead."

I cast a quick glance at my uncle, and I saw that the shadow had deepened upon his face.

"What became of him?" he asked.

"'E slouched away, sir, an' I saw the last of 'im."

"You've seen no one else? You didn't, for example, see a woman and a man pass down the lane together?"

"No, sir."

"Or hear anything unusual?"

"Why, now that you mention it, sir, I did 'ear somethin'; but on a night like this, when all these London blades are in the village - "

"What was it, then?" cried my uncle, impatiently.

"Well, sir, it was a kind of a cry out yonder as if some one 'ad got 'imself into trouble. I thought, maybe, two sparks were fightin', and I took no partic'lar notice."

"Where did it come from?"

"From the side road, yonder."

"Was it distant?"

"No, sir; I should say it didn't come from more'n two hundred yards."

"A single cry?"

"Well, it was a kind of screech, sir, and then I 'eard somebody drivin' very 'ard down the road. I remember thinking that it was strange that any one should be driving away from Crawley on a great night like this."

My uncle seized the lantern from the fellow's hand, and we all trooped behind him down the lane. At the further end the road cut it across at right angles. Down this my uncle hastened, but his search was not a long one, for the glaring light fell suddenly upon something which brought a groan to my lips and a bitter curse to those of Jem Belcher. Along the white surface of the dusty highway there was drawn a long smear of crimson, while beside this ominous stain there lay a murderous little pocket-bludgeon, such as Warr had described in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI - CRAWLEY DOWNS

All through that weary night my uncle and I, with Belcher, Berkeley Craven, and a dozen of the Corinthians, searched the country side for some trace of our missing man, but save for that ill-boding splash upon the road not the slightest clue could be obtained as to what had befallen him. No one had seen or heard anything of him, and the single cry in the night of which the ostler told us was the only indication of the tragedy which had taken place. In small parties we scoured the country as far as East Grinstead and Bletchingley, and the sun had been long over the horizon before we found ourselves back at Crawley once more with heavy hearts and tired feet. My uncle, who had driven to Reigate in the hope of gaining some intelligence, did not return until past seven o’clock, and a glance at his face gave us the same black news which he gathered from ours.

We held a council round our dismal breakfast-table, to which Mr. Berkeley Craven was invited as a man of sound wisdom and large experience in matters of sport. Belcher was half frenzied by this sudden ending of all the pains which he had taken in the training, and could only rave out threats at Berks and his companions, with terrible menaces as to what he would do when he met them. My uncle sat grave and thoughtful, eating nothing and drumming his fingers upon the table, while my heart was heavy within me, and I could have sunk my face into my hands and burst into tears as I thought how powerless I was to aid my friend. Mr. Craven, a fresh-faced, alert man of the world, was the only one of us who seemed to preserve both his wits and his appetite.

“Let me see! The fight was to be at ten, was it not?” he asked.

“It was to be.”

“I dare say it will be, too. Never say die, Tregellis! Your man has still three hours in which to come back.”

My uncle shook his head.

“The villains have done their work too well for that, I fear,” said he.

“Well, now, let us reason it out,” said Berkeley Craven. “A woman comes and she coaxes this young man out of his room. Do you know any young woman who had an influence over him?”

My uncle looked at me.

"No," said I. "I know of none."

"Well, we know that she came," said Berkeley Craven. "There can be no question as to that. She brought some piteous tale, no doubt, such as a gallant young man could hardly refuse to listen to. He fell into the trap, and allowed himself to be decoyed to the place where these rascals were waiting for him. We may take all that as proved, I should fancy, Tregellis."

"I see no better explanation," said my uncle.

"Well, then, it is obviously not the interest of these men to kill him. Warr heard them say as much. They could not make sure, perhaps, of doing so tough a young fellow an injury which would certainly prevent him from fighting. Even with a broken arm he might pull the fight off, as men have done before. There was too much money on for them to run any risks. They gave him a tap on the head, therefore, to prevent his making too much resistance, and they then drove him off to some farmhouse or stable, where they will hold him a prisoner until the time for the fight is over. I warrant that you see him before to-night as well as ever he was."

This theory sounded so reasonable that it seemed to lift a little of the weight from my heart, but I could see that from my uncle's point of view it was a poor consolation.

"I dare say you are right, Craven," said he.

"I am sure that I am."

"But it won't help us to win the fight."

"That's the point, sir," cried Belcher. "By the Lord, I wish they'd let me take his place, even with my left arm strapped behind me."

"I should advise you in any case to go to the ringside," said Craven. "You should hold on until the last moment in the hope of your man turning up."

"I shall certainly do so. And I shall protest against paying the wagers under such circumstances."

Craven shrugged his shoulders.

"You remember the conditions of the match," said he. "I fear it is pay or play. No doubt the point might be submitted to the referees, but I cannot doubt that they would have to give it against you."

We had sunk into a melancholy silence, when suddenly Belcher sprang up from the table.

"Hark!" he cried. "Listen to that!"

"What is it?" we cried, all three.

“The betting! Listen again!”

Out of the babel of voices and roaring of wheels outside the window a single sentence struck sharply on our ears.

“Even money upon Sir Charles’s nominee!”

“Even money!” cried my uncle. “It was seven to one against me, yesterday. What is the meaning of this?”

“Even money either way,” cried the voice again.

“There’s somebody knows something,” said Belcher, “and there’s nobody has a better right to know what it is than we. Come on, sir, and we’ll get to the bottom of it.”

The village street was packed with people, for they had been sleeping twelve and fifteen in a room, whilst hundreds of gentlemen had spent the night in their carriages. So thick was the throng that it was no easy matter to get out of the George. A drunken man, snoring horribly in his breathing, was curled up in the passage, absolutely oblivious to the stream of people who flowed round and occasionally over him.

“What’s the betting, boys?” asked Belcher, from the steps.

“Even money, Jim,” cried several voices.

“It was long odds on Wilson when last I heard.”

“Yes; but there came a man who laid freely the other way, and he started others taking the odds, until now you can get even money.”

“Who started it?”

“Why, that’s he! The man that lies drunk in the passage. He’s been pouring it down like water ever since he drove in at six o’clock, so it’s no wonder he’s like that.”

Belcher stooped down and turned over the man’s inert head so as to show his features.

“He’s a stranger to me, sir.”

“And to me,” added my uncle.

“But not to me,” I cried. “It’s John Cumming, the landlord of the inn at Friar’s Oak. I’ve known him ever since I was a boy, and I can’t be mistaken.”

“Well, what the devil can *he* know about it?” said Craven.

“Nothing at all, in all probability,” answered my uncle. “He is backing young Jim because he knows him, and because he has more brandy than sense. His drunken confidence set others to do the same, and so the odds came down.”

“He was as sober as a judge when he drove in here this morning,” said the landlord. “He began backing Sir Charles’s nominee from the moment he arrived. Some of the other boys took the office from him, and they very soon brought the odds down amongst them.”

“I wish he had not brought himself down as well,” said my uncle. “I beg that you will bring me a little lavender water, landlord, for the smell of this crowd is appalling. I suppose you could not get any sense from this drunken fellow, nephew, or find out what it is he knows.”

It was in vain that I rocked him by the shoulder and shouted his name in his ear. Nothing could break in upon that serene intoxication.

“Well, it’s a unique situation as far as my experience goes,” said Berkeley Craven. “Here we are within a couple of hours of the fight, and yet you don’t know whether you have a man to represent you. I hope you don’t stand to lose very much, Tregellis.”

My uncle shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and took a pinch of his snuff with that inimitable sweeping gesture which no man has ever ventured to imitate.

“Pretty well, my boy!” said he. “But it is time that we thought of going up to the Downs. This night journey has left me just a little *effleuré*, and I should like half an hour of privacy to arrange my toilet. If this is my last kick, it shall at least be with a well-brushed boot.”

I have heard a traveller from the wilds of America say that he looked upon the Red Indian and the English gentleman as closely akin, citing the passion for sport, the aloofness and the suppression of the emotions in each. I thought of his words as I watched my uncle that morning, for I believe that no victim tied to the stake could have had a worse outlook before him. It was not merely that his own fortunes were largely at stake, but it was the dreadful position in which he would stand before this immense concourse of people, many of whom had put their money upon his judgment, if he should find himself at the last moment with an impotent excuse instead of a champion to put before them. What a situation for a man who prided himself upon his aplomb, and upon bringing all that he undertook to the very highest standard of success! I, who knew him well, could tell from his wan cheeks and his restless fingers that he was at his wit’s ends what to do; but no stranger who observed his jaunty bearing, the flecking of his laced handkerchief, the handling of his quizzing glass, or the shooting of his ruffles, would ever have thought that this butterfly creature could have had a care upon earth.

It was close upon nine o'clock when we were ready to start for the Downs, and by that time my uncle's curricle was almost the only vehicle left in the village street. The night before they had lain with their wheels interlocking and their shafts under each other's bodies, as thick as they could fit, from the old church to the Crawley Elm, spanning the road five-deep for a good half-mile in length. Now the grey village street lay before us almost deserted save by a few women and children. Men, horses, carriages - all were gone. My uncle drew on his driving-gloves and arranged his costume with punctilious neatness; but I observed that he glanced up and down the road with a haggard and yet expectant eye before he took his seat. I sat behind with Belcher, while the Hon. Berkeley Craven took the place beside him.

The road from Crawley curves gently upwards to the upland heather-clad plateau which extends for many miles in every direction. Strings of pedestrians, most of them so weary and dust-covered that it was evident that they had walked the thirty miles from London during the night, were plodding along by the sides of the road or trailing over the long mottled slopes of the moorland. A horseman, fantastically dressed in green and splendidly mounted, was waiting at the crossroads, and as he spurred towards us I recognised the dark, handsome face and bold black eyes of Mendoza.

“I am waiting here to give the office, Sir Charles,” said he. “It's down the Grinstead road, half a mile to the left.”

“Very good,” said my uncle, reining his mares round into the cross-road.

“You haven't got your man there,” remarked Mendoza, with something of suspicion in his manner.

“What the devil is that to you?” cried Belcher, furiously.

“It's a good deal to all of us, for there are some funny stories about.”

“You keep them to yourself, then, or you may wish you had never heard them.”

“All right, Jem! Your breakfast don't seem to have agreed with you this morning.”

“Have the others arrived?” asked my uncle, carelessly.

“Not yet, Sir Charles. But Tom Oliver is there with the ropes and stakes. Jackson drove by just now, and most of the ring-keepers are up.”

“We have still an hour,” remarked my uncle, as he drove on. “It is possible that the others may be late, since they have to come from Reigate.”

“You take it like a man, Tregellis,” said Craven. “We must keep a bold face and brazen it out until the last moment.”

“Of course, sir,” cried Belcher. “I’ll never believe the betting would rise like that if somebody didn’t know something. We’ll hold on by our teeth and nails, Sir Charles, and see what comes of it.”

We could hear a sound like the waves upon the beach, long before we came in sight of that mighty multitude, and then at last, on a sudden dip of the road, we saw it lying before us, a whirlpool of humanity with an open vortex in the centre. All round, the thousands of carriages and horses were dotted over the moor, and the slopes were gay with tents and booths. A spot had been chosen for the ring, where a great basin had been hollowed out in the ground, so that all round that natural amphitheatre a crowd of thirty thousand people could see very well what was going on in the centre. As we drove up a buzz of greeting came from the people upon the fringe which was nearest to us, spreading and spreading, until the whole multitude had joined in the acclamation. Then an instant later a second shout broke forth, beginning from the other side of the arena, and the faces which had been turned towards us whisked round, so that in a twinkling the whole foreground changed from white to dark.

“It’s they. They are in time,” said my uncle and Craven together.

Standing up on our curricle, we could see the cavalcade approaching over the Downs. In front came a huge yellow barouche, in which sat Sir Lothian Hume, Crab Wilson, and Captain Barclay, his trainer. The postillions were flying canary-yellow ribands from their caps, those being the colours under which Wilson was to fight. Behind the carriage there rode a hundred or more noblemen and gentlemen of the west country, and then a line of gigs, tilburies, and carriages wound away down the Grinstead road as far as our eyes could follow it. The big barouche came lumbering over the sward in our direction until Sir Lothian Hume caught sight of us, when he shouted to his postillions to pull up.

“Good morning, Sir Charles,” said he, springing out of the carriage. “I thought I knew your scarlet curricle. We have an excellent morning for the battle.”

My uncle bowed coldly, and made no answer.

“I suppose that since we are all here we may begin at once,” said Sir Lothian, taking no notice of the other’s manner.

“We begin at ten o’clock. Not an instant before.”

“Very good, if you prefer it. By the way, Sir Charles, where is your man?”

“I would ask *you* that question, Sir Lothian,” answered my uncle. “Where is my man?”

A look of astonishment passed over Sir Lothian’s features, which, if it were not real, was most admirably affected.

“What do you mean by asking me such a question?”

“Because I wish to know.”

“But how can I tell, and what business is it of mine?”

“I have reason to believe that you have made it your business.”

“If you would kindly put the matter a little more clearly there would be some possibility of my understanding you.”

They were both very white and cold, formal and unimpassioned in their bearing, but exchanging glances which crossed like rapier blades. I thought of Sir Lothian’s murderous repute as a duellist, and I trembled for my uncle.

“Now, sir, if you imagine that you have a grievance against me, you will oblige me vastly by putting it into words.”

“I will,” said my uncle. “There has been a conspiracy to maim or kidnap my man, and I have every reason to believe that you are privy to it.”

An ugly sneer came over Sir Lothian’s saturnine face.

“I see,” said he. “Your man has not come on quite as well as you had expected in his training, and you are hard put to it to invent an excuse. Still, I should have thought that you might have found a more probable one, and one which would entail less serious consequences.”

“Sir,” answered my uncle, “you are a liar, but how great a liar you are nobody knows save yourself.”

Sir Lothian’s hollow cheeks grew white with passion, and I saw for an instant in his deep-set eyes such a glare as comes from the frenzied hound rearing and ramping at the end of its chain. Then, with an effort, he became the same cold, hard, self-contained man as ever.

“It does not become our position to quarrel like two yokels at a fair,” said he; “we shall go further into the matter afterwards.”

“I promise you that we shall,” answered my uncle, grimly.

"Meanwhile, I hold you to the terms of your wager. Unless you produce your nominee within five-and-twenty minutes, I claim the match."

"Eight-and-twenty minutes," said my uncle, looking at his watch. "You may claim it then, but not an instant before."

He was admirable at that moment, for his manner was that of a man with all sorts of hidden resources, so that I could hardly make myself realise as I looked at him that our position was really as desperate as I knew it to be. In the meantime Berkeley Craven, who had been exchanging a few words with Sir Lothian Hume, came back to our side.

"I have been asked to be sole referee in this matter," said he. "Does that meet with your wishes, Sir Charles?"

"I should be vastly obliged to you, Craven, if you will undertake the duties."

"And Jackson has been suggested as timekeeper."

"I could not wish a better one."

"Very good. That is settled."

In the meantime the last of the carriages had come up, and the horses had all been picketed upon the moor. The stragglers who had dotted the grass had closed in until the huge crowd was one unit with a single mighty voice, which was already beginning to bellow its impatience. Looking round, there was hardly a moving object upon the whole vast expanse of green and purple down. A belated gig was coming at full gallop down the road which led from the south, and a few pedestrians were still trailing up from Crawley, but nowhere was there a sign of the missing man.

"The betting keeps up for all that," said Belcher. "I've just been to the ring-side, and it is still even."

"There's a place for you at the outer ropes, Sir Charles," said Craven.

"There is no sign of my man yet. I won't come in until he arrives."

"It is my duty to tell you that only ten minutes are left."

"I make it five," cried Sir Lothian Hume.

"That is a question which lies with the referee," said Craven, firmly. "My watch makes it ten minutes, and ten it must be."

"Here's Crab Wilson!" cried Belcher, and at the same moment a shout like a thunderclap burst from the crowd. The west countryman had emerged from his dressing-tent, followed by Dutch Sam and Tom Owen, who were acting as his seconds. He was nude to the waist, with a pair of white calico drawers, white silk stockings, and running shoes. Round his middle was a canary-yellow sash, and dainty little ribbons of the same colour fluttered from the sides of his knees. He carried a high white hat in his hand, and running down the lane which had been kept open through the crowd to allow persons to reach the ring, he threw the hat high into the air, so that it fell within the staked inclosure. Then with a double spring he cleared the outer and inner line of rope, and stood with his arms folded in the centre.

I do not wonder that the people cheered. Even Belcher could not help joining in the general shout of applause. He was certainly a splendidly built young athlete, and one could not have wished to look upon a finer sight as his white skin, sleek and luminous as a panther’s, gleamed in the light of the morning sun, with a beautiful liquid rippling of muscles at every movement. His arms were long and slingy, his shoulders loose and yet powerful, with the downward slant which is a surer index of power than squareness can be. He clasped his hands behind his head, threw them aloft, and swung them backwards, and at every movement some fresh expanse of his smooth, white skin became knobbed and gnarled with muscles, whilst a yell of admiration and delight from the crowd greeted each fresh exhibition. Then, folding his arms once more, he stood like a beautiful statue waiting for his antagonist.

Sir Lothian Hume had been looking impatiently at his watch, and now he shut it with a triumphant snap.

“Time’s up!” he cried. “The match is forfeit.”

“Time is not up,” said Craven.

“I have still five minutes.” My uncle looked round with despairing eyes.

“Only three, Tregellis!”

A deep angry murmur was rising from the crowd.

“It’s a cross! It’s a cross! It’s a fake!” was the cry.

“Two minutes, Tregellis!”

“Where’s your man, Sir Charles? Where’s the man that we have backed?” Flushed faces began to crane over each other, and angry eyes glared up at us.

“One more minute, Tregellis! I am very sorry, but it will be my duty to declare it forfeit against you.”

There was a sudden swirl in the crowd, a rush, a shout, and high up in the air there spun an old black hat, floating over the heads of the ring-siders and flickering down within the ropes.

“Saved, by the Lord!” screamed Belcher.

“I rather fancy,” said my uncle, calmly, “that this must be my man.”

“Too late!” cried Sir Lothian.

“No,” answered the referee. “It was still twenty seconds to the hour. The fight will now proceed.”

CHAPTER XVII - THE RING-SIDE

Out of the whole of that vast multitude I was one of the very few who had observed whence it was that this black hat, skimming so opportunely over the ropes, had come. I have already remarked that when we looked around us there had been a single gig travelling very rapidly upon the southern road. My uncle's eyes had rested upon it, but his attention had been drawn away by the discussion between Sir Lothian Hume and the referee upon the question of time. For my own part, I had been so struck by the furious manner in which these belated travellers were approaching, that I had continued to watch them with all sorts of vague hopes within me, which I did not dare to put into words for fear of adding to my uncle's disappointments. I had just made out that the gig contained a man and a woman, when suddenly I saw it swerve off the road, and come with a galloping horse and bounding wheels right across the moor, crashing through the gorse bushes, and sinking down to the hubs in the heather and bracken. As the driver pulled up his foam-spattered horse, he threw the reins to his companion, sprang from his seat, butted furiously into the crowd, and then an instant afterwards up went the hat which told of his challenge and defiance.

"There is no hurry now, I presume, Craven," said my uncle, as coolly as if this sudden effect had been carefully devised by him.

"Now that your man has his hat in the ring you can take as much time as you like, Sir Charles."

"Your friend has certainly cut it rather fine, nephew."

"It is not Jim, sir," I whispered. "It is some one else."

My uncle's eyebrows betrayed his astonishment.

"Some one else!" he ejaculated.

"And a good man too!" roared Belcher, slapping his thigh with a crack like a pistol-shot. "Why, blow my dickey if it ain't old Jack Harrison himself!"

Looking down at the crowd, we had seen the head and shoulders of a powerful and strenuous man moving slowly forward, and leaving behind him a long V-shaped ripple upon its surface like the wake of a swimming dog. Now, as he pushed his way through the looser fringe the head was raised, and there was the grinning, hardy face of the smith looking up at us. He had left his hat in the ring, and was enveloped in an overcoat with a blue bird's-eye handkerchief tied round his neck. As he emerged from the throng he let his great-coat fly loose, and showed that he was dressed in his full fighting kit - black drawers, chocolate stockings, and white shoes.

"I'm right sorry to be so late, Sir Charles," he cried. "I'd have been sooner, but it took me a little time to make it all straight with the missus. I couldn't convince her all at once, an' so I brought her with me, and we argued it out on the way."

Looking at the gig, I saw that it was indeed Mrs. Harrison who was seated in it. Sir Charles beckoned him up to the wheel of the curricle.

"What in the world brings you here, Harrison?" he whispered. "I am as glad to see you as ever I was to see a man in my life, but I confess that I did not expect you."

"Well, sir, you heard I was coming," said the smith.

"Indeed, I did not."

"Didn't you get a message, Sir Charles, from a man named Cumming, landlord of the Friar's Oak Inn? Mister Rodney there would know him."

"We saw him dead drunk at the George."

"There, now, if I wasn't afraid of it!" cried Harrison, angrily. "He's always like that when he's excited, and I never saw a man more off his head than he was when he heard I was going to take this job over. He brought a bag of sovereigns up with him to back me with."

"That's how the betting got turned," said my uncle. "He found others to follow his lead, it appears."

"I was so afraid that he might get upon the drink that I made him promise to go straight to you, sir, the very instant he should arrive. He had a note to deliver."

"I understand that he reached the George at six, whilst I did not return from Reigate until after seven, by which time I have no doubt that he had drunk his message to me out of his head. But where is your nephew Jim, and how did you come to know that you would be needed?"

"It is not his fault, I promise you, that you should be left in the lurch. As to me, I had my orders to take his place from the only man upon earth whose word I have never disobeyed."

"Yes, Sir Charles," said Mrs. Harrison, who had left the gig and approached us. "You can make the most of it this time, for never again shall you have my Jack - not if you were to go on your knees for him."

"She's not a patron of sport, and that's a fact," said the smith.

"Sport!" she cried, with shrill contempt and anger. "Tell me when all is over."

She hurried away, and I saw her afterwards seated amongst the bracken, her back turned towards the multitude, and her hands over her ears, cowering and wincing in an agony of apprehension.

Whilst this hurried scene had been taking place, the crowd had become more and more tumultuous, partly from their impatience at the delay, and partly from their exuberant spirits at the unexpected chance of seeing so celebrated a fighting man as Harrison. His identity had already been noised abroad, and many an elderly connoisseur plucked his long net-purse out of his fob, in order to put a few guineas upon the man who would represent the school of the past against the present. The younger men were still in favour of the west-countryman, and small odds were to be had either way in proportion to the number of the supporters of each in the different parts of the crowd.

In the mean time Sir Lothian Hume had come bustling up to the Honourable Berkeley Craven, who was still standing near our curricle.

"I beg to lodge a formal protest against these proceedings," said he.

"On what grounds, sir?"

"Because the man produced is not the original nominee of Sir Charles Tregellis."

"I never named one, as you are well aware," said my uncle.

"The betting has all been upon the understanding that young Jim Harrison was my man's opponent. Now, at the last moment, he is withdrawn and another and more formidable man put into his place."

"Sir Charles Tregellis is quite within his rights," said Craven, firmly. "He undertook to produce a man who should be within the age limits stipulated, and I understand that Harrison fulfils all the conditions. You are over five-and-thirty, Harrison?"

"Forty-one next month, master."

"Very good. I direct that the fight proceed."

But alas! there was one authority which was higher even than that of the referee, and we were destined to an experience which was the prelude, and sometimes the conclusion, also, of many an old-time fight. Across the moor there had ridden a black-coated gentleman, with buff-topped hunting-boots and a couple of grooms behind him, the little knot of horsemen showing up clearly upon the curving swells and then dipping down into the alternate hollows. Some of the more observant of the crowd had glanced suspiciously at this advancing figure, but the majority had not observed him at all until he reined up his horse upon a knoll which overlooked the amphitheatre, and in a stentorian voice announced that he represented the *Custos rotulorum* of His Majesty's county of Sussex, that he proclaimed this assembly to be gathered together for an illegal purpose, and that he was commissioned to disperse it by force, if necessary.

Never before had I understood that deep-seated fear and wholesome respect which many centuries of bludgeoning at the hands of the law had beaten into the fierce and turbulent natives of these islands. Here was a man with two attendants upon one side, and on the other thirty thousand very angry and disappointed people, many of them fighters by profession, and some from the roughest and most dangerous classes in the country. And yet it was the single man who appealed confidently to force, whilst the huge multitude swayed and murmured like a mutinous fierce-willed creature brought face to face with a power against which it knew that there was neither argument nor resistance. My uncle, however, with Berkeley Craven, Sir John Lade, and a dozen other lords and gentlemen, hurried across to the interrupter of the sport.

"I presume that you have a warrant, sir?" said Craven.

"Yes, sir, I have a warrant."

"Then I have a legal right to inspect it."

The magistrate handed him a blue paper which the little knot of gentlemen clustered their heads over, for they were mostly magistrates themselves, and were keenly alive to any possible flaw in the wording. At last Craven shrugged his shoulders, and handed it back.

"This seems to be correct, sir," said he.

"It is entirely correct," answered the magistrate, affably. "To prevent waste of your valuable time, gentlemen, I may say, once for all, that it is my unalterable determination that no fight shall, under any circumstances, be brought off in the county over which I have control, and I am prepared to follow you all day in order to prevent it."

To my inexperience this appeared to bring the whole matter to a conclusion, but I had underrated the foresight of those who arrange these affairs, and also the advantages which made Crawley Down so favourite a rendezvous. There was a hurried consultation between the principals, the backers, the referee, and the timekeeper.

“It’s seven miles to Hampshire border and about two to Surrey,” said Jackson. The famous Master of the Ring was clad in honour of the occasion in a most resplendent scarlet coat worked in gold at the buttonholes, a white stock, a looped hat with a broad black band, buff knee-breeches, white silk stockings, and paste buckles - a costume which did justice to his magnificent figure, and especially to those famous “balustrade” calves which had helped him to be the finest runner and jumper as well as the most formidable pugilist in England. His hard, high-boned face, large piercing eyes, and immense physique made him a fitting leader for that rough and tumultuous body who had named him as their commander-in-chief.

“If I might venture to offer you a word of advice,” said the affable official, “it would be to make for the Hampshire line, for Sir James Ford, on the Surrey border, has as great an objection to such assemblies as I have, whilst Mr. Merridew, of Long Hall, who is the Hampshire magistrate, has fewer scruples upon the point.”

“Sir,” said my uncle, raising his hat in his most impressive manner, “I am infinitely obliged to you. With the referee’s permission, there is nothing for it but to shift the stakes.”

In an instant a scene of the wildest animation had set in. Tom Owen and his assistant, Fogo, with the help of the ring-keepers, plucked up the stakes and ropes, and carried them off across country. Crab Wilson was enveloped in great coats, and borne away in the barouche, whilst Champion Harrison took Mr. Craven’s place in our curricle. Then, off the huge crowd started, horsemen, vehicles, and pedestrians, rolling slowly over the broad face of the moorland. The carriages rocked and pitched like boats in a seaway, as they lumbered along, fifty abreast, scrambling and lurching over everything which came in their way. Sometimes, with a snap and a thud, one axle would come to the ground, whilst a wheel reeled off amidst the tussocks of heather, and roars of delight greeted the owners as they looked ruefully at the ruin. Then as the gorse clumps grew thinner, and the sward more level, those on foot began to run, the riders struck in their spurs, the drivers cracked their whips, and away they all streamed in the maddest, wildest cross-country steeplechase, the yellow barouche and the crimson curricle, which held the two champions, leading the van.

"What do you think of your chances, Harrison?" I heard my uncle ask, as the two mares picked their way over the broken ground.

"It's my last fight, Sir Charles," said the smith. "You heard the missus say that if she let me off this time I was never to ask again. I must try and make it a good one."

"But your training?"

"I'm always in training, sir. I work hard from morning to night, and I drink little else than water. I don't think that Captain Barclay can do much better with all his rules."

"He's rather long in the reach for you."

"I've fought and beat them that were longer. If it comes to a rally I should hold my own, and I should have the better of him at a throw."

"It's a match of youth against experience. Well, I would not hedge a guinea of my money. But, unless he was acting under force, I cannot forgive young Jim for having deserted me."

"He *was* acting under force, Sir Charles."

"You have seen him, then?"

"No, master, I have not seen him."

"You know where he is?"

"Well, it is not for me to say one way or the other. I can only tell you that he could not help himself. But here's the beak a-comin' for us again."

The ominous figure galloped up once more alongside of our curricle, but this time his mission was a more amiable one.

"My jurisdiction ends at that ditch, sir," said he. "I should fancy that you could hardly wish a better place for a mill than the sloping field beyond. I am quite sure that no one will interfere with you there."

His anxiety that the fight should be brought off was in such contrast to the zeal with which he had chased us from his county, that my uncle could not help remarking upon it.

"It is not for a magistrate to wink at the breaking of the law, sir," he answered. "But if my colleague of Hampshire has no scruples about its being brought off within his jurisdiction, I should very much like to see the fight," with which he spurred his horse up an adjacent knoll, from which he thought that he might gain the best view of the proceedings.

And now I had a view of all those points of etiquette and curious survivals of custom which are so recent, that we have not yet appreciated that they may some day be as interesting to the social historian as they then were to the sportsman. A dignity was given to the contest by a rigid code of ceremony, just as the clash of mail-clad knights was prefaced and adorned by the calling of the heralds and the showing of blazoned shields. To many in those ancient days the tourney may have seemed a bloody and brutal ordeal, but we who look at it with ample perspective see that it was a rude but gallant preparation for the conditions of life in an iron age. And so also, when the ring has become as extinct as the lists, we may understand that a broader philosophy would show that all things, which spring up so naturally and spontaneously, have a function to fulfil, and that it is a less evil that two men should, of their own free will, fight until they can fight no more than that the standard of hardihood and endurance should run the slightest risk of being lowered in a nation which depends so largely upon the individual qualities of her citizens for her defence. Do away with war, if the cursed thing can by any wit of man be avoided, but until you see your way to that, have a care in meddling with those primitive qualities to which at any moment you may have to appeal for your own protection.

Tom Owen and his singular assistant, Fogo, who combined the functions of prize-fighter and of poet, though, fortunately for himself, he could use his fists better than his pen, soon had the ring arranged according to the rules then in vogue. The white wooden posts, each with the P.C. of the pugilistic club printed upon it, were so fixed as to leave a square of 24 feet within the roped enclosure. Outside this ring an outer one was pitched, eight feet separating the two. The inner was for the combatants and for their seconds, while in the outer there were places for the referee, the timekeeper, the backers, and a few select and fortunate individuals, of whom, through being in my uncle’s company, I was one. Some twenty well-known prize-fighters, including my friend Bill Warr, Black Richmond, Maddox, The Pride of Westminster, Tom Belcher, Paddington Jones, Tough Tom Blake, Symonds the ruffian, Tyne the tailor, and others, were stationed in the outer ring as beaters. These fellows all wore the high white hats which were at that time much affected by the fancy, and they were armed with horse-whips, silver-mounted, and each bearing the P.C. monogram. Did any one, be it East End rough or West End patrician, intrude within the outer ropes, this corp of guardians neither argued nor expostulated, but they fell upon the offender and laced him with their whips until he escaped back out of the forbidden ground. Even with so formidable a guard and such fierce measures, the beaters-out, who had to check the forward heaves of a maddened, straining crowd, were often as exhausted at the end of a fight as the principals themselves. In the mean time they formed up in a line of sentinels, presenting under their row of white hats every type of fighting face, from the fresh boyish countenances of Tom Belcher, Jones, and the other younger recruits, to the scarred and mutilated visages of the veteran bruisers.

Whilst the business of the fixing of the stakes and the fastening of the ropes was going forward, I from my place of vantage could hear the talk of the crowd behind me, the front two rows of which were lying upon the grass, the next two kneeling, and the others standing in serried ranks all up the side of the gently sloping hill, so that each line could just see over the shoulders of that which was in front. There were several, and those amongst the most experienced, who took the gloomiest view of Harrison's chances, and it made my heart heavy to overhear them.

"It's the old story over again," said one. "They won't bear in mind that youth will be served. They only learn wisdom when it's knocked into them."

"Ay, ay," responded another. "That's how Jack Slack thrashed Boughton, and I myself saw Hooper, the tinman, beat to pieces by the fighting oilman. They all come to it in time, and now it's Harrison's turn."

"Don't you be so sure about that!" cried a third. "I've seen Jack Harrison fight five times, and I never yet saw him have the worse of it. He's a slaughterer, and so I tell you."

"He was, you mean."

"Well, I don't see no such difference as all that comes to, and I'm putting ten guineas on my opinion."

"Why," said a loud, consequential man from immediately behind me, speaking with a broad western burr, "vrom what I've zeen of this young Gloucester lad, I doan't think Harrison could have stood bevore him for ten rounds when he vas in his prime. I vas coming up in the Bristol coach yesterday, and the guard he told me that he had vifteen thousand pound in hard gold in the boot that had been zent up to back our man."

"They'll be in luck if they see their money again," said another. "Harrison's no lady's-maid fighter, and he's blood to the bone. He'd have a shy at it if his man was as big as Carlton House."

"Tut," answered the west-countryman. "It's only in Bristol and Gloucester that you can get men to beat Bristol and Gloucester."

"It's like your damned himpudence to say so," said an angry voice from the throng behind him. "There are six men in London that would hengage to walk round the best twelve that hever came from the west."

The proceedings might have opened by an impromptu bye-battle between the indignant cockney and the gentleman from Bristol, but a prolonged roar of applause broke in upon their altercation. It was caused by the appearance in the ring of Crab Wilson, followed by Dutch Sam and Mendoza carrying the basin, sponge, brandy-bladder, and other badges of their office. As he entered Wilson pulled the canary-yellow handkerchief from his waist, and going to the corner post, he tied it to the top of it, where it remained fluttering in the breeze. He then took a bundle of smaller ribands of the same colour from his seconds, and walking round, he offered them to the noblemen and Corinthians at half-a-guinea apiece as souvenirs of the fight. His brisk trade was only brought to an end by the appearance of Harrison, who climbed in a very leisurely manner over the ropes, as befitted his more mature years and less elastic joints. The yell which greeted him was even more enthusiastic than that which had heralded Wilson, and there was a louder ring of admiration in it, for the crowd had already had their opportunity of seeing Wilson's physique, whilst Harrison's was a surprise to them.

I had often looked upon the mighty arms and neck of the smith, but I had never before seen him stripped to the waist, or understood the marvellous symmetry of development which had made him in his youth the favourite model of the London sculptors. There was none of that white sleek skin and shimmering play of sinew which made Wilson a beautiful picture, but in its stead there was a rugged grandeur of knotted and tangled muscle, as though the roots of some old tree were writhing from breast to shoulder, and from shoulder to elbow. Even in repose the sun threw shadows from the curves of his skin, but when he exerted himself every muscle bunched itself up, distinct and hard, breaking his whole trunk into gnarled knots of sinew. His skin, on face and body, was darker and harsher than that of his youthful antagonist, but he looked tougher and harder, an effect which was increased by the sombre colour of his stockings and breeches. He entered the ring, sucking a lemon, with Jim Belcher and Caleb Baldwin, the coster, at his heels. Strolling across to the post, he tied his blue bird's-eye handkerchief over the west-countryman's yellow, and then walked to his opponent with his hand out.

“I hope I see you well, Wilson,” said he.

“Pretty tidy, I thank you,” answered the other. “We’ll speak to each other in a different vashion, I ‘spects, afore we part.”

“But no ill-feeling,” said the smith, and the two fighting men grinned at each other as they took their own corners.

“May I ask, Mr. Referee, whether these two men have been weighed?” asked Sir Lothian Hume, standing up in the outer ring.

“Their weight has just been taken under my supervision, sir,” answered Mr. Craven. “Your man brought the scale down at thirteen-three, and Harrison at thirteen-eight.”

“He’s a fifteen-stoner from the loins upwards,” cried Dutch Sam, from his corner.

“We’ll get some of it off him before we finish.”

“You’ll get more off him than ever you bargained for,” answered Jim Belcher, and the crowd laughed at the rough chaff.

CHAPTER XVIII - THE SMITH’S LAST BATTLE

“Clear the outer ring!” cried Jackson, standing up beside the ropes with a big silver watch in his hand.

“Ss-whack! ss-whack! ss-whack!” went the horse-whips - for a number of the spectators, either driven onwards by the pressure behind or willing to risk some physical pain on the chance of getting a better view, had crept under the ropes and formed a ragged fringe within the outer ring. Now, amidst roars of laughter from the crowd and a shower of blows from the beaters-out, they dived madly back, with the ungainly haste of frightened sheep blundering through a gap in their hurdles. Their case was a hard one, for the folk in front refused to yield an inch of their places - but the arguments from the rear prevailed over everything else, and presently every frantic fugitive had been absorbed, whilst the beaters-out took their stands along the edge at regular intervals, with their whips held down by their thighs.

“Gentlemen,” cried Jackson, again, “I am requested to inform you that Sir Charles Tregellis’s nominee is Jack Harrison, fighting at thirteen-eight, and Sir Lothian Hume’s is Crab Wilson, at thirteen-three. No person can be allowed at the inner ropes save the referee and the timekeeper. I have only to beg that, if the occasion should require it, you will all give me your assistance to keep the ground clear, to prevent confusion, and to have a fair fight. All ready?”

“All ready!” from both corners.

“Time!”

There was a breathless hush as Harrison, Wilson, Belcher, and Dutch Sam walked very briskly into the centre of the ring. The two men shook hands, whilst their seconds did the same, the four hands crossing each other. Then the seconds dropped back, and the two champions stood toe to toe, with their hands up.

It was a magnificent sight to any one who had not lost his sense of appreciation of the noblest of all the works of Nature. Both men fulfilled that requisite of the powerful athlete that they should look larger without their clothes than with them. In ring slang, they buffed well. And each showed up the other's points on account of the extreme contrast between them: the long, loose-limbed, deer-footed youngster, and the square-set, rugged veteran with his trunk like the stump of an oak. The betting began to rise upon the younger man from the instant that they were put face to face, for his advantages were obvious, whilst those qualities which had brought Harrison to the top in his youth were only a memory in the minds of the older men. All could see the three inches extra of height and two of reach which Wilson possessed, and a glance at the quick, cat-like motions of his feet, and the perfect poise of his body upon his legs, showed how swiftly he could spring either in or out from his slower adversary. But it took a subtler insight to read the grim smile which flickered over the smith's mouth, or the smouldering fire which shone in his grey eyes, and it was only the old-timers who knew that, with his mighty heart and his iron frame, he was a perilous man to lay odds against.

Wilson stood in the position from which he had derived his nickname, his left hand and left foot well to the front, his body sloped very far back from his loins, and his guard thrown across his chest, but held well forward in a way which made him exceedingly hard to get at. The smith, on the other hand, assumed the obsolete attitude which Humphries and Mendoza introduced, but which had not for ten years been seen in a first-class battle. Both his knees were slightly bent, he stood square to his opponent, and his two big brown fists were held over his mark so that he could lead equally with either. Wilson's hands, which moved incessantly in and out, had been stained with some astringent juice with the purpose of preventing them from puffing, and so great was the contrast between them and his white forearms, that I imagined that he was wearing dark, close-fitting gloves until my uncle explained the matter in a whisper. So they stood in a quiver of eagerness and expectation, whilst that huge multitude hung so silently and breathlessly upon every motion that they might have believed themselves to be alone, man to man, in the centre of some primeval solitude.

It was evident from the beginning that Crab Wilson meant to throw no chance away, and that he would trust to his lightness of foot and quickness of hand until he should see something of the tactics of this rough-looking antagonist. He paced swiftly round several times, with little, elastic, menacing steps, whilst the smith pivoted slowly to correspond. Then, as

Wilson took a backward step to induce Harrison to break his ground and follow him, the older man grinned and shook his head.

"You must come to me, lad," said he. "I'm too old to scamper round the ring after you. But we have the day before us, and I'll wait."

He may not have expected his invitation to be so promptly answered; but in an instant, with a panther spring, the west-countryman was on him. Smack! smack! smack! Thud! thud! The first three were on Harrison's face, the last two were heavy counters upon Wilson's body. Back danced the youngster, disengaging himself in beautiful style, but with two angry red blotches over the lower line of his ribs. "Blood for Wilson!" yelled the crowd, and as the smith faced round to follow the movements of his nimble adversary, I saw with a thrill that his chin was crimson and dripping. In came Wilson again with a feint at the mark and a flush hit on Harrison's cheek; then, breaking the force of the smith's ponderous right counter, he brought the round to a conclusion by slipping down upon the grass.

"First knock-down for Harrison!" roared a thousand voices, for ten times as many pounds would change hands upon the point.

"I appeal to the referee!" cried Sir Lothian Hume. "It was a slip, and not a knock-down."

"I give it a slip," said Berkeley Craven, and the men walked to their corners, amidst a general shout of applause for a spirited and well-contested opening round. Harrison fumbled in his mouth with his finger and thumb, and then with a sharp half-turn he wrenched out a tooth, which he threw into the basin. "Quite like old times," said he to Belcher.

"Have a care, Jack!" whispered the anxious second. "You got rather more than you gave."

"Maybe I can carry more, too," said he serenely, whilst Caleb Baldwin mopped the big sponge over his face, and the shining bottom of the tin basin ceased suddenly to glimmer through the water.

I could gather from the comments of the experienced Corinthians around me, and from the remarks of the crowd behind, that Harrison's chance was thought to have been lessened by this round.

"I've seen his old faults and I haven't seen his old merits," said Sir John Lade, our opponent of the Brighton Road. "He's as slow on his feet and with his guard as ever. Wilson hit him as he liked."

"Wilson may hit him three times to his once, but his one is worth Wilson's three," remarked my uncle. "He's a natural fighter and the other an excellent sparrer, but I don’t hedge a guinea.”

A sudden hush announced that the men were on their feet again, and so skilfully had the seconds done their work, that neither looked a jot the worse for what had passed. Wilson led viciously with his left, but misjudged his distance, receiving a smashing counter on the mark in reply which sent him reeling and gasping to the ropes. “Hurrah for the old one!” yelled the mob, and my uncle laughed and nudged Sir John Lade. The west-countryman smiled, and shook himself like a dog from the water as with a stealthy step he came back to the centre of the ring, where his man was still standing. Bang came Harrison’s right upon the mark once more, but Crab broke the blow with his elbow, and jumped laughing away. Both men were a little winded, and their quick, high breathing, with the light patter of their feet as they danced round each other, blended into one continuous, long-drawn sound. Two simultaneous exchanges with the left made a clap like a pistol-shot, and then as Harrison rushed in for a fall, Wilson slipped him, and over went my old friend upon his face, partly from the impetus of his own futile attack, and partly from a swinging half-arm blow which the west-countryman brought home upon his ear as he passed.

“Knock-down for Wilson,” cried the referee, and the answering roar was like the broadside of a seventy-four. Up went hundreds of curly brimmed Corinthian hats into the air, and the slope before us was a bank of flushed and yelling faces. My heart was cramped with my fears, and I winced at every blow, yet I was conscious also of an absolute fascination, with a wild thrill of fierce joy and a certain exultation in our common human nature which could rise above pain and fear in its straining after the very humblest form of fame.

Belcher and Baldwin had pounced upon their man, and had him up and in his corner in an instant, but, in spite of the coolness with which the hardy smith took his punishment, there was immense exultation amongst the west-countrymen.

“We’ve got him! He’s beat! He’s beat!” shouted the two Jew seconds. “It’s a hundred to a tizzy on Gloucester!”

“Beat, is he?” answered Belcher. “You’ll need to rent this field before you can beat him, for he’ll stand a month of that kind of fly-flappin’.” He was swinging a towel in front of Harrison as he spoke, whilst Baldwin mopped him with the sponge.

“How is it with you, Harrison?” asked my uncle.

“Hearty as a buck, sir. It’s as right as the day.”

The cheery answer came with so merry a ring that the clouds cleared from my uncle’s face.

“You should recommend your man to lead more, Tregellis,” said Sir John Lade. “He’ll never win it unless he leads.”

“He knows more about the game than you or I do, Lade. I’ll let him take his own way.”

“The betting is three to one against him now,” said a gentleman, whose grizzled moustache showed that he was an officer of the late war.

“Very true, General Fitzpatrick. But you’ll observe that it is the raw young bloods who are giving the odds, and the Sheenies who are taking them. I still stick to my opinion.”

The two men came briskly up to the scratch at the call of time, the smith a little lumpy on one side of his head, but with the same good-humoured and yet menacing smile upon his lips. As to Wilson, he was exactly as he had begun in appearance, but twice I saw him close his lips sharply as if he were in a sudden spasm of pain, and the blotches over his ribs were darkening from scarlet to a sullen purple. He held his guard somewhat lower to screen this vulnerable point, and he danced round his opponent with a lightness which showed that his wind had not been impaired by the body-blows, whilst the smith still adopted the impassive tactics with which he had commenced.

Many rumours had come up to us from the west as to Crab Wilson’s fine science and the quickness of his hitting, but the truth surpassed what had been expected of him. In this round and the two which followed he showed a swiftness and accuracy which old ringsiders declared that Mendoza in his prime had never surpassed. He was in and out like lightning, and his blows were heard and felt rather than seen. But Harrison still took them all with the same dogged smile, occasionally getting in a hard body-blow in return, for his adversary’s height and his position combined to keep his face out of danger. At the end of the fifth round the odds were four to one, and the west-countrymen were riotous in their exultation.

“What think you now?” cried the west-countryman behind me, and in his excitement he could get no further save to repeat over and over again, “What think you now?” When in the sixth round the smith was peppered twice without getting in a counter, and had the worst of the fall as well, the fellow became inarticulate altogether, and could only huzza wildly in his delight. Sir Lothian Hume was smiling and nodding his head, whilst my uncle was coldly impassive, though I was sure that his heart was as heavy as mine.

“This won’t do, Tregellis,” said General Fitzpatrick. “My money is on the old one, but the other is the finer boxer.”

“My man is *un peu passé*, but he will come through all right,” answered my uncle.

I saw that both Belcher and Baldwin were looking grave, and I knew that we must have a change of some sort, or the old tale of youth and age would be told once more.

The seventh round, however, showed the reserve strength of the hardy old fighter, and lengthened the faces of those layers of odds who had imagined that the fight was practically over, and that a few finishing rounds would have given the smith his *coup-de-grâce*. It was clear when the two men faced each other that Wilson had made himself up for mischief, and meant to force the fighting and maintain the lead which he had gained, but that grey gleam was not quenched yet in the veteran’s eyes, and still the same smile played over his grim face. He had become more jaunty, too, in the swing of his shoulders and the poise of his head, and it brought my confidence back to see the brisk way in which he squared up to his man.

Wilson led with his left, but was short, and he only just avoided a dangerous right-hander which whistled in at his ribs. “Bravo, old ‘un, one of those will be a dose of laudanum if you get it home,” cried Belcher. There was a pause of shuffling feet and hard breathing, broken by the thud of a tremendous body blow from Wilson, which the smith stopped with the utmost coolness. Then again a few seconds of silent tension, when Wilson led viciously at the head, but Harrison took it on his forearm, smiling and nodding at his opponent. “Get the pepper-box open!” yelled Mendoza, and Wilson sprang in to carry out his instructions, but was hit out again by a heavy drive on the chest. “Now’s the time! Follow it up!” cried Belcher, and in rushed the smith, pelting in his half-arm blows, and taking the returns without a wince, until Crab Wilson went down exhausted in the corner. Both men had their marks to show, but Harrison had all the best of the rally, so it was our turn to throw our hats into the air and to shout ourselves hoarse, whilst the seconds clapped their man upon his broad back as they hurried him to his corner.

“What think you now?” shouted all the neighbours of the west-countryman, repeating his own refrain.

“Why, Dutch Sam never put in a better rally,” cried Sir John Lade. “What’s the betting now, Sir Lothian?”

“I have laid all that I intend; but I don’t think my man can lose it.” For all that, the smile had faded from his face, and I observed that he glanced continually over his shoulder into the crowd behind him.

A sullen purple cloud had been drifting slowly up from the south-west - though I dare say that out of thirty thousand folk there were very few who had spared the time or attention to mark it. Now it suddenly made its presence apparent by a few heavy drops of rain, thickening rapidly into a sharp shower, which filled the air with its hiss, and rattled noisily upon the high, hard hats of the Corinthians. Coat-collars were turned up and handkerchiefs tied round. necks, whilst the skins of the two men glistened with the moisture as they stood up to each other once more. I noticed that Belcher whispered very earnestly into Harrison’s ear as he rose from his knee, and that the smith nodded his head curtly, with the air of a man who understands and approves of his orders.

And what those orders were was instantly apparent. Harrison was to be turned from the defender into the attacker. The result of the rally in the last round had convinced his seconds that when it came to give-and-take hitting, their hardy and powerful man was likely to have the better of it. And then on the top of this came the rain. With the slippery grass the superior activity of Wilson would be neutralised, and he would find it harder to avoid the rushes of his opponent. It was in taking advantage of such circumstances that the art of ringcraft lay, and many a shrewd and vigilant second had won a losing battle for his man. “Go in, then! Go in!” whooped the two prize-fighters, while every backer in the crowd took up the roar.

And Harrison went in, in such fashion that no man who saw him do it will ever forget it. Crab Wilson, as game as a pebble, met him with a flush hit every time, but no human strength or human science seemed capable of stopping the terrible onslaught of this iron man. Round after round he scrambled his way in, slap-bang, right and left, every hit tremendously sent home. Sometimes he covered his own face with his left, and sometimes he disdained to use any guard at all, but his springing hits were irresistible. The rain lashed down upon them, pouring from their faces and running in crimson trickles over their bodies, but neither gave any heed to it save to manoeuvre always with the view of bringing it in to each other's eyes. But round after round the west-countryman fell, and round after round the betting rose, until the odds were higher in our favour than ever they had been against us. With a sinking heart, filled with pity and admiration for these two gallant men, I longed that every bout might be the last, and yet the "Time!" was hardly out of Jackson's mouth before they had both sprung from their second's knees, with laughter upon their mutilated faces and chaffing words upon their bleeding lips. It may have been a humble object-lesson, but I give you my word that many a time in my life I have braced myself to a hard task by the remembrance of that morning upon Crawley Downs, asking myself if my manhood were so weak that I would not do for my country, or for those whom I loved, as much as these two would endure for a paltry stake and for their own credit amongst their fellows. Such a spectacle may brutalise those who are brutal, but I say that there is a spiritual side to it also, and that the sight of the utmost human limit of endurance and courage is one which bears a lesson of its own.

But if the ring can breed bright virtues, it is but a partisan who can deny that it can be the mother of black vices also, and we were destined that morning to have a sight of each. It so chanced that, as the battle went against his man, my eyes stole round very often to note the expression upon Sir Lothian Hume's face, for I knew how fearlessly he had laid the odds, and I understood that his fortunes as well as his champion were going down before the smashing blows of the old bruiser. The confident smile with which he had watched the opening rounds had long vanished from his lips, and his cheeks had turned of a sallow pallor, whilst his small, fierce grey eyes looked furtively from under his craggy brows, and more than once he burst into savage imprecations when Wilson was beaten to the ground. But especially I noticed that his chin was always coming round to his shoulder, and that at the end of every round he sent keen little glances flying backwards into the crowd. For some time, amidst the immense hillside of faces which banked themselves up on the slope behind us, I was unable to pick out the exact point at which his gaze was directed. But at last I succeeded in following it. A very tall man, who showed a pair of broad, bottle-green shoulders high above his neighbours, was looking very hard in our direction, and I assured myself that a quick exchange of almost imperceptible signals was going on between him and the Corinthian baronet. I became conscious, also, as I watched this stranger, that the cluster of men around him were the roughest elements of the whole assembly: fierce, vicious-looking fellows, with cruel, debauched faces, who howled like a pack of wolves at every blow, and yelled execrations at Harrison whenever he walked across to his corner. So turbulent were they that I saw the ringkeepers whisper together and glance up in their direction, as if preparing for trouble in store, but none of them had realised how near it was to breaking out, or how dangerous it might prove.

Thirty rounds had been fought in an hour and twenty-five minutes, and the rain was pelting down harder than ever. A thick steam rose from the two fighters, and the ring was a pool of mud. Repeated falls had turned the men brown, with a horrible mottling of crimson blotches. Round after round had ended by Crab Wilson going down, and it was evident, even to my inexperienced eyes, that he was weakening rapidly. He leaned heavily upon the two Jews when they led him to his corner, and he reeled when their support was withdrawn. Yet his science had, through long practice, become an automatic thing with him, so that he stopped and hit with less power, but with as great accuracy as ever. Even now a casual observer might have thought that he had the best of the battle, for the smith was far the more terribly marked, but there was a wild stare in the west-countryman's eyes, and a strange catch in his breathing, which told us that it is not the most dangerous blow which shows upon the surface. A heavy cross-buttock at the end of the thirty-first round shook the breath from his body, and he came up for the thirty-second with the same jaunty gallantry as ever, but with the dazed expression of a man whose wind has been utterly smashed.

"He's got the roly-polies," cried Belcher. "You have it your own way now!"

"I'll vight for a week yet," gasped Wilson.

"Damme, I like his style," cried Sir John Lade. "No shifting, nothing shy, no hugging nor hauling. It's a shame to let him fight. Take the brave fellow away!"

"Take him away! Take him away!" echoed a hundred voices.

"I won't be taken away! Who dares say so?" cried Wilson, who was back, after another fall, upon his second's knee.

"His heart won't suffer him to cry enough," said General Fitzpatrick. "As his patron, Sir Lothian, you should direct the sponge to be thrown up."

"You think he can't win it?"

"He is hopelessly beat, sir."

"You don't know him. He's a glutton of the first water."

"A gamer man never pulled his shirt off; but the other is too strong for him."

"Well, sir, I believe that he can fight another ten rounds." He half turned as he spoke, and I saw him throw up his left arm with a singular gesture into the air.

"Cut the ropes! Fair play! Wait till the rain stops!" roared a stentorian voice behind me, and I saw that it came from the big man with the bottle-green coat. His cry was a signal, for, like a thunderclap, there came a hundred hoarse voices shouting together: "Fair play for Gloucester! Break the ring! Break the ring!"

Jackson had called "Time," and the two mud-plastered men were already upon their feet, but the interest had suddenly changed from the fight to the audience. A succession of heaves from the back of the crowd had sent a series of long ripples running through it, all the heads swaying rhythmically in the one direction like a wheatfield in a squall. With every impulsion the oscillation increased, those in front trying vainly to steady themselves against the rushes from behind, until suddenly there came a sharp snap, two white stakes with earth clinging to their points flew into the outer ring, and a spray of people, dashed from the solid wave behind, were thrown against the line of the beaters-out. Down came the long horse-whips, swayed by the most vigorous arms in England; but the wincing and shouting victims had no sooner scrambled back a few yards from the merciless cuts, before a fresh charge from the rear hurled them once more into the arms of the prize-fighters. Many threw themselves down upon the turf and allowed successive waves to pass over their bodies, whilst others, driven wild by the blows, returned them with their hunting-crops and walking-canes. And then, as half the crowd strained to the left and half to the right to avoid the pressure from behind, the vast mass was suddenly reft in twain, and through the gap surged the rough fellows from behind, all armed with loaded sticks and yelling for "Fair play and Gloucester!" Their determined rush carried the prize-fighters before them, the inner ropes snapped like threads, and in an instant the ring was a swirling,' seething mass of figures, whips and sticks falling and clattering, whilst, face to face, in the middle of it all, so wedged that they could neither advance nor retreat, the smith and the west-countryman continued their long-drawn battle as oblivious of the chaos raging round them as two bulldogs would have been who had got each other by the throat. The driving rain, the cursing and screams of pain, the swish of the blows, the yelling of orders and advice, the heavy smell of the damp cloth - every incident of that scene of my early youth comes back to me now in my old age as clearly as if it had been but yesterday.

It was not easy for us to observe anything at the time, however, for we were ourselves in the midst of the frantic crowd, swaying about and carried occasionally quite off our feet, but endeavouring to keep our places behind Jackson and Berkeley Craven, who, with sticks and whips meeting over their heads, were still calling the rounds and superintending the fight.

“The ring’s broken!” shouted Sir Lothian Hume. “I appeal to the referee! The fight is null and void.”

“You villain!” cried my uncle, hotly; “this is your doing.”

“You have already an account to answer for with me,” said Hume, with his sinister sneer, and as he spoke he was swept by the rush of the crowd into my uncle’s very arms. The two men’s faces were not more than a few inches apart, and Sir Lothian’s bold eyes had to sink before the imperious scorn which gleamed coldly in those of my uncle.

“We will settle our accounts, never fear, though I degrade myself in meeting such a blackleg. What is it, Craven?”

“We shall have to declare a draw, Tregellis.”

“My man has the fight in hand.”

“I cannot help it. I cannot attend to my duties when every moment I am cut over with a whip or a stick.”

Jackson suddenly made a wild dash into the crowd, but returned with empty hands and a rueful face.

“They’ve stolen my timekeeper’s watch,” he cried. “A little cove snatched it out of my hand.”

My uncle clapped his hand to his fob.

“Mine has gone also!” he cried.

“Draw it at once, or your man will get hurt,” said Jackson, and we saw that as the undaunted smith stood up to Wilson for another round, a dozen rough fellows were clustering round him with bludgeons.

“Do you consent to a draw, Sir Lothian Hume?”

“I do.”

“And you, Sir Charles?”

“Certainly not.”

“The ring is gone.”

“That is no fault of mine.”

“Well, I see no help for it. As referee I order that the men be withdrawn, and that the stakes be returned to their owners.”

“A draw! A draw!” shrieked every one, and the crowd in an instant dispersed in every direction, the pedestrians running to get a good lead upon the London road, and the Corinthians in search of their horses and carriages. Harrison ran over to Wilson’s corner and shook him by the hand.

“I hope I have not hurt you much.”

“I’m hard put to it to stand. How are you?”

“My head’s singin’ like a kettle. It was the rain that helped me.”

“Yes, I thought I had you beat one time. I never wish a better battle.”

“Nor me either. Good-bye.”

And so those two brave-hearted fellows made their way amidst the yelping roughs, like two wounded lions amidst a pack of wolves and jackals. I say again that, if the ring has fallen low, it is not in the main the fault of the men who have done the fighting, but it lies at the door of the vile crew of ring-side parasites and ruffians, who are as far below the honest pugilist as the welsher and the blackleg are below the noble racehorse which serves them as a pretext for their villainies.

CHAPTER XIX - CLIFFE ROYAL

My uncle was humanely anxious to get Harrison to bed as soon as possible, for the smith, although he laughed at his own injuries, had none the less been severely punished.

“Don’t you dare ever to ask my leave to fight again, Jack Harrison,” said his wife, as she looked ruefully at his battered face. “Why, it’s worse than when you beat Black Baruk; and if it weren’t for your topcoat, I couldn’t swear you were the man who led me to the altar! If the King of England ask you, I’ll never let you do it more.”

“Well, old lass, I give my davy that I never will. It’s best that I leave fightin’ before fightin’ leaves me.” He screwed up his face as he took a sup from Sir Charles’s brandy flask. “It’s fine liquor, sir, but it gets into my cut lips most cruel. Why, here’s John Cummings of the Friars’ Oak Inn, as I’m a sinner, and seekin’ for a mad doctor, to judge by the look of him!”

It was certainly a most singular figure who was approaching us over the moor. With the flushed, dazed face of a man who is just recovering from recent intoxication, the landlord was tearing madly about, his hat gone, and his hair and beard flying in the wind. He ran in little zigzags from one knot of people to another, whilst his peculiar appearance drew a running fire of witticisms as he went, so that he reminded me irresistibly of a snipe skimming along through a line of guns. We saw him stop for an instant by the yellow barouche, and hand something to Sir Lothian Hume. Then on he came again, until at last, catching sight of us, he gave a cry of joy, and ran for us full speed with a note held out at arm’s length.

“You’re a nice cove, too, John Cummings,” said Harrison, reproachfully. “Didn’t I tell you not to let a drop pass your lips until you had given your message to Sir Charles?”

“I ought to be pole-axed, I ought,” he cried in bitter repentance. “I asked for you, Sir Charles, as I’m a livin’ man, I did, but you weren’t there, and what with bein’ so pleased at gettin’ such odds when I knew Harrison was goin’ to fight, an’ what with the landlord at the George wantin’ me to try his own specials, I let my senses go clean away from me. And now it’s only after the fight is over that I see you, Sir Charles, an’ if you lay that whip over my back, it’s only what I deserve.”

But my uncle was paying no attention whatever to the voluble self-reproaches of the landlord. He had opened the note, and was reading it with a slight raising of the eyebrows, which was almost the very highest note in his limited emotional gamut.

“What make you of this, nephew?” he asked, handing it to me.

This was what I read -

“SIR CHARLES TREGELLIS,

“For God’s sake, come at once, when this reaches you, to Cliffe Royal, and tarry as little as possible upon the way. You will see me there, and you will hear much which concerns you deeply. I pray you to come as soon as may be; and until then I remain him whom you knew as

“JAMES HARRISON.”

“Well, nephew?” asked my uncle.

“Why, sir, I cannot tell what it may mean.”

“Who gave it to you, sirrah?”

“It was young Jim Harrison himself, sir,” said the landlord, “though indeed I scarce knew him at first, for he looked like his own ghost. He was so eager that it should reach you that he would not leave me until the horse was harnessed and I started upon my way. There was one note for you and one for Sir Lothian Hume, and I wish to God he had chosen a better messenger!”

“This is a mystery indeed,” said my uncle, bending his brows over the note. “What should he be doing at that house of ill-omen? And why does he sign himself ‘him whom you knew as Jim Harrison?’ By what other style should I know him? Harrison, you can throw a light upon this. You, Mrs. Harrison; I see by your face that you understand it.”

“Maybe we do, Sir Charles; but we are plain folk, my Jack and I, and we go as far as we see our way, and when we don’t see our way any longer, we just stop. We’ve been goin’ this twenty year, but now we’ll draw aside and let our betters get to the front; so if you wish to find what that note means, I can only advise you to do what you are asked, and to drive over to Cliffe Royal, where you will find out.”

My uncle put the note into his pocket.

“I don’t move until I have seen you safely in the hands of the surgeon, Harrison.”

"Never mind for me, sir. The missus and me can drive down to Crawley in the gig, and a yard of stickin' plaster and a raw steak will soon set me to rights."

But my uncle was by no means to be persuaded, and he drove the pair into Crawley, where the smith was left under the charge of his wife in the very best quarters which money could procure. Then, after a hasty luncheon, we turned the mares' heads for the south.

"This ends my connection with the ring, nephew," said my uncle. "I perceive that there is no possible means by which it can be kept pure from roguery. I have been cheated and befooled; but a man learns wisdom at last, and never again do I give countenance to a prize-fight."

Had I been older or he less formidable, I might have said what was in my heart, and begged him to give up other things also - to come out from those shallow circles in which he lived, and to find some work that was worthy of his strong brain and his good heart. But the thought had hardly formed itself in my mind before he had dropped his serious vein, and was chatting away about some new silver-mounted harness which he intended to spring upon the Mall, and about the match for a thousand guineas which he meant to make between his filly Ethelberta and Lord Doncaster's famous three-year-old Aurelius.

We had got as far as Whiteman's Green, which is rather more than midway between Crawley Down and Friars' Oak, when, looking backwards, I saw far down the road the gleam of the sun upon a high yellow carriage. Sir Lothian Hume was following us.

"He has had the same summons as we, and is bound for the same destination," said my uncle, glancing over his shoulder at the distant barouche. "We are both wanted at Cliffe Royal - we, the two survivors of that black business. And it is Jim Harrison of all people who calls us there. Nephew, I have had an eventful life, but I feel as if the very strangest scene of it were waiting for me among those trees."

He whipped up the mares, and now from the curve of the road we could see the high dark pinnacles of the old Manor-house shooting up above the ancient oaks which ring it round. The sight of it, with its bloodstained and ghost-blasted reputation, would in itself have been enough to send a thrill through my nerves; but when the words of my uncle made me suddenly realise that this strange summons was indeed for the two men who were concerned in that old-world tragedy, and that it was the playmate of my youth who had sent it, I caught my breath as I seemed vaguely to catch a glimpse of some portentous thing forming itself in front of us. The rusted gates between the crumbling heraldic pillars were folded back, and my uncle flicked the mares impatiently as we flew up the weed-grown avenue, until he pulled them on their haunches before the time-blotched steps. The front door was open, and Boy Jim was waiting there to meet us.

But it was a different Boy Jim from him whom I had known and loved. There was a change in him somewhere, a change so marked that it was the first thing that I noticed, and yet so subtle that I could not put words to it. He was not better dressed than of old, for I well knew the old brown suit that he wore.

He was not less comely, for his training had left him the very model of what a man should be. And yet there was a change, a touch of dignity in the expression, a suggestion of confidence in the bearing which seemed, now that it was supplied, to be the one thing which had been needed to give him harmony and finish.

Somehow, in spite of his prowess, his old school name of “Boy” had clung very naturally to him, until that instant when I saw him standing in his self-contained and magnificent manhood in the doorway of the ancient house. A woman stood beside him, her hand resting upon his shoulder, and I saw that it was Miss Hinton of Anstey Cross.

“You remember me, Sir Charles Tregellis,” said she, coming forward, as we sprang down from the curricle.

My uncle looked hard at her with a puzzled face.

“I do not think that I have the privilege, madame. And yet - “

“Polly Hinton, of the Haymarket. You surely cannot have forgotten Polly Hinton.”

“Forgotten! Why, we have mourned for you in Fops’ Alley for more years than I care to think of. But what in the name of wonder - “

“I was privately married, and I retired from the stage. I want you to forgive me for taking Jim away from you last night.”

“It was you, then?”

“I had a stronger claim even than you could have. You were his patron; I was his mother.” She drew his head down to hers as she spoke, and there, with their cheeks together, were the two faces, the one stamped with the waning beauty of womanhood, the other with the waxing strength of man, and yet so alike in the dark eyes, the blue-black hair and the broad white brow, that I marvelled that I had never read her secret on the first days that I had seen them together. "Yes," she cried, "he is my own boy, and he saved me from what is worse than death, as your nephew Rodney could tell you. Yet my lips were sealed, and it was only last night that I could tell him that it was his mother whom he had brought back by his gentleness and his patience into the sweetness of life."

"Hush, mother!" said Jim, turning his lips to her cheek. "There are some things which are between ourselves. But tell me, Sir Charles, how went the fight?"

"Your uncle would have won it, but the roughs broke the ring."

"He is no uncle of mine, Sir Charles, but he has been the best and truest friend, both to me and to my father, that ever the world could offer. I only know one as true," he continued, taking me by the hand, "and dear old Rodney Stone is his name. But I trust he was not much hurt?"

"A week or two will set him right. But I cannot pretend to understand how this matter stands, and you must allow me to say that I have not heard you advance anything yet which seems to me to justify you in abandoning your engagements at a moment's notice."

"Come in, Sir Charles, and I am convinced that you will acknowledge that I could not have done otherwise. But here, if I mistake not, is Sir Lothian Hume."

The yellow barouche had swung into the avenue, and a few moments later the weary, panting horses had pulled up behind our curricle. Sir Lothian sprang out, looking as black as a thunder-cloud.

"Stay where you are, Corcoran," said he; and I caught a glimpse of a bottle-green coat which told me who was his travelling companion. "Well," he continued, looking round him with an insolent stare, "I should vastly like to know who has had the insolence to give me so pressing an invitation to visit my own house, and what in the devil you mean by daring to trespass upon my grounds?"

"I promise you that you will understand this and a good deal more before we part, Sir Lothian," said Jim, with a curious smile playing over his face. "If you will follow me, I will endeavour to make it all clear to you."

With his mother's hand in his own, he led us into that ill-omened room where the cards were still heaped upon the sideboard, and the dark shadow lurked in the corner of the ceiling.

“Now, sirrah, your explanation!” cried Sir Lothian, standing with his arms folded by the door.

“My first explanations I owe to you, Sir Charles,” said Jim; and as I listened to his voice and noted his manner, I could not but admire the effect which the company of her whom he now knew to be his mother had had upon a rude country lad. “I wish to tell you what occurred last night.”

“I will tell it for you, Jim,” said his mother. “You must know, Sir Charles, that though my son knew nothing of his parents, we were both alive, and had never lost sight of him. For my part, I let him have his own way in going to London and in taking up this challenge. It was only yesterday that it came to the ears of his father, who would have none of it. He was in the weakest health, and his wishes were not to be gainsayed. He ordered me to go at once and to bring his son to his side. I was at my wit’s end, for I was sure that Jim would never come unless a substitute were provided for him. I went to the kind, good couple who had brought him up, and I told them how matters stood. Mrs. Harrison loved Jim as if he had been her own son, and her husband loved mine, so they came to my help, and may God bless them for their kindness to a distracted wife and mother! Harrison would take Jim’s place if Jim would go to his father. Then I drove to Crawley. I found out which was Jim’s room, and I spoke to him through the window, for I was sure that those who had backed him would not let him go. I told him that I was his mother. I told him who was his father. I said that I had my phaeton ready, and that he might, for all I knew, be only in time to receive the dying blessing of that parent whom he had never known. Still the boy would not go until he had my assurance that Harrison would take his place.”

“Why did he not leave a message with Belcher?”

“My head was in a whirl, Sir Charles. To find a father and a mother, a new name and a new rank in a few minutes might turn a stronger brain than ever mine was. My mother begged me to come with her, and I went. The phaeton was waiting, but we had scarcely started when some fellow seized the horses’ heads, and a couple of ruffians attacked us. One of them I beat over the head with the butt of the whip, so that he dropped the cudgel with which he was about to strike me; then lashing the horse, I shook off the others and got safely away. I cannot imagine who they were or why they should molest us.”

“Perhaps Sir Lothian Hume could tell you,” said my uncle.

Our enemy said nothing; but his little grey eyes slid round with a most murderous glance in our direction.

“After I had come here and seen my father I went down - “

My uncle stopped him with a cry of astonishment.

“What did you say, young man? You came here and you saw your father - here at Cliffe Royal?”

“Yes, sir.”

My uncle had turned very pale.

“In God’s name, then, tell us who your father is!”

Jim made no answer save to point over our shoulders, and glancing round, we became aware that two people had entered the room through the door which led to the bedroom stair. The one I recognised in an instant. That impassive, mask-like face and demure manner could only belong to Ambrose, the former valet of my uncle. The other was a very different and even more singular figure. He was a tall man, clad in a dark dressing-gown, and leaning heavily upon a stick. His long, bloodless countenance was so thin and so white that it gave the strangest illusion of transparency. Only within the folds of a shroud have I ever seen so wan a face. The brindled hair and the rounded back gave the impression of advanced age, and it was only the dark brows and the bright alert eyes glancing out from beneath them which made me doubt whether it was really an old man who stood before us.

There was an instant of silence, broken by a deep oath from Sir Lothian Hume -

“Lord Avon, by God!” he cried.

“Very much at your service, gentlemen,” answered the strange figure in the dressing-gown.

CHAPTER XX - LORD AVON

My uncle was an impassive man by nature and had become more so by the tradition of the society in which he lived. He could have turned a card upon which his fortune depended without the twitch of a muscle, and I had seen him myself driving to imminent death on the Godstone Road with as calm a face as if he were out for his daily airing in the Mall. But now the shock which had come upon him was so great that he could only stand with white cheeks and staring, incredulous eyes. Twice I saw him open his lips, and twice he put his hand up to his throat, as though a barrier had risen betwixt himself and his utterance. Finally, he took a sudden little run forward with both his hands thrown out in greeting.

"Ned!" he cried.

But the strange man who stood before him folded his arms over his breast.

"No Charles," said he.

My uncle stopped and looked at him in amazement.

"Surely, Ned, you have a greeting for me after all these years?"

"You believed me to have done this deed, Charles. I read it in your eyes and in your manner on that terrible morning. You never asked me for an explanation. You never considered how impossible such a crime must be for a man of my character. At the first breath of suspicion you, my intimate friend, the man who knew me best, set me down as a thief and a murderer."

"No, no, Ned."

"You did, Charles; I read it in your eyes. And so it was that when I wished to leave that which was most precious to me in safe hands I had to pass you over and to place him in the charge of the one man who from the first never doubted my innocence. Better a thousand times that my son should be brought up in a humble station and in ignorance of his unfortunate father, than that he should learn to share the doubts and suspicions of his equals."

"Then he is really your son!" cried my uncle, staring at Jim in amazement.

For answer the man stretched out his long withered arm, and placed a gaunt hand upon the shoulder of the actress, whilst she looked up at him with love in her eyes.

"I married, Charles, and I kept it secret from my friends, for I had chosen my wife outside our own circles. You know the foolish pride which has always been the strongest part of my nature. I could not bear to avow that which I had done. It was this neglect upon my part which led to an estrangement between us, and drove her into habits for which it is I who am to blame and not she. Yet on account of these same habits I took the child from her and gave her an allowance on condition that she did not interfere with it. I had feared that the boy might receive evil from her, and had never dreamed in my blindness that she might get good from him. But I have learned in my miserable life, Charles, that there is a power which fashions things for us, though we may strive to thwart it, and that we are in truth driven by an unseen current towards a certain goal, however much we may deceive ourselves into thinking that it is our own sails and oars which are speeding us upon our way."

My eyes had been upon the face of my uncle as he listened, but now as I turned them from him they fell once more upon the thin, wolfish face of Sir Lothian Hume. He stood near the window, his grey silhouette thrown up against the square of dusty glass; and I have never seen such a play of evil passions, of anger, of jealousy, of disappointed greed upon a human face before.

"Am I to understand," said he, in a loud, harsh voice, "that this young man claims to be the heir of the peerage of Avon?"

"He is my lawful son."

"I knew you fairly well, sir, in our youth; but you will allow me to observe that neither I nor any friend of yours ever heard of a wife or a son. I defy Sir Charles Tregellis to say that he ever dreamed that there was any heir except myself."

"I have already explained, Sir Lothian, why I kept my marriage secret."

"You have explained, sir; but it is for others in another place to say if that explanation is satisfactory."

Two blazing dark eyes flashed out of the pale haggard face with as strange and sudden an effect as if a stream of light were to beat through the windows of a shattered and ruined house.

"You dare to doubt my word?"

"I demand a proof."

"My word is proof to those who know me."

"Excuse me, Lord Avon; but I know you, and I see no reason why I should accept your statement."

It was a brutal speech, and brutally delivered. Lord Avon staggered forward, and it was only his son on one aide and his wife on the other who kept his quivering hands from the throat of his insulter. Sir Lothian recoiled from the pale fierce face with the black brows, but he still glared angrily about the room.

"A very pretty conspiracy this," he cried, "with a criminal, an actress, and a prize-fighter all playing their parts. Sir Charles Tregellis, you shall hear from me again! And you also, my lord!" He turned upon his heel and strode from the room.

"He has gone to denounce me," said Lord Avon, a spasm of wounded pride distorting his features.

"Shall I bring him back?" cried Boy Jim.

"No, no, let him go. It is as well, for I have already made up my mind that my duty to you, my son, outweighs that which I owe, and have at such bitter cost fulfilled, to my brother and my family."

"You did me an injustice, Ned," said my uncle, "if you thought that I had forgotten you, or that I had judged you unkindly. If ever I have thought that you had done this deed - and how could I doubt the evidence of my own eyes - I have always believed that it was at a time when your mind was unhinged, and when you knew no more of what you were about than the man who is walking in his sleep."

"What do you mean when you talk about the evidence of your own eyes?" asked Lord Avon, looking hard at my uncle.

"I saw you, Ned, upon that accursed night."

"Saw me? Where?"

"In the passage."

"And doing what?"

"You were coming from your brother's room. I had heard his voice raised in anger and pain only an instant before. You carried in your hand a bag full of money, and your face betrayed the utmost agitation. If you can but explain to me, Ned, how you came to be there, you will take from my heart a weight which has pressed upon it for all these years."

No one now would have recognised in my uncle the man who was the leader of all the fops of London. In the presence of this old friend and of the tragedy which girt him round, the veil of triviality and affectation had been rent, and I felt all my gratitude towards him deepening for the first time into affection whilst I watched his pale, anxious face, and the eager hops which shone in his eyes as he awaited his friend's explanation. Lord Avon sank his face in his hands, and for a few moments there was silence in the dim grey room.

"I do not wonder now that you were shaken," said he at last. "My God, what a net was cast round me! Had this vile charge been brought against me, you, my dearest friend, would have been compelled to tear away the last doubt as to my guilt. And yet, in spite of what you have seen, Charles, I am as innocent in the matter as you are."

"I thank God that I hear you say so."

"But you are not satisfied, Charles. I can read it on your face. You wish to know why an innocent man should conceal himself for all these years."

"Your word is enough for me, Ned; but the world will wish this other question answered also."

"It was to save the family honour, Charles. You know how dear it was to me. I could not clear myself without proving my brother to have been guilty of the foulest crime which a gentleman could commit. For eighteen years I have screened him at the expense of everything which a man could sacrifice. I have lived a living death which has left me an old and shattered man when I am but in my fortieth year. But now when I am faced with the alternative of telling the facts about my brother, or of wronging my son, I can only act in one fashion, and the more so since I have reason to hope that a way may be found by which what I am now about to disclose to you need never come to the public ear."

He rose from his chair, and leaning heavily upon his two supporters, he tottered across the room to the dust-covered sideboard. There, in the centre of it, was lying that ill-boding pile of time-stained, mildewed cards, just as Boy Jim and I had seen them years before. Lord Avon turned them over with trembling fingers, and then picking up half a dozen, he brought them to my uncle.

"Place your finger and thumb upon the left-hand bottom corner of this card, Charles," said he. "Pass them lightly backwards and forwards, and tell me what you feel."

"It has been pricked with a pin."

"Precisely. What is the card?"

My uncle turned it over.

“It is the king of clubs.”

“Try the bottom corner of this one.”

“It is quite smooth.”

“And the card is?”

“The three of spades.”

“And this one?”

“It has been pricked. It is the ace of hearts.” Lord Avon hurled them down upon the floor.

“There you have the whole accursed story!” he cried. “Need I go further where every word is an agony?”

“I see something, but not all. You must continue, Ned.”

The frail figure stiffened itself, as though he were visibly bracing himself for an effort.

“I will tell it you, then, once and for ever. Never again, I trust, will it be necessary for me to open my lips about the miserable business. You remember our game. You remember how we lost. You remember how you all retired, and left me sitting in this very room, and at that very table. Far from being tired, I was exceedingly wakeful, and I remained here for an hour or more thinking over the incidents of the game and the changes which it promised to bring about in my fortunes. I had, as you will recollect, lost heavily, and my only consolation was that my own brother had won. I knew that, owing to his reckless mode of life, he was firmly in the clutches of the Jews, and I hoped that that which had shaken my position might have the effect of restoring his. As I sat there, fingering the cards in an abstracted way, some chance led me to observe the small needle-pricks which you have just felt. I went over the packs, and found, to my unspeakable horror, that any one who was in the secret could hold them in dealing in such a way as to be able to count the exact number of high cards which fell to each of his opponents. And then, with such a flush of shame and disgust as I had never known, I remembered how my attention had been drawn to my brother’s mode of dealing, its slowness, and the way in which he held each card by the lower corner.

“I did not condemn him precipitately. I sat for a long time calling to mind every incident which could tell one way or the other. Alas! it all went to confirm me in my first horrible suspicion, and to turn it into a certainty. My brother had ordered the packs from Ledbury’s, in Bond Street. They had been for some hours in his chambers. He had played throughout with a decision which had surprised us at the time. Above all, I could not conceal from myself that his past life was not such as to make even so abominable a crime as this impossible to him. Tingling with anger and shame, I went straight up that stair, the cards in my hand, and I taxed him with this lowest and meanest of all the crimes to which a villain could descend.

"He had not retired to rest, and his ill-gotten gains were spread out upon the dressing-table. I hardly know what I said to him, but the facts were so deadly that he did not attempt to deny his guilt. You will remember, as the only mitigation of his crime, that he was not yet one and twenty years of age. My words overwhelmed him. He went on his knees to me, imploring me to spare him. I told him that out of consideration for our family I should make no public exposure of him, but that he must never again in his life lay his hand upon a card, and that the money which he had won must be returned next morning with an explanation. It would be social ruin, he protested. I answered that he must take the consequence of his own deed. Then and there I burned the papers which he had won from me, and I replaced in a canvas bag which lay upon the table all the gold pieces. I would have left the room without another word, but he clung to me, and tore the ruffle from my wrist in his attempt to hold me back, and to prevail upon me to promise to say nothing to you or Sir Lothian Hume. It was his despairing cry, when he found that I was proof against all his entreaties, which reached your ears, Charles, and caused you to open your chamber door and to see me as I returned to my room."

My uncle drew a long sigh of relief.

"Nothing could be clearer!" he murmured.

"In the morning I came, as you remember, to your room, and I returned your money. I did the same to Sir Lothian Hume. I said nothing of my reasons for doing so, for I found that I could not bring myself to confess our disgrace to you. Then came the horrible discovery which has darkened my life, and which was as great a mystery to me as it has been to you. I saw that I was suspected, and I saw, also, that even if I were to clear myself, it could only be done by a public confession of the infamy of my brother. I shrank from it, Charles. Any personal suffering seemed to me to be better than to bring public shame upon a family which has held an untarnished record through so many centuries. I fled from my trial, therefore, and disappeared from the world.

“But, first of all, it was necessary that I should make arrangements for the wife and the son, of whose existence you and my other friends were ignorant. It is with shame, Mary, that I confess it, and I acknowledge to you that the blame of all the consequences rests with me rather than with you. At the time there were reasons, now happily long gone past, which made me determine that the son was better apart from the mother, whose absence at that age he would not miss. I would have taken you into my confidence, Charles, had it not been that your suspicions had wounded me deeply - for I did not at that time understand how strong the reasons were which had prejudiced you against me.

“On the evening after the tragedy I fled to London, and arranged that my wife should have a fitting allowance on condition that she did not interfere with the child. I had, as you remember, had much to do with Harrison, the prize-fighter, and I had often had occasion to admire his simple and honest nature. I took my boy to him now, and I found him, as I expected, incredulous as to my guilt, and ready to assist me in any way. At his wife’s entreaty he had just retired from the ring, and was uncertain how he should employ himself. I was able to fit him up as a smith, on condition that he should ply his trade at the village of Friar’s Oak. My agreement was that James was to be brought up as their nephew, and that he should know nothing of his unhappy parents.

“You will ask me why I selected Friar’s Oak. It was because I had already chosen my place of concealment; and if I could not see my boy, it was, at least, some consolation to know that he was near me. You are aware that this mansion is one of the oldest in England; but you are not aware that it has been built with a very special eye to concealment, that there are no less than two habitable secret chambers, and that the outer or thicker walls are tunnelled into passages. The existence of these rooms has always been a family secret, though it was one which I valued so little that it was only the chance of my seldom using the house which had prevented me from pointing them out to some friend. Now I found that a secure retreat was provided for me in my extremity. I stole down to my own mansion, entered it at night, and, leaving all that was dear to me behind, I crept like a rat behind the wainscot, to live out the remainder of my weary life in solitude and misery. In this worn face, Charles, and in this grizzled hair, you may read the diary of my most miserable existence.

"Once a week Harrison used to bring me up provisions, passing them through the pantry window, which I left open for the purpose. Sometimes I would steal out at night and walk under the stars once more, with the cool breeze upon my forehead; but this I had at last to stop, for I was seen by the rustics, and rumours of a spirit at Cliffe Royal began to get about. One night two ghost-hunters - "

"It was I, father," cried Boy Jim; "I and my friend, Rodney Stone."

"I know it was. Harrison told me so the same night. I was proud, James, to see that you had the spirit of the Barringtons, and that I had an heir whose gallantry might redeem the family blot which I have striven so hard to cover over. Then came the day when your mother's kindness - her mistaken kindness - gave you the means of escaping to London."

"Ah, Edward," cried his wife, "if you had seen our boy, like a caged eagle, beating against the bars, you would have helped to give him even so short a flight as this."

"I do not blame you, Mary. It is possible that I should have done so. He went to London, and he tried to open a career for himself by his own strength and courage. How many of our ancestors have done the same, save only that a sword-hilt lay in their closed hands; but of them all I do not know that any have carried themselves more gallantly!"

"That I dare swear," said my uncle, heartily.

"And then, when Harrison at last returned, I learned that my son was actually matched to fight in a public prize-battle. That would not do, Charles! It was one thing to fight as you and I have fought in our youth, and it was another to compete for a purse of gold."

"My dear friend, I would not for the world - "

"Of course you would not, Charles. You chose the best man, and how could you do otherwise? But it would not do! I determined that the time had come when I should reveal myself to my son, the more so as there were many signs that my most unnatural existence had seriously weakened my health. Chance, or shall I not rather say Providence, had at last made clear all that had been dark, and given me the means of establishing my innocence. My wife went yesterday to bring my boy at last to the side of his unfortunate father."

There was silence for some time, and then it was my uncle's voice which broke it.

“You’ve been the most ill-used man in the world, Ned,” said he. “Please God we shall have many years yet in which to make up to you for it. But, after all, it seems to me that we are as far as ever from learning how your unfortunate brother met his death.”

“For eighteen years it was as much a mystery to me as to you, Charles. But now at last the guilt is manifest. Stand forward, Ambrose, and tell your story as frankly and as fully as you have told it to me.”

CHAPTER XXI - THE VALET’S STORY

The valet had shrunk into the dark corner of the room, and had remained so motionless that we had forgotten his presence until, upon this appeal from his former master, he took a step forward into the light, turning his sallow face in our direction. His usually impassive features were in a state of painful agitation, and he spoke slowly and with hesitation, as though his trembling lips could hardly frame the words. And yet, so strong is habit, that, even in this extremity of emotion he assumed the deferential air of the high-class valet, and his sentences formed themselves in the sonorous fashion which had struck my attention upon that first day when the curricle of my uncle had stopped outside my father’s door.

“My Lady Avon and gentlemen,” said he, “if I have sinned in this matter, and I freely confess that I have done so, I only know one way in which I can atone for it, and that is by making the full and complete confession which my noble master, Lord Avon, has demanded. I assure you, then, that what I am about to tell you, surprising as it may seem, is the absolute and undeniable truth concerning the mysterious death of Captain Barrington.

“It may seem impossible to you that one in my humble walk of life should bear a deadly and implacable hatred against a man in the position of Captain Barrington. You think that the gulf between is too wide. I can tell you, gentlemen, that the gulf which can be bridged by unlawful love can be spanned also by an unlawful hatred, and that upon the day when this young man stole from me all that made my life worth living, I vowed to Heaven that I should take from him that foul life of his, though the deed would cover but the tiniest fraction of the debt which he owed me. I see that you look askance at me, Sir Charles Tregellis, but you should pray to God, sir, that you may never have the chance of finding out what you would yourself be capable of in the same position.”

It was a wonder to all of us to see this man’s fiery nature breaking suddenly through the artificial constraints with which he held it in check. His short dark hair seemed to bristle upwards, his eyes glowed with the intensity of his passion, and his face expressed a malignity of hatred which neither the death of his enemy nor the lapse of years could mitigate. The demure servant was gone, and there stood in his place a deep and dangerous man, one who might be an ardent lover or a most vindictive foe.

"We were about to be married, she and I, when some black chance threw him across our path. I do not know by what base deceptions he lured her away from me. I have heard that she was only one of many, and that he was an adept at the art. It was done before ever I knew the danger, and she was left with her broken heart and her ruined life to return to that home into which she had brought disgrace and misery. I only saw her once. She told me that her seducer had burst out a-laughing when she had reproached him for his perfidy, and I swore to her that his heart's blood should pay me for that laugh.

"I was a valet at the time, but I was not yet in the service of Lord Avon. I applied for and gained that position with the one idea that it might give me an opportunity of settling my accounts with his younger brother. And yet my chance was a terribly long time coming, for many months had passed before the visit to Cliffe Royal gave me the opportunity which I longed for by day and dreamed of by night. When it did come, however, it came in a fashion which was more favourable to my plans than anything that I had ever ventured to hope for.

"Lord Avon was of opinion that no one but himself knew of the secret passages in Cliffe Royal. In this he was mistaken. I knew of them - or, at least, I knew enough of them to serve my purpose. I need not tell you how, one day, when preparing the chambers for the guests, an accidental pressure upon part of the fittings caused a panel to gape in the woodwork, and showed me a narrow opening in the wall. Making my way down this, I found that another panel led into a larger bedroom beyond. That was all I knew, but it was all that was needed for my purpose. The disposal of the rooms had been left in my hands, and I arranged that Captain Barrington should sleep in the larger and I in the smaller. I could come upon him when I wished, and no one would be the wiser.

"And then he arrived. How can I describe to you the fever of impatience in which I lived until the moment should come for which I had waited and planned. For a night and a day they gambled, and for a night and a day I counted the minutes which brought me nearer to my man. They might ring for fresh wine at what hour they liked, they always found me waiting and ready, so that this young captain hiccoughed out that I was the model of all valets. My master advised me to go to bed. He had noticed my flushed cheek and my bright eyes, and he set me down as being in a fever. So I was, but it was a fever which only one medicine could assuage.

"Then at last, very early in the morning, I heard them push back their chairs, and I knew that their game had at last come to an end. When I entered the room to receive my orders, I found that Captain Barrington had already stumbled off to bed. The others had also retired, and my master was sitting alone at the table, with his empty bottle and the scattered cards in front of him. He ordered me angrily to my room, and this time I obeyed him.

"My first care was to provide myself with a weapon. I knew that if I were face to face with him I could tear his throat out, but I must so arrange that the fashion of his death should be a noiseless one. There was a hunting trophy in the hall, and from it I took a straight heavy knife which I sharpened upon my boot. Then I stole to my room, and sat waiting upon the side of my bed. I had made up my mind what I should do. There would be little satisfaction in killing him if he was not to know whose hand had struck the blow, or which of his sins it came to avenge. Could I but bind him and gag him in his drunken sleep, then a prick or two of my dagger would arouse him to listen to what I had to say to him. I pictured the look in his eyes as the haze of sleep cleared slowly away from them, the look of anger turning suddenly to stark horror as he understood who I was and what I had come for. It would be the supreme moment of my life.

"I waited as it seemed to me for at least an hour; but I had no watch, and my impatience was such that I dare say it really was little more than a quarter of that time. Then I rose, removed my shoes, took my knife, and having opened the panel, slipped silently through. It was not more than thirty feet that I had to go, but I went inch by inch, for the old rotten boards snapped like breaking twigs if a sudden weight was placed upon them. It was, of course, pitch dark, and very, very slowly I felt my way along. At last I saw a yellow seam of light glimmering in front of me, and I knew that it came from the other panel. I was too soon, then, since he had not extinguished his candles. I had waited many months, and I could afford to wait another hour, for I did not wish to do anything precipitately or in a hurry.

"It was very necessary to move silently now, since I was within a few feet of my man, with only the thin wooden partition between. Age had warped and cracked the boards, so that when I had at last very stealthily crept my way as far as the sliding-panel, I found that I could, without any difficulty, see into the room. Captain Barrington was standing by the dressing-table with his coat and vest off. A large pile of sovereigns, and several slips of paper were lying before him, and he was counting over his gambling gains. His face was flushed, and he was heavy from want of sleep and from wine. It rejoiced me to see it, for it meant that his slumber would be deep, and that all would be made easy for me.

"I was still watching him, when of a sudden I saw him start, and a terrible expression come upon his face. For an instant my heart stood still, for I feared that he had in some way divined my presence. And then I heard the voice of my master within. I could not see the door by which he had entered, nor could I see him where he stood, but I heard all that he had to say. As I watched the captain's face flush fiery-red, and then turn to a livid white as he listened to those bitter words which told him of his infamy, my revenge was sweeter - far sweeter - than my most pleasant dreams had ever pictured it. I saw my master approach the dressing-table, hold the papers in the flame of the candle, throw their charred ashes into the grate, and sweep the golden pieces into a small brown canvas bag. Then, as he turned to leave the room, the captain seized him by the wrist, imploring him, by the memory of their mother, to have mercy upon him; and I loved my master as I saw him drag his sleeve from the grasp of the clutching fingers, and leave the stricken wretch grovelling upon the floor.

"And now I was left with a difficult point to settle, for it was hard for me to say whether it was better that I should do that which I had come for, or whether, by holding this man's guilty secret, I might not have in my hand a keener and more deadly weapon than my master's hunting-knife. I was sure that Lord Avon could not and would not expose him. I knew your sense of family pride too well, my lord, and I was certain that his secret was safe in your hands. But I both could and would; and then, when his life had been blasted, and he had been hounded from his regiment and from his clubs, it would be time, perhaps, for me to deal in some other way with him."

"Ambrose, you are a black villain," said my uncle.

"We all have our own feelings, Sir Charles; and you will permit me to say that a serving-man may resent an injury as much as a gentleman, though the redress of the duel is denied to him. But I am telling you frankly, at Lord

Avon’s request, all that I thought and did upon that night, and I shall continue to do so, even if I am not fortunate enough to win your approval.

“When Lord Avon had left him, the captain remained for some time in a kneeling attitude, with his face sunk upon a chair. Then he rose, and paced slowly up and down the room, his chin sunk upon his breast. Every now and then he would pluck at his hair, or shake his clenched hands in the air; and I saw the moisture glisten upon his brow. For a time I lost sight of him, and I heard him opening drawer after drawer, as though he were in search of something. Then he stood over by his dressing-table again, with his back turned to me. His head was thrown a little back, and he had both hands up to the collar of his shirt, as though he were striving to undo it. And then there was a gush as if a ewer had been upset, and down he sank upon the ground, with his head in the corner, twisted round at so strange an angle to his shoulders that one glimpse of it told me that my man was slipping swiftly from the clutch in which I had fancied that I held him. I slid my panel, and was in the room in an instant. His eyelids still quivered, and it seemed to me, as my gaze met his glazing eyes, that I could read both recognition and surprise in them. I laid my knife upon the floor, and I stretched myself out beside him, that I might whisper in his ear one or two little things of which I wished to remind him; but even as I did so, he gave a gasp and was gone.

“It is singular that I, who had never feared him in life, should be frightened at him now, and yet when I looked at him, and saw that all was motionless save the creeping stain upon the carpet, I was seized with a sudden foolish spasm of terror, and, catching up my knife, I fled swiftly and silently back to my own room, closing the panels behind me. It was only when I had reached it that I found that in my mad haste I had carried away, not the hunting-knife which I had taken with me, but the bloody razor which had dropped from the dead man’s hand. This I concealed where no one has ever discovered it; but my fears would not allow me to go back for the other, as I might perhaps have done, had I foreseen how terribly its presence might tell against my master. And that, Lady Avon and gentlemen, is an exact and honest account of how Captain Barrington came by his end.”

“And how was it,” asked my uncle, angrily, “that you have allowed an innocent man to be persecuted all these years, when a word from you might have saved him?”

"Because I had every reason to believe, Sir Charles, that that would be most unwelcome to Lord Avon. How could I tell all this without revealing the family scandal which he was so anxious to conceal? I confess that at the beginning I did not tell him what I had seen, and my excuse must be that he disappeared before I had time to determine what I should do. For many a year, however - ever since I have been in your service, Sir Charles - my conscience tormented me, and I swore that if ever I should find my old master, I should reveal everything to him. The chance of my overhearing a story told by young Mr. Stone here, which showed me that some one was using the secret chambers of Cliffe Royal, convinced me that Lord Avon was in hiding there, and I lost no time in seeking him out and offering to do him all the justice in my power."

"What he says is true," said his master; "but it would have been strange indeed if I had hesitated to sacrifice a frail life and failing health in a cause for which I freely surrendered all that youth had to offer. But new considerations have at last compelled me to alter my resolution. My son, through ignorance of his true position, was drifting into a course of life which accorded with his strength and spirit, but not with the traditions of his house. Again, I reflected that many of those who knew my brother had passed away, that all the facts need not come out, and that my death whilst under the suspicion of such a crime would cast a deeper stain upon our name than the sin which he had so terribly expiated. For these reasons - "

The tramp of several heavy footsteps reverberating through the old house broke in suddenly upon Lord Avon's words. His wan face turned even a shade greyer as he heard it, and he looked piteously to his wife and son.

"They will arrest me!" he cried. "I must submit to the degradation of an arrest."

"This way, Sir James; this way," said the harsh tones of Sir Lothian Hume from without.

"I do not need to be shown the way in a house where I have drunk many a bottle of good claret," cried a deep voice in reply; and there in the doorway stood the broad figure of Squire Ovington in his buckskins and top-boots, a riding-crop in his hand. Sir Lothian Hume was at his elbow, and I saw the faces of two country constables peeping over his shoulders.

"Lord Avon," said the squire, "as a magistrate of the county of Sussex, it is my duty to tell you that a warrant is held against you for the wilful murder of your brother, Captain Barrington, in the year 1786."

“I am ready to answer the charge.”

“This I tell you as a magistrate. But as a man, and the Squire of Rougham Grange, I’m right glad to see you, Ned, and here’s my hand on it, and never will I believe that a good Tory like yourself, and a man who could show his horse’s tail to any field in the whole Down county, would ever be capable of so vile an act.”

“You do me justice, James,” said Lord Avon, clasping the broad, brown hand which the country squire had held out to him. “I am as innocent as you are; and I can prove it.”

“Damned glad I am to hear it, Ned! That is to say, Lord Avon, that any defence which you may have to make will be decided upon by your peers and by the laws of your country.”

“Until which time,” added Sir Lothian Hume, “a stout door and a good lock will be the best guarantee that Lord Avon will be there when called for.”

The squire’s weather-stained face flushed to a deeper red as he turned upon the Londoner.

“Are you the magistrate of a county, sir?”

“I have not the honour, Sir James.”

“Then how dare you advise a man who has sat on the bench for nigh twenty years! When I am in doubt, sir, the law provides me with a clerk with whom I may confer, and I ask no other assistance.”

“You take too high a tone in this matter, Sir James. I am not accustomed to be taken to task so sharply.”

“Nor am I accustomed, sir, to be interfered with in my official duties. I speak as a magistrate, Sir Lothian, but I am always ready to sustain my opinions as a man.”

Sir Lothian bowed.

“You will allow me to observe, sir, that I have personal interests of the highest importance involved in this matter, I have every reason to believe that there is a conspiracy afoot which will affect my position as heir to Lord Avon’s titles and estates. I desire his safe custody in order that this matter may be cleared up, and I call upon you, as a magistrate, to execute your warrant.”

“Plague take it, Ned!” cried the squire, “I would that my clerk Johnson were here, for I would deal as kindly by you as the law allows; and yet I am, as you hear, called upon to secure your person.”

“Permit me to suggest, sir,” said my uncle, “that so long as he is under the personal supervision of the magistrate, he may be said to be under the care of the law, and that this condition will be fulfilled if he is under the roof of Rougham Grange.”

“Nothing could be better,” cried the squire, heartily. “You will stay with me, Ned, until this matter blows over. In other words, Lord Avon, I make myself responsible, as the representative of the law, that you are held in safe custody until your person may be required of me.”

“Yours is a true heart, James.”

“Tut, tut! it is the due process of the law. I trust, Sir Lothian Hume, that you find nothing to object to in it?”

Sir Lothian shrugged his shoulders, and looked blackly at the magistrate. Then he turned to my uncle.

“There is a small matter still open between us,” said he. “Would you kindly give me the name of a friend? Mr. Corcoran, who is outside in my barouche, would act for me, and we might meet to-morrow morning.”

“With pleasure,” answered my uncle. “I dare say your father would act for me, nephew? Your friend may call upon Lieutenant Stone, of Friar’s Oak, and the sooner the better.”

And so this strange conference ended. As for me, I had sprung to the side of the old friend of my boyhood, and was trying to tell him my joy at his good fortune, and listening to his assurance that nothing that could ever befall him could weaken the love that he bore me. My uncle touched me on the shoulder, and we were about to leave, when Ambrose, whose bronze mask had been drawn down once more over his fiery passions, came demurely towards him.

“Beg your pardon, Sir Charles,” said he; “but it shocks me very much to see your cravat.”

“You are right, Ambrose,” my uncle answered. “Lorimer does his best, but I have never been able to fill your place.”

“I should be proud to serve you, sir; but you must acknowledge that Lord Avon has the prior claim. If he will release me - “

“You may go, Ambrose; you may go!” cried Lord Avon. “You are an excellent servant, but your presence has become painful to me.”

“Thank you, Ned,” said my uncle. “But you must not leave me so suddenly again, Ambrose.”

“Permit me to explain the reason, sir. I had determined to give you notice when we reached Brighton; but as we drove from the village that day, I caught a glimpse of a lady passing in a phaeton between whom and Lord Avon I was well aware there was a close intimacy, although I was not certain that she was actually his wife. Her presence there confirmed me in my opinion that he was in hiding at Cliffe Royal, and I dropped from your curricle and followed her at once, in order to lay the matter before her, and explain how very necessary it was that Lord Avon should see me.”

“Well, I forgive you for your desertion, Ambrose,” said my uncle; “and,” he added, “I should be vastly obliged to you if you would re-arrange my tie.”

CHAPTER XXII - THE END

Sir James Ovington's carriage was waiting without, and in it the Avon family, so tragically separated and so strangely re-united, were borne away to the squire's hospitable home. When they had gone, my uncle mounted his curricle, and drove Ambrose and myself to the village.

"We had best see your father at once, nephew," said he. "Sir Lothian and his man started some time ago. I should be sorry if there should be any hitch in our meeting."

For my part, I was thinking of our opponent's deadly reputation as a duellist, and I suppose that my features must have betrayed my feelings, for my uncle began to laugh.

"Why, nephew," said he, "you look as if you were walking behind my coffin. It is not my first affair, and I dare bet that it will not be my last. When I fight near town I usually fire a hundred or so in Manton's back shop, but I dare say I can find my way to his waistcoat. But I confess that I am somewhat *accablé*, by all that has befallen us. To think of my dear old friend being not only alive, but innocent as well! And that he should have such a strapping son and heir to carry on the race of Avon! This will be the last blow to Hume, for I know that the Jews have given him rope on the score of his expectations. And you, Ambrose, that you should break out in such a way!"

Of all the amazing things which had happened, this seemed to have impressed my uncle most, and he recurred to it again and again. That a man whom he had come to regard as a machine for tying cravats and brewing chocolate should suddenly develop fiery human passions was indeed a prodigy. If his silver razor-heater had taken to evil ways he could not have been more astounded.

We were still a hundred yards from the cottage when I saw the tall, green-coated Mr. Corcoran striding down the garden path. My father was waiting for us at the door with an expression of subdued delight upon his face.

"Happy to serve you in any way, Sir Charles," said he. "We've arranged it for to-morrow at seven on Ditching Common."

"I wish these things could be brought off a little later in the day," said my uncle. "One has either to rise at a perfectly absurd hour, or else to neglect one’s toilet.”

“They are stopping across the road at the Friar’s Oak inn, and if you would wish it later - “

“No, no; I shall make the effort. Ambrose, you will bring up the *batteris de toilette* at five.”

“I don’t know whether you would care to use my barkers,” said my father. “I’ve had ‘em in fourteen actions, and up to thirty yards you couldn’t wish a better tool.”

“Thank you, I have my duelling pistols under the seat. See that the triggers are oiled, Ambrose, for I love a light pull. Ah, sister Mary, I have brought your boy back to you, none the worse, I hope, for the dissipations of town.”

I need not tell you how my dear mother wept over me and fondled me, for you who have mothers will know for yourselves, and you who have not will never understand how warm and snug the home nest can be. How I had chafed and longed for the wonders of town, and yet, now that I had seen more than my wildest dreams had ever deemed possible, my eyes had rested upon nothing which was so sweet and so restful as our own little sitting-room, with its terra-cotta-coloured walls, and those trifles which are so insignificant in themselves, and yet so rich in memories - the blow-fish from the Moluccas, the narwhal’s horn from the Arctic, and the picture of the *Ca Ira*, with Lord Hotham in chase! How cheery, too, to see at one side of the shining grate my father with his pipe and his merry red face, and on the other my mother with her fingers ever turning and darting with her knitting-needles! As I looked at them I marvelled that I could ever have longed to leave them, or that I could bring myself to leave them again.

But leave them I must, and that speedily, as I learned amidst the boisterous congratulations of my father and the tears of my mother. He had himself been appointed to the *Cato,* 64, with post rank, whilst a note had come from Lord Nelson at Portsmouth to say that a vacancy was open for me if I should present myself at once.

“And your mother has your sea-chest all ready, my lad, and you can travel down with me to-morrow; for if you are to be one of Nelson’s men, you must show him that you are worthy of it.”

“All the Stones have been in the sea-service,” said my mother, apologetically to my uncle, “and it is a great chance that he should enter under Lord Nelson’s own patronage. But we can never forget your kindness, Charles, in showing our dear Rodney something of the world.”

“On the contrary, sister Mary,” said my uncle, graciously, “your son has been an excellent companion to me - so much so that I fear that I am open to the charge of having neglected my dear Fidelio. I trust that I bring him back somewhat more polished than I found him. It would be folly to call him *distingué*, but he is at least unobjectionable. Nature has denied him the highest gifts, and I find him adverse to employing the compensating advantages of art; but, at least, I have shown him something of life, and I have taught him a few lessons in finesse and deportment which may appear to be wasted upon him at present, but which, none the less, may come back to him in his more mature years. If his career in town has been a disappointment to me, the reason lies mainly in the fact that I am foolish enough to measure others by the standard which I have myself set. I am well disposed towards him, however, and I consider him eminently adapted for the profession which he is about to adopt.”

He held out his sacred snuff-box to me as he spoke, as a solemn pledge of his goodwill, and, as I look back at him, there is no moment at which I see him more plainly than that with the old mischievous light dancing once more in his large intolerant eyes, one thumb in the armpit of his vest, and the little shining box held out upon his snow-white palm. He was a type and leader of a strange breed of men which has vanished away from England - the full-blooded, virile buck, exquisite in his dress, narrow in his thoughts, coarse in his amusements, and eccentric in his habits. They walk across the bright stage of English history with their finicky step, their preposterous cravats, their high collars, their dangling seals, and they vanish into those dark wings from which there is no return. The world has outgrown them, and there is no place now for their strange fashions, their practical jokes, and carefully cultivated eccentricities. And yet behind this outer veiling of folly, with which they so carefully draped themselves, they were often men of strong character and robust personality. The languid loungers of St. James’s were also the yachtsmen of the Solent, the fine riders of the shires, and the hardy fighters in many a wayside battle and many a morning frolic. Wellington picked his best officers from amongst them. They condescended occasionally to poetry or oratory; and Byron, Charles James Fox, Sheridan, and Castlereagh, preserved some reputation amongst them, in spite of their publicity. I cannot think how the historian of the future can hope to understand them, when I, who knew one of them so well, and bore his blood in my veins, could never quite tell how much of him was real, and how much was due to the affectations which he had cultivated so long that they had ceased to deserve the name. Through the chinks of that armour of folly I have sometimes thought that I had caught a glimpse of a good and true man within, and it pleases me to hope that I was right.

It was destined that the exciting incidents of that day were even now not at an end. I had retired early to rest, but it was impossible for me to sleep, for my mind would turn to Boy Jim and to the extraordinary change in his position and prospects. I was still turning and tossing when I heard the sound of flying hoofs coming down the London Road, and immediately afterwards the grating of wheels as they pulled up in front of the inn. My window chanced to be open, for it was a fresh spring night, and I heard the creak of the inn door, and a voice asking whether Sir Lothian Hume was within. At the name I sprang from my bed, and I was in time to see three men, who had alighted from the carriage, file into the lighted hall. The two horses were left standing, with the glare of the open door falling upon their brown shoulders and patient heads.

Ten minutes may have passed, and then I heard the clatter of many steps, and a knot of men came clustering through the door.

"You need not employ violence," said a harsh, clear voice. "On whose suit is it?"

"Several suits, sir. They 'eld over in the 'opes that you'd pull off the fight this mornin'. Total amounts is twelve thousand pound."

"Look here, my man, I have a very important appointment for seven o'clock to-morrow. I'll give you fifty pounds if you will leave me until then."

"Couldn't do it, sir, really. It's more than our places as sheriff's officers is worth."

In the yellow glare of the carriage-lamp I saw the baronet look up at our windows, and if hatred could have killed, his eyes would have been as deadly as his pistol.

"I can't mount the carriage unless you free my hands," said he.

"'Old 'ard, Bill, for 'e looks vicious. Let go o' one arm at a time! Ah, would you then?"

“Corcoran! Corcoran!” screamed a voice, and I saw a plunge, a struggle, and one frantic figure breaking its way from the rest. Then came a heavy blow, and down he fell in the middle of the moonlit road, flapping and jumping among the dust like a trout new landed.

“He’s napped it this time! Get ‘im by the wrists, Jim! Now, all together!”

He was hoisted up like a bag of flour, and fell with a brutal thud into the bottom of the carriage. The three men sprang in after him, a whip whistled in the darkness, and I had seen the last that I or any one else, save some charitable visitor to a debtors’ gaol, was ever again destined to see of Sir Lothian Hume, the once fashionable Corinthian.

Lord Avon lived for two years longer - long enough, with the help of Ambrose, to fully establish his innocence of the horrible crime, in the shadow of which he had lived so long. What he could not clear away, however, was the effect of those years of morbid and unnatural life spent in the hidden chambers of the old house; and it was only the devotion of his wife and of his son which kept the thin and flickering flame of his life alight. She whom I had known as the play actress of Anstey Cross became the dowager Lady Avon; whilst Boy Jim, as dear to me now as when we harried birds’ nests and tickled trout together, is now Lord Avon, beloved by his tenantry, the finest sportsman and the most popular man from the north of the Weald to the Channel. He was married to the second daughter of Sir James Ovington; and as I have seen three of his grandchildren within the week, I fancy that if any of Sir Lothian’s descendants have their eye upon the property, they are likely to be as disappointed as their ancestor was before them. The old house of Cliffe Royal has been pulled down, owing to the terrible family associations which hung round it, and a beautiful modern building sprang up in its place. The lodge which stood by the Brighton Road was so dainty with its trellis-work and its rose bushes that I was not the only visitor who declared that I had rather be the owner of it than of the great house amongst the trees. There for many years in a happy and peaceful old age lived Jack Harrison and his wife, receiving back in the sunset of their lives the loving care which they had themselves bestowed. Never again did Champion Harrison throw his leg over the ropes of a twenty-four-foot ring; but the story of the great battle between the smith and the West Countryman is still familiar to old ring-goers, and nothing pleased him better than to re-fight it all, round by round, as he sat in the sunshine under his rose-girt porch. But if he heard the tap of his wife's stick approaching him, his talk would break off at once into the garden and its prospects, for she was still haunted by the fear that he would some day go back to the ring, and she never missed the old man for an hour without being convinced that he had hobbled off to wrest the belt from the latest upstart champion. It was at his own very earnest request that they inscribed "He fought the good fight" upon his tombstone, and though I cannot doubt that he had Black Bank and Crab Wilson in his mind when he asked it, yet none who knew him would grudge its spiritual meaning as a summing up of his clean and manly life.

Sir Charles Tregellis continued for some years to show his scarlet and gold at Newmarket, and his inimitable coats in St. James's. It was he who invented buttons and loops at the ends of dress pantaloons, and who broke fresh ground by his investigation of the comparative merits of isinglass and of starch in the preparation of shirt-fronts. There are old fops still lurking in the corners of Arthur's or of White's who can remember Tregellis's dictum, that a cravat should be so stiffened that three parts of the length could be raised by one corner, and the painful schism which followed when Lord Alvanley and his school contended that a half was sufficient. Then came the supremacy of Brummell, and the open breach upon the subject of velvet collars, in which the town followed the lead of the younger man. My uncle, who was not born to be second to any one, retired instantly to St. Albans, and announced that he would make it the centre of fashion and of society, instead of degenerate London. It chanced, however, that the mayor and corporation waited upon him with an address of thanks for his good intentions towards the town, and that the burgesses, having ordered new coats from London for the occasion, were all arrayed in velvet collars, which so preyed upon my uncle's spirits that he took to his bed, and never showed his face in public again. His money, which had ruined what might have been a great life, was divided amongst many bequests, an annuity to his valet, Ambrose, being amongst them; but enough has come to his sister, my dear mother, to help to make her old age as sunny and as pleasant as even I could wish.

And as for me - the poor string upon which these beads are strung - I dare scarce say another word about myself, lest this, which I had meant to be the last word of a chapter, should grow into the first words of a new one. Had I not taken up my pen to tell you a story of the land, I might, perchance, have made a better one of the sea; but the one frame cannot hold two opposite pictures. The day may come when I shall write down all that I remember of the greatest battle ever fought upon salt water, and how my father's gallant life was brought to an end as, with his paint rubbing against a French eighty-gun ship on one side and a Spanish seventy-four upon the other he stood eating an apple in the break of his poop. I saw the smoke banks on that October evening swirl slowly up over the Atlantic swell, and rise, and rise, until they had shredded into thinnest air, and lost themselves in the infinite blue of heaven. And with them rose the cloud which had hung over the country; and it also thinned and thinned, until God's own sun of peace and security was shining once more upon us, never more, we hope, to be bedimmed.

UNCLE BERNAC

This was one of several fictional historical works that Doyle wrote during the last five years of the 19th century, as he tried to find something to replace Sherlock Holmes, whom he had ‘killed off’ in 1894. Doyle later dismissed this novel as a failure, although he always liked his lengthy description of Napoleon (which he had written before beginning the novel).

This murder mystery story tells the story of a young Frenchman, who, grown up in England, returns to France during the time of Napoleon Bonaparte’s “Prise de pouvoir” to offer him his services, and the adventures this causes him to be involved in.

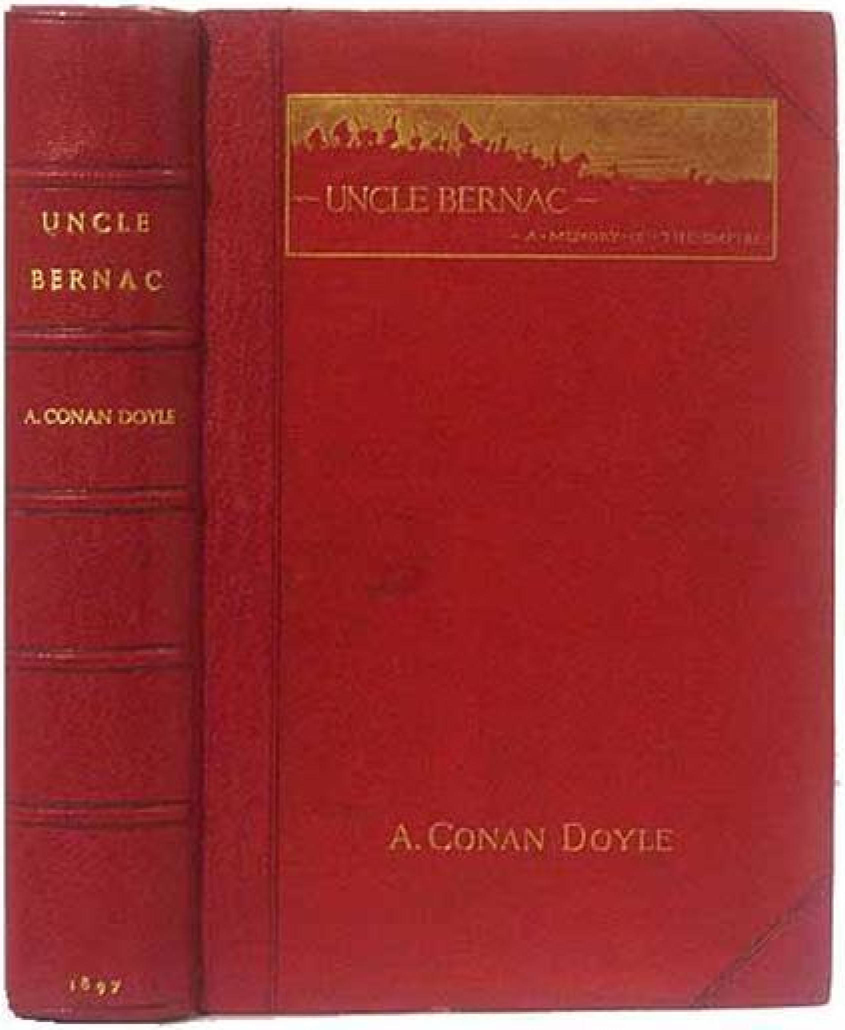
UNCLE BERNAC
A. CONAN DOYLE
1897
UNCLE BERNAC
A MEMORY OF THE EMPIRE
A. CONAN DOYLE

The first edition

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CHAPTER I

THE COAST OF FRANCE

I dare say that I had already read my uncle’s letter a hundred times, and I am sure that I knew it by heart. None the less I took it out of my pocket, and, sitting on the side of the lugger, I went over it again with as much attention as if it were for the first time. It was written in a prim, angular hand, such as one might expect from a man who had begun life as a village attorney, and it was addressed to Louis de Laval, to the care of William Hargreaves, of the Green Man in Ashford, Kent. The landlord had many a hogshead of untaxed French brandy from the Normandy coast, and the letter had found its way by the same hands.

‘My dear nephew Louis,’ said the letter, ‘now that your father is dead, and that you are alone in the world, I am sure that you will not wish to carry on the feud which has existed between the two halves of the family. At the time of the troubles your father was drawn towards the side of the King, and I towards that of the people, and it ended, as you know, by his having to fly from the country, and by my becoming the possessor of the estates of Grosbois. No doubt it is very hard that you should find yourself in a different position to your ancestors, but I am sure that you would rather that the land should be held by a Bernac than by a stranger. From the brother of your mother you will at least always meet with sympathy and consideration.

‘And now I have some advice for you. You know that I have always been a Republican, but it has become evident to me that there is no use in fighting against fate, and that Napoleon’s power is far too great to be shaken. This being so, I have tried to serve him, for it is well to howl when you are among wolves. I have been able to do so much for him that he has become my very good friend, so that I may ask him what I like in return. He is now, as you are probably aware, with the army at Boulogne, within a few miles of Grosbois. If you will come over at once he will certainly forget the hostility of your father in consideration of the services of your uncle. It is true that your name is still proscribed, but my influence with the Emperor will set that matter right. Come to me, then, come at once, and come with confidence. ‘Your uncle, ‘C. BERNAC.’

So much for the letter, but it was the outside which had puzzled me most. A seal of red wax had been affixed at either end, and my uncle had apparently used his thumb as a signet. One could see the little rippling edges of a coarse skin imprinted upon the wax. And then above one of the seals there was written in English the two words, ‘Don’t come.’ It was hastily scrawled, and whether by a man or a woman it was impossible to say; but there it stared me in the face, that sinister addition to an invitation.

‘Don’t come!’ Had it been added by this unknown uncle of mine on account of some sudden change in his plans? Surely that was inconceivable, for why in that case should he send the invitation at all? Or was it placed there by some one else who wished to warn me from accepting this offer of hospitality? The letter was in French. The warning was in English. Could it have been added in England? But the seals were unbroken, and how could any one in England know what were the contents of the letter?

And then, as I sat there with the big sail humming like a shell above my head and the green water hissing beside me, I thought over all that I had heard of this uncle of mine. My father, the descendant of one of the proudest and oldest families in France, had chosen beauty and virtue rather than rank in his wife. Never for an hour had she given him cause to regret it; but this lawyer brother of hers had, as I understood, offended my father by his slavish obsequiousness in days of prosperity and his venomous enmity in the days of trouble. He had hounded on the peasants until my family had been compelled to fly from the country, and had afterwards aided Robespierre in his worst excesses, receiving as a reward the castle and estate of Grosbois, which was our own. At the fall of Robespierre he had succeeded in conciliating Barras, and through every successive change he still managed to gain a fresh tenure of the property. Now it appeared from his letter that the new Emperor of France had also taken his part, though why he should befriend a man with such a history, and what service my Republican uncle could possibly render to him, were matters upon which I could form no opinion.

And now you will ask me, no doubt, why I should accept the invitation of such a man — a man whom my father had always stigmatised as a usurper and a traitor. It is easier to speak of it now than then, but the fact was that we of the new generation felt it very irksome and difficult to carry on the bitter quarrels of the last. To the older *emigres* the clock of time seemed to have stopped in the year 1792, and they remained for ever with the loves and the hatreds of that era fixed indelibly upon their souls. They had been burned into them by the fiery furnace through which they had passed. But we, who had grown up upon a strange soil, understood that the world had moved, and that new issues had arisen. We were inclined to forget these feuds of the last generation. France to us was no longer the murderous land of the *sans-culotte* and the guillotine basket; it was rather the glorious queen of war, attacked by all and conquering all, but still so hard pressed that her scattered sons could hear her call to arms for ever sounding in their ears. It was that call more than my uncle’s letter which was taking me over the waters of the Channel.

For long my heart had been with my country in her struggle, and yet while my father lived I had never dared to say so; for to him, who had served under Conde and fought at Quiberon, it would have seemed the blackest treason. But after his death there was no reason why I should not return to the land of my birth, and my desire was the stronger because Eugenie — the same Eugenie who has been thirty years my wife — was of the same way of thinking as myself. Her parents were a branch of the de Choiseuls, and their prejudices were even stronger than those of my father. Little did they think what was passing in the minds of their children. Many a time when they were mourning a French victory in the parlour we were both capering with joy in the garden. There was a little window, all choked round with laurel bushes, in the corner of the bare brick house, and there we used to meet at night, the dearer to each other from our difference with all who surrounded us. I would tell her my ambitions; she would strengthen them by her enthusiasm. And so all was ready when the time came.

But there was another reason besides the death of my father and the receipt of this letter from my uncle. Ashford was becoming too hot to hold me. I will say this for the English, that they were very generous hosts to the French emigrants. There was not one of us who did not carry away a kindly remembrance of the land and its people. But in every country there are overbearing, swaggering folk, and even in quiet, sleepy Ashford we were plagued by them. There was one young Kentish squire, Farley was his name, who had earned a reputation in the town as a bully and a roisterer. He could not meet one of us without uttering insults not merely against the present French Government, which might have been excusable in an

English patriot, but against France itself and all Frenchmen. Often we were forced to be deaf in his presence, but at last his conduct became so intolerable that I determined to teach him a lesson. There were several of us in the coffee-room at the Green Man one evening, and he, full of wine and malice, was heaping insults upon the French, his eyes creeping round to me every moment to see how I was taking it. ‘Now, Monsieur de Laval,’ he cried, putting his rude hand upon my shoulder, ‘here is a toast for you to drink. This is to the arm of Nelson which strikes down the French.’ He stood leering at me to see if I would drink it. ‘Well, sir,’ said I, ‘I will drink your toast if you will drink mine in return.’ ‘Come on, then!’ said he. So we drank. ‘Now, monsieur, let us have your toast,’ said he. ‘Fill your glass, then,’ said I. ‘It is full now.’ ‘Well, then, here’s to the cannon-ball which carried off that arm!’ In an instant I had a glass of port wine running down my face, and within an hour a meeting had been arranged. I shot him through the shoulder, and that night, when I came to the little window, Eugenie plucked off some of the laurel leaves and stuck them in my hair.

There were no legal proceedings about the duel, but it made my position a little difficult in the town, and it will explain, with other things, why I had no hesitation in accepting my unknown uncle’s invitation, in spite of the singular addition which I found upon the cover. If he had indeed sufficient influence with the Emperor to remove the proscription which was attached to our name, then the only barrier which shut me off from my country would be demolished.

You must picture me all this time as sitting upon the side of the lugger and turning my prospects and my position over in my head. My reverie was interrupted by the heavy hand of the English skipper dropping abruptly upon my arm.

‘Now then, master,’ said he, it’s time you were stepping into the dingey.’

I do not inherit the politics of the aristocrats, but I have never lost their sense of personal dignity. I gently pushed away his polluting hand, and I remarked that we were still a long way from the shore.

‘Well, you can do as you please,’ said he roughly; ‘I’m going no nearer, so you can take your choice of getting into the dingey or of swimming for it.’

It was in vain that I pleaded that he had been paid his price. I did not add that that price meant that the watch which had belonged to three generations of de Lavals was now lying in the shop of a Dover goldsmith.

‘Little enough, too!’ he cried harshly. ‘Down sail, Jim, and bring her to! Now, master, you can step over the side, or you can come back to Dover, but I don’t take the Vixen a cable’s length nearer to Ambleteuse Beef with this gale coming up from the sou’-west.’

‘In that case I shall go,’ said I.

‘You can lay your life on that!’ he answered, and laughed in so irritating a fashion that I half turned upon him with the intention of chastising him. One is very helpless with these fellows, however, for a serious affair is of course out of the question, while if one uses a cane upon them they have a vile habit of striking with their hands, which gives them an advantage. The Marquis de Chamfort told me that, when he first settled in Sutton at the time of the emigration, he lost a tooth when reproving an unruly peasant. I made the best of a necessity, therefore, and, shrugging my shoulders, I passed over the side of the lugger into the little boat. My bundle was dropped in after me — conceive to yourself the heir of all the de Lavals travelling with a single bundle for his baggage! — and two seamen pushed her off, pulling with long slow strokes towards the low-lying shore.

There was certainly every promise of a wild night, for the dark cloud which had rolled up over the setting sun was now frayed and ragged at the edges, extending a good third of the way across the heavens. It had split low down near the horizon, and the crimson glare of the sunset beat through the gap, so that there was the appearance of fire with a monstrous reek of smoke. A red dancing belt of light lay across the broad slate-coloured ocean, and in the centre of it the little black craft was wallowing and tumbling. The two seamen kept looking up at the heavens, and then over their shoulders at the land, and I feared every moment that they would put back before the gale burst. I was filled with apprehension every time when the end of their pull turned their faces skyward, and it was to draw their attention away from the storm-drift that I asked them what the lights were which had begun to twinkle through the dusk both to the right and to the left of us.

‘That’s Boulogne to the north, and Etaples upon the south,’ said one of the seamen civilly.

Boulogne! Etaples! How the words came back to me! It was to Boulogne that in my boyhood we had gone down for the summer bathing. Could I not remember as a little lad trotting along by my father’s side as he paced the beach, and wondering why every fisherman’s cap flew off at our approach?

And as to Etaples, it was thence that we had fled for England, when the folks came raving to the pier-head as we passed, and I joined my thin voice to my father's as he shrieked back at them, for a stone had broken my mother's knee, and we were all frenzied with our fear and our hatred. And here they were, these places of my childhood, twinkling to the north and south of me, while there, in the darkness between them, and only ten miles off at the furthest, lay my own castle, my own land of Grosbois, where the men of my blood had lived and died long before some of us had gone across with Duke William to conquer the proud island over the water. How I strained my eager eyes through the darkness as I thought that the distant black keep of our fortalice might even now be visible!

'Yes, sir,' said the seaman, ''tis a fine stretch of lonesome coast, and many is the cock of your hackle that I have helped ashore there.'

'What do you take me for, then?' I asked.

'Well, 'tis no business of mine, sir,' he answered. 'There are some trades that had best not even be spoken about.'

'You think that I am a conspirator?'

'Well, master, since you have put a name to it. Lor' love you, sir, we're used to it.'

'I give you my word that I am none.'

'An escaped prisoner, then?'

'No, nor that either.'

The man leaned upon his oar, and I could see in the gloom that his face was thrust forward, and that it was wrinkled with suspicion.

'If you're one of Boney's spies—' he cried.

'I! A spy!' The tone of my voice was enough to convince him.

'Well,' said he,' I'm darned if I know what you are. But if you'd been a spy I'd ha' had no hand in landing you, whatever the skipper might say.'

'Mind you, I've no word to say against Boney,' said the other seaman, speaking in a very thick rumbling voice. 'He's been a rare good friend to the poor mariner.'

It surprised me to hear him speak so, for the virulence of feeling against the new French Emperor in England exceeded all belief, and high and low were united in their hatred of him; but the sailor soon gave me a clue to his politics.

'If the poor mariner can run in his little bit of coffee and sugar, and run out his silk and his brandy, he has Boney to thank for it,' said he. 'The merchants have had their spell, and now it’s the turn of the poor mariner.’

I remembered then that Buonaparte was personally very popular amongst the smugglers, as well he might be, seeing that he had made over into their hands all the trade of the Channel. The seaman continued to pull with his left hand, but he pointed with his right over the slate-coloured dancing waters.

‘There’s Boney himself,’ said he.

You who live in a quieter age cannot conceive the thrill which these simple words sent through me. It was but ten years since we had first heard of this man with the curious Italian name — think of it, ten years, the time that it takes for a private to become a non-commissioned officer, or a clerk to win a fifty-pound advance in his salary. He had sprung in an instant out of nothing into everything. One month people were asking who he was, the next he had broken out in the north of Italy like the plague; Venice and Genoa withered at the touch of this swarthy ill-nourished boy. He cowed the soldiers in the field, and he outwitted the statesmen in the council chamber. With a frenzy of energy he rushed to the east, and then, while men were still marvelling at the way in which he had converted Egypt into a French department, he was back again in Italy and had beaten Austria for the second time to the earth. He travelled as quickly as the rumour of his coming; and where he came there were new victories, new combinations, the crackling of old systems and the blurring of ancient lines of frontier. Holland, Savoy, Switzerland — they were become mere names upon the map. France was eating into Europe in every direction. They had made him Emperor, this beardless artillery officer, and without an effort he had crushed down those Republicans before whom the oldest king and the proudest nobility of Europe had been helpless. So it came about that we, who watched him dart from place to place like the shuttle of destiny, and who heard his name always in connection with some new achievement and some new success, had come at last to look upon him as something more than human, something monstrous, overshadowing France and menacing Europe. His giant presence loomed over the continent, and so deep was the impression which his fame had made in my mind that, when the English sailor pointed confidently over the darkening waters, and cried ‘There’s Boney!’ I looked up for the instant with a foolish expectation of seeing some gigantic figure, some elemental creature, dark, inchoate, and threatening, brooding over the waters of the Channel. Even now, after the long gap of years and the knowledge of his downfall, that great man casts his spell upon you, but all that you read and all that you hear cannot give you an idea of what his name meant in the days when he was at the summit of his career.

What actually met my eye was very different from this childish expectation of mine. To the north there was a long low cape, the name of which has now escaped me. In the evening light it had been of the same greyish green tint as the other headlands; but now, as the darkness fell, it gradually broke into a dull glow, like a cooling iron. On that wild night, seen and lost with the heave and sweep of the boat, this lurid streak carried with it a vague but sinister suggestion. The red line splitting the darkness might have been a giant half-forged sword-blade with its point towards England.

‘What is it, then?’ I asked.

‘Just what I say, master,’ said he. ‘It’s one of Boney’s armies, with Boney himself in the middle of it as like as not. Them is their camp fires, and you’ll see a dozen such between this and Ostend. He’s audacious enough to come across, is little Boney, if he could dowse Lord Nelson’s other eye; but there’s no chance for him until then, and well he knows it.’

‘How can Lord Nelson know what he is doing?’ I asked.

The man pointed out over my shoulder into the darkness, and far on the horizon I perceived three little twinkling lights.

‘Watch dog,’ said he, in his husky voice.

‘Andromeda. Forty-four,’ added his companion.

I have often thought of them since, the long glow upon the land, and the three little lights upon the sea, standing for so much, for the two great rivals face to face, for the power of the land and the power of the water, for the centuries-old battle, which may last for centuries to come. And yet, Frenchman as I am, do I not know that the struggle is already decided? — for it lies between the childless nation and that which has a lusty young brood springing up around her. If France falls she dies, but if England falls how many nations are there who will carry her speech, her traditions and her blood on into the history of the future?

The land had been looming darker, and the thudding of waves upon the sand sounded louder every instant upon my ears. I could already see the quick dancing gleam of the surf in front of me. Suddenly, as I peered through the deepening shadow, a long dark boat shot out from it, like a trout from under a stone, making straight in our direction.

‘A guard boat!’ cried one of the seamen.

‘Bill, boy, we’re done!’ said the other, and began to stuff something into his sea boot.

But the boat swerved at the sight of us, like a shying horse, and was off in another direction as fast as eight frantic oars could drive her. The seamen stared after her and wiped their brows. ‘Her conscience don’t seem much easier than our own,’ said one of them. ‘I made sure it was the preventives.’

‘Looks to me as if you weren’t the only queer cargo on the coast to-night, mister,’ remarked his comrade. ‘What could she be?’

‘Cursed if I know what she was. I rammed a cake of good Trinidad tobacco into my boot when I saw her. I’ve seen the inside of a French prison before now. Give way, Bill, and have it over.’

A minute later, with a low grating sound, we ran aground upon a gravelly leach. My bundle was thrown ashore, I stepped after it, and a seaman pushed the prow off again, springing in as his comrade backed her into deep water. Already the glow in the west had vanished, the storm-cloud was half up the heavens, and a thick blackness had gathered over the ocean. As I turned to watch the vanishing boat a keen wet blast flapped in my face, and the air was filled with the high piping of the wind and with the deep thunder of the sea.

And thus it was that, on a wild evening in the early spring of the year 1805, I, Louis de Laval, being in the twenty-first year of my age, returned, after an exile of thirteen years, to the country of which my family had for many centuries been the ornament and support. She had treated us badly, this country; she had repaid our services by insult, exile, and confiscation. But all that was forgotten as I, the only de Laval of the new generation, dropped upon my knees upon her sacred soil, and, with the strong smell of the seaweed in my nostrils, pressed my lips upon the wet and pringling gravel.

CHAPTER II

THE SALT-MARSH

When a man has reached his mature age he can rest at that point of vantage, and cast his eyes back at the long road along which he has travelled, lying with its gleams of sunshine and its stretches of shadow in the valley behind him. He knows then its whence and its whither, and the twists and bends which were so full of promise or of menace as he approached them lie exposed and open to his gaze. So plain is it all that he can scarce remember how dark it may have seemed to him, or how long he once hesitated at the cross roads. Thus when he tries to recall each stage of the journey he does so with the knowledge of its end, and can no longer make it clear, even to himself, how it may have seemed to him at the time. And yet, in spite of the strain of years, and the many passages which have befallen me since, there is no time of my life which comes back so very clearly as that gusty evening, and to this day I cannot feel the briny wholesome whiff of the seaweed without being carried back, with that intimate feeling of reality which only the sense of smell can confer, to the wet shingle of the French beach.

When I had risen from my knees, the first thing that I did was to put my purse into the inner pocket of my coat. I had taken it out in order to give a gold piece to the sailor who had handed me ashore, though I have little doubt that the fellow was both wealthier and of more assured prospects than myself. I had actually drawn out a silver half-crown, but I could not bring myself to offer it to him, and so ended by giving a tenth part of my whole fortune to a stranger. The other nine sovereigns I put very carefully away, and then, sitting down upon a flat rock just above high water mark, I turned it all over in my mind and weighed what I should do. Already I was cold and hungry, with the wind lashing my face and the spray smarting in my eyes, but at least I was no longer living upon the charity of the enemies of my country, and the thought set my heart dancing within me. But the castle, as well as I could remember, was a good ten miles off. To go there now was to arrive at an unseemly hour, unkempt and weather-stained, before this uncle whom I had never seen. My sensitive pride conjured up a picture of the scornful faces of his servants as they looked out upon this bedraggled wanderer from England slinking back to the castle which should have been his own. No, I must seek shelter for the night, and then at my leisure, with as fair a show of appearances as possible, I must present myself before my relative. Where then could I find a refuge from the storm?

You will ask me, doubtless, why I did not make for Etaples or Boulogne. I answer that it was for the same reason which forced me to land secretly upon that forbidding coast. The name of de Laval still headed the list of the proscribed, for my father had been a famous and energetic leader of the small but influential body of men who had remained true at all costs to the old order of things. Do not think that, because I was of another way of thinking, I despised those who had given up so much for their principles. There is a curious saint-like trait in our natures which draws us most strongly towards that which involves the greatest sacrifice, and I have sometimes thought that if the conditions had been less onerous the Bourbons might have had fewer, or at least less noble, followers. The French nobles had been more faithful to them than the English to the Stuarts, for Cromwell had no luxurious court or rich appointments which he could hold out to those who would desert the royal cause. No words can exaggerate the self-abnegation of those men. I have seen a supper party under my father’s roof where our guests were two fencing-masters, three professors of language, one ornamental gardener, and one translator of books, who held his hand in the front of his coat to conceal a rent in the lapel. But these eight men were of the highest nobility of France, who might have had what they chose to ask if they would only consent to forget the past, and to throw themselves heartily into the new order of things. But the humble, and what is sadder the incapable, monarch of Hartwell still held the allegiance of those old Montmorencies, Rohans, and Choiseuls, who, having shared the greatness of his family, were determined also to stand by it in its ruin. The dark chambers of that exiled monarch were furnished with something better than the tapestry of Gobelins or the china of Sevres. Across the gulf which separates my old age from theirs I can still see those ill-clad, grave-mannered men, and I raise my hat to the noblest group of nobles that our history can show.

To visit a coast-town, therefore, before I had seen my uncle, or learnt whether my return had been sanctioned, would be simply to deliver myself into the hands of the *gens d’armes*, who were ever on the look-out for strangers from England. To go before the new Emperor was one thing and to be dragged before him another. On the whole, it seemed to me that my best course was to wander inland, in the hope of finding some empty barn or out-house, where I could pass the night unseen and undisturbed. Then in the morning I should consider how it was best for me to approach my uncle Bernac, and through him the new master of France.

The wind had freshened meanwhile into a gale, and it was so dark upon the seaward side that I could only catch the white flash of a leaping wave here and there in the blackness. Of the lugger which had brought me from Dover I could see no sign. On the land side of me there seemed, as far as I could make it out, to be a line of low hills, but when I came to traverse them I found that the dim light had exaggerated their size, and that they were mere scattered sand-dunes, mottled with patches of bramble. Over these I toiled with my bundle slung over my shoulder, plodding heavily through the loose sand, and tripping over the creepers, but forgetting my wet clothes and my numb hands as I recalled the many hardships and adventures which my ancestors had undergone. It amused me to think that the day might come when my own descendants might fortify themselves by the recollection of that which was happening to me, for in a great family like ours the individual is always subordinate to the race.

It seemed to me that I should never get to the end of the sand-dunes, but when at last I did come off them I heartily wished that I was back upon them again; for the sea in that part comes by some creek up the back of the beach, forming at low tide a great desolate salt-marsh, which must be a forlorn place even in the daytime, but upon such a night as that it was a most dreary wilderness. At first it was but a softness of the ground, causing me to slip as I walked, but soon the mud was over my ankles and half-way up to my knees, so that each foot gave a loud flop as I raised it, and a dull splash as I set it down again. I would willingly have made my way out, even if I had to return to the sand-dunes, but in trying to pick my path I had lost all my bearings, and the air was so full of the sounds of the storm that the sea seemed to be on every side of me. I had heard of how one may steer oneself by observation of the stars, but my quiet English life had not taught me how such things were done, and had I known I could scarcely have profited by it, since the few stars which were visible peeped out here and there in the rifts of the flying storm-clouds. I wandered on then, wet and weary, trusting to fortune, but always blundering deeper and deeper into this horrible bog, until I began to think that my first night in France was destined also to be my last, and that the heir of the de Lavals was destined to perish of cold and misery in the depths of this obscene morass.

I must have toiled for many miles in this dreary fashion, sometimes coming upon shallower mud and sometimes upon deeper, but never making my way on to the dry, when I perceived through the gloom something which turned my heart even heavier than it had been before. This was a curious clump of some whitish shrub — cotton-grass of a flowering variety — which glimmered suddenly before me in the darkness. Now, an hour earlier I had passed just such a square-headed, whitish clump; so that I was confirmed in the opinion which I had already begun to form, that I was wandering in a circle. To make it certain I stooped down, striking a momentary flash from my tinder-box, and there sure enough was my own old track very clearly marked in the brown mud in front of me. At this confirmation of my worst fears I threw my eyes up to heaven in my despair, and there I saw something which for the first time gave me a clue in the uncertainty which surrounded me.

It was nothing else than a glimpse of the moon between two flowing clouds. This in itself might have been of small avail to me, but over its white face was marked a long thin V, which shot swiftly across like a shaftless arrow. It was a flock of wild ducks, and its flight was in the same direction as that towards which my face was turned. Now, I had observed in Kent how all these creatures come further inland when there is rough weather breaking, so I made no doubt that their course indicated the path which would lead me away from the sea. I struggled on, therefore, taking every precaution to walk in a straight line, above all being very careful to make a stride of equal length with either leg, until at last, after half an hour or so, my perseverance was rewarded by the welcome sight of a little yellow light, as from a cottage window, glimmering through the darkness. Ah, how it shone through my eyes and down into my heart, glowing and twinkling there, that little golden speck, which meant food, and rest, and life itself to the wanderer! I blundered towards it through the mud and the slush as fast as my weary legs would bear me. I was too cold and miserable to refuse any shelter, and I had no doubt that for the sake of one of my gold pieces the fisherman or peasant who lived in this strange situation would shut his eyes to whatever might be suspicious in my presence or appearance.

As I approached it became more and more wonderful to me that any one should live there at all, for the bog grew worse rather than better, and in the occasional gleams of moonshine I could make out that the water lay in glimmering pools all round the low dark cottage from which the light was breaking. I could see now that it shone through a small square window. As I approached the gleam was suddenly obscured, and there in a yellow frame appeared the round black outline of a man's head peering out into the darkness. A second time it appeared before I reached the cottage, and there was something in the stealthy manner in which it peeped and whisked away, and peeped once more, which filled me with surprise, and with a certain vague apprehension.

So cautious were the movements of this sentinel, and so singular the position of his watch-house, that I determined, in spite of my misery, to see something more of him before I trusted myself to the shelter of his roof. And, indeed, the amount of shelter which I might hope for was not very great, for as I drew softly nearer I could see that the light from within was beating through at several points, and that the whole cottage was in the most crazy state of disrepair. For a moment I paused, thinking that even the salt-marsh might perhaps be a safer resting-place for the night than the headquarters of some desperate smuggler, for such I conjectured that this lonely dwelling must be. The scud, however, had covered the moon once more, and the darkness was so pitchy black that I felt that I might reconnoitre a little more closely without fear of discovery. Walking on tiptoe I approached the little window and looked in.

What I saw reassured me vastly. A small wood fire was crackling in one of those old-fashioned country grates, and beside it was seated a strikingly handsome young man, who was reading earnestly out of a fat little book. He had an oval, olive-tinted face, with long black hair, ungathered in a queue, and there was something of the poet or of the artist in his whole appearance. The sight of that refined face, and of the warm yellow firelight which beat upon it, was a very cheering one to a cold and famished traveller. I stood for an instant gazing at him, and noticing the way in which his full and somewhat loose-fitting lower lip quivered continually, as if he were repeating to himself that which he was reading. I was still looking at him when he put his book down upon the table and approached the window.

Catching a glimpse of my figure in the darkness he called out something which I could not hear, and waved his hand in a gesture of welcome. An instant later the door flew open, and there was his thin tall figure standing upon the threshold, with his skirts flapping in the wind.

‘My dear friends,’ he cried, peering out into the gloom with his hand over his eyes to screen them from the salt-laden wind and driving sand, ‘I had given you up. I thought that you were never coming. I’ve been waiting for two hours.’

For answer I stepped out in front of him, so that the light fell upon my face.

‘I am afraid, sir—’ said I.

But I had no time to finish my sentence. He struck at me with both hands like an angry cat, and, springing back into the room, he slammed the door with a crash in my face.

The swiftness of his movements and the malignity of his gesture were in such singular contrast with his appearance that I was struck speechless with surprise. But as I stood there with the door in front of me I was a witness to something which filled me with even greater astonishment.

I have already said that the cottage was in the last stage of disrepair. Amidst the many seams and cracks through which the light was breaking there was one along the whole of the hinge side of the door, which gave me from where I was standing a view of the further end of the room, at which the fire was burning. As I gazed then I saw this man reappear in front of the fire, fumbling furiously with both his hands in his bosom, and then with a spring he disappeared up the chimney, so that I could only see his shoes and half of his black calves as he stood upon the brickwork at the side of the grate. In an instant he was down again and back at the door.

‘Who are you?’ he cried, in a voice which seemed to me to be thrilling with some strong emotion.

‘I am a traveller, and have lost my way.’ There was a pause as if he were thinking what course he should pursue.

‘You will find little here to tempt you to stay,’ said he at last.

‘I am weary and spent, sir; and surely you will not refuse me shelter.

I have been wandering for hours in the salt-marsh.’

‘Did you meet anyone there?’ he asked eagerly.

‘No.’

‘Stand back a little from the door. This is a wild place, and the times are troublous. A man must take some precautions.’

I took a few steps back, and he then opened the door sufficiently to allow his head to come through. He said nothing, but he looked at me for a long time in a very searching manner.

‘What is your name?’

‘Louis Laval,’ said I, thinking that it might sound less dangerous in this plebeian form.

‘Whither are you going?’

‘I wish to reach some shelter.’

‘You are from England?’

‘I am from the coast.’

He shook his head slowly to show me how little my replies had satisfied him.

‘You cannot come in here,’ said he.

‘But surely—’

‘No, no, it is impossible.’

‘Show me then how to find my way out of the marsh.’

‘It is easy enough. If you go a few hundred paces in that direction you will perceive the lights of a village. You are already almost free of the marsh.’

He stepped a pace or two from the door in order to point the way for me, and then turned upon his heel. I had already taken a stride or two away from him and his inhospitable hut, when he suddenly called after me.

‘Come, Monsieur Laval,’ said he, with quite a different ring in his voice; ‘I really cannot permit you to leave me upon so tempestuous a night. A warm by my fire and a glass of brandy will hearten you upon your way.’

You may think that I did not feel disposed to contradict him, though I could make nothing of this sudden and welcome change in his manner.

‘I am much obliged to you, sir,’ said I.

And I followed him into the hut.

CHAPTER III

THE RUINED COTTAGE

It was delightful to see the glow and twinkle of the fire and to escape from the wet wind and the numbing cold, but my curiosity had already risen so high about this lonely man and his singular dwelling that my thoughts ran rather upon that than upon my personal comfort. There was his remarkable appearance, the fact that he should be awaiting company within that miserable ruin in the heart of the morass at so sinister an hour, and finally the inexplicable incident of the chimney, all of which excited my imagination. It was beyond my comprehension why he should at one moment charge me sternly to continue my journey, and then, in almost the same breath, invite me most cordially to seek the shelter of his hut. On all these points I was keenly on the alert for an explanation. Yet I endeavoured to conceal my feelings, and to assume the air of a man who finds everything quite natural about him, and who is much too absorbed in his own personal wants to have a thought to spare upon anything outside himself.

A glance at the inside of the cottage, as I entered, confirmed me in the conjecture which the appearance of the outside had already given rise to, that it was not used for human residence, and that this man was only here for a rendezvous. Prolonged moisture had peeled the plaster in flakes from the walls, and had covered the stones with blotches and rosettes of lichen. The whole place was rotten and scaling like a leper. The single large room was unfurnished save for a crazy table, three wooden boxes, which might be used as seats, and a great pile of decayed fishing-net in the corner. The splinters of a fourth box, with a hand-axe, which leaned against the wall, showed how the wood for the fire had been gathered. But it was to the table that my gaze was chiefly drawn, for there, beside the lamp and the book, lay an open basket, from which projected the knuckle-end of a ham, the corner of a loaf of bread, and the black neck of a bottle.

If my host had been suspicious and cold at our first meeting he was now atoning for his inhospitality by an overdone cordiality even harder for me to explain. With many lamentations over my mud-stained and sodden condition, he drew a box close to the blaze and cut me off a corner of the bread and ham. I could not help observing, however, that though his loose under-lipped mouth was wreathed with smiles, his beautiful dark eyes were continually running over me and my attire, asking and re-asking what my business might be.

‘As for myself,’ said he, with an air of false candour, ‘you will very well understand that in these days a worthy merchant must do the best he can to get his wares, and if the Emperor, God save him, sees fit in his wisdom to put an end to open trade, one must come to such places as these to get into touch with those who bring across the coffee and the tobacco. I promise you that in the Tuileries itself there is no difficulty about getting either one or the other, and the Emperor drinks his ten cups a day of the real Mocha without asking questions, though he must know that it is not grown within the confines of France. The vegetable kingdom still remains one of the few which Napoleon has not yet conquered, and, if it were not for traders, who are at some risk and inconvenience, it is hard to say what we should do for our supplies. I suppose, sir, that you are not yourself either in the seafaring or in the trading line?’

I contented myself by answering that I was not, by which reticence I could see that I only excited his curiosity the more. As to his account of himself, I read a lie in those tell-tale eyes all the time that he was talking. As I looked at him now in the full light of the lamp and the fire, I could see that he was even more good-looking than I had at first thought, but with a type of beauty which has never been to my taste. His features were so refined as to be almost effeminate, and so regular that they would have been perfect if it had not been for that ill-fitting, slabbing mouth. It was a clever, and yet it was a weak face, full of a sort of fickle enthusiasm and feeble impulsiveness. I felt that the more I knew him the less reason I should probably find either to like him or to fear him, and in my first conclusion I was right, although I had occasion to change my views upon the second.

‘You will forgive me, Monsieur Laval, if I was a little cold at first,’ said he. ‘Since the Emperor has been upon the coast the place swarms with police agents, so that a trader must look to his own interests. You will allow that my fears of you were not unnatural, since neither your dress nor your appearance were such as one would expect to meet with in such a place and at such a time.’

It was on my lips to return the remark, but I refrained.

‘I can assure you,’ said I, ‘that I am merely a traveller who have lost my way. Now that I am refreshed and rested I will not encroach further upon your hospitality, except to ask you to point out the way to the nearest village.’

‘Tut; you had best stay where you are, for the night grows wilder every instant.’ As he spoke there came a whoop and scream of wind in the chimney, as if the old place were coming down about our ears. He walked across to the window and looked very earnestly out of it, just as I had seen him do upon my first approach. ‘The fact is, Monsieur Laval,’ said he, looking round at me with his false-air of good fellowship, ‘you may be of some good service to me if you will wait here for half an hour or so.’

‘How so?’ I asked, wavering between my distrust and my curiosity.

‘Well, to be frank with you’ — and never did a man look less frank as he spoke—’I am waiting here for some of those people with whom I do business; but in some way they have not come yet, and I am inclined to take a walk round the marsh on the chance of finding them, if they have lost their way. On the other hand, it would be exceedingly awkward for me if they were to come here in my absence and imagine that I am gone. I should take it as a favour, then, if you would remain here for half an hour or so, that you may tell them how matters stand if I should chance to miss them.’

The request seemed reasonable enough, and yet there was that same oblique glance which told me that it was false. Still, I could not see what harm could come to me by complying with his request, and certainly I could not have devised any arrangement which would give me such an opportunity of satisfying my curiosity. What was in that wide stone chimney, and why had he clambered up there upon the sight of me? My adventure would be inconclusive indeed if I did not settle that point before I went on with my journey.

‘Well,’ said he, snatching up his black broad-brimmed hat and running very briskly to the door, ‘I am sure that you will not refuse me my request, and I must delay no longer or I shall never get my business finished.’ He closed the door hurriedly behind him, and I heard the splashing of his footsteps until they were lost in the howling of the gale.

And so the mysterious cottage was mine to ransack if I could pluck its secrets from it. I lifted the book which had been left upon the table. It was Rousseau’s ‘Social Contract’ — excellent literature, but hardly what one would expect a trader to carry with him whilst awaiting an appointment with smugglers. On the fly-leaf was written ‘Lucien Lesage,’ and beneath it, in a woman’s hand, ‘Lucien, from Sibylle.’ Lesage, then, was the name of my good-looking but sinister acquaintance. It only remained for me now to discover what it was which he had concealed up the chimney. I listened intently, and as there was no sound from without save the cry of the storm, I stepped on to the edge of the grate as I had seen him do, and sprang up by the side of the fire.

It was a very broad, old-fashioned cottage chimney, so that standing on one side I was not inconvenienced either by the heat or by the smoke, and the bright glare from below showed me in an instant that for which I sought. There was a recess at the back, caused by the fall or removal of one of the stones, and in this was lying a small bundle. There could not be the least doubt that it was this which the fellow had striven so frantically to conceal upon the first alarm of the approach of a stranger. I took it down and held it to the light. It was a small square of yellow glazed cloth tied round with white tape. Upon my opening it a number of letters appeared, and a single large paper folded up. The addresses upon the letters took my breath away. The first that I glanced at was to Citizen Talleyrand. The others were in the Republican style addressed to Citizen Fouche, to Citizen Soult, to Citizen MacDonald, to Citizen Berthier, and so on through the whole list of famous names in war and in diplomacy who were the pillars of the new Empire. What in the world could this pretended merchant of coffee have to write to all these great notables about? The other paper would explain, no doubt. I laid the letters upon the shelf and I unfolded the paper which had been enclosed with them. It did not take more than the opening sentence to convince me that the salt-marsh outside might prove to be a very much safer place than this accursed cottage.

These were the words which met my eyes: —

‘Fellow-citizens of France. The deed of to-day has proved that, even in the midst of his troops, a tyrant is unable to escape the vengeance of an outraged people. The committee of three, acting temporarily for the Republic, has awarded to Buonaparte the same fate which has already befallen Louis Capet. In avenging the outrage of the 18th Brumaire—’

So far I had got when my heart sprang suddenly into my mouth and the paper fluttered down from my fingers. A grip of iron had closed suddenly round each of my ankles, and there in the light of the fire I saw two hands which, even in that terrified glance, I perceived to be covered with black hair and of an enormous size.

‘So, my friend,’ cried a thundering voice, ‘this time, at least, we have been too many for you.’

CHAPTER IV

MEN OF THE NIGHT

I had little time given me to realise the extraordinary and humiliating position in which I found myself, for I was lifted up by my ankles, as if I were a fowl pulled off a perch, and jerked roughly down into the room, my back striking upon the stone floor with a thud which shook the breath from my body.

‘Don’t kill him yet, Toussac,’ said a soft voice. ‘Let us make sure who he is first.’

I felt the pressure of a thumb upon my chin and of fingers upon my throat, and my head was slowly forced round until the strain became unbearable.

‘Quarter of an inch does it and no mark,’ said the thunderous voice.

‘You can trust my old turn.’

‘Don’t, Toussac; don’t!’ said the same gentle voice which had spoken first. ‘I saw you do it once before, and the horrible snick that it made haunted me for a long time. To think that the sacred flame of life can be so readily snuffed out by that great material finger and thumb! Mind can indeed conquer matter, but the fighting must not be at close quarters.’

My neck was so twisted that I could not see any of these people who were discussing my fate. I could only lie and listen.

‘The fact remains, my dear Charles, that the fellow has our all-important secret, and that it is our lives or his.

‘I recognised in the voice which was now speaking that of the man of the cottage.

‘We owe it to ourselves to put it out of his power to harm us. Let him sit up, Toussac, for there is no possibility of his escaping.’

Some irresistible force at the back of my neck dragged me instantly into a sitting position, and so for the first time I was able to look round me in a dazed fashion, and to see these men into whose hands I had fallen. That they were murderers in the past and had murderous plans for the future I already gathered from what I had heard and seen. I understood also that in the heart of that lonely marsh I was absolutely in their power. None the less, I remembered the name that I bore, and I concealed as far as I could the sickening terror which lay at my heart.

There were three of them in the room, my former acquaintance and two new comers. Lesage stood by the table, with his fat brown book in his hand, looking at me with a composed face, but with that humorous questioning twinkle in his eyes which a master chess-player might assume when he had left his opponent without a move. On the top of the box beside him sat a very ascetic-faced, yellow, hollow-eyed man of fifty, with prim lips and a shrunken skin, which hung loosely over the long jerking tendons under his prominent chin. He was dressed in snuff-coloured clothes, and his legs under his knee-breeches were of a ludicrous thinness. He shook his head at me with an air of sad wisdom, and I could read little comfort in his inhuman grey eyes. But it was the man called Toussac who alarmed me most. He was a colossus; bulky rather than tall, but misshapen from his excess of muscle. His huge legs were crooked like those of a great ape; and, indeed, there was something animal about his whole appearance, something for he was bearded up to his eyes, and it was a paw rather than a hand which still clutched me by the collar. As to his expression, he was too thatched with hair to show one, but his large black eyes looked with a sinister questioning from me to the others. If they were the judge and jury, it was clear who was to be executioner.

‘Whence did he come? What is his business? How came he to know the hiding-place?’ asked the thin man.

‘When he first came I mistook him for you in the darkness,’ Lesage answered. ‘You will acknowledge that it was not a night on which one would expect to meet many people in the salt-marsh. On discovering my mistake I shut the door and concealed the papers in the chimney. I had forgotten that he might see me do this through that crack by the hinges, but when I went out again, to show him his way and so get rid of him, my eye caught the gap, and I at once realised that he had seen my action, and that it must have aroused his curiosity to such an extent that it would be quite certain that he would think and speak of it. I called him back into the hut, therefore, in order that I might have time to consider what I had best do with him.’

‘Sapristi! a couple of cuts of that wood-axe, and a bed in the softest corner of the marsh, would have settled the business at once,’ said the fellow by my side.

‘Quite true, my good Toussac; but it is not usual to lead off with your ace of trumps. A little delicacy — a little finesse—’

‘Let us hear what you did then?’

‘It was my first object to learn whether this man Laval—’

‘What did you say his name was?’ cried the thin man.

‘His name, according to his account, is Laval. My first object then was to find out whether he had in truth seen me conceal the papers or not. It was an important question for us, and, as things have turned out, more important still for him. I made my little plan, therefore. I waited until I saw you approach, and I then left him alone in the hut. I watched through the window and saw him fly to the hiding-place. We then entered, and I asked you, Toussac, to be good enough to lift him down — and there he lies.’

The young fellow looked proudly round for the applause of his comrades, and the thin man clapped his hands softly together, looking very hard at me while he did so.

‘My dear Lesage,’ said he, ‘you have certainly excelled yourself. When our new republic looks for its minister of police we shall know where to find him. I confess that when, after guiding Toussac to this shelter, I followed you in and perceived a gentleman’s legs projecting from the fireplace, even my wits, which are usually none of the slowest, hardly grasped the situation. Toussac, however, grasped the legs. He is always practical, the good Toussac.’

‘Enough words!’ growled the hairy creature beside me. ‘It is because we have talked instead of acting that this Buonaparte has a crown upon his head or a head upon his shoulders. Let us have done with the fellow and come to business.’

The refined features of Lesage made me look towards him as to a possible protector, but his large dark eyes were as cold and hard as jet as he looked back at me.

‘What Toussac says is right,’ said he. ‘We imperil our own safety if he goes with our secret.’

‘The devil take our own safety!’ cried Toussac. ‘What has that to do with the matter? We imperil the success of our plans — that is of more importance.’

‘The two things go together,’ replied Lesage. ‘There is no doubt that Rule 13 of our confederation defines exactly what should be done in such a case.

Any responsibility must rest with the passers of Rule 13.’

My heart had turned cold when this man with his poet’s face supported the savage at my side. But my hopes were raised again when the thin man, who had said little hitherto, though he had continued to stare at me very intently, began now to show some signs of alarm at the bloodthirsty proposals of his comrades.

‘My dear Lucien,’ said he, in a soothing voice, laying his hand upon the young man’s arm, ‘we philosophers and reasoners must have a respect for human life. The tabernacle is not to be lightly violated. We have frequently agreed that if it were not for the excesses of Marat—’

‘I have every respect for your opinion, Charles,’ the other interrupted. ‘You will allow that I have always been a willing and obedient disciple. But I again say that our personal safety is involved, and that, as far as I see, there is no middle course. No one could be more averse from cruelty than I am, but you were present with me some months ago when Toussac silenced the man from Bow Street, and certainly it was done with such dexterity that the process was probably more painful to the spectators than to the victim. He could not have been aware of the horrible sound which announced his own dissolution. If you and I had constancy enough to endure this — and if I remember right it was chiefly at your instigation that the deed was done — then surely on this more vital occasion—’

‘No, no, Toussac, stop!’ cried the thin man, his voice rising from its soft tones to a perfect scream as the giant’s hairy hand gripped me by the chin once more. ‘I appeal to you, Lucien, upon practical as well as upon moral grounds, not to let this deed be done. Consider that if things should go against us this will cut us off from all hopes of mercy. Consider also—’

This argument seemed for a moment to stagger the younger man, whose olive complexion had turned a shade greyer.

‘There will be no hope for us in any case, Charles,’ said he. ‘We have no choice but to obey Rule 13.’

‘Some latitude is allowed to us. We are ourselves upon the inner committee.’

‘But it takes a quorum to change a rule, and we have no powers to do it.’ His pendulous lip was quivering, but there was no softening in his eyes. Slowly under the pressure of those cruel fingers my chin began to sweep round to my shoulder, and I commended my soul to the Virgin and to Saint Ignatius, who has always been the especial patron of my family. But this man Charles, who had already befriended me, darted forwards and began to tear at Toussac's hands with a vehemence which was very different from his former philosophic calm.

'You *shall* not kill him!' he cried angrily.

'Who are you, to set your wills up against mine? Let him go, Toussac! Take your thumb from his chin! I won't have it done, I tell you!' Then, as he saw by the inflexible faces of his companions that blustering would not help him, he turned suddenly to tones of entreaty. 'See, now! I'll make you a promise!' said he. 'Listen to me, Lucien! Let me examine him! If he is a police spy he shall die! You may have him then, Toussac. But if he is only a harmless traveller, who has blundered in here by an evil chance, and who has been led by a foolish curiosity to inquire into our business, then you will leave him to me.'

You will observe that from the beginning of this affair I had never once opened my mouth, nor said a word in my defence, which made me mightily pleased with myself afterwards, though my silence came rather from pride than from courage. To lose life and self-respect together was more than I could face. But now, at this appeal from my advocate, I turned my eyes from the monster who held me to the other who condemned me. The brutality of the one alarmed me less than the self-interested attitude of the other, for a man is never so dangerous as when he is afraid, and of all judges the judge who has cause to fear you is the most inflexible.

My life depended upon the answer which was to come to the appeal of my champion. Lesage tapped his fingers upon his teeth, and smiled indulgently at the earnestness of his companion.

'Rule 13! Rule 13!' he kept repeating, in that exasperating voice of his.

'I will take all responsibility.'

'I'll tell you what, mister,' said Toussac, in his savage voice. 'There's another rule besides Rule 13, and that's the one that says that if any man shelters an offender he shall be treated as if he was himself guilty of the offence.'

This attack did not shake the serenity of my champion in the least.

'You are an excellent man of action, Toussac,' said he calmly; 'but when it comes to choosing the right course, you must leave it to wiser heads than your own.'

His air of tranquil superiority seemed to daunt the fierce creature who held me. He shrugged his huge shoulders in silent dissent.

‘As to you, Lucien,’ my friend continued, ‘I am surprised, considering the position to which you aspire in my family, that you should for an instant stand in the way of any wish which I may express. If you have grasped the true principles of liberty, and if you are privileged to be one of the small band who have never despaired of the republic, to whom is it that you owe it?’

‘Yes, yes, Charles; I acknowledge what you say,’ the young man answered, with much agitation. ‘I am sure that I should be the last to oppose any wish which you might express, but in this case I fear lest your tenderness of heart may be leading you astray. By all means ask him any questions that you like; but it seems to me that there can be only one end to the matter.’

So I thought also; for, with the full secret of these desperate men in my possession, what hope was there that they would ever suffer me to leave the hut alive? And yet, so sweet is human life, and so dear a respite, be it ever so short a one, that when that murderous hand was taken from my chin I heard a sudden chiming of little bells, and the lamp blazed up into a strange fantastic blur. It was but for a moment, and then my mind was clear again, and I was looking up at the strange gaunt face of my examiner.

‘Whence have you come?’ he asked.

‘From England.’

‘But you are French?’

‘Yes.’

‘When did you arrive?’

‘To-night.’

‘How?’

‘In a lugger from Dover.’

‘The fellow is speaking the truth,’ growled Toussac. ‘Yes, I’ll say that for him, that he is speaking the truth. We saw the lugger, and someone was landed from it just after the boat that brought me over pushed off.’

I remembered that boat, which had been the first thing which I had seen upon the coast of France. How little I had thought what it would mean to me!

And now my advocate began asking questions — vague, useless questions — in a slow, hesitating fashion which set Toussac grumbling. This cross-examination appeared to me to be a useless farce; and yet there was a certain eagerness and intensity in my questioner’s manner which gave me the assurance that he had some end in view. Was it merely that he wished to gain time? Time for what? And then, suddenly, with that quick perception which comes upon those whose nerves are strained by an extremity of danger, I became convinced that he really was awaiting something — that he was tense with expectation. I read it upon his drawn face, upon his sidelong head with his ear scooped into his hand, above all in his twitching, restless eyes. He expected an interruption, and he was talking, talking, talking, in order to gain time for it. I was as sure of it as if he had whispered his secret in my ear, and down in my numb, cold heart a warm little spring of hope began to bubble and run.

But Toussac had chafed at all this word-fencing, and now with an oath he broke in upon our dialogue.

‘I have had enough of this!’ he cried. ‘It is not for child’s play of this sort that I risked my head in coming over here. Have we nothing better to talk about than this fellow? Do you suppose I came from London to listen to your fine phrases? Have done with it, I say, and get to business.’

‘Very good,’ said my champion. ‘There’s an excellent little cupboard here which makes as fine a prison as one could wish for. Let us put him in here, and pass on to business. We can deal with him when we have finished.’

‘And have him overhear all that we say,’ said Lesage.

‘I don’t know what the devil has come over you,’ cried Toussac, turning suspicious eyes upon my protector. ‘I never knew you squeamish before, and certainly you were not backward in the affair of the man from Bow Street. This fellow has our secret, and he must either die, or we shall see him at our trial. What is the sense of arranging a plot, and then at the last moment turning a man loose who will ruin us all? Let us snap his neck and have done with it.’

The great hairy hands were stretched towards me again, but Lesage had sprung suddenly to his feet. His face had turned very white, and he stood listening with his forefinger up and his head slanted. It was a long, thin, delicate hand, and it was quivering like a leaf in the wind.

‘I heard something,’ he whispered.

‘And I,’ said the older man.

‘What was it?’

‘Silence. Listen!’

For a minute or more we all stayed with straining ears while the wind still whimpered in the chimney or rattled the crazy window.

‘It was nothing,’ said Lesage at last, with a nervous laugh.

‘The storm makes curious sounds sometimes.’

‘I heard nothing,’ said Toussac.

‘Hush!’ cried the other. ‘There it is again!’

A clear rising cry floated high above the wailing of the storm; a wild, musical cry, beginning on a low note, and thrilling swiftly up to a keen, sharp-edged howl.

‘A hound!’

‘They are following us!’

Lesage dashed to the fireplace, and I saw him thrust his papers into the blaze and grind them down with his heel.

Toussac seized the wood-axe which leaned against the wall. The thin man dragged the pile of decayed netting from the corner, and opened a small wooden screen, which shut off a low recess.

‘In here,’ he whispered, ‘quick!’

And then, as I scrambled into my refuge, I heard him say to the others that I would be safe there, and that they could lay their hands upon me when they wished.

CHAPTER V

THE LAW

The cupboard — for it was little more — into which I had been hurried was low and narrow, and I felt in the darkness that it was heaped with peculiar round wickerwork baskets, the nature of which I could by no means imagine, although I discovered afterwards that they were lobster traps. The only light which entered was through the cracks of the old broken door, but these were so wide and numerous that I could see the whole of the room which I had just quitted. Sick and faint, with the shadow of death still clouding my wits, I was none the less fascinated by the scene which lay before me.

My thin friend, with the same prim composure upon his emaciated face, had seated himself again upon the box. With his hands clasped round one of his knees he was rocking slowly backwards and forwards; and I noticed, in the lamplight, that his jaw muscles were contracting rhythmically, like the gills of a fish. Beside him stood Lesage, his white face glistening with moisture and his loose lip quivering with fear. Every now and then he would make a vigorous attempt to compose his features, but after each rally a fresh wave of terror would sweep everything before it, and set him shaking once more. As to Toussac, he stood before the fire, a magnificent figure, with the axe held down by his leg, and his head thrown back in defiance, so that his great black beard bristled straight out in front of him. He said not a word, but every fibre of his body was braced for a struggle. Then, as the howl of the hound rose louder and clearer from the marsh outside, he ran forward and threw open the door.

‘No, no, keep the dog out!’ cried Lesage in an agony of apprehension.

‘You fool, our only chance is to kill it.’

‘But it is in leash.’

‘If it is in leash nothing can save us. But if, as I think, it is running free, then we may escape yet.’

Lesage cowered up against the table, with his agonised eyes fixed upon the blue-black square of the door. The man who had befriended me still swayed his body about with a singular half-smile upon his face. His skinny hand was twitching at the frill of his shirt, and I conjectured that he held some weapon concealed there. Toussac stood between them and the open door, and, much as I feared and loathed him, I could not take my eyes from his gallant figure. As to myself, I was so much occupied by the singular drama before me, and by the impending fate of those three men of the cottage, that all thought of my own fortunes had passed completely out of my mind. On this mean stage a terrible all-absorbing drama was being played, and I, crouching in a squalid recess, was to be the sole spectator of it. I could but hold my breath and wait and watch.

And suddenly I became conscious that they could all three see something which was invisible to me. I read it from their tense faces and their staring eyes. Toussac swung his axe over his shoulder and poised himself for a blow. Lesage cowered away and put one hand between his eyes and the open door. The other ceased swinging his spindle legs and sat like a little brown image upon the edge of his box. There was a moist pattering of feet, a yellow streak shot through the doorway, and Toussac lashed at it as I have seen an English cricketer strike at a ball. His aim was true, for he buried the head of the hatchet in the creature’s throat, but the force of his blow shattered his weapon, and the weight of the hound carried him backwards on to the floor. Over they rolled and over, the hairy man and the hairy dog, growling and worrying in a bestial combat. He was fumbling at the animal’s throat, and I could not see what he was doing, until it gave a sudden sharp yelp of pain, and there was a rending sound like the tearing of canvas. The man staggered up with his hands dripping, and the tawny mass with the blotch of crimson lay motionless upon the floor.

‘Now!’ cried Toussac in a voice of thunder, ‘now!’ and he rushed from the hut.

Lesage had shrunk away into the corner in a frenzy of fear whilst Toussac had been killing the hound, but now he raised his agonised face, which was as wet as if he had dipped it into a basin.

‘Yes, yes,’ he cried; ‘we must fly, Charles. The hound has left the police behind, and we may still escape.’

But the other, with the same imperturbable face, motionless save for the rhythm of his jaw muscles, walked quietly over and closed the door upon the inside.

‘I think, friend Lucien,’ said he in his quiet voice, ‘that you had best stay where you are.’

Lesage looked at him with amazement gradually replacing terror upon his pallid features.

‘But you do not understand, Charles,’ he cried.

‘Oh, yes, I think I do,’ said the other, smiling.

‘They may be here in a few minutes. The hound has slipped its leash, you see, and has left them behind in the marsh; but they are sure to come here, for there is no other cottage but this.’

‘They are sure to come here.’

‘Well, then, let us fly. In the darkness we may yet escape.’

‘No; we shall stay where we are.’

‘Madman, you may sacrifice your own life, but not mine. Stay if you wish, but for my part I am going.’

He ran towards the door with a foolish, helpless flapping of his hands, but the other sprang in front of him with so determined a gesture of authority that the younger man staggered back from it as from a blow.

‘You fool!’ said his companion. ‘You poor miserable dupe!’

Lesage’s mouth opened, and he stood staring with his knees bent and his spread-fingered hands up, the most hideous picture of fear that I have ever seen.

‘You, Charles, you!’ he stammered, hawking up each word.

‘Yes, me,’ said the other, smiling grimly.

‘A police agent all the time! You who were the very soul of our society! You who were in our inmost council! You who led us on! Oh, Charles, you have not the heart! I think I hear them coming, Charles. Let me pass; I beg and implore you to let me pass.’

The granite face shook slowly from side to side.

‘But why me? Why not Toussac?’

‘If the dog had crippled Toussac, why then I might have had you both. But friend Toussac is rather vigorous for a thin little fellow like me. No, no, my good Lucien, you are destined to be the trophy of my bow and my spear, and you must reconcile yourself to the fact.’

Lesage slapped his forehead as if to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

‘A police agent!’ he repeated, ‘Charles a police agent!’

‘I thought it would surprise you.’

‘But you were the most republican of us all. We were none of us advanced enough for you. How often have we gathered round you, Charles, to listen to your philosophy! And there is Sibylle, too! Don’t tell me that Sibylle was a police spy also. But you are joking, Charles. Say that you are joking!’

The man relaxed his grim features, and his eyes puckered with amusement.

‘Your astonishment is very flattering,’ said he. ‘I confess that I thought that I played my part rather cleverly. It is not my fault that these bunglers unleashed their hound, but at least I shall have the credit of having made a single-handed capture of one very desperate and dangerous conspirator.’ He smiled drily at this description of his prisoner. ‘The Emperor knows how to reward his friends,’ he added, ‘and also how to punish his enemies.’

All this time he had held his hand in his bosom, and now he drew it out so far as to show the brass gleam of a pistol butt.

‘It is no use,’ said he, in answer to some look in the other’s eye.

‘You stay in the hut, alive or dead.’

Lesage put his hands to his face and began to cry with loud, helpless sobbings.

‘Why, you have been worse than any of us, Charles,’ he moaned. ‘It was you who told Toussac to kill the man from Bow Street, and it was you also who set fire to the house in the Rue Basse de la Rampart. And now you turn on us!’

‘I did that because I wished to be the one to throw light upon it all — and at the proper moment.’

‘That is very fine, Charles, but what will be thought about that when I make it all public in my own defence? How can you explain all that to your Emperor? There is still time to prevent my telling all that I know about you.’

‘Well, really, I think that you are right, my friend,’ said the other, drawing out his pistol and cocking it. ‘Perhaps I *did* go a little beyond my instructions in one or two points, and, as you very properly remark, there is still time to set it right. It is a matter of detail whether I give you up living or give you up dead, and I think that, on the whole, it had better be dead.’

It had been horrible to see Toussac tear the throat out of the hound, but it had not made my flesh creep as it crept now. Pity was mingled with my disgust for this unfortunate young man, who had been fitted by Nature for the life of a retired student or of a dreaming poet, but who had been dragged by stronger wills than his own into a part which no child could be more incapable of playing. I forgave him the trick by which he had caught me and the selfish fears to which he had been willing to sacrifice me. He had flung himself down upon the ground, and floundered about in a convulsion of terror, whilst his terrible little companion, with his cynical smile, stood over him with his pistol in his hand. He played with the helpless panting coward as a cat might with a mouse; but I read in his inexorable eyes that it was no jest, and his finger seemed to be already tightening upon his trigger. Full of horror at so cold-blooded a murder, I pushed open my crazy cupboard, and had rushed out to plead for the victim, when there came a buzz of voices and a clanking of steel from without. With a stentorian shout of 'In the name of the Emperor!' a single violent wrench tore the door of the hut from its hinges.

It was still blowing hard, and through the open doorway I could see a thick cluster of mounted men, with plumes slanted and mantles flapping, the rain shining upon their shoulders. At the side the light from the hut struck upon the heads of two beautiful horses, and upon the heavy red-toupeed busbies of the hussars who stood at their heads. In the doorway stood another hussar — a man of high rank, as could be seen from the richness of his dress and the distinction of his bearing. He was booted to the knees, with a uniform of light blue and silver, which his tall, slim, light-cavalry figure suited to a marvel. I could not but admire the way in which he carried himself, for he never deigned to draw the sword which shone at his side, but he stood in the doorway glancing round the blood-bespattered hut, and staring at its occupants with a very cool and alert expression. He had a handsome face, pale and clear-cut, with a bristling moustache, which cut across the brass chin-chain of his busby.

'Well,' said he, 'well?'

The older man had put his pistol back into the breast of his brown coat.

'This is Lucien Lesage,' said he.

The hussar looked with disgust at the prostrate figure upon the floor.

'A pretty conspirator!' said he. 'Get up, you grovelling hound! Here, Gerard, take charge of him and bring him into camp.'

A younger officer with two troopers at his heels came clanking in to the hut, and the wretched creature, half swooning, was dragged out into the darkness.

‘Where is the other — the man called Toussac?’

‘He killed the hound and escaped. Lesage would have got away also had I not prevented him. If you had kept the dog in leash we should have had them both, but as it is, Colonel Lasalle, I think that you may congratulate me.’ He held out his hand as he spoke, but the other turned abruptly on his heel.

‘You hear that, General Savary?’ said he, looking out of the door.

‘Toussac has escaped.’

A tall, dark young man appeared within the circle of light cast by the lamp. The agitation of his handsome swarthy face showed the effect which the news had upon him.

‘Where is he then?’

‘It is a quarter of an hour since he got away.’

‘But he is the only dangerous man of them all. The Emperor will be furious. In which direction did he fly?’

‘It must have been inland.’

‘But who is this?’ asked General Savary, pointing at me. ‘I understood from your information that there were only two besides yourself, Monsieur — .’

‘I had rather no names were mentioned,’ said the other abruptly.

‘I can well understand that,’ General Savary answered with a sneer.

‘I would have told you that the cottage was the rendezvous, but it was not decided upon until the last moment. I gave you the means of tracking Toussac, but you let the hound slip. I certainly think that you will have to answer to the Emperor for the way in which you have managed the business.’

‘That, sir, is our affair,’ said General Savary sternly. ‘In the meantime you have not told us who this person is.’

It seemed useless for me to conceal my identity, since I had a letter in my pocket which would reveal it.

‘My name is Louis de Laval,’ said I proudly.

I may confess that I think we had exaggerated our own importance over in England. We had thought that all France was wondering whether we should return, whereas in the quick march of events France had really almost forgotten our existence. This young General Savary was not in the least impressed by my aristocratic name, but he jotted it down in his notebook.

‘Monsieur de Laval has nothing whatever to do with the matter,’ said the spy. ‘He has blundered into it entirely by chance, and I will answer for his safe keeping in case he should be wanted.’

‘He will certainly be wanted,’ said General Savary. ‘In the meantime I need every trooper that I have for the chase, so, if you make yourself personally responsible, and bring him to the camp when needed, I see no objection to his remaining in your keeping. I shall send to you if I require him.’

‘He will be at the Emperor’s orders.’

‘Are there any papers in the cottage?’

‘They have been burned.’

‘That is unfortunate.’

‘But I have duplicates.’

‘Excellent! Come, Lasalle, every minute counts, and there is nothing to be done here. Let the men scatter, and we may still ride him down.’

The two tall soldiers clanked out of the cottage without taking any further notice of my companion, and I heard the sharp stern order and the jingling of metal as the troopers sprang back into their saddles once more. An instant later they were off, and I listened to the dull beat of their hoofs dying rapidly into a confused murmur. My little snuff-coloured champion went to the door of the hut and peered after them through the darkness. Then he came back and looked me up and down, with his usual dry sardonic smile.

‘Well, young man,’ said he, ‘we have played some pretty *tableaux vivants* for your amusement, and you can thank me for that nice seat in the front row of the parterre.’

‘I am under a very deep obligation to you, sir,’ I answered, struggling between my gratitude and my aversion. ‘I hardly know how to thank you.’

He looked at me with a singular expression in his ironical eyes.

‘You will have the opportunity for thanking me later,’ said he. ‘In the meantime, as you say that you are a stranger upon our coast, and as I am responsible for your safe keeping, you cannot do better than follow me, and I will take you to a place where you may sleep in safety.’

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET PASSAGE

The fire had already smouldered down, and my companion blew out the lamp, so that we had not taken ten paces before we had lost sight of the ill-omened cottage, in which I had received so singular a welcome upon my home-coming. The wind had softened down, but a fine rain, cold and clammy, came drifting up from the sea. Had I been left to myself I should have found myself as much at a loss as I had been when I first landed; but my companion walked with a brisk and assured step, so that it was evident that he guided himself by landmarks which were invisible to me. For my part, wet and miserable, with my forlorn bundle under my arm, and my nerves all jangled by my terrible experiences, I trudged in silence by his side, turning over in my mind all that had occurred to me. Young as I was, I had heard much political discussion amongst my elders in England, and the state of affairs in France was perfectly familiar to me. I was aware that the recent elevation of Buonaparte to the throne had enraged the small but formidable section of Jacobins and extreme Republicans, who saw that all their efforts to abolish a kingdom had only ended in transforming it into an empire. It was, indeed, a pitiable result of their frenzied strivings that a crown with eight *fleurs-de-lis* should be changed into a higher crown surmounted by a cross and ball. On the other hand, the followers of the Bourbons, in whose company I had spent my youth, were equally disappointed at the manner in which the mass of the French people hailed this final step in the return from chaos to order. Contradictory as were their motives, the more violent spirits of both parties were united in their hatred to Napoleon, and in their fierce determination to get rid of him by any means. Hence a series of conspiracies, most of them with their base in England; and hence also a large use of spies and informers upon the part of Fouche and of Savary, upon whom the responsibility of the safety of the Emperor lay. A strange chance had landed me upon the French coast at the very same time as a murderous conspirator, and had afterwards enabled me to see the weapons with which the police contrived to thwart and outwit him and his associates. When I looked back upon my series of adventures, my wanderings in the salt-marsh, my entrance into the cottage, my discovery of the papers, my capture by the conspirators, the long period of suspense with Toussac’s dreadful thumb upon my chin, and finally the moving scenes which I had witnessed — the killing of the hound, the capture of Lesage, and the arrival of the soldiers — I could not wonder that my nerves were overwrought, and that I surprised myself in little convulsive gestures, like those of a frightened child.

The chief thought which now filled my mind was what my relations were with this dangerous man who walked by my side. His conduct and bearing had filled me with abhorrence. I had seen the depth of cunning with which he had duped and betrayed his companions, and I had read in his lean smiling face the cold deliberate cruelty of his nature, as he stood, pistol in hand, over the whimpering coward whom he had outwitted. Yet I could not deny that when, through my own foolish curiosity, I had placed myself in a most hopeless position, it was he who had braved the wrath of the formidable Toussac in order to extricate me. It was evident also that he might have made his achievement more striking by delivering up two prisoners instead of one to the troopers. It is true that I was not a conspirator, but I might have found it difficult to prove it. So inconsistent did such conduct seem in this little yellow flint-stone of a man that, after walking a mile or two in silence, I asked him suddenly what the meaning of it might be.

I heard a dry chuckle in the darkness, as if he were amused by the abruptness and directness of my question.

‘You are a most amusing person, Monsieur — Monsieur — let me see, what did you say your name was?’

‘De Laval.’

‘Ah, quite so, Monsieur de Laval. You have the impetuosity and the ingenuousness of youth. You want to know what is up a chimney, you jump up the chimney. You want to know the reason of a thing, and you blurt out a question. I have been in the habit of living among people who keep their thoughts to themselves, and I find you very refreshing.’

‘Whatever the motives of your conduct, there is no doubt that you saved my life,’ said I. ‘I am much obliged to you for your intercession.’ It is the most difficult thing in the world to express gratitude to a person who fills you with abhorrence, and I fear that my halting speech was another instance of that ingenuousness of which he accused me.

‘I can do without your thanks,’ said he coldly. ‘You are perfectly right when you think that if it had suited my purpose I should have let you perish, and I am perfectly right when I think that if it were not that you are under an obligation you would fail to see my hand if I stretched it out to you just as that overgrown puppy Lasalle did. It is very honourable, he thinks, to serve the Emperor upon the field of battle, and to risk life in his behalf, but when it comes to living amidst danger as I have done, consorting with desperate men, and knowing well that the least slip would mean death, why then one is beneath the notice of a fine clean-handed gentleman. Why,’ he continued in a burst of bitter passion, ‘I have dared more, and endured more, with Toussac and a few of his kidney for comrades, than this Lasalle has done in all the childish cavalry charges that ever he undertook. As to service, all his Marshals put together have not rendered the Emperor as pressing a service as I have done. But I daresay it does not strike you in that light, Monsieur — Monsieur—’

‘De Laval.’

‘Quite so — it is curious how that name escapes me. I daresay you take the same view as Colonel Lasalle?’

‘It is not a question upon which I can offer an opinion,’ said I.

‘I only know that I owe my life to your intercession.’

I do not know what reply he might have made to this evasion, but at that moment we heard a couple of pistol shots and a distant shouting from far away in the darkness. We stopped for a few minutes, but all was silent once more.

‘They must have caught sight of Toussac,’ said my companion. ‘I am afraid that he is too strong and too cunning to be taken by them. I do not know what impression he left upon you, but I can tell you that you will go far to meet a more dangerous man.’

I answered that I would go far to avoid meeting one, unless I had the means of defending myself, and my companion’s dry chuckle showed that he appreciated my feelings.

‘Yet he is an absolutely honest man, which is no very common thing in these days,’ said he. ‘He is one of those who, at the outbreak of the Revolution, embraced it with the whole strength of his simple nature. He believed what the writers and the speakers told him, and he was convinced that, after a little disturbance and a few necessary executions, France was to become a heaven upon earth, the centre of peace and comfort and brotherly love. A good many people got those fine ideas into their heads, but the heads have mostly dropped into the sawdust-basket by this time. Toussac was true to them, and when instead of peace he found war, instead of comfort a grinding poverty, and instead of equality an Empire, it drove him mad. He became the fierce creature you see, with the one idea of devoting his huge body and giant's strength to the destruction of those who had interfered with his ideal. He is fearless, persevering, and implacable. I have no doubt at all that he will kill me for the part that I have played to-night.'

It was in the calmest voice that my companion uttered the remark, and it made me understand that it was no boast when he said there was more courage needed to carry on his unsavoury trade than to play the part of a *beau sabreur* like Lasalle. He paused a little, and then went on as if speaking to himself.

'Yes,' said he, 'I missed my chance. I certainly ought to have shot him when he was struggling with the hound. But if I had only wounded him he would have torn me into bits like an over-boiled pullet, so perhaps it is as well as it is.'

We had left the salt-marsh behind us, and for some time I had felt the soft springy turf of the downland beneath my feet, and our path had risen and dipped over the curves of the low coast hills. In spite of the darkness my companion walked with great assurance, never hesitating for an instant, and keeping up a stiff pace which was welcome to me in my sodden and benumbed condition. I had been so young when I left my native place that it is doubtful whether, even in daylight, I should have recognised the countryside, but now in the darkness, half stupefied by my adventures, I could not form the least idea as to where we were or what we were making for. A certain recklessness had taken possession of me, and I cared little where I went as long as I could gain the rest and shelter of which I stood in need.

I do not know how long we had walked; I only know that I had dozed and woke and dozed again whilst still automatically keeping pace with my comrade, when I was at last aroused by his coming to a dead stop. The rain had ceased, and although the moon was still obscured, the heavens had cleared somewhat, and I could see for a little distance in every direction. A huge white basin gaped in front of us, and I made out that it was a deserted chalk quarry, with brambles and ferns growing thickly all round the edges. My companion, after a stealthy glance round to make sure that no one was observing us, picked his way amongst the scattered clumps of bushes until he reached the wall of chalk. This he skirted for some distance, squeezing between the cliff and the brambles until he came at last to a spot where all further progress appeared to be impossible.

‘Can you see a light behind us?’ asked my companion.

I turned round and looked carefully in every direction, but was unable to see one.

‘Never mind,’ said he. ‘You go first, and I will follow.’

In some way during the instant that my back had been turned he had swung aside or plucked out the tangle of bush which had barred our way. When I turned there was a square dark opening in the white glimmering wall in front of us.

‘It is small at the entrance, but it grows larger further in,’ said he.

I hesitated for an instant. Whither was it that this strange man was leading me? Did he live in a cave like a wild beast, or was this some trap into which he was luring me? The moon shone out at the instant, and in its silver light this black, silent porthole looked inexpressibly cheerless and menacing.

‘You have gone rather far to turn back, my good friend,’ said my companion. ‘You must either trust me altogether or not trust me at all.’

‘I am at your disposal.’

‘Pass in then, and I shall follow.’

I crept into the narrow passage, which was so low that I had to crawl down it upon my hands and knees. Craning my neck round, I could see the black angular silhouette of my companion as he came after me. He paused at the entrance, and then, with a rustling of branches and snapping of twigs, the faint light was suddenly shut off from outside, and we were left in pitchy darkness. I heard the scraping of his knees as he crawled up behind me.

‘Go on until you come to a step down,’ said he. ‘We shall have more room there, and we can strike a light.’

The ceiling was so low that by arching my back I could easily strike it, and my elbows touched the wall upon either side. In those days I was slim and lithe, however, so that I found no difficulty in making my way onwards until, at the end of a hundred paces, or it may have been a hundred and fifty, I felt with my hands that there was a dip in front of me. Down this I clambered, and was instantly conscious from the purer air that I was in some larger cavity. I heard the snapping of my companion’s flint, and the red glow of the tinder paper leaped suddenly into the clear yellow flame of the taper. At first I could only see that stern, emaciated face, like some grotesque carving in walnut wood, with the ceaseless fishlike vibration of the muscles of his jaw. The light beat full upon it, and it stood strangely out with a dim halo round it in the darkness. Then he raised the taper and swept it slowly round at arm’s length so as to illuminate the place in which we stood.

I found that we were in a subterranean tunnel, which appeared to extend into the bowels of the earth. It was so high that I could stand erect with ease, and the old lichen-blotched stones which lined the walls told of its great age. At the spot where we stood the ceiling had fallen in and the original passage been blocked, but a cutting had been made from this point through the chalk to form the narrow burrow along which we had come. This cutting appeared to be quite recent, for a mound of *debris* and some trenching tools were still lying in the passage. My companion, taper in hand, started off down the tunnel, and I followed at his heels, stepping over the great stones which had fallen from the roof or the walls, and now obstructed the path.

‘Well,’ said he, grinning at me over his shoulder, ‘have you ever seen anything like this in England?’

‘Never,’ I answered.

‘These are the precautions and devices which men adopted in rough days long ago. Now that rough days have come again, they are very useful to those who know of such places.’

‘Whither does it lead, then?’ I asked.

‘To this,’ said he, stopping before an old wooden door, powerfully clamped with iron. He fumbled with the metal-work, keeping himself between me and it, so that I could not see what he was doing. There was a sharp snick, and the door revolved slowly upon its hinges. Within there was a steep flight of time-worn steps leading upwards. He motioned me on, and closed the door behind us. At the head of the stair there was a second wooden gate, which he opened in a similar manner.

I had been dazed before ever I came into the chalk pit, but now, at this succession of incidents, I began to rub my eyes and ask myself whether this was young Louis de Laval, late of Ashford, in Kent, or whether it was some dream of the adventures of a hero of Pigault Lebrun. These massive moss-grown arches and mighty iron-clamped doors were, indeed, like the dim shadowy background of a vision; but the guttering taper, my sodden bundle, and all the sordid details of my disarranged toilet assured me only too clearly of their reality. Above all, the swift, brisk, business-like manner of my companion, and his occasional abrupt remarks, brought my fancies back to the ground once more. He held the door open for me now, and closed it again when I had passed through.

We found ourselves in a long vaulted corridor, with a stone-flagged floor, and a dim oil lamp burning at the further end. Two iron-barred windows showed that we had come above the earth's surface once more. Down this corridor we passed, and then through several passages and up a short winding stair. At the head of it was an open door, which led into a small but comfortable bedroom.

'I presume that this will satisfy your wants for to-night,' said he.

I asked for nothing better than to throw myself down, damp clothes and all, upon that snowy coverlet; but for the instant my curiosity overcame my fatigue.

'I am much indebted to you, sir,' said I. 'Perhaps you will add to your favours by letting me know where I am.'

'You are in my house, and that must suffice you for to-night. In the morning we shall go further into the matter.' He rang a small bell, and a gaunt shock-headed country man-servant came running at the call.

'Your mistress has retired, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir, a good two hours ago.'

'Very good. I shall call you myself in the morning.' He closed my door, and the echo of his steps seemed hardly to have died from my ears before I had sunk into that deep and dreamless sleep which only youth and fatigue can give.

CHAPTER VII

THE OWNER OF GROSBOIS

My host was as good as his word, for, when a noise in my room awoke me in the morning, it was to find him standing by the side of my bed, so composed in his features and so drab in his attire, that it was hard to associate him with the stirring scenes of yesterday and with the repulsive part which he had played in them. Now in the fresh morning sunlight he presented rather the appearance of a pedantic schoolmaster, an impression which was increased by the masterful, and yet benevolent, smile with which he regarded me. In spite of his smile, I was more conscious than ever that my whole soul shrank from him, and that I should not be at my ease until I had broken this companionship which had been so involuntarily formed. He carried a heap of clothes over one arm, which he threw upon a chair at the bottom of my bed.

‘I gather from the little that you told me last night,’ said he, ‘that your wardrobe is at present somewhat scanty. I fear that your inches are greater than those of anyone in my household, but I have brought a few things here amongst which you may find something to fit you. Here, too, are the razors, the soap, and the powder-box. I will return in half an hour, when your toilet will doubtless be completed.’

I found that my own clothes, with a little brushing, were as good as ever, but I availed myself of his offer to the extent of a ruffled shirt and a black satin cravat. I had finished dressing and was looking out of the window of my room, which opened on to a blank wall, when my host returned. He looked me all over with a keenly scrutinising eye, and appeared to be satisfied with what he saw.

‘That will do! That will do very well indeed!’ said he, nodding a critical head. ‘In these times a slight indication of travel or hard work upon a costume is more fashionable than the foppishness of the Incroyable. I have heard ladies remark that it was in better taste. Now, sir, if you will kindly follow me.’

His solicitude about my dress filled me with surprise, but this was soon forgotten in the shock which was awaiting me. For as we passed down the passage and into a large hall which seemed strangely familiar to me, there was a full-length portrait of my father standing right in front of me. I stood staring with a gasp of astonishment, and turned to see the cold grey eyes of my companion fixed upon me with a humorous glitter.

‘You seem surprised, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he.

‘For God’s sake,’ said I, ‘do not trifle with me any further! Who are you, and what is this place to which you have taken me?’

For answer he broke into one of his dry chuckles, and, laying his skinny brown hand upon my wrist, he led me into a large apartment. In the centre was a table, tastefully laid, and beyond it in a low chair a young lady was seated, with a book in her hand. She rose as we entered, and I saw that she was tall and slender, with a dark face, pronounced features, and black eyes of extraordinary brilliancy. Even in that one glance it struck me that the expression with which she regarded me was by no means a friendly one.

‘Sibylle,’ said my host, and his words took the breath from my lips, ‘this is your cousin from England, Louis de Laval. This, my dear nephew, is my only daughter, Sibylle Bernac.’

‘Then you—’

‘I am your mother’s brother, Charles Bernac.’

‘You are my Uncle Bernac!’ I stammered at him like an idiot. ‘But why did you not tell me so?’ I cried.

‘I was not sorry to have a chance of quietly observing what his English education had done for my nephew. It might also have been harder for me to stand your friend if my comrades had any reason to think that I was personally interested in you. But you will permit me now to welcome you heartily to France, and to express my regret if your reception has been a rough one. I am sure that Sibylle will help me to atone for it.’ He smiled archly at his daughter, who continued to regard me with a stony face.

I looked round me, and gradually the spacious room, with the weapons upon the wall, and the deer’s heads, came dimly back to my memory. That view through the oriel window, too, with the clump of oaks in the sloping park, and the sea in the distance beyond, I had certainly seen it before. It was true then, and I was in our own castle of Grosbois, and this dreadful man in the snuff-coloured coat, this sinister plotter with the death’s-head face, was the man whom I had heard my poor father curse so often, the man who had ousted him from his own property and installed himself in his place. And yet I could not forget that it was he also who, at some risk to himself, had saved me the night before, and my soul was again torn between my gratitude and my repulsion.

We had seated ourselves at the table, and as we ate, this newly-found uncle of mine continued to explain all those points which I had failed to understand.

‘I suspected that it was you the instant that I set eyes upon you,’ said he. ‘I am old enough to remember your father when he was a young gallant, and you are his very double — though I may say, without flattery, that where there is a difference it is in your favour. And yet he had the name of being one of the handsomest men betwixt Rouen and the sea. You must bear in mind that I was expecting you, and that there are not so many young aristocrats of your age wandering about along the coast. I was surprised when you did not recognise where you were last night. Had you never heard of the secret passage of Grosbois?’

It came vaguely back to me that in my childhood I had heard of this underground tunnel, but that the roof had fallen in and rendered it useless.

‘Precisely,’ said my uncle. ‘When the castle passed into my hands, one of the very first things which I did was to cut a new opening at the end of it, for I foresaw that in these troublesome times it might be of use to me; indeed, had it been in repair it might have made the escape of your mother and father a very much easier affair.’

His words recalled all that I had heard and all that I could remember of those dreadful days when we, the Lords of the country side, had been chased across it as if we had been wolves, with the howling mob still clustering at the pier-head to shake their fists and hurl their stones at us. I remembered, too, that it was this very man who was speaking to me who had thrown oil upon the flames in those days, and whose fortunes had been founded upon our ruin. As I looked across at him I found that his keen grey eyes were fixed upon me, and I could see that he had read the thoughts in my mind.

‘We must let bygones be bygones,’ said he. ‘Those are quarrels of the last generation, and Sibylle and you represent a new one.’

My cousin had not said one word or taken any notice of my presence, but at this joining of our names she glanced at me with the same hostile expression which I had already remarked.

‘Come, Sibylle,’ said her father, ‘you can assure your cousin Louis that, so far as you are concerned, any family misunderstanding is at an end.’

‘It is very well for us to talk in that way, father,’ she answered. ‘It is not your picture that hangs in the hall, or your coat-of-arms that I see upon the wall. We hold the castle and the land, but it is for the heir of the de Lavals to tell *us* if he is satisfied with this.’ Her dark scornful eyes were fixed upon me as she waited for my reply, but her father hastened to intervene.

‘This is not a very hospitable tone in which to greet your cousin,’ said he harshly. ‘It has so chanced that Louis’ heritage has fallen to us, but it is not for us to remind him of the fact.’

‘He needs no reminding,’ said she.

‘You do me an injustice,’ I cried, for the evident and malignant scorn of this girl galled me to the quick. ‘It is true that I cannot forget that this castle and these grounds belonged to my ancestors — I should be a clod indeed if I *could* forget it — but if you think that I harbour any bitterness, you are mistaken. For my own part, I ask nothing better than to open up a career for myself with my own sword.’

‘And never was there a time when it could be more easily and more brilliantly done,’ cried my uncle. ‘There are great things about to happen in the world, and if you are at the Emperor’s court you will be in the middle of them. I understand that you are content to serve him?’

‘I wish to serve my country.’

‘By serving the Emperor you do so, for without him the country becomes chaos.’

‘From all we hear it is not a very easy service,’ said my cousin. ‘I should have thought that you would have been very much more comfortable in England — and then you would have been so much safer also.’

Everything which the girl said seemed to be meant as an insult to me, and yet I could not imagine how I had ever offended her. Never had I met a woman for whom I conceived so hearty and rapid a dislike. I could see that her remarks were as offensive to her father as they were to me, for he looked at her with eyes which were as angry as her own.

‘Your cousin is a brave man, and that is more than can be said for someone else that I could mention,’ said he.

‘For whom?’ she asked.

‘Never mind!’ he snapped, and, jumping up with the air of a man who is afraid that his rage may master him, and that he may say more than he wished, he ran from the room.

She seemed startled by this retort of his, and rose as if she would follow him. Then she tossed her head and laughed incredulously.

‘I suppose that you have never met your uncle before?’ said she, after a few minutes of embarrassed silence.

‘Never,’ answered I.

‘Well, what do you think of him now you *have* met him?’

Such a question from a daughter about her father filled me with a certain vague horror. I felt that he must be even a worse man than I had taken him for if he had so completely forfeited the loyalty of his own nearest and dearest.

‘Your silence is a sufficient answer,’ said she, as I hesitated for a reply. ‘I do not know how you came to meet him last night, or what passed between you, for we do not share each other’s confidences. I think, however, that you have read him aright. Now I have something to ask you. You had a letter from him inviting you to leave England and to come here, had you not?’

‘Yes, I had.’

‘Did you observe nothing on the outside?’

I thought of those two sinister words which had puzzled me so much.

‘What! it was you who warned me not to come?’

‘Yes, it was I. I had no other means of doing it.’

‘But why did you do it?’

‘Because I did not wish you to come here.’

‘Did you think that I would harm you?’

She sat silent for a few seconds like one who is afraid of saying too much. When her answer came it was a very unexpected one:

‘I was afraid that you would be harmed.’

‘You think that I am in danger here?’

‘I am sure of it.’

‘You advise me to leave?’

‘Without losing an instant.’

‘From whom is the danger then?’

Again she hesitated, and then, with a reckless motion like one who throws prudence to the winds, she turned upon me.

‘It is from my father,’ said she.

‘But why should he harm me?’

‘That is for your sagacity to discover.’

‘But I assure you, mademoiselle, that in this matter you misjudge him,’ said I. ‘As it happens, he interfered to save my life last night.’

‘To save your life! From whom?’

‘From two conspirators whose plans I had chanced to discover.’

‘Conspirators!’ She looked at me in surprise.

‘They would have killed me if he had not intervened.’

‘It is not his interest that you should be harmed yet awhile. He had reasons for wishing you to come to Castle Grosbois. But I have been very frank with you, and I wish you to be equally so with me. Does it happen — does it happen that during your youth in England you have ever — you have ever had an affair of the heart?’

Everything which this cousin of mine said appeared to me to be stranger than the last, and this question, coming at the end of so serious a conversation, was the strangest of all. But frankness begets frankness, and I did not hesitate.

‘I have left the very best and truest girl in the world behind me in England,’ said I. ‘Eugenie is her name, Eugenie de Choiseul, the niece of the old Duke.’

My reply seemed to give my cousin great satisfaction. Her large dark eyes shone with pleasure.

‘You are very attached?’ she asked.

‘I shall never be happy until I see her.’

‘And you would not give her up?’

‘God forbid!’

‘Not for the Castle of Grosbois?’

‘Not even for that.’

My cousin held out her hand to me with a charmingly frank impulsiveness.

‘You will forgive me for my rudeness,’ said she. ‘I see that we are to be allies and not enemies.’

And our hands were still clasped when her father re-entered the room.

CHAPTER VIII

COUSIN SIBYLLE

I could see in my uncle’s grim face as he looked at us the keenest satisfaction contending with surprise at this sign of our sudden reconciliation. All trace of his recent anger seemed to have left him as he addressed his daughter, but in spite of his altered tone I noticed that her eyes looked defiance and distrust.

‘I have some papers of importance to look over,’ said he. ‘For an hour or so I shall be engaged. I can guess that Louis would like to see the old place once again, and I am sure that he could not have a better guide than you, Sibylle, if you will take him over it.’

She raised no objection, and for my part I was overjoyed at the proposal, as it gave me an opportunity of learning more of this singular cousin of mine, who had told me so much and yet seemed to know so much more. What was the meaning of this obscure warning which she had given me against her father, and why was she so frankly anxious to know about my love affairs? These were the two questions which pressed for an answer. So out we went together into the sweet coast-land air, the sweeter for the gale of the night before, and we walked through the old yew-lined paths, and out into the park, and so round the castle, looking up at the gables, the grey pinnacles, the oak-mullioned windows, the ancient wing with its crenulated walls and its meurtriere windows, the modern with its pleasant verandah and veil of honeysuckle. And as she showed me each fresh little detail, with a particularity which made me understand how dear the place had become to her, she would still keep offering her apologies for the fact that she should be the hostess and I the visitor.

‘It is not against you but against ourselves that I was bitter,’ said she, ‘for are we not the cuckoos who have taken a strange nest and driven out those who built it? It makes me blush to think that my father should invite you to your own house.’

‘Perhaps we had been rooted here too long,’ I answered. ‘Perhaps it is for our own good that we are driven out to carve our own fortunes, as I intend to do.’

‘You say that you are going to the Emperor?’

‘Yes.’

‘You know that he is in camp near here?’

‘So I have heard.’

‘But your family is still proscribed?’

‘I have done him no harm. I will go boldly to him and ask him to admit me into his service.’

‘Well,’ said she, ‘there are some who call him a usurper, and wish him all evil; but for my own part I have never heard of anything that he has said and done which was not great and noble. But I had expected that you would be quite an Englishman, Cousin Louis, and come over here with your pockets full of Pitt’s guineas and your heart of treason.’

‘I have met nothing but hospitality from the English,’ I answered; ‘but my heart has always been French.’

‘But your father fought against us at Quiberon.’

‘Let each generation settle its own quarrels,’ said I. ‘I am quite of your father’s opinion about that.’

‘Do not judge my father by his words, but by his deeds,’ said she, with a warning finger upraised; ‘and, above all, Cousin Louis, unless you wish to have my life upon your conscience, never let him suspect that I have said a word to set you on your guard.’

‘Your life!’ I gasped.

‘Oh, yes, he would not stick at that!’ she cried. ‘He killed my mother. I do not say that he slaughtered her, but I mean that his cold brutality broke her gentle heart. Now perhaps you begin to understand why I can talk of him in this fashion.’

As she spoke I could see the secret broodings of years, the bitter resentments crushed down in her silent soul, rising suddenly to flush her dark cheeks and to gleam in her splendid eyes. I realised at that moment that in that tall slim figure there dwelt an unconquerable spirit.

‘You must think that I speak very freely to you, since I have only known you a few hours, Cousin Louis,’ said she.

‘To whom should you speak freely if not to your own relative?’

‘It is true; and yet I never expected that I should be on such terms with you. I looked forward to your coming with dread and sorrow. No doubt I showed something of my feelings when my father brought you in.’

‘Indeed you did,’ I answered. ‘I feared that my presence was unwelcome to you.’

‘Most unwelcome, both for your own sake and for mine,’ said she. ‘For your sake because I suspected, as I have told you, that my father’s intentions might be unfriendly. For mine—’

‘Why for yours?’ I asked in surprise, for she had stopped in embarrassment.

‘You have told me that your heart is another’s. I may tell you that my hand is also promised, and that my love has gone with it.’

‘May all happiness attend it!’ said I. ‘But why should this make my coming unwelcome?’

‘That thick English air has dimmed your wits, cousin,’ said she, shaking her stately head at me. ‘But I can speak freely now that I know that this plan would be as hateful to you as to me. You must know, then, that if my father could have married us he would have united all claims to the succession of Grosbois. Then, come what might — Bourbon or Buonaparte — nothing could shake his position.’

I thought of the solicitude which he had shown over my toilet in the morning, his anxiety that I should make a favourable impression, his displeasure when she had been cold to me, and the smile upon his face when he had seen us hand in hand.

‘I believe you are right!’ I cried.

‘Right! Of course I am right! Look at him watching us now.’

We were walking on the edge of the dried moat, and as I looked up there, sure enough, was the little yellow face toned towards us in the angle of one of the windows. Seeing that I was watching him, he rose and waved his hand merrily.

‘Now you know why he saved your life — since you say that he saved it,’ said she. ‘It would suit his plans best that you should marry his daughter, and so he wished you to live. But when once he understands that that is impossible, why then, my poor Cousin Louis, his only way of guarding against the return of the de Lavals must lie in ensuring that there are none to return.’

It was those words of hers, coupled with that furtive yellow face still lurking at the window, which made me realise the imminence of my danger. No one in France had any reason to take an interest in me. If I were to pass away there was no one who could make inquiry — I was absolutely in his power. My memory told me what a ruthless and dangerous man it was with whom I had to deal.

‘But,’ said I, ‘he must have known that your affections were already engaged.’

‘He did,’ she answered; ‘it was that which made me most uneasy of all. I was afraid for you and afraid for myself, but, most of all, I was afraid for Lucien. No man can stand in the way of his plans.’

‘Lucien! ‘The name was like a lightning flash upon a dark night. I had heard of the vagaries of a woman’s love, but was it possible that this spirited woman loved that poor creature whom I had seen grovelling last night in a frenzy of fear? But now I remembered also where I had seen the name Sibylle. It was upon the fly-leaf of his book. ‘Lucien, from Sibylle,’ was the inscription. I recalled also that my uncle had said something to him about his aspirations.

‘Lucien is hot-headed, and easily carried away,’ said she. ‘My father has seen a great deal of him lately. They sit for hours in his room, and Lucien will say nothing of what passes between them. I fear that there is something going forward which may lead to evil. Lucien is a student rather than a man of the world, but he has strong opinions about politics.’

I was at my wit’s ends what to do, whether to be silent, or to tell her of the terrible position in which her lover was placed; but, even as I hesitated, she, with the quick intuition of a woman, read the doubts which were in my mind.

‘You know something of him,’ she cried. ‘I understood that he had gone to Paris. For God’s sake tell me what you know about him!’

‘His name is Lesage?’

‘Yes, yes. Lucien Lesage.’

‘I have — I have seen him,’ I stammered.

‘You have seen him! And you only arrived in France last night. Where did you see him? What has happened to him?’ She gripped me by the wrist in her anxiety.

It was cruel to tell her, and yet it seemed more cruel still to keep silent. I looked round in my bewilderment, and there was my uncle himself coming along over the close-cropped green lawn. By his side, with a merry clashing of steel and jingling of spurs, there walked a handsome young hussar — the same to whom the charge of the prisoner had been committed upon the night before. Sibylle never hesitated for an instant, but, with a set face and blazing eyes, she swept towards them.

‘Father,’ said she, ‘what have you done with Lucien?’

I saw his impassive face wince for a moment before the passionate hatred and contempt which he read in her eyes. ‘We will discuss this at some future time,’ said he.

‘I will know here and now,’ she cried. ‘What have you done with Lucien?’

‘Gentlemen,’ said he, turning to the young hussar and me,’ I am sorry that we should intrude our little domestic differences upon your attention. You will, I am sure, make allowances, lieutenant, when I tell you that your prisoner of last night was a very dear friend of my daughter’s. Such family considerations do not prevent me from doing my duty to the Emperor, but they make that duty more painful than it would otherwise be.’

‘You have my sympathy, mademoiselle,’ said the young hussar.

It was to him that my cousin had now turned.

‘Do I understand that you took him prisoner?’ she asked.

‘It was unfortunately my duty.’

‘From you I will get the truth. Whither did you take him?’

‘To the Emperor’s camp.’

‘And why?’

‘Ah, mademoiselle, it is not for me to go into politics. My duties are but to wield a sword, and sit a horse, and obey my orders. Both these gentlemen will be my witnesses that I received my instructions from Colonel Lasalle.’

‘But on what charge was he arrested?’

‘Tut, tut, child, we have had enough of this!’ said my uncle harshly. ‘If you insist upon knowing I will tell you once and for all, that Monsieur Lucien Lesage has been seized for being concerned in a plot against the life of the Emperor, and that it was my privilege to denounce the would-be assassin.’

‘To denounce him!’ cried the girl. ‘I know that it was you who set him on, who encouraged him, who held him to it whenever he tried to draw back. Oh, you villain! you villain! What have I over done, what sin of my ancestors am I expiating, that I should be compelled to call such a man Father?’

My uncle shrugged his shoulders as if to say that it was useless to argue with a woman’s tantrums. The hussar and I made as if we would stroll away, for it was embarrassing to stand listening to such words, but in her fury she called to us to stop and be witnesses against him. Never have I seen such a recklessness of passion as blazed in her dry wide-opened eyes.

‘You have deceived others, but you have never deceived me,’ she cried. ‘I know you as your own conscience knows you. You may murder me, as you murdered my mother before me, but you can never frighten me into being your accomplice. You proclaimed yourself a Republican that you might creep into a house and estate which do not belong to you. And now you try to make a friend of Buonaparte by betraying your old associates, who still trust in you. And you have sent Lucien to his death! But I know your plans, and my Cousin Louis knows them also, and I can assure you that there is just as much chance of his agreeing to them as there is of my doing so. I’d rather lie in my grave than be the wife of any man but Lucien.’

‘If you had seen the pitiful poltroon that he proved himself you would not say so,’ said my uncle coolly. ‘You are not yourself at present, but when you return to your right mind you will be ashamed of having made this public exposure of your weakness. And now, lieutenant, you have something to say.’

‘My message was to you, Monsieur de Laval,’ said the young hussar, turning his back contemptuously upon my uncle. ‘The Emperor has sent me to bring you to him at once at the camp at Boulogne.’

My heart leapt at the thought of escaping from my uncle.

‘I ask nothing better,’ I cried.

‘A horse and an escort are waiting at the gates.’

‘I am ready to start at this instant.’

‘Nay, there can be no such very great hurry,’ said my uncle. ‘Surely you will wait for luncheon, Lieutenant Gerard.’

‘The Emperor’s commissions, sir, are not carried out in such a manner,’ said the young hussar sternly. ‘I have already wasted too much time. We must be upon our way in five minutes.’

My uncle placed his hand upon my arm and led me slowly towards the gateway, through which my cousin Sibylle had already passed.

‘There is one matter that I wish to speak to you about before you go. Since my time is so short you will forgive me if I introduce it without preamble. You have seen your cousin Sibylle, and though her behaviour this morning is such as to prejudice you against her, yet I can assure you that she is a very amiable girl. She spoke just now as if she had mentioned the plan which I had conceived to you. I confess to you that I cannot imagine anything more convenient than that we should unite in order to settle once for all every question as to which branch of the family shall hold the estates.'

'Unfortunately,' said I, 'there are objections.'

'And pray what are they?'

'The fact that my cousin's hand, as I have just learned, is promised to another.'

'That need not hinder us,' said he, with a sour smile; 'I will undertake that he never claims the promise.'

'I fear that I have the English idea of marriage, that it should go by love and not by convenience. But in any case your scheme is out of the question, for my own affections are pledged to a young lady in England.'

He looked wickedly at me out of the corners of his grey eyes.

'Think well what you are doing, Louis,' said he, in a sibilant whisper which was as menacing as a serpent's hiss. 'You are deranging my plans, and that is not done with impunity.'

'It is not a matter in which I have any choice.'

He gripped me by the sleeve, and waved his hand round as Satan may have done when he showed the kingdoms and principalities. 'Look at the park,' he cried, 'the fields, the woods. Look at the old castle in which your fathers have lived for eight hundred years. You have but to say the word and it is all yours once more.'

There flashed up into my memory the little red-brick house at Ashford, and Eugenie's sweet pale face looking over the laurel bushes which grew by the window.

'It is impossible!' said I.

There must have been something in my manner which made him comprehend that it really was so, for his face darkened with anger, and his persuasion changed in an instant to menace.

'If I had known this they might have done what they wished with you last night,' said he, 'I would never have put out a finger to save you.'

'I am glad to hear you say so,' I answered, 'for it makes it easier for me to say that I wish to go my own way, and to have nothing more to do with you. What you have just said frees me from the bond of gratitude which held me back.'

‘I have no doubt that you would like to have nothing more to do with me,’ he cried. ‘You will wish it more heartily still before you finish. Very well, sir, go your own way and I will go mine, and we shall see who comes out the best in the end.’

A group of hussars were standing by their horses’ heads in the gateway. In a few minutes I had packed my scanty possessions, and I was hastening with them down the corridor when a chill struck suddenly through my heart at the thought of my cousin Sibylle. How could I leave her alone with this grim companion in the old castle? Had she not herself told me that her very life might be at stake? I had stopped in my perplexity, and suddenly there was a patter of feet, and there she was running towards me.

‘Good-bye, Cousin Louis,’ she cried, with outstretched hands.

‘I was thinking of you,’ said I; ‘your father and I have had an explanation and a quarrel.’

‘Thank God!’ she cried. ‘Your only chance was to get away from him.

But beware, for he will do you an injury if he can!’

‘He may do his worst; but how can I leave you here in his power?’

‘Have no fears about me. He has more reason to avoid me than I him. But they are calling for you, Cousin Louis. Good-bye, and God be with you!’

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP OF BOULOGNE

My uncle was still standing at the castle gateway, the very picture of a usurper, with our own old coat-of-arms of the bend argent and the three blue martlets engraved upon the stones at either side of him. He gave me no sign of greeting as I mounted the large grey horse which was awaiting me, but he looked thoughtfully at me from under his down-drawn brows, and his jaw muscles still throbbed with that stealthy rhythmical movement. I read a cold and settled malice in his set yellow face and his stern eyes. For my own part I sprang readily enough into the saddle, for the man's presence had, from the first, been loathsome to me, and I was right glad to be able to turn my back upon him. And so, with a stern quick order from the lieutenant and a jingle and clatter from the troopers, we were off upon our journey. As I glanced back at the black keep of Grosbois, and at the sinister figure who stood looking after us from beside the gateway, I saw from over his head a white handkerchief gleam for an instant in a last greeting from one of the gloomy meurtriere windows, and again a chill ran through me as I thought of the fearless girl and of the hands in which we were leaving her.

But sorrow clears from the mind of youth like the tarnish of breath upon glass, and who could carry a heavy heart upon so lightfooted a horse and through so sweet an air? The white glimmering road wound over the downs with the sea far upon the left, and between lay that great salt-marsh which had been the scene of our adventures. I could even see, as I fancied, a dull black spot in the distance to mark the position of that terrible cottage. Far away the little clusters of houses showed the positions of Etaples, Ambleterre, and the other fishing villages, whilst I could see that the point which had seemed last night to glow like a half-forged red-hot sword-blade was now white as a snow-field with the camp of a great army. Far, far away, a little dim cloud upon the water stood for the land where I had spent my days — the pleasant, homely land which will always rank next to my own in my affections.

And now I turned my attention from the downs and the sea to the hussars who rode beside me, forming, as I could perceive, a guard rather than an escort. Save for the patrol last night, they were the first of the famous soldiers of Napoleon whom I had ever seen, and it was with admiration and curiosity that I looked upon men who had won a world-wide reputation for their discipline and their gallantry. Their appearance was by no means gorgeous, and their dress and equipment was much more modest than that of the East Kent Yeomanry, which rode every Saturday through Ashford; but the stained tunics, the worn leathers, and the rough hardy horses gave them a very workmanlike appearance. They were small, light, brown-faced fellows, heavily whiskered and moustached, many of them wearing ear-rings in their ears. It surprised me that even the youngest and most boyish-looking of them should be so bristling with hair, until, upon a second look, I perceived that his whiskers were formed of lumps of black wax stuck on to the sides of his face. The tall young lieutenant noticed the astonishment with which I gazed at his boyish trooper.

‘Yes, yes,’ said he, ‘they are artificial, sure enough; but what can you expect from a lad of seventeen? On the other hand, we cannot spoil the appearance of the regiment upon parade by having a girl’s cheeks in the ranks.’

‘It melts terribly in this warm weather, lieutenant,’ said the hussar, joining in the conversation with the freedom which was one of the characteristics of Napoleon’s troops.

‘Well, well, Caspar, in a year or two you will dispense with them.’

‘Who knows? Perhaps he will have dispensed with his head also by that time,’ said a corporal in front, and they all laughed together in a manner which in England would have meant a court-martial. This seemed to me to be one of the survivals of the Revolution, that officer and private were left, upon a very familiar footing, which was increased, no doubt, by the freedom with which the Emperor would chat with his old soldiers, and the liberties which he would allow them to take with him. It was no uncommon thing for a shower of chaff to come from the ranks directed at their own commanding officers, and I am sorry to say, also, that it was no very unusual thing for a shower of bullets to come also. Unpopular officers were continually assassinated by their own men; at the battle of Montebello it is well known that every officer, with the exception of one lieutenant belonging to the 24th demi-brigade, was shot down from behind. But this was a relic of the bad times, and, as the Emperor gained more complete control, a better feeling was established. The history of our army at that time proved, at any rate, that the highest efficiency could be maintained without the flogging which was still used in the Prussian and the English service, and it was shown, for the first time, that great bodies of men could be induced to act from a sense of duty and a love of country, without hope of reward or fear of punishment. When a French general could suffer his division to straggle as they would over the face of the country, with the certainty that they would concentrate upon the day of battle, he proved that he had soldiers who were worthy of his trust.

One thing had struck me as curious about these hussars — that they pronounced French with the utmost difficulty. I remarked it to the lieutenant as he rode by my side, and I asked him from what foreign country his men were recruited, since I could perceive that they were not Frenchmen.

‘My faith, you must not let them hear you say so,’ said he, ‘for they would answer you as like as not by a thrust from their sabres. We are the premier regiment of the French cavalry, the First Hussars of Bercheny, and, though it is true that our men are all recruited in Alsace, and few of them can speak anything but German, they are as good Frenchmen as Kleber or Kellermann, who came from the same parts. Our men are all picked, and our officers,’ he added, pulling at his light moustache, ‘are the finest in the service.’

The swaggering vanity of the fellow amused me, for he cocked his busby, swung the blue dolman which hung from his shoulder, sat his horse, and clattered his scabbard in a manner which told of his boyish delight and pride in himself and his regiment. As I looked at his lithe figure and his fearless bearing, I could quite imagine that he did himself no more than justice, while his frank smile and his merry blue eyes assured me that he would prove a good comrade. He had himself been taking observations of me, for he suddenly placed his hand upon my knee as we rode side by side.

‘I trust that the Emperor is not displeased with you,’ said he, with a very grave face.

‘I cannot think that he can be so,’ I answered, ‘for I have come from England to put my services at his disposal.’

‘When the report was presented last night, and he heard of your presence in that den of thieves, he was very anxious that you should be brought to him. Perhaps it is that he wishes you to be guide to us in England. No doubt you know your way all over the island.’

The hussar’s idea of an island seemed to be limited to the little patches which lie off the Norman or Breton coast. I tried to explain to him that this was a great country, not much smaller than France.

‘Well, well,’ said he, ‘we shall know all about it presently, for we are going to conquer it. They say in the camp that we shall probably enter London either next Wednesday evening or else on the Thursday morning. We are to have a week for plundering the town, and then one army corps is to take possession of Scotland and another of Ireland.’

His serene confidence made me smile. ‘But how do you know you can do all this?’ I asked.

‘Oh!’ said he, ‘the Emperor has arranged it.’

‘But they have an army, and they are well prepared. They are brave men and they will fight.’

‘There would be no use their doing that, for the Emperor is going over himself,’ said he; and in the simple answer I understood for the first time the absolute trust and confidence which these soldiers had in their leader. Their feeling for him was fanaticism, and its strength was religion, and never did Mahomet nerve the arms of his believers and strengthen them against pain and death more absolutely than this little grey-coated idol did to those who worshipped him. If he had chosen — and he was more than once upon the point of it — to assert that he was indeed above humanity he would have found millions to grant his claim. You who have heard of him as a stout gentleman in a straw hat, as he was in his later days, may find it hard to understand it, but if you had seen his mangled soldiers still with their dying breath crying out to him, and turning their livid faces towards him as he passed, you would have realised the hold which he had over the minds of men.

‘You have been over there?’ asked the lieutenant presently, jerking his thumb towards the distant cloud upon the water.

‘Yes, I have spent my life there.’

‘But why did you stay there when there was such good fighting to be had in the French service?’

‘My father was driven out of the country as an aristocrat. It was only after his death that I could offer my sword to the Emperor.’

‘You have missed a great deal, but I have no doubt that we shall still have plenty of fine wars. And you think that the English will offer us battle?’

‘I have no doubt of it.’

‘We feared that when they understood that it was the Emperor in person who had come they would throw down their arms. I have heard that there are some fine women over there.’

‘The women are beautiful.’

He said nothing, but for some time he squared his shoulders and puffed out his chest, curling up the ends of his little yellow moustache.

‘But they will escape in boats,’ he muttered at last; and I could see that he had still that picture of a little island in his imagination. ‘If they could but see us they might remain. It has been said of the Hussars of Bercheny that they can set a whole population running, the women towards us, the men away. We are, as you have no doubt observed, a very fine body of men, and the officers are the pick of the service, though the seniors are hardly up to the same standard as the rest of us.’

With all his self-confidence, this officer did not seem to me to be more than my own age, so I asked him whether he had seen any service. His moustache bristled with indignation at my question, and he looked me up and down with a severe eye.

‘I have had the good fortune to be present at nine battles, sir, and at more than forty skirmishes,’ said he. ‘I have also fought a considerable number of duels, and I can assure you that I am always ready to meet anyone — even a civilian — who may wish to put me to the proof.’

I assured him that he was very fortunate to be so young and yet to have seen so much, upon which his ill-temper vanished as quickly as it came, and he explained that he had served in the Hohenlinden campaign under Moreau, as well as in Napoleon’s passage of the Alps, and the campaign of Marengo.

‘When you have been with the army for a little time the name of Etienne Gerard will not be so unfamiliar to you,’ said he. ‘I believe that I may claim to be the hero of one or two little stories which the soldiers love to tell about their camp fires. You will hear of my duel with the six fencing masters, and you will be told how, single-handed, I charged the Austrian Hussars of Graz and brought their silver kettledrum back upon the crupper of my mare. I can assure you that it was not by accident that I was present last night, but it was because Colonel Lasalle was very anxious to be sure of any prisoners whom he might make. As it turned out, however, I only had the one poor chicken-hearted creature, whom I handed over to the provost-marshal.’

‘And the other — Toussac?’

‘Ah, he seems to have been a man of another breed. I could have asked nothing better than to have had him at my sword-point. But he has escaped. They caught sight of him and fired a pistol or two, but he knew the bog too well, and they could not follow him.’

‘And what will be done to your prisoner?’ I asked.

Lieutenant Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

‘I am very sorry for Mademoiselle your cousin,’ said he, ‘but a fine girl should not love such a man when there are so many gallant soldiers upon the country side. I hear that the Emperor is weary of these endless plottings, and that an example will be made of him.’

Whilst the young hussar and I had been talking we had been cantering down the broad white road, until we were now quite close to the camp, which we could see lying in its arrangement of regiments and brigades beneath us. Our approach lay over the high ground, so that we could see down into this canvas city, with its interminable lines of picketed horses, its parks of artillery, and its swarms of soldiers. In the centre was a clear space, with one very large tent and a cluster of low wooden houses in the middle of it, with the tricolour banner waving above them.

‘That is the Emperor’s quarters, and the smaller tent there is the headquarters of General Ney, who commands this corps. You understand that this is only one of several armies dotted along from Dunkirk in the north to this, which is the most southerly. The Emperor goes from one to the other, inspecting each in its turn, but this is the main body, and contains most of the picked troops, so that it is we who see most of him, especially now that the Empress and the Court have come to Pont de Briques. He is in there at the present moment,’ he added in a hushed voice, pointing to the great white tent in the centre.

The road into the camp ran through a considerable plain, which was covered by bodies of cavalry and infantry engaged upon their drill. We had heard so much in England about Napoleon’s troops, and their feats had appeared so extraordinary, that my imagination had prepared me for men of very striking appearance. As a matter of fact, the ordinary infantry of the line, in their blue coats and white breeches and gaiters, were quite little fellows, and even their high brass-covered hats and red plumes could not make them very imposing.

In spite of their size, however, they were tough and wiry, and after their eighteen months in camp they were trained to the highest pitch of perfection. The ranks were full of veterans, and all the under-officers had seen much service, while the generals in command have never been equalled in ability, so that it was no mean foe which lay with its menacing eyes fixed upon the distant cliffs of England. If Pitt had not been able to place the first navy in the world between the two shores the history of Europe might be very different to-day.

Lieutenant Gerard, seeing the interest with which I gazed at the manoeuvring troops, was good enough to satisfy my curiosity about such of them as approached the road along which we were journeying.

‘Those fellows on the black horses with the great blue rugs upon their croups are the Cuirassiers,’ said he. ‘They are so heavy that they cannot raise more than a trot, so when they charge we manage that there shall be a brigade of chasseurs or hussars behind them to follow up the advantage.’

‘Who is the civilian who is inspecting them?’ I asked.

‘That is not a civilian, but it is General St. Cyr, who is one of those whom they called the Spartans of the Rhine. They were of opinion that simplicity of life and of dress were part of a good soldier, and so they would wear no uniform beyond a simple blue riding coat, such as you see. St. Cyr is an excellent officer, but he is not popular, for he seldom speaks to anyone, and he sometimes shuts himself up for days on end in his tent, where he plays upon his violin. I think myself that a soldier is none the worse because he enjoys a glass of good wine, or has a smart jacket and a few Brandenburgs across his chest. For my part I do both, and yet those who know me would tell you that it has not harmed my soldiering. You see this infantry upon the left?’

‘The men with the yellow facings?’

‘Precisely. Those are Oudinot’s famous grenadiers. And the other grenadiers, with the red shoulder-knots and the fur hats strapped above their knapsacks, are the Imperial Guard, the successors of the old Consular Guard who won Marengo for us. Eighteen hundred of them got the cross of honour after the battle. There is the 57th of the line, which has been named “The Terrible,” and there is the 7th Light Infantry, who come from the Pyrenees, and who are well known to be the best marchers and the greatest rascals in the army. The light cavalry in green are the Horse Chasseurs of the Guard, sometimes called the Guides, who are said to be the Emperor’s favourite troops, although he makes a great mistake if he prefers them to the Hussars of Bercheny. The other cavalry with the green pelisses are also chasseurs, but I cannot tell from here what regiment they are. Their colonel handles them admirably. They are moving to a flank in open column of half-squadrons and then wheeling into line to charge. We could not do it better ourselves. And now, Monsieur de Laval, here we are at the gates of the Camp of Boulogne, and it is my duty to take you straight to the Emperor’s quarters.’

CHAPTER X

THE ANTE-ROOM

The camp of Boulogne contained at that time one hundred and fifty thousand infantry, with fifty thousand cavalry, so that its population was second only to Paris among the cities of France. It was divided into four sections, the right camp, the left camp, the camp of Wimereux, and the camp of Ambleteuse, the whole being about a mile in depth, and extending along the seashore for a length of about seven miles. On the land side it was open, but on the sea side it was fringed by powerful batteries containing mortars and cannon of a size never seen before. These batteries were placed along the edges of the high cliffs, and their lofty position increased their range, and enabled them to drop their missiles upon the decks of the English ships.

It was a pretty sight to ride through the camp, for the men had been there for more than a year, and had done all that was possible to decorate and ornament their tents. Most of them had little gardens in front or around them, and the sun-burned fellows might be seen as we passed kneeling in their shirt-sleeves with their spuds and their watering-cans in the midst of their flower-beds. Others sat in the sunshine at the openings of the tents tying up their queues, pipe-claying their belts, and polishing their arms, hardly bestowing a glance upon us as we passed, for patrols of cavalry were coming and going in every direction. The endless lines were formed into streets, with their names printed up upon boards. Thus we had passed through the Rue d’Arcola, the Rue de Kleber, the Rue d’Egypte, and the Rue d’Artillerie Volante, before we found ourselves in the great central square in which the headquarters of the army were situated.

The Emperor at this time used to sleep at a village called Pont de Briques, some four miles inland, but his days were spent at the camp, and his continual councils of war were held there. Here also were his ministers, and the generals of the army corps which were scattered up and down the coast came thither to make their reports and to receive their orders. For these consultations a plain wooden house had been constructed containing one very large room and three small ones. The pavilion which we had observed from the Downs served as an ante-chamber to the house, in which those who sought audience with the Emperor might assemble. It was at the door of this, where a strong guard of grenadiers announced Napoleon’s presence, that my guardian sprang down from his horse and signed to me to follow his example. An officer of the guard took our names and returned to us accompanied by General Duroc, a thin, hard, dry man of forty, with a formal manner and a suspicious eye.

‘Is this Monsieur Louis de Laval?’ he asked, with a stiff smile.

I bowed.

‘The Emperor is very anxious to see you. You are no longer needed,

Lieutenant.’

‘I am personally responsible for bringing him safely, General.’

‘Very good. You may come in, if you prefer it!’ And he passed us into the huge tent, which was unfurnished, save for a row of wooden benches round the sides. A number of men in naval and military uniforms were seated upon these, and numerous groups were standing about chatting in subdued tones. At the far end was a door which led into the Imperial council chamber. Now and then I saw some man in official dress walk up to this door, scratch gently upon it with his nail, and then, as it instantly opened, slip discreetly through, closing it softly behind him. Over the whole assembly there hung an air of the Court rather than of the camp, an atmosphere of awe and of reverence which was the more impressive when it affected these bluff soldiers and sailors. The Emperor had seemed to me to be formidable in the distance, but I found him even more overwhelming now that he was close at hand.

‘You need have no fears, Monsieur de Laval,’ said my companion.

‘You are going to have a good reception.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘From General Duroc’s manner. In these cursed Courts, if the Emperor smiles upon you everyone smiles, down to that flunkey in the red velvet coat yonder. But if the Emperor frowns, why, you have only to look at the face of the man who washes the Imperial plates, and you will see the frown reflected upon it. And the worst of it is that, if you are a plain-witted man, you may never find out what earned you either the frown or the smile. That is why I had rather wear the shoulder-straps of a lieutenant, and be at the side of my squadron, with a good horse between my knees and my sabre clanking against my stirrup-iron, than have Monsieur Talleyrand’s grand hotel in the Rue Saint Florentin, and his hundred thousand livres of income.’

I was still wondering whether the hussar could be right, and if the smile with which Duroc had greeted me could mean that the Emperor’s intentions towards me were friendly, when a very tall and handsome young man, in a brilliant uniform, came towards me. In spite of the change in his dress, I recognised him at once as the General Savary who had commanded the expedition of the night before.

‘Well, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he, shaking hands with me very pleasantly, ‘you have heard, no doubt, that this fellow Toussac has escaped us. He was really the only one whom we were anxious to seize, for the other is evidently a mere dupe and dreamer. But we shall have him yet, and between ourselves we shall keep a very strict guard upon the Emperor’s person until we do, for Master Toussac is not a man to be despised.’

I seemed to feel his great rough thumb upon my chin as I answered that I thought he was a very dangerous man indeed.

‘The Emperor will see you presently,’ said Savary. ‘He is very busy this morning, but he bade me say that you should have an audience.’ He smiled and passed on.

‘Assuredly you are getting on,’ whispered Gerard. ‘There are a good many men here who would risk something to have Savary address them as he addressed you. The Emperor is certainly going to do something for you. But attention, friend, for here is Monsieur de Talleyrand himself coming towards us.’

A singular-looking person was shuffling in our direction. He was a man about fifty years of age, largely made about the shoulders and chest, but stooping a good deal, and limping heavily in one leg. He walked slowly, leaning upon a silver-headed stick, and his sober suit of black, with silk stockings of the same hue, looked strangely staid among the brilliant uniforms which surrounded him. But in spite of his plain dress there was an expression of great authority upon his shrewd face, and every one drew back with bows and salutes as he moved across the tent.

‘Monsieur Louis de Laval?’ said he, as he stopped in front of me, and his cold grey eyes played over me from head to heel.

I bowed, and with some coldness, for I shared the dislike which my father used to profess for this unfrocked priest and perjured politician; but his manner was so polished and engaging that it was hard to hold out against it.

‘I knew your cousin de Rohan very well indeed,’ said he. ‘We were two rascals together when the world was not quite so serious as it is at present. I believe that you are related to the Cardinal de Montmorency de Laval, who is also an old friend of mine. I understand that you are about to offer your services to the Emperor?’

‘I have come from England for that purpose, sir.’

‘And met with some little adventure immediately upon your arrival, as I understand. I have heard the story of the worthy police agent, the two Jacobins, and the lonely hut. Well, you have seen the danger to which the Emperor is exposed, and it may make you the more zealous in his service. Where is your uncle, Monsieur Bernac?’

‘He is at the Castle of Grosbois.’

‘Do you know him well?’

‘I had not seen him until yesterday.’

‘He is a very useful servant of the Emperor, but — but—’ he inclined his head downward to my ear, ‘some more congenial service will be found for you, Monsieur de Laval,’ and so, with a bow, he whisked round, and tapped his way across the tent again.

‘Why, my friend, you are certainly destined for something great,’ said the hussar lieutenant. ‘Monsieur de Talleyrand does not waste his smiles and his bows, I promise you. He knows which way the wind blows before he flies his kite, and I foresee that I shall be asking for your interest to get me my captaincy in this English campaign. Ah, the council of war is at an end.’

As he spoke the inner door at the end of the great tent opened, and a small knot of men came through dressed in the dark blue coats, with trimmings of gold oak-leaves, which marked the marshals of the Empire. They were, all but one, men who had hardly reached their middle age, and who, in any other army, might have been considered fortunate if they had gained the command of a regiment; but the continuous wars and the open system by which rules of seniority yielded to merit had opened up a rapid career to a successful soldier. Each carried his curved cocked hat under his arm, and now, leaning upon their sword-hilts, they fell into a little circle and chatted eagerly among themselves.

‘You are a man of family, are you not?’ asked my hussar.

‘I am of the same blood as the de Rohans and the Montmorencies.’

‘So I had understood. Well, then, you will understand that there have been some changes in this country when I tell you that those men, who, under the Emperor, are the greatest in the country have been the one a waiter, the next a wine smuggler, the next a cooper of barrels, and the next a house painter. Those are the trades which gave us Murat, Massena, Ney, and Lannes.’

Aristocrat as I was, no names had ever thrilled me as those did, and I eagerly asked him to point me out each of these famous soldiers.

‘Oh, there are many famous soldiers in the room,’ said he. ‘Besides,’ he added, twisting his moustache, ‘there may be junior officers here who have it in them to rise higher than any of them. But there is Ney to the right.’

I saw a man with close-cropped red hair and a large square-jowled face, such as I have seen upon an English prize-fighter.

‘We call him Peter the Red, and sometimes the Red Lion, in the army,’ said my companion. ‘He is said to be the bravest man in the army, though I cannot admit that he is braver than some other people whom I could mention. Still he is undoubtedly a very good leader.’

‘And the general next him?’ I asked. ‘Why does he carry his head all upon one side?’

‘That is General Lannes, and he carries his head upon his left shoulder because he was shot through the neck at the siege of St. Jean d’Acre. He is a Gascon, like myself, and I fear that he gives some ground to those who accuse my countrymen of being a little talkative and quarrelsome. But monsieur smiles?’

‘You are mistaken.’

‘I thought that perhaps something which I had said might have amused monsieur. I thought that possibly he meant that Gascons really were quarrelsome, instead of being, as I contend, the mildest race in France — an opinion which I am always ready to uphold in any way which may be suggested. But, as I say, Lannes is a very valiant man, though, occasionally, perhaps, a trifle hot-headed. The next man is Auguereau.’

I looked with interest upon the hero of Castiglione, who had taken command upon the one occasion when Napoleon’s heart and spirit had failed him. He was a man, I should judge, who would shine rather in war than in peace, for, with his long goat’s face and his brandy nose, he looked, in spite of his golden oak-leaves, just such a long-legged, vulgar, swaggering, foul-mouthed old soldier as every barrack-room can show. He was an older man than the others, and his sudden promotion had come too late for him to change. He was always the Corporal of the Prussian Guard under the hat of the French Marshal.

‘Yes, yes; he is a rough fellow,’ said Gerard, in answer to my remark. ‘He is one of those whom the Emperor had to warn that he wished them to be soldiers only with the army. He and Rapp and Lefebvre, with their big boots and their clanking sabres, were too much for the Empress’s drawing-room at the Tuileries. There is Vandamme also, the dark man with the heavy face. Heaven help the English village that he finds his quarters in! It was he who got into trouble because he broke the jaw of a Westphalian priest who could not find him a second bottle of Tokay.’

‘And that is Murat, I suppose?’

‘Yes; that is Murat with the black whiskers and the red, thick lips, and the brown of Egypt upon his face. He is the man for me! My word, when you have seen him raving in front of a brigade of light cavalry, with his plumes tossing and his sabre flashing, you would not wish to see anything finer. I have known a square of grenadiers break and scatter at the very sight of him. In Egypt the Emperor kept away from him, for the Arabs would not look at the little General when this fine horseman and swordsman was before them. In my opinion Lasalle is the better light cavalry officer, but there is no one whom the men will follow as they do Murat.’

‘And who is the stern-looking man, leaning on the Oriental sword?’

‘Oh, that is Soult! He is the most obstinate man in the world. He argues with the Emperor. The handsome man beside him is Junot, and Bernadotte is leaning against the tent-pole.’

I looked with interest at the extraordinary face of this adventurer, who, after starting with a musket and a knapsack in the ranks, was not contented with the baton of a marshal, but passed on afterwards to grasp the sceptre of a king. And it might be said of him that, unlike his fellows, he gained his throne in spite of Napoleon rather than by his aid. Any man who looked at his singular pronounced features, the swarthiness of which proclaimed his half Spanish origin, must have read in his flashing black eyes and in that huge aggressive nose that he was reserved for a strange destiny. Of all the fierce and masterful men who surrounded the Emperor there was none with greater gifts, and none, also, whose ambitions he more distrusted, than those of Jules Bernadotte.

And yet, fierce and masterful as these men were, having, as Auguereau boasted, fear neither of God nor of the devil, there was something which thrilled or cowed them in the pale smile or black frown of the little man who ruled them. For, as I watched them, there suddenly came over the assembly a start and hush such as you see in a boys' school when the master enters unexpectedly, and there near the open doors of his headquarters stood the master himself. Even without that sudden silence, and the scramble to their feet of those upon the benches, I felt that I should have known instantly that he was present. There was a pale luminosity about his ivory face which drew the eye towards it, and though his dress might be the plainest of a hundred, his appearance would be the first which one would notice. There he was, with his little plump, heavy-shouldered figure, his green coat with the red collar and cuffs, his white, well-formed legs, his sword with the gilt hilt and the tortoise-shell scabbard. His head was uncovered, showing his thin hair of a ruddy chestnut colour. Under one arm was the flat cocked hat with the twopenny tricolour rosette, which was already reproduced in his pictures. In his right hand he held a little riding switch with a metal head. He walked slowly forward, his face immutable, his eyes fixed steadily before him, measured, inexorable, the very personification of Destiny.

'Admiral Bruix!'

I do not know if that voice thrilled through every one as it did through me. Never had I heard anything more harsh, more menacing, more sinister. From under his puckered brows his light-blue eyes glanced swiftly round with a sweep like a sabre.

'I am here, Sire!' A dark, grizzled, middle-aged man, in a naval uniform, had advanced from the throng. Napoleon took three quick little steps towards him in so menacing a fashion, that I saw the weather-stained cheeks of the sailor turn a shade paler, and he gave a helpless glance round him, as if for assistance.

'How comes it, Admiral Bruix,' cried the Emperor, in the same terrible rasping voice, 'that you did not obey my commands last night?'

'I could see that a westerly gale was coming up, Sire. I knew that — ,' he could hardly speak for his agitation, 'I knew that if the ships went out with this lee shore—'

'What right have you to judge, sir?' cried the Emperor, in a cold fury of indignation. 'Do you conceive that your judgment is to be placed against mine?’

‘In matters of navigation, Sire.’

‘In no matters whatsoever.’

‘But the tempest, Sire! Did it not prove me to be in the right?’

‘What! You still dare to bandy words with me?’

‘When I have justice on my side.’

There was a hush amidst all the great audience; such a heavy silence as comes only when many are waiting, and all with bated breath. The Emperor’s face was terrible. His cheeks were of a greenish, livid tint, and there was a singular rotary movement of the muscles of his forehead. It was the countenance of an epileptic. He raised the whip to his shoulder, and took a step towards the admiral.

‘You insolent rascal!’ he hissed. It was the Italian word *coglione* which he used, and I observed that as his feelings overcame him his French became more and more that of a foreigner.

For a moment he seemed to be about to slash the sailor across the face with his whip. The latter took a step back, and clapped his hand to his sword.

‘Have a care, Sire,’ said he.

For a few instants the tension was terrible. Then Napoleon brought the whip down with a sharp crack against his own thigh.

‘Vice-Admiral Magon,’ he cried, ‘you will in future receive all orders connected with the fleet. Admiral Bruix, you will leave Boulogne in twenty-four hours and withdraw to Holland. Where is Lieutenant Gerard, of the Hussars of Bercheny?’

My companion’s gauntlet sprang to his busby.

‘I ordered you to bring Monsieur Louis de Laval from the castle of Grosbois.’

‘He is here, Sire.’

‘Good! You may retire.’

The lieutenant saluted, whisked round upon his heel, and clattered away, whilst the Emperor’s blue eyes were turned upon me. I had often heard the phrase of eyes looking through you, but that piercing gaze did really give one the feeling that it penetrated to one’s inmost thoughts. But the sternness had all melted out of it, and I read a great gentleness and kindness in their expression.

‘You have come to serve me, Monsieur de Laval?’

‘Yes, Sire.’

‘You have been some time in making up your mind.’

‘I was not my own master, Sire.’

‘Your father was an aristocrat?’

‘Yes, Sire.’

‘And a supporter of the Bourbons?’

‘Yes, Sire.’

‘You will find that in France now there are no aristocrats and no Jacobins; but that we are all Frenchmen working for the glory of our country. Have you seen Louis de Bourbon?’

‘I have seen him once, Sire?’

‘An insignificant-looking man, is he not?’

‘No, Sire, I thought him a fine-looking man.’

For a moment I saw a hard gleam of resentment in those changing blue eyes. Then he put out his hand and pinched one of my ears.

‘Monsieur de Laval was not born to be a courtier,’ said he. ‘Well, well, Louis de Bourbon will find that he cannot gain a throne by writing proclamations in London and signing them Louis. For my part, I found the crown of France lying upon the ground, and I lifted it upon my sword-point.’

‘You have lifted France with your sword also, Sire,’ said Talleyrand, who stood at his elbow.

Napoleon looked at his famous minister, and I seemed to read suspicion in his eyes. Then he turned to his secretary.

‘I leave Monsieur de Laval in your hands, de Meneval,’ said he. ‘I desire to see him in the council chamber after the inspection of the artillery.’

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRETARY

Emperor, generals, and officials all streamed away to the review, leaving me with a gentle-looking, large-eyed man in a black suit with very white cambric ruffles, who introduced himself to me as Monsieur de Meneval, private secretary to His Majesty.

‘We must get some food, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he. ‘It is always well, if you have anything to do with the Emperor, to get your food whenever you have the chance. It may be many hours before he takes a meal, and if you are in his presence you have to fast also. I assure you that I have nearly fainted from hunger and from thirst.’

‘But how does the Emperor manage himself?’ I asked. This Monsieur de Meneval had such a kindly human appearance that I already felt much at my ease with him.

‘Oh, he, he is a man of iron, Monsieur de Laval. We must not set our watches by his. I have known him work for eighteen hours on end and take nothing but a cup or two of coffee. He wears everybody out around him. Even the soldiers cannot keep up with him. I assure you that I look upon it as the very highest honour to have charge of his papers, but there are times when it is very trying all the same. Sometimes it is eleven o’clock at night, Monsieur de Laval, and I am writing to his dictation with my head aching for want of sleep. It is dreadful work, for he dictates as quickly as he can talk, and he never repeats anything. “Now, Meneval,” says he suddenly, “we shall stop here and have a good night’s rest.” And then, just as I am congratulating myself, he adds, “and we shall continue with the dictation at three to-morrow morning.” That is what he means by a good night’s rest.’

‘But has he no hours for his meals, Monsieur de Meneval?’ I asked, as I accompanied the unhappy secretary out of the tent.

‘Oh, yes, he has hours, but he will not observe them. You see that it is already long after dinner time, but he has gone to this review. After the review something else will probably take up his attention, and then something else, until suddenly in the evening it will occur to him that he has had no dinner. “My dinner, Constant, this instant!” he will cry, and poor Constant has to see that it is there.’

‘But it must be unfit to eat by that time,’ said I.

The secretary laughed in the discreet way of a man who has always been obliged to control his emotions.

‘This is the Imperial kitchen,’ said he, indicating a large tent just outside the headquarters. ‘Here is Borel, the second cook, at the door. How many pullets to-day, Borel?’

‘Ah, Monsieur de Meneval, it is heartrending,’ cried the cook. ‘Behold them!’ and, drawing back the flap of the entrance, he showed us seven dishes, each of them containing a cold fowl. ‘The eighth is now on the fire and done to a turn, but I hear that His Majesty has started for the review, so we must put on a ninth.’

‘That is how it is managed,’ said my companion, as we turned from the tent. ‘I have known twenty-three fowls got ready for him before he asked for his meal. That day he called for his dinner at eleven at night. He cares little what he eats or drinks, but he will not be kept waiting. Half a bottle of Chambertin, a red mullet, or a pullet a la Marengo satisfy every need, but it is unwise to put pastry or cream upon the table, because he is as likely as not to eat it before the fowl. Ah, that is a curious sight, is it not?’

I had halted with an exclamation of astonishment. A groom was cantering a very beautiful Arab horse down one of the lanes between the tents. As it passed, a grenadier who was standing with a small pig under his arm hurled it down under the feet of the horse. The pig squealed vigorously and scuttled away, but the horse cantered on without changing its step.

‘What does that mean?’ I asked.

‘That is Jardin, the head groom, breaking in a charger for the Emperor’s use. They are first trained by having a cannon fired in their ears, then they are struck suddenly by heavy objects, and finally they have the test of the pig being thrown under their feet. The Emperor has not a very firm seat, and he very often loses himself in a reverie when be is riding, so it might not be very safe if the horse were not well trained. Do you see that young man asleep at the door of a tent?’

‘Yes, I see him.’

‘You would not think that he is at the present moment serving the Emperor?’

‘It seems a very easy service.’

‘I wish all our services were as easy, Monsieur de Laval. That is Joseph Linden, whose foot is the exact size of the Emperor’s. He wears his new boots and shoes for three days before they are given to his master. You can see by the gold buckles that he has a pair on at the present moment. Ah, Monsieur de Caulaincourt, will you not join us at dinner in my tent?’

A tall, handsome man, very elegantly dressed, came across and greeted us. ‘It is rare to find you at rest, Monsieur de Meneval. I have no very light task myself as head of the household, but I think I have more leisure than you. Have we time for dinner before the Emperor returns?’

‘Yes, yes; here is the tent, and everything ready. We can see when the Emperor returns, and be in the room before he can reach it. This is camp fare, Monsieur de Laval, but no doubt you will excuse it.’

For my own part I had an excellent appetite for the cutlets and the salad, but what I relished above all was to hear the talk of my companions, for I was full of curiosity as to everything which concerned this singular man, whose genius had elevated him so rapidly to the highest position in the world. The head of his household discussed him with an extraordinary frankness.

‘What do they say of him in England, Monsieur de Laval?’ he asked.

‘Nothing very good.’

‘So I have gathered from their papers. They drive the Emperor frantic, and yet he will insist upon reading them. I am willing to lay a wager that the very first thing which he does when he enters London will be to send cavalry detachments to the various newspaper offices, and to endeavour to seize the editors.’

‘And the next?’

‘The next,’ said he, laughing, ‘will be to issue a long proclamation to prove that we have conquered England entirely for the good of the English, and very much against our own inclinations. And then, perhaps, the Emperor will allow the English to understand that, if they absolutely demand a Protestant for a ruler, it is possible that there are a few little points in which he differs from Holy Church.’

‘Too bad! Too bad!’ cried de Meneval, looking amused and yet rather frightened at his companion’s audacity. ‘No doubt for state reasons the Emperor had to tamper a little with Mahomedanism, and I daresay he would attend this Church of St. Paul’s as readily as he did the Mosque at Cairo;

but it would not do for a ruler to be a bigot. After all, the Emperor has to think for all.'

'He thinks too much,' said Caulaincourt, gravely. 'He thinks so much that other people in France are getting out of the way of thinking at all. You know what I mean, de Meneval, for you have seen it as much as I have.'

'Yes, yes,' answered the secretary. 'He certainly does not encourage originality among those who surround him. I have heard him say many a time that he desired nothing but mediocrity, which was a poor compliment, it must be confessed, to us who have the honour of serving him.'

'A clever man at his Court shows his cleverness best by pretending to be dull,' said Caulaincourt, with some bitterness.

'And yet there are many famous characters there,' I remarked.

'If so, it is only by concealing their characters that they remain there. His ministers are clerks, his generals are superior aides-de-camp. They are all agents. You have this wonderful man in the middle, and all around you have so many mirrors which reflect different sides of him. In one you see him as a financier, and you call it Lebrun. In another you have him as a *gendarme*, and you name it Savary or Fouche. In yet another he figures as a diplomatist, and is called Talleyrand. You see different figures, but it is really the same man. There is a Monsieur de Caulaincourt, for example, who arranges the household; but he cannot dismiss a servant without permission. It is still always the Emperor. And he plays upon us. We must confess, de Meneval, that he plays upon us. In nothing else do I see so clearly his wonderful cleverness. He will not let us be too friendly lest we combine. He has set his Marshals against each other until there are hardly two of them on speaking terms. Look how Davoust hates Bernadotte, or Lannes and Bessieres, or Ney and Massena. It is all they can do to keep their sabres in they sheaths when they meet. And then he knows our weak points. Savary's thirst for money, Cambaceres's vanity, Duroc's bluntness, Berthier's foolishness, Maret's insipidity, Talleyrand's mania for speculation, they are all so many tools in his hand. I do not know what my own greatest weakness may be, but I am sure that he does, and that he uses his knowledge.'

'But how he must work!' I exclaimed.

'Ah, you may say so,' said de Meneval. 'What energy! Eighteen hours out of twenty-four for weeks on end. He has presided over the Legislative Council until they were fainting at their desks. As to me, he will be the death of me, just as he wore out de Bourrienne; but I will die at my post without a murmur, for if he is hard upon us he is hard upon himself also.'

'He was the man for France,' said de Caulaincourt. 'He is the very genius of system and of order, and of discipline. When one renumbers the chaos in which our poor country found itself after the Revolution, when no one would be governed and everyone wanted to govern someone else, you will understand that only Napoleon could have saved us. We were all longing for something fixed to secure ourselves to, and then we came upon this iron pillar of a man. And what a man he was in those days, Monsieur de Laval! You see him now when he has got all that he can want. He is good-humoured and easy. But at that time he had got nothing, but coveted everything. His glance frightened women. He walked the streets like a wolf. People looked after him as he passed. His face was quite different — it was craggy, hollow-cheeked, with an oblique menacing gaze, and the jaws of a pike. Oh, yes, this little Lieutenant Buonaparte from the Military School of Brienne was a singular figure. "There is a man," said I, when I saw him, "who will sit upon a throne or kneel upon a scaffold." And now look at him!'

'And that is ten years ago,' I exclaimed.

'Only ten years, and they have brought him from a barrack-room to the Tuileries. But he was born for it. You could not keep him down. De Bourrienne told me that when he was a little fellow at Brienne he had the grand Imperial manner, and would praise or blame, glare or smile, exactly as he does now. Have you seen his mother, Monsieur de Laval? She is a tragedy queen, tall, stern, reserved, silent. There is the spring from which he flowed.'

I could see in the gentle, spaniel-eyes of the secretary that he was disturbed by the frankness of de Caulaincourt's remarks.

'You can tell that we do not live under a very terrible tyranny, Monsieur de Laval,' said he, 'or we should hardly venture to discuss our ruler so frankly. The fact is that we have said nothing which he would not have listened to with pleasure and perhaps with approval. He has his little frailties, or he would not be human, but take his qualities as a ruler and I would ask you if there has ever been a man who has justified the choice of a nation so completely. He works harder than any of his subjects. He is a general beloved by his soldiers. He is a master beloved by his servants. He never has a holiday, and he is always ready for his work. There is not under the roof of the Tuileries a more abstemious eater or drinker. He educated his brothers at his own expense when he was a very poor man, and he has caused even his most distant relatives to share in his prosperity. In a word, he is economical, hard-working, and temperate. We read in the London papers about this Prince of Wales, Monsieur de Laval, and I do not think that he comes very well out of the comparison.'

I thought of the long record of Brighton scandals, London scandals, Newmarket scandals, and I had to leave George undefended.

'As I understand it,' said I, 'it is not the Emperor's private life, but his public ambition, that the English attack.'

'The fact is,' said de Caulaincourt, 'that the Emperor knows, and we all know, that there is not room enough in the world for both France and England. One or other must be supreme. If England were once crushed we could then lay the foundations of a permanent peace. Italy is ours. Austria we can crush again as we have crushed her before. Germany is divided. Russia can expand to the south and east. America we can take at our leisure, finding our pretext in Louisiana or in Canada. There is a world empire waiting for us, and there is the only thing that stops us.' He pointed out through the opening of the tent at the broad blue Channel.

Far away, like snow-white gulls in the distance, were the sails of the blockading fleet. I thought again of what I had seen the night before — the lights of the ships upon the sea and the glow of the camp upon the shore. The powers of the land and of the ocean were face to face whilst a waiting world stood round to see what would come of it.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN OF ACTION

De Meneval’s tent had been pitched in such a way that he could overlook the Royal headquarters, but whether it was that we were too absorbed in the interest of our conversation, or that the Emperor had used the other entrance in returning from the review, we were suddenly startled by the appearance of a captain dressed in the green jacket of the Chasseurs of the Guard, who had come to say that Napoleon was waiting for his secretary. Poor de Meneval’s face turned as white as his beautiful ruffles as he sprang to his feet, hardly able to speak for agitation.

‘I should have been there!’ he gasped. ‘Oh, what a misfortune! Monsieur de Caulaincourt, you must excuse me! Where is my hat and my sword? Come, Monsieur de Laval, not an instant is to be lost!’

I could judge from the terror of de Meneval, as well as from the scene which I had witnessed with Admiral Bruix, what the influence was which the Emperor exercised over those who were around him. They were never at their ease, always upon the brink of a catastrophe, encouraged one day only to be rudely rebuffed the next, bullied in public and slighted in private, and yet, in spite of it all, the singular fact remains that they loved him and served him as no monarch has been loved and served.

‘Perhaps I had best stay here,’ said I, when we had come to the ante-chamber, which was still crowded with people.

‘No, no, I am responsible for you. You must come with me. Oh, I trust he is not offended with me! How could he have got in without my seeing him?’

My frightened companion scratched at the door, which was opened instantly by Roustem the Mameluke, who guarded it within. The room into which we passed was of considerable size, but was furnished with extreme simplicity. It was papered of a silver-grey colour, with a sky-blue ceiling, in the centre of which was the Imperial eagle in gold, holding a thunderbolt. In spite of the warm weather, a large fire was burning at one side, and the air was heavy with heat and the aromatic smell of aloes. In the middle of the room was a large oval table covered with green cloth and littered with a number of letters and papers. A raised writing-desk was at one side of the table, and behind it in a green morocco chair with curved arms there sat the Emperor. A number of officials were standing round the walls, but he took no notice of them. In his hand he had a small penknife, with which he whittled the wooden knob at the end of his chair. He glanced up as we entered, and shook his head coldly at de Meneval.

‘I have had to wait for you, Monsieur de Meneval,’ said he. ‘I cannot remember that I ever waited for my late secretary de Bourrienne. That is enough! No excuses! Take this report which I have written in your absence, and make a copy of it.’

Poor de Meneval took the paper with a shaking hand, and carried it to the little side table which was reserved for his use. Napoleon rose and paced slowly up and down the room with his hands behind his back, and his big round head stooping a little forwards. It was certainly as well that he had a secretary, for I observed that in writing this single document he had spattered the whole place with ink, and it was obvious that he had twice used his white kerseymere knee-breeches as a pen-wiper. As for me, I stood quietly beside Roustem at the door, and he took not the slightest notice of my presence.

‘Well,’ he cried presently, ‘is it ready, de Meneval? We have something more to do.’

The secretary half turned in his chair, and his face was more agitated than ever.

‘If it please you, Sire—’ he stammered.

‘Well, well, what is the matter now?’

‘If it please you, Sire, I find some little difficulty in reading what you have written.’

‘Tut, tut, sir. You see what the report is about.’

‘Yes, Sire, it is about forage for the cavalry horses.’

Napoleon smiled, and the action made his face look quite boyish.

‘You remind me of Cambaceres, de Meneval. When I wrote him an account of the battle of Marengo, he thought that my letter was a rough plan of the engagement. It is incredible how much difficulty you appear to have in reading what I write. This document has nothing to do with cavalry horses, but it contains the instructions to Admiral Villeneuve as to the concentration of his fleet so as to obtain command of the Channel. Give it to me and I will read it to you.'

He snatched the paper up in the quick impulsive way which was characteristic of him. But after a long fierce stare he crumpled it up and hurled it under the table.

'I will dictate it to you,' said he; and, pacing up and down the long room, he poured forth a torrent of words, which poor de Meneval, his face shining with his exertions, strove hard to put upon paper. As he grew excited by his own ideas, Napoleon's voice became shriller, his step faster, and he seized his right cuff in the fingers of the same hand, and twisted his right arm in the singular epileptic gesture which was peculiar to him. But his thoughts and plans were so admirably clear that even I, who knew nothing of the matter, could readily follow them, while above all I was impressed by the marvellous grasp of fact which enabled him to speak with confidence, not only of the line-of-battle ships, but of the frigates, sloops, and brigs at Ferrol, Rochefort, Cadiz, Carthagena, and Brest, with the exact strength of each in men and in guns; while the names and force of the English vessels were equally at his fingers' ends. Such familiarity would have been remarkable in a naval officer, but when I thought that this question of the ships was only one out of fifty with which this man had to deal, I began to realise the immense grasp of that capacious mind. He did not appear to be paying the least attention to me, but it seems that he was really watching me closely, for he turned upon me when he had finished his dictation.

'You appear to be surprised, Monsieur de Laval, that I should be able to transact my naval business without having my minister of marine at my elbow; but it is one of my rules to know and to do things for myself. Perhaps if these good Bourbons had had the same habit they would not now be living amidst the fogs of England.'

'One must have your Majesty's memory in order to do it,' I observed.

'It is the result of system,' said he. 'It is as if I had drawers in my brain, so that when I opened one I could close the others. It is seldom that I fail to find what I want there. I have a poor memory for names or dates, but an excellent one for facts or faces. There is a good deal to bear in mind, Monsieur de Laval. For example, I have, as you have seen, my one little drawer full of the ships upon the sea. I have another which contains all the harbours and forts of France. As an example, I may tell you that when my minister of war was reading me a report of all the coast defences, I was able to point out to him that he had omitted two guns in a battery near Ostend. In yet another of my brain-drawers I have the regiments of France. Is that drawer in order, Marshal Berthier?'

A clean-shaven man, who had stood biting his nails in the window, bowed at the Emperor's question.

'I am sometimes tempted to believe, Sire, that you know the name of every man in the ranks,' said he.

'I think that I know most of my old Egyptian grumblers,' said he. 'And then, Monsieur de Laval, there is another drawer for canals, bridges, roads, manufactures, and every detail of internal administration. The law, finance, Italy, the Colonies, Holland, all these things demand drawers of their own. In these days, Monsieur de Laval, France asks something more of its ruler than that he should carry eight yards of ermine with dignity, or ride after a stag in the forest of Fontainebleau.'

I thought of the helpless, gentle, pompous Louis whom my father had once taken me to visit, and I understood that France, after her convulsions and her sufferings, did indeed require another and a stronger head.

'Do you not think so, Monsieur de Laval?' asked the Emperor. He had halted for a moment by the fire, and was grinding his dainty gold-buckled shoe into one of the burning logs.

'You have come to a very wise decision,' said he when I had answered his question. 'But you have always been of this way of thinking, have you not? Is it not true that you once defended me when some young Englishman was drinking toasts to my downfall at an inn in this village in which you lived?'

I remembered the incident, although I could not imagine how it had reached his ears.

'Why should you have done this?'

'I did it on impulse, Sire.'

'On impulse!' he cried, in a tone of contempt. 'I do not know what people mean when they say that they do things upon impulse. In Charenton things are doubtless done upon impulse, but not amongst sane people. Why should you risk your life over there in defending me when at the time you had nothing to hope for from me?'

'It was because I felt that you stood for France, Sire.'

During this conversation he had still walked up and down the room, twisting his right arm about, and occasionally looking at one or other of us with his eyeglass, for his sight was so weak that he always needed a single glass indoors and binoculars outside. Sometimes he stopped and helped himself to great pinches of snuff from a tortoise-shell box, but I observed that none of it ever reached his nose, for he dropped it all from between his fingers on to his waistcoat and the floor. My answer seemed to please him, for he suddenly seized my ear and pulled it with considerable violence.

‘You are quite right, my friend,’ said he. ‘I stand for France just as Frederic the Second stood for Prussia. I will make her the great Power of the world, so that every monarch in Europe will find it necessary to keep a palace in Paris, and they will all come to hold the train at the coronation of my descendants—’ a spasm of pain passed suddenly over his face. ‘My God! for whom am I building? Who will be my descendants?’ I heard him mutter, and he passed his hand over his forehead.

‘Do they seem frightened in England about my approaching invasion?’ he asked suddenly. ‘Have you heard them express fears lest I get across the Channel?’

I was forced in truth to say that the only fears which I had ever heard expressed were lest he should not get across.

‘The soldiers are very jealous that the sailors should always have the honour,’ said I.

‘But they have a very small army.’

‘Nearly every man is a volunteer, Sire.’

‘Pooh, conscripts!’ he cried, and made a motion with his hands as if to sweep them from before him. I will land with a hundred thousand men in Kent or in Sussex. I will fight a great battle which I will win with a loss of ten thousand men. On the third day I shall be in London. I will seize the statesmen, the bankers, the merchants, the newspaper men. I will impose an indemnity of a hundred millions of their pounds. I will favour the poor at the expense of the rich, and so I shall have a party. I will detach Scotland and Ireland by giving them constitutions which will put them in a superior condition to England. Thus I will sow dissensions everywhere. Then as a price for leaving the island I will claim their fleet and their colonies. In this way I shall secure the command of the world to France for at least a century to come.’

In this short sketch I could perceive the quality which I have since heard remarked in Napoleon, that his mind could both conceive a large scheme, and at the same time evolve those practical details which would seem to bring it within the bounds of possibility. One instant it would be a wild dream of overrunning the East. The next it was a schedule of the ships, the ports, the stores, the troops, which would be needed to turn dream into fact. He gripped the heart of a question with the same decision which made him strike straight for an enemy’s capital. The soul of a poet, and the mind of a man of business of the first order, that is the combination which may make a man dangerous to the world.

I think that it may have been his purpose — for he never did anything without a purpose — to give me an object-lesson of his own capacity for governing, with the idea, perhaps, that I might in turn influence others of the Emigres by what I told them. At any rate he left me there to stand and to watch the curious succession of points upon which he had to give an opinion during a few hours. Nothing seemed to be either too large or too small for that extraordinary mind. At one instant it was the arrangements for the winter cantonments of two hundred thousand men, at the next he was discussing with de Caulaincourt the curtailing of the expenses of the household, and the possibility of suppressing some of the carriages.

‘It is my desire to be economical at home so as to make a good show abroad,’ said he. ‘For myself, when I had the honour to be a sub-lieutenant I found that I could live very well upon 1,200 francs a year, and it would be no hardship to me to go back to it. This extravagance of the palace must be stopped. For example, I see upon your accounts that 155 cups of coffee are drunk a day, which with sugar at 4 francs and coffee at 5 francs a pound come to 20 sous a cup. It would be better to make an allowance for coffee. The stable bills are also too high. At the present price of fodder seven or eight francs a week should be enough for each horse in a stable of two hundred. I will not have any waste at the Tuileries.’

Thus within a few minutes he would pass from a question of milliards to a question of sous, and from the management of a empire to that of a stable. From time to time I could observe that he threw a little oblique glance at me as if to ask what I thought of it all, and at the time I wondered very much why my approval should be of any consequence to him. But now, when I look back and see that my following his fortunes brought over so many others of the young nobility, I understand that he saw very much further than I did.

‘Well, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he suddenly, ‘you have seen something of my methods. Are you prepared to enter my service?’

‘Assuredly, Sire,’ I answered.

‘I can be a very hard master when I like,’ said he smiling. ‘You were there when I spoke to Admiral Bruix. We have all our duty to do, and discipline is as necessary in the highest as in the lowest ranks. But anger with me never rises above here,’ and he drew his hand across his throat. ‘I never permit it to cloud my brain. Dr. Corvisart here would tell you that I have the slowest pulse of all his patients.’

‘And that you are the fastest eater, Sire,’ said a large-faced, benevolent-looking person who had been whispering to Marshal Berthier.

‘Ohe, you rascal, you rake that up against me, do you? The Doctor will not forgive me because I tell him when I am unwell that I had rather die of the disease than of the remedies. If I eat too fast it is the fault of the State, which does not allow me more than a few minutes for my meals. Which reminds me that it must be rather after my dinner hour, Constant?’

‘It is four hours after it, Sire.’

‘Serve it up then at once.’

‘Yes, Sire. Monsieur Isabey is outside, Sire, with his dolls.’

‘Ah, we shall see them at once. Show him in.’

A man entered who had evidently just arrived from a long journey. Under his arm he carried a large flat wickerwork basket.

‘It is two days since I sent for you, Monsieur Isabey.’

‘The courier arrived yesterday, Sire. I have been travelling from Paris ever since.’

‘Have you the models there?’

‘Yes, Sire.’

‘Then you may lay them out on that table.’

I could not at first imagine what it meant when I saw, upon Isabey opening his basket, that it was crammed with little puppets about a foot high, all of them dressed in the most gorgeous silk and velvet costumes, with trimmings of ermine and hangings of gold lace. But presently, as the designer took them out one by one and placed them on the table, I understood that the Emperor, with his extraordinary passion for detail and for directly controlling everything in his Court, had had these dolls dressed in order to judge the effect of the gorgeous costumes which had been ordered for his grand functionaries upon State occasions.

‘What is this?’ he asked, holding up a little lady in hunting costume of amaranth and gold with a toque and plume of white feathers.

‘That is for the Empress’s hunt, Sire.’

‘You should have the waist rather lower,’ said Napoleon, who had very definite opinions about ladies’ dresses. ‘These cursed fashions seem to be the only thing in my dominions which I cannot regulate. My tailor, Duchesne, takes three inches from my coat-tails, and all the armies and fleets of France cannot prevent him. Who is this?’

He had picked up a very gorgeous figure in a green coat.

‘That is the grand master of the hunt, Sire.’

‘Then it is you, Berthier. How do you like your new costume? And this in red?’

‘That is the Arch-Chancellor.’

‘And the violet?’

‘That is the Grand Chamberlain.’

The Emperor was as much amused as a child with a new toy. He formed little groups of the figures upon the table, so that he might have an idea of how the dignitaries would look when they chatted together. Then he threw them all back into the basket.

‘Very good,’ said he. ‘You and David have done your work very well, Isabey. You will submit these designs to the Court outfitters and have an estimate for the expense. You may tell Lenormand that if she ventures to send in such an account as the last which she sent to the Empress she shall see the inside of Vincennes. You would not think it right, Monsieur de Laval, to spend twenty-five thousand francs upon a single dress, even though it were for Mademoiselle Eugenie de Choiseul.’

Was there anything which this wizard of a man did not know? What could my love affairs be to him amidst the clash of armies and the struggles of nations? When I looked at him, half in amazement and half in fear, that pleasant boyish smile lit up his pale face, and his plump little hand rested for an instant upon my shoulder. His eyes were of a bright blue when he was amused, though they would turn dark when he was thoughtful, and steel-grey in moments of excitement.

‘You were surprised when I told you a little while ago about your encounter with the Englishman in the village inn. You are still more surprised now when I tell you about a certain young lady. You must certainly have thought that I was very badly served by my agents in England if I did not know such important details as these.’

‘I cannot conceive, Sire, why such trifles should be reported to you, or why you should for one instant remember them.’

‘You are certainly a very modest young man, and I hope you will not lose that charming quality when you have been for a little time at my Court. So you think that your own private affairs are of no importance to me?’

‘I do not know why they should be, Sire.’

‘What is the name of your great-uncle?’

‘He is the Cardinal de Laval de Montmorency.’

‘Precisely. And where is he?’

‘He is in Germany.’

‘Quite so — in Germany, and not at Notre Dame, where I should have placed him. Who is your first cousin?’

‘The Duke de Rohan.’

‘And where is he?’

‘In London.’

‘Yes, in London, and not at the Tuileries, where he might have had what he liked for the asking. I wonder if I were to fall whether I should have followers as faithful as those of the Bourbons. Would the men that I have made go into exile and refuse all offers until I should return? Come here, Berthier!’ he took his favourite by the ear with the caressing gesture which was peculiar to him. ‘Could I count upon you, you rascal — eh?’

‘I do not understand you, Sire.’ Our conversation had been carried on in a voice which had made it inaudible to the other people in the room, but now they were all listening to what Berthier had to say.

‘If I were driven out, would you go into exile also?’

‘No, Sire.’

‘Diable! At least you are frank.’

‘I could not go into exile, Sire.’

‘And why?’

‘Because I should be dead, Sire.’

Napoleon began to laugh.

‘And there are some who say that our Berthier is dull-witted,’ said he. ‘Well, I think I am pretty sure of you, Berthier, for although I am fond of you for reasons of my own I do not think that you would be of much value to anyone else. Now I could not say that of you, Monsieur Talleyrand. You would change very quickly to a new master as you have changed from an old one. You have a genius, you know, for adapting yourself.’

There was nothing which the Emperor loved more than to suddenly produce little scenes of this sort which made everybody very uncomfortable, for no one could tell what awkward or compromising question he was going to put to them next. At present, however, they all forgot their own fears of what might come in their interest at the reply which the famous diplomatist might make to a suggestion which everybody knew to be so true. He stood, leaning upon his black ebony stick, with his bulky shoulders stooping forward, and an amused smile upon his face, as if the most innocent of compliments had been addressed to him. One of his few titles to respect is that he always met Napoleon upon equal terms, and never condescended to fawn upon him or to flatter him.

‘You think I should desert you, Sire, if your enemies offered me more than you have given me?’

‘I am perfectly sure that you would.’

‘Well, really I cannot answer for myself, Sire, until the offer has been made. But it will have to be a very large one. You see, apart from my very nice hotel in the Rue St. Florentin, and the two hundred thousand or so which you are pleased to allow me, there is my position as the first minister in Europe. Really, Sire, unless they put me on the throne I cannot see how I can better my position.’

‘No, I think I have you pretty safe,’ said Napoleon, looking hard at him with thoughtful eyes. ‘By the way, Talleyrand, you must either marry Madame Grand or get rid of her, for I cannot have a scandal about the Court.’

I was astounded to hear so delicate and personal a matter discussed in this public way, but this also was characteristic of the rule of this extraordinary man, who proclaimed that he looked upon delicacy and good taste as two of the fetters with which mediocrity attempted to cripple genius. There was no question of private life, from the choosing of a wife to the discarding of a mistress, that this young conqueror of thirty-six did not claim the right of discussing and of finally settling. Talleyrand broke once more into his benevolent but inscrutable smile.

‘I suppose that it is from early association, Sire,’ said he, ‘but my instincts are to avoid marriage.’

Napoleon began to laugh.

‘I forget sometimes that it is really the Bishop of Autun to whom I am speaking,’ said he. ‘I think that perhaps I have interest enough with the

Pope to ask him, in return for any little attention which we gave him at the Coronation, to show you some leniency in this matter. She is a clever woman, this Madame Grand. I have observed that she listens with attention.'

Talleyrand shrugged his rounded shoulders. 'Intellect in a woman is not always an advantage, Sire. A clever woman compromises her husband. A stupid woman only compromises herself.'

'The cleverest woman,' said Napoleon, 'is the woman who is clever enough to conceal her cleverness. The women in France have always been a danger, for they are cleverer than the men. They cannot understand that it is their hearts and not their heads that we want. When they have had influence upon a monarch, they have invariably ruined his career. Look at Henry the Fourth and Louis the Fourteenth. They are all ideologists, dreamers, sentimentalists, full of emotion and energy, but without logic or foresight. Look at that accursed Madame de Stael! Look at the Salons of the Quartier St. Germain! Their eternal clack, clack, clack give me more trouble than the fleet of England. Why cannot they look after their babies and their needlework? I suppose you think that these are very dreadful opinions, Monsieur de Laval?'

It was not an easy question to answer, so I was silent.

'You have not at your age become a practical man,' said the Emperor. 'You will understand then. I dare say that I thought as you do at the time when the stupid Parisians were saying what a misalliance the widow of the famous General de Beauharnais was making by marrying the unknown Buonaparte. It was a beautiful dream! There are nine inns in a single day's journey between Milan and Mantua, and I wrote a letter to my wife from each of them. Nine letters in a day — but one becomes disillusioned, monsieur. One learns to accept things as they are.'

I could not but think what a beautiful young man he must have been before he had learned to accept things as they are. The glamour, the romance — what a bald dead thing is life without it! His own face had clouded over as if that old life had perhaps had a charm which the Emperor's crown had never given. It may be that those nine letters written in one day at wayside inns had brought him more true joy than all the treaties by which he had torn provinces from his neighbours. But the sentiment passed from his face, and he came back in his sudden concise fashion to my own affairs.

‘Eugenie de Choiseul is the niece of the Duc de Choiseul, is she not?’ he asked.

‘Yes, Sire.’

‘You are affianced!’

‘Yes, Sire.’

He shook his head impatiently.

‘If you wish to advance yourself in my Court, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he,’ you must commit such matters to my care. Is it likely that I can look with indifference upon a marriage between emigres — an alliance between my enemies?’

‘But she shares my opinions, Sire.’

‘Ta, ta, ta, at her age one has no opinions. She has the emigre blood in her veins, and it will come out. Your marriage shall be my care, Monsieur de Laval. And I wish you to come to the Pont de Briques that you may be presented to the Empress. What is it, Constant?’

‘There is a lady outside who desires to see your Majesty. Shall I tell her to come later?’

‘A lady!’ cried the Emperor smiling. ‘We do not see many faces in the camp which have not a moustache upon them. Who is she? What does she want?’

‘Her name, Sire, is Mademoiselle Sibylle Bernac.’

‘What!’ cried Napoleon. ‘It must be the daughter of old Bernac of Grosbois. By the way, Monsieur de Laval, he is your uncle upon your mother’s side, is he not?’

I may have flushed with shame as I acknowledged it, for the Emperor read my feelings.

‘Well, well, he has not a very savoury trade, it is true, and yet I can assure you that it is one which is very necessary to me. By the way, this uncle of yours, as I understand, holds the estates which should have descended to you, does he not?’

‘Yes, Sire.’

His blue eyes flashed suspicion at me.

‘I trust that you are not joining my service merely in the hope of having them restored to you.’

‘No, Sire. It is my ambition to make a career for myself.’

‘It is a prouder thing,’ said the Emperor, ‘to found a family than merely to perpetuate one. I could not restore your estates, Monsieur de Laval, for things have come to such a pitch in France that if one once begins restorations the affair is endless. It would shake all public confidence. I have no more devoted adherents than the men who hold land which does not belong to them. As long as they serve me, as your uncle serves me, the land must remain with them. But what can this young lady require of me? Show her in, Constant!'

An instant later my cousin Sibylle was conducted into the room. Her face was pale and set, but her large dark eyes were filled with resolution, and she carried herself like a princess.

'Well, mademoiselle, why do you come here? What is it that you want?' asked the Emperor in the brusque manner which he adopted to women, even if he were wooing them.

Sibylle glanced round, and as our eyes met for an instant I felt that my presence had renewed her courage. She looked bravely at the Emperor as she answered him.

'I come, Sire, to implore a favour of you.'

'Your father's daughter has certainly claims upon me, mademoiselle.

What is it that you wish?'

'I do not ask it in my father's name, but in my own. I implore you, Sire, to spare the life of Monsieur Lucien Lesage, who was arrested yesterday upon a charge of treason. He is a student, Sire — a mere dreamer who has lived away from the world and has been made a tool by designing men.'

'A dreamer!' cried the Emperor harshly. 'They are the most dangerous of all.' He took a bundle of notes from his table and glanced them over. 'I presume that he is fortunate enough to be your lover, mademoiselle?'

Sibylle's pale face flushed, and she looked down before the Emperor's keen sardonic glance.

'I have his examination here. He does not come well out of it. I confess that from what I see of the young man's character I should not say that he is worthy of your love.'

'I implore you to spare him, Sire.'

'What you ask is impossible, mademoiselle. I have been conspired against from two sides — by the Bourbons and by the Jacobins. Hitherto I have been too long-suffering, and they have been encouraged by my patience. Since Cadoudal and the Due d'Enghien died the Bourbons have been quiet. Now I must teach the same lesson to these others.'

I was astonished and am still astonished at the passion with which my brave and pure cousin loved this cowardly and low-minded man, though it is but in accordance with that strange law which draws the extremes of nature together. As she heard the Emperor's stern reply the last sign of colour faded from her pale face, and her eyes were dimmed with despairing tears, which gleamed upon her white cheeks like dew upon the petals of a lily.

'For God's sake, Sire! For the love of your mother spare him!' she cried, falling upon her knees at the Emperor's feet. 'I will answer for him that he never offends you again.'

'Tut, tut!' cried Napoleon angrily, turning upon his heel and walking impatiently up and down the room. 'I cannot grant you what you ask, mademoiselle. When I say so once it is finished. I cannot have my decisions in high matters of State affected by the intrusion of women. The Jacobins have been dangerous of late, and an example must be made or we shall have the Faubourg St. Antoine upon our hands once more.'

The Emperors set face and firm manner showed it was hopeless, and yet my cousin persevered as no one but a woman who pleads for her lover would have dared to do.

'He is harmless, Sire.'

'His death will frighten others.'

'Spare him and I will answer for his loyalty.'

'What you ask is impossible.'

Constant and I raised her from the ground.

'That is right, Monsieur de Laval,' said the Emperor. 'This interview can lead to nothing. Remove your cousin from the room!'

But she had again turned to him with a face which showed that even now all hope had not been abandoned.

'Sire,' she cried. 'You say that an example must be made. There is

Toussac — !'

'Ah, if I could lay my hands upon Toussac!'

'He is the dangerous man. It was he and my father who led Lucien on. If an example must be made it should be an example of the guilty rather than of the innocent.'

'They are both guilty. And, besides, we have our hands upon the one but not upon the other.'

'But if I could find him?'

Napoleon thought for a moment.

‘If you do,’ said he, ‘Lesage will be forgiven!’

‘But I cannot do it in a day.’

‘How long do you ask?’

‘A week at the least.’

‘Then he has a respite of a week. If you can find Toussac in the time, Lesage will be pardoned. If not he will die upon the eighth day. It is enough. Monsieur de Laval, remove your cousin, for I have matters of more importance to attend to. I shall expect you one evening at the Pont de Briques, when you are ready to be presented to the Empress.’

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN OF DREAMS

When I had escorted my cousin Sibylle from the presence of the Emperor, I was surprised to find the same young hussar officer waiting outside who had commanded the guard which had brought me to the camp.

‘Well, mademoiselle, what luck?’ he asked excitedly, clanking towards us.

For answer Sibylle shook her head.

‘Ah, I feared as much, for the Emperor is a terrible man. It was brave, indeed, of you to attempt it. I had rather charge an unshaken square upon a spent horse than ask him for anything. But my heart is heavy, mademoiselle, that you should have been unsuccessful.’ His boyish blue eyes filled with tears and his fair moustache drooped in such a deplorable fashion, that I could have laughed had the matter been less serious.

‘Lieutenant Gerard chanced to meet me, and escorted me through the camp,’ said my cousin. ‘He has been kind enough to give me sympathy in my trouble.’

‘And so do I, Sibylle,’ I cried; ‘you carried yourself like an angel, and it is a lucky man who is blessed with your love. I trust that he may be worthy of it.’

She turned cold and proud in an instant when anyone threw a doubt upon this wretched lover of hers.

‘I know him as neither the Emperor nor you can do,’ said she. ‘He has the heart and soul of a poet, and he is too high-minded to suspect the intrigues to which he has fallen a victim. But as to Toussac, I should have no pity upon him, for I know him to be a murderer five times over, and I know also that there will be no peace in France until he has been taken. Cousin Louis, will you help me to do it?’

The lieutenant had been tugging at his moustache and looking me up and down with a jealous eye.

‘Surely, mademoiselle, you will permit me to help you?’ he cried in a piteous voice.

‘I may need you both,’ said she. ‘I will come to you if I do. Now I will ask you to ride with me to the edge of the camp and there to leave me.’

She had a quick imperative way which came charmingly from those sweet womanly lips. The grey horse upon which I had come to the camp was waiting beside that of the hussar, so we were soon in the saddle. When we were clear of the huts my cousin turned to us.

‘I had rather go alone now,’ said she. ‘It is understood, then, that I can rely upon you.’

‘Entirely,’ said I.

‘To the death,’ cried Gerard.

‘It is everything to me to have two brave men at my back,’ said she, and so, with a smile, gave her horse its head and cantered off over the downland in the direction of Grosbois.

For my part I remained in thought for some time, wondering what plan she could have in her head by which she hoped to get upon the track of Toussac. A woman’s wit, spurred by the danger of her lover, might perhaps succeed where Fouche and Savary had failed. When at last I turned my horse I found my young hussar still staring after the distant rider.

‘My faith! There is the woman for you, Etienne!’ he kept repeating. ‘What an eye! What a smile! What a rider! And she is not afraid of the Emperor. Oh, Etienne, here is the woman who is worthy of you!’

These were the little sentences which he kept muttering to himself until she vanished over the hill, when he became conscious at last of my presence.

‘You are mademoiselle’s cousin?’ he asked. ‘You are joined with me in doing something for her. I do not yet know what it is, but I am perfectly ready to do it.’

‘It is to capture Toussac.’

‘Excellent!’

‘In order to save the life of her lover.’

There was a struggle in the face of the young hussar, but his more generous nature won.

‘Sapristi! I will do even that if it will make her the happier!’ he cried, and he shook the hand which I extended towards him. ‘The Hussars of Bercheny are quartered over yonder, where you see the lines of picketed horses. If you will send for Lieutenant Etienne Gerard you will find a sure blade always at your disposal. Let me hear from you then, and the sooner the better!’ He shook his bridle and was off, with youth and gallantry in every line of him, from his red toupet and flowing dolman to the spur which twinkled on his heel.

But for four long days no word came from my cousin as to her quest, nor did I hear from this grim uncle of mine at the Castle of Grosbois. For myself I had gone into the town of Boulogne and had hired such a room as my thin purse could afford over the shop of a baker named Vidal, next to the Church of St. Augustin, in the Rue des Vents. Only last year I went back there under that strange impulse which leads the old to tread once more with dragging feet the same spots which have sounded to the crisp tread of their youth. The room is still there, the very pictures and the plaster head of Jean Bart which used to stand upon the side table. As I stood with my back to the narrow window, I had around me every smallest detail upon which my young eyes had looked; nor was I conscious that my own heart and feelings had undergone much change. And yet there, in the little round glass which faced me, was the long drawn, weary face of an aged man, and out of the window, when I turned, were the bare and lonely downs which had been peopled by that mighty host of a hundred and fifty thousand men. To think that the Grand Army should have vanished away like a shredding cloud upon a windy day, and yet that every sordid detail of a bourgeois lodging should remain unchanged! Truly, if man is not humble it is not for want of having his lesson taught to him by Nature.

My first care after I had chosen my room was to send to Grosbois for that poor little bundle which I had carried ashore with me that squally night from the English lugger. My next was to use the credit which my favourable reception by the Emperor and his assurance of employment had given me in order to obtain such a wardrobe as would enable me to appear without discredit among the richly dressed courtiers and soldiers who surrounded him. It was well known that it was his whim that he should himself be the only plainly-dressed man in the company, and that in the most luxurious times of the Bourbons there was never a period when fine linen and a brave coat were more necessary for a man who would keep in favour. A new court and a young empire cannot afford to take anything for granted.

It was upon the morning of the fifth day that I received a message from Duroc, who was the head of the household, that I was to attend the Emperor at the headquarters in the camp, and that a seat in one of the Imperial carriages would be at my disposal that I might proceed with the Court to

Pont de Briques, there to be present at the reception of the Empress. When I arrived I was shown at once through the large entrance tent, and admitted by Constant into the room beyond, where the Emperor stood with his back to the fire, kicking his heels against the grate. Talleyrand and Berthier were in attendance, and de Meneval, the secretary, sat at the writing-table.

‘Ah, Monsieur de Laval,’ said the Emperor with a friendly nod.

‘Have you heard anything yet of your charming cousin?’

‘Nothing, Sire,’ I answered.

‘I fear that her efforts will be in vain. I wish her every success, for we have no reason at all to fear this miserable poet, while the other is formidable. All the same, an example of some sort must be made.’

The darkness was drawing in, and Constant had appeared with a taper to light the candles, but the Emperor ordered him out.

‘I like the twilight,’ said he. ‘No doubt, Monsieur de Laval, after your long residence in England you find yourself also most at home in a dim light. I think that the brains of these people must be as dense as their fogs, to judge by the nonsense which they write in their accursed papers.’ With one of those convulsive gestures which accompanied his sudden outbursts of passion he seized a sheaf of late London papers from the table, and ground them into the fire with his heel. ‘An editor!’ he cried in the guttural rasping voice which I had heard when I first met him. ‘What is he? A dirty man with a pen in a back office. And he will talk like one of the great Powers of Europe. I have had enough of this freedom of the Press. There are some who would like to see it established in Paris. You are among them, Talleyrand. For my part I see no need for any paper at all except the *Moniteur* by which the Government may make known its decisions to the people.’

‘I am of opinion, Sire,’ said the minister, ‘that it is better to have open foes than secret ones, and that it is less dangerous to shed ink than blood. What matter if your enemies have leave to rave in a few Paris papers, as long as you are at the head of five hundred thousand armed men?’

‘Ta, ta, ta!’ cried the Emperor impatiently. ‘You speak as if I had received my crown from my father the late king. But even if I had, it would be intolerable, this government by newspaper. The Bourbons allowed themselves to be criticised, and where are they now? Had they used their Swiss Guards as I did the Grenadiers upon the eighteenth Brumaire what would have become of their precious National Assembly? There was a time when a bayonet in the stomach of Mirabeau might have settled the whole matter. Later it took the heads of a king and queen and the blood of a hundred thousand people.’

He sat down, and stretched his plump, white-clad legs towards the fire. Through the blackened shreds of the English papers the red glow beat upwards upon the beautiful, pallid, sphinx-like face — the face of a poet, of a philosopher — of anything rather than of a ruthless and ambitious soldier. I have heard folk remark that no two portraits of the Emperor are alike, and the fault does not lie with the artists but with the fact that every varying mood made him a different man. But in his prime, before his features became heavy, I, who have seen sixty years of mankind, can say that in repose I have never looked upon a more beautiful face.

‘You have no dreams and no illusions, Talleyrand,’ said he. ‘You are always practical, cold, and cynical. But with me, when I am in the twilight, as now, or when I hear the sound of the sea, my imagination begins to work. It is the same when I hear some music — especially music which repeats itself again and again like some pieces of Passaniello. They have a strange effect upon me, and I begin to Ossianise. I get large ideas and great aspirations. It is at such times that my mind always turns to the East, that swarming ant-heap of the human race, where alone it is possible to be very great. I renew my dreams of ‘98. I think of the possibility of drilling and arming these vast masses of men, and of precipitating them upon Europe. Had I conquered Syria I should have done this, and the fate of the world was really decided at the siege of Acre. With Egypt at my feet I already pictured myself approaching India, mounted upon an elephant, and holding in my hand a new version of the Koran which I had myself composed. I have been born too late. To be accepted as a world’s conqueror one must claim to be divine. Alexander declared himself to be the son of Jupiter, and no one questioned it. But the world has grown old, and has lost its enthusiasms. What would happen if I were to make the same claim? Monsieur de Talleyrand would smile behind his hand, and the Parisians would write little lampoons upon the walls.’

He did not appear to be addressing us, but rather to be expressing his thoughts aloud, while allowing them to run to the most fantastic and extravagant lengths. This it was which he called Ossianising, because it recalled to him the wild vague dreams of the Gaelic Ossian, whose poems had always had a fascination for him. De Meneval has told me that for an hour at a time he has sometimes talked in this strain of the most intimate thoughts and aspirations of his heart, while his courtiers have stood round in silence waiting for the instant when he would return once more to his practical and incisive self.

‘The great ruler,’ said he, ‘must have the power of religion behind him as well as the power of the sword. It is more important to command the souls than the bodies of men. The Sultan, for example, is the head of the faith as well as of the army. So were some of the Roman Emperors. My position must be incomplete until this is accomplished. At the present instant there are thirty departments in France where the Pope is more powerful than I am. It is only by universal dominion that peace can be assured in the world. When there is only one authority in Europe, seated at Paris, and when all the kings are so many lieutenants who hold their crowns from the central power of France, it is then that the reign of peace will be established. Many powers of equal strength must always lead to struggles until one becomes predominant. Her central position, her wealth and her history, all mark France out as being the power which will control and regulate the others. Germany is divided. Russia is barbarous. England is insular. France only remains.’

I began to understand as I listened to him that my friends in England had not been so far wrong when they had declared that as long as he lived — this little thirty-six year old artilleryman — there could not possibly be any peace in the world. He drank some coffee which Constant had placed upon the small round table at his elbow. Then he leaned back in his chair once more, still staring moodily at the red glow of the fire, with his chin sunk upon his chest.

‘In those days,’ said he, ‘the kings of Europe will walk behind the Emperor of France in order to hold up his train at his coronation. Each of them will have to maintain a palace in Paris, and the city will stretch as far as Versailles. These are the plans which I have made for Paris if she will show herself to be worthy of them. But I have no love for them, these Parisians, and they have none for me, for they cannot forget that I turned my guns upon them once before, and they know that I am ready to do so again. I have made them admire me and fear me, but I have never made them like me. Look what I have done for them. Where are the treasures of Genoa, the pictures and statues of Venice and of the Vatican? They are in the Louvre. The spoils of my victories have gone to decorate her. But they must always be changing, always chattering. They wave their hats at me now, but they would soon be waving their fists if I did not give them something to talk over and to wonder at. When other things are quiet, I have the dome of the Invalides regilded to keep their thoughts from mischief. Louis XIV. gave them wars. Louis XV. gave them the gallantries and scandals of his Court. Louis XVI. gave them nothing, so they cut off his head. It was you who helped to bring him to the scaffold, Talleyrand.'

'No, Sire, I was always a moderate.'

'At least, you did not regret his death.'

'The less so, since it has made room for you,

Sire.'

'Nothing could have held me down, Talleyrand. I was born to reach the highest. It has always been the same with me. I remember when we were arranging the Treaty of Campo Formio — I a young general under thirty — there was a high vacant throne with the Imperial arms in the Commissioner's tent. I instantly sprang up the steps, and threw myself down upon it. I could not endure to think that there was anything above myself. And all the time I knew in my heart all that was going to happen to me. Even in the days when my brother Lucien and I lived in a little room upon a few francs a week, I knew perfectly well that the day would come when I should stand where I am now. And yet I had no prospects and no reason for any great hopes. I was not clever at school. I was only the forty-second out of fifty-eight. At mathematics I had perhaps some ability, but at nothing else. The truth is that I was always dreaming when the others were working. There was nothing to encourage my ambition, for the only thing which I inherited from my father was a weak stomach. Once, when I was very young, I went up to Paris with my father and my sister Caroline. We were in the Rue Richelieu, and we saw the king pass in his carriage. Who would have thought that the little boy from Corsica, who took his hat off and stared, was destined to be the next monarch of France? And yet even then I felt as if that carriage ought to belong to me. What is it, Constant?'

The discreet valet bent down and whispered something to the Emperor.

'Ah, of course,' said he. 'It was an appointment. I had forgotten it.

Is she there?'

'Yes, Sire.'

'In the side room?'

'Yes, Sire.'

Talleyrand and Berthier exchanged glances, and the minister began to move towards the door.

‘No, no, you can remain here,’ said the Emperor. ‘Light the lamps, Constant, and have the carriages ready in half-an-hour. Look over this draft of a letter to the Emperor of Austria, and let me have your observations upon it, Talleyrand. De Meneval, there is a lengthy report here as to the new dockyard at Brest. Extract what is essential from it, and leave it upon my desk at five o’clock to-morrow morning. Berthier, I will have the whole army into the boats at seven. We will see if they can embark within three hours. Monsieur de Laval, you will wait here until we start for Pont de Briques.’ So with a crisp order to each of us, he walked with little swift steps across the room, and I saw his square green back and white legs framed for an instant in the doorway. There was the flutter of a pink skirt beyond, and then the curtains closed behind him.

Berthier stood biting his nails, while Talleyrand looked at him with a slight raising of his bushy eyebrows. De Meneval with a rueful face was turning over the great bundle of papers which had to be copied by morning. Constant, with a noiseless tread, was lighting the candles upon the sconces round the room.

‘Which is it?’ I heard the minister whisper.

‘The girl from the Imperial Opera,’ said Berthier.

‘Is the little Spanish lady out of favour then?’

‘No, I think not. She was here yesterday.’

‘And the other, the Countess?’

‘She has a cottage at Ambleteuse?’

‘But we must have no scandal about the Court,’ said Talleyrand, with a sour smile, recalling the moral sentiments with which the Emperor had reproved him. ‘And now, Monsieur de Laval,’ he added, drawing me aside, ‘I very much wish to hear from you about the Bourbon party in England. You must have heard their views. Do they imagine that they have any chance of success?’

And so for ten minutes he plied me with questions, which showed me clearly that the Emperor had read him aright, and that he was determined, come what might, to be upon the side which won. We were still talking when Constant entered hurriedly, with a look of anxiety and perplexity which I could not have imagined upon so smooth and imperturbable a face.

‘Good Heavens, Monsieur Talleyrand,’ he cried, clasping and unclasping his hands. ‘Such a misfortune! Who could have expected it?’

‘What is it, then, Constant?’

‘Oh, Monsieur, I dare not intrude upon the Emperor. And yet — And yet — The

Empress is outside, and she is coming in.’

CHAPTER XIV

JOSEPHINE

At this unexpected announcement Talleyrand and Berthier looked at each other in silence, and for once the trained features of the great diplomatist, who lived behind a mask, betrayed the fact that he was still capable of emotion. The spasm which passed over them was caused, however, rather by mischievous amusement than by consternation, while Berthier — who had an honest affection for both Napoleon and Josephine — ran frantically to the door as if to bar the Empress from entering. Constant rushed towards the curtains which screened the Emperor's room, and then, losing courage, although he was known to be a stout-hearted man, he came running back to Talleyrand for advice. It was too late now, however, for Roustem the Mameluke had opened the door, and two ladies had entered the room. The first was tall and graceful, with a smiling face, and an affable though dignified manner. She was dressed in a black velvet cloak with white lace at the neck and sleeves, and she wore a black hat with a curling white feather. Her companion was shorter, with a countenance which would have been plain had it not been for the alert expression and large dark eyes, which gave it charm and character. A small black terrier dog had followed them in, but the first lady turned and handed the thin steel chain with which she led it to the Mameluke attendant.

'You had better keep Fortune outside, Roustem,' said she, in a peculiarly sweet musical voice. 'The Emperor is not very fond of dogs, and if we intrude upon his quarters we cannot do less than consult his tastes. Good evening, Monsieur de Talleyrand! Madame de Remusat and I have driven all along the cliffs, and we have stopped as we passed to know if the Emperor is coming to Pont de Briques. But perhaps he has already started. I had expected to find him here.'

'His Imperial Majesty was here a short time ago,' said Talleyrand, bowing and rubbing his hands.

'I hold my *salon* — such a *salon* as Pont de Briques is capable of — this evening, and the Emperor promised me that he would set his work aside for once, and favour us with his presence. I wish we could persuade him to work less, Monsieur de Talleyrand. He has a frame of iron, but he cannot continue in this way. These nervous attacks come more frequently upon him. He will insist upon doing everything, everything himself. It is noble, but it is to be a martyr. I have no doubt that at the present moment — but you have not yet told me where he is, Monsieur de Talleyrand.'

'We expect him every instant, your Majesty.'

'In that case we shall sit down and await his return. Ah, Monsieur de Meneval, how I pity you when I see you among all those papers! I was desolate when Monsieur de Bourrienne deserted the Emperor, but you have more than taken his place. Come up to the fire, Madame de Remusat! Yes, yes, I insist upon it, for I know that you must be cold. Constant, come and put the rug under Madame de Remusat's feet.'

It was by little acts of thoughtfulness and kindness like this that the Empress so endeared herself that she had really no enemies in France, even among those who were most bitterly opposed to her husband. Whether as the consort of the first man in Europe, or as the lonely divorced woman eating her heart out at Malmaison, she was always praised and beloved by those who knew her. Of all the sacrifices which the Emperor ever made to his ambition that of his wife was the one which cost him the greatest struggle and the keenest regret.

Now as she sat before the fire in the same chair which had so recently been occupied by the Emperor, I had an opportunity of studying this person, whose strange fate had raised her from being the daughter of a lieutenant of artillery to the first position among the women of Europe. She was six years older than Napoleon, and on this occasion, when I saw her first, she was in her forty-second year; but at a little distance or in a discreet light, it was no courtier's flattery to say that she might very well have passed for thirty. Her tall, elegant figure was girlish in its supple slimness, and she had an easy and natural grace in every movement, which she inherited with her tropical West Indian blood. Her features were delicate, and I have heard that in her youth she was strikingly beautiful; but, like most Creole women, she had become *passee* in early middle age. She had made a brave fight, however — with art as her ally — against the attacks of time, and her success had been such that when she sat aloof upon a dais or drove past in a procession, she might still pass as a lovely woman. In a small room, however, or in a good light, the crude pinks and whites with which she had concealed her sallow cheeks became painfully harsh and artificial. Her own natural beauty, however, still lingered in that last refuge of beauty — the eyes, which were large, dark, and sympathetic. Her mouth, too, was small and amiable, and her most frequent expression was a smile, which seldom broadened into a laugh, as she had her own reasons for preferring that her teeth should not be seen. As to her bearing, it was so dignified, that if this little West Indian had come straight from the loins of Charlemagne, it could not have been improved upon. Her walk, her glance, the sweep of her dress, the wave of her hand — they had all the happiest mixture of the sweetness of a woman and the condescension of a queen. I watched her with admiration as she leaned forward, picking little pieces of aromatic aloes wood out of the basket and throwing them on to the fire.

‘Napoleon likes the smell of burning aloes,’ said she. ‘There was never anyone who had such a nose as he, for he can detect things which are quite hidden from me.’

‘The Emperor has an excellent nose for many things,’ said Talleyrand.

‘The State contractors have found that out to their cost.’

‘Oh, it is dreadful when he comes to examine accounts — dreadful, Monsieur de Talleyrand! Nothing escapes him. He will make no allowances. Everything must be exact. But who is this young gentleman, Monsieur de Talleyrand? I do not think that he has been presented to me.’

The minister explained in a few words that I had been received into the Emperor’s personal service, and Josephine congratulated me upon it with the most kindly sympathy.

‘It eases my mind so to know that he has brave and loyal men round him. Ever since that dreadful affair of the infernal machine I have always been uneasy if he is away from me. He is really safest in time of war, for it is only then that he is away from the assassins who hate him. And now I understand that a new Jacobin plot has only just been discovered.’

‘This is the same Monsieur de Laval who was there when the conspirator was taken,’ said Talleyrand.

The Empress overwhelmed me with questions, hardly waiting for the answers in her anxiety.

‘But this dreadful man Toussac has not been taken yet,’ she cried. ‘Have I not heard that a young lady is endeavouring to do what has baffled the secret police, and that the freedom of her lover is to be the reward of her success?’

‘She is my cousin, your Imperial Majesty. Mademoiselle Sibylle Bernac is her name.’

‘You have only been in France a few days, Monsieur de Laval,’ said Josephine, smiling, ‘but it seems to me that all the affairs of the Empire are already revolving round you. You must bring this pretty cousin of yours — the Emperor said that she is pretty — to Court with you, and present her to me. Madame de Remusat, you will take a note of the name.’

The Empress had stooped again to the basket of aloes wood which stood beside the fireplace. Suddenly I saw her stare hard at something, and then, with a little cry of surprise, she stooped and lifted an object from the carpet. It was the Emperor’s soft flat beaver with the little tricolour cockade. Josephine sprang up, and looked from the hat in her hand to the imperturbable face of the minister.

‘How is this, Monsieur de Talleyrand,’ she cried, and the dark eyes began to shine with anger and suspicion. ‘You said to me that the Emperor was out, and here is his hat!’

‘Pardon me, your Imperial Majesty, I did not say that he was out.’

‘What did you say then?’

‘I said that he left the room a short time before.’

‘You are endeavouring to conceal something from me,’ she cried, with the quick instinct of a woman.

‘I assure you that I tell you all I know.’

The Empress’s eyes darted from face to face.

‘Marshal Berthier,’ she cried, ‘I insist upon your telling me this instant where the Emperor is, and what he is doing.’

The slow-witted soldier stammered and twisted his cocked hat about.

‘I know no more than Monsieur de Talleyrand does,’ said he; ‘the Emperor left us some time ago.’

‘By which door?’

Poor Berthier was more confused than ever.

‘Really, your Imperial Majesty, I cannot undertake to say by which door it was that the Emperor quitted the apartment.’

Josephine’s eyes flashed round at me, and my heart shrunk within me as I thought that she was about to ask me that same dreadful question. But I had just time to breathe one prayer to the good Saint Ignatius, who has always been gracious to our family, and the danger passed.

‘Come, Madame de Remusat,’ said she. ‘If these gentlemen will not tell us we shall very soon find out for ourselves.’

She swept with great dignity towards the curtained door, followed at the distance of a few yards by her waiting lady, whose frightened face and lagging, unwilling steps showed that she perfectly appreciated the situation. Indeed, the Emperor’s open infidelities, and the public scenes to which they gave rise, were so notorious, that even in Ashford they had reached our ears. Napoleon’s self-confidence and his contempt of the world had the effect of making him careless as to what was thought or said of him, while Josephine, when she was carried away by jealousy, lost all the dignity and restraint which usually marked her conduct; so between them they gave some embarrassing moments to those who were about them. Talleyrand turned away with his fingers over his lips, while Berthier, in an agony of apprehension, continued to double up and to twist the cocked hat which he held between his hands. Only Constant, the faithful valet, ventured to intervene between his mistress and the fatal door.

‘If your Majesty will resume your seat I shall inform the Emperor that you are here,’ said he, with two deprecating hands outstretched.

‘Ah, then he *is* there!’ she cried furiously. ‘I see it all! I understand it all! But I will expose him — I will reproach him with his perfidy! Let me pass, Constant! How dare you stand in my way?’

‘Allow me to announce you, your Majesty.’

‘I shall announce myself.’ With swift undulations of her beautiful figure she darted past the protesting valet, parted the curtains, threw open the door, and vanished into the next room.

She had seemed a creature full of fire and of spirit as, with a flush which broke through the paint upon her cheeks, and with eyes which gleamed with the just anger of an outraged wife, she forced her way into her husband’s presence. But she was a woman of change and impulse, full of little squirts of courage and corresponding reactions into cowardice. She had hardly vanished from our sight when there was a harsh roar, like an angry beast, and next instant Josephine came flying into the room again, with the Emperor, inarticulate with passion, raving at her heels. So frightened was she, that she began to run towards the fireplace, upon which Madame de Remusat, who had no wish to form a rearguard upon such an occasion, began running also, and the two of them, like a pair of startled hens, came rustling and fluttering back to the seats which they had left. There they cowered whilst the Emperor, with a convulsed face and a torrent of camp-fire oaths, stamped and raged about the room.

‘You, Constant, you!’ he shouted; ‘is this the way in which you serve me? Have you no sense then — no discretion? Am I never to have any privacy? Must I eternally submit to be spied upon by women? Is everyone else to have liberty, and I only to have none? As to you, Josephine, this finishes it all. I had hesitations before, but now I have none. This brings everything to an end between us.’

We would all, I am sure, have given a good deal to slip from the room — at least, my own embarrassment far exceeded my interest — but the Emperor from his lofty standpoint cared as little about our presence as if we had been so many articles of furniture. In fact, it was one of this strange man’s peculiarities that it was just those delicate and personal scenes with which privacy is usually associated that he preferred to have in public, for he knew that his reproaches had an additional sting when they fell upon other ears besides those of his victim. From his wife to his groom there was not one of those who were about him who did not live in dread of being held up to ridicule and infamy before a smiling crowd, whose amusement was only tempered by the reflection that each of them might be the next to endure the same exposure.

As to Josephine, she had taken refuge in a woman’s last resource, and was crying bitterly, with her graceful neck stooping towards her knees and her two hands over her face. Madame de Remusat was weeping also, and in every pause of his hoarse scolding — for his voice was very hoarse and raucous when he was angry — there came the soft hissing and clicking of their sobs. Sometimes his fierce taunts would bring some reply from the Empress, some gentle reproof to him for his gallantries, but each remonstrance only excited him to a fresh rush of vituperation. In one of his outbursts he threw his snuff-box with a crash upon the floor as a spoiled child would hurl down its toys.

‘Morality!’ he cried, ‘morality was not made for me, and I was not made for morality. I am a man apart, and I accept nobody’s conditions. I tell you always, Josephine, that these are the foolish phrases of mediocre people who wish to fetter the great. They do not apply to me. I will never consent to frame my conduct by the puerile arrangements of society.’

‘Have you no feeling then?’ sobbed the Empress.

‘A great man is not made for feeling. It is for him to decide what he shall do, and then to do it without interference from anyone. It is your place, Josephine, to submit to all my fancies, and you should think it quite natural that I should allow myself some latitude.’

It was a favourite device of the Emperor’s, when he was in the wrong upon one point, to turn the conversation round so as to get upon some other one on which he was in the right. Having worked off the first explosion of his passion he now assumed the offensive, for in argument, as in war, his instinct was always to attack.

‘I have been looking over Lenormand’s accounts, Josephine,’ said he. ‘Are you aware how many dresses you have had last year? You have had a hundred and forty — no less — and many of them cost as much as twenty-five thousand livres. I am told that you have six hundred dresses in your wardrobes, many of which have hardly ever been used. Madame de Remusat knows that what I say is true. She cannot deny it.’

‘You like me to dress well, Napoleon.’

‘I will not have such monstrous extravagance. I could have two regiments of cuirassiers, or a fleet of frigates, with the money which you squander upon foolish silks and furs. It might turn the fortunes of a campaign. Then again, Josephine, who gave you permission to order that parure of diamonds and sapphires from Lefebvre? The bill has been sent to me and I have refused to pay for it. If he applies again, I shall have him marched to prison between a file of grenadiers, and your milliner shall accompany him there.’

The Emperor’s fits of anger, although tempestuous, were never very prolonged. The curious convulsive wriggle of one of his arms, which always showed when he was excited, gradually died away, and after looking for some time at the papers of de Meneval — who had written away like an automaton during all this uproar — he came across to the fire with a smile upon his lips, and a brow from which the shadow had departed.

‘You have no excuse for extravagance, Josephine,’ said he, laying his hand upon her shoulder. ‘Diamonds and fine dresses are very necessary to an ugly woman in order to make her attractive, but *you* cannot need them for such a purpose. You had no fine dresses when first I saw you in the Rue Chautereine, and yet there was no woman in the world who ever attracted me so. Why will you vex me, Josephine, and make me say things which seem unkind? Drive back, little one, to Pont de Briques, and see that you do not catch cold.’

‘You will come to the salon, Napoleon?’ asked the Empress, whose bitterest resentment seemed to vanish in an instant at the first kindly touch from his hand. She still held her handkerchief before her eyes, but it was chiefly, I think, to conceal the effect which her tears had had upon her cheeks.

‘Yes, yes, I will come. Our carriages will follow yours. See the ladies into the berline, Constant. Have you ordered the embarkation of the troops, Berthier? Come here, Talleyrand, for I wish to describe my views about the future of Spain and Portugal. Monsieur de Laval, you may escort the Empress to Pont de Briques, where I shall see you at the reception.’

CHAPTER XV

THE RECEPTION OF THE EMPRESS

Pont de Briques is but a small village, and this sudden arrival of the Court, which was to remain for some weeks, had crammed it with visitors. It would have been very much simpler to have come to Boulogne, where there were more suitable buildings and better accommodation, but Napoleon had named Pont de Briques, so Pont de Briques it had to be. The word impossible was not permitted amongst those who had to carry out his wishes. So an army of cooks and footmen settled upon the little place, and then there arrived the dignitaries of the new Empire, and then the ladies of the Court, and then their admirers from the camp. The Empress had a chateau for her accommodation. The rest quartered themselves in cottages or where they best might, and waited ardently for the moment which was to take them back to the comforts of Versailles or Fontainebleau.

The Empress had graciously offered me a seat in her berline, and all the way to the village, entirely forgetful apparently of the scene through which she passed, she chatted away, asking me a thousand personal questions about myself and my affairs, for a kindly curiosity in the doings of everyone around her was one of her most marked characteristics. Especially was she interested in Eugenie, and as the subject was one upon which I was equally interested in talking it ended in a rhapsody upon my part, amid little sympathetic ejaculations from the Empress and titterings from Madame de Remusat.

‘But you must certainly bring her over to the Court!’ cried the kindly woman. ‘Such a paragon of beauty and of virtue must not be allowed to waste herself in this English village. Have you spoken about her to the Emperor?’

‘I found that he knew all about her, your Majesty.’

‘He knows all about everything. Oh, what a man he is! You heard him about those diamonds and sapphires. Lefebvre gave me his word that no one should know of it but ourselves, and that I should pay at my leisure, and yet you see that the Emperor knew. But what did he say, Monsieur de Laval?'

'He said that my marriage should be his affair.'

Josephine shook her head and groaned.

'But this is serious, Monsieur de Laval. He is capable of singling out any one of the ladies of the Court and marrying you to her within a week. It is a subject upon which he will not listen to argument. He has brought about some extraordinary matches in this way. But I will speak to the Emperor before I return to Paris, and I will see what I can arrange for you.'

I was still endeavouring to thank her for her sympathy and kindness when the berline rattled up the drive and pulled up at the entrance to the chateau, where the knot of scarlet footmen and the bearskins of two sentries from the Guards announced the Imperial quarters. The Empress and her lady hurried away to prepare their toilets for the evening, and I was shown at once into the salon, in which the guests had already begun to assemble.

This was a large square room furnished as modestly as the sitting-room of a provincial gentleman would be likely to be. The wall-paper was gloomy, and the furniture was of dark mahogany upholstered in faded blue nankeen, but there were numerous candles in candelabra upon the tables and in sconces upon the walls which gave an air of festivity even to these sombre surroundings. Out of the large central room were several smaller ones in which card-tables had been laid out, and the doorways between had been draped with Oriental chintz. A number of ladies and gentlemen were standing about, the former in the high evening dresses to which the Emperor had given his sanction, the latter about equally divided between the civilians in black court costumes and the soldiers in their uniforms. Bright colours and graceful draperies predominated, for in spite of his lectures about economy the Emperor was very harsh to any lady who did not dress in a manner which would sustain the brilliancy of his Court. The prevailing fashions gave an opening to taste and to display, for the simple classical costumes had died out with the Republic, and Oriental dresses had taken their place as a compliment to the Conqueror of Egypt. Lucretia had changed to Zuleika, and the salons which had reflected the austerity of old Rome had turned suddenly into so many Eastern harems.

On entering the room I had retired into a corner, fearing that I should find none there whom I knew; but someone plucked at my arm, and turning round I found myself looking into the yellow inscrutable face of my uncle

Bernac. He seized my unresponsive hand and wrung it with a false cordiality.

‘My dear Louis,’ said he. ‘It was really the hope of meeting you here which brought me over from Grosbois — although you can understand that living so far from Paris I cannot afford to miss such an opportunity of showing myself at Court. Nevertheless I can assure you that it was of you principally that I was thinking. I hear that you have had a splendid reception from the Emperor, and that you have been taken into his personal service. I had spoken to him about you, and I made him fully realise that if he treats you well he is likely to coax some of the other young emigres into his service.’

I was convinced that he was lying, but none the less I had to bow and utter a few words of cold thanks.

‘I see that you still bear me some grudge for what passed between us the other day,’ said he, ‘but really, my dear Louis, you have no occasion to do so. It was your own good which I had chiefly at heart. I am neither a young nor a strong man, Louis, and my profession, as you have seen, is a dangerous one. There is my child, and there is my estate. Who takes one, takes both. Sibylle is a charming girl, and you must not allow yourself to be prejudiced against her by any ill temper which she may have shown towards me. I will confess that she had some reason to be annoyed at the turn which things had taken. But I hope to hear that you have now thought better upon this matter.’

‘I have never thought about it at all, and I beg that you will not discuss it,’ said I curtly.

He stood in deep thought for a few moments, and then he raised his evil face and his cruel grey eyes to mine.

‘Well, well, that is settled then,’ said he. ‘But you cannot bear me a grudge for having wished you to be my successor. Be reasonable, Louis. You must acknowledge that you would now be six feet deep in the salt-marsh with your neck broken if I had not stood your friend, at some risk to myself. Is that not true?’

‘You had your own motive for that,’ said I.

‘Very likely. But none the less I saved you. Why should you bear me ill will? It is no fault of mine if I hold your estate.’

‘It is not on account of that.’

‘Why is it then?’

I could have explained that it was because he had betrayed his comrades, because his daughter hated him, because he had ill-used his wife, because my father regarded him as the source of all his troubles — but the salon of the Empress was no place for a family quarrel, so I merely shrugged my shoulders, and was silent.

‘Well, I am very sorry,’ said he, ‘for I had the best of intentions towards you. I could have advanced you, for there are few men in France who exercise more influence. But I have one request to make to you.’

‘What is that, sir?’

‘I have a number of personal articles, belonging to your father — his sword, his seals, a deskful of letters, some silver plate — such things in short as you would wish to keep in memory of him. I should be glad if you will come to Grosbois — if it is only for one night — and look over these things, choosing what you wish to take away. My conscience will then be clear about them.’

I promised readily that I would do so.

‘And when would you come?’ he asked eagerly. Something in the tone of his voice aroused my suspicions, and glancing at him I saw exultation in his eyes. I remembered the warning of Sibylle.

‘I cannot come until I have learned what my duties with the Emperor are to be. When that is settled I shall come.’

‘Very good. Next week perhaps, or the week afterwards. I shall expect you eagerly, Louis. I rely upon your promise, for a Laval was never known to break one.’ With another unanswered squeeze of my hand, he slipped off among the crowd, which was growing denser every instant in the salon.

I was standing in silence thinking over this sinister invitation of my uncle’s, when I heard my own name, and, looking up, I saw de Caulaincourt, with his brown handsome face and tall elegant figure, making his way towards me.

‘It is your first entrance at Court, is it not, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he, in his high-bred cordial manner; ‘you should not feel lonely, for there are certainly many friends of your father here who will be overjoyed to make the acquaintance of your father’s son. From what de Meneval told me I gather that you know hardly anyone — even by sight.’

‘I know the Marshals,’ said I; ‘I saw them all at the council in the Emperor’s tent. There is Ney with the red head. And there is Lefebvre with his singular mouth, and Bernadotte with the beak of a bird of prey.’

‘Precisely. And that is Rapp, with the round, bullet head. He is talking to Junot, the handsome dark man with the whiskers. These poor soldiers are very unhappy.’

‘Why so?’ I asked.

‘Because they are all men who have risen from nothing. This society and etiquette terrifies them much more than all the dangers of war. When they can hear their sabres clashing against their big boots they feel at home, but when they have to stand about with their cocked hats under their arms, and have to pick their spurs out of the ladies’ trains, and talk about David’s picture or Passaniello’s opera, it prostrates them. The Emperor will not even permit them to swear, although he has no scruples upon his own account. He tells them to be soldiers with the army, and courtiers with the Court, but the poor fellows cannot help being soldiers all the time. Look at Rapp with his twenty wounds, endeavouring to exchange little delicate drolleries with that young lady. There, you see, he has said something which would have passed very well with a vivandiere, but it has made her fly to her mamma, and he is scratching his head, for he cannot imagine how he has offended her.’

‘Who is the beautiful woman with the white dress and the tiara of diamonds?’ I asked.

‘That is Madame Murat, who is the sister of the Emperor. Caroline is beautiful, but she is not as pretty as her sister Marie, whom you see over yonder in the corner. Do you see the tall stately dark-eyed old lady with whom she is talking? That is Napoleon’s mother — a wonderful woman, the source of all their strength, shrewd, brave, vigorous, forcing respect from everyone who knows her. She is as careful and as saving as when she was the wife of a small country gentleman in Corsica, and it is no secret that she has little confidence in the permanence of the present state of things, and that she is always laying by for an evil day. The Emperor does not know whether to be amused or exasperated by her precautions. Well, Murat, I suppose we shall see you riding across the Kentish hop-fields before long.’

The famous soldier had paused opposite to us, and shook hands with my companion. His elegant well-knit figure, large fiery eyes, and noble bearing made this innkeeper’s boy a man who would have drawn attention and admiration to himself in any assembly in Europe. His mop of curly hair and thick red lips gave that touch of character and individuality to his appearance which redeem a handsome face from insipidity.

‘I am told that it is devilish bad country for cavalry — all cut up into hedges and ditches,’ said he. ‘The roads are good, but the fields are impossible. I hope that we are going soon, Monsieur de Caulaincourt, for our men will all settle down as gardeners if this continues. They are learning more about watering-pots and spuds than about horses and sabres.’

‘The army, I hear, is to embark to-morrow.’

‘Yes, yes, but you know very well that they will disembark again upon the wrong side of the Channel. Unless Villeneuve scatters the English fleet, nothing can be attempted.’

‘Constant tells me that the Emperor was whistling “Malbrook” all the time that he was dressing this morning, and that usually comes before a move.’

‘It was very clever of Constant to tell what tune it was which the Emperor was whistling,’ said Murat, laughing. ‘For my part I do not think that he knows the difference between the “Malbrook” and the “Marseillaise.” Ah, here is the Empress — and how charming she is looking!’

Josephine had entered, with several of her ladies in her train, and the whole assembly rose to do her honour. The Empress was dressed in an evening gown of rose-coloured tulle, spangled with silver stars — an effect which might have seemed meretricious and theatrical in another woman, but which she carried off with great grace and dignity. A little sheaf of diamond wheat-ears rose above her head, and swayed gently as she walked. No one could entertain more charmingly than she, for she moved about among the people with her amiable smile, setting everybody at their ease by her kindly natural manner, and by the conviction which she gave them that she was thoroughly at her ease herself. ‘How amiable she is!’ I exclaimed. ‘Who could help loving her?’

‘There is only one family which can resist her,’ said de Caulaincourt, glancing round to see that Murat was out of hearing. ‘Look at the faces of the Emperor’s sisters.’

I was shocked when I followed his direction to see the malignant glances with which these two beautiful women were following the Empress as she walked about the room. They whispered together and tittered maliciously.

Then Madame Murat turned to her mother behind her, and the stern old lady tossed her haughty head in derision and contempt.

‘They feel that Napoleon is theirs and that they ought to have everything. They cannot bear to think that she is Her Imperial Majesty and they are only Her Highness. They all hate her, Joseph, Lucien — all of them. When they had to carry her train at the coronation they tried to trip her up, and the Emperor had to interfere. Oh yes, they have the real Corsican blood, and they are not very comfortable people to get along with.’

But in spite of the evident hatred of her husband’s family, the Empress appeared to be entirely unconcerned and at her ease as she strolled about among the groups of her guests with a kindly glance and a pleasant word for each of them. A tall, soldierly man, brown-faced and moustached, walked beside her, and she occasionally laid her hand with a caressing motion upon his arm.

‘That is her son, Eugene de Beauharnais,’ said my companion.

‘Her son!’ I exclaimed, for he seemed to me to be the older of the two.

De Caulaincourt smiled at my surprise.

‘You know she married Beauharnais when she was very young — in fact she was hardly sixteen. She has been sitting in her boudoir while her son has been baking in Egypt and Syria, so that they have pretty well bridged over the gap between them. Do you see the tall, handsome, clean-shaven man who has just kissed Josephine’s hand. That is Talma the famous actor. He once helped Napoleon at a critical moment of his career, and the Emperor has never forgotten the debt which the Consul contracted. That is really the secret of Talleyrand’s power. He lent Napoleon a hundred thousand francs before he set out for Egypt, and now, however much he distrusts him, the Emperor cannot forget that old kindness. I have never known him to abandon a friend or to forgive an enemy. If you have once served him well you may do what you like afterwards. There is one of his coachmen who is drunk from morning to night. But he gained the cross at Marengo, and so he is safe.’

De Caulaincourt had moved on to speak with some lady, and I was again left to my own thoughts, which turned upon this extraordinary man, who presented himself at one moment as a hero and at another as a spoiled child, with his nobler and his worse side alternating so rapidly that I had no sooner made up my mind about him than some new revelation would destroy my views and drive me to some fresh conclusion. That he was necessary to France was evident, and that in serving him one was serving one’s country. But was it an honour or a penance to serve him? Was he worthy merely of obedience, or might love and esteem be added to it? These were the questions which we found it difficult to answer — and some of us will never have answered them up to the end of time.

The company had now lost all appearance of formality, and even the soldiers seemed to be at their ease. Many had gone into the side rooms, where they had formed tables for whist and for vingt-et-un. For my own part I was quite entertained by watching the people, the beautiful women, the handsome men, the bearers of names which had been heard of in no previous generation, but which now rung round the world. Immediately in front of me were Ney, Lannes, and Murat chatting together and laughing with the freedom of the camp. Of the three, two were destined to be executed in cold blood, and the third to die upon the battle-field, but no coming shadow ever cast a gloom upon their cheery, full-blooded lives.

A small, silent, middle-aged man, who looked unhappy and ill at ease, had been leaning against the wall beside me. Seeing that he was as great a stranger as myself, I addressed some observation to him, to which he replied with great good-will, but in the most execrable French.

‘You don’t happen to understand English?’ he asked. ‘I’ve never met one living soul in this country who did.’

‘Oh yes, I understand it very well, for I have lived most of my life over yonder. But surely you are not English, sir? I understood that every Englishman in France was under lock and key ever since the breach of the treaty of Amiens.’

‘No, I am not English,’ he answered, ‘I am an American. My name is Robert Fulton, and I have to come to these receptions because it is the only way in which I can keep myself in the memory of the Emperor, who is examining some inventions of mine which will make great changes in naval warfare.’

Having nothing else to do I asked this curious American what his inventions might be, and his replies very soon convinced me that I had to do with a madman. He had some idea of making a ship go against the wind and against the current by means of coal or wood which was to be burned inside of her. There was some other nonsense about floating barrels full of gunpowder which would blow a ship to pieces if she struck against them. I listened to him at the time with an indulgent smile, but now looking back from the point of vantage of my old age I can see that not all the warriors and statesmen in that room — no, not even the Emperor himself — have had as great an effect upon the history of the world as that silent American who looked so drab and so commonplace among the gold-slashed uniforms and the Oriental dresses.

But suddenly our conversation was interrupted by a hush in the room — such a cold, uncomfortable hush as comes over a roomful of happy, romping children when a grave-faced elder comes amongst them. The chatting and the laughter died away. The sound of the rustling cards and of the clicking counters had ceased in the other rooms. Everyone, men and women, had risen to their feet with a constrained expectant expression upon their faces. And there in the doorway were the pale face and the green coat with the red cordon across the white waistcoat.

There was no saying how he might behave upon these occasions. Sometimes he was capable of being the merriest and most talkative of the company, but this was rather in his consular than in his imperial days. On the other hand he might be absolutely ferocious, with an insulting observation for everyone with whom he came in contact. As a rule he was between these two extremes, silent, morose, ill at ease, shooting out curt little remarks which made everyone uncomfortable. There was always a sigh of relief when he would pass from one room into the next.

On this occasion he seemed to have not wholly recovered from the storm of the afternoon, and he looked about him with a brooding eye and a lowering brow. It chanced that I was not very far from the door, and that his glance fell upon me.

‘Come here, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he. He laid his hand upon my shoulder and turned to a big, gaunt man who had accompanied him into the room. ‘Look here, Cambaceres, you simpleton,’ said he. ‘You always said that the old families would never come back, and that they would settle in England as the Huguenots have done. You see that, as usual, you have miscalculated, for here is the heir of the de Lavals come to offer his services. Monsieur de Laval, you are now my aide-de-camp, and I beg you to keep with me wherever I go.’

This was promotion indeed, and yet I had sense enough to know that it was not for my own sweet sake that the Emperor had done it, but in order to encourage others to follow me. My conscience approved what I had done, for no sordid motive and nothing but the love of my country had prompted me; but now, as I walked round behind Napoleon, I felt humiliated and ashamed, like a prisoner led behind the car of his captor.

And soon there was something else to make me ashamed, and that was the conduct of him whose servant I had become. His manners were outrageous. As he had himself said, it was his nature to be always first, and this being so he resented those courtesies and gallantries by which men are accustomed to disguise from women the fact that they are the weaker sex. The Emperor, unlike Louis XIV., felt that even a temporary and conventional attitude of humility towards a woman was too great a condescension from his own absolute supremacy. Chivalry was among those conditions of society which he refused to accept.

To the soldiers he was amiable enough, with a nod and a joke for each of them. To his sisters also he said a few words, though rather in the tone of a drill sergeant to a pair of recruits. It was only when the Empress had joined him that his ill-humour came to a head.

‘I wish you would not wear those wisps of pink about your head, Josephine,’ said he, pettishly. ‘All that women have to think about is how to dress themselves, and yet they cannot even do that with moderation or taste. If I see you again in such a thing I will thrust it in the fire as I did your shawl the other day.’

‘You are so hard to please, Napoleon. You like one day what you cannot abide the next. But I will certainly change it if it offends you,’ said Josephine, with admirable patience.

The Emperor took a few steps between the people, who had formed a lane for us to pass through. Then he stopped and looked over his shoulder at the Empress.

‘How often have I told you, Josephine, that I cannot tolerate fat women.’

‘I always bear it in mind, Napoleon.’

‘Then why is Madame de Chevreux present?’

‘But surely, Napoleon, madame is not very fat.’

‘She is fatter than she should be. I should prefer not to see her. Who is this?’ He had paused before a young lady in a blue dress, whose knees seemed to be giving way under her as the terrible Emperor transfixed her with his searching eyes.

‘This is Mademoiselle de Bergerot.’

‘How old are you?’

‘Twenty-three, sire.’

‘It is time that you were married. Every woman should be married at twenty-three. How is it that you are not married?’

The poor girl appeared to be incapable of answering, so the Empress gently remarked that it was to the young men that that question should be addressed.

‘Oh, that is the difficulty, is it?’ said the Emperor. ‘We must look about and find a husband for you.’ He turned, and to my horror I found his eyes fixed with a questioning gaze upon my face.

‘We have to find you a wife also, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he. ‘Well, well, we shall see — we shall see. What is your name?’ to a quiet refined man in black.

‘I am Gretry, the musician.’

‘Yes, yes, I remember you. I have seen you a hundred times, but I can never recall your name. Who are you?’

‘I am Joseph de Chenier.’

‘Of course. I have seen your tragedy. I have forgotten the name of it, but it was not good. You have written some other poetry, have you not?’

‘Yes, sire. I had your permission to dedicate my last volume to you.’

‘Very likely, but I have not had time to read it. It is a pity that we have no poets now in France, for the deeds of the last few years would have given a subject for a Homer or a Virgil. It seems that I can create kingdoms but not poets. Whom do you consider to be the greatest French writer?’

‘Racine, sire.’

‘Then you are a blockhead, for Corneille was infinitely greater. I have no ear for metre or trivialities of the kind, but I can sympathise with the spirit of poetry, and I am conscious that Corneille is far the greatest of poets. I would have made him my prime minister had he had the good fortune to live in my epoch. It is his intellect which I admire, his knowledge of the human heart, and his profound feeling. Are you writing anything at present?’

‘I am writing a tragedy upon Henry IV., sire.’

‘It will not do, sir. It is too near the present day, and I will not have politics upon the stage. Write a play about Alexander. What is your name?’

He had pitched upon the same person whom he had already addressed.

‘I am still Gretry, the musician,’ said he meekly.

The Emperor flushed for an instant at the implied rebuke. He said nothing, however, but passed on to where several ladies were standing together near the door of the card-room.

‘Well, madame,’ said he to the nearest of them, ‘I hope you are behaving rather better. When last I heard from Paris your doings were furnishing the Quartier St. Germain with a good deal of amusement and gossip.’

‘I beg that your Majesty will explain what you mean,’ said she with spirit.

‘They had coupled your name with that of Colonel Lasalle.’

‘It is a foul calumny, sire.’

‘Very possibly, but it is awkward when so many calumnies cluster round one person. You are certainly a most unfortunate lady in that respect. You had a scandal once before with General Rapp’s aide-de-camp. This must come to an end. What is your name?’ he continued, turning to another.

‘Mademoiselle de Perigord.’

‘Your age?’

‘Twenty.’

‘You are very thin and your elbows are red. My God, Madame Boismaison, are we never to see anything but this same grey gown and the red turban with the diamond crescent?’

‘I have never worn it before, sire?’

‘Then you had another the same, for I am weary of the sight of it. Let me never see you in it again. Monsieur de Remusat, I make you a good allowance. Why do you not spend it?’

‘I do, sire.’

‘I hear that you have been putting down your carriage. I do not give you money to hoard in a bank, but I give it to you that you may keep up a fitting appearance with it. Let me hear that your carriage is back in the coach-house when I return to Paris. Junot, you rascal, I hear that you have been gambling and losing.’

‘The most infernal run of luck, sire,’ said the soldier, ‘I give you my word that the ace fell four times running.’

‘Ta, ta, you are a child, with no sense of the value of money. How much do you owe?’

‘Forty thousand, sire.’

‘Well, well, go to Lebrun and see what he can do for you. After all, we were together at Toulon.’

‘A thousand thanks, sire.’

‘Tut! You and Rapp and Lasalle are the spoiled children of the army. But no more cards, you rascal! I do not like low dresses, Madame Picard. They spoil even pretty women, but in you they are inexcusable. Now, Josephine, I am going to my room, and you can come in half an hour and read me to sleep. I am tired to-night, but I came to your salon, since you desired that I should help you in welcoming and entertaining your guests. You can remain here, Monsieur de Laval, for your presence will not be necessary until I send you my orders.’

And so the door closed behind him, and with a long sigh of relief from everyone, from the Empress to the waiter with the negus, the friendly chatter began once more, with the click of the counters and the rustle of the cards just as they had been before he came to help in the entertainment.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LIBRARY OF GROSBOIS

And now, my friends, I am coming to the end of those singular adventures which I encountered upon my arrival in France, adventures which might have been of some interest in themselves had I not introduced the figure of the Emperor, who has eclipsed them all as completely as the sun eclipses the stars. Even now, you see, after all these years, in an old man's memoirs, the Emperor is still true to his traditions, and will not brook any opposition. As I draw his words and his deeds I feel that my own poor story withers before them. And yet if it had not been for that story I should not have had an excuse for describing to you my first and most vivid impressions of him, and so it has served a purpose after all. You must bear with me now while I tell you of our expedition to the Red Mill and of what befell in the library of Grosbois.

Two days had passed away since the reception of the Empress Josephine, and only one remained of the time which had been allowed to my cousin Sibylle in which she might save her lover, and capture the terrible Toussac. For my own part I was not so very anxious that she should save this craven lover of hers, whose handsome face belied the poor spirit within him. And yet this lonely beautiful woman, with the strong will and the loyal heart, had touched my feelings, and I felt that I would help her to anything — even against my own better judgment, if she should desire it. It was then with a mixture of feelings that late in the afternoon I saw her and General Savary enter the little room in which I lodged at Boulogne. One glance at her flushed cheeks and triumphant eyes told me that she was confident in her own success.

'I told you that I would find him, Cousin Louis!' she cried; 'I have come straight to you, because you said that you would help in the taking of him.'

'Mademoiselle insists upon it that I should not use soldiers,' said Savary, shrugging his shoulders.

'No, no, no,' she cried with vehemence. 'It has to be done with discretion, and at the sight of a soldier he would fly to some hiding-place, where you would never be able to follow him. I cannot afford to run a risk. There is too much already at stake.’

‘In such an affair three men are as useful as thirty,’ said Savary. ‘I should not in any case have employed more. You say that you have another friend, Lieutenant — ?’

‘Lieutenant Gerard of the Hussars of Bercheny.’

‘Quite so. There is not a more gallant officer in the Grand Army than Etienne Gerard. The three of us, Monsieur de Laval, should be equal to any adventure.’

‘I am at your disposal.’

‘Tell us then, mademoiselle, where Toussac is hiding.’

‘He is hiding at the Red Mill.’

‘But we have searched it, I assure you that he is not there.’

‘When did you search it?’

‘Two days ago.’

‘Then he has come there since. I knew that Jeanne Portal loved him. I have watched her for six days. Last night she stole down to the Red Mill with a basket of wine and fruit. All the morning I have seen her eyes sweeping the country side, and I have read the terror in them whenever she has seen the twinkle of a bayonet. I am as sure that Toussac is in the mill as if I had seen him with my own eyes.’

‘In that case there is not an instant to be lost,’ cried Savary. ‘If he knows of a boat upon the coast he is as likely as not to slip away after dark and make his escape for England. From the Red Mill one can see all the surrounding country, and Mademoiselle is right in thinking that a large body of soldiers would only warn him to escape.’

‘What do you propose then?’ I asked.

‘That you meet us at the south gate of the camp in an hour’s time dressed as you are. You might be any gentleman travelling upon the high road. I shall see Gerard, and we shall adopt some suitable disguise. Bring your pistols, for it is with the most desperate man in France we have to do. We shall have a horse at your disposal.’

The setting sun lay dull and red upon the western horizon, and the white chalk cliffs of the French coast had all flushed into pink when I found myself once more at the gate of the Boulogne Camp. There was no sign of my companions, but a tall man, dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons like a small country farmer, was tightening the girth of a magnificent black horse, whilst a little further on a slim young ostler was waiting by the roadside, holding the bridles of two others. It was only when I recognised one of the pair as the horse which I had ridden on my first coming to camp that I answered the smile upon the keen handsome face of the ostler, and saw the swarthy features of Savary under the broad-brimmed hat of the farmer.

‘I think that we may travel without fearing to excite suspicion,’ said he. ‘Crook that straight back of yours a little, Gerard! And now we shall push upon our way, or we may find that we are too late.’

My life has had its share of adventures, and yet, somehow, this ride stands out above the others.

There over the waters I could dimly see the loom of the English coast, with its suggestions of dreamy villages, humming bees, and the pealing of Sunday bells. I thought of the long, white High Street of Ashford, with its red brick houses, and the inn with the great swinging sign. All my life had been spent in these peaceful surroundings, and now, here I was with a spirited horse between my knees, two pistols peeping out of my holsters, and a commission upon which my whole future might depend, to arrest the most redoubtable conspirator in France. No wonder that, looking back over many dangers and many vicissitudes, it is still that evening ride over the short crisp turf of the downs which stands out most clearly in my memory. One becomes *blase* to adventure, as one becomes *blase* to all else which the world can give, save only the simple joys of home, and to taste the full relish of such an expedition one must approach it with the hot blood of youth still throbbing in one’s veins.

Our route, when we had left the uplands of Boulogne behind us, lay along the skirts of that desolate marsh in which I had wandered, and so inland, through plains of fern and bramble, until the familiar black keep of the Castle of Grosbois rose upon the left. Then, under the guidance of Savary, we struck to the right down a sunken road, and so over the shoulder of a hill until, on a further slope beyond, we saw the old windmill black against the evening sky. Its upper window burned red like a spot of blood in the last rays of the setting sun. Close by the door stood a cart full of grain sacks, with the shafts pointing downwards and the horse grazing at some distance. As we gazed, a woman appeared upon the downs and stared round, with her hand over her eyes.

‘See that!’ said Savary eagerly. ‘He is there sure enough, or why should they be on their guard? Let us take this road which winds round the hill, and they will not see us until we are at the very door.’

‘Should we not gallop forward?’ I suggested.

‘The ground is too cut up. The longer way is the safer. As long as we are upon the road they cannot tell us from any other travellers.’

We walked our horses along the path, therefore, with as unconcerned an air as we could assume; but a sharp exclamation made us glance suddenly round, and there was the woman standing on a hillock by the roadside and gazing down at us with a face that was rigid with suspicion. The sight of the military bearing of my companions changed all her fear into certainties. In an instant she had whipped the shawl from her shoulders, and was waving it frantically over her head. With a hearty curse Savary spurred his horse up the bank and galloped straight for the mill, with Gerard and myself at his heels.

It was only just in time. We were still a hundred paces from the door when a man sprang out from it, and gazed about him, his head whisking this way and that. There could be no mistaking the huge bristling beard, the broad chest, and the rounded shoulders of Toussac. A glance showed him that we would ride him down before he could get away, and he sprang back into the mill, closing the heavy door with a clang behind him.

‘The window, Gerard, the window!’ cried Savary.

There was a small, square window opening into the basement room of the mill. The young hussar disengaged himself from the saddle and flew through it as the clown goes through the hoops at Franconi’s. An instant later he had opened the door for us, with the blood streaming from his face and hands.

‘He has fled up the stair,’ said he.

‘Then we need be in no hurry, since he cannot pass us,’ said Savary, as we sprang from our horses. ‘You have carried his first line of entrenchments most gallantly, Lieutenant Gerard. I hope you are not hurt?’

‘A few scratches, General, nothing more.’

‘Get your pistols, then. Where is the miller?’

‘Here I am,’ said a squat, rough little fellow, appearing in the open doorway. ‘What do you mean, you brigands, by entering my mill in this fashion? I am sitting reading my paper and smoking my pipe of coltsfoot, as my custom is about this time of the evening, and suddenly, without a word, a man comes flying through my window, covers me with glass, and opens my door to his friends outside. I've had trouble enough with my one lodger all day without three more of you turning up.'

'You have the conspirator Toussac in your house.'

'Toussac!' cried the miller. 'Nothing of the kind. His name is Maurice, and he is a merchant in silks.'

'He is the man we want. We come in the Emperor's name.'

The miller's jaw dropped as he listened.

'I don't know who he is, but he offered a good price for a bed and I asked no more questions. In these days one cannot expect a certificate of character from every lodger. But, of course, if it is a matter of State, why, it is not for me to interfere. But, to do him justice, he was a quiet gentleman enough until he had that letter just now.'

'What letter? Be careful what you say, you rascal, for your own head may find its way into the sawdust basket.'

'It was a woman who brought it. I can only tell you what I know. He has been talking like a madman ever since. It made my blood run cold to hear him. There's someone whom he swears he will murder. I shall be very glad to see the last of him.'

'Now, gentlemen,' said Savary, drawing his sword, 'we may leave our horses here. There is no window for forty feet, so he cannot escape from us. If you will see that your pistols are primed, we shall soon bring the fellow to terms.'

The stair was a narrow winding one made of wood, which led to a small loft lighted from a slit in the wall.

Some remains of wood and a litter of straw showed that this was where Toussac had spent his day. There was, however, no sign of him now, and it was evident that he had ascended the next flight of steps.

We climbed them, only to find our way barred by a heavy door.

'Surrender, Toussac!' cried Savary. 'It is useless to attempt to escape us.

A hoarse laugh sounded from behind the door.

'I am not a man who surrenders. But I will make a bargain with you. I have a small matter of business to do to-night. If you will leave me alone, I will give you my solemn pledge to surrender at the camp to-morrow. I have a little debt that I wish to pay. It is only to-day that I understood to whom I owed it.'

'What you ask is impossible.'

‘It would save you a great deal of trouble.’

‘We cannot grant such a request. You must surrender.’

‘You’ll have some work first.’

‘Come, come, you cannot escape us. Put your shoulders against the door! Now, all together?’

There was the hot flash of a pistol from the keyhole, and a bullet smacked against the wall between us. We hurled ourselves against the door. It was massive, but rotten with age. With a splintering and rending it gave way before us. We rushed in, weapons in hand, to find ourselves in an empty room.

‘Where the devil has he got to?’ cried Savary, glaring round him.

‘This is the top room of all. There is nothing above it.’

It was a square empty space with a few corn-bags littered about. At the further side was an open window, and beside it lay a pistol, still smoking from the discharge. We all rushed across, and, as we craned our heads over, a simultaneous cry of astonishment escaped from us.

The distance to the ground was so great that no one could have survived the fall, but Toussac had taken advantage of the presence of that cart full of grain-sacks, which I have described as having lain close to the mill. This had both shortened the distance and given him an excellent means of breaking the fall. Even so, however, the shock had been tremendous, and as we looked out he was lying panting heavily upon the top of the bags. Hearing our cry, however, he looked up, shook his fist defiantly, and, rolling from the cart, he sprang on to the back of Savary’s black horse, and galloped off across the downs, his great beard flying in the wind, untouched by the pistol bullets with which we tried to bring him down.

How we flew down those creaking wooden stairs and out through the open door of the mill! Quick as we were, he had a good start, and by the time Gerard and I were in the saddle he had become a tiny man upon a small horse galloping up the green slope of the opposite hill. The shades of evening, too, were drawing in, and upon his left was the huge salt-marsh, where we should have found it difficult to follow him. The chances were certainly in his favour. And yet he never swerved from his course, but kept straight on across the downs on a line which took him farther and farther from the sea. Every instant we feared to see him dart away in the morass, but still he held his horse’s head against the hill-side. What could he be making for? He never pulled rein and never glanced round, but flew onwards, like a man with a definite goal in view.

Lieutenant Gerard and I were lighter men, and our mounts were as good as his, so that it was not long before we began to gain upon him. If we could only keep him in sight it was certain that we should ride him down; but there was always the danger that he might use his knowledge of the country to throw us off his track. As we sank beneath each hill my heart sank also, to rise again with renewed hope as we caught sight of him once more galloping in front of us.

But at last that which I had feared befell us. We were not more than a couple of hundred paces behind him when we lost all trace of him. He had vanished behind some rolling ground, and we could see nothing of him when we reached the summit.

‘There is a road there to the left,’ cried Gerard, whose Gascon blood was aflame with excitement.

‘On, my friend, on, let us keep to the left!’

‘Wait a moment!’ I cried. ‘There is a bridle-path upon the right, and it is as likely that he took that.’

‘Then do you take one and I the other.’

‘One moment, I hear the sound of hoofs!’

‘Yes, yes, it is his horse!’

A great black horse, which was certainly that of General Savary, had broken out suddenly through a dense tangle of brambles in front of us. The saddle was empty.

‘He has found some hiding-place here amongst the brambles,’ I cried.

Gerard had already sprung from his horse, and was leading him through the bushes. I followed his example, and in a minute or two we made our way down a winding path into a deep chalk quarry.

‘There is no sign of him!’ cried Gerard. ‘He has escaped us.’

But suddenly I had understood it all. His furious rage which the miller had described to us was caused no doubt by his learning how he came to be betrayed upon the night of his arrival. This sweetheart of his had in some way discovered it, and had let him know. His promise to deliver himself up to-morrow was in order to give him time to have his revenge upon my uncle. And now with one idea in his head he had ridden to this chalk quarry. Of course, it must be the same chalk quarry into which the underground passage of Grosbois opened, and no doubt during his treasonable meetings with my uncle he had learned the secret. Twice I hit upon the wrong spot, but at the third trial I gained the face of the cliff, made my way between it and the bushes, and found the narrow opening, which was hardly visible in the gathering darkness. During our search Savary had overtaken us on foot, so now, leaving our horses in the chalk-pit, my two companions followed me through the narrow entrance tunnel, and on into the larger and older passage beyond. We had no lights, and it was as black as pitch within, so I stumbled forward as best I might, feeling my way by keeping one hand upon the side wall, and tripping occasionally over the stones which were scattered along the path. It had seemed no very great distance when my uncle had led the way with the light, but now, what with the darkness, and what with the uncertainty and the tension of our feelings, it appeared to be a long journey, and Savary's deep voice at my elbow growled out questions as to how many more miles we were to travel in this moleheap.

'Hush!' whispered Gerard. 'I hear someone in front of us.'

We stood listening in breathless silence. Then far away through the darkness I heard the sound of a door creaking upon its hinges.

'On, on!' cried Savary, eagerly. 'The rascal is there, sure enough.

This time at least we have got him!'

But for my part I had my fears. I remembered that my uncle had opened the door which led into the castle by some secret catch. This sound which we had heard seemed to show that Toussac had also known how to open it. But suppose that he had closed it behind him. I remembered its size and the iron clampings which bound it together. It was possible that even at the last moment we might find ourselves face to face with an insuperable obstacle. On and on we hurried in the dark, and then suddenly I could have raised a shout of joy, for there in the distance was a yellow glimmer of light, only visible in contrast with the black darkness which lay between. The door was open. In his mad thirst for vengeance Toussac had never given a thought to the pursuers at his heels.

And now we need no longer grope. It was a race along the passage and up the winding stair, through the second door, and into the stone-flagged corridor of the Castle of Grosbois, with the oil-lamp still burning at the end of it. A frightful cry — a long-drawn scream of terror and of pain — rang through it as we entered.

'He is killing him! He is killing him!' cried a voice, and a woman servant rushed madly out into the passage. 'Help, help; he is killing Monsieur

Bernac!’

‘Where is he?’ shouted Savary.

‘There! The library! The door with the green curtain!’ Again that horrible cry rang out, dying down to a harsh croaking. It ended in a loud, sharp snick, as when one cracks one’s joint, but many times louder. I knew only too well what that dreadful sound portended. We rushed together into the room, but the hardened Savary and the dare-devil hussar both recoiled in horror from the sight which met our gaze.

My uncle had been seated writing at his desk, with his back to the door, when his murderer had entered. No doubt it was at the first glance over his shoulder that he had raised the scream when he saw that terrible hairy face coming in upon him, while the second cry may have been when those great hands clutched at his head. He had never risen from his chair — perhaps he had been too paralysed by fear — and he still sat with his back to the door. But what struck the colour from our cheeks was that his head had been turned completely round, so that his horribly distorted purple face looked squarely at us from between his shoulders. Often in my dreams that thin face, with the bulging grey eyes, and the shockingly open mouth, comes to disturb me. Beside him stood Toussac, his face flushed with triumph, and his great arms folded across his chest.

‘Well, my friends,’ said he, ‘you are too late, you see. I have paid my debts after all.’

‘Surrender!’ cried Savary.

‘Shoot away! Shoot away!’ he cried, drumming his hands upon his breast. ‘You don’t suppose I fear your miserable pellets, do you? Oh, you imagine you will take me alive! I’ll soon knock that idea out of your heads.’

In an instant he had swung a heavy chair over his head, and was rushing furiously at us. We all fired our pistols into him together, but nothing could stop that thunderbolt of a man. With the blood spurting from his wounds, he lashed madly out with his chair, but his eyesight happily failed him, and his swashing blow came down upon the corner of the table with a crash which broke it into fragments. Then with a mad bellow of rage he sprang upon Savary, tore him down to the ground, and had his hand upon his chin before Gerard and I could seize him by the arms. We were three strong men, but he was as strong as all of us put together, for again and again he shook himself free, and again and again we got our grip upon him once more. But he was losing blood fast. Every instant his huge strength ebbed away. With a supreme effort he staggered to his feet, the three of us hanging on to him like hounds on to a bear. Then, with a shout of rage and despair which thundered through the whole castle, his knees gave way under him, and he fell in a huge inert heap upon the floor, his black beard bristling up towards the ceiling. We all stood panting round, ready to spring upon him if he should move; but it was over. He was dead.

Savary, deadly pale, was leaning with his hand to his side against the table. It was not for nothing that those mighty arms had been thrown round him.

‘I feel as if I had been hugged by a bear,’ said he. ‘Well, there is one dangerous man the less in France, and the Emperor has lost one of his enemies. And yet he was a brave man too!’

‘What a soldier he would have made!’ said Gerard thoughtfully. ‘What a quartermaster for the Hussars of Bercheny! He must have been a very foolish person to set his will against that of the Emperor.’

I had seated myself, sick and dazed, upon the settee, for scenes of bloodshed were new to me then, and this one had been enough to shock the most hardened. Savary gave us all a little cognac from his flask, and then tearing down one of the curtains he laid it over the terrible figure of my Uncle Bernac.

‘We can do nothing here,’ said he. ‘I must get back and report to the Emperor as soon as possible. But all these papers of Bernac’s must be seized, for many of them bear upon this and other conspiracies.’ As he spoke he gathered together a number of documents which were scattered about the table — among the others a letter which lay before him upon the desk, and which he had apparently just finished at the time of Toussac’s irruption.

‘Hullo, what’s this?’ said Savary, glancing over it. ‘I fancy that our friend Bernac was a dangerous man also. “My dear Catulle — I beg of you to send me by the very first mail another phial of the same tasteless essence which you sent three years ago. I mean the almond decoction which leaves no traces. I have particular reasons for wanting it in the course of next week, so I implore you not to delay. You may rely upon my interest with the Emperor whenever you have occasion to demand it.”’

‘Addressed to a chemist in Amiens,’ said Savary, turning over the letter. ‘A poisoner then, on the top of his other virtues. I wonder for whom this essence of almonds which leaves no trace was intended.’

‘I wonder,’ said I.
After all, he was my uncle, and he was dead, so why should I say further?

CHAPTER XVII

THE END

General Savary rode straight to Pont de Briques to report to the Emperor, while Gerard returned with me to my lodgings to share a bottle of wine. I had expected to find my Cousin Sibylle there, but to my surprise there was no sign of her, nor had she left any word to tell us whither she had gone.

It was just after daybreak in the morning when I woke to find an equerry of the Emperor with his hand upon my shoulder.

‘The Emperor desires to see you, Monsieur de Laval,’ said he.

‘Where?’

‘At the Pont de Briques.’

I knew that promptitude was the first requisite for those who hoped to advance themselves in his service. In ten minutes I was in the saddle, and in half an hour I was at the chateau. I was conducted upstairs to a room in which were the Emperor and Josephine, she reclining upon a sofa in a charming dressing-gown of pink and lace, he striding about in his energetic fashion, dressed in the curious costume which he assumed before his official hours had begun — a white sleeping suit, red Turkish slippers, and a white bandanna handkerchief tied round his head, the whole giving him the appearance of a West Indian planter. From the strong smell of eau-de-Cologne I judged that he had just come from his bath. He was in the best of humours, and she, as usual, reflected him, so that they were two smiling faces which were turned upon me as I was announced. It was hard to believe that it was this man with the kindly expression and the genial eye who had come like an east wind into the reception-room the other night, and left a trail of wet cheeks and downcast faces wherever he had passed.

‘You have made an excellent debut as aide-de-camp,’ said he; ‘Savary has told me all that has occurred, and nothing could have been better arranged. I have not time to think of such things myself, but my wife will sleep more soundly now that she knows that this Toussac is out of the way.’

‘Yes, yes, he was a terrible man,’ cried the Empress. ‘So was that Georges Cadoudal. They were both terrible men.’

‘I have my star, Josephine,’ said Napoleon, patting her upon the head. ‘I see my own career lying before me and I know exactly what I am destined to do. Nothing can harm me until my work is accomplished. The Arabs are believers in Fate, and the Arabs are in the right.’

‘Then why should you plan, Napoleon, if everything is to be decided by Fate?’

‘Because it is fated that I should plan, you little stupid. Don’t you see that that is part of Fate also, that I should have a brain which is capable of planning. I am always building behind a scaffolding, and no one can see what I am building until I have finished. I never look forward for less than two years, and I have been busy all morning, Monsieur de Laval, in planning out the events which will occur in the autumn and winter of 1807. By the way, that good-looking cousin of yours appears to have managed this affair very cleverly. She is a very fine girl to be wasted upon such a creature as the Lucien Lesage who has been screaming for mercy for a week past. Do you not think that it is a great pity?’

I acknowledged that I did.

‘It is always so with women — ideologists, dreamers, carried away by whims and imaginings. They are like the Easterns, who cannot conceive that a man is a fine soldier unless he has a formidable presence. I could not get the Egyptians to believe that I was a greater general than Kleber, because he had the body of a porter and the head of a hair-dresser. So it is with this poor creature Lesage, who will be made a hero by women because he has an oval face and the eyes of a calf. Do you imagine that if she were to see him in his true colours it would turn her against him?’

‘I am convinced of it, sire. From the little that I have seen of my cousin I am sure that no one could have a greater contempt for cowardice or for meanness.’

‘You speak warmly, sir. You are not by chance just a little touched yourself by this fair cousin of yours?’

‘Sire, I have already told you—’

‘Ta, ta, ta, but she is across the water, and many things have happened since then.’

Constant had entered the room.

‘He has been admitted, sire.’

‘Very good. We shall move into the next room. Josephine, you shall come too, for it is your business rather than mine.’

The room into which we passed was a long, narrow one. There were two windows at one side, but the curtains had been drawn almost across, so that the light was not very good. At the further door was Roustem the Mameluke, and beside him, with arms folded and his face sunk downwards in an attitude of shame and contrition, there was standing the very man of whom we had been talking. He looked up with scared eyes, and started with fear when he saw the Emperor approaching him. Napoleon stood with legs apart and his hands behind his back, and looked at him long and searchingly.

‘Well, my fine fellow,’ said he at last, ‘you have burned your fingers, and I do not fancy that you will come near the fire again. Or do you perhaps think of continuing with politics as a profession?’

‘If your Majesty will overlook what I have done,’ Lesage stammered, ‘I shall faithfully promise you that I will be your most loyal servant until the day of my death.’

‘Hum!’ said the Emperor, spilling a pinch of snuff over the front of his white jacket. ‘There is some sense in what you say, for no one makes so good a servant as the man who has had a thorough fright. But I am a very exacting master.’

‘I do not care what you require of me. Everything will be welcome, if you will only give me your forgiveness.’

‘For example,’ said the Emperor. ‘It is one of my whims that when a man enters my service I shall marry him to whom I like. Do you agree to that?’

There was a struggle upon the poet’s face, and he clasped and unclasped his hands.

‘May I ask, sire — ?’

‘You may ask nothing.’

‘But there are circumstances, sire—’

‘There, there, that is enough!’ cried the Emperor harshly, turning upon his heel. ‘I do not argue, I order. There is a young lady, Mademoiselle de Bergerot, for whom I desire a husband. Will you marry her, or will you return to prison?’

Again there was the struggle in the man’s face, and he was silent, twitching and writhing in his indecision.’

‘It is enough!’ cried the Emperor. ‘Roustem, call the guard!’

‘No, no, sire, do not send me back to prison.’

‘The guard, Roustem!’

‘I will do it, sire! I will do it! I will marry whomever you please!’

‘You villain!’ cried a voice, and there was Sibylle standing in the opening of the curtains at one of the windows. Her face was pale with anger and her eyes shining with scorn; the parting curtains framed her tall, slim figure, which leaned forwards in her fury of passion. She had forgotten the Emperor, the Empress, everything, in her revulsion of feeling against this craven whom she had loved.

‘They told me what you were,’ she cried. ‘I would not believe them, I *could* not believe them — for I did not know that there was upon this earth a thing so contemptible. They said that they would prove it, and I defied them to do so, and now I see you as you are. Thank God that I have found you out in time! And to think that for your sake I have brought about the death of a man who was worth a hundred of you! Oh, I am rightly punished for an unwomanly act. Toussac has had his revenge.’

‘Enough!’ said the Emperor sternly. ‘Constant, lead Mademoiselle Bernac into the next room. As to you, sir, I do not think that I can condemn any lady of my Court to take such a man as a husband. Suffice it that you have been shown in your true colours, and that Mademoiselle Bernac has been cured of a foolish infatuation. Roustem, remove the prisoner!’

‘There, Monsieur de Laval,’ said the Emperor, when the wretched Lesage had been conducted from the room. ‘We have not done such a bad piece of work between the coffee and the breakfast. It was your idea, Josephine, and I give you credit for it. But now, de Laval, I feel that we owe you some recompense for having set the young aristocrats a good example, and for having had a share in this Toussac business. You have certainly acted very well.’

‘I ask no recompense, sire,’ said I, with an uneasy sense of what was coming.

‘It is your modesty that speaks. But I have already decided upon your reward. You shall have such an allowance as will permit you to keep up a proper appearance as my aide-de-camp, and I have determined to marry you suitably to one of the ladies-in-waiting of the Empress.’ My heart turned to lead within me.

‘But, sire,’ I stammered, ‘this is impossible.’

‘Oh, you have no occasion to hesitate. The lady is of excellent family and she is not wanting in personal charm. In a word, the affair is settled, and the marriage takes place upon Thursday.’

‘But it is impossible, sire,’ I repeated.

‘Impossible! When you have been longer in my service, sir, you will understand that that is a word which I do not tolerate. I tell you that it is settled.’

‘My love is given to another, sire. It is not possible for me to change.’

‘Indeed!’ said the Emperor coldly. ‘If you persist in such a resolution you cannot expect to retain your place in my household.’

Here was the whole structure which my ambition had planned out crumbling hopelessly about my ears. And yet what was there for me to do?

‘It is the bitterest moment of my life, sire,’ said I, ‘and yet I must be true to the promise which I have given. If I have to be a beggar by the roadside, I shall none the less marry Eugenie de Choiseul or no one.’

The Empress had risen and had approached the window.

‘Well, at least, before you make up your mind, Monsieur de Laval,’ said she, ‘I should certainly take a look at this lady-in-waiting of mine, whom you refuse with such indignation.’

With a quick rasping of rings she drew back the curtain of the second window. A woman was standing in the recess. She took a step forward into the room, and then — and then with a cry and a spring my arms were round her, and hers round me, and I was standing like a man in a dream, looking down into the sweet laughing eyes of my Eugenie. It was not until I had kissed her and kissed her again upon her lips, her cheeks, her hair, that I could persuade myself that she was indeed really there.

‘Let us leave them,’ said the voice of the Empress behind me. ‘Come, Napoleon. It makes me sad! It reminds me too much of the old days in the Rue Chautereine.’

So there is an end of my little romance, for the Emperor’s plans were, as usual, carried out, and we were married upon the Thursday, as he had said. That long and all-powerful arm had plucked her out from the Kentish town, and had brought her across the Channel, in order to make sure of my allegiance, and to strengthen the Court by the presence of a de Choiseul. As to my cousin Sibylle, it shall be written some day how she married the gallant Lieutenant Gerard many years afterwards, when he had become the chief of a brigade, and one of the most noted cavalry leaders in all the armies of France. Some day also I may tell how I came back into my rightful inheritance of Grosbois, which is still darkened to me by the thought of that terrible uncle of mine, and of what happened that night when Toussac stood at bay in the library. But enough of me and of my small fortunes. You have already heard more of them, perhaps, than you care for.

As to the Emperor, some faint shadow of whom I have tried in these pages to raise before you, you have heard from history how, despairing of gaining command of the Channel, and fearing to attempt an invasion which might be cut off from behind, he abandoned the camp of Boulogne. You have heard also how, with this very army which was meant for England, he struck down Austria and Russia in one year, and Prussia in the next. From the day that I entered his service until that on which he sailed forth over the Atlantic, never to return, I have faithfully shared his fortunes, rising with his star and sinking with it also. And yet, as I look back at my old master, I find it very difficult to say if he was a very good man or a very bad one. I only know that he was a very great one, and that the things in which he dealt were also so great that it is impossible to judge him by any ordinary standard. Let him rest silently, then, in his great red tomb at the Invalides, for the workman's work is done, and the mighty hand which moulded France and traced the lines of modern Europe has crumbled into dust. The Fates have used him, and the Fates have thrown him away, but still it lives, the memory of the little man in the grey coat, and still it moves the thoughts and actions of men. Some have written to praise and some to blame, but for my own part I have tried to do neither one nor the other, but only to tell the impression which he made upon me in those far-off days when the Army of England lay at Boulogne, and I came back once more to my Castle of Grosbois.

THE END

SIR NIGEL

Sir Nigel is a historical novel set during the Hundred Years' War. Written in 1906, it is a precursor to Doyle's earlier novel *The White Company*, and describes the early life of that book's hero Sir Nigel Loring in the service of King Edward III at the start of the Hundred Years' War.

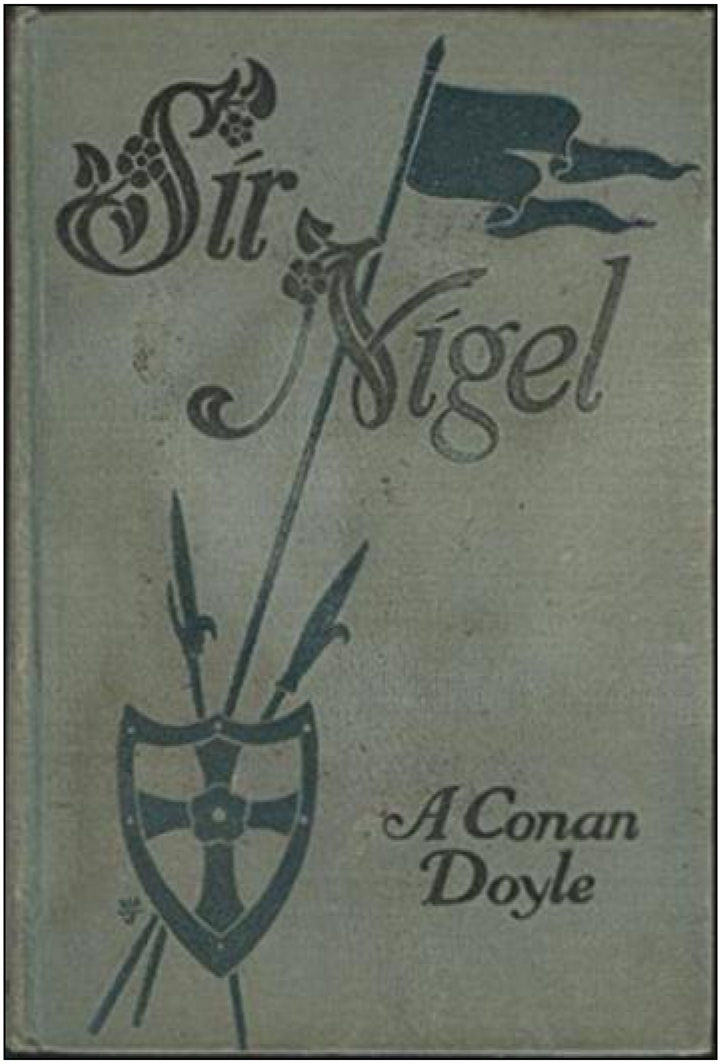
Sir Nigel
A Conan Doyle

The first edition

SIR NIGEL

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INTRODUCTION

Dame History is so austere a lady that if one, has been so ill-advised as to take a liberty with her, one should hasten to make amends by repentance and confession. Events have been transposed to the extent of some few months in this narrative in order to preserve the continuity and evenness of the story. I hope so small a divergence may seem a venial error after so many centuries. For the rest, it is as accurate as a good deal of research and hard work could make it.

The matter of diction is always a question of taste and discretion in a historical reproduction. In the year 1350 the upper classes still spoke Norman-French, though they were just beginning to condescend to English. The lower classes spoke the English of the original Piers Plowman text, which would be considerably more obscure than their superiors' French if the two were now reproduced or imitated. The most which the chronicles can do is to catch the cadence and style of their talk, and to infuse here and there such a dash of the archaic as may indicate their fashion of speech.

I am aware that there are incidents which may strike the modern reader as brutal and repellent. It is useless, however, to draw the Twentieth Century and label it the Fourteenth. It was a sterner age, and men's code of morality, especially in matters of cruelty, was very different. There is no incident in the text for which very good warrant may not be given. The fantastic graces of Chivalry lay upon the surface of life, but beneath it was a half-savage population, fierce and animal, with little ruth or mercy. It was a raw, rude England, full of elemental passions, and redeemed only by elemental virtues. Such I have tried to draw it.

For good or bad, many books have gone to the building of this one. I look round my study table and I survey those which lie with me at the moment, before I happily disperse them forever. I see La Croix's "Middle Ages," Oman's "Art of War," Rietstap's "Armorial General," De la Borderie's "Histoire de Bretagne," Dame Berner's "Boke of St. Albans," "The Chronicle of Jocelyn of Brokeland," "The Old Road," Hewitt's "Ancient Armour," Coussan's "Heraldry," Boutell's "Arms," Browne's "Chaucer's England," Cust's "Scenes of the Middle Ages," Husserand's "Wayfaring Life," Ward's "Canterbury Pilgrims;" Cornish's "Chivalry," Hastings'

“British Archer,” Strutt’s “Sports,” Johnes Froissart, Hargrove’s “Archery,” Longman’s “Edward III,” Wright’s “Domestic Manners.” With these and many others I have lived for months. If I have been unable to combine and transfer their effect, the fault is mine.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

“UNDERSHAW,” November 30, 1905.

I. THE HOUSE OF LORING

In the month of July of the year 1348, between the feasts of St. Benedict and of St. Swithin, a strange thing came upon England, for out of the east there drifted a monstrous cloud, purple and piled, heavy with evil, climbing slowly up the hushed heaven. In the shadow of that strange cloud the leaves drooped in the trees, the birds ceased their calling, and the cattle and the sheep gathered cowering under the hedges. A gloom fell upon all the land, and men stood with their eyes upon the strange cloud and a heaviness upon their hearts. They crept into the churches where the trembling people were blessed and shriven by the trembling priests. Outside no bird flew, and there came no rustling from the woods, nor any of the homely sounds of Nature. All was still, and nothing moved, save only the great cloud which rolled up and onward, with fold on fold from the black horizon. To the west was the light summer sky, to the east this brooding cloud-bank, creeping ever slowly across, until the last thin blue gleam faded away and the whole vast sweep of the heavens was one great leaden arch.

Then the rain began to fall. All day it rained, and all the night and all the week and all the month, until folk had forgotten the blue heavens and the gleam of the sunshine. It was not heavy, but it was steady and cold and unceasing, so that the people were weary of its hissing and its splashing, with the slow drip from the eaves. Always the same thick evil cloud flowed from east to west with the rain beneath it. None could see for more than a bow-shot from their dwellings for the drifting veil of the rain-storms. Every morning the folk looked upward for a break, but their eyes rested always upon the same endless cloud, until at last they ceased to look up, and their hearts despaired of ever seeing the change. It was raining at Lammas-tide and raining at the Feast of the Assumption and still raining at Michaelmas. The crops and the hay, sodden and black, had rotted in the fields, for they were not worth the garnering. The sheep had died, and the calves also, so there was little to kill when Martinmas came and it was time to salt the meat for the winter. They feared a famine, but it was worse than famine which was in store for them.

For the rain had ceased at last, and a sickly autumn sun shone upon a land which was soaked and sodden with water. Wet and rotten leaves reeked and festered under the foul haze which rose from the woods. The fields were spotted with monstrous fungi of a size and colour never matched before — scarlet and mauve and liver and black. It was as though the sick earth had burst into foul pustules; mildew and lichen mottled the walls, and with that filthy crop Death sprang also from the water-soaked earth. Men died, and women and children, the baron of the castle, the franklin on the farm, the monk in the abbey and the villein in his wattle-and-daub cottage. All breathed the same polluted reek and all died the same death of corruption. Of those who were stricken none recovered, and the illness was ever the same — gross boils, raving, and the black blotches which gave its name to the disease. All through the winter the dead rotted by the wayside for want of some one to bury them. In many a village no single man was left alive. Then at last the spring came with sunshine and health and lightness and laughter — the greenest, sweetest, tenderest spring that England had ever known — but only half of England could know it. The other half had passed away with the great purple cloud.

Yet it was there in that stream of death, in that reek of corruption, that the brighter and freer England was born. There in that dark hour the first streak of the new dawn was seen. For in no way save by a great upheaval and change could the nation break away from that iron feudal system which held her limbs. But now it was a new country which came out from that year of death. The barons were dead in swaths. No high turret nor cunning moat could keep out that black commoner who struck them down.

Oppressive laws slackened for want of those who could enforce them, and once slackened could never be enforced again. The laborer would be a slave no longer. The bondsman snapped his shackles. There was much to do and few left to do it. Therefore the few should be freemen, name their own price, and work where and for whom they would. It was the black death which cleared the way for that great rising thirty years later which left the English peasant the freest of his class in Europe.

But there were few so far-sighted that they could see that here, as ever, good was coming out of evil. At the moment misery and ruin were brought into every family. The dead cattle, the ungarnered crops, the untilled lands — every spring of wealth had dried up at the same moment. Those who were rich became poor; but those who were poor already, and especially those who were poor with the burden of gentility upon their shoulders, found themselves in a perilous state. All through England the smaller gentry were ruined, for they had no trade save war, and they drew their living from the work of others. On many a manor-house there came evil times, and on none more than on the Manor of Tilford, where for many generations the noble family of the Lorings had held their home.

There was a time when the Lorings had held the country from the North Downs to the Lakes of Frensham, and when their grim castle-keep rising above the green meadows which border the River Wey had been the strongest fortalice betwixt Guildford Castle in the east and Winchester in the west. But there came that Barons’ War, in which the King used his Saxon subjects as a whip with which to scourge his Norman barons, and Castle Loring, like so many other great strongholds, was swept from the face of the land. From that time the Lorings, with estates sadly curtailed, lived in what had been the dower-house, with enough for splendor.

And then came their lawsuit with Waverley Abbey, and the Cistercians laid claim to their richest land, with peccary, turbary and feudal rights over the remainder. It lingered on for years, this great lawsuit, and when it was finished the men of the Church and the men of the Law had divided all that was richest of the estate between them. There was still left the old manor-house from which with each generation there came a soldier to uphold the credit of the name and to show the five scarlet roses on the silver shield where it had always been shown — in the van. There were twelve bronzes in the little chapel where Matthew the priest said mass every morning, all of men of the house of Loring. Two lay with their legs crossed, as being from the Crusades. Six others rested their feet upon lions, as having died in war. Four only lay with the effigy of their hounds to show that they had passed in peace.

Of this famous but impoverished family, doubly impoverished by law and by pestilence, two members were living in the year of grace 1349 — Lady Ermyntrude Loring and her grandson Nigel. Lady Ermyntrude’s husband had fallen before the Scottish spearsmen at Stirling, and her son Eustace, Nigel’s father, had found a glorious death nine years before this chronicle opens upon the poop of a Norman galley at the sea-fight of Sluys. The lonely old woman, fierce and brooding like the falcon mewed in her chamber, was soft only toward the lad whom she had brought up. All the tenderness and love of her nature, so hidden from others that they could not imagine their existence, were lavished upon him. She could not bear him away from her, and he, with that respect for authority which the age demanded, would not go without her blessing and consent.

So it came about that Nigel, with his lion heart and with the blood of a hundred soldiers thrilling in his veins, still at the age of two and twenty, wasted the weary days reclaiming his hawks with leash and lure or training the alans and spaniels who shared with the family the big earthen-floored hall of the manor-house.

Day by day the aged Lady Ermyntrude had seen him wax in strength and in manhood, small of stature, it is true, but with muscles of steel — and a soul of fire. From all parts, from the warden of Guildford Castle, from the tilt-yard of Farnham, tales of his prowess were brought back to her, of his daring as a rider, of his debonair courage, of his skill with all weapons; but still she, who had both husband and son torn from her by a bloody death, could not bear that this, the last of the Lorings, the final bud of so famous an old tree, should share the same fate. With a weary heart, but with a smiling face, he bore with his uneventful days, while she would ever put off the evil time until the harvest was better, until the monks of Waverley should give up what they had taken, until his uncle should die and leave money for his outfit, or any other excuse with which she could hold him to her side.

And indeed, there was need for a man at Tilford, for the strife betwixt the Abbey and the manor-house had never been appeased, and still on one pretext or another the monks would clip off yet one more slice of their neighbour’s land. Over the winding river, across the green meadows, rose the short square tower and the high gray walls of the grim Abbey, with its bell tolling by day and night, a voice of menace and of dread to the little household.

It is in the heart of the great Cistercian monastery that this chronicle of old days must take its start, as we trace the feud betwixt the monks and the house of Loring, with those events to which it gave birth, ending with the coming of Chandos, the strange spear-running of Tilford Bridge and the deeds with which Nigel won fame in the wars. Elsewhere, in the chronicle of the White Company, it has been set forth what manner of man was Nigel Loring. Those who love him may read herein those things which went to his making. Let us go back together and gaze upon this green stage of England, the scenery, hill, plain and river even as now, the actors in much our very selves, in much also so changed in thought and act that they might be dwellers in another world to ours.

II. HOW THE DEVIL CAME TO WAVERLEY

The day was the first of May, which was the Festival of the Blessed Apostles Philip and James. The year was the 1,349th from man's salvation.

From tierce to sext, and then again from sext to nones, Abbot John of the House of Waverley had been seated in his study while he conducted the many high duties of his office. All around for many a mile on every side stretched the fertile and flourishing estate of which he was the master. In the center lay the broad Abbey buildings, with church and cloisters, hospitium, chapter-house and frater-house, all buzzing with a busy life. Through the open window came the low hum of the voices of the brethren as they walked in pious converse in the ambulatory below. From across the cloister there rolled the distant rise and fall of a Gregorian chant, where the precentor was hard at work upon the choir, while down in the chapter-house sounded the strident voice of Brother Peter, expounding the rule of Saint Bernard to the novices.

Abbot John rose to stretch his cramped limbs. He looked out at the greensward of the cloister, and at the graceful line of open Gothic arches which skirted a covered walk for the brethren within. Two and two in their black-and-white garb with slow step and heads inclined, they paced round and round. Several of the more studious had brought their illuminating work from the scriptorium, and sat in the warm sunshine with their little platters of pigments and packets of gold-leaf before them, their shoulders rounded and their faces sunk low over the white sheets of vellum. There too was the copper-worker with his burin and graver. Learning and art were not traditions with the Cistercians as with the parent Order of the Benedictines, and yet the library of Waverley was well filled both with precious books and with pious students.

But the true glory of the Cistercian lay in his outdoor work, and so ever and anon there passed through the cloister some sunburned monk, soiled mattock or shovel in hand, with his gown looped to his knee, fresh from the fields or the garden. The lush green water-meadows speckled with the heavy-fleeced sheep, the acres of corn-land reclaimed from heather and bracken, the vineyards on the southern slope of Crooksbury Hill, the rows of Hankley fish-ponds, the Frensham marshes drained and sown with vegetables, the spacious pigeon-cotes, all circled the great Abbey round with the visible labors of the Order.

The Abbot’s full and florid face shone with a quiet content as he looked out at his huge but well-ordered household. Like every head of a prosperous Abbey, Abbot John, the fourth of the name, was a man of various accomplishments. Through his own chosen instruments he had to minister a great estate and to keep order and decorum among a large body of men living a celibate life. He was a rigid disciplinarian toward all beneath him, a supple diplomatist to all above. He held high debate with neighbouring abbots and lords, with bishops, with papal legates, and even on occasion with the King’s majesty himself. Many were the subjects with which he must be conversant. Questions of doctrine, questions of building, points of forestry, of agriculture, of drainage, of feudal law, all came to the Abbot for settlement. He held the scales of justice in all the Abbey banlieue which stretched over many a mile of Hampshire and of Surrey. To the monks his displeasure might mean fasting, exile to some sterner community, or even imprisonment in chains. Over the layman also he could hold any punishment save only corporeal death, instead of which he had in hand the far more dreadful weapon of spiritual excommunication.

Such were the powers of the Abbot, and it is no wonder that there were masterful lines in the ruddy features of Abbot John, or that the brethren, glancing up, should put on an even meeker carriage and more demure expression as they saw the watchful face in the window above them.

A knock at the door of his studio recalled the Abbot to his immediate duties, and he returned to his desk. Already he had spoken with his cellarer and prior, almoner, chaplain and lector, but now in the tall and gaunt monk who obeyed his summons to enter he recognised the most important and also the most importunate of his agents, Brother Samuel the sacrist, whose office, corresponding to that of the layman’s bailiff, placed the material interests of the monastery and its dealings with the outer world entirely under his control, subject only to the check of the Abbot. Brother Samuel was a gnarled and stringy old monk whose stern and sharp-featured face reflected no light from above but only that sordid workaday world toward which it was forever turned. A huge book of accounts was tucked under one of his arms, while a great bunch of keys hung from the other hand, a badge of his office, and also on occasion of impatience a weapon of offense, as many a scarred head among rustics and lay brothers could testify.

The Abbot sighed wearily, for he suffered much at the hands of his strenuous agent. “Well, Brother Samuel, what is your will?” he asked.

“Holy father, I have to report that I have sold the wool to Master Baldwin of Winchester at two shillings a bale more than it fetched last year, for the murrain among the sheep has raised the price.”

“You have done well, brother.”

“I have also to tell you that I have distrained Wat the warrener from his cottage, for his Christmas rent is still unpaid, nor the hen-rents of last year.”

“He has a wife and four children, brother.” He was a good, easy man, the Abbot, though liable to be overborne by his sterner subordinate.

“It is true, holy father; but if I should pass him, then how am I to ask the rent of the foresters of Puttenham, or the hinds in the village? Such a thing spreads from house to house, and where then is the wealth of Waverley?”

“What else, Brother Samuel?”

“There is the matter of the fish-ponds.”

The Abbot’s face brightened. It was a subject upon which he was an authority. If the rule of his Order had robbed him of the softer joys of life, he had the keener zest for those which remained.

“How have the char prospered, brother?”

“They have done well, holy father, but the carp have died in the Abbot’s pond.”

“Carp prosper only upon a gravel bottom. They must be put in also in their due proportion, three milters to one spawner, brother sacrist, and the spot must be free from wind, stony and sandy, an ell deep, with willows and grass upon the banks. Mud for tench, brother, gravel for carp.”

The sacrist leaned forward with the face of one who bears tidings of woe. “There are pike in the Abbot’s pond,” said he.

“Pike!” cried the Abbot in horror. “As well shut up a wolf in our sheepfold. How came a pike in the pond? There were no pike last year, and a pike does not fall with the rain nor rise in the springs. The pond must be drained, or we shall spend next Lent upon stockfish, and have the brethren down with the great sickness ere Easter Sunday has come to absolve us from our abstinence.”

“The pond shall be drained, holy father; I have already ordered it. Then we shall plant pot-herbs on the mud bottom, and after we have gathered them in, return the fish and water once more from the lower pond, so that they may fatten among the rich stubble.”

"Good!" cried the Abbot. "I would have three fish-stews in every well-ordered house — one dry for herbs, one shallow for the fry and the yearlings, and one deep for the breeders and the tablefish. But still, I have not heard you say how the pike came in the Abbot's pond."

A spasm of anger passed over the fierce face of the sacrist, and his keys rattled as his bony hand clasped them more tightly. "Young Nigel Loring!" said he. "He swore that he would do us scathe, and in this way he has done it."

"How know you this?"

"Six weeks ago he was seen day by day fishing for pike at the great Lake of Frensham. Twice at night he has been met with a bundle of straw under his arm on the Hankley Down. Well, I wot that the straw was wet and that a live pike lay within it."

The Abbot shook his head. "I have heard much of this youth's wild ways; but now indeed he has passed all bounds if what you say be truth. It was bad enough when it was said that he slew the King's deer in Woolmer Chase, or broke the head of Hobbs the chapman, so that he lay for seven days betwixt life and death in our infirmary, saved only by Brother Peter's skill in the pharmacies of herbs; but to put pike in the Abbot's pond — why should he play such a devil's prank?"

"Because he hates the House of Waverley, holy father; because he swears that we hold his father's land."

"In which there is surely some truth."

"But, holy father, we hold no more than the law has allowed."

"True, brother, and yet between ourselves, we may admit that the heavier purse may weigh down the scales of Justice. When I have passed the old house and have seen that aged woman with her ruddled cheeks and her baleful eyes look the curses she dare not speak, I have many a time wished that we had other neighbours."

"That we can soon bring about, holy father. Indeed, it is of it that I wished to speak to you. Surely it is not hard for us to drive them from the country-side. There are thirty years' claims of escuage unsettled, and there is Sergeant Wilkins, the lawyer of Guildford, whom I will warrant to draw up such arrears of dues and rents and issues of hidage and fodder-corn that these folk, who are as beggarly as they are proud, will have to sell the roof-tree over them ere they can meet them. Within three days I will have them at our mercy."

“They are an ancient family and of good repute. I would not treat them too harshly, brother.”

“Bethink you of the pike in the carp pond!”

The Abbot hardened his heart at the thought. “It was indeed a devil’s deed — when we had but newly stocked it with char and with carp. Well, well, the law is the law, and if you can use it to hurt, it is still lawful to do so. Have these claims been advanced?”

“Deacon the bailiff with his two varlets went down to the Hall yesternight on the matter of the escuage, and came screaming back with this young hothead raging at their heels. He is small and slight, yet he has the strength of many men in the hour of his wrath. The bailiff swears that he will go no more, save with half a score of archers to uphold him.”

The Abbot was red with anger at this new offense. “I will teach him that the servants of Holy Church, even though we of the rule of Saint Bernard be the lowliest and humblest of her children, can still defend their own against the froward and the violent! Go, cite this man before the Abbey court. Let him appear in the chapter-house after tierce to-morrow.”

But the wary sacrist shook his head: “Nay, holy father, the times are not yet ripe. Give me three days, I pray you, that my case against him may be complete. Bear in mind that the father and the grandfather of this unruly squire were both famous men of their day and the foremost knights in the King’s own service, living in high honor and dying in their knightly duty. The Lady Ermyntrude Loring was first lady to the King’s mother. Roger FitzAlan of Farnham and Sir Hugh Walcott of Guildford Castle were each old comrades-in-arms of Nigel’s father, and sib to him on the distaff side. Already there has been talk that we have dealt harshly with them. Therefore, my rede is that we be wise and wary and wait until his cup be indeed full.”

The Abbot had opened his mouth to reply, when the consultation was interrupted by a most unwonted buzz of excitement from among the monks in the cloister below. Questions and answers in excited voices sounded from one side of the ambulatory to the other. Sacrist and Abbot were gazing at each other in amazement at such a breach of the discipline and decorum of their well-trained flock, when there came a swift step upon the stair, and a white-faced brother flung open the door and rushed into the room.

“Father Abbot!” he cried. “Alas, alas! Brother John is dead, and the holy subprior is dead, and the Devil is loose in the five-virgate field!”

III. THE YELLOW HORSE OF CROOKSBURY

In those simple times there was a great wonder and mystery in life. Man walked in fear and solemnity, with Heaven very close above his head, and Hell below his very feet. God's visible hand was everywhere, in the rainbow and the comet, in the thunder and the wind. The Devil too raged openly upon the earth; he skulked behind the hedge-rows in the gloaming; he laughed loudly in the night-time; he clawed the dying sinner, pounced on the unbaptized babe, and twisted the limbs of the epileptic. A foul fiend slunk ever by a man's side and whispered villainies in his ear, while above him there hovered an angel of grace who pointed to the steep and narrow track. How could one doubt these things, when Pope and priest and scholar and King were all united in believing them, with no single voice of question in the whole wide world?

Every book read, every picture seen, every tale heard from nurse or mother, all taught the same lesson. And as a man traveled through the world his faith would grow the firmer, for go where he would there were the endless shrines of the saints, each with its holy relic in the center, and around it the tradition of incessant miracles, with stacks of deserted crutches and silver votive hearts to prove them. At every turn he was made to feel how thin was the veil, and how easily rent, which screened him from the awful denizens of the unseen world.

Hence the wild announcement of the frightened monk seemed terrible rather than incredible to those whom he addressed. The Abbot's ruddy face paled for a moment, it is true, but he plucked the crucifix from his desk and rose valiantly to his feet.

"Lead me to him!" said he. "Show me the foul fiend who dares to lay his grip upon brethren of the holy house of Saint Bernard! Run down to my chaplain, brother! Bid him bring the exorcist with him, and also the blessed box of relics, and the bones of Saint James from under the altar! With these and a contrite and humble heart we may show front to all the powers of darkness."

But the sacrist was of a more critical turn of mind. He clutched the monk's arm with a grip which left its five purple spots for many a day to come.

“Is this the way to enter the Abbot’s own chamber, without knock or reverence, or so much as a ‘Pax vobiscum’?” said he sternly. “You were wont to be our gentlest novice, of lowly carriage in chapter, devout in psalmody and strict in the cloister. Pull your wits together and answer me straightly. In what form has the foul fiend appeared, and how has he done this grievous scathe to our brethren? Have you seen him with your own eyes, or do you repeat from hearsay? Speak, man, or you stand on the penance-stool in the chapter-house this very hour!”

Thus adjured, the frightened monk grew calmer in his bearing, though his white lips and his startled eyes, with the gasping of his breath, told of his inward tremors.

“If it please you, holy father, and you, reverend sacrist, it came about in this way. James the subprior, and Brother John and I had spent our day from sext onward on Hankley, cutting bracken for the cow-houses. We were coming back over the five-virgate field, and the holy subprior was telling us a saintly tale from the life of Saint Gregory, when there came a sudden sound like a rushing torrent, and the foul fiend sprang over the high wall which skirts the water-meadow and rushed upon us with the speed of the wind. The lay brother he struck to the ground and trampled into the mire. Then, seizing the good subprior in his teeth, he rushed round the field, swinging him as though he were a fardel of old clothes.

“Amazed at such a sight, I stood without movement and had said a credo and three aves, when the Devil dropped the subprior and sprang upon me. With the help of Saint Bernard I clambered over the wall, but not before his teeth had found my leg, and he had torn away the whole back skirt of my gown.” As he spoke he turned and gave corroboration to his story by the hanging ruins of his long trailing garment.

“In what shape then did Satan appear?” the Abbot demanded.

“As a great yellow horse, holy father — a monster horse, with eyes of fire and the teeth of a griffin.”

“A yellow horse!” The sacrist glared at the scared monk. “You foolish brother! How will you behave when you have indeed to face the King of Terrors himself if you can be so frightened by the sight of a yellow horse? It is the horse of Franklin Aylward, my father, which has been distrained by us because he owes the Abbey fifty good shillings and can never hope to pay it. Such a horse, they say, is not to be found betwixt this and the King’s stables at Windsor, for his sire was a Spanish destrier, and his dam an Arab mare of the very breed which Saladin, whose soul now reeks in Hell, kept for his own use, and even it has been said under the shelter of his own tent. I took him in discharge of the debt, and I ordered the varlets who had haltered him to leave him alone in the water-meadow, for I have heard that the beast has indeed a most evil spirit, and has killed more men than one."

"It was an ill day for Waverley that you brought such a monster within its bounds," said the Abbot. "If the subprior and Brother John be indeed dead, then it would seem that if the horse be not the Devil he is at least the Devil's instrument."

"Horse or Devil, holy father, I heard him shout with joy as he trampled upon Brother John, and had you seen him tossing the subprior as a dog shakes a rat you would perchance have felt even as I did."

"Come then," cried the Abbot, "let us see with our own eyes what evil has been done."

And the three monks hurried down the stair which led to the cloisters.

They had no sooner descended than their more pressing fears were set at rest, for at that very moment, limping, disheveled and mud-stained, the two sufferers were being led in amid a crowd of sympathizing brethren. Shouts and cries from outside showed, however, that some further drama was in progress, and both Abbot and sacrist hastened onward as fast as the dignity of their office would permit, until they had passed the gates and gained the wall of the meadow. Looking over it, a remarkable sight presented itself to their eyes.

Fetlock deep in the lush grass there stood a magnificent horse, such a horse as a sculptor or a soldier might thrill to see. His colour was a light chestnut, with mane and tail of a more tawny tint. Seventeen hands high, with a barrel and haunches which bespoke tremendous strength, he fined down to the most delicate lines of dainty breed in neck and crest and shoulder. He was indeed a glorious sight as he stood there, his beautiful body leaning back from his wide-spread and propped fore legs, his head craned high, his ears erect, his mane bristling, his red nostrils opening and shutting with wrath, and his flashing eyes turning from side to side in haughty menace and defiance.

Scattered round in a respectful circle, six of the Abbey lay servants and foresters, each holding a halter, were creeping toward him. Every now and then, with a beautiful toss and swerve and plunge, the great creature would turn upon one of his would-be captors, and with outstretched head, flying mane and flashing teeth, would chase him screaming to the safety of the wall, while the others would close swiftly in behind and cast their ropes in the hope of catching neck or leg, but only in their turn to be chased to the nearest refuge.

Had two of these ropes settled upon the horse, and had their throwers found some purchase of stump or boulder by which they could hold them, then the man's brain might have won its wonted victory over swiftness and strength. But the brains were themselves at fault which imagined that one such rope would serve any purpose save to endanger the thrower.

Yet so it was, and what might have been foreseen occurred at the very moment of the arrival of the monks. The horse, having chased one of his enemies to the wall, remained so long snorting his contempt over the coping that the others were able to creep upon him from behind. Several ropes were flung, and one noose settled over the proud crest and lost itself in the waving mane. In an instant the creature had turned and the men were flying for their lives; but he who had cast the rope lingered, uncertain what use to make of his own success. That moment of doubt was fatal. With a yell of dismay, the man saw the great creature rear above him. Then with a crash the fore feet fell upon him and dashed him to the ground. He rose screaming, was hurled over once more, and lay a quivering, bleeding heap, while the savage horse, the most cruel and terrible in its anger of all creatures on earth, bit and shook and trampled the writhing body.

A loud wail of horror rose from the lines of tonsured heads which skirted the high wall — a wail which suddenly died away into a long hushed silence, broken at last by a rapturous cry of thanksgiving and of joy.

On the road which led to the old dark manor-house upon the side of the hill a youth had been riding. His mount was a sorry one, a weedy, shambling, long-haired colt, and his patched tunic of faded purple with stained leather belt presented no very smart appearance; yet in the bearing of the man, in the poise of his head, in his easy graceful carriage, and in the bold glance of his large blue eyes, there was that stamp of distinction and of breed which would have given him a place of his own in any assembly. He was of small stature, but his frame was singularly elegant and graceful. His face, though tanned with the weather, was delicate in features and most eager and alert in expression. A thick fringe of crisp yellow curls broke from under the dark flat cap which he was wearing, and a short golden beard hid the outline of his strong square chin. One white osprey feather thrust through a gold brooch in the front of his cap gave a touch of grace to his somber garb. This and other points of his attire, the short hanging mantle, the leather-sheathed hunting-knife, the cross belt which sustained a brazen horn, the soft doe-skin boots and the prick spurs, would all disclose themselves to an observer; but at the first glance the brown face set in gold and the dancing light of the quick, reckless, laughing eyes, were the one strong memory left behind.

Such was the youth who, cracking his whip joyously, and followed by half a score of dogs, cantered on his rude pony down the Tilford Lane, and thence it was that with a smile of amused contempt upon his face he observed the comedy in the field and the impotent efforts of the servants of Waverley.

Suddenly, however, as the comedy turned swiftly to black tragedy, this passive spectator leaped into quick strenuous life. With a spring he was off his pony, and with another he was over the stone wall and flying swiftly across the field. Looking up from his victim, the great yellow horse saw this other enemy approach, and spurning the prostrate, but still writhing body with its heels, dashed at the newcomer.

But this time there was no hasty flight, no rapturous pursuit to the wall. The little man braced himself straight, flung up his metal-headed whip, and met the horse with a crashing blow upon the head, repeated again and again with every attack. In vain the horse reared and tried to overthrow its enemy with swooping shoulders and pawing hoofs. Cool, swift and alert, the man sprang swiftly aside from under the very shadow of death, and then again came the swish and thud of the unerring blow from the heavy handle.

The horse drew off, glared with wonder and fury at this masterful man, and then trotted round in a circle, with mane bristling, tail streaming and ears on end, snorting in its rage and pain. The man, hardly deigning to glance at his fell neighbour, passed on to the wounded forester, raised him in his arms with a strength which could not have been expected in so slight a body, and carried him, groaning, to the wall, where a dozen hands were outstretched to help him over. Then, at his leisure, the young man also climbed the wall, smiling back with cool contempt at the yellow horse, which had come raging after him once more.

As he sprang down, a dozen monks surrounded him to thank him or to praise him; but he would have turned sullenly away without a word had he not been stopped by Abbot John in person.

"Nay, Squire Loring," said he, "if you be a bad friend to our Abbey, yet we must needs own that you have played the part of a good Christian this day, for if there is breath left in our servant's body it is to you next to our blessed patron Saint Bernard that we owe it."

"By Saint Paul! I owe you no good-will, Abbot John," said the young man. "The shadow of your Abbey has ever fallen across the house of Loring. As to any small deed that I may have done this day, I ask no thanks for it. It is not for you nor for your house that I have done it, but only because it was my pleasure so to do."

The Abbot flushed at the bold words, and bit his lip with vexation.

It was the sacrist, however, who answered: "It would be more fitting and more gracious," said he, "if you were to speak to the holy Father Abbot in a manner suited to his high rank and to the respect which is due to a Prince of the Church."

The youth turned his bold blue eyes upon the monk, and his sunburned face darkened with anger. "Were it not for the gown upon your back, and for your silvering hair, I would answer you in another fashion," said he. "You are the lean wolf which growls ever at our door, greedy for the little which hath been left to us. Say and do what you will with me, but by Saint Paul! if I find that Dame Ermyntrude is baited by your ravenous pack I will beat them off with this whip from the little patch which still remains of all the acres of my fathers."

"Have a care, Nigel Loring, have a care!" cried the Abbot, with finger upraised. "Have you no fears of the law of England?"

"A just law I fear and obey."

"Have you no respect for Holy Church?"

"I respect all that is holy in her. I do not respect those who grind the poor or steal their neighbour's land."

"Rash man, many a one has been blighted by her ban for less than you have now said! And yet it is not for us to judge you harshly this day. You are young and hot words come easily to your lips. How fares the forester?"

"His hurt is grievous, Father Abbot, but he will live," said a brother, looking up from the prostrate form. "With a blood-letting and an electuary, I will warrant him sound within a month."

"Then bear him to the hospital. And now, brother, about this terrible beast who still gazes and snorts at us over the top of the wall as though his thoughts of Holy Church were as uncouth as those of Squire Nigel himself, what are we to do with him?"

"Here is Franklin Aylward," said one of the brethren. "The horse was his, and doubtless he will take it back to his farm."

But the stout red-faced farmer shook his head at the proposal. "Not I, in faith!" said he. "The beast hath chased me twice round the paddock; it has nigh slain my boy Samkin. He would never be happy till he had ridden it, nor has he ever been happy since. There is not a hind in my employ who will enter his stall. Ill fare the day that ever I took the beast from the Castle stud at Guildford, where they could do nothing with it and no rider could be found bold enough to mount it! When the sacrist here took it for a fifty-shilling debt he made his own bargain and must abide by it. He comes no more to the Crooksbury farm."

"And he stays no more here," said the Abbot. "Brother sacrist, you have raised the Devil, and it is for you to lay it again."

"That I will most readily," cried the sacrist. "The pittance-master can stop the fifty shillings from my very own weekly dole, and so the Abbey be none the poorer. In the meantime here is Wat with his arbalist and a bolt in his girdle. Let him drive it to the head through this cursed creature, for his hide and his hoofs are of more value than his wicked self."

A hard brown old woodman who had been shooting vermin in the Abbey groves stepped forward with a grin of pleasure. After a lifetime of stoats and foxes, this was indeed a noble quarry which was to fall before him. Fitting a bolt on the nut of his taut crossbow, he had raised it to his shoulder and leveled it at the fierce, proud, disheveled head which tossed in savage freedom at the other side of the wall. His finger was crooked on the spring, when a blow from a whip struck the bow upward and the bolt flew harmless over the Abbey orchard, while the woodman shrank abashed from Nigel Loring's angry eyes.

"Keep your bolts for your weasels!" said he. "Would you take life from a creature whose only fault is that its spirit is so high that it has met none yet who dare control it? You would slay such a horse as a king might be proud to mount, and all because a country franklin, or a monk, or a monk's varlet, has not the wit nor the hands to master him?"

The sacrist turned swiftly on the Squire. "The Abbey owes you an offering for this day's work, however rude your words may be," said he. "If you think so much of the horse, you may desire to own it. If I am to pay for it, then with the holy Abbot’s permission it is in my gift and I bestow it freely upon you.”

The Abbot plucked at his subordinate’s sleeve. “Bethink you, brother sacrist,” he whispered, “shall we not have this man’s blood upon our heads?”

“His pride is as stubborn as the horse’s, holy father,” the sacrist answered, his gaunt fact breaking into a malicious smile. “Man or beast, one will break the other and the world will be the better for it. If you forbid me—”

“Nay, brother, you have bought the horse, and you may have the bestowal of it.”

“Then I give it — hide and hoofs, tail and temper — to Nigel Loring, and may it be as sweet and as gentle to him as he hath been to the Abbot of Waverley!”

The sacrist spoke aloud amid the tittering of the monks, for the man concerned was out of earshot. At the first words which had shown him the turn which affairs had taken he had run swiftly to the spot where he had left his pony. From its mouth he removed the bit and the stout bridle which held it. Then leaving the creature to nibble the grass by the wayside he sped back whence he came.

“I take your gift, monk,” said he, “though I know well why it is that you give it. Yet I thank you, for there are two things upon earth for which I have ever yearned, and which my thin purse could never buy. The one is a noble horse, such a horse as my father’s son should have betwixt his thighs, and here is the one of all others which I would have chosen, since some small deed is to be done in the winning of him, and some honorable advancement to be gained. How is the horse called?”

“Its name,” said the franklin, “is Pommers. I warn you, young sir, that none may ride him, for many have tried, and the luckiest is he who has only a staved rib to show for it.”

“I thank you for your rede,” said Nigel, “and now I see that this is indeed a horse which I would journey far to meet. I am your man, Pommers, and you are my horse, and this night you shall own it or I will never need horse again. My spirit against thine, and God hold thy spirit high, Pommers, so that the greater be the adventure, and the more hope of honor gained!”

While he spoke the young Squire had climbed on to the top of the wall and stood there balanced, the very image of grace and spirit and gallantry, his bridle hanging from one hand and his whip grasped in the other. With a fierce snort, the horse made for him instantly, and his white teeth flashed as he snapped; but again a heavy blow from the loaded whip caused him to swerve, and even at the instant of the swerve, measuring the distance with steady eyes, and bending his supple body for the spring, Nigel bounded into the air and fell with his legs astride the broad back of the yellow horse. For a minute, with neither saddle nor stirrups to help him, and the beast ramping and rearing like a mad thing beneath him, he was hard pressed to hold his own. His legs were like two bands of steel welded on to the swelling arches of the great horse's ribs, and his left hand was buried deep in the tawny mane.

Never had the dull round of the lives of the gentle brethren of Waverley been broken by so fiery a scene. Springing to right and swooping to left, now with its tangled wicked head betwixt its forefeet, and now pawing eight feet high in the air, with scarlet, furious nostrils and maddened eyes, the yellow horse was a thing of terror and of beauty. But the lithe figure on his back, bending like a reed in the wind to every movement, firm below, pliant above, with calm inexorable face, and eyes which danced and gleamed with the joy of contest, still held its masterful place for all that the fiery heart and the iron muscles of the great beast could do.

Once a long drone of dismay rose from the monks, as rearing higher and higher yet a last mad effort sent the creature toppling over backward upon its rider. But, swift and cool, he had writhed from under it ere it fell, spurned it with his foot as it rolled upon the earth, and then seizing its mane as it rose swung himself lightly on to its back once more. Even the grim sacrist could not but join the cheer, as Pommers, amazed to find the rider still upon his back, plunged and curveted down the field.

But the wild horse only swelled into a greater fury. In the sullen gloom of its untamed heart there rose the furious resolve to dash the life from this clinging rider, even if it meant destruction to beast and man. With red, blazing eyes it looked round for death. On three sides the five-virgate field was bounded by a high wall, broken only at one spot by a heavy four-foot wooden gate. But on the fourth side was a low gray building, one of the granges of the Abbey, presenting a long flank unbroken by door or window. The horse stretched itself into a gallop, and headed straight for that craggy thirty-foot wall. He would break in red ruin at the base of it if he could but dash forever the life of this man, who claimed mastery over that which had never found its master yet.

The great haunches gathered under it, the eager hoofs drummed the grass, as faster and still more fast the frantic horse bore himself and his rider toward the wall. Would Nigel spring off? To do so would be to bend his will to that of the beast beneath him. There was a better way than that. Cool, quick and decided, the man swiftly passed both whip and bridle into the left hand which still held the mane. Then with the right he slipped his short mantle from his shoulders and lying forward along the creature's strenuous, rippling back he cast the flapping cloth over the horse's eyes.

The result was but too successful, for it nearly brought about the downfall of the rider. When those red eyes straining for death were suddenly shrouded in unexpected darkness the amazed horse propped on its forefeet and came to so dead a stop that Nigel was shot forward on to its neck and hardly held himself by his hair-entwined hand. Ere he had slid back into position the moment of danger had passed, for the horse, its purpose all blurred in its mind by this strange thing which had befallen, wheeled round once more, trembling in every fiber, and tossing its petulant head until at last the mantle had been slipped from its eyes and the chilling darkness had melted into the homely circle of sunlit grass once more.

But what was this new outrage which had been inflicted upon it? What was this defiling bar of iron which was locked hard against its mouth? What were these straps which galled the tossing neck, this band which spanned its chest? In those instants of stillness ere the mantle had been plucked away Nigel had lain forward, had slipped the snaffle between the champing teeth, and had deftly secured it.

Blind, frantic fury surged in the yellow horse's heart once more at this new degradation, this badge of serfdom and infamy. His spirit rose high and menacing at the touch. He loathed this place, these people, all and everything which threatened his freedom. He would have done with them forever; he would see them no more. Let him away to the uttermost parts of the earth, to the great plains where freedom is. Anywhere over the far horizon where he could get away from the defiling bit and the insufferable mastery of man.

He turned with a rush, and one magnificent deer-like bound carried him over the four-foot gate. Nigel's hat had flown off, and his yellow curls streamed behind him as he rose and fell in the leap. They were in the water-meadow now, and the rippling stream twenty feet wide gleamed in front of them running down to the main current of the Wey. The yellow horse gathered his haunches under him and flew over like an arrow. He took off from behind a boulder and cleared a furze-bush on the farther side. Two stones still mark the leap from hoof-mark to hoof-mark, and they are eleven good paces apart. Under the hanging branch of the great oak-tree on the farther side (that Quercus Tilfordiensis ordiensis is still shown as the bound of the Abby's immediate precincts) the great horse passed. He had hoped to sweep off his rider, but Nigel sank low on the heaving back with his face buried in the flying mane. The rough bough rasped him rudely, but never shook his spirit nor his grip. Rearing, plunging and struggling, Pommers broke through the sapling grove and was out on the broad stretch of Hankley Down.

And now came such a ride as still lingers in the gossip of the lowly country folk and forms the rude jingle of that old Surrey ballad, now nearly forgotten, save for the refrain:

The Doe that sped on Hinde Head,
  The Kestril on the winde,
And Nigel on the Yellow Horse
  Can leave the world behinde.

Before them lay a rolling ocean of dark heather, knee-deep, swelling in billow on billow up to the clear-cut hill before them. Above stretched one unbroken arch of peaceful blue, with a sun which was sinking down toward the Hampshire hills. Through the deep heather, down the gullies, over the watercourses, up the broken slopes, Pommers flew, his great heart bursting with rage, and every fiber quivering at the indignities which he had endured.

And still, do what he would, the man clung fast to his heaving sides and to his flying mane, silent, motionless, inexorable, letting him do what he would, but fixed as Fate upon his purpose. Over Hankley Down, through Thursley Marsh, with the reeds up to his mud-splashed withers, onward up the long slope of the Headland of the Hinds, down by the Nutcombe Gorge, slipping, blundering, bounding, but never slackening his fearful speed, on went the great yellow horse. The villagers of Shottermill heard the wild clatter of hoofs, but ere they could swing the ox-hide curtains of their cottage doors horse and rider were lost amid the high bracken of the Haslemere Valley. On he went, and on, tossing the miles behind his flying hoofs. No marsh-land could clog him, no hill could hold him back. Up the slope of Linchmere and the long ascent of Fernhurst he thundered as on the level, and it was not until he had flown down the incline of Henley Hill, and the gray castle tower of Midhurst rose over the coppice in front, that at last the eager outstretched neck sank a little on the breast, and the breath came quick and fast. Look where he would in woodland and on down, his straining eyes could catch no sign of those plains of freedom which he sought.

And yet another outrage! It was bad that this creature should still cling so tight upon his back, but now he would even go to the intolerable length of checking him and guiding him on the way that he would have him go. There was a sharp pluck at his mouth, and his head was turned north once more. As well go that way as another, but the man was mad indeed if he thought that such a horse as Pommers was at the end of his spirit or his strength. He would soon show him that he was unconquered, if it strained his sinews or broke his heart to do so. Back then he flew up the long, long ascent. Would he ever get to the end of it? Yet he would not own that he could go no farther while the man still kept his grip. He was white with foam and caked with mud. His eyes were gorged with blood, his mouth open and gasping, his nostrils expanded, his coat stark and reeking. On he flew down the long Sunday Hill until he reached the deep Kingsley Marsh at the bottom. No, it was too much! Flesh and blood could go no farther. As he struggled out from the reedy slime with the heavy black mud still clinging to his fetlocks, he at last eased down with sobbing breath and slowed the tumultuous gallop to a canter.

Oh, crowning infamy! Was there no limit to these degradations? He was no longer even to choose his own pace. Since he had chosen to gallop so far at his own will he must now gallop farther still at the will of another. A spur struck home on either flank. A stinging whip-lash fell across his shoulder. He bounded his own height in the air at the pain and the shame of it. Then, forgetting his weary limbs, forgetting his panting, reeking sides, forgetting everything save this intolerable insult and the burning spirit within, he plunged off once more upon his furious gallop. He was out on the heather slopes again and heading for Weydown Common. On he flew and on. But again his brain failed him and again his limbs trembled beneath him, and yet again he strove to ease his pace, only to be driven onward by the cruel spur and the falling lash. He was blind and giddy with fatigue.

He saw no longer where he placed his feet, he cared no longer whither he went, but his one mad longing was to get away from this dreadful thing, this torture which clung to him and would not let him go. Through Thursley village he passed, his eyes straining in his agony, his heart bursting within him, and he had won his way to the crest of Thursley Down, still stung forward by stab and blow, when his spirit weakened, his giant strength ebbed out of him, and with one deep sob of agony the yellow horse sank among the heather. So sudden was the fall that Nigel flew forward over his shoulder, and beast and man lay prostrate and gasping while the last red rim of the sun sank behind Butser and the first stars gleamed in a violet sky.

The young Squire was the first to recover, and kneeling by the panting, overwrought horse he passed his hand gently over the tangled mane and down the foam-flecked face. The red eye rolled up at him; but it was wonder not hatred, a prayer and not a threat, which he could read in it. As he stroked the reeking muzzle, the horse whinnied gently and thrust his nose into the hollow of his hand. It was enough. It was the end of the contest, the acceptance of new conditions by a chivalrous foe from a chivalrous victor.

“You are my horse, Pommers,” Nigel whispered, and he laid his cheek against the craning head. “I know you, Pommers, and you know me, and with the help of Saint Paul we shall teach some other folk to know us both. Now let us walk together as far as this moorland pond, for indeed I wot not whether it is you or I who need the water most.”

And so it was that some belated monks of Waverley passing homeward from the outer farms saw a strange sight which they carried on with them so that it reached that very night the ears both of sacrist and of Abbot. For, as they passed through Tilford they had seen horse and man walking side by side and head by head up the manor-house lane. And when they had raised their lanterns on the pair it was none other than the young Squire himself who was leading home, as a shepherd leads a lamb, the fearsome yellow horse of Crooksbury.

IV. HOW THE SUMMONER CAME TO THE MANOR HOUSE OF TILFORD

By the date of this chronicle the ascetic sternness of the old Norman castles had been humanized and refined so that the new dwellings of the nobility, if less imposing in appearance, were much more comfortable as places of residence. A gentle race had built their houses rather for peace than for war. He who compares the savage bareness of Pevensey or Guildford with the piled grandeur of Bodmin or Windsor cannot fail to understand the change in manners which they represent.

The earlier castles had a set purpose, for they were built that the invaders might hold down the country; but when the Conquest was once firmly established a castle had lost its meaning save as a refuge from justice or as a center for civil strife. On the marches of Wales and of Scotland the castle might continue to be a bulwark to the kingdom, and there still grew and flourished; but in all other places they were rather a menace to the King's majesty, and as such were discouraged and destroyed. By the reign of the third Edward the greater part of the old fighting castles had been converted into dwelling-houses or had been ruined in the civil wars, and left where their grim gray bones are still littered upon the brows of our hills. The new buildings were either great country-houses, capable of defense, but mainly residential, or they were manor-houses with no military significance at all.

Such was the Tilford Manor-house where the last survivors of the old and magnificent house of Loring still struggled hard to keep a footing and to hold off the monks and the lawyers from the few acres which were left to them. The mansion was a two-storied one, framed in heavy beams of wood, the interstices filled with rude blocks of stone. An outside staircase led up to several sleeping-rooms above. Below there were only two apartments, the smaller of which was the bower of the aged Lady Ermyntrude. The other was the hall, a very large room, which served as the living room of the family and as the common dining-room of themselves and of their little group of servants and retainers. The dwellings of these servants, the kitchens, the offices and the stables were all represented by a row of penthouses and sheds behind the main building. Here lived Charles the page, Peter the old falconer, Red Swire who had followed Nigel's grandfather to the Scottish wars, Weathercote the broken minstrel, John the cook, and other survivors of more prosperous days, who still clung to the old house as the barnacles to some wrecked and stranded vessel.

One evening about a week after the breaking of the yellow horse, Nigel and his grandmother sat on either side of the large empty fireplace in this spacious apartment. The supper had been removed, and so had the trestle tables upon which it had been served, so that the room seemed bare and empty. The stone floor was strewed with a thick layer of green rushes, which was swept out every Saturday and carried with it all the dirt and debris of the week. Several dogs were now crouched among these rushes, gnawing and cracking the bones which had been thrown from the table. A long wooden buffet loaded with plates and dishes filled one end of the room, but there was little other furniture save some benches against the walls, two dorseret chairs, one small table littered with chessmen, and a great iron coffer. In one corner was a high wickerwork stand, and on it two stately falcons were perched, silent and motionless, save for an occasional twinkle of their fierce yellow eyes.

But if the actual fittings of the room would have appeared scanty to one who had lived in a more luxurious age, he would have been surprised on looking up to see the multitude of objects which were suspended above his head. Over the fireplace were the coats-of-arms of a number of houses allied by blood or by marriage to the Lorings. The two cresset-lights which flared upon each side gleamed upon the blue lion of the Percies, the red birds of de Valence, the black engrailed cross of de Mohun, the silver star of de Vere, and the ruddy bars of FitzAlan, all grouped round the famous red roses on the silver shield which the Lorings had borne to glory upon many a bloody field. Then from side to side the room was spanned by heavy oaken beams from which a great number of objects were hanging. There were mail-shirts of obsolete pattern, several shields, one or two rusted and battered helmets, bowstaves, lances, otter-spears, harness, fishing-rods, and other implements of war or of the chase, while higher still amid the black shadows of the peaked roof could be seen rows of hams, flitches of bacon, salted geese, and those other forms of preserved meat which played so great a part in the housekeeping of the Middle Ages.

Dame Ermyntrude Loring, daughter, wife, and mother of warriors, was herself a formidable figure. Tall and gaunt, with hard craggy features and intolerant dark eyes, even her snow-white hair and stooping back could not entirely remove the sense of fear which she inspired in those around her. Her thoughts and memories went back to harsher times, and she looked upon the England around her as a degenerate and effeminate land which had fallen away from the old standard of knightly courtesy and valor.

The rising power of the people, the growing wealth of the Church, the increasing luxury in life and manners, and the gentler tone of the age were all equally abhorrent to her, so that the dread of her fierce face, and even of the heavy oak staff with which she supported her failing limbs, was widespread through all the country round.

Yet if she was feared she was also respected, for in days when books were few and readers scarce, a long memory and a ready tongue were of the more value; and where, save from Dame Ermyntrude, could the young unlettered Squires of Surrey and Hampshire hear of their grandfathers and their battles, or learn that lore of heraldry and chivalry which she handed down from a ruder but a more martial age? Poor as she was, there was no one in Surrey whose guidance would be more readily sought upon a question of precedence or of conduct than the Dame Ermyntrude Loring.

She sat now with bowed back by the empty fireplace, and looked across at Nigel with all the harsh lines of her old ruddled face softening into love and pride. The young Squire was busy cutting bird-bolts for his crossbow, and whistling softly as he worked. Suddenly he looked up and caught the dark eyes which were fixed upon him. He leaned forward and patted the bony hand.

“What hath pleased you, dear dame? I read pleasure in your eyes.”

“I have heard to-day, Nigel, how you came to win that great war-horse which stamps in our stable.”

“Nay, dame; I had told you that the monks had given it to me.”

“You said so, fair son, but never a word more. Yet the horse which you brought home was a very different horse I wot, to that which was given you. Why did you not tell me?”

“I should think it shame to talk of such a thing.”

“So would your father before you, and his father no less. They would sit silent among the knights when the wine went round and listen to every man’s deeds; but if perchance there was anyone who spoke louder than the rest and seemed to be eager for honor, then afterwards your father would pluck him softly by the sleeve and whisper in his ear to learn if there was any small vow of which he could relieve him, or if he would deign to perform some noble deed of arms upon his person. And if the man were a braggart and would go no further, your father would be silent and none would know it. But if he bore himself well, your father would spread his fame far and wide, but never make mention of himself."

Nigel looked at the old woman with shining eyes. "I love to hear you speak of him," said he. "I pray you to tell me once more of the manner of his death."

"He died as he had lived, a very courtly gentleman. It was at the great sea-battle upon the Norman coast, and your father was in command of the after-guard in the King's own ship. Now the French had taken a great English ship the year before when they came over and held the narrow seas and burned the town of Southampton.

"This ship was the Christopher, and they placed it in the front of their battle; but the English closed upon it and stormed over its side, and slew all who were upon it.

"But your father and Sir Lorredan of Genoa, who commanded the Christopher, fought upon the high poop, so that all the fleet stopped to watch it, and the King himself cried aloud at the sight, for Sir Lorredan was a famous man-at-arms and bore himself very stoutly that day, and many a knight envied your father that he should have chanced upon so excellent a person. But your father bore him back and struck him such a blow with a mace that he turned the helmet half round on his head, so that he could no longer see through the eye holes, and Sir Lorredan threw down his sword and gave himself to ransom. But your father took him by the helmet and twisted it until he had it straight upon his head. Then, when he could see once again, he handed him his sword, and prayed him that he would rest himself and then continue, for it was great profit and joy to see any gentleman carry himself so well. So they sat together and rested by the rail of the poop; but even as they raised their hands again your father was struck by a stone from a mangonel and so died."

"And this Sir Lorredan," cried Nigel, "he died also, as I understand?"

"I fear that he was slain by the archers, for they loved your father, and they do not see these things with our eyes."

"It was a pity," said Nigel; "for it is clear that he was a good knight and bore himself very bravely."

"Time was, when I was young, when commoners dared not have laid their grimy hands upon such a man. Men of gentle blood and coat-armor made war upon each other, and the others, spearmen or archers, could scramble amongst themselves. But now all are of a level, and only here and there one like yourself, fair son, who reminds me of the men who are gone."

Nigel leaned forward and took her hands in his. "What I am you have made me," said he.

"It is true, Nigel. I have indeed watched over you as the gardener watches his most precious blossom, for in you alone are all the hopes of our ancient house, and soon — very soon — you will be alone."

"Nay, dear lady, say not that."

"I am very old, Nigel, and I feel the shadow closing in upon me. My heart yearns to go, for all whom I have known and loved have gone before me. And you — it will be a blessed day for you, since I have held you back from that world into which your brave spirit longs to plunge."

"Nay, nay, I have been happy here with you at Tilford."

"We are very poor, Nigel. I do not know where we may find the money to fit you for the wars. Yet we have good friends. There is Sir John Chandos, who has won such credit in the French wars and who rides ever by the King's bridle-arm. He was your father's friend and they were Squires together. If I sent you to court with a message to him he would do what he could."

Nigel's fair face flushed. "Nay, Dame Ermyntrude, I must find my own gear, even as I have found my own horse, for I had rather ride into battle in this tunic than owe my suit to another."

"I feared that you would say so, Nigel; but indeed I know not how else we may get the money," said the old woman sadly. "It was different in the days of my father. I can remember that a suit of mail was but a small matter in those days, for in every English town such things could be made. But year by year since men have come to take more care of their bodies, there have been added a plate of proof here and a cunning joint there, and all must be from Toledo or Milan, so that a knight must have much metal in his purse ere he puts any on his limbs."

Nigel looked up wistfully at the old armor which was slung on the beams above him. "The ash spear is good," said he, "and so is the oaken shield with facings of steel. Sir Roger FitzAlan handled them and said that he had never seen better. But the armor—"

Lady Ermyntrude shook her old head and laughed. “You have your father’s great soul, Nigel, but you have not his mighty breadth of shoulder and length of limb. There was not in all the King’s great host a taller or a stronger man. His harness would be little use to you. No, fair son, I rede you that when the time comes you sell this crumbling house and the few acres which are still left, and so go forth to the wars in the hope that with your own right hand you will plant the fortunes of a new house of Loring.”

A shadow of anger passed over Nigel’s fresh young face. “I know not if we may hold off these monks and their lawyers much longer. This very day there came a man from Guildford with claims from the Abbey extending back before my father’s death.”

“Where are they, fair son?”

“They are flapping on the furze-bushes of Hankley, for I sent his papers and parchments down wind as fast as ever falcon flew.”

“Nay! you were mad to do that, Nigel. And the man, where is he?”

“Red Swire and old George the archer threw him into the Thursley bog.”

“Alas! I fear me such things cannot be done in these days, though my father or my husband would have sent the rascal back to Guildford without his ears. But the Church and the Law are too strong now for us who are of gentler blood. Trouble will come of it, Nigel, for the Abbot of Waverley is not one who will hold back the shield of the Church from those who are her servants.”

“The Abbot would not hurt us. It is that gray lean wolf of a sacrist who hungers for our land. Let him do his worst. I fear him not.”

“He has such an engine at his back, Nigel, that even the bravest must fear him. The ban which blasts a man’s soul is in the keeping of his church, and what have we to place against it? I pray you to speak him fair, Nigel.”

“Nay, dear lady, it is both my duty and my pleasure to do what you bid me; but I would die ere I ask as a favor that which we can claim as a right. Never can I cast my eyes from yonder window that I do not see the swelling down-lands and the rich meadows, glade and dingle, copse and wood, which have been ours since Norman-William gave them to that Loring who bore his shield at Senlac. Now, by trick and fraud, they have passed away from us, and many a franklin is a richer man than I; but never shall it be said that I saved the rest by bending my neck to their yoke. Let them do their worst, and let me endure it or fight it as best I may.”

The old lady sighed and shook her head. “You speak as a Loring should, and yet I fear that some great trouble will befall us. But let us talk no more of such matters, since we cannot mend them. Where is your citole, Nigel? Will you not play and sing to me?”

The gentleman of those days could scarce read and write; but he spoke in two languages, played at least one musical instrument as a matter of course, and possessed a number of other accomplishments, from the imping of hawk’s feathers, to the mystery of venery, with knowledge of every beast and bird, its time of grace and when it was seasonable. As far as physical feats went, to vault barebacked upon a horse, to hit a running hare with a crossbow-bolt, or to climb the angle of a castle courtyard, were feats which had come by nature to the young Squire; but it was very different with music, which had called for many a weary hour of irksome work. Now at last he could master the strings, but both his ear and his voice were not of the best, so that it was well perhaps that there was so small and so unprejudiced an audience to the Norman-French chanson, which he sang in a high reedy voice with great earnestness of feeling, but with many a slip and quaver, waving his yellow head in cadence to the music:

A sword! A sword! Ah, give me a sword!
  For the world is all to win.
Though the way be hard and the door be barred,
  The strong man enters in.
If Chance and Fate still hold the gate,
  Give me the iron key,
And turret high my plume shall fly,
  Or you may weep for me!

A horse! A horse! Ah, give me a horse!
  To bear me out afar,
Where blackest need and grimmest deed
  And sweetest perils are.
Hold thou my ways from glutted days
  Where poisoned leisure lies,
And point the path of tears and wrath
  Which mounts to high emprise!

A heart! A heart! Ah, give me a heart
  To rise to circumstance!
Serene and high and bold to try
  The hazard of the chance,
With strength to wait, but fixed as fate
  To plan and dare and do,
The peer of all, and only thrall,
  Sweet lady mine, to you!

It may have been that the sentiment went for more than the music, or it may have been the nicety of her own ears had been dulled by age, but old Dame Ermyntrude clapped her lean hands together and cried out in shrill applause.

“Weathercote has indeed had an apt pupil!” she said. “I pray you that you will sing again.”

“Nay, dear dame, it is turn and turn betwixt you and me. I beg that you will recite a romance, you who know them all. For all the years that I have listened I have never yet come to the end of them, and I dare swear that there are more in your head than in all the great books which they showed me at Guildford Castle. I would fain hear ‘Doon of Mayence,’ or ‘The Song of Roland,’ or ‘Sir Isumbras.’”

So the old dame broke into a long poem, slow and dull in the inception, but quickening as the interest grew, until with darting hands and glowing face she poured forth the verses which told of the emptiness of sordid life, the beauty of heroic death, the high sacredness of love and the bondage of honor. Nigel, with set, still features and brooding eyes, drank in the fiery words, until at last they died upon the old woman’s lips and she sank back weary in her chair.

Nigel stooped over her and kissed her brow. “Your words will ever be as a star upon my path,” said he. Then, carrying over the small table and the chessmen, he proposed that they should play their usual game before they sought their rooms for the night.

But a sudden and rude interruption broke in upon their gentle contest. A dog pricked its ears and barked. The others ran growling to the door. And then there came a sharp clash of arms, a dull heavy blow as from a club or sword-pommel, and a deep voice from without summoned them to open in the King’s name. The old dame and Nigel had both sprung to their feet, their table overturned and their chessmen scattered among the rushes. Nigel’s hand had sought his crossbow, but the Lady Ermyntrude grasped his arm.

“Nay, fair son! Have you not heard that it is in the King’s name?” said she. “Down, Talbot! Down, Bayard! Open the door and let his messenger in!”

Nigel undid the bolt, and the heavy wooden door swung outward upon its hinges. The light from the flaring cressets beat upon steel caps and fierce bearded faces, with the glimmer of drawn swords and the yellow gleam of bowstaves. A dozen armed archers forced their way into the room. At their head were the gaunt sacrist of Waverley and a stout elderly man clad in a red velvet doublet and breeches much stained and mottled with mud and clay. He bore a great sheet of parchment with a fringe of dangling seals, which he held aloft as he entered.

“I call on Nigel Loring!” he cried. “I, the officer of the King’s law and the lay summoner of Waverley, call upon the man named Nigel Loring!”

“I am he.”

“Yes, it is he!” cried the sacrist. “Archers, do as you were ordered!”

In an instant the band threw themselves upon him like the hounds on a stag. Desperately Nigel strove to gain his sword which lay upon the iron coffer. With the convulsive strength which comes from the spirit rather than from the body, he bore them all in that direction, but the sacrist snatched the weapon from its place, and the rest dragged the writhing Squire to the ground and swathed him in a cord.

“Hold him fast, good archers! Keep a stout grip on him!” cried the summoner. “I pray you, one of you, prick off these great dogs which snarl at my heels. Stand off, I say, in the name of the King! Watkin, come betwixt me and these creatures who have as little regard for the law as their master.”

One of the archers kicked off the faithful dogs. But there were others of the household who were equally ready to show their teeth in defense of the old house of Loring. From the door which led to their quarters there emerged the pitiful muster of Nigel’s threadbare retainers. There was a time when ten knights, forty men-at-arms and two hundred archers would march behind the scarlet roses. Now at this last rally when the young head of the house lay bound in his own hall, there mustered at his call the page Charles with a cudgel, John the cook with his longest spit, Red Swire the aged man-at-arms with a formidable ax swung over his snowy head, and Weathercote the minstrel with a boar-spear. Yet this motley array was fired with the spirit of the house, and under the lead of the fierce old soldier they would certainly have flung themselves upon the ready swords of the archers, had the Lady Ermyntrude not swept between them:

“Stand back, Swire!” she cried. “Back, Weathercote Charles, put a leash on Talbot, and hold Bayard back!” Her black eyes blazed upon the invaders until they shrank from that baleful gaze. “Who are you, you rascal robbers, who dare to misuse the King’s name and to lay hands upon one whose smallest drop of blood has more worth than all your thrall and caitiff bodies?”

“Nay, not so fast, dame, not so fast, I pray you!” cried the stout summoner, whose face had resumed its natural colour, now that he had a woman to deal with. “There is a law of England, mark you, and there are those who serve and uphold it, who are the true men and the King’s own lieges. Such a one am I. Then again, there are those who take such as me and transfer, carry or convey us into a bog or morass. Such a one is this graceless old man with the ax, whom I have seen already this day. There are also those who tear, destroy or scatter the papers of the law, of which this young man is the chief. Therefore, I would rede you, dame, not to rail against us, but to understand that we are the King’s men on the King’s own service.”

“What then is your errand in this house at this hour of the night?”

The summoner cleared his throat pompously, and turning his parchment to the light of the cressets he read out a long document in Norman-French, couched in such a style and such a language that the most involved and foolish of our forms were simplicity itself compared to those by which the men of the long gown made a mystery of that which of all things on earth should be the plainest and the most simple. Despair fell cold upon Nigel’s heart and blanched the face of the old dame as they listened to the dread catalogue of claims and suits and issues, questions of peccary and turbary, of house-bote and fire-bote, which ended by a demand for all the lands, hereditaments, tenements, messuages and curtilages, which made up their worldly all.

Nigel, still bound, had been placed with his back against the iron coffer, whence he heard with dry lips and moist brow this doom of his house. Now he broke in on the recital with a vehemence which made the summoner jump:

“You shall rue what you have done this night!” he cried. “Poor as we are, we have our friends who will not see us wronged, and I will plead my cause before the King’s own majesty at Windsor, that he, who saw the father die, may know what things are done in his royal name against the son. But these matters are to be settled in course of law in the King’s courts, and how will you excuse yourself for this assault upon my house and person?”

“Nay, that is another matter,” said the sacrist. “The question of debt may indeed be an affair of a civil court. But it is a crime against the law and an act of the Devil, which comes within the jurisdiction of the Abbey Court of Waverley when you dare to lay hands upon the summoner or his papers.”

“Indeed, he speaks truth,” cried the official. “I know no blacker sin.”

“Therefore,” said the stern monk, “it is the order of the holy father Abbot that you sleep this night in the Abbey cell, and that to-morrow you be brought before him at the court held in the chapter-house so that you receive the fit punishment for this and the many other violent and froward deeds which you have wrought upon the servants of Holy Church. Enough is now said, worthy master summoner. Archers, remove your prisoner!”

As Nigel was lifted up by four stout archers, the Dame Ermyntrude would have rushed to his aid, but the sacrist thrust her back.

“Stand off, proud woman! Let the law take its course, and learn to humble your heart before the power of Holy Church. Has your life not taught its lesson, you, whose horn was exalted among the highest and will soon not have a roof above your gray hairs? Stand back, I say, lest I lay a curse upon you!”

The old dame flamed suddenly into white wrath as she stood before the angry monk: “Listen to me while I lay a curse upon you and yours!” she cried as she raised her shriveled arms and blighted him with her flashing eyes —

“As you have done to the house of Loring, so may God do to you, until your power is swept from the land of England, and of your great Abbey of Waverley there is nothing left but a pile of gray stones in a green meadow! I see it! I see it! With my old eyes I see it! From scullion to Abbot and from cellar to tower, may Waverley and all within it droop and wither from this night on!”

The monk, hard as he was, quailed before the frantic figure and the bitter, burning words. Already the summoner and the archers with their prisoner were clear of the house. He turned and with a clang he shut the heavy door behind him.

V. HOW NIGEL WAS TRIED BY THE ABBOT OF WAVERLEY

The law of the Middle Ages, shrouded as it was in old Norman-French dialect, and abounding in uncouth and incomprehensible terms, in deodands and heriots, in infang and outfang, was a fearsome weapon in the hands of those who knew how to use it. It was not for nothing that the first act of the rebel commoners was to hew off the head of the Lord Chancellor. In an age when few knew how to read or to write, these mystic phrases and intricate forms, with the parchments and seals which were their outward expression, struck cold terror into hearts which were steeled against mere physical danger.

Even young Nigel Loring's blithe and elastic spirit was chilled as he lay that night in the penal cell of Waverley and pondered over the absolute ruin which threatened his house from a source against which all his courage was of no avail. As well take up sword and shield to defend himself against the black death, as against this blight of Holy Church. He was powerless in the grip of the Abbey. Already they had shorn off a field here and a grove there, and now in one sweep they would take in the rest, and where then was the home of the Lorings, and where should Lady Ermyntrude lay her aged head, or his old retainers, broken and spent, eke out the balance of their days? He shivered as he thought of it.

It was very well for him to threaten to carry the matter before the King, but it was years since royal Edward had heard the name of Loring, and Nigel knew that the memory of princes was a short one. Besides, the Church was the ruling power in the palace as well as in the cottage, and it was only for very good cause that a King could be expected to cross the purposes of so high a prelate as the Abbot of Waverley, as long as they came within the scope of the law. Where then was he to look for help? With the simple and practical piety of the age, he prayed for the aid of his own particular saints: of Saint Paul, whose adventures by land and sea had always endeared him; of Saint George, who had gained much honorable advancement from the Dragon; and of Saint Thomas, who was a gentleman of coat-armor, who would understand and help a person of gentle blood.

Then, much comforted by his naive orisons he enjoyed the sleep of youth and health until the entrance of the lay brother with the bread and small beer, which served as breakfast, in the morning.

The Abbey court sat in the chapter-house at the canonical hour of tierce, which was nine in the forenoon. At all times the function was a solemn one, even when the culprit might be a villain who was taken poaching on the Abbey estate, or a chapman who had given false measure from his biased scales. But now, when a man of noble birth was to be tried, the whole legal and ecclesiastical ceremony was carried out with every detail, grotesque or impressive, which the full ritual prescribed. The distant roll of church music and the slow tolling of the Abbey bell; the white-robed brethren, two and two, walked thrice round the hall singing the “Benedicite” and the “Veni, Creator” before they settled in their places at the desks on either side. Then in turn each high officer of the Abbey from below upward, the almoner, the lector, the chaplain, the subprior and the prior, swept to their wonted places.

Finally there came the grim sacrist, with demure triumph upon his downcast features, and at his heels Abbot John himself, slow and dignified, with pompous walk and solemn, composed face, his iron-beaded rosary swinging from his waist, his breviary in his hand, and his lips muttering as he hurried through his office for the day. He knelt at his high prie-dieu; the brethren, at a signal from the prior, prostrated themselves upon the floor, and the low deep voices rolled in prayer, echoed back from the arched and vaulted roof like the wash of waves from an ocean cavern. Finally the monks resumed their seats; there entered clerks in seemly black with pens and parchment; the red-velveted summoner appeared to tell his tale; Nigel was led in with archers pressing close around him; and then, with much calling of old French and much legal incantation and mystery, the court of the Abbey was open for business.

It was the sacrist who first advanced to the oaken desk reserved for the witnesses and expounded in hard, dry, mechanical fashion the many claims which the House, of Waverley had against the family of Loring. Some generations back in return for money advanced or for spiritual favor received the Loring of the day had admitted that his estate had certain feudal duties toward the Abbey. The sacrist held up the crackling yellow parchment with swinging leaden seals on which the claim was based. Amid the obligations was that of escuage, by which the price of a knight’s fee should be paid every year. No such price had been paid, nor had any service been done. The accumulated years came now to a greater sum than the fee simple of the estate. There were other claims also. The sacrist called for his books, and with thin, eager forefinger he tracked them down: dues for this, and tailage for that, so many shillings this year, and so many marks that one. Some of it occurred before Nigel was born; some of it when he was but a child. The accounts had been checked and certified by the sergeant of the law.

Nigel listened to the dread recital, and felt like some young stag who stands at bay with brave pose and heart of fire, but who sees himself compassed round and knows clearly that there is no escape. With his bold young face, his steady blue eyes, and the proud poise of his head, he was a worthy scion of the old house, and the sun, shining through the high oriel window, and showing up the stained and threadbare condition of his once rich doublet, seemed to illuminate the fallen fortunes of his family.

The sacrist had finished his exposition, and the sergeant-at-law was about to conclude a case which Nigel could in no way controvert, when help came to him from an unexpected quarter. It may have been a certain malignity with which the sacrist urged his suit, it may have been a diplomatic dislike to driving matters to extremes, or it may have been some genuine impulse of kindliness, for Abbot John was choleric but easily appeased. Whatever the cause, the result was that a white plump hand, raised in the air with a gesture of authority, showed that the case was at an end.

“Our brother sacrist hath done his duty in urging this suit,” said he, “for the worldly wealth of this Abbey is placed in his pious keeping, and it is to him that we should look if we suffered in such ways, for we are but the trustees of those who come after us. But to my keeping has been consigned that which is more precious still, the inner spirit and high repute of those who follow the rule of Saint Bernard. Now it has ever been our endeavor, since first our saintly founder went down into the valley of Clairvaux and built himself a cell there, that we should set an example to all men in gentleness and humility. For this reason it is that we built our houses in lowly places, that we have no tower to our Abbey churches, and that no finery and no metal, save only iron or lead, come within our walls. A brother shall eat from a wooden platter, drink from an iron cup, and light himself from a leaden sconce. Surely it is not for such an order who await the exaltation which is promised to the humble, to judge their own case and so acquire the lands of their neighbour! If our cause be just, as indeed I believe that it is, then it were better that it be judged at the King’s assizes at Guildford, and so I decree that the case be now dismissed from the Abbey court so that it can be heard elsewhere.”

Nigel breathed a prayer to the three sturdy saints who had stood by him so manfully and well in the hour of his need. “Abbot John,” said he, “I never thought that any man of my name would utter thanks to a Cistercian of Waverley; but by Saint Paul! you have spoken like a man this day, for it would indeed be to play with cogged dice if the Abbey’s case is to be tried in the Abbey court.”

The eighty white-clad brethren looked with half resentful, half amused eyes as they listened to this frank address to one who, in their small lives, seemed to be the direct vice-regent of Heaven. The archers had stood back from Nigel, as though he was at liberty to go, when the loud voice of the summoner broke in upon the silence —

“If it please you, holy father Abbot,” cried the voice, “this decision of yours is indeed secundum legem and intra vires so far as the civil suit is concerned which lies between this person and the Abbey. That is your affair; but it is I, Joseph the summoner, who have been grievously and criminally mishandled, my writs, papers and indentures destroyed, my authority flouted, and my person dragged through a bog, quagmire or morass, so that my velvet gabardine and silver badge of office were lost and are, as I verily believe, in the morass, quagmire or bog aforementioned, which is the same bog, morass—”

“Enough!” cried the Abbot sternly. “Lay aside this foolish fashion of speech and say straitly what you desire.”

“Holy father, I have been the officer of the King’s law no less than the servant of Holy Church, and I have been let, hindered and assaulted in the performance of my lawful and proper duties, whilst my papers, drawn in the King’s name, have been shended and rended and cast to the wind. Therefore, I demand justice upon this man in the Abbey court, the said assault having been committed within the banlieue of the Abbey’s jurisdiction.”

“What have you to say to this, brother sacrist?” asked the Abbot in some perplexity.

“I would say, father, that it is within our power to deal gently and charitably with all that concerns ourselves, but that where a the King’s officer is concerned we are wanting in our duty if we give him less than the protection that he demands. I would remind you also, holy father, that this is not the first of this man’s violence, but that he has before now beaten our servants, defied our authority, and put pike in the Abbot’s own fish-pond.”

The prelate’s heavy cheeks flushed with anger as this old grievance came fresh into his mind. His eyes hardened as he looked at the prisoner. “Tell me, Squire Nigel, did you indeed put pike in the pond?”

The young man drew himself proudly up. “Ere I answer such a question, father Abbot, do you answer one from me, and tell me what the monks of Waverley have ever done for me that I should hold my hand when I could injure them?”

A low murmur ran round the room, partly wonder at his frankness, and partly anger at his boldness.

The Abbot settled down in his seat as one who has made up his mind. “Let the case of the summoner be laid before me,” said he. “Justice shall be done, and the offender shall be punished, be he noble or simple. Let the plaint be brought before the court.”

The tale of the summoner, though rambling and filled with endless legal reiteration, was only too clear in its essence. Red Swire, with his angry face framed in white bristles, was led in, and confessed to his ill treatment of the official. A second culprit, a little wiry nut-brown archer from Churt, had aided and abetted in the deed. Both of them were ready to declare that young Squire Nigel Loring knew nothing of the matter. But then there was the awkward incident of the tearing of the writs. Nigel, to whom a lie was an impossibility, had to admit that with his own hands he had shredded those august documents. As to an excuse or an explanation, he was too proud to advance any. A cloud gathered over the brow of the Abbot, and the sacrist gazed with an ironical smile at the prisoner, while a solemn hush fell over the chapter-house as the case ended and only, judgment remained.

“Squire Nigel,” said the Abbot, “it was for you, who are, as all men know, of ancient lineage in this land, to give a fair example by which others should set their conduct. Instead of this, your manor house has ever been a center for the stirring up of strife, and now not content with your harsh showing toward us, the Cistercian monks of Waverley, you have even marked your contempt for the King’s law, and through your servants have mishandled the person of his messenger. For such offenses it is in my power to call the spiritual terrors of the Church upon your head, and yet I would not be harsh with you, seeing that you are young, and that even last week you saved the life of a servant of the Abbey when in peril. Therefore, it is by temporal and carnal means that I will use my power to tame your overbold spirit, and to chasten that headstrong and violent humor which has caused such scandal in your dealings with our Abbey. Bread and water for six weeks from now to the Feast of Saint Benedict, with a daily exhortation from our chaplain, the pious Father Ambrose, may still avail to bend the stiff neck and to soften the hard heart."

At this ignominious sentence by which the proud heir of the house of Loring would share the fate of the meanest village poacher, the hot blood of Nigel rushed to his face, and his eye glanced round him with a gleam which said more plainly than words that there could be no tame acceptance of such a doom. Twice he tried to speak, and twice his anger and his shame held the words in his throat.

"I am no subject of yours, proud Abbot!" he cried at last. "My house has ever been vavasor to the King. I deny the power of you and your court to lay sentence upon me. Punish these your own monks, who whimper at your frown, but do not dare to lay your hand upon him who fears you not, for he is a free man, and the peer of any save only the King himself."

The Abbot seemed for an instant taken aback by these bold words, and by the high and strenuous voice in which they were uttered. But the sterner sacrist came as ever to stiffen his will. He held up the old parchment in his hand.

"The Lorings were indeed vavasors to the King," said he; "but here is the very seal of Eustace Loring which shows that he made himself vassal to the Abbey and held his land from it."

"Because he was gentle," cried Nigel, "because he had no thought of trick or guile."

"Nay!" said the summoner. "If my voice may be heard, father Abbot, upon a point of the law, it is of no weight what the causes may have been why a deed is subscribed, signed or confirmed, but a court is concerned only with the terms, articles, covenants and contracts of the said deed."

"Besides," said the sacrist, "sentence is passed by the Abbey court, and there is an end of its honor and good name if it be not upheld."

"Brother sacrist," said the Abbot angrily, "methinks you show overmuch zeal in this case, and certes, we are well able to uphold the dignity and honor of the Abbey court without any rede of thine. As to you, worthy summoner, you will give your opinion when we crave for it, and not before, or you may yourself get some touch of the power of our tribunal. But your case hath been tried, Squire Loring, and judgment given. I have no more to say.”

He motioned with his hand, and an archer laid his grip upon the shoulder of the prisoner. But that rough plebeian touch woke every passion of revolt in Nigel’s spirit. Of all his high line of ancestors, was there one who had been subjected to such ignominy as this? Would they not have preferred death? And should he be the first to lower their spirit or their traditions? With a quick, lithe movement, he slipped under the arm of the archer, and plucked the short, straight sword from the soldier’s side as he did so. The next instant he had wedged himself into the recess of one of the narrow windows, and there were his pale set face, his burning eyes, and his ready blade turned upon the assembly.

“By Saint Paul!” said he, “I never thought to find honorable advancement under the roof of an abbey, but perchance there may, be some room for it ere you hale me to your prison.”

The chapter-house was in an uproar. Never in the long and decorous history of the Abbey had such a scene been witnessed within its walls. The monks themselves seemed for an instant to be infected by this spirit of daring revolt. Their own lifelong fetters hung more loosely as they viewed this unheard-of defiance of authority. They broke from their seats on either side and huddled half-scared, half-fascinated, in a large half-circle round the defiant captive, chattering, pointing, grimacing, a scandal for all time. Scourges should fall and penance be done for many a long week before the shadow of that day should pass from Waverley. But meanwhile there was no effort to bring them back to their rule. Everything was chaos and disorder. The Abbot had left his seat of justice and hurried angrily forward, to be engulfed and hustled in the crowd of his own monks like a sheep-dog who finds himself entangled amid a flock.

Only the sacrist stood clear. He had taken shelter behind the half-dozen archers, who looked with some approval and a good deal of indecision at this bold fugitive from justice.

“On him!” cried the sacrist. “Shall he defy the authority of the court, or shall one man hold six of you at bay? Close in upon him and seize him. You, Baddlesmere, why do you hold back?”

The man in question, a tall bushy-bearded fellow, clad like the others in green jerkin and breeches with high brown boots, advanced slowly, sword in hand, against Nigel. His heart was not in the business, for these clerical courts were not popular, and everyone had a tender heart for the fallen fortunes of the house of Loring and wished well to its young heir.

“Come, young sir, you have caused scathe enough,” said he. “Stand forth and give yourself up!”

“Come and fetch me, good fellow,” said Nigel, with a dangerous smile.

The archer ran in. There was a rasp of steel, a blade flickered like a swift dart of flame, and the man staggered back, with blood running down his forearm and dripping from his fingers. He wrung them and growled a Saxon oath.

“By the black rood of Bromeholm!” he cried, “I had as soon put my hand down a fox’s earth to drag up a vixen from her cubs.”

“Standoff!” said Nigel curtly. “I would not hurt you; but by Saint Paul! I will not be handled, or some one will be hurt in the handling.”

So fierce was his eye and so menacing his blade as he crouched in the narrow bay of the window that the little knot of archers were at a loss what to do. The Abbot had forced his way through the crowd and stood, purple with outraged dignity, at their side.

“He is outside the law,” said he. “He hath shed blood in a court of justice, and for such a sin there is no forgiveness. I will not have my court so flouted and set at naught. He who draws the sword, by the sword also let him perish. Forester Hugh lay a shaft to your bow!”

The man, who was one of the Abbey’s lay servants, put his weight upon his long bow and slipped the loose end of the string into the upper notch. Then, drawing one of the terrible three-foot arrows, steel-tipped and gaudily winged, from his waist, he laid it to the string.

“Now draw your bow and hold it ready!” cried the furious Abbot. “Squire Nigel, it is not for Holy Church to shed blood, but there is naught but violence which will prevail against the violent, and on your head be the sin. Cast down the sword which you hold in your hand!”

“Will you give me freedom to leave your Abbey?”

“When you have abided your sentence and purged your sin.”

“Then I had rather die where I stand than give up my sword.”

A dangerous flame lit in the Abbot’s eyes. He came of a fighting Norman stock, like so many of those fierce prelates who, bearing a mace lest they should be guilty of effusion of blood, led their troops into battle, ever remembering that it was one of their own cloth and dignity who, crosier in hand, had turned the long-drawn bloody day of Hastings. The soft accent of the churchman was gone and it was the hard voice of a soldier which said—

"One minute I give you, and no more. Then when I cry 'Loose!' drive me an arrow through his body."

The shaft was fitted, the bow was bent, and the stern eyes of the woodman were fixed on his mark. Slowly the minute passed, while Nigel breathed a prayer to his three soldier saints, not that they should save his body in this life, but that they should have a kindly care for his soul in the next. Some thought of a fierce wildcat sally crossed his mind, but once out of his corner he was lost indeed. Yet at the last he would have rushed among his enemies, and his body was bent for the spring, when with a deep sonorous hum, like a breaking harp-string, the cord of the bow was cloven in twain, and the arrow tinkled upon the tiled floor. At the same moment a young curly-headed bowman, whose broad shoulders and deep chest told of immense strength, as clearly as his frank, laughing face and honest hazel eyes did of good humor and courage, sprang forward sword in hand and took his place by Nigel's side.

"Nay, comrades!" said he. "Samkin Aylward cannot stand by and see a gallant man shot down like a bull at the end of a baiting. Five against one is long odds; but two against four is better, and by my finger-bones! Squire Nigel and I leave this room together, be it on our feet or no."

The formidable appearance of this ally and his high reputation among his fellows gave a further chill to the lukewarm ardor of the attack. Aylward's left arm was passed through his strung bow, and he was known from Woolmer Forest to the Weald as the quickest, surest archer that ever dropped a running deer at tenscore paces.

"Nay, Baddlesmere, hold your fingers from your string-case, or I may chance to give your drawing hand a two months' rest," said Aylward. "Swords, if you will, comrades, but no man strings his bow till I have loosed mine."

Yet the angry hearts of both Abbot and sacrist rose higher with a fresh obstacle.

"This is an ill day for your father, Franklin Aylward, who holds the tenancy of Crooksbury," said the sacrist. "He will rue it that ever he begot a son who will lose him his acres and his steading."

“My father is a bold yeoman, and would rue it evermore that ever his son should stand by while foul work was afoot,” said Aylward stoutly. “Fall on, comrades! We are waiting.”

Encouraged by promises of reward if they should fall in the service of the Abbey, and by threats of penalties if they should hold back, the four archers were about to close, when a singular interruption gave an entirely new turn to the proceedings.

At the door of the chapter-house, while these fiery doings had been afoot, there had assembled a mixed crowd of lay brothers, servants and varlets who had watched the development of the drama with the interest and delight with which men hail a sudden break in a dull routine. Suddenly there was an agitation at the back of this group, then a swirl in the center, and finally the front rank was violently thrust aside, and through the gap there emerged a strange and whimsical figure, who from the instant of his appearance dominated both chapter-house and Abbey, monks, prelates and archers, as if he were their owner and their master.

He was a man somewhat above middle age, with thin lemon-coloured hair, a curling mustache, a tufted chin of the same hue, and a high craggy face, all running to a great hook of the nose, like the beak of an eagle. His skin was tanned a brown-red by much exposure to the wind and sun. In height he was tall, and his figure was thin and loose-jointed, but stringy and hard-bitten. One eye was entirely covered by its lid, which lay flat over an empty socket, but the other danced and sparkled with a most roguish light, darting here and there with a twinkle of humor and criticism and intelligence, the whole fire of his soul bursting through that one narrow cranny.

His dress was as noteworthy as his person. A rich purple doublet and cloak was marked on the lapels with a strange scarlet device shaped like a wedge. Costly lace hung round his shoulders, and amid its soft folds there smoldered the dull red of a heavy golden chain. A knight’s belt at his waist and a knight’s golden spurs twinkling from his doeskin riding-boots proclaimed his rank, and on the wrist of his left gauntlet there sat a demure little hooded falcon of a breed which in itself was a mark of the dignity of the owner. Of weapons he had none, but a mandolin was slung by a black silken band over his back, and the high brown end projected above his shoulder. Such was the man, quaint, critical, masterful, with a touch of what is formidable behind it, who now surveyed the opposing groups of armed men and angry monks with an eye which commanded their attention.

"Excusez!" said he, in a lisping French. "Excusez, mes amis! I had thought to arouse from prayer or meditation, but never have I seen such a holy exercise as this under an abbey's roof, with swords for breviaries and archers for acolytes. I fear that I have come amiss, and yet I ride on an errand from one who permits no delay."

The Abbot, and possibly the sacrist also, had begun to realise that events had gone a great deal farther than they had intended, and that without an extreme scandal it was no easy matter for them to save their dignity and the good name of Waverley. Therefore, in spite of the debonair, not to say disrespectful, bearing of the newcomer, they rejoiced at his appearance and intervention.

"I am the Abbot of Waverley, fair son," said the prelate. "If your message deal with a public matter it may be fitly repeated in the chapter-house; if not I will give you audience in my own chamber; for it is clear to me that you are a gentle man of blood and coat-armor who would not lightly break in upon the business of our court — a business which, as you have remarked, is little welcome to men of peace like myself and the brethren of the rule of Saint Bernard."

"Pardieu! Father Abbot," said the stranger. "One had but to glance at you and your men to see that the business was indeed little to your taste, and it may be even less so when I say that rather than see this young person in the window, who hath a noble bearing, further molested by these archers, I will myself adventure my person on his behalf."

The Abbot's smile turned to a frown at these frank words. "It would become you better, sir, to deliver the message of which you say that you are the bearer, than to uphold a prisoner against the rightful judgment of a court."

The stranger swept the court with his questioning eye. "The message is not for you, good father Abbot. It is for one whom I know not. I have been to his house, and they have sent me hither. The name is Nigel Loring."

"It is for me, fair sir."

"I had thought as much. I knew your father, Eustace Loring, and though he would have made two of you, yet he has left his stamp plain enough upon your face."

“You know not the truth of this matter,” said the Abbot. “If you are a loyal man, you will stand aside, for this young man hath grievously offended against the law, and it is for the King’s lieges to give us their support.”

“And you have haled him up for judgment,” cried the stranger with much amusement. “It is as though a rookery sat in judgment upon a falcon. I warrant that you have found it easier to judge than to punish. Let me tell you, father Abbot, that this standeth not aright. When powers such as these were given to the like of you, they were given that you might check a brawling underling or correct a drunken woodman, and not that you might drag the best blood in England to your bar and set your archers on him if he questioned your findings.”

The Abbot was little used to hear such words of reproof uttered in so stern a voice under his own abbey roof and before his listening monks. “You may perchance find that an Abbey court has more powers than you wot of, Sir Knight,” said he, “if knight indeed you be who are so uncourteous and short in your speech. Ere we go further, I would ask your name and style?”

The stranger laughed. “It is easy to see that you are indeed men of peace,” said he proudly. “Had I shown this sign,” and he touched the token upon his lapels, “whether on shield or pennon, in the marches of France or Scotland, there is not a cavalier but would have known the red pile of Chandos.”

Chandos, John Chandos, the flower of English chivalry, the pink of knight-errantry, the hero already of fifty desperate enterprises, a man known and honored from end to end of Europe! Nigel gazed at him as one who sees a vision. The archers stood back abashed, while the monks crowded closer to stare at the famous soldier of the French wars. The Abbot abated his tone, and a smile came to his angry face.

“We are indeed men of peace, Sir John, and little skilled in warlike blazonry,” said he; “yet stout as are our Abbey walls, they are not so thick that the fame of your exploits has not passed through them and reached our ears. If it be your pleasure to take an interest in this young and misguided Squire, it is not for us to thwart your kind intention or to withhold such grace as you request. I am glad indeed that he hath one who can set him so fair an example for a friend.”

"I thank you for your courtesy, good father Abbot," said Chandos carelessly. "This young Squire has, however, a better friend than myself, one who is kinder to those he loves and more terrible to those he hates. It is from him I bear a message."

"I pray you, fair and honored sir," said Nigel, "that you will tell me what is the message that you bear."

"The message, mon ami, is that your friend comes into these parts and would have a night's lodging at the manor house of Tilford for the love and respect that he bears your family."

"Nay, he is most welcome," said Nigel, "and yet I hope that he is one who can relish a soldier's fare and sleep under a humble roof, for indeed we can but give our best, poor as it is."

"He is indeed a soldier and a good one," Chandos answered, laughing, "and I warrant he has slept in rougher quarters than Tilford Manor-house."

"I have few friends, fair sir," said Nigel, with a puzzled face. "I pray you give me this gentleman's name."

"His name is Edward."

"Sir Edward Mortimer of Kent, perchance, or is it Sir Edward Brocas of whom the Lady Ermyntrude talks?"

"Nay, he is known as Edward only, and if you ask a second name it is Plantagenet, for he who comes to seek the shelter of your roof is your liege lord and mine, the King's high majesty, Edward of England."

VI. IN WHICH LADY ERMYNTRUDE OPENS THE IRON COFFER

AS in a dream Nigel heard these stupendous and incredible words. As in a dream also he had a vision of a smiling and conciliatory Abbot, of an obsequious sacrist, and of a band of archers who cleared a path for him and for the King's messenger through the motley crowd who had choked the entrance of the Abbey court. A minute later he was walking by the side of Chandos through the peaceful cloister, and in front in the open archway of the great gate was the broad yellow road between its borders of green meadow-land. The spring air was the sweeter and the more fragrant for that chill dread of dishonor and captivity which had so recently frozen his ardent heart. He had already passed the portal when a hand plucked at his sleeve and he turned to find himself confronted by the brown honest face and hazel eyes of the archer who had interfered in his behalf.

"Well," said Aylward, "what have you to say to me, young sir?"

"What can I say, my good fellow, save that I thank you with all my heart? By Saint Paul! if you had been my blood brother you could not have stood by me more stoutly."

"Nay! but this is not enough."

Nigel coloured with vexation, and the more so as Chandos was listening with his critical smile to their conversation. "If you had heard what was said in the court," said he, "you would understand that I am not blessed at this moment with much of this world's gear. The black death and the monks have between them been heavy upon our estate. Willingly would I give you a handful of gold for your assistance, since that is what you seem to crave; but indeed I have it not, and so once more I say that you must be satisfied with my thanks."

"Your gold is nothing to me," said Aylward shortly, "nor would you buy my loyalty if you filled my wallet with rose nobles, so long as you were not a man after my own heart. But I have seen you back the yellow horse, and I have seen you face the Abbot of Waverley, and you are such a master as I would very gladly serve if you have by chance a place for such a man. I have seen your following, and I doubt not that they were stout fellows in your grandfather’s time; but which of them now would draw a bow-string to his ear? Through you I have left the service of the Abbey of Waverley, and where can I look now for a post? If I stay here I am all undone like a fretted bow-string.”

“Nay, there can be no difficulty there,” said Chandos. “Pardieu! a roistering, swaggering dare-devil archer is worth his price on the French border. There are two hundred such who march behind my own person, and I would ask nothing better than to see you among them.”

“I thank you, noble sir, for your offer,” said Aylward, “and I had rather follow your banner than many another one, for it is well known that it goes ever forward, and I have heard enough of the wars to know that there are small pickings for the man who lags behind. Yet, if the Squire will have me, I would choose to fight under the five roses of Loring, for though I was born in the hundred of Easebourne and the rape of Chichester, yet I have grown up and learned to use the longbow in these parts, and as the free son of a free franklin I had rather serve my own neighbour than a stranger.”

“My good fellow,” said Nigel, “I have told you that I could in no wise reward you for such service.”

“If you will but take me to the wars I will see to my own reward,” said Aylward. “Till then I ask for none, save a corner of your table and six feet of your floor, for it is certain that the only reward I would get from the Abbey for this day’s work would be the scourge for my back and the stocks for my ankles. Samkin Aylward is your man, Squire Nigel, from this hour on, and by these ten finger-bones he trusts the Devil will fly away with him if ever he gives you cause to regret it!” So saying he raised his hand to his steel cap in salute, slung his great yellow bow over his back, and followed on some paces in the rear of his new master.

“Pardieu! I have arrived a la bonne heure,” said Chandos. “I rode from Windsor and came to your manor house, to find it empty save for a fine old dame, who told me of your troubles. From her I walked across to the Abbey, and none too soon, for what with cloth-yard shafts for your body, and bell, book and candle for your soul, it was no very cheerful outlook. But here is the very dame herself, if I mistake not.”

It was indeed the formidable figure of the Lady Ermyntrude, gaunt, bowed and leaning on her staff, which had emerged from the door of the manor-house and advanced to greet them. She croaked with laughter, and shook her stick at the great building as she heard of the discomfiture of the

Abbey court. Then she led the way into the hall where the best which she could provide had been laid out for their illustrious guest. There was Chandos blood in her own veins, traceable back through the de Greys, de Multons, de Valences, de Montagues and other high and noble strains, so that the meal had been eaten and cleared before she had done tracing the network of intermarriages and connections, with quarterings, impalements, lozenges and augmentations by which the blazonry of the two families might be made to show a common origin. Back to the Conquest and before it there was not a noble family-tree every twig and bud of which was not familiar to the Dame Ermyntrude.

And now when the trestles were cleared and the three were left alone in the hall, Chandos broke his message to the lady. “King Edward hath ever borne in mind that noble knight your son Sir Eustace,” said he. “He will journey to Southampton next week, and I am his harbinger. He bade me say, noble and honored lady, that he would come from Guildford in any easy stage so that he might spend one night under your roof.”

The old dame flushed with pleasure, and then turned white with vexation at the words. “It is in truth great honor to the house of Loring,” said she, “yet our roof is now humble and, as you have seen, our fare is plain. The King knows not that we are so poor. I fear lest we seem churlish and niggard in his eyes.”

But Chandos reasoned away her fears. The King’s retinue would journey on to Farnham Castle. There were no ladies in his party. Though he was King, still he was a hardy soldier, and cared little for his ease. In any case, since he had declared his coming, they must make the best of it. Finally, with all delicacy, Chandos offered his own purse if it would help in the matter. But already the Lady Ermyntrude had recovered her composure.

“Nay, fair kinsman, that may not be,” said she. “I will make such preparation as I may for the King. He will bear in mind that if the house of Loring can give nothing else, they have always held their blood and their lives at his disposal.”

Chandos was to ride on to Farnham Castle and beyond, but he expressed his desire to have a warm bath ere he left Tilford, for like most of his fellow-knights, he was much addicted to simmering in the hottest water that he could possibly endure. The bath therefore, a high hooped arrangement like a broader but shorter churn, was carried into the privacy of the guest-chamber, and thither it was that Nigel was summoned to hold him company while he stewed and sweltered in his tub.

Nigel perched himself upon the side of the high bed, swinging his legs over the edge and gazing with wonder and amusement at the quaint face, the ruffled yellow hair, and the sinewy shoulders of the famous warrior, dimly seen amid a pillar of steam. He was in a mood for talk; so Nigel with eager lips plied him with a thousand questions about the wars, hanging upon every word which came back to him, like those of the ancient oracles, out of the mist and the cloud. To Chandos himself, the old soldier for whom war had lost its freshness, it was a renewal of his own ardent youth to listen to Nigel's rapid questions and to mark the rapt attention with which he listened.

"Tell me of the Welsh, honored sir," asked the Squire. "What manner of soldiers are the Welsh?"

"They are very valiant men of war," said Chandos, splashing about in his tub. "There is good skirmishing to be had in their valleys if you ride with a small following. They flare up like a furzebush in the flames, but if for a short space you may abide the heat of it, then there is a chance that it may be cooler."

"And the Scotch?" asked Nigel. "You have made war upon them also, as I understand."

"The Scotch knights have no masters in the world, and he who can hold his own with the best of them, be it a Douglas, a Murray or a Seaton, has nothing more to learn. Though you be a hard man, you will always meet as hard a one if you ride northward. If the Welsh be like the furze fire, then, pardieu! the Scotch are the peat, for they will smolder and you will never come to the end of them. I have had many happy hours on the marches of Scotland, for even if there be no war the Percies of Alnwick or the Governor of Carlisle can still raise a little bickering with the border clans."

"I bear in mind that my father was wont to say that they were very stout spearmen."

"No better in the world, for the spears are twelve foot long and they hold them in very thick array; but their archers are weak, save only the men of Ettrick and Selkirk who come from the forest. I pray you to open the lattice, Nigel, for the steam is overthick. Now in Wales it is the spearmen who are weak, and there are no archers in these islands like the men of Gwent with their bows of elm, which shoot with such power that I have known a cavalier to have his horse killed when the shaft had passed through his mail breeches, his thigh and his saddle. And yet, what is the most strongly shot arrow to these new balls of iron driven by the fire-powder which will crush a man’s armor as an egg is crushed by a stone? Our fathers knew them not.”

“Then the better for us,” cried Nigel, “since there is at least one honorable venture which is all our own.”

Chandos chuckled and turned upon the flushed youth a twinkling and sympathetic eye. “You have a fashion of speech which carries me back to the old men whom I met in my boyhood,” said he. “There were some of the real old knight-errants left in those days, and they spoke as you do. Young as you are, you belong to another age. Where got you that trick of thought and word?”

“I have had only one to teach me, the Lady Ermyntrude.”

“Pardieu! she has trained a proper young hawk ready to stoop at a lordly quarry,” said Chandos. “I would that I had the first unhooding of you. Will you not ride with me to the wars?”

The tears brimmed over from Nigel’s eyes, and he wrung the gaunt hand extended from the bath. “By Saint Paul! what could I ask better in the world? I fear to leave her, for she has none other to care for her. But if it can in any way be arranged—”

“The King’s hand may smooth it out. Say no more until he is here. But if you wish to ride with me—”

“What could man wish for more? Is there a Squire in England who would not serve under the banner of Chandos! Whither do you go, fair sir? And when do you go? Is it to Scotland? Is it to Ireland? Is it to France? But alas, alas!”

The eager face had clouded. For the instant he had forgotten that a suit of armor was as much beyond his means as a service of gold plate. Down in a twinkling came all his high hopes to the ground. Oh, these sordid material things, which come between our dreams and their fulfilment! The Squire of such a knight must dress with the best. Yet all the fee simple of Tilford would scarce suffice for one suit of plate.

Chandos, with his quick wit and knowledge of the world, had guessed the cause of this sudden change. “If you fight under my banner it is for me to find the weapons,” said he. “Nay, I will not be denied.”

But Nigel shook his head sadly. “It may not be. The Lady Ermyntrude would sell this old house and every acre round it, ere she would permit me to accept this gracious bounty which you offer. Yet I do not despair, for only last week I won for myself a noble war-horse for which I paid not a penny, so perchance a suit of armor may also come my way.”

“And how won you the horse?”

“It was given me by the monks of Waverley.”

“This is wonderful. Pardieu! I should have expected, from what I had seen, that they would have given you little save their malediction.”

“They had no use for the horse, and they gave it to me.”

“Then we have only to find some one who has no use for a suit of armor and will give it to you. Yet I trust that you will think better of it and let me, since that good lady proves that I am your kinsman, fit you for the wars.”

“I thank you, noble sir, and if I should turn to anyone it would indeed be to you; but there are other ways which I would try first. But I pray you, good Sir John, to tell me of some of your noble spear-runnings against the French, for the whole land rings with the tale of your deeds and I have heard that in one morning three champions have fallen before your lance. Was it not so?”

“That it was indeed so these scars upon my body will prove; but these were the follies of my youth.”

“How can you call them follies? Are they not the means by which honorable advancement may be gained and one’s lady exalted?”

“It is right that you should think so, Nigel. At your age a man should have a hot head and a high heart. I also had both and fought for my lady’s glove or for my vow or for the love of fighting. But as one grows older and commands men one has other things to think of. One thinks less of one’s own honor and more of the safety of the army. It is not your own spear, your own sword, your own arm, which will turn the tide of fight; but a cool head may save a stricken field. He who knows when his horsemen should charge and when they should fight on foot, he who can mix his archers with his men-at-arms in such a fashion that each can support the other, he who can hold up his reserve and pour it into the battle when it may turn the tide, he who has a quick eye for boggy land and broken ground — that is the man who is of more worth to an army than Roland, Oliver and all the paladins.”

“Yet if his knights fail him, honored sir, all his head-work will not prevail.”

“True enough, Nigel; so may every Squire ride to the wars with his soul on fire, as yours is now. But I must linger no longer, for the King’s service must be done. I will dress, and when I have bid farewell to the noble Dame Ermyntrude I will on to Farnham; but you will see me here again on the day that the King comes.”

So Chandos went his way that evening, walking his horse through the peaceful lanes and twanging his citole as he went, for he loved music and was famous for his merry songs. The cottagers came from their huts and laughed and clapped as the rich full voice swelled and sank to the cheery tinkling of the strings. There were few who saw him pass that would have guessed that the quaint one-eyed man with the yellow hair was the toughest fighter and craftiest man of war in Europe. Once only, as he entered Farnham, an old broken man-at-arms ran out in his rags and clutched at his horse as a dog gambols round his master. Chandos threw him a kind word and a gold coin as he passed on to the castle.

In the meanwhile young Nigel and the Lady Ermyntrude, left alone with their difficulties, looked blankly in each other’s faces.

“The cellar is well nigh empty,” said Nigel. “There are two firkins of small beer and a tun of canary. How can we set such drink before the King and his court?”

“We must have some wine of Bordeaux. With that and the mottled cow’s calf and the fowls and a goose, we can set forth a sufficient repast if he stays only for the one night. How many will be with him?”

“A dozen, at the least.”

The old dame wrung her hands in despair. “Nay, take it not to heart, dear lady!” said Nigel. “We have but to say the word and the King would stop at Waverley, where he and his court would find all that they could wish.”

“Never!” cried the Lady Ermyntrude. “It would be shame and disgrace to us forever if the King were to pass our door when he has graciously said that he was fain to enter in. Nay, I will do it. Never did I think that I would be forced to this, but I know that he would wish it, and I will do it.”

She went to the old iron coffer, and taking a small key from her girdle she unlocked it. The rusty hinges, screaming shrilly as she threw back the lid, proclaimed how seldom it was that she had penetrated into the sacred recesses of her treasure-chest. At the top were some relics of old finery: a silken cloak spangled with golden stars, a coif of silver filigree, a roll of Venetian lace. Beneath were little packets tied in silk which the old lady handled with tender care: a man’s hunting-glove, a child’s shoe, a love-knot done in faded green ribbon, some letters in rude rough script, and a vernicle of Saint Thomas. Then from the very bottom of the box she drew three objects, swathed in silken cloth, which she uncovered and laid upon the table. The one was a bracelet of rough gold studded with uncut rubies, the second was a gold salver, and the third was a high goblet of the same metal.

“You have heard me speak of these, Nigel, but never before have you seen them, for indeed I have not opened the hutch for fear that we might be tempted in our great need to turn them into money. I have kept them out of my sight and even out of my thoughts. But now it is the honor of the house which calls, and even these must go. This goblet was that which my husband, Sir Nele Loring, won after the intaking of Belgrade when he and his comrades held the lists from matins to vespers against the flower of the French chivalry. The salver was given him by the Earl of Pembroke in memory of his valor upon the field of Falkirk.”

“And the bracelet, dear lady?”

“You will not laugh, Nigel?”

“Nay, why should I laugh?”

“The bracelet was the prize for the Queen of Beauty which was given to me before all the high-born ladies of England by Sir Nele Loring a month before our marriage — the Queen of Beauty, Nigel — I, old and twisted, as you see me. Five strong men went down before his lance ere he won that trinket for me. And now in my last years—”

“Nay, dear and honored lady, we will not part with it.”

“Yes, Nigel, he would have it so. I can hear his whisper in my ear. Honor to him was everything — the rest nothing. Take it from me, Nigel, ere my heart weakens. To-morrow you will ride with it to Guildford; you will see Thorold the goldsmith; and you will raise enough money to pay for all that we shall need for the King’s coming.” She turned her face away to hide the quivering of her wrinkled features, and the crash of the iron lid covered the sob which burst from her overwrought soul.

VII. HOW NIGEL WENT MARKETING TO GUILDFORD

It was on a bright June morning that young Nigel, with youth and springtime to make his heart light, rode upon his errand from Tilford to Guildford town. Beneath him was his great yellow warhorse, caracoling and curveting as he went, as blithe and free of spirit as his master. In all England one would scarce have found upon that morning so high-mettled and so debonair a pair. The sandy road wound through groves of fir, where the breeze came soft and fragrant with resinous gums, or over heathery downs, which rolled away to north and to south, vast and untenanted, for on the uplands the soil was poor and water scarce. Over Crooksbury Common he passed, and then across the great Heath of Puttenham, following a sandy path which wound amid the bracken and the heather, for he meant to strike the Pilgrims' Way where it turned eastward from Farnham and from Seale. As he rode he continually felt his saddle-bag with his hand, for in it, securely strapped, he had placed the precious treasures of the Lady Ermyntrude. As he saw the grand tawny neck tossing before him, and felt the easy heave of the great horse and heard the muffled drumming of his hoofs, he could have sung and shouted with the joy of living.

Behind him, upon the little brown pony which had been Nigel's former mount, rode Samkin Aylward the bowman, who had taken upon himself the duties of personal attendant and body-guard. His great shoulders and breadth of frame seemed dangerously top-heavy upon the tiny steed, but he ambled along, whistling a merry lilt and as lighthearted as his master. There was no countryman who had not a nod and no woman who had not a smile for the jovial bowman, who rode for the most part with his face over his shoulder, staring at the last petticoat which had passed him. Once only he met with a harsher greeting. It was from a tall, white-headed, red-faced man whom they met upon the moor.

"Good-morrow, dear father!" cried Aylward. "How is it with you at Crooksbury? And how are the new black cow and the ewes from Alton and Mary the dairymaid and all your gear?"

“It ill becomes you to ask, you ne’er-do-weel,” said the old man. “You have angered the monks of Waverley, whose tenant I am, and they would drive me out of my farm. Yet there are three more years to run, and do what they may I will bide till then. But little did I think that I should lose my homestead through you, Samkin, and big as you are I would knock the dust out of that green jerkin with a good hazel switch if I had you at Crooksbury.”

“Then you shall do it to-morrow morning, good father, for I will come and see you then. But indeed I did not do more at Waverley than you would have done yourself. Look me in the eye, old hothead, and tell me if you would have stood by while the last Loring — look at him as he rides with his head in the air and his soul in the clouds — was shot down before your very eyes at the bidding of that fat monk! If you would, then I disown you as my father.”

“Nay, Samkin, if it was like that, then perhaps what you did was not so far amiss. But it is hard to lose the old farm when my heart is buried deep in the good brown soil.”

“Tut, man! there are three years to run, and what may not happen in three years? Before that time I shall have gone to the wars, and when I have opened a French strong box or two you can buy the good brown soil and snap your fingers at Abbot John and his bailiffs. Am I not as proper a man as Tom Withstaff of Churt? And yet he came back after six months with his pockets full of rose nobles and a French wench on either arm.”

“God preserve us from the wenches, Samkin! But indeed I think that if there is money to be gathered you are as likely to get your fist full as any man who goes to the war. But hasten, lad, hasten! Already your young master is over the brow.”

Thus admonished, the archer waved his gauntleted hand to his father, and digging his heels into the sides of his little pony soon drew up with the Squire. Nigel glanced over his shoulder and slackened speed until the pony’s head was up to his saddle.

“Have I not heard, archer,” said he, “that an outlaw has been loose in these parts?”

“It is true, fair sir. He was villain to Sir Peter Mandeville, but he broke his bonds and fled into the forests. Men call him the ‘Wild Man of Puttenham.’”

“How comes it that he has not been hunted down? If the man be a draw-latch and a robber it would be an honorable deed to clear the country of such an evil.”

“Twice the sergeants-at-arms from Guildford have come out against him, but the fox has many earths, and it would puzzle you to get him out of them.”

“By Saint Paul! were my errand not a pressing one I would be tempted to turn aside and seek him. Where lives he, then?”

“There is a great morass beyond Puttenham, and across it there are caves in which he and his people lurk.”

“His people? He hath a band?”

“There are several with him.”

“It sounds a most honorable enterprise,” said Nigel. “When the King hath come and gone we will spare a day for the outlaws of Puttenham. I fear there is little chance for us to see them on this journey.”

“They prey upon the pilgrims who pass along the Winchester Road, and they are well loved by the folk in these parts, for they rob none of them and have an open hand for all who will help them.”

“It is right easy to have an open hand with the money that you have stolen,” said Nigel; “but I fear that they will not try to rob two men with swords at their girdles like you and me, so we shall have no profit from them.”

They had passed over the wild moors and had come down now into the main road by which the pilgrims from the west of England made their way to the national shrine at Canterbury. It passed from Winchester, and up the beautiful valley of the Itchen until it reached Farnham, where it forked into two branches, one of which ran along the Hog’s Back, while the second wound to the south and came out at Saint Catherine’s Hill where stands the Pilgrim shrine, a gray old ruin now, but once so august, so crowded and so affluent. It was this second branch upon which Nigel and Aylward found themselves as they rode to Guildford.

No one, as it chanced, was going the same way as themselves, but they met one large drove of pilgrims returning from their journey with pictures of Saint Thomas and snails’ shells or little leaden ampullae in their hats and bundles of purchases over their shoulders. They were a grimy, ragged, travel-stained crew, the men walking, the women borne on asses. Man and beast, they limped along as if it would be a glad day when they saw their homes once more. These and a few beggars or minstrels, who crouched among the heather on either side of the track in the hope of receiving an occasional farthing from the passer-by, were the only folk they met until they had reached the village of Puttenham. Already there, was a hot sun and just breeze enough to send the dust flying down the road, so they were glad to clear their throats with a glass of beer at the ale-stake in the village, where the fair alewife gave Nigel a cold farewell because he had no attentions for her, and Aylward a box on the ear because he had too many.

On the farther side of Puttenham the road runs through thick woods of oak and beech, with a tangled undergrowth of fern and bramble. Here they met a patrol of sergeants-at-arms, tall fellows, well-mounted, clad in studded-leather caps and tunics, with lances and swords. They walked their horses slowly on the shady side of the road, and stopped as the travelers came up, to ask if they had been molested on the way.

"Have a care," they added, "for the 'Wild Man' and his wife are out. Only yesterday they slew a merchant from the west and took a hundred crowns."

"His wife, you say?"

"Yes, she is ever at his side, and has saved him many a time, for if he has the strength it is she who has the wit. I hope to see their heads together upon the green grass one of these mornings."

The patrol passed downward toward Farnham, and so, as it proved, away from the robbers, who had doubtless watched them closely from the dense brushwood which skirted the road. Coming round a curve, Nigel and Aylward were aware of a tall and graceful woman who sat, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, upon the bank by the side of the track. At such a sight of beauty in distress Nigel pricked Pommers with the spur and in three bounds was at the side of the unhappy lady.

"What ails you, fair dame?" he asked. "Is there any small matter in which I may stand your friend, or is it possible that anyone hath so hard a heart as to do you an injury."

She rose and turned upon him a face full of hope and entreaty. "Oh, save my poor, poor father!" she cried. "Have you perchance seen the way-wardens? They passed us, and I fear they are beyond reach."

"Yes, they have ridden onward, but we may serve as well."

"Then hasten, hasten, I pray you! Even now they may be doing him to death. They have dragged him into yonder grove and I have heard his voice growing ever weaker in the distance. Hasten, I implore you!”

Nigel sprang from his horse and tossed the rein to Aylward.

“Nay, let us go together. How many robbers were there, lady?”

“Two stout fellows.”

“Then I come also.”

“Nay, it is not possible,” said Nigel. “The wood is too thick for horses, and we cannot leave them in the road.”

“I will guard them,” cried the lady.

“Pommers is not so easily held. Do you bide here, Aylward, until you hear from me. Stir not, I command you!” So saying, Nigel, with the light, of adventure gleaming in his joyous eyes, drew his sword and plunged swiftly into the forest.

Far and fast he ran, from glade to glade, breaking through the bushes, springing over the brambles, light as a young deer, peering this way and that, straining his ears for a sound, and catching only the cry of the wood-pigeons. Still on he went, with the constant thought of the weeping woman behind and of the captured man in front. It was not until he was footsore and out of breath that he stopped with his hand to his side, and considered that his own business had still to be done, and that it was time once more that he should seek the road to Guildford.

Meantime Aylward had found his own rough means of consoling the woman in the road, who stood sobbing with her face against the side of Pommers’ saddle.

“Nay, weep not, my pretty one,” said he. “It brings the tears to my own eyes to see them stream from thine.”

“Alas! good archer, he was the best of fathers, so gentle and so kind! Had you but known him, you must have loved him.”

“Tut, tut! he will suffer no scathe. Squire Nigel will bring him back to you anon.”

“No, no, I shall never see him more. Hold me, archer, or I fall!”

Aylward pressed his ready arm round the supple waist. The fainting woman leaned with her hand upon his shoulder. Her pale face looked past him, and it was some new light in her eyes, a flash of expectancy, of triumph, of wicked joy, which gave him sudden warning of his danger.

He shook her off and sprang to one side, but only just in time to avoid a crashing blow from a great club in the hands of a man even taller and stronger than himself. He had one quick vision of great white teeth clenched in grim ferocity, a wild flying beard and blazing wild-beast eyes. The next instant he had closed, ducking his head beneath another swing of that murderous cudgel.

With his arms round the robber's burly body and his face buried in his bushy beard, Aylward gasped and strained and heaved. Back and forward in the dusty road the two men stamped and staggered, a grim wrestling-match, with life for the prize. Twice the great strength of the outlaw had Aylward nearly down, and twice with his greater youth and skill the archer restored his grip and his balance. Then at last his turn came. He slipped his leg behind the other's knee, and, giving a mighty wrench, tore him across it. With a hoarse shout the outlaw toppled backward and had hardly reached the ground before Aylward had his knee upon his chest and his short sword deep in his beard and pointed to his throat.

"By these ten finger-bones!" he gasped, "one more struggle and it is your last!"

The man lay still enough, for he was half-stunned by the crashing fall. Aylward looked round him, but the woman had disappeared. At the first blow struck she had vanished into the forest. He began to have fears for his master, thinking that he perhaps had been lured into some deathtrap; but his forebodings were soon at rest, for Nigel himself came hastening down the road, which he had struck some distance from the spot where he left it.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, "who is this man on whom you are perched, and where is the lady who has honored us so far as to crave our help? Alas, that I have been unable to find her father!"

"As well for you, fair sir," said Aylward, "for I am of opinion that her father was the Devil. This woman is, as I believe, the wife of the 'Wild Man of Puttenham,' and this is the 'Wild Man' himself who set upon me and tried to brain me with his club."

The outlaw, who had opened his eyes, looked with a scowl from his captor to the new-comer. "You are in luck, archer," said he, "for I have come to grips with many a man, but I cannot call to mind any who have had the better of me."

"You have indeed the grip of a bear," said Aylward; "but it was a coward deed that your wife should hold me while you dashed out my brains with a stick. It is also a most villainous thing to lay a snare for wayfarers by asking for their pity and assistance, so that it was our own soft hearts which brought us into such danger. The next who hath real need of our help may suffer for your sins."

"When the hand of the whole world is against you," said the outlaw in a surly voice, "you must fight as best you can."

"You well deserve to be hanged, if only because you have brought this woman, who is fair and gentle-spoken, to such a life," said Nigel. "Let us tie him by the wrist to my stirrup leather, Aylward, and we will lead him into Guildford."

The archer drew a spare bowstring from his case and had bound the prisoner as directed, when Nigel gave a sudden start and cry of alarm.

"Holy Mary!" he cried. "Where is the saddle-bag?"

It had been cut away by a sharp knife. Only the two ends of strap remained. Aylward and Nigel stared at each other in blank dismay. Then the young Squire shook his clenched hands and pulled at his yellow curls in his despair.

"The Lady Ermyntrude's bracelet! My grandfather's cup!" he cried. "I would have died ere I lost them! What can I say to her? I dare not return until I have found them. Oh, Aylward, Aylward! how came you to let them be taken?"

The honest archer had pushed back his steel cap and was scratching his tangled head. "Nay, I know nothing of it. You never said that there was aught of price in the bag, else had I kept a better eye upon it. Certes! it was not this fellow who took it, since I have never had my hands from him. It can only be the woman who fled with it while we fought."

Nigel stamped about the road in his perplexity. "I would follow her to the world's end if I knew where I could find her, but to search these woods for her is to look for a mouse in a wheat-field. Good Saint George, thou who didst overcome the Dragon, I pray you by that most honorable and knightly achievement that you will be with me now! And you also, great Saint Julian, patron of all wayfarers in distress! Two candles shall burn before your shrine at Godalming, if you will but bring me back my saddle-bag. What would I not give to have it back?"

"Will you give me my life?" asked the outlaw. "Promise that I go free, and you shall have it back, if it be indeed true that my wife has taken it."

"Nay, I cannot do that," said Nigel. "My honor would surely be concerned, since my loss is a private one; but it would be to the public scathe that you should go free. By Saint Paul! it would be an ungentle deed if in order to save my own I let you loose upon the gear of a hundred others."

"I will not ask you to let me loose," said the "Wild Man." "If you will promise that my life be spared I will restore your bag."

"I cannot give such a promise, for it will lie with the Sheriff and reeves of Guildford."

"Shall I have your word in my favor?"

"That I could promise you, if you will give back the bag, though I know not how far my word may avail. But your words are vain, for you cannot think that we will be so fond as to let you go in the hope that you return?"

"I would not ask it," said the "Wild Man," "for I can get your bag and yet never stir from the spot where I stand. Have I your promise upon your honor and all that you hold dear that you will ask for grace?"

"You have."

"And that my wife shall be unharmed?"

"I promise it."

The outlaw laid back his head and uttered a long shrill cry like the howl of a wolf. There was a silent pause, and then, clear and shrill, there rose the same cry no great distance away in the forest. Again the "Wild Man" called, and again his mate replied. A third time he summoned, as the deer bells to the doe in the greenwood. Then with a rustle of brushwood and snapping of twigs the woman was before them once more, tall, pale, graceful, wonderful. She glanced neither at Aylward nor Nigel, but ran to the side of her husband.

"Dear and sweet lord," she cried, "I trust they have done you no hurt. I waited by the old ash, and my heart sank when you came not."

"I have been taken at last, wife."

"Oh, cursed, cursed day! Let him go, kind, gentle sirs; do not take him from me!"

"They will speak for me at Guildford," said the "Wild Man." "They have sworn it. But hand them first the bag that you have taken."

She drew it out from under her loose cloak. "Here it is, gentle sir. Indeed it went to my heart to take it, for you had mercy upon me in my trouble. But now I am, as you see, in real and very sore distress. Will you not have mercy now? Take ruth on us, fair sir! On my knees I beg it of you, most gentle and kindly Squire!"

Nigel had clutched his bag, and right glad he was to feel that the treasures were all safe within it. “My proffer is given,” said he. “I will say what I can; but the issue rests with others. I pray you to stand up, for indeed I cannot promise more.”

“Then I must be content,” said she, rising, with a composed face. “I have prayed you to take ruth, and indeed I can do no more; but ere I go back to the forest I would rede you to be on your guard lest you lose your bag once more. Wot you how I took it, archer? Nay, it was simple enough, and may happen again, so I make it clear to you. I had this knife in my sleeve, and though it is small it is very sharp. I slipped it down like this. Then when I seemed to weep with my face against the saddle, I cut down like this—”

In an instant she had shorn through the stirrup leather which bound her man, and he, diving under the belly of the horse, had slipped like a snake into the brushwood. In passing he had struck Pommers from beneath, and the great horse, enraged and insulted, was rearing high, with two men hanging to his bridle. When at last he had calmed there was no sign left of the “Wild Man” or of his wife. In vain did Aylward, an arrow on his string, run here and there among the great trees and peer down the shadowy glades. When he returned he and his master cast a shamefaced glance at each other.

“I trust that we are better soldiers than jailers,” said Aylward, as he climbed on his pony.

But Nigel’s frown relaxed into a smile. “At least we have gained back what we lost,” said he. “Here I place it on the pommel of my saddle, and I shall not take my eyes from it until we are safe in Guildford town.”

So they jogged on together until passing Saint Catherine’s shrine they crossed the winding Wey once more, and so found themselves in the steep high street with its heavy-caved gabled houses, its monkish hospitium upon the left, where good ale may still be quaffed, and its great square-keeped castle upon the right, no gray and grim skeleton of ruin, but very quick and alert, with blazoned banner flying free, and steel caps twinkling from the battlement. A row of booths extended from the castle gate to the high street, and two doors from the Church of the Trinity was that of Thorold the goldsmith, a rich burgess and Mayor of the town.

He looked long and lovingly at the rich rubies and at the fine work upon the goblet. Then he stroked his flowing gray beard as he pondered whether he should offer fifty nobles or sixty, for he knew well that he could sell them again for two hundred. If he offered too much his profit would be reduced. If he offered too little the youth might go as far as London with them, for they were rare and of great worth. The young man was ill-clad, and his eyes were anxious. Perchance he was hard pressed and was ignorant of the value of what he bore. He would sound him.

"These things are old and out of fashion, fair sir," said he. "Of the stones I can scarce say if they are of good quality or not, but they are dull and rough. Yet, if your price be low I may add them to my stock, though indeed this booth was made to sell and not to buy. What do you ask?"

Nigel bent his brows in perplexity. Here was a game in which neither his bold heart nor his active limbs could help him. It was the new force mastering the old: the man of commerce conquering the man of war — wearing him down and weakening him through the centuries until he had him as his bond-servant and his thrall.

"I know not what to ask, good sir," said Nigel. "It is not for me, nor for any man who bears my name, to chaffer and to haggle. You know the worth of these things, for it is your trade to do so. The Lady Ermyntrude lacks money, and we must have it against the King's coming, so give me that which is right and just, and we will say no more."

The goldsmith smiled. The business was growing more simple and more profitable. He had intended to offer fifty, but surely it would be sinful waste to give more than twenty-five.

"I shall scarce know what to do with them when I have them," said he. "Yet I should not grudge twenty nobles if it is a matter in which the King is concerned."

Nigel's heart turned to lead. This sum would not buy one-half what was needful. It was clear that the Lady Ermyntrude had overvalued her treasures. Yet he could not return empty-handed, so if twenty nobles was the real worth, as this good old man assured him, then he must be thankful and take it.

"I am concerned by what you say," said he. "You know more of these things than I can do. However, I will take—"

"A hundred and fifty," whispered Aylward's voice in his ear.

"A hundred and fifty," said Nigel, only too relieved to have found the humblest guide upon these unwonted paths.

The goldsmith started. This youth was not the simple soldier that he had seemed. That frank face, those blue eyes, were traps for the unwary. Never had he been more taken aback in a bargain.

"This is fond talk and can lead to nothing, fair sir," said he, turning away and fiddling with the keys of his strong boxes. "Yet I have no wish to be hard on you. Take my outside price, which is fifty nobles."

"And a hundred," whispered Aylward.

"And a hundred," said Nigel, blushing at his own greed.

"Well, well, take a hundred!" cried the merchant. "Fleece me, skin me, leave me a loser, and take for your wares the full hundred!"

"I should be shamed forever if I were to treat you so badly," said Nigel. "You have spoken me fair, and I would not grind you down. Therefore, I will gladly take one hundred—"

"And fifty," whispered Aylward.

"And fifty," said Nigel.

"By Saint John of Beverley!" cried the merchant. "I came hither from the North Country, and they are said to be shrewd at a deal in those parts; but I had rather bargain with a synagogue full of Jews than with you, for all your gentle ways. Will you indeed take no less than a hundred and fifty? Alas! you pluck from me my profits of a month. It is a fell morning's work for me. I would I had never seen you!" With groans and lamentations he paid the gold pieces across the counter, and Nigel, hardly able to credit his own good fortune, gathered them into the leather saddle-bag.

A moment later with flushed face he was in the street and pouring out his thanks to Aylward.

"Alas, my fair lord! the man has robbed us now," said the archer. "We could have had another twenty had we stood fast."

"How know you that, good Aylward?"

"By his eyes, Squire Loring. I wot I have little store of reading where the parchment of a book or the pinching of a blazon is concerned, but I can read men's eyes, and I never doubted that he would give what he has given."

The two travelers had dinner at the monk's hospitium, Nigel at the high table and Aylward among the commonalty. Then again they roamed the high street on business intent. Nigel bought taffeta for hangings, wine, preserves, fruit, damask table linen and many other articles of need. At last he halted before the armorer's shop at the castle-yard, staring at the fine suits of plate, the engraved pectorals, the plumed helmets, the cunningly jointed gorgets, as a child at a sweet-shop.

“Well, Squire Loring,” said Wat the armorer, looking sidewise from the furnace where he was tempering a sword blade, “what can I sell you this morning? I swear to you by Tubal Cain, the father of all workers in metal, that you might go from end to end of Cheapside and never see a better suit than that which hangs from yonder hook!”

“And the price, armorer?”

“To anyone else, two hundred and fifty rose nobles. To you two hundred.”

“And why cheaper to me, good fellow?”

“Because I fitted your father also for the wars, and a finer suit never went out of my shop. I warrant that it turned many an edge before he laid it aside. We worked in mail in those days, and I had as soon have a well-made thick-meshed mail as any plates; but a young knight will be in the fashion like any dame of the court, and so it must be plate now, even though the price be trebled.”

“Your rede is that the mail is as good?”

“I am well sure of it.”

“Hearken then, armorer! I cannot at this moment buy a suit of plate, and yet I sorely need steel harness on account of a small deed which it is in my mind to do. Now I have at my home at Tilford that very suit of mail of which you speak, with which my father first rode to the wars. Could you not so alter it that it should guard my limbs also?”

The armorer looked at Nigel’s small upright figure and burst out laughing. “You jest, Squire Loring! The suit was made for one who was far above the common stature of man.”

“Nay, I jest not. If it will but carry me through one spear-running it will have served its purpose.”

The armorer leaned back on his anvil and pondered while Nigel stared anxiously at his sooty face.

“Right gladly would I lend you a suit of plate for this one venture, Squire Loring, but I know well that if you should be overthrown your harness becomes prize to the victor. I am a poor man with many children, and I dare not risk the loss of it. But as to what you say of the old suit of mail, is it indeed in good condition?”

“Most excellent, save only at the neck, which is much frayed.”

“To shorten the limbs is easy. It is but to cut out a length of the mail and then loop up the links. But to shorten the body — nay, that is beyond the armorer’s art.”

“It was my last hope. Nay, good armorer, if you have indeed served and loved my gallant father, then I beg you by his memory that you will help me now.”

The armorer threw down his heavy hammer with a crash upon the floor. “It is not only that I loved your father, Squire Loring, but it is that I have seen you, half armed as you were, ride against the best of them at the Castle tiltyard. Last Martinmas my heart bled for you when I saw how sorry was your harness, and yet you held your own against the stout Sir Oliver with his Milan suit: When go you to Tilford?”

“Even now.”

“Heh, Jenkin, fetch out the cob!” cried the worthy Wat. “May my right hand lose its cunning if I do not send you into battle in your father’s suit! To-morrow I must be back in my booth, but to-day I give to you without fee and for the sake of the good-will which I bear to your house. I will ride with you to Tilford, and before night you shall see what Wat can do.”

So it came about that there was a busy evening at the old Tilford Manor-house, where the Lady Ermyntrude planned and cut and hung the curtains for the hall, and stocked her cupboards with the good things which Nigel had brought from Guildford.

Meanwhile the Squire and the armorer sat with their heads touching and the old suit of mail with its gorget of overlapping plates laid out across their knees. Again and again old Wat shrugged his shoulders, as one who has been asked to do more than can be demanded from mortal man. At last, at a suggestion from the Squire, he leaned back in his chair and laughed long and loudly in his bushy beard, while the Lady Ermyntrude glared her black displeasure at such plebeian merriment. Then taking his fine chisel and his hammer from his pouch of tools, the armorer, still chuckling at his own thoughts, began to drive a hole through the center of the steel tunic.

VIII. HOW THE KING HAWKED ON CROOKSBURY HEATH

The King and his attendants had shaken off the crowd who had followed them from Guildford along the Pilgrims’ Way and now, the mounted archers having beaten off the more persistent of the spectators, they rode at their ease in a long, straggling, glittering train over the dark undulating plain of heather.

In the van was the King himself, for his hawks were with him and he had some hope of sport. Edward at that time was a well-grown, vigorous man in the very prime of his years, a keen sportsman, an ardent gallant and a chivalrous soldier. He was a scholar too, speaking Latin, French, German, Spanish, and even a little English.

So much had long been patent to the world, but only of recent years had he shown other and more formidable characteristics: a restless ambition which coveted his neighbour’s throne, and a wise foresight in matters of commerce, which engaged him now in transplanting Flemish weavers and sowing the seeds of what for many years was the staple trade of England. Each of these varied qualities might have been read upon his face. The brow, shaded by a crimson cap of maintenance, was broad and lofty. The large brown eyes were ardent and bold. His chin was clean-shaven, and the close-cropped dark mustache did not conceal the strong mouth, firm, proud and kindly, but capable of setting tight in merciless ferocity. His complexion was tanned to copper by a life spent in field sports or in war, and he rode his magnificent black horse carelessly and easily, as one who has grown up in the saddle. His own colour was black also, for his active; sinewy figure was set off by close-fitting velvet of that hue, broken only by a belt of gold, and by a golden border of open pods of the broom-plant.

With his high and noble bearing, his simple yet rich attire and his splendid mount, he looked every inch a King.

The picture of gallant man on gallant horse was completed by the noble Falcon of the Isles which fluttered along some twelve feet above his head, “waiting on,” as it was termed, for any quarry which might arise. The second bird of the cast was borne upon the gauntleted wrist of Raoul the chief falconer in the rear.

At the right side of the monarch and a little behind him rode a youth some twenty years of age, tall, slim and dark, with noble aquiline features and keen penetrating eyes which sparkled with vivacity and affection as he answered the remarks of the King. He was clad in deep crimson diapered with gold, and the trappings of his white palfrey were of a magnificence which proclaimed the rank of its rider. On his face, still free from mustache or beard, there sat a certain gravity and majesty of expression which showed that young as he was great affairs had been in his keeping and that his thoughts and interests were those of the statesman and the warrior. That great day when, little more than a school-boy, he had led the van of the victorious army which had crushed the power of France and Crecy, had left this stamp upon his features; but stern as they were they had not assumed that tinge of fierceness which in after years was to make “The Black Prince” a name of terror on the marches of France. Not yet had the first shadow of fell disease come to poison his nature ere it struck at his life, as he rode that spring day, light and debonair, upon the heath of Crooksbury.

On the left of the King, and so near to him that great intimacy was implied, rode a man about his own age, with the broad face, the projecting jaw and the flattish nose which are often the outward indications of a pugnacious nature.

His complexion was crimson, his large blue eyes somewhat prominent, and his whole appearance full-blooded and choleric. He was short, but massively built, and evidently possessed of immense strength. His voice, however, when he spoke was gentle and lisping, while his manner was quiet and courteous. Unlike the King or the Prince, he was clad in light armor and carried a sword by his side and a mace at his saddle-bow, for he was acting as Captain of the King’s Guard, and a dozen other knights in steel followed in the escort. No hardier soldier could Edward have at his side, if, as was always possible in those lawless times, sudden danger was to threaten, for this was the famous knight of Hainault, now naturalised as an Englishman, Sir Walter Manny, who bore as high a reputation for chivalrous valor and for gallant temerity as Chandos himself.

Behind the knights, who were forbidden to scatter and must always follow the King’s person, there was a body of twenty or thirty hobblers or mounted bowmen, together with several squires, unarmed themselves but leading spare horses upon which the heavier part of their knights' equipment was carried. A straggling tail of falconers, harbingers, varlets, body-servants and huntsmen holding hounds in leash completed the long and many-coloured train which rose and dipped on the low undulations of the moor.

Many weighty things were on the mind of Edward the King. There was truce for the moment with France, but it was a truce broken by many small deeds of arms, raids, surprises and ambushes upon either side, and it was certain that it would soon dissolve again into open war. Money must be raised, and it was no light matter to raise it, now that the Commons had once already voted the tenth lamb and the tenth sheaf. Besides, the Black Death had ruined the country, the arable land was all turned to pasture, the laborer, laughing at statutes, would not work under fourpence a day, and all society was chaos. In addition, the Scotch were growling over the border, there was the perennial trouble in half-conquered Ireland, and his allies abroad in Flanders and in Brabant were clamoring for the arrears of their subsidies.

All this was enough to make even a victorious monarch full of care; but now Edward had thrown it all to the winds and was as light-hearted as a boy upon a holiday. No thought had he for the dunning of Florentine bankers or the vexatious conditions of those busybodies at Westminster. He was out with his hawks, and his thoughts and his talk should be of nothing else. The varlets beat the heather and bushes as they passed, and whooped loudly as the birds flew out.

“A magpie! A magpie!” cried the falconer.

“Nay, nay, it is not worthy of your talons, my brown-eyed queen,” said the King, looking up at the great bird which flapped from side to side above his head, waiting for the whistle which should give her the signal. “The tercels, falconer — a cast of tercels! Quick, man, quick! Ha! the rascal makes for wood! He puts in! Well flown, brave peregrine! He makes his point. Drive him out to thy comrade. Serve him, varlets! Beat the bushes! He breaks! He breaks! Nay, come away then! You will see Master Magpie no more.”

The bird had indeed, with the cunning of its race, flapped its way through brushwood and bushes to the thicker woods beyond, so that neither the hawk amid the cover nor its partner above nor the clamorous beaters could harm it. The King laughed at the mischance and rode on. Continually birds of various sorts were flushed, and each was pursued by the appropriate hawk, the snipe by the tercel, the partridge by the goshawk, even the lark by the little merlin. But the King soon tired of this petty sport and went slowly on his way, still with the magnificent silent attendant flapping above his head.

"Is she not a noble bird, fair son?" he asked, glancing up as her shadow fell upon him.

"She is indeed, sire. Surely no finer ever came from the isles of the north."

"Perhaps not, and yet I have had a hawk from Barbary as good a footer and a swifter flyer. An Eastern bird in yarak has no peer."

"I had one once from the Holy Land," said de Manny. "It was fierce and keen and swift as the Saracens themselves. They say of old Saladin that in his day his breed of birds, of hounds and of horses had no equal on earth."

"I trust, dear father, that the day may come when we shall lay our hands on all three," said the Prince, looking with shining eyes upon the King. "Is the Holy Land to lie forever in the grasp of these unbelieving savages, or the Holy Temple to be defiled by their foul presence? Ah! my dear and most sweet lord, give to me a thousand lances with ten thousand bowmen like those I led at Crecy, and I swear to you by God's soul that within a year I will have done homage to you for the Kingdom of Jerusalem!"

The King laughed as he turned to Walter Manny. "Boys will still be boys," said he.

"The French do not count me such!" cried the young Prince, flushing with anger.

"Nay, fair son, there is no one sets you at a higher rate than your father. But you have the nimble mind and quick fancy of youth, turning over from the thing that is half done to a further task beyond. How would we fare in Brittany and Normandy while my young paladin with his lances and his bowmen was besieging Ascalon or battering at Jerusalem?"

"Heaven would help in Heaven's work."

"From what I have heard of the past," said the King dryly, "I cannot see that Heaven has counted for much as an ally in these wars of the East. I speak with reverence, and yet it is but sooth to say that Richard of the Lion Heart or Louis of France might have found the smallest earthly principality of greater service to him than all the celestial hosts. How say you to that, my Lord Bishop?"

A stout churchman who had ridden behind the King on a solid bay cob, well-suited to his weight and dignity, jogged up to the monarch's elbow. "How say you, sire? I was watching the goshawk on the partridge and heard you not."

"Had I said that I would add two manors to the See of Chichester, I warrant that you would have heard me, my Lord Bishop."

"Nay, fair lord, test the matter by saying so," cried the jovial Bishop.

The King laughed aloud. "A fair counter, your reverence. By the rood! you broke your lance that passage. But the question I debated was this: How is it that since the Crusades have manifestly been fought in God's quarrel, we Christians have had so little comfort or support in fighting them. After all our efforts and the loss of more men than could be counted, we are at last driven from the country, and even the military orders which were formed only for that one purpose can scarce hold a footing in the islands of the Greek sea. There is not one seaport nor one fortress in Palestine over which the flag of the Cross still waves. Where then was our ally?"

"Nay, sire, you open a great debate which extends far beyond this question of the Holy Land, though that may indeed be chosen as a fair example. It is the question of all sin, of all suffering, of all injustice — why it should pass without the rain of fire and the lightnings of Sinai. The wisdom of God is beyond our understanding."

The King shrugged his shoulders. "This is an easy answer, my Lord Bishop. You are a prince of the Church. It would fare ill with an earthly prince who could give no better answer to the affairs which concerned his realm."

"There are other considerations which might be urged, most gracious sire. It is true that the Crusades were a holy enterprise which might well expect the immediate blessing of God; but the Crusaders — is it certain that they deserved such a blessing? Have I not heard that their camp was the most dissolute ever seen?"

"Camps are camps all the world over, and you cannot in a moment change a bowman into a saint. But the holy Louis was a crusader after your own heart. Yet his men perished at Mansurah and he himself at Tunis."

"Bethink you also that this world is but the antechamber of the next," said the prelate. "By suffering and tribulation the soul is cleansed, and the true victor may be he who by the patient endurance of misfortune merits the happiness to come.”

“If that be the true meaning of the Church’s blessing, then I hope that it will be long before it rests upon our banners in France,” said the King. “But methinks that when one is out with a brave horse and a good hawk one might find some other subject than theology. Back to the birds, Bishop, or Raoul the falconer will come to interrupt thee in thy cathedral.”

Straightway the conversation came back to the mystery of the woods and the mystery of the rivers, to the dark-eyed hawks and the yellow-eyed, to hawks of the lure and hawks of the fist. The Bishop was as steeped in the lore of falconry as the King, and the others smiled as the two wrangled hard over disputed and technical questions: if an eyas trained in the mews can ever emulate the passage hawk taken wild, or how long the young hawks should be placed at hack, and how long weathered before they are fully reclaimed.

Monarch and prelate were still deep in this learned discussion, the Bishop speaking with a freedom and assurance which he would never have dared to use in affairs of Church and State, for in all ages there is no such leveler as sport. Suddenly, however, the Prince, whose keen eyes had swept from time to time over the great blue heaven, uttered a peculiar call and reined up his palfrey, pointing at the same time into the air.

“A heron!” he cried. “A heron on passage!”

To gain the full sport of hawking a heron must not be put up from its feeding-ground, where it is heavy with its meal, and has no time to get its pace on before it is pounced upon by the more active hawk, but it must be aloft, traveling from point to point, probably from the fish-stream to the heronry. Thus to catch the bird on passage was the prelude of all good sport. The object to which the Prince had pointed was but a black dot in the southern sky, but his strained eyes had not deceived him, and both Bishop and King agreed that it was indeed a heron, which grew larger every instant as it flew in their direction.

“Whistle him off, sire! Whistle off the gerfalcon!” cried the Bishop.

“Nay, nay, he is overfar. She would fly at check.”

“Now, sire, now!” cried the Prince, as the great bird with the breeze behind him came sweeping down the sky.

The King gave the shrill whistle, and the well-trained hawk raked out to the right and to the left to make sure which quarry she was to follow. Then, spying the heron, she shot up in a swift ascending curve to meet him.

"Well flown, Margot! Good bird!" cried the King, clapping his hands to encourage the hawk, while the falconers broke into the shrill whoop peculiar to the sport.

Going on her curve, the hawk would soon have crossed the path of the heron; but the latter, seeing the danger in his front and confident in his own great strength of wing and lightness of body, proceeded to mount higher in the air, flying in such small rings that to the spectators it almost seemed as if the bird was going perpendicularly upward.

"He takes the air!" cried the King. "But strong as he flies, he cannot out fly Margot. Bishop, I lay you ten gold pieces to one that the heron is mine."

"I cover your wager, sire," said the Bishop. "I may not take gold so won, and yet I warrant that there is an altar-cloth somewhere in need of repairs."

"You have good store of altar-cloths, Bishop, if all the gold I have seen you win at tables goes to the mending of them," said the King. "Ah! by the rood, rascal, rascal! See how she flies at check!"

The quick eyes of the Bishop had perceived a drift of rooks when on their evening flight to the rookery were passing along the very line which divided the hawk from the heron. A rook is a hard temptation for a hawk to resist. In an instant the inconstant bird had forgotten all about the great heron above her and was circling over the rooks, flying westward with them as she singled out the plumpest for her stoop.

"There is yet time, sire! Shall I cast off her mate?" cried the falconer.

"Or shall I show you, sire, how a peregrine may win where a gerfalcon fails?" said the Bishop. "Ten golden pieces to one upon my bird."

"Done with you, Bishop!" cried the King, his brow dark with vexation. "By the rood! if you were as learned in the fathers as you are in hawks you would win to the throne of Saint Peter! Cast off your peregrine and make your boasting good."

Smaller than the royal gerfalcon, the Bishop's bird was none the less a swift and beautiful creature. From her perch upon his wrist she had watched with fierce, keen eyes the birds in the heaven, mantling herself from time to time in her eagerness. Now when the button was undone and the leash uncast the peregrine dashed off with a whir of her sharp-pointed wings, whizzing round in a great ascending circle which mounted swiftly upward, growing ever smaller as she approached that lofty point where, a mere speck in the sky, the heron sought escape from its enemies. Still higher and higher the two birds mounted, while the horsemen, their faces upturned, strained their eyes in their efforts to follow them.

"She rings! She still rings!" cried the Bishop. "She is above him! She has gained her pitch."

"Nay, nay, she is far below," said the King.

"By my soul, my Lord Bishop is right!" cried the Prince. "I believe she is above. See! See! She swoops!"

"She binds! She binds!" cried a dozen voices as the two dots blended suddenly into one.

There could be no doubt that they were falling rapidly. Already they grew larger to the eye. Presently the heron disengaged himself and flapped heavily away, the worse for that deadly embrace, while the peregrine, shaking her plumage, ringed once more so as to get high above the quarry and deal it a second and more fatal blow. The Bishop smiled, for nothing, as it seemed, could hinder his victory.

"Thy gold pieces shall be well spent, sire," said he. "What is lost to the Church is gained by the loser."

But a most unlooked-for chance deprived the Bishop's altar cloth of its costly mending. The King's gerfalcon having struck down a rook, and finding the sport but tame, bethought herself suddenly of that noble heron, which she still perceived fluttering over Crooksbury Heath. How could she have been so weak as to allow these silly, chattering rooks to entice her away from that lordly bird? Even now it was not too late to atone for her mistake. In a great spiral she shot upward until she was over the heron. But what was this? Every fiber of her, from her crest to her deck feathers, quivered with jealousy and rage at the sight of this creature, a mere peregrine, who had dared to come between a royal gerfalcon and her quarry. With one sweep of her great wings she shot up until she was above her rival. The next instant —

"They crab! They crab!" cried the King, with a roar of laughter, following them with his eyes as they bustled down through the air. "Mend thy own altar-cloths, Bishop. Not a groat shall you have from me this journey. Pull them apart, falconer, lest they do each other an injury. And now, masters, let us on, for the sun sinks toward the west."

The two hawks, which had come to the ground interlocked with clutching talons and ruffled plumes, were torn apart and brought back bleeding and panting to their perches, while the heron after its perilous adventure flapped its way heavily onward to settle safely in the heronry of Waverley. The cortege, who had scattered in the excitement of the chase, came together again, and the journey was once more resumed.

A horseman who had been riding toward them across the moor now quickened his pace and closed swiftly upon them. As he came nearer, the King and the Prince cried out joyously and waved their hands in greeting.

"It is good John Chandos!!" cried the King. "By the rood, John, I have missed your merry songs this week or more! Glad I am to see that you have your citole slung to your back. Whence come you then?"

"I come from Tilford, sire, in the hope that I should meet your majesty."

"It was well thought of. Come, ride here between the Prince and me, and we will believe that we are back in France with our war harness on our backs once more. What is your news, Master John?"

Chandos' quaint face quivered with suppressed amusement and his one eye twinkled like a star. "Have you had sport, my liege?"

"Poor sport, John. We flew two hawks on the same heron. They crabbed, and the bird got free. But why do you smile so?"

"Because I hope to show you better sport ere you come to Tilford."

"For the hawk? For the hound?"

"A nobler sport than either."

"Is this a riddle, John? What mean you?"

"Nay, to tell all would be to spoil all. I say again that there is rare sport betwixt here and Tilford, and I beg you, dear lord, to mend your pace that we make the most of the daylight."

Thus adjured, the King set spurs to his horse, and the whole cavalcade cantered over the heath in the direction which Chandos showed. Presently as they came over a slope they saw beneath them a winding river with an old high-backed bridge across it. On the farther side was a village green with a fringe of cottages and one dark manor house upon the side of the hill.

"This is Tilford," said Chandos. "Yonder is the house of the Lorings."

The King's expectations had been aroused and his face showed his disappointment.

"Is this the sport that you have promised us, Sir John? How can you make good your words?"

"I will make them good, my liege."

"Where then is the sport?"

On the high crown of the bridge a rider in armor was seated, lance in hand, upon a great yellow steed. Chandos touched the King’s arm and pointed. “That is the sport,” said he.

IX. HOW NIGEL HELD THE BRIDGE AT TILFORD

The King looked at the motionless figure, at the little crowd of hushed expectant rustics beyond the bridge, and finally at the face of Chandos, which shone with amusement.

“What is this, John?” he asked.

“You remember Sir Eustace Loring, sire?”

“Indeed I could never forget him nor the manner of his death.”

“He was a knight errant in his day.”

“That indeed he was — none better have I known.”

“So is his son Nigel, as fierce a young war-hawk as ever yearned to use beak and claws; but held fast in the mews up to now. This is his trial fight. There he stands at the bridge-head, as was the wont in our fathers’ time, ready to measure himself against all comers.”

Of all Englishmen there was no greater knight errant than the King himself, and none so steeped in every quaint usage of chivalry; so that the situation was after his own heart.

“He is not yet a knight?”

“No, sire, only a Squire.”

“Then he must bear himself bravely this day if he is to make good what he has done. Is it fitting that a young untried Squire should venture to couch his lance against the best in England?”

“He hath given me his cartel and challenge,” said Chandos, drawing a paper from his tunic. “Have I your permission, sire, to issue it?”

“Surely, John, we have no cavalier more versed in the laws of chivalry than yourself. You know this young man, and you are aware how far he is worthy of the high honor which he asks. Let us hear his defiance.”

The knights and squires of the escort, most of whom were veterans of the French war, had been gazing with interest and some surprise at the steel-clad figure in front of them. Now at a call from Sir Walter Manny they assembled round the spot where the King and Chandos had halted. Chandos cleared his throat and read from his paper —

"'A tous seigneurs, chevaliers et escuyers,' so it is headed, gentlemen. It is a message from the good Squire Nigel Loring of Tilford, son of Sir Eustace Loring, of honorable memory. Squire Loring awaits you in arms, gentlemen, yonder upon the crown of the old bridge. Thus says he: 'For the great desire that I, a most humble and unworthy Squire, entertain, that I may come to the knowledge of the noble gentlemen who ride with my royal master, I now wait on the Bridge of the Way in the hope that some of them may condescend to do some small deed of arms upon me, or that I may deliver them from any vow which they may have taken. This I say out of no esteem for myself, but solely that I may witness the noble bearing of these famous cavaliers and admire their skill in the handling of arms. Therefore, with the help of Saint George, I will hold the bridge with sharpened lances against any or all who may deign to present themselves while daylight lasts."

"What say you to this, gentlemen?" asked the King, looking round with laughing eyes.

"Truly it is issued in very good form," said the Prince. "Neither Claricieux nor Red Dragon nor any herald that ever wore tabard could better it. Did he draw it of his own hand?"

"He hath a grim old grandmother who is one of the ancient breed," said Chandos. "I doubt not that the Dame Ermyntrude hath drawn a challenge or two before now. But hark ye, sire, I would have a word in your ear — and yours too, most noble Prince."

Leading them aside, Chandos whispered some explanations, which ended by them all three bursting into a shout of laughter.

"By the rood! no honorable gentleman should be reduced to such straits," said the King. "It behooves me to look to it. But how now, gentlemen? This worthy cavalier still waits his answer."

The soldiers had all been buzzing together; but now Walter Manny turned to the King with the result of their counsel.

"If it please your majesty," said he, "we are of opinion that this Squire hath exceeded all bounds in desiring to break a spear with a belted knight ere he has given his proofs. We do him sufficient honor if a Squire ride against him, and with your consent I have chosen my own body-squire, John Widdicombe, to clear the path for us across the bridge."

"What you say, Walter, is right and fair," said the King. "Master Chandos, you will tell our champion yonder what hath been arranged. You will advise him also that it is our royal will that this contest be not fought upon the bridge, since it is very clear that it must end in one or both going over into the river, but that he advance to the end of the bridge and fight upon the plain. You will tell him also that a blunted lance is sufficient for such an encounter, but that a hand-stroke or two with sword or mace may well be exchanged, if both riders should keep their saddles. A blast upon Raoul's horn shall be the signal to close."

Such ventures as these where an aspirant for fame would wait for days at a cross-road, a ford, or a bridge, until some worthy antagonist should ride that way, were very common in the old days of adventurous knight erranty, and were still familiar to the minds of all men because the stories of the romancers and the songs of the trouveres were full of such incidents. Their actual occurrence however had become rare. There was the more curiosity, not unmixed with amusement, in the thoughts of the courtiers as they watched Chandos ride down to the bridge and commented upon the somewhat singular figure of the challenger. His build was strange, and so also was his figure, for the limbs were short for so tall a man. His head also was sunk forward as if he were lost in thought or overcome with deep dejection.

"This is surely the Cavalier of the Heavy Heart," said Manny. "What trouble has he, that he should hang his head?"

"Perchance he hath a weak neck," said the King.

"At least he hath no weak voice," the Prince remarked, as Nigel's answer to Chandos came to their ears. "By our lady, he booms like a bittern."

As Chandos rode back again to the King, Nigel exchanged the old ash spear which had been his father's for one of the blunted tournament lances which he took from the hands of a stout archer in attendance. He then rode down to the end of the bridge where a hundred-yard stretch of greensward lay in front of him. At the same moment the Squire of Sir Walter Manny, who had been hastily armed by his comrades, spurred forward and took up his position.

The King raised his hand; there was a clang from the falconer's horn, and the two riders, with a thrust of their heels and a shake of their bridles, dashed furiously at each other. In the center the green strip of marshy meadowland, with the water squirting from the galloping hoofs, and the two crouching men, gleaming bright in the evening sun, on one side the half circle of motionless horsemen, some in steel, some in velvet, silent and attentive, dogs, hawks, and horses all turned to stone; on the other the old peaked bridge, the blue lazy river, the group of openmouthed rustics, and the dark old manor-house with one grim face which peered from the upper window.

A good man was John Widdicombe, but he had met a better that day. Before that yellow whirlwind of a horse and that rider who was welded and riveted to his saddle his knees could not hold their grip. Nigel and Pommers were one flying missile, with all their weight and strength and energy centered on the steady end of the lance. Had Widdicombe been struck by a thunderbolt he could not have flown faster or farther from his saddle. Two full somersaults did he make, his plates clanging like cymbals, ere he lay prone upon his back.

For a moment the King looked grave at that prodigious fall. Then smiling once more as Widdicombe staggered to his feet, he clapped his hands loudly in applause. “A fair course and fairly run!” he cried. “The five scarlet roses bear themselves in peace even as I have seen them in war. How now, my good Walter? Have you another Squire or will you clear a path for us yourself?”

Manny’s choleric face had turned darker as he observed the mischance of his representative. He beckoned now to a tall knight, whose gaunt and savage face looked out from his open bassinet as an eagle might from a cage of steel.

“Sir Hubert,” said he, “I bear in mind the day when you overbore the Frenchman at Caen. Will you not be our champion now?”

“When I fought the Frenchman, Walter, it was with naked weapons,” said the knight sternly. “I am a soldier and I love a soldier’s work, but I care not for these tiltyard tricks which were invented for nothing but to tickle the fancies of foolish women.”

“Oh, most ungallant speech!” cried the King. “Had my good-consort heard you she would have arraigned you to appear at a Court of Love with a jury of virgins to answer for your sins. But I pray you to take a tilting spear, good Sir Hubert!”

“I had as soon take a peacock’s feather, my fair lord; but I will do it, if you ask me. Here, page, hand me one of those sticks, and let me see what I can do.”

But Sir Hubert de Burgh was not destined to test either his skill or his luck. The great bay horse which he rode was as unused to this warlike play as was its master, and had none of its master's stoutness of heart; so that when it saw the leveled lance, the gleaming figure and the frenzied yellow horse rushing down upon it, it swerved, turned and galloped furiously down the river-bank. Amid roars of laughter from the rustics on the one side and from the courtiers on the other, Sir Hubert was seen, tugging vainly at his bridle, and bounding onward, clearing gorse-bushes and heather-clumps, until he was but a shimmering, quivering gleam upon the dark hillside. Nigel, who had pulled Pommers on to his very haunches at the instant that his opponent turned, saluted with his lance and trotted back to the bridge-head, where he awaited his next assailant.

"The ladies would say that a judgment hath fallen upon our good Sir Hubert for his impious words," said the King.

"Let us hope that his charger may be broken in ere they venture to ride out between two armies," remarked the Prince. "They might mistake the hardness of his horse's mouth for a softness of the rider's heart. See where he rides, still clearing every bush upon his path."

"By the rood!" said the King, "if the bold Hubert has not increased his repute as a jouster he has gained great honor as a horseman. But the bridge is still closed, Walter. How say you now? Is this young Squire never to be unhorsed, or is your King himself to lay lance in rest ere his way can be cleared? By the head of Saint Thomas! I am in the very mood to run a course with this gentle youth."

"Nay, nay, sire, too much honor hath already been done him!" said Manny, looking angrily at the motionless horseman. "That this untried boy should be able to say that in one evening he has unhorsed my Squire, and seen the back of one of the bravest knights in England is surely enough to turn his foolish head. Fetch me a spear, Robert! I will see what I can make of him."

The famous knight took the spear when it was brought to him as a master-workman takes a tool. He balanced it, shook it once or twice in the air, ran his eyes down it for a flaw in the wood, and then finally having made sure of its poise and weight laid it carefully in rest under his arm. Then gathering up his bridle so as to have his horse under perfect command, and covering himself with the shield, which was slung round his neck, he rode out to do battle.

Now, Nigel, young and inexperienced, all Nature's aid will not help you against the mixed craft and strength of such a warrior. The day will come when neither Manny nor even Chandos could sweep you from your saddle; but now, even had you some less cumbrous armor, your chance were small. Your downfall is near; but as you see the famous black chevrons on a golden ground your gallant heart which never knew fear is only filled with joy and amazement at the honor done you. Your downfall is near, and yet in your wildest dreams you would never guess how strange your downfall is to be.

Again with a dull thunder of hoofs the horses gallop over the soft water-meadow. Again with a clash of metal the two riders meet. It is Nigel now, taken clean in the face of his helmet with the blunted spear, who flies backward off his horse and falls clanging on the grass.

But good heavens! what is this? Manny has thrown up his hands in horror and the lance has dropped from his nerveless fingers. From all sides, with cries of dismay, with oaths and shouts and ejaculations to the saints, the horsemen ride wildly in. Was ever so dreadful, so sudden, so complete, an end to a gentle passage at arms? Surely their eyes must be at fault? Some wizard's trick has been played upon them to deceive their senses. But no, it was only too clear. There on the greensward lay the trunk of the stricken cavalier, and there, a good dozen yards beyond, lay his helmeted head.

"By the Virgin!" cried Manny wildly, as he jumped from his horse, "I would give my last gold piece that the work of this evening should be undone! How came it? What does it mean? Hither, my Lord Bishop, for surely it smacks of witchcraft and the Devil."

With a white face the Bishop had sprung down beside the prostrate body, pushing through the knot of horrified knights and squires.

"I fear that the last offices of the Holy Church come too late," said he in a quivering voice. "Most unfortunate young man! How sudden an end! In medio vitae, as the Holy Book has it — one moment in the pride of his youth, the next his head torn from his body. Now God and his saints have mercy upon me and guard me from evil!"

The last prayer was shot out of the Bishop with an energy and earnestness unusual in his orisons. It was caused by the sudden outcry of one of the Squires who, having lifted the helmet from the ground, cast it down again with a scream of horror.

"It is empty!" he cried. "It weighs as light as a feather."

"'Fore God, it is true!" cried Manny, laying his hand on it. "There is no one in it. With what have I fought, father Bishop? Is it of this world or of the next?”

The Bishop had clambered on his horse the better to consider the point. “If the foul fiend is abroad,” said he, “my place is over yonder by the King’s side. Certes that sulphur-coloured horse hath a very devilish look. I could have sworn that I saw both smoke and flame from its nostrils. The beast is fit to bear a suit of armor which rides and fights and yet hath no man within it.”

“Nay, not too fast, father Bishop,” said one of the knights. “It may be all that you say and yet come from a human workshop. When I made a campaign in South Germany I have seen at Nuremberg a cunning figure, devised by an armorer, which could both ride and wield a sword. If this be such a one—”

“I thank you all for your very gentle courtesy,” said a booming voice from the figure upon the ground.

At the words even the valiant Manny sprang into his saddle. Some rode madly away from the horrid trunk. A few of the boldest lingered.

“Most of all,” said the voice, “would I thank the most noble knight, Sir Walter Manny, that he should deign to lay aside his greatness and condescend to do a deed of arms upon so humble a Squire.”

“‘Fore God!” said Manny, “if this be the Devil, then the Devil hath a very courtly tongue. I will have him out of his armor, if he blast me!”

So saying he sprang once more from his horse and plunging his hand down the slit in the collapsed gorget he closed it tightly upon a fistful of Nigel’s yellow curls. The groan that came forth was enough to convince him that it was indeed a man who lurked within. At the same time his eyes fell upon the hole in the mail corselet which had served the Squire as a visor, and he burst into deep-chested mirth. The King, the Prince and Chandos, who had watched the scene from a distance, too much amused by it to explain or interfere, rode up weary with laughter, now that all was discovered.

“Let him out!” said the King, with his hand to his side. “I pray you to unlace him and let him out! I have shared in many a spear-running, but never have I been nearer falling from my horse than as I watched this one. I feared the fall had struck him senseless, since he lay so still.”

Nigel had indeed lain with all the breath shaken from his body, and as he was unaware that his helmet had been carried off, he had not understood either the alarm or the amusement that he had caused. Now freed from the great hauberk in which he had been shut like a pea in a pod, he stood blinking in the light, blushing deeply with shame that the shifts to which his poverty had reduced him should be exposed to all these laughing courtiers. It was the King who brought him comfort.

“You have shown that you can use your father’s weapons,” said he, “and you have proved also that you are the worthy bearer of his name and his arms, for you have within you that spirit for which he was famous. But I wot that neither he nor you would suffer a train of hungry men to starve before your door; so lead on, I pray you, and if the meat be as good as this grace before it, then it will be a feast indeed.”

X. HOW THE KING GREETED HIS SENESCHAL OF CALAIS

It would have fared ill with the good name of Tilford Manor house and with the housekeeping of the aged Dame Ermyntrude had the King’s whole retinue, with his outer and inner marshal, his justiciar, his chamberlain and his guard, all gathered under the one roof. But by the foresight and the gentle management of Chandos this calamity was avoided, so that some were quartered at the great Abbey and others passed on to enjoy the hospitality of Sir Roger FitzAlan at Farnham Castle. Only the King himself, the Prince, Manny, Chandos, Sir Hubert de Burgh, the Bishop and two or three more remained behind as the guests of the Lorings.

But small as was the party and humble the surroundings, the King in no way relaxed that love of ceremony, of elaborate form and of brilliant colouring which was one of his characteristics. The sumpter-mules were unpacked, squires ran hither and thither, baths smoked in the bed-chambers, silks and satins were unfolded, gold chains gleamed and clinked, so that when at last, to the long blast of two court trumpeters, the company took their seats at the board, it was the brightest, fairest scene which those old black rafters had ever spanned.

The great influx of foreign knights who had come in their splendor from all parts of Christendom to take part in the opening of the Round Tower of Windsor six years before, and to try their luck and their skill at the tournament connected with it, had deeply modified the English fashions of dress. The old tunic, over-tunic and cyclas were too sad and simple for the new fashions, so now strange and brilliant cote-hardies, pourpoints, courtepies, paltocks, hanselines and many other wondrous garments, parti-coloured or diapered, with looped, embroidered or escalloped edges, flamed and glittered round the King. He himself, in black velvet and gold, formed a dark rich center to the finery around him. On his right sat the Prince, on his left the Bishop, while Dame Ermyntrude marshaled the forces of the household outside, alert and watchful, pouring in her dishes and her flagons at the right moment, rallying her tired servants, encouraging the van, hurrying the rear, hastening up her reserves, the tapping of her oak stick heard everywhere the pressure was the greatest.

Behind the King, clad in his best, but looking drab and sorry amid the brilliant costumes round him, Nigel himself, regardless of an aching body and a twisted knee, waited upon his royal guests, who threw many a merry jest at him over their shoulders as they still chuckled at the adventure of the bridge.

“By the rood!” said King Edward, leaning back, with a chicken bone held daintily between the courtesy fingers of his left hand, “the play is too good for this country stage. You must to Windsor with me, Nigel, and bring with you this great suit of harness in which you lurk. There you shall hold the lists with your eyes in your midriff, and unless some one cleave you to the waist I see not how any harm can befall you. Never have I seen so small a nut in so great a shell.”

The Prince, looking back with laughing eyes, saw by Nigel’s flushed and embarrassed face that his poverty hung heavily upon him. “Nay,” said he kindly, “such a workman is surely worthy of better tools.”

“And it is for his master to see that he has them,” added the King. “The court armorer will look to it that the next time your helmet is carried away, Nigel, your head shall be inside it.”

Nigel, red to the roots of his flaxen hair, stammered out some words of thanks.

John Chandos, however, had a fresh suggestion, and he cocked a roguish eye as he made it: “Surely, my liege, your bounty is little needed in this case. It is the ancient law of arms that if two cavaliers start to joust, and one either by maladdress or misadventure fail to meet the shock, then his arms become the property of him who still holds the lists. This being so, methinks, Sir Hubert de Burgh, that the fine hauberk of Milan and the helmet of Bordeaux steel in which you rode to Tilford should remain with our young host as some small remembrance of your visit.”

The suggestion raised a general chorus of approval and laughter, in which all joined, save only Sir Hubert himself, who, flushed with anger, fixed his baleful eyes upon Chandos’ mischievous and smiling face.

“I said that I did not play that foolish game, and I know nothing of its laws,” said he; “but you know well, John, that if you would have a bout with sharpened spear or sword, where two ride to the ground, and only one away from it, you have not far to go to find it.”

“Nay, nay, would you ride to the ground? Surely you had best walk, Hubert,” said Chandos. “On your feet I know well that I should not see your back as we have seen it to-day. Say what you will, your horse has played you false, and I claim your suit of harness for Nigel Loring.”

“Your tongue is overlong, John, and I am weary of its endless clack!” said Sir Hubert, his yellow mustache bristling from a scarlet face. “If you claim my harness, do you yourself come and take it. If there is a moon in the sky you may try this very night when the board is cleared.”

“Nay, fair sirs,” cried the King, smiling from one to the other, “this matter must be followed no further. Do you fill a bumper of Gascony, John, and you also, Hubert. Now pledge each other, I pray you, as good and loyal comrades who would scorn to fight save in your King’s quarrel. We can spare neither of you while there is so much work for brave hearts over the sea. As to this matter of the harness, John Chandos speaks truly where it concerns a joust in the lists, but we hold that such a law is scarce binding in this, which was but a wayside passage and a gentle trial of arms. On the other hand, in the case of your Squire, Master Manny, there can be no doubt that his suit is forfeit.”

“It is a grievous hearing for him, my liege,” said Walter Manny; “for he is a poor man and hath been at sore pains to fit himself for the wars. Yet what you say shall be done, fair sire. So, if you will come to me in the morning, Squire Loring, John Widdicombe’s suit will be handed over to you.”

“Then with the King’s leave, I will hand it back to him,” said Nigel, troubled and stammering; “for indeed I had rather never ride to the wars than take from a brave man his only suit of plate.”

“There spoke your father’s spirit!” cried the King. “By the rood! Nigel, I like you full well. Let the matter bide in my hands. But I marvel much that Sir Aymery the Lombard hath not come to us yet from Windsor.”

From the moment of his arrival at Tilford, again and again King Edward had asked most eagerly whether Sir Aymery had come, and whether there was any news of him, so that the courtiers glanced at each other in wonder. For Aymery was known to all of them as a famous mercenary of Italy, lately appointed Governor of Calais, and this sudden and urgent summons from the King might well mean some renewal of the war with France, which was the dearest wish of every soldier. Twice the King had stopped his meal and sat with sidelong head; his wine-cup in his hand, listening attentively when some sound like the clatter of hoofs was heard from outside; but the third time there could be no mistake. The tramp and jingle of the horses broke loud upon the ear, and ended in hoarse voices calling out of the darkness, which were answered by the archers posted as sentries without the door.

"Some traveler has indeed arrived, my liege," said Nigel. "What is your royal will?"

"It can be but Aymery," the King answered, "for it was only to him that I left the message that he should follow me hither. Bid him come in, I pray you, and make him very welcome at your board."

Nigel cast open the door, plucking a torch from its bracket as he did so. Half a dozen men-at-arms sat on their horses outside, but one had dismounted, a short, squat, swarthy man with a rat face and quick, restless brown eyes which peered eagerly past Nigel into the red glare of the well-lit hall.

"I am Sir Aymery of Pavia," he whispered. "For God's sake, tell me! is the King within?"

"He is at table, fair sir, and he bids you to enter."

"One moment, young man, one moment, and a secret word in your ear. Wot you why it is that the King has sent for me?"

Nigel read terror in the dark cunning eyes which glanced in sidelong fashion into his. "Nay, I know not."

"I would I knew — I would I was sure ere I sought his presence."

"You have but to cross the threshold, fair sir, and doubtless you will learn from the King's own lips."

Sir Aymery seemed to gather himself as one who braces for a spring into ice-cold water. Then he crossed with a quick stride from the darkness into the light. The King stood up and held out his hand with a smile upon his long handsome face, and yet it seemed to the Italian that it was the lips which smiled but not the eyes.

"Welcome!" cried Edward. "Welcome to our worthy and faithful Seneschal of Calais! Come, sit here before me at the board, for I have sent for you that I may hear your news from over the sea, and thank you for the care that you have taken of that which is as dear to me as wife or child. Set a place for Sir Aymery there, and give him food and drink, for he has ridden fast and far in our service to-day."

Throughout the long feast which the skill of the Lady Ermyntrude had arranged, Edward chatted lightly with the Italian as well as with the barons near him. Finally, when the last dish was removed and the gravy-soaked rounds of coarse bread which served as plates had been cast to the dogs, the wine-flagons were passed round; and old Weathercote the minstrel entered timidly with his harp in the hope that he might be allowed to play before the King's majesty. But Edward had other sport afoot.

"I pray you, Nigel, to send out the servants, so that we may be alone. I would have two men-at-arms at every door lest we be disturbed in our debate, for it is a matter of privacy. And now, Sir Aymery, these noble lords as well as I, your master, would fain hear from your own lips how all goes forward in France."

The Italian's face was calm; but he looked restlessly from one to another along the line of his listeners.

"So far as I know, my liege, all is quiet on the French marches," said he.

"You have not heard then that they have mustered or gathered to a head with the intention of breaking the truce and making some attempt upon our dominions?"

"Nay, sire, I have heard nothing of it."

"You set my mind much at ease, Aymery," said the King; "for if nothing has come to your ears, then surely it cannot be. It was said that the wild Knight de Chargny had come down to St. Omer with his eyes upon my precious jewel and his mailed hands ready to grasp it."

"Nay, sire, let him come. He will find the jewel safe in its strong box, with a goodly guard over it."

"You are the guard over my jewel, Aymery."

"Yes, sire, I am the guard."

"And you are a faithful guard and one whom I can trust, are you not? You would not barter away that which is so dear to me when I have chosen you out of all my army to hold it for me?"

"Nay, sire, what reasons can there be for such questions? They touch my honor very nearly. You know that I would part with Calais only when I parted with my soul."

"Then you know nothing of de Chargny's attempt?"

"Nothing sire."

"Liar and villain!" yelled the King, springing to his feet and dashing his fist upon the table until the glasses rattled again. "Seize him, archers! Seize him this instant! Stand close by either elbow, lest he do himself a mischief! Now do you dare to tell me to my face, you perjured Lombard, that you know nothing of de Chargny and his plans?"

“As God is my witness I know nothing of him!” The man’s lips were white, and he spoke in a thin, sighing, reedy voice, his eyes wincing away from the fell gaze of the angry King.

Edward laughed bitterly, and drew a paper from his breast. “You are the judges in this case, you, my fair son, and you, Chandos, and you, Manny, and you, Sir Hubert, and you also, my Lord Bishop. By my sovereign power I make you a court that you may deal justice upon this man, for by God’s eyes I will not stir from this room until I have sifted the matter to the bottom. And first I would read you this letter. It is superscribed to Sir Aymery of Pavia, nomme Le Lombard, Chateau de Calais. Is not that your name and style, you rogue?”

“It is my name, sire; but no such letter has come to me.”

“Else had your villainy never been disclosed. It is signed ‘Isidore de Chargny’. What says my enemy de Chargny to my trusted servant? Listen! ‘We could not come with the last moon, for we have not gathered sufficient strength, nor have we been able to collect the twenty thousand crowns which are your price. But with the next turn of the moon in the darkest hour we will come and you will be paid your money at the small postern gate with the rowan-bush beside it.’ Well, rogue, what say you now?”

“It is a forgery!” gasped the Italian.

“I pray you that you will let me see it, sire,” said Chandos. “De Chargny was my prisoner, and so many letters passed ere his ransom was paid that his script is well-known to me. Yes, yes, I will swear that this is indeed his. If my salvation were at stake I could swear it.”

“If it were indeed written by de Chargny it was to dishonor me,” cried Sir Aymery.

“Nay, nay!” said the young Prince. “We all know de Chargny and have fought against him. Many faults he has, a boaster and a brawler, but a braver man and one of greater heart and higher of enterprise does not ride beneath the lilies of France. Such a man would never stoop to write a letter for the sake of putting dishonor upon one of knightly rank. I, for one, will never believe it.”

A gruff murmur from the others showed that they were of one mind with the Prince. The light of the torches from the walls beat upon the line of stern faces at the high table. They had sat like flint, and the Italian shrank from their inexorable eyes. He looked swiftly round, but armed men choked every entrance. The shadow of death had fallen athwart his soul.

“This letter,” said the King, “was given by de Chargny to one Dom Beauvais, a priest of St. Omer, to carry into Calais. The said priest, smelling a reward, brought it to one who is my faithful servant, and so it came to me. Straightway I sent for this man that he should come to me. Meanwhile the priest has returned so that de Chargny may think that his message is indeed delivered.”

“I know nothing of it,” said the Italian doggedly, licking his dry lips.

A dark flush mounted to the King’s forehead, and his eyes were gorged with his wrath. “No more of this, for God’s dignity!” he cried. “Had we this fellow at the Tower, a few turns of the rack would tear a confession from his craven soul. But why should we need his word for his own guilt? You have seen, my lords, you have heard! How say you, fair son? Is the man guilty?”

“Sire, he is guilty.”

“And you, John? And you, Walter? And you, Hubert? And you, my Lord Bishop? You are all of one mind, then. He is guilty of the betrayal of his trust. And the punishment?”

“It can only be death,” said the Prince, and each in turn the others nodded their agreement.

“Aymery of Pavia, you have heard your doom,” said Edward, leaning his chin upon his hand and glooming at the cowering Italian. “Step forward, you archer at the door, you with the black beard. Draw your sword! Nay, you white-faced rogue, I would not dishonor this roof-tree by your blood. It is your heels, not your head, that we want. Hack off these golden spurs of knighthood with your sword, archer! ‘Twas I who gave them, and I who take them back. Ha! they fly across the hall, and with them every bond betwixt you and the worshipful order whose sign and badge they are! Now lead him out on the heath afar from the house where his carrion can best lie, and hew his scheming head from his body as a warning to all such traitors!”

The Italian, who had slipped from his chair to his knees, uttered a cry of despair, as an archer seized him by either shoulder. Writhing out of their grip, he threw himself upon the floor and clutched at the King’s feet.

“Spare me, my most dread lord, spare me, I beseech you! In the name of Christ’s passion, I implore your grace and pardon! Bethink you, my good and dear lord, how many years I have served under your banners and how many services I have rendered. Was it not I who found the ford upon the Seine two days before the great battle? Was it not I also who marshaled the attack at the intaking of Calais? I have a wife and four children in Italy, great King; and it was the thought of them which led me to fall from my duty, for this money would have allowed me to leave the wars and to see them once again. Mercy, my liege, mercy, I implore!”

The English are a rough race, but not a cruel one. The King sat with a face of doom; but the others looked askance and fidgeted in their seats.

“Indeed, my fair liege,” said Chandos, “I pray you that you will abate somewhat of your anger.”

Edward shook his head curtly. “Be silent, John. It shall be as I have said.”

“I pray you, my dear and honored liege, not to act with overmuch haste in the matter,” said Manny. “Bind him and hold him until the morning, for other counsels may prevail.”

“Nay, I have spoken. Lead him out!”

But the trembling man clung to the King’s knees in such a fashion that the archers could not disengage his convulsive grip. “Listen to me a moment, I implore you! Give me but one minute to plead with you, and then do what you will.”

The King leaned back in his chair. “Speak and have done,” said he.

“You must spare me, my noble liege. For your own sake I say that you must spare me, for I can set you in the way of such a knightly adventure as will gladden your heart. Bethink you, sire, that this de Chargny and his comrades know nothing of their plans having gone awry. If I do but send them a message they will surely come to the postern gate. Then, if we have placed our bushment with skill we shall have such a capture and such a ransom as will fill your coffers. He and his comrades should be worth a good hundred thousand crowns.”

Edward spurned the Italian away from him with his foot until he sprawled among the rushes, but even as he lay there like a wounded snake his dark eyes never left the King’s face.

“You double traitor! You would sell Calais to de Chargny, and then in turn you would sell de Chargny to me. How dare you suppose that I or any noble knight had such a huckster’s soul as to think only of ransoms where honor is to be won? Could I or any true man be so caitiff and so thrall? You have sealed your own doom. Lead him out!”

“One instant, I pray you, my fair and most sweet lord,” cried the Prince. “Assuage your wrath yet a little while, for this man’s rede deserves perhaps more thought than we have given it. He has turned your noble soul sick with his talk of ransoms; but look at it, I pray you, from the side of honor, and where could we find such hope of worshipfully winning worship? I pray you to let me put my body in this adventure, for it is one from which, if rightly handled, much advancement is to be gained."

Edward looked with sparkling eyes at the noble youth at his side. "Never was hound more keen on the track of a stricken hart than you on the hope of honor, fair son," said he. "How do you conceive the matter in your mind?"

"De Chargny and his men will be such as are worth going far to meet, for he will have the pick of France under his banner that night. If we did as this man says and awaited him with the same number of lances, then I cannot think that there is any spot in Christendom where one would rather be than in Calais that night."

"By the rood, fair son, you are right!" cried the King, his face shining with the thought. "Now which of you, John Chandos or Walter Manny, will take the thing in charge?" He looked mischievously from one to the other like a master who dangles a bone betwixt two fierce old hounds. All they had to say was in their burning, longing eyes. "Nay, John, you must not take it amiss; but it is Walter's turn, and he shall have it."

"Shall we not all go under your banner, sire, or that of the Prince?"

"Nay, it is not fitting that the royal banners of England should be advanced in so small an adventure. And yet, if you have space in your ranks for two more cavaliers, both the Prince and I would ride with you that night."

The young man stooped and kissed his father's hand.

"Take this man in your charge, Walter, and do with him as you will. Guard well lest he betray us once again. Take him from my sight, for his breath poisons the room. And now, Nigel, if that worthy graybeard of thine would fain twang his harp or sing to us — but what in God's name would you have?"

He had turned, to find his young host upon his knee and his flaxen head bent in entreaty.

"What is it, man? What do you crave?"

"A boon, fair liege!"

"Well, well, am I to have no peace to-night, with a traitor kneeling to me in front, and a true man on his knees behind? Out with it, Nigel. What would you have?"

"To come with you to Calais."

“By the rood! your request is fair enough, seeing that our plot is hatched beneath your very roof. How say you, Walter? Will you take him, armor and all?” asked King Edward.

“Say rather will you take me?” said Chandos. “We two are rivals in honor, Walter, but I am very sure that you would not hold me back.”

“Nay, John, I will be proud to have the best lance in Christendom beneath my banner.”

“And I to follow so knightly a leader. But Nigel Loring is my Squire, and so he comes with us also.”

“Then that is settled,” said the King, “and now there is no need for hurry, since there can be no move until the moon has changed. So I pray you to pass the flagon once again, and to drink with me to the good knights of France. May they be of great heart and high of enterprise when we all meet once more within the castle wall of Calais!”

XI. IN THE HALL OF THE KNIGHT OF DUPLIN

The King had come and had gone. Tilford Manor house stood once more dark and silent, but joy and contentment reigned within its walls. In one night every trouble had fallen away like some dark curtain which had shut out the sun. A princely sum of money had come from the King's treasurer, given in such fashion that there could be no refusal. With a bag of gold pieces at his saddle-bow Nigel rode once more into Guildford, and not a beggar on the way who had not cause to bless his name.

There he had gone first to the goldsmith and had bought back cup and salver and bracelet, mourning with the merchant over the evil chance that gold and gold-work had for certain reasons which only those in the trade could fully understand gone up in value during the last week, so that already fifty gold pieces had to be paid more than the price which Nigel had received. In vain the faithful Aylward fretted and fumed and muttered a prayer that the day would come when he might feather a shaft in the merchant's portly paunch. The money had to be paid.

Thence Nigel hurried to Wat the armorer's and there he bought that very suit for which he had yearned so short a time before. Then and there he tried it on in the booth, Wat and his boy walking round him with spanner and wrench, fixing bolts and twisting rivets.

"How is that, my fair sir?" cried the armorer as he drew the bassinet over the head and fastened it to the camail which extended to the shoulders. "I swear by Tubal Cain that it fits you as the shell fits the crab! A finer suit never came from Italy or Spain."

Nigel stood in front of a burnished shield which served as a mirror, and he turned this way and that, preening himself like a little shining bird. His smooth breastplate, his wondrous joints with their deft protection by the disks at knee and elbow and shoulder, the beautifully flexible gauntlets and sollerets, the shirt of mail and the close-fitting greave-plates were all things of joy and of beauty in his eyes. He sprang about the shop to show his lightness, and then running out he placed his hand on the pommel and vaulted into Pommers' saddle, while Wat and his boy applauded in the doorway.

Then springing off and running into the shop again he clanked down upon his knees before the image of the Virgin upon the smithy wall. There from his heart he prayed that no shadow or stain should come upon his soul or his honor whilst these arms incased his body, and that he might be strengthened to use them for noble and godly ends. A strange turn this to a religion of peace, and yet for many a century the sword and the faith had upheld each other and in a darkened world the best ideal of the soldier had turned in some dim groping fashion toward the light. “Benedictus dominus deus meus qui docet manus meas ad Praelium et digitos meos ad bellum!” There spoke the soul of the knightly soldier.

So the armor was trussed upon the armorer's mule and went back with them to Tilford, where Nigel put it on once more for the pleasure of the Lady Ermyntrude, who clapped her skinny hands and shed tears of mingled pain and joy — pain that she should lose him, joy that he should go so bravely to the wars. As to her own future, it had been made easy for her, since it was arranged that a steward should look to the Tilford estate whilst she had at her disposal a suite of rooms in royal Windsor, where with other venerable dames of her own age and standing she could spend the twilight of her days discussing long-forgotten scandals and whispering sad things about the grandfathers and the grandmothers of the young courtiers all around them. There Nigel might leave her with an easy mind when he turned his face to France.

But there was one more visit to be paid and one more farewell to be spoken ere Nigel could leave the moorlands where he had dwelled so long. That evening he donned his brightest tunic, dark purple velvet of Genoa, with trimming of miniver, his hat with the snow-white feather curling round the front, and his belt of embossed silver round his loins. Mounted on lordly Pommers, with his hawk upon wrist and his sword by his side, never did fairer young gallant or one more modest in mind set forth upon such an errand. It was but the old Knight of Duplin to whom he would say farewell; but the Knight of Duplin had two daughters, Edith and Mary, and Edith was the fairest maid in all the heather-country.

Sir John Buttesthorn, the Knight of Duplin, was so called because he had been present at that strange battle, some eighteen years before, when the full power of Scotland had been for a moment beaten to the ground by a handful of adventurers and mercenaries, marching under the banner of no nation, but fighting in their own private quarrel. Their exploit fills no pages of history, for it is to the interest of no nation to record it, and yet the rumor and fame of the great fight bulked large in those times, for it was on that day when the flower of Scotland was left dead upon the field, that the world first understood that a new force had arisen in war, and that the English archer, with his robust courage and his skill with the weapon which he had wielded from his boyhood, was a power with which even the mailed chivalry of Europe had seriously to reckon.

Sir John after his return from Scotland had become the King’s own head huntsman, famous through all England for his knowledge of venery, until at last, getting overheavy for his horses, he had settled in modest comfort into the old house of Cosford upon the eastern slope of the Hindhead hill. Here, as his face grew redder and his beard more white, he spent the evening of his days, amid hawks and hounds, a flagon of spiced wine ever at his elbow, and his swollen foot perched upon a stool before him. There it was that many an old comrade broke his journey as he passed down the rude road which led from London to Portsmouth, and thither also came the young gallants of the country to hear the stout knight’s tales of old wars, or to learn, from him that lore of the forest and the chase which none could teach so well as he.

But sooth to say, whatever the old knight might think, it was not merely his old tales and older wine which drew the young men to Cosford, but rather the fair face of his younger daughter, or the strong soul and wise counsel of the elder. Never had two more different branches sprung from the same trunk. Both were tall and of a queenly graceful figure. But there all resemblance began and ended.

Edith was yellow as the ripe corn, blue-eyed, winning, mischievous, with a chattering tongue, a merry laugh, and a smile which a dozen of young gallants, Nigel of Tilford at their head, could share equally amongst them. Like a young kitten she played with all things that she found in life, and some there were who thought that already the claws could be felt amid the patting of her velvet touch.

Mary was dark as night, grave-featured, plain-visaged, with steady brown eyes looking bravely at the world from under a strong black arch of brows. None could call her beautiful, and when her fair sister cast her arm round her and placed her cheek against hers, as was her habit when company was there, the fairness of the one and the plainness of the other leaped visibly to the eyes of all, each the clearer for that hard contrast. And yet, here and there, there was one who, looking at her strange, strong face, and at the passing gleams far down in her dark eyes, felt that this silent woman with her proud bearing and her queenly grace had in her something of strength, of reserve and of mystery which was more to them than all the dainty glitter of her sister.

Such were the ladies of Cosford toward whom Nigel Loring rode that night with doublet of Genoan velvet and the new white feather in his cap.

He had ridden over Thursley Ridge past that old stone where in days gone by at the place of Thor the wild Saxons worshiped their war-god. Nigel looked at it with a wary eye and spurred Pommers onward as he passed it, for still it was said that wild fires danced round it on the moonless nights, and they who had ears for such things could hear the scream and sob of those whose lives had been ripped from them that the fiend might be honored. Thor’s stone, Thor’s jumps, Thor’s punch-bowl — the whole country-side was one grim monument to the God of Battles, though the pious monks had changed his uncouth name for that of the Devil his father, so that it was the Devil’s jumps and the Devil’s punch-bowl of which they spoke. Nigel glanced back at the old gray boulder, and he felt for an instant a shudder pass through his stout heart. Was it the chill of the evening air, or was it that some inner voice had whispered to him of the day when he also might lie bound on such a rock and have such a blood-stained pagan crew howling around him.

An instant later the rock and his vague fear and all things else had passed from his mind, for there, down the yellow sandy path, the setting sun gleaming on her golden hair, her lithe figure bending and swaying with every heave of the cantering horse, was none other than the same fair Edith, whose face had come so often betwixt him and his sleep. His blood rushed hot to his face at the sight, for fearless of all else, his spirit was attracted and yet daunted by the delicate mystery of woman. To his pure and knightly soul not Edith alone, but every woman, sat high and aloof, enthroned and exalted, with a thousand mystic excellencies and virtues which raised her far above the rude world of man. There was joy in contact with them; and yet there was fear, fear lest his own unworthiness, his untrained tongue or rougher ways should in some way break rudely upon this delicate and tender thing. Such was his thought as the white horse cantered toward him;

but a moment later his vague doubts were set at rest by the frank voice of the young girl, who waved her whip in merry greeting.

"Hail and well met, Nigel!" she cried. "Whither away this evening? Sure I am that it is not to see your friends of Cosford, for when did you ever don so brave a doublet for us? Come, Nigel, her name, that I may hate her for ever."

"Nay, Edith," said the young Squire, laughing back at the laughing girl. "I was indeed coming to Cosford."

"Then we shall ride back together, for I will go no farther. How think you that I am looking?"

Nigel's answer was in his eyes as he glanced at the fair flushed face, the golden hair, the sparkling eyes and the daintily graceful figure set off in a scarlet-and-black riding-dress. "You are as fair as ever, Edith."

"Oh, cold of speech! Surely you were bred for the cloisters, and not for a lady's bower, Nigel. Had I asked such a question from young Sir George Brocas or the Squire of Fernhurst, he would have raved from here to Cosford. They are both more to my taste than you are, Nigel."

"It is the worse for me, Edith," said Nigel ruefully.

"Nay, but you must not lose heart."

"Have I not already lost it?" said he.

"That is better," she cried, laughing. "You can be quick enough when you choose, Master Malapert. But you are more fit to speak of high and weary matters with my sister Mary. She will have none of the prattle and courtesy of Sir George, and yet I love them well. But tell me, Nigel, why do you come to Cosford to-night?"

"To bid you farewell."

"Me alone?"

"Nay, Edith, you and your sister Mary and the good knight your father."

"Sir George would have said that he had come for me alone. Indeed you are but a poor courtier beside him. But is it true, Nigel, that you go to France?"

"Yes, Edith."

"It was so rumored after the King had been to Tilford. The story goes that the King goes to France and you in his train. Is that true?"

"Yes, Edith, it is true."

"Tell me, then, to what part you go, and when?"

"That, alas! I may not say."

“Oh, in sooth!” She tossed her fair head and rode onward in silence, with compressed lips and angry eyes.

Nigel glanced at her in surprise and dismay. “Surely, Edith,” said he at last, “you have overmuch regard for my honor that you should wish me to break the word that I have given?”

“Your honor belongs to you, and my likings belong to me,” said she. “You hold fast to the one, and I will do the same by the other.”

They rode in silence through Thursley village. Then a thought came to her mind and in an instant her anger was forgotten and she was hot on a new scent.

“What would you do if I were injured, Nigel? I have heard my father say that small as you are there is no man in these parts could stand against you. Would you be my champion if I suffered wrong?”

“Surely I or any man of gentle blood would be the champion of any woman who had suffered wrong.”

“You or any and I or any — what sort of speech is that? Is it a compliment, think you, to be mixed with a drove in that fashion? My question was of you and me. If I were wronged would you be my man?”

“Try me and see, Edith!”

“Then I will do so, Nigel. Either Sir George Brocas or the Squire of Fernhurst would gladly do what I ask, and yet I am of a mind, Nigel, to turn to you.”

“I pray you to tell me what it is.”

“You know Paul de la Fosse of Shalford?”

“You mean the small man with the twisted back?”

“He is no smaller than yourself, Nigel, and as to his back there are many folk that I know who would be glad to have his face.”

“Nay, I am no judge of that, and I spoke out of no discourtesy. What of the man?”

“He has flouted me, Nigel, and I would have revenge.”

“What — on that poor twisted creature?”

“I tell you that he has flouted me!”

“But how?”

“I should have thought that a true cavalier would have flown to my aid, withouten all these questions. But I will tell you, since I needs must. Know then that he was one of those who came around me and professed to be my own. Then, merely because he thought that there were others who were as dear to me as himself he left me, and now he pays court to Maude Twynham, the little freckle-faced hussy in his village."

"But how has this hurt you, since he was no man of thine?"

"He was one of my men, was he not? And he has made game of me to his wench. He has told her things about me. He has made me foolish in her eyes. Yes, yes, I can read it in her saffron face and in her watery eyes when we meet at the church door on Sundays. She smiles — yes, smiles at me! Nigel, go to him! Do not slay him, nor even wound him, but lay his face open with thy riding-whip, and then come back to me and tell me how I can serve you."

Nigel's face was haggard with the strife within, for desire ran hot in every vein, and yet reason shrank with horror. "By Saint Paul! Edith," he cried, "I see no honor nor advancement of any sort in this thing which you have asked me to do. Is it for me to strike one who is no better than a cripple? For my manhood I could not do such a deed, and I pray you, dear lady, that you will set me some other task."

Her eyes flashed at him in contempt. "And you are a man-at-arms!" she cried, laughing in bitter scorn. "You are afraid of a little man who can scarce walk. Yes, yes, say what you will, I shall ever believe that you have heard of his skill at fence and of his great spirit, and that your heart has failed you! You are right, Nigel. He is indeed a perilous man. Had you done what I asked he would have slain you, and so you have shown your wisdom."

Nigel flushed and winced under the words, but he said no more, for his mind was fighting hard within him, striving to keep that high image of woman which seemed for a moment to totter on the edge of a fall. Together in silence, side by side, the little man and the stately woman, the yellow charger and the white jennet, passed up the sandy winding track with the gorse and the bracken head-high on either side. Soon a path branched off through a gateway marked with the boar-heads of the Buttesthorns, and there was the low widespread house heavily timbered, loud with the barking of dogs. The ruddy Knight limped forth with outstretched hand and roaring voice —

"What how, Nigel! Good welcome and all hail! I had thought that you had given over poor friends like us, now that the King had made so much of you. The horses, varlets, or my crutch will be across you! Hush, Lydiard!

Down, Pelamon! I can scarce hear my voice for your yelping. Mary, a cup of wine for young Squire Loring!"

She stood framed in the doorway, tall, mystic, silent, with strange, wistful face and deep soul shining in her dark, questioning eyes. Nigel kissed the hand that she held out, and all his faith in woman and his reverence came back to him as he looked at her. Her sister had slipped behind her and her fair elfish face smiled her forgiveness of Nigel over Mary's shoulder.

The Knight of Duplin leaned his weight upon the young man's arm and limped his way across the great high-roofed hall to his capacious oaken chair. "Come, come, the stool, Edith!" he cried. "As God is my help, that girl's mind swarms with gallants as a granary with rats. Well, Nigel, I hear strange tales of your spear-running at Tilford and of the visit of the King. How seemed he? And my old friend Chandos — many happy hours in the woodlands have we had together — and Manny too, he was ever a bold and a hard rider — what news of them all?"

Nigel told to the old Knight all that had occurred, saying little of his own success and much of his own failure, yet the eyes of the dark woman burned the brighter as she sat at her tapestry and listened.

Sir John followed the story with a running fire of oaths, prayers, thumps with his great fist and flourishes of his crutch. "Well, well, lad, you could scarce expect to hold your saddle against Manny, and you have carried yourself well. We are proud of you, Nigel, for you are our own man, reared in the heather country. But indeed I take shame that you are not more skilled in the mystery of the woods, seeing that I have had the teaching of you, and that no one in broad England is my master at the craft. I pray you to fill your cup again whilst I make use of the little time that is left to us."

And straightway the old Knight began a long and weary lecture upon the times of grace and when each beast and bird was seasonable, with many anecdotes, illustrations, warnings and exceptions, drawn from his own great experience. He spoke also of the several ranks and grades of the chase: how the hare, hart and boar must ever take precedence over the buck, the doe, the fox, the marten and the roe, even as a knight banneret does over a knight, while these in turn are of a higher class to the badger, the wildcat or the otter, who are but the common populace of the world of beasts. Of blood-stains also he spoke — how the skilled hunter may see at a glance if blood be dark and frothy, which means a mortal hurt, or thin and clear, which means that the arrow has struck a bone.

"By such signs," said he, "you will surely know whether to lay on the hounds and cast down the blinks which hinder the stricken deer in its flight. But above all I pray you, Nigel, to have a care in the use of the terms of the craft, lest you should make some blunder at table, so that those who are wiser may have the laugh of you, and we who love you may be shamed."

"Nay, Sir John," said Nigel. "I think that after your teaching I can hold my place with the others."

The old Knight shook his white head doubtfully. "There is so much to be learned that there is no one who can be said to know all," said he. "For example, Nigel, it is sooth that for every collection of beasts of the forest, and for every gathering of birds of the air, there is their own private name so that none may be confused with another."

"I know it, fair sir."

"You know it, Nigel, but you do not know each separate name, else are you a wiser man than I had thought you. In truth — none can say that they know all, though I have myself picked off eighty, and six for a wager at court, and it is said that the chief huntsman of the Duke of Burgundy has counted over a hundred — but it is in my mind that he may have found them as he went, for there was none to say him nay. Answer me now, lad, how would you say if you saw ten badgers together in the forest?"

"A cete of badgers, fair sir."

"Good, Nigel — good, by my faith! And if you walk in Woolmer Forest and see a swarm of foxes, how would you call it?"

"A skulk of foxes."

"And if they be lions?"

"Nay, fair sir, I am not like to meet several lions in Woolmer Forest."

"Aye, lad, but there are other forests besides Woolmer, and other lands besides England, and who can tell how far afield such a knight errant as Nigel of Tilford may go, when he sees worship to be won? We will say that you were in the deserts of Nubia, and that afterward at the court of the great Sultan you wished to say that you had seen several lions, which is the first beast of the chase, being the king of all animals. How then would you say it?"

Nigel scratched his head. "Surely, fair sir, I would be content to say that I had seen a number of lions, if indeed I could say aught after so wondrous an adventure."

“Nay, Nigel, a huntsman would have said that he had seen a pride of lions, and so proved that he knew the language of the chase. Now had it been boars instead of lions?”

“One says a singular of boars.”

“And if they be swine?”

“Surely it is a herd of swine.”

“Nay, nay, lad, it is indeed sad to see how little you know. Your hands, Nigel, were always better than your head. No man of gentle birth would speak of a herd of swine; that is the peasant speech. If you drive them it is a herd. If you hunt them it is other. What call you them, then, Edith?”

“Nay, I know not,” said the girl listlessly. A crumpled note brought in by a varlet was clinched in her right hand and her blue eyes looked afar into the deep shadows of the roof.

“But you can tell us, Mary?”

“Surely, sweet sir, one talks of a sounder of swine.”

The old Knight laughed exultantly. “Here is a pupil who never brings me shame!” he cried. “Be it lore — of chivalry or heraldry or woodcraft or what you will, I can always turn to Mary. Many a man can she put to the blush.”

“Myself among them,” said Nigel.

“Ah, lad, you are a Solomon to some of them. Hark ye! only last week that jack-fool, the young Lord of Brocas, was here talking of having seen a covey of pheasants in the wood. One such speech would have been the ruin of a young Squire at the court. How would you have said it, Nigel?”

“Surely, fair sir, it should be a nye of pheasants.”

“Good, Nigel — a nye of pheasants, even as it is a gaggle of geese or a badling of ducks, a fall of woodcock or a wisp of snipe. But a covey of pheasants! What sort of talk is that? I made him sit even where you are sitting, Nigel, and I saw the bottom of two pots of Rhenish ere I let him up. Even then I fear that he had no great profit from his lesson, for he was casting his foolish eyes at Edith when he should have been turning his ears to her father. But where is the wench?”

“She hath gone forth, father.”

“She ever doth go forth when there is a chance of learning aught that is useful indoors. But supper will soon be ready, and there is a boar’s ham fresh from the forest with which I would ask your help, Nigel, and a side of venison from the King’s own chase. The tinemen and verderers have not forgotten me yet, and my larder is ever full. Blow three moots on the horn, Mary, that the varlets may set the table, for the growing shadow and my loosening belt warn me that it is time.”

XII. HOW NIGEL FOUGHT THE TWISTED MAN OF SHALFORD

In the days of which you read all classes, save perhaps the very poor, fared better in meat and in drink than they have ever done since. The country was covered with woodlands — there were seventy separate forests in England alone, some of them covering half a shire. Within these forests the great beasts of the chase were strictly preserved, but the smaller game, the hares, the rabbits, the birds, which swarmed round the coverts, found their way readily into the poor man's pot. Ale was very cheap, and cheaper still was the mead which every peasant could make for himself out of the wild honey in the tree-trunks. There were many tea-like drinks also, which were brewed by the poor at no expense: mallow tea, tansy tea, and others the secret of which has passed.

Amid the richer classes there was rude profusion, great joints ever on the sideboard, huge pies, beasts of the field and beasts of the chase, with ale and rough French or Rhenish wines to wash them down. But the very rich had attained to a high pitch of luxury in their food, and cookery was a science in which the ornamentation of the dish was almost as important as the dressing of the food. It was gilded, it was silvered, it was painted, it was surrounded with flame. From the boar and the peacock down to such strange food as the porpoise and the hedgehog, every dish had its own setting and its own sauce, very strange and very complex, with flavorings of dates, currants, cloves, vinegar, sugar and honey, of cinnamon, ground ginger, sandalwood, saffron, brawn and pines. It was the Norman tradition to eat in moderation, but to have a great profusion of the best and of the most delicate from which to choose. From them came this complex cookery, so unlike the rude and often gluttonous simplicity of the old Teutonic stock.

Sir John Buttesthorn was of that middle class who fared in the old fashion, and his great oak supper-table groaned beneath the generous pastries, the mighty joints and the great flagons. Below were the household, above on a raised dais the family table, with places ever ready for those frequent guests who dropped in from the high road outside. Such a one had just come, an old priest, journeying from the Abbey of Chertsey to the Priory of Saint John at Midhurst. He passed often that way, and never without breaking his journey at the hospitable board of Cosford.

“Welcome again, good Father Athanasius!” cried the burly Knight. “Come sit here on my right and give me the news of the country-side, for there is never a scandal but the priests are the first to know it.”

The priest, a kindly, quiet man, glanced at an empty place upon the farther side of his host. “Mistress Edith?” said he.

“Aye, aye, where is the hussy?” cried her father impatiently. “Mary, I beg you to have the horn blown again, that she may know that the supper is on the table. What can the little owlet do abroad at this hour of the night?”

There was trouble in the priest’s gentle eyes as he touched the Knight upon the sleeve. “I have seen Mistress Edith within this hour,” said he. “I fear that she will hear no horn that you may blow, for she must be at Milford ere now.”

“At Milford? What does she there?”

“I pray you, good Sir John, to abate your voice somewhat, for indeed this matter is for our private discourse, since it touches the honor of a lady.”

“Her honor?” Sir John’s ruddy face had turned redder still, as he stared at the troubled features of the priest. “Her honor, say you — the honor of my daughter? Make good those words, or never set your foot over the threshold of Cosford again!”

“I trust that I have done no wrong, Sir John, but indeed I must say what I have seen, else would I be a false friend and an unworthy priest.”

“Haste man, haste! What in the Devil’s name have you seen?”

“Know you a little man, partly misshapen, named Paul de la Fosse?”

“I know him well. He is a man of noble family and coat-armor, being the younger brother of Sir Eustace de la Fosse of Shalford. Time was when I had thought that I might call him son, for there was never a day that he did not pass with my girls, but I fear that his crooked back sped him ill in his wooing.”

“Alas, Sir John! It is his mind that is more crooked than his back. He is a perilous man with women, for the Devil hath given him such a tongue and such an eye that he charms them even as the basilisk. Marriage may be in their mind, but never in his, so that I could count a dozen and more whom he has led to their undoing. It is his pride and his boast over the whole countryside.”

“Well, well, and what is this to me or mine?”

“Even now, Sir John, as I rode my mule up the road I met this man speeding toward his home. A woman rode by his side, and though her face was hooded I heard her laugh as she passed me. That laugh I have heard before, and it was under this very roof, from the lips of Mistress Edith.”

The Knight’s knife dropped from his hand. But the debate had been such that neither Mary nor Nigel could fail to have heard it. Mid the rough laughter and clatter of voices from below the little group at the high table had a privacy of their own.

“Fear not, father,” said the girl—”indeed, the good Father Athanasius hath fallen into error, and Edith will be with us anon. I have heard her speak of this man many times of late, and always with bitter words.”

“It is true, sir,” cried Nigel eagerly. “It was only this very evening as we rode over Thursley Moor that Mistress Edith told me that she counted him not a fly, and that she would be glad if he were beaten for his evil deeds.”

But the wise priest shook his silvery locks. “Nay, there is ever danger when a woman speaks like that. Hot hate is twin brother to hot love. Why should she speak so if there were not some bond between them?”

“And yet,” said Nigel, “what can have changed her thoughts in three short hours? She was here in the hall with us since I came. By Saint Paul, I will not believe it!”

Mary’s face darkened. “I call to mind,” said she, “that a note was brought her by Hannekin the stable varlet when you were talking to us, fair sir, of the terms of the chase. She read it and went forth.”

Sir John sprang to his feet, but sank into his chair again with a groan. “Would that I were dead,” he cried, “ere I saw dishonor come upon my house, and am so tied with this accursed foot that I can neither examine if it be true, nor yet avenge it! If my son Oliver were here, then all would be well. Send me this stable varlet that I may question him.”

“I pray you, fair and honored sir,” said Nigel, “that you will take me for your son this night, that I may handle this matter in the way which seems best. On jeopardy of my honor I will do all that a man may.”

“Nigel, I thank you. There is no man in Christendom to whom I would sooner turn.”

“But I would lean your mind in one matter, fair sir. This man, Paul de la Fosse, owns broad acres, as I understand, and comes of noble blood. There is no reason if things be as we fear that he should not marry your daughter?"

"Nay, she could not wish for better."

"It is well. And first I would question this Hannekin; but it shall be done in such a fashion that none shall know, for indeed it is not a matter for the gossip of servants. But if you will show me the man, Mistress Mary, I will take him out to tend my own horse, and so I shall learn all that he has to tell."

Nigel was absent for some time, and when he returned the shadow upon his face brought little hope to the anxious hearts at the high table. "I have locked him in the stable loft, lest he talk too much," said he, "for my questions must have shown him whence the wind blew. It was indeed from this man that the note came, and he had brought with him a spare horse for the lady."

The old Knight groaned, and his face sank upon his hands.

"Nay, father, they watch you!" whispered Mary. "For the honor of our house let us keep a bold face to all." Then, raising her young clear voice, so that it sounded through the room: "If you ride eastward, Nigel, I would fain go with you, that my sister may not come back alone."

"We will ride together, Mary," said Nigel, rising; then in a lower voice: "But we cannot go alone, and if we take a servant all is known. I pray you to stay at home and leave the matter with me."

"Nay, Nigel, she may sorely need a woman's aid, and what woman should it be save her own sister? I can take my tire-woman with us."

"Nay, I shall ride with you myself if your impatience can keep within the powers of my mule," said the old priest.

"But it is not your road, father?"

"The only road of a true priest is that which leads to the good of others. Come, my children, and we will go together."

And so it was that stout Sir John Buttesthorn, the aged Knight of Duplin, was left alone at his own high table, pretending to eat, pretending to drink, fidgeting in his seat, trying hard to seem unconcerned with his mind and body in a fever, while below him his varlets and handmaids laughed and jested, clattering their cups and clearing their trenchers, all unconscious of the dark shadow which threw its gloom over the lonely man upon the dais above.

Meantime the Lady Mary upon the white jennet which her sister had ridden on the same evening, Nigel on his war-horse, and the priest on the mule, clattered down the rude winding road which led to London. The country on either side was a wilderness of heather moors and of morasses from which came the strange crying of night-fowl. A half-moon shone in the sky between the rifts of hurrying clouds. The lady rode in silence, absorbed in the thought of the task before them, the danger and the shame.

Nigel chatted in a low tone with the priest. From him he learned more of the evil name of this man whom they followed. His house at Shalford was a den of profligacy and vice. No woman could cross that threshold and depart unstained. In some strange fashion, inexplicable and yet common, the man, with all his evil soul and his twisted body, had yet some strange fascination for women, some mastery over them which compelled them to his will. Again and again he had brought ruin to a household, again and again his adroit tongue and his cunning wit had in some fashion saved him from the punishment of his deeds. His family was great in the county, and his kinsmen held favor with the King, so that his neighbours feared to push things too far against him. Such was the man, malignant and ravenous, who had stooped like some foul night-hawk and borne away to his evil nest the golden beauty of Cosford. Nigel said little as he listened, but he raised his hunting-dagger to his tightened lips, and thrice he kissed the cross of its handle.

They had passed over the moors and through the village of Milford and the little township of Godalming, until their path turned southward over the Pease marsh and crossed the meadows of Shalford. There on the dark hillside glowed the red points of light which marked the windows of the house which they sought. A somber arched avenue of oak-trees led up to it, and then they were in the moon-silvered clearing in front.

From the shadow of the arched door there sprang two rough serving-men, bearded and gruff, great cudgels in their hands, to ask them who they were and what their errand. The Lady Mary had slipped from her horse and was advancing to the door, but they rudely barred her way.

“Nay, nay, our master needs no more!” cried one, with a hoarse laugh. “Stand back, mistress, whoever you be! The house is shut, and our lord sees no guests to-night.”

“Fellow,” said Nigel, speaking low and clear, “stand back from us! Our errand is with your master.”

“Bethink you, my children,” cried the old priest, “would it not be best perchance, that I go in to him and see whether the voice of the Church may not soften this hard heart? I fear bloodshed if you enter.”

“Nay, father, I pray you to stay here for the nonce,” said Nigel. “And you, Mary, do you bide with the good priest, for we know not what may be within.”

Again he turned to the door, and again the two men barred his passage.

“Stand back, I say, back for your lives!” said Nigel. “By Saint Paul! I should think it shame to soil my sword with such as you, but my soul is set, and no man shall bar my path this night.”

The men shrank from the deadly menace of that gentle voice.

“Hold!” said one of them, peering through the darkness, “is it not Squire Loring of Tilford?”

“That is indeed my name.”

“Had you spoken it I for one would not have stopped your way. Put down your staff, Wat, for this is no stranger, but the Squire of Tilford.”

“As well for him,” grumbled the other, lowering his cudgel with an inward prayer of thanksgiving. “Had it been otherwise I should have had blood upon my soul to-night. But our master said nothing of neighbours when he ordered us to hold the door. I will enter and ask him what is his will.”

But already Nigel was past them and had pushed open the outer door. Swift as he was, the Lady Mary was at his very heels, and the two passed together into the hall beyond.

It was a great room, draped and curtained with black shadows, with one vivid circle of light in the center, where two oil lamps shone upon a small table. A meal was laid upon the table, but only two were seated at it, and there were no servants in the room. At the near end was Edith, her golden hair loose and streaming down over the scarlet and black of her riding-dress.

At the farther end the light beat strongly upon the harsh face and the high-drawn misshapen shoulders of the lord of the house. A tangle of black hair surmounted a high rounded forehead, the forehead of a thinker, with two deep-set cold gray eyes twinkling sharply from under tufted brows. His nose was curved and sharp, like the beak of some cruel bird, but below the whole of his clean-shaven powerful face was marred by the loose slabbing mouth and the round folds of the heavy chin. His knife in one hand and a half-gnawed bone in the other, he looked fiercely up, like some beast disturbed in his den, as the two intruders broke in upon his hall.

Nigel stopped midway between the door and the table. His eyes and those of Paul de la Fosse were riveted upon each other. But Mary, with her woman's soul flooded over with love and pity, had rushed forward and cast her arms round her younger sister. Edith had sprung up from her chair, and with averted face tried to push the other away from her.

"Edith, Edith! By the Virgin, I implore you to come back with us, and to leave this wicked man!" cried Mary. "Dear sister, you would not break our father's heart, nor bring his gray head in dishonor to the grave! Come back Edith, come back and all is well."

But Edith pushed her away, and her fair cheeks were flushed with her anger. "What right have you over me, Mary, you who are but two years older, that you should follow me over the country-side as though I were a runagate villain and you my mistress? Do you yourself go back, and leave me to do that which seems best in my own eyes."

But Mary still held her in her arms, and still strove to soften the hard and angry heart. "Our mother is dead, Edith. I thank God that she died ere she saw you under this roof! But I stand for her, as I have done all my life, since I am indeed your elder. It is with her voice that I beg and pray you that you will not trust this man further, and that you will come back ere it be too late!"

Edith writhed from her grasp, and stood flushed and defiant, with gleaming, angry eyes fixed upon her sister. "You may speak evil of him now," said she, "but there was a time when Paul de la Fosse came to Cosford, and who so gentle and soft-spoken to him then as wise, grave, sister Mary? But he has learned to love another; so now he is the wicked man, and it is shame to be seen under his roof! From what I see of my good pious sister and her cavalier it is sin for another to ride at night with a man at your side, but it comes easy enough to you. Look at your own eye, good sister, ere you would take the speck from that of another."

Mary stood irresolute and greatly troubled, holding down her pride and her anger, but uncertain how best to deal with this strong wayward spirit.

"It is not a time for bitter words, dear sister," said she, and again she laid her hand upon her sister's sleeve. "All that you say may be true. There was indeed a time when this man was friend to us both, and I know even as you do the power which he may have to win a woman's heart. But I know him now, and you do not. I know the evil that he has wrought, the dishonor that he has brought, the perjury that lies upon his soul, the confidence betrayed, the promise unfulfilled — all this I know. Am I to see my own sister caught in the same well-used trap? Has it shut upon you, child? Am I indeed already too late? For God’s sake, tell me, Edith, that it is not so?”

Edith plucked her sleeve from her sister and made two swift steps to the head of the table. Paul de la Fosse still sat silent with his eyes upon Nigel. Edith laid her hand upon his shoulder: “This is the man I love, and the only man that I have ever loved. This is my husband,” said she.

At the word Mary gave a cry of joy.

“And is it so?” she cried. “Nay, then all is in honor, and God will see to the rest. If you are man and wife before the altar, then indeed why should I, or any other, stand between you? Tell me that it is indeed so, and I return this moment to make your father a happy man.”

Edith pouted like a naughty child. “We are man and wife in the eyes of God. Soon also we shall be wedded before all the world. We do but wait until next Monday when Paul’s brother, who is a priest at St. Albans, will come to wed us. Already a messenger has sped for him, and he will come, will he not, dear love?”

“He will come,” said the master of Shalford, still with his eyes fixed upon the silent Nigel.

“It is a lie; he will not come,” said a voice from the door.

It was the old priest, who had followed the others as far as the threshold.

“He will not come,” he repeated as he advanced into the room. “Daughter, my daughter, hearken to the words of one who is indeed old enough to be your earthly father. This lie has served before. He has ruined others before you with it. The man has no brother at Saint Albans. I know his brothers well, and there is no priest among them. Before Monday, when it is all too late, you will have found the truth as others have done before you. Trust him not, but come with us!”

Paul de la Fosse looked up at her with a quick smile and patted the hand upon his shoulder.

“Do you speak to them, Edith,” said he.

Her eyes flashed with scorn as she surveyed them each in turn, the woman, the youth and the priest.

“I have but one word to say to them,” said she. “It is that they go hence and trouble us no more. Am I not a free woman? Have I not said that this is the only man I ever loved? I have loved him long. He did not know it, and in despair he turned to another. Now he knows all and never again can doubt come between us. Therefore I will stay here at Shalford and come to Cosford no more save upon the arm of my husband. Am I so weak that I would believe the tales you tell against him? Is it hard for a jealous woman and a wandering priest to agree upon a lie? No, no, Mary, you can go hence and take your cavalier and your priest with you, for here I stay, true to my love and safe in my trust upon his honor!”

“Well spoken, on my faith, my golden bird!” said the little master of Shalford. “Let me add my own word to that which has been said. You would not grant me any virtue in your unkindly speech, good Lady Mary, and yet you must needs confess that at least I have good store of patience, since I have not set my dogs upon your friends who have come between me and my ease. But even to the most virtuous there comes at last a time when poor human frailty may prevail, and so I pray you to remove both yourself, your priest and your valiant knight errant, lest perhaps there be more haste and less dignity when at last you do take your leave. Sit down, my fair love, and let us turn once more to our supper.” He motioned her to her chair, and he filled her wine-cup as well as his own.

Nigel had said no word since he had entered the room, but his look had never lost its set purpose, nor had his brooding eyes ever wandered from the sneering face of the deformed master of Shalford. Now he turned with swift decision to Mary and to the priest.

“That is over,” said he in a low voice. “You have done all that you could, and now it is for me to play my part as well as I am able. I pray you, Mary, and you, good father, that you will await me outside.”

“Nay, Nigel, if there is danger—”

“It is easier for me, Mary, if you are not there. I pray you to go. I can speak to this man more at my ease.”

She looked at him with questioning eyes and then obeyed.

Nigel plucked at the priest’s gown.

“I pray you, father, have you your book of offices with you?”

“Surely, Nigel, it is ever in my breast.”

“Have it ready, father!”

“For what, my son?”

“There are two places you may mark; there is the service of marriage and there is the prayer for the dying. Go with her, father, and be ready at my call.”

He closed the door behind them and was alone with this ill-matched couple. They both turned in their chairs to look at him, Edith with a defiant face, the man with a bitter smile upon his lips and malignant hatred in his eyes.

“What,” said he, “the knight errant still lingers? Have we not heard of his thirst for glory? What new venture does he see that he should tarry here?”

Nigel walked to the table.

“There is no glory and little venture,” said he; “but I have come for a purpose and I must do it. I learn from your own lips, Edith, that you will not leave this man.”

“If you have ears you have heard it.”

“You are, as you have said, a free woman, and who can gainsay you? But I have known you, Edith, since we played as boy and girl on the heather-hills together. I will save you from this man’s cunning and from your own foolish weakness.”

“What would you do?”

“There is a priest without. He will marry you now. I will see you married ere I leave this hall.”

“Or else?” sneered the man.

“Or else you never leave this hall alive. Nay, call not for your servants or your dogs! By Saint Paul! I swear to you that this matter lies between us three, and that if any fourth comes at your call you, at least, shall never live to see what comes of it! Speak then, Paul of Shalford! Will you wed this woman now, or will you not?”

Edith was on her feet with outstretched arms between them. “Stand back, Nigel! He is small and weak. You would not do him a hurt! Did you not say so this very day? For God’s sake, Nigel, do not look at him so! There is death in your eyes.”

“A snake may be small and weak, Edith, yet every honest man would place his heel upon it. Do you stand back yourself, for my purpose is set.”

“Paul!” she turned her eyes to the pale sneering face. “Bethink you, Paul! Why should you not do what he asks? What matter to you whether it be now or on Monday? I pray you, dear Paul, for my sake let him have his way! Your brother can read the service again if it so please him. Let us wed now, Paul, and then all is well.”

He had risen from his chair, and he dashed aside her appealing hands. "You foolish woman," he snarled, "and you, my savior of fair damsels, who are so bold against a cripple, you have both to learn that if my body be weak there is the soul of my breed within it! To marry because a boasting, ranting, country Squire would have me do so — no, by the soul of God, I will die first! On Monday I will marry, and no day sooner, so let that be your answer."

"It is the answer that I wished," said Nigel, "for indeed I see no happiness in this marriage, and the other may well be the better way. Stand aside, Edith!" He gently forced her to one side and drew his sword.

De la Fosse cried aloud at the sight. "I have no sword. You would not murder me?" said he, leaning back with haggard-face and burning eyes against his chair. The bright steel shone in the lamp-light. Edith shrank back, her hand over her face.

"Take this sword!" said Nigel, and he turned the hilt to the cripple. "Now!" he added, as he drew his hunting knife. "Kill me if you can, Paul de la Fosse, for as God is my help I will do as much for you!"

The woman, half swooning and yet spellbound and fascinated, looked on at that strange combat. For a moment the cripple stood with an air of doubt, the sword grasped in his nerveless fingers. Then as he saw the tiny blade in Nigel's hand the greatness of the advantage came home to him, and a cruel smile tightened his loose lips. Slowly, step by step he advanced, his chin sunk upon his chest, his eyes glaring from under the thick tangle of his brows like fires through the brushwood. Nigel waited for him, his left hand forward, his knife down by his hip, his face grave, still and watchful.

Nearer and nearer yet, with stealthy step, and then with a bound and a cry of hatred and rage Paul de la Fosse had sped his blow. It was well judged and well swung, but point would have been wiser than edge against that supple body and those active feet. Quick as a flash, Nigel had sprung inside the sweep of the blade, taking a flesh wound on his left forearm, as he pressed it under the hilt. The next instant the cripple was on the ground and Nigel's dagger was at his throat.

"You dog!" he whispered. "I have you at my mercy! Quick ere I strike, and for the last time! Will you marry or no?"

The crash of the fall and the sharp point upon his throat had cowed the man's spirit. He looked up with a white face and the sweat gleamed upon his forehead. There was terror in his eyes.

"Nay, take your knife from me!" he cried. "I cannot die like a calf in the shambles."

"Will you marry?"

"Yes, yes, I will wed her! After all she is a good wench and I might do worse. Let me up! I tell you I will marry her! What more would you have?"

Nigel stood above him with his foot upon his misshapen body. He had picked up his sword, and the point rested upon the cripple's breast.

"Nay, you will bide where you are! If you are to live — and my conscience cries loud against it — at least your wedding will be such as your sins have deserved. Lie there, like the crushed worm that you are!" Then he raised his voice. "Father Athanasius!" he cried. "What ho! Father Athanasius!"

The old priest ran to the cry, and so did the Lady Mary. A strange sight it was that met them now in the circle of light, the frightened girl, half-unconscious against the table, the prostrate cripple, and Nigel with foot and sword upon his body.

"Your book, father!" cried Nigel. "I know not if what we do is good or ill; but we must wed them, for there is no way out."

But the girl by the table had given a great cry, and she was clinging and sobbing with her arms round her sister's neck.

"Oh, Mary, I thank the Virgin that you have come! I thank the Virgin that it is not too late! What did he say? He said that he was a de la Fosse and that he would not be married at the sword-point. My heart went out to him when he said it. But I, am I not a Buttesthorn, and shall it be said that I would marry a man who could be led to the altar with a knife at his throat? No, no, I see him as he is! I know him now, the mean spirit, the lying tongue! Can I not read in his eyes that he has indeed deceived me, that he would have left me as you say that he has left others? Take me home, Mary, my sister, for you have plucked me back this night from the very mouth of Hell!"

And so it was that the master of Shalford, livid and brooding, was left with his wine at his lonely table, while the golden beauty of Cosford, hot with shame and anger, her fair face wet with tears, passed out safe from the house of infamy into the great calm and peace of the starry night.

XIII. HOW THE COMRADES JOURNEYED DOWN THE OLD, OLD ROAD

And now the season of the moonless nights was drawing nigh and the King’s design was ripe. Very secretly his preparations were made. Already the garrison of Calais, which consisted of five hundred archers and two hundred men-at-arms, could, if forewarned, resist any attack made upon it. But it was the King’s design not merely to resist the attack, but to capture the attackers. Above all it was his wish to find the occasion for one of those adventurous passages of arms which had made his name famous throughout Christendom as the very pattern and leader of knight-errant chivalry.

But the affair wanted careful handling. The arrival of any, reinforcements, or even the crossing of any famous soldier, would have alarmed the French and warned them that their plot had been discovered. Therefore it was in twos and threes in the creyers and provision ships which were continually passing from shore to shore that the chosen warriors and their squires were brought to Calais. There they were passed at night through the water-gate into the castle where they could lie hidden, unknown to the townsfolk, until the hour for action had come.

Nigel had received word from Chandos to join him at “The Sign of the Broom-Pod” in Winchelsea. Three days beforehand he and Aylward rode from Tilford all armed and ready for the wars. Nigel was in hunting-costume, blithe and gay, with his precious armor and his small baggage trussed upon the back of a spare horse which Aylward led by the bridle. The archer had himself a good black mare, heavy and slow, but strong enough to be fit to carry his powerful frame. In his brigandine of chain mail and his steel cap, with straight strong sword by his side, his yellow long-bow jutting over his shoulder, and his quiver of arrows supported by a scarlet baldric, he was such a warrior as any knight might well be proud to have in his train. All Tilford trailed behind them, as they rode slowly over the long slope of heath land which skirts the flank of Crooksbury Hill.

At the summit of the rise Nigel reined in Pommers and looked back at the little village behind him. There was the old dark manor house, with one bent figure leaning upon a stick and gazing dimly after him from beside the door. He looked at the high-pitched roof, the timbered walls, the long trail of swirling blue smoke which rose from the single chimney, and the group of downcast old servants who lingered at the gate, John the cook, Weathercote the minstrel, and Red Swire the broken soldier. Over the river amid the trees he could see the grim, gray tower of Waverley, and even as he looked, the iron bell, which had so often seemed to be the hoarse threatening cry of an enemy, clanged out its call to prayer. Nigel doffed his velvet cap and prayed also — prayed that peace might remain at home, and good warfare, in which honor and fame should await him, might still be found abroad. Then, waving his hand to the people, he turned his horse's head and rode slowly eastward. A moment later Aylward broke from the group of archers and laughing girls who clung to his bridle and his stirrup straps, and rode on, blowing kisses over his shoulder. So at last the two comrades, gentle and simple, were fairly started on their venture.

There are two seasons of colour in those parts: the yellow, when the country-side is flaming with the gorse-blossoms, and the crimson, when all the long slopes are smoldering with the heather. So it was now. Nigel looked back from time to time, as he rode along the narrow track where the ferns and the ling brushed his feet on either side, and as he looked it seemed to him that wander where he might he would never see a fairer scene than that of his own home. Far to the westward, glowing in the morning light, rolled billow after billow of ruddy heather land, until they merged into the dark shadows of Woolmer Forest and the pale clear green of the Butser chalk downs. Never in his life had Nigel wandered far beyond these limits, and the woodlands, the down and the heather were dear to his soul. It gave him a pang in his heart now as he turned his face away from them; but if home lay to the westward, out there to the eastward was the great world of adventure, the noble stage where each of his kinsmen in turn had played his manly part and left a proud name behind.

How often he had longed for this day! And now it had come with no shadow cast behind it. Dame Ermyntrude was under the King's protection. The old servants had their future assured. The strife with the monks of Waverley had been assuaged. He had a noble horse under him, the best of weapons, and a stout follower at his back. Above all he was bound on a gallant errand with the bravest knight in England as his leader. All these thoughts surged together in his mind, and he whistled and sang, as he rode, out of the joy of his heart, while Pommers sidled and curveted in sympathy with the mood of his master. Presently, glancing back, he saw from Aylward's downcast eyes and Puckered brow that the archer was clouded with trouble. He reined his horse to let him come abreast of him.

"How now, Aylward?" said he. "Surely of all men in England you and I should be the most blithe this morning, since we ride forward with all hopes of honorable advancement. By Saint Paul! ere we see these heather hills once more we shall either worshipfully win worship, or we shall venture our persons in the attempt. These be glad thoughts, and why should you be downcast?"

Aylward shrugged his broad shoulders, and a wry smile dawned upon his rugged face. "I am indeed as limp as a wetted bowstring," said he. "It is the nature of a man that he should be sad when he leaves the woman he loves."

"In truth, yes!" cried Nigel, and in a flash the dark eyes of Mary Buttesthorn rose before him, and he heard her low, sweet, earnest voice as he had heard it that night when they brought her frailer sister back from Shalford Manor, a voice which made all that was best and noblest in a man thrill within his soul. "Yet, bethink you, archer, that what a woman loves in man is not his gross body, but rather his soul, his honor, his fame, the deeds with which he has made his life beautiful. Therefore you are winning love as well as glory when you turn to the wars."

"It may be so," said Aylward; "but indeed it goes to my heart to see the pretty dears weep, and I would fain weep as well to keep them company. When Mary — or was it Dolly? — nay, it was Martha, the red-headed girl from the mill — when she held tight to my baldric it was like snapping my heart-string to pluck myself loose."

"You speak of one name and then of another," said Nigel. "How is she called then, this maid whom you love?"

Aylward pushed back his steel cap and scratched his bristling head with some embarrassment. "Her name," said he, "is Mary Dolly Martha Susan Jane Cicely Theodosia Agnes Johanna Kate."

Nigel laughed as Aylward rolled out this prodigious title. "I had no right to take you to the wars," said he; "for by Saint Paul! it is very clear that I have widowed half the parish. But I saw your aged father the franklin. Bethink you of the joy that will fill his heart when he hears that you have done some small deed in France, and so won honor in the eyes of all."

"I fear that honor will not help him to pay his arrears of rent to the sacrist of Waverley," said Aylward. "Out he will go on the roadside, honor and all, if he does not find ten nobles by next Epiphany. But if I could win a ransom or be at the storming of a rich city, then indeed the old man would be proud of me. 'Thy sword must help my spade, Samkin,' said he as he kissed me goodby. Ah! it would indeed be a happy day for him and for all if I could ride back with a saddle-bag full of gold pieces, and please God, I shall dip my hand in somebody's pocket before I see Crooksbury Hill once more!"

Nigel shook his head, for indeed it seemed hopeless to try to bridge the gulf between them. Already they had made such good progress along the bridle-path through the heather that the little hill of Saint Catharine and the ancient shrine upon its summit loomed up before them. Here they crossed the road from the south to London, and at the crossing two wayfarers were waiting who waved their hands in greeting, the one a tall, slender, dark woman upon a white jennet, the other a very thick and red-faced old man, whose weight seemed to curve the back of the stout gray cob which he bestrode.

"What how, Nigel!" he cried. "Mary has told me that you make a start this morning, and we have waited here this hour and more on the chance of seeing you pass. Come, lad, and have a last stoup of English ale, for many a time amid the sour French wines you will long for the white foam under your nose, and the good homely twang of it."

Nigel had to decline the draft, for it meant riding into Guildford town, a mile out of his course, but very gladly he agreed with Mary that they should climb the path to the old shrine and offer a last orison together. The knight and Aylward waited below with the horses; and so it came about that Nigel and Mary found themselves alone under the solemn old Gothic arches, in front of the dark shadowed recess in which gleamed the golden reliquary of the saint. In silence they knelt side by side in prayer, and then came forth once more out of the gloom and the shadow into the fresh sunlit summer morning. They stopped ere they descended the path, and looked to right and left at the fair meadows and the blue Wey curling down the valley.

"What have you prayed for, Nigel?" said she.

"I have prayed that God and His saints will hold my spirit high and will send me back from France in such a fashion that I may dare to come to you and to claim you for my own."

"Bethink you well what it is that you say, Nigel," said she. "What you are to me only my own heart can tell; but I would never set eyes upon your face again rather than abate by one inch that height of honor and worshipful achievement to which you may attain.”

“Nay, my dear and most sweet lady, how should you abate it, since it is the thought of you which will nerve my arm and uphold my heart?”

“Think once more, my fair lord, and hold yourself bound by no word which you have said. Let it be as the breeze which blows past our faces and is heard of no more. Your soul yearns for honor. To that has it ever turned. Is there room in it for love also? or is it possible that both shall live at their highest in one mind? Do you not call to mind that Galahad and other great knights of old have put women out of their lives that they might ever give their whole soul and strength to the winning of honor? May it not be that I shall be a drag upon you, that your heart may shrink from some honorable task, lest it should bring risk and pain to me? Think well before you answer, my fair lord, for indeed my very heart would break if it should ever happen that through love of me your high hopes and great promise should miss fulfilment.”

Nigel looked at her with sparkling eyes. The soul which shone through her dark face had transformed it for the moment into a beauty more lofty and more rare than that of her shallow sister. He bowed before the majesty of the woman, and pressed his lips to her hand. “You are like a star upon my path which guides me on the upward way,” said he. “Our souls are set together upon the finding of honor, and how shall we hold each other back when our purpose is the same?”

She shook her proud head. “So it seems to you now, fair lord, but it may be otherwise as the years pass. How shall you prove that I am indeed a help and not a hindrance?”

“I will prove it by my deeds, fair and dear lady,” said Nigel. “Here at the shrine of the holy Catharine, on this, the Feast of Saint Margaret, I take my oath that I will do three deeds in your honor as a proof of my high love before I set eyes upon your face again, and these three deeds shall stand as a proof to you that if I love you dearly, still I will not let the thought of you stand betwixt me and honorable achievement!”

Her face shone with her love and her pride. “I also make my oath,” said she, “and I do it in the name of the holy Catharine whose shrine is hard by. I swear that I will hold myself for you until these three deeds be done and we meet once more; also that if — which may dear Christ forfend! you fall in doing them then I shall take the veil in Shalford nunnery and look upon no man’s face again! Give me your hand, Nigel.”

She had taken a little bangle of gold filigree work from her arm and fastened it upon his sunburnt wrist, reading aloud to him the engraved motto in old French: “Fais ce que dois, adviegne que pourra — c’est commande au chevalier.” Then for one moment they fell into each other’s arms and with kiss upon kiss, a loving man and a tender woman, they swore their troth to each other. But the old knight was calling impatiently from below and together they hurried down the winding path to where the horses waited under the sandy bluff.

As far as the Shalford crossing Sir John rode by Nigel’s arm, and many were the last injunctions which he gave him concerning woodcraft, and great his anxiety lest he confuse a spay with a brocket, or either with a hind. At last when they came to the reedy edge of the Wey the old knight and his daughter reined up their horses. Nigel looked back at them ere he entered the dark Chantry woods, and saw them still gazing after him and waving their hands. Then the path wound amongst the trees and they were lost to sight; but long afterwards when a clearing exposed once more the Shalford meadows Nigel saw that the old man upon the gray cob was riding slowly toward Saint Catharine’s Hill, but that the girl was still where he had seen her last, leaning forward in her saddle and straining her eyes to pierce the dark forest which screened her lover from her view. It was but a fleeting glance through a break in the foliage, and yet in after days of stress and toil in far distant lands it was that one little picture — the green meadow, the reeds, the slow blue-winding river, and the eager bending graceful figure upon the white horse — which was the clearest and the dearest image of that England which he had left behind him.

But if Nigel’s friends had learned that this was the morning of his leaving, his enemies too were on the alert. The two comrades had just emerged from the Chantry woods and were beginning the ascent of that curving path which leads upward to the old Chapel of the Martyr when with a hiss like an angry snake a long white arrow streaked under Pommers and struck quivering in the grassy turf. A second whizzed past Nigel’s ear, as he tried to turn; but Aylward struck the great war-horse a sharp blow over the haunches, and it had galloped some hundreds of yards before its rider could pull it up. Aylward followed as hard as he could ride, bending low over his horse’s neck, while arrows whizzed all around him.

"By Saint Paul!" said Nigel, tugging at his bridle and white with anger, "they shall not chase me across the country as though I was a frighted doe. Archer, how dare you to lash my horse when I would have turned and ridden in upon them?"

"It is well that I did so," said Aylward, "or by these ten finger-bones! our journey would have begun and ended on the same day. As I glanced round I saw a dozen of them at the least amongst the brushwood. See now how the light glimmers upon their steel caps yonder in the bracken under the great beech-tree. Nay, I pray you, my fair lord, do not ride forward. What chance has a man in the open against all these who lie at their ease in the underwood? If you will not think of yourself, then consider your horse, which would have a cloth-yard shaft feathered in its hide ere it could reach the wood."

Nigel chafed in impotent anger. "Am I to be shot at like a popinjay at a fair, by any reaver or outlaw that seeks a mark for his bow?" he cried. "By Saint Paul! Aylward, I will put on my harness and go further into the matter. Help me to untruss, I pray you!"

"Nay, my fair lord, I will not help you to your own downfall. It is a match with cogged dice betwixt a horseman on the moor and archers amid the forest. But these men are no outlaws, or they would not dare to draw their bows within a league of the sheriff of Guildford."

"Indeed, Aylward, I think that you speak truth," said Nigel. "It may be that these are the men of Paul de la Fosse of Shalford, whom I have given little cause to love me. Ah! there is indeed the very man himself."

They sat their horses with their backs to the long slope which leads up to the old chapel on the hill. In front of them was the dark ragged edge of the wood, with a sharp twinkle of steel here and there in its shadows which spoke of these lurking foes. But now there was a long moot upon a horn, and at once a score of russet-clad bowmen ran forward from amid the trees, spreading out into a scattered line and closing swiftly in upon the travelers. In the midst of them, upon a great gray horse, sat a small misshapen man, waving and cheering as one sets hounds on a badger, turning his head this way and that as he whooped and pointed, urging his bowmen onward up the slope.

"Draw them on, my fair lord! Draw them on until we have them out on the down!" cried Aylward, his eyes shining with joy. "Five hundred paces more, and then we may be on terms with them. Nay, linger not, but keep them always just clear of arrowshot until our turn has come."

Nigel shook and trembled with eagerness, as with his hand on his sword-hilt he looked at the line of eager hurrying men. But it flashed through his mind what Chandos had said of the cool head which is better for the warrior than the hot heart. Aylward's words were true and wise. He turned Pommers' head therefore, and amid a cry of derision from behind them the comrades trotted over the down. The bowmen broke into a run, while their leader screamed and waved more madly than before. Aylward cast many a glance at them over his shoulder.

"Yet a little farther! Yet a little farther still!" he muttered. "The wind is towards them and the fools have forgot that I can overshoot them by fifty paces. Now, my good lord, I pray you for one instant to hold the horses, for my weapon is of more avail this day, than thine can be. They may make sorry cheer ere they gain the shelter of the wood once more."

He had sprung from his horse, and with a downward wrench of his arm and a push with his knee he slipped the string into the upper nock of his mighty war-bow. Then in a flash he notched his shaft and drew it to the pile, his keen blue eyes glowing fiercely behind it from under his knotted brows. With thick legs planted sturdily apart, his body laid to the bow, his left arm motionless as wood, his right bunched into a double curve of swelling muscles as he stretched the white well-waxed string, he looked so keen and fierce a fighter that the advancing line stopped for an instant at the sight of him. Two or three loosed off their arrows, but the shafts flew heavily against the head wind, and snaked along the hard turf some score of paces short of the mark. One only, a short bandy-legged man, whose squat figure spoke of enormous muscular strength, ran swiftly in and then drew so strong a bow that the arrow quivered in the ground at Aylward's very feet.

"It is Black Will of Lynchmere," said the bowman. "Many a match have I shot with him, and I know well that no other man on the Surrey marches could have sped such a shaft. I trust that you are houseled and shriven, Will, for I have known you so long that I would not have your damnation upon my soul."

He raised his bow as he spoke, and the string twanged with a rich deep musical note. Aylward leaned upon his bow-stave as he keenly watched the long swift flight of his shaft, skimming smoothly down the wind.

“On him, on him! No, over him, by my hilt!” he cried. “There is more wind than I had thought. Nay, nay, friend, now that I have the length of you, you can scarce hope to loose again.”

Black Will had notched an arrow and was raising his bow when Aylward’s second shaft passed through the shoulder of his drawing arm. With a shout of anger and pain he dropped his weapon, and dancing in his fury he shook his fist and roared curses at his rival.

“I could slay him; but I will not, for good bowmen are not so common,” said Aylward. “And now, fair sir, we must on, for they are spreading round on either side, and if once they get behind us, then indeed our journey has come to a sudden end. But ere we go I would send a shaft through yonder horseman who leads them on.”

“Nay, Aylward, I pray you to leave him,” said Nigel. “Villain as he is, he is none the less a gentleman of coat-armor, and should die by some other weapon than thine.”

“As you will,” said Aylward, with a clouded brow. “I have been told that in the late wars many a French prince and baron has not been too proud to take his death wound from an English yeoman’s shaft, and that nobles of England have been glad enough to stand by and see it done.”

Nigel shook his head sadly. “It is sooth you say, archer, and indeed it is no new thing, for that good knight Richard of the Lion Heart met his end in such a lowly fashion, and so also did Harold the Saxon. But this is a private matter, and I would not have you draw your bow against him. Neither can I ride at him myself, for he is weak in body, though dangerous in spirit. Therefore, we will go upon our way, since there is neither profit nor honor to be gained, nor any hope of advancement.”

Aylward, having unstrung his bow, had remounted his horse during this conversation, and the two rode swiftly past the little squat Chapel of the Martyr and over the brow of the hill. From the summit they looked back. The injured archer lay upon the ground, with several of his comrades gathered in a knot around him. Others ran aimlessly up the hill, but were already far behind. The leader sat motionless upon his horse, and as he saw them look back he raised his hand and shrieked his curses at them. An instant later the curve of the ground had hid them from view. So, amid love and hate, Nigel bade adieu to the home of his youth.

And now the comrades were journeying upon that old, old road which runs across the south of England and yet never turns toward London, for the good reason that the place was a poor hamlet when first the road was laid. From Winchester, the Saxon capital, to Canterbury, the holy city of Kent, ran that ancient highway, and on from Canterbury to the narrow straits where, on a clear day, the farther shore can be seen. Along this track as far back as history can trace the metals of the west have been carried and passed the pack-horses which bore the goods which Gaul sent in exchange. Older than the Christian faith and older than the Romans, is the old road. North and south are the woods and the marshes, so that only on the high dry turf of the chalk land could a clear track be found. The Pilgrim’s Way, it still is called; but the pilgrims were the last who ever trod it, for it was already of immemorial age before the death of Thomas a Becket gave a new reason why folk should journey to the scene of his murder.

From the hill of Weston Wood the travelers could see the long white band which dipped and curved and rose over the green downland, its course marked even in the hollows by the line of the old yew-trees which flanked it. Neither Nigel nor Aylward had wandered far from their own country, and now they rode with light hearts and eager eyes taking note of all the varied pictures of nature and of man which passed before them. To their left was a hilly country, a land of rolling heaths and woods, broken here and there into open spaces round the occasional farm-house of a franklin. Hackhurst Down, Dunley Hill, and Ranmore Common swelled and sank, each merging into the other. But on the right, after passing the village of Shere and the old church of Gomshall, the whole south country lay like a map at their feet. There was the huge wood of the Weald, one unbroken forest of oak-trees stretching away to the South Downs, which rose olive-green against the deep blue sky. Under this great canopy of trees strange folk lived and evil deeds were done. In its recesses were wild tribes, little changed from their heathen ancestors, who danced round the altar of Thor, and well was it for the peaceful traveler that he could tread the high open road of the chalk land with no need to wander into so dangerous a tract, where soft clay, tangled forest and wild men all barred his progress.

But apart from the rolling country upon the left and the great forest-hidden plain upon the right, there was much upon the road itself to engage the attention of the wayfarers. It was crowded with people. As far as their eyes could carry they could see the black dots scattered thickly upon the thin white band, sometimes single, sometimes several abreast, sometimes in moving crowds, where a drove of pilgrims held together for mutual protection, or a nobleman showed his greatness by the number of retainers who trailed at his heels. At that time the main roads were very crowded, for there were many wandering people in the land. Of all sorts and kinds, they passed in an unbroken stream before the eyes of Nigel and of Aylward, alike only in the fact that one and all were powdered from their hair to their shoes with the gray dust of the chalk.

There were monks journeying from one cell to another, Benedictines with their black gowns looped up to show their white skirts, Carthusians in white, and pied Cistercians. Friars also of the three wandering orders — Dominicans in black, Carmelites in white and Franciscans in gray. There was no love lost between the cloistered monks and the free friars, each looking on the other as a rival who took from him the oblations of the faithful; so they passed on the high road as cat passes dog, with eyes askance and angry faces.

Then besides the men of the church there were the men of trade, the merchant in dusty broadcloth and Flanders hat riding at the head of his line of pack-horses. He carried Cornish tin, Welt-country wool, or Sussex iron if he traded eastward, or if his head should be turned westward then he bore with him the velvets of Genoa, the ware of Venice, the wine of France, or the armor of Italy and Spain. Pilgrims were everywhere, poor people for the most part, plodding wearily along with trailing feet and bowed heads, thick staves in their hands and bundles over their shoulders. Here and there on a gaily caparisoned palfrey, or in the greater luxury of a horse-litter, some West-country lady might be seen making her easy way to the shrine of Saint Thomas.

Besides all these a constant stream of strange vagabonds drifted along the road: minstrels who wandered from fair to fair, a foul and pestilent crew; jugglers and acrobats, quack doctors and tooth-drawers, students and beggars, free workmen in search of better wages, and escaped bondsmen who would welcome any wages at all. Such was the throng which set the old road smoking in a haze of white dust from Winchester to the narrow sea.

But of all the wayfarers those which interested Nigel most were the soldiers. Several times they passed little knots of archers or men-at-arms, veterans from France, who had received their discharge and were now making their way to their southland homes. They were half drunk all of them, for the wayfarers treated them to beer at the frequent inns and ale-stakes which lined the road, so that they cheered and sang lustily as they passed. They roared rude pleasantries at Aylward, who turned in his saddle and shouted his opinion of them until they were out of hearing.

Once, late in the afternoon, they overtook a body of a hundred archers all marching together with two knights riding at their head. They were passing from Guildford Castle to Reigate Castle, where they were in garrison. Nigel rode with the knights for some distance, and hinted that if either was in search of honorable advancement, or wished to do some small deed, or to relieve himself of any vow, it might be possible to find some means of achieving it. They were both, however, grave and elderly men, intent upon their business and with no mind for fond wayside adventures, so Nigel quickened his pace and left them behind.

They had left Boxhill and Headley Heath upon the left, and the towers of Reigate were rising amid the trees in front of them, when they overtook a large, cheery, red-faced man, with a forked beard, riding upon a good horse and exchanging a nod or a merry word with all who passed him. With him they rode nearly as far as Bletchingley, and Nigel laughed much to hear him talk; but always under the raillery there was much earnestness and much wisdom in all his words. He rode at his ease about the country, he said, having sufficient money to keep him from want and to furnish him for the road. He could speak all the three languages of England, the north, the middle and the south, so that he was at home with the people of every shire and could hear their troubles and their joys. In all parts in town and in country there was unrest, he said; for the poor folk were weary of their masters both of the Church and State, and soon there would be such doings in England as had never been seen before.

But above all this man was earnest against the Church its enormous wealth, its possession of nearly one-third of the whole land of the country, its insatiable greed for more at the very time when it claimed to be poor and lowly. The monks and friars, too, he lashed with his tongue: their roguish ways, their laziness and their cunning. He showed how their wealth and that of the haughty lord must always be founded upon the toil of poor humble Peter the Plowman, who worked and strove in rain and cold out in the fields, the butt and laughing-stock of everyone, and still bearing up the whole world upon his weary shoulders. He had set it all out in a fair parable; so now as he rode he repeated some of the verses, chanting them and marking time with his forefinger, while Nigel and Aylward on either side of him with their heads inclined inward listened with the same attention, but with very different feelings — Nigel shocked at such an attack upon authority, and Aylward chuckling as he heard the sentiments of his class so shrewdly expressed. At last the stranger halted his horse outside the “Five Angels” at Gatton.

“It is a good inn, and I know the ale of old,” said he. “When I had finished that ‘Dream of Piers the Plowman’ from which I have recited to you, the last verses were thus:

“‘Now have I brought my little booke to an ende
God’s blessing be on him who a drinke will me sende’ —

“I pray you come in with me and share it.”

“Nay,” said Nigel, “we must on our way, for we have far to go. But give me your name, my friend, for indeed we have passed a merry hour listening to your words.”

“Have a care!” the stranger answered, shaking his head. “You and your class will not spend a merry hour when these words are turned into deeds and Peter the Plowman grows weary of swinking in the fields and takes up his bow and his staff in order to set this land in order.”

“By Saint Paul! I expect that we shall bring Peter to reason and also those who have put such evil thoughts into his head,” said Nigel. “So once more I ask your name, that I may know it if ever I chance to hear that you have been hanged?”

The stranger laughed good-humoredly. “You can call me Thomas Lackland,” said he. “I should be Thomas Lack-brain if I were indeed to give my true name, since a good many robbers, some in black gowns and some in steel, would be glad to help me upwards in the way you speak of. So good-day to you, Squire, and to you also, archer, and may you find your way back with whole bones from the wars!”

That night the comrades slept in Godstone Priory, and early next morning they were well upon their road down the Pilgrim’s Way. At Titsey it was said that a band of villeins were out in Westerham Wood and had murdered three men the day before; so that Nigel had high hopes of an encounter; but the brigands showed no sign, though the travelers went out of their way to ride their horses along the edges of the forest. Farther on they found traces of their work, for the path ran along the hillside at the base of a chalk quarry, and there in the cutting a man was lying dead. From his twisted limbs and shattered frame it was easy to see that he had been thrown over from above, while his pockets turned outward showed the reason for his murder. The comrades rode past without too close a survey, for dead men were no very uncommon objects on the King's highway, and if sheriff or bailiff should chance upon you near the body you might find yourself caught in the meshes of the law.

Near Sevenoaks their road turned out of the old Canterbury way and pointed south toward the coast, leaving the chalk lands and coming down into the clay of the Weald. It was a wretched, rutted mule-track running through thick forests with occasional clearings in which lay the small Kentish villages, where rude shock-headed peasants with smocks and galligaskins stared with bold, greedy eyes at the travelers. Once on the right they caught a distant view of the Towers of Penshurst, and once they heard the deep tolling of the bells of Bayham Abbey, but for the rest of their day's journey savage peasants and squalid cottages were all that met their eyes, with endless droves of pigs who fed upon the litter of acorns. The throng of travelers who crowded the old road were all gone, and only here and there did they meet or overtake some occasional merchant or messenger bound for Battle Abbey, Pevensey Castle or the towns of the south.

That night they slept in a sordid inn, overrun with rats and with fleas, one mile south of the hamlet of Mayfield. Aylward scratched vigorously and cursed with fervor. Nigel lay without movement or sound. To the man who had learned the old rule of chivalry there were no small ills in life. It was beneath the dignity of his soul to stoop to observe them. Cold and heat, hunger and thirst, such things did not exist for the gentleman. The armor of his soul was so complete that it was proof not only against the great ills of life but even against the small ones; so the flea-bitten Nigel lay grimly still while Aylward writhed upon his couch.

They were now but a short distance from their destination; but they had hardly started on their journey through the forest next morning, when an adventure befell them which filled Nigel with the wildest hopes.

Along the narrow winding path between the great oak trees there rode a dark sallow man in a scarlet tabard who blew so loudly upon a silver trumpet that they heard the clanging call long before they set eyes on him. Slowly he advanced, pulling up every fifty paces to make the forest ring with another warlike blast. The comrades rode forward to meet him.

"I pray you," said Nigel, "to tell me who you are and why you blow upon this trumpet."

The fellow shook his head, so Nigel repeated the question in French, the common language of chivalry, spoken at that age by every gentleman in Western Europe.

The man put his lips to the trumpet and blew another long note before he answered. “I am Gaston de Castrier,” said he, “the humble Squire of the most worthy and valiant knight Raoul de Tubiers, de Pestels, de Grimsard, de Mersac, de Leoy, de Bastanac, who also writes himself Lord of Pons. It is his order that I ride always a mile in front of him to prepare all to receive him, and he desires me to blow upon a trumpet not out of vainglory, but out of greatness of spirit, so that none may be ignorant of his coming should they desire to encounter him.”

Nigel sprang from his horse with a cry of joy, and began to unbutton his doublet. “Quick, Aylward, quick!” he said. “He comes, a knight errant comes! Was there ever such a chance of worshipfully winning worship? Untruss the harness whilst I loose my clothes! Good sir, I beg you to warn your noble and valiant master that a poor Squire of England would implore him to take notice of him and to do some small deed upon him as he passes.”

But already the Lord of Pons had come in sight. He was a huge man upon an enormous horse, so that together they seemed to fill up the whole long dark archway under the oaks. He was clad in full armor of a brazen hue with only his face exposed, and of this face there was little visible save a pair of arrogant eyes and a great black beard, which flowed through the open visor and down over his breastplate. To the crest of his helmet was tied a small brown glove, nodding and swinging above him. He bore a long lance with a red square banner at the end, charged with a black boar’s head, and the same symbol was engraved upon his shield. Slowly he rode through the forest, ponderous, menacing, with dull thudding of his charger’s hoofs and constant clank of metal, while always in front of him came the distant peal of the silver trumpet calling all men to admit his majesty and to clear his path ere they be cleared from it.

Never in his dreams had so perfect a vision come to cheer Nigel’s heart, and as he struggled with his clothes, glancing up continually at this wondrous traveler, he pattered forth prayers of thanksgiving to the good Saint Paul who had shown such loving-kindness to his unworthy servant and thrown him in the path of so excellent and debonair a gentleman.

But alas! how often at the last instant the cup is dashed from the lips! This joyful chance was destined to change suddenly to unexpected and grotesque disaster — disaster so strange and so complete that through all his life Nigel flushed crimson when he thought of it. He was busily stripping his hunting-costume, and with feverish haste he had doffed boots, hat, hose, doublet and cloak, so that nothing remained save a pink jupon and pair of silken drawers. At the same time Aylward was hastily unbuckling the load with the intention of handing his master his armor piece by piece, when the Squire gave one last challenging peal from his silver trumpet into the very ear of the spare horse.

In an instant it had taken to its heels, the precious armor upon its back, and thundered away down the road which they had traversed. Aylward jumped upon his mare, drove his prick spurs into her sides and galloped after the runaway as hard as he could ride. Thus it came about that in an instant Nigel was shorn of all his little dignity, had lost his two horses, his attendant and his outfit, and found himself a lonely and unarmed man standing in his shirt and drawers upon the pathway down which the burly figure of the Lord of Pons was slowly advancing.

The knight errant, whose mind had been filled by the thought of the maiden whom he had left behind at St. Jean — the same whose glove dangled from his helmet — had observed nothing that had occurred. Hence, all that met his eyes was a noble yellow horse, which was tethered by the track, and a small young man, who appeared to be a lunatic since he had undressed hastily in the heart of the forest, and stood now with an eager anxious face clad in his underlinen amid the scattered debris of his garments. Of such a person the high Lord of Pons could take no notice, and so he pursued his inexorable way, his arrogant eyes looking out into the distance and his thoughts set intently upon the maiden of St. Jean. He was dimly aware that the little crazy man in the undershirt ran a long way beside him in his stockings, begging, imploring and arguing.

“Just one hour, most fair sir, just one hour at the longest, and a poor Squire of England shall ever hold himself your debtor! Do but condescend to rein your horse until my harness comes back to me! Will you not stoop to show me some small deed of arms? I implore you, fair sir, to spare me a little of your time and a handstroke or two ere you go upon your way!”

Lord de Pons motioned impatiently with his gauntleted hand, as one might brush away an importunate fly, but when at last Nigel became desperate in his clamor he thrust his spurs into his great war-horse, and clashing like a pair of cymbals he thundered off through the forest. So he rode upon his majestic way, until two days later he was slain by Lord Reginald Cobham in a field near Weybridge.

When after a long chase Aylward secured the spare horse and brought it back, he found his master seated upon a fallen tree, his face buried in his hands and his mind clouded with humiliation and grief. Nothing was said, for the matter was beyond words, and so in moody silence they rode upon their way.

But soon they came upon a scene which drew Nigel's thoughts away from his bitter trouble, for in front of them there rose the towers of a great building with a small gray sloping village around it, and they learned from a passing hind that this was the hamlet and Abbey of Battle. Together they drew rein upon the low ridge and looked down into that valley of death from which even now the reek of blood seems to rise. Down beside that sinister lake and amid those scattered bushes sprinkled over the naked flank of the long ridge was fought that long-drawn struggle betwixt two most noble foes with broad England as the prize of victory. Here, up and down the low hill, hour by hour the grim struggle had waxed and waned, until the Saxon army had died where it stood, King, court, house-carl and fyrdsman, each in their ranks even as they had fought. And now, after all the stress and toil, the tyranny, the savage revolt, the fierce suppression, God had made His purpose complete, for here were Nigel the Norman and Aylward the Saxon with good-fellowship in their hearts and a common respect in their minds, with the same banner and the same cause, riding forth to do battle for their old mother England.

And now the long ride drew to an end. In front of them was the blue sea, flecked with the white sails of ships. Once more the road passed upward from the heavy-wooded plain to the springy turf of the chalk downs. Far to the right rose the grim fortalice of Pevensey, squat and powerful, like one great block of rugged stone, the parapet twinkling with steel caps and crowned by the royal banner of England. A flat expanse of reeded marshland lay before them, out of which rose a single wooded hill, crowned with towers, with a bristle of masts rising out of the green plain some distance to the south of it. Nigel looked at it with his hand shading his eyes, and then urged Pommers to a trot. The town was Winchelsea, and there amid that cluster of houses on the hill the gallant Chandos must be awaiting him.

XIV. HOW NIGEL CHASED THE RED FERRET

They passed a ferry, wound upward by a curving path, and then, having satisfied a guard of men-at-arms, were admitted through the frowning arch of the Pipewell Gate. There waiting for them, in the middle of the east street, the sun gleaming upon his lemon-coloured beard, and puckering his single eye, stood Chandos himself, his legs apart, his hands behind his back, and a welcoming smile upon his quaint high-nosed face. Behind him a crowd of little boys were gazing with reverent eyes at the famous soldier.

"Welcome, Nigel!" said he, "and you also, good archer! I chanced to be walking on the city wall, and I thought from the colour of your horse that it was indeed you upon the Udimore Road. How have you fared, young squire errant? Have you held bridges or rescued damsels or slain oppressors on your way from Tilford?"

"Nay, my fair lord, I have accomplished nothing; but I once had hopes—" Nigel flushed at the remembrance.

"I will give you more than hopes, Nigel. I will put you where you can dip both arms to the elbow into danger and honor, where peril will sleep with you at night and rise with you in the morning and the very air you breathe be laden with it. Are you ready for that, young sir?"

"I can but pray, fair lord, that my spirit will rise to it."

Chandos smiled his approval and laid his thin brown hand on the youth's shoulder. "Good!" said he. "It is the mute hound which bites the hardest. The babbler is ever the hang-back. Bide with me here, Nigel, and walk upon the ramparts. Archer, do you lead the horses to the 'Sign of the Broom Pod' in the high street, and tell my varlets to see them aboard the cog Thomas before nightfall. We sail at the second hour after curfew. Come hither, Nigel, to the crest of the corner turret, for from it I will show you what you have never seen."

It was but a dim and distant white cloud upon the blue water seen far off over the Dungeness Point, and yet the sight of it flushed the young Squire's cheeks and sent the blood hot through his veins. It was the fringe of France, that land of chivalry and glory, the stage where name and fame were to be won. With burning eyes he gazed across at it, his heart rejoicing to think that the hour was at hand when he might tread that sacred soil. Then his gaze crossed the immense stretch of the blue sea, dotted over with the sails of fishing-boats, until it rested upon the double harbor beneath packed with vessels of every size and shape, from the pessoners and creyers which plied up and down the coast to the great cogs and galleys which were used either as war-ships or merchantmen as the occasion served. One of them was at that instant passing out to sea, a huge galleass, with trumpets blowing and nakers banging, the flag of Saint George flaunting over the broad purple sail, and the decks sparkling from end to end with steel. Nigel gave a cry of pleasure at the splendor of the sight.

"Aye, lad," said Chandos, "it is the Trinity of Rye, the very ship on which I fought at Sluys. Her deck ran blood from stem to stern that day. But turn your eyes this way, I beg you, and tell me if you see aught strange about this town."

Nigel looked down at the noble straight street, at the Roundel Tower, at the fine church of Saint Thomas, and the other fair buildings of Winchelsea. "It is all new," said he—"church, castle, houses, all are new."

"You are right, fair son. My grandfather can call to mind the time when only the conies lived upon this rock. The town was down yonder by the sea, until one night the waves rose upon it and not a house was left. See, yonder is Rye, huddling also on a hill, the two towns like poor sheep when the waters are out. But down there under the blue water and below the Camber Sand lies the true Winchelsea — tower, cathedral, walls and all, even as my grandfather knew it, when the first Edward was young upon the throne."

For an hour or more Chandos paced upon the ramparts with his young Squire at his elbow and talked to him of his duties and of the secrets and craft of warfare, Nigel drinking in and storing in his memory every word from so revered a teacher. Many a time in after life, in stress and in danger, he strengthened himself by the memory of that slow walk with the blue sea on one side and the fair town on the other, when the wise soldier and noble-hearted knight poured forth his precept and advice as the master workman to the apprentice.

"Perhaps, fair son," said he, "you are like so many other lads who ride to the wars, and know so much already that it is waste of breath to advise them?"

“Nay, my fair lord, I know nothing save that I would fain do my duty and either win honorable advancement or die worshipful on the field.”

“You are wise to be humble,” said Chandos; “for indeed he who knows most of war knows best that there is much to learn. As there is a mystery of the rivers and a mystery of woodcraft, even so there is a mystery of warfare by which battles may be lost and gained; for all nations are brave, and where the brave meets the brave it is he who is crafty and war-wise who will win the day. The best hound will run at fault if he be ill laid on, and the best hawk will fly at check if he be badly loosed, and even so the bravest army may go awry if it be ill handled. There are not in Christendom better knights and squires than those of the French, and yet we have had the better of them, for in our Scottish Wars and elsewhere we have learned more of this same mystery of which I speak.”

“And wherein lies our wisdom, honored sir?” asked Nigel. “I also would fain be war-wise and learn to fight with my wits as well as with my sword.”

Chandos shook his head and smiled. “It is in the forest and on the down that you learn to fly the hawk and loose the hound,” said he. “So also it is in camp and on the field that the mystery of war can be learned. There only has every great captain come to be its master. To start he must have a cool head, quick to think, soft as wax before his purpose is formed, hard as steel when once he sees it before him. Ever alert he must be, and cautious also, but with judgment to turn his caution into rashness where a large gain may be put against a small stake. An eye for country also, for the trend of the rivers, the slope of the hills, the cover of the woods, and the light green of the bog-land.”

Poor Nigel, who had trusted to his lance and to Pommers to break his path to glory, stood aghast at this list of needs. “Alas!” he cried. “How am I to gain all this? — I, who could scarce learn to read or write though the good Father Matthew broke a hazel stick a day across my shoulders?”

“You will gain it, fair son, where others have gained it before you. You have that which is the first thing of all, a heart of fire from which other colder hearts may catch a spark. But you must have knowledge also of that which warfare has taught us in olden times. We know, par exemple, that horsemen alone cannot hope to win against good foot-soldiers. Has it not been tried at Courtrai, at Stirling, and again under my own eyes at Crecy, where the chivalry of France went down before our bowmen?”

Nigel stared at him, with a perplexed brow. “Fair sir, my heart grows heavy as I hear you. Do you then say that our chivalry can make no head against archers, billmen and the like?”

“Nay, Nigel, for it has also been very clearly shown that the best foot-soldiers unsupported cannot hold their own against the mailed horsemen.”

“To whom then is the victory?” asked Nigel.

“To him who can mix his horse and foot, using each to strengthen the other. Apart they are weak. Together they are strong. The archer who can weaken the enemy’s line, the horseman who can break it when it is weakened, as was done at Falkirk and Duplin, there is the secret of our strength. Now touching this same battle of Falkirk, I pray you for one instant to give it your attention.”

With his whip he began to trace a plan of the Scottish battle upon the dust, and Nigel with knitted brows was trying hard to muster his small stock of brains and to profit by the lecture, when their conversation was interrupted by a strange new arrival.

It was a very stout little man, wheezy and purple with haste, who scudded down the rampart as if he were blown by the wind, his grizzled hair flying and his long black gown floating behind him. He was clad in the dress of a respectable citizen, a black jerkin trimmed with sable, a black-velvet beaver hat and a white feather. At the sight of Chandos he gave a cry of joy and quickened his pace so that when he did at last reach him he could only stand gasping and waving his hands.

“Give yourself time, good Master Wintersole, give yourself time!” said Chandos in a soothing voice.

“The papers!” gasped the little man. “Oh, my Lord Chandos, the papers —”

“What of the papers, my worthy sir?”

“I swear by our good patron Saint Leonard, it is no fault of mine! I had locked them in my coffer. But the lock was forced and the coffer rifled.”

A shadow of anger passed over the soldier’s keen face.

“How now, Master Mayor? Pull your wits together and do not stand there babbling like a three-year child. Do you say that some one hath taken the papers?”

“It is sooth, fair sir! Thrice I have been Mayor of the town, and fifteen years burgess and jurat, but never once has any public matter gone awry through me. Only last month there came an order from Windsor on a

Tuesday for a Friday banquet, a thousand soles, four thousand plaice, two thousand mackerel, five hundred crabs, a thousand lobsters, five thousand whiting—"

"I doubt not, Master Mayor, that you are an excellent fishmonger; but the matter concerns the papers I gave into your keeping. Where are they?"

"Taken, fair sir — gone!"

"And who hath dared to take them?"

"Alas! I know not. It was but for as long as you would say an angelus that I left the chamber, and when I came back there was the coffer, broken and empty, upon my table."

"Do you suspect no one?"

"There was a varlet who hath come with the last few days into my employ. He is not to be found, and I have sent horsemen along both the Udimore road and that to Rye, that they may seize him. By the help of Saint Leonard they can scarce miss him, for one can tell him a bow-shot off by his hair."

"Is it red?" asked Chandos eagerly. "Is it fox-red, and the man a small man pocked with sun-spots, and very quick in his movements?"

"It is the man himself."

Chandos shook his clenched hand with annoyance, and then set off swiftly down the street.

"It is Peter the Red Ferret once more!" said he. "I knew him of old in France, where he has done us more harm than a company of men-at-arms. He speaks English as he speaks French, and he is of such daring and cunning that nothing is secret from him. In all France there is no more dangerous man, for though he is a gentleman of blood and coat-armor he takes the part of a spy, because it hath the more danger and therefore the more honor."

"But, my fair lord," cried the Mayor, as he hurried along, keeping pace with the long strides of the soldier, "I knew that you warned me to take all care of the papers; but surely there was no matter of great import in it? It was but to say what stores were to be sent after you to Calais?"

"Is that not everything?" cried Chandos impatiently. "Can you not see, oh foolish Master Wintersole, that the French suspect we are about to make some attempt and that they have sent Peter the Red Ferret, as they have sent him many times before, to get tidings of whither we are bound? Now that he knows that the stores are for Calais, then the French near Calais will take his warning, and so the King's whole plan come to nothing."

"Then he will fly by water. We can stop him yet. He has not an hour's start."

"It may be that a boat awaits him at Rye or Hythe; but it is more like that he has all ready to depart from here. Ah, see yonder! I'll warrant that the Red Ferret is on board!"

Chandos had halted in front of his inn, and now he pointed down to the outer harbor, which lay two miles off across the green plain. It was connected by a long winding canal with the inner dock at the base of the hill, upon which the town was built. Between the two horns formed by the short curving piers a small schooner was running out to sea, dipping and rising before a sharp southerly breeze.

"It is no Winchelsea boat," said the Mayor. "She is longer and broader in the beam than ours."

"Horses! bring horses!" cried Chandos. "Come, Nigel, let us go further into the matter."

A busy crowd of varlets, archers, and men-at-arms swarmed round the gateway of the "Sign of the Broom Pod," singing, shouting, and jostling in rough good-fellowship. The sight of the tall thin figure of Chandos brought order amongst them, and a few minutes later the horses were ready and saddled. A breakneck ride down a steep declivity, and then a gallop of two miles over the sedgy plain carried them to the outer harbor. A dozen vessels were lying there, ready to start for Bordeaux or Rochelle, and the quay was thick with sailors, laborers and townsmen and heaped with wine-barrels and wool-packs.

"Who is warden here?" asked Chandos, springing from his horse.

"Badding! Where is Cock Badding? Badding is warden!" shouted the crowd.

A moment later a short swarthy man, bull-necked and deep-chested, pushed through the people. He was clad in rough russet wool with a scarlet cloth tied round his black curly head. His sleeves were rolled up to his shoulders, and his brown arms, all stained with grease and tar, were like two thick gnarled branches from an oaken stump. His savage brown face was fierce and frowning, and was split from chin to temple with the long white wale of an ill-healed wound.

"How now, gentles, will you never wait your turn?" he rumbled in a deep angry voice. "Can you not see that we are warping the Rose of Guienne into midstream for the ebb-tide? Is this a time to break in upon us? Your goods will go aboard in due season, I promise you; so ride back into the town and find such pleasure as you may, while I and my mates do our work without let or hindrance."

"It is the gentle Chandos!" cried some one in the crowd. "It is the good Sir John."

The rough harbor-master changed his gruffness to smiles in an instant. "Nay, Sir John, what would you? I pray you to hold me excused if I was short of speech, but we port-wardens are sore plagued with foolish young lordlings, who get betwixt us and our work and blame us because we do not turn an ebb-tide into a flood, or a south wind into a north. I pray you to tell me how I can serve you."

"That boat!" said Chandos, pointing to the already distant sail rising and falling on the waves. "What is it?"

Cock Badding shaded his keen eyes with his strong brows hand. "She has but just gone out," said he. "She is La Pucelle, a small wine-sloop from Gascony, home-bound and laden with barrel-staves."

"I pray you did any man join her at the very last?"

"Nay, I know not. I saw no one."

"But I know," cried a seaman in the crowd. "I was standing at the wharf-side and was nigh knocked into the water by a little red-headed fellow, who breathed as though he had run from the town. Ere I had time to give him a cuff he had jumped aboard, the ropes were cast off, and her nose was seaward."

In a few words Chandos made all clear to Badding, the crowd pressing eagerly round.

"Aye, aye!" cried a seaman, "the good Sir John is right. See how she points. It is Picardy and not Gascony that she will fetch this journey in spite of her wine-staves."

"Then we must lay her aboard!" cried Cock Badding. "Come, lads, here is my own Marie Rose ready to cast off. Who's for a trip with a fight at the end of it?"

There was a rush for the boat; but the stout little seaman picked his men. "Go back, Jerry! Your heart is good, but you are overfat for the work. You, Luke, and you, Thomas, and the two Deedes, and William of Sandgate. You will work the boat. And now we need a few men of their hands. Do you come, little sir?"

"I pray you, my dear lord, to let me go!" cried Nigel.

"Yes, Nigel, you can go, and I will bring your gear over to Calais this night."

"I will join you there, fair sir, and with the help of Saint Paul I will bring this Red Ferret with me."

"Aboard, aboard! Time passes!" cried Badding impatiently, while already his seamen were hauling on the line and raising the mainsail. "Now then, sirrah! who are you?" It was Aylward, who had followed Nigel and was pushing his way aboard.

"Where my master goes I go also," cried Aylward, "so stand clear, master-shipman, or you may come by a hurt."

"By Saint Leonard! archer," said Cock Badding, "had I more time I would give you a lesson ere I leave land. Stand back and give place to others!"

"Nay, stand back and give place to me!" cried Aylward, and seizing Badding round the waist he slung him into the dock.

There was a cry of anger from the crowd, for Badding was the hero of all the Cinque Ports and had never yet met his match in manhood. The epitaph still lingers in which it was said that he "could never rest until he had foughten his fill." When, therefore, swimming like a duck, he reached a rope and pulled himself hand over hand up to the quay, all stood aghast to see what fell fate would befall this bold stranger. But Badding laughed loudly, dashing the saltwater from his eyes and hair.

"You have fairly won your place, archer," said he. "You are the very man for our work. Where is Black Simon of Norwich?"

A tall dark young man with a long, stern, lean face came forward. "I am with you, Cock," said he, "and I thank you for my place."

"You can come, Hugh Baddlesmere, and you, Hal Masters, and you, Dicon of Rye. That is enough. Now off, in God's name, or it will be night ere we can come up with them!"

Already the head-sails and the main-sail had been raised, while a hundred willing hands poled her off from the wharf. Now the wind caught her; heeling over, and quivering with eagerness like an unleashed hound she flew through the opening and out into the Channel. She was a famous little schooner, the Marie Rose of Winchelsea, and under her daring owner Cock

Badding, half trader and half pirate, had brought back into port many a rich cargo taken in mid-Channel, and paid for in blood rather than money. Small as she was, her great speed and the fierce character of her master had made her a name of terror along the French coast, and many a bulky Eastlander or Fleming as he passed the narrow seas had scanned the distant Kentish shore, fearing lest that ill-omened purple sail with a gold Christopher upon it should shoot out suddenly from the dim gray cliffs. Now she was clear of the land, with the wind on her larboard quarter, every inch of canvas set, and her high sharp bows smothered in foam, as she dug through the waves.

Cock Badding trod the deck with head erect and jaunty bearing, glancing up at the swelling sails and then ahead at the little tilted white triangle, which stood out clear and hard against the bright blue sky. Behind was the lowland of the Camber marshes, with the bluffs of Rye and Winchelsea, and the line of cliffs behind them. On the larboard bow rose the great white walls of Folkestone and of Dover, and far on the distant sky-line the gray shimmer of those French cliffs for which the fugitives were making.

“By Saint Paul!” cried Nigel, looking with eager eyes over the tossing waters, “it seems to me, Master Badding, that already we draw in upon them.”

The master measured the distance with his keen steady gaze, and then looked up at the sinking sun. “We have still four hours of daylight,” said he; “but if we do not lay her aboard ere darkness falls she will save herself, for the nights are as black as a wolf’s mouth, and if she alter her course I know not how we may follow her.”

“Unless, indeed, you might guess to which port she was bound and reach it before her.”

“Well thought of, little master!” cried Badding. “If the news be for the French outside Calais, then Ambleteuse would be nearest to Saint Omer. But my sweeting sails three paces to that lubber’s two, and if the wind holds we shall have time and to spare. How now, archer? You do not seem so eager as when you made your way aboard this boat by slinging me into the sea.”

Aylward sat on the upturned keel of a skiff which lay upon the deck. He groaned sadly and held his green face between his two hands. “I would gladly sling you into the sea once more, master-shipman,” said he, “if by so doing I could get off this most accursed vessel of thine. Or if you would wish to have your turn, then I would thank you if you would lend me a hand over the side, for indeed I am but a useless weight upon your deck. Little did I think that Samkin Aylward could be turned into a weakling by an hour of salt water. Alas the day that ever my foot wandered from the good red heather of Crooksbury!”

Cock Badding laughed loud and long. “Nay, take it not to heart, archer,” he cried; “for better men than you or I have groaned upon this deck. The Prince himself with ten of his chosen knights crossed with me once, and eleven sadder faces I never saw. Yet within a month they had shown at Crecy that they were no weaklings, as you will do also, I dare swear, when the time comes. Keep that thick head of thine down upon the planks, and all will be well anon. But we raise her, we raise her with every blast of the wind!”

It was indeed evident, even to the inexperienced eyes of Nigel, that the Marie Rose was closing in swiftly upon the stranger. She was a heavy, bluff-bowed, broad-sterned vessel which labored clumsily through the seas. The swift, fierce little Winchelsea boat swooping and hissing through the waters behind her was like some keen hawk whizzing down wind at the back of a flapping heavy-bodied duck. Half an hour before La Pucelle had been a distant patch of canvas. Now they could see the black hull, and soon the cut of her sails and the lines of her bulwarks. There were at least a dozen men upon her deck, and the twinkle of weapons from amongst them showed that they were preparing to resist. Cock Badding began to muster his own forces.

He had a crew of seven rough, hardy mariners, who had been at his back in many a skirmish. They were armed with short swords, but Cock Badding carried a weapon peculiar to himself, a twenty-pound blacksmith’s hammer, the memory of which, as “Badding’s cracker,” still lingers in the Cinque Ports. Then there were the eager Nigel, the melancholy Aylward, Black Simon who was a tried swordsman, and three archers, Baddlesmere, Masters and Dicon of Rye, all veterans of the French War. The numbers in the two vessels might be about equal; but Badding as he glanced at the bold harsh faces which looked to him for orders had little fear for the result.

Glancing round, however, he saw something which was more dangerous to his plans than the resistance of the enemy. The wind, which had become more fitful and feebler, now fell suddenly away, until the sails hung limp and straight above them. A belt of calm lay along the horizon, and the waves around had smoothed down into a long oily swell on which the two little vessels rose and fell. The great boom of the Marie Rose rattled and jarred with every lurch, and the high thin prow pointed skyward one instant and seaward the next in a way that drew fresh groans from the unhappy Aylward. In vain Cock Badding pulled on his sheets and tried hard to husband every little wandering gust which ruffled for an instant the sleek rollers. The French master was as adroit a sailor, and his boom swung round also as each breath of wind came up from astern.

At last even these fitful puffs died finally away, and a cloudless sky overhung a glassy sea. The sun was almost upon the horizon behind Dungeness Point, and the whole western heaven was bright with the glory of the sunset, which blended sea and sky in one blaze of ruddy light. Like rollers of molten gold, the long swell heaved up Channel from the great ocean beyond. In the midst of the immense beauty and peace of nature the two little dark specks with the white sail and the purple rose and fell, so small upon the vast shining bosom of the waters, and yet so charged with all the unrest and the passion of life.

The experienced eye of the seaman told him that it was hopeless to expect a breeze before nightfall. He looked across at the Frenchman, which lay less than a quarter of a mile ahead, and shook his gnarled fist at the line of heads which could be seen looking back over her stern. One of them waved a white kerchief in derision, and Cock Badding swore a bitter oath at the sight.

“By Saint Leonard of Winchelsea,” he cried, “I will rub my side up against her yet! Out with the skiff, lads, and two of you to the oars. Make fast the line to the mast, Will. Do you go in the boat, Hugh, and I’ll make the second. Now if we bend our backs to it we may have them yet ere night cover them.”

The little skiff was swiftly lowered over the side and the slack end of the cable fastened to the after thwart. Cock Badding and his comrades pulled as if they would snap their oars, and the little vessel began slowly to lurch forward over the rollers. But the next moment a larger skiff had splashed over the side of the Frenchman, and no less than four seamen were hard at work under her bows. If the Marie Rose advanced a yard the Frenchman was going two. Again Cock Badding raved and shook his fist. He clambered aboard, his face wet with sweat and dark with anger.

“Curse them! they have had the best of us!” he cried. “I can do no more. Sir John has lost his papers, for indeed now that night is at hand I can see no way in which we can gain them.”

Nigel had leaned against the bulwark during these events, watching with keen attention the doings of the sailors, and praying alternately to Saint Paul, Saint George, and Saint Thomas for a slant of wind which would put them along side their enemy. He was silent; but his hot heart was simmering within him. His spirit had risen even above the discomfort of the sea, and his mind was too absorbed in his mission to have a thought for that which had laid Aylward flat upon the deck. He had never doubted that Cock Badding in one way or another would accomplish his end, but when he heard his speech of despair he bounded off the bulwark and stood before the seaman with his face flushed and all his soul afire.

“By Saint Paul! master-shipman,” he cried, “we should never hold up our heads in honor if we did not go further into the matter! Let us do some small deed this night upon the water, or let us never see land again, for indeed we could not wish fairer prospect of winning honorable advancement.”

“With your leave, little master, you speak like a fool,” said the gruff seaman. “You and all your kind are as children when once the blue water is beneath you. Can you not see that there is no wind, and that the Frenchman can warp her as swiftly as we? What then would you do?”

Nigel pointed to the boat which towed astern. “Let us venture forth in her,” said he, “and let us take this ship or die worshipful in the attempt.”

His bold and fiery words found their echo in the brave rough hearts around him. There was a deep-chested shout from both archers and seamen. Even Aylward sat up, with a wan smile upon his green face.

But Cock Badding shook his head. “I have never met the man who could lead where I would not follow,” said he; “but by Saint Leonard! this is a mad business, and I should be a fool if I were to risk my men and my ship. Bethink you, little master, that the skiff can hold only five, though you load her to the water’s edge. If there is a man yonder, there are fourteen, and you have to climb their side from the boat. What chance would you have? Your boat stove and you in the water — there is the end of it. No man of mine goes on such a fool’s errand, and so I swear!”

“Then, Master Badding, I must crave the loan of your skiff, for by Saint Paul! the good Lord Chandos’ papers are not to be so lightly lost. If no one else will come, then I will go alone.”

The shipman smiled at the words; but the smile died away from his lips when Nigel, with features set like ivory and eyes as hard as steel, pulled on the rope so as to bring the skiff under the counter. It was very clear that he would do even as he said. At the same time Aylward raised his bulky form from the deck, leaned for a moment against the bulwarks, and then tottered aft to his master's side.

"Here is one that will go with you," said he, "or he would never dare show his face to the girls of Tilford again. Come, archers, let us leave these salt herrings in their pickle tub and try our luck out on the water."

The three archers at once ranged themselves on the same side as their comrade. They were bronzed, bearded men, short in stature, as were most Englishmen of that day, but hardy, strong and skilled with their weapons. Each drew his string from its waterproof case and bent the huge arc of his war-bow as he fitted it into the nocks.

"Now, master, we are at your back," said they as they pulled and tightened their sword-belts.

But already Cock Badding had been carried away by the hot lust of battle and had thrown aside every fear and doubt which had clouded him. To see a fight and not to be in it was more than he could bear.

"Nay, have it your own way!" he cried, "and may Saint Leonard help us, for a madder venture I have never seen! And yet it may be worth the trial. But if it be done let me have the handling of it, little master, for you know no more of a boat than I do of a war-horse. The skiff can bear five and not a man more. Now, who will come?"

They had all caught fire, and there was not one who would be left out.

Badding picked up his hammer. "I will come myself," said he, "and you also, little master, since it is your hot head that has planned it. Then there is Black Simon, the best sword of the Cinque Ports. Two archers can pull on the oars, and it may be that they can pick off two or three of these Frenchmen before we close with them. Hugh Baddlesmere, and you, Dicon of Rye — into the boat with you!"

"What?" cried Aylward. "Am I to be left behind? I, who am the Squire's own man? Ill fare the bowman who comes betwixt me and yonder boat!"

"Nay, Aylward," said his master, "I order that you stay, for indeed you are a sick man."

"But now that the waves have sunk I am myself again. Nay, fair sir, I pray that you will not leave me behind."

“You must needs take the space of a better man; for what do you know of the handling of a boat?” said Badding shortly. “No more fool’s talk, I pray you, for the night will soon fall. Stand aside!”

Aylward looked hard at the French boat. “I could swim ten times up and down Frensham pond,” said he, “and it will be strange if I cannot go as far as that. By these finger-bones, Samkin Aylward may be there as soon as you!”

The little boat with its five occupants pushed off from the side of the schooner, and dipping and rising, made its slow way toward the Frenchman. Badding and one archer had single oars, the second archer was in the prow, while Black Simon and Nigel huddled into the stern with the water lapping and hissing at their very elbows. A shout of defiance rose from the Frenchmen, and they stood in a line along the side of their vessel shaking their fists and waving their weapons. Already the sun was level with Dungeness, and the gray of evening was blurring sky and water into one dim haze. A great silence hung over the broad expanse of nature, and no sound broke it save the dip and splash of the oars and the slow deep surge of the boat upon the swell. Behind them their comrades of the Marie Rose stood motionless and silent, watching their progress with eager eyes.

They were near enough now to have a good look at the Frenchmen. One was a big swarthy man with a long black beard. He had a red cap and an ax over his shoulder. There were ten other hardy-looking fellows, all of them well armed, and there were three who seemed to be boys.

“Shall we try a shaft upon them?” asked Hugh Baddlesmere. “They are well within our bowshot.”

“Only one of you can shoot at a time, for you have no footing,” said Badding. “With one foot in the prow and one over the thwart you will get your stance. Do what you may, and then we will close in upon them.”

The archer balanced himself in the rolling boat with the deftness of a man who has been trained upon the sea, for he was born and bred in the Cinque Ports. Carefully he nocked his arrow, strongly he drew it, steadily he loosed it, but the boat swooped at the instant, and it buried itself in the waves. The second passed over the little ship, and the third struck in her black side. Then in quick succession so quick that two shafts were often in the air at the same instant — he discharged a dozen arrows, most of which just cleared the bulwarks and dropped upon the deck. There was a cry on the Frenchman, and the heads vanished from the side.

"Enough!" cried Badding. "One is down, and it may be two. Close in, close in, in God's name, before they rally!"

He and the other bent to their oars; but at the same instant there was a sharp zip in the air and a hard clear sound like a stone striking a wall. Baddlesmere clapped his hand to his head, groaned and fell forward out of the boat, leaving a swirl of blood upon the surface. A moment later the same fierce hiss ended in a loud wooden crash, and a short, thick crossbow-bolt was buried deep in the side of their boat.

"Close in, close in!" roared Badding, tugging at his oar. "Saint George for England! Saint Leonard for Winchelsea! Close in!"

But again that fatal crossbow twanged. Dicon of Rye fell back with a shaft through his shoulder. "God help me, I can no more!" said he.

Badding seized the oar from his hand; but it was only to sweep the boat's head round and pull her back to the Marie Rose. The attack had failed.

"What now, master-shipman?" cried Nigel. "What has befallen to stop us? Surely the matter does not end here?"

"Two down out of five," said Badding, "and twelve at the least against us. The odds are too long, little master. Let us at least go back, fill up once more, and raise a mantelet against the bolts, for they have an arbalist which shoots both straight and hard. But what we do we must do quickly, for the darkness falls apace."

Their repulse had been hailed by wild yells of delight from the Frenchmen, who danced with joy and waved their weapons madly over their heads. But before their rejoicings had finished they saw the little boat creeping out once more from the shadow of the Marie Rose, a great wooden screen in her bows to protect her from the arrows. Without a pause she came straight and fast for her enemy. The wounded archer had been put on board, and Aylward would have had his place had Nigel been able to see him upon the deck. The third archer, Hal Masters, had sprung in, and one of the seamen, Wat Finnis of Hythe. With their hearts hardened to conquer or to die, the five ran alongside the Frenchman and sprang upon her deck. At the same instant a great iron weight crashed through the bottom of their skiff, and their feet had hardly left her before she was gone. There was no hope and no escape save victory.

The crossbowman stood under the mast, his terrible weapon at his shoulder, the steel string stretched taut, the heavy bolt shining upon the nut. One life at least he would claim out of this little band. Just for one instant too long did he dwell upon his aim, shifting from the seaman to Cock Badding, whose formidable appearance showed him to be the better prize. In that second of time Hal Masters' string twanged and his long arrow sped through the arbalister's throat. He dropped on the deck, with blood and curses pouring from his mouth.

A moment later Nigel's sword and Badding's hammer had each claimed a victim and driven back the rush of assailants. The five were safe upon the deck, but it was hard for them to keep a footing there. The French seamen, Bretons and Normans, were stout, powerful fellows, armed with axes and swords, fierce fighters and brave men. They swarmed round the little band, attacking them from all sides. Black Simon felled the black-bearded French Captain, and at the same instant was cut over the head and lay with his scalp open upon the deck. The seaman Wat of Hythe was killed by a crashing blow from an ax. Nigel was struck down, but was up again like a flash, and drove his sword through the man who had felled him.

But Badding, Masters the archer and he had been hustled back to the bulwark and were barely holding their own from minute to minute against the fierce crowd who assailed them, when an arrow coming apparently from the sea struck the foremost Frenchman to the heart. A moment later a boat dashed up alongside and four more men from the Marie Rose scrambled on to the blood-stained deck. With one fierce rush the remaining Frenchmen were struck down or were seized by their assailants. Nine prostrate men upon the deck showed how fierce had been the attack, how desperate the resistance.

Badding leaned panting upon his blood-clotted hammer. "By Saint Leonard!" he cried, "I thought that this little master had been the death of us all. God wot you were but just in time, and how you came I know not. This archer has had a hand in it, by the look of him."

Aylward, still pale from his seasickness and dripping from head to foot with water, had been the first man in the rescue party.

Nigel looked at him in amazement. "I sought you aboard the ship, Aylward, but I could not lay eyes on you," said he.

"It was because I was in the water, fair sir, and by my hilt! it suits my stomach better than being on it," he answered. "When you first set forth I swam behind you, for I saw that the Frenchman's boat hung by a rope, and I thought that while you kept him in play I might gain it. I had reached it when you were driven back, so I hid behind it in the water and said my prayers as I have not said them for many a day. Then you came again, and no one had an eye for me, so I clambered into it, cut the rope, took the oars which I found there and brought her back for more men."

"By Saint Paul! you have acted very wisely and well," said Nigel, "and I think that of all of us it is you who have won most honor this day. But of all these men dead and alive I see none who resembles that Red Ferret whom my Lord Chandos has described and who has worked such despite upon us in the past: It would indeed be an evil chance if he has in spite of all our pains made his way to France in some other boat."

"That we shall soon find out," said Badding. "Come with me and we will search the ship from truck to keel ere he escapes us."

There was a scuttle at the base of the mast which led down into the body of the vessel, and the Englishmen were approaching this when a strange sight brought them to a stand. A round brazen head had appeared in the square dark opening. An instant afterward a pair of shining shoulders followed. Then slowly the whole figure of a man in complete plate-armor emerged on the deck. In his gauntleted hand he carried a heavy steel mace. With this uplifted he moved toward his enemies, silent save for the ponderous clank of his footfall. It was an inhuman, machine-like figure, menacing and terrible, devoid of all expression, slow-moving, inexorable and awesome.

A sudden wave of terror passed over the English seamen. One of them tried to pass and get behind the brazen man, but he was pinned against the side by a quick movement and his brains dashed out by a smashing blow from the heavy mace. Wild panic seized the others, and they rushed back to the boat. Aylward strung an arrow, but his bowstring was damp and the shaft rang loudly upon the shining breast-plate and glanced off into the sea. Masters struck the brazen head with a sword, but the blade snapped without injuring the helmet, and an instant later the bowman was stretched senseless on the deck. The seamen shrank from this terrible silent creature and huddled in the stern, all the fight gone out of them.

Again he raised his mace and was advancing on the helpless crowd where the brave were encumbered and hampered by the weaklings, when Nigel shook himself clear and bounded forward into the open, his sword in his hand and a smile of welcome upon his lips.

The sun had set, and one long mauve gash across the western Channel was closing swiftly into the dull grays of early night. Above, a few stars began to faintly twinkle; yet the twilight was still bright enough for an observer to see every detail of the scene: the Marie Rose, dipping and rising on the long rollers astern; the broad French boat with its white deck blotched with blood and littered with bodies; the group of men in the stern, some trying to advance and some seeking to escape — all a confused, disorderly, struggling rabble.

Then betwixt them and the mast the two figures: the armed shining man of metal, with hand upraised, watchful, silent, motionless, and Nigel, bareheaded and crouching, with quick foot, eager eyes and fearless happy face, moving this way and that, in and out, his sword flashing like a gleam of light as he sought at all points for some opening in the brazen shell before him.

It was clear to the man in armor that if he could but pen his antagonist in a corner he would beat him down without fail. But it was not to be done. The unhampered man had the advantage of speed. With a few quick steps he could always glide to either side and escape the clumsy rush. Aylward and Badding had sprung out to Nigel's assistance; but he shouted to them to stand back, with such authority and anger in his voice that their weapons dropped to their sides. With staring eyes and set features they stood watching that unequal fight.

Once it seemed that all was over with the Squire, for in springing back from his enemy he tripped over one of the bodies which strewed the deck and fell flat upon his back, but with a swift wriggle he escaped the heavy blow which thundered down upon him, and springing to his feet he bit deeply into the Frenchman's helmet with a sweeping cut in return. Again the mace fell, and this time Nigel had not quite cleared himself. His sword was beaten down and the blow fell partly upon his left shoulder. He staggered, and once more the iron club whirled upward to dash him to the ground.

Quick as a flash it passed through his mind that he could not leap beyond its reach. But he might get within it. In an instant he had dropped his sword, and springing in he had seized the brazen man round the waist. The mace was shortened and the handle jobbed down once upon the bare flaxen head. Then, with a sonorous clang, and a yell of delight from the spectators, Nigel with one mighty wrench tore his enemy from the deck and hurled him down upon his back. His own head was whirling and he felt that his senses were slipping away, but already his hunting-knife was out and pointing through the slit in the brazen helmet.

“Give yourself up, fair sir!” said he.

“Never to fishermen and to archers! I am a gentleman of coat-armor. Kill me!”

“I also am a gentleman of coat-armor. I promise you quarter.”

“Then, sir, I surrender myself to you.”

The dagger tinkled down upon the deck. Seamen and archers ran forward, to find Nigel half senseless upon his face. They drew him off, and a few deft blows struck off the helmet of his enemy. A head, sharp-featured, freckled and foxy-red, disclosed itself beneath it. Nigel raised himself on his elbow for an instant.

“You are the Red Ferret?” said he.

“So my enemies call me,” said the Frenchman, with a smile. “I rejoice, sir, that I have fallen to so valiant and honorable a gentleman.”

“I thank you, fair sir,” said Nigel feebly. “I also rejoice that I have encountered so debonair a person, and I shall ever bear in mind the pleasure which I have had from our meeting.”

So saying, he laid his bleeding head upon his enemy’s brazen front and sank into a dead faint.

XV. HOW THE RED FERRET CAME TO COSFORD

The old chronicler in his “Gestes du Sieur Nigel” has bewailed his broken narrative, which rose from the fact that out of thirty-one years of warfare no less than seven were spent by his hero at one time or another in the recovery from his wounds or from those illnesses which arose from privation and fatigue. Here at the very threshold of his career, on the eve of a great enterprise, this very fate befell him.

Stretched upon a couch in a low-roofed and ill-furnished chamber, which looks down from under the machicolated corner turret upon the inner court of the Castle of Calais, he lay half-unconscious and impotent, while great deeds were doing under his window. Wounded in three places, and with his head splintered by the sharp pommel of the Ferret’s mace, he hovered betwixt life and death, his shattered body drawing him downward, his youthful spirit plucking him up.

As in some strange dream he was aware of that deed of arms within the courtyard below. Dimly it came back to his memory afterwards the sudden startled shout, the crash of metal, the slamming of great gates, the roar of many voices, the clang, clang, clang, as of fifty lusty smiths upon their anvils, and then at last the dwindling of the hubbub, the low groans and sudden shrill cries to the saints, the measured murmur of many voices, the heavy clanking of armored feet.

Sometime in that fell struggle he must have drawn his weakened body as far as the narrow window, and hanging to the iron bars have looked down on the wild scene beneath him. In the red glare of torches held from windows and from roof he saw the rush and swirl of men below, the ruddy light shining back from glowing brass and gleaming steel. As a wild vision it came to him afterward, the beauty and the splendor, the flying lambrequins, the jeweled crests, the blazonry and richness of surcoat and of shield, where sable and gules, argent and vair, in every pattern of saltire, bend or chevron, glowed beneath him like a drift of many-coloured blossoms, tossing, sinking, stooping into shadow, springing into light. There glared the blood-red gules of Chandos, and he saw the tall figure of his master, a thunderbolt of war, raging in the van. There too were the three black chevrons on the golden shield which marked the noble Manny. That strong swordsman must surely be the royal Edward himself, since only he and the black-armored swift-footed youth at his side were marked by no symbol of heraldry. “Manny! Manny! George for England!” rose the deep-throated bay, and ever the gallant counter-cry: “A Chargny! A Chargny! Saint Denis for France!” thundered amid the clash and thudding of the battle.

Such was the vague whirling memory still lingering in Nigel’s mind when at last the mists cleared away from it and he found himself weak but clear on the low couch in the corner turret. Beside him, crushing lavender betwixt his rough fingers and strewing it over floor and sheets, was Aylward the archer. His longbow leaned at the foot of the bed, and his steel cap was balanced on the top of it, while he himself, sitting in his shirt sleeves, fanned off the flies and scattered the fragrant herbs over his helpless master.

“By my hilt!” he cried with a sudden shout, every tooth in his head gleaming with joy, “I thank the Virgin and all the saints for this blessed sight! I had not dared to go back to Tilford had I lost you. Three weeks have you lain there and babbled like a babe, but now I see in your eyes that you are your own man again.”

“I have indeed had some small hurt,” said Nigel feebly; “but it is shame and sorrow that I should lie here if there is work for my hands. Whither go you, archer?”

“To tell the good Sir John that you are mending.”

“Nay, bide with me a little longer, Aylward. I can call to mind all that has passed. There was a bickering of small boats, was there not, and I chanced upon a most worthy person and exchanged handstrokes with him? He was my prisoner, was he not?”

“He was, fair sir.”

“And where is he now?”

“Below in the castle.”

A smile stole over Nigel’s pale face. “I know what I will do with him,” said he.

“I pray you to rest, fair sir,” said Aylward anxiously. “The King’s own leech saw you this morning, and he said that if the bandage was torn from your head you would surely die.”

“Nay, good archer, I will not move. But tell me what befell upon the boat?”

“There is little to tell, fair sir. Had this Ferret not been his own squire and taken so long a time to don his harness it is likely that they would have had the better of us. He did not reach the battle till his comrades were on their backs. Him we took to the Marie Rose, because he was your man. The others were of no worth, so we threw them into the sea.”

“The quick and the dead?”

“Every man of them.”

“It was an evil deed.”

Aylward shrugged his shoulders. “I tried to save one boy,” said he; “but Cock Badding would not have it, and he had Black Simon and the others at his back. ‘It is the custom of the Narrow Seas,’ said they: ‘To-day for them; to-morrow for us.’ — Then they tore him from his hold and cast him screaming over the side. By my hilt! I have no love for the sea and its customs, so I care not if I never set foot on it again when it has once borne me back to England.”

“Nay, there are great happenings upon the sea, and many worthy people to be found upon ships,” said Nigel. “In all parts, if one goes far enough upon the water, one would find those whom it would be joy to meet. If one crosses over the Narrow Sea, as we have done, we come on the French who are so needful to us; for how else would we win worship? Or if you go south, then in time one may hope to come to the land of the unbelievers, where there is fine skirmishing and much honor for him who will venture his person. Bethink you, archer, how fair a life it must be when one can ride forth in search of advancement with some hope of finding many debonair cavaliers upon the same quest, and then if one be overborne one has died for the faith, and the gates of Heaven are open before you. So also the sea to the north is a help to him who seeks honor, for it leads to the country of the Eastlanders and to those parts where the heathen still dwell who turn their faces from the blessed Gospel. There also a man might find some small deeds to do, and by Saint Paul! Aylward, if the French hold the truce and the good Sir John permits us, I would fain go down into those parts. The sea is a good friend to the cavalier, for it takes him where he may fulfil his vows.”

Aylward shook his head, for his memories were too recent; but he said nothing, because at this instant the door opened and Chandos entered. With joy in his face he stepped forward to the couch and took Nigel's hand in his. Then he whispered a word in Aylward's ear, who hurried from the room.

"Pardieu! this is a good sight," said the knight. "I trust that you will soon be on your feet again."

"I crave your pardon, my honored lord, that I have been absent from your side," said Nigel.

"In truth my heart was sore for you, Nigel; for you have missed such a night as comes seldom in any man's life. All went even as we had planned. The postern gate was opened, and a party made their way in; but we awaited them, and all were taken or slain. But the greater part of the French had remained without upon the plain of Nieullet, so we took horse and went out against them. When we drew near them they were surprised, but they made good cheer among themselves, calling out to each other: 'If we fly we lose all. It is better to fight on, in the hopes that the day may be ours.' This was heard by our people in the van, who cried out to them: 'By Saint George! you speak truth. Evil befall him who thinks of flying!' So they held their ground like worthy people for the space of an hour, and there were many there whom it is always good to meet: Sir Geoffrey himself, and Sir Pepin de Werre, with Sir John de Landas, old Ballieul of the Yellow Tooth, and his brother Hector the Leopard. But above all Sir Eustace de Ribeaumont was at great pains to meet us worthily, and he was at handstrokes with the King for a long time. Then, when we had slain or taken them, all the prisoners were brought to a feast which was ready for them, and the knights of England waited upon them at the table and made good cheer with them. And all this, Nigel, we owe to you."

The Squire flushed with pleasure at the words. "Nay, most honored lord, it was but a small thing which I have been able to do. But I thank God and our Lady that I have done some service, since it has pleased you to take me with you to the wars. Should it chance—"

But the words were cut short upon Nigel's lips, and he lay back with amazed eyes staring from his pallid face. The door of his little chamber had opened, and who was this, the tall stately man with the noble presence, the high forehead, the long handsome face, the dark, brooding eyes — who but the noble Edward of England?

"Ha, my little cock of Tilford Bridge, I still bear you in mind," said he. "Right glad I was to hear that you had found your wits again, and I trust that I have not helped to make you take leave of them once more."

Nigel’s stare of astonishment had brought a smile to the King’s lips. Now the Squire stammered forth some halting words of gratitude at the honor done to him.

“Nay, not a word,” said the King. “But in sooth it is a joy to my heart to see the son of my old comrade Eustace Loring carry himself so bravely. Had this boat got before us with news of our coming, then all our labor had been in vain, and no Frenchman ventured to Calais that night. But above all I thank you for that you have delivered into my hands one whom I had vowed to punish in that he has caused us more scathe by fouler means than any living man. Twice have I sworn that Peter the Red Ferret shall hang, for all his noble blood and coat-armor, if ever he should fall into my hands. Now at last his time has come; but I would not put him to death until you, who had taken him, could be there to see it done. Nay, thank me not, for I could do no less, seeing that it is to you that I owe him.”

But it was not thanks which Nigel was trying to utter. It was hard to frame his words, and yet they must be said. “Sire,” he murmured, “it ill becomes me to cross your royal will—”

The dark Plantagenet wrath gathered upon the King’s high brow and gloomed in his fierce deep-set eyes. “By God’s dignity! no man has ever crossed it yet and lived unscathed. How now, young sir, what mean such words, to which we are little wont? Have a care, for this is no light thing which you venture.”

“Sire,” said Nigel, “in all matters in which I am a free man I am ever your faithful liege, but some things there are which may not be done.”

“How?” cried the King. “In spite of my will?”

“In spite of your will, sire,” said Nigel, sitting up on his couch, with white face and blazing eyes.

“By the Virgin!” the angry King thundered, “we are come to a pretty pass! You have been held too long at home, young man. The overstabled horse will kick. The unweathered hawk will fly at check. See to it, Master Chandos! He is thine to break, and I hold you to it that you break him. And what is it that Edward of England may not do, Master Loring?”

Nigel faced the King with a face as grim as his own. “You may not put to death the Red Ferret.”

“Pardieu! And why?”

“Because he is not thine to slay, sire. Because he is mine. Because I promised him his life, and it is not for you, King though you be, to constrain a man of gentle blood to break his plighted word and lose his honor."

Chandos laid his soothing hand upon his Squire's shoulder. "Excuse him, sire; he is weak from his wounds," said he. "Perhaps we have stayed overlong, for the leech has ordered repose."

But the angry King was not easily to be appeased. "I am not wont to be so browbeat," said he hotly. "This is your Squire, Master John. How comes it that you can stand there and listen to his pert talk, and say no word to chide him? Is this how you guide your household? Have you not taught him that every promise given is subject to the King's consent, and that with him only lie the springs of life and death? If he is sick, you at least are hale. Why stand you there in silence?"

"My liege," said Chandos gravely, "I have served you for over a score of years, and have shed my blood through as many wounds in your cause, so that you should not take my words amiss. But indeed I should feel myself to be no true man if I did not tell you that my Squire Nigel, though perchance he has spoken more bluntly than becomes him, is none the less right in this matter, and that you are wrong. For bethink you, sire—"

"Enough!" cried the King, more furious than ever. "Like master, like man, and I might have known why it is that this saucy Squire dares to bandy words with his sovereign lord. He does but give out what he hath taken in. John, John, you grow overbold. But this I tell you, and you also, young man, that as God is my help, ere the sun has set this night the Red Ferret will hang as a warning to all spies and traitors from the highest tower of Calais, that every ship upon the Narrow Seas, and every man for ten miles round may see him as he swings and know how heavy is the hand of the English King. Do you bear it in mind, lest you also may feel its weight!" With a glare like an angry lion he walked from the room, and the iron-clamped door clanged loudly behind him.

Chandos and Nigel looked ruefully at each other. Then the knight patted his Squire upon his bandaged head.

"You have carried yourself right well, Nigel. I could not wish for better. Fear not. All will be well."

"My fair and honored lord," cried Nigel, "I am heavy at heart, for indeed I could do no other, and yet I have brought trouble upon you."

"Nay, the clouds will soon pass. If he does indeed slay this Frenchman, you have done all that lay within your power, and your mind may rest easy.”

“I pray that it will rest easy in Paradise,” said Nigel; “for at the hour that I hear that I am dishonored and my prisoner slain I tear this bandage from my head and so end all things. I will not live when once my word is broken.”

“Nay, fair son, you take this thing too heavily,” said Chandos, with a grave face. “When a man has done all he may there remains no dishonor; but the King hath a kind heart for all his hot head, and it may be that if I see him I will prevail upon him. Bethink you how he swore to hang the six burghers of this very town, and yet he pardoned them. So keep a high heart, fair son, and I will come with good news ere evening.”

For three hours, as the sinking sun traced the shadow higher and ever higher upon the chamber wall, Nigel tossed feverishly upon his couch, his ears straining for the footfall of Aylward or of Chandos, bringing news of the fate of the prisoner. At last the door flew open, and there before him stood the one man whom he least expected, and yet would most gladly have seen. It was the Red Ferret himself, free and joyous.

With swift furtive steps he was across the room and on his knees beside the couch, kissing the pendent hand. “You have saved me, most noble sir!” he cried. “The gallows was fixed and the rope slung, when the good Lord Chandos told the King that you would die by your own hand if I were slain. ‘Curse this mule-headed Squire!’ he cried. ‘In God’s name let him have his prisoner, and let him do what he will with him so long as he troubles me no more!’ So here I have come, fair sir, to ask you what I shall do.”

“I pray you to sit beside me and be at your ease,” said Nigel. “In a few words I will tell you what I would have you do. Your armor I will keep, that I may have some remembrance of my good fortune in meeting so valiant a gentleman. We are of a size, and I make little doubt that I can wear it. Of ransom I would ask a thousand crowns.”

“Nay, nay!” cried the Ferret. “It would be a sad thing if a man of my position was worth less than five thousand.”

“A thousand will suffice, fair sir, to pay my charges for the war. You will not again play the spy, nor do us harm until the truce is broken.”

“That I will swear.”

“And lastly there is a journey that you shall make.”

The Frenchman’s face lengthened. “Where you order I must go,” said he; “but I pray you that it is not to the Holy Land.”

“Nay,” said Nigel; “but it is to a land which is holy to me. You will make your way back to Southampton.”

“I know it well. I helped to burn it down some years ago.”

“I rede you to say nothing of that matter when you get there. You will then journey as though to London until you come to a fair town named Guildford.”

“I have heard of it. The King hath a hunt there.”

“The same. You will then ask for a house named Cosford, two leagues from the town on the side of a long hill.”

“I will bear it in mind.”

“At Cosford you will see a good knight named Sir John Buttesthorn, and you will ask to have speech with his daughter, the Lady Mary.”

“I will do so; and what shall I say to the Lady Mary, who lives at Cosford on the slope of a long hill two leagues from the fair town of Guildford?”

“Say only that I sent my greeting, and that Saint Catharine has been my friend — only that and nothing more. And now leave me, I pray you, for my head is weary and I would fain have sleep.”

Thus it came about that a month later on the eve of the Feast of Saint Matthew, the Lady Mary, as she walked front Cosford gates, met with a strange horseman, richly clad, a serving-man behind him, looking shrewdly about him with quick blue eyes, which twinkled from a red and freckled face. At sight of her he doffed his hat and reined his horse.

“This house should be Cosford,” said he. “Are you by chance the Lady Mary who dwells there?”

The lady bowed her proud dark head.

“Then,” said he, “Squire Nigel Loring sends you greeting and tells you that Saint Catharine has been his friend.” Then turning to his servant he cried: “Heh, Raoul, our task is done! Your master is a free man once more. Come, lad, come, the nearest port to France! Hola! Hola! Hola!” And so without a word more the two, master and man, set spurs to their horses and galloped like madmen down the long slope of Hindhead, until as she looked after them they were but two dark dots in the distance, waist-high in the ling and the bracken.

She turned back to the house, a smile upon her face. Nigel had sent her greeting. A Frenchman had brought it. His bringing it had made him a freeman. And Saint Catherine had been Nigel’s friend. It was at her shrine that he had sworn that three deeds should be done ere he should set eyes upon her again. In the privacy of her room the Lady Mary sank upon her prie-dieu and poured forth the thanks of her heart to the Virgin that one deed was accomplished; but even as she did so her joy was overcast by the thought of those two others which lay before him.

XVI. HOW THE KING’S COURT FEASTED IN CALAIS CASTLE

It was a bright sunshiny morning when Nigel found himself at last able to leave his turret chamber and to walk upon the rampart of the castle. There was a brisk northern wind, heavy and wet with the salt of the sea, and he felt, as he turned his face to it, fresh life and strength surging in his blood and bracing his limbs. He took his hand from Aylward’s supporting arm and stood with his cap off, leaning on the rampart and breathing in the cool strong air. Far off upon the distant sky-line, half hidden by the heave of the waves, was the low white fringe of cliffs which skirted England. Between him and them lay the broad blue Channel, seamed and flecked with flashing foam, for a sharp sea was running and the few ships in sight were laboring heavily. Nigel’s eyes traversed the wide-spread view, rejoicing in the change from the gray wall of his cramped chamber. Finally they settled upon a strange object at his very feet.

It was a long trumpet-shaped engine of leather and iron bolted into a rude wooden stand and fitted with wheels. Beside it lay a heap of metal slugs and lumps of stone. The end of the machine was raised and pointed over the battlement. Behind it stood an iron box which Nigel opened. It was filled with a black coarse powder, like gritty charcoal.

“By Saint Paul!” said he, passing his hands over the engine, “I have heard men talk of these things, but never before have I seen one. It is none other than one of those wondrous new-made bombards.”

“In sooth, it is even as you say,” Aylward answered, looking at it with contempt and dislike in his face. “I have seen them here upon the ramparts, and have also exchanged a buffet or two with him who had charge of them. He was jack-fool enough to think that with this leather pipe he could outshoot the best archer in Christendom. I lent him a cuff on the ear that laid him across his foolish engine.”

“It is a fearsome thing,” said Nigel, who had stooped to examine it. “We live in strange times when such things can be made. It is loosed by fire, is it not, which springs from the black dust?”

"By my hilt! fair sir, I know not. And yet I call to mind that ere we fell out this foolish bombardman did say something of the matter. The fire-dust is within and so also is the ball. Then you take more dust from this iron box and place it in the hole at the farther end — so. It is now ready. I have never seen one fired, but I wot that this one could be fired now."

"It makes a strange sound, archer, does it not?" said Nigel wistfully.

"So I have heard, fair sir — even as the bow twangs, so it also has a sound when you loose it."

"There is no one to hear, since we are alone upon the rampart, nor can it do scathe, since it points to sea. I pray you to loose it and I will listen to the sound." He bent over the bombard with an attentive ear, while Aylward, stooping his earnest brown face over the touch-hole, scraped away diligently with a flint and steel. A moment later both he and Nigel were seated some distance off upon the ground while amid the roar of the discharge and the thick cloud of smoke they had a vision of the long black snakelike engine shooting back upon the recoil. For a minute or more they were struck motionless with astonishment while the reverberations died away and the smoke wreaths curled slowly up to the blue heavens.

"Good lack!" cried Nigel at last, picking himself up and looking round him. "Good lack, and Heaven be my aid! I thank the Virgin that all stands as it did before. I thought that the castle had fallen."

"Such a bull's bellow I have never heard," cried Aylward, rubbing his injured limbs. "One could hear it from Frensham Pond to Guildford Castle. I would not touch one again — not for a hide of the best land in Puttenham!"

"It may fare ill with your own hide, archer, if you do," said an angry voice behind them. Chandos had stepped from the open door of the corner turret and stood looking at them with a harsh gaze. Presently, as the matter was made clear to him his face relaxed into a smile.

"Hasten to the warden, archer, and tell him how it befell. You will have the castle and the town in arms. I know not what the King may think of so sudden an alarm. And you, Nigel, how in the name of the saints came you to play the child like this?"

"I knew not its power, fair lord."

"By my soul, Nigel, I think that none of us know its power. I can see the day when all that we delight in, the splendor and glory of war, may all go down before that which beats through the plate of steel as easily as the leathern jacket. I have bestrode my warhorse in my armor and have looked down at the sooty, smoky bombardman beside me, and I have thought that perhaps I was the last of the old and he the first of the new; that there would come a time when he and his engines would sweep you and me and the rest of us from the field."

"But not yet, I trust, honored sir?"

"No, not yet, Nigel. You are still in time to win your spurs even as your fathers did. How is your strength?"

"I am ready for any task, my good and honored lord."

"It is well, for work awaits us — good work, pressing work, work of peril and of honor. Your eyes shine and your face flushes, Nigel. I live my own youth over again as I look at you. Know then that though there is truce with the French here, there is not truce in Brittany where the houses of Blois and of Montfort still struggle for the dukedom. Half Brittany fights for one, and half for the other. The French have taken up the cause of Blois, and we of Montfort, and it is such a war that many a great leader, such as Sir Walter Manny, has first earned his name there. Of late the war has gone against us, and the bloody hands of the Rohans, of Gaptooth Beaumanoir, of Oliver the Flesher and others have been heavy upon our people. The last tidings have been of disaster, and the King's soul is dark with wrath for that his friend and comrade Gilles de St. Pol has been done to death in the Castle of La Brohiniere. He will send succors to the country, and we go at their head. How like you that, Nigel?"

"My honored lord, what could I ask for better?"

"Then have your harness ready, for we start within the week. Our path by land is blocked by the French, and we go by sea. This night the King gives a banquet ere he returns to England, and your place is behind my chair. Be in my chamber that you may help me to dress, and so we will to the hall together."

With satin and with samite, with velvet and with fur, the noble Chandos was dressed for the King's feast, and Nigel too had donned his best silk jupon, faced with the five scarlet roses, that he might wait upon him. In the great hall of Calais Castle the tables were set, a high table for the lords, a second one for the less distinguished knights, and a third at which the squires might feast when their masters were seated.

Never had Nigel in his simple life at Tilford pictured a scene of such pomp and wondrous luxury. The grim gray walls were covered from ceiling to floor with priceless tapestry of Arras, where hart, hounds and huntsmen circled the great hall with one long living image of the chase. Over the principal table drooped a line of banners, and beneath them rows of emblazoned shields upon the wall carried the arms of the high noblemen who sat beneath. The red light of cressets and of torches burned upon the badges of the great captains of England. The lions and lilies shone over the high dorseret chair in the center, and the same august device marked with the cadency label indicated the seat of the Prince, while glowing to right and to left were the long lines of noble insignia, honored in peace and terrible in war. There shone the gold and sable of Manny, the engrailed cross of Suffolk, the red chevron of Stafford, the scarlet and gold of Audley, the blue lion rampant of the Percies, the silver swallows of Arundel, the red roebuck of the Montacutes, the star of the de Veres, the silver scallops of Russell, the purple lion of de Lacy, and the black crosses of Clinton.

A friendly Squire at Nigel's elbow whispered the names of the famous warriors beneath. "You are young Loring of Tilford, the Squire of Chandos, are you not?" said he. "My name is Delves, and I come from Doddington in Cheshire. I am the Squire of Sir James Audley, yonder round-backed man with the dark face and close-cropped beard, who hath the Saracen head as a crest above him."

"I have heard of him as a man of great valor," said Nigel, gazing at him with interest.

"Indeed, you may well say so, Master Loring. He is the bravest knight in England, and in Christendom also, as I believe. No man hath done such deeds of valor."

Nigel looked at his new acquaintance with hope in his eyes. "You speak as it becomes you to speak when you uphold your own master," said he. "For the same reason, Master Delves, and in no spirit of ill-will to you, it behooves me to tell you that he is not to be compared in name or fame with the noble knight on whom I wait. Should you hold otherwise, then surely we can debate the matter in whatever way or time may please you best."

Delves smiled good-humoredly. "Nay, be not so hot," said he. "Had you upheld any other knight, save perhaps Sir Walter Manny, I had taken you at your word, and your master or mine would have had place for a new Squire. But indeed it is only truth that no knight is second to Chandos, nor would I draw my sword to lower his pride of place. Ha, Sir James' cup is low! I must see to it!" He darted off, a flagon of Gascony in his hand. "The King hath had good news to-night," he continued when he returned. "I have not seen him in so merry a mind since the night when we took the Frenchmen and he laid his pearl chaplet upon the head of de Ribeaumont. See how he laughs, and the Prince also. That laugh bodes some one little good, or I am the more mistaken. Have a care! Sir John's plate is empty."

It was Nigel's turn to dart away; but ever in the intervals he returned to the corner whence he could look down the hall and listen to the words of the older Squire. Delves was a short, thick-set man past middle age, weather-beaten and scarred, with a rough manner and bearing which showed that he was more at his ease in a tent than a hall. But ten years of service had taught him much, and Nigel listened eagerly to his talk.

"Indeed the King hath some good tidings," he continued. "See now, he has whispered it to Chandos and to Manny. Manny spreads it on to Sir Reginald Cobham, and he to Robert Knolles, each smiling like the Devil over a friar."

"Which is Sir Robert Knolles?" asked Nigel with interest. "I have heard much of him and his deeds."

"He is the tall hard-faced man in yellow silk, he with the hairless cheeks and the split lip. He is little older than yourself, and his father was a cobbler in Chester, yet he has already won the golden spurs. See how he dabs his great hand in the dish and hands forth the gobbets. He is more used to a camp-kettle than a silver plate. The big man with the black beard is Sir Bartholomew Berghersh, whose brother is the Abbot of Beaulieu. Haste, haste! for the boar's head is come and the plate's to be cleaned."

The table manners of our ancestors at this period would have furnished to the modern eye the strangest mixture of luxury and of barbarism. Forks were still unknown, and the courtesy fingers, the index and the middle of the left hand, took their place. To use any others was accounted the worst of manners. A crowd of dogs lay among the rushes growling at each other and quarreling over the gnawed bones which were thrown to them by the feasters. A slice of coarse bread served usually as a plate, but the King's own high table was provided with silver platters, which were wiped by the Squire or page after each course. On the other hand the table-linen was costly, and the courses, served with a pomp and dignity now unknown, comprised such a variety of dishes and such complex marvels of cookery as no modern banquet could show. Besides all our domestic animals and every kind of game, such strange delicacies as hedgehogs, bustards, porpoises, squirrels, bitterns and cranes lent variety to the feast.

Each new course, heralded by a flourish of silver trumpets, was borne in by liveried servants walking two and two, with rubicund marshals strutting in front and behind, bearing white wands in their hands, not only as badges of their office, but also as weapons with which to repel any impertinent inroad upon the dishes in the journey from the kitchen to the hall. Boar's heads, enarmed and endored with gilt tusks and flaming mouths, were followed by wondrous pasties molded to the shape of ships, castles and other devices with sugar seamen or soldiers who lost their own bodies in their fruitless defense against the hungry attack. Finally came the great nef, a silver vessel upon wheels laden with fruit and sweetmeats which rolled with its luscious cargo down the line of guests. Flagons of Gascony, of Rhine wine, of Canary and of Rochelle were held in readiness by the attendants; but the age, though luxurious, was not drunken, and the sober habits of the Norman had happily prevailed over the license of those Saxon banquets where no guest might walk from the table without a slur upon his host. Honor and hardihood go ill with a shaking hand or a blurred eye.

Whilst wine, fruit and spices were handed round the high tables the squires had been served in turn at the farther end of the hall. Meanwhile round the King there had gathered a group of statesmen and soldiers, talking eagerly among themselves. The Earl of Stafford, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Arundel, Lord Beauchamp and Lord Neville were assembled at the back of his chair, with Lord Percy and Lord Mowbray at either side. The little group blazed with golden chains and jeweled chaplets, flame coloured paltocks and purple tunics.

Of a sudden the King said something over his shoulder to Sir William de Pakyngton the herald, who advanced and stood by the royal chair. He was a tall and noble-featured man, with long grizzled beard which rippled down to the gold-linked belt girdling his many-coloured tabard. On his head he had placed the heraldic barret-cap which bespoke his dignity, and he slowly raised his white wand high in the air, while a great hush fell upon the hall.

"My lords of England," said he, "knight bannerets, knights, squires, and all others here present of gentle birth and coat-armor, know that your dread and sovereign lord, Edward, King of England and of France, bids me give you greeting and commands you to come hither that he may have speech with you."

In an instant the tables were deserted and the whole company had clustered in front of the King's chair. Those who had sat on either side of him crowded inward so that his tall dark figure upreared itself amid the dense circle of his guests.

With a flush upon his olive cheeks and with pride smoldering in his dark eyes, he looked round him at the eager faces of the men who had been his comrades from Sluys and Cadsand to Crecy and Calais. They caught fire from that warlike gleam in his masterful gaze, and a sudden wild, fierce shout pealed up to the vaulted ceiling, a soldierly thanks for what was passed and a promise for what was to come. The King's teeth gleamed in a quick smile, and his large white hand played with the jeweled dagger in his belt.

"By the splendor of God!" said he in a loud clear voice, "I have little doubt that you will rejoice with me this night, for such tidings have come to my ears as may well bring joy to everyone of you. You know well that our ships have suffered great scathe from the Spaniards, who for many years have slain without grace or ruth all of my people who have fallen into their cruel hands. Of late they have sent their ships into Flanders, and thirty great cogs and galleys lie now at Sluys well-filled with archers and men-at-arms and ready in all ways for battle. I have it to-day from a sure hand that, having taken their merchandise aboard, these ships will sail upon the next Sunday and will make their way through our Narrow Sea. We have for a great time been long-suffering to these people, for which they have done us many contraries and despites, growing ever more arrogant as we grow more patient. It is in my mind therefore that we hie us to-morrow to Winchelsea, where we have twenty ships, and make ready to sally out upon them as they pass. May God and Saint George defend the right!"

A second shout, far louder and fiercer than the first, came like a thunderclap after the King's words. It was the bay of a fierce pack to their trusted huntsman.

Edward laughed again as he looked round at the gleaming eyes, the waving arms and the flushed joyful faces of his liegemen. "Who hath fought against these Spaniards?" he asked. "Is there anyone here who can tell us what manner of men they be?"

A dozen hands went up into the air; but the King turned to the Earl of Suffolk at his elbow.

"You have fought them, Thomas?" said he.

“Yes, sire, I was in the great sea-fight eight years ago at the Island of Guernsey, when Lord Lewis of Spain held the sea against the Earl of Pembroke.”

“How found you them, Thomas?”

“Very excellent people, sire, and no man could ask for better. On every ship they have a hundred crossbowmen of Genoa, the best in the world, and their spearmen also are very hardy men. They would throw great cantles of iron from the tops of the masts, and many of our people met their death through it. If we can bar their way in the Narrow Sea, then there will be much hope of honor for all of us.”

“Your words are very welcome, Thomas,” said the King, “and I make no doubt that they will show themselves to be very worthy of what we prepare for them. To you I give a ship, that you may have the handling of it. You also, my dear son, shall have a ship, that evermore honor may be thine.”

“I thank you, my fair and sweet father,” said the Prince, with joy flushing his handsome boyish face.

“The leading ship shall be mine. But you shall have one, Walter Manny, and you, Stafford, and you, Arundel, and you, Audley, and you, Sir Thomas Holland, and you, Brocas, and you, Berkeley, and you, Reginald. The rest shall be awarded at Winchelsea, whither we sail to-morrow. Nay, John, why do you pluck so at my sleeve?”

Chandos was leaning forward, with an anxious face. “Surely, my honored lord, I have not served you so long and so faithfully that you should forget me now. Is there then no ship for me?”

The King smiled, but shook his head. “Nay, John, have I not given you two hundred archers and a hundred men-at-arms to take with you into Brittany? I trust that your ships will be lying in Saint Malo Bay ere the Spaniards are abreast of Winchelsea. What more would you have, old war-dog? Wouldst be in two battles at once?”

“I would be at your side, my liege, when the lion banner is in the wind once more. I have ever been there. Why should you cast me now? I ask little, dear lord — a galley, a balinger, even a pinnace, so that I may only be there.”

“Nay, John, you shall come. I cannot find it in my heart to say you nay. I will find you place in my own ship, that you may indeed be by my side.”

Chandos stooped and kissed the King’s hand. “My Squire?” he asked.

The King’s brows knotted into a frown. “Nay, let him go to Brittany with the others,” said he harshly. “I wonder, John, that you should bring back to my memory this youth whose pertness is too fresh that I should forget it. But some one must go to Brittany in your stead, for the matter presses and our people are hard put to it to hold their own.” He cast his eyes over the assembly, and they rested upon the stern features of Sir Robert Knolles.

“Sir Robert,” he said, “though you are young in years you are already old in war, and I have heard that you are as prudent in council as you are valiant in the field. To you I commit the charge of this venture to Brittany in place of Sir John Chandos, who will follow thither when our work has been done upon the waters. Three ships lie in Calais port and three hundred men are ready to your hand. Sir John will tell you what our mind is in the matter. And now, my friends and good comrades, you will haste you each to his own quarters, and you will make swiftly such preparations as are needful, for, as God is my aid, I will sail with you to Winchelsea to-morrow!”

Beckoning to Chandos, Manny and a few of his chosen leaders, the King led them away to an inner chamber, where they might discuss the plans for the future. At the same time the assembly broke up, the knights in silence and dignity, the squires in mirth and noise, but all joyful at heart for the thought of the great days which lay before them.

XVII. THE SPANIARDS ON THE SEA

Day had not yet dawned when Nigel was in the chamber of Chandos preparing him for his departure and listening to the last cheery words of advice and direction from his noble master. That same morning, before the sun was half-way up the heaven, the King’s great nef Philippa, bearing within it the most of those present at his banquet the night before, set its huge sail, adorned with the lions and the lilies, and turned its brazen beak for England. Behind it went five smaller cogs crammed with squires, archers and men-at-arms.

Nigel and his companions lined the ramparts of the castle and waved their caps as the bluff, burly vessels, with drums beating and trumpets clanging, a hundred knightly pennons streaming from their decks and the red cross of England over all, rolled slowly out to the open sea. Then when they had watched them until they were hull down they turned, with hearts heavy at being left behind, to make ready for their own more distant venture.

It took them four days of hard work ere their preparations were complete, for many were the needs of a small force sailing to a strange country. Three ships had been left to them, the cog Thomas of Romney, the Grace Dieu of Hythe, and the Basilisk of Southampton, into each of which one hundred men were stowed, besides the thirty seamen who formed the crew. In the hold were forty horses, amongst them Pommers, much wearied by his long idleness, and homesick for the slopes of Surrey where his great limbs might find the work he craved. Then the food and the water, the bow-staves and the sheaves of arrows, the horseshoes, the nails, the hammers, the knives, the axes, the ropes, the vats of hay, the green fodder and a score of other things were packed aboard. Always by the side of the ships stood the stern young knight Sir Robert, checking, testing, watching and controlling, saying little, for he was a man of few words, but with his eyes, his hands, and if need be his heavy dog-whip, wherever they were wanted.

The seamen of the Basilisk, being from a free port, had the old feud against the men of the Cinque Ports, who were looked upon by the other mariners of England as being unduly favored by the King. A ship of the West Country could scarce meet with one from the Narrow Seas without blood flowing. Hence sprang sudden broils on the quay side, when with yell and blow the Thomases and Grace Dieus, Saint Leonard on their lips and murder in their hearts, would fall upon the Basilisks. Then amid the whirl of cudgels and the clash of knives would spring the tiger figure of the young leader, lashing mercilessly to right and left like a tamer among his wolves, until he had beaten them howling back to their work. Upon the morning of the fourth day all was ready, and the ropes being cast off the three little ships were warped down the harbor by their own pinnaces until they were swallowed up in the swirling folds of a Channel mist.

Though small in numbers, it was no mean force which Edward had dispatched to succor the hard-pressed English garrisons in Brittany. There was scarce a man among them who was not an old soldier, and their leaders were men of note in council and in war. Knolles flew his flag of the black raven aboard the Basilisk. With him were Nigel and his own Squire John Hawthorn. Of his hundred men, forty were Yorkshire Dalesmen and forty were men of Lincoln, all noted archers, with old Wat of Carlisle, a grizzled veteran of border warfare, to lead them.

Already Aylward by his skill and strength had won his way to an under-officership amongst them, and shared with Long Ned Widdington, a huge North Countryman, the reputation of coming next to famous Wat Carlisle in all that makes an archer. The men-at-arms too were war-hardened soldiers, with Black Simon of Norwich, the same who had sailed from Winchelsea, to lead them. With his heart filled with hatred for the French who had slain all who were dear to him, he followed like a bloodhound over land and sea to any spot where he might glut his vengeance. Such also were the men who sailed in the other ships, Cheshire men from the Welsh borders in the cog Thomas, and Cumberland men, used to Scottish warfare, in the Grace Dieu.

Sir James Astley hung his shield of cinquefoil ermine over the quarter of the Thomas. Lord Thomas Percy, a cadet of Alnwick, famous already for the high spirit of that house which for ages was the bar upon the landward gate of England, showed his blue lion rampant as leader of the Grace Dieu. Such was the goodly company Saint-Malo bound, who warped from Calais Harbor to plunge into the thick reek of a Channel mist.

A slight breeze blew from the eastward, and the highended, round-bodied craft rolled slowly down the Channel. The mist rose a little at times, so that they had sight of each other dipping and rising upon a sleek, oily sea, but again it would sink down, settling over the top, shrouding the great yard, and finally frothing over the deck until even the water alongside had vanished from their view and they were afloat on a little raft in an ocean of vapor. A thin cold rain was falling, and the archers were crowded under the shelter of the overhanging poop and forecastle, where some spent the hours at dice, some in sleep, and many in trimming their arrows or polishing their weapons.

At the farther end, seated on a barrel as a throne of honor, with trays and boxes of feathers around him, was Bartholomew the bowyer and Fletcher, a fat, bald-headed man, whose task it was to see that every man's tackle was as it should be, and who had the privilege of selling such extras as they might need. A group of archers with their staves and quivers filed before him with complaints or requests, while half a dozen of the seniors gathered at his back and listened with grinning faces to his comments and rebukes.

"Canst not string it?" he was saying to a young bowman. "Then surely the string is overshort or the stave overlong. It could not by chance be the fault of thy own baby arms more fit to draw on thy hosen than to dress a warbow. Thou lazy lurdan, thus is it strung!" He seized the stave by the center in his right hand, leaned the end on the inside of his right foot, and then, pulling the upper nock down with the left hand, slid the eye of the string easily into place. "Now I pray thee to unstring it again," handing it to the bowman.

The youth with an effort did so, but he was too slow in disengaging his fingers, and the string sliding down with a snap from the upper nock caught and pinched them sorely against the stave. A roar of laughter, like the clap of a wave, swept down the deck as the luckless bowman danced and wrung his hand.

"Serve thee well right, thou redeless fool!" growled the old bowyer. "So fine a bow is wasted in such hands. How now, Samkin? I can teach you little of your trade, I trow. Here is a bow dressed as it should be; but it would, as you say, be the better for a white band to mark the true nocking point in the center of this red wrapping of silk. Leave it and I will tend to it anon. And you, Wat? A fresh head on yonder stele? Lord, that a man should carry four trades under one hat, and be bowyer, fletcher, stringer and headmaker! Four men's work for old Bartholomew and one man's pay!"

"Nay, say no more about that," growled an old wizened bowman, with a brown-parchment skin and little beady eyes. "It is better in these days to mend a bow than to bend one. You who never looked a Frenchman in the face are pricked off for ninepence a day, and I, who have fought five stricken fields, can earn but fourpence."

"It is in my mind, John of Tuxford, that you have looked in the face more pots of mead than Frenchmen," said the old bowyer. "I am swinking from dawn to night, while you are guzzling in an alestake. How now, youngster? Overbowed? Put your bow in the tiller. It draws at sixty pounds — not a pennyweight too much for a man of your inches. Lay more body to it, lad, and it will come to you. If your bow be not stiff, how can you hope for a twenty-score flight. Feathers? Aye, plenty and of the best. Here, peacock at a groat each. Surely a dandy archer like you, Tom Beverley, with gold earrings in your ears, would have no feathering but peacocks?"

"So the shaft fly straight, I care not of the feather," said the bowman, a tall young Yorkshireman, counting out pennies on the palm of his horny hand.

"Gray goose-feathers are but a farthing. These on the left are a halfpenny, for they are of the wild goose, and the second feather of a fenny goose is worth more than the pinion of a tame one. These in the brass tray are dropped feathers, and a dropped feather is better than a plucked one. Buy a score of these, lad, and cut them saddle-backed or swine-backed, the one for a dead shaft and the other for a smooth flyer, and no man in the company will swing a better-fletched quiver over his shoulder."

It chanced that the opinion of the bowyer on this and other points differed from that of Long Ned of Widdington, a surly straw-bearded Yorkshireman, who had listened with a sneering face to his counsel. Now he broke in suddenly upon the bowyer's talk. "You would do better to sell bows than to try to teach others how to use them," said he; "for indeed, Bartholomew, that head of thine has no more sense within it than it has hairs without. If you had drawn string for as many months as I have years you would know that a straight-cut feather flies smoother than a swine-backed, and pity it is that these young bowmen have none to teach them better!"

This attack upon his professional knowledge touched the old bowyer on the raw. His fat face became suffused with blood and his eyes glared with fury as he turned upon the archer. "You seven-foot barrel of lies!" he cried. "All-hallows be my aid, and I will teach you to open your slabbing mouth against me! Pluck forth your sword and stand out on yonder deck, that we may see who is the man of us twain. May I never twirl a shaft over my thumb nail if I do not put Bartholomew's mark upon your thick head!"

A score of rough voices joined at once in the quarrel, some upholding the bowyer and others taking the part of the North Countryman. A red-headed Dalesman snatched up a sword, but was felled by a blow from the fist of his neighbour. Instantly, with a buzz like a swarm of angry hornets, the bowmen were out on the deck; but ere a blow was struck Knolles was amongst them with granite face and eyes of fire.

“Stand apart, I say! I will warrant you enough fighting to cool your blood ere you see England once more. Loring, Hawthorn, cut any man down who raises his hand. Have you aught to say, you fox-haired rascal?” He thrust his face within two inches of that of the red man who had first seized his sword. The fellow shrank back, cowed, from his fierce eyes. “Now stint your noise, all of you, and stretch your long ears. Trumpeter, blow once more!”

A bugle call had been sounded every quarter of an hour so as to keep in touch with the other two vessels who were invisible in the fog. Now the high clear note rang out once more, the call of a fierce sea-creature to its mates, but no answer came back from the thick wall which pent them in. Again and again they called, and again and again with bated breath they waited for an answer.

“Where is the Shipman?” asked Knolles. “What is your name, fellow? Do you dare call yourself master-mariner?”

“My name is Nat Dennis, fair sir,” said the gray-bearded old seaman. “It is thirty years since first I showed my cartel and blew trumpet for a crew at the water-gate of Southampton. If any man may call himself master-mariner, it is surely I.”

“Where are our two ships?”

“Nay, sir, who can say in this fog?”

“Fellow, it was your place to hold them together.”

“I have but the eyes God gave me, fair sir, and they cannot see through a cloud.”

“Had it been fair, I, who am a soldier, could have kept them in company. Since it was foul, we looked to you, who are called a mariner, to do so. You have not done it. You have lost two of my ships ere the venture is begun.”

“Nay, fair sir, I pray you to consider—”

“Enough words!” said Knolles sternly. “Words will not give me back my two hundred men. Unless I find them before I come to Saint-Malo, I swear by Saint Wilfrid of Ripon that it will be an evil day for you! Enough! Go forth and do what you may!”

For five hours with a light breeze behind them they lurched through the heavy fog, the cold rain still matting their beards and shining on their faces. Sometimes they could see a circle of tossing water for a bowshot or so in each direction, and then the wreaths would crawl in upon them once more and bank them thickly round. They had long ceased to blow the trumpet for their missing comrades, but had hopes when clear weather came to find them still in sight. By the shipman’s reckoning they were now about midway between the two shores.

Nigel was leaning against the bulwarks, his thoughts away in the dingle at Cosford and out on the heather-clad slopes of Hindhead, when something struck his ear. It was a thin clear clang of metal, pealing out high above the dull murmur of the sea, the creak of the boom and the flap of the sail. He listened, and again it was borne to his ear.

“Hark, my lord!” said he to Sir Robert. “Is there not a sound in the fog?”

They both listened together with sidelong heads. Then it rang clearly forth once more, but this time in another direction. It had been on the bow; now it was on the quarter. Again it sounded, and again. Now it had moved to the other bow; now back to the quarter again; now it was near; and now so far that it was but a faint tinkle on the ear. By this time every man on board, seamen, archers and men-at-arms, were crowding the sides of the vessel. All round them there were noises in the darkness, and yet the wall of fog lay wet against their very faces. And the noises were such as were strange to their ears, always the same high musical clashing.

The old shipman shook his head and crossed himself.

“In thirty years upon the waters I have never heard the like,” said he. “The Devil is ever loose in a fog. Well is he named the Prince of Darkness.”

A wave of panic passed over the vessel, and these rough and hardy men who feared no mortal foe shook with terror at the shadows of their own minds. They stared into the cloud with blanched faces and fixed eyes, as though each instant some fearsome shape might break in upon them. And as they stared there came a gust of wind. For a moment the fog-bank rose and a circle of ocean lay before them.

It was covered with vessels. On all sides they lay thick upon its surface. They were huge caracks, high-ended and portly, with red sides and bulwarks carved and crusted with gold. Each had one great sail set and was driving down channel on the same course at the Basilisk. Their decks were thick with men, and from their high poops came the weird clashing which filled the air. For one moment they lay there, this wondrous fleet, surging slowly forward, framed in gray vapor. The next the clouds closed in and they had vanished from view. There was a long hush, and then a buzz of excited voices.

"The Spaniards!" cried a dozen bowmen and sailors.

"I should have known it," said the shipman. "I call to mind on the Biscay Coast how they would clash their cymbals after the fashion of the heathen Moor with whom they fight; but what would you have me do, fair sir? If the fog rises we are all dead men."

"There were thirty ships at the least," said Knolles, with a moody brow. "If we have seen them I trow that they have also seen us. They will lay us aboard."

"Nay, fair sir, it is in my mind that our ship is lighter and faster than theirs. If the fog hold another hour we should be through them."

"Stand to your arms!" yelled Knolles. "Stand to your arms — ! They are on us!"

The Basilisk had indeed been spied from the Spanish Admiral's ship before the fog closed down. With so light a breeze, and such a fog, he could not hope to find her under sail. But by an evil chance not a bowshot from the great Spanish carack was a low galley, thin and swift, with oars which could speed her against wind or tide. She also had seen the Basilisk and it was to her that the Spanish leader shouted his orders. For a few minutes she hunted through the fog, and then sprang out of it like a lean and stealthy beast upon its prey. It was the sight of the long dark shadow gliding after them which had brought that wild shout of alarm from the lips of the English knight. In another instant the starboard oars of the galley had been shipped, the sides of the two vessels grated together, and a stream of swarthy, red-capped Spaniards were swarming up the sides of the Basilisk and dropped with yells of triumph upon her deck.

For a moment it seemed as if the vessel was captured without a blow being struck, for the men of the English ship had run wildly in all directions to look for their arms. Scores of archers might be seen under the shadow of the forecastle and the poop bending their bowstaves to string them with the cords from their waterproof cases. Others were scrambling over saddles, barrels and cases in wild search of their quivers. Each as he came upon his arrows pulled out a few to lend to his less fortunate comrades. In mad haste the men-at-arms also were feeling and grasping in the dark corners, picking up steel caps which would not fit them, hurling them down on the deck, and snatching eagerly at any swords or spears that came their way.

The center of the ship was held by the Spaniards; and having slain all who stood before them, they were pressing up to either end before they were made to understand that it was no fat sheep but a most fierce old wolf which they had taken by the ears.

If the lesson was late, it was the more thorough. Attacked on both sides and hopelessly outnumbered, the Spaniards, who had never doubted that this little craft was a merchant-ship, were cut off to the last man. It was no fight, but a butchery. In vain the survivors ran screaming prayers to the saints and threw themselves down into the galley alongside. It also had been riddled with arrows from the poop of the Basilisk, and both the crew on the deck and the galley-slaves in the outriggers at either side lay dead in rows under the overwhelming shower from above. From stem to rudder every foot of her was furred with arrows. It was but a floating coffin piled with dead and dying men, which wallowed in the waves behind them as the Basilisk lurched onward and left her in the fog.

In their first rush on to the Basilisk, the Spaniards had seized six of the crew and four unarmed archers. Their throats had been cut and their bodies tossed overboard. Now the Spaniards who littered the deck, wounded and dead, were thrust over the side in the same fashion. One ran down into the hold and had to be hunted and killed squealing under the blows like a rat in the darkness. Within half an hour no sign was left of this grim meeting in the fog save for the crimson splashes upon bulwarks and deck. The archers, flushed and merry, were unstringing their bows once more, for in spite of the water glue the damp air took the strength from the cords. Some were hunting about for arrows which might have stuck inboard, and some tying up small injuries received in the scuffle. But an anxious shadow still lingered upon the face of Sir Robert, and he peered fixedly about him through the fog.

“Go among the archers, Hawthorne,” said he to his Squire. “Charge them on their lives to make no sound! You also, Loring. Go to the afterguard and say the same to them. We are lost if one of these great ships should spy us.”

For an hour with bated breath they stole through the fleet, still hearing the cymbals clashing all round them, for in this way the Spaniards held themselves together. Once the wild music came from above their very prow, and so warned them to change their course. Once also a huge vessel loomed for an instant upon their quarter, but they turned two points away from her, and she blurred and vanished. Soon the cymbals were but a distant tinkling, and at last they died gradually away.

"It is none too soon," said the old shipman, pointing to a yellowish tint in the haze above them. "See yonder! It is the sun which wins through. It will be here anon. Ah! said I not so?"

A sickly sun, no larger and far dimmer than the moon, had indeed shown its face, with cloud-wreaths smoking across it. As they looked up it waxed larger and brighter before their eyes — a yellow halo spread round it, one ray broke through, and then a funnel of golden light poured down upon them, widening swiftly at the base. A minute later they were sailing on a clear blue sea with an azure cloud-flecked sky above their heads, and such a scene beneath it as each of them would carry in his memory while memory remained.

They were in mid-channel. The white and green coasts of Picardy and of Kent lay clear upon either side of them. The wide channel stretched in front, deepening from the light blue beneath their prow to purple on the far sky-line. Behind them was that thick bank of cloud from which they had just burst. It lay like a gray wall from east to west, and through it were breaking the high shadowy forms of the ships of Spain. Four of them had already emerged, their red bodies, gilded sides and painted sails shining gloriously in the evening sun. Every instant a fresh golden spot grew out of the fog, which blazed like a star for an instant, and then surged forward to show itself as the brazen beak of the great red vessel which bore it. Looking back, the whole bank of cloud was broken by the widespread line of noble ships which were bursting through it. The Basilisk lay a mile or more in front of them and two miles clear of their wing. Five miles farther off, in the direction of the French coast, two other small ships were running down Channel. A cry of joy from Robert Knolles and a hearty prayer of gratitude to the saints from the old shipman hailed them as their missing comrades, the cog Thomas and the Grace Dieu.

But fair as was the view of their lost friends, and wondrous the appearance of the Spanish ships, it was not on those that the eyes of the men of the Basilisk were chiefly bent. A greater sight lay before them — a sight which brought them clustering to the forecastle with eager eyes and pointing fingers. The English fleet was coming forth from the Winchelsea Coast. Already before the fog lifted a fast galleass had brought the news down Channel that the Spanish were on the sea, and the King's fleet was under way. Now their long array of sails, gay with the coats and colours of the towns which had furnished them, lay bright against the Kentish coast from Dungeness Point to Rye. Nine and twenty ships were there from Southampton, Shoreham, Winchelsea, Hastings, Rye, Hythe, Romney, Folkestone, Deal, Dover and Sandwich. With their great sails slued round to catch the wind they ran out, whilst the Spanish, like the gallant foes that they have ever been, turned their heads landward to meet them. With flaunting banners and painted sails, blaring trumpets and clashing cymbals, the two glittering fleets, dipping and rising on the long Channel swell, drew slowly together.

King Edward had been lying all day in his great ship the Philippa, a mile out from the Camber Sands, waiting for the coming of the Spaniards. Above the huge sail which bore the royal arms flew the red cross of England. Along the bulwarks were shown the shields of forty knights, the flower of English chivalry, and as many pennons floated from the deck. The high ends of the ship glittered with the weapons of the men-at-arms, and the waist was crammed with the archers. From time to time a crash of nakers and blare of trumpets burst from the royal ship, and was answered by her great neighbours, the Lion on which the Black Prince flew his flag, the Christopher with the Earl of Suffolk, the Salle du Roi of Robert of Namur, and the Grace Marie of Sir Thomas Holland. Farther off lay the White Swan, bearing the arms of Mowbray, the Palmer of Deal, flying the Black Head of Audley, and the Kentish man under the Lord Beauchamp. The rest lay, anchored but ready, at the mouth of Winchelsea Creek.

The King sat upon a keg in the fore part of his ship, with little John of Richmond, who was no more than a schoolboy, perched upon his knee. Edward was clad in the black velvet jacket which was his favorite garb, and wore a small brown-beaver hat with a white plume at the side. A rich cloak of fur turned up with miniver drooped from his shoulders. Behind him were a score of his knights, brilliant in silks and sarcenets, some seated on an upturned boat and some swinging their legs from the bulwark.

In front stood John Chandos in a party-coloured jupon, one foot raised upon the anchor-stock, picking at the strings of his guitar and singing a song which he had learned at Marienburg when last he helped the Teutonic knights against the heathen. The King, his knights, and even the archers in the waist below them, laughed at the merry lilt and joined lustily in the chorus, while the men of the neighbouring ships leaned over the side to hearken to the deep chant rolling over the waters.

But there came a sudden interruption to the song. A sharp, harsh shout came down from the lookout stationed in the circular top at the end of the mast. “I spy a sail — two sails!” he cried.

John Bunce the King’s shipman shaded his eyes and stared at the long fog-bank which shrouded the northern channel. Chandos, with his fingers over the strings of his guitar, the King, the knights, all gazed in the same direction. Two small dark shapes had burst forth, and then after some minutes a third.

“Surely they are the Spaniards?” said the King.

“Nay, sire,” the seaman answered, “the Spaniards are greater ships and are painted red. I know not what these may be.”

“But I could hazard a guess!” cried Chandos. “Surely they are the three ships with my own men on their way to Brittany.”

“You have hit it, John,” said the King. “But look, I pray you! What in the name of the Virgin is that?”

Four brilliant stars of flashing light had shone out from different points of the cloud-bank. The next instant as many tall ships had swooped forth into the sunshine. A fierce shout rang from the King’s ship, and was taken up all down the line, until the whole coast from Dungeness to Winchelsea echoed the warlike greeting. The King sprang up with a joyous face.

“The game is afoot, my friends!” said he. “Dress, John! Dress, Walter! Quick all of you! Squires, bring the harness! Let each tend to himself, for the time is short.”

A strange sight it was to see these forty nobles tearing off their clothes and littering the deck with velvets and satins, whilst the squire of each, as busy as an ostler before a race, stooped and pulled and strained and riveted, fastening the bassinets, the legpieces, the front and the back plates, until the silken courtier had become the man of steel. When their work was finished, there stood a stern group of warriors where the light dandies had sung and jested round Sir John’s guitar. Below in orderly silence the archers were mustering under their officers and taking their allotted stations. A dozen had swarmed up to their hazardous post in the little tower in the tops.

“Bring wine, Nicholas!” cried the King. “Gentlemen, ere you close your visors I pray you to take a last rouse with me. You will be dry enough, I promise you, before your lips are free once more. To what shall we drink, John?”

“To the men of Spain,” said Chandos, his sharp face peering like a gaunt bird through the gap in his helmet. “May their hearts be stout and their spirits high this day!”

“Well said, John!” cried the King, and the knights laughed joyously as they drank. “Now, fair sirs, let each to his post! I am warden here on the forecastle. Do you, John, take charge of the afterguard. Walter, James, William, Fitzallan, Goldesborough, Reginald — you will stay with me! John, you may pick whom you will and the others will bide with the archers. Now bear straight at the center, master-shipman. Ere yonder sun sets we will bring a red ship back as a gift to our ladies, or never look upon a lady’s face again.”

The art of sailing into a wind had not yet been invented, nor was there any fore-and-aft canvas, save for small headsails with which a vessel could be turned. Hence the English fleet had to take a long slant down channel to meet their enemies; but as the Spaniards coming before the wind were equally anxious to engage there was the less delay. With stately pomp and dignity, the two great fleets approached.

It chanced that one fine carack had outstripped its consorts and came sweeping along, all red and gold, with a fringe of twinkling steel, a good half-mile before the fleet. Edward looked at her with a kindling eye, for indeed she was a noble sight with the blue water creaming under her gilded prow.

“This is a most worthy and debonair vessel, Master Bunce,” said he to the shipman beside him. “I would fain have a tilt with her. I pray you to hold us straight that we may bear her down.”

“If I hold her straight, then one or other must sink, and it may be both,” the seaman answered.

“I doubt not that with the help of our Lady we shall do our part,” said the King. “Hold her straight, master-shipman, as I have told you.”

Now the two vessels were within arrow flight, and the bolts from the crossbowmen pattered upon the English ship. These short thick devil’s darts were everywhere humming like great wasps through the air, crashing against the bulwarks, beating upon the deck, ringing loudly on the armor of the knights, or with a soft muffled thud sinking to the socket in a victim.

The bowmen along either side of the Philippa had stood motionless waiting for their orders, but now there was a sharp shout from their leader, and every string twanged together. The air was full of their harping, together with the swish of the arrows, the long-drawn keening of the bowmen and the short deep bark of the under-officers. “Steady, steady! Loose steady! Shoot wholly together! Twelve score paces! Ten score! Now eight! Shoot wholly together!” Their gruff shouts broke through the high shrill cry like the deep roar of a wave through the howl of the wind.

As the two great ships hurtled together the Spaniard turned away a few points so that the blow should be a glancing one. None the less it was terrific. A dozen men in the tops of the carack were balancing a huge stone with the intention of dropping it over on the English deck. With a scream of horror they saw the mast cracking beneath them. Over it went, slowly at first, then faster, until with a crash it came down on its side, sending them flying like stones from a sling far out into the sea. A swath of crushed bodies lay across the deck where the mast had fallen. But the English ship had not escaped unscathed. Her mast held, it is true, but the mighty shock not only stretched every man flat upon the deck, but had shaken a score of those who lined her sides into the sea. One bowman was hurled from the top, and his body fell with a dreadful crash at the very side of the prostrate King upon the forecastle. Many were thrown down with broken arms and legs from the high castles at either end into the waist of the ship. Worst of all, the seams had been opened by the crash and the water was gushing in at a dozen places.

But these were men of experience and of discipline, men who had already fought together by sea and by land, so that each knew his place and his duty. Those who could staggered to their feet and helped up a score or more of knights who were rolling and clashing in the scuppers unable to rise for the weight of their armor. The bowmen formed up as before. The seamen ran to the gaping seams with oakum and with tar. In ten minutes order had been restored and the Philippa, though shaken and weakened, was ready for battle once more. The King was glaring round him like a wounded boar.

“Grapple my ship with that,” he cried, pointing to the crippled Spaniard, “for I would have possession of her!”

But already the breeze had carried them past it, and a dozen Spanish ships were bearing down full upon them.

“We cannot win back to her, lest we show our flank to these others,” said the shipman.

“Let her go her way!” cried the knights. “You shall have better than her.”

“By Saint George! you speak the truth,” said the King, “for she is ours when we have time to take her. These also seem very worthy ships which are drawing up to us, and I pray you, master-shipman, that you will have a tilt with the nearest.”

A great carack was within a bowshot of them and crossing their bows. Bunce looked up at his mast, and he saw that already it was shaken and drooping. Another blow and it would be over the side and his ship a helpless log upon the water. He jammed his helm round therefore, and ran his ship alongside the Spaniard, throwing out his hooks and iron chains as he did so.

They, no less eager, grappled the Philippa both fore and aft, and the two vessels, linked tightly together, surged slowly over the long blue rollers. Over their bulwarks hung a cloud of men locked together in a desperate struggle, sometimes surging forward on to the deck of the Spaniard, sometimes recoiling back on to the King’s ship, reeling this way and that, with the swords flickering like silver flames above them, while the long-drawn cry of rage and agony swelled up like a wolf’s howl to the calm blue heaven above them.

But now ship after ship of the English had come up, each throwing its iron over the nearest Spaniard and striving to board her high red sides. Twenty ships were drifting in furious single combat after the manner of the Philippa, until the whole surface of the sea was covered with a succession of these desperate duels. The dismasted carack, which the King’s ship had left behind it, had been carried by the Earl of Suffolk’s Christopher, and the water was dotted with the heads of her crew. An English ship had been sunk by a huge stone discharged from an engine, and her men also were struggling in the waves, none having leisure to lend them a hand. A second English ship was caught between two of the Spanish vessels and overwhelmed by a rush of boarders so that not a man of her was left alive. On the other hand, Mowbray and Audley had each taken the caracks which were opposed to them, and the battle in the center, after swaying this way and that, was turning now in favor of the Islanders.

The Black Prince, with the Lion, the Grace Marie and four other ships had swept round to turn the Spanish flank; but the movement was seen, and the Spaniards had ten ships with which to meet it, one of them their great carack the St. Iago di Compostella. To this ship the Prince had attached his little cog and strove desperately to board her, but her side was so high and the defense so desperate that his men could never get beyond her bulwarks but were hurled down again and again with a clang and clash to the deck beneath. Her side bristled with crossbowmen, who shot straight down on to the packed waist of the Lion, so that the dead lay there in heaps. But the most dangerous of all was a swarthy black-bearded giant in the tops, who crouched so that none could see him, but rising every now and then with a huge lump of iron between his hands, hurled it down with such force that nothing would stop it. Again and again these ponderous bolts crashed through the deck and hurtled down into the bottom of the ship, starting the planks and shattering all that came in their way.

The Prince, clad in that dark armor which gave him his name, was directing the attack from the poop when the shipman rushed wildly up to him with fear on his face.

“Sire!” he cried. “The ship may not stand against these blows. A few more will sink her! Already the water floods inboard.”

The Prince looked up, and as he did so the shaggy beard showed once more and two brawny arms swept downward. A great slug, whizzing down, beat a gaping hole in the deck, and fell rending and riving into the hold below. The master-mariner tore his grizzled hair.

“Another leak!” he cried. “I pray to Saint Leonard to bear us up this day! Twenty of my shipmen are bailing with buckets, but the water rises on them fast. The vessel may not float another hour.”

The Prince had snatched a crossbow from one of his attendants and leveled it at the Spaniard’s tops. At the very instant when the seaman stood erect with a fresh bar in his hands, the bolt took him full in the face, and his body fell forward over the parapet, hanging there head downward. A howl of exultation burst from the English at the sight, answered by a wild roar of anger from the Spaniards. A seaman had run from the Lion’s hold and whispered in the ear of the shipman. He turned an ashen face upon the Prince.

“It is even as I say, sire. The ship is sinking beneath our feet!” he cried.

“The more need that we should gain another,” said he. “Sir Henry Stokes, Sir Thomas Stourton, William, John of Clifton, here lies our road! Advance my banner, Thomas de Mohun! On, and the day is ours!”

By a desperate scramble a dozen men, the Prince at their head, gained a footing on the edge of the Spaniard’s deck. Some slashed furiously to clear a space, others hung over, clutching the rail with one hand and pulling up their comrades from below. Every instant that they could hold their own their strength increased, till twenty had become thirty and thirty forty, when of a sudden the newcomers, still reaching forth to their comrades below, saw the deck beneath them reel and vanish in a swirling sheet of foam. The Prince’s ship had foundered.

A yell went up from the Spaniards as they turned furiously upon the small band who had reached their deck. Already the Prince and his men had carried the poop, and from that high station they beat back their swarming enemies. But crossbow darts pelted and thudded among their ranks till a third of their number were stretched upon the planks. Lined across the deck they could hardly keep an unbroken front to the leaping, surging crowd who pressed upon them. Another rush, or another after that, must assuredly break them, for these dark men of Spain, hardened by an endless struggle with the Moors, were fierce and stubborn fighters. But hark to this sudden roar upon the farther side of them —

“Saint George! Saint George! A Knolles to the rescue!” A small craft had run alongside and sixty men had swarmed on the deck of the St. Iago. Caught between two fires, the Spaniards wavered and broke. The fight became a massacre. Down from the poop sprang the Prince’s men. Up from the waist rushed the new-corners. There were five dreadful minutes of blows and screams and prayers with struggling figures clinging to the bulwarks and sullen splashes into the water below. Then it was over, and a crowd of weary, overstrained men leaned panting upon their weapons, or lay breathless and exhausted upon the deck of the captured carack.

The Prince had pulled up his visor and lowered his beaver. He smiled proudly as he gazed around him and wiped his streaming face. “Where is the shipman?” he asked. “Let him lead us against another ship.”

“Nay, sire, the shipman and all his men have sunk in the Lion,” said Thomas de Mohun, a young knight of the West Country, who carried the standard. “We have lost our ship and the half of our following. I fear that we can fight no more.”

“It matters the less since the day is already ours,” said the Prince, looking over the sea. “My noble father’s royal banner flies upon yonder Spaniard. Mowbray, Audley, Suffolk, Beauchamp, Namur, Tracey, Stafford, Arundel, each has his flag over a scarlet carack, even as mine floats over this. See, yonder squadron is already far beyond our reach. But surely we owe thanks to you who came at so perilous a moment to our aid. Your face I have seen, and your coat-armor also, young sir, though I cannot lay my tongue to your name. Let me know that I may thank you.”

He had turned to Nigel, who stood flushed and joyous at the head of the boarders from the Basilisk.

“I am but a Squire, sire, and can claim no thanks, for there is nothing that I have done. Here is our leader.”

The Prince’s eyes fell upon the shield charged with the Black Raven and the stern young face of him who bore it. “Sir Robert Knolles,” said he, “I had thought you were on your way to Brittany.”

“I was so, sire, when I had the fortune to see this battle as I passed.”

The Prince laughed. “It would indeed be to ask too much, Robert, that you should keep on your course when much honor was to be gathered so close to you. But now I pray you that you will come back with us to Winchelsea, for well I know that my father would fain thank you for what you have done this day.”

But Robert Knolles shook his head. “I have your father’s command, sire, and without his order I may not go against it. Our people are hard-pressed in Brittany, and it is not for me to linger on the way. I pray you, sire, if you must needs mention me to the King, to crave his pardon that I should have broken my journey thus.”

“You are right, Robert. God-speed you on your way! And I would that I were sailing under your banner, for I see clearly that you will take your people where they may worshipfully win worship. Perchance I also maybe in Brittany before the year is past.”

The Prince turned to the task of gathering his weary people together, and the Basilisks passed over the side once more and dropped down on to their own little ship. They poled her off from the captured Spaniard and set their sail with their prow for the south. Far ahead of them were their two consorts, beating towards them in the hope of giving help, while down Channel were a score of Spanish ships with a few of the English vessels hanging upon their skirts. The sun lay low on the water, and its level beams glowed upon the scarlet and gold of fourteen great caracks, each flying the cross of Saint George, and towering high above the cluster of English ships which, with brave waving of flags and blaring of music, were moving slowly towards the Kentish coast.

XVIII. HOW BLACK SIMON CLAIMED FORFEIT FROM THE KING OF SARK

For a day and a half the small fleet made good progress, but on the second morning, after sighting Cape de la Hague, there came a brisk land wind which blew them out to sea. It grew into a squall with rain and fog so that they were two more days beating back. Next morning they found themselves in a dangerous rock studded sea with a small island upon their starboard quarter. It was girdled with high granite cliffs of a reddish hue, and slopes of bright green grassland lay above them. A second smaller island lay beside it. Dennis the shipman shook his head as he looked.

"That is Brechou," said he, "and the larger one is the Island of Sark. If ever I be cast away, I pray the saints that I may not be upon yonder coast!"

Knolles gazed across at it. "You say well, master-shipman," said he. "It does appear to be a rocky and perilous spot."

"Nay, it is the rocky hearts of those who dwell upon it that I had in my mind," the old sailor answered. "We are well safe in three goodly vessels, but had we been here in a small craft I make no doubt that they would have already had their boats out against us."

"Who then are these people, and how do they live upon so small and windswept an island?" asked the soldier.

"They do not live from the island, fair sir, but from what they can gather upon the sea around it. They are broken folk from all countries, justice-fliers, prison-breakers, reavers, escaped bondsmen, murderers and staff-strikers who have made their way to this outland place and hold it against all comers. There is one here who could tell you of them and of their ways, for he was long time prisoner amongst them." The seaman pointed to Black Simon, the dark man from Norwich, who was leaning against the side lost in moody thought and staring with a brooding eye at the distant shore.

"How now, fellow?" asked Knolles. "What is this I hear? Is it indeed sooth that you have been a captive upon this island?"

"It is true, fair sir. For eight months I have been servant to the man whom they call their King. His name is La Muette, and he comes from Jersey nor is there under God's sky a man whom I have more desire to see."

"Has he then mishandled you?"

Black Simon gave a wry smile and pulled off his jerkin. His lean sinewy back was waled and puckered with white scars. "He has left his sign of hand upon me," said he. "He swore that he would break me to his will, and thus he tried to do it. But most I desire to see him because he hath lost a wager to me and I would fain be paid."

"This is a strange saying," said Knolles. "What is this wager, and why should he pay you?"

"It is but a small matter," Simon answered; "but I am a poor man and the payment would be welcome. Should it have chanced that we stopped at this island I should have craved your leave that I go ashore and ask for that which I have fairly won."

Sir Robert Knolles laughed. "This business tickleth my fancy," said he. "As to stopping at the island, this shipman tells me that we must needs wait a day and a night, for that we have strained our planks. But if you should go ashore, how will you be sure that you will be free to depart, or that you will see this King of whom you speak?"

Black Simon's dark face was shining with a fierce joy. "Fair sir, I will ever be your debtor if you will let me go. Concerning what you ask, I know this island even as I know the streets of Norwich, as you may well believe seeing that it is but a small place and I upon it for near a year. Should I land after dark, I could win my way to the King's house, and if he be not dead or distraught with drink I could have speech with him alone, for I know his ways and his hours and how he may be found. I would ask only that Aylward the archer may go with me, that I may have one friend at my side if things should chance to go awry."

Knolles thought awhile. "It is much that you ask," said he, "for by God's truth I reckon that you and this friend of yours are two of my men whom I would be least ready to lose. I have seen you both at grips with the Spaniards and I know you. But I trust you, and if we must indeed stop at this accursed place, then you may do as you will. If you have deceived me, or if this is a trick by which you design to leave me, then God be your friend when next we meet, for man will be of small avail!"

It proved that not only the seams had to be calked but that the cog Thomas was out of fresh water. The ships moored therefore near the Isle of Brechou, where springs were to be found. There were no people upon this little patch, but over on the farther island many figures could be seen watching them, and the twinkle of steel from among them showed that they were armed men. One boat had ventured forth and taken a good look at them, but had hurried back with the warning that they were too strong to be touched.

Black Simon found Aylward seated under the poop with his back, against Bartholomew the bowyer. He was whistling merrily as he carved a girl's face upon the horn of his bow.

"My friend," said Simon, "will you come ashore to-night — for I have need of your help?"

Aylward crowed lustily. "Will I come, Simon? By my hilt, I shall be right glad to put my foot on the good brown earth once more. All my life I have trod it, and yet I would never have learned its worth had I not journeyed in these cursed ships. We will go on shore together, Simon, and we will seek out the women, if there be any there, for it seems a long year since I heard their gentle voices, and my eyes are weary of such faces as Bartholomew's or thine."

Simon's grim features relaxed into a smile. "The only face that you will see ashore, Samkin, will bring you small comfort," said he, "and I warn you that this is no easy errand, but one which may be neither sweet nor fair, for if these people take us our end will be a cruel one."

"By my hilt," said Aylward, "I am with you, gossip, wherever you may go! Say no more, therefore, for I am weary of living like a cony in a hole, and I shall be right glad to stand by you in your venture."

That night, two hours after dark, a small boat put forth from the Basilisk. It contained Simon, Aylward and two seamen. The soldiers carried their swords, and Black Simon bore a brown biscuit-bag over his shoulder. Under his direction the rowers skirted the dangerous surf which beat against the cliffs until they came to a spot where an outlying reef formed a breakwater. Within was a belt of calm water and a shallow cover with a sloping beach. Here the boat was dragged up and the seamen were ordered to wait, while Simon and Aylward started on their errand.

With the assured air of a man who knows exactly where he is and whither he is going, the man-at-arms began to clamber up a narrow fern-lined cleft among the rocks. It was no easy ascent in the darkness, but Simon climbed on like an old dog hot upon a scent, and the panting Aylward struggled after as best he might. At last they were at the summit and the archer threw himself down upon the grass.

"Nay, Simon, I have not enough breath to blow out a candle," said he. "Stint your haste for a minute, since we have a long night before us. Surely this man is a friend indeed, if you hasten so to see him."

"Such a friend," Simon answered, "that I have often dreamed of our next meeting. Now before that moon has set it will have come."

"Had it been a wench I could have understood it," said Aylward. "By these ten finger-bones, if Mary of the mill or little Kate of Compton had waited me on the brow of this cliff, I should have come up it and never known it was there. But surely I see houses and hear voices over yonder in the shadow?"

"It is their town," whispered Simon. "There are a hundred as bloody-minded cutthroats as are to be found in Christendom beneath those roofs. Hark to that!"

A fierce burst of laughter came out of the darkness, followed by a long cry of pain.

"All-hallows be with us!" cried Aylward. "What is that?"

"As like as not some poor devil has fallen into their clutches, even as I did. Come this way, Samkin, for there is a peat-cutting where we may hide. Aye, here it is, but deeper and broader than of old. Now follow me close, for if we keep within it we shall find ourselves a stone cast off the King's house."

Together they crept along the dark cutting. Suddenly Simon seized Aylward by the shoulder and pushed him into the shadow of the bank. Crouching in the darkness, they heard footsteps and voices upon the farther side of the trench. Two men sauntered along it and stopped almost at the very spot where the comrades were lying. Aylward could see their dark figures outlined against the starry sky.

"Why should you scold, Jacques," said one of them, speaking a strange half-French, half-English lingo. "Le diable t'emporte for a grumbling rascal. You won a woman and I got nothing. What more would you have?"

"You will have your chance off the next ship, mon garcon, but mine is passed. A woman, it is true — an old peasant out of the fields, with a face as yellow as a kite's claw. But Gaston, who threw a nine against my eight, got as fair a little Normandy lass as ever your eyes have seen. Curse the dice, I say! And as to my woman, I will sell her to you for a firkin of Gascony."

"I have no wine to spare, but I will give you a keg of apples," said the other. "I had it out of the Peter and Paul, the Falmouth boat that struck in Creux Bay."

"Well, well your apples may be the worse for keeping, but so is old Marie, and we can cry quits on that. Come round and drink a cup over the bargain."

They shuffled onward in the darkness.

"Heard you ever such villainy?" cried Aylward, breathing fierce and hard. "Did you hear them, Simon? A woman for a keg of apples! And my heart's root is sad for the other one, the girl of Normandy. Surely we can land to-morrow and burn all these water-rats out of their nest."

"Nay, Sir Robert will not waste time or strength ere he reach Brittany."

"Sure I am that if my little master Squire Loring had the handling of it, every woman on this island would be free ere another day had passed."

"I doubt it not," said Simon. "He is one who makes an idol of woman, after the manner of those crazy knight errants. But Sir Robert is a true soldier and hath only his purpose in view."

"Simon," said Aylward, "the light is not overgood and the place is cramped for sword-play, but if you will step out into the open I will teach you whether my master is a true soldier or not."

"Tut, man! you are as foolish yourself," said Simon. "Here we are with our work in hand, and yet you must needs fall out with me on our way to it. I say nothing against your master save that he hath the way of his fellows who follow dreams and fancies. But Knolles looks neither to right nor left and walks forward to his mark. Now, let us on, for the time passes."

"Simon, your words are neither good nor fair. When we are back on shipboard we will speak further of this matter. Now lead on, I pray you, and let us see some more of this ten-devil island."

For half a mile Simon led the way until they came to a large house which stood by itself. Peering at it from the edge of the cutting, Aylward could see that it was made from the wreckage of many vessels, for at each corner a prow was thrust out. Lights blazed within, and there came the sound of a strong voice singing a gay song which was taken up by a dozen others in the chorus.

"All is well, lad!" whispered Simon in great delight. "That is the voice of the King. It is the very song he used to sing. 'Les deux filles de Pierre.'

‘Fore God, my back tingles at the very sound of it. Here we will wait until his company take their leave.”

Hour after hour they crouched in the peat-cutting, listening to the noisy songs of the revelers within, some French, some English, and all growing fouler and less articulate as the night wore on. Once a quarrel broke out and the clamor was like a cageful of wild beasts at feeding-time. Then a health was drunk and there was much stamping and cheering.

Only once was the long vigil broken. A woman came forth from the house and walked up and down, with her face sunk upon her breast. She was tall and slender, but her features could not be seen for a wimple over her head. Weary sadness could be read in her bowed back and dragging steps. Once only they saw her throw her two hands up to Heaven as one who is beyond human aid. Then she passed slowly into the house again. A moment later the door of the hall was flung open, and a shouting stumbling throng came crowding forth, with whoop and yell, into the silent night. Linking arms and striking up a chorus, they marched past the peat-cutting, their voices dwindling slowly away as they made for their homes.

“Now, Samkin, now!” cried Simon, and jumping out from the hiding-place he made for the door. It had not yet been fastened. The two comrades sprang inside. Then Simon drew the bolts so that none might interrupt them.

A long table littered with flagons and beakers lay before them. It was lit up by a line of torches, which flickered and smoked in their iron sconces. At the farther end a solitary man was seated. His head rested upon his two hands, as if he were befuddled with wine, but at the harsh sound of the snapping bolts he raised his face and looked angrily around him. It was a strange powerful head, tawny and shaggy like a lion’s, with a tangled beard and a large harsh face, bloated and blotched with vice. He laughed as the newcomers entered, thinking that two of his boon companions had returned to finish a flagon. Then he stared hard and he passed his hand over his eyes like one who thinks he may be dreaming.

“Mon Dieu!” he cried. “Who are you and whence come you at this hour of the night? Is this the way to break into our royal presence?”

Simon approached up one side of the table and Aylward up the other. When they were close to the King, the man-at-arms plucked a torch from its socket and held it to his own face. The King staggered back with a cry, as he gazed at that grim visage.

"Le diable noir!" he cried. "Simon, the Englishman! What make you here?"

Simon put his hand upon his shoulder. "Sit here!" said he, and he forced the King into his seat. "Do you sit on the farther side of him, Aylward. We make a merry group, do we not? Often have I served at this table, but never did I hope to drink at it. Fill your cup, Samkin, and pass the flagon."

The King looked from one to the other with terror in his bloodshot eyes. "What would you do?" he asked. "Are you mad, that you should come here. One shout and you are at my mercy."

"Nay, my friend, I have lived too long in your house not to know the ways of it. No man-servant ever slept beneath your roof, for you feared lest your throat would be cut in the night-time. You may shout and shout, if it so please you. It chanced that I was passing on my way from England in those ships which lie off La Brechou, and I thought I would come in and have speech with you."

"Indeed, Simon, I am right glad to see you," said the King, cringing away from the fierce eyes of the soldier. "We were good friends in the past, were we not, and I cannot call to mind that I have ever done you injury. When you made your way to England by swimming to the Levantine there was none more glad in heart than I!"

"If I cared to doff my doublet I could show you the marks of what your friendship has done for me in the past," said Simon. "It is printed on my back as clearly as on my memory. Why, you foul dog, there are the very rings upon the wall to which my hands were fastened, and there the stains upon the boards on which my blood has dripped! Is it not so, you king of butchers?"

The pirate chief turned whiter still. "It may be that life here was somewhat rough, Simon, but if I have wronged you in anyway, I will surely make amends. What do you ask?"

"I ask only one thing, and I have come hither that I may get it. It is that you pay me forfeit for that you have lost your wager."

"My wager, Simon! I call to mind no wager."

"But I will call it to your mind, and then I will take my payment. Often have you sworn that you would break my courage. 'By my head!' you have cried to me. 'You will crawl at my feet!' and again: 'I will wager my head that I will tame you!' Yes, yes, a score of times you have said so. In my heart, as I listened, I have taken up your gage. And now, dog, you have lost and I am here to claim the forfeit."

His long heavy sword flew from its sheath. The King, with a howl of despair, flung his arms round him, and they rolled together under the table. Aylward sat with a ghastly face, and his toes curled with horror at the sight, for he was still new to scenes of strife and his blood was too cold for such a deed. When Simon rose he tossed something into his bag and sheathed his bloody sword.

"Come, Samkin, our work is well done," said he.

"By my hilt, if I had known what it was I would have been less ready to come with you," said the archer. "Could you not have clapped a sword in his fist and let him take his chance in the hall?"

"Nay, Samkin, if you had such memories as I, you would have wished that he should die like a sheep and not like a man. What chance did he give me when he had the power? And why should I treat him better? But, Holy Virgin, what have we here?"

At the farther end of the table a woman was standing. An open door behind her showed that she had come from the inner room of the house. By her tall figure the comrades knew that she was the same that they had already seen. Her face had once been fair, but now was white and haggard with wild dark eyes full of a hopeless terror and despair. Slowly she paced up the room, her gaze fixed not upon the comrades, but upon the dreadful thing beneath the table. Then as she stooped and was sure she burst into loud laughter and clapped her hands.

"Who shall say there is no God?" she cried. "Who shall say that prayer is unavailing? Great sir, brave sir, let me kiss that conquering hand!"

"Nay, nay, dame, stand back! Well, if you must needs have one of them, take this which is the clean one."

"It is the other I crave — that which is red with his blood! Oh! joyful night when my lips have been wet with it! Now I can die in peace!"

"We must go, Aylward," said Simon. "In another hour the dawn will have broken. In daytime a rat could not cross this island and pass unseen. Come, man, and at once!"

But Aylward was at the woman's side. "Come with us, fair dame," said he. "Surely we can, at least, take you from this island, and no such change can be for the worse."

"Nay," said she, "the saints in Heaven cannot help me now until they take me to my rest. There is no place for me in the world beyond, and all my friends were slain on the day I was taken. Leave me, brave men, and let me care for myself. Already it lightens in the east, and black will be your fate if you are taken. Go, and may the blessing of one who was once a holy nun go with you and guard you from danger!"

Sir Robert Knolles was pacing the deck in the early morning, when he heard the sound of oars, and there were his two night-birds climbing up the side.

"So, fellow," said he, "have you had speech with the King of Sark?"

"Fair sir, I have seen him."

"And he has paid his forfeit?"

"He has paid it, sir!"

Knolles looked with curiosity at the bag which Simon bore. "What carry you there?" he asked.

"The stake that he has lost."

"What was it then? A goblet? A silver plate?"

For answer Simon opened his bag and shook it on the deck.

Sir Robert turned away with a whistle. "'Fore God!" said he, "it is in my mind that I carry some hard men with me to Brittany."

XIX. HOW A SQUIRE OF ENGLAND MET A SQUIRE OF FRANCE

Sir Robert Knolles with his little fleet had sighted the Breton coast near Cancale; they had rounded the Point du Grouin, and finally had sailed past the port of St. Malo and down the long narrow estuary of the Rance until they were close to the old walled city of Dinan, which was held by that Montfort faction whose cause the English had espoused. Here the horses had been disembarked, the stores were unloaded, and the whole force encamped outside the city, whilst the leaders waited for news as to the present state of affairs, and where there was most hope of honor and profit.

The whole of France was feeling the effects of that war with England which had already lasted some ten years, but no Province was in so dreadful a condition as this unhappy land of Brittany. In Normandy or Picardy the inroads of the English were periodical with intervals of rest between; but Brittany was torn asunder by constant civil war apart from the grapple of the two great combatants, so that there was no surcease of her sufferings. The struggle had begun in 1341 through the rival claims of Montfort and of Blois to the vacant dukedom. England had taken the part of Montfort, France that of Blois. Neither faction was strong enough to destroy the other, and so after ten years of continual fighting, history recorded a long ineffectual list of surprises and ambushes, of raids and skirmishes, of towns taken and retaken, of alternate victory and defeat, in which neither party could claim a supremacy. It mattered nothing that Montfort and Blois had both disappeared from the scene, the one dead and the other taken by the English. Their wives caught up the swords which had dropped from the hands of their lords, and the long struggle went on even more savagely than before.

In the south and east the Blois faction held the country, and Nantes the capital was garrisoned and occupied by a strong French army. In the north and west the Montfort party prevailed, for the island kingdom was at their back and always fresh sails broke the northern sky-line bearing adventurers from over the channel.

Between these two there lay a broad zone comprising all the center of the country which was a land of blood and violence, where no law prevailed save that of the sword. From end to end it was dotted with castles, some held for one side, some for the other, and many mere robber strongholds, the scenes of gross and monstrous deeds, whose brute owners, knowing that they could never be called to account, made war upon all mankind, and wrung with rack and with flame the last shilling from all who fell into their savage hands. The fields had long been untilled. Commerce was dead. From Rennes in the east to Hennebon in the west, and from Dinan in the north to Nantes in the south, there was no spot where a man's life or a woman's honor was safe. Such was the land, full of darkness and blood, the saddest, blackest spot in Christendom, into which Knolles and his men were now advancing.

But there was no sadness in the young heart of Nigel, as he rode by the side of Knolles at the head of a clump of spears, nor did it seem to him that Fate had led him into an unduly arduous path. On the contrary, he blessed the good fortune which had sent him into so delightful a country, and it seemed to him as he listened to dreadful stories of robber barons, and looked round at the black scars of war which lay branded upon the fair faces of the hills, that no hero of romances or trouveur had ever journeyed through such a land of promise, with so fair a chance of knightly venture and honorable advancement.

The Red Ferret was one deed toward his vow. Surely a second, and perhaps a better, was to be found somewhere upon this glorious countryside. He had borne himself as the others had in the sea-fight, and could not count it to his credit where he had done no more than mere duty. Something beyond this was needed for such a deed as could be laid at the feet of the Lady Mary. But surely it was to be found here in fermenting war-distracted Brittany. Then with two done it would be strange if he could not find occasion for that third one, which would complete his service and set him free to look her in the face once more. With the great yellow horse curveting beneath him, his Guildford armor gleaming in the sun, his sword clanking against his stirrup-iron, and his father's tough ash-spear in his hand, he rode with a light heart and a smiling face, looking eagerly to right and to left for any chance which his good Fate might send.

The road from Dinan to Caulnes, along which the small army was moving, rose and dipped over undulating ground, with a bare marshy plain upon the left where the river Rance ran down to the sea, while upon the right lay a wooded country with a few wretched villages, so poor and sordid that they had nothing with which to tempt the spoiler. The peasants had left them at the first twinkle of a steel cap, and lurked at the edges of the woods, ready in an instant to dive into those secret recesses known only to themselves. These creatures suffered sorely at the hands of both parties, but when the chance came they revenged their wrongs on either in a savage way which brought fresh brutalities upon their heads.

The new-comers soon had a chance of seeing to what lengths they would go, for in the roadway near to Caulnes they came upon an English man-at-arms who had been waylaid and slain by them. How they had overcome him could not be told, but how they had slain him within his armor was horribly apparent, for they had carried such a rock as eight men could lift, and had dropped it upon him as he lay, so that he was spread out in his shattered case like a crab beneath a stone. Many a fist was shaken at the distant woods and many a curse hurled at those who haunted them, as the column of scowling soldiers passed the murdered man, whose badge of the Molene cross showed him to have been a follower of that House of Bentley, whose head, Sir Walter, was at that time leader of the British forces in the country.

Sir Robert Knolles had served in Brittany before, and he marshaled his men on the march with the skill and caution of the veteran soldier, the man who leaves as little as possible to chance, having too steadfast a mind to heed the fool who may think him overcautious. He had recruited a number of bowmen and men-at-arms at Dinan; so that his following was now close upon five hundred men. In front under his own leadership were fifty mounted lancers, fully armed and ready for any sudden attack. Behind them on foot came the archers, and a second body of mounted men closed up the rear. Out upon either flank moved small bodies of cavalry, and a dozen scouts, spread fanwise, probed every gorge and dingle in front of the column. So for three days he moved slowly down the Southern Road.

Sir Thomas Percy and Sir James Astley had ridden to the head of the column, and Knolles conferred with them as they marched concerning the plan of their campaign. Percy and Astley were young and hot-headed with wild visions of dashing deeds and knight errantry, but Knolles with cold, clear brain and purpose of iron held ever his object in view.

“By the holy Dunstan and all the saints of Lindisfarne!” cried the fiery Borderer, “it goes to my heart to ride forward when there are such honorable chances on either side of us. Have I not heard that the French are at Evran beyond the river, and is it not sooth that yonder castle, the towers of which I see above the woods, is in the hands of a traitor, who is false to his liege lord of Montford? There is little profit to be gained upon this road, for the folk seem to have no heart for war. Had we ventured as far over the marches of Scotland as we now are in Brittany, we should not have lacked some honorable venture or chance of winning worship.”

“You say truth, Thomas,” cried Astley, a red-faced and choleric young man. “It is well certain that the French will not come to us, and surely it is the more needful that we go to them. In sooth, any soldier who sees us would smile that we should creep for three days along this road as though a thousand dangers lay before us, when we have but poor broken peasants to deal with.”

But Robert Knolles shook his head. “We know not what are in these woods, or behind these hills,” said he, “and when I know nothing it is my wont to prepare for the worst which may befall. It is but prudence so to do.”

“Your enemies might find some harsher name for it,” said Astley with a sneer. “Nay, you need not think to scare me by glaring at me, Sir Robert, nor will your ill-pleasure change my thoughts. I have faced fiercer eyes than thine, and I have not feared.”

“Your speech, Sir James, is neither courteous nor good,” said Knolles, “and if I were a free man I would cram your words down your throat with the point of my dagger. But I am here to lead these men in profit and honor, not to quarrel with every fool who has not the wit to understand how soldiers should be led. Can you not see that if I make attempts here and there, as you would have me do, I shall have weakened my strength before I come to that part where it can best be spent?”

“And where is that?” asked Percy. “‘Fore God, Astley, it is in my mind that we ride with one who knows more of war than you or I, and that we would be wise to be guided by his rede. Tell us then what is in your mind.”

“Thirty miles from here,” said Knolles, “there is, as I am told, a fortalice named Ploermel, and within it is one Bambro’, an Englishman, with a good garrison. No great distance from him is the Castle of Josselin where dwells Robert of Beaumanoir with a great following of Bretons. It is my intention that we should join Bambro’, and so be in such strength that we may throw ourselves upon Josselin, and by taking it become the masters of all mid-Brittany, and able to make head against the Frenchmen in the south."

"Indeed I think that you can do no better," said Percy heartily, "and I swear to you on jeopardy of my soul that I will stand by you in the matter! I doubt not that when we come deep into their land they will draw together and do what they may to make head against us; but up to now I swear by all the saints of Lindisfarne that I should have seen more war in a summer's day in Liddesdale or at the Forest of Jedburgh than any that Brittany has shown us. But see, yonder horsemen are riding in. They are our own hobblers, are they not? And who are these who are lashed to their stirrups?"

A small troop of mounted bowmen had ridden out of an oak grove upon the left of the road. They trotted up to where the three knights had halted. Two wretched peasants whose wrists had been tied to their leathers came leaping and straining beside the horses in their effort not to be dragged off their feet. One was a tall, gaunt, yellow-haired man, the other short and swarthy, but both so crusted with dirt, so matted and tangled and ragged, that they were more like beasts of the wood than human beings.

"What is this?" asked Knolles. "Have I not ordered you to leave the countryfolk at peace?"

The leader of the archers, old Wat of Carlisle, held up a sword, a girdle and a dagger. "If it please you, fair sir," said he, "I saw the glint of these, and I thought them no fit tools for hands which were made for the spade and the plow. But when we had ridden them down and taken them, there was the Bentley cross upon each, and we knew that they had belonged to yonder dead Englishman upon the road. Surely then, these are two of the villains who have slain him, and it is right that we do justice upon them."

Sure enough, upon sword, girdle and dagger shone the silver Molene cross which had gleamed on the dead man's armor. Knolles looked at them and then at the prisoners with a face of stone. At the sight of those fell eyes they had dropped with inarticulate howls upon their knees, screaming out their protests in a tongue which none could understand.

"We must have the roads safe for wandering Englishmen," said Knolles. "These men must surely die. Hang them to yonder tree."

He pointed to a live-oak by the roadside, and rode onward upon his way in converse with his fellow-knights. But the old bowman had ridden after him.

“If it please you, Sir Robert, the bowmen would fain put these men to death in their own fashion,” said he.

“So that they die, I care not how,” Knolles answered carelessly, and looked back no more.

Human life was cheap in those stern days when the footmen of a stricken army or the crew of a captured ship were slain without any question or thought of mercy by the victors. War was a rude game with death for the stake, and the forfeit was always claimed on the one side and paid on the other without doubt or hesitation. Only the knight might be spared, since his ransom made him worth more alive than dead. To men trained in such a school, with death forever hanging over their own heads, it may be well believed that the slaying of two peasant murderers was a small matter.

And yet there was special reason why upon this occasion the bowmen wished to keep the deed in their own hands. Ever since their dispute aboard the Basilisk, there had been ill-feeling betwixt Bartholomew the old bald-headed bowyer, and long Ned Widdington the Dalesman, which had ended in a conflict at Dinan, in which not only they, but a dozen of their friends had been laid upon the cobble-stones. The dispute raged round their respective knowledge and skill with the bow, and now some quick wit amongst the soldiers had suggested a grim fashion in which it should be put to the proof, once for all, which could draw the surer shaft.

A thick wood lay two hundred paces from the road upon which the archers stood. A stretch of smooth grassy sward lay between. The two peasants were led out fifty yards from the road, with their faces toward the wood. There they stood, held on a leash, and casting many a wondering frightened glance over their shoulders at the preparations which were being made behind them.

Old Bartholomew and the big Yorkshireman had stepped out of the ranks and stood side by side each with his strung bow in his left hand and a single arrow in his right. With care they had drawn on and greased their shooting-gloves and fastened their bracers. They plucked and cast up a few blades of grass to measure the wind, examined every small point of their tackle, turned their sides to the mark, and Widened their feet in a firmer stance. From all sides came chaff and counsel from their comrades.

“A three-quarter wind, bowyer!” cried one. “Aim a body’s breadth to the right!”

"But not thy body's breadth, bowyer," laughed another. "Else may you be overwide."

"Nay, this wind will scarce turn a well-drawn shaft," said a third. "Shoot dead upon him and you will be clap in the clout."

"Steady, Ned, for the good name of the Dales," cried a Yorkshireman. "Loose easy and pluck not, or I am five crowns the poorer man."

"A week's pay on Bartholomew!" shouted another. "Now, old fat-pate, fail me not!"

"Enough, enough! Stint your talk!" cried the old bowman, Wat of Carlisle. "Were your shafts as quick as your tongues there would be no facing you. Do you shoot upon the little one, Bartholomew, and you, Ned, upon the other. Give them law until I cry the word, then loose in your own fashion and at your own time. Are you ready! Hola, there, Hayward, Beddington, let them run!"

The leashes were torn away, and the two men, stooping their heads, ran madly for the shelter of the wood amid such a howl from the archers as beaters may give when the hare starts from its form. The two bowmen, each with his arrow drawn to the pile, stood like russet statues, menacing, motionless, their eager eyes fixed upon the fugitives, their bow-staves rising slowly as the distance between them lengthened. The Bretons were half-way to the wood, and still Old Wat was silent. It may have been mercy or it may have been mischief, but at least the chase should have a fair chance of life. At six score paces he turned his grizzled head at last.

"Loose!" he cried.

At the word the Yorkshireman's bow-string twanged. It was not for nothing that he had earned the name of being one of the deadliest archers of the North and had twice borne away the silver arrow of Selby. Swift and true flew the fatal shaft and buried itself to the feather in the curved back of the long yellow-haired peasant. Without a sound he fell upon his face and lay stone-dead upon the grass, the one short white plume between his dark shoulders to mark where Death had smote him.

The Yorkshireman threw his bowstave into the air and danced in triumph, whilst his comrades roared their fierce delight in a shout of applause, which changed suddenly into a tempest of hooting and of laughter.

The smaller peasant, more cunning, than his comrade, had run more slowly, but with many a backward glance. He had marked his companion's fate and had waited with keen eyes until he saw the bowyer loose his string.

At the moment he had thrown himself flat upon the grass and had heard the arrow scream above him, — and seen it quiver in the turf beyond. Instantly he had sprung to his feet again and amid wild whoops and halloos from the bowmen had made for the shelter of the wood. Now he had reached it, and ten score good paces separated him from the nearest of his persecutors. Surely they could not reach him here. With the tangled brushwood behind him he was as safe as a rabbit at the mouth of his burrow. In the joy of his heart he must needs dance in derision and snap his fingers at the foolish men who had let him slip. He threw back his head, howling at them like a dog, and at the instant an arrow struck him full in the throat and laid him dead among the bracken. There was a hush of surprised silence and then a loud cheer burst from the archers.

“By the rood of Beverley!” cried old Wat, “I have not seen a finer roving shaft this many a year. In my own best day I could not have bettered it. Which of you loosed it?”

“It was Aylward of Tilford — Samkin Aylward,” cried a score of voices, and the bowman, flushed at his own fame, was pushed to the front.

“Indeed I would that it had been at a nobler mark,” said he. “He might have gone free for me, but I could not keep my fingers from the string when he turned to jeer at us.”

“I see well that you are indeed a master-bowman,” said old Wat, “and it is comfort to my soul to think that if I fall I leave such a man behind me to hold high the credit of our craft. Now gather your shafts and on, for Sir Robert awaits us on the brow of the hill.”

All day Knolles and his men marched through the same wild and deserted country, inhabited only by these furtive creatures, hares to the strong and wolves to the weak, who hovered in the shadows of the wood. Ever and anon upon the tops of the hills they caught a glimpse of horsemen who watched them from a distance and vanished when approached. Sometimes bells rang an alarm from villages amongst the hills, and twice they passed castles which drew up their drawbridges at their approach and lined their walls with hooting soldiers as they passed. The Englishmen gathered a few oxen and sheep from the pastures of each, but Knolles had no mind to break his strength upon stone walls, and so he went upon his way.

Once at St. Meen they passed a great nunnery, girt with a high gray lichened wall, an oasis of peace in this desert of war, the black-robed nuns basking in the sun or working in the gardens, with the strong gentle hand of

Holy Church shielding them ever from evil. The archers doffed caps to them as they passed, for the boldest and roughest dared not cross that line guarded by the dire ban and blight which was the one only force in the whole steel-ridden earth which could stand betwixt the weakling and the spoiler.

The little army halted at St. Meen and cooked its midday meal. It had gathered into its ranks again and was about to start, when Knolles drew Nigel to one side.

"Nigel," said he, "it seems to me that I have seldom set eyes upon a horse which hath more power and promise of speed than this great beast of thine."

"It is indeed a noble steed, fair sir," said Nigel. Betwixt him and his young leader there had sprung up great affection and respect since the day that they set foot in the Basilisk.

"It will be the better if you stretch his limbs, for he grows overheavy," said the knight. "Now mark me, Nigel! Yonder betwixt the ash-tree and the red rock what do you see on the side of the far hill?"

"There is a white dot upon it. Surely it is a horse."

"I have marked it all morning, Nigel. This horseman has kept ever upon our flank, spying upon us or waiting to make some attempt upon us. Now I should be right glad to have a prisoner, for it is my wish to know something of this country-side, and these peasants can speak neither French nor English. I would have you linger here in hiding when we go forward. This man will still follow us. When he does so, yonder wood will lie betwixt you and him. Do you ride round it and come upon him from behind. There is broad plain upon his left, and we will cut him off upon the right. If your horse be indeed the swifter, then you cannot fail to take him."

Nigel had already sprung down and was tightening Pommers' girth.

"Nay, there is no need of haste, for you cannot start until we are two miles upon our way. And above all I pray you, Nigel, none of your knight-errant ways. It is this roan that I want, him and the news that he can bring me. Think little of your own advancement and much of the needs of the army. When you get him, ride westwards upon the sun, and you cannot fail to find the road."

Nigel waited with Pommers under the shadow of the nunnery wall, horse and man chafing with impatience, whilst above them six round-eyed innocent nun-faces looked down on this strange and disturbing vision from the outer world. At last the long column wound itself out of sight round a curve of the road, and the white dot was gone from the bare green flank of the hill. Nigel bowed his steel head to the nuns, gave his bridle a shake, and bounded off upon his welcome mission. The round-eyed sisters saw yellow horse and twinkling man sweep round the skirt of the wood, caught a last glimmer of him through the tree-trunks, and paced slowly back to their pruning and their planting, their minds filled with the beauty and the terror of that outer world beyond the high gray lichen-mottled wall.

Everything fell out even as Knolles had planned. As Nigel rounded the oak forest, there upon the farther side of it, with only good greensward between, was the rider upon the white horse. Already he was so near that Nigel could see him clearly, a young cavalier, proud in his bearing, clad in purple silk tunic with a red curling feather in his low black cap. He wore no armor, but his sword gleamed at his side. He rode easily and carelessly, as one who cares for no man, and his eyes were forever fixed upon the English soldiers on the road. So intent was he upon them that he gave no thought to his own safety, and it was only when the low thunder of the great horse’s hoofs broke upon his ears that he turned in his saddle, looked very coolly and steadily at Nigel, then gave his own bridle a shake and darted off, swift as a hawk, toward the hills upon the left.

Pommers had met his match that day. The white horse, two parts Arab, bore the lighter weight, since Nigel was clad in full armor. For five miles over the open neither gained a hundred yards upon the other. They had topped the hill and flew down the farther side, the stranger continually turning in his saddle to have a look at his pursuer. There was no panic in his flight, but rather the amused rivalry with which a good horseman who is proud of his mount contends with one who has challenged him. Below the hill was a marshy plain, studded with great Druidic stones, some prostrate, some erect, some bearing others across their tops like the huge doors of some vanished building. A path ran through the marsh with green rushes as a danger signal on either side of it. Across this path many of the huge stones were lying, but the white horse cleared them in its stride and Pommers followed close upon his heels. Then came a mile of soft ground where the lighter weight again drew to the front, but it ended in a dry upland and once again Nigel gained. A sunken road crossed it, but the white cleared it with a mighty spring, and again the yellow followed. Two small hills lay before them with a narrow gorge of deep bushes between. Nigel saw the white horse bounding chest-deep amid the underwood.

Next instant its hind legs were high in the air, and the rider had been shot from its back. A howl of triumph rose from amidst the bushes, and a dozen wild figures armed with club and with spear, rushed upon the prostrate man.

“A moi, Anglais, a moi!” cried a voice, and Nigel saw the young rider stagger to his feet, strike round him with his sword, and then fall once more before the rush of his assailants.

There was a comradeship among men of gentle blood and bearing which banded them together against all ruffianly or unchivalrous attack. These rude fellows were no soldiers. Their dress and arms, their uncouth cries and wild assault, marked them as banditti — such men as had slain the Englishman upon the road. Waiting in narrow gorges with a hidden rope across the path, they watched for the lonely horseman as a fowler waits by his bird-trap, trusting that they could overthrow the steed and then slay the rider ere he had recovered from his fall.

Such would have been the fate of the stranger, as of so many cavaliers before him, had Nigel not chanced to be close upon his heels. In an instant Pommers had burst through the group who struck at the prostrate man, and in another two of the robbers had fallen before Nigel’s sword. A spear rang on his breastplate, but one blow shore off its head, and a second that of him who held it. In vain they thrust at the steel-girt man. His sword played round them like lightning, and the fierce horse ramped and swooped above them with pawing iron-shod hoofs and eyes of fire. With cries and shrieks they flew off to right and left amidst the bushes, springing over boulders and darting under branches where no horseman could follow them. The foul crew had gone as swiftly and suddenly as it had come, and save for four ragged figures littered amongst the trampled bushes, no sign remaining of their passing.

Nigel tethered Pommers to a thorn-bush and then turned his attention to the injured man. The white horse had regained his feet and stood whinnying gently as he looked down on his prostrate master. A heavy blow, half broken by his sword, had beaten him down and left a great raw bruise upon his forehead. But a stream gurgled through the gorge, and a capful of water dashed over his face brought the senses back to the injured man. He was a mere stripling, with the delicate features of a woman, and a pair of great violet-blue eyes which looked up presently with a puzzled stare into Nigel’s face.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Ah yes! I call you to mind. You are the young Englishman who chased me on the great yellow horse. By our Lady of Rocamadour whose vernicle is round my neck! I could not have believed that any horse could have kept at the heels of Charlemagne so long. But I will wager you a hundred crowns, Englishman, that I lead you over a five-mile course."

"Nay," said Nigel, "we will wait till you can back a horse ere we talk of racing it. I am Nigel of Tilford, of the family of Loring, a squire by rank and the son of a knight. How are you called, young sir?"

"I also am a squire by rank and the son of a knight. I am Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, whose father writes himself Lord of Grosbois, a free vavasor of the noble Count of Toulouse, with the right of fossa and of furca, the high justice, the middle and the low." He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Englishman, you have saved my life as I would have saved yours, had I seen such yelping dogs set upon a man of blood and of coat-armor. But now I am yours, and what is your sweet will?"

"When you are fit to ride, you will come back with me to my people."

"Alas! I feared that you would say so. Had I taken you, Nigel — that is your name, is it not? — had I taken you, I would not have acted thus."

"How then would you have ordered things?" asked Nigel, much taken with the frank and debonair manner of his captive.

"I would not have taken advantage of such a mischance as has befallen me which has put me in your power. I would give you a sword and beat you in fair fight, so that I might send you to give greeting to my dear lady and show her the deeds which I do for her fair sake."

"Indeed, your words are both good and fair," said Nigel. "By Saint Paul! I cannot call to mind that I have ever met a man who bore himself better. But since I am in my armor and you without, I see not how we can debate the matter."

"Surely, gentle Nigel, you could doff your armor."

"Then have I only my underclothes."

"Nay, there shall be no unfairness there, for I also will very gladly strip to my underclothes."

Nigel looked wistfully at the Frenchman; but he shook his head. "Alas! it may not be," said he. "The last words that Sir Robert said to me were that I was to bring you to his side, for he would have speech with you. Would that I could do what you ask, for I also have a fair lady to whom I would fain send you. What use are you to me, Raoul, since I have gained no honor in the taking of you? How is it with you now?"

The young Frenchman had risen to his feet. "Do not take my sword," he said. "I am yours, rescue or no rescue. I think now that I could mount my horse, though indeed my head still rings like a cracked bell."

Nigel had lost all traces of his comrades; but he remembered Sir Robert's words that he should ride upon the sun with the certainty that sooner or later he would strike upon the road. As they jogged slowly along over undulating hills, the Frenchman shook off his hurt and the two chatted merrily together.

"I had but just come from France," said he, "and I had hoped to win honor in this country, for I have ever heard that the English are very hardy men and excellent people to fight with. My mules and my baggage are at Evran; but I rode forth to see what I could see, and I chanced upon your army moving down the road, so I coasted it in the hopes of some profit or adventure. Then you came after me and I would have given all the gold goblets upon my father's table if I had my harness so that I could have turned upon you. I have promised the Countess Beatrice that I will send her an Englishman or two to kiss her hands."

"One might perchance have a worse fate," said Nigel. "Is this fair dame your betrothed?"

"She is my love," answered the Frenchman. "We are but waiting for the Count to be slain in the wars, and then we mean to marry. And this lady of thine, Nigel? I would that I could see her."

"Perchance you shall, fair sir," said Nigel, "for all that I have seen of you fills me with desire to go further with you. It is in my mind that we might turn this thing to profit and to honor, for when Sir Robert has spoken with you, I am free to do with you as I will."

"And what will you do, Nigel?"

"We shall surely try some small deed upon each other, so that either I shall see the Lady Beatrice, or you the Lady Mary. Nay, thank me not, for like yourself, I have come to this country in search of honor, and I know not where I may better find it than at the end of your sword-point. My good lord and master, Sir John Chandos, has told me many times that never yet did he meet French knight nor squire that he did not find great pleasure and profit from their company, and now I very clearly see that he has spoken the truth."

For an hour these two friends rode together, the Frenchman pouring forth the praises of his lady, whose glove he produced from one pocket, her garter from his vest, and her shoe from his saddle-bag. She was blond, and when he heard that Mary was dark, he would fain stop then and there to fight the question of colour. He talked too of his great chateau at Lauta, by the head waters of the pleasant Garonne; of the hundred horses in the stables, the seventy hounds in the kennels, the fifty hawks in the mews. His English friend should come there when the wars were over, and what golden days would be theirs! Nigel too, with his English coldness thawing before this young sunbeam of the South, found himself talking of the heather slopes of Surrey, of the forest of Woolmer, even of the sacred chambers of Cosford.

But as they rode onward towards the sinking sun, their thoughts far away in their distant homes, their horses striding together, there came that which brought their minds back in an instant to the perilous hillsides of Brittany.

It was the long blast of a trumpet blown from somewhere on the farther side of a ridge toward which they were riding. A second long-drawn note from a distance answered it.

“It is your camp,” said the Frenchman.

“Nay,” said Nigel; “we have pipes with us and a naker or two, but I have heard no trumpet-call from our ranks. It behooves us to take heed, for we know not what may be before us. Ride this way, I pray you, that we may look over and yet be ourselves unseen.”

Some scattered boulders crowned the height, and from behind them the two young Squires could see the long rocky valley beyond. Upon a knoll was a small square building with a battlement round it. Some distance from it towered a great dark castle, as massive as the rocks on which it stood, with one strong keep at the corner, and four long lines of machicolated walls. Above, a great banner flew proudly in the wind, with some device which glowed red in the setting sun. Nigel shaded his eyes and stared with wrinkled brow.

“It is not the arms of England, nor yet the lilies of France, nor is it the ermine of Brittany,” said he. “He who holds this castle fights for his own hand, since his own device flies above it. Surely it is a head gules on an argent field.”

“The bloody head on a silver tray!” cried the Frenchman. “Was I not warned against him? This is not a man, friend Nigel. It is a monster who wars upon English, French and all Christendom. Have you not heard of the Butcher of La Brohiniere?"

"Nay, I have not heard of him."

"His name is accursed in France. Have I not been told also that he put to death this very year Gilles de St. Pol, a friend of the English King?"

"Yes, in very truth it comes back to my mind now that I heard something of this matter in Calais before we started."

"Then there he dwells, and God guard you if ever you pass under yonder portal, for no prisoner has ever come forth alive! Since these wars began he hath been a king to himself, and the plunder of eleven years lies in yonder cellars. How can justice come to him, when no man knows who owns the land? But when we have packed you all back to your island, by the Blessed Mother of God, we have a heavy debt to pay to the man who dwells in yonder pile!"

But even as they watched, the trumpet-call burst forth once more. It came not from the castle but from the farther end of the valley. It was answered by a second call from the walls. Then in a long, straggling line there came a wild troop of marauders streaming homeward from some foray. In the van, at the head of a body of spearmen, rode a tall and burly man, clad in brazen armor, so that he shone like a golden image in the slanting rays of the sun. His helmet had been loosened from his gorget and was held before him on his horse's neck. A great tangled beard flowed over his breastplate, and his hair hung down as far behind. A squire at his elbow bore high the banner of the bleeding head. Behind the spearmen were a line of heavily laden mules, and on either side of them a drove of poor country folk, who were being herded into the castle. Lastly came a second strong troop of mounted spearmen, who conducted a score or more of prisoners who marched together in a solid body.

Nigel stared at them and then, springing on his horse, he urged it along the shelter of the ridge so as to reach unseen a spot which was close to the castle gate. He had scarce taken up his new position when the cavalcade reached the drawbridge, and amid yells of welcome from those upon the wall, filed in a thin line across it. Nigel stared hard once more at the prisoners in the rear, and so absorbed was he by the sight that he had passed the rocks and was standing sheer upon the summit.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, "it must indeed be so. I see their russet jackets. They are English archers!"

As he spoke, the hindmost one, a strongly built, broad-shouldered man, looked round and saw the gleaming figure above him upon the hill, with open helmet, and the five roses glowing upon his breast. With a sweep of his hands he had thrust his guardians aside and for a moment was clear of the throng.

“Squire Loring! Squire Loring!” he cried. “It is I, Aylward the archer! It is I, Samkin Aylward!” The next minute a dozen hands had seized him, his cries were muffled with a gag, and he was hurled, the last of the band, through the black and threatening archway of the gate. Then with a clang the two iron wings came together, the portcullis swung upward, and captives and captors, robbers and booty, were all swallowed up within the grim and silent fortress.

XX. HOW THE ENGLISH ATTEMPTED THE CASTLE OF LA BROHINIERE

For some minutes Nigel remained motionless upon the crest of the hill, his heart, like lead within him, and his eyes fixed upon the huge gray walls which contained his unhappy henchman. He was roused by a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder and the voice of his young prisoner in his ear.

"Peste!" said he. "They have some of your birds in their cage, have they not? What then, my friend? Keep your heart high! Is it not the chance of war, to-day to them, to-morrow to thee, and death at last for us all? And yet I had rather they were in any hands than those of Oliver the Butcher."

"By Saint Paul, we cannot suffer it!" cried Nigel distractedly. "This man has come with me from my own home. He has stood between me and death before now. It goes to my very heart that he should call upon me in vain. I pray you, Raoul, to use your wits, for mine are all curdled in my head. Tell me what I should do and how I may bring him help."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "As easy to get a lamb unscathed out of a wolves' lair as a prisoner safe from La Brohiniere. Nay, Nigel, whither do you go? Have you indeed taken leave of your wits?"

The Squire had spurred his horse down the hillside and never halted until he was within a bowshot of the gate. The French prisoner followed hard behind him, with a buzz of reproaches and expostulations.

"You are mad, Nigel!" he cried. "What do you hope to do then? Would you carry the castle with your own hands? Halt, man, halt, in the name of the Virgin!"

But Nigel had no plan in his head and only obeyed the fevered impulse to do something to ease his thoughts. He paced his horse up and down, waving his spear, and shouting insults and challenges to the garrison. Over the high wall a hundred jeering faces looked down upon him. So rash and wild was his action that it seemed to those within to mean some trap, so the drawbridge was still held high and none ventured forth to seize him. A few long-range arrows pattered on the rocks, and then with a deep booming sound a huge stone, hurled from a mangonel, sang over the head of the two

Squires and crushed into splinters amongst the boulders behind them. The Frenchman seized Nigel's bridle and forced him farther from the gateway.

"By the dear Virgin!" he cried, "I care not to have those pebbles about my ears, yet I cannot go back alone, so it is very clear, my crazy comrade, that you must come also. Now we are beyond their reach! But see, my friend Nigel, who are those who crown the height?"

The sun had sunk behind the western ridge, but the glowing sky was fringed at its lower edge by a score of ruddy twinkling points. A body of horsemen showed hard and black upon the bare hill. Then they dipped down the slope into the valley, whilst a band of footmen followed behind.

"They are my people," cried Nigel joyously. "Come, my friend, hasten, that we may take counsel what we shall do."

Sir Robert Knolles rode a bowshot in front of his men, and his brow was as black as night. Beside him, with crestfallen face, his horse bleeding, his armor dinted and soiled, was the hot-headed knight, Sir James Astley. A fierce discussion raged between them.

"I have done my devoir as best I might," said Astley. "Alone I had ten of them at my sword-point. I know not how I have lived to tell it."

"What is your devoir to me? Where are my thirty bowmen?" cried Knolles in bitter wrath. "Ten lie dead upon the ground and twenty are worse than dead in yonder castle. And all because you must needs show all men how bold you are, and ride into a bushment such as a child could see. Alas for my own folly that ever I should have trusted such a one as you with the handling of men!"

"By God, Sir Robert, you shall answer to me for those words!" cried Astley with a choking voice. "Never has a man dared to speak to me as you have done this day."

"As long as I hold the King's order I shall be master, and by the Lord I will hang you, James, on a near tree if I have further cause of offense! How now, Nigel? I see by yonder white horse that you at least have not failed me. I will speak with you anon. Percy, bring up your men, and let us gather round this castle, for, as I hope for my soul's salvation, I win not leave it until I have my archers, or the head of him who holds them."

That night the English lay thick round the fortress of La Brohiniere so that none might come forth from it. But if none could come forth it was hard to see how any could win their way in, for it was full of men, the walls were high and strong, and a deep dry ditch girt it round. But the hatred and fear which its master had raised over the whole country-side could now be plainly seen, for during the night the brushwood men and the villagers came in from all parts with offers of such help as they could give for the intaking of the castle. Knolles set them cutting bushes and tying them into fagots. When morning came he rode out before the wall and he held counsel with his knights and squires as to how he should enter in.

"By noon," said he, "we shall have so many fagots that we may make our way over the ditch. Then we will beat in the gates and so win a footing."

The young Frenchman had come with Nigel to the conference, and now, amid the silence which followed the leader's proposal, he asked if he might be heard. He was clad in the brazen armor which Nigel had taken from the Red Ferret.

"It may be that it is not for me to join in your counsel," said he, "seeing that I am a prisoner and a Frenchman. But this man is the enemy of all, and we of France owe him a debt even as you do, since many a good Frenchman has died in his cellars. For this reason I crave to be heard."

"We will hear you," said Knolles.

"I have come from Evran yesterday," said he. "Sir Henry Spinnefort, Sir Peter La Roye and many other brave knights and squires lie there, with a good company of men, all of whom would very gladly join with you to destroy this butcher and his castle, for it is well known amongst us that his deeds are neither good nor fair. There are also bombards which we could drag over the hills, and so beat down this iron gate. If you so order it I will ride to Evran and bring my companions back with me."

"Indeed, Robert," said Percy, "it is in my mind that this Frenchman speaks very wisely and well."

"And when we have taken the castle — what then?" asked Knolles.

"Then you could go upon your way, fair sir, and we upon ours. Or if it please you better you could draw together on yonder hill and we on this one, so that the valley lies between us. Then if any cavalier wished to advance himself or to shed a vow and exalt his lady, an opening might be found for him. Surely it would be shame if so many brave men drew together and no small deed were to come of it."

Nigel clasped his captive's hand to show his admiration and esteem, but Knolles shook his head.

"Things are not ordered thus, save in the tales of the minstrels," said he. "I have no wish that your people at Evran should know our numbers or our plans. I am not in this land for knight errantry, but I am here to make head against the King’s enemies. Has no one aught else to say?”

Percy pointed to the small outlying fortalice upon the knoll, on which also flew the flag of the bloody head. “This smaller castle, Robert, is of no great strength and cannot hold more than fifty men. It is built, as I conceive it, that no one should seize the high ground and shoot down into the other. Why should we not turn all our strength upon it, since it is the weaker of the twain?”

But again the young leader shook his head. “If I should take it,” said he, “I am still no nearer to my desire, nor will it avail me in getting back my bowmen. It may cost a score of men, and what profit shall I have from it? Had I bombards, I might place them on yonder hill, but having none it is of little use to me.”

“It may be,” said Nigel, “that they have scant food or water, and so must come forth to fight us.”

“I have made inquiry of the peasants,” Knolles answered, “and they are of one mind that there is a well within the castle, and good store of food. Nay, gentlemen, there is no way before us save to take it by arms, and no spot where we can attempt it save through the great gate. Soon we will have so many fagots that we can cast them down into the ditch, and so win our way across. I have ordered them to cut a pine-tree on the hill and shear the branches so that we may beat down the gate with it. But what is now amiss, and why do they run forward to the castle?”

A buzz had risen from the soldiers in the camp, and they all crowded in one direction, rushing toward the castle wall. The knights and squires rode after them, and when in view of the main gate, the cause of the disturbance lay before them. On the tower above the portal three men were standing in the garb of English archers, ropes round their necks and their hands bound behind them. Their comrades surged below them with cries of recognition and of pity.

“It is Ambrose!” cried one. “Surely it is Ambrose of Ingleton.”

“Yes, in truth, I see his yellow hair. And the other, him with the beard, it is Lockwood of Skipton. Alas for his wife who keeps the booth by the bridge-head of Ribble! I wot not who the third may be.”

“It is little Johnny Alspaye, the youngest man in the company,” cried old Wat, with the tears running down his cheeks, “‘Twas I who brought him from his home. Alas! Alas! Foul fare the day that ever I coaxed him from his mother's side that he might perish in a far land."

There was a sudden flourish of a trumpet and the drawbridge fell. Across it strode a portly man with a faded herald's coat. He halted warily upon the farther side and his voice boomed like a drum. "I would speak with your leader." he cried.

Knolles rode forward.

"Have I your knightly word that I may advance unscathed with all courteous entreaty as befits a herald?"

Knolles nodded his head.

The man came slowly and pompously forward. "I am the messenger and liege servant," said he, "of the high baron, Oliver de St. Yvon, Lord of La Brohiniere. He bids me to say that if you continue your journey and molest him no further he will engage upon his part to make no further attack upon you. As to the men whom he holds, he will enroll them in his own honorable service, for he has need of longbowmen, and has heard much of their skill. But if you constrain him or cause him further displeasure by remaining before his castle he hereby gives you warning that he will hang these three men over his gateway and every morning another three until all have been slain. This he has sworn upon the rood of Calvary, and as he has said so he will do upon jeopardy of his soul."

Robert Knolles looked grimly at the messenger. "You may thank the saints that you have had my promise," said he, "else would I have stripped that lying tabard from thy back and the skin beneath it from thy bones, that thy master might have a fitting answer to his message. Tell him that I hold him and all that are within his castle as hostage for the lives of my men, and that should he dare to do them scathe he and every man that is with him shall hang upon his battlements. Go, and go quickly, lest my patience fail."

There was that in Knolles' cold gray eyes and in his manner of speaking those last words which sent the portly envoy back at a quicker gait than he had come. As he vanished into the gloomy arch of the gateway the drawbridge swung up with creak and rattle behind him.

A few minutes later a rough-bearded fellow stepped out over the portal where the condemned archers stood and seizing the first by the shoulders he thrust him over the wall. A cry burst from the man's lips and a deep groan from those of his comrades below as he fell with a jerk which sent him half-way up to the parapet again, and then after dancing like a child’s toy swung slowly backward and forward with limp limbs and twisted neck.

The hangman turned and bowed in mock reverence to the spectators beneath him. He had not yet learned in a land of puny archers how sure and how strong is the English bow. Half a dozen men, old Wat amongst them, had run forward toward the wall. They were too late to save their comrades, but at least their deaths were speedily avenged.

The man was in the act of pushing off the second prisoner when an arrow crashed through his head, and he fell stone dead upon the parapet. But even in falling he had given the fatal thrust and a second russet figure swung beside the first against the dark background of the castle wall.

There only remained the young lad, Johnny Alspaye, who stood shaking with fear, an abyss below him, and the voices of those who would hurl him over it behind. There was a long pause before anyone would come forth to dare those deadly arrows. Then a fellow, crouching double, ran forward from the shelter, keeping the young archer’s body as a shield between him and danger.

“Aside, John! Aside!” cried his comrades from below.

The youth sprang as far as the rope would allow him, and slipped it half over his face in the effort. Three arrows flashed past his side, and two of them buried themselves in the body of the man behind. A howl of delight burst from the spectators as he dropped first upon his knees and then upon his face. A life for a life was no bad bargain.

But it was only a short respite which the skill of his comrades had given to the young archer. Over the parapet there appeared a ball of brass, then a pair of great brazen shoulders, and lastly the full figure of an armored man. He walked to the edge and they heard his hoarse guffaw of laughter as the arrows clanged and clattered against his impenetrable mail. He slapped his breast-plate, as he jeered at them. Well he knew that at the distance no dart ever sped by mortal hands could cleave through his plates of metal. So he stood, the great burly Butcher of La Brohiniere, with head uptossed, laughing insolently at his foes. Then with slow and ponderous tread he walked toward his boy victim, seized him by the ear, and dragged him across so that the rope might be straight. Seeing that the noose had slipped across the face, he tried to push it down, but the mail glove hampering him he pulled it off, and grasped the rope above the lad’s head with his naked hand.

Quick as a flash old Wat's arrow had sped, and the Butcher sprang back with a howl of pain, his hand skewered by a cloth-yard shaft. As he shook it furiously at his enemies a second grazed his knuckles. With a brutal kick of his metal-shod feet he hurled young Alspaye over the edge, looked down for a few moments at his death agonies, and then walked slowly from the parapet, nursing his dripping hand, the arrows still ringing loudly upon his back-piece as he went.

The archers below, enraged at the death of their comrades, leaped and howled like a pack of ravening wolves.

"By Saint Dunstan," said Percy, looking round at their flushed faces, "if ever we are to carry it now is the moment, for these men will not be stopped if hate can take them forward."

"You are right, Thomas!" cried Knolles. "Gather together twenty men-at-arms each with his shield to cover him. Astley, do you place the bowmen so that no head may show at window or parapet. Nigel, I pray you to order the countryfolk forward with their fardels of fagots. Let the others bring up the lopped pine-tree which lies yonder behind the horse lines. Ten men-at-arms can bear it on the right, and ten on the left, having shields over their heads. The gate once down, let every man rush in. And God help the better cause!"

Swiftly and yet quietly the dispositions were made, for these were old soldiers whose daily trade was war. In little groups the archers formed in front of each slit or crevice in the walls, whilst others scanned the battlements with wary eyes, and sped an arrow at every face which gleamed for an instant above them. The garrison shot forth a shower of crossbow bolts and an occasional stone from their engine, but so deadly was the hail which rained upon them that they had no time to dwell upon their aim, and their discharges were wild and harmless. Under cover of the shafts of the bowmen a line of peasants ran unscathed to the edge of the ditch, each hurling in the bundle which he bore in his arms, and then hurrying back for another one. In twenty minutes a broad pathway of fagots lay level with the ground upon one side and the gate upon the other. With the loss of two peasants slain by bolts and one archer crushed by a stone, the ditch had been filled up. All was ready for the battering-ram.

With a shout, twenty picked men rushed forward with the pine-tree under their arms, the heavy end turned toward the gate. The arbalesters on the tower leaned over and shot into the midst of them, but could not stop their advance. Two dropped, but the others raising their shields ran onward still shouting, crossed the bridge of fagots, and came with a thundering crash against the door. It splintered from base to arch, but kept its place.

Swinging their mighty weapon, the storming party thudded and crashed upon the gate, every blow loosening and widening the cracks which rent it from end to end. The three knights, with Nigel, the Frenchman Raoul and the other squires, stood beside the ram, cheering on the men, and chanting to the rhythm of the swing with a loud “Ha!” at every blow. A great stone loosened from the parapet roared through the air and struck Sir James Astley and another of the attackers, but Nigel and the Frenchman had taken their places in an instant, and the ram thudded and smashed with greater energy than ever. Another blow and another! the lower part was staving inward, but the great central bar still held firm. Surely another minute would beat it from its sockets.

But suddenly from above there came a great deluge of liquid. A hogshead of it had been tilted from the battlement until soldiers, bridge, and ram were equally drenched in yellow slime. Knolles rubbed his gauntlet in it, held it to his visor, and smelled it.

“Back, back!” he cried. “Back before it is too late!”

There was a small barred window above their heads at the side of the gate. A ruddy glare shone through it, and then a blazing torch was tossed down upon them. In a moment the oil had caught and the whole place was a sheet of flame. The fir-tree that they carried, the fagots beneath them, their very weapons, were all in a blaze.

To right and left the men sprang down into the dry ditch, rolling with screams upon the ground in their endeavor to extinguish the flames. The knights and squires protected by their armor strove hard, stamping and slapping, to help those who had but leather jacks to shield their bodies. From above a ceaseless shower of darts and of stones were poured down upon them, while on the other hand the archers, seeing the greatness of the danger, ran up to the edge of the ditch, and shot fast and true at every face which showed above the wall.

Scorched, wearied and bedraggled, the remains of the storming party clambered out of the ditch as best they could, clutching at the friendly hands held down to them, and so limped their way back amid the taunts and howls of their enemies. A long pile of smoldering cinders was all that remained of their bridge, and on it lay Astley and six other red-hot men glowing in their armor.

Knolles clinched his hands as he looked back at the ruin that was wrought, and then surveyed the group of men who stood or lay around him nursing their burned limbs and scowling up at the exultant figures who waved on the castle wall. Badly scorched himself, the young leader had no thought for his own injuries in the rage and grief which racked his soul. “We will build another bridge,” he cried. “Set the peasants binding fagots once more.”

But a thought had flashed through Nigel’s mind. “See, fair sir,” said he. “The nails of yonder door are red-hot and the wood as white as ashes. Surely we can break our way through it.”

“By the Virgin, you speak truly!” cried the French Squire. “If we can cross the ditch the gate will not stop us. Come, Nigel, for our fair ladies’ sakes, I will race you who will reach it first, England or France.”

Alas for all the wise words of the good Chandos! Alas for all the lessons in order and discipline learned from the wary Knolles. In an instant, forgetful of all things but this noble challenge, Nigel was running at the top of his speed for the burning gate. Close at his heels was the Frenchman, blowing and gasping, as he rushed along in his brazen armor. Behind came a stream of howling archers and men-at-arms, like a flood which has broken its dam. Down they slipped into the ditch, rushed across it, and clambered on each other’s backs up the opposite side. Nigel, Raoul and two archers gained a foothold in front of the burning gate at the same moment. With blows and kicks they burst it to pieces, and dashed with a yell of triumph through the dark archway beyond. For a moment they thought with mad rapture that the castle was carried. A dark tunnel lay before them, down which they rushed. But alas! at the farther end it was blocked by a second gateway as strong as that which had been burned. In vain they beat upon it with their swords and axes. On each side the tunnel was pierced with slits, and the crossbow bolts discharged at only a few yards’ distance crashed through armor as if it were cloth and laid man after man upon the stones. They raged and leaped before the great iron-clamped barrier, but the wall itself was as easy to tear down.

It was bitter to draw back; but it was madness to remain. Nigel looked round and saw that half his men were down. At the same moment Raoul sank with a gasp at his feet, a bolt driven to its socket through the links of the camail which guarded his neck. Some of the archers, seeing that certain death awaited them, were already running back to escape from the fatal passage.

"By Saint Paul!" cried Nigel hotly. "Would you leave our wounded where this butcher may lay his hands upon them? Let the archers shoot inwards and hold them back from the slits. Now let each man raise one of our comrades, lest we leave our honor in the gate of this castle."

With a mighty effort he had raised Raoul upon his shoulders and staggered with him to the edge of the ditch. Several men were waiting below where the steep bank shield them from the arrows, and to them Nigel handed down his wounded friend, and each archer in turn did the same. Again and again Nigel went back until no one lay in the tunnel save seven who had died there. Thirteen wounded were laid in the shelter of the ditch, and there they must remain until night came to cover them. Meanwhile the bowmen on the farther side protected them from attack, and also prevented the enemy from all attempts to build up the outer gate. The gaping smoke-blackened arch was all that they could show for a loss of thirty men, but that at least Knolles was determined to keep.

Burned and bruised, but unconscious of either pain or fatigue for the turmoil of his spirit within him, Nigel knelt by the Frenchman and loosened his helmet. The girlish face of the young Squire was white as chalk, and the haze of death was gathering over his violet eyes, but a faint smile played round his lips as he looked up at his English comrade.

"I shall never see Beatrice again," he whispered. "I pray you, Nigel, that when there is a truce you will journey as far as my father's chateau and tell him how his son died. Young Gaston will rejoice, for to him come the land and the coat, the war-cry and the profit. See them, Nigel, and tell them that I was as forward as the others."

"Indeed Raoul, no man could have carried himself with more honor or won more worship than you have done this day. I will do your behest when the time comes."

"Surely you are happy, Nigel," the dying Squire murmured, "for this day has given you one more deed which you may lay at the feet of your lady-love."

"It might have been so had we carried the gate," Nigel answered sadly; "but by Saint Paul! I cannot count it a deed where I have come back with my purpose unfulfilled. But this is no time, Raoul, to talk of my small affairs. If we take the castle and I bear a good part in it, then perchance all this may indeed avail.”

The Frenchman sat up with that strange energy which comes often as the harbinger of death. “You will win your Lady Mary, Nigel, and your great deeds will be not three but a score, so that in all Christendom there shall be no man of blood and coat-armor who has not heard your name and your fame. This I tell you — I, Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, dying upon the field of honor. And now kiss me, sweet friend, and lay me back, for the mists close round me and I am gone!”

With tender hands the Squire lowered his comrade’s head, but even as he did so there came a choking rush of blood, and the soul had passed. So died a gallant cavalier of France, and Nigel as he knelt in the ditch beside him prayed that his own end might be as noble and as debonair.

XXI. HOW THE SECOND MESSENGER WENT TO COSFORD

Under cover of night the wounded men were lifted from the ditch and carried back, whilst pickets of archers were advanced to the very gate so that none should rebuild it. Nigel, sick at heart over his own failure, the death of his prisoner and his fears for Aylward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash. Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his crazy knight errantry had brought about. Twenty men had been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandos should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen.

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandos would have said the same though, perchance, in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down amongst the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands. He had striven hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the tiny bangle which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catharine’s Hill on the Guildford Road. He remembered the motto curiously worked in filigree of gold. It ran: “Fais ce que dois, adviegne que pourra — c’est commande au chevalier.”

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human may do that. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see she would surely have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom, and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

“Surely you are the Squire Loring,” he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

“I am he. What then?”

“I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found hard by. I would have a word with you.”

“Speak on.”

“This man Aylward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature that God has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also.”

“I have good cause so to do.”

“Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captives within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed him, most surely cut the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?”

“By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it.”

“I was with you, hammering at the inner gate,” said Simon, “and yet once when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: ‘Good-by, Samkin! I shall never see you more.’ This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give up my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all.”

“It may be that you are right, Simon,” said Nigel, “and the thought of it should assuage our grief. But if we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed.”

“It may be so, or it may not,” Simon answered slowly. “It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly, and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe.”

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier’s arm.

“You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is.”

“I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for to-morrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts. Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with a white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony’s fire upon the cheek.”

“But what has this to do with Aylward?”

“I will show you. This evening after the assault I chanced to walk with some of my fellows, round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face, red hair and a touch of Anthony’s fire upon his cheek? What make you of that, Squire Nigel?”

“That this man had crossed from the castle to the fort.”

“In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such ken-speckled men in the world. But if he crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between.”

“By Saint Paul! I see your meaning!” cried Nigel. “It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other.”

“I am well sure of it.”

“Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also.”

“Such a thing might happen,” said Simon, “and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come.”

“What then is your rede?”

“Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it and breaking into it so that both fort and castle are at our mercy before either knows that we are there.”

Nigel clapped his hands with joy. “‘Fore God!” he cried. “It is a most noble plan! But alas! Simon, I see not how we can tell the course of this passage or where we should dig."

"I have peasants yonder with spades," said Simon. "There are two of my friends, Harding of Barnstable and West-country John who are waiting for us with their gear. If you will come to lead us, Squire Nigel, we are ready to venture our bodies in the attempt."

What would Knolles say in case they failed? The thought flashed through Nigel's mind, but another came swiftly behind it. He would not venture further unless he found hopes of success. And if he did venture further he would put his life upon it. Giving that, he made amends for all errors. And if on the other hand success crowned their efforts, then Knolles would forgive his failure at the gateway. A minute later, every doubt banished from his mind, he was making his way through the darkness under the guidance of Black Simon.

Outside the camp the two other men-at-arms were waiting for them, and the four advanced together. Presently a little group of figures loomed up in the darkness. It was a cloudy night, and a thin rain was falling which obscured both the castle and the fort; but a stone had been placed by Simon in the daytime which assured that they were between the two.

"Is blind Andreas there?" asked Simon.

"Yes, kind sir, I am here," said a voice.

"This man," said Simon, "was once rich and of good repute, but he was beggared by this robber lord, who afterwards put out his eyes so that he has lived for many years in darkness at the charity of others."

"How can he help us in our enterprise if he be indeed blind?" asked Nigel.

"It is for that very reason, fair lord, that he can be of greater service than any other man," Simon answered; "for it often happens that when a man has lost a sense the good God will strengthen those that remain. Hence it is that Andreas has such ears that he can hear the sap in the trees or the cheep of the mouse in its burrow. He has come to help us to find the tunnel."

"And I have found it," said the blind man proudly. "Here I have placed my staff upon the line of it. Twice as I lay there with my ear to the ground I have heard footsteps pass beneath me."

"I trust you make no mistake, old man," said Nigel.

For answer the blind man raised his staff and smote twice upon the ground, once to the right and once to the left. The one gave a dull thud, the other a hollow boom.

“Can you not hear that?” he asked. “Will you ask me now if I make a mistake?”

“Indeed, we are much beholden to you!” cried Nigel. “Let the peasants dig then, and as silently as they may. Do you keep your ear upon the ground, Andreas, so that if anyone pass beneath us we shall be warned.”

So, amid the driving rain, the little group toiled in the darkness. The blind man lay silent, flat upon his face, and twice they heard his warning hiss and stopped their work, whilst some one passed beneath. In an hour they had dug down to a stone arch which was clearly the outer side of the tunnel roof. Here was a sad obstacle, for it might take long to loosen a stone, and if their work was not done by the break of day then their enterprise was indeed hopeless. They loosened the mortar with a dagger, and at last dislodged one small stone which enabled them to get at the others. Presently a dark hole blacker than the night around them yawned at their feet, and their swords could touch no bottom to it. They had opened the tunnel.

“I would fain enter it first,” said Nigel. “I pray you to lower me down.” They held him to the full length of their arms and then letting him drop they heard him land safely beneath them. An instant later the blind man started up with a low cry of alarm.

“I hear steps coming,” said he. “They are far off, but they draw nearer.”

Simon thrust his head and neck down the hole. “Squire Nigel,” he whispered, “can you hear me?”

“I can hear you, Simon.”

“Andreas says that some one comes.”

“Then cover over the hole,” came the answer. “Quick, I pray you, cover it over!”

A mantle was stretched across it, so that no glimmer of light should warn the new-comer. The fear was that he might have heard, the sound of Nigel’s descent. But soon it was clear that he had not done so, for Andreas announced that he was still advancing. Presently Nigel could hear the distant thud of his feet. If he bore a lantern all was lost. But no gleam of light appeared in the black tunnel, and still the footsteps drew nearer.

Nigel breathed a prayer of thanks to all his guardian saints as he crouched close to the slimy wall and waited breathless, his dagger in his hand. Nearer yet and nearer came the steps. He could hear the stranger’s coarse breathing in the darkness. Then as he brushed past Nigel bounded upon him with a tiger spring. There was one gasp of astonishment, and not a sound more, for the Squire's grip was on the man's throat and his body was pinned motionless against the wall.

"Simon! Simon!" cried Nigel loudly.

The mantle was moved from the hole.

"Have you a cord? Or your belts linked together may serve."

One of the peasants had a rope, and Nigel soon felt it dangling against his hand. He listened and there was no sound in the passage. For an instant he released his captive's throat. A torrent of prayers and entreaties came forth. The man was shaking like a leaf in the wind. Nigel pressed the point of his dagger against his face and dared him to open his lips. Then he slipped the rope beneath his arms and tied it.

"Pull him up!" he whispered, and for an instant the gray glimmer above him was obscured.

"We have him, fair sir," said Simon.

"Then drop me the rope and hold it fast."

A moment later Nigel stood among the group of men who had gathered round their captive. It was too dark to see him, and they dare not strike flint and steel.

Simon passed his hand roughly over him and felt a fat clean-shaven face, and a cloth gabardine which hung to the ankles. "Who are you?" he whispered. "Speak the truth and speak it low, if you would ever speak again."

The man's teeth chattered in his head with cold and fright. "I speak no English," he murmured.

"French, then," said Nigel.

"I am a holy priest of God. You court the ban of holy Church when you lay hands upon me. I pray you let me go upon my way, for there are those whom I would shrive and housel. If they should die in sin, their damnation is upon you."

"How are you called then?"

"I am Dom Peter de Cervolles."

"De Cervolles, the arch-priest, he who heated the brazier when they burned out my eyes," cried old Andreas. "Of all the devils in hell there is none fouler than this one. Friends, friends, if I have done aught for you this night, I ask but one reward, that ye let me have my will of this man."

But Nigel pushed the old man back. "There is no time for this," he said. "Now hark you, priest — if priest indeed you be — your gown and tonsure will not save you if you play us false, for we are here of a set purpose and we will go forward with it, come what may. Answer me and answer me truly or it will be an ill night for you. In what part of the Castle does this tunnel enter?”

“In the lower cellar.”

“What is at the end?”

“An oaken door.”

“Is it barred?”

“Yes, it is barred.”

“How would you have entered?”

“I would have given the password.”

“Who then would have opened?”

“There is a guard within.”

“And beyond him?”

“Beyond him are the prison cells and the jailers.”

“Who else would be afoot?”

“No one save a guard at the gate and another on the battlement.”

“What then is the password?”

The man was silent.

“The password, fellow!”

The cold points of two daggers pricked his throat; but still he would not speak.

“Where is the blind man?” asked Nigel. “Here, Andreas, you can have him and do what you will with him.”

“Nay, nay,” the priest whimpered. “Keep him off me. Save me from blind Andreas! I will tell you everything.”

“The password then, this instant?”

“It is ‘Benedicite!’”

“We have the password, Simon,” cried Nigel. “Come then, let us on to the farther end. These peasants will guard the priest, and they will remain here lest we wish to send a message.”

“Nay, fair sir, it is in my mind that we can do better,” said Simon. “Let us take the priest with us, so that he who is within may know his voice.”

“It is well thought of,” said Nigel, “and first let us pray together, for indeed this night may well be our last.”

He and the three men-at-arms knelt in the rain and sent up their simple orisons, Simon still clutching tight to his prisoner’s wrist.

The priest fumbled in his breast and drew something forth. “It is the heart of the blessed confessor Saint Enogat,” said he. “It may be that it will ease and assoil your souls if you would wish to handle it.”

The four Englishmen passed the flat silver case from hand to hand, each pressing his lips devoutly upon it. Then they rose to their feet. Nigel was the first to lower himself down the hole; then Simon; then the priest, who was instantly seized by the other two. The men-at-arms followed them. They had scarcely moved away from the hole when Nigel stopped.

“Surely some one else came after us,” said he.

They listened, but no whisper or rustle came from behind them. For a minute they paused and then resumed their journey through the dark. It seemed a long, long way, though in truth it was but a few hundred yards before they came to a door with a glimmer of yellow light around it, which barred their passage. Nigel struck upon it with his hand.

There was the rasping of a bolt and then a loud voice “Is that you, priest?”

“Yes, it is I,” said the prisoner in a quavering voice. “Open, Arnold!”

The voice was enough. There was no question of passwords. The door swung inward, and in an instant the janitor was cut down by Nigel and Simon. So sudden and so fierce was the attack that save for the thud of his body no sound was heard. A flood of light burst outward into the passage, and the Englishmen stood with blinking eyes in its glare.

In front of them lay a stone-flagged corridor, across which lay the dead body of the janitor. It had doors on either side of it, and another grated door at the farther end. A strange hubbub, a kind of low droning and whining filled the air. The four men were standing listening, full of wonder as to what this might mean, when a sharp cry came from behind them. The priest lay in a shapeless heap upon the ground, and the blood was rushing from his gaping throat. Down the passage, a black shadow in the yellow light, there fled a crouching man, who clattered with a stick as he went.

“It is Andreas,” cried West-country Will. “He has slain him.”

“Then it was he that I heard behind us,” said Nigel. “Doubtless he was at our very heels in the darkness. I fear that the priest’s cry has been heard.”

“Nay,” said Simon, “there are so many cries that one more may well pass. Let us take this lamp from the wall and see what sort of devil’s den we have around us.”

They opened the door upon the right, and so horrible a smell issued from it that they were driven back from it. The lamp which Simon held forward showed a monkeylike creature mowing and grimacing in the corner, man or woman none could tell, but driven crazy by loneliness and horror. In the other cell was a graybearded man fettered to the wall, looking blankly before him, a body without a soul, yet with life still in him, for his dull eyes turned slowly in their direction. But it was from behind the central door at the end of the passage that the chorus of sad cries came which filled the air.

"Simon," said Nigel, "before we go farther we will take this outer door from its hinges. With it we will block this passage so that at the worst we may hold our ground here until help comes. Do you back to the camp as fast as your feet can bear you. The peasants will draw you upward through the hole. Give my greetings to Sir Robert and tell him that the castle is taken without fail if he comes this way with fifty men. Say that we have made a lodgment within the walls. And tell him also, Simon, that I would counsel him to make a stir before the gateway so that the guard may be held there whilst we make good our footing behind them. Go, good Simon, and lose not a moment!"

But the man-at-arms shook his head. "It is I who have brought you here, fair sir, and here I bide through fair and foul. But you speak wisely and well, for Sir Robert should indeed be told what is going forward now that we have gone so far. Harding, do you go with all speed and bear the gentle Nigel's message."

Reluctantly the man-at-arms sped upon his errand. They could hear the racing of his feet and the low jingle of his harness until they died away in the tunnel. Then the three companions approached the door at the end. It was their intention to wait where they were until help should come, but suddenly amid the babel of cries within there broke forth an English voice, shouting in torment.

"My God!" it cried, "I pray you, comrades, for a cup of water, as you hope for Christ's mercy!"

A shout of laughter and the thud of a heavy blow followed the appeal.

All the hot blood rushed to Nigel's head at the sound, buzzing in his ears and throbbing in his temples. There are times when the fiery heart of a man must overbear the cold brain of a soldier. With one bound he was at the door, with another he was through it, the men-at-arms at his heels. So strange was the scene before them that for an instant all three stood motionless with horror and surprise.

It was a great vaulted chamber, brightly lit by many torches. At the farther end roared a great fire. In front of it three naked men were chained to posts in such a way that flinch as they might they could never get beyond the range of its scorching heat. Yet they were so far from it that no actual burn would be inflicted if they could but keep turning and shifting so as continually to present some fresh portion of their flesh to the flames. Hence they danced and whirled in front of the fire, tossing ceaselessly this way and that within the compass of their chains, wearied to death, their protruding tongues cracked and blackened with thirst, but unable for one instant to rest from their writhings and contortions.

Even stranger was the sight at each side of the room, whence came that chorus of groans which had first struck upon the ears of Nigel and his companions. A line of great hogsheads were placed alongside the walls, and within each sat a man, his head protruding from the top. As they moved within there was a constant splashing and washing of water. The white wan faces all turned together as the door flew open, and a cry of amazement and of hope took the place of those long-drawn moans of despair.

At the same instant two fellows clad in black, who had been seated with a flagon of wine between them at a table near the fire, sprang wildly to their feet, staring with blank amazement at this sudden inrush. That instant of delay deprived them of their last chance of safety. Midway down the room was a flight of stone steps which led to the main door.

Swift as a wildcat Nigel bounded toward it and gained the steps a stride or two before the jailers. They turned and made for the other which led to the passage, but Simon and his comrades were nearer to it than they. Two sweeping blows, two dagger thrusts into writhing figures, and the ruffians who worked the will of the Butcher lay dead upon the floor of their slaughter-house.

Oh, the buzz of joy and of prayer from all those white lips! Oh, the light of returning hope in all those sunken weary eyes! One wild shout would have gone up had not Nigel’s outstretched hands and warning voice hushed them to silence.

He opened the door behind him. A curving newel staircase wound upward into the darkness. He listened, but no sound came down. There was a key in the outer lock of the iron door. He whipped it out and turned it on the inner side. The ground that they had gained was safe. Now they could turn to the relief of these poor fellows beside them. A few strong blows struck off the irons and freed the three dancers before the fire. With a husky croak of joy, they rushed across to their comrades' water-barrels, plunged their heads in like horses, and drank and drank and drank. Then in turn the poor shivering wretches were taken out of the barrels, their skins bleached and wrinkled with long soaking. Their bonds were torn from them; but, cramped and fixed, their limbs refused to act, and they tumbled and twisted upon the floor in their efforts to reach Nigel and to kiss his hand.

In a corner lay Aylward, dripping from his barrel and exhausted with cold and hunger. Nigel ran to his side and raised his head. The jug of wine from which the two jailers had drunk still stood upon their table. The Squire placed it to the archer's lips and he took a hearty pull at it.

"How is it with you now, Aylward?"

"Better, Squire, better, but may I never touch water again as long as I live! Alas! poor Dicon has gone, and Stephen also — the life chilled out of them. The cold is in the very marrow of my bones. I pray you, let me lean upon your arm as far as the fire, that I may warm the frozen blood and set it running in my veins once more."

A strange sight it was to see these twenty naked men crouching in a half-circle round the fire with their trembling hands extended to the blaze. Soon their tongues at least were thawed, and they poured out the story of their troubles with many a prayer and ejaculation to the saints for their safe delivery. No food had crossed their lips since they had been taken. The Butcher had commanded them to join his garrison and to shoot upon their comrades from the wall. When they refused he had set aside three of them for execution.

The others had been dragged to the cellar, whither the leering tyrant had followed them. Only one question he had asked them, whether they were of a hot-blooded nature or of a cold. Blows were showered upon them until they answered. Three had said cold, and had been condemned to the torment of the fire. The rest who had said hot were delivered up to the torture of the water-cask. Every few hours this man or fiend had come down to exult over their sufferings and to ask them whether they were ready yet to enter his service. Three had consented and were gone. But the others had all of them stood firm, two of them even to their death.

Such was the tale to which Nigel and his comrades listened whilst they waited impatiently for the coming of Knolles and his men. Many an anxious look did they cast down the black tunnel, but no glimmer of light and no clash of steel came from its depths. Suddenly, however, a loud and measured sound broke upon their ears. It was a dull metallic clang, ponderous and slow, growing louder and ever louder — the tread of an armored man. The poor wretches round the fire, all unnerved by hunger and suffering, huddled together with wan, scared faces, their eyes fixed in terror on the door.

“It is he!” they whispered. “It is the Butcher himself!”

Nigel had darted to the door and listened intently. There were no footfalls save those of one man. Once sure of that, he softly turned the key in the lock. At the same instant there came a bull’s bellow from without.

“Ives! Bertrand!” cried the voice. “Can you not hear me coming, you drunken varlets? You shall cool your own heads in the water-casks, you lazy rascals! What, not even now! Open, you dogs. Open, I say!”

He had thrust down the latch, and with a kick he flung the door wide and rushed inward. For an instant he stood motionless, a statue of dull yellow metal, his eyes fixed upon the empty casks and the huddle of naked men. Then with the roar of a trapped lion, he turned, but the door had slammed behind him, and Black Simon, with grim figure and sardonic face, stood between.

The Butcher looked round him helplessly, for he was unarmed save for his dagger. Then his eyes fell upon Nigel’s roses.

“You are a gentleman of coat-armor,” he cried. “I surrender myself to you.”

“I will not take your surrender, you black villain,” said Nigel. “Draw and defend yourself. Simon, give him your sword.”

“Nay, this is madness,” said the blunt man-at-arms. “Why should I give the wasp a sting?”

“Give it him, I say. I cannot kill him in cold blood.”

“But I can!” yelled Aylward, who had crept up from the fire. “Come, comrades! By these ten finger-bones! has he not taught us how cold blood should be warmed?”

Like a pack of wolves they were on him, and he clanged upon the floor with a dozen frenzied naked figures clutching and clinging above him. In vain Nigel tried to pull them off. They were mad with rage, these tortured starving men, their eyes fixed and glaring, their hair on end, their teeth gnashing with fury, while they tore at the howling, writhing man. Then with a rattle and clatter they pulled him across the room by his two ankles and dragged him into the fire.

Nigel shuddered and turned away his eyes as he saw the brazen figure roll out and stagger to his knees, only to be hurled once more into the heart of the blaze. His prisoners screamed with joy and clapped their hands as they pushed him back with their feet until the armor was too hot for them to touch. Then at last he lay still and glowed darkly red, whilst the naked men danced in a wild half-circle round the fire.

But now at last the supports had come. Lights flashed and armor gleamed down the tunnel. The cellar filled with armed men, while from above came the cries and turmoil of the feigned assault upon the gate. Led by Knolles and Nigel, the storming party rushed upward and seized the courtyard. The guard of the gate taken in the rear threw down their weapons and cried for mercy. The gate was thrown open and the assailants rushed in, with hundreds of furious peasants at their heels. Some of the robbers died in hot blood, many in cold; but all died, for Knolles had vowed to give no quarter. Day was just breaking when the last fugitive had been hunted out and slain. From all sides came the yells and whoops of the soldiers with the rending and riving of doors as they burst into the store-rooms and treasure-chambers. There was a joyous scramble amongst them, for the plunder of eleven years, gold and jewels, satins and velvets, rich plate and noble hangings were all to be had for the taking.

The rescued prisoners, their hunger appeased and their clothes restored, led the search for booty. Nigel, leaning on his sword by the gateway, saw Aylward totter past, a huge bundle under each arm, another slung over his back and a smaller packet hanging from his mouth. He dropped it for a moment as he passed his young master.

“By these ten finger-bones! I am right glad that I came to the war, and no man could ask for a more goodly life,” said he. “I have a present here for every girl in Tilford, and my father need never fear the frown of the sacrist of Waverley again. But how of you, Squire Loring? It standeth not aright that we should gather the harvest whilst you, who sowed it, go forth empty-handed. Come, gentle sir, take these things that I have gathered, and I will go back and find more.”

But Nigel smiled and shook his head. “You have gained what your heart desired, and perchance I have done so also,” said he.

An instant later Knolles strode up to him with outstretched hand. “I ask your pardon, Nigel,” said he. “I have spoken too hotly in my wrath.”

“Nay, fair sir, I was at fault.”

“If we stand here now within this castle, it is to you that I owe it. The King shall know of it, and Chandos also. Can I do aught else, Nigel, to prove to you the high esteem in which I hold you?”

The Squire flushed with pleasure. “Do you send a messenger home to England, fair sir, with news of these doings?”

“Surely, I must do so. But do not tell me, Nigel, that you would be that messenger. Ask me some other favor, for indeed I cannot let you go.”

“Now God forbid!” cried Nigel. “By Saint Paul! I would not be so caitiff and so thrall as to leave you, when some small deed might still be done. But I would fain send a message by your messenger.”

“To whom?”

“It is to the Lady Mary, daughter of old Sir John Buttesthorn who dwells near Guildford.”

“But you will write the message, Nigel. Such greetings as a cavalier sends to his lady-love should be under seal.”

“Nay, he can carry my message by word of mouth.”

“Then I shall tell him for he goes this morning. What message, then, shall he say to the lady?”

“He will give her my very humble greeting, and he will say to her that for the second time Saint Catharine has been our friend.”

XXII. HOW ROBERT OF BEAUMANOIR CAME TO PLOERMEL

Sir Robert Knolles and his men passed onward that day, looking back many a time to see the two dark columns of smoke, one thicker and one more slender, which arose from the castle and from the fort of La Brohiniere. There was not an archer nor a man-at-arms who did not bear a great bundle of spoil upon his back, and Knolles frowned darkly as he looked upon them. Gladly would he have thrown it all down by the roadside, but he had tried such matters before, and he knew that it was as safe to tear a half-gnawed bone from a bear as their blood-won plunder from such men as these. In any case it was but two days' march to Ploermel, where he hoped to bring his journey to an end.

That night they camped at Mauron, where a small English and Breton garrison held the castle. Right glad were the bowmen to see some of their own countrymen once more, and they spent the night over wine and dice, a crowd of Breton girls assisting, so that next morning their bundles were much lighter, and most of the plunder of La Brohiniere was left with the men and women of Mauron. Next day their march lay with a fair sluggish river upon their right, and a great rolling forest upon their left which covered the whole country. At last toward evening the towers of Ploermel rose before them and they saw against a darkening sky the Red Cross of England waving in the wind. So blue was the river Duc which skirted the road, and so green its banks, that they might indeed have been back beside their own homely streams, the Oxford Thames or the Midland Trent, but ever as the darkness deepened there came in wild gusts the howling of wolves from the forest to remind them that they were in a land of war. So busy had men been for many years in hunting one another that the beasts of the chase had grown to a monstrous degree, until the streets of the towns were no longer safe from the wild inroads of the fierce creatures, the wolves and the bears, who swarmed around them.

It was nightfall when the little army entered the outer gate of the Castle of Ploermel and encamped in the broad Bailey yard. Ploermel was at that time the center of British power in Mid-Brittany, as Hennebon was in the

West, and it was held by a garrison of five hundred men under an old soldier, Richard of Bambro’, a rugged Northumbrian, trained in that great school of warriors, the border wars. He who had ridden the marches of the most troubled frontier in Europe, and served his time against the Liddlesdale and Nithsdale raiders was hardened for a life in the field.

Of late, however, Bambro’ had been unable to undertake any enterprise, for his reinforcements had failed him, and amid his following he had but three English knights and seventy men. The rest were a mixed crew of Bretons, Hainaulters and a few German mercenary soldiers, brave men individually, as those of that stock have ever been, but lacking interest in the cause, and bound together by no common tie of blood or tradition.

On the other hand, the surrounding castles, and especially that of Josselin, were held by strong forces of enthusiastic Bretons, inflamed by a common patriotism, and full of warlike ardor. Robert of Beaumanoir, the fierce seneschal of the house of Rohan, pushed constant forays and excursions against Ploermel so that town and castle were both in daily dread of being surrounded and besieged. Several small parties of the English faction had been cut off and slain to a man, and so straitened were the others that it was difficult for them to gather provisions from the country round.

Such was the state of Bambro’s garrison when on that March evening Knolles and his men streamed into the bailey-yard of his Castle.

In the glare of the torches at the inner gate Bambro’ was waiting to receive them, a dry, hard, wizened man, small and fierce, with beady black eyes and quick furtive ways.

Beside him, a strange contrast, stood his Squire, Croquart, a German, whose name and fame as a man-at-arms were widespread, though like Robert Knolles himself he had begun as a humble page. He was a very tall man, with an enormous spread of shoulders, and a pair of huge hands with which he could crack a horse-shoe. He was slow and lethargic, save in moments of excitement, and his calm blond face, his dreamy blue eyes and his long fair hair gave him so gentle an appearance that none save those who had seen him in his berserk mood, raging, an iron giant, in the forefront of the battle, could ever guess how terrible a warrior he might be. Little knight and huge squire stood together under the arch of the donjon and gave welcome to the newcomers, whilst a swarm of soldiers crowded round to embrace their comrades and to lead them off where they might feed and make merry together.

Supper had been set in the hall of Ploermel wherein the knights and squires assembled. Bambro' and Croquart were there with Sir Hugh Calverly, an old friend of Knolles and a fellow-townsman, for both were men of Chester. Sir Hugh was a middle-sized flaxen man, with hard gray eyes and fierce large-nosed face sliced across with the scar of a sword-cut. There too were Geoffrey D'Ardaine, a young Breton seigneur, Sir Thomas Belford, a burly thick-set Midland Englishman, Sir Thomas Walton, whose surcoat of scarlet martlets showed that he was of the Surrey Waltons, James Marshall and John Russell, young English squires, and the two brothers, Richard and Hugh Le Galliard, who were of Gascon blood. Besides these were several squires, unknown to fame, and of the new-comers, Sir Robert Knolles, Sir Thomas Percy, Nigel Loring and two other squires, Allington and Parsons. These were the company who gathered in the torch-light round the table of the Seneschal of Ploermel, and kept high revel with joyous hearts because they thought that much honor and noble deeds lay before them.

But one sad face there was at the board, and that belonged to him at the head of it. Sir Robert Bambro' sat with his chin leaning upon his hand and his eyes downcast upon the cloth, whilst all round him rose the merry clatter of voices, everyone planning some fresh enterprise which might now be attempted. Sir Robert Knolles was for an immediate advance upon Josselin. Calverly thought that a raid might be made into the South where the main French power lay. Others spoke of an attack upon Vannes.

To all these eager opinions Bambro' listened in a moody silence, which he broke at last by a fierce execration which drew a hushed attention from the company. "Say no more, fair sirs," he cried; "for indeed your words are like so many stabs in my heart. All this and more we might indeed have done. But of a truth you are too late."

"Too late?'" cried Knolles. "What mean you, Richard?"

"Alas; that I should have to say it, but you and all these fair soldiers might be back in England once more for all the profit that I am like to have from your coming. Saw you a rider on a white horse ere you reached the Castle?"

"Nay, I saw him not?"

“He came by the western road from Hennebon. Would that he had broken his neck ere he came here. Not an hour ago he left his message and now hath ridden on to warn the garrison of Malestroit. A truce has been proclaimed for a year betwixt the French King and the English, and he who breaks it forfeits life and estate.”

“A truce!” Here was an end to all their fine dreams. They looked blankly at each other all round the table, whilst Croquart brought his great fist down upon the board until the glasses rattled again. Knolles sat with clenched hands as if he were a figure of stone, while Nigel’s heart turned cold and heavy within him. A truce! Where then was his third deed, and how might he return without it?

Even as they sat in moody silence there was the call of a bugle from somewhere out in the darkness.

Sir Richard looked up with surprise. “We are not wont to be summoned after once the portcullis is up,” said he. “Truce or no truce, we must let no man within our walls until we have proved him. Croquart, see to it!”

The huge German left the room. The company were still seated in despondent silence when he returned.

“Sir Richard,” said he, “the brave knight Robert of Beaumanoir and his Squire William de Montaubon are without the gate, and would fain have speech with you.”

Bambro’ started in his chair. What could the fierce leader of the Bretons, a man who was red to the elbow with English blood, have to say to them? On what errand had he left his castle of Josselin to pay this visit to his deadly enemies?

“Are they armed?” he asked.

“They are unarmed.”

“Then admit them and bring them hither, but double the guards and take all heed against surprise.”

Places were set at the farther end of the table for these most unexpected guests. Presently the door was swung open, and Croquart with all form and courtesy announced the two Bretons, who entered with the proud and lofty air of gallant warriors and high-bred gentlemen.

Beaumanoir was a tall dark man with raven hair and long swarthy beard. He was strong and straight as a young oak, with fiery black eyes, and no flaw in his comely features save that his front teeth had been dashed from their sockets. His Squire, William of Montaubon, was also tall, with a thin hatchet face, and two small gray eyes set very close upon either side of a long fierce nose. In Beaumanoir's expression one read only gallantry and frankness; in Montaubon's there was gallantry also, but it was mixed with the cruelty and cunning of the wolf. They bowed as they entered, and the little English seneschal advanced with outstretched hand to meet them.

"Welcome, Robert, so long as you are beneath this roof," said he. "Perhaps the time may come in another place when we may speak to each other in another fashion."

"So I hope, Richard," said Beaumanoir; "but indeed we of Josselin bear you in high esteem and are much beholden to you and to your men for all that you have done for us. We could not wish better neighbours nor any from whom more honor is to be gained. I learn that Sir Robert Knolles and others have joined you, and we are heavy-hearted to think that the orders of our Kings should debar us from attempting a venture." He and his squire sat down at the places set for them, and filling their glasses drank to the company.

"What you say is true, Robert," said Bambro', "and before you came we were discussing the matter among ourselves and grieving that it should be so. When heard you of the truce?"

"Yester-evening a messenger rode from Nantes."

"Our news came to-night from Hennebon. The King's own seal was on the order. So I fear that for a year at least you will bide at Josselin and we at Ploermel, and kill time as we may. Perchance we may hunt the wolf together in the great forest, or fly our hawks on the banks of the Duc."

"Doubtless we shall do all this, Richard," said Beaumanoir; "but by Saint Cadoc it is in my mind that with good-will upon both sides we may please ourselves and yet stand excused before our Kings."

Knights and squires leaned forward in their chairs, their eager eyes, fixed upon him. He broke into a gap-toothed smile as he looked round at the circle, the wizened seneschal, the blond giant, Nigel's fresh young face, the grim features of Knolles, and the yellow hawk-like Calverly, all burning with the same desire.

"I see that I need not doubt the good-will," said he, "and of that I was very certain before I came upon this errand. Bethink you then that this order applies to war but not to challenges, spear-runnings, knightly exchanges or the like. King Edward is too good a knight, and so is King John, that either of them should stand in the way of a gentleman who desires to advance himself or to venture his body for the exaltation of his lady. Is this not so?"

A murmur of eager assent rose from the table.

"If you as the garrison of Ploermel march upon the garrison of Josselin, then it is very plain that we have broken the truce and upon our heads be it. But if there be a private bickering betwixt me, for example, and this young squire whose eyes show that he is very eager for honor, and if thereafter others on each side join in and fight upon the quarrel, it is in no sense war, but rather our own private business which no king can alter."

"Indeed, Robert," said Bambro', "all that you say is very good and fair."

Beaumanoir leaned forward toward Nigel, his brimming glass in his hand. "Your name, squire?" said he.

"My name is Nigel Loring."

"I see that you are young and eager, so I choose you as I would fain have been chosen when I was of your age."

"I thank you, fair sir," said Nigel. "It is great honor that one so famous as yourself should condescend to do some small deed upon me."

"But we must have cause for quarrel, Nigel. Now here I drink to the ladies of Brittany, who of all ladies upon this earth are the most fair and the most virtuous, so that the least worthy-amongst them is far above the best of England. What say you to that, young sir?"

Nigel dipped his finger in his glass and leaning over he placed its wet impress on the Breton's hand. "This in your face!" said he.

Beaumanoir swept off the red drop of moisture and smiled his approval. "It could not have been better done," said he. "Why spoil my velvet paltock as many a hot-headed fool would have done. It is in my mind, young sir, that you will go far. And now, who follows up this quarrel?"

A growl ran round the table.

Beaumanoir ran his eye round and shook his head. "Alas!" said he, "there are but twenty of you here, and I have thirty at Josselin who are so eager to advance themselves that if I return without hope for all of them there will be sore hearts amongst them. I pray you, Richard, since we have been at these pains to arrange matters, that you in turn will do what you may. Can you not find ten more men?"

"But not of gentle blood."

"Nay, it matters not, if they will only fight."

“Of that there can be no doubt, for the castle is full of archers and men-at-arms who would gladly play a part in the matter.”

“Then choose ten,” said Beaumanoir.

But for the first time the wolf-like squire opened his thin lips. “Surely, my lord, you will not allow archers,” said he.

“I fear not any man.”

“Nay, fair sir, consider that this is a trial of weapons betwixt us where man faces man. You have seen these English archers, and you know how fast and how strong are their shafts. Bethink you that if ten of them were against us it is likely that half of us would be down before ever we came to handstrokes.”

“By Saint Cadoc, William, I think that you are right,” cried the Breton. “If we are to have such a fight as will remain in the memories of men, you will bring no archers and we no crossbows. Let it be steel upon steel. How say you then?”

“Surely we can bring ten men-at-arms to make up the thirty that you desire, Robert. It is agreed then that we fight on no quarrel of England and France, but over this matter of the ladies in which you and Squire Loring have fallen out. And now the time?”

“At once.”

“Surely at once, or perchance a second messenger may come and this also be forbidden. We will be ready with to-morrow’s sunrise.”

“Nay, a day later,” cried the Breton Squire. “Bethink you, my lord, that the three lances of Radenac would take time to come over.”

“They are not of our garrison, and they shall not have a place.”

“But, fair sir, of all the lances of Brittany—”

“Nay, William, I will not have it an hour later. To-morrow it shall be, Richard.”

“And where?”

“I marked a fitting place even as I rode here this evening. If you cross the river and take the bridle-path through the fields which leads to Josselin you come midway upon a mighty oak standing at the corner of a fair and level meadow. There let us meet at midday to-morrow.”

“Agreed!” cried Bambro’. “But I pray you not to rise, Robert! The night is still young and the spices and hippocras will soon be served. Bide with us, I pray you, for if you would fain hear the latest songs from England, these gentlemen have doubtless brought them. To some of us perchance it is the last night, so we would make it a full one.”

But the gallant Breton shook his head. “It may indeed be the last night for many,” said he, “and it is but right that my comrades should know it. I have no need of monk or friar, for I cannot think that harm will ever come beyond the grave to one who has borne himself as a knight should, but others have other thoughts upon these matters and would fain have time for prayer and penitence. Adieu, fair sirs, and I drink a last glass to a happy meeting at the midway oak.”

XXIII. HOW THIRTY OF JOSSELIN ENCOUNTERED THIRTY OF PLOERMEL

All night the Castle of Ploermel rang with warlike preparations, for the smiths were hammering and filing and riveting, preparing the armor for the champions. In the stable yard hostlers were testing and grooming the great war-horses, whilst in the chapel knights and squires were easing their souls at the knees of old Father Benedict.

Down in the courtyard, meanwhile, the men-at-arms had been assembled, and the volunteers weeded out until the best men had been selected. Black Simon had obtained a place, and great was the joy which shone upon his grim visage. With him were chosen young Nicholas Dagsworth, a gentleman adventurer who was nephew to the famous Sir Thomas, Walter the German, Hulbitee — a huge peasant whose massive frame gave promise which his sluggish spirit failed to fulfil — John Alcock, Robin Adey and Raoul Provost. These with three others made up the required thirty. Great was the grumbling and evil the talk amongst the archers when it was learned that none of them were to be included, but the bow had been forbidden on either side. It is true that many of them were expert fighters both with ax and with sword, but they were unused to carry heavy armor, and a half-armed man would have short shrift in such a hand-to-hand struggle as lay before them.

It was two hours after tierce, or one hour before noon, on the fourth Wednesday of Lent in the year of Christ 1351 that the men of Ploermel rode forth from their castle-gate and crossed the bridge of the Due. In front was Bambro’ with his Squire Croquart, the latter on a great roan horse bearing the banner of Ploermel, which was a black rampant lion holding a blue flag upon a field of ermine. Behind him came Robert Knolles and Nigel Loring, with an attendant at their side, who carried the pennon of the black raven. Then rode Sir Thomas Percy with his blue lion flaunting above him, and Sir Hugh Calverly, whose banner bore a silver owl, followed by the massive Belford who carried a huge iron club, weighing sixty pounds, upon his saddlebow, and Sir Thomas Walton the knight of Surrey. Behind them were four brave Anglo-Bretons, Perrot de Commelain, Le Gaillart, d’Aspremont and d’Ardaine, who fought against their own countrymen because they were partisans of the Countess of Montfort. Her engrailed silver cross upon a blue field was carried at their head. In the rear were five German or Hainault mercenaries, the tall Hulbitee, and the men-at-arms. Altogether of these combatants twenty were of English birth, four were Breton and six were of German blood.

So, with glitter of armor and flaunting of pennons, their warhorses tossing and pawing, the champions rode down to the midway oak. Behind them streamed hundreds of archers and men-at-arms whose weapons had been wisely taken from them lest a general battle should ensue. With them also went the townsfolk, men and women, together with wine-sellers, provisions merchants, armorers, grooms and heralds, with surgeons to tend the wounded and priests to shrive the dying. The path was blocked by this throng, but all over the face of the country horsemen and footmen, gentle and simple, men and women, could be seen speeding their way to the scene of the encounter.

The journey was not a long one, for presently, as they threaded their way through the fields, there appeared before them a great gray oak which spread its gnarled leafless branches over the corner of a green and level meadow. The tree was black with the peasants who had climbed into it, and all round it was a huge throng, chattering and calling like a rookery at sunset. A storm of hooting broke out from them at the approach of the English, for Bambro’ was hated in the country where he raised money for the Montfort cause by putting every parish to ransom and maltreating those who refused to pay. There was little amenity in the warlike ways which had been learned upon the Scottish border. The champions rode onward without deigning to take notice of the taunts of the rabble, but the archers turned that way and soon beat the mob to silence. Then they resolved themselves into the keepers of the ground, and pressed the people back until they formed a dense line along the edge of the field, leaving the whole space clear for the warriors.

The Breton champions had not yet arrived, so the English tethered their horses at one side of the ground, and then gathered round their leader. Every man had his shield slung round his neck, and had cut his spear to the length of five feet so that it might be more manageable for fighting on foot. Besides the spear a sword or a battle-ax hung at the side of each. They were clad from head to foot in armor, with devices upon the crests and surcoats to distinguish them from their antagonists. At present their visors were still up and they chatted gayly with each other.

"By Saint Dunstan!" cried Percy, slapping his gauntleted hands together and stamping his steel feet. "I shall be right glad to get to work, for my blood is chilled."

"I warrant you will be warm enough ere you get through," said Calverly.

"Or cold forever. Candle shall burn and bell toll at Alnwick Chapel if I leave this ground alive, but come what may, fair sirs, it should be a famous joust and one which will help us forward. Surely each of us will have worshipfully won worship, if we chance to come through."

"You say truth, Thomas," said Knolles, bracing his girdle. "For my own part I have no joy in such encounters when there is warfare to be carried out, for it standeth not aright that a man should think of his own pleasure and advancement rather than of the King's cause and the weal of the army. But in times of truce I can think of no better way in which a day may be profitably spent. Why so silent, Nigel?"

"Indeed, fair sir, I was looking toward Josselin, which lies as I understand beyond those woods. I see no sign of this debonair gentleman and of his following. It would be indeed grievous pity if any cause came to hold them back."

Hugh Calverly laughed at the words. "You need have no fear, young sir," said he. "Such a spirit lies in Robert de Beaumanoir that if he must come alone he would ride against us none the less. I warrant that if he were on a bed of death he would be borne here and die on the green field."

"You say truly, Hugh," said Bambro'. "I know him and those who ride behind him. Thirty stouter men or more skilled in arms are not to be found in Christendom. It is in my mind that come what may there will be much honor for all of us this day. Ever in my head I have a rhyme which the wife of a Welsh archer gave me when I crossed her hand with a golden bracelet after the intaking of Bergerac. She was of the old blood of Merlin with the power of sight. Thus she said —

"'Twixt the oak-tree and the river
Knightly fame aid brave endeavor
Make an honored name forever.'

"Methinks I see the oak-tree, and yonder is the river. Surely this should betide some good to us."

The huge German Squire betrayed some impatience during this speech of his leader. Though his rank was subordinate, no man present had more experience of warfare or was more famous as a fighter than he. He new broke brusquely into the talk. “We should be better employed in ordering our line and making our plans than in talking of the rhymes of Merlin or such old wives’ tales,” said he. “It is to our own strong arms and good weapons that we must trust this day. And first I would ask you, Sir Richard, what is your will if perchance you should fall in the midst of the fight?”

Bambro’ turned to the others. “If such should be the case, fair sirs, I desire that my Squire Croquart should command.”

There was a pause while the knights looked with some chagrin at each other. The silence was broken by Knolles.

“I will do what you say, Richard,” said he, “though indeed it is bitter that we who are knights should serve beneath a squire. Yet it is not for us to fall out among ourselves now at this last moment, and I have ever heard that Croquart is a very worthy and valiant man. Therefore, I will pledge you on jeopardy of my soul that I will accept him as leader if you fall.”

“So will I also, Richard,” said Calverly.

“And I too!” cried Belford. “But surely I hear music, and yonder are their pennons amid the trees.”

They all turned, leaning upon their short spears, and watched the advance of the men of Josselin, as their troop wound its way out from the woodlands. In front rode three heralds with tabards of the ermine of Brittany, blowing loudly upon silver trumpets. Behind them a great man upon a white horse bore the banner of Josselin which carries nine golden torteaus upon a scarlet field. Then came the champions riding two and two, fifteen knights and fifteen squires, each with his pennon displayed. Behind them on a litter was borne an aged priest, the Bishop of Rennes, carrying in his hands the viaticum and the holy oils that he might give the last aid and comfort of the Church to those who were dying. The procession was terminated by hundreds of men and women from Josselin, Guegon, and Helleon, and by the entire garrison of the fortress, who came, as the English had done, without their arms. The head of this long column had reached the field before the rear were clear of the wood, but as they arrived the champions picketed their horses on the farther side, behind which their banner was planted and the people lined up until they had inclosed the whole lists with a dense wall of spectators.

With keen eyes the English party had watched the armorial blazonry of their antagonists, for those fluttering pennons and brilliant surcoats carried a language which all men could read. In front was the banner of Beaumanoir, blue with silver frets. His motto “J’ayme qui m’ayme” was carried on a second flag by a little page.

“Whose is the shield behind him — silver with scarlet drops?” asked Knolles.

“It is his Squire, William of Montaubon,” Calverly answered. “And there are the golden lion of Rochefort and the silver cross of Du Bois the Strong. I would not wish to meet a better company than are before us this day. See, there are the blue rings of young Tintiniac, who slew my Squire Hubert last Lammastide. With the aid of Saint George I will avenge him ere nightfall.”

“By the three kings of Almain,” growled Croquart, “we will need to fight hard this day, for never have I seen so many good soldiers gathered together. Yonder is Yves Cheruel, whom they call the man of iron, Caro de Bodegat also with whom I have had more than one bickering — that is he with the three ermine circles on the scarlet shield. There too is left-handed Alain de Karanais; bear in mind that his stroke comes on the side where there is no shield.”

“Who is the small stout man” — asked Nigel—”he with the black and silver shield? By Saint Paul! he seems a very worthy person and one from whom much might be gained, for he is nigh as broad as he is long.”

“It is Sir Robert Raguenel,” said Calverly, whose long spell of service in Brittany had made him familiar with the people. “It is said that he can lift a horse upon his back. Beware a full stroke of that steel mace, for the armor is not made that can abide it. But here is the good Beaumanoir, and surely it is time that we came to grips.”

The Breton leader had marshaled his men in a line opposite to the English, and now he strode forward and shook Bambro’ by the hand. “By Saint Cadoc! this is a very joyous meeting, Richard,” said he, “and we have certainly hit upon a very excellent way of keeping a truce.”

“Indeed, Robert,” said Bambro’, “we owe you much thanks, for I can see that you have been at great pains to bring a worthy company against us this day. Surely if all should chance to perish there will be few noble houses in Brittany who will not mourn.”

“Nay, we have none of the highest of Brittany,” Beaumanoir answered. “Neither a Blois, nor a Leon, nor a Rohan, nor a Conan, fights in our ranks this day. And yet we are all men of blood and coat-armor, who are ready to venture our persons for the desire of our ladies and the love of the high order of knighthood. And now, Richard, what is your sweet will concerning this fight?”

“That we continue until one or other can endure no longer, for since it is seldom that so many brave men draw together it is fitting that we see as much as is possible of each other.”

“Richard, your words are fair and good. It shall be even as you say. For the rest, each shall fight as pleases him best from the time that the herald calls the word. If any man from without shall break in upon us he shall be hanged on yonder oak.”

With a salute he drew down his visor and returned to his own men, who were kneeling in a twinkling, many coloured group whilst the old bishop gave them his blessing.

The heralds rode round with a warning to the spectators. Then they halted at the side of the two bands of men who now stood in a long line facing each other with fifty yards of grass between. The visors had been closed, and every man was now cased in metal from head to foot, some few glowing in brass, the greater number shining in steel. Only their fierce eyes could be seen smoldering in the dark shadow of their helmets. So for an instant they stood glaring and crouching.

Then with a loud cry of “Allez!” the herald dropped his upraised hand, and the two lines of men shuffled as fast as their heavy armor would permit until they met with a sharp clang of metal in the middle of the field. There was a sound as of sixty smiths working upon their anvils. Then the babel of yells and shouts from the spectators, cheering on this party or that, rose and swelled until even the uproar of the combat was drowned in that mighty surge.

So eager were the combatants to engage that in a few moments all order had been lost and the two bands were mixed up in one furious scrambling, clattering throng, each man tossed hither and thither, thrown against one adversary and then against another, beaten and hustled and buffeted, with only the one thought in his mind to thrust with his spear or to beat with his ax against anyone who came within the narrow slit of vision left by his visor.

But alas for Nigel and his hopes of some great deed! His was at least the fate of the brave, for he was the first to fall. With a high heart he had placed himself in the line as nearly opposite to Beaumanoir as he could, and had made straight for the Breton leader, remembering that in the out set the quarrel had been so ordered that it lay between them. But ere he could reach his goal he was caught in the swirl of his own comrades, and being the lighter man was swept aside and dashed into the arms of Alain de Karanais, the left-handed swordsman, with such a crash that the two rolled upon the ground together. Light footed as a cat, Nigel had sprung up first, and was stooping over the Breton Squire when the powerful dwarf Raguenel brought his mace thudding down upon the exposed back of his helmet. With a groan Nigel fell upon his face, blood gushing from his mouth, nose, and ears. There he lay, trampled over by either party, while that great fight for which his fiery soul had panted was swaying back and forward above his unconscious form.

But Nigel was not long unavenged. The huge iron club of Belford struck the dwarf Raguenel to the ground, while Belford in turn was felled by a sweeping blow from Beaumanoir. Sometimes a dozen were on the ground at one time, but so strong was the armor, and so deftly was the force of a blow broken by guard and shield, that the stricken men were often pulled to their feet once more by their comrades, and were able to continue the fight.

Some, however, were beyond all aid. Croquart had cut at a Breton knight named Jean Rousselot and had shorn away his shoulder-piece, exposing his neck and the upper part of his arm. Vainly he tried to cover this vulnerable surface with his shield. It was his right side, and he could not stretch it far enough across, nor could he get away on account of the press of men around him. For a time he held his foemen at bay, but that bare patch of white shoulder was a mark for every weapon, until at last a hatchet sank up to the socket in the knight’s chest. Almost at the same moment a second Breton, a young Squire named Geoffrey Mellon, was slain by a thrust from Black Simon which found the weak spot beneath the armpit. Three other Bretons, Evan Cheruel, Caro de Bodegat, and Tristan de Pestivien, the first two knights and the latter a squire, became separated from their comrades, and were beaten to the ground with English all around them, so that they had to choose between instant death and surrender. They handed their swords to Bambro’ and stood apart, each of them sorely wounded, watching with hot and bitter hearts the melee which still surged up and down the field.

But now the combat had lasted half an hour without stint or rest, until the warriors were so exhausted with the burden of their armor, the loss of blood, the shock of blows, and their own furious exertions, that they could scarce totter or raise their weapons. There must be a pause if the combat was to have any decisive end. “Cessez! Cessez! Retirez!” cried the heralds, as they spurred their horses between the exhausted men.

Slowly the gallant Beaumanoir led the twenty-five men who were left to their original station, where they opened their visors and threw themselves down upon the grass, panting like weary dogs, and wiping the sweat from their bloodshot eyes. A pitcher of wine of Anjou was carried round by a page, and each in turn drained a cup, save only Beaumanoir who kept his Lent with such strictness that neither food nor drink might pass his lips before sunset. He paced slowly amongst his men, croaking forth encouragement from his parched lips and pointing out to them that among the English there was scarce a man who was not wounded, and some so sorely that they could hardly stand. If the fight so far had gone against them, there were still five hours of daylight, and much might happen before the last of them was laid upon his back.

Varlets had rushed forth to draw away the two dead Bretons, and a brace of English archers had carried Nigel from the field. With his own hands Aylward had unlaced the crushed helmet and had wept to see the bloodless and unconscious face of his young master. He still breathed, however, and stretched upon the grass by the riverside the bowman tended him with rude surgery, until the water upon his brow and the wind upon his face had coaxed back the life into his battered frame. He breathed with heavy gasps, and some tinge of blood crept hack into his cheeks, but still he lay unconscious of the roar of the crowd and of that great struggle which his comrades were now waging once again.

The English had lain for a space bleeding and breathless, in no better case than their rivals, save that they were still twenty-nine in number. But of this muster there were not nine who were hale men, and some were so weak from loss of blood that they could scarce keep standing. Yet, when the signal was at last given to reengage there was not a man upon either side who did not totter to his feet and stagger forward toward his enemies.

But the opening of this second phase of the combat brought one great misfortune and discouragement to the English. Bambro’ like the others, had undone his visor, but with his mind full of many cares he had neglected to make it fast again. There was an opening an inch broad betwixt it and the beaver. As the two lines met the left-handed Breton squire, Alain de Karanais, caught sight of Bambro’s face, and in an instant thrust his short spear through the opening. The English leader gave a cry of pain and fell on his knees, but staggered to his feet again, too weak to raise his shield. As he stood exposed the Breton knight, Geoffrey Dubois the Strong, struck him such a blow with his ax that he beat in the whole breast-plate with the breast behind it. Bambro’ fell dead upon the ground and for a few minutes a fierce fight raged round his body.

Then the English drew back, sullen and dogged, bearing Bambro’ with them, and the Bretons, breathing hard, gathered again in their own quarter. At the same instant the three prisoners picked up such weapons as were scattered upon the grass and ran over to join their own party.

“Nay, nay!” cried Knolles, raising his visor and advancing. “This may not be. You have been held to mercy when we might have slain you, and by the Virgin I will hold you dishonored, all three, if you stand not back.”

“Say not so, Robert Knolles,” Evan Cheruel answered. “Never yet has the word dishonor been breathed with my name, but I should count myself faineant if I did not fight beside my comrades when chance has made it right and proper that I should do so.”

“By Saint Cadoc! he speaks truly,” croaked Beaumanoir, advancing in front of his men. “You are well aware, Robert, that it is the law of war and the usage of chivalry that if the knight to whom you have surrendered is himself slain the prisoners thereby become released.”

There was no answer to this and Knolles, weary and spent, returned to his comrades. “I would that we had slain them,” said he. “We have lost our leader and they have gained three men by the same stroke.”

“If any more lay down their arms it is my order that you slay them forthwith,” said Croquart, whose bent sword and bloody armor showed how manfully he had borne himself in the fray. “And now, comrades, do not be heavy-hearted because we have lost our leader. Indeed, his rhymes of Merlin have availed him little. By the three kings of Almain! I can teach you what is better than an old woman’s prophecies, and that is that you should keep your shoulders together and your shields so close that none can break between them. Then you will know what is on either side of you, and you can fix your eyes upon the front. Also, if any be so weak or wounded that he must sink his hands his comrades on right and left can bear him up.

Now advance all together in God’s name, for the battle is still ours if we bear ourselves like men.”

In a solid line the English advanced, while the Bretons ran forward as before to meet them. The swiftest of these was a certain Squire, Geoffrey Poulart, who bore a helmet which was fashioned as a cock’s head, with high comb above, and long pointed beak in front pierced with the breathing-holes. He thrust with his sword at Calverly, but Belford who was the next in the line raised his giant club and struck him a crushing blow from the side. He staggered, and then pushing forth from the crowd, he ran round and round in circles as one whose brain is stricken, the blood dripping from the holes of his brazen beak. So for a long time he ran, the crowd laughing and cock-crowing at the sight, until at last he stumbled and fell stone-dead upon his face. But the fighters had seen nothing of his fate, for desperate and unceasing was the rush of the Bretons and the steady advance of the English line.

For a time it seemed as if nothing would break it, but gap-toothed Beaumanoir was a general as well as a warrior. Whilst his weary, bleeding, hard-breathing men still flung themselves upon the front of the line, he himself with Raguenel, Tentiniac, Alain de Karanais, and Dubois rushed round the flank and attacked the English with fury from behind. There was a long and desperate melee until once more the heralds, seeing the combatants stand gasping and unable to strike a blow, rode in and called yet another interval of truce.

But in those few minutes whilst they had been assaulted upon both sides, the losses of the English party had been heavy. The Anglo-Breton D’Ardaine had fallen before Beaumanoir’s sword, but not before he had cut deeply into his enemy’s shoulder. Sir Thomas Walton, Richard of Ireland one of the Squires, and Hulbitee the big peasant had all fallen before the mace of the dwarf Raguenel or the swords of his companions. Some twenty men were still left standing upon either side, but all were in the last state of exhaustion, gasping, reeling, hardly capable of striking a blow.

It was strange to see them as they staggered with many a lurch and stumble toward each other once again, for they moved like drunken men, and the scales of their neck-armor and joints were as red as fishes’ gills when they raised them They left foul wet footprints behind them on the green grass as they moved forward once more to their endless contest.

Beaumanoir, faint with the drain of his blood and with a tongue of leather, paused as he advanced. “I am fainting, comrades,” he cried. “I must drink.”

“Drink your own blood, Beaumanoir!” cried Dubois, and the weary men all croaked together in dreadful laughter.

But now the English had learned from experience, and under the guidance of Croquart they fought no longer in a straight line, but in one so bent that at last it became a circle. As the Bretons still pushed and staggered against it they thrust it back on every side, until they had turned it into the most dangerous formation of all, a solid block of men, their faces turned outward, their weapons bristling forth to meet every attack. Thus the English stood, and no assault could move them. They could lean against each other back to back while they waited and allowed their foemen to tire themselves out. Again and again the gallant Bretons tried to make a way through. Again and again they were beaten back by a shower of blows.

Beaumanoir, his head giddy with fatigue, opened his helmet and gazed in despair at this terrible, unbreakable circle. Only too clearly he could see the inevitable result. His men were wearing themselves out. Already many of them could scarce stir hand or foot, and might be dead for any aid which they could give him in winning the fight. Soon all would be in the same plight. Then these cursed English would break their circle to swarm over his helpless men and to strike them down. Do what he might, he could see no way by which such an end might be prevented. He cast his eyes round in his agony, and there was one of his Bretons slinking away to the side of the lists. He could scarce credit his senses when he saw by the scarlet and silver that the deserter was his own well-tried squire, William of Montaubon.

“William! William!” he cried. “Surely you would not leave me?”

But the other’s helmet was closed and he could hear nothing. Beaumanoir saw that he was staggering away as swiftly as he could. With a cry of bitter despair, he drew into a knot as many of his braves as could still move, and together they made a last rush upon the English spears. This time he was firmly resolved, deep in his gallant soul, that he would come no foot back, but would find his death there amongst his foemen or carve a path into the heart of their ranks. The fire in his breast spread from man to man of his followers, and amid the crashing of blows they still locked themselves against the English shields and drove hard for an opening in their ranks.

But all was vain! Beaumanoir’s head reeled. His senses were leaving him. In another minute he and his men would have been stretched senseless before this terrible circle of steel, when suddenly the whole array fell in pieces before his eyes, his enemies Croquart, Knolles, Calverly, Belford, all were stretched upon the ground together, their weapons dashed from their hands and their bodies too exhausted to rise. The surviving Bretons had but strength to fall upon them dagger in hands, and to wring from them their surrender with the sharp point stabbing through their visors. Then victors and vanquished lay groaning and panting in one helpless and blood-smeared heap.

To Beaumanoir’s simple mind it had seemed that at the supreme moment the Saints of Brittany had risen at their country’s call. Already, as he lay gasping, his heart was pouring forth its thanks to his patron Saint Cadoc. But the spectators had seen clearly enough the earthly cause of this sudden victory, and a hurricane of applause from one side, with a storm of hooting from the other showed how different was the emotion which it raised in minds which sympathized with the victors or the vanquished.

William of Montaubon, the cunning squire, had made his way across to the spot where the steeds were tethered, and had mounted his own great roussin. At first it was thought that he was about to ride from the field, but the howl of execration from the Breton peasants changed suddenly to a yell of applause and delight as he turned the beast’s head for the English circle and thrust his long prick spurs into its side. Those who faced him saw this sudden and unexpected appearance. Time was when both horse and rider must have winced away from the shower of their blows. But now they were in no state to meet such a rush. They could scarce raise their arms. Their blows were too feeble to hurt this mighty creature. In a moment it had plunged through the ranks, and seven of them were on the grass. It turned and rushed through them again, leaving five others helpless beneath its hoofs. No need to do more! Already Beaumanoir and his companions were inside the circle, the prostrate men were helpless, and Josselin had won.

That night a train of crestfallen archers, bearing many a prostrate figure, marched sadly into Ploermel Castle. Behind them rode ten men, all weary, all wounded, and all with burning hearts against William of Montaubon for the foul trick that he had served them.

But over at Josselin, yellow gorse-blossoms in their helmets, the victors were borne in on the shoulders of a shouting mob, amid the fanfare of trumpets and the beating of drums. Such was the combat of the Midway Oak, where brave men met brave men, and such honor was gained that from that day he who had fought in the Battle of the Thirty was ever given the highest place and the post of honor, nor was it easy for any man to pretend to have been there, for it has been said by that great chronicler who knew them all, that not one on either side failed to carry to his grave the marks of that stern encounter.

XXIV. HOW NIGEL WAS CALLED TO HIS MASTER

“My sweet ladye,” wrote Nigel in a script which it would take the eyes of love to read, “there hath been a most noble meeting in the fourth sennight of Lent betwixt some of our own people and sundry most worthy persons of this country, which ended, by the grace of our Lady, in so fine a joust that no man living can call to mind so fair an occasion. Much honor was gained by the Sieurde Beaumanoir and also by an Almain named Croquart, with whom I hope to have some speech when I am hale again, for he is a most excellent person and very ready to advance himself or to relieve another from a vow. For myself I had hoped, with Godde’s help, to venture that third small deed which might set me free to haste to your sweet side, but things have gone awry with me, and I early met with such scathe and was of so small comfort to my friends that my heart is heavy within me, and in sooth I feel that I have lost honor rather than gained it. Here I have lain since the Feast of the Virgin, and here I am like still to be, for I can move no limb, save only my hand; but grieve not, sweet lady, for Saint Catharine hath been our friend since in so short a time I had two such ventures as the Red Ferret and the intaking of the Reaver’s fortalice. It needs but one more deed, and sickerly when I am hale once more it will not be long ere I seek it out. Till then, if my eyes may not rest upon you, my heart at least is ever at thy feet.”

So he wrote from his sick-room in the Castle of Ploermel late in the summer, but yet another summer had come before his crushed head had mended and his wasted limbs had gained their strength once more. With despair he heard of the breaking of the truce, and of the fight at Mauron in which Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Walter Bentley crushed the rising power of Brittany — a fight in which many of the thirty champions of Josselin met their end. Then, when with renewed strength and high hopes in his heart he went forth to search for the famous Croquart who proclaimed himself ever ready night or day to meet any man with any weapon, it was only to find that in trying the paces of his new horse the German had been cast into a ditch and had broken his neck. In the same ditch perished Nigel’s last chance of soon accomplishing that deed which should free him from his vow.

There was truce once more over all Christendom, and mankind was sated with war, so that only in far-off Prussia, where the Teutonic knights waged ceaseless battle with the Lithuanian heathen, could he hope to find his heart’s desire. But money and high knightly fame were needed ere a man could go upon the northern crusade, and ten years were yet to pass ere Nigel should look from the battlements of Marienberg on the waters of the Frische Haff, or should endure the torture of the hot plate when bound to the Holy Woden stone of Memel. Meanwhile, he chafed his burning soul out through the long seasons of garrison life in Brittany, broken only by one visit to the chateau of the father of Raoul, when he carried to the Lord of Grosbois the news of how his son had fallen like a gallant gentleman under the gateway of La Brohiniere.

And then, then at last, when all hope was well-nigh dead in his heart, there came one glorious July morning which brought a horseman bearing a letter to the Castle of Vannes, of which Nigel now was seneschal. It contained but few words, short and clear as the call of a war-trumpet. It was Chandos who wrote. He needed his Squire at his side, for his pennon was in the breeze once more. He was at Bordeaux. The Prince was starting at once for Bergerac, whence he would make a great raid into France. It would not end without a battle. They had sent word of their coming, and the good French King had promised to be at great pains to receive them. Let Nigel hasten at once. If the army had left, then let him follow after with all speed. Chandos had three other squires, but would very gladly see his fourth once again, for he had heard much of him since he parted, and nothing which he might not have expected to hear of his father’s son. Such was the letter which made the summer sun shine brighter and the blue sky seem of a still fairer blue upon that happy morning in Vannes.

It is a weary way from Vannes to Bordeaux. Coastwise ships are hard to find, and winds blow north when all brave hearts would fain be speeding south. A full month has passed from the day when Nigel received his letter before he stood upon the quay-side of the Garonne amid the stacked barrels of Gascon wine and helped to lead Pommers down the gang-planks. Not Aylward himself had a worse opinion of the sea than the great yellow horse, and he whinnied with joy as he thrust his muzzle into his master’s outstretched hand, and stamped his ringing hoofs upon the good firm cobblestones. Beside him, slapping his tawny shoulder in encouragement, was the lean spare form of Back Simon who had remained ever under Nigel's pennon.

But Aylward, where was he? Alas! two years before he and the whole of Knolles' company of archers had been drafted away on the King's service to Guienne, and since he could not write the Squire knew not whether he was alive or dead. Simon, indeed, had thrice heard of him from wandering archers, each time that he was alive and well and newly married, but as the wife in one case was a fair maid, and in another a dark, while in the third she was a French widow, it was hard to know the truth.

Already the army had been gone a month, but news of it came daily to the town, and such news as all men could read, for through the landward gates there rolled one constant stream of wagons, pouring down the Libourne Road, and bearing the booty of Southern France. The town was full of foot-soldiers, for none but mounted men had been taken by the Prince. With sad faces and longing eyes they watched the passing of the train of plunder-laden carts, piled high with rich furniture, silks, velvets, tapestries, carvings, and precious metals, which had been the pride of many a lordly home in fair Auvergne or the wealthy Bourbonnais.

Let no man think that in these wars England alone was face to face with France alone. There is glory and to spare without trifling with the truth. Two Provinces in France, both rich and warlike, had become English through a royal marriage, and these, Guienne and Gascony, furnished many of the most valiant soldiers under the island flag. So poor a country as England could not afford to keep a great force overseas, and so must needs have lost the war with France through want of power to uphold the struggle. The feudal system enabled an army to be drawn rapidly together with small expense, but at the end of a few weeks it dispersed again as swiftly, and only by a well-filled money-chest could it be held together. There was no such chest in England, and the King was forever at his wits' end how to keep his men in the field.

But Guienne and Gascony were full of knights and squires who were always ready to assemble from their isolated castles for a raid into France, and these with the addition of those English cavaliers who fought for honor, and a few thousand of the formidable archers, hired for fourpence a day, made an army with which a short campaign could be carried on. Such were the materials of the Prince's force, some eight thousand strong, who were now riding in a great circle through Southern France, leaving a broad wale of blackened and ruined country behind them.

But France, even with her southwestern corner in English hands, was still a very warlike power, far richer and more populous than her rival. Single Provinces were so great that they were stronger than many a kingdom. Normandy in the north, Burgundy in the east, Brittany in the west and Languedoc in the south were each capable of fitting out a great army of their own. Therefore the brave and spirited John, watching from Paris this insolent raid into his dominions, sent messengers in hot haste to all these great feudatories as well as to Lorraine, Picardy, Auvergne, Hainault, Vermandois, Champagne, and to the German mercenaries over his eastern border, bidding all of them to ride hard, with bloody spur, day and night, until they should gather to a head at Chartres.

There a great army had assembled early in September, whilst the Prince, all unconscious of its presence sacked towns and besieged castles from Bourges to Issodun, passing Romorautin, and so onward to Vierzon and to Tours. From week to week there were merry skirmishes at barriers, brisk assaults of fortresses in which much honor was won, knightly meetings with detached parties of Frenchmen and occasional spear-runnings where noble champions deigned to venture their persons. Houses, too, were to be plundered, while wine and women were in plenty. Never had either knights or archers had so pleasant and profitable an excursion, so that it was with high heart and much hope of pleasant days at Bordeaux with their pockets full of money that the army turned south from the Loire and began to retrace its steps to the seaboard city.

But now its pleasant and martial promenade changed suddenly to very serious work of war. As the Prince moved south he found that all, supplies had been cleared away from in front of him and that there was neither fodder for the horses nor food for the men. Two hundred wagons laden with spoil rolled at the head of the army, but the starving soldiers would soon have gladly changed it all for as many loads of bread and of meat. The light troops of the French had preceded then and burned or destroyed everything that could be of use. Now also for the first time the Prince and his men became aware that a great army was moving upon the eastern side of them, streaming southward in the hope of cutting off their retreat to the sea. The sky glowed with their fires at night, and the autumn sun twinkled and gleamed from one end of the horizon to the other upon the steel caps and flashing weapons of a mighty host.

Anxious to secure his plunder, and conscious that the levies of France were far superior in number to his own force, the Prince redoubled his attempts to escape; but his horses were exhausted and his starving men were hardly to be kept in order. A few more days would unfit them for battle. Therefore, when he found near the village of Maupertuis a position in which a small force might have a chance to hold its own, he gave up the attempt to outmarch his pursuers, and he turned at bay, like a hunted boar, all tusks and eyes of flame.

Whilst these high events had been in progress, Nigel with Black Simon and four other men-at-arms from Bordeaux, was hastening northward to join the army. As far as Bergerac they were in a friendly land, but thence onward they rode over a blackened landscape with many a roofless house, its two bare gable-ends sticking upward — a “Knolles’ miter” as it was afterward called when Sir Robert worked his stern will upon the country. For three days they rode northward, seeing many small parties of French in all directions, but too eager to reach the army to ease their march in the search of adventures.

Then at last after passing Lusignan they began to come in touch with English foragers, mounted bowmen for the most part, who were endeavoring to collect supplies either for the army or for themselves. From them Nigel learned that the Prince, with Chandos ever at his side, was hastening south and might be met within a short day’s march. As he still advanced these English stragglers became more and more numerous, until at last he overtook a considerable column of archers moving in the same direction as his own party. These were men whose horses had failed them and who had therefore been left behind on the advance, but were now hastening to be in time for the impending battle. A crowd of peasant girls accompanied them upon their march, and a whole train of laden mules were led beside them.

Nigel and his little troop of men-at-arms were riding past the archers when Black Simon with a sudden exclamation touched his leader upon the arm.

“See yonder, fair sir,” he cried, with gleaming eyes, “there where the wastrel walks with the great fardel upon his back! Who is he who marches behind him?”

Nigel looked, and was aware of a stunted peasant who bore upon his rounded back an enormous bundle very much larger than himself. Behind him walked a burly broad-shouldered archer, whose stained jerkin and battered headpiece gave token of long and hard service. His bow was slung over his shoulder, and his arms were round the waists of two buxom Frenchwomen, who tripped along beside him with much laughter and many saucy answers flung back over their shoulders to a score of admirers behind them.

"Aylward!" cried Nigel, spurring forward.

The archer turned his bronzed face, stared for an instant with wild eyes, and then, dropping his two ladies, who were instantly carried off by his comrades, he rushed to seize the hand which his young master held down to him. "Now, by my hilt, Squire Nigel, this is the fairest sight of my lifetime!" he cried. "And you, old leather-face! Nay, Simon, I would put my arms round your dried herring of a body, if I could but reach you. Here is Pommers too, and I read in his eye that he knows me well and is as ready to put his teeth into me as when he stood in my father's stall."

It was like a whiff of the heather-perfumed breezes of Hankley to see his homely face once more. Nigel laughed with sheer joy as he looked at him.

"It was an ill day when the King's service called you from my side," said he, "and by Saint Paul! I am right glad to set eyes upon you once more! I see well that you are in no wise altered, but the same Aylward that I have ever known. But who is this varlet with the great bundle who waits upon your movements?"

"It is no less than a feather-bed, fair sir, which he bears upon his back, for I would fain bring it to Tilford, and yet it is overlarge for me when I take my place with my fellows in the ranks. But indeed this war has been a most excellent one, and I have already sent half a wagonload of my gear back to Bordeaux to await my homecoming. Yet I have my fears when I think of all the rascal foot-archers who are waiting there, for some folk have no grace or honesty in their souls, and cannot keep their hands from that which belongs to another. But if I may throw my leg over yonder spare horse I will come on with you, fair sir, for indeed it would be joy to my heart to know that I was riding under your banner once again."

So Aylward, having given instructions to the bearer of his feather-bed, rode away in spite of shrill protests from his French companions, who speedily consoled themselves with those of his comrades who seemed to have most to give. Nigel’s party was soon clear of the column of archers and riding hard in the direction of the Prince’s army. They passed by a narrow and winding track, through the great wood of Nouaille, and found before them a marshy valley down which ran a sluggish stream. Along its farther bank hundreds of horses were being watered, and beyond was a dense block of wagons. Through these the comrades passed, and then topped a small mound from which the whole strange scene lay spread before them.

Down the valley the slow stream meandered with marshy meadows on either side. A mile or two lower a huge drove of horses were to be seen assembled upon the bank. They were the steeds of the French cavalry, and the blue haze of a hundred fires showed where King John’s men were camping. In front of the mound upon which they stood the English line was drawn, but there were few fires, for indeed, save their horses, there was little for them to cook. Their right rested upon the river, and their array stretched across a mile of ground until the left was in touch with a tangled forest which guarded it from flank attack. In front was a long thick hedge and much broken ground, with a single deeply rutted country road cutting through it in the middle. Under the hedge and along the Whole front of the position lay swarms of archers upon the grass, the greater number slumbering peacefully with sprawling limbs in the warm rays of the September sun. Behind were the quarters of the various knights, and from end to end flew the banners and pennons marked with the devices of the chivalry of England and Guienne.

With a glow in his heart Nigel saw those badges of famous captains and leaders and knew that now at last he also might show his coat-armor in such noble company. There was the flag of Jean Grailly, the Captal de Buch, five silver shells on a black cross, which marked the presence of the most famous soldier of Gascony, while beside it waved the red lion of the noble Knight of Hainault, Sir Eustace d’Ambreticourt. These two coats Nigel knew, as did every warrior in Europe, but a dense grove of pennoned lances surrounded them, bearing charges which were strange to him, from which he understood that these belonged to the Guienne division of the army. Farther down the line the famous English ensigns floated on the wind, the scarlet and gold of Warwick, the silver star of Oxford, the golden cross of Suffolk, the blue and gold of Willoughby, and the gold-fretted scarlet of Audley. In the very center of them, all was one which caused all others to pass from his mind, for close to the royal banner of England, crossed with the label of the Prince, there waved the war-worn flag with the red wedge upon the golden field which marked the quarters of the noble Chandos.

At the sight Nigel set spurs to his horse, and a few minutes later had reached the spot. Chandos, gaunt from hunger and want of sleep, but with the old fire lurking in his eye, was standing by the Prince’s tent, gazing down at what could be seen of the French array, and heavy with thought. Nigel sprang from his horse and was within touch of his master when the silken hanging of the royal tent was torn violently aside and Edward rushed out.

He was without his armor and clad in a sober suit of black, but the high dignity of his bearing and the imperious anger which flushed his face proclaimed the leader and the Prince. At his heels was a little white-haired ecclesiastic in a flowing gown of scarlet sendal, expostulating and arguing in a torrent of words.

“Not another word, my Lord Cardinal,” cried the angry prince. “I have listened to you overlong, and by God’s dignity! that which you say is neither good nor fair in my ears. Hark you, John, I would have your counsel. What think you is the message which my Lord Cardinal of Perigord has carried from the King of France? He says that of his clemency he will let my army pass back to Bordeaux if we will restore to him all that we have taken, remit all ransoms, and surrender my own person with that of a hundred nobles of England and Guienne to be held as prisoners. What think you, John?”

Chandos smiled. “Things are not done in that fashion,” said he.

“But my Lord Chandos,” cried the Cardinal, “I have made it clear to the Prince that indeed it is a scandal to all Christendom and a cause of mocking to the heathen, that two great sons of the Church should turn their swords thus upon each other.”

“Then bid the King of France keep clear of us,” said the Prince.

“Fair son, you are aware that you are in the heart of his country and that it standeth not aright that he should suffer you to go forth as you came. You have but a small army, three thousand bowmen and five thousand men-at-arms at the most, who seem in evil case for want of food and rest. The King has thirty thousand men at his back, of which twenty thousand are expert men-at-arms. It is fitting therefore that you make such terms as you may, lest worse befall.”

“Give my greetings to the King of France and tell him that England will never pay ransom for me. But it seems to me, my Lord Cardinal, that you have our numbers and condition very ready upon your tongue, and I would fain know how the eye of a Churchman can read a line of battle so easily. I have seen that these knights of your household have walked freely to and fro within our camp, and I much fear that when I welcomed you as envoys I have in truth given my protection to spies. How say you, my Lord Cardinal?”

“Fair Prince, I know not how you can find it in your heart or conscience to say such evil words.”

“There is this red-bearded nephew of thine, Robert de Duras. See where he stands yonder, counting and prying. Hark hither, young sir! I have been saying to your uncle the Cardinal that it is in my mind that you and your comrades have carried news of our dispositions to the French King. How say you?”

The knight turned pale and sank his eyes. “My lord,” he murmured, “it may be that I have answered some questions.”

“And how will such answers accord with your honor, seeing that we have trusted you since you came in the train of the Cardinal?”

“My lord, it is true that I am in the train of the Cardinal, and yet I am liege man of King John and a knight of France, so I pray you to assuage your wrath against me.”

The Prince ground his teeth and his piercing eyes blazed upon the youth. “By my father’s soul! I can scarce forbear to strike you to the earth! But this I promise you, that if you show that sign of the Red Griffin in the field and if you be taken alive in to-morrow’s battle, your head shall most assuredly be shorn from your shoulders.”

“Fair son, indeed you speak wildly,” cried the Cardinal. “I pledge you my word that neither my nephew Robert nor any of my train will take part in the battle. And now I leave you, sire, and may God assoil your soul, for indeed in all this world no men stand in greater peril than you and those who are around you, and I rede you that you spend the night in such ghostly exercises as may best prepare you for that which may befall.” So saying the Cardinal bowed, and with his household walking behind him set off for the spot where they had left their’ horses, whence they rode to the neighbouring Abbey.

The angry Prince turned upon his heel and entered his tent once more, whilst Chandos, glancing round, held out a warm welcoming hand to Nigel.

"I have heard much of your noble deeds," said he. "Already your name rises as a squire errant. I stood no higher, nor so high, at your age."

Nigel flushed with pride and pleasure. "Indeed, my dear lord, it is very little that I have done. But now that I am back at your side I hope that in truth I shall learn to bear myself in worthy fashion, for where else should I win honor if it be not under your banner."

"Truly, Nigel, you have come at a very good time for advancement. I cannot see how we can leave this spot without a great battle which will live in men's minds forever. In all our fights in France I cannot call to mind any in which they have been so strong or we so weak as now, so that there will be the more honor to be gained. I would that we had two thousand more archers. But I doubt not that we shall give them much trouble ere they drive us out from amidst these hedges. Have you seen the French?"

"Nay, fair sir, I have but this moment arrived."

"I was about to ride forth myself to coast their army and observe their countenance, so come with me ere the night fall, and we shall see what we can of their order and dispositions."

There was a truce betwixt the two forces for the day, on account of the ill-advised and useless interposition of the Cardinal of Perigord, Hence when Chandos and Nigel had pushed their horses through the long hedge which fronted the position they found that many small parties of the knights of either army were riding up and down on the plain outside. The greater number of these groups were French, since it was very necessary for them to know as much as possible of the English defenses; and many of their scouts had ridden up to within a hundred yards of the hedge, where they were sternly ordered back by the pickets of archers on guard.

Through these scattered knots of horsemen Chandos rode, and as many of them were old antagonists it was "Ha, John!" on the one side, and "Ha, Raoul!" "Ha, Nicholas!" "Ha, Guichard!" upon the other, as they brushed past them. Only one cavalier greeted them amiss, a large, red-faced man, the Lord Clermont, who by some strange chance bore upon his surcoat a blue virgin standing amid golden sunbeams, which was the very device which Chandos had donned for the day. The fiery Frenchman dashed across their path and drew his steed back on to its haunches.

"How long is it, my Lord Chandos," said he hotly, "since you have taken it upon yourself to wear my arms?"

Chandos smiled. "It is surely you who have mine," said he, "since this surcoat was worked for thee by the good nuns of Windsor a long year ago."

"If it were not for the truce," said Clermont, "I would soon show you that you have no right to wear it."

"Look for it then in the battle to-morrow, and I also will look for yours," Chandos answered. "There we can very honorably settle the matter."

But the Frenchman was choleric and hard to appease. "You English can invent nothing," said he, "and you take for your own whatever you see handsome belonging to others." So, grumbling and fuming, he rode upon his way, while Chandos, laughing gayly, spurred onward across the plain.

The immediate front of the English line was shrouded with scattered trees and bushes which hid the enemy; but when they had cleared these a fair view of the great French army lay before them. In the center of the huge camp was a long and high pavilion of red silk, with the silver lilies of the King at one end of it, and the golden oriflamme, the battle-flag of old France, at the other. Like the reeds of a pool from side to side of the broad array, and dwindling away as far as their eyes could see, were the banners and pennons of high barons and famous knights, but above them all flew the ducal standards which showed that the feudal muster of all the warlike provinces of France was in the field before them.

With a kindling eye Chandos looked across at the proud ensigns of Normandy, or Burgundy, of Auvergne, of Champagne, of Vermandois, and of Berry, flaunting and gleaming in the rays of the sinking sun. Riding slowly down the line he marked with attentive gaze the camp of the crossbowmen, the muster of the German mercenaries, the numbers of the foot-soldiers, the arms of every proud vassal or vavasor which might give some guide as to the power of each division. From wing to wing and round the flanks he went, keeping ever within crossbow-shot of the army, and then at last having noted all things in his mind he turned his horse's head and rode slowly back, heavy with thought, to the English lines.

XXV. HOW THE KING OF FRANCE HELD COUNSEL AT MAUPERTUIS

The morning of Sunday, the nineteenth of September, in the year of our Lord 1356, was cold and fine. A haze which rose from the marshy valley of Muisson covered both camps and set the starving Englishmen shivering, but it cleared slowly away as the sun rose. In the red silken pavilion of the French King — the same which had been viewed by Nigel and Chandos the evening before — a solemn mass was held by the Bishop of Chalons, who prayed for those who were about to die, with little thought in his mind that his own last hour was so near at hand. Then, when communion had been taken by the King and his four young sons the altar was cleared away, and a great red-covered table placed lengthwise down the tent, round which John might assemble his council and determine how best he should proceed. With the silken roof, rich tapestries of Arras round the walls and Eastern rugs beneath the feet, his palace could furnish no fairer chamber.

King John, who sat upon the canopied dais at the upper end, was now in the sixth year of his reign and the thirty-sixth of his life. He was a short burly man, ruddy-faced and deep-chested, with dark kindly eyes and a most noble bearing. It did not need the blue cloak sewed with silver lilies to mark him as the King. Though his reign had been short, his fame was already widespread over all Europe as a kindly gentleman and a fearless soldier — a fit leader for a chivalrous nation. His elder son, the Duke of Normandy, still hardly more than a boy, stood beside him, his hand upon the King's shoulder, and John half turned from time to time to fondle him. On the right, at the same high dais, was the King's younger brother, the Duke of Orleans, a pale heavy-featured man, with a languid manner and intolerant eyes. On the left was the Duke of Bourbon, sad-faced and absorbed, with that gentle melancholy in his eyes and bearing which comes often with the premonition of death. All these were in their armor, save only for their helmets, which lay upon the board before them.

Below, grouped around the long red table, was an assembly of the most famous warriors in Europe. At the end nearest the King was the veteran soldier the Duke of Athens, son of a banished father, and now High

Constable of France. On one side of him sat the red-faced and choleric Lord Clermont, with the same blue Virgin in golden rays upon his surcoat which had caused his quarrel with Chandos the night before. On the other was a noble-featured grizzly-haired soldier, Arnold d’Andreghen, who shared with Clermont the honor of being Marshal of France. Next to them sat Lord James of Bourbon, a brave warrior who was afterwards slain by the White Company at Brignais, and beside him a little group of German noblemen, including the Earl of Salzburg and the Earl of Nassau, who had ridden over the frontier with their formidable mercenaries at the bidding of the French King. The ridged armor and the hanging nasals of their bassinets were enough in themselves to tell every soldier that they were from beyond the Rhine. At the other side of the table were a line of proud and warlike Lords, Fiennes, Chatillon, Nesle, de Landas, de Beaujeu, with the fierce knight errant de Chargny, he who had planned the surprise of Calais, and Eustace de Ribeaumont, who had upon the same occasion won the prize of valor from the hands of Edward of England. Such were the chiefs to whom the King now turned for assistance and advice.

“You have already heard, my friends,” said he, “that the Prince of Wales has made no answer to the proposal which we sent by the Lord Cardinal of Perigord. Certes this is as it should be, and though I have obeyed the call of Holy Church I had no fears that so excellent a Prince as Edward of England would refuse to meet us in battle. I am now of opinion that we should fall upon them at once, lest perchance the Cardinal’s cross should again come betwixt our swords and our enemies.”

A buzz of joyful assent arose from the meeting, and even from the attendant men-at-arms who guarded the door. When it had died away the Duke of Orleans rose in his place beside the King.

“Sire,” said he, “you speak as we would have you do, and I for one am of opinion that the Cardinal of Perigord has been an ill friend of France, for why should we bargain for a part when we have but to hold out our hand in order to grasp the whole? What need is there for words? Let us spring to horse forthwith and ride over this handful of marauders who have dared to lay waste your fair dominions. If one of them go hence save as our prisoner we are the more to blame.”

“By Saint Denis, brother!” said the King, smiling, “if words could slay you would have had them all upon their backs ere ever we left Chartres. You are new to war, but when you have had experience of a stricken field or two you would know that things must be done with forethought and in order or they may go awry. In our father’s time we sprang to horse and spurred upon these English at Crecy and elsewhere as you advise, but we had little profit from it, and now we are grown wiser. How say you, Sieur de Ribeaumont? You have coasted their lines and observed their countenance. Would you ride down upon them, as my brother has advised, or how would you order the matter?”

De Ribeaumont, a tall dark-eyed handsome man, paused ere he answered. “Sire,” he said at last, “I have indeed ridden along their front and down their flanks, in company with Lord Landas and Lord de Beaujeu, who are here at your council to witness to what I say. Indeed, sire, it is in my mind that though the English are few in number yet they are in such a position amongst these hedges and vines that you would be well-advised if you were to leave them alone, for they have no food and must retreat, so that you will be able to follow them and to fight them to better advantage.”

A murmur of disapproval rose from the company, and the Lord Clermont, Marshal of the army, sprang to his feet, his face red with anger.

“Eustace; Eustace,” said he, “I bear in mind the days when you were of great heart and high enterprise, but since King Edward gave you yonder chaplet of pearls you have ever been backward against the English!”

“My Lord Clermont,” said de Ribeaumont sternly, “it is not for me to brawl at the King’s council and in the face of the enemy, but we will go further into this matter at some other time. Meanwhile, the King has asked me for my advice and I have given it as best I might.”

“It had been better for your honor, Sir Eustace, had you held your peace,” said the Duke of Orleans. “Shall we let them slip from our fingers when we have them here and are fourfold their number? I know not where we should dwell afterwards, for I am very sure that we should be ashamed to ride back to Paris, or to look our ladies in the eyes again.”

“Indeed, Eustace, you have done well to say what is in your mind,” said the King; “but I have already said that we shall join battle this morning, so that there is no room here for further talk. But I would fain have heard from you how it would be wisest and best that we attack them?”

“I will advise you, sire, to the best of my power. Upon their right is a river with marshes around it, and upon their left a great wood, so that we can advance only upon the center. Along their front is a thick hedge, and behind it I saw the green jerkins of their archers, as thick as the sedges by the river. It is broken by one road where only four horsemen could ride abreast, which leads through the position. It is clear then that if we are to drive them back we must cross the great hedge, and I am very sure that the horses will not face it with such a storm of arrows beating from behind it. Therefore, it is my council that we fight upon foot, as the English did at Crecy, for indeed we may find that our horses will be more hindrance than help to us this day."

"The same thought was in my own mind, sire," said Arnold d'Andreghen the veteran Marshal. "At Crecy the bravest had to turn their backs, for what can a man do with a horse which is mad with pain and fear? If we advance upon foot we are our own masters, and if we stop the shame is ours."

"The counsel is good," said the Duke of Athens, turning his shrewd wizened face to the King; "but one thing only I would add to it. The strength of these people lies in their archers, and if we could throw them into disorder, were it only for a short time, we should win the hedge; else they will shoot so strongly that we must lose many men before we reach it, for indeed we have learned that no armor will keep out their shafts when they are close."

"Your words, fair sir, are both good and wise," said the King, "but I pray you to tell us how you would throw these archers into disorder?"

"I would choose three hundred horsemen, sire, the best and most forward in the army. With these I would ride up the narrow road, and so turn to right and left, falling upon the archers behind the hedge. It may be that the three hundred would suffer sorely, but what are they among so great a host, if a road may be cleared for their companions?"

"I would say a word to that, sire," cried the German Count of Nassau, "I have come here with my comrades to venture our persons in your quarrel; but we claim the right to fight in our own fashion, and we would count it dishonor to dismount from our steeds out of fear of the arrows of the English. Therefore, with your permission, we will ride to the front, as the Duke of Athens has advised, and so clear a path for the rest of you."

"This may not be!" cried the Lord Clermont angrily. "It would be strange indeed if Frenchmen could not be found to clear a path for the army of the King of France. One would think to hear you talk, my Lord Count, that your hardihood was greater than our own, but by our Lady of Rocamadour you will learn before nightfall that it is not so. It is for me, who am a Marshal of France; to lead these three hundred, since it is an honorable venture."

"And I claim the same right for the same reason," said Arnold of Andreghen.

The German Count struck the table with his mailed fist. "Do what you like!" said he. "But this only I can promise you, that neither I nor any of my German riders will descend from our horses so long as they are able to carry us, for in our country it is only people of no consequence who fight upon their feet."

The Lord Clermont was leaning angrily forward with some hot reply when King John intervened. "Enough, enough!" he said. "It is for you to give your opinions, and for me to tell you what you will do. Lord Clermont, and you, Arnold, you will choose three hundred of the bravest cavaliers in the army and you will endeavor to break these archers. As to you and your Germans, my Lord Nassau, you will remain upon horseback, since you desire it, and you will follow the Marshals and support them as best you may. The rest of the army will advance upon foot, in three other divisions as arranged: yours, Charles," and he patted his son, the Duke of Normandy, affectionately upon the hand; "yours, Philip," he glanced at the Duke of Orleans; "and the main battle which is my own. To you, Geoffrey de Chargny, I intrust the oriflamme this day. But who is this knight and what does he desire?"

A young knight, ruddy-bearded and tall, a red griffin upon his surcoat, had appeared in the opening of the tent. His flushed face and disheveled dress showed that he had come in haste. "Sire," said he, "I am Robert de Duras, of the household of the Cardinal de Perigord. I have told you yesterday all that I have learned of the English camp. This morning I was again admitted to it, and I have seen their wagons moving to the rear. Sire, they are in flight for Bordeaux."

"'Fore God, I knew it!" cried the Duke of Orleans in a voice of fury. "Whilst we have been talking they have slipped through our fingers. Did I not warn you?"

"Be silent, Philip!" said the King angrily. "But you, sir, have you seen this with your own eyes?"

"With my own eyes, sire, and I have ridden straight from their camp."

King John looked at him with a stern gaze. "I know not how it accords with your honor to carry such tidings in such a fashion," said he; "but we cannot choose but take advantage of it. Fear not, brother Philip, it is in my mind that you will see all that you would wish of the Englishmen before nightfall. Should we fall upon them whilst they cross the ford it will be to our advantage. Now, fair sirs, I pray you to hasten to your posts and to carry out all that we have agreed. Advance the oriflamme, Geoffrey, and do you marshal the divisions, Arnold. So may God and Saint Denis have us in their holy keeping this day!"

The Prince of Wales stood upon that little knoll where Nigel had halted the day before. Beside him were Chandos, and a tall sun-burned warrior of middle age, the Gascon Captal de Buch. The three men were all attentively watching the distant French lines, while behind them a column of wagons wound down to the ford of the Muisson.

Close in the rear four knights in full armor with open visors sat their horses and conversed in undertones with each other. A glance at their shields would have given their names to any soldier, for they were all men of fame who had seen much warfare. At present they were awaiting their orders, for each of them commanded the whole or part of a division of the army. The youth upon the left, dark, slim and earnest, was William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, only twenty-eight years of age and yet a veteran of Crecy. How high he stood in reputation is shown by the fact that the command of the rear, the post of honor in a retreating army, had been given to him by the Prince. He was talking to a grizzled harsh-faced man, somewhat over middle age, with lion features and fierce light-blue eyes which gleamed as they watched the distant enemy. It was the famous Robert de Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, who had fought without a break from Cadsand onward through the whole Continental War. The other tall silent soldier, with the silver star gleaming upon his surcoat, was John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and he listened to the talk of Thomas Beauchamp, a burly, jovial, ruddy nobleman and a tried soldier, who leaned forward and tapped his mailed hand upon the other's steel-clad thigh. They were old battle-companions, of the same age and in the very prime of life, with equal fame and equal experience of the wars. Such was the group of famous English soldiers who sat their horses behind the Prince and waited for their orders.

"I would that you had laid hands upon him," said the Prince angrily, continuing his conversation with Chandos, "and yet, perchance, it was wiser to play this trick and make them think that we were retreating."

"He has certainly carried the tidings," said Chandos, with a smile. "No sooner had the wagons started than I saw him gallop down the edge of the wood."

"It was well thought of, John," the Prince remarked, "for it would indeed be great comfort if we could turn their own spy against them. Unless they advance upon us, I know not how we can hold out another day, for there is not a loaf left in the army; and yet if we leave this position where shall we hope to find such another?"

"They will stoop, fair sir, they will stoop to our lure. Even now Robert de Duras will be telling them that the wagons are on the move, and they will hasten to overtake us lest we pass the ford. But who is this, who rides so fast? Here perchance may be tidings."

A horseman had spurred up to the knoll. He sprang from the saddle, and sank on one knee before the Prince.

"How now, my Lord Audley," said Edward. "What would you have?"

"Sir," said the knight, still kneeling with bowed head before his leader, "I have a boon to ask of you."

"Nay, James, rise! Let me hear what I can do."

The famous knight errant, pattern of chivalry for all time; rose and turned his swarthy face and dark earnest eyes upon his master. "Sir," said he, "I have ever served most loyally my lord your father and yourself, and shall continue so to do so long as I have life. Dear sir, I must now acquaint you that formerly I made a vow if ever I should be in any battle under your command that I would be foremost or die in the attempt. I beg therefore that you will graciously permit me to honorably quit my place among the others, that I may post myself in such wise as to accomplish my vow."

The Prince smiled, for it was very sure that vow or no vow, permission or no permission, Lord James Audley would still be in the van. "Go, James," said he, shaking his hand, "and God grant that this day you may shine in valor above all knights. But hark, John, what is that?"

Chandos cast up his fierce nose like the eagle which smells slaughter afar. "Surely, sir, all is forming even as we had planned it."

From far away there came a thunderous shout. Then another and yet another.

"See, they are moving!" cried the Captal de Buch.

All morning they had watched the gleam of the armed squadrons who were drawn up in front of the French camp. Now whilst a great blare of trumpets was borne to their ears, the distant masses flickered and twinkled in the sunlight.

"Yes, yes, they are moving!" cried the Prince.

“They are moving! They are moving!” Down the line the murmur ran. And then with a sudden impulse the archers at the hedge sprang to their feet and the knights behind them waved their weapons in the air, while one tremendous shout of warlike joy carried their defiance to the approaching enemy. Then there fell such a silence that the pawing of the horses or the jingle of their harness struck loud upon the ear, until amid the hush there rose a low deep roar like the sound of the tide upon the beach, ever growing and deepening as the host of France drew near.

XXVI. HOW NIGEL FOUND HIS THIRD DEED

Four archers lay behind a clump of bushes ten yards in front of the thick hedge which shielded their companions. Amid the long line of bowmen those behind them were their own company, and in the main the same who were with Knolles in Brittany. The four in front were their leaders: old Wat of Carlisle, Ned Widdington the red-headed Dalesman, the bald bowyer Bartholomew, and Samkin Alyward, newly rejoined after a week's absence. All four were munching bread and apples, for Aylward had brought in a full haversack and divided them freely amongst his starving comrades. The old Borderer and the Yorkshireman were gaunt and hollow-eyed with privation, while the bowyer's round face had fallen in so that the skin hung in loose pouches under his eyes and beneath his jaws.

Behind them lines of haggard, wolfish men glared through the underwood, silent and watchful save that they burst into a fierce yelp of welcome when Chandos and Nigel galloped up, sprang from their horses and took their station beneath them. All along the green fringe of bowmen might be seen the steel-clad figures of knights and squires who had pushed their way into the front line to share the fortune of the archers.

"I call to mind that I once shot six ends with a Kentish woldsman at Ashford—" began the Bowyer.

"Nay, nay, we have heard that story!" said old Wat impatiently. "Shut thy clap, Bartholomew, for it is no time for redeless gossip! Walk down the line, I pray you, and see if there be no frayed string, nor broken nock nor loosened whipping to be mended."

The stout bowyer passed down the fringe of bowmen, amidst a running fire of rough wit. Here and there a bow was thrust out at him through the hedge for his professional advice.

"Wax your heads!" he kept crying. "Pass down the wax-pot and wax your heads. A waxed arrow will pass where a dry will be held. Tom Beverley, you jack-fool! where is your bracer-guard? Your string will flay your arm ere you reach your up-shot this day. And you, Watkin, draw not to your mouth, as is your wont, but to your shoulder. You are so used to the wine-pot that the string must needs follow it. Nay, stand loose, and give space for your drawing arms, for they will be on us anon."

He ran back and joined his comrades in the front, who had now risen to their feet. Behind them a half-mile of archers stood behind the hedge, each with his great warbow strung, half a dozen shafts loose behind him, and eighteen more in the quiver slung across his front. With arrow on string, their feet firm-planted, their fierce eager faces peering through the branches, they awaited the coming storm.

The broad flood of steel, after oozing slowly forward, had stopped about a mile from the English front. The greater part of the army had then descended from their horses, while a crowd of varlets and hostlers led them to the rear. The French formed themselves now into three great divisions, which shimmered in the sun like silvery pools, reed-capped with many a thousand of banners and pennons. A space of several hundred yards divided each. At the same time two bodies of horsemen formed themselves in front. The first consisted of three hundred men in one thick column, the second of a thousand, riding in a more extended line.

The Prince had ridden up to the line of archers. He was in dark armor, his visor open, and his handsome aquiline face all glowing with spirit and martial fire. The bowmen yelled at him, and he waved his hands to them as a huntsman cheers his hounds.

“Well, John, what think you now?” he asked. “What would my noble father not give to be by our side this day? Have you seen that they have left their horses?”

“Yes, my fair lord, they have learned their lesson,” said Chandos. “Because we have had good fortune upon our feet at Crecy and elsewhere they think that they have found the trick of it. But it is in my mind that it is very different to stand when you are assailed, as we have done, and to assail others when you must drag your harness for a mile and come weary to the fray.”

“You speak wisely, John. But these horsemen who form in front and ride slowly towards us, what make you of them?”

“Doubtless they hope to cut the strings of our bowmen and so clear a way for the others. But they are indeed a chosen band, for mark you, fair sir, are not those the colours of Clermont upon the left, and of d’Andreghen upon the right, so that both marshals ride with the vanguard?”

“By God’s soul, John!” cried the Prince, “it is very sure that you can see more with one eye than any man in this army with two. But it is even as you say. And this larger band behind?”

"They should be Germans, fair sir, by the fashion of their harness."

The two bodies of horsemen had moved slowly over the plain, with a space of nearly a quarter of a mile between them. Now, having come two bowshots from the hostile line, they halted. All that they could see of the English was the long hedge, with an occasional twinkle of steel through its leafy branches, and behind that the spear-heads of the men-at-arms rising from amidst the brushwood and the vines. A lovely autumn countryside with changing many-tinted foliage lay stretched before them, all bathed in peaceful sunshine, and nothing save those flickering fitful gleams to tell of the silent and lurking enemy who barred their way. But the bold spirit of the French cavaliers rose the higher to the danger. The clamor of their war-cries filled the air, and they tossed their pennoned spears over their heads in menace and defiance. From the English line it was a noble sight, the gallant, pawing, curveting horses, the many-coloured twinkling riders, the swoop and wave and toss of plume and banner.

Then a bugle rang forth. With a sudden yell every spur struck deep, every lance was laid in rest, and the whole gallant squadron flew like a glittering thunderbolt for the center of the English line.

A hundred yards they had crossed, and yet another hundred, but there was no movement in front of them, and no sound save their own hoarse battle-cries and the thunder of their horses. Ever swifter and swifter they flew. From behind the hedge it was a vision of horses, white, bay and black, their necks stretched, their nostrils distended, their bellies to the ground, whilst of the rider one could but see a shield with a plume-tufted visor above it, and a spear-head twinkling in front.

Then of a sudden the Prince raised his hand and gave a cry. Chandos echoed it, it swelled down the line, and with one mighty chorus of twanging strings and hissing shafts the long-pent storm broke at last.

Alas for the noble steeds! Alas for the gallant men. When the lust of battle is over who would not grieve to see that noble squadron break into red ruin before the rain of arrows beating upon the faces and breasts of the horses? The front rank crashed down, and the others piled themselves upon the top of them, unable to check their speed, or to swerve aside from the terrible wall of their shattered comrades which had so suddenly sprung up before them. Fifteen feet high was that blood-spurting mound of screaming, kicking horses and writhing, struggling men. Here and there on the flanks a horseman cleared himself and dashed for the hedge, only to have his steed slain under him and to be hurled from his saddle. Of all the three hundred gallant riders, not one ever reached that fatal hedge.

But now in a long rolling wave of steel the German battalion roared swiftly onward. They opened in the center to pass that terrible mound of death, and then spurred swiftly in upon the archers. They were brave men, well led, and in their open lines they could avoid the clubbing together which had been the ruin of the vanguard; yet they perished singly even as the others had perished together. A few were slain by the arrows. The greater number had their horses killed under them, and were so shaken and shattered by the fall that they could not raise their limbs, over-weighted with iron, from the spot where they lay.

Three men riding together broke through the bushes which sheltered the leaders of the archers, cut down Widdington the Dalesman, spurred onward through the hedge, dashed over the bowmen behind it, and made for the Prince. One fell with an arrow through his head, a second was beaten from his saddle by Chandos, and the third was slain by the Prince's own hand. A second band broke through near the river, but were cut off by Lord Audley and his squires, so that all were slain. A single horseman whose steed was mad with pain, an arrow in its eye and a second in its nostril, sprang over the hedge and clattered through the whole army, disappearing amid whoops and laughter into the woods behind. But none others won as far as the hedge. The whole front of the position was fringed with a litter of German wounded or dead, while one great heap in the center marked the downfall of the gallant French three hundred.

Whilst these two waves of the attack had broken in front of the English position, leaving this blood-stained wreckage behind them, the main divisions had halted and made their last preparations for their own assault. They had not yet begun their advance, and the nearest was still half a mile distant, when the few survivors from the forlorn hope, their maddened horses bristling with arrows, flew past them on either flank.

At the same moment the English archers and men-at-arms dashed through the hedge, and dragged all who were living out of that tangled heap of shattered horses and men. It was a mad wild rush, for in a few minutes the fight must be renewed, and yet there was a rich harvest of wealth for the lucky man who could pick a wealthy prisoner from amid the crowd. The nobler spirits disdained to think of ransoms whilst the fight was still unsettled; but a swarm of needy soldiers, Gascons and English, dragged the wounded out by the leg or the arm, and with daggers at their throats demanded their names, title and means. He who had made a good prize hurried him to the rear where his own servants could guard him, while he who was disappointed too often drove the dagger home and then rushed once more into the tangle in the hope of better luck. Clermont, with an arrow through the sky-blue Virgin on his surcoat, lay dead within ten paces of the hedge; d’Andreghen was dragged by a penniless squire from under a horse and became his prisoner. The Earl of Salzburg and of Nassau were both found helpless on the ground and taken to the rear. Aylward cast his thick arms round Count Otto von Langenbeck, and laid him, helpless from a broken leg, behind his bush. Black Simon had made prize of Bernard, Count of Ventadour, and hurried him through the hedge. Everywhere there was rushing and shouting, brawling and buffeting, while amidst it all a swarm of archers were seeking their shafts, plucking them from the dead, and sometimes even from the wounded. Then there was a sudden cry of warning. In a moment every man was back in his place once more, and the line of the hedge was clear.

It was high time; for already the first division of the French was close upon them. If the charge of the horsemen had been terrible from its rush and its fire, this steady advance of a huge phalanx of armored footmen was even more fearsome to the spectator. They moved very slowly, on account of the weight of their armor, but their progress was the more regular and inexorable. With elbows touching — their shields slung in front, their short five-foot spears carried in their right hands, and their maces or swords ready at their belts, the deep column of men-at-arms moved onward. Again the storm of arrows beat upon them clinking and thudding on the armor. They crouched double behind their shields as they met it. Many fell, but still the slow tide lapped onward. Yelling, they surged up to the hedge, and lined it for half a mile, struggling hard to pierce it.

For five minutes the long straining ranks faced each other with fierce stab of spear on one side and heavy beat of ax or mace upon the other. In many parts the hedge was pierced or leveled to the ground, and the French men-at-arms were raging amongst the archers, hacking and hewing among the lightly armed men. For a moment it seemed as if the battle was on the turn.

But John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, cool, wise and crafty in war, saw and seized his chance. On the right flank a marshy meadow skirted the river. So soft was it that a heavily-armed man would sink to his knees. At his order a spray of light bowmen was thrown out from the battle line and forming upon the flank of the French poured their arrows into them. At the same moment Chandos, with Audley, Nigel, Bartholomew Burghersh, the Captal de Buch, and a score of other knights sprang upon their horses, and charging down the narrow lane rode over the French line in front of them. Once through it they spurred to left and right, trampling down the dismounted men-at-arms.

A fearsome sight was Pommers that day, his red eyes rolling, his nostrils gaping, his tawny mane tossing, and his savage teeth gnashing in fury, as he tore and smashed and ground beneath his ramping hoofs all that came before him. Fearsome too was the rider, ice-cool; alert, concentrated of purpose, with, heart of fire and muscles of steel. A very angel of battle he seemed as he drove his maddened horse through the thickest of the press, but strive as he would: the tall figure of his master upon his coal-black steed was ever half a length before him.

Already the moment of danger was passed. The French line had given back. Those who had pierced the hedge had fallen like brave men amid the ranks of their foemen. The division of Warwick had hurried up from the vineyards to fill the gaps of Salisbury’s battle-line. Back rolled the shining tide, slowly at first, even as it had advanced, but quicker now as the bolder fell and the weaker shredded out and shuffled with ungainly speed for a place of safety. Again there was a rush from behind the hedge. Again there was a reaping of that strange crop of bearded arrows which grew so thick upon the ground, and again the wounded prisoners were seized and dragged in brutal haste to the rear. Then the line was restored, and the English, weary, panting and shaken, awaited the next attack.

But a great good fortune had come to them — so great that as they looked down the valley they could scarce credit their own senses. Behind the division of the Dauphin, which had pressed them so hard, stood a second division hardly less numerous, led by the Duke of Orleans. The fugitives from in front, blood-smeared and bedraggled, blinded with sweat and with fear, rushed amidst its ranks in their flight, and in a moment, without a blow being struck, had carried them off in their wild rout. This vast array, so solid and so martial, thawed suddenly away like a snow-wreath in the sun. It was gone, and in its place thousands of shining dots scattered over the whole plain as each man made his own way to the spot where he could find his horse and bear himself from the field. For a moment it seemed that the battle was won, and a thundershout of joy pealed up from the English line.

But as the curtain of the Duke’s division was drawn away it was only to disclose stretching far behind it, and spanning the valley from side to side, the magnificent array of the French King, solid, unshaken, and preparing its ranks for the attack. Its numbers were as great as those of the English army; it was unscathed by all that was past, and it had a valiant monarch to lead it to the charge. With the slow deliberation of the man who means to do or to die, its leader marshaled its ranks for the supreme effort of the day.

Meanwhile during that brief moment of exultation when the battle appeared to be won, a crowd of hot-headed young knights and squires swarmed and clamored round the Prince, beseeching that he would allow them to ride forth.

“See this insolent fellow who bears three martlets upon a field gales!” cried Sir Maurice Berkeley. “He stands betwixt the two armies as though he had no dread of us.”

“I pray you, sir, that I may ride out to him, since he seems ready to attempt some small deed,” pleaded Nigel.

“Nay, fair sirs, it is an evil thing that we should break our line, seeing that we still have much to do,” said the Prince. “See! he rides away, and so the matter is settled.”

“Nay, fair prince,” said the young knight who had spoken first. “My gray horse, Lebryte, could run him down ere he could reach shelter. Never since I left Severn side have I seen steed so fleet as mine. Shall I not show you?” In an instant he had spurred the charger and was speeding across the plain.

The Frenchman, John de Helennes, a squire of Picardy, had waited with a burning heart, his soul sick at the flight of the division in which he had ridden. In the hope of doing some redeeming exploit, or of meeting his own death, he had loitered betwixt the armies, but no movement had come from the English lines. Now he had turned his horse’s head to join the King’s array, when the low drumming of hoofs sounded behind him, and he turned to find a horseman hard upon his heels. Each had drawn his sword, and the two armies paused to view the fight. In the first bout Sir Maurice Berkeley’s lance was struck from his hand, and as he sprang down to recover it the Frenchman ran him through the thigh, dismounted from his horse, and received his surrender. As the unfortunate Englishman hobbled away at the side of his captor a roar of laughter burst from both armies at the spectacle.

"By my ten finger-bones!" cried Aylward, chuckling behind the remains of his bush, "he found more on his distaff that time than he knew how to spin. Who was the knight?"

"By his arms," said old Wat, "he should either be a Berkeley of the West or a Popham of Kent."

"I call to mind that I shot a match of six ends once with a Kentish woldsman—" began the fat Bowyer.

"Nay, nay, stint thy talk, Bartholomew!" cried old Wat. "Here is poor Ned with his head cloven, and it would be more fitting if you were saying aves for his soul, instead of all this bobance and boasting. Now, now, Tom of Beverley?"

"We have suffered sorely in this last bout, Wat. There are forty of our men upon their backs, and the Dean Foresters on the right are in worse case still."

"Talking will not mend it, Tom, and if all but one were on their backs he must still hold his ground."

Whilst the archers were chatting, the leaders of the army were in solemn conclave just behind them. Two divisions of the French had been repulsed, and yet there was many an anxious face as the older knights looked across the plain at the unbroken array of the French King moving slowly toward them. The line of the archers was much thinned and shredded. Many knights and squires had been disabled in the long and fierce combat at the hedge. Others, exhausted by want of food, had no strength left and were stretched panting upon the ground. Some were engaged in carrying the wounded to the rear and laying them under the shelter of the trees, whilst others were replacing their broken swords or lances from the weapons of the slain. The Captal de Buch, brave and experienced as he was, frowned darkly and whispered his misgivings to Chandos.

But the Prince's courage flamed the higher as the shadow fell, while his dark eyes gleamed with a soldier's pride as he glanced round him at his weary comrades, and then at the dense masses of the King's battle which now, with a hundred trumpets blaring and a thousand pennons waving, rolled slowly over the plain. "Come what may, John, this has been a most noble meeting," said he. "They will not be ashamed of us in England. Take heart, my friends, for if we conquer we shall carry the glory ever with us; but if we be slain then we die most worshipfully and in high honor, as we have ever prayed that we might die, and we leave behind us our brothers and kinsmen who will assuredly avenge us. It is but one more effort, and all will be well. Warwick, Oxford, Salisbury, Suffolk, every man to the front! My banner to the front also! Your horses, fair sirs! The archers are spent, and our own good lances must win the field this day. Advance, Walter, and may God and Saint George be with England!”

Sir Walter Woodland, riding a high black horse, took station by the Prince, with the royal banner resting in a socket by his saddle. From all sides the knights and squires crowded in upon it, until they formed a great squadron containing the survivors of the battalions of Warwick and Salisbury as well as those of the Prince. Four hundred men-at-arms who had been held in reserve were brought up and thickened the array, but even so Chandos’ face was grave as he scanned it and then turned his eyes upon the masses of the Frenchmen.

“I like it not, fair sir. The weight is overgreat,” he whispered to the Prince.

“How would you order it, John? Speak what is in your mind.”

“We should attempt something upon their flank whilst we hold them in front. How say you, Jean?” He turned to the Captal de Buch, whose dark, resolute face reflected the same misgivings.

“Indeed, John, I think as you do,” said he. “The French King is a very valiant man, and so are those who are about him, and I know not how we may drive them back unless we can do as you advise. If you will give me only a hundred men I will attempt it.”

“Surely the task is mine, fair sir, since the thought has come from me,” said Chandos.

“Nay, John, I would keep you at my side. But you speak well, Jean, and you shall do even as you have said. Go ask the Earl of Oxford for a hundred men-at-arms and as many hobblers, that you may ride round the mound yonder, and so fall upon them unseen. Let all that are left of the archers gather on each side, shoot away their arrows, and then fight as best they may. Wait till they are past yonder thorn-bush and then, Walter, bear my banner straight against that of the King of France. Fair sirs, may God and the thought of your ladies hold high your hearts!”

The French monarch, seeing that his footmen had made no impression upon the English, and also that the hedge had been well-nigh leveled to the ground in the course of the combat, so that it no longer presented an obstacle, had ordered his followers to remount their horses, and it was as a solid mass of cavalry that the chivalry of France advanced to their last supreme effort. The King was in the center of the front line, Geoffrey de Chargny with the golden oriflamme upon his right, and Eustace de Ribeaumont with the royal lilies upon the left. At his elbow was the Duke of Athens, High Constable of France, and round him were the nobles of the court, fiery and furious, yelling their warcries as they waved their weapons over their heads. Six thousand gallant men of the bravest race in Europe, men whose very names are like blasts of a battle-trumpet — Beaujeus and Chatillons, Tancarvilles and Ventadours — pressed hard behind the silver lilies.

Slowly they moved at first, walking their horses that they might be the fresher for the shock. Then they broke into a trot which was quickening into a gallop when the remains of the hedge in front of them was beaten in an instant to the ground and the broad line of the steel-clad chivalry of England swept grandly forth to the final shock. With loose rein and busy spur the two lines of horsemen galloped at the top of their speed straight and hard for each other. An instant later they met with a thunder-crash which was heard by the burghers on the wall of Poitiers, seven good miles away.

Under that frightful impact horses fell dead with broken necks, and many a rider, held in his saddle by the high pommel, fractured his thighs with the shock. Here and there a pair met breast to breast, the horses rearing straight upward and falling back upon their masters. But for the most part the line had opened in the gallop, and the cavaliers, flying through the gaps, buried themselves in the enemy’s ranks. Then the flanks shredded out, and the thick press in the center loosened until there was space to swing a sword and to guide a steed. For ten acres there was one wild tumultuous swirl of tossing heads, of gleaming weapons which rose and fell, of upthrown hands, of tossing plumes and of lifted shields, whilst the din of a thousand war-cries and the clash-clash of metal upon metal rose and swelled like the roar and beat of an ocean surge upon a rock-bound coast. Backward and forward swayed the mighty throng, now down the valley and now up, as each side in turn put forth its strength for a fresh rally. Locked in one long deadly grapple, great England and gallant France with iron hearts and souls of fire strove and strove for mastery.

Sir Walter Woodland, riding hard upon his high black horse, had plunged into the swelter and headed for the blue and silver banner of King John. Close at his heels in a solid wedge rode the Prince, Chandos, Nigel, Lord

Reginald Cobham, Audley with his four famous squires, and a score of the flower of the English and Gascon knighthood. Holding together and bearing down opposition by a shower of blows and by the weight of their powerful horses, their progress was still very slow, for ever fresh waves of French cavaliers surged up against them and broke in front only to close in again upon their rear. Sometimes they were swept backward by the rush, sometimes they gained a few paces, sometimes they could but keep their foothold, and yet from minute to minute that blue and silver flag which waved above the press grew ever a little closer. A dozen furious hard-breathing French knights had broken into their ranks, and clutched at Sir Walter Woodland's banner, but Chandos and Nigel guarded it on one side, Audley with his squires on the other, so that no man laid his hand upon it and lived.

But now there was a distant crash and a roar of "Saint George for Guienne!" from behind. The Captal de Buch had charged home. "Saint George for England!" yelled the main attack, and ever the counter-cry came back to them from afar. The ranks opened in front of them. The French were giving way. A small knight with golden scroll-work upon his armor threw himself upon the Prince and was struck dead by his mace. It was the Duke of Athens, Constable of France, but none had time to note it, and the fight rolled on over his body. Looser still were the French ranks. Many were turning their horses, for that ominous roar from the rear had shaken their resolution. The little English wedge poured onward, the Prince, Chandos, Audley and Nigel ever in the van.

A huge warrior in black, bearing a golden banner, appeared suddenly in a gap of the shredding ranks. He tossed his precious burden to a squire, who bore it away. Like a pack of hounds on the very haunch of a deer the English rushed yelling for the oriflamme. But the black warrior flung himself across their path. "Chargny! Chargny a la recousse!" he roared with a voice of thunder. Sir Reginald Cobham dropped before his battle-ax, so did the Gascon de Clisson. Nigel was beaten down on to the crupper of his horse by a sweeping blow; but at the same instant Chandos' quick blade passed through the Frenchman's camail and pierced his throat. So died Geoffrey de Chargny; but the oriflamme was saved.

Dazed with the shock, Nigel still kept his saddle, and Pommers, his yellow hide mottled with blood, bore him onward with the others. The French horsemen were now in full flight; but one stern group of knights stood firm, like a rock in a rushing torrent, beating off all, whether friend or foe, who tried to break their ranks. The oriflamme had gone, and so had the blue and silver banner, but here were desperate men ready to fight to the death. In their ranks honor was to be reaped. The Prince and his following hurled themselves upon them, while the rest of the English horsemen swept onward to secure the fugitives and to win their ransoms. But the nobler spirits — Audley, Chandos and the others — would have thought it shame to gain money whilst there was work to be done or honor to be won. Furious was the wild attack, desperate the prolonged defense. Men fell from their saddles for very exhaustion.

Nigel, still at his place near Chandos’ elbow, was hotly attacked by a short broad-shouldered warrior upon a stout white cob, but Pommers reared with pawing fore feet and dashed the smaller horse to the ground. The falling rider clutched Nigel’s arm and tore him from the saddle, so that the two rolled upon the grass under the stamping hoofs, the English squire on the top, and his shortened sword glimmered before the visor of the gasping, breathless Frenchman.

“Je me rends! je axe rends!” he panted.

For a moment a vision of rich ransoms passed through Nigel’s brain. That noble palfrey, that gold-flecked armor, meant fortune to the captor. Let others have it! There was work still to be done. How could he desert the Prince and his noble master for the sake of a private gain? Could he lead a prisoner to the rear when honor beckoned him to the van? He staggered to his feet, seized Pommers by the mane, and swung himself into the saddle.

An instant later he was by Chandos’ side once more and they were bursting together through the last ranks of the gallant group who had fought so bravely to the end. Behind them was one long swath of the dead and the wounded. In front the whole wide plain was covered with the flying French and their pursuers.

The Prince reined up his steed and opened his visor, whilst his followers crowded round him with waving weapons and frenzied shouts of victory. “What now, John!” cried the smiling Prince, wiping his streaming face with his ungauntleted hand. “How fares it then?”

“I am little hurt, fair lord, save for a crushed hand and a spear-prick in the shoulder. But you, sir? I trust you have no scathe?”

“In truth, John, with you at one elbow and Lord Audley at the other, I know not how I could come to harm. But alas! I fear that Sir James is sorely stricken.”

The gallant Lord Audley had dropped upon the ground and the blood oozed from every crevice of his battered armor. His four brave Squires — Dutton of Dutton, Delves of Doddington, Fowlhurst of Crewe and Hawkstone of Wainhill — wounded and weary themselves, but with no thought save for their master, unlaced his helmet and bathed his pallid blood-stained face.

He looked up at the Prince with burning eyes. “I thank you, sir, for deigning to consider so poor a knight as myself,” said he in a feeble voice.

The Prince dismounted and bent over him. “I am bound to honor you very much, James,” said he, “for by your valor this day you have won glory and renown above us all, and your prowess has proved you to be the bravest knight.”

“My Lord,” murmured the wounded man, “you have a right to say what you please; but I wish it were as you say.”

“James,” said the Prince, “from this time onward I make you a knight of my own household, and I settle upon you five hundred marks of yearly income from my own estates in England.”

“Sir,” the knight answered, “God make me worthy of the good fortune you bestow upon me. Your knight I will ever be, and the money I will divide with your leave amongst these four squires who have brought me whatever glory I have won this day.” So saying his head fell back, and he lay white and silent upon the grass.

“Bring water!” said the Prince. “Let the royal leech see to him; for I had rather lose many men than the good Sir James. Ha, Chandos, what have we here?”

A knight lay across the path with his helmet beaten down upon his shoulders. On his surcoat and shield were the arms of a red griffin.

“It is Robert de Duras the spy,” said Chandos.

“Well for him that he has met his end,” said the angry Prince. “Put him on his shield, Hubert, and let four archers bear him to the monastery. Lay him at the feet of the Cardinal and say that by this sign I greet him. Place my flag on yonder high bush, Walter, and let my tent be raised there, that my friends may know where to seek me.”

The flight and pursuit had thundered far away, and the field was deserted save for the numerous groups of weary horsemen who were making their way back, driving their prisoners before them. The archers were scattered over the whole plain, rifling the saddle-bags and gathering the armor of those who had fallen, or searching for their own scattered arrows.

Suddenly, however, as the Prince was turning toward the bush which he had chosen for his headquarters, there broke out from behind him an extraordinary uproar and a group of knights and squires came pouring toward him, all arguing, swearing and abusing each other in French and English at the tops of their voices. In the midst of them limped a stout little man in gold-spangled armor, who appeared to be the object of the contention, for one would drag him one way and one another, as though they would pull him limb from limb. “Nay, fair sirs, gently, gently, I pray you!” he pleaded. “There is enough for all, and no need to treat me so rudely.” But ever the hubbub broke out again, and swords gleamed as the angry disputants glared furiously at each other. The Prince’s eyes fell upon the small prisoner, and he staggered back with a gasp of astonishment.

“King John!” he cried.

A shout of joy rose from the warriors around him. “The King of France! The King of France a prisoner!” they cried in an ecstasy.

“Nay, nay, fair sirs, let him not hear that we rejoice! Let no word bring pain to his soul!” Running forward the Prince clasped the French King by the two hands.

“Most welcome, sire!” he cried. “Indeed it is good for us that so gallant a knight should stay with us for some short time, since the chance of war has so ordered it. Wine there! Bring wine for the King!”

But John was flushed and angry. His helmet had been roughly torn off, and blood was smeared upon his cheek. His noisy captors stood around him in a circle, eying him hungrily like dogs who have been beaten from their quarry. There were Gascons and English, knights, squires and archers, all pushing and straining.

“I pray you, fair Prince, to get rid of these rude fellows,” said King John, “for indeed they have plagued me sorely. By Saint Denis! my arm has been well-nigh pulled from its socket.”

“What wish you then?” asked the Prince, turning angrily upon the noisy swarm of his followers.

“We took him, fair lord. He is ours!” cried a score of voices. They closed in, all yelping together like a pack of wolves. “It was I, fair lord!”—”Nay, it was I!”—”You lie, you rascal, it was I!” Again their fierce eyes glared and their blood-stained hands sought the hilts of their weapons.

“Nay, this must be settled here and now!” said the Prince. “I crave your patience, fair and honored sir, for a few brief minutes, since indeed much ill-will may spring from this if it be not set at rest. Who is this tall knight who can scarce keep his hands from the King’s shoulder?”

“It is Denis de Morbecque, my lord, a knight of St. Omer, who is in our service, being an outlaw from France.”

“I call him to mind. How then, Sir Denis? What say you in this matter?”

“He gave himself to me, fair lord. He had fallen in the press, and I came upon him and seized him. I told him that I was a knight from Artois, and he gave me his glove. See here, I bear it in my hand.”

“It is true, fair lord! It is true!” cried a dozen French voices.

“Nay, sir, judge not too soon!” shouted an English squire, pushing his way to the front. “It was I who had him at my mercy, and he is my prisoner, for he spoke to this man only because he could tell by his tongue that he was his own countryman. I took him, and here are a score to prove it.”

“It is true, fair lord. We saw it and it was even so,” cried a chorus of Englishmen.

At all times there was growling and snapping betwixt the English and their allies of France. The Prince saw how easily this might set a light to such a flame as could not readily be quenched. It must be stamped out now ere it had time to mount.

“Fair and honored lord,” he said to the King, “again I pray you for a moment of patience. It is your word and only yours which can tell us what is just and right. To whom were you graciously pleased to commit your royal person?”

King John looked up from the flagon which had been brought to him and wiped his lips with the dawnings of a smile upon his ruddy face.

“It was not this Englishman,” he said, and a cheer burst from the Gascons, “nor was it this bastard Frenchman,” he added. “To neither of them did I surrender.”

There was a hush of surprise.

“To whom then, sir?” asked the Prince.

The King looked slowly round. “There was a devil of a yellow horse,” said he. “My poor palfrey went over like a skittle-pin before a ball. Of the rider I know nothing save that he bore red roses on a silver shield. Ah! by Saint Denis, there is the man himself, and there his thrice-accursed horse!”

His head swimming, and moving as if in a dream, Nigel found himself the center of the circle of armed and angry men.

The Prince laid his hand upon his shoulder. “It is the little cock of Tilford Bridge,” said he. “On my father’s soul, I have ever said that you would win your way. Did you receive the King’s surrender?”

“Nay, fair lord, I did not receive it.”

“Did you hear him give it?”

“I heard, sir, but I did not know that it was the King. My master Lord Chandos had gone on, and I followed after.”

“And left him lying. Then the surrender was not complete, and by the laws of war the ransom goes to Denis de Morbecque, if his story be true.”

“It is true,” said the King. “He was the second.”

“Then the ransom is yours, Denis. But for my part I swear by my father’s soul that I had rather have the honor this Squire has gathered than all the richest ransoms of France.”

At these words spoken before that circle of noble warriors Nigel’s heart gave one great throb, and he dropped upon his knee before the Prince. “Fair lord, how can I thank you?” he murmured. “These words at least are more than any ransom.”

“Rise up!” said the smiling Prince, and he smote with his sword upon his shoulder. “England has lost a brave Squire, and has gained a gallant knight. Nay, linger not, I pray! Rise up, Sir Nigel!”

XXVII. HOW THE THIRD MESSENGER CAME TO COSFORD

Two months have passed, and the long slopes of Hindhead are russet with the faded ferns — the fuzzy brown pelt which wraps the chilling earth. With whoop and scream the wild November wind sweeps over the great rolling downs, tossing the branches of the Cosford beeches, and rattling at the rude latticed windows. The stout old knight of Duplin, grown even a little stouter, with whiter beard to fringe an ever redder face, sits as of yore at the head of his own board. A well-heaped platter flanked by a foaming tankard stands before him. At his right sits the Lady Mary, her dark, plain, queenly face marked deep with those years of weary waiting, but bearing the gentle grace and dignity which only sorrow and restraint can give. On his left is Matthew, the old priest. Long ago the golden-haired beauty had passed from Cosford to Fernhurst, where the young and beautiful Lady Edith Brocas is the belle of all Sussex, a sunbeam of smiles and merriment, save perhaps when her thoughts for an instant fly back to that dread night when she was plucked from under the very talons of the foul hawk of Shalford.

The old knight looked up as a fresh gust of wind with a dash of rain beat against the window behind him. “By Saint Hubert, it is a wild night!” said he. “I had hoped to-morrow to have a flight at a heron of the pool or a mallard in the brook. How fares it with little Katherine the peregrine, Mary?”

“I have joined the wing, father, and I have imped the feathers; but I fear it will be Christmas ere she can fly again.”

“This is a hard saying,” said Sir John; “for indeed I have seen no bolder better bird. Her wing was broken by a heron’s beak last Sabbath sennight, holy father, and Mary has the mending of it.”

“I trust, my son, that you had heard mass ere you turned to worldly pleasure upon God’s holy day,” Father Matthew answered.

“Tut, tut!” said the old knight, laughing. “Shall I make confession at the head of my own table? I can worship the good God amongst his own works, the woods and the fields, better than in yon pile of stone and wood. But I call to mind a charm for a wounded hawk which was taught me by the fowler of Gaston de Foix. How did it run? ‘The lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.’ Yes, those were the words to be said three times as you walk round the perch where the bird is mewed.”

The old priest shook his head. “Nay, these charms are tricks of the Devil,” said he. “Holy Church lends them no countenance, for they are neither good nor fair. But how is it now with your tapestry, Lady Mary? When last I was beneath this roof you had half done in five fair colours the story of Theseus and Ariadne.”

“It is half done still, holy father.”

“How is this, my daughter? Have you then so many calls?”

“Nay, holy father, her thoughts are otherwhere,” Sir John answered. “She will sit an hour at a time, the needle in her hand and her soul a hundred leagues from Cosford House. Ever since the Prince’s battle—”

“Good father, I beg you—”

“Nay, Mary, none can hear me, save your own confessor, Father Matthew. Ever since the Prince’s battle, I say, when we heard that young Nigel had won such honor she is brain-wode, and sits ever — well, even as you see her now.”

An intent look had come into Mary’s eyes; her gaze was fixed upon the dark rain-splashed window. It was a face carved from ivory, white-lipped and rigid, on which the old priest looked.

“What is it, my daughter? What do you see?”

“I see nothing, father.”

“What is it then that disturbs you?”

“I hear, father.”

“What do you hear?”

“There are horsemen on the road.”

The old knight laughed. “So it goes on, father. What day is there that a hundred horsemen do not pass our gate, and yet every clink of hoofs sets her poor heart a-trembling. So strong and steadfast she has ever been, my Mary, and now no sound too slight to shake her to the soul! Nay, daughter, nay, I pray you!”

She had half-risen from her chair, her hands clenched and her dark, startled eyes still fixed upon the window. “I hear them, father! I hear them amid the wind and the rain! Yes, yes, they are turning — they have turned! My God, they are at our very door!”

"By Saint Hubert, the girl is right!" cried old Sir John, beating his fist upon the board. "Ho, varlets, out with you to the yard! Set the mulled wine on the blaze once more! There are travelers at the gate, and it is no night to keep a dog waiting at our door. Hurry, Hannekin! Hurry, I say, or I will haste you with my cudgel!"

Plainly to the ears of all men could be heard the stamping of the horses. Mary had stood up, quivering in every limb. An eager step at the threshold, the door was flung wide, and there in the opening stood Nigel, the rain gleaming upon his smiling face, his cheeks flushed with the beating of the wind, his blue eyes shining with tenderness and love. Something held her by the throat, the light of the torches danced up and down; but her strong spirit rose at the thought that others should see that inner holy of holies of her soul. There is a heroism of women to which no valor of man can attain. Her eyes only carried him her message as she held out her hand.

"Welcome, Nigel!" said she.

He stooped and kissed it.

"Saint Catharine has brought me home," said he.

A merry supper it was at Cosford Manor that night, with Nigel at the head betwixt the jovial old knight and the Lady Mary, whilst at the farther end Samkin Aylward, wedged between two servant maids, kept his neighbours in alternate laughter and terror as he told his tales of the French Wars. Nigel had to turn his doeskin heels and show his little golden spurs. As he spoke of what was passed Sir John clapped him on the shoulder, while Mary took his strong right hand in hers, and the good old priest smiling blessed them both. Nigel had drawn a little golden ring from his pocket, and it twinkled in the torchlight.

"Did you say that you must go on your way to-morrow, father?" he asked the priest.

"Indeed, fair son, the matter presses."

"But you may bide the morning?"

"It will suffice if I start at noon."

"Much may be done in a morning." He looked at Mary, who blushed and smiled. "By Saint Paul! I have waited long enough."

"Good, good!" chuckled the old knight, with wheezy laughter. "Even so I wooed your mother, Mary. Wooers were brisk in the olden time. To-morrow is Tuesday, and Tuesday is ever a lucky day. Alas! that the good Dame Ermyntrude is no longer with us to see it done! The old hound must run us down, Nigel, and I hear its bay upon my own heels; but my heart will rejoice that before the end I may call you son. Give me your hand, Mary, and yours, Nigel. Now, take an old man's blessing, and may God keep and guard you both, and give you your desert, for I believe on my soul that in all this broad land there dwells no nobler man nor any woman more fitted to be his mate!"

There let us leave them, their hearts full of gentle joy, the golden future of hope and promise stretching out before their youthful eyes. Alas for those green spring dreaming! How often do they fade and wither until they fall and rot, a dreary sight, by the wayside of life! But here, by God's blessing, it was not so, for they burgeoned and they grew, ever fairer and more noble, until the whole wide world might marvel at the beauty of it.

It has been told elsewhere how as the years passed Nigel's name rose higher in honor; but still Mary's would keep pace with it, each helping and sustaining the other upon an ever higher path. In many lands did Nigel carve his fame, and ever as he returned spent and weary from his work he drank fresh strength and fire and craving for honor from her who glorified his home. At Twynham Castle they dwelled for many years, beloved and honored by all. Then in the fullness of time they came back to the Tilford Manor-house and spent their happy, healthy age amid those heather downs where Nigel had passed his first lusty youth, ere ever he turned his face to the wars. Thither also came Aylward when he had left the "Pied Merlin" where for many a year he sold ale to the men of the forest.

But the years pass; the old wheel turns and ever the thread runs out. The wise and the good, the noble and the brave, they come from the darkness, and into the darkness they go, whence, whither and why, who may say? Here is the slope of Hindhead. The fern still glows russet in November, the heather still burns red in July; but where now is the Manor of Cosford? Where is the old house of Tilford? Where, but for a few scattered gray stones, is the mighty pile of Waverley? And yet even gnawing Time has not eaten all things away. Walk with me toward Guildford, reader, upon the busy highway. Here, where the high green mound rises before us, mark yonder roofless shrine which still stands foursquare to the winds. It is St. Catharine's, where Nigel and Mary plighted their faith. Below lies the winding river, and over yonder you still see the dark Chantry woods which mount up to the bare summit, on which, roofed and whole, stands that Chapel of the Martyr where the comrades beat off the archers of the crooked Lord of Shalford. Down yonder on the flanks of the long chalk hills one traces the road by which they made their journey to the wars. And now turn hither to the north, down this sunken winding path! It is all unchanged since Nigel's day. Here is the Church of Compton. Pass under the aged and crumbling arch. Before the steps of that ancient altar, unrecorded and unbrassed, lies the dust of Nigel and of Mary. Near them is that of Maude their daughter, and of Alleyne Edricson, whose spouse she was; their children and children's children are lying by their side. Here too, near the old yew in the churchyard, is the little mound which marks where Samkin Aylward went back to that good soil from which he sprang.

So lie the dead leaves; but they and such as they nourish forever that great old trunk of England, which still sheds forth another crop and another, each as strong and as fair as the last. The body may lie in moldering chancel, or in crumbling vault, but the rumor of noble lives, the record of valor and truth, can never die, but lives on in the soul of the people. Our own work lies ready to our hands; and yet our strength may be the greater and our faith the firmer if we spare an hour from present toils to look back upon the women who were gentle and strong, or the men who loved honor more than life, on this green stage of England where for a few short years we play our little part.

Other Novels and Novellas

Conan Doyle playing baseball on a visit to Jasper National Park, June 1914.

THE MYSTERY OF CLOOMBER

This novel is narrated by John Fothergill West, a Scot who has moved with his family from Edinburgh to Wigtownshire to care for the estate of his father’s half brother, William Farintosh. It was first published in 1889.

Doyle, at the time of publication

THE MYSTERY OF CLOOMBER

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CHAPTER I. THE HEGIRA OF THE WESTS FROM EDINBURGH

I John Fothergill West, student of law in the University of St. Andrews, have endeavoured in the ensuing pages to lay my statement before the public in a concise and business-like fashion.

It is not my wish to achieve literary success, nor have I any desire by the graces of my style, or by the artistic ordering of my incidents, to throw a deeper shadow over the strange passages of which I shall have to speak. My highest ambition is that those who know something of the matter should, after reading my account, be able to conscientiously indorse it without finding a single paragraph in which I have either added to or detracted from the truth.

Should I attain this result, I shall rest amply satisfied with the outcome of my first, and probably my last, venture in literature.

It was my intention to write out the sequence of events in due order, depending on trustworthy hearsay when I was describing that which was beyond my own personal knowledge. I have now, however, through the kind cooperation of friends, hit upon a plan which promises to be less onerous to me and more satisfactory to the reader. This is nothing less than to make use of the various manuscripts which I have by me bearing upon the subject, and to add to them the first-hand evidence contributed by those who had the best opportunities of knowing Major-General J. B. Heatherstone.

In pursuance of this design I shall lay before the public the testimony of Israel Stakes, formerly coachman at Cloomber Hall, and of John Easterling, F.R.C.P. Edin., now practising at Stranraer, in Wigtownshire. To these I shall add a verbatim account extracted from the journal of the late John Berthier Heatherstone, of the events which occurred in the Thul Valley in the autumn of ‘41 towards the end of the first Afghan War, with a description of the skirmish in the Terada defile, and of the death of the man Ghoolab Shah.

To myself I reserve the duty of filling up all the gaps and chinks which may be left in the narrative. By this arrangement I have sunk from the position of an author to that of a compiler, but on the other hand my work has ceased to be a story and has expanded into a series of affidavits.

My Father, John Hunter West, was a well known Oriental and Sanskrit scholar, and his name is still of weight with those who are interested in such matters. He it was who first after Sir William Jones called attention to the great value of early Persian literature, and his translations from the Hafiz and from Ferideddin Atar have earned the warmest commendations from the Baron von Hammer-Purgstall, of Vienna, and other distinguished Continental critics.

In the issue of the *Orientalisches Scienzblatt* for January, 1861, he is described as *“Der beruhmte und sehr gelhernte Hunter West von Edinburgh”* — a passage which I well remember that he cut out and stowed away, with a pardonable vanity, among the most revered family archives.

He had been brought up to be a solicitor, or Writer to the Signet, as it is termed in Scotland, but his learned hobby absorbed so much of his time that he had little to devote to the pursuit of his profession.

When his clients were seeking him at his chambers in George Street, he was buried in the recesses of the Advocates’ Library, or poring over some mouldy manuscript at the Philosophical Institution, with his brain more exercised over the code which Menu propounded six hundred years before the birth of Christ than over the knotty problems of Scottish law in the nineteenth century. Hence it can hardly be wondered at that as his learning accumulated his practice dissolved, until at the very moment when he had attained the zenith of his celebrity he had also reached the nadir of his fortunes.

There being no chair of Sanscrit in any of his native universities, and no demand anywhere for the only mental wares which he had to dispose of, we should have been forced to retire into genteel poverty, consoling ourselves with the aphorisms and precepts of Firdousi, Omar Khayyam, and others of his Eastern favourites, had it not been for the kindness and liberality of his half-brother William Farintosh, the Laird of Branksome, in Wigtownshire.

This William Farintosh was the proprietor of a landed estate, the acreage which bore, unfortunately, a most disproportional relation to its value, for it formed the bleakest and most barren tract of land in the whole of a bleak and barren shire. As a bachelor, however, his expenses had been small, and he had contrived from the rents of his scattered cottages, and the sale of the

Galloway nags, which he bred upon the moors, not only to live as a laird should, but to put by a considerable sum in the bank.

We had heard little from our kinsman during the days of our comparative prosperity, but just as we were at our wit’s end, there came a letter like a ministering angel, giving us assurance of sympathy and succour. In it the Laird of Branksome told us that one of his lungs had been growing weaker for some time, and that Dr. Easterling, of Stranraer, had strongly advised him to spend the few years which were left to him in some more genial climate. He had determined, therefore to set out for the South of Italy, and he begged that we should take up our residence at Branksome in his absence, and that my father should act as his land steward and agent at a salary which placed us above all fear of want.

Our mother had been dead for some years, so that there were only myself, my father, and my sister Esther to consult, and it may be readily imagined that it did not take us long to decide upon the acceptance of the laird’s generous offer. My father started for Wigtown that very night, while Esther and I followed a few days afterwards, bearing with us two potato-sacksful of learned books, and such other of our household effects that were worth the trouble and expense of transport.

CHAPTER II. OF THE STRANGE MANNER IN WHICH A TENANT CAME TO CLOOMBER

Branksome might have appeared a poor dwelling-place when compared with the house of an English squire, but to us, after our long residence in stuffy apartments, it was of regal magnificence.

The building was broad-spread and low, with red-tiled roof, diamond-paned windows, and a profusion of dwelling rooms with smoke-blackened ceilings and oaken wainscots. In front was a small lawn, girt round with a thin fringe of haggard and ill grown beeches, all gnarled and withered from the effects of the sea-spray. Behind lay the scattered hamlet of Branksome-Bere — a dozen cottages at most — inhabited by rude fisher-folk who looked upon the laird as their natural protector.

To the west was the broad, yellow beach and the Irish Sea, while in all other directions the desolate moors, greyish-green in the foreground and purple in the distance, stretched away in long, low curves to the horizon.

Very bleak and lonely it was upon this Wigtown coast. A man might walk many a weary mile and never see a living thing except the white, heavy-flapping kittiwakes, which screamed and cried to each other with their shrill, sad voices.

Very lonely and very bleak! Once out of sight of Branksome and there was no sign of the works of man save only where the high, white tower of Cloomber Hall shot up, like a headstone of some giant grave, from amid the firs and larches which girt it round.

This great house, a mile or more from our dwelling, had been built by a wealthy Glasgow merchant of strange tastes and lonely habits, but at the time of our arrival it had been untenanted for many years, and stood with weather-blotched walls and vacant, staring windows looking blankly out over the hill side.

Empty and mildewed, it served only as a landmark to the fishermen, for they had found by experience that by keeping the laird’s chimney and the white tower of Cloomber in a line they could steer their way through the ugly reef which raises its jagged back, like that of some sleeping monster, above the troubled waters of the wind-swept bay.

To this wild spot it was that Fate had brought my father, my sister, and myself. For us its loneliness had no terrors. After the hubbub and bustle of a great city, and the weary task of upholding appearances upon a slender income, there was a grand, soul-soothing serenity in the long sky-line and the eager air. Here at least there was no neighbour to pry and chatter.

The laird had left his phaeton and two ponies behind him, with the aid of which my father and I would go the round of the estate doing such light duties as fall to an agent, or "factor" as it was there called, while our gentle Esther looked to our household needs, and brightened the dark old building.

Such was our simple, uneventful existence, until the summer night when an unlooked-for incident occurred which proved to be the herald of those strange doings which I have taken up my pen to describe.

It had been my habit to pull out of an evening in the laird's skiff and to catch a few whiting which might serve for our supper. On this well-remembered occasion my sister came with me, sitting with her book in the stern-sheets of the boat, while I hung my lines over the bows.

The sun had sunk down behind the rugged Irish coast, but a long bank of flushed cloud still marked the spot, and cast a glory upon the waters. The whole broad ocean was seamed and scarred with crimson streaks. I had risen in the boat, and was gazing round in delight at the broad panorama of shore and sea and sky, when my sister plucked at my sleeve with a little, sharp cry of surprise.

"See, John," she cried, "there is a light in Cloomber Tower!".

I turned my head and stared back at the tall, white turret which peeped out above the belt of trees. As I gazed I distinctly saw at one of the windows the glint of a light, which suddenly vanished, and then shone out once more from another higher up. There it flickered for some time, and finally flashed past two successive windows underneath before the trees obscured our view of it. It was clear that some one bearing a lamp or a candle had climbed up the tower stairs and had then returned into the body of the house.

"Who in the world can it be?" I exclaimed, speaking rather to myself than to Esther, for I could see by the surprise upon her face that she had no solution to offer. "Maybe some of the folk from Branksome-Bere have wanted to look over the place."

My sister shook her head.

“There is not one of them would dare to set foot within the avenue gates,” she said. “Besides, John, the keys are kept by the house-agent at Wigtown. Were they ever so curious, none of our people could find their way in.”

When I reflected upon the massive door and ponderous shutters which guarded the lower storey of Cloomber, I could not but admit the force of my sister’s objection. The untimely visitor must either have used considerable violence in order to force his way in, or he must have obtained possession of the keys.

Piqued by the little mystery, I pulled for the beach, with the determination to see for myself who the intruder might be, and what were his intentions. Leaving my sister at Branksome, and summoning Seth Jamieson, an old man-o’-war’s-man and one of the stoutest of the fishermen, I set off across the moor with him through the gathering darkness.

“It hasna a guid name after dark, yon hoose,” remarked my companion, slackening his pace perceptibly as I explained to him the nature of our errand. “It’s no for naething that him wha owns it wunna gang within a Scotch mile o’t.”

“Well, Seth, there is some one who has no fears about going into it,” said I, pointing to the great, white building which flickered up in front of us through the gloom.

The light which I had observed from the sea was moving backwards and forward past the lower floor windows, the shutters of which had been removed. I could now see that a second fainter light followed a few paces behind the other. Evidently two individuals, the one with a lamp and the other with a candle or rushlight, were making a careful examination of the building.

“Let ilka man blaw his ain parritch,” said Seth Jamieson doggedly, coming to a dead stop. “What is it tae us if a wraith or a bogle minds tae tak’ a fancy tae Cloomber? It’s no canny tae meddle wi’ such things.”

“Why, man,” I cried, “you don’t suppose a wraith came here in a gig? What are those lights away yonder by the avenue gates?”

“The lamps o’ a gig, sure enough!” exclaimed my companion in a less lugubrious voice. “Let’s steer for it, Master West, and speer where she hails frae.”

By this time night had closed in save for a single long, narrow slit in the westward. Stumbling across the moor together, we made our way into the

Wigtown Road, at the point where the high stone pillars mark the entrance to the Cloomber avenue. A tall dog-cart stood in front of the gateway, the horse browsing upon the thin border of grass which skirted the road.

"It's a' richt!" said Jamieson, taking a close look at the deserted vehicle. "I ken it weel. It belongs tae Maister McNeil, the factor body frae Wigtown — him wha keeps the keys."

"Then we may as well have speech with him now that we are here," I answered. "They are coming down, if I am not mistaken."

As I spoke we heard the slam of the heavy door and within a few minutes two figures, the one tall and angular, the other short and thick came towards us through the darkness. They were talking so earnestly that they did not observe us until they had passed through the avenue gate.

"Good evening, Mr. McNeil," said I, stepping forward and addressing the Wigtown factor, with whom I had some slight acquaintance.

The smaller of the two turned his face towards me as I spoke, and showed me that I was not mistaken in his identity, but his taller companion sprang back and showed every sign of violent agitation.

"What is this, McNeil?" I heard him say, in a gasping, choking voice. "Is this your promise? What is the meaning of it?"

"Don't be alarmed, General! Don't be alarmed!" said the little fat factor in a soothing fashion, as one might speak to a frightened child. "This is young Mr. Fothergill West, of Branksome, though what brings him up here tonight is more than I can understand. However, as you are to be neighbours, I can't do better than take the opportunity to introduce you to each other. Mr. West, this is General Heatherstone, who is about to take a lease of Cloomber Hall."

I held out my hand to the tall man, who look it in a hesitating, half-reluctant fashion.

"I came up," I explained, "because I saw your lights in the windows, and I bought that something might be wrong. I am very glad I did so, since it has given me the chance of making the general's acquaintance."

Whilst I was talking, I was conscious that the new tenant of Cloomber Hall was peering at me very closely through the darkness. As I concluded, he stretched out a long, tremulous arm, and turned the gig-lamp in such a way as to throw a flood of light upon my face.

"Good Heavens, McNeil!" he cried, in the same quivering voice as before, "the fellow's as brown as chocolate. He's not an Englishman.

You’re not an Englishman — you, sir?”

“I’m a Scotchman, born and bred,” said I, with an inclination to laugh, which was only checked by my new acquaintance’s obvious terror.

“A Scotchman, eh?” said he, with a sigh of relief. “It’s all one nowadays. You must excuse me, Mr. — Mr. West. I’m nervous, infernally nervous. Come along, McNeil, we must be back in Wigtown in less than an hour. Good-night, gentlemen, good-night!”

The two clambered into their places; the factor cracked his whip, and the high dog-cart clattered away through the darkness, casting a brilliant tunnel of yellow light on either side of it, until the rumble of its wheels died away in the distance.

“What do you think of our new neighbour, Jamieson?” I asked, after a long silence.

“‘Deed, Mr. West, he seems, as he says himsel’, to be vera nervous. Maybe his conscience is oot o’ order.”

“His liver, more likely,” said I. “He looks as if he had tried his constitution a bit. But it’s blowing chill, Seth, my lad, and it’s time both of us were indoors.”

I bade my companion good-night, and struck off across the moors for the cheery, ruddy light which marked the parlour windows of Branksome.

CHAPTER III. OF OUR FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE WITH MAJOR-GENERAL J. B. HEATHERSTONE

There was, as may well be imagined, much stir amongst our small community at the news that the Hall was to be inhabited once more, and considerable speculation as to the new tenants, and their object in choosing this particular part of the country for their residence.

It speedily became apparent that, whatever their motives might be, they had definitely determined upon a lengthy stay, for relays of plumbers and of joiners came down from Wigtown, and there was hammering and repairing going on from morning till night.

It was surprising how quickly the signs of the wind and weather were effaced, until the great, square-set house was all as spick-and-span as though it had been erected yesterday. There were abundant signs that money was no consideration to General Heatherstone, and that it was not on the score of retrenchment that he had taken up his abode among us.

“It may be that he is devoted to study,” suggested my father, as we discussed the question round the breakfast table. “Perhaps he has chosen this secluded spot to finish some magnum opus upon which he is engaged. If that is the case I should be happy to let him have the run of my library.”

Esther and I laughed at the grandiloquent manner in which he spoke of the two potato-sacksful of books.

“It may be as you say,” said I, “but the general did not strike me during our short interview as being a man who was likely to have any very pronounced literary tastes. If I might hazard a guess, I should say that he is here upon medical advice, in the hope that the complete quiet and fresh air may restore his shattered nervous system. If you had seen how he glared at me, and the twitching of his fingers, you would have thought it needed some restoring.”

“I do wonder whether he has a wife and a family,” said my sister. “Poor souls, how lonely they will be! Why, excepting ourselves, there is not a family that they could speak to for seven miles and more.”

“General Heatherstone is a very distinguished soldier,” remarked my father.

“Why, papa, however came you to know anything about him?”

“Ah, my dears,” said my father, smiling at us over his coffee-cup, “you were laughing at my library just now, but you see it may be very useful at times.” As he spoke he took a red-covered volume from a shelf and turned over the pages. “This is an Indian Army List of three years back,” he explained, “and here is the very gentleman we want-’Heatherstone, J. B., Commander of the Bath,’ my dears, and ‘V.C.’, think of that, ‘V.C.’—’formerly colonel in the Indian Infantry, 41st Bengal Foot, but now retired with the rank of major-general.’ In this other column is a record of his services—’capture of Ghuznee and defence of Jellalabad, Sobraon 1848, Indian Mutiny and reduction of Oudh. Five times mentioned in dispatches.’ I think, my dears, that we have cause to be proud of our new neighbour.”

“It doesn’t mention there whether he is married or not, I suppose?” asked Esther.

“No,” said my father, wagging his white head with a keen appreciation of his own humour. “It doesn’t include that under the heading of ‘daring actions’ — though it very well might, my dear, it very well might.”

All our doubts, however, upon this head were very soon set at rest, for on the very day that the repairing and the furnishing had been completed I had occasion to ride into Wigtown, and I met upon the way a carriage which was bearing General Heatherstone and his family to their new home. An elderly lady, worn and sickly-looking, was by his side, and opposite him sat a young fellow about my own age and a girl who appeared to be a couple of years younger.

I raised my hat, and was about to pass them, when the general shouted to his coachman to pull up, and held out his hand to me. I could see now in the daylight that his face, although harsh and stern, was capable of assuming a not unkindly expression.

“How are you, Mr. Fothergill West?” he cried. “I must apologise to you if I was a little brusque the other night — you will excuse an old soldier who has spent the best part of his life in harness — All the same, you must confess that you are rather dark-skinned for a Scotchman.”

“We have a Spanish strain in our blood,” said I, wondering at his recurrence to the topic.

“That would, of course, account for it,” he remarked. “My dear,” to his wife, “allow me to introduce Mr. Fothergill West to you. This is my son and my daughter. We have come here in search of rest, Mr. West — complete rest.”

“And you could not possibly have come to a better place,” said I.

“Oh, you think so?” he answered. “I suppose it is very quiet indeed, and very lonely. You might walk through these country lanes at night, I dare say, and never meet a soul, eh?”

“Well, there are not many about after dark,” I said.

“And you are not much troubled with vagrants or wandering beggars, eh? Not many tinkers or tramps or rascally gipsies — no vermin of that sort about?”

“I find it rather cold,” said Mrs. Heatherstone, drawing her thick sealskin mantle tighter round her figure. “We are detaining Mr. West, too.”

“So we are, my dear, so we are. Drive on, coachman. Good-day, Mr. West.”

The carriage rattled away towards the Hall, and I trotted thoughtfully onwards to the little country metropolis.

As I passed up the High Street, Mr. McNeil ran out from his office and beckoned to me to stop.

“Our new tenants have gone out,” he said. “They drove over this morning.”

“I met them on the way,” I answered.

As I looked down at the little factor, I could see that his face was flushed and that he bore every appearance of having had an extra glass.

“Give me a real gentleman to do business with,” he said, with a burst of laughter. “They understand me and I understand them. ‘What shall I fill it up for?’ says the general, taking a blank cheque out o’ his pouch and laying it on the table. ‘Two hundred,’ says I, leaving a bit o’ a margin for my own time and trouble.”

“I thought that the landlord had paid you for that,” I remarked.

“Aye, aye, but it’s well to have a bit margin. He filled it up and threw it over to me as if it had been an auld postage stamp. That’s the way business should be done between honest men — though it wouldna do if one was inclined to take an advantage. Will ye not come in, Mr. West, and have a taste of my whisky?”

“No, thank you,” said I, “I have business to do.”

“Well, well, business is the chief thing. It’s well not to drink in the morning, too. For my own part, except a drop before breakfast to give me an appetite, and maybe a glass, or even twa, afterwards to promote digestion, I never touch spirits before noon. What d’ye think o’ the general, Mr. West?”

“Why, I have hardly had an opportunity of judging,” I answered.

Mr. McNeil tapped his forehead with his forefinger.

“That’s what I think of him,” he said in a confidential whisper, shaking his head at me. “He’s gone, sir, gone, in my estimation. Now what would you take to be a proof of madness, Mr. West?”

“Why, offering a blank cheque to a Wigtown house-agent,” said I.

“Ah, you’re aye at your jokes. But between oorsel’s now, if a man asked ye how many miles it was frae a seaport, and whether ships come there from the East, and whether there were tramps on the road, and whether it was against the lease for him to build a high wall round the grounds, what would ye make of it, eh?”

“I should certainly think him eccentric,” said I.

“If every man had his due, our friend would find himsel’ in a house with a high wall round the grounds, and that without costing him a farthing,” said the agent.

“Where then?” I asked, humouring his joke.

“Why, in the Wigtown County Lunatic Asylum,” cried the little man, with a bubble of laughter, in the midst of which I rode on my way, leaving him still chuckling over his own facetiousness.

The arrival of the new family at Cloomber Hall had no perceptible effect in relieving the monotony of our secluded district, for instead of entering into such simple pleasures as the country had to offer, or interesting themselves, as we had hoped, in our attempts to improve the lot of our poor crofters and fisherfolk, they seemed to shun all observation, and hardly ever to venture beyond the avenue gates.

We soon found, too, that the factor’s words as to the inclosing of the grounds were founded upon fact, for gangs of workmen were kept hard at work from early in the morning until late at night in erecting a high, wooden fence round the whole estate.

When this was finished and topped with spikes, Cloomber Park became impregnable to any one but an exceptionally daring climber. It was as if the old soldier had been so imbued with military ideas that, like my Uncle

Toby, he could not refrain even in times of peace from standing upon the defensive.

Stranger still, he had victualled the house as if for a siege, for Begbie, the chief grocer of Wigtown, told me himself in a rapture of delight and amazement that the general had sent him an order for hundreds of dozens of every imaginable potted meat and vegetable.

It may be imagined that all these unusual incidents were not allowed to pass without malicious comment. Over the whole countryside and as far away as the English border there was nothing but gossip about the new tenants of Cloomber Hall and the reasons which had led them to come among us.

The only hypothesis, however, which the bucolic mind could evolve, was that which had already occurred to Mr. McNeil, the factor — namely, that the old general and his family were one and all afflicted with madness, or, as an alternative conclusion, that he had committed some heinous offence and was endeavouring to escape the consequences of his misdeeds.

These were both natural suppositions under the circumstances, but neither of them appeared to me to commend itself as a true explanation of the facts.

It is true that General Heatherstone's behaviour on the occasion of our first interview was such as to suggest some suspicion of mental disease, but no man could have been more reasonable or more courteous than he had afterwards shown himself to be.

Then, again, his wife and children led the same secluded life that he did himself, so that the reason could not be one peculiar to his own health.

As to the possibility of his being a fugitive from justice, that theory was even more untenable. Wigtownshire was bleak and lonely, but it was not such an obscure corner of the world that a well-known soldier could hope to conceal himself there, nor would a man who feared publicity set every one's tongue wagging as the general had done.

On the whole, I was inclined to believe that the true solution of the enigma lay in his own allusion to the love of quiet, and that they had taken shelter here with an almost morbid craving for solitude and repose. We very soon had an instance of the great lengths to which this desire for isolation would carry them.

My father had come down one morning with the weight of a great determination upon his brow.

“You must put on your pink frock to-day, Esther,” said he, “and you, John, you must make yourself smart, for I have determined that the three of us shall drive round this afternoon and pay our respects to Mrs. Heatherstone and the general.”

“A visit to Cloomber,” cried Esther, clapping her hands.

“I am here,” said my father, with dignity, “not only as the laird’s factor, but also as his kinsman. In that capacity I am convinced that he would wish me to call upon these newcomers and offer them any politeness which is in our power. At present they must feel lonely and friendless. What says the great Firdousi? ‘The choicest ornaments to a man’s house are his friends.’”

My sister and I knew by experience that when the old man began to justify his resolution by quotations from the Persian poets there was no chance of shaking it. Sure enough that afternoon saw the phaeton at the door, with my father perched upon the seat, with his second-best coat on and a pair of new driving-gloves.

“Jump in, my dears,” he cried, cracking his whip briskly, “we shall show the general that he has no cause to be ashamed of his neighbours.”

Alas! pride always goes before a fall. Our well-fed ponies and shining harness were not destined that day to impress the tenants of Cloomber with a sense of our importance.

We had reached the avenue gate, and I was about to get out and open it, when our attention was arrested by a very large wooden placard, which was attached to one of the trees in such a manner that no one could possibly pass without seeing it. On the white surface of this board was printed in big, black letters the following hospitable inscription:

GENERAL AND MRS. HEATHERSTONE
HAVE NO WISH
TO INCREASE
THE CIRCLE OF THEIR ACQUAINTANCE.

We all sat gazing at this announcement for some moments in silent astonishment. Then Esther and I, tickled by the absurdity of the thing, burst out laughing, but my father pulled the ponies’ heads round, and drove home with compressed lips and the cloud of much wrath upon his brow. I have never seen the good man so thoroughly moved, and I am convinced that his anger did not arise from any petty feeling of injured vanity upon his own part, but from the thought that a slight had been offered to the Laird of Branksome, whose dignity he represented.

CHAPTER IV. OF A YOUNG MAN WITH A GREY HEAD

If I had any personal soreness on account of this family snub, it was a very passing emotion, and one which was soon effaced from my mind.

It chanced that on the very next day after the episode I had occasion to pass that way, and stopped to have another look at the obnoxious placard. I was standing staring at it and wondering what could have induced our neighbours to take such an outrageous step, when I became suddenly aware of a sweet, girlish face which peeped out at me from between the bars of the gate, and of a white hand which eagerly beckoned me to approach. As I advanced to her I saw that it was the same young lady whom I had seen in the carriage.

“Mr. West,” she said, in a quick whisper, glancing from side to side as she spoke in a nervous, hasty manner, “I wish to apologise to you for the indignity to which you and your family were subjected yesterday. My brother was in the avenue and saw it all, but he is powerless to interfere. I assure you, Mr. West, that if that hateful thing,” pointing up at the placard, “has given you any annoyance, it has given my brother and myself far more.”

“Why, Miss Heatherstone,” said I, putting the matter off with a laugh, “Britain is a free country, and if a man chooses to warn off visitors from his premises there is no reason why he should not.”

“It is nothing less than brutal,” she broke out, with a petulant stamp of the foot. “To think that your sister, too, should have such a unprovoked insult offered to her! I am ready to sink with shame at the very thought.”

“Pray do not give yourself one moment’s uneasiness upon the subject,” said I earnestly, for I was grieved at her evident distress. “I am sure that your father has some reason unknown to us for taking this step.”

“Heaven knows he has!” she answered, with ineffable sadness in her voice, “and yet I think it would be more manly to face a danger than to fly from it. However, he knows best, and it is impossible for us to judge. But who is this?” she exclaimed, anxiously, peering up the dark avenue. “Oh, it is my brother Mordaunt. Mordaunt,” she said, as the young man approached us. “I have been apologising to Mr. West for what happened yesterday, in your name as well as my own.”

“I am very, very glad to have the opportunity of doing it in person,” said he courteously. “I only wish that I could see your sister and your father as well as yourself, to tell them how sorry I am. I think you had better run up to the house, little one, for it’s getting near tiffin-time. No — don’t you go Mr. West. I want to have a word with you.”

Miss Heatherstone waved her hand to me with a bright smile, and tripped up the avenue, while her brother unbolted the gate, and, passing through, closed it again, locking it upon the outside.

“I’ll have a stroll down the road with you, if you have no objection. Have a manilla.” He drew a couple of cheroots from his pocket and handed one to me. “You’ll find they are not bad,” he said. “I became a connoisseur in tobacco when I was in India. I hope I am not interfering with your business in coming along with you?”

“Not at all,” I answered “I am very glad to have your company.”

“I’ll tell you a secret,” said my companion. “This is the first time that I have been outside the grounds since we have been down here.”

“And your sister?”

“She has never been out, either,” he answered. “I have given the governor the slip to-day, but he wouldn’t half like it if he knew. It’s a whim of his that we should keep ourselves entirely to ourselves. At least, some people would call it a whim, for my own part I have reason to believe that he has solid grounds for all that he does — though perhaps in this matter he may be a little too exacting.”

“You must surely find it very lonely,” said I. “Couldn’t you manage to slip down at times and have a smoke with me? That house over yonder is Branksome.”

“Indeed, you are very kind,” he answered, with sparkling eyes. “I should dearly like to run over now and again. With the exception of Israel Stakes, our old coachman and gardener, I have not a soul that I can speak to.”

“And your sister — she must feel it even more,” said I, thinking in my heart that my new acquaintance made rather too much of his own troubles and too little of those of his companion.

“Yes; poor Gabriel feels it, no doubt,” he answered carelessly, “but it’s a more unnatural thing for a young man of my age to be cooped up in this way than for a woman. Look at me, now. I am three-and-twenty next

March, and yet I have never been to a university, nor to a school for that matter. I am as complete an ignoramus as any of these clodhoppers. It seems strange to you, no doubt, and yet it is so. Now, don’t you think I deserve a better fate?”

He stopped as he spoke, and faced round to me, throwing his palms forward in appeal.

As I looked at him, with the sun shining upon his face, he certainly did seem a strange bird to be cooped up in such a cage. Tall and muscular, with a keen, dark face, and sharp, finely cut features, he might have stepped out of a canvas of Murillo or Velasquez. There were latent energy and power in his firm-set mouth, his square eyebrows, and the whole pose of his elastic, well-knit figure.

“There is the learning to be got from books and the learning to be got from experience,” said I sententiously. “If you have less of your share of the one, perhaps you have more of the other. I cannot believe you have spent all your life in mere idleness and pleasure.”

“Pleasure!” he cried. “Pleasure! Look at this!” He pulled off his hat, and I saw that his black hair was all decked and dashed with streaks of grey. “Do you imagine that this came from pleasure?” he asked, with a bitter laugh.

“You must have had some great shock,” I said, astonished at the sight, “some terrible illness in your youth. Or perhaps it arises from a more chronic cause — a constant gnawing anxiety. I have known men as young as you whose hair was as grey.”

“Poor brutes!” he muttered. “I pity them.”

“If you can manage to slip down to Branksome at times,” I said, “perhaps you could bring Miss Heatherstone with you. I know that my father and my sister would be delighted to see her, and a change, if only for an hour or two, might do her good.”

“It would be rather hard for us both to get away together,” he answered, “However, if I see a chance I shall bring her down. It might be managed some afternoon perhaps, for the old man indulges in a siesta occasionally.”

We had reached the head of the winding lane which branches off from the high road and leads to the laird’s house, so my companion pulled up.

“I must go back,” he said abruptly, “or they will miss me. It’s very kind of you, West, to take this interest in us. I am very grateful to you, and so will Gabriel be when she hears of your kind invitation. It’s a real heaping of coals of fire after that infernal placard of my father’s.”

He shook my hand and set off down the road, but he came running after me presently, calling me to stop.

“I was just thinking,” he said, “that you must consider us a great mystery up there at Cloomber. I dare say you have come to look upon it as a private lunatic asylum, and I can’t blame you. If you are interested in the matter, I feel it is unfriendly upon my part not to satisfy your curiosity, but I have promised my father to be silent about it. And indeed if I were to tell you all that I know you might not be very much the wiser after all. I would have you understand this, however — that my father is as sane as you or I, and that he has very good reasons for living the life which he does. I may add that his wish to remain secluded does not arise from any unworthy or dishonourable motives, but merely from the instinct of self-preservation.”

“He is in danger, then?” I ejaculated.

“Yes; he is in constant danger.”

“But why does he not apply to the magistrates for protection?” I asked. “If he is afraid of any one, he has only to name him and they will bind him over to keep the peace.”

“My dear West,” said young Heatherstone, “the danger with which my father is threatened is one that cannot be averted by any human intervention. It is none the less very real, and possibly very imminent.”

“You don’t mean to assert that it is supernatural,” I said incredulously.

“Well, hardly that, either,” he answered with hesitation. “There,” he continued, “I have said rather more than I should, but I know that you will not abuse my confidence. Good-bye!”

He look to his heels and was soon out of sight round a curve in the country road.

A danger which was real and imminent, not to be averted by human means, and yet hardly supernatural — here was a conundrum indeed!

I had come to look upon the inhabitants of the Hall as mere eccentrics, but after what young Mordaunt Heatherstone had just told me, I could no longer doubt that some dark and sinister meaning underlay all their actions. The more I pondered over the problem, the more unanswerable did it appear, and yet I could not get the matter out of my thoughts.

The lonely, isolated Hall, and the strange, impending catastrophe which hung over its inmates, appealed forcibly to my imagination. All that evening, and late into the night, I sat moodily by the fire, pondering over what I had heard, and revolving in my mind the various incidents which might furnish me with some clue to the mystery.

CHAPTER V. HOW FOUR OF US CAME TO BE UNDER THE SHADOW OF CLOOMBER

I trust that my readers will not set me down as an inquisitive busybody when I say that as the days and weeks went by I found my attention and my thoughts more and more attracted to General Heatherstone and the mystery which surrounded him.

It was in vain that I endeavoured by hard work and a strict attention to the laird's affairs to direct my mind into some more healthy channel. Do what I would, on land or on the water, I would still find myself puzzling over this one question, until it obtained such a hold upon me that I felt it was useless for me to attempt to apply myself to anything until I had come to some satisfactory solution of it.

I could never pass the dark line of five-foot fencing, and the great iron gate, with its massive lock, without pausing and racking my brain as to what the secret might be which was shut in by that inscrutable barrier. Yet, with all my conjectures and all my observations, I could never come to any conclusion which could for a moment be accepted as an explanation of the facts.

My sister had been out for a stroll one night, visiting a sick peasant or performing some other of the numerous acts of charity by which she had made herself beloved by the whole countryside.

"John," she said when she returned, "have you seen Cloomber Hall at night?"

"No," I answered, laying down the book which I was reading. "Not since that memorable evening when the general and Mr. McNeil came over to make an inspection."

"Well, John, will you put your hat on and come a little walk with me?"

I could see by her manner that something had agitated or frightened her.

"Why, bless the girl!" cried I boisterously, "what is the matter? The old Hall is not on fire, surely? You look as grave as if all Wigtown were in a blaze."

"Not quite so bad as that," she said, smiling. "But do come out, Jack. I should very much like you to see it."

I had always refrained from saying anything which might alarm my sister, so that she knew nothing of the interest which our neighbours' doings had for me. At her request I took my hat and followed her out into the darkness. She led the way along a little footpath over the moor, which brought us to some rising ground, from which we could look down upon the Hall without our view being obstructed by any of the fir-trees which had been planted round it.

"Look at that!" said my sister, pausing at the summit of this little eminence.

Cloomber lay beneath us in a blaze of light. In the lower floors the shutters obscured the illumination, but above, from the broad windows of the second storey to the thin slits at the summit of the tower, there was not a chink or an aperture which did not send forth a stream of radiance. So dazzling was the effect that for a moment I was persuaded that the house was on fire, but the steadiness and clearness of the light soon freed me from that apprehension. It was clearly the result of many lamps placed systematically all over the building.

It added to the strange effect that all these brilliantly illuminated rooms were apparently untenanted, and some of them, so far as we could judge, were not even furnished. Through the whole great house there was no sign of movement or of life — nothing but the clear, unwinking flood of yellow light.

I was still lost in wonder at the sight when I heard a short, quick sob at my side.

"What is it, Esther, dear?" I asked, looking down at my companion.

"I feel so frightened. Oh, John, John, take me home, I feel so frightened!"

She clung to my arm, and pulled at my coat in a perfect frenzy of fear.

"It's all safe, darling," I said soothingly. "There is nothing to fear. What has upset you so?"

"I am afraid of them, John; I am afraid of the Heatherstones. Why is their house lit up like this every night? I have heard from others that it is always so. And why does the old man run like a frightened hare if any one comes upon him. There is something wrong about it, John, and it frightens me."

I pacified her as well as I could, and led her home with me, where I took care that she should have some hot port negus before going to bed. I avoided the subject of the Heatherstones for fear of exciting her, and she did not recur to it of her own accord. I was convinced, however, from what I had heard from her, that she had for some time back been making her own observations upon our neighbours, and that in doing so she had put a considerable strain upon her nerves.

I could see that the mere fact of the Hall being illuminated at night was not enough to account for her extreme agitation, and that it must have derived its importance in her eyes from being one in a chain of incidents, all of which had left a weird or unpleasant impression upon her mind.

That was the conclusion which I came to at the time, and I have reason to know now that I was right, and that my sister had even more cause than I had myself for believing that there was something uncanny about the tenants of Cloomber.

Our interest in the matter may have arisen at first from nothing higher than curiosity, but events soon look a turn which associated us more closely with the fortunes of the Heatherstone family.

Mordaunt had taken advantage of my invitation to come down to the laird’s house, and on several occasions he brought with him his beautiful sister. The four of us would wander over the moors together, or perhaps if the day were fine set sail upon our little skiff and stand off into the Irish Sea.

On such excursions the brother and sister would be as merry and as happy as two children. It was a keen pleasure to them to escape from their dull fortress, and to see, if only for a few hours, friendly and sympathetic faces round them.

There could be but one result when four young people were brought together in sweet, forbidden intercourse. Acquaintance-ship warmed into friendship, and friendship flamed suddenly into love.

Gabriel sits beside me now as I write, and she agrees with me that, dear as is the subject to ourselves, the whole story of our mutual affection is of too personal a nature to be more than touched upon in this statement. Suffice it to say that, within a few weeks of our first meeting Mordaunt Heatherstone had won the heart of my clear sister, and Gabriel had given me that pledge which death itself will not be able to break.

I have alluded in this brief way to the double tie which sprang up between the two families, because I have no wish that this narrative should degenerate into anything approaching to romance, or that I should lose the thread of the facts which I have set myself to chronicle. These are connected with General Heatherstone, and only indirectly with my own personal history.

It is enough if I say that after our engagement the visits to Branksome became more frequent, and that our friends were able sometimes to spend a whole day with us when business had called the general to Wigtown, or when his gout confined him to his room.

As to our good father, he was ever ready to greet us with many small jests and tags of Oriental poems appropriate to the occasion, for we had no secrets from him, and he already looked upon us all as his children.

There were times when on account of some peculiarly dark or restless fit of the general's it was impossible for weeks on end for either Gabriel or Mordaunt to get away from the grounds. The old man would even stand on guard, a gloomy and silent sentinel, at the avenue gate, or pace up and down the drive as though he suspected that attempts had been made to penetrate his seclusion.

Passing of an evening I have seen his dark, grim figure flitting about in the shadow of the trees, or caught a glimpse of his hard, angular, swarthy face peering out suspiciously at me from behind the bars.

My heart would often sadden for him as I noticed his uncouth, nervous movements, his furtive glances and twitching features. Who would have believed that this slinking, cowering creature had once been a dashing officer, who had fought the battles of his country and had won the palm of bravery among the host of brave men around him?

In spite of the old soldier's vigilance, we managed to hold communication with our friends.

Immediately behind the Hall there was a spot where the fencing had been so carelessly erected that two of the rails could be removed without difficulty, leaving a broad gap, which gave us the opportunity for many a stolen interview, though they were necessarily short, for the general's movements were erratic, and no part of the grounds was secure from his visitations.

How vividly one of these hurried meetings rises before me! It stands out clear, peaceful, and distinct amid the wild, mysterious incidents which were destined to lead up to the terrible catastrophe which has cast a shade over our lives.

I can remember that as I walked through the fields the grass was damp with the rain of the morning, and the air was heavy with the smell of the fresh-turned earth. Gabriel was waiting for me under the hawthorn tree outside the gap, and we stood hand-in-hand looking down at the long sweep of moorland and at the broad blue channel which encircled it with its fringe of foam.

Far away in the north-west the sun glinted upon the high peak of Mount Throston. From where we stood we could see the smoke of the steamers as they ploughed along the busy water-way which leads to Belfast.

“Is it not magnificent?” Gabriel cried, clasping her hands round my arm. “Ah, John, why are we not free to sail away over these waves together, and leave all our troubles behind us on the shore?”

“And what are the troubles which you would leave behind you, dear one?” I asked. “May I not know them, and help you to bear them?”

“I have no secrets from you, John,” she answered, “Our chief trouble is, as you may guess, our poor father’s strange behaviour. Is it not a sad thing for all of us that a man who has played such a distinguished part in the world should skulk from one obscure corner of the country to another, and should defend himself with locks and barriers as though he were a common thief flying from justice? This is a trouble, John, which it is out of your power to alleviate.”

“But why does he do it, Gabriel?” I asked.

“I cannot tell,” she answered frankly. “I only know that he imagines some deadly danger to be hanging over his head, and that this danger was incurred by him during his stay in India. What its nature may be I have no more idea than you have.”

“Then your brother has,” I remarked. “I am sure from the way in which he spoke to me about it one day that he knows what it is, and that he looks upon it as real.”

“Yes, he knows, and so does my mother,” she answered, “but they have always kept it secret from me. My poor father is very excited at present. Day and night he is in an agony of apprehension, but it will soon be the fifth of October, and after that he will be at peace.”

“How do you know that?” I asked in surprise.

“By experience,” she answered gravely. “On the fifth of October these fears of his come to a crisis. For years back he has been in the habit of locking Mordaunt and myself up in our rooms on that date, so that we have no idea what occurs, but we have always found that he has been much relieved afterwards, and has continued to be comparatively in peace until that day begins to draw round again.”

“Then you have only ten days or so to wait,” I remarked, for September was drawing to a close. “By the way, dearest, why is it that you light up all your rooms at night?”

“You have noticed it, then?” she said. “It comes also from my father’s fears. He does not like to have one dark corner in the whole house. He walks about a good deal at night, and inspects everything, from the attics right down to the cellars. He has large lamps in every room and corridor, even the empty ones, and he orders the servants to light them all at dusk.”

“I am rather surprised that you manage to keep your servants,” I said, laughing. “The maids in these parts are a superstitious class, and their imaginations are easily excited by anything which they don’t understand.”

“The cook and both housemaids are from London, and are used to our ways. We pay them on a very high scale to make up for any inconvenience to which they may be put. Israel Stakes, the coachman, is the only one who comes from this part of the country, and he seems to be a stolid, honest fellow, who is not easily scared.”

“Poor little girl,” I exclaimed, looking down at the slim, graceful figure by my side. “This is no atmosphere for you to live in. Why will you not let me rescue you from it? Why won’t you allow me to go straight and ask the general for your hand? At the worst he could only refuse.”

She turned quite haggard and pale at the very thought.

“For Heaven’s sake, John,” she cried earnestly, “do nothing of the kind. He would whip us all away in the dead of the night, and within a week we should be settling down again in some wilderness where we might never have a chance of seeing or hearing from you again. Besides, he never would forgive us for venturing out of the grounds.”

“I don’t think that he is a hard-hearted man,” I remarked. “I have seen a kindly look in his eyes, for all his stern face.”

“He can be the kindest of fathers,” she answered. “But he is terrible when opposed or thwarted. You have never seen him so, and I trust you never will. It was that strength of will and impatience of opposition which made him such a splendid officer. I assure you that in India every one thought a great deal of him. The soldiers were afraid of him, but they would have followed him anywhere."

"And had he these nervous attacks then?"

"Occasionally, but not nearly so acutely. He seems to think that the danger — whatever it may be — becomes more imminent every year. Oh, John, it is terrible to be waiting like this with a sword over our heads — and all the more terrible to me since I have no idea where the blow is to come from."

"Dear Gabriel," I said, taking her hand and drawing her to my side, "look over all this pleasant countryside and the broad blue sea. Is it not all peaceful and beautiful? In these cottages, with their red-tiled roofs peeping out from the grey moor, there live none but simple, God-fearing men, who toil hard at their crafts and bear enmity to no man. Within seven miles of us is a large town, with every civilised appliance for the preservation of order. Ten miles farther there is a garrison quartered, and a telegram would at any time bring down a company of soldiers. Now, I ask you, dear, in the name of common-sense, what conceivable danger could threaten you in this secluded neighbourhood, with the means of help so near? You assure me that the peril is not connected with your father's health?"

"No, I am sure of that. It is true that Dr. Easterling, of Stranraer. has been over to see him once or twice, but that was merely for some small indisposition. I can assure you that the danger is not to be looked for in that direction."

"Then I can assure you," said I, laughing, "that there is no danger at all. It must be some strange monomania or hallucination. No other hypothesis will cover the facts."

"Would my father's monomania account for the fact of my brother's hair turning grey and my mother wasting away to a mere shadow?"

"Undoubtedly," I answered, "The long continued worry of the general's restlessness and irritability would produce those effects on sensitive natures."

"No, no!" said she, shaking her head sadly, "I have been exposed to his restlessness and irritability, but they have had no such effect upon me. The difference between us lies in the fact that they know this awful secret and I do not."

“My dear girl,” said I, “the days of family apparitions and that kind of thing are gone. Nobody is haunted nowadays, so we can put that supposition out of the question. Having done so, what remains? There is absolutely no other theory which could even be suggested. Believe me, the whole mystery is that the heat of India has been too much for your poor father’s brain.”

What she would have answered I cannot tell, for at that moment she gave a start as if some sound had fallen upon her ear. As she looked round apprehensively, I suddenly saw her features become rigid and her eyes fixed and dilated.

Following the direction of her gaze, I felt a sudden thrill of fear pass through me as I perceived a human face surveying us from behind one of the trees — a man’s face, every feature of which was distorted by the most malignant hatred and anger. Finding himself observed, he stepped out and advanced towards us, when I saw that it was none other than the general himself. His beard was all a-bristle with fury, and his deepset eyes glowed from under their heavily veined lids with a most sinister and demoniacal brightness.

CHAPTER VI. HOW I CAME TO BE ENLISTED AS ONE OF THE GARRISON OF CLOOMBER

“To your room, girl!” he cried in a hoarse, harsh voice, stepping in between us and pointing authoritatively towards the house.

He waited until Gabriel, with a last frightened glance at me, had passed through the gap, and then he turned upon me with an expression so murderous that I stepped back a pace or two, and tightened my grasp upon my oak stick.

“You-you—” he spluttered, with his hand twitching at his throat, as though his fury were choking him. “You have dared to intrude upon my privacy! Do you think I built this fence that all the vermin in the country might congregate round it? Oh, you have been very near your death, my fine fellow! You will never be nearer until your time comes. Look at this!” he pulled a squat, thick pistol out of his bosom. “If you had passed through that gap and set foot on my land I’d have let daylight into you. I’ll have no vagabonds here. I know how to treat gentry of that sort, whether their faces are black or white.”

“Sir,” said I, “I meant no harm by coming here, and I do not know how I have deserved this extraordinary outburst. Allow me to observe, however, that you are still covering me with your pistol, and that, as your hand is rather tremulous, it is more than possible that it may go off. If you don’t turn the muzzle down I shall be compelled in self-defence to strike you over the wrist with my stick.”

“What the deuce brought you here, then?” he asked, in a more composed voice, putting his weapon back into his bosom. “Can’t a gentleman live quietly without your coming to peep and pry? Have you no business of your own to look after, eh? And my daughter? how came you to know anything of her? and what have you been trying to squeeze out of her? It wasn’t chance that brought you here.”

“No,” said I boldly, “it was not chance which brought me here. I have had several opportunities of seeing your daughter and of appreciating her many noble qualities. We are engaged to be married to each other, and I came up with the express intention of seeing her."

Instead of blazing into a fury, as I had expected, the general gave a long whistle of astonishment, and then leant up against the railings, laughing softly to himself.

"English terriers are fond of nosing worms," he remarked at last. "When we brought them out to India they used to trot off into the jungle and begin sniffing at what, they imagined to be worms there. But the worm turned out to be a venomous snake, and so poor doggy played no more. I think you'll find yourself in a somewhat analogous position if you don't look out."

"You surely don't mean to cast an aspersion upon your own daughter?" I said, flushing with indignation.

"Oh, Gabriel is all right," he answered carelessly. "Our family is not exactly one, however, which I should recommend a young fellow to marry into. And pray how is it that I was not informed of this snug little arrangement of yours?"

"We were afraid, sir, that you might separate us," I replied, feeling that perfect candour was the best policy under the circumstances. "It is possible that we were mistaken. Before coming to any final decision, I implore you to remember that the happiness of both of us is at stake. It is in your power to divide our bodies, but our souls shall be for ever united."

"My good fellow," said the general, in a not unkindly tone, "you don't know what you are asking for. There is a gulf between you and any one of the blood of Heatherstone which can never be bridged over."

All trace of anger had vanished now from his manner, and given place to an air of somewhat contemptuous amusement.

My family pride took fire at his words. "The gulf may be less than you imagine," I said coldly. "We are not clodhoppers because we live in this out-of-the-way place. I am of noble descent on one side, and my mother was a Buchan of Buchan, I assure you that there is no such disparity between us as you seem to imagine."

"You misunderstand me," the general answered. "It is on our side that the disparity lies. There are reasons why my daughter Gabriel should live and die single. It would not be to your advantage to marry her."

"But surely, sir," I persisted, "I am the best judge of my own interests and advantages. Since you take this ground all becomes easy, for I do assure you that the one interest which overrides all others is that I should have the woman I love for my wife. If this is your only objection to our match you may surely give us your consent, for any danger or trial which I may incur in marrying Gabriel will not weigh with me one featherweight."

"Here's a young bantam!" exclaimed the old soldier, smiling at my warmth. "It's easy to defy danger when you don't know what the danger is."

"What is it, then?" I asked, hotly. "There is no earthly peril which will drive me from Gabriel's side. Let me know what it is and test me."

"No, no. That would never do," he answered with a sigh, and then, thoughtfully, as if speaking his mind aloud: "He has plenty of pluck and is a well-grown lad, too. We might do worse than make use of him."

He went on mumbling to himself with a vacant stare in his eyes as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Look here, West," he said presently. "You'll excuse me if I spoke hastily a little time ago. It is the second time that I have had occasion to apologise to you for the same offence. It shan't occur again. I am rather over-particular, no doubt, in my desire for complete isolation, but I have good reasons for insisting on the point. Rightly or wrongly, I have got it into my head that some day there might be an organised raid upon my grounds. If anything of the sort should occur I suppose I might reckon upon your assistance?"

"With all my heart."

"So that if ever you got a message such as 'Come up,' or even 'Cloomber,' you would know that it was an appeal for help, and would hurry up immediately, even if it were in the dead of the night?"

"Most certainly I should," I answered. "But might I ask you what the nature of the danger is which you apprehend?"

"There would be nothing gained by your knowing. Indeed, you would hardly understand it if I told you. I must bid you good day now, for I have stayed with you too long. Remember, I count upon you as one of the Cloomber garrison now."

"One other thing, sir," I said hurriedly, for he was turning away, "I hope that you will not be angry with your daughter for anything which I have told you. It was for my sake that she kept it all secret from you."

"All right," he said, with his cold, inscrutable smile. "I am not such an ogre in the bosom of my family as you seem to think. As to this marriage question, I should advise you as a friend to let it drop altogether, but if that is impossible I must insist that it stand over completely for the present. It is impossible to say what unexpected turn events may take. Good-bye."

He plunged into the wood and was quickly out of sight among the dense plantation.

Thus ended this extraordinary interview, in which this strange man had begun by pointing a loaded pistol at my breast and had ended, by partially acknowledging the possibility of my becoming his future son-in-law. I hardly knew whether to be cast down or elated over it.

On the one hand he was likely, by keeping a closer watch over his daughter, to prevent us from communicating as freely as we had done hitherto. Against this there was the advantage of having obtained an implied consent to the renewal of my suit at some future date. On the whole, I came to the conclusion as I walked thoughtfully home that I had improved my position by the incident.

But this danger — this shadowy, unspeakable danger — which appeared to rise up at every turn, and to hang day and night over the towers of Cloomber! Rack my brain as I would, I could not conjure up any solution to the problem which was not puerile and inadequate.

One fact struck me as being significant. Both the father and the son had assured me, independently of each other, that if I were told what the peril was, I would hardly realise its significance. How strange and bizarre must the fear be which can scarcely be expressed in intelligible language!

I held up my hand in the darkness before I turned to sleep that night, and I swore that no power of man or devil should ever weaken my love for the woman whose pure heart I had had the good fortune to win.

CHAPTER VII. OF CORPORAL RUFUS SMITH AND HIS COMING TO CLOOMBER

In making this statement I have purposely couched it in bald and simple language, for fear I should be accused of colouring my narrative for the sake of effect. If, however, I have told my story with any approach to realism, the reader will understand me when I say that by this time the succession of dramatic incidents which had occurred had arrested my attention and excited my imagination to the exclusion of all minor topics.

How could I plod through the dull routine of an agent's work, or interest myself in the thatch of this tenant's bothy or the sails of that one's boat, when my mind was taken up by the chain of events which I have described, and was still busy seeking an explanation for them.

Go where I would over the countryside, I could see the square, white tower shooting out from among the trees, and beneath that tower this ill-fated family were watching and waiting, waiting and watching — and for what? That was still the question which stood like an impassable barrier at the end of every train of thought.

Regarded merely as an abstract problem, this mystery of the Heatherstone family had a lurid fascination about it, but when the woman whom I loved a thousandfold better than I did myself proved to be so deeply interested in the solution, I felt that it was impossible to turn my thoughts to anything else until it had been finally cleared up.

My good father had received a letter from the laird, dated from Naples, which told us that he had derived much benefit from the change, and that he had no intention of returning to Scotland for some time. This was satisfactory to all of us, for my father had found Branksome such an excellent place for study that it would have been a sore trial to him to return to the noise and tumult of a city. As to my dear sister and myself, there were, as I have shown, stronger reasons still to make us love the Wigtownshire moors.

In spite of my interview with the general — or perhaps I might say on account of it — I took occasion at least twice a day to walk towards Cloomber and satisfy myself that all was well there. He had begun by resenting my intrusion, but he had ended by taking me into a sort of half-confidence, and even by asking my assistance, so I felt that I stood upon a different footing with him than I had done formerly, and that he was less likely to be annoyed by my presence. Indeed, I met him pacing round the inclosure a few days afterwards, and his manner towards me was civil, though he made no allusion to our former conversation.

He appeared to be still in an extreme state of nervousness, starting from time to time, and gazing furtively about him, with little frightened, darting glances to the right and the left. I hoped that his daughter was right in naming the fifth of October as the turning point of his complaint, for it was evident to me as I looked at his gleaming eyes and quivering hands, that a man could not live long in such a state of nervous tension.

I found on examination that he had had the loose rails securely fastened so as to block up our former trysting-place, and though I prowled round the whole long line of fencing, I was unable to find any other place where an entrance could be effected.

Here and there between the few chinks left in the barrier I could catch glimpses of the Hall, and once I saw a rough-looking, middle-aged man standing at a window on the lower floor, whom I supposed to be Israel Stakes, the coachman. There was no sign, however, of Gabriel or of Mordaunt, and their absence alarmed me. I was convinced that, unless they were under some restraint, they would have managed to communicate with my sister or myself. My fears became more and more acute as day followed day without our seeing or hearing anything of them.

One morning — it was the second day of October — I was walking towards the Hall, hoping that I might be fortunate enough to learn some news of my darling, when I observed a man perched upon a stone at the side of the road.

As I came nearer to him I could see that he was a stranger, and from his dusty clothes and dilapidated appearance he seemed to have come from a distance. He had a great hunch of bread on his knee and a clasp-knife in his hand, but he had apparently just finished his breakfast, for he brushed the crumbs off his lap and rose to his feet when he perceived me.

Noticing the great height of the fellow and that he still held his weapon, I kept well to the other side of the road, for I knew that destitution makes men desperate and that the chain that glittered on my waistcoat might be too great a temptation to him upon this lonely highway. I was confirmed in my fears when I saw him step out into the centre of the road and bar my progress.

"Well, my lad," I said, affecting an ease which I by no means felt, "what can I do for you this morning?"

The fellow's face was the colour of mahogany with exposure to the weather, and he had a deep scar from the corner of his mouth to his ear, which by no means improved his appearance. His hair was grizzled, but his figure was stalwart, and his fur cap was cocked on one side so as to give him a rakish, semi-military appearance. Altogether he gave me the impression of being one of the most dangerous types of tramp that I had ever fallen in with.

Instead of replying to my question, he eyed me for some time in silence with sullen, yellow-shot eyes, and then closed his knife with a loud snick.

"You're not a beak," he said, "too young for that, I guess. They had me in chokey at Paisley and they had me in chokey at Wigtown, but by the living thunder if another of them lays a hand on me I'll make him remember Corporal Rufus Smith! It's a darned fine country this, where they won't give a man work, and then lay him by the heels for having no visible means of subsistence."

"I am sorry to see an old soldier so reduced," said I. "What corps did you serve in?"

"H Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. Bad cess to the Service and every one in it! Here I am nigh sixty years of age, with a beggarly pension of thirty-eight pound ten — not enough to keep me in beer and baccy."

"I should have thought thirty-eight pound ten a year would have been a nice help to you in your old age," I remarked.

"Would you, though?" he answered with a sneer, pushing his weather-beaten face forward until it was within a foot of my own.

"How much d'ye think that slash with a tulwar is worth? And my foot with all the bones rattling about like a bagful of dice where the trail of the gun went across it. What's that worth, eh? And a liver like a sponge, and ague whenever the wind comes round to the east — what's the market value of that? Would you take the lot for a dirty forty pound a year — would you now?"

"We are poor folk in this part of the country," I answered. "You would pass for a rich man down here."

"They are fool folk and they have fool tastes," said he, drawing a black pipe from his pocket and stuffing it with tobacco. "I know what good living is, and, by cripes! while I have a shilling in my pocket I like to spend it as a shilling should be spent. I've fought for my country and my country has done darned little for me. I'll go to the Rooshians, so help me! I could show them how to cross the Himalayas so that it would puzzle either Afghans or British to stop 'em. What's that secret worth in St. Petersburg, eh, mister?"

"I am ashamed to hear an old soldier speak so, even in jest," said I sternly.

"Jest, indeed!" He cried, with a great, roaring oath. "I'd have done it years ago if the Rooshians had been game to take it up. Skobeloff was the best of the bunch, but he's been snuffed out. However, that's neither here nor there. What I want to ask you is whether you've ever heard anything in this quarter of a man called Heatherstone, the same who used to be colonel of the 41st Bengalis? They told me at Wigtown that he lived somewhere down this way."

"He lives in that large house over yonder," said I, pointing to Cloomber Tower. "You'll find the avenue gate a little way down the road, but the general isn't over fond of visitors."

The last part of my speech was lost upon Corporal Rufus Smith; for the instant that I pointed out the gate he set off hopping down the road.

His mode of progression was the most singular I have ever seen, for He would only put his right foot to the ground once in every half-dozen strides, while he worked so hard and attained such a momentum with the other limb that he got over the ground at an astonishing speed.

I was so surprised that I stood in the roadway gazing after this hulking figure until the thought suddenly struck me that some serious result might come from a meeting between a man of such blunt speech and the choleric, hot-headed general. I therefore followed him as he hopped along like some great, clumsy bird, and overtook him at the avenue gate, where he stood grasping the ironwork and peering through at the dark carriage-drive beyond.

"He's a sly old jackal," he said, looking round at me and nodding his head in the direction of the Hall. "He's a deep old dog. And that's his bungalow, is it, among the trees?"

"That is his house," I answered; "but I should advise you to keep a more civil tongue in your head if you intend to speak with the general. He is not a man to stand any nonsense.”

“Right you are. He was always a hard nut to crack. But isn’t this him coming down the avenue?”

I looked through the gate and saw that it was indeed the general, who, having either seen us or been attracted by our voices, was hurrying down towards us. As he advanced he would stop from time to time and peer at us through the dark shadow thrown by the trees, as if he were irresolute whether to come on or no.

“He’s reconnoitering!” whispered my companion with a hoarse chuckle. “He’s afraid — and I know what he’s afraid of. He won’t be caught in a trap if he can help it, the old ‘un. He’s about as fly as they make ‘em, you bet!”

Then suddenly standing on his tip-toes and waving his hand through the bars of the gate, he shouted at the top of his voice:

“Come on, my gallant commandant! Come on! The coast’s clear, and no enemy in sight.”

This familiar address had the effect of reassuring the general, for he came right for us, though I could tell by his heightened colour that his temper was at boiling point.

“What, you here, Mr. West?” he said, as his eye fell upon me. “What is it you want, and why have you brought this fellow with you?”

“I have not brought him with me, sir,” I answered, feeling rather disgusted at being made responsible for the presence of the disreputable-looking vagabond beside me. “I found him on the road here, and he desired to be directed to you, so I showed him the way. I know nothing of him myself.”

“What do you want with me, then?” the general asked sternly, turning to my companion.

“If you please, sir,” said the ex-corporal, speaking in a whining voice, and touching his moleskin cap with a humility which contrasted strangely with the previous rough independence of his bearing, “I’m an old gunner in the Queen’s service, sir, and knowing your name by hearing it in India I thought that maybe you would take me as your groom or gardener, or give me any other place as happened to be vacant.”

“I am sorry that I cannot do anything for you, my man,” the old soldier answered impressively.

“Then you’ll give me a little just to help me on my way, sir,” said he cringing mendicant. “You

won't see an old comrade go to the bad for the sake of a few rupees? I was with Sale's brigade
in the Passes, sir, and I was at the second taking of Cabul."

General Heatherstone looked keenly at the supplicant, but was silent
to his appeal.

"I was in Ghuznee with you when the walls were all shook down by an earthquake, and when we found forty thousand Afghans within gunshot of us. You ask me about it, and you'll see whether I'm lying or not. We went through all this when we were young, and now that we are old you are to live in a fine bungalow, and I am to starve by the roadside. It don't seem to me to be fair."

"You are an impertinent scoundrel," said the general. "If you had been a good soldier you would never need to ask for help. I shall not give you a farthing."

"One word more, sir," cried the tramp, for the other was turning away, "I've been in the Tarada Pass."

The old soldier sprang round as if the words had been a pistol-shot.

"What — what d'ye mean?" he stammered. "I've been in the Tarada Pass, sir, and I knew a man there called Ghoolab Shah."

These last were hissed out in an undertone, and a malicious grin overspread the face of the speaker.

Their effect upon the general was extraordinary. He fairly staggered back from the gateway, and his yellow countenance blanched to a livid, mottled grey. For a moment he was too overcome to speak. At last he gasped out:

"Ghoolab Shah' Who are you who know Ghoolab Shah?"

"Take another look," said the tramp, "your sight is not as keen as it was forty years ago."

The general took a long, earnest look at the unkempt wanderer in front of him, and as he gazed I saw the light of recognition spring up in his eyes.

"God bless my soul!" he cried. "Why, it's Corporal Rufus Smith."

"You've come on it at last," said the other, chuckling to himself. "I was wondering how long it would be before you knew me. And, first of all, just unlock this gate, will you? It's hard to talk through a grating. It's too much like ten minutes with a visitor in the cells."

The general, whose face still bore evidences of his agitation, undid the bolts with nervous, trembling fingers. The recognition of Corporal Rufus

Smith had, I fancied, been a relief to him, and yet he plainly showed by his manner that he regarded his presence as by no means an unmixed blessing.

“Why, Corporal,” he said, as the gate swung open, “I have often wondered whether you were dead or alive, but I never expected to see you again. How have you been all these long years?”

“How have I been?” the corporal answered gruffly. “Why, I have been drunk for the most part. When I draw my money I lay it out in liquor, and as long as that lasts I get some peace in life. When I’m cleaned out I go upon tramp, partly in the hope of picking up the price of a dram, and partly in order to look for you.”

“You’ll excuse us talking about these private matters, West,” the general said, looking round at me, for I was beginning to move away. “Don’t leave us. You know something of this matter already, and may find yourself entirely in the swim with us some of these days.”

Corporal Rufus Smith looked round at me in blank astonishment.

“In the swim with us?” he said. “However did he get there?”

“Voluntarily, voluntarily,” the general explained, hurriedly sinking his voice. “He is a neighbour of mine, and he has volunteered his help in case I should ever need it.”

This explanation seemed, if anything, to increase the big stranger’s surprise.

“Well, if that don’t lick cock-fighting!” he exclaimed, contemplating me with admiration. “I never heard tell of such a thing.”

“And now you have found me, Corporal Smith,” said the tenant of Cloomber, “what is it that you want of me?”

“Why, everything. I want a roof to cover me, and clothes to wear, and food to eat, and, above all, brandy to drink.”

“Well, I’ll take you in and do what I can for you,” said the general slowly. “But look here, Smith, we must have discipline. I’m the general and you are the corporal; I am the master and you are the man. Now, don’t let me have to remind you of that again.”

The tramp drew himself up to his full height and raised his right hand with the palm forward in a military salute.

“I can take you on as gardener and get rid of the fellow I have got. As to brandy, you shall have an allowance and no more. We are not deep drinkers at the Hall.”

“Don’t you take opium, or brandy, or nothing yourself, sir?” asked Corporal Rufus Smith.

“Nothing,” the general said firmly.

“Well, all I can say is, that you’ve got more nerve and pluck than I shall ever have. I don’t wonder now at your winning that Cross in the Mutiny. If I was to go on listening night after night to them things without ever taking a drop of something to cheer my heart — why, it would drive me silly.”

General Heatherstone put his hand up, as though afraid that his companion might say too much.

“I must thank you, Mr. West,” he said, “for having shown this man my door. I would not willingly allow an old comrade, however humble, to go to the bad, and if I did not acknowledge his claim more readily it was simply because I had my doubts as to whether he was really what he represented himself to be. Just walk up to the Hall, Corporal, and I shall follow you in a minute.”

“Poor fellow!” he continued, as he watched the newcomer hobbling up the avenue in the ungainly manner which I have described. “He got a gun over his foot, and it crushed the bones, but the obstinate fool would not let the doctors take it off. I remember him now as a smart young soldier in Afghanistan. He and I were associated in some queer adventures, which I may tell you of some day, and I naturally feel sympathy towards him, and would befriend him. Did he tell you anything about me before I came?”

“Not a word,” I replied.

“Oh,” said the general carelessly, but with an evident expression of relief, “I thought perhaps he might have said something of old times. Well, I must go and look after him, or the servants will be frightened, for he isn’t a beauty to look at. Good-bye!”

With a wave of the hand the old man turned away from me and hurried up the drive after this unexpected addition to his household, while I strolled on round the high, black paling, peering through every chink between the planks, but without seeing a trace either of Mordaunt or of his sister.

I have now brought this statement down to the coming of Corporal Rufus Smith, which will prove to be the beginning of the end.

I have set down soberly and in order the events which brought us to Wigtownshire, the arrival of the Heatherstones at Cloomber, the many strange incidents which excited first our curiosity and finally our intense interest in that family, and I have briefly touched upon the circumstances which brought my sister and myself into a closer and more personal relationship with them. I think that there cannot be a better moment than this to hand the narrative over to those who had means of knowing something of what was going on inside Cloomber during the months that I was observing it from without.

Israel Stakes, the coachman, proved to be unable to read or write, but Mr. Mathew Clark, the Presbyterian Minister of Stoneykirk, has copied down his deposition, duly attested by the cross set opposite to his name. The good clergyman has, I fancy, put some slight polish upon the narrator’s story, which I rather regret, as it might have been more interesting, if less intelligible, when reported verbatim. It still preserves, however, considerable traces of Israel’s individuality, and may be regarded as an exact record of what he saw and did while in General Heatherstone’s service.

CHAPTER VIII. STATEMENT OF ISRAEL STAKES

(Copied and authenticated by the Reverend Mathew Clark, Presbyterian Minister of Stoneykirk, in Wigtownshire)

Maister Fothergill West and the meenister say that I maun tell all I can aboot General Heatherstone and his hoose, but that I maunna say muckle aboot mysel' because the readers wouldna care to hear aboot me or my affairs. I am na sae sure o' that, for the Stakes is a family weel kenned and respecked on baith sides o' the Border, and there's mony in Nithsdale and Annandale as would be gey pleased to hear news o' the son o' Archie Stakes, o' Ecclefechan.

I maun e'en do as I'm tauld, however, for Mr. West's sake, hoping he'll no forget me when I chance to hae a favour tae ask.(1) I'm no able tae write mysel' because my feyther sent me oot to scare craws instead o' sendin' me tae school, but on the ither hond he brought me up in the preenciples and practice o' the real kirk o' the Covenant, for which may the Lord be praised!

It way last May twel'month that the factor body, Maister McNeil, cam ower tae me in the street and speered whether I was in want o' a place as a coachman and gairdner. As it fell oot I chanced tae be on the look oot for something o' the sort mysel' at the time, but I wasna ower quick to let him see that I wanted it.

"Ye can tak it or leave it," says he sharp like. "It's a guid place, and there's mony would be glad o't. If ye want it ye can come up tae my office at twa the morn and put your ain questions tae the gentleman."

That was a' I could get frae him, for he's a close man and a hard one at a bargain — which shall profit him leetle in the next life, though he lay by a store o' siller in this. When the day comes there'll be a hantle o' factors on the left hand o' the throne, and I shouldna be surprised if Maister McNeil found himsel' amang them.

Weel, on the morn I gaed up to the office and there I foond the factor and a lang, thin, dour man wi' grey hair and a face as brown and crinkled as a walnut. He looked hard at me wi' a pair o' een that glowed like twa spunks, and then he says, says he:

"You've been born in these pairts, I understan'?"

"Aye," says I, "and never left them neither."

"Never been oot o' Scotland?" he speers.

"Twice to Carlisle fair," says I, for I am a man wha loves the truth; and besides I kenned that the factor would mind my gaeing there, for I bargained fur twa steers and a stirk that he wanted for the stockin' o' the Drumleugh Fairm.

"I learn frae Maister McNeil," says General Heatherstone — for him it was and nane ither—"that ye canna write."

"Na," says I.

"Nor read?"

"Na," says I.

"It seems tae me," says he, turnin' tae the factor, "that this is the vera man I want. Servants is spoilt noo-a-days," says he, "by ower muckle eddication. I hae nae doobt, Stakes, that ye will suit me well enough. Ye'll hae three pund a month and a' foond, but I shall resairve the right o' givin' ye twenty-four hoors' notice at any time. How will that suit ye?"

"It's vera different frae my last place," says I, discontented-like.

And the words were true enough, for auld Fairmer Scott only gave me a pund a month and parritch twice a day.

"Weel, weel," says he, "maybe we'll gie ye a rise if ye suit. Meanwhile here's the han'sel shillin' that Maister McNeil tells me it's the custom tae give, and I shall expec' tae see ye at Cloomber on Monday."

When the Monday cam roond I walked oot tae Cloomber, and a great muckle hoose it is, wi' a hunderd windows or mair, and space enough tae hide awa' half the parish.

As tae gairdening, there was no gairden for me tae work at, and the horse was never taken oot o' the stables frae week's end tae week's end. I was busy enough for a' that, for there was a deal o' fencing tae be put up, and one thing or anither, forbye cleanin' the knives and brushin' the boots and such-like jobs as is mair fit for an auld wife than for a grown man.

There was twa besides mysel' in the kitchen, the cook Eliza, and Mary the hoosemaid, puir, benighted beings baith o' them, wha had wasted a' their lives in London, and kenned leetle aboot the warld or the ways o' the flesh.

I hadna muckle tae say to them, for they were simple folk who could scarce understand English, and had hardly mair regard for their ain souls than the tods on the moor. When the cook said she didna think muckle o' John Knox, and the ither that she wouldna give saxpence tae hear the discourse o' Maister Donald McSnaw o' the true kirk, I kenned it was time for me tae leave them tae a higher Judge.

There was four in family, the general, my leddy, Maister Mordaunt, and Miss Gabriel, and it wasna long before I found that a' wasna just exactly as it should be. My leddy was as thin and as white as a ghaist, and many's the time as I've come on her and found her yammerin' and greetin' all by hersel'. I've watched her walkin' up and doon in the wood where she thought nane could see her and wringin' her honds like one demented.

There was the young gentleman, tae, and his sister — they baith seemed to hae some trouble on their minds, and the general maist of a', for the ithers were up ane day and down anither; but he was aye the same, wi' a face as dour and sad as a felon when he feels the tow roond his neck.

I speered o' the hussies in the kitchen whether they kenned what was amiss wi' the family, but the cook she answered me back that it wasna for her tae inquire into the affairs o' her superiors, and that it was naething to her as long as she did her work and had her wages. They were puir, feckless bodies, the twa o' them, and would scarce gie an answer tae a ceevil question, though they could clack lood eneugh when they had a mind.

Weel, weeks passed into months and a' things grew waur instead o' better in the Hall. The general he got mair nairvous, and his leddy mair melancholy every day, and yet there wasna any quarrel or bickering between them, for when they've been togither in the breakfast room I used often tae gang round and prune the rose-tree alongside o' the window, so that I couldna help hearin' a great pairt o' their conversation, though sair against the grain.

When the young folk were wi' them they would speak little, but when they had gone they would aye talk as if some waefu' trial ere aboot to fa' upon them, though I could never gather from their words what it was that they were afeared o'.

I've heard the general say mair than ance that he wasna frighted o' death, or any danger that he could face and have done wi', but that it was the lang, weary waitin' and the uncertainty that had taken a' the strength and the mettle oot o' him. Then my leddy would console him and tell him that maybe it wasna as bad as he thocht, and that a' would come richt in the end — but a' her cheery words were clean throwed away upon him.

As tae the young folks, I kenned weel that they didna bide in the groonds, and that they were awa' whenever they got a chance wi' Maister Fothergill West tae Branksome, but the general was too fu' o' his ain troubles tae ken aboot it, and it didna seem tae me that it was pairt o' my duties either as coachman or as gairdner tae mind the bairns. He should have lairnt that if ye forbid a lassie and a laddie to dae anything it's just the surest way o' bringin' it aboot. The Lord foond that oot in the gairden o' Paradise, and there's no muckle change between the folk in Eden and the folk in Wigtown.

There's ane thing that I havena spoke aboot yet, but that should be set doon.

The general didna share his room wi' his wife, but slept a' alane in a chamber at the far end o' the hoose, as distant as possible frae every one else. This room was aye lockit when he wasna in it, and naebody was ever allowed tae gang into it. He would mak' his ain bed, and red it up and dust it a' by himsel', but he wouldna so much as allow one o' us to set fut on the passage that led tae it.

At nicht he would walk a' ower the hoose, and he had lamps hung in every room and corner, so that no pairt should be dark.

Many's the time frae my room in the garret I've heard his futsteps comin' and gangin', comin' and gangin' doon one passage and up anither frae midnight till cockcraw. It was weary wark to lie listenin' tae his clatter and wonderin' whether he was clean daft, or whether maybe he'd lairnt pagan and idolatrous tricks oot in India, and that his conscience noo was like the worm which gnaweth and dieth not. I'd ha' speered frae him whether it wouldna ease him to speak wi' the holy Donald McSnaw, but it might ha' been a mistake, and the general wasna a man that you'd care tae mak' a mistake wi'.

Ane day I was workin' at the grass border when he comes up and he says, says he:

"Did ye ever have occasion tae fire a pistol, Israel?"

"Godsakes!" says I, "I never had siccan a thing in my honds in my life."

"Then you'd best not begin noo," says he. "Every man tae his ain weepon," he says. "Now I warrant ye could do something wi' a guid crab-tree cudgel!"

“Aye, could I,” I answered blithely, “as well as ony lad on the Border.”

“This is a lonely hoose,” says he, “and we might be molested by some rascals. It’s weel tae be ready for whatever may come. Me and you and my son Mordaunt and Mr. Fothergill West of Branksome, who would come if he was required, ought tae be able tae show a bauld face — what think ye?”

“‘Deed, sir,” I says, “feastin’ is aye better than fechtin’ — but if ye’ll raise me a pund a month, I’ll no’ shirk my share o’ either.”

“We won’t quarrel ower that,” says he, and agreed tae the extra twal’ pund a year as easy as though it were as many bawbees. Far be it frae me tae think evil, but I couldna help surmisin’ at the time that money that was so lightly pairted wi’ was maybe no’ so very honestly cam by.

I’m no’ a curious or a pryin’ mun by nature, but I was sair puzzled in my ain mind tae tell why it was that the general walked aboot at nicht and what kept him frae his sleep.

Weel, ane day I was cleanin’ doon the passages when my e’e fell on a great muckle heap o’ curtains and auld cairpets and sic’ like things that were piled away in a corner, no vera far frae the door o’ the general’s room. A’ o’ a sudden a thocht came intae my heid and I says tae mysel’:

“Israel, laddie,” says I, “what’s tae stop ye frae hidin’ behind that this vera nicht and seein’ the auld mun when he doesna ken human e’e is on him?”

The mair I thocht o’t the mair seemple it appeared, and I made up my mind tae put the idea intae instant execution.

When the nicht cam roond I tauld the women-folk that I was bad wi’ the jawache, and would gang airly tae my room. I kenned fine when ance I got there that there was na chance o’ ony ane disturbin’ me, so I waited a wee while, and then when a’ was quiet, I slippit aff my boots and ran doon the ither stair until I cam tae the heap o’ auld clothes, and there I lay doon wi’ ane e’e peepin’ through a kink and a’ the rest covered up wi’ a great, ragged cairpet.

There I bided as quiet as a mouse until the general passed me on his road tae bed, and a’ was still in the hoose.

My certie! I wouldna gang through wi’ it again for a’ the siller at the Union Bank of Dumfries, I canna think o’t noo withoot feelin’ cauld a’ the way doon my back.

It was just awfu’ lyin’ there in the deid silence, waitin’ and waitin’ wi’ never a soond tae break the monotony, except the heavy tickin’ o’ an auld clock somewhere doon the passage.

First I would look doon the corridor in the one way, and syne I'd look doon in t'ither, but it aye seemed to me as though there was something coming up frae the side that I wasna lookin' at. I had a cauld sweat on my broo, and my hairt was beatin' twice tae ilka tick o' the clock, and what feared me most of a' was that the dust frae the curtains and things was aye gettin' doon intae my lungs, and it was a' I could dae tae keep mysel' frae coughin'.

Godsakes! I wonder my hair wasna grey wi' a' that I went through. I wouldna dae it again to be made Lord Provost o' Glasgie.

Weel, it may have been twa o'clock in the mornin' or maybe a little mair, and I was just thinkin' that I wasna tae see onything after a' — and I wasna very sorry neither — when all o' a sudden a soond cam tae my ears clear and distinct through the stillness o' the nicht.

I've been asked afore noo tae describe that soond, but I've aye foond that it's no' vera easy tae gie a clear idea o't, though it was unlike any other soond that ever I hearkened tae. It was a shairp, ringin' clang, like what could be caused by flippin' the rim o' a wineglass, but it was far higher and thinner than that, and had in it, tae, a kind o' splash, like the tinkle o' a raindrop intae a water-butt.

In my fear I sat up amang my cairpets, like a puddock among gowan-leaves, and I listened wi' a' my ears. A' was still again noo, except for the dull tickin' o' the distant clock.

Suddenly the soond cam again, as clear, as shrill, as shairp as ever, and this time the general heard it, for I heard him gie a kind o' groan, as a tired man might wha has been roosed oot o' his sleep.

He got up frae his bed, and I could make oot a rustling noise, as though he were dressin' himsel', and presently his footfa' as he began tae walk up and doon in his room.

Mysakes! it didna tak lang for me tae drap doon amang the cairpets again and cover mysel' ower. There I lay tremblin' in every limb, and sayin' as mony prayers as I could mind, wi' my e'e still peepin' through the keek-hole, and' fixed upon the door o' the general's room.

I heard the rattle o' the handle presently, and the door swung slowly open. There was a licht burnin' in the room beyond, an' I could just catch a glimpse o' what seemed tae me like a row o' swords stuck alang the side o' the wa', when the general stepped oot and shut the door behind him. He was dressed in a dressin’ goon, wi’ a red smokin’-cap on his heid, and a pair o’ slippers wi’ the heels cut off and the taes turned up.

For a moment it cam into my held that maybe he was walkin’ in his sleep, but as he cam towards me I could see the glint o’ the licht in his e’en, and his face was a’ twistin’, like a man that’s in sair distress o’ mind. On my conscience, it gies me the shakes noo when I think o’ his tall figure and his yelley face comin’ sae solemn and silent doon the lang, lone passage.

I haud my breath and lay close watchin’ him, but just as he cam tae where I was my vera hairt stood still in my breast, for “ting!” — loud and clear, within a yaird o’ me cam the ringin’, clangin’ soond that I had a’ready hairkened tae.

Where it cam frae is mair than I can tell or what was the cause o’t. It might ha’ been that the general made it, but I was sair puzzled tae tell hoo, for his honds were baith doon by his side as he passed me. It cam frae his direction, certainly, but it appeared tae me tae come frae ower his heid, but it was siccan a thin, eerie, high-pitched, uncanny kind o’ soond that it wasna easy tae say just exactly where it did come frae.

The general tuk nae heed o’t, but walked on and was soon oot o’ sicht, and I didna lose a minute in creepin’ oot frae my hidin’ place and scamperin’ awa’ back tae my room, and if a’ the bogies in the Red Sea were trapesin’ up and doon the hale nicht through, I wud never put my heid oot again tae hae a glimpse o’ them.

I didna say a word tae anybody aboot what I’d seen, but I made up my mind that I wudna stay muckle langer at Cloomber Ha’. Four pund a month is a good wage, but it isna enough tae pay a man for the loss o’ his peace o’ mind, and maybe the loss o’ his soul as weel, for when the deil is aboot ye canna tell what sort o’ a trap he may lay for ye, and though they say that Providence is stronger than him, it’s maybe as weel no’ to risk it.

It was clear tae me that the general and his hoose were baith under some curse, and it was fit that that curse should fa’ on them that had earned it, and no’ on a righteous Presbyterian, wha had ever trod the narrow path.

My hairt was sair for young Miss Gabriel — for she was a bonnie and winsome lassie — but for a’ that, I felt that my duty was tae mysel’ and that I should gang forth, even as Lot ganged oot o’ the wicked cities o’ the plain.

That awfu’ cling-clang was aye dingin’ in my lugs, and I couldna bear to be alane in the passages for fear o’ hearin’ it ance again. I only wanted a chance or an excuse tae gie the general notice, and tae gang back to some place where I could see Christian folk, and have the kirk within a stone-cast tae fa' back upon.

But it proved tae be ordained that, instead o' my saying the word, it should come frae the general himsel'.

It was ane day aboot the beginning of October, I was comin' oot o' the stable, after giein' its oats tae the horse, when I seed a great muckle loon come hoppin' on ane leg up the drive, mair like a big, ill-faured craw than a man.

When I clapped my een on him I thocht that maybe this was ane of the rascals that the maister had been speakin' aboot, so withoot mair ado I fetched oot my bit stick with the intention o' tryin' it upon the limmer's heid. He seed me comin' towards him, and readin' my intention frae my look maybe, or frae the stick in my hand, he pu'ed oot a lang knife frae his pocket and swore wi' the most awfu' oaths that if I didna stan' back he'd be the death o' me.

Ma conscience! the words the chiel used was eneugh tae mak' the hair stand straight on your heid. I wonder he wasna struck deid where he stood.

We were still standin' opposite each ither — he wi' his knife and me wi' the stick — when the general he cam up the drive and foond us. Tae my surprise he began tae talk tae the stranger as if he'd kenned him a' his days.

"Put your knife in your pocket, Corporal," says he. "Your fears have turned your brain."

"Blood an' wounds!" says the other. "He'd ha' turned my brain tae some purpose wi' that muckle stick o' his if I hadna drawn my snickersnee. You shouldna keep siccan an auld savage on your premises."

The maister he frooned and looked black at him, as though he didna relish advice comin' frae such a source. Then turnin' tae me—"You won't be wanted after to-day, Israel," he says; "you have been a guid servant, and I ha' naething tae complain of wi' ye, but circumstances have arisen which will cause me tae change my arrangements."

"Vera guid, sir," says I.

"You can go this evening," says he, "and you shall have an extra month's pay tae mak up t'ye for this short notice."

Wi' that he went intae the hoose, followed by the man that he ca'ed the corporal, and frae that day tae this I have never clapped een either on the ane or the ither. My money was sent oot tae me in an envelope, and havin' said a few pairtin' words tae the cook and the wench wi' reference tae the wrath tae come and the treasure that is richer than rubies, I shook the dust o’ Cloomber frae my feet for ever.

Maister Fothergill West says I maunna express an opeenion as tae what cam aboot afterwards, but maun confine mysel’ tae what I saw mysel’. Nae doubt he has his reasons for this — and far be it frae me tae hint that they are no’ guid anes — but I maun say this, that what happened didna surprise me. It was just as I expeckit, and so I said tae Maister Donald McSnaw.

I’ve tauld ye a’ aboot it noo, and I havena a word tae add or tae withdraw. I’m muckle obleeged tae Maister Mathew Clairk for puttin’ it a’ doon in writin’ for me, and if there’s ony would wish tae speer onything mair o’ me I’m well kenned and respeckit in Ecclefechan, and Maister McNeil, the factor o’ Wigtown, can aye tell where I am tae be foond.

(1) The old rascal was well paid for his trouble, so he need not have made such a favour of it. — J.F.W.

CHAPTER IX. NARRATIVE OF JOHN EASTERLING, F.R.C.P.EDIN.

Having given the statement of Israel Stakes *in extenso,* I shall append a short memorandum from Dr. Easterling, now practising at Stranraer. It is true that the doctor was only once within the walls of Cloomber during its tenancy by General Heatherstone, but there were some circumstances connected with this visit which made it valuable, especially when considered as a supplement to the experiences which I have just submitted to the reader.

The doctor has found time amid the calls of a busy country practice to jot down his recollections, and I feel that I cannot do better than subjoin them exactly as they stand.

I have very much pleasure in furnishing Mr. Fothergill West with an account of my solitary visit to Cloomber Hall, not only on account of the esteem which I have formed for that gentleman ever since his residence at Branksome, but also because it is my conviction that the facts in the case of General Heatherstone are of such a singular nature that it is of the highest importance that they should be placed before the public in a trustworthy manner.

It was about the beginning of September of last year that I received a note from Mrs. Heatherstone, of Cloomber Hall, desiring me to make a professional call upon her husband, whose health, she said, had been for some time in a very unsatisfactory state.

I had heard something of the Heatherstones and of the strange seclusion in which they lived, so that I was very much pleased at this opportunity of making their closer acquaintance, and lost no time in complying with her request.

I had known the Hall in the old days of Mr. McVittie, the original proprietor, and I was astonished on arriving at the avenue gate to observe the changes which had taken place.

The gate itself, which used to yawn so hospitably upon the road, was now barred and locked, and a high wooden fence, with nails upon the top, encircled the whole grounds. The drive itself was leaf-strewn and uncared-for, and the whole place had a depressing air of neglect and decay.

I had to knock twice before a servant-maid opened the door and showed me through a dingy hall into a small room, where sat an elderly, careworn lady, who introduced herself as Mrs. Heatherstone. With her pale face, her grey hair, her sad, colourless eyes, and her faded silk dress, she was in perfect keeping with her melancholy surroundings.

"You find us in much trouble, doctor," she said, in a quiet, refined voice. "My poor husband has had a great deal to worry him, and his nervous system for a long time has been in a very weak state. We came to this part of the country in the hope that the bracing air and the quiet would have a good effect upon him. Instead of improving, however, he has seemed to grow weaker, and this morning he is in a high fever and a little inclined to be delirious. The children and I were so frightened that we sent for you at once. If you will follow me I will take you to the general's bedroom."

She led the way down a series of corridors to the chamber of the sick man, which was situated in the extreme wing of the building.

It was a carpetless, bleak-looking room, scantily furnished with a small truckle bed, a campaigning chair, and a plain deal table, on which were scattered numerous papers and books. In the centre of this table there stood a large object of irregular outline, which was covered over with a sheet of linen.

All round the walls and in the corners were arranged a very choice and varied collection of arms, principally swords, some of which were of the straight pattern in common use in the British Army, while among the others were scimitars, tulwars, cuchurries, and a score of other specimens of Oriental workmanship. Many of these were richly mounted, with inlaid sheaths and hilts sparkling with precious stones, so that there was a piquant contrast between the simplicity of the apartment and the wealth which glittered on the walls.

I had little time, however, to observe the general's collection, since the general himself lay upon the couch and was evidently in sore need of my services.

He was lying with his head turned half away from us. Breathing heavily, and apparently unconscious of our presence. His bright, staring eyes and the deep, hectic flush upon his cheek showed that his fever was at its height.

I advanced to the bedside, and, stooping over him, I placed my fingers upon his pulse, when immediately he sprang up into the sitting position and struck at me frenziedly with his clenched hands. I have never seen such intensity of fear and horror stamped upon a human face as appeared upon that that which was now glaring up at me.

"Bloodhound!" he yelled; "let me go — let me go, I say! Keep your hands off me! Is it not enough that my life has been ruined? When is it all to end? How long am I to endure it?"

"Hush, dear, hush!" said his wife in a soothing voice, passing her cool hand over his heated forehead. "This is Doctor Easterling, from Stranraer. He has not come to harm you, but to do you good."

The general dropped wearily back upon his pillow, and I could see by the changed expression of his face that his delirium had left him, and that he understood what had been said.

I slipped my clinical thermometer into his armpit and counted his pulse rate. It amounted to 120 per minute, and his temperature proved to be 104 degrees. Clearly it was a case of remittent fever, such as occurs in men who have spent a great part of their lives in the tropics.

"There is no danger," I remarked. "With a little quinine and arsenic we shall very soon overcome the attack and restore his health."

"No danger, eh?" he said. "There never is any danger for me. I am as hard to kill as the Wandering Jew. I am quite clear in the head now, Mary; so you may leave me with the doctor."

Mrs. Heatherstone left the room-rather unwillingly, as I thought — and I sat down by the bedside to listen to anything which my patient might have to communicate.

"I want you to examine my liver," he said when the door was closed. "I used to have an abscess there, and Brodie, the staff-surgeon, said that it was ten to one that it would carry me off. I have not felt much of it since I left the East. This is where it used to be, just under the angle of the ribs."

"I can find the place," said I, after making a careful examination; "but I am happy to tell you that the abscess has either been entirely absorbed, or has turned calcareous, as these solitary abscesses will. There is no fear of its doing you any harm now."

He seemed to be by no means overjoyed at the intelligence.

"Things always happen so with me," he said moodily. "Now, if another fellow was feverish and delirious he would surely be in some danger, and yet you will tell me that I am in none. Look at this, now." He bared his chest and showed me a puckered wound over the region of the heart. "That's where the jezail bullet of a Hillman went in. You would think that was in the right spot to settle a man, and yet what does it do but glance upon a rib, and go clean round and out at the back, without so much as penetrating what you medicos call the pleura. Did ever you hear of such a thing?"

"You were certainly born under a lucky star," I observed, with a smile.

"That's a matter of opinion," he answered, shaking his head. "Death has no terrors for me, if it will but come in some familiar form, but I confess that the anticipation of some strange, some preternatural form of death is very terrible and unnerving."

"You mean," said I, rather puzzled at his remark, "that you would prefer a natural death to a death by violence?"

"No, I don't mean that exactly," he answered. "I am too familiar with cold steel and lead to be afraid of either. Do you know anything about odyllic force, doctor?"

"No, I do not," I replied, glancing sharply at him to see if there were any signs of his delirium returning. His expression was intelligent, however, and the feverish flush had faded from his cheeks.

"Ah, you Western scientific men are very much behind the day in some things," he remarked. "In all that is material and conducive to the comfort of the body you are pre-eminent, but in what concerns the subtle forces of Nature and the latent powers of the human spirit your best men are centuries behind the humblest coolies of India. Countless generations of beef-eating, comfort loving ancestors have given our animal instincts the command over our spiritual ones. The body, which should have been a mere tool for the use of the soul, has now become a degrading prison in which it is confined. The Oriental soul and body are not so welded together as ours are, and there is far less wrench when they part in death."

"They do not appear to derive much benefit from this peculiarity in their organisation," I remarked incredulously.

"Merely the benefit of superior knowledge," the general answered. "If you were to go to India, probably the very first thing you would see in the way of amusement would be a native doing what is called the mango trick. Of course you have heard or read of it. The fellow plants a mango seed, and makes passes over it until it sprouts and bears leaves and fruit — all in the space of half-an-hour. It is not really a trick — it is a power. These men know more than your Tyndalls or Huxleys do about Nature's processes, and they can accelerate or retard her workings by subtle means of which we have no conception. These low-caste conjurers — as they are called — are mere vulgar dabblers, but the men who have trod the higher path are as far superior to us in knowledge as we are to the Hottentots or Patagonians."

"You speak as if you were well acquainted with them," I remarked.

"To my cost, I am," he answered. "I have been brought in contact with them in a way in which I trust no other poor chap ever will be. But, really, as regards odyllic force, you ought to know something of it, for it has a great future before it in your profession. You should read Reichcnbach's 'Researches on Magnetism and Vital Force,' and Gregory's 'Letters on Animal Magnetism.' These, supplemented by the twenty-seven Aphorisms of Mesmer, and the works of Dr. Justinus Kerner, of Weinsberg, would enlarge your ideas."

I did not particularly relish having a course of reading prescribed for me on a subject connected with my own profession, so I made no comment, but rose to take my departure. Before doing so I felt his pulse once more, and found that the fever had entirely left him in the sudden, unaccountable fashion which is peculiar to these malarious types of disease.

I turned my face towards him to congratulate him upon his improvement, and stretched out my hand at the same time to pick my gloves from the table, with the result that I raised not only my own property, but also the linen cloth which was arranged over some object in the centre.

I might not have noticed what I had done had I not seen an angry look upon the invalid's face and heard him utter an impatient exclamation. I at once turned, and replaced the cloth so promptly that I should have been unable to say what was underneath it, beyond having a general impression that it looked like a bride-cake.

"All right, doctor," the general said good-humouredly, perceiving how entirely accidental the incident was. "There is no reason why you should not see it," and stretching out his hand, he pulled away the linen covering for the second time.

I then perceived that what I had taken for a bride-cake was really an admirably executed model of a lofty range of mountains, whose snow-clad peaks were not unlike the familiar sugar pinnacles and minarets.

“These are the Himalayas, or at least the Surinam branch of them,” he remarked, “showing the principal passes between India and Afghanistan. It is an excellent model. This ground has a special interest for me, because it is the scene of my first campaign. There is the pass opposite Kalabagh and the Thul valley, where I was engaged during the summer of 1841 in protecting the convoys and keeping the Afridis in order. It wasn’t a sinecure, I promise you.”

“And this,” said I, indicating a blood-red spot which had been marked on one side of the pass which he had pointed out—”this is the scene of some fight in which you were engaged.”

“Yes, we had a skirmish there,” he answered, leaning forward and looking at the red mark. “We were attacked by—”

At this moment he fell back upon his pillow as if he had been shot, while the same look of horror came over his face which I had observed when I first entered the room. At the same instant there came, apparently from the air immediately above his bed, a sharp, ringing, tinkling sound, which I can only compare with the noise made by a bicycle alarm, though it differed from this in having a distinctly throbbing character. I have never, before or since, heard any sound which could be confounded with it.

I stared round in astonishment, wondering where it could have come from, but without perceiving anything to which it could be ascribed.

“It’s all right, doctor,” the general said with a ghastly smile. “It’s only my private gong. Perhaps you had better step downstairs and write my prescription in the dining-room.”

He was evidently anxious to get rid of me, so I was forced to take my departure, though I would gladly have stayed a little longer, in the hope of learning something as to the origin of the mysterious sound.

I drove away from the house with the full determination of calling again upon my interesting patient, and endeavouring to elicit some further particulars as to his past life and his present circumstances. I was destined, however, to be disappointed, for I received that very evening a note from the general himself, enclosing a handsome fee for my single visit, and informing me that my treatment had done him so much good that he considered himself to be convalescent, and would not trouble me to see him again.

This was the last and only communication which I ever received from the tenant of Cloomber.

I have been asked frequently by neighbours and others who were interested in the matter whether he gave me the impression of insanity. To this I must unhesitatingly answer in the negative. On the contrary, his remarks gave me the idea of a man who had both read and thought deeply.

I observed, however, during our single interview, that his reflexes were feeble, his arcus senilis well marked, and his arteries atheromatous — all signs that his constitution was in an unsatisfactory condition, and that a sudden crisis might be apprehended.

CHAPTER X. OF THE LETTER WHICH CAME FROM THE HALL

Having thrown this side-light upon my narrative, I can now resume the statement of my own personal experiences. These I had brought down, as the reader will doubtless remember, to the date of the arrival of the savage-looking wanderer who called himself Corporal Rufus Smith. This incident occurred about the beginning of the month of October, and I find upon a comparison of dates that Dr. Easterling’s visit to Cloomber preceded it by three weeks or more.

During all this time I was in sore distress of mind, for I had never seen anything either of Gabriel or of her brother since the interview in which the general had discovered the communication which was kept up between us. I had no doubt that some sort of restraint had been placed upon them; and the thought that we had brought trouble on their heads was a bitter one both to my sister and myself.

Our anxiety, however, was considerably mitigated by the receipt, a couple of days after my last talk with the general, of a note from Mordaunt Heatherstone. This was brought us by a little, ragged urchin, the son of one of the fishermen, who informed us that it had been handed to him at the avenue gate by an old woman — who, I expect, must have been the Cloomber cook.

“MY DEAREST FRIENDS,” it ran, “Gabriel and I have grieved to think how concerned you must be at having neither heard from nor seen us. The fact is that we are compelled to remain in the house. And this compulsion is not physical but moral.

“Our poor father, who gets more and more nervous every day, has entreated us to promise him that we will not go out until after the fifth of October, and to allay his fears we have given him the desired pledge. On the other hand, he has promised us that after the fifth — that is, in less than a week — we shall be as free as air to come or go as we please, so we have something to look forward to.

“Gabriel says that she has explained to you that the governor is always a changed man after this particular date, on which his fears reach a crisis. He apparently has more reason than usual this year to anticipate that trouble is brewing for this unfortunate family, for I have never known him to take so many elaborate precautions or appear so thoroughly unnerved. Who would ever think, to see his bent form and his shaking hands, that he is the same man who used some few short years ago to shoot tigers on foot among the jungles of the Terai, and would laugh at the more timid sportsmen who sought the protection of their elephant's howdah?

"You know that he has the Victoria Cross, which he won in the streets of Delhi, and yet here he is shivering with terror and starting at every noise, in the most peaceful corner of the world. Oh, the pity of it. West! Remember what I have already told you — that it is no fanciful or imaginary peril, but one which we have every reason to suppose to be most real. It is, however, of such a nature that it can neither be averted nor can it profitably be expressed in words. If all goes well, you will see us at Branksome on the sixth.

"With our fondest love to both of you, I am ever, my dear friends, your attached

"MORDAUNT."

This letter was a great relief to us as letting us know that the brother and sister were under no physical restraint, but our powerlessness and inability even to comprehend what the danger was which threatened those whom we had come to love better than ourselves was little short of maddening.

Fifty times a day we asked ourselves and asked each other from what possible quarter this peril was to be expected, but the more we thought of it the more hopeless did any solution appear.

In vain we combined our experiences and pieced together every word which had fallen from the lips of any inmate of Cloomber which might be supposed to bear directly or indirectly upon the subject.

At last, weary with fruitless speculation, we were fain to try to drive the matter from our thoughts, consoling ourselves with the reflection that in a few more days all restrictions would be removed, and we should be able to learn from our friends' own lips.

Those few intervening days, however, would, we feared, be dreary, long ones. And so they would have been, had it not been for a new and most unexpected incident, which diverted our minds from our own troubles and gave them something fresh with which to occupy themselves.

CHAPTER XI. OF THE CASTING AWAY OF THE BARQUE “BELINDA”

The third of October had broken auspiciously with a bright sun and a cloudless sky. There had in the morning been a slight breeze, and a few little white wreaths of vapour drifted here and there like the scattered feathers of some gigantic bird, but, as the day wore on, such wind as there was fell completely away, and the air became close and stagnant.

The sun blazed down with a degree of heat which was remarkable so late in the season, and a shimmering haze lay upon the upland moors and concealed the Irish mountains on the other side of the Channel.

The sea itself rose and fell in a long, heavy, oily roll, sweeping slowly landward, and breaking sullenly with a dull, monotonous booming upon the rock-girt shore. To the inexperienced all seemed calm and peaceful, but to those who are accustomed to read Nature’s warnings there was a dark menace in air and sky and sea.

My sister and I walked out in the afternoon, sauntering slowly along the margin of the great, sandy spit which shoots out into the Irish Sea, flanking upon one side the magnificent Bay of Luce, and on the other the more obscure inlet of Kirkmaiden, on the shores of which the Branksome property is situated.

It was too sultry to go far, so we soon seated ourselves upon one of the sandy hillocks, overgrown with faded grass-tufts, which extend along the coast-line, and which form Nature’s dykes against the encroachments of the ocean.

Our rest was soon interrupted by the scrunching of heavy boots upon the shingle, and Jamieson, the old man-o’-war’s man whom I have already had occasion to mention, made his appearance, with the flat, circular net upon his back which he used for shrimp-catching. He came towards us upon seeing us, and said in his rough, kindly way that he hoped we would not take it amiss if he sent us up a dish of shrimps for our tea at Branksome.

“I aye make a good catch before a storm,” he remarked.

“You think there is going to be a storm, then?” I asked.

“Why, even a marine could see that,” he answered, sticking a great wedge of tobacco into his cheek. “The moors over near Cloomber are just white wi’ gulls and kittiewakes. What d’ye think they come ashore for except to escape having all the feathers blown out o’ them? I mind a day like this when I was wi’ Charlie Napier off Cronstadt. It well-nigh blew us under the guns of the forts, for all our engines and propellers.”

“Have you ever known a wreck in these parts?” I asked.

“Lord love ye, sir, it’s a famous place for wrecks. Why, in that very bay down there two o’ King Philip’s first-rates foundered wi’ all hands in the days o’ the Spanish war. If that sheet o’ water and the Bay o’ Luce round the corner could tell their ain tale they’d have a gey lot to speak of. When the Jedgment Day comes round that water will be just bubbling wi’ the number o’ folks that will be coming up frae the bottom.”

“I trust that there will be no wrecks while we are here,” said Esther earnestly.

The old man shook his grizzled head and looked distrustfully at the hazy horizon.

“If it blows from the west,” he said, “some o’ these sailing ships may find it no joke to be caught without sea-room in the North Channel. There’s that barque out yonder — I daresay her maister would be glad enough to find himsel’ safe in the Clyde.”

“She seems to be absolutely motionless,” I remarked, looking at the vessel in question, whose black hull and gleaming sails rose and fell slowly with the throbbing of the giant pulse beneath her. “Perhaps, Jamieson, we are wrong, and there will be no storm after all.”

The old sailor chuckled to himself with an air of superior knowledge, and shuffled away with his shrimp-net, while my sister and I walked slowly homewards through the hot and stagnant air.

I went up to my father’s study to see if the old gentleman had any instructions as to the estate, for he had become engrossed in a new work upon Oriental literature, and the practical management of the property had in consequence devolved entirely upon me.

I found him seated at his square library table, which was so heaped with books and papers that nothing of him was visible from the door except a tuft of white hair.

“My dear son,” he said to me as I entered, “it is a great grief to me that you are not more conversant with Sanscrit. When I was your age, I could converse not only in that noble language, but also in the Tamulic, Lohitic, Gangelic, Taic, and Malaic dialects, which are all offshoots from the Turanian branch.”

“I regret extremely, sir,” I answered, “that I have not inherited your wonderful talents as a polyglot.”

“I have set myself a task,” he explained, “which, if it could only be continued from generation to generation in our own family until it was completed, would make the name of West immortal. This is nothing less than to publish an English translation of the Buddhist Djarmas, with a preface giving an idea of the position of Brahminism before the coming of Sakyamuni. With diligence it is possible that I might be able myself to complete part of the preface before I die.”

“And pray, sir,” I asked, “how long would the whole work be when it was finished?”

“The abridged edition in the Imperial Library of Pekin,” said my father, rubbing his hands together, “consists of 325 volumes of an average weight of five pounds. Then the preface, which must embrace some account of the Rig-veda, the Sama-veda, the Yagur-veda, and the Atharva-veda, with the Brahmanas, could hardly be completed in less than ten volumes. Now, if we apportion one volume to each year, there is every prospect of the family coming to an end of its task about the date 2250, the twelfth generation completing the work, while the thirteenth might occupy itself upon the index.”

“And how are our descendants to live, sir,” I asked, with a smile, “during the progress of this great undertaking:’”

“That’s the worst of you, Jack,” my father cried petulantly. “There is nothing practical about you. Instead of confining your attention to the working out of my noble scheme, you begin raising all sorts of absurd objections. It is a mere matter of detail how our descendants live, so long as they stick to the Djarmas. Now, I want you to go up to the bothy of Fergus McDonald and see about the thatch, and Willie Fullerton has written to say that his milk-cow is bad. You might took in upon your way and ask after it.”

I started off upon my errands, but before doing so I took a look at the barometer upon the wall. The mercury had sunk to the phenomenal point of twenty-eight inches. Clearly the old sailor had not been wrong in his interpretation of Nature’s signs.

As I returned over the moors in the evening, the wind was blowing in short, angry puffs, and the western horizon was heaped with sombre clouds which stretched their long, ragged tentacles right up to the zenith.

Against their dark background one or two livid, sulphur-coloured splotches showed up malignant and menacing, while the surface of the sea had changed from the appearance of burnished quicksilver to that of ground glass. A low, moaning sound rose up from the ocean as if it knew that trouble was in store for it.

Far out in the Channel I saw a single panting, eager steam vessel making ifs way to Belfast Lough, and the large barque which I had observed in the morning still beating about in the offing, endeavouring to pass to the northward.

At nine o’clock a sharp breeze was blowing, at ten it had freshened into a gale, and before midnight the most furious storm was raging which I can remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

I sat for some time in our small, oak-panelled sitting-room listening to the screeching and howling of the blast and to the rattle of the gravel and pebbles as they pattered against the window. Nature’s grim orchestra was playing its world-old piece with a compass which ranged from the deep diapason of the thundering surge to the thin shriek of the scattered shingle and the keen piping of frightened sea birds.

Once for an instant I opened the lattice window, but a gust of wind and rain came blustering through, bearing with it a great sheet of seaweed, which flapped down upon the table. It was all I could do to close it again with a thrust of my shoulder in the face of the blast.

My sister and father had retired to their rooms, but my thoughts were too active for sleep, so I continued to sit and to smoke by the smouldering fire.

What was going on in the Hall now, I wondered? What did Gabriel think of the storm, and how did it affect the old man who wandered about in the night? Did he welcome these dread forces of Nature as being of the same order of things as his own tumultuous thoughts?

It was only two days now from the date which I had been assured was to mark a crisis in his fortunes. Would he regard this sudden tempest as being in any way connected with the mysterious fate which threatened him?

Over all these things and many more I pondered as I sat by the glowing embers until they died gradually out, and the chill night air warned me that it was time to retire.

I may have slept a couple of hours when I was awakened by some one tugging furiously at my shoulder. Sitting up in bed, I saw by the dim light that my father was standing half-clad by my bedside, and that it was his grasp which I felt on my night-shirt.

“Get up, Jack, get up!” he was crying excitedly. “There’s a great ship ashore in the bay, and the poor folk will all be drowned. Come down, my boy, and let us see what we can do.”

The good old man seemed to be nearly beside himself with excitement and impatience. I sprang from my bed, and was huddling on a few clothes, when a dull, booming sound made itself heard above the howling of the wind and the thunder of the breakers.

“There it is again!” cried my father. “It is their signal gun, poor creatures! Jamieson and the fishermen are below. Put your oil-skin coat on and the Glengarry hat. Come, come, every second may mean a human life!”

We hurried down together and made our way to the beach, accompanied by a dozen or so of the inhabitants of Branksome.

The gale had increased rather than moderated, and the wind screamed all round us with an infernal clamour. So great was its force that we had to put our shoulders against it, and bore our way through it, while the sand and gravel tingled up against our faces.

There was just light enough to make out the scudding clouds and the white gleam of the breakers, but beyond that all was absolute darkness.

We stood ankle deep in the shingle and seaweed, shading our eyes with our hands and peering out into the inky obscurity.

It seemed to me as I listened that I could hear human voices loud in intreaty and terror, but amid the wild turmoil of Nature it was difficult to distinguish one sound from another.

Suddenly, however, a light glimmered in the heart of the tempest, and next instant the beach and sea and wide, tossing bay were brilliantly illuminated by the wild glare of a signal light.

The ship lay on her beam-ends right in the centre of the terrible Hansel reef, hurled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. I recognised her at once as being the same three-masted barque which I had observed in the Channel in the morning, and the Union Jack which was nailed upside down to the jagged slump of her mizzen proclaimed her nationality.

Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the vivid light which spluttered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship, out of the great darkness came the long, rolling lines of big waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume and to hurry on more impetuously until with a roar and a jarring crash it sprang upon its victim.

Clinging to the weather shrouds we could distinctly see ten or a dozen frightened seamen who, when the light revealed our presence, turned their white faces towards us and waved their hands imploringly. The poor wretches had evidently taken fresh hope from our presence, though it was clear that their own boats had either been washed away or so damaged as to render them useless.

The sailors who clung to the rigging were not, however, the only unfortunates on board. On the breaking poop there stood three men who appeared to be both of a different race and nature from the cowering wretches who implored our assistance.

Leaning upon the shattered taff-rail they seemed to be conversing together as quietly and unconcernedly as though they were unconscious of the deadly peril which surrounded them.

As the signal light flickered over them, we could see from the shore that these immutable strangers wore red fezes, and that their faces were of a swarthy, large-featured type, which proclaimed an Eastern origin.

There was little time, however, for us to take note of such details. The ship was breaking rapidly, and some effort must be made to save the poor, sodden group of humanity who implored our assistance.

The nearest lifeboat was in the Bay of Luce, ten long miles away, but here was our own broad, roomy craft upon the shingle, and plenty of brave fisher lads to form a crew. Six of us sprang to the oars, the others pushed us off, and we fought our way through the swirling, raging waters, staggering and recoiling before the great, sweeping billows, but still steadily decreasing the distance between the barque and ourselves.

It seemed, however, that our efforts were fated to be in vain.

As we mounted upon a surge I saw a giant wave, topping all the others, and coming after them like a driver following a flock, sweep down upon the vessel, curling its great, green arch over the breaking deck.

With a rending, riving sound the ship split in two where the terrible, serrated back of the Hansel reef was sawing into her keel. The after-part, with the broken mizzen and the three Orientals, sank backwards into deep water and vanished, while the fore-half oscillated helplessly about, retaining its precarious balance upon the rocks.

A wail of fear went up from the wreck and was echoed from the beach, but by the blessing of Providence she kept afloat until we made our way under her bowsprit and rescued every man of the crew.

We had not got half-way upon our return, however, when another great wave swept the shattered forecastle off the reef, and, extinguishing the signal light, hid the wild denouement from our view.

Our friends upon the shore were loud in congratulation and praise, nor were they backward in welcoming and comforting the castaways. They were thirteen in all, as cold and cowed a set of mortals as ever slipped through Death’s fingers, save, indeed, their captain, who was a hardy, robust man, and who made light of the affair.

Some were taken off to this cottage and some to that, but the greater part came back to Branksome with us, where we gave them such dry clothes as we could lay our hands on, and served them with beef and beer by the kitchen fire. The captain, whose name was Meadows, compressed his bulky form into a suit of my own, and came down to the parlour, where he mixed himself some grog and gave my father and myself an account of the disaster.

“If it hadn’t been for you, sir, and your brave fellows,” he said, smiling across at me, “we should be ten fathoms deep by this time. As to the *Belinda*, she was a leaky old tub and well insured, so neither the owners nor I are likely to break our hearts over her.”

“I am afraid,” said my father sadly, “that we shall never see your three passengers again. I have left men upon the beach in case they should be washed up, but I fear it is hopeless. I saw them go down when the vessel split, and no man could have lived for a moment among that terrible surge.”

“Who were they?” I asked. “I could not have believed that it was possible for men to appear so unconcerned in the face of such imminent peril.”

“As to who they are or were,” the captain answered, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe, “that is by no means easy to say. Our last port was Kurrachee, in the north of India, and there we took them aboard as passengers for Glasgow. Ram Singh was the name of the younger, and it is only with him that I have come in contact, but they all appeared to be quiet, inoffensive gentlemen. I never inquired their business, but I should judge that they were Parsee merchants from Hyderabad whose trade took them to Europe. I could never see why the crew should fear them, and the mate, too, he should have had more sense."

"Fear them I!" I ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, they had some preposterous idea that they were dangerous shipmates. I have no doubt if you were to go down into the kitchen now you would find that they are all agreed that our passengers were the cause of the whole disaster."

As the captain was speaking the parlour door opened and the mate of the barque, a tall, red-bearded sailor, stepped in. He had obtained a complete rig-out from some kind-hearted fisherman, and looked in his comfortable jersey and well-greased seaboots a very favourable specimen of a shipwrecked mariner.

With a few words of grateful acknowledgment of our hospitality, he drew a chair up to the fire and warmed his great, brown hands before the blaze.

"What d'ye think now, Captain Meadows?" he asked presently, glancing up at his superior officer. "Didn't I warn you what would be the upshot of having those niggers on board the *Belinda*?"

The captain leant back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Didn't I tell you?" he cried, appealing to us. "Didn't I tell you?"

"It might have been no laughing matter for us," the other remarked petulantly. "I have lost a good sea-kit and nearly my life into the bargain."

"Do I understand you to say," said I, "that you attribute your misfortunes to your ill-fated passengers?"

The mate opened his eyes at the adjective.

"Why ill-fated, sir?" he asked.

"Because they are most certainly drowned," I answered.

He sniffed incredulously and went on warming his hands.

"Men of that kind are never drowned," he said, after a pause. "Their father, the devil, looks after them. Did you see them standing on the poop and rolling cigarettes at the time when the mizzen was carried away and the quarter-boats stove? That was enough for me. I'm not surprised at you landsmen not being able to take it in, but the captain here, who's been sailing since he was the height of the binnacle, ought to know by this time that a cat and a priest are the worst cargo you can carry. If a Christian priest is bad, I guess an idolatrous pagan one is fifty times worse. I stand by the old religion, and be d — d to it!"

My father and I could not help laughing at the rough sailor's very unorthodox way of proclaiming his orthodoxy. The mate, however, was evidently in deadly earnest, and proceeded to state his case, marking off the different points upon the rough, red fingers of his left hand.

"It was at Kurrachee, directly after they come that I warned ye," he said reproachfully to the captain. "There was three Buddhist Lascars in my watch, and what did they do when them chaps come aboard? Why, they down on their stomachs and rubbed their noses on the deck — that's what they did. They wouldn't ha' done as much for an admiral of the R'yal Navy. They know who's who — these niggers do; and I smelt mischief the moment I saw them on their faces. I asked them afterwards in your presence, Captain, why they had done it, and they answered that the passengers were holy men. You heard 'em yourself."

"Well, there's no harm in that, Hawkins," said Captain Meadows.

"I don't know that," the mate said doubtfully. "The holiest Christian is the one that's nearest God, but the holiest nigger is, in my opinion, the one that's nearest the devil. Then you saw yourself, Captain Meadows, how they went on during the voyage, reading books that was writ on wood instead o' paper, and sitting up right through the night to jabber together on the quarter-deck. What did they want to have a chart of their own for and to mark the course of the vessel every day?"

"They didn't," said the captain.

"Indeed they did, and if I did not tell you sooner it was because you were always ready to laugh at what I said about them. They had instruments o' their own — when they used them I can't say — but every day at noon they worked out the latitude and longitude, and marked out the vessel's position on a chart that was pinned on their cabin table. I saw them at it, and so did the steward from his pantry."

"Well, I don't see what you prove from that," the captain remarked, "though I confess it is a strange thing."

"I'll tell you another strange thing," said the mate impressively. "Do you know the name of this bay in which we are cast away?"

"I have learnt from our kind friends here that we are upon the Wigtownshire coast," the captain answered, "but I have not heard the name of the bay."

The mate leant forward with a grave face.

"It is the Bay of Kirkmaiden," he said.

If he expected to astonish Captain Meadows he certainly succeeded, for that gentleman was fairly bereft of speech for a minute or more.

"This is really marvellous," he said, after a time, turning to us. "These passengers of ours cross-questioned us early in the voyage as to the existence of a bay of that name. Hawkins here and I denied all knowledge of one, for on the chart it is included in the Bay of Luce. That we should eventually be blown into it and destroyed is an extraordinary coincidence."

"Too extraordinary to be a coincidence," growled the mate. "I saw them during the calm yesterday morning, pointing to the land over our starboard quarter. They knew well enough that that was the port they were making for."

"What do you make of it all, then, Hawkins?" asked the captain, with a troubled face. "What is your own theory on the matter?"

"Why, in my opinion," the mate answered, "them three swabs have no more difficulty in raising a gale o' wind than I should have in swallowing this here grog. They had reasons o' their own for coming to this God-forsaken — saving your presence, sirs — this God-forsaken bay, and they took a short cut to it by arranging to be blown ashore there. That's my idea o' the matter, though what three Buddhist priests could find to do in the Bay of Kirkmaiden is clean past my comprehension."

My father raised his eyebrows to indicate the doubt which his hospitality forbade him from putting into words.

"I think, gentlemen," he said, "that you are both sorely in need of rest after your perilous adventures. If you will follow me I shall lead you to your rooms."

He conducted them with old-fashioned ceremony to the laird's best spare bedroom, and then, returning to me in the parlour, proposed that we should go down together to the beach and learn whether anything fresh had occurred.

The first pale light of dawn was just appearing in the east when we made our way for the second time to the scene of the shipwreck. The gale had blown itself out, but the sea was still very high, and all inside the breakers was a seething, gleaming line of foam, as though the fierce old ocean were gnashing its white fangs at the victims who had escaped from its clutches.

All along the beach fishermen and crofters were hard at work hauling up spars and barrels as fast as they were tossed ashore. None of them had seen any bodies, however, and they explained to us that only such things as could float had any chance of coming ashore, for the undercurrent was so strong that whatever was beneath the surface must infallibly be swept out to sea.

As to the possibility of the unfortunate passengers having been able to reach the shore, these practical men would not hear of it for a moment, and showed us conclusively that if they had not been drowned they must have been dashed to pieces upon the rocks.

“We did all that could be done,” my father said sadly, as we returned home. “I am afraid that the poor mate has had his reason affected by the suddenness of the disaster. Did you hear what he said about Buddhist priests raising a gale?”

“Yes, I heard him,” said I. “It was very painful to listen to him,” said my father. “I wonder if he would object to my putting a small mustard plaster under each of his ears. It would relieve any congestion of the brain. Or perhaps it would be best to wake him up and give him two antibilious pills. What do you think, Jack?”

“I think,” said I, with a yawn, “that you had best let him sleep, and go to sleep yourself. You can physic him in the morning if he needs it.”

So saying I stumbled off to my bedroom, and throwing myself upon the couch was soon in a dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XII. OF THE THREE FOREIGN MEN UPON THE COAST

It must have been eleven or twelve o’clock before I awoke, and it seemed to me in the flood of golden light which streamed into my chamber that the wild, tumultuous episodes of the night before must have formed part of some fantastic dream.

It was hard to believe that the gentle breeze which whispered so softly among the ivy-leaves around my window was caused by the same element which had shaken the very house a few short hours before. It was as if Nature had repented of her momentary passion and was endeavouring to make amends to an injured world by its warmth and its sunshine. A chorus of birds in the garden below filled the whole air with their wonder and congratulations.

Down in the hall I found a number of the shipwrecked sailors, looking all the better for their night’s repose, who set up a buzz of pleasure and gratitude upon seeing me.

Arrangements had been made to drive them to Wigtown, whence they were to proceed to Glasgow by the evening train, and my father had given orders that each should be served with a packet of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs to sustain him on the way.

Captain Meadows thanked us warmly in the name of his employers for the manner in which we had treated them, and he called for three cheers from his crew, which were very heartily given. He and the mate walked down with us after we had broken our fast to have a last look at the scene of the disaster.

The great bosom of the bay was still heaving convulsively, and its waves were breaking into sobs against the rocks, but there was none of that wild turmoil which we had seen in the early morning. The long, emerald ridges, with their little, white crests of foam, rolled slowly and majestically in, to break with a regular rhythm — the panting of a tired monster.

A cable length from the shore we could see the mainmast of the barque floating upon the waves, disappearing at times in the trough of the sea, and then shooting up towards Heaven like a giant javelin, shining and dripping as the rollers tossed it about. Other smaller pieces of wreckage dotted the waters, while innumerable spars and packages were littered over the sands. These were being drawn up and collected in a place of safety by gangs of peasants. I noticed that a couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times we could hear their raucous voices as they cried to one another of what they saw.

“She was a leaky old craft,” said the captain, looking sadly out to sea, “but there’s always a feeling of sorrow when we see the last of a ship we have sailed in. Well, well, she would have been broken up in any case, and sold for firewood.”

“It looks a peaceful scene,” I remarked. “Who would imagine that three men lost their lives last night in those very waters?”

“Poor fellows,” said the captain, with feeling, “Should they be cast up after our departure, I am sure, Mr. West, that you will have them decently interred.”

I was about to make some reply when the mate burst into a loud guffaw, slapping his thigh and choking with merriment.

“If you want to bury them,” he said, “you had best look sharp, or they may clear out of the country. You remember what I said last night? Just look at the top of that ‘ere hillock, and tell me whether I was in the right or not?”

There was a high sand dune some little distance along the coast, and upon the summit of this the figure was standing which had attracted the mate’s attention. The captain threw up his hands in astonishment as his eyes rested upon it.

“By the eternal,” he shouted, “it’s Ram Singh himself! Let us overhaul him!”

Taking to his heels in his excitement he raced along the beach, followed by the mate and myself, as well as by one or two of the fishermen who had observed the presence of the stranger.

The latter, perceiving our approach, came down from his post of observation and walked quietly in our direction, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is absorbed in thought.

I could not help contrasting our hurried and tumultuous advance with the gravity and dignity of this lonely Oriental, nor was the matter mended when he raised a pair of steady, thoughtful dark eyes and inclined his head in a graceful, sweeping salutation. It seemed to me that we were like a pack of schoolboys in the presence of a master.

The stranger's broad, unruffled brow, his clear, searching gaze, firm-set yet sensitive mouth, and clean-cut, resolute expression, all combined to form the most imposing and noble presence which I had ever known. I could not have imagined that such imperturbable calm and at the same time such a consciousness of latent strength could have been expressed by any human face.

He was dressed in a brown velveteen coat, loose, dark trousers, with a shirt that was cut low in the collar, so as to show the muscular, brown neck, and he still wore the red fez which I had noticed the night before.

I observed with a feeling of surprise, as we approached him, that none of these garments showed the slightest indication of the rough treatment and wetting which they must have received during their wearer's submersion and struggle to the shore.

"So you are none the worse for your ducking," he said in a pleasant, musical voice, looking from the captain to the mate. "I hope that your poor sailors have found pleasant quarters."

"We are all safe," the captain answered. "But we had given you up for lost — you and your two friends. Indeed, I was just making arrangements for your burial with Mr. West here."

The stranger looked at me and smiled.

"We won't give Mr. West that trouble for a little time yet," he remarked; "my friends and I came ashore all safe, and we have found shelter in a hut a mile or so along the coast. It is lonely down there, but we have everything which we can desire."

"We start for Glasgow this afternoon," said the captain; "I shall be very glad if you will come with us. If you have not been in England before you may find it awkward travelling alone."

"We are very much indebted to you for your thoughtfulness," Ram Singh answered; "but we will not take advantage of your kind offer. Since Nature has driven us here we intend to have a look about us before we leave."

"As you like," the captain said, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't think you are likely to find very much to interest you in this hole of a place."

"Very possibly not," Ram Singh answered with an amused smile. "You remember Milton's lines:

'The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a hell of Heaven, a heaven of Hell.’

I dare say we can spend a few days here comfortably enough. Indeed, I think you must be wrong in considering this to be a barbarous locality. I am much mistaken if this young gentleman’s father is not Mr. James Hunter West, whose name is known and honoured by the pundits of India.”

“My father is, indeed, a well-known Sanscrit scholar,” I answered in astonishment.

“The presence of such a man,” observed the stranger slowly, “changes a wilderness into a city. One great mind is surely a higher indication of civilisation than are incalculable leagues of bricks and mortar.

“Your father is hardly so profound as Sir William Jones, or so universal as the Baron Von Hammer-Purgstall, but he combines many of the virtues of each. You may tell him, however, from me that he is mistaken in the analogy which he has traced between the Samoyede and Tamulic word roots.”

“If you have determined to honour our neighbourhood by a short stay,” said I, “you will offend my father very much if you do not put up with him. He represents the laird here, and it is the laird’s privilege, according to our Scottish custom, to entertain all strangers of repute who visit this parish.”

My sense of hospitality prompted me to deliver this invitation, though I could feel the mate twitching at my sleeves as if to warn me that the offer was, for some reason, an objectionable one. His fears were, however, unnecessary, for the stranger signified by a shake of the head that it was impossible for him to accept it.

“My friends and I are very much obliged to you,” he said, “but we have our own reasons for remaining where we are. The hut which we occupy is deserted and partly ruined, but we Easterns have trained ourselves to do without most of those things which are looked upon as necessaries in Europe, believing firmly in that wise axiom that a man is rich, not in proportion to what he has, but in proportion to what he can dispense with. A good fisherman supplies us with bread and with herbs, we have clean, dry straw for our couches; what could man wish for more?”

“But you must feel the cold at night, coming straight from the tropics,” remarked the captain. “Perhaps our bodies are cold sometimes. We have not noticed it. We have all three spent many years in the Upper Himalayas on the border of the region of eternal snow, so we are not very sensitive to inconveniences of the sort.”

“At least,” said I, “you must allow me to send you over some fish and some meat from our larder.”

“We are not Christians,” he answered, “but Buddhists of the higher school. We do not recognise that man has a moral right to slay an ox or a fish for the gross use of his body. He has not put life into them, and has assuredly no mandate from the Almighty to take life from them save under most pressing need. We could not, therefore, use your gift if you were to send it.”

“But, sir,” I remonstrated, “if in this changeable and inhospitable climate you refuse all nourishing food your vitality will fail you — you will die.”

“We shall die then,” he answered, with an amused smile. “And now, Captain Meadows, I must bid you adieu, thanking you for your kindness during the voyage, and you, too, good-bye — you will command a ship of your own before the year is out. I trust, Mr. West, that I may see you again before I leave this part of the country. Farewell!”

He raised his red fez, inclined his noble head with the stately grace which characterised all his actions, and strode away in the direction from which he had come.

“Let me congratulate you, Mr. Hawkins,” said the captain to the mate as we walked homewards. “You are to command your own ship within the year.”

“No such luck!” the mate answered, with a pleased smile upon his mahogany face, “still, there’s no saying how things may come out. What d’ye think of him, Mr. West?”

“Why,” said I, “I am very much interested in him. What a magnificent head and bearing he has for a young man. I suppose he cannot be more than thirty.”

“Forty,” said the mate.

“Sixty, if he is a day,” remarked Captain Meadows. “Why, I have heard him talk quite familiarly of the first Afghan war. He was a man then, and that is close on forty years ago.”

“Wonderful!” I ejaculated. “His skin is as smooth and his eyes are as clear as mine are. He is the superior priest of the three, no doubt.”

“The inferior,” said the captain confidently. “That is why he does all the talking for them. Their minds are too elevated to descend to mere worldly chatter.”

“They are the strangest pieces of flotsam and jetsam that were ever thrown upon this coast,” I remarked. “My father will be mightily interested in them.”

“Indeed, I think the less you have to do with them the better for you,” said the mate. “If I do command my own ship I’ll promise you that I never carry live stock of that sort on board of her. But here we are all aboard and the anchor tripped, so we must bid you good-bye.”

The wagonette had just finished loading up when we arrived, and the chief places, on either side of the driver, had been reserved for my two companions, who speedily sprang into them. With a chorus of cheers the good fellows whirled away down the road, while my father, Esther, and I stood upon the lawn and waved our hands to them until they disappeared behind the Cloomber woods, *en route* for the Wigtown railway station. Barque and crew had both vanished now from our little world, the only relic of either being the heaps of *debris* upon the beach, which were to lie there until the arrival of an agent from Lloyd’s.

CHAPTER XIII. IN WHICH I SEE THAT WHICH HAS BEEN SEEN BY FEW

At dinner that evening I mentioned to my father the episode of the three Buddhist priests, and found, as I had expected, that he was very much interested by my account of them.

When, however, he heard of the high manner in which Ram Singh had spoken of him, and the distinguished position which he had assigned him among philologists, he became so excited that it was all we could do to prevent him from setting off then and there to make his acquaintance.

Esther and I were relieved and glad when we at last succeeded in abstracting his boots and manoeuvring him to his bedroom, for the exciting events of the last twenty-four hours had been too much for his weak frame and delicate nerves.

I was silting at the open porch in the gloaming, turning over in my mind the unexpected events which had occurred so rapidly — the gale, the wreck, the rescue, and the strange character of the castaways — when my sister came quietly over to me and put her hand in mine.

“Don’t you think, Jack.” she said, in her low, sweet voice, “that we are forgetting our friends over at Cloomber? Hasn’t all this excitement driven their fears and their danger out of our heads?”

“Out of our heads, but never out of our hearts,” said I, laughing. “However, you are right, little one, for our attention has certainly been distracted from them. I shall walk up in the morning and see if I can see anything of them. By the way, to-morrow is the fateful 5th of October — one more day, and all will be well with us.”

“Or ill,” said my sister gloomily.

“Why, what a little croaker you are, to be sure!” I cried. “What in the world is coming over you?”

“I feel nervous and low-spirited,” she answered, drawing closer to my side and shivering. “I feel as if some great peril were hanging over the heads of those we love. Why should these strange men wish to stay upon the coast?”

“What, the Buddhists?” I said lightly. “Oh, these fellows have continual feast-days and religious rites of all sorts. They have some very good reason for staying, you may be sure.”

“Don’t you think,” said Esther, in an awe-struck whisper, “that it is very strange that these priests should arrive here all the way from India just at the present moment? Have you not gathered from all you have heard that the general’s fears are in some way connected with India and the Indians?”

The remark made me thoughtful.

“Why, now that you mention it,” I answered, “I have some vague impression that the mystery is connected with some incident which occurred in that country. I am sure, however, that your fears would vanish if you saw Ram Singh. He is the very personification of wisdom and benevolence. He was shocked at the idea of our killing a sheep, or even a fish for his benefit — said he would rather die than have a hand in taking the life of an animal.”

“It is very foolish of me to be so nervous,” said my sister bravely. “But you must promise me one thing, Jack. You will go up to Cloomber in the morning, and if you can see any of them you must tell them of these strange neighbours of ours. They are better able to judge than we are whether their presence has any significance or not.”

“All right, little one,” I answered, as we went indoors. “You have been over-excited by all these wild doings, and you need a sound night’s rest to compose you. I’ll do what you suggest, however, and our friends shall judge for themselves whether these poor fellows should be sent about their business or not.”

I made the promise to allay my sister’s apprehensions, but in the bright sunlight of morning it appeared less than absurd to imagine that our poor vegetarian castaways could have any sinister intentions, or that their advent could have any effect upon the tenant of Cloomber.

I was anxious, myself, however, to see whether I could see anything of the Heatherstones, so after breakfast I walked up to the Hall. In their seclusion it was impossible for them to have learnt anything of the recent events. I felt, therefore, that even if I should meet the general he could hardly regard me as an intruder while I had so much news to communicate.

The place had the same dreary and melancholy appearance which always characterised it. Looking through between the thick iron bars of the main gateway there was nothing to be seen of any of the occupants. One of the great Scotch firs had been blown down in the gale, and its long, ruddy trunk lay right across the grass-grown avenue; but no attempt had been made to remove it.

Everything about the property had the same air of desolation and neglect, with the solitary exception of the massive and impenetrable fencing, which presented as unbroken and formidable an obstacle as ever to the would-be trespasser.

I walked round this barrier as far as our old trysting-place without finding any flaw through which I could get a glimpse of the house, for the fence had been repaired with each rail overlapping the last, so as to secure absolute privacy for those inside, and to block those peep-holes which I had formerly used.

At the old spot, however, where I had had the memorable interview with the general on the occasion when he surprised me with his daughter, I found that the two loose rails had been refixed in such a manner that there was a gap of two inches or more between them.

Through this I had a view of the house and of part of the lawn in front of it, and, though I could see no signs of life outside or at any of the windows, I settled down with the intention of sticking to my post until I had a chance of speaking to one or other of the inmates. Indeed, the cold, dead aspect of the house had struck such a chill into my heart that I determined to scale the fence at whatever risk of incurring the general’s displeasure rather than return without news of the Heatherstones.

Happily there was no need of this extreme expedient, for I had not been there half-an-hour before I heard the harsh sound of an opening lock, and the general himself emerged from the main door.

To my surprise he was dressed in a military uniform, and that not the uniform in ordinary use in the British Army. The red coat was strangely cut and stained with the weather. The trousers had originally been white, but had now faded to a dirty yellow. With a red sash across his chest and a straight sword hanging from his side, he stood the living example of a bygone type — the John Company’s officer of forty years ago.

He was followed by the ex-tramp, Corporal Rufus Smith, now well-clad and prosperous, who limped along beside his master, the two pacing up and down the lawn absorbed in conversation. I observed that from time to time one or other of them would pause and glance furtively all about them, as though guarding keenly against a surprise. I should have preferred communicating with the general alone, but since there was no dissociating him from his companion, I beat loudly on the fencing with my stick to attract their attention. They both faced round in a moment, and I could see from their gestures that they were disturbed and alarmed.

I then elevated my stick above the barrier to show them where the sound proceeded from. At this the general began to walk in my direction with the air of a man who is bracing himself up for an effort, but the other caught him by the wrist and endeavoured to dissuade him.

It was only when I shouted out my name and assured them that I was alone that I could prevail upon them to approach. Once assured of my identity the general ran eagerly towards me and greeted me with the utmost cordiality.

“This is truly kind of you, West,” he said. “It is only at such times as these that one can judge who is a friend and who not. It would not be fair to you to ask you to come inside or to stay any time, but I am none the less very glad to see you.”

“I have been anxious about you all,” I said, “for it is some little time since I have seen or heard from any of you. How have you all been keeping?”

“Why, as well as could be expected. But we will be better tomorrow — we will be different men to-morrow, eh, Corporal?”

“Yes, sir,” said the corporal, raising his hand to his forehead in a military salute. “We’ll be right as the bank to-morrow.”

“The corporal and I are a little disturbed in our minds just now,” the general explained, “but I have no doubt that all will come right. After all, there is nothing higher than Providence, and we are all in His hands. And how have you been, eh?”

“We have been very busy for one thing,” said I. “I suppose you have heard nothing of the great shipwreck?”

“Not a word,” the general answered listlessly.

“I thought the noise of the wind would prevent you hearing the signal guns. She came ashore in the bay the night before last — a great barque from India.”

“From India!” ejaculated the general.

“Yes. Her crew were saved, fortunately, and have all been sent on to Glasgow.”

“All sent on!” cried the general, with a face as bloodless as a corpse.

"All except three rather strange characters who claim to be Buddhist priests. They have decided to remain for a few days upon the coast."

The words were hardly out of my mouth when the general dropped upon his knees with his long, thin arms extended to Heaven.

"Thy will be done!" he cried in a cracking voice. "Thy blessed will be done!"

I could see through the crack that Corporal Rufus Smith's face had turned to a sickly yellow shade, and that he was wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"It's like my luck!" he said. "After all these years, to come when I have got a snug billet."

"Never mind, my lad," the general said, rising, and squaring his shoulders like a man who braces himself up for an effort. "Be it what it may we'll face it as British soldiers should. D'ye remember at Chillianwallah, when you had to run from your guns to our square, and the Sikh horse came thundering down on our bayonets? We didn't flinch then, and we won't flinch now. It seems to me that I feel better than I have done for years. It was the uncertainty that was killing me."

"And the infernal jingle-jangle," said the corporal. "Well, we all go together — that's some consolation."

"Good-bye, West," said the general. "Be a good husband to Gabriel, and give my poor wife a home. I don't think she will trouble you long. Good-bye! God bless you!"

"Look here, General," I said, peremptorily breaking off a piece of wood to make communication more easy, "this sort of thing has been going on too long. What are these hints and allusions and innuendoes? It is time we had a little plain speaking. What is it you fear? Out with it! Are you in dread of these Hindoos? If you are, I am able, on my father's authority, to have them arrested as rogues and vagabonds."

"No, no, that would never do," he answered, shaking his head. "You will learn about the wretched business soon enough. Mordaunt knows where to lay his hand upon the papers bearing on the matter. You can consult him about it to-morrow."

"But surely," I cried, "if the peril is so imminent something may be done to avert it. If you would but tell me what you fear I should know how to act."

"My dear friend," he said, "there is nothing to be done, so calm yourself, and let things take their course. It has been folly on my part to shelter myself behind mere barriers of wood and stone. The fact is, that inaction was terrible to me, and I felt that to do anything, however futile, in the nature of a precaution, was better than passive resignation. My humble friend here and I have placed ourselves in a position in which, I trust, no poor fellow will ever find himself again. We can only recommend ourselves to the unfailing goodness of the Almighty, and trust that what we have endured in this world may lessen our atonement in the world to come. I must leave you now, for I have many papers to destroy and much to arrange. Good-bye!"

He pushed his hand through the hole which I had made, and grasped mine in a solemn farewell, after which he walked back to the Hall with a firm and decided step, still followed by the crippled and sinister corporal.

I walked back to Branksome much disturbed by this interview, and extremely puzzled as to what course I should pursue.

It was evident now that my sister's suspicions were correct, and that there was some very intimate connection between the presence of the three Orientals and the mysterious peril which hung over the towers of Cloomber.

It was difficult for me to associate the noble-faced Ram Singh's gentle, refined manner and words of wisdom with any deed of violence, yet now that I thought of it I could see that a terrible capacity for wrath lay behind his shaggy brows and dark, piercing eyes.

I felt that of all men whom I had ever met he was the one whose displeasure I should least care to face. But how could two men so widely dissociated as the foul-mouthed old corporal of artillery and the distinguished Anglo-Indian general have each earned the ill-will of these strange castaways? And if the danger were a positive physical one, why should he not consent to my proposal to have the three men placed under custody — though I confess it would have gone much against my grain to act in so inhospitable a manner upon such vague and shadowy grounds.

These questions were absolutely unanswerable, and yet the solemn words and the terrible gravity which I had seen in the faces of both the old soldiers forbade me from thinking that their fears were entirely unfounded.

It was all a puzzle — an absolutely insoluble puzzle.

One thing at least was clear to me — and that was that in the present state of my knowledge, and after the general's distinct prohibition, it was impossible for me to interfere in any way. I could only wait and pray that, whatever the danger might be, it might pass over, or at least that my dear Gabriel and her brother might be protected against it.

I was walking down the lane lost in thought, and had got as far as the wicket gate which opens upon the Branksome lawn, when I was surprised to hear my father's voice raised in most animated and excited converse.

The old man had been of late so abstracted from the daily affairs of the world, and so absorbed in his own special studies, that it was difficult to engage his attention upon any ordinary, mundane topic. Curious to know what it was that had drawn him so far out of himself, I opened the gate softly, and walking quietly round the laurel bushes, found him sitting, to my astonishment, with none other than the very man who was occupying my thoughts, Ram Singh, the Buddhist.

The two were sitting upon a garden bench, and the Oriental appeared to be laying down some weighty proposition, checking every point upon his long, quivering, brown fingers, while my father, with his hands thrown abroad and his face awry, was loud in protestation and in argument.

So absorbed were they in their controversy, that I stood within a hand-touch of them for a minute or more before they became conscious of my presence.

On observing me the priest sprang to his feet and greeted me with the same lofty courtesy and dignified grace which had so impressed me the day before.

"I promised myself yesterday," he said, "the pleasure of calling upon your father. You see I have kept my word. I have even been daring enough to question his views upon some points in connection with the Sanscrit and Hindoo tongues, with the result that we have been arguing for an hour or more without either of us convincing the other. Without pretending to as deep a theoretical knowledge as that which has made the name of James Hunter West a household word among Oriental scholars, I happen to have given considerable attention to this one point, and indeed I am in a position to say that I know his views to be unsound. I assure you, sir, that up to the year 700, or even later, Sanscrit was the ordinary language of the great bulk of the inhabitants of India."

"And I assure you, sir," said my father warmly, "that it was dead and forgotten at that date, save by the learned, who used it as a vehicle for scientific and religious works — just as Latin was used in the Middle Ages long after it had ceased to be spoken by any European nation.”

“If you consult the puranas you will find,” said Ram Singh, “that this theory, though commonly received, is entirely untenable.”

“And if you will consult the Ramayana, and more particularly the canonical books on Buddhist discipline,” cried my father, “you will find that the theory is unassailable.”

“But look at the Kullavagga,” said our visitor earnestly.

“And look at King Asoka,” shouted my father triumphantly. “When, in the year 300 before the Christian era — before, mind you — he ordered the laws of Buddha to be engraved upon the rocks, what language did he employ, eh? Was it Sanscrit? — no! And why was it not Sanscrit? Because the lower orders of his subjects would not have been able to understand a word of it. Ha, ha! That was the reason. How are you going to get round King Asoka’s edicts, eh?”

“He carved them in the various dialects,” Ram Singh answered. “But energy is too precious a thing to be wasted in mere wind in this style. The sun has passed its meridian, and I must return to my companions.”

“I am sorry that you have not brought them to see us,” said my father courteously. He was, I could see, uneasy lest in the eagerness of debate he had overstepped the bounds of hospitality.

“They do not mix with the world,” Ram Singh answered, rising to his feet. “They are of a higher grade than I, and more sensitive to contaminating influences. They are immersed in a six months’ meditation upon the mystery of the third incarnation, which has lasted with few intermissions from the time that we left the Himalayas. I shall not see you again, Mr. Hunter West, and I therefore bid you farewell. Your old age will be a happy one, as it deserves to be, and your Eastern studies will have a lasting effect upon the knowledge and literature of your own country. Farewell!”

“And am I also to see no more of you?” I asked.

“Unless you will walk with me along the sea-shore,” he answered. “But you have already been out this morning, and may be tired. I ask too much of you.”

“Nay, I should be delighted to come,” I responded from my heart, and we set off together, accompanied for some little distance by my father, who would gladly, I could see, have reopened the Sanscrit controversy, had not his stock of breath been too limited to allow of his talking and walking at the same time.

"He is a learned man," Ram Singh remarked, after we had left him behind, "but, like many another, he is intolerant towards opinions which differ from his own. He will know better some day."

I made no answer to this observation, and we trudged along for a time in silence, keeping well down to the water's edge, where the sands afforded a good foothold.

The sand dunes which lined the coast formed a continuous ridge upon our left, cutting us off entirely from all human observation, while on the right the broad Channel stretched away with hardly a sail to break its silvery uniformity. The Buddhist priest and I were absolutely alone with Nature.

I could not help reflecting that if he were really the dangerous man that the mate affected to consider him, or that might be inferred from the words of General Heatherstone, I had placed myself completely in his power.

Yet such was the majestic benignity of the man's aspect, and the unruffled serenity of his deep, dark eyes, that I could afford in his presence to let fear and suspicion blow past me as lightly as the breeze which whistled round us. His face might be stern, and even terrible, but I felt that he could never be unjust.

As I glanced from time to time at his noble profile and the sweep of his jet-black beard, his rough-spun tweed travelling suit struck me with an almost painful sense of incongruity, and I re-clothed him in my imagination with the grand, sweeping Oriental costume which is the fitting and proper frame for such a picture — the only garb which does not detract from the dignity and grace of the wearer.

The place to which he led me was a small fisher cottage which had been deserted some years before by its tenant, but still stood gaunt and bare, with the thatch partly blown away and the windows and doors in sad disrepair. This dwelling, which the poorest Scotch beggar would have shrunk from, was the one which these singular men had preferred to the proffered hospitality of the laird's house. A small garden, now a mass of tangled brambles, stood round it, and through this my acquaintance picked his way to the ruined door. He glanced into the house and then waved his hand for me to follow him.

"You have now an opportunity," he said, in a subdued, reverential voice, "of seeing a spectacle which few Europeans have had the privilege of beholding. Inside that cottage you will find two Yogis — men who are only one remove from the highest plane of adeptship. They are both wrapped in an ecstatic trance, otherwise I should not venture to obtrude your presence upon them. Their astral bodies have departed from them, to be present at the feast of lamps in the holy Lamasery of Rudok in Tibet. Tread lightly lest by stimulating their corporeal functions you recall them before their devotions are completed.”

Walking slowly and on tiptoe, I picked my way through the weed-grown garden, and peered through the open doorway.

There was no furniture in the dreary interior, nor anything to cover the uneven floor save a litter of fresh straw in a corner.

Among this straw two men were crouching, the one small and wizened, the other large-boned and gaunt, with their legs crossed in Oriental fashion and their heads sunk upon their breasts. Neither of them looked up, or took the smallest notice of our presence.

They were so still and silent that they might have been two bronze statues but for the slow and measured rhythm of their breathing. Their faces, however, had a peculiar, ashen-grey colour, very different from the healthy brown of my companion’s, and I observed, on, stooping my head, that only the whites of their eyes were visible, the balls being turned upwards beneath the lids.

In front of them upon a small mat lay an earthenware pitcher of water and half-a-loaf of bread, together with a sheet of paper inscribed with certain cabalistic characters. Ram Singh glanced at these, and then, motioning to me to withdraw, followed me out into the garden.

“I am not to disturb them until ten o’clock,” he said. “You have now seen in operation one of the grandest results of our occult philosophy, the dissociation of spirit from body. Not only are the spirits of these holy men standing at the present moment by the banks of the Ganges, but those spirits are clothed in a material covering so identical with their real bodies that none of the faithful will ever doubt that Lal Hoomi and Mowdar Khan are actually among them. This is accomplished by our power of resolving an object into its ‘chemical atoms, of conveying these atoms with a speed which exceeds that of lightning to any given spot, and of there re-precipitating them and compelling them to retake their original form. Of old, in the days of our ignorance, it was necessary to convey the whole body in this way, but we have since found that it was as easy and more convenient to transmit material enough merely to build up an outside shell or semblance. This we have termed the astral body.”

“But if you can transmit your spirits so readily,” I observed, “why should they be accompanied by any body at all?”

“In communicating with brother initiates we are able to employ our spirits only, but when we wish to come in contact with ordinary mankind it is essential that we should appear in some form which they can see and comprehend.”

“You have interested me deeply in all that you have told me,” I said, grasping the hand which Ram Singh had held out to me as a sign that our interview was at an end. “I shall often think of our short acquaintance.”

“You will derive much benefit from it,” he said slowly, still holding my hand and looking gravely and sadly into my eyes. “You must remember that what will happen in the future is not necessarily bad because it does not fall in with your preconceived ideas of right. Be not hasty in your judgments. There are certain great rules which must be carried out, at whatever cost to individuals. Their operation may appear to you to be harsh and cruel, but that is as nothing compared with the dangerous precedent which would be established by not enforcing them. The ox and the sheep are safe from us, but the man with the blood of the highest upon his hands should not and shall not live.”

He threw up his arms at the last words with a fierce, threatening gesture, and, turning away from me, strode back to the ruined hut.

I stood gazing after him until he disappeared through the doorway, and then started off for home, revolving in my mind all that I had heard, and more particularly this last outburst of the occult philosopher.

Far on the right I could see the tall, white tower of Cloomber standing out clear-cut and sharp against a dark cloud-bank which rose behind it. I thought how any traveller who chanced to pass that way would envy in his heart the tenant of that magnificent building, and how little they would guess the strange terrors, the nameless dangers, which were gathering about his head. The black cloud-wrack was but the image, I reflected, of the darker, more sombre storm which was about to burst.

“Whatever it all means, and however it happens,” I ejaculated, “God grant that the innocent be not confounded with the guilty.”

My father, when I reached home, was still in a ferment over his learned disputation with the stranger.

“I trust, Jack,” he said, “that I did not handle him too roughly. I should remember that I am *in loco magistri*, and be less prone to argue with my guests. Yet, when he took up this most untenable position, I could not refrain from attacking him and hurling him out of it, which indeed I did, though you, who are ignorant of the niceties of the question, may have failed to perceive it. You observed, however, that my reference to King Asoka’s edicts was so conclusive that he at once rose and took his leave.”

“You held your own bravely,” I answered, “but what is your impression of the man now that you have seen him?” “Why,” said my father, “he is one of those holy men who, under the various names of Sannasis, Yogis, Sevras, Qualanders, Hakims, and Cufis have devoted their lives to the study of the mysteries of the Buddhist faith. He is, I take it, a theosophist, or worshipper of the God of knowledge, the highest grade of which is the adept. This man and his companions have not attained this high position or they could not have crossed the sea without contamination. It is probable that they are all advanced chelas who hope in time to attain to the supreme honour of adeptship.”

“But, father,” interrupted my sister, “this does not explain why men of such sanctity and attainments should choose to take up their quarters on the shores of a desolate Scotch bay.”

“Ah, there you get beyond me,” my father answered. “I may suggest, however, that it is nobody’s business but their own, so long as they keep the peace and are amenable to the law of the land.”

“Have you ever heard,” I asked, “that these higher priests of whom you speak have powers which are unknown to us?”

“Why, Eastern literature is full of it. The Bible is an Eastern book, and is it not full of the record of such powers from cover to cover? It is unquestionable that they have in the past known many of Nature’s secrets which are lost to us. I cannot say, however, from my own knowledge that the modern theosophists really possess the powers that they claim.”

“Are they a vindictive class of people?” I asked. “Is there any offence among them which can only be expiated by death?”

“Not that I know of,” my father answered, raising his white eyebrows in surprise. “You appear to be in an inquisitive humour this afternoon — what is the object of all these questions? Have our Eastern neighbours aroused your curiosity or suspicion in any way?”

I parried the question as best I might, for I was unwilling to let the old man know what was in my mind. No good purpose could come from his enlightenment; his age and his health demanded rest rather than anxiety; and indeed, with the best will in the world I should have found it difficult to explain to another what was so very obscure to myself. For every reason I felt that it was best that he should be kept in the dark.

Never in all my experience had I known a day pass so slowly as did that eventful 5th of October. In every possible manner I endeavoured to while away the tedious hours, and yet it seemed as if darkness would never arrive.

I tried to read, I tried to write, I paced about the lawn, I walked to the end of the lane, I put new flies upon my fishing-hooks, I began to index my father’s library — in a dozen ways I endeavoured to relieve the suspense which was becoming intolerable. My sister, I could see, was suffering from the same feverish restlessness.

Again and again our good father remonstrated with us in his mild way for our erratic behaviour and the continual interruption of his work which arose from it.

At last, however, the tea was brought, and the tea was taken, the curtains were drawn, the lamps lit, and after another interminable interval the prayers were read and the servants dismissed to their rooms. My father compounded and swallowed his nightly jorum of toddy, and then shuffled off to his room, leaving the two of us in the parlour with our nerves in a tingle and our minds full of the most vague and yet terrible apprehensions.

CHAPTER XIV. OF THE VISITOR WHO RAN DOWN THE ROAD IN THE NIGHT-TIME

It was a quarter past ten o’clock by the parlour timepiece when my father went off to his room, and left Esther and myself together. We heard his slow steps dying away up the creaking staircase, until the distant slamming of a door announced that he had reached his sanctum.

The simple oil lamp upon the table threw a weird, uncertain light over the old room, flickering upon the carved oak panelling, and casting strange, fantastic shadows from the high-elbowed, straight-backed furniture. My sister’s white, anxious face stood out in the obscurity with a startling exactness of profile like one of Rembrandt’s portraits.

We sat opposite to each other on either side of the table with no sound breaking the silence save the measured ticking of the clock and the intermittent chirping of a cricket beneath the grate.

There was something awe-inspiring in the absolute stillness. The whistling of a belated peasant upon the high road was a relief to us, and we strained our ears to catch the last of his notes as he plodded steadily homewards.

At first we had made some pretence — she of knitting and I of reading — but we soon abandoned the useless deception, and sat uneasily waiting, starting and glancing at each other with questioning eyes whenever the faggot crackled in the fire or a rat scampered behind the wainscot. There was a heavy electrical feeling in the air, which weighed us down with a foreboding of disaster.

I rose and flung the hall door open to admit the fresh breeze of the night. Ragged clouds swept across the sky, and the moon peeped out at times between their hurrying fringes, bathing the whole countryside in its cold, white radiance. From where I stood in the doorway I could see the edge of the Cloomber wood, though the house itself was only visible from the rising ground some little distance off. At my sister’s suggestion we walked together, she with her shawl over her head, as far as the summit of this elevation, and looked out in the direction of the Hall.

There was no illumination of the windows tonight. From roof to basement not a light twinkled in any part of the great building. Its huge mass loomed up dark and sullen amid the trees which surrounded it, looking more like some giant sarcophagus than a human habitation.

To our overwrought nerves there was something of terror in its mere bulk and its silence. We stood for some little time peering at it through the darkness, and then we made our way back to the parlour again, where we sat waiting — waiting, we knew not for what, and yet with absolute conviction that some terrible experience was in store for us.

It was twelve o'clock or thereabout when my sister suddenly sprang to her feet and held up her fingers to bespeak attention.

"Do you hear nothing?" she asked.

I strained my ears, but without success.

"Come to the door," she cried, with a trembling voice. "Now can you hear anything?"

In the deep silence of the night I distinctly heard a dull, murmuring, clattering sound, continuous apparently, but very faint and low.

"What is it?" I asked, in a subdued voice.

"It's the sound of a man running towards us," she answered, and then, suddenly dropping the last semblance of self-command, she tell upon her knees beside the table and began praying aloud with that frenzied earnestness which intense, overpowering fear can produce, breaking off now and again into half-hysterical whimperings.

I could distinguish the sound clearly enough now to know that her quick, feminine perception had not deceived her, and that it was indeed caused by a running man.

On he came, and on down the high road, his footfalls ringing out clearer and sharper every moment. An urgent messenger he must be, for he neither paused nor slackened his pace.

The quick, crisp rattle was changed suddenly to a dull, muffled murmur. He had reached the point where sand had been recently laid down for a hundred yards or so. In a few moments, however, he was back on hard ground again and his flying feet came nearer and ever nearer.

He must, I reflected, be abreast of the head of the lane now. Would he hold on? Or would he turn down to Branksome?

The thought had hardly crossed my mind when I heard by the difference of the sound that the runner had turned the corner, and that his goal was beyond all question the laird’s house.

Rushing down to the gate of the lawn, I reached it just as our visitor dashed it open and fell into my arms. I could see in the moonlight that it was none other than Mordaunt Heatherstone.

“What has happened?” I cried. “What is amiss, Mordaunt?”

“My father!” he gasped—”my father!”

His hat was gone, his eyes dilated with terror, and his face as bloodless as that of a corpse. I could feel that the hands which clasped my arms were quivering and shaking with emotion.

“You are exhausted,” I said, leading him into the parlour. “Give yourself a moment’s rest before you speak to us. Be calm, man, you are with your best friends.”

I laid him on the old horsehair sofa, while Esther, whose fears had all flown to the winds now that something practical was to be done, dashed some brandy into a tumbler and brought it to him. The stimulant had a marvellous effect upon him, for the colour began to come back into his pale cheeks and the light of recognition in his eyes.

He sat up and took Esther’s hand in both of his, like a man who is waking out of some bad dream and wishes to assure himself that he is really in safety.

“Your father?” I asked. “What of him?”

“He is gone.”

“Gone!”

“Yes; he is gone; and so is Corporal Rufus Smith. We shall never set eyes upon them again.”

“But where have they gone?” I cried. “This is unworthy of you, Mordaunt. What right have we to sit here, allowing our private feelings to overcome us, while there is a possibility of succouring your father? Up, man! Let us follow him. Tell me only what direction he took.”

“It’s no use,” young Heatherstone answered, burying his face in his hands. “Don’t reproach me, West, for you don’t know all the circumstances. What can we do to reverse the tremendous and unknown laws which are acting against us? The blow has long been hanging over us, and now it has fallen. God help us!”

“In Heaven’s name tell me what has happened?” said I excitedly. “We must not yield to despair.”

“We can do nothing until daybreak,” he answered. “We shall then endeavour to obtain some trace of them. It is hopeless at present.”

“And how about Gabriel and Mrs. Heatherstone?” I asked. “Can we not bring them down from the Hall at once? Your poor sister must be distracted with terror.”

“She knows nothing of it,” Mordaunt answered. “She sleeps at the other side of the house, and has not heard or seen anything. As to my poor mother, she has expected some such event for so long a time that it has not come upon her as a surprise. She is, of course, overwhelmed with grief, but would, I think, prefer to be left to herself for the present. Her firmness and composure should be a lesson to me, but I am constitutionally excitable, and this catastrophe coming after our long period of suspense deprived me of my very reason for a time.”

“If we can do nothing until the morning,” I said, “you have time to tell us all that has occurred.”

“I will do so,” he answered, rising and holding his shaking hands to the fire. “You know already that we have had reason for some time — for many years in fact — to fear that a terrible retribution was hanging over my father’s head for a certain action of his early life. In this action he was associated with the man known as Corporal Rufus Smith, so that the fact of the latter finding his way to my father was a warning to us that the time had come, and that this 5th of October — the anniversary of the misdeed — would be the day of its atonement. I told you of our fears in my letter, and, if I am not mistaken, my father also had some conversation with you, John, upon the subject. When I saw yesterday morning that he had hunted out the old uniform which he had always retained since he wore it in the Afghan war, I was sure that the end was at hand, and that our forebodings would be realised.

“He appeared to be more composed in the afternoon than I have seen him for years, and spoke freely of his life in India and of the incidents of his youth. About nine o’clock he requested us to go up to our own rooms, and locked us in there — a precaution which he frequently took when the dark fit way upon him. It was always his endeavour, poor soul, to keep us clear of the curse which had fallen upon his own unfortunate head. Before parting from us he tenderly embraced my mother and Gabriel, and he afterwards followed me to my room, where he clasped my hand affectionately and gave into my charge a small packet addressed to yourself.”

“To me?” I interrupted.

“To you. I shall fulfill my commission when I have told you my story. I conjured him to allow me to sit up with him and share any danger which might arise, but he implored me with irresistible earnestness not to add to his troubles by thwarting his arrangements. Seeing that I was really distressing him by my pertinacity, I at last allowed him to close the door and to turn the key upon the outside. I shall always reproach myself for my want of firmness. But what can you do when your own father refuses your assistance or co-operation? You cannot force yourself upon him.”

“I am sure that you did all you could do,” my sister said.

“I meant to, dear Esther, but, God help me, it was hard to tell what was right. He left me, and I heard his footsteps die away down the long corridor. It was then about ten o’clock, or a little after. For a time I paced up and down the room, and then, carrying the lamp to the head of my bed, I lay down without undressing, reading St. Thomas a Kempis, and praying from my heart that the night might pass safely over us.

“I had at last fallen into a troubled sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a loud, sonorous sound ringing in my ears. I sat up bewildered, but all was silent again. The lamp was burning low, and my watch showed me that it was going on to midnight. I blundered to my feet, and was striking a match with the intention of lighting the candles, when the sharp, vehement cry broke out again so loud and so clear that it might have been in the very room with me. My chamber is in the front of the house, while those of my mother and sister are at the back, so that I am the only one who commands a view of the avenue.

“Rushing to the window I drew the blind aside and looked out. You know that the gravel-drive opens up so as to form a broad stretch immediately in front of the house. Just in the centre of this clear space there stood three men looking up at the house.

“The moon shone full upon them, glistening on their upturned eyeballs, and by its light I could see that they were swarthy-faced and black-haired, of a type that I was familiar with among the Sikhs and Afridis. Two of them were thin, with eager, aesthetic countenances, while the third was kinglike and majestic, with a noble figure and flowing beard.”

“Ram Singh!” I ejaculated.

“What, you know of them?” exclaimed Mordaunt in great surprise. “You have met them?”

“I know of them. They are Buddhist priests,” I answered, “but go on.”

“They stood in a line,” he continued, “sweeping their arms upwards and downwards, while their lips moved as if repeating some prayer or incantation. Suddenly they ceased to gesticulate, and broke out for the third time into the wild, weird, piercing cry which had roused me from my slumber. Never shall I forget that shrill, dreadful summons swelling and reverberating through the silent night with an intensity of sound which is still ringing in my ears.

“As it died slowly away, there was a rasping and creaking as of keys and bolts, followed by the clang of an opening door and the clatter of hurrying feet. From my window I saw my father and Corporal Rufus Smith rush frantically out of the house hatless and unkempt, like men who are obeying a sudden and overpowering impulse. The three strangers laid no hands on them, but all five swept swiftly away down the avenue and vanished among the trees. I am positive that no force was used, or constraint of any visible kind, and yet I am as sure that my poor father and his companion were helpless prisoners as it I bad seen them dragged away in manacles.

“All this took little time in the acting. From the first summons which disturbed my sleep to the last shadowy glimpse which I had of them between the tree trunks could hardly have occupied more than five minutes of actual time. So sudden was it, and so strange, that when the drama was over and they were gone I could have believed that it was all some terrible nightmare, some delusion, had I not felt that the impression was too real, too vivid, to be imputed to fancy.

“I threw my whole weight against my bedroom door in the hope of forcing the lock. It stood firm for a while, but I flung myself upon it again and again, until something snapped and I found myself in the passage.

“My first thought was for my mother, I rushed to her room and turned the key in her door. The moment that I did so she stepped out into the corridor in her dressing-gown, and held up a warning finger.

“‘No noise, she said,’ Gabriel is asleep. They have been called away?’

“‘They have,’ I answered.

“‘God’s will be done!’ she cried. ‘Your poor father will be happier in the next world than he has ever been in this. Thank Heaven that Gabriel is asleep. I gave her chloral in her cocoa.’

“‘What am I to do?’ I said distractedly.

“‘Where have they gone? How can I help him? We cannot let him go from us like this, or leave these men to do what they will with him. Shall I ride into Wigtown and arouse the police?’

“‘Anything rather than that’, my mother said earnestly. ‘He has begged me again and again to avoid it. My son, we shall never set eyes upon your father again. You may marvel at my dry eyes, but it you knew as I know the peace which death would bring him, you could not find it in your heart to mourn for him. All pursuit is, I feel, vain, and yet some pursuit there must be. Let it be as private as possible. We cannot serve him better than by consulting his wishes.’

“‘But every minute is precious,’ I cried. ‘Even now he may be calling upon us to rescue him from the clutches of those dark-skinned fiends.’

“The thought so maddened me that I rushed out of the house and down to the high road, but once there I had no indication in which direction to turn. The whole wide moor lay before me, without a sign of movement upon its broad expanse. I listened, but not a sound broke the perfect stillness of the night.

“It was then, my dear friends, as I stood, not knowing in which direction to turn, that the horror and responsibility broke full upon me. I felt that I was combating against forces of which I knew nothing. All was strange and dark and terrible.

“The thought of you, and of the help which I might look for from your advice and assistance, was a beacon of hope to me. At Branksome, at least, I should receive sympathy, and, above all, directions as to what I should do, for my mind is in such a whirl that I cannot trust my own judgment. My mother was content to be alone, my sister asleep, and no prospect of being able to do anything until daybreak. Under those circumstances what more natural than that I should fly to you as fast as my feet would carry me? You have a clear head, Jack; speak out, man, and tell me what I should do. Esther, what should I do?”

He turned from one to the other of us with outstretched hands and eager, questioning eyes.

“You can do nothing while the darkness lasts,” I answered. “We must report the matter to the Wigtown police, but we need not send our message to them until we are actually starting upon the search, so as to comply with the law and yet have a private investigation, as your mother wishes. John Fullarton, over the hill, has a lurcher dog which is as good as a bloodhound.

If we set him on the general’s trail he will run him down if he had to follow him to John o’ Groat’s.”

“It is terrible to wait calmly here while he may need our assistance.”

“I fear our assistance could under any circumstances do him little good. There are forces at work here which are beyond human intervention. Besides, there is no alternative. We have, apparently, no possible clue as to the direction which they have taken, and for us to wander aimlessly over the moor in the darkness would be to waste the strength which may be more profitably used in the morning. It will be daylight by five o’clock. In an hour or so we can walk over the hill together and get Fullarton’s dog.”

“Another hour!” Mordaunt groaned, “every minute seems an age.”

“Lie down on the sofa and rest yourself,” said I. “You cannot serve your father better than by laying up all the strength you can, for we may have a weary trudge before us. But you mentioned a packet which the general had intended for me.”

“It is here,” he answered, drawing a small, flat parcel from his pocket and handing it over to me, “you will find, no doubt, that it will explain all which has been so mysterious.”

The packet was sealed at each end with black wax, bearing the impress of the flying griffin, which I knew to be the general’s crest. It was further secured by a band of broad tape, which I cut with my pocket-knife. Across the outside was written in bold handwriting: “J. Fothergill West, Esq.,” and underneath: “To be handed to that gentleman in the event of the disappearance or decease of Major-General J. B. Heatherstone, V.C., C.B., late of the Indian Army.”

So at last I was to know the dark secret which had cast a shadow over our lives. Here in my hands I held the solution of it.

With eager fingers I broke the seals and undid the wrapper. A note and a small bundle of discoloured paper lay within. I drew the lamp over to me and opened the former. It was dated the preceding afternoon, and ran in this way:

MY DEAR WEST, —

I should have satisfied your very natural curiosity on the subject which we have had occasion to talk of more than once, but I refrained for your own sake. I knew by sad experience how unsettling and unnerving it is to be for ever waiting for a catastrophe which you are convinced must befall, and which you can neither avert nor accelerate.

Though it affects me specially, as being the person most concerned, I am still conscious that the natural sympathy which I have observed in you, and your regard for Gabriel’s father, would both combine to render you unhappy if you knew the hopelessness and yet the vagueness of the fate which threatens me. I feared to disturb your mind, and I was therefore silent, though at some cost to myself, for my isolation has not been the least of the troubles which have weighed me down.

Many signs, however, and chief among them the presence of the Buddhists upon the coast as described by you this morning, have convinced me that the weary waiting is at last over and that the hour of retribution is at hand. Why I should have been allowed to live nearly forty years after my offence is more than I can understand, but it is possible that those who had command over my fate know that such a life is the greatest of all penalties to me.

Never for an hour, night or day, have they suffered me to forget that they have marked me down as their victim. Their accursed astral bell has been ringing my knell for two-score years, reminding me ever that there is no spot upon earth where I can hope to be in safety. Oh, the peace, the blessed peace of dissolution! Come what may on the other side of the tomb, I shall at least be quit of that thrice terrible sound.

There is no need for me to enter into the wretched business again, or to detail at any length the events of October 5th, 1841, and the various circumstances which led up to the death of Ghoolab Shah, the arch adept.

I have torn a sheaf of leaves from my old journal, in which you will find a bald account of the matter, and an independent narrative was furnished by. Sir Edward Elliott, of the Artillery, to the Star of India some years ago — in which, however, the names were suppressed.

I have reason to believe that many people, even among those who knew India well, thought that Sir Edward was romancing, and that he had evolved his incidents from his imagination. The few faded sheets which I send you will show you that this is not the case, and that our men of science must recognise powers and laws which can and have been used by man, but which are unknown to European civilisation.

I do not wish to whine or to whimper, but I cannot help feeling that I have had hard measure dealt me in this world. I would not, God knows, take the life of any man, far less an aged one, in cold blood. My temper and nature, however, were always fiery and headstrong, and in action when my blood is up, I have no knowledge of what I am about. Neither the corporal nor I would have laid a finger upon Ghoolab Shah had we not seen that the tribesmen were rallying behind him. Well, well, it is an old story now, and there is no profit in discussing it. May no other poor fellow ever have the same evil fortune!

I have written a short supplement to the statements contained in my journal for your information and that of any one else who may chance to be interested in the matter.

And now, adieu! Be a good husband to Gabriel, and, if your sister be brave enough to marry into such a devil-ridden family as ours, by all means let her do so. I have left enough to keep my poor wife in comfort.

When she rejoins me I should wish it to be equally divided between the children. If you hear that I am gone, do not pity, but congratulate

Your unfortunate friend,

JOHN BERTHIER HEATHERSTONE.

I threw aside the letter and picked up the roll of blue foolscap which contained the solution of the mystery. It was all ragged and frayed at the inner edge, with traces of gum and thread still adhering to it, to show that it had been torn out of a strongly bound volume. The ink with which it had been written was faded somewhat, but across the head of the first page was inscribed in bold, clear characters, evidently of later date than the rest: “Journal of Lieutenant J. B. Heatherstone in the Thull Valley during the autumn of 1841,” and then underneath:

This extract contains some account of the events of the first week of October of that year, including the skirmish of the Terada ravine and the death of the man Ghoolab Shah.

I have the narrative lying before me now, and I copy it verbatim. If it contains some matter which has no direct bearing upon the question at issue, I can only say that I thought it better to publish what is irrelevant than by cutting and clipping to lay the whole statement open to the charge of having been tampered with.

CHAPTER XV. THE DAY-BOOK OF JOHN BERTHIER HEATHERSTONE

Thull Valley, Oct. 1, 1841. — The Fifth Bengal and Thirty-third Queen’s passed through this morning on their way to the Front. Had tiffin with the Bengalese. Latest news from home that two attempts had been made on the Queen’s life by semi-maniacs named Francis and Bean.

It promises to be a hard winter. The snow-line has descended a thousand feet upon the peaks, but the passes will be open for weeks to come, and, even if they were blocked, we have established so many depots in the country that Pollock and Nott will have no difficulty in holding their own. They shall not meet with the fate of Elphinstone’s army. One such tragedy is enough for a century.

Elliott of the Artillery, and I, are answerable for the safety of the communications for a distance of twenty miles or more, from the mouth of the valley to this side of the wooden bridge over the Lotar. Goodenough, of the Rifles, is responsible on the other side, and Lieutenant-Colonel Sidney Herbert of the Engineers, has a general supervision over both sections.

Our force is not strong enough for the work which has to be done. I have a company and a half of our own regiment, and a squadron of Sowars, who are of no use at all among the rocks. Elliott has three guns, but several of his men are down with cholera, and I doubt if he has enough to serve more than two.

(Note: capsicum for cholera — tried it)

On the other hand, each convoy is usually provided with some guard of its own, though it is often absurdly inefficient. These valleys and ravines which branch out of the main pass are alive with Afridis and Pathans, who are keen robbers as well as religious fanatics. I wonder they don’t swoop down on some of our caravans. They could plunder them and get back to their mountain fastnesses before we could interfere or overtake them. Nothing but fear will restrain them.

If I had my way I would hang one at the mouth of every ravine as a warning to the gang. They are personifications of the devil to look at, hawk-nosed, full-lipped, with a mane of tangled hair, and most Satanic sneer. No news today from the Front.

October 2. — I must really ask Herbert for another company at the very least. I am convinced that the communications would be cut off if any serious attack were made upon us.

Now, this morning two urgent messages were sent me from two different points more than sixteen miles apart, to say that there were signs of a descent of the tribes.

Elliott, with one gun and the Sowars, went to the farther ravine, while I, with the infantry, hurried to the other, but we found it was a false alarm. I saw no signs of the Hillmen, and though we were greeted by a splutter of jezail bullets we were unable to capture any of the rascals.

Woe betide them if they fall into my hands. I would give them as short a shrift as ever a Highland cateran got from a Glasgow judge. These continued alarms may mean nothing or they may be an indication that the Hillmen are assembling and have some plan in view.

We have had no news from the Front for some time, but to-day a convoy of wounded came through with the intelligence that Nott had taken Ghuznee. I hope he warmed up any of the black rascals that fell into his hands.

No word of Pollock.

An elephant battery came up from the Punjab, looking in very good condition. There were several convalescents with it going up to rejoin their regiments. Knew none of them except Mostyn of the Hussars and young Blakesley, who was my fag at Charterhouse, and whom I have never seen since.

Punch and cigars *al fresco* up to eleven o’clock.

Letters to-day from Wills & Co. about their little bill forwarded on from Delhi. Thought a campaign freed a man from these annoyances. Wills says in his note that, since his written applications have been in vain, he must call upon me in person. If he calls upon me now he will assuredly be the boldest and most persevering of tailors.

A line from Calcutta Daisy and another from Hobhouse to say that Matilda comes in for all the money under the will. I am glad of it.

October 3. — Glorious news from the Front today. Barclay, of the Madras Cavalry, galloped through with dispatches. Pollock entered Cabul triumphantly on the 16th of last month, and, better still, Lady Sale has been rescued by Shakespear, and brought safe into the British camp, together with the other hostages. *Te Deum laudamus!*

This should end the whole wretched business — this and the sack of the city. I hope Pollock won't be squeamish, or truckle to the hysterical party at home. The towns should be laid in ashes and the fields sown with salt. Above all, the Residency and the Palace must come down. So shall Burnes, McNaghten, and many another gallant fellow know that his countrymen could avenge if they could not save him!

It is hard when others are gaining glory and experience to be stuck in this miserable valley. I have been out of it completely, bar a few petty skirmishes. However, we may see some service yet.

A jemidar of ours brought in a Hillman today, who says that the tribes are massing in the Terada ravine, ten miles to the north of us, and intend attacking the next convoy. We can't rely on information of this sort, but there may prove to be some truth in it. Proposed to shoot our informant, so as to prevent his playing the double traitor and reporting our proceedings. Elliott demurred.

If you are making war you should throw no chance away. I hate half-and-half measures. The Children of Israel seem to have been the only people who ever carried war to its logical conclusion — except Cromwell in Ireland. Made a compromise at last by which the man is to be detained as a prisoner and executed if his information prove to be false. I only hope we get a fair chance of showing what we can do.

No doubt these fellows at the Front will have C.B.'s and knighthoods showering upon them thick and fast, while we poor devils, who have had most of the responsibility and anxiety, will be passed over completely. Elliott has a whitlow.

The last convoy left us a large packet of sauces, but as they forgot to leave anything to eat with them, we have handed them over to the Sowars, who drink them out of their pannikins as if they were liqueurs. We hear that another large convoy may be expected from the plains in the course of a day or two. Took nine to four on Cleopatra for the Calcutta Cup.

October 4. — The Hillmen really mean business this time, I think. We have had two of our spies come in this morning with the same account about the gathering in the Terada quarter. That old rascal Zemaun is at the head of it, and I had recommended the Government to present him with a telescope in return for his neutrality! There will be no Zemaun to present it to if I can but lay hands upon him.

We expect the convoy tomorrow morning, and need anticipate no attack until it comes up, for these fellows fight for plunder, not for glory, though, to do them justice, they have plenty of pluck when they get started. I have devised an excellent plan, and it has Elliott's hearty support. By Jove! if we can only manage it, it will be as pretty a ruse as ever I heard of.

Our intention is to give out that we are going down the valley to meet the convoy and to block the mouth of a pass from which we profess to expect an attack. Very good. We shall make a night-march to-night and reach their camp. Once there I shall conceal my two hundred men in the waggons and travel up with the convoy again.

Our friends the enemy, having heard that we intended to go south, and seeing the caravan going north without us, will naturally swoop down upon it under the impression that we are twenty miles away. We shall teach them such a lesson that they would as soon think of stopping a thunderbolt as of interfering again with one of Her Britannic Majesty's provision trains. I am all on thorns to be off.

Elliott has rigged up two of his guns so ingeniously that they look more like costermongers' barrows than anything else. To see artillery ready for action in the convoy might arouse suspicion. The artillerymen will be in the waggons next the guns, all ready to unlimber and open fire. Infantry in front and rear. Have told our confidential and discreet Sepoy servants the plan which we do not intend to adopt. N.B. — If you wish a thing to be noised over a whole province always whisper it under a vow of secrecy to your confidential native servant.

8.45 P.M. — Just starting for the convoy. May luck go with us!

October 5. — Seven o'clock in the evening. *Io triumphe!* Crown us with laurel — Elliott and myself! Who can compare with us as vermin killers?

I have only just got back, tired and weary, stained with blood and dust, but I have sat down before either washing or changing to have the satisfaction of seeing our deeds set forth in black and white — if only in my private log for no eye but my own. I shall describe it all fully as a preparation for an official account, which must be drawn up when Elliott gets back. Billy Dawson used to say that there were three degrees of comparison — a prevarication, a lie, and an official account. We at least cannot exaggerate our success, for it would be impossible to add anything to it.

We set out, then, as per programme, and came upon the camp near the head of the valley. They had two weak companies of the 54th with them who might no doubt have held their own with warning, but an unexpected rush of wild Hillmen is a very difficult thing to stand against. With our reinforcements, however, and on our guard, we might defy the rascals.

Chamberlain was in command — a fine young fellow. We soon made him understand the situation, and were all ready for a start by daybreak though his waggons were so full that we were compelled to leave several tons of fodder behind in order to make room for my Sepoys and for the artillery.

About five o'clock we inspanned, to use an Africanism, and by six we were well on our way, with our escort as straggling and unconcerned as possible — as helpless-looking a caravan as ever invited attack.

I could soon see that it was to be no false alarm this time, and that the tribes really meant business.

From my post of observation, under the canvas screens of one of the waggons, I could make out turbaned heads popping up to have a look at us from among the rocks, and an occasional scout hurrying northward with the news of our approach.

It was not, however, until we came abreast of the Terada Pass, a gloomy defile bounded by gigantic cliffs, that the Afridis began to show in force, though they had ambushed themselves so cleverly that, had we not been keenly on the look-out for them, we might have walked right into the trap. As it was, the convoy halted, upon which the Hillmen, seeing that they were observed, opened a heavy but ill-directed fire upon us.

I had asked Chamberlain to throw out his men in skirmishing order, and to give them directions to retreat slowly upon the waggons so as to draw the Afridis on. The ruse succeeded to perfection.

As the redcoats steadily retired, keeping behind cover as much as possible, the enemy followed them up with yells of exultation, springing from rock to rock, waving their jezails in the air, and howling like a pack of demons.

With their black, contorted, mocking faces, their fierce gestures, and their fluttering garments, they would have made a study for any painter who wished to portray Milton's conception of the army of the damned.

From every side they pressed in until, seeing, as they thought, nothing between them and victory, they left the shelter of the rocks and came rushing down, a furious, howling throng, with the green banner of the Prophet in their van.

Now was our chance, and gloriously we utilised it.

From every cranny and slit of the waggons came a blaze of fire, every shot of which told among the close-packed mob. Two or three score rolled over like rabbits and the rest reeled for a moment, and then, with their chiefs at their head, came on again in a magnificent rush.

It was useless, however, for undisciplined men to attempt to face such a well-directed fire. The leaders were bowled over, and the others, after hesitating for a few moments, turned and made for the rocks.

It was our turn now to assume the offensive. The guns were unlimbered and grape poured into them, while our little infantry force advanced at the double, shooting and stabbing all whom they overtook.

Never had I known the tide of battle turn so rapidly and so decisively. The sullen retreat became a flight, and the flight a panic-stricken rout, until there was nothing left of the tribesmen except a scattered, demoralised rabble flying wildly to their native fastnesses for shelter and protection.

I was by no means inclined to let them off cheaply now that I had them in my power. On the contrary, I determined to teach them such a lesson that the sight of a single scarlet uniform would in future be a passport in itself.

We followed hard upon the track of the fugitives and entered the Terada defile at their very heels. Having detached Chamberlain and Elliott with a company on either side to protect my wings, I pushed on with my Sepoys and a handful of artillerymen, giving the enemy no time to rally or to recover themselves. We were so handicapped, however, by our stiff European uniforms and by our want of practice in climbing, that we should have been unable to overtake any of the mountaineers had it not been for a fortunate accident.

There is a smaller ravine which opens into the main pass, and in their hurry and confusion some of the fugitives rushed down this. I saw sixty or seventy of them turn down, but I should have passed them by and continued in pursuit of the main body had not one of my scouts come rustling up to inform me that the smaller ravine was a *cul-de-sac,* and that the Afridis who had gone up it had no possible means of getting out again except by cutting their way through our ranks.

Here was an opportunity of striking terror into the tribes. Leaving Chamberlain and Elliott to continue the pursuit of the main body, I wheeled my Sepoys into the narrow path and proceeded slowly down it in extended order, covering the whole ground from cliff to cliff. Not a jackal could have passed us unseen. The rebels were caught like rats in a trap.

The defile in which we found ourselves was the most gloomy and majestic that I have ever seen. On either side naked precipices rose sheer up for a thousand feet or more, converging upon each other so as to leave a very narrow slit of daylight above us, which was further reduced by the feathery fringe of palm trees and aloes which hung over each lip of the chasm.

The cliffs were not more than a couple of hundred yards apart at the entrance, but as we advanced they grew nearer and nearer, until a half company in close order could hardly march abreast.

A sort of twilight reigned in this strange valley, and the dim, uncertain light made the great, basalt rocks loom up vague and fantastic. There was no path, and the ground was most uneven, but I pushed on briskly, cautioning my fellows to have their fingers on their triggers, for I could see that we were nearing the point where the two cliffs would form an acute angle with each other.

At last we came in sight of the place. A great pile of boulders was heaped up at the very end of the pass, and among these our fugitives were skulking, entirely demoralised apparently, and incapable of resistance. They were useless as prisoners, and it was out of the question to let them go, so there was no choice but to polish them off.

Waving my sword, I was leading my men on, when we had a most dramatic interruption of a sort which I have seen once or twice on the boards of Drury Lane, but never in real life.

In the side of the cliff, close to the pile of stones where the Hillmen were making their last stand, there was a cave which looked more like the lair of some wild beast than a human habitation.

Out of this dark archway there suddenly emerged an old man — such a very, very old man that all the other veterans whom I have seen were as chickens compared with him. His hair and beard were both as white as snow, and each reached more than half-way to his waist. His face was wrinkled and brown and ebony, a cross between a monkey and a mummy, and so thin and emaciated were his shrivelled limbs that you would hardly have given him credit for having any vitality left, were it not for his eyes, which glittered and sparkled with excitement, like two diamonds in a setting of mahogany.

This apparition came rushing out of the cave, and, throwing himself between the fugitives and our fellows, motioned us back with as imperious a sweep of the hand as ever an emperor used to his slaves.

“Men of blood,” he cried, in a voice of thunder, speaking excellent English, too—”this is a place for prayer and meditation, not for murder. Desist, lest the wrath of the gods fall upon you.”

“Stand aside, old man,” I shouted. “You will meet with a hurt if you don’t get out of the way.”

I could see that the Hillmen were taking heart, and that some of my Sepoys were flinching, as if they did not relish this new enemy. Clearly, I must act promptly if I wished to complete our success.

I dashed forward at the head of the white artillerymen who had stuck to me. The old fellow rushed at us with his arms out as if to stop us, but it was not time to stick at trifles, so I passed my sword through his body at the same moment that one of the gunners brought his carbine down upon his head. He dropped instantly, and the Hillmen, at the sight of his fall, set up the most unearthly howl of horror and consternation.

The Sepoys, who had been inclined to hang back, came on again the moment he was disposed of, and it did not take us long to consummate our victory. Hardly a man of the enemy got out of the defile alive.

What could Hannibal or Caesar have done more? Our own loss in the whole affair has been insignificant — three killed and about fifteen wounded. Got their banner, a green wisp of a thing with a sentence of the Koran engraved upon it.

I looked, after the action, for the old chap, but his body had disappeared, though how or whither I have no conception. His blood be upon his own head! He would be alive now if he had not interfered, as the constables say at home, “with an officer in the execution of his duty.”

The scouts tell me that his name was Ghoolab Shah, and that he was one of the highest and holiest of the Buddhists. He had great fame in the district as a prophet and worker of miracles — hence the hubbub when he was cut down. They tell me that he was living in this very cave when Tamerlane passed this way in 1399, with a lot more bosh of that sort.

I went into the cave, and how any man could live in it a week is a mystery to me, for it was little more than four feet high, and as damp and dismal a grotto as ever was seen. A wooden settle and a rough table were the sole furniture, with a lot of parchment scrolls with hieroglyphics.

Well, he has gone where he will learn that the gospel of peace and good will is superior to all his Pagan lore. Peace go with him.

Elliott and Chamberlain never caught the main body — I knew they wouldn’t — so the honours of the day rest with me. I ought to get a step for it, anyhow, and perhaps, who knows? some mention in the *Gazette*. What a lucky chance! I think Zemaun deserves his telescope after all for giving it to me. Shall have something to eat now, for I am half starved. Glory is an excellent thing, but you cannot live upon it.

October 6, 11 A.M. — Let me try to set down as calmly and as accurately as I can all that occurred last night. I have never been a dreamer or a visionary, so I can rely upon my own senses, though I am bound to say that if any other fellow had told me the same thing I should have doubted him. I might even have suspected that I was deceived at the time had I not heard the bell since. However, I must narrate what happened.

Elliott was in my tent with me having a quiet cheroot until about ten o’clock. I then walked the rounds with my jemidar, and having seen that all was right I turned in a little before eleven.

I was just dropping off to sleep, for I was dog-tired after the day’s work, when I was aroused by some slight noise, and, looking round, I saw a man dressed in Asiatic costume standing at the entrance of my tent. He was motionless when I saw him, and he had his eyes fixed upon me with a solemn and stern expression.

My first thought was that the fellow was some Ghazi or Afghan fanatic who had stolen in with the intention of stabbing me, and with this idea in my mind I had all the will to spring from my couch and defend myself, but the power was unaccountably lacking.

An overpowering languor and want of energy possessed me. Had I seen the dagger descending upon my breast I could not have made an effort to avert it. I suppose a bird when it is under the influence of a snake feels very much as I did in the presence of this gloomy-faced stranger. My mind was clear enough, but my body was as torpid as though I were still asleep.

I shut my eyes once or twice and tried to persuade myself that the whole thing was a delusion, but every time that I opened them there was the man still regarding me with the same stony, menacing stare.

The silence became unendurable. I felt that I must overcome my languor so far as to address him. I am not a nervous man, and I never knew before what Virgil meant when he wrote “adhoesit faucibus ora.” At last I managed to stammer out a few words, asking the intruder who he was and what he wanted.

“Lieutenant Heatherstone,” he answered, speaking slowly and gravely, “you have committed this day the foulest sacrilege and the greatest crime which it is possible for man to do. You have slain one of the thrice blessed and reverend ones, an arch adept of the first degree, an elder brother who has trod the higher path for more years than you have numbered months. You have cut him off at a time when his labours promised to reach a climax and when he was about to attain a height of occult knowledge which would have brought man one step nearer to his Creator. All this you have done without excuse, without provocation, at a time when he was pleading the cause of the helpless and distressed. Listen now to me, John Heatherstone.

“When first the occult sciences were pursued many thousands of years ago, it was found by the learned that the short tenure of human existence was too limited to allow a man to attain the loftiest heights of inner life. The inquirers of those days directed their energies in the first place, therefore, to the lengthening of their own days in order that they might have more scope for improvement.

“By their knowledge of the secret laws of Nature they were enabled to fortify their bodies against disease and old age. It only remained to protect themselves against the assaults of wicked and violent men who are ever ready to destroy what is wiser and nobler than themselves. There was no direct means by which this protection could be effected, but it was in some measure attained by arranging the occult forces in such a way that a terrible and unavoidable retribution should await the offender.

“It was irrevocably ordained by laws which cannot be reversed that any one who should shed the blood of a brother who had attained a certain degree of sanctity should be a doomed man. Those laws are extant to this day, John Heatherstone, and you have placed yourself in their power. King or emperor would be helpless before the forces which you have called into play. What hope, then, is there for you?

“In former days these laws acted so instantaneously that the slayer perished with his victim. It was judged afterwards that this prompt retribution prevented the offender from having time to realise the enormity of his offence.

"It was therefore ordained that in all such cases the retribution should be left in the hands of the *chelas*, or immediate disciples of the holy man, with power to extend or shorten it at their will, exacting it either at the time or at any future anniversary of the day when the crime was committed.

"Why punishment should come on those days only it does not concern you to know. Suffice it that you are the murderer of Ghoolab Shah, the thrice blessed, and that I am the senior of his three *chelas* commissioned to avenge his death.

"It is no personal matter between us. Amid our studies we have no leisure or inclination for personal matters. It is an immutable law, and it is as impossible for us to relax it as it is for you to escape from it Sooner or later we shall come to you and claim your life in atonement for the one which you have taken.

"The same fate shall be meted out to the wretched soldier, Smith, who, though less guilty than yourself, has incurred the same penalty by raising his sacrilegious hand against the chosen of Buddha. If your life is prolonged, it is merely that you may have time to repent of your misdeed and to feel the full force of your punishment.

"And lest you should be tempted to cast it out of your mind and to forget it, our bell — our astral bell, the use of which is one of our occult secrets — shall ever remind you of what have been and what is to be. You shall hear it by day and you shall hear it by night, and it will be a sign to you that do what you may and go where you will, you can never shake yourself clear of the *chelas* of Ghoolab Shah.

"You will never see me more, accursed one, until the day when we come for you. Live in fear, and in that anticipation which is worse than death."

With a menacing wave of the hand the figure turned and swept out of my tent into the darkness. The instant that the fellow disappeared from my sight I recovered from my lethargy which had fallen upon me. Springing to my feet, I rushed to the opening and looked out. A Sepoy sentry was standing leaning upon his musket, a few paces off.

"You dog," I said in Hindustani. "What do you mean by letting people disturb me in this way?"

The man stared at me in amazement. "Has any one disturbed the sahib?" he asked.

"This instant — this moment. You must have seen him pass out of my tent."

"Surely the Burra Sahib is mistaken," the man answered, respectfully but firmly. "I have been here for an hour, and no one has passed from the tent."

Puzzled and disconcerted, I was sitting by the side of my couch wondering whether the whole thing were a delusion, brought on by the nervous excitement of our skirmish, when a new marvel overtook me. From over my head there suddenly sounded a sharp, tinkling sound, like that produced by an empty glass when flipped by the nail, only louder and more intense.

I looked up, but nothing was to be seen. I examined the whole interior of the tent carefully, but without discovering any cause for the strange sound. At last, worn out with fatigue, I gave the mystery up, and throwing myself on the couch was soon fast asleep.

When I awoke this morning I was inclined to put the whole of my yesternight's experiences down to imagination, but I was soon disabused of the idea, for I had hardly risen before the same strange sound was repeated in my very ear as loudly, and to all appearance as causelesly, as before. What it is or where it comes from I cannot conceive. I have not heard it since.

Can the fellow's threats have something in them and this be the warning bell of which he spoke? Surely it is impossible. Yet his manner was indescribably impressive.

I have tried to set down what he said as accurately as I can, but I fear I have omitted a good deal. What is to be the end of this strange affair? I must go in for a course of religion and holy water. Not a word to Chamberlain or Elliott. They tell me I am looking like a ghost this morning.

Evening. — Have managed to compare notes with Gunner Rufus Smith of the Artillery, who knocked the old fellow over with the butt of his gun. His experience has been the same as mine. He has heard the sound, too. What is the meaning of it all? My brain is in a whirl.

Oct. 10 (four days later). — God help us!

This last laconic entry terminated the journal. It seemed to me that, coming as it did after four days' complete silence, it told a clearer tale of shaken nerve and a broken spirit than could any more elaborate narrative. Pinned on to the journal was a supplementary statement which had evidently been recently added by the general.

“From that day to this,” it said, “I have had no night or day free from the intrusion of that dreadful sound with its accompanying train of thought. Time and custom have brought me no relief, but on the contrary, as the years pass over my head my physical strength decreases and my nerves become less able to bear up against the continual strain.

“I am a broken man in mind and body. I live in a state of tension, always straining my ears for the hated sound, afraid to converse with my fellows for fear of exposing my dreadful condition to them, with no comfort or hope of comfort on this side of the grave. I should be willing. Heaven knows, to die, and yet as each 5th of October comes round, I am prostrated with fear because I do not know what strange and terrible experience may be in store for me.

“Forty years have passed since I slew Ghoolab Shah, and forty times I have gone through all the horrors of death, without attaining the blessed peace which lies beyond.

“I have no means of knowing in what shape my fate will come upon me. I have immured myself in this lonely country, and surrounded myself with barriers, because in my weaker moments my instincts urge me to take some steps for self-protection, but I know well in my heart how futile it all is. They must come quickly now, for I grow old, and Nature will forestall them unless they make haste.

“I take credit to myself that I have kept my hands off the prussic-acid or opium bottle. It has always been in my power to checkmate my occult persecutors in that way, but I have ever held that a man in this world cannot desert his post until he has been relieved in due course by the authorities. I have had no scruples, however, about exposing myself to danger, and, during the Sikh and Sepoy wars, I did all that a man could do to court Death. He passed me by, however, and picked out many a young fellow to whom life was only opening and who had everything to live for, while I survived to win crosses and honours which had lost all relish for me.

“Well, well, these things cannot depend upon chance, and there is no doubt some deep reason for it all.

“One compensation Providence has made me in the shape of a true and faithful wife, to whom I told my dreadful secret before the wedding, and who nobly consented to share my lot. She has lifted half the burden from my shoulders, but with the effect, poor soul, of crushing her own life beneath its weight!

"My children, too, have been a comfort to me. Mordaunt knows all, or nearly all. Gabriel we have endeavoured to keep in the dark, though we cannot prevent her from knowing that there is something amiss.

"I should like this statement to be shown to Dr. John Easterling of Stranraer. He heard on one occasion this haunting sound. My sad experience may show him that I spoke truth when I said that there was much knowledge in the world which has never found its way to England.

"J. B. HEATHERSTONE."

It was going on for dawn by the time that I had finished this extraordinary narrative, to which my sister and Mordaunt Heatherstone listened with the most absorbed attention. Already we could see through the window that the stars had begun to fade and a grey light to appear in the east. The crofter who owned the lurcher dog lived a couple of miles off, so it was time for us to be on foot. Leaving Esther to tell my father the story in such fashion as she might, we thrust some food in our pockets and set off upon our solemn and eventful errand.

CHAPTER XVI. AT THE HOLE OF CREE

It was dark enough when we started to make it no easy matter to find our way across the moors, but as we advanced it grew lighter and lighter, until by the time we reached Fullarton’s cabin it was broad daylight.

Early as it was, he was up and about, for the Wigtown peasants are an early rising race. We explained our mission to him in as few words as possible, and having made his bargain — what Scot ever neglected that preliminary? — he agreed not only to let us have the use of his dog but to come with us himself.

Mordaunt, in his desire for privacy, would have demurred at this arrangement, but I pointed out to him that we had no idea what was in store for us, and the addition of a strong, able-bodied man to our party might prove to be of the utmost consequence.

Again, the dog was less likely to give us trouble if we had its master to control it. My arguments carried the day, and the biped accompanied us as well as his four-footed companion.

There was some little similarity between the two, for the man was a towsy-headed fellow with a great mop of yellow hair and a straggling beard, while the dog was of the long-haired, unkempt breed looking like an animated bundle of oakum.

All our way to the Hall its owner kept retailing instances of the creature’s sagacity and powers of scent, which, according to his account, were little less than miraculous. His anecdotes had a poor audience, I fear, for my mind was filled with the strange story which I had been reading, while Mordaunt strode on with wild eyes and feverish cheeks, without a thought for anything but the problem which we had to solve.

Again and again as we topped an eminence I saw him look eagerly round him in the faint hope of seeing some trace of the absentee, but over the whole expanse of moorland there was no sign of movement or of life. All was dead and silent and deserted.

Our visit to the Hall was a very brief one, for every minute now was of importance. Mordaunt rushed in and emerged with an old coat of his father’s, which he handed to Fullarton, who held it out to the dog.

The intelligent brute sniffed at it all over, then ran whining a little way down the avenue, came back to sniff the coat again, and finally elevating its stump of a tail in triumph, uttered a succession of sharp yelps to show that it was satisfied that it had struck the trail. Its owner tied a long cord to its collar to prevent it from going too fast for us, and we all set off upon our search, the dog tugging and training at its leash in its excitement as it followed in the general's footsteps.

Our way lay for a couple of hundred yards along the high road, and then passed through a gap In the hedge and on to the moor, across which we were led in a bee-line to the northward.

The sun had by this time risen above the horizon, and the whole countryside looked so fresh and sweet, from the blue, sparkling sea to the purple mountains, that it was difficult to realise how weird and uncanny was the enterprise upon which we were engaged.

The scent must have lain strongly upon the ground, for the dog never hesitated nor stopped, dragging its master along at a pace which rendered conversation impossible.

At one place, in crossing a small stream, we seemed to get off the trail for a few minutes, but our keen-nosed ally soon picked it up on the other side and followed it over the trackless moor, whining and yelping all the time in its eagerness. Had we not all three been fleet of foot and long of wind, we could not have persisted in the continuous, rapid journey over the roughest of ground, with the heather often well-nigh up to our waists.

For my own part, I have no idea now, looking back, what goal it was which I expected to reach at the end of our pursuit. I can remember that my mind was full of the vaguest and most varying speculations.

Could it be that the three Buddhists had had a craft in readiness off the coast, and had embarked with their prisoners for the East? The direction of their track seemed at first to favour this supposition, for it lay in the line of the upper end of the bay, but it ended by branching off and striking directly inland. Clearly the ocean was not to be our terminus.

By ten o'clock we had walked close upon twelve miles, and were compelled to call a halt for a few minutes to recover our breath, for the last mile or two we had been breasting the long, wearying slope of the Wigtown hills.

From the summit of this range, which is nowhere more than a thousand feet in height, we could see, looking northward, such a scene of bleakness and desolation as can hardly be matched in any country.

Right away to the horizon stretched the broad expanse of mud and of water, mingled and mixed together in the wildest chaos, like a portion of some world in the process of formation. Here and there on the dun-coloured surface of this great marsh there had burst out patches of sickly yellow reeds and of livid, greenish scum, which only served to heighten and intensify the gloomy effect of the dull, melancholy expanse.

On the side nearest to us some abandoned peat-cuttings showed that ubiquitous man had been at work there, but beyond these few petty scars there was no sign anywhere of human life. Not even a crow nor a seagull flapped its way over that hideous desert.

This is the great Bog of Cree. It is a salt-water marsh formed by an inroad of the sea, and so intersected is it with dangerous swamps and treacherous pitfalls of liquid mud, that no man would venture through it unless he had the guidance of one of the few peasants who retain the secret of its paths.

As we approached the fringe of rushes which marked its border, a foul, dank smell rose up from the stagnant wilderness, as from impure water and decaying vegetation — an earthy, noisome smell which poisoned the fresh upland air.

So forbidding and gloomy was the aspect of the place that our stout crofter hesitated, and it was all that we could do to persuade him to proceed. Our lurcher, however, not being subject to the delicate impressions of our higher organisation, still ran yelping along with its nose on the ground and every fibre of its body quivering with excitement and eagerness.

There was no difficulty about picking our way through the morass, for wherever the five could go we three could follow.

If we could have had any doubts as to our dog’s guidance they would all have been removed now, for in the soft, black, oozing soil we could distinctly trace the tracks of the whole party. From these we could see that they had walked abreast, and, furthermore, that each was about equidistant from the other. Clearly, then, no physical force had been used in taking the general and his companion along. The compulsion had been psychical and not material.

Once within the swamp, we had to be careful not to deviate from the narrow track, which offered a firm foothold.

On each side lay shallow sheets of stagnant water overlying a treacherous bottom of semi-fluid mud, which rose above the surface here and there in moist, sweltering banks, mottled over with occasional patches of unhealthy vegetation. Great purple and yellow fungi had broken out in a dense eruption, as though Nature were afflicted with a foul disease, which manifested itself by this crop of plague spots.

Here and there dark, crab-like creatures scuttled across our path, and hideous, flesh-coloured worms wriggled and writhed amid the sickly reeds. Swarms of buzzing, piping insects rose up at every step and formed a dense cloud around our heads, settling on our hands and faces and inoculating us with their filthy venom. Never had I ventured into so pestilent and forbidding a place.

Mordaunt Heatherstone strode on, however, with a set purpose upon his swarthy brow, and we could but follow him, determined to stand by him to the end of the adventure. As we advanced, the path grew narrower and narrower until, as we saw by the tracks, our predecessors had been compelled to walk in single file. Fullarton was leading us with the dog, Mordaunt behind him, while I brought up the rear. The peasant had been sulky and surly for a little time back, hardly answering when spoken to, but he now stopped short and positively refused to go a step farther.

“It’s no’ canny,” he said, “besides I ken where it will lead us tae’”

“Where, then?” I asked.

“Tae the Hole o’ Cree,” he answered. “It’s no far frae here, I’m thinking.”

“The Hole of Cree! What is that, then?”

“It’s a great, muckle hole in the ground that gangs awa’ doon so deep that naebody could ever reach the bottom. Indeed there are folk wha says that it’s just a door leadin’ intae the bottomless pit itsel’.”

“You have been there, then?” I asked.

“Been there!” he cried. “What would I be doin’ at the Hole o’ Cree? No, I’ve never been there, nor any other man in his senses.”

“How do you know about it, then?”

“My great-grandfeyther had been there, and that’s how I ken,” Fullarton answered. “He was fou’ one Saturday nicht and he went for a bet. He didna like tae talk aboot it afterwards, and he wouldna tell a’ what befell him, but he was aye feared o’ the very name. He’s the first Fullarton that’s been at the Hole o’ Cree, and he’ll be the last for me. If ye’ll tak’ my advice ye’ll just gie the matter up and gang name again, for there’s na guid tae be got oot o’ this place.”

“We shall go on with you or without you,” Mordaunt answered. “Let us have your dog and we can pick you up on our way back.”

“Na, na,” he cried, “I’ll no’ hae my dog scaret wi’ bogles, and running down Auld Nick as if he were a hare. The dog shall bide wi’ me.”

“The dog shall go with us,” said my companion, with his eyes blazing. “We have no time to argue with you. Here’s a five-pound note. Let us have the dog, or, by Heaven, I shall take it by force and throw you in the bog if you hinder us.”

I could realise the Heatherstone of forty years ago when I saw the fierce and sudden wrath which lit up the features of his son.

Either the bribe or the threat had the desired effect, for the fellow grabbed at the money with one hand while with the other he surrendered the leash which held the lurcher. Leaving him to retrace his steps, we continued to make our way into the utmost recesses of the great swamp.

The tortuous path grew less and less defined as we proceeded, and was even covered in places with water, but the increasing excitement of the hound and the sight of the deep footmarks in the mud stimulated us to push on. At last, after struggling through a grove of high bulrushes, we came on a spot the gloomy horror of which might have furnished Dante with a fresh terror for his “Inferno.”

The whole bog in this part appeared to have sunk in, forming a great, funnel-shaped depression, which terminated in the centre in a circular rift or opening about forty feet in diameter. It was a whirlpool — a perfect maelstrom of mud, sloping down on every side to this silent and awful chasm.

Clearly this was the spot which, under the name of the Hole of Cree, bore such a sinister reputation among the rustics. I could not wonder at its impressing their imagination, for a more weird or gloomy scene, or one more worthy of the avenue which led to it, could not be conceived.

The steps passed down the declivity which surrounded the abyss, and we followed them with a sinking feeling in our hearts, as we realised that this was the end of our search.

A little way from the downward path was the return trail made by the feet of those who had come back from the chasm’s edge. Our eyes fell upon these tracks at the same moment, and we each gave a cry of horror, and stood gazing speechlessly at them. For there, in those blurred footmarks, the whole drama was revealed.

Five had gone down, but only three had returned.

None shall ever know the details of that strange tragedy. There was no mark of struggle nor sign of attempt at escape. We knelt at the edge of the Hole and endeavoured to pierce the unfathomable gloom which shrouded it. A faint, sickly exhalation seemed to rise from its depths, and there was a distant hurrying, clattering sound as of waters in the bowels of the earth.

A great stone lay embedded in the mud, and this I hurled over, but we never heard thud or splash to show that it had reached the bottom.

As we hung over the noisome chasm a sound did at last rise to our ears out of its murky depths. High, clear, and throbbing, it tinkled for an instant out of the abyss, to be succeeded by the same deadly stillness which had preceded it.

I did not wish to appear superstitious, or to put down to extraordinary causes that which may have a natural explanation. That one keen note may have been some strange water sound produced far down in the bowels of the earth. It may have been that or it may have been that sinister bell of which I had heard so much. Be this as it may, it was the only sign that rose to us from the last terrible resting-place of the two who had paid the debt which had so long been owing.

We joined our voices in a call with the unreasoning obstinacy with which men will cling to hope, but no answer came back to us save a hollow moaning from the depths beneath. Footsore and heart-sick, we retraced our steps and climbed the slimy slope once more.

“What shall we do, Mordaunt?” I asked, in a subdued voice. “We can but pray that their souls may rest in peace.”

Young Heatherstone looked at me with flashing eyes.

“This may be all according to occult laws,” he cried, “but we shall see what the laws of England have to say upon it. I suppose a *chela* may be hanged as well as any other man. It may not be too late yet to run them down. Here, good dog, good dog-here!”

He pulled the hound over and set it on the track of the three men. The creature sniffed at it once or twice, and then, falling upon its stomach, with bristling hair and protruding tongue, it lay shivering and trembling, a very embodiment of canine terror.

“You see,” I said, “it is no use contending against those who have powers at their command to which we cannot even give a name. There is nothing for it but to accept the inevitable, and to hope that these poor men may meet with some compensation in another world for all that they have suffered in this."

"And be free from all devilish religions and their murderous worshippers!" Mordaunt cried furiously.

Justice compelled me to acknowledge in my own heart that the murderous spirit had been set on foot by the Christian before it was taken up by the Buddhists, but I forbore to remark upon it, for fear of irritating my companion.

For a long time I could not draw him away from the scene of his father's death, but at last, by repeated arguments and reasonings, I succeeded in making him realise how useless and unprofitable any further efforts on our part must necessarily prove, and in inducing him to return with me to Cloomber.

Oh, the wearisome, tedious journey! It had seemed long enough when we had some slight flicker of hope, or at least of expectation, before us, but now that our worst fears were fulfilled it appeared interminable.

We picked up our peasant guide at the outskirts of the marsh, and having restored his dog we let him find his own way home, without telling him anything of the results of our expedition. We ourselves plodded all day over the moors with heavy feet and heavier hearts until we saw the ill-omened tower of Cloomber, and at last, as the sun was setting, found ourselves once more beneath its roof.

There is no need for me to enter into further details, nor to describe the grief which our tidings conveyed to mother and to daughter. Their long expectation of some calamity was not sufficient to prepare them for the terrible reality.

For weeks my poor Gabriel hovered between life and death, and though she came round al last, thanks to the nursing of my sister and the professional skill of Dr. John Easterling, she has never to this day entirely recovered her former vigour. Mordaunt, too, suffered much for some time, and it was only after our removal to Edinburgh that he rallied from the shock which he had undergone.

As to poor Mrs. Heatherstone, neither medical attention nor change of air can ever have a permanent effect upon her. Slowly and surely, but very placidly, she has declined in health and strength, until it is evident that in a very few weeks at the most she will have rejoined her husband and restored to him the one thing which he must have grudged to leave behind.

The Laird of Branksome came home from Italy restored in health, with the result that we were compelled to return once more to Edinburgh.

The change was agreeable to us, for recent events had cast a cloud over our country life and had surrounded us with unpleasant associations. Besides, a highly honourable and remunerative appointment in connection with the University library had become vacant, and had, through the kindness of the late Sir Alexander Grant, been offered to my father, who, as may be imagined, lost no time in accepting so congenial a post.

In this way we came back to Edinburgh very much more important people than we left it, and with no further reason to be uneasy about the details of housekeeping. But, in truth, the whole household has been dissolved, for I have been married for some months to my dear Gabriel, and Esther is to become Mrs. Heatherstone upon the 23rd of the month. If she makes him as good a wife as his sister has made me, we may both set ourselves down as fortunate men.

These mere domestic episodes are, as I have already explained, introduced only because I cannot avoid alluding to them.

My object in drawing up this statement and publishing the evidence which corroborates it, was certainly not to parade my private affairs before the public, but to leave on record an authentic narrative of a most remarkable series of events. This I have endeavoured to do in as methodical a manner as possible, exaggerating nothing and suppressing nothing.

The reader has now the evidence before him, and can form his own opinions unaided by me as to the causes of the disappearance and death of Rufus Smith and of John Berthier Heatherstone, V.C., C.B.

There is only one point which is still dark to me. Why the *chelas* of Ghoolab Shah should have removed their victims to the desolate Hole of Cree instead of taking their lives at Cloomber, is, I confess, a mystery to me.

In dealing with occult laws, however, we must allow for our own complete ignorance of the subject. Did we know more we might see that there was some analogy between that foul bog and the sacrilege which had been committed, and that their ritual and customs demanded that just such a death was the one appropriate to the crime.

On this point I should be sorry to be dogmatic, but at least we must allow that the Buddhist priests must have had some very good cause for the course of action which they so deliberately carried out.

Months afterwards I saw a short paragraph in the *Star of India* announcing that three eminent Buddhists — Lal Hoomi, Mowdar Khan, and Ram Singh — had just returned in the steamship *Deccan* from a short trip to Europe. The very next item was devoted to an account of the life and services of Major-General Heatherstone, "who has lately disappeared from his country house in Wigtownshire, and who, there is too much reason to fear, has been drowned."

I wonder if by chance there was any other human eye but mine which traced a connection between these paragraphs. I never showed them to my wife or to Mordaunt, and they will only know of their existence when they read these pages.

I don't know that there is any other point which needs clearing up. The intelligent reader will have already seen the reasons for the general's fear of dark faces, of wandering men (not knowing how his pursuers might come after him), and of visitors (from the same cause and because his hateful bell was liable to sound at all times).

His broken sleep led him to wander about the house at night, and the lamps which he burnt in every room were no doubt to prevent his imagination from peopling the darkness with terrors. Lastly, his elaborate precautions were, as he has himself explained, rather the result of a feverish desire to do something than in the expectation that he could really ward off his fate.

Science will tell you that there are no such powers as those claimed by the Eastern mystics. I, John Fothergill West, can confidently answer that science is wrong.

For what is science? Science is the consensus of opinion of scientific men, and history has shown that it is slow to accept a truth. Science sneered at Newton for twenty years. Science proved mathematically that an iron ship could not swim, and science declared that a steamship could not cross the Atlantic.

Like Goethe's Mephistopheles, our wise professor's forte is "stets verneinen." Thomas Didymus is, to use his own jargon, his prototype. Let him learn that if he will but cease to believe in the infallibility of his own methods, and will look to the East, from which all great movements come, he will find there a school of philosophers and of savants who, working on different lines from his own, are many thousand years ahead of him in all the essentials of knowledge.

THE END

THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE

This novel was first published in 1890 by Chatto and Windus. It tells the story of John Girdlestone, whose firm is a very lucrative business. Both he and his son are cynics and have no other thought but for their business. After giving a donation of £25 for charity, John Girdlestone remarks to himself that it is not a bad “investment”, as it will make a favorable impression on the collector, who is a Member of Parliament, whose influence he hopes to use some day. These events then lead on to an ultimate murder, completely unforeseen.

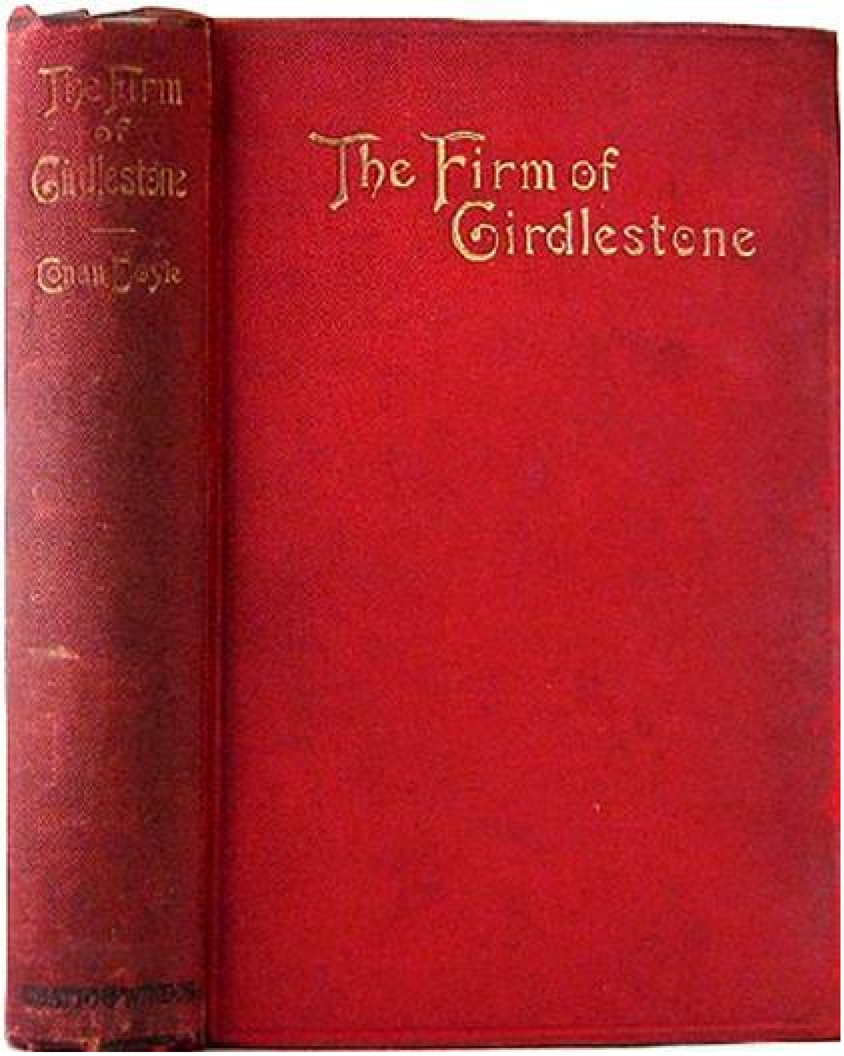
The Firm of Girdlestone
The Firm of Girdlestone
Conan Doyle
Chatto & Windus

The first edition

THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE.

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TO MY OLD FRIEND
PROFESSOR WILLIAM K. BURTON,
OF THE IMPERIAL UNIVERSITY, TOKYO,
WHO FIRST ENCOURAGED ME, YEARS AGO, TO PROCEED WITH THIS LITTLE STORY,
I DESIRE AFFECTIONATELY TO
DEDICATE IT.
THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE

I cannot let this small romance go to press without prefacing it with a word of cordial thanks to Mr. P. G. Houlgrave, of 28, Millman Street, Bedford Row. To this gentleman I owe the accuracy of my African chapters, and I am much indebted to him for the copious details with which he furnished me.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE.

CHAPTER I.

MR. JOHN HARSTON KEEPS AN APPOINTMENT.

The approach to the offices of Girdlestone and Co. was not a very dignified one, nor would the uninitiated who traversed it form any conception of the commercial prosperity of the firm in question. Close to the corner of a broad and busy street, within a couple of hundred yards of Fenchurch Street Station, a narrow doorway opens into a long whitewashed passage. On one side of this is a brass plate with the inscription “Girdlestone and Co., African Merchants,” and above it a curious hieroglyphic supposed to represent a human hand in the act of pointing. Following the guidance of this somewhat ghostly emblem, the wayfarer finds himself in a small square yard surrounded by doors, upon one of which the name of the firm reappears in large white letters, with the word “Push” printed beneath it. If he follows this laconic invitation he will make his way into a long, low apartment, which is the counting-house of the African traders.

On the afternoon of which we speak things were quiet at the offices. The line of pigeon-holes in the wire curtain was deserted by the public, though the linoleum-covered floor bore abundant traces of a busy morning. Misty London light shone hazily through the glazed windows and cast dark shadows in the corners. On a high perch in the background a weary-faced, elderly man, with muttering lips and tapping fingers, cast up endless lines of figures. Beneath him, in front of two long shining mahogany desks, half a score of young men, with bent heads and stooping shoulders, appeared to be riding furiously, neck and neck, in the race of life. Any habitue of a London office might have deduced from their relentless energy and incorruptible diligence that they were under the eyes of some member of the firm.

The member in question was a broad-shouldered, bull-necked young man, who leaned against the marble mantel-piece, turning over the pages of an almanac, and taking from time to time a stealthy peep over the top of it at the toilers around him. Command was imprinted in every line of his strong, square-set face and erect, powerful frame. Above the medium size, with a vast spread of shoulder, a broad aggressive jaw, and bright bold glance, his whole pose and expression spoke of resolution pushed to the verge of obstinacy. There was something classical in the regular olive-tinted features and black, crisp, curling hair fitting tightly to the well-rounded head. Yet, though classical, there was an absence of spirituality. It was rather the profile of one of those Roman emperors, splendid in its animal strength, but lacking those subtle softnesses of eye and mouth which speak of an inner life. The heavy gold chain across the waistcoat and the bright stone which blazed upon the finger were the natural complement of the sensuous lip and curving chin. Such was Ezra, only child of John Girdlestone, and heir to the whole of his vast business. Little wonder that those who had an eye to the future bent over their ledgers and worked with a vigour calculated to attract the attention of the junior partner, and to impress him with a due sense of their enthusiastic regard for the interests of the firm.

It was speedily apparent, however, that the young gentleman's estimate of their services was not entirely based upon their present performance. With his eyes still fixed upon the almanac and a sardonic smile upon his dark face, he uttered a single word —

"Parker!"

A flaxen-haired clerk, perched at the further end of the high glistening desk, gave a violent start, and looked up with a scared face.

"Well, Parker, who won?" asked the junior partner.

"Won, sir!" the youth stammered.

"Yes, who won?" repeated his employer.

"I hardly understand you, sir," the clerk said, growing very red and confused.

"Oh yes, you do, Parker," young Girdlestone remarked, tapping his almanac sharply with the paper-knife. "You were playing odd man out with Robson and Perkins when I came in from lunch. As I presume you were at it all the time I was away, I have a natural curiosity to know who won."

The three unhappy clerks fixed their eyes upon their ledgers to avoid the sarcastic gaze of their employer. He went on in the same quiet tones —

"You gentlemen draw about thirty shillings a week from the firm. I believe I am right in my figures, Mr. Gilray?" addressing the senior clerk seated at the high solitary desk apart from the others. "Yes, I thought so.

Now, odd man out is, no doubt, a very harmless and fascinating game, but you can hardly expect us to encourage it so far as to pay so much an hour for the privilege of having it played in our counting-house. I shall therefore recommend my father to deduct five shillings from the sum which each of you will receive upon Saturday. That will cover the time which you have devoted to your own amusements during the week."

He paused, and the three culprits were beginning to cool down and congratulate themselves, when he began again.

"You will see, Mr. Gilray, that this deduction is made," he said, "and at the same time I beg that you will deduct ten shillings from your own salary, since, as senior clerk, the responsibility of keeping order in this room in the absence of your employers rests with you, and you appear to have neglected it. I trust you will look to this, Mr. Gilray."

"Yes, sir," the senior clerk answered meekly. He was an elderly man with a large family, and the lost ten shillings would make a difference to the Sunday dinner. There was nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable, and his little pinched face assumed an expression of gentle resignation. How to keep his ten young subordinates in order, however, was a problem which vexed him sorely.

The junior partner was silent, and the remaining clerks were working uneasily, not exactly knowing whether they might not presently be included in the indictment. Their fears were terminated, however, by the sharp sound of a table-gong and the appearance of a boy with the announcement that Mr. Girdlestone would like a moment's conversation with Mr. Ezra. The latter gave a keen glance at his subjects and withdrew into the back office, a disappearance which was hailed by ten pens being thrown into the air and deftly caught again, while as many derisive and triumphant young men mocked at the imploring efforts of old Gilray in the interests of law and order.

The sanctum of Mr. John Girdlestone was approached by two doors, one of oak with ground-glass panels, and the other covered with green baize. The room itself was small, but lofty, and the walls were ornamented by numerous sections of ships stuck upon long flat boards, very much as the remains of fossil fish are exhibited in museums, together with maps, charts, photographs, and lists of sailings innumerable. Above the fire-place was a large water-colour painting of the barque Belinda as she appeared when on a reef to the north of Cape Palmas. An inscription beneath this work of art announced that it had been painted by the second officer and presented by him to the head of the firm. It was generally rumoured that the merchants had lost heavily over this disaster, and there were some who quoted it as an instance of Girdlestone's habitual strength of mind that he should decorate his wall with so melancholy a souvenir. This view of the matter did not appear to commend itself to a flippant member of Lloyd's agency, who contrived to intimate, by a dexterous use of his left eyelid and right forefinger, that the vessel may not have been so much under-insured, nor the loss to the firm so enormous as was commonly reported.

John Girdlestone, as he sat at his square office-table waiting for his son, was undeniably a remarkable-looking man. For good or for evil no weak character lay beneath that hard angular face, with the strongly marked features and deep-set eyes. He was clean shaven, save for an iron-grey fringe of ragged whisker under each ear, which blended with the grizzled hair above. So self-contained, hard-set, and immutable was his expression that it was impossible to read anything from it except sternness and resolution, qualities which are as likely to be associated with the highest natures as with the most dangerous. It may have been on account of this ambiguity of expression that the world's estimate of the old merchant was a very varying one. He was known to be a fanatic in religion, a purist in morals, and a man of the strictest commercial integrity. Yet there were some few who looked askance at him, and none, save one, who could apply the word "friend" to him.

He rose and stood with his back to the fire-place as his son entered. He was so tall that he towered above the younger man, but the latter's square and compact frame made him, apart from the difference of age, the stronger man.

The young man had dropped the air of sarcasm which he found was most effective with the clerks, and had resumed his natural manner, which was harsh and brusque.

"What's up!" he asked, dropping back into a chair, and jingling the loose coins in his trouser pockets.

"I have had news of the Black Eagle," his father answered. "She is reported from Madeira."

"Ah!" cried the junior partner eagerly. "What luck?"

"She is full, or nearly so, according to Captain Hamilton Miggs' report."

"I wonder Miggs was able to send a report at all, and I wonder still more that you should put any faith in it," his son said impatiently. "The fellow is never sober."

"Miggs is a good seaman, and popular on the coast. He may indulge at times, but we all have our failings. Here is the list as vouched for by our agent. 'Six hundred barrels of palm oil'—"

"Oil is down to-day," the other interrupted.

"It will rise before the Black Eagle arrives," the merchant rejoined confidently. "Then he has palm nuts in bulk, gum, ebony, skins, cochineal, and ivory."

The young man gave a whistle of satisfaction. "Not bad for old Miggs!" he said. "Ivory is at a fancy figure."

"We are sorely in need of a few good voyages," Girdlestone remarked, "for things have been very slack of late. There is one very sad piece of intelligence here which takes away the satisfaction which we might otherwise feel. Three of the crew have died of fever. He does not mention the names."

"The devil!" said Ezra. "We know very well what that means. Three women, each with an armful of brats, besieging the office and clamouring for a pension. Why are seamen such improvident dogs?"

His father held up his white hand deprecatingly. "I wish," he said, "that you would treat these subjects with more reverence. What could be sadder than that the bread-winner of a family should be cut off? It has grieved me more than I can tell."

"Then you intend to pension the wives?" Ezra said, with a sly smile.

"By no means," his father returned with decision. "Girdlestone and Co. are not an insurance office. The labourer is worthy of his hire, but when his work in this world is over, his family must fall back upon what has been saved by his industry and thrift. It would be a dangerous precedent for us to allow pensions to the wives of these sailors, for it would deprive the others of all motive for laying their money by, and would indirectly encourage vice and dissipation."

Ezra laughed, and continued to rattle his silver and keys.

"It is not upon this matter that I desired to speak to you," Girdlestone continued. "It has, however, always been my practice to prefer matters of business to private affairs, however pressing. John Harston is said to be dying, and he has sent a message to me saying that he wishes to see me. It is inconvenient for me to leave the office, but I feel that it is my Christian duty to obey such a summons. I wish you, therefore, to look after things until I return."

"I can hardly believe that the news is true," Ezra said, in astonishment. "There must be some mistake. Why, I spoke to him on 'Change last Monday."

"It is very sudden," his father answered, taking his broad-brimmed hat from a peg. "There is no doubt about the fact, however. The doctor says that there is very little hope that he will survive until evening. It is a case of malignant typhoid."

"You are very old friends?" Ezra remarked, looking thoughtfully at his father.

"I have known him since we were boys together," the other replied, with a slight dry cough, which was the highest note of his limited emotional gamut. "Your mother, Ezra, died upon the very day that Harston's wife gave birth to this daughter of his, seventeen years ago. Mrs. Harston only survived a few days. I have heard him say that, perhaps, we should also go together. We are in the hands of a higher Power, however, and it seems that one shall be taken and another left."

"How will the money go if the doctors are right?" Ezra asked keenly.

"Every penny to the girl. She will be an heiress. There are no other relations that I know of, except the Dimsdales, and they have a fair fortune of their own. But I must go."

"By the way, malignant typhoid is very catching, is it not?"

"So they say," the merchant said quietly, and strode off through the counting-house.

Ezra Girdlestone remained behind, stretching his legs In front of the empty grate. "The governor is a hard nail," he soliloquized, as he stared down at the shining steel bars. "Depend upon it, though, he feels this more than he shows. Why, it's the only friend he ever had in the world — or ever will have, in all probability. However, it's no business of mine," with which comforting reflection he began to whistle as he turned over the pages of the private day-book of the firm.

It is possible that his son's surmise was right, and that the gaunt, unemotional African merchant felt an unwonted heartache as he hailed a hansom and drove out to his friend's house at Fulham. He and Harston had been charity schoolboys together, had roughed it together, risen together, and prospered together. When John Girdlestone was a raw-boned lad and Harston a chubby-faced urchin, the latter had come to look upon the other as his champion and guide. There are some minds which are parasitic in their nature. Alone they have little vitality, but they love to settle upon some stronger intellect, from which they may borrow their emotions and conclusions at second-hand. A strong, vigorous brain collects around it in time many others, whose mental processes are a feeble imitation of its own. Thus it came to pass that, as the years rolled on, Harston learned to lean more and more upon his old school-fellow, grafting many of his stern peculiarities upon his own simple vacuous nature, until he became a strange parody of the original. To him Girdlestone was the ideal man, Girdlestone's ways the correct ways, and Girdlestone's opinions the weightiest of all opinions. Forty years of this undeviating fidelity must, however he might conceal it, have made an impression upon the feelings of the elder man.

Harston, by incessant attention to business and extreme parsimony, had succeeded in founding an export trading concern. In this he had followed the example of his friend. There was no fear of their interests ever coming into collision, as his operations were confined to the Mediterranean. The firm grew and prospered, until Harston began to be looked upon as a warm man in the City circles. His only child was Kate, a girl of seventeen. There were no other near relatives, save Dr. Dimsdale, a prosperous West-end physician. No wonder that Ezra Girdlestone's active business mind, and perhaps that of his father too, should speculate as to the disposal of the fortune of the dying man.

Girdlestone pushed open the iron gate and strode down the gravel walk which led to his friend's house. A bright autumn sun shining out of a cloudless heaven bathed the green lawn and the many-coloured flower-beds in its golden light. The air, the leaves, the birds, all spoke of life. It was hard to think that death was closing its grip upon him who owned them all. A plump little gentleman in black was just descending the steps.

"Well, doctor," the merchant asked, "how is your patient?"

"You've not come with the intention of seeing him, have you?" the doctor asked, glancing up with some curiosity at the grey face and overhanging eyebrows of the merchant.

"Yes, I am going up to him now."

"It is a most virulent case of typhoid. He may die in an hour or he may live until nightfall, but nothing can save him. He will hardly recognise you, I fear, and you can do him no good. It is most infectious, and you are incurring a needless danger. I should strongly recommend you not to go."

"Why, you've only just come down from him yourself, doctor."

"Ah, I'm there in the way of duty."

"So am I," said the visitor decisively, and passing up the stone steps of the entrance strode into the hall. There was a large sitting-room upon the ground floor, through the open door of which the visitor saw a sight which arrested him for a moment. A young girl was sitting in a recess near the window, with her lithe, supple figure bent forward, and her hands clasped at the back of her head, while her elbows rested upon a small table in front of her. Her superb brown hair fell in a thick wave on either side over her white round arms, and the graceful curve of her beautiful neck might have furnished a sculptor with a study for a mourning Madonna. The doctor had just broken his sad tidings to her, and she was still in the first paroxysm of her grief — a grief too acute, as was evident even to the unsentimental mind of the merchant, to allow of any attempt at consolation. A greyhound appeared to think differently, for he had placed his fore-paws upon his young mistress's lap, and was attempting to thrust his lean muzzle between her arms and to lick her face in token of canine sympathy. The merchant paused irresolutely for a moment, and then ascending the broad staircase he pushed open the door of Harston's room and entered.

The blinds were drawn down and the chamber was very dark. A pungent whiff of disinfectants issued from it, mingled with the dank, heavy smell of disease. The bed was in a far corner. Without seeing him, Girdlestone could hear the fast laboured breathing of the invalid. A trimly dressed nurse who had been sitting by the bedside rose, and, recognising the visitor, whispered a few words to him and left the room. He pulled the cord of the Venetian blind so as to admit a few rays of daylight. The great chamber looked dreary and bare, as carpet and hangings had been removed to lessen the chance of future infection. John Girdlestone stepped softly across to the bedside and sat down by his dying friend.

The sufferer was lying on his back, apparently unconscious of all around him. His glazed eyes were turned upwards towards the ceiling, and his parched lips were parted, while the breath came in quick, spasmodic gasps. Even the unskilled eye of the merchant could tell that the angel of death was hovering very near him. With an ungainly attempt at tenderness, which had something pathetic in it, he moistened a sponge and passed it over the sick man’s feverish brow. The latter turned his restless head round, and a gleam of recognition and gratitude came into his eyes.

“I knew that you would come,” he said.

“Yes. I came the moment that I got your message.”

“I am glad that you are here,” the sufferer continued with a sigh of relief. From the brightened expression upon his pinched face, it seemed as if, even now in the jaws of death, he leaned upon his old schoolfellow and looked to him for assistance. He put a wasted hand above the counterpane and laid it upon Girdlestone’s.

“I wish to speak to you, John,” he said. “I am very weak. Can you hear what I say?”

“Yes, I hear you.”

“Give me a spoonful from that bottle. It clears my mind for a time.

I have been making my will, John.”

“Yes,” said the merchant, replacing the medicine bottle.

“The lawyer made it this morning. Stoop your head and you will hear me better. I have less than fifty thousand. I should have done better had I retired years ago.”

“I told you so,” the other broke in gruffly.

“You did — you did. But I acted for the best. Forty thousand I leave to my dear daughter Kate.”

A look of interest came over Girdlestone’s face. “And the balance?” he asked.

“I leave that to be equally divided among the various London institutions for educating the poor. We were both poor boys ourselves, John, and we know the value of such schools.”

Girdlestone looked perhaps a trifle disappointed. The sick man went on very slowly and painfully —

“My daughter will have forty thousand pounds. But it is so tied up that she can neither touch it herself nor enable any one else to do so until she is of age. She has no friends, John, and no relations, save only my cousin, Dr. George Dimsdale. Never was a girl left more lonely and unprotected. Take her, I beg of you, and bring her up under your own eye. Treat her as though she were your child. Guard her above all from those who would wreck her young life in order to share her fortune. Do this, old friend, and make me happy on my deathbed.”

The merchant made no answer. His heavy eyebrows were drawn down, and his forehead all puckered with thought.

"You are the one man," continued the sufferer, "whom I know to be just and upright. Give me the water, for my mouth is dry. Should, which God forbid, my dear girl perish before she marries, then—" His breath failed him for a moment, and he paused to recover it.

"Well, what then?"

"Then, old friend, her fortune reverts to you, for there is none who will use it so well. Those are the terms of the will. But you will guard her and care for her, as I would myself. She is a tender plant, John, too weak to grow alone. Promise me that you will do right by her — promise it?"

"I do promise it," John Girdlestone answered in a deep voice. He was standing up now, and leaning over to catch the words of the dying man.

Harston was sinking rapidly. With a feeble motion he pointed to a brown-backed volume upon the table.

"Take up the book," he said.

The merchant picked it up.

"Now, repeat after me, I swear and solemnly pledge myself—"

"I swear and solemnly pledge myself —

"To treasure and guard as if she were my own—" came the tremulous voice from the bed.

"To treasure and guard as if she were my own—" in the deep bass of the merchant.

"Kate Harston, the daughter of my deceased friend—"

"Kate Harston, the daughter of my deceased friend—"

"And as I treat her, so may my own flesh and blood treat me!"

"And as I treat her, so may my own flesh and blood treat me!"

The sick man's head fell back exhausted upon his pillow. "Thank God!" he muttered, "now I can die in peace."

"Turn your mind away from the vanities and dross of this world," John Girdlestone said sternly, "and fix it upon that which is eternal, and can never die."

"Are you going?" the invalid asked sadly, for he had taken up his hat and stick.

"Yes, I must go; I have an appointment in the City at six, which I must not miss."

“And I have an appointment which I must not miss,” the dying man said with a feeble smile.

“I shall send up the nurse as I go down,” Girdlestone said.

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye! God bless you, John!”

The firm, strong hand of the hale man enclosed for a moment the feeble, burning one of the sufferer. Then John Girdlestone plodded heavily down the stair, and these friends of forty years’ standing had said their last adieu.

The African merchant kept his appointment in the City, but long before he reached it John Harston had gone also to keep that last terrible appointment of which the messenger is death.

CHAPTER II.

CHARITY A LA MODE.

It was a dull October morning in Fenchurch Street, some weeks after the events with which our story opened. The murky City air looked murkier still through the glazed office windows. Girdlestone, grim and grey, as though he were the very embodiment of the weather, stooped over his mahogany table. He had a long list in front of him, on which he was checking off, as a prelude to the day's work, the position in the market of the various speculations in which the capital of the firm was embarked. His son Ezra lounged in an easy chair opposite him, looking dishevelled and dark under the eyes, for he had been up half the night, and the Nemesis of reaction was upon him.

"Faugh!" his father ejaculated, glancing round at him with disgust.

"You have been drinking already this morning."

"I took a brandy and seltzer on the way to the office," he answered carelessly. "I needed one to steady me."

"A young fellow of your age should not want steadying. You have a strong constitution, but you must not play tricks with it. You must have been very late last night. It was nearly one before I went to bed."

"I was playing cards with Major Clutterbuck and one or two others.

We kept it up rather late."

"With Major Clutterbuck?"

"Yes."

"I don't care about your consorting so much with that man. He drinks and gambles, and does you no good. What good has he ever done himself? Take care that he does not fleece you." The merchant felt instinctively, as he glanced at the shrewd, dark face of his son, that the warning was a superfluous one.

"No fear, father," Ezra answered sulkily; "I am old enough to choose my own friends."

"Why such a friend as that?"

"I like to know men of that class. You are a successful man, father, but you — well, you can't be much help to me socially. You need some one to show you the ropes, and the major is my man. When I can stand alone, I'll soon let him know it."

"Well, go your own way," said Girdlestone shortly. Hard to all the world, he was soft only in this one direction. From childhood every discussion between father and son had ended with the same words.

"It is business time," he resumed. "Let us confine ourselves to business. I see that Illinois were at 112 yesterday."

"They are at 113 this morning."

"What! have you been on 'Change already?"

"Yes, I dropped in there on my way to the office. I would hold on to those. They will go up for some days yet."

The senior partner made a pencil note on the margin of the list.

"We'll hold on to the cotton we have," he said.

"No, sell out at once," Ezra answered with decision, "I saw young Featherstone, of Liverpool, last night, or rather this morning. It was hard to make head or tail of what the fool said, but he let fall enough to show that there was likely to be a drop."

Girdlestone made another mark upon the paper. He never questioned his son's decisions now, for long experience had shown him that they were never formed without solid grounds. "Take this list, Ezra," he said, handing him the paper, "and run your eye over it. If you see anything that wants changing, mark it."

"I'll do it in the counting-house," his son answered. "I can keep my eye on those lazy scamps of clerks. Gilray has no idea of keeping them in order."

As he went out he cannoned against an elderly gentleman in a white waistcoat, who was being shown in, and who ricochetted off him into the office, where he shook hands heartily with the elder Girdlestone. It was evident from the laboured cordiality of the latter's greeting that the new-comer was a man of some importance. He was, indeed, none other than the well-known philanthropist, Mr. Jefferson Edwards, M.P. for Middlehurst, whose name upon a bill was hardly second to that of Rothschild.

"How do, Girdlestone, how do?" he exclaimed, mopping his face with his handkerchief. He was a fussy little man, with a brusque, nervous manner.

“Hard at it as usual, eh? Always pegging away. Wonderful man. Ha, ha! Wonderful!”

“You look warm,” the merchant answered, rubbing his hands. “Let me offer you some claret. I have some in the cupboard.”

“No, thank you,” the visitor answered, staring across at the head of the firm as though he were some botanical curiosity. “Extraordinary fellow. ‘Iron’ Girdlestone, they call you in the City. A good name, too — ha! ha! — an excellent name. Iron-grey, you know, and hard to look at, but soft here, my dear sir, soft here.” The little man tapped him with his walking-stick over the cardiac region and laughed boisterously, while his grim companion smiled slightly and bowed to the compliment.

“I’ve come here begging,” said Mr. Jefferson Edwards, producing a portentous-looking roll of paper from an inner pocket. “Know I’ve come to the right place for charity. The Aboriginal Evolution Society, my dear boy. All it wants are a few hundreds to float it off. Noble aim, Girdlestone — glorious object.”

“What is the object?” the merchant asked.

“Well, the evolution of the aborigines,” Edwards answered in some confusion. “Sort of practical Darwinism. Evolve ‘em into higher types, and turn ‘em all white in time. Professor Wilder gave us a lecture about it. I’ll send you round a Times with the account. Spoke about their thumbs. They can’t cross them over their palms, and they have rudimentary tails, or had until they were educated off them. They wore all the hair off their backs by leaning against trees. Marvellous things! All they want is a little money.”

“It seems to be a praiseworthy object,” the merchant said gravely.

“I knew that you would think so!” cried the little philanthropist enthusiastically. “Of course, bartering as you do with aboriginal races, their development and evolution is a matter of the deepest importance to you. If a man came down to barter with you who had a rudimentary tail and couldn’t bend his thumb — well, it wouldn’t be pleasant, you know. Our idea is to elevate them in the scale of humanity and to refine their tastes. Hewett, of the Royal Society, went to report on the matter a year or so back, and some rather painful incident occurred. I believe Hewett met with some mishap — in fact, they go the length of saying that he was eaten. So you see we’ve had our martyrs, my dear friend, and the least that we can do who stay at home at ease is to support a good cause to the best of our ability.”

“Whose names have you got?” asked the merchant.

“Let’s see,” Jefferson Edwards said, unfolding his list. “Spriggs, ten; Morton, ten; Wigglesworth, five; Hawkins, ten; Indermann, fifteen; Jones, five; and a good many smaller amounts.”

“What is the highest as yet?”

“Indermann, the tobacco importer, has given fifteen.”

“It is a good cause,” Mr. Girdlestone said, dipping his pen into the ink-bottle. “‘He that giveth’ — you know what the good old Book says. Of course a list of the donations will be printed and circulated?”

“Most certainly.”

“Here is my cheque for twenty-five pounds. I am proud to have had this opportunity of contributing towards the regeneration of those poor souls whom Providence has placed in a lower sphere than myself.”

“Girdlestone,” said the member of Parliament with emotion, as he pocketed the cheque, “you are a good man. I shall not forget this, my friend; I shall never forget it.”

“Wealth has its duties, and charity is among them,” Girdlestone answered with unction, shaking the philanthropist’s extended hand. “Good-bye, my dear sir. Pray let me know if our efforts are attended with any success. Should more money be needed, you know one who may be relied on.”

There was a sardonic smile upon the hard face of the senior partner as he closed the door behind his visitor. “It’s a legitimate investment,” he muttered to himself as he resumed his seat. “What with his Parliamentary interest and his financial power, it’s a very legitimate investment. It looks well on the list, too, and inspires confidence. I think the money is well spent.”

Ezra had bowed politely as the great man passed through the office, and Gilray, the wizened senior clerk, opened the outer door. Jefferson Edwards turned as he passed him and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Lucky fellow,” he said in his jerky way. “Good employer — model to follow — great man. Watch him, mark him, imitate him — that’s the way to get on. Can’t go wrong,” and he trotted down the street in search of fresh contributions towards his latest fad.

CHAPTER III.

THOMAS GILRAY MAKES AN INVESTMENT.

The shambling little clerk was still standing at the door watching the retreating figure of the millionaire, and mentally splicing together his fragmentary remarks into a symmetrical piece of advice which might be carried home and digested at leisure, when his attention was attracted to a pale-faced woman, with a child in her arms, who was hanging about the entrance. She looked up at the clerk in a wistful way, as if anxious to address him and yet afraid to do so. Then noting, perhaps, some gleam of kindness in his yellow wrinkled face, she came across to him.

"D'ye think I could see Muster Girdlestone, sir," she asked, with a curtsey; "or, maybe, you're Mr. Girdlestone yourself?" The woman was wretchedly dressed, and her eyelids were swollen and red as from long crying.

"Mr. Girdlestone is in his room," said the head clerk kindly. "I have no doubt that he will see you if you will wait for a moment." Had he been speaking to the grandest of the be-silked and be-feathered dames who occasionally frequented the office; he could not have spoken with greater courtesy. Verily in these days the spirit of true chivalry has filtered down from the surface and has found a lodgment in strange places.

The merchant looked with a surprised and suspicious eye at his visitor when she was ushered in. "Take a seat, my good woman," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Please, Mr. Girdlestone, I'm Mrs. Hudson," she answered, seating herself in a timid way upon the extreme edge of a chair. She was weary and footsore, for she had carried the baby up from Stepney that morning.

"Hudson — Hudson — can't remember the name," said Girdlestone, shaking his head reflectively.

"Jim Hudson as was, sir, he was my husband, the bo'sun for many a year o' your ship the Black Eagle. He went out to try and earn a bit for me and the child, sir, but he's dead o' fever, poor dear, and lying in Bonny river, wi' a cannon ball at his feet, as the carpenter himself told me who sewed him up, and I wish I was dead and with him, so I do.” She began sobbing in her shawl and moaning, while the child, suddenly awakened by the sound, rubbed its eyes with its wrinkled mottled hands, and then proceeded to take stock of Mr. Girdlestone and his office with the critical philosophy of infancy.

“Calm yourself, my good woman, calm yourself,” said the senior partner. He perceived that the evil prophesied by his son had come upon him, and he made a mental note of this fresh instance of Ezra’s powers of foresight.

“It was hard, so it was,” said Mrs. Hudson, drying her eyes, but still giving vent to an occasional tempestuous sob. “I heard as the Black Eagle was comin’ up the river, so I spent all I had in my pocket in makin’ Jim a nice little supper — ham an’ eggs, which was always his favourite, an’ a pint o’ bitter, an’ a quartern o’ whiskey that he could take hot after, bein’ naturally o’ a cold turn, and him comin’ from a warm country, too. Then out I goes, and down the river, until I sees the Black Eagle a-comin’ up wi’ a tug in front of her. Well I knowed the two streaks o’ white paint, let alone the screechin’ o’ the parrots which I could hear from the bank. I could see the heads o’ some of the men peepin’ over the side, so I waves my handkercher, and one o’ them he waves back. ‘Trust Jim for knowin’ his little wife,’ says I, proud like to myself, and I runs round to where I knew as they’d dock her. What with me being that excited that I couldn’t rightly see where I was going, and what with the crowd, for the men was comin’ from work, I didn’t get there till the ship was alongside. Then I jumps aboard, and the first man I seed was Sandy McPherson, who I knowed when we lived in Binnacle Lane. ‘Where’s Jim?’ I cried, running forward, eager like, to the forecastle, but he caught me by the arm as I passed him. ‘Steady, lass, steady!’ Then I looked up at him, and his face was very grave, and my knees got kind o’ weak. ‘Where’s Jim?’ says I. ‘Don’t ask,’ says he. ‘Where is he, Sandy?’ I screeches; and then, ‘Don’t say the word, Sandy, don’t you say it.’ But, Lor’ bless ye, sir, it didn’t much matter what he said nor what he didn’t, for I knowed all, an’ down I flops on the deck in a dead faint. The mate, he took me home in a cab, and when I come to there was the supper lying, sir, and the beer, and the things a-shinin’, and all so cosy, an’ the child askin’ where her father was, for I told her he’d bring her some things from Africa. Then, to think of him a-lyin’ dead in Bonny river, why, sir, it nigh broke my heart.”

“A sore affliction,” the merchant said, shaking his grizzled head. “A sad visitation. But these things are sent to try us, Mrs. Hudson. They are warnings to us not to fix our thoughts too much upon the dross of this world, but to have higher aims and more durable aspirations. We are poor short-sighted creatures, the best of us, and often mistake evil for good. What seems so sad to-day may, if taken in a proper spirit, be looked back upon as a starting-point from which all the good of your life has come.”

“Bless you, sir!” said the widow, still furtively rubbing her eyes with the corner of her little shawl. “You’re a real kind gentleman. It does me good to hear you talk.”

“We have all our burdens and misfortunes,” continued the senior partner. “Some have more, some have less. To-day is your turn, to-morrow it may be mine. But let us struggle on to the great goal, and the weight of our burden need never cause us to sink by the wayside. And now I must wish you a very good morning, Mrs. Hudson. Believe me, you have my hearty sympathy.”

The woman rose and then stood irresolute for a moment, as though there was something which she still wished to mention.

“When will I be able to draw Jim’s back pay, sir?” she asked nervously. “I have pawned nigh everything in the house, and the child and me is weak from want of food.”

“Your husband’s back pay,” the merchant said, taking down a ledger from the shelf and turning rapidly over the leaves. “I think that you are under a delusion, Mrs. Hudson. Let me see — Dawson, Duffield, Everard, Francis, Gregory, Gunter, Hardy. Ah, here it is — Hudson, boatswain of the Black Eagle. The wages which he received amounted, I see, to five pounds a month. The voyage lasted eight months, but the ship had only been out two months and a half when your husband died.”

“That’s true, sir,” the widow said, with an anxious look at the long line of figures in the ledger.

“Of course, the contract ended at his death, so the firm owed him twelve pounds ten at that date. But I perceive from my books that you have been drawing half-pay during the whole eight months. You have accordingly had twenty pounds from the firm, and are therefore in its debt to the amount of seven pounds ten shillings. We’ll say nothing of that at present,” the senior partner concluded with a magnificent air. “When you are a little better off you can make good the balance, but really you can hardly expect us to assist you any further at present.”

“But, sir, we have nothing,” Mrs. Hudson sobbed.

“It is deplorable, most deplorable. But we are not the people to apply to. Your own good sense will tell you that, now that I have explained it to you. Good morning. I wish you good fortune, and hope you will let us know from time to time how you go on. We always take a keen interest in the families of those who serve us.” Mr. Girdlestone opened the door, and the heart-sick little woman staggered away across the office, still bearing her heavy child.

When she got into the open air she stared around her like one dazed. The senior clerk looked anxiously at her as he stood at the open door. Then he glanced back into the office. Ezra Girdlestone was deep in some accounts, and his brother clerks were all absorbed in their work. He stole up to the woman, with an apologetic smile, slipped something into her hand, and then hurried back into the office with an austere look upon his face, as if his whole mind were absorbed in the affairs of the firm. There are speculations above the ken of business men. Perhaps, Thomas Gilray, that ill-spared half-crown of yours may bring in better interest than the five-and-twenty pounds of your employer.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN HAMILTON MIGGS OF THE “BLACK EAGLE.”

The head of the firm had hardly recovered his mental serenity after the painful duty of explaining her financial position to the Widow Hudson, when his quick ear caught the sound of a heavy footstep in the counting-house. A gruff voice was audible at the same time, which demanded in rather more energetic language than was usually employed in that orderly establishment, whether the principal was to be seen or not. The answer was evidently in the affirmative, for the lumbering tread came rapidly nearer, and a powerful double knock announced that the visitor was at the other side of the door.

“Come in,” cried Mr. Girdlestone, laying down his pen.

This invitation was so far complied with that the handle turned, and the door revolved slowly upon its hinges. Nothing more substantial than a strong smell of spirituous liquors, however, entered the apartment.

“Come in,” the merchant repeated impatiently.

At this second mandate a great tangled mass of black hair was slowly protruded round the angle of the door. Then a copper-coloured forehead appeared, with a couple of very shaggy eyebrows and eventually a pair of eyes, which protruded from their sockets and looked yellow and unhealthy. These took a long look, first at the senior partner and then at his surroundings, after which, as if reassured by the inspection, the remainder of the face appeared — a flat nose, a large mouth with a lower lip which hung down and exposed a line of tobacco-stained teeth, and finally a thick black beard which bristled straight out from the chin, and bore abundant traces of an egg having formed part of its owner’s morning meal. The head having appeared, the body soon followed it, though all in the same anaconda-like style of progression, until the individual stood revealed. He was a stoutly-built sea-faring man, dressed in a pea jacket and blue trousers and holding his tarpaulin hat in his hand. With a rough scrape and a most unpleasant leer he advanced towards the merchant, a tattoed and hairy hand outstretched in sign of greeting.

"Why, captain," said the head of the firm, rising and grasping the other's hand with effusion, "I am glad to see you back safe and well."

"Glad to see ye, sir — glad to see ye."

His voice was thick and husky, and there was an indecision about his gait as though he had been drinking heavily. "I came in sort o' cautious," he continued, "'cause I didn't know who might be about. When you and me speaks together we likes to speak alone, you bet."

The merchant raised his bushy eyebrows a little, as though he did not relish the idea of mutual confidences suggested by his companion's remark. "Hadn't you better take a seat?" he said.

The other took a cane-bottomed chair and carried it into the extreme corner of the office. Then having looked steadily at the wall behind him, and rapped it with his knuckles, he sat down, still throwing an occasional apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "I've got a touch of the jumps," he remarked apologetically to his employer. "I likes to know as there ain't no one behind me."

"You should give up this shocking habit of drinking," Mr. Girdlestone said seriously. "It is a waste of the best gifts with which Providence has endowed us. You are the worse for it both in this world and in the next."

Captain Hamilton Miggs did not seem to be at all impressed by this very sensible piece of advice. On the contrary, he chuckled boisterously to himself, and, slapping his thigh, expressed his opinion that his employer was a "rum 'un" — a conviction which he repeated to himself several times with various symptoms of admiration.

"Well, well," Girdlestone said, after a short pause, "boys will be boys, and sailors, I suppose, will be sailors. After eight months of anxiety and toil, ending in success, captain — I am proud to be able to say the words — some little licence must be allowed. I do not judge others by the same hard and fast lines by which I regulate my own conduct."

This admirable sentiment also failed to elicit any response from the obdurate Miggs, except the same manifestations of mirth and the same audible aside as to the peculiarities of his master's character.

"I must congratulate you on your cargo, and wish you the same luck for your next voyage," the merchant continued.

“Ivory, an’ gold dust, an’ skins, an’ resin, an’ cochineal, an’ gums, an’ ebony, an’ rice, an’ tobacco, an’ fruits, an’ nuts in bulk. If there’s a better cargo about, I’d like to see it,” the sailor said defiantly.

“An excellent cargo, captain; very good indeed. Three of your men died, I believe?”

“Ay, three of the lubbers went under. Two o’ fever and one o’ snake-bite. It licks me what sailors are comin’ to in these days. When I was afore the mast we’d ha’ been ashamed to die o’ a trifle like that. Look at me. I’ve been down wi’ coast fever sixteen times, and I’ve had yellow jack an’ dysentery, an’ I’ve been bit by the black cobra in the Andamans. I’ve had cholera, too. It broke out in a brig when I was in the Sandwich Island trade, and I was shipmates wi’ seven dead out o’ a crew o’ ten. But I ain’t none the worse for it — no, nor never will be. But I say, gov’nor, hain’t you got a drop of something about the office?”

The senior partner rose, and taking a bottle from the cupboard filled out a stiff glass of rum. The sailor drank it off eagerly, and laid down the empty tumbler with a sigh of satisfaction.

“Say, now,” he said, with an unpleasant confidential leer, “weren’t you surprised to see us come back — eh? Straight now, between man and man?”

“The old ship hangs together well, and has lots of work in her yet,” the merchant answered.

“Lots of work! God’s truth, I thought she was gone in the bay! We’d a dirty night with a gale from the west-sou’-west, an’ had been goin’ by dead reckonin’ for three days, so we weren’t over and above sure o’ ourselves. She wasn’t much of a sea-going craft when we left England, but the sun had fried all the pitch out o’ her seams, and you might ha’ put your finger through some of them. Two days an’ a night we were at the pumps, for she leaked like a sieve. We lost the fore topsail, blown clean out o’ the ringbolts. I never thought to see Lunnon again.”

“If she could weather a gale like that she could make another voyage.”

“She could start on another,” the sailor said gloomily, “but as like as not she’d never see the end o’t.”

“Come, come, you’re not quite yourself this morning, Miggs. We value you as a dashing, fearless fellow — let me fill your glass again — who doesn’t fear a little risk where there’s something to be gained. You’ll lose your good name if you go on like that.”

“She’s in a terrible bad way,” the captain insisted. “You’ll have to do something before she can go.”

“What shall we have to do?”

“Dry dock her and give her a thorough overhaul. She might sink before she got out o’ the Channel if she went as she is just now.”

“Very well,” the merchant said coldly. “If you insist on it, it must be done. But, of course, it would make a great difference in your salary.”

“Eh?”

“You are at present getting fifteen pounds a month, and five per cent. commission. These are exceptional terms in consideration of any risk that you may run. We shall dry dock the Black Eagle, and your salary is now ten pounds a month and two and a half commission.”

“Belay, there, belay!” the sailor shouted. His coppery face was a shade darker than usual, and his bilious eyes had a venomous gleam in them. “Don’t you beat me down, curse you!” he hissed, advancing to the table and leaning his hands upon it while he pushed his angry face forward until it was within a foot of that of the merchant. “Don’t you try that game on, mate, for I am a free-born British seaman, and I am under the thumb of no man.”

“You’re drunk,” said the senior partner. “Sit down!”

“You’d reduce my screw, would ye?” roared Captain Hamilton Miggs, working himself into a fury. “Me that has worked for ye, and slaved for ye, and risked my life for ye. You try it on, guv’nor; just you try it on! Suppose I let out that little story o’ the painting out o’ the marks — where would the firm of Girdlestone be then! I guess you’d rather double my wage than have that yarn goin’ about.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? You don’t know what I mean, do you? Of course not. It wasn’t you as set us on to go at night and paint out the Government Plimsoll marks and then paint ‘em in again higher up, so as to be able to overload. That wasn’t you, was it?”

“Do you mean to assert that it was?”

“In course I do,” thundered the angry seaman.

The senior partner struck the gong which stood upon the table.

“Gilray,” he said quietly, “go out and bring in a policeman.”

Captain Hamilton Miggs seemed to be somewhat startled by this sudden move of his antagonist. “Steady your helm, governor,” he said. “What are ye up to now?”

“I’m going to give you in charge.”

“What for?”

“For intimidation and using threatening language, and endeavouring to extort money under false pretences.”

“There’s no witnesses,” the sailor said in a half-cringing, half-defiant manner.

“Oh yes, there are,” Ezra Girdlestone remarked, coming into the room. He had been standing between the two doors which led to the counting-house, and had overheard the latter portion of the conversation. “Don’t let me interrupt you. You were saying that you would blacken my father’s character unless he increased your salary.”

“I didn’t mean no harm,” said Captain Hamilton Miggs, glancing nervously from the one to the other. He had been fairly well known to the law in his younger days, and had no desire to renew the acquaintance.

“Who painted out those Plimsoll marks?” asked the merchant.

“It was me.”

“Did any one suggest it to you?”

“No.”

“Shall I send in the policeman, sir?” asked Gilray, opening the door.

“Ask him to wait for a moment,” Girdlestone answered.

“And now, captain, to return to the original point, shall we dry dock the Black Eagle and reduce the salary, or do you see your way to going back in her on the same terms?”

“I’ll go back and be damned to it!” said the captain recklessly, plunging his hands into the pockets of his pea jacket and plumping back into his chair.

“That’s right,” his grim employer remarked approvingly.

“But swearing is a most sinful practice. Send the policeman away,

Ezra.”

The young man went out with an amused smile, and the two were left together again.

“You’ll not be able to pass the Government inspector unless you do something to her,” the seaman said after a long pause, during which he brooded over his wrongs.

“Of course we shall do something. The firm is not mean, though it avoids unnecessary expense. We’ll put a coat of paint on her, and some pitch, and do up the rigging. She's a stout old craft, and with one of the smartest sailors afloat in command of her — for we always give you credit for being that — she'll run many a voyage yet."

"I'm paid for the risk, guv'nor, as you said just now," the sailor remarked. "But don't it seem kind o' hard on them as isn't — on the mates an' the hands?"

"There is always a risk, my dear captain. There is nothing in the world without risk. You remember what is said about those who go down to the sea in ships. They see the wonders of the deep, and in return they incur some little danger. My house in Eccleston Square might be shaken down by an earthquake, or a gale might blow in the walls, but I'm not always brooding over the chance of it. There's no use your taking it for granted that some misfortune will happen to the Black Eagle."

The sailor was silenced, but not convinced by his employer's logic. "Well, well," he said sulkily, "I am going, so there's an end of it, and there's no good in having any more palaver about it. You have your object in running rotten ships, and you make it worth my while to take my chances in them. I'm suited, and you're suited, so there's no more to be said."

"That's right. Have some more rum?"

"No, not a spot."

"Why not?"

"Because I likes to keep my head pretty clear when I'm a-talkin' to you, Muster Girdlestone. Out o' your office I'll drink to further orders, but I won't do business and muddle myself at the same time. When d'ye want me to start?"

"When she's unloaded and loaded up again. Three weeks or a month yet. I expect that Spender will have come in with the Maid of Athens by that time."

"Unless some accident happens on the way," said Captain Hamilton Miggs, with his old leer. "He was at Sierra Leone when we came up the coast. I couldn't put in there, for the swabs have got a warrant out ag'in me for putting a charge o' shot into a nigger."

"That was a wicked action — very wrong, indeed," the merchant said gravely. "You must consider the interests of the firm, Miggs. We can't afford to have a good port blocked against our ships in this fashion. Did they serve this writ on you?"

"Another nigger brought it aboard."

"Did you read it?"

"No; I threw it overboard."

"And what became of the negro?"

"Well," said Miggs with a grin, "when I threw the writ overboard he happened to be a-holdin' on to it. So, ye see, he went over, too. Then I up anchor and scooted."

"There are sharks about there?"

"A few."

"Really, Miggs," the merchant said, "you must restrain your sinful passions. You have broken the fifth commandment, and closed the trade of Freetown to the Black Eagle."

"It never was worth a rap," the sailor answered. "I wouldn't give a cuss for any of the British settlements. Give me real niggers, chaps as knows nothing of law or civilizing, or any rot of the sort. I can pull along with them.

"I have often wondered how you managed it," Girdlestone said curiously. "You succeed in picking up a cargo where the steadiest and best men can't get as much as a bag of nuts. How do you work it?"

"There's many would like to know that," Miggs answered, with an expressive wink.

"It is a secret, then?"

"Well, it ain't a secret to you, 'cause you ain't a skipper, and it don't matter if you knows it or not. I don't want to have 'em all at the same game."

"How is it, then?"

"I'll tell ye," said Miggs. He seemed to have recovered his serenity by this time, and his eyes twinkled as he spoke of his own exploits. "I gets drunk with them. That's how I does it."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes, that's how it's worked. Lord love ye, when these fust-class certificated, second-cousin-to-an-earl merchant skippers comes out they move about among the chiefs and talks down to them as if they was tin Methuselahs on wheels. The Almighty's great coat wouldn't make a waistcoat for some o' these blokes. Now when I gets among 'em I has 'em all into the cabin, though they're black an' naked, an' the smell ain't over an' above pleasant. Then I out with the rum and it's 'help yourself an' pass the bottle.' Pretty soon, d'ye see, their tongues get loosened, and as I lie low an’ keep dark I gets a pretty good idea o’ what’s in the market. Then when I knows what’s to be got, it’s queer if I don’t manage to get it. Besides, they like a little notice, just as Christians does, and they remembers me because I treat them well.”

“An excellent plan, Miggs — a capital plan!” said the senior partner.

“You are an invaluable servant.”

“Well,” the captain said, rising from his chair, “I’m getting a great deal too dry with all this palaver. I don’t mind gettin’ drunk with nigger chiefs, but I’m darned if I’ll—” He paused, but the grim smile on his companion’s face showed that he appreciated the compliment.

“I say,” he continued, giving his employer a confidential nudge with his elbow, “suppose we’d gone down in the bay this last time, you’d ha’ been a bit out in your reckoning — eh, what?”

“Why so?”

“Well, we were over-insured on our outward passage. An accident then might ha’ put thousands in your pocket, I know. Coming back, though, the cargo was worth more than the insurance, I reckon. You’d ha’ been out o’ pocket if we’d foundered. It would ha’ been a case o’ the engineer hoisted on his own Peter, as Shakspere says.”

“We take our chance of these things,” the merchant said with dignity.

“Well, good morning, guv’nor,” Captain Hamilton Miggs said brusquely. “When you wants me you can lay your hands on me at the old crib, the Cock and Cowslip, Rotherhithe.”

As he passed out through the office, Ezra rejoined his father.

“He’s a curious chap,” he remarked, jerking his head in the direction which Miggs had taken. “I heard him bellowing like a bull, so I thought I had best listen to what he had to say. He’s a useful servant, though.”

“The fellow’s half a savage himself,” his father said. “He’s in his element among them. That’s why he gets on so well with them.”

“He doesn’t seem much the worse for the climate, either.”

“His body does not, but his soul, Ezra, his soul? However, to return to business. I wish you to see the underwriters and pay the premium of the Black Eagle. If you see your way to it, increase the policy; but do it carefully, Ezra, and with tact. She will start about the time of the equinoctial gales. If anything should happen to her, it would be as well that the firm should have a margin on the right side.”

CHAPTER V.

MODERN ATHENIANS.

Edinburgh University may call herself with grim jocoseness the “alma mater” of her students, but if she be a mother at all she is one of a very heroic and Spartan cast, who conceals her maternal affection with remarkable success. The only signs of interest which she ever designs to evince towards her alumni are upon those not infrequent occasions when guineas are to be demanded from them. Then one is surprised to find how carefully the old hen has counted her chickens, and how promptly the demand is conveyed to each one of the thousands throughout the empire who, in spite of neglect, cherish a sneaking kindness for their old college. There is symbolism in the very look of her, square and massive, grim and grey, with never a pillar or carving to break the dead monotony of the great stone walls. She is learned, she is practical, and she is useful. There is little sentiment or romance in her composition, however, and in this she does but conform to the instincts of the nation of which she is the youngest but the most flourishing teacher.

A lad coming up to an English University finds himself In an enlarged and enlightened public school. If he has passed through Harrow and Eton there is no very abrupt transition between the life which he has led in the sixth form and that which he finds awaiting him on the banks of the Cam and the Isis. Certain rooms are found for him which have been inhabited by generations of students in the past, and will be by as many in the future. His religion is cared for, and he is expected to put in an appearance at hall and at chapel. He must be within bounds at a fixed time. If he behave indecorously he is liable to be pounced upon and reported by special officials, and a code of punishments is hung perpetually over his head. In return for all this his University takes a keen interest in him. She pats him on the back if he succeeds. Prizes and scholarships, and fine fat fellowships are thrown plentifully in his way if he will gird up his loins and aspire to them.

There is nothing of this in a Scotch University. The young aspirant pays his pound, and finds himself a student. After that he may do absolutely what he will. There are certain classes going on at certain hours, which he may attend if he choose. If not, he may stay away without the slightest remonstrance from the college. As to religion, he may worship the sun, or have a private fetish of his own upon the mantelpiece of his lodgings for all that the University cares. He may live where he likes, he may keep what hours he chooses, and he is at liberty to break every commandment in the decalogue as long as he behaves himself with some approach to decency within the academical precincts. In every way he is absolutely his own master. Examinations are periodically held, at which he may appear or not, as he chooses. The University is a great unsympathetic machine, taking in a stream of raw-boned cartilaginous youths at one end, and turning them out at the other as learned divines, astute lawyers, and skilful medical men. Of every thousand of the raw material about six hundred emerge at the other side. The remainder are broken in the process.

The merits and faults of this Scotch system are alike evident. Left entirely to his own devices in a far from moral city, many a lad falls at the very starting-point of his life’s race, never to rise again. Many become idlers or take to drink, while others, after wasting time and money which they could ill afford, leave the college with nothing learned save vice. On the other hand, those whose manliness and good sense keep them straight have gone through a training which lasts them for life. They have been tried, and have not been found wanting. They have learned self-reliance, confidence, and, in a word, have become men of the world while their confreres in England are still magnified schoolboys.

High up in a third flat in Howe Street one, Thomas Dimsdale, was going through his period of probation in a little bedroom and a large sitting-room, which latter, “more studentium,” served the purpose of dining-room, parlour, and study. A dingy sideboard, with four still more dingy chairs and an archaeological sofa, made up the whole of the furniture, with the exception of a circular mahogany centre-table, littered with note-books and papers. Above the mantelpiece was a fly-blown mirror with innumerable cards and notices projecting in a fringe all around, and a pair of pipe racks flanking it on either side. Along the centre of the side-board, arranged with suspicious neatness, as though seldom disturbed, stood a line of solemn books, Holden’s Osteology, Quain’s Anatomy, Kirkes’ Physiology, and

Huxley's Invertebrata, together with a disarticulated human skull. On one side of the fireplace two thigh bones were stacked; on the other a pair of foils, two basket-hilted single-sticks, and a set of boxing-gloves. On a shelf in a convenient niche was a small stock of general literature, which appeared to have been considerably more thumbed than the works upon medicine. Thackeray's Esmond and Meredith's Richard Feveret rubbed covers with Irving's Conquest of Granada and a tattered line of paper-covered novels. Over the sideboard was a framed photograph of the Edinburgh University Football Fifteen, and opposite it a smaller one of Dimsdale himself, clad in the scantiest of garb, as he appeared after winning the half-mile at the Inter-University Handicap. A large silver goblet, the trophy of that occasion, stood underneath upon a bracket. Such was the student's chamber upon the morning in question, save that in a roomy arm-chair in the corner the young gentleman himself was languidly reclining, with a short wooden pipe in his mouth, and his feet perched up upon the side of the table.

Grey-eyed, yellow-haired, broad in the chest and narrow in the loins, with the strength of a bullock and the graceful activity of a stag, it would be hard to find a finer specimen of young British manhood. The long, fine curves of the limbs, and the easy pose of the round, strong head upon the thick, muscular neck, might have served as a model to an Athenian sculptor. There was nothing in the face, however, to recall the regular beauty of the East. It was Anglo-Saxon to the last feature, with its honest breadth between the eyes and its nascent moustache, a shade lighter in colour than the sun-burned skin. Shy, and yet strong; plain, and yet pleasing; it was the face of a type of man who has little to say for himself in this world, and says that little badly, but who has done more than all the talkers and the writers to ring this planet round with a crimson girdle of British possessions.

"Wonder whether Jack Garraway is ready!" he murmured, throwing down the Scotsman, and staring up at the roof. "It's nearly eleven o'clock."

He rose with a yawn, picked up the poker, stood upon the chair, and banged three times upon the ceiling. Three muffled taps responded from the room above. Dimsdale stepped down and began slowly to discard his coat and his waistcoat. As he did so there was a quick, active step upon the stair, and a lean, wiry-looking, middle-sized young fellow stepped into the room. With a nod of greeting he pushed the table over to one side, threw off his two upper garments, and pulled on a pair of the boxing-gloves from the corner. Dimsdale had already done the same, and was standing, a model of manly grace and strength, in the centre of the room.

“Practice your lead, Jack. About here.” He tapped the centre of his forehead with his swollen gauntlet.

His companion poised himself for a moment, and then, lashing out with his left hand, came home with a heavy thud on the place indicated. Dimsdale smiled gently and shook his head.

“It won’t do,” he said.

“I hit my hardest,” the other answered apologetically.

“It won’t do. Try again.”

The visitor repeated the blow with all the force that he could command.

Dimsdale shook his head again despondently. “You don’t seem to catch it,” he said. “It’s like this.” He leaned forward, there was the sound of a sharp clip, and the novice shot across the room with a force that nearly sent his skull through the panel of the door.

“That’s it,” said Dimsdale mildly.

“Oh, it is, is it?” the other responded, rubbing his head.

“It’s deucedly interesting, but I think I would understand it better if I saw you do it to some one else. It is something between the explosion of a powder magazine and a natural convulsion.”

His instructor smiled grimly. “That’s the only way to learn,” he said. “Now we shall have three minutes of give-and-take, and so ends the morning lesson.”

While this little scene was being enacted in the lodgings of the student, a very stout little elderly man was walking slowly down Howe Street, glancing up at the numbers upon the doors. He was square and deep and broad, like a bottle of Geneva, with a large ruddy face and a pair of bright black eyes, which were shrewd and critical, and yet had a merry twinkle of eternal boyishness in their depths. Bushy side whiskers, shot with grey, flanked his rubicund visage, and he threw out his feet as he walked with the air of a man who is on good terms with himself and with every one around him.

At No.13 he stopped and rapped loudly upon the door with the head of his metal-headed stick. “Mrs. McTavish?” he asked, as a hard-lined, angular woman responded to his summons.

“That’s me, sir.”

“Mr. Dimsdale lives with you, I believe?”

“Third floor front, sir.”

“Is he in?”

Suspicion shone in the woman’s eyes. “Was it aboot a bill?” she asked.

“A bill, my good woman! No, no, nothing of the kind. Dr. Dimsdale is my name. I am the lad’s father — just come up from London to see him. I hope he has not been overworking himself?”

A ghost of a smile played about the woman’s face. “I think not, sir,” she answered.

“I almost wish I had come round in the afternoon,” said the visitor, standing with his thick legs astride upon the door-mat. “It seems a pity to break his chain of thought. The morning is his time for study.”

“Houts! I wouldna’ fash aboot that.”

“Well! well! The third floor, you say. He did not expect me so early,

I shall surprise the dear boy at his work.”

The landlady stood listening expectantly in the passage. The sturdy little man plodded heavily up the first flight of stairs. He paused on the landing.

“Dear me!” he murmured. “Some one is beating carpets. How can they expect poor Tom to read?”

At the second landing the noise was much louder. “It must be a dancing school,” conjectured the doctor.

When he reached his son’s door, however, there could no longer be any doubt as to whence the sounds proceeded. There was the stamp and shuffle of feet, the hissing of in-drawn breath, and an occasional soft thud, as if some one were butting his head against a bale of wool. “It’s epilepsy,” gasped the doctor, and turning the handle he rushed into the room.

One hurried glance showed him the struggle which was going on. There was no time to note details. Some maniac was assaulting his Tom. He sprang at the man, seized him round the waist, dragged him to the ground, and seated himself upon him. “Now tie his hands,” he said complacently, as he balanced himself upon the writhing figure.

CHAPTER VI.

A RECTORIAL ELECTION.

It took some little time before his son, who was half-choked with laughter, could explain to the energetic doctor that the gentleman upon whom he was perched was not a dangerous lunatic, but, on the contrary, a very harmless and innocent member of society. When at last it was made clear to him, the doctor released his prisoner and was profuse in his apologies.

“This is my father, Garraway,” said Dimsdale. “I hardly expected him so early.”

“I must offer you a thousand apologies, sir. The fact is that I am rather short-sighted, and had no time to put my glasses on. It seemed to me to be a most dangerous scuffle.”

“Don’t mention it, sir,” said Garraway, with great good humour.

“And you, Tom, you rogue, is this the way you spend your mornings? I expected to find you deep in your books. I told your landlady that I hardly liked to come up for fear of disturbing you at your work. You go up for your first professional in a few weeks, I understand?”

“That will be all right, dad,” said his son demurely. “Garraway and I usually take a little exercise of this sort as a preliminary to the labours of the day. Try this armchair and have a cigarette.”

The doctor’s eye fell upon the medical works and the disarticulated skull, and his ill-humour departed.

“You have your tools close at hand, I see,” he remarked.

“Yes, dad, all ready.”

“Those bones bring back old memories to me. I am rusty in my anatomy, but I dare say I could stump you yet. Let me see now. What are the different foramina of the sphenoid bone, and what structures pass through them? Eh?”

“Coming!” yelled his son. “Coming!” and dashed out of the room.

“I didn’t hear any one call,” observed the doctor.

“Didn’t you, sir?” said Garraway, pulling on his coat. “I thought I heard a noise.”

“You read with my son, I believe?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then perhaps you can tell me what the structures are which pass through the foramina of the sphenoid?”

“Oh yes, sir. There is the — All right, Tom, all right! Excuse me, sir! He is calling me;” and Garraway vanished as precipitately as his friend had done. The doctor sat alone, puffing at his cigarette, and brooding over his own dullness of hearing.

Presently the two students returned, looking just a little shame-faced, and plunged instantly into wild talk about the weather, the town, and the University — anything and everything except the sphenoid bone.

“You have come in good time to see something of University life,” said young Dimsdale. “To-day we elect our new Lord Rector. Garraway and I will take you down and show you the sights.”

“I have often wished to see something of it,” his father answered. “I was apprenticed to my profession, Mr. Garraway, in the old-fashioned way, and had few opportunities of attending college.”

“Indeed, sir.”

“But I can imagine it all. What can be more charming than the sight of a community of young men all striving after knowledge, and emulating each other in the ardour of their studies? Not that I would grudge them recreation. I can fancy them strolling in bands round the classic precincts of their venerable University, and amusing themselves by discussing the rival theories of physiologists or the latest additions to the pharmacopoeia.”

Garraway had listened with becoming gravity to the commencement of this speech, but at the last sentence he choked and vanished for the second time out of the room.

“Your friend seems amused,” remarked Dr. Dimsdale mildly.

“Yes. He gets taken like that sometimes,” said his son. “His brothers are just the same. I have hardly had a chance yet to say how glad I am to see you, dad.”

“And I to see you, my dear boy. Your mother and Kate come up by the night train. I have private rooms at the hotel.”

“Kate Harston! I can only remember her as a little quiet girl with long brown hair. That was six years ago. She promised to be pretty.”

“Then she has fulfilled her promise. But you shall judge that for yourself. She is the ward of John Girdlestone, the African merchant, but we are the only relations she has upon earth. Her father was my second cousin. She spends a good deal of her time now with us at Phillimore Gardens — as much as her guardian will allow. He prefers to have her under his own roof, and I don’t blame him, for she is like a ray of sunshine in the house. It was like drawing his teeth to get him to consent to this little holiday, but I stuck at it until I wearied him out — fairly wearied him out.” The little doctor chuckled at the thought of his victory, and stretched out his thick legs towards the fire.

“This examination will prevent me from being with you as much as I wish.”

“That’s right, my boy; let nothing interfere with your work.”

“Still, I think I am pretty safe. I am glad they have come now, for next Wednesday is the international football match. Garraway and I are the two Scotch half-backs. You must all come down and see it.”

“I’ll tell you what, Dimsdale,” said Garraway, reappearing in the doorway, “if we don’t hurry up we shall see nothing of the election. It is close on twelve.”

“I am all ready,” cried Dr. Dimsdale, jumping to his feet and buttoning his coat.

“Let us be off, then,” said his son; and picking up hats and sticks they clattered off down the lodging-house stairs.

A rectorial election is a peculiarly Scotch institution, and, however it may strike the impartial observer, it is regarded by the students themselves as a rite of extreme solemnity and importance from which grave issues may depend. To hear the speeches and addresses of rival orators one would suppose that the integrity of the constitution and the very existence of the empire hung upon the return of their special nominee. Two candidates are chosen from the most eminent of either party and a day is fixed for the polling. Every undergraduate has a vote, but the professors have no voice in the matter. As the duties are nominal and the position honourable, there is never any lack of distinguished aspirants for a vacancy. Occasionally some well-known literary or scientific man is invited to become a candidate, but as a rule the election is fought upon strictly political lines, with all the old-fashioned accompaniments of a Parliamentary contest.

For months before the great day there is bustle and stir. Secret committees meet, rules are formulated, and insidious agents prowl about with an eye to the political training of those who have not yet nailed their colours to any particular mast. Then comes a grand meeting of the Liberal Students' Association, which is trumped by a dinner of the Undergraduates' Conservative Society. The campaign is then in full swing. Great boards appear at the University gates, on which pithy satires against one or other candidate, parodies on songs, quotations from their speeches, and gaudily painted cartoons are posted. Those who are supposed to be able to feel the pulse of the University move about with the weight of much knowledge upon their brows, throwing out hints as to the probable majority one way or the other. Some profess to know it to a nicety. Others shake their heads and remark vaguely that there is not much to choose either way. So week after week goes by, until the excitement reaches a climax when the date of the election comes round.

There was no need upon that day for Dr. Dimsdale or any other stranger in the town to ask his way to the University, for the whooping and yelling which proceeded from that usually decorous building might have been heard from Prince's Street to Newington. In front of the gates was a dense crowd of townspeople peering through into the quadrangle, and deriving much entertainment from the movements of the lively young gentlemen within. Large numbers of the more peaceable undergraduates stood about under the arches, and these quickly made a way for the newcomers, for both Garraway and Dimsdale as noted athletes commanded a respect among their fellow-students which medallists and honours men might look for in vain.

The broad open quadrangle, and all the numerous balconies and terraces which surround it, were crowded with an excited mob of students. The whole three thousand odd electors who stand upon the college rolls appeared to be present, and the noise which they were making would have reflected credit on treble their number. The dense crowd surged and seethed without pause or rest. Now and again some orator would be hoisted up on the shoulders of his fellows, when an oscillation of the crowd would remove his supporters and down he would come, only to be succeeded by another at some other part of the assembly. The name of either candidate would produce roars of applause and equally vigorous howls of execration. Those who were lucky enough to be in the balconies above hurled down missiles on the crowd beneath — peas, eggs, potatoes, and bags of flour or of sulphur; while those below, wherever they found room to swing an arm, returned the fusillade with interest. The doctor's views of academical serenity and the high converse of pallid students vanished into thin air as he gazed upon the mad tumultuous scene. Yet, in spite of his fifty years, he laughed as heartily as any boy at the wild pranks of the young politicians, and the ruin which was wrought upon broad-cloth coat and shooting jacket by the hail of unsavoury projectiles.

The crowd was most dense and most noisy in front of the class-room in which the counting of the votes was going forward. At one the result was to be announced, and as the long hand of the great clock crept towards the hour, a hush of expectation fell upon the assembly. The brazen clang broke harshly out, and at the same moment the folding doors were flung open, and a knot of men rushed out into the crowd, who swirled and eddied round them. The centre of the throng was violently agitated, and the whole mass of people swayed outwards and inwards. For a minute or two the excited combatants seethed and struggled without a clue as to the cause of the commotion. Then the corner of a large placard was elevated above the heads of the rioters, on which was visible the word “Liberal” in great letters, but before it could be raised further it was torn down, and the struggle became fiercer than ever. Up came the placard again — the other corner this time — with the word “Majority” upon it, and then immediately vanished as before. Enough had been seen, however, to show which way the victory had gone, and shouts of triumph arose everywhere, with waving of hats and clatter of sticks. Meanwhile, in the centre the two parties fought round the placard, and the commotion began to cover a wider area, as either side was reinforced by fresh supporters. One gigantic Liberal seized the board, and held it aloft for a moment, so that it could be seen in its entirety by the whole multitude:

LIBERAL MAJORITY,
241.

But his triumph was short-lived. A stick descended upon his head, his heels were tripped up, and he and his placard rolled upon the ground together. The victors succeeded, however, in forcing their way to the extreme end of the quadrangle, where, as every Edinburgh man knows, the full-length statue of Sir David Brewster looks down upon the classic ground which he loved so well. An audacious Radical swarmed up upon the pedestal and balanced the obnoxious notice on the marble arms of the professor. Thus converted into a political partisan, the revered inventor of the kaleidoscope became the centre of a furious struggle, the vanquished politicians making the most desperate efforts to destroy the symbol of their opponents' victory, while the others offered an equally vigorous resistance to their attacks. The struggle was still proceeding when Dimsdale removed his father, for it was impossible to say what form the riot might assume.

"What Goths! what barbarians!" cried the little doctor, as they walked down the Bridges. "And this is my dream of refined quiet and studious repose!"

"They are not always like that, sir," said his son apologetically.

"They were certainly a little jolly to-day."

"A little jolly!" cried the doctor. "You rogue, Tom. I believe if I had not been there you would have been their ringleader."

He glanced from one to the other, and it was so evident from the expression of their faces that he had just hit the mark, that he burst into a great guffaw of laughter, in which, after a moment's hesitation, his two young companions heartily joined.

CHAPTER VII.

ENGLAND VERSUS SCOTLAND.

The rectorial election had come and had gone, but another great event had taken its place. It was the day of the England and Scotland Rugby match.

Better weather could not have been desired. The morning had been hazy, but as the sun shone out the fog had gradually risen, until now there remained but a suspicion of it, floating like a plume, above the frowning walls of Edinburgh Castle, and twining a fairy wreath round the unfinished columns of the national monument upon the Calton Hill. The broad stretch of the Prince’s Street Gardens, which occupy the valley between the old town and the new, looked green and spring-like, and their fountains sparkled merrily in the sunshine. Their wide expanse, well-trimmed and bepathed, formed a strange contrast to the rugged piles of grim old houses which bounded them upon the other side and the massive grandeur of the great hill beyond, which lies like a crouching lion keeping watch and ward, day and night, over the ancient capital of the Scottish kings. Travellers who have searched the whole world round have found no fairer view.

So thought three of the genus who were ensconced that forenoon in the bow windows of the Royal Hotel and gazed across the bright green valley at the dull historical background beyond. One we already know, a stoutish gentleman, ruddy-faced and black-eyed, with check trousers, light waistcoat and heavy chain, legs widely parted, his hands in his pockets, and on his face that expression of irreverent and critical approval with which the travelled Briton usually regards the works of nature. By his side was a young lady in a tight-fitting travelling dress, with trim leather belt and snow-white collar and cuffs. There was no criticism in her sweet face, now flushed with excitement — nothing but unqualified wonder and admiration at the beautiful scene before her. An elderly placid-faced woman sat in a basket chair in the recess, and looked up with quiet loving eyes at the swift play of emotions which swept over the girl’s eager features.

“Oh, Uncle George,” she cried, “it is really too heavenly. I cannot realise that we are free. I can’t help fearing that it is all a dream, and that I shall wake up to find myself pouring out Ezra Girdlestone’s coffee, or listening to Mr. Girdlestone as he reads the morning quotations.”

The elder woman stroked the girl’s hand caressingly with her soft, motherly palm. “Don’t think about it,” she murmured.

“No, don’t think about it,” echoed the doctor. “My wife is quite right. Don’t think about it. But, dear me, what a job I had to persuade your guardian to let you go. I should have given it up in despair — I really should — if I had not known that you had set your heart upon it.”

“Oh, how good you both are to me!” cried the girl, in a pretty little gush of gratitude.

“Pooh, pooh, Kate! But as to Girdlestone, he is perfectly right. If I had you I should keep you fast to myself, I promise you. Eh, Matilda?”

“That we would, George.”

“Perfect tyrants, both of us. Eh, Matilda?”

“Yes, George.”

“I am afraid that I am not very useful in a household,” said the girl. “I was too young to look after things for poor papa. Mr. Girdlestone, of course, has a housekeeper of his own. I read the Financial News to him after dinner every day, and I know all about stock and Consols and those American railways which are perpetually rising and falling. One of them went wrong last week, and Ezra swore, and Mr. Girdlestone said that the Lord chastens those whom He loves. He did not seem to like being chastened a bit though. But how delightful this is! It is like living in another world.”

The girl was a pretty figure as she stood in the window, tall, lithe, and graceful, with the long soft curves of budding womanhood. Her face was sweet rather than beautiful, but an artist would have revelled in the delicate strength of the softly rounded chin, and the quick bright play of her expression. Her hair, of a deep rich brown, with a bronze shimmer where a sunbeam lay athwart it, swept back in those thick luxuriant coils which are the unfailing index of a strong womanly nature. Her deep blue eyes danced with life and light, while her slightly retrousse nose and her sensitive smiling mouth all spoke of gentle good humour. From her sunny face to the dainty little shoe which peeped from under the trim black skirt, she was an eminently pleasant object to look upon. So thought the passers-by as they glanced up at the great bow window, and so, too, thought a young gentleman who had driven up to the hotel door, and who now bounded up the steps and into the room. He was enveloped in a long shaggy ulster, which stretched down to his ankles, and he wore a velvet cap trimmed with silver stuck carelessly on the back of his powerful yellow curled head.

“Here is the boy!” cried his mother gaily.

“How are you, mam dear?” he cried, stooping over her to kiss her. “How are you, dad? Good morning, Cousin Kate. You must come down and wish us luck. What a blessing that it is pretty warm. It is miserable for the spectators when there is an east wind. What do you think of it, dad?”

“I think you are an unnatural young renegade to play against your mother country,” said the sturdy doctor.

“Oh, come, dad! I was born in Scotland, and I belong to a Scotch club.

Surely that is good enough.”

“I hope you lose, then.”

“We are very likely to. Atkinson, of the West of Scotland, has strained his leg, and we shall have to play Blair, of the Institution, at full back — not so good a man by a long way. The odds are five to four on the English this morning. They are said to be the very strongest lot that ever played in an International match. I have brought a cab with me, so the moment you are ready we can start.”

There were others besides the students who were excited about the coming struggle. All Edinburgh was in a ferment. Football is, and always has been, the national game of Scotland among those who affect violent exercise, while golf takes its place with the more sedately inclined. There is no game so fitted to appeal to a hardy and active people as that composite exercise prescribed by the Rugby Union, in which fifteen men pit strength, speed, endurance, and every manly attribute they possess in a prolonged struggle against fifteen antagonists. There is no room for mere knack or trickery. It is a fierce personal contest in which the ball is the central rallying point. That ball may be kicked, pushed, or carried; it may be forced onwards in any conceivable manner towards the enemy’s goal. The fleet of foot may seize it and by superior speed thread their way through the ranks of their opponents. The heavy of frame may crush down all opposition by dead weight. The hardiest and most enduring must win.

Even matches between prominent local clubs excite much interest in Edinburgh and attract crowds of spectators. How much more then when the pick of the manhood of Scotland were to try their strength against the very cream of the players from the South of the Tweed. The roads which converged on the Raeburn Place Grounds, on which the match was to be played, were dark with thousands all wending their way in one direction. So thick was the moving mass that the carriage of the Dimsdale party had to go at a walk for the latter half of the journey, In spite of the objurgations of the driver, who, as a patriot, felt the responsibility which rested upon him in having one of the team in his charge, and the necessity there was for delivering him up by the appointed time. Many in the crowd recognised the young fellow and waved their hands to him or called out a few words of encouragement. Miss Kate Harston and even the doctor began to reflect some of the interest and excitement which showed itself on every face around them. The youth alone seemed to be unaffected by the general enthusiasm, and spent the time in endeavouring to explain the principles of the game to his fair companion, whose ignorance of it was comprehensive and astounding.

“You understand,” he said, “that there are fifteen players on each side. But it would not do for the whole of these fifteen men to play in a crowd, for, in that case, if the other side forced the ball past them, they would have nothing to fall back upon — no reserves, as it were. Therefore, as we play the game in Scotland, ten men are told off to play in a knot. They are picked for their weight, strength, and endurance. They are called the forwards, and are supposed to be always on the ball, following it everywhere, never stopping or tiring. They are opposed, of course, by the forwards of the other side. Now, immediately behind the forwards are the two quarter-backs. They should be very active fellows, good dodgers and fast runners. They never join in the very rough work, but they always follow on the outskirts of the forwards, and if the ball is forced past it is their duty to pick it up and make away with it like lightning. If they are very fast they may succeed in carrying it a long way before they are caught—’tackled,’ as we call it. It is their duty also to keep their eye on the quarter-backs of the enemy, and to tackle them if they get away. Behind them again are the two half-backs — or ‘three-quarters,’ as they call them in England. I am one of them. They are supposed to be fast runners too, and a good deal of the tackling comes to their lot, for a good runner of the other side can often get past the quarters, and then the halves have got to bring him down. Behind the half-backs is a single man — the back. He is the last resource when all others are past. He should be a sure and long kicker, so as to get the ball away from the goal by that means — but you are not listening.”

“Oh yes, I am,” said Kate. As a matter of fact the great throng and the novel sights were distracting her so much that she found it hard to attend to her companion’s disquisition.

“You’ll understand it quickly enough when you see it,” the student remarked cheerily. “Here we are at the grounds.”

As he spoke the carriage rattled through a broad gateway into a large open grassy space, with a great pavilion at one side of it and a staked enclosure about two hundred yards long and a hundred broad, with a goal-post at each end. This space was marked out by gaily coloured flags, and on every side of it, pressing against the barrier the whole way round, was an enormous crowd, twenty and thirty deep, with others occupying every piece of rising ground or coign of vantage behind them. The most moderate computation would place the number of spectators at fifteen thousand. At one side there was a line of cabs in the background, and thither the carriage of the Dimsdales drove, while Tom rushed off with his bag to the pavilion to change.

It was high time to do so, for just as the carriage took up its position a hoarse roar burst from the great multitude, and was taken up again and again. It was a welcome to the English team, which had just appeared upon the ground. There they were, clad in white knickerbockers and jerseys, with a single red rose embroidered upon their breasts; as gallant-looking a set of young fellows as the whole world could produce. Tall, square-shouldered, straight-limbed, as active as kittens and as powerful as young bullocks, it was clear that they would take a lot of beating. They were the pick of the University and London clubs, with a few players from the northern counties; not a man among them whose name was not known wherever football was played. That tall, long-legged youth is Evans, the great half-back, who is said to be able to send a drop-kick further than any of his predecessors in the annals of the game. There is Buller, the famous Cambridge quarter, only ten stone in weight, but as lithe and slippery as an eel; and Jackson, the other quarter, is just such another — hard to tackle himself, but as tenacious as a bulldog in holding an adversary. That one with the straw-coloured hair is Coles, the great forward; and there are nine lads of metal who will stand by him to-day through thick and thin. They were a formidable-looking lot, and betting, which had been five on four to them in the morning, showed symptoms of coming to five to three. In the meantime, by no means abashed at finding themselves the cynosure of so many eyes, the Englishmen proceeded to keep up their circulation by leap-frog and horse-play, for their jerseys were thin and the wind bleak.

But where were their adversaries? A few impatient moments slowly passed, and then from one corner of the ground there rose a second cheer, which rippled down the long line of onlookers and swelled into a mighty shout as the Scotchmen vaulted over the barrier into the arena. It was a nice question for connoisseurs in physical beauty as to which team had the best of it in physique. The Northerners in their blue jerseys, with a thistle upon their breasts, were a sturdy, hard-bitten lot, averaging a couple of pounds more in weight than their opponents. The latter were, perhaps, more regularly and symmetrically built, and were pronounced by experts to be the faster team, but there was a massive, gaunt look about the Scotch forwards which promised well for their endurance. Indeed, it was on their forwards that they principally relied. The presence of three such players as Buller, Evans, and Jackson made the English exceptionally strong behind, but they had no men in front who were individually so strong and fast as Miller, Watts, or Grey. Dimsdale and Garraway, the Scotch half-backs, and Tookey, the quarter, whose blazing red head was a very oriflamme wherever the struggle waxed hottest, were the best men that the Northerners could boast of behind.

The English had won the choice of goals, and elected to play with what slight wind there was at their backs. A small thing may turn the scale between two evenly balanced teams. Evans, the captain, placed the ball in front of him upon the ground, with his men lined all along on either side, as eager as hounds in leash. Some fifty yards in front of him, about the place where the ball would drop, the blue-vested Scots gathered in a sullen crowd. There was a sharp ring from a bell, a murmur of excitement from the crowd. Evans took two quick steps forward, and the yellow ball flew swift and straight, as if it had been shot from a cannon, right into the expectant group in front of him.

For a moment there was grasping and turmoil among the Scotchmen. Then from the crowd emerged Grey, the great Glasgow forward, the ball tucked well under his arm, his head down, running like the wind, with his nine forwards in a dense clump behind him, ready to bear down all opposition, while the other five followed more slowly, covering a wider stretch of ground. He met the Englishmen who had started full cry after the ball the moment that their captain had kicked it. The first hurled himself upon him. Grey, without slackening his pace, swerved slightly, and he missed him. The second he passed in the same way, but the third caught quickly at his legs, and the Scot flew head over heels and was promptly collared. Not much use collaring him now! In the very act of falling he had thrown the ball behind him. Gordon, of Paisley, caught it and bore it on a dozen yards, when he was seized and knocked down, but not before he had bequeathed his trust to another, who struggled manfully for some paces before he too was brought to the ground. This pretty piece of “passing” had recovered for the Scotch all the advantage lost by the English kick-off, and was greeted by roars of applause from the crowd.

And now there is a “maul” or “scrimmage.” Was there ever another race which did such things and called it play! Twenty young men, so blended and inextricably mixed that no one could assign the various arms and legs to their respective owners, are straining every muscle and fibre of their bodies against each other, and yet are so well balanced that the dense clump of humanity stands absolutely motionless. In the centre is an inextricable chaos where shoulders heave and heads rise and fall. At the edges are a fringe of legs — legs in an extreme state of tension — ever pawing for a firmer foothold, and apparently completely independent of the rest of their owners, whose heads and bodies have bored their way Into the melee. The pressure in there is tremendous, yet neither side gives an inch. Just on the skirts of the throng, with bent bodies and hands on knees, stand the cool little quarter-backs, watching the gasping giants, and also keeping a keen eye upon each other. Let the ball emerge near one of these, and he will whip it up and be ten paces off before those in the “maul” even know that it is gone. Behind them again are the halves, alert and watchful, while the back, with his hands in his pockets, has an easy consciousness that he will have plenty of warning before the ball can pass the four good men who stand between the “maul” and himself.

Now the dense throng sways a little backwards and forwards. An inch is lost and an inch is gained. The crowd roar with delight. “Mauled, Scotland!” “Mauled England!” “England!” “Scotland!” The shouting would stir the blood of the mildest mortal that ever breathed. Kate Harston stands in the carriage, rosy with excitement and enjoyment. Her heart is all with the wearers of the rose, in spite of the presence of her old play-mate in the opposite ranks. The doctor is as much delighted as the youngest man on the ground, and the cabman waves his arms and shouts in a highly indecorous fashion. The two pounds’ difference in weight is beginning to tell. The English sway back a yard or two. A blue coat emerges among the white ones. He has fought his way through, but has left the ball behind him, so he dashes round and puts his weight behind it once more. There is a last upheaval, the maul is split in two, and through the rent come the redoubtable Scotch forwards with the ball amongst them. Their solid phalanx has scattered the English like spray to right and left. There is no one in front of them, no one but a single little man, almost a boy in size and weight. Surely he cannot hope to stop the tremendous rush. The ball is a few yards in advance of the leading Scot when he springs forward at it. He seizes it an instant before his adversary, and with the same motion writhes himself free from the man’s grasp. Now is the time for the crack Cambridge quarter-back to show what he is made of. The crowd yell with excitement. To right and left run the great Scotch forwards, grasping, slipping, pursuing, and right in the midst of them, as quick and as erratic as a trout in a pool, runs the calm-faced little man, dodging one, avoiding another, slipping between the fingers of two others. Surely he is caught now. No, he has passed all the forwards and emerges from the ruck of men, pelting along at a tremendous pace. He has dodged one of the Scotch quarters, and outstripped the other. “Well played, England!” shout the crowd. “Well run, Buller!” “Now, Tookey!” “Now, Dimsdale!” “Well collared, Dimsdale; well collared, indeed!” The little quarter-back had come to an end of his career, for Tom had been as quick as he and had caught him round the waist as he attempted to pass, and brought him to the ground. The cheers were hearty, for the two half-backs were the only University men in the team, and there were hundreds of students among the spectators. The good doctor coloured up with pleasure to hear his boy’s name bellowed forth approvingly by a thousand excited lungs.

The play is, as all good judges said it would be, very equal. For the first forty minutes every advantage gained by either side had been promptly neutralised by a desperate effort on the part of the other. The mass of struggling players has swayed backwards and forwards, but never more than twenty or thirty yards from the centre of the ground. Neither goal had been seriously threatened as yet. The spectators fail to see how the odds laid on England are justified, but the “fancy” abide by their choice. In the second forty it is thought that the superior speed and staying power of the Southerners will tell over the heavier Scots. There seems little the matter with the latter as yet, as they stand in a group, wiping their grimy faces and discussing the state of the game; for at the end of forty minutes the goals are changed and there is a slight interval.

And now the last hour is to prove whether there are good men bred in the hungry North as any who live on more fruitful ground and beneath warmer skies. If the play was desperate before, it became even more so now. Each member of either team played as if upon him alone depended the issue of the match. Again and again Grey, Anderson, Gordon, and their redoubtable phalanx of dishevelled hard-breathing Scots broke away with the ball; but as often the English quarter and half-backs, by their superior speed, more than made up for the weakness of their forwards, and carried the struggle back into the enemy's ground. Two or three time Evans, the long-kicker, who was credited with the power of reaching the goal from almost any part of the ground, got hold of the ball, but each time before he could kick he was charged by some one of his adversaries. At last, however, his chance came. The ball trickled out of a maul into the hands of Buller, who at once turned and threw it to the half-back behind him. There was no time to reach him. He took a quick glance at the distant goal, a short run forward, and his long limb swung through the air with tremendous force. There was a dead silence of suspense among the crowd as the ball described a lofty parabola. Down it came, down, down, as straight and true as an arrow, just grazing the cross-bar and pitching on the grass beyond, and the groans of a few afflicted patriots were drowned in the hearty cheers which hailed the English goal.

But the victory was not won yet. There were ten minutes left for the Scotchmen to recover this blow or for the Englishmen to improve upon it. The Northerners played so furiously that the ball was kept down near the English goal, which was only saved by the splendid defensive play of their backs. Five minutes passed, and the Scots in turn were being pressed back. A series of brilliant runs by Buller, Jackson, and Evans took the fight into the enemy's country, and kept it there. It seemed as if the visitors meant scoring again, when a sudden change occurred in the state of affairs. It was but three minutes off the calling of time when Tookey, one of the Scotch quarter-backs, got hold of the ball, and made a magnificent run, passing right through the opposing forwards and quarters. He was collared by Evans, but immediately threw the ball behind him. Dimsdale had followed up the quarter-back and caught the ball when it was thrown backwards.

Now or never! The lad felt that he would sacrifice anything to pass the three men who stood between him and the English goal. He passed Evans like the wind before the half-back could disentangle himself from Tookey. There were but two now to oppose him. The first was the other English half-back, a broad-shouldered, powerful fellow, who rushed at him; but Tom, without attempting to avoid him, lowered his head and drove at him full tilt with such violence that both men reeled back from the collision. Dimsdale recovered himself first, however, and got past before the other had time to seize him. The goal was now not more than twenty yards off, with only one between Tom and it, though half a dozen more were in close pursuit. The English back caught him round the waist, while another from behind seized the collar of his jersey, and the three came heavily to the ground together. But the deed was done. In the very act of falling he had managed to kick the ball, which flickered feebly up into the air and just cleared the English bar. It had scarcely touched the ground upon the other side when the ringing of the great bell announced the termination of the match, though its sound was entirely drowned by the tumultuous shouting of the crowd. A thousand hats were thrown into the air, ten thousand voices joined in the roar, and meanwhile the cause of all this outcry was still sitting on the ground, smiling, it is true, but very pale, and with one of his arms dangling uselessly from his shoulder.

Well, the breaking of a collar-bone is a small price to pay for the saving of such a match as that. So thought Tom Dimsdale as he made for the pavilion, with his father keeping off the exultant crowd upon one side and Jack Garraway upon the other. The doctor butted a path through the dense half-crazy mob with a vigour which showed that his son’s talents in that direction were hereditary. Within half an hour Tom was safely ensconced in the corner of the carriage, with his shoulder braced back, secundum artem, and his arm supported by a sling. How quietly and deftly the two women slipped a shawl here and a rug there to save him from the jarring of the carriage! It is part of the angel nature of woman that when youth and strength are maimed and helpless they appeal to her more than they can ever do in the pride and flush of their power. Here lies the compensation of the unfortunate. Kate’s dark blue eyes filled with ineffable compassion as she bent over him; and he, catching sight of that expression, felt a sudden new unaccountable spring of joy bubble up in his heart, which made all previous hopes and pleasures seem vapid and meaningless. The little god shoots hard and straight when his mark is still in the golden dawn of life. All the way back he lay with his head among the cushions, dreaming of ministering angels, his whole soul steeped in quiet contentment as it dwelt upon the sweet earnest eyes which had looked so tenderly into his. It had been an eventful day with the student. He had saved his side, he had broken his collar-bone, and now, most serious of all, he had realised that he was hopelessly in love.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIRST PROFESSIONAL.

Within a few weeks of his recovery from his accident Tom Dimsdale was to go up for his first professional examination, and his father, who had now retired from practice with a fair fortune, remained in Edinburgh until that event should come off. There had been some difficulty in persuading Girdlestone to give his consent to this prolongation of his ward’s leave, but the old merchant was very much engrossed with his own affairs about that time, which made him more amenable than he might otherwise have been. The two travellers continued, therefore, to reside in their Princes Street hotel, but the student held on to his lodgings in Howe Street, where he used to read during the morning and afternoon. Every evening, however, he managed to dine at the Royal, and would stay there until his father packed him off to his books once more. It was in vain for him to protest and to plead for another half-hour. The physician was inexorable. When the fated hour came round the unhappy youth slowly gathered together his hat, his gloves, and his stick, spreading out that operation over the greatest possible extent of time which it could by any means be made to occupy. He would then ruefully bid his kinsfolk adieu, and retire rebelliously to his books.

Very soon, however, he made a discovery. From a certain seat in the Princes Street Gardens it was possible to see the interior of the sitting-room in which the visitors remained after dinner. From the time when this fact dawned upon him, his rooms in the evening knew him no more. The gardens were locked at night, but that was a mere trifle. He used to scramble over the railings like a cat, and then, planting himself upon the particular seat, he would keep a watch upon the hotel window until the occupants of the room retired to rest. It might happen that his cousin remained invisible. Then he would return to his rooms in a highly dissatisfied state, and sit up half the night protesting against fate and smoking strong black tobacco. On the other hand, if he had the good luck to see the graceful figure of his old playfellow, he felt that that was the next best thing to being actually in her company, and departed eventually in a more contented frame of mind. Thus, when Dr. Dimsdale fondly imagined his son to be a mile away grappling with the mysteries of science, that undutiful lad was in reality perched within sixty yards of him, with his thoughts engrossed by very different matters.

Kate could not fail to understand what was going on. However young and innocent a girl may be, there is always some subtle feminine instinct which warns her that she is loved. Then first she realises that she has passed the shadowy frontier line which divides the child-life from that of the woman. Kate felt uneasy and perplexed, and half involuntarily she changed her manner towards him.

It had been frank and sisterly; now it became more distant and constrained. He was quick to observe the change, and in private raved and raged at it. He even made the mistake of showing his pique to her, upon which she became still more retiring and conventional. Then be bemoaned himself in the sleepless watches of the night, and confided to his bed-post that in his belief such a case had never occurred before in the history of the world, and never by any chance could or would happen again. He also broke out into an eruption of bad verses, which were found by his landlady during her daily examination of his private papers, and were read aloud to a select audience of neighbours, who were all much impressed, and cackled sympathetically among themselves.

By degrees Tom developed other symptoms of the distemper which had come upon him so suddenly. He had always been remarkable for a certain towsiness of appearance and carelessness of dress which harmonized with his Bohemian habits. All this he suddenly abjured. One fine morning he paid successive visits to his tailor, his boot-maker, his hatter, and his hosier, which left all those worthy tradesmen rubbing their hands with satisfaction. About a week afterwards he emerged from his rooms in a state of gorgeousness which impressed his landlady and amazed his friends. His old college companions hardly recognised Tom’s honest phiz as it looked out above the most fashionable of coats and under the glossiest of hats.

His father was anything but edified by the change.

“I don’t know what’s coming over the lad, Kate,” he remarked after one of his visits. “If I thought he was going to turn to a fop, by the Lord Harry I’d disown him! Don’t you notice a change in him yourself?”

Kate managed to evade the question, but her bright blush might have opened the old man’s eyes had he observed it. He hardly realised yet that his son really was a man, and still less did he think of John Harston’s little girl as a woman. It is generally some comparative stranger who first makes that discovery and brings it home to friends and relatives.

Love has an awkward way of intruding itself at inconvenient times, but it never came more inopportunely than when it smote one who was reading for his first professional examination. During these weeks, when Tom was stumping about in boots which were two sizes too small for him, in the hope of making his muscular, well-formed foot a trifle more elegant, and was splitting gloves in a way which surprised his glover, all his energies ought by rights to have been concentrated upon the mysteries of botany, chemistry, and zoology. During the precious hours that should have been devoted to the mastering of the sub-divisions of the celenterata or the natural orders of endogenous plants, he was expending his energies in endeavouring to recall the words of the song which his cousin had sung the evening before, or to recollect the exact intonation with which she remarked to him that it had been a fine day, or some other equally momentous observation. It follows that, as the day of the examination came round, the student, in his lucid intervals, began to feel anxious for the result. He had known his work fairly well, however, at one time, and with luck he might pull through. He made an energetic attempt to compress a month’s reading into a week, and when the day for the written examination came round he had recovered some of his lost ground. The papers suited him fairly well, and he felt as he left the hall that he had had better fortune than he deserved. The viva voce ordeal was the one, however, which he knew would be most dangerous to him, and he dreaded it accordingly.

It was a raw spring morning when his turn came to go up. His father and Kate drove round with him to the University gates.

“Keep up your pluck, Tom,” the old gentleman said. “Be cool, and have all your wits about you. Don’t lose your head, whatever you do.”

“I seem to have forgotten the little I ever knew,” Tom said dolefully, as he trudged up the steps. As he looked back he saw Kate wave her hand to him cheerily, and it gave him fresh heart.

“We shall hope to see you at lunch time,” his father shouted after him. “Mind you bring us good news.” As he spoke the carriage rattled away down the Bridges, and Tom joined the knot of expectant students who were waiting at the door of the great hall.

A melancholy group they were, sallow-faced, long-visaged and dolorous, partly from the effects of a long course of study and partly from their present trepidation. It was painful to observe their attempts to appear confident and unconcerned as they glanced round the heavens, as if to observe the state of the weather, or examined with well-feigned archaeological fervour the inscriptions upon the old University walls. Most painful of all was it, when some one, plucking up courage, would venture upon a tiny joke, at which the whole company would gibber in an ostentatious way, as though to show that even in this dire pass the appreciation of humour still remained with them. At times, when any of their number alluded to the examination or detailed the questions which had been propounded to Brown or Baker the day before, the mask of unconcern would be dropped, and the whole assembly would glare eagerly and silently at the speaker. Generally on such occasions matters are made infinitely worse by some Job’s comforter, who creeps about suggesting abstruse questions, and hinting that they represent some examiner’s particular hobby. Such a one came to Dimsdale’s elbow, and quenched the last ray of hope which lingered in the young man’s bosom.

“What do you know about cacodyl?” was his impressive question.

“Cacodyl?” Tom cried aghast. “It’s some sort of antediluvian reptile, isn’t it?”

The questioner broke into a sickly smile. “No,” he said. “It’s an organic explosive chemical compound. You’re sure to be asked about cacodyl. Tester’s dead on it. He asks every one how it is prepared.”

Tom, much perturbed at these tidings, was feverishly endeavouring to extract some little information from his companion concerning the compound, when a bell rang abruptly inside the room and a janitor with a red face and a blue slip of paper appeared at the door.

“Dillon, Dimsdale, Douglas,” this functionary shouted in a very pompous voice, and three unhappy young men filed through the half-opened door into the solemn hall beyond.

The scene inside was not calculated to put them at their ease. Three tables, half a dozen yards from each other, were littered with various specimens and scientific instruments, and behind each sat two elderly gentlemen, stern-faced and critical. At one side were stuffed specimens of various small beasts, numerous skeletons and skulls, large jars containing fish and reptiles preserved in spirits of wine, jawbones with great teeth which grinned savagely at the unfortunate candidate, and numerous other zoological relics. The second table was heaped over with a blaze of gorgeous orchids and tropical plants, which looked strangely out of place in the great bleak room. A row of microscopes bristled along the edge. The third was the most appalling of all, for it was bare with the exception of several sheets of paper and a pencil. Chemistry was the most dangerous of the many traps set to ensnare the unwary student.

“Dillon — botany; Dimsdale — zoology; Douglas — chemistry,” the janitor shouted once more, and the candidates moved in front of the respective tables. Tom found himself facing a great spider crab, which appeared to be regarding him with a most malignant expression upon its crustacean features. Behind the crab sat a little professor, whose projecting eyes and crooked arms gave him such a resemblance to the creature in front that the student could not help smiling.

“Sir,” said a tall, clean-shaven man at the other end of the table, “be serious. This is no time for levity.”

Tom’s expression after that would have made the fortune of a mute.

“What is this?” asked the little professor, handing a small round object to the candidate.

“It is an echinus — a sea-urchin,” Tom said triumphantly.

“Have they any circulation?” asked the other examiner.

“A water vascular system.”

“Describe it.”

Tom started off fluently, but it was no part of the policy of the examiners to allow him to waste the fifteen minutes allotted them in expatiating upon what he knew well. They interrupted him after a few sentences.

“How does this creature walk?” asked the crab-like one.

“By means of long tubes which it projects at pleasure.”

“How do the tubes enable the creature to walk?”

“They have suckers on them.”

“What are the suckers like?”

“They are round hollow discs.”

“Are you sure they are round?” asked the other sharply.

“Yes,” said Tom stoutly, though his ideas on the subject were rather vague.”

“And how does this sucker act?” asked the taller examiner.

Tom began to feel that these two men were exhibiting a very unseemly curiosity. There seemed to be no satiating their desire for information. “It creates a vacuum,” he cried desperately.

“How does it create a vacuum?”

“By the contraction of a muscular pimple in the centre,” said Tom, in a moment of inspiration.

“And what makes this pimple contract?”

Tom lost his head, and was about to say “electricity,” when he happily checked himself and substituted “muscular action.”

“Very good,” said the examiners, and the student breathed again. The taller one returned to the charge, however, with, “And this muscle — is it composed of striped fibres or non-striped?”

“Non-striped,” shrieked Tom at a venture, and both examiners rubbed their hands and murmured, “Very good, indeed!” at which Tom’s hair began to lie a little flatter, and he ceased to feel as if he were in a Turkish bath.

“How many teeth has a rabbit?” the tall man asked suddenly.

“I don’t know,” the student answered with candour.

The two looked triumphantly at one another.

“He doesn’t know!” cried the goggle-eyed one decisively.

“I should recommend you to count them the next time you have one for dinner,” the other remarked. As this was evidently meant for a joke, Tom had the tact to laugh, and a very gruesome and awe-inspiring laugh it was too.

Then the candidate was badgered about the pterodactyl, and concerning the difference in anatomy between a bat and a bird, and about the lamprey, and the cartilaginous fishes, and the amphioxus. All these questions he answered more or less to the satisfaction of the examiners — generally less. When at last the little bell tinkled which was the sign for candidates to move on to other tables, the taller man leaned over a list in front of him and marked down upon it the following hieroglyphic: —

“S. B. — .”

This Tom’s sharp eye at once detected, and he departed well pleased, for he knew that the “S. B.” meant satis bene, and as to the minus sign after it, it mattered little to him whether he had done rather more than well or rather less. He had passed in zoology, and that was all which concerned him at present.

CHAPTER IX.

A NASTY CROPPER.

But there were pitfalls ahead. As he moved to the botany table a grey-bearded examiner waved his hand in the direction of the row of microscopes as an intimation that the student was to look through them and pronounce upon what he saw. Tom seemed to compress his whole soul into his one eye as he glared hopelessly through the tube at what appeared to him to resemble nothing so much as a sheet of ice with the marks of skates upon it.

"Come along, come along!" the examiner growled impatiently. Courtesy is conspicuous by its absence in most of the Edinburgh examinations. "You must pass on to the next one, unless you can offer an opinion."

This venerable teacher of botany, though naturally a kind-hearted man, was well known as one of the most malignant species of examiners, one of the school which considers such an ordeal in the light of a trial of strength between their pupils and themselves. In his eyes the candidate was endeavouring to pass, and his duty was to endeavour to prevent him, a result which, in a large proportion of cases, he successfully accomplished.

"Hurry on, hurry on!" he reiterated fussily.

"It's a section of a leaf," said the student.

"It's nothing of the sort," the examiner shouted exultantly. "You've made a bad mistake, sir; a very bad one, indeed. It's the spirilloe of a water plant. Move on to the next."

Tom, in much perturbation of mind, shuffled down the line and looked through the next brazen tube. "This is a preparation of stomata," he said, recognising it from a print in his book on botany.

The professor shook his head despondingly. "You are right," he said; "pass on to the next."

The third preparation was as puzzling to the student as the first had been, and he was steeling himself to meet the inevitable when an unexpected circumstance turned the scale in his favour. It chanced that the other examiner, being somewhat less of a fossil than his confreres, and having still vitality enough to take an interest in things which were foreign to his subject, had recognised the student as being the young hero who had damaged himself in upholding the honour of his country. Being an ardent patriot himself his heart warmed towards Tom, and perceiving the imminent peril in which he stood he interfered in his behalf, and by a few leading questions got him on safer ground, and managed to keep him there until the little bell tinkled once more. The younger examiner showed remarkable tact in feeling his way, and keeping within the very limited area of the student's knowledge. He succeeded so well, however, that although his colleague shook his hoary head and intimated in other ways his poor opinion of the candidate's acquirements, he was forced to put down another "S. B." upon the paper in front of him. The student drew a long breath when he saw it, and marched across to the other table with a mixture of trepidation and confidence, like a jockey riding at the last and highest hurdle in a steeple-chase.

Alas! it is the last hurdle which often floors the rider, and Thomas too was doomed to find the final ordeal an insurmountable one. As he crossed the room some evil chance made him think of the gossip outside and of his allusion to the abstruse substance known as cacodyl. Once let a candidate's mind hit upon such an idea as this, and nothing will ever get it out of his thoughts. Tom felt his head buzz round, and he passed his hand over his forehead and through his curly yellow hair to steady himself. He felt a frenzied impulse as he sat down to inform the examiners that he knew very well what they were going to ask him, and that it was hopeless for him to attempt to answer it.

The leading professor was a ruddy-faced, benevolent old gentleman, with spectacles and a kindly manner. He made a few commonplace remarks to his colleagues with the good-natured intention of giving the confused-looking student before him time to compose himself. Then, turning blandly towards him, he said in the mildest of tones —

"Have you ever rowed in a pond?"

Tom acknowledged that he had.

"Perhaps, on those occasions," the examiner continued, "you may have chanced to touch the mud at the bottom with your oar."

Tom agreed that it was possible.

"In that case you may have observed that a large bubble, or a succession of them has risen from the bottom to the surface. Now, of what gas was that bubble composed?”

The unhappy student, with the one idea always fermenting on his brain, felt that the worst had come upon him. Without a moment’s hesitation or thought he expressed his conviction that the compound was cacodyl.

Never did two men look more surprised, and never did two generally grave savants laugh more heartily than did the two examiners when they realised what the candidate had answered. Their mirth speedily brought him back to his senses. He saw with a feeling of despair that it was marsh gas which they had expected — one of the simplest and commonest of chemical combinations. Alas! it was too late now. He knew full well that nothing could save him. With poor marks in botany and zoology, such an error in chemistry was irreparable. He did what was perhaps the best thing under the circumstances. Rising from his chair he made a respectful bow to the examiners, and walked straight out of the room — to the great astonishment of the janitor, who had never before witnessed such a breach of decorum. As the student closed the door behind him he looked back and saw that the other professors had left their respective tables and were listening to an account of the incident from one of the chemists — and a roar of laughter the moment afterwards showed that they appreciated the humour of it. His fellow-students gathered round Tom outside in the hope of sharing in the joke, but he pushed them angrily aside and strode through the midst of them and down the University steps. He knew that the story would spread fast enough without his assistance. His mind was busy too in shaping a certain resolution which he had often thought over during the last few months.

The two old people and Miss Kate Harston waited long and anxiously in their sitting-room at the hotel for some news of the absentee. The doctor had, at first, attempted a lofty cynicism and general assumption of indifference, which rapidly broke down as the time went by, until at last he was wandering round the room, drumming upon the furniture with his fingers and showing every other sign of acute impatience. The window was on the first floor, and Kate had been stationed there as a sentinel to watch the passing crowd and signal the first sign of tidings.

“Can’t you see him yet?” the doctor asked for the twentieth time.

“No, dear, I don’t,” she answered, glancing up and down the street.

“He must be out now. He should have come straight to us. Come away from the window, my dear. We must not let the young monkey see how anxious we are about him.”

Kate sat down by the old man and stroked his broad brown hand with her tender white one. “Don’t be uneasy, dear,” she said; “it’s sure to be all right.”

“Yes, he is sure to pass,” the doctor answered; “but — bless my soul, who’s this?”

The individual who caused this exclamation was a very broad-faced and rosy-cheeked little girl, coarsely clad, with a pile of books and a slate under her arm, who had suddenly entered the apartment.

“Please sir,” said this apparition, with a bob, “I’m Sarah Jane.”

“Are you, indeed?” said the doctor, with mild irony. “And what d’ye want here, Sarah Jane?”

“Please, sir, my mithar, Mrs. McTavish, asked me if I wudna’ gie ye this letter frae the gentleman what’s lodgin’ wi’ her.” With these words the little mite delivered her missive and, having given another bob, departed upon her ways.

“Why,” the doctor cried in astonishment, “it’s directed to me and in

Tom’s writing. What can be the meaning of this?”

“Oh dear! oh dear!” Mrs. Dimsdale cried, with the quick perception of womanhood; “it means that he has failed.”

“Impossible!” said the doctor, fumbling with nervous fingers at the envelope. “By Jove, though,” he continued, as he glanced over the contents, “you’re right. He has. Poor lad! he’s more cut up about it than we can be, so we must not blame him.”

The good physician read the letter over several times before he finally put it away in his note-book, and he did so with a thoughtful face which showed that it was of importance. As it has an influence upon the future course of our story we cannot end the chapter better than by exercising our literary privilege, and peeping over the doctor’s shoulder before he has folded it up. This is the epistle in extenso: —

“My Dear Father,

“You will be sorry to hear that I have failed in my exam. I am very cut up about it, because I fear that it will cause you grief and disappointment, and you deserve neither the one nor the other at my hands.”

“It is not an unmixed misfortune to me, because it helps me to make a request which I have long had in my mind. I wish you to allow me to give up the study of medicine and to go in for commerce. You have never made a secret of our money affairs to me, and I know that if I took my degree there would never be any necessity for me to practise. I should therefore have spent five years of my life in acquiring knowledge which would not be of any immediate use to me. I have no personal inclination towards medicine, while I have a very strong objection to simply living in the world upon money which other men have earned. I must therefore turn to some fresh pursuit for my future career, and surely it would be best that I should do so at once. What that fresh pursuit is to be I leave to your judgment. Personally, I think that if I embarked my capital in some commercial undertaking I might by sticking to my work do well. I feel too much cast down at my own failure to see you to-night, but to-morrow I hope to hear what you think from your own lips."

"TOM."

"Perhaps this failure will do no harm after all," the doctor muttered thoughtfully, as he folded up the letter and gazed out at the cold glare of the northern sunset.

CHAPTER X.

DWELLERS IN BOHEMIA.

The residence of Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of the 119th Light Infantry, was not known to any of his friends. It is true that at times he alluded in a modest way to his “little place,” and even went to the length of remarking airily to new acquaintances that he hoped they would look him up any time they happened to be in his direction. As he carefully refrained, however, from ever giving the slightest indication of which direction that might be, his invitations never led to any practical results. Still they had the effect of filling the recipient with a vague sense of proffered hospitality, and occasionally led to more substantial kindness in return.

The gallant major’s figure was a familiar one in the card-room of the Rag and Bobtail, at the bow-window of the Jeunesse Doree. Tall and pompous, with a portly frame and a puffy clean-shaven face which peered over an abnormally high collar and old-fashioned linen cravat, he stood as a very type and emblem of staid middle-aged respectability. The major’s hat was always of the glossiest, the major’s coat was without a wrinkle, and, in short, from the summit of the major’s bald head to his bulbous finger-tips and his gouty toes, there was not a flaw which the most severe critic of deportment — even the illustrious Turveydrop himself — could have detected. Let us add that the conversation of the major was as irreproachable as his person — that he was a distinguished soldier and an accomplished traveller, with a retentive memory and a mind stuffed with the good things of a lifetime. Combine all these qualities, and one would naturally regard the major as a most desirable acquaintance.

It is painful to have to remark, however, that, self-evident as this proposition might appear, it was vehemently contradicted by some of the initiated. There were rumours concerning the major which seriously compromised his private character. Indeed, such a pitch had they reached that when that gallant officer put himself forward as a candidate for a certain select club, he had, although proposed by a lord and seconded by a baronet, been most ignominiously pilled. In public the major affected to laugh over this social failure, and to regard it as somewhat in the nature of a practical joke, but privately he was deeply incensed. One day he momentarily dropped his veil of unconcern while playing billiards with the Honourable Fungus Brown, who was generally credited with having had some hand in the major's exclusion. "Be Ged! sir," the veteran suddenly exclaimed, inflating his chest and turning his apoplectic face upon his companion, "in the old days I would have called the lot of you out, sir, every demned one, beginning with the committee and working down; I would, be George!" At which savage attack the Honourable Fungus's face grew as white as the major's was red, and he began to wish that he had been more reserved in his confidences to some of his acquaintances respecting the exclusiveness of the club in question, or at least refrained from holding up the major's pilling as a proof thereof.

The cause of this vague feeling of distrust which had gone abroad concerning the old soldier was no very easy matter to define. It is true that he was known to have a book on every race, and to have secret means of information from stud-grooms and jockeys which occasionally stood him in good stead; but this was no uncommon thing among the men with whom he consorted. Again, it is true that Major Clutterbuck was much addicted to whist, with guinea points, and to billiard matches for substantial sums, but these stimulating recreations are also habitual to many men who have led eventful lives and require a strong seasoning to make ordinary existence endurable. Perhaps one reason may have been that the major's billiard play in public varied to an extraordinary degree, so that on different occasions he had appeared to be aiming at the process termed by the initiated "getting on the money." The warm friendships, too, which the old soldier had contracted with sundry vacuous and sappy youths, who were kindly piloted by him into quasi-fashionable life and shown how and when to spend their money, had been most uncharitably commented upon. Perhaps the vagueness about the major's private residence and the mystery which hung over him outside his clubs may also have excited prejudice against him. Still, however his detractors might malign him, they could not attempt to deny the fact that Tobias Clutterbuck was the third son of the Honourable Charles Clutterbuck, who again was the second son of the Earl of Dunross, one of the most ancient of Hibernian families. This pedigree the old soldier took care to explain to every one about him, more particularly to the sappy youths aforementioned.

It chanced that on the afternoon of which we speak the major was engrossed by this very subject. Standing at the head of the broad stone steps which lead up to the palatial edifice which its occupiers irreverently term the Rag and Bobtail, he was explaining to a bull-necked, olive-complexioned young man the series of marriages and inter-marriages which had culminated in the production of his own portly, stiff-backed figure. His companion, who was none other than Ezra Girdlestone, of the great African firm of that name, leaned against one of the pillars of the portico and listened gloomily to the major's family reminiscences, giving an occasional yawn which he made no attempt to conceal.

"It's as plain as the fingers of me hand," the old soldier said in a wheezy muffled brogue, as if he were speaking from under a feather-bed. "See here now, Girdlestone — this is Miss Letitia Snackles of Snackleton, a cousin of old Sir Joseph." The major tapped his thumb with the silver head of his walking-stick to represent the maiden Snackles. "She marries Crawford, of the Blues — one o' the Warwickshire Crawfords; that's him" — here he elevated his stubby forefinger; "and here's their three children, Jemima, Harold, and John." Up went three other fingers. "Jemima Crawford grows up, and then Charley Clutterbuck runs away with her. This other thumb o' mine will stand for that young divil Charley, and then me fingers—"

"Oh, hang your fingers," Girdlestone exclaimed with emphasis. "It's very interesting, major, but it would be more intelligible if you wrote it out."

"And so I shall, me boy!" the major cried enthusiastically, by no means abashed at the sudden interruption. "I'll draw it up on a bit o' foolscap paper. Let's see; Fenchurch Street, eh? Address to the offices, of course. Though, for that matter, 'Girdlestone, London,' would foind you. I was spakin' of ye to Sir Musgrave Moore, of the Rifles, the other day, and he knew you at once. 'Girdlestone?' says he. 'The same,' says I. 'A merchant prince?' says he. 'The same,' says I. 'I'd be proud to meet him,' says he. 'And you shall,' says I. He's the best blood of county Waterford."

"More blood than money, I suppose," the young man said, smoothing out his crisp black moustache.

"Bedad, you've about hit it there. He went to California, and came back with five and twinty thousand pounds. I met him in Liverpool the day he arrived. 'This is no good to me, Toby,' says he. 'Why not?' I asks. 'Not enough,' says he; 'just enough to unsettle me.' 'What then?' says I. 'Put it on the favourite for the St. Leger,' says he. And he did too, every pinny of it, and the horse was beat on the post by a short head. He dropped the lot in one day. A fact, sir, ‘pon me honour! Came to me next day. ‘Nothing left!’ says he. ‘Nothing?’ says I. ‘Only one thing,’ says he. ‘Suicide?’ says I. ‘Marriage,’ says he. Within a month he was married to the second Miss Shuttleworth, who had five thou. in her own right, and five more when Lord Dungeness turns up his toes.”

“Indeed?” said his companion languidly.

“Fact, ‘pon me honour! By the way — ah, here comes Lord Henry Richardson. How d’ye do, Richardson, how d’ye do? Ged, I remember Richardson when he was a tow-headed boy at Clongowes, and I used to lam him with a bootjack for his cheek. Ah, yes; I was going to say — it seems a demned awkward incident — ha! ha! — ridiculous, but annoying, you know. The fact is, me boy, coming away in a hurry from me little place, I left me purse on the drawers in the bedroom, and here’s Jorrocks up in the billiard-room afther challenging me to play for a tenner — but I won’t without having the money in me pocket. Tobias Clutterbuck may be poor, me dear friend, but” — and here he puffed out his chest and tapped on it with his round, sponge-like fist—”he’s honest, and pays debts of honour on the nail. No, sir, there’s no one can say a word against Tobias, except that he’s a half-pay old fool with more heart than brains. However,” he added, suddenly dropping the sentimental and coming back to the practical, “if you, me dear boy, can obloige me with the money until to-morrow morning, I’ll play Jorrocks with pleasure. There’s not many men that I’d ask such a favour of, and even from you I’d never accept anything more than a mere timporary convanience.”

“You may stake your life on that,” Ezra Girdlestone said with a sneer, looking sullenly down and tracing figures with the end of his stick on the stone steps. “You’ll never get the chance. I make it a rule never to lend any one money, either for short or long periods.”

“And you won’t let me have this throifling accommodation?”

“No,” the young man said decisively.

For a moment the major’s brick-coloured, weather-beaten face assumed an even darker tint, and his small dark eyes looked out angrily from under his shaggy brows at his youthful companion. He managed to suppress the threatened explosion, however, and burst into a loud roar of laughter.

“‘Pon me sowl!” he wheezed, poking the young man in the ribs with his stick, an implement which he had grasped a moment before as though he meditated putting it to a less pacific use, "you young divils of business-men are too much for poor old Tobias. Ged, sir, to think of being stuck in the mud for the want of a paltry tenner! Tommy Heathcote will laugh when he hears of it. You know Tommy of the 81st? He gave me good advice: 'Always sew a fifty-pound note into the lining of each waistcoat you've got. Then you can't go short.' Tried it once, and, be George! if me demned man-servant didn't stale that very waistcoat and sell it for six and sixpence. You're not going, are you?"

"Yes; I'm due in the City. The governor leaves at four. Good-bye.

Shall I see you to-night?"

"Card-room, as per usual," quoth the clean-shaven warrior. He looked after the retreating figure of his late companion with anything but a pleasant expression upon his face. The young man happened to glance round as he was half-way down the street, on which the major smiled after him paternally, and gave a merry flourish with his stick.

As the old soldier stood on the top of the club steps, pompous, pigeon-chested, and respectable, posing himself as though he had been placed there for the inspection of passers-by as a sample of the aristocracy within, he made several attempts to air his grievances to passing members touching the question of the expectant Jorrocks and the missing purse. Beyond, however, eliciting many sallies of wit from the younger spirits, for it was part of the major's policy to lay himself open to be a butt, his laudable perseverance was entirely thrown away. At last he gave it up in disgust, and raising his stick hailed a passing 'bus, into which he sprang, taking a searching glance round to see that no one was following him. After a drive which brought him to the other side of the City, he got out in a broad, busy thoroughfare, lined with large shops. A narrow turning from the main artery led into a long, dingy street, consisting of very high smoke-coloured houses, which ran parallel to the other, and presented as great a contrast to it as the back of a painting does to the front.

Down this sombre avenue the major strutted with all his wonted pomposity, until about half-way down he reached a tall, grim-looking house, with many notices of "apartments" glaring from the windows. The line of railings which separated this house from the street was rusty, and broken and the whole place had a flavour of mildew. The major walked briskly up the stone steps, hollowed out by the feet of generations of lodgers, and pushing open the great splotchy door, which bore upon it a brass plate indicating that the establishment was kept by a Mrs. Robins, he walked into the hall with the air of one who treads familiar ground. Up one flight of stairs, up two flights of stairs, and up three flights of stairs did he climb, until on the fourth landing he pushed open a door and found himself in a small room, which formed for the nonce the “little place” about which he was wont at the club to make depreciatory allusions, so skilfully introduced that the listener was left in doubt as to whether the major was the happy possessor of a country house and grounds, or whether he merely owned a large suburban villa. Even this modest sanctum was not entirely the major’s own, as was shown by the presence of a ruddy-faced man with a long, tawny beard, who sat on one side of the empty fire-place, puffing at a great china-bowled pipe, and comporting himself with an ease which showed that he was no casual visitor.

As the other entered, the man in the chair gave vent to a guttural grunt without removing the mouthpiece of his pipe from between his lips; and Major Clutterbuck returned the greeting with an off-handed nod. His next proceeding was to take off his glossy hat and pack it away in a hat-box. He then removed his coat, his collar, his tie, and his gaiters, with equal solicitude, and put them in a place of safety. After which he donned a long purple dressing-gown and a smoking-cap, in which garb he performed the first steps of a mazurka as a sign of the additional ease which he experienced.

“Not much to dance about either, me boy,” the old soldier said, seating himself in a camp-chair and putting his feet upon another one. “Bedad, we’re all on the verge. Unless luck takes a turn there’s no saying what may become of us.”

“We have been badder than this before now many a time,” said the yellow-bearded man, in an accent which proclaimed him to be a German. “My money vill come, or you vill vin, or something vill arrive to set all things right.”

“Let’s hope so,” the major said fervently. “It’s a mercy to get out of these stiff and starched clothes; but I have to be careful of them, for me tailor — bad cess to him! — will give no credit, and there’s little of the riddy knocking about. Without good clothes on me back I’d be like a sweeper without a broom.”

The German nodded his intense appreciation of the fact, and puffed a great blue cloud to the ceiling. Sigismond von Baumser was a political refugee from the fatherland, who had managed to become foreign clerk in a small London firm, an occupation which just enabled him to keep body and soul together. He and the major had lodged in different rooms in another establishment until some common leaven of Bohemianism had brought them together. When circumstances had driven them out of their former abode, it had occurred to the major that by sharing his rooms with Von Baumser he would diminish his own expenses, and at the same time secure an agreeable companion, for the veteran was a sociable soul in his unofficial hours and had all the Hibernian dislike to solitude. The arrangement commended itself to the German, for he had a profound admiration for the other's versatile talents and varied experiences; so he grunted an acquiescence and the thing was done. When the major's luck was good there were brave times in the little fourth floor back. On the other hand, if any slice of good fortune came in the German's way, the major had a fair share of the prosperity. During the hard times which intervened between these gleams of opulence, the pair roughed it uncomplainingly as best they might. The major would sometimes create a fictitious splendour by dilating upon the beauties of Castle Dunross, in county Mayo, which is the headquarters of all the Clutterbucks. "We'll go and live there some day, me boy," he would say, slapping his comrade on the back. "It will be mine from the dungeons forty foot below the ground, right up, bedad, to the flagstaff from which the imblem of loyalty flaunts the breeze." At these speeches the simple-minded German used to rub his great red hands together with satisfaction, and feel as pleased as though he had actually been presented with the fee simple of the castle in question.

"Have you had your letter?" the major asked with interest, rolling a cigarette between his fingers. The German was expecting his quarterly remittance from his friends at home, and they were both anxiously awaiting it.

Von Baumser shook his head.

"Bad luck to them! they should have sent a wake ago. You should do what Jimmy Towler did. You didn't know Towler, of the Sappers? When he and I were souldiering in Canada he was vexed at the allowance which he had from ould Sir Oliver, his uncle, not turning up at the right time. 'Ged, Toby,' he says to me, 'I'll warm the old rascal up.' So he sits down and writes a letter to his uncle, in which he told him his unbusiness-like ways would be the ruin of them, and more to the same effect. When Sir Oliver got the letter he was in such a divil's own rage, that while he was dictating a codicil to his will he tumbled off the chair in a fit, and Jimmy came in for a clean siven thousand a year."

"Dat was more dan he deserved," the German remarked. "But you — how do you stand for money?"

Major Clutterbuck took ten sovereigns out of his trouser pocket and placed them upon the table. "You know me law," he said; "I never, on any consideration, break into these. You can't sit down to play cards for high stakes with less in your purse, and if I was to change one, be George! they'd all go like a whiff o' smoke. The Lord knows when I'd get a start again then. Bar this money I've hardly a pinny."

"Nor me," said Von Baumser despondently, slapping his pockets.

"Niver mind, me boy! What's in the common purse, I wonder?"

He looked up at a little leather bag which hung from a brass nail on the wall. In flush times they were wont to deposit small sums in this, on which they might fall back in their hours of need.

"Not much, I fear," the other said, shaking his head.

"Well, now, we want something to pull us together on a dull day like this. Suppose we send out for a bottle of sparkling, eh?"

"Not enough money," the other objected.

"Well, well, let's have something cheaper. Beaune, now; Beaune's a good comforting sort of drink. What d'ye say to splitting a bottle of Beaune, and paying for it from the common purse?"

"Not enough money," the other persisted doggedly.

"Well, claret be it," sighed the major. "Maybe it's better in this sort of weather. Let us send Susan out for a bottle of claret?"

The German took down the little leather bag and turned it upside down.

A threepenny-piece and a penny rolled out. "Dat's all," he said.

"Not enough for claret."

"But there is for beer," cried the major radiantly. "Bedad, it's just the time for a quart of fourpinny. I remimber ould Gilder, when he was our chief in India, used to say that a man who got beyond enjoying beer and a clay pipe at a pinch was either an ass or a coxcomb. He smoked a clay at the mess table himself. Draper, who commanded the division, told him it was unsoldier-like. 'Unsoldier-like be demned,' he said. Ged, they nearly court-martialled the ould man for it. He got the V.C. at the Quarries, and was killed at the Redan."

A slatternly, slipshod girl answered the bell, and having received her orders and the united available funds of the two comrades, speedily returned with a brace of frothing pint pots. The major ruminated silently over his cigarette for some time, on some unpleasant subject, apparently, for his face was stem and his brows knitted. At last he broke out with an oath.

“Be George! Baumser, I can’t stand that young fellow Girdlestone. I’ll have to chuck him up. He’s such a cold-blooded, flinty-hearted, calculating sort of a chap, that—” The remainder of the major’s sentence was lost in the beer flagon.

“What for did you make him your friend, then?”

“Well,” the old soldier confessed, “it seemed to me that if he wanted to fool his money away at cards or any other divilment, Tobias Clutterbuck might as well have the handling of it as any one else. Bedad, he’s as cunning as a basketful of monkeys. He plays a safe game for low stakes, and never throws away a chance. Demned if I don’t think I’ve been a loser in pocket by knowing him, while as to me character, I’m very sure I’m the worse there.”

“Vat’s de matter mit him?”

“What’s not the matter with him. If he’s agrayable he’s not natural, and if he’s natural he’s not agrayable. I don’t pretind to be a saint. I’ve seen some fun in me day, and hope to see some more before I die; but there are some things that I wouldn’t do. If I live be cards it’s all fair and aboveboard. I never play anything but games o’ skill, and I reckon on me skill bringing me out on the right side, taking one night with another through the year. Again, at billiards I may not always play me best, but that’s gineralship. You don’t want a whole room to know to a point what your game is. I’m the last man to preach, but, bedad, I don’t like that chap, and I don’t like that handsome, brazen face of his. I’ve spint the greater part of my life reading folks’ faces, and never very far out either.”

Von Baumser made no remark, and the two continued to smoke silently, with an occasional pull at their flagons.

“Besides, it’s no good to me socially,” the major continued. “The fellow can’t keep quiet, else he might pass in a crowd; but that demned commercial instinct will show itself. If he went to heaven he’d start an agency for harps and crowns. Did I tell you what the Honourable Jack Gibbs said to me at the club? Ged, he let me have it straight! ‘Buck,’ he said, ‘I don’t mind you. You’re one o’ the right sort when all’s said and done, but if you ever inthroduce such a chap as that to me again, I'll cut you as well as him for the future.' I'd inthroduced them to put the young spalpeen in a good humour, for, being short, as ye know, I thought it might be necessary to negotiate a loan from him."

"Vat did you say his name vas?" Von Baumser asked suddenly.

"Girdlestone."

"Is his father a Kauffmann?"

"What the divil is a Kauffmann?" the major asked impatiently. "Is it a merchant you mean?"

"Ah, a merchant. One who trades with the Afrikaner?"

"The same."

Von Baumser took a bulky pocket-book from his inside pocket, and scanned a long list of names therein. "Ah, it is the same," he cried at last triumphantly, shutting up the book and replacing it. "Girdlestone & Co., African kauf — dat is, merchants — Fenchurch Street, City."

"Those are they."

"And you say dey are rich?"

"Yes."

"Very rich?"

"Yes."

The major began to think that his companion had been imbibing in his absence, for there was an unfathomable smile upon his face, and his red beard and towsy hair seemed to bristle from some internal excitement.

"Very rich! Ho, ho! Very rich!" he laughed. "I know dem; not as friends, Gott bewahre! but I know dem and their affairs."

"What are you driving at? Let's have it. Out with it, man."

"I tell you," said the German, suddenly becoming supernaturally solemn and sawing his hand up and down in the air to emphasize his remarks, "in tree or four months, or a year at the most, there vill be no firm of Girdlestone. They are rotten, useless — whoo! He blew an imaginary feather up into the air to demonstrate the extreme fragility of the house in question.

"You're raving, Baumser," said Major Clutterbuck excitedly. "Why, man, their names are above suspicion. They are looked upon as the soundest concern in the City."

"Dat may be; dat may be," the German answered stolidly. "Vat I know, I know, and vat I say I say."

“And how d’ye know it? D’ye tell me that you know lore about it than the men on ‘Change and the firms that do business with them?”

“I know vat I know, and I say vat I say,” the other repeated. “Dat tobacco-man Burger is a rogue. Dere is five-and-thirty in the hundred of water in this canaster tobacco, and one must be for ever relighting.”

“And you won’t tell me where you heard this of the Girdlestones?”

“It vould be no good to you. It Is enough dat vat I say is certain. Let it suffice that dere are people vat are bound to tell other people all dat dey know about anything whatever.”

“You don’t make it over clear now,” the old soldier grumbled. “You mane that these secret societies and Socialists let each other know all that comes in their way and have their own means of getting information.”

“Dat may be, and dat may not be,” the German answered, in the same oracular voice. “I thought, in any case, my good friend Clutterbuck, dat I vould give you vat you call in English the straight tap. It is always vell to have the straight tap.”

“Thank ye, me boy,” the major said heartily. “If the firm’s in a bad way, either the youngster doesn’t know of it, or else he’s the most natural actor that ever lived. Be George! there’s the tay-bell; let’s get down before the bread and butther is all finished.”

Mrs. Robbins was in the habit of furnishing her lodgers with an evening meal at a small sum per head. There was only a certain amount of bread and butter supplied for this, however, and those who came late were likely to find an empty platter. The two Bohemians felt that the subject was too grave a one to trifle with, so they suspended their judgment upon the Girdlestones while they clattered down to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI.

SENIOR AND JUNIOR.

Although not a whisper had been heard of it in ordinary commercial circles, there was some foundation for the forecast which Von Baumser had made as to the fate of the great house of Girdlestone. For some time back matters had been going badly with the African traders. If the shrewd eyes of Major Tobias Clutterbuck were unable to detect any indications of this state of affairs in the manner or conversation of the junior partner, the reason simply was that that gentleman was entirely ignorant of the imminent danger which hung over his head. As far as he knew, the concern was as prosperous and as flourishing as it had been at the time of the death of John Harston. The momentous secret was locked in the breast of his grim old father, who bore it about with him as the Spartan lad did the fox — without a quiver or groan to indicate the care which was gnawing at his heart. Placed face to face with ruin, Girdlestone fought against it desperately, and, withal, coolly and warily, throwing away no chance and leaving no stone unturned. Above all, he exerted himself — and exerted himself successfully — to prevent any rumour of the critical position of the firm from leaking out in the city. He knew well that should that once occur nothing could save him. As the wounded buffalo is gored to death by the herd, so the crippled man of business may give up all hope when once his position is known by his fellows. At present, although Von Baumser and a few other such Ishmaelites might have an inkling from sources of their own as to how matters stood, the name of Girdlestone was still regarded by business men as the very synonym for commercial integrity and stability. If anything, there seemed to be more business in Fenchurch Street and more luxury at the residence at Eccleston Square than in former days. Only the stern-faced and silent senior partner knew how thin the veneer was which shone so deceptively upon the surface.

Many things had contributed towards this state of affairs. The firm had been involved in a succession of misfortunes, some known to the world, and others known to no one save the elder Girdlestone. The former had been accepted with such perfect stoicism and cheerfulness that they rather increased than diminished the reputation of the concern; the latter were the more crushing, and also the more difficult to bear.

Lines of fine vessels from Liverpool and from Hamburg were running to the West Coast of Africa, and competition had cut down freightage to the lowest possible point. Where the Girdlestones had once held almost a monopoly there were now many in the field. Again, the negroes of the coast were becoming educated and had a keen eye to business, so that the old profits were no longer obtainable. The days had gone by when flint-lock guns and Manchester prints could be weighed in the balance against ivory and gold dust.

While these general causes were at work a special misfortune had befallen the house of Girdlestone. Finding that their fleet of old sailing vessels was too slow and clumsy to compete with more modern ships, they had bought in two first-rate steamers. One was the Providence, a fine screw vessel of twelve hundred tons, and the other was the Evening Star, somewhat smaller in size, but both classed A1 at Lloyd’s. The former cost twenty-two thousand pounds, and the latter seventeen thousand. Now, Mr. Girdlestone had always had a weakness for petty savings, and in this instance he determined not to insure his new vessels. If the crazy old tubs, for which he had paid fancy premiums for so many years with an eye to an ultimate profit, met with no disaster, surely those new powerful clippers were safe. With their tonnage and horse-power they appeared to him to be superior to all the dangers of the deep. It chanced, however, by that strange luck which would almost make one believe that matters nautical were at the mercy of some particularly malignant demon, that as the Evening Star was steaming up Channel in a dense fog on her return from her second voyage, she ran right into the Providence, which had started that very morning from Liverpool upon her third outward trip. The Providence was almost cut in two, and sank within five minutes, taking down the captain and six of the crew, while the Evening Star was so much damaged about the bows that she put into Falmouth in a sinking condition. That day’s work cost the African firm more than five and thirty thousand pounds.

Other mishaps had occurred to weaken the firm, apart from their trade with the coast. The senior partner had engaged in speculation without the knowledge of his son, and the result had been disastrous. One of the Cornish tin mines in which he had sunk a large amount of money, and which had hitherto yielded him a handsome return, became suddenly exhausted, and the shares went down to zero. No firm could stand against such a run of bad luck, and the African trading company reeled before it. John Girdlestone had not said a word yet of all this to his son. As claims arose he settled them in the best manner he could, and postponed the inevitable day when he should have to give a true account of their financial position. He hoped against hope that the chapter of accidents or the arrival of some brilliant cargoes from the coast might set the concern on its legs again.

From day to day he had been expecting news of one of his vessels. At last one morning he found a telegram awaiting him at the office. He tore it eagerly open, for it bore the Madeira mark. It was from his agent, Jose Alveciras, and announced that the voyage from which he had hoped so much had been a total failure. The cargo was hardly sufficient to defray the working expenses. As the merchant read it, his head dropped over the table and he groaned aloud. Another of the props which upheld him from ruin had snapped beneath him.

There were three letters lying beside the telegram. He glanced through them, but there was no consolation in any of them. One was from a bank manager, informing him that his account was somewhat overdrawn. Another from Lloyd’s Insurance Agency, pointing out that the policies on two of his vessels would lapse unless paid within a certain date. The clouds were gathering very darkly over the African firm, yet the old man bore up against misfortune with dauntless courage. He sat alone in his little room, with his head sunk upon his breast, and his thatched eye-brows drawn down over his keen grey eyes. It was clear to him that the time had come when he must enlighten his son as to the true state of their affairs. With his co-operation he might carry out a plan which had been maturing some months in his brain.

It was a hard task for the proud and austere merchant to be compelled to confess to his son that he had speculated without his knowledge in the capital of the company, and that a large part of that capital had disappeared. These speculations in many instances had promised large returns, and John Girdlestone had withdrawn money from safer concerns, and reinvested it in the hope of getting a higher rate of interest. He had done this with his eyes open to the risk, and knowing that his son was of too practical and cautious a nature to embark in such commercial gambling, he had never consulted him upon the point, nor had he made any entry of the money so invested in the accounts of the firm. Hence Ezra was entirely ignorant of the danger which hung over them, and his father saw that, in order to secure his energetic assistance in the stroke which he was contemplating, it was absolutely necessary that he should know how critical their position was.

The old man had hardly come to this conclusion when he heard the sharp footfall of his son in the outer office and the harsh tones of his voice as he addressed the clerks. A moment or two later the green baize door flew open, and the young man came in, throwing his hat and coat down on one of the chairs. It was evident that something had ruffled his temper.

“Good-morning,” he said brusquely, nodding his head to his father.

“Good-morning, Ezra,” the merchant answered meekly.

“What’s the matter with you, father?” his son asked, looking at him keenly. “You don’t look yourself, and haven’t for some time back.”

“Business worries, my boy, business worries,” John Girdlestone answered wearily.

“It’s the infernal atmosphere of this place,” Ezra said impatiently. “I feel it myself sometimes. I wonder you don’t start a little country seat with some grounds. Just enough to ask a fellow to shoot over, and with a good billiard board, and every convenience of that sort. It would do for us to spend the time from Saturday to Monday, and allow us to get some fresh air into our lungs. There are plenty of men who can’t afford it half as well, and yet have something of the sort. What’s the use of having a good balance at your banker’s, if you don’t live better than your neighbours?”

“There is only one objection to it,” the merchant said huskily, and with a forced laugh; “I have not got a good balance at the banker’s.”

“Pretty fair, pretty fair,” his son said knowingly, picking up the long thin volume in which the finance of the firm was recorded and tapping it against the table.

“But the figures there are not quite correct, Ezra,” his father said, still more huskily. “We have not got nearly so much as that.”

“What!” roared the junior partner.

“Hush! For God’s sake don’t let the clerks hear you. We have not so much as that. We have very little. In fact, Ezra, we have next to nothing in the bank. It is all gone.”

For a moment the young man stood motionless, glaring at his father. The expression of incredulity which had appeared on his features faded away before the earnestness of the other, and was replaced by a look of such malignant passion that it contorted his whole face.

“You fool!” he shrieked, springing forward with the book upraised as though he would have struck the old merchant. “I see it now. You have been speculating on your own hook, you cursed ass! What have you done with it?” He seized his father by the collar and shook him furiously in his wrath.

“Keep your hands off me!” the senior partner cried, wrenching himself free from his son’s grasp. “I did my best with the money. How dare you address me so?”

“Did your best!” hissed Ezra, hurling the ledger down on the table with a crash. “What did you mean by speculating without my knowledge, and telling me at the same time that I knew all that was done? Hadn’t I warned you a thousand times of the danger of it? You are not to be trusted with money.”

“Remember, Ezra,” his father said with dignity, re-seating himself in the chair from which he had risen, in order to free himself from his son’s clutches, “if I lost the money, I also made it. This was a flourishing concern before you were born. If the worst comes to the worst you are only where I started. But we are far from being absolutely ruined as yet.”

“To think of it!” Ezra cried, flinging himself upon the office sofa, and burying his face in his hands. “To think of all I have said of our money and our resources! What will Clutterbuck and the fellows at the club say? How can I alter the ways of life that I have learned?” Then, suddenly clenching his hands, and turning upon his father he broke out, “We must have it back, father; we must, by fair means or foul. You must do it, for it was you who lost it. What can we do? How long have we to do it in? Is this known in the City? Oh, I shall be ashamed to show my face on ‘Change.” So he rambled on, half-maddened by the pictures of the future which rose up in his mind.

“Be calm, Ezra, be calm!” his father said imploringly. “We have many chances yet if we only make the best of them. There is no use lamenting the past. I freely confess that I was wrong in using this money without your knowledge, but I did it from the best of motives. We must put our heads together now to retrieve our losses, and there are many ways in which that may be done. I want your clear common sense to help me in the matter.”

“Pity you didn’t apply to that before,” Ezra said sulkily.

“I have suffered for not doing so,” the older man answered meekly. “In considering how to rally under this grievous affliction which has come upon us, we must remember that our credit is a great resource, and one upon which we have never drawn. That gives us a broad margin to help us while we are carrying out our plans for the future."

"What will our credit be worth when this matter leaks out?"

"But it can't leak out. No one suspects it for a moment. They might imagine that we are suffering from some temporary depression of trade, but no one could possibly know the sad truth. For Heaven's sake don't you let it out!"

His son broke into an impatient oath.

A flush came into Girdlestone's sallow cheeks, and his eyes sparkled angrily.

"Be careful how you speak, Ezra. There are limits to what I will endure from you, though I make every allowance for your feelings at this sudden catastrophe, for which I acknowledge myself responsible."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and drummed his heel against the ground impatiently.

"I have more than one plan in my head," the merchant said, "by which our affairs may be re-established on their old footing. If we can once get sufficient money to satisfy our present creditors, and so tide over this run of bad luck, the current will set in the other way, and all will go well. And, first of all, there is one question, my boy, which I should like to ask you. What do you think of John Harston's daughter?"

"She's right enough," the young man answered brusquely.

"She's a good girl, Ezra — a thoroughly good girl, and a rich girl too, though her money is a small thing in my eyes compared to her virtue."

Young Girdlestone sneered. "Of course," he said impatiently. "Well, go on — what about her?"

"Just this, Ezra, that there is no girl in the world whom I should like better to receive as my daughter-in-law. Ah, you rogue! you could come round her; you know you could." The old man poked his long bony finger In the direction of his son's ribs with grim playfulness.

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" remarked the junior partner, with a very unpleasant smile.

"Yes, that is one way out of our difficulties. She has forty thousand pounds, which would be more than enough to save the firm. At the same time you would gain a charming wife."

“Yes, there are a good many girls about who might make charming wives,” his son remarked dubiously. “No matrimony for me yet awhile.”

“But it is absolutely necessary,” his father urged.

“A very fine necessity,” Ezra broke in savagely. “I am to tie myself up for life and you are to use all the money in rectifying your blunders. It’s a very pretty division of labour, is that.”

“The business is yours as well as mine. It is your interest to invest the money in it, for if it fails you are as completely ruined as I should be. You think you could win her if you tried?”

Ezra stroked his dark moustache complacently, and took a momentary glance at his own bold handsome features in the mirror above the fire-place. “If we are reduced to such an expedient, I think I can answer for the result,” he said. “The girl’s not a bad-looking one. But you said you had several plans. Let us hear some of the other ones. If the worst comes to the worst I might consent to that — on condition, of course, that I should have the whole management of the money.”

“Quite so — quite so,” his father said hurriedly. “That’s a dear, good lad. As you say, when all other things fail we can always fall back upon that. At present I intend to raise as much money as I can upon our credit, and invest it in such a manner as to bring in a large and immediate profit.”

“And how do you intend to do this?” his son asked doubtfully.

“I intend,” said John Girdlestone, solemnly rising up and leaning his elbow against the mantelpiece—”I intend to make a corner in diamonds.”

CHAPTER XII.

A CORNER IN DIAMONDS.

John Girdlestone propounded his intention with such dignity and emphasis that he evidently expected the announcement to come as a surprise upon his son. If so, he was not disappointed, for the young man stared open-eyed.

“A corner in diamonds!” he repeated. “How will you do that?”

“You know what a corner is,” his father explained. “If you buy up all the cotton, say, or sugar in the market, so as to have the whole of it in your own hands, and to be able to put your own price on it in selling it again — that is called making a corner in sugar or cotton. I intend to make a corner in diamonds.”

“Of course, I know what a corner is,” Ezra said impatiently. “But how on earth are you going to buy all the diamonds in? You would want the capital of a Rothschild?”

“Not so much as you think, my boy, for there are not any great amount of diamonds in the market at any one time. The yield of the South African fields regulates the price. I have had this idea in my head for some time, and have studied the details. Of course, I should not attempt to buy in all the diamonds that are in the market. A small portion of them would yield profit enough to float the firm off again.”

“But if you have only a part of the supply in your hands, how are you to regulate the market value? You must come down to the prices at which other holders are selling.”

“Ha! Ha! Very good! very good!” the old merchant said, shaking his head good-humouredly. “But you don’t quite see my plan yet. You have not altogether grasped it. Allow me to explain it to you.”

His son lay back upon the sofa with a look of resignation upon his face. Girdlestone continued to stand upon the hearth-rug and spoke very slowly and deliberately, as though giving vent to thoughts which had been long and carefully considered.

“You see, Ezra,” he said, “diamonds, being a commodity of great value, of which there is never very much in the market at one time, are extremely sensitive to all sorts of influences. The value of them varies greatly from time to time. A very little thing serves to depreciate their price, and an equally small thing will send it up again.”

Ezra Girdlestone grunted to show that he followed his father’s remarks.

“I did some business in diamonds myself when I was a younger man, and so I had an opportunity of observing their fluctuations in the market. Now, there is one thing which invariably depreciates the price of diamonds. That is the rumour of fresh discoveries of mines in other parts of the world. The instant such a thing gets wind the value of the stones goes down wonderfully. The discovery of diamonds in Central India not long ago had that effect very markedly, and they have never recovered their value since. Do you follow me?”

An expression of interest had come over Ezra’s face, and he nodded to show that he was listening.

“Now, supposing,” continued the senior partner, with a smile on his thin lips, “that such a report got about. Suppose, too, that we were at this time, when the market was in a depressed condition, to invest a considerable capital in them. If these rumours of an alleged discovery turned out to be entirely unfounded, of course the value of the stones which we held would go up once more, and we might very well sell out for double or treble the sum that we invested. Don’t you see the sequence of events?”

“There seems to me to be rather too much of the ‘suppose’ in it,” remarked Ezra. “How do we know that such rumours will get about; and if they do, how do we know that they will prove to be unfounded?”

“How are we to know?” the merchant cried, wriggling his long lank body with amusement. “Why, my lad, if we spread the rumours ourselves we shall have pretty good reason to believe that they are unfounded. Eh, Ezra? Ha! ha! You see there are some brains in the old man yet.”

Ezra looked at his father in considerable surprise and some admiration. “Why, damn it!” he exclaimed, “it’s dishonest. I’m not sure that it’s not actionable.”

“Dishonest! Pooh!” The merchant snapped his fingers. “It’s finesse, my boy, commercial finesse. Who’s to trace it, I should like to know. I haven’t worked out all the details — I want your co-operation over that — but here’s a rough sketch of my plan. We send a man we can depend upon to some distant part of the world — Chimborazo, for example, or the Ural Mountains. It doesn’t matter where, as long as it is out of the way. On arriving at this place our agent starts a report that he has discovered a diamond mine. We should even go the length, if he considers it necessary, of hiding a few rough stones in the earth, which he can dig up to give colour to his story. Of course the local press would be full of this. He might present one of the diamonds to the editor of the nearest paper. In course of time a pretty coloured description of the new diamond fields would find its way to London and thence to the Cape. I'll answer for it that the immediate effect is a great drop in the price of stones. We should have a second agent at the Cape diamond fields, and he would lay our money out by buying in all that he could while the panic lasted. Then, the original scare having proved to be all a mistake, the prices naturally go up once more, and we get a long figure for all that we hold. That's what I mean by making 'a corner in diamonds.' There is no room in it for any miscalculation. It is as certain as a proposition of Euclid, and as easily worked out."

"It sounds very nice," his son remarked thoughtfully. "I'm not so sure about its working, though."

"It must work well. As far as human calculation can go there is no possibility of failure. Besides, my boy, never lose sight of the fact that we shall be speculating with other people's money. We ourselves have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing."

"I am not likely to lose sight of it," said Ezra angrily, his mind coming back to his grievance.

"I reckon that we can raise from forty to fifty thousand pounds without much difficulty. My name is, as you know, as good as that of any firm in the City. For nearly forty years it has been above stain or suspicion. If we carry on our plans at once, and lay this money out judiciously, all may come right."

"It's Hobson's choice," the young man remarked. "We must try some bold stroke of the sort. Have you chosen the right sort of men for agents? You should have men of some standing to set such reports going. They would have more weight then."

John Girdlestone shook his head despondingly. "How am I to get a man of any standing to do such a piece of business?" he said.

"Nothing easier," answered Ezra, with a cynical laugh. "I could pick out a score of impecunious fellows from the clubs who would be only too glad to earn a hundred or two in any way you can mention. All their talk about honour and so forth is very pretty and edifying, but it's not meant for every day use. Of course we should have to pay him."

"Them, you mean?"

"No, we should only want one man."

"How about our purchaser at the diamond fields?"

"You don't mean to say," Ezra said roughly, "that you would be so absurd as to trust any man with our money. Why, I wouldn't let the Archbishop of Canterbury out of my sight with forty thousand pounds of mine. No, I shall go myself to the diamond fields — that is, if I can trust you here alone."

"That is unkind, Ezra," said his father. "Your idea is an excellent one. I should have proposed it myself but for the discomforts and hardships of such a journey."

"There's no use doing things by halves," the young man remarked. "As to our other agent, I have the very man — Major Tobias Clutterbuck. He is a shrewd, clever fellow, and he's always hard up. Last week he wanted to borrow a tenner from me. The job would be a godsend to him, and his social rank would be a great help to our plan. I'll answer for his jumping at the idea."

"Sound him on the subject, then."

"I will."

"I am glad," said the old merchant, "that you and I have had this conversation, Ezra. The fact of my having speculated without your knowledge, and deceived you by a false ledger, has often weighed heavily upon my conscience, I assure you. It is a relief to me to have told you all."

"Drop the subject, then," Ezra said curtly. "I must put up with it, for I have no redress. The thing is done and nothing can undo it; but I consider that you have willfully wasted the money."

"Believe me, I have tried to act for the best. The good name of our firm is everything to me. I have spent my whole life in building it up, and if the day should come when it must go, I trust that I may have gone myself. There is nothing which I would not do to preserve it."

"I see they want our premiums," Ezra said, glancing at the open letter upon the table. "How is it that none of those ships go down? That would give us help."

"Hush! hush!" John Girdlestone cried imploringly. "Speak in a whisper when you talk of such things."

"I can't understand you," said Ezra petulantly. "You persistently over-insure your ships, year after year. Look at the Leopard; it is put at more than twice what she was worth as new. And the Black Eagle, I dare say, is about the same. Yet you never have an accident with them, while your two new uninsured clippers run each other down."

"Well, what more can I do?" replied the merchant "They are thoroughly rotten. I have done nothing for them for years. Sooner or later they must go. I cannot do any more."

"I'd make 'em go down quick enough," muttered Ezra, with an oath.

"Why don't you make old Miggs bore a hole in them, or put a light to a
barrel of paraffin? Bless your soul! the thing's done every day.
What's the use of being milk-and-watery about it?"

"No, no, Ezra!" cried his father. "Not that — not that. It's one thing letting matters take their course, and it is another thing giving positive orders to scuttle a ship. Besides, it would put us in Miggs' power. It would be too dangerous."

"Please yourself," said Ezra, with a sneer. "You've got us into the mess and you must take us out again. If the worst comes to the worst I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll marry Kate Harston, wash my hands of the firm, leave you to settle matters with the creditors, and retire with the forty thousand pounds;" with which threat the junior partner took up his hat and swaggered out of the office.

After his departure, John Girdlestone spent an hour in anxious thought, arranging the details of the scheme which he had just submitted to his son. As he sat, his eye chanced to fall upon the two letters lying on his desk, and it struck him that they had better be attended to. It did not suit his plans to fall back upon his credit just yet. It has been already shown that he was a man of ready resource. He rang the bell and summoned his senior clerk.

"Good morning, John," he said affably.

"Good morning, Mr. Girdlestone, good morning, sir," said wizened little John Gilray, rubbing his thin yellow hands together, as a sign of his gratification.

"I hear, John, that you have come into a legacy lately," Mr. Girdlestone said.

"Yes, sir. Fifteen hundred pounds, sir. Less legacy duty and incidental expenses, fourteen hundred and twenty-eight six and fourpence. My wife's brother Andrew left it, sir, and a very handsome legacy too."

John Girdlestone smiled with the indulgent smile of one to whom such a sum was absolutely nothing.

“What have you done with the money, then, John?” he asked carelessly.

“Banked it, sir, in the United Metropolitan.”

“In the United Metropolitan, John? Let me see. Their present rate of interest is three and a half?”

“Three, sir,” said John.

“Three! Dear me, John, that is poor interest, very poor indeed. It is most fortunate that I made these inquiries. I was on the point of drawing fourteen hundred pounds from one of my correspondents as a temporary convenience. For this I should pay him five per cent. I have no objection, John, as you are an old servant of the firm, to giving you the preference in this matter. I cannot take more than fourteen hundred — but I shall be happy to accommodate you up to that sum at the rate named.”

John Gilray was overwhelmed by this thoughtful and considerate act. “It is really too generous and kind, sir,” he said. “I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, John,” the senior partner said grandly. “The firm is always glad to advance the interests of its employees in any reasonable manner. Have you your cheque-book with you? Fill it up for fourteen hundred. No more, John; I cannot oblige you by taking any more.”

The head clerk having made out his cheque for the amount, and having signed his name to it in a cramped little quaint handwriting, which reminded one of his person, was duly presented with a receipt and dismissed to his counting-house. There he entertained the other clerks by a glowing description of the magnanimity of his employer.

John Girdlestone took some sheets of blue official paper from a drawer, and his quill pen travelled furiously over them with many a screech and splutter.

“Sir,” he said to the bank manager, “I enclose fourteen hundred pounds, which represents the loose cash about the office. I shall make a heavy deposit presently. In the meantime, you will, of course, honour anything that may be presented. — Yours truly, JOHN GIRDLESTONE.”

To Lloyd’s Insurance Agency he wrote:—”Sir, — Enclosed you will find cheque for 241 pounds seven shillings and sixpence, being amount due as premium on the Leopard, Black Eagle, and Maid of Athens. Should have forwarded cheque before, but with so many things of importance to look after these trifles are liable to be overlooked.”

These two epistles having been sealed, addressed, and despatched, the elder Girdlestone began to feel somewhat more easy in his mind, and to devote himself once more to the innocent amusement of planning how a corner might best be created in diamonds.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOW AND LIGHT.

John Girdlestone's private residence in Eccleston Square was a large and substantial house in a district which the wave of fashion had passed over in its westward course. It might still, however, be said to be covered by a deposit of eminent respectability. The building was stern and hard, and massive in its external appearance, but the interior was luxury itself, for the old merchant, in spite of his ascetic appearance, was inclined to be a sybarite at heart, and had a due appreciation of the good things of this world. Indeed, there was an oriental and almost barbarous splendour about the great rooms, where the richest of furniture was interspersed with skins from the Gaboon, hand-worked ivory from Old Calabar, and the thousand other strange valuables which were presented by his agents to the African trader.

After the death of his friend, Girdlestone had been as good as his word. He had taken Kate Harston away from the desolate house at Fulham and brought her to live with him. From the garrets of that palatial edifice to the cellars she was at liberty to roam where she would, and do what she chose. The square garden too, with its smoke-dried trees and faded lawn, was at her disposal, in which she might walk, or work, or read. No cares or responsibilities were imposed upon her. The domestic affairs were superintended by a stern housekeeper, who bore a quaint resemblance to Girdlestone himself in petticoats, and who arranged every detail of housekeeping. The young girl had apparently only to exist and to be happy.

Yet the latter item was not so easy as it might seem. It was not a congenial atmosphere. Her whole society consisted of the stern, unemotional merchant and his vulgar, occasionally brutal, son. At first, while the memory of her father was still fresh, she felt her new surroundings acutely, contrasting, as they did, with her happy Fulham home. Gradually, however, as time deadened the sting, she came to accommodate herself to circumstances. The two men left her very much to her own devices. Girdlestone was so engrossed in his business that he had little time to inquire into her pursuits, and Ezra, being addicted to late hours, was seldom seen except at breakfast-time, when she listened with awe to his sporting slang and cynical comments upon men and manners.

John Girdlestone had been by no means overjoyed upon the return of the Dimsdales from Edinburgh to learn that his ward had been thrown into the company of her young cousin. He received her coldly and forbade her to visit Phillimore Gardens for some time to come. He took occasion also to speak of Tom, and to assure her that he had received very serious accounts as to his spiritual state. “He is addicted to all manner of debasing pursuits,” he remarked, “and it is my particular wish that you should avoid him.” Learning that young Dimsdale was in London, he even took the precaution of telling off a confidential footman to walk behind her on all occasions, and to act either as an escort or as a sentry.

It chanced, however, that one day, a few weeks after her return, Kate found an opportunity of recovering her freedom. The footman had been despatched upon some other duty, so she bethought herself that a book was to be bought and some lace to be matched, and several other important feminine duties to be fulfilled. It happened, however, that as she walked sedately down Warwick Street, her eyes fell upon a very tall and square-shouldered young man, who was lounging in her direction, tapping his stick listlessly against the railings, as is the habit of idle men. At this Kate forgot incontinently all about the book and the lace, while the tall youth ceased to tap the railings, and came striding towards her with long springy footsteps and a smiling face.

“Why Cousin Tom, who would have thought of meeting you here?” she exclaimed, when the first greetings had been exchanged. “It is a most surprising thing.”

It is possible that the incident would not have struck her as so very astonishing after all, had she known that Tom had spent six hours a day for the last fortnight in blockading the entrances to Eccleston Square.

“Most remarkable!” said the young hypocrite. “You see, I haven’t anything to do yet, so I walk about London a good deal. It was a lucky chance that sent me in this direction.”

“And how is the doctor?” Kate asked eagerly. “And Mrs. Dimsdale, how is she? You must give my love to them both.”

“How is it that you have never been to see us?” Tom asked reproachfully.

"Mr. Girdlestone thinks that I have been too idle lately, and that I should stay at home. I am afraid it will be some little time before I can steal away to Kensington."

Tom consigned her guardian under his breath to a region warmer even than the scene of that gentleman's commercial speculations.

"Which way are you going?" he asked.

"I was going to Victoria Street to change my book, and then to Ford Street."

"What a strange thing!" the young man exclaimed; "I was going in that direction too." It seemed the more strange, as he was walking in the opposite direction when she met him. Neither seemed inclined to make any comment upon the fact, so they walked on together. "And you have not forgotten the days in Edinburgh yet?" Tom asked, after a long pause.

"No, indeed," his companion answered with enthusiasm. "I shall never forget them as long as I live."

"Nor I," said Tom earnestly. "You remember the day we had at the Pentlands?"

"And the drive round Arthur's Seat."

"And the time that we all went to Roslin and saw the chapel."

"And the day at Edinburgh Castle when we saw the jewels and the armoury. But you must have seen all these things many times before? You could not have enjoyed it as much as we did for the first time."

"Oh yes, I did," Tom said stoutly, wondering to himself how it was that the easy grace with which he could turn compliments to maidens for whom he cared nothing had so entirely deserted him. "You see, Kate-well — you were not there when I saw them before."

"Ah," said Kate demurely, "what a beautiful day it is? I fancied in the morning that it was going to rain."

Tom was not to be diverted from his subject by any meteorological observations. "Perhaps some time your guardian will allow the dad to take you on another little holiday," he said hopefully.

"I'm afraid he won't," answered Kate.

"Why not?"

"Because he seemed so cross when I came back this last time."

"Why was he cross?" asked Tom.

"Because—" She was about to say that it was because she had been brought in contact with him; but she recollected herself in time.

"Because what?"

"Because he happened to be in a bad temper," she answered.

"It is too bad that you should have to submit to any one's whims and tempers," the young man said, switching his stick angrily backwards and forwards.

"Why not?" she asked, laughing. "Everybody has some one over them.

If you hadn't, you would never know right from wrong."

"But he is unkind to you."

"No, indeed," said Kate, with decision. "He is really very kind to me. He may appear a little stern at times, but I know that he means it for my own good, and I should be a very foolish girl if I resented it. Besides, he is so pious and good that what may seem a little fault to us would appear a great thing in his eyes."

"Oh, he is very pious and good, then," Tom remarked, in a doubtful voice. His shrewd old father had formed his own views as to John Girdlestone's character, and his son had in due course imbibed them from him.

"Yes, of course he is," answered Kate, looking up with great wondering eyes. "Don't you know that he is the chief supporter of the Purbrook Street Branch of the Primitive Trinitarians, and sits in the front pew three times every Sunday?"

"Ah!" said Tom.

"Yes, and subscribes to all the charitable funds, and is a friend of Mr. Jefferson Edwards, the great philanthropist. Besides, look how good he has been to me. He has taken the place of my father."

"Hum!" Tom said dubiously; and then, with a little pang at his heart,

"Do you like Ezra Girdlestone too?"

"No, indeed," cried his companion with energy. "I don't like him in the least. He is a cruel, bad-hearted man."

"Cruel! You don't mean cruel to you, of course."

"No, not to me. I avoid him as much as I can, and sometimes for weeks we hardly exchange a word. Do you know what he did the other day? It makes me shudder even to think of it. I heard a cat crying pitifully in the garden, so I went out to see what was the matter. When I got outside I saw Ezra Girdlestone leaning out of a window with a gun in his hands — one of those air-guns which don't make any noise when they go off. And there, in the middle of the garden, was a poor cat that he had tied to a bush, and he had been practising at it for ever so long. The poor creature was still alive, but oh! so dreadfully injured.”

“The brute! What did you do?”

“I untied it and brought it inside, but it died during the night.”

“And what did he say?”

“He put up his gun while I was untying it, as if he had half a mind to take a shot at me. When I met him afterwards he said that he would teach me to mind my own business. I didn’t mind what he said though, as long as I had the cat.”

“Spoke like that, did he?” said Tom savagely, flushing up to his eyes.

“I wish I saw him now. I’d teach him manners, or—”

“You’ll certainly get run over if you go on like that,” interrupted

Kate.

Indeed, the young man in his indignation was striding over a crossing without the slightest heed of the imminent danger which he ran from the stream of traffic.

“Don’t be so excitable, Cousin Tom,” she said, laying her gloved hand upon his arm; “there is nothing to be cross about.”

“Isn’t there?” he answered furiously. “It’s a pretty state of things that you should have to submit to insults from a brutal puppy like that fellow Ezra Girdlestone.” The pair had managed by this time to get half-way across the broad road, and were halting upon the little island of safety formed by the great stone base of a lamp-post. An interminable stream of ‘buses — yellow, purple, and brown — with vans, hansoms, and growlers, blocked the way in front of them. A single policeman, with his back turned to them, and his two arms going like an animated semaphore, was the only human being in their immediate vicinity. Amid all the roar and rattle of the huge city they were as thoroughly left to themselves as though they were in the centre of Salisbury Plain.

“You must have a protector,” Tom said with decision.

“Oh, Cousin Tom, don’t be foolish; I can protect myself very well.”

“You must have some one who has a right to look after you.” The young man’s voice was husky, for the back part of his throat had become unaccountably dry of a sudden.

“You can pass now, sir,” roared the constable, for there was a momentary break in the traffic.

“Don’t go for a moment,” Tom cried, desperately detaining his companion by the sleeve of her jacket. “We are alone here and can talk. Don’t you think — don’t you think you could like me a little bit if you were to try? I love you so, Kate, that I cannot help hoping that my love is not all lost.”

“All clear now, sir,” shouted the constable once more.

“Don’t mind him,” said Tom, still detaining her on the little-island. “Since I met you in Edinburgh, Kate, I have seemed to be walking in a dream. Do what I will, go where I will, I still have you before my eyes and hear your sweet voice in my ears. I don’t believe any girl was ever loved more dearly than I love you, but I find it so hard to put into words the thoughts that I have in my mind. For Heaven’s sake, give me some little gleam of hope to carry away with me. You don’t dislike me, Kate, do you?”

“You know that I don’t, Cousin Tom,” said the young lady, with downcast eyes. He had cornered her so skilfully against the great lamp that she could move neither to the right nor to the left.

“Do you like me, then, Kate?” he asked eagerly, with a loving light in his earnest grey eyes.

“Of course I do.”

“Do you think you could love me?” continued this persistent young man. “I don’t mean all at once, and in a moment, because I know very well that I am not worthy of it. But in time don’t you think you could come to love me?”

“Perhaps,” murmured Kate, with averted face. It was such a very little murmur that it was wonderful that it should be audible at all; yet it pealed in the young man’s ears above the rattle and the clatter of the busy street. His head was very near to hers at the time.

“Now’s your time, sir,” roared the semaphoric policeman.

Had Tom been in a less exposed position it is possible that he might have acted upon that well-timed remark from the cunning constable. The centre of a London crossing is not, however, a very advantageous spot for the performance of love passages. As they walked on, threading their way among the vehicles, Tom took his companion’s hand in his, and they exchanged one firm grip, which each felt to be of the nature of a pledge. How sunny and bright the dull brick-lined streets appeared to those two young people that afternoon. They were both looking into a future which seemed to be one long vista of happiness and love. Of all the gifts of

Providence, surely our want of knowledge of the things which are to come upon us is the most merciful, and the one we could least dispense with!

So happy and so light-hearted were these two lovers that it was not until they found themselves in Warwick Street once more that they came down from the clouds, and realised that there were some commonplace details which must be dealt with in one way or another.

"Of course, I may tell my own people, dearest, about our engagement?"

Tom said.

"I wonder what your mother will say?" answered Kate, laughing merrily.

"She will be awfully astonished."

"How about Girdlestone?" asked Tom.

The thought of the guardian had never occurred to either of them before. They stared at each other, and Kate's face assumed such an expression of dismay that her companion burst out laughing.

"Don't be frightened, darling," he said. "If you like, I'll go in and 'beard the lion in his den.' There is no time like the present."

"No, no, dear Tom," she cried eagerly. "You must not do that." It was impossible for her to tell him how especially Girdlestone had cautioned her against him, but she felt that it would never do to allow the two to meet. "We must conceal our engagement from Mr. Girdlestone."

"Conceal our engagement!"

"Yes, Tom. He has warned me so often against anything of the sort, that really I don't know what he would do if he knew about it. He would certainly make it very uncomfortable for me to live with him. Remember I am nearly twenty now, so in a little more than a year I shall be entirely free. That is not very long."

"I don't know about that," Tom said doubtfully. "However, if you will be more comfortable, of course that settles the question. It seems rather hard, though, that we should have to conceal it, simply in order to pacify this old bear."

"It's only for a time, Tom; and you may tell them at home by all means. Now, good-bye, dear; they will see you from the windows if you come nearer."

"Good-bye, my darling."

They shook hands and parted, he hurrying away with the glad tidings to Phillimore Gardens, she tripping back to her captivity with the lightest heart that she had felt for a weary time. Passers-by glanced back at the bright little face under the bright little bonnet, and Ezra Girdlestone, looking down at her from the drawing-room window, bethought him that if the diamond speculation should fail it would be no hardship to turn to his father’s word.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SLIGHT MISUNDERSTANDING.

The revelation of the real state of the firm’s finances was a terrible blow to Ezra Girdlestone. To a man of his overbearing, tempestuous disposition failure and poverty were bitter things to face. He had been wont to tread down before him all such little difficulties and obstacles as came across him in his former life. Now he encountered a great barrier which could not be passed so easily, and he raged and chafed before it. It made him still more wroth to think that the fault was none of his. All his life he had reckoned, as a matter of course, that when his father passed away he would be left almost a millionaire. A single half-hour’s conversation had shattered this delusion and left him face to face with ruin. He lost his sleep and became restless and hollow-eyed. Once or twice he was seen the worse for drink in the daytime.

He was a man of strong character, however, and though somewhat demoralised by the sudden shock, he threw away no point in the game which he and his father were playing. He saw clearly that only a bold stroke could save them. He therefore threw himself heart and soul into the diamond scheme, and worked out the details in a masterly manner. The more he looked into it the more convinced he became, not only of its feasibility, but of its absolute safety. It seemed as though it were hardly possible that it should fail.

Among other things he proceeded to qualify himself as a dealer in diamonds. It happened that he was acquainted with one of the partners of the firm of Fugger & Stoltz, who did the largest import trade in precious stones. Through his kindness he received practical instructions in the variety and value of diamonds, and learned to detect all those little flaws and peculiarities which are only visible to the eye of an expert, and yet are of the highest importance in determinating the price of a stone. With such opportunities Ezra made rapid progress, and within a few weeks there were not many dealers in the trade who had a better grasp of the subject.

Both the Girdlestones recognised that the success of their plan depended very largely upon their choice of an agent, and both were of the opinion that in Major Tobias Clutterbuck they had just the man that they were in want of. The younger merchant had long felt vaguely that the major's social position, combined with his impecuniosity and the looseness of his morality, as inferred from his mode of life, might some day make him a valuable agent under delicate circumstances. As to the old soldier's own inclinations, Ezra flattered himself that he knew the man's nature to a nicety. It was simply a question of the price to be paid. No doubt the figure would be substantial, but he recognised with a trader's instinct that the article was a superior one, and he was content to allow for the quality in estimating the value.

Early one April afternoon the major was strutting down St. James's Street, frock-coated and kid-gloved, with protuberant chest and glittering shoes which peeped out from beneath the daintiest of gaiters. Young Girdlestone, who had been on the look-out from a club window, ran across and intercepted him.

"How are you, my dear major?" he cried, advancing upon him with outstretched hand and as much show of geniality as his nature permitted.

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do?" said the other somewhat pompously. He had made up his mind that nothing was to be done with the young man, and yet he was reluctant to break entirely with one whose purse was well lined and who had sporting proclivities.

"I've been wishing to speak with you for some days, major," said Ezra.

"When could I see you?"

"You'll niver see me any plainer than you do at this very moment," the old soldier answered, taking a sidelong glance of suspicion at his companion.

"Ah, but I wish to speak to you quietly on a matter of business," the young merchant persisted. "It's a delicate matter which may need some talking over, and, above all, it is a private matter."

"Ged!" said the major, with a wheezy laugh, "you'd have thought I wanted to borrow money if I had said as much. Look here now, we'll go into White's private billiard-room, and I'll let you have two hunthred out of five for a tinner — though it's as good as handing you the money to offer you such odds. You can talk this over while we play."

“No, no, major,” urged the junior partner. “I tell you it is a matter of the greatest importance to both of us. Can you meet me at Nelson’s Cafe at four o’clock? I know the manager, and he’ll let us have a private room.”

“I’d ask you round to me own little place,” the major said, “but it’s rather too far. Nelson’s at four. Right you are! ‘Punctuality is next to godliness,’ as ould Willoughby of the Buffs used to say. You didn’t know Willoughby, eh? Gad, he was second to a man at Gib in ‘47. He brought his man on the ground, but the opponents didn’t turn up. Two minutes after time Willoughby wanted his man to leave. ‘Teach ‘em punctuality,’ he said. ‘Can’t be done,’ said his man. ‘Must be done,’ said Willoughby. ‘Out of the question,’ said the man, and wouldn’t budge. Willoughby persisted; there were high words and a quarrel. The docther put ‘em up at fifteen paces, and the man shot Willoughby through the calf of the leg. He was a martyr to punctuality. Four o’clock-bye, bye!” The major nodded pleasantly and swaggered away, flourishing his little cane jauntily in the air.

In spite of his admiration of punctuality, as exemplified in the person of Willoughby of the Buffs, the major took good care to arrive at the trysting-place somewhat behind the appointed time. It was clear to him that some service or other was expected of him, and it was obviously his game therefore to hang back and not appear to be too eager to enter into young Girdlestone’s views. When he presented himself at the entrance of Nelson’s Cafe the young merchant had been fuming and chafing in the sitting-room for five and twenty minutes.

It was a dingy apartment, with a single large horse-hair chair and half a dozen small wooden dittoes, placed with mathematical precision along the walls. A square table in the centre and a shabby mirror over the mantelpiece completed the furniture. With the instinct of an old campaigner the major immediately dropped into the arm-chair, and, leaning luxuriously back, took a cigar from his case and proceeded to light it. Ezra Girdlestone seated himself near the table and twisted his dark moustache, as was his habit when collecting himself.

“What will you drink?” he asked,

“Anything that’s going.”

“Fetch in a decanter of brandy and some seltzer water,” said Ezra to the waiter; “then shut the door and leave us entirely to ourselves.”

When the liquor was placed upon the table he drank off his first glass at a gulp, and then refilled it. The major placed his upon the mantelpiece beside him without tasting it. Both were endeavouring to be at their best and clearest in the coming interview, and each set about it in his own manner.

“I’ll tell you why I wanted to have a chat with you, major,” Ezra said, having first opened the door suddenly and glanced out as a precaution against eavesdroppers. “I have to be cautious, because what I have to say affects the interest of the firm. I wouldn’t for the world have any one know about it except yourself.”

“What is it, me boy?” the major asked, with languid curiosity, puffing at his weed and staring up at the smoke-blackened ceiling.

“You understand that in commercial speculations the least breath of information beforehand may mean a loss of thousands on thousands.”

The major nodded his head as a sign that he appreciated this fact.

“We have a difficult enterprise on which we are about to embark,” Ezra said, leaning forward and sinking his voice almost to a whisper. “It is one which will need great skill and tact, though it may be made to pay well if properly managed. You follow me?”

His companion nodded once more.

“For this enterprise we require an agent to perform one of the principal parts. This agent must possess great ability, and, at the same time, be a man on whom we can thoroughly rely. Of course we do not expect to find such qualities without paying for them.”

The major grunted a hearty acquiescence.

“My father,” continued Ezra, “wanted to employ one of our own men.

We have numbers who are capable in every way of managing the business.

I interfered, however. I said that I had a good friend, named Major

Tobias Clutterbuck, who was well qualified for the position.

I mentioned that you were of the blood of the old Silesian kings. Was I not right?”

“Begad you were not. Milesian, sir; Milesian!”

“Ah, Milesian. It’s all the same.”

“It’s nothing of the sort,” said the major indignantly.

“I mean it was all the same to my father. He wouldn’t know the difference. Well, I told him of your high descent, and that you were a traveller, a soldier, and a man of steady and trustworthy habits.”

“Eh?” ejaculated the major involuntarily. “Well, all right. Go on!”

“I told him all this,” said Ezra slowly, “and I pointed out to him that the sum of money which he was prepared to lay out would be better expended on such a man than on one who had no virtues beyond those of business.”

“I didn’t give you credit for so much sinse!” his companion exclaimed with enthusiasm.

“I said to him that if the matter were left entirely in your hands we could rely upon its being done thoroughly. At the same time, we should have the satisfaction of knowing that the substantial sum which we are prepared to pay our agent had come into worthy hands.”

“You hit it there again,” murmured the veteran.

“You are prepared, then,” said Ezra, glancing keenly at him, “to put yourself at our orders on condition that you are well paid for it?”

“Not so fast, me young friend, not so fast!” said the major, taking his cigar from between his lips and letting the blue smoke curl round his head. “Let’s hear what it is that you want me to do, and then I’m riddy to say what I’ll agree to and what I won’t. I remimber Jimmy Baxter in Texas—”

“Hang Jimmy Baxter!” Ezra cried impatiently.

“That’s been done already,” observed the major calmly. “Lynched for horse-stealing in ‘66. However, go on, and I’ll promise not to stop you until you have finished.”

Thus encouraged, Ezra proceeded to unfold the plan upon which the fortunes of the House of Girdlestone depended. Not a word did he say of ruin or danger, or the reasons which had induced this speculation. On the contrary, he depicted the affairs of the firm as being in a most nourishing condition, and this venture as simply a small insignificant offshoot from their business, undertaken as much for amusement as for any serious purpose. Still, he laid stress upon the fact that though the sum in question was a small one to the firm, yet it was a very large one in other men’s eyes. As to the morality of the scheme, that was a point which Ezra omitted entirely to touch upon. Any comment upon that would, he felt, be superfluous when dealing with such a man as his companion.

“And now, major,” he concluded, “provided you lend us your name and your talents to help us in our speculation, the firm are prepared to meet you in a most liberal spirit in the matter of remuneration. Of course your voyage and your expenses will be handsomely paid. You will have to travel by steamer to St. Petersburg, provided that we choose the Ural Mountains as the scene of our imaginary find. I hear that there is high play going on aboard these boats, and with your well-known skill you will no doubt be able to make the voyage a remunerative one. We calculate that at the most you will be in Russia about three months. Now, the firm thought that it would be very fair if they were to guarantee you two hundred and fifty pounds, which they would increase to five hundred in case of success; of course by that we mean complete success, such as would be likely to attend your exertions."

Now, had there been any third person in the room during this long statement of the young merchant's, and had that third person been a man of observation, he might have remarked several peculiarities in the major's demeanour. At the commencement of the address he might have posed as the very model and type of respectable composure. As the plan was gradually unfolded, however, the old soldier began to puff harder at his cigar until a continuous thick grey cloud rose up from him, through which the lurid tip of the havannah shone like a murky meteor. From time to time he passed his hand down his puffy cheeks, as was his custom when excited. Then he moved uneasily in his chair, cleared his throat huskily, and showed other signs of restlessness, all of which were hailed by Ezra Girdlestone as unmistakable proofs of the correctness of his judgment and of the not unnatural eagerness of the veteran on hearing of the windfall which chance had placed in his way.

When the young man had finished, the major stood up with his face to the empty fire-place, his legs apart, his chest inflated, and his body rocking ponderously backwards and forwards.

"Let me be quite sure that I understand you," he said. "You wish me to go to Russia?"

"Quite so," Ezra remarked, rubbing his hands pleasantly.

"You have the goodness to suggist that on me way I should rook me fellow-passengers in the boat?"

"That is to say, if you think it worth your while."

"Quite so, if I think it worth me while. I am then to procade across the counthry to some mountains—"

"The Urals."

"And there I am to pretind to discover certain diamond mines, and am to give weight to me story by the fact that I am known to be a man of good birth, and also by exhibiting some rough stones which you wish me to take out with me from England?"

“Quite right, major,” Ezra said encouragingly.

“I am then to tilegraph or write this lie to England and git it inserted in the papers?”

“That’s an ugly word,” Ezra remonstrated. “This ‘report’ we will say.

A report may be either true or false, you know.”

“And by this report, thin,” the major continued, “you reckon that the market will be so affected that your father and you will be able to buy and sell in a manner that will be profitable to you, but by which you will do other people out of their money?”

“You have an unpleasant way of putting it,” said Ezra, with a forced laugh; “but you have the idea right.”

“I have another idea as well,” roared the old soldier, flushing purple with passion. “I’ve an idea that if I was twinty years younger I’d see whether you’d fit through that window, Master Girdlestone. Ged! I’d have taught you to propose such a schame to a man with blue blood in his veins, you scounthrel!”

Ezra fell back in his chair. He was outwardly composed, but there was a dangerous glitter in his eye, and his face had turned from a healthy olive to a dull yellow tint.

“You won’t do it?” he gasped.

“Do it! D’ye think that a man who’s worn Her Majesty’s scarlet jacket for twinty years would dirty his hands with such a trick? I tell ye, I wouldn’t do it for all the money that iver was coined. Look here, Girdlestone, I know you, but, by the Lord, you don’t know me!”

The young merchant sat silently in his chair, with the same livid colour upon his face and savage expression in his eyes. Major Tobias Clutterbuck stood at the end of the table, stooping forward so as to lean his hands upon it, with his eyes protuberant and his scanty grey fringe in a bristle with indignation.

“What right had you to come to me with such a proposal? I don’t set up for being a saint, Lord knows, but, be George! I’ve some morals, such as they are, and I mean to stick to them. One of me rules of life has been niver to know a blackgaird, and so, me young friend, from this day forth you and I go on our own roads. Ged! I’m not particular, but ‘you must draw the line somewhere,’ as me frind, Charlie Monteith, of the Indian Horse, used to say I when he cut his father-in-law. I draw it at you.”

While the major was solemnly delivering himself of these sentiments, Ezra continued to sit watching him in a particularly venomous manner. His straight, cruel lips were blanched with passion, and the veins stood out upon his forehead. The young man was a famous amateur bruiser, and could fight a round with any professional in London. The old soldier would be a child in his hands. As the latter picked up his hat preparatory to leaving the room, Ezra rose and bolted the door upon the inside. “It’s worth five pounds in a police court,” he muttered to himself, and knotting up his great hands, which glittered with rings, he approached his companion with his head sunk upon his breast, his eyes flashing from under his dark brows, and the slow, stealthy step of a beast of prey. There was a characteristic refinement of cruelty about his attack, as though he wished to gloat over the helplessness of his victim, and give him time to realise his position before he set upon him.

If such were his intention he failed signally in producing the desired effect. The instant the major perceived his manoeuvre he pulled himself up to his full height, as he might have done on parade, and slipping his hand beneath the tails of his frock-coat, produced a small glittering implement, which he levelled straight at the young merchant’s head.

“A revolver!” Ezra gasped, staggering back.

“No, a derringer,” said the veteran blandly. “I got into the thrick of carrying one when I was in Colorado, and I have stuck to it ever since. You niver know when it may be useful.” As he spoke he continued to hold the black muzzle of his pistol in a dead line with the centre of the young man’s forehead, and to follow the latter’s movements with a hand which was as steady as a rock. Ezra was no coward, but he ceased his advance and stood irresolute.

“Now, thin,” cried the major, in sharp military accents, “undo that door.”

The young merchant took one look at the threatening apoplectic face of his antagonist, and another at the ugly black spot which covered him. He stooped, and pushed back the bolt.

“Now, open it! Ged, if you don’t look alive I’ll have to blow a hole in you afther all. You wouldn’t be the first man I’ve killed, nor the last maybe.”

Ezra opened the door precipitately.

“Now walk before me into the strate.”

It struck the waiters at Nelson’s well-known restaurant as a somewhat curious thing that their two customers should walk out with such very grave faces and in so unsociable a manner. “C’est la froideur Anglaise!” remarked little Alphonse Lefanue to a fellow exile as they paused in the laying of tables to observe the phenomenon. Neither of them noticed that the stout gentleman behind with his hand placed jauntily in the breast of his coat, was still clutching the brown handle of a pistol.

There was a hansom standing at the door and Major Clutterbuck stepped into it.

“Look ye here, Girdlestone,” he said, as the latter stood looking sulkily up and down the street. “You should learn a lesson from this. Never attack a man unless you’re sure that he’s unarmed. You may git shot, if you do.”

Ezra continued to stare gloomily into vacancy and took no notice of his late companion’s remark.

“Another thing,” said the major. “You must niver take it for granted that every man you mate is as great a blackgaird as yourself.”

The young merchant gave him a malignant glance from his dark eyes and was turning to go, but the gentleman in the cab stretched out his hand to detain him.

“One more lesson,” he said. “Never funk a pistol unless you are sure there’s a carthridge inside. Mine hadn’t. Drive on, cabby!” With which parting shot the gallant major rattled away down Piccadilly with a fixed determination never again to leave his rooms without a few of Eley’s No 4 central fires in his pocket.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADDITION TO THE HOUSE.

There were rejoicings in Phillimore Gardens over Tom's engagement, for the two old people were both heartily fond of Kate—"our Kate," as they were wont proudly to call her. The physician chafed at first over the idea of keeping the matter a secret from Girdlestone. A little reflection served to show him, however, that there was nothing to be gained by informing him, while Kate's life, during the time that she was forced to remain under his roof, would be more tolerable as long as he was kept in ignorance of it. In the meanwhile the lovers saw little of each other, and Tom was only consoled by the thought that every day which passed brought him nearer to the time when he could claim his prize without concealment or fear. He went about as happy and as light-hearted a man as any in all London. His mother was delighted at his high spirits, but his bluff old father was not so well satisfied. "Confound the lad!" he said to himself. "He is settling down to a life of idleness. It suits him too well. We must get him to choose one way or the other."

Accordingly, after breakfast one morning, the doctor asked his son to step with him into the library, where he lit his long cherry-wood pipe, as was his custom after every meal, and smoked for some time in silence.

"You must do something to keep you from mischief, my boy," he said at last brusquely.

"I'm ready for anything, dad," replied Tom, "but I don't quite see what I'm fitted for."

"First of all, what do you think of this?" the doctor asked abruptly, handing a letter over to his son, who opened it and read as follows: —

"DEAR SIR, —

"It has come to my knowledge through my son that your boy has abandoned the study of medicine, and that you are still uncertain as to his future career. I have long had the intention of seeking a young man who might join in our business, and relieve my old shoulders of some of the burden. Ezra urges me to write and propose that your son should become one of us. If he has any taste for business we shall be happy to advance his interest in every way. He would, of course, have to purchase a share in the concern, which would amount to seven thousand pounds, on which he would be paid interest at the rate of five per cent. By allowing this interest to accumulate, and investing also his share of the profits, he might in time absorb a large portion of the business. In case he joined us upon this footing we should have no objection to his name appearing as one of the firm. Should the idea commend itself to you, I should be most happy to talk over details, and to explain to you the advantages which the firm can offer, at my office in Fenchurch Street, any day between ten and four.”

“With kind regards to your family, and hoping that they enjoy the great blessing of health, I remain sincerely yours,”

“JOHN GIRDLESTONE.”

“What d’ye think of that?” the doctor asked, when his son had finished reading it.

“I hardly know,” said Tom; “I should like a little time to think it over.”

“Seven thousand pounds is a good round sum. It is more than half the total capital which I have invested for you. On the other hand, I have heard those who ought to know say there is not a sounder or better managed concern in London. There’s no time like the present, Tom. Get your hat, and we’ll go down to Fenchurch Street together and look into it.”

While father and son were rattling along in a cab from Kensington to the City, the young man had time to turn the matter over in his mind. He wanted to be at work, and why not take this up as well as anything else. It is true that he disliked what he had seen of both the Girdlestones, but, on the other hand, by becoming a member of the firm he would probably be thrown in the way of meeting the old merchant’s ward. This last consideration decided the matter, and long before the cab had pulled up at the long and dirty passage which led to the offices of the great African firm, the party principally interested had fully made up his mind as to the course he should adopt.

They were duly ushered into the small sanctum adorned with the dissected ships, the maps, the charts, the lists of sailing, and the water-colour picture of the barque Belinda, where they were received by the head of the firm. With a charming personal modesty, tempered by a becoming pride in the great business which he had himself created, he discoursed upon its transactions and its importance. He took down ledgers and flashed great rows of figures before the eyes of the good doctor, explaining, at the same time, how month after month their receipts increased and their capital grew. Then he spoke touchingly of his own ripe years, and of the quiet and seclusion which he looked forward to after his busy lifetime.

"With my young friend here," he said, patting Tom affectionately on the shoulder, "and my own boy Ezra, both working together, there will be young blood and life in the concern. They'll bring the energy, and when they want advice they can come to the old man for it. I intend in a year or so, when the new arrangement works smoothly, to have a run over to Palestine. It may seem a weakness to you, but all my life I have hoped some day to stand upon that holy ground, and to look down on those scenes which we have all imagined to ourselves. Your son will start with a good position and a fair income, which he will probably double before he is five years older. The money invested by him is simply to ensure that he shall have a substantial interest in promoting the affairs of the firm." Thus the old man ran on, and when Tom and his father left the office with the sound of great sums of money, and huge profits, and heavy balances, and safe investments, all jostling each other in their brains, they had both made up their minds as to the future.

Hence in a couple of days there was a stir in the legal house of Jones, Morgan, & Co., with much rustling of parchment, and signing of names, and drinking of inferior sherry. The result of all which was that the firm of Girdlestone & Co. were seven thousand pounds the richer, and Thomas Dimsdale found himself a recognised member of a great commercial house with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto.

"A good day's work, Tom," said the old doctor, as they left the lawyer's office together. "You have now taken an irrevocable step in life, my boy. The world is before you. You belong to a first-class firm and you have every chance. May you thrive and prosper."

"If I don't it won't be my fault," Tom answered with decision. "I shall work with my whole heart and soul."

"A good day's work, Ezra," the African merchant was remarking at that very moment in Fenchurch Street. "The firm is pinched again for working expenses. This will help;" and he threw a little slip of green paper across the table to his son.

"It will help us for a time," Ezra said, gloomily, glancing at the figures. "It was fortunate that I was able to put you on his track. It is only a drop in the ocean, however. Unless this diamond spec. comes off, nothing can save us."

"But it shall come off," his father answered resolutely. He had succeeded in obtaining an agent who appeared to be almost as well fitted for the post as the recalcitrant major. This worthy had started off already for Russia, where the scene of his operations was to lie.

"I hope so," said Ezra. "We have neglected no precaution. Langworthy should be at Tobolsk by this time. I saw that he had a bag of rough stones with him which would do well enough for his purpose."

"We have your money ready, too. I can rely upon rather over thirty thousand pounds. Our credit was good for that, but I did not wish to push it too far for fear of setting tongues wagging."

"I am thinking of starting shortly in the mail boat Cyprian," said Ezra. "I should be at the diamond fields in little more than a month. I dare say Langworthy won't show any signs for some time yet, but I may as well be there as here. It will give me a little while to find my way about. You see, if the tidings and I were to come almost simultaneously, it might arouse suspicions. In the meantime, no one knows our little game."

"Except your friend Clutterbuck."

A dark shadow passed over Ezra's handsome face, and his cruel lip tightened in a way which boded little good to the old soldier should he ever lie at his mercy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRST STEP.

It was a proud day for the ex-medical student when he first entered the counting-house of the African firm and realised that he was one of the governing powers in that busy establishment. Tom Dimsdale’s mind was an intensely practical one, and although he had found the study of science an irksome matter, he was able to throw himself into business with uncommon energy and devotion. The clerks soon found that the sunburnt, athletic-looking young man intended to be anything but a sleeping partner, and both they and old Gilray respected him accordingly.

The latter had at first been inclined to resent the new arrangement as far as his gentle down-trodden nature could resent anything. Hitherto he had been the monarch of the counting-house in the absence of the Girdlestones, but now a higher desk had been erected in a more central portion of the room, and this was for the accommodation of the new comer. Gilray, after his thirty years of service, felt this usurpation of his rights very keenly; but there was such a simple kindness about the invader, and he was so grateful for any assistance in his new duties, that the old clerk’s resentment soon melted away.

A little incident occurred which strengthened this kindly feeling. It chanced that some few days after Tom’s first appearance in the office several of the clerks, who had not yet quite gauged what manner of man this young gentleman might be, took advantage of the absence of the Girdlestones to take a rise out of the manager. One of them, a great rawboned Scotchman, named McCalister, after one or two minor exhibitions of wit concluded by dropping a heavy ruler over the partition of the old man’s desk in such a way that it crashed down upon his head as he sat stooping over his writing. Tom, who had been watching the proceedings with a baleful eye, sprang off his stool and made across the office at the offender. McCalister seemed inclined for a moment to brazen it out, but there was a dangerous sling about Tom’s shoulders and a flush of honest indignation upon his face. “I didn’t mean to hurt him,” said the Scotchman.

“Don’t hit him, sir!” cried the little manager. “Beg his pardon,” said Tom between his teeth. McCalister stammered out some lame apology, and the matter was ended. It revealed the new partner, however, in an entirely novel light to the inmates of the counting-house. That under such circumstances a complaint should be carried to the senior was only natural, but that the junior should actually take the matter into his own hands and execute lynch law then and there was altogether a new phenomenon. From that day Tom acquired a great ascendancy in the office, and Gilray became his devoted slave. This friendship with the old clerk proved to be very useful, for by means of his shrewd hints and patient teaching the new comer gained a grasp of the business which he could not have attained by any other method.

Girdlestone called him into the office one day and congratulated him upon the progress which he was making. “My dear young man,” he said to him in his patriarchal way, “I am delighted to hear of the way in which you identify yourself with the interests of the firm. If at first you find work allotted to you which may appear to you to be rather menial, you must understand that that is simply due to our desire that you should master the whole business from its very foundations.”

“There is nothing I desire better,” said Tom.

“In addition to the routine of office work, and the superintendence of the clerks, I should wish you to have a thorough grasp of all the details of the shipping, and of the loading and unloading of our vessels, as well as of the storage of goods when landed. When any of our ships are in, I should wish you to go down to the docks and to overlook everything which is done.”

Tom bowed and congratulated himself inwardly upon these new duties, which promised to be interesting.

“As you grow older,” said the senior partner, “you will find it of inestimable value that you have had practical experience of what your subordinates have to do. My whole life has taught me that. When you are in doubt upon any subject you can ask Ezra for assistance and advice. He is a young man whom you might well take as an example, for he has great business capacity. When he has gone to Africa you can come to me if there is anything which you do not understand.” John Girdlestone appeared to be so kindly and benevolent during this and other interviews, that Tom’s heart warmed towards him, and he came to the conclusion that his father had judged the old merchant harshly. More than once, so impressed was he by his kindness, that he was on the point of disclosing to him his engagement to his ward, but on each occasion there arose within him a lively recollection of Kate's frightened face when he had suggested such a course, and he felt that without her consent he had no right to divulge the secret.

If the elder Girdlestone improved upon acquaintance it was exactly the reverse with his son Ezra. The dislike with which Tom had originally regarded him deepened as he came in closer contact, and appeared to be reciprocated by the other, so that they held but little intercourse together. Ezra had taken into his own charge all the financial part of the concern, and guarded it the more jealously when he realised that the new partner was so much less simple than he had expected. Thus Tom had no opportunity of ascertaining for himself how the affairs of the firm stood, but believed implicitly, as did Gilray, that every outlay was bringing in a large and remunerative return. Very much astonished would both of them have been had they realised that the working expenses were at present being paid entirely from their own capital until such time as the plot should ripen which was to restore the fortunes of the African company.

In one respect Tom Dimsdale was immeasurably the gainer by his connection with the firm, for without that it is difficult to say how he could have found opportunities for breaking through the barrier which separated him from Kate. The surveillance of the merchant had become stricter of late, and all invitations from Mrs. Dimsdale or other friends who pitied the loneliness of the girl were repulsed by Girdlestone with the curt intimation that his ward's health was not such as to justify him in allowing her to incur any risk of catching a chill. She was practically a prisoner in the great stone cage in Eccleston Square, and even on her walks a warder in the shape of a footman was, as we have seen, told off to guard her. Whatever John Girdlestone's reasons may have been, he had evidently come to the conclusion that it was of the highest importance that she should be kept secluded.

As it was, Tom, thanks to his position as one of the firm, was able occasionally, in spite of every precaution to penetrate through the old man's defensive works. If a question of importance arose at Fenchurch Street during the absence of the senior partner, what more natural than that Mr. Dimsdale should volunteer to walk round to Eccleston Square in order to acquaint him with the fact. And if it happened that the gentleman was not to be found there, how very natural that the young man should wait half an hour for him, and that Miss Harston should take the opportunity of a chat with an old friend? Precious, precious interviews those, the more so for their rarity. They brightened the dull routine of Kate's weary life and sent Tom back to the office full of spirit and hope. The days were at hand when the memory of them was to shine out like little rifts of light in the dark cloud of existence.

And now the time was coming when it was to be decided whether, by a last bold stroke, the credit of the House of Girdlestone was to be saved, or whether the attempt was to plunge them into deeper and more hopeless ruin. An unscrupulous agent named Langworthy had, as already indicated, been despatched to Russia well primed with instructions as to what to do and how to do it. He had been in the employ of an English corn merchant at Odessa, and had some knowledge of the Russian language which would be invaluable to him in his undertaking. In the character of an English gentleman of scientific tastes he was to establish himself in some convenient village among the Ural Mountains. There he was to remain some little time, so as to arouse confidence in the people before making his pretended discovery. He was then to carry his rough diamonds to Tobolsk, as the nearest large town, and to exhibit them there, backing up his assertion by the evidence of villagers who had seen him dig them up. The Girdlestones knew that that alone would be sufficient when telegraphed to England to produce a panic in the sensitive diamond market. Before any systematic inquiry could be made, Langworthy would have disappeared, and their little speculation would have come off. After that the sooner the people realised that it was a hoax the better for the conspirators. In any case, there seemed to be no possibility that the origin of the rumour could be traced. Meanwhile, Ezra Girdlestone had secured his passage in the Cape mail steamer Cyprian. On the night that he left he sat up late in the library at Eccleston Square talking over the matter for the last time with his father.

The old man was pale and nervous. The one weak point in his character was his affection for his son, an affection which he strove to hide under an austere manner, but which was none the less genuine. He had never before parted with him for any length of time, and he felt the wrench keenly. As to Ezra, he was flushed and excited at the thought of the new scenes which lay before him and the daring speculation in which he was about to embark. He flung himself into a chair and stretched his thick, muscular limbs out in front of him.

"I know as much about stones," he said exultantly, "as any man in London. I was pricing a bag of rough ones at Van Helmer's to-day, and he is reckoned a good judge. He said that no expert could have done it better. Lord bless you! pure or splints, or cracked, or off colour, or spotted, or twin stones, I'm up to them all. I wasn't a pound out in the market value of any one of them."

"You deserve great credit for your quickness and perseverance," replied his father. "Your knowledge will be invaluable to you when you are at the fields. Be careful of yourself when you are there, my son, if only for my sake. There are rough fellows at such places, and you must give them soft words. I know that your temper is quick, but remember those wise words, 'He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.'"

"Never fear for me, dad," said Ezra, with a sinister smile, pointing to a small leather case which lay among his things. "That's the best six-shooter I could get for money. I've taken a tip, you see, from our good friend, the major, and have six answers for any one that wants to argue with me. If I had had that the other day he wouldn't have bounced me so easily."

"Nay, but Ezra, Ezra," his father said, in great agitation, "you will promise to be careful and to avoid quarrels and bloodshed. It is against the great law, the new commandment."

"I won't get into any rows if I can help it," his son answered.

"That's not my game."

"But if you think that there is no mistake, if your opponent is undoubtedly about to proceed to extremities, shoot him down at once, my dear lad, before he has time to draw. I have heard those who have been out there say that in such cases everything depends upon getting the first shot. I am anxious about you, and shall not be easy until I see you again."

"Blessed if he hasn't tears in his eyes!" Ezra exclaimed to himself, much astonished at this unprecedented occurrence.

"When do you go?" his father asked.

"My train leaves in an hour or so. I reach the steamer at Southampton about three in the morning, and she starts with the full tide at six."

"Look after your health," the old man continued. "Don't get your feet wet, and wear flannel next your skin. Don't forget your religious duties either. It has a good effect upon those among whom you do business."

Ezra sprang from his chair with an exclamation of disgust and began to pace up and down. "I wish to Heaven you would drop that sort of gammon when we are alone," he said irritably.

"My dear boy," said the father, with a mild look of surprise upon his face, "you seem to be under a misapprehension in this matter. You appear to consider that we are embarking upon some unjustifiable undertaking. This is not so. What we are doing is simply a small commercial ruse — a finesse. It is a recognised maxim of trade to endeavour to depreciate the price of whatever you want to buy, and to raise it again when the time comes for selling."

"It's steering very close to the law," his son retorted. "No speculating, now, while I am away; whatever comes in must go towards getting us out of this scrape, not to plunging us deeper in the mire."

"I shall not expend an unnecessary penny."

"Well, then, good-bye." said the young man, rising up and holding out his hand. "Keep your eye on Dimsdale and don't trust him."

"Good-bye, my son, good-bye — God bless you!"

The old merchant was honestly moved, and his voice quivered as he spoke. He stood motionless for a minute or so until the heavy door slammed, and then he threw open the window and gazed sorrowfully down the street at the disappearing cab. His whole attitude expressed such dejection that his ward, who had just entered the room, felt more drawn towards him than she had ever done before. Slipping up to him she placed her warm tender hand upon his sympathetically.

"He will soon be back, dear Mr. Girdlestone," she said. "You must not be uneasy about him."

As she stood beside him in her white dress, with a single red ribbon round her neck and a band of the same colour round her waist, she was as fair a specimen of English girl-hood as could have been found in all London. The merchant's features softened as he looked down at her fresh young face, and he put out his hand as though to caress her, but some unpleasant thought must have crossed his mind, for he assumed suddenly a darker look and turned away from her without a word. More than once that night she recalled that strange spasmodic expression of something akin to horror which had passed over her guardian's features as he gazed at her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAND OF DIAMONDS.

The anxious father had not very long to wait before he heard tidings of his son. Upon the first of June the great vessel weighed her anchor in the Southampton Water, and steamed past the Needles into the Channel. On the 5th she was reported from Madeira, and the merchant received telegrams both from the agent of the firm and from his son. Then there was a long interval of silence, for the telegraph did not extend to the Cape at that time, but, at last on the 8th of August, a letter announced Ezra’s safe arrival. He wrote again from Wellington, which was the railway terminus, and finally there came a long epistle from Kimberley, the capital of the mining district, in which the young man described his eight hundred miles drive up country and all the adventures which overtook him on the way.

“This place, Kimberley,” he said in his letter, “has grown into a fair-sized town, though a few years ago it was just a camp. Now there are churches, banks, and a club in it. There are a sprinkling of well-dressed people in the streets, but the majority are grimy-looking chaps from the diggings, with slouched hats and coloured shirts, rough fellows to look at, though quiet enough as a rule. Of course, there are blacks everywhere, of all shades, from pure jet up to the lightest yellow. Some of these niggers have money, and are quite independent. You would be surprised at their impertinence. I kicked one of them in the hotel yesterday, and he asked me what the devil I was doing, so I knocked the insolent scoundrel down. He says that he will sue me, but I cannot believe that the law is so servile as to bolster up a black man against a white one.

“Though Kimberley is the capital of the dry diggings, it is not there that all the actual mining is done. It goes on briskly in a lot of little camps, which are dotted along the Vaal River for fifty or sixty miles. The stones are generally bought by licensed agents immediately after they have been found, and are paid for by cheques on banks in Kimberley. I have, therefore, transferred our money to the Standard Bank here, and have taken my licence. I start to-morrow for Hebron, Klipdrift, and other of the mining centres to see for myself how business is done and to make friends with the miners, so as to get myself known. As soon as the news comes I shall buy in all that offers. Keep your eyes on that fellow Dimsdale, and let him know nothing of what is going on."

He wrote again about a fortnight afterwards, and his letter, as it crossed the Atlantic, passed the outward mail, which bore the news of the wonderful diamond find made by an English geologist among the Ural Mountains.

"I am now on a tour among the camps," he said. "I have worked right through from Hebron to Klipdrift, Pniel, Cawood's Hope, Waldeck's Plant, Neukirk's Hope, Winterrush, and Bluejacket. To-morrow I push on to Delparte's Hope and Larkin's Flat. I am well received wherever I go, except by the dealers, who are mostly German Jews. They hear that I am a London capitalist, and fear that I may send up the prices. They little know! I bought stones all the way along, but not very valuable ones, for we must husband our resources.

"The process of mining is very simple. The men dig pits in loose gravel lying along the banks of the river, and it is in these pits that the diamonds are found. The black men, or 'boys,' as they call them, do all the work, and the 'baas,' or master, superintends. Everything that turns up belongs to the 'baas,' but the boys have a fixed rate of wages, which never varies, whether the work is paying or not. I was standing at Hebron watching one of the gangs working when the white chap gave a shout, and dived his hand into a heap of stuff he had just turned over, pulling out a dirty looking little lump about the size of a marble. At his shout all the other fellows from every claim within hearing gathered round, until there was quite a crowd.

"'It's a fine stone,' said the man that turned it up.

"'Fifty carats if it's one,' cried another, weighing it in the palm of his hand.

"I had my scales with me, so I offered to weigh it. It was sixty-four and a half carats. Then they washed it and examined it. There was a lot of whispering among them and then the one who had found it came forward.

"'You deal, don't you, Mr. Girdlestone?' he said.

"'Now and then,' I answered, 'but I'm not very keen about it. I came out here more for pleasure than business.

"'Well,' he said, 'you may go far before you see a finer stone than this. What will you bid for it?'

"I looked at it. 'It's off-coloured,' I said.

"'It's white,' said he and one or two of his chums.

"'Gentlemen,' I said, 'it is not white. There are two shades of yellow in it. It is worth little or nothing.'

"'Why, if it is yellow it makes it all the more valuable,' said a big fellow with a black beard and corduroy trousers. 'A yellow stone's as good as a white.'

"'Yes,' I answered, 'a pure yellow stone is. But this is neither one nor the other. It's off-colour, and you know that as well as I.'

"'Won't you bid for it, then?' said one of them.

"'I'll bid seventy pounds,' I said, 'but not a penny more.'

"You should have heard the howl they all set up. 'It's worth five hundred,' the fellow cried.

"'All right,' I said, 'keep it and sell it for that; good day,' and I went off. The stone was sent after me that evening with a request for my cheque, and I sold it for a hundred two days afterwards. You see old Van Harmer's training has come in very handy. I just tell you this little anecdote to let you see that though I'm new in the work I'm not to be done. Nothing in the papers here from Russia. I am ready, come when it may. What would you do if there should be any hitch and the affair did not come off? Would you cut and run, or would you stand by your colours and pay a shilling or so in the pound? The more I think of it the more I curse your insanity in getting us into such a mess. Good-bye."

"He is right. It was insanity," said the old merchant leaning his head upon his hands. "It seems unkind of the lad to say so when he is so far away, but he was always plain and blunt. 'If the affair did not come off' — he must have some doubts about the matter, else he would not even suppose such a thing. God knows what I should do then. There are other ways — other ways." He passed his hand over his eyes as he spoke, as though to shut out some ugly vision. Such a wan, strange expression played over his grim features that he was hardly to be recognised as the revered elder of the Trinitarian Chapel or the esteemed man of business of Fenchurch Street.

He was lost in thought for some little time, and then, rising, he touched the bell upon the table. Gilray trotted in upon the signal so rapidly and noiselessly, that he might have been one of those convenient genii in the Eastern fables, only that the little clerk's appearance, from the tips of his ink-stained fingers to the toes of his seedy boots, was so hopelessly prosaic that it was impossible to picture him as anything but what he was.

“Ah, Gilray!” the merchant began, “is Mr. Dimsdale in the office?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’s all right. He seems to be very regular in his attendance.”

“Very, sir.”

“And seems to take to the business very well.”

“Uncommonly quick, sir, to be sure,” said the head clerk. “What with work among the ships, and work in the office, he’s at it late and early.”

“That is very right,” said the old man, playing with the letter weights. “Application in youth, Gilray, leads to leisure in old age. Is the Maid of Athens unloading?”

“Mr. Dimsdale has been down to her this morning, sir. They’re getting the things out fast. He wants to call attention to the state of the vessel, Mr. Girdlestone. He says that it’s making water even in dock, and that some of the hands say that they won’t go back in her.”

“Tut! tut!” John Girdlestone said peevishly. “What are the Government inspectors for? There is no use paying them if we are to inspect ourselves. If they insist upon any alterations they shall be made.”

“They were there, sir, at the same time as Mr. Dimsdale,” said Gilray, diffidently.

“Well, what then?” asked his employer.

“He says, sir, that the inspectors went down to the cabin and had some champagne with Captain Spender. They then professed themselves to be very well satisfied with the state of the vessel and came away.”

“There you are!” the senior partner cried triumphantly. “Of course these men can see at a glance how things stand, and if things had really been wrong they would have called attention to it. Let us have no more of these false alarms. You must say a few words on the point to Mr. Dimsdale, as coming from yourself, not from me. Tell him to be more careful before he jumps to conclusions.”

“I will, sir.”

“And bring me ledger No. 33.”

Gilray stretched up his arm and took down a fat little ledger from a high shelf, which he laid respectfully before his employer. Then, seeing that he was no longer wanted, he withdrew.

Ledger No. 33 was secured by a clasp and lock — the latter a patent one which defied all tamperers. John Girdlestone took a small key from his pocket and opened it with a quick snap. A precious volume this, for it was the merchant's private book, which alone contained a true record of the financial state of the firm, all others being made merely for show. Without it he would have been unable to keep his son in the dark for so many months until bitter necessity at last compelled him to show his hand.

He turned the pages over slowly and sadly. Here was a record of the sums sunk in the Lake Tanganyika Gold Company, which was to have paid 33 per cent., and which fell to pieces in the second month of its existence. Here was the money advanced to Durer, Hallett, & Co., on the strength of securities which proved to be the flimsiest of insecurities when tested. Further on was the account of the dealings of the firm with the Levant Petroleum Company, the treasurer of which had levanted with the greater part of the capital. Here, too, was a memorandum of the sums sunk upon the Evening Star and the Providence, whose unfortunate collision had well-nigh proved the death blow of the firm. It was melancholy reading, and perhaps the last page was the most melancholy of all. On it the old man had drawn up in a condensed form an exact account of the present condition of the firm's finances. Here it is exactly word for word as he had written it down himself.

GIRDLESTONE & CO.

October 1876

Debit. Credit.

Pounds Sterling Pounds Sterling Debts incurred previous to | Ezra, in Africa, holds disclosure to Ezra 34000 | this money with which 15000 pounds raised at six | to speculate. 35000 months, and 20000 pounds | Balance in bank, at nine months 35000 | including what remains Interest on said money at | of Dimsdale's premium. 8400 5 per cent. 1125 | Profit on the cargo of Working expenses of the | Maid of Athens, now firm during the next six | in port. 2000 months, including cost of | Profit on the cargoes ships, at 150 pounds per | of Black Eagle,Swan week 3900 | and Panther, calculated Private expenses at | at the same rate. 6000 Ecclestone Square, say 1000 | Deficit 26425 Expenses of Langworthy | in Russia, and of my dear | son in Africa, say 600 | Insurances 1200 | Total 76825 | Total 76825 | All this money must be found within |The possibility of the sinking nine months at the outside. |of a ship must not be |overlooked — that would bring in |from 12000 to 20000 pounds.

“Come, it’s not so very bad after all,” the merchant muttered, after he had gone over these figures very slowly and carefully. He leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling with a much more cheerful expression upon his face. “At the worst it is less than thirty thousand pounds. Why, many firms would think little of it. The fact is, that I have so long been accustomed to big balances on the right side that it seems to be a very dreadful thing now that it lies the other way. A dozen things may happen to set all right. I must not forget, however,” he continued, with a darker look, “that I have dipped into my credit so freely that I could not borrow any more without exciting suspicion and having the whole swarm down on us. After all, our hopes lie in the diamonds. Ezra cannot fail. He must succeed. Who can prevent him?”

“Major Tobias Clutterbuck,” cried the sharp, creaky voice of Gilray as if in answer to the question, and the little clerk, who had knocked once or twice unnoticed, opened the door and ushered in the old Campaigner.

It may be well to remark, that this and succeeding incidents occurred in the old Crown Colony days, before the diamond legislation was as strict as it has since become.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAJOR TOBIAS CLUTTERBUCK COMES IN FOR A THOUSAND POUNDS.

John Girdlestone had frequently heard his son speak of the major in the days when they had been intimate, and had always attributed some of the young man’s more obvious vices to the effects of this ungodly companionship. He had also heard from Ezra a mangled version of the interview and quarrel in the private room of Nelson’s Restaurant. Hence, as may be imagined, his feelings towards his visitor were far from friendly, and he greeted him as he entered with the coldest of possible bows. The major, however, was by no means abashed by this chilling reception, but stumped forward with beaming face and his pudgy hand outstretched, so that the other had no alternative but to shake it, which he did very gingerly and reluctantly.

“And how are ye?” said the major, stepping back a pace or two, and inspecting the merchant as though he were examining his points with the intention of purchasing him. “Many’s the time I’ve heard talk of ye. It’s a real treat to see ye. How are ye?” Pouncing upon the other’s unresponsive hand, he wrung it again with effusion.

“I am indebted to Providence for fairly good health, sir,” John Girdlestone answered coldly. “May I request you to take a seat?”

“That was what me friend Fagan was trying to do for twelve years, and ruined himself over it in the ind. He put up at Murphytown in the Conservative interest, and the divil a vote did he get, except one, and that was a blind man who signed the wrong paper be mistake, Ha! ha!” The major laughed boisterously at his own anecdote, and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

The two men, as they stood opposite each other, were a strange contrast, the one tall, grave, white, and emotionless, the other noisy and pompous, with protuberant military chest and rubicund features. They had one common characteristic, however. From under the shaggy eyebrows of the merchant and the sparse light-coloured lashes of the major there came the same keen, restless, shifting glance. Both were crafty, and each was keenly on his guard against the other.

"I have heard of you from my son," the merchant said, motioning his visitor to a chair. "You were, I believe, in the habit of meeting together for the purpose of playing cards, billiards, and other such games, which I by no means countenance myself, but to which my son is unhappily somewhat addicted."

"You don't play yourself," said the major, in a sympathetic voice. "Ged, sir, it's never too late to begin, and many a man has put in a very comfortable old age On billiards and whist. Now, if ye feel inclined to make a start, I'll give ye seventy-five points in a hundred for a commincement."

"Thank you," said the merchant drily. "It is not one of my ambitions.

Was this challenge the business upon which you came?"

The old soldier laughed until his merriment startled the clerks in the counting-house. "Be jabers!" he said, In a wheezy voice, "d'ye think I came five miles to do that? No, sir, I wanted to talk to you about your son."

"My son!"

"Yes, your son. He's a smart lad — very smart indeed — about as quick as they make 'em. He may be a trifle coarse at times, but that's the spirit of the age, me dear sir. Me friend Tuffleton, of the Blues, says that delicacy went out of fashion with hair powder and beauty patches. he's a demned satirical fellow is Tuffleton. Don't know him, eh?"

"No, sir, I don't," Girdlestone said angrily; "nor have I any desire to make his acquaintance. Let us proceed to business for my time is valuable."

The major looked at him with an amiable smile. "That quick temper runs in the family," he said. "I've noticed It in your son Ezra. As I said before, he's a smart lad; but me friend, he's shockingly rash and extremely indiscrate. Ye musk speak to him about it."

"What do you mean sir?" asked the merchant, white with anger.

"Have you come to insult him in his absence?"

"Absence?" said the soldier, still smiling blandly over his stock. "That's the very point I wanted to get at. He is away in Africa — at the diamond fields. A wonderful interprise, conducted with remarkable energy, but also with remarkable rashness, sir — yes, bedad, inexcusable rashness."

Old Girdlestone took up his heavy ebony ruler and played with it nervously. He had an overpowering desire to hurl it at the head of his companion.

"What would ye say, now," the veteran continued, crossing one leg over the other and arguing the matter out in a confidential undertone—"what would you say if a young man came to you, and, on the assumption that you were a dishonest blackgaird, appealed to you to help him in a very shady sort of a scheme? It would argue indiscretion on his part, would it not?"

The merchant sat still, but grew whiter and whiter.

"And if on the top of that he gave you all the details of his schame, without even waiting to see if you favoured it or not, he would be more than indiscrate, wouldn't he? Your own good sinse, me dear sir, will tell you that he would be culpably foolish — culpably so, bedad!"

"Well, sir?" said the old man, in a hoarse voice.

"Well," continued the major, "I have no doubt that your son told you of the interesting little conversation that we had together. He was good enough to promise that if I went to Russia and pretinded to discover a fictitious mine, I should be liberally rewarded by the firm. I was under the necessity of pointing out to him that certain principles on which me family" — here the major inflated his chest—"on which me family are accustomed to act would prevint me from taking advantage of his offer. He then, I am sorry to say, lost his temper, and some words passed between us, the result of which was that we parted so rapidly that, be jabers! I had hardly time to make him realise how great an indiscretion he had committed."

The merchant still sat perfectly still, tapping the table with his black ebony ruler.

"Of course, afther hearing a skitch of the plan," continued the major, "me curiosity was so aroused that I could not help following the details with intherest. I saw the gintleman who departed for Russia — Langworthy, I believe, was his name. Ged! I knew a chap of that name in the Marines who used to drink raw brandy and cayenne pepper before breakfast every morning. Did ye? Of course you couldn't. What was I talking of at all at all?"

Girdlestone stared gloomily at his visitor. The latter took a pinch of snuff from a tortoise-shell box, and flicked away a few wandering grains which settled upon the front of his coat.

"Yes," he went on, I saw Langworthy off to Russia. Then I saw your son start for Africa. He's an interprising lad, and sure to do well there. coelum non animam mutant, as we used to say at Clongowes. He'll always come to the front, wherever he is, as long as he avoids little slips like this one we're spaking of. About the same time I heard that Girdlestone & Co, had raised riddy money to the extint of five and thirty thousand pounds. That's gone to Africa, too, I presume. It's a lot o' money to invist in such a game, and it might be safe if you were the only people that knew about it, but whin there are others—"

"Others?"

"Why, me, of course," said the major. "I know about it, and more be token I am not in the swim with you. Sure, I could go this very evening to the diamond merchants about town and give them a tip about the coming fall in prices that would rather astonish 'em."

"Look here, Major Clutterbuck," cried the merchant, in a voice which quivered with suppressed passion, "you have come into possession of an important commercial secret. Why beat about the bush any longer? What is the object of your visit to-day? What is it that you want?"

"There now!" the major said, addressing himself and smiling more amicably than ever. "That's business. Bedad, there's where you commercial men have the pull. You go straight to the point and stick there. Ah, when I look at ye, I can't help thinking of your son. The same intelligent eye, the same cheery expression, the same devil-may-care manner and dry humour —"

"Answer my question, will you?" the merchant interrupted savagely.

"And the same hasty timper," continued the major imperturbably.

"I've forgotten, me dear sir, what it was you asked me."

"What is it you want?"

"Ah, yes, of course. What is it I want?" the old soldier said meditatively. "Some would say more, some less. Some would want half, but that is overdoing it. How does a thousand pound stroike you? Yes, I think we may put it at a thousand pounds."

"You want a thousand pounds?"

"Ged, I've been wanting it all me life. The difference is that I'm going to git it now."

"And for what?"

"Sure, for silence — for neutrality. We're all in it now, and there's a fair division of labour. You plan, your son works, I hold me tongue. You make your tens of thousands, I make my modest little thousand. We all git paid for our throuble."

"And suppose I refuse?"

“Ah! but you wouldn’t — you couldn’t,” the major said suavely. “Ged, sir, I haven’t known ye long, but I have far too high an opinion of ye to suppose ye could do anything so foolish. If you refuse, your speculation is thrown away. There’s no help for it. Bedad, it would be painful for me to have to blow the gaff; but you know the old saying, that ‘charity begins at home.’ You must sell your knowledge at the best market.”

Girdlestone thought intently for a minute or two, with his great eyebrows drawn down over his little restless eyes.

“You said to my son,” he remarked at last, “that you were too honourable to embark in our undertaking. Do you consider it honourable to make use of knowledge gained in confidence for the purpose of extorting money?”

“Me dear sir,” answered the major, holding up his hand deprecatingly, “you put me in the painful position of having to explain meself in plain words. If I saw a man about to do a murther, I should think nothing of murthering him. If I saw a pickpocket at work, I’d pick his pocket, and think it good fun to do it. Now, this little business of yours is — well, we’ll say unusual, and if what I do seems a little unusual too, it’s to be excused. Ye can’t throw stones at every one, me boy, and then be surprised when some one throws one at you. You bite the diamond holders, d’ye see, and I take a little nibble at you. It’s all fair enough.”

The merchant reflected again for some moments. “Suppose we agree to purchasing your silence at this price,” he said, “what guarantee have we that you will not come and extort more money, or that you may not betray our secret after all?”

“The honour of a soldier and a gintleman,” answered the major, rising and tapping his chest with two fingers of his right hand.

A slight sneer played over Girdlestone’s pale face, but he made no remark. “We are in your power,” he said, and have no resource but to submit to your terms. You said five hundred pounds?”

“A thousand,” the major answered cheerfully.

“It’s a great sum of money.”

“Deuce of a lot!” said the veteran cordially.

“Well, you shall have it. I will communicate with you.” Girdlestone rose as if to terminate the interview.

The major made no remark, but he showed his white teeth again, and tapped Mr. Girdlestone’s cheque-book with the silver head of his walking-stick.

"What! Now?"

"Yes, now."

The two looked at each other for a moment and the merchant sat down again and scribbled out a cheque, which he tossed to his companion. The latter looked it over carefully, took a fat little pocket-book from the depths of his breast pocket, and having placed the precious slip of paper in it, laboriously pushed it back into its receptacle. Then he very slowly and methodically picked up his jaunty curly-brimmed hat and shining kid gloves, and with a cheery nod to his companion, who answered it with a scowl, he swaggered off into the counting-house. There he shook hands with Tom, whom he had known for some months, and having made three successive offers — one to stand immediately an unlimited quantity of champagne, a second to play him five hundred up for anything he would name, and a third to lay a tenner for him at 7 to 4 on Amelia for the Oaks — all of which offers were declined with thanks — he bowed himself out, leaving a vague memory of smiles, shirt collars, and gaiters in the minds of the awe-struck Clerks.

Whatever an impartial judge might think of the means whereby Major Tobias Clutterbuck had successfully screwed a thousand pounds out of the firm of Girdlestone, it is quite certain that that gentleman's seasoned conscience did not reproach him in the least degree. On the contrary, his whole being seemed saturated and impregnated with the wildest hilarity and delight. Twice in less than a hundred yards, he was compelled to stop and lean upon his cane owing to the breathlessness which supervened upon his attempts to smother the delighted chuckles which came surging up from the inmost recesses of his capacious frame. At the second halt he wriggled his hand inside his tight-breasted coat, and after as many contortions as though he were about to shed that garment as a snake does its skin, he produced once more the little fat pocket-book. From it he extracted the cheque and looked it over lovingly. Then he hailed a passing hansom. "Drive to the Capital and Counties Bank," he said. It had struck him that since the firm was in a shaky state he had better draw the money as soon as possible.

In the bank a gloomy-looking cashier took the cheque and stared at it somewhat longer than the occasion seemed to demand. It was but a few minutes, yet it appeared a very long time to the major.

"How will you have it?" he asked at last, in a mournful voice. It tends to make a man cynical when he spends his days in handling untold riches while his wife and six children are struggling to make both ends meet at home.

“A hunthred in gold and the rest in notes,” said the major, with a sigh of relief.

The cashier counted and handed over a thick packet of crisp rustling paper and a little pile of shining sovereigns. The major stowed away the first in the pocket-book and the latter in his trouser pockets. Then he swaggered out with a great increase of pomposity and importance, and ordered his cabman to drive to Kennedy Place.

Von Baumser was sitting in the major’s campaigning chair, smoking his china-bowled pipe and gazing dreamily at the long blue wreaths. Times had been bad with the comrades of late, as the German’s seedy appearance sufficiently testified. His friends in Germany had ceased to forward his small remittance, and Endermann’s office, in which he had been employed, had given him notice that for a time they could dispense with his services. He had been spending the whole afternoon in perusing the long list of “wanteds” in the Daily Telegraph, and his ink-stained forefinger showed the perseverance with which he had been answering every advertisement that could possibly apply to him. A pile of addressed envelopes lay upon the table, and it was only the uncertainty of his finances and the fact that the humble penny stamp mounts into shillings when frequently employed, that prevented him from increasing the number of his applications. He looked up and uttered a word of guttural greeting as his companion came striding in.

“Get out of this,” the major said abruptly. “Get away into the bedroom.”

“Potztausand! Vot is it then?” cried the astonished Teuton.

“Out with you! I want this room to meself.”

Von Baumser shrugged his shoulders and lumbered off like a good-natured plantigrade, closing the door behind him.

When his companion had disappeared the major proceeded to lay out all his notes upon the table, overlapping each other, but still so arranged that every separate one was visible. He then built in the centre ten little golden columns in a circle, each consisting of ten sovereigns, until the whole presented the appearance of a metallic Stonehenge upon a plain of bank notes. This done, he cocked his head on one side, like a fat and very ruddy turkey, and contemplated his little arrangement with much pride and satisfaction.

Solitary delight soon becomes wearisome, however, so the veteran summoned his companion. The Teuton was so dumbfounded by this display of wealth, that he was bereft for a time of all faculty of speech, and could only stare open-mouthed at the table. At last he extended a fore-finger and thumb and rubbed a five pound note between them, as though to convince himself of its reality, after which he began to gyrate round the table in a sort of war dance, never taking his eyes from the heap of influence in front of him. “Mein Gott!” he exclaimed, “Gnadiger Vater! Ach Himmel! Was fur eine Schatze! Donnerwetter!” und a thousand other cacophonous expressions of satisfaction and amazement.

When the old soldier had sufficiently enjoyed the lively emotion which showed itself on every feature of the German’s countenance, he picked up the notes and locked them in his desk together with half the gold. The other fifty pounds he returned into his pocket.

“Come on!” he said to his companion abruptly.

“Come vere? Vat is it?”

“Come on!” roared the major irascibly. “What d’ye want to stand asking questions for? Put on your hat and come.”

The major had retained the cab at the door, and the two jumped into it.

“Drive to Verdi’s Restaurant,” he said to the driver.

When they arrived at that aristocratic and expensive establishment, the soldier ordered the best dinner for two that money could procure. “Have it riddy in two hours sharp,” he said to the manager. “None of your half-and-half wines, mind! We want the rale thing, and, be ged! we can tell the difference!”

Having left the manager much impressed, the two friends set out for a ready-made clothing establishment. “I won’t come in,” the major said, slipping ten sovereigns into Von Baumser’s hand. “Just you go in and till them ye want the best suit o’ clothes they can give you. They’ve a good seliction there, I know.”

“Gott in Himmel!” cried the amazed German. “But, my dear vriend, you cannot vait in the street. Come in mit me.”

“No, I’ll wait,” the old soldier answered. “They might think I was paying for the clothes if I came in.”

“Well, but so you—”

“Eh, would ye?” roared the major, raising his cane, and Von Baumser disappeared precipitately into the shop.

When he emerged once more at the end of twenty minutes, he was attired in an elegant and close-fitting suit of heather tweed. The pair then made successive visits to a shoe-maker, a hatter, and a draper, with the result that Von Baumser developed patent leather boots, a jaunty brown hat, and a pair of light yellow gloves. By the end of their walk there seemed nothing left of the original Von Baumser except a tawny beard, and an expression of hopeless and overpowering astonishment.

Having effected this transformation, the friends retraced their steps to Verdi's and did full justice to the spread awaiting them, after which the old soldier won the heart of the establishment by bestowing largess upon every one who came in his way. As to the further adventures of these two Bohemians, it would be as well perhaps to draw a veil over them. Suffice it that, about two in the morning, the worthy Mrs. Robins was awakened by a stentorian voice in the street below demanding to know "Was ist das Deutsche Vaterland?" — a somewhat vexed question which the owner of the said voice was propounding to the solitary lamp-post of Kennedy Place. On descending the landlady discovered that the author of this disturbance was a fashionably dressed gentleman, who, upon closer inspection, proved to her great surprise to be none other than the usually demure part proprietor of her fourth floor. As to the major, he walked in quietly the next day about twelve o'clock, looking as trim and neat as ever, but minus the balance of the fifty pounds, nor did he think fit ever to make any allusion to this some what heavy deficit.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEWS FROM THE URALS.

Major Tobias Clutterbuck had naturally reckoned that the longer he withheld this trump card of his the greater would be its effect when played. An obstacle appearing at the last moment produces more consternation than when a scheme is still in its infancy. It proved, however, that he had only just levied his blackmail in time, for within a couple of days of his interview with the head of the firm news arrived of the great discovery of diamonds among the Ural Mountains. The first intimation was received through the Central News Agency in the form of the following telegram: —

"Moscow, August 22. — It is reported from Tobolsk that an important discovery of diamond fields has been made amongst the spurs of the Ural Mountains, at a point not very far from that city. They are said to have been found by an English geologist, who has exhibited many magnificent gems in proof of his assertion. These stones have been examined at Tobolsk, and are pronounced to be equal, if not superior, in quality to any found elsewhere. A company has been already formed for the purpose of purchasing the land and working the mines."

Some days afterwards there came a Reuter's telegram giving fuller details. "With regard to the diamond fields near Tobolsk," it said, "there is every reason to believe that they are of great, and possibly unsurpassed, wealth. There is no question now as to their authenticity, since their discoverer proves to be an English gentleman of high character, and his story is corroborated by villagers from this district who have dug up stones for themselves. The Government contemplate buying out the company and taking over the mines, which might be profitably worked by the forced labour of political prisoners on a system similar to that adopted in the salt mines of Siberia. The discovery is universally regarded as one which has materially increased the internal resources of the country, and there is some talk of the presentation of a substantial testimonial to the energetic and scientific traveller to whom it is due."

Within a week or ten days of the receipt of these telegrams in London there came letters from the Russian correspondents of the various journals giving fuller details upon a subject of so much general interest. The Times directed attention to the matter in a leader.

“It appears,” remarked the great paper, “that a most important addition has been made to the mineral wealth of the Russian Empire. The silver mines of Siberia and the petroleum wells of the Caucasus are to be outrivalled by the new diamond fields of the Ural Mountains. For untold thousands of years these precious fragments of crystallized carbon have been lying unheeded among the gloomy gorges waiting for the hand of man to pick them out. It has fallen to the lot of one of our countrymen to point out to the Russian nation the great wealth which lay untouched and unsuspected in the heart of their realm. The story is a romantic one. It appears that a Mr. Langworthy, a wealthy English gentleman of good extraction, had, in the course of his travels in Russia, continued his journey as far as the great mountain barrier which separates Europe from Asia. Being fond of sport, he was wandering in search of game down one of the Ural valleys, when his attention was attracted by the thick gravel, which was piled up along the track of a dried-up water-course. The appearance and situation of this gravel reminded him forcibly of the South African diamond fields, and so strong was the impression that he at once laid down his gun and proceeded to rake the gravel over and to examine it. His search was rewarded by the discovery of several stones, which he conveyed home with him, and which proved, after being cleaned, to be gems of the first water. Elated at this success, he returned to the spot next day with a spade, and succeeded in obtaining many other specimens, and in convincing himself that the deposit stretched up and down for a long distance on both sides of the torrent. Having satisfied himself upon this point, our compatriot made his way to Tobolsk, where he exhibited his prizes to several of the richest merchants, and proceeded to form a company for the working of the new fields. He was so successful in this that the shares are already far above par, and our correspondent writes that there has been a rush of capitalists, all eager to invest their money in so promising a venture. It is expected that within a few months the necessary plant will have been erected and the concern be in working order.”

The Daily Telegraph treated the matter from a jocose and historical point of view.

“It has long been a puzzle to antiquaries and geologists,” it remarked, “as to where those jewels which Solomon brought from the East were originally obtained. There has been much speculation, too, regarding the source of those less apocryphal gems which sparkled in the regalia of the Indian monarchs and adorned the palaces of Delhi and Benares. As a nation we have a personal interest in the question, since the largest and most magnificent of these stones is now in the possession of our most gracious Queen. Mr. Langworthy has thrown a light upon this obscure subject. According to this gentleman’s researches these treasures were unearthed amidst that dark and gloomy range of mountains which Providence has interposed between a nascent civilization and a continent of barbarians. Nor is Mr. Langworthy’s opinion founded upon theory alone. He lends point to his arguments by presenting to the greedy eyes of the merchants of Tobolsk a bag filled with valuable diamonds, each and every one of which he professes to have discovered in these barren inhospitable valleys. This tweed-suited English tourist, descending like some good spirit among these dreamy Muscovites, points out to them the untold wealth which has lain for so many centuries at their feet, and with the characteristic energy of his race shows them at the same time how to turn the discovery to commercial advantage. If the deposit prove to be as extensive as is supposed, it is possible that our descendants may wear cut diamonds in their eye-glasses, should such accessories be necessary, and marvel at the ignorance of those primitive days when a metamorphosed piece of coal was regarded as the most valuable product of nature.”

The ordinary British paterfamilias, glancing over his morning paper, bestowed probably but few passing thoughts on the incident, but among business men and in the City its significance was at once understood. Not only did it create the deepest consternation amongst all who were connected with the diamond industry, but it reacted upon every other branch of South African commerce. It was the chief subject of conversation upon the Stock Exchange, and many were the surmises as to what the effect of the news would be at the fields. Fugger, the father of the diamond industry, was standing discussing the question, when a little rosy-faced Jew, named Goldschmidt, came bustling up to him. He was much excited, for he speculated in stones, and had just been buying in for a rise.

“Misther Fugger,” he cried, “you’re shust the man I want to see. My Gott, vot is to become of us all? Vot is to become of de diamond trade ven one can pick them up like cockles on the sea shore?”

“We must wait for details,” the great financier said phlegmatically. His fortune was so enormous that it mattered little to him whether the report was true or false.

“Details! It is nothing but details,” cried the little Jew. “The papers is full of them. I vish to the Lord that that Langworthy had proke his neck in the Ural Mountains before he got up to any such games. Vat business had he to go examining gravel and peeping about in such places as them. Nobody that’s any good would ever go to the Ural Mountains at all.”

“It won’t hurt you,” Fugger said; “you’ll simply have to pay less for your stones and sell them cheaper after they are cut. It won’t make much difference in the long run.”

“Von’t it, by Joves! Why, man, I’ve got over a hundred shtones on my hands now. Vat am I going to do vid ‘em.”

“Ah, that’s a bad job. You must make up your mind to lose on them.”

“Von’t you buy them yourself, Mr. Fugger?” asked the Hebrew, in an insinuating voice. “Maybe this here story will all turn out wrong. S’elp me bob I gave three thousand for the lot, and you shall have them for two. Let’s have a deal, my tear Mr. Fugger, do?”

“No more for me, thank you,” Fugger said with decision. “As to the story being wrong, I have telegraphed to Rotterdam, and they have sent on a trusty man. He’ll be weeks, however, before we hear from him.”

“Here’s Mr. Girdlestone, the great Mr. Girdlestone,” cried Goldschmidt, perceiving our worthy merchant of Fenchurch Street among the crowd. “Oh, Misther Girdlestone, I’ve got diamonds here what is worth three thousand pounds, and you shall have them for two — you shall, by chingo, and we’ll go together now and get them?”

“Don’t pester me!” said Girdlestone, brushing the little Jew aside with his long, bony arm. “Can I have a word with you, Fugger?”

“Certainly,” replied the diamond dealer. Girdlestone was a very well-known man upon ‘Change, and one who was universally respected and looked up to.

“What do you think about this report?” he asked, in a confidential voice. “Do you imagine that it will affect prices in Africa?”

“Affect prices! My dear sir, if it proves true it will ruin the African fields. The mere report coming in a circumstantial fashion will send prices down fifty per cent.”

“As much as that!” said the merchant, with an excellent affectation of surprise. “I am anxious about it, for my boy is out there. It was a hobby of his, and I let him go. I trust he will not be bitten.”

“He is much more likely to do the biting,” remarked Fugger bluntly. He had met Ezra Girdlestone in business more than once, and had been disagreeably impressed by the young gentleman’s sharpness.

“Poor lad!” said his father. “He is young, and has had little experience as yet. I hope all is well with him!” He shook his head despondently, and walked slowly homewards, but his heart beat triumphantly within him, for he was assured now that the report would influence prices as he had foreseen, and the African firm reap the benefit of their daring speculation.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. HECTOR O’FLAHERTY FINDS SOMETHING IN THE PAPER.

Ezra Girdlestone had taken up his quarters in two private rooms at the Central Hotel, Kimberley, and had already gained a considerable reputation in the town by the engaging “abandon” of his manners, and by the munificent style in which he entertained the more prominent citizens of the little capital. His personal qualities of strength and beauty had also won him the respect which physical gifts usually command in primitive communities, and the smart young Londoner attracted custom to himself among the diggers in a way which excited the jealousy of the whole tribe of elderly Hebrews who had hitherto enjoyed a monopoly of the trade. Thus, he had already gained his object in making himself known, and his name was a familiar one in every camp from Waldeck’s Plant to Cawood’s Hope. Keeping his headquarters at Kimberley, he travelled perpetually along the line of the diggings. All the time he was chafing secretly and marvelling within himself how it was that no whisper of the expected news had arrived yet from England.

One sunny day he had returned from a long ride, and, having dined, strolled out into the streets, Panama hat upon head and cigar in mouth. It was the 23rd of October, and he had been nearly ten weeks in the colony. Since his arrival he had taken to growing a beard. Otherwise, he was much as we have seen him in London, save that a ruddier glow of health shone upon his sunburned face. The life of the diggings appeared to agree with him.

As he turned down Stockdale Street, a man passed him leading a pair of horses tired and dusty, with many a strap and buckle hanging down behind them. After him came another leading a second pair, and after him another with a third. They were taking them round to the stables. “Hullo!” cried Ezra, with sudden interest; “what’s up?”

“The mail’s just in.”

“Mail from Capetown?”

"Yes."

Ezra quickened his pace and strode down Stockdale Street into the Main Street, which, as the name implies, is the chief thoroughfare of Kimberley. He came out close to the office of the Vaal River Advertiser and Diamond Field Gazette. There was a crowd in front of the door. This Vaal River Advertiser was a badly conducted newspaper, badly printed upon bad paper, but selling at sixpence a copy, and charging from seven shillings and sixpence to a pound for the insertion of an advertisement. It was edited at present by a certain P. Hector O'Flaherty, who having been successively a dentist, a clerk, a provision merchant, an engineer, and a sign painter, and having failed at each and every one of these employments, had taken to running a newspaper as an easy and profitable occupation. Indeed, as managed by Mr. O'Flaherty, the process was simplicity itself. Having secured by the Monday's mail copies of the London papers of two months before, he spent Tuesday in cutting extracts from them with the greatest impartiality, chopping away everything which might be of value to him. The Wednesday was occupied in cursing at three black boys who helped to put up the type, and on the Thursday a fresh number of the Vaal River Advertiser and Diamond Field Gazette was given to the world. The remaining three days were devoted by Mr. O'Flaherty to intoxication, but the Monday brought him back once more to soda water and literature.

It was seldom, indeed, that the Advertiser aroused interest enough to cause any one to assemble round the Office. Ezra's heart gave a quick flutter at the sight, and he gathered himself together like a runner who sees his goal in view. Throwing away his cigar, he hurried on ad joined the little crowd.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"There's news come by the mail," said one or two bystanders.

"Big news."

"What sort of news?"

"Don't know yet."

"Who said there was news?"

"Driver."

"Where is he?"

"Don't know."

"Who will know about it?"

"O'Flaherty."

Here there was a general shout from the crowd for O’Flaherty, and an irascible-looking man, with a red bloated face and bristling hair came to the office door.

“Now, what the divil d’ye want?” he roared, shaking a quill pen at the crowd. “What are ye after at all? Have ye nothing betther to do than to block up the door of a decent office?”

“What’s the news?” cried a dozen voices.

“The news, is it?” roared O’Flaherty, more angrily than ever; “and can’t ye foind out that by paying your sixpences like men, and taking the Advertoiser? It’s a paper, though Oi says it as shouldn’t, that would cut out some o’ these Telegraphs and Chronicles if it was only in London. Begad, instead of encouraging local talent ye spind your toime standing around in the strate, and trying to suck a man’s news out of him for nothing.”

“Look here, boss,” said a rough-looking fellow in the front of the crowd, “you keep your hair on, and don’t get slinging words about too freely, or it may be the worse for you and for your office too. We heard as there was big news, an’ we come down to hear it, but as to gettin’ it without paying, that ain’t our sort. I suppose we can call it square if we each hands in sixpence, which is the price o’ your paper, and then you can tell us what’s on.”

O’Flaherty considered for a moment. “It’s worth a shillin’ each,” he said, “for it plays the divil with the circulation of a paper whin its news gits out too soon.”

“Well, we won’t stick at that,” said the miner. “What say you, boys?”

There was a murmur of assent, and a broad-brimmed straw hat was passed rapidly from hand to band. It was half full of silver when it reached O’Flaherty. The Advertiser had never before had such a circulation, for the crowd had rapidly increased during the preceding dialogue, and now numbered some hundreds.

“Thank ye, gintlemen,” said the editor.

“Well, what’s the news?” cried the impatient crowd.

“Sure I haven’t opened the bag yet, but I soon will. Whativer it is it’s bound to be there. Hey there, Billy, ye divil’s brat, where’s the mail bag?”

Thus apostrophized, a sharp little Kaffir came running out with the brown bag, and Mr. O’Flaherty examined it in a leisurely manner, which elicited many an oath from the eager crowd.

“Here’s the Standard and the Times,” he said, handing the various papers out to his subordinate. “Begad, there’s not one of ye knows the expinse of k’aping a great paper loike this going, forebye the brains and no profit at the ind of it. Here’s the Post and the News. If you were men you’d put in an advertisement ivery wake, whether ye needed it or not, just to encourage literature. Here’s the Cape Argus — it’ll be in here whativer it is.”

With great deliberation Mr. Hector O’Flaherty put on a pair of spectacles and folded the paper carefully round, so as to bring the principal page to the front. Then he cleared his throat, with the pomposity which is inseparable with most men from the act of reading aloud.

“Go it, boss!” cried his audience encouragingly.

“‘Small-pox at Wellington’ — that’s not it, is it? ‘Germany and the

Vatican’—’Custom House Duties at Port Elizabeth’—’Roosian Advances in

Cintral Asia’ eh? Is that it—’Discovery of great Diamond Moines?’”

“That’s it,” roared the crowd; “let’s hear about that.” There was an anxious ring in their voices, and their faces were grave and serious as they looked up at the reader upon the steps of the office.

“‘Diamond moines have been discovered in Roosia,’” read O’Flaherty, “‘which are confidently stated to exceed in riches anything which has existed before. It is ginerally anticipated that this discovery, if confirmed, will have a most prejudicial effect upon the African trade.’ That’s an extract from the London news of the Argus.”

A buzz of ejaculations and comments arose from the crowd. “Isn’t there any more about it?” they cried.

“Here’s a later paper, boss,” said the little Kaffir, who had been diligently looking over the dates.

O’Flaherty opened it, and gave a whistle of astonishment. “Here’s enough to satisfy you,” he said. “It’s in big toipe and takes up noigh the whole of the first page. I can only read ye the headings, for we must get to work and have out a special edition. You’ll git details there, an’ it’ll be out in a few hours. Look here at the fuss they’ve made about it.” The editor turned the paper as he spoke, and exhibited a series of large black headings in this style: —

RUSSIAN DIAMOND FIELDS.

EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY BY AN ENGLISHMAN. THREATENED EXTINCTION OF THE CAPE INDUSTRY. GREAT FALL IN PRICES. OPINIONS OF THE LONDON PRESS. FULL DETAILS.

“What d’ye think of that?” cried O’Flaherty, triumphantly, as if he had had some hand in the matter. “Now I must git off to me work, and you’ll have it all before long in your hands. Ye should bliss your stars that ye have some one among ye to offer ye the convanience of the latest news. Good noight to ye all,” and he trotted back into his office with his hat and its silver contents in his hand.

The crowd broke up into a score of gesticulating chattering groups, and wandered up or down the street. Ezra Girdlestone waited until they had cleared away, and then stepped into the office of the Advertiser.

“What’s the matter now?” asked O’Flaherty, angrily. He was a man who lived in a state of chronic irritation.

“Have you a duplicate of that paper?”

“Suppose I have?”

“What will you sell it for?”

“What will you give?”

“Half a sovereign.”

“A sovereign.”

“Done!” and so Ezra Girdlestone walked out of the office with full details in his hand, and departed to his hotel, where he read the account through very slowly and deliberately. It appeared to be satisfactory, for he chuckled to himself a good deal as he perused it. Having finished it, he folded the paper up, placed it in his breast pocket, and, having ordered his horse, set off to the neighbouring township of Dutoitspan with the intention of carrying the news with him.

Ezra had two motives in galloping across the veldt that October night. One was to judge with his own ears and eyes what effect the news would have upon practical men. The other was a desire to gratify that sinister pleasure which an ill-natured man has in being the bearer of evil tidings. They had probably heard the report by this time, but it was unlikely that any details had reached them. No one knew better than young Girdlestone that this message from Europe would bring utter ruin and extinction to many a small capitalist, that it would mean the shattering of a thousand hopes, and the advent of poverty and misery to the men with whom he had been associating. In spite of this knowledge, his heart beat high, as his father’s had done in London, and as he spurred his horse onwards through the darkness, he was hardly able to refrain from shouting and whooping in his exultation.

The track from Kimberley to Dutoitspan was a rough one, but the moon was up, and the young merchant found no difficulty in following it. When he reached the summit of the low hill over which the road ran, he saw the lights of the little town sparkling in the valley beneath him. It was ten o’clock before he galloped into the main street, and he saw at a glance that the news had, as he expected, arrived before him. In front of the Griqualand Saloon a great crowd of miners had assembled, who were talking excitedly among themselves. The light of the torches shone down upon herculean figures, glaring shirts, and earnest bearded faces. The whole camp appeared to have assembled there to discuss the situation, and it was evident from their anxious countenances and subdued voices, that they took no light view of it.

The instant the young man alighted from his horse he was surrounded by a knot of eager questioners. “You’ve just come from Kimberley,” they cried. “What is the truth of it, Mr. Girdlestone? Let us know the truth of it.”

“It’s a bad business, my friends,” he answered, looking around at the ring of inquiring faces. “I have been reading a full account of it in the Cape Argus. They have made a great find in Russia. There seems to be no doubt at all about the matter.”

“D’ye think it will send prices down here as much as they say?”

“I’m afraid it will send them very low. I hold a lot of stones myself, and I should be very glad to get rid of them at any price. I fear it will hardly pay you to work your claims now.”

“And the price of claims will go down?”

“Of course it will.”

“Eh, mister, what’s that?” cried a haggard, unkempt little man, pushing his way to the front and catching hold of Ezra’s sleeve to ensure his attention. “Did ye say it would send the price o’ claims down? You didn’t say that, did you? Why, in course, it stands to reason that what happened in Roosia couldn’t make no difference over here. That’s sense, mates, ain’t it?” He looked round him appealingly, and laughed a little nervous laugh.

“You try,” said Ezra coldly. “If you get one-third of what you gave for your claim you’ll be lucky. Why, man, you don’t suppose we produce diamonds for local consumption. They are for exporting to Europe, and if Europe is already supplied by Russia, where are you to get your market?”

“That’s it?” cried several voices.

"If you take my advice," Ezra continued, "you'll get rid of what you have at any loss, for the time may be coming when you'll get nothing at all."

"Now, look at that!" cried the little man, throwing out his hands. "They call me Unlucky Jim, and Unlucky Jim I'll be to the end of the chapter. Why, boss, me and Sammy Walker has sunk every damned cent we've got in that claim, the fruit o' nine years' hard work, and here you comes ridin' up as cool as may be, and tells me that it's all gone for nothing."

"Well, there are others who will suffer as well as you," said one of the crowd.

"I reckon we're all hit pretty hard if this is true," remarked another.

"I'm fair sick of it," said the little man, passing his grimy hand across his eyes and leaving a black smear as he did so. "This ain't the first time — no, nor the second — that my luck has played me this trick. I've a mighty good mind to throw up my hand altogether."

"Come in and have some whisky," said a rough sympathizer, and the unlucky one was hustled in through the rude door of the Griqualand Saloon, there to find such comfort as he might from the multitudinous bottles which adorned the interior of that building. Liquor had lost its efficacy that evening, however, and a dead depression rested over the little town. Nor was it confined to Dutoitspan. All along the diggings the dismal tidings spread with a rapidity which was astonishing. At eleven o'clock there was consternation at Klipdrift. At quarter-past one Hebron was up and aghast at the news. At three in the morning a mounted messenger galloped into Bluejacket, and before daybreak a digger committee was sitting at Delporte's Hope discussing the situation. So during that eventful night down the whole long line of the Vaal River there was ruin and heartburning and dismay, while five thousand miles away an old gentleman was sleeping calmly and dreamlessly in his comfortable bed, from whose busy brain had emanated all this misery and misfortune.

Perhaps the said old gentleman might have slumbered a little less profoundly could he have seen the sight which met his son's eyes on the following morning. Ezra had passed the night at Dutoitspan, in the hut of a hospitable miner. Having risen in the morning, he was dressing himself in a leisurely, methodical fashion, when his host, who had been inhaling the morning breeze, thrust his head through the window.

"Come out here, Mr. Girdlestone," he cried. "There's some fun on.

One of the boys is dead drunk, and they are carrying him in."

Ezra pulled on his coat and ran out. A little group of miners were walking slowly up the main street. He and his host were waiting for the procession to pass them with several jocose remarks appropriate to the occasion ready upon their lips, when their eyes fell upon a horrible splotchy red track which marked the road the party had taken. They both ran forward with exclamations and inquiries.

"It's Jim Stewart," said one of the bearers. "Him that they used to call Unlucky Jim."

"What's up with him?"

"He has shot himself through the head. Where d'ye think we found him? Slap in the middle o' his own claim, with his fingers dug into the gravel, as dead as a herring."

"He's a bad plucked 'un to knock under like that," Ezra's companion remarked.

"Yes," said the croupier of the saloon gambling table. "If he'd waited for another deal he might have held every trump. He was always a soft chap, was Jim, and he was saying last night as how this spoiled the last chance he was ever like to have of seeing his wife and childer in England. He's blowed a fine clean hole in himself. Would you like to see it, Mr. Girdlestone?" The fellow was about to remove the blood-stained handkerchief which covered the dead man's face, but Ezra recoiled in horror.

"Mr. Girdlestone looks faint like," some one observed.

"Yes," said Ezra, who was white to his very lips. "This has upset me rather. I'll have a drop of brandy." As he walked back to the hut, he wondered inwardly whether the incident would have discomposed his father.

"I suppose he would call it part of our commercial finesse," he said bitterly to himself. "However, we have put our hands to the plough, and we must not let homicide stop us." So saying, he steadied his nerves with a draught of brandy, and prepared for the labours of the day.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED BLOW.

The crisis at the African fields was even more acute than had been anticipated by the conspirators. Nothing approaching to it had ever been known in South Africa before. Diamonds went steadily down in value until they were selling at a price which no dealer would have believed possible, and the sale of claims reached such a climax that men were glad to get rid of them for the mere price of the plant and machinery erected at them. The offices of the various dealers at Kimberley were besieged night and day by an importunate crowd of miners, who were willing to sell at any price in order to save something from the general ruin which they imagined was about to come upon the industry. Some, more long-headed or more desperate than their neighbours, continued to work their claims and to keep the stones which they found until prices might be better. As fresh mails came from the Cape, however, each confirming and amplifying the ominous news, these independent workers grew fewer and more faint-hearted, for their boys had to be paid each week, and where was the money to come from with which to pay them? The dealers, too, began to take the alarm, and the most tempting offers would hardly induce them to give hard cash in exchange for stones which might prove to be a drug in the market. Everywhere there was misery and stagnation.

Ezra Girdlestone was not slow to take advantage of this state of things, but he was too cunning to do so in a manner which might call attention to himself or his movements. In his wanderings he had come across an outcast named Farintosh, a man who had once been a clergyman and a master of arts of Trinity College, Dublin, but who was now a broken-down gambler with a slender purse and a still more slender conscience. He still retained a plausible manner and an engaging address, and these qualities first recommended him to the notice of the young merchant. A couple of days after the receipt of the news from Europe, Ezra sent for this fellow and sat with him for some time on the verandah of the hotel, talking over the situation.

"You see, Farintosh," he remarked, "it might be a false alarm, might it not?"

The ex-clergyman nodded. He was a man of few words.

"If it should be, it would be an excellent thing for those who buy now."

Farintosh nodded once again.

"Of course," Ezra continued, "it looks as if the thing was beyond all doubt. My experience has taught me, however, that there is nothing so uncertain as a certainty. That's what makes me think of speculating over this. If I lose it won't hurt me much, and I might win. I came out here more for the sake of seeing a little of the world than anything else, but now that this has turned up I'll have a shy at it."

"Quite so," said Farintosh, rubbing his hands.

"You see," Ezra continued, lighting a cheroot, "I have the name here of having a long purse and of knowing which way the wind blows. If I were to be seen buying others would follow my lead, and prices would soon be as high as ever. Now, what I purpose is to work through you, d'ye see? You can take out a licence and buy in stones on the quiet without attracting much attention. Beat them down as low as you can, and give this hotel as your address. When they call here they shall be paid, which is better than having you carrying the money round with you."

The clergyman scowled as though he thought it was anything but better.

He did not make any remark, however.

"You can get one or two fellows to help you," said Ezra. "I'll pay for their licences. I can't expect you to work all the camps yourself. Of course, if you offer more for a stone than I care to give, that's your look out, but if you do your work well you shall not be the loser. You shall have a percentage on business done and a weekly salary as well."

"How much money do you care to invest?" asked Farintosh.

"I'm not particular," Ezra answered. "If I do a thing I like to do it well. I'll go the length of thirty thousand pounds."

Farintosh was so astonished at the magnitude of the sum that he sank back in his chair in bewilderment. "Why, sir," he said, "I think just at present you could buy the country for that."

Ezra laughed. "We'll make it go as far as we can," he said. "Of course you may buy claims as well as stones."

"And I have carte blanche to that amount?"

"Certainly."

"All right, I'll begin this evening," said the ex-parson; and picking up his slouched hat, which he still wore somewhat broader in the brim than his comrades, in deference to old associations, he departed upon his mission.

Farintosh was a clever man and soon chose two active subordinates. These were a navvy, named Burt, and Williams, a young Welshman, who had disappeared from home behind a cloud of forged cheques, and having changed his name had made a fresh start in life to the south of the equator. These three worked day and night buying in stones from the more needy and impecunious miners, to whom ready money was a matter of absolute necessity. Farintosh bought in the stock, too, of several small dealers whose nerves had been shaken by the panic. In this way bag after bag was filled with diamonds by Ezra, while he himself was to all appearances doing nothing but smoking cigars and sipping brandy-and-water in front of the Central Hotel.

He was becoming somewhat uneasy in his mind as to how long the delusion would be kept up, or how soon news might come from the Cape that the Ural find had been examined into and had proved to be a myth. In any case, he thought that he would be free from suspicion. Still, it might be as well for him by that time to be upon his homeward journey, for he knew that if by any chance the true facts leaked out there would be no hope of mercy from the furious diggers. Hence he incited Farintosh to greater speed, and that worthy divine with his two agents worked so energetically that in less than a week there was little left of five and thirty thousand pounds.

Ezra Girdlestone had shown his power of reading character when he chose the ex-clergyman as his subordinate. It is possible, however, that the young man's judgment had been inferior to his powers of observation. A clever man as a trusty ally is a valuable article, but when the said cleverness may be turned against his employer the advantage becomes a questionable one.

It was perfectly evident to Farintosh that though a stray capitalist might risk a thousand pounds or so on a speculation of this sort, Rothschild himself would hardly care to invest such a sum as had passed through his hands without having some ground on which to go. Having formed this conclusion, and having also turned over in his mind the remarkable coincidence that the news of this discovery in Russia should follow so very rapidly upon the visit of the junior partner of the House of Girdlestone, the astute clergyman began to have some dim perception of the truth. Hence he brooded a good deal as he went about his work, and cogitated deeply in a manner which was once again distinctly undesirable in so very intelligent a subordinate.

These broodings and cogitations culminated in a meeting, which was held by him with his two sub-agents in the private parlour of the Digger's Retreat. It was a low-roofed, smoke-stained room, with a profusion of spittoons scattered over it, which, to judge by the condition of the floor, the patrons of the establishment had taken some pains to avoid. Round a solid, old-fashioned table in the centre of this apartment sat Ezra's staff of assistants, the parson thoughtful but self-satisfied, the others sullen and inquisitive. Farintosh had convened the meeting, and his comrades had an idea that there was something in the wind. They applied themselves steadily, therefore, to the bottle of Hollands upon the table, and waited for him to speak.

"Well," the ex-clergyman said at last, "the game is nearly over, and we'll not be wanted any more. Girdlestone's off to England in a day or two."

Burt and Williams groaned sympathetically. Work was scarce in the diggings during the crisis, and their agencies had been paying them well.

"Yes, he's off," Farintosh went on, glancing keenly at his companions, "and he takes with him five and thirty thousand pounds worth of diamonds that we bought for him. Poor devils like us, Burt, have to do the work, and then are thrown aside as you would throw your pick aside when you are done with it. When he sells out in London and makes his pile, it won't much matter to him that the three men who helped him are starving in Griqualand."

"Won't he give us somethin' at partin'?" asked Burt, the navvy. He was a savage-looking, hairy man, with a brick-coloured face and over-hanging eyebrows. "Won't he give us nothing to remembrance him by?"

"Give you something!" Farintosh said with a sneer. "Why, man, he says you are too well paid already."

"Does he, though?" cried the navvy, flushing even redder than nature had made him. "Is that the way he speaks after we makes him? It ain't on the square. I likes to see things honest an' above board betwixt man an' man, and this pitchin' of them as has helped ye over ain't that."

Farintosh lowered his voice and bent further over the table. His companions involuntarily imitated his movement, until the three cunning, cruel faces were looking closely into one another's eyes.

"Nobody knows that he holds those stones," said Farintosh. "He's too smart to let it out to any one but ourselves."

"Where does he keep 'em?" asked the Welshman.

"In a safe in his room."

"Where is the key?"

"On his watch-chain."

"Could we get an impression?"

"I have one."

"Then I can make one," cried Williams triumphantly.

"It's done," said Farintosh, taking a small key from his pocket. "This is a duplicate, and will open the safe. I took the moulding from his key while I was speaking to him."

The navvy laughed hoarsely. "If that don't lick creation for smartness!" he cried. "And how are we to get to this safe? It would serve him right if we collar the lot. It'll teach him that if he ain't honest by nature he's got to be when he deals with the like of us. I like straightness, and by the Lord I'll have it!" He brought his great fist down upon the table to emphasize this commendable sentiment.

"It's not an easy matter," Farintosh said thoughtfully. "When he goes out he locks his door, and there's no getting in at the window. There's only one chance for us that I can see. His room is a bit cut off from the rest of the hotel. There's a gallery of twenty feet or more that leads to it. Now, I was thinking that if the three of us were to visit him some evening, just to wish him luck on his journey, as it were, and if, while we were in the room something sudden was to happen which would knock him silly for a minute or two, we might walk off with the stones and be clean gone before he could raise an alarm."

"And what would knock him silly?" asked Williams. He was an unhealthy, scorbutic-looking youth, and his pallid complexion had assumed a greenish tinge of fear as he listened to the clergyman's words. He had the makings in him of a mean and dangerous criminal, but not of a violent one — belonging to the jackal tribe rather than to the tiger.

"What would knock him senseless?" Farintosh asked Burt, with a knowing look.

Burt laughed again in his bushy, red beard. "You can leave that to me, mate," he said.

Williams glanced from one to the other and he became even more cadaverous. “I’m not in it,” he stammered. “It will be a hanging job. You will kill him as like as not.”

“Not in it, ain’t ye?” growled the navvy. “Why, you white-livered hound, you’re too deep in it ever to get out again. D’ye think we’ll let you spoil a lay of this sort as we might never get a chance of again?”

“You can do it without me,” said the Welshman, trembling in every limb.

“And have you turnin’ on us the moment a reward was offered. No, no, chummy, you don’t get out of it that way. If you won’t stand by us, I’ll take care you don’t split.”

“Think of the diamonds,” Farintosh put in.

“Think of your own skin,” said the navvy.

“You could go back to England a rich man if you do it.”

“You’ll never go back at all if you don’t.” Thus worked upon alternately by his hopes and by his fears, Williams showed some signs of yielding. He took a long draught from his glass and filled it up again.

“I ain’t afraid,” he said. “Don’t imagine that I am afraid. You won’t hit him very hard, Mr. Burt?”

“Just enough to curl him up,” the navvy answered. “Lord love ye, it ain’t the first man by many a one that I’ve laid on his back, though I never had the chance before of fingering five and thirty thousand pounds worth of diamonds for my pains.”

“But the hotel-keeper and the servants?”

“That’s all right,” said Farintosh. “You leave it to me. If we go up quietly and openly, and come down quietly and openly, who is to suspect anything? Our horses will be outside, in Woodley Street, and we’ll be out of their reach in no time. Shall we say to-morrow evening for the job?”

“That’s very early,” Williams cried tremulously.

“The sooner the better,” Burt said, with an oath. “And look here, young man,” fixing Williams with his bloodshot eyes, “one sign of drawing back, and by the living jingo I’ll let you have more than I’m keeping for him. You hear me, eh?” He grasped the youth’s white wrist and squeezed it in his iron grip until he writhed with the pain.

“Oh, I’m with you, heart and soul,” he cried. “I’m sure what you and Mr. Farintosh advise must be for the best.”

“Meet here at eight o’clock to-morrow night then,” said the leader.

“We can get it over by nine, and we will have the night for our escape.

I'll have the horses ready, and it will be strange if we don't get such a start as will puzzle them."

So, having arranged all the details of their little plan, these three gentlemen departed in different directions — Farintosh to the Central Hotel, to give Ezra his evening report, and the others to the mining-camps, which were the scene of their labours.

The meeting just described took place upon a Tuesday, early in November. On the Saturday Ezra Girdlestone had fully made up his mind to turn his back upon the diggings and begin his homeward journey. He was pining for the pleasures of his old London life, and was weary of the monotonous expanse of the South African veldt. His task was done, too, and it would be well for him to be at a distance before the diggers discovered the manner in which they had been hoaxed. He began to pack his boxes, therefore, and to make every preparation for his departure.

He was busily engaged in this employment upon the Wednesday evening when there was a tap at the door and Farintosh walked in, accompanied by Burt and Williams. Girdlestone glanced up at them, and greeted them briefly. He was not surprised at their visit, for they had come together several times before to report progress or make arrangements. Farintosh bowed as he entered the room, Burt nodded, and Williams rubbed his hands together and looked amiably bilious.

"We looked in, Mr. Girdlestone," Farintosh began, "to learn if you had any commands for us."

"I told you before that I had not," Ezra said curtly. "I am going on Saturday. I have made a mistake in speculating on those diamonds. Prices are sinking lower and lower."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Farintosh sympathetically. "Maybe the market will take a turn."

"Let us hope so," the merchant answered. "It doesn't look like it."

"But you are satisfied with us, guv'nor," Burt struck in, pushing his bulky form in front of Farintosh. "We have done our work all right, haven't we?"

"I have nothing to complain of," Ezra said coldly.

"Well then, guv'nor, you surely ain't going away without leaving us nothing to remembrance you with, seeing that we've stood by you and never gone back on you."

"You have been paid every week for what you have done," the young man said. "You won't get another penny out of me, so you set your mind at rest about that."

"You won't give us nothing?" cried the navvy angrily.

"No, I won't; and I'll tell you what it is, Burt, big as you are, if you dare to raise your voice in my presence I'll give you the soundest hiding that ever you had in your life."

Ezra had stood up and showed every indication of being as good as his word.

"Don't let us quarrel the last time we may meet," Farintosh cried, intervening between the two. "It is not money we expect from you. All we want is a drain of rum to drink success to you with."

"Oh, if that's all," said the young merchant — and turned round to pick up the bottle which stood on a table behind him. Quick as a flash Burt sprang upon him and struck him down with a life-preserver. With a gasping cry and a heavy thud Ezra fell face downwards upon the floor, the bottle still clutched in his senseless hand, and the escaping rum forming a horrible mixture with the blood which streamed from a great gash in his head.

"Very neat — very pretty indeed!" cried the ex-parson, in a quiet tone of critical satisfaction, as a connoisseur might speak of a specimen which interested him. He was already busy at the door of the safe.

"Well done, Mr. Burt, well done!" cried Williams, in a quivering voice; and going up to the body he kicked it in the side. "You see I am not afraid, Mr. Burt, am I?"

"Stow your gab!" snarled the navvy. "Here's the rum all gettin' loose."

Picking up the bottle he took a pull of what was left in it.

"Here's the bag, parson," he whispered, pulling a black linen bag from his pocket. "We haven't made much noise over the job."

"Here are the stones," said Farintosh, in the same quiet voice. "Hold the mouth open." He emptied an avalanche of diamonds into the receptacle. "Here are some notes and gold. We may as well have them too. Now, tie it up carefully. That's the way! If we meet any one on the stairs, take it coolly. Turn that lamp out, Williams, so that if any one looks in he'll see nothing. Come along!"

The guilty trio stole out of the room, bearing their plunder with them, and walked down the passage of the hotel unmolested and unharmed.

The moon, as it rose over the veldt that night, shone on three horsemen spurring it along the Capetown road as though their very lives depended upon their speed. Its calm, clear rays streamed over the silent roofs of

Kimberley and in through a particular window of the Central Hotel, throwing silvery patches upon the carpet, and casting strange shadows from the figure which lay as it had fallen, huddled in an ungainly heap upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROBBERS AND ROBBED.

It might perhaps have been as well for the curtailing of this narrative, and for the interests of the world at large if the blow dealt by the sturdy right arm of the navvy had cut short once for all the career of the junior African merchant. Ezra, however, was endowed with a rare vitality, which enabled him not only to shake off the effects of his mishap, but to do so in an extraordinarily short space of time. There was a groan from the prostrate figure, then a feeble movement, then another and a louder groan, and then an oath. Gradually raising himself upon his elbow, he looked around him in a bewildered way, with his other hand pressed to the wound at the back of his head, from which a few narrow little rivulets of blood were still meandering. His glance wandered vaguely over the table and the chairs and the walls, until it rested upon the safe. He could see in the moonlight that it was open, and empty. In a moment the whole circumstances of the case came back to him, and he staggered to the door with a hoarse cry of rage and of despair.

Whatever Ezra's faults may have been, irresolution or want of courage were not among them. In a moment he grasped the situation, and realised that it was absolutely essential that he should act, and at once. The stones must be recovered, or utter and irretrievable ruin stared him in the face. At his cries the landlord and several attendants, white and black, came rushing into the room.

"I've been robbed and assaulted," Ezra said, steadying himself against the mantelpiece, for he was still weak and giddy. "Don't all start cackling, but do what I ask you. Light the lamp!"

The lamp was lit, and there was a murmur from the little knot of employees, reinforced by some late loungers at the bar, as they saw the disordered room and the great crimson patch upon the carpet.

"The thieves called at nine," said Ezra, talking rapidly, but collectedly. "Their names were Farintosh, Burt, and Williams. We talked for, some little time, so they probably did not leave the house before a quarter past at the soonest. It is now half-past ten, so they have no very great start. You, Jamieson, and you, Van Muller, run out and find if three men have been seen getting away. Perhaps they took a buggy. Go up and down, and ask all you see. You, Jones, go as hard as you can to Inspector Ainslie. Tell him there has been robbery and attempted murder, and say that I want half a dozen of his best mounted men — not his best men, you understand, but his best horses. I shall see that he is no loser if he is smart. Where's my servant Pete? Pete, you dog, get my horse saddled and bring her round. She ought to be able to catch anything in Griqualand."

As Ezra gave his orders the men hurried off in different directions to carry them out. He himself commenced to arrange his dress, and tied a handkerchief tightly round his head.

"Surely you are not going, sir?" the landlord said, "You are not fit."

"Fit or not, I am going," Ezra said resolutely. "If I have to be strapped to my horse I'll go. Send me up some brandy. Put some in a flask, too. I may feel faint before I get back."

A great concourse of people had assembled by this time, attracted by the report of the robbery. The whole square in front of the hotel was crowded with diggers and store-keepers and innumerable Kaffirs, all pressing up to the portico in the hope of hearing some fresh details. Mr. Hector O'Flaherty, over the way, was already busy setting up his type in preparation for a special edition, in which the Vaal River Advertiser should give its version of the affair. In the office the great man himself, who was just convalescing from an attack of ardent spirits, was busily engaged, with a wet towel round his head, writing a leader upon the event. This production, which was very sonorous and effective, was peppered all over with such phrases as "protection of property," "outraged majesty of the law," and "scum of civilization" — expressions which had been used so continuously by Mr. O'Flaherty, that he had come to think that he had a copyright in them, and loudly accused the London papers of plagiarism if he happened to see them in their columns.

There was a buzz of excitement among the crowd when Ezra appeared on the steps of the hotel, looking as white as a sheet, with a handkerchief bound round his head and his collar all crusted with blood. As he mounted his horse one of his emissaries rushed to him.

"If you please, sir," he said, "they have taken the Capetown road. A dozen people saw them. Their horses were not up to much, for I know the man they got them from. You are sure to catch them."

A smile played over Ezra's pale face, which boded little good for the fugitives. "Curse those police!" he cried; "are they never going to come?"

"Here they are!" said the landlord; and sure enough, with a jingling of arms and a clatter of hoofs, half a dozen of the Griqualand Mounted Constabulary trotted through the crowd and drew up in front of the steps. They were smart, active young fellows, armed with revolver and sabre, and their horses were tough brutes, uncomely to look at, but with wonderful staying power. Ezra noted the fact with satisfaction as he rode up to the grizzled sergeant in command.

"There's not a moment to be lost, sergeant," he said. "They have an hour and a half's start, but their cattle are not up to much. Come on! It's the Capetown road. A hundred pounds if we catch them!"

"Threes!" roared the sergeant. "Right half turn — trot!" The crowd split asunder, and the little troop, with Ezra at their head, clove a path through them. "Gallop!" shouted the sergeant, and away they clattered down the High Street of Kimberley, striking fire out of the stone and splashing up the gravel, until the sound of their hoofs died away into a dull, subdued rattle, and finally faded altogether from the ears of the listening crowd.

For the first few miles the party galloped in silence. The moon was still shining brilliantly, and they could see the white line of the road stretching out in front of them and winding away over the undulating veldt. To right and left spread a broad expanse of wiry grass stretching to the horizon, with low bushes and scrub scattered over it in patches. Here and there were groups of long-legged, unhealthy-looking sheep, who crashed through the bushes in wild terror as the riders swept by them. Their plaintive calls were the only sounds which broke the silence of the night, save the occasional dismal hooting of the veldt owl.

Ezra, on his powerful grey, had been riding somewhat ahead of the troopers, but the sergeant managed to get abreast of him. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, raising his hand to his kepi, "but don't you think this pace is too good to last? The horses will be blown."

"As long as we catch them," Ezra answered, "I don't care what becomes of the horses. I would sooner stand you a dozen horses apiece than let them get away."

The young merchant's words were firm and his seat steady, in spite of the throbbing at his head. The fury in his heart supplied him with strength, and he gnawed his moustache in his impatience and dug his spurs into his horse’s flanks until the blood trickled down its glossy coat. Fortune, reputation, above all, revenge, all depended upon the issue of this headlong chase through the darkness.

The sergeant and Ezra galloped along, leather to leather, and rein to rein, while the troop clattered in their rear. “There’s Combrink about two miles further on,” said the sergeant; “we will hear news of them there.”

“They can’t get off the high road, can they?”

“Not likely, sir. They couldn’t get along as fast anywhere else. Indeed, it’s hardly safe riding across the veldt. They might be down a pit before they knew of it.”

“As long as they are on the road, we must catch them,” quoth Ezra; “for if it ran straight from here to hell I would follow them there.”

“And we’d stand by you, sir,” said the sergeant, catching something of his companion’s enthusiasm. “At this pace, if the horses hold out, we might catch them before morning. There are the lights of the shanty.”

As he spoke they were galloping round a long curve in the road, at the further end of which there was a feeble yellow glimmer. As they came abreast of it they saw that the light came through an open door, in the centre of which a burly Afrikaner was standing with his hands in his breeches pockets and his pipe in his mouth.

“Good evening,” said the sergeant, as his men pulled up their reeking horses. “Has any one passed this way before us?”

“Many a tausand has passed this way before you,” said the Dutchman, taking his pipe out of his mouth to laugh.

“To-night, man, to-night!” the sergeant cried angrily.

“Oh yes; down the Port Elizabeth Road there, not one hour ago. Three men riding fit to kill their horses.”

“That’ll do,” Ezra shouted; and away they went once more down the broad white road. They passed Bluewater’s Drift at two in the morning, and were at Van Hayden’s farm at half-past. At three they left the Modder River far behind them, and at a quarter past four they swept down the main street of the little township of Jacobsdal, their horses weak and weary and all mottled with foam. There was a police patrol in the street.

“Has any one passed?” cried the sergeant.

“Three men, a quarter of an hour ago.”

“Have they gone on?”

“Straight on. Their horses were nearly dead beat, though.”

“Come on!” cried Ezra eagerly. “Come on!”

“Four of the horses are exhausted, sir,” said the sergeant.

“They can’t move another step.”

“Come on without them then.”

“The patrol could come,” the sergeant suggested.

“I should have to report myself at the office, sir,” said the trooper.

“Jump on to his horse, sergeant,” cried Ezra. “He can take yours to report himself on. Now then you and I at least are bound to come up with them. Forward! gallop!” And they started off once more on their wild career, rousing the quiet burghers of Jacobsdal by the wild turmoil of their hoofs.

Out once more upon the Port Elizabeth Road it was a clear race between the pursuers and the pursued. The former knew that the fugitives, were it daytime, would possibly be within sight of them, and the thought gave them additional ardour. The sergeant having a fresh horse rode in front, his head down and his body forward, getting every possible inch of pace out of the animal. At his heels came Ezra, on his gallant grey, the blood-stained handkerchief fluttering from his head. He was sitting very straight in his saddle with a set stern smile upon his lips. In his right hand he held a cocked revolver. A hundred yards or so behind them the two remaining troopers came toiling along upon their weary nags, working hard with whip and spur to stimulate them to further exertions. Away in the east a long rosy streak lay low upon the horizon, which showed that dawn was approaching, and a grey light stole over the landscape. Suddenly the sergeant pulled his horse up.

“There’s some one coming towards us,” he cried.

Ezra and the troopers halted their panting steeds. Through the uncertain light they saw a solitary horseman riding down the road. At first they had thought that it might possibly be one of the fugitives who had turned, but as he came nearer they perceived that it was a stranger. His clothes were so dusty and his horse so foam-flecked and weary that it was evident that he also had left many a long mile of road behind him.

“Have you seen three men on horseback?” cried Ezra as he approached.

“I spoke to them,” the traveller answered. “They are about half a mile ahead.”

“Come on! Come on!” Ezra shouted.

“I am bringing news from Jagersfontein—” the man said.

“Come on!” Ezra interrupted furiously; and the horses stretched their stiff limbs into a feeble lumbering gallop. Ezra and the sergeant shot to the front, and the others followed as best they might. Suddenly in the stillness they heard far away a dull rattling sound like the clatter of distant castanets. “It’s their horses’ hoofs!” cried Ezra; and the troopers behind raised a cheer to show that they too understood the significance of the sound.

It was a wild, lonely spot, where the plain was bare even of the scanty foliage which usually covered it. Here and there great granite rocks protruded from the brown soil, as though Nature’s covering had in bygone days been rent until her gaunt bones protruded through the wound. As Ezra and the sergeant swept round a sharp turn in the road they saw, some little way ahead of them, the three fugitives, enveloped in a cloud of dust. Almost at the same moment they heard a shout and crash behind them, and, looking round, saw a confused heap upon the ground. The horse of the leading trooper had fallen from pure fatigue, and had rolled over upon its rider. The other trooper had dismounted, and was endeavouring to extricate his companion.

“Let us see if he is hurt,” the sergeant cried.

“On! on!” shouted Ezra, whose passion was increased by the sight of the thieves. “Not a foot back.”

“He may have broken his neck,” grumbled the sergeant, drawing his revolver. “Have your pistol ready, sir. We shall be up with them in a few minutes, and they may show fight.”

They were up with them rather sooner than the policeman expected. Farintosh, finding that speed was of no avail, and that the numbers of his pursuers was now reduced to two, had recourse to strategy. There was a sharp turn in the road a hundred yards ahead, and on reaching it the three flung themselves off their horses and lay down behind cover. As Ezra and the sergeant, the grey horse and the bay, came thundering round the curve, there was a fierce splutter of pistol shots from amongst the bushes, and the grey sank down upon its knees with a sobbing moan, struck mortally in the head. Ezra sprang to his feet and rushed at the ambuscade, while the sergeant, who had been grazed on the cheek by the first volley, jumped from his horse and followed him. Burt and Farintosh met them foot to foot with all the Saxon gallantry which underlies the Saxon brutality. Burt stabbed at the sergeant and struck him through the muscle of the neck. Farintosh fired at the policeman, and was himself shot down by Ezra. Burt, seeing his companion fall, sprang past his two assailants with a vicious side blow at the merchant, and throwing himself upon the sergeant’s horse, regardless of a bullet from the latter’s revolver, he galloped away, and was speedily out of range. As to Williams, from the beginning of the skirmish he had lain face downwards upon the ground, twisting his thin limbs about in an agony of fear, and howling for mercy.

“He’s gone!” Ezra said ruefully, gazing after the fugitive. “We have nothing to go after him with.”

“I’m well-nigh gone myself,” said the policeman, mopping up the blood from his stab, which was more painful than dangerous. “He has given me a nasty prod.”

“Never mind, my friend, you shall not be the loser. Get up, you little viper!” — this to Williams, who was still writhing himself into the most extraordinary attitudes.

“Oh, please, Mr. Girdlestone,” he cried, clutching at Ezra’s boots with his long thin fingers, “it wasn’t me that hit you. It was Mr. Burt. I had nothing to do with robbing you either. That was Mr. Farintosh. I wouldn’t have gone with him, only I knew that he was a clergyman, so I expected no harm. I am surprised at you, Mr. Farintosh, I really am. I’m very glad that Mr. Girdlestone has shot you.”

The ex-parson was sitting with his back against a gnarled stump, which gave him some support. He had his hand to his chest, and as he breathed a ghastly whistling sound came from the wound, and spirts of blood rushed from his mouth. His glazed eyes were fixed upon the man who had shot him, and a curious smile played about his thin lips.

“Come here, Mr. Girdlestone,” he croaked; “come here.”

Ezra strode over to him with a face as inexorable as fate.

“You’ve done for me,” said Farintosh faintly. “It’s a queer end for the best man of his year at Trinity — master of arts, sir, and Jacksonian prizeman. Not much worth now, is it? Who’d have thought then that I should have died like a dog in this wilderness? What’s the odds how a man dies though. If I’d kept myself straight I should have gone off a few years later in a feather bed as the Dean of St. Patrick’s may be. What will that matter? I’ve enjoyed myself” — the dying man’s eyes glistened at the thought of past dissipations. “If I had my time to do over again,” he continued, “I’d enjoy myself the same way. I’m not penitent, sir. No death-bed snivelling about me, or short cuts into heaven. That’s not what I wanted to say though. I have a choking in the throat, but I dare say you can hear what I am driving at. You met a man riding towards Jacobsdal, did you not?”

Ezra nodded sullenly.

“You didn’t speak to him? Too busy trying to catch yours truly, eh? Will you have your stones back, for they are in the bag by my side, but they’ll not be very much good to you. The little spec won’t come off this time. You don’t know what the news was that the man was bringing?”

A vague feeling of impending misfortune stole over Ezra. He shook his head.

“His news was,” said Farintosh, leaning up upon his hand, “that fresh diamond fields have been discovered at Jagersfontein, in the Orange Free State. So Russia, or no Russia, stones will not rise. Ha! ha! will not rise. Look at his face! It’s whiter than mine. Ha! ha! ha!” With the laugh upon his lips, a great flow of blood stopped the clergyman’s utterance, and he rolled slowly over upon his side, a dead man.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MOMENTOUS RESOLUTION.

During the months which Ezra Girdlestone had spent in Africa the affairs of the firm in Fenchurch Street had been exceedingly prosperous. Trade upon the coast had been brisker than usual, and three of the company's ships had come in at short intervals with excellent cargoes. Among these was the Black Eagle which, to the astonishment of Captain Hamilton Miggs and the disgust of his employer, had weathered a severe gale in the Channel, and had arrived safe and sound once more. This run of luck, supplemented by the business capacity of the old merchant and the indomitable energy of young Dimsdale, made the concern look so flourishing that the former felt more than ever convinced that if he could but stave off the immediate danger things would soon right themselves. Hence he read with delight the letters from Africa, in which his son narrated the success of the conspiracy and the manner in which the miners had been hoodwinked. The old man's figure grew straighter and his step more firm as the conviction grew upon him that the company would soon return once again to its former condition of affluence.

It may be imagined, therefore, that when the rumours of a bona fide diamond find in the Orange Free State came to his ears John Girdlestone was much agitated and distressed. On the same day that he saw the announcement in the papers he received a letter from his son announcing the failure of their enterprise. After narrating the robbery, the pursuit, the death of Farintosh, and the announcement of the new discovery, it gave an account of his subsequent movements.

"There was no doubt about the truth of the scoundrel's words," he said, "for when we went to the nearest farm to get some food and have the sergeant's wound dressed we found that every one was talking about it. There was a chap there who had just come from the State and knew all about it. After hearing the details from him I saw that there was no doubt of the genuineness of the thing.

“The police rode back to Jacobsdal with Williams, and I promised to come after them; but when I came to think it over it didn’t seem good enough. The fact of my having so many diamonds would set every tongue wagging, and, again, the sergeant had heard what Farintosh said to me, so it was very possible that I might have the whole district about my ears. As it was, I had the stones and all my money in the bag. I wrote back to the hotel, therefore, telling the landlord to send on my traps to Cape Town by mail, and promising to settle my bill with him when I received them. I then bought a horse and came straight south. I shall take the first steamer and be with you within a few days of your receiving this.

“As to our speculation, it is, of course, all up. Even when the Russian business proves to be a hoax, the price of stones will remain very low on account of these new fields. It is possible that we may sell our lot at some small profit but it won’t be the royal road to a fortune that you prophesied, nor will it help the firm out of the rut into which you have shoved it. My only regret in leaving Africa like this is that that vermin Williams will have no one to prosecute him. My head is almost well now.”

This letter was a rude shock to the African merchant. Within a week of the receipt of it his son Ezra, gloomy and travel-stained, walked into the sanctum at Fenchurch Street and confirmed all the evil tidings by word of mouth. The old man was of too tough a fibre to break down completely, but his bony hands closed convulsively upon the arms of the chair, and a cold perspiration broke out upon his wrinkled forehead as he listened to such details as his son vouchsafed to afford him.

“You have your stones all safe, though?” he stammered out at last.

“They are in my box, at home,” said Ezra, gloomy and morose, leaning against the white marble mantelpiece. “The Lord knows what they are worth! We’ll be lucky if we clear as much as they cost and a margin for my expenses and Langworthy’s. A broken head is all that I have got from your fine scheme.”

“Who could foresee such a thing?” the old man said plaintively. He might have added Major Clutterbuck’s thousand pounds as another item to be cleared, but he thought it as well to keep silent upon the point.

“Any fool could foresee the possibility of it,” quoth Ezra brusquely.

“The fall in prices is sure to be permanent, then?” the old man asked.

“It will last for some years, any way,” Ezra answered. “The Jagersfontein gravel is very rich, and there seems to be plenty of it.”

“And within a few months we must repay both capital and interest. We are ruined!” The old merchant spoke in a broken voice, and his head sank upon his breast. “When that day comes,” he continued, “the firm which has been for thirty years above reproach, and a model to the whole City, will be proclaimed as a bankrupt concern. Worse still, it will be shown to have been kept afloat for years by means which will be deemed fraudulent. I tell you, my dear son, that if any means could be devised which would avert this — any means — I should not hesitate to adopt them. I am a frail old man, and I feel that the short balance of my life would be a small thing for me to give in return for the assurance that the work which I have built up should not be altogether thrown away.”

“Your life cannot affect the matter one way or the other unless it were more heavily insured than it is,” Ezra said callously, though somewhat moved by his father’s intensity of manner. “Perhaps there is some way out of the wood yet,” he added, in a more cheerful tone.

“It’s so paying, so prosperous — that’s what goes to my heart. If it had ruined itself it would be easier to bear it, but it is sacrificed to outside speculations — my wretched, wretched speculations. That is what makes it so hard.” He touched the bell, and Gilray answered the summons. “Listen to this, Ezra. What was our turn over last month, Gilray?”

“Fifteen thousand pounds, sir,” said the little clerk, bobbing up and down like a buoy in a gale in his delight at seeing the junior partner once again.

“And the expenses?”

“Nine thousand three hundred. Uncommon brown you look, Mr. Ezra, to be sure, uncommon brown and well. I hopes as you enjoyed yourself in Africa, sir, and was too much for them Hottenpots and Boars.” With this profound ethnological remark Mr. Gilray bobbed himself out of the room and went back radiantly to his ink-stained desk.

“Look at that,” the old man said, when the click of the outer door showed that the clerk was out of ear-shot. “Over five thousand profit in a month. Is it not terrible that such a business should go to ruin? What a fortune it would have been for you!”

“By heavens, it must be saved!” cried Ezra, with meditative brows and hands plunged deep in his trouser pockets. “There is that girl’s money. Could we not get the temporary use of it.”

“Impossible!” his father answered with a sigh. “It is so tied up in the will that she cannot sign it away herself until she comes of age. There is no way of touching it except by her marriage — or by her death.”

“Then we must have it by the only means open to us.”

“And that is?”

“I must marry her.”

“You will?”

“I shall. Here is my hand on it.”

“Then we are saved,” cried the old man, throwing up his tremulous hands.

“Girdlestone & Son will weather the storm yet.”

“But Girdlestone becomes a sleeping partner,” said Ezra. “It’s for my own sake I do it and not for yours,” with which frank remark he drew his hat down over his brows and set off for Eccleston Square.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DANGEROUS PROMISE.

During Ezra Girdlestone's absence in Africa our heroine's life had been even less eventful than of old. There was a consistency about the merchant's establishment which was characteristic of the man. The house itself was austere and gloomy, and every separate room, in spite of profuse expenditure and gorgeous furniture, had the same air of discomfort. The servants too, were, with one single exception, from the hard-visaged housekeeper to the Calvinistic footman, a depressing and melancholy race. The only departure from this general rule was Kate's own maid, Rebecca Taylforth, a loudly-dressed, dark-eyed, coarse-voiced young woman, who raised up her voice and wept when Ezra departed for Africa. This damsel's presence was most disagreeable to Kate, and, indeed, to John Girdlestone also, who only retained her on account of his son's strong views upon the subject, and out of fear of an explosion which might wreck all his plans.

The old merchant was Kate's only companion during this period, and their conversation was usually limited to a conventional inquiry at breakfast time as to each other's health. On his return from the City in the evening Girdlestone was always in a moody humour, and would eat his dinner hastily and in silence. After dinner he was in the habit of reading methodically the various financial articles in the day's papers, which would occupy him until bedtime. Occasionally his companion would read these aloud to him, and such was the monotony of her uneventful life that she found herself becoming insensibly interested in the fluctuations of Grand Trunk scrip or Ohio and Delaware shares. The papers once exhausted, a bell was rung to summon the domestics, and when all were assembled the merchant, in a hard metallic voice, read through the lesson for the day and the evening prayers. On grand occasions he supplemented this by a short address, in the course of which he would pelt his frightened audience with hard jagged texts until he had reduced them to a fitting state of spiritual misery. No wonder that, under the influence of such an existence, the roses began to fade from his ward’s cheeks, and her youthful heart to grow sad and heavy.

One daily tonic there was, however, which never deserted her. Strictly as Girdlestone guarded her, and jealously as he fenced her off from the outer world, he was unable to prevent this one little ray of light penetrating her prison. With an eye to the future he had so placed her that it seemed to him to be impossible that any sympathy could reach her from the outside world. Visits and visitors were alike forbidden to her. On no consideration was she to venture out alone. In spite of all his precautions, however, love has many arts and wiles which defy all opposition, and which can outplot the deepest of plotters.

Eccleston Square was by no means in a direct line between Kensington and the City, yet morning and evening, as sure as the clock pointed to half-past nine and to quarter to six, Tom would stride through the old-fashioned square and past the grim house, whose grimness was softened to his eyes through its association with the bright dream of his life. It was but the momentary glance of a sweet face at the upper window and a single wave of a white hand, but it sent him on with a fresh heart and courage, and it broke the dull monotony of her dreary life.

Occasionally, as we have seen, he even managed to find his way into the interior of this ogre’s castle, in which his fair princess was immured. John Girdlestone put an end to this by ordering that business messages should never under any circumstances be conveyed to his private residence. Nothing daunted, however, the lovers soon devised another means of surmounting the barrier which divided them.

The centre of the square was taken up by a garden, rectangular and uninviting, fenced round with high forbidding walls which shut out all intruders and gave the place a resemblance to the exercise ground of a prison. Within the rails were clumps of bushes, and here and there a few despondent trees drooped their heads as though mourning over the uncongenial site in which they had been planted. Among these trees and bushes there were scattered seats, and the whole estate was at the disposal of the inhabitants of Eccleston Square, and was dignified by the name of the Eccleston Gardens. This was the only spot in which Kate was trusted without the surveillance of a footman, and it was therefore a favourite haunt of hers, where she would read or work for hours under the shelter of the scanty foliage.

Hence it came about that one day, as Thomas Dimsdale was making his way Cityward at a rather earlier hour than was customary with him, he missed the usual apparition at the window. Looking round blankly in search of some explanation of this absence, he perceived in the garden a pretty white bonnet which glinted among the leaves, and on closer inspection a pair of bright eyes, which surveyed him merrily from underneath it. The gate was open, and in less time than it takes to tell it the sacrilegious feet of the young man had invaded the sacred domains devoted to the sole use and behoof of the Ecclestonians. It may be imagined that he was somewhat late at the office that morning and on many subsequent mornings, until the clerks began to think that their new employer was losing the enthusiasm for business which had possessed him.

Tom frequently begged permission to inform Mr. Girdlestone of his engagement, but Kate was inflexible upon that point. The fact is, that she knew her guardian’s character very much better than her lover did, and remembering his frequent exhortations upon the subject of the vanity and wickedness of such things, she feared the effects of his anger when he learned the truth. In a year or so she would be of age and her own mistress, but at present she was entirely in his power. Why should she subject herself to the certainty of constant harshness and unkindness which would await her? Had her guardian really fulfilled the functions of a father towards her he would have a right to be informed, but as it was she felt that she owed him no such duty. She therefore made up her mind that he should know nothing of the matter; but the fates unfortunately willed otherwise.

It chanced that one morning the interview between the lovers had lasted rather longer than usual, and had been concluded by Kate’s returning to the house, while Tom remained sitting upon the garden seat lost in such a reverie as affects men in his position. While thus pleasantly employed, his thoughts were suddenly recalled to earth by the appearance of a dark shadow on the gravel in front of him, and looking up he saw the senior partner standing a short distance away and regarding him with anything but an amiable expression upon his face. He had himself been having a morning stroll in the garden, and had overseen the whole of the recent interview without the preoccupied lovers being aware of his presence.

“Are you coming to the office?” he asked sternly. “If so, we can go together.”

Tom rose and followed him out of the gardens without a word. He knew from the other's expression that all was known to him, and in his heart he was not sorry. His only fear was that the old man's anger might fall upon his ward and this he determined to prevent. They walked side by side as far as the station in complete silence, but on reaching Fenchurch Street Girdlestone asked his young partner to step into his private sanctum.

"Now, sir," he said, as he closed the door behind him "I think that I have a right to inquire what the meaning may be of the scene of which I was an involuntary witness this morning?"

"It means," Tom answered firmly but gently, "that I am engaged to Miss Harston, and have been for some time."

"Oh, indeed," Girdlestone answered coldly, sitting down at his desk and turning over the pile of letters.

"At my request," said Tom, "our engagement was kept from your knowledge. I had reason to believe that you objected to early engagements, and I feared that ours might be disagreeable to you." I trust that the recording angel will not register a very black mark against our friend for this, the one and only falsehood that ever passed his lips.

During the long silent walk the merchant had been revolving in his mind what course he should pursue, and he had come to the conclusion that it was more easy to guide this impetuous stream of youth than to attempt to stem it. He did not realise the strength of the tie that bound these two young people together, and imagined that with judgment and patience it might yet be snapped. It was, therefore, with as good an imitation of geniality as his angular visage would permit of that he answered his companion's confession.

"You can hardly wonder at my being surprised," he said. "Such a thing never entered my mind for a moment. You would have done better to have confided in me before."

"I must ask your pardon for not having done so."

"As far as you are concerned," said John Girdlestone affably, "I believe you to be hard-working and right-principled. Your conduct since you have joined the firm has been everything which I could desire."

Tom bowed his acknowledgments, much pleased by this preamble.

"With regard to my ward," continued the senior partner, speaking very slowly and evidently weighing his words, "I could not wish her to have a better husband. In considering such a question I have, however, as you may imagine, to consult above everything else the wishes of my dead friend, Mr. John Harston, the father of the young lady to whom you say that you are engaged. A trust has been reposed in me, and that trust must, of course, be fulfilled to the letter."

"Certainly," said Tom, wondering in his own mind how he could ever have brought himself for one moment to think evil of this kindly and righteous old man.

"It was one of Mr. Harston's most clearly expressed wishes that no words or even thoughts of such matters should be allowed to come in his daughter's way until she had attained maturity, by which he meant the age of one-and-twenty."

"But he could not foresee the circumstances," Tom pleaded. "I am sure that a year or so will make no difference in her sentiments in this matter."

"My duty is to carry out his instructions to the letter. I won't say, however," continued Mr. Girdlestone, "that circumstances might not arise which might induce me to shorten this probationary period. If my further acquaintance with you confirms the high impression which I now have of your commercial ability, that, of course, would have weight with me; and, again, if I find Miss Harston's mind is made up upon the point, that also would influence my judgment."

"And what are we to do in the mean time?" asked the junior partner anxiously.

"In the mean time neither you nor your people must write to her, or speak to her, or hold any communication with her whatever. If I find you or them doing so, I shall be compelled in justice to Mr. Harston's last request to send her to some establishment abroad where she shall be entirely out of your way. My mind is irrevocably made up upon that point. It is not a matter of personal inclination, but of conscience."

"And how long is this to last?" cried Tom.

"It will depend upon yourselves. If you prove yourself to be a man of honour in this matter, I may be inclined to sanction your addresses. In the mean time you must give me your word to let it rest, and neither to attempt to speak to Miss Harston, nor to see her, nor to allow your parents to communicate with her. The last condition may seem to you to be hard, but, in my eyes, it is a very important one. Unless you can bring yourself to promise all this, my duty will compel me to remove my ward entirely out of your reach, a course which would be painful to her and inconvenient to myself."

"But I must let her know of this arrangement. I must tell her that you hold out hopes to us on condition that we keep apart for a time."

"It would be cruel not to allow you to do that," Girdlestone answered. "You may send her one letter, but remember there shall be no reply to it."

"Thank you, sir; thank you!" Tom cried fervently. "I have something to live for now. This separation will but make our hearts grow fonder. What change can time make in either of us?"

"Quite so," said John Girdlestone, with a smile. "Remember there must be no more walking through the square. You must remain absolutely apart if you wish to gain my consent."

"It is hard, very, very hard. But I will promise to do it. What would

I not promise which would lead to our earlier union?"

"That is settled then. In the mean time, I should be obliged if you would go down to the docks and look after the loading of the transferable corrugated iron houses for New Calabar."

"All right, sir, and thank you for your kindness," said Tom, bowing himself out. He hardly knew whether to be pleased or grieved over the result of his interview; but, on the whole, satisfaction prevailed, since at the worst it was but to wait for a year or so, while there seemed to be some hopes of gaining the guardian's consent before that. On the other hand, he had pledged himself to separate from Kate; but that would, he reflected, only make their re-union the sweeter.

All the morning he was engaged in superintending the stowing of great slabs of iron in the capacious hold of the Maid of Athens. When the hour of luncheon arrived no thought of food was in the lad's head, but, burying himself in the back parlour of a little Blackwall public-house, he called for pen, ink, and paper, and proceeded to indite a letter to his sweetheart. Never was so much love and comfort and advice and hope compressed into the limits of four sheets of paper or contained in the narrow boundary of a single envelope. Tom read it over after he had finished, and felt that it feebly expressed his thoughts; but, then, what lover ever yet did succeed in getting his thoughts satisfactorily represented upon paper. Having posted this effusion, in which he had carefully explained the conditions imposed upon him, Tom felt considerably more light-hearted, and returned with renewed vigour to the loading of the corrugated iron. He would hardly have felt so satisfied had he seen John Girdlestone receiving that same letter from the hands of the footman, and reading it afterwards in the privacy of his bedroom with a sardonic smile upon his face. Still less contented would he have been had he beheld the merchant tearing it into small fragments and making a bonfire of it in his capacious grate. Next morning Kate looked in vain out of the accustomed window, and was sore at heart when no tall figure appeared in sight and no friendly hand waved a morning salutation.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHANGE OF FRONT.

This episode had occurred about a fortnight before Ezra's return from Africa, and was duly retailed to him by his father.

"You need not be discouraged by that," he said. "I can always keep them apart, and if he is absent and you are present — especially as she has no idea of the cause of his absence — she will end by feeling slighted and preferring you."

"I cannot understand how you ever came to let the matter go so far," his son answered sullenly. "What does the young puppy want to come poaching upon our preserves for? The girl belongs to us. She was given to you to look after, and a nice job you seem to have made of it!"

"Never mind, my boy," replied the merchant. "I'll answer for keeping them apart if you will only push the matter on your own account."

"I've said that I would do so, and I will," Ezra returned; and events soon showed that he was as good as his word.

Before his African excursion the relations between young Girdlestone and his father's ward had never been cordial. Kate's nature, however, was so sweet and forgiving, that it was impossible for her to harbour any animosity, and she greeted Ezra kindly on his return from his travels. Within a few days she became conscious that a remarkable change had come over him — a change, as it seemed to her, very much for the better. In the past, weeks had frequently elapsed without his addressing her, but now he went out of his way to make himself agreeable. Sometimes he would sit for a whole evening describing to her all that he had seen in Africa, and really interesting her by his account of men and things. She, poor lass, hailed this new departure with delight, and did all in her power to encourage his better nature and to show that she appreciated the alteration in his bearing. At the same time, she was rather puzzled in her mind, for an occasional flash of coarseness or ferocity showed her that the real nature of the man was unaltered, and that he was putting an unnatural restraint upon himself.

As the days went on, and no word or sign came from Tom, a great fear and perplexity arose within the girl's mind. She had heard nothing of the interview at Fenchurch Street, nor had she any clue at all which could explain the mystery. Could it be that Tom had informed her guardian of their engagement, and had received such a rebuff that he had abandoned her in despair? That was surely impossible; yet why was it that he had ceased to walk through the square? She knew that he was not ill, because she heard her two companions talking of him in connection with business. What could be the matter, then? Her little heart was torn by a thousand conflicting doubts and fears.

In the mean time Ezra gave fresh manifestations of the improvement which travel had wrought upon him. She had remarked one day that she was fond of moss roses. On coming down to breakfast next morning she found a beautiful moss rose upon her plate, and every morning afterwards a fresh flower appeared in the same place. This pretty little piece of courtesy, which she knew could only come from Ezra, surprised and pleased her, for delicacy was the last quality for which she would have given him credit.

On another occasion she had expressed a desire to read Thackeray's works, the books in the library being for the most part of last century. On entering her room that same evening she found, to her astonishment, a handsomely bound edition of the novels in question standing on the centre of her table. For a moment a wild, unreasoning hope awoke in her that perhaps this was Tom's doing — that he had taken this means of showing that she was still dear to him. She soon saw, however, that the books could only have come from the same source as the flowers, and she marvelled more than ever at this fresh proof of the good will of her companion.

One day her guardian took the girl aside. "Your life must be rather dull," he said. "I have taken a box for you to-night at the opera. I do not care about such spectacles myself, but I have made arrangements for your escort. A change will do you good."

Poor Kate was too sad at heart to be inclined for amusement.

She endeavoured, however, to look pleased and grateful.

"My good friend, Mrs. Wilkinson, is coming for you," the merchant said, "and Ezra is going too. He has a great liking for music."

Kate could not help smiling at this last remark, as she thought how very successfully the young man had concealed his taste during the years that she had known him.

She was ready, however, at the appointed hour, and Mrs. Wilkinson, a prim old gentlewoman, who had chaperoned Kate on the rare occasions when she went out, having arrived, the three drove off together.

The opera happened to be “Faust,” and the magnificent scenery and dresses astonished Kate, who had hardly ever before been within the walls of a theatre. She sat as if entranced, with a bright tinge of colour upon her cheeks, which, with her sparkling eyes, made her look surpassingly beautiful. So thought Ezra Girdlestone as he sat in the recesses of the box and watched the varied expressions which flitted across her mobile features. “She is well worth having, money or no,” he muttered to himself, and redoubled his attentions to her during the evening.

An incident occurred between the acts that night which would have pleased the old merchant had he witnessed it. Kate had been looking down from the box, which was upon the third tier, at the sea of heads beneath them. Suddenly she gave a start, and her face grew a trifle paler.

“Isn’t that Mr. Dimsdale down there?” she said to her companion.

“Where?” asked Ezra, craning his neck. “Oh yes, there he is, in the second row of the stalls.”

“Do you know who the young lady is that he is talking to?” Kate asked.

“I don’t know,” said Ezra. “I have seen him about with her a good deal lately.” The latter was a deliberate falsehood, but Ezra saw his chance of prejudicing his rival, and took prompt advantage of it. “She is very good-looking,” he added presently, keeping his eyes upon his companion.

“Oh, indeed,” said Kate, and turned with some common-place remark to Mrs. Wilkinson. Her heart was sore nevertheless, and she derived little pleasure from the remainder of the performance. As to Ezra, in spite of his great love for music, he dozed peacefully in a corner of the box during the whole of the last act. None of them were sorry when Faust was duly consigned to the nether regions and Marguerite was apotheosed upon a couple of wooden clouds. Ezra narrated the incident of the recognition in the stalls to his father on his return, and the old gentleman rubbed his hands over it.

“Most fortunate!” he exclaimed gleefully. “By working on that idea we might produce great effects. Who was the girl, do you know?”

“Some poor relation, I believe, whom he trots out at times.”

“We will find out her name and all about her. Capital, capital!” cried John Girdlestone; and the two worthies departed to their rooms much pleased at this new card which chance had put into their hands.

During the weary weeks while Tom Dimsdale, in accordance with his promise, avoided Eccleston Square and everything which could remind Kate of his existence, Ezra continued to leave no stone unturned in his endeavours to steal his way into her affections. Poor Tom's sole comfort was the recollection of that last passionate letter which he had written in the Blackwall public-house, and which had, as he imagined, enlightened her as to the reasons of his absence, and had prevented her from feeling any uneasiness or surprise. Had he known the fate that had befallen that epistle, he would hardly have been able to continue his office duties so patiently or to wait with so much resignation for Mr. Girdlestone's sanction to his engagement.

As the days passed and still brought no news, Kate's face grew paler and her heart more weary and desponding. That the young man was well was beyond dispute, since she had seen him with her own eyes at the opera. What explanation could there be, then, for his conduct? Was it possible that he had told Mr. Girdlestone of their engagement, and that her guardian had found some means of dissuading him from continuing his suit — found some appeal to his interest, perhaps, which was too strong for his love. All that she knew of Tom's nature contradicted such a supposition. Again, if Girdlestone had learned anything of their engagement, surely he would have reproached her with it. His manner of late had been kinder rather than harsher. On the other hand, could it have chanced that Tom had met this lady of the opera, and that her charms had proved too much for his constancy? When she thought of the honest grey eyes which had looked down into hers at that last meeting in the garden, she found it hard to imagine the possibility of such things, and yet there was a fact which had to be explained. The more she thought of it the more incomprehensible it grew, but still the pale face grew paler and the sad heart more heavy.

Soon, however, her doubts and fears began to resolve themselves into something more substantial than vague conjecture. The conversation of the Girdlestones used to turn upon their business colleague, and always in the same strain. There were stray remarks about his doings; hints from the father and laughter from the son. "Not much work to be got out of him now," the old man would say. "When a man's in love he's not over fond of a ledger."

“A nice-looking girl, too,” said Ezra, in answer to some such remark. “I thought something would come of it. We saw them together at the opera, didn’t we, Kate?”

So they would gossip together, and every word a stab to the poor girl. She strove to conceal her feelings, and, indeed, her anger and her pride were stronger even than her grief, for she felt that she had been cruelly used. One day she found Girdlestone alone and unbosomed herself to him.

“Is it really true,” she asked, with a quick pant and a catch of her breath, “that Mr. Dimsdale is engaged to be married?”

“I believe so, my dear,” her guardian answered. “It is commonly reported so. When a young lady and gentleman correspond it is usually a sign of something of the sort.”

“Oh, they correspond?”

“Yes, they certainly correspond. Her letters are sent to him at the office. I don’t know that I altogether like that arrangement. It looks as if he were deceiving his parents.” All this was an unmitigated lie, but Girdlestone had gone too far now to stick at trifles.

“Who is the lady?” asked Kate, with a calm set face but a quivering lip.

“A cousin of his. Miss Ossary is her name, I believe. I am not sorry, for it may be a sign that he has sown all his wild oats. Do you know at one time, Kate, I feared that he might take a fancy to you. He has a specious way with him, and I felt my responsibility in the matter.”

“You need not be afraid on that score,” Kate said bitterly. “I think I can gauge Mr. Dimsdale’s specious manner at its proper value.” With this valiant speech she marched off, head in air, to her room, and there wept as though her very heart would break.

John Girdlestone told his son of this scene as they walked home from Fenchurch Street that same day. “We must look sharp over it,” he said, “or that young fool may get impatient and upset our plans.”

“It’s not such an easy matter,” said his son gloomily. “I get along so far, but no further. It’s a more uphill job than I expected.”

“Why, you had a bad enough name among women,” the merchant said, with something approaching to a sneer. “I have been grieved times out of number by your looseness in that respect. I should have thought that you might have made your experience of some use now.”

“There are women and women,” his son remarked. “A girl like this takes as much managing as a skittish horse.”

“Once get her into harness, and I warrant you’ll keep her there quiet enough.”

“You bet,” said Ezra, with a loud laugh. “But at present she has the pull. Her mind is still running on that fellow.”

“She spoke bitterly enough of him this morning.”

“So she might, but she thinks of him none the less. If I could once make her thoroughly realise that he had thrown her over I might catch her on the hop. She’d marry for spite if she wouldn’t for love.”

“Just so; just so. Wait a bit. That can be managed, I think, if you will leave it to me.”

The old man brooded over the problem all day, for from week to week the necessity for the money was becoming more pressing, and that money could only be hoped for through the success of Ezra’s wooing. No wonder that every little detail which might sway the balance one way or the other was anxiously pondered over by the head of the firm, and that even the fluctuations in oil and ivory became secondary to this great object.

Next day, immediately after they had sat down to dinner, some letters were handed in by the footman. “Forwarded on from the office, sir,” said the flunkey. “The clerk says that Mr. Gilray was away and that he did not like to open them.”

“Just like him!” said Girdlestone, peevishly pushing back his plate of soup. “I hate doing business out of hours.” He tore the envelopes off the various letters as he spoke. “What’s this? Casks returned as per invoice; that’s all right. Note from Rudder & Saxe — that can be answered to-morrow. Memorandum on the Custom duties at Sierra Leone. Hallo! what have we here? ‘My darling Tom’ — who is this from — Yours ever, Mary Ossary.’ Why, it’s one of young Dimsdale’s love-letters which has got mixed up with my business papers. Ha! ha! I must really apologize to him for having opened it, but he must take his chance of that, if he has his correspondence sent to the office. I take it for granted that everything there is a business communication.”

Kate’s face grew very white as she listened. She ate little dinner that day, poor child, and took the earliest opportunity of retiring to her room.

“You did that uncommonly well, dad,” said Ezra approvingly, after she was gone. “It hit her hard, I could see that.”

“I think it touched her pride. People should not have pride. We are warned against it. Now, that same pride of hers will forbid her ever thinking of that young man again."

"And you had the letter written?"

"I wrote it myself. I think, in such a case, any stratagem is justifiable. Such large interests are at stake that we must adopt strong measures. I quite agree with the old Churchmen that the end occasionally justifies the means."

"Capital, dad; very good!" cried Ezra, chewing his toothpick. "I like to hear you argue. It's quite refreshing."

"I act according to the lights which are vouchsafed me," said John Girdlestone gravely; on which Ezra leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

The very next morning the merchant spoke to Dimsdale on the matter, for he had observed signs of impatience in the young man, and feared that some sudden impulse might lead him to break his promise and so upset everything.

"Take a seat. I should like to have a word with you," he said graciously, when his junior partner appeared before him to consult with him as to the duties of the day. Tom sat down with hope in his heart.

"It is only fair to you, Mr. Dimsdale," Girdlestone said, in a kindly voice, "that I should express to you my appreciation of your honourable conduct. You have kept your promise in regard to Miss Harston in the fullest manner."

"Of course I kept my promise," said Tom bluntly. "I trust, however, that you will soon see your way to withdrawing your prohibition. It has been a hard trial to me."

"I have insisted upon it because it seemed to me to be my duty. Every one takes his own view upon such points, and it has always been my custom throughout life to take what some might think a stringent one. It appears to me that I owe it to my deceased friend to prevent his daughter, whom he has confided to me, from making any mistake. As I said before, if you continue to show that you are worthy of her, I may think more favourably of it. Exemplary as your conduct has been since you joined us, I believe that I am not wrong in stating that you were a little wild when you were at Edinburgh."

"I never did anything that I am ashamed of," said Tom.

"Very likely not," Girdlestone answered, with an irrepressible sneer.

"The question is, did you do anything that your father was ashamed of?"

“Certainly not,” cried Tom hotly. “I was no milksop or psalm singer, but there is nothing that I ever did there of which I should be ashamed of my father knowing.”

“Don’t speak lightly of psalm singing. It is a good practice in its way, and you would have been none the worse had you indulged in it perhaps. However, that is neither here nor there. What I want you clearly to understand is that my ultimate consent to your union depends entirely upon your own conduct. Above all, I insist that you refrain from unsettling the girl’s mind at present.”

“I have already promised. Hard as the struggle may be, I shall not break my word. I have the consolation of knowing that if we were separated for twenty years we should still be true to one another.”

“That’s very satisfactory,” said the merchant grimly.

“Nevertheless it is a weary, weary time. If I could only write a line—”

“Not a word,” Girdlestone interrupted. “It is only because I trust you that I keep her in London at all. If I thought there was a possibility of your doing such a thing I should remove her at once.”

“I shall do nothing without your permission,” Tom said, taking up his hat to go. He paused with his hand upon the door. “If ever it seems good to me,” he said, “I consider that by giving you due notice I absolve myself from my promise.”

“You would not do anything so foolish.”

“Still I reserve myself the right of doing so,” said Tom, and went off with a heavy heart to his day’s work.

“Everything is clear for you now,” the old man said to his son triumphantly. “There’s no chance of interference, and the girl is in the very humour to be won. I flatter myself that it has been managed with tact. Remember that all is at stake, and go in and win.”

“I shall go in,” said Ezra “and I think the chances are that I shall win too.”

At which reassuring speech the old man laughed, and slapped his son approvingly upon the shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BREAKING GROUND.

In spite of John Girdlestone’s temporary satisfaction and the stoical face which he presented to the world, it is probable that in the whole of London there was no more unhappy and heart-weary man. The long fight against impending misfortune had shattered his iron constitution and weakened him both in body and in mind. It was remarked upon ‘Change how much he had aged of late, and moralists commented upon the vanity and inefficacy of the wealth which could not smooth the wrinkles from the great trader’s haggard visage. He was surprised himself when he looked in the glass at the change which had come over him. “Never mind,” he would say in his dogged heart a hundred times a day, “they can’t beat me. Do what they will, they can’t beat me.” This was the one thought which sustained and consoled him. The preservation of his commercial credit had become the aim and object of his life, to which there was nothing that he was not prepared to sacrifice.

His cunningly devised speculation in diamonds had failed, but this failure had been due to an accident which could neither have been foreseen nor remedied. To carry out this scheme he had, as we have seen, been obliged to borrow money, which had now to be repaid. This he had managed to do, more or less completely, by the sale of the stones which Ezra had brought home, supplemented by the recent profits of the firm. There was still the original deficit to be faced, and John Girdlestone knew that though a settlement might be postponed from month to month, still the day must come, and come soon, when his debts must be met, or his inability to meet them become apparent to the whole world. Should Ezra be successful in his wooing and his ward’s forty thousand pounds be thrown into the scale, the firm would shake itself clear from the load which oppressed it. Supposing, however, that Kate were to refuse his son. What was to occur then? The will was so worded that there appeared to be no other way of obtaining the money. A very vulpine look would come over the old man’s face as he brooded over that problem.

The strangest of all the phenomena, however, presented by John Girdlestone at this period of his life was his own entire conviction of the righteousness of his actions. When every night and morning he sank upon his knees with his household and prayed for the success of the firm's undertakings, no qualms of conscience ever troubled him as to their intrinsic morality. On Sundays the grey head of the merchant in the first pew was as constant an object as was the pew itself, yet in that head no thought ever rose of the inconsistency of his religion and of his practice. For fifty years he had been persuading himself that he was a righteous man, and the conviction was now so firmly impressed upon his very soul that nothing could ever shake it. Ezra was wrong when he set this down as deliberate hypocrisy. Blind strength of will and self-conceit were at the bottom of his actions, but he would have been astonished and indignant had he been accused of simulating piety or of using it as a tool. To him the firm of Girdlestone was the very representation of religion in the commercial world, and as such must be upheld by every conceivable means.

To his son this state of mind was unintelligible, and he simply gave his father credit for being a consummate and accomplished hypocrite, who found a mantle of piety a very convenient one under which to conceal his real character. He had himself inherited the old man's dogged pertinacity and commercial instincts, and was by nature unscrupulous and impatient of any obstacle placed in his way. He was now keenly alive to the fact that the existence of the firm depended upon the success of his suit, and he knew also how lucrative a concern the African business would prove were it set upon its legs again. He had determined in case he succeeded to put his father aside as a sleeping partner and to take the reins of management entirely into his own hands. His practical mind had already devised countless ways in which the profits might be increased. The first step of all, then, was the gaining possession of the forty thousand pounds, and to that he devoted himself heart and soul. When two such men work together for one end, it is seldom that they fail to achieve it.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Ezra felt himself in any degree in love at this time. He recognised his companion's sweetness and gentleness, but these were not qualities which appealed to his admiration. Kate's amiable, quiet ways seemed insipid to a man who was used to female society of a very different order.

"She has no go or snap about her," he would complain to his father.

"She's not like Polly Lucas at the Pavilion, or Minnie Walker."

"God forbid!" ejaculated the merchant. "That sort of thing is bad enough out of doors, but worst of all in your own house."

"It makes courting a good deal easier," Ezra answered.

"If a girl will answer up and give you an opening now and then, it makes all the difference."

"You can't write poetry, can you?"

"Not much," Ezra said with a grin.

"That's a pity. I believe it goes a long way with women. You might get some one to write some, and let her think it is yours. Or you could learn a little off and repeat it."

"Yes, I might do that. I'm going to buy a collar for that beast of a dog of hers. All the time that I was talking to her yesterday she was so taken up with it that I don't believe she heard half that I said. My fingers itched to catch it up and chuck it through the window."

"Don't forget yourself, my boy, don't forget yourself!" cried the merchant. "A single false step might ruin every thing."

"Never fear," Ezra said confidently, and went off upon the dog-collar mission. While he was in the shop he bought a dog-whip as well, which he locked up in his drawers to use as the occasion served.

During all this time Kate had been entirely unconscious of her companion's intentions and designs. She had been associated with Ezra for so many years, and had met such undeviated want of courtesy from him, that the idea of his presenting himself as a suitor never came into her head. She hailed his charge of demeanour, therefore, as being the result of his larger experience of the world, and often wondered how it was that he had profited so much by his short stay at the Cape. In the cheerless house it was pleasant to have at least one companion who seemed to have kindly feelings towards her. She was only too glad, therefore, to encourage his advances, and to thank him with sweet smiles and eloquent eyes for what appeared to her to be his disinterested kindness.

After a while, however, Ezra's attentions became so marked that it was impossible for her to misunderstand them any longer. Not only did he neglect his usual work in order to hang round her from morning to night, but he paid her many clumsy compliments and gave other similar indications of the state of his affections. As soon as this astounding fact had been fairly realised by the girl, she at once changed her manner and became formal and distant. Ezra, nothing daunted, redoubled his tender words and glances, and once would have kissed her hand had she not rapidly withdrawn it. On this Kate shut herself up in her room, and rarely came out save when the other was away in the City. She was determined that there should be no possibility of any misunderstanding as to her feelings in the matter.

John Girdlestone had been watching these little skirmishes closely and with keen interest. When Kate took to immuring herself in her room he felt that it was time for him to interfere.

“You must go about a little more, and have more fresh air,” he said to her one day, when they were alone after breakfast. “You will lose your roses if you don’t.”

“I am sure I don’t care whether I lose them or not,” answered his ward listlessly.

“You may not, but there are others who do,” remarked the merchant.

“I believe it would break Ezra’s heart.”

Kate flushed up at this sudden turn of the conversation. “I don’t see what reason your son has to care about it,” she said.

“Care about it! Are you so blind that you don’t see that he loves the very ground you walk on. He has grown quite pale and ill these last few days because he has not seen you, and he imagines that he may have offended you.”

“For goodness’ sake!” cried Kate earnestly, “persuade him to think of some one else. It will only be painful both to him and to me if he keeps on this way. It cannot possibly lead to anything.”

“And why not? Why should—”

“Oh, don’t let us argue about it,” she cried passionately. “The very idea is horrible. It won’t bear talking about.”

“But why, my dear, why? You are really too impulsive. Ezra has his faults, but what man has not? He has been a little wild in his youth, but he is settling down now into an excellent man of business. I assure you that, young as he is, there are few names more respected on ‘Change. The way in which he managed the business of the firm in Africa was wonderful. He is already a rich man, and will be richer before he dies. I cannot see any cause for this deep-rooted objection of yours. As to looks he is, you must confess, as fine a young fellow as there is in London.”

“I wish you not to speak of it or think of it again,” said Kate. “My mind is entirely made up when I say that I shall never marry any one — him least of all.”

“You will think better of it, I am sure,” her guardian said, patting her chestnut hair kindly as he stood over her. “Since your poor father handed you over to me I have guarded you and cared for you to the best of my ability. Many a sleepless night I have spent thinking of your future and endeavouring to plan it out so as to secure your happiness. I should not be likely to give you bad advice now, or urge you to take a step which would make you unhappy. Have you anything to complain of in my treatment of you?”

“You have been always very just,” Kate said with a sob.

“And this is how you repay me! You are going to break my son’s heart, and through his mine. He is my only boy, and if anything went wrong with him I tell you that it would bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. You have it in your power to do this, or, on the other hand, you may make my old age a happy one by the knowledge that the lad is mated with a good woman, and has attained the object on which his whole mind and heart are set.”

“Oh, I can’t, I can’t. Do let the matter drop.”

“Think it over,” the old man said. “Look at it from every point of view. Remember that the love of an honest man is not to be lightly spurned. I am naturally anxious about it, for my future happiness, as well as his, depends upon your decision.”

John Girdlestone was fairly satisfied with this interview. It seemed to him that his ward was rather less decided in her refusal at the end of it, and that his words had had some effect upon her, which might possibly increase with reflection.

“Give her a little time now,” was his advice to his son. “I think she will come round, but she needs managing.”

“If I could get the money without taking her it would be better for me,”

Ezra said with an oath.

“And better for her too,” remarked John Girdlestone grimly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. SCULLY OF MORRISON’S.

One day Major Tobias Clutterbuck was sitting at the window of his little room smoking his cigarette and sipping his glass of wine, as was his custom if times were reasonably good. While thus agreeably employed he chanced to look across the road and perceived a little fringe of dark hair, and a still darker eye, which surveyed him round the border of one of the curtains which flanked a window opposite. The gallant major was much interested in this apparition, and rose to make a closer inspection of it, but, alas! before he could focus it with his eye-glass it was gone! He bent his gaze resolutely in that direction for a long time, and smoked at least half a dozen cigarettes, besides finishing the bottle of wine; but although he thought he saw certain flittings and whiskings of garments in the dark background of the opposite room, he could not make out anything more definite.

Next day the soldier was on the look-out at the same hour, and was rewarded by the appearance of two eyes, very mischievous and dangerous ones too, which were set in a buxom and by no means unprepossessing face. The lady who owned these charms looked very deliberately up the street, and very deliberately down the street, after which she bethought herself to look across the street, and started to perceive a stout, middle-aged gentleman, with a fiery face, who was looking at her with an expression of intense admiration. So much alarmed was she that she vanished behind the curtains and the major feared that he would see her no more. Fortunately, however, it became evident that the lady’s alarm was not very overpowering, for within five minutes she was back at the window, where her eyes again fell upon the beaming face and jaunty figure of the major, who had posed himself in a striking attitude, which was somewhat marred by the fact that he was still enveloped in his purple dressing-gown. This time her eyes lingered a little longer than before and the suspicion of a smile appeared upon her features. On this the major smiled and bowed, and she smiled also, showing a pretty little line of white teeth as she did so. What the veteran’s next move might have been no one can tell, for the lady solved the problem by disappearing, and this time permanently. He was very well satisfied, however, and chuckled much to himself while arraying himself in his long frock coat and immaculate collar before setting out for the club. He had been a sly old dog in his day, and had followed Venus almost as much as he had Mars during his chequered career.

All day the recollection of this little episode haunted him. So much preoccupied was he at the club that he actually played out the thirteenth trump upon his partner's long suit and so sacrificed the game — being the first and only time that he was ever known to throw away a point. He told Von Baumser all about it when he came back.

"She's a demned foine-looking woman, whoever she may be," he remarked, at they sat together before turning in. "Be George! she's the foinest woman I've seen for a long time."

"She's a window," said the German.

"A what?"

"A window — the window of an engineer."

"Is it a widow you mane? What d'ye know about her? What's her name, and where does she come from?"

"I have heard from the slavey that a win — a widow lives over dere in those rooms. She boards mit Madame Morrison, and that window belongs to her privacy zimmer — dat is, chamber. As to her name, I have not heard it, or else I disremember it."

"Ged!" said the major, "she'd eyes that looked right through ye, and a figure like Juno."

"She's vierzig if she's a day — dat is, forty," Von Baumser remarked.

"Well, if she is, me boy, a woman of forty is just in the proime o' loife. If you'd seen her at the window, she would have taken ye by storm. She stands like this, and she looks up like this, and then down in this way." The major pursed up his warlike features into what he imagined to be an innocent and captivating expression. Then she looks across and sees me, and down go the lids of her eyes, like the shutting off of a bull's-eye lantern. Then she blushed and stole just one more glance at me round the corner of the curtain. She had two peeps, the divil a doubt of it."

"Dat is very good," the German said encouragingly.

"Ah, me boy, twinty years ago, when I was forty inches round the chest and thirty-three round the waist, I was worth looking at twice. Bedad, when a man gets ould and lonely he sees what a fool he was not to make better use of his time when he'd the chance."

"Mein Gott!" cried Von Baumser. "You don't mean to say that you would marry suppose you had the chance?"

"I don't know," the major answered reflectively.

"The vomens is not to be trusted," the German said sadly. "I knew a voman in my own country which was the daughter of a man dat kept a hotel — and she and I was promised to be married to each others. Karl Hagelstein, he was to be vat you call my best man. A very handsome man was Karl, and I sent him often mit little presents of one thing or another to my girl, for there were reasons why I could not go myself. He was nicer than me because my hair was red, and pretty soon she began to like him, and he liked her too. So the day before the vedding she went down the Rhine to Frankfort by the boat, and he went down by train, and there they met and was married the one to the other."

"And what did you do?" the major asked with interest.

"Ah, dat was the most worst thing of all, for I followed them mit a friend of mine, and when we caught them I did not let her know, but I called him out of his hotel, and I told him that he must fight me. Dat vos a mistake. I should have done him an insult, and then he vould have had to ask me to fight, and I could have chosen my own veapon. As it was he chose swords, for he knew veil that I knew nothing of them, and he had been the best fencer in the whole of his University. Then we met in the morning, and before I had time to do anything he ran me through the left lung. I have shown you the mark of it. After dat I vas in bed for two month and more, and it still hurts me ven de veather is cold. That is vat they call satisfaction," Baumser added, pulling his long red beard reflectively. "To me it has ever seemed the most dissatisfactory thing that could be imagined."

"I don't wonder you're afraid of the women after that," said the major, laughing. "There are plenty of good women in the world, though, if you have the luck to come across them. D'ye know a young fellow called Dimsdale — ? Ah, you wouldn't, but I've met him lately at the club. He's got a girl who's the adopted daughter of that same ould Girdlestone that we talk about. I saw the two of them togither one day as happy as a pair of young love birds. Sure, you've only got to look at her face to see that she's as good as gold. I’ll bet that that woman over the strate there is another of the right sort.”

“Dat voman is alvays in your head,” the German said, with a smile. “You shall certainly dream about her to-night. I remember a voman in Germany—” And so these two Bohemians rambled on into the small hours, discoursing upon their past experiences and regaling each other with many reminiscences, some of which, perhaps, are just as well omitted and allowed to sink into oblivion. When the major finally retired for the night, his last thought was of the lady at the window and of the means by which he might contrive to learn something of her.

These proved to be more easy than he anticipated, for next morning, on cross-examining the little servant girl from whom Von Baumser had derived his information, the major found out all that he desired to know. According to this authority, the lady was a widow of the name of Scully, the relict of a deceased engineer, and had been staying some little time at Morrison’s, which was the rival establishment to that in which the major and Von Baumser resided.

Armed with this information, the major pondered for some time before deciding upon his course of action. He saw no possible means by which he could gain an introduction to his charming neighbour unless he had recourse to some daring strategem. “Audace et toujours audace” had always been the soldier’s motto. He rose from his chair, discarded his purple gown, and arrayed himself in his best attire. Never had he paid such attention to his toilet. His face was clean shaven and shining, his sparse hairs were laid out to the best advantage, his collar spotless, his frock coat oppressively respectable, and his tout ensemble irreproachable. “Be George!” he said to himself, as he surveyed himself in the small lodging-house glass, “I’d look as young as Baumser if I had some more hair on me head. Bad cess to the helmets and shakoes that wore it all off.”

When his toilet was fully completed and rounded off by the addition of a pair of light gloves and an ebony stick with a silver head, the veteran strode forth with a bold front, but with considerable trepidation at his heart; for when is a man so seasoned as to have no misgivings when he makes the first advances to a woman who really attracts him? Whatever the major’s inward feelings may have been, however, he successfully concealed them as he rang the bell of the rival lodging-house and inquired of the servant whether Mrs. Scully was at home.

"Yes, sir, she is," said the slavey, with a frightened bob, which was a tribute to the major's martial mien and gorgeous attire.

"Would you tell her that I should like to see her," said the major boldly. "I shan't detain her a moment. Here is my card — Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of the 119th Light Infantry."

The servant disappeared with the card, and presently returned with a request that he would step up. The old soldier stumped his way upstairs with the firm footfall of one who has taken a thing in hand and means to carry it through at all hazard. As he ascended, it seemed to him that he heard the sound of feminine laughter in the distance. If so, it could hardly have come from the lady whom he was in quest of, for he was shown into a large and well-furnished room, where she sat looking demure and grave enough, as did another young lady who was crocheting on the ottoman beside her.

The major made his most courtly bow, though he felt very much as the Spaniards may be supposed to have done when they saw their ships blazing behind them. "I trust you will excuse this intrusion on my part," he began. "I happened to hear that a lady of the name of Scully was stopping here."

"My name is Scully, sir," said the lady, whose dark eyes had allured the major to this feat of daring.

"Then perhaps, madam," the veteran said with another bow, "you will allow me to ask you whether you are any relation to Major-gineral Scully, of the Indian Sappers?"

"Pray take a seat, Major — Major Clutterbuck," said Mrs. Scully, referring to his card, which she still held in her very well-formed little hand. "Major-general Scully, did you say? Dear me! I know that one of my husband's relations went into the army, but we never heard what became of him. A major-general, is he? Whoever would have thought it!"

"As dashing a souldier, madam," said the major, warming into eloquence, "as ever hewed a way through the ranks of the enemy, or stormed the snow-clad passes of the Himalayas."

"Fancy!" ejaculated the young lady with the crochet needle.

"Many a time," continued the soldier, "he and I after some hard-fought battle have slept togither upon the blood-stained ground wrapped in the same martial cloak."

"Fancy!" cried both ladies in chorus; and they could not have selected a more appropriate interjection.

“And when at last he died,” the major went on with emotion, “cut in two with a tulwar in a skirmish with hill tribes, he turned to me—”

“After being cut in two?” interrupted the younger lady.

“He turned to me,” said the major inflexibly, “and putting his hand in mine, he said, with his last breath, ‘Toby’ — that was what he always called me—’Toby,’ he said, ‘I have a—’ Your husband was his brother, I think you said, ma’am?”

“No, it was Mr. Scully’s uncle who went into the army.”

“Ah, quite so. ‘I have a nephew in England,’ he said, ‘who is very dear to me. He is married to a charming woman. Search out the young couple, Toby. Guard over them. Protict them!’ Those were his last words, madam. Next moment his sowl had fled. When I heard your name casually mintioned I could not feel satisfied in me mind until I had come across and ascertained if you were the lady in question.”

Now, this narrative not only surprised the widow, which was not unnatural, seeing that it was entirely an invention of the old soldier’s, but it appealed to her weakest point. The father of the deceased Scully had been of plebeian origin, so that the discovery in the family of a real major-general — albeit he was dead — was a famous windfall, for the widow had social ambitions which hitherto she had never been able to gratify. Hence she smiled sweetly at the veteran in a way which stimulated him to further flights of mendacity.

“Sure he and I were like brothers,” he said. “He was a man that any one might well be proud to know. Commander-in-chief said to me once, ‘Clutterbuck,’ says he, ‘I don’t know what we’d do if we had a European war. I’ve no one I can rely on,’ says he. ‘There’s Scully,’ says I. ‘Right,’ says he, ‘Scully would be our man.’ He was terribly cut up when this occurred. ‘Here’s a blow to the British army!’ he remarked, as he looked down at him where he lay with a bullet through his head — he did, madam, be Jove!”

“But, major, I understood you to say that he was cut in two?”

“So he was. Cut in two, and shot and mortally wounded in a dozen places besides. Ah, if he could have foreseen that I should have met you he would have died happy.”

“It’s strange he never let us know of his existence when he was alive,” the widow remarked.

"Pride, madam, pride! 'Until I reach the top of the tree, Toby,' he used to say, 'I shall niver reveal myself to me brother.'"

"Nephew," interpolated the widow.

"Quite so—' I shall niver reveal myself to me nephew.' He said those very words to me only a few minutes before the fatal shell struck him."

"A shell, major? You mean a bullet."

"A shell, madam, a shell," said the major with decision.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Scully, with a somewhat bewildered expression. "How very sad it all is. We must thank you very much, Major Bottletop—"

"Clutterbuck," said the Major.

"I beg pardon, Major Clutterbuck. It was very kind of you to call upon us in this friendly way and to give us these details. Of course, when a relative dies, even though you don't know much about him, still it is interesting to have a clear account of how it all happened. Just fancy, Clara," continued the widow, drawing her handkerchief from her reticule and mopping one of her eyes with it. "Just fancy the poor fellow being cut in two with a bullet far away in India and him just speaking about Jack and me a few minutes before. I am sure we must thank Major Bottlenose—"

"Clutterbuck, madam," cried the major with some indignation.

"I really beg pardon. We must thank him, Clara, for having told us about it and for having called."

"Do not thank me, me dear Mrs. Scully," said the major, clearing his throat and waving his stubby hand deprecatingly. "I have already had me reward in having the pleasure and honour of making your acquaintance and of coming nearer to those charums which I had alriddy admired from a distance."

"Oh, auntie, listen to that!" cried Clara, and both ladies giggled.

"Not forgetting yours, Miss-Miss—"

"Miss Timms," said Mrs. Scully. "My brother's daughter."

"Not forgetting your charums, Miss Timms," continued the major, with a bow and a flourish. "To a lonely man like meself, the very sight of a lady is like dew to a plant. I feel stringthened, madam, vitalised, invigorated." The major puffed out his chest and looked apoplectically tender over his high white collar.

"The chief object of me visit," the old soldier said after a pause, "was to learn whether I could be of any assistance to you in any way. Afther your sad bereavement, of which I have heard, it may be that even a comparative stranger may be of service in business matters."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, major," the widow answered. "Since poor Jack died everything has been in disorder. If it wouldn't trouble you, I should very much like your advice on some future occasion. I'll ask your opinion when I have cleared up things a little myself. As to these lawyers, they think of their own interests, not of yours."

"Quite so," said the major sympathetically.

"There's the fifteen hundred of poor Jack's insurance. That's not laid out yet."

"Fifteen hundred!" said the major. "That's seventy-five pounds a year at five per cint."

"I can get better interest than that," said the widow gaily. "I've got two thousand laid out at seven per cent. — haven't I, Clara?"

"Safe, too," said the girl.

"The deuce you have!" thought the major.

"So, when we are making arrangements, I'll ask your assistance and advice, Major Tanglebobs. I know that we poor women are very bad at business."

"I shall look forward to the day," said the major gallantly, rising and taking up his hat. He was very well satisfied with his little ruse and his success in breaking the ice.

"Be George!" he remarked to Von Baumser that evening, "she's got money as well as her looks. It's a lucky man that gits her."

"I vill bet dat you ask her for to marry you," Von Baumser said with a smile.

"I'll bet that she refuses me if I do," answered the major despondently, in spite of which he retired that night feeling considerably more elated than on the preceding evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BACK IN BOHEMIA.

Fortune had been smiling upon the Bohemians of late. Ever since the major’s successful visit to Fenchurch Street he had been able to live in a state of luxury to which he had long been unaccustomed. His uncle, the earl, too, had condescended to think of his humble relative, and had made a small provision for him, which, with his other resources, removed all anxiety as to the future. Von Baumser had his fair share in this sudden accession of prosperity. The German had resumed his situation as commercial clerk and foreign correspondent to Eckermann & Co., so that his circumstances had also improved. The pair had even had some conversation as to the expediency of migrating into larger and more expensive lodgings, but the major’s increasing intimacy with his fair neighbour opposite stood in the way of a change. In any case, they were loth to leave their fourth floor, and to have the trouble of moving their effects.

These same effects were the pride of Major Clutterbuck’s heart. Small as their sanctum was, it was a very museum of curious objects brought from every part of the world, most of them of little intrinsic value, but all possessing a charm of association to their owner. They were his trophies of travel, battle, and the chase. From the bison rug and tiger skin upon the floor to the great Sumatran bat which hung head downwards, as in the days of its earthly existence, from the ceiling, there was not an object but had its own special history. In one corner was an Afghan matchlock, and a bundle of spears from the southern seas; in another a carved Indian paddle, a Kaffir assegai, and an American blowpipe, with its little sheaf of poisoned arrows. Here was a hookah, richly mounted, and with all due accessories, just as it was presented to the major twenty years before by a Mahommedan chieftain, and there was a high Mexican saddle on which he had ridden through the land of the Aztecs. There was not a square foot of the walls which was not adorned by knives, javelins, Malay kreeses, Chinese opium pipes, and such other trifles as old travellers gather round them. By the side of the fire rested the campaigner’s straight regulation sword in its dim sheath — all the dimmer because the companions occasionally used it as a poker when that instrument happened to be missing.

“It’s not the value of thim,” the major remarked, glancing round the apartment, “but, bedad, there’s not one of the lot that has not got a story tacked on to it. Look at that bear’s head now, that’s grinning at ye from over the door. That’s a Thibet bear, not much bigger than a Newfoundland dog, but as fierce as a grizzly. That’s the very one that clawed Charley Travers, of the 49th. Ged, he’d have been done for if I hadn’t got me Westley Richards to bear on him. ‘Duck man I duck!’ I cried, for they were so mixed that I couldn’t tell one from the other. He put his head down, and I caught the brute right between the eyes. Ye can see the track of the bullet on the bone.”

The major paused, and the pair smoked meditatively, for Baumser had returned from the City, and the twilight was falling and everything conduced to tobacco and reverie.

“See that necklace of cowrie shells hanging beside it,” continued the veteran, waving his cigarette in that direction; “that came from the neck of a Hottentot woman — a black Vanus, be Jove! We were trekking up country before the second Kaffir war. Made an appintment — could not go — orderly duty — so sent a trusty man to tell her. He was found next day with twenty assegais in his body. She was a decoy duck, bedad, and the whole thing a plant.”

“Mein Gott!” Von Baumser ejaculated. “What a life you have led! I have lived with you now many months and heard you tell many tales, but ever there are fresh ones.”

“Yes, a strange life,” answered the major, stretching out his gaitered legs and gazing up at the ceiling. I niver thought to be stranded in me ould age. If I hadn’t commuted I’d have had a fair pinsion, but I drew me money in a lump sum, and went to Monte Carlo to break the bank. Instead o’ that the bank broke me, and yet I believe me system was correct enough, and I must have won if I had had more capital.”

“There is many says dat,” grunted Von Baumser doubtfully.

“I believe it for all that,” the major continued. “Why, man, I was always the luckiest chap at cards. I depinded on me skill principally, but still I had luck as well. I remimber once being becalmed for a fortnight in the Bay of Biscay in a small transport. Skipper and I tried to kill time by playing nap, and we had the stakes low enough at first, but they soon grew higher, for he kept trying to cover his losses. Before the ind of the two weeks I cleared out of him nearly all he had in the world. ‘Look here, Clutterbuck,’ he said at last, looking mighty white about the gills, ‘this ship that we are in is more than half mine. I am chief owner. I’ll stake me share of the ship on the next game against all that I have lost.’ ‘Done!’ said I, and shuffled, cut, and dealt. He went four on three highest trumps, and an ace, and I held four small trumps. ‘It’s a bad job for my creditors,’ he said, as he threw his hand down. Ged! I started on that vyage a poor captain, and I came into port very fairly well off, and sailing in me own ship, too! What d’ye think of that?”

“Wunderbar!” ejaculated the German. “And the captain?”

“Brandy, and delirium tremens,” the major said, between the puffs of his cigarette. “Jumped overboard off Finisterre, on the homeward vyage. Shocking thing, gamblin’ — when you lose.”

“Ach Gott! And those two knives upon the wall, the straight one and the one with the crook; is there a history about them?”

“An incident,” the major answered languidly. “Curious, but true. Saw it meself. In the Afghan war I was convoying supplies through the passes, when we were set upon by Afreedees, hillmen, and robbers. I had fifty men of the 27th Native Infantry under me, with a sergeant. Among the Afreedees was a thumping big chief, who stood among the rocks with that very knife in his hand, the long one, shouting insults at our fellows. Our sergeant was a smart little nigger, and this cheek set his blood up. Be jabers! he chucked his gun down, pulled out that curved dagger — a Ghoorkha knife it is — and made for the big hillman. Both sides stopped firing to see the two chaps fight. As our fellow came scrambling up over the rocks, the chief ran at him and thrust with all his stringth. Be jabers! I thought I saw the pint of the blade come out through the sergeant’s back. He managed to twist round though, so as to dodge it. At the same time he hit up from below, and the hillman sprang into the air, looking for all the world like one o’ those open sheep you see outside a butcher’s shop. He was ripped up from stomach to throat. The sight knocked all the fight out of the other spalpeens, and they took to their heels as hard as they could run. I took the dead man’s knife away, and the sergeant sold me his for a few rupees, so there they are. Not much to make a story of, but it was intheresting to see. I’d have bet five to three on the chief.”

“Bad discipline, very bad,” Baumser remarked. “To break the ranks and run mit knives would make my old Unter-offizier Kritzer very mad indeed.” The German had served his time in the Prussian Army, and was still mindful of his training.

“Your stiff-backed Pickelhaubes would have had a poor chance in the
passes,” answered the major. “It was ivery man for himself there.
You might lie, or stand, or do what you liked as long as you didn’t run.
Discipline goes to pieces in a war of that sort.”

“Dat is what you call gorilla warfare,” said Von Baumser, with a proud consciousness of having mastered an English idiom. “For all dat, discipline is a very fine thing — very good indeed. I vell remember in the great krieg — the war with Austria — we had made a mine and were about to fire it. A sentry had been placed just over this, and after the match was lit it was forgotten to withdraw the man. He knew well that the powder beneath him would presently him into the air lift, but since he had not been dismissed in right form he remained until the ausbruch had exploded. He was never seen no more, and, indeed, dat he had ever been dere might well have been forgotten, had it not been dat his nadelgewehr was dere found. Dat was a proper soldier, I think, to be placed in command had he lived.”

“To be placed in a lunatic asylum if he lived,” said the Irishman testily. “Hullo, what’s this?”

The “this” was the appearance of the boarding-house slavey with a very neat pink envelope upon a tray, addressed, in the most elegant of female hands, to “Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of Her Majesty’s Hundred and Nineteenth.”

“Ah!” cried Von Baumser, laughing in his red beard, “it is from a woman. You are what the English call a sly hog, a very sly hog — or, I should say, dog, though it is much the same.”

“It’s for you as well as for me. See here. ‘Mrs. Lavinia Scully presints her compliments to Major Tobias Clutterbuck and to his friend, Mr. Sigismund von Baumser, and trusts that they may be able to favour her with their company on Tuesday evening at eight, to meet a few frinds.’ It’s a dance,” said the major. “That accounts for the harp and the tables and binches and wine cases I saw going in this morning.”

“Will you go?”

“Yes, of course I will, and so shall you. We’d better answer it.”

So in due course an acceptance was sent across to Mrs. Scully’s hospitable invitation.

Never was there such a brushing and scrubbing in the bedroom of a couple of quiet bachelors as occurred some two evenings afterwards in the top story of Mrs. Robins’ establishment. The major’s suit had been pursued unremittingly since his first daring advance upon the widow, but under many difficulties and discouragements. In the occasional chance interviews which he had with his attractive neighbour he became more and more enamoured, but he had no opportunity of ascertaining whether the feeling was mutual. This invitation appeared to promise him the very chance which he desired, and many were the stern resolutions which he formed as he stood in front of his toilet-table and arranged his tie and his shirt front to his satisfaction. Von Baumser, who was arrayed in a dress coat of antiquated shape, and very shiny about the joints, sat on the side of the bed, eyeing his companion’s irreproachable get-up with envy and admiration.

“It fits you beautiful,” he said, alluding to the coat.

“It came from Poole’s,” answered the major carelessly.

“As for me,” said Von Baumser, “I have never used mine in England at all. Truly, as you know, I hate all dances and dinners. I come with you, however, very willingly, for I would not for nothing in the world give offence to the liebchen of my comrade. Since I go, I shall go as a gentleman should.” He looked down as he spoke with much satisfaction at his withered suit of black.

“But, me good fellow,” cried the major, who had now completed his toilet, “you’ve got your tie under your lift ear. It looks very quaint and ornamintal there, but still it’s not quite the place for it. You look as if you were ticketed for sale.”

“They von’t see it unless I puts it out sidevays from under my beard,” the German said apologetically. “However, if you think it should be hidden, it shall be so. How are my stud-buttons? You have them of gold, I see, but mine are of mother-of-oysters.”

“Mother-of-pearl,” said the major, laughing. “They will do very well. There’s the divil of a lot of cabs at their door,” he continued, peering round the corner of the blind. “The rooms are all lighted up, and I can hear them tuning the instruments. Maybe we’d better go across.”

“Vorvarts, then!” said Von Baumser resolutely; and the two set off, the major with a fixed determination that he should know his fate before the evening was over.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GREAT DANCE AT MORRISON'S.

Never in the whole history of Morrison's boarding establishment had such festive preparations been known. The landlady herself had entered heart and soul into the business, and as all the boarders had received invitations for themselves and their friends, they co-operated in every possible manner to make the evening a success. The large drawing-room had been cleared and the floor waxed. This process left it in a very glassy and orthodox condition, as the cook discovered when, on bustling in, the back of her cranium came in violent contact with the boards, while her body described a half-circle with a velocity which completely eclipsed any subsequent feats of agility shown by the dancers in the evening. The saloon had been very tastefully laid out as a supper-room, and numerous other little chambers were thrown open and brightened up to serve as lounging places for those who were fatigued. In the parlour there were two card-tables, and every other convenience for any who preferred sedentary amusements. Altogether both Mrs. Morrison and the boarders, in solemn conclave assembled, agreed that the thing looked very promising, and that it would be a credit to the establishment.

The guests were as varied as the wines, though hardly as select. Mrs. Scully's exuberant hospitality included, as already intimated, not only her own friends, but those of her fellow-boarders, so that from an early hour the rooms began to fill, and by nine o'clock there was hardly space for the dancers. Hansoms and growlers rattled up in a continuous stream and discharged their burdens. There was a carpet down from the kerb to the head of the lodging-house steps, "like r'yalty," as the cook expressed it, and the greengrocer's man in the hall looked so pompous and inflated in his gorgeous attire that his own cabbages would hardly have recognised him. His main defect as a footman was that he was somewhat hard of hearing, and had a marvellous faculty of misinterpreting whatever was said to him, which occasionally led to remarkable results. Thus, when he announced the sporting Captain Livingstone Tuck under the title of Captain Lives-on-his luck, it was felt that he was rather too near the truth to be pleasant. Indeed, the company had hardly recovered from the confusion produced by this small incident when the two Bohemians made their appearance.

Mrs. Scully, who was tastefully arrayed in black satin and lace, stood near the door of the drawing-room, and looked very charming and captivating as she fulfilled her duties as hostess. So thought the major as he approached her and shook her hand, with some well turned compliment upon his lips.

“Let me inthroduce me friend, Herr von Baumser,” he added.

Mrs. Scully smiled upon the German in a way that won his Teutonic heart. “You will find programmes over there,” she explained. “I think the first is a round dance. No, thank you, major; I shall stand out, or there will be no one to receive the people.” She hurried away to greet a party of new arrivals, while the major and Baumser wandered off in search of partners.

There was no want of spirit or of variety in the dancing at Morrison’s. From Mr. Snodder, the exciseman, who danced the original old-fashioned trois-temps, to young Bucklebury, of the Bank, who stationed himself immediately underneath the central chandelier, and spun rapidly round with his partner upon his own axis, like a couple of beetles impaled upon a single pin, every possible variation of the art of waltzing was to be observed. There was Mr. Smith, of the Medical College, rotating round with Miss Clara Timms, their faces wearing that pained and anxious expression which the British countenance naturally assumes when dancing, giving the impression that the legs have suddenly burst forth in a festive mood, and have dragged the rest of the body into it very much against its will. There was the major too, who had succeeded in obtaining Mrs. Scully as a partner, and was dancing as old soldiers can dance, threading his way through the crowded room with the ease begotten by the experience of a lifetime. Meanwhile Von Baumser, at the other end, was floundering about with a broad smile upon his face and an elderly lady tucked under his right arm, while he held her disengaged hand straight out at right angles, as if she had been a banjo. In short, the fun was fast and furious, and waltz followed polka and mazurka followed waltz with a rapidity which weeded out the weaker vessels among the dancers and tested the stamina of the musicians.

Then there was the card-room, whither the Widow Scully and the major and many others of the elders repaired when they found the pace too fast for them. Very snug and comfortable it was, with its square tables, each with a fringe of chairs, and the clean shining cards spread out over their green baize surfaces. The major and his hostess played against Captain Livingstone Tuck and an old gentleman who came from Lambeth, with the result that the gallant captain and his partner rose up poorer and sadder men, which was rather a blow to the former, who reckoned upon clearing a little on such occasions, and had not expected to find himself opposed by such a past master of the art as the major. Then the veteran and another played the hostess and another lady, and the cunning old dog managed to lose in such a natural manner, and to pay up with such a good grace, and with so many pretty speeches and compliments, that the widow's partner was visibly impressed, a fact which, curiously enough, seemed to be anything but agreeable to the widow. After that they all filed off to supper, where they found the dancers already in possession, and there was much crushing and crowding, which tended to do away with ceremony and to promote the harmony of the evening.

If the major had contrived to win favour from Mrs. Lavinia Scully in the early part of the evening, he managed now to increase any advantage he had gained. In the first place he inquired in a very loud voice of Captain Tuck, at the other end of the table, whether that gentleman had ever met the deceased Major-General Scully, and being answered in the negative, he descanted fluently upon the merits of that imaginary warrior. After this unscrupulous manoeuvre the major proceeded to do justice to the wine and to indulge in sporting reminiscences, and military reminiscences, and travelling reminiscences, and social reminiscences, all of which he treated in a manner which called forth the admiration of his audience. Then, when supper had at last been finished, and the last cork drawn and the last glass filled, the dancers went back to their dance and the card-players to their cards, and the major addressed himself more assiduously than ever to the pursuit of the widow.

"I am afraid that you find the rooms very hot, major," she remarked.

"They are rather hot," he answered candidly.

"There is a room here," she said, "where you might be cooler. You might have a cigarette, too. I meant these rooms as smoking-rooms."

"Then you must come, too."

"No, no, major. You must remember that I am the hostess."

"But there is no one to entertain. They are all entertaining each other. You are too unselfish."

“But really, major—”

“Sure you are tired out and need a little rest.”

He held the door open so persuasively that she yielded. It was a snug little room, somewhat retired from the bustle, with two or three chintz-covered chairs scattered round it, and a sofa of the same material at one side. The widow sat down at one end of this sofa, and the major perched himself at the other, looking even redder than usual, and puffing out his chest and frowning, as was his custom upon critical occasions.

“Do light a cigarette?” said Mrs. Scully.

“But the smell?”

“I like it.”

The major extracted one from his flat silver case. His companion rolled a spill and lit it at the gas.

“To one who is as lonely as I am,” she remarked, “it Is a pleasure to feel that one has friends near one, and to serve them even in trifles.”

“Lonely!” said the major, shuffling along the sofa, “I might talk with authority on that point. If I were to turn me toes up to-morrow there’s not a human being would care a thraneen about the mather, unless it were old Von Baumser.”

“Oh, don’t talk so,” cried Mrs. Scully, with emotion.

“It is a fact. I’ve kicked against me fate at times, though. I’ve had fancies of late of something happier and cheerier. They have come on me as I sat over yonder at the window, and, do what I will, I have not been able to git them from me heart. Yit I know how rash I have been to treasure them, for if they fail me I shall feel me loneliness as I niver did before.”

The major paused and cleared his throat huskily, while the widow remained silent, with her head bent and her eyes intent upon the pattern of the carpet.

“These hopes are,” said the major, in a low voice, leaning forward and taking his companion’s little ring-covered hand in his thick, pudgy fingers, “that you will have pity upon me; that you will—”

“Ach, my very goot vriend!” cried Von Baumser heartily, suddenly protruding his hairy head into the room and smiling benignantly.

“Go to the divil!” roared the major, springing furiously to his feet, while the German’s head disappeared like a Jack-in-the-box. “Forgive the warmth of me language,” the veteran continued, apologetically, “but me feelings overcame me. Will you be mine, Lavinia? I am a plain ould soldier, and have little to offer you save a faithful heart, and that is yours, and always will be. Will you make the remainder of me life happy by becoming me wife?” He endeavoured to pass his arm round her waist, but she sprang up from the sofa and stood upon the rug, facing him with an amused and somewhat triumphant smile upon her buxom features.

“Look here, major,” she said, “I am a plain-spoken woman, as my poor Tom that’s dead was a plain-spoken man. Out with it straight, now — have you come after me, or have you come after my money?”

The major was so astonished at this point-blank question, that for a moment he sat speechless upon the sofa. Being a man of ready resource, however, and one who was accustomed to sudden emergencies, he soon recovered himself.

“Yoursilf, of course” cried he. “If you hadn’t a stiver I would do the same.”

“Take care! take care!” said the lady, with a warning finger uplifted.

“You heard of the breaking of the Agra Bank?”

“What of that?”

“Every penny that I had in the world was in it.”

This was facer number two for the campaigner. He recovered himself more quickly from this one, however, and inflated his chest with even more than his usual pomposity.

“Lavinia,” said he, “you have been straight with me, and, bedad, I’ll be so with you? When I first thought of you I was down in the world, and, much as I admired you, I own that your money was an inducement as well as yoursilf. I was so placed that it was impossible for me to think of any woman who had not enough to keep up her own end of the game. Since that time I’ve done bether. How I got it is neither here nor there, but I have a little nist-egg in the bank and see me way to increasing it. You tell me your money’s gone, and I tell you I’ve enough for two; so say the word, acushla, and it’s done.”

“What! without the money?”

“Damn the money?” exclaimed Major Tobias Clutterbuck, and put his arm for the second time around his companion. This time it remained there. What happened after that is neither my business nor the reader’s. Couples who have left their youth behind them have their own little romance quite as much as their juniors, and it is occasionally the more heartfelt of the two.

“What a naughty boy to swear!” exclaimed the widow at last. “Now I must give you a lecture since I have the chance.”

“Bless her mischievous eyes!” cried the major, with delight in every feature of his face. “You shall give me as many lectures as you plase.”

“You must be good, then, Toby, if you are to be my husband. You must not play billiards for money any more.”

“No billiards! Why, pool is worth three or four pound a wake to me.”

“It doesn’t matter. No billiards and no cards, and no racing and no betting. Toby must be very good and behave as a distinguished soldier should do.”

“What are you afther at all?” the major cried. “Sure if I am to give up me pool and whist, how is a distinguished soldier, and, above all, a distinguished soldier’s wife, going to live?”

“We’ll manage, dear,” she said, looking roguishly up into his face.

“I told you that my money was all in the Agra Bank that broke.”

“You did, worse luck!”

“But I didn’t tell you that I had drawn it all out before it broke, Toby dear. It was too bad to put you to such a trial, wasn’t it? but really I couldn’t resist the temptation. Toby shall have money enough without betting, and he shall settle down and tell his stories, and do what he likes without anything to bother him.”

“Bless her heart!” cried the major fervently; and the battered old Bohemian, as he stooped over and kissed her, felt a tear spring to his eyes as he knew that he had come into harbour after life’s stormy tossings.

“No billiards or cards for three months, then,” said the little woman firmly, with her hands round his arm. “None at all mind! I am going into Hampshire on a visit to my cousins in the country, and you shall not see me for that time, though you may write. If you can give me your word of honour when I come back that you’ve given up your naughty ways, why then—”

“What then?”

“Wait till then and you’ll see,” she said, with a merry laugh. “No, really, I won’t stay another moment. Whatever will the guests say? I must, Toby; I really must—” Away she tripped, while the major remained standing where she had left him, feeling a better man than he had done since he was a young ensign and kissed his mother for the last time at the Portsmouth jetty before the great transport carried him off to India.

Everything in the world must have an end, and Mrs. Scully’s dance was no exception to the rule. The day was breaking, however, before the last guests had muffled themselves up and the last hansom dashed away from the door. The major lingered behind to bid farewell, and then rejoined his German friend, who had been compelled to wait at the door for the latchkey.

“Look here, major,” the latter said, when they came into their room, “is it well to tell a Brussian gentleman to go to the devil? You have much offended me. Truly I was surprised that you should have so spoken!”

“Me dear friend,” the old soldier answered, shaking his hand, “I would not hurt your feelings for the world. Bedad, if I come into the room while you are proposing to a lady, you are welcome to use the strongest German verb to me that you can lay your tongue to.”

“You have probosed, then?” cried the good-natured German, forgetting all about his grievance in an instant.

“Yes.”

“And been took — received by her?”

“Yes.”

“Dat Is gloriful!” Von Baumser cried, clapping his hands. “Three hochs for Frau Scully, and another one for Frau Clutterbuck. We must drink a drink on it; we truly must.”

“So we shall, me boy, but it’s time we turned in now. She’s a good woman, and she plays a good hand at whist. Ged! she cleared the trumps and made her long suit to-night as well as ever I saw it done in me life!” With which characteristic piece of eulogy the major bade his comrade good night and retired to his room.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE “COCK AND COWSLIP.”

Tom Dimsdale’s duties were far from light. Not only was he expected to supervise the clerks’ accounts and to treat with the wholesale dealers, but he was also supposed to spend a great part of his time in the docks, overlooking the loading of the outgoing ships and checking the cargo of the incoming ones. This latter portion of his work was welcome as taking him some hours a day from the close counting-house, and allowing him to get a sniff of the sea air — if, indeed, a sniff is to be had on the inland side of Woolwich. There was a pleasing life and bustle, too, in the broad, brown river, with its never-ending panorama of vessels of every size and shape which ebb and flow in the great artery of national life.

So interesting was this liquid highway to Tom’s practical mind, that he would often stand at the head of the wharf when his work was done and smoke a meditative pipe. It was a quiet spot, which had once been busy enough, but was now superseded by new quays and more convenient landing-places. All over it were scattered great rusty anchors, colossal iron chains, deserted melancholy boilers, and other debris which are found in such places, and which might seem to the fanciful to be the shells and skeletons of strange monsters washed up there by the tide. To whom do these things belong? Who has an interest in them? Of what use are they? It appeared to Tom sometimes as if the original owners and their heirs must have all died away, and left these grim relics behind them to any one who might have the charity to remove them.

From this coign of vantage a long reach of the river was visible, and Tom sitting there would watch the fleets of passing vessels, and let his imagination wander away to the broad oceans which they had traversed, and the fair lands under bluer skies and warmer suns from which they had sailed. Here is a tiny steam-tug panting and toiling in front of a majestic three-master with her great black hulk towering out of the water and her masts shooting up until the topmast rigging looks like the delicate web of some Titanic spider. She is from Canton, with tea, and coffee, and spices, and all good things from the land of small feet and almond eyes. Here, too, is a Messagerie boat, the French ensign drooping daintily over her stern, and her steam whistle screeching a warning to some obstinate lighters, crawling with their burden of coal to a grimy collier whose steam-winch is whizzing away like a corncrake of the deep. That floating palace is an Orient boat from Australia. See how, as the darkness falls, a long row of yellow eyes glimmer out from her sides as the light streams through her countless portholes. And there is the Rotterdam packet-boat coming slowly up, very glad to get back into safe waters again, for she has had a wildish time in the North Sea. A coasting brig has evidently had a wilder time still, for her main-topmast is cracked across, and her rigging is full of the little human mites who crawl about, and reef, and splice, and mend.

An old acquaintance of ours was out in that same gale, and is even now making his way into the shelter of the Albert docks. This was none other than the redoubtable Captain Hamilton Miggs, whose ship will persistently keep afloat, to the astonishment of the gallant captain himself, and of every one else who knows anything of her sea-going qualities. Again and again she had been on the point of foundering; and again and again some change in the weather or the steady pumping of the crew had prevented her from fulfilling her destiny. So surprised was the skipper at these repeated interpositions of Providence that he had quite made up his superstitious mind that the ship never would go down, and now devoted himself with a whole heart to his old occupation of drinking himself into delirium tremens and physicking himself out of it again.

The Black Eagle had a fair cargo aboard, and Miggs was proportionately jubilant. The drunken old sea-dog had taken a fancy to Tom’s frank face and honest eyes, and greeted him with effusion when he came aboard next morning.

“Knock me asunder, but you look rosy, man!” he cried. “It’s easy to see that you have not been lying off Fernando Po, or getting the land mist into your lungs in the Gaboon.”

“You look well yourself, captain,” said Tom.

“Tolerable, tolerable. Just a touch of the jumps at times.”

“We can begin getting our cargo out, I suppose? I have a list here to check it. Will you have the hatches off at once?”

“No work for me,” said Captain Hamilton Miggs with decision. “Here, Sandy — Sandy McPherson, start the cargo, will ye, and stir your great

Scotch bones. I’ve done enough in bringing this sieve of a ship all the way from Africa, without working when I am in dock.”

McPherson was the first mate, a tall, yellow-bearded Aberdonian. “I’ll see t’it,” he said shortly. “You can gang ashore or where you wull.”

“The Cock and Cowslip,” said the captain, “I say, you — Master Dimsdale — when you’re done come up an’ have a glass o’ wine with me. I’m only a plain sailor man, but I’m damned if my heart ain’t in the right place. You too, McPherson — you’ll come up and show Mr. Dimsdale the way. Cock and Cowslip, corner o’ Sextant Court.” The two having accepted his invitation, the captain shuffled off across the gangway and on to terra firma.

All day Tom stood at the hatchway of the Black Eagle, checking the cargo as it was hoisted out of her, while McPherson and his motley assistants, dock labourers, seamen, and black Kroomen from the coast, worked and toiled in the depths below. The engine rattled and snorted, and the great chain clanked as it was lowered into the hold.

“Make fast there!” cries the mate.

“Aye, aye, sir!”

“All right?”

“All right, sir.”

“Hoist away!”

And clank, clank went the chain again, and whir-r-r the engine, and up would come a pair of oil casks, as though the crane were some giant forceps which was plucking out the great wooden teeth of the vessel. It seemed to Tom, as he stood looking down, note-book in hand, that some of the actual malarious air of the coast had been carried home in the hold, so foul and close were the smells evolved from it. Great cockchafers crawled about over the packages, and occasionally a rat would scamper over the barrels, such a rat as is only to be found in ships which hail from the tropics. On one occasion too, as a tusk of ivory was being hoisted out, there was a sudden cry of alarm among the workers, and a long, yellow snake crawled out of the cavity of the trunk and writhed away into the darkness. It is no uncommon thing to find the deadly creatures hibernating in the hollow of the tusks until the cold English air arouses them from their torpor, to the cost occasionally of some unhappy stevedore or labourer.

All day Tom stood amid grease and steam, bustle and blasphemy, checking off the cargo, and looking to its conveyance to the warehouses. At one o’clock there was a break of an hour for dinner, and then the work went on until six, when all hands struck and went off to their homes or to the public-house according to inclination. Tom and the mate, both fairly tired by their day’s work, prepared to accept the captain’s invitation, and to meet him up in his quarters. The mate dived down into his cabin, and soon reappeared with his face shining and his long hair combed into some sort of order.

“I’ve been performing my ablutions,” he said, rolling out the last word with great emphasis and pomposity, for, like many Scotchmen, he had the greatest possible reverence for a sonorous polysyllable. Indeed, in McPherson, this national foible was pushed to excess, for, however inappropriate the word, he never hesitated to drag it into his conversation if he thought it would aid in the general effect.

“The captain,” he continued, “has been far from salubrious this voyage.

He’s aye complainin’ o’ his bodily infirmities.”

“Hypochondriacal, perhaps,” Tom remarked.

The Scotchman looked at his companion with a great accession of respect.

“My certie!” he cried. “That’s the best I’ve heard since a word that
Jimmy M’Gee, of the Corisco, said the voyage afore last. Would you
kindly arteeculate it again.”

“Hypochondriacal,” said Tom laughing heartily.

“Hypo-chon-driacal,” the mate repeated slowly. “I shouldn’t think Jimmy M’Gee kens that, or he’d ha’ communicated it to me. I shall certainly utilize it, and am obleeged to you for namin’ it.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Tom. “I’ll let you have as many long words as you like, if you are a collector of them. But what is the matter with the captain?”

“It’s aye the drink,” the mate said gravely. “I can tak’ my modicum mysel’ and enjoy it, but that’s no the same as for a man to lock himself up in his cabin, and drink rum steady on from four bells in the mornin’ watch to eight bells in the evenin’. And then the cussin’, and prayin’, and swearin’ as he sets up is just awfu’. It’s what might weel be described as pandemoniacal.”

“Is he often like that, then?” Tom asked.

“Often! Why, he’s never anything else, sir. And yet he’s a good seaman too, and however fu’ he may be, he keeps some form o’ reckoning, and never vera far oot either. He’s an ambeequosity to me, sir, for if I took a tithe o’ the amount I’d be clean daft.”

“He must be dangerous when he is like that?” Tom remarked.

“He is that. He emptied a sax-shooter down the deck last bout he had, and nigh perforated the carpenter. Another time he scoots after the cook — chased him with a handspike in his hand right up the rigging to the cross-trees. If the cook hadn’t slid down the backstay of the mast, he’d ha’ been obeetuarised.”

Tom could not refrain from laughing at the last expression. “That’s a new word,” he said.

“Ha!” his companion cried with great satisfaction, “it is, is it? Then we are quits now on the hypochondriacal.” He was so pleased that he chuckled to himself for some minutes in the depths of his tawny beard. “Yes,” he continued at last, “he is dangerous to us at times, and he is dangerous to you. This is atween oorsels, as man to man, and is said withoot prejudice, but he do go on when he is in they fits aboot the firm, and aboot insurances, and rotten ships, and ither such things, which is all vera well when sequestrated amang gentlemen like oorsels, but sounds awfu’ bad when it fa’s on the ignorant tympanums of common seamen.”

“It’s scandalous,” Tom said gravely, “that he should spread such reports about his employer. Our ships are old, and some of them, in my opinion, hardly safe, but that’s a very different thing from implying, as you hint, that Mr. Girdlestone wishes them to go down.”

“We’ll no argue aboot that,” said the canny Scot. “Muster Girdlestone kens on which side his bread is buttered. He may wish ‘em to sink or he may wish ‘em to swim. That’s no for us to judge. You’ll hear him speak o’t to-night as like as not, for he’s aye on it when he’s half over. Here we are, sir. The corner edifice wi’ the red blinds in the window.”

During this conversation the two had been threading their way through the intricate and dirty lanes which lead up from the water side to the outskirts of Stepney. It was quite dark by the time that they reached a long thoroughfare, lined by numerous shops, with great gas flares outside them. Many of these belonged to dealers in marine stores, and the numerous suits of oil-skin, hung up for exhibition, swung to and fro in the uncertain light, like rows of attenuated pirates. At every corner was a great public-house with glittering windows, and a crowd of slatternly women and jersey-clad men elbowing each other at the door. At the largest and most imposing of these gin-palaces the mate and Dimsdale now pulled up.

“Come in this way,” said McPherson, who had evidently paid many a visit there before. Pushing open a swinging door, he made his way into the crowded bar, where the reek of bad spirits and the smell of squalid humanity seemed to Tom to be even more horrible than the effluvium of the grease-laden hold.

“Captain Miggs in?” asked McPherson of a rubicund, white-aproned personage behind the bar.

“Yes, sir. He’s in his room, sir, and expectin’ you. There’s a gent with him, sir, but he told me to send you up. This way, sir.”

They were pushing their way through the crowd to reach the door which led behind the bar, when Tom’s attention was arrested by the conversation of a very seedy-looking individual who was leaning with his elbows upon the zinc-covered counter.

“You take my tip,” he said to an elderly man beside him. “You stick to the beer. The sperits in here is clean poison, and it’s a sin and a shame as they should be let sell such stuff to Christian men. See here — see my sleeve!” He showed the threadbare cuff of his coat, which was corroded away in one part, as by a powerful acid. “I give ye my word I done that by wiping my lips wi’ it two or three times after drinkin’ at this bar. That was afore I found out that the whisky was solid vitriol. If thread and cotton can’t stand it, how’s the linin’ of a poor cove’s stomach, I’d like to know?”

“I wonder,” thought Tom to himself, “if one of these poor devils goes home and murders his wife, who ought to be hung for it? Is it he, or that smug-faced villain behind the bar, who, for the sake of the gain of a few greasy coppers, gives him the poison that maddens him?” He was still pondering over this knotty point when they were ushered into the captain’s room.

That worthy was leaning back in a rocking-chair with his feet perched upon the mantelpiece and a large glass of rum arid water within reach of his great leathery hand. Opposite him, in a similar chair and with a similar glass, was no less an individual than our old acquaintance, Von Baumser. As a mercantile clerk in the London office of a Hamburg firm the German was thrown into contact with the shippers of the African fleet, and had contracted a special alliance with the bibulous Miggs, who was a social soul in his hours of relaxation.

“Come in, my hearties, come in!” he cried huskily. “Take a seat, Mr. Dimsdale. And you, Sandy, can’t you bring yourself to your berth without being asked? You should know your moorings by this time. This is my friend, Mr. Von Baumser from Eckermann’s office.”

“And dis, I think, is Mr. Dimsdale,” said the German, shaking hands with Tom. “I have heard my very goot vriend, Major Clutterbuck, speak of your name, sir.”

“Ah, the old major,” Tom answered. “Of course, I remember him well.”

“He is not so very old either,” said Von Baumser, in a somewhat surly voice. “He has been took by a very charming and entirely pleasant woman, and they are about to be married before three months, the one to the other. Let me tell you, sir, I, who have lived with him so long, dat I have met no man for whom I have greater respect than for the major, however much they give him pills at a club or other such snobberies.”

“Fill your glasses,” Miggs broke in, pushing over the bottle of rum. “There are weeds in that box — never paid duty, either the one or the other. By the Lord, Sandy, a couple of days ago we hardly hoped ever to be yarning here.”

“It was rather beyond our prognostication, sir,” said the mate, taking a pull at his rum.

“It was that! A nasty sea on, Mr. Dimsdale, sir, and the old ship so full o’ water that she could not rise to it. They were making a clean breach over us, and we lost nigh everything we could lose.”

“I suppose you’ll have her thoroughly repaired now?” Tom remarked.

Both the skipper and the mate laughed heartily at the observation.

“That wouldn’t do, Sandy, would it?” said Miggs, shaking his head.

“We couldn’t afford to have our screw cut down like that.”

“Cut down! You don’t mean to say you are paid in proportion to the rottenness of the ships?”

“There ain’t no use makin’ a secret of it among friends,” said Miggs. “That’s just how the land lies with us. A voyage or two back I spoke to Mr. Girdlestone, and I says to him, says I, ‘Give the ship an overhauling,’ says I. ‘Well and good,’ says he, ‘but it will mean so much off your wage,’ says he, ‘and the mate’s wage as well.’ I put it to him straight and strong, but he stuck at that. So Sandy and me, we put our heads together, and we ‘greed It was better to take fifteen pound and the risk, than come down to twelve pound and safety.”

“It is scandalous!” cried Tom Dimsdale hotly. “I could not have believed it.”

“God bless ye! it’s done every day, and will be while there is insurance money to be gained,” said Miggs, blowing a blue cloud up to the ceiling. “It’s an easy thing to turn a few thousands a year while there are old ships to be bought, and offices which will insure them above their value. There was D’Arcy Campbell, of the Silvertown — what a trade that man did! He was smart — tarnation smart! Collisions was his line, and he worked ‘em well. There warn’t a skipper out of Liverpool as could get run down as nat’ral as he could.”

“Get run down?”

“Aye. He’d go lolloping about in the Channel if there was any fog on, steering for the lights o’ any steamers or headin’ round for all the fog whistles if it was too thick to see. Sooner or later, as sure as fate, he’d get cut down to the water’s edge. Lor’, it was a fine game! Half a ‘yard o’ print about his noble conduc’ in the newspapers, and maybe a leader about the British tar and unexpected emergencies. It once went the length o’ a subscription. Ha! ha!” Miggs laughed until he choked.

“And what became of this British star?” asked the German.

“He’s still about. He’s in the passenger trade now.”

“Potztausand!” Von Baumser ejaculated. “I would not go as a passenger with him for something.”

“There’s many a way that it’s done, sir,” the mate added, filling up his glass again, and passing the bottle to the captain. “There’s loadin’ a cranky vessel wi’ grain in bulk without usin’ partition boards. If you get a little water in, as you are bound to do with a ship o’ that kind, the grain will swell and swell until it bursts the seams open, and down ye go. Then there’s ignition o’ coal gas aboard o’ steamers. That’s a safe game, for nobody can deny it. And there are accidents to propellers. If the shaft o’ a propeller breaks in heavy weather it’s a bad look-out. I’ve known ships leave the docks with their propellers half sawn through all round. Lor’, there’s no end o’ the tricks o’ the trade.”

“I cannot believe, however,” said Tom stoutly, “that Mr. Girdlestone connives at such things.”

“He’s on the waitin’ lay,” the seaman answered. “He doesn’t send ‘em down, but he just hangs on, and keeps his insurances up, and trusts in Providence. He’s had some good hauls that way, though not o’ late. There was the Belinda at Cape Palmas. That was five thousand, clear, if it was a penny. And the Sockatoo — that was a bad business! She was never heard of, nor her crew. Went down at sea, and left no trace."

"The crew too!" Tom cried with horror. "But how about yourselves, if what you say is true?"

"We are paid for the risk," said both the seamen, shrugging their shoulders.

"But there are Government inspectors?"

"Ha! ha! I dare say you've seen the way some o' them do their work!" said Miggs.

Tom's mind was filled with consternation at what he had heard. If the African merchant were capable of this, what might he not be capable of? Was his word to be depended on under any circumstances? And what sort of firm must this be, which turned so fair a side to the world and in which he had embarked his fortune? All these thoughts flashed through his mind as he listened to the gossip of the garrulous old sea dogs. A greater shock still, however, was in store for him.

Von Baumser had been listening to the conversation with an amused look upon his good-humoured face. "Ah!" said he, suddenly striking in, "I vill tell you something of your own firm which perhaps you do not know. Have you heard dat Mr. Ezra Girdlestone is about to be married?"

"To be married!"

"Oh yes; I have heard It dis morning at Eckermann's office. I think it is the talk of the City."

"Who's the gal?" Miggs asked, with languid interest.

"I disremember her name," Von Baumser answered. "It is a girl the major has met — the young lady who has lived in the same house, and is vat they call a warder."

"Not — not his ward?" cried Tom, springing to his feet and turning as white as a sheet. "Not Miss Harston? You don't tell me that he is going to marry Miss Harston?"

"Dat is the name. Miss Harston it is, sure enough."

"It is a lie — an infamous lie!" Tom cried hotly.

"So it may be," Von Baumser answered serenely. "I do but say vat I have heard, and heard more than once on good authority."

"If it is true there is villainy in it," cried Tom, with wild eyes, "the blackest villainy that ever was done upon earth. I'll go — I'll see him to-night. By heavens, I shall know the truth!" He rushed furiously downstairs and through the bar. There was a cab near the door. "Drive into London!" he cried; "69, Eccleston Square. I am on fire to be there!" The cabman sprang on the box, and they rattled away as fast as the horse would go.

This sudden exit caused, as may be imagined, considerable surprise in the parlour of the Cock and Cowslip.

"He's a vera tumultuous young man," the mate remarked. "He was off like a clipper in a hurricane."

"I perceive," said Von Baumser, "dat he has left his hat behind him. I do now remember dat I have heard his name spoken with dat of dis very young lady by my good vriend, the major."

"Then he's jealous belike," said Hamilton Miggs, with a knowing shake of the head. "I've felt that way myself before now. I rounded on Billy Barlow, o' the Flying Scud, over that very thing, twelve months ago come Christmas. But I don't think it was the thing for this young chap to cut away and never say 'With your leave,' or 'By your leave,' or as much as 'Good night, gentlemen all.' It ain't what you call straight up an' down."

"It's transcendental," said the mate severely; "that is what I call it."

"Ah, my vriends," the German put in, "when a man is in love you must make excuses for him. I am very sure dat he did mean no offence."

In spite of this assurance Captain Hamilton Miggs continued to be very sore upon the point. It was only by dint of many replenishings of his glass and many arguments that his companions could restore him to his pristine good humour. Meanwhile, the truant was speeding through the night with a fixed determination in his heart that he should have before morning such an understanding, one way or the other, as would never again leave room for a doubt.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CRISIS AT ECCLESTON SQUARE.

His father’s encouraging words had given Ezra Girdlestone fresh heart, and he had renewed his importunities with greater energy than ever. Never surely did any man devote every moment of his time more completely to the winning of a woman’s heart. From morning until night the one idea was ever before his mind and every little want of Kate’s was forestalled with a care and foresight which astonished her. The richest fruit and flowers found their way unexpectedly into her room; her table was littered with the latest books from Mudie’s, and the newest pieces lay upon her music-stand. Nothing which attention and thoughtfulness could do was left undone either by the father or the son.

In spite of these attentions, however, and the frequent solicitations of her guardian, Kate stood firmly to her colours. If the Tom of the present were false, she at least would be true to the memory of the Tom of other days, the lad who had first whispered words of love into her ears. Her ideal should remain with her whatever might befall. No other man could ever take the place of that.

That Tom was from some unexplained and unaccountable reason false to her appeared to be beyond all question. Her trusting and innocent heart could not dream of the subtle network which was being wound round her. Her secluded life had left her very ignorant of the ways of the world, and the possibility of an elaborate deceit being practised upon her had never occurred to her. From the day that she heard the extract of the letter read by her guardian she never doubted but that such letters were received at the office by the man who professed to love her. How could she hesitate to believe it when it was confirmed by his avoidance of Eccleston Square and of herself? The cause of it all was a mystery which no amount of speculation could clear up. Sometimes the poor girl would blame herself, as is the way of women in such cases. “I have not seen enough of the world,” she would say to herself. “I have none of the charms of these women whom I read of in the novels. No doubt I seemed dull and insipid in his eyes. And yet — and yet—” There always remained at the end of her cogitations the same vague sense of bewilderment and mystery.

She endeavoured as far as possible to avoid Ezra Girdlestone, and stay in her room for the most part on the days when he was at home. He had, however, on the advice of his father, ceased pressing his suit except in the silent manner aforementioned, so that she gradually took courage, and ended by resuming her old habits. In her heart she pitied the young merchant very sincerely, for he was looking haggard and pale. “Poor fellow,” she thought as she watched him, “he certainly loves me. Ah, Tom, Tom! had you only been as constant, how happy we should be!” She was even prompted sometimes to cheer Ezra up by some kind word or look. This he naturally took to be an encouragement to renew his advances. Perhaps he was not far wrong, for if love be wanting pity is occasionally an excellent substitute.

One morning after breakfast the elder Girdlestone called his son aside into the library. “I’ve had a notice,” he said, “as to paying up dividends. Our time is short, Ezra. You must bring matters to a head. If you don’t it will be too late.”

“You mustn’t pick fruit before it is ripe,” the other answered moodily.

“You can try if it is ripe, though. If not, you can try again. I think that your chance is a good one. She is alone in the breakfast-room, and the table has been cleared. You cannot have a better opening. Go, my son, and may Heaven prosper you!”

“Very well. Do you wait in here, and I shall let you know how things go.”

The young man buttoned up his coat, pulled down his cuffs, and walked back into the breakfast-room with a sullen look of resolution upon his dark face.

Kate was sitting in a wicker chair by the window, arranging flowers in a vase. The morning sunlight streaming in upon her gave a colour to her pale face and glittered in her heavy coils of chestnut hair. She wore a light pink morning dress which added to the ethereal effect of her lithe beautiful figure. As Ezra entered she looked round and started at sight of his face. Instinctively she knew on what errand he had come.

“You will be late at Fenchurch Street,” she said, with a constrained smile. “It is nearly eleven now.”

“I am not going to the office to-day,” he answered gravely. “I am come in here, Kate, to know my fate. You know very well, and must have known for some time back, that I love you. If you’ll marry me you’ll make me a happy man, and I’ll make you a happy woman. I’m not very eloquent and that sort of thing, but what I say I mean. What have you to say in answer?” He leaned his broad hands on the back of a chair as he spoke, and drummed nervously with his fingers.

Kate had drooped her head over the flowers, but she looked up at him now with frank, pitying eyes.

“Put this idea out of your head, Ezra,” she said, in a low but firm voice. “Believe me, I shall always be grateful to you for the kindness which you have shown me of late. I will be a sister to you, if you will let me, but I can never be more.”

“And why not?” asked Ezra, still leaning over the chair, with an angry light beginning to sparkle in his dark eyes. “Why can you never be my wife?”

“It is so, Ezra. You must not think of it. I am so sorry to grieve you.”

“You can’t love me, then,” cried the young merchant hoarsely.

“Other women before now would have given their eyes to have had me. Do you know that?”

“For goodness’ sake, then go back to the others,” said Kate, half amused and half angry.

That suspicion of a smile upon her face was the one thing needed to set Ezra’s temper in a blaze. “You won’t have me,” he cried savagely.

“I haven’t got the airs and graces of that fellow, I suppose. You haven’t got him out of your head, though he is off with another girl.”

“How dare you speak to me so?” Kate cried, springing to her feet in honest anger.

“It’s the truth, and you know it,” returned Ezra, with a sneer. “Aren’t you too proud to be hanging on to a man who doesn’t want you — a man that is a smooth-tongued sneak, with the heart of a rabbit?”

“If he were here you would not dare to say so!” Kate retorted hotly.

“Wouldn’t I?” he snarled fiercely.

“No, you wouldn’t. I don’t believe that he has ever been untrue to me. I believe that you and your father have planned to make me believe it and to keep us apart.”

Heaven knows what it was that suddenly brought this idea most clearly before Kate’s mind. Perhaps it was that Ezra’s face, distorted with passion, gave her some dim perception of the wickedness of which such a nature might be capable. The dark face turned so much darker at her words that she felt a great throb of joy at her heart, and knew that this strange new thought which had flashed upon her was the truth.

"You can't deny it," she cried, with shining eyes and clenched hands. "You know that it is true. I shall see him and hear from his own lips what he has to say. He loves me still, and I love him, and have never ceased to love him."

"Oh, you do, do you?" snarled Ezra, taking a step forward, with a devilish gleam in his eyes. "Your love may do him very little good. We shall see which of us gets the best of it in the long run. We'll—" His passion was so furious that he stopped, fairly unable to articulate another word.

With a threatening motion of his hands he turned upon his heel and rushed from the room. As he passed it chanced that Flo, Kate's little Skye terrier, ran across his path. All the brutality of the man's soul rose up in the instant. He raised his heavy boot, and sent the poor little creature howling and writhing under the sofa, whence it piteously emerged upon three legs, trailing the fourth one behind it.

"The brute!" Kate cried, as she fondled the injured animal and poured indignant tears over it. Her gentle soul was so stirred by the cowardly deed that she felt that she could have flown at her late suitor were he still in the room. "Poor little Flo! That kick was meant for me in reality, my little pet. Never mind, dear, there are bright days coming, and he has not forgotten me, Flo. I know it! I know it!" The little dog whined sympathetically, and licked its mistress's hand as though it were looking into its canine future, and could also discern better days ahead.

Ezra Girdlestone, fierce and lowering, tramped into the library, and told his father brusquely of the result of his wooing. What occurred in that interview was never known to any third person. The servants, who had some idea that something was afoot, have recorded that at the beginning of the conversation the bass voice of the son and the high raucous tones of the father were heard in loud recrimination and reproach. Then they suddenly sunk into tones so low that there might have been complete silence in the room for all that any one could tell from the passage outside. This whispered conversation may have lasted the greater part of an hour. At the end of it the young merchant departed for the City. It has been remarked that from that time there came a change over both the father and the son —

a change so subtle that It could hardly be described, though it left its mark upon them both. It was not that the grey, wolfish face of the old man looked even greyer and fiercer, or that the hard, arrogant expression of Ezra deepened into something even more sinister. It was that a shadow hung over both their brows — a vague indefinable shadow — as of men who carry a thought in their minds on which it is not good to dwell.

During that long hour Kate had remained in the breakfast-room, still nursing her injured companion, and very busy with her own thoughts. She was as convinced now that Tom had been true to her as if she had had the assurance from his own lips. Still there was much that was unaccountable — much which she was unable to fathom. A vague sense of the wickedness around her depressed and weighed her down. What deep scheme could these men have invented to keep him away from her during these long weeks? Was he, too, under some delusion, or the victim of some conspiracy? Whatever had been done was certainly connived at by her guardian. For the first time a true estimate of the character of the elder Girdlestone broke upon her, and she dimly realised that the pious, soft-spoken merchant was more to be dreaded than his brutal son. A shudder ran through her whole frame as, looking up, she saw him standing before her.

His appearance was far from reassuring. His hands were clasped behind his back, his head bent forward, and he surveyed her with a most malignant expression upon his face.

“Well done!” he said, with a bitter smile. “Well done! This is a good morning’s work, Miss Harston. You have repaid your father’s friend for the care he has bestowed upon you.”

“My only wish is to leave your house,” cried Kate, with an angry flash in her deep blue eyes. “You are a cruel, wicked, hypocritical old man. You have deceived me about Mr. Dimsdale. I read it in your son’s face, and now I read it in your own. How could you do it — oh, how could you have the heart?”

John Girdlestone was fairly staggered by this blaze of feminine anger in his demure and obedient ward. “God knows,” he said, “whatever my faults may have been, neglect of you has not been among them. I am not immaculate. Even the just man falleth. If I have endeavoured to wean you from this foolish love affair of yours, it has been entirely because I saw that it was against your own interests.”

"You have told lies in order to turn me away from the only man who ever loved me. You and your odious son have conspired to ruin my happiness and break my heart. What have you told him that keeps him away? I shall see him and learn the truth." Kate's face was unnaturally calm and rigid as she faced her guardian's angry gaze.

"Silence!" the old man cried hoarsely. "You forget your position in this house. You are presuming too much upon my kindness. As to this girl's fancy of yours, you may put all thought of it out of your head. I am still your guardian, and I should be culpably remiss if I ever allowed you to see this man again. This afternoon you shall come with me to Hampshire."

"To Hampshire?"

"Yes. I have taken a small country seat there, where we intend to spend some months of the winter. You shall leave it when you have reconciled yourself to forget these romantic ideas of yours — but not till then."

"Then I shall never leave it," said Kate, with a sigh.

"That will depend upon yourself. You shall at least be guarded there from the advances of designing persons. When you come of age you may follow your own fancies. Until then my conscience demands, and the law allows, that I should spare no pains to protect you from your own folly. We start from Waterloo at four." Girdlestone turned for the door, but looked round as he was leaving the room. "May God forgive you," he said solemnly, raising his lean hands towards the ceiling, "for what you have done this day!"

Poor Kate, left to herself, was much concerned by this fresh misfortune. She knew that her guardian had power to carry out his plan, and that there was no appeal from his decision. What could she do? She had not a friend in the wide world to whom she could turn for advice or assistance. It occurred to her to fly to the Dimsdales at Kensington, and throw herself upon their compassion. It was only the thought of Tom which prevented her. In her heart she had fully exonerated him, yet there was much to be explained before they could be to each other as of old. She might write to Mrs. Dimsdale, but then her guardian had not told her what part of Hampshire they were going to. She finally came to the conclusion that it would be better to wait, and to write when she had reached her destination. In the meantime, she went drearily to her room and began packing, aided by the ruddy-cheeked maid, Rebecca.

At half-past three a cab drove up to the door, and the old merchant stepped out of it. The boxes were thrown upon the top, and the young lady curtly ordered to get in. Girdlestone took his seat beside her, and gave a sign to the cabman to drive on. As they rattled out of the square, Kate looked back at the great gloomy mansion in which she had spent the last three years of her life. Had she known what the future was to bring, it is possible that she would have clung even to that sombre and melancholy old house as to an ark of safety.

Another cab passed through Eccleston Square that evening — a cab which bore a pale-faced and wild-eyed young man, who looked ever and anon impatiently out of the window to see if he were nearing his destination. Long before reaching No. 69 he had opened the door, and was standing upon the step. The instant that the cab pulled up he sprang off, and rang loudly at the great brass bell which flanked the heavy door.

"Is Mr. Girdlestone in?" he asked, as Rebecca appeared at the door.

"No, sir."

"Miss Harston, is she at home?" he said excitedly.

"No, sir. They have both gone away."

"Gone away!"

"Yes. Gone into the country, sir. And Mr. Ezra, too, sir."

"And when are they coming back?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"They are not coming back."

"Impossible!" Tom cried in despair. "What is their address, then?"

"They have left no address. I am sorry I can't help you. Good night, sir." Rebecca closed the door, laughing maliciously at the visitor's bewildered looks. She knew the facts of the case well, and having long been jealous of her young mistress, she was not sorry to find things going wrong with her.

Tom Dimsdale stood upon the doorstep looking blankly into the night. He felt dazed and bewildered. What fresh villainy was this? Was it a confirmation of the German's report, or was it a contradiction of it? Cold beads stood upon his forehead as he thought of the possibility of such a thing. "I must find her," he cried, with clenched hands, and turned away heartsick into the turmoil and bustle of the London streets.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONVERSATION IN THE ECCLESTON SQUARE LIBRARY.

Rebecca, the fresh-complexioned waiting-maid, was still standing behind the ponderous hall door, listening, with a smile upon her face, to young Dimsdale’s retreating footsteps, when another and a brisker tread caught her ear coming from the opposite direction. The smile died away as she heard it, and her features assumed a peculiar expression, in which it would be hard to say whether fear or pleasure predominated. She passed her hands up over her face and smoothed her hair with a quick nervous gesture, glancing down at the same time at her snowy apron and the bright ribbons which set it off. Whatever her intentions may have been, she had no time to improve upon her toilet before a key turned in the door and Ezra Girdlestone stepped into the hall. As he saw her shadowy figure, for the gas was low, he uttered a hoarse cry of surprise and fear, and staggered backwards against the door-post.

“Don’t be afeared, Mister Ezra,” she said in a whisper; “it’s only me.”

“The devil take you!” cried Ezra furiously. “What makes you stand about like that? You gave me quite a turn.”

“I didn’t mean for to do it. I’ve only just been answering of the door. Why, surely you’ve come in before now and found me in the hall without making much account of it.”

“Ah, lass,” answered Ezra, “my nerves have had a shake of late.

I’ve felt queer all day. Look how my hand shakes.”

“Well, I’m blessed!” said the girl, with a titter, turning up the gas. “I never thought to see you afeared of anything. Why, you looks as white as a sheet!”

“There, that’s enough!” he answered roughly. “Where are the others?”

“Jane is out. Cook and William and the boy are downstairs.”

“Come into the library here. They will think that you are up in the bedrooms. I want to have a quiet word or two with you. Turn up that reading lamp. Well, are they gone?”

“Yes, they are gone,” she answered, standing by the side of the couch on which he had thrown himself. “Your father came about three with a cab, and took her away.”

“She didn’t make a fuss?”

“Make a fuss? No; why should she? There’s fuss enough made about her, in all conscience. Oh, Ezra, before she got between us you was kind to me at times. I could stand harsh words from you six days a week, if there was a chance of a kind one on the seventh. But now — now what notice do you take of me?” She began to whimper and to wipe her eyes with a little discoloured pocket-handkerchief.

“Drop it, woman, drop it!” cried her companion testily. “I want information, not snivelling. She seemed reconciled to go?”

“Yes, she went quiet enough,” the girl said, with a furtive sob.

“Just give me a drop of brandy out of that bottle over there — the one with the cork half out. I’ve not got over my start yet. Did you hear my father say anything as to where they were going?”

“I heard him tell the cabman to drive to Waterloo Station.”

“Nothing more?”

“No.”

“Well, if he won’t tell you, I will. They have gone down to Hampshire, my lass. Bedsworth is the name of the place, and it is a pleasant little corner near the sea. I want you to go down there as well to-morrow.”

“Want me to go?”

“Yes; they need some one who is smart and handy to keep house for them.

There is some old woman already, I believe, but she is old and useless. I’ll warrant you wouldn’t take long getting things shipshape. My father intends to stay down there some little time with Miss Harston.”

“And how about you?” the girl asked, with a quick flash of suspicion in her dark eyes.

“Don’t trouble about me. I shall stay behind and mind the business. Some one must be on the spot. I think cook and Jane and William ought to be able to look after me among them.”

“And I won’t see you at all?” the girl cried, with a quiver in her voice.

“Oh yes, you shall. I’ll be down from Saturday to Monday every week, and perhaps oftener. If business goes well I may come down and stay for some time. Whether I do or not may depend upon you.”

Rebecca Taylforth started and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"How can it depend upon me?" she asked eagerly.

"Well," said Ezra, in a hesitating way, "it may depend upon whether you are a good girl, and do what you are told or not. I am sure that you would do anything to serve me, would you not?"

"You know very well that I would, Mister Ezra. When you want anything done you remember it, but if you have no use for me, then there is never a kind look on your face or a kind word from your lips. If I was a dog you could not use me worse. I could stand your harshness. I could stand the blow you gave me, and forgive you for it, from my heart; but, oh! it cut me to the very soul to be standing by and waiting while you were making up to another woman. It was more than I can bear."

"Never mind, my girl," said Ezra in a soothing voice; "that's all over and done with. See what I've brought you." He rummaged in his pocket and produced a little parcel of tissue paper, which he handed to her.

It was only a small silver anchor, with Scotch pebbles inlaid in it. The woman's eyes, however, flashed as she looked at it, and she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

"God bless it and you too!" she said. "I've heard tell as the anchor's the emblem of hope, and so it shall be with me. Oh, Ezra, you may travel far and meet them as can play and can sing and do many a thing as I can't do, but you'll never get one who will love you as dearly and well."

"I know it, my lass, I know it," said Ezra, smoothing down her dark hair, for she had dropped upon her knees beside the couch. "I've never met your equal yet. That's why I want you down at Bedsworth. I must have some one there that I can trust.

"What am I to do down at Bedsworth?" she asked.

"I want you to be Miss Harston's companion. She'll be lonely, and will need some other woman in the house to look after her."

"Curse her!" cried Rebecca, springing to her feet with flashing eyes. "You are still thinking of her, then! She must have this; she must have that! Everything else is as dirt before her. I'll not serve her — so there! You can knock me down if you like."

"Rebecca," said Ezra slowly, "do you hate Kate Harston?"

"From the bottom of my soul," she answered.

"Well, if you hate her, I tell you that I hate her a thousand times more. You thought that I was fond of her. All that is over now, and you may set your mind at ease.”

“Why do you want her so well cared for, then?” asked the girl suspiciously.

“I want some one who feels towards her as I do to be by her side. If she were never to come back from Bedsworth it would be nothing to me.”

“What makes you look at me so strangely?” she said, shrinking away from his intense gaze.

“Never mind. You go. You will understand many things in time which seem strange to you now. At present if you will do what I ask you will oblige me greatly. Will you go?”

“Yes, I will go.”

“There’s a good lass. Give us a kiss, my girl. You have the right spirit in you. I’ll let you know when the train goes to-morrow, and I will write to my father to expect you. Now, off with you, or you’ll have them gossiping downstairs. Good night.”

“Good night, Mister Ezra,” said the girl, with her hand upon the handle of the library door. “You’ve made my heart glad this night. I live in hope — ever in hope.”

“I wonder what the deuce she hopes about,” the young merchant said to himself as she closed the door behind her. “Hopes I’ll marry her, I suppose. She must be of a very sanguine disposition. A girl like that might be invaluable down at Bedsworth. If we had no other need for her, she would be an excellent spy.” He lay for some little time on the couch with bent brow and pursed lips, musing over the possibilities of the future.

While this dialogue had been going on in the library of Eccleston Square, Tom Dimsdale was still wending his way homewards with a feeling of weight in his mind and a presentiment of misfortune which overshadowed his whole soul. In vain he assured himself that this disappearance of Kate’s was but temporary, and that the rumour of an engagement between her and Ezra was too ridiculous to be believed for a moment. Argue it as he would, the same dread, horrible feeling of impending trouble weighed upon him. Impossible as it was to imagine that Kate was false to him, it was strange that on the very day that this rumour reached his ears she should disappear from London. How bitterly he regretted now that he had allowed himself to be persuaded by John Girdlestone into ceasing to communicate with her. He began to realise that he had been duped, and that all these specious promises as to a future consent to their union had been so many baits to amuse him while the valuable present was slipping away. What could he do now to repair the past? His only course was to wait for the morrow and see whether the senior partner would appear at the offices. If he did so, the young man was determined that he should have an understanding with him.

So downcast was Tom that, on arriving at Phillimore Gardens, he would have slipped off to his room at once had he not met his burly father upon the stairs. “Bed!” roared the old man upon hearing his son’s proposition. “Nothing of the sort, sir. Come down into the parlour and smoke a pipe with me. Your mother has been waiting for you all the evening.”

“I am sorry to be late, mother,” the lad said, kissing the old lady.

“I have been down at the docks all day and have been busy and worried.”

Mrs. Dimsdale was sitting in her chair beside the fire, knitting, when her son came in. At the sound of his voice she glanced anxiously up at his face, with all her motherly instincts on the alert.

“What is it, my boy?” she said. “You don’t look yourself. Something has gone wrong with you. Surely you’re not keeping anything secret from your old mother?”

“Don’t be so foolish as that, my boy,” said the doctor earnestly. “If you have anything on your mind, out with it. There’s nothing so far wrong but that it can’t be set right, I’ll be bound.”

Thus pressed, their son told them all that had happened, the rumour which he had heard from Von Baumser at the Cock and Cowslip, and the subsequent visit to Eccleston Square. “I can hardly realise it all yet,” he said in conclusion. “My head seems to be in a whirl, and I can’t reason about it.”

The old couple listened very attentively to his narrative, and were silent some little time after he had finished. His mother first broke the silence. “I was always sure,” she said, “that we were wrong to stop our correspondence at the request of Mr. Girdlestone.”

“It’s easy enough to say that now,” said Tom ruefully. “At the time it seemed as if we had no alternative.”

“There’s no use crying over spilt milk,” remarked the old physician, who had been very grave during his son’s narrative. “We must set to work and get things right again. There is one thing very certain, Tom, and that is that Kate Harston is a girl who never did or could do a dishonourable thing. If she said that she would wait for you, my boy, you may feel perfectly safe; and if you doubt her for one moment you ought to be deuced well ashamed of yourself.”

“Well said, governor!” cried Tom, with beaming face. “Now, that is exactly my own feeling, but there is so much to be explained. Why have they left London, and where have they gone to?”

“No doubt that old scoundrel Girdlestone thought that your patience would soon come to an end, so he got the start of you by carrying the girl off into the country.”

“And if he has done this, what can I do?”

“Nothing. It is entirely within his right to do it.”

“And have her stowed away in some little cottage in the country, with that brute Ezra Girdlestone hanging round her all the time. It is the thought of that that drives me wild.”

“You trust in her, my boy,” said the old doctor. “We’ll try our best in the meantime to find out where she has gone to. If she is unhappy or needs a friend you may be sure that she will write to your mother.”

“Yes, there is always that hope,” exclaimed Tom, in a more cheerful voice. “To-morrow I may learn something at the office.”

“Don’t make the mistake of quarrelling with the Girdlestones. After all, they are within their rights in doing what they appear to have done.”

“They may be within their legal rights,” Tom cried indignantly; “but the old man made a deliberate compact with me, which he has broken.”

“Never mind. Don’t give them an advantage by losing your temper.” The doctor chatted away over the matter for some time, and his words, together with those of his mother, cheered the young fellow’s heart. Nevertheless, after they had retired to their rooms, Dr. Dimsdale continued to be very thoughtful and very grave. “I don’t like it,” he said, more than once. “I don’t like the idea of the poor girl being left entirely in the hands of that pair of beauties. God grant that no harm come of it, Matilda!” a prayer which his good wife echoed with all the strength of her kindly nature.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JOURNEY TO THE PRIORY.

It was already dusk when John Girdlestone and his ward reached Waterloo Station. He gave orders to the guard that the luggage should be stamped, but took care that she should not hear the name of their destination. Hurrying her rapidly down the platform amid the confused heaps of luggage and currents of eager passengers, he pushed her into a first-class carriage, and sprang after her just as the bell rang and the wheels began to revolve.

They were alone. Kate crouched up into the corner among the cushions, and wrapped her rug round her, for it was bitterly cold. The merchant pulled a note-book from his pocket and proceeded by the light of the lamp above him to add up columns of figures. He sat very upright in his seat, and appeared to be as absorbed in his work as though he were among his papers in Fenchurch Street. He neither glanced at his companion nor made any inquiry as to her comfort.

As she sat opposite to him she could not keep her eyes from his hard angular face, every rugged feature of which was exaggerated by the flickering yellow light above him. Those deep-set eyes and sunken cheeks had been familiar to her for years. How was it that they now, for the first time, struck her as being terrible? Was it that new expression which had appeared upon them, that hard inexorable set about the mouth, which gave a more sinister character to his whole face? As she gazed at him an ineffable loathing and dread rose in her soul, and she could have shrieked out of pure terror. She put her hand up to her throat with a gasp to keep down the sudden inclination to cry out. As she did so her guardian glanced over the top of the note-book with his piercing light grey eyes.

“Don’t get hysterical!” he cried. “You have given us trouble enough without that.”

“Oh, why are you so harsh?” she cried, throwing out her arms towards him in eloquent entreaty, while the tears coursed down her cheeks. “What have I done that is so dreadful? I could not love your son, and I do love another. I am so grieved to have offended you. You used to be kind and like a father to me.”

“And a nice return you have made me! ‘Honour your father,’ says the good old Book. What honour did you give me save to disobey every command which I have ever given you. I have to blame myself to some extent for having allowed you to go on that most pernicious trip to Scotland, where you were thrown into the company of this young adventurer by his scheming old fool of a father.”

It would have been a study for a Rembrandt to depict the craggy, strongly lined face of the old merchant, and the beautiful pleading one which looked across at him, with the light throwing strange shadows over both. As he spoke she brushed the tears from her eyes and an angry flush sprang to her cheeks.

“You may say what you like of me,” she said bitterly. “I suppose that is one of your privileges as my guardian. You have no right, however, to speak evil of my friends. ‘He who calleth his brother a fool,’ I think the good old Book says something of that.”

Girdlestone was staggered for a moment by this unexpected counter. Then he took off his broad-brimmed hat and bowed his head with drooping lids.

“Out of the mouths of babes and of sucklings!” he cried. “You are right. I spoke too warmly. It is my zeal for you which betrays me.”

“The same zeal which made you tell me so many things which I now know to be untrue about Mr. Dimsdale,” said Kate, waxing more fearless as her mind turned to her wrongs.

“You are becoming impertinent,” he answered, and resumed his calculations in his note-book.

Kate cowered back into her corner again, while the train thundered and screeched and rattled through the darkness. Looking through the steamy window, nothing was to be seen save the twinkle here and there of the lights of the scattered country cottages. Occasionally a red signal lamp would glare down upon her like the bloodshot eye of some demon who presided over this kingdom of iron and steam. Far behind a lurid trail of smoke marked the way that they had come. To Kate’s mind it was all as weird and gloomy and cheerless even as the thoughts within her.

And they were gloomy enough. Where was she going? How long was she going for? What was she to do when there? On all these points she was absolutely ignorant. What was the object of this sudden flight from London? Her guardian could have separated her from the Dimsdales in many less elaborate ways than this. Could it be that he intended some system of pressure and terrorism by which she should be forced to accept Ezra as a suitor. She clenched her little white teeth as she thought of it, and registered a vow that nothing in this world would ever bring her to give in upon that point. There was only one bright spot in her outlook. When she reached her destination she would at once write to Mrs. Dimsdale, tell her where she was, and ask her frankly for an explanation of their sudden silence. How much wiser if she had done so before. Only a foolish pride had withheld her from it.

The train had already stopped at one large junction. Looking out through the window she saw by the lamps that it was Guildford. After another interminable interval of clattering and tossing and plunging through the darkness, they came to a second station of importance, Petersfield. “We are nearing our destination,” Girdlestone remarked, shutting up his book.

This proved to be a small wayside station, illuminated by a single lamp, which gave no information as to the name. They were the only passengers who alighted, and the train rolled on for Portsmouth, leaving them with their trunks upon the dark and narrow platform. It was a black night with a bitter wind which carried with it a suspicion of dampness, which might have been rain, or might have been the drift of the neighbouring ocean. Kate was numb with the cold, and even her gaunt companion stamped his feet and shivered as he looked about him.

“I telegraphed for a trap,” said he to the guard. “Is there not one waiting?”

“Yes, sir; if you be Mister Girdlestone, there’s a trap from the Flyin’

Bull. Here, Carker, here’s your gentleman.”

At this summons a rough-looking ostler emerged into the circle of light thrown by the single lamp and, touching his hat, announced in a surly voice that he was the individual In question. The guard and he then proceeded to drag the trunks to the vehicle. It was a small wagonette, with a high seat for the driver in front.

“Where to, sir?” asked the driver, when the travellers had taken their seats.

“To Hampton Priory. Do you know where that is?”

“Better’n two mile from here, and close to the railway line,” said the man. “There hain’t been no one livin’ there for two year at the least.”

“We are expected and all will be ready for us,” said Girdlestone.

“Go as fast as you can, for we are cold.”

The driver cracked his whip, and the horse started at a brisk trot down the dark country road.

Looking round her, Kate saw that they were passing through a large country village, consisting of a broad main street, with a few insignificant offshoots branching away on either side. A church stood on one side, and on the other the village inn. The door was open and the light shining through the red curtains of the bar parlour looked warm and cosy. The clink of glasses and the murmur of cheerful voices sounded from within. Kate, as she looked across, felt doubly cheerless and lonely by the contrast. Girdlestone looked too, but with different emotions.

“Another plague spot,” he cried, jerking his head in that direction. “In town or country it is the same. These poison-sellers are scattered over the whole face of the land, and every one of them is a focus of disease and misery.”

“Beg your pardon, sir,” the surly driver observed, screwing round in his seat. “That ‘ere’s the Flyin’ Bull, sir, where I be in sarvice, and it ain’t no poison-seller, but a real right down good house.”

“All liquor is poison, and every house devoted to the sale of it is a sinful house,” Girdlestone said curtly.

“Don’t you say that to my maister,” remarked the driver. “He be a big man wi’ a ter’bly bad temper and a hand like a leg o’ mutton. Hold up, will ye!”

The last remark was addressed to the horse, which had stumbled in going down a sharp incline. They were out of the village by this time, and the road was lined on either side by high hedges, which threw a dense shadow over everything. The feeble lamps of the wagonette bored two little yellow tunnels of light on either side. The man let the reins lie loose upon the horse’s back, and the animal picked out the roadway for itself. As they swung round from the narrow lane on to a broader road Kate broke out into a little cry of pleasure.

“There’s the sea!” she exclaimed joyfully. The moon had broken from behind the clouds and glittered on the vast silvery expanse.

“Yes, that’s the sea,” the driver said, “and them lights down yonder is at Lea Claxton, where the fisher-folk live; and over there,” pointing with his whip to a long dark shadow on the waters, “is the Oilywoite.”

“The what?”

“The Isle of Wight, he means,” said Girdlestone. The driver looked at him reproachfully. “Of course,” said he, “if you Lunnon folks knows more about it than we who are born an’ bred in the place, it’s no manner o’ use our tryin’ to teach you.” With this sarcastic comment he withdrew into himself, and refused to utter another word until the end of their journey.

It was not long before this was attained. Passing down a deeply rutted lane, they came to a high stone wall which extended for a couple of hundred yards. It had a crumbling, decaying appearance, as far as could be judged in the uncertain light. This wall was broken by a single iron gate, flanked by two high pillars, each of which was surmounted by some weather-beaten heraldic device. Passing through they turned up a winding avenue, with lines of trees on either side, which shot their branches so thickly above them that they might have been driving through some sombre tunnel. This avenue terminated in an open space, in the midst of which towered a great irregular whitewashed building, which was the old Priory. All below it was swathed in darkness, but the upper windows caught the glint of the moon and emitted a pallid and sickly glimmer. The whole effect was so weird and gloomy that Kate felt her heart sink within her. The wagonette pulled up in front of the door, and Girdlestone assisted her to alight.

There had been no lights or any symptoms of welcome, but as they pulled down the trunks the door opened and a little old woman appeared with a candle in her hand, which she carefully shaded from the wind while she peered out into the darkness.

“Is that Mr. Girdlestone?” she cried.

“Of course it is,” the merchant said impatiently. “Did I not telegraph and tell you that I was coming?”

“Yes, yes,” she answered, hobbling forward with the light. “And this is the young lady? Come in, my dear, come in. We have not got things very smart yet, but they will soon come right.”

She led the way through a lofty hall into a large sitting-room, which, no doubt, had been the monkish refectory in bygone days. It looked very bleak and cold now, although a small fire sputtered and sparkled in the corner of the great iron grate. There was a pan upon the fire, and the deal table in the centre of the room was laid out roughly as for a meal. The candle which the old woman had carried in was the only light, though the flickering fire cast strange fantastic shadows in the further corners and among the great oaken rafters which formed the ceiling.

"Come up to the fire, my dear," said the old woman. "Take off your cloak and warm yourself." She held her own shrivelled arms towards the blaze, as though her short exposure to the night air had chilled her. Glancing at her, Kate saw that her face was sharp-featured and cunning, with a loose lower lip which exposed a line of yellow teeth, and a chin which bristled with a tuft of long grey hairs.

From without there came the crunching of gravel as the wagonette turned and rattled down the avenue. Kate listened to the sound of the wheels until they died away in the distance. They seemed somehow to be the last link which bound her to the human race. Her heart failed her completely, and she burst into tears.

"What's the matter then?" the old woman asked, looking up at her.

"What are ye crying about?"

"Oh, I am so miserable and so lonely," she cried. "What have I done that I should be so unhappy? Why should I be taken to this horrible, horrible place?"

"What's the matter with the place?" asked her withered companion.

"I don't see nought amiss with it. Here's Mr. Girdlestone a-comin'.

He don't grumble at the place, I'll warr'nt."

The merchant was not in the best of tempers, for he had had an altercation with the driver about the fare, and was cold into the bargain. "At it again?" he said roughly, as he entered. "It is I who ought to weep, I think, who have been put to all this trouble and inconvenience by your disobedience and weakness of mind."

Kate did not answer, but sat upon a coarse deal chair beside the fire, and buried her face in her hands. All manner of vague fears and fancies filled her mind. What was Tom doing now? How quickly he would fly to her rescue did he but know how strangely she was situated! She determined that her very first action next morning should be to write to Mrs. Dimsdale and to tell her, not only where she was, but all that had occurred. The reflection that she could do this cheered her heart, and she managed to eat a little of the supper which the old woman had now placed upon the table. It was a rough stew of some sort, but the long journey had given an edge to their appetites, and the merchant, though usually epicurean in his tastes, ate a hearty meal.

When supper was over the crone, who was addressed by Girdlestone as Jorrocks, led the way upstairs and showed Kate to her room. If the furniture of the dining-room had been Spartan in its simplicity, this was even more so, for there was nothing in it save a small iron bedstead, much rusted from want of use, and a high wooden box on which stood the simplest toilet requisites. In spite of the poverty of the apartment Kate had never been more glad to enter her luxurious chamber at home. The little carpetless room was a haven of rest where she would be left, for one night at least, to her own thoughts. As she lay in bed, however, she could hear far away the subdued murmur of Girdlestone's voice and the shrill tones of the old woman. They were in deep and animated converse. Though they were too far distant for her to distinguish a word, something told her that their talk was about herself, and the same instinct assured her that it boded her little good.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MAN WITH THE CAMP-STOOL.

When she awoke in the morning it was some little time before she could realise where she was or recall the events which had made such a sudden change in her life. The bare, cold room, with the whitewashed walls, and the narrow bed upon which she lay, brought back to her the recollection of a hospital ward which she had seen in Edinburgh, and her first thought was that she had had some accident and had been conveyed to some such establishment. The delusion was only momentary, however, for her true situation came back to her at once with all its vague horror. Of the two, she would have preferred that her first impression had been correct.

The small window of her apartment was covered by a dirty muslin blind. She rose and, drawing it aside, looked eagerly out. From what she had seen the night before she had hoped that this prison to which she had been conveyed might make amends for its loneliness by some degree of natural beauty. The scene which now met her eyes soon dispelled any expectations of the sort. The avenue with its trees lay on the other side of the house. From her window nothing was visible but a dreary expanse of bog-land and mudbanks stretching down to the sea. At high tide this enormous waste of dreariness and filth was covered by the water, but at present it lay before her in all its naked hideousness, the very type of dullness and desolation. Here and there a few scattered reeds, or an unhealthy greenish scum upon the mud, gave a touch of colour to the scene; but for the most part the great plain was all of the same sombre mud tint, with its monotony broken only by the white flecks where the swarms of gulls and kittiwakes had settled in the hope of picking up whatever had been left by the receding tide. Away across the broad surface a line of sparkling foam marked the fringe of the ocean, which stretched away to the horizon.

A mile or two to the eastward of her Kate saw some sign of houses, and a blue smoke which flickered up into the air. This she guessed to be the fishing village of Lea Claxton, which the driver had mentioned the night before. She felt, as she gazed at the little hamlet and the masts of the boats in front of it, that she was not alone in the world, and that even in this strange and desolate place there were honest hearts to whom as a last resource she could appeal.

She was still standing at the window when there came a knocking at the door, and she heard the voice of the old woman asking if she were awake. “Breakfast is ready,” she said, “and the master is a-wondering why you bean’t down.”

On this summons Kate hastened her toilet and made her way down the old winding stair to the room in which they had supped the night before. Surely Girdlestone must have had a heart of flint not to be melted by the sight of that fair, fresh face. His features set as hard as adamant as she entered the room, and he looked at her with eyes which were puckered and angry.

“You are late,” he said coldly. “You must remember that you are not in
Eccleston Square. ‘An idle soul shall suffer hunger,’ says the prophet.
You are here to be disciplined, and disciplined you shall be.”

“I am sorry,” she answered. “I think that I must have been tired by our journey.”

The vast room looked even more comfortless and bleak than on the preceding evening. On the table was a plate of ham and eggs. John Girdlestone served out a portion, and pushed it in her direction. She sat down on one of the rough wooden chairs and ate listlessly, wondering how all this was going to end.

After breakfast Girdlestone ordered the old woman out of the room, and, standing in front of the fire with his long legs apart and his hands behind his back, he told her in harsh concise language what his intentions were.

“I had long determined,” he said, “that if you ran counter to my wishes, and persisted in your infatuated affection for that scapegrace, I should remove you to some secluded spot, where you might reconsider your conduct and form better resolutions for the future. This country house answered the purpose admirably, and as an old servant of mine, Mrs. Jorrocks, chanced to reside in the neighbourhood, I have warned her that at any time I might come down and should expect to find things ready. Your rash and heartless conduct has, however, precipitated matters, and we have arrived before her preparations were complete. Our future arrangements will therefore be less primitive than they are at present. Here you shall remain, young lady, until you show signs of repentance, and of a willingness to undo the harm which you have done.”

“If you mean until I consent to marry your son, then I shall live and die here,” the girl said bravely.

“That rests with yourself. As I said before, you are under discipline here, and you may not find existence such a bed of roses as it was in Eccleston Square.”

“Can I have my maid?” Kate asked. “I can hardly stay here with no one but the old woman in the house.”

“Rebecca is coming down. I had a telegram from Ezra to that effect, and he will himself join us for a day or two in each week.”

“Ezra here!” Kate cried in horror. Her chief consolation through all her troubles had been that there seemed to be some chance of getting rid of her terrible suitor.

“And why not?” the old man asked angrily. “Are you so bitter against the lad as to grudge him the society of his own father?”

Kate was saved from further reproaches by the entrance of the old woman to clear the table. The last item of intelligence, however, had given her a terrible shock, and at the same time had filled her with astonishment. What could the fast-living, comfort-seeking man about town want in this dreary abode? She knew Ezra well, and was sure that he was not a man to alter his ways of life or suffer discomfort of any kind without some very definite object. It seemed to her that this was a new mesh in the net which was being drawn round her.

When her guardian had left the room Kate asked Mrs. Jorrocks for a sheet of paper. The crone shook her head and wagged her pendulous lip in derision.

“Mister Girdlestone thought as you would be after that,” she said.

“There ain’t no paper here, nor pens neither, nor ink neither.”

“What, none! Dear Mrs. Jorrocks, do have pity on me, and get me a sheet, however old and soiled. See, here is some silver! You are very welcome to it if you will give me the materials for writing one letter.”

Mrs. Jorrocks looked longingly with her bleared eyes at the few shillings which the girl held out to her, but she shook her head. “I dursn’t do it,” she said. “It’s as much as my place is worth.”

“Then I shall walk down to Bedsworth myself,” said Kate angrily. “I have no doubt that the people in the post office will let me sit there and write it.”

The old hag laughed hoarsely to herself until the scraggy sinews of her withered neck stood out like whipcord. She was still chuckling and coughing when the merchant came back into the room.

“What then?” he asked sternly, looking from one to the other. He was himself constitutionally averse to merriment, and he was irritated by it in others. “Why are you laughing, Mrs. Jorrocks?”

“I was a-laughing at her,” the woman wheezed, pointing with tremulous fingers. “She was askin’ me for paper, and sayin’ as she would go and write a letter at the Bedsworth Post Office.”

“You must understand once for all,” Girdlestone roared, turning savagely upon the girl, “that you are cut off entirely from the outer world. I shall give you no loophole which you may utilize to continue your intimacy with undesirable people. I have given orders that you should not be provided with either paper or ink.”

Poor Kate’s last hope seemed to be fading away. Her heart sank within her, but she kept a brave face, for she did not wish him to see how his words had stricken her. She had a desperate plan in her head, which would be more likely to be successful could she but put him off his guard.

She spent the morning in her own little room. She had been provided with a ponderous brown Bible, out of which the fly leaves had been carefully cut, and this she read, though her thoughts often wandered away from the sacred pages. About one o’clock she heard the clatter of hoofs and the sound of wheels on the drive. Going down, she found that it was a cart which had come from Bedsworth with furniture. There were carpets, a chest of drawers, tables, and several other articles, which the driver proceeded to carry upstairs, helped by John Girdlestone. The old woman was in the upper room. It seemed to Kate that she might never again have such an opportunity of carrying out the resolve which she had formed. She put on her bonnet, and began to stroll listlessly about in front of the door, picking a few straggling leaves from the neglected lawn. Gradually she sauntered away in this manner to the head of the avenue, and then, taking one swift timid glance around, she slipped in among the trees, and made the best of her way, half walking, half running, down the dark winding drive.

Oh, the joy of the moment when the great white house which had already become so hateful to her was obscured among the trees behind her! She had some idea of the road which she had traversed the night before. Behind her were all her troubles. In front the avenue gate, Bedsworth, and freedom. She would send both a telegram and a letter to Dr. Dimsdale, and explain to him her exact situation. If the kind-hearted and energetic physician once knew of it, he would take care that no harm befell her. She could return then, and face with a light heart the worst which her guardian could do to her. Here was the avenue entrance now, the high lichen-eaten stone pillars, with the battered device upon the top. The iron gate between was open. With a glad cry she quickened her pace, and in another moment would have been in the high-road, when —

"Now then, where are you a-comin' to?" cried a gruff voice from among the bushes which flanked the gate.

The girl stopped, all in a tremble. In the shadow of the trees there was a camp-stool, and on the camp-stool sat a savage-looking man, dressed in a dark corduroy suit, with a blackened clay pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth. His weather-beaten mahogany face was plentifully covered with small-pox marks, and one of his eyes was sightless and white from the effects of the same disease. He rose now, and interposed himself between her and the gate.

"Sink me, if it ain't her," he said slowly, surveying her from head to foot. "I were given to understand that she was a spanker, an' a spanker she be." With this oracular remark he took a step back and surveyed Kate again with his one eye.

"My good man," she said, in a trembling voice, for his appearance was far from reassuring, "I wish to go past and to get to Bedsworth. Here is a shilling, and I beg that you will not detain me."

Her companion stretched out a very dirty hand, took the coin, spun it up in the air, caught it, bit it, and finally plunged it into the depths of his trouser pockets. "No road this way, missy," he said; "I've given my word to the guv'nor, and I can't go back from it."

"You have no right to detain me," Kate cried angrily. "I have good friends in London who will make you suffer for this."

"She's a-goin' to flare up," said the one-eyed man; "knock me helpless, if she ain't!"

"I shall come through!" the girl cried in desperation. She was only a dozen yards from the lane which led to freedom, so she made a quick little feminine rush in the hope of avoiding this dreadful sentinel who barred her passage. He caught her round the waist, however, and hurled her back with such violence that she staggered across the path, and would have fallen had she not struck violently against a tree. As it was, she was badly bruised and the breath shaken out of her body.

“She has flared up,” said the one-eyed man, removing his pipe from his lips. “Blow me asunder if she bean’t a rustler!” He brought his camp-stool from the side of the pillar and, planting it right in the centre of the gateway, sat down upon it again. “You see, missy,” he remarked, “it’s no manner o’ use. If you did get out it would only be to be put in a reg’lar ‘sylum.”

“An asylum!” gasped Kate, sobbing with pain and anger. “Do you think I am mad, then?”

“I don’t think nowt about it,” the man remarked calmly. “I knows it.”

This was a new light to Kate. She was so bewildered that she could hardly realise the significance of the remark.

“Who are you?” she said. “Why is it that you treat me in this cruel way?”

“Ah, now we come to business,” he said, in a satisfied way, crossing his legs, and blowing great wreaths from his pipe. “This is more like reason. Who am I? says you. Well, my name’s Stevens — Bill Stevens, hesquire, o’ Claxton, in the county o’ Hants. I’ve been an A.B. in the navy, and I’ve got my pension to show it. I’ve been in the loon’cy business, too — was second warder in the suicide ward at Portsmouth for more’n two year. I’ve been out of a billet for some time, and Muster Girdlestone he came to me and he says, ‘You’re William Stevens, hesquire?’ says he. ‘I am,’ says I. ‘You’ve had experience o’ loonies?’ says he. ‘I have,’ says I. ‘Then you’re the man I want,’ says he. ‘You shall have a pound a week an’ nothing to do.’ ‘The very crib for me,’ says I. ‘You’ve got to sit at the gate,’ says he, ‘and prevent a patient from gettin’ out!’ That was all as he said. Then you comes down from Lunnon, an’ I comes up from Claxton, and here we be, all snug an’ comfort’ble. So, you see, missy, it ain’t no use at all, and you’ll never get out this way.”

“But if you let me past he will think that I ran by so quickly that you could not stop me. He could not be very angry then, and I shall give you more money than you would lose.”

“No, no,” said the man, shaking his head energetically, “I’m true to my colours, sink me, but I am! I never was bribed yet, and never will be unless you can offer cash down instead o’ promises. You can’t lay them by to live on in your old age.”

“Alas!” Kate cried, “I have no money except these few shillings.”

“Give them over here, then.” He put them in his trouser pocket beside the other one. “That’s all right, missy,” he said, in a beery whisper. “I won’t say anything now to Muster Girdlestone about this job. He’d be wild if he knew, but mum’s the word with William Stevens, hesquire. Lor’, if this ain’t my wife a-comin’ out wi’ my dinner! Away with ye, away! If she seed me a-speakin’ to you she’d tear your hair for you as like as not. She’s jealous, that’s what’s the matter wi’ her. If she sees a woman makin’ much o’ me, it’s just pisen to her, and she goes for ‘em straight. She’s the one to make the fur fly! Away with you, I say!”

Poor Kate, appalled by the possibility of making a new enemy, turned and retraced her steps slowly and sadly up the avenue. As she glanced back she saw a gaunt, hard-featured woman trudging up the lane with a tin can in her hand. Lonely and forlorn, but not yet quite destitute of hope, she turned to the right among the trees, and pushed her way through bushes and brambles to the boundary of the Priory grounds. It was a lofty wall, at least nine feet in height, with a coping which bristled with jagged pieces of glass. Kate walked along the base Of it, her fair skin all torn and bleeding with scratches from the briars, until she satisfied herself that there was no break in it. There was one small wooden door on the side which was skirted by the railway line, but it was locked and impassable. The only opening through which a human being could pass was that which was guarded in the manner she had seen. The sickening conviction took possession of her mind that without wings it was an utter impossibility either to get away or to give the least information to any one in the world as to where she was or what might befall her.

When she came back to the house, tired and dishevelled after her journey of exploration, Girdlestone was standing by the door to receive her with a sardonic smile upon his thin lips. “How do you like the grounds, then?” he asked, with, the nearest approach to hilarity which she had ever heard from him. “And the ornamental fencing? and the lodge-keeper? How did you like them all?”

Kate tried for a moment to make some brave retort, but it was a useless attempt. Her lips trembled, her eyes filled, and, with a cry of grief and despair which might have moved a wild beast, she fled to her room, and, throwing herself upon her bed, burst into such scalding bitter tears as few women are ever called upon to shed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TALK ON THE LAWN.

That same evening Rebecca came down from London. Her presence was a comfort to Kate, for though she had never liked or trusted the girl, yet the mere fact of having some one of her own age near her, gave her a sense of security and of companionship. Her room, too, had been altered for the better, and the maid was given the one next door, so that by knocking on the wall she could always communicate with her. This was an unspeakable consolation, for at night the old house was so full of the sudden crackings of warped timber and the scampering of rats that entire loneliness was unendurable.

Apart from these uncanny sounds there were other circumstances which gave the Priory a sinister reputation. The very aspect of the building was enough to suggest weird impressions. Its high white walls were blotched with patches of mildew, and in some parts there were long greenish stains from roof to ground, like tear streaks on the crumbling plaster. Indoors there was a dank graveyard smell in the low corridors and narrow stair-cases. Floors and ceilings were equally worm-eaten and rotten. Broad flakes of plaster from the walls lay littered about in the passages. The wind, too, penetrated the building through many cracks and crannies, so that there was a constant sighing and soughing in the big dreary rooms, which had a most eerie and melancholy effect.

Kate soon learned, however, that, besides these vague terrors, all predisposing the mind to alarm and exciting the imagination, there was a general belief that another more definite cause for fear existed in the old monastery. With cruel minuteness of detail her guardian had told her the legend which haunted those gloomy corridors.

It appears that in olden times the Priory had been inhabited by Dominicans, and that in the course of years these monks had fallen away from their original state of sanctity. They preserved a name for piety among the country folk by their austere demeanour, but in secret, within the walls of their own monastery, they practised every sort of dissipation and crime.

While the community was in this state of demoralisation, each, from the abbot downwards, vying with the other in the number and enormity of their sins, there came a pious-minded youth from a neighbouring village, who begged that he might be permitted to join the order. He had been attracted, he said, by the fame of their sanctity. He was received amongst them, and at first was not admitted to their revels, but gradually, as his conscience was supposed to become more hardened, he was duly initiated into all their mysteries. Horrified by what he saw, the good youth concealed his indignation until he had mastered all the abominations of the establishment, and then, rising up on the altar steps, he denounced them in fiery, scathing words. He would leave them that night, he said, and he would tell his experiences through the length and breadth of the country. Incensed and alarmed, the friars held a hasty meeting, and then, seizing the young novice, they dragged him down the cellar steps and locked him up there. This same cellar had long been celebrated for the size and ferocity of the rats which inhabited it which were so fierce and strong that even during the day they had been known to attack those who entered. It is said that long into the weary hours of the night, the fearful shrieks and terrible struggles of the captive, as he fought with his innumerable assailants, resounded through the long corridors.

“They do say that he walks about the house at times,” Girdlestone said, in conclusion. “No one has ever been found who would live here very long since then. But, of course, such a strong-minded young woman as you, who cannot even obey your own guardian, would never be frightened by such a childish idea as that.”

“I do not believe in ghosts, and I don’t think I shall be frightened,” Kate answered; but, for all that, the horrible story stuck in her mind, and added another to the many terrors which surrounded her.

Mr. Girdlestone’s room was immediately above hers. On the second day of her imprisonment she went up on to this landing, for, having nothing to read save the Bible, and no materials for writing, she had little to do but to wander over the old house, and through the grounds. The door of Girdlestone’s room was ajar, and she could not help observing as she passed that the apartment was most elegantly and comfortably furnished. So was the next room, the door of which was also open. The solid furniture and rich carpet contrasted strangely with her own bare, whitewashed chamber. All this pointed to the fact that her removal to the Priory had not been a sudden impulse on the part of the old merchant, but that he had planned and arranged every detail beforehand. Her refusal of Ezra was only the excuse for setting the machinery in motion. What was the object, then, and what was to be the end of this subtle scheming? That was the question which occurred to her every hour of the day, and every hour the answer seemed more grim and menacing.

There was one link in the chain which was ever hidden from her. It had never occurred to the girl that her fortune could be of moment to the firm. She had been so accustomed to hear Ezra and his father talk glibly of millions, that she depreciated her own little capital and failed to realise how important it might be in a commercial crisis. Indeed, the possibility of such a crisis never entered her head, for one of her earliest impressions was hearing her father talk of the great resources of the firm and of its stability. That this firm was now in the direst straits, and that her money was absolutely essential to its existence, were things which never for one instant entered her thoughts.

Yet that necessity was becoming more pressing every day. Ezra, in London, was doing all that indomitable energy and extraordinary business capacity could do to prolong the struggle. As debts became due, he would still stave off each creditor with such skill and plausibility as allayed every suspicion. Day by day, however, the work became more severe, and he felt that he was propping up an edifice which was so rotten that it must, sooner or later, come crumbling about his ears. When he came down to the Priory upon the Saturday, the young man’s haggard and anxious face showed the severe ordeal which he had undergone.

Kate had already retired to her room when he arrived. She heard the sound of the trap, however, and guessed who it was, even before his deep bass voice sounded in the room beneath. Looking out of her window a little later she saw him walking to and fro in the moonlight, talking earnestly to his father. It was a bitter night, and she wondered what they could have to talk about which might not be said beside the warm fire in the dining-room. They flickered up and down among the shadows for more than an hour, and then the girl heard the door slam, and shortly afterwards the heavy tread of the two men passed her chamber, and ascended to the rooms above.

It was a momentous conversation which she had witnessed. In it Ezra had shown his father how impossible it was to keep up appearances, and how infallible was their ruin unless help came speedily.

"I don't think any of them smell a rat," he said. "Mortimer and Johnson pressed for their bill in rather an ugly manner, but I talked them over completely. I took out my cheque-book. 'Look here, gentlemen,' said I, 'if you wish I shall write a cheque for the amount. If I do, it will be the last piece of business which we shall do together. A great house like ours can't afford to be disturbed in the routine of their business.' They curled up at once, and said no more about it. It was an anxious moment though, for if they had taken my offer, the whole murder would have been out."

The old man started at the word his son had used, and rubbed his hands together as though a sudden chill had struck through him.

"Don't you think, Ezra," he said, clutching his son's arm, "that is a very foolish saying about 'murder will out'? I remember Pilkington, the detective, who was a member of our church when I used to worship at Durham Street, speaking on this subject. He said that it was his opinion that people are being continually made away with, and that not more than one in ten are ever accounted for. Nine chances to one, Ezra, and then those which are found out are very vulgar affairs. If a man of intellect gave his mind to it, there would be little chance of detection. How very cold the night is!"

"Yes," returned his son. "It is best to talk of such things in the open air, though. How has all gone since you have been down here?"

"Very well. She was restive the first day, and wanted to get to

Bedsworth. I think that she has given it up now as a bad job.

Stevens, the gatekeeper, is a very worthy fellow."

"What steps have you taken?" asked Ezra, striking a fusee and lighting a cigar.

"I have taken care that they should know that she is an invalid, both at Bedsworth and at Claxton. They have all heard of the poor sick young lady at the Priory. I have let them know also that her mind is a little strange, which accounts, of course, for her being kept in solitude. When it happens —"

"For God's sake, be quiet!" the young man cried, with a shudder.

"It's an awful job; it won't bear thinking of."

"Yes, it is a sad business; but what else is there?"

"And how would you do it?" Ezra asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"No violence, I hope."

"It may come to that. I have other plans in my head, however, which may be tried first. I think that I see one way out of it which would simplify matters.”

“If there is no alternative I have a man who is ripe for any job of the sort.”

“Ah, who is that?”

“A fellow who can hit a good downright blow, as I can testify to my cost. His name is Burt. He is the man who cut my head open in Africa. I met him in London the other day, and spotted him at once. He is a half-starved, poor devil, and as desperate as a man could be. He is just in the key for any business of the sort. I’ve got the whip-hand of him now, and he knows it, so that I could put him up to anything. I believe that such a job would be a positive pleasure to him, for the fellow is more like a wild beast than a man.”

“Sad, sad!” Girdlestone exclaimed. “If a man once falls away, what is there to separate him from the beasts? How can I find this man?”

“Wire to me. Put ‘Send a doctor;’ that will do as well as anything else, and will sound well at the post-office. I’ll see that he comes down by the next train. You’d best meet him at the station, for the chances are that he will be drunk.”

“Bring him down,” said Girdlestone. “You must be here yourself.”

“Surely you can do without me?”

“No, no. We must stand or fall together.”

“I’ve a good mind to throw the thing over,” said Ezra, stopping in his walk. “It sickens me.”

“What! Go back now!” the old man cried vehemently. “No, no, that would be too craven. We have everything in our favour, and all that we want is a stout heart. Oh, my boy, my boy, on the one side of you are ruin, dishonour, a sordid existence, and the scorn of your old companions; on the other are success and riches and fame and all that can make life pleasant. You know as well as I do that the girl’s money would turn the scale, and that all would then be well. Your whole future depends upon her death. We have given her every chance. She laughed at your love. It is time now to show her your hate.”

“That is true enough,” Ezra said, walking on. “There is no reason why I should pity her. I’ve put my hand to the plough, and I shall go on. I seem to be getting into your infernal knack of scripture quoting.”

“There is a brave, good lad,” cried his father. “It would not do to draw back now.”

“You will find Rebecca useful,” the young man said, “You may trust her entirely.”

“You did well to send her. Have they asked for me much?”

“Yes. I have told them all the same story — nervous exhaustion, and doctor’s orders that you were not to be disturbed by any business letters. The only man who seemed to smell a rat was that young Dimsdale.”

“Ah!” cried the old man, with a chuckle; “of course he would be surprised at our disappearance.”

“He looks like a madman; asked me where you had gone, and when I answered him as I had the others, stormed out that he had a right to know, and that he would know. His blood was up, and there was nearly being a pretty scene before the clerks. He follows me home every evening to Eccleston Square, and waits outside half the night through to see that I do not leave the house.”

“Does he, though?”

“Yes; he came after me to the station to-day. He had a cravat round his mouth and an ulster, but I could see that it was he. I took a ticket for Colchester. He took one also, and made for the Colchester train. I gave him the slip, got the right ticket, and came on. I’ve no doubt he is at Colchester at this moment.”

“Remember, my boy,” the merchant said, as they turned from the door, “this is the last of our trials. If we succeed in this, all is well for the future.”

“We have tried diamonds, and we have tried marriage. The third time is the charm,” said Ezra, as he threw away his cigar and followed his father.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE INCIDENT OF THE CORRIDOR.

Ezra Girdlestone hardly went through the formality of greeting Kate next morning when she came down to breakfast. He was evidently ill at ease, and turned away his eyes when she looked at him, though he glanced at her furtively from time to time. His father chatted with him upon City matters, but the young man’s answers were brusque and monosyllabic. His sleep had been troubled and broken, for the conversation of the night before had obtruded unpleasantly on his dreams.

Kate slipped away from them as soon as she could and, putting on her bonnet, went for a long walk through the grounds, partly for the sake of exercise, and partly in the hope of finding some egress. The one-eyed gate-keeper was at his post, and set up a hideous shout of laughter when he saw her; so she branched off among the trees to avoid him, and walked once more very carefully round the boundary wall. It was no easy matter to follow it continuously, for the briars and brambles grew in a confused tangle up to its very base. By perseverance, however, she succeeded in tracing every foot of it, and so satisfying herself finally that there was no diminution anywhere in its height, no break in its continuity, save the one small wooden door which was securely fastened.

There was one spot, however, where a gleam of hope presented itself. At an angle of the wall there stood a deserted wooden shed, which had been used for the protection of gardeners’ tools in the days when the grounds had been kept in better order. It was not buttressed up against the wall, but stood some eight or ten feet from it. Beside the shed was an empty barrel which had once been a water-butt. The girl managed to climb to the top of the barrel, and from this she was easily able to gain the sloping roof of the shed. Up this she clambered until she stood upon the summit, a considerable height above the ground. From it she was able to look down over the wall on to the country-road and the railway line which lay on the other side of it. True that an impassable chasm lay between her and the wall, but it would be surely possible for her to hail passers-by from here, and to persuade some of them to carry a letter to Bedsworth or to bring paper from there. Fresh hope gushed into her heart at the thought.

It was not a very secure footing, for the planks of, which the shed was composed were worm-eaten and rotten. They cracked and crumbled beneath her feet, but what would she not dare to see a friendly human face? As she stood there a couple of country louts, young lads about sixteen, came strolling down the road, the one whistling and the other munching at a raw turnip. They lounged along until they came opposite to Kate’s point of observation, when one of them looking up saw her pale face surmounting the wall.

“Hey, Bill,” he cried to his companion, “blowed if the mad wench bean’t up on the shed over yander!”

“So she be!” said the other eagerly. “Give me your turnip. Jimmy, an’

I’ll shy it at her.”

“Noa, I’ll shy it mysel’,” said the gallant Jimmy; and at the word whizz came the half of a turnip within art inch of Kate’s ear.

“You’ve missed her!” shrieked the other savage. “‘Ere, quick, where be a stone?” But before he could find one the poor girl, sick at heart, clambered down from her exposed situation.

“There is no hope for me anywhere,” she sobbed to herself. “Every man’s hand is against me. I have only one true friend, and he is far away.” She went back to her room utterly disheartened and dispirited.

Her guardian knocked at her door before dinner time. “I trust,” he said, “that you have read over the service. It is as well to do so when you cannot go to church.”

“And why should you prevent me from going to church?” she asked.

“Ah, my lady,” he said with a sneer, “you are reaping what you have sown. You are tasting now, the bitter fruits of your disobedience. Repent before it is too late!”

“I have done no wrong,” she said, turning on him with flashing eyes. “It is for you to repent, you violent and hypocritical man. It is for you to answer for your godly words and your ungodly and wicked actions. There is a power which will judge between us some day, and will exact atonement for your broken oath to your dead friend and for your cruel treatment of one who was left to your care.” She spoke with burning cheeks and with such fearless energy that the hard City man fairly cowered away from her.

“We will leave that to the future,” he said. “I came up to do you a kindness, and you abuse me. I hear that there are insects about the house, beetles and the like. A few drops from this bottle scattered about the room would keep them away. Take care, for it is a violent though painless poison if taken by a human being.” He handed her a phial, with a brownish turbid liquid in it, and a large red poison label, which she took without comment and placed upon the mantelpiece. Girdlestone gave a quick, keen glance at her as he retired. In truth he was astonished at the alteration which the last few days had made in her appearance. Her cheeks were colourless and sunken, save for the single hectic spot, which announced the fever within. Her eyes were unnaturally bright. A strange and new expression had settled upon her whole countenance. It seemed to Girdlestone that there was every chance that his story might become a reality, and her reason be permanently deranged. She had, however, more vitality than her guardian gave her credit for. Indeed, at the very time when he set her down in his mind as a broken woman, she had formed a fresh plan for escape, which it would require both energy and determination to put into execution.

During the last few days she had endeavoured to make friends with the maid Rebecca, but the invincible aversion which the latter had entertained for her, ever since Ezra had visited her with his unwelcome attentions, was not to be overcome by any advances which she could make. She performed her offices with a heart full of malice, and an eye which triumphed in her mistress’s misfortunes.

Kate had bethought herself that Stevens, the gatekeeper, only mounted guard during the day. She had observed, too, at the time of her conversation with him, that the iron gate was in such a state of disrepair that, even if it were locked, it would not be a difficult matter to scramble through or over it. If she could only gain the open air during the night there would be nothing to prevent her from making her way to Bedsworth, whence she could travel on to Portsmouth, which was only seven miles away. Surely there she would find some charitable people who would communicate with her friends and give her a temporary shelter.

The front door of the house was locked every night, but there was a nail behind it, on which she hoped to find the key. There was another door at the back. Then there were the windows of the ground-floor, which might be tried in case the doors were too securely fastened. If only she could avoid waking any one there was no reason why she should not succeed. If the worst came to the worst and she was detected, they could not treat her more cruelly than they had already done.

Ezra had gone back to London, so that she had only three enemies to contend against, Girdlestone, Rebecca, and old Mrs. Jorrocks. Of these, Girdlestone slept upon the floor above, and Mrs. Jorrocks, who might have been the most dangerous of all, as her room was on the ground-floor, was fortunately so deaf that there was little risk of disturbing her. The problem resolved itself, therefore, into being able to pass Rebecca's room without arousing her, and, as she knew the maid to be a sound sleeper, there seemed to be every chance of success.

She sat at her window all that afternoon steeling her mind to the ordeal before her. She was weak, poor girl, and shaken, little fit for anything which required courage and resolution. Her mind ran much upon her father, and upon the mother whom she had never known, but whose miniature was among her most precious treasures. The thought of them helped to dispel the dreadful feeling of utter loneliness, which was the most unendurable of all her troubles.

It was a cold, bright day, and the tide was in, covering the mudbanks and lapping up against the walls of the Priory grounds. So clear was it that she could distinguish the houses at the east end of the Isle of Wight. When she opened her window and looked out she could perceive that the sea upon her right formed a great inlet, dreary and dry at low tide, but looking now like a broad, reed-girt lake. This was Langston Harbour, and far away at its mouth she could make out a clump of buildings which marked the watering-place of Hayling.

There were other signs, however, of the presence of man. From her window she could see the great men-of-war steaming up the Channel, to and from the anchorage at Spithead. Some were low in the water and venomous looking, with bulbous turrets and tiny masts. Others were long and stately, with great lowering hulks and broad expanse of canvas. Occasionally a foreign service gunboat would pass, white and ghostly, like some tired seabird flapping its way home. It was one of Kate's few amusements to watch the passing and repassing of the vessels, and to speculate upon whence they had come and whither they were bound.

On that eventful evening Rebecca went to bed rather earlier than usual. Kate retired to her room, and having made her final preparations and stuffed her few articles of jewelry into her pockets, to serve in place of money, she lay down upon her bed, and trembled at the thought of what was in front of her. Down below she could hear her guardian’s shuffling step as he moved about the refectory. Then came the creaking of the rusty lock as he secured the door, and shortly afterwards he passed upstairs to his room. Mrs. Jorrocks had also gone to bed, and all was quiet in the house.

Kate knew that some hours must elapse before she could venture to make the attempt. She remembered to have read in some book that the sleep of a human being was usually deepest about two in the morning, so she had chosen that hour for her enterprise. She had put on her strongest dress and her thickest shoes, but had muffled the latter in cloth, so that they should make no sound. No precaution which she could think of had been neglected. There was now nothing to be done but to spend the time as best she might until the hour of action should arrive.

She rose and looked out of the window again. The tide was out now, and the moon glittered upon the distant ocean. A mist was creeping up, however, and even as she looked it drew its veil over the water. It was bitterly cold. She shivered and her teeth began to chatter. Stretching herself upon the bed once more, she wrapped the blankets round her, and, worn out with anxiety and fatigue, dropped into a troubled sleep.

She slumbered some hours before she awoke.

Looking at her watch she found that it was after two. She must not delay any longer. With the little bundle of her more valuable possessions in her hand, she gave such a gasp as a diver gives before he makes his spring, and slipping past Rebecca’s half-opened door she felt her way down the wooden stair, picking her steps very carefully.

Even in the daytime she had often noticed how those old planks creaked and cracked beneath her weight. Now, in the dead silence of the night, they emitted such sounds that her heart sank within her. She stopped several times, convinced that she must be discovered, but all was hushed and still. It was a relief when at last she reached the ground-floor, and was able to feel her way along the passage to the door.

Shaking in every limb from cold and fear, she put her hand to the lock; the key was not there. She tried the nail; there was nothing there. Her wary gaoler had evidently carried it away with him to his room. Would it occur to him to do the same in the case of the back door? It was very possible that he might have overlooked it. She retraced her steps down the passage, passed Mrs. Jorrocks’ room, where the old woman was snoring peacefully, and began to make her way as best she could through the great rambling building.

Running along the basement floor from front to back there was a long corridor, one side of which was pierced for windows. At the end of this corridor was the door which she wished to reach. The moon had broken through the fog, and pouring its light through each opening cast a succession of silvery flickering spots upon the floor. Between each of these bars of uncertain light was an interval of darkness. Kate stood at the head of this corridor with her hand against the wall, awed by the sudden sight of the moonlight and by the weird effect which was produced by the alternate patches of shadow and brightness. As she stood there, suddenly, with eyes distended with horror, she became aware that something was approaching her down the corridor.

She saw it moving as a dark formless mass at the further end. It passed through the bar of light, vanished, appeared once more, lost itself in the darkness, emerged again. It was half-way down the passage and still coming on. Petrified with terror, she could only wait and watch. Nearer it came and nearer. It was gliding into the last bar of light Immediately in front of her! It was on her! God of mercy, it was a Dominican friar! The moon shone clear and cold upon his gaunt figure and his sombre robes. The poor girl threw up her hands, gave one terrible scream of horror, which rang through the old house, and sank senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CHASE AND A BRAWL.

It would be impossible to describe the suspense in which Tom Dimsdale lived during these weeks. In vain he tried in every manner to find some way of tracing the fugitives. He wandered aimlessly about London from one inquiry office to another, telling his story and appealing for assistance. He advertised in papers and cross-questioned every one who might know anything of the matter. There were none, however, who could help him or throw any light upon the mystery.

No one at the office knew anything of the movements of the senior partner. To all inquiries Ezra replied that he had been ordered by the doctors to seek complete repose in the country. Dimsdale dogged Ezra's footsteps night after night in the hope of gaining some clue, but in vain. On the Saturday he followed him to the railway station, but Ezra, as we have seen, succeeded in giving him the slip.

His father became seriously anxious about the young fellow's health. He ate nothing and his sleep was much broken. Both the old people tried to inculcate patience and moderation.

"That fellow, Ezra Girdlestone, knows where they are," Tom would cry, striding wildly up and down the room with unkempt hair and clenched hands. "I will have his secret, if I have to tear it out of him."

"Steady, lad, steady!" the doctor replied to one of these outbursts. "There is nothing to be gained by violence. They are on the right side of the law at present, and you will be on the wrong if you do anything rash. The girl could have written if she were uncomfortable."

"Ah, so she could. She must have forgotten us. How could she, after all that has passed!"

"Let us hope for the best, let us hope for the best," the doctor would say soothingly. Yet it must be confessed that he was considerably staggered by the turn which things had taken. He had seen so much of the world in his professional capacity that he had become a very reliable judge of character. All his instincts told him that Kate Harston was a true-hearted and well-principled girl. It was not in her nature to leave London and never to send a single line to her friends to tell them where or why she had gone. There must, he was sure, be some good reason for her silence, and this reason resolved itself into one or two things — either she was ill and unable to hold a pen, or she had lost her freedom and was restrained from writing to them. The last supposition seemed to the doctor to be the more serious of the two.

Had he known the instability of the Girdlestone firm, and the necessity they were under of getting ready money, he would at once have held the key to the enigma. He had no idea of that, but in spite of his ignorance he was deeply distrustful of both father and son. He knew and had often deplored the clause in John Harston's will by which the ward's money reverted to the guardian. Forty thousand pounds were a bait which might tempt even a wealthy man into crooked paths.

It was Saturday — the third Saturday since Girdlestone and his ward had disappeared. Dimsdale had fully made up his mind that, go where he would, Ezra should not escape him this time. On two consecutive Saturdays the young merchant had managed to get away from him, and had been absent each time until the Monday morning. Tom knew, and the thought was a bitter one, that these days were spent in some unknown retreat in the company of Kate and of her guardian. This time at least he should not get away without revealing his destination.

The two young men remained in the office until two o'clock. Then Ezra put on his hat and overcoat, buttoning it up close, for the weather was bitterly cold. Tom at once picked up his wide-awake and followed him out into Fenchurch Street, so close to his heels that the swinging door had not shut on the one before the other passed through. Ezra glanced round at him when he heard the footsteps, and gave a snarl like an angry dog. There was no longer any pretence of civility between the two, and whenever their eyes met it was only to exchange glances of hatred and defiance.

A hansom was passing down the street, and Ezra, with a few muttered words to the driver, sprang in. Fortunately another had just discharged its fare, and was still waiting by the curb. Tom ran up to it. "Keep that red cab in sight," he said. "Whatever you do, don't let it get away from you." The driver, who was a man of few words, nodded and whipped up his horse.

It chanced that this same horse was either a faster or a fresher one than that which bore the young merchant. The red cab rattled down Fleet Street, then doubled on its tracks, and coming back by St. Paul’s plunged into a labyrinth of side streets, from which it eventually emerged upon the Thames Embankment. In spite of all its efforts, however, it was unable to shake off its pursuer. The red cab journeyed on down the Embankment and across one of the bridges, Tom’s able charioteer still keeping only a few yards behind it. Among the narrow streets on the Surrey side Ezra’s vehicle pulled up at a low beer-shop. Tom’s drove on a hundred yards or so, and then stopped where he could have a good view of whatever occurred. Ezra had jumped out and entered the public-house. Tom waited patiently outside until he should reappear. His movements hitherto had puzzled him completely. For a moment the wild hope came into his head that Kate might be concealed in this strange hiding-place, but a little reflection showed him the absurdity and impossibility of the idea.

He had not long to wait. In a very few minutes young Girdlestone came out again, accompanied by a tall, burly man, with a bushy red beard, who was miserably dressed, and appeared to be somewhat the worse for drink. He was helped into the cab by Ezra, and the pair drove off together. Tom was more bewildered than ever. Who was this fellow, and what connection had he with the matter on hand? Like a sleuth-hound the pursuing hansom threaded its way through the torrent of vehicles which pour down the London streets, never for one moment losing sight of its quarry. Presently they wheeled into the Waterloo Road, close to the Waterloo Station. The red cab turned sharp round and rattled up the incline which leads to the main line. Tom sprang out, tossed a sovereign to the driver, and followed on foot at the top of his speed.

As he ran into the station Ezra Girdlestone and the red-bearded stranger were immediately in front of him. There was a great swarm of people all around, for, as it was Saturday, there were special trains to the country. Tom was afraid of losing sight of the two men in the crowd, so he elbowed his way through as quickly as he could, and got immediately behind them — so close that he could have touched them with his hand. They were approaching the booking-office, when Ezra glanced round and saw his rival standing behind him. He gave a bitter curse, and whispered something to his half-drunken companion. The latter turned, and with an inarticulate cry, like a wild beast, rushed at the young man and seized him by the throat with his brawny hands.

It is one thing, however, to catch a man by the throat, and another to retain that grip, especially when your antagonist happens to be an International football player. To Tom this red-bearded rough, who charged him so furiously, was nothing more than the thousands of bull-headed forwards who had come upon him like thunder-bolts in the days of old. With the ease begotten by practice he circled his assailant with his long muscular arms, and gave a quick convulsive jerk in which every sinew of his body participated. The red-bearded man's stumpy legs described a half-circle in the air, and he came down on the stone pavement with a sounding crash which shook every particle of breath from his enormous body.

Tom's fighting blood was all aflame now, and his grey eyes glittered with a Berserk joy as he made at Ezra. All the cautions of his father and the exhortations of his mother were cast to the winds as he saw his enemy standing before him. To do him justice, Ezra was nothing loth, but sprang forward to meet him, hitting with both hands. They were well matched, for both were trained boxers and exceptionally powerful men. Ezra was perhaps the stronger, but Tom was in better condition. There was a short eager rally — blow and guard and counter so quick and hard that the eye could hardly follow it. Then a rush of railway servants and bystanders tore them asunder. Tom had a red flush on his forehead where a blow had fallen, Ezra was spitting out the fragments of a broken tooth, and bleeding profusely. Each struggled furiously to get at the other, with the result that they were dragged farther apart. Eventually a burly policeman seized Tom by the collar, and held him as in a vice.

"Where is he?" Tom cried, craning his neck to catch a glimpse of his enemy. "He'll get away after all."

"Can't 'elp that," said the guardian of the peace phlegmatically. "A gen'elman like you ought to be ashamed. Keep quiet now! Would yer, then!" This last at some specially energetic effort on the part of the prisoner to recover his freedom.

"They'll get away! I know they will!" Tom cried in despair, for both Ezra and his companion, who was none other than Burt, of African notoriety, had disappeared from his sight. His fears proved to be only too well founded, for when at last he succeeded in wresting himself from the constable's clutches he could find no trace of his enemies. A dozen bystanders gave a dozen different accounts of their movements. He rushed from one platform to another over all the great station. He could have torn his hair at the thought of the way in which he had allowed them to slip through his fingers. It was fully an hour before he finally abandoned the search, and acknowledged to himself that he had been hoodwinked for the third time, and that a long week would elapse before he could have another chance of solving the mystery.

He turned at last sadly and reluctantly away from the station, and walked across to Waterloo Bridge, brooding over all that had occurred, and cursing himself for his stupidity in allowing himself to be drawn into a vulgar brawl, when he might have attained his end so much better by quiet observation. It was some consolation, however, that he had had one fair crack at Ezra Girdlestone. He glanced down at his knuckles, which were raw and bleeding, with a mixture of satisfaction and disgust. With half a smile he put his injured hand in his pocket, and looking up once more became aware that a red-faced gentleman was approaching him in a highly excited manner.

It could not be said that the red-faced gentleman walked, neither could it be said that the red-faced gentleman ran. His mode of progression might best be described as a succession of short and unwieldy jumps, which, as he was a rather stout gentleman, appeared to indicate some very urgent and pressing need for hurry. His face was bathed in perspiration, and his collar had become flaccid and shapeless from the same cause. It appeared to Tom, as he gazed at those rubicund, though anxious, features, that they should be well known to him. That glossy hat, those speckless gaiters, and the long frock-coat, surely they could belong to none other than the gallant Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of her Majesty’s 119th of the Line?

As the old soldier approached Tom, he quickened his pace, so that when he eventually came up with him he could only puff and pant and hold out a soiled letter.

“Read!” he managed to ejaculate.

Tom opened the letter and glanced his eye over the contents, with a face which had turned as pale as the major’s was red. When he finished it he turned without a word, and began to run in the direction from which he had come, the major following as quickly as his breath would permit.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GIRDLESTONE SENDS FOR THE DOCTOR.

When Kate came to herself after the terrible incident which frustrated her attempt at escape, she found herself in bed in her own little room. By the light which shone in through the window she knew that it must be well on in the day. Her head was throbbing violently, and she was so weak that she could hardly raise herself in bed. When she looked round she found that Rebecca had brought a chair in from her room and was sitting by the fire. At the sound of her movement the maid glanced up and perceived that her mistress had recovered consciousness.

"Lor' bless me!" she cried, "you've given us a pretty fright. We thought you wasn't coming back to your senses no more. You've been a-lyin' there since the middle of the night, and now it's close on to twelve o'clock."

Kate lay silent for some little time, putting together all that had occurred. "Oh, Rebecca," she said at last, shivering at the recollection, "I have seen the most dreadful sight. Either I am going mad, or I have seen a ghost."

"We thought you were a ghost yourself," said the girl reproachfully. "What with the screechin' and you lying so white in the middle of the passage, it was enough to make any one's 'air turn grey. Mr. Girdlestone, he lifted you up, an' carried you back into your room. He was cut to the heart, the good gentleman, when he saw what you'd been after, a-tryin' to give him the slip."

"Oh, this dreadful house will kill me — it will kill me!" Kate moaned.

"I cannot stay in it any longer. What shall I do? Oh, Rebecca,

Rebecca, what shall I do?"

The fresh-coloured maid came across with a simper upon her pretty, vulgar face, and sat on the side of the bed. "What's the matter, then?" she asked. "What is it that you have seen?"

"I have seen — oh, Rebecca, it is too dreadful to talk of. I have seen that poor monk who was killed in the cellars. It was not fancy. I saw him as plainly as I see you now, with his tall thin figure, and long loose gown, and the brown cowl drawn over his face."

"God preserve us!" cried Rebecca nervously, glancing over her shoulder. "It is enough to give one the creeps."

"I pray that I may never see such a sight again. Oh, Rebecca, if you have the heart of a woman, help me to get away from this place. They mean that I should never go from it alive. I have read it in my guardian's eyes. He longs for my death. Do, do tell me what I should do for the best."

"I'm surprised at you!" the maid said with dignity. "When Mr. Girdlestone and Mr. Ezra is so good to you, and provides you with a country-house and every convenience as 'eart could wish, all you can find to do is to go screamin' about at night, and then talk as if you was a-goin' to be murdered in the day. I really am surprised. There's Mr. Girdlestone a-callin.' He'd be shocked, poor gentleman, if he knew how you was abusin' of him." Rebecca's face assumed an expression of virtuous indignation as she swept out of the room, but her black eyes shone with the unholy light of cruelty and revenge.

Left to herself, Kate rose and dressed as well as her weakness would permit. Her nerves were so shaken that she started at the least sound, and she could hardly recognise the poor pale face which she saw in the glass as her own. She had scarcely finished her toilet before her guardian came up into her room.

"You are better, then?" he said.

"I am very ill," she answered gently.

"No wonder, after rushing about the corridors in that absurd fashion in the dead of the night. Rebecca tells me that you imagine you met with some apparition. You are crying. Are you so unhappy, then?"

"Very, very miserable," Kate answered, sinking her face upon her hands.

"Ah," said Girdlestone softly, "it is only in some higher life that we shall find entire peace and contentment." His voice had altered, so that a little warm spring of hope began to rise in the girl's heart, that perhaps the sight of her many miseries was beginning to melt this iron man.

"Beyond the grave is rest," he continued, in the same gentle tones. "It has seemed to me sometimes that if it were not for the duties which I have to perform in this world, and the many who are dependent upon me, I should be tempted to shorten my existence in order to attain the peace which is to come. Some precisians have pronounced it to be sinful to cut the thread of life. For my part I have never thought it so, and yet my view of morals has been a strict one. I hold that of all things in this world one's life is the thing which belongs most entirely to one’s self, and may therefore most freely be terminated when it seems good to us.” He picked up the phial from the mantelpiece and gazed thoughtfully at it. “How strange,” he said, “to think that within the compass of this tiny bottle lies a cure for every earthly evil! One draught and the body slips off like a garment, while the soul walks forth in all its beauty and freedom. Trouble is over. One draught, and — Ah, let go, I say! What have you done?”

Kate had snatched the bottle from him, and with a quick feminine gesture had hurled it against the wall, where it splintered to pieces, sending a strong turpentiney odour through the apartment. Her strength was so impaired that she staggered back after this feat, and sat down on the side of the bed, while her guardian, grim and threatening, stood over her with his long, bony fingers opening and shutting, as though he found it difficult to keep them from her throat.

“I will not help you in it,” she said, in a low but firm voice.

“You would kill my soul as well.”

The mask had fairly dropped from Girdlestone. No gaunt old wolf could have glared down with fiercer eyes or a more cruel mouth. “You fool!” he hissed.

“I am not afraid to die,” she said, looking up at him with brave, steadfast eyes.

Girdlestone recovered his self-possession by an effort. “It is clear to me,” he said calmly, “that your reason is unhinged. What is all this nonsense about death? There is nothing that will harm you except your own evil actions.” He turned abruptly and strode out of the room with the firm and decided step of a man who has taken an irrevocable resolution.

With a set and rigid face he ascended the steps which led to his bedroom, and, rummaging in his desk, produced a telegram form. This he filled up and took with him downstairs. There he put on his hat and started off to the Bedsworth Post-office at full speed.

At the avenue gate he met his sentinel, who was sitting on his camp stool as grim as ever.

“She is very bad, Stevens,” Girdlestone said, stopping and jerking his head in the direction of the house. “She is going downhill. I am afraid that she can’t last long. If any one asks you about her, you can say that she was despaired of. I am just sending off a telegram to a doctor in London, so that she may have the best advice.”

Stevens touched his greasy-peaked cap as a token of respect. “She was down here behavin’ outrageous the other day,” said he. “‘Let me pass,’ says she, ‘and you shall have ten golden guineas.’ Them’s her very words. ‘Not for ten hundred golden guineas,’ I answers, ‘would William Stevens, hesquire, do what he didn’t ought to.’”

“Very proper, very proper indeed,” said Girdlestone approvingly. “Every man in his own station has his own duties to fulfil, and he will be judged as he has fulfilled them, well or ill. I shall see that you are no loser by your staunchness.”

“Thank ye, guv’nor.”

“She is wild and delirious, and can get about in spite of her low state of health. It is possible that she may make some effort to get away, so be vigilant. Good day to you.”

“Good day, sir.” William Stevens stood at the gate, looking pensively after his employer; then he reseated himself upon his camp-stool, and, lighting his pipe, resumed his meditations. “I can’t make nought of it,” he muttered, scratching his head, “It do seem uncommon queer, to be sure. The boss he says, ‘She’s very low,’ says he, and then next minute he says, ‘She may be comin’ down and tryin’ to escape. ‘I’ve seen diers o’ all shapes and sizes, but I’ve never seed one as went a galivantin’ about like this — at least, not among them as died a nat’ral death. It do seem uncommon strange. Then, again, he’s off telegrayphin’ for a doctor to Lunnon, when there’s Doctor Corbett, o’ Claxton, or Doctor Hutton, o’ Bedsworth, would come quick enough if he wanted them. I can’t make no sense of it. Why, bust my buttons!” he continued, taking his pipe out of his mouth in a paroxysm of astonishment, “if here hain’t the dier herself!”

It was, indeed, Kate, who, learning that her guardian was gone, had come out with some vague idea of making a last struggle for her life and freedom. With the courage of despair, she came straight down the avenue to the sole spot where escape seemed possible.

“Good mornin’, missy,” cried Stevens, as she approached. “You don’t look extra bright this mornin’, but you ain’t as bad as your good guardian made me think. You don’t seem to feel no difficulty in gettin’ about.”

“There is nothing the matter with me,” the girl answered earnestly.

“I assure you there is not. My mind is as sound as yours.”

“That’s what they all says,” said the ex-warder with a chuckle.

“But it is so. I cannot stay in that house longer. I cannot, Mr.

Stevens, I cannot! It is haunted, and my guardian will murder me.

He means to. I read it in his eyes. He as good as tried this morning.

To die without one word to those I love — without any explanation of what

has passed — that would give a sting to death.”

“Well, if this ain’t outragis!” cried the one-eyed man; “perfectly outragis! Going to murder you, says you! What’s he a-goin’ to do that for?”

“God knows! He hates me for some reason. I have never gone against his wishes, save in one respect, and in that I can never obey him, for it is a matter in which he has no right to command.”

“Quite so!” said Stevens, winking his one eye. “I knows the feeling myself, cuss me, but I do! ‘Thine for once and thine for never,’ as the song says.”

“Why won’t you let me pass?” pleaded Kate. “You may have had daughters of your own. What would you do if they were treated as I have been? If I had money you should have it, but I have none. Do, do let me go! God will reward you for it. Perhaps when you are on your last bed of sickness the memory of this one good deed may outweigh all the evil that you have done.”

“Lor’, don’t she speak!” said Stevens, appealing confidentially to the nearest tree. “It’s like a dictionary.”

“And you won’t lose by it in this life,” the girl added eagerly. “See, here is my watch and my chain. You shall have that if you will let me through?”

“Let’s see it.” He opened it and examined it critically.

“Eighteen carat — it’s only a Geneva, though. What can you expect for a

Geneva?”

“And you shall have fifty pounds when I get back to my friends. Do let me pass, good Mr. Stevens, for my guardian may return at any moment.”

“See here, miss,” Stevens said solemnly; “dooty is dooty, and if every hair of your ‘ead was tagged wi’ a jewel, and you offered to make me your barber, I wouldn’t let you through that gate. As to this ‘ere watch, if so be as you would like to write a line to your friends, I’ll post it for you at Bedsworth in exchange for it, though it be only a Geneva.”

“You good, kind man!” cried Kate, all excitement and delight. “I have a pencil in my pocket. What shall I do for paper?” She looked eagerly round and spied a small piece which lay among the brushwood. With a cry of joy she picked it out. It was very coarse and very dirty, but she managed to scrawl a few lines upon it, describing her situation and asking for aid. “I will write the address upon the back,” she said. “When you get to Bedsworth you must buy an envelope and ask the post-office people to copy the address on to it.”

“I bargained to post it for the Geneva,” he said. “I didn’t bargain to buy envelopes and copy addresses. That’s a nice pencil-case of yourn. Now I’ll make a clean job of it if you’ll throw that in.”

Kate handed it over without a murmur. At last a small ray of light seemed to be finding its way through the darkness which had so long surrounded her. Stevens put the watch and pencil-case in his pocket, and took the little scrap of paper on which so much depended. As Kate handed it to him she saw over his shoulder that coming up the lane was a small pony-carriage, in which sat a buxom lady and a very small page. The sleek little brown pony which drew it ambled along at a methodical pace which showed that it was entirely master of the situation, while the whole turnout had an indescribable air of comfort and good nature. Poor Kate had been so separated from her kind that the sight of people who, if not friendly, were at least not hostile to her, sent a thrill of pleasure into her heart. There was something wholesome and prosaic too about this homely equipage, which was inexpressibly soothing to a mind so worn by successive terrors.

“Here’s some one a-comin’,” cried Stevens. “Clear out from here — it’s the governor’s orders.”

“Oh, do let me stay and say one word to the lady!” Stevens seized his great stick savagely. “Clear out!” he cried in a hoarse, angry voice, and made a step towards her as if he would strike her. She shrank away from him, and then, a sudden thought seizing her, she turned and ran through the woods as fast as her feeble strength would allow. The instant that she was out of sight, Stevens very deliberately and carefully tore up the little slip of paper with which she had entrusted him, and scattered the pieces to the wind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

Kate Harston fled as quickly as she could through the wood, stumbling over the brambles and crashing through the briars, regardless of pain or scratches or anything else which could stand between her and the possibility of safety. She soon gained the shed and managed to mount on to the top of it by the aid of the barrel. Craning her neck, she could see the long dusty lane, with the bare withered hedges upon either side, and the dreary line of the railway embankment beyond. There was no pony-carriage in sight.

She hardly expected that there would be, for she had taken a short cut, and the carriage would have to go some distance round. The road along which it was travelling ran at right angles to the one which she was now overlooking, and the chances were equal as to whether the lady would turn round or go straight on. In the latter case, it would not be possible for her to attract her attention. Her heart seemed to stand still with anxiety as she peered over the high wall at the spot where the two roads crossed.

Presently she heard the rattle of wheels, and the brown pony trotted round the corner. The carriage drew up at the end of the lane, and the driver seemed to be uncertain how to proceed. Then she shook the reins, and the pony lumbered on along the road. Kate gave a cry of despair and the last ray of hope died away from her heart.

It chanced, however, that the page in the carriage was just at that happy age when the senses are keen and on the alert. He heard the cry, and glancing round he saw through a break in the hedge that a lady was looking over the wall which skirted the lane they had passed. He mentioned the fact to his mistress.

“Maybe we’d better go back, ma’am,” he said.

“Maybe we’d better not, John,” said the buxom lady. “People can look over their garden walls without our interfering with them, can’t they?”

“Yes, ma’am, but she was a-hollerin’ at us.”

“No, John, was she though? Maybe this is a private road and we have no right to be on it.”

“She gave a holler as if some one was a-hurtin’ of her,” said John with decision.

“Then we’ll go back,” said the lady, and turned the pony round.

Hence it came about that just as Kate was descending with a sad heart from her post of observation, she was electrified to see the brown pony reappear and come trotting round the curve of the lane, with a rapidity which was altogether foreign to that quadruped’s usual habits. Indeed, the girl turned so very white at the sight, and her face assumed such an expression of relief and delight, that the lady who was approaching saw at once that it was no common matter which had caused her to summon them.

“What is it, my dear?” she cried, pulling up when she came abreast of the place. Her good, kind heart was touched already by the pleading expression upon the girl’s sweet face.

“Oh, madam, whoever you may be,” said Kate, in a low, rapid voice, “I believe God has sent you here this day. I am shut up in these grounds, and shall be murdered unless help comes.”

“Be murdered!” cried the lady in the pony-carriage, dropping back in her seat and raising her hands in astonishment.

“It is only too true,” Kate said, trying to speak concisely and clearly so as to enforce conviction, but feeling a choking sensation about her throat, as though an hysterical attack were impending. “My guardian has shut me up here for some weeks, and I firmly believe that he will never let me out alive. Oh, don’t, pray don’t think me mad! I am as sane as you are, though, God knows, what I have gone through has been enough to shake my reason.”

This last appeal of Kate’s was in answer to an expression of incredulity and doubt which had passed over the face of the lady below. It was successful in its object, for the ring of truth with which she spoke and the look of anxiety and terror upon her face were too genuine to be mistaken. The lady drew her rein so as to bring the carriage as near the wall as was possible without losing sight of Kate’s face.

“My dear,” she said, “you may safely tell me everything. Whatever I can do to help you shall be done, and where I am powerless there are others who are my friends and may be of assistance. Scully is my name — Mrs.

Lavinia Scully, of London. Don’t cry, my poor girl, but tell me all about it, and let us see how we can put matters right.”

Thus encouraged, Kate wiped away the tears which had been brought to her eyes by the unwonted sound of a friendly voice. Leaning forward as far as she could, and preventing herself from falling by passing her arm round a great branch which shot across the top of the shed, she gave in as few words as she could a detailed account of all that had befallen her. She described her guardian’s anxiety that she should marry his son, her refusal, their sudden departure from London, their life at the Priory, the manner in which she was cut off from all human aid, and the reasons which made her believe that an attempt would be made upon her life. In conclusion, she narrated the scene which had occurred that very morning, when her guardian had tempted her to commit suicide. The only incident which she omitted from her story was that which had occurred the night before, for she felt that it might put too severe a tax upon Mrs. Scully’s credulity. Indeed, looking back at it, she almost persuaded herself that the sight which she had seen might be some phantom conjured up by her own imagination, weakened as she was in mind and in body.

Having concluded her narrative, she wound up by imploring her new-found friend to assist her by letting her friends in London know what had become of her and where she was. Mrs. Scully listened with a face which expressed alternately the most profound pity and the most burning indignation. When Kate had finished, she sat silent for a minute or more entirely absorbed in her own thoughts. She switched her whip up and down viciously, and her usually placid countenance assumed an expression so fierce that Kate, looking down at her, feared that she had given her offence. When she looked up at last, however, she smiled so pleasantly that the poor girl was reassured, and felt instinctively that she had really found a true and effective friend at last.

“We must act promptly,” she said, “for we don’t know what they may be about, or what their plans are for the future. Who did you say your friends were?”

“Dr. Dimsdale, of Phillimore Gardens, Kensington.”

“Hasn’t he got a grown-up son?”

“Yes,” said Kate, with a slight flush on her pale cheeks.

“Ah!” cried the good lady, with a very roguish smile. “I see how the land lies. Of course, of course, why shouldn’t it? I remember hearing about that young man. I have heard about the Girdlestones also. African merchants they were in the City. You see I know all about you."

"You know Tom?" Kate cried in astonishment.

"Oh, don't let us get talking of Tom," said Mrs. Scully good-humouredly. "When girls get on a subject of that sort there's an end to everything. What I want now is business. In the first place I shall drive down to Bedsworth, and I shall send to London."

"God bless you!" ejaculated Kate.

"But not to Phillimore Gardens. Hot-headed young men do foolish things under such circumstances as these. This is a case that wants careful management. I know a gentleman in London who is just the man, and who I know would be only too proud to help a lady in distress. He is a retired officer, and his name is Major Clutterbuck — Major Tobias Clutterbuck."

"Oh, I know him very well, and I have heard of you, too," said Kate, with a smile. "I remember your name now in connection with his."

It was Mrs. Scully's turn to blush now. "Never mind that," she said. "I can trust the major, and I know he will be down here at a word from me. I shall let him have the facts, and he can tell the Dimsdales if he thinks it best. Good-bye, dear; don't be unhappy any more, but remember that you have friends outside who will very quickly set all right. Good-bye!" and waving her hand in encouragement, the good widow woke up the pony, which had fallen fast asleep, and rattled away down the lane in the direction from which she had come.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MAJOR HAS A LETTER.

At four o’clock Mr. Girdlestone stepped into the Bedsworth telegraph office and wired his short message. It ran thus: “Case hopeless. Come on to-morrow with a doctor.” On receipt of this he knew by their agreement that his son would come down, bringing with him the man of violence whom he had spoken of at their last interview. There was nothing for it now but that his ward should die. If he delayed longer, the crash might come before her money was available, and then how vain all regrets would be.

It seemed to him that there was very little risk in the matter. The girl had had no communication with any one. Even of those around her, Mrs. Jorrocks was in her dotage, Rebecca Taylforth was staunch and true, and Stevens knew nothing. Every one on the country side had heard of the invalid young lady at the Priory. Who would be surprised to hear that she had passed away? He dare not call in any local medical man, but his inventive brain had overcome the difficulty, and had hit upon a device by which he might defy both doctors and coroner. If all went as he had planned it, it was difficult to see any chance of detection. In the case of a poorer man the fact that the girl’s money reverted to him might arouse suspicion, but he rightly argued that with his great reputation no one would ever dream that such a consideration could have weight with him.

Having sent the telegram off, and so taken a final step, John Girdlestone felt more at his ease. He was proud of his own energy and decision. As he walked very pompously and gravely down the village street, his heart glowed within him at the thought of the long struggle which he had maintained against misfortune. He passed over in his mind all the successive borrowings and speculations and makeshifts and ruses which the firm had resorted to. Yet, in spite of every danger and difficulty, it still held up its head with the best, and would weather the storm at last. He reflected proudly that there was no other man in the City who would have had the dogged tenacity and the grim resolution which he had displayed during the last twelve months. “If ever any one should put it all in a book,” he said to himself, “there are few who would believe it possible. It is not by my own strength that I have done it.”

The man had no consciousness of blasphemy in him as he revolved this thought in his mind. He was as thoroughly in earnest as were any of those religious fanatics who, throughout history, have burned, sacked, and destroyed, committing every sin under heaven in the name of a God of peace and of mercy.

When he was half-way to the Priory he met a small pony-carriage, which was rattling towards Bedsworth at a great pace, driven by a good-looking middle-aged lady with a small page by her side. The merchant encountered this equipage in a narrow country lane without a footpath, and as it approached him he could not help observing that the lady wore an indignant and gloomy look upon her features which was out of keeping with their general contour. Her forehead was contracted into a very decided frown, and her lips were gathered into what might be described as a negative smile. Girdlestone stood aside to let her pass, but the lady, by a sudden twitch of her right-hand rein, brought the wheels across in so sudden a manner that they were within an ace of going over his toes. He only saved himself by springing back into a gap of the hedge. As it was, he found on looking down that his pearl grey trousers were covered with flakes of wet mud. What made the incident more perplexing was that both the middle-aged lady and the page laughed very heartily as they rattled away to the village. The merchant proceeded on his way marvelling in his heart at the uncharitableness and innate wickedness of unregenerated human nature.

Good Mrs. Scully little dreamed of the urgency of the case. Had she seen the telegram which John Girdlestone had just despatched, it is conceivable that she might have read between the words, and by acting more promptly have prevented a terrible crime. As a matter of fact, with all her sympathy the worthy woman had taken a large part of Kate’s story with the proverbial grain of salt. It seemed to her to be incredible and impossible that in this nineteenth century such a thing as deliberate and carefully planned murder should occur in Christian England. That these things occur in the abstract we are ready to admit, but we find it very difficult to realise that they may come within the horizon of our own experience. Hence Mrs. Scully set no importance upon Kate’s fears for her life, and put them down to the excited state of the girl’s imagination. She did consider it, however, to be a very iniquitous and unjustifiable thing that a young girl should be cooped up and separated from all the world in such a very dreary place of seclusion as the Priory. This consideration and nothing more serious had set that look of wrath upon her pleasant face, and had stirred her up to frustrate Girdlestone and to communicate with Kate's friends.

Her intention had been to telegraph to London, but as she drove to Bedsworth she bethought her how impossible it would be for her within the limits of a telegram to explain to her satisfaction all that she wanted to express. A letter, she reflected, would, if posted now, reach the major by the first post on Saturday morning. It would simply mean a few hours' delay in the taking of steps to relieve Kate, and what difference could a few hours more or less make to the girl. She determined, therefore, that she would write to the major, explaining all the circumstances, and leave it to him what course of action should be pursued.

Mrs. Scully was well known at the post office, and they quickly accommodated her with the requisites for correspondence. Within a quarter of an hour she had written, sealed, stamped, and posted the following epistle: —

"DEAREST TOBY,

"I am afraid you must find your period of probation very slow. Poor boy! what does he do? No billiards, no cards, no betting — how does he manage to get through the day at all? Smokes, I suppose, and looks out of the window, and tells all his grievances to Mr. Von Baumser. Aren't you sorry that ever you made the acquaintance of Morrison's second floor front? Poor Toby!

"Who do you think I have come across down here? No less a person than that Miss Harston who was Girdlestone's ward. You used to talk about her, I remember, and indeed you were a great admirer of hers. You would be surprised if you saw her now, so thin and worn and pale. Still her face is very sweet and pretty, so I won't deny your good taste — how could I after you have paid your addresses to me?

"Her guardian has brought her down here and has locked her up in a great bleak house called the Priory. She has no one to speak to, and is not allowed to write letters. She seemed to be heart-broken because none of her friends know where she is, and she fears that they may imagine that she has willingly deserted them. Of course, by her friends she means that curly-headed Mr. Dimsdale that you spoke of. The poor girl is in a very low nervous state, and told me over the wall of the park that she feared her guardian had designs on her life. I can hardly believe that, but I do think that she is far from well, and that it is enough to drive her mad to coop her up like that. We must get her out somehow or another. I suppose that her guardian is within his rights, and that it is not a police matter. You must consider what must be done, and let young Dimsdale know if you think best. He will want to come down to see her, no doubt, and if Toby were to come too I should not be sorry.

"I should have telegraphed about it, but I could not explain myself sufficiently. I assure you that the poor girl is in a very bad way, and we can't be too energetic in what we do. It was very sad to hear the positive manner in which she declared that her guardian would murder her, though she did not attempt to give any reason why he should commit such a terrible crime. We saw a horrid one-eyed man at the gate, who appeared to be on guard to prevent any one from coming out or in. On our way to Bedsworth we met no less a person than the great Mr. Girdlestone himself, and we actually drove so clumsily that we splashed him all over with mud. Wasn't that a very sad and unaccountable thing? I fancy I see Toby smiling over that.

"Good-bye, my dear lad. Be as good as you can. I know you've got rather out of the way of it, but practice works wonders.

"Ever yours,

"LAVINIA SCULLY."

It happened that on the morning on which this missive came to Kennedy Place, Von Baumser had not gone to the City. The major had just performed his toilet and was marching up and down with a cigarette in his mouth and the United Service Gazette in his hand, descanting fluently, as is the habit of old soldiers, on the favouritism of the Horse Guards and the deterioration of the service.

"Look at this fellow Carmoichael!" he cried excitedly, slapping the paper with one, hand, while he crumpled it up with the other. "They've made him lieutinant-gineral! The demndest booby in the regiment, sir! A fellow who's seen no service and never heard a shot fired in anger. They promoted him on the stringth of a sham fight, bedad! He commanded a definding force operating along the Thames and opposing an invading army that was advancing from Guildford. Did iver ye hear such infernal nonsense in your life? And there's Stares, and Knight, and Underwood, and a dozen more I could mintion, that have volunteered for everything since the Sikh war of

‘46, all neglicted, sir — neglicted! The British Army is going straight to the divil.”

“Dat’s a very bad look-out for the devil,” said Von Baumser, filling up a cup of coffee.

The major continued to stride angrily about the room. “That’s why we niver have a satisfactory campaign with a European foe,” he broke out. “Our success is always half and half, and leads to nothing. Yet we have the finest raw material and the greatest individual fighting power and divilment of any army in the world.”

“Always, of course, not counting de army of his most graceworthy majesty de Emperor William,” said Von Baumser, with his mouth full of toast. “Here is de girl mit a letter. Let us hope dat it is my Frankfort money.”

“Two to one it’s for me.”

“Ah, he must not bet!” cried Von Baumser, with upraised finger.

“You have right, though. It is for you, and from de proper quarter too,

I think.”

It was the letter which we have already quoted. The major broke the seal and read it over very carefully, after which he read it again. Von Baumser, watching him across the table, saw a very anxious and troubled look upon his ruddy face.

“I hope dere is nothing wrong mit my good vriend, Madame Scully?” he remarked at last.

“No, nothing wrong with her. There is with some one else, though;” and with that he read to his companion all that part of his letter which referred to Miss Harston.

“Dat is no joke at all,” the German remarked; and the two sat for some little time lost in thought, the major with the letter still lying open upon his knee.

“What d’ye think of it?” he asked at last.

“I think dat it is a more bad thing than the good madame seems to think. I think dat if Miss Harston says dat Herr Girdlestone intends to kill her, it is very likely dat he has dat intention”

“Ged, he’s not a man to stick at troifles,” the major said, rubbing his chin reflectively. “Here’s a nice kettle of fish! What the deuce could cause him to do such a thing?”

“Money, of course. I have told you, my good vriend, dat since a year de firm has been in a very bad way indeed. It is not generally known, but I know it, and so do others. Dis girl, I have heard, has money which would come to de old man in case of her death. It is as plain as de vingers on my hand.”

“Be George, the thing looks very ugly!” said the major, pacing up and down the room. “I believe that fellow and his beauty of a son are game for anything. Lavinia takes the mather too lightly. Fancy any one being such a scounthrel as to lay a hand on that dear girl, though. Ged, Baumser, it makes ivery drop of blood in me body tingle in me veins!”

“My dear vriend,” Von Baumser answered, “it is very good of your blood for to tingle, but I do not see how dat will help the mees. Let us be practical, and make up our brains what we should do.”

“I must find young Dimsdale at once. He has a right to know.”

“Yes, I should find him. Dere is no doubt that you and he should at once start off for dis place. I know dat young man. Dere vill be no holding him at all when he has heard of it. You must go too, to prevent him from doing dummheiten, and also because good Madame Scully has said so in her letter.”

“Certainly. We shall go down togither. One of us will manage to see the young lady and find out if she requoires assistance. Bedad, if she does, she shall have it, guardian or no guardian. If we don’t whip her out in a brace of shakes me name’s not Clutterbuck.”

“You must remember,” remarked Baumser, “dat dese people are desperate. If dey intend to murder a voman dey vould certainly not stick at a man or two men. You have no knowledge of how many dere may be. Dere is certainly Herr Girdlestone and his son and de man mit de eye, but madame knows not how many may be at de house. Remember also dat de police are not on your side, but rather against you, for as yet dere is no evidence dat any crime is intentioned. Ven you think of all dis I am sure dat you vill agree with me dat it would be vell to take mit you two or tree men dat would stick by you through thin and broad.”

The major was so busy in making his preparations for departure that he could only signify by a nod that he agreed with his friend’s remarks. “What men could I git?” he asked.

“Dere is I myself,” said the German, counting upon his big red fingers, “and dere are some of our society who would very gladly come on such an errand, and are men who are altogether to be relied upon. Dere is little Fritz Bulow, of Kiel, and a Russian man whose name I disremember, but he is a good man. He vas a Nihilist at Odessa, and is sentenced to death suppose they could him catch. Dere are others as good, but it might take me time to find dem. Dese two I can very easily get. Dey are living together, and have neither of dem nothing to do."

"Bring them, then," said the major. "Git a cab and run them down to Waterloo Station. That's the one for Bedsworth. I'll bring Dimsdale down with me and mate you there. In me opinion there's no time to be lost."

The major was ready to start, so Von Baumser threw on his coat and hat, and picked out a thick stick from a rack in the corner. "We may need something of de sort," he said.

"I have me derringer," the soldier answered. They left the house together, and Von Baumser drove off to the East End, where his political friends resided. The major called a cab and rattled away to Phillimore Gardens and thence to the office, without being able to find the man of whom he was in search. He then rushed down the Strand as quickly as he could, intending to catch the next train and go alone, but on his way to Waterloo Station he fell in with Tom Dimsdale, as recorded in a preceding chapter.

The letter was a thunderbolt to Tom, In his worst dreams he had never imagined anything so dark as this. He hurried back to the station at such a pace that the poor major was reduced to a most asthmatical and wheezy condition. He trotted along pluckily, however, and as he went heard the account of Tom's adventures in the morning and of the departure of Ezra Girdlestone and of his red-bearded companion. The major's face grew more anxious still when he heard of it. "Pray God we may not be too late!" he panted.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CLOUDS GROW DARKER.

When Kate had made a clean breast of all her troubles to the widow Scully, and had secured that good woman’s co-operation, a great weight seemed to have been lifted from her heart, and she sprang from the shed a different woman. It would soon be like a dream, all these dreary weeks in the grim old house. Within a day she was sure that either Tom or the major would find means of communicating with her. The thought made her so happy that the colour stole back into her cheeks, and she sang for very lightness of heart as she made her way back to the Priory.

Mrs. Jorrocks and Rebecca observed the change which had come over her and marvelled at it. Kate attempted to aid the former in her household work, but the old crone refused her assistance and repulsed her harshly. Her maid too answered her curtly when she addressed her, and eyed her in anything but a friendly manner.

“You don’t seem much the worse,” she remarked, “for all the wonderful things you seed in the night.”

“Oh, don’t speak of it,” said Kate. “I am afraid that I have given you a great fright. I was feeling far from well, and I suppose that I must have imagined all about that dreadful monk. Yet, at the time, I assure you that I saw it as plainly as I see you now.”

“What’s that she says?” asked Mrs. Jorrocks, with her hand to her ear.

“She says that she saw a ghost last night as plain as she sees you now.”

“Pack of nonsense!” cried the old woman, rattling the poker in the grate. “I’ve been here afore she came — all alone in the house, too — and I hain’t seen nothing of the sort. When she’s got nothing else to grumble about she pretends as she has seen a ghost.”

“No, no,” the girl said cheerily. “I am not grumbling — indeed I am not.”

“It’s like her contrariness to say so,” old Mrs. Jorrocks cried hoarsely. “She’s always a-contradictin’.”

"You're not in a good temper to-day," Kate remarked, and went off to her room, going up the steps two at a time with her old springy footstep.

Rebecca followed her, and noticing the change, interpreted it in her own narrow fashion.

"You seems cheerful enough now," she said, standing at Kate's door and looking into her room, with a bitter smile on her lips. "To-morrow is Saturday. That's what's the matter with you."

"To-morrow Saturday!" Kate repeated in astonishment.

"Yes; you know what I mean well enough. It's no use pretending that you don't."

The girl's manner was so aggressive that Kate was astonished.

"I haven't the least idea of what you mean," she said.

"Oh no," cried Rebecca, with her arms akimbo and a sneer on her face. "She doesn't know what I mean. She doesn't know that her young man is coming down on the Saturday. She does not know that Mr. Ezra comes all the way from London on that day just for to see her. It isn't that that makes you cheerful, is it? Oh, you double face!" The girl's pretty features were all distorted with malice as she spoke, and her two hands were clenched passionately.

"Rebecca!" cried Kate energetically, "I really think that you are the most complete fool that ever I met in my life. I will trouble you to remember that I am your mistress and you are my servant. How dare you speak to me in such a way? Leave my room this instant!"

The girl stood her ground as though she intended to brazen it out, but Kate swept towards her with so much honest anger in her voice, and such natural dignity in her bearing, that she sank her bold gaze, and with a few muttered words slunk away into her own room. Kate closed the door behind her, and then, her sense of the ludicrous overpowering her anger, she laughed for the first time since she had been in the Priory. It was so intensely ridiculous that even the most foolish of mortals should imagine that she could, under any circumstances, be desirous of seeing Ezra Girdlestone. The very thought of him brought her amusement to an end, for the maid was right, and to-morrow would bring him down once more. Perhaps her friends might arrive before he did. God grant it!

It was a cold but a bright day. From her window she could see the snow-white sails of the Hampshire fishing-boats dipping and rising against the deep blue sea. A single barque rode amongst them, like a swan among ducklings, beating up against the wind for Portsmouth or Southampton. Away on the right was the long line of white foam which marked the Winner Sands. The tide was in and the great mudbanks had disappeared, save that here and there their dun-coloured convexity rose above the surface like the back of a sleeping leviathan. Overhead a great flock of wild geese were flapping their way southward, like a broad arrow against the sky. It was an exhilarating, bracing scene, and accorded well with her own humour. She felt so full of life and hope that she could hardly believe that she was the same girl who that very morning had hurled away the poison bottle, knowing in her heart that unless she destroyed it she might be tempted to follow her guardian's sinister suggestions. Yet the incident was real enough, for there were the fragments of glass scattered over the bare planks of her floor, and the insidious odour of the drug was still so strong that she opened the window in order to dissipate it. Looking back at it now, it all seemed like some hideous nightmare.

She had no very clear idea as to what she expected her friends to do.

That she would be saved, and that speedily, she never for one instant

doubted. She had only to wait patiently and all would be well.

By to-morrow night, at the latest, her troubles would be over.

So thought Girdlestone too, as he sat down below, with his head bent upon his breast and his eyes looking moodily from under his shaggy brows at the glowing coals. To-morrow evening would settle the matter once and for ever. Burt and Ezra would be down by five o'clock, and that would be the beginning of the end. As to Burt's future there was no difficulty about that. He was a broken man. If well supplied with unlimited liquor he would not live long to trouble them. He had nothing to gain, and everything to lose by denouncing them. Should the worst come to the worst, the ravings of a dipsomaniac could do little harm to a man as respected as the African merchant. Every event had been foreseen and provided for by the old schemer. Above all, he had devised a method by which even a coroner's inquiry could be faced with impunity, and which would do away with all necessity for elaborate concealment.

He beckoned Mrs. Jorrocks over to him, for he had been sitting in the large room, which was used both as a dining-room and as a kitchen.

"What is the latest train to-morrow?" he asked.

"There be one that reaches Bedsworth at a quarter to ten."

"It passes the grounds at about twenty to ten, then?"

“That reg’lar that I could set my clock by it.”

“That’ll do. Where is Miss Harston?”

“Upstairs, sir. She came back a-laughin’ and a-jumpin’ and as sassy as you please to them as was old before she was born.”

“Laughing!” said Girdlestone, raising his eyebrows. “She did not seem in a laughing mood this morning. You don’t think she has gone out of her mind, do you?”

“I don’t know nought about that. There was Rebecca came down here a-cryin’ ‘cause she’d ordered her out of her room. Oh, she’s mistress of the house — there’s no doubt about that. She’ll be a-givin’ of us all the sack presently.”

Girdlestone relapsed into silence, but his face showed that he was puzzled by what he had heard.

Kate slept a sound and dreamless sleep that night. At her age trouble is shaken from the young mind like water from the feathers of a duck. It had been all very gloomy and terrible while it lasted, but now the dawn of better days had come. She woke cheerful and light-hearted. She felt that when once she was free she could forgive her guardian and Rebecca and all of them — even Ezra. She would bury the whole hideous incident, and never think of it or refer to it again.

She amused herself that morning by reckoning up in her mind what the sequence of events would be in London, and how long it would be before she heard from her friends. If Mrs. Scully had telegraphed, news would have reached them last night. Probably she would write as well, giving all the particulars about her. The post came in about nine o’clock, she thought. Then some time would elapse before the major could find Tom. After that, no doubt they would have to consider what had best be done, and perhaps would go and consult with Dr. Dimsdale. That would occupy the morning and part of the afternoon. They could hardly reach the Priory before nightfall.

Ezra would be down by that time. On the Saturday before he had arrived between five and six. A great dread filled her soul at the thought of meeting the young merchant again. It was merely the natural instinct of a lady shrinking from whatever is rough and coarse and antagonistic. She had no conception of the impending danger, or of what his coming might mean to her.

Mr. Girdlestone was more gracious to her than usual that morning at breakfast. He seemed anxious to efface the remembrance of his fierce and threatening words the day before. Rebecca, who waited upon them, was astonished to hear the way in which he spoke. His whole manner was less heavy and ungainly than usual, for now that the time for action was at hand he felt braced and invigorated, as energetic men do.

“You should study botany while you are down here,” he said blandly. “Depend upon it, one cannot learn too many things in one’s youth. Besides, a knowledge of natural science teaches us the marvellous harmony which prevails throughout the universe, and so enlarges our minds.”

“I should very much like to know something of it,” answered Kate.

“My only fear is that I should not be clever enough to learn it.”

“The wood here is full of wonders. The tiniest mushroom is as extraordinary and as worthy of study as the largest oak. Your father was fond of plants and animals.”

“Yes, I can remember that,” said Kate, her face growing sad as her mind travelled back to years gone by. What would that same father have thought, she wondered, had he known how this man opposite to her had treated her! What did it matter now, though, when she would so soon be out of his power!

“I remember,” said Girdlestone, stirring his tea thoughtfully, “when we lived in the City as ‘prentice lads together, we shared a room above the shop. He used to have a dormouse that he was very fond of. All his leisure time was spent in nursing the creature and cleaning its cage. It seemed to be his only pleasure in life. One night it was running across the floor, and I put my foot upon it.”

“Oh, poor papa!” cried Kate.

“I did it upon principle. ‘You have devoted too much time to the creature,’ I said. ‘Raise up your thoughts higher!’ He was grieved and angry, but in time he came to thank me. It was a useful lesson.”

Kate was so startled by this anecdote that she remained silent for some little time. “How old were you then?” she asked at last.

“I was about sixteen.”

“Then you were always — inclined that way?” She found some difficulty in conveying her meaning in polite tones.

“Yes; I received a call when I was very young. I became one of the elect at an early age.”

“And which are the elect?” his ward asked demurely.

“The members of the Community of the Primitive Trinitarians — or, at least those of them who frequent Purbrook Street Chapel. I hold that the ministers in the other chapels that I have attended do not preach the unadulterated Word, and have therefore missed the narrow path.”

“Then,” said Kate, “you think that no one will be saved except those who frequent the Purbrook Street Chapel?”

“And not all of them — no, nor one in ten,” the merchant said confidently, and with some approach to satisfaction. “Heaven must be a very small place,” Kate remarked, as she rose from the table.

“Are you going out?”

“I was thinking of having a stroll in the wood.”

“Think over a text as you walk. It is an excellent commencement of the day.”

“What text should I think of?” she asked, standing smiling in the doorway, with the bright sunshine bursting in behind her.

“‘In the midst of life we are in death,’” he said solemnly. His voice was so hollow and stern that it struck a chill into the girl’s heart. The effect was only momentary, however. The day was so fine, and the breeze so fresh, that sadness was out of the question. Besides, was not her deliverance at hand! On this of all mornings she should be free from vague presentiments and dim forebodings. The change in her guardian’s manner was an additional cause for cheerfulness. She almost persuaded herself that she had misconstrued his words and his intentions upon the preceding day.

She went down the avenue and had a few words with the sentry there. She felt no bitterness against him now — on the contrary, she could afford to laugh at his peculiarities. He was in a very bad humour on account of some domestic difficulties. His wife had been abusing him, and had ended by assaulting him. “She used to argey first, and then fetch the poker,” he said ruefully; “but now it’s the poker first, and there ain’t no argeyment at all.”

Kate looked at his savage face and burly figure, and thought what a very courageous woman his wife must be.

“It’s all ‘cause the fisher lasses won’t lemme alone,” he explained with a leer. “She don’t like it, knock me sideways if she do! It ain’t my fault, though. I allers had a kind o’ a fetchin’ way wi’ women.”

“Did you post my note?” asked Kate.

“Yes, in course I did,” he answered. “It’ll be in Lunnon now, most like.” His one eye moved about in such a very shifty way as he spoke that she was convinced that he was telling a lie. She could not be sufficiently thankful that she had something else to rely upon besides the old scoundrel’s assurances.

There was nothing to be seen down the lane except a single cart with a loutish young man walking at the horse’s head. She had a horror of the country folk since her encounter with the two bumpkins upon the Sunday. She therefore slipped away from the gate, and went through the wood to the shed, which she mounted. On the other side of the wall there was standing a little boy in buttons, so rigid and motionless that he might have been one of Madame Tussaud’s figures, were it not for his eyes, which were rolling about in every direction, and which finally fixed themselves on Kate’s face.

“Good morning, miss,” said this apparition.

“Good morning,” she answered. “I think I saw you with Mrs. Scully yesterday?”

“Yes, miss. Missus, she told me to wait here and never to move until I seed you. She said as you would be sure to come. I’ve been waitin’ here for nigh on an hour.”

“Your mistress is an angel,” Kate said enthusiastically, “and you are a very good little boy.”

“Indeed, you’ve hit it about the missus,” said the youth, in a hoarse whisper, nodding his head to emphasize his remarks. “She’s got a heart as is big enough for three.”

Kate could not help smiling at the enthusiasm with which the little fellow spoke.

“You seem fond of her,” she said.

“I’d be a bad ‘un if I wasn’t. She took me out of the work’us without character or nothing, and now she’s a-educatin’ of me. She sent me ‘ere with a message?”

“What was it?”

“She said as how she had written instead o’ electro-telegraphing, ‘cause she had so much to say she couldn’t fit it all on a telegraph.”

“I thought that would be so,” Kate said.

“She wrote to Major — Major — him as is a-follerin’ of her. She said as she had no doubt as he’d be down to-day, and you was to keep up your sperrits and let her know by me if any one was a-wexin’ you.”

“No, no. Not at all,” Kate answered, smiling again. “You can tell her that my guardian has been much kinder to-day. I am full of hope now. Give her my warmest thanks for her kindness.”

“All right, miss. Say, that chap at the gate hasn’t been giving you no cheek has he — him with the game eye?”

“No, no, John.”

John looked at her suspiciously. “If he hasn’t, it’s all right,” he said; “but I think as you’re one of them as don’t complain if you can ‘elp it.” He opened his hand and showed a great jagged flint which he carried. “I’d ha’ knocked his other peeper out with this,” he said, “blowed if I wouldn’t!”

“Don’t do anything of the sort, John, but run home like a good little boy.”

“All right, miss. Good-bye to ye!”

Kate watched him stroll down the lane. He paused at the bottom as if irresolute, and then she was relieved to see him throw the stone over into a turnip field, and walk rapidly off in the opposite direction to the Priory gates.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE THREE FACES AT THE WINDOW.

Late in the afternoon Ezra arrived at the Priory. From one of the passage windows Kate saw him driving up the avenue in a high dog-cart. There was a broad-shouldered, red-bearded man sitting beside him, and the ostler from the Flying Bull was perched behind. Kate had rushed to the window on hearing the sound of wheels, with some dim expectation that her friends had come sooner than she anticipated. A glance, however, showed her that the hope was vain. From behind a curtain she watched them alight and come into the house, while the trap wheeled round and rattled off for Bedsworth again.

She went slowly back to her room, wondering what friend this could be whom Ezra had brought with him. She had noticed that he was roughly clad, presenting a contrast to the young merchant, who was vulgarly spruce in his attire. Evidently he intended to pass the night at the Priory, since they had let the trap go back to the village. She was glad that he had come, for his presence would act as a restraint upon the Girdlestones. In spite of her guardian’s amiability at breakfast, she could not forget the words which he had used the morning before or the incident of the poison bottle. She was as convinced as ever that he meant mischief to her, but she had ceased to fear him. It never for one moment occurred to her that her guardian’s machinations might come to a head before her rescuers could arrive.

As the long afternoon stole away she became more and more impatient and expectant. She had been sewing in her room, but she found that she could no longer keep her attention on the stitches. She paced nervously up and down the little apartment. In the room beneath she could hear the dull muffled sound of men’s voices in a long continuous monotone, broken only by the interposition now and again of one voice which was so deep and loud that it reminded her of the growl of a beast of prey. This must belong to the red-bearded stranger. Kate wondered what it could be that they were talking over so earnestly. City affairs, no doubt, or other business matters of importance. She remembered having once heard it remarked that many of the richest men on ‘Change were eccentric and slovenly in their dress, so the new-comer might be a more important person than he seemed.

She had determined to remain in her room all the afternoon to avoid Ezra, but her restlessness was so great that she felt feverish and hot. The fresh air, she thought, would have a reviving effect upon her. She slipped down the staircase, treading as lightly as possible not to disturb the gentlemen in the refectory. They appeared to hear her however, for the hum of conversation died away, and there was a dead silence until after she had passed.

She went out on to the little lawn which lay in front of the old house. There were some flower-beds scattered about on it, but they were overgrown with weeds and in the last stage of neglect. She amused herself by attempting to improve the condition of one of them and kneeling down beside it she pulled up a number of the weeds which covered it. There was a withered rose-bush in the centre, so she pulled up that also, and succeeded in imparting some degree of order among the few plants which remained. She worked with unnatural energy, pausing every now and again to glance down the dark avenue, or to listen intently to any chance sound which might catch her ear.

In the course of her work she chanced to look up at the Priory. The refectory faced the lawn, and at the window of it there stood the three men looking out at her. The Girdlestones were nodding their heads, as though they were pointing her out to the third man, who stood between them. He was looking at her with an expression of interest. Kate thought as she returned his gaze that she had never seen a more savage and brutal face. He was flushed and laughing, while Ezra beside him appeared to be pale and anxious. They all, when they saw that she noticed them, stepped precipitately back from the window. She had only a momentary glance at them, and yet the three faces — the strange fierce red one, and the two hard familiar pale ones which flanked it — remained vividly impressed upon her memory.

Girdlestone had been so pleased at the early appearance of his allies, and the prospect of settling the matter once for all, that he received them with a cordiality which was foreign to his nature.

“Always punctual, my dear son, and always to be relied upon,” he said. “You are a model to our young business men. As to you, Mr. Burt,” he continued, grasping the navvy’s horny hand, “I am delighted to see you at the Priory, much as I regret the sad necessity which has brought you down.”

“Talk it over afterwards,” said Ezra shortly. “Burt and I have had no luncheon yet.”

“I am cursed near starved,” the other growled, throwing himself into a chair. Ezra had been careful to keep him from drink on the way down, and he was now sober, or as nearly sober as a brain saturated with liquor could ever be.

Girdlestone called for Mrs. Jorrocks, who laid the cloth and put a piece of cold corned beef and a jug of beer upon the table. Ezra appeared to have a poor appetite, but Burt ate voraciously, and filled his glass again and again from the jug. When the meal was finished and the ale all consumed, he rose with a grunt of repletion, and, pulling a roll of black tobacco from his pocket, proceeded to cut it into slices, and to cram it into his pipe. Ezra drew a chair up to the fire, and his father did the same, after ordering the old woman out of the room and carefully closing the door behind her.

“You have spoken to our friend here about the business?” Girdlestone asked, nodding his head in the direction of Burt.

“Yes. I have made it all clear.”

“Five hundred pounds down, and a free passage to Africa,” said Burt.

“An energetic man like you can do a great deal in the colonies with five hundred pounds,” Girdlestone remarked.

“What I do with it is nothin’ to you, guv’nor,” Burt remarked surlily. “I does the job, you pays the money, and there’s an end as far as you are concerned.”

“Quite so,” the merchant said in a conciliatory voice. “You are free to do what you like with the money.”

“Without axin’ your leave,” growled Burt. He was a man of such a turbulent and quarrelsome disposition that he was always ready to go out of his way to make himself disagreeable.

“The question is how it is to be done,” interposed Ezra. He was looking very nervous and uneasy. Hard as he was, he had neither the pseudo-religious monomania of his father, nor the callous brutality of Burt, and he shuddered at the thought of what was to come. His eyes were red and bleared, and he sat with one arm thrown over the back of his chair, while he drummed nervously with the fingers of his other hand upon his knee. “You’ve got some plan in your head, I suppose,” he said to his father. “It’s high time the thing was carried through, or we shall have to put up the shutters in Fenchurch Street.”

His father shivered at the very thought. “Anything rather than that,” he said.

“It will precious soon come to that. It was the devil of a fight to keep things straight last week.”

“What’s the matter with your lip? It seems to be swollen.”

“I had a turn with that fellow Dimsdale,” Ezra answered, putting his hand up to his mouth to hide the disfigurement. “He followed us to the station, and we had to beat him off; but I think I left my marks upon him.”

“He played some damned hokey-pokey business on me,” said Burt. “He tripped me in some new-fangled way, and nigh knocked the breath out of me. I don’t fall as light as I used.”

“He did not succeed in tracing you?” Girdlestone asked uneasily. “There is no chance of his turning up here and spoiling the whole business?”

“Not the least,” said Ezra confidently. “He was in the hands of a policeman when I saw him last.”

“That is well. Now I should like, before we go further, to say a few words to Mr. Burt as to what has led up to this.”

“You haven’t got a drop to drink, boss?”

“Yes, yes, of course. What is that in the bottle over there?

Ginger wine. How will that do?”

“Here’s something better,” Ezra said, rummaging in the cupboard. “Here is a bottle of Hollands. It is Mrs. Jorrocks’ private store, I fancy.”

Burt poured himself out half a tumblerful, and filled it up with water.

“Drive along,” he said; “I am lisnin’.”

Girdlestone rose and stood with his back to the fire, and his hands under his coat-tails. “I wish you to understand,” he said, “that this is no sudden determination of ours, but that events have led up to it in such a way that it was impossible to avoid it. Our commercial honour and integrity are more precious to us than anything else, and we have both agreed that we are ready to sacrifice anything rather than lose it. Unfortunately, our affairs have become somewhat involved, and it was absolutely necessary that the firm should have a sum of money promptly in order to extricate itself from its difficulties. This sum we endeavoured to get through a daring speculation in diamonds, which was, though I say it, ingeniously planned and cleverly carried out, and which would have succeeded admirably had it not been for an unfortunate chance.”

“I remember,” said Burt.

“Of course. You were there at the time. We were able to struggle along for some time after this on money which we borrowed and on the profits of our African trade. The time came, however, when the borrowed money was to be repaid, and once again the firm was in danger. It was then that we first thought of the fortune of my ward. It was enough to turn the scale in our favour, could we lay our hands upon it. It was securely tied up, however, in such a way that there were only two means by which we could touch a penny of it. One was by marrying her to my son; the other was by the young lady’s death. Do you follow me?”

Burt nodded his shaggy head.

“This being so, we did all that we could to arrange a marriage. Without flattery I may say that no girl was ever approached in a more delicate and honourable way than she was by my son Ezra. I, for my part, brought all my influence to bear upon her in order to induce her to meet his advances in a proper spirit. In spite of our efforts, she rejected him in the most decided way, and gave us to understand that it was hopeless to attempt to make her change her mind.”

“Some one else, maybe,” suggested Burt.

“The man who put you on your back at the station,” said Ezra.

“Ha! I’ll pay him for that,” the navvy growled viciously.

“A human life, Mr. Burt,” continued Girdlestone, “is a sacred thing, but a human life, when weighed against the existence of a great firm from which hundreds derive their means of livelihood, is a small consideration indeed. When the fate of Miss Harston is put against the fate of the great commercial house of Girdlestone, it is evident which must go to the wall.”

Burt nodded, and poured some more Hollands from the square bottle.

“Having seen,” Girdlestone continued, “that this sad necessity might arise, I had made every arrangement some time before. This building is, as you may have observed in your drive, situated in a lonely and secluded part of the country. It is walled round too in such a manner that any one residing here is practically a prisoner. I removed the lady so suddenly that no one can possibly know where she has gone to, and I have spread such reports as to her condition that no one down here would be surprised to hear of her decease.”

“But there is bound to be an inquiry. How about a medical certificate?” asked Ezra.

“I shall insist upon a coroner’s inquest,” his father answered.

"An inquest! Are you mad?"

"When you have heard me I think that you will come to just the opposite conclusion. I think that I have hit upon a scheme which is really neat — neat in its simplicity." He rubbed his hands together, and showed his long yellow fangs in his enjoyment of his own astuteness.

Burt and Ezra leaned forward to listen, while the old man sank his voice to a whisper.

"They think that she is insane," he said.

"Yes."

"There's a small door in the boundary wall which leads out to the railway line."

"Well, what of that?"

"Suppose that door to be left open, would it be an impossible thing for a crazy woman to slip out through it, and to be run over by the ten o'clock express?"

"If she would only get in the way of it."

"You don't quite catch my idea yet. Suppose that the express ran over the dead body of a woman, would there be anything to prove afterwards that she was dead, and not alive at the time of the accident? Do you think that it would ever occur to any one's mind that the express ran over a dead body?"

"I see your meaning," said his son thoughtfully. "You would settle her, and then put her there."

"Of course. What could be more delightfully simple. Friend Burt here does his work; we carry her through the garden gate, and lay her on the darkest part of the rails. Then we miss her at the house. There is an alarm and a search. The gate is found open. We naturally go through with lanterns, and find her on the line. I don't think we need fear the coroner, or any one else then?"

"He's a sharp 'un, is the guv'nor," cried Burt, slapping his thigh enthusiastically. "It's the downiest lay I have heard this many a day."

"I believe you are the devil incarnate," said Ezra, looking at his father with a mixture of horror and of admiration. "But how about Jorrocks and Stevens and Rebecca? Would you trust them?"

"Certainly not!" Girdlestone answered. "It is not necessary. Mr. Burt can do his part of the business out of doors. We can entice her out upon some excuse. There is no reason why any one should have a suspicion of the truth."

“But they know that she is not mad.”

“They will think that she did it on purpose. The secret will be locked up in our three breasts. After one night’s work our friend here goes to the colonies a prosperous man, and the firm of Girdlestone holds up its head once more, stainless and irreproachable.”

“Speak low!” said Ezra, in a whisper. “I hear her coming downstairs.”

They listened to her light springy footstep as it passed the door.

“Come here, Burt,” he said, after a pause. “She is at work on the lawn.

Come and have a look at her.”

They all went over to the window, and looked out. It was then that

Kate, glancing up, saw the three cruel faces surveying her.

“She’s a rare well-built ‘un,” said Burt, as he stepped back from the window. “It is the ugliest job as ever I was on.”

“But we can rely upon you?” Girdlestone asked, looking at him with puckered eyes.

“You bet — as long as you pay me,” the navvy answered phlegmatically, and went back to his pipe and to Mrs. Jorrocks’ bottle of Hollands.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BAIT ON THE HOOK.

The grey winter evening was beginning to steal in before the details had all been arranged by the conspirators. It had grown so chill that Kate had abandoned her attempt at gardening, and had gone back to her room. Ezra left his father and Burt by the fire and came out to the open hall-door. The grim old trees looked gaunt and eerie as they waved their naked arms about in the cutting wind. A slight fog had come up from the sea and lay in light wreaths over the upper branches, like a thin veil of gauze. Ezra was shivering as he surveyed the dreary scene, when he felt a hand on his arm, and looking round saw that the maid Rebecca was standing beside him.

"Haven't you got one word for me?" she said sadly, looking up into his face. "It's but once a week, and then never a word of greeting."

"I didn't see you, my lass," Ezra answered. "How does the Priory suit you?"

"One place is the same as another to me," she said drearily. "You asked me to come here, and I have come. You said once that you would let me know how I could serve you down here. When am I to know?"

"Why, there's no secret about that. You do serve me when you look after my father as you have done these weeks back. That old woman isn't fit to manage the whole place by herself."

"That wasn't what you meant, though," said the girl, looking at him with questioning eyes. "I remember your face now as you spoke the words. You have something on your mind, and have now, only you keep it to yourself. Why won't you trust me with it?"

"Don't be a fool!" answered Ezra curtly. "I have a great deal to worry me in business matters. Much good it would do telling you about them!"

"It's more than that," said Rebecca doggedly. "Who is that man who has come down?"

"A business man from London. He has come to consult my father about money matters. Any more questions you would like to ask?"

"I should like to know how long we are to be kept down here, and what the meaning of it all may be."

"We are going back before the end of the winter, and the meaning of it is that Miss Harston was not well and needed a change of air. Now are you satisfied?" He was determined to allay as far as possible any suspicions that the girl might have previously formed.

"And what brings you down here?" she asked, with the same searching look. "You don't come down into this hole without some good reason. I did think at first that you might come down in order to see me, but you soon showed me that it wasn't that. There was a time when you was fond of me."

"So I am now, lass."

"Ay, very fond! Not a word nor a look from you last time you came.

You must have some reason, though, that brings you here."

"There's nothing wonderful in a man coming to see his own father,"

"Much you cared for him in London," she cried, with a shrill laugh. "If he was under the sod you would not be the sadder. It's my belief as you come down after that doll-faced missy upstairs."

"Dry up, now!" said Ezra roughly. "I've had enough of your confounded nonsense."

"You don't talk in that style to her," she said excitedly. "You scorn me, but I know this, that if I can't have your love no one else shall. I've got a dash of the gipsy in me, as you know. Rather than that girl should have you, I would knife her and you, too!" She shook her clenched right hand as she spoke, and her face was so full of vindictive passion that Ezra was astonished.

"I always knew that you were a spitfire," he said, "but you never came it quite so strong as this before."

The reaction had already come upon her, however, and tears were running down her cheeks. "You'll never leave me entirely?" she cried, clasping his arm. "I could bear to share your love with another, but I wouldn't have you turn altogether against me."

"You'll have my father out presently with your damned noise!" said Ezra.

"Get away, and wash your face."

His word was law to her, and she turned away, still weeping bitterly. In her poor, dim, eventless life the sole bright spot had been the attention which the young merchant had occasionally shown her. To her distorted fancy he was a man among men, a hero, all that was admirable and magnificent. What was there which she would not do for him? She had the faithfulness of a dog, but like a dog she would snarl fiercely at any one who came between her master's affection and herself. Deep down in her heart rankled the one suspicion which no assurances could remove, that an understanding existed between the man she loved and the woman she hated. As she withdrew to her room she determined that during this visit of Ezra's she would manage in such a way that no communication could pass between them without her knowledge. She knew that it was a dangerous thing to play the spy upon the young man, for he had shown her before now that her sex was no precaution against his brutality. Nevertheless, she set herself to do it, with all the cunning and perseverance of a jealous woman.

As the light faded and the greys of evening deepened into darkness, Kate sat patiently in her bare little room. A coal fire sputtered and sparkled in the rusty grate, and there was a tin bucket full of coals beside the fender from which to replenish it. She was very cold, so she drew her single chair up to the blaze and held her hands over it. It was a lonesome and melancholy vigil, while the wind whistled through the branches of the trees and moaned drearily in the cracks and crannies of the old house. When were her friends coming? Perhaps something had occurred to detain them to-day. This morning such a thing would have appeared to her to be an impossibility, but now that the time had come when she had expected them, it appeared probable enough that something might have delayed them. To-morrow at latest they could not fail to come. She wondered what they would do if they did arrive. Would they come boldly up the avenue and claim her from the Girdlestones, or would they endeavour to communicate with her first? Whatever they decided upon would be sure to be for the best.

She went to the window once and looked out. It promised to be a wild night. Far away in the south-west lay a great cumulus of rugged clouds from which dark streamers radiated over the sky, like the advance guard of an army. Here and there a pale star twinkled dimly out through the rifts, but the greater part of the heavens was black and threatening. It was so dark that she could no longer see the sea, but the crashing, booming sound of the great waves filled the air and the salt spray came driving in through the open window. She shut it and resumed her seat by the fire, shivering partly from cold and partly from some vague presentiment of evil.

An hour or more had passed when she heard a step upon the stairs and a knock came to her door. It was Rebecca, with a cup of tea upon a tray and some bread-and-butter. Kate was grateful at this attention, for it saved her from having to go down to the dining-room and face Ezra and his unpleasant-looking companion. Rebecca laid down the tray, and then, to her mistress's surprise, turned back and shut the door. The girl's face was very pale, and her manner was wild and excited.

"Here's a note for you," she said. "It was given Mrs. Jorrocks to give you, but I am better at climbing stairs than she is, so I brought it up." She handed Kate a little slip of paper as she spoke.

A note for her! Could it be that her friends had arrived and had managed to send a message to her? It must be so. She took it from the maid. As she did so she noticed that the other's hands were shaking as though she had the ague. "You are not well, Rebecca," said Kate kindly. "Oh yes, I am. You read your note and don't mind me," the girl answered, in her usual surly fashion. Instead of leaving the room, she was bustling about the bed as though putting things in order.

Kate's impatience was too great to allow her to wait, so she untwisted the paper, which had no seal or fastening. She had hoped in her heart to see the name of her lover at the end of it. Instead of that, her eye fell upon the signature of Ezra Girdlestone. What could he have to say to her? She moved the solitary candle on to the mantelpiece, and read the following note, roughly scribbled upon a coarse piece of paper: —

"MY DEAR MISS HARSTON."

"I am afraid your confinement here has been very irksome to you. I have repeatedly requested my father to alleviate or modify it, but he has invariably refused. As he still persists in his refusal, I wish to offer you my aid, and, to show you that I am your sincere friend in spite of all that has passed, it you could slip out to-night at nine o'clock and meet me by the withered oak at the head of the avenue, I shall see you safe to Bedsworth, and you can, if you wish, go on to Portsmouth by the next train. I shall manage so that you may find the door open by that time. I shall not, of course, go to Portsmouth with you, but shall return here after dropping you at the station. I do this small thing to show you that, hopeless as it may be, the affection which I bear you is still as deep as ever."

"Yours,"

"E. GIRDLESTONE."

Our heroine was so surprised at this epistle that she sat for some time dangling the slip of paper between her fingers and lost in thought. When she glanced round, Rebecca had left the room. She rolled the paper up and threw it into the fire. Ezra, then, was not so hard-hearted as she had thought him. He had used his influence to soften his father. Should she accept this chance of escape, or should she wait some word from her friends? Perhaps they were already in Bedsworth, but did not know how to communicate with her. If so, this offer of Ezra’s was just what was needed. In any case, she could go on to Portsmouth and telegraph from there to the Dimsdales. It was too good an offer to be refused. She made up her mind that she would accept it. It was past eight now, and nine was the hour. She stood up with the intention of putting on her cloak and her bonnet.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

This conversation with Rebecca had suggested to Ezra that he might still have influence enough with his father’s ward to induce her to come out of doors, and so put herself within the reach of Burt. He had proposed the plan to his father, who approved of it heartily. The only weak point in his scheme had been the difficulty which might arise in inducing the girl to venture out of the Priory on that tempestuous winter’s night. There was evidently only one incentive strong enough to bring it about, and that was the hope of escape. By harping skilfully upon this string they might lure her into the trap. Ezra and his father composed the letter together, and the former handed it to Mrs. Jorrocks, with a request that she should deliver it.

It chanced, however, that Rebecca, keenly alive to any attempt at communication between the young merchant and her mistress, saw the crone hobbling down the passage with the note in her hand.

“What’s that, mother?” she asked.

“It’s a letter for her,” wheezed the old woman, nodding her tremulous head in the direction of Kate’s room.

“I’ll take it up,” said Rebecca eagerly. “I am just going up there with her tea.”

“Thank ye. Them stairs tries my rheumatiz something cruel.”

The maid took the note and carried it upstairs. Instead of taking it straight to her mistress she slipped into her own room and read every word of it. It appeared to confirm her worst suspicions. Here was Ezra asking an interview with the woman whom he had assured her that he hated. It was true that the request was made in measured words and on a plausible pretext. No doubt that was merely to deceive any other eye which might rest upon it. There was an understanding between them, and this was an assignation. The girl walked swiftly up and down the room like a caged tigress, striking her head with her clenched hands in her anger and biting her lip until the blood came. It was some time before she could overcome her agitation sufficiently to deliver the note, and when she did so her mistress, as we have seen, noticed that her manner was nervous and wild. She little dreamed of the struggle which was going on in the dark-eyed girl’s mind against the impulse which urged her to seize her imagined rival by the white throat and choke the life out of her.

“It’s eight o’clock now,” Ezra was saying downstairs. “I wonder whether she will come?”

“She is sure to come,” his father said briefly.

“Suppose she didn’t?”

“In that case we should find other means to bring her out. We have not gone so far, to break down over a trifle at the last moment.”

“I must have something to drink,” Ezra said, after a pause, helping himself from the bottle. “I feel as cold as ice and as nervous as a cat. I can’t understand how you look so unconcerned. If you were going to sign an invoice or audit an account or anything else in the way of business you could not take it more calmly. I wish the time would come. This waiting is terrible.”

“Let us pass the time to advantage,” said John Girdlestone; and drawing a little fat Bible from his pocket he began to read it aloud in a solemn and sonorous voice. The yellow light illuminated the old merchant’s massive features as he stooped forwards towards the candle. His strongly marked nose and his hollow cheeks gave him a vulture-like aspect, which was increased by the effect of his deep-set glittering eyes.

Ezra, leaning back in his chair with the firelight flickering over his haggard but still handsome face, looked across at his father with a puzzled expression. He had never yet been able to determine whether the old man was a consummate hypocrite or a religious monomaniac. Burt lay with his feet in the light of the fire and his head sunk back across the arm of the chair, fast asleep and snoring loudly.

“Isn’t it time to wake him up?” Ezra asked, interrupting the reading.

“Yes, I think it is,” his father answered, closing the sacred volume reverently and replacing it in his bosom.

Ezra took up the candle and held it over the sleeping man. “What a brute he looks!” he said. “Did ever you see such an animal in your life?”

The navvy was certainly not a pretty sight. His muscular arms and legs were all a-sprawl and his head hung back at a strange angle to his body, so that his fiery red beard pointed upwards, exposing all the thick sinewy throat beneath it. His eyes were half open and looked bleared and unhealthy, while his thick lips puffed out with a whistling sound at every expiration. His dirty brown coat was thrown open, and out of one of the pockets protruded a short thick cudgel with a leaden head.

John Girdlestone picked it out and tried it in the air. “I think I could kill an ox with this,” he said.

“Don’t wave it about my head,” cried Ezra. “As you stand in the firelight brandishing that stick in your long arms you are less attractive than usual.”

John Girdlestone smiled and replaced the cudgel in the sleeper’s pocket. “Wake up, Burt,” he cried, shaking him by the arm. “It’s half-past eight.”

The navvy started to his feet with an oath and then fell back into his chair, staring round him vacantly, at a loss as to where he might be. His eye fell upon the bottle of Hollands, which was now nearly empty, and he held out his hand to it with an exclamation of recognition.

“I’ve been asleep, guv’nor,” he said hoarsely. “Must have a dram to set me straight. Did you say it was time for the job.”

“We have made arrangements by which she will be out by the withered oak at nine o’clock.”

“That’s not for half an hour,” cried Burt, in a surly voice. “You need not have woke me yet.”

“We’d better go out there now. She may come rather before the time”

“Come on, then!” said the navvy, buttoning up his coat and rolling a ragged cravat round his throat. “Who is a-comin’ with me?”

“We shall both come,” answered John Girdlestone firmly. “You will need help to carry her to the railway line.”

“Surely Burt can do that himself,” Ezra remarked. “She’s not so very heavy.”

Girdlestone drew his son aside. “Don’t be so foolish, Ezra,” he said. “We can’t trust the half-drunken fellow. It must be done with the greatest carefulness and precision, and no traces left. Our old business watchword was to overlook everything ourselves, and we shall certainly do so now.”

“It’s a horrible affair!” Ezra said, with a shudder. “I wish I was out of it.”

“You won’t think that to-morrow morning when you realise that the firm is saved and no one the wiser. He has gone on. Don’t lose sight of him.”

They both hurried out, and found Burt standing in front of the door. It was blowing half a gale now, and the wind was bitterly cold. There came a melancholy rasping and rustling from the leafless wood, and every now and again a sharp crackling sound would announce that some rotten branch had come crashing down. The clouds drove across the face of the moon, so that at times the cold, clear light silvered the dark wood and the old monastery, while at others all was plunged in darkness. From the open door a broad golden bar was shot across the lawn from the lamp in the hall. The three dark figures with their long fantastic shadows looked eerie and unnatural in the yellow glare.

“Are we to have a lantern?” asked Burt.

“No, no,” cried Ezra. “We shall see quite enough as it is. We don’t want a light.”

“I have one,” said the father. “We can use it if it is necessary. I think we had better take our places now. She may come sooner than we expect. It will be well to leave the door as it is. She will see that there is no obstacle in the way.”

“You’re not half sharp enough,” said Ezra. “If the door was left like that it might suggest a trap to her. Better close the dining-room door and then leave the hall door just a little ajar. That would look more natural. She would conclude that Burt and you were in there.”

“Where are Jorrocks and Rebecca?” Girdlestone asked, closing the door as suggested.

“Jorrocks is in her room. Rebecca, I have no doubt, is in hers also.”

“Things look safe enough. Come along, Burt. This way.”

The three tramped their way across the gravelled drive and over the slushy grass to the border of the wood.

“This is the withered oak,” said Girdlestone, as a dark mass loomed in front of them. It stood somewhat apart from the other trees, and the base of it was free from the brambles which formed a thick undergrowth elsewhere.

Burt walked round the great trunk and made as careful an examination of the ground as he could in the dark.

“Would the lantern be of any use to you?” Girdlestone asked.

“No, It’s all serene. I think I know how to fix it now. You two can get behind those trees, or where you like, as long as you’re not in the way. I don’t want no ‘sistance. When Jem Burt takes a job in hand he carries it through in a workmanlike manner. I don’t want nobody else foolin’ around.”

“We would not dream of interfering with your arrangements,” said Girdlestone.

“You’d better not!” Burt growled. “I’ll lay down behind this oak, d’ye see. When she comes, she’ll think as he’s not arrived yet, and she’ll get standin’ around and waitin’. When I see my chance, I’ll get behind her, and she’ll never know that she has not been struck by lightnin’.”

“Excellent!” cried John Girdlestone; “excellent! We had best get into our places.”

“Mind you do it all in one crack,” Ezra said. “Don’t let us have any crying out afterwards. I could stand a good deal, but not that.”

“You should know how I hits,” Burt remarked with a malicious grin, which was hidden from his companion. “If your head wasn’t well nigh solid you wouldn’t be here now.”

Ezra’s hand involuntarily went up to the old scar. “I think such a one as that would settle her!” he said, as he withdrew with his father. The two took up their position under the shadow of some trees fifty yards off or more. Burt crouched down behind the withered oak with his weapon in his hand and waited for the coming of his victim.

Ezra, though usually resolute and daring, had completely lost his nerve, and his teeth were chattering in his head. His father, on the other hand, was emotionless and impassive as ever.

“It’s close upon nine o’clock,” Ezra whispered.

“Ten minutes to,” said the other, peering at his great golden chronometer through the darkness.

“What if she fails to come?”

“We must devise other means of bringing her out.”

From the spot where they stood they had a view of the whole of the Priory. She could not come out without being seen. Above the door was a long narrow window which opened upon the staircase. On this Girdlestone and his son fixed their eyes, for they knew that on her way down she would be visible at it. As they looked, the dim light which shone through it was obscured and then reappeared.

“She has passed!”

“Hush!”

Another moment and the door was stealthily opened. Once again the broad golden bar shot out across the lawn almost to the spot where the confederates were crouching. In the centre of the zone of light there stood a figure — the figure of the girl. Even at that distance they could distinguish the pearl-grey mantle which she usually wore and the close-fitting bonnet.

She had wrapped a shawl round the lower part of her face to protect her from the boisterous wind. For a minute or more she stood peering out into the darkness of the night, as though uncertain whether to proceed or to go back. Then, with a quick, sudden gesture she closed the door behind her. The light was no longer there, but they knew that she was outside the house, and that the appointment would be kept.

What an age it seemed before they heard her footsteps. She came very slowly, putting one foot gingerly before the other, as if afraid of falling over something in the darkness. Once or twice she stopped altogether, looking round, no doubt, to make sure of her whereabouts. At that instant the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and they saw her dark figure a short distance on. The light enabled her to see the withered oak, for she came rapidly towards it. As she approached, she satisfied herself apparently that she was the first on the ground, for she slackened her pace once more and walked in the listless way that people assume when they are waiting. The clouds were overtaking the moon again, and the light was getting dimmer.

“I can see her still,” said Ezra in a whisper, grasping his father’s wrist in his excitement.

The old man said nothing, but he peered through the darkness with eager, straining eyes.

“There she is, standing out a little from the oak,” the young merchant said, pointing with a quivering finger. “She’s not near enough for him to reach her.”

“He’s coming out from the shadow now,” the other said huskily.

“Don’t you see him crawling along the ground?”

“I see him,” returned the other in the same subdued, awestruck voice. “Now he has stopped; now he goes on again! My God, he’s close behind her! She is looking the other way.”

A thin ray of light shot down between the clouds. In its silvery radiance two figures stood out hard and black, that of the unconscious girl and of the man who crouched like a beast of prey behind her. He made a step forward, which brought him within a yard of her. She may have heard the heavy footfall above the shriek of the storm, for she turned suddenly and faced him. At the same instance she was struck down with a crashing blow. There was no time for a prayer, no time for a scream. One moment had seen her a magnificent woman in all the pride of her youthful beauty, the next left her a poor battered, senseless wreck. The navvy had earned his blood-money.

At the sound of the blow and the sight of the fall both the old man and the young ran out from their place of concealment. Burt was standing over the body, his bludgeon in his hand.

“Not even a groan!” he said. “What d’ye think of that?”

Girdlestone wrung his hand and congratulated him warmly. “Shall I light the lantern?” he asked.

“For God’s sake, don’t!” Ezra said earnestly.

“I had no idea that you were so faint-hearted, my son,” the merchant remarked. “However, I know the way to the gate well enough to go there blindfold. What a comfort it is to know that there is no blood about! That’s the advantage of a stick over a knife.”

“You’re correct there, guv’nor,” Burt said approvingly.

“Will you kindly carry one end and I’ll take the other. I’ll go first, if you don’t mind, because I know the way best. The train will pass in less than half an hour, so we have not long to wait. Within that time every chance of detection will have gone.”

Girdlestone raised up the head of the murdered girl, and Burt took her feet. Ezra walked behind as though he were in some dreadful dream. He had fully recognised the necessity for the murder, but he had never before realised how ghastly the details would be. Already he had begun to repent that he had ever acquiesced in it. Then came thoughts of the splendid possibilities of the African business, which could only be saved from destruction by this woman’s death. How could he, with his luxurious tastes, bear the squalor and poverty which would be his lot were the firm to fail? Better a rope and a long drop than such a life as that! All these considerations thronged into his mind as he plodded along the slippery footpath which led through the forest to the wooden gate.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE INVASION OF HAMPSHIRE.

When Tom and the major arrived at Waterloo Station, the latter in the breathless condition described in a preceding chapter, they found the German waiting for them with his two fellow-exiles. The gentleman of Nihilistic proclivities was somewhat tall and thin, with a long frock-coat buttoned almost up to his throat, which showed signs of giving at the seams every here and there. His grizzly hair fell over his collar behind, and he had a short bristling beard. He stood with one hand stuck into the front of his coat and the other upon his hip, as though rehearsing the position in which his statue might be some day erected in the streets of his native Russia, when the people had their own, and despotism was no more. In spite of his worn attire there was something noble and striking about the man. His bow, when Baumser introduced him to the major and Tom, would have graced any Court in Europe. Round his neck he had a coarse string from which hung a pair of double eye-glasses. These he fixed upon his aquiline nose, and took a good look at the gentlemen whom he had come to serve.

Bulow, of Kiel, was a small, dark-eyed, clean-shaven fellow, quick and energetic in his movements, having more the appearance of a Celt than of a Teuton. He seemed to be full of amiability, and assured the major in execrable English how very happy he was to be able to do a service to one who had shown kindness to their esteemed colleague and persecuted patriot, Von Baumser. Indeed both of the men showed great deference to the German, and the major began to perceive that his friend was a very exalted individual in Socialistic circles. He liked the look of the two foreigners, and congratulated himself upon having their co-operation in the matter on hand.

Ill luck was in store for the expedition, however. On inquiry at the ticket-office they found that there was no train for upwards of two hours, and then it was a slow one which would not land them until eight o’clock at Bedsworth. At this piece of information Tom Dimsdale fairly broke down, and stamped about the station, raving and beseeching the officials to run a special, be the cost what it might. This, however, could by no means be done, owing to the press of Saturday traffic. There was nothing for it but to wait. The three foreigners went off in search of something to eat, and having found a convenient cookshop they disappeared therein and feasted royally at Von Baumser's expense. Major Tobias Clutterbuck remained with the young man, who resolutely refused to leave the platform. The major knew of a snug little corner not far off where he could have put in the time very comfortably, but he could not bring himself to desert his companion even for a minute. I have no doubt that that wait of two hours in the draughty station is marked up somewhere to the old sinner's credit account.

Indeed, it was well that day that young Dimsdale had good friends at his back. His appearance was so strange and wild that the passers-by turned back to have another look at him, His eyes were open and staring, giving a fear-inspiring character to his expression. He could not sit still for an instant, but paced up and down and backwards and forwards under the influence of the fierce energy which consumed him, while the major plodded along manfully at his side, suggesting every consideration which might cheer him up, and narrating many tales, true and apocryphal, most of which fell upon heedless ears.

Ezra Girdlestone had four hours' start of them. That was the thought which rankled in Tom's heart and outweighed every other consideration. He knew Kate's nature so well that he was convinced that she would never have expressed such fears to Mrs. Scully unless she had very assured reasons for them. In fact, apart from her own words, what could this secrecy and seclusion mean except foul play. After what he had learned about the insurance of the ships and the manner in which the elder Girdlestone had induced him to cease corresponding with Kate, he could believe anything of his partners. He knew, also, that in case of Kate's death the money reverted to her guardian. There was not a single link missing in the chain of evidence which showed that a crime was in contemplation. Then, who was that butcher-like man whom Ezra was taking down with him? Tom could have torn his hair as he thought of his present impotence and of his folly in losing sight of young Girdlestone.

The major has put it on record that those two hours appeared to him the longest that ever he passed in his life, and Tom, no doubt, would endorse the sentiment. Everything must have an end, however, and the station clock, the hands of which seemed several times to have stopped altogether, began at last to approach the hour at which the Portsmouth train was timed to depart. Baumser and his two friends had come back, all three smoking cigarettes, and looking the better for their visit to the cookshop. The five got into a first-class railway carriage and waited. Would they never have done examining tickets and stamping luggage and going through all sorts of tedious formalities? At last, thank God! comes the shrill whistle of the guard, the answering snort from the engine, and they are fairly started upon their mission of rescue.

There was much to be arranged as to their plan of action. Tom, Von Baumser, and the major talked it over in a low voice, while the two Socialists chatted together in German and consumed eternal cigarettes. Tom was for marching straight up to the Priory and demanding that Girdlestone should deliver his ward up to them. To the major and the German this seemed an unwise proceeding. It was to put themselves hopelessly wrong from a legal point of view. Girdlestone had only to say, as he assuredly would, that the whole story was a ridiculous mare's nest, and then what proof could they adduce, or what excuse give for their interference. However plausible their suspicions might be, they were, after all, only suspicions, which other people might not view in as grave a light.

"What would you advise, then?" Tom asked, passing his hand over his heated forehead.

"Bedad! I'll tell you the plan," the old soldier answered, "and I think me friend Von Baumser will agray with me. I understand that this place is surrounded by a wall to which there is only one gate. Sure, we shall wait outside this wall, and one of us can go in as a skirmisher and find out how the land lies. Let him ascertain from the young lady herself if she requires immadiate help, and what she would wish done. If he can't make his way to her, let him hang about the house, and see and hear all that he can. We shall then have something solid to work on. I have a dog whistle here on me watch-chain, given me by Charley Gill, of the Inniskillens. Our skirmisher could take that with him, and if he wants immadiate help one blow of it would be enough to bring the four of us over to him. Though how the divil I am to git over a wall," concluded the major ruefully, looking down at his own proportions, "is more than I can tell."

"I hope, my vriends," said Von Baumser, "dat you vill allow me the honour of going first, for ven I vas in the Swabian Jager I vas always counted a very good spion."

"That is my place," said Tom with decision.

"You have the best claim," the major answered. "What a train this is! Ged, it's as slow as the one which Jimmy Travers, of the Commissariat, travelled in in America. They were staming along, according to Jimmy, when they saw a cow walking along the loine in front of them. They all thought that they were going to run into her, but it was all right, for they never overtook her, and she soon walked clane out of sight. Here we are at a station! How far to Bedsworth, guard?"

"Next station, sir."

"Thank the Lord! It's twinty to eight. We are rather behind our time.

You always are if you are in a particular hurry."

It was nearly eight o'clock by the time they reached their destination. The station-master directed them to the Flying Bull, where they secured the very vehicle in which Kate and her guardian had been originally driven up. By the time that the horse was put in it was close upon the half-hour.

"Drive as hard as you can go to the Proiory, me man," said the major.

The sulky ostler made no remark, but a look of surprise passed over his phlegmatic countenance. For years back so little had been heard of the old monastery that its very existence had been almost forgotten in Bedsworth. Now whole troops of Londoners were coming down in succession, demanding to be driven there. He pondered over the strange fact as he drove through the darkness, but the only conclusion to which his bucolic mind could come was that it was high time to raise the fare to that particular point.

It was a miserable night, stormy and wet and bitterly cold. None of the five men had a thought to spare for the weather, however. The two foreigners had been so infected by the suppressed excitement of their companions, or had so identified themselves with their comrades' cause, that they were as eager as the others.

"Are we near?" the major asked.

"The gate is just at the end o' the lane, sir."

"Don't pull up at the gate, but take us a little past it."

"There ain't no way in except the gate," the driver remarked.

"Do what you're ordered," said the major sternly. Once again the ostler's face betrayed unbounded astonishment. He slewed half-way round in his seat and took as good a look as was possible in the uncertain light at the faces of his passengers. It had occurred to him that it was more than likely that he would have to swear to them at some future date in a police-court. “I’d know that thick ‘un wi’ the red face,” he muttered to himself, “and him wi’ the yeller beard and the stick.”

They passed the stone pillars with the weather-beaten heraldic devices, and drove along by the high park wall. When they had gone a hundred yards or so the major ordered the driver to pull up, and they all got down. The increased fare was paid without remonstrance, and the ostler rattled away homewards, with the intention of pulling up at the county police-station and lodging information as to the suspicious visitors whom he had brought down.

“It is loikely that they have a watch at the gate,” said the major. “We must kape away from there. This wall is a great hoight. We’d best kape on until we find the aisiest place to scale it.”

“I could get over it here,” Tom said eagerly.

“Wait a bit. A few minutes can make no difference one way or the other. Ould Sir Colin used to say that there were more battles lost by over-haste than by slowness. What’s the high bank running along on the right here?”

“Dat’s a railway bankment,” said Von Baumser. “See de posts and de little red lights over yonder.”

“So it is. The wall seems to me to be lower here. What’s this dark thing? Hullo, here’s a door lading into the grounds.”

“It is locked though.”

“Give me a hoist here,” Tom said imploringly. “Don’t throw a minute away. You can’t tell what may be going on inside. At this very moment for all we know they may be plotting her murder.”

“He has right,” said Von Baumser. “We shall await here until we hear from you. Help him, my vriends — shove him up!”

Tom caught the coping of the wall, although the broken glass cut deeply into his hands. With a great heave he swung himself up, and was soon astride upon the top.

“Here’s the whistle,” said the major, standing on tiptoe to reach a downstretched hand. “If you want us, give a good blow at it. We’ll be with you in a brace of shakes. If we can’t get over the wall we’ll have the door down. Divil a fear but we’ll be there!”

Tom was in the act of letting himself drop into the wood, when suddenly the watchers below saw him crouch down upon the wall, and lie motionless, as though listening intently.

“Hush!” he whispered, leaning over. “Some one is coming through the wood.”

The wind had died away and the storm subsided. Even from the lane they could hear the sound of feet, and of muffled voices inside the grounds. They all crouched down in the shadow of the wall. Tom lay flat upon the glass-studded coping, and no one looking from below could distinguish him from the wall itself.

The voices and the footsteps sounded louder and louder, until they were just at the other side of the boundary. They seemed to come from several people walking slowly and heavily. There was the shrill rasping of a key, and the wooden door swung back on its rusty hinges, while three dark figures passed out who appeared to bear some burden between them. The party in the shadow crouched closer still, and peered through the darkness with eager, anxious eyes. They could discern little save the vague outlines of the moving men, and yet as they gazed at them an unaccountable and overpowering horror crept into the hearts of every one of them. They breathed the atmosphere of death.

The new-comers tramped across the road, and, pushing through the thin hedge, ascended the railway embankment upon the other side. It was evident that their burden was a heavy one, for they stopped more than once while ascending the steep grassy slope, and once, when near the top, one of the party slipped, and there was a sound as though he had fallen upon his knees, together with a stifled oath. They reached the top, however, and their figures, which had disappeared from view, came into sight again, standing out dimly against the murky sky. They bent down over the railway line, and placed the indistinguishable mass which they bore carefully upon it.

“We must have the light,” said a voice.

“No, no; there’s no need,” another expostulated.

“We can’t work in the dark,” said a third, loudly and harshly.

“Where’s your lantern, guv’nor? I’ve got a lucifer.”

“We must manage that the train passes over right,” the first voice remarked. “Here, Burt, you light it?”

There was the sharp sound of the striking of a match, and a feeble glimmer appeared, in the darkness. It flickered and waned, as though the wind would extinguish it, but next instant the wick of the lantern had caught, and threw a strong yellow glare upon the scene. The light fell upon the major and his comrades, who had sprung into the road, and it lit up the group on the railway line. Yet it was not upon the rescuing party that the murderers fixed their terror-stricken eyes, and the major and his friends had lost all thought of the miscreants above them — for there, standing in the centre of the roadway, there with the light flickering over her pale sweet face, like a spirit from the tomb, stood none other than the much-enduring, cruelly-treated girl for whom Burt's murderous blow had been intended.

For a few moments she stood there without either party moving a foot or uttering a sound. Then there came from the railway line a cry so wild that it will ring for ever in the ears of those who heard it. Burt dropped upon his knees and put his band over his eyes to keep out the sight. John Girdlestone caught his son by the wrist and dashed away into the darkness, flying wildly, madly, with white faces and staring eyes, as men who have looked upon that which is not of this world. In the meantime, Tom had sprung down from his perch, and had clasped Kate in his arms, and there she lay, sobbing and laughing, with many pretty feminine ejaculations and exclamations and questions, saved at last from the net of death which had been closing upon her so long.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A MIDNIGHT CRUISE.

If ever two men were completely cowed and broken down those two were the African merchants and his son. Wet, torn, and soiled, they still struggled on in their aimless flight, crashing through hedges and clambering over obstacles, with the one idea in their frenzied minds of leaving miles between them and that fair accusing face. Exhausted and panting they still battled through the darkness and the storm, until they saw the gleam of the surge and heard the crash of the great waves upon the beach. Then they stopped amid the sand and the shingle. The moon was shining down now in all its calm splendour, illuminating the great tossing ocean and the long dark sweep of the Hampshire coast. By its light the two men looked at one another, such a look as two lost souls might have exchanged when they heard the gates of hell first clang behind them.

Who could have recognised them now as the respected trader of Fenchurch Street and his fastidious son. Their clothes were tattered, their faces splashed with mud and scarred by brambles and thorns, the elder man had lost his hat, and his silvery hair blew out in a confused tangle behind him. Even more noticeable, however, than the change in their attire was the alteration in their expression. Both had the same startled, furtive look of apprehension, like beasts of prey who hear the baying of the hounds in the distance. Their quivering hands and gasping breath betrayed their exhaustion, yet they glanced around them nervously, as though the least sound would send them off once more upon their wild career.

“You devil!” Ezra cried at last, in a harsh, choking voice, taking a step towards his father with a gesture as though he would have struck him. “You have brought us to this with your canting and scheming and plotting. What are we to do now — eh? Answer me that!” He caught the old man by the coat and shook him violently.

Girdlestone’s face was all drawn, as though he were threatened with a fit, and his eyes were glassy and vacant. The moonlight glittered in them and played over his contorted features. “Did you see her?” he whispered with trembling lips. “Did you see her?”

“Yes, I saw her,” the other answered brusquely; “and I saw that infernal fellow from London, and the major, and God knows how many more behind her. A nice hornets’ nest to bring about one’s ears.”

“It was her spirit,” said his father in the same awe-struck voice.

“The spirit of John Harston’s murdered daughter.”

“It was the girl herself,” said Ezra. He had been panic-stricken at the moment, but had had time during their flight to realise the situation. “We have made a pretty botch of the whole thing.”

“The girl herself!” cried Girdlestone in bewilderment. “For Heaven’s sake, don’t mock me! Who was it that we carried through the wood and laid upon the rails?”

“Who was it? Why that jealous jade, Rebecca Taylforth, of course, who must have read my note and come out in the other’s cloak and hat to hear what I had to say to her. The cursed fool!”

“The wrong woman!” Girdlestone muttered with the same vacant look upon his face. “All for nothing, then — for nothing!”

“Don’t stand mumbling to yourself there,” cried Ezra, catching his father’s arm and half dragging him along the beach. “Don’t you understand that there’s a hue and cry out after you, and that we’ll be hung if we are taken. Wake up and exert yourself. The gallows would be a nice end to all your preaching and praying, wouldn’t it?”

They hurried along together down the beach, ploughing their way through the loose shingle and tripping over the great mats of seaweed which had been cast up in the recent gale. The wind was still so great that they had to lower their heads and to put their shoulders against it, while the salt spray caused their eyes to smart and tingled on their lips.

“Where are you taking me, my son?” asked the old man once.

“To the only chance we have of safety. Come on, and ask no questions.”

Through the murkiness of the night they saw a single light flickering dimly ahead of them. This was evidently the goal at which Ezra was aiming. As they toiled on it grew larger and brighter, until it resolved itself into the glare of a lamp shining through a small diamond-paned window. Girdlestone recognised the place now. It was the hut of a fisherman named Sampson, who lived a mile or more from Claxton. He remembered having his attention attracted to the place by the curious nature of the building, which was constructed out of the remnants of a Norwegian barque stranded some years before. The thatch which covered it and the windows and door cut in the sides gave it a curiously hybrid appearance, and made it an object of interest to sightseers in those parts. Sampson was the owner of a fair-sized fishing-boat, which he worked with his eldest son, and which was said to yield him a decent livelihood.

"What are you going to do?" asked Girdlestone, as his son made his way to the door.

"Don't look like a ghost," Ezra answered in an angry whisper.

"We're all safe, if we are only cool."

"I am better now. You can trust me."

"Keep a smiling face, then," said Ezra, and knocked loudly at the door of the hut. The occupants had not heard their approach owing to the storm, but the instant that the young merchant struck the door there was a buzz of conversation and the sharp barking of a dog. Then came a dull thud and the barking ceased, from which Ezra concluded that some one had hurled a boot at the animal.

"We hain't no bait," cried a gruff voice.

"Can I see Mr. Sampson?" asked Ezra.

"I tell 'ee we hain't no bait," roared the voice in a more irritable tone.

"We don't want bait. We want a word of talk," said Ezra.

As he spoke, the door flew open, and a burly middle-aged man, in a red shirt, appeared, with a face which was almost the same colour as his garment. "We hain't got no—" he was beginning, when he suddenly recognised his visitors and broke short off, staring at them with as much surprise as it is possible for human features to express.

"Well, if it ain't the genelman from the Priory!" he exclaimed at last, with a whistle, which seemed to be his way of letting off the astonishment which would otherwise remain bottled up in his system.

"We want a minute's talk with you, Mr. Sampson," said Ezra.

"Surely, sir — sure-ly!" the fisherman cried, bustling indoors and rubbing the top of two stools with his sleeve. "Coom in! 'Ere, Jarge, pull the seats up for the genelmen."

At this summons, a lanky, big-boned hobbledehoy, in sea boots, pushed the stools up towards the fire, on which a log of wood was blazing cheerily. The two Girdlestones sat warming themselves, while the fisherman and his son surveyed them silently with open eyes and mouth, as though they were a pair of strange zoological curiosities cast up by the gale.

“Keep doon, Sammy!” the fisherman said hoarsely to a great collie dog who was licking at Girdlestone’s hands. “What be he a suckin’ at? Why, sure, sir, there be blood on your hands.”

“My father scratched himself,” said Ezra promptly.

“His hat has blown away too, and we lost our way in the dark, so we’re rather in a mess.”

“Why, so you be!” Sampson cried, eyeing them up and down. “I thought, when I heard you, as it was they folk from Claxton as comes ‘ere for bait whenever they be short. That’s nigh about the only visitors we ever gets here; bean’t it, Jarge?”

George, thus appealed to, made no articulate reply, but he opened his great mouth and laughed vociferously.

“We’ve come for something which will pay you better than that,” said Ezra. “You remember my meeting you two or three Saturdays ago, and speaking to you about your house and your boat and one thing or another?”

The fisherman nodded.

“You said something then about your boat being a good sea-going craft, and that it was as roomy as many a yacht. I think I told you that I might give it a try some day.”

The fisherman nodded again. His wondering eyes were still surveying his visitors, dwelling on every rent in their clothes or stain on their persons.

“My father and I want to get down the coast as far as the Downs. Now we thought that we might just as well give your boat a turn and have your son and yourself to work it. I suppose she is fit to go that distance?”

“Fit! whoy she be fit to go to ‘Meriky! The Downs ain’t more’n hunder and twenty mile. With a good breeze she would do it in a day. By to-morrow afternoon we’d be ready to make a start if the wind slackens.”

“To-morrow afternoon! We must be there by that time. We want you to start to-night.”

The seaman looked round at his son, and the boy burst out laughing once again.

“It ‘ud be a rum start for a vyage at this time o’ night, with half a gale from the sou’-west. I never heard tell o’ sich a thing!”

“Look here,” said Ezra, bending forward and emphasizing his words with his uplifted hand, “we’ve set our minds on going, and we don’t mind paying for the fancy. The sooner we start the better pleased we shall be. Name your price. If you won't take us, there are many in Claxton that will."

"Well, it be a cruel bad night to be sure," the fisherman answered. "Like as not we'd get the boat knocked about, an' maybe have her riggin' damaged. We've been a-fresh paintin' of her too, and that would be spoiled. It's a powerful long way, and then there's the gettin' back. It means the loss of two or three days' work, and there's plenty of fish on the coast now, and a good market for them."

"Would thirty pounds pay you?" asked Ezra.

The sum was considerably more than the fisherman would have ventured to ask. The very magnificence of it, however, encouraged him to hope that more might be forthcoming.

"Five-and-thirty wouldn't pay me for the loss and trouble," he said; "forbye the damage to the boat."

"Say forty, then," said Ezra. "It's rather much to pay for a freak of this sort, but we won't haggle over a pound or two."

The old seaman scratched his head as though uncertain whether to take this blessing which the gods had sent or to hold out for more.

Ezra solved the matter by springing to his feet. "Come on to Claxton, father," he cried. "We'll get what we want there."

"Steady, sir, steady!" the fisherman said hastily. "I didn't say as I wasn't good for the job. I'm ready to start for the sum you names. Hurry up, Jarge, and get the tackle ready."

The sea-booted youth began to bustle about at this summons, bearing things out into the darkness and running back for more with an alacrity which one would hardly have suspected from his uncouth appearance.

"Can I wash my hands?" asked Girdlestone. There were several crimson stains where he had held the body of the murdered girl. It appeared that Burt's bludgeon was not such a bloodless weapon after all.

"There's water, sir, in that bucket. Maybe you would like a bit o' plaster to bind up the cut?"

"It's not bad enough for that," said the merchant hastily.

"I'll leave you here," the fisherman remarked. "There's much to be done down theer. You'll have poor feedin' I'm afraid; biscuits and water and bully beef."

"Never mind that. Hurry up all you can." The man tramped away down to the beach, and Ezra remained with his father in the hut. The old man washed his hands very carefully, and poured the stained water away outside the door.

"How are you going to pay this man?" he asked.

"I have some money sewed up in my waistcoat," Ezra answered. "I wasn't such a fool as not to know that a crash might come at any moment. I was determined that all should not go to the creditors."

"How much have you?"

"What's that to you?" Ezra asked angrily. "You mind your own affairs. The money's mine, since I have saved it. It's quite enough if I spend part of it in helping you away."

"I don't dispute it, my boy," the old merchant said meekly. "It's a blessing that you had the foresight to secure it. Are you thinking of making for France now?"

"France! Pshaw, man, the telegraph would have set every gendarme on the coast on the look-out. No, no, that would be a poor hope of safety!"

"Where then?"

"Where is the fisherman?" asked Ezra suspiciously, peering out from the door into the darkness. "No one must know our destination. We'll pick up Migg's ship, the Black Eagle, in the Downs. She was to have gone down the Thames to-day, and to lie at Gravesend, and then to work round to the Downs, where she will be to-morrow. It will be a Sunday, so no news can get about. If we get away with him they will lose all trace of us. We'll get him to land up upon the Spanish coast. I think it will fairly puzzle the police. No doubt they are watching every station on the line by this time. I wonder what has become of Burt?"

"I trust that they will hang him," John Girdlestone cried, with a gleam of his old energy. "If he had taken the ordinary precaution of making sure who the girl was, this would never have occurred."

"Don't throw the blame on him," said Ezra bitterly. "Who was it who kept us all up to it whenever we wished to back out? If it had not been for you, who would have thought of it?"

"I acted for the best," cried the old man, throwing his hands up with a piteous gesture. "You should be the last to upbraid me. It was the dream of leaving you rich and honoured which drove me on. I was prepared to do anything for that end."

"You have always excellent intentions," his son said callously.

"They have a queer way of showing themselves, however. Look out, here's

Sampson!"

As he spoke they heard the crunching of the fisherman's heavy boots on the shingle, and he looked in, with his ruddy face all shining with the salt water.

"We're all ready now, sirs," he said. "Jarge and I will get into our oil duds, and then we can lock up the shop. It'll have to take care of itself until we come back."

The two gentlemen walked down to the edge of the sea. There was a little dinghy there, and the boat was anchored a couple of hundred yards off. They could just make out the loom of her through the darkness, and see her shadowy spars, dipping, rising, and falling with the wash of the waves. To right and left spread the long white line of thundering foam, as though the ocean were some great beast of prey which was gnashing its glistening teeth at them. The gale had partially died away, but there still came fitful gusts from the south-west, and the thick clouds overhead were sweeping in a majestic procession across the sky, and falling like a dark cataract over the horizon, showing that up there at least there was no lull in the tempest. It was bitterly cold, and both men buttoned up their coats and slapped their hands against each other to preserve their warmth.

After some little delay, Sampson and his son came down from the hut with a lantern in each of their hands. They had locked the door behind them, which showed that they were ready for a final start. By the lights which they carried it could be seen that they were dressed in yellow suits of oilskin and sou'wester hats, as if prepared for a wet night.

"You ain't half dressed for a cruise of this kind," Sampson said.

"You'll be nigh soaked through, I fear."

"That's our look-out," answered Ezra. "Let us get off."

"Step in, sir, and we'll get in after."

The dinghy was shoved off into the surf, and the two seamen clambered in after. Ezra and his father sat in the sheets, while the others rowed. The sea was running very high — so high that when the dinghy lay in the trough of a wave they could see neither the boat for which they were steering nor the shore which they had left — nothing indeed but the black line of hissing water above their heads. At times they would go up until they hung on the crest of a great roller and saw the dark valleys gaping beyond into which they were forthwith precipitated. Sometimes, when they were high upon a wave, the fishing-boat would be between the seas, and then there would be nothing of her visible except the upper portion of her mast. It was only a couple of hundred yards, but seemed a long journey to the shivering fugitives.

“Stand by with the boat-hook!” Sampson cried at last. The dark outline of the boat was looming immediately above them.

“All right, father.”

The dinghy was held alongside, and the two gentlemen scrambled aboard as best they could, followed by their companions.

“Have you the painter, Jarge?”

“Ay, ay.”

“Make it fast aft then!”

The lad fastened the rope which held the dinghy to a stanchion beside the tiller. Then he and his father proceeded to hoist the foresail so as to get the boat’s head round.

“She’ll do now,” Sampson cried. “Give us a hand here, sir, if you don’t mind.”

Ezra caught hold of the rope which was handed him and pulled for some time. It was a relief to him to have something, however small, which would distract his mind from the events of the night.

“That will do, sir,” the skipper cried, and, leaning over the bows, he seized the anchor which Ezra had hauled up, and tumbled it with a crash on the deck.

“Now, Jarge, with three reefs in her we might give her the mains’le.”

With much pulling at ropes and with many strange nautical cries the father and the son, aided by their passengers, succeeded in raising the great brown sail. The little vessel lay over under the pressure of the wind until her lee bulwark was flush with the water, and the deck lay at such an angle that it was only by holding on to the weather rigging that the two gentlemen could retain their footing. The wild waves swirled and foamed round her bows, and beat at her quarter and beneath her counter, but the little boat rose gallantly to them, and shot away through the storm, running due eastward.

“It ain’t much of a cabin,” Sampson said apologetically. “Such as it is, you’ll find it down there.”

“Thank you,” answered Ezra; “we’ll stay on deck at present. When ought we to get to the Downs?”

“At this rate we’ll be there by to-morrow afternoon.”

“Thank you.”

The fisherman and his boy took turn and turn, one steering and the other keeping a look-out forward and trimming the sails. The two passengers crouched huddled together against the weather rail. They were each too occupied with thought to have time for speech. Suddenly, after passing Claxton and rounding the point, they came in full sight of the Priory, every window of which was blazing with light. They could see dark figures passing to and fro against the glare.

“Look there,” Girdlestone whispered.

“Ay, the police have not taken long,” his son answered. John Girdlestone was silent for some time. Then he suddenly dropped his face upon his hands, and sobbed hoarsely for the first and last time in his career.

“I am thinking of Monday in Fenchurch Street,” he said. “My God! is this the end of a life of hard work! Oh, my business, my business, that I built up myself! It will break my heart!”

And so through the long cold winter’s night they sat together while the boat ploughed its way down the English Channel. Who shall say what their thoughts were as they stared with pale, rigid faces into the darkness, while their minds, perhaps, peered even more cheerlessly into the dismal obscurity which lay over their future. Better be the lifeless wreck whom they have carried up to the Priory, than be torn as these men are torn, by the demons of fear and remorse and grief, and crushed down by the weight of a sin-stained and irrevocable past.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LAW AND ORDER.

The ruffian Burt was so horror-stricken at the sight of the girl whom he imagined that he had murdered, that he lay grovelling on the railway lines by the side of his victim, moaning with terror, and incapable of any resistance. He was promptly seized by the major's party, and the Nihilist secured his hands with a handkerchief so quickly and effectively that it was clearly not the first time that he had performed the feat. He then calmly drew a very long and bright knife from the recesses of his frock-coat, and having pressed it against Burt's nose to ensure his attention, he brandished it in front of him in a menacing way, as a hint that an attempt at escape might be dangerous.

"And who is dis?" asked Baumser, lifting up the dead woman's head, and resting it upon his knee.

"Poor girl! She will niver spake again, whoever she may have been," the major said, holding the lantern to her cold pale face. "Here's where the cowards struck her. Death must have been instantaneous and painless. I could have sworn it was the young lady we came afther, if it were not that we have her safe down there, thank the Lord!"

"Vere are those oders?" asked Von Baumser, peering about through the darkness. "If dere is justice in de country, dey vill hang for the work of dis night."

"They are off," the major answered, laying the girl's head reverently down again. "It's hopeless to follow them, as we know nothing of the counthry, nor which direction they took. They ran like madmen. Hullo! What the divil can this be?"

The sight which had attracted the veteran's attention was nothing less than the appearance at the end of the lane of three brilliant luminous discs moving along abreast of one another. They came rapidly nearer, increasing in brilliancy as they approached. Then a voice rang out of the darkness, "There they are, officers! Close with them! Don't let 'em get away!" And before the major and his party could quite grasp the situation they were valiantly charged by three of those much-enduring, stout-hearted mortals known as the British police force.

It takes courage to plunge into the boiling surf and to carry the rope to the breaking vessel. It takes courage to spring from the ship’s side and support the struggling swimmer, never knowing the moment at which a flickering shadow may appear in the deep green water, and the tiger of the deep turn its white belly upwards as it dashes on its prey. There is courage too in the infantryman who takes a sturdy grip of his rifle and plants his feet firmly as he sees the Lancers sweeping down on his comrades and himself. But of all these types of bravery there is none that can compare with that of our homely constable when he finds on the dark November nights that a door on his beat is ajar, and, listening below, learns that the time has come to show the manhood that is in him. He must fight odds in the dark. He must, single-handed, cage up desperate men like rats in a hole. He must oppose his simple weapon to the six-shooter and the life-preserver. All these thoughts, and the remembrance of his wife and children at home, and of how easy it would be not to observe the open door, come upon him, and then what does he do? Why, with the thought of duty in his heart, and his little cudgel in his hand, he goes to what is too often his death, like a valiant high-minded Englishman, who fears the reproach of his own conscience more than pistol bullet, or bludgeon stroke.

Which digression may serve to emphasize the fact that these three burly Hampshire policemen, having been placed upon our friends’ track by the ostler of the Flying Bull, and having themselves observed manoeuvres which could only be characterized as suspicious, charged down with such vehemence, that in less time than it takes to tell it, both Tom and the major and Von Baumser were in safe custody. The Nihilist, who had an unextinguishable hatred of the law, and who could never be brought to understand that it might under any circumstances be on his side, pulled himself very straight and held his knife down at his hip as though he meant to use it, while Bulow, of Kiel, likewise assumed an aggressive attitude. Fortunately, however, the appearance of their prisoners and a few hurried words from the major made the inspector in charge understand how the land lay, and he transferred his attention to Burt, on whose wrists he placed the handcuffs. He then listened to a more detailed account of the circumstances from the lips of the major.

“Who is this young lady?” he asked, pointing to Kate.

“This is the Miss Harston whom we came to rescue, and for whom no doubt the blow was intended which killed this unhappy girl.”

“Perhaps, sir,” said the inspector to Tom, “you had better take her up to the house.”

“Thank you,” said Tom, and went off through the wood with Kate upon his arm. On their way, she told him how, being unable to find her bonnet and cloak, which Rebecca had abstracted, she had determined to keep her appointment without them. Her delay rendered her a little late, however; but on reaching the withered oak she heard voices and steps in front of her, which she had followed. These had led her to the open gate, and the lighting of the lantern had revealed her to friends and foes. Ere she concluded her story Tom noticed that she leaned more and more heavily upon him, until by the time that they reached the Priory he was obliged to lift her up and carry her to prevent her from falling. The hardships of the last few weeks, and this final terrible and yet most joyful incident of all, had broken down her strength. He bore her into the house, and laying her by the fire in the dining-room, watched tenderly over her, and exhausted his humble stock of medical knowledge in devising remedies for her condition.

In the meantime the inspector, having thoroughly grasped the major’s lucid narrative, was taking prompt and energetic measures.

“You go down to the station, Constable Jones,” he ordered. “Wire to London, ‘John Girdlestone, aged sixty-one, and his son, aged twenty-eight, wanted for murder. Address, Eccleston Square and Fenchurch Street, City.’ Send a description of them. ‘Father, six feet one inch in height, hatchet-faced, grey hair and whiskers, deep-set eyes, heavy brows, round shoulders. Son, five feet ten, dark-faced, black eyes, black curly hair, strongly made, legs rather bandy, well dressed, usually wears a dog’s head scarf-pin.’ That ought to do!”

“Yes, that’s near enough,” observed the major.

“Wire to every station along the line to be on the look-out. Send a description to the chief constable of Portsmouth, and have a watch kept on the shipping. That should catch them!”

“It vill,” cried Von Baumser confidentially. “I’ll bet money dat it vill.” It was as well that the German’s sporting offer found no takers, otherwise our good friend would have been a poorer man.

“Let us carry the poor soul up to the house,” the inspector continued, after making careful examination of the ground all round the body.

The party assisted in raising the girl up, and in carrying her back along the path by which she had been brought.

Burt tramped stolidly along behind with the remaining policeman beside him. The Nihilist brought up the rear with his keen eye fixed upon the navvy, and his knife still ready for use. When they reached the Priory the prisoner was safely locked away in one of the numerous empty rooms, while Rebecca was carried upstairs and laid upon the very bed which had been hers.

“We must search the house,” the inspector said; and Mrs. Jorrocks having been brought out of her room, and having forthwith fainted and been revived again, was ordered to accompany the police in their investigation, which she did in a very dazed and stupefied manner. Indeed, not a word could be got from her until, entering the dining-room, she perceived her bottle of Hollands upon the table, on which she raised up her voice and cursed the whole company, from the inspector downwards, with the shrillest volubility of invective. Having satisfied her soul in this manner, she wound up by a perfect shriek of profanity, and breaking away from her guardians, she regained the shelter of her room and locked herself up there, after which they could hear by the drumming of her heels that she went into a violent hysterical attack upon the floor.

Kate had, however, recovered sufficiently to be able to show the police the different rooms, and to explain to them which was which. The inspector examined the scanty furniture of Kate’s apartment with great interest.

“You say you have been living here for three weeks?” he said.

“Nearly a month,” Kate answered.

“God help you! No wonder you look pale and ill. You have a fine prospect from the window.” He drew the blind aside and looked out into the darkness. A gleam of moonlight lay upon the heaving ocean, and in the centre of this silver streak was a single brown-sailed fishing-boat running to the eastward before the wind. The inspector’s keen eye rested upon it for an instant, and then he dropped the blind and turned away. It never flashed across his mind that the men whom he was hunting down could have chosen that means of escape, and were already beyond his reach.

He examined very carefully the rooms of Ezra and of his father. Both had been furnished comfortably, if not solidly, with spring mattresses to their beds and carpets upon the floor. The young man’s room had little in it beyond the mere furniture, which was natural, as his visits were so short. In the merchant’s chamber, however, were many books and papers. On the little square table was a long slip of foolscap covered with complex figures. It appeared to be a statement of his affairs, in which he had been computing the liabilities of the firm. By the side of it was a small calf-bound diary. The inspector glanced over one of the pages and uttered an exclamation of disgust. “Here are some pretty entries,” he cried. “‘Feel the workings of grace within me!’ ‘Prayed that I might be given a livelier interest in the Holy Scriptures!’ The book’s full of that sort of thing!” he added, turning over the leaves. “The fellow seems to have played the hypocrite even with himself, for he could never have known that other eyes would rest upon this.”

“Dere’ll be some queer company among de elect if he is dere!” Von Baumser remarked.

“What’s all this?” asked the inspector, tumbling a heap of clothes out of the corner with his foot. “Why, here’s a monk’s dress!”

Kate sprang forward at the words. “Then I did see him!” she cried.

“I had almost persuaded myself that it was a dream.”

“What was that?”

Kate told her story as well as she could, and the inspector made notes of it.

“The crafty old dog!” he cried. “No doubt he could reconcile it with his conscience more easily to frighten you to death than to actually kill you. He told you that cock-and-a-bull story to excite your imagination, and then, feeling sure that you would sooner or later try and escape by night, he kept guard in this rig. The only wonder is that he didn’t succeed in either killing you or driving you mad with fright.”

“Never mind now, dear,” Tom whispered, as he saw the look of fear spring into her eyes at the recollection of what had passed. “Don’t think of these terrible things. You will soon be safe in Phillimore Gardens in my mother’s arms. In the meanwhile, I think you would be the better for some sleep.”

“I think I should, Tom.”

“Are you afraid to sleep in your own room?”

“No; I am afraid of nothing, now that I know you are near me. I knew so well that you would come. I have been expecting you all the evening.”

“I can never thank my good friends here enough for the help which they have given me!” Tom exclaimed, turning to his companions.

“It is I who should thank them,” said Kate earnestly, “I have found friends, indeed. Who can say now that the days of chivalry are past?”

“Me dear young lady,” the major answered, bowing with all the innate grace of an Irish gentleman, “ye have warmed us by what ye say. I personally was, as ye know, under orders which left me no choice but to come. I hope, however, that ye will believe that had Mrs. Scully not occupied the place in me affections which she does, I should still be as prompt as me friends here to hasten to the rescue of a lady. Tobias Clutterbuck may be ould, Miss Harston, but his heart will niver grow so hardened but that it will milt at the thought of beauty in distriss.” With this beautiful sentiment the major placed his fat hand over his heart, and bowed again, even more gracefully than before. The three foreigners behind made no remark, but they all stood in a line grinning in a most amicable fashion, and nodding their heads as if to intimate that the major was expressing their united sentiments to a nicety. Kate’s last recollection of that eventful evening was the smiling visages of Von Baumser, Bulow, and the nameless Russian as they beamed their good night at her.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CAPTAIN HAMILTON MIGGS SEES A VISION.

Ezra Girdlestone had given many indications during his life, both in Africa and elsewhere, of being possessed of the power of grasping a situation and of acting for the best at the shortest notice. He never showed this quality more conclusively than at that terrible moment, when he realised not only that the crime in which he bad participated had failed, but that all was discovered, and that his father and he were hunted criminals. With the same intuitive quickness which made him a brilliant man of business, he saw instantly what were the only available means of escape, and proceeded at once to adopt them. If they could but reach the vessel of Captain Hamilton Miggs they might defy the pursuit of the law.

The Black Eagle had dropped down the Thames on the very Saturday which was so fruitful of eventful episodes. Miggs would lie at Gravesend, and intended afterwards to beat round to the Downs, there to await the final instructions of the firm. If they could catch him before he left, there was very little chance that he would know anything of what had occurred. It was a fortunate chance that the next day was Sunday, and there would be no morning paper to enlighten him as to the doings in Hampshire. They had only to invent some plausible excuse for their wish to accompany him, and get him to drop them upon the Spanish coast. Once out of sight of England and on the broad ocean, what detective could follow their track?

Of course upon Sampson’s return all would come out. Ezra reckoned, however, that it would be some time before the fisherman got back from his journey. What was a favourable wind going would be dead in his teeth coming back. It might take him a week’s tacking and beating about before he got home. By that time Ezra hoped to be beyond the reach of all danger. He had a thousand five pound Bank of England notes sewn into the back of his waistcoat, for knowing that a crash might come at any moment, he had long made provision against it. With this he felt that he could begin life again in the new world, and with his youth and energy he might hope to attain success. As to his father, he was fully determined to abandon him completely at the first opportunity.

Through the whole of that wintry night the fishing-boat scudded away to the eastward, and the two fugitives remained upon deck, drenched through with rain and with spray, but feeling that the wild turmoil around them was welcome as a relief to their own thoughts. Better the cutting wind and the angry sea than the thought of the dead girl upon the rails and of the bloodhounds of the law.

Ezra pointed up once at the moon, on whose face two storm wreaths had marked a rectangular device.

“Look at that!” he cried. “It looks like a gallows.”

“What is there to live for?” said his father, looking up with the cold light glittering on his deep-set eyes.

“Not much for you, perhaps,” his son retorted. “You’ve had your fling, but I am young and have not yet had a fair show. I have no fancy to be scragged yet.”

“Poor lad!” the father muttered; “poor lad!”

“They haven’t caught me yet,” said Ezra. “If they did I question whether they could do much. They couldn’t hang three for the death of one. You would have to swing, and that’s about all.”

About two in the morning they saw a line of lights, which the fisherman informed them was from the town of Worthing. Again before daybreak they scudded past another and far brighter and larger area of twinkling points, which marked the position of Brighton. They were nearly half-way upon their journey already. As the dawn approached the dark storm-clouds gathered away to the northern horizon and lay in a great shadow over the coast. On all other points the sky was clear, save that here and there a single puff of white vapour sailed along like the feather of some gigantic bird floating in the ocean of air. These isolated clouds, which had been pearly grey in the dim light of early day, gradually took a lilac tint, which deepened into pink, and then blushed suddenly to a fiery scarlet as the red rim of the sun rose majestically over the horizon. All the heaven was filled with colour from the palest, lightest blue at the zenith to the most brilliant crimson in the east, as though it were nature’s palette on which she had dashed every tint that she possessed. The sea reflected the rich glow, and the tossing waves were gashed with scarlet streaks. “It looks like a sea of blood,” the merchant remarked with a shudder, as he gazed at the wonderful spectacle.

By the returning light the two fugitives were able to notice each other’s appearance. Both were pale, haggard, dishevelled, with bloodshot, dark-rimmed eyes and anxious, weary faces.

“This won’t do!” remarked Ezra. “If Miggs sees us like this he’ll smell a rat.”

He dipped a bucket overboard, and after some search a small piece of soap and a broken comb were extracted from one of the lockers. With these materials they managed to perform their toilets. They re-arranged and cleaned each other’s clothing too, and Ezra purchased a yachting-cap from Sampson for his father, the jaunty nature of which contrasted strangely with the old man’s grim angular visage.

“There’s a fine view!” Sampson observed, pointing towards the land, just as his two passengers had finished their toilet.

They were passing a high range of cliffs which ran along for a great distance. Some were of chalk and others were brownish, as though consisting of some sort of earth. There was one which terminated the line towering up above the rest, and as remarkable for the boldness of its outline as for its height. A lighthouse stood upon the summit, and the whole showed up so clearly in the bright morning air that the fugitives could see the green grass round the house and the coastguardsman at the signal station, who was strolling leisurely about and looking down from his elevation at their little craft. To the eastward of this chalk promontory was a large fine-looking town, which stretched in a wide semicircle round the shores of a curving bay.

“That’s Beachy Head,” said Sampson, pointing at the cliff. “It’s the hoiest p’int down Channel, and they have a look-out place up there to report ships as pass. It was a Muster Lloyd as put it up. I doan’t know who he be, that same Muster Lloyd, but he do seem to take a powerful deal of interest in everythink which has to do wi’ shipping. He’s an admiral belike, or something o’ the sort.”

Neither of the Girdlestones appeared inclined to enlighten him upon the point.

“What’s the town?” asked Ezra.

“Eastbourne,” the fisherman answered shortly, and lounged away into the bows, while his son remained at the tiller.

The two fugitives had their breakfast; but as it consisted of nothing more appetising than tinned corned-beef and ships' biscuits, and as neither of them had much inclination for food, it was not a very lengthy meal. Then they sat in the sheets once more, watching the grand panorama of green woodland and swelling down and towering cliff, which passed before them on the one side while on the other the great ocean highway was dotted with every variety of vessel, from the Portland ketch or the Sunderland brig, with its cargo of coals, to the majestic four-masted liner which swept past, with the green waves swirling round her forefoot and breaking away into a fork of eddying waters in her wake.

Ezra cautioned his father to sit down, for he observed a row of curious faces gazing at them over the quarter of one great vessel.

"Our dress isn't quite what you would expect to see in a fishing-boat," he said. "There is no use setting tongues wagging." There was still a fresh breeze, and the little boat continued to fly before it at the rate of six or eight knots. "This wind is a lucky chance," Ezra remarked, rather to himself than to his companion.

"It is the working of Providence," answered John Girdlestone, with an earnestness which showed that his mind still retained its habitual peculiarity.

By ten o'clock they were abreast of the long stone terraces of Hastings; at half-past eleven they saw the masts of the fishing-smacks of Winchelsea. By one they were rounding the sharp bold promontory of Dungeness. They kept further to sea after that, so that the long white wall and the spires of Folkestone and of Dover lay far on the horizon. On the other side a dim haze upon the blue water marked the position of the French coast. It was nearly five, and the sun was beginning to sink down again in the west, when the fisherman, after gazing steadily ahead for some time, with his horny hand shading his eyes, touched Ezra on the sleeve.

"See them breakers over there," he said, pointing over the starboard bow. Far away Ezra could see a long roll of foam breaking the monotony of the broad stretch of ocean. "Them's the Goodwins," he went on; "and them craft ahead is at anchor in the Downs."

The vessels in question were miles away, but Ezra brightened up at the sight of their destination, and he once again arranged his toilet and that of his father.

“Thank goodness!” he muttered, with a long sigh of relief as he peered at the ships, which were growing clearer and larger every moment. “That outer one is the Black Eagle, or I am much mistaken. He’s not gone yet!”

“That is the Black Eagle,” his father said with confidence. “I know her by the cut of her stern and the rake of her masts.”

As they came nearer still, any lingering doubt was finally dispelled.

“There’s the white paint line,” said Ezra. “It’s certainly her.

Take us alongside that ship which is lying to the outside there,

Sampson.”

The fisherman looked ahead once more. “To the barque which has just got her anchor up?” he said. “Why, we won’t be in time to catch her.”

“Her anchor up!” screamed Ezra. “You don’t mean to tell me she’s off!”

“Look at that!” the man answered.

As he spoke they saw first one great square of canvas appear above the vessel, and then another, until she had spread her white wings to their fullest extent.

“Don’t say we can’t catch her!” cried Ezra, with a furious oath.

“I tell you, man, that we must catch her. Everything depends on that.”

“She must take three short tacks before she’s out from the Goodwins. If we run right on as we are going, we may get near her before she’s free.”

“For God’s sake! clap on all the sail you can! Get these reefs out!” With trembling fingers Ezra let out the sail, and the boat lay over further under the increased pressure. “Is there no other sail that we could put up?”

“If we were running, we could rig up a spinnaker,” the fisherman answered; “but the wind has come round three points. We can do no more.”

“I think we are catching her,” John Girdlestone cried, keeping his eyes fixed upon the barque, which was about a mile and a half ahead.

“Yes, we are now, but she hain’t got her way on yet. She’ll draw ahead presently; won’t she, Jarge?”

The fisherman’s son nodded, and burst into hoarse merriment.

“It’s better’n a race,” he cried.

“With our necks for a prize,” Ezra muttered to himself.

“It’s a little too exciting to be pleasant. We are still gaining.”

They had a clear view of the dark hull and towering canvas of the barque as she swept along in front of them, intending evidently to take advantage of the wind in order to get outside the Goodwins before beating up Channel.

"She's going about," Sampson remarked. As he spoke the snow-white pile lay over in the opposite direction, and the whole broadside of the vessel became visible to them, every sail standing out as though carved from ivory against the cold blue sky. "If we don't catch her on this tack we won't get her at all," the fisherman observed. "When they put about next they'll reach right out into the Channel."

"Where's something white?" said Ezra excitedly. He dived into the cabin and reappeared with a dirty table-cloth. "Stand up here, father! Now keep on waving it! They may see you."

"I think as we are overhaulin' of them," remarked the boy.

"We're doing that," his father answered. "The question is, will we get near enough to stop 'em afore they gets off on the next tack?"

The old merchant was standing in the bows waving the signal in the air. His son sprang up beside him and flourished his handkerchief. "They don't look more than half a mile off. Let us shout together." The two blended their voices in a hoarse roar, which was taken up by the boatman and his son. "Once again!" cried Ezra; and again their shout resounded over the sea — a long-drawn cry it was, with a ring of despair and of sorrow. Still the barque kept steadily on her way.

"If they don't go about we shall catch them," the fisherman said.

"If they keep on another five minutes we are right."

"Do you hear that?" Ezra cried to his father; and they both shouted with new energy and waved their signals.

"They're goin' about," George burst in. "It's all up." Girdlestone groaned as he saw the mainyard swing back. They all strained their eyes, waiting for the other to follow. It remained stationary.

"They have seen us!" cried the fisherman. "They are waitin' to pick us up!"

"Then we are saved!" said Ezra, stepping down and wiping the perspiration which poured from his forehead. "Go down into the cabin, father, and put yourself straight. You look like a ghost."

Captain Hamilton Miggs had found the liquor of the Cock and Cowslip so very much to his taste, in spite of its vitriolic peculiarities recorded in a preceding chapter, that he rejoined his ship in a very shaky and demoralised condition. He was a devout believer in the homoeopathic revelation that like may be cured by like, so he forthwith proceeded to set himself straight by the consumption of an unlimited quantity of ship's rum. "What's the good of having a pilot aboard if I am to keep sober?” he hiccoughed to his mate McPherson. After which piece of logic he shut himself up in his cabin and roared comic songs all the way from London to Gravesend. He was so exhausted by his performance that he fell fast asleep, and snored stertorously for fifteen hours, at the end of which time he came on deck and found that the Black Eagle was lying off Deal, and that her anchor was just being hoisted for a start up Channel.

Captain Hamilton Miggs watched the sail-setting with his hands in his pockets, and swore promiscuously at every one, from the mate downwards, in a hearty comprehensive way, which showed a mind that was superior to petty distinctions. Having run over all the oaths that he could think of, he dived below and helped himself from the rum bottle, a process which appeared to aid his memory or his invention, for he reappeared upon deck and evolved a new many-jointed expletive at the man at the wheel. He then strode in gloomy majesty up and down the quarter-deck, casting his eyes at the sails and at the clouds in a critical way calculated to impress the crew generally with a sense of their captain’s extraordinary sagacity.

The Blank Eagle had gone about for the second time, and was just about to free herself from the Goodwins and reach out into the Channel, when Miggs’ eye happened to fall upon the fishing boat in pursuit and the white flutter in her bows. He examined her with his glass, steadying it as well as he could by leaning it across the rail, as his hand was very shaky. After a short inspection, a look of astonishment, followed by one of resignation, stole over his features.

“I’ve got them again, Mac,” he remarked to the mate.

“Got what, sir?”

“The diddleums, the jumps, the visions. It’s the change of air as has done it.”

“You look all right,” remarked the mate in a sympathetic voice.

“So I may; but I’ve got ‘em. It’s usually rats — rats, and sometimes cockroaches; but it’s worse than that this time. As I’m a livin’ man, I looked through the glass at that fishing-boat astern of us, and I saw young Muster Ezra Girdlestone in it, and the old boss standin’ up wi’ a yachtin’-cap at the side of his head and waving a towel. This is the smartest bout that ever I have had. I’ll take some of the medicine left from my last touch and I’ll turn in.” He vanished down the companion, and having taken a strong dose of bromide of potassium, tumbled into his bunk, cursing loudly at his ill luck.

The astonishment of McPherson upon deck was as great as that of Captain Miggs, when, on looking through the glass, he ascertained beyond all doubt that both of his employers were in the fishing-boat. He at once ordered the mainyard to be hauled back and awaited their arrival. In a few minutes the boat was alongside, a ladder thrown down, and the two Girdlestones were on the deck of their own ship.

“Where’s the captain?” asked the head of the firm.

“He’s below, sir. He’s no very salubrious.” The mate’s love of long words rose superior to any personal emotion.

“You can square the yard,” said Ezra. “We are going with you.”

“Ay, ay, sir. Square away that yard there!” It swung round into position, and the Black Eagle resumed her voyage.

“There is some business to be looked after in Spain,” Girdlestone remarked to McPherson. “It came up suddenly or we should have given you notice. It was absolutely necessary that we should be there personally. It was more convenient to go in our own vessel than to wait for a passenger ship.”

“Where will you sleep, sir?” asked the mate. “I doubt the accommodation’s no very munificent.”

“There are two settees in the cabin. We can do on them very well. I think we can’t do better than go down there at once, for we have had a long and tiring journey.”

After they had disappeared into the cabin, McPherson trod the deck for the remainder of his watch with a grave and a thoughtful face. Like most of his countrymen he was shrewd and long-headed. It struck him that it was a very strange thing for the two partners to be absent at the same time from their business. Again, where was their luggage? Grave misgivings arose in his mind as to the reason of it all. He kept them to himself, however, and contented himself with remarking to the carpenter that in all his experience he had never met with a more “monumentous episode.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

A VOYAGE IN A COFFIN SHIP.

The early part of the voyage of the Black Eagle was extremely fortunate. The wind came round to the eastward, and wafted them steadily down Channel, until on the third day they saw the Isle of Ushant lying low upon the sky-line. No inquisitive gunboat or lurking police launch came within sight of them, though whenever any vessel's course brought her in their direction the heart of Ezra Girdlestone sank within him. On one occasion a small brig signalled to them, and the wretched fugitives, when they saw the flags run up, thought that all was lost. It proved, however, to be merely some trivial message, and the two owners breathed again.

The wind fell away on the day that they cleared the Channel, and the whole surface of the sea was like a great expanse of quicksilver, which shimmered in the rays of the wintry sun. There was still a considerable swell after the recent gale, and the Black Eagle lay rolling about as though she had learned habits of inebriation from her skipper. The sky was very clear above, but all round the horizon a low haze lay upon the water. So silent was it that the creaking of the boats as they swung at the davits, and the straining of the shrouds as the ship rolled, sounded loud and clear, as did the raucous cries of a couple of gulls which hovered round the poop. Every now and then a rumbling noise ending in a thud down below showed that the swing of the ship had caused something to come down with a run. Underlying all other sounds, however, was a muffled clank, clank, which might almost make one forget that this was a sailing ship, it sounded so like the chipping of a propeller.

"What is that noise, Captain Miggs?" asked John Girdlestone as he stood leaning over the quarter rail, while the old sea-dog, sextant in hand, was taking his midday observations. The captain had been on his good behaviour since the unexpected advent of his employers, and he was now in a wonderful and unprecedented state of sobriety.

"Them's the pumps a-goin'," Miggs answered, packing his sextant away in its case.

“The pumps! I thought they were only used when a ship was in danger?”

Ezra came along the deck at this moment, and listened with interest to the conversation.

“This ship is in danger,” Miggs remarked calmly.

“In danger!” cried Ezra, looking round the clear sky and placid sea.

“Where is the danger? I did not think you were such an old woman, Miggs.”

“We will see about that,” the seaman answered angrily. “If a ship’s got no bottom in her she’s bound to be in danger, be the weather fair or foul.”

“Do you mean to tell me this ship has no bottom?”

“I mean to tell you that there are places where you could put your fingers through her seams. It’s only the pumpin’ that keeps her afloat.”

“This is a pretty state of things,” said Girdlestone. “How is it that I have not been informed of it before! It is most dangerous.”

“Informed!” cried Miggs. “Informed of it! Has there been a v’yage yet that I haven’t come to ye, Muster Girdlestone, and told ye I was surprised ever to find myself back in Lunnon? A year agone I told ye how this ship was, and ye laughed at me, ye did. It’s only when ye find yourselves on her in the middle o’ the broad sea that ye understan’ what it is that sailor folk have to put up wi’.”

Girdlestone was about to make some angry reply to this address, but his son put his hand on his arm to restrain him. It would never do to quarrel with Hamilton Miggs before they reached their port of refuge. They were too completely in his power.

“What the captain says has a great deal of truth in it,” he remarked, with a laugh. “You don’t realise a thing until you’ve had to experience it. The Black Eagle shall certainly have an overhauling next time, and we’ll see if we can’t give her captain an increase at the same time.”

Miggs gave a grunt which, might be taken as expressing thanks or as signifying doubt. Perhaps there was a mixture of both in his mind.

“I presume,” Girdlestone said, in a conciliatory voice, “that there would be no real danger as long as the weather was fine?”

“It won’t be fine long,” the captain answered gruffly. “The glass was well under thirty when I come up, and it is fallin’ fast. I’ve been about here before at this time o’ year in a calm, with a ground swell and a sinkin’ glass. No good ever came of it. Look there at the norrard. What d’ye make o’ that, Sandy?”

“In conjunction wi’ the descending glass, it has an ominous appairance,” the Scotchman answered, with much stress on the first syllable of the adjective.

The phenomenon which had attracted their professional attention did not appear to either of the Girdlestones to be a very important one. The haze on the horizon to the north was rather thicker than elsewhere, and a few thin streaky clouds straggled upwards across the clear cold heaven, like the feelers of some giant octopus which lay behind the fog bank. At the same time the sea changed in places from the appearance of quicksilver to that of grained glass.

“There’s the wind,” Miggs said confidently. “I’d furl the top-gallant sails and get her stay-sails down, Mr. McPherson.” Whenever he gave an order he was careful to give the mate his full title, though at other times he called him indiscriminately Sandy or Mac.

The mate gave the necessary commands, while Miggs dived down into the cabin. He came up again looking even graver than when he left the deck.

“The glass is nearly down to twenty-eight,” he said. “I never seed it as low since I’ve been at sea. Take in the mains’l, Mr. McPherson, and have the topsails reefed down!”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

There was no lack of noise now as the men hauled at the halliards with their shrill strange cries, which sounded like the piping of innumerable sea-birds. Half a dozen lay out on the yard above, tucking away the great sail and making all snug.

“Take a reef in the fores’l!” the mate roared, “and look alive about it!”

“Hurry up, ye swabs!” Miggs bellowed. “You’ll be blown away, every mother’s son of ye, if you don’t stir yourselves!”

Even the two landsmen could see now that the danger was no imaginary one, and that a storm was about to burst over them. The long black lines of vapour had lengthened and coalesced, until now the whole northern heaven was one great rolling black cloud, with an angry, ragged fringe which bespoke the violence of the wind that drove it. Here and there against the deep black background a small whitish or sulphur-coloured wreath stood clearly out, looking livid and dangerous. The whole great mass was sweeping onwards with prodigious and majestic rapidity, darkening the ocean beneath it, and emitting a dull, moaning, muttering sound, which was indescribably menacing and mournful.

“This may be the same gale as was on some days ago,” Miggs remarked. “They travel in circles very often, and come back to where they start from.”

“We are all snug aloft, but this ship won’t stand much knocking about, an’ that’s a fact,” observed the mate gloomily.

It was blowing now in short frequent puffs, which ruffled the surface of the water, and caused the Black Eagle to surge slowly forward over the rollers. A few drops of rain came pattering down upon the deck. The great bank of cloud was above the ship, still hurrying wildly across the heavens.

“Look out!” cried an old quartermaster. “Here she comes!”

As he spoke the storm burst with a shriek, as though all the demons of the air had been suddenly unchained and were rejoicing in their freedom. The force of the blast was so great that Girdlestone could almost have believed that he had been struck by some solid object. The barque heeled over until her lee rail touched the water, and lay so for a minute or more in a smother of foam. Her deck was at such an angle that it seemed as though she never could right herself. Gradually, however, she rose a little, staggered and trembled like a living thing, and then plunged away through the storm, as a piece of paper is whirled before the wind.

By evening the gale was at its height. The Black Eagle was running under maintopsail and foretopmast staysail. The sea had risen very quickly, as it will when wind comes upon a swell. As far as the eye could see from the summit of a wave there was a vista of dark towering ridges with their threatening crests of foam. When the barque sank in the hollow these gleaming summits rose as high as her mainyard, and the two fugitives, clinging to the weather-shrouds, looked up in terror and amazement at the masses of water which hung above them. Once or twice waves actually broke over the vessel, crashing and roaring down the deck, and washing hither and thither until gradually absorbed between the planks or drained away through the scupper-holes. On each of these occasions the poor rotten vessel would lurch and shiver in every plank, as if with a foreknowledge of her fate.

It was a dreary night for all on board. As long as there was light they could at least see what danger was to be faced, but now the barque was plunging and tossing through an inky obscurity. With a wild scooping motion she was hurled up on the summit of a great wave, and thence she shot down into the black gulf beyond with such force that when checked by meeting the next billow her whole fabric jarred from truck to keelson. There were two seamen at the wheel and two at the relieving tackles, yet it was all that they could do among the wild commotion to keep her steady.

No one thought of going below. It was better to see and know the worst than to be shut up in a coffin where one could not stretch out a hand to help one's self. Once Captain Hamilton Miggs clawed his way along the rail to where the Girdlestones were standing.

"Look there!" he roared, pointing to windward.

It was difficult to turn one's face straight to the wild rush of wind and spray and hail. Shading their eyes, they peered into the storm. Right in the heart of it, and apparently not more than a couple of hundred yards from the barque, was a lurid glare of ruddy light, rising and falling with the sea, but advancing rapidly through it. There was a bright central glowing spot, with smaller lights glimmering above and beside it. The effect of the single glare of light against the inky darkness of the sea and sky would have made a study for a Turner.

"What's that?"

"It's a steamer," the captain shouted. It was only by great exertions that he could make himself audible above the shrieking of the wind and the dash of the waves.

"What do you think of it all?" Ezra asked.

"Very bad," Miggs answered. "Couldn't be worse;" and with that he clawed his way aft again, grasping every stanchion or shroud on his way, like a parroquet in a cage.

The clouds above broke somewhat towards morning, but there was no sign of abatement in the tempest. Here and there through the rifts the glimmer of the stars might be seen, and once the pale moon gleamed through the storm wreath. The dawn broke cheerless and dreary, disclosing the great turmoil of endless slate-coloured waves and the solitary little barque, with her rag of canvas, like a broken-winged seabird, staggering to the south.

Even the Girdlestones had noticed that, whereas towards the commencement of the storm it had been a rare occurrence for a wave to break over the ship, the decks were now continually knee-deep in water, and there was a constant splashing and crashing as the seas curled over the weather bulwark. Miggs had already observed it, and conferred gravely with his mate on the point.

"I don't like the looks of her, Mac," he shouted. "She don't rise to them."

"She's near water-logged, I'm thinkin'," the mate responded gravely.

He knew the danger, and his thoughts were wandering away to a little slate-tiled cottage near Peterhead. It is true that there was not much in it save a wife, who was said to give Sandy the rough side of her tongue, and occasionally something rougher still. Affection is a capricious emotion, however, and will cling to the most unlikely objects; so the big Scotchman's eyes were damp with something else beside the sea spray as he realised that he might never look upon cottage or occupant again.

"No wonder," said Miggs, "when she's takin' in water above and below too. The men are weary wi' pumpin', and it still gains."

"I doot it's our last v'yage thgither," the mate remarked, his Scottish accent waxing broader under the influence of emotion.

"What d'ye say to heavin' her to?"

"I'd let her run on. She would na rise tae the waves, I'm fearin'. We canna be vera fa' frae the Spanish coast, accordin' to my surmisation. That wud gie us a chance o' savin' oorsels, though I'm a feared na boat would live in siccan a sea."

"You're right. We have a better chance so than if we let her ride. She'd founder as sure as eggs are eggs. Damn it, Mac, I could almost be glad this has happened now we've got them two aboard. We'll teach 'em what coffin ships is like in a gale o' wind." The rough seaman laughed hoarsely as he spoke.

The carpenter came aft at this moment, balancing himself as best he could, for the deck was only a few degrees off the perpendicular.

"The leak is gaining fast," he said. "The hands are clean done up.

There's land on the port bow."

The mate and the captain peered out through the dense wrack and haze. A great dark cliff loomed out upon the left, jagged, inhospitable, and menacing.

"We'd best run towards it," the mate said. "We've na chance o' saving the ship, but we might run her ashore."

"The ship will go down before you reach it," the carpenter remarked gloomily.

"Keep your heart up!" Miggs shouted, and then crawled along to the Girdlestones. "There is no hope for the ship but we may save ourselves," he said. "You'll have to take your turn at the pumps."

They followed him forward without a word. The crew, listless and weary, were grouped about the pumps. The feeble clanking sounded like the ticking of a watch amid the horrible uproar which filled the air.

"Buckle to again, boys!" cried Miggs. "These two will help you and the carpenter and mate."

Ezra and his father, the old man's grizzled locks flying wildly from his head, seized the rope and worked with the crew, hardly able to retain their foothold upon the slippery sloping decks. Miggs went down into the cabin. His behaviour during the gale had been most exemplary, but he recognised now that there was nothing more to be done, and, having thrown off his public responsibilities, he renewed his private peculiarities. He filled out nearly a tumblerful of raw rum and took it off at a gulp. Then he began to sing and made his way on deck in a very hilarious and reckless mood.

The vessel was still flying towards the rugged line of cliffs, which were now visible along the whole horizon, the great projection on the left being their culminating point. She was obviously sinking lower in the water, and she plunged in a heavy, sulky manner through the waves, instead of rising to them as she did before. The water was steadily gaining in her interior, and it was clear that she would not float long. The straining of the gale had increased the long-neglected rifts between her timbers, and no amount of pumping could save her. On the other hand, the sky had broken above them, and the wind was by no means so violent as before. The sun broke through between two great hurrying clouds, and turned all the waves to the brightest emerald green, with sparkling snow-white crests of foam. This sudden change and the brightness of the scene made their fate seem all the harder to the seamen aboard the sinking vessel.

"The gale is clearin'," remarked McPherson. "If we'd had a ship that wasna rotten to the hairt, like her owners, we'd ha pu'ed through."

"Right you are, old Sandy! But we're all goin' together, captain and owners and the whole bilin'," yelled Miggs recklessly.

The mate looked at him half in surprise and half in contempt.

"You've been at the bottle," he said. "Eh mun, mun, if we are a'
drooned, as seems likely, it's an awfu' thing to appear before your
Maker wi' your meeserable soul a' steeped in drink."

“You go down and have a drink yourself,” Miggs cried huskily.

“Na, na. If I am to dee, I’ll dee sober.”

“You’ll die a fool,” the skipper shouted wrathfully.

“Well, old preacher, you’ve brought us into a nice hole with your damned insurance cheating, cheese-paring business. What d’ye think of it now, when the ship’s settlin’ down under our feet, eh? Would you repair her if you had her back in the Albert Dock, eh?”

This speech was addressed to the old merchant, who had ceased pumping, and was leaning against the cuddy and looking up hopelessly at the long line of brown cliffs which were now only half a mile away. They could hear the roar of the surf, and saw the white breakers where the Atlantic stormed in all its fury against nature’s break-water.

“He’s not fit to command,” said Ezra to the mate. “What would you advise?”

“We’ll bring her round and lower the boats on the lee side. They may live or no, but it’s the only chance for us. Them twa boats will hold us a’ easy.”

The ship was settling down in the water so fast that it was no difficult matter to let the boats down. They only hung a few feet above the surface. The majority of the crew got safely into the long boat, and the Girdlestones, with Miggs and four seamen, occupied the gig. It was no easy thing to prevent the boats from being stove, as the waves alternately drove them from the ship’s side or brought the two together with a force which seemed irresistible. By skilful management, however, they both succeeded in casting off and getting clear without accident.

It was only when they emerged from under the shelter of the vessel that they felt the full power of the sea. If it had appeared stupendous when they trod the deck of the barque, how much more so now, when, by leaning the arm over the side, they could touch the surface. The great glassy green billows hurled them up and down, and tossed them and buffeted them as though the two boats were their playthings, and they were trying what antics they could perform with them without destroying them. Girdlestone sat very grim and pale, with Ezra at his side. The young fellow’s expression was that of a daring man who realises his danger, but is determined to throw no chance of safety away. His mouth was set firm and hard, and his dark eyebrows were drawn down over his keen eyes, which glanced swiftly to right and left, like a rat in a trap. Miggs held the tiller, and laughed from time to time in a drunken fashion, while the four seamen, quiet and subdued, steadied the boat as long as they could with their oars, and looked occasionally over their shoulders at the breakers behind them. The sun was shining on the rugged precipices, showing out the green turf upon their summit and a little dark group of peasants, who were watching the scene from above, but making no effort to assist the castaways. There was no alternative but to row straight in for the nearest point of land, for the boats were filling, and might go down at any moment.

"The ship's gone!" Ezra said, as they rose on the summit of a wave. When they came up again all looked round, but there was no sign of the ill-fated Black Eagle.

"We'll all be gone when we get among the breakers," shouted Captain Hamilton Miggs. "Pull, ye devils, pull! Beat the mate's boat. It's a race, my lads, and the winnin' post is hell."

Ezra glanced at his father, and saw that his lips were moving tremulously as they pattered forth prayers.

"Still at it!" he said, with a sneer.

"Making my peace," the old man said solemnly. "My faith is now indeed a staff and a comfort. I look back at my long life, and though I humbly confess that I have erred, and erred grievously, still in the main I have walked straight. From my youth I have been frugal and industrious. Oh, my boy, look with candid eyes into your own heart, and see if you are fit to be called away."

"Look to your own beam," Ezra answered, keeping his eye upon the line of boiling surf, which came nearer and nearer every moment. "How about John Harston's daughter, eh?" Even at that awful hour Ezra felt a sinister pleasure at observing the spasm which shot across his father's face at the mention of his ward.

"If I sinned I sinned for a worthy purpose," he answered. "It was to preserve my business. Its fall was a blow to righteousness and a triumph to evil. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit!"

As he spoke a great wave hurled the boat in upon its broad bosom, and flung it down upon the cruel jagged rocks, which bristled from the base of the cliff. There was a horrible rending crash, and the stout keel snapped asunder, while a second wave swept over it, tearing out the struggling occupants and bearing them on, only to hurl them upon a second ridge beyond. The peasants upon the cliff gave piteous cries of grief and pity, which blended with the agonized groans and screams of drowning men and the thunder of the pitiless surge. Looking down they could see the black dots, which indicated the heads of the poor wretches below, diminishing one by one as they were hurled upon the rocks or dragged down by the under-current.

Ezra was a strong swimmer, but when he had shaken himself free of the boat, and kicked away a seaman who clung to him, he made no attempt to strike out. He knew that the waves would bear him quickly enough on to the rocks, and he reserved himself for the struggle with them. A great roller came surging over the outlying reef. It carried him in like a feather and hurled him up against the face of the cliff. As he struggled upon its crest, he mechanically put out his hands and seized a projecting portion of the rock. The shock of the contact was tremendous, but he retained his grasp and found himself, when the wave receded, standing battered and breathless upon a small niche in the front of the rock which just gave him foothold. It was a marvellous escape, for looking on either side he could not see any break in the sheer declivity.

He was by no means safe as yet. If a wave had landed him there another might come as high and drag him away. Looking down he saw one or two smaller ones break into spray far below him, and then a second great green billow came rolling majestically towards him. He eyed it as it came foaming in, and calculated that it would come at least as high as his knees. Would it drag him back with it, or could he hold his own? He braced himself as firmly as he could, placing his feet apart, and digging his nails into the inequalities of the rock until the blood gushed from them. The water surged up upon him, and he felt it tugging like some murderous demon at his legs, but he held on bravely until the pressure decreased. Looking below the saw the wave sinking down the face of the cliff. Another wave overtook it and welled it up again, and then from the depths of the green waters Ezra saw a long white arm shoot up, and grasp the edge of the ledge upon which he stood.

Even before the face appeared the young man knew that the hand was his father’s. A second followed the first, and then the old merchant’s face was uplifted from the waves. He was cruelly bruised and battered, and his clothes had been partly torn away. He recognised his son, however, and looked up at him beseechingly, while he held on with all his strength to the ledge of rock. So small was the space that his clinging fingers touched Ezra’s toes.

“There’s no room here,” the young man said brutally.

“For God’s sake!”

“Hardly room for one.”

The merchant was hanging with the lower portion of his body in the water. It was but a few instants, but the old man had time to think of many an incident in his past life. Once more he saw the darkened sick-room, and his own form standing by the bed of the dying man. What are these words which ring in his ears above the crash of the surf? “May your flesh and blood treat you as you treat her.” He looked up appealing at his son. Ezra saw that the next wave would lift him right up on to the ledge. In that case he might be hustled off.

“Leave go!” he cried.

“Help me, Ezra.”

His son brought down his heavy heel upon the bloodless hands. The old African trader gave a wild shriek and fell back into the sea. Looking down, Ezra saw his despairing face gazing at him through the water. Slowly it sank until it was but a flickering white patch far down in the green depths. At the same instant a thick rope came dangling down the face of the cliff, and the young man knew that he was saved.

CHAPTER L.

WINDS UP THE THREAD AND TIES TWO KNOTS AT THE END.

Great was the excitement of the worthy couple at Phillimore Gardens when Kate Harston was brought back to them. Good Mrs. Dimsdale pressed her to her ample bosom and kissed her, and scolded her, and wept over her, while the doctor was so moved that it was only by assuming an expression of portentous severity and by bellowing and stamping about that he was able to keep himself in decent control.

"And you really thought we had forgotten you because we were insane enough to stop writing at that villain's request?" he said, patting Kate's pale cheeks tenderly and kissing her.

"I was very foolish," she said, blushing prettily and rearranging her hair, which had been somewhat tumbled by her numerous caresses.

"Oh, that scoundrel — that pair of scoundrels!" roared the doctor, shaking his fist and dancing about on the hearth-rug. "Pray God they may catch 'em before the trial comes off!"

The good physician's prayer was not answered in this case, for Burt was the only criminal who appeared in the dock. Our friends all went down to the Winchester Assizes to give evidence, and the navvy was duly convicted of the death of Rebecca Taylforth and condemned to death. He was executed some three weeks afterwards, dying as he had lived, stolid and unrepenting.

There is a little unpretending church not far from Phillimore Gardens, in which a little unpretending clergyman preaches every Sunday out of a very shabby pulpit. It lies in Castle Lane, which is a narrow by-way, and the great crowd of church-goers ebbs and flows within a hundred yards of it, but none know of its existence, for it has never risen to the dignity of a spire, and the bell is so very diminutive that the average muffin man produces quite as much noise. Hence, with the exception of some few families who have chanced to find their way there, and have been so pleased with their spiritual welcome that they have returned, there is a poor and fluctuating congregation. So scanty is it that the struggling incumbent could very well weep when he has spent the week in polishing and strengthening his sermon, and then finds upon the Sunday how very scanty is the audience to whom it is to be addressed.

Imagine, then, this good man’s surprise when asked to publish the banns of marriage of two couples simultaneously, each of whom he knew to be in the upper circles of life, and when informed at the same time that the said marriages were actually to be celebrated under his own auspices and in his own church. In the fullness of his heart he at once bought a most unwearable black bonnet with lilac flowers and red berries, which he brought in triumph to his wife, who, good woman, affected extreme delight, and afterwards cut away all the obnoxious finery and replaced it to her own taste. The scanty congregation was no less surprised when they heard that Tobias Clutterbuck, bachlelor, was about to marry Lavinia Scully, widow, and that Thomas Dimsdale, bachelor, was to do as much to Catherine Harston, spinster. They communicated the tidings to their friends, and the result was a great advertisement to the little church, so that the incumbent preached his favourite sermon upon barren fig trees to a crowded audience, and received such an offertory as had never entered into his wildest dreams.

And if this was an advertisement to the Castle Lane church, how much more so was it when the very pompous carriages came rolling up with their very pompous drivers, all of whom, being married men, had a depreciatory and wearied expression upon their faces, to show that they had done it all before and that it was nothing new to them. Out of the one carriage there jumped a very jaunty gentleman, somewhat past the middle age and a little inclined to stoutness, but looking very healthy and rosy nevertheless. Besides him there walked a tall, tawny-bearded man, who glanced solicitously every now and again at his companion, as though he were the bottle-holder at a prize-fight and feared that his man might collapse at a moment’s notice. From a second carriage there emerged an athletic brown-faced young fellow accompanied by a small wizened gentleman in spotless attire, who was in such a state of nervousness that he dropped his lavender glove twice on his way up the aisle. These gentlemen grouped themselves at the end of the church conversing in low whispers and looking exceedingly uncomfortable, as is the prerogative of the sterner sex under such circumstances. Mr. Gilray, who was Tom’s best man, was introduced to Herr von Baumser, and every one was very affable and nervous.

Now there comes a rustling of drapery, and every one turns their heads as the brides sweep up to the altar. Here Is Mrs. Scully, looking quite as charming as she did fifteen years ago on the last occasion when she performed the ceremony. She was dressed in a French grey gown with bonnet to match, and the neatest little bouquet in the world, for which the major had ransacked Covent Garden. Behind her came bonny Kate, a very vision of loveliness in her fairy-like lace and beautiful ivory satin. Her dark lashes drooped over her violet eyes and a slight flush tinged her cheeks, but she glided steadily into her place and did her share in the responses when the earnest little clergyman appeared upon the scene. There was Dr. Dimsdale too, with the brightest of smiles and snowiest of waistcoats, giving away the brides in the most open-handed fashion. His wife too was by his side in tears and purple velvet, and many other friends and relations, including the two Socialists, who came at the major’s invitation, and beamed on every one out of a side pew.

Then there was the signing of the registers, and such a kissing and a weeping and a distributing of fees as never was seen in Castle Lane church before. And Mrs. Dimsdale, as one of the witnesses, would insist upon writing her name in the space reserved for the bride, on which there were many small jokes passed and much laughter. Then the wheezy old organ struck up Mendelssohn’s wedding march, and the major puffed out his chest and stumped down the aisle with his bride, while Tom followed with his, looking round with proud and happy eyes. The carriages rolled up, there was a slamming of doors and a cracking of whips, and two more couples had started hand in hand down the long road of life which leads — who shall say whither!

The breakfast was at Phillimore Gardens, and a very glorious breakfast it was. Those who were present still talk of the manner in which the health of the brides was proposed by Dr. Dimsdale and of the enthusiasm with which the toast was received by the company. Also of the flowery address in which the major returned thanks for the said toast, and the manly demeanour of the younger man as he followed suit. They speak too of many other pleasant things said and done upon that occasion. How Von Baumser proposed the health of the little incumbent, and the little incumbent that of Dr. Dimsdale, and the doctor drank to the unpronounceable Russian, who, being unable to reply, sang a revolutionary song which no one could understand. Very happy and very hearty was every one by the time that the hour came at which the carriages were ordered, when, amid a patter ing of rice and a chorus of heartfelt good wishes, the happy couples drove off upon their travels.

The liabilities of the firm of Girdlestone proved to be less serious than was at first imagined. After the catastrophe which had befallen the founder of the business, there was almost a panic in Fenchurch Street, but on examination it proved that though the books had been deliberately falsified for some time, yet trade had been so brisk of late that, with a little help, the firm could continue to exist. Dimsdale threw all his money and his energy into the matter, and took Gilray into partnership, which proved to be an excellent thing for both of them. The firm of Dimsdale and Gilray is now among the most successful and popular of all the English firms connected with the African trade. Of their captains there is none upon whom they place greater reliance than upon McPherson, whose boat was providentially saved from the danger which destroyed his former captain and his employer.

What became of Ezra Girdlestone was never known. Some years after Tom heard from a commercial traveller of a melancholy, broken man who haunted the low betting-houses of San Francisco, and who met his death eventually in some drunken fracas. There was much about this desperado which tallied with the description of young Girdlestone, but nothing certain was ever known about the matter.

And now I must bid adieu to the shadowy company with whom I have walked so long. I see them going on down the vista of the future, gathering wisdom and happiness as they go. There is the major, as stubby-toed and pigeon-breasted as ever, broken from many of his Bohemian ways, but still full of anecdote and of kindliness. There is his henchman, Von Baumser, too, who is a constant diner at his hospitable board, and who conveys so many sweets to a young Clutterbuck who has made his appearance, that one might suspect him of receiving a commission from the family doctor. Mrs. Clutterbuck, as buxom and pleasant as ever, makes noble efforts at stopping these contraband supplies, but the wily Teuton still manages to smuggle them through in the face of every obstacle. I see Kate and her husband, chastened by their many troubles, and making the road to the grave pleasant to the good old couple who are so proud of their son. All these I watch as they pass away into the dim coming time, and I know as I shut the book that, whatever may be in store for us there, they, at least, can never in the eternal justice of things come to aught but good.

THE END

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW

This novella was first published in 1891 and features a mysterious millionaire and the impact he has on the local people of his new town.

Conan Doyle at his London home, 1891 — the time of publication

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CHAPTER I. A DOUBLE ENIGMA.

“I’m afraid that he won’t come,” said Laura McIntyre, in a disconsolate voice.

“Why not?”

“Oh, look at the weather; it is something too awful.”

As she spoke a whirl of snow beat with a muffled patter against the cosy red-curtained window, while a long blast of wind shrieked and whistled through the branches of the great white-limbed elms which skirted the garden.

Robert McIntyre rose from the sketch upon which he had been working, and taking one of the lamps in his hand peered out into the darkness. The long skeleton limbs of the bare trees tossed and quivered dimly amid the whirling drift. His sister sat by the fire, her fancy-work in her lap, and looked up at her brothers profile which showed against the brilliant yellow light. It was a handsome face, young and fair and clear cut, with wavy brown hair combed backwards and rippling down into that outward curve at the ends which one associates with the artistic temperament. There was refinement too in his slightly puckered eyes, his dainty gold-rimmed pince-nez glasses, and in the black velveteen coat which caught the light so richly upon its shoulder. In his mouth only there was something — a suspicion of coarseness, a possibility of weakness — which in the eyes of some, and of his sister among them, marred the grace and beauty of his features. Yet, as he was wont himself to say, when one thinks that each poor mortal is heir to a legacy of every evil trait or bodily taint of so vast a line of ancestors, lucky indeed is the man who does not find that Nature has scored up some long-owing family debt upon his features.

And indeed in this case the remorseless creditor had gone so far as to exact a claim from the lady also, though in her case the extreme beauty of the upper part of the face drew the eye away from any weakness which might be found in the lower. She was darker than her brother — so dark that her heavily coiled hair seemed to be black until the light shone slantwise across it. The delicate, half-petulant features, the finely traced brows, and the thoughtful, humorous eyes were all perfect in their way, and yet the combination left something to be desired. There was a vague sense of a flaw somewhere, in feature or in expression, which resolved itself, when analysed, into a slight out-turning and droop of the lower lip; small indeed, and yet pronounced enough to turn what would have been a beautiful face into a merely pretty one. Very despondent and somewhat cross she looked as she leaned back in the armchair, the tangle of bright-coloured silks and of drab holland upon her lap, her hands clasped behind her head, with her snowy forearms and little pink elbows projecting on either side.

"I know he won't come," she repeated.

"Nonsense, Laura! Of course he'll come. A sailor and afraid of the weather!"

"Ha!" She raised her finger, and a smile of triumph played over her face, only to die away again into a blank look of disappointment. "It is only papa," she murmured.

A shuffling step was heard in the hall, and a little peaky man, with his slippers very much down at the heels, came shambling into the room. Mr. McIntyre, sen., was pale and furtive-looking, with a thin straggling red beard shot with grey, and a sunken downcast face. Ill-fortune and ill-health had both left their marks upon him. Ten years before he had been one of the largest and richest gunmakers in Birmingham, but a long run of commercial bad luck had sapped his great fortune, and had finally driven him into the Bankruptcy Court. The death of his wife on the very day of his insolvency had filled his cup of sorrow, and he had gone about since with a stunned, half-dazed expression upon his weak pallid face which spoke of a mind unhinged. So complete had been his downfall that the family would have been reduced to absolute poverty were it not for a small legacy of two-hundred a year which both the children had received from one of their uncles upon the mother's side who had amassed a fortune in Australia. By combining their incomes, and by taking a house in the quiet country district of Tamfield, some fourteen miles from the great Midland city, they were still able to live with some approach to comfort. The change, however, was a bitter one to all — to Robert, who had to forego the luxuries dear to his artistic temperament, and to think of turning what had been merely an overruling hobby into a means of earning a living; and even more to Laura, who winced before the pity of her old friends, and found the lanes and fields of Tamfield intolerably dull after the life and bustle of Edgbaston. Their discomfort was aggravated by the conduct of their father, whose life now was one long wail over his misfortunes, and who alternately sought comfort in the Prayer-book and in the decanter for the ills which had befallen him.

To Laura, however, Tamfield presented one attraction, which was now about to be taken from her. Their choice of the little country hamlet as their residence had been determined by the fact of their old friend, the Reverend John Spurling, having been nominated as the vicar. Hector Spurling, the elder son, two months Laura's senior, had been engaged to her for some years, and was, indeed, upon the point of marrying her when the sudden financial crash had disarranged their plans. A sub-lieutenant in the Navy, he was home on leave at present, and hardly an evening passed without his making his way from the Vicarage to Elmdene, where the McIntyres resided. To-day, however, a note had reached them to the effect that he had been suddenly ordered on duty, and that he must rejoin his ship at Portsmouth by the next evening. He would look in, were it but for half-an-hour, to bid them adieu.

"Why, where's Hector?" asked Mr. McIntyre, blinking round from side to side.

"He's not come, father. How could you expect him to come on such a night as this? Why, there must be two feet of snow in the glebe field."

"Not come, eh?" croaked the old man, throwing himself down upon the sofa. "Well, well, it only wants him and his father to throw us over, and the thing will be complete."

"How can you even hint at such a thing, father?" cried Laura indignantly. "They have been as true as steel. What would they think if they heard you."

"I think, Robert," he said, disregarding his daughter's protest, "that I will have a drop, just the very smallest possible drop, of brandy. A mere thimbleful will do; but I rather think I have caught cold during the snowstorm to-day."

Robert went on sketching stolidly in his folding book, but Laura looked up from her work.

"I'm afraid there is nothing in the house, father," she said.

"Laura! Laura!" He shook his head as one more in sorrow than in anger. "You are no longer a girl, Laura; you are a woman, the manager of a household, Laura. We trust in you. We look entirely towards you. And yet you leave your poor brother Robert without any brandy, to say nothing of me, your father. Good heavens, Laura! what would your mother have said? Think of accidents, think of sudden illness, think of apoplectic fits, Laura. It is a very grave res — a very grave response — a very great risk that you run.”

“I hardly touch the stuff,” said Robert curtly; “Laura need not provide any for me.”

“As a medicine it is invaluable, Robert. To be used, you understand, and not to be abused. That’s the whole secret of it. But I’ll step down to the Three Pigeons for half an hour.”

“My dear father,” cried the young man “you surely are not going out upon such a night. If you must have brandy could I not send Sarah for some? Please let me send Sarah; or I would go myself, or—”

Pip! came a little paper pellet from his sister’s chair on to the sketch-book in front of him! He unrolled it and held it to the light.

“For Heaven’s sake let him go!” was scrawled across it.

“Well, in any case, wrap yourself up warm,” he continued, laying bare his sudden change of front with a masculine clumsiness which horrified his sister. “Perhaps it is not so cold as it looks. You can’t lose your way, that is one blessing. And it is not more than a hundred yards.”

With many mumbles and grumbles at his daughter’s want of foresight, old McIntyre struggled into his great-coat and wrapped his scarf round his long thin throat. A sharp gust of cold wind made the lamps flicker as he threw open the hall-door. His two children listened to the dull fall of his footsteps as he slowly picked out the winding garden path.

“He gets worse — he becomes intolerable,” said Robert at last. “We should not have let him out; he may make a public exhibition of himself.”

“But it’s Hector’s last night,” pleaded Laura. “It would be dreadful if they met and he noticed anything. That was why I wished him to go.”

“Then you were only just in time,” remarked her brother, “for I hear the gate go, and — yes, you see.”

As he spoke a cheery hail came from outside, with a sharp rat-tat at the window. Robert stepped out and threw open the door to admit a tall young man, whose black frieze jacket was all mottled and glistening with snow crystals. Laughing loudly he shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and kicked the snow from his boots before entering the little lamplit room.

Hector Spurling’s profession was written in every line of his face. The clean-shaven lip and chin, the little fringe of side whisker, the straight decisive mouth, and the hard weather-tanned cheeks all spoke of the Royal Navy. Fifty such faces may be seen any night of the year round the mess-table of the Royal Naval College in Portsmouth Dockyard — faces which bear a closer resemblance to each other than brother does commonly to brother. They are all cast in a common mould, the products of a system which teaches early self-reliance, hardihood, and manliness — a fine type upon the whole; less refined and less intellectual, perhaps, than their brothers of the land, but full of truth and energy and heroism. In figure he was straight, tall, and well-knit, with keen grey eyes, and the sharp prompt manner of a man who has been accustomed both to command and to obey.

"You had my note?" he said, as he entered the room. "I have to go again, Laura. Isn't it a bore? Old Smithers is short-handed, and wants me back at once." He sat down by the girl, and put his brown hand across her white one. "It won't be a very large order this time," he continued. "It's the flying squadron business — Madeira, Gibraltar, Lisbon, and home. I shouldn't wonder if we were back in March."

"It seems only the other day that you landed." she answered.

"Poor little girl! But it won't be long. Mind you take good care of her, Robert when I am gone. And when I come again, Laura, it will be the last time mind! Hang the money! There are plenty who manage on less. We need not have a house. Why should we? You can get very nice rooms in Southsea at 2 pounds a week. McDougall, our paymaster, has just married, and he only gives thirty shillings. You would not be afraid, Laura?"

"No, indeed."

"The dear old governor is so awfully cautious. Wait, wait, wait, that's always his cry. I tell him that he ought to have been in the Government Heavy Ordnance Department. But I'll speak to him tonight. I'll talk him round. See if I don't. And you must speak to your own governor. Robert here will back you up. And here are the ports and the dates that we are due at each. Mind that you have a letter waiting for me at every one."

He took a slip of paper from the side pocket of his coat, but, instead of handing it to the young lady, he remained staring at it with the utmost astonishment upon his face.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Robert; what do you call this?"

"Hold it to the light. Why, it's a fifty-pound Bank of England note. Nothing remarkable about it that I can see."

"On the contrary. It's the queerest thing that ever happened to me. I can't make head or tail of it."

“Come, then, Hector,” cried Miss McIntyre with a challenge in her eyes. “Something very queer happened to me also to-day. I’ll bet a pair of gloves that my adventure was more out of the common than yours, though I have nothing so nice to show at the end of it.”

“Come, I’ll take that, and Robert here shall be the judge.”

“State your cases.” The young artist shut up his sketch-book, and rested his head upon his hands with a face of mock solemnity. “Ladies first! Go along Laura, though I think I know something of your adventure already.”

“It was this morning, Hector,” she said. “Oh, by the way, the story will make you wild. I had forgotten that. However, you mustn’t mind, because, really, the poor fellow was perfectly mad.”

“What on earth was it?” asked the young officer, his eyes travelling from the bank-note to his *fiancee*.

“Oh, it was harmless enough, and yet you will confess it was very queer. I had gone out for a walk, but as the snow began to fall I took shelter under the shed which the workmen have built at the near end of the great new house. The men have gone, you know, and the owner is supposed to be coming to-morrow, but the shed is still standing. I was sitting there upon a packing-case when a man came down the road and stopped under the same shelter. He was a quiet, pale-faced man, very tall and thin, not much more than thirty, I should think, poorly dressed, but with the look and bearing of a gentleman. He asked me one or two questions about the village and the people, which, of course, I answered, until at last we found ourselves chatting away in the pleasantest and easiest fashion about all sorts of things. The time passed so quickly that I forgot all about the snow until he drew my attention to its having stopped for the moment. Then, just as I was turning to go, what in the world do you suppose that he did? He took a step towards me, looked in a sad pensive way into my face, and said: `I wonder whether you could care for me if I were without a penny.’ Wasn’t it strange? I was so frightened that I whisked out of the shed, and was off down the road before he could add another word. But really, Hector, you need not look so black, for when I look back at it I can quite see from his tone and manner that he meant no harm. He was thinking aloud, without the least intention of being offensive. I am convinced that the poor fellow was mad.”

“Hum! There was some method in his madness, it seems to me,” remarked her brother.

“There would have been some method in my kicking,” said the lieutenant savagely. “I never heard of a more outrageous thing in my life.”

“Now, I said that you would be wild!” She laid her white hand upon the sleeve of his rough frieze jacket. “It was nothing. I shall never see the poor fellow again. He was evidently a stranger to this part of the country. But that was my little adventure. Now let us have yours.”

The young man crackled the bank-note between his fingers and thumb, while he passed his other hand over his hair with the action of a man who strives to collect himself.

“It is some ridiculous mistake,” he said. “I must try and set it right. Yet I don’t know how to set about it either. I was going down to the village from the Vicarage just after dusk when I found a fellow in a trap who had got himself into broken water. One wheel had sunk into the edge of the ditch which had been hidden by the snow, and the whole thing was high and dry, with a list to starboard enough to slide him out of his seat. I lent a hand, of course, and soon had the wheel in the road again. It was quite dark, and I fancy that the fellow thought that I was a bumpkin, for we did not exchange five words. As he drove off he shoved this into my hand. It is the merest chance that I did not chuck it away, for, feeling that it was a crumpled piece of paper, I imagined that it must be a tradesman’s advertisement or something of the kind. However, as luck would have it, I put it in my pocket, and there I found it when I looked for the dates of our cruise. Now you know as much of the matter as I do.”

Brother and sister stared at the black and white crinkled note with astonishment upon their faces.

“Why, your unknown traveller must have been Monte Cristo, or Rothschild at the least!” said Robert. “I am bound to say, Laura, that I think you have lost your bet.”

“Oh, I am quite content to lose it. I never heard of such a piece of luck. What a perfectly delightful man this must be to know.”

“But I can’t take his money,” said Hector Spurling, looking somewhat ruefully at the note. “A little prize-money is all very well in its way, but a Johnny must draw the line somewhere. Besides it must have been a mistake. And yet he meant to give me something big, for he could not mistake a note for a coin. I suppose I must advertise for the fellow.”

“It seems a pity too,” remarked Robert. “I must say that I don’t quite see it in the same light that you do.”

"Indeed I think that you are very Quixotic, Hector," said Laura McIntyre. "Why should you not accept it in the spirit in which it was meant? You did this stranger a service — perhaps a greater service than you know of — and he meant this as a little memento of the occasion. I do not see that there is any possible reason against your keeping it."

"Oh, come!" said the young sailor, with an embarrassed laugh, "it is not quite the thing — not the sort of story one would care to tell at mess."

"In any case you are off to-morrow morning," observed Robert. "You have no time to make inquiries about the mysterious Croesus. You must really make the best of it."

"Well, look here, Laura, you put it in your work-basket," cried Hector Spurling. "You shall be my banker, and if the rightful owner turns up then I can refer him to you. If not, I suppose we must look on it as a kind of salvage-money, though I am bound to say I don't feel entirely comfortable about it." He rose to his feet, and threw the note down into the brown basket of coloured wools which stood beside her. "Now, Laura, I must up anchor, for I promised the governor to be back by nine. It won't be long this time, dear, and it shall be the last. Good-bye, Robert! Good luck!"

"Good-bye, Hector! *Bon voyage!*"

The young artist remained by the table, while his sister followed her lover to the door. In the dim light of the hall he could see their figures and overhear their words.

"Next time, little girl?"

"Next time be it, Hector."

"And nothing can part us?"

"Nothing."

"In the whole world?"

"Nothing."

Robert discreetly closed the door. A moment later a thud from without, and the quick footsteps crunching on the snow told him that their visitor had departed.

CHAPTER II. THE TENANT OF THE NEW HALL.

The snow had ceased to fall, but for a week a hard frost had held the country side in its iron grip. The roads rang under the horses' hoofs, and every wayside ditch and runlet was a street of ice. Over the long undulating landscape the red brick houses peeped out warmly against the spotless background, and the lines of grey smoke streamed straight up into the windless air. The sky was of the lightest palest blue, and the morning sun, shining through the distant fog-wreaths of Birmingham, struck a subdued glow from the broad-spread snow fields which might have gladdened the eyes of an artist.

It did gladden the heart of one who viewed it that morning from the summit of the gently-curving Tamfield Hill Robert McIntyre stood with his elbows upon a gate-rail, his Tam-o'-Shanter hat over his eyes, and a short briar-root pipe in his mouth, looking slowly about him, with the absorbed air of one who breathes his fill of Nature. Beneath him to the north lay the village of Tamfield, red walls, grey roofs, and a scattered bristle of dark trees, with his own little Elmdene nestling back from the broad, white winding Birmingham Road. At the other side, as he slowly faced round, lay a vast stone building, white and clear-cut, fresh from the builders' hands. A great tower shot up from one corner of it, and a hundred windows twinkled ruddily in the light of the morning sun. A little distance from it stood a second small square low-lying structure, with a tall chimney rising from the midst of it, rolling out a long plume of smoke into the frosty air. The whole vast structure stood within its own grounds, enclosed by a stately park wall, and surrounded by what would in time be an extensive plantation of fir-trees. By the lodge gates a vast pile of debris, with lines of sheds for workmen, and huge heaps of planks from scaffoldings, all proclaimed that the work had only just been brought to an end.

Robert McIntyre looked down with curious eyes at the broad-spread building. It had long been a mystery and a subject of gossip for the whole country side. Hardly a year had elapsed since the rumour had first gone about that a millionaire had bought a tract of land, and that it was his intention to build a country seat upon it. Since then the work had been pushed on night and day, until now it was finished to the last detail in a shorter time than it takes to build many a six-roomed cottage. Every morning two long special trains had arrived from Birmingham, carrying down a great army of labourers, who were relieved in the evening by a fresh gang, who carried on their task under the rays of twelve enormous electric lights. The number of workmen appeared to be only limited by the space into which they could be fitted. Great lines of waggons conveyed the white Portland stone from the depot by the station. Hundreds of busy toilers handed it over, shaped and squared, to the actual masons, who swung it up with steam cranes on to the growing walls, where it was instantly fitted and mortared by their companions. Day by day the house shot higher, while pillar and cornice and carving seemed to bud out from it as if by magic. Nor was the work confined to the main building. A large separate structure sprang up at the same time, and there came gangs of pale-faced men from London with much extraordinary machinery, vast cylinders, wheels and wires, which they fitted up in this outlying building. The great chimney which rose from the centre of it, combined with these strange furnishings, seemed to mean that it was reserved as a factory or place of business, for it was rumoured that this rich man’s hobby was the same as a poor man’s necessity, and that he was fond of working with his own hands amid chemicals and furnaces. Scarce, too, was the second storey begun ere the wood-workers and plumbers and furnishers were busy beneath, carrying out a thousand strange and costly schemes for the greater comfort and convenience of the owner. Singular stories were told all round the country, and even in Birmingham itself, of the extraordinary luxury and the absolute disregard for money which marked all these arrangements. No sum appeared to be too great to spend upon the smallest detail which might do away with or lessen any of the petty inconveniences of life. Waggons and waggons of the richest furniture had passed through the village between lines of staring villagers. Costly skins, glossy carpets, rich rugs, ivory, and ebony, and metal; every glimpse into these storehouses of treasure had given rise to some new legend. And finally, when all had been arranged, there had come a staff of forty servants, who heralded the approach of the owner, Mr. Raffles Haw himself.

It was no wonder, then, that it was with considerable curiosity that Robert McIntyre looked down at the great house, and marked the smoking chimneys, the curtained windows, and the other signs which showed that its tenant had arrived. A vast area of greenhouses gleamed like a lake on the further side, and beyond were the long lines of stables and outhouses. Fifty horses had passed through Tamfield the week before, so that, large as were the preparations, they were not more than would be needed. Who and what could this man be who spent his money with so lavish a hand? His name was unknown. Birmingham was as ignorant as Tamfield as to his origin or the sources of his wealth. Robert McIntyre brooded languidly over the problem as he leaned against the gate, puffing his blue clouds of bird's-eye into the crisp, still air.

Suddenly his eye caught a dark figure emerging from the Avenue gates and striding up the winding road. A few minutes brought him near enough to show a familiar face looking over the stiff collar and from under the soft black hat of an English clergyman.

"Good-morning, Mr. Spurling."

"Ah, good-morning, Robert. How are you? Are you coming my way? How slippery the roads are!"

His round, kindly face was beaming with good nature, and he took little jumps as he walked, like a man who can hardly contain himself for pleasure.

"Have you heard from Hector?"

"Oh, yes. He went off all right last Wednesday from Spithead, and he will write from Madeira. But you generally have later news at Elmdene than I have."

"I don't know whether Laura has heard. Have you been up to see the new comer?"

"Yes; I have just left him."

"Is he a married man — this Mr. Raffles Haw?"

"No, he is a bachelor. He does not seem to have any relations either, as far as I could learn. He lives alone, amid his huge staff of servants. It is a most remarkable establishment. It made me think of the Arabian Nights."

"And the man? What is he like?"

"He is an angel — a positive angel. I never heard or read of such kindness in my life. He has made me a happy man."

The clergyman's eyes sparkled with emotion, and he blew his nose loudly in his big red handkerchief.

Robert McIntyre looked at him in surprise.

"I am delighted to hear it," he said. "May I ask what he has done?"

"I went up to him by appointment this morning. I had written asking him if I might call. I spoke to him of the parish and its needs, of my long struggle to restore the south side of the church, and of our efforts to help my poor parishioners during this hard weather. While I spoke he said not a word, but sat with a vacant face, as though he were not listening to me. When I had finished he took up his pen. 'How much will it take to do the church?' he asked. 'A thousand pounds,' I answered; 'but we have already raised three hundred among ourselves. The Squire has very handsomely given fifty pounds.' 'Well,' said he, 'how about the poor folk? How many families are there?' 'About three hundred,' I answered. 'And coals, I believe, are at about a pound a ton', said he. 'Three tons ought to see them through the rest of the winter. Then you can get a very fair pair of blankets for two pounds. That would make five pounds per family, and seven hundred for the church.' He dipped his pen in the ink, and, as I am a living man, Robert, he wrote me a cheque then and there for two thousand two hundred pounds. I don't know what I said; I felt like a fool; I could not stammer out words with which to thank him. All my troubles have been taken from my shoulders in an instant, and indeed, Robert, I can hardly realise it."

"He must be a most charitable man."

"Extraordinarily so. And so unpretending. One would think that it was I who was doing the favour and he who was the beggar. I thought of that passage about making the heart of the widow sing for joy. He made my heart sing for joy, I can tell you. Are you coming up to the Vicarage?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Spurling. I must go home and get to work on my new picture. It's a five-foot canvas — the landing of the Romans in Kent. I must have another try for the Academy. Good-morning."

He raised his hat and continued down the road, while the vicar turned off into the path which led to his home.

Robert McIntyre had converted a large bare room in the upper storey of Elmdene into a studio, and thither he retreated after lunch. It was as well that he should have some little den of his own, for his father would talk of little save of his ledgers and accounts, while Laura had become peevish and querulous since the one tie which held her to Tamfield had been removed. The chamber was a bare and bleak one, un-papered and un-carpeted, but a good fire sparkled in the grate, and two large windows gave him the needful light. His easel stood in the centre, with the great canvas balanced across it, while against the walls there leaned his two last attempts, “The Murder of Thomas of Canterbury” and “The Signing of Magna Charta.” Robert had a weakness for large subjects and broad effects. If his ambition was greater than his skill, he had still all the love of his art and the patience under discouragement which are the stuff out of which successful painters are made. Twice his brace of pictures had journeyed to town, and twice they had come back to him, until the finely gilded frames which had made such a call upon his purse began to show signs of these varied adventures. Yet, in spite of their depressing company, Robert turned to his fresh work with all the enthusiasm which a conviction of ultimate success can inspire.

But he could not work that afternoon.

In vain he dashed in his background and outlined the long curves of the Roman galleys. Do what he would, his mind would still wander from his work to dwell upon his conversation with the vicar in the morning. His imagination was fascinated by the idea of this strange man living alone amid a crowd, and yet wielding such a power that with one dash of his pen he could change sorrow into joy, and transform the condition of a whole parish. The incident of the fifty-pound note came back to his mind. It must surely have been Raffles Haw with whom Hector Spurling had come in contact. There could not be two men in one parish to whom so large a sum was of so small an account as to be thrown to a bystander in return for a trifling piece of assistance. Of course, it must have been Raffles Haw. And his sister had the note, with instructions to return it to the owner, could he be found. He threw aside his palette, and descending into the sitting-room he told Laura and his father of his morning’s interview with the vicar, and of his conviction that this was the man of whom Hector was in quest.

“Tut! Tut!” said old McIntyre. “How is this, Laura? I knew nothing of this. What do women know of money or of business? Hand the note over to me and I shall relieve you of all responsibility. I will take everything upon myself.”

“I cannot possibly, papa,” said Laura, with decision. “I should not think of parting with it.”

“What is the world coming to?” cried the old man, with his thin hands held up in protest. “You grow more undutiful every day, Laura. This money would be of use to me — of use, you understand. It may be the corner-stone of the vast business which I shall re-construct. I will use it, Laura, and I will pay something — four, shall we say, or even four and a-half — and you may have it back on any day. And I will give security — the security of my — well, of my word of honour.”

“It is quite impossible, papa,” his daughter answered coldly. “It is not my money. Hector asked me to be his banker. Those were his very words. It is not in my power to lend it. As to what you say, Robert, you may be right or you may be wrong, but I certainly shall not give Mr. Raffles Haw or anyone else the money without Hector’s express command.”

“You are very right about not giving it to Mr. Raffles Haw,” cried old McIntyre, with many nods of approbation. “I should certainly not let it go out of the family.”

“Well, I thought that I would tell you.”

Robert picked up his Tam-o’-Shanter and strolled out to avoid the discussion between his father and sister, which he saw was about to be renewed. His artistic nature revolted at these petty and sordid disputes, and he turned to the crisp air and the broad landscape to soothe his ruffled feelings. Avarice had no place among his failings, and his father’s perpetual chatter about money inspired him with a positive loathing and disgust for the subject.

Robert was lounging slowly along his favourite walk which curled over the hill, with his mind turning from the Roman invasion to the mysterious millionaire, when his eyes fell upon a tall, lean man in front of him, who, with a pipe between his lips, was endeavouring to light a match under cover of his cap. The man was clad in a rough pea-jacket, and bore traces of smoke and grime upon his face and hands. Yet there is a Freemasonry among smokers which overrides every social difference, so Robert stopped and held out his case of fusees.

“A light?” said he.

“Thank you.” The man picked out a fusee, struck it, and bent his head to it. He had a pale, thin face, a short straggling beard, and a very sharp and curving nose, with decision and character in the straight thick eyebrows which almost met on either side of it. Clearly a superior kind of workman, and possibly one of those who had been employed in the construction of the new house. Here was a chance of getting some first-hand information on the question which had aroused his curiosity. Robert waited until he had lit his pipe, and then walked on beside him.

“Are you going in the direction of the new Hall?” he asked.

"Yes."

The man's voice was cold, and his manner reserved.

"Perhaps you were engaged in the building of it?"

"Yes, I had a hand in it."

"They say that it is a wonderful place inside. It has been quite the talk of the district. Is it as rich as they say?"

"I am sure I don't know. I have not heard what they say."

His attitude was certainly not encouraging, and it seemed to Robert that he gave little sidelong suspicious glances at him out of his keen grey eyes. Yet, if he were so careful and discreet there was the more reason to think that there was information to be extracted, if he could but find a way to it.

"Ah, there it lies!" he remarked, as they topped the brow of the hill, and looked down once more at the great building. "Well, no doubt it is very gorgeous and splendid, but really for my own part I would rather live in my own little box down yonder in the village."

The workman puffed gravely at his pipe.

"You are no great admirer of wealth, then?" he said.

"Not I. I should not care to be a penny richer than I am. Of course I should like to sell my pictures. One must make a living. But beyond that I ask nothing. I dare say that I, a poor artist, or you, a man who work for your bread, have more happiness out of life than the owner of that great palace."

"Indeed, I think that it is more than likely," the other answered, in a much more conciliatory voice.

"Art," said Robert, warming to the subject, "is her own reward. What mere bodily indulgence is there which money could buy which can give that deep thrill of satisfaction which comes on the man who has conceived something new, something beautiful, and the daily delight as he sees it grow under his hand, until it stands before him a completed whole? With my art and without wealth I am happy. Without my art I should have a void which no money could fill. But I really don't know why I should say all this to you."

The workman had stopped, and was staring at him earnestly with a look of the deepest interest upon his smoke-darkened features.

"I am very glad to hear what you say," said he. "It is a pleasure to know that the worship of gold is not quite universal, and that there are at least some who can rise above it. Would you mind my shaking you by the hand?"

It was a somewhat extraordinary request, but Robert rather prided himself upon his Bohemianism, and upon his happy facility for making friends with all sorts and conditions of men. He readily exchanged a cordial grip with his chance acquaintance.

“You expressed some curiosity as to this house. I know the grounds pretty well, and might perhaps show you one or two little things which would interest you. Here are the gates. Will you come in with me?”

Here was, indeed, a chance. Robert eagerly assented, and walked up the winding drive amid the growing fir-trees. When he found his uncouth guide, however, marching straight across the broad, gravel square to the main entrance, he felt that he had placed himself in a false position.

“Surely not through the front door,” he whispered, plucking his companion by the sleeve. “Perhaps Mr. Raffles Haw might not like it.”

“I don’t think there will be any difficulty,” said the other, with a quiet smile. “My name is Raffles Haw.”

CHAPTER III. A HOUSE OF WONDERS.

Robert McIntyre’s face must have expressed the utter astonishment which filled his mind at this most unlooked-for announcement. For a moment he thought that his companion must be joking, but the ease and assurance with which he lounged up the steps, and the deep respect with which a richly-clad functionary in the hall swung open the door to admit him, showed that he spoke in sober earnest. Raffles Haw glanced back, and seeing the look of absolute amazement upon the young artist’s features, he chuckled quietly to himself.

“You will forgive me, won’t you, for not disclosing my identity?” he said, laying his hand with a friendly gesture upon the other’s sleeve. “Had you known me you would have spoken less freely, and I should not have had the opportunity of learning your true worth. For example, you might hardly have been so frank upon the matter of wealth had you known that you were speaking to the master of the Hall.”

“I don’t think that I was ever so astonished in my life,” gasped Robert.

“Naturally you are. How could you take me for anything but a workman? So I am. Chemistry is one of my hobbies, and I spend hours a day in my laboratory yonder. I have only just struck work, and as I had inhaled some not-over-pleasant gases, I thought that a turn down the road and a whiff of tobacco might do me good. That was how I came to meet you, and my toilet, I fear, corresponded only too well with my smoke-grimed face. But I rather fancy I know you by repute. Your name is Robert McIntyre, is it not?”

“Yes, though I cannot imagine how you knew.”

“Well, I naturally took some little trouble to learn something of my neighbours. I had heard that there was an artist of that name, and I presume that artists are not very numerous in Tamfield. But how do you like the design? I hope it does not offend your trained taste.”

“Indeed, it is wonderful — marvellous! You must yourself have an extraordinary eye for effect.”

“Oh, I have no taste at all; not the slightest. I cannot tell good from bad. There never was such a complete Philistine. But I had the best man in

London down, and another fellow from Vienna. They fixed it up between them.”

They had been standing just within the folding doors upon a huge mat of bison skins. In front of them lay a great square court, paved with many-coloured marbles laid out in a labyrinth of arabesque design. In the centre a high fountain of carved jade shot five thin feathers of spray into the air, four of which curved towards each corner of the court to descend into broad marble basins, while the fifth mounted straight up to an immense height, and then tinkled back into the central reservoir. On either side of the court a tall, graceful palm-tree shot up its slender stem to break into a crown of drooping green leaves some fifty feet above their heads. All round were a series of Moorish arches, in jade and serpentine marble, with heavy curtains of the deepest purple to cover the doors which lay between them. In front, to right and to left, a broad staircase of marble, carpeted with rich thick Smyrna rug work, led upwards to the upper storeys, which were arranged around the central court. The temperature within was warm and yet fresh, like the air of an English May.

“It’s taken from the Alhambra,” said Raffles Haw. “The palm-trees are pretty. They strike right through the building into the ground beneath, and their roots are all girt round with hot-water pipes. They seem to thrive very well.”

“What beautifully delicate brass-work!” cried Robert, looking up with admiring eyes at the bright and infinitely fragile metal trellis screens which adorned the spaces between the Moorish arches.

“It is rather neat. But it is not brass-work. Brass is not tough enough to allow them to work it to that degree of fineness. It is gold. But just come this way with me. You won’t mind waiting while I remove this smoke?”

He led the way to a door upon the left side of the court, which, to Robert’s surprise, swung slowly open as they approached it. “That is a little improvement which I have adopted,” remarked the master of the house. “As you go up to a door your weight upon the planks releases a spring which causes the hinges to revolve. Pray step in. This is my own little sanctum, and furnished after my own heart.”

If Robert expected to see some fresh exhibition of wealth and luxury he was woefully disappointed, for he found himself in a large but bare room, with a little iron truckle-bed in one corner, a few scattered wooden chairs, a dingy carpet, and a large table heaped with books, bottles, papers, and all the other debris which collect around a busy and untidy man. Motioning his visitor into a chair, Raffles Haw pulled off his coat, and, turning up the sleeves of his coarse flannel shirt, he began to plunge and scrub in the warm water which flowed from a tap in the wall.

"You see how simple my own tastes are," he remarked, as he mopped his dripping face and hair with the towel. "This is the only room in my great house where I find myself in a congenial atmosphere. It is homely to me. I can read here and smoke my pipe in peace. Anything like luxury is abhorrent to me."

"Really, I should not have though it," observed Robert.

"It is a fact, I assure you. You see, even with your views as to the worthlessness of wealth, views which, I am sure, are very sensible and much to your credit, you must allow that if a man should happen to be the possessor of vast — well, let us say of considerable — sums of money, it is his duty to get that money into circulation, so that the community may be the better for it. There is the secret of my fine feathers. I have to exert all my ingenuity in order to spend my income, and yet keep the money in legitimate channels. For example, it is very easy to give money away, and no doubt I could dispose of my surplus, or part of my surplus, in that fashion, but I have no wish to pauperise anyone, or to do mischief by indiscriminate charity. I must exact some sort of money's worth for all the money which I lay out You see my point, don't you?"

"Entirely; though really it is something novel to hear a man complain of the difficulty of spending his income."

"I assure you that it is a very serious difficulty with me. But I have hit upon some plans — some very pretty plans. Will you wash your hands? Well, then, perhaps you would care to have a look round. Just come into this corner of the room, and sit upon this chair. So. Now I will sit upon this one, and we are ready to start."

The angle of the chamber in which they sat was painted for about six feet in each direction of a dark chocolate-brown, and was furnished with two red plush seats protruding from the walls, and in striking contrast with the simplicity of the rest of the apartment.

"This," remarked Raffles Haw, "is a lift, though it is so closely joined to the rest of the room that without the change in colour it might puzzle you to find the division. It is made to run either horizontally or vertically. This line of knobs represents the various rooms. You can see 'Dining,' 'Smoking,' ‘Billiard,’ ‘Library’ and so on, upon them. I will show you the upward action. I press this one with ‘Kitchen’ upon it.”

There was a sense of motion, a very slight jar, and Robert, without moving from his seat, was conscious that the room had vanished, and that a large arched oaken door stood in the place which it had occupied.

“That is the kitchen door,” said Raffles Haw. “I have my kitchen at the top of the house. I cannot tolerate the smell of cooking. We have come up eighty feet in a very few seconds. Now I press again and here we are in my room once more.”

Robert McIntyre stared about him in astonishment.

“The wonders of science are greater than those of magic,” he remarked.

“Yes, it is a pretty little mechanism. Now we try the horizontal. I press the ‘Dining’ knob and here we are, you see. Step towards the door, and you will find it open in front of you.”

Robert did as he was bid, and found himself with his companion in a large and lofty room, while the lift, the instant that it was freed from their weight, flashed back to its original position. With his feet sinking into the soft rich carpet, as though he were ankle-deep in some mossy bank, he stared about him at the great pictures which lined the walls.

“Surely, surely, I see Raphael’s touch there,” he cried, pointing up at the one which faced him.

“Yes, it is a Raphael, and I believe one of his best. I had a very exciting bid for it with the French Government. They wanted it for the Louvre, but of course at an auction the longest purse must win.”

“And this ‘Arrest of Catiline’ must be a Rubens. One cannot mistake his splendid men and his infamous women.”

“Yes, it is a Rubens. The other two are a Velasquez and a Teniers, fair specimens of the Spanish and of the Dutch schools. I have only old masters here. The moderns are in the billiard-room. The furniture here is a little curious. In fact, I fancy that it is unique. It is made of ebony and narwhals’ horns. You see that the legs of everything are of spiral ivory, both the table and the chairs. It cost the upholsterer some little pains, for the supply of these things is a strictly limited one. Curiously enough, the Chinese Emperor had given a large order for narwhals’ horns to repair some ancient pagoda, which was fenced in with them, but I outbid him in the market, and his celestial highness has had to wait. There is a lift here in the corner, but we do not need it. Pray step through this door. This is the billiard-room,” he continued as they advanced into the adjoining room. “You see I have a few recent pictures of merit upon the walls. Here is a Corot, two Meissoniers, a Bouguereau, a Millais, an Orchardson, and two Alma-Tademas. It seems to me to be a pity to hang pictures over these walls of carved oak. Look at those birds hopping and singing in the branches. They really seem to move and twitter, don’t they?”

“They are perfect. I never saw such exquisite work. But why do you call it a billiard-room, Mr. Haw? I do not see any board.”

“Oh, a board is such a clumsy uncompromising piece of furniture. It is always in the way unless you actually need to use it. In this case the board is covered by that square of polished maple which you see let into the floor. Now I put my foot upon this motor. You see!” As he spoke, the central portion of the flooring flew up, and a most beautiful tortoise-shell-plated billiard-table rose up to its proper position. He pressed a second spring, and a bagatelle-table appeared in the same fashion. “You may have card-tables or what you will by setting the levers in motion,” he remarked. “But all this is very trifling. Perhaps we may find something in the museum which may be of more interest to you.”

He led the way into another chamber, which was furnished in antique style, with hangings of the rarest and richest tapestry. The floor was a mosaic of coloured marbles, scattered over with mats of costly fur. There was little furniture, but a number of Louis Quatorze cabinets of ebony and silver with delicately-painted plaques were ranged round the apartment.

“It is perhaps hardly fair to dignify it by the name of a museum,” said Raffles Haw. “It consists merely of a few elegant trifles which I have picked up here and there. Gems are my strongest point. I fancy that there, perhaps, I might challenge comparison with any private collector in the world. I lock them up, for even the best servants may be tempted.”

He took a silver key from his watch chain, and began to unlock and draw out the drawers. A cry of wonder and of admiration burst from Robert McIntyre, as his eyes rested upon case after case filled with the most magnificent stones. The deep still red of the rubies, the clear scintillating green of the emeralds, the hard glitter of the diamonds, the many shifting shades of beryls, of amethysts, of onyxes, of cats’-eyes, of opals, of agates, of cornelians seemed to fill the whole chamber with a vague twinkling, many-coloured light. Long slabs of the beautiful blue lapis lazuli, magnificent bloodstones, specimens of pink and red and white coral, long strings of lustrous pearls, all these were tossed out by their owner as a careless schoolboy might pour marbles from his bag.

“This isn’t bad,” he said, holding up a great glowing yellow mass as large as his own head. “It is really a very fine piece of amber. It was forwarded to me by my agent at the Baltic. Twenty-eight pounds, it weighs. I never heard of so fine a one. I have no very large brilliants — there were no very large ones in the market — but my average is good. Pretty toys, are they not?” He picked up a double handful of emeralds from a drawer, and then let them trickle slowly back into the heap.

“Good heavens!” cried Robert, as he gazed from case to case. “It is an immense fortune in itself. Surely a hundred thousand pounds would hardly buy so splendid a collection.”

“I don’t think that you would do for a valuer of precious stones,” said Raffles Haw, laughing. “Why, the contents of that one little drawer of brilliants could not be bought for the sum which you name. I have a memo. here of what I have expended up to date on my collection, though I have agents at work who will probably make very considerable additions to it within the next few weeks. As matters stand, however, I have spent — let me see-pearls one forty thousand; emeralds, seven fifty; rubies, eight forty; brilliants, nine twenty; onyxes — I have several very nice onyxes-two thirty. Other gems, carbuncles, agates — hum! Yes, it figures out at just over four million seven hundred and forty thousand. I dare say that we may say five millions, for I have not counted the odd money.”

“Good gracious!” cried the young artist, with staring eyes.

“I have a certain feeling of duty in the matter. You see the cutting, polishing, and general sale of stones is one of those industries which is entirely dependent upon wealth. If we do not support it, it must languish, which means misfortune to a considerable number of people. The same applies to the gold filigree work which you noticed in the court. Wealth has its responsibilities, and the encouragement of these handicrafts are among the most obvious of them. Here is a nice ruby. It is Burmese, and the fifth largest in existence. I am inclined to think that if it were uncut it would be the second, but of course cutting takes away a great deal.” He held up the blazing red stone, about the size of a chestnut, between his finger and thumb for a moment, and then threw it carelessly back into its drawer. “Come into the smoking-room,” he said; “you will need some little refreshment, for they say that sight-seeing is the most exhausting occupation in the world.”

CHAPTER IV. FROM CLIME TO CLIME

The chamber in which the bewildered Robert now found himself was more luxurious, if less rich, than any which he had yet seen. Low settees of claret-coloured plush were scattered in orderly disorder over a mossy Eastern carpet. Deep lounges, reclining sofas, American rocking-chairs, all were to be had for the choosing. One end of the room was walled by glass, and appeared to open upon a luxuriant hot-house. At the further end a double line of gilt rails supported a profusion of the most recent magazines and periodicals. A rack at each side of the inlaid fireplace sustained a long line of the pipes of all places and nations — English cherrywoods, French briars, German china-bowls, carved meerschaums, scented cedar and myall-wood, with Eastern narghiles, Turkish chibooques, and two great golden-topped hookahs. To right and left were a series of small lockers, extending in a treble row for the whole length of the room, with the names of the various brands of tobacco scrolled in ivory work across them. Above were other larger tiers of polished oak, which held cigars and cigarettes.

“Try that Damascus settee,” said the master of the house, as he threw himself into a rocking-chair. “It is from the Sultan’s upholsterer. The Turks have a very good notion of comfort. I am a confirmed smoker myself, Mr. McIntyre, so I have been able, perhaps, to check my architect here more than in most of the other departments. Of pictures, for example, I know nothing, as you would very speedily find out. On a tobacco, I might, perhaps, offer an opinion. Now these” — he drew out some long, beautifully-rolled, mellow-coloured cigars—”these are really something a little out of the common. Do try one.”

Robert lit the weed which was offered to him, and leaned back luxuriously amid his cushions, gazing through the blue balmy fragrant cloud-wreaths at the extraordinary man in the dirty pea-jacket who spoke of millions as another might of sovereigns. With his pale face, his sad, languid air, and his bowed shoulders, it was as though he were crushed down under the weight of his own gold. There was a mute apology, an attitude of deprecation in his manner and speech, which was strangely at variance with the immense power which he wielded. To Robert the whole whimsical incident had been intensely interesting and amusing. His artistic nature blossomed out in this atmosphere of perfect luxury and comfort, and he was conscious of a sense of repose and of absolute sensual contentment such as he had never before experienced.

“Shall it be coffee, or Rhine wine, or Tokay, or perhaps something stronger,” asked Raffles Haw, stretching out his hand to what looked like a piano-board projecting from the wall. “I can recommend the Tokay. I have it from the man who supplies the Emperor of Austria, though I think I may say that I get the cream of it.”

He struck twice upon one of the piano-notes, and sat expectant. With a sharp click at the end of ten seconds a sliding shutter flew open, and a small tray protruded bearing two long tapering Venetian glasses filled with wine.

“It works very nicely,” said Raffles Haw. “It is quite a new thing — never before done, as far as I know. You see the names of the various wines and so on printed on the notes. By pressing the note down I complete an electric circuit which causes the tap in the cellars beneath to remain open long enough to fill the glass which always stands beneath it. The glasses, you understand, stand upon a revolving drum, so that there must always be one there. The glasses are then brought up through a pneumatic tube, which is set working by the increased weight of the glass when the wine is added to it. It is a pretty little idea. But I am afraid that I bore you rather with all these petty contrivances. It is a whim of mine to push mechanism as far as it will go.”

“On the contrary, I am filled with interest and wonder,” said Robert warmly. “It is as if I had been suddenly whipped up out of prosaic old England and transferred in an instant to some enchanted palace, some Eastern home of the Genii. I could not have believed that there existed upon this earth such adaptation of means to an end, such complete mastery of every detail which may aid in stripping life of any of its petty worries.”

“I have something yet to show you,” remarked Raffles Haw; “but we will rest here for a few minutes, for I wished to have a word with you. How is the cigar?”

“Most excellent.”

“It was rolled in Louisiana in the old slavery days. There is nothing made like them now. The man who had them did not know their value. He let them go at merely a few shillings apiece. Now I want you to do me a favour, Mr. McIntyre.”

“I shall be so glad.”

"You can see more or less how I am situated. I am a complete stranger here. With the well-to-do classes I have little in common. I am no society man. I don't want to call or be called on. I am a student in a small way, and a man of quiet tastes. I have no social ambitions at all. Do you understand?"

"Entirely."

"On the other hand, my experience of the world has been that it is the rarest thing to be able to form a friendship with a poorer man — I mean with a man who is at all eager to increase his income. They think much of your wealth, and little of yourself. I have tried, you understand, and I know." He paused and ran his fingers through his thin beard.

Robert McIntyre nodded to show that he appreciated his position.

"Now, you see," he continued, "if I am to be cut off from the rich by my own tastes, and from those who are not rich by my distrust of their motives, my situation is an isolated one. Not that I mind isolation: I am used to it. But it limits my field of usefulness. I have no trustworthy means of informing myself when and where I may do good. I have already, I am glad to say, met a man to-day, your vicar, who appears to be thoroughly unselfish and trustworthy. He shall be one of my channels of communication with the outer world. Might I ask you whether you would be willing to become another?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Robert eagerly.

The proposition filled his heart with joy, for it seemed to give him an almost official connection with this paradise of a house. He could not have asked for anything more to his taste.

"I was fortunate enough to discover by your conversation how high a ground you take in such matters, and how entirely disinterested you are. You may have observed that I was short and almost rude with you at first. I have had reason to fear and suspect all chance friendships. Too often they have proved to be carefully planned beforehand, with some sordid object in view. Good heavens, what stories I could tell you! A lady pursued by a bull — I have risked my life to save her, and have learned afterwards that the scene had been arranged by the mother as an effective introduction, and that the bull had been hired by the hour. But I won't shake your faith in human nature. I have had some rude shocks myself. I look, perhaps, with a jaundiced eye on all who come near me. It is the more needful that I should have one whom I can trust to advise me."

"If you will only show me where my opinion can be of any use I shall be most happy," said Robert. "My people come from Birmingham, but I know most of the folk here and their position."

"That is just what I want. Money can do so much good, and it may do so much harm. I shall consult you when I am in doubt. By the way, there is one small question which I might ask you now. Can you tell me who a young lady is with very dark hair, grey eyes, and a finely chiselled face? She wore a blue dress when I saw her, with astrachan about her neck and cuffs."

Robert chuckled to himself.

"I know that dress pretty well," he said. "It is my sister Laura whom you describe."

"Your sister! Really! Why, there is a resemblance, now that my attention is called to it. I saw her the other day, and wondered who she might be. She lives with you, of course?"

"Yes; my father, she, and I live together at Elmdene."

"Where I hope to have the pleasure of making their acquaintance. You have finished your cigar? Have another, or try a pipe. To the real smoker all is mere trifling save the pipe. I have most brands of tobacco here. The lockers are filled on the Monday, and on Saturday they are handed over to the old folk at the alms-houses, so I manage to keep it pretty fresh always. Well, if you won't take anything else, perhaps you would care to see one or two of the other effects which I have devised. On this side is the armoury, and beyond it the library. My collection of books is a limited one; there are just over the fifty thousand volumes. But it is to some extent remarkable for quality. I have a Visigoth Bible of the fifth century, which I rather fancy is unique; there is a 'Biblia Pauperum' of 1430; a MS. of Genesis done upon mulberry leaves, probably of the second century; a 'Tristan and Iseult' of the eighth century; and some hundred black-letters, with five very fine specimens of Schoffer and Fust. But those you may turn over any wet afternoon when you have nothing better to do. Meanwhile, I have a little device connected with this smoking-room which may amuse you. Light this other cigar. Now sit with me upon this lounge which stands at the further end of the room."

The sofa in question was in a niche which was lined in three sides and above with perfectly clear transparent crystal. As they sat down the master of the house drew a cord which pulled out a crystal shutter behind them, so that they were enclosed on all sides in a great box of glass, so pure and so highly polished that its presence might very easily be forgotten. A number of golden cords with crystal handles hung down into this small chamber, and appeared to be connected with a long shining bar outside.

"Now, where would you like to smoke your cigar?" said Raffles Haw, with a twinkle in his demure eyes. "Shall we go to India, or to Egypt, or to China, or to—"

"To South America," said Robert.

There was a twinkle, a whirr, and a sense of motion. The young artist gazed about him in absolute amazement. Look where he would all round were tree-ferns and palms with long drooping creepers, and a blaze of brilliant orchids. Smoking-room, house, England, all were gone, and he sat on a settee in the heart of a virgin forest of the Amazon. It was no mere optical delusion or trick. He could see the hot steam rising from the tropical undergrowth, the heavy drops falling from the huge green leaves, the very grain and fibre of the rough bark which clothed the trunks. Even as he gazed a green mottled snake curled noiselessly over a branch above his head, and a bright-coloured paroquet broke suddenly from amid the foliage and flashed off among the tree-trunks. Robert gazed around, speechless with surprise, and finally turned upon his host a face in which curiosity was not un-mixed with a suspicion of fear.

"People have been burned for less, have they not?" cried Raffles Haw laughing heartily. "Have you had enough of the Amazon? What do you say to a spell of Egypt?"

Again the whirr, the swift flash of passing objects, and in an instant a huge desert stretched on every side of them, as far as the eye could reach. In the foreground a clump of five palm-trees towered into the air, with a profusion of rough cactus-like plants bristling from their base. On the other side rose a rugged, gnarled, grey monolith, carved at the base into a huge scarabaeus. A group of lizards played about on the surface of the old carved stone. Beyond, the yellow sand stretched away into furthest space, where the dim mirage mist played along the horizon.

"Mr. Haw, I cannot understand it!" Robert grasped the velvet edge of the settee, and gazed wildly about him.

"The effect is rather startling, is it not? This Egyptian desert is my favourite when I lay myself out for a contemplative smoke. It seems strange that tobacco should have come from the busy, practical West. It has much more affinity for the dreamy, languid East. But perhaps you would like to run over to China for a change?”

“Not to-day,” said Robert, passing his hand over his forehead. “I feel rather confused by all these wonders, and indeed I think that they have affected my nerves a little. Besides, it is time that I returned to my prosaic Elmdene, if I can find my way out of this wilderness to which you have transplanted me. But would you ease my mind, Mr. Haw, by showing me how this thing is done?”

“It is the merest toy — a complex plaything, nothing more. Allow me to explain. I have a line of very large greenhouses which extends from one end of my smoking-room. These different houses are kept at varying degrees of heat and humidity so as to reproduce the exact climates of Egypt, China, and the rest. You see, our crystal chamber is a tramway running with a minimum of friction along a steel rod. By pulling this or that handle I regulate how far it shall go, and it travels, as you have seen, with amazing speed. The effect of my hot-houses is heightened by the roofs being invariably concealed by skies, which are really very admirably painted, and by the introduction of birds and other creatures, which seem to flourish quite as well in artificial as in natural heat. This explains the South American effect.”

“But not the Egyptian.”

“No. It is certainly rather clever. I had the best man in France, at least the best at those large effects, to paint in that circular background. You understand, the palms, cacti, obelisk, and so on, are perfectly genuine, and so is the sand for fifty yards or so, and I defy the keenest-eyed man in England to tell where the deception commences. It is the familiar and perhaps rather meretricious effect of a circular panorama, but carried out in the most complete manner. Was there any other point?”

“The crystal box? Why was it?”

“To preserve my guests from the effects of the changes of temperature. It would be a poor kindness to bring them back to my smoking-room drenched through, and with the seeds of a violent cold. The crystal has to be kept warm, too, otherwise vapour would deposit, and you would have your view spoiled. But must you really go? Then here we are back in the smoking-room. I hope that it will not be your last visit by many a one. And if I may come down to Elmdene I should be very glad to do so. This is the way through the museum.”

As Robert McIntyre emerged from the balmy aromatic atmosphere of the great house, into the harsh, raw, biting air of an English winter evening, he felt as though he had been away for a long visit in some foreign country. Time is measured by impressions, and so vivid and novel had been his feelings, that weeks and weeks might have elapsed since his chat with the smoke-grimed stranger in the road. He walked along with his head in a whirl, his whole mind possessed and intoxicated by the one idea of the boundless wealth and the immense power of this extraordinary stranger. Small and sordid and mean seemed his own Elmdene as he approached it, and he passed over its threshold full of restless discontent against himself and his surroundings.

CHAPTER V. LAURA’S REQUEST.

That night after supper Robert McIntyre poured forth all that he had seen to his father and to his sister. So full was he of the one subject that it was a relief to him to share his knowledge with others. Rather for his own sake, then, than for theirs he depicted vividly all the marvels which he had seen; the profusion of wealth, the regal treasure-house of gems, the gold, the marble, the extraordinary devices, the absolute lavishness and complete disregard for money which was shown in every detail. For an hour he pictured with glowing words all the wonders which had been shown him, and ended with some pride by describing the request which Mr. Raffles Haw had made, and the complete confidence which he had placed in him.

His words had a very different effect upon his two listeners. Old McIntyre leaned back in his chair with a bitter smile upon his lips, his thin face crinkled into a thousand puckers, and his small eyes shining with envy and greed. His lean yellow hand upon the table was clenched until the knuckles gleamed white in the lamplight. Laura, on the other hand, leaned forward, her lips parted, drinking in her brother’s words with a glow of colour upon either cheek. It seemed to Robert, as he glanced from one to the other of them, that he had never seen his father look so evil, or his sister so beautiful.

“Who is the fellow, then?” asked the old man after a considerable pause. “I hope he got all this in an honest fashion. Five millions in jewels, you say. Good gracious me! Ready to give it away, too, but afraid of pauperising any one. You can tell him, Robert, that you know of one very deserving case which has not the slightest objection to being pauperised.”

“But who can he possibly be, Robert?” cried Laura. “Haw cannot be his real name. He must be some disguised prince, or perhaps a king in exile. Oh, I should have loved to have seen those diamonds and the emeralds! I always think that emeralds suit dark people best. You must tell me again all about that museum, Robert.”

“I don’t think that he is anything more than he pretends to be,” her brother answered. “He has the plain, quiet manners of an ordinary middle-class Englishman. There was no particular polish that I could see. He knew a little about books and pictures, just enough to appreciate them, but nothing more. No, I fancy that he is a man quite in our own position of life, who has in some way inherited a vast sum. Of course it is difficult for me to form an estimate, but I should judge that what I saw to-day — house, pictures, jewels, books, and so on — could never have been bought under twenty millions, and I am sure that that figure is entirely an under-statement."

"I never knew but one Haw," said old McIntyre, drumming his fingers on the table; "he was a foreman in my pin-fire cartridge-case department. But he was an elderly single man. Well, I hope he got it all honestly. I hope the money is clean."

"And really, really, he is coming to see us!" cried Laura, clapping her hands. "Oh, when do you think he will come, Robert? Do give me warning. Do you think it will be to-morrow?"

"I am sure I cannot say."

"I should so love to see him. I don't know when I have been so interested."

"Why, you have a letter there," remarked Robert. "From Hector, too, by the foreign stamp. How is he?"

"It only came this evening. I have not opened it yet. To tell the truth, I have been so interested in your story that I had forgotten all about it. Poor old Hector! It is from Madeira." She glanced rapidly over the four pages of straggling writing in the young sailor's bold schoolboyish hand. "Oh, he is all right," she said. "They had a gale on the way out, and that sort of thing, but he is all right now. He thinks he may be back by March. I wonder whether your new friend will come to-morrow — your knight of the enchanted Castle."

"Hardly so soon, I should fancy."

"If he should be looking about for an investment. Robert," said the father, "you won't forget to tell him what a fine opening there is now in the gun trade. With my knowledge, and a few thousands at my back, I could bring him in his thirty per cent. as regular as the bank. After all, he must lay out his money somehow. He cannot sink it all in books and precious stones. I am sure that I could give him the highest references."

"It may be a long time before he comes, father," said Robert coldly; "and when he does I am afraid that I can hardly use his friendship as a means of advancing your interest."

“We are his equals, father,” cried Laura with spirit. “Would you put us on the footing of beggars? He would think we cared for him only for his money. I wonder that you should think of such a thing.”

“If I had not thought of such things where would your education have been, miss?” retorted the angry old man; and Robert stole quietly away to his room, whence amid his canvases he could still hear the hoarse voice and the clear in their never-ending family jangle. More and more sordid seemed the surroundings of his life, and more and more to be valued the peace which money can buy.

Breakfast had hardly been cleared in the morning, and Robert had not yet ascended to his work, when there came a timid tapping at the door, and there was Raffles Haw on the mat outside. Robert ran out and welcomed him with all cordiality.

“I am afraid that I am a very early visitor,” he said apologetically; “but I often take a walk after breakfast.” He had no traces of work upon him now, but was trim and neat with a dark suit, and carefully brushed hair. “You spoke yesterday of your work. Perhaps, early as it is, you would allow me the privilege of looking over your studio?”

“Pray step in, Mr. Haw,” cried Robert, all in a flutter at this advance from so munificent a patron of art; “I should be only too happy to show you such little work as I have on hand, though, indeed, I am almost afraid when I think how familiar you are with some of the greatest masterpieces. Allow me to introduce you to my father and to my sister Laura.”

Old McIntyre bowed low and rubbed his thin hands together; but the young lady gave a gasp of surprise, and stared with widely-opened eyes at the millionaire. Maw stepped forward, however, and shook her quietly by the hand,

“I expected to find that it was you,” he said. “I have already met your sister, Mr. McIntyre, on the very first day that I came here. We took shelter in a shed from a snowstorm, and had quite a pleasant little chat.”

“I had no notion that I was speaking to the owner of the Hall,” said Laura in some confusion. “How funnily things turn out, to be sure!”

“I had often wondered who it was that I spoke to, but it was only yesterday that I discovered. What a sweet little place you have here! It must be charming in summer. Why, if it were not for this hill my windows would look straight across at yours.”

“Yes, and we should see all your beautiful plantations,” said Laura, standing beside him in the window. “I was wishing only yesterday that the hill was not there.”

“Really! I shall be happy to have it removed for you if you would like it.”

“Good gracious!” cried Laura. “Why, where would you put it?”

“Oh, they could run it along the line and dump it anywhere. It is not much of a hill. A few thousand men with proper machinery, and a line of rails brought right up to them could easily dispose of it in a few months.”

“And the poor vicar’s house?” Laura asked, laughing.

“I think that might be got over. We could run him up a facsimile, which would, perhaps, be more convenient to him. Your brother will tell you that I am quite an expert at the designing of houses. But, seriously, if you think it would be an improvement I will see what can be done.”

“Not for the world, Mr. Haw. Why, I should be a traitor to the whole village if I were to encourage such a scheme. The hill is the one thing which gives Tamfield the slightest individuality. It would be the height of selfishness to sacrifice it in order to improve the view from Elmdene.”

“It is a little box of a place this, Mr. Haw,” said old McIntyre. “I should think you must feel quite stifled in it after your grand mansion, of which my son tells me such wonders. But we were not always accustomed to this sort of thing, Mr. Haw. Humble as I stand here, there was a time, and not so long ago, when I could write as many figures on a cheque as any gunmaker in Birmingham. It was—”

“He is a dear discontented old papa,” cried Laura, throwing her arm round him in a caressing manner. He gave a sharp squeak and a grimace of pain, which he endeavoured to hide by an outbreak of painfully artificial coughing.

“Shall we go upstairs?” said Robert hurriedly, anxious to divert his guest’s attention from this little domestic incident. “My studio is the real atelier, for it is right up under the tiles. I shall lead the way, if you will have the kindness to follow me.”

Leaving Laura and Mr. McIntyre, they went up together to the workroom. Mr. Haw stood long in front of the “Signing of Magna Charta,” and the “Murder of Thomas a Becket,” screwing up his eyes and twitching nervously at his beard, while Robert stood by in anxious expectancy.

“And how much are these?” asked Raffles Haw at last.

“I priced them at a hundred apiece when I sent them to London.”

“Then the best I can wish you is that the day may come when you would gladly give ten times the sum to have them back again. I am sure that there are great possibilities in you, and I see that in grouping and in boldness of design you have already achieved much. But your drawing, if you will excuse my saying so, is just a little crude, and your colouring perhaps a trifle thin. Now, I will make a bargain with you, Mr. McIntyre, if you will consent to it. I know that money has no charms for you, but still, as you said when I first met you, a man must live. I shall buy these two canvases from you at the price which you name, subject to the condition that you may always have them back again by repaying the same sum.”

“You are really very kind.” Robert hardly knew whether to be delighted at having sold his pictures or humiliated at the frank criticism of the buyer.

“May I write a cheque at once?” said Raffles Haw. “Here is pen and ink. So! I shall send a couple of footmen down for them in the afternoon. Well, I shall keep them in trust for you. I dare say that when you are famous they will be of value as specimens of your early manner.”

“I am sure that I am extremely obliged to you, Mr. Haw,” said the young artist, placing the cheque in his notebook. He glanced at it as he folded it up, in the vague hope that perhaps this man of whims had assessed his pictures at a higher rate than he had named. The figures, however, were exact. Robert began dimly to perceive that there were drawbacks as well as advantages to the reputation of a money-scorner, which he had gained by a few chance words, prompted rather by the reaction against his father’s than by his own real convictions.

“I hope, Miss McIntyre,” said Raffles Haw, when they had descended to the sitting-room once more, “that you will do me the honour of coming to see the little curiosities which I have gathered together. Your brother will, I am sure, escort you up; or perhaps Mr. McIntyre would care to come?”

“I shall be delighted to come, Mr. Haw,” cried Laura, with her sweetest smile. “A good deal of my time just now is taken up in looking after the poor people, who find the cold weather very trying.” Robert raised his eyebrows, for it was the first he had heard of his sister’s missions of mercy, but Mr. Raffles Haw nodded approvingly. “Robert was telling us of your wonderful hot-houses. I am sure I wish I could transport the whole parish into one of them, and give them a good warm.”

“Nothing would be easier, but I am afraid that they might find it a little trying when they came out again. I have one house which is only just finished. Your brother has not seen it yet, but I think it is the best of them all. It represents an Indian jungle, and is hot enough in all conscience."

"I shall so look forward to seeing it," cried Laura, clasping her hands. "It has been one of the dreams of my life to see India. I have read so much of it, the temples, the forests, the great rivers, and the tigers. Why, you would hardly believe it, but I have never seen a tiger except in a picture."

"That can easily be set right," said Raffles Haw, with his quiet smile. "Would you care to see one?"

"Oh, immensely."

"I will have one sent down. Let me see, it is nearly twelve o'clock. I can get a wire to Liverpool by one. There is a man there who deals in such things. I should think he would be due to-morrow morning. Well, I shall look forward to seeing you all before very long. I have rather outstayed my time, for I am a man of routine, and I always put in a certain number of hours in my laboratory." He shook hands cordially with them all, and lighting his pipe at the doorstep, strolled off upon his way.

"Well, what do you think of him now?" asked Robert, as they watched his black figure against the white snow.

"I think that he is no more fit to be trusted with all that money than a child," cried the old man. "It made me positively sick to hear him talk of moving hills and buying tigers, and such-like nonsense, when there are honest men without a business, and great businesses starving for a little capital. It's unchristian — that's what I call it."

"I think he is most delightful, Robert," said Laura. "Remember, you have promised to take us up to the Hall. And he evidently wishes us to go soon. Don't you think we might go this afternoon?"

"I hardly think that, Laura. You leave it in my hands, and I will arrange it all. And now I must get to work, for the light is so very short on these winter days."

That night Robert McIntyre had gone to bed, and was dozing off when a hand plucked at his shoulder, and he started up to find his sister in some white drapery, with a shawl thrown over her shoulders, standing beside him in the moonlight.

"Robert, dear," she whispered, stooping over him, "there was something I wanted to ask you, but papa was always in the way. You will do something to please me, won't you, Robert?"

"Of course, Laura. What is it?"

“I do so hate having my affairs talked over, dear. If Mr. Raffles Haw says anything to you about me, or asks any questions, please don’t say anything about Hector. You won’t, will you, Robert, for the sake of your little sister?”

“No; not unless you wish it.”

“There is a dear good brother.” She stooped over him and kissed him tenderly.

It was a rare thing for Laura to show any emotion, and her brother marvelled sleepily over it until he relapsed into his interrupted doze.

CHAPTER VI. A STRANGE VISITOR.

The McIntyre family was seated at breakfast on the morning which followed the first visit of Raffles Haw, when they were surprised to hear the buzz and hum of a multitude of voices in the village street. Nearer and nearer came the tumult, and then, of a sudden, two maddened horses reared themselves up on the other side of the garden hedge, prancing and pawing, with ears laid back and eyes ever glancing at some horror behind them. Two men hung shouting to their bridles, while a third came rushing up the curved gravel path. Before the McIntyres could realise the situation, their maid, Mary, darted into the sitting-room with terror in her round freckled face:

"If you please, miss," she screamed, "your tiger has arrove."

"Good heavens!" cried Robert, rushing to the door with his half-filled teacup in his hand. "This is too much. Here is an iron cage on a trolly with a great ramping tiger, and the whole village with their mouths open."

"Mad as a hatter!" shrieked old Mr. McIntyre. "I could see it in his eye. He spent enough on this beast to start me in business. Whoever heard of such a thing? Tell the driver to take it to the police-station."

"Nothing of the sort, papa," said Laura, rising with dignity and wrapping a shawl about her shoulders. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed, and she carried herself like a triumphant queen.

Robert, with his teacup in his hand, allowed his attention to be diverted from their strange visitor while he gazed at his beautiful sister.

"Mr. Raffles Haw has done this out of kindness to me," she said, sweeping towards the door. "I look upon it as a great attention on his part. I shall certainly go out and look at it."

"If you please, sir," said the carman, reappearing at the door, "it's all as we can do to 'old in the 'osses."

"Let us all go out together then," suggested Robert.

They went as far as the garden fence and stared over, while the whole village, from the school-children to the old grey-haired men from the almshouses, gathered round in mute astonishment. The tiger, a long, lithe, venomous-looking creature, with two blazing green eyes, paced stealthily round the little cage, lashing its sides with its tail, and rubbing its muzzle against the bars.

"What were your orders?" asked Robert of the carman.

"It came through by special express from Liverpool, sir, and the train is drawn up at the Tamfield siding all ready to take it back. If it 'ad been royalty the railway folk couldn't ha' shown it more respec'. We are to take it back when you're done with it. It's been a cruel job, sir, for our arms is pulled clean out of the sockets a-'olding in of the 'osses."

"What a dear, sweet creature it is," cried Laura. "How sleek and how graceful! I cannot understand how people could be afraid of anything so beautiful."

"If you please, marm," said the carman, touching his skin cap, "he out with his paw between the bars as we stood in the station yard, and if I 'adn't pulled my mate Bill back it would ha' been a case of kingdom come. It was a proper near squeak, I can tell ye."

"I never saw anything more lovely," continued Laura, loftily overlooking the remarks of the driver. "It has been a very great pleasure to me to see it, and I hope that you will tell Mr. Haw so if you see him, Robert."

"The horses are very restive," said her brother. "Perhaps, Laura, if you have seen enough, it would be as well to let them go."

She bowed in the regal fashion which she had so suddenly adopted. Robert shouted the order, the driver sprang up, his comrades let the horses go, and away rattled the waggon and the trolly with half the Tamfielders streaming vainly behind it.

"Is it not wonderful what money can do?" Laura remarked, as they knocked the snow from their shoes within the porch. "There seems to be no wish which Mr. Haw could not at once gratify."

"No wish of yours, you mean," broke in her father. "It's different when he is dealing with a wrinkled old man who has spent himself in working for his children. A plainer case of love at first sight I never saw."

"How can you be so coarse, papa?" cried Laura, but her eyes flashed, and her teeth gleamed, as though the remark had not altogether displeased her.

"For heaven's sake, be careful, Laura!" cried Robert. "It had not struck me before, but really it does look rather like it. You know how you stand. Raffles Haw is not a man to play with."

"You dear old boy!" said Laura, laying her hand upon his shoulder, "what do you know of such things? All you have to do is to go on with your painting, and to remember the promise you made the other night.”

“What promise was that, then?” cried old McIntyre suspiciously.

“Never you mind, papa. But if you forget it, Robert, I shall never forgive you as long as I live.”

CHAPTER VII. THE WORKINGS OF WEALTH.

It can easily be believed that as the weeks passed the name and fame of the mysterious owner of the New Hall resounded over the quiet countryside until the rumour of him had spread to the remotest corners of Warwickshire and Staffordshire. In Birmingham on the one side, and in Coventry and Leamington on the other, there was gossip as to his untold riches, his extraordinary whims, and the remarkable life which he led. His name was bandied from mouth to mouth, and a thousand efforts were made to find out who and what he was. In spite of all their pains, however, the newsmongers were unable to discover the slightest trace of his antecedents, or to form even a guess as to the secret of his riches.

It was no wonder that conjecture was rife upon the subject, for hardly a day passed without furnishing some new instance of the boundlessness of his power and of the goodness of his heart. Through the vicar, Robert, and others, he had learned much of the inner life of the parish, and many were the times when the struggling man, harassed and driven to the wall, found thrust into his hand some morning a brief note with an enclosure which rolled all the sorrow back from his life. One day a thick double-breasted pea-jacket and a pair of good sturdy boots were served out to every old man in the almshouse. On another, Miss Swire, the decayed gentlewoman who eked out her small annuity by needlework, had a brand new first-class sewing-machine handed in to her to take the place of the old worn-out treadle which tried her rheumatic joints. The pale-faced schoolmaster, who had spent years with hardly a break in struggling with the juvenile obtuseness of Tamfield, received through the post a circular ticket for a two months’ tour through Southern Europe, with hotel coupons and all complete. John Hackett, the farmer, after five long years of bad seasons, borne with a brave heart, had at last been overthrown by the sixth, and had the bailiffs actually in the house when the good vicar had rushed in, waving a note above his head, to tell him not only that his deficit had been made up, but that enough remained over to provide the improved machinery which would enable him to hold his own for the future. An almost superstitious feeling came upon the rustic folk as they looked at the great palace when the sun gleamed upon the huge hot-houses, or even more so, perhaps, when at night the brilliant electric lights shot their white radiance through the countless rows of windows. To them it was as if some minor Providence presided in that great place, unseen but seeing all, boundless in its power and its graciousness, ever ready to assist and to befriend. In every good deed, however, Raffles Haw still remained in the background, while the vicar and Robert had the pleasant task of conveying his benefits to the lowly and the suffering.

Once only did he appear in his own person, and that was upon the famous occasion when he saved the well-known bank of Garraweg Brothers in Birmingham. The most charitable and upright of men, the two brothers, Louis and Rupert, had built up a business which extended its ramifications into every townlet of four counties. The failure of their London agents had suddenly brought a heavy loss upon them, and the circumstance leaking out had caused a sudden and most dangerous run upon their establishment. Urgent telegrams for bullion from all their forty branches poured in at the very instant when the head office was crowded with anxious clients all waving their deposit-books, and clamouring for their money. Bravely did the two brothers with their staff stand with smiling faces behind the shining counter, while swift messengers sped and telegrams flashed to draw in all the available resources of the bank. All day the stream poured through the office, and when four o’clock came, and the doors were closed for the day, the street without was still blocked by the expectant crowd, while there remained scarce a thousand pounds of bullion in the cellars.

“It is only postponed. Louis,” said brother Rupert despairingly, when the last clerk had left the office, and when at last they could relax the fixed smile upon their haggard faces.

“Those shutters will never come down again,” cried brother Louis, and the two suddenly burst out sobbing in each other’s arms, not for their own griefs, but for the miseries which they might bring upon those who had trusted them.

But who shall ever dare to say that there is no hope, if he will but give his griefs to the world? That very night Mrs. Spurling had received a letter from her old school friend, Mrs. Louis Garraweg, with all her fears and her hopes poured out in it, and the whole sad story of their troubles. Swift from the Vicarage went the message to the Hall, and early next morning Mr.

Raffles Haw, with a great black carpet-bag in his hand, found means to draw the cashier of the local branch of the Bank of England from his breakfast, and to persuade him to open his doors at unofficial hours. By half-past nine the crowd had already begun to collect around Garraweg's, when a stranger, pale and thin, with a bloated carpet-bag, was shown at his own very pressing request into the bank parlour.

"It is no use, sir," said the elder brother humbly, as they stood together encouraging each other to turn a brave face to misfortune, "we can do no more. We have little left, and it would be unfair to the others to pay you now. We can but hope that when our assets are realised no one will be the loser save ourselves."

"I did not come to draw out, but to put in," said Raffles Haw in his demure apologetic fashion. "I have in my bag five thousand hundred-pound Bank of England notes. If you will have the goodness to place them to my credit account I should be extremely obliged."

"But, good heavens, sir!" stammered Rupert Garraweg, "have you not heard? Have you not seen? We cannot allow you to do this thing blindfold; can we Louis?"

"Most certainly not. We cannot recommend our bank, sir, at the present moment, for there is a run upon us, and we do not know to what lengths it may go."

"Tut! tut!" said Raffles Haw. "If the run continues you must send me a wire, and I shall make a small addition to my account. You will send me a receipt by post. Good-morning, gentlemen!" He bowed himself out ere the astounded partners could realise what had befallen them, or raise their eyes from the huge black bag and the visiting card which lay upon their table. There was no great failure in Birmingham that day, and the house of Garraweg still survives to enjoy the success which it deserves.

Such were the deeds by which Raffles Haw made himself known throughout the Midlands, and yet, in spite of all his open-handedness, he was not a man to be imposed upon. In vain the sturdy beggar cringed at his gate, and in vain the crafty letter-writer poured out a thousand fabulous woes upon paper. Robert was astonished when he brought some tale of trouble to the Hall to observe how swift was the perception of the recluse, and how unerringly he could detect a flaw in a narrative, or lay his finger upon the one point which rang false. Were a man strong enough to help himself, or of such a nature as to profit nothing by help, none would he get from the master of the New Hall. In vain, for example, did old McIntyre throw himself continually across the path of the millionaire, and impress upon him, by a thousand hints and innuendoes, the hard fortune which had been dealt him, and the ease with which his fallen greatness might be restored. Raffles Haw listened politely, bowed, smiled, but never showed the slightest inclination to restore the querulous old gunmaker to his pedestal.

But if the recluse's wealth was a lure which drew the beggars from far and near, as the lamp draws the moths, it had the same power of attraction upon another and much more dangerous class. Strange hard faces were seen in the village street, prowling figures were marked at night stealing about among the fir plantations, and warning messages arrived from city police and county constabulary to say that evil visitors were known to have taken train to Tamfield. But if, as Raffles Haw held, there were few limits to the power of immense wealth, it possessed, among other things, the power of self-preservation, as one or two people were to learn to their cost.

"Would you mind stepping up to the Hall?" he said one morning, putting his head in at the door of the Elmdene sitting-room. "I have something there that might amuse you." He was on intimate terms with the McIntyres now, and there were few days on which they did not see something of each other.

They gladly accompanied him, all three, for such invitations were usually the prelude of some agreeable surprise which he had in store for them.

"I have shown you a tiger," he remarked to Laura, as he led them into the dining-room. "I will now show you something quite as dangerous, though not nearly so pretty." There was an arrangement of mirrors at one end of the room, with a large circular glass set at a sharp angle at the top.

"Look in there — in the upper glass," said Raffles Haw.

"Good gracious! what dreadful-looking men!" cried Laura. "There are two of them, and I don't know which is the worse."

"What on earth are they doing?" asked Robert. "They appear to be sitting on the ground in some sort of a cellar."

"Most dangerous-looking characters," said the old man. "I should strongly recommend you to send for a policeman."

"I have done so. But it seems a work of supererogation to take them to prison, for they are very snugly in prison already. However, I suppose that the law must have its own."

"And who are they, and how did they come there? Do tell us, Mr. Haw."

Laura McIntyre had a pretty beseeching way with her, which went rather piquantly with her queenly style of beauty.

"I know no more than you do. They were not there last night, and they are here this morning, so I suppose it is a safe inference that they came in during the night, especially as my servants found the window open when they came down. As to their character and intentions, I should think that is pretty legible upon their faces. They look a pair of beauties, don't they?"

"But I cannot understand in the least where they are," said Robert, staring into the mirror. "One of them has taken to butting his head against the wall. No, he is bending so that the other may stand upon his back. He is up there now, and the light is shining upon his face. What a bewildered ruffianly face it is too. I should so like to sketch it. It would be a study for the picture I am thinking of of the Reign of Terror."

"I have caught them in my patent burglar trap," said Haw. "They are my first birds, but I have no doubt that they will not be the last. I will show you how it works. It is quite a new thing. This flooring is now as strong as possible, but every night I disconnect it. It is done simultaneously by a central machine for every room on the ground-floor. When the floor is disconnected one may advance three or four steps, either from the window or door, and then that whole part turns on a hinge and slides you into a padded strong-room beneath, where you may kick your heels until you are released. There is a central oasis between the hinges, where the furniture is grouped for the night. The flooring flies into position again when the weight of the intruder is removed, and there he must bide, while I can always take a peep at him by this simple little optical arrangement. I thought it might amuse you to have a look at my prisoners before I handed them over to the head-constable, who I see is now coming up the avenue."

"The poor burglars!" cried Laura. "It is no wonder that they look bewildered, for I suppose, Mr. Haw, that they neither know where they are, nor how they came there. I am so glad to know that you guard yourself in this way, for I have often thought that you ran a danger."

"Have you so?" said he, smiling round at her. "I think that my house is fairly burglar-proof. I have one window which may be used as an entrance, the centre one of the three of my laboratory. I keep it so because, to tell the truth, I am somewhat of a night prowler myself, and when I treat myself to a ramble under the stars I like to slip in and out without ceremony. It would, however, be a fortunate rogue who picked the only safe entrance out of a hundred, and even then he might find pitfalls. Here is the constable, but you must not go, for Miss McIntyre has still something to see in my little place. If you will step into the billiard-room I shall be with you in a very few moments.”

CHAPTER VIII. A BILLIONAIRE’S PLANS.

That morning, and many mornings both before and afterwards, were spent by Laura at the New Hall examining the treasures of the museum, playing with the thousand costly toys which Raffles Haw had collected, or sallying out from the smoking-room in the crystal chamber into the long line of luxurious hot-houses. Haw would walk demurely beside her as she flitted from one thing to another like a butterfly among flowers, watching her out of the corner of his eyes, and taking a quiet pleasure in her delight. The only joy which his costly possessions had ever brought him was that which came from the entertainment of others.

By this time his attentions towards Laura McIntyre had become so marked that they could hardly be mistaken. He visibly brightened in her presence, and was never weary of devising a thousand methods of surprising and pleasing her. Every morning ere the McIntyre family were afoot a great bouquet of strange and beautiful flowers was brought down by a footman from the Hall to brighten their breakfast-table. Her slightest wish, however fantastic, was instantly satisfied, if human money or ingenuity could do it. When the frost lasted a stream was dammed and turned from its course that it might flood two meadows, solely in order that she might have a place upon which to skate. With the thaw there came a groom every afternoon with a sleek and beautiful mare in case Miss McIntyre should care to ride. Everything went to show that she had made a conquest of the recluse of the New Hall.

And she on her side played her part admirably. With female adaptiveness she fell in with his humour, and looked at the world through his eyes. Her talk was of almshouses and free libraries, of charities and of improvements. He had never a scheme to which she could not add some detail making it more complete and more effective. To Haw it seemed that at last he had met a mind which was in absolute affinity with his own. Here was a help-mate, who could not only follow, but even lead him in the path which he had chosen.

Neither Robert nor his father could fail to see what was going forward, but to the latter nothing could possibly be more acceptable than a family tie which should connect him, however indirectly, with a man of vast fortune.

The glamour of the gold bags had crept over Robert also, and froze the remonstrance upon his lips. It was very pleasant to have the handling of all this wealth, even as a mere agent. Why should he do or say what might disturb their present happy relations? It was his sister's business, not his; and as to Hector Spurling, he must take his chance as other men did. It was obviously best not to move one way or the other in the matter.

But to Robert himself, his work and his surroundings were becoming more and more irksome. His joy in his art had become less keen since he had known Raffles Haw. It seemed so hard to toll and slave to earn such a trifling sum, when money could really be had for the asking. It was true that he had asked for none, but large sums were for ever passing through his hands for those who were needy, and if he were needy himself his friend would surely not grudge it to him. So the Roman galleys still remained faintly outlined upon the great canvas, while Robert's days were spent either in the luxurious library at the Hall, or in strolling about the country listening to tales of trouble, and returning like a tweed-suited ministering angel to carry Raffles Haw's help to the unfortunate. It was not an ambitious life, but it was one which was very congenial to his weak and easy-going nature.

Robert had observed that fits of depression had frequently come upon the millionaire, and it had sometimes struck him that the enormous sums which he spent had possibly made a serious inroad into his capital, and that his mind was troubled as to the future. His abstracted manner, his clouded brow, and his bent head all spoke of a soul which was weighed down with care, and it was only in Laura's presence that he could throw off the load of his secret trouble. For five hours a day he buried himself in the laboratory and amused himself with his hobby, but it was one of his whims that no one, neither any of his servants, nor even Laura or Robert, should ever cross the threshold of that outlying building. Day after day he vanished into it, to reappear hours afterwards pale and exhausted, while the whirr of machinery and the smoke which streamed from his high chimney showed how considerable were the operations which he undertook single-handed.

"Could I not assist you in any way?" suggested Robert, as they sat together after luncheon in the smoking-room. "I am convinced that you over-try your strength. I should be so glad to help you, and I know a little of chemistry."

"Do you, indeed?" said Raffles Haw, raising his eyebrows. "I had no idea of that; it is very seldom that the artistic and the scientific faculties go together."

"I don't know that I have either particularly developed. But I have taken classes, and I worked for two years in the laboratory at Sir Josiah Mason's Institute."

"I am delighted to hear it," Haw replied with emphasis. "That may be of great importance to us. It is very possible — indeed, almost certain — that I shall avail myself of your offer of assistance, and teach you something of my chemical methods, which I may say differ considerably from those of the orthodox school. The time, however, is hardly ripe for that. What is it, Jones?"

"A note, sir."

The butler handed it in upon a silver salver. Haw broke the seal and ran his eye over it.

"Tut! tut! It is from Lady Morsley, asking me to the Lord-Lieutenant's ball. I cannot possibly accept. It is very kind of them, but I do wish they would leave me alone. Very well, Jones. I shall write. Do you know, Robert, I am often very unhappy."

He frequently called the young artist by his Christian name, especially in his more confidential moments.

"I have sometimes feared that you were," said the other sympathetically. "But how strange it seems, you who are yet young, healthy, with every faculty for enjoyment, and a millionaire."

"Ah, Robert," cried Haw, leaning back in his chair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. "You have put your finger upon my trouble. If I were a millionaire I might be happy, but, alas, I am no millionaire!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Robert.

Cold seemed to shoot to his inmost soul as it flashed upon him that this was a prelude to a confession of impending bankruptcy, and that all this glorious life, all the excitement and the colour and change, were about to vanish into thin air.

"No millionaire!" he stammered.

"No, Robert; I am a billionaire — perhaps the only one in the world. That is what is on my mind, and why I am unhappy sometimes. I feel that I should spend this money — that I should put it in circulation — and yet it is so hard to do it without failing to do good — without doing positive harm. I feel my responsibility deeply. It weighs me down. Am I justified in continuing to live this quiet life when there are so many millions whom I might save and comfort if I could but reach them?”

Robert heaved a long sigh of relief. “Perhaps you take too grave a view of your responsibilities,” he said. “Everybody knows that the good which you have done is immense. What more could you desire? If you really wished to extend your benevolence further, there are organised charities everywhere which would be very glad of your help.”

“I have the names of two hundred and seventy of them,” Haw answered. “You must run your eye over them some time, and see if you can suggest any others. I send my annual mite to each of them. I don’t think there is much room for expansion in that direction.”

“Well, really you have done your share, and more than your share. I would settle down to lead a happy life, and think no more of the matter.”

“I could not do that,” Haw answered earnestly. “I have not been singled out to wield this immense power simply in order that I might lead a happy life. I can never believe that. Now, can you not use your imagination, Robert, and devise methods by which a man who has command of — well, let us say, for argument’s sake, boundless wealth, could benefit mankind by it, without taking away any one’s independence or in any way doing harm?”

“Well, really, now that I come to think of it, it is a very difficult problem,” said Robert.

“Now I will submit a few schemes to you, and you may give me your opinion on them. Supposing that such a man were to buy ten square miles of ground here in Staffordshire, and were to build upon it a neat city, consisting entirely of clean, comfortable little four-roomed houses, furnished in a simple style, with shops and so forth, but no public-houses. Supposing, too, that he were to offer a house free to all the homeless folk, all the tramps, and broken men, and out-of-workers in Great Britain. Then, having collected them together, let him employ them, under fitting superintendence, upon some colossal piece of work which would last for many years, and perhaps be of permanent value to humanity. Give them a good rate of pay, and let their hours of labour be reasonable, and those of recreation be pleasant. Might you not benefit them and benefit humanity at one stroke?”

“But what form of work could you devise which would employ so vast a number for so long a time, and yet not compete with any existing industry?

To do the latter would simply mean to shift the misery from one class to another.”

“Precisely so. I should compete with no one. What I thought of doing was of sinking a shaft through the earth’s crust, and of establishing rapid communication with the Antipodes. When you had got a certain distance down — how far is an interesting mathematical problem — the centre of gravity would be beneath you, presuming that your boring was not quite directed towards the centre, and you could then lay down rails and tunnel as if you were on the level.”

Then for the first time it flashed into Robert McIntyre’s head that his father’s chance words were correct, and that he was in the presence of a madman. His great wealth had clearly turned his brain, and made him a monomaniac. He nodded indulgently, as when one humours a child.

“It would be very nice,” he said. “I have heard, however, that the interior of the earth is molten, and your workmen would need to be Salamanders.”

“The latest scientific data do not bear out the idea that the earth is so hot,” answered Raffles Haw. “It is certain that the increased temperature in coal mines depends upon the barometric pressure. There are gases in the earth which may be ignited, and there are combustible materials as we see in the volcanoes; but if we came across anything of the sort in our borings, we could turn a river or two down the shaft, and get the better of it in that fashion.”

“It would be rather awkward if the other end of your shaft came out under the Pacific Ocean,” said Robert, choking down his inclination to laugh.

“I have had estimates and calculations from the first living engineers — French, English, and American. The point of exit of the tunnel could be calculated to the yard. That portfolio in the corner is full of sections, plans, and diagrams. I have agents employed in buying up land, and if all goes well, we may get to work in the autumn. That is one device which may produce results. Another is canal-cutting.”

“Ah, there you would compete with the railways.”

“You don’t quite understand. I intend to cut canals through every neck of land where such a convenience would facilitate commerce. Such a scheme, when unaccompanied by any toll upon vessels, would, I think, be a very judicious way of helping the human race.”

“And where, pray, would you cut the canals?” asked Robert.

“I have a map of the world here,” Haw answered, rising, and taking one down from the paper-rack. “You see the blue pencil marks. Those are the points where I propose to establish communication. Of course, I should begin by the obvious duty of finishing the Panama business.”

“Naturally.” The man’s lunacy was becoming more and more obvious, and yet there was such precision and coolness in his manner, that Robert found himself against his own reason endorsing and speculating over his plans.

“The Isthmus of Corinth also occurs to one. That, however, is a small matter, from either a financial or an engineering point of view. I propose, however, to make a junction here, through Kiel between the German Ocean and the Baltic. It saves, you will observe, the whole journey round the coast of Denmark, and would facilitate our trade with Germany and Russia. Another very obvious improvement is to join the Forth and the Clyde, so as to connect Leith with the Irish and American routes. You see the blue line?”

“Quite so.”

“And we will have a little cutting here. It will run from Uleaborg to Kem, and will connect the White Sea with the Gulf of Bothnia. We must not allow our sympathies to be insular, must we? Our little charities should be cosmopolitan. We will try and give the good people of Archangel a better outlet for their furs and their tallow.”

“But it will freeze.”

“For six months in the year. Still, it will be something. Then we must do something for the East. It would never do to overlook the East.”

“It would certainly be an oversight,” said Robert, who was keenly alive to the comical side of the question. Raffles Haw, however, in deadly earnest, sat scratching away at his map with his blue pencil.

“Here is a point where we might be of some little use. If we cut through from Batoum to the Kura River we might tap the trade of the Caspian, and open up communication with all the rivers which run into it. You notice that they include a considerable tract of country. Then, again, I think that we might venture upon a little cutting between Beirut, on the Mediterranean, and the upper waters of the Euphrates, which would lead us into the Persian Gulf. Those are one or two of the more obvious canals which might knit the human race into a closer whole.”

“Your plans are certainly stupendous,” said Robert, uncertain whether to laugh or to be awe-struck. “You will cease to be a man, and become one of the great forces of Nature, altering, moulding, and improving."

"That is precisely the view which I take of myself. That is why I feel my responsibility so acutely."

"But surely if you will do all this you may rest. It is a considerable programme."

"Not at all. I am a patriotic Briton, and I should like to do something to leave my name in the annals of my country. I should prefer, however, to do it after my own death, as anything in the shape of publicity and honour is very offensive to me. I have, therefore, put by eight hundred million in a place which shall be duly mentioned in my will, which I propose to devote to paying off the National Debt. I cannot see that any harm could arise from its extinction."

Robert sat staring, struck dumb by the audacity of the strange man's words.

"Then there is the heating of the soil. There is room for improvement there. You have no doubt read of the immense yields which have resulted in Jersey and elsewhere, from the running of hot-water pipes through the soil. The crops are trebled and quadrupled. I would propose to try the experiment upon a larger scale. We might possibly reserve the Isle of Man to serve as a pumping and heating station. The main pipes would run to England, Ireland, and Scotland, where they would subdivide rapidly until they formed a network two feet deep under the whole country. A pipe at distances of a yard would suffice for every purpose."

"I am afraid," suggested Robert, "that the water which left the Isle of Man warm might lose a little of its virtue before it reached Caithness, for example."

"There need not be any difficulty there. Every few miles a furnace might be arranged to keep up the temperature. These are a few of my plans for the future, Robert, and I shall want the co-operation of disinterested men like yourself in all of them. But how brightly the sun shines, and how sweet the countryside looks! The world is very beautiful, and I should like to leave it happier than I found it. Let us walk out together, Robert, and you will tell me of any fresh cases where I may be of assistance."

CHAPTER IX. A NEW DEPARTURE.

Whatever good Mr. Raffles Haw’s wealth did to the world, there could be no doubt that there were cases where it did harm. The very contemplation and thought of it had upon many a disturbing and mischievous effect. Especially was this the case with the old gunmaker. From being merely a querulous and grasping man, he had now become bitter, brooding, and dangerous. Week by week, as he saw the tide of wealth flow as it were through his very house without being able to divert the smallest rill to nourish his own fortunes, he became more wolfish and more hungry-eyed. He spoke less of his own wrongs, but he brooded more, and would stand for hours on Tamfield Hill looking down at the great palace beneath, as a thirst-stricken man might gaze at the desert mirage.

He had worked, and peeped, and pried, too, until there were points upon which he knew more than either his son or his daughter.

“I suppose that you still don’t know where your friend gets his money?” he remarked to Robert one morning, as they walked together through the village.

“No, father, I do not. I only know that he spends it very well.”

“Well!” snarled the old man. “Yes, very well! He has helped every tramp and slut and worthless vagabond over the countryside, but he will not advance a pound, even on the best security, to help a respectable business man to fight against misfortune.”

“My dear father, I really cannot argue with you about it,” said Robert. “I have already told you more than once what I think. Mr. Haw’s object is to help those who are destitute. He looks upon us as his equals, and would not presume to patronise us, or to act as if we could not help ourselves. It would be a humiliation to us to take his money.”

“Pshaw! Besides, it is only a question of an advance, and advances are made every day among business men. How can you talk such nonsense, Robert?”

Early as it was, his son could see from his excited, quarrelsome manner that the old man had been drinking. The habit had grown upon him of late, and it was seldom now that he was entirely sober.

“Mr. Raffles Haw is the best judge,” said Robert coldly. “If he earns the money, he has a right to spend it as he likes.”

“And how does he earn it? You don’t know, Robert. You don’t know that you aren’t aiding and abetting a felony when you help him to fritter it away. Was ever so much money earned in an honest fashion? I tell you there never was. I tell you, also, that lumps of gold are no more to that man than chunks of coal to the miners over yonder. He could build his house of them and think nothing of it.”

“I know that he is very rich, father. I think, however, that he has an extravagant way of talking sometimes, and that his imagination carries him away. I have heard him talk of plans which the richest man upon earth could not possibly hope to carry through.”

“Don’t you make any mistake, my son. Your poor old father isn’t quite a fool, though he is only an honest broken merchant.” He looked up sideways at his son with a wink and a most unpleasant leer. “Where there’s money I can smell it. There’s money there, and heaps of it. It’s my belief that he is the richest man in the world, though how he came to be so I should not like to guarantee. I’m not quite blind yet, Robert. Have you seen the weekly waggon?”

“The weekly waggon!”

“Yes, Robert. You see I can find some news for you yet. It is due this morning. Every Saturday morning you will see the waggon come in. Why, here it is now, as I am a living man, coming round the curve.”

Robert glanced back and saw a great heavy waggon drawn by two strong horses lumbering slowly along the road which led to the New Hall. From the efforts of the animals and its slow pace the contents seemed to be of great weight.

“Just you wait here,” old McIntyre cried, plucking at his son’s sleeve with his thin bony hand. “Wait here and see it pass. Then we will watch what becomes of it.”

They stood by the side of the road until it came abreast of them. The waggon was covered with tarpaulin sheetings in front and at the sides, but behind some glimpse could be caught of the contents. They consisted, as far as Robert could see, of a number of packets of the same shape, each about two feet long and six inches high, arranged symmetrically upon the top of each other. Each packet was surrounded by a covering of coarse sacking.

"What do you think of that?" asked old McIntyre triumphantly as the load creaked past.

"Why, father? What do you make of it?"

"I have watched it, Robert — I have watched it every Saturday, and I had my chance of looking a little deeper into it. You remember the day when the elm blew down, and the road was blocked until they could saw it in two. That was on a Saturday, and the waggon came to a stand until they could clear a way for it. I was there, Robert, and I saw my chance. I strolled behind the waggon, and I placed my hands upon one of those packets. They look small, do they not? It would take a strong man to lift one. They are heavy, Robert, heavy, and hard with the hardness of metal. I tell you, boy, that that waggon is loaded with gold."

"Gold!"

"With solid bars of gold, Robert. But come into the plantation and we shall see what becomes of it."

They passed through the lodge gates, behind the waggon, and then wandered off among the fir-trees until they gained a spot where they could command a view. The load had halted, not in front of the house, but at the door of the out-building with the chimney. A staff of stablemen and footmen were in readiness, who proceeded to swiftly unload and to carry the packages through the door. It was the first time that Robert had ever seen any one save the master of the house enter the laboratory. No sign was seen of him now, however, and in half an hour the contents had all been safely stored and the waggon had driven briskly away.

"I cannot understand it, father," said Robert thoughtfully, as they resumed their walk. "Supposing that your supposition is correct, who would send him such quantities of gold, and where could it come from?"

"Ha, you have to come to the old man after all!" chuckled his companion. "I can see the little game. It is clear enough to me. There are two of them in it, you understand. The other one gets the gold. Never mind how, but we will hope that there is no harm. Let us suppose, for example, that they have found a marvellous mine, where you can just shovel it out like clay from a pit. Well, then, he sends it on to this one, and he has his furnaces and his chemicals, and he refines and purifies it and makes it fit to sell. That's my explanation of it, Robert. Eh, has the old man put his finger on it?"

"But if that were true, father, the gold must go back again."

“So it does, Robert, but a little at a time. Ha, ha! I’ve had my eyes open, you see. Every night it goes down in a small cart, and is sent on to London by the 7.40. Not in bars this time, but done up in iron-bound chests. I’ve seen them, boy, and I’ve had this hand upon them.”

“Well,” said the young man thoughtfully, “maybe you are right. It is possible that you are right.”

While father and son were prying into his secrets, Raffles Haw had found his way to Elmdene, where Laura sat reading the Queen by the fire.

“I am so sorry,” she said, throwing down her paper and springing to her feet. “They are all out except me. But I am sure that they won’t be long. I expect Robert every moment.”

“I would rather speak with you alone,” answered Raffles Haw quietly. “Pray sit down, for I wanted to have a little chat with you.”

Laura resumed her seat with a flush upon her cheeks and a quickening of the breath. She turned her face away and gazed into the fire; but there was a sparkle in her eyes which was not caught from the leaping flames.

“Do you remember the first time that we met, Miss McIntyre?” he asked, standing on the rug and looking down at her dark hair, and the beautifully feminine curve of her ivory neck.

“As if it were yesterday,” she answered in her sweet mellow tones.

“Then you must also remember the wild words that I said when we parted. It was very foolish of me. I am sure that I am most sorry if I frightened or disturbed you, but I have been a very solitary man for a long time, and I have dropped into a bad habit of thinking aloud. Your voice, your face, your manner, were all so like my ideal of a true woman, loving, faithful, and sympathetic, that I could not help wondering whether, if I were a poor man, I might ever hope to win the affection of such a one.”

“Your good opinion, Mr. Raffles Haw, is very dear to me,” said Laura. “I assure you that I was not frightened, and that there is no need to apologise for what was really a compliment.”

“Since then I have found,” he continued, “that all that I had read upon your face was true. That your mind is indeed that of the true woman, full of the noblest and sweetest qualities which human nature can aspire to. You know that I am a man of fortune, but I wish you to dismiss that consideration from your mind. Do you think from what you know of my character that you could be happy as my wife, Laura?”

She made no answer, but still sat with her head turned away and her sparkling eyes fixed upon the fire. One little foot from under her skirt tapped nervously upon the rug.

“It is only right that you should know a little more about me before you decide. There is, however, little to know. I am an orphan, and, as far as I know, without a relation upon earth. My father was a respectable man, a country surgeon in Wales, and he brought me up to his own profession. Before I had passed my examinations, however, he died and left me a small annuity. I had conceived a great liking for the subjects of chemistry and electricity, and instead of going on with my medical work I devoted myself entirely to these studies, and eventually built myself a laboratory where I could follow out my own researches. At about this time I came into a very large sum of money, so large as to make me feel that a vast responsibility rested upon me in the use which I made of it. After some thought I determined to build a large house in a quiet part of the country, not too far from a great centre. There I could be in touch with the world, and yet would have quiet and leisure to mature the schemes which were in my head. As it chanced, I chose Tamfield as my site. All that remains now is to carry out the plans which I have made, and to endeavour to lighten the earth of some of the misery and injustice which weigh it down. I again ask you, Laura, will you throw in your lot with mine, and help me in the life’s work which lies before me?”

Laura looked up at him, at his stringy figure, his pale face, his keen, yet gentle eyes. Somehow as she looked there seemed to form itself beside him some shadow of Hector Spurling, the manly features, the clear, firm mouth, the frank manner. Now, in the very moment of her triumph, it sprang clearly up in her mind how at the hour of their ruin he had stood firmly by them, and had loved the penniless girl as tenderly as the heiress to fortune. That last embrace at the door, too, came back to her, and she felt his lips warm upon her own.

“I am very much honoured, Mr. Haw,” she stammered, “but this is so sudden. I have not had time to think. I do not know what to say.”

“Do not let me hurry you,” he cried earnestly. “I beg that you will think well over it. I shall come again for my answer. When shall I come? Tonight?”

“Yes, come tonight.”

“Then, adieu. Believe me that I think more highly of you for your hesitation. I shall live in hope.” He raised her hand to his lips, and left her to her own thoughts.

But what those thoughts were did not long remain in doubt. Dimmer and dimmer grew the vision of the distant sailor face, clearer and clearer the image of the vast palace, of the queenly power, of the diamonds, the gold, the ambitious future. It all lay at her feet, waiting to be picked up. How could she have hesitated, even for a moment? She rose, and, walking over to her desk, she took out a sheet of paper and an envelope. The latter she addressed to Lieutenant Spurling, H.M.S. *Active*, Gibraltar. The note cost some little trouble, but at last she got it worded to her mind.

> “Dear Hector,” she said—”I am convinced that your father has never entirely approved of our engagement, otherwise he would not have thrown obstacles in the way of our marriage. I am sure, too, that since my poor father’s misfortune it is only your own sense of honour and feeling of duty which have kept you true to me, and that you would have done infinitely better had you never seen me. I cannot bear, Hector, to allow you to imperil your future for my sake, and I have determined, after thinking well over the matter, to release you from our boy and girl engagement, so that you may be entirely free in every way. It is possible that you may think it unkind of me to do this now, but I am quite sure, dear Hector, that when you are an admiral and a very distinguished man, you will look back at this, and you will see that I have been a true friend to you, and have prevented you from making a false step early in your career. For myself, whether I marry or not, I have determined to devote the remainder of my life to trying to do good, and to leaving the world happier than I found it. Your father is very well, and gave us a capital sermon last Sunday. I enclose the bank-note which you asked me to keep for you. Good-bye, for ever, dear Hector, and believe me when I say that, come what may, I am ever your true friend,
>
> “Laura S. McIntyre.”

She had hardly sealed her letter before her father and Robert returned. She closed the door behind them, and made them a little curtsey.

"I await my family's congratulations," she said, with her head in the air. "Mr. Raffles Haw has been here, and he has asked me to be his wife."

"The deuce he did!" cried the old man. "And you said — ?"

"I am to see him again."

"And you will say — ?"

"I will accept him."

"You were always a good girl, Laura," said old McIntyre, standing on his tiptoes to kiss her.

"But Laura, Laura, how about Hector?" asked Robert in mild remonstrance.

"Oh, I have written to him," his sister answered carelessly. "I wish you would be good enough to post the letter."

CHAPTER X. THE GREAT SECRET.

And so Laura McIntyre became duly engaged to Raffles Haw, and old McIntyre grew even more hungry-looking as he felt himself a step nearer to the source of wealth, while Robert thought less of work than ever, and never gave as much as a thought to the great canvas which still stood, dust-covered, upon his easel. Haw gave Laura an engagement ring of old gold, with a great blazing diamond bulging out of it. There was little talk about the matter, however, for it was Haw's wish that all should be done very quietly. Nearly all his evenings were spent at Elmdene, where he and Laura would build up the most colossal schemes of philanthropy for the future. With a map stretched out on the table in front of them, these two young people would, as it were, hover over the world, planning, devising, and improving.

"Bless the girl!" said old McIntyre to his son; "she speaks about it as if she were born to millions. Maybe, when once she is married, she won't be so ready to chuck her money into every mad scheme that her husband can think of."

"Laura is greatly changed," Robert answered; "she has grown much more serious in her ideas."

"You wait a bit!" sniggered his father. "She is a good girl, is Laura, and she knows what she is about. She's not a girl to let her old dad go to the wall if she can set him right. It's a pretty state of things," he added bitterly: "here's my daughter going to marry a man who thinks no more of gold than I used to of gun-metal; and here's my son going about with all the money he cares to ask for to help every ne'er-do-well in Staffordshire; and here's their father, who loved them and cared for them, and brought them both up, without money enough very often to buy a bottle of brandy. I don't know what your poor dear mother would have thought of it."

"You have only to ask for what you want."

"Yes, as if I were a five-year-old child. But I tell you, Robert, I'll have my rights, and if I can't get them one way I will another. I won't be treated as if I were no one. And there's one thing: if I am to be this man's pa-in-law, I'll want to know something about him and his money first. We may be poor, but we are honest. I’ll up to the Hall now, and have it out with him.” He seized his hat and stick and made for the door.

“No, no, father,” cried Robert, catching him by the sleeve. “You had better leave the matter alone. Mr. Haw is a very sensitive man. He would not like to be examined upon such a point. It might lead to a serious quarrel. I beg that you will not go.”

“I am not to be put off for ever,” snarled the old man, who had been drinking heavily. “I’ll put my foot down now, once and for ever.” He tugged at his sleeve to free himself from his son’s grasp.

“At least you shall not go without Laura knowing. I will call her down, and we shall have her opinion.”

“Oh, I don’t want to have any scenes,” said McIntyre sulkily, relaxing his efforts. He lived in dread of his daughter, and at his worst moments the mention of her name would serve to restrain him.

“Besides,” said Robert, “I have not the slightest doubt that Raffles Haw will see the necessity for giving us some sort of explanation before matters go further. He must understand that we have some claim now to be taken into his confidence.”

He had hardly spoken when there was a tap at the door, and the man of whom they were speaking walked in.

“Good-morning, Mr. McIntyre,” said he. “Robert, would you mind stepping up to the Hall with me? I want to have a little business chat.” He looked serious, like a man who is carrying out something which he has well weighed.

They walked up together with hardly a word on either side. Raffles Haw was absorbed in his own thoughts. Robert felt expectant and nervous, for he knew that something of importance lay before him. The winter had almost passed now, and the first young shoots were beginning to peep out timidly in the face of the wind and the rain of an English March. The snows were gone, but the countryside looked bleaker and drearier, all shrouded in the haze from the damp, sodden meadows.

“By the way, Robert,” said Raffles Haw suddenly, as they walked up the Avenue. “Has your great Roman picture gone to London?”

“I have not finished it yet.”

“But I know that you are a quick worker. You must be nearly at the end of it.”

“No, I am afraid that it has not advanced much since you saw it. For one thing, the light has not been very good.”

Raffles Haw said nothing, but a pained expression flashed over his face. When they reached the house he led the way through the museum. Two great metal cases were lying on the floor.

“I have a small addition there to the gem collection,” he remarked as he passed. “They only arrived last night, and I have not opened them yet, but I am given to understand from the letters and invoices that there are some fine specimens. We might arrange them this afternoon, if you care to assist me. Let us go into the smoking-room now.”

He threw himself down into a settee, and motioned Robert into the armchair in front of him.

“Light a cigar,” he said. “Press the spring if there is any refreshment which you would like. Now, my dear Robert, confess to me in the first place that you have often thought me mad.”

The charge was so direct and so true that the young artist hesitated, hardly knowing how to answer.

“My dear boy, I do not blame you. It was the most natural thing in the world. I should have looked upon anyone as a madman who had talked to me as I have talked to you. But for all that, Robert, you were wrong, and I have never yet in our conversations proposed any scheme which it was not well within my power to carry out. I tell you in all sober earnest that the amount of my income is limited only by my desire, and that all the bankers and financiers combined could not furnish the sums which I can put forward without an effort.”

“I have had ample proof of your immense wealth,” said Robert.

“And you are very naturally curious as to how that wealth was obtained. Well, I can tell you one thing. The money is perfectly clean. I have robbed no one, cheated no one, sweated no one, ground no one down in the gaining of it. I can read your father’s eye, Robert. I can see that he has done me an injustice in this matter. Well, perhaps he is not to be blamed. Perhaps I also might think uncharitable things if I were In his place. But that is why I now give an explanation to you, Robert, and not to him. You, at least, have trusted me, and you have a right, before I become one of your family, to know all that I can tell you. Laura also has trusted me, but I know well that she is content still to trust me.”

"I would not intrude upon your secrets, Mr. Haw," said Robert, "but of course I cannot deny that I should be very proud and pleased if you cared to confide them to me."

"And I will. Not all. I do not think that I shall ever, while I live, tell all. But I shall leave directions behind me so that when I die you may be able to carry on my unfinished work. I shall tell you where those directions are to be found. In the meantime, you must be content to learn the effects which I produce without knowing every detail as to the means."

Robert settled himself down in his chair and concentrated his attention upon his companion's words, while Haw bent forward his eager, earnest face, like a man who knows the value of the words which he is saying.

"You are already aware," he remarked, "that I have devoted a great deal of energy and of time to the study of chemistry."

"So you told me."

"I commenced my studies under a famous English chemist, I continued them under the best man in France, and I completed them in the most celebrated laboratory of Germany. I was not rich, but my father had left me enough to keep me comfortably, and by living economically I had a sum at my command which enabled me to carry out my studies in a very complete way. When I returned to England I built myself a laboratory in a quiet country place where I could work without distraction or interruption. There I began a series of investigations which soon took me into regions of science to which none of the three famous men who taught me had ever penetrated.

"You say, Robert, that you have some slight knowledge of chemistry, and you will find it easier to follow what I say. Chemistry is to a large extent an empirical science, and the chance experiment may lead to greater results than could, with our present data, be derived from the closest study or the keenest reasoning. The most important chemical discoveries from the first manufacture of glass to the whitening and refining of sugar have all been due to some happy chance which might have befallen a mere dabbler as easily as a deep student.

"Well, it was to such a chance that my own great discovery — perhaps the greatest that the world has seen — was due, though I may claim the credit of having originated the line of thought which led up to it. I had frequently speculated as to the effect which powerful currents of electricity exercise upon any substance through which they are poured for a considerable time. I did not here mean such feeble currents as are passed along a telegraph wire, but I mean the very highest possible developments. Well, I tried a series of experiments upon this point. I found that in liquids, and in compounds, the force had a disintegrating effect. The well-known experiment of the electrolysis of water will, of course, occur to you. But I found that in the case of elemental solids the effect was a remarkable one. The element slowly decreased in weight, without perceptibly altering in composition. I hope that I make myself clear to you?”

“I follow you entirely,” said Robert, deeply interested in his companion’s narrative.

“I tried upon several elements, and always with the same result. In every case an hour’s current would produce a perceptible loss of weight. My theory at that stage was that there was a loosening of the molecules caused by the electric fluid, and that a certain number of these molecules were shed off like an impalpable dust, all round the lump of earth or of metal, which remained, of course, the lighter by their loss. I had entirely accepted this theory, when a very remarkable chance led me to completely alter my opinions.

“I had one Saturday night fastened a bar of bismuth in a clamp, and had attached it on either side to an electric wire, in order to observe what effect the current would have upon it. I had been testing each metal in turn, exposing them to the influence for from one to two hours. I had just got everything in position, and had completed my connection, when I received a telegram to say that John Stillingfleet, an old chemist in London with whom I had been on terms of intimacy, was dangerously ill, and had expressed a wish to see me. The last train was due to leave in twenty minutes, and I lived a good mile from the station, I thrust a few things into a bag, locked my laboratory, and ran as hard as I could to catch it.

“It was not until I was in London that it suddenly occurred to me that I had neglected to shut off the current, and that it would continue to pass through the bar of bismuth until the batteries were exhausted. The fact, however, seemed to be of small importance, and I dismissed it from my mind. I was detained in London until the Tuesday night, and it was Wednesday morning before I got back to my work. As I unlocked the laboratory door my mind reverted to the uncompleted experiment, and it struck me that in all probability my piece of bismuth would have been entirely disintegrated and reduced to its primitive molecules. I was utterly unprepared for the truth.

“When I approached the table I found, sure enough, that the bar of metal had vanished, and that the clamp was empty. Having noted the fact, I was about to turn away to something else, when my attention was attracted to the fact that the table upon which the clamp stood was starred over with little patches of some liquid silvery matter, which lay in single drops or coalesced into little pools. I had a very distinct recollection of having thoroughly cleared the table before beginning my experiment, so that this substance had been deposited there since I had left for London. Much interested, I very carefully collected it all into one vessel, and examined it minutely. There could be no question as to what it was. It was the purest mercury, and gave no response to any test for bismuth.

“I at once grasped the fact that chance had placed in my hands a chemical discovery of the very first importance. If bismuth were, under certain conditions, to be subjected to the action of electricity, it would begin by losing weight, and would finally be transformed into mercury. I had broken down the partition which separated two elements.

“But the process would be a constant one. It would presumably prove to be a general law, and not an isolated fact. If bismuth turned into mercury, what would mercury turn into? There would be no rest for me until I had solved the question. I renewed the exhausted batteries and passed the current through the bowl of quicksilver. For sixteen hours I sat watching the metal, marking how it slowly seemed to curdle, to grow firmer, to lose its silvery glitter and to take a dull yellow hue. When I at last picked it up in a forceps, and threw it upon the table, it had lost every characteristic of mercury, and had obviously become another metal. A few simple tests were enough to show me that this other metal was platinum.

“Now, to a chemist, there was something very suggestive in the order in which these changes had been effected. Perhaps you can see the relation, Robert, which they bear to each other?”

“No, I cannot say that I do.”

Robert had sat listening to this strange statement with parted lips and staring eyes.

“I will show you. Speaking atomically, bismuth is the heaviest of the metals. Its atomic weight is 210. The next in weight is lead, 207, and then comes mercury at 200. Possibly the long period during which the current had acted in my absence had reduced the bismuth to lead and the lead in turn to mercury. Now platinum stands at 197.5, and it was accordingly the next metal to be produced by the continued current. Do you see now?”

“It is quite clear.”

“And then there came the inference, which sent my heart into my mouth and caused my head to swim round. Gold is the next in the series. Its atomic weight is 197. I remembered now, and for the first time understood why it was always lead and mercury winch were mentioned by the old alchemists as being the two metals which might be used in their calling. With fingers which trembled with excitement I adjusted the wires again, and in little more than an hour — for the length of the process was always in proportion to the difference in the metals — I had before me a knob of ruddy crinkled metal, which answered to every reaction for gold.

“Well, Robert, this is a long story, but I think that you will agree with me that its importance justifies me in going into detail. When I had satisfied myself that I had really manufactured gold I cut the nugget in two. One half I sent to a jeweller and worker in precious metals, with whom I had some slight acquaintance, asking him to report upon the quality of the metal. With the other half I continued my series of experiments, and reduced it in successive stages through all the long series of metals, through silver and zinc and manganese, until I brought it to lithium, which is the lightest of all.”

“And what did it turn to then?” asked Robert.

“Then came what to chemists is likely to be the most interesting portion of my discovery. It turned to a greyish fine powder, which powder gave no further results, however much I might treat it with electricity. And that powder is the base of all things; it is the mother of all the elements; it is, in short, the substance whose existence has been recently surmised by a leading chemist, and which has been christened protyle by him. I am the discoverer of the great law of the electrical transposition of the metals, and I am the first to demonstrate protyle, so that, I think, Robert, if all my schemes in other directions come to nothing, my name is at least likely to live in the chemical world.

“There is not very much more for me to tell you. I had my nugget back from my friend the jeweller, confirming my opinion as to its nature and its quality. I soon found several methods by which the process might be simplified, and especially a modification of the ordinary electric current, which was very much more effective. Having made a certain amount of gold, I disposed of it for a sum which enabled me to buy improved materials and stronger batteries. In this way I enlarged my operations until at last I was in a position to build this house and to have a laboratory where I could carry out my work on a much larger scale. As I said before, I can now state with all truth that the amount of my income is only limited by my desires."

"It is wonderful!" gasped Robert. "It is like a fairy tale. But with this great discovery in your mind you must have been sorely tempted to confide it to others."

"I thought well over it. I gave it every consideration. It was obvious to me that if my invention were made public, its immediate result would be to deprive the present precious metals of all their special value. Some other substance — amber, we will say, or ivory — would be chosen as a medium for barter, and gold would be inferior to brass, as being heavier and yet not so hard. No one would be the better for such a consummation as that. Now, if I retained my secret, and used it with wisdom, I might make myself the greatest benefactor to mankind that has ever lived. Those were the chief reasons, and I trust that they are not dishonourable ones, which led me to form the resolution, which I have today for the first time broken."

"But your secret is safe with me," cried Robert. "My lips shall be sealed until I have your permission to speak."

"If I had not known that I could trust you I should have withheld it from your knowledge. And now, my dear Robert, theory is very weak work, and practice is infinitely more interesting. I have given you more than enough of the first. If you will be good enough to accompany me to the laboratory I shall give you a little of the latter."

CHAPTER XI. A CHEMICAL DEMONSTRATION.

Raffles Haw led the way through the front door, and crossing over the gravelled drive pushed open the outer door of the laboratory — the same through which the McIntyres had seen the packages conveyed from the waggon. On passing through it Robert found that they were not really within the building, but merely in a large bare ante-chamber, around the walls of which were stacked the very objects which had aroused his curiosity and his father's speculations. All mystery had gone from them now, however, for while some were still wrapped in their sackcloth coverings, others had been undone, and revealed themselves as great pigs of lead.

"There is my raw material," said Raffles Haw carelessly, nodding at the heap. "Every Saturday I have a waggon-load sent up, which serves me for a week, but we shall need to work double tides when Laura and I are married, and we get our great schemes under way. I have to be very careful about the quality of the lead, for, of course, every impurity is reproduced in the gold."

A heavy iron door led into the inner chamber. Haw unlocked it, but only to disclose a second one about five feet further on.

"This flooring is all disconnected at night," he remarked. "I have no doubt that there is a good deal of gossip in the servants'-hall about this sealed chamber, so I have to guard myself against some inquisitive ostler or too adventurous butler."

The inner door admitted them into the laboratory, a high, bare, whitewashed room with a glass roof. At one end was the furnace and boiler, the iron mouth of which was closed, though the fierce red light beat through the cracks, and a dull roar sounded through the building. On either side innumerable huge Leyden jars stood ranged in rows, tier topping tier, while above them were columns of Voltaic cells. Robert's eyes, as he glanced around, lit on vast wheels, complicated networks of wire, stands, test-tubes, coloured bottles, graduated glasses, Bunsen burners, porcelain insulators, and all the varied *debris* of a chemical and electrical workshop.

“Come across here,” said Raffles Haw, picking his way among the heaps of metal, the coke, the packing-cases, and the carboys of acid. “Yours is the first foot except my own which has ever penetrated to this room since the workmen left it. My servants carry the lead into the ante-room, but come no further. The furnace can be cleaned and stoked from without. I employ a fellow to do nothing else. Now take a look in here.”

He threw open a door on the further side, and motioned to the young artist to enter. The latter stood silent with one foot over the threshold, staring in amazement around him. The room, which may have been some thirty feet square, was paved and walled with gold. Great brick-shaped ingots, closely packed, covered the whole floor, while on every side they were reared up in compact barriers to the very ceiling. The single electric lamp which lighted the windowless chamber struck a dull, murky, yellow light from the vast piles of precious metal, and gleamed ruddily upon the golden floor.

“This is my treasure house,” remarked the owner. “You see that I have rather an accumulation just now. My imports have been exceeding my exports. You can understand that I have other and more important duties even than the making of gold, just now. This is where I store my output until I am ready to send it off. Every night almost I am in the habit of sending a case of it to London. I employ seventeen brokers in its sale. Each thinks that he is the only one, and each is dying to know where I can get such large quantities of virgin gold. They say that it is the purest which comes into the market. The popular theory is, I believe, that I am a middleman acting on behalf of some new South African mine, which wishes to keep its whereabouts a secret. What value would you put upon the gold in this chamber? It ought to be worth something, for it represents nearly a week’s work.”

“Something fabulous, I have no doubt,” said Robert, glancing round at the yellow barriers. “Shall I say a hundred and fifty thousand pounds?”

“Oh dear me, it is surely worth very much more than that,” cried Raffles Haw, laughing. “Let me see. Suppose that we put it at three ten an ounce, which is nearly ten shillings under the mark. That makes, roughly, fifty-six pounds for a pound in weight. Now each of these ingots weighs thirty-six pounds, which brings their value to two thousand and a few odd pounds. There are five hundred ingots on each of these three sides of the room, but on the fourth there are only three hundred, on account of the door, but there cannot be less than two hundred on the floor, which gives us a rough total of two thousand ingots. So you see, my dear boy, that any broker who could get the contents of this chamber for four million pounds would be doing a nice little stroke of business."

"And a week's work!" gasped Robert. "It makes my head swim."

"You will follow me now when I repeat that none of the great schemes which I intend to simultaneously set in motion are at all likely to languish for want of funds. Now come into the laboratory with me and see how it is done."

In the centre of the workroom was an instrument like a huge vice, with two large brass-coloured plates, and a great steel screw for bringing them together. Numerous wires ran into these metal plates, and were attached at the other end to the rows of dynamic machines. Beneath was a glass stand, which was hollowed out in the centre into a succession of troughs.

"You will soon understand all about it," said Raffles Haw, throwing off his coat, and pulling on a smoke-stained and dirty linen jacket. "We must first stoke up a little." He put his weight on a pair of great bellows, and an answering roar came from the furnace. "That will do. The more heat the more electric force, and the quicker our task. Now for the lead! Just give me a hand in carrying it."

They lifted a dozen of the pigs of lead from the floor on to the glass stand, and having adjusted the plates on either side, Haw screwed up the handle so as to hold them in position.

"It used in the early days to be a slow process," he remarked; "but now that I have immense facilities for my work it takes a very short time. I have now only to complete the connection in order to begin."

He took hold of a long glass lever which projected from among the wires, and drew it downwards. A sharp click was heard, followed by a loud, sparkling, crackling noise. Great spurts of flame sprang from the two electrodes, and the mass of lead was surrounded by an aureole of golden sparks, which hissed and snapped like pistol-shots. The air was filled with the peculiar acid smell of ozone.

"The power there is immense," said Raffles Haw, superintending the process, with his watch upon the palm of his hand. "It would reduce an organic substance to protyle instantly. It is well to understand the mechanism thoroughly, for any mistake might be a grave matter for the operator. You are dealing with gigantic forces. But you perceive that the lead is already beginning to turn."

Silvery dew-like drops had indeed begun to form upon the dull-coloured mass, and to drop with a tinkle and splash into the glass troughs. Slowly the lead melted away, like an icicle in the sun, the electrodes ever closing upon it as it contracted, until they came together in the centre, and a row of pools of quicksilver had taken the place of the solid metal. Two smaller electrodes were plunged into the mercury, which gradually curdled and solidified, until it had resumed the solid form, with a yellowish brassy shimmer.

"What lies in the moulds now is platinum," remarked Raffles Haw. "We must take it from the troughs and refix it in the large electrodes. So! Now we turn on the current again. You see that it gradually takes a darker and richer tint. Now I think that it is perfect." He drew up the lever, removed the electrodes, and there lay a dozen bricks of ruddy sparkling gold.

"You see, according to our calculations, our morning's work has been worth twenty-four thousand pounds, and it has not taken us more than twenty minutes," remarked the alchemist, as he picked up the newly-made ingots, and threw them down among the others.

"We will devote one of them to experiment," said he, leaving the last standing upon the glass insulator. "To the world it would seem an expensive demonstration which cost two thousand pounds, but our standard, you see, is a different one. Now you will see me run through the whole gamut of metallic nature."

First of all men after the discoverer, Robert saw the gold mass, when the electrodes were again applied to it, change swiftly and successively to barium, to tin, to silver, to copper, to iron. He saw the long white electric sparks change to crimson with the strontium, to purple with the potassium, to yellow with the manganese. Then, finally, after a hundred transformations, it disintegrated before his eyes, and lay as a little mound of fluffy grey dust upon the glass table.

"And this is protyle," said Haw, passing his fingers through it. "The chemist of the future may resolve it into further constituents, but to me it is the Ultima Thule."

"And now, Robert," he continued, after a pause, "I have shown you enough to enable you to understand something of my system. This is the great secret. It is the secret which endows the man who knows it with such a universal power as no man has ever enjoyed since the world was made.

This secret it is the dearest wish of my heart to use for good, and I swear to you, Robert McIntyre, that if I thought it would tend to anything but good I would have done with it for ever. No, I would neither use it myself nor would any other man learn it from my lips. I swear it by all that is holy and solemn!"

His eyes flashed as he spoke, and his voice quivered with emotion. Standing, pale and lanky, amid his electrodes and his retorts, there was still something majestic about this man, who, amid all his stupendous good fortune, could still keep his moral sense undazzled by the glitter of his gold. Robert's weak nature had never before realised the strength which lay in those thin, firm lips and earnest eyes.

"Surely in your hands, Mr. Haw, nothing but good can come of it," he said.

"I hope not — I pray not — most earnestly do I pray not. I have done for you, Robert, what I might not have done for my own brother had I one, and I have done it because I believe and hope that you are a man who would not use this power, should you inherit it, for selfish ends. But even now I have not told you all. There is one link which I have withheld from you, and which shall be withheld from you while I live. But look at this chest, Robert."

He led him to a great iron-clamped chest which stood in the corner, and, throwing it open, he took from it a small case of carved ivory.

"Inside this," he said, "I have left a paper which makes clear anything which is still hidden from you. Should anything happen to me you will always be able to inherit my powers, and to continue my plans by following the directions which are there expressed. And now," he continued, throwing his casket back again into the box, "I shall frequently require your help, but I do not think it will be necessary this morning. I have already taken up too much of your time. If you are going back to Elmdene I wish that you would tell Laura that I shall be with her in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XII. A FAMILY JAR.

And so the great secret was out, and Robert walked home with his head in a whirl, and the blood tingling in his veins. He had shivered as he came up at the damp cold of the wind and the sight of the mist-mottled landscape. That was all gone now. His own thoughts tinged everything with sunshine, and he felt inclined to sing and dance as he walked down the muddy, deeply-rutted country lane. Wonderful had been the fate allotted to Raffles Haw, but surely hardly less important that which had come upon himself. He was the sharer of the alchemist’s secret, and the heir to an inheritance which combined a wealth greater than that of monarchs, to a freedom such as monarchs cannot enjoy. This was a destiny indeed! A thousand gold-tinted visions of his future life rose up before him, and in fancy he already sat high above the human race, with prostrate thousands imploring his aid, or thanking him for his benevolence.

How sordid seemed the untidy garden, with its scrappy bushes and gaunt elm trees! How mean the plain brick front, with the green wooden porch! It had always offended his artistic sense, but now it was obtrusive in its ugliness. The plain room, too, with the American leather chairs, the dull-coloured carpet, and the patchwork rug, he felt a loathing for it all. The only pretty thing in it, upon which his eyes could rest with satisfaction, was his sister, as she leaned back in her chair by the fire with her white, clear beautiful face outlined against the dark background.

“Do you know, Robert,” she said, glancing up at him from under her long black lashes, “Papa grows unendurable. I have had to speak very plainly to him, and to make him understand that I am marrying for my own benefit and not for his.”

“Where is he, then?”

“I don’t know. At the Three Pigeons, no doubt. He spends most of his time there now. He flew off in a passion, and talked such nonsense about marriage settlements, and forbidding the banns, and so on. His notion of a marriage settlement appears to be a settlement upon the bride’s father. He should wait quietly, and see what can be done for him.”

“I think, Laura, that we must make a good deal of allowance for him,” said Robert earnestly. “I have noticed a great change in him lately. I don’t think he is himself at all. I must get some medical advice. But I have been up at the Hall this morning."

"Have you? Have you seen Raffles? Did he send anything for me?"

"He said that he would come down when he had finished his work."

"But what is the matter, Robert?" cried Laura, with the swift perception of womanhood. "You are flushed, and your eyes are shining, and really you look quite handsome. Raffles has been telling you something! What was it? Oh, I know! He has been telling you how he made his money. Hasn't he, now?"

"Well, yes. He took me partly into his confidence. I congratulate you, Laura, with all my heart, for you will be a very wealthy woman."

"How strange it seems that he should have come to us in our poverty. It is all owing to you, you dear old Robert; for if he had not taken a fancy to you, he would never have come down to Elmdene and taken a fancy to some one else."

"Not at all," Robert answered, sitting down by his sister, and patting her hand affectionately. "It was a clear case of love at first sight. He was in love with you before he ever knew your name. He asked me about you the very first time I saw him."

"But tell me about his money, Bob," said his sister. "He has not told me yet, and I am so curious. How did he make it? It was not from his father; he told me that himself. His father was just a country doctor. How did he do it?"

"I am bound over to secrecy. He will tell you himself."

"Oh, but only tell me if I guess right. He had it left him by an uncle, eh? Well, by a friend? Or he took out some wonderful patent? Or he discovered a mine? Or oil? Do tell me, Robert!"

"I mustn't, really," cried her brother laughing. "And I must not talk to you any more. You are much too sharp. I feel a responsibility about it; and, besides, I must really do some work."

"It Is very unkind of you," said Laura, pouting. "But I must put my things on, for I go into Birmingham by the 1.20."

"To Birmingham?"

"Yes, I have a hundred things to order. There is everything to be got. You men forget about these details. Raffles wishes to have the wedding in little more than a fortnight. Of course it will be very quiet, but still one needs something."

"So early as that!" said Robert, thoughtfully. "Well, perhaps it is better so."

"Much better, Robert. Would it not be dreadful if Hector came back first and there was a scene? If I were once married I should not mind. Why should I? But of course Raffles knows nothing about him, and it would be terrible if they came together."

"That must be avoided at any cost."

"Oh, I cannot bear even to think of it. Poor Hector! And yet what could I do, Robert? You know that it was only a boy and girl affair. And how could I refuse such an offer as this? It was a duty to my family, was it not?"

"You were placed in a difficult position — very difficult," her brother answered. "But all will be right, and I have no doubt Hector will see it as you do. But does Mr. Spurling know of your engagement?"

"Not a word. He was here yesterday, and talked of Hector, but indeed I did not know how to tell him. We are to be married by special licence in Birmingham, so really there is no reason why he should know. But now I must hurry or I shall miss my train."

When his sister was gone Robert went up to his studio, and having ground some colours upon his palette he stood for some time, brush and mahlstick in hand, in front of his big bare canvas. But how profitless all his work seemed to him now! What object had he in doing it? Was it to earn money? Money could be had for the asking, or, for that matter, without the asking. Or was it to produce a thing of beauty? But he had artistic faults. Raffles Haw had said so, and he knew that he was right. After all his pains the thing might not please; and with money he could at all times buy pictures which would please, and which would be things of beauty. What, then, was the object of his working? He could see none. He threw down his brush, and, lighting his pipe, he strolled downstairs once more.

His father was standing in front of the fire, and in no very good humour, as his red face and puckered eyes sufficed to show.

"Well, Robert," he began, "I suppose that, as usual, you have spent your morning plotting against your father?"

"What do you mean, father?"

"I mean what I say. What is it but plotting when three folk — you and she and this Raffles Haw — whisper and arrange and have meetings without a word to me about it? What do I know of your plans?"

"I cannot tell you secrets which are not my own, father."

"But I'll have a voice in the matter, for all that. Secrets or no secrets, you will find that Laura has a father, and that he is not a man to be set aside. I may have had my ups and downs in trade, but I have not quite fallen so low that I am nothing in my own family. What am I to get out of this precious marriage?"

"What should you get? Surely Laura's happiness and welfare are enough for you?"

"If this man were really fond of Laura he would show proper consideration for Laura's father. It was only yesterday that I asked him for a loan-condescended actually to ask for it — I, who have been within an ace of being Mayor of Birmingham! And he refused me point blank."

"Oh, father! How could you expose yourself to such humiliation?"

"Refused me point blank!" cried the old man excitedly. "It was against his principles, if you please. But I'll be even with him — you see if I am not. I know one or two things about him. What is it they call him at the Three Pigeons? A 'smasher' — that's the word-a coiner of false money. Why else should he have this metal sent him, and that great smoky chimney of his going all day?"

"Why can you not leave him alone, father?" expostulated Robert. "You seem to think of nothing but his money. If he had not a penny he would still be a very kind-hearted, pleasant gentleman."

Old McIntyre burst into a hoarse laugh.

"I like to hear you preach," said he. "Without a penny, indeed! Do you think that you would dance attendance upon him if he were a poor man? Do you think that Laura would ever have looked twice at him? You know as well as I do that she is marrying him only for his money."

Robert gave a cry of dismay. There was the alchemist standing in the doorway, pale and silent, looking from one to the other of them with his searching eyes.

"I must apologise," he said coldly. "I did not mean to listen to your words. I could not help it. But I have heard them. As to you, Mr. McIntyre, I believe that you speak from your own bad heart. I will not let myself be moved by your words. In Robert I have a true friend. Laura also loves me for my own sake. You cannot shake my faith in them. But with you, Mr. McIntyre, I have nothing in common; and it is as well, perhaps, that we should both recognise the fact."

He bowed, and was gone ere either of the McIntyres could say a word.

“You see!” said Robert at last. “You have done now what you cannot undo!”

“I will be even with him!” cried the old man furiously, shaking his fist through the window at the dark slow-pacing figure. “You just wait, Robert, and see if your old dad is a man to be played with.”

CHAPTER XIII. A MIDNIGHT VENTURE.

Not a word was said to Laura when she returned as to the scene which had occurred in her absence. She was in the gayest of spirits, and prattled merrily about her purchases and her arrangements, wondering from time to time when Raffles Haw would come. As night fell, however, without any word from him, she became uneasy.

"What can be the matter that he does not come?" she said. "It is the first day since our engagement that I have not seen him."

Robert looked out through the window.

"It is a gusty night, and raining hard," he remarked. "I do not at all expect him."

"Poor Hector used to come, rain, snow, or fine. But, then, of course, he was a sailor. It was nothing to him. I hope that Raffles is not ill."

"He was quite well when I saw him this morning," answered her brother, and they relapsed into silence, while the rain pattered against the windows, and the wind screamed amid the branches of the elms outside.

Old McIntyre had sat in the corner most of the day biting his nails and glowering into the fire, with a brooding, malignant expression upon his wrinkled features. Contrary to his usual habits, he did not go to the village inn, but shuffled off early to bed without a word to his children. Laura and Robert remained chatting for some time by the fire, she talking of the thousand and one wonderful things which were to be done when she was mistress of the New Hall. There was less philanthropy in her talk when her future husband was absent, and Robert could not but remark that her carriages, her dresses, her receptions, and her travels in distant countries were the topics into which she threw all the enthusiasm which he had formerly heard her bestow upon refuge homes and labour organisations.

"I think that greys are the nicest horses," she said. "Bays are nice too, but greys are more showy. We could manage with a brougham and a landau, and perhaps a high dog-cart for Raffles. He has the coach-house full at present, but he never uses them, and I am sure that those fifty horses would all die for want of exercise, or get livers like Strasburg geese, if they waited for him to ride or drive them."

"I suppose that you will still live here?" said her brother.

“We must have a house in London as well, and run up for the season. I don’t, of course, like to make suggestions now, but it will be different afterwards. I am sure that Raffles will do it if I ask him. It is all very well for him to say that he does not want any thanks or honours, but I should like to know what is the use of being a public benefactor if you are to have no return for it. I am sure that if he does only half what he talks of doing, they will make him a peer — Lord Tamfield, perhaps — and then, of course, I shall be my Lady Tamfield, and what would you think of that, Bob?” She dropped him a stately curtsey, and tossed her head in the air, as one who was born to wear a coronet.

“Father must be pensioned off,” she remarked presently. “He shall have so much a year on condition that he keeps away. As to you, Bob, I don’t know what we shall do for you. We shall make you President of the Royal Academy if money can do it.”

It was late before they ceased building their air-castles and retired to their rooms. But Robert’s brain was excited, and he could not sleep. The events of the day had been enough to shake a stronger man. There had been the revelation of the morning, the strange sights which he had witnessed in the laboratory, and the immense secret which had been confided to his keeping. Then there had been his conversation with his father in the afternoon, their disagreement, and the sudden intrusion of Raffles Haw. Finally the talk with his sister had excited his imagination, and driven sleep from his eyelids. In vain he turned and twisted in his bed, or paced the floor of his chamber. He was not only awake, but abnormally awake, with every nerve highly strung, and every sense at the keenest. What was he to do to gain a little sleep? It flashed across him that there was brandy in the decanter downstairs, and that a glass might act as a sedative.

He had opened the door of his room, when suddenly his ear caught the sound of slow and stealthy footsteps upon the stairs. His own lamp was unlit, but a dim glimmer came from a moving taper, and a long black shadow travelled down the wall. He stood motionless, listening intently. The steps were in the hall now, and he heard a gentle creaking as the key was cautiously turned in the door. The next instant there came a gust of cold air, the taper was extinguished, and a sharp snap announced that the door had been closed from without.

Robert stood astonished. Who could this night wanderer be? It must be his father. But what errand could take him out at three in the morning? And such a morning, too! With every blast of the wind the rain beat up against his chamber-window as though it would drive it in. The glass rattled in the frames, and the tree outside creaked and groaned as its great branches were tossed about by the gale. What could draw any man forth upon such a night?

Hurriedly Robert struck a match and lit his lamp. His father's room was opposite his own, and the door was ajar. He pushed it open and looked about him. It was empty. The bed had not even been lain upon. The single chair stood by the window, and there the old man must have sat since he left them. There was no book, no paper, no means by which he could have amused himself, nothing but a razor-strop lying on the window-sill.

A feeling of impending misfortune struck cold to Robert's heart. There was some ill-meaning in this journey of his father's. He thought of his brooding of yesterday, his scowling face, his bitter threats. Yes, there was some mischief underlying it. But perhaps he might even now be in time to prevent it. There was no use calling Laura. She could be no help in the matter. He hurriedly threw on his clothes, muffled himself in his top-coat, and, seizing his hat and stick, he set off after his father.

As he came out into the village street the wind whirled down it, so that he had to put his ear and shoulder against it, and push his way forward. It was better, however, when he turned into the lane. The high bank and the hedge sheltered him upon one side. The road, however, was deep in mud, and the rain fell in a steady swish. Not a soul was to be seen, but he needed to make no inquiries, for he knew whither his father had gone as certainly as though he had seen him.

The iron side gate of the avenue was half open, and Robert stumbled his way up the gravelled drive amid the dripping fir-trees. What could his father's intention be when he reached the Hall? Was it merely that he wished to spy and prowl, or did he intend to call up the master and enter into some discussion as to his wrongs? Or was it possible that some blacker and more sinister design lay beneath his strange doings? Robert thought suddenly of the razor-strop, and gasped with horror. What had the old man been doing with that? He quickened his pace to a run, and hurried on until he found himself at the door of the Hall.

Thank God! all was quiet there. He stood by the big silent door and listened intently. There was nothing to be heard save the wind and the rain. Where, then, could his father be? If he wished to enter the Hall he would not attempt to do so by one of the windows, for had he not been present when Raffles Haw had shown them the precautions which he had taken? But then a sudden thought struck Robert. There was one window which was left unguarded. Haw had been imprudent enough to tell them so. It was the middle window of the laboratory. If he remembered it so clearly, of course his father would remember it too. There was the point of danger.

The moment that he had come round the corner of the building he found that his surmise had been correct. An electric lamp burned in the laboratory, and the silver squares of the three large windows stood out clear and bright in the darkness. The centre one had been thrown open, and, even as he gazed, Robert saw a dark monkey-like figure spring up on to the sill, and vanish into the room beyond. For a moment only it outlined itself against the brilliant light beyond, but in that moment Robert had space to see that it was indeed his father. On tiptoe he crossed the intervening space, and peeped in through the open window. It was a singular spectacle which met his eyes.

There stood upon the glass table some half-dozen large ingots of gold, which had been made the night before, but which had not been removed to the treasure-house. On these the old man had thrown himself, as one who enters into his rightful inheritance. He lay across the table, his arms clasping the bars of gold, his cheek pressed against them, crooning and muttering to himself. Under the clear, still light, amid the giant wheels and strange engines, that one little dark figure clutching and clinging to the ingots had in it something both weird and piteous.

For five minutes or more Robert stood in the darkness amid the rain, looking in at this strange sight, while his father hardly moved save to cuddle closer to the gold, and to pat it with his thin hands. Robert was still uncertain what he should do, when his eyes wandered from the central figure and fell on something else which made him give a little cry of astonishment — a cry which was drowned amid the howling of the gale.

Raffles Haw was standing in the corner of the room. Where he had come from Robert could not say, but he was certain that he had not been there when he first looked in. He stood silent, wrapped in some long, dark dressing-gown, his arms folded, and a bitter smile upon his pale face. Old McIntyre seemed to see him at almost the same moment, for he snarled out an oath, and clutched still closer at his treasure, looking slantwise at the master of the house with furtive, treacherous eyes.

“And it has really come to this!” said Haw at last, taking a step forward. “You have actually fallen so low, Mr. McIntyre, as to steal into my house at night like a common burglar. You knew that this window was unguarded. I remember telling you as much. But I did not tell you what other means I had adopted by which I might be warned if knaves made an entrance. But that you should have come! You!”

The old gunmaker made no attempt to justify himself, but he muttered some few hoarse words, and continued to cling to the treasure.

“I love your daughter,” said Raffles Haw, “and for her sake I will not expose you. Your hideous and infamous secret shall be safe with me. No ear shall hear what has happened this night. I will not, as I might, arouse my servants and send for the police. But you must leave my house without further words. I have nothing more to say to you. Go as you have come.”

He took a step forward, and held out his hand as if to detach the old man’s grasp from the golden bars. The other thrust his hand into the breast of his coat, and with a shrill scream of rage flung himself upon the alchemist. So sudden and so fierce was the movement that Haw had no time for defence. A bony hand gripped him by the throat, and the blade of a razor flashed in the air. Fortunately, as it fell, the weapon struck against one of the many wires which spanned the room, and flying out of the old man’s grasp, tinkled upon the stone floor. But, though disarmed, he was still dangerous. With a horrible silent energy he pushed Haw back and back until, coming to a bench, they both fell over it, McIntyre remaining uppermost. His other hand was on the alchemist’s throat, and it might have fared ill with him had Robert not climbed through the window and dragged his father off from him. With the aid of Haw, he pinned the old man down, and passed a long cravat around his arms. It was terrible to look at him, for his face was convulsed, his eyes bulging from his head, and his lips white with foam.

Haw leaned against the glass table panting, with his hand to his side.

“You here, Robert?” he gasped. “Is it not horrible? How did you come?”

“I followed him. I heard him go out.”

“He would have robbed me. And he would have murdered me. But he is mad — stark, staring mad!”

There could be no doubt of it. Old McIntyre was sitting up now, and burst suddenly into a hoarse peal of laughter, rocking himself backwards and forwards, and looking up at them with little twinkling, cunning eyes. It was clear to both of them that his mind, weakened by long brooding over the one idea, had now at last become that of a monomaniac. His horrid causeless mirth was more terrible even than his fury.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Haw. "We cannot take him back to Elmdene. It would be a terrible shock to Laura."

"We could have doctors to certify in the morning. Could we not keep him here until then? If we take him back, some one will meet us, and there will be a scandal."

"I know. We will take him to one of the padded rooms, where he can neither hurt himself nor anyone else. I am somewhat shaken myself. But I am better now. Do you take one arm, and I will take the other."

Half-leading and half-dragging him they managed between them to convey the old gunmaker away from the scene of his disaster, and to lodge him for the night in a place of safety. At five in the morning Robert had started in the gig to make the medical arrangements, while Raffles Haw paced his palatial house with a troubled face and a sad heart.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SPREAD OF THE BLIGHT.

It may be that Laura did not look upon the removal of her father as an unmixed misfortune. Nothing was said to her as to the manner of the old man's seizure, but Robert informed her at breakfast that he had thought it best, acting under medical advice, to place him for a time under some restraint. She had herself frequently remarked upon the growing eccentricity of his manner, so that the announcement could have been no great surprise to her. It is certain that it did not diminish her appetite for the coffee and the scrambled eggs, nor prevent her from chatting a good deal about her approaching wedding.

But it was very different with Raffles Haw. The incident had shocked him to his inmost soul. He had often feared lest his money should do indirect evil, but here were crime and madness arising before his very eyes from its influence. In vain he tried to choke down his feelings, and to persuade himself that this attack of old McIntyre's was something which came of itself — something which had no connection with himself or his wealth. He remembered the man as he had first met him, garrulous, foolish, but with no obvious vices. He recalled the change which, week by week, had come over him — his greedy eye, his furtive manner, his hints and innuendoes, ending only the day before in a positive demand for money. It was too certain that there was a chain of events there leading direct to the horrible encounter in the laboratory. His money had cast a blight where he had hoped to shed a blessing.

Mr. Spurling, the vicar, was up shortly after breakfast, some rumour of evil having come to his ears. It was good for Haw to talk with him, for the fresh breezy manner of the old clergyman was a corrective to his own sombre and introspective mood.

"Prut, tut!" said he. "This is very bad — very bad indeed! Mind unhinged, you say, and not likely to get over it! Dear, dear! I have noticed a change in him these last few weeks. He looked like a man who had something upon his mind. And how is Mr. Robert McIntyre?"

"He is very well. He was with me this morning when his father had this attack."

"Ha! There is a change in that young man. I observe an alteration in him. You will forgive me, Mr. Raffles Haw, if I say a few serious words of advice to you. Apart from my spiritual functions I am old enough to be your father. You are a very wealthy man, and you have used your wealth nobly — yes, sir, nobly. I do not think that there is a man in a thousand who would have done as well. But don't you think sometimes that it has a dangerous influence upon those who are around you?"

"I have sometimes feared so." "We may pass over old Mr. McIntyre. It would hardly be just, perhaps, to mention him in this connection. But there is Robert. He used to take such an interest in his profession. He was so keen about art. If you met him, the first words he said were usually some reference to his plans, or the progress he was making in his latest picture. He was ambitious, pushing, self-reliant. Now he does nothing. I know for a fact that it is two months since he put brush to canvas. He has turned from a student into an idler, and, what is worse, I fear into a parasite. You will forgive me for speaking so plainly?"

Raffles Haw said nothing, but he threw out his hands with a gesture of pain.

"And then there is something to be said about the country folk," said the vicar. "Your kindness has been, perhaps, a little indiscriminate there. They don't seem to be as helpful or as self-reliant as they used. There was old Blaxton, whose cowhouse roof was blown off the other day. He used to be a man who was full of energy and resource. Three months ago he would have got a ladder and had that roof on again in two days' work. But now he must sit down, and wring his hands, and write letters, because he knew that it would come to your ears, and that you would make it good. There's old Ellary, too! Well, of course he was always poor, but at least he did something, and so kept himself out of mischief. Not a stroke will he do now, but smokes and talks scandal from morning to night. And the worst of it is, that it not only hurts those who have had your help, but it unsettles those who have not. They all have an injured, surly feeling as if other folk were getting what they had an equal right to. It has really come to such a pitch that I thought it was a duty to speak to you about it. Well, it is a new experience to me. I have often had to reprove my parishioners for not being charitable enough, but it is very strange to find one who is too charitable. It is a noble error.”

“I thank you very much for letting me know about it,” answered Raffles Haw, as he shook the good old clergyman’s hand. “I shall certainly reconsider my conduct in that respect.”

He kept a rigid and unmoved face until his visitor had gone, and then retiring to his own little room, he threw himself upon the bed and burst out sobbing with his face buried in the pillow. Of all men in England, this, the richest, was on that day the most miserable. How could he use this great power which he held? Every blessing which he tried to give turned itself into a curse. His intentions were so good, and yet the results were so terrible. It was as if he had some foul leprosy of the mind which all caught who were exposed to his influence. His charity, so well meant, so carefully bestowed, had yet poisoned the whole countryside. And if in small things his results were so evil, how could he tell that they would be better in the larger plans which he had formed? If he could not pay the debts of a simple yokel without disturbing the great laws of cause and effect which lie at the base of all things, what could he hope for when he came to fill the treasury of nations, to interfere with the complex conditions of trade, or to provide for great masses of the population? He drew back with horror as he dimly saw that vast problems faced him in which he might make errors which all his money could not repair. The way of Providence was the straight way. Yet he, a half-blind creature, must needs push in and strive to alter and correct it. Would he be a benefactor? Might he not rather prove to be the greatest malefactor that the world had seen?

But soon a calmer mood came upon him, and he rose and bathed his flushed face and fevered brow. After all, was not there a field where all were agreed that money might be well spent? It was not the way of nature, but rather the way of man which he would alter. It was not Providence that had ordained that folk should live half-starved and overcrowded in dreary slums. That was the result of artificial conditions, and it might well be healed by artificial means. Why should not his plans be successful after all, and the world better for his discovery? Then again, it was not the truth that he cast a blight on those with whom he was brought in contact. There was Laura; who knew more of him than she did, and yet how good and sweet and true she was! She at least had lost nothing through knowing him. He would go down and see her. It would be soothing to hear her voice, and to turn to her for words of sympathy in this his hour of darkness.

The storm had died away, but a soft wind was blowing, and the smack of the coming spring was in the air. He drew in the aromatic scent of the fir-trees as he passed down the curving drive. Before him lay the long sloping countryside, all dotted over with the farmsteadings and little red cottages, with the morning sun striking slantwise upon their grey roofs and glimmering windows. His heart yearned over all these people with their manifold troubles, their little sordid miseries, their strivings and hopings and petty soul-killing cares. How could he get at them? How could he manage to lift the burden from them, and yet not hinder them in their life aim? For more and more could he see that all refinement is through sorrow, and that the life which does not refine is the life without an aim.

Laura was alone in the sitting-room at Elmdene, for Robert had gone out to make some final arrangements about his father. She sprang up as her lover entered, and ran forward with a pretty girlish gesture to greet him.

“Oh, Raffles!” she cried, “I knew that you would come. Is it not dreadful about papa?”

“You must not fret, dearest,” he answered gently. “It may not prove to be so very grave after all.”

“But it all happened before I was stirring. I knew nothing about it until breakfast-time. They must have gone up to the Hall very early.”

“Yes, they did come up rather early.”

“What is the matter with you, Raffles?” cried Laura, looking up into his face. “You look so sad and weary!”

“I have been a little in the blues. The fact is, Laura, that I have had a long talk with Mr. Spurling this morning.”

The girl started, and turned white to the lips. A long talk with Mr. Spurling! Did that mean that he had learned her secret?

“Well?” she gasped.

“He tells me that my charity has done more harm than good, and in fact, that I have had an evil influence upon every one whom I have come near. He said it in the most delicate way, but that was really what it amounted to.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Laura, with a long sigh of relief. “You must not think of minding what Mr. Spurling says. Why, it is absurd on the face of it! Everybody knows that there are dozens of men all over the country who would have been ruined and turned out of their houses if you had not stood their friend. How could they be the worse for having known you? I wonder that Mr. Spurling can talk such nonsense!"

"How is Robert's picture getting on?"

"Oh, he has a lazy fit on him. He has not touched it for ever so long. But why do you ask that? You have that furrow on your brow again. Put it away, sir!"

She smoothed it away with her little white hand.

"Well, at any rate, I don't think that quite everybody is the worse," said he, looking down at her. "There is one, at least, who is beyond taint, one who is good, and pure, and true, and who would love me as well if I were a poor clerk struggling for a livelihood. You would, would you not, Laura?"

"You foolish boy! of course I would."

"And yet how strange it is that it should be so. That you, who are the only woman whom I have ever loved, should be the only one in whom I also have raised an affection which is free from greed or interest. I wonder whether you may not have been sent by Providence simply to restore my confidence in the world. How barren a place would it not be if it were not for woman's love! When all seemed black around me this morning, I tell you, Laura, that I seemed to turn to you and to your love as the one thing on earth upon which I could rely. All else seemed shifting, unstable, influenced by this or that base consideration. In you, and you only, could I trust."

"And I in you, dear Raffles! I never knew what love was until I met you."

She took a step towards him, her hands advanced, love shining in her features, when in an instant Raffles saw the colour struck from her face, and a staring horror spring into her eyes. Her blanched and rigid face was turned towards the open door, while he, standing partly behind it, could not see what it was that had so moved her.

"Hector!" she gasped, with dry lips.

A quick step in the hall, and a slim, weather-tanned young man sprang forward into the room, and caught her up in his arms as if she had been a feather.

"You darling!" he said; "I knew that I would surprise you. I came right up from Plymouth by the night train. And I have long leave, and plenty of time to get married. Isn't it jolly, dear Laura?"

He pirouetted round with her in the exuberance of his delight. As he spun round, however, his eyes fell suddenly upon the pale and silent stranger who stood by the door. Hector blushed furiously, and made an awkward sailor bow, standing with Laura's cold and unresponsive hand still clasped in his.

"Very sorry, sir — didn't see you," he said. "You'll excuse my going on in this mad sort of way, but if you had served you would know what it is to get away from quarter-deck manners, and to be a free man. Miss McIntyre will tell you that we have known each other since we were children, and as we are to be married in, I hope, a month at the latest, we understand each other pretty well."

Raffles Haw still stood cold and motionless. He was stunned, benumbed, by what he saw and heard. Laura drew away from Hector, and tried to free her hand from his grasp.

"Didn't you get my letter at Gibraltar?" she asked.

"Never went to Gibraltar. Were ordered home by wire from Madeira. Those chaps at the Admiralty never know their own minds for two hours together. But what matter about a letter, Laura, so long as I can see you and speak with you? You have not introduced me to your friend here."

"One word, sir," cried Raffles Haw in a quivering voice. "Do I entirely understand you? Let me be sure that there is no mistake. You say that you are engaged to be married to Miss McIntyre?"

"Of course I am. I've just come back from a four months' cruise, and I am going to be married before I drag my anchor again."

"Four months!" gasped Haw. "Why, it is just four months since I came here. And one last question, sir. Does Robert McIntyre know of your engagement?"

"Does Bob know? Of course he knows. Why, it was to his care I left Laura when I started. But what is the meaning of all this? What is the matter with you, Laura? Why are you so white and silent? And — hallo! Hold up, sir! The man is fainting!"

"It is all right!" gasped Haw, steadying himself against the edge of the door.

He was as white as paper, and his hand was pressed close to his side as though some sudden pain had shot through him. For a moment he tottered there like a stricken man, and then, with a hoarse cry, he turned and fled out through the open door.

"Poor devil!" said Hector, gazing in amazement after him. "He seems hard hit anyhow. But what is the meaning of all this, Laura?"

His face had darkened, and his mouth had set.

She had not said a word, but had stood with a face like a mask looking blankly in front of her. Now she tore herself away from him, and, casting herself down with her face buried in the cushion of the sofa, she burst into a passion of sobbing.

"It means that you have ruined me," she cried. "That you have ruined-ruined — ruined me! Could you not leave us alone? Why must you come at the last moment? A few more days, and we were safe. And you never had my letter."

"And what was in your letter, then?" he asked coldly, standing with his arms folded, looking down at her.

"It was to tell you that I released you. I love Raffles Haw, and I was to have been his wife. And now it is all gone. Oh, Hector, I hate you, and I shall always hate you as long as I live, for you have stepped between me and the only good fortune that ever came to me. Leave me alone, and I hope that you will never cross our threshold again."

"Is that your last word, Laura?"

"The last that I shall ever speak to you."

"Then, good-bye. I shall see the Dad, and go straight back to Plymouth." He waited an instant, in hopes of an answer, and then walked sadly from the room.

CHAPTER XV. THE GREATER SECRET.

It was late that night that a startled knocking came at the door of Elmdene. Laura had been in her room all day, and Robert was moodily smoking his pipe by the fire, when this harsh and sudden summons broke in upon his thoughts. There in the porch was Jones, the stout head-butler of the Hall, hatless, scared, with the raindrops shining in the lamplight upon his smooth, bald head.

"If you please, Mr. McIntyre, sir, would it trouble you to step up to the Hall?" he cried. "We are all frightened, sir, about master."

Robert caught up his hat and started at a run, the frightened butler trotting heavily beside him. It had been a day of excitement and disaster. The young artist's heart was heavy within him, and the shadow of some crowning trouble seemed to have fallen upon his soul.

"What is the matter with your master, then?" he asked, as he slowed down into a walk.

"We don't know, sir; but we can't get an answer when we knock at the laboratory door. Yet he's there, for it's locked on the inside. It has given us all a scare, sir, that, and his goin's-on during the day."

"His goings-on?"

"Yes, sir; for he came back this morning like a man demented, a-talkin' to himself, and with his eyes starin' so that it was dreadful to look at the poor dear gentleman. Then he walked about the passages a long time, and he wouldn't so much as look at his luncheon, but he went into the museum, and gathered all his jewels and things, and carried them into the laboratory. We don't know what he's done since then, sir, but his furnace has been a-roarin', and his big chimney spoutin' smoke like a Birmingham factory. When night came we could see his figure against the light, a-workin' and a-heavin' like a man possessed. No dinner would he have, but work, and work, and work. Now it's all quiet, and the furnace cold, and no smoke from above, but we can't get no answer from him, sir, so we are scared, and Miller has gone for the police, and I came away for you."

They reached the Hall as the butler finished his explanation, and there outside the laboratory door stood the little knot of footmen and ostlers, while the village policeman, who had just arrived, was holding his bull's-eye to the keyhole, and endeavouring to peep through.

"The key is half-turned," he said. "I can't see nothing except just the light."

"Here's Mr. McIntyre," cried half-a-dozen voices, as Robert came forward.

"We'll have to beat the door in, sir," said the policeman. "We can't get any sort of answer, and there's something wrong."

Twice and thrice they threw their united weights against it until at last with a sharp snap the lock broke, and they crowded into the narrow passage. The inner door was ajar, and the laboratory lay before them.

In the centre was an enormous heap of fluffy grey ash, reaching up half-way to the ceiling. Beside it was another heap, much smaller, of some brilliant scintillating dust, which shimmered brightly in the rays of the electric light. All round was a bewildering chaos of broken jars, shattered bottles, cracked machinery, and tangled wires, all bent and draggled. And there in the midst of this universal ruin, leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped upon his lap, and the easy pose of one who rests after hard work safely carried through, sat Raffles Haw, the master of the house, and the richest of mankind, with the pallor of death upon his face. So easily he sat and so naturally, with such a serene expression upon his features, that it was not until they raised him, and touched his cold and rigid limbs, that they could realise that he had indeed passed away.

Reverently and slowly they bore him to his room, for he was beloved by all who had served him. Robert alone lingered with the policeman in the laboratory. Like a man in a dream he wandered about, marvelling at the universal destruction. A large broad-headed hammer lay upon the ground, and with this Haw had apparently set himself to destroy all his apparatus, having first used his electrical machines to reduce to protyle all the stock of gold which he had accumulated. The treasure-room which had so dazzled Robert consisted now of merely four bare walls, while the gleaming dust upon the floor proclaimed the fate of that magnificent collection of gems which had alone amounted to a royal fortune. Of all the machinery no single piece remained intact, and even the glass table was shattered into three pieces. Strenuously earnest must have been the work which Raffles Haw had done that day.

And suddenly Robert thought of the secret which had been treasured in the casket within the iron-clamped box. It was to tell him the one last essential link which would make his knowledge of the process complete. Was it still there? Thrilling all over, he opened the great chest, and drew out the ivory box. It was locked, but the key was in it. He turned it and threw open the lid. There was a white slip of paper with his own name written upon it. With trembling fingers he unfolded it. Was he the heir to the riches of El Dorado, or was he destined to be a poor struggling artist? The note was dated that very evening, and ran in this way:

> “MY DEAR ROBERT, — My secret shall never be used again. I cannot tell you how I thank Heaven that I did not entirely confide it to you, for I should have been handing over an inheritance of misery both to yourself and others. For myself I have hardly had a happy moment since I discovered it. This I could have borne had I been able to feel that I was doing good, but, alas! the only effect of my attempts has been to turn workers into idlers, contented men into greedy parasites, and, worst of all, true, pure women into deceivers and hypocrites. If this is the effect of my interference on a small scale, I cannot hope for anything better were I to carry out the plans which we have so often discussed. The schemes of my life have all turned to nothing. For myself, you shall never see me again. I shall go back to the student life from which I emerged. There, at least, if I can do little good, I can do no harm. It is my wish that such valuables as remain in the Hall should be sold, and the proceeds divided amidst all the charities of Birmingham. I shall leave tonight if I am well enough, but I have been much troubled all day by a stabbing pain in my side. It is as if wealth were as bad for health as it is for peace of mind. Good-bye, Robert, and may you never have as sad a heart as I have to-night.
> Yours very truly,
> RAFFLES HAW.”

“Was it suicide, sir? Was it suicide?” broke in the policeman as Robert put the note in his pocket.

“No,” he answered; “I think it was a broken heart.”

And so the wonders of the New Hall were all dismantled, the carvings and the gold, the books and the pictures, and many a struggling man or woman who had heard nothing of Raffles Haw during his life had cause to bless him after his death. The house has been bought by a company now, who have turned it into a hydropathic establishment, and of all the folk who frequent it in search of health or of pleasure there are few who know the strange story which is connected with it.

The blight which Haw’s wealth cast around it seemed to last even after his death. Old McIntyre still raves in the County Lunatic Asylum, and treasures up old scraps of wood and metal under the impression that they are all ingots of gold. Robert McIntyre is a moody and irritable man, for ever pursuing a quest which will always evade him. His art is forgotten, and he spends his whole small income upon chemical and electrical appliances, with which he vainly seeks to rediscover that one hidden link. His sister keeps house for him, a silent and brooding woman, still queenly and beautiful, but of a bitter, dissatisfied mind. Of late, however, she has devoted herself to charity, and has been of so much help to Mr. Spurling’s new curate that it is thought that he may be tempted to secure her assistance for ever. So runs the gossip of the village, and in small places such gossip is seldom wrong. As to Hector Spurling, he is still in her Majesty’s service, and seems inclined to abide by his father’s wise advice, that he should not think of marrying until he was a Commander. It is possible that of all who were brought within the spell of Raffles Haw he was the only one who had occasion to bless it.

BEYOND THE CITY

This novella was first published in 1892 and concerns the interrelations of the Denver, Westmacott, and Walker families, whilst satirising life in a small town in Victorian England. *Beyond the City* is notable for its depictition of greed and lust driving characters beyond the typical boundaries of their middle class lives.

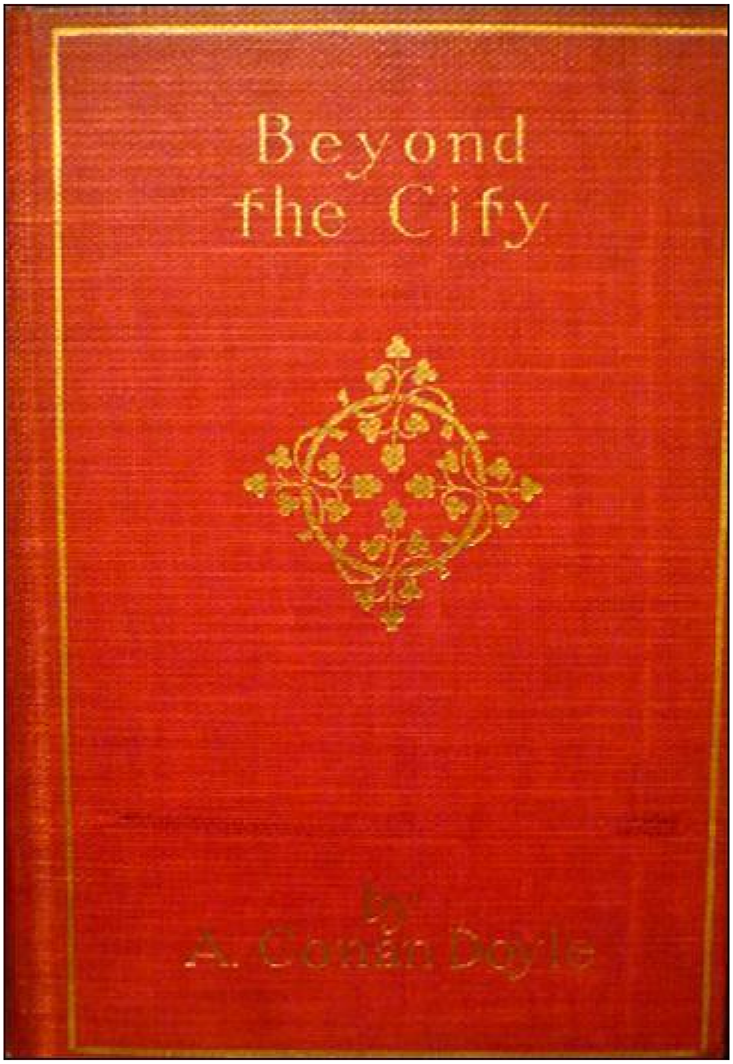
Beyond the City
by
A. Conan Doyle

The first edition

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CHAPTER I. THE NEW-COMERS.

“If you please, mum,” said the voice of a domestic from somewhere round the angle of the door, “number three is moving in.”

Two little old ladies, who were sitting at either side of a table, sprang to their feet with ejaculations of interest, and rushed to the window of the sitting-room.

“Take care, Monica dear,” said one, shrouding herself in the lace curtain; “don’t let them see us.

“No, no, Bertha. We must not give them reason to say that their neighbours are inquisitive. But I think that we are safe if we stand like this.”

The open window looked out upon a sloping lawn, well trimmed and pleasant, with fuzzy rosebushes and a star-shaped bed of sweet-william. It was bounded by a low wooden fence, which screened it off from a broad, modern, new metaled road. At the other side of this road were three large detached deep-bodied villas with peaky eaves and small wooden balconies, each standing in its own little square of grass and of flowers. All three were equally new, but numbers one and two were curtained and sedate, with a human, sociable look to them; while number three, with yawning door and unkempt garden, had apparently only just received its furniture and made itself ready for its occupants. A four-wheeler had driven up to the gate, and it was at this that the old ladies, peeping out bird-like from behind their curtains, directed an eager and questioning gaze.

The cabman had descended, and the passengers within were handing out the articles which they desired him to carry up to the house. He stood red-faced and blinking, with his crooked arms outstretched, while a male hand, protruding from the window, kept piling up upon him a series of articles the sight of which filled the curious old ladies with bewilderment.

“My goodness me!” cried Monica, the smaller, the drier, and the more wizened of the pair. “What do you call that, Bertha? It looks to me like four batter puddings.”

“Those are what young men box each other with,” said Bertha, with a conscious air of superior worldly knowledge.

“And those?”

Two great bottle-shaped pieces of yellow shining wood had been heaped upon the cabman.

“Oh, I don’t know what those are,” confessed Bertha. Indian clubs had never before obtruded themselves upon her peaceful and very feminine existence.

These mysterious articles were followed, however, by others which were more within their range of comprehension — by a pair of dumb-bells, a purple cricket-bag, a set of golf clubs, and a tennis racket. Finally, when the cabman, all top-heavy and bristling, had staggered off up the garden path, there emerged in a very leisurely way from the cab a big, powerfully built young man, with a bull pup under one arm and a pink sporting paper in his hand. The paper he crammed into the pocket of his light yellow dust-coat, and extended his hand as if to assist some one else from the vehicle. To the surprise of the two old ladies, however, the only thing which his open palm received was a violent slap, and a tall lady bounded unassisted out of the cab. With a regal wave she motioned the young man towards the door, and then with one hand upon her hip she stood in a careless, lounging attitude by the gate, kicking her toe against the wall and listlessly awaiting the return of the driver.

As she turned slowly round, and the sunshine struck upon her face, the two watchers were amazed to see that this very active and energetic lady was far from being in her first youth, so far that she had certainly come of age again since she first passed that landmark in life’s journey. Her finely chiseled, clean-cut face, with something red Indian about the firm mouth and strongly marked cheek bones, showed even at that distance traces of the friction of the passing years. And yet she was very handsome. Her features were as firm in repose as those of a Greek bust, and her great dark eyes were arched over by two brows so black, so thick, and so delicately curved, that the eye turned away from the harsher details of the face to marvel at their grace and strength. Her figure, too, was straight as a dart, a little portly, perhaps, but curving into magnificent outlines, which were half accentuated by the strange costume which she wore. Her hair, black but plentifully shot with grey, was brushed plainly back from her high forehead, and was gathered under a small round felt hat, like that of a man, with one sprig of feather in the band as a concession to her sex. A double-breasted jacket of some dark frieze-like material fitted closely to her figure, while her straight blue skirt, untrimmed and ungathered, was cut so short that the lower curve of her finely-turned legs was plainly visible beneath it, terminating in a pair of broad, flat, low-heeled and square-toed shoes. Such was the lady who lounged at the gate of number three, under the curious eyes of her two opposite neighbours.

But if her conduct and appearance had already somewhat jarred upon their limited and precise sense of the fitness of things, what were they to think of the next little act in this tableau vivant? The cabman, red and heavy-jowled, had come back from his labors, and held out his hand for his fare. The lady passed him a coin, there was a moment of mumbling and gesticulating, and suddenly she had him with both hands by the red cravat which girt his neck, and was shaking him as a terrier would a rat. Right across the pavement she thrust him, and, pushing him up against the wheel, she banged his head three several times against the side of his own vehicle.

“Can I be of any use to you, aunt?” asked the large youth, framing himself in the open doorway.

“Not the slightest,” panted the enraged lady. “There, you low blackguard, that will teach you to be impertinent to a lady.”

The cabman looked helplessly about him with a bewildered, questioning gaze, as one to whom alone of all men this unheard-of and extraordinary thing had happened. Then, rubbing his head, he mounted slowly on to the box and drove away with an uptossed hand appealing to the universe. The lady smoothed down her dress, pushed back her hair under her little felt hat, and strode in through the hall-door, which was closed behind her. As with a whisk her short skirts vanished into the darkness, the two spectators — Miss Bertha and Miss Monica Williams — sat looking at each other in speechless amazement. For fifty years they had peeped through that little window and across that trim garden, but never yet had such a sight as this come to confound them.

“I wish,” said Monica at last, “that we had kept the field.”

“I am sure I wish we had,” answered her sister.

CHAPTER II. BREAKING THE ICE.

The cottage from the window of which the Misses Williams had looked out stands, and has stood for many a year, in that pleasant suburban district which lies between Norwood, Anerley, and Forest Hill. Long before there had been a thought of a township there, when the Metropolis was still quite a distant thing, old Mr. Williams had inhabited “The Brambles,” as the little house was called, and had owned all the fields about it. Six or eight such cottages scattered over a rolling country-side were all the houses to be found there in the days when the century was young. From afar, when the breeze came from the north, the dull, low roar of the great city might be heard, like the breaking of the tide of life, while along the horizon might be seen the dim curtain of smoke, the grim spray which that tide threw up. Gradually, however, as the years passed, the City had thrown out a long brick-feeler here and there, curving, extending, and coalescing, until at last the little cottages had been gripped round by these red tentacles, and had been absorbed to make room for the modern villa. Field by field the estate of old Mr. Williams had been sold to the speculative builder, and had borne rich crops of snug suburban dwellings, arranged in curving crescents and tree-lined avenues. The father had passed away before his cottage was entirely bricked round, but his two daughters, to whom the property had descended, lived to see the last vestige of country taken from them. For years they had clung to the one field which faced their windows, and it was only after much argument and many heartburnings, that they had at last consented that it should share the fate of the others. A broad road was driven through their quiet domain, the quarter was re-named “The Wilderness,” and three square, staring, uncompromising villas began to sprout up on the other side. With sore hearts, the two shy little old maids watched their steady progress, and speculated as to what fashion of neighbours chance would bring into the little nook which had always been their own.

And at last they were all three finished. Wooden balconies and overhanging eaves had been added to them, so that, in the language of the advertisement, there were vacant three eligible Swiss-built villas, with sixteen rooms, no basement, electric bells, hot and cold water, and every modern convenience, including a common tennis lawn, to be let at L100 a year, or L1,500 purchase. So tempting an offer did not long remain open. Within a few weeks the card had vanished from number one, and it was known that Admiral Hay Denver, V. C., C. B., with Mrs. Hay Denver and their only son, were about to move into it. The news brought peace to the hearts of the Williams sisters. They had lived with a settled conviction that some wild impossible colony, some shouting, singing family of madcaps, would break in upon their peace. This establishment at least was irreproachable. A reference to "Men of the Time" showed them that Admiral Hay Denver was a most distinguished officer, who had begun his active career at Bomarsund, and had ended it at Alexandria, having managed between these two episodes to see as much service as any man of his years. From the Taku Forts and the *Shannon* brigade, to dhow-harrying off Zanzibar, there was no variety of naval work which did not appear in his record; while the Victoria Cross, and the Albert Medal for saving life, vouched for it that in peace as in war his courage was still of the same true temper. Clearly a very eligible neighbour this, the more so as they had been confidentially assured by the estate agent that Mr. Harold Denver, the son, was a most quiet young gentleman, and that he was busy from morning to night on the Stock Exchange.

The Hay Denvers had hardly moved in before number two also struck its placard, and again the ladies found that they had no reason to be discontented with their neighbours. Doctor Balthazar Walker was a very well-known name in the medical world. Did not his qualifications, his membership, and the record of his writings fill a long half-column in the "Medical Directory," from his first little paper on the "Gouty Diathesis" in 1859 to his exhaustive treatise upon "Affections of the Vaso-Motor System" in 1884? A successful medical career which promised to end in a presidentship of a college and a baronetcy, had been cut short by his sudden inheritance of a considerable sum from a grateful patient, which had rendered him independent for life, and had enabled him to turn his attention to the more scientific part of his profession, which had always had a greater charm for him than its more practical and commercial aspect. To this end he had given up his house in Weymouth Street, and had taken this opportunity of moving himself, his scientific instruments, and his two charming daughters (he had been a widower for some years) into the more peaceful atmosphere of Norwood.

There was thus but one villa unoccupied, and it was no wonder that the two maiden ladies watched with a keen interest, which deepened into a dire apprehension, the curious incidents which heralded the coming of the new tenants. They had already learned from the agent that the family consisted of two only, Mrs. Westmacott, a widow, and her nephew, Charles Westmacott. How simple and how select it had sounded! Who could have foreseen from it these fearful portents which seemed to threaten violence and discord among the dwellers in The Wilderness? Again the two old maids cried in heartfelt chorus that they wished they had not sold their field.

"Well, at least, Monica," remarked Bertha, as they sat over their teacups that afternoon, "however strange these people may be, it is our duty to be as polite to them as to the others."

"Most certainly," acquiesced her sister.

"Since we have called upon Mrs. Hay Denver and upon the Misses Walker, we must call upon this Mrs. Westmacott also."

"Certainly, dear. As long as they are living upon our land I feel as if they were in a sense our guests, and that it is our duty to welcome them."

"Then we shall call to-morrow," said Bertha, with decision.

"Yes, dear, we shall. But, oh, I wish it was over!"

At four o'clock on the next day, the two maiden ladies set off upon their hospitable errand. In their stiff, crackling dresses of black silk, with jet-bespangled jackets, and little rows of cylindrical grey curls drooping down on either side of their black bonnets, they looked like two old fashion plates which had wandered off into the wrong decade. Half curious and half fearful, they knocked at the door of number three, which was instantly opened by a red-headed page-boy.

Yes, Mrs. Westmacott was at home. He ushered them into the front room, furnished as a drawing-room, where in spite of the fine spring weather a large fire was burning in the grate. The boy took their cards, and then, as they sat down together upon a settee, he set their nerves in a thrill by darting behind a curtain with a shrill cry, and prodding at something with his foot. The bull pup which they had seen upon the day before bolted from its hiding-place, and scuttled snarling from the room.

"It wants to get at Eliza," said the youth, in a confidential whisper. "Master says she would give him more'n he brought." He smiled affably at the two little stiff black figures, and departed in search of his mistress.

"What — what did he say?" gasped Bertha.

“Something about a —— Oh, goodness gracious! Oh, help, help, help, help, help!” The two sisters had bounded on to the settee, and stood there with staring eyes and skirts gathered in, while they filled the whole house with their yells. Out of a high wicker-work basket which stood by the fire there had risen a flat diamond-shaped head with wicked green eyes which came flickering upwards, waving gently from side to side, until a foot or more of glossy scaly neck was visible. Slowly the vicious head came floating up, while at every oscillation a fresh burst of shrieks came from the settee.

“What in the name of mischief!” cried a voice, and there was the mistress of the house standing in the doorway. Her gaze at first had merely taken in the fact that two strangers were standing screaming upon her red plush sofa. A glance at the fireplace, however, showed her the cause of the terror, and she burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

“Charley,” she shouted, “here’s Eliza misbehaving again.”

“I’ll settle her,” answered a masculine voice, and the young man dashed into the room. He had a brown horse-cloth in his hand, which he threw over the basket, making it fast with a piece of twine so as to effectually imprison its inmate, while his aunt ran across to reassure her visitors.

“It is only a rock snake,” she explained.

“Oh, Bertha!” “Oh, Monica!” gasped the poor exhausted gentlewomen.

“She’s hatching out some eggs. That is why we have the fire. Eliza always does better when she is warm. She is a sweet, gentle creature, but no doubt she thought that you had designs upon her eggs. I suppose that you did not touch any of them?”

“Oh, let us get away, Bertha!” cried Monica, with her thin, black-gloved hands thrown forwards in abhorrence.

“Not away, but into the next room,” said Mrs. Westmacott, with the air of one whose word was law. “This way, if you please! It is less warm here.” She led the way into a very handsomely appointed library, with three great cases of books, and upon the fourth side a long yellow table littered over with papers and scientific instruments. “Sit here, and you, there,” she continued. “That is right. Now let me see, which of you is Miss Williams, and which Miss Bertha Williams?”

“I am Miss Williams,” said Monica, still palpitating, and glancing furtively about in dread of some new horror.

“And you live, as I understand, over at the pretty little cottage. It is very nice of you to call so early. I don’t suppose that we shall get on, but still the intention is equally good.” She crossed her legs and leaned her back against the marble mantelpiece.

“We thought that perhaps we might be of some assistance,” said Bertha, timidly. “If there is anything which we could do to make you feel more at home — —”

“Oh, thank you, I am too old a traveler to feel anything but at home wherever I go. I’ve just come back from a few months in the Marquesas Islands, where I had a very pleasant visit. That was where I got Eliza. In many respects the Marquesas Islands now lead the world.”

“Dear me!” ejaculated Miss Williams. “In what respect?”

“In the relation of the sexes. They have worked out the great problem upon their own lines, and their isolated geographical position has helped them to come to a conclusion of their own. The woman there is, as she should be, in every way the absolute equal of the male. Come in, Charles, and sit down. Is Eliza all right?”

“All right, aunt.”

“These are our neighbours, the Misses Williams. Perhaps they will have some stout. You might bring in a couple of bottles, Charles.”

“No, no, thank you! None for us!” cried her two visitors, earnestly.

“No? I am sorry that I have no tea to offer you. I look upon the subserviency of woman as largely due to her abandoning nutritious drinks and invigorating exercises to the male. I do neither.” She picked up a pair of fifteen-pound dumb-bells from beside the fireplace and swung them lightly about her head. “You see what may be done on stout,” said she.

“But don’t you think,” the elder Miss Williams suggested timidly, “don’t you think, Mrs. Westmascott, that woman has a mission of her own?”

The lady of the house dropped her dumb-bells with a crash upon the floor.

“The old cant!” she cried. “The old shibboleth! What is this mission which is reserved for woman? All that is humble, that is mean, that is soul-killing, that is so contemptible and so ill-paid that none other will touch it. All that is woman’s mission. And who imposed these limitations upon her? Who cooped her up within this narrow sphere? Was it Providence? Was it nature? No, it was the arch enemy. It was man.”

“Oh, I say, auntie!” drawled her nephew.

“It was man, Charles. It was you and your fellows I say that woman is a colossal monument to the selfishness of man. What is all this boasted chivalry — these fine words and vague phrases? Where is it when we wish to put it to the test? Man in the abstract will do anything to help a woman. Of course. How does it work when his pocket is touched? Where is his chivalry then? Will the doctors help her to qualify? will the lawyers help her to be called to the bar? will the clergy tolerate her in the Church? Oh, it is close your ranks then and refer poor woman to her mission! Her mission! To be thankful for coppers and not to interfere with the men while they grabble for gold, like swine round a trough, that is man’s reading of the mission of women. You may sit there and sneer, Charles, while you look upon your victim, but you know that it is truth, every word of it.”

Terrified as they were by this sudden torrent of words, the two gentlewomen could not but smile at the sight of the fiery, domineering victim and the big apologetic representative of mankind who sat meekly bearing all the sins of his sex. The lady struck a match, whipped a cigarette from a case upon the mantelpiece, and began to draw the smoke into her lungs.

“I find it very soothing when my nerves are at all ruffled,” she explained. “You don’t smoke? Ah, you miss one of the purest of pleasures — one of the few pleasures which are without a reaction.”

Miss Williams smoothed out her silken lap.

“It is a pleasure,” she said, with some approach to self-assertion, “which Bertha and I are rather too old-fashioned to enjoy.”

“No doubt, It would probably make you very ill if you attempted it. By the way, I hope that you will come to some of our Guild meetings. I shall see that tickets are sent you.”

“Your Guild?”

“It is not yet formed, but I shall lose no time in forming a committee. It is my habit to establish a branch of the Emancipation Guild wherever I go. There is a Mrs. Sanderson in Anerley who is already one of the emancipated, so that I have a nucleus. It is only by organized resistance, Miss Williams, that we can hope to hold our own against the selfish sex. Must you go, then?”

“Yes, we have one or two other visits to pay,” said the elder sister. “You will, I am sure, excuse us. I hope that you will find Norwood a pleasant residence.”

“All places are to me simply a battle-field,” she answered, gripping first one and then the other with a grip which crumpled up their little thin fingers. “The days for work and healthful exercise, the evenings to Browning and high discourse, eh, Charles? Good-bye!” She came to the door with them, and as they glanced back they saw her still standing there with the yellow bull pup cuddled up under one forearm, and the thin blue reek of her cigarette ascending from her lips.

“Oh, what a dreadful, dreadful woman!” whispered sister Bertha, as they hurried down the street. “Thank goodness that it is over.”

“But she’ll return the visit,” answered the other. “I think that we had better tell Mary that we are not at home.”

CHAPTER III. DWELLERS IN THE WILDERNESS.

How deeply are our destinies influenced by the most trifling causes! Had the unknown builder who erected and owned these new villas contented himself by simply building each within its own grounds, it is probable that these three small groups of people would have remained hardly conscious of each other's existence, and that there would have been no opportunity for that action and reaction which is here set forth. But there was a common link to bind them together. To single himself out from all other Norwood builders the landlord had devised and laid out a common lawn tennis ground, which stretched behind the houses with taut-stretched net, green close-cropped sward, and widespread whitewashed lines. Hither in search of that hard exercise which is as necessary as air or food to the English temperament, came young Hay Denver when released from the toil of the City; hither, too, came Dr. Walker and his two fair daughters, Clara and Ida, and hither also, champions of the lawn, came the short-skirted, muscular widow and her athletic nephew. Ere the summer was gone they knew each other in this quiet nook as they might not have done after years of a stiffer and more formal acquaintance.

And especially to the Admiral and the Doctor were this closer intimacy and companionship of value. Each had a void in his life, as every man must have who with unexhausted strength steps out of the great race, but each by his society might help to fill up that of his neighbour. It is true that they had not much in common, but that is sometimes an aid rather than a bar to friendship. Each had been an enthusiast in his profession, and had retained all his interest in it. The Doctor still read from cover to cover his Lancet and his Medical Journal, attended all professional gatherings, worked himself into an alternate state of exaltation and depression over the results of the election of officers, and reserved for himself a den of his own, in which before rows of little round bottles full of glycerine, Canadian balsam, and staining agents, he still cut sections with a microtome, and peeped through his long, brass, old-fashioned microscope at the arcana of nature. With his typical face, clean shaven on lip and chin, with a firm mouth, a strong jaw, a steady eye, and two little white fluffs of whiskers, he could never be taken for anything but what he was, a high-class British medical consultant of the age of fifty, or perhaps just a year or two older.

The Doctor, in his hey-day, had been cool over great things, but now, in his retirement, he was fussy over trifles. The man who had operated without the quiver of a finger, when not only his patient's life but his own reputation and future were at stake, was now shaken to the soul by a mislaid book or a careless maid. He remarked it himself, and knew the reason. "When Mary was alive," he would say, "she stood between me and the little troubles. I could brace myself for the big ones. My girls are as good as girls can be, but who can know a man as his wife knows him?" Then his memory would conjure up a tuft of brown hair and a single white, thin hand over a coverlet, and he would feel, as we have all felt, that if we do not live and know each other after death, then indeed we are tricked and betrayed by all the highest hopes and subtlest intuitions of our nature.

The Doctor had his compensations to make up for his loss. The great scales of Fate had been held on a level for him; for where in all great London could one find two sweeter girls, more loving, more intelligent, and more sympathetic than Clara and Ida Walker? So bright were they, so quick, so interested in all which interested him, that if it were possible for a man to be compensated for the loss of a good wife then Balthazar Walker might claim to be so.

Clara was tall and thin and supple, with a graceful, womanly figure. There was something stately and distinguished in her carriage, "queenly" her friends called her, while her critics described her as reserved and distant.

Such as it was, however, it was part and parcel of herself, for she was, and had always from her childhood been, different from any one around her. There was nothing gregarious in her nature. She thought with her own mind, saw with her own eyes, acted from her own impulse. Her face was pale, striking rather than pretty, but with two great dark eyes, so earnestly questioning, so quick in their transitions from joy to pathos, so swift in their comment upon every word and deed around her, that those eyes alone were to many more attractive than all the beauty of her younger sister. Hers was a strong, quiet soul, and it was her firm hand which had taken over the duties of her mother, had ordered the house, restrained the servants, comforted her father, and upheld her weaker sister, from the day of that great misfortune.

Ida Walker was a hand’s breadth smaller than Clara, but was a little fuller in the face and plumper in the figure. She had light yellow hair, mischievous blue eyes with the light of humor ever twinkling in their depths, and a large, perfectly formed mouth, with that slight upward curve of the corners which goes with a keen appreciation of fun, suggesting even in repose that a latent smile is ever lurking at the edges of the lips. She was modern to the soles of her dainty little high-heeled shoes, frankly fond of dress and of pleasure, devoted to tennis and to comic opera, delighted with a dance, which came her way only too seldom, longing ever for some new excitement, and yet behind all this lighter side of her character a thoroughly good, healthy-minded English girl, the life and soul of the house, and the idol of her sister and her father. Such was the family at number two. A peep into the remaining villa and our introductions are complete.

Admiral Hay Denver did not belong to the florid, white-haired, hearty school of sea-dogs which is more common in works of fiction than in the Navy List. On the contrary, he was the representative of a much more common type which is the antithesis of the conventional sailor. He was a thin, hard-featured man, with an ascetic, acquiline cast of face, grizzled and hollow-cheeked, clean-shaven with the exception of the tiniest curved promontory of ash-coloured whisker. An observer, accustomed to classify men, might have put him down as a canon of the church with a taste for lay costume and a country life, or as the master of a large public school, who joined his scholars in their outdoor sports. His lips were firm, his chin prominent, he had a hard, dry eye, and his manner was precise and formal. Forty years of stern discipline had made him reserved and silent. Yet, when at his ease with an equal, he could readily assume a less quarter-deck style, and he had a fund of little, dry stories of the world and its ways which were of interest from one who had seen so many phases of life. Dry and spare, as lean as a jockey and as tough as whipcord, he might be seen any day swinging his silver-headed Malacca cane, and pacing along the suburban roads with the same measured gait with which he had been wont to tread the poop of his flagship. He wore a good service stripe upon his cheek, for on one side it was pitted and scarred where a spurt of gravel knocked up by a round-shot had struck him thirty years before, when he served in the Lancaster gun-battery. Yet he was hale and sound, and though he was fifteen years senior to his friend the Doctor, he might have passed as the younger man.

Mrs. Hay Denver's life had been a very broken one, and her record upon land represented a greater amount of endurance and self-sacrifice than his upon the sea. They had been together for four months after their marriage, and then had come a hiatus of four years, during which he was flitting about between St. Helena and the Oil Rivers in a gunboat. Then came a blessed year of peace and domesticity, to be followed by nine years, with only a three months' break, five upon the Pacific station, and four on the East Indian. After that was a respite in the shape of five years in the Channel squadron, with periodical runs home, and then again he was off to the Mediterranean for three years and to Halifax for four. Now, at last, however, this old married couple, who were still almost strangers to one another, had come together in Norwood, where, if their short day had been chequered and broken, the evening at least promised to be sweet and mellow. In person Mrs. Hay Denver was tall and stout, with a bright, round, ruddy-cheeked face still pretty, with a gracious, matronly comeliness. Her whole life was a round of devotion and of love, which was divided between her husband and her only son, Harold.

This son it was who kept them in the neighbourhood of London, for the Admiral was as fond of ships and of salt water as ever, and was as happy in the sheets of a two-ton yacht as on the bridge of his sixteen-knot monitor. Had he been untied, the Devonshire or Hampshire coast would certainly have been his choice. There was Harold, however, and Harold's interests were their chief care. Harold was four-and-twenty now. Three years before he had been taken in hand by an acquaintance of his father's, the head of a considerable firm of stock-brokers, and fairly launched upon 'Change. His three hundred guinea entrance fee paid, his three sureties of five hundred pounds each found, his name approved by the Committee, and all other formalities complied with, he found himself whirling round, an insignificant unit, in the vortex of the money market of the world. There, under the guidance of his father's friend, he was instructed in the mysteries of bulling and of bearing, in the strange usages of 'Change in the intricacies of carrying over and of transferring. He learned to know where to place his clients' money, which of the jobbers would make a price in New Zealands, and which would touch nothing but American rails, which might be trusted and which shunned. All this, and much more, he mastered, and to such purpose that he soon began to prosper, to retain the clients who had been recommended to him, and to attract fresh ones. But the work was never congenial. He had inherited from his father his love of the air of heaven, his affection for a manly and natural existence. To act as middleman between the pursuer of wealth, and the wealth which he pursued, or to stand as a human barometer, registering the rise and fall of the great mammon pressure in the markets, was not the work for which Providence had placed those broad shoulders and strong limbs upon his well knit frame. His dark open face, too, with his straight Grecian nose, well opened brown eyes, and round black-curled head, were all those of a man who was fashioned for active physical work. Meanwhile he was popular with his fellow brokers, respected by his clients, and beloved at home, but his spirit was restless within him and his mind chafed unceasingly against his surroundings.

"Do you know, Willy," said Mrs. Hay Denver one evening as she stood behind her husband's chair, with her hand upon his shoulder, "I think sometimes that Harold is not quite happy."

"He looks happy, the young rascal," answered the Admiral, pointing with his cigar. It was after dinner, and through the open French window of the dining-room a clear view was to be had of the tennis court and the players. A set had just been finished, and young Charles Westmacott was hitting up the balls as high as he could send them in the middle of the ground. Doctor Walker and Mrs. Westmacott were pacing up and down the lawn, the lady waving her racket as she emphasized her remarks, and the Doctor listening with slanting head and little nods of agreement. Against the rails at the near end Harold was leaning in his flannels talking to the two sisters, who stood listening to him with their long dark shadows streaming down the lawn behind them. The girls were dressed alike in dark skirts, with light pink tennis blouses and pink bands on their straw hats, so that as they stood with the soft red of the setting sun tinging their faces, Clara, demure and quiet, Ida, mischievous and daring, it was a group which might have pleased the eye of a more exacting critic than the old sailor.

"Yes, he looks happy, mother," he repeated, with a chuckle. "It is not so long ago since it was you and I who were standing like that, and I don't remember that we were very unhappy either. It was croquet in our time, and the ladies had not reefed in their skirts quite so taut. What year would it be? Just before the commission of the Penelope."

Mrs. Hay Denver ran her fingers through his grizzled hair. "It was when you came back in the Antelope, just before you got your step."

“Ah, the old Antelope! What a clipper she was! She could sail two points nearer the wind than anything of her tonnage in the service. You remember her, mother. You saw her come into Plymouth Bay. Wasn’t she a beauty?”

“She was indeed, dear. But when I say that I think that Harold is not happy I mean in his daily life. Has it never struck you how thoughtful, he is at times, and how absent-minded?”

“In love perhaps, the young dog. He seems to have found snug moorings now at any rate.”

“I think that it is very likely that you are right, Willy,” answered the mother seriously. “But with which of them?”

“I cannot tell.”

“Well, they are very charming girls, both of them. But as long as he hangs in the wind between the two it cannot be serious. After all, the boy is four-and-twenty, and he made five hundred pounds last year. He is better able to marry than I was when I was lieutenant.”

“I think that we can see which it is now,” remarked the observant mother. Charles Westmacott had ceased to knock the tennis balls about, and was chatting with Clara Walker, while Ida and Harold Denver were still talking by the railing with little outbursts of laughter. Presently a fresh set was formed, and Doctor Walker, the odd man out, came through the wicket gate and strolled up the garden walk.

“Good evening, Mrs. Hay Denver,” said he, raising his broad straw hat. “May I come in?”

“Good evening, Doctor! Pray do!”

“Try one of these,” said the Admiral, holding out his cigar-case. “They are not bad. I got them on the Mosquito Coast. I was thinking of signaling to you, but you seemed so very happy out there.”

“Mrs. Westmacott is a very clever woman,” said the Doctor, lighting the cigar. “By the way, you spoke about the Mosquito Coast just now. Did you see much of the Hyla when you were out there?”

“No such name on the list,” answered the seaman, with decision. “There’s the Hydra, a harbor defense turret-ship, but she never leaves the home waters.”

The Doctor laughed. “We live in two separate worlds,” said he. “The Hyla is the little green tree frog, and Beale has founded some of his views on protoplasm upon the appearances, of its nerve cells. It is a subject in which I take an interest.”

"There were vermin of all sorts in the woods. When I have been on river service I have heard it at night like the engine-room when you are on the measured mile. You can't sleep for the piping, and croaking, and chirping. Great Scott! what a woman that is! She was across the lawn in three jumps. She would have made a captain of the foretop in the old days."

"She is a very remarkable woman."

"A very cranky one."

"A very sensible one in some things," remarked Mrs. Hay Denver.

"Look at that now!" cried the Admiral, with a lunge of his forefinger at the Doctor. "You mark my words, Walker, if we don't look out that woman will raise a mutiny with her preaching. Here's my wife disaffected already, and your girls will be no better. We must combine, man, or there's an end of all discipline."

"No doubt she is a little excessive in her views." said the Doctor, "but in the main I think as she does."

"Bravo, Doctor!" cried the lady.

"What, turned traitor to your sex! We'll court-martial you as a deserter."

"She is quite right. The professions are not sufficiently open to women. They are still far too much circumscribed in their employments. They are a feeble folk, the women who have to work for their bread — poor, unorganized, timid, taking as a favor what they might demand as a right. That is why their case is not more constantly before the public, for if their cry for redress was as great as their grievance it would fill the world to the exclusion of all others. It is all very well for us to be courteous to the rich, the refined, those to whom life is already made easy. It is a mere form, a trick of manner. If we are truly courteous, we shall stoop to lift up struggling womanhood when she really needs our help — when it is life and death to her whether she has it or not. And then to cant about it being unwomanly to work in the higher professions. It is womanly enough to starve, but unwomanly to use the brains which God has given them. Is it not a monstrous contention?"

The Admiral chuckled. "You are like one of these phonographs, Walker," said he; "you have had all this talked into you, and now you are reeling it off again. It's rank mutiny, every word of it, for man has his duties and woman has hers, but they are as separate as their natures are. I suppose that we shall have a woman hoisting her pennant on the flagship presently, and taking command of the Channel Squadron."

“Well, you have a woman on the throne taking command of the whole nation,” remarked his wife; “and everybody is agreed that she does it better than any of the men.”

The Admiral was somewhat staggered by this home-thrust. “That’s quite another thing,” said he.

“You should come to their next meeting. I am to take the chair. I have just promised Mrs. Westmacott that I will do so. But it has turned chilly, and it is time that the girls were indoors. Good night! I shall look out for you after breakfast for our constitutional, Admiral.”

The old sailor looked after his friend with a twinkle in his eyes.

“How old is he, mother?”

“About fifty, I think.”

“And Mrs. Westmacott?”

“I heard that she was forty-three.”

The Admiral rubbed his hands, and shook with amusement. “We’ll find one of these days that three and two make one,” said he. “I’ll bet you a new bonnet on it, mother.”

CHAPTER IV. A SISTER’S SECRET.

“Tell me, Miss Walker! You know how things should be. What would you say was a good profession for a young man of twenty-six who has had no education worth speaking about, and who is not very quick by nature?” The speaker was Charles Westmacott, and the time this same summer evening in the tennis ground, though the shadows had fallen now and the game been abandoned.

The girl glanced up at him, amused and surprised.

“Do you mean yourself?”

“Precisely.”

“But how could I tell?”

“I have no one to advise me. I believe that you could do it better than any one. I feel confidence in your opinion.”

“It is very flattering.” She glanced up again at his earnest, questioning face, with its Saxon eyes and drooping flaxen mustache, in some doubt as to whether he might be joking. On the contrary, all his attention seemed to be concentrated upon her answer.

“It depends so much upon what you can do, you know. I do not know you sufficiently to be able to say what natural gifts you have.” They were walking slowly across the lawn in the direction of the house.

“I have none. That is to say none worth mentioning. I have no memory and I am very slow.”

“But you are very strong.”

“Oh, if that goes for anything. I can put up a hundred-pound bar till further orders; but what sort of a calling is that?”

Some little joke about being called to the bar flickered up in Miss Walker’s mind, but her companion was in such obvious earnest that she stifled down her inclination to laugh.

“I can do a mile on the cinder-track in 4:50 and across-country in 5:20, but how is that to help me? I might be a cricket professional, but it is not a very dignified position. Not that I care a straw about dignity, you know, but I should not like to hurt the old lady’s feelings.

“Your aunt’s?”

“Yes, my aunt’s. My parents were killed in the Mutiny, you know, when I was a baby, and she has looked after me ever since. She has been very good to me. I’m sorry to leave her.”

“But why should you leave her?” They had reached the garden gate, and the girl leaned her racket upon the top of it, looking up with grave interest at her big white-flanneled companion.

“It’s, Browning,” said he.

“What!”

“Don’t tell my aunt that I said it” — he sank his voice to a whisper—”I hate Browning.”

Clara Walker rippled off into such a merry peal of laughter that he forgot the evil things which he had suffered from the poet, and burst out laughing too.

“I can’t make him out,” said he. “I try, but he is one too many. No doubt it is very stupid of me; I don’t deny it. But as long as I cannot there is no use pretending that I can. And then of course she feels hurt, for she is very fond of him, and likes to read him aloud in the evenings. She is reading a piece now `Pippa Passes,’ and I assure you, Miss Walker, that I don’t even know what the title means. You must think me a dreadful fool.”

“But surely he is not so incomprehensible as all that?” she said, as an attempt at encouragement.

“He is very bad. There are some things, you know, which are fine. That ride of the three Dutchmen, and Herve Riel and others, they are all right. But there was a piece we read last week. The first line stumped my aunt, and it takes a good deal to do that, for she rides very straight. `Setebos and Setebos and Setebos.’ That was the line.”

“It sounds like a charm.”

“No, it is a gentleman’s name. Three gentlemen, I thought, at first, but my aunt says one. Then he goes on, `Thinketh he dwelleth in the light of the moon.’ It was a very trying piece.”

Clara Walker laughed again.

“You must not think of leaving your aunt,” she said. “Think how lonely she would be without you.”

“Well, yes, I have thought of that. But you must remember that my aunt is to all intents hardly middle-aged, and a very eligible person. I don’t think that her dislike to mankind extends to individuals. She might form new ties, and then I should be a third wheel in the coach. It was all very well as long as I was only a boy, when her first husband was alive."

"But, good gracious, you don't mean that Mrs. Westmacott is going to marry again?" gasped Clara.

The young man glanced down at her with a question in his eyes. "Oh, it is only a remote, possibility, you know," said he. "Still, of course, it might happen, and I should like to know what I ought to turn my hand to."

"I wish I could help you," said Clara. "But I really know very little about such things. However, I could talk to my father, who knows a very great deal of the world."

"I wish you would. I should be so glad if you would."

"Then I certainly will. And now I must say good-night, Mr. Westmacott, for papa will be wondering where I am."

"Good night, Miss Walker." He pulled off his flannel cap, and stalked away through the gathering darkness.

Clara had imagined that they had been the last on the lawn, but, looking back from the steps which led up to the French windows, she saw two dark figures moving across towards the house. As they came nearer she could distinguish that they were Harold Denver and her sister Ida. The murmur of their voices rose up to her ears, and then the musical little child-like laugh which she knew so well. "I am so delighted," she heard her sister say. "So pleased and proud. I had no idea of it. Your words were such a surprise and a joy to me. Oh, I am so glad."

"Is that you, Ida?"

"Oh, there is Clara. I must go in, Mr. Denver. Good-night!"

There were a few whispered words, a laugh from Ida, and a "Good-night, Miss Walker," out of the darkness. Clara took her sister's hand, and they passed together through the long folding window. The Doctor had gone into his study, and the dining-room was empty. A single small red lamp upon the sideboard was reflected tenfold by the plate about it and the mahogany beneath it, though its single wick cast but a feeble light into the large, dimly shadowed room. Ida danced off to the big central lamp, but Clara put her hand upon her arm. "I rather like this quiet light," said she. "Why should we not have a chat?" She sat in the Doctor's large red plush chair, and her sister cuddled down upon the footstool at her feet, glancing up at her elder with a smile upon her lips and a mischievous gleam in her eyes. There was a shade of anxiety in Clara's face, which cleared away as she gazed into her sister's frank blue eyes.

"Have you anything to tell me, dear?" she asked.

Ida gave a little pout and shrug to her shoulder. "The Solicitor-General then opened the case for the prosecution," said she. "You are going to cross-examine me, Clara, so don't deny it. I do wish you would have that grey satin foulard of yours done up. With a little trimming and a new white vest it would look as good as new, and it is really very dowdy."

"You were quite late upon the lawn," said the inexorable Clara.

"Yes, I was rather. So were you. Have you anything to tell me?" She broke away into her merry musical laugh.

"I was chatting with Mr. Westmacott."

"And I was chatting with Mr. Denver. By the way, Clara, now tell me truly, what do you think of Mr. Denver? Do you like him? Honestly now!"

"I like him very much indeed. I think that he is one of the most gentlemanly, modest, manly young men that I have ever known. So now, dear, have you nothing to tell me?" Clara smoothed down her sister's golden hair with a motherly gesture, and stooped her face to catch the expected confidence. She could wish nothing better than that Ida should be the wife of Harold Denver, and from the words which she had overheard as they left the lawn that evening, she could not doubt that there was some understanding between them.

But there came no confession from Ida. Only the same mischievous smile and amused gleam in her deep blue eyes.

"That grey foulard dress — —" she began.

"Oh, you little tease! Come now, I will ask you what you have just asked me. Do you like Harold Denver?"

"Oh, he's a darling!"

"Ida!"

"Well, you asked me. That's what I think of him. And now, you dear old inquisitive, you will get nothing more out of me; so you must wait and not be too curious. I'm going off to see what papa is doing." She sprang to her feet, threw her arms round her sister's neck, gave her a final squeeze, and was gone. A chorus from Olivette, sung in her clear contralto, grew fainter and fainter until it ended in the slam of a distant door.

But Clara Walker still sat in the dim-lit room with her chin upon her hands, and her dreamy eyes looking out into the gathering gloom. It was the duty of her, a maiden, to play the part of a mother — to guide another in paths which her own steps had not yet trodden. Since her mother died not a thought had been given to herself, all was for her father and her sister. In her own eyes she was herself very plain, and she knew that her manner was often ungracious when she would most wish to be gracious. She saw her face as the glass reflected it, but she did not see the changing play of expression which gave it its charm — the infinite pity, the sympathy, the sweet womanliness which drew towards her all who were in doubt and in trouble, even as poor slow-moving Charles Westmacott had been drawn to her that night. She was herself, she thought, outside the pale of love. But it was very different with Ida, merry, little, quick-witted, bright-faced Ida. She was born for love. It was her inheritance. But she was young and innocent. She must not be allowed to venture too far without help in those dangerous waters. Some understanding there was between her and Harold Denver. In her heart of hearts Clara, like every good woman, was a match-maker, and already she had chosen Denver of all men as the one to whom she could most safely confide Ida. He had talked to her more than once on the serious topics of life, on his aspirations, on what a man could do to leave the world better for his presence. She knew that he was a man of a noble nature, high-minded and earnest. And yet she did not like this secrecy, this disinclination upon the part of one so frank and honest as Ida to tell her what was passing. She would wait, and if she got the opportunity next day she would lead Harold Denver himself on to this topic. It was possible that she might learn from him what her sister had refused to tell her.

CHAPTER V. A NAVAL CONQUEST.

It was the habit of the Doctor and the Admiral to accompany each other upon a morning ramble between breakfast and lunch. The dwellers in those quiet tree-lined roads were accustomed to see the two figures, the long, thin, austere seaman, and the short, bustling, tweed-clad physician, pass and repass with such regularity that a stopped clock has been reset by them. The Admiral took two steps to his companion's three, but the younger man was the quicker, and both were equal to a good four and a half miles an hour.

It was a lovely summer day which followed the events which have been described. The sky was of the deepest blue, with a few white, fleecy clouds drifting lazily across it, and the air was filled with the low drone of insects or with a sudden sharper note as bee or bluefly shot past with its quivering, long-drawn hum, like an insect tuning-fork. As the friends topped each rise which leads up to the Crystal Palace, they could see the dun clouds of London stretching along the northern skyline, with spire or dome breaking through the low-lying haze. The Admiral was in high spirits, for the morning post had brought good news to his son.

"It is wonderful, Walker," he was saying, "positively wonderful, the way that boy of mine has gone ahead during the last three years. We heard from Pearson to-day. Pearson is the senior partner, you know, and my boy the junior — Pearson and Denver the firm. Cunning old dog is Pearson, as cute and as greedy as a Rio shark. Yet he goes off for a fortnight's leave, and puts my boy in full charge, with all that immense business in his hands, and a freehand to do what he likes with it. How's that for confidence, and he only three years upon 'Change?"

"Any one would confide in him. His face is a surety," said the Doctor.

"Go on, Walker!" The Admiral dug his elbow at him. "You know my weak side. Still it's truth all the same. I've been blessed with a good wife and a good son, and maybe I relish them the more for having been cut off from them so long. I have much to be thankful for!"

"And so have I. The best two girls that ever stepped. There's Clara, who has learned up as much medicine as would give her the L.S.A., simply in order that she may sympathize with me in my work. But hullo, what is this coming along?"

“All drawing and the wind astern!” cried the Admiral. “Fourteen knots if it’s one. Why, by George, it is that woman!”

A rolling cloud of yellow dust had streamed round the curve of the road, and from the heart of it had emerged a high tandem tricycle flying along at a breakneck pace. In front sat Mrs. Westmacott clad in a heather tweed pea-jacket, a skirt which just{?} passed her knees and a pair of thick gaiters of the same material. She had a great bundle of red papers under her arm, while Charles, who sat behind her clad in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, bore a similar roll protruding from either pocket. Even as they watched, the pair eased up, the lady sprang off, impaled one of her bills upon the garden railing of an empty house, and then jumping on to her seat again was about to hurry onwards when her nephew drew her attention to the two gentlemen upon the footpath.

“Oh, now, really I didn’t notice you,” said she, taking a few turns of the treadle and steering the machine across to them. “Is it not a beautiful morning?”

“Lovely,” answered the Doctor. “You seem to be very busy.”

“I am very busy.” She pointed to the coloured paper which still fluttered from the railing. “We have been pushing our propaganda, you see. Charles and I have been at it since seven o’clock. It is about our meeting. I wish it to be a great success. See!” She smoothed out one of the bills, and the Doctor read his own name in great black letters across the bottom.

“We don’t forget our chairman, you see. Everybody is coming. Those two dear little old maids opposite, the Williamses, held out for some time; but I have their promise now. Admiral, I am sure that you wish us well.”

“Hum! I wish you no harm, ma’am.”

“You will come on the platform?”

“I’ll be —— No, I don’t think I can do that.”

“To our meeting, then?”

“No, ma’am; I don’t go out after dinner.”

“Oh yes, you will come. I will call in if I may, and chat it over with you when you come home. We have not breakfasted yet. Goodbye!” There was a whir of wheels, and the yellow cloud rolled away down the road again. By some legerdemain the Admiral found that he was clutching in his right hand one of the obnoxious bills. He crumpled it up, and threw it into the roadway.

"I'll be hanged if I go, Walker," said he, as he resumed his walk. "I've never been hustled into doing a thing yet, whether by woman or man."

"I am not a betting man," answered the Doctor, "but I rather think that the odds are in favor of your going."

The Admiral had hardly got home, and had just seated himself in his dining-room, when the attack upon him was renewed. He was slowly and lovingly unfolding the Times preparatory to the long read which led up to luncheon, and had even got so far as to fasten his golden pince-nez on to his thin, high-bridged nose, when he heard a crunching of gravel, and, looking over the top of his paper, saw Mrs. Westmacott coming up the garden walk. She was still dressed in the singular costume which offended the sailor's old-fashioned notions of propriety, but he could not deny, as he looked at her, that she was a very fine woman. In many climes he had looked upon women of all shades and ages, but never upon a more clearcut, handsome face, nor a more erect, supple, and womanly figure. He ceased to glower as he gazed upon her, and the frown smoothed away from his rugged brow.

"May I come in?" said she, framing herself in the open window, with a background of green sward and blue sky. "I feel like an invader deep in an enemy's country."

"It is a very welcome invasion, ma'am," said he, clearing his throat and pulling at his high collar. "Try this garden chair. What is there that I can do for you? Shall I ring and let Mrs. Denver know that you are here?"

"Pray do not trouble, Admiral. I only looked in with reference to our little chat this morning. I wish that you would give us your powerful support at our coming meeting for the improvement of the condition of woman."

"No, ma'am, I can't do that." He pursed up his lips and shook his grizzled head.

"And why not?"

"Against my principles, ma'am."

"But why?"

"Because woman has her duties and man has his. I may be old-fashioned, but that is my view. Why, what is the world coming to? I was saying to Dr. Walker only last night that we shall have a woman wanting to command the Channel Fleet next."

"That is one of the few professions which cannot be improved," said Mrs. Westmacott, with her sweetest smile. "Poor woman must still look to man for protection."

"I don't like these new-fangled ideas, ma'am. I tell you honestly that I don't. I like discipline, and I think every one is the better for it. Women have got a great deal which they had not in the days of our fathers. They have universities all for themselves, I am told, and there are women doctors, I hear. Surely they should rest contented. What more can they want?"

"You are a sailor, and sailors are always chivalrous. If you could see how things really are, you would change your opinion. What are the poor things to do? There are so many of them and so few things to which they can turn their hands. Governesses? But there are hardly any situations. Music and drawing? There is not one in fifty who has any special talent in that direction. Medicine? It is still surrounded with difficulties for women, and it takes many years and a small fortune to qualify. Nursing? It is hard work ill paid, and none but the strongest can stand it. What would you have them do then, Admiral? Sit down and starve?"

"Tut, tut! It is not so bad as that."

"The pressure is terrible. Advertise for a lady companion at ten shillings a week, which is less than a cook's wage, and see how many answers you get. There is no hope, no outlook, for these struggling thousands. Life is a dull, sordid struggle, leading down to a cheerless old age. Yet when we try to bring some little ray of hope, some chance, however distant, of something better, we are told by chivalrous gentlemen that it is against their principles to help."

The Admiral winced, but shook his head in dissent.

"There is banking, the law, veterinary surgery, government offices, the civil service, all these at least should be thrown freely open to women, if they have brains enough to compete successfully for them. Then if woman were unsuccessful it would be her own fault, and the majority of the population of this country could no longer complain that they live under a different law to the minority, and that they are held down in poverty and serfdom, with every road to independence sealed to them."

"What would you propose to do, ma'am?"

"To set the more obvious injustices right, and so to pave the way for a reform. Now look at that man digging in the field. I know him. He can neither read nor write, he is steeped in whisky, and he has as much intelligence as the potatoes that he is digging. Yet the man has a vote, can possibly turn the scale of an election, and may help to decide the policy of this empire. Now, to take the nearest example, here am I, a woman who have had some education, who have traveled, and who have seen and studied the institutions of many countries. I hold considerable property, and I pay more in imperial taxes than that man spends in whisky, which is saying a great deal, and yet I have no more direct influence upon the disposal of the money which I pay than that fly which creeps along the wall. Is that right? Is it fair?"

The Admiral moved uneasily in his chair. "Yours is an exceptional case," said he.

"But no woman has a voice. Consider that the women are a majority in the nation. Yet if there was a question of legislation upon which all women were agreed upon one side and all the men upon the other, it would appear that the matter was settled unanimously when more than half the population were opposed to it. Is that right?"

Again the Admiral wriggled. It was very awkward for the gallant seaman to have a handsome woman opposite to him, bombarding him with questions to none of which he could find an answer. "Couldn't even get the tompions out of his guns," as he explained the matter to the Doctor that evening.

"Now those are really the points that we shall lay stress upon at the meeting. The free and complete opening of the professions, the final abolition of the zenana I call it, and the franchise to all women who pay Queen's taxes above a certain sum. Surely there is nothing unreasonable in that. Nothing which could offend your principles. We shall have medicine, law, and the church all rallying that night for the protection of woman. Is the navy to be the one profession absent?"

The Admiral jumped out of his chair with an evil word in his throat. "There, there, ma'am," he cried. "Drop it for a time. I have heard enough. You've turned me a point or two. I won't deny it. But let it stand at that. I will think it over."

"Certainly, Admiral. We would not hurry you in your decision. But we still hope to see you on our platform." She rose and moved about in her lounging masculine fashion from one picture to another, for the walls were thickly covered with reminiscences of the Admiral's voyages.

"Hullo!" said she. "Surely this ship would have furled all her lower canvas and reefed her topsails if she found herself on a lee shore with the wind on her quarter."

“Of course she would. The artist was never past Gravesend, I swear. It’s the Penelope as she was on the 14th of June, 1857, in the throat of the Straits of Banca, with the Island of Banca on the starboard bow, and Sumatra on the port. He painted it from description, but of course, as you very sensibly say, all was snug below and she carried storm sails and double-reefed topsails, for it was blowing a cyclone from the sou’east. I compliment you, ma’am, I do indeed!”

“Oh, I have done a little sailoring myself — as much as a woman can aspire to, you know. This is the Bay of Funchal. What a lovely frigate!”

“Lovely, you say! Ah, she was lovely! That is the Andromeda. I was a mate aboard of her — sub-lieutenant they call it now, though I like the old name best.”

“What a lovely rake her masts have, and what a curve to her bows! She must have been a clipper.”

The old sailor rubbed his hands and his eyes glistened. His old ships bordered close upon his wife and his son in his affections.

“I know Funchal,” said the lady carelessly. “A couple of years ago I had a seven-ton cutter-rigged yacht, the Banshee, and we ran over to Madeira from Falmouth.”

“You ma’am, in a seven-tonner?”

“With a couple of Cornish lads for a crew. Oh, it was glorious! A fortnight right out in the open, with no worries, no letters, no callers, no petty thoughts, nothing but the grand works of God, the tossing sea and the great silent sky. They talk of riding, indeed, I am fond of horses, too, but what is there to compare with the swoop of a little craft as she pitches down the long steep side of a wave, and then the quiver and spring as she is tossed upwards again? Oh, if our souls could transmigrate I’d be a seamew above all birds that fly! But I keep you, Admiral. Adieu!”

The old sailor was too transported with sympathy to say a word. He could only shake her broad muscular hand. She was half-way down the garden path before she heard him calling her, and saw his grizzled head and weather-stained face looking out from behind the curtains.

“You may put me down for the platform,” he cried, and vanished abashed behind the curtain of his Times, where his wife found him at lunch time.

“I hear that you have had quite a long chat with Mrs. Westmacott,” said she.

“Yes, and I think that she is one of the most sensible women that I ever knew.”

“Except on the woman’s rights question, of course.”

“Oh, I don’t know. She had a good deal to say for herself on that also. In fact, mother, I have taken a platform ticket for her meeting.”

CHAPTER VI. AN OLD STORY.

But this was not to be the only eventful conversation which Mrs. Westmacott held that day, nor was the Admiral the only person in the Wilderness who was destined to find his opinions considerably changed. Two neighbouring families, the Winslows from Anerley, and the Cumberbatches from Gipsy Hill, had been invited to tennis by Mrs. Westmacott, and the lawn was gay in the evening with the blazers of the young men and the bright dresses of the girls. To the older people, sitting round in their wicker-work garden chairs, the darting, stooping, springing white figures, the sweep of skirts, and twinkle of canvas shoes, the click of the rackets and sharp whiz of the balls, with the continual “fifteen love — fifteen all!” of the marker, made up a merry and exhilarating scene. To see their sons and daughters so flushed and healthy and happy, gave them also a reflected glow, and it was hard to say who had most pleasure from the game, those who played or those who watched.

Mrs. Westmacott had just finished a set when she caught a glimpse of Clara Walker sitting alone at the farther end of the ground. She ran down the court, cleared the net to the amazement of the visitors, and seated herself beside her. Clara’s reserved and refined nature shrank somewhat from the boisterous frankness and strange manners of the widow, and yet her feminine instinct told her that beneath all her peculiarities there lay much that was good and noble. She smiled up at her, therefore, and nodded a greeting.

“Why aren’t you playing, then? Don’t, for goodness’ sake, begin to be languid and young ladyish! When you give up active sports you give up youth.”

“I have played a set, Mrs. Westmacott.”

“That’s right, my dear.” She sat down beside her, and tapped her upon the arm with her tennis racket. “I like you, my dear, and I am going to call you Clara. You are not as aggressive as I should wish, Clara, but still I like you very much. Self-sacrifice is all very well, you know, but we have had rather too much of it on our side, and should like to see a little on the other. What do you think of my nephew Charles?”

The question was so sudden and unexpected that Clara gave quite a jump in her chair. "I — I — I hardly ever have thought of your nephew Charles."

"No? Oh, you must think him well over, for I want to speak to you about him."

"To me? But why?"

"It seemed to me most delicate. You see, Clara, the matter stands in this way. It is quite possible that I may soon find myself in a completely new sphere of life, which will involve fresh duties and make it impossible for me to keep up a household which Charles can share."

Clara stared. Did this mean that she was about to marry again? What else could it point to?

"Therefore Charles must have a household of his own. That is obvious. Now, I don't approve of bachelor establishments. Do you?"

"Really, Mrs. Westmacott, I have never thought of the matter."

"Oh, you little sly puss! Was there ever a girl who never thought of the matter? I think that a young man of six-and-twenty ought to be married."

Clara felt very uncomfortable. The awful thought had come upon her that this ambassadress had come to her as a proxy with a proposal of marriage. But how could that be? She had not spoken more than three or four times with her nephew, and knew nothing more of him than he had told her on the evening before. It was impossible, then. And yet what could his aunt mean by this discussion of his private affairs?

"Do you not think yourself," she persisted, "that a young man of six-and-twenty is better married?"

"I should think that he is old enough to decide for himself."

"Yes, yes. He has done so. But Charles is just a little shy, just a little slow in expressing himself. I thought that I would pave the way for him. Two women can arrange these things so much better. Men sometimes have a difficulty in making themselves clear."

"I really hardly follow you, Mrs. Westmacott," cried Clara in despair.

"He has no profession. But he has nice tastes. He reads Browning every night. And he is most amazingly strong. When he was younger we used to put on the gloves together, but I cannot persuade him to now, for he says he cannot play light enough. I should allow him five hundred, which should be enough at first."

"My dear Mrs. Westmacott," cried Clara, "I assure you that I have not the least idea what it is that you are talking of."

“Do you think your sister Ida would have my nephew Charles?”

Her sister Ida? Quite a little thrill of relief and of pleasure ran through her at the thought. Ida and Charles Westmacott. She had never thought of it. And yet they had been a good deal together. They had played tennis. They had shared the tandem tricycle. Again came the thrill of joy, and close at its heels the cold questionings of conscience. Why this joy? What was the real source of it? Was it that deep down, somewhere pushed back in the black recesses of the soul, there was the thought lurking that if Charles prospered in his wooing then Harold Denver would still be free? How mean, how unmaidenly, how unsisterly the thought! She crushed it down and thrust it aside, but still it would push up its wicked little head. She crimsoned with shame at her own baseness, as she turned once more to her companion.

“I really do not know,” she said.

“She is not engaged?”

“Not that I know of.”

“You speak hesitatingly.”

“Because I am not sure. But he may ask. She cannot but be flattered.”

“Quite so. I tell him that it is the most practical compliment which a man can pay to a woman. He is a little shy, but when he sets himself to do it he will do it. He is very much in love with her, I assure you. These little lively people always do attract the slow and heavy ones, which is nature’s device for the neutralising of bores. But they are all going in. I think if you will allow me that I will just take the opportunity to tell him that, as far as you know, there is no positive obstacle in the way.”

“As far as I know,” Clara repeated, as the widow moved away to where the players were grouped round the net, or sauntering slowly towards the house. She rose to follow her, but her head was in a whirl with new thoughts, and she sat down again. Which would be best for Ida, Harold or Charles? She thought it over with as much solicitude as a mother who plans for her only child. Harold had seemed to her to be in many ways the noblest and the best young man whom she had known. If ever she was to love a man it would be such a man as that. But she must not think of herself. She had reason to believe that both these men loved her sister. Which would be the best for her? But perhaps the matter was already decided. She could not forget the scrap of conversation which she had heard the night before, nor the secret which her sister had refused to confide to her. If Ida would not tell her, there was but one person who could. She raised her eyes and there was Harold Denver standing before her.

“You were lost in your thoughts,” said he, smiling. “I hope that they were pleasant ones.”

“Oh, I was planning,” said she, rising. “It seems rather a waste of time as a rule, for things have a way of working themselves out just as you least expect.”

“What were you planning, then?”

“The future.”

“Whose?”

“Oh, my own and Ida’s.”

“And was I included in your joint futures?

“I hope all our friends were included.”

“Don’t go in,” said he, as she began to move slowly towards the house. “I wanted to have a word. Let us stroll up and down the lawn. Perhaps you are cold. If you are, I could bring you out a shawl.”

“Oh, no, I am not cold.”

“I was speaking to your sister Ida last night.” She noticed that there was a slight quiver in his voice, and, glancing up at his dark, clearcut face, she saw that he was very grave. She felt that it was settled, that he had come to ask her for her sister’s hand.

“She is a charming girl,” said he, after a pause.

“Indeed she is,” cried Clara warmly. “And no one who has not lived with her and known her intimately can tell how charming and good she is. She is like a sunbeam in the house.”

“No one who was not good could be so absolutely happy as she seems to be. Heaven’s last gift, I think, is a mind so pure and a spirit so high that it is unable even to see what is impure and evil in the world around us. For as long as we can see it, how can we be truly happy?”

“She has a deeper side also. She does not turn it to the world, and it is not natural that she should, for she is very young. But she thinks, and has aspirations of her own.”

“You cannot admire her more than I do. Indeed, Miss Walker, I only ask to be brought into nearer relationship with her, and to feel that there is a permanent bond between us.”

It had come at last. For a moment her heart was numbed within her, and then a flood of sisterly love carried all before it. Down with that dark thought which would still try to raise its unhallowed head! She turned to Harold with sparkling eyes and words of pleasure upon her lips.

“I should wish to be near and dear to both of you,” said he, as he took her hand. “I should wish Ida to be my sister, and you my wife.”

She said nothing. She only stood looking at him with parted lips and great, dark, questioning eyes. The lawn had vanished away, the sloping gardens, the brick villas, the darkening sky with half a pale moon beginning to show over the chimney-tops. All was gone, and she was only conscious of a dark, earnest, pleading face, and of a voice, far away, disconnected from herself, the voice of a man telling a woman how he loved her. He was unhappy, said the voice, his life was a void; there was but one thing that could save him; he had come to the parting of the ways, here lay happiness and honor, and all that was high and noble; there lay the soul-killing round, the lonely life, the base pursuit of money, the sordid, selfish aims. He needed but the hand of the woman that he loved to lead him into the better path. And how he loved her his life would show. He loved her for her sweetness, for her womanliness, for her strength. He had need of her. Would she not come to him? And then of a sudden as she listened it came home to her that the man was Harold Denver, and that she was the woman, and that all God’s work was very beautiful — the green sward beneath her feet, the rustling leaves, the long orange slashes in the western sky. She spoke; she scarce knew what the broken words were, but she saw the light of joy shine out on his face, and her hand was still in his as they wandered amid the twilight. They said no more now, but only wandered and felt each other’s presence. All was fresh around them, familiar and yet new, tinged with the beauty of their new-found happiness.

“Did you not know it before?” he asked. “I did not dare to think it.”

“What a mask of ice I must wear! How could a man feel as I have done without showing it? Your sister at least knew.”

“Ida!”

“It was last night. She began to praise you, I said what I felt, and then in an instant it was all out.”

“But what could you — what could you see in me? Oh, I do pray that you may not repent it!” The gentle heart was ruffled amid its joy by the thought of its own unworthiness.

“Repent it! I feel that I am a saved man. You do not know how degrading this city life is, how debasing, and yet how absorbing. Money for ever clinks in your ear. You can think of nothing else. From the bottom of my heart I hate it, and yet how can I draw back without bringing grief to my dear old father? There was but one way in which I could defy the taint, and that was by having a home influence so pure and so high that it may brace me up against all that draws me down. I have felt that influence already. I know that when I am talking to you I am a better man. It is you who, must go with me through life, or I must walk for ever alone."

"Oh, Harold, I am so happy!" Still they wandered amid the darkening shadows, while one by one the stars peeped out in the blue black sky above them. At last a chill night wind blew up from the east, and brought them back to the realities of life.

"You must go in. You will be cold."

"My father will wonder where I am. Shall I say anything to him?"

"If you like, my darling. Or I will in the morning. I must tell my mother to-night. I know how delighted she will be."

"I do hope so."

"Let me take you up the garden path. It is so dark. Your lamp is not lit yet. There is the window. Till to-morrow, then, dearest."

"Till to-morrow, Harold."

"My own darling!" He stooped, and their lips met for the first time. Then, as she pushed open the folding windows she heard his quick, firm step as it passed down the graveled path. A lamp was lit as she entered the room, and there was Ida, dancing about like a mischievous little fairy in front of her.

"And have you anything to tell me?" she asked, with a solemn face. Then, suddenly throwing her arms round her sister's neck, "Oh, you dear, dear old Clara! I am so pleased. I am so pleased."

CHAPTER VII. VENIT TANDEM FELICITAS.

It was just three days after the Doctor and the Admiral had congratulated each other upon the closer tie which was to unite their two families, and to turn their friendship into something even dearer and more intimate, that Miss Ida Walker received a letter which caused her some surprise and considerable amusement. It was dated from next door, and was handed in by the red-headed page after breakfast.

“Dear Miss Ida,” began this curious document, and then relapsed suddenly into the third person. “Mr. Charles Westmacott hopes that he may have the extreme pleasure of a ride with Miss Ida Walker upon his tandem tricycle. Mr. Charles Westmacott will bring it round in half an hour. You in front. Yours very truly, Charles Westmacott.” The whole was written in a large, loose-jointed, and school-boyish hand, very thin on the up strokes and thick on the down, as though care and pains had gone to the fashioning of it.

Strange as was the form, the meaning was clear enough; so Ida hastened to her room, and had hardly slipped on her light grey cycling dress when she saw the tandem with its large occupant at the door. He handed her up to her saddle with a more solemn and thoughtful face than was usual with him, and a few moments later they were flying along the beautiful, smooth suburban roads in the direction of Forest Hill. The great limbs of the athlete made the heavy machine spring and quiver with every stroke; while the mignon grey figure with the laughing face, and the golden curls blowing from under the little pink-banded straw hat, simply held firmly to her perch, and let the treadles whirl round beneath her feet. Mile after mile they flew, the wind beating in her face, the trees dancing past in two long ranks on either side, until they had passed round Croydon and were approaching Norwood once more from the further side.

“Aren’t you tired?” she asked, glancing over her shoulder and turning towards him a little pink ear, a fluffy golden curl, and one blue eye twinkling from the very corner of its lid.

“Not a bit. I am just getting my swing.”

“Isn’t it wonderful to be strong? You always remind me of a steamengine.”

“Why a steamengine?”

“Well, because it is so powerful, and reliable, and unreasoning. Well, I didn’t mean that last, you know, but — but — you know what I mean. What is the matter with you?”

“Why?”

“Because you have something on your mind. You have not laughed once.”

He broke into a gruesome laugh. “I am quite jolly,” said he.

“Oh, no, you are not. And why did you write me such a dreadfully stiff letter?”

“There now,” he cried, “I was sure it was stiff. I said it was absurdly stiff.”

“Then why write it?”

“It wasn’t my own composition.”

“Whose then? Your aunt’s?”

“Oh, no. It was a person of the name of Slattery.”

“Goodness! Who is he?”

“I knew it would come out, I felt that it would. You’ve heard of Slattery the author?”

“Never.”

“He is wonderful at expressing himself. He wrote a book called `The Secret Solved; or, Letter-writing Made Easy.’ It gives you models of all sorts of letters.”

Ida burst out laughing. “So you actually copied one.”

“It was to invite a young lady to a picnic, but I set to work and soon got it changed so that it would do very well. Slattery seems never to have asked any one to ride a tandem. But when I had written it, it seemed so dreadfully stiff that I had to put a little beginning and end of my own, which seemed to brighten it up a good deal.”

“I thought there was something funny about the beginning and end.”

“Did you? Fancy your noticing the difference in style. How quick you are! I am very slow at things like that. I ought to have been a woodman, or game-keeper, or something. I was made on those lines. But I have found something now.”

“What is that, then?”

“Ranching. I have a chum in Texas, and he says it is a rare life. I am to buy a share in his business. It is all in the open air — shooting, and riding, and sport. Would it — would it inconvenience you much, Ida, to come out there with me?”

Ida nearly fell off her perch in her amazement. The only words of which she could think were “My goodness me!” so she said them.

“If it would not upset your plans, or change your arrangements in any way.” He had slowed down and let go of the steering handle, so that the great machine crawled aimlessly about from one side of the road to the other. “I know very well that I am not clever or anything of that sort, but still I would do all I can to make you very happy. Don’t you think that in time you might come to like me a little bit?”

Ida gave a cry of fright. “I won’t like you if you run me against a brick wall,” she said, as the machine rasped up against the curb “Do attend to the steering.”

“Yes, I will. But tell me, Ida, whether you will come with me.”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s too absurd! How can we talk about such things when I cannot see you? You speak to the nape of my neck, and then I have to twist my head round to answer.”

“I know. That was why I put `You in front’ upon my letter. I thought that it would make it easier. But if you would prefer it I will stop the machine, and then you can sit round and talk about it.”

“Good gracious!” cried Ida. “Fancy our sitting face to face on a motionless tricycle in the middle of the road, and all the people looking out of their windows at us!”

“It would look rather funny, wouldn’t it? Well, then, suppose that we both get off and push the tandem along in front of us?”

“Oh, no, this is better than that.”

“Or I could carry the thing.”

Ida burst out laughing. “That would be more absurd still.”

“Then we will go quietly, and I will look out for the steering. I won’t talk about it at all if you would rather not. But I really do love you very much, and you would make me happy if you came to Texas with me, and I think that perhaps after a time I could make you happy too.”

“But your aunt?”

“Oh, she would like it very much. I can understand that your father might not like to lose you. I’m sure I wouldn’t either, if I were he. But after all, America is not very far off nowadays, and is not so very wild. We would take a grand piano, and — and — a copy of Browning. And Denver and his wife would come over to see us. We should be quite a family party. It would be jolly.”

Ida sat listening to the stumbling words and awkward phrases which were whispered from the back of her, but there was something in Charles Westmacott’s clumsiness of speech which was more moving than the words of the most eloquent of pleaders. He paused, he stammered, he caught his breath between the words, and he blurted out in little blunt phrases all the hopes of his heart. If love had not come to her yet, there was at least pity and sympathy, which are nearly akin to it. Wonder there was also that one so weak and frail as she should shake this strong man so, should have the whole course of his life waiting for her decision. Her left hand was on the cushion at her side. He leaned forward and took it gently in his own. She did not try to draw it back from him.

“May I have it,” said he, “for life?”

“Oh, do attend to your steering,” said she, smiling round at him; “and don’t say any more about this to-day. Please don’t!”

“When shall I know, then?”

“Oh, to-night, to-morrow, I don’t know. I must ask Clara. Talk about something else.”

And they did talk about something else; but her left hand was still enclosed in his, and he knew, without asking again, that all was well.

CHAPTER VIII. SHADOWS BEFORE.

Mrs. Westmacott's great meeting for the enfranchisement of woman had passed over, and it had been a triumphant success. All the maids and matrons of the southern suburbs had rallied at her summons, there was an influential platform with Dr. Balthazar Walker in the chair, and Admiral Hay Denver among his more prominent supporters. One benighted male had come in from the outside darkness and had jeered from the further end of the hall, but he had been called to order by the chair, petrified by indignant glances from the unenfranchised around him, and finally escorted to the door by Charles Westmacott. Fiery resolutions were passed, to be forwarded to a large number of leading statesmen, and the meeting broke up with the conviction that a shrewd blow had been struck for the cause of woman.

But there was one woman at least to whom the meeting and all that was connected with it had brought anything but pleasure. Clara Walker watched with a heavy heart the friendship and close intimacy which had sprung up between her father and the widow. From week to week it had increased until no day ever passed without their being together. The coming meeting had been the excuse for these continual interviews, but now the meeting was over, and still the Doctor would refer every point which rose to the judgment of his neighbour. He would talk, too, to his two daughters of her strength of character, her decisive mind, and of the necessity of their cultivating her acquaintance and following her example, until at last it had become his most common topic of conversation.

All this might have passed as merely the natural pleasure which an elderly man might take in the society of an intelligent and handsome woman, but there were other points which seemed to Clara to give it a deeper meaning. She could not forget that when Charles Westmacott had spoken to her one night he had alluded to the possibility of his aunt marrying again. He must have known or noticed something before he would speak upon such a subject. And then again Mrs. Westmacott had herself said that she hoped to change her style of living shortly and take over completely new duties. What could that mean except that she expected to marry? And whom? She seemed to see few friends outside their own little circle. She must have alluded to her father. It was a hateful thought, and yet it must be faced.

One evening the Doctor had been rather late at his neighbour's. He used to go into the Admiral's after dinner, but now he turned more frequently in the other direction. When he returned Clara was sitting alone in the drawing-room reading a magazine. She sprang up as he entered, pushed forward his chair, and ran to fetch his slippers.

"You are looking a little pale, dear," he remarked.

"Oh, no, papa, I am very well."

"All well with Harold?"

"Yes. His partner, Mr. Pearson, is still away, and he is doing all the work."

"Well done. He is sure to succeed. Where is Ida?"

"In her room, I think."

"She was with Charles Westmacott on the lawn not very long ago. He seems very fond of her. He is not very bright, but I think he will make her a good husband."

"I am sure of it, papa. He is very manly and reliable."

"Yes, I should think that he is not the sort of man who goes wrong. There is nothing hidden about him. As to his brightness, it really does not matter, for his aunt, Mrs. Westmacott, is very rich, much richer than you would think from her style of living, and she has made him a handsome provision."

"I am glad of that."

"It is between ourselves. I am her trustee, and so I know something of her arrangements. And when are you going to marry, Clara?"

"Oh, papa, not for some time yet. We have not thought of a date."

"Well, really, I don't know that there is any reason for delay. He has a competence and it increases yearly. As long as you are quite certain that your mind is made up — —"

"Oh, papa!"

"Well, then, I really do not know why there should be any delay. And Ida, too, must be married within the next few months. Now, what I want to know is what I am to do when my two little companions run away from me." He spoke lightly, but his eyes were grave as he looked questioningly at his daughter.

“Dear papa, you shall not be alone. It will be years before Harold and I think of marrying, and when we do you must come and live with us.”

“No, no, dear. I know that you mean what you say, but I have seen something of the world, and I know that such arrangements never answer. There cannot be two masters in a house, and yet at my age my freedom is very necessary to me.”

“But you would be completely free.”

“No, dear, you cannot be that if you are a guest in another man’s house. Can you suggest no other alternative?”

“That we remain with you.”

“No, no. That is out of the question. Mrs. Westmacott herself says that a woman’s first duty is to marry. Marriage, however, should be an equal partnership, as she points out. I should wish you both to marry, but still I should like a suggestion from you, Clara, as to what I should do.”

“But there is no hurry, papa. Let us wait. I do not intend to marry yet.”

Doctor Walker looked disappointed. “Well, Clara, if you can suggest nothing, I suppose that I must take the initiative myself,” said he.

“Then what do you propose, papa?” She braced herself as one who sees the blow which is about to fall.

He looked at her and hesitated. “How like your poor dear mother you are, Clara!” he cried. “As I looked at you then it was as if she had come back from the grave.” He stooped towards her and kissed her. “There, run away to your sister, my dear, and do not trouble yourself about me. Nothing is settled yet, but you will find that all will come right.”

Clara went upstairs sad at heart, for she was sure now that what she had feared was indeed about to come to pass, and that her father was going to take Mrs. Westmacott to be his wife. In her pure and earnest mind her mother’s memory was enshrined as that of a saint, and the thought that any one should take her place seemed a terrible desecration. Even worse, however, did this marriage appear when looked at from the point of view of her father’s future. The widow might fascinate him by her knowledge of the world, her dash, her strength, her unconventionality — all these qualities Clara was willing to allow her — but she was convinced that she would be unendurable as a life companion. She had come to an age when habits are not lightly to be changed, nor was she a woman who was at all likely to attempt to change them. How would a sensitive man like her father stand the constant strain of such a wife, a woman who was all decision, with no softness, and nothing soothing in her nature? It passed as a mere eccentricity when they heard of her stout drinking, her cigarette smoking, her occasional whiffs at a long clay pipe, her horsewhipping of a drunken servant, and her companionship with the snake Eliza, whom she was in the habit of bearing about in her pocket. All this would become unendurable to her father when his first infatuation was past. For his own sake, then, as well as for her mother's memory, this match must be prevented. And yet how powerless she was to prevent it! What could she do? Could Harold aid her? Perhaps. Or Ida? At least she would tell her sister and see what she could suggest.

Ida was in her boudoir, a tiny little tapestried room, as neat and dainty as herself, with low walls hung with Imari plaques and with pretty little Swiss brackets bearing blue Kaga ware, or the pure white Coalport china. In a low chair beneath a red shaded standing lamp sat Ida, in a diaphanous evening dress of mousseline de soie, the ruddy light tinging her sweet childlike face, and glowing on her golden curls. She sprang up as her sister entered, and threw her arms around her.

"Dear old Clara! Come and sit down here beside me. I have not had a chat for days. But, oh, what a troubled face! What is it then?" She put up her forefinger and smoothed her sister's brow with it.

Clara pulled up a stool, and sitting down beside her sister, passed her arm round her waist. "I am so sorry to trouble you, dear Ida," she said. "But I do not know what to do.

"There's nothing the matter with Harold?"

"Oh, no, Ida."

"Nor with my Charles?"

"No, no."

Ida gave a sigh of relief. "You quite frightened me, dear," said she. "You can't think how solemn you look. What is it, then?"

"I believe that papa intends to ask Mrs. Westmacott to marry him."

Ida burst out laughing. "What can have put such a notion into your head, Clara?"

"It is only too true, Ida. I suspected it before, and he himself almost told me as much with his own lips to-night. I don't think that it is a laughing matter."

"Really, I could not help it. If you had told me that those two dear old ladies opposite, the Misses Williams, were both engaged, you would not have surprised me more. It is really too funny.”

“Funny, Ida! Think of any one taking the place of dear mother.”

But her sister was of a more practical and less sentimental nature. “I am sure,” said she, “that dear mother would like papa to do whatever would make him most happy. We shall both be away, and why should papa not please himself?”

“But think how unhappy he will be. You know how quiet he is in his ways, and how even a little thing will upset him. How could he live with a wife who would make his whole life a series of surprises? Fancy what a whirlwind she must be in a house. A man at his age cannot change his ways. I am sure he would be miserable.”

Ida’s face grew graver, and she pondered over the matter for a few minutes. “I really think that you are right as usual,” said she at last. “I admire Charlie’s aunt very much, you know, and I think that she is a very useful and good person, but I don’t think she would do as a wife for poor quiet papa.”

“But he will certainly ask her, and I really think that she intends to accept him. Then it would be too late to interfere. We have only a few days at the most. And what can we do? How can we hope to make him change his mind?”

Again Ida pondered. “He has never tried what it is to live with a strong-minded woman,” said she. “If we could only get him to realise it in time. Oh, Clara, I have it; I have it! Such a lovely plan!” She leaned back in her chair and burst into a fit of laughter so natural and so hearty that Clara had to forget her troubles and to join in it.

“Oh, it is beautiful!” she gasped at last. “Poor papa! What a time he will have! But it’s all for his own good, as he used to say when we had to be punished when we were little. Oh, Clara, I do hope your heart won’t fail you.”

“I would do anything to save him, dear.”

“That’s it. You must steel yourself by that thought.”

“But what is your plan?”

“Oh, I am so proud of it. We will tire him for ever of the widow, and of all emancipated women. Let me see, what are Mrs. Westmacott’s main ideas? You have listened to her more than I. Women should attend less to household duties. That is one, is it not?”

"Yes, if they feel they have capabilities for higher things. Then she thinks that every woman who has leisure should take up the study of some branch of science, and that, as far as possible, every woman should qualify herself for some trade or profession, choosing for preference those which have been hitherto monopolized by men. To enter the others would only be to intensify the present competition."

"Quite so. That is glorious!" Her blue eyes were dancing with mischief, and she clapped her hands in her delight. "What else? She thinks that whatever a man can do a woman should be allowed to do also — does she not?"

"She says so."

"And about dress? The short skirt, and the divided skirt are what she believes in?"

"Yes."

"We must get in some cloth."

"Why?"

"We must make ourselves a dress each. A brand-new, enfranchised, emancipated dress, dear. Don't you see my plan? We shall act up to all Mrs. Westmacott's views in every respect, and improve them when we can. Then papa will know what it is to live with a woman who claims all her rights. Oh, Clara, it will be splendid."

Her milder sister sat speechless before so daring a scheme. "But it would be wrong, Ida!" she cried at last.

"Not a bit. It is to save him."

"I should not dare."

"Oh, yes, you would. Harold will help. Besides, what other plan have you?"

"I have none."

"Then you must take mine."

"Yes. Perhaps you are right. Well, we do it for a good motive."

"You will do it?"

"I do not see any other way."

"You dear good Clara! Now I will show you what you are to do. We must not begin too suddenly. It might excite suspicion."

"What would you do, then?"

"To-morrow we must go to Mrs. Westmacott, and sit at her feet and learn all her views."

“What hypocrites we shall feel!”

“We shall be her newest and most enthusiastic converts. Oh, it will be such fun, Clara! Then we shall make our plans and send for what we want, and begin our new life.”

“I do hope that we shall not have to keep it up long. It seems so cruel to dear papa.”

“Cruel! To save him!”

“I wish I was sure that we were doing right. And yet what else can we do? Well, then, Ida, the die is cast, and we will call upon Mrs. Westmacott tomorrow.”

CHAPTER IX. A FAMILY PLOT.

Little did poor Doctor Walker imagine as he sat at his breakfast-table next morning that the two sweet girls who sat on either side of him were deep in a conspiracy, and that he, munching innocently at his muffins, was the victim against whom their wiles were planned. Patiently they waited until at last their opening came.

“It is a beautiful day,” he remarked. “It will do for Mrs. Westmacott. She was thinking of having a spin upon the tricycle.”

“Then we must call early. We both intended to see her after breakfast.”

“Oh, indeed!” The Doctor looked pleased.

“You know, pa,” said Ida, “it seems to us that we really have a very great advantage in having Mrs. Westmacott living so near.”

“Why so, dear?”

“Well, because she is so advanced, you know. If we only study her ways we may advance ourselves also.”

“I think I have heard you say, papa,” Clara remarked, “that she is the type of the woman of the future.”

“I am very pleased to hear you speak so sensibly, my dears. I certainly think that she is a woman whom you may very well take as your model. The more intimate you are with her the better pleased I shall be.”

“Then that is settled,” said Clara demurely, and the talk drifted to other matters.

All the morning the two girls sat extracting from Mrs. Westmacott her most extreme view as to the duty of the one sex and the tyranny of the other. Absolute equality, even in details, was her ideal. Enough of the parrot cry of unwomanly and unmaidenly. It had been invented by man to scare woman away when she poached too nearly upon his precious preserves. Every woman should be independent. Every woman should learn a trade. It was their duty to push in where they were least welcome. Then they were martyrs to the cause, and pioneers to their weaker sisters. Why should the wash-tub, the needle, and the housekeeper’s book be eternally theirs? Might they not reach higher, to the consulting-room, to the bench, and even to the pulpit? Mrs. Westmacott sacrificed her tricycle ride in her eagerness over her pet subject, and her two fair disciples drank in every word, and noted every suggestion for future use. That afternoon they went shopping in London, and before evening strange packages began to be handed in at the Doctor's door. The plot was ripe for execution, and one of the conspirators was merry and jubilant, while the other was very nervous and troubled.

When the Doctor came down to the dining-room next morning, he was surprised to find that his daughters had already been up some time. Ida was installed at one end of the table with a spirit-lamp, a curved glass flask, and several bottles in front of her. The contents of the flask were boiling furiously, while a villainous smell filled the room. Clara lounged in an arm-chair with her feet upon a second one, a blue-covered book in her hand, and a huge map of the British Islands spread across her lap. "Hullo!" cried the Doctor, blinking and sniffing, "where's the breakfast?"

"Oh, didn't you order it?" asked Ida.

"I! No; why should I?" He rang the bell. "Why have you not laid the breakfast, Jane?"

"If you please, sir, Miss Ida was a workin' at the table."

"Oh, of course, Jane," said the young lady calmly. "I am so sorry. I shall be ready to move in a few minutes."

"But what on earth are you doing, Ida?" asked the Doctor. "The smell is most offensive. And, good gracious, look at the mess which you have made upon the cloth! Why, you have burned a hole right through."

"Oh, that is the acid," Ida answered contentedly. "Mrs. Westmacott said that it would burn holes."

"You might have taken her word for it without trying," said her father dryly.

"But look here, pa! See what the book says: `The scientific mind takes nothing upon trust. Prove all things!' I have proved that."

"You certainly have. Well, until breakfast is ready I'll glance over the Times. Have you seen it?"

"The Times? Oh, dear me, this is it which I have under my spirit-lamp. I am afraid there is some acid upon that too, and it is rather damp and torn. Here it is."

The Doctor took the bedraggled paper with a rueful face. "Everything seems to be wrong to-day," he remarked. "What is this sudden enthusiasm about chemistry, Ida?"

"Oh, I am trying to live up to Mrs. Westmacott's teaching."

“Quite right! quite right!” said he, though perhaps with less heartiness than he had shown the day before. “Ah, here is breakfast at last!”

But nothing was comfortable that morning. There were eggs without egg-spoons, toast which was leathery from being kept, dried-up rashers, and grounds in the coffee. Above all, there was that dreadful smell which pervaded everything and gave a horrible twang to every mouthful.

“I don’t wish to put a damper upon your studies, Ida,” said the Doctor, as he pushed back his chair. “But I do think it would be better if you did your chemical experiments a little later in the day.”

“But Mrs. Westmacott says that women should rise early, and do their work before breakfast.”

“Then they should choose some other room besides the breakfast-room.” The Doctor was becoming just a little ruffled. A turn in the open air would soothe him, he thought. “Where are my boots?” he asked.

But they were not in their accustomed corner by his chair. Up and down he searched, while the three servants took up the quest, stooping and peeping under book-cases and drawers. Ida had returned to her studies, and Clara to her blue-covered volume, sitting absorbed and disinterested amid the bustle and the racket. At last a general buzz of congratulation announced that the cook had discovered the boots hung up among the hats in the hall. The Doctor, very red and flustered, drew them on, and stamped off to join the Admiral in his morning walk.

As the door slammed Ida burst into a shout of laughter. “You see, Clara,” she cried, “the charm works already. He has gone to number one instead of to number three. Oh, we shall win a great victory. You’ve been very good, dear; I could see that you were on thorns to help him when he was looking for his boots.”

“Poor papa! It is so cruel. And yet what are we to do?”

“Oh, he will enjoy being comfortable all the more if we give him a little discomfort now. What horrible work this chemistry is! Look at my frock! It is ruined. And this dreadful smell!” She threw open the window, and thrust her little golden-curled head out of it. Charles Westmacott was hoeing at the other side of the garden fence.

“Good morning, sir,” said Ida.

“Good morning!” The big man leaned upon his hoe and looked up at her.

“Have you any cigarettes, Charles?”

“Yes, certainly.”

"Throw me up two."

"Here is my case. Can you catch!"

A seal-skin case came with a soft thud on to the floor. Ida opened it. It was full.

"What are these?" she asked.

"Egyptians."

"What are some other brands?"

"Oh, Richmond Gems, and Turkish, and Cambridge. But why?"

"Never mind!" She nodded to him and closed the window. "We must remember all those, Clara," said she. "We must learn to talk about such things. Mrs. Westmacott knows all about the brands of cigarettes. Has your rum come?"

"Yes, dear. It is here."

"And I have my stout. Come along up to my room now. This smell is too abominable. But we must be ready for him when he comes back. If we sit at the window we shall see him coming down the road."

The fresh morning air, and the genial company of the Admiral had caused the Doctor to forget his troubles, and he came back about midday in an excellent humor. As he opened the hall door the vile smell of chemicals which had spoilt his breakfast met him with a redoubled virulence. He threw open the hall window, entered the dining-room, and stood aghast at the sight which met his eyes.

Ida was still sitting among her bottles, with a lit cigarette in her left hand and a glass of stout on the table beside her. Clara, with another cigarette, was lounging in the easy chair with several maps spread out upon the floor around. Her feet were stuck up on the coal scuttle, and she had a tumblerful of some reddish-brown composition on the smoking table close at her elbow. The Doctor gazed from one to the other of them through the thin grey haze of smoke, but his eyes rested finally in a settled stare of astonishment upon his elder and more serious daughter.

"Clara!" he gasped, "I could not have believed it!"

"What is it, papa?"

"You are smoking!"

"Trying to, papa. I find it a little difficult, for I have not been used to it."

"But why, in the name of goodness—"

"Mrs. Westmacott recommends it."

"Oh, a lady of mature years may do many things which a young girl must avoid."

"Oh, no," cried Ida, "Mrs. Westmacott says that there should be one law for all. Have a cigarette, pa?"

"No, thank you. I never smoke in the morning."

"No? Perhaps you don't care for the brand. What are these, Clara?"

"Egyptians."

"Ah, we must have some Richmond Gems or Turkish. I wish, pa, when you go into town, you would get me some Turkish."

"I will do nothing of the kind. I do not at all think that it is a fitting habit for young ladies. I do not agree with Mrs. Westmacott upon the point."

"Really, pa! It was you who advised us to imitate her."

"But with discrimination. What is it that you are drinking, Clara?"

"Rum, papa."

"Rum? In the morning?" He sat down and rubbed his eyes as one who tries to shake off some evil dream. "Did you say rum?"

"Yes, pa. They all drink it in the profession which I am going to take up."

"Profession, Clara?"

"Mrs. Westmacott says that every woman should follow a calling, and that we ought to choose those which women have always avoided."

"Quite so."

"Well, I am going to act upon her advice. I am going to be a pilot."

"My dear Clara! A pilot! This is too much."

"This is a beautiful book, papa. `The Lights, Beacons, Buoys, Channels, and Landmarks of Great Britain.' Here is another, `The Master Mariner's Handbook.' You can't imagine how interesting it is."

"You are joking, Clara. You must be joking!"

"Not at all, pa. You can't think what a lot I have learned already. I'm to carry a green light to starboard and a red to port, with a white light at the mast-head, and a flare-up every fifteen minutes."

"Oh, won't it look pretty at night!" cried her sister.

"And I know the fog-signals. One blast means that a ship steers to starboard, two to port, three astern, four that it is unmanageable. But this man asks such dreadful questions at the end of each chapter. Listen to this: `You see a red light. The ship is on the port tack and the wind at north; what course is that ship steering to a point?'"

The Doctor rose with a gesture of despair. “I can’t imagine what has come over you both,” said he.

“My dear papa, we are trying hard to live up to Mrs. Westmacott’s standard.”

“Well, I must say that I do not admire the result. Your chemistry, Ida, may perhaps do no harm; but your scheme, Clara, is out of the question. How a girl of your sense could ever entertain such a notion is more than I can imagine. But I must absolutely forbid you to go further with it.”

“But, pa,” asked Ida, with an air of innocent inquiry in her big blue eyes, “what are we to do when your commands and Mrs. Westmacott’s advice are opposed? You told us to obey her. She says that when women try to throw off their shackles, their fathers, brothers and husbands are the very first to try to rivet them on again, and that in such a matter no man has any authority.”

“Does Mrs. Westmacott teach you that I am not the head of my own house?” The Doctor flushed, and his grizzled hair bristled in his anger.

“Certainly. She says that all heads of houses are relics of the dark ages.”

The Doctor muttered something and stamped his foot upon the carpet. Then without a word he passed out into the garden and his daughters could see him striding furiously up and down, cutting off the heads of the flowers with a switch.

“Oh, you darling! You played your part so splendidly!” cried Ida.

“But how cruel it is! When I saw the sorrow and surprise in his eyes I very nearly put my arms about him and told him all. Don’t you think we have done enough?”

“No, no, no. Not nearly enough. You must not turn weak now, Clara. It is so funny that I should be leading you. It is quite a new experience. But I know I am right. If we go on as we are doing, we shall be able to say all our lives that we have saved him. And if we don’t, oh, Clara, we should never forgive ourselves.”

CHAPTER X. WOMEN OF THE FUTURE.

From that day the Doctor’s peace was gone. Never was a quiet and orderly household transformed so suddenly into a bear garden, or a happy man turned into such a completely miserable one. He had never realised before how entirely his daughters had shielded him from all the friction of life. Now that they had not only ceased to protect him, but had themselves become a source of trouble to him, he began to understand how great the blessing was which he had enjoyed, and to sigh for the happy days before his girls had come under the influence of his neighbour.

“You don’t look happy,” Mrs. Westmacott had remarked to him one morning. “You are pale and a little off colour. You should come with me for a ten mile spin upon the tandem.”

“I am troubled about my girls.” They were walking up and down in the garden. From time to time there sounded from the house behind them the long, sad wail of a French horn.

“That is Ida,” said he. “She has taken to practicing on that dreadful instrument in the intervals of her chemistry. And Clara is quite as bad. I declare it is getting quite unendurable.”

“Ah, Doctor, Doctor!” she cried, shaking her forefinger, with a gleam of her white teeth. “You must live up to your principles — you must give your daughters the same liberty as you advocate for other women.”

“Liberty, madam, certainly! But this approaches to license.”

“The same law for all, my friend.” She tapped him reprovingly on the arm with her sunshade. “When you were twenty your father did not, I presume, object to your learning chemistry or playing a musical instrument. You would have thought it tyranny if he had.”

“But there is such a sudden change in them both.”

“Yes, I have noticed that they have been very enthusiastic lately in the cause of liberty. Of all my disciples I think that they promise to be the most devoted and consistent, which is the more natural since their father is one of our most trusted champions.”

The Doctor gave a twitch of impatience. “I seem to have lost all authority,” he cried.

"No, no, my dear friend. They are a little exuberant at having broken the trammels of custom. That is all."

"You cannot think what I have had to put up with, madam. It has been a dreadful experience. Last night, after I had extinguished the candle in my bedroom, I placed my foot upon something smooth and hard, which scuttled from under me. Imagine my horror! I lit the gas, and came upon a well-grown tortoise which Clara has thought fit to introduce into the house. I call it a filthy custom to have such pets."

Mrs. Westmacott dropped him a little courtesy. "Thank you, sir," said she. "That is a nice little side hit at my poor Eliza."

"I give you my word that I had forgotten about her," cried the Doctor, flushing. "One such pet may no doubt be endured, but two are more than I can bear. Ida has a monkey which lives on the curtain rod. It is a most dreadful creature. It will remain absolutely motionless until it sees that you have forgotten its presence, and then it will suddenly bound from picture to picture all round the walls, and end by swinging down on the bell-rope and jumping on to the top of your head. At breakfast it stole a poached egg and daubed it all over the door handle. Ida calls these outrages amusing tricks."

"Oh, all will come right," said the widow reassuringly.

"And Clara is as bad, Clara who used to be so good and sweet, the very image of her poor mother. She insists upon this preposterous scheme of being a pilot, and will talk of nothing but revolving lights and hidden rocks, and codes of signals, and nonsense of the kind."

"But why preposterous?" asked his companion. "What nobler occupation can there be than that of stimulating commerce, and aiding the mariner to steer safely into port? I should think your daughter admirably adapted for such duties."

"Then I must beg to differ from you, madam."

"Still, you are inconsistent."

"Excuse me, madam, I do not see the matter in the same light. And I should be obliged to you if you would use your influence with my daughter to dissuade her."

"You wish to make me inconsistent too."

"Then you refuse?"

"I am afraid that I cannot interfere."

The Doctor was very angry. "Very well, madam," said he. "In that case I can only say that I have the honor to wish you a very good morning." He raised his broad straw hat and strode away up the gravel path, while the widow looked after him with twinkling eyes. She was surprised herself to find that she liked the Doctor better the more masculine and aggressive he became. It was unreasonable and against all principle, and yet so it was and no argument could mend the matter.

Very hot and angry, the Doctor retired into his room and sat down to read his paper. Ida had retired, and the distant wails of the bugle showed that she was upstairs in her boudoir. Clara sat opposite to him with her exasperating charts and her blue book. The Doctor glanced at her and his eyes remained fixed in astonishment upon the front of her skirt.

"My dear Clara," he cried, "you have torn your skirt!"

His daughter laughed and smoothed out her frock. To his horror he saw the red plush of the chair where the dress ought to have been. "It is all torn!" he cried. "What have you done?"

"My dear papa!" said she, "what do you know about the mysteries of ladies' dress? This is a divided skirt."

Then he saw that it was indeed so arranged, and that his daughter was clad in a sort of loose, extremely long knickerbockers.

"It will be so convenient for my sea-boots," she explained.

Her father shook his head sadly. "Your dear mother would not have liked it, Clara," said he.

For a moment the conspiracy was upon the point of collapsing. There was something in the gentleness of his rebuke, and in his appeal to her mother, which brought the tears to her eyes, and in another instant she would have been kneeling beside him with everything confessed, when the door flew open and her sister Ida came bounding into the room. She wore a short grey skirt, like that of Mrs. Westmacott, and she held it up in each hand and danced about among the furniture.

"I feel quite the Gaiety girl!" she cried. "How delicious it must be to be upon the stage! You can't think how nice this dress is, papa. One feels so free in it. And isn't Clara charming?"

"Go to your room this instant and take it off!" thundered the Doctor. "I call it highly improper, and no daughter of mine shall wear it."

"Papa! Improper! Why, it is the exact model of Mrs. Westmacott's."

"I say it is improper. And yours also, Clara! Your conduct is really outrageous. You drive me out of the house. I am going to my club in town. I have no comfort or peace of mind in my own house. I will stand it no longer. I may be late to-night — I shall go to the British Medical meeting. But when I return I shall hope to find that you have reconsidered your conduct, and that you have shaken yourself clear of the pernicious influences which have recently made such an alteration in your conduct." He seized his hat, slammed the dining-room door, and a few minutes later they heard the crash of the big front gate.

"Victory, Clara, victory!" cried Ida, still pirouetting around the furniture. "Did you hear what he said? Pernicious influences! Don't you understand, Clara? Why do you sit there so pale and glum? Why don't you get up and dance?"

"Oh, I shall be so glad when it is over, Ida. I do hate to give him pain. Surely he has learned now that it is very unpleasant to spend one's life with reformers."

"He has almost learned it, Clara. Just one more little lesson. We must not risk all at this last moment."

"What would you do, Ida? Oh, don't do anything too dreadful. I feel that we have gone too far already."

"Oh, we can do it very nicely. You see we are both engaged and that makes it very easy. Harold will do what you ask him, especially as you have told him the reason why, and my Charles will do it without even wanting to know the reason. Now you know what Mrs. Westmacott thinks about the reserve of young ladies. Mere prudery, affectation, and a relic of the dark ages of the Zenana. Those were her words, were they not?"

"What then?"

"Well, now we must put it in practice. We are reducing all her other views to practice, and we must not shirk this one.

"But what would you do? Oh, don't look so wicked, Ida! You look like some evil little fairy, with your golden hair and dancing, mischievous eyes. I know that you are going to propose something dreadful!"

"We must give a little supper to-night."

"We? A supper!"

"Why not? Young gentlemen give suppers. Why not young ladies?"

"But whom shall we invite?"

"Why, Harold and Charles of course."

"And the Admiral and Mrs. Hay Denver?"

"Oh, no. That would be very old-fashioned. We must keep up with the times, Clara."

“But what can we give them for supper?”

“Oh, something with a nice, fast, rollicking, late-at-night-kind of flavor to it. Let me see! Champagne, of course — and oysters. Oysters will do. In the novels, all the naughty people take champagne and oysters. Besides, they won’t need any cooking. How is your pocket-money, Clara?”

“I have three pounds.”

“And I have one. Four pounds. I have no idea how much champagne costs. Have you?”

“Not the slightest.”

“How many oysters does a man eat?”

“I can’t imagine.”

“I’ll write and ask Charles. No, I won’t. I’ll ask Jane. Ring for her, Clara. She has been a cook, and is sure to know.”

Jane, on being cross-questioned, refused to commit herself beyond the statement that it depended upon the gentleman, and also upon the oysters. The united experience of the kitchen, however, testified that three dozen was a fair provision.

“Then we shall have eight dozen altogether,” said Ida, jotting down all her requirements upon a sheet of paper. “And two pints of champagne. And some brown bread, and vinegar, and pepper. That’s all, I think. It is not so very difficult to give a supper after all, is it, Clara?”

“I don’t like it, Ida. It seems to me to be so very indelicate.”

“But it is needed to clinch the matter. No, no, there is no drawing back now, Clara, or we shall ruin everything. Papa is sure to come back by the 9:45. He will reach the door at 10. We must have everything ready for him. Now, just sit down at once, and ask Harold to come at nine o’clock, and I shall do the same to Charles.”

The two invitations were dispatched, received and accepted. Harold was already a confidant, and he understood that this was some further development of the plot. As to Charles, he was so accustomed to feminine eccentricity, in the person of his aunt, that the only thing which could surprise him would be a rigid observance of etiquette. At nine o’clock they entered the dining-room of Number 2, to find the master of the house absent, a red-shaded lamp, a snowy cloth, a pleasant little feast, and the two whom they would have chosen, as their companions. A merrier party never met, and the house rang with their laughter and their chatter.

“It is three minutes to ten,” cried Clara, suddenly, glancing at the clock.

“Good gracious! So it is! Now for our little tableau!” Ida pushed the champagne bottles obtrusively forward, in the direction of the door, and scattered oyster shells over the cloth.

“Have you your pipe, Charles?”

“My pipe! Yes.”

“Then please smoke it. Now don’t argue about it, but do it, for you will ruin the effect otherwise.”

The large man drew out a red case, and extracted a great yellow meerschaum, out of which, a moment later, he was puffing thick wreaths of smoke. Harold had lit a cigar, and both the girls had cigarettes.

“That looks very nice and emancipated,” said Ida, glancing round. “Now I shall lie on this sofa. So! Now, Charles, just sit here, and throw your arm carelessly over the back of the sofa. No, don’t stop smoking. I like it. Clara, dear, put your feet upon the coal-scuttle, and do try to look a little dissipated. I wish we could crown ourselves with flowers. There are some lettuces on the sideboard. Oh dear, here he is! I hear his key.” She began to sing in her high, fresh voice a little snatch from a French song, with a swinging tra la-la chorus.

The Doctor had walked home from the station in a peaceable and relenting frame of mind, feeling that, perhaps, he had said too much in the morning, that his daughters had for years been models in every way, and that, if there had been any change of late, it was, as they said themselves, on account of their anxiety to follow his advice and to imitate Mrs. Westmacott. He could see clearly enough now that that advice was unwise, and that a world peopled with Mrs. Westmacotts would not be a happy or a soothing one. It was he who was, himself, to blame, and he was grieved by the thought that perhaps his hot words had troubled and saddened his two girls.

This fear, however, was soon dissipated. As he entered his hall he heard the voice of Ida uplifted in a rollicking ditty, and a very strong smell of tobacco was borne to his nostrils. He threw open the dining-room door, and stood aghast at the scene which met his eyes.

The room was full of the blue wreaths of smoke, and the lamp-light shone through the thin haze upon gold-topped bottles, plates, napkins, and a litter of oyster shells and cigarettes. Ida, flushed and excited, was reclining upon the settee, a wine-glass at her elbow, and a cigarette between her fingers, while Charles Westmacott sat beside her, with his arm thrown over the head of the sofa, with the suggestion of a caress. On the other side of the room, Clara was lounging in an arm-chair, with Harold beside her, both smoking, and both with wine-glasses beside them. The Doctor stood speechless in the doorway, staring at the Bacchanalian scene.

"Come in, papa! Do!" cried Ida. "Won't you have a glass of champagne?"

"Pray excuse me," said her father, coldly, "I feel that I am intruding. I did not know that you were entertaining. Perhaps you will kindly let me know when you have finished. You will find me in my study." He ignored the two young men completely, and, closing the door, retired, deeply hurt and mortified, to his room. A quarter of an hour afterwards he heard the door slam, and his two daughters came to announce that the guests were gone.

"Guests! Whose guests?" he cried angrily. "What is the meaning of this exhibition?"

"We have been giving a little supper, papa. They were our guests."

"Oh, indeed!" The Doctor laughed sarcastically. "You think it right, then, to entertain young bachelors late at night, to, smoke and drink with them, to —— Oh, that I should ever have lived to blush for my own daughters! I thank God that your dear mother never saw the day."

"Dearest papa," cried Clara, throwing her arms about him. "Do not be angry with us. If you understood all, you would see that there is no harm in it."

"No harm, miss! Who is the best judge of that?"

"Mrs. Westmacott," suggested Ida, slyly.

The Doctor sprang from his chair. "Confound Mrs. Westmacott!" he cried, striking frenziedly into the air with his hands. "Am I to hear of nothing but this woman? Is she to confront me at every turn? I will endure it no longer."

"But it was your wish, papa."

"Then I will tell you now what my second and wiser wish is, and we shall see if you will obey it as you have the first."

"Of course we will, papa."

"Then my wish is, that you should forget these odious notions which you have imbibed, that you should dress and act as you used to do, before ever you saw this woman, and that, in future, you confine your intercourse with her to such civilities as are necessary between neighbours."

"We are to give up Mrs. Westmacott?"

“Or give up me.”

“Oh, dear dad, how can you say anything so cruel?” cried Ida, burrowing her towsy golden hair into her father’s shirt front, while Clara pressed her cheek against his whisker. “Of course we shall give her up, if you prefer it.”

“Of course we shall, papa.”

The Doctor patted the two caressing heads. “These are my own two girls again,” he cried. “It has been my fault as much as yours. I have been astray, and you have followed me in my error. It was only by seeing your mistake that I have become conscious of my own. Let us set it aside, and neither say nor think anything more about it.”

CHAPTER XI. A BLOT FROM THE BLUE.

So by the cleverness of two girls a dark cloud was thinned away and turned into sunshine. Over one of them, alas, another cloud was gathering, which could not be so easily dispersed. Of these three households which fate had thrown together, two had already been united by ties of love. It was destined, however, that a bond of another sort should connect the Westmacotts with the Hay Denvers.

Between the Admiral and the widow a very cordial feeling had existed since the day when the old seaman had hauled down his flag and changed his opinions; granting to the yachts-woman all that he had refused to the reformer. His own frank and downright nature respected the same qualities in his neighbour, and a friendship sprang up between them which was more like that which exists between two men, founded upon esteem and a community of tastes.

“By the way, Admiral,” said Mrs. Westmacott one morning, as they walked together down to the station, “I understand that this boy of yours in the intervals of paying his devotions to Miss Walker is doing something upon ‘Change.”

“Yes, ma’am, and there is no man of his age who is doing so well. He’s drawing ahead, I can tell you, ma’am. Some of those that started with him are hull down astarn now. He touched his five hundred last year, and before he’s thirty he’ll be making the four figures.”

“The reason I asked is that I have small investments to make myself from time to time, and my present broker is a rascal. I should be very glad to do it through your son.”

“It is very kind of you, ma’am. His partner is away on a holiday, and Harold would like to push on a bit and show what he can do. You know the poop isn’t big enough to hold the lieutenant when the skipper’s on shore.”

“I suppose he charges the usual half per cent?”

“Don’t know, I’m sure, ma’am. I’ll swear that he does what is right and proper.”

“That is what I usually pay — ten shillings in the hundred pounds. If you see him before I do just ask him to get me five thousand in New Zealands. It is at four just now, and I fancy it may rise.”

“Five thousand!” exclaimed the Admiral, reckoning it in his own mind. “Lemme see! That’s twenty-five pounds commission. A nice day’s work, upon my word. It is a very handsome order, ma’am.”

“Well, I must pay some one, and why not him?”

“I’ll tell him, and I’m sure he’ll lose no time.”

“Oh, there is no great hurry. By the way, I understand from what you said just now that he has a partner.”

“Yes, my boy is the junior partner. Pearson is the senior. I was introduced to him years ago, and he offered Harold the opening. Of course we had a pretty stiff premium to pay.”

Mrs. Westmacott had stopped, and was standing very stiffly with her Red Indian face even grimmer than usual.

“Pearson?” said she. “Jeremiah Pearson?”

“The same.”

“Then it’s all off,” she cried. “You need not carry out that investment.”

“Very well, ma’am.”

They walked on together side by side, she brooding over some thought of her own, and he a little crossed and disappointed at her caprice and the lost commission for Harold.

“I tell you what, Admiral,” she exclaimed suddenly, “if I were you I should get your boy out of this partnership.”

“But why, madam?”

“Because he is tied to one of the deepest, slyest foxes in the whole city of London.”

“Jeremiah Pearson, ma’am? What can you know of him? He bears a good name.”

“No one in this world knows Jeremiah Pearson as I know him, Admiral. I warn you because I have a friendly feeling both for you and for your son. The man is a rogue and you had best avoid him.”

“But these are only words, ma’am. Do you tell me that you know him better than the brokers and jobbers in the City?”

“Man,” cried Mrs. Westmacott, “will you allow that I know him when I tell you that my maiden name was Ada Pearson, and that Jeremiah is my only brother?”

The Admiral whistled. “Whew!” cried he. “Now that I think of it, there is a likeness.”

"He is a man of iron, Admiral — a man without a heart. I should shock you if I were to tell you what I have endured from my brother. My father's wealth was divided equally between us. His own share he ran through in five years, and he has tried since then by every trick of a cunning, low-minded man, by base cajolery, by legal quibbles, by brutal intimidation, to juggle me out of my share as well. There is no villainy of which the man is not capable. Oh, I know my brother Jeremiah. I know him and I am prepared for him."

"This is all new to me, ma'am. 'Pon my word, I hardly know what to say to it. I thank you for having spoken so plainly. From what you say, this is a poor sort of consort for a man to sail with. Perhaps Harold would do well to cut himself adrift."

"Without losing a day."

"Well, we shall talk it over. You may be sure of that. But here we are at the station, so I will just see you into your carriage and then home to see what my wife says to the matter."

As he trudged homewards, thoughtful and perplexed, he was surprised to hear a shout behind him, and to see Harold running down the road after him.

"Why, dad," he cried, "I have just come from town, and the first thing I saw was your back as you marched away. But you are such a quick walker that I had to run to catch you."

The Admiral's smile of pleasure had broken his stern face into a thousand wrinkles. "You are early to-day," said he.

"Yes, I wanted to consult you."

"Nothing wrong?"

"Oh no, only an inconvenience."

"What is it, then?"

"How much have we in our private account?"

"Pretty fair. Some eight hundred, I think."

"Oh, half that will be ample. It was rather thoughtless of Pearson."

"What then?"

"Well, you see, dad, when he went away upon this little holiday to Havre he left me to pay accounts and so on. He told me that there was enough at the bank for all claims. I had occasion on Tuesday to pay away two cheques, one for L80, and the other for L120, and here they are returned with a bank notice that we have already overdrawn to the extent of some hundreds."

The Admiral looked very grave. "What's the meaning of that, then?" he asked.

"Oh, it can easily be set right. You see Pearson invests all the spare capital and keeps as small a margin as possible at the bank. Still it was too bad for him to allow me even to run a risk of having a cheque returned. I have written to him and demanded his authority to sell out some stock, and I have written an explanation to these people. In the meantime, however, I have had to issue several cheques; so I had better transfer part of our private account to meet them."

"Quite so, my boy. All that's mine is yours. But who do you think this Pearson is? He is Mrs. Westmacott's brother."

"Really. What a singular thing! Well, I can see a likeness now that you mention it. They have both the same hard type of face."

"She has been warning me against him — says he is the rankest pirate in London. I hope that it is all right, boy, and that we may not find ourselves in broken water."

Harold had turned a little pale as he heard Mrs. Westmacott's opinion of his senior partner. It gave shape and substance to certain vague fears and suspicions of his own which had been pushed back as often as they obtruded themselves as being too monstrous and fantastic for belief.

"He is a well-known man in the City, dad," said he.

"Of course he is — of course he is. That is what I told her. They would have found him out there if anything had been amiss with him. Bless you, there's nothing so bitter as a family quarrel. Still it is just as well that you have written about this affair, for we may as well have all fair and aboveboard."

But Harold's letter to his partner was crossed by a letter from his partner to Harold. It lay awaiting him upon the breakfast table next morning, and it sent the heart into his mouth as he read it, and caused him to spring up from his chair with a white face and staring eyes.

"My boy! My boy!"

"I am ruined, mother — ruined!" He stood gazing wildly in front of him, while the sheet of paper fluttered down on the carpet. Then he dropped back into the chair, and sank his face into his hands. His mother had her arms round him in an instant, while the Admiral, with shaking fingers, picked up the letter from the floor and adjusted his glasses to read it.

"My DEAR DENVER," it ran. "By the time that this reaches you I shall be out of the reach of yourself or of any one else who may desire an interview. You need not search for me, for I assure you that this letter is posted by a friend, and that you will have your trouble in vain if you try to find me. I am sorry to leave you in such a tight place, but one or other of us must be squeezed, and on the whole I prefer that it should be you. You'll find nothing in the bank, and about L13,000 unaccounted for. I'm not sure that the best thing you can do is not to realise what you can, and imitate your senior's example. If you act at once you may get clean away. If not, it's not only that you must put up your shutters, but I am afraid that this missing money could hardly be included as an ordinary debt, and of course you are legally responsible for it just as much as I am. Take a friend's advice and get to America. A young man with brains can always do something out there, and you can live down this little mischance. It will be a cheap lesson if it teaches you to take nothing upon trust in business, and to insist upon knowing exactly what your partner is doing, however senior he may be to you.

"Yours faithfully,

"JEREMIAH PEARSON."

"Great Heavens!" groaned the Admiral, "he has absconded."

"And left me both a bankrupt and a thief."

"No, no, Harold," sobbed his mother. "All will be right. What matter about money!"

"Money, mother! It is my honor."

"The boy is right. It is his honor, and my honor, for his is mine. This is a sore trouble, mother, when we thought our life's troubles were all behind us, but we will bear it as we have borne others." He held out his stringy hand, and the two old folk sat with bowed grey heads, their fingers intertwined, strong in each other's love and sympathy.

"We were too happy," she sighed.

"But it is God's will, mother."

"Yes, John, it is God's will."

"And yet it is bitter to bear. I could have lost all, the house, money, rank — I could have borne it. But at my age — my honor — the honor of an admiral of the fleet."

"No honor can be lost, John, where no dishonor has been done. What have you done? What has Harold done? There is no question of honor."

The old man shook his head, but Harold had already called together his clear practical sense, which for an instant in the presence of this frightful blow had deserted him.

"The mater is right, dad," said he. "It is bad enough, Heaven knows, but we must not take too dark a view of it. After all, this insolent letter is in itself evidence that I had nothing to do with the schemes of the base villain who wrote it."

"They may think it prearranged."

"They could not. My whole life cries out against the thought. They could not look me in the face and entertain it."

"No, boy, not if they have eyes in their heads," cried the Admiral, plucking up courage at the sight of the flashing eyes and brave, defiant face. "We have the letter, and we have your character. We'll weather it yet between them. It's my fault from the beginning for choosing such a land-shark for your consort. God help me, I thought I was finding such an opening for you."

"Dear dad! How could you possibly know? As he says in his letter, it has given me a lesson. But he was so much older and so much more experienced, that it was hard for me to ask to examine his books. But we must waste no time. I must go to the City."

"What will you do?"

"What an honest man should do. I will write to all our clients and creditors, assemble them, lay the whole matter before them, read them the letter and put myself absolutely in their hands."

"That's it, boy — yard-arm to yard-arm, and have it over."

"I must go at once." He put on his top-coat and his hat. "But I have ten minutes yet before I can catch a train. There is one little thing which I must do before I start."

He had caught sight through the long glass folding door of the gleam of a white blouse and a straw hat in the tennis ground. Clara used often to meet him there of a morning to say a few words before he hurried away into the City. He walked out now with the quick, firm step of a man who has taken a momentous resolution, but his face was haggard and his lips pale.

"Clara," said he, as she came towards him with words of greeting, "I am sorry to bring ill news to you, but things have gone wrong in the City, and

— and I think that I ought to release you from your engagement.”

Clara stared at him with her great questioning dark eyes, and her face became as pale as his.

“How can the City affect you and me, Harold?”

“It is dishonor. I cannot ask you to share it.”

“Dishonor! The loss of some miserable gold and silver coins!”

“Oh, Clara, if it were only that! We could be far happier together in a little cottage in the country than with all the riches of the City. Poverty could not cut me to the heart, as I have been cut this morning. Why, it is but twenty minutes since I had the letter, Clara, and it seems to me to be some old, old thing which happened far away in my past life, some horrid black cloud which shut out all the freshness and the peace from it.”

“But what is it, then? What do you fear worse than poverty?”

“To have debts that I cannot meet. To be hammered upon ‘Change and declared a bankrupt. To know that others have a just claim upon me and to feel that I dare not meet their eyes. Is not that worse than poverty?”

“Yes, Harold, a thousand fold worse! But all this may be got over. Is there nothing more?”

“My partner has fled and left me responsible for heavy debts, and in such a position that I may be required by the law to produce some at least of this missing money. It has been confided to him to invest, and he has embezzled it. I, as his partner, am liable for it. I have brought misery on all whom I love — my father, my mother. But you at least shall not be under the shadow. You are free, Clara. There is no tie between us.”

“It takes two to make such a tie, Harold,” said she, smiling and putting her hand inside his arm. “It takes two to make it, dear, and also two to break it. Is that the way they do business in the City, sir, that a man can always at his own sweet will tear up his engagement?”

“You hold me to it, Clara?”

“No creditor so remorseless as I, Harold. Never, never shall you get from that bond.”

“But I am ruined. My whole life is blasted.”

“And so you wish to ruin me, and blast my life also. No indeed, sir, you shall not get away so lightly. But seriously now, Harold, you would hurt me if it were not so absurd. Do you think that a woman’s love is like this sunshade which I carry in my hand, a thing only fitted for the sunshine, and of no use when the winds blow and the clouds gather?”

"I would not drag you down, Clara."

"Should I not be dragged down indeed if I left your side at such a time? It is only now that I can be of use to you, help you, sustain you. You have always been so strong, so above me. You are strong still, but then two will be stronger. Besides, sir, you have no idea what a woman of business I am. Papa says so, and he knows."

Harold tried to speak, but his heart was too full. He could only press the white hand which curled round his sleeve. She walked up and down by his side, prattling merrily, and sending little gleams of cheeriness through the gloom which girt him in. To listen to her he might have thought that it was Ida, and not her staid and demure sister, who was chatting to him.

"It will soon be cleared up," she said, "and then we shall feel quite dull. Of course all business men have these little ups and downs. Why, I suppose of all the men you meet upon 'Change, there is not one who has not some such story to tell. If everything was always smooth, you know, then of course every one would turn stockbroker, and you would have to hold your meetings in Hyde Park. How much is it that you need?"

"More than I can ever get. Not less than thirteen thousand pounds."

Clara's face fell as she heard the amount. "What do you purpose doing?"

"I shall go to the City now, and I shall ask all our creditors to meet me to-morrow. I shall read them Pearson's letter, and put myself into their hands."

"And they, what will they do?"

"What can they do? They will serve writs for their money, and the firm will be declared bankrupt."

"And the meeting will be to-morrow, you say. Will you take my advice?"

"What is it, Clara?"

"To ask them for a few days of delay. Who knows what new turn matters may take?"

"What turn can they take? I have no means of raising the money."

"Let us have a few days."

"Oh, we should have that in the ordinary course of business. The legal formalities would take them some little time. But I must go, Clara, I must not seem to shirk. My place now must be at my offices."

"Yes, dear, you are right. God bless you and guard you! I shall be here in The Wilderness, but all day I shall be by your office table at Throgmorton Street in spirit, and if ever you should be sad you will hear my little whisper in your ear, and know that there is one client whom you will never be able to get rid of — never as long as we both live, dear.”

CHAPTER XII. FRIENDS IN NEED.

“Now, papa,” said Clara that morning, wrinkling her brows and putting her finger-tips together with the air of an experienced person of business, “I want to have a talk to you about money matters.”

“Yes, my dear.” He laid down his paper, and looked a question.

“Kindly tell me again, papa, how much money I have in my very own right. You have often told me before, but I always forget figures.”

“You have two hundred and fifty pounds a year of your own, under your aunt’s will.

“And Ida?”

“Ida has one hundred and fifty.”

“Now, I think I can live very well on fifty pounds a year, papa. I am not very extravagant, and I could make my own dresses if I had a sewing-machine.”

“Very likely, dear.”

“In that case I have two hundred a year which I could do without.”

“If it were necessary.”

“But it is necessary. Oh, do help me, like a good, dear, kind papa, in this matter, for my whole heart is set upon it. Harold is in sore need of money, and through no fault of his own.” With a woman’s tact and eloquence, she told the whole story. “Put yourself in my place, papa. What is the money to me? I never think of it from year’s end to year’s end. But now I know how precious it is. I could not have thought that money could be so valuable. See what I can do with it. It may help to save him. I must have it by to-morrow. Oh, do, do advise me as to what I should do, and how I should get the money.”

The Doctor smiled at her eagerness. “You are as anxious to get rid of money as others are to gain it,” said he. “In another case I might think it rash, but I believe in your Harold, and I can see that he has had villainous treatment. You will let me deal with the matter.”

“You, papa?”

“It can be done best between men. Your capital, Clara, is some five thousand pounds, but it is out on a mortgage, and you could not call it in.”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!”

“But we can still manage. I have as much at my bank. I will advance it to the Denvers as coming from you, and you can repay it to me, or the interest of it, when your money becomes due.”

“Oh, that is beautiful! How sweet and kind of you!”

“But there is one obstacle: I do not think that you would ever induce Harold to take this money.”

Clara’s face fell. “Don’t you think so, really?”

“I am sure that he would not.”

“Then what are you to do? What horrid things money matters are to arrange!”

“I shall see his father. We can manage it all between us.”

“Oh, do, do, papa! And you will do it soon?”

“There is no time like the present. I will go in at once.” He scribbled a cheque, put it in an envelope, put on his broad straw hat, and strolled in through the garden to pay his morning call.

It was a singular sight which met his eyes as he entered the sitting-room of the Admiral. A great sea chest stood open in the center, and all round upon the carpet were little piles of jerseys, oil-skins, books, sextant boxes, instruments, and sea-boots. The old seaman sat gravely amidst this lumber, turning it over, and examining it intently; while his wife, with the tears running silently down her ruddy cheeks, sat upon the sofa, her elbows upon her knees and her chin upon her hands, rocking herself slowly backwards and forwards.

“Hullo, Doctor,” said the Admiral, holding out his hand, “there’s foul weather set in upon us, as you may have heard, but I have ridden out many a worse squall, and, please God, we shall all three of us weather this one also, though two of us are a little more cranky than we were.”

“My dear friends, I came in to tell you how deeply we sympathize with you all. My girl has only just told me about it.”

“It has come so suddenly upon us, Doctor,” sobbed Mrs. Hay Denver. “I thought that I had John to myself for the rest of our lives — Heaven knows that we have not seen very much of each other — but now he talks of going to sea again.

“Aye, aye, Walker, that’s the only way out of it. When I first heard of it I was thrown up in the wind with all aback. I give you my word that I lost my bearings more completely than ever since I strapped a middy’s dirk to my belt. You see, friend, I know something of shipwreck or battle or whatever may come upon the waters, but the shoals in the City of London on which my poor boy has struck are clean beyond me. Pearson had been my pilot there, and now I know him to be a rogue. But I've taken my bearings now, and I see my course right before me."

"What then, Admiral?"

"Oh, I have one or two little plans. I'll have some news for the boy. Why, hang it, Walker man, I may be a bit stiff in the joints, but you'll be my witness that I can do my twelve miles under the three hours. What then? My eyes are as good as ever except just for the newspaper. My head is clear. I'm three-and-sixty, but I'm as good a man as ever I was — too good a man to lie up for another ten years. I'd be the better for a smack of the salt water again, and a whiff of the breeze. Tut, mother, it's not a four years' cruise this time. I'll be back every month or two. It's no more than if I went for a visit in the country." He was talking boisterously, and heaping his sea-boots and sextants back into his chest.

"And you really think, my dear friend, of hoisting your pennant again?"

"My pennant, Walker? No, no. Her Majesty, God bless her, has too many young men to need an old hulk like me. I should be plain Mr. Hay Denver, of the merchant service. I daresay that I might find some owner who would give me a chance as second or third officer. It will be strange to me to feel the rails of the bridge under my fingers once more."

"Tut! tut! this will never do, this will never do, Admiral!" The Doctor sat down by Mrs. Hay Denver and patted her hand in token of friendly sympathy. "We must wait until your son has had it out with all these people, and then we shall know what damage is done, and how best to set it right. It will be time enough then to begin to muster our resources to meet it."

"Our resources!" The Admiral laughed. "There's the pension. I'm afraid, Walker, that our resources won't need much mustering."

"Oh, come, there are some which you may not have thought of. For example, Admiral, I had always intended that my girl should have five thousand from me when she married. Of course your boy's trouble is her trouble, and the money cannot be spent better than in helping to set it right. She has a little of her own which she wished to contribute, but I thought it best to work it this way. Will you take the cheque, Mrs. Denver, and I think it would be best if you said nothing to Harold about it, and just used it as the occasion served?"

“God bless you, Walker, you are a true friend. I won’t forget this, Walker.” The Admiral sat down on his sea chest and mopped his brow with his red handkerchief.

“What is it to me whether you have it now or then? It may be more useful now. There’s only one stipulation. If things should come to the worst, and if the business should prove so bad that nothing can set it right, then hold back this cheque, for there is no use in pouring water into a broken basin, and if the lad should fall, he will want something to pick himself up again with.”

“He shall not fall, Walker, and you shall not have occasion to be ashamed of the family into which your daughter is about to marry. I have my own plan. But we shall hold your money, my friend, and it will strengthen us to feel that it is there.”

“Well, that is all right,” said Doctor Walker, rising. “And if a little more should be needed, we must not let him go wrong for the want of a thousand or two. And now, Admiral, I’m off for my morning walk. Won’t you come too?”

“No, I am going into town.”

“Well, good-bye. I hope to have better news, and that all will come right. Good-bye, Mrs. Denver. I feel as if the boy were my own, and I shall not be easy until all is right with him.”

CHAPTER XIII. IN STRANGE WATERS.

When Doctor Walker had departed, the Admiral packed all his possessions back into his sea chest with the exception of one little brass-bound desk. This he unlocked, and took from it a dozen or so blue sheets of paper all mottled over with stamps and seals, with very large V. R.'s printed upon the heads of them. He tied these carefully into a small bundle, and placing them in the inner pocket of his coat, he seized his stick and hat.

"Oh, John, don't do this rash thing," cried Mrs. Denver, laying her hands upon his sleeve. "I have seen so little of you, John. Only three years since you left the service. Don't leave me again. I know it is weak of me, but I cannot bear it."

"There's my own brave lass," said he, smoothing down the grey-shot hair. "We've lived in honor together, mother, and please God in honor we'll die. No matter how debts are made, they have got to be met, and what the boy owes we owe. He has not the money, and how is he to find it? He can't find it. What then? It becomes my business, and there's only one way for it."

"But it may not be so very bad, John. Had we not best wait until after he sees these people to-morrow?"

"They may give him little time, lass. But I'll have a care that I don't go so far that I can't put back again. Now, mother, there's no use holding me. It's got to be done, and there's no sense in shirking it." He detached her fingers from his sleeve, pushed her gently back into an arm-chair, and hurried from the house.

In less than half an hour the Admiral was whirled into Victoria Station and found himself amid a dense bustling throng, who jostled and pushed in the crowded terminus. His errand, which had seemed feasible enough in his own room, began now to present difficulties in the carrying out, and he puzzled over how he should take the first steps. Amid the stream of business men, each hurrying on his definite way, the old seaman in his grey tweed suit and black soft hat strode slowly along, his head sunk and his brow wrinkled in perplexity. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He walked back to the railway stall and bought a daily paper. This he turned and turned until a certain column met his eye, when he smoothed it out, and carrying it over to a seat, proceeded to read it at his leisure.

And, indeed, as a man read that column, it seemed strange to him that there should still remain any one in this world of ours who should be in straits for want of money. Here were whole lines of gentlemen who were burdened with a surplus in their incomes, and who were loudly calling to the poor and needy to come and take it off their hands. Here was the guileless person who was not a professional moneylender, but who would be glad to correspond, etc. Here too was the accommodating individual who advanced sums from ten to ten thousand pounds without expense, security, or delay. "The money actually paid over within a few hours," ran this fascinating advertisement, conjuring up a vision of swift messengers rushing with bags of gold to the aid of the poor struggler. A third gentleman did all business by personal application, advanced money on anything or nothing; the lightest and airiest promise was enough to content him according to his circular, and finally he never asked for more than five per cent. This struck the Admiral as far the most promising, and his wrinkles relaxed, and his frown softened away as he gazed at it. He folded up the paper rose from the seat, and found himself face to face with Charles Westmacott.

"Hullo, Admiral!"

"Hullo, Westmacott!" Charles had always been a favorite of the seaman's. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I have been doing a little business for my aunt. But I have never seen you in London before."

"I hate the place. It smothers me. There's not a breath of clean air on this side of Greenwich. But maybe you know your way about pretty well in the City?"

"Well, I know something about it. You see I've never lived very far from it, and I do a good deal of my aunt's business."

"Maybe you know Bread Street?"

"It is out of Cheapside."

"Well then, how do you steer for it from here? You make me out a course and I'll keep to it."

"Why, Admiral, I have nothing to do. I'll take you there with pleasure."

"Will you, though? Well, I'd take it very kindly if you would. I have business there. Smith and Hanbury, financial agents, Bread Street."

The pair made their way to the river-side, and so down the Thames to St. Paul’s landing — a mode of travel which was much more to the Admiral’s taste than ‘bus or cab. On the way, he told his companion his mission and the causes which had led to it. Charles Westmacott knew little enough of City life and the ways of business, but at least he had more experience in both than the Admiral, and he made up his mind not to leave him until the matter was settled.

“These are the people,” said the Admiral, twisting round his paper, and pointing to the advertisement which had seemed to him the most promising. “It sounds honest and above-board, does it not? The personal interview looks as if there were no trickery, and then no one could object to five per cent.”

“No, it seems fair enough.”

“It is not pleasant to have to go hat in hand borrowing money, but there are times, as you may find before you are my age, Westmacott, when a man must stow away his pride. But here’s their number, and their plate is on the corner of the door.”

A narrow entrance was flanked on either side by a row of brasses, ranging upwards from the shipbrokers and the solicitors who occupied the ground floors, through a long succession of West Indian agents, architects, surveyors, and brokers, to the firm of which they were in quest. A winding stone stair, well carpeted and railed at first but growing shabbier with every landing, brought them past innumerable doors until, at last, just under the ground-glass roofing, the names of Smith and Hanbury were to be seen painted in large white letters across a panel, with a laconic invitation to push beneath it. Following out the suggestion, the Admiral and his companion found themselves in a dingy apartment, ill lit from a couple of glazed windows. An ink-stained table, littered with pens, papers, and almanacs, an American cloth sofa, three chairs of varying patterns, and a much-worn carpet, constituted all the furniture, save only a very large and obtrusive porcelain spittoon, and a gaudily framed and very somber picture which hung above the fireplace. Sitting in front of this picture, and staring gloomily at it, as being the only thing which he could stare at, was a small sallow-faced boy with a large head, who in the intervals of his art studies munched sedately at an apple.

“Is Mr. Smith or Mr. Hanbury in?” asked the Admiral.

“There ain’t no such people,” said the small boy.

“But you have the names on the door.”

“Ah, that is the name of the firm, you see. It’s only a name. It’s Mr. Reuben Metaxa that you wants.”

“Well then, is he in?”

“No, he’s not.”

“When will he be back?”

“Can’t tell, I’m sure. He’s gone to lunch. Sometimes he takes one hour, and sometimes two. It’ll be two to-day, I ‘spect, for he said he was hungry afore he went.”

“Then I suppose that we had better call again,” said the Admiral.

“Not a bit,” cried Charles. “I know how to manage these little imps. See here, you young varmint, here’s a shilling for you. Run off and fetch your master. If you don’t bring him here in five minutes I’ll clump you on the side of the head when you get back. Shoo! Scat!” He charged at the youth, who bolted from the room and clattered madly down-stairs.

“He’ll fetch him,” said Charles. “Let us make ourselves at home. This sofa does not feel over and above safe. It was not meant for fifteen-stone men. But this doesn’t look quite the sort of place where one would expect to pick up money.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said the Admiral, looking ruefully about him.

“Ah, well! I have heard that the best furnished offices generally belong to the poorest firms. Let us hope it’s the opposite here. They can’t spend much on the management anyhow. That pumpkin-headed boy was the staff, I suppose. Ha, by Jove, that’s his voice, and he’s got our man, I think!”

As he spoke the youth appeared in the doorway with a small, brown, dried-up little chip of a man at his heels. He was clean-shaven and blue-chinned, with bristling black hair, and keen brown eyes which shone out very brightly from between pouched under-lids and drooping upper ones. He advanced, glancing keenly from one to the other of his visitors, and slowly rubbing together his thin, blue-veined hands. The small boy closed the door behind him, and discreetly vanished.

“I am Mr. Reuben Metaxa,” said the moneylender. “Was it about an advance you wished to see me?”

“Yes.”

“For you, I presume?” turning to Charles Westmacott.

“No, for this gentleman.”

The moneylender looked surprised. “How much did you desire?”

“I thought of five thousand pounds,” said the Admiral.

“And on what security?”

“I am a retired admiral of the British navy. You will find my name in the Navy List. There is my card. I have here my pension papers. I get L850 a year. I thought that perhaps if you were to hold these papers it would be security enough that I should pay you. You could draw my pension, and repay yourselves at the rate, say, of L500 a year, taking your five per cent interest as well.”

“What interest?”

“Five per cent per annum.”

Mr. Metaxa laughed. “Per annum!” he said. “Five per cent a month.”

“A month! That would be sixty per cent a year.”

“Precisely.”

“But that is monstrous.”

“I don’t ask gentlemen to come to me. They come of their own free will. Those are my terms, and they can take it or leave it.”

“Then I shall leave it.” The Admiral rose angrily from his chair.

“But one moment, sir. Just sit down and we shall chat the matter over. Yours is a rather unusual case and we may find some other way of doing what you wish. Of course the security which you offer is no security at all, and no sane man would advance five thousand pennies on it.”

“No security? Why not, sir?”

“You might die to-morrow. You are not a young man. What age are you?”

“Sixty-three.”

Mr. Metaxa turned over a long column of figures. “Here is an actuary’s table,” said he. “At your time of life the average expectancy of life is only a few years even in a well-preserved man.”

“Do you mean to insinuate that I am not a well-preserved man?”

“Well, Admiral, it is a trying life at sea. Sailors in their younger days are gay dogs, and take it out of themselves. Then when they grow older they are still hard at it, and have no chance of rest or peace. I do not think a sailor’s life a good one.”

“I’ll tell you what, sir,” said the Admiral hotly. “If you have two pairs of gloves I’ll undertake to knock you out under three rounds. Or I’ll race you from here to St. Paul’s, and my friend here will see fair. I’ll let you see whether I am an old man or not.”

“This is beside the question,” said the moneylender with a deprecatory shrug. “The point is that if you died to-morrow where would be the security then?”

“I could insure my life, and make the policy over to you.”

“Your premiums for such a sum, if any office would have you, which I very much doubt, would come to close on five hundred a year. That would hardly suit your book.”

“Well, sir, what do you intend to propose?” asked the Admiral.

“I might, to accommodate you, work it in another way. I should send for a medical man, and have an opinion upon your life. Then I might see what could be done.”

“That is quite fair. I have no objection to that.”

“There is a very clever doctor in the street here. Proudie is his name. John, go and fetch Doctor Proudie.” The youth was dispatched upon his errand, while Mr. Metaxa sat at his desk, trimming his nails, and shooting out little comments upon the weather. Presently feet were heard upon the stairs, the moneylender hurried out, there was a sound of whispering, and he returned with a large, fat, greasy-looking man, clad in a much worn frock-coat, and a very dilapidated top hat.

“Doctor Proudie, gentlemen,” said Mr. Metaxa.

The doctor bowed, smiled, whipped off his hat, and produced his stethoscope from its interior with the air of a conjurer upon the stage. “Which of these gentlemen am I to examine?” he asked, blinking from one to the other of them. “Ah, it is you! Only your waistcoat! You need not undo your collar. Thank you! A full breath! Thank you! Ninety-nine! Thank you! Now hold your breath for a moment. Oh, dear, dear, what is this I hear?”

“What is it then?” asked the Admiral coolly.

“Tut! tut! This is a great pity. Have you had rheumatic fever?”

“Never.”

“You have had some serious illness?”

“Never.”

“Ah, you are an admiral. You have been abroad, tropics, malaria, ague — I know.”

“I have never had a day’s illness.”

“Not to your knowledge; but you have inhaled unhealthy air, and it has left its effect. You have an organic murmur — slight but distinct.”

"Is it dangerous?"

"It might at anytime become so. You should not take violent exercise."

"Oh, indeed. It would hurt me to run a half mile?"

"It would be very dangerous."

"And a mile?"

"Would be almost certainly fatal."

"Then there is nothing else the matter?"

"No. But if the heart is weak, then everything is weak, and the life is not a sound one."

"You see, Admiral," remarked Mr. Metaxa, as the doctor secreted his stethoscope once more in his hat, "my remarks were not entirely uncalled for. I am sorry that the doctor's opinion is not more favorable, but this is a matter of business, and certain obvious precautions must be taken."

"Of course. Then the matter is at an end."

"Well, we might even now do business. I am most anxious to be of use to you. How long do you think, doctor, that this gentleman will in all probability live?"

"Well, well, it's rather a delicate question to answer," said Dr. Proudie, with a show of embarrassment.

"Not a bit, sir. Out with it! I have faced death too often to flinch from it now, though I saw it as near me as you are."

"Well, well, we must go by averages of course. Shall we say two years? I should think that you have a full two years before you."

"In two years your pension would bring you in L1,600. Now I will do my very best for you, Admiral! I will advance you L2,000, and you can make over to me your pension for your life. It is pure speculation on my part. If you die to-morrow I lose my money. If the doctor's prophecy is correct I shall still be out of pocket. If you live a little longer, then I may see my money again. It is the very best I can do for you."

"Then you wish to buy my pension?"

"Yes, for two thousand down."

"And if I live for twenty years?"

"Oh, in that case of course my speculation would be more successful. But you have heard the doctor's opinion."

"Would you advance the money instantly?"

"You should have a thousand at once. The other thousand I should expect you to take in furniture."

“In furniture?”

“Yes, Admiral. We shall do you a beautiful houseful at that sum. It is the custom of my clients to take half in furniture.”

The Admiral sat in dire perplexity. He had come out to get money, and to go back without any, to be powerless to help when his boy needed every shilling to save him from disaster, that would be very bitter to him. On the other hand, it was so much that he surrendered, and so little that he received. Little, and yet something. Would it not be better than going back empty-handed? He saw the yellow backed chequebook upon the table. The moneylender opened it and dipped his pen into the ink.

“Shall I fill it up?” said he.

“I think, Admiral,” remarked Westmacott, “that we had better have a little walk and some luncheon before we settle this matter.”

“Oh, we may as well do it at once. It would be absurd to postpone it now,” Metaxa spoke with some heat, and his eyes glinted angrily from between his narrow lids at the imperturbable Charles. The Admiral was simple in money matters, but he had seen much of men and had learned to read them. He saw that venomous glance, and saw too that intense eagerness was peeping out from beneath the careless air which the agent had assumed.

“You’re quite right, Westmacott,” said he. “We’ll have a little walk before we settle it.”

“But I may not be here this afternoon.”

“Then we must choose another day.”

“But why not settle it now?”

“Because I prefer not,” said the Admiral shortly.

“Very well. But remember that my offer is only for to-day. It is off unless you take it at once.”

“Let it be off, then.

“There’s my fee,” cried the doctor.

“How much?”

“A guinea.”

The Admiral threw a pound and a shilling upon the table. “Come, Westmacott,” said he, and they walked together from the room.

“I don’t like it,” said Charles, when they found themselves in the street once more; “I don’t profess to be a very sharp chap, but this is a trifle too thin. What did he want to go out and speak to the doctor for? And how very convenient this tale of a weak heart was! I believe they are a couple of rogues, and in league with each other."

"A shark and a pilot fish," said the Admiral.

"I'll tell you what I propose, sir. There's a lawyer named McAdam who does my aunt's business. He is a very honest fellow, and lives at the other side of Poultry. We'll go over to him together and have his opinion about the whole matter."

"How far is it to his place?"

"Oh, a mile at least. We can have a cab."

"A mile? Then we shall see if there is any truth in what that swab of a doctor said. Come, my boy, and clap on all sail, and see who can stay the longest."

Then the sober denizens of the heart of business London saw a singular sight as they returned from their luncheons. Down the roadway, dodging among cabs and carts, ran a weather-stained elderly man, with wide flapping black hat, and homely suit of tweeds. With elbows braced back, hands clenched near his armpits, and chest protruded, he scudded along, while close at his heels lumbered a large-limbed, heavy, yellow mustached young man, who seemed to feel the exercise a good deal more than his senior. On they dashed, helter-skelter, until they pulled up panting at the office where the lawyer of the Westmacotts was to be found.

"There now!" cried the Admiral in triumph. "What d'ye think of that? Nothing wrong in the engine-room, eh?"

"You seem fit enough, sir.

"Blessed if I believe the swab was a certificated doctor at all. He was flying false colours, or I am mistaken."

"They keep the directories and registers in this eating-house," said Westmacott. "We'll go and look him out."

They did so, but the medical rolls contained no such name as that of Dr. Proudie, of Bread Street.

"Pretty villainy this!" cried the Admiral, thumping his chest. "A dummy doctor and a vamped up disease. Well, we've tried the rogues, Westmacott! Let us see what we can do with your honest man."

CHAPTER XIV. EASTWARD HO!

Mr. McAdam, of the firm of McAdam and Squire, was a highly polished man who dwelt behind a highly polished table in the neatest and snuggest of offices. He was white-haired and amiable, with a deep-lined aquiline face, was addicted to low bows, and indeed, always seemed to carry himself at half-cock, as though just descending into one, or just recovering himself. He wore a high-buckled stock, took snuff, and adorned his conversation with little scraps from the classics.

“My dear Sir,” said he, when he had listened to their story, “any friend of Mrs. Westmacott’s is a friend of mine. Try a pinch. I wonder that you should have gone to this man Metaxa. His advertisement is enough to condemn him. Habet foenum in cornu. They are all rogues.”

“The doctor was a rogue too. I didn’t like the look of him at the time.”

“Arcades ambo. But now we must see what we can do for you. Of course what Metaxa said was perfectly right. The pension is in itself no security at all, unless it were accompanied by a life assurance which would be an income in itself. It is no good whatever.”

His clients’ faces fell.

“But there is the second alternative. You might sell the pension right out. Speculative investors occasionally deal in such things. I have one client, a sporting man, who would be very likely to take it up if we could agree upon terms. Of course, I must follow Metaxa’s example by sending for a doctor.”

For the second time was the Admiral punched and tapped and listened to. This time, however, there could be no question of the qualifications of the doctor, a well-known Fellow of the College of Surgeons, and his report was as favorable as the other’s had been adverse.

“He has the heart and chest of a man of forty,” said he. “I can recommend his life as one of the best of his age that I have ever examined.”

“That’s well,” said Mr. McAdam, making a note of the doctor’s remarks, while the Admiral disbursed a second guinea. “Your price, I understand, is five thousand pounds. I can communicate with Mr. Elberry, my client, and let you know whether he cares to touch the matter. Meanwhile you can leave your pension papers here, and I will give you a receipt for them.”

“Very well. I should like the money soon.”

"That is why I am retaining the papers. If I can see Mr. Elberry to-day we may let you have a cheque to-morrow. Try another pinch. No? Well, good-bye. I am very happy to have been of service." Mr. McAdam bowed them out, for he was a very busy man, and they found themselves in the street once more with lighter hearts than when they had left it.

"Well, Westmacott, I am sure I am very much obliged to you," said the Admiral. "You have stood by me when I was the better for a little help, for I'm clean out of my soundings among these city sharks. But I've something to do now which is more in my own line, and I need not trouble you any more."

"Oh, it is no trouble. I have nothing to do. I never have anything to do. I don't suppose I could do it if I had. I should be delighted to come with you, sir, if I can be of any use."

"No, no, my lad. You go home again. It would be kind of you, though, if you would look in at number one when you get back and tell my wife that all's well with me, and that I'll be back in an hour or so."

"All right, sir. I'll tell her." Westmacott raised his hat and strode away to the westward, while the Admiral, after a hurried lunch, bent his steps towards the east.

It was a long walk, but the old seaman swung along at a rousing pace, leaving street after street behind him. The great business places dwindled down into commonplace shops and dwellings, which decreased and became more stunted, even as the folk who filled them did, until he was deep in the evil places of the eastern end. It was a land of huge, dark houses and of garish gin-shops, a land, too, where life moves irregularly and where adventures are to be gained — as the Admiral was to learn to his cost.

He was hurrying down one of the long, narrow, stone-flagged lanes between the double lines of crouching, disheveled women and of dirty children who sat on the hollowed steps of the houses, and basked in the autumn sun. At one side was a barrowman with a load of walnuts, and beside the barrow a bedraggled woman with a black fringe and a chequered shawl thrown over her head. She was cracking walnuts and picking them out of the shells, throwing out a remark occasionally to a rough man in a rabbit-skin cap, with straps under the knees of his corduroy trousers, who stood puffing a black clay pipe with his back against the wall. What the cause of the quarrel was, or what sharp sarcasm from the woman's lips pricked suddenly through that thick skin may never be known, but suddenly the man took his pipe in his left hand, leaned forward, and deliberately struck her across the face with his right. It was a slap rather than a blow, but the woman gave a sharp cry and cowered up against the barrow with her hand to her cheek.

“You infernal villain!” cried the Admiral, raising his stick. “You brute and blackguard!”

“Garn!” growled the rough, with the deep rasping intonation of a savage. “Garn out o’ this or I’ll — —” He took a step forward with uplifted hand, but in an instant down came cut number three upon his wrist, and cut number five across his thigh, and cut number one full in the center of his rabbit-skin cap. It was not a heavy stick, but it was strong enough to leave a good red weal wherever it fell. The rough yelled with pain, and rushed in, hitting with both hands, and kicking with his ironshod boots, but the Admiral had still a quick foot and a true eye, so that he bounded backwards and sideways, still raining a shower, of blows upon his savage antagonist. Suddenly, however, a pair of arms closed round his neck, and glancing backwards he caught a glimpse of the black coarse fringe of the woman whom he had befriended, “I’ve got him!” she shrieked. “I’ll ‘old ‘im. Now, Bill, knock the tripe out of him!” Her grip was as strong as a man’s, and her wrist pressed like an iron bar upon the Admiral’s throat. He made a desperate effort to disengage himself, but the most that he could do was to swing her round, so as to place her between his adversary and himself. As it proved, it was the very best thing that he could have done. The rough, half-blinded and maddened by the blows which he had received, struck out with all his ungainly strength, just as his partner’s head swung round in front of him. There was a noise like that of a stone hitting a wall, a deep groan, her grasp relaxed, and she dropped a dead weight upon the pavement, while the Admiral sprang back and raised his stick once more, ready either for attack or defense. Neither were needed, however, for at that moment there was a scattering of the crowd, and two police constables, burly and helmeted, pushed their way through the rabble. At the sight of them the rough took to his heels, and was instantly screened from view by a veil of his friends and neighbours.

“I have been assaulted,” panted the Admiral. “This woman was attacked and I had to defend her.”

“This is Bermondsey Sal,” said one police officer, bending over the bedraggled heap of tattered shawl and dirty skirt. “She’s got it hot this time.”

“He was a shortish man, thick, with a beard.”

“Ah, that’s Black Davie. He’s been up four times for beating her. He’s about done the job now. If I were you I would let that sort settle their own little affairs, sir.”

“Do you think that a man who holds the Queen’s commission will stand by and see a woman struck?” cried the Admiral indignantly.

“Well, just as you like, sir. But you’ve lost your watch, I see.”

“My watch!” He clapped his hand to his waistcoat. The chain was hanging down in front, and the watch gone.

He passed his hand over his forehead. “I would not have lost that watch for anything,” said he. “No money could replace it. It was given me by the ship’s company after our African cruise. It has an inscription.”

The policeman shrugged his shoulders. “It comes from meddling,” said he.

“What’ll you give me if I tell yer where it is?” said a sharp-faced boy among the crowd. “Will you gimme a quid?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, where’s the quid?”

The Admiral took a sovereign from his pocket. “Here it is.”

“Then ‘ere’s the ticker!” The boy pointed to the clenched hand of the senseless woman. A glimmer of gold shone out from between the fingers, and on opening them up, there was the Admiral’s chronometer. This interesting victim had throttled her protector with one hand, while she had robbed him with the other.

The Admiral left his address with the policeman, satisfied that the woman was only stunned, not dead, and then set off upon his way once more, the poorer perhaps in his faith in human nature, but in very good spirits none the less. He walked with dilated nostrils and clenched hands, all glowing and tingling with the excitement of the combat, and warmed with the thought that he could still, when there was need, take his own part in a street brawl in spite of his three-score and odd years.

His way now led towards the river-side regions, and a cleansing whiff of tar was to be detected in the stagnant autumn air. Men with the blue jersey and peaked cap of the boatman, or the white ducks of the dockers, began to replace the corduroys and fustian of the laborers. Shops with nautical instruments in the windows, rope and paint sellers, and slop shops with long rows of oilskins dangling from hooks, all proclaimed the neighbourhood of the docks. The Admiral quickened his pace and straightened his figure as his surroundings became more nautical, until at last, peeping between two high, dingy wharfs, he caught a glimpse of the mud-coloured waters of the Thames, and of the bristle of masts and funnels which rose from its broad bosom. To the right lay a quiet street, with many brass plates upon either side, and wire blinds in all of the windows. The Admiral walked slowly down it until "The Saint Lawrence Shipping Company" caught his eye. He crossed the road, pushed open the door, and found himself in a low-ceilinged office, with a long counter at one end and a great number of wooden sections of ships stuck upon boards and plastered all over the walls.

"Is Mr. Henry in?" asked the Admiral.

"No, sir," answered an elderly man from a high seat in the corner. "He has not come into town to-day. I can manage any business you may wish seen to."

"You don't happen to have a first or second officer's place vacant, do you?"

The manager looked with a dubious eye at his singular applicant.

"Do you hold certificates?" he asked.

"I hold every nautical certificate there is."

"Then you won't do for us."

"Why not?"

"Your age, sir."

"I give you my word that I can see as well as ever, and am as good a man in every way."

"I don't doubt it."

"Why should my age be a bar, then?"

"Well, I must put it plainly. If a man of your age, holding certificates, has not got past a second officer's berth, there must be a black mark against him somewhere. I don't know what it is, drink or temper, or want of judgment, but something there must be."

"I assure you there is nothing, but I find myself stranded, and so have to turn to the old business again."

"Oh, that's it," said the manager, with suspicion in his eye. "How long were you in your last billet?"

"Fifty-one years."

"What!"

“Yes, sir, one-and-fifty years.”

“In the same employ?”

“Yes.”

“Why, you must have begun as a child.”

“I was twelve when I joined.”

“It must be a strangely managed business,” said the manager, “which allows men to leave it who have served for fifty years, and who are still as good as ever. Who did you serve?”

“The Queen. Heaven bless her!”

“Oh, you were in the Royal Navy. What rating did you hold?”

“I am Admiral of the Fleet.”

The manager started, and sprang down from his high stool.

“My name is Admiral Hay Denver. There is my card. And here are the records of my service. I don’t, you understand, want to push another man from his billet; but if you should chance to have a berth open, I should be very glad of it. I know the navigation from the Cod Banks right up to Montreal a great deal better than I know the streets of London.”

The astonished manager glanced over the blue papers which his visitor had handed him. “Won’t you take a chair, Admiral?” said he.

“Thank you! But I should be obliged if you would drop my title now. I told you because you asked me, but I’ve left the quarter-deck, and I am plain Mr. Hay Denver now.”

“May I ask,” said the manager, “are you the same Denver who commanded at one time on the North American station?”

“I did.”

“Then it was you who got one of our boats, the Comus, off the rocks in the Bay of Fundy? The directors voted you three hundred guineas as salvage, and you refused them.”

“It was an offer which should not have been made,” said the Admiral sternly.

“Well, it reflects credit upon you that you should think so. If Mr. Henry were here I am sure that he would arrange this matter for you at once. As it is, I shall lay it before the directors to-day, and I am sure that they will be proud to have you in our employment, and, I hope, in some more suitable position than that which you suggest.”

“I am very much obliged to you, sir,” said the Admiral, and started off again, well pleased, upon his homeward journey.

CHAPTER XV. STILL AMONG SHOALS.

Next day brought the Admiral a cheque for L5,000 from Mr. McAdam, and a stamped agreement by which he made over his pension papers to the speculative investor. It was not until he had signed and sent it off that the full significance of all that he had done broke upon him. He had sacrificed everything. His pension was gone. He had nothing save only what he could earn. But the stout old heart never quailed. He waited eagerly for a letter from the Saint Lawrence Shipping Company, and in the meanwhile he gave his landlord a quarter's notice. Hundred pound a year houses would in future be a luxury which he could not aspire to. A small lodging in some inexpensive part of London must be the substitute for his breezy Norwood villa. So be it, then! Better that a thousand fold than that his name should be associated with failure and disgrace.

On that morning Harold Denver was to meet the creditors of the firm, and to explain the situation to them. It was a hateful task, a degrading task, but he set himself to do it with quiet resolution. At home they waited in intense anxiety to learn the result of the meeting. It was late before he returned, haggard pale, like a man who has done and suffered much.

"What's this board in front of the house?" he asked.

"We are going to try a little change of scene," said the Admiral. "This place is neither town nor country. But never mind that, boy. Tell us what happened in the City."

"God help me! My wretched business driving you out of house and home!" cried Harold, broken down by this fresh evidence of the effects of his misfortunes. "It is easier for me to meet my creditors than to see you two suffering so patiently for my sake."

"Tut, tut!" cried the Admiral. "There's no suffering in the matter. Mother would rather be near the theaters. That's at the bottom of it, isn't it, mother? You come and sit down here between us and tell us all about it."

Harold sat down with a loving hand in each of his.

"It's not so bad as we thought," said he, "and yet it is bad enough. I have about ten days to find the money, but I don't know which way to turn for it. Pearson, however, lied, as usual, when he spoke of L13,000. The amount is not quite L7,000."

The Admiral claped his hands. “I knew we should weather it after all! Hurrah my boy! Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!”

Harold gazed at him in surprise, while the old seaman waved his arm above his head and bellowed out three stentorian cheers. “Where am I to get seven thousand pounds from, dad?” he asked.

“Never mind. You spin your yarn.”

“Well, they were very good and very kind, but of course they must have either their money or their money’s worth. They passed a vote of sympathy with me, and agreed to wait ten days before they took any proceedings. Three of them, whose claim came to L3,500, told me that if I would give them my personal I.O.U., and pay interest at the rate of five per cent, their amounts might stand over as long as I wished. That would be a charge of L175 upon my income, but with economy I could meet it, and it diminishes the debt by one-half.”

Again the Admiral burst out cheering.

“There remains, therefore, about L3,200 which has to be found within ten days. No man shall lose by me. I gave them my word in the room that if I worked my soul out of my body every one of them should be paid. I shall not spend a penny upon myself until it is done. But some of them can’t wait. They are poor men themselves, and must have their money. They have issued a warrant for Pearson’s arrest. But they think that he has got away the States.”

“These men shall have their money,” said the Admiral.

“Dad!”

“Yes, my boy, you don’t know the resources of the family. One never does know until one tries. What have you yourself now?”

“I have about a thousand pounds invested.”

“All right. And I have about as much more. There’s a good start. Now, mother, it is your turn. What is that little bit of paper of yours?”

Mrs. Denver unfolded it, and placed it upon Harold’s knee.

“Five thousand pounds!” he gasped.

“Ah, but mother is not the only rich one. Look at this!” And the Admiral unfolded his cheque, and placed it upon the other knee.

Harold gazed from one to the other in bewilderment. “Ten thousand pounds!” he cried. “Good heavens! where did these come from?”

“You will not worry any longer, dear,” murmured his mother, slipping her arm round him.

But his quick eye had caught the signature upon one of the cheques. “Doctor Walker!” he cried, flushing. “This is Clara’s doing. Oh, dad, we cannot take this money. It would not be right nor honorable.”

“No, boy, I am glad you think so. It is something, however, to have proved one’s friend, for a real good friend he is. It was he who brought it in, though Clara sent him. But this other money will be enough to cover everything, and it is all my own.”

“Your own? Where did you get it, dad?”

“Tut, tut! See what it is to have a City man to deal with. It is my own, and fairly earned, and that is enough.”

“Dear old dad!” Harold squeezed his gnarled hand. “And you, mother! You have lifted the trouble from my heart. I feel another man. You have saved my honor, my good name, everything. I cannot owe you more, for I owe you everything already.”

So while the autumn sunset shone ruddily through the broad window these three sat together hand in hand, with hearts which were too full to speak. Suddenly the soft thudding of tennis balls was heard, and Mrs. Westmacott bounded into view upon the lawn with brandished racket and short skirts fluttering in the breeze. The sight came as a relief to their strained nerves, and they burst all three into a hearty fit of laughter.

“She is playing with her nephew,” said Harold at last. “The Walkers have not come out yet. I think that it would be well if you were to give me that cheque, mother, and I were to return it in person.”

“Certainly, Harold. I think it would be very nice.”

He went in through the garden. Clara and the Doctor were sitting together in the dining-room. She sprang to her feet at the sight of him.

“Oh, Harold, I have been waiting for you so impatiently,” she cried; “I saw you pass the front windows half an hour ago. I would have come in if I dared. Do tell us what has happened.”

“I have come in to thank you both. How can I repay you for your kindness? Here is your cheque, Doctor. I have not needed it. I find that I can lay my hands on enough to pay my creditors.”

“Thank God!” said Clara fervently.

“The sum is less than I thought, and our resources considerably more. We have been able to do it with ease.”

“With ease!” The Doctor’s brow clouded and his manner grew cold. “I think, Harold, that you would do better to take this money of mine, than to use that which seems to you to be gained with ease."

"Thank you, sir. If I borrowed from any one it would be from you. But my father has this very sum, five thousand pounds, and, as I tell him, I owe him so much that I have no compunction about owing him more."

"No compunction! Surely there are some sacrifices which a son should not allow his parents to make."

"Sacrifices! What do you mean?"

"Is it possible that you do not know how this money has been obtained?"

"I give you my word, Doctor Walker, that I have no idea. I asked my father, but he refused to tell me."

"I thought not," said the Doctor, the gloom clearing from his brow. "I was sure that you were not a man who, to clear yourself from a little money difficulty, would sacrifice the happiness of your mother and the health of your father."

"Good gracious! what do you mean?"

"It is only right that you should know. That money represents the commutation of your father's pension. He has reduced himself to poverty, and intends to go to sea again to earn a living."

"To sea again! Impossible!"

"It is the truth. Charles Westmacott has told Ida. He was with him in the City when he took his poor pension about from dealer to dealer trying to sell it. He succeeded at last, and hence the money."

"He has sold his pension!" cried Harold, with his hands to his face. "My dear old dad has sold his pension!" He rushed from the room, and burst wildly into the presence of his parents once more. "I cannot take it, father," he cried. "Better bankruptcy than that. Oh, if I had only known your plan! We must have back the pension. Oh, mother, mother, how could you think me capable of such selfishness? Give me the cheque, dad, and I will see this man to-night, for I would sooner die like a dog in the ditch than touch a penny of this money."

CHAPTER XVI. A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

Now all this time, while the tragi-comedy of life was being played in these three suburban villas, while on a commonplace stage love and humor and fears and lights and shadows were so swiftly succeeding each other, and while these three families, drifted together by fate, were shaping each other's destinies and working out in their own fashion the strange, intricate ends of human life, there were human eyes which watched over every stage of the performance, and which were keenly critical of every actor on it. Across the road beyond the green palings and the close-cropped lawn, behind the curtains of their creeper-framed windows, sat the two old ladies, Miss Bertha and Miss Monica Williams, looking out as from a private box at all that was being enacted before them. The growing friendship of the three families, the engagement of Harold Denver with Clara Walker, the engagement of Charles Westmacott with her sister, the dangerous fascination which the widow exercised over the Doctor, the preposterous behavior of the Walker girls and the unhappiness which they had caused their father, not one of these incidents escaped the notice of the two maiden ladies. Bertha the younger had a smile or a sigh for the lovers, Monica the elder a frown or a shrug for the elders. Every night they talked over what they had seen, and their own dull, uneventful life took a warmth and a colouring from their neighbours as a blank wall reflects a beacon fire.

And now it was destined that they should experience the one keen sensation of their later years, the one memorable incident from which all future incidents should be dated.

It was on the very night which succeeded the events which have just been narrated, when suddenly into Monica William's head, as she tossed upon her sleepless bed, there shot a thought which made her sit up with a thrill and a gasp.

“Bertha,” said she, plucking at the shoulder of her sister, “I have left the front window open.”

“No, Monica, surely not.” Bertha sat up also, and thrilled in sympathy.

“I am sure of it. You remember I had forgotten to water the pots, and then I opened the window, and Jane called me about the jam, and I have never been in the room since.”

“Good gracious, Monica, it is a mercy that we have not been murdered in our beds. There was a house broken into at Forest Hill last week. Shall we go down and shut it?”

“I dare not go down alone, dear, but if you will come with me. Put on your slippers and dressing-gown. We do not need a candle. Now, Bertha, we will go down together.”

Two little white patches moved vaguely through the darkness, the stairs creaked, the door whined, and they were at the front room window. Monica closed it gently down, and fastened the snib.

“What a beautiful moon!” said she, looking out. “We can see as clearly as if it were day. How peaceful and quiet the three houses are over yonder! It seems quite sad to see that `To Let’ card upon number one. I wonder how number two will like their going. For my part I could better spare that dreadful woman at number three with her short skirts and her snake. But, oh, Bertha, look! look!! look!!!” Her voice had fallen suddenly to a quivering whisper and she was pointing to the Westmacotts’ house. Her sister gave a gasp of horror, and stood with a clutch at Monica’s arm, staring in the same direction.

There was a light in the front room, a slight, wavering light such as would be given by a small candle or taper. The blind was down, but the light shone dimly through. Outside in the garden, with his figure outlined against the luminous square, there stood a man, his back to the road, his two hands upon the window ledge, and his body rather bent as though he were trying to peep in past the blind. So absolutely still and motionless was he that in spite of the moon they might well have overlooked him were it not for that tell-tale light behind.

“Good heaven!” gasped Bertha, “it is a burglar.”

But her sister set her mouth grimly and shook her head. “We shall see,” she whispered. “It may be something worse.”

Swiftly and furtively the man stood suddenly erect, and began to push the window slowly up. Then he put one knee upon the sash, glanced round to see that all was safe, and climbed over into the room. As he did so he had to push the blind aside. Then the two spectators saw where the light came from. Mrs. Westmacott was standing, as rigid as a statue, in the center of the room, with a lighted taper in her right hand. For an instant they caught a glimpse of her stern face and her white collar. Then the blind fell back into position, and the two figures disappeared from their view.

"Oh, that dreadful woman!" cried Monica. "That dreadful, dreadful woman! She was waiting for him. You saw it with your own eyes, sister Bertha!"

"Hush, dear, hush and listen!" said her more charitable companion. They pushed their own window up once more, and watched from behind the curtains.

For a long time all was silent within the house. The light still stood motionless as though Mrs. Westmacott remained rigidly in the one position, while from time to time a shadow passed in front of it to show that her midnight visitor was pacing up and down in front of her. Once they saw his outline clearly, with his hands outstretched as if in appeal or entreaty. Then suddenly there was a dull sound, a cry, the noise of a fall, the taper was extinguished, and a dark figure fled in the moonlight, rushed across the garden, and vanished amid the shrubs at the farther side.

Then only did the two old ladies understand that they had looked on whilst a tragedy had been enacted. "Help!" they cried, and "Help!" in their high, thin voices, timidly at first, but gathering volume as they went on, until the Wilderness rang with their shrieks. Lights shone in all the windows opposite, chains rattled, bars were unshot, doors opened, and out rushed friends to the rescue. Harold, with a stick; the Admiral, with his sword, his grey head and bare feet protruding from either end of a long brown ulster; finally, Doctor Walker, with a poker, all ran to the help of the Westmacotts. Their door had been already opened, and they crowded tumultuously into the front room.

Charles Westmacott, white to his lips, was kneeling an the floor, supporting his aunt's head upon his knee. She lay outstretched, dressed in her ordinary clothes, the extinguished taper still grasped in her hand, no mark or wound upon her — pale, placid, and senseless.

"Thank God you are come, Doctor," said Charles, looking up. "Do tell me how she is, and what I should do."

Doctor Walker kneeled beside her, and passed his left hand over her head, while he grasped her pulse with the right.

"She has had a terrible blow," said he. "It must have been with some blunt weapon. Here is the place behind the ear. But she is a woman of extraordinary physical powers. Her pulse is full and slow. There is no stertor. It is my belief that she is merely stunned, and that she is in no danger at all."

“Thank God for that!”

“We must get her to bed. We shall carry her upstairs, and then I shall send my girls in to her. But who has done this?”

“Some robber,” said Charles. “You see that the window is open. She must have heard him and come down, for she was always perfectly fearless. I wish to goodness she had called me.”

“But she was dressed.”

“Sometimes she sits up very late.”

“I did sit up very late,” said a voice. She had opened her eyes, and was blinking at them in the lamplight. “A villain came in through the window and struck me with a life-preserver. You can tell the police so when they come. Also that it was a little fat man. Now, Charles, give me your arm and I shall go upstairs.”

But her spirit was greater than her strength, for, as she staggered to her feet, her head swam round, and she would have fallen again had her nephew not thrown his arms round her. They carried her upstairs among them and laid her upon the bed, where the Doctor watched beside her, while Charles went off to the police-station, and the Denvers mounted guard over the frightened maids.

CHAPTER XVII. IN PORT AT LAST.

Day had broken before the several denizens of the Wilderness had all returned to their homes, the police finished their inquiries, and all come back to its normal quiet. Mrs. Westmacott had been left sleeping peacefully with a small chloral draught to steady her nerves and a handkerchief soaked in arnica bound round her head. It was with some surprise, therefore, that the Admiral received a note from her about ten o'clock, asking him to be good enough to step in to her. He hurried in, fearing that she might have taken some turn for the worse, but he was reassured to find her sitting up in her bed, with Clara and Ida Walker in attendance upon her. She had removed the handkerchief, and had put on a little cap with pink ribbons, and a maroon dressing-jacket, daintily fulled at the neck and sleeves.

"My dear friend," said she as he entered, "I wish to make a last few remarks to you. No, no," she continued, laughing, as she saw a look of dismay upon his face. "I shall not dream of dying for at least another thirty years. A woman should be ashamed to die before she is seventy. I wish, Clara, that you would ask your father to step up. And you, Ida, just pass me my cigarettes, and open me a bottle of stout."

"Now then," she continued, as the doctor joined their party. "I don't quite know what I ought to say to you, Admiral. You want some very plain speaking to."

"'Pon my word, ma'am, I don't know what you are talking about."

"The idea of you at your age talking of going to sea, and leaving that dear, patient little wife of yours at home, who has seen nothing of you all her life! It's all very well for you. You have the life, and the change, and the excitement, but you don't think of her eating her heart out in a dreary London lodging. You men are all the same."

"Well, ma'am, since you know so much, you probably know also that I have sold my pension. How am I to live if I do not turn my hand to work?"

Mrs. Westmacott produced a large registered envelope from beneath the sheets and tossed it over to the old seaman.

"That excuse won't do. There are your pension papers. Just see if they are right."

He broke the seal, and out tumbled the very papers which he had made over to McAdam two days before.

“But what am I to do with these now?” he cried in bewilderment.

“You will put them in a safe place, or get a friend to do so, and, if you do your duty, you will go to your wife and beg her pardon for having even for an instant thought of leaving her.”

The Admiral passed his hand over his rugged forehead. “This is very good of you, ma’am,” said he, “very good and kind, and I know that you are a staunch friend, but for all that these papers mean money, and though we may have been in broken water lately, we are not quite in such straits as to have to signal to our friends. When we do, ma’am, there’s no one we would look to sooner than to you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” said the widow. “You know nothing whatever about it, and yet you stand there laying down the law. I’ll have my way in the matter, and you shall take the papers, for it is no favor that I am doing you, but simply a restoration of stolen property.”

“How’s that, ma’am?”

“I am just going to explain, though you might take a lady’s word for it without asking any questions. Now, what I am going to say is just between you four, and must go no farther. I have my own reasons for wishing to keep it from the police. Who do you think it was who struck me last night, Admiral?”

“Some villain, ma’am. I don’t know his name.”

“But I do. It was the same man who ruined or tried to ruin your son. It was my only brother, Jeremiah.”

“Ah!”

“I will tell you about him — or a little about him, for he has done much which I would not care to talk of, nor you to listen to. He was always a villain, smooth-spoken and plausible, but a dangerous, subtle villain all the same. If I have some hard thoughts about mankind I can trace them back to the childhood which I spent with my brother. He is my only living relative, for my other brother, Charles’s father, was killed in the Indian mutiny.

“Our father was rich, and when he died he made a good provision both for Jeremiah and for me. He knew Jeremiah and he mistrusted him, however; so instead of giving him all that he meant him to have he handed me over a part of it, telling me, with what was almost his dying breath, to hold it in trust for my brother, and to use it in his behalf when he should have squandered or lost all that he had. This arrangement was meant to be a secret between my father and myself, but unfortunately his words were overheard by the nurse, and she repeated them afterwards to my brother, so that he came to know that I held some money in trust for him. I suppose tobacco will not harm my head, Doctor? Thank you, then I shall trouble you for the matches, Ida.” She lit a cigarette, and leaned back upon the pillow, with the blue wreaths curling from her lips.

“I cannot tell you how often he has attempted to get that money from me. He has bullied, cajoled, threatened, coaxed, done all that a man could do. I still held it with the presentiment that a need for it would come. When I heard of this villainous business, his flight, and his leaving his partner to face the storm, above all that my old friend had been driven to surrender his income in order to make up for my brother’s defalcations, I felt that now indeed I had a need for it. I sent in Charles yesterday to Mr. McAdam, and his client, upon hearing the facts of the case, very graciously consented to give back the papers, and to take the money which he had advanced. Not a word of thanks to me, Admiral. I tell you that it was very cheap benevolence, for it was all done with his own money, and how could I use it better?

“I thought that I should probably hear from him soon, and I did. Last evening there was handed in a note of the usual whining, cringing tone. He had come back from abroad at the risk of his life and liberty, just in order that he might say good-bye to the only sister he ever had, and to entreat my forgiveness for any pain which he had caused me. He would never trouble me again, and he begged only that I would hand over to him the sum which I held in trust for him. That, with what he had already, would be enough to start him as an honest man in the new world, when he would ever remember and pray for the dear sister who had been his savior. That was the style of the letter, and it ended by imploring me to leave the window-latch open, and to be in the front room at three in the morning, when he would come to receive my last kiss and to bid me farewell.

“Bad as he was, I could not, when he trusted me, betray him. I said nothing, but I was there at the hour. He entered through the window, and implored me to give him the money. He was terribly changed; gaunt, wolfish, and spoke like a madman. I told him that I had spent the money. He gnashed his teeth at me, and swore it was his money. I told him that I had spent it on him. He asked me how. I said in trying to make him an honest man, and in repairing the results of his villainy. He shrieked out a curse, and pulling something out of the breast of his coat — a loaded stick, I think — he struck me with it, and I remembered nothing more."

"The blackguard!" cried the Doctor, "but the police must be hot upon his track."

"I fancy not," Mrs. Westmacott answered calmly. "As my brother is a particularly tall, thin man, and as the police are looking for a short, fat one, I do not think that it is very probable that they will catch him. It is best, I think, that these little family matters should be adjusted in private."

"My dear ma'am," said the Admiral, "if it is indeed this man's money that has bought back my pension, then I can have no scruples about taking it. You have brought sunshine upon us, ma'am, when the clouds were at their darkest, for here is my boy who insists upon returning the money which I got. He can keep it now to pay his debts. For what you have done I can only ask God to bless you, ma'am, and as to thanking you I can't even — —"

"Then pray don't try," said the widow. "Now run away, Admiral, and make your peace with Mrs. Denver. I am sure if I were she it would be a long time before I should forgive you. As for me, I am going to America when Charles goes. You'll take me so far, won't you, Ida? There is a college being built in Denver which is to equip the woman of the future for the struggle of life, and especially for her battle against man. Some months ago the committee offered me a responsible situation upon the staff, and I have decided now to accept it, for Charles's marriage removes the last tie which binds me to England. You will write to me sometimes, my friends, and you will address your letters to Professor Westmacott, Emancipation College, Denver. From there I shall watch how the glorious struggle goes in conservative old England, and if I am needed you will find me here again fighting in the forefront of the fray. Good-bye — but not you, girls; I have still a word I wish to say to you.

"Give me your hand, Ida, and yours, Clara," said she when they were alone. "Oh, you naughty little pusses, aren't you ashamed to look me in the face? Did you think — did you really think that I was so very blind, and could not see your little plot? You did it very well, I must say that, and really I think that I like you better as you are. But you had all your pains for nothing, you little conspirators, for I give you my word that I had quite made up my mind not to have him."

And so within a few weeks our little ladies from their observatory saw a mighty bustle in the Wilderness, when two-horse carriages came, and coachmen with favors, to bear away the twos who were destined to come back one. And they themselves in their crackling silk dresses went across, as invited, to the big double wedding breakfast which was held in the house of Doctor Walker. Then there was health-drinking, and laughter, and changing of dresses, and rice-throwing when the carriages drove up again, and two more couples started on that journey which ends only with life itself.

Charles Westmacott is now a flourishing ranchman in the western part of Texas, where he and his sweet little wife are the two most popular persons in all that county. Of their aunt they see little, but from time to time they see notices in the papers that there is a focus of light in Denver, where mighty thunderbolts are being forged which will one day bring the dominant sex upon their knees. The Admiral and his wife still live at number one, while Harold and Clara have taken number two, where Doctor Walker continues to reside. As to the business, it had been reconstructed, and the energy and ability of the junior partner had soon made up for all the ill that had been done by his senior. Yet with his sweet and refined home atmosphere he is able to realise his wish, and to keep himself free from the sordid aims and base ambitions which drag down the man whose business lies too exclusively in the money market of the vast Babylon. As he goes back every evening from the crowds of Throgmorton Street to the tree-lined peaceful avenues of Norwood, so he has found it possible in spirit also to do one’s duties amidst the babel of the City, and yet to live beyond it.

THE PARASITE

This is a 1894 novella, whose main character is a young man known as Austin Gilroy. He studies physiology and knows a professor who is studying the occult. The young man is introduced to a middle-aged woman known as Miss Penclosa, who has a crippled leg and psychic powers. She is a friend of the Professor's wife. The skeptical Gilroy's fiancée, Agatha, is put into a trance to prove Miss Penclosa's powers. This succeeds and Gilroy begins to go to the Professor's house where Miss Penclosa practices her powers on him (one of the many things she tells him is that her powers vary with her strength).

THE PARASITE

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I

March 24. The spring is fairly with us now. Outside my laboratory window the great chestnut-tree is all covered with the big, glutinous, gummy buds, some of which have already begun to break into little green shuttlecocks. As you walk down the lanes you are conscious of the rich, silent forces of nature working all around you. The wet earth smells fruitful and luscious. Green shoots are peeping out everywhere. The twigs are stiff with their sap; and the moist, heavy English air is laden with a faintly resinous perfume. Buds in the hedges, lambs beneath them — everywhere the work of reproduction going forward!

I can see it without, and I can feel it within. We also have our spring when the little arterioles dilate, the lymph flows in a brisker stream, the glands work harder, winnowing and straining. Every year nature readjusts the whole machine. I can feel the ferment in my blood at this very moment, and as the cool sunshine pours through my window I could dance about in it like a gnat. So I should, only that Charles Sadler would rush upstairs to know what was the matter. Besides, I must remember that I am Professor Gilroy. An old professor may afford to be natural, but when fortune has given one of the first chairs in the university to a man of four-and-thirty he must try and act the part consistently.

What a fellow Wilson is! If I could only throw the same enthusiasm into physiology that he does into psychology, I should become a Claude Bernard at the least. His whole life and soul and energy work to one end. He drops to sleep collating his results of the past day, and he wakes to plan his researches for the coming one. And yet, outside the narrow circle who follow his proceedings, he gets so little credit for it. Physiology is a recognised science. If I add even a brick to the edifice, every one sees and applauds it. But Wilson is trying to dig the foundations for a science of the future. His work is underground and does not show. Yet he goes on uncomplainingly, corresponding with a hundred semi-maniacs in the hope of finding one reliable witness, sifting a hundred lies on the chance of gaining one little speck of truth, collating old books, devouring new ones, experimenting, lecturing, trying to light up in others the fiery interest which is consuming him. I am filled with wonder and admiration when I think of him, and yet, when he asks me to associate myself with his researches, I am compelled to tell him that, in their present state, they offer little attraction to a man who is devoted to exact science. If he could show me something positive and objective, I might then be tempted to approach the question from its physiological side. So long as half his subjects are tainted with charlatanerie and the other half with hysteria we physiologists must content ourselves with the body and leave the mind to our descendants.

No doubt I am a materialist. Agatha says that I am a rank one. I tell her that is an excellent reason for shortening our engagement, since I am in such urgent need of her spirituality. And yet I may claim to be a curious example of the effect of education upon temperament, for by nature I am, unless I deceive myself, a highly psychic man. I was a nervous, sensitive boy, a dreamer, a somnambulist, full of impressions and intuitions. My black hair, my dark eyes, my thin, olive face, my tapering fingers, are all characteristic of my real temperament, and cause experts like Wilson to claim me as their own. But my brain is soaked with exact knowledge. I have trained myself to deal only with fact and with proof. Surmise and fancy have no place in my scheme of thought. Show me what I can see with my microscope, cut with my scalpel, weigh in my balance, and I will devote a lifetime to its investigation. But when you ask me to study feelings, impressions, suggestions, you ask me to do what is distasteful and even demoralising. A departure from pure reason affects me like an evil smell or a musical discord.

Which is a very sufficient reason why I am a little loath to go to Professor Wilson’s tonight. Still I feel that I could hardly get out of the invitation without positive rudeness; and, now that Mrs. Marden and Agatha are going, of course I would not if I could. But I had rather meet them anywhere else. I know that Wilson would draw me into this nebulous semi-science of his if he could. In his enthusiasm he is perfectly impervious to hints or remonstrances. Nothing short of a positive quarrel will make him realise my aversion to the whole business. I have no doubt that he has some new mesmerist or clairvoyant or medium or trickster of some sort whom he is going to exhibit to us, for even his entertainments bear upon his hobby. Well, it will be a treat for Agatha, at any rate. She is interested in it, as woman usually is in whatever is vague and mystical and indefinite.

10.50 P. M. This diary-keeping of mine is, I fancy, the outcome of that scientific habit of mind about which I wrote this morning. I like to register impressions while they are fresh. Once a day at least I endeavor to define my own mental position. It is a useful piece of self-analysis, and has, I fancy, a steadying effect upon the character. Frankly, I must confess that my own needs what stiffening I can give it. I fear that, after all, much of my neurotic temperament survives, and that I am far from that cool, calm precision which characterizes Murdoch or Pratt-Haldane. Otherwise, why should the tomfoolery which I have witnessed this evening have set my nerves thrilling so that even now I am all unstrung? My only comfort is that neither Wilson nor Miss Penclosa nor even Agatha could have possibly known my weakness.

And what in the world was there to excite me? Nothing, or so little that it will seem ludicrous when I set it down.

The Mardens got to Wilson’s before me. In fact, I was one of the last to arrive and found the room crowded. I had hardly time to say a word to Mrs. Marden and to Agatha, who was looking charming in white and pink, with glittering wheat-ears in her hair, when Wilson came twitching at my sleeve.

“You want something positive, Gilroy,” said he, drawing me apart into a corner. “My dear fellow, I have a phenomenon — a phenomenon!”

I should have been more impressed had I not heard the same before. His sanguine spirit turns every fire-fly into a star.

“No possible question about the bona fides this time,” said he, in answer, perhaps, to some little gleam of amusement in my eyes. “My wife has known her for many years. They both come from Trinidad, you know. Miss Penclosa has only been in England a month or two, and knows no one outside the university circle, but I assure you that the things she has told us suffice in themselves to establish clairvoyance upon an absolutely scientific basis. There is nothing like her, amateur or professional. Come and be introduced!”

I like none of these mystery-mongers, but the amateur least of all. With the paid performer you may pounce upon him and expose him the instant that you have seen through his trick. He is there to deceive you, and you are there to find him out. But what are you to do with the friend of your host’s wife? Are you to turn on a light suddenly and expose her slapping a surreptitious banjo? Or are you to hurl cochineal over her evening frock when she steals round with her phosphorus bottle and her supernatural platitude? There would be a scene, and you would be looked upon as a brute. So you have your choice of being that or a dupe. I was in no very good humor as I followed Wilson to the lady.

Any one less like my idea of a West Indian could not be imagined. She was a small, frail creature, well over forty, I should say, with a pale, peaky face, and hair of a very light shade of chestnut. Her presence was insignificant and her manner retiring. In any group of ten women she would have been the last whom one would have picked out. Her eyes were perhaps her most remarkable, and also, I am compelled to say, her least pleasant, feature. They were gray in colour, — gray with a shade of green, — and their expression struck me as being decidedly furtive. I wonder if furtive is the word, or should I have said fierce? On second thoughts, feline would have expressed it better. A crutch leaning against the wall told me what was painfully evident when she rose: that one of her legs was crippled.

So I was introduced to Miss Penclosa, and it did not escape me that as my name was mentioned she glanced across at Agatha. Wilson had evidently been talking. And presently, no doubt, thought I, she will inform me by occult means that I am engaged to a young lady with wheat-ears in her hair. I wondered how much more Wilson had been telling her about me.

"Professor Gilroy is a terrible sceptic," said he; "I hope, Miss Penclosa, that you will be able to convert him."

She looked keenly up at me.

"Professor Gilroy is quite right to be sceptical if he has not seen any thing convincing," said she. "I should have thought," she added, "that you would yourself have been an excellent subject."

"For what, may I ask?" said I.

"Well, for mesmerism, for example."

"My experience has been that mesmerists go for their subjects to those who are mentally unsound. All their results are vitiated, as it seems to me, by the fact that they are dealing with abnormal organisms."

"Which of these ladies would you say possessed a normal organism?" she asked. "I should like you to select the one who seems to you to have the best balanced mind. Should we say the girl in pink and white? — Miss Agatha Marden, I think the name is."

"Yes, I should attach weight to any results from her."

"I have never tried how far she is impressionable. Of course some people respond much more rapidly than others. May I ask how far your scepticism extends? I suppose that you admit the mesmeric sleep and the power of suggestion.”

“I admit nothing, Miss Penclosa.”

“Dear me, I thought science had got further than that. Of course I know nothing about the scientific side of it. I only know what I can do. You see the girl in red, for example, over near the Japanese jar. I shall will that she come across to us.”

She bent forward as she spoke and dropped her fan upon the floor. The girl whisked round and came straight toward us, with an enquiring look upon her face, as if some one had called her.

“What do you think of that, Gilroy?” cried Wilson, in a kind of ecstasy.

I did not dare to tell him what I thought of it. To me it was the most barefaced, shameless piece of imposture that I had ever witnessed. The collusion and the signal had really been too obvious.

“Professor Gilroy is not satisfied,” said she, glancing up at me with her strange little eyes. “My poor fan is to get the credit of that experiment. Well, we must try something else. Miss Marden, would you have any objection to my putting you off?”

“Oh, I should love it!” cried Agatha.

By this time all the company had gathered round us in a circle, the shirt-fronted men, and the white-throated women, some awed, some critical, as though it were something between a religious ceremony and a conjurer’s entertainment. A red velvet arm-chair had been pushed into the centre, and Agatha lay back in it, a little flushed and trembling slightly from excitement. I could see it from the vibration of the wheat-ears. Miss Penclosa rose from her seat and stood over her, leaning upon her crutch.

And there was a change in the woman. She no longer seemed small or insignificant. Twenty years were gone from her age. Her eyes were shining, a tinge of colour had come into her sallow cheeks, her whole figure had expanded. So I have seen a dull-eyed, listless lad change in an instant into briskness and life when given a task of which he felt himself master. She looked down at Agatha with an expression which I resented from the bottom of my soul — the expression with which a Roman empress might have looked at her kneeling slave. Then with a quick, commanding gesture she tossed up her arms and swept them slowly down in front of her.

I was watching Agatha narrowly. During three passes she seemed to be simply amused. At the fourth I observed a slight glazing of her eyes, accompanied by some dilation of her pupils. At the sixth there was a momentary rigor. At the seventh her lids began to droop. At the tenth her eyes were closed, and her breathing was slower and fuller than usual. I tried as I watched to preserve my scientific calm, but a foolish, causeless agitation convulsed me. I trust that I hid it, but I felt as a child feels in the dark. I could not have believed that I was still open to such weakness.

"She is in the trance," said Miss Penclosa.

"She is sleeping!" I cried.

"Wake her, then!"

I pulled her by the arm and shouted in her ear. She might have been dead for all the impression that I could make. Her body was there on the velvet chair. Her organs were acting — her heart, her lungs. But her soul! It had slipped from beyond our ken. Whither had it gone? What power had dispossessed it? I was puzzled and disconcerted.

"So much for the mesmeric sleep," said Miss Penclosa. "As regards suggestion, whatever I may suggest Miss Marden will infallibly do, whether it be now or after she has awakened from her trance. Do you demand proof of it?"

"Certainly," said I.

"You shall have it." I saw a smile pass over her face, as though an amusing thought had struck her. She stooped and whispered earnestly into her subject's ear. Agatha, who had been so deaf to me, nodded her head as she listened.

"Awake!" cried Miss Penclosa, with a sharp tap of her crutch upon the floor. The eyes opened, the glazing cleared slowly away, and the soul looked out once more after its strange eclipse.

We went away early. Agatha was none the worse for her strange excursion, but I was nervous and unstrung, unable to listen to or answer the stream of comments which Wilson was pouring out for my benefit. As I bade her good-night Miss Penclosa slipped a piece of paper into my hand.

"Pray forgive me," said she, "if I take means to overcome your scepticism. Open this note at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. It is a little private test."

I can't imagine what she means, but there is the note, and it shall be opened as she directs. My head is aching, and I have written enough for to-night. To-morrow I dare say that what seems so inexplicable will take quite another complexion. I shall not surrender my convictions without a struggle.

March 25. I am amazed, confounded. It is clear that I must reconsider my opinion upon this matter. But first let me place on record what has occurred.

I had finished breakfast, and was looking over some diagrams with which my lecture is to be illustrated, when my housekeeper entered to tell me that Agatha was in my study and wished to see me immediately. I glanced at the clock and saw with sun rise that it was only half-past nine.

When I entered the room, she was standing on the hearth-rug facing me. Something in her pose chilled me and checked the words which were rising to my lips. Her veil was half down, but I could see that she was pale and that her expression was constrained.

"Austin," she said, "I have come to tell you that our engagement is at an end."

I staggered. I believe that I literally did stagger. I know that I found myself leaning against the bookcase for support.

"But — but — —" I stammered. "This is very sudden, Agatha."

"Yes, Austin, I have come here to tell you that our engagement is at an end."

"But surely," I cried, "you will give me some reason! This is unlike you, Agatha. Tell me how I have been unfortunate enough to offend you."

"It is all over, Austin."

"But why? You must be under some delusion, Agatha. Perhaps you have been told some falsehood about me. Or you may have misunderstood something that I have said to you. Only let me know what it is, and a word may set it all right."

"We must consider it all at an end."

"But you left me last night without a hint at any disagreement. What could have occurred in the interval to change you so? It must have been something that happened last night. You have been thinking it over and you have disapproved of my conduct. Was it the mesmerism? Did you blame me for letting that woman exercise her power over you? You know that at the least sign I should have interfered."

"It is useless, Austin. All is over:"

Her voice was cold and measured; her manner strangely formal and hard. It seemed to me that she was absolutely resolved not to be drawn into any argument or explanation. As for me, I was shaking with agitation, and I turned my face aside, so ashamed was I that she should see my want of control.

"You must know what this means to me!" I cried. "It is the blasting of all my hopes and the ruin of my life! You surely will not inflict such a punishment upon me unheard. You will let me know what is the matter. Consider how impossible it would be for me, under any circumstances, to treat you so. For God's sake, Agatha, let me know what I have done!"

She walked past me without a word and opened the door.

"It is quite useless, Austin," said she. "You must consider our engagement at an end." An instant later she was gone, and, before I could recover myself sufficiently to follow her, I heard the hall-door close behind her.

I rushed into my room to change my coat, with the idea of hurrying round to Mrs. Marden's to learn from her what the cause of my misfortune might be. So shaken was I that I could hardly lace my boots. Never shall I forget those horrible ten minutes. I had just pulled on my overcoat when the clock upon the mantel-piece struck ten.

Ten! I associated the idea with Miss Penclosa's note. It was lying before me on the table, and I tore it open. It was scribbled in pencil in a peculiarly angular handwriting.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR GILROY [it said]: Pray excuse the personal nature of the test which I am giving you. Professor Wilson happened to mention the relations between you and my subject of this evening, and it struck me that nothing could be more convincing to you than if I were to suggest to Miss Marden that she should call upon you at half-past nine to-morrow morning and suspend your engagement for half an hour or so. Science is so exacting that it is difficult to give a satisfying test, but I am convinced that this at least will be an action which she would be most unlikely to do of her own free will. Forget any thing that she may have said, as she has really nothing whatever to do with it, and will certainly not recollect any thing about it. I write this note to shorten your anxiety, and to beg you to forgive me for the momentary unhappiness which my suggestion must have caused you.

"Yours faithfully;

"HELEN PENCLOSA.

Really, when I had read the note, I was too relieved to be angry. It was a liberty. Certainly it was a very great liberty indeed on the part of a lady whom I had only met once. But, after all, I had challenged her by my scepticism. It may have been, as she said, a little difficult to devise a test which would satisfy me.

And she had done that. There could be no question at all upon the point. For me hypnotic suggestion was finally established. It took its place from now onward as one of the facts of life. That Agatha, who of all women of my acquaintance has the best balanced mind, had been reduced to a condition of automatism appeared to be certain. A person at a distance had worked her as an engineer on the shore might guide a Brennan torpedo. A second soul had stepped in, as it were, had pushed her own aside, and had seized her nervous mechanism, saying: "I will work this for half an hour." And Agatha must have been unconscious as she came and as she returned. Could she make her way in safety through the streets in such a state? I put on my hat and hurried round to see if all was well with her.

Yes. She was at home. I was shown into the drawing-room and found her sitting with a book upon her lap.

"You are an early visitor, Austin," said she, smiling.

"And you have been an even earlier one," I answered.

She looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"You have not been out to-day?"

"No, certainly not."

"Agatha," said I seriously, "would you mind telling me exactly what you have done this morning?"

She laughed at my earnestness.

"You've got on your professional look, Austin. See what comes of being engaged to a man of science. However, I will tell you, though I can't imagine what you want to know for. I got up at eight. I breakfasted at half-past. I came into this room at ten minutes past nine and began to read the 'Memoirs of Mme. de Remusat.' In a few minutes I did the French lady the bad compliment of dropping to sleep over her pages, and I did you, sir, the very flattering one of dreaming about you. It is only a few minutes since I woke up."

"And found yourself where you had been before?"

"Why, where else should I find myself?"

“Would you mind telling me, Agatha, what it was that you dreamed about me? It really is not mere curiosity on my part.”

“I merely had a vague impression that you came into it. I cannot recall any thing definite.”

“If you have not been out to-day, Agatha, how is it that your shoes are dusty?”

A pained look came over her face.

“Really, Austin, I do not know what is the matter with you this morning. One would almost think that you doubted my word. If my boots are dusty, it must be, of course, that I have put on a pair which the maid had not cleaned.”

It was perfectly evident that she knew nothing whatever about the matter, and I reflected that, after all, perhaps it was better that I should not enlighten her. It might frighten her, and could serve no good purpose that I could see. I said no more about it, therefore, and left shortly afterward to give my lecture.

But I am immensely impressed. My horizon of scientific possibilities has suddenly been enormously extended. I no longer wonder at Wilson’s demonic energy and enthusiasm. Who would not work hard who had a vast virgin field ready to his hand? Why, I have known the novel shape of a nucleolus, or a trifling peculiarity of striped muscular fibre seen under a 300-diameter lens, fill me with exultation. How petty do such researches seem when compared with this one which strikes at the very roots of life and the nature of the soul! I had always looked upon spirit as a product of matter. The brain, I thought, secreted the mind, as the liver does the bile. But how can this be when I see mind working from a distance and playing upon matter as a musician might upon a violin? The body does not give rise to the soul, then, but is rather the rough instrument by which the spirit manifests itself. The windmill does not give rise to the wind, but only indicates it. It was opposed to my whole habit of thought, and yet it was undeniably possible and worthy of investigation.

And why should I not investigate it? I see that under yesterday’s date I said: “If I could see something positive and objective, I might be tempted to approach it from the physiological aspect.” Well, I have got my test. I shall be as good as my word. The investigation would, I am sure, be of immense interest. Some of my colleagues might look askance at it, for science is full of unreasoning prejudices, but if Wilson has the courage of his convictions, I can afford to have it also. I shall go to him to-morrow morning — to him and to Miss Penclosa. If she can show us so much, it is probable that she can show us more.

II

March 26. Wilson was, as I had anticipated, very exultant over my conversion, and Miss Penclosa was also demurely pleased at the result of her experiment. Strange what a silent, colourless creature she is save only when she exercises her power! Even talking about it gives her colour and life. She seems to take a singular interest in me. I cannot help observing how her eyes follow me about the room.

We had the most interesting conversation about her own powers. It is just as well to put her views on record, though they cannot, of course, claim any scientific weight.

“You are on the very fringe of the subject,” said she, when I had expressed wonder at the remarkable instance of suggestion which she had shown me. “I had no direct influence upon Miss Marden when she came round to you. I was not even thinking of her that morning. What I did was to set her mind as I might set the alarum of a clock so that at the hour named it would go off of its own accord. If six months instead of twelve hours had been suggested, it would have been the same.”

“And if the suggestion had been to assassinate me?”

“She would most inevitably have done so.”

“But this is a terrible power!” I cried.

“It is, as you say, a terrible power,” she answered gravely, “and the more you know of it the more terrible will it seem to you.”

“May I ask,” said I, “what you meant when you said that this matter of suggestion is only at the fringe of it? What do you consider the essential?”

“I had rather not tell you.”

I was surprised at the decision of her answer.

“You understand,” said I, “that it is not out of curiosity I ask, but in the hope that I may find some scientific explanation for the facts with which you furnish me.”

“Frankly, Professor Gilroy,” said she, “I am not at all interested in science, nor do I care whether it can or cannot classify these powers.”

“But I was hoping — —”

“Ah, that is quite another thing. If you make it a personal matter,” said she, with the pleasantest of smiles, “I shall be only too happy to tell you any thing you wish to know. Let me see; what was it you asked me? Oh, about the further powers. Professor Wilson won't believe in them, but they are quite true all the same. For example, it is possible for an operator to gain complete command over his subject — presuming that the latter is a good one. Without any previous suggestion he may make him do whatever he likes."

"Without the subject's knowledge?"

"That depends. If the force were strongly exerted, he would know no more about it than Miss Marden did when she came round and frightened you so. Or, if the influence was less powerful, he might be conscious of what he was doing, but be quite unable to prevent himself from doing it."

"Would he have lost his own will power, then?"

"It would be over-ridden by another stronger one."

"Have you ever exercised this power yourself?"

"Several times."

"Is your own will so strong, then?"

"Well, it does not entirely depend upon that. Many have strong wills which are not detachable from themselves. The thing is to have the gift of projecting it into another person and superseding his own. I find that the power varies with my own strength and health."

"Practically, you send your soul into another person's body."

"Well, you might put it that way."

"And what does your own body do?"

"It merely feels lethargic."

"Well, but is there no danger to your own health?" I asked.

"There might be a little. You have to be careful never to let your own consciousness absolutely go; otherwise, you might experience some difficulty in finding your way back again. You must always preserve the connection, as it were. I am afraid I express myself very badly, Professor Gilroy, but of course I don't know how to put these things in a scientific way. I am just giving you my own experiences and my own explanations."

Well, I read this over now at my leisure, and I marvel at myself! Is this Austin Gilroy, the man who has won his way to the front by his hard reasoning power and by his devotion to fact? Here I am gravely retailing the gossip of a woman who tells me how her soul may be projected from her body, and how, while she lies in a lethargy, she can control the actions of people at a distance. Do I accept it? Certainly not. She must prove and reprove before I yield a point. But if I am still a sceptic, I have at least ceased to be a scoffer. We are to have a sitting this evening, and she is to try if she can produce any mesmeric effect upon me. If she can, it will make an excellent starting-point for our investigation. No one can accuse me, at any rate, of complicity. If she cannot, we must try and find some subject who will be like Caesar’s wife. Wilson is perfectly impervious.

10 P. M. I believe that I am on the threshold of an epoch-making investigation. To have the power of examining these phenomena from inside — to have an organism which will respond, and at the same time a brain which will appreciate and criticise — that is surely a unique advantage. I am quite sure that Wilson would give five years of his life to be as susceptible as I have proved myself to be.

There was no one present except Wilson and his wife. I was seated with my head leaning back, and Miss Penclosa, standing in front and a little to the left, used the same long, sweeping strokes as with Agatha. At each of them a warm current of air seemed to strike me, and to suffuse a thrill and glow all through me from head to foot. My eyes were fixed upon Miss Penclosa’s face, but as I gazed the features seemed to blur and to fade away. I was conscious only of her own eyes looking down at me, gray, deep, inscrutable. Larger they grew and larger, until they changed suddenly into two mountain lakes toward which I seemed to be falling with horrible rapidity. I shuddered, and as I did so some deeper stratum of thought told me that the shudder represented the rigor which I had observed in Agatha. An instant later I struck the surface of the lakes, now joined into one, and down I went beneath the water with a fulness in my head and a buzzing in my ears. Down I went, down, down, and then with a swoop up again until I could see the light streaming brightly through the green water. I was almost at the surface when the word “Awake!” rang through my head, and, with a start, I found myself back in the arm-chair, with Miss Penclosa leaning on her crutch, and Wilson, his note book in his hand, peeping over her shoulder. No heaviness or weariness was left behind. On the contrary, though it is only an hour or so since the experiment, I feel so wakeful that I am more inclined for my study than my bedroom. I see quite a vista of interesting experiments extending before us, and am all impatience to begin upon them.

March 27. A blank day, as Miss Penclosa goes with Wilson and his wife to the Suttons’. Have begun Binet and Ferre’s “Animal Magnetism.” What strange, deep waters these are! Results, results, results — and the cause an absolute mystery. It is stimulating to the imagination, but I must be on my guard against that. Let us have no inferences nor deductions, and nothing but solid facts. I KNOW that the mesmeric trance is true; I KNOW that mesmeric suggestion is true; I KNOW that I am myself sensitive to this force. That is my present position. I have a large new note-book which shall be devoted entirely to scientific detail.

Long talk with Agatha and Mrs. Marden in the evening about our marriage. We think that the summer vac. (the beginning of it) would be the best time for the wedding. Why should we delay? I grudge even those few months. Still, as Mrs. Marden says, there are a good many things to be arranged.

March 28. Mesmerized again by Miss Penclosa. Experience much the same as before, save that insensibility came on more quickly. See Note-book A for temperature of room, barometric pressure, pulse, and respiration as taken by Professor Wilson.

March 29. Mesmerized again. Details in Note-book A.

March 30. Sunday, and a blank day. I grudge any interruption of our experiments. At present they merely embrace the physical signs which go with slight, with complete, and with extreme insensibility. Afterward we hope to pass on to the phenomena of suggestion and of lucidity. Professors have demonstrated these things upon women at Nancy and at the Salpetriere. It will be more convincing when a woman demonstrates it upon a professor, with a second professor as a witness. And that I should be the subject — I, the sceptic, the materialist! At least, I have shown that my devotion to science is greater than to my own personal consistency. The eating of our own words is the greatest sacrifice which truth ever requires of us.

My neighbour, Charles Sadler, the handsome young demonstrator of anatomy, came in this evening to return a volume of Virchow's "Archives" which I had lent him. I call him young, but, as a matter of fact, he is a year older than I am.

"I understand, Gilroy," said he, "that you are being experimented upon by Miss Penclosa."

"Well," he went on, when I had acknowledged it, "if I were you, I should not let it go any further. You will think me very impertinent, no doubt, but, none the less, I feel it to be my duty to advise you to have no more to do with her."

Of course I asked him why.

"I am so placed that I cannot enter into particulars as freely as I could wish," said he. "Miss Penclosa is the friend of my friend, and my position is a delicate one. I can only say this: that I have myself been the subject of some of the woman's experiments, and that they have left a most unpleasant impression upon my mind."

He could hardly expect me to be satisfied with that, and I tried hard to get something more definite out of him, but without success. Is it conceivable that he could be jealous at my having superseded him? Or is he one of those men of science who feel personally injured when facts run counter to their preconceived opinions? He cannot seriously suppose that because he has some vague grievance I am, therefore, to abandon a series of experiments which promise to be so fruitful of results. He appeared to be annoyed at the light way in which I treated his shadowy warnings, and we parted with some little coldness on both sides.

March 31. Mesmerized by Miss P.

April 1. Mesmerized by Miss P. (Note-book A.)

April 2. Mesmerized by Miss P. (Sphygmographic chart taken by Professor Wilson.)

April 3. It is possible that this course of mesmerism may be a little trying to the general constitution. Agatha says that I am thinner and darker under the eyes. I am conscious of a nervous irritability which I had not observed in myself before. The least noise, for example, makes me start, and the stupidity of a student causes me exasperation instead of amusement. Agatha wishes me to stop, but I tell her that every course of study is trying, and that one can never attain a result with out paying some price for it. When she sees the sensation which my forthcoming paper on "The Relation between Mind and Matter" may make, she will understand that it is worth a little nervous wear and tear. I should not be surprised if I got my F. R. S. over it.

Mesmerized again in the evening. The effect is produced more rapidly now, and the subjective visions are less marked. I keep full notes of each sitting. Wilson is leaving for town for a week or ten days, but we shall not interrupt the experiments, which depend for their value as much upon my sensations as on his observations.

April 4. I must be carefully on my guard. A complication has crept into our experiments which I had not reckoned upon. In my eagerness for scientific facts I have been foolishly blind to the human relations between Miss Penclosa and myself. I can write here what I would not breathe to a living soul. The unhappy woman appears to have formed an attachment for me.

I should not say such a thing, even in the privacy of my own intimate journal, if it had not come to such a pass that it is impossible to ignore it. For some time, — that is, for the last week, — there have been signs which I have brushed aside and refused to think of. Her brightness when I come, her dejection when I go, her eagerness that I should come often, the expression of her eyes, the tone of her voice — I tried to think that they meant nothing, and were, perhaps, only her ardent West Indian manner. But last night, as I awoke from the mesmeric sleep, I put out my hand, unconsciously, involuntarily, and clasped hers. When I came fully to myself, we were sitting with them locked, she looking up at me with an expectant smile. And the horrible thing was that I felt impelled to say what she expected me to say. What a false wretch I should have been! How I should have loathed myself to-day had I yielded to the temptation of that moment! But, thank God, I was strong enough to spring up and hurry from the room. I was rude, I fear, but I could not, no, I COULD not, trust myself another moment. I, a gentleman, a man of honor, engaged to one of the sweetest girls in England — and yet in a moment of reasonless passion I nearly professed love for this woman whom I hardly know. She is far older than myself and a cripple. It is monstrous, odious; and yet the impulse was so strong that, had I stayed another minute in her presence, I should have committed myself. What was it? I have to teach others the workings of our organism, and what do I know of it myself? Was it the sudden upcropping of some lower stratum in my nature — a brutal primitive instinct suddenly asserting itself? I could almost believe the tales of obsession by evil spirits, so overmastering was the feeling.

Well, the incident places me in a most unfortunate position. On the one hand, I am very loath to abandon a series of experiments which have already gone so far, and which promise such brilliant results. On the other, if this unhappy woman has conceived a passion for me —— But surely even now I must have made some hideous mistake. She, with her age and her deformity! It is impossible. And then she knew about Agatha. She understood how I was placed. She only smiled out of amusement, perhaps, when in my dazed state I seized her hand. It was my half-mesmerized brain which gave it a meaning, and sprang with such bestial swiftness to meet it. I wish I could persuade myself that it was indeed so. On the whole, perhaps, my wisest plan would be to postpone our other experiments until Wilson's return. I have written a note to Miss Penclosa, therefore, making no allusion to last night, but saying that a press of work would cause me to interrupt our sittings for a few days. She has answered, formally enough, to say that if I should change my mind I should find her at home at the usual hour.

10 P. M. Well, well, what a thing of straw I am! I am coming to know myself better of late, and the more I know the lower I fall in my own estimation. Surely I was not always so weak as this. At four o'clock I should have smiled had any one told me that I should go to Miss Penclosa's to-night, and yet, at eight, I was at Wilson's door as usual. I don't know how it occurred. The influence of habit, I suppose. Perhaps there is a mesmeric craze as there is an opium craze, and I am a victim to it. I only know that as I worked in my study I became more and more uneasy. I fidgeted. I worried. I could not concentrate my mind upon the papers in front of me. And then, at last, almost before I knew what I was doing, I seized my hat and hurried round to keep my usual appointment.

We had an interesting evening. Mrs. Wilson was present during most of the time, which prevented the embarrassment which one at least of us must have felt. Miss Penclosa's manner was quite the same as usual, and she expressed no surprise at my having come in spite of my note. There was nothing in her bearing to show that yesterday's incident had made any impression upon her, and so I am inclined to hope that I overrated it.

April 6 (evening). No, no, no, I did not overrate it. I can no longer attempt to conceal from myself that this woman has conceived a passion for me. It is monstrous, but it is true. Again, tonight, I awoke from the mesmeric trance to find my hand in hers, and to suffer that odious feeling which urges me to throw away my honor, my career, every thing, for the sake of this creature who, as I can plainly see when I am away from her influence, possesses no single charm upon earth. But when I am near her, I do not feel this. She rouses something in me, something evil, something I had rather not think of. She paralyzes my better nature, too, at the moment when she stimulates my worse. Decidedly it is not good for me to be near her.

Last night was worse than before. Instead of flying I actually sat for some time with my hand in hers talking over the most intimate subjects with her. We spoke of Agatha, among other things. What could I have been dreaming of? Miss Penclosa said that she was conventional, and I agreed with her. She spoke once or twice in a disparaging way of her, and I did not protest. What a creature I have been!

Weak as I have proved myself to be, I am still strong enough to bring this sort of thing to an end. It shall not happen again. I have sense enough to fly when I cannot fight. From this Sunday night onward I shall never sit with Miss Penclosa again. Never! Let the experiments go, let the research come to an end; any thing is better than facing this monstrous temptation which drags me so low. I have said nothing to Miss Penclosa, but I shall simply stay away. She can tell the reason without any words of mine.

April 7. Have stayed away as I said. It is a pity to ruin such an interesting investigation, but it would be a greater pity still to ruin my life, and I KNOW that I cannot trust myself with that woman.

11 P. M. God help me! What is the matter with me? Am I going mad? Let me try and be calm and reason with myself. First of all I shall set down exactly what occurred.

It was nearly eight when I wrote the lines with which this day begins. Feeling strangely restless and uneasy, I left my rooms and walked round to spend the evening with Agatha and her mother. They both remarked that I was pale and haggard. About nine Professor Pratt-Haldane came in, and we played a game of whist. I tried hard to concentrate my attention upon the cards, but the feeling of restlessness grew and grew until I found it impossible to struggle against it. I simply COULD not sit still at the table. At last, in the very middle of a hand, I threw my cards down and, with some sort of an incoherent apology about having an appointment, I rushed from the room. As if in a dream I have a vague recollection of tearing through the hall, snatching my hat from the stand, and slamming the door behind me. As in a dream, too, I have the impression of the double line of gas-lamps, and my bespattered boots tell me that I must have run down the middle of the road. It was all misty and strange and unnatural. I came to Wilson’s house; I saw Mrs. Wilson and I saw Miss Penclosa. I hardly recall what we talked about, but I do remember that Miss P. shook the head of her crutch at me in a playful way, and accused me of being late and of losing interest in our experiments. There was no mesmerism, but I stayed some time and have only just returned.

My brain is quite clear again now, and I can think over what has occurred. It is absurd to suppose that it is merely weakness and force of habit. I tried to explain it in that way the other night, but it will no longer suffice. It is something much deeper and more terrible than that. Why, when I was at the Mardens' whist-table, I was dragged away as if the noose of a rope had been cast round me. I can no longer disguise it from myself. The woman has her grip upon me. I am in her clutch. But I must keep my head and reason it out and see what is best to be done.

But what a blind fool I have been! In my enthusiasm over my research I have walked straight into the pit, although it lay gaping before me. Did she not herself warn me? Did she not tell me, as I can read in my own journal, that when she has acquired power over a subject she can make him do her will? And she has acquired that power over me. I am for the moment at the beck and call of this creature with the crutch. I must come when she wills it. I must do as she wills. Worst of all, I must feel as she wills. I loathe her and fear her, yet, while I am under the spell, she can doubtless make me love her.

There is some consolation in the thought, then, that those odious impulses for which I have blamed myself do not really come from me at all. They are all transferred from her, little as I could have guessed it at the time. I feel cleaner and lighter for the thought.

April 8. Yes, now, in broad daylight, writing coolly and with time for reflection, I am compelled to confirm every thing which I wrote in my journal last night. I am in a horrible position, but, above all, I must not lose my head. I must pit my intellect against her powers. After all, I am no silly puppet, to dance at the end of a string. I have energy, brains, courage. For all her devil's tricks I may beat her yet. May! I MUST, or what is to become of me?

Let me try to reason it out! This woman, by her own explanation, can dominate my nervous organism. She can project herself into my body and take command of it. She has a parasite soul; yes, she is a parasite, a monstrous parasite. She creeps into my frame as the hermit crab does into the whelk's shell. I am powerless What can I do? I am dealing with forces of which I know nothing. And I can tell no one of my trouble. They would set me down as a madman. Certainly, if it got noised abroad, the university would say that they had no need of a devil-ridden professor. And Agatha! No, no, I must face it alone.

III

I read over my notes of what the woman said when she spoke about her powers. There is one point which fills me with dismay. She implies that when the influence is slight the subject knows what he is doing, but cannot control himself, whereas when it is strongly exerted he is absolutely unconscious. Now, I have always known what I did, though less so last night than on the previous occasions. That seems to mean that she has never yet exerted her full powers upon me. Was ever a man so placed before?

Yes, perhaps there was, and very near me, too. Charles Sadler must know something of this! His vague words of warning take a meaning now. Oh, if I had only listened to him then, before I helped by these repeated sittings to forge the links of the chain which binds me! But I will see him to-day. I will apologize to him for having treated his warning so lightly. I will see if he can advise me.

4 P. M. No, he cannot. I have talked with him, and he showed such surprise at the first words in which I tried to express my unspeakable secret that I went no further. As far as I can gather (by hints and inferences rather than by any statement), his own experience was limited to some words or looks such as I have myself endured. His abandonment of Miss Penclosa is in itself a sign that he was never really in her toils. Oh, if he only knew his escape! He has to thank his phlegmatic Saxon temperament for it. I am black and Celtic, and this hag's clutch is deep in my nerves. Shall I ever get it out? Shall I ever be the same man that I was just one short fortnight ago?

Let me consider what I had better do. I cannot leave the university in the middle of the term. If I were free, my course would be obvious. I should start at once and travel in Persia. But would she allow me to start? And could her influence not reach me in Persia, and bring me back to within touch of her crutch? I can only find out the limits of this hellish power by my own bitter experience. I will fight and fight and fight — and what can I do more?

I know very well that about eight o'clock to-night that craving for her society, that irresistible restlessness, will come upon me. How shall I overcome it? What shall I do? I must make it impossible for me to leave the room. I shall lock the door and throw the key out of the window. But, then, what am I to do in the morning? Never mind about the morning. I must at all costs break this chain which holds me.

April 9. Victory! I have done splendidly! At seven o’clock last night I took a hasty dinner, and then locked myself up in my bedroom and dropped the key into the garden. I chose a cheery novel, and lay in bed for three hours trying to read it, but really in a horrible state of trepidation, expecting every instant that I should become conscious of the impulse. Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and I awoke this morning with the feeling that a black nightmare had been lifted off me. Perhaps the creature realised what I had done, and understood that it was useless to try to influence me. At any rate, I have beaten her once, and if I can do it once, I can do it again.

It was most awkward about the key in the morning. Luckily, there was an under-gardener below, and I asked him to throw it up. No doubt he thought I had just dropped it. I will have doors and windows screwed up and six stout men to hold me down in my bed before I will surrender myself to be hag-ridden in this way.

I had a note from Mrs. Marden this afternoon asking me to go round and see her. I intended to do so in any case, but had not excepted to find bad news waiting for me. It seems that the Armstrongs, from whom Agatha has expectations, are due home from Adelaide in the Aurora, and that they have written to Mrs. Marden and her to meet them in town. They will probably be away for a month or six weeks, and, as the Aurora is due on Wednesday, they must go at once — to-morrow, if they are ready in time. My consolation is that when we meet again there will be no more parting between Agatha and me.

“I want you to do one thing, Agatha,” said I, when we were alone together. “If you should happen to meet Miss Penclosa, either in town or here, you must promise me never again to allow her to mesmerize you.”

Agatha opened her eyes.

“Why, it was only the other day that you were saying how interesting it all was, and how determined you were to finish your experiments.”

“I know, but I have changed my mind since then.”

“And you won’t have it any more?”

“No.”

“I am so glad, Austin. You can’t think how pale and worn you have been lately. It was really our principal objection to going to London now that we did not wish to leave you when you were so pulled down. And your manner has been so strange occasionally — especially that night when you left poor Professor Pratt-Haldane to play dummy. I am convinced that these experiments are very bad for your nerves.”

“I think so, too, dear.”

“And for Miss Penclosa’s nerves as well. You have heard that she is ill?”

“No.”

“Mrs. Wilson told us so last night. She described it as a nervous fever. Professor Wilson is coming back this week, and of course Mrs. Wilson is very anxious that Miss Penclosa should be well again then, for he has quite a programme of experiments which he is anxious to carry out.”

I was glad to have Agatha’s promise, for it was enough that this woman should have one of us in her clutch. On the other hand, I was disturbed to hear about Miss Penclosa’s illness. It rather discounts the victory which I appeared to win last night. I remember that she said that loss of health interfered with her power. That may be why I was able to hold my own so easily. Well, well, I must take the same precautions to-night and see what comes of it. I am childishly frightened when I think of her.

April 10. All went very well last night. I was amused at the gardener’s face when I had again to hail him this morning and to ask him to throw up my key. I shall get a name among the servants if this sort of thing goes on. But the great point is that I stayed in my room without the slightest inclination to leave it. I do believe that I am shaking myself clear of this incredible bond — or is it only that the woman’s power is in abeyance until she recovers her strength? I can but pray for the best.

The Mardens left this morning, and the brightness seems to have gone out of the spring sunshine. And yet it is very beautiful also as it gleams on the green chestnuts opposite my windows, and gives a touch of gayety to the heavy, lichen-mottled walls of the old colleges. How sweet and gentle and soothing is Nature! Who would think that there lurked in her also such vile forces, such odious possibilities! For of course I understand that this dreadful thing which has sprung out at me is neither supernatural nor even preternatural. No, it is a natural force which this woman can use and society is ignorant of. The mere fact that it ebbs with her strength shows how entirely it is subject to physical laws. If I had time, I might probe it to the bottom and lay my hands upon its antidote. But you cannot tame the tiger when you are beneath his claws. You can but try to writhe away from him. Ah, when I look in the glass and see my own dark eyes and clear-cut

Spanish face, I long for a vitriol splash or a bout of the small-pox. One or the other might have saved me from this calamity.

I am inclined to think that I may have trouble to-night. There are two things which make me fear so. One is that I met Mrs. Wilson in the street, and that she tells me that Miss Penclosa is better, though still weak. I find myself wishing in my heart that the illness had been her last. The other is that Professor Wilson comes back in a day or two, and his presence would act as a constraint upon her. I should not fear our interviews if a third person were present. For both these reasons I have a presentiment of trouble to-night, and I shall take the same precautions as before.

April 10. No, thank God, all went well last night. I really could not face the gardener again. I locked my door and thrust the key underneath it, so that I had to ask the maid to let me out in the morning. But the precaution was really not needed, for I never had any inclination to go out at all. Three evenings in succession at home! I am surely near the end of my troubles, for Wilson will be home again either today or tomorrow. Shall I tell him of what I have gone through or not? I am convinced that I should not have the slightest sympathy from him. He would look upon me as an interesting case, and read a paper about me at the next meeting of the Psychical Society, in which he would gravely discuss the possibility of my being a deliberate liar, and weigh it against the chances of my being in an early stage of lunacy. No, I shall get no comfort out of Wilson.

I am feeling wonderfully fit and well. I don’t think I ever lectured with greater spirit. Oh, if I could only get this shadow off my life, how happy I should be! Young, fairly wealthy, in the front rank of my profession, engaged to a beautiful and charming girl — have I not every thing which a man could ask for? Only one thing to trouble me, but what a thing it is!

Midnight. I shall go mad. Yes, that will be the end of it. I shall go mad. I am not far from it now. My head throbs as I rest it on my hot hand. I am quivering all over like a scared horse. Oh, what a night I have had! And yet I have some cause to be satisfied also.

At the risk of becoming the laughing-stock of my own servant, I again slipped my key under the door, imprisoning myself for the night. Then, finding it too early to go to bed, I lay down with my clothes on and began to read one of Dumas’s novels. Suddenly I was gripped — gripped and dragged from the couch. It is only thus that I can describe the overpowering nature of the force which pounced upon me. I clawed at the coverlet. I clung to the wood-work. I believe that I screamed out in my frenzy. It was all useless, hopeless. I MUST go. There was no way out of it. It was only at the outset that I resisted. The force soon became too overmastering for that. I thank goodness that there were no watchers there to interfere with me. I could not have answered for myself if there had been. And, besides the determination to get out, there came to me, also, the keenest and coolest judgment in choosing my means. I lit a candle and endeavored, kneeling in front of the door, to pull the key through with the feather-end of a quill pen. It was just too short and pushed it further away. Then with quiet persistence I got a paper-knife out of one of the drawers, and with that I managed to draw the key back. I opened the door, stepped into my study, took a photograph of myself from the bureau, wrote something across it, placed it in the inside pocket of my coat, and then started off for Wilson's.

It was all wonderfully clear, and yet disassociated from the rest of my life, as the incidents of even the most vivid dream might be. A peculiar double consciousness possessed me. There was the predominant alien will, which was bent upon drawing me to the side of its owner, and there was the feebler protesting personality, which I recognised as being myself, tugging feebly at the overmastering impulse as a led terrier might at its chain. I can remember recognising these two conflicting forces, but I recall nothing of my walk, nor of how I was admitted to the house.

Very vivid, however, is my recollection of how I met Miss Penclosa. She was reclining on the sofa in the little boudoir in which our experiments had usually been carried out. Her head was rested on her hand, and a tiger-skin rug had been partly drawn over her. She looked up expectantly as I entered, and, as the lamp-light fell upon her face, I could see that she was very pale and thin, with dark hollows under her eyes. She smiled at me, and pointed to a stool beside her. It was with her left hand that she pointed, and I, running eagerly forward, seized it, — I loathe myself as I think of it, — and pressed it passionately to my lips. Then, seating myself upon the stool, and still retaining her hand, I gave her the photograph which I had brought with me, and talked and talked and talked — of my love for her, of my grief over her illness, of my joy at her recovery, of the misery it was to me to be absent a single evening from her side. She lay quietly looking down at me with imperious eyes and her provocative smile. Once I remember that she passed her hand over my hair as one caresses a dog; and it gave me pleasure

— the caress. I thrilled under it. I was her slave, body and soul, and for the moment I rejoiced in my slavery.

And then came the blessed change. Never tell me that there is not a Providence! I was on the brink of perdition. My feet were on the edge. Was it a coincidence that at that very instant help should come? No, no, no; there is a Providence, and its hand has drawn me back. There is something in the universe stronger than this devil woman with her tricks. Ah, what a balm to my heart it is to think so!

As I looked up at her I was conscious of a change in her. Her face, which had been pale before, was now ghastly. Her eyes were dull, and the lids drooped heavily over them. Above all, the look of serene confidence had gone from her features. Her mouth had weakened. Her forehead had puckered. She was frightened and undecided. And as I watched the change my own spirit fluttered and struggled, trying hard to tear itself from the grip which held it — a grip which, from moment to moment, grew less secure.

"Austin," she whispered, "I have tried to do too much. I was not strong enough. I have not recovered yet from my illness. But I could not live longer without seeing you. You won't leave me, Austin? This is only a passing weakness. If you will only give me five minutes, I shall be myself again. Give me the small decanter from the table in the window."

But I had regained my soul. With her waning strength the influence had cleared away from me and left me free. And I was aggressive — bitterly, fiercely aggressive. For once at least I could make this woman understand what my real feelings toward her were. My soul was filled with a hatred as bestial as the love against which it was a reaction. It was the savage, murderous passion of the revolted serf. I could have taken the crutch from her side and beaten her face in with it. She threw her hands up, as if to avoid a blow, and cowered away from me into the corner of the settee.

"The brandy!" she gasped. "The brandy!"

I took the decanter and poured it over the roots of a palm in the window. Then I snatched the photograph from her hand and tore it into a hundred pieces.

"You vile woman," I said, "if I did my duty to society, you would never leave this room alive!"

"I love you, Austin; I love you!" she wailed.

"Yes," I cried, "and Charles Sadler before. And how many others before that?"

“Charles Sadler!” she gasped. “He has spoken to you? So, Charles Sadler, Charles Sadler!” Her voice came through her white lips like a snake’s hiss.

“Yes, I know you, and others shall know you, too. You shameless creature! You knew how I stood. And yet you used your vile power to bring me to your side. You may, perhaps, do so again, but at least you will remember that you have heard me say that I love Miss Marden from the bottom of my soul, and that I loathe you, abhor you!

“The very sight of you and the sound of your voice fill me with horror and disgust. The thought of you is repulsive. That is how I feel toward you, and if it pleases you by your tricks to draw me again to your side as you have done to-night, you will at least, I should think, have little satisfaction in trying to make a lover out of a man who has told you his real opinion of you. You may put what words you will into my mouth, but you cannot help remembering — —”

I stopped, for the woman’s head had fallen back, and she had fainted. She could not bear to hear what I had to say to her! What a glow of satisfaction it gives me to think that, come what may, in the future she can never misunderstand my true feelings toward her. But what will occur in the future? What will she do next? I dare not think of it. Oh, if only I could hope that she will leave me alone! But when I think of what I said to her —— Never mind; I have been stronger than she for once.

April 11. I hardly slept last night, and found myself in the morning so unstrung and feverish that I was compelled to ask Pratt-Haldane to do my lecture for me. It is the first that I have ever missed. I rose at mid-day, but my head is aching, my hands quivering, and my nerves in a pitiable state.

Who should come round this evening but Wilson. He has just come back from London, where he has lectured, read papers, convened meetings, exposed a medium, conducted a series of experiments on thought transference, entertained Professor Richet of Paris, spent hours gazing into a crystal, and obtained some evidence as to the passage of matter through matter. All this he poured into my ears in a single gust.

“But you!” he cried at last. “You are not looking well. And Miss Penclosa is quite prostrated to-day. How about the experiments?”

“I have abandoned them.”

“Tut, tut! Why?”

“The subject seems to me to be a dangerous one.”

Out came his big brown note-book.

“This is of great interest,” said he. “What are your grounds for saying that it is a dangerous one? Please give your facts in chronological order, with approximate dates and names of reliable witnesses with their permanent addresses.”

“First of all,” I asked, “would you tell me whether you have collected any cases where the mesmerist has gained a command over the subject and has used it for evil purposes?”

“Dozens!” he cried exultantly. “Crime by suggestion — —”

“I don’t mean suggestion. I mean where a sudden impulse comes from a person at a distance — an uncontrollable impulse.”

“Obsession!” he shrieked, in an ecstasy of delight. “It is the rarest condition. We have eight cases, five well attested. You don’t mean to say — —” His exultation made him hardly articulate.

“No, I don’t,” said I. “Good-evening! You will excuse me, but I am not very well to-night.” And so at last I got rid of him, still brandishing his pencil and his note-book. My troubles may be bad to hear, but at least it is better to hug them to myself than to have myself exhibited by Wilson, like a freak at a fair. He has lost sight of human beings. Every thing to him is a case and a phenomenon. I will die before I speak to him again upon the matter.

April 12. Yesterday was a blessed day of quiet, and I enjoyed an uneventful night. Wilson’s presence is a great consolation. What can the woman do now? Surely, when she has heard me say what I have said, she will conceive the same disgust for me which I have for her. She could not, no, she COULD not, desire to have a lover who had insulted her so. No, I believe I am free from her love — but how about her hate? Might she not use these powers of hers for revenge? Tut! why should I frighten myself over shadows? She will forget about me, and I shall forget about her, and all will be well.

April 13. My nerves have quite recovered their tone. I really believe that I have conquered the creature. But I must confess to living in some suspense. She is well again, for I hear that she was driving with Mrs. Wilson in the High Street in the afternoon.

April 14. I do wish I could get away from the place altogether. I shall fly to Agatha’s side the very day that the term closes. I suppose it is pitiably weak of me, but this woman gets upon my nerves most terribly. I have seen her again, and I have spoken with her.

It was just after lunch, and I was smoking a cigarette in my study, when I heard the step of my servant Murray in the passage. I was languidly conscious that a second step was audible behind, and had hardly troubled myself to speculate who it might be, when suddenly a slight noise brought me out of my chair with my skin creeping with apprehension. I had never particularly observed before what sort of sound the tapping of a crutch was, but my quivering nerves told me that I heard it now in the sharp wooden clack which alternated with the muffled thud of the foot fall. Another instant and my servant had shown her in.

I did not attempt the usual conventions of society, nor did she. I simply stood with the smouldering cigarette in my hand, and gazed at her. She in her turn looked silently at me, and at her look I remembered how in these very pages I had tried to define the expression of her eyes, whether they were furtive or fierce. To-day they were fierce — coldly and inexorably so.

“Well,” said she at last, “are you still of the same mind as when I saw you last?”

“I have always been of the same mind.”

“Let us understand each other, Professor Gilroy,” said she slowly. “I am not a very safe person to trifle with, as you should realise by now. It was you who asked me to enter into a series of experiments with you, it was you who won my affections, it was you who professed your love for me, it was you who brought me your own photograph with words of affection upon it, and, finally, it was you who on the very same evening thought fit to insult me most outrageously, addressing me as no man has ever dared to speak to me yet. Tell me that those words came from you in a moment of passion and I am prepared to forget and to forgive them. You did not mean what you said, Austin? You do not really hate me?”

I might have pitied this deformed woman — such a longing for love broke suddenly through the menace of her eyes. But then I thought of what I had gone through, and my heart set like flint.

“If ever you heard me speak of love,” said I, “you know very well that it was your voice which spoke, and not mine. The only words of truth which I have ever been able to say to you are those which you heard when last we met.”

“I know. Some one has set you against me. It was he!” She tapped with her crutch upon the floor. “Well, you know very well that I could bring you this instant crouching like a spaniel to my feet. You will not find me again in my hour of weakness, when you can insult me with impunity. Have a care what you are doing, Professor Gilroy. You stand in a terrible position. You have not yet realised the hold which I have upon you.”

I shrugged my shoulders and turned away.

“Well,” said she, after a pause, “if you despise my love, I must see what can be done with fear. You smile, but the day will come when you will come screaming to me for pardon. Yes, you will grovel on the ground before me, proud as you are, and you will curse the day that ever you turned me from your best friend into your most bitter enemy. Have a care, Professor Gilroy!” I saw a white hand shaking in the air, and a face which was scarcely human, so convulsed was it with passion. An instant later she was gone, and I heard the quick hobble and tap receding down the passage.

But she has left a weight upon my heart. Vague presentiments of coming misfortune lie heavy upon me. I try in vain to persuade myself that these are only words of empty anger. I can remember those relentless eyes too clearly to think so. What shall I do — ah, what shall I do? I am no longer master of my own soul. At any moment this loathsome parasite may creep into me, and then —— I must tell some one my hideous secret — I must tell it or go mad. If I had some one to sympathize and advise! Wilson is out of the question. Charles Sadler would understand me only so far as his own experience carries him. Pratt-Haldane! He is a well-balanced man, a man of great common-sense and resource. I will go to him. I will tell him every thing. God grant that he may be able to advise me!

IV

6.45 P. M. No, it is useless. There is no human help for me; I must fight this out single-handed. Two courses lie before me. I might become this woman's lover. Or I must endure such persecutions as she can inflict upon me. Even if none come, I shall live in a hell of apprehension. But she may torture me, she may drive me mad, she may kill me: I will never, never, never give in. What can she inflict which would be worse than the loss of Agatha, and the knowledge that I am a perjured liar, and have forfeited the name of gentleman?

Pratt-Haldane was most amiable, and listened with all politeness to my story. But when I looked at his heavy set features, his slow eyes, and the ponderous study furniture which surrounded him, I could hardly tell him what I had come to say. It was all so substantial, so material. And, besides, what would I myself have said a short month ago if one of my colleagues had come to me with a story of demonic possession? Perhaps. I should have been less patient than he was. As it was, he took notes of my statement, asked me how much tea I drank, how many hours I slept, whether I had been overworking much, had I had sudden pains in the head, evil dreams, singing in the ears, flashes before the eyes — all questions which pointed to his belief that brain congestion was at the bottom of my trouble. Finally he dismissed me with a great many platitudes about open-air exercise, and avoidance of nervous excitement. His prescription, which was for chloral and bromide, I rolled up and threw into the gutter.

No, I can look for no help from any human being. If I consult any more, they may put their heads together and I may find myself in an asylum. I can but grip my courage with both hands, and pray that an honest man may not be abandoned.

April 10. It is the sweetest spring within the memory of man. So green, so mild, so beautiful! Ah, what a contrast between nature without and my own soul so torn with doubt and terror! It has been an uneventful day, but I know that I am on the edge of an abyss. I know it, and yet I go on with the routine of my life. The one bright spot is that Agatha is happy and well and out of all danger. If this creature had a hand on each of us, what might she not do?

April 16. The woman is ingenious in her torments. She knows how fond I am of my work, and how highly my lectures are thought of. So it is from that point that she now attacks me. It will end, I can see, in my losing my professorship, but I will fight to the finish. She shall not drive me out of it without a struggle.

I was not conscious of any change during my lecture this morning save that for a minute or two I had a dizziness and swimminess which rapidly passed away. On the contrary, I congratulated myself upon having made my subject (the functions of the red corpuscles) both interesting and clear. I was surprised, therefore, when a student came into my laboratory immediately after the lecture, and complained of being puzzled by the discrepancy between my statements and those in the text books. He showed me his note-book, in which I was reported as having in one portion of the lecture championed the most outrageous and unscientific heresies. Of course I denied it, and declared that he had misunderstood me, but on comparing his notes with those of his companions, it became clear that he was right, and that I really had made some most preposterous statements. Of course I shall explain it away as being the result of a moment of aberration, but I feel only too sure that it will be the first of a series. It is but a month now to the end of the session, and I pray that I may be able to hold out until then.

April 26. Ten days have elapsed since I have had the heart to make any entry in my journal. Why should I record my own humiliation and degradation? I had vowed never to open it again. And yet the force of habit is strong, and here I find myself taking up once more the record of my own dreadful experiences — in much the same spirit in which a suicide has been known to take notes of the effects of the poison which killed him.

Well, the crash which I had foreseen has come — and that no further back than yesterday. The university authorities have taken my lectureship from me. It has been done in the most delicate way, purporting to be a temporary measure to relieve me from the effects of overwork, and to give me the opportunity of recovering my health. None the less, it has been done, and I am no longer Professor Gilroy. The laboratory is still in my charge, but I have little doubt that that also will soon go.

The fact is that my lectures had become the laughing-stock of the university. My class was crowded with students who came to see and hear what the eccentric professor would do or say next. I cannot go into the detail of my humiliation. Oh, that devilish woman! There is no depth of buffoonery and imbecility to which she has not forced me. I would begin my lecture clearly and well, but always with the sense of a coming eclipse. Then as I felt the influence I would struggle against it, striving with clenched hands and beads of sweat upon my brow to get the better of it, while the students, hearing my incoherent words and watching my contortions, would roar with laughter at the antics of their professor. And then, when she had once fairly mastered me, out would come the most outrageous things — silly jokes, sentiments as though I were proposing a toast, snatches of ballads, personal abuse even against some member of my class. And then in a moment my brain would clear again, and my lecture would proceed decorously to the end. No wonder that my conduct has been the talk of the colleges. No wonder that the University Senate has been compelled to take official notice of such a scandal. Oh, that devilish woman!

And the most dreadful part of it all is my own loneliness. Here I sit in a commonplace English bow-window, looking out upon a commonplace English street with its garish ‘buses and its lounging policeman, and behind me there hangs a shadow which is out of all keeping with the age and place. In the home of knowledge I am weighed down and tortured by a power of which science knows nothing. No magistrate would listen to me. No paper would discuss my case. No doctor would believe my symptoms. My own most intimate friends would only look upon it as a sign of brain derangement. I am out of all touch with my kind. Oh, that devilish woman! Let her have a care! She may push me too far. When the law cannot help a man, he may make a law for himself.

She met me in the High Street yesterday evening and spoke to me. It was as well for her, perhaps, that it was not between the hedges of a lonely country road. She asked me with her cold smile whether I had been chastened yet. I did not deign to answer her. “We must try another turn of the screw;” said she. Have a care, my lady, have a care! I had her at my mercy once. Perhaps another chance may come.

April 28. The suspension of my lectureship has had the effect also of taking away her means of annoying me, and so I have enjoyed two blessed days of peace. After all, there is no reason to despair. Sympathy pours in to me from all sides, and every one agrees that it is my devotion to science and the arduous nature of my researches which have shaken my nervous system. I have had the kindest message from the council advising me to travel abroad, and expressing the confident hope that I may be able to resume all my duties by the beginning of the summer term. Nothing could be more flattering than their allusions to my career and to my services to the university. It is only in misfortune that one can test one's own popularity. This creature may weary of tormenting me, and then all may yet be well. May God grant it!

April 29. Our sleepy little town has had a small sensation. The only knowledge of crime which we ever have is when a rowdy undergraduate breaks a few lamps or comes to blows with a policeman. Last night, however, there was an attempt made to break-into the branch of the Bank of England, and we are all in a flutter in consequence.

Parkenson, the manager, is an intimate friend of mine, and I found him very much excited when I walked round there after breakfast. Had the thieves broken into the counting-house, they would still have had the safes to reckon with, so that the defence was considerably stronger than the attack. Indeed, the latter does not appear to have ever been very formidable. Two of the lower windows have marks as if a chisel or some such instrument had been pushed under them to force them open. The police should have a good clue, for the wood-work had been done with green paint only the day before, and from the smears it is evident that some of it has found its way on to the criminal's hands or clothes.

4.30 P. M. Ah, that accursed woman! That thrice accursed woman! Never mind! She shall not beat me! No, she shall not! But, oh, the she-devil! She has taken my professorship. Now she would take my honor. Is there nothing I can do against her, nothing save —— Ah, but, hard pushed as I am, I cannot bring myself to think of that!

It was about an hour ago that I went into my bedroom, and was brushing my hair before the glass, when suddenly my eyes lit upon something which left me so sick and cold that I sat down upon the edge of the bed and began to cry. It is many a long year since I shed tears, but all my nerve was gone, and I could but sob and sob in impotent grief and anger. There was my house jacket, the coat I usually wear after dinner, hanging on its peg by the wardrobe, with the right sleeve thickly crusted from wrist to elbow with daubs of green paint.

So this was what she meant by another turn of the screw! She had made a public imbecile of me. Now she would brand me as a criminal. This time she has failed. But how about the next? I dare not think of it — and of Agatha and my poor old mother! I wish that I were dead!

Yes, this is the other turn of the screw. And this is also what she meant, no doubt, when she said that I had not realised yet the power she has over me. I look back at my account of my conversation with her, and I see how she declared that with a slight exertion of her will her subject would be conscious, and with a stronger one unconscious. Last night I was unconscious. I could have sworn that I slept soundly in my bed without so much as a dream. And yet those stains tell me that I dressed, made my way out, attempted to open the bank windows, and returned. Was I observed? Is it possible that some one saw me do it and followed me home? Ah, what a hell my life has become! I have no peace, no rest. But my patience is nearing its end.

10 P. M. I have cleaned my coat with turpentine. I do not think that any one could have seen me. It was with my screw-driver that I made the marks. I found it all crusted with paint, and I have cleaned it. My head aches as if it would burst, and I have taken five grains of antipyrine. If it were not for Agatha, I should have taken fifty and had an end of it.

May 3. Three quiet days. This hell fiend is like a cat with a mouse. She lets me loose only to pounce upon me again. I am never so frightened as when every thing is still. My physical state is deplorable — perpetual hiccough and ptosis of the left eyelid.

I have heard from the Mardens that they will be back the day after to-morrow. I do not know whether I am glad or sorry. They were safe in London. Once here they may be drawn into the miserable network in which I am myself struggling. And I must tell them of it. I cannot marry Agatha so long as I know that I am not responsible for my own actions. Yes, I must tell them, even if it brings every thing to an end between us.

To-night is the university ball, and I must go. God knows I never felt less in the humor for festivity, but I must not have it said that I am unfit to appear in public. If I am seen there, and have speech with some of the elders of the university it will go a long way toward showing them that it would be unjust to take my chair away from me.

10 P. M. I have been to the ball. Charles Sadler and I went together, but I have come away before him. I shall wait up for him, however, for, indeed, I fear to go to sleep these nights. He is a cheery, practical fellow, and a chat with him will steady my nerves. On the whole, the evening was a great

success. I talked to every one who has influence, and I think that I made them realise that my chair is not vacant quite yet. The creature was at the ball — unable to dance, of course, but sitting with Mrs. Wilson. Again and again her eyes rested upon me. They were almost the last things I saw before I left the room. Once, as I sat sideways to her, I watched her, and saw that her gaze was following some one else. It was Sadler, who was dancing at the time with the second Miss Thurston. To judge by her expression, it is well for him that he is not in her grip as I am. He does not know the escape he has had. I think I hear his step in the street now, and I will go down and let him in. If he will ——

May 4. Why did I break off in this way last night? I never went down stairs, after all — at least, I have no recollection of doing so. But, on the other hand, I cannot remember going to bed. One of my hands is greatly swollen this morning, and yet I have no remembrance of injuring it yesterday. Otherwise, I am feeling all the better for last night's festivity. But I cannot understand how it is that I did not meet Charles Sadler when I so fully intended to do so. Is it possible —— My God, it is only too probable! Has she been leading me some devil's dance again? I will go down to Sadler and ask him.

Mid-day. The thing has come to a crisis. My life is not worth living. But, if I am to die, then she shall come also. I will not leave her behind, to drive some other man mad as she has me. No, I have come to the limit of my endurance. She has made me as desperate and dangerous a man as walks the earth. God knows I have never had the heart to hurt a fly, and yet, if I had my hands now upon that woman, she should never leave this room alive. I shall see her this very day, and she shall learn what she has to expect from me.

I went to Sadler and found him, to my surprise, in bed. As I entered he sat up and turned a face toward me which sickened me as I looked at it.

"Why, Sadler, what has happened?" I cried, but my heart turned cold as I said it.

"Gilroy," he answered, mumbling with his swollen lips, "I have for some weeks been under the impression that you are a madman. Now I know it, and that you are a dangerous one as well. If it were not that I am unwilling to make a scandal in the college, you would now be in the hands of the police."

"Do you mean — —" I cried.

"I mean that as I opened the door last night you rushed out upon me, struck me with both your fists in the face, knocked me down, kicked me furiously in the side, and left me lying almost unconscious in the street. Look at your own hand bearing witness against you."

Yes, there it was, puffed up, with sponge-like knuckles, as after some terrific blow. What could I do? Though he put me down as a madman, I must tell him all. I sat by his bed and went over all my troubles from the beginning. I poured them out with quivering hands and burning words which might have carried conviction to the most sceptical. "She hates you and she hates me!" I cried. "She revenged herself last night on both of us at once. She saw me leave the ball, and she must have seen you also. She knew how long it would take you to reach home. Then she had but to use her wicked will. Ah, your bruised face is a small thing beside my bruised soul!"

He was struck by my story. That was evident. "Yes, yes, she watched me out of the room," he muttered. "She is capable of it. But is it possible that she has really reduced you to this? What do you intend to do?"

"To stop it!" I cried. "I am perfectly desperate; I shall give her fair warning to-day, and the next time will be the last."

"Do nothing rash," said he.

"Rash!" I cried. "The only rash thing is that I should postpone it another hour." With that I rushed to my room, and here I am on the eve of what may be the great crisis of my life. I shall start at once. I have gained one thing to-day, for I have made one man, at least, realise the truth of this monstrous experience of mine. And, if the worst should happen, this diary remains as a proof of the goad that has driven me.

Evening. When I came to Wilson's, I was shown up, and found that he was sitting with Miss Penclosa. For half an hour I had to endure his fussy talk about his recent research into the exact nature of the spiritualistic rap, while the creature and I sat in silence looking across the room at each other. I read a sinister amusement in her eyes, and she must have seen hatred and menace in mine. I had almost despaired of having speech with her when he was called from the room, and we were left for a few moments together.

"Well, Professor Gilroy — or is it Mr. Gilroy?" said she, with that bitter smile of hers. "How is your friend Mr. Charles Sadler after the ball?"

"You fiend!" I cried. "You have come to the end of your tricks now. I will have no more of them. Listen to what I say." I strode across and shook her roughly by the shoulder "As sure as there is a God in heaven, I swear that if you try another of your deviltries upon me I will have your life for it. Come what may, I will have your life. I have come to the end of what a man can endure."

"Accounts are not quite settled between us," said she, with a passion that equalled my own. "I can love, and I can hate. You had your choice. You chose to spurn the first; now you must test the other. It will take a little more to break your spirit, I see, but broken it shall be. Miss Marden comes back to-morrow, as I understand."

"What has that to do with you?" I cried. "It is a pollution that you should dare even to think of her. If I thought that you would harm her — —"

She was frightened, I could see, though she tried to brazen it out. She read the black thought in my mind, and cowered away from me.

"She is fortunate in having such a champion," said she. "He actually dares to threaten a lonely woman. I must really congratulate Miss Marden upon her protector."

The words were bitter, but the voice and manner were more acid still.

"There is no use talking," said I. "I only came here to tell you, — and to tell you most solemnly, — that your next outrage upon me will be your last." With that, as I heard Wilson's step upon the stair, I walked from the room. Ay, she may look venomous and deadly, but, for all that, she is beginning to see now that she has as much to fear from me as I can have from her. Murder! It has an ugly sound. But you don't talk of murdering a snake or of murdering a tiger. Let her have a care now.

May 5. I met Agatha and her mother at the station at eleven o'clock. She is looking so bright, so happy, so beautiful. And she was so overjoyed to see me. What have I done to deserve such love? I went back home with them, and we lunched together. All the troubles seem in a moment to have been shredded back from my life. She tells me that I am looking pale and worried and ill. The dear child puts it down to my loneliness and the perfunctory attentions of a housekeeper. I pray that she may never know the truth! May the shadow, if shadow there must be, lie ever black across my life and leave hers in the sunshine. I have just come back from them, feeling a new man. With her by my side I think that I could show a bold face to any thing which life might send.

5 P. M. Now, let me try to be accurate. Let me try to say exactly how it occurred. It is fresh in my mind, and I can set it down correctly, though it is

not likely that the time will ever come when I shall forget the doings of to-day.

I had returned from the Mardens’ after lunch, and was cutting some microscopic sections in my freezing microtome, when in an instant I lost consciousness in the sudden hateful fashion which has become only too familiar to me of late.

When my senses came back to me I was sitting in a small chamber, very different from the one in which I had been working. It was cosey and bright, with chintz-covered settees, coloured hangings, and a thousand pretty little trifles upon the wall. A small ornamental clock ticked in front of me, and the hands pointed to half-past three. It was all quite familiar to me, and yet I stared about for a moment in a half-dazed way until my eyes fell upon a cabinet photograph of myself upon the top of the piano. On the other side stood one of Mrs. Marden. Then, of course, I remembered where I was. It was Agatha’s boudoir.

But how came I there, and what did I want? A horrible sinking came to my heart. Had I been sent here on some devilish errand? Had that errand already been done? Surely it must; otherwise, why should I be allowed to come back to consciousness? Oh, the agony of that moment! What had I done? I sprang to my feet in my despair, and as I did so a small glass bottle fell from my knees on to the carpet.

It was unbroken, and I picked it up. Outside was written “Sulphuric Acid. Fort.” When I drew the round glass stopper, a thick fume rose slowly up, and a pungent, choking smell pervaded the room. I recognised it as one which I kept for chemical testing in my chambers. But why had I brought a bottle of vitriol into Agatha’s chamber? Was it not this thick, reeking liquid with which jealous women had been known to mar the beauty of their rivals? My heart stood still as I held the bottle to the light. Thank God, it was full! No mischief had been done as yet. But had Agatha come in a minute sooner, was it not certain that the hellish parasite within me would have dashed the stuff into her —— Ah, it will not bear to be thought of! But it must have been for that. Why else should I have brought it? At the thought of what I might have done my worn nerves broke down, and I sat shivering and twitching, the pitiable wreck of a man.

It was the sound of Agatha’s voice and the rustle of her dress which restored me. I looked up, and saw her blue eyes, so full of tenderness and pity, gazing down at me.

“We must take you away to the country, Austin,” she said. “You want rest and quiet. You look wretchedly ill.”

“Oh, it is nothing!” said I, trying to smile. “It was only a momentary weakness. I am all right again now.”

“I am so sorry to keep you waiting. Poor boy, you must have been here quite half an hour! The vicar was in the drawing-room, and, as I knew that you did not care for him, I thought it better that Jane should show you up here. I thought the man would never go!”

“Thank God he stayed! Thank God he stayed!” I cried hysterically.

“Why, what is the matter with you, Austin?” she asked, holding my arm as I staggered up from the chair. “Why are you glad that the vicar stayed? And what is this little bottle in your hand?”

“Nothing,” I cried, thrusting it into my pocket. “But I must go. I have something important to do.”

“How stern you look, Austin! I have never seen your face like that. You are angry?”

“Yes, I am angry.”

“But not with me?”

“No, no, my darling! You would not understand.”

“But you have not told me why you came.”

“I came to ask you whether you would always love me — no matter what I did, or what shadow might fall on my name. Would you believe in me and trust me however black appearances might be against me?”

“You know that I would, Austin.”

“Yes, I know that you would. What I do I shall do for you. I am driven to it. There is no other way out, my darling!” I kissed her and rushed from the room.

The time for indecision was at an end. As long as the creature threatened my own prospects and my honor there might be a question as to what I should do. But now, when Agatha — my innocent Agatha — was endangered, my duty lay before me like a turnpike road. I had no weapon, but I never paused for that. What weapon should I need, when I felt every muscle quivering with the strength of a frenzied man? I ran through the streets, so set upon what I had to do that I was only dimly conscious of the faces of friends whom I met — dimly conscious also that Professor Wilson met me, running with equal precipitance in the opposite direction. Breathless but resolute I reached the house and rang the bell. A white cheeked maid opened the door, and turned whiter yet when she saw the face that looked in at her.

“Show me up at once to Miss Penclosa,” I demanded.

“Sir,” she gasped, “Miss Penclosa died this afternoon at half-past three!”

THE STARK MUNRO LETTERS

By J. Stark Munro

BEING A SERIES OF TWELVE LETTERS
WRITTEN BY J. STARK MUNRO, M.B.,
TO HIS FRIEND AND FORMER FELLOW-STUDENT,
HERBERT SWANBOROUGH,
OF LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS,
DURING THE YEARS 1881-1884

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Edited And Arranged By A. Conan Doyle

The letters of my friend Mr. Stark Munro appear to me to form so connected a whole, and to give so plain an account of some of the troubles which a young man may be called upon to face right away at the outset of his career, that I have handed them over to the gentleman who is about to edit them. There are two of them, the fifth and the ninth, from which some excisions are necessary; but in the main I hope that they may be reproduced as they stand. I am sure that there is no privilege which my friend would value more highly than the thought that some other young man, harassed by the needs of this world and doubts of the next, should have gotten strength by reading how a brother had passed down the valley of shadow before him.

HERBERT SWANBOROUGH.
LOWELL, MASS.

THE STARK MUNRO LETTERS.

I. HOME. 30th March, 1881.

I have missed you very much since your return to America, my dear Bertie, for you are the one man upon this earth to whom I have ever been able to unreservedly open my whole mind. I don’t know why it is; for, now that I come to think of it, I have never enjoyed very much of your confidence in return. But that may be my fault. Perhaps you don’t find me sympathetic, even though I have every wish to be. I can only say that I find you intensely so, and perhaps I presume too much upon the fact. But no, every instinct in my nature tells me that I don’t bore you by my confidences.

Can you remember Cullingworth at the University? You never were in the athletic set, and so it is possible that you don’t. Anyway, I’ll take it for granted that you don’t, and explain it all from the beginning. I’m sure that you would know his photograph, however, for the reason that he was the ugliest and queerest-looking man of our year.

Physically he was a fine athlete — one of the fastest and most determined Rugby forwards that I have ever known, though he played so savage a game that he was never given his international cap. He was well-grown, five foot nine perhaps, with square shoulders, an arching chest, and a quick jerky way of walking. He had a round strong head, bristling with short wiry black hair. His face was wonderfully ugly, but it was the ugliness of character, which is as attractive as beauty. His jaw and eyebrows were scraggy and rough-hewn, his nose aggressive and red-shot, his eyes small and near set, light blue in colour, and capable of assuming a very genial and also an exceedingly vindictive expression. A slight wiry moustache covered his upper lip, and his teeth were yellow, strong, and overlapping. Add to this that he seldom wore collar or necktie, that his throat was the colour and texture of the bark of a Scotch fir, and that he had a voice and especially a laugh like a bull’s bellow. Then you have some idea (if you can piece all these items in your mind) of the outward James Cullingworth.

But the inner man, after all, was what was most worth noting. I don’t pretend to know what genius is. Carlyle’s definition always seemed to me to be a very crisp and clear statement of what it is NOT. Far from its being an infinite capacity for taking pains, its leading characteristic, as far as I have ever been able to observe it, has been that it allows the possessor of it to attain results by a sort of instinct which other men could only reach by hard work. In this sense Cullingworth was the greatest genius that I have ever known. He never seemed to work, and yet he took the anatomy prize over the heads of all the ten-hour-a-day men. That might not count for much, for he was quite capable of idling ostentatiously all day and then reading desperately all night; but start a subject of your own for him, and then see his originality and strength. Talk about torpedoes, and he would catch up a pencil, and on the back of an old envelope from his pocket he would sketch out some novel contrivance for piercing a ship's netting and getting at her side, which might no doubt involve some technical impossibility, but which would at least be quite plausible and new. Then as he drew, his bristling eyebrows would contract, his small eyes would gleam with excitement, his lips would be pressed together, and he would end by banging on the paper with his open hand, and shouting in his exultation. You would think that his one mission in life was to invent torpedoes. But next instant, if you were to express surprise as to how it was that the Egyptian workmen elevated the stones to the top of the pyramids, out would come the pencil and envelope, and he would propound a scheme for doing that with equal energy and conviction. This ingenuity was joined to an extremely sanguine nature. As he paced up and down in his jerky quick-stepping fashion after one of these flights of invention, he would take out patents for it, receive you as his partner in the enterprise, have it adopted in every civilised country, see all conceivable applications of it, count up his probable royalties, sketch out the novel methods in which he would invest his gains, and finally retire with the most gigantic fortune that has ever been amassed. And you would be swept along by his words, and would be carried every foot of the way with him, so that it would come as quite a shock to you when you suddenly fell back to earth again, and found yourself trudging the city street a poor student, with Kirk's Physiology under your arm, and hardly the price of your luncheon in your pocket.

I read over what I have written, but I can see that I give you no real insight into the demoniac cleverness of Cullingworth. His views upon medicine were most revolutionary, but I daresay that if things fulfil their promise I may have a good deal to say about them in the sequel. With his brilliant and unusual gifts, his fine athletic record, his strange way of dressing (his hat on the back of his head and his throat bare), his thundering voice, and his ugly, powerful face, he had quite the most marked individuality of any man that I have ever known.

Now, you will think me rather prolix about this man; but, as it looks as if his life might become entwined with mine, it is a subject of immediate interest to me, and I am writing all this for the purpose of reviving my own half-faded impressions, as well as in the hope of amusing and interesting you. So I must just give you one or two other points which may make his character more clear to you.

He had a dash of the heroic in him. On one occasion he was placed in such a position that he must choose between compromising a lady, or springing out of a third-floor window. Without a moment’s hesitation he hurled himself out of the window. As luck would have it, he fell through a large laurel bush on to a garden plot, which was soft with rain, and so escaped with a shaking and a bruising. If I have to say anything that gives a bad impression of the man, put that upon the other side.

He was fond of rough horse-play; but it was better to avoid it with him, for you could never tell what it might lead to. His temper was nothing less than infernal. I have seen him in the dissecting-rooms begin to skylark with a fellow, and then in an instant the fun would go out of his face, his little eyes would gleam with fury, and the two would be rolling, worrying each other like dogs, below the table. He would be dragged off, panting and speechless with fury, with his wiry hair bristling straight up like a fighting terrier’s.

This pugnacious side of his character would be worthily used sometimes. I remember that an address which was being given to us by an eminent London specialist was much interrupted by a man in the front row, who amused himself by interjecting remarks. The lecturer appealed to his audience at last. “These interruptions are insufferable, gentlemen,” said he; “will no one free me from this annoyance?” “Hold your tongue — you, sir, on the front bench,” cried Cullingworth, in his bull’s bellow. “Perhaps you’ll make me,” said the fellow, turning a contemptuous face over his shoulder. Cullingworth closed his note-book, and began to walk down on the tops of the desks to the delight of the three hundred spectators. It was fine to see the deliberate way in which he picked his way among the ink bottles. As he sprang down from the last bench on to the floor, his opponent struck him a smashing blow full in the face. Cullingworth got his bulldog grip on him, however, and rushed him backwards out of the class-room. What he did with him I don’t know, but there was a noise like the delivery of a ton of coals; and the champion of law and order returned, with the sedate air of a man who had done his work. One of his eyes looked like an over-ripe damson, but we gave him three cheers as he made his way back to his seat. Then we went on with the dangers of Placenta Praevia.

He was not a man who drank hard, but a little drink would have a very great effect upon him. Then it was that the ideas would surge from his brain, each more fantastic and ingenious than the last. And if ever he did get beyond the borderland he would do the most amazing things. Sometimes it was the fighting instinct that would possess him, sometimes the preaching, and sometimes the comic, or they might come in succession, replacing each other so rapidly as to bewilder his companions. Intoxication brought all kinds of queer little peculiarities with it. One of them was that he could walk or run perfectly straight, but that there always came a time when he unconsciously returned upon his tracks and retraced his steps again. This had a strange effect sometimes, as in the instance which I am about to tell you.

Very sober to outward seeming, but in a frenzy within, he went down to the station one night, and, stooping to the pigeon-hole, he asked the ticket-clerk, in the suavest voice, whether he could tell him how far it was to London. The official put forward his face to reply when Cullingworth drove his fist through the little hole with the force of a piston. The clerk flew backwards off his stool, and his yell of pain and indignation brought some police and railway men to his assistance. They pursued Cullingworth; but he, as active and as fit as a greyhound, outraced them all, and vanished into the darkness, down the long, straight street. The pursuers had stopped, and were gathered in a knot talking the matter over, when, looking up, they saw, to their amazement, the man whom they were after, running at the top of his speed in their direction. His little peculiarity had asserted itself, you see, and he had unconsciously turned in his flight. They tripped him up, flung themselves upon him, and after a long and desperate struggle dragged him to the police station. He was charged before the magistrate next morning, but made such a brilliant speech from the dock in his own defence that he carried the Court with him, and escaped with a nominal fine. At his invitation, the witnesses and the police trooped after him to the nearest hotel, and the affair ended in universal whisky-and-sodas.

Well, now, if, after all these illustrations, I have failed to give you some notion of the man, able, magnetic, unscrupulous, interesting, many-sided, I must despair of ever doing so. I'll suppose, however, that I have not failed; and I will proceed to tell you, my most patient of confidants, something of my personal relations with Cullingworth.

When I first made a casual acquaintance with him he was a bachelor. At the end of a long vacation, however, he met me in the street, and told me, in his loud-voiced volcanic shoulder-slapping way, that he had just been married. At his invitation, I went up with him then and there to see his wife; and as we walked he told me the history of his wedding, which was as extraordinary as everything else he did. I won't tell it to you here, my dear Bertie, for I feel that I have dived down too many side streets already; but it was a most bustling business, in which the locking of a governess into her room and the dyeing of Cullingworth's hair played prominent parts. Apropos of the latter he was never quite able to get rid of its traces; and from this time forward there was added to his other peculiarities the fact that when the sunlight struck upon his hair at certain angles, it turned it all iridescent and shimmering.

Well, I went up to his lodgings with him, and was introduced to Mrs. Cullingworth. She was a timid, little, sweet-faced, grey-eyed woman, quiet-voiced and gentle-mannered. You had only to see the way in which she looked at him to understand that she was absolutely under his control, and that do what he might, or say what he might, it would always be the best thing to her. She could be obstinate, too, in a gentle, dove-like sort of way; but her obstinacy lay always in the direction of backing up his sayings and doings. This, however, I was only to find out afterwards; and at that, my first visit, she impressed me as being one of the sweetest little women that I had ever known.

They were living in the most singular style, in a suite of four small rooms, over a grocer's shop. There was a kitchen, a bedroom, a sitting-room, and a fourth room, which Cullingworth insisted upon regarding as a most unhealthy apartment and a focus of disease, though I am convinced that it was nothing more than the smell of cheeses from below which had given him the idea. At any rate, with his usual energy he had not only locked the room up, but had gummed varnished paper over all the cracks of the door, to prevent the imaginary contagion from spreading. The furniture was the sparest possible. There were, I remember, only two chairs in the sitting-room; so that when a guest came (and I think I was the only one) Cullingworth used to squat upon a pile of yearly volumes of the British Medical Journal in the corner. I can see him now levering himself up from his lowly seat, and striding about the room roaring and striking with his hands, while his little wife sat mum in the corner, listening to him with love and admiration in her eyes. What did we care, any one of the three of us, where we sat or how we lived, when youth throbbed hot in our veins, and our souls were all aflame with the possibilities of life? I still look upon those Bohemian evenings, in the bare room amid the smell of the cheese, as being among the happiest that I have known.

I was a frequent visitor to the Cullingworths, for the pleasure that I got was made the sweeter by the pleasure which I hoped that I gave. They knew no one, and desired to know no one; so that socially I seemed to be the only link that bound them to the world. I even ventured to interfere in the details of their little menage. Cullingworth had a fad at the time, that all the diseases of civilisation were due to the abandonment of the open-air life of our ancestors, and as a corollary he kept his windows open day and night. As his wife was obviously fragile, and yet would have died before she would have uttered a word of complaint, I took it upon myself to point out to him that the cough from which she suffered was hardly to be cured so long as she spent her life in a draught. He scowled savagely at me for my interference; and I thought we were on the verge of a quarrel, but it blew over, and he became more considerate in the matter of ventilation.

Our evening occupations just about that time were of a most extraordinary character. You are aware that there is a substance, called waxy matter, which is deposited in the tissues of the body during the course of certain diseases. What this may be and how it is formed has been a cause for much bickering among pathologists. Cullingworth had strong views upon the subject, holding that the waxy matter was really the same thing as the glycogen which is normally secreted by the liver. But it is one thing to have an idea, and another to be able to prove it. Above all, we wanted some waxy matter with which to experiment. But fortune favoured us in the most magical way. The Professor of Pathology had come into possession of a magnificent specimen of the condition. With pride he exhibited the organ to us in the class-room before ordering his assistant to remove it to the ice-chest, preparatory to its being used for microscopical work in the practical class. Cullingworth saw his chance, and acted on the instant. Slipping out of the classroom, he threw open the ice-chest, rolled his ulster round the dreadful glistening mass, closed the chest again, and walked quietly away. I have no doubt that to this day the disappearance of that waxy liver is one of the most inexplicable mysteries in the career of our Professor.

That evening, and for many evenings to come, we worked upon our liver. For our experiments it was necessary to subject it all to great heat in an endeavour to separate the nitrogenous cellular substance from the non-nitrogenous waxy matter. With our limited appliances the only way we could think of was to cut it into fine pieces and cook it in a frying pan. So night after night the curious spectacle might have been seen of a beautiful young woman and two very earnest young men busily engaged in making these grim fricassees. Nothing came of all our work; for though Cullingworth considered that he had absolutely established his case, and wrote long screeds to the medical papers upon the subject, he was never apt at stating his views with his pen, and he left, I am sure, a very confused idea on the minds of his readers as to what it was that he was driving at. Again, as he was a mere student without any letters after his name, he got scant attention, and I never heard that he gained over a single supporter.

At the end of the year we both passed our examinations and became duly qualified medical men. The Cullingworths vanished away, and I never heard any more of them, for he was a man who prided himself upon never writing a letter. His father had formerly a very large and lucrative practice in the West of Scotland, but he died some years ago. I had a vague idea, founded upon some chance remark of his, that Cullingworth had gone to see whether the family name might still stand him in good stead there. As for me I began, as you will remember that I explained in my last, by acting as assistant in my father’s practice. You know, however, that at its best it is not worth more than L700 a year, with no room for expansion. This is not large enough to keep two of us at work. Then, again, there are times when I can see that my religious opinions annoy the dear old man. On the whole, and for every reason, I think that it would be better if I were out of this. I applied for several steamship lines, and for at least a dozen house surgeonships; but there is as much competition for a miserable post with a hundred a year as if it were the Viceroyship of India. As a rule, I simply get my testimonials returned without any comment, which is the sort of thing that teaches a man humility. Of course, it is very pleasant to live with the mater, and my little brother Paul is a regular trump. I am teaching him boxing; and you should see him put his tiny fists up, and counter with his right. He got me under the jaw this evening, and I had to ask for poached eggs for supper.

And all this brings me up to the present time and the latest news. It is that I had a telegram from Cullingworth this morning — after nine months' silence. It was dated from Avonmouth, the town where I had suspected that he had settled, and it said simply, “Come at once. I have urgent need of you. CULLINGWORTH.” Of course, I shall go by the first train to-morrow. It may mean anything or nothing. In my heart of hearts I hope and believe that old Cullingworth sees an opening for me either as his partner or in some other way. I always believed that he would turn up trumps, and make my fortune as well as his own. He knows that if I am not very quick or brilliant I am fairly steady and reliable. So that's what I've been working up to all along, Bertie, that to-morrow I go to join Cullingworth, and that it looks as if there was to be an opening for me at last. I gave you a sketch of him and his ways, so that you may take an interest in the development of my fortune, which you could not do if you did not know something of the man who is holding out his hand to me.

Yesterday was my birthday, and I was two and twenty years of age. For two and twenty years have I swung around the sun. And in all seriousness, without a touch of levity, and from the bottom of my soul, I assure you that I have at the present moment the very vaguest idea as to whence I have come from, whither I am going, or what I am here for. It is not for want of inquiry, or from indifference. I have mastered the principles of several religions. They have all shocked me by the violence which I should have to do to my reason to accept the dogmas of any one of them. Their ethics are usually excellent. So are the ethics of the common law of England. But the scheme of creation upon which those ethics are built! Well, it really is to me the most astonishing thing that I have seen in my short earthly pilgrimage, that so many able men, deep philosophers, astute lawyers, and clear-headed men of the world should accept such an explanation of the facts of life. In the face of their apparent concurrence my own poor little opinion would not dare to do more than lurk at the back of my soul, were it not that I take courage when I reflect that the equally eminent lawyers and philosophers of

Rome and Greece were all agreed that Jupiter had numerous wives and was fond of a glass of good wine.

Mind, my dear Bertie, I do not wish to run down your view or that of any other man. We who claim toleration should be the first to extend it to others. I am only indicating my own position, as I have often done before. And I know your reply so well. Can't I hear your grave voice saying "Have faith!" Your conscience allows you to. Well, mine won't allow me. I see so clearly that faith is not a virtue, but a vice. It is a goat which has been herded with the sheep. If a man deliberately shut his physical eyes and refused to use them, you would be as quick as any one in seeing that it was immoral and a treason to Nature. And yet you would counsel a man to shut that far more precious gift, the reason, and to refuse to use it in the most intimate question of life.

"The reason cannot help in such a matter," you reply. I answer that to say so is to give up a battle before it is fought. My reason SHALL help me, and when it can help no longer I shall do without help.

It's late, Bertie, and the fire's out, and I'm shivering; and you, I'm very sure, are heartily weary of my gossip and my heresies, so adieu until my next.

II. HOME, 10th April, 1881.

Well, my dear Bertie, here I am again in your postbox. It’s not a fortnight since I wrote you that great long letter, and yet you see I have news enough to make another formidable budget. They say that the art of letter-writing has been lost; but if quantity may atone for quality, you must confess that (for your sins) you have a friend who has retained it.

When I wrote to you last I was on the eve of going down to join the Cullingworths at Avonmouth, with every hope that he had found some opening for me. I must tell you at some length the particulars of that expedition.

I travelled down part of the way with young Leslie Duncan, whom I think you know. He was gracious enough to consider that a third-class carriage and my company were to be preferred to a first class with solitude. You know that he came into his uncle’s money a little time ago, and after a first delirious outbreak, he has now relapsed into that dead heavy state of despair which is caused by having everything which one can wish for. How absurd are the ambitions of life when I think that I, who am fairly happy and as keen as a razor edge, should be struggling for that which I can see has brought neither profit nor happiness to him! And yet, if I can read my own nature, it is not the accumulation of money which is my real aim, but only that I may acquire so much as will relieve my mind of sordid cares and enable me to develop any gifts which I may have, undisturbed. My tastes are so simple that I cannot imagine any advantage which wealth can give — save indeed the exquisite pleasure of helping a good man or a good cause. Why should people ever take credit for charity when they must know that they cannot gain as much pleasure out of their guineas in any other fashion? I gave my watch to a broken schoolmaster the other day (having no change in my pocket), and the mater could not quite determine whether it was a trait of madness or of nobility. I could have told her with absolute confidence that it was neither the one nor the other, but a sort of epicurean selfishness with perhaps a little dash of swagger away down at the bottom of it. What had I ever had from my chronometer like the quiet thrill of satisfaction when the fellow brought me the pawn ticket and told me that the thirty shillings had been useful?

Leslie Duncan got out at Carstairs, and I was left alone with a hale, white-haired, old Roman Catholic priest, who had sat quietly reading his office in the corner. We fell into the most intimate talk, which lasted all the way to Avonmouth — indeed, so interested was I that I very nearly passed through the place without knowing it. Father Logan (for that was his name) seemed to me to be a beautiful type of what a priest should be — self-sacrificing and pure-minded, with a kind of simple cunning about him, and a deal of innocent fun. He had the defects as well as the virtues of his class, for he was absolutely reactionary in his views. We discussed religion with fervour, and his theology was somewhere about the Early Pliocene. He might have chattered the matter over with a priest of Charlemagne's Court, and they would have shaken hands after every sentence. He would acknowledge this and claim it as a merit. It was consistency in his eyes. If our astronomers and inventors and law-givers had been equally consistent where would modern civilisation be? Is religion the only domain of thought which is non-progressive, and to be referred for ever to a standard set two thousand years ago? Can they not see that as the human brain evolves it must take a wider outlook? A half-formed brain makes a half-formed God, and who shall say that our brains are even half-formed yet? The truly inspired priest is the man or woman with the big brain. It is not the shaven patch on the outside, but it is the sixty ounces within which is the real mark of election.

You know that you are turning up your nose at me, Bertie. I can see you do it. But I'll come off the thin ice, and you shall have nothing but facts now. I'm afraid that I should never do for a story-teller, for the first stray character that comes along puts his arm in mine and walks me off, with my poor story straggling away to nothing behind me.

Well, then, it was night when we reached Avonmouth, and as I popped my head out of the carriage window, the first thing that my eyes rested upon was old Cullingworth, standing in, the circle of light under a gas-lamp. His frock coat was flying open, his waistcoat unbuttoned at the top, and his hat (a top hat this time) jammed on the back of his head, with his bristling hair spurting out in front of it. In every way, save that he wore a collar, he was the same Cullingworth as ever. He gave a roar of recognition when he saw me, bustled me out of my carriage, seized my carpet bag, or grip-sack as you used to call it, and a minute later we were striding along together through the streets.

I was, as you may imagine, all in a tingle to know what it was that he wanted with me. However, as he made no allusion to it, I did not care to ask, and, during our longish walk, we talked about indifferent matters. It was football first, I remember, whether Richmond had a chance against Blackheath, and the way in which the new passing game was shredding the old scrimmages. Then he got on to inventions, and became so excited that he had to give me back my bag in order that he might be able to slap all his points home with his fist upon his palm. I can see him now stopping, with his face leaning forward and his yellow tusks gleaming in the lamplight.

"My dear Munro" (this was the style of the thing), "why was armour abandoned, eh? What! I'll tell you why. It was because the weight of metal that would protect a man who was standing up was more than he could carry. But battles are not fought now-a-days by men who are standing up. Your infantry are all lying on their stomachs, and it would take very little to protect them. And steel has improved, Munro! Chilled steel! Bessemer! Bessemer! Very good. How much to cover a man? Fourteen inches by twelve, meeting at an angle so that the bullet will glance. A notch at one side for the rifle. There you have it, laddie — the Cullingworth patent portable bullet-proof shield! Weight? Oh, the weight would be sixteen pounds. I worked it out. Each company carries its shields in go-carts, and they are served out on going into action. Give me twenty thousand good shots, and I'll go in at Calais and come out at Pekin. Think of it, my boy! the moral effect. One side gets home every time and the other plasters its bullets up against steel plates. No troops would stand it. The nation that gets it first will pitchfork the rest of Europe over the edge. They're bound to have it — all of them. Let's reckon it out. There's about eight million of them on a war footing. Let us suppose that only half of them have it. I say only half, because I don't want to be too sanguine. That's four million, and I should take a royalty of four shillings on wholesale orders. What's that, Munro? About three-quarters of a million sterling, eh? How's that, laddie, eh? What?"

Really, that is not unlike his style of talk, now that I come to read it over, only you miss the queer stops, the sudden confidential whispers, the roar with which he triumphantly answered his own questions, the shrugs and slaps, and gesticulations. But not a word all the time as to what it was that made him send me that urgent wire which brought me to Avonmouth.

I had, of course, been puzzling in my mind as to whether he had succeeded or not, though from his cheerful appearance and buoyant talk, it was tolerably clear to me that all was well with him. I was, however, surprised when, as we walked along a quiet, curving avenue, with great houses standing in their own grounds upon either side, he stopped and turned in through the iron gate which led up to one of the finest of them. The moon had broken out and shone upon the high-peaked roof, and upon the gables at each corner. When he knocked it was opened by a footman with red plush knee-breeches. I began to perceive that my friend's success must have been something colossal.

When we came down to the dining-room for supper, Mrs. Cullingworth was waiting there to greet me. I was sorry to see that she was pale and weary-looking. However, we had a merry meal in the old style, and her husband's animation reflected itself upon her face, until at last we might have been back in the little room, where the Medical Journals served as a chair, instead of in the great oak-furnished, picture-hung chamber to which we had been promoted. All the time, however, not one word as to the object of my journey.

When the supper was finished, Cullingworth led the way into a small sitting-room, where we both lit our pipes, and Mrs. Cullingworth her cigarette. He sat for some little time in silence, and then bounding up rushed to the door and flung it open. It is always one of his strange peculiarities to think that people are eavesdropping or conspiring against him; for, in spite of his superficial brusqueness and frankness, a strange vein of suspicion runs through his singular and complex nature. Having satisfied himself now that there were no spies or listeners he threw himself down into his armchair.

"Munro," said he, prodding at me with his pipe, "what I wanted to tell you is, that I am utterly, hopelessly, and irretrievably ruined."

My chair was tilted on its back legs as he spoke, and I assure you that I was within an ace of going over. Down like a pack of cards came all my dreams as to the grand results which were to spring from my journey to Avonmouth. Yes, Bertie, I am bound to confess it: my first thought was of my own disappointment, and my second of the misfortune of my friends. He had the most diabolical intuitions, or I a very tell-tale face, for he added at once —

“Sorry to disappoint you, my boy. That’s not what you expected to hear, I can see.”

“Well,” I stammered, “it IS rather a surprise, old chap. I thought from the... from the...”

“From the house, and the footman, and the furniture,” said he. “Well, they’ve eaten me up among them... licked me clean, bones and gravy. I’m done for, my boy, unless...” — here I saw a question in his eyes—”unless some friend were to lend me his name on a bit of stamped paper.”

“I can’t do it, Cullingworth,” said I. “It’s a wretched thing to have to refuse a friend; and if I had money...”

“Wait till you’re asked, Munro,” he interrupted, with his ugliest of expressions. “Besides, as you have nothing and no prospects, what earthly use would YOUR name on a paper be?”

“That’s what I want to know,” said I, feeling a little mortified, none the less.

“Look here, laddie,” he went on; “d’you see that pile of letters on the left of the table?”

“Yes.”

“Those are duns. And d’you see those documents on the right? Well, those are County Court summonses. And, now, d’you see that;” he picked up a little ledger, and showed me three or, four names scribbled on the first page.

“That’s the practice,” he roared, and laughed until the great veins jumped out on his forehead. His wife laughed heartily also, just as she would have wept, had he been so disposed.

“It’s this way, Munro,” said he, when he had got over his paroxysm. “You have probably heard — in fact, I have told you myself — that my father had the finest practice in Scotland. As far as I could judge he was a man of no capacity, but still there you are — he had it.”

I nodded and smoked.

“Well, he’s been dead seven years, and fifty nets dipping into his little fish-pond. However, when I passed I thought my best move was to come down to the old place, and see whether I couldn’t piece the thing together again. The name ought to be worth something, I thought. But it was no use doing the thing in a half hearted way. Not a bit of use in that, Munro. The kind of people who came to him were wealthy, and must see a fine house and a man in livery. What chance was there of gathering them into a bowwindowed forty pound-a-year house with a grubby-faced maid at the door? What do you suppose I did? My boy, I took the governor's old house, that was unlet — the very house that he kept up at five thousand a year. Off I started in rare style, and sank my last cent in furniture. But it's no use, laddie. I can't hold on any longer. I got two accidents and an epileptic — twenty-two pounds, eight and sixpence — that's the lot!

"What will you do, then?"

"That's what I wanted your advice about. That's why I wired for you. I always respected your opinion, my boy, and I thought that now was the time to have it."

It struck me that if he had asked for it nine months before there would have been more sense in it. What on earth could I do when affairs were in such a tangle? However, I could not help feeling complimented when so independent a fellow as Cullingworth turned to me in this way.

"You really think," said I, "that it is no use holding on here?"

He jumped up, and began pacing the room in his swift jerky way.

"You take warning from it, Munro," said he. "You've got to start yet. Take my tip, and go where no one knows you. People will trust a stranger quick enough; but if they can remember you as a little chap who ran about in knickerbockers, and got spanked with a hair brush for stealing plums, they are not going to put their lives in your keeping. It's all very well to talk about friendship and family connections; but when a man has a pain in the stomach he doesn't care a toss about all that. I'd stick it up in gold, letters in every medical class-room — have it carved across the gate of the University — that if a man wants friends be must go among strangers. It's all up here, Munro; so there's no use in advising me to hold on."

I asked him how much he owed. It came to about seven hundred pounds. The rent alone was two hundred. He had already raised money on the furniture, and his whole assets came to less than a tenner. Of course, there was only one possible thing that I could advise.

"You must call your creditors together," said I; "they can see for themselves that you are young and energetic — sure to succeed sooner or later. If they push you into a corner now, they can get nothing. Make that clear to them. But if you make a fresh start elsewhere and succeed, you may pay them all in full. I see no other possible way out of it."

"I knew that you'd say that, and it's just what I thought myself. Isn't it, Hetty? Well, then, that settles it; and I am much obliged to you for your advice, and that's all we'll say about the matter to-night. I've made my shot and missed. Next time I shall hit, and it won't be long either."

His failure did not seem to weigh very heavily on his mind, for in a few minutes he was shouting away as lustily as ever. Whiskey and hot water were brought in, that we might all drink luck to the second venture.

And this whiskey led us to what might have been a troublesome affair. Cullingworth, who had drunk off a couple of glasses, waited until his wife had left the room, and then began to talk of the difficulty of getting any exercise now that he had to wait in all day in the hope of patients. This led us round to the ways in which a man might take his exercise indoors, and that to boxing. Cullingworth took a couple of pairs of gloves out of a cupboard, and proposed that we should fight a round or two then and there.

If I hadn't been a fool, Bertie, I should never have consented. It's one of my many weaknesses, that, whether it's a woman or a man, anything like a challenge sets me off. But I knew Cullingworth's ways, and I told you in my last what a lamb of a temper he has. None the less, we pushed back the table, put the lamp on a high bracket, and stood up to one another.

The moment I looked him in the face I smelled mischief. He had a gleam of settled malice in his eye. I believe it was my refusal to back his paper which was running in his head. Anyway he looked as dangerous as he could look, with his scowling face sunk forward a little, his hands down near his hips (for his boxing, like everything else about him, is unconventional), and his jaw set like a rat-trap.

I led off, and then in he came hitting with both hands, and grunting like a pig at every blow. From what I could see of him he was no boxer at all, but just a formidable rough and tumble fighter. I was guarding with both hands for half a minute, and then was rushed clean off my legs and banged up against the door, with my head nearly through one of the panels. He wouldn't stop then, though he saw that I had no space to get my elbows back; and he let fly a right-hander which would have put me into the hall, if I hadn't slipped it and got back to the middle of the room.

"Look here, Cullingworth," said I; "there's not much boxing about this game."

"Yes, I hit pretty hard, don't I?"

"If you come boring into me like that, I'm bound to hit you out again," I said. "I want to play light if you'll let me."

The words were not out of my mouth before he was on me like a flash. I slipped him again; but the room was so small, and he as active as a cat, that there was no getting away from him. He was on me once more with a regular football rush that knocked me off my balance. Before I knew where I was he got his left on the mark and his right on my ear. I tripped over a footstool, and then before I could get my balance he had me on the same ear again, and my head was singing like a tea-kettle. He was as pleased as possible with himself, blowing out his chest and slapping it with his palms as he took his place in the middle of the room.

"Say when you've had enough, Munro," said he.

This was pretty stiff, considering that I had two inches the better of him in height, and as many stone in weight, besides being the better boxer. His energy and the size of the room had been against me so far, but he wasn't to have all the slogging to himself in the next round if I could help it.

In he came with one of his windmill rushes. But I was on the look-out for him this time. I landed him with my left a regular nose-ender as he came, and then, ducking under his left, I got him a cross-counter on the jaw that laid him flat across his own hearthrug. He was up in an instant, with a face like a madman.

"You swine!" he shouted. "Take those gloves off, and put your hands up!" He was tugging at his own to get them off.

"Go on, you silly ass!" said I. "What is there to fight about?"

He was mad with passion, and chucked his gloves down under the table.

"By God, Munro," he cried, "if you don't take those gloves off, I'll go for you, whether you have them on or not."

"Have a glass of soda water," said I.

He made a crack at me. "You're afraid of me, Munro. That's what's the matter with you," he snarled.

This was getting too hot, Bertie. I saw all the folly of the thing. I believed that I might whip him; but at the same time I knew that we were so much of a match that we would both get pretty badly cut up without any possible object to serve. For all that, I took my gloves off, and I think perhaps it was the wisest course after all. If Cullingworth once thought he had the whiphand of you, you might be sorry for it afterwards.

But, as fate would have it, our little barney was nipped in the bud. Mrs. Cullingworth came into the room at that instant, and screamed out when she saw her husband. His nose was bleeding and his chin was all slobbered with blood, so that I don't wonder that it gave her a turn.

"James!" she screamed; and then to me: "What is the meaning of this, Mr. Munro?"

You should have seen the hatred in her dove's eyes. I felt an insane impulse to pick her up and kiss her.

"We've only been having a little spar, Mrs. Cullingworth," said I. "Your husband was complaining that he never got any exercise."

"It's all right, Hetty," said he, pulling his coat on again. "Don't be a little stupid. Are the servants gone to bed? Well, you might bring some water in a basin from the kitchen. Sit down, Munro, and light your pipe again. I have a hundred things that I want to talk to you about."

So that was the end of it, and all went smoothly for the rest of the evening. But, for all that, the little wife will always look upon me as a brute and a bully; while as to Cullingworth —— well, it's rather difficult to say what Cullingworth thinks about the matter.

When I woke next morning he was in my room, and a funny-looking object he was. His dressing-gown lay on a chair, and he was putting up a fifty-six pound dumb-bell, without a rag to cover him. Nature didn't give him a very symmetrical face, nor the sweetest of expressions; but he has a figure like a Greek statue. I was amused to see that both his eyes had a touch of shadow to them. It was his turn to grin when I sat up and found that my ear was about the shape and consistence of a toadstool. However, he was all for peace that morning, and chatted away in the most amiable manner possible.

I was to go back to my father's that day, but I had a couple of hours with Cullingworth in his consulting room before I left. He was in his best form, and full of a hundred fantastic schemes, by which I was to help him. His great object was to get his name into the newspapers. That was the basis of all success, according to his views. It seemed to me that he was confounding cause with effect; but I did not argue the point. I laughed until my sides ached over the grotesque suggestions which poured from him. I was to lie senseless in the roadway, and to be carried into him by a sympathising crowd, while the footman ran with a paragraph to the newspapers. But there was the likelihood that the crowd might carry me in to the rival practitioner opposite. In various disguises I was to feign fits at his very door, and so furnish fresh copy for the local press. Then I was to die — absolutely to expire — and all Scotland was to resound with how Dr. Cullingworth, of Avonmouth, had resuscitated me. His ingenious brain rang a thousand changes out of the idea, and his own impending bankruptcy was crowded right out of his thoughts by the flood of half-serious devices.

But the thing that took the fun out of him, and made him gnash his teeth, and stride cursing about the room, was to see a patient walking up the steps which led to the door of Scarsdale, his opposite neighbour. Scarsdale had a fairly busy practice, and received his people at home from ten to twelve, so that I got quite used to seeing Cullingworth fly out of his chair, and rush raving to the window. He would diagnose the cases, too, and estimate their money value until he was hardly articulate.

"There you are!" he would suddenly yell; "see that man with a limp! Every morning he goes. Displaced semilunar cartilage, and a three months' job. The man's worth thirty-five shillings a week. And there! I'm hanged if the woman with the rheumatic arthritis isn't round in her bath-chair again. She's all sealskin and lactic acid. It's simply sickening to see how they crowd to that man. And such a man! You haven't seen him. All the better for you. I don't know what the devil you are laughing at, Munro. I can't see where the fun comes in myself."

Well, it was a short experience that visit to Avonmouth, but I think that I shall remember it all my life. Goodness knows, you must be sick enough of the subject, but when I started with so much detail I was tempted to go. It ended by my going back again in the afternoon, Cullingworth assuring me that he would call his creditors together as I had advised, and that he would let me know the result in a few days. Mrs. C. would hardly shake hands with me when I said goodbye; but I like her the better for that. He must have a great deal of good in him, or he could not have won her love and confidence so completely. Perhaps there is another Cullingworth behind the scenes — a softer, tenderer man, who can love and invite love. If there is, I have never got near him. And yet I may only have been tapping at the shell. Who knows? For that matter, it is likely enough that he has never got at the real Johnnie Munro. But you have, Bertie; and I think that you've had a little too much of him this time, only you encourage me to this sort of excess by your sympathetic replies. Well, I've done as much as the General Post Office will carry for fivepence, so I'll conclude by merely remarking that a fortnight has passed, and that I have had no news from Avonmouth, which does not in the very slightest degree surprise me. If I ever do hear anything, which is exceedingly doubtful, you may be sure that I will put a finish to this long story.

III. HOME, 15th October, 1881.

Without any figure of speech I feel quite ashamed when I think of you, Bertie. I send you one or two enormously long letters, burdened, as far as I can remember them, with all sorts of useless detail. Then, in spite of your kindly answers and your sympathy, which I have done so little to deserve, I drop you completely for more than six months. By this J pen I swear that it shall not happen again; and this letter may serve to bridge the gap and to bring you up to date in my poor affairs, in which, of all outer mankind, you alone take an interest.

To commence with what is of most moment, you may rest assured that what you said in your last letter about religion has had my most earnest attention. I am sorry that I have not got it by me to refer to (I lent it to Charlie), but I think I have the contents in my head. It is notorious, as you say, that an unbeliever may be as bigoted as any of the orthodox, and that a man may be very dogmatic in his opposition to dogma. Such men are the real enemies of free thought. If anything could persuade me to turn traitor to my reason, it would, for example, be the blasphemous and foolish pictures displayed in some of the agnostic journals.

But every movement has its crowd of camp followers, who straggle and scatter. We are like a comet, bright at the head but tailing away into mere gas behind. However, every man may speak for himself, and I do not feel that your charge comes home to me. I am only bigoted against bigotry, and that I hold to be as legitimate as violence to the violent. When one considers what effect the perversion of the religious instinct has had during the history of the world; the bitter wars, Christian and Mahomedan, Catholic and Protestant; the persecutions, the torturings, the domestic hatreds, the petty spites, with ALL creeds equally blood-guilty, one cannot but be amazed that the concurrent voice of mankind has not placed bigotry at the very head of the deadly sins. It is surely a truism to say that neither smallpox nor the plague have brought the same misery upon mankind.

I cannot be bigoted, my dear boy, when I say from the bottom of my heart that I respect every good Catholic and every good Protestant, and that I recognise that each of these forms of faith has been a powerful instrument in the hands of that inscrutable Providence which rules all things. Just as in the course of history one finds that the most far-reaching and admirable effects may proceed from a crime; so in religion, although a creed be founded upon an entirely inadequate conception of the Creator and His ways, it may none the less be the very best practical thing for the people and age which have adopted it. But if it is right for those to whom it is intellectually satisfying to adopt it, it is equally so for those to whom it is not, to protest against it, until by this process the whole mass of mankind gets gradually leavened, and pushed a little further upon their slow upward journey.

Catholicism is the more thorough. Protestantism is the more reasonable. Protestantism adapts itself to modern civilisation. Catholicism expects civilisation to adapt itself to it. Folk climb from the one big branch to the other big branch, and think they have made a prodigious change, when the main trunk is rotten beneath them, and both must in their present forms be involved sooner or later in a common ruin. The movement of human thought, though slow, is still in the direction of truth, and the various religions which man sheds as he advances (each admirable in its day) will serve, like buoys dropped down from a sailing vessel, to give the rate and direction of his progress.

But how do I know what is truth, you ask? I don’t. But I know particularly well what isn’t. And surely that is something to have gained. It isn’t true that the great central Mind that planned all things is capable of jealousy or of revenge, or of cruelty or of injustice. These are human attributes; and the book which ascribes them to the Infinite must be human also. It isn’t true that the laws of Nature have been capriciously disturbed, that snakes have talked, that women have been turned to salt, that rods have brought water out of rocks. You must in honesty confess that if these things were presented to us when we were, adults for the first time, we should smile at them. It isn’t true that the Fountain of all common sense should punish a race for a venial offence committed by a person long since dead, and then should add to the crass injustice by heaping the whole retribution upon a single innocent scapegoat. Can you not see all the want of justice and logic, to say nothing of the want of mercy, involved in such a conception? Can you not see it, Bertie? How can you blind yourself to it! Take your eyes away from the details for a moment, and look at this root idea of the predominant Faith. Is the general conception of it consistent with infinite wisdom and mercy? If not, what becomes of the dogmas, the sacraments, the whole scheme which is founded upon this sand-bank? Courage, my friend! At the right moment all will be laid aside, as the man whose strength increases lays down the crutch which has been a good friend to him in his weakness. But his changes won’t be over then. His hobble will become a walk, and his walk a run. There is no finality — CAN be none since the question concerns the infinite. All this, which appears too advanced to you to-day, will seem reactionary and conservative a thousand years hence.

Since I am upon this topic, may I say just a little more without boring you? You say that criticism such as mine is merely destructive, and that I have nothing to offer in place of what I pull down. This is not quite correct. I think that there are certain elemental truths within our grasp which ask for no faith for their acceptance, and which are sufficient to furnish us with a practical religion, having so much of reason in it that it would draw thinking men into its fold, not drive them forth from it.

When we all get back to these elemental and provable facts there will be some hopes of ending the petty bickerings of creeds, and of including the whole human family in one comprehensive system of thought.

When first I came out of the faith in which I had been reared, I certainly did feel for a time as if my life-belt had burst. I won’t exaggerate and say that I was miserable and plunged in utter spiritual darkness. Youth is too full of action for that. But I was conscious of a vague unrest, of a constant want of repose, of an emptiness and hardness which I had not noticed in life before. I had so identified religion with the Bible that I could not conceive them apart. When the foundation proved false, the whole structure came rattling about my ears. And then good old Carlyle came to the rescue; and partly from him, and partly from my own broodings, I made a little hut of my own, which has kept me snug ever since, and has even served to shelter a friend or two besides.

The first and main thing was to get it thoroughly soaked into one that the existence of a Creator and an indication of His attributes does in no way depend upon Jewish poets, nor upon human paper or printing ink. On the contrary, all such efforts to realise Him must only belittle Him, bringing the Infinite down to the narrow terms of human thought, at a time when that thought was in the main less spiritual than it is at present. Even the most material of modern minds would flinch at depicting the Deity as ordering wholesale executions, and hacking kings to pieces upon the horns of altars.

Then having prepared your mind for a higher (if perhaps a vaguer) idea of the Deity, proceed to study Him in His works, which cannot be counterfeited or manipulated. Nature is the true revelation of the Deity to man. The nearest green field is the inspired page from which you may read all that it is needful for you to know.

I confess that I have never been able to understand the position of the atheist. In fact, I have come to disbelieve in his existence, and to look upon the word as a mere term of theological reproach. It may represent a temporary condition, a passing mental phase, a defiant reaction against an anthropomorphic ideal; but I cannot conceive that any man can continue to survey Nature and to deny that there are laws at work which display intelligence and power. The very existence of a world carries with it the proof of a world-maker, as the table guarantees the pre-existence of the carpenter. Granting this, one may form what conception one will of that Maker, but one cannot be an atheist.

Wisdom and power and means directed to an end run all through the scheme of Nature. What proof do we want, then, from a book? If the man who observes the myriad stars, and considers that they and their innumerable satellites move in their serene dignity through the heavens, each swinging clear of the other’s orbit — if, I say, the man who sees this cannot realise the Creator’s attributes without the help of the book of Job, then his view of things is beyond my understanding. Nor is it only in the large things that we see the ever present solicitude of some intelligent force. Nothing is too tiny for that fostering care. We see the minute proboscis of the insect carefully adjusted to fit into the calyx of the flower, the most microscopic hair and gland each with its definite purposeful function to perform. What matter whether these came by special creation or by evolution? We know as a matter of fact that they came by evolution, but that only defines the law. It does not explain it.

But if this power has cared for the bee so as to furnish it with its honey bag and its collecting forceps, and for the lowly seed so as to have a thousand devices by which it reaches a congenial soil, then is it conceivable that we, the highest product of all, are overlooked? It is NOT conceivable. The idea is inconsistent with the scheme of creation as we see it. I say again that no faith is needed to attain the certainty of a most watchful Providence.

And with this certainty surely we have all that is necessary for an elemental religion. Come what may after death, our duties lie clearly defined before us in this life; and the ethical standard of all creeds agrees so far that there is not likely to be any difference of opinion as to that. The last reformation simplified Catholicism. The coming one will simplify Protestantism. And when the world is ripe for it another will come and simplify that. The ever improving brain will give us an ever broadening creed. Is it not glorious to think that evolution is still living and acting — that if we have an anthropoid ape as an ancestor, we may have archangels for our posterity?

Well, I really never intended to inflict all this upon you, Bertie. I thought I could have made my position clear in a page or so. But you can see how one point has brought up another. Even now I am leaving so much unsaid. I can see with such certainty exactly what you will say. “If you deduce a good Providence from the good things in nature, what do you make of the evil?” That’s what you will say. Suffice it that I am inclined to deny the existence of evil. Not another word will I say upon the subject; but if you come back to it yourself, then be it on your own head.

You remember that when I wrote last I had just returned from visiting the Cullingworths at Avonmouth, and that he had promised to let me know what steps he took in appeasing his creditors. As I expected, I have not had one word from him since. But in a roundabout way I did get some news as to what happened. From this account, which was second-hand, and may have been exaggerated, Cullingworth did exactly what I had recommended, and calling all his creditors together he made them a long statement as to his position. The good people were so touched by the picture that he drew of a worthy man fighting against adversity that several of them wept, and there was not only complete unanimity as to letting their bills stand over, but even some talk of a collection then and there to help Cullingworth on his way. He has, I understand, left Avonmouth, but no one has any idea what has become of him. It is generally supposed that he has gone to England. He is a strange fellow, but I wish him luck wherever he goes.

When I came back I settled down once more to the routine of my father’s practice, holding on there until something may turn up. And for six months I have had to wait; a weary six months they have been. You see I cannot ask my father for money — or, at least, I cannot bring myself to take an unnecessary penny of his money — for I know how hard a fight it is with him to keep the roof over our heads and pay for the modest little horse and trap which are as necessary to his trade as a goose is to a tailor. Foul fare the grasping taxman who wrings a couple of guineas from us on the plea that it is a luxury! We can just hold on, and I would not have him a pound the poorer for me. But you can understand, Bertie, that it is humiliating for a man of my age to have to go about without any money in my pocket. It affects me in so many petty ways. A poor man may do me a kindness, and I have to seem mean in his eyes. I may want a flower for a girl, and must be content to appear ungallant. I don’t know why I should be ashamed of this, since it is no fault of mine, and I hope that I don’t show it to any one else that I AM ashamed of it; but to you, my dear Bertie, I don’t mind confessing that it hurts my self-respect terribly.

I have often wondered why some of those writing fellows don’t try their hands at drawing the inner life of a young man from about the age of puberty until he begins to find his feet a little. Men are very fond of analysing the feelings of their heroines, which they cannot possibly know anything about, while they have little to say of the inner development of their heroes, which is an experience which they have themselves undergone. I should like to try it myself, but it would need blending with fiction, and I never had a spark of imagination. But I have a vivid recollection of what I went through myself. At the time I thought (as everybody thinks) that it was a unique experience; but since I have heard the confidences of my father’s patients I am convinced that it is the common lot. The shrinking, horrible shyness, alternating with occasional absurd fits of audacity which represent the reaction against it, the longing for close friendship, the agonies over imaginary slights, the extraordinary sexual doubts, the deadly fears caused by non-existent diseases, the vague emotion produced by all women, and the half-frightened thrill by particular ones, the aggressiveness caused by fear of being afraid, the sudden blacknesses, the profound self-distrust — I dare bet that you have felt every one of them, Bertie, just as I have, and that the first lad of eighteen whom you see out of your window is suffering from them now.

This is all a digression, however, from the fact that I have been six months at home and am weary of it, and pleased at the new development of which I shall have to tell you. The practice here, although unremunerative, is very busy with its three-and-sixpenny visits and guinea confinements, so that both the governor and I have had plenty to do. You know how I admire him, and yet I fear there is little intellectual sympathy between us. He appears to think that those opinions of mine upon religion and politics which come hot from my inmost soul have been assumed either out of indifference or bravado. So I have ceased to talk on vital subjects with him, and, though we affect to ignore it, we both know that there is a barrier there. Now, with my mother — ah, but my mother must have a paragraph to herself.

You met her, Bertie! You must remember her sweet face, her sensitive mouth, her peering, short-sighted eyes, her general suggestion of a plump little hen, who is still on the alert about her chickens. But you cannot realise all that she is to me in our domestic life. Those helpful fingers! That sympathetic brain! Ever since I can remember her she has been the quaintest mixture of the housewife and the woman of letters, with the highbred spirited lady as a basis for either character. Always a lady, whether she was bargaining with the butcher, or breaking in a skittish charwoman, or stirring the porridge, which I can see her doing with the porridge-stick in one hand, and the other holding her Revue des deux Mondes within two inches of her dear nose. That was always her favourite reading, and I can never think of her without the association of its browny-yellow cover.

She is a very well-read woman is the mother; she keeps up to date in French literature as well as in English, and can talk by the hour about the Goncourts, and Flaubert, and Gautier. Yet she is always hard at work; and how she imbibes all her knowledge is a mystery. She reads when she knits, she reads when she scrubs, she even reads when she feeds her babies. We have a little joke against her, that at an interesting passage she deposited a spoonful of rusk and milk into my little sister’s car-hole, the child having turned her head at the critical instant. Her hands are worn with work, and yet where is the idle woman who has read as much?

Then, there is her family pride. That is a very vital portion of the mother. You know how little I think of such things. If the Esquire were to be snipped once and for ever from the tail of my name I should be the lighter for it. But, ma foi! — to use her own favourite expletive — it would not do to say this to her. On the Packenham side (she is a Packenham) the family can boast of some fairly good men — I mean on the direct line — but when we get on the side branches there is not a monarch upon earth who does not roost on that huge family tree. Not once, nor twice, but thrice did the Plantagenets intermarry with us, the Dukes of Brittany courted our alliance, and the Percies of Northumberland intertwined themselves with our whole illustrious record. So in my boyhood she would expound the matter, with hearthbrush in one hand and a glove full of cinders in the other, while I would sit swinging my knickerbockered legs, swelling with pride until my waistcoat was as tight as a sausage skin, as I contemplated the gulf which separated me from all other little boys who swang their legs upon tables. To this day if I chance to do anything of which she strongly approves, the dear heart can say no more than that I am a thorough Packenham; while if I fall away from the straight path, she says with a sigh that there are points in which I take after the Munros.

She is broad-minded and intensely practical in her ordinary moods, though open to attacks of romance. I can recollect her coming to see me at a junction through which my train passed, with a six months' absence on either side of the incident. We had five minutes' conversation, my head out of the carriage window. “Wear flannel next your skin, my dear boy, and never believe in eternal punishment,” was her last item of advice as we rolled out of the station. Then to finish her portrait I need not tell you, who have seen her, that she is young-looking and comely to be the mother of about thirty-five feet of humanity. She was in the railway carriage and I on the platform the other day. “Your husband had better get in or we'll go without him,” said the guard. As we went off, the mother was fumbling furiously in her pocket, and I know that she was looking for a shilling.

Ah! what a gossip I have been! And all to lead up to the one sentence that I could not have stayed at home this six months if it had not been for the company and the sympathy of my mother.

Well, now I want to tell you about the scrape that I got myself into. I suppose that I ought to pull a long face over it, but for the life of me I can't help laughing. I have you almost up to date in my history now, for what I am going to tell you happened only last week. I must mention no names here even to you; for the curse of Ernulphus, which includes eight and forty minor imprecations, be upon the head of the man who kisses and tells.

You must know, then, that within the boundaries of this city there are two ladies, a mother and a daughter, whom I shall call Mrs. and Miss Laura Andrews. They are patients of the governor's, and have become to some extent friends of the family. Madame is Welsh, charming in appearance, dignified in her manners, and High Church in her convictions. The daughter is rather taller than the mother, but otherwise they are strikingly alike. The mother is thirty-six and the daughter eighteen. Both are exceedingly charming. Had I to choose between them, I think, entre nous, that the mother would have attracted me most, for I am thoroughly of Balzac’s opinion as to the woman of thirty. However, fate was to will it otherwise.

It was the coming home from a dance which first brought Laura and me together. You know how easily and suddenly these things happen, beginning in playful teasing and ending in something a little warmer than friendship. You squeeze the slender arm which is passed through yours, you venture to take the little gloved hand, you say good night at absurd length in the shadow of the door. It is innocent and very interesting, love trying his wings in a first little flutter. He will keep his sustained flight later on, the better for the practice. There was never any question of engagements between us, nor any suggestion of harm. She knew that I was a poor devil with neither means nor prospects, and I knew that her mother’s will was her law, and that her course was already marked out for her. However, we exchanged our little confidences, and met occasionally by appointment, and tried to make our lives brighter without darkening those of any one else. I can see you shake your head here and growl, like the comfortable married man that you are, that such relations are very dangerous. So they are, my boy: but neither of us cared, she out of innocence and I out of recklessness, for from the beginning all the fault in the matter was mine.

Well, matters were in this state when one day last week a note came up to the Dad saying that Mrs. Andrews’ servant was ill, and would he come at once. The old man had a touch of gout, so I donned my professional coat and sallied forth, thinking that perhaps I might combine pleasure with business, and have a few words with Laura. Sure enough, as I passed up the gravel drive which curves round to the door, I glanced through the drawing-room window, and saw her sitting painting, with her back to the light. It was clear that she had not heard me. The hall door was ajar, and when I pushed it open, no one was in the hall. A sudden fit of roguishness came over me. I pushed the drawing-room door very slowly wider, crept in on tiptoe, stole quietly across, and bending down, I kissed the artist upon the nape of her neck. She turned round with a squeal, and it was the mother!

I don’t know whether you have ever been in a tighter corner than that, Bertie. It was quite tight enough for me. I remember that I smiled as I stole across the carpet on that insane venture. I did not smile again that evening. It makes me hot now when I think of it.

Well, I made the most dreadful fool of myself. At first, the good lady who (as I think I told you) is very dignified and rather reserved, could not believe her senses. Then, as the full force of my enormity came upon her she reared herself up until she seemed the tallest and the coldest woman I had ever seen. It was an interview with a refrigerator. She asked me what I had ever observed in her conduct which had encouraged me to subject her to such an outrage. I saw, of course, that any excuses upon my part would put her on the right track and give poor Laura away; so I stood with my hair bristling and my top hat in my hand, presenting, I am sure, a most extraordinary figure. Indeed, she looked rather funny herself, with her palette in one hand, her brush in the other, and the blank astonishment on her face. I stammered out something about hoping that she did not mind, which made her more angry than ever. “The only possible excuse for your conduct, sir, is that you are under the influence of drink,” said she. “I need not say that we do not require the services of a medical man in that condition.” I did not try to disabuse her of the idea, for really I could see no better explanation; so I beat a retreat in a very demoralised condition. She wrote a letter to my father about it in the evening, and the old man was very angry indeed. As to the mother, she is as staunch as steel, and quite prepared to prove that poor Mrs. A. was a very deep designing person, who had laid a trap for innocent Johnnie. So there has been a grand row; and not a soul upon earth has the least idea of what it all means, except only yourself as you read this letter.

You can imagine that this has not contributed to make life here more pleasant, for my father cannot bring himself to forgive me. Of course, I don’t wonder at his anger. I should be just the same myself. It does look like a shocking breach of professional honour, and a sad disregard of his interests. If he knew the truth he would see that it was nothing worse than a silly ill-timed boyish joke. However, he never shall know the truth.

And now there is some chance of my getting something to do. We had a letter to-night from Christie & Howden, the writers to the Signet, saying that they desire an interview with me, in view of a possible appointment. We can’t imagine what it means, but I am full of hopes. I go to-morrow morning to see them, and I shall let you know the result.

Good-bye, my dear Bertie! Your life flows in a steady stream, and mine in a broken torrent. Yet I would have every detail of what happens to you.

IV. HOME, 1st December, 1881.

I may be doing you an injustice, Bertie, but it seemed to me in your last that there were indications that the free expression of my religious views had been distasteful to you. That you should disagree with me I am prepared for; but that you should object to free and honest discussion of those subjects which above all others men should be honest over, would, I confess, be a disappointment. The Freethinker is placed at this disadvantage in ordinary society, that whereas it would be considered very bad taste upon his part to obtrude his unorthodox opinion, no such consideration hampers those with whom he disagrees. There was a time when it took a brave man to be a Christian. Now it takes a brave man not to be. But if we are to wear a gag, and hide our thoughts when writing in confidence to our most intimate —— no, but I won't believe it. You and I have put up too many thoughts together and chased them where-ever{sic} they would double, Bertie; so just write to me like a good fellow, and tell me that I am an ass. Until I have that comforting assurance, I shall place a quarantine upon everything which could conceivably be offensive to you.

Does not lunacy strike you, Bertie, as being a very eerie thing? It is a disease of the soul. To think that you may have a man of noble mind, full of every lofty aspiration, and that a gross physical cause, such as the fall of a spicule of bone from the inner table of his skull on to the surface of the membrane which covers his brain, may have the ultimate effect of turning him into an obscene creature with every bestial attribute! That a man's individuality should swing round from pole to pole, and yet that one life should contain these two contradictory personalities — is it not a wondrous thing?

I ask myself, where is the man, the very, very inmost essence of the man? See how much you may subtract from him without touching it. It does not lie in the limbs which serve him as tools, nor in the apparatus by which he is to digest, nor in that by which he is to inhale oxygen. All these are mere accessories, the slaves of the lord within. Where, then, is he? He does not lie in the features which are to express his emotions, nor in the eyes and ears which can be dispensed with by the blind and deaf. Nor is he in the bony framework which is the rack over which nature hangs her veil of flesh. In none of these things lies the essence of the man. And now what is left? An arched whitish putty-like mass, some fifty odd ounces in weight, with a number of white filaments hanging down from it, looking not unlike the medusae which float in our summer seas. But these filaments only serve to conduct nerve force to muscles and to organs which serve secondary purposes. They may themselves therefore be disregarded. Nor can we stop here in our elimination. This central mass of nervous matter may be pared down on all sides before we seem to get at the very seat of the soul. Suicides have shot away the front lobes of the brain, and have lived to repent it. Surgeons have cut down upon it and have removed sections. Much of it is merely for the purpose of furnishing the springs of motion, and much for the reception of impressions. All this may be put aside as we search for the physical seat of what we call the soul — the spiritual part of the man. And what is left then? A little blob of matter, a handful of nervous dough, a few ounces of tissue, but there — somewhere there — lurks that impalpable seed, to which the rest of our frame is but the pod. The old philosophers who put the soul in the pineal gland were not right, but after all they were uncommonly near the mark.

You'll find my physiology even worse than my theology, Bertie. I have a way of telling stories backwards to you, which is natural enough when you consider that I always sit down to write under the influence of the last impressions which have come upon me. All this talk about the soul and the brain arises simply from the fact that I have been spending the last few weeks with a lunatic. And how it came about I will tell you as clearly as I can.

You remember that in my last I explained to you how restive I had been getting at home, and how my idiotic mistake had annoyed my father and had made my position here very uncomfortable. Then I mentioned, I think, that I had received a letter from Christie & Howden, the lawyers. Well, I brushed up my Sunday hat, and my mother stood on a chair and landed me twice on the ear with a clothes brush, under the impression that she was making the collar of my overcoat look more presentable. With which accolade out I sallied into the world, the dear soul standing on the steps, peering after me and waving me success.

Well, I was in considerable trepidation when I reached the office, for I am a much more nervous person than any of my friends will ever credit me with being. However, I was shown in at once to Mr. James Christie, a wiry, sharp, thin-lipped kind of man, with an abrupt manner, and that sort of Scotch precision of speech which gives the impression of clearness of thought behind it.

"I understand from Professor Maxwell that you have been looking about for an opening, Mr. Munro," said he.

Maxwell had said that he would give me a hand if he could; but you remember that he had a reputation for giving such promises rather easily. I speak of a man as I find him, and to me he has been an excellent friend.

"I should be very happy to hear of any opening," said I.

"Of your medical qualifications there is no need to speak," he went on, running his eyes all over me in the most questioning way. "Your Bachelorship of Medicine will answer for that. But Professor Maxwell thought you peculiarly fitted for this vacancy for physical reasons. May I ask you what your weight is?"

"Fourteen stone."

"And you stand, I should judge, about six feet high?"

"Precisely."

"Accustomed too, as I gather, to muscular exercise of every kind. Well, there can be no question that you are the very man for the post, and I shall be very happy to recommend you to Lord Saltire."

"You forget," said I, "that I have not yet heard what the position is, or the terms which you offer."

He began to laugh at that. "It was a little precipitate on my part," said he; "but I do not think that we are likely to quarrel as to position or terms. You may have heard perhaps of the sad misfortune of our client, Lord Saltire? Not? To put it briefly then, his son, the Hon. James Derwent, the heir to the estates and the only child, was struck down by the sun while fishing without his hat last July. His mind has never recovered from the shock, and he has been ever since in a chronic state of moody sullenness which breaks out every now and then into violent mania. His father will not allow him to be removed from Lochtully Castle, and it is his desire that a medical man should stay there in constant attendance upon his son. Your physical strength would of course be very useful in restraining those violent attacks of which I have spoken. The remuneration will be twelve pounds a month, and you would be required to take over your duties to-morrow."

I walked home, my dear Bertie, with a bounding heart, and the pavement like cotton wool under my feet. I found just eightpence in my pocket, and I spent the whole of it on a really good cigar with which to celebrate the occasion. Old Cullingworth has always had a very high opinion of lunatics for beginners. “Get a lunatic, my boy! Get a lunatic!” he used to say. Then it was not only the situation, but the fine connection that it opened up. I seemed to see exactly what would happen. There would be illness in the family, — Lord Saltire himself perhaps, or his wife. There would be no time to send for advice. I would be consulted. I would gain their confidence and become their family attendant. They would recommend me to their wealthy friends. It was all as clear as possible. I was debating before I reached home whether it would be worth my while to give up a lucrative country practice in order to take the Professorship which might be offered me.

My father took the news philosophically enough, with some rather sardonic remark about my patient and me being well qualified to keep each other company. But to my mother it was a flash of joy, followed by a thunderclap of consternation. I had only three under-shirts, the best of my linen had gone to Belfast to be refronted and recuffed, the night-gowns were not marked yet — there were a dozen of those domestic difficulties of which the mere male never thinks. A dreadful vision of Lady Saltire looking over my things and finding the heel out of one of my socks obsessed my mother. Out we trudged together, and before evening her soul was at rest, and I had mortgaged in advance my first month’s salary. She was great, as we walked home, upon the grand people into whose service I was to enter. “As a matter of fact, my dear,” said she, “they are in a sense relations of yours. You are very closely allied to the Percies, and the Saltires have Percy blood in them also. They are only a cadet branch, and you are close upon the main line; but still it is not for us to deny the connection.” She brought a cold sweat out upon me by suggesting that she should make things easy by writing to Lord Saltire and explaining our respective positions. Several times during the evening I heard her murmur complacently that they were only the cadet branch.

Am I not the slowest of story-tellers? But you encourage me to it by your sympathetic interest in details. However, I shall move along a little faster now. Next morning I was off to Lochtully, which, as you know, is in the north of Perthshire. It stands three miles from the station, a great gray pinnacled house, with two towers cocking out above the fir woods, like a hare’s ears from a tussock of grass. As we drove up to the door I felt pretty solemn — not at all as the main line should do when it condescends to visit the cadet branch. Into the hall as I entered came a grave learned-looking man, with whom in my nervousness I was about to shake hands cordially. Fortunately he forestalled the impending embrace by explaining that he was the butler. He showed me into a small study, where everything stank of varnish and morocco leather, there to await the great man. He proved when he came to be a much less formidable figure than his retainer — indeed, I felt thoroughly at my ease with him from the moment he opened his mouth. He is grizzled, red-faced, sharp-featured, with a prying and yet benevolent expression, very human and just a trifle vulgar. His wife, however, to whom I was afterwards introduced, is a most depressing person, — pale, cold, hatchet-faced, with drooping eyelids and very prominent blue veins at her temples. She froze me up again just as I was budding out under the influence of her husband. However, the thing that interested me most of all was to see my patient, to whose room I was taken by Lord Saltire after we had had a cup of tea.

The room was a large bare one, at the end of a long corridor. Near the door was seated a footman, placed there to fill up the gap between two doctors, and looking considerably relieved at my advent. Over by the window (which was furnished with a wooden guard, like that of a nursery) sat a tall, yellow-haired, yellow-bearded, young man, who raised a pair of startled blue eyes as we entered. He was turning over the pages of a bound copy of the Illustrated London News.

“James,” said Lord Saltire, “this is Dr. Stark Munro, who has come to look after you.”

My patient mumbled something in his beard, which seemed to me suspiciously like “Damn Dr. Stark Munro!” The peer evidently thought the same, for he led me aside by the elbow.

“I don’t know whether you have been told that James is a little rough in his ways at present,” said he; “his whole nature has deteriorated very much since this calamity came upon him. You must not be offended by anything he may say or do.”

“Not in the least,” said I.

“There is a taint of this sort upon my wife’s side,” I whispered the little lord; “her uncle’s symptoms were identical. Dr. Peterson says that the sunstroke was only the determining cause. The predisposition was already there. I may tell you that the footman will always be in the next room, so that you can call him if you need his assistance."

Well, it ended by lord and lacquey moving off, and leaving me with my patient. I thought that I should lose no time in establishing a kindly relation with him, so I drew a chair over to his sofa and began to ask him a few questions about his health and habits. Not a word could I get out of him in reply. He sat as sullen as a mule, with a kind of sneer about his handsome face, which showed me very well that he had heard everything. I tried this and tried that, but not a syllable could I get from him; so at last I turned from him and began to look over some illustrated papers on the table. He doesn't read, it seems, and will do nothing but look at pictures. Well, I was sitting like this with my back half turned, when you can imagine my surprise to feel something plucking gently at me, and to see a great brown hand trying to slip its way into my coat pocket. I caught at the wrist and turned swiftly round, but too late to prevent my handkerchief being whisked out and concealed behind the Hon. James Derwent, who sat grinning at me like a mischievous monkey.

"Come, I may want that," said I, trying to treat the matter as a joke.

He used some language which was more scriptural than religious. I saw that he did not mean giving it up, but I was determined not to let him get the upper hand over me. I grabbed for the handkerchief; and he, with a snarl, caught my hand in both of his. He had a powerful grip, but I managed to get his wrist and to give it a wrench round, until, with a howl, he dropped my property.

"What fun," said I, pretending to laugh. "Let us try again. Now, you take it up, and see if I can get it again."

But he had had enough of that game. Yet he appeared to be better humoured than before the incident, and I got a few short answers to the questions which I put to him.

And here comes in the text which started me preaching about lunacy at the beginning of this letter. WHAT a marvellous thing it is! This man, from all I can learn of him, has suddenly swung clean over from one extreme of character to the other. Every plus has in an instant become a minus. He's another man, but in the same case. I am told that he used to be (only a few months ago, mind you) most fastidious in dress and speech. Now he is a foul-tongued rough! He had a nice taste in literature. Now he stares at you if you speak of Shakespeare. Queerest of all, he used to be a very high-and-dry Tory in his opinions. He is fond now of airing the most democratic views, and in a needlessly offensive way. When I did get on terms with him at last, I found that there was nothing on which he could be drawn on to talk so soon as on politics. In substance, I am bound to say that I think his new views are probably saner than his old ones, but the insanity lies in his sudden reasonless change and in his violent blurts of speech.

It was some weeks, however, before I gained his confidence, so far as to be able to hold a real conversation with him. For a long time he was very sullen and suspicious, resenting the constant watch which I kept upon him. This could not be relaxed, for he was full of the most apish tricks. One day he got hold of my tobacco pouch, and stuffed two ounces of my tobacco into the long barrel of an Eastern gun which hangs on the wall. He jammed it all down with the ramrod, and I was never able to get it up again. Another time he threw an earthenware spittoon through the window, and would have sent the clock after it had I not prevented him. Every day I took him for a two hours' constitutional, save when it rained, and then we walked religiously for the same space up and down the room. Heh! but it was a deadly, dreary, kind of life.

I was supposed to have my eye upon him all day, with a two-hour interval every afternoon and an evening to myself upon Fridays. But then what was the use of an evening to myself when there was no town near, and I had no friends whom I could visit? I did a fair amount of reading, for Lord Saltire let me have the run of his library. Gibbon gave me a couple of enchanting weeks. You know the effect that he produces. You seem to be serenely floating upon a cloud, and looking down on all these pigmy armies and navies, with a wise Mentor ever at your side to whisper to you the inner meaning of all that majestic panorama.

Now and again young Derwent introduced some excitement into my dull life. On one occasion when we were walking in the grounds, he suddenly snatched up a spade from a grass-plot, and rushed at an inoffensive under-gardener. The man ran screaming for his life, with my patient cursing at his very heels, and me within a few paces of him. When I at last laid my hand on his collar, he threw down his weapon and burst into shrieks of laughter. It was only mischief and not ferocity; but when that under-gardener saw us coming after that he was off with a face like a cream cheese. At night the attendant slept in a camp-bed at the foot of the patient's, and my room was next door, so that I could be called if necessary. No, it was not a very exhilarating life!

We used to go down to family meals when there were no visitors; and there we made a curious quartette: Jimmy (as he wished me to call him) glum and silent; I with the tail of my eye always twisted round to him; Lady Saltire with her condescending eyelids and her blue veins; and the good-natured peer, fussy and genial, but always rather subdued in the presence of his wife. She looked as if a glass of good wine would do her good, and he as if he would be the better for abstinence; and so, in accordance with the usual lopsidedness of life, he drank freely, and she took nothing but lime-juice and water. You cannot imagine a more ignorant, intolerant, narrow-minded woman than she. If she had only been content to be silent and hidden that small brain of hers, it would not have mattered; but there was no end to her bitter and exasperating clacking. What was she after all but a thin pipe for conveying disease from one generation to another? She was bounded by insanity upon the north and upon the south. I resolutely set myself to avoid all argument with her; but she knew, with her woman's instinct, that we were as far apart as the poles, and took a pleasure in waving the red flag before me. One day she was waxing eloquent as to the crime of a minister of an Episcopal church performing any service in a Presbyterian chapel. Some neighbouring minister had done it, it seems; and if he had been marked down in a pot house she could not have spoken with greater loathing. I suppose that my eyes were less under control than my tongue, for she suddenly turned upon me with:

"I see that you don't agree with me, Dr. Munro."

I replied quietly that I did not, and tried to change the conversation; but she was not to be shaken off.

"Why not, may I ask?"

I explained that in my opinion the tendency of the age was to break down those ridiculous doctrinal points which are so useless, and which have for so long set people by the ears. I added that I hoped the time was soon coming when good men of all creeds would throw this lumber overboard and join hands together.

She half rose, almost speechless with indignation.

"I presume," said she, "that you are one of those people who would separate the Church from the State?"

"Most certainly," I answered.

She stood erect in a kind of cold fury, and swept out of the room. Jimmy began to chuckle, and his father looked perplexed.

“I am sorry that my opinions are offensive to Lady Saltire,” I remarked.

“Yes, yes; it’s a pity; a pity,” said he “well, well, we must say what we think; but it’s a pity you think it — a very great pity.”

I quite expected to get my dismissal over this business, and indeed, indirectly I may say that I did so. From that day Lady Saltire was as rude to me as she could be, and never lost an opportunity of making attacks upon what she imagined to be my opinions. Of these I never took the slightest notice; but at last on an evil day she went for me point-blank, so that there was no getting away from her. It was just at the end of lunch, when the footman had left the room. She had been talking about Lord Saltire’s going up to London to vote upon some question in the House of Lords.

“Perhaps, Dr. Munro,” said she, turning acidly upon me, “that is also an institution which has not been fortunate enough to win your approval.”

“It is a question, Lady Saltire, which I should much prefer not to discuss,” I answered.

“Oh, you might just as well have the courage of your convictions,” said she. “Since you desire to despoil the National Church, it is natural enough that you should wish also to break up the Constitution. I have heard that an atheist is always a red republican.”

Lord Saltire rose, wishing, I have no doubt, to put an end to the conversation. Jimmy and I rose also; and suddenly I saw that instead of moving towards the door he was going to his mother. Knowing his little tricks, I passed my hand under his arm, and tried to steer him away. She noticed it, however, and interfered.

“Did you wish to speak to me, James?”

“I want to whisper in your ear, mother.”

“Pray don’t excite yourself, sir,” said I, again attempting to detain him. Lady Saltire arched her aristocratic eyebrows.

“I think, Dr. Munro, that you push your authority rather far when you venture to interfere between a mother and her son,” said she. “What was it, my poor dear boy?”

Jimmy bent down and whispered something in her ear. The blood rushed into her pale face, and she sprang from him as if he had struck her. Jimmy began to snigger.

"This is your doing, Dr. Munro," she cried furiously. "You have corrupted my son's mind, and encouraged him to insult his mother."

"My dear! My dear!" said her husband soothingly, and I quietly led the recalcitrant Jimmy upstairs. I asked him what it was that he had said to his mother, but got only chuckles in reply.

I had a presentiment that I should hear more of the matter; and I was not wrong. Lord Saltire called me into his study in the evening.

"The fact is, doctor," said he, "that Lady Saltire has been extremely annoyed and grieved about what occurred at lunch to-day. Of course, you can imagine that such an expression coming from her own son, shocked her more than I can tell."

"I assure you, Lord Saltire," said I, "that I have no idea at all what passed between Lady Saltire and my patient."

"Well," said he, "without going into details, I may say that what he whispered was a blasphemous wish, most coarsely expressed, as to the future of that Upper House to which I have the honor to belong."

"I am very sorry," said I, "and I assure you that I have never encouraged him in his extreme political views, which seem to me to be symptoms of his disease."

"I am quite convinced that what you say is true," he answered; "but Lady Saltire is unhappily of the opinion that you have instilled these ideas into him. You know that it is a little difficult sometimes to reason with a lady. However, I have no doubt that all may be smoothed over if you would see Lady Saltire and assure her that she has misunderstood your views upon this point, and that you are personally a supporter of a Hereditary Chamber."

It put me in a tight corner, Bertie; but my mind was instantly made up. From the first word I had read my dismissal in every uneasy glance of his little eyes.

"I am afraid," said I, "that that is rather further than I am prepared to go. I think that since there has been for some weeks a certain friction between Lady Saltire and myself, it would perhaps be as well that I should resign the post which I hold in your household. I shall be happy, however, to remain here until you have found some one to take over my duties."

"Well, I am sorry it has come to this, and yet it may be that you are right," said he, with an expression of relief; "as to James, there need be no difficulty about that, for Dr. Patterson could come in tomorrow morning."

“Then to-morrow morning let it be,” I answered.

“Very good, Dr. Munro; I will see that you have your cheque before you go.”

So there was the end of all my fine dreams about aristocratic practices and wonderful introductions! I believe the only person in the whole house who regretted me was Jimmy, who was quite downcast at the news. His grief, however, did not prevent him from brushing my new top-hat the wrong way on the morning that I left. I did not notice it until I reached the station, and a most undignified object I must have looked when I took my departure.

So ends the history of a failure. I am, as you know, inclined to fatalism, and do not believe that such a thing as chance exists; so I am bound to think that this experience was given to me for some end. It was a preliminary canter for the big race, perhaps. My mother was disappointed, but tried to show it as little as possible. My father was a little sardonic over the matter. I fear that the gap between us widens. By the way, an extraordinary card arrived from Cullingworth during my absence. “You are my man,” said he; “mind that I am to have you when I want you.” There was no date and no address, but the postmark was Bradfield in the north of England. Does it mean nothing? Or may it mean everything? We must wait and see.

Good-bye, old man. Let me hear equally fully about your own affairs. How did the Rattray business go off?

V. MERTON ON THE MOORS, 5th March, 1882.

I was so delighted, my dear chap, to have your assurance that nothing that I have said or could say upon the subject of religion could offend you. It is difficult to tell you how pleased and relieved I was at your cordial letter. I have no one to whom I can talk upon such matters. I am all driven inwards, and thought turns sour when one lets it stagnate like that. It is a grand thing to be able to tell it all to a sympathetic listener — and the more so perhaps when he looks at it all from another standpoint. It steadies and sobers one.

Those whom I love best are those who have least sympathy with my struggles. They talk about having faith, as if it could be done by an act of volition. They might as well tell me to have black hair instead of red. I might simulate it perhaps by refusing to use my reason at all in religious matters. But I will never be traitor to the highest thing that God has given me. I WILL use it. It is more moral to use it and go wrong, than to forego it and be right. It is only a little foot-rule, and I have to measure Mount Everest with it; but it's all I have, and I'll never give it up while there's breath between my lips.

With all respect to you, Bertie, it is very easy to be orthodox. A man who wanted mental peace and material advancement in this world would certainly choose to be so. As Smiles says—"A dead fish can float with the stream, but it takes a man to swim against it." What could be more noble than the start and the starter of Christianity? How beautiful the upward struggle of an idea, like some sweet flower blossoming out amongst rubble and cinders! But, alas! to say that this idea was a final idea! That this scheme of thought was above the reason! That this gentle philosopher was that supreme intelligence to which we cannot even imagine a personality without irreverence! — all this will come to rank with the strangest delusions of mankind. And then how clouded has become that fine daybreak of Christianity! Its representatives have risen from the manger to the palace, from the fishing smack to the House of Lords. Nor is that other old potentate in the Vatican, with his art treasures, his guards, and his cellars of wine in a more logical position. They are all good and talented men, and in the market of brains are worth perhaps as much as they get. But how can they bring themselves to pose as the representatives of a creed, which, as they themselves expound it, is based upon humility, poverty, and self-denial? Not one of them who would not quote with approval the parable of the Wedding Guest. But try putting one of them out of their due precedence at the next Court reception. It happened some little time ago with a Cardinal, and England rang with his protests. How blind not to see how they would spring at one leap into the real first place if they would but resolutely claim the last as the special badge of their master!

What can we know? What are we all? Poor silly half-brained things peering out at the infinite, with the aspirations of angels and the instincts of beasts. But surely all will be well with us. If not, then He who made us is evil, which is not to be thought. Surely, then, all must go very well with us!

I feel ashamed when I read this over. My mind fills in all the trains of thought of which you have the rude ends peeping out from this tangle. Make what you can of it, dear Bertie, and believe that it all comes from my innermost heart. Above all may I be kept from becoming a partisan, and tempering with truth in order to sustain a case. Let me but get a hand on her skirt, and she may drag me where she will, if she will but turn her face from time to time that I may know her.

You’ll see from the address of this letter, Bertie, that I have left Scotland and am in Yorkshire. I have been here three months, and am now on the eve of leaving under the strangest circumstances and with the queerest prospects. Good old Cullingworth has turned out a trump, as I always knew he would. But, as usual, I am beginning at the wrong end, so here goes to give you an idea of what has been happening.

I told you in my last about my lunacy adventure and my ignominious return from Lochtully Castle. When I had settled for the flannel vests which my mother had ordered so lavishly I had only five pounds left out of my pay. With this, as it was the first money that I had ever earned im{sic} my life, I bought her a gold bangle, so behold me reduced at once to my usual empty pocketed condition. Well, it was something just to feel that I HAD earned money. It gave me an assurance that I might again.

I had not been at home more than a few days when my father called me into the study after breakfast one morning and spoke very seriously as to our financial position. He began the interview by unbuttoning his waistcoat and asking me to listen at his fifth intercostal space, two inches from the left sternal line. I did so, and was shocked to hear a well-marked mitral regurgitant murmur.

"It is of old standing," said he, "but of late I have had a puffiness about the ankles and some renal symptoms which show me that it is beginning to tell."

I tried to express my grief and sympathy, but he cut me short with some asperity.

"The point is," said he, "that no insurance office would accept my life, and that I have been unable, owing to competition and increased expenses, to lay anything by. If I die soon (which, between ourselves, is by no means improbable), I must leave to your care your mother and the children. My practice is so entirely a personal one that I cannot hope to be able to hand over to you enough to afford a living."

I thought of Cullingworth's advice about going where you are least known. "I think," said I, "that, my chances would be better away from here."

"Then you must lose no time in establishing yourself," said he. "Your position would be one of great responsibility if anything were to happen to me just now. I had hoped that you had found an excellent opening with the Saltires; but I fear that you can hardly expect to get on in the world, my boy, if you insult your employer's religious and political view at his own table."

It wasn't a time to argue, so I said nothing. My father took a copy of the Lancet out of his desk, and turned up an advertisement which he had marked with a blue pencil. "Read this!" said he.

I've got it before me as I write. It runs thus: Qualified Assistant. Wanted at once in a large country and colliery practice. Thorough knowledge of obstetrics and dispensing indispensable. Ride and drive. L70 a year. Apply Dr. Horton Merton on the Moors, Yorkshire."

"There might be an opening there," said he. "I know Horton, and I am convinced that I can get you the appointment. It would at least give you the opportunity of looking round and seeing whether there was any vacancy there. How do you think it would suit you?"

Of course I could only answer that I was willing to turn my hand to anything. But that interview has left a mark upon me — a heavy ever-present gloom away at the back of my soul, which I am conscious of even when the cause of it has for a moment gone out of my thoughts.

I had enough to make a man serious before, when I had to face the world without money or interest. But now to think of the mother and my sisters and little Paul all leaning upon me when I cannot stand myself — it is a nightmare. Could there be anything more dreadful in life than to have those whom you love looking to you for help and to be unable to give it? But perhaps it won't come to that. Perhaps my father may hold his own for years. Come what may, I am bound to think that all things are ordered for the best; though when the good is a furlong off, and we with our beetle eyes can only see three inches, it takes some confidence in general principles to pull us through.

Well, it was all fixed up; and down I came to Yorkshire. I wasn't in the best of spirits when I started, Bertie, but they went down and down as I neared my destination. How people can dwell in such places passes my comprehension. What can life offer them to make up for these mutilations of the face of Nature? No woods, little grass, spouting chimneys, slate-coloured streams, sloping mounds of coke and slag, topped by the great wheels and pumps of the mines. Cinder-strewn paths, black as though stained by the weary miners who toil along them, lead through the tarnished fields to the rows of smoke-stained cottages. How can any young unmarried man accept such a lot while there's an empty hammock in the navy, or a berth in a merchant forecastle? How many shillings a week is the breath of the ocean worth? It seems to me that if I were a poor man — well, upon my word, that "if" is rather funny when I think that many of the dwellers in those smoky cottages have twice my salary with half my expenses.

Well, as I said, my spirits sank lower and lower until they got down into the bulb, when on looking through the gathering gloom I saw "Merton" printed on the lamps of a dreary dismal station. I got out, and was standing beside my trunk and my hat-box, waiting for a porter, when up came a cheery-looking fellow and asked me whether I was Dr. Stark Munro. "I'm Horton," said he; and shook hands cordially.

In that melancholy place the sight of him was like a fire on a frosty night. He was gaily dressed in the first place, check trousers, white waistcoat, a flower in his button hole. But the look of the man was very much to my heart. He was ruddy checked and black eyed, with a jolly stout figure and an honest genial smile. I felt as we clinched hands in the foggy grimy station that I had met a man and a friend.

His carriage was waiting, and we drove out to his residence, The Myrtles, where I was speedily introduced both to his family and his practice. The former is small, and the latter enormous. The wife is dead; but her mother, Mrs. White, keeps house for him; and there are two dear little girls, about five and seven. Then there is an unqualified assistant, a young Irish student, who, with the three maids, the coachman, and the stable boy, make up the whole establishment. When I tell you that we give four horses quite as much as they can do, you will have an idea of the ground we cover.

The house, a large square brick one, standing in its own grounds, is built on a small hill in an oasis of green fields. Beyond this, however, on every side the veil of smoke hangs over the country, with the mine pumps and the chimneys bristling out of it. It would be a dreadful place for an idle man: but we are all so busy that we have hardly time to think whether there's a view or not.

Day and night we are at work; and yet the three months have been very pleasant ones to look back upon.

I'll give you an idea of what a day's work is like. We breakfast about nine o'clock, and immediately afterwards the morning patients begin to drop in. Many of them are very poor people, belonging to the colliery clubs, the principle of which is, that the members pay a little over a halfpenny a week all the year round, well or ill, in return for which they get medicine and attendance free. "Not much of a catch for the doctors," you would say, but it is astonishing what competition there is among them to get the appointment. You see it is a certainty for one thing, and it leads indirectly to other little extras. Besides, it amounts up surprisingly. I have no doubt that Horton has five or six hundred a year from his clubs alone. On the other hand, you can imagine that club patients, since they pay the same in any case, don't let their ailments go very far before they are round in the consulting room.

Well, then, by half-past nine we are in full blast. Horton is seeing the better patients in the consulting room, I am interviewing the poorer ones in the waiting room, and McCarthy, the Irishman, making up prescriptions as hard as he can tear. By the club rules, patients are bound to find their own bottles and corks.

They generally remember the bottle, but always forget the cork. "Ye must pay a pinny or ilse put your forefinger in," says McCarthy. They have an idea that all the strength of the medicine goes if the bottle is open, so they trot off with their fingers stuck in the necks. They have the most singular notions about medicines. "It's that strong that a spoon will stand oop in't!" is one man's description. Above all, they love to have two bottles, one with a solution of citric acid, and the other with carbonate of soda. When the mixture begins to fizz, they realise that there is indeed a science of medicine.

This sort of work, with vaccinations, bandagings, and minor surgery, takes us to nearly eleven o’clock, when we assemble in Horton’s room to make out the list. All the names of patients under treatment are pinned upon a big board. We sit round with note books open, and distribute those who must be seen between us. By the time this is done and the horses in, it is half-past eleven. Then away we all FLY upon our several tasks: Horton in a carriage and pair to see the employers; I in a dog cart to see the employed; and McCarthy on his good Irish legs to see those chronic cases to which a qualified man can do no good, and an unqualified no harm.

Well, we all work back again by two o’clock, when we find dinner waiting for us. We may or may not have finished our rounds. If not away we go again. If we have, Horton dictates his prescriptions, and strides off to bed with his black clay pipe in his mouth. He is the most abandoned smoker I have ever met with, collecting the dottles of his pipes in the evening, and smoking them the next morning before breakfast in the stable yard. When he has departed for his nap, McCarthy and I get to work on the medicine. There are, perhaps, fifty bottles to put up, with pills, ointment, etc. It is quite half-past four before we have them all laid out on the shelf addressed to the respective invalids. Then we have an hour or so of quiet, when we smoke or read, or box with the coachman in the harness room. After tea the evening’s work commences. From six to nine people are coming in for their medicine, or fresh patients wishing advice. When these are settled we have to see again any very grave cases which may be on the list; and so, about ten o’clock, we may hope to have another smoke, and perhaps a game of cards. Then it is a rare thing for a night to pass without one or other of us having to trudge off to a case which may take us two hours, or may take us ten. Hard work, as you see; but Horton is such a good chap, and works so hard himself, that one does not mind what one does. And then we are all like brothers in the house; our talk is just a rattle of chaff, and the patients are as homely as ourselves, so that the work becomes quite a pleasure to all of us.

Yes, Horton is a real right-down good fellow. His heart is broad and kind and generous. There is nothing petty in the man. He loves to see those around him happy; and the sight of his sturdy figure and jolly red face goes far to make them so. Nature meant him to be a healer; for he brightens up a sick room as he did the Merton station when first I set eyes upon him. Don’t imagine from my description that he is in any way soft, however. There is no one on whom one could be less likely to impose. He has a temper which is easily aflame and as easily appeased. A mistake in the dispensing may wake it up and then he bursts into the surgery like a whiff of cast wind, his checks red, his whiskers bristling, and his eyes malignant. The daybook is banged, the bottles rattled, the counter thumped, and then he is off again with five doors slamming behind him. We can trace his progress when the black mood is on him by those dwindling slams. Perhaps it is that McCarthy has labelled the cough mixture as the eye-wash, or sent an empty pillbox with an exhortation to take one every four hours. In any case the cyclone comes and goes, and by the next meal all is peace once more.

I said that the patients were very homely. Any one who is over-starched might well come here to be unstiffened. I confess that I did not quite fall in with it at once. When on one of my first mornings a club patient with his bottle under his arm came up to me and asked me if I were the doctor’s man, I sent him on to see the groom in the stable. But soon one falls into the humour of it. There is no offence meant; and why should any be taken? They are kindly, generous folk; and if they pay no respect to your profession in the abstract, and so rather hurt your dignity, they will be as leal and true as possible to yourself if you can win their respect. I like the grip of their greasy and blackened hands.

Another peculiarity of the district is that many of the manufacturers and colliery owners have risen from the workmen, and have (in some cases at least) retained their old manners and even their old dress. The other day Mrs. White, Horton’s mother-in-law, had a violent sick headache, and, as we are all very fond of the kind old lady, we were trying to keep things as quiet as possible down-stairs. Suddenly there came a bang! bang! bang! at the knocker; and then in an instant another rattling series of knocks, as if a tethered donkey were trying to kick in the panel. After all our efforts for silence it was exasperating. I rushed to the door to find a seedy looking person just raising his hand to commence a fresh bombardment. “What on earth’s the matter?” I asked, only I may have been a little more emphatic. “Pain in the jaw,” said he. “You needn’t make such a noise,” said I; “other people are ill besides you.” “If I pay my money, young man, I’ll make such noise as I like.” And actually in cold blood he commenced a fresh assault upon the door. He would have gone on with his devil’s tattoo all morning if I had not led him down the path and seen him off the premises. An hour afterwards Horton whirled into the surgery, with a trail of banged doors behind him. “What’s this about Mr. Usher, Munro?” he asked. “He says that you were violent towards him.” “There was a club patient here who kept on banging the knocker,” said I; “I was afraid that he would disturb Mrs. White, and so I made him stop.” Horton’s eyes began to twinkle. “My boy,” said he, “that club patient, as you call him, is the richest man in Merton, and worth a hundred a year to me.” I have no doubt that he appeased him by some tale of my disgrace and degradation; but I have not heard anything of the matter since.

It has been good for me to be here, Bertie. It has brought me in close contact with the working classes, and made me realise what fine people they are. Because one drunkard goes home howling on a Saturday night, we are too apt to overlook the ninety-nine decent folk by their own firesides. I shall not make that mistake any more. The kindliness of the poor to the poor makes a man sick of himself. And their sweet patience! Depend upon it, if ever there is a popular rising, the wrongs which lead to it must be monstrous and indefensible. I think the excesses of the French Revolution are dreadful enough in themselves, but much more so as an index to the slow centuries of misery against which they were a mad protest. And then the wisdom of the poor! It is amusing to read the glib newspaper man writing about the ignorance of the masses. They don’t know the date of Magna Charta, or whom John of Gaunt married; but put a practical up-to-date problem before them, and see how unerringly they take the right side. Didn’t they put the Reform Bill through in the teeth of the opposition of the majority of the so-called educated classes? Didn’t they back the North against the South when nearly all our leaders went wrong? When universal arbitration and the suppression of the liquor traffic comes, is it not sure to be from the pressure of these humble folks? They look at life with clearer and more unselfish eyes. It’s an axiom, I think, that to heighten a nation’s wisdom you must lower its franchise.

I often have my doubts, Bertie, if there is such a thing as the existence of evil? If we could honestly convince ourselves that there was not, it would help us so much in formulating a rational religion. But don’t let us strain truth even for such an object as that. I must confess that there are some forms of vice, cruelty for example, for which it is hard to find any explanation, save indeed that it is a degenerate survival of that war-like ferocity which may once have been of service in helping to protect the community. No; let me be frank, and say that I can’t make cruelty fit into my scheme. But when you find that other evils, which seem at first sight black enough, really tend in the long run to the good of mankind, it may be hoped that those which continue to puzzle us may at last be found to serve the same end in some fashion which is now inexplicable.

It seems to me that the study of life by the physician vindicates the moral principles of right and wrong. But when you look closely it is a question whether that which is a wrong to the present community may not prove to have been a right to the interests of posterity. That sounds a little foggy; but I will make my meaning more clear when I say that I think right and wrong are both tools which are being wielded by those great hands which are shaping the destinies of the universe, that both are making for improvement; but that the action of the one is immediate, and that of the other more slow, but none the less certain. Our own distinction of right and wrong is founded too much upon the immediate convenience of the community, and does not inquire sufficiently deeply into the ultimate effect.

I have my own views about Nature’s methods, though I feel that it is rather like a beetle giving his opinions upon the milky way. However, they have the merit of being consoling; for if we could conscientiously see that sin served a purpose, and a good one, it would take some of the blackness out of life. It seems to me, then, that Nature, still working on the lines of evolution, strengthens the race in two ways. The one is by improving those who are morally strong, which is done by increased knowledge and broadening religious views; the other, and hardly less important, is by the killing off and extinction of those who are morally weak. This is accomplished by drink and immorality. These are really two of the most important forces which work for the ultimate perfection of the race. I picture them as two great invisible hands hovering over the garden of life and plucking up the weeds. Looked at in one’s own day, one can only see that they produce degradation and misery. But at the end of a third generation from then, what has happened? The line of the drunkard and of the debauchee, physically as well as morally weakened, is either extinct or on the way towards it. Struma, tubercle, nervous disease, have all lent a hand towards the pruning off of that rotten branch, and the average of the race is thereby improved. I believe from the little that I have seen of life, that it is a law which acts with startling swiftness, that a majority of drunkards never perpetuate their species at all, and that when the curse is hereditary, the second generation generally sees the end of it.

Don’t misunderstand me, and quote me as saying that it is a good thing for a nation that it should have many drunkards. Nothing of the kind. What I say is, that if a nation has many morally weak people, then it is good that there should be a means for checking those weaker strains. Nature has her devices, and drink is among them. When there are no more drunkards and reprobates, it means that the race is so advanced that it no longer needs such rough treatment. Then the all-wise Engineer will speed us along in some other fashion.

I’ve been thinking a good deal lately about this question of the uses of evil, and of how powerful a tool it is in the hands of the Creator. Last night the whole thing crystallised out quite suddenly into a small set of verses. Please jump them if they bore you.

WITH EITHER HAND.

1.
God’s own best will bide the test,
  And God’s own worst will fall;
But, best or worst or last or first,
  He ordereth it all.
2.
For ALL is good, if understood,
  (Ah, could we understand!)
And right and ill are tools of skill
  Held in His either hand.
3.
The harlot and the anchorite,
  The martyr and the rake,
Deftly He fashions each aright,
  Its vital part to take.
4.
Wisdom He makes to guide the sap
  Where the high blossoms be;
And Lust to kill the weaker branch,
  And Drink to trim the tree.

5.
And Holiness that so the bole
  Be solid at the core;
And Plague and Fever, that the whole
  Be changing evermore.
6.
He strews the microbes in the lung,
  The blood-clot in the brain;
With test and test He picks the best,
  Then tests them once again.
7.
He tests the body and the mind,
  He rings them o’er and o’er;
And if they crack, He throws them back,
  And fashions them once more.
8.
He chokes the infant throat with slime,
  He sets the ferment free;
He builds the tiny tube of lime
  That blocks the artery.
9.
He lets the youthful dreamer store
  Great projects in his brain,
Until he drops the fungus spore
  That smears them out again.
10.
He stores the milk that feeds the babe,
  He dulls the tortured nerve;
He gives a hundred joys of sense
  Where few or none might serve.
11.
And still he trains the branch of good
  Where the high blossoms be,
And wieldeth still the shears of ill
  To prune and prune His tree.
12.
So read I this — and as I try

To write it clear again,
I feel a second finger lie
Above mine on the pen.

13.
Dim are these peering eyes of mine,
And dark what I have seen.
But be I wrong, the wrong is Thine,
Else had it never been.

I am quite ashamed of having been so didactic. But it is fine to think that sin may have an object and work towards good. My father says that I seem to look upon the universe as if it were my property, and can’t be happy until I know that all is right with it. Well, it does send a glow through me when I seem to catch a glimpse of the light behind the clouds.

And now for my big bit of news which is going to change my whole life. Whom do you think I had a letter from last Tuesday week? From Cullingworth, no less. It had no beginning, no end, was addressed all wrong, and written with a very thick quill pen upon the back of a prescription. How it ever reached me is a wonder. This is what he had to say: —

“Started here in Bradfield last June. Colossal success. My example must revolutionise medical practice. Rapidly making fortune. Have invention which is worth millions. Unless our Admiralty take it up shall make Brazil the leading naval power. Come down by next train on receiving this. Have plenty for you to do.”

That was the whole of this extraordinary letter; it had no name to it, which was certainly reasonable enough, since no one else could have written it. Knowing Cullingworth as well as I did, I took it with reservations and deductions. How could he have made so rapid and complete a success in a town in which he must have been a complete stranger? It was incredible. And yet there must be some truth in it, or he would not invite me to come down and test it. On the whole, I thought that I had better move very cautiously in the matter; for I was happy and snug where I was, and kept on putting a little by, which I hoped would form a nucleus to start me in practice. It is only a few pounds up to date, but in a year or so it might mount to something. I wrote to Cullingworth, therefore, thanking him for having remembered me, and explaining how matters stood.

I had had great difficulty in finding an opening, I said, and now that I had one I was loth to give it up save for a permanency.

Ten days passed, during which Cullingworth was silent. Then came a huge telegram.

“Your letter to hand. Why not call me a liar at once? I tell you that I have seen thirty thousand patients in the last year. My actual takings have been over four thousand pounds. All patients come to me. Would not cross the street to see Queen Victoria. You can have all visiting, all surgery, all midwifery. Make what you like of it. Will guarantee three hundred pounds the first year.”

Well, this began to look more like business — especially that last sentence. I took it to Horton, and asked his advice. His opinion was that I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. So it ended by my wiring back accepting the partnership — if it is a partnership — and to-morrow morning I am off to Bradfield with great hopes and a small portmanteau. I know how interested you are in the personality of Cullingworth — as every one is who comes, even at second hand, within range of his influence; and so you may rely upon it that I shall give you a very full and particular account of all that passes between us. I am looking forward immensely to seeing him again, and I trust we won’t have any rows.

Goodbye, old chap. My foot is upon the threshold of fortune. Congratulate me.

VI. THE PARADE, BRADFIELD, 7th March, 1882.

It is only two days since I wrote to you, my dear old chap, and yet I find myself loaded to the muzzle and at full cock again. I have come to Bradfield. I have seen old Cullingworth once more, and I have found that all he has told me is true. Yes; incredible as it sounded, this wonderful fellow seems to have actually built up a great practice in little more than a year. He really is, with all his eccentricities, a very remarkable man, Bertie. He doesn’t seem to have a chance of showing his true powers in this matured civilisation. The law and custom hamper him. He is the sort of fellow who would come right to the front in a French Revolution. Or if you put him as Emperor over some of these little South American States, I believe that in ten years he would either be in his grave, or would have the Continent. Yes; Cullingworth is fit to fight for a higher stake than a medical practice, and on a bigger stage than an English provincial town. When I read of Aaron Burr in your history I always picture him as a man like C.

I had the kindest of leave takings from Horton. If he had been my brother he could not have been more affectionate. I could not have thought that I should grow so fond of a man in so short a time. He takes the keenest interest in my venture, and I am to write him a full account. He gave me as we parted a black old meerschaum which he had coloured himself — the last possible pledge of affection from a smoker. It was pleasant for me to feel that if all went wrong at Bradfield, I had a little harbour at Merton for which I could make. Still, of course, pleasant and instructive as the life there was, I could not shut my eyes to the fact that it would take a terribly long time before I could save enough to buy a share in a practice — a longer time probably than my poor father’s strength would last. That telegram of Cullingworth’s in which, as you may remember, he guaranteed me three hundred pounds in the first year, gave me hopes of a much more rapid career. You will agree with me, I am sure, that I did wisely to go to him.

I had an adventure upon the way to Bradfield. The carriage in which I was travelling contained a party of three, at whom I took the most casual of glances before settling down to the daily paper. There was an elderly lady, with a bright rosy face, gold spectacles, and a dash of red velvet in her bonnet. With her were two younger people, who I took to be her son and her daughter — the one a quiet, gentle-looking girl of twenty or so, dressed in black, and the other a short, thick-set young fellow, a year or two older. The two ladies sat by each other in the far corner, and the son (as I presume him to be) sat opposite me. We may have travelled an hour or more without my paying any attention to this little family party, save that I could not help hearing some talk between the two ladies. The younger, who was addressed as Winnie, had, as I noticed, a very sweet and soothing voice. She called the elder "mother," which showed that I was right as to the relationship.

I was sitting, then, still reading my paper, when I was surprised to get a kick on the shins from the young fellow opposite. I moved my legs, thinking that it was an accident, but an instant afterwards I received another and a harder one. I dropped my paper with a growl, but the moment that I glanced at him I saw how the matter stood. His foot was jerking spasmodically, his two hands clenched, and drumming against his breast, while his eyes were rolling upwards until only the rim of his iris was to be seen. I sprang upon him, tore open his collar, unbuttoned his waistcoat, and pulled his head down upon the seat. Crash went one of his heels through the carriage window, but I contrived to sit upon his knees while I kept hold of his two wrists.

"Don't be alarmed!" I cried, "it's epilepsy, and will soon pass!"

Glancing up, I saw that the little girl was sitting very pale and quiet in the corner. The mother had pulled a bottle out of her bag and was quite cool and helpful.

"He often has them," said she, "this is bromide."

"He is coming out," I answered; "you look after Winnie."

I blurted it out because her head seemed to rock as if she were going off; but the absurdity of the thing struck us all next moment, and the mother burst into a laugh in which the daughter and I joined. The son had opened his eyes and had ceased to struggle.

"I must really beg your pardon," said I, as I helped him up again. "I had not the advantage of knowing your other name, and I was in such a hurry that I had no time to think what I was saying."

They laughed again in the most good-humoured way, and, as soon as the young fellow had recovered, we all joined in quite a confidential conversation. It is wonderful how the intrusion of any of the realities of life brushes away the cobwebs of etiquette. In half an hour we knew all about each other, or at any rate I knew all about them. Mrs. La Force was the mother's name, a widow with these two children. They had given up housekeeping, and found it more pleasant to live in apartments, travelling from one watering place to another. Their one trouble was the nervous weakness of the son Fred. They were now on their way to Birchespool, where they hoped that he might get some good from the bracing air. I was able to recommend vegetarianism, which I have found to act like a charm in such cases. We had quite a spirited conversation, and I think that we were sorry on both sides when we came to the junction where they had to change. Mrs. La Force gave me her card, and I promised to call if ever I should be in Birchespool.

However, all this must be stupid enough to you. You know my little ways by this time, and you don't expect me to keep on the main line of my story. However, I am back on the rails now, and I shall try to remain there.

Well, it was nearly six o'clock, and evening was just creeping in when we drew up in Bradfield Station. The first thing I saw when I looked out of the window was Cullingworth, exactly the same as ever, striding in his jerky way down the platform, his coat flying open, his chin thrust forward (he is the most under-hung man I have ever seen), and his great teeth all gleaming, like a good-natured blood-hound. He roared with delight when he saw me, wrung my hand, and slapped me enthusiastically upon the shoulder.

"My dear chap!" said he. "We'll clear this town out. I tell you, Munro, we won't leave a doctor in it. It's all they can do now to get butter to their bread; and when we get to work together they'll have to eat it dry. Listen to me, my boy! There are a hundred and twenty thousand folk in this town, all shrieking for advice, and there isn't a doctor who knows a rhubarb pill from a calculus. Man, we only have to gather them in. I stand and take the money until my arm aches."

"But how is it?" I asked, as we pushed our way through the crowd, "are there so few other doctors?"

"Few!" he roared. "By Crums, the streets are blocked with them. You couldn't fall out of a window in this town without killing a doctor. But of all the —— well, there, you'll see them for yourself. You walked to my house at Avonmouth, Munro. I don't let my friends walk to my house at Bradfield — eh, what?"

A well-appointed carriage with two fine black horses was drawn up at the station entrance. The smart coachman touched his hat as Cullingworth opened the door.

"Which of the houses, sir?" he asked.

Cullingworth's eyes shot round to me to see what I thought of such a query. Between ourselves I have not the slightest doubt that he had instructed the man to ask it. He always had a fine eye for effect, but he usually erred by underrating the intelligence of those around him.

"Ah!" said he, rubbing his chin like a man in doubt. "Well, I daresay dinner will be nearly ready. Drive to the town residential."

"Good gracious, Cullingworth!" said I as we started. "How many houses do you inhabit? It sounds as if you had bought the town."

"Well, well," said he, laughing, "we are driving to the house where I usually live. It suits us very well, though I have not been able to get all the rooms furnished yet. Then I have a little farm of a few hundred acres just outside the city. It is a pleasant place for the week ends, and we send the nurse and the child — —"

"My dear chap, I did not know that you had started a family!"

"Yes, it's an infernal nuisance; but still the fact remains. We get our butter and things from the farm. Then, of course, I have my house of business in the heart of the city."

"Consulting and waiting room, I suppose?"

He looked at me with a sort of half vexed, half amused expression. "You cannot rise to a situation, Munro," said he. "I never met a fellow with such a stodgy imagination. I'd trust you to describe a thing when you have seen it, but never to build up an idea of it beforehand."

"What's the trouble now?" I asked.

"Well, I have written to you about my practice, and I've wired to you about it, and here you sit asking me if I work it in two rooms. I'll have to hire the market square before I've finished, and then I won't have space to wag my elbows. Can your imagination rise to a great house with people waiting in every room, jammed in as tight as they'll fit, and two layers of them squatting in the cellar? Well, that's my house of business on an average day. The folk come in from the county fifty miles off, and eat bread and treacle on the doorstep, so as to be first in when the housekeeper comes down. The medical officer of health made an official complaint of the over-crowding of my waiting-rooms. They wait in the stables, and sit along the racks and under the horses' bellies. I'll turn some of 'em on to you, my boy, and then you'll know a little more about it."

Well, all this puzzled me a good deal, as you can imagine, Bertie; for, making every allowance for Cullingworth's inflated way of talking, there must be something at the back of it. I was thinking to myself that I must keep my head cool, and have a look at everything with my own eyes, when the carriage pulled up and we got out.

"This is my little place," said Cullingworth.

It was the corner house of a line of fine buildings, and looked to me much more like a good-sized hotel than a private mansion. It had a broad sweep of steps leading to the door, and towered away up to five or six stories, with pinnacles and a flagstaff on the top. As a matter of fact, I learned that before Cullingworth took it, it had been one of the chief clubs in the town, but the committee had abandoned it on account of the heavy rent. A smart maid opened the door; and a moment later I was shaking hands with Mrs. Cullingworth, who was all kindliness and cordiality. She has, I think, forgotten the little Avonmouth business, when her husband and I fell out.

The inside of the house was even huger than I had thought from the look of the exterior. There were over thirty bedrooms, Cullingworth informed me, as he helped me to carry my portmanteau upstairs. The hall and first stair were most excellently furnished and carpetted, but it all run to nothing at the landing. My own bedroom had a little iron bed, and a small basin standing on a packing case. Cullingworth took a hammer from the mantelpiece, and began to knock in nails behind the door.

"These will do to hang your clothes on," said he; "you don't mind roughing it a little until we get things in order?"

"Not in the least."

"You see," he explained, "there's no good my putting a forty pound suite into a bed-room, and then having to chuck it all out of the window in order to make room for a hundred-pound one. No sense in that, Munro! Eh, what! I'm going to furnish this house as no house has ever been furnished. By Crums! I'll bring the folk from a hundred miles round just to have leave to look at it. But I must do it room by room. Come down with me and look at the dining-room. You must be hungry after your journey."

It really was furnished in a marvellous way — nothing flash, and everything magnificent. The carpet was so rich that my feet seemed to sink into it as into deep moss. The soup was on the table, and Mrs. Cullingworth sitting down, but he kept hauling me round to look at something else.

“Go on, Hetty,” he cried over his shoulder. “I just want to show Munro this. Now, these plain dining-room chairs, what d’you think they cost each? Eh, what?”

“Five pounds,” said I at a venture.

“Exactly!” he cried, in great delight; “thirty pounds for the six. You hear, Hetty! Munro guessed the price first shot. Now, my boy, what for the pair of curtains?”

They were a magnificent pair of stamped crimson velvet, with a two-foot gilt cornice above them. I thought that I had better not imperil my newly gained reputation by guessing.

“Eighty pounds!” he roared, slapping them with the back of his hand. “Eighty pounds, Munro! What d’ye think of that? Everything that I have in this house is going to be of the best. Why, look at this waiting-maid! Did you ever see a neater one?”

He swung the girl, towards me by the arm.

“Don’t be silly, Jimmy,” said Mrs. Cullingworth mildly, while he roared with laughter, with all his fangs flashing under his bristling moustache. The girl edged closer to her mistress, looking half-frightened and half-angry.

“All right, Mary, no harm!” he cried. “Sit down, Munro, old chap. Get a bottle of champagne, Mary, and we’ll drink to more luck.”

Well, we had a very pleasant little dinner. It is never slow if Cullingworth is about. He is one of those men who make a kind of magnetic atmosphere, so that you feel exhilarated and stimulated in their presence. His mind is so nimble and his thoughts so extravagant, that your own break away from their usual grooves, and surprise you by their activity. You feel pleased at your own inventiveness and originality, when you are really like the wren when it took a lift on the eagle’s shoulder. Old Peterson, you remember, used to have a similar effect upon you in the Linlithgow days.

In the middle of dinner he plunged off, and came back with a round bag about the size of a pomegranate in his hand.

“What d’ye think this is, Munro? Eh?”

“I have no idea.”

“Our day’s take. Eh, Hetty?” He undid a string, and in an instant a pile of gold and silver rattled down upon the cloth, the coins whirling and clinking among the dishes. One rolled off the table and was retrieved by the maid from some distant corner.

“What is it, Mary? A half sovereign? Put it in your pocket. What did the lot come to, Hetty?”

“Thirty-one pound eight.”

“You see, Munro! One day’s work.” He plunged his hand into his trouser pocket and brought out a pile of sovereigns, which he balanced in his palm. “Look at that, laddie. Rather different from my Avonmouth form, eh? What?”

“It will be good news for them,” I suggested.

He was scowling at me in an instant with all his old ferocity. You cannot imagine a more savage-looking creature than Cullingworth is when his temper goes wrong. He gets a perfectly fiendish expression in his light blue eyes, and all his hair bristles up like a striking cobra. He isn’t a beauty at his best, but at his worst he’s really phenomenal. At the first danger signal his wife had ordered the maid from the room.

“What rot you do talk, Munro!” he cried. “Do you suppose I am going to cripple myself for years by letting those debts hang on to me?”

“I understood that you had promised,” said I. “Still, of course, it is no business of mine.”

“I should hope not,” he cried. “A tradesman stands to win or to lose. He allows a margin for bad debts. I would have paid it if I could. I couldn’t, and so I wiped the slate clean. No one in his senses would dream of spending all the money that I make in Bradfield upon the tradesmen of Avonmouth.”

“Suppose they come down upon you?”

“Well, we’ll see about that when they do. Meanwhile I am paying ready money for every mortal thing that comes up the door steps. They think so well of me here that I could have had the whole place furnished like a palace from the drain pipes to the flagstaff, only I determined to take each room in turn when I was ready for it. There’s nearly four hundred pounds under this one ceiling.”

There came a tap at the door, and in walked a boy in buttons.

“If you please, sir, Mr. Duncan wishes to see you.”

“Give my compliments to Mr. Duncan, and tell him he may go to the devil!”

“My dear Jimmy!” cried Mrs. Cullingworth.

“Tell him I am at dinner; and if all the kings in Europe were waiting in the hall with their crowns in their hands I wouldn’t cross that door mat to see them.”

The boy vanished, but was back in an instant.

“Please, sir, he won’t go.”

“Won’t go! What d’you mean?” Cullingworth sat with his mouth open and his knife and fork sticking up. “What d’you mean, you brat? What are you boggling about?”

“It’s his bill, sir,” said the frightened boy.

Cullingworth’s face grew dusky, and the veins began to swell on his forehead.

“His bill, eh! Look here!” He took his watch out and laid it on the table. “It’s two minutes to eight. At eight I’m coming out, and if I find him there I’ll strew the street with him. Tell him I’ll shred him over the parish. He has two minutes to save his life in, and one of them is nearly gone.”

The boy bolted from the room, and in an instant afterwards we heard the bang of the front door, with a clatter of steps down the stairs. Cullingworth lay back in his chair and roared until the tears shone on his eyelashes, while his wife quivered all over with sympathetic merriment.

“I’ll drive him mad,” Cullingworth sobbed at last. “He’s a nervous, chicken-livered kind of man; and when I look at him he turns the colour of putty. If I pass his shop I usually just drop in and stand and look at him. I never speak, but just look. It paralyses him. Sometimes the shop is full of people; but it is just the same.”

“Who is he, then?” I asked.

“He’s my corn merchant. I was saying that I paid my tradesmen as I go, but he is the only exception. He has done me once or twice, you see; and so I try to take it out of him. By the way, you might send him down twenty pounds to-morrow, Hetty. It’s time for an instalment.”

What a gossip you will think me, Bertie? But when I begin, my memory brings everything back so clearly, and I write on and on almost unconsciously. Besides, this fellow is such a mixture of qualities, that I could never give you any idea of him by myself; and so I just try to repeat to you what he says, and what he does, so that you may build up your own picture of the man. I know that he has always interested you, and that he does so more now than ever since our fates have drawn us together again.

After dinner, we went into the back room, which was the most extraordinary contrast to the front one, having only a plain deal table, and half-a-dozen kitchen chairs scattered about on a linoleum floor. At one end was an electric battery and a big magnet. At the other, a packing case with several pistols and a litter of cartridges upon it. A rook rifle was leaning tip against it, and looking round I saw that the walls were all pocked with bullet marks.

"What's this, then?" I asked, rolling my eyes round.

"Hetty, what's this?" he asked, with his pipe in his hand and his head cocked sideways.

"Naval supremacy and the command of the seas," said she, like a child repeating a lesson.

"That's it," he shouted, stabbing at me with the amber. "Naval supremacy and command of the seas. It's all here right under your nose. I tell you, Munro, I could go to Switzerland to-morrow, and I could say to them —'Look here, you haven't got a seaboard and you haven't got a port; but just find me a ship, and hoist your flag on it, and I'll give you every ocean under heaven.' I'd sweep the seas until there wasn't a match-box floating on them. Or I could make them over to a limited company, and join the board after allotment. I hold the salt water in the cup of this hand, every drop of it."

His wife put her hands on his shoulder with admiration in her eyes. I turned to knock out my pipe, and grinned over the grate.

"Oh, you may grin," said he. (He was wonderfully quick at spotting what you were doing.) "You'll grin a little wider when you see the dividends coming in. What's the value of that magnet?"

"A pound?"

"A million pounds. Not a penny under. And dirt cheap to the nation that buys it. I shall let it go at that, though I could make ten times as much if I held on. I shall take it up to the Secretary of the Navy in a week or two; and if he seems to be a civil deserving sort of person I shall do business with him. It's not every day, Munro, that a man comes into his office with the Atlantic under one arm and the Pacific under the other. Eh, what?"

I knew it would make him savage, but I lay back in my chair and laughed until I was tired. His wife looked at me reproachfully; but he, after a moment of blackness, burst out laughing also, stamping up and down the room and waving his arms.

“Of course it seems absurd to you,” he cried. “Well, I daresay it would to me if any other fellow had worked it out. But you may take my word for it that it’s all right. Hetty here will answer for it. Won’t you, Hetty?”

“It’s splendid, my dear.”

“Now I’ll show you, Munro; what an unbelieving Jew you are, trying to look interested, and giggling at the back of your throat! In the first place, I have discovered a method — which I won’t tell you — of increasing the attractive power of a magnet a hundred-fold. Have you grasped that?”

“Yes.”

“Very good. You are also aware, I presume, that modern projectiles are either made of or tipped with steel. It may possibly have come to your ears that magnets attract steel. Permit me now to show you a small experiment.” He bent over his apparatus, and I suddenly heard the snapping of electricity. “This,” he continued going across to the packing case, “is a saloon pistol, and will be exhibited in the museums of the next century as being the weapon with which the new era was inaugurated. Into the breech I place a Boxer cartridge, specialty provided for experimental purposes with a steel bullet. I aim point blank at the dab of red sealing wax upon the wall, which is four inches above the magnet. I am an absolutely dead shot. I fire. You will now advance, and satisfy yourself that the bullet is flattened upon the end of the magnet, after which you will apologise to me for that grin.”

I looked, and it certainly was as he had said.

“I’ll tell you what I would do,” he cried. “I am prepared to put that magnet in Hetty’s bonnet, and to let you fire six shots straight at her face. How’s that for a test? You wouldn’t mind, Hetty? Eh, what!”

“I don’t think she would have objected, but I hastened to disclaim any share in such an experiment.

“Of course, you see that the whole thing is to scale. My warship of the future carries at her prow and stern a magnet which shall be as much larger than that as the big shell will be larger than this tiny bullet. Or I might have a separate raft, possibly, to carry my apparatus. My ship goes into action. What happens then, Munro? Eh, what! Every shot fired at her goes smack on to the magnet. There’s a reservoir below into which they drop when the electric circuit is broken. After every action they are sold by auction for old metal, and the result divided as prize money among the crew. But think of it, man! I tell you it is an absolute impossibility for a shot to strike any ship which is provided with my apparatus. And then look at the cheapness. You don't want armour. You want nothing. Any ship that floats becomes invulnerable with one of these. The war ship of the future will cost anything from seven pound ten. You're grinning again; but if you give me a magnet and a Brixton trawler with a seven-pounder gun I'll show sport to the finest battle-ship afloat."

"Well, there must be some flaw about this," I suggested. "If your magnet is so strong as all that, you would have your own broadside boomeranging back upon you."

"Not a bit of it! There's a big difference between a shot flying away from you with all its muzzle velocity, and another one which is coming towards you and only needs a slight deflection to strike the magnet. Besides, by breaking the circuit I can take off the influence when I am firing my own broadside. Then I connect, and instantly become invulnerable."

"And your nails and screws?"

"The warship of the future will be bolted together by wood."

Well, he would talk of nothing else the whole evening but of this wonderful invention of his. Perhaps there is nothing in it — probably there is not; and yet it illustrates the many-sided nature of the man, that he should not say one word about his phenomenal success here — of which I am naturally most anxious to hear — not a word either upon the important subject of our partnership, but will think and talk of nothing but this extraordinary naval idea. In a week he will have tossed it aside in all probability, and be immersed in some plan for reuniting the Jews and settling them in Madagascar. Yet from all he has said, and all I have seen, there can be no doubt that he has in some inexplicable way made a tremendous hit, and to-morrow I shall let you know all about it. Come what may, I am delighted that I came, for things promise to be interesting. Regard this not as the end of a letter, but of a paragraph. You shall have the conclusion to-morrow, or on Thursday at the latest. Goodbye, and my remembrance to Lawrence if you see him. How's your friend from Yale?

VII. THE PARADE, BRADFIELD, 9th March, 1882.

Well, you see I am as good as my word, Bertie; and here is a full account of this queer little sample gouged out of real life, never to be seen, I should fancy, by any eye save your own. I have written to Horton also, and of course to my mother; but I don't go into detail with them, as I have got into the way of doing with you. You keep on assuring me that you like it; so on your own head be it if you find my experiences gradually developing into a weariness.

When I woke in the morning, and looked round at the bare walls and the basin on the packing case, I hardly knew where I was. Cullingworth came charging into the room in his dressing gown, however, and roused me effectually by putting his hands on the rail at the end of the bed, and throwing a somersault over it which brought his heels on to my pillow with a thud. He was in great spirits, and, squatting on the bed, he held forth about his plans while I dressed.

"I tell you one of the first things I mean to do, Munro," said he. "I mean to have a paper of my own. We'll start a weekly paper here, you and I, and we'll make them sit up all round. We'll have an organ of our own, just like every French politician. If any one crosses us, we'll make them wish they had never been born. Eh, what, laddie? what d'you think? So clever, Munro, that everybody's bound to read it, and so scathing that it will just fetch out blisters every time. Don't you think we could?"

"What politics?" I asked.

"Oh, curse the politics! Red pepper well rubbed in, that's my idea of a paper. Call it the Scorpion. Chaff the Mayor and the Council until they call a meeting and hang themselves. I'd do the snappy paragraphs, and you would do the fiction and poetry. I thought about it during the night, and Hetty has written to Murdoch's to get an estimate for the printing. We might get our first number out this day week."

"My dear chap!" I gasped.

"I want you to start a novel this morning. You won't get many patients at first, and you'll have lots of time."

“But I never wrote a line in my life.”

“A properly balanced man can do anything he sets his hand to. He’s got every possible quality inside him, and all he wants is the will to develop it.”

“Could you write a novel yourself?” I asked.

“Of course I could. Such a novel, Munro, that when they’d read the first chapter the folk would just sit groaning until the second came out. They’d wait in rows outside my door in the hope of hearing what was coming next. By Crums, I’ll go and begin it now!” And, with another somersault over the end of the bed, he rushed from the room, with the tassels of his dressing gown flying behind him.

I daresay you’ve quite come to the conclusion by this time that Cullingworth is simply an interesting pathological study — a man in the first stage of lunacy or general paralysis. You might not be so sure about it if you were in close contact with him. He justifies his wildest flights by what he does. It sounds grotesque when put down in black and white; but then it would have sounded equally grotesque a year ago if he had said that he would build up a huge practice in a twelvemonth. Now we see that he has done it. His possibilities are immense. He has such huge energy at the back of his fertility of invention. I am afraid, on thinking over all that I have written to you, that I may have given you a false impression of the man by dwelling too much on those incidents in which he has shown the strange and violent side of his character, and omitting the stretches between where his wisdom and judgment have had a chance. His conversation when he does not fly off at a tangent is full of pith and idea. “The greatest monument ever erected to Napoleon Buonaparte was the British National debt,” said he yesterday. Again, “We must never forget that the principal export of Great Britain to the United States IS the United States.” Again, speaking of Christianity, “What is intellectually unsound cannot be morally sound.” He shoots off a whole column of aphorisms in a single evening. I should like to have a man with a note book always beside him to gather up his waste. No; you must not let me give you a false impression of the man’s capacity. On the other hand, it would be dishonest to deny that I think him thoroughly unscrupulous, and full of very sinister traits. I am much mistaken, however, if he has not fine strata in his nature. He is capable of rising to heights as well as of sinking to depths.

Well, when we had breakfasted we got into the carriage and drove off to the place of business.

“I suppose you are surprised at Hetty coming with us, said Cullingworth, slapping me on the knee. Hetty, Munro is wondering what the devil you are here for, only he is too polite to ask.”

In fact, it HAD struck me as rather strange that she should, as a matter of course, accompany us to business.

“You’ll see when we get there,” he cried chuckling. “We run this affair on lines of our own.”

It was not very far, and we soon found ourselves outside a square whitewashed building, which had a huge “Dr. Cullingworth” on a great brass plate at the side of the door. Underneath was printed “May be consulted gratis from ten to four.” The door was open, and I caught a glimpse of a crowd of people waiting in the hall.

“How many here?” asked Cullingworth of the page boy.

“A hundred and forty, sir.”

“All the waiting rooms full?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Courtyard full?

“Yes, sir.”

“Stable full?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Coach-house full?”

“There’s still room in the coach-house, sir.”

“Ah, I’m sorry we haven’t got a crowded day for you, Munro,” said he. “Of course, we can’t command these things, and must take them as they come. Now then, now then, make a gangway, can’t you?” — this to his patients. “Come here and see the waiting-room. Pooh! what an atmosphere! Why on earth can’t you open the windows for yourselves? I never saw such folk! There are thirty people in this room, Munro, and not one with sense enough to open a window to save himself from suffocation.”

“I tried, sir, but there’s a screw through the sash,” cried one fellow.

“Ah, my boy, you’ll never get on in the world if you can’t open a window without raising a sash,” said Cullingworth, slapping him on the shoulder. He took the man’s umbrella and stuck it through two of the panes of glass.

“That’s the way!” he said. “Boy, see that the screw is taken out. Now then, Munro, come along, and we’ll get to work.”

We went up a wooden stair, uncarpeted, leaving every room beneath us, as far as I could see, crowded with patients. At the top was a bare passage, which had two rooms opposite to each other at one end, and a single one at the other.

"This is my consulting room," said he, leading the way into one of these. It was a good-sized square chamber, perfectly empty save for two plain wooden chairs and an unpainted table with two books and a stethoscope upon it. "It doesn't look like four or five thousand a year, does it? Now, there is an exactly similar one opposite which you can have for yourself. I'll send across any surgical cases which may turn up. To-day, however, I think you had better stay with me, and see how I work things."

"I should very much like to," said I.

"There are one or two elementary rules to be observed in the way of handling patients," he remarked, seating himself on the table and swinging his legs. "The most obvious is that you must never let them see that you want them. It should be pure condescension on your part seeing them at all; and the more difficulties you throw in the way of it, the more they think of it. Break your patients in early, and keep them well to heel. Never make the fatal mistake of being polite to them. Many foolish young men fall into this habit, and are ruined in consequence. Now, this is my form" — he sprang to the door, and putting his two hands to his mouth he bellowed: "Stop your confounded jabbering down there! I might as well be living above a poultry show! There, you see," he added to me, "they will think ever so much more of me for that."

"But don't they get offended?" I asked.

"I'm afraid not. I have a name for this sort of thing now, and they have come to expect it. But an offended patient — I mean a thoroughly insulted one — is the finest advertisement in the world. If it is a woman, she runs clacking about among her friends until your name becomes a household word, and they all pretend to sympathise with her, and agree among themselves that you must be a remarkably discerning man. I quarrelled with one man about the state of his gall duct, and it ended by my throwing him down the stairs. What was the result? He talked so much about it that the whole village from which he came, sick and well, trooped to see me. The little country practitioner who had been buttering them up for a quarter of a century found that he might as well put up his shutters. It's human nature, my boy, and you can't alter it. Eh, what? You make yourself cheap and you become cheap. You put a high price on yourself and they rate you at that price. Suppose I set up in Harley Street to-morrow, and made it all nice and easy, with hours from ten to three, do you think I should get a patient? I might starve first. How would I work it? I should let it be known that I only saw patients from midnight until two in the morning, and that bald-headed people must pay double. That would set people talking, their curiosity would be stimulated, and in four months the street would be blocked all night. Eh, what? laddie, you'd go yourself. That's my principle here. I often come in of a morning and send them all about their business, tell them I'm going off to the country for a day. I turn away forty pounds, and it's worth four hundred as an advertisement!"

"But I understood from the plate that the consultations were gratis."

"So they are, but they have to pay for the medicine. And if a patient wishes to come out of turn he has to pay half-a-guinea for the privilege. There are generally about twenty every day who would rather pay that than wait several hours. But, mind you, Munro, don't you make any mistake about this! All this would go for nothing if you had not something, slid behind — I cure them. That's the point. I take cases that others have despaired of, and I cure them right off. All the rest is only to bring them here. But once here I keep them on my merits. It would all be a flash in the pan but for that. Now, come along and see Hetty's department."

We walked down the passage to the other room. It was elaborately fitted up as a dispensary, and there with a chic little apron Mrs. Cullingworth was busy making up pills. With her sleeves turned up and a litter of glasses and bottles all round her, she was laughing away like a little child among its toys.

"The best dispenser in the world!" cried Cullingworth, patting her on the shoulder. "You see how I do it, Munro. I write on a label what the prescription is, and make a sign which shows how much is to be charged. The man comes along the passage and passes the label through the pigeon hole. Hetty makes it up, passes out the bottle, and takes the money. Now, come on and clear some of these folk out of the house."

It is impossible for me to give you any idea of that long line of patients, filing hour after hour through the unfurnished room, and departing, some amused, and some frightened, with their labels in their hands. Cullingworth's antics are beyond belief. I laughed until I thought the wooden chair under me would have come to pieces. He roared, he raved, he swore, he pushed them about, slapped them on the back, shoved them against the wall, and occasionally rushed out to the head of the stair to address them en masse. At the same time, behind all this tomfoolery, I, watching his prescriptions, could see a quickness of diagnosis, a scientific insight, and a daring and unconventional use of drugs, which satisfied me that he was right in saying that, under all this charlatanism, there lay solid reasons for his success. Indeed, “charlatanism” is a misapplied word in this connection; for it would describe the doctor who puts on an artificial and conventional manner with his patients, rather than one who is absolutely frank and true to his own extraordinary nature.

To some of his patients he neither said one word nor did he allow them to say one. With a loud “hush” he would rush at them, thump them on the chests, listen to their hearts, write their labels, and then run them out of the room by their shoulders. One poor old lady he greeted with a perfect scream. “You’ve been drinking too much tea!” he cried. “You are suffering from tea poisoning!” Then, without allowing her to get a word in, he clutched her by her crackling black mantle, dragged her up to the table, and held out a copy of “Taylor’s Medical Jurisprudence” which was lying there. “Put your hand on the book,” he thundered, “and swear that for fourteen days you will drink nothing but cocoa.” She swore with upturned eyes, and was instantly whirled off with her label in her hand, to the dispensary. I could imagine that to the last day of her life, the old lady would talk of her interview with Cullingworth; and I could well understand how the village from which she came would send fresh recruits to block up his waiting rooms.

Another portly person was seized by the two armholes of his waistcoat, just as he was opening his mouth to explain his symptoms, and was rushed backward down the passage, down the stairs, and finally into the street, to the immense delight of the assembled patients, “You eat too much, drink too much, and sleep too much,” Cullingworth roared after him. “Knock down a policeman, and come again when they let you out.” Another patient complained of a “sinking feeling.” “My dear,” said he, “take your medicine; and if that does no good, swallow the cork, for there is nothing better when you are sinking.”

As far as I could judge, the bulk of the patients looked upon a morning at Cullingworth’s as a most enthralling public entertainment, tempered only by a thrill lest it should be their turn next to be made an exhibition of.

Well, with half-an-hour for lunch, this extraordinary business went on till a quarter to four in the afternoon. When the last patient had departed, Cullingworth led the way into the dispensary, where all the fees had been arranged upon the counter in the order of their value. There were seventeen half-sovereigns, seventy-three shillings, and forty-six florins; or thirty-two pounds eight and sixpence in all. Cullingworth counted it up, and then mixing the gold and silver into one heap, he sat running his fingers through it and playing with it. Finally, he raked it into the canvas bag which I had seen the night before, and lashed the neck up with a boot-lace.

We walked home, and that walk struck me as the most extraordinary part of all that extraordinary day. Cullingworth paraded slowly through the principal streets with his canvas bag, full of money, outstretched at the full length of his arm. His wife and I walked on either side, like two acolytes supporting a priest, and so we made our way solemnly homewards the people stopping to see us pass.

"I always make a point of walking through the doctor's quarter," said Cullingworth. "We are passing through it now. They all come to their windows and gnash their teeth and dance until I am out of sight."

"Why should you quarrel with them? What is the matter with them?" I asked.

"Pooh! what's the use of being mealy-mouthed about it?" said he. "We are all trying to cut each other's throats, and why should we be hypocritical over it? They haven't got a good word for me, any one of them; so I like to take a rise out of them."

"I must say that I can see no sense in that. They are your brothers in the profession, with the same education and the same knowledge. Why should you take an offensive attitude towards them?"

"That's what I say, Dr. Munro," cried his wife. "It is so very unpleasant to feel that one is surrounded by enemies on every side."

"Hetty's riled because their wives wouldn't call upon her," he cried. "Look at that, my dear," jingling his bag. "That is better than having a lot of brainless women drinking tea and cackling in our drawing-room. I've had a big card printed, Munro, saying that we don't desire to increase the circle of our acquaintance. The maid has orders to show it to every suspicious person who calls."

"Why should you not make money at your practice, and yet remain on good terms with your professional brethren?" said I. "You speak as if the two things were incompatible."

"So they are. What's the good of beating about the bush, laddie? My methods are all unprofessional, and I break every law of medical etiquette as often as I can think of it. You know very well that the British Medical Association would hold up their hands in horror if it could see what you have seen to-day."

"But why not conform to professional etiquette?"

"Because I know better. My boy, I'm a doctor's son, and I've seen too much of it. I was born inside the machine, and I've seen all the wires. All this etiquette is a dodge for keeping the business in the hands of the older men. It's to hold the young men back, and to stop the holes by which they might slip through to the front. I've heard my father say so a score of times. He had the largest practice in Scotland, and yet he was absolutely devoid of brains. He slipped into it through seniority and decorum. No pushing, but take your turn. Very well, laddie, when you're at the top of the line, but how about it when you've just taken your place at the tail? When I'm on the top rung I shall look down and say, 'Now, you youngsters, we are going to have very strict etiquette, and I beg that you will come up very quietly and not disarrange me from my comfortable position.' At the same time, if they do what I tell them, I shall look upon them as a lot of infernal blockheads. Eh, Munro, what?"

I could only say again that I thought he took a very low view of the profession, and that I disagreed with every word he said.

"Well, my boy, you may disagree as much as you like, but if you are going to work with me you must throw etiquette to the devil!"

"I can't do that."

"Well, if you are too clean handed for the job you can clear out. We can't keep you here against your will."

I said nothing; but when we got back, I went upstairs and packed up my trunk, with every intention of going back to Yorkshire by the night train. He came up to my room, and finding what I was at, he burst into apologies which would have satisfied a more exacting man than I am.

"You shall do just exactly what you like, my dear chap. If you don't like my way, you may try some way of your own."

"That's fair enough," said I. "But it's a little trying to a man's self-respect if he is told to clear out every time there is a difference of opinion."

"Well, well, there was no harm meant, and it shan't occur again. I can't possibly say more than that; so come along down and have a cup of tea."

And so the matter blew over; but I very much fear, Bertie, that this is the first row of a series. I have a presentiment that sooner or later my position here will become untenable. Still, I shall give it a fair trial as long as he will let me. Cullingworth is a fellow who likes to have nothing but inferiors and dependants round him. Now, I like to stand on my own legs, and think with my own mind. If he'll let me do this we'll get along very well; but if I know the man he will claim submission, which is more than I am inclined to give. He has a right to my gratitude, which I freely admit. He has found an opening for me when I badly needed one and had no immediate prospects. But still, one may pay too high a price even for that, and I should feel that I was doing so if I had to give up my individuality and my manhood.

We had an incident that evening which was so characteristic that I must tell you of it. Cullingworth has an air gun which fires little steel darts. With this he makes excellent practice at about twenty feet, the length of the back room. We were shooting at a mark after dinner, when he asked me whether I would hold a halfpenny between my finger and thumb, and allow him to shoot it out. A halfpenny not being forthcoming, he took a bronze medal out of his waistcoat pocket, and I held that tip as a mark. "Kling!" went the air gun, and the medal rolled upon the floor.

"Plumb in the centre," said he.

"On the contrary," I answered, "you never hit it at all!"

"Never hit it! I must have hit it!"

"I am confident you didn't."

"Where's the dart, then?"

"Here," said I, holding up a bleeding forefinger, from which the tail end of the fluff with which the dart was winged was protruding.

I never saw a man so abjectly sorry for anything in my life. He used language of self-reproach which would have been extravagant if he had shot off one of my limbs. Our positions were absurdly reversed; and it was he who sat collapsed in a chair, while it was I, with the dart still in my finger, who leaned over him and laughed the matter off. Mrs. Cullingworth had run for hot water, and presently with a tweezers we got the intruder out. There was very little pain (more to-day than yesterday), but if ever you are called upon to identify my body you may look for a star at the end of my right forefinger.

When the surgery was completed (Cullingworth writhing and groaning all the time) my eyes happened to catch the medal which I had dropped, lying upon the carpet. I lifted it up and looked at it, eager to find some topic which would be more agreeable. Printed upon it was—”Presented to James Cullingworth for gallantry in saving life. Jan. 1879.”

“Hullo, Cullingworth,” said I. “You never told me about this!”

He was off in an instant in his most extravagant style.

“What! the medal? Haven’t you got one? I thought every one had. You prefer to be select, I suppose. It was a little boy. You’ve no idea the trouble I had to get him in.”

“Get him out, you mean.”

“My dear chap, you don’t understand! Any one could get a child out. It’s getting one in that’s the bother. One deserves a medal for it. Then there are the witnesses, four shillings a day I had to pay them, and a quart of beer in the evenings. You see you can’t pick up a child and carry it to the edge of a pier and throw it in. You’d have all sorts of complications with the parents. You must be patient and wait until you get a legitimate chance. I caught a quinsy walking up and down Avonmouth pier before I saw my opportunity. He was rather a stolid fat boy, and he was sitting on the very edge, fishing. I got the sole of my foot on to the small of his back, and shot him an incredible distance. I had some little difficulty in getting him out, for his fishing line got twice round my legs, but it all ended well, and the witnesses were as staunch as possible. The boy came up to thank me next day, and said that he was quite uninjured save for a bruise on the back. His parents always send me a brace of fowls every Christmas.”

I was sitting with my finger in the hot water listening to this rigmarole. When he had finished he ran off to get his tobacco box, and we could hear the bellowing of his laughter dwindling up the stair. I was still looking at the medal, which, from the dents all over it, had evidently been often used as a target, when I felt a timid touch upon my sleeve; it was Mrs. Cullingworth, who was looking earnestly at me with a very distressed expression upon her face.

“You believe far too much what James says,” said she. “You don’t know him in the least, Mr. Munro. You don’t look at a thing from his point of view, and you will never understand him until you do. It is not, of course, that he means to say anything that is untrue; but his fancy is excited, and he is quite carried away by the humour of any idea, whether it tells against himself or not. It hurts me, Mr. Munro, to see the only man in the world towards whom he has any feeling of friendship, misunderstanding him so completely, for very often when you say nothing your face shows very clearly what you think.”

I could only answer lamely that I was very sorry if I had misjudged her husband in any way, and that no one had a keener appreciation of some of his qualities than I had.

“I saw how gravely you looked when he told you that absurd story about pushing a little boy into the water,” she continued; and, as she spoke, she drew from somewhere in the front of her dress a much creased slip of paper. “Just glance at that, please, Dr. Munro.”

It was a newspaper cutting, which gave the true account of the incident. Suffice it that it was an ice accident, and that Cullingworth had really behaved in a heroic way and had been drawn out himself insensible, with the child so clasped in his arms that it was not until he had recovered his senses that they were able to separate them. I had hardly finished reading it when we heard his step on the stairs; and she, thrusting the paper back into her bosom, became in an instant the same silently watchful woman as ever.

Is he not a conundrum? If he interests you at a distance (and I take for granted that what you say in your letters is not merely conventional compliment) you can think how piquant he is in actual life. I must confess, however, that I can never shake off the feeling that I am living with some capricious creature who frequently growls and may possibly bite. Well, it won’t be very long before I write again, and by that time I shall probably know whether I am likely to find any permanent billet here or not. I am so sorry to hear about Mrs. Swanborough’s indisposition. You know that I take the deepest interest in everything that affects you. They tell me here that I am looking very fit, though I think they ought to spell it with an “a.”

VIII. THE PARADE, BRADFIELD, 6th April, 1882.

I am writing this, my dear Bertie, at a little table which has been fitted up in the window of my bedroom. Every one in the house is asleep except myself; and all the noise of the city is hushed. Yet my own brain is singularly active, and I feel that I am better employed in sitting up and writing to you, than in tossing about upon my bed. I am often accused of being sleepy in the daytime, but every now and then Nature gets level by making me abnormally wakeful at night.

Are you conscious of the restful influence which the stars exert? To me they are the most soothing things in Nature. I am proud to say that I don’t know the name of one of them. The glamour and romance would pass away from them if they were all classified and ticketed in one’s brain. But when a man is hot and flurried, and full of his own little ruffled dignities and infinitesimal misfortunes, then a star bath is the finest thing in the world. They are so big, and so serene and so lovely. They tell me that the interplanetary spaces are full of the debris of shattered asteroids; so, perhaps, even among them there are such things as disease and death. Yet just to look at them must remind a man of what a bacillus of a thing he is — the whole human race like some sprinkling of impalpable powder upon the surface of one of the most insignificant fly-wheels of a monstrous machine. But there’s order in it, Bertie, there’s order! And where there is order there must be mind, and where there is mind there must be sense of Justice. I don’t allow that there can be any doubt as to the existence of that central Mind, or as to the possession by it of certain attributes. The stars help me to realise these. It is strange, when one looks upon them, to think that the Churches are still squabbling down here over such questions as whether the Almighty is most gratified by our emptying a tea-spoonful of water over our babies’ heads, or by our waiting a few years and then plunging them bodily into a tank. It would be comic if it were not so tragic.

This train of thought is the after-swell from an argument with Cullingworth this evening. He holds that the human race is deteriorating mentally and morally. He calls out at the grossness which confounds the

Creator with a young Jewish Philosopher. I tried to show him that this is no proof of degeneration, since the Jewish Philosopher at least represented a moral idea, and was therefore on an infinitely higher plane than the sensual divinities of the ancients. His own views of the Creator seem to me to be a more evident degeneration. He declares that looking round at Nature he can see nothing but ruthlessness and brutality. “Either the Creator is not all-powerful, or else He is not all-good,” says he. “Either He can stop these atrocities and won’t, in which case He is not all-good; or else He would stop them but can’t, in which case He is not all-powerful.” It was a difficult dilemma for a man who professes to stick to reason to get out of. Of course, if you plead faith, you can always slip out of anything. I was forced to get behind a corner of that buckler with which you have so often turned my own thrusts. I said that the dilemma arose from our taking it for granted that that which seemed evil really was EVIL. “It lies with you to prove that it isn’t,” said he. “We may hope that it isn’t,” said I. “Wait until some one tells you that you have cancer of the pyloric end of the stomach,” said he; and he shouted it out again every time I tried to renew the argument.

But in all soberness, I really do think, Bertie, that very much which seems to be saddest in life might be very different if we could focus it properly. I tried to give you my views about this in the case of drink and immorality. But physically, I fancy that it applies more obviously than it does morally. All the physical evils of life seem to culminate in death; and yet death, as I have seen it, has not been a painful or terrible process. In many cases, a man dies without having incurred nearly as much pain, during the whole of his fatal illness, as would have arisen from a whitlow or an abscess of the jaw. And it is often those deaths which seem most terrible to the onlooker, which are least so to the sufferer. When a man is overtaken by an express and shivered into fragments, or when he drops from a fourth-floor window and is smashed into a bag of splinters, the unfortunate spectators are convulsed with horror, and find a text for pessimistic views about the Providence which allows such things to be. And yet, it is very doubtful whether the deceased, could his tongue be loosened, would remember anything at all about the matter. We know, as students of medicine, that though pain is usually associated with cancers and with abdominal complaints; still, in the various fevers, in apoplexy, in blood poisonings, in lung diseases, and, in short, in the greater proportion of serious maladies, there is little suffering.

I remember how struck I was when first I saw the actual cautery applied in a case of spinal disease. The white hot iron was pressed firmly into the patient’s back, without the use of any anaesthetic, and what with the sight and the nauseating smell of burned flesh I felt faint and ill. Yet, to my astonishment, the patient never flinched nor moved a muscle of his face, and on my inquiring afterwards, he assured me that the proceeding was absolutely painless, a remark which was corroborated by the surgeon. “The nerves are so completely and instantaneously destroyed,” he explained, “that they have no time to convey a painful impression.” But then if this be so, what becomes of all the martyrs at the stake, and the victims of Red Indians, and other poor folk over whose sufferings and constancy we have wondered? It may be that Providence is not only not cruel itself, but will not allow man to be cruel either. Do your worst, and it will step in with a “No, I won’t allow this poor child of mine to be hurt”; and then comes the dulling of the nerve and the lethargy which takes the victim out of the reach of the tormentor. David Livingstone under the claws of the lion must have looked like an object lesson of the evil side of things, and yet he has left it upon record that his own sensations were pleasurable rather than otherwise. I am well convinced that if the newly-born infant and the man who had just died could compare their experiences, the former would have proved to be the sufferer. It is not for nothing that the first thing the newcomer into this planet does is to open its toothless mouth and protest energetically against fate.

Cullingworth has written a parable which makes a paragraph for our wonderful new weekly paper.

“The little cheese mites held debate,” he says, “as to who made the cheese. Some thought that they had no data to go upon, and some that it had come together by a solidification of vapour, or by the centrifugal attraction of atoms. A few surmised that the platter might have something to do with it; but the wisest of them could not deduce the existence of a cow.”

We are at one, he and I, in thinking that the infinite is beyond our perception. We differ only in that he sees evil and I see good in the working of the universe. Ah, what a mystery it all is! Let us be honest and humble and think kindly of each other. There’s a line of stars all winking at me over the opposite roof — winking slyly at the silly little person with the pen and paper who is so earnest about what he can never understand.

Well, now, I'll come back to something practical. It is nearly a month since I wrote to you last. The date is impressed upon my memory because it was the day after Cullingworth shot the air-dart into my finger. The place festered and prevented my writing to any one for a week or two, but it is all right again now. I have ever so much of different sorts to tell you, but really when I come to think of it, it does not amount to very much after all.

First of all, about the practice. I told you that I was to have a room immediately opposite to Cullingworth's, and that all the surgical cases were to be turned over to me. For a few days I had nothing to do, except to listen to him romping and scuffling with his patients, or making speeches to them from the top of the stairs. However, a great "Dr. Stark Munro, Surgeon," has been affixed to the side of the door downstairs, opposite Cullingworth's plate; and a proud man was I when first my eyes lit upon it. On the fourth day, however, in came a case. He little knew that he was the first that I had ever had all to myself in my life. Perhaps he would not have looked quite so cheerful if he had realised it.

Poor chap, he had little enough to be cheery over either. He was an old soldier who had lost a good many teeth, but who had continued to find room between his nose and chin for a short black clay pipe. Lately there appeared a small sore on his nose which had spread, and become crusted. On feeling it I found it as hard as a streak of glue, with constant darting pains passing through it. Of course, there could be no question as to diagnosis. It was epitheliomatous cancer, caused by the irritation of the hot tobacco smoke. I sent him back to his village, and two days after I drove over in Cullingworth's dog-cart, and removed the growth. I only got a sovereign for it. But it may be a nucleus for cases. The old fellow did most admirably, and he has just been in (with a most aristocratic curl to his nostrils) to tell me that he has bought a box full of churchwardens. It was my first operation, and I daresay I was more nervous about it than my patient, but the result has given me confidence. I have fully made up my mind to let nothing pass me. Come what may, I am prepared to do it. Why should a man wait? Of course, I know that many men do; but surely one's nerve is more likely to be strong and one's knowledge fresh now than in twenty years.

Cases came dribbling in from day to day — all very poor people, and able to pay very poor fees — but still most welcome to me. The first week I took (including that operation fee) one pound seventeen and sixpence. The second, I got two pounds exactly. The third, I had two pounds five, and now I find that this last week has brought in two pounds eighteen; so I am moving in the right direction. Of course, it compares absurdly enough with Cullingworth's twenty pound a day, and my little quiet back-water seems a strange contrast to the noisy stream which pours for ever through his room. Still, I am quite satisfied, and I have no doubt at all that his original estimate of three hundred pounds for the first year will be amply justified. It would be a pleasant thing to think that if anything were really to happen at home, I should be able to be of some use to them. If things go on as they have begun, I shall soon have my feet firmly planted.

I was compelled, by the way, to forego an opening which a few months ago would have been the very summit of my ambition. You must know (possibly I told you), that immediately after I passed, I put my name down as a candidate for a surgeonship on the books of several of the big steamship lines. It was done as a forlorn hope, for a man has usually to wait several years before his turn comes round. Well, just a week after I started here, I got a telegram one night from Liverpool: "Join the Decia to-morrow as surgeon, not later than eight in the evening." It was from Staunton & Merivale, the famous South American firm, and the Decia is a fine 6000-ton passenger boat, doing the round journey by Bahia and Buenos Ayres to Rio and Valparaiso. I had a bad quarter of an hour, I can tell you. I don't think I was ever so undecided about anything in my life. Cullingworth was dead against my going, and his influence carried the day.

"My dear chap," said he, "you'd knock down the chief mate, and he'd spread you out with a handspike. You'd get tied by your thumbs to the rigging. You'd be fed on stinking water and putrid biscuits. I've been reading a novel about the merchant service, and I know."

When I laughed at his ideas of modern sea-going he tried another line.

"You're a bigger fool than I take you for if you go," said he. "Why, what can it lead to? All the money you earn goes to buy a blue coat, and daub it with lace. You think you're bound for Valparaiso, and you find yourself at the poor-house. You've got a rare opening here, and everything ready to your hand. You'll never get such another again."

And so it ended by my letting them have a wire to say that I could not come. It is strange when you come to a point where the road of your life obviously divides, and you take one turning or the other after vainly trying to be sure about the finger-post. I think after all I chose rightly. A ship's surgeon must remain a ship’s surgeon, while here there is no horizon to my possibilities.

As to old Cullingworth, he is booming along as merrily as ever. You say in your last, that what you cannot understand is how he got his hold of the public in so short a time. That is just the point which I have found it hard to get light upon. He told me that after his first coming he had not a patient for a month, and that he was so disheartened that he very nearly made a moonlight exodus. At last, however, a few cases came his way — and he made such extraordinary cures of them, or else impressed them so by his eccentricity, that they would do nothing but talk of him. Some of his wonderful results got into the local press, though, after my Avonmouth experience, I should not like to guarantee that he did not himself convey them there. He showed me an almanac, which had a great circulation in the district.

It had an entry sandwiched in this way:

Aug. 15. Reform Bill passed 1867.

Aug. 16. Birth of Julius Caesar.

Aug. 17. Extraordinary cure by Dr. Cullingworth of a case of dropsy in Bradfield, 1881.

Aug. 18. Battle of Gravelotte, 1870.

It reads as if it were one of the landmarks of the latter half of the century. I asked him how on earth it got there; but I could only learn that the woman was fifty-six inches round the waist, and that he had treated her with elaterium.

That leads me to another point. You ask me whether his cures are really remarkable, and, if so, what his system is. I answer unhesitatingly, that his cures are very remarkable, indeed, and that I look upon him as a sort of Napoleon of medicine. His view is that the pharmacopaeal doses are in nearly every instance much too low. Excessive timidity has cut down the dose until it has ceased to produce a real effect upon the disease.

Medical men, according to his view, have been afraid of producing a poisonous effect with their drugs. With him, on the contrary, the whole art of medicine lies in judicious poisoning, and when the case is serious, his remedies are heroic. Where, in epilepsy, I should have given thirty-grain doses of bromide or chloral every four hours, he would give two drachms every three. No doubt it will seem to you very kill-or-cure, and I am myself afraid that a succession of coroners’ inquests may check Cullingworth’s career; but hitherto he has had no public scandal, while the cases which he has brought back to life have been numerous. He is the most fearless fellow. I have seen him pour opium into a dysenteric patient until my hair bristled. But either his knowledge or his luck always brings him out right.

Then there are other cures which depend, I think, upon his own personal magnetism. He is so robust and loud-voiced and hearty that a weak nervous patient goes away from him recharged with vitality. He is so perfectly confident that he can cure them, that he makes them perfectly confident that they can be cured; and you know how in nervous cases the mind reacts upon the body. If he chose to preserve crutches and sticks, as they do in the mediaeval churches, he might, I am sure, paper his consulting room with them. A favourite device of his with an impressionable patient is to name the exact hour of their cure. “My dear,” he will say, swaying some girl about by the shoulders, with his nose about three inches from hers, “you’ll feel better to-morrow at a quarter to ten, and at twenty past you’ll be as well as ever you were in your life. Now, keep your eye on the clock, and see if I am not right.” Next day, as likely as not, her mother will be in, weeping tears of joy; and another miracle has been added to Cullingworth’s record. It may smell of quackery, but it is exceedingly useful to the patient.

Still I must confess that there is nothing about Cullingworth which jars me so much as the low view which he takes of our profession. I can never reconcile myself to his ideas, and yet I can never convert him to mine; so there will be a chasm there which sooner or later may open to divide us altogether. He will not acknowledge any philanthropic side to the question. A profession, in his view, is a means of earning a livelihood, and the doing good to our fellow mortals, is quite a secondary one.

“Why the devil should we do all the good, Munro?” he shouts. “Eh, what? A butcher would do good to the race, would he not, if he served his chops out gratis through the window? He’d be a real benefactor; but he goes on selling them at a shilling the pound for all that. Take the case of a doctor who devotes himself to sanitary science. He flushes out drains, and keeps down infection. You call him a philanthropist! Well, I call him a traitor. That’s it, Munro, a traitor and a renegade! Did you ever hear of a congress of lawyers for simplifying the law and discouraging litigation? What are the Medical Association and the General Council, and all these bodies for? Eh, laddie? For encouraging the best interests of the profession. Do you suppose they do that by making the population healthy? It’s about time we had a mutiny among the general practitioners. If I had the use of half the funds which the Association has, I should spend part of them in drain-blocking, and the rest in the cultivation of disease germs, and the contamination of drinking water."

Of course, I told him that his views were diabolical; but, especially since that warning which I had from his wife, I discount everything that he says. He begins in earnest; but as he goes on the humour of exaggeration gets hold of him, and he winds up with things which he would never uphold in cold blood. However, the fact remains that we differ widely in our views of professional life, and I fear that we may come to grief over the question.

What do you think we have been doing lately? Building a stable — no less. Cullingworth wanted to have another one at the business place, as much, I think, for his patients as his horses; and, in his audacious way, he determined that he would build it himself. So at it we went, he, I, the coachman, Mrs. Cullingworth, and the coachman's wife. We dug foundations, got bricks in by the cartload, made our own mortar, and I think that we shall end by making a very fair job of it. It's not quite as flat-chested as we could wish; and I think that if I were a horse inside it, I should be careful about brushing against the walls; but still it will keep the wind and rain out when it is finished. Cullingworth talks of our building a new house for ourselves; but as we have three large ones already there does not seem to be any pressing need.

Talking about horses, we had no end of a fuss here the other day. Cullingworth got it into his head that he wanted a first-class riding horse; and as neither of the carriage ones would satisfy him, he commissioned a horse dealer to get him one. The man told us of a charger which one of the officers in the garrison was trying to get rid of. He did not conceal the fact that the reason why he wished to sell it was because he considered it to be dangerous; but, he added, that Captain Lucas had given L150 for it, and was prepared to sell it at seventy. This excited Cullingworth, and he ordered the creature to be saddled and brought round. It was a beautiful animal, coal black, with a magnificent neck and shoulders, but with a nasty backward tilt to its ears, and an unpleasant way of looking at you. The horse dealer said that our yard was too small to try the creature in; but Cullingworth clambered up upon its back and formally took possession of it by lamming it between the ears with the bone handle of his whip. Then ensued one of the most lively ten minutes that I can remember. The beast justified his reputation; but Cullingworth, although he was no horseman, stuck to him like a limpet. Backwards, forwards, sideways, on his fore feet, on his hind feet, with his back curved, with his back sunk, bucking and kicking, there was nothing the creature did not try. Cullingworth was sitting alternately on his mane and on the root of his tail — never by any chance in the saddle — he had lost both stirrups, and his knees were drawn up and his heels dug into the creature's ribs, while his hands clawed at mane, saddle, or ears, whichever he saw in front of him. He kept his whip, however; and whenever the brute eased down, Cullingworth lammed him once more with the bone handle. His idea, I suppose, was to break its spirit, but he had taken a larger contract than he could carry through. The animal bunched his four feet together, ducked down his head, arched his back like a yawning cat, and gave three convulsive springs into the air. At the first, Cullingworth's knees were above the saddle flaps, at the second his ankles were retaining a convulsive grip, at the third he flew forward like a stone out of a sling, narrowly missed the coping of the wall, broke with his head the iron bar which held some wire netting, and toppled back with a thud into the yard. Up he bounded with the blood streaming down his face, and running into our half-finished stables he seized a hatchet, and with a bellow of rage rushed at the horse. I caught him by the coat and put on a fourteen-stone drag, while the horse dealer (who was as white as a cheese) ran off with his horse into the street. Cullingworth broke away from my grip, and cursing incoherently, his face slobbered with blood, and his hatchet waving over his head, he rushed out of the yard — the most diabolical looking ruffian you can imagine. However, luckily for the dealer, he had got a good start, and Cullingworth was persuaded to come back and wash his face. We bound up his cut, and found him little the worse, except in his temper. But for me he would most certainly have paid seventy pounds for his insane outburst of rage against the animal.

I daresay you think it strange that I should write so much about this fellow and so little about anybody else; but the fact is, that I know nobody else, and that my whole circle is bounded by my patients, Cullingworth and his wife. They visit nobody, and nobody visits them. My living with them brings the same taboo from my brother doctors upon my head, although I have never done anything unprofessional myself. Who should I see in the street the other day but the McFarlanes, whom you will remember at Linlithgow? I was foolish enough to propose to Maimie McFarlane once, and she was sensible enough to refuse me. What I should have done had she accepted me, I can’t imagine; for that was three years ago, and I have more ties and less prospect of marriage now than then. Well, there’s no use yearning for what you can’t have, and there’s no other man living to whom I would speak about the matter at all; but life is a deadly, lonely thing when a man has no one on his side but himself. Why is it that I am sitting here in the moonlight writing to you, except that I am craving for sympathy and fellowship? I get it from you, too — as much as one friend ever got from another — and yet there are some sides to my nature with which neither wife nor friend nor any one else can share. If you cut your own path, you must expect to find yourself alone upon it.

Heigh ho! it’s nearly dawn, and I as wakeful as ever. It is chilly, and I have draped a blanket round me. I’ve heard that this is the favourite hour of the suicide, and I see that I’ve been tailing off in the direction of melancholy myself. Let me wind up on a lighter chord by quoting Cullingworth’s latest article. I must tell you that he is still inflamed by the idea of his own paper, and his brain is in full eruption, sending out a perpetual stream of libellous paragraphs, doggerel poems, social skits, parodies, and articles. He brings them all to me, and my table is already piled with them. Here is his latest, brought up to my room after he had undressed. It was the outcome of some remarks I had made about the difficulty which our far-off descendants may have in determining what the meaning is of some of the commonest objects of our civilisation, and as a corollary how careful we should be before we become dogmatic about the old Romans or Egyptians.

“At the third annual meeting of the New Guinea Archaeological Society a paper was read upon recent researches on the supposed site of London, together with some observations upon hollow cylinders in use among the ancient Londoners. Several examples of these metallic cylinders or tubings were on exhibition in the hall, and were passed round for inspection among the audience. The learned lecturer prefaced his remarks by observing that on account of the enormous interval of time which separated them from the days when London was a flourishing city, it behoved them to be very guarded in any conclusions to which they might come as to the habits of the inhabitants. Recent research appeared to have satisfactorily established the fact that the date of the final fall of London was somewhat later than that of the erection of the Egyptian Pyramids. A large building had recently been unearthed near the dried-up bed of the river Thames; and there could be no question from existing records that this was the seat of the law-making council among the ancient Britons — or Anglicans, as they were sometimes called. The lecturer proceeded to point out that the bed of the Thames had been tunnelled under by a monarch named Brunel, who is supposed by some authorities to have succeeded Alfred the Great. The open spaces of London, he went on to remark, must have been far from safe, as the bones of lions, tigers, and other extinct forms of carnivora had been discovered in the Regent’s Park. Having briefly referred to the mysterious structures known as ‘pillar-boxes,’ which are scattered thickly over the city, and which are either religious in their origin, or else may be taken as marking the tombs of Anglican chiefs, the lecturer passed on to the cylindrical piping. This had been explained by the Patagonian school as being a universal system of lightning-conductors. He (the lecturer) could not assent to this theory. In a series of observations, extending over several months, he had discovered the important fact that these lines of tubing, if followed out, invariably led to large hollow metallic reservoirs which were connected with furnaces. No one who knew how addicted the ancient Britons were to the use of tobacco could doubt what this meant. Evidently large quantities of the herb were burned in the central chamber, and the aromatic and narcotic vapour was carried through the tubes to the house of every citizen, so that he might inhale it at will. Having illustrated his remarks by a series of diagrams, the lecturer concluded by saying that, although true science was invariably cautious and undogmatic, it was none the less an incontestable fact that so much light had been thrown upon old London, that every action of the citizens’ daily life was known, from the taking of a tub in the morning, until after a draught of porter he painted himself blue before retiring to rest.”

After all, I daresay this explanation of the London gas pipes is not more absurd than some of our shots about the Pyramids, or ideas of life among the Babylonians.

Well, good-bye, old chap; this is a stupid inconsequential letter, but life has been more quiet and less interesting just of late. I may have something a little more moving for my next.

IX. THE PARADE, BRADFIELD, 23rd April, 1882.

I have some recollection, my dear Bertie, that when I wrote you a rambling disconnected sort of letter about three weeks ago, I wound up by saying that I might have something more interesting to tell you next time. Well, so it has turned out! The whole game is up here, and I am off upon a fresh line of rails altogether. Cullingworth is to go one way and I another; and yet I am glad to say that there has not been any quarrel between us. As usual, I have begun my letter at the end, but I'll work up to it more deliberately now, and let you know exactly how it came about.

And first of all, a thousand thanks for your two long letters, which lie before me as I write. There is little enough personal news in them, but I can quite understand that the quiet happy routine of your life reels off very smoothly from week to week. On the other hand, you give me plenty of proof of that inner life which is to me so very much more interesting. After all, we may very well agree to differ. You think some things are proved which I don't believe in. You think some things edifying which do not appear to me to be so. Well, I know that you are perfectly honest in your belief. I am sure you give me credit for being the same. The future wilt decide which of us is right. The survival of the truest is a constant law, I fancy, though it must be acknowledged that it is very slow in action.

You make a mistake, however, in assuming that those who think as I do are such a miserable minority. The whole essence of our thought is independence and individual judgment; so that we don't get welded into single bodies as the churches do, and have no opportunity of testing our own strength. There are, no doubt, all shades of opinion among us; but if you merely include those who in their private hearts disbelieve the doctrines usually accepted, and think that sectarian churches tend to evil rather than good, I fancy that the figures would be rather surprising. When I read your letter, I made a list of all those men with whom I ever had intimate talk upon such matters. I got seventeen names, with four orthodox. Cullingworth tried and got twelve names, with one orthodox. From all sides, one hears that every church complains of the absence of men in the congregations.

The women predominate three to one. Is it that women are more earnest than men? I think it is quite the other way. But the men are following their reason, and the women their emotion. It is the women only who keep orthodoxy alive.

No, you mustn’t be too sure of that majority of yours. Taking the scientific, the medical, the professional classes, I question whether it exists at all. The clergy, busy in their own limited circles, and coming in contact only with those who agree with them, have not realised how largely the rising generation has outgrown them. And (with exceptions like yourself) it is not the most lax, but the BEST of the younger men, the larger-brained and the larger-hearted, who have shaken themselves most clear of the old theology. They cannot abide its want of charity, it’s limitations of God’s favours, its claims for a special Providence, its dogmatism about what seems to be false, its conflict with what we know to be true. We KNOW that man has ascended, not descended; so what is the value of a scheme of thought which depends upon the supposition of his fall? We KNOW that the world was not made in six days, that the sun could never be stopped since it was never moving, and that no man ever lived three days in a fish; so what becomes of the inspiration of a book which contains such statements? “Truth, though it crush me!”

There, now, you see what comes of waving the red rag! Let me make a concession to appease you. I do believe that Christianity in its different forms has been the very best thing for the world during all this long barbarous epoch. Of course, it has been the best thing, else Providence would not have permitted it. The engineer knows best what tools to use in strengthening his own machine. But when you say that this is the best and last tool which will be used, you are laying down the law a little too much.

Now, first of all, I want to tell you about how the practice has been going on. The week after I wrote last showed a slight relapse. I only took two pounds. But on the next I took a sudden jump up to three pounds seven shillings, and this last week I took three pounds ten. So it was steadily creeping up; and I really thought that I saw my road clear in front of me, when the bolt suddenly fell from the blue. There were reasons, however, which prevented my being very disappointed when it did come down; and these I must make clear to you.

I think that I mentioned, when I gave you a short sketch of my dear old mother, that she has a very high standard of family honour. She really tries to live up to the Percy-Plantagenet blend which is said to flow in our veins; and it is only our empty pockets which prevent her from sailing through life, like the grande dame that she is, throwing largesse to right and left, with her head in the air and her soul in the clouds. I have often heard her say (and I am quite convinced that she meant it) that she would far rather see any one of us in our graves than know that we had committed a dishonourable action. Yes; for all her softness and femininity, she could freeze iron-hard at the suspicion of baseness; and I have seen the blood flush from her white cap to her lace collar when she has heard of an act of meanness.

Well, she had heard some details about the Cullingworths which displeased her when I first knew them. Then came the smash-up at Avonmouth, and my mother liked them less and less. She was averse to my joining them in Bradfield, and it was only by my sudden movement at the end that I escaped a regular prohibition. When I got there, the very first question she asked (when I told her of their prosperity) was whether they had paid their Avonmouth creditors. I was compelled to answer that they had not. In reply she wrote imploring me to come away, and saying that, poor as our family was, none of them had ever fallen so low as to enter into a business partnership with a man of unscrupulous character and doubtful antecedents. I answered that Cullingworth spoke sometimes of paying his creditors, that Mrs. Cullingworth was in favour of it also, and that it seemed to me to be unreasonable to expect that I should sacrifice a good opening on account of things with which I had no connection. I assured her that if Cullingworth did anything from then onwards which seemed to me dishonourable, I would disassociate myself from him, and I mentioned that I had already refused to adopt some of his professional methods. Well, in reply to this, my mother wrote a pretty violent letter about what she thought of Cullingworth, which led to another from me defending him, and showing that there were some deep and noble traits in his character. That produced another still more outspoken letter from her; and so the correspondence went on, she attacking and I defending, until a serious breach seemed to be opening between us. I refrained from writing at last, not out of ill temper, but because I thought that if she were given time she would cool down, and take, perhaps, a more reasonable view of the situation. My father, from the short note which he sent me, seemed to think the whole business absolutely irregular, and to refuse to believe my accounts of Cullingworth's practice and receipts. This double opposition, from the very people whose interests had really been nearest my heart in the whole affair, caused me to be less disappointed than I should otherwise have been when it all came to an end. In fact, I was quite in the humour to finish it myself when Fate did it for me.

Now about the Cullingworths. Madam is as amiable as ever; and yet somehow, unless I am deceiving myself, she has changed somewhat of late in her feelings towards me. I have turned upon her suddenly more than once, and caught the skirt of a glance which was little less than malignant. In one or two small matters I have also detected a hardness in her which I had never observed before. Is it that I have intruded too much into their family life? Have I come between the husband and the wife? Goodness knows I have striven with all my little stock of tact to avoid doing so. And yet I have often felt that my position was a false one. Perhaps a young man attaches too much importance to a woman’s glances and gestures. He wishes to assign a definite meaning to each, when they may be only the passing caprice of the moment. Ah, well, I have nothing to blame myself with; and in any case it will soon be all over now.

And then I have seen something of the same sort in Cullingworth; but he is so strange a being that I never attach much importance to his variations. He glares at me like an angry bull occasionally; and then when I ask him what is the matter, he growls out, “Oh, nothing!” and turns on his heel. Then at other times he is so cordial and friendly that he almost overdoes it, and I find myself wondering whether he is not acting. It must seem ungracious to you that I should speak so of a man who has been my benefactor; and it seems so to me also, but still that IS the impression which he leaves upon me sometimes. It’s an absurd idea, too; for what possible object could his wife and he have in pretending to be amiable, if they did not really feel so? And yet you know the feeling that you get when a man smiles with his lips and not with his eyes.

One day we went to the Central Hotel billiard-room in the evening to play a match. Our form is just about the same, and we should have bad an enjoyable game if it had not been for that queer temper of his. He had been in a sullen humour the whole day, pretending not to hear what I said to him, or else giving snappy answers, and looking like a thunder-cloud. I was determined not to have a row, so I took no notice at all of his continual provocations, which, instead of pacifying him, seemed to encourage him to become more offensive. At the end of the match, wanting two to win, I put down the white which was in the jaws of the pocket. He cried out that this was bad form. I contended that it was folly to refrain from doing it when one was only two off game, and, on his continuing to make remarks, I appealed to the marker, who took the same view as I did. This opposition only increased his anger, and he suddenly broke out into most violent language, abusing me in unmeasured terms. I said to him, “If you have anything to say to me, Cullingworth, come out into the street and say it there. It’s a caddish thing to speak like that before the marker.” He lifted his cue, and I thought he was going to strike me with it; but he flung it clattering on the floor, and chucked half a crown to the man. When we got out in the street, he began at once in as offensive a tone as ever.

“That’s enough, Cullingworth,” I said. “I’ve stood already rather more than I can carry.”

We were in the bright light of a shop window at that moment. He looked at me, and looked a second time, uncertain what to do. At any moment I might have found myself in a desperate street row with a man who was my medical partner. I gave no provocation, but kept myself keenly on the alert. Suddenly, to my relief, he burst out laughing (such a roar as made the people stop on the other side of the road), and passing his arm through mine, he hurried me down the street.

“Devil of a temper you’ve got, Munro,” said he. “By Crums, it’s hardly safe to go out with you. I never know what you’re going to do next. Eh, what? You mustn’t be peppery with me, though; for I mean well towards you, as you’ll see before you get finished with me.”

I have told you this trivial little scene, Bertie, to show the strange way in which Cullingworth springs quarrels upon me; suddenly, without the slightest possible provocation, taking a most offensive tone, and then when he sees he has goaded me to the edge of my endurance, turning the whole thing to chaff. This has occurred again and again recently; and, when coupled with the change in Mrs. Cullingworth’s demeanour, makes one feel that something has happened to change one’s relations. What that something may be, I give you my word that I have no more idea than you have. Between their coldness, however, and my unpleasant correspondence with my mother, I was often very sorry that I had not taken the South American liner.

Cullingworth is preparing for the issue of our new paper. He has carried the matter through with his usual energy, but he doesn’t know enough about local affairs to be able to write about them, and it is a question whether he can interest the people here in anything else. At present we are prepared to run the paper single-handed; we are working seven hours a day at the practice; we are building a stable; and in our odd hours we are practising at our magnetic ship-protector, with which Cullingworth is still well pleased, though he wants to get it more perfect before submitting it to the Admiralty.

His mind runs rather on naval architecture at present, and he has been devising an ingenious method of preventing wooden-sided vessels from being crippled by artillery fire. I did not think much of his magnetic attractor, because it seemed to me that even if it had all the success that he claimed for it, it would merely have the effect of substituting some other metal for steel in the manufacture of shells. This new project has, however, more to recommend it. This is the idea, as put in his own words; and, as he has been speaking of little else for the last two days, I ought to remember them.

“If you’ve got your armour there, laddie, it will be pierced,” says he. “Put up forty feet thick of steel; and I’ll build a gun that will knock it into tooth-powder. It would blow away, and set the folk coughing after I had one shot at it. But you can’t pierce armour which only drops after the shot has passed through. What’s the good of it? Why it keeps out the water. That’s the main thing, after all. I call it the Cullingworth spring-shutter screen. Eh, what, Munro? I wouldn’t take a quarter of a million for the idea. You see how it would work. Spring shutters are furled all along the top of the bulwarks where the hammocks used to be. They are in sections, three feet broad, we will say, and capable when let down of reaching the keel. Very well! Enemy sends a shot through Section A of the side. Section A shutter is lowered. Only a thin film, you see, but enough to form a temporary plug. Enemy’s ram knocks in sections B, C, D of the side. What do you do? Founder? Not a bit; you lower sections B, C, and D of Cullingworth’s spring-shutter screen. Or you knock a hole on a rock. The same thing again. It’s a ludicrous sight to see a big ship founder when so simple a precaution would absolutely save her. And it’s equally good for ironclads also. A shot often starts their plates and admits water without breaking them. Down go your shutters, and all is well.”

That’s his idea, and he is busy on a model made out of the steels of his wife’s stays. It sounds plausible, but he has the knack of making anything plausible when he is allowed to slap his hands and bellow.

We are both writing novels, but I fear that the results don’t bear out his theory that a man may do anything which he sets his will to. I thought mine was not so bad (I have done nine chapters), but Cullingworth says he has read it all before, and that it is much too conventional. We must rivet the attention of the public from the start, he says. Certainly, his own is calculated to do so, for it seems to me to be wild rubbish. The end of his first chapter is the only tolerable point that he has made. A fraudulent old baronet is running race-horses on the cross. His son, who is just coming of age, is an innocent youth. The news of the great race of the year has just been received.

“Sir Robert tottered into the room with dry lips and a ghastly face.

“‘My poor boy!’ he cried. ‘Prepare for the worst!’

“‘Our horse has lost!’ cried the young heir, springing from his chair.

“The old man threw himself in agony upon the rug. ‘No, no!’ he screamed. ‘IT HAS WON!’”

Most of it, however, is poor stuff, and we are each agreed that the other was never meant for a novelist.

So much for our domestic proceedings, and all these little details which you say you like to hear of. Now I must tell you of the great big change in my affairs, and how it came about.

I have told you about the strange, sulky behaviour of Cullingworth, which has been deepening from day to day. Well, it seemed to reach a climax this morning, and on our way to the rooms I could hardly get a word out of him. The place was fairly crowded with patients, but my own share was rather below the average. When I had finished I added a chapter to my novel, and waited until he and his wife were ready for the daily bag-carrying homewards.

It was half-past three before he had done. I heard him stamp out into the passage, and a moment later he came banging into my room. I saw in an instant that some sort of a crisis had come.

“Munro,” he cried, “this practice is going to the devil!”

“Ah!” said I. “How’s that?

“It’s going to little pieces, Munro. I’ve been taking figures, and I know what I am talking about. A month ago I was seeing six hundred a week. Then I dropped to five hundred and eighty; then to five-seventy-five; and now to five-sixty. What do you think of that?”

“To be honest, I don’t think much of it,” I answered. “The summer is coming on. You are losing all your coughs and colds and sore throats. Every practice must dwindle at this time of year.”

“That’s all very well,” said he, pacing up and down the room, with his hands thrust into his pockets, and his great shaggy eyebrows knotted together. “You may put it down to that, but I think quite differently about it.”

“What do you put it down to, then?”

“To you.”

“How’s that?” I asked.

“Well,” said he, “you must allow that it is a very queer coincidence — if it is a coincidence — that from the day when your plate was put up my practice has taken a turn for the worse.”

“I should be very sorry to think it was cause and effect,” I answered. “How do you think that my presence could have hurt you?”

“I’ll tell you frankly, old chap,” said he, putting on suddenly that sort of forced smile which always seems to me to have a touch of a sneer in it. “You see, many of my patients are simple country folk, half imbecile for the most part, but then the half-crown of an imbecile is as good as any other half-crown. They come to my door, and they see two names, and their silly jaws begin to drop, and they say to each other, ‘There’s two of ‘em here. It’s Dr. Cullingworth we want to see, but if we go in we’ll be shown as likely as not to Dr. Munro.’ So it ends in some cases in their not coming at all. Then there are the women. Women don’t care a toss whether you are a Solomon, or whether you are hot from an asylum. It’s all personal with them. You fetch them, or you don’t fetch them. I know how to work them, but they won’t come if they think they are going to be turned over to anybody else. That’s what I put the falling away down to.”

“Well,” said I, “that’s easily set right.” I marched out of the room and downstairs, with both Cullingworth and his wife behind me. Into the yard I went, and, picking up a big hammer, I started for the front door, with the pair still at my heels. I got the forked end of the hammer under my plate, and with a good wrench I brought the whole thing clattering on to the pavement.

“That won’t interfere with you any more,” said I.

“What do you intend to do now?” he asked.

“Oh, I shall find plenty to do. Don’t you worry about that,” I answered.

“Oh, but this is all rot,” said he, picking up the plate. “Come along upstairs and let us see where we stand.”

We filed off once more, he leading with the huge brass “Dr. Munro” under his arm; then the little woman, and then this rather perturbed and bemuddled young man. He and his wife sat on the deal table in the consulting room, like a hawk and a turtle-dove on the same perch, while I leaned against the mantelpiece with my hands in my pockets. Nothing could be more prosaic and informal; but I knew very well that I was at a crisis of my life. Before, it was only a choosing between two roads. Now my main track had run suddenly to nothing, and I must go back or find a bye-path.

“It’s this way, Cullingworth,” said I. “I am very much obliged to you, and to you, Mrs. Cullingworth, for all your kindness and good wishes, but I did not come here to spoil your practice; and, after what you have told me, it is quite impossible for me to work with you any more.”

“Well, my boy,” said he, “I am inclined myself to think that we should do better apart; and that’s Hetty’s idea also, only she is too polite to say so.”

“It is a time for plain speaking,” I answered, “and we may as well thoroughly understand each other. If I have done your practice any harm, I assure you that I am heartily sorry, and I shall do all I can to repair it. I cannot say more.”

“What are you going to do, then?” asked Cullingworth.

“I shall either go to sea or else start a practice on my own account.”

“But you have no money.”

“Neither had you when you started.”

“Ah, that was different. Still, it may be that you are right. You’ll find it a stiff pull at first.”

“Oh, I am quite prepared for that.”

“Well, you know, Munro, I feel that I am responsible to you to some extent, since I persuaded you not to take that ship the other day.”

“It was a pity, but it can’t be helped.”

“We must do what we can to make up. Now, I tell you what I am prepared to do. I was talking about it with Hetty this morning, and she thought as I did. If we were to allow you one pound a week until you got your legs under you, it would encourage you to start for yourself, and you could pay it back as soon as you were able.”

“It is very kind of you,” said I. “If you would let the matter stand just now, I should like just to take a short walk by myself, and to think it all over.”

So the Cullingworths did their bag-procession through the doctors’ quarter alone to-day, and I walked to the park, where I sat down on one of the seats, lit a cigar, and thought the whole matter over. I was down on my luck at first; but the balmy air and the smell of spring and the budding flowers soon set me right again. I began my last letter among the stars, and I am inclined to finish this one among the flowers, for they are rare companions when one’s mind is troubled. Most things on this earth, from a woman’s beauty to the taste of a nectarine, seem to be the various baits with which Nature lures her silly gudgeons. They shall eat, they shall propagate, and for the sake of pleasing themselves they shall hurry down the road which has been laid out for them. But there lurks no bribe in the smell and beauty of the flower. It’s charm has no ulterior motive.

Well, I sat down there and brooded. In my heart I did not believe that Cullingworth had taken alarm at so trifling a decrease. That could not have been his real reason for driving me from the practice. He had found me in the way in his domestic life, no doubt, and he had devised this excuse for getting rid of me. Whatever the reason was, it was sufficiently plain that all my hopes of building up a surgical practice, which should keep parallel with his medical one, were for ever at an end. On the whole, bearing in mind my mother’s opposition, and the continual janglings which we had had during the last few weeks, I was not very sorry. On the contrary, a sudden curious little thrill of happiness took me somewhere about the back of the midriff, and, as a drift of rooks passed cawing over my head, I began cawing also in the overflow of my spirits.

And then as I walked back I considered how far I could avail myself of this money from Cullingworth. It was not much, but it would be madness to start without it, for I had sent home the little which I had saved at Horton’s. I had not more than six pounds in the whole world. I reflected that the money could make no difference to Cullingworth, with his large income, while it made a vast one to me. I should repay him in a year or two at the latest. Perhaps I might get on so well as to be able to dispense with it almost at once. There could be no doubt that it was the representations of Cullingworth as to my future prospects in Bradfield which had made me refuse the excellent appointment in the Decia. I need not therefore have any scruples at accepting some temporary assistance from his hands. On my return, I told him that I had decided to do so, and thanked him at the same time for his generosity.

"That's all right," said he. "Hetty, my dear, get a bottle of fez in, and we shall drink success to Munro's new venture."

It seemed only the other day that he had been drinking my entrance into partnership; and here we were, the same three, sipping good luck to my exit from it! I'm afraid our second ceremony was on both sides the heartier of the two.

"I must decide now where I am to start," I remarked. "What I want is some nice little town where all the people are rich and ill."

"I suppose you wouldn't care to settle here in Bradfield?" asked Cullingworth.

"Well, I cannot see much point in that. If I harmed you as a partner, I might do so more as a rival. If I succeeded it might be at your expense."

"Well," said he, "choose your town, and my offer still holds good."

We hunted out an atlas, and laid the map of England before us on the table. Cities and villages lay beneath me as thick as freckles, and yet there was nothing to lead me to choose one rather than another.

"I think it should be some place large enough to give you plenty of room for expansion," said he.

"Not too near London," added Mrs. Cullingworth.

"And, above all, a place where I know nobody," said I. "I can rough it by myself, but I can't keep up appearances before visitors."

"What do you say to Stockwell?" said Cullingworth, putting the amber of his pipe upon a town within thirty miles of Bradfield.

I had hardly heard of the place, but I raised my glass. "Well, here's to Stockwell!" I cried; "I shall go there to-morrow morning and prospect." We all drank the toast (as you will do at Lowell when you read this); and so it is arranged, and you may rely upon it that I shall give you a full and particular account of the result.

X. CADOGAN TERRACE, BIRCHESPOOL, 21st May, 1882.

My dear old chap, things have been happening, and I must tell you all about it. Sympathy is a strange thing; for though I never see you, the mere fact that you over there in New England are keenly interested in what I am doing and thinking, makes my own life in old England very much more interesting to me. The thought of you is like a good staff in my right hand.

The unexpected has happened so continually in my life that it has ceased to deserve the name. You remember that in my last I had received my dismissal, and was on the eve of starting for the little country town of Stockwell to see if there were any sign of a possible practice there. Well, in the morning, before I came down to breakfast, I was putting one or two things into a bag, when there came a timid knock at my door, and there was Mrs. Cullingworth in her dressing-jacket, with her hair down her back.

“Would you mind coming down and seeing James, Dr. Munro?” said she. “He has been very strange all night, and I am afraid that he is ill.”

Down I went, and found Cullingworth looking rather red in the face, and a trifle wild about the eyes. He was sitting up in bed, with the neck of his nightgown open, and an acute angle of hairy chest exposed. He had a sheet of paper, a pencil, and a clinical thermometer upon the coverlet in front of him.

“Deuced interesting thing, Munro,” said he. “Come and look at this temperature chart. I’ve been taking it every quarter of an hour since I couldn’t sleep, and it’s up and down till it looks like the mountains in the geography books. We’ll have some drugs in — eh, what, Munro? — and by Crums, we’ll revolutionise all their ideas about fevers. I’ll write a pamphlet from personal experiment that will make all their books clean out of date, and they’ll have to tear them up and wrap sandwiches in them.”

He was talking in the rapid slurring way of a man who has trouble coming. I looked at his chart, and saw that he was over 102 degrees. His pulse rub-a-dubbed under my fingers, and his skin sent a glow into my hand.

“Any symptoms?” I asked, sitting down on the side of his bed.

"Tongue like a nutmeg-grater," said he, thrusting it out. "Frontal headache, renal pains, no appetite, and a mouse nibbling inside my left elbow. That's as far as we've got at present."

"I'll tell you what it is, Cullingworth," said I. "You have a touch of rheumatic fever, and you will have to lie by for a bit."

"Lie by be hanged!" he cried. "I've got a hundred people to see to-day. My boy, I must be down there if I have the rattle in my throat. I didn't build up a practice to have it ruined by a few ounces of lactic acid."

"James dear, you can easily build up another one," said his wife, in her cooing voice. "You must do what Dr. Munro tells you."

"Well," said I, "you'll want looking after, and your practice will want looking after, and I am quite ready to do both. But I won't take the responsibility unless you give me your word that you will do what you are told."

"If I'm to have any doctoring it must come from you, laddie," he said; "for if I was to turn my toes up in the public square, there's not a man here who would do more than sign my certificate. By Crums, they might get the salts and oxalic acid mixed up if they came to treat me, for there's no love lost between us. But I want to go down to the practice all the same."

"It's out of the question. You know the sequel of this complaint. You'll have endocarditis, embolism, thrombosis, metastatic abscesses — you know the danger as well as I do."

He sank back into his bed laughing.

"I take my complaints one at a time, thank you," said he. "I wouldn't be so greedy as to have all those — eh, Munro, what? — when many another poor devil hasn't got an ache to his back." The four posts of his bed quivered with his laughter. "Do what you like, laddie — but I say, mind, if anything should happen, no tomfoolery over my grave. If you put so much as a stone there, by Crums, Munro, I'll come back in the dead of the night and plant it on the pit of your stomach."

Nearly three weeks passed before he could set his foot to the ground again. He wasn't such a bad patient, after all; but he rather complicated my treatment by getting in all sorts of phials and powders, and trying experiments upon his own symptoms. It was impossible to keep him quiet, and our only means of retaining him in bed was to allow him all the work that he could do there.

He wrote copiously, built up models of his patent screen, and banged off pistols at his magnetic target, which he had rigged tip on the mantelpiece. Nature has given him a constitution of steel, however, and he shook off his malady more quickly and more thoroughly than the most docile of sufferers.

In the meantime, Mrs. Cullingworth and I ran the practice together. As a substitute for him I was a dreadful failure. They would not believe in me in the least. I felt that I was as flat as water after champagne. I could not address them from the stairs, nor push them about, nor prophesy to the anaeemic women. I was much too solemn and demure after what they had been accustomed to. However, I held the thing together as best I could, and I don’t think that he found the practice much the worse when he was able to take it over. I could not descend to what I thought was unprofessional, but I did my very best to keep the wheels turning.

Well, I know that I am a shocking bad story-teller, but I just try to get things as near the truth as I can manage it. If I only knew how to colour it up, I could make some of this better reading. I can get along when I am on one line, but it is when I have to bring in a second line of events that I understand what C. means when he says that I will never be able to keep myself in nibs by what I earn in literature.

The second line is this, that I had written to my mother on the same night that I wrote to you last, telling her that there need no longer be a shadow of a disagreement between us, because everything was arranged, and I was going to leave Cullingworth at once. Then within a couple of posts I had to write again and announce that my departure was indefinitely postponed, and that I was actually doing his whole practice. Well, the dear old lady was very angry. I don’t suppose she quite understood how temporary the necessity was, and how impossible it would have been to leave Cullingworth in the lurch. She was silent for nearly three weeks, and then she wrote a very stinging letter (and she handles her adjectives most deftly when she likes). She went so far as to say that Cullingworth was a “bankrupt swindler,” and that I had dragged the family honour in the dirt by my prolonged association with him. This letter came on the morning of the very last day that my patient was confined to the house. When I returned from work I found him sitting in his dressing-gown downstairs. His wife, who had driven home, was beside him. To my surprise, when I congratulated him on being fit for work again, his manner (which had been most genial during his illness) was as ungracious as before our last explanation. His wife, too, seemed to avoid my eye, and cocked her chin at me when she spoke.

"Yes, I'll take it over to-morrow," said he. "What do I owe you for looking after it?"

"Oh, it was all in the day's work," said I.

"Thank you, I had rather have strict business," he answered. "You know where you are then, but a favour is a thing with no end to it. What d'you put it at?"

"I never thought about it in that light."

"Well, think about it now. A locum would have cost me four guineas a week. Four fours sixteen. Make it twenty. Well, I promised to allow you a pound a week, and you were to pay it back. I'll put twenty pounds to your credit account, and you'll have it every week as sure as Saturday."

"Thank you," said I. "If you are so anxious to make a business matter of it, you can arrange it so." I could not make out, and cannot make out now, what had happened to freeze them up so; but I supposed that they had been talking it over, and came to the conclusion that I was settling down too much upon the old lines, and that they must remind me that I was under orders to quit. They might have done it with more tact.

To cut a long story short, on the very day that Cullingworth was able to resume his work I started off for Stockwell, taking with me only a bag, for it was merely a prospecting expedition, and I intended to return for my luggage if I saw reason for hope. Alas! there was not the faintest. The sight of the place would have damped the most sanguine man that ever lived. It is one of those picturesque little English towns with a history and little else. A Roman trench and a Norman keep are its principal products. But to me the most amazing thing about it was the cloud of doctors which had settled upon it. A double row of brass plates flanked the principal street. Where their patients came from I could not imagine, unless they practised upon each other. The host of the "Bull" where I had my modest lunch explained the mystery to some extent by saying that, as there was pure country with hardly a hamlet for nearly twelve miles in every direction, it was in these scattered farm-houses that the Stockwell doctors found their patients. As I chatted with him a middle-aged, dusty-booted man trudged up the street. "There's Dr. Adam," said he. "He's only a new-comer, but they say that some o' these days he'll be starting his carriage." "What do you mean by a new-comer?" I asked. "Oh, he's scarcely been here ten years," said the landlord. “Thank you,” said I. “Can you tell me when the next train leaves for Bradfield?” So back I came, rather heavy at heart, and having spent ten or twelve shillings which I could ill afford. My fruitless journey seemed a small thing, however, when I thought of the rising Stockwellite with his ten years and his dusty boots. I can trudge along a path, however rough, if it will but lead to something; but may kindly Fate keep me out of all cul-de-sacs!

The Cullingworths did not receive me cordially upon my return. There was a singular look upon both their faces which seemed to ME to mean that they were disappointed at this hitch in getting rid of me. When I think of their absolute geniality a few days ago, and their markedly reserved manner now, I can make no sense out of it. I asked Cullingworth point blank what it meant, but he only turned it off with a forced laugh, and some nonsense about my thin skin. I think that I am the last man in the world to take offence where none is meant; but at any rate I determined to end the matter by leaving Bradfield at once. It had struck me, during my journey back from Stockwell, that Birchespool would be a good place; so on the very next day I started off, taking my luggage with me, and bidding a final good-bye to Cullingworth and his wife.

“You rely upon me, laddie,” said C. with something of his old geniality, as we shook hands on parting. “You get a good house in a central position, put up your plate and hold on by your toe-nails. Charge little or nothing until you get a connection, and none of your professional haw-dammy or you are a broken man. I’ll see that you don’t stop steaming for want of coal.”

So with that comforting assurance I left them on the platform of the Bradfield station. The words seem kind, do they not? and yet taking this money jars every nerve in my body. When I find that I can live on bread and water without it, I will have no more of it. But to do without it now would be for the man who cannot swim to throw off his life-belt.

I had plenty of time on my way to Birchespool to reflect upon my prospects and present situation. My baggage consisted of a large brassplate, a small leather trunk, and a hat-box. The plate with my name engraved upon it was balanced upon the rack above my head. In my box were a stethoscope, several medical books, a second pair of boots, two suits of clothes, my linen and my toilet things. With this, and the five pounds eighteen shillings which remain in my purse, I was sallying out to clear standing-room, and win the right to live from my fellow-men. But at least there was some chance of permanency about this; and if there was the promise of poverty and hardship, there was also that of freedom. I should have no Lady Saltire to toss up her chin because I had my own view of things, no Cullingworth to fly out at me about nothing. I would be my own — my very own. I capered up and down the carriage at the thought. After all, I had everything to gain and nothing in the whole wide world to lose. And I had youth and strength and energy, and the whole science of medicine packed in between my two ears. I felt as exultant as though I were going to take over some practice which lay ready for me.

It was about four in the afternoon when I reached Birchespool, which is fifty-three miles by rail from Bradfield. It may be merely a name to you, and, indeed, until I set foot in it I knew nothing of it myself; but I can tell you now that it has a population of a hundred and thirty thousand souls (about the same as Bradfield), that it is mildly manufacturing, that it is within an hour's journey of the sea, that it has an aristocratic western suburb with a mineral well, and that the country round is exceedingly beautiful. It is small enough to have a character of its own, and large enough for solitude, which is always the great charm of a city, after the offensive publicity of the country.

When I turned out with my brass plate, my trunk, and my hat-box upon the Birchespool platform, I sat down and wondered what my first move should be. Every penny was going to be of the most vital importance to me, and I must plan things within the compass of that tiny purse. As I sat pondering, there came a sight of interest, for I heard a burst of cheering with the blare of a band upon the other side of the station, and then the pioneers and leading files of a regiment came swinging on to the platform. They wore white sun-hats, and were leaving for Malta, in anticipation of war in Egypt. They were young soldiers — English by the white facings — with a colonel whose moustache reached his shoulders, and a number of fresh-faced long-legged subalterns. I chiefly remember one of the colour-sergeants, a man of immense size and ferocious face, who leaned upon his Martini, with two little white kittens peeping over either shoulder from the flaps of his knapsack. I was so moved at the sight of these youngsters going out to do their best for the dear old country, that I sprang up on my box, took off my hat, and gave them three cheers. At first the folk on my side looked at me in their bovine fashion — like a row of cows over a wall. At the second a good many joined, and at the third my own voice was entirely lost. So I turned to go my way, and the soldier laddies to go theirs; and I wondered which of us had the stiffest and longest fight before us.

I left my baggage at the office, and jumped into a tramcar which was passing the station, with the intention of looking for lodgings, as I judged that they would be cheaper than an hotel. The conductor interested himself in my wants in that personal way which makes me think that the poorer classes in England are one of the kindliest races on earth. Policemen, postmen, railway guards, busmen, what good helpful fellows they all are! This one reckoned the whole thing out, how this street was central but dear, and the other was out-of-the-way but cheap, and finally dropped me at a medium shabby-genteel kind of thoroughfare called Cadogan Terrace, with instructions that I was to go down there and see how I liked it.

I could not complain of a limited selection, for a “to let” or “apartments” was peeping out of every second window. I went into the first attractive house that I saw, and interviewed the rather obtuse and grasping old lady who owned it. A sitting-bed-room was to be had for thirteen shillings a week. As I had never hired rooms before, I had no idea whether this was cheap or dear; but I conclude it was the latter, since on my raising my eyebrows as an experiment she instantly came down to ten shillings and sixpence. I tried another look and an exclamation of astonishment; but as she stood firm, I gathered that I had touched the bottom.

“Your rooms are quite clean?” I asked, for there was a wooden panelling which suggested possibilities.

“Quite clean, Sir.”

“No vermin?”

“The officers of the garrison come sometimes.”

This took some thinking out. It had an ugly sound, but I gathered that she meant that there could be no question about the cleanliness since these gentlemen were satisfied. So the bargain was struck, and I ordered tea to be ready in an hour, while I went back to the station to fetch up my luggage. A porter brought it up for eightpence (saving fourpence on a cab, my boy!) and so I found myself in the heart of Birchespool with a base of operations secured. I looked out of the little window of my lodgings at the reeking pots and grey sloping roofs, with a spire or two spurting up among them, and I shook my teaspoon defiantly at them. “You’ve got to conquer me,” said I, “or else I’m man enough to conquer you.”

Now, you would hardly expect that a fellow would have an adventure on his very first night in a strange town; but I had — a trivial one, it is true, but fairly exciting while it lasted. Certainly it reads more like what might happen to a man in a book, but you may take it from me that it worked out just as I set it down here.

When I had finished my tea, I wrote a few letters — one to Cullingworth, and one to Horton. Then, as it was a lovely evening, I determined to stroll out and see what sort of a place it was upon which Fate had washed me up. “Best begin as you mean to go on,” thought I; so I donned my frock-coat, put on my carefully-brushed top-hat, and sallied forth with my very respectable metal-headed walking stick in my hand.

I walked down to the Park, which is the chief centre of the place, and I found that I liked everything I saw of it. It was a lovely evening, and the air was fresh and sweet. I sat down and listened to the band for an hour, watching all the family parties, and feeling particularly lonely. Music nearly always puts me into the minor key; so there came a time when I could stand it no longer, and I set off to find my way back to my lodgings. On the whole, I felt that Birchespool was a place in which a man might very well spend a happy life.

At one end of Cadogan Terrace (where I am lodging) there is a wide open space where several streets meet. In the centre of this stands a large lamp in the middle of a broad stone pedestal, a foot or so high, and ten or twelve across. Well, as I strolled along I saw there was something going on round this lamppost. A crowd of people had gathered, with a swirl in the centre. I was, of course, absolutely determined not to get mixed up in any row; but I could not help pushing my way through the crowd to see what was the matter.

It wasn’t a pretty sight. A woman, pinched and bedraggled, with a baby on her arm, was being knocked about by a burly brute of a fellow whom I judged to be her husband from the way in which he cherished her. He was one of those red-faced, dark-eyed men who can look peculiarly malignant when they choose. It was clear that he was half mad with drink, and that she had been trying to lure him away from some den. I was just in time to see him take a flying kick at her, amid cries of “Shame!” from the crowd, and then lurch forward again, with the evident intention of having another, the mob still expostulating vaguely.

If, Bertie, it had been old student days, I should have sailed straight in, as you or any other fellow would have done. My flesh crept with my loathing for the brute. But I had also to think of what I was and where I was, and what I had come there to do. However, there are some things which a man cannot stand, so I took a couple of steps forward, put my hand on the fellow's shoulder, and said in as conciliatory and genial a voice as I could muster: "Come, come, my lad! Pull yourself together."

Instead of "pulling himself together," he very nearly knocked me asunder. I was all abroad for an instant. He had turned on me like a flash, and had struck me on the throat just under the chin, my head being a little back at the moment. It made me swallow once or twice, I can tell you. Sudden as the blow was, I had countered, in the automatic sort of way that a man who knows anything of boxing does. It was only from the elbow, with no body behind it, but it served to stave him off for the moment, while I was making inquiries about my windpipe. Then in he came with a rush; and the crowd swarming round with shrieks of delight, we were pushed, almost locked in each other's arms on to that big pedestal of which I have spoken. "Go it, little 'un!" "Give him beans!" yelled the mob, who had lost all sight of the origin of the fray, and could only see that my opponent was two inches the shorter man. So there, my dear Bertie, was I, within a few hours of my entrance into this town, with my top-hat down to my ears, my highly professional frock-coat, and my kid gloves, fighting some low bruiser on a pedestal in one of the most public places, in the heart of a yelling and hostile mob! I ask you whether that was cruel luck or not?

Cullingworth told me before I started that Birchespool was a lively place. For the next few minutes it struck me as the liveliest I had ever seen. The fellow was a round hand hitter, but so strong that he needed watching. A round blow is, as you know, more dangerous than a straight one if it gets home; for the angle of the jaw, the ear, and the temple, are the three weakest points which you present. However, I took particular care that my man did not get home; but, on the other hand, I fear that I did not do him much harm either. He bored in with his head down; and I, like a fool, broke my knuckles over the top of his impenetrable skull. Of course, theoretically I should either have stepped back and tried an undercut, or else taken him into chancery; but I must confess to feeling flurried and rattled from the blow I had had, as well as from the suddenness of the whole affair.

However, I was cooling down, and I daresay should in time have done something rational, when the affray came to a sudden and unexpected end.

This was from the impatience and excitement of the crowd. The folk behind, wishing to see all that was going on, pushed against those in front, until half-a-dozen of the foremost (with, I think, a woman among them) were flung right up against us. One of these, a rough, sailor-like fellow in a jersey, got wedged between us; and my antagonist, in his blind rage, got one of his swinging blows home upon this new-comer's ear. "What, you —— !" yelled the sailor; and in an instant he had taken over the whole contract, and was at it hammer and tongs with my beauty. I grabbed my stick, which had fallen among the crowd, and backed my way out, rather dishevelled, but very glad to get off so cheaply. From the shouting which I could hear some time after I reached the door of my lodgings, I gathered that a good battle was still raging.

You see, it was the merest piece of luck in the world that my first appearance in Birchespool was not in the dock of the police-court. I should have had no one to answer for me, if I had been arrested, and should have been put quite on a level with my adversary. I daresay you think I made a great fool of myself, but I should like to know how I could have acted otherwise. The only thing that I feel now is my loneliness. What a lucky fellow you are with your wife and child!

After all, I see more and more clearly that both men and women are incomplete, fragmentary, mutilated creatures, as long as they are single. Do what they may to persuade themselves that their state is the happiest, they are still full of vague unrests, of dim, ill-defined dissatisfactions, of a tendency to narrow ways and selfish thoughts. Alone each is a half-made being, with every instinct and feeling yearning for its missing moiety. Together they form a complete and symmetrical whole, the minds of each strongest where that of the other needs reinforcing. I often think that if our souls survive death (and I believe they do, though I base my believe on very different grounds from yours), every male soul will have a female one attached to or combined with it, to round it off and give it symmetry. So thought the old Mormon, you remember, who used it as an argument for his creed. "You cannot take your railway stocks into the next world with you," he said. "But with all our wives and children we should make a good start in the world to come."

I daresay you are smiling at me, as you read this, from the vantage ground of your two years of matrimony. It will be long before I shall be able to put my views into practice.

Well, good-bye, my dear old chap! As I said at the beginning of my letter, the very thought of you is good for me, and never more so than at this moment, when I am alone in a strange city, with very dubious prospects, and an uncertain future. We differ as widely as the poles, you and I, and have done ever since I have known you. You are true to your faith, I to my reason — you to your family belief, I to my own ideas; but our friendship shows that the real essentials of a man, and his affinity for others, depends upon quite other things than views on abstract questions. Anyway, I can say with all my heart that I wish I saw you with that old corncob of yours between your teeth, sitting in that ricketty American-leather armchair, with the villanous lodging-house antimacassar over the back of it. It is good of you to tell me how interested you are in my commonplace adventures; though if I had not KNOWN that you were so, you may be sure that I should never have ventured to inflict any of them upon you. My future is now all involved in obscurity, but it is obvious that the first thing I must do is to find a fitting house, and my second to cajole the landlord into letting me enter into possession of it without any prepayment. To that I will turn myself to-morrow morning, and you shall know the result. Whom should I hear from the other day but Archie McLagan? Of course it was a begging letter. You can judge how far I am in a state to lose money; but in a hot fit I sent him ten shillings, which now, in my cold, I bitterly regret. With every good wish to you and yours, including your town, your State, and your great country, yours as ever.

XI. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 29th May, 1882.

Birchespool is really a delightful place, dear Bertie; and I ought to know something about it, seeing that I have padded a good hundred miles through its streets during the last seven days. Its mineral springs used to be quite the mode a century or more ago; and it retains many traces of its aristocratic past, carrying it with a certain grace, too, as an emigre countess might wear the faded dress which had once rustled in Versailles. I forget the new roaring suburbs with their out-going manufactures and their incoming wealth, and I live in the queer health-giving old city of the past. The wave of fashion has long passed over it, but a deposit of dreary respectability has been left behind. In the High Street you can see the long iron extinguishers upon the railings where the link-boys used to put out their torches, instead of stamping upon them or slapping them on the pavement, as was the custom in less high-toned quarters. There are the very high curbstones too, so that Lady Teazle or Mrs. Sneerwell could step out of coach or sedan chair without soiling her dainty satin shoes. It brings home to me what an unstable chemical compound man is. Here are the stage accessories as good as ever, while the players have all split up into hydrogen and oxygen and nitrogen and carbon, with traces of iron and silica and phosphorus. A tray full of chemicals and three buckets of water, — there is the raw material of my lady in the sedan chair! It’s a curious double picture, if one could but conjure it up. On the one side, the high-born bucks, the mincing ladies, the scheming courtiers, pushing and planning, and striving every one of them to attain his own petty object. Then for a jump of a hundred years. What is this in the corner of the old vault? Margarine and chlesterine, carbonates, sulphates, and ptomaines! We turn from it in loathing, and as we go we carry with us that from which we fly.

But, mind you, Bertie, I have a very high respect for the human body, and I hold that it has been unduly snubbed and maligned by divines and theologians: “our gross frames” and “our miserable mortal clay” are phrases which to my mind partake more of blasphemy than of piety. It is no compliment to the Creator to depreciate His handiwork. Whatever theory or belief we may hold about the soul, there can, I suppose, be no doubt that the body is immortal. Matter may be transformed (in which case it may be re-transformed), but it can never be destroyed. If a comet were to strike this globule of ours, and to knock it into a billion fragments, which were splashed all over the solar system — if its fiery breath were to lick up the earth's surface until it was peeled like an orange, still at the end of a hundred millions of years every tiniest particle of our bodies would exist — in other forms and combinations, it is true, but still those very atoms which now form the forefinger which traces these words. So the child with the same wooden bricks will build a wall, then strew them on the table; then a tower, then strew once more, and so ever with the same bricks.

But then our individuality? I often wonder whether something of that wilt cling to our atoms — whether the dust of Johnnie Munro will ever have something of him about it, and be separable from that of Bertie Swanborough. I think it is possible that we DO impress ourselves upon the units of our own structure. There are facts which tend to show that every tiny organic cell of which a man is composed, contains in its microcosm a complete miniature of the individual of which it forms a part. The ovum itself from which we are all produced is, as you know, too small to be transfixed upon the point of a fine needle; and yet within that narrow globe lies the potentiality, not only for reproducing the features of two individuals, but even their smallest tricks of habit and of thought. Well, if a single cell contains so much, perhaps a single molecule and atom has more than we think.

Have you ever had any personal experience of dermoid cysts? We had one in Cullingworth's practice just before his illness, and we were both much excited about it. They seem to me to be one of those wee little chinks through which one may see deep into Nature's workings. In this case the fellow, who was a clerk in the post office, came to us with a swelling over his eyebrow. We opened it under the impression that it was an abscess, and found inside some hair and a rudimentary jaw with teeth in it. You know that such cases are common enough in surgery, and that no pathological museum is without an example.

But what are we to understand by it? So startling a phenomenon must have a deep meaning. That can only be, I think, that EVERY cell in the body has the power latent in it by which it may reproduce the whole individual — and that occasionally under some special circumstances —

some obscure nervous or vascular excitement — one of these microscopic units of structure actually does make a clumsy attempt in that direction.

But, my goodness, where have I got to? All this comes from the Birchespool lamp-posts and curb-stones. And I sat down to write such a practical letter too! However, I give you leave to be as dogmatic and didactic as you like in return. Cullingworth says my head is like a bursting capsule, with all the seeds getting loose. Poor seed, too, I fear, but some of it may lodge somewhere — or not, as Fate pleases.

I wrote to you last on the night that I reached here. Next morning I set to work upon my task. You would be surprised (at least I was) to see how practical and methodical I can be. First of all I walked down to the post-office and I bought a large shilling map of the town. Then back I came and pinned this out upon the lodging-house table. This done, I set to work to study it, and to arrange a series of walks by which I should pass through every street of the place. You have no idea what that means until you try to do it. I used to have breakfast, get out about ten, walk till one, have a cheap luncheon (I can do well on three-pence), walk till four, get back and note results. On my map I put a cross for every empty house and a circle for every doctor. So at the end of that time I had a complete chart of the whole place, and could see at a glance where there was a possible opening, and what opposition there was at each point.

In the meantime I had enlisted a most unexpected ally. On the second evening a card was solemnly brought up by the landlady’s daughter from the lodger who occupied the room below. On it was inscribed “Captain Whitehall”; and then underneath, in brackets, “Armed Transport.” On the back of the card was written, “Captain Whitehall (Armed Transport) presents his compliments to Dr. Munro, and would be glad of his company to supper at 8.30.” To this I answered, “Dr. Munro presents his compliments to Captain Whitehall (Armed Transport), and will be most happy to accept his kind invitation.” What “Armed Transport” might mean I had not an idea, but I thought it well to include it, as he seemed so particular about it himself.

On descending I found a curious-looking figure in a gray dressing-gown with a purple cord. He was an elderly man — his hair not quite white yet, but well past mouse colour. His beard and moustache, however, were of a yellowish brown, and his face all puckered and shot with wrinkles, spare and yet puffy, with hanging bags under his singular light blue eyes.

“By God, Dr. Munro, sir,” said he, as he shook my hand. “I take it as very kind of you that you should accept an informal invitation. I do, sir, by God!”

This sentence was, as it proved, a very typical one, for he nearly always began and ended each with an oath, while the centre was, as a rule, remarkable for a certain suave courtesy. So regular was his formula that I may omit it and you suppose it, every time that he opened his mouth. A dash here and there will remind you.

“It’s been my practice, Dr. Munro, sir, to make friends with my neighbours through life; and some strange neighbours I have had. By —— , sir, humble as you see me, I have sat with a general on my right, and an admiral on my left, and my toes up against a British ambassador. That was when I commanded the armed transport Hegira in the Black Sea in ‘55. Burst up in the great gale in Balaclava Bay, sir, and not as much left as you could pick your teeth with.”

There was a strong smell of whisky in the room, and an uncorked bottle upon the mantelpiece. The captain himself spoke with a curious stutter, which I put down at first to a natural defect; but his lurch as he, turned back to his armchair showed me that he had had as much as he could carry.

“Not much to offer you, Dr. Munro, sir. The hind leg of a —— duck, and a sailor’s welcome. Not Royal Navy, sir, though I have a —— sight better manners than many that are. No, sir, I fly no false colours, and put no R. N. after my name; but I’m the Queen’s servant, by —— ! No mercantile marine about me! Have a wet, sir! It’s the right stuff, and I have drunk enough to know the difference.”

Well, as the supper progressed I warmed with the liquor and the food, and I told my new acquaintance all about my plans and intentions. I didn’t realise how lonely I had been until I found the pleasure of talking. He listened to it all with much sympathy, and to my horror tossed off a whole tumbler-full of neat whisky to my success. So enthusiastic was he that it was all I could do to prevent him from draining a second one.

“You’ll do it, Dr. Munro, sir!” he cried. “I know a man when I see one, and you’ll do it. There’s my hand, sir! I’m with you! You needn’t be ashamed to grasp it, for by —— , though I say it myself, it’s been open to the poor and shut to a bully ever since I could suck milk. Yes, sir, you’ll make a good ship-mate, and I’m —— glad to have you on my poop.”

For the remainder of the evening his fixed delusion was that I had come to serve under him; and he read me long rambling lectures about ship's discipline, still always addressing me as "Dr. Munro, sir." At last, however, his conversation became unbearable — a foul young man is odious, but a foul old one is surely the most sickening thing on earth. One feels that the white upon the hair, like that upon the mountain, should signify a height attained. I rose and bade him good-night, with a last impression of him leaning back in his dressing-gown, a sodden cigar-end in the corner of his mouth, his beard all slopped with whisky, and his half-glazed eyes looking sideways after me with the leer of a satyr. I had to go into the street and walk up and down for half-an-hour before I felt clean enough to go to bed.

Well, I wanted to see no more of my neighbour, but in he came as I was sitting at breakfast, smelling like a bar-parlour, with stale whisky oozing at every pore.

"Good morning, Dr. Munro, sir," said he, holding out a twitching hand. "I compliment you, sir! You look fresh, —— fresh, and me with a head like a toy-shop. We had a pleasant, quiet evening, and I took nothing to hurt, but it is the —— relaxing air of this place that settles me. I can't bear up against it. Last year it gave me the horrors, and I expect it will again. You're off house-hunting, I suppose?"

"I start immediately after breakfast."

"I take a cursed interest in the whole thing. You may think it a —— impertinence, but that's the way I'm made. As long as I can steam I'll throw a rope to whoever wants a tow. I'll tell you what I'll do, Dr. Munro, sir. I'll stand on one tack if you'll stand on the other, and I'll let you know if I come across anything that will do."

There seemed to be no alternative between taking him with me, or letting him go alone; so I could only thank him and let him have carte blanche. Every night he would turn up, half-drunk as a rule, having, I believe, walked his ten or fifteen miles as conscientiously as I had done. He came with the most grotesque suggestions.

Once he had actually entered into negotiations with the owner of a huge shop, a place that had been a raper's, with a counter about sixty feet long. His reason was that he knew an innkeeper who had done very well a little further down on the other side. Poor old "armed transport" worked so hard that I could not help being touched and grateful; yet I longed from my heart that he would stop for he was a most unsavoury agent, and I never knew what extraordinary step he might take in my name. He introduced me to two other men, one of them a singular-looking creature named Turpey, who was struggling along upon a wound-pension, having, when only a senior midshipman, lost the sight of one eye and the use of one arm through the injuries he received at some unpronounceable Pah in the Maori war. The other was a sad-faced poetical-looking man, of good birth as I understood, who had been disowned by his family on the occasion of his eloping with the cook. His name was Carr, and his chief peculiarity, that he was so regular in his irregularities that he could always tell the time of day by the state of befuddlement that he was in. He would cock his head, think over his own symptoms, and then give you the hour fairly correctly. An unusual drink would disarrange him, however; and if you forced the pace in the morning, he would undress and go to bed about tea-time, with a full conviction that all the clocks had gone mad. These two strange waifs were among the craft to whom old Whitehall had in his own words, "thrown a rope"; and long after I had gone to bed I could hear the clink of their glasses, and the tapping of their pipes against the fender in the room below.

Well, when I had finished my empty-house-and-doctor chart, I found that there was one villa to let, which undoubtedly was far the most suitable for my purpose. In the first place it was fairly cheap-forty pounds, or fifty with taxes. The front looked well. It had no garden. It stood with the well-to-do quarter upon the one side, and the poorer upon the other. Finally, it was almost at the intersection of four roads, one of which was a main artery of the town. Altogether, if I had ordered a house for my purpose I could hardly have got anything better, and I was thrilled with apprehension lest some one should get before me to the agent. I hurried round and burst into the office with a precipitancy which rather startled the demure clerk inside.

His replies, however, were reassuring. The house was still to let. It was not quite the quarter yet, but I could enter into possession. I must sign an agreement to take it for one year, and it was usual to pay a quarter's rent in advance.

I don't know whether I turned colour a little.

"In advance!" I said, as carelessly as I could.

"It is usual."

"Or references?"

"Well, that depends, of couse{sic}, upon the references."

“Not that it matters much,” said I. (Heaven forgive me!) “Still, if it is the same to the firm, I may as well pay by the quarter, as I shall do afterwards.”

“What names did you propose to give?” he asked.

My heart gave a bound, for I knew that all was right. My uncle, as you know, won his knighthood in the Artillery, and though I have seen nothing of him, I knew that he was the man to pull me out of this tight corner.

“There’s my uncle, Sir Alexander Munro, Lismore House, Dublin,” said I. “He would be happy to answer any inquiry, and so would my friend Dr. Cullingworth of Bradfield.”

I brought him down with both barrels. I could see it by his eyes and the curve of his back.

“I have no doubt that that will be quite satisfactory,” said he. “Perhaps you would kindly sign the agreement.”

I did so, and drew my hind foot across the Rubicon. The die was cast. Come what might, 1 Oakley Villas was on my hand for a twelve-month.

“Would you like the key now?”

I nearly snatched it out of his hands. Then away I ran to take possession of my property. Never shall I forget my feelings, my dear Bertie, when the key clicked in the lock, and the door flew open. It was my own house — all my very own! I shut the door again, the noise of the street died down, and I had, in that empty, dust-strewn hall, such a sense of soothing privacy as had never come to me before. In all my life it was the first time that I had ever stood upon boards which were not paid for by another.

Then I proceeded to go from room to room with a delicious sense of exploration. There were two upon the ground floor, sixteen feet square each, and I saw with satisfaction that the wall papers were in fair condition. The front one would make a consulting room, the other a waiting room, though I did not care to reflect who was most likely to do the waiting. I was in the highest spirits, and did a step dance in each room as an official inauguration.

Then down a winding wooden stair to the basement, where were kitchen and scullery, dimly lit, and asphalt-floored. As I entered the latter I stood staring. In every corner piles of human jaws were grinning at me. The place was a Golgotha! In that half light the effect was sepulchral. But as I approached and picked up one of them the mystery vanished. They were of plaster-of-Paris, and were the leavings evidently of the dentist, who had been the last tenant. A more welcome sight was a huge wooden dresser with drawers and a fine cupboard in the corner. It only wanted a table and a chair to be a furnished room.

Then I ascended again and went up the first flight of stairs. There were two other good sized apartments there. One should be my bedroom, and the other a spare room. And then another flight with two more. One for the servant, when I had one, and the other for a guest.

From the windows I had a view of the undulating gray back of the city, with the bustle of green tree tops. It was a windy day, and the clouds were drifting swiftly across the heavens, with glimpses of blue between. I don't know how it was, but as I stood looking through the grimy panes in the empty rooms a sudden sense of my own individuality and of my responsibility to some higher power came upon me, with a vividness which was overpowering. Here was a new chapter of my life about to be opened. What was to be the end of it? I had strength, I had gifts. What was I going to do with them? All the world, the street, the cabs, the houses, seemed to fall away, and the mite of a figure and the unspeakable Guide of the Universe were for an instant face to face. I was on my knees — hurled down all against my own will, as it were. And even then I could find no words to say. Only vague yearnings and emotions and a heartfelt wish to put my shoulder to the great wheel of good. What could I say? Every prayer seemed based on the idea that God was a magnified man — that He needed asking and praising and thanking. Should the cog of the wheel creak praise to the Engineer? Let it rather cog harder, and creak less. Yet I did, I confess, try to put the agitation of my soul into words. I meant it for a prayer; but when I considered afterwards the "supposing thats" and "in case ofs" with which it was sprinkled, it must have been more like a legal document. And yet I felt soothed and happier as I went downstairs again.

I tell you this, Bertie, because if I put reason above emotion I would not have you think that I am not open to attacks of the latter also. I feel that what I say about religion is too cold and academic. I feel that there should be something warmer and sweeter and more comforting. But if you ask me to buy this at the price of making myself believe a thing to be true, which all that is nearest the divine in me cries out against, then you are selling your opiates too high. I'm a volunteer for "God's own forlorn hope," and I'll clamber up the breech as long as I think I can see the flag of truth waving in front of me.

Well, my next two cares were to get drugs and furniture. The former I was sure that I could obtain on long credit; while the latter I was absolutely determined not to get into debt over. I wrote to the Apothecaries' Company, giving the names of Cullingworth and of my father, and ordering twelve pounds' worth of tinctures, infusions, pills, powders, ointments, and bottles. Cullingworth must, I should think, have been one of their very largest customers, so I knew very well that my order would meet with prompt attention.

There remained the more serious matter of the furniture. I calculated that when my lodgings were paid for I might, without quite emptying my purse, expend four pounds upon furniture — not a large allowance for a good sized villa. That would leave me a few shillings to go on with, and before they were exhausted Cullingworth's pound would come in. Those pounds, however, would be needed for the rent, so I could hardly reckon upon them at all, as far as my immediate wants went. I found in the columns of the Birchespool Post that there was to be a sale of furniture that evening, and I went down to the auctioneer's rooms, accompanied, much against my will, by Captain Whitehall, who was very drunk and affectionate.

"By God, Dr. Munro, sir, I'm the man that's going to stick to you. I'm only an old sailor-man, sir, with perhaps more liquor than sense; but I'm the Queen's servant, and touch my pension every quarter day. I don't claim to be R. N., but I'm not merchant service either. Here I am, rotting in lodgings, but by —— , Dr. Munro, sir, I carried seven thousand stinking Turks from Varna to Balaclava Bay. I'm with you, Dr. Munro, and we put this thing through together."

We came to the auction rooms and we stood on the fringe of the crowd waiting for our chance. Presently up went a very neat little table. I gave a nod and got it for nine shillings. Then three rather striking looking chairs, black wood and cane bottoms. Four shillings each I gave for those. Then a metal umbrella-stand, four and sixpence. That was a mere luxury, but I was warming to the work. A job lot of curtains all tied together in a bundle went up. Somebody bid five shillings. The auctioneer's eye came round to me, and I nodded. Mine again for five and sixpence. Then I bought a square of red drugget for half-a-crown, a small iron bed for nine shillings, three watercolour paintings, "Spring," "The Banjo Player," and "Windsor Castle," for five shillings; a tiny fender, half-a-crown; a toilet set, five shillings; another very small square-topped table, three and sixpence.

Whenever I bid for anything, Whitehall thrust his black-thorn up into the air, and presently I found him doing so on my behalf when I had no intention of buying. I narrowly escaped having to give fourteen and sixpence for a stuffed macaw in a glass case.

"It would do to hang in your hall, Dr. Munro, sir," said he when I remonstrated with him.

"I should have to hang myself in my hall soon if I spent my money like that," said I. "I've got as much as I can afford now, and I must stop."

When the auction was over, I paid my bill and had my goods hoisted on to a trolly, the porter undertaking to deliver them for two shillings. I found that I had over-estimated the cost of furnishing, for the total expense was little more than three pounds. We walked round to Oakley Villa, and I proudly deposited all my goods in the hall. And here came another extraordinary example of the kindness of the poorer classes. The porter when I had paid him went out to his trolly and returned with a huge mat of oakum, as ugly a thing as I have ever set eyes upon. This he laid down inside my door, and then without a word, brushing aside every remonstrance or attempt at thanks, he vanished away with his trolly into the night.

Next morning I came round to my house — MY house, my boy! — for good and all, after paying off my landlady. Her bill came to more than I expected, for I only had breakfast and tea, always "dining out" as I majestically expressed it. However, it was a relief to me to get it settled, and to go round with my box to Oakley Villas. An ironmonger had fixed my plate on to the railings for half-a-crown the evening before, and there it was, glittering in the sun, when I came round. It made me quite shy to look at it, and I slunk into the house with a feeling that every window in the street had a face in it.

But once inside, there was so much to be done that I did not know what I should turn to first. I bought a one-and-ninepenny broom and set to work. You notice that I am precise about small sums, because just there lies the whole key of the situation. In the yard I found a zinc pail with a hole in it, which was most useful, for by its aid I managed to carry up all the jaws with which my kitchen was heaped. Then with my new broom, my coat hung on a gas-bracket and my shirt sleeves turned to the elbow, I cleaned out the lower rooms and the hall, brushing the refuse into the yard. After that I did as much for the upper floor, with the result that I brought several square yards of dust down into the hall again, and undid my previous cleaning. This was disheartening, but at least it taught me to begin at the furthest point in future. When I had finished, I was as hot and dirty as if it were half-time at a football match. I thought of our tidy charwoman at home, and realised what splendid training she must be in.

Then came the arranging of the furniture. The hall was easily managed, for the planks were of a dark colour, which looked well of themselves. My oakum mat and my umbrella stand were the only things in it; but I bought three pegs for sixpence, and fastened them up at the side, completing the effect by hanging my two hats upon them. Finally, as the expanse of bare floor was depressing, I fixed one of my curtains about halfway down it, draping it back, so that it had a kind of oriental look, and excited a vague idea of suites of apartments beyond. It was a fine effect, and I was exceedingly proud of it.

From that I turned to the most important point of all — the arrangement of my consulting room. My experience with Cullingworth had taught me one thing at least, — that patients care nothing about your house if they only think that you can cure them. Once get that idea into their heads, and you may live in a vacant stall in a stable and write your prescriptions on the manger. Still, as this was, for many a day to come, to be the only furnished room in my house, it was worth a little planning to get it set out to the best advantage.

My red drugget I laid out in the centre, and fastened it down with brass-headed nails. It looked much smaller than I had hoped, — a little red island on an ocean of deal board, or a postage stamp in the middle of an envelope. In the centre of it I placed my table, with three medical works on one side of it, and my stethoscope and dresser’s case upon the other. One chair went with the table, of course; and then I spent the next ten minutes in trying to determine whether the other two looked better together — a dense block of chairs, as it were — or scattered so that the casual glance would get the idea of numerous chairs. I placed them finally one on the right, and one in front of the table. Then I put down my fender, and nailed “Spring,” “The Banjo Players,” and “Windsor Castle” on to three of the walls, with the mental promise that my first spare half-crown should buy a picture for the fourth. In the window I placed my little square table, and balanced upon it a photograph with an ivory mounting and a nice plush frame which I had brought in my trunk. Finally, I found a pair of dark brown curtains among the job lot which I had bought at the sale, and these I put up and drew pretty close together, so that a subdued light came into the room, which toned everything down, and made the dark corners look furnished. When I had finished I really do not believe that any one could have guessed that the total contents of that room came to about thirty shillings.

Then I pulled my iron bed upstairs and fixed it in the room which I had from the first determined upon as my bedchamber. I found an old packing case in the yard — a relic of my predecessor's removal — and this made a very good wash-hand stand for my basin and jug. When it was all fixed up I walked, swelling with pride, through my own chambers, giving a touch here and a touch there until I had it perfect. I wish my mother could see it — or, on second thoughts, I don't; for I know that her first act would be to prepare gallons of hot water, and to holystone the whole place down, from garret to cellar — and I know by my own small experience what that means.

Well, that's as far as I've got as yet. What trivial, trivial stuff, interesting to hardly a soul under heaven, save only about three! Yet it pleases me to write as long as I have your assurance that it pleases you to read. Pray, give my kindest remembrances to your wife, and to Camelford also, if he should happen to come your way. He was on the Mississippi when last I heard.

XII. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 5th June, 1882.

When I had made all those dispositions which I described with such painful prolixity in my last letter, my dear Bertie, I sat down on my study chair, and I laid out the whole of my worldly wealth upon the table in front of me. I was startled when I looked at it, — three half-crowns, a florin, and four sixpences, or eleven and sixpence in all. I had expected to hear from Cullingworth before this; but at least he was always there, a trusty friend, at my back. Immediately upon engaging the house I had written him a very full letter, telling him that I had committed myself to keeping it for one year, but assuring him that I was quite convinced that with the help which he had promised me I should be able to hold my own easily. I described the favourable position of the house, and gave him every detail of the rent and neighbourhood. That letter would, I was sure, bring a reply from him which would contain my weekly remittance. One thing I had, above all, determined upon. That was that, whatever hardships might lie before me, I would fight through them without help from home. I knew, of course, that my mother would have sold everything down to her gold eye-glasses to help me, and that no thought of our recent disagreement would have weighed with her for an instant; but still a man has his feelings, you know, and I did not propose to act against her judgment and then run howling for help.

I sat in my house all day, with that ever-present sense of privacy and novelty which had thrilled me when I first shut the street door behind me. At evening I sallied out and bought a loaf of bread, half a pound of tea (“sweepings,” they call it, and it cost eightpence), a tin kettle (fivepence), a pound of sugar, a tin of Swiss milk, and a tin of American potted meat. I had often heard my mother groan over the expenses of housekeeping, and now I began to understand what she meant. Two and ninepence went like a flash, but at least I had enough to keep myself going for some days.

There was a convenient gas bracket in the back room. I hammered a splinter of wood into the wall above it, and so made an arm upon which I could hang my little kettle and boil it over the flame. The attraction of the idea was that there was no immediate expense, and many things would have happened before I was called upon to pay the gas bill. The back room was converted then into both kitchen and dining room. The sole furniture consisted of my box, which served both as cupboard, as table, and as chair. My eatables were all kept inside, and when I wished for a meal I had only to pick them out and lay them on the lid, leaving room for myself to sit beside them.

It was only when I went to my bedroom that I realised the oversights which I had made in my furnishing. There was no mattress and no pillow or bed-clothes. My mind had been so centred upon the essentials for the practice, that I had never given a thought to my own private wants. I slept that night upon the irons of my bed, and rose up like St. Lawrence from the gridiron. My second suit of clothes with Bristowe's "Principles of Medicine" made an excellent pillow, while on a warm June night a man can do well wrapped in his overcoat. I had no fancy for second-hand bed-clothes, and determined until I could buy some new ones, to make myself a straw pillow, and to put on both my suits of clothes on the colder nights. Two days later, however, the problem was solved in more luxurious style by the arrival of a big brown tin box from my mother, which was as welcome to me, and as much of a windfall, as the Spanish wreck to Robinson Crusoe. There were too pairs of thick blankets, two sheets, a counterpane, a pillow, a camp-stool, two stuffed bears' paws (of all things in this world!), two terra-cotta vases, a tea-cosy, two pictures in frames, several books, an ornamental ink-pot, and a number of antimacassars and coloured tablecloths. It is not until you own a table with a deal top and mahogany legs, that you understand what the true inner meaning of an ornamental cloth is. Right on the top of this treasure came a huge hamper from the Apothecaries' Society with the drugs which I had ordered. When they were laid out in line, the bottles extended right down one side of the dining-room and half down the other. As I walked through my house and viewed my varied possessions, I felt less radical in my views, and begun to think that there might be something in the rights of property after all.

And I added to my effects in a marvellous way. I made myself an excellent mattress out of some sacking and the straw in which the medicine bottles had been packed.

Again, out of three shutters which belonged to the room, I rigged up a very effective side-table for my own den, which when covered with a red cloth, and ornamented with the bears' paws, might have cost twenty guineas for all that the patient could say to the contrary. I had done all this with a light heart and a good spirit before the paralysing blow which I shall have to tell you about, came upon me.

Of course it was obvious from the first that a servant was out of the question. I could not feed one, far less pay one, and I had no kitchen furniture. I must open my door to my own patients — let them think what they would of it. I must clean my own plate and brush down my own front; and these duties must be thoroughly done, come what might, for I must show a presentable outside to the public. Well, there was no great hardship in that, for I could do it under the cover of night. But I had had a suggestion from my mother which simplified matters immensely. She had written to say that if I wished she would send my little brother Paul to keep me company. I wrote back eagerly to agree. He was a hardy cheery little fellow of nine, who would, I knew, gladly share hard times with me; while, if they became unduly so, I could always have him taken home again. Some weeks must pass before he could come, but it cheered me to think of him. Apart from his company, there were a thousand ways in which he might be useful.

Who should come in on the second day but old Captain Whitehall? I was in the back room, trying how many slices I could make out of a pound of potted beef, when he rang my bell, and I only just shut my mouth in time to prevent my heart jumping out.

How that bell clanged through the empty house! I saw who it was, however, when I went into the hall; for the middle panels of my door are of glazed glass, so that I can always study a silhouette of my visitors before coming to closer quarters.

I was not quite sure yet whether I loathed the man or liked him. He was the most extraordinary mixture of charity and drunkenness, lechery and self-sacrifice that I had ever come across. But he brought into the house with him a whiff of cheeriness and hope for which I could not but be grateful. He had a large brown paper parcel under his arm, which he unwrapped upon my table, displaying a great brown jar. This he carried over and deposited on the centre of my mantel-piece.

"You will permit me, Dr. Munro, sir, to place this trifle in your room. It's lava, sir; lava from Vesuvius, and made in Naples. By —— , you may think its empty, Dr. Munro, sir, but it is full of my best wishes; and when you've got the best practice in this town you may point to that vase and tell how it came from a skipper of an armed transport, who backed you from the start.”

I tell you, Bertie, the tears started to my eyes, and I could hardly gulp out a word or two of thanks. What a crisscross of qualities in one human soul! It was not the deed or the words; but it was the almost womanly look in the eyes of this broken, drink-sodden old Bohemian — the sympathy and the craving for sympathy which I read there. Only for an instant though, for he hardened again into his usual reckless and half defiant manner.

“There’s another thing, sir. I’ve been thinking for some time back of having a medical opinion on myself. I’d be glad to put myself under your hands, if you would take a survey of me.”

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Dr. Munro, sir,” said he, “I am a walking museum. You could fit what ISN’T the matter with me on to the back of a —— visiting card. If there’s any complaint you want to make a special study of, just you come to me, sir, and see what I can do for you. It’s not every one that can say that he has had cholera three times, and cured himself by living on red pepper and brandy. If you can only set the —— little germs sneezing they’ll soon leave you alone. That’s my theory about cholera, and you should make a note of it, Dr. Munro, sir, for I was shipmates with fifty dead men when I was commanding the armed transport Hegira in the Black Sea, and I know —— well what I am talking about.”

I fill in Whitehall’s oaths with blanks because I feel how hopeless it is to reproduce their energy and variety. I was amazed when he stripped, for his whole body was covered with a perfect panorama of tattooings, with a big blue Venus right over his heart.

“You may knock,” said he, when I began to percuss his chest, “but I am —— sure there’s no one at home. They’ve all gone visiting one another. Sir John Hutton had a try some years ago. ‘Why, dammy, man, where’s your liver?’ said he. ‘Seems to me that some one has stirred you up with a porridge stick,’ said he. ‘Nothing is in its right place.’ ‘Except my heart, Sir John,’ said I. ‘Aye, by —— , that will never lose its moorings while it has a flap left.’”

Well, I examined him, and I found his own account not very far from the truth. I went over him carefully from head to foot, and there was not much left as Nature made it. He had mitral regurgitation, cirrhosis of the liver, Bright’s disease, an enlarged spleen, and incipient dropsy. I gave him a lecture about the necessity of temperance, if not of total abstinence; but I fear that my words made no impression. He chuckled, and made a kind of clucking noise in his throat all the time that I was speaking, but whether in assent or remonstrance I cannot say.

He pulled out his purse when I had finished, but I begged him to look on my small service as a mere little act of friendship. This would not do at all, however, and he seemed so determined about it that I was forced to give way.

“My fee is five shillings, then, since you insist upon making it a business matter.”

“Dr. Munro, sir,” he broke out, “I have been examined by men whom I wouldn’t throw a bucket of water over if they were burning, and I never paid them less than a guinea. Now that I have come to a gentleman and a friend, stiffen me purple if I pay one farthing less.”

So, after much argument, it ended in the kind fellow going off and leaving a sovereign and a shilling on the edge of my table. The money burned my fingers, for I knew that his pension was not a very large one; and yet, since I could not avoid taking it, there was no denying that it was exceedingly useful. Out I sallied and spent sixteen shillings of it upon a new palliasse which should go under the straw mattress upon my bed. Already, you see, I was getting to a state of enervating luxury in my household arrangements, and I could only lull my conscience by reminding myself that little Paul would have to sleep with me when he came.

However, I had not quite got to the end of Whitehall’s visit yet. When I went back I took down the beautiful lava jug, and inside I found his card. On the back was written, “You have gone into action, sir. It may be your fate to sink or to swim, but it can never be your degradation to strike. Die on the last plank and be damned to you, or come into port with your ensign flying mast-high.”

Was it not fine? It stirred my blood, and the words rang like a bugle call in my head. It braced me, and the time was coming when all the bracing I could get would not be too much. I copied it out, and pinned it on one side of my mantel-piece. On the other I stuck up a chip from Carlyle, which I daresay is as familiar to you as to me. “One way or another all the light, energy, and available virtue which we have does come out of us, and goes very infallibly into God’s treasury, living and working through eternities there. We are not lost — not a single atom of us — of one of us.” Now, there is a religious sentence which is intellectually satisfying, and therefore morally sound.

This last quotation leads to my second visitor. Such a row we had! I make a mistake in telling you about it, for I know your sympathies will be against me; but at least it will have the good effect of making you boil over into a letter of remonstrance and argument than which nothing could please me better.

Well, the second person whom I admitted through my door was the High Church curate of the parish — at least, I deduced High Church from his collar and the cross which dangled from his watch chain. He seemed to be a fine upstanding manly fellow — in fact, I am bound in honesty to admit that I have never met the washy tea-party curate outside the pages of Punch. As a body, I think they would compare very well in manliness (I do not say in brains) with as many young lawyers or doctors. Still, I have no love for the cloth. Just as cotton, which is in itself the most harmless substance in the world, becomes dangerous on being dipped into nitric acid, so the mildest of mortals is to be feared if he is once soaked in sectarian religion. If he has any rancour or hardness in him it will bring it out. I was therefore by no means overjoyed to see my visitor, though I trust that I received him with fitting courtesy. The quick little glance of surprise which he shot round him as he entered my consulting-room, told me that it was not quite what he had expected.

“You see, the Vicar has been away for two years,” he explained, “and we have to look after things in his absence. His chest is weak, and he can’t stand Birchespool. I live just opposite, and, seeing your plate go up, I thought I would call and welcome you into our parish.”

I told him that I was very much obliged for the attention. If he had stopped there all would have been well, and we should have had a pleasant little chat. But I suppose it was his sense of duty which would not permit it.

“I trust,” said he, “that we shall see you at St. Joseph’s.”

I was compelled to explain that it was not probable.

“A Roman Catholic?” he asked, in a not unfriendly voice.

I shook my head, but nothing would discourage him.

“Not a dissenter!” he exclaimed, with a sudden hardening of his genial face.

I shook my head again.

"Ah, a little lax — a little remiss!" he said playfully, and with an expression of relief. "Professional men get into these ways. They have much to distract them. At least, you cling fast, no doubt, to the fundamental truths of Christianity?"

"I believe from the bottom of my heart," said I, "that the Founder of it was the best and sweetest character of whom we have any record in the history of this planet."

But instead of soothing him, my conciliatory answer seemed to be taken as a challenge. "I trust," said he severely, "that your belief goes further than that. You, are surely prepared to admit that He was an incarnation of the God-head."

I began to feel like the old badger in his hole who longs to have a scratch at the black muzzle which is so eager to draw him.

"Does it not strike you," I said, "that if He were but a frail mortal like ourselves, His life assumes a much deeper significance? It then becomes a standard towards which we might work. If, on the other hand, He was intrinsically of a different nature to ourselves, then His existence loses its point, since we and He start upon a different basis. To my mind it is obvious that such a supposition takes away the beauty and the moral of His life. If He was divine then He COULD not sin, and there was an end of the matter. We who are not divine and can sin, have little to learn from a life like that."

"He triumphed over sin," said my visitor, as if a text or a phrase were an argument.

"A cheap triumph!" I said. "You remember that Roman emperor who used to descend into the arena fully armed, and pit himself against some poor wretch who had only a leaden foil which would double up at a thrust. According to your theory of your Master's life, you would have it that He faced the temptations of this world at such an advantage that they were only harmless leaden things, and not the sharp assailants which we find them. I confess, in my own case, that my sympathy is as strong when I think of His weaknesses as of His wisdom and His virtue. They come more home to me, I suppose, since I am weak myself."

"Perhaps you would be good enough to tell me what has impressed you as weak in His conduct?" asked my visitor stiffly.

"Well, the more human traits—'weak' is hardly the word I should have used. His rebuke of the Sabbatarians, His personal violence to the hucksters, His outbursts against the Pharisees, His rather unreasoning petulance against the fig-tree because it bore no fruit at the wrong season of the year, His very human feeling towards the housewife who bustled about when He was talking, his gratification that the ointment should have been used for Him instead of being devoted to the poor, His self-distrust before the crisis — these make me realise and love the man."

"You are a Unitarian, then, or rather, perhaps, a mere Deist?" said the curate, with a combative flush.

"You may label me as you like," I answered (and by this time I fear that I had got my preaching stop fairly out); "I don't pretend to know what truth is, for it is infinite, and I finite; but I know particularly well what it is NOT. It is not true that religion reached its acme nineteen hundred years ago, and that we are for ever to refer back to what was written and said in those days. No, sir; religion is a vital living thing, still growing and working, capable of endless extension and development, like all other fields of thought. There were many eternal truths spoken of old and handed down to us in a book, some parts of which may indeed be called holy. But there are others yet to be revealed; and if we are to reject them because they are not in those pages, we should act as wisely as the scientist who would take no notice of Kirschoff's spectral analysis because there is no mention of it in Albertus Magnus. A modern prophet may wear a broadcloth coat and write to the magazines; but none the less he may be the little pipe which conveys a tiny squirt from the reservoirs of truth. Look at this!" I cried, rising and reading my Carlyle text. "That comes from no Hebrew prophet, but from a ratepayer in Chelsea. He and Emerson are also among the prophets. The Almighty has not said His last say to the human race, and He can speak through a Scotchman or a New Englander as easily as through a Jew. The Bible, sir, is a book which comes out in instalments, and 'To be continued,' not 'Finis,' is written at the end of it."

My visitor had been showing every sign of acute uneasiness during this long speech of mine. Finally, he sprang to his feet, and took his hat from the table.

"Your opinions are highly dangerous, sir," said he. "It is my duty to tell you so. You believe in nothing."

"Nothing which limits the power or the goodness of the Almighty," I answered.

"You have evolved all this from your own spiritual pride and self-sufficiency," said he, hotly. "Why do you not turn to that Deity whose name you use. Why do you not humble yourself before Him?"

"How do you know I don't?"

"You said yourself that you never went to church."

"I carry my own church about under my own hat," said I. "Bricks and mortar won't make a staircase to heaven. I believe with your Master that the human heart is the best temple. I am sorry to see that you differ from Him upon the point."

Perhaps it was too bad of me to say that. I might have guarded without countering. Anyhow; it had the effect of ending an interview which was becoming oppressive. My visitor was too indignant to answer, and swept out of the room without a word. From my window I could see him hurry down the street, a little black angry thing, very hot and troubled because he cannot measure the whole universe with his pocket square and compasses.

Think of it, and think of what he is, an atom among atoms, standing at the meeting point of two eternities! But what am I, a brother atom, that I should judge him?

After all, I own to you, that it might have been better had I listened to what he had to say, and refused to give my own views. On the other hand, truth MUST be as broad as the universe which it is to explain, and therefore far broader than anything which the mind of man can conceive. A protest against sectarian thought must always be an aspiration towards truth. Who shall dare to claim a monopoly of the Almighty? It would be an insolence on the part of a solar system, and yet it is done every day by a hundred little cliques of mystery mongers. There lies the real impiety.

Well, the upshot of it all is, my dear Bertie, that I have begun my practice by making an enemy of the man who, of the whole parish, has the most power to injure me. I know what my father would think about it, if he knew.

And now I come to the great event of this morning, from which I am still gasping. That villain Cullingworth has cut the painter, and left me to drift as best I may.

My post comes at eight o'clock in the morning, and I usually get my letters and take them into bed to read them. There was only one this morning, addressed in his strange, unmistakable hand. I made sure, of course, that it was my promised remittance, and I opened it with a pleasurable feeling of expectation. This is a copy of what I read: —

"When the maid was arranging your room after your departure, she cleared some pieces of torn paper from under the grate. Seeing my name upon them, she brought them, as in duty bound, to her mistress, who pasted them together and found that they formed a letter from your mother to you, in which I am referred to in the vilest terms, such as ‘a bankrupt swindler’ and ‘the unscrupulous Cullingworth.’ I can only say that we are astonished that you could have been a party to such a correspondence while you were a guest under our roof, and we refuse to have anything more to do with you in any shape or form.”

That was a nice little morning greeting was it not, after I had, on the strength of his promise, started in practice, and engaged a house for a year with a few shillings in my pocket? I have given up smoking for reasons of economy; but I felt that the situation was worthy of a pipe, so I climbed out of bed, gathered a little heap of tobacco-dust from the linings of my pocket, and smoked the whole thing over. That life-belt of which I had spoken so confidingly had burst, and left me to kick as best I might in very deep water. I read the note over and over again; and for all my dilemma, I could not help laughing at the mingled meanness and stupidity of the thing. The picture of the host and hostess busying themselves in gumming together the torn letters of their departed guest struck me as one of the funniest things I could remember. And there was the stupidity of it, because surely a child could have seen that my mother’s attack was in answer to my defence. Why should we write a duet each saying the same thing? Well, I’m still very confused about it all, and I don’t in the least know what I am going to do — more likely to die on the last plank, than to get into port with my ensign mast-high. I must think it out and let you know the result. Come what may, one thing only is sure, and that is that, in weal or woe, I remain, ever, your affectionate and garrulous friend.

XIII. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 12th June, 1882.

When I wrote my last letter, my dear Bertie, I was still gasping, like a cod on a sand-bank, after my final dismissal by Cullingworth. The mere setting of it all down in black and white seemed to clear the matter up, and I felt much more cheery by the time I had finished my letter. I was just addressing the envelope (observe what a continuous narrative you get of my proceedings!) when I was set jumping out of my carpet slippers by a ring at the bell. Through the glass panel I observed that it was a respectable-looking bearded individual with a top-hat. It was a patient. It MUST be a patient! Then first I realised what an entirely different thing it is to treat the patient of another man (as I had done with Horton) or to work a branch of another man's practice (as I had done with Cullingworth), and to have to do with a complete stranger on your own account. I had been thrilling to have one. Now that he had come I felt for an instant as if I would not open the door. But of course that was only a momentary weakness. I answered his ring with, I fear, rather a hypocritical air of insouciance, as though I had happened to find myself in the hall, and did not care to trouble the maid to ascend the stairs.

"Dr. Stark Munro?" he asked.

"Pray step in," I answered, and waved him into the consulting-room. He was a pompous, heavy-stepping, thick-voiced sort of person, but to me he was an angel from on high. I was nervous, and at the same time so afraid that he should detect my nervousness and lose confidence in me, that I found myself drifting into an extravagant geniality. He seated himself at my invitation and gave a husky cough.

"Ah," said I — I always prided myself on being quick at diagnosis —"bronchial, I perceive. These summer colds are a little trying."

"Yes," said he. "I've had it some time."

"With a little care and treatment — —" I suggested.

He did not seem sanguine, but groaned and shook his head. "It's not about that I've come," said he.

"No?" My heart turned to lead.

"No, doctor." He took out a bulging notebook. "It's about a small sum that's due on the meter."

You'll laugh, Bertie, but it was no laughing matter to me. He wanted eight and sixpence on account of something that the last tenant either had or had not done. Otherwise the company would remove the gas-meter. How little he could have guessed that the alternative he was presenting to me was either to pay away more than half my capital, or to give up cooking my food! I at last appeased him by a promise that I should look into the matter, and so escaped for the moment, badly shaken but still solvent. He gave me a good deal of information about the state of his tubes (his own, not the gas company's) before he departed; but I had rather lost interest in the subject since I had learned that he was being treated by his club doctor.

That was the first of my morning incidents. My second followed hard upon the heels of it. Another ring came, and from my post of observation I saw that a gipsy's van, hung with baskets and wickerwork chairs, had drawn up at the door. Two or three people appeared to be standing outside. I understood that they wished me to purchase some of their wares, so I merely opened the door about three inches, said "No, thank you," and closed it. They seemed not to have heard me for they rang again, upon which I opened the door wider and spoke more decidedly. Imagine my surprise when they rang again. I flung the door open, and was about to ask them what they meant by their impudence, when one of the little group upon my doorstep said, "If you please, sir, it's the baby." Never was there such a change — from the outraged householder to the professional man. "Pray step in, madam," said I, in quite my most courtly style; and in they all came — the husband, the brother, the wife and the baby. The latter was in the early stage of measles. They were poor outcast sort of people, and seemed not to have sixpence among them; so my demands for a fee at the end of the consultation ended first in my giving the medicine for nothing, and finally adding fivepence in coppers, which was all the small change I had. A few more such patients and I am a broken man.

However, the two incidents together had the effect of taking up my attention and breaking the blow which I had had in the Cullingworth letter. It made me laugh to think that the apparent outsider should prove to be a patient, and the apparent patient an outsider. So back I went, in a much more judicial frame of mind, to read that precious document over again, and to make up my mind what it was that I should do.

And now I came to my first real insight into the depths which lie in the character of Cullingworth. I began by trying to recall how I could have torn up my mother's letters, for it is not usual for me to destroy papers in this manner. I have often been chaffed about the way in which I allow them to accumulate until my pockets become unbearable. The more I thought about it the more convinced I was that I could not have done anything of the sort; so finally I got out the little house jacket which I had usually worn at Bradfield, and I examined the sheaves of letters which it contained. It was there, Bertie! Almost the very first one that I opened was the identical one from which Cullingworth was quoting in which my mother had described him in those rather forcible terms.

Well, this made me sit down and gasp. I am, I think, one of the most unsuspicious men upon earth, and through a certain easy-going indolence of disposition I never even think of the possibility of those with whom I am brought in contact trying to deceive me. It does not occur to me. But let me once get on that line of thought — let me have proof that there is reason for suspicion — and then all faith slips completely away from me. Now I could see an explanation for much which had puzzled me at Bradfield. Those sudden fits of ill temper, the occasional ill-concealed animosity of Cullingworth — did they not mark the arrival of each of my mother's letters? I was convinced that they did. He had read them then — read them from the pockets of the little house coat which I used to leave carelessly in the hall when I put on my professional one to go out. I could remember, for example, how at the end of his illness his manner had suddenly changed on the very day when that final letter of my mother's had arrived. Yes, it was certain that he had read them from the beginning.

But a blacker depth of treachery lay beyond. If he had read them, and if he had been insane enough to think that I was acting disloyally towards him, why had he not said so at the time? Why had he contented himself with sidelong scowls and quarrelling over trivialities — breaking, too, into forced smiles when I had asked him point blank what was the matter? One obvious reason was that he could not tell his grievance without telling also how he had acquired his information. But I knew enough of Cullingworth's resource to feel that he could easily have got over such a difficulty as that. In fact, in this last letter he HAD got over it by his tale about the grate and the maid. He must have had some stronger reason for restraint. As I thought over the course of our relations I was convinced that his scheme was to lure me on by promises until I had committed myself, and then to abandon me, so that I should myself have no resource but to compound with my creditors-to be, in fact, that which my mother had called him.

But in that case he must have been planning it out almost from the beginning of my stay with him, for my mother's letters stigmatising his conduct had begun very early. For some time he had been uncertain how to proceed. Then he had invented the excuse (which seemed to me at the time, if you remember, to be quite inadequate) about the slight weekly decline in the practice in order to get me out of it. His next move was to persuade me to start for myself; and as this would be impossible without money, he had encouraged me to it by the promise of a small weekly loan. I remembered how he had told me not to be afraid about ordering furniture and other things, because tradesmen gave long credit to beginners, and I could always fall back upon him if necessary. He knew too from his own experience that the landlord would require at least a year's tenancy. Then he waited to spring his mine until I had written to say that I had finally committed myself, on which by return of post came his letter breaking the connection. It was so long and so elaborate a course of deceit, that I for the first time felt something like fear as I thought of Cullingworth. It was as though in the guise and dress of a man I had caught a sudden glimpse of something subhuman — of something so outside my own range of thought that I was powerless against it.

Well, I wrote him a little note — only a short one, but with, I hope, a bit of a barb to it. I said that his letter had been a source of gratification to me, as it removed the only cause for disagreement between my mother and myself. She had always thought him a blackguard, and I had always defended him; but I was forced now to confess that she had been right from the beginning. I said enough to show him that I saw through his whole plot; and I wound up by assuring him that if he thought he had done me any harm he had made a great mistake; for I had every reason to believe that he had unintentionally forced me into the very opening which I had most desired myself.

After this bit of bravado I felt better, and I thought over the situation. I was alone in a strange town, without connections, without introductions, with less than a pound in my pocket, and with no possibility of freeing myself from my responsibilities. I had no one at all to look to for help, for all my recent letters from home had given a dreary account of the state of things there. My poor father’s health and his income were dwindling together. On the other hand, I reflected that there were some points in my favour. I was young. I was energetic. I had been brought up hard, and was quite prepared to rough it. I was well up in my work, and believed I could get on with patients. My house was an excellent one for my purpose, and I had already put the essentials of furniture into it. The game was not played out yet. I jumped to my feet and clenched my hand, and swore to the chandelier that it never should be played out until I had to beckon for help from the window.

For the next three days I had not a single ring at the bell of any sort whatever. A man could not be more isolated from his kind. It used to amuse me to sit upstairs and count how many of the passers-by stopped to look at my plate. Once (on a Sunday morning) there were over a hundred in an hour, and often I could see from their glancing over their shoulders as they walked on, that they were thinking or talking of the new doctor.

This used to cheer me up, and make me feel that something was going on.

Every night between nine and ten I slip out and do my modest shopping, having already made my MENU for the coming day. I come back usually with a loaf of bread, a paper of fried fish, or a bundle of saveloys. Then when I think things are sufficiently quiet, I go out and brush down the front with my broom, leaning it against the wall and looking up meditatively at the stars whenever anyone passes. Then, later still, I bring out my polishing paste, my rag, and my chamois leather; and I assure you that if practice went by the brilliancy of one’s plate, I should sweep the town.

Who do you think was the first person who broke this spell of silence? The ruffian whom I had fought under the lamp-post. He is a scissors-grinder it seems, and rang to know if I had a job for him. I could not help grinning at him when I opened the door and saw who it was. He showed no sign of recognising me, however, which is hardly to be wondered at.

The next comer was a real bona fide patient, albeit a very modest one. She was a little anaemic old maid, a chronic hypochondriac I should judge, who had probably worked her way round every doctor in the town, and was anxious to sample this novelty. I don’t know whether I gave her satisfaction. She said that she would come again on Wednesday, but her eyes shifted as she said it. One and sixpence was as much as she could pay, but it was very welcome. I can live three days on one and sixpence.

I think that I have brought economy down to its finest point. No doubt, for a short spell I could manage to live on a couple of pence a day; but what I am doing now is not to be a mere spurt, but my regular mode of life for many a month to come. My tea and sugar and milk (Swiss) come collectively to one penny a day. The loaf is at twopence three-farthings, and I consume one a day. My dinner consists in rotation of one third of a pound of bacon, cooked over the gas (twopence halfpenny), or two saveloys (twopence), or two pieces of fried fish (twopence), or a quarter of an eightpenny tin of Chicago beef (twopence). Any one of these, with a due allowance of bread and water, makes a most substantial meal. Butter I have discarded for the present. My actual board therefore comes well under sixpence a day, but I am a patron of literature to the extent of a halfpenny a day, which I expend upon an evening paper; for with events hurrying on like this in Alexandria, I cannot bear to be without the news. Still I often reproach myself with that halfpenny, for if I went out in the evening and looked at the placards I might save it, and yet have a general idea of what is going on. Of course, a halfpenny a night sounds nothing, but think of a shilling a month! Perhaps you picture me as bloodless and pulled down on this diet! I am thin, it is true, but I never felt more fit in my life. So full of energy am I that I start off sometimes at ten at night and walk hard until two or three in the morning. I dare not go out during the day, you see, for fear that I should miss a patient. I have asked my mother not to send little Paul down yet until I see my way more clearly.

Old Whitehall came in to see me the other day. The object of his visit was to invite me to dinner, and the object of the dinner to inaugurate my starting in practice. If I were the kind old fellow’s son he could not take a deeper interest in me and my prospects.

“By —— , Dr. Munro, sir,” said he, “I’ve asked every —— man in Birchespool that’s got anything the matter with him. You’ll have the lot as patients within a week. There’s Fraser, who’s got a touch of Martell’s three star. He’s coming. And there’s Saunders, who talks about nothing but his spleen. I’m sick of his —— spleen! But I asked him. And there’s Turpey’s wound! This wet weather sets it tingling, and his own surgeon can do nothing but dab it with vaseline. He’ll be there. And there’s Carr, who is drinking himself to death. He has not much for the doctors, but what there is you may as well have.”

All next day he kept popping in to ask me questions about the dinner. Should we have clear soup or ox-tail? Didn't I think that burgundy was better than port and sherry? The day after was the celebration itself, and he was in with a bulletin immediately after breakfast. The cooking was to be done at a neighbouring confectioner's. The landlady's son was coming in to wait. I was sorry to see that Whitehall was already slurring his words together, and had evidently been priming himself heavily. He looked in again in the afternoon to tell me what a good time we should have. So-and-so could talk well, and the other man could sing a song. He was so far gone by now, that I ventured (in the capacity of medical adviser) to speak to him about it.

It's not the liquor, Dr. Munro, sir," said he earnestly. It's the —— relaxing air of this town. But I'll go home and lie I'll down, and be as fresh as paint to welcome my guests."

But the excitement of the impending event must have been too much for him. When I arrived at five minutes to seven, Turpey, the wounded lieutenant, met me in the hall with a face of ill omen.

"It's all up with Whitehall," said he.

"What's the matter?"

"Blind, speechless and paralytic. Come and look."

The table in his room was nicely laid for dinner, and several decanters with a large cold tart lay upon the sideboard. On the sofa was stretched our unfortunate host, his head back, his forked beard pointing to the cornice, and a half finished tumbler of whisky upon the chair beside him. All our shakes and shouts could not break in upon that serene drunkenness.

"What are we to do?" gasped Turpey.

"We must not let him make an exhibition of himself. We had better get him away before any one else arrives."

So we bore him off, all in coils and curves like a dead python, and deposited him upon his bed. When we returned three other guests had arrived.

"You'll be sorry to hear that Whitehall is not very well," said Turpey. "Dr. Munro thought it would be better that he should not come down."

"In fact, I have ordered him to bed," said I.

"Then I move that Mr. Turpey be called upon to act as host," said one of the new comers; and so it was at once agreed.

Presently the other men arrived; but there was no sign of the dinner. We waited for a quarter of an hour, but nothing appeared. The landlady was summoned, but could give no information.

“Captain Whitehall ordered it from a confectioner’s, sir,” said she, in reply to the lieutenant’s cross-examination. “He did not tell me which confectioner’s. It might have been any one of four or five. He only said that it would all come right, and that I should bake an apple tart.”

Another quarter of an hour passed, and we were all ravenous. It was evident that Whitehall had made some mistake. We began to roll our eyes towards the apple pie, as the boat’s crew does towards the boy in the stories of shipwreck. A large hairy man, with an anchor tattooed upon his hand, rose and set the pie in front of Turpey.

“What d’you say, gentlemen, — shall I serve it out?”

We all drew up at the table with a decision which made words superfluous. In five minutes the pie dish was as clean as when the cook first saw it. And our ill-luck vanished with the pie. A minute later the landlady’s son entered with the soup; and cod’s head, roast beef, game and ice pudding followed in due succession. It all came from some misunderstanding about time. But we did them justice, in spite of the curious hors d’oeuvre with which we had started; and a pleasanter dinner or a more enjoyable evening I have seldom had.

“Sorry I was so bowled over, Dr. Munro, sir,” said Whitehall next morning. “I need hilly country and a bracing air, not a —— croquet lawn like this. Well, I’m —— glad to hear that you gentlemen enjoyed yourselves, and I hope you found everything to your satisfaction.”

I assured him that we did; but I had not the heart to tell him about the apple pie.

I tell you these trivial matters, my dear Bertie, just to show you that I am not down on my luck, and that my life is not pitched in the minor key altogether, in spite of my queer situation. But, to turn to graver things: I was right glad to get your letter, and to read all your denunciations about dogmatic science. Don’t imagine that my withers are wrung by what you say, for I agree with almost every word of it.

The man who claims that we can know nothing is, to my mind, as unreasonable as he who insists that everything has been divinely revealed to us. I know nothing more unbearable than the complacent type of scientist who knows very exactly all that he does know, but has not imagination enough to understand what a speck his little accumulation of doubtful erudition is when compared with the immensity of our ignorance. He is the person who thinks that the universe can be explained by laws, as if a law did not require construction as well as a world! The motion of the engine can be explained by the laws of physics, but that has not made the foregoing presence of an engineer less obvious. In this world, however, part of the beautiful poise of things depends upon the fact that whenever you have an exaggerated fanatic of any sort, his exact opposite at once springs up to neutralise him. You have a Mameluke: up jumps a Crusader. You have a Fenian: up jumps an Orangeman. Every force has its recoil. And so these more hide-bound scientists must be set against those gentlemen who still believe that the world was created in the year 4004 B. C.

After all, true science must be synonymous with religion, since science is the acquirement of fact; and facts are all that we have from which to deduce what we are and why we are here. But surely the more we pry into the methods by which results are brougt{sic} about, the more stupendous and wonderful becomes the great unseen power which lies behind, the power which drifts the solar system in safety through space, and yet adjusts the length of the insects proboscis to the depth of the honey-bearing flower. What is that central intelligence? You may fit up your dogmatic scientist with a 300-diameter microscope, and with a telescope with a six-foot speculum, but neither near nor far can he get a trace of that great driving power.

What should we say of a man who has a great and beautiful picture submitted to him, and who, having satisfied himself that the account given of the painting of the picture is incorrect, at once concludes that no one ever painted it, or at least asserts that he has no possible means of knowing whether an artist has produced it or not? That is, as it seems to me, a fair statement of the position of some of the more extreme agnostics. “Is not the mere existence of the picture in itself a proof that a skilful artist has been busied upon it? one might ask.” “Why, no,” says the objector. “It is possible that the picture produced itself by the aid of certain rules. Besides, when the picture was first submitted to me I was assured that it had all been produced within a week, but by examining it I am able to say with certainty that it has taken a considerable time to put together. I am therefore of opinion that it is questionable whether any one ever painted it at all.”

Leaving this exaggerated scientific caution on the one side, and faith on the other, as being equally indefensible, there remains the clear line of reasoning that a universe implies the existence of a universe maker, and that we may deduce from it some of His attributes, His power, His wisdom, His forethought for small wants, His providing of luxuries for His creatures. On the other hand, do not let us be disingenuous enough to shirk the mystery which lies in pain, in cruelty, in all which seems to be a slur upon His work. The best that we can say for them is to hope that they are not as bad as they seem, and possibly lead to some higher end. The voices of the ill-used child and of the tortured animal are the hardest of all for the philosopher to answer.

Good-bye, old chap! It is quite delightful to think that on one point at least we are in agreement.

XIV. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 15th January, 1883.

You write reproachfully, my dear Bertie, and you say that absence must have weakened our close friendship, since I have not sent you a line during this long seven months. The real truth of the matter is that I had not the heart to write to you until I could tell you something cheery; and something cheery has been terribly long in coming. At present I can only claim that the cloud has perhaps thinned a little at the edges.

You see by the address of this letter that I still hold my ground, but between ourselves it has been a terrible fight, and there have been times when that last plank of which old Whitehall wrote seemed to be slipping out of my clutch. I have ebbed and flowed, sometimes with a little money, sometimes without. At my best I was living hard, at my worst I was very close upon starvation. I have lived for a whole day upon the crust of a loaf, when I had ten pounds in silver in the drawer of my table. But those ten pounds had been most painfully scraped together for my quarter’s rent, and I would have tried twenty-four hours with a tight leather belt before I would have broken in upon it. For two days I could not raise a stamp to send a letter. I have smiled when I have read in my evening paper of the privations of our fellows in Egypt. Their broken victuals would have been a banquet to me. However, what odds how you take your carbon and nitrogen and oxygen, as long as you DO get it? The garrison of Oakley Villa has passed the worst, and there is no talk of surrender.

It was not that I have had no patients. They have come in as well as could be expected. Some, like the little old maid, who was the first, never returned. I fancy that a doctor who opened his own door forfeited their confidence. Others have become warm partisans. But they have nearly all been very poor people; and when you consider how many one and sixpences are necessary in order to make up the fifteen pounds which I must find every quarter for rent, taxes, gas and water, you will understand that even with some success, I have still found it a hard matter to keep anything in the portmanteau which serves me as larder. However, my boy, two quarters are paid up, and I enter upon a third one with my courage unabated. I have lost about a stone, but not my heart.

I have rather a vague recollection of when it was exactly that my last was written. I fancy that it must have been a fortnight after my start, immediately after my breach with Cullingworth. It's rather hard to know where to begin when one has so many events to narrate, disconnected from each other, and trivial in themselves, yet which have each loomed large as I came upon them, though they look small enough now that they are so far astern. As I have mentioned Cullingworth, I may as well say first the little that is to be said about him. I answered his letter in the way which I have, I think, already described. I hardly expected to hear from him again; but my note had evidently stung him, and I had a brusque message in which he said that if I wished him to believe in my "bona-fides" (whatever he may have meant by that), I would return the money which I had had during the time that I was with him at Bradfield. To this I replied that the sum was about twelve pounds; that I still retained the message in which he had guaranteed me three hundred pounds if I came to Bradfield, that the balance in my favour was two hundred and eighty-eight pounds; and that unless I had a cheque by return, I should put the matter into the hands of my solicitor. This put a final end to our correspondence.

There was one other incident, however. One day after I had been in practice about two months, I observed a bearded commonplace-looking person lounging about on the other side of the road. In the afternoon he was again visible from my consulting-room window. When I saw him there once more next morning, my suspicions were aroused, and they became certainties when, a day or so afterwards, I came out of a patient's house in a poor street, and saw the same fellow looking into a greengrocer's shop upon the other side. I walked to the end of the street, waited round the corner, and met him as he came hurrying after.

"You can go back to Dr. Cullingworth, and tell him that I have as much to do as I care for," said I. "If you spy upon me after this it will be at your own risk."

He shuffled and coloured, but I walked on and saw him no more. There was no one on earth who could have had a motive for wanting to know exactly what I was doing except Cullingworth; and the man's silence was enough in itself to prove that I was right. I have heard nothing of Cullingworth since.

I had a letter from my uncle in the Artillery, Sir Alexander Munro, shortly after my start, telling me that he had heard of my proceedings from my mother, and that he hoped to learn of my success. He is, as I think you know, an ardent Wesleyan, like all my father's people, and he told me that the chief Wesleyan minister in the town was an old friend of his own, that he had learned from him that there was no Wesleyan doctor, and that, being of a Wesleyan stock myself, if I would present the enclosed letter of introduction to the minister, I should certainly find it very much to my advantage. I thought it over, Bertie, and it seemed to me that it would be playing it rather low down to use a religious organisation to my own advantage, when I condemned them in the abstract. It was a sore temptation, but I destroyed the letter.

I had one or two pieces of luck in the way of accidental cases. One (which was of immense importance to me) was that of a grocer named Haywood, who fell down in a fit outside the floor of his shop. I was passing on my way to see a poor labourer with typhoid. You may believe that I saw my chance, bustled in, treated the man, conciliated the wife, tickled the child, and gained over the whole household. He had these attacks periodically, and made an arrangement with me by which I was to deal with him, and we were to balance bills against each other. It was a ghoulish compact, by which a fit to him meant butter and bacon to me, while a spell of health for Haywood sent me back to dry bread and saveloys. However, it enabled me to put by for the rent many a shilling which must otherwise have gone in food. At last, however, the poor fellow died, and there was our final settlement.

Two small accidents occurred near my door (it was a busy crossing), and though I got little enough from either of them, I ran down to the newspaper office on each occasion, and had the gratification of seeing in the evening edition that “the driver, though much shaken, is pronounced by Dr. Stark Munro, of Oakley Villa, to have suffered no serious injury.” As Cullingworth used to say, it is hard enough for the young doctor to push his name into any publicity, and he must take what little chances he has. Perhaps the fathers of the profession would shake their heads over such a proceeding in a little provincial journal; but I was never able to see that any of them were very averse from seeing their own names appended to the bulletin of some sick statesman in The Times.

And then there came another and a more serious accident. This would be about two months after the beginning, though already I find it hard to put things in their due order. A lawyer in the town named Dickson was riding past my windows when the horse reared up and fell upon him. I was eating saveloys in the back room at the time, but I heard the noise and rushed to the door in time to meet the crowd who were carrying him in. They flooded into my house, thronged my hall, dirtied my consulting room, and even pushed their way into my back room, which they found elegantly furnished with a portmanteau, a lump of bread, and a cold sausage.

However, I had no thought for any one but my patient, who was groaning most dreadfully. I saw that his ribs were right, tested his joints, ran my hand down his limbs, and concluded that there was no break or dislocation. He had strained himself in such a way, however, that it was very painful to him to sit or to walk. I sent for an open carriage, therefore, and conveyed him to his home, I sitting with my most professional air, and he standing straight up between my hands. The carriage went at a walk, and the crowd trailed behind, with all the folk looking out of the windows, so that a more glorious advertisement could not be conceived. It looked like the advance guard of a circus. Once at his house, however, professional etiquette demanded that I should hand the case over to the family attendant, which I did with as good a grace as possible — not without some lingering hope that the old established practitioner might say, “You have taken such very good care of my patient, Dr. Munro, that I should not dream of removing him from your hands.” On the contrary, he snatched it away from me with avidity, and I retired with some credit, an excellent advertisement, and a guinea.

These are one or two of the points of interest which show above the dead monotony of my life — small enough, as you see, but even a sandhill looms large in Holland. In the main, it is a dreary sordid record of shillings gained and shillings spent — of scraping for this and scraping for that, with ever some fresh slip of blue paper fluttering down upon me, left so jauntily by the tax-collector, and meaning such a dead-weight pull to me. The irony of my paying a poor-rate used to amuse me. I should have been collecting it. Thrice at a crisis I pawned my watch, and thrice I rallied and rescued it. But how am I to interest you in the details of such a career? Now, if a fair countess had been so good as to slip on a piece of orange peel before my door, or if the chief merchant in the town had been saved by some tour-de-force upon my part, or if I had been summoned out at midnight to attend some nameless person in a lonely house with a princely fee for silence — then I should have something worthy of your attention. But the long months and months during which I listened to the throb of the charwoman's heart and the rustle of the greengrocer's lungs, present little which is not dull and dreary. No good angels came my way.

Wait a bit, though! One did. I was awakened at six in the morning one day by a ringing at my bell, and creeping to the angle of the stair I saw through the glass a stout gentleman in a top-hat outside. Much excited, with a thousand guesses capping one another in my head, I ran back, pulled on some clothes, rushed down, opened the door, and found myself in the grey morning light face to face with Horton. The good fellow had come down from Merton in an excursion train, and had been travelling all night. He had an umbrella under his arm, and two great straw baskets in each hand, which contained, when unpacked, a cold leg of mutton, half-a-dozen of beer, a bottle of port, and all sorts of pasties and luxuries. We had a great day together, and when he rejoined his excursion in the evening he left a very much cheerier man than he had found.

Talking of cheeriness, you misunderstand me, Bertie, if you think (as you seem to imply) that I take a dark view of things. It is true that I discard some consolations which you possess, because I cannot convince myself that they are genuine; but in this world, at least, I see immense reason for hope, and as to the next I am confident that all will be for the best. From annihilation to beatification I am ready to adapt myself to whatever the great Designer's secret plan my be.

But there is much in the prospects of this world to set a man's heart singing. Good is rising and evil sinking like oil and water in a bottle. The race is improving. There are far fewer criminal convictions. There is far more education. People sin less and think more. When I meet a brutal looking fellow I often think that he and his type may soon be as extinct as the great auk. I am not sure that in the interest of the 'ologies we ought not to pickle a few specimens of Bill Sykes, to show our children's children what sort of a person he was.

And then the more we progress the more we tend to progress. We advance not in arithmetical but in geometrical progression. We draw compound interest on the whole capital of knowledge and virtue which has been accumulated since the dawning of time. Some eighty thousand years are supposed to have existed between paleolithic and neolithic man. Yet in all that time he only learned to grind his flint stones instead of chipping them. But within our father's lives what changes have there not been? The railway and the telegraph, chloroform and applied electricity. Ten years now go further than a thousand then, not so much on account of our finer intellects as because the light we have shows us the way to more. Primeval man stumbled along with peering eyes, and slow, uncertain footsteps. Now we walk briskly towards our unknown goal.

And I wonder what that goal is to be! I mean, of course, as far as this world is concerned. Ever since man first scratched hieroglyphics upon an ostracon, or scribbled with sepia upon papyrus, he must have wondered, as we wonder to-day. I suppose that we DO know a little more than they. We have an arc of about three thousand years given us, from which to calculate out the course to be described by our descendants; but that arc is so tiny when compared to the vast ages which Providence uses in working out its designs that our deductions from it must, I think, be uncertain. Will civilisation be swamped by barbarism? It happened once before, because the civilised were tiny specks of light in the midst of darkness. But what, for example, could break down the great country in which you dwell? No, our civilisation will endure and grow more complex. Man will live in the air and below the water. Preventive medicine will develop until old age shall become the sole cause of death. Education and a more socialistic scheme of society will do away with crime. The English-speaking races will unite, with their centre in the United States. Gradually the European States will follow their example. War will become rare, but more terrible. The forms of religion will be abandoned, but the essence will be maintained; so that one universal creed will embrace the whole civilised earth, which will preach trust in that central power, which will be as unknown then as now. That's my horoscope, and after that the solar system may be ripe for picking. But Bertie Swanborough and Stark Munro will be blowing about on the west wind, and dirtying the panes of careful housewives long before the half of it has come to pass.

And then man himself will change, of course. The teeth are going rapidly. You've only to count the dentists' brass plates in Birchespool to be sure of that. And the hair also. And the sight. Instinctively, when we think of the more advanced type of young man, we picture him as bald, and with double eye-glasses. I am an absolute animal myself, and my only sign of advance is that two of my back teeth are going. On the other hand, there is some evidence in favour of the development of a sixth sense-that of perception. If I had it now I should know that you are heartily weary of all my generalisations and dogmatism.

And certainly there must be a spice of dogmatism in it when we begin laying down laws about the future; for how do we know that there are not phases of nature coming upon us of which we have formed no conception? After all, a few seconds are a longer fraction of a day than an average life is of the period during which we know that the world has been in existence. But if a man lived only for a few seconds of daylight, his son the same, and his son the same, what would their united experiences after a hundred generations tell them of the phenomenon which we call night? So all our history and knowledge is no guarantee that our earth is not destined for experiences of which we can form no conception.

But to drop down from the universe to my own gnat’s buzz of an existence, I think I have told you everything that might interest you of the first six months of my venture. Towards the end of that time my little brother Paul came down — and the best of companions he is! He shares the discomforts of my little menage in the cheeriest spirit, takes me out of my blacker humours, goes long walks with me, is interested in all that interests me (I always talk to him exactly as if he were of my own age), and is quite ready to turn his hand to anything, from boot-blacking to medicine-carrying. His one dissipation is cutting out of paper, or buying in lead (on the rare occasion when we find a surplus), an army of little soldiers. I have brought a patient into the consulting room, and found a torrent of cavalry, infantry, and artillery pouring across the table. I have been myself attacked as I sat silently writing, and have looked up to find fringes of sharp-shooters pushing up towards me, columns of infantry in reserve, a troop of cavalry on my flank, while a battery of pea muzzle-loaders on the ridge of my medical dictionary has raked my whole position — with the round, smiling face of the general behind it all. I don’t know how many regiments he has on a peace footing; but if serious trouble were to break out, I am convinced that every sheet of paper in the house would spring to arms.

One morning I had a great idea which has had the effect of revolutionising our domestic economy. It was at the time when the worst pinch was over, and when we had got back as far as butter and occasional tobacco, with a milkman calling daily; which gives you a great sense of swagger when you have not been used to it.

“Paul, my boy,” said I, “I see my way to fitting up this house with a whole staff of servants for nothing.”

He looked pleased, but not surprised. He had a wholly unwarranted confidence in my powers; so that if I had suddenly declared that I saw my way to tilting Queen Victoria from her throne and seating myself upon it, he would have come without a question to aid and abet.

I took a piece of paper and wrote, “To Let. A basement floor, in exchange for services. Apply 1 Oakley Villas.”

“There, Paul,” said I, “run down to the Evening News office, and pay a shilling for three insertions.”

There was no need of three insertions. One would have been ample. Within half an hour of the appearance of the first edition, I had an applicant at the end of my bell-wire, and for the remainder of the evening Paul was ushering them in and I interviewing them with hardly a break. I should have been prepared at the outset to take anything in a petticoat; but as we saw the demand increase, our conditions went up and up; white aprons, proper dress for answering door, doing beds and boots, cooking, — we became more and more exacting. So at last we made our selection; a Miss Wotton, who asked leave to bring her sister with her. She was a hard-faced brusque-mannered person, whose appearance in a bachelor’s household was not likely to cause a scandal. Her nose was in itself a certificate of virtue. She was to bring her furniture into the basement, and I was to give her and her sister one of the two upper rooms for a bedroom.

They moved in a few days later. I was out at the time, and the first intimation I had was finding three little dogs in my hall when I returned. I had her up, and explained that this was a breach of contract, and that I had no thoughts of running a menagerie. She pleaded very hard for her little dogs, which it seems are a mother and two daughters of some rare breed; so I at last gave in on the point. The other sister appeared to lead a subterranean troglodytic sort of existence; for, though I caught a glimpse of her whisking round the corner at times, it was a good month before I could have sworn to her in a police court.

For a time the arrangement worked well, and then there came complications. One morning, coming down earlier than usual, I saw a small bearded man undoing the inside chain of my door. I captured him before he could get it open. “Well,” said I, “what’s this?”

“If you please, sir,” said he, “I’m Miss Wotton’s husband.”

Dreadful doubts of my housekeeper flashed across my mind, but I thought of her nose and was reassured. An examination revealed everything. She was a married woman. The lines were solemnly produced. Her husband was a seaman. She had passed as a miss, because she thought I was more likely to take a housekeeper without encumbrances. Her husband had come home unexpectedly from a long voyage, and had returned last night. And then — plot within plot — the other woman was not her sister, but a friend, whose name was Miss Williams. She thought I was more likely to take two sisters than two friends. So we all came to know who the other was; and I, having given Jack permission to remain, assigned the other top room to Miss Williams. From absolute solitude I seemed to be rapidly developing into the keeper of a casual ward.

It was a never-failing source of joy to us to see the procession pass on the way to their rooms at night. First came a dog; then Miss Williams, with a candle; then Jack; then another dog; and finally, Mrs. Wotton, with her candle in one hand and another dog under her arm. Jack was with us for three weeks; and as I made him holystone the whole place down twice a week until the boards were like a quarter deck, we got something out of him in return for his lodging.

About this time, finding a few shillings over and no expense imminent, I laid down a cellar, in the shape of a four and a half gallon cask of beer, with a firm resolution that it should never be touched save on high days and holidays, or when guests had to be entertained.

Shortly afterwards Jack went away to sea again; and after his departure there were several furious quarrels between the women down below, which filled the whole house with treble reproaches and repartees. At last one evening Miss Williams — the quiet one — came to me and announced with sobs that she must go. Mrs. Wotton made her life unbearable, she said. She was determined to be independent, and had fitted up a small shop in a poor quarter of the town. She was going now, at once, to take possession of it.

I was sorry, because I liked Miss Williams, and I said a few words to that effect. She got as far as the hall door, and then came rustling back again into the consulting room. “Take a drink of your own beer!” she cried, and vanished.

It sounded like some sort of slang imprecation. If she had said “Oh, pull up your socks!” I should have been less surprised. And then suddenly the words took a dreadful meaning in my mind, and I rushed to the cellar. The cask was tilted forward on the trestles. I struck it and it boomed like a drum. I turned the tap, and not one drop appeared. Let us draw a veil over the painful scene. Suffice it that Mrs. Wotton got her marching orders then and there — and that next day Paul and I found ourselves alone in the empty house once more.

But we were demoralised by luxury. We could no longer manage without a helper — especially now in the winter time, when fires had to be lit — the most heart-breaking task that a man can undertake. I bethought me of the quiet Miss Williams, and hunted her up in her shop. She was quite willing to come, and saw how she could get out of the rent; but the difficulty lay with her stock. This sounded formidable at first, but when I came to learn that the whole thing had cost eleven shillings, it did not appear insurmountable. In half an hour my watch was pawned, and the affair concluded. I returned with an excellent housekeeper, and with a larger basketful of inferior Swedish matches, bootlaces, cakes of black lead, and little figures made of sugar than I should have thought it possible to get for the money. So now we have settled down, and I hope that a period of comparative peace lies before us.

Good-bye, old chap, and never think that I forget you. Your letters are read and re-read with avidity. I think I have every line you ever wrote me. You simply knock Paley out every time. I am so glad that you got out of that brewery business all right. For a time I was really afraid that you must either lose your money or else risk more upon the shares. I can only thank you for your kind offer of blank cheques.

It is wonderful that you should have slipped back into your American life so easily after your English hiatus. As you say, however, it is not a change but only a modification, since the root idea is the same in each. Is it not strange how the two great brothers are led to misunderstand each other? A man is punished for private libel (over here at any rate), although the consequences can only be slight. But a man may perpetrate international libel, which is a very heinous and far-reaching offence, and there is no law in the world which can punish him. Think of the contemptible crew of journalists and satirists who for ever picture the Englishman as haughty and h-dropping, or the American as vulgar and expectorating. If some millionaire would give them all a trip round the world we should have some rest — and if the plug came out of the boat midway it would be more restful still. And your vote-hunting politicians with their tail-twisting campaigns, and our editors of the supercilious weeklies with their inane tone of superiority, if they were all aboard how much clearer we should be! Once more adieu, and good luck!

XV. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 3rd August, 1883.

Do you think that such a thing as chance exists? Rather an explosive sentence to start a letter with; but pray cast your mind back over your own life, and tell me if you think that we really are the sports of chance. You know how often the turning down this street or that, the accepting or rejecting of an invitation, may deflect the whole current of our lives into some other channel. Are we mere leaves, fluttered hither and thither by the wind, or are we rather, with every conviction that we are free agents, carried steadily along to a definite and pre-determined end? I confess that as I advance through life, I become more and more confirmed in that fatalism to which I have always had an inclination.

Look at it in this way. We know that many of the permanent facts of the universe are NOT chance. It is not chance that the heavenly bodies swing clear of each other, that the seed is furnished with the apparatus which will drift it to a congenial soil, that the creature is adapted to its environment. Show me a whale with its great-coat of fat, and I want no further proof of design. But logically, as it seems to me, ALL must be design, or all must be chance. I do not see how one can slash a line right across the universe, and say that all to the right of that is chance, and all to the left is pre-ordained. You would then have to contend that things which on the face of them are of the same class, are really divided by an impassable gulf, and that the lower are regulated, while the higher are not. You would, for example, be forced to contend that the number of articulations in a flea’s hind leg has engaged the direct superintendence of the Creator, while the mischance which killed a thousand people in a theatre depended upon the dropping of a wax vesta upon the floor, and was an unforeseen flaw in the chain of life. This seems to me to be unthinkable.

It is a very superficial argument to say that if a man holds the views of a fatalist he will therefore cease to strive, and will wait resignedly for what fate may send him. The objector forgets that among the other things fated is that we of northern blood SHOULD strive and should NOT sit down with folded hands. But when a man has striven, when he has done all he knows, and when, in spite of it, a thing comes to pass, let him wait ten years before he says that it is a misfortune. It is part of the main line of his destiny then, and is working to an end. A man loses his fortune; he gains earnestness. His eyesight goes; it leads him to a spirituality. The girl loses her beauty; she becomes more sympathetic. We think we are pushing our own way bravely, but there is a great Hand in ours all the time.

You'll wonder what has taken me off on this line. Only that I seem to see it all in action in my own life. But, as usual, I have started merrily off with an appendix, so I shall go back and begin my report as nearly as possible where I ended the last. First of all, I may say generally that the clouds were thinning then, and that they broke shortly afterwards. During the last few months we have never once quite lost sight of the sun.

You remember that we (Paul and I) had just engaged a certain Miss Williams to come and keep house for us. I felt that on the basement-lodger principle I had not control enough; so we now entered upon a more business-like arrangement, by which a sum (though, alas! an absurdly small one) was to be paid her for her services. I would it had been ten times as much, for a better and a more loyal servant man never had. Our fortunes seemed to turn from the hour that she re-entered the house.

Slowly, week by week, and month by month, the practice began to spread and to strengthen. There were spells when never a ring came to the bell, and it seemed as though all our labour had gone for nothing — but then would come other days when eight and ten names would appear in my ledger. Where did it come from you will ask. Some from old Whitehall and his circle of Bohemians. Some from accident cases. Some from new comers to the town who drifted to me. Some from people whom I met first in other capacities. An insurance superintendent gave me a few cases to examine, and that was a very great help. Above all, I learned a fact which I would whisper in the ear of every other man who starts, as I have done, a stranger among strangers. Do not think that practice will come to you. You must go to it. You may sit upon your consulting room chair until it breaks under you, but without purchase or partnership you will make little or no progress. The way to do it is to go out, to mix everywhere with men, to let them know you. You will come back many a time and be told by a reproachful housekeeper that some one has been for you in your absence. Never mind! Go out again. A noisy smoking concert where you will meet eighty men is better for you than the patient or two whom you might have seen at home. It took me some time to realise, but I speak now as one who knows.

But — there is a great big “but” in the case. You must ride yourself on the curb the whole time. Unless you are sure — absolutely sure — that you can do this, you are far best at home. You must never for one instant forget yourself. You must remember what your object is in being there. You must inspire respect. Be friendly, genial, convivial — what you will — but preserve the tone and bearing of a gentleman. If you can make yourself respected and liked you will find every club and society that you join a fresh introduction to practice. But beware of drink! Above everything, beware of drink! The company that you are in may condone it in each other, but never in the man who wishes them to commit their lives to his safe keeping. A slip is fatal — a half slip perilous. Make your rule of life and go by it, in spite of challenge or coaxers. It will be remembered in your favour next morning.

And of course I do not mean merely festive societies. Literary, debating, political, social, athletic, every one of them is a tool to your hands. But you must show them what a good man you are. You must throw yourself into each with energy and conviction. You will soon find yourself on the committee — possibly the secretary, or even in the presidential chair. Do not grudge labour where the return may be remote and indirect. Those are the rungs up which one climbs.

That was how, when I had gained some sort of opening, I set to work to enlarge it. I joined this. I joined that. I pushed in every direction. I took up athletics again much to the advantage of my health, and found that the practice benefited as well as I. My cricket form for the season has been fair, with an average of about 20 with the bat and 9 with the ball.

It must be allowed, however, that this system of sallying out for my patients and leaving my consulting room empty might be less successful if it were not for my treasure of a housekeeper. She is a marvel of discretion, and the way in which she perjures her soul for the sake of the practice is a constant weight upon my conscience. She is a tall, thin woman, with a grave face and an impressive manner. Her standard fiction, implied rather than said (with an air as if it were so universally known that it would be absurd to put it into words) is, that I am so pressed by the needs of my enormous practice, that any one wishing to consult me must make their appointment very exactly and a long time in advance.

“Dear me, now!” she says to some applicant. “He’s been hurried off again. If you’d been here half-an-hour ago he might have given you a minute. I never saw such a thing” (confidentially). “Between you and me I don’t think he can last at it long. He’s bound to break down. But come in, and I’ll do all I can for you.”

Then, having carefully fastened the patient up in the consulting room, she goes to little Paul.

“Run round to the bowling green, Master Paul,” says she. “You’ll find the doctor there, I think. Just tell him that a patient is waiting for him.”

She seems in these interviews to inspire them with a kind of hushed feeling of awe, as if they had found their way into some holy of holies. My own actual appearance is quite an anti-climax after the introduction by Miss Williams.

Another of her devices is to make appointments with an extreme precision as to time, I being at the moment worked to death (at a cricket match).

“Let us see!” says she, looking at the slate. “He will be clear at seven minutes past eight this evening. Yes, he could just manage it then. He has no one at all from seven past to the quarter past” — and so at the appointed hour I have my patient precipitating himself into my room with the demeanour of the man who charges in for his bowl of hot soup at a railway station. If he knew that he is probably the only patient who has opened my door that evening he would not be in such a hurry — or think so much of my advice.

One curious patient has come my way who has been of great service to me. She is a stately looking widow, Turner by name, the most depressingly respectable figure, as of Mrs. Grundy’s older and less frivolous sister. She lives in a tiny house, with one small servant to scale. Well, every two months or so she quite suddenly goes on a mad drink, which lasts for about a week. It ends as abruptly as it begins, but while it is on the neighbours know it. She shrieks, yells, sings, chivies the servant, and skims plates out of the window at the passers-by. Of course, it is really not funny, but pathetic and deplorable — all the same, it is hard to keep from laughing at the absurd contrast between her actions and her appearance. I was called in by accident in the first instance; but I speedily acquired some control over her, so that now the neighbours send for me the moment the crockery begins to come through the window. She has a fair competence, so that her little vagaries are a help to me with my rent. She has, too, a number of curious jugs, statues, and pictures, a selection of which she presents to me in the course of each of her attacks, insisting upon my carrying them away then and there; so that I stagger out of the house like one of Napoleon's generals coming out of Italy. There is a good deal of method in the old lady, however, and on her recovery she invariably sends round a porter, with a polite note to say that she would be very glad to have her pictures back again.

And now I have worked my way to the point where I can show you what I mean when I talk about fate. The medical practitioner who lives next me — Porter is his name — is a kindly sort of man, and knowing that I have had a long uphill fight, he has several times put things in my way. One day about three weeks ago he came into my consulting room after breakfast.

"Could you come with me to a consultation?" he asked.

"With pleasure."

"I have my carriage outside."

He told me something of the case as we went. It was a young fellow, an only son, who had been suffering from nervous symptoms for some time, and lately from considerable pain in his head. "His people are living with a patient of mine, General Wainwright," said Porter. "He didn't like the symptoms, and thought he would have a second opinion."

We came to the house, a great big one, in its own grounds, and had a preliminary talk with the dark-faced, white-haired Indian soldier who owns it. He was explaining the responsibility that he felt, the patient being his nephew, when a lady entered the room. "This is my sister, Mrs. La Force," said he, "the mother of the gentleman whom you are going to see."

I recognised her instantly. I had met her before and under curious circumstances. (Dr. Stark Munro here proceeds to narrate again how he had met the La Forces, having evidently forgotten that he had already done so in Letter VI.) When she was introduced I could see that she had not associated me with the young doctor in the train. I don't wonder, for I have started a beard, in the hope of making myself look a little older. She was naturally all anxiety about her son, and we went up with her (Porter and I) to have a look at him. Poor fellow! he seemed peakier and more sallow than when I had seen him last. We held our consultation, came to an agreement about the chronic nature of his complaint, and finally departed without my reminding Mrs. La Force of our previous meeting.

Well, there the matter might have ended; but about three days afterwards who should be shown into my consulting room but Mrs. La Force and her daughter. I thought the latter looked twice at me, when her mother introduced her, as if she had some recollection of my face; but she evidently could not recall where she had seen it, and I said nothing to help her. They both seemed to be much distressed in mind — indeed, the tears were brimming over from the girl's eyes, and her lip was quivering.

"We have come to you, Doctor Munro, in the greatest distress," said Mrs. La Force; "we should be very glad of your advice."

"You place me in rather a difficult position, Mrs. La Force," said I. "The fact is, that I look upon you as Dr. Porter's patients, and it is a breach of etiquette upon my part to hold any communication with you except through him."

"It was he who sent us here," said she.

"Oh, that alters the matter entirely."

"He said he could do nothing to help us, and that perhaps you could."

"Pray let me know what you wish done."

She set out valorously to explain; but the effort of putting her troubles into words seemed to bring them more home to her, and she suddenly blurred over and became inarticulate. Her daughter bent towards her, and kissed her with the prettiest little spasm of love and pity.

"I will tell you about it, doctor," said she. "Poor mother is almost worn out. Fred — my brother, that is to say, is worse. He has become noisy, and will not be quiet."

"And my brother, the general," continued Mrs. La Force, "naturally did not expect this when he kindly offered us a home, and, being a nervous man, it is very trying to him. In fact, it cannot go on. He says so himself."

"But what is mother to do?" cried the girl, taking up the tale again. "No hotel or lodging-house would take us in while poor Fred is like that. And we have not the heart to send him to an asylum. Uncle will not have us any longer, and we have nowhere to go to." Her grey eyes tried to look brave, but her mouth would go down at the corners.

I rose and walked up and down the room, trying to think it all out.

"What I wanted to ask you," said Mrs. La Force, "was whether perhaps you knew some doctor or some private establishment which took in such cases — so that we could see Fred every day or so. The only thing is that he must be taken at once, for really my brother has reached the end of his patience."

I rang the bell for my housekeeper.

"Miss Williams," said I, "do you think we can furnish a bedroom by to-night, so as to take in a gentleman who is ill?"

Never have I so admired that wonderful woman's self-command.

"Why, easily, sir, if the patients will only let me alone. But with that bell going thirty times an hour, it's hard to say what you are going to do."

This with her funny manner set the ladies laughing, and the whole business seemed lighter and easier. I promised to have the room ready by eight o'clock. Mrs. La Force arranged to bring her son round at that hour, and both ladies thanked me a very great deal more than I deserved; for after all it was a business matter, and a resident patient was the very thing that I needed. I was able to assure Mrs. La Force that I had had a similar case under my charge before — meaning, of course, poor "Jimmy," the son of Lord Saltire. Miss Williams escorted them to the door, and took occasion to whisper to them that it was wonderful how I got through with it, and that I was within sight of my carriage.

It was a short notice, but we got everything ready by the hour. Carpet, bed, suite, curtains — all came together, and were fixed in their places by the united efforts of Miss Williams, Paul, and myself. Sharp at eight a cab arrived, and Fred was conducted by me into his bedroom. The moment I looked at him I could see that he was much worse than when I saw him with Dr. Porter. The chronic brain trouble had taken a sudden acute turn.

His eyes were wild, his cheeks flushed, his lips drawn slightly away from his teeth. His temperature was 102 deg., and he muttered to himself continually, and paid no attention to my questions. It was evident to me at a glance that the responsibility which I had taken upon myself was to be no light one.

However, we could but do our best. I undressed him and got him safely to bed, while Miss Williams prepared some arrowroot for his supper. He would eat nothing, however, but seemed more disposed to dose, so having seen him settle down we left him. His room was the one next to mine, and as the wall was thin, I could hear the least movement. Two or three times he muttered and groaned, but finally he became quiet, and I was able to drop to sleep.

At three in the morning, I was awakened by a dreadful crash. Bounding out of bed I rushed into the other room. Poor Fred was standing in his long gown, a pathetic little figure in the grey light of the dawning day. He had pulled over his washing-stand (with what object only his bemuddled mind could say), and the whole place was a morass of water with islands of broken crockery. I picked him up and put him back into his bed again — his body glowing through his night-dress, and his eyes staring wildly about him. It was evidently impossible to leave him, and so I spent the rest of the night nodding and shivering in the armchair. No, it was certainly not a sinecure that I had undertaken.

In the morning I went round to Mrs. La Force and gave her a bulletin. Her brother had recovered his serenity now that the patient had left. He had the Victoria Cross it seems, and was one of the desperate little garrison who held Lucknow in that hell-whirl of a mutiny. And now the sudden opening of a door sets him shaking, and a dropped tongs gives him palpitations. Are we not the strangest kind of beings?

Fred was a little better during the day, and even seemed in a dull sort of way to recognise his sister, who brought him flowers in the afternoon. Towards evening his temperature sank to 101.5@, and he fell into a kind of stupor. As it happened, Dr. Porter came in about supper-time, and I asked him if he would step up and have a look at my patient. He did so, and we found him dozing peacefully. You would hardly think that that small incident may have been one of the most momentous in my life. It was the merest chance in the world that Porter went up at all.

Fred was taking medicine with a little chloral in it at this time. I gave him his usual dose last thing at night; and then, as he seemed to be sleeping peacefully, I went to my own room for the rest which I badly needed. I did not wake until eight in the morning, when I was roused by the jingling of a spoon in a saucer, and the step of Miss Williams passing my door. She was taking him the arrowroot which I had ordered over-night. I heard her open the door, and the next moment my heart sprang into my mouth as she gave a hoarse scream, and her cup and saucer crashed upon the floor. An instant later she had burst into my room, with her face convulsed with terror.

“My God!” she cried, “he’s gone!”

I caught up my dressing-gown and rushed into the next room.

Poor little Fred was stretched sideways across his bed, quite dead. He looked as if he had been rising and had fallen backwards. His face was so peaceful and smiling that I could hardly have recognised the worried, fever-worn features of yesterday. There is great promise, I think, on the faces of the dead. They say it is but the post-mortem relaxation of the muscles, but it is one of the points on which I should like to see science wrong.

Miss Williams and I stood for five minutes without a word, hushed by the presence of that supreme fact. Then we laid him straight, and drew the sheet over him. She knelt down and prayed and sobbed, while I sat on the bed, with the cold hand in mine. Then my heart turned to lead as I remembered that it lay for me to break the news to the mother.

However, she took it most admirably. They were all three at breakfast when I came round, the general, Mrs. La Force, and the daughter. Somehow they seemed to know all that I had to say at the very sight of me; and in their womanly unselfishness their sympathy was all for me, for the shock I had suffered, and the disturbance of my household. I found myself turned from the consoler into the consoled. For an hour or more we talked it over, I explaining what I hope needed no explanation, that as the poor boy could not tell me his symptoms it was hard for me to know how immediate was his danger. There can be no doubt that the fall of temperature and the quietness which both Porter and I had looked upon as a hopeful sign, were really the beginning to the end.

Mrs. La Force asked me to see to everything, the formalities, register, and funeral. It was on a Wednesday, and we thought it best that the burial should be on the Friday. Back I hurried, therefore, not knowing what to do first, and found old Whitehall waiting for me in my consulting room, looking very jaunty with a camelia in his button-hole. Not an organ in its right place, and a camelia in his button-hole!

Between ourselves, I was sorry to see him, for I was in no humour for his company; but he had heard all about it from Miss Williams, and had come to stop. Only then did I fully realise how much of the kindly, delicate-minded gentleman remained behind that veil of profanity and obscenity which he so often held before him.

“I’ll trot along with you, Dr. Munro, sir. A man’s none the worse for a companion at such times. I’ll not open my mouth unless you wish it, sir; but I am an idle man, and would take it as a kindness if you would let me come round with you.”

Round he came, and very helpful he was. He seemed to know all about the procedure—”Buried two wives, Dr. Munro, sir!” I signed the certificate myself, conveyed it to the registrar, got the order for burial, took it round to the parish clerk, arranged an hour, then off to the undertaker’s, and back to my practice. It was a kind of nightmare morning to look back upon, relieved only by the figure of my old Bohemian, with his pea jacket, his black thorn, his puffy, crinkly face, and his camelia.

To make a long story short, then, the funeral came off as arranged, General Wainwright, Whitehall, and I being the sole mourners. The captain had never seen poor Fred in the flesh, but he “liked to be in at the finish, sir,” and so he gave me his company. It was at eight in the morning, and it was ten before we found ourselves at Oakley Villa. A burly man with bushy whiskers was waiting for us at the door.

“Are you Dr. Munro, sir?” he asked.

“I am.”

“I am a detective from the local office. I was ordered to inquire into the death of the young man in your house lately.”

Here was a thunderbolt! If looking upset is a sign of guilt, I must have stood confessed as a villain. It was so absolutely unexpected. I hope, however, that I had command of myself instantly.

“Pray step in!” said I. Any information I can give you is entirely at your service. Have you any objection to my friend Captain Whitehall being present?

“Not in the least.” So in we both went, taking this bird of ill-omen.

He was, however, a man of tact and with a pleasant manner.

“Of course, Dr. Munro,” said he, “you are much too well known in the town for any one to take this matter seriously. But the fact is that we had an anonymous letter this morning saying that the young man had died yesterday and was to be buried at an unusual hour to-day, and that the circumstances were suspicious.”

“He died the day before yesterday. He was buried at eight to-day,” I explained; and then I told him the whole story from the beginning. He listened attentively and took a note or two.

“Who signed the certificate?” he asked.

“I did,” said I.

He raised his eyebrows slightly. “There is really no one to check your statement then?” said he.

“Oh yes, Dr. Porter saw him the night before he died. He knew all about the case.”

The detective shut his note-book with a snap. “That is final, Dr. Munro,” said he. “Of course I must see Dr. Porter as a matter of form, but if his opinion agrees with yours I can only apologise to you for this intrusion.”

“And there is one more thing, Mr. Detective, sir,” said Whitehall explosively. “I’m not a rich man, sir, only the —— half-pay skipper of an armed transport; but by —— , sir, I’d give you this hat full of dollars to know the name of the —— rascal who wrote that anonymous letter, sir. By —— sir, you’d have a real case to look after then.” And he waved his black thorn ferociously.

So the wretched business ended, Bertie. But on what trifling chances do our fortunes depend! If Porter had not seen him that night, it is more than likely that there would have been an exhumation. And then, — well, there would be chloral in the body; some money interests *DID* depend upon the death of the lad — a sharp lawyer might have made much of the case. Anyway, the first breath of suspicion would have blown my little rising practice to wind. What awful things lurk at the corners of Life’s highway, ready to pounce upon us as we pass!

And so you really are going a-voyaging! Well, I won’t write again until I hear that you are back from the Islands, and then I hope to have something a little more cheery to talk about.

XVI. OAKLEY VILLAS, BIRCHESPOOL, 4th November, 1884.

I face my study window as I write, Bertie. Slate-coloured clouds with ragged fringes are drifting slowly overhead. Between them one has a glimpse of higher clouds of a lighter gray. I can hear the gentle swish of the rain striking a clearer note on the gravel path and a duller among the leaves. Sometimes it falls straight and heavy, till the air is full of the delicate gray shading, and for half a foot above the ground there is a haze from the rebound of a million tiny globules. Then without any change in the clouds it cases off again. Pools line my walk, and lie thick upon the roadway, their surface pocked by the falling drops. As I sit I can smell the heavy perfume of the wet earth, and the laurel bushes gleam where the light strikes sideways upon them. The gate outside shines above as though it were new varnished, and along the lower edge of the upper bar there hangs a fringe of great clear drops.

That is the best that November can do for us in our dripping little island. You, I suppose, sitting among the dying glories of an American fall, think that this must needs be depressing. Don't make any mistake about that, my dear boy. You may take the States, from Detroit to the Gulf, and you won't find a happier man than this one. What do you suppose I've got att his{sic — at this} moment in my consulting room? A bureau? A bookcase? No, I know you've guessed my secret already. She is sitting in my big armchair; and she is the best, the kindest, the sweetest little woman in England.

Yes, I've been married six months now — the almanack says months, though I should have thought weeks. I should, of course, have sent cake and cards, but had an idea that you were not home from the Islands yet. It is a good year since I wrote to you; but when you give an amorphous address of that sort, what can you expect? I've thought of you, and talked of you often enough.

Well, I daresay, with the acumen of an old married man, you have guessed who the lady is as well. We surely know by some nameless instinct more about our futures than we think we know. I can remember, for example, that years ago the name of Bradfield used to strike with a causeless familiarity upon my ear; and since then, as you know, the course of my life has flowed through it. And so when I first saw Winnie La Force in the railway carriage, before I had spoken to her or knew her name, I felt an inexplicable sympathy for and interest in her. Have you had no experience of the sort in your life? Or was it merely that she was obviously gentle and retiring, and so made a silent claim upon all that was helpful and manly in me? At any rate, I was conscious of it; and again and again every time that I met her. How good is that saying of some Russian writer that he who loves one woman knows more of the whole sex than he who has had passing relations with a thousand! I thought I knew something of women. I suppose every medical student does. But now I can see that I really knew nothing. My knowledge was all external. I did not know the woman soul, that crowning gift of Providence to man, which, if we do not ourselves degrade it, will set an edge to all that is good in us. I did not know how the love of a woman will tinge a man's whole life and every action with unselfishness. I did not know how easy it is to be noble when some one else takes it for granted that one will be so; or how wide and interesting life becomes when viewed by four eyes instead of two. I had much to learn, you see; but I think I have learned it.

It was natural that the death of poor Fred La Force should make me intimate with the family. It was really that cold hand which I grasped that morning as I sat by his bed which drew me towards my happiness. I visited them frequently, and we often went little excursions together. Then my dear mother came down to stay with me for a spell, and turned Miss Williams gray by looking for dust in all sorts of improbable corners; or advancing with a terrible silence, a broom in one hand and a shovel in the other, to the attack of a spider's web which she had marked down in the beer cellar. Her presence enabled me to return some of the hospitality which I had received from the La Forces, and brought us still nearer together.

I had never yet reminded them of our previous meeting. One evening, however, the talk turned upon clairvoyance, and Mrs. La Force was expressing the utmost disbelief in it. I borrowed her ring, and holding it to my forehead, I pretended to be peering into her past.

"I see you in a railway carriage," said I. "You are wearing a red feather in your bonnet. Miss La Force is dressed in something dark. There is a young man there. He is rude enough to address your daughter as Winnie before he has ever been — —"

“Oh, mother,” she cried, “of course it is he! The face haunted me, and I could not think where we had met it.”

Well, there are some things that we don’t talk about to another man, even when we know each other as well as I know you. Why should we, when that which is most engrossing to us consists in those gradual shades of advance from friendship to intimacy, and from intimacy to something more sacred still, which can scarcely be written at all, far less made interesting to another? The time came at last when they were to leave Birchespool, and my mother and I went round the night before to say goodbye. Winnie and I were thrown together for an instant.

“When will you come back to Birchespool?” I asked.

“Mother does not know.”

“Will you come soon, and be my wife?”

I had been turning over in my head all the evening how prettily I could lead up to it, and how neatly I could say it — and behold the melancholy result! Well, perhaps the feeling of my heart managed to make itself clear even through those bald words. There was but one to judge, and she was of that opinion.

I was so lost in my own thoughts that I walked as far as Oakley Villa with my mother before I opened my mouth. “Mam,” said I at last, “I have proposed to Winnie La Force, and she has accepted me.”

“My boy,” said she, “you are a true Packenham.” And so I knew that my mother’s approval had reached the point of enthusiasm. It was not for days — not until I expressed a preference for dust under the bookcase with quiet, against purity and ructions — that the dear old lady perceived traces of the Munros.

The time originally fixed for the wedding was six months after this; but we gradually whittled it down to five and to four. My income had risen to about two hundred and seventy pounds at the time; and Winnie had agreed, with a somewhat enigmatical smile, that we could manage very well on that — the more so as marriage sends a doctor’s income up. The reason of her smile became more apparent when a few weeks before that date I received a most portentous blue document in which “We, Brown & Woodhouse, the solicitors for the herein and hereafter mentioned Winifred La Force, do hereby” — state a surprising number of things, and use some remarkably bad English. The meaning of it, when all the “whereas’s and aforesaids” were picked out, was, that Winnie had about a hundred a year of her own. It could not make me love her a shade better than I did; but at the same time I won't be so absurd as to say that I was not glad, or to deny that it made our marriage much easier than it would otherwise have been.

Poor Whitehall came in on the morning of the ceremony. He was staggering under the weight of a fine Japanese cabinet which he had carried round from his lodgings. I had asked him to come to the church, and the old gentleman was resplendent in a white waistcoat and a silk tie. Between ourselves, I had been just a little uneasy lest his excitement should upset him, as in the case of the dinner; but nothing could be more exemplary than his conduct and appearance. I had introduced him to Winnie some days before.

"You'll forgive me for saying, Dr. Munro, sir, that you are a —— lucky fellow," said he. "You've put your hand in the bag, sir, and taken out the eel first time, as any one with half an eye can see. Now, I've had three dips, and landed a snake every dip. If I'd had a good woman at my side, Dr. Munro, sir, I might not be the broken half-pay skipper of an armed transport to-day."

"I thought you had been twice married, captain."

"Three times, sir. I buried two. The other lives at Brussels. Well, I'll be at the church, Dr. Munro, sir; and you may lay that there is no one there who wishes you better than I do."

And yet there were many there who wished me well. My patients had all got wind of it; and they assembled by the pew-full, looking distressingly healthy. My neighbour, Dr. Porter, was there also to lend me his support, and old General Wainwright gave Winnie away. My mother, Mrs. La Force, and Miss Williams were all in the front pew; and away at the back of the church I caught a glimpse of the forked beard and crinkly face of Whitehall, and beside him the wounded lieutenant, the man who ran away with the cook, and quite a line of the strange Bohemians who followed his fortunes. Then when the words were said, and man's form had tried to sanctify that which was already divine, we walked amid the pealings of the "Wedding March" into the vestry, where my dear mother relieved the tension of the situation by signing the register in the wrong place, so that to all appearance it was she who had just married the clergyman. And then amid congratulations and kindly faces, we were together, her hand on my forearm, upon the steps of the church, and saw the familiar road stretching before us. But it was not that road which lay before my eyes, but rather the path of our lives; — that broader path on which our feet were now planted, so pleasant to tread, and yet with its course so shrouded in the mist. Was it long, or was it short? Was it uphill, or was it down? For her, at least, it should be smooth, if a man's love could make it so.

We were away for several weeks in the Isle of Man, and then came back to Oakley Villa, where Miss Williams was awaiting us in a house in which even my mother could have found no dust, and with a series of cheering legends as to the crowds of patients who had blocked the street in my absence. There really was a marked increase in my practice; and for the last six months or so, without being actually busy, I have always had enough to occupy me. My people are poor, and I have to work hard for a small fee; but I still study and attend the local hospital, and keep my knowledge up-to-date, so as to be ready for my opening when it comes. There are times when I chafe that I may not play a part upon some larger stage than this; but my happiness is complete, and if fate has no further use for me, I am content now from my heart to live and to die where I am.

You will wonder, perhaps, how we get on — my wife and I — in the matter of religion. Well, we both go our own ways. Why should I proselytise? I would not for the sake of abstract truth take away her child-like faith which serves to make life easier and brighter to her. I have made myself ill-understood by you in these discursive letters if you have read in them any bitterness against the orthodox creeds. Far from saying that they are all false, it would express my position better to say that they are all true. Providence would not have used them were they not the best available tools, and in that sense divine. That they are final I deny. A simpler and more universal creed will take their place, when the mind of man is ready for it; and I believe it will be a creed founded upon those lines of absolute and provable truth which I have indicated. But the old creeds are still the best suited to certain minds, and to certain ages. If they are good enough for Providence to use, they are good enough for us to endure. We have but to wait upon the survival of the truest. If I have seemed to say anything aggressive against them, it was directed at those who wish to limit the Almighty's favour to their own little clique, or who wish to build a Chinese wall round religion, with no assimilation of fresh truths, and no hope of expansion in the future. It is with these that the pioneers of progress can hold no truce. As for my wife, I would as soon think of breaking in upon her innocent prayers, as she would of carrying off the works of philosophy from my study table. She is not narrow in her views; but if one could stand upon the very topmost pinnacle of broad-mindedness, one would doubtless see from it that even the narrow have their mission.

About a year ago I had news of Cullingworth from Smeaton, who was in the same football team at college, and who had called when he was passing through Bradfield. His report was not a very favourable one. The practice had declined considerably. People had no doubt accustomed themselves to his eccentricities, and these had ceased to impress them. Again, there had been one or two coroner's inquests, which had spread the impression that he had been rash in the use of powerful drugs. If the coroner could have seen the hundreds of cures which Cullingworth had effected by that same rashness he would have been less confident with his censures. But, as you can understand, C.'s rival medical men were not disposed to cover him in any way. He had never had much consideration for them.

Besides this decline in his practice, I was sorry to hear that Cullingworth had shown renewed signs of that curious vein of suspicion which had always seemed to me to be the most insane of all his traits. His whole frame of mind towards me had been an example of it, but as far back as I can remember it had been a characteristic. Even in those early days when they lived in four little rooms above a grocer's shop, I recollect that he insisted upon gumming up every chink of one bedroom for fear of some imaginary infection. He was haunted, too, with a perpetual dread of eavesdroppers, which used to make him fly at the door and fling it open in the middle of his conversation, pouncing out into the passage with the idea of catching somebody in the act. Once it was the maid with the tea tray that he caught, I remember; and I can see her astonished face now, with an aureole of flying cups and lumps of sugar.

Smeaton tells me that this has now taken the form of imagining that some one is conspiring to poison him with copper, against which he takes the most extravagant precautions. It is the strangest sight, he says, to see Cullingworth at his meals; for he sits with an elaborate chemical apparatus and numerous retorts and bottles at his elbow, with which he tests samples of every course. I could not help laughing at Smeaton's description, and yet it was a laugh with a groan underlying it. Of all ruins, that of a fine man is the saddest.

I never thought I should have seen Cullingworth again, but fate has brought us together. I have always had a kindly feeling for him, though I feel that he used me atrociously. Often I have wondered whether, if I were placed before him, I should take him by the throat or by the hand. You will be interested to hear what actually occurred.

One day, just a week or so back, I was starting on my round, when a boy arrived with a note. It fairly took my breath away when I saw the familiar writing, and realised that Cullingworth was in Birchespool. I called Winnie, and we read it together.

"Dear Munro," it said, "James is in lodgings here for a few days. We are on the point of leaving England. He would be glad, for the sake of old times, to have a chat with you before he goes.

"Yours faithfully,

"HETTY CULLINGWORTH."

The writing was his and the style of address, so that it was evidently one of those queer little bits of transparent cunning which were characteristic of him, to make it come from his wife, that he might not lay himself open to a direct rebuff. The address, curiously enough, was that very Cadogan Terrace at which I had lodged, but two doors higher up.

Well, I was averse from going myself, but Winnie was all for peace and forgiveness. Women who claim nothing invariably get everything, and so my gentle little wife always carries her point. Half an hour later I was in Cadogan Terrace with very mixed feelings, but the kindlier ones at the top. I tried to think that Cullingworth's treatment of me had been pathological — the result of a diseased brain. If a delirious man had struck me, I should not have been angry with him. That must be my way of looking at it.

If Cullingworth still bore any resentment, he concealed it most admirably. But then I knew by experience that that genial loud-voiced John-Bull manner of his COULD conceal many things. His wife was more open; and I could read in her tightened lips and cold grey eyes, that she at least stood fast to the old quarrel. Cullingworth was little changed, and seemed to be as sanguine and as full of spirits as ever.

"Sound as a trout, my boy!" he cried, drumming on his chest with his hands. "Played for the London Scottish in their opening match last week, and was on the ball from whistle to whistle. Not so quick on a sprint — you find that yourself, Munro, eh what? — but a good hard-working bullocky forward. Last match I shall have for many a day, for I am off to South America next week."

"You have given up Bradfield altogether then?"

“Too provincial, my boy! What’s the good of a village practice with a miserable three thousand or so a year for a man that wants room to spread? My head was sticking out at one end of Bradfield and my feet at the other. Why, there wasn’t room for Hetty in the place, let alone me! I’ve taken to the eye, my boy. There’s a fortune in the eye. A man grudges a half-crown to cure his chest or his throat, but he’d spend his last dollar over his eye. There’s money in ears, but the eye is a gold mine.”

“What!” said I, “in South America?”

“Just exactly in South America,” he cried, pacing with his quick little steps up and down the dingy room. “Look here, laddie! There’s a great continent from the equator to the icebergs, and not a man in it who could correct an astigmatism. What do they know of modern eye-surgery and refraction? Why, dammy, they don’t know much about it in the provinces of England yet, let alone Brazil. Man, if you could only see it, there’s a fringe of squinting millionaires sitting ten deep round the whole continent with their money in their hands waiting for an oculist. Eh, Munro, what? By Crums, I’ll come back and I’ll buy Bradfield, and I’ll give it away as a tip to a waiter.”

“You propose to settle in some large city, then?”

“City! What use would a city be to me? I’m there to squeeze the continent. I work a town at a time. I send on an agent to the next to say that I am coming. I ‘Here’s the chance of a lifetime,’ says he, ‘no need to go back to Europe. Here’s Europe come to you. Squints, cataracts, iritis, refractions, what you like; here’s the great Signor Cullingworth, right up to date and ready for anything!’ In they come of course, droves of them, and then I arrive and take the money. Here’s my luggage!” he pointed to two great hampers in the corner of the room. “Those are glasses, my boy, concave and convex, hundreds of them. I test an eye, fit him on the spot, and send him away shouting. Then I load up a steamer and come home, unless I elect to buy one of their little States and run it.”

Of course it sounded absurd as he put it; but I could soon see that he had worked out his details, and that there was a very practical side to his visions.

“I work Bahia,” said he. “My agent prepares Pernambuco. When Bahia is squeezed dry I move on to Pernambuco, and the agent ships to Monte Video. So we work our way round with a trail of spectacles behind us. It’ll go like clock-work.”

"You will need to speak Spanish," said I.

"Tut, it does not take any Spanish to stick a knife into a man's eye. All I shall want to know is, 'Money down — no credit.' That's Spanish enough for me."

We had a long and interesting talk about all that had happened to both of us, without, however, any allusion to our past quarrel. He would not admit that he had left Bradfield on account of a falling-off in his practice, or for any reason except that he found the place too small. His spring-screen invention had, he said, been favourably reported upon by one of the first private shipbuilding firms on the Clyde, and there was every probability of their adopting it.

"As to the magnet," said he, "I'm very sorry for my country, but there is no more command of the seas for her. I'll have to let the thing go to the Germans. It's not my fault. They must not blame me when the smash comes. I put the thing before the Admiralty, and I could have made a board school understand it in half the time. Such letters, Munro! Colney Hatch on blue paper. When the war comes, and I show those letters, somebody will be hanged. Questions about this — questions about that. At last they asked me what I proposed to fasten my magnet to. I answered to any solid impenetrable object, such as the head of an Admiralty official. Well, that broke the whole thing up. They wrote with their compliments, and they were returning my apparatus. I wrote with my compliments, and they might go to the devil. And so ends a great historical incident, Munro — eh, what?"

We parted very good friends, but with reservations, I fancy, on both sides. His last advice to me was to clear out of Birchespool.

"You can do better — you can do better, laddie!" said he. "Look round the whole world, and when you see a little round hole, jump in feet foremost. There's a lot of 'em about if a man keeps himself ready."

So those were the last words of Cullingworth, and the last that I may ever see of him also, for he starts almost immediately upon his strange venture. He must succeed. He is a man whom nothing could hold down. I wish him luck, and have a kindly feeling towards him, and yet I distrust him from the bottom of my heart, and shall be just as pleased to know that the Atlantic rolls between us.

Well, my dear Bertie, a happy and tranquil, if not very ambitious existence stretches before us. We are both in our twenty-fifth year, and I suppose that without presumption we can reckon that thirty-five more years lie in front of us. I can foresee the gradually increasing routine of work, the wider circle of friends, the indentification with this or that local movement, with perhaps a seat on the Bench, or at least in the Municipal Council in my later years. It’s not a very startling programme, is it? But it lies to my hand, and I see no other. I should dearly love that the world should be ever so little better for my presence. Even on this small stage we have our two sides, and something might be done by throwing all one’s weight on the scale of breadth, tolerance, charity, temperance, peace, and kindliness to man and beast. We can’t all strike very big blows, and even the little ones count for something.

So good-bye, my dear boy, and remember that when you come to England our home would be the brighter for your presence. In any case, now that I have your address, I shall write again in a very few weeks. My kindest regards to Mrs. Swanborough.

Yours ever,
J. STARK MUNRO.

[This is the last letter which I was destined to receive from my poor friend. He started to spend the Christmas of that year (1884) with his people, and on the journey was involved in the fatal railroad accident at Sittingfleet, where the express ran into a freight train which was standing in the depot. Dr. and Mrs. Munro were the only occupants of the car next the locomotive, and were killed instantly, as were the brakesman and one other passenger. It was such an end as both he and his wife would have chosen; and no one who knew them would regret that neither was left to mourn the other. His insurance policy of eleven hundred pounds was sufficient to provide for the wants of his own family, which, as his father was sick, was the one worldly matter which could have caused him concern. —H. S.]

THE TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO

Serialised in *The Strand Magazine* between May and December 1897, this novel features a group of European tourists are enjoying their trip to Egypt in the year 1895. They are sailing up the River Nile in a “a turtle-bottomed, round-bowed stern-wheeler”, the Korosko. They intend to travel to Abousir at the southern frontier of Egypt, after which the Dervish country starts. They are attacked and abducted by a marauding band of Dervish warriors. The novel contains a strong defence of British Imperialism and in particular the Imperial project in North Africa. It also reveals the very great suspicion of Islam felt by many Europeans at the time.

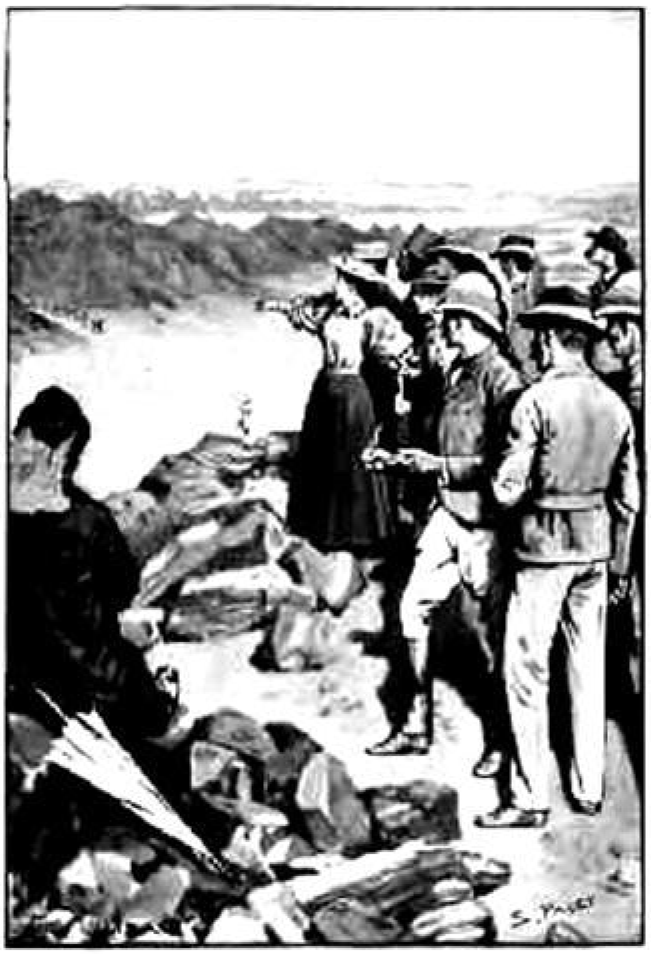

They all looked at the long string of red-turbaned riders

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TO MY FRIEND JAMES PAYN IN TOKEN OF MY AFFECTION AND ESTEEM

PREFACE

This book has been materially enlarged and altered since its appearance in serial form

A. Conan Doyle
October 17, 1897

CHAPTER I

The public may possibly wonder why it is that they have never heard in the papers of the fate of the passengers of the *Korosko*. In these days of universal press agencies, responsive to the slightest stimulus, it may well seem incredible that an international incident of such importance should remain so long unchronicled. Suffice it that there were very valid reasons, both of a personal and political nature, for holding it back. The facts were well known to a good number of people at the time, and some version of them did actually appear in a provincial paper, but was generally discredited They have now been thrown into narrative form, the incidents having been collated from the sworn statements of Colonel Cochrane Cochrane, of the Army and Navy Club, and from the letters of Miss Adams, of Boston, Mass. These have been supplemented by the evidence of Captain Archer, of the Egyptian Camel Corps, as given before the secret Government inquiry at Cairo. Mr. James Stephens has refused to put his version of the matter into writing, but as these proofs have been submitted to him, and no correction or deletion has been made in them, it may be supposed that he has not succeeded in detecting any grave misstatement of fact, and that any objection which he may have to their publication depends rather upon private and personal scruples.

The *Korosko*, a turtle-bottomed, round-bowed stern-wheeler, with a 30-inch draught and the lines of a flat-iron, started upon the 13th of February, in the year 1895, from Shellal, at the head of the first cataract, bound for Wady Haifa. I have a passenger card for the trip, which I hereby produce:

S. W. "*Korosko*," February 13TH.

PASSENGERS.

Colonel Cochrane Cochrane	London
Mr. Cecil Brown	London
John H. Headingly	Boston, USA
Miss Adams	Boston, USA

Miss S. Adams	Worcester, Mass, USA
Mons Fardet	Paris
Mr. and Mrs. Belmont	Dublin
James Stephens	Manchester
Rev. John Stuart	Birmingham
Mrs. Shlesinger, nurse and child	Florence

This was the party as it started from Shellal with the intention of travelling up the two hundred miles of Nubian Nile which lie between the first and the second cataract.

It is a singular country, this Nubia. Varying in breadth from a few miles to as many yards (for the name is only applied to the narrow portion which is capable of cultivation), it extends in a thin, green, palm-fringed strip upon either side of the broad coffee-coloured river. Beyond it there stretches on the Libyan bank a savage and illimitable desert, extending to the whole breadth of Africa. On the other side an equally desolate wilderness is bounded only by the distant Red Sea. Between these two huge and barren expanses Nubia writhes like a green sandworm along the course of the river. Here and there it disappears altogether, and the Nile runs between black and sun-cracked hills, with the orange drift-sand lying like glaciers in their valleys. Everywhere one sees traces of vanished races and submerged civilisations. Grotesque graves dot the hills or stand up against the sky-line: pyramidal graves, tumulus graves, rock graves, — everywhere, graves. And, occasionally, as the boat rounds a rocky point, one sees a deserted city up above, — houses, walls, battlements, with the sun shining through the empty window squares. Sometimes you learn that it has been Roman, sometimes Egyptian, sometimes all record of its name or origin has been absolutely lost, You ask yourself in amazement why any race should build in so uncouth a solitude, and you find it difficult to accept the theory that this has only been of value as a guard-house to the richer country down below, and that these frequent cities have been so many fortresses to hold off the wild and predatory men of the south. But whatever be their explanation, be it a fierce neighbour, or be it a climatic change, there they stand, these grim and silent cities, and up on the hills you can see the graves of their people, like the port-holes of a man-of-war. It is through this weird, dead country that the tourists smoke and gossip and flirt as they pass up to the Egyptian frontier.

The passengers of the *Korosko* formed a merry party, for most of them had travelled up together from Cairo to Assouan, and even Anglo-Saxon ice thaws rapidly upon the Nile. They were fortunate in being without the single disagreeable person who in these small boats is sufficient to mar the enjoyment of the whole party. On a vessel which is little more than a large steam launch, the bore, the cynic, or the grumbler holds the company at his mercy. But the *Korosko* was free from anything of the kind. Colonel Cochrane Cochrane was one of those officers whom the British Government, acting upon a large system of averages, declares at a certain age to be incapable of further service, and who demonstrate the worth of such a system by spending their declining years in exploring Morocco, or shooting lions in Somaliland. He was a dark, straight, aquiline man, with a courteously deferential manner, but a steady, questioning eye; very neat in his dress and precise in his habits, a gentleman to the tips of his trim fingernails. In his Anglo-Saxon dislike to effusiveness he had cultivated a self-contained manner which was apt at first acquaintance to be repellant, and he seemed to those who really knew him to be at some pains to conceal the kind heart and human emotions which influenced his actions. It was respect rather than affection which he inspired among his fellow-travellers, for they felt, like all who had ever met him, that he was a man with whom acquaintance was unlikely to ripen into a friendship, though a friendship when once attained would be an unchanging and inseparable part of himself. He wore a grizzled military moustache, but his hair was singularly black for a man of his years. He made no allusion in his conversation to the numerous campaigns in which he had distinguished himself, and the reason usually given for his reticence was that they dated back to such early Victorian days that he had to sacrifice his military glory at the shrine of his perennial youth.

Mr. Cecil Brown — to take the names in the chance order in which they appear upon the passenger list — was a young diplomatist from a Continental Embassy, a man slightly tainted with the Oxford manner, and erring upon the side of unnatural and inhuman refinement, but full of interesting talk and cultured thought. He had a sad, handsome face, a small wax-tipped moustache, a low voice and a listless manner, which was relieved by a charming habit of suddenly lighting up into a rapid smile and gleam when anything caught his fancy. An acquired cynicism was eternally crushing and overlying his natural youthful enthusiasms, and he ignored what was obvious while expressing keen appreciation for what seemed to the average man to be either trivial or unhealthy. He chose Walter Pater for his travelling author, and sat all day, reserved but affable, under the awning, with his novel and his sketch-book upon a campstool beside him. His personal dignity prevented him from making advances to others, but if they chose to address him, they found him a courteous and amiable companion.

The Americans formed a group by themselves. John H. Headingly was a New Englander, a graduate of Harvard, who was completing his education by a tour round the world. He stood for the best type of young American, — quick, observant, serious, eager for knowledge, and fairly free from prejudice, with a fine ballast of unsectarian but earnest religious feeling, which held him steady amid all the sudden gusts of youth. He had less of the appearance and more of the reality of culture than the young Oxford diplomatist, for he had keener emotions though less exact knowledge. Miss Adams and Miss Sadie Adams were aunt and niece, the former a little, energetic, hard-featured Bostonian old-maid, with a huge surplus of unused love behind her stern and swarthy features. She had never been from home before, and she was now busy upon the self-imposed task of bringing the East up to the standard of Massachusetts. She had hardly landed in Egypt before she realised that the country needed putting to rights, and since the conviction struck her she had been very fully occupied. The saddle-galled donkeys, the starved pariah dogs, the flies round the eyes of the babies, the naked children, the importunate begging, the ragged, untidy women, — they were all challenges to her conscience, and she plunged in bravely at her work of reformation. As she could not speak a word of the language, however, and was unable to make any of the delinquents understand what it was that she wanted, her passage up the Nile left the immemorial East very much as she had found it, but afforded a good deal of sympathetic amusement to her fellow-travellers. No one enjoyed her efforts more than her niece, Sadie, who shared with Mrs. Belmont the distinction of being the most popular person upon the boat. She was very young, — fresh from Smith College, — and she still possessed many both of the virtues and of the faults of a child. She had the frankness, the trusting confidence, the innocent straightforwardness, the high spirits, and also the loquacity and the want of reverence. But even her faults caused amusement, and if she had preserved many of the characteristics of a clever child, she was none the less a tall and handsome woman, who looked older than her years on account of that low curve of the hair over the ears, and that fulness of bodice and skirt which Mr. Gibson has either initiated or imitated. The whisk of those skirts, and the frank incisive voice and pleasant, catching laugh were familiar and welcome sounds on board of the *Korosko*. Even the rigid Colonel softened into geniality, and the Oxford-bred diplomatist forgot to be unnatural with Miss Sadie Adams as a companion.

The other passengers may be dismissed more briefly. Some were interesting, some neutral, and all amiable. Monsieur Fardet was a good-natured but argumentative Frenchman, who held the most decided views as to the deep machinations of Great Britain and the illegality of her position in Egypt. Mr. Belmont was an iron-grey, sturdy Irishman, famous as an astonishingly good long-range rifle-shot, who had carried off nearly every prize which Wimbledon or Bisley had to offer. With him was his wife, a very charming and refined woman, full of the pleasant playfulness of her country. Mrs. Shiesinger was a middle-aged widow, quiet and soothing, with her thoughts all taken up by her six-year-old child, as a mother's thoughts are likely to be in a boat which has an open rail for a bulwark. The Reverend John Stuart was a Non-conformist minister from Birmingham, — either a Presbyterian or a Congregationalist, — a man of immense stoutness, slow and torpid in his ways, but blessed with a considerable fond of homely humour, which made him, I am told, a very favourite preacher and an effective speaker from advanced radical platforms.

Finally, there was Mr. James Stephens, a Manchester solicitor (junior partner of Hickson, Ward, and Stephens), who was travelling to shake off the effects of an attack of influenza. Stephens was a man who, in the course of thirty years, had worked himself up from cleaning the firm's windows to managing its business. For most of that long time he had been absolutely immersed in dry, technical work, living with the one idea of satisfying old clients and attracting new ones, until his mind and soul had become as formal and precise as the laws which he expounded. A fine and sensitive nature was in danger of being as warped as a busy city man's is liable to become. His work had become an engrained habit, and, being a bachelor, he had hardly an interest in life to draw him away from it, so that his soul was being gradually bricked up like the body of a mediæval nun. But at last there came this kindly illness, and Nature hustled James Stephens out of his groove, and sent him into the broad world far away from roaring Manchester and his shelves full of calf-skin authorities. At first he resented it deeply. Everything seemed trivial to him compared to his own petty routine. But gradually his eyes were opened, and he began dimly to see that it was his work which was trivial when compared to this wonderful, varied, inexplicable world of which he was so ignorant. Vaguely he realised that the interruption to his career might be more important than the career itself. All sorts of new interests took, possession of him; and the middle-aged lawyer developed an after-glow of that youth which had been wasted among his books. His character was too formed to admit of his being anything but dry and precise in his ways, and a trifle pedantic in his mode of speech; but he read and thought and observed, scoring his “Baedeker” with underlinings and annotations as he had once done his “Prideaux’s Commentaries.” He had travelled up from Cairo with the party, and had contracted a friendship with Miss Adams and her niece. The young American girl, with her chatter, her audacity, and her constant flow of high spirits, amused and interested him, and she in turn felt a mixture of respect and of pity for his knowledge and his limitations. So they became good friends, and people smiled to see his clouded face and her sunny one bending over the same guide-book.

The little *Korosko* puffed and spluttered her way up the river, kicking up the white water behind her, and making more noise and fuss over her five knots an hour than an Atlantic liner on a record voyage. On deck, under the thick awning, sat her little family of passengers, and every few hours she eased down and sidled up to the bank to allow them to visit one more of that innumerable succession of temples. The remains, however, grow more modern as one ascends from Cairo, and travellers who have sated themselves at Gizeh and Sakara with the contemplation of the very oldest buildings which the hands of man have constructed, become impatient of temples which are hardly older than the Christian era. Ruins which would be gazed upon with wonder and veneration in any other country are hardly noticed in Egypt. The tourists viewed with languid interest the half-Greek art of the Nubian bas-reliefs; they climbed the hill of *Korosko* to see the sun rise over the savage Eastern desert; they were moved to wonder by the great shrine of Abou-Simbel, where some old race has hollowed out a mountain as if it were a cheese; and, finally, upon the evening of the fourth day of their travels they arrived at Wady Haifa, the frontier garrison town, some few hours after they were due, on account of a small mishap in the engine-room. The next morning was to be devoted to an expedition to the famous rock of Abousir, from which a great view may be obtained of the second cataract. At eight-thirty, as the passengers sat on deck after dinner, Mansoor, the dragoman, half Copt half Syrian, came forward, according to the nightly custom, to announce the programme for the morrow.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, plunging boldly into the rapid but broken stream of his English, "to-morrow you will remember not to forget to rise when the gong strikes you for to compress the journey before twelve o'clock. Having arrived at the place where the donkeys expect us, we shall ride five miles over the desert, passing a very fine temple of Ammon-ra which dates itself from the eighteenth dynasty upon the way, and so reach the celebrated pulpit rock of Abou-sir. The pulpit rock is supposed to have been called so because it is a rock like a pulpit. When you have reached it you will know that you are on the very edge of civilisation, and that very little more will take you into the country of the Dervishes, which will be obvious to you at the top. Having passed the summit, you will perceive the full extremity of the second cataract, embracing wild natural beauties of the most dreadful variety. Here all very famous people carve their names, —and so you will carve your names also."

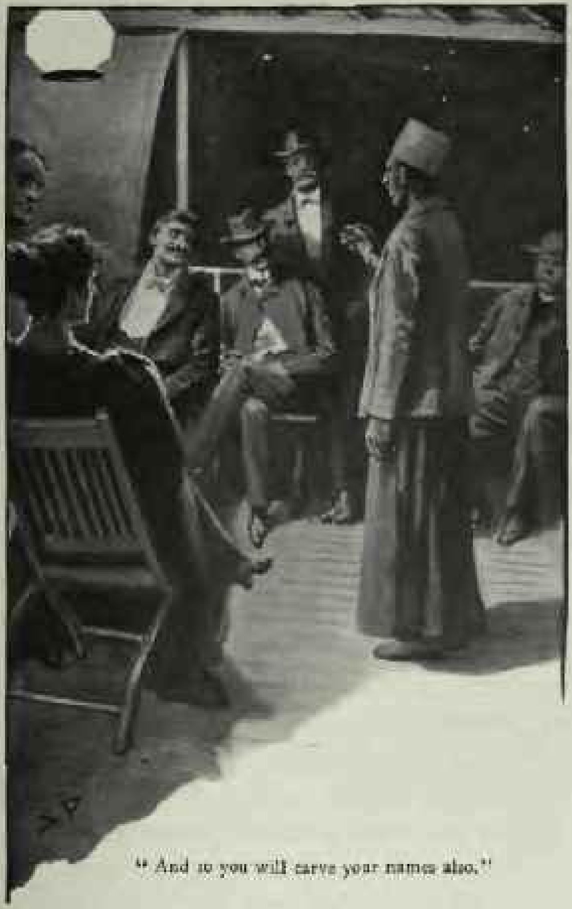

"And so you will carve your names also."

Mansoor waited expectantly for a titter, and bowed to it when it arrived. "You will then return to Wady Haifa, and there remain two hours to suspect (sp.) the Camel Corps, including the grooming of the beasts, and the bazaar before returning, so I wish you a very happy good-night." There was a gleam of his white teeth in the lamplight, and then his long, dark petticoats, his short English cover-coat, and his red tarboosh vanished successively down the ladder. The low buzz of conversation which had been suspended by his coming broke out anew.

"I'm relying on you, Mr. Stephens, to tell me all about Abousir," said Miss Sadie Adams. "I do like to know what I am looking at right there at the time, and not six hours afterwards in my state-room. I haven't got Abou-Simbel and the wall pictures straight in my mind yet, though I saw them yesterday."

“I never hope to keep up with it,” said her aunt. “When I am safe back in Commonwealth Avenue, and there’s no dragoman to hustle me around, I’ll have time to read about it all, and then I expect I shall begin to enthuse and want to come right back again. But it’s just too good of you, Mr. Stephens, to try and keep us informed.”

“I thought that you might wish precise information, and so I prepared a small digest of the matter,” said Stephens, handing a slip of paper to Miss Sadie. She looked at it in the light of the deck lamp, and broke into her low, hearty laugh.

“*Re* Abousir,” she read; “now, what *do* you mean by ‘*re*,’ Mr. Stephens? You put ‘*re* Rameses the Second’ on the last paper you gave me.”

“It is a habit I have acquired, Miss Sadie,” said Stephens; “it is the custom in the legal profession when they make a memo.”

“Make what, Mr. Stephens?”

“A memo a memorandum, you know. We put *re* so-and-so to show what it is about.”

“I suppose it’s a good short way,” said Miss Sadie, “but it feels queer somehow when applied to scenery or to dead Egyptian kings. ‘*Re* Cheops,’ — doesn’t that strike you as funny?”

“No, I can’t say that it does,” said Stephens.

“I wonder if it is true that the English have less humour than the Americans, or whether it’s just another kind of humour,” said the girl. She had a quiet, abstracted way of talking as if she were thinking aloud. “I used to imagine they had less, and yet, when you come to think of it, Dickens and Thackeray and Barrie, and so many other of the humourists we admire most, are Britishers. Besides, I never in all my days heard people laugh so hard as in that London theatre. There was a man behind us, and every time he laughed auntie looked round to see if a door had opened, he made such a draught. But you have some funny expressions, Mr. Stephens!”

“What else strikes you as funny, Miss Sadie?”

“Well, when you sent me the temple ticket and the little map, you began your letter, ‘Enclosed, please find,’ and then at the bottom, in brackets, you had ‘2 enclo.’”

“That is the usual form in business.”

“Yes, in business,” said Sadie, demurely, and there was a silence.

“There’s one thing I wish,” remarked Miss Adams, in the hard, metallic voice with which she disguised her softness of heart, “and that is, that I could see the Legislature of this country and lay a few cold-drawn facts in front of them, I'd make a platform of my own, Mr. Stephens, and run a party on my ticket. A Bill for the compulsory use of eyewash would be one of my planks, and another would be for the abolition of those Yashmak veil things which turn a woman into a bale of cotton goods with a pair of eyes looking out of it."

"I never could think why they wore them," said Sadie; "until one day I saw one with her veil lifted. Then I knew."

"They make me tired, those women," cried Miss Adams, wrathfully. "One might as well try to preach duty and decency and cleanliness to a line of bolsters. Why, good land, it was only yesterday at Abou-Simbel, Mr. Stephens, I was passing one of their houses, — if you can call a mud-pie like that a house, — and I saw two of the children at the door with the usual crust of flies round their eyes, and great holes in their poor little blue gowns! So I got off my donkey, and I turned up my sleeves, and I washed their faces well with my handkerchief, and sewed up the rents, — for in this country I would as soon think of going ashore without my needle-case as without my white umbrella, Mr. Stephens. Then as I warmed on the job I got into the room, — such a room! — and I packed the folks out of it, and I fairly did the chores as if I had been the hired help. I've seen no more of that temple of Abou-Simbel than if I had never left Boston; but, my sakes, I saw more dust and mess than you would think they could crowd into a house the size of a Newport bathing-hut. From the time I pinned up my skirt until I came out, with my face the colour of that smoke-stack, wasn't more than an hour, or maybe an hour and a half, but I had that house as clean and fresh as a new pine-wood box. I had a *New York Herald* with me, and I lined their shelf with paper for them. Well, Mr. Stephens, when I had done washing my hands outside, I came past the door again, and there were those two children sitting on the stoop with their eyes full of flies, and all just the same as ever, except that each had a little paper cap made out of the *New York Herald* upon his head. But, say, Sadie, it's going on to ten o'clock, and tomorrow an early excursion."

"It's just too beautiful, this purple sky and the great silver stars," said Sadie. "Look at the silent desert and the black shadows of the hills. It's grand, but it's terrible, too; and then when you think that we really *are*, as that dragoman said just now, on the very end of civilisation, and with nothing but savagery and bloodshed down there where the Southern Cross is twinkling so prettily, why, it's like standing on the beautiful edge of a live volcano."

"Shucks, Sadie, don't talk like that, child," said the older woman, nervously. "It's enough to scare any one to listen to you."

"Well, but don't you feel it yourself, Auntie? Look at that great desert stretching away and away until it is lost in the shadows. Hear the sad whisper of the wind across it! It's just the most solemn thing that ever I saw in my life."

"I'm glad we've found something that will make you solemn, my dear," said her Aunt. "I've sometimes thought —— Sakes alive, what's that?"

From somewhere amongst the hill shadows upon the other side of the river there had risen a high shrill whimpering, rising and swelling, to end in a long weary wail.

"It's only a jackal, Miss Adams," said Stephens. "I heard one when we went out to see the Sphinx by moonlight."

But the American lady had risen, and her face showed that her nerves had been ruffled.

"If I had my time over again I wouldn't have come past Assouan," said she. "I can't think what possessed me to bring you all the way up here, Sadie. Your mother will think that I am clean crazy, and I'd never dare to look her in the eye if anything went wrong with us. I've seen all I want to see of this river, and all I ask now is to be back at Cairo again."

"Why, Auntie," cried the girl, "it isn't like you to be faint-hearted."

"Well, I don't know how it is, Sadie, but I feel a bit unstrung, and that beast caterwauling over yonder was just more than I could put up with. There's one consolation, we are scheduled to be on our way home to-morrow, after we've seen this one rock or temple, or whatever it is. I'm full up of rocks and temples, Mr. Stephens. I shouldn't mope if I never saw another. Come, Sadie! Good-night!"

"Good-night! Good-night, Miss Adams!" and the two ladies passed down to their cabins.

Monsieur Fardet was chatting, in a subdued voice, with Headingly, the young Harvard graduate, bending forward confidentially between the whiffs of his cigarette.

"Dervishes, Mister Headingly!" said he, speaking excellent English, but separating his syllables as a Frenchman will. "There are no Dervishes. They do not exist."

"Why, I thought the woods were full of them," said the American.

Monsieur Fardet glanced across to where the red core of Colonel Cochrane's cigar was glowing through the darkness.

"You are an American, and you do not like the English," he whispered. "It is perfectly comprehended upon the Continent that the Americans are opposed to the English."

"Well," said Headingly, with his slow, deliberate manner, "I won't say that we have not our tiffs, and there are some of our people — mostly of Irish stock — who are always mad with England; but the most of us have a kindly thought for the mother country. You see, they may be aggravating folk sometimes, but after all they are our *own* folk, and we can't wipe that off the slate."

"*Eh bien!*" said the Frenchman. "At least I can say to you what I could not without offence say to these others. And I repeat that there *are* no Dervishes. They were an invention of Lord Cromer in the year 1885."

"You don't say!" cried Headingly.

"It is well known in Paris, and has been exposed in *La Patrie* and other of our so well-informed papers."

"But this is colossal," said Headingly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Monsieur Fardet, that the siege of Khartoum and the death of Gordon and the rest of it was just one great bluff?"

"I will not deny that there was an emeute, but it was local, you understand, and now long forgotten. Since then there has been profound peace in the Soudan."

"But I have heard of raids, Monsieur Fardet, and I've read of battles, too, when the Arabs tried to invade Egypt. It was only two days ago that we passed Toski, where the dragoman said there had been a fight. Is that all bluff also?"

"Pah, my friend, you do not know the English. You look at them as you see them with their pipes and their contented faces, and you say, 'Now, these are good, simple folk who will never hurt any one.' But all the time they are thinking and watching and planning. 'Here is Egypt weak,' they cry. '*Allons!*' and down they swoop like a gull upon a crust. 'You have no right there,' says the world. 'Come out of it!' But England has already begun to tidy everything, just like the good Miss Adams when she forces her way into the house of an Arab. 'Come out,' says the world. 'Certainly,' says England; 'just wait one little minute until I have made everything nice and proper.’ So the world waits for a year or so, and then it says once again, ‘Come out.’ ‘Just wait a little,’ says England; ‘there is trouble at Khartoum, and when I have set that all right I shall be very glad to come out.’ So they wait until it is all over, and then again they say, ‘Come out.’ ‘How can I come out,’ says England, ‘when there are still raids and battles going on? If we were to leave, Egypt would be run over.’ ‘But there are no raids,’ says the world. ‘Oh, are there not?’ says England, and then within a week sure enough the papers are full of some new raid of Dervishes. We are not all blind, Mister Headingly. We understand very well how such things can be done. A few Bedouins, a little backsheesh, some blank cartridges, and, behold — a raid!”

“Well, well,” said the American, “I’m glad to know the rights of this business, for it has often puzzled me. But what does England get out of it?”

“She gets the country, monsieur.”

“I see. You mean, for example, that there is a favourable tariff for British goods?”

“No, monsieur; it is the same for all.”

“Well, then, she gives the contracts to Britishers?”

“Precisely, monsieur.”

“For example, the railroad that they are building right through the country, the one that runs alongside the river, that would be a valuable contract for the British?”

Monsieur Fardet was an honest man, if an imaginative one.

“It is a French company, monsieur, which holds the railway contract,” said he.

The American was puzzled.

“They don’t seem to get much for their trouble,” said he. “Still, of course, there must be some indirect pull somewhere. For example, Egypt no doubt has to pay and keep all those red-coats in Cairo.”

“Egypt, monsieur! No, they are paid by England.”

“Well, I suppose they know their own business best, but they seem to me to take a great deal of trouble, and to get mighty little in exchange. If they don’t mind keeping order and guarding the frontier, with a constant war against the Dervishes on their hands, I don’t know why any one should object. I suppose no one denies that the prosperity of the country has increased enormously since they came. The revenue returns show that.

They tell me, also, that the poorer folks have justice, which they never had before."

"What are they doing here at all?" cried the Frenchman, angrily. "Let them go back to their island. We cannot have them all over the world."

"Well, certainly, to us Americans who live all in our own land it does seem strange how you European nations are for ever slopping over into some other country which was not meant for you. It's easy for us to talk, of course, for we have still got room and to spare for all our people. When we start pushing each other over the edge we shall have to start annexing also. But at present just here in North Africa there is Italy in Abyssinia, and England in Egypt, and France in Algiers — —"

"France!" cried Monsieur Fardet. "Algiers belongs to France. You laugh, monsieur. I have the honour to wish you a very good-night." He rose from his seat, and walked off, rigid with outraged patriotism, to his cabin.

CHAPTER II

The young American hesitated for a little, debating in his mind whether he should not go down and post up the daily record of his impressions which he kept for his home-staying sister. But the cigars of Colonel Cochrane and of Cecil Brown were still twinkling in the far corner of the deck, and the student was acquisitive in the search of information. He did not quite know how to lead up to the matter, but the Colonel very soon did it for him.

“Come on, Headingly,” said he, pushing a camp-stool in his direction. “This is the place for an antidote. I see that Fardet has been pouring politics into your ear.”

“I can always recognise the confidential stoop of his shoulders when he discusses *la haute politique*” said the dandy diplomatist. “But what a sacrilege upon a night like this! What a nocturne in blue and silver might be suggested by that moon rising above the desert. There is a movement in one of Mendelssohn’s songs which seems to embody it all, — a sense of vastness, of repetition, the cry of the wind over an interminable expanse. The subtler emotions which cannot be translated into words are still to be hinted at by chords and harmonies.”

“It seems wilder and more savage than ever to-night,” remarked the American. “It gives me the same feeling of pitiless force that the Atlantic does upon a cold, dark, winter day. Perhaps it is the knowledge that we are right there on the very edge of any kind of law and order. How far do you suppose that we are from any Dervishes, Colonel Cochrane?”

“Well, on the Arabian side,” said the Colonel, “we have the Egyptian fortified camp of Sarras about forty miles to the south of us. Beyond that are sixty miles of very wild country before you would come to the Dervish post at Akasheh. On this other side, however, there is nothing between us and them.”

“Abousir is on this side, is it not?”

“Yes. That is why the excursion to the Abousir Rock has been forbidden for the last year. But things are quieter now.”

“What is to prevent them from coming down on that side?”

“Absolutely nothing,” said Cecil Brown, in his listless voice.

"Nothing, except their fears. The coming, of course, would be absolutely simple. The difficulty would lie in the return. They might find it hard to get back if their camels were spent and the Haifa garrison with their beasts fresh got on their track. They know it as well as we do, and it has kept them from trying."

"It isn't safe to reckon upon a Dervish's fears," remarked Brown. "We must always bear in mind that they are not amenable to the same motives as other people. Many of them are anxious to meet death, and all of them are absolute, uncompromising believers in destiny. They exist as a *reductio ad absurdum* of all bigotry, — a proof of how surely it leads towards blank barbarism."

"You think these people are a real menace to Egypt?" asked the American. "There seems from what I have heard to be some difference of opinion about it. Monsieur Fardet, for example, does not seem to think that the danger is a very pressing one."

"I am not a rich man," Colonel Cochrane answered, after a little pause, "but I am prepared to lay all I am worth that within three years of the British officers being withdrawn, the Dervishes would be upon the Mediterranean. Where would the civilisation of Egypt be? where would the hundreds of millions be which have been invested in this country? where the monuments which all nations look upon as most precious memorials of the past?"

"Come now, Colonel," cried Headingly, laughing, "surely you don't mean that they would shift the pyramids?"

"You cannot foretell what they would do. There is no iconoclast in the world like an extreme Mohammedan. Last time they overran this country they burned the Alexandrian library. You know that all representations of the human features are against the letter of the Koran. A statue is always an irreligious object in their eyes. What do these fellows care for the sentiment of Europe? The more they could offend it the more delighted they would be. Down would go the Sphinx, the Colossi, the Statues of Abou-Simbel, — as the saints went down in England before Cromwell's troopers."

"Well now," said Headingly, in his slow, thoughtful fashion, "suppose I grant you that the Dervishes could overrun Egypt, and suppose also that you English are holding them out, what I'm never done asking is, what reason have you for spending all these millions of dollars and the lives of so many of your men? What do you get out of it, more than France gets, or Germany, or any other country, that runs no risk and never lays out a cent?"

"There are a good many Englishmen who are asking themselves that question," remarked Cecil Brown. "It's my opinion that we have been the policemen of the world long enough. We policed the seas for pirates and slavers. Now we police the land for Dervishes and brigands and every sort of danger to civilisation. There is never a mad priest or a witch doctor, or a firebrand of any sort on this planet, who does not report his appearance by sniping the nearest British officer. One tires of it at last. If a Kurd breaks loose in Asia Minor, the world wants to know why Great Britain does not keep him in order. If there is a military mutiny in Egypt, or a Jehad in the Soudan, it is still Great Britain who has to set it right. And all to an accompaniment of curses such as the policeman gets when he seizes a ruffian among his pals. We get hard knocks and no thanks, and why should we do it? Let Europe do its own dirty work."

"Well," said Colonel Cochrane, crossing his legs and leaning forward with the decision of a man who has definite opinions, "I don't at all agree with you, Brown, and I think that to advocate such a course is to take a very limited view of our national duties. I think that behind national interests and diplomacy and all that there lies a great guiding force, — a Providence, in fact, — which is for ever getting the best out of each nation and using it for the good of the whole. When a nation ceases to respond, it is time that she went into hospital for a few centuries, like Spain or Greece, — the virtue has gone out of her. A man or a nation is not here upon this earth merely to do what is pleasant and profitable. It is often called upon to carry out what is unpleasant and unprofitable; but if it is obviously right, it is mere shirking not to undertake it."

Headingly nodded approvingly.

"Each has its own mission. Germany is predominant in abstract thought; France in literature, art, and grace. But we and you, — for the English-speakers are all in the same boat, however much the *New York Sun* may scream over it, — we and you have among our best men a higher conception of moral sense and public duty than is to be found in any other people. Now, these are the two qualities which are needed for directing a weaker race. You can't help them by abstract thought or by graceful art, but only by that moral sense which will hold the scales of Justice even, and keep itself free from every taint of corruption. That is how we rule India.

We came there by a kind of natural law, like air rushing into a vacuum. All over the world, against our direct interests and our deliberate intentions, we are drawn into the same thing. And it will happen to you also. The pressure of destiny will force you to administer the whole of America from Mexico to the Horn.”

Headingly whistled.

“Our Jingoes would be pleased to hear you, Colonel Cochrane,” said he. “They’d vote you into our Senate and make you one of the Committee on Foreign Relations.”

“The world is small, and it grows smaller every day. It’s a single organic body, and one spot of gangrene is enough to vitiate the whole. There’s no room upon it for dishonest, defaulting, tyrannical, irresponsible Governments. As long as they exist they will always be centres of trouble and of danger. But there are many races which appear to be so incapable of improvement that we can never hope to get a good Government out of them. What is to be done, then? The former device of Providence in such a case was extermination by some more virile stock. An Attila or a Tamerlane pruned off the weaker branch. Now, we have a more merciful substitution of rulers, or even of mere advice from a more advanced race. That is the case with the Central Asian Khanates and with the protected States of India. If the work has to be done, and if we are the best fitted for the work, then I think that it would be a cowardice and a crime to shirk it.”

“But who is to decide whether it is a fitting case for your interference?” objected the American. “A predatory country could grab every other land in the world upon such a pretext.”

“Events — inexorable, inevitable events — will decide it. Take this Egyptian business as an example. In 1881 there was nothing in this world further from the minds of our people than any interference with Egypt; and yet 1882 left us in possession of the country. There was never any choice in the chain of events. A massacre in the streets of Alexandria, and the mounting of guns to drive out our fleet — which was there, you understand, in fulfilment of solemn treaty obligations — led to the bombardment. The bombardment led to a landing to save the city from destruction. The landing caused an extension of operations — and here we are, with the country upon our hands. At the time of trouble we begged and implored the French or any one else to come and help us to set the thing to rights, but they all deserted us when there was work to be done, though they are ready enough to scold and to impede us now. When we tried to get out of it, up came this wild Dervish movement, and we had to sit tighter than ever. We never wanted the task; but, now that it has come, we must put it through in a workmanlike manner. We've brought justice into the country, and purity of administration, and protection for the poor man. It has made more advance in the last twelve years than since the Moslem invasion in the seventh century. Except the pay of a couple of hundred men, who spend their money in the country, England has neither directly nor indirectly made a shilling out of it, and I don't believe you will find in history a more successful and more disinterested bit of work."

Headingly puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"There is a house near ours, down on the Back Bay at Boston, which just ruins the whole prospect," said he. "It has old chairs littered about the stoop, and the shingles are loose, and the garden runs wild; but I don't know that the neighbours are exactly justified in rushing in, and stamping around, and running the thing on their own lines."

"Not if it were on fire?" asked the Colonel.

Headingly laughed, and rose from his camp-stool.

"Well, it doesn't come within the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, Colonel," said he. "I'm beginning to think, that modern Egypt is every bit as interesting as ancient, and that Rameses the Second wasn't the last live man in the country."

The two Englishmen rose and yawned.

"Yes, it's a whimsical freak of fortune which has sent men from a little island in the Atlantic to administer the land of the Pharaohs. We shall pass away and never leave a trace among the successive races who have held the country, for it is an Anglo-Saxon custom to write their deeds upon rocks. I dare say that the remains of a Cairo drainage system will be our most permanent record, unless they prove a thousand years hence that it was the work of the Hyksos kings," remarked Cecil Brown. "But here is the shore party come back."

Down below they could hear the mellow Irish accents of Mrs. Belmont and the deep voice of her husband, the iron-grey rifleshot. Mr. Stuart, the fat Birmingham clergyman, was thrashing out a question of piastres with a noisy donkey-boy, and the others were joining in with chaff and advice. Then the hubbub died away, the party from above came down the ladder, there were "good-nights," the shutting of doors, and the little steamer lay silent, dark, and motionless in the shadow of the high Haifa bank. And beyond this one point of civilisation and of comfort there lay the limitless, savage, unchangeable desert, straw-coloured and dream-like in the moonlight, mottled over with the black shadows of the hills.

CHAPTER III

“Stoppa! Backa!” cried the native pilot to the European engineer.

The bluff bows of the stern-wheeler had squelched into the soft brown mud, and the current had swept the boat alongside the bank. The long gangway was thrown across, and the six tall soldiers of the Soudanese escort filed along it, their light-blue, gold-trimmed zouave uniforms and their jaunty yellow and red forage caps showing up bravely in the clear morning light.

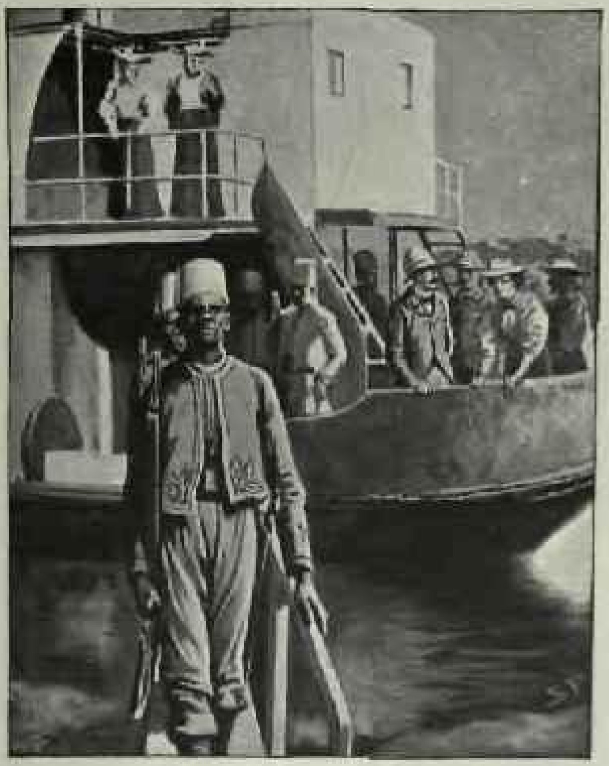

The Soudanese escort filed along.

Above them, on the top of the bank, was ranged the line of donkeys, and the air was full of the clamour of the boys. In shrill, strident voices each was crying out the virtues of his own beast, and abusing that of his neighbour.

Colonel Cochrane and Mr. Belmont stood together in the bows, each wearing the broad white puggareed hat of the tourist. Miss Adams and her niece leaned against the rail beside them.

“Sorry your wife isn’t coming, Belmont,” said the Colonel.

“I think she had a touch of the sun yesterday. Her head aches very badly.”

His voice was strong and thick like his figure.

“I should stay to keep her company, Mr. Belmont,” said the little American old maid; “but I learn that Mrs. Shlesinger finds the ride too long for her, and has some letters which she must mail to-day, so Mrs. Belmont will not be lonesome.”

“You’re very good, Miss Adams. We shall be back, you know, by two o’clock.”

“Is that certain?”

“It must be certain, for we are taking no lunch with us, and we shall be famished by then.”

“Yes, I expect we shall be ready for a hock and seltzer, at any rate,” said the Colonel. “This desert dust gives a flavour to the worst wine.”

“Now, ladies and gentlemen!” cried Mansoor, the dragoman, moving forward with something of the priest in his flowing garments and smooth, clean-shaven face. “We must start early that we may return before the meridial heat of the weather.” He ran his dark eyes over the little group of his tourists with a paternal expression. “You take your green glasses, Miss Adams, for glare very great out in the desert. Ah, Mr. Stuart, I set aside very fine donkey for you, — prize donkey, sir, always put aside for the gentleman of most weight. Never mind to take your monument ticket to-day. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if *you* please!”

Like a grotesque frieze the party moved one by one along the plank gangway and up the brown crumbling bank. Mr. Stephens led them, a thin, dry, serious figure, in an English straw hat. His red “Baedeker” gleamed under his arm, and in one hand he held a little paper of notes, as if it were a brief. He took Miss Sadie by one arm and her aunt by the other as they toiled up the bank, and the young girl’s laughter rang frank and clear in the morning air as “Baedeker” came fluttering down at their feet. Mr. Belmont and Colonel Cochrane followed, the brims of their sun-hats touching as they discussed the relative advantages of the Mauser, the Lebel, and the Lee-Metford. Behind them walked Cecil Brown, listless, cynical, self-contained. The fat clergyman puffed slowly up the bank, with many gasping witticisms at his own defects. “I’m one of those men who carry everything before them,” said he, glancing ruefully at his rotundity, and chuckling wheezily at his own little joke. Last of all came Headingly, slight and tall, with the student stoop about his shoulders, and Fardet, the good-natured, fussy, argumentative Parisian.

“You see we have an escort to-day,” he whispered to his companion.

“So I observed.”

“Pah!” cried the Frenchman, throwing out his arms in derision; “as well have an escort from Paris to Versailles. This is all part of the play, Monsieur Headingly. It deceives no one, but it is part of the play.

Pourquoi ces drôles de militaires, dragoman, hein?”

It was the dragoman’s *rôle* to be all things to all men, so he looked cautiously round before he answered to make sure that the English were mounted and out of earshot.

“*C’est ridicule, monsieur!*” said he, shrugging his fat shoulders. “*Mais que voulez-vous? C’est l’ordre officiel Egyptien.*”

“*Egyptien! Pah, Anglais, Anglais — toujours Anglais!*” cried the angry Frenchman.

The frieze now was more grotesque than ever, but had changed suddenly to an equestrian one, sharply outlined against the deep-blue Egyptian sky. Those who have never ridden before have to ride in Egypt, and when the donkeys break into a canter, and the Nile Irregulars are at full charge, such a scene of flying veils, clutching hands, huddled swaying figures, and anxious faces is nowhere to be seen. Belmont, his square figure balanced upon a small white donkey, was waving his hat to his wife, who had come out upon the saloon-deck of the *Korosko*. Cochrane sat very erect with a stiff military seat, hands low, head high, and heels down, while beside him rode the young Oxford man, looking about him with drooping eyelids as if he thought the desert hardly respectable, and had his doubts about the Universe. Behind them the whole party was strung along the bank in varying stages of jolting and discomfort, a brown-faced, noisy donkey-boy running after each donkey. Looking back, they could see the little lead-coloured stern-wheeler, with the gleam of Mrs. Belmont’s handkerchief from the deck. Beyond ran the broad, brown river, winding down in long curves to where, five miles off, the square, white block-houses upon the black, ragged hills marked the outskirts of Wady Haifa, which had been their starting-point that morning.

"Isn't it just too lovely for anything?" cried Sadie, joyously. "I've got a donkey that runs on casters, and the saddle is just elegant. Did you ever see anything so cunning as these beads and things round his neck? You must make a memo, *re* donkey, Mr. Stephens. Isn't that correct legal English?"

Stephens looked at the pretty, animated, boyish face looking up at him from under the coquettish straw hat, and he wished that he had the courage to tell her in her own language that she was just too sweet for anything. But he feared above all things lest he should offend her, and so put an end to their present pleasant intimacy. So his compliment dwindled into a smile.

"You look very happy," said he.

"Well, who could help feeling good with this dry, clear air, and the blue sky and the crisp, yellow sand, and a superb donkey to carry you. I've just got everything in the world to make me happy."

"Everything?"

"Well, everything that I have any use for just now."

"I suppose you never know what it is to be sad?"

"Oh, when I *am* miserable I am just too miserable for words. I've sat and cried for days and days at Smith's College, and the other girls were just crazy to know what I was crying about, and guessing what the reason was that I wouldn't tell, when all the time the real true reason was that I didn't know myself. You know how it comes like a great dark shadow over you, and you don't know why or wherefore, but you've just got to settle down to it and be miserable."

"But you never had any real cause?"

"No, Mr. Stephens, I've had such a good time all my life, that I don't think, when I look back, that I ever had any real cause for sorrow."

"Well, Miss Sadie, I hope with all my heart that you will be able to say the same when you are the same age as your Aunt. Surely I hear her calling!"

"I wish, Mr. Stephens, you would strike my donkey-boy with your whip if he hits the donkey again," cried Miss Adams, jogging up on a high, raw-Boned beast. "Hi, dragoman, Mansoor, you tell this boy that I won't have the animals ill used, and that he ought to be ashamed of himself. Yes, you little rascal, you ought! He's grinning at me like an advertisement for a tooth paste. Do you think, Mr. Stephens, that if I were to knit that black soldier a pair of woollen stockings he would be allowed to wear them? The poor creature has bandages round his legs."

“Those are his putties, Miss Adams,” said Colonel Cochrane, looking back at her. “We have found in India that they are the best support to the leg in marching. They are very much better than any stocking.”

“Well, you don’t say! They remind me mostly of a sick horse. But it’s elegant to have the soldiers with us, though Monsieur Fardet tells me there’s nothing for us to be scared about.”

“That is only my opinion, Miss Adams,” said the Frenchman, hastily. “It may be that Colonel Cochrane thinks otherwise.”

“It is Monsieur Fardet’s opinion against that of the officers who have the responsibility of caring for the safety of the frontier,” said the Colonel, coldly. “At least we will all agree that they have the effect of making the scene very much more picturesque.”

The desert upon their right lay in long curves of sand, like the dunes which might have fringed some forgotten primeval sea. Topping them they could see the black, craggy summits of the curious volcanic hills which rise upon the Libyan side. On the crest of the low sand-hills they would catch a glimpse every now and then of a tall, sky-blue soldier, walking swiftly, his rifle at the trail. For a moment the lank, warlike figure would be sharply silhouetted against the sky. Then he would dip into a hollow and disappear, while some hundred yards off another would show for an instant and vanish.

“Wherever are they raised?” asked Sadie, watching the moving figures. “They look to me just about the same tint as the hotel boys in the States.”

“I thought some question might arise about them,” said Mr. Stephens, who was never so happy as when he could anticipate some wish of the pretty American. “I made one or two references this morning in the ship’s library. Here it is — *re* — that’s to say, about black soldiers. I have it on my notes that they are from the 10th Soudanese battalion of the Egyptian army. They are recruited from the Dinkas and the Shilluks — two negroid tribes living to the south of the Dervish country, near the Equator.”

“How can the recruits come through the Dervishes, then?” asked Headingly, sharply.

“I dare say there is no such very great difficulty over that,” said Monsieur Fardet, with a wink at the American.

“The older men are the remains of the old black battalions. Some of them served with Gordon at Khartoum and have his medal to show. The others are many of them deserters from the Mahdi’s army,” said the Colonel.

“Well, so long as they are not wanted, they look right elegant in those blue jackets,” Miss Adams observed. “But if there was any trouble, I guess we would wish they were less ornamental and a bit whiter.”

“I am not so sure of that, Miss Adams,” said the Colonel. “I have seen these fellows in the field, and I assure you that I have the utmost confidence in their steadiness.”

“Well, I’ll take your word without trying,” said Miss Adams, with a decision which made every one smile.

So far their road had lain along the side of the river, which was swirling down upon their left hand deep and strong from the cataracts above. Here and there the rush of the current was broken by a black shining boulder over which the foam was spouting. Higher up they could see the white gleam of the rapids, and the banks grew into rugged cliffs, which were capped by a peculiar, outstanding, semicircular rock. It did not require the dragoman’s aid to tell the party that this was the famous landmark to which they were bound. A long, level stretch lay before them, and the donkeys took it at a canter. At the farther side were scattered rocks, black upon orange; and in the midst of them rose some broken shafts of pillars and a length of engraved wall, looking in its greyness and its solidity more like some work of Nature than of man. The fat, sleek dragoman had dismounted, and stood waiting in his petticoats and his cover-coat for the stragglers to gather round him.

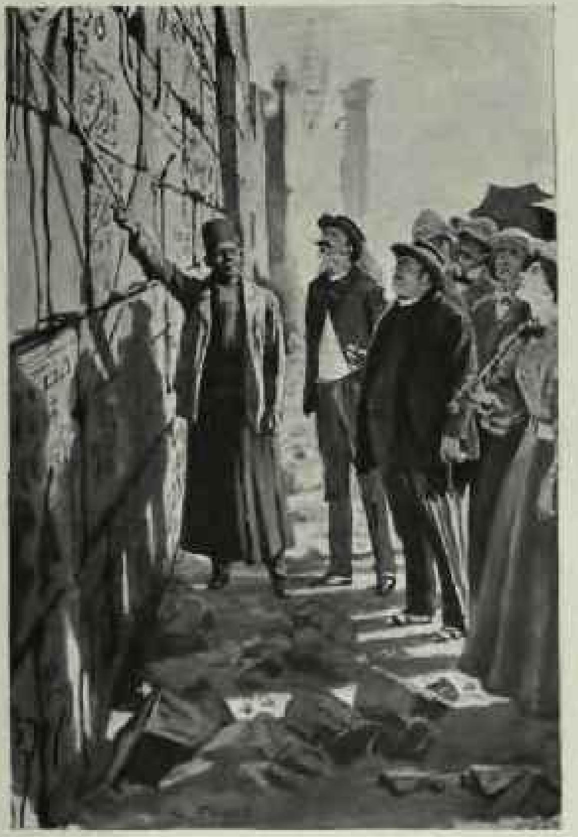

He pointed up with his donkey-whip.

“This temple, ladies and gentlemen,” he cried, with the air of an auctioneer who is about to sell it to the highest bidder, “very fine example from the eighteenth dynasty. Here is the cartouche of Thotmes the Third,” he pointed up with his donkey-whip at the rude, but deep, hieroglyphics upon the wall above him. “He live sixteen hundred years before Christ, and this is made to remember his victorious exhibition into Mesopotamia. Here we have his history from the time that he was with his mother, until he return with captives tied to his chariot. In this you see him crowned with Lower Egypt, and with Upper Egypt offering up sacrifice in honour of his victory to the God Ammon-ra. Here he bring his captives before him, and he cut off each his right hand. In this corner you see little pile — all right hands.”

“My sakes, I shouldn’t have liked to be here in those days,” said Miss Adams.

“Why, there’s nothing altered,” remarked Cecil Brown. “The East is still the East. I’ve no doubt that within a hundred miles, or perhaps a good deal less, from where you stand—”

“Shut up!” whispered the Colonel, and the party shuffled on down the line of the wall with their faces up and their big hats thrown backwards. The sun behind them struck the old grey masonry with a brassy glare, and carried on to it the strange black shadows of the tourists, mixing them up with the grim, high-nosed, square-shouldered warriors, and the grotesque, rigid deities who lined it. The broad shadow of the Reverend John Stuart, of Birmingham, smudged out both the heathen King and the god whom he worshipped.

“What’s this?” he was asking in his wheezy voice, pointing up with a yellow Assouan cane.

“That is a hippopotamus,” said the dragoman; and the tourists all tittered, for there was just a suspicion of Mr. Stuart himself in the carving.

“But it isn’t bigger than a little pig,” he protested. “You see that the King is putting his spear through it with ease.”

“They make it small to show that it was a very small thing to the King,” said the dragoman. “So you see that all the King’s prisoners do not exceed his knee — which is not because he was so much taller, but so much more powerful. You see that he is bigger than his horse, because he is a king and the other is only a horse. The same way, these small women whom you see here and there are just his trivial little wives.”

“Well, now!” cried Miss Adams, indignantly. “If they had sculped that King’s soul it would have needed a lens to see it. Fancy his allowing his wives to be put in like that.”

“If he did it now, Miss Adams,” said the Frenchman, “he would have more fighting than ever in Mesopotamia. But time brings revenge. Perhaps the day will soon come when we have the picture of the big, strong wife and the trivial little husband — *hein?*”

Cecil Brown and Headingly had dropped behind, for the glib comments of the dragoman, and the empty, light-hearted chatter of the tourists jarred upon their sense of solemnity. They stood in silence watching the grotesque procession, with its sun-hats and green veils, as it passed in the vivid sunshine down the front of the old grey wall. Above them two crested hoopoes were fluttering and calling amid the ruins of the pylon.

“Isn’t it a sacrilege?” said the Oxford man, at last.

"Well, now, I'm glad you feel that about it, because it's how it always strikes me," Headingly answered, with feeling. "I'm not quite clear in my own mind how these things should be approached, — if they are to be approached at all, — but I am sure this is not the way. On the whole, I prefer the ruins that I have not seen to those which I have."

The young diplomatist looked up with his peculiarly bright smile, which faded away too soon into his languid, *blasé* mask.

"I've got a map," said the American, "and sometimes far away from anything in the very midst of the waterless, trackless desert, I see 'ruins' marked upon it — or 'remains of a temple,' perhaps. For example, the temple of Jupiter Ammon, which was one of the most considerable shrines in the world, was hundreds of miles from anywhere. Those are the ruins, solitary, unseen, unchanging through the centuries, which appeal to one's imagination. But when I present a check at the door, and go in as if it were Barnum's show, all the subtle feeling of romance goes right out of it."

"Absolutely!" said Cecil Brown, looking over the desert with his dark, intolerant eyes. "If one could come wandering here alone — stumble upon it by chance, as it were — and find one's self in absolute solitude in the dim light of the temple, with these grotesque figures all around, it would be perfectly overwhelming. A man would be prostrated with wonder and awe. But when Belmont is puffing his bulldog pipe, and Stuart is wheezing, and Miss Sadie Adams is laughing — —"

"And that jay of a dragoman speaking his piece," said Headingly; "I want to stand and think all the time, and I never seem to get the chance. I was ripe for manslaughter when I stood before the Great Pyramid, and couldn't get a quiet moment because they would boost me on to the top. I took a kick at one man which would have sent *him* to the top in one jump if I had hit meat. But fancy travelling all the way from America to see the pyramid, and then finding nothing better to do than to kick an Arab in front of it!"

The Oxford man laughed in his gentle, tired fashion.

"They are starting again," said he, and the two hastened forwards to take their places at the tail of the absurd procession.

Their route ran now among large, scattered boulders, and between stony, shingly hills. A narrow, winding path curved in and out amongst the rocks. Behind them their view was cut off by similar hills, black and fantastic, like the slag-heaps at the shaft of a mine. A silence fell upon the little company, and even Sadie's bright face reflected the harshness of Nature. The escort had closed in, and marched beside them, their boots scrunching among the loose black rubble. Colonel Cochrane and Belmont were still riding together in the van.

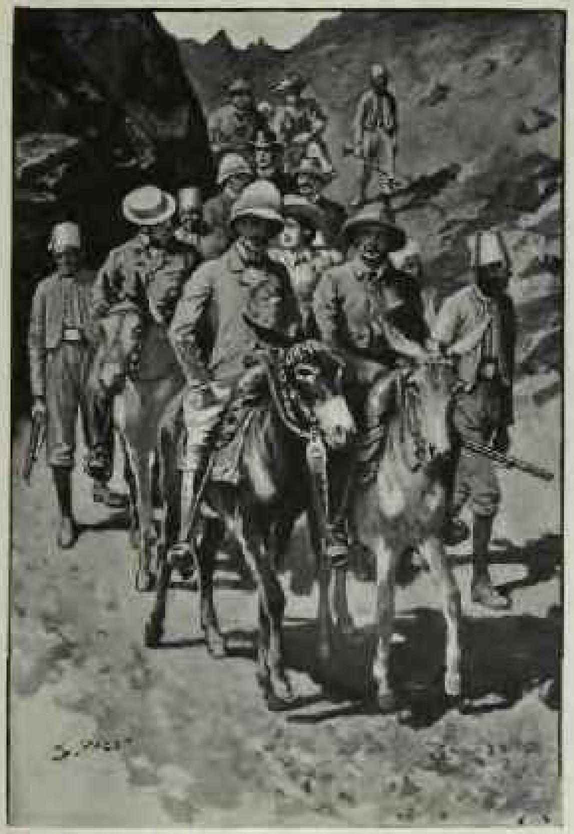

A silence fell upon the little company.

“Do you know, Belmont,” said the Colonel, in a low voice, “you may think me a fool, but I don’t like this one little bit.”

Belmont gave a short gruff laugh.

“It seemed all right in the saloon of the *Korosko*, but now that we are here we *do* seem rather up in the air,” said he. “Still, you know, a party comes here every week, and nothing has ever yet gone wrong.”

“I don’t mind taking my chances when I am on the war-path,” the Colonel answered. “That’s all straightforward and in the way of business. But when you have women with you, and a helpless crowd like this, it becomes really dreadful. Of course, the chances are a hundred to one that we have no trouble; but if we should have — well, it won’t bear thinking about. The wonderful thing is their complete unconsciousness that there is any danger whatever.”

“Well, I like the English tailor-made dresses well enough for walking, Mr. Stephens,” said Miss Sadie from behind them. “But for an afternoon dress, I think the French have more style than the English. Your milliners have a more severe cut, and they don’t do the cunning little ribbons and bows and things in the same way.”

The Colonel smiled at Belmont.

“*She* is quite serene in her mind, at any rate,” said he. “Of course, I wouldn’t say what I drink to any one but you, and I dare say it will all prove to be quite unfounded.”

“Well, I could imagine parties of Dervishes on the prowl,” said Belmont. “But what I cannot imagine is that they should just happen to come to the pulpit rock on the very morning when we are due there.”

“Considering that our movements have been freely advertised, and that every one knows a week beforehand what our programme is, and where we are to be found, it does not strike me as being such a wonderful coincidence.”

“It is a very remote chance,” said Belmont, stoutly, but he was glad in his heart that his wife was safe and snug on board the steamer.

And now they were clear of the rocks again, with a fine stretch of firm yellow sand extending to the very base of the conical hill which lay before them. “Ay-ah! Ayah!” cried the boys, and whack came their sticks upon the flanks of the donkeys, which broke into a gallop, and away they all streamed over the plain. It was not until they had come to the end of the path which curves up the hill that the dragoman called a halt.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, we are arrived for the so famous pulpit rock of Abousir. From the summit you will presently enjoy a panorama of remarkable fertility. But first you will observe that over the rocky side of the hill are everywhere cut the names of great men who have passed it in their travels, and some of these names are older than the time of Christ.”

“Got Moses?” asked Miss Adams.

“Auntie, I’m surprised at you!” cried Sadie.

“Well, my dear, he was in Egypt, and he was a great man, and he may have passed this way.”

“Moses’s name very likely there, and the same with Herodotus,” said the dragoman, gravely. “Both have been long worn away. But there on the brown rock you will see Belzoni. And up higher is Gordon. There is hardly a name famous in the Soudan which you will not find, if you like. And now, with your permission, we shall take good-bye of our donkeys and walk up the path, and you will see the river and the desert from the summit of the top."

A minute or two of climbing brought them out upon the semicircular platform which crowns the rock. Below them on the far side was a perpendicular black cliff, a hundred and fifty feet high, with the swirling, foam-streaked river roaring past its base. The swish of the water and the low roar as it surged over the mid-stream boulders boomed through the hot, stagnant air. Far up and far down they could see the course of the river, a quarter of a mile in breadth, and running very deep and strong, with sleek black eddies and occasional spoutings of foam. On the other side was a frightful wilderness of black, scattered rocks, which were the *débris* carried down by the river at high flood. In no direction were there any signs of human beings or their dwellings.

"On the far side," said the dragoman, waving his donkey-whip towards the east, "is the military line which conducts Wady Haifa to Sarras. Sarras lies to the south, under that black hill. Those two blue mountains which you see very far away are in Dongola, more than a hundred miles from Sarras. The railway there is forty miles long, and has been much annoyed by the Dervishes, who are very glad to turn the rails into spears. The telegraph wires are also much appreciated thereby. Now, if you will kindly turn round, I will explain, also, what we see upon the other side."

It was a view which, when once seen, must always haunt the mind. Such an expanse of savage and unrelieved desert might be part of some cold and burned-out planet rather than of this fertile and bountiful earth. Away and away it stretched to die into a soft, violet haze in the extremest distance. In the foreground the sand was of a bright golden yellow, which was quite dazzling in the sunshine. Here and there in a scattered cordon stood the six trusty negro soldiers leaning motionless upon their rifles, and each throwing a shadow which looked as solid as himself. But beyond this golden plain lay a low line of those black slag-heaps, with yellow sand-valleys winding between them. These in their turn were topped by higher and more fantastic hills, and these by others, peeping over each other's shoulders until they blended with that distant violet haze. None of these hills were of any height, — a few hundred feet at the most, — but their savage, saw-toothed crests and their steep scarps of sun-baked stone gave them a fierce character of their own.

“The Libyan desert,” said the dragoman, with a proud wave of his hand. “The greatest desert in the world. Suppose you travel right west from here, and turn neither to the north nor to the south, the first houses you would come to would be in America. That make you homesick, Miss Adams, I believe?”

But the American old maid had her attention drawn away by the conduct of Sadie, who had caught her arm by one hand and was pointing over the desert with the other.

“Well, now, if that isn’t too picturesque for anything!” she cried, with a flush of excitement upon her pretty face. “Do look, Mr. Stephens! That’s just the one only thing we wanted to make it just perfectly grand. See the men upon the camels coming out from between those hills!”

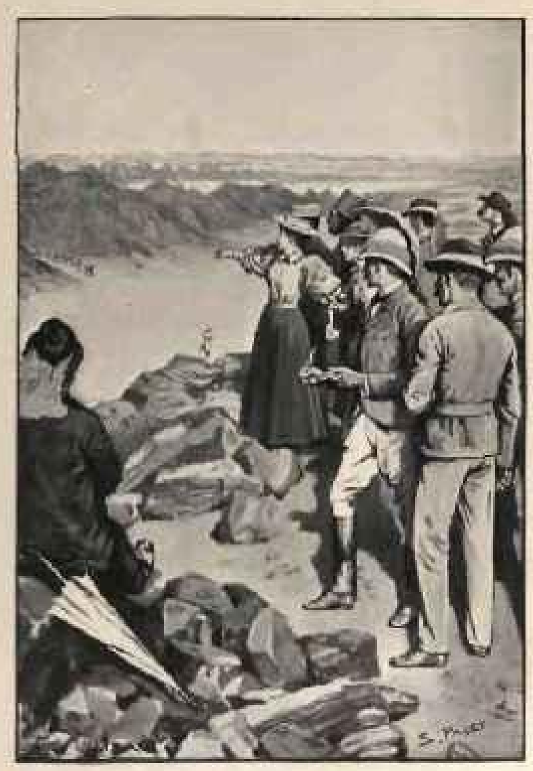

They all looked at the long string of red-turbaned riders.

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They all looked at the long string of red-turbaned riders who were winding out of the ravine, and there fell such a hush that the buzzing of the flies sounded quite loud upon their ears. Colonel Cochrane had lit a match, and he stood with it in one hand and the unlit cigarette in the other until the flame licked round his fingers. Belmont whistled. The dragoman stood staring with his mouth half-open, and a curious slaty tint in his full, red lips. The others looked from one to the other with an uneasy sense that there was something wrong. It was the Colonel who broke the silence.

“By George, Belmont, I believe the hundred-to-one chance has come off!” said he.

CHAPTER IV

"What's the meaning of this, Mansoor?" cried Belmont, harshly. "Who are these people, and why are you standing staring as if you had lost your senses?"

The dragoman made an effort to compose himself, and licked his dry lips before he answered.

"I do not know who they are," said he, in a quavering voice. "I did not expect to see any Arabs in this part."

"Who they are?" cried the Frenchman. "You can see who they are. They are armed men upon camels, Ababdeh, Bishareen — Bedouins, in short, such as are employed by the Government upon the frontier."

"By Jove, he may be right, Cochrane," said Belmont, looking inquiringly at the Colonel. "Why shouldn't it be as he says? why shouldn't these fellows be friendlies?"

"There are no friendlies upon this side of the river," said the Colonel, abruptly; "I am perfectly certain about that. There is no use in mincing matters. We must prepare for the worst."

But in spite of his words, they stood stock-still, in a huddled group, staring out over the plain. Their nerves were numbed by the sudden shock, and to all of them it was like a scene in a dream, vague, impersonal, and unreal. The men upon the camels had streamed out from a gorge which lay a mile or so distant on the side of the path along which they had travelled. Their retreat, therefore, was entirely cut off. It appeared, from the dust and the length of the line, to be quite an army which was emerging from the hills, for seventy men upon camels cover a considerable stretch of ground. Having reached the sandy plain, they very deliberately formed to the front, and then at the harsh call of a bugle they trotted forward in line, the parti-coloured figures all swaying and the sand smoking in a rolling yellow cloud at the heels of their camels. At the same moment the six black soldiers doubled in from the front with their Martinis at the trail, and snuggled down like well-trained skirmishers behind the rocks upon the haunch of the hill. Their breech-blocks all snapped together as their corporal gave them the order to load.

And now suddenly the first stupor of the excursionists passed away, and was succeeded by a frantic and impotent energy. They all ran about upon the plateau of rock in an aimless, foolish flurry, like frightened fowls in a yard. They could not bring themselves to acknowledge that there was no possible escape for them. Again and again they rushed to the edge of the great cliff which rose from the river, but the youngest and most daring of them could never have descended it. The two women clung one on each side of the trembling Mansoor, with a feeling that he was officially responsible for their safety. When he ran up and down in his desperation, his skirts and theirs all fluttered together. Stephens, the lawyer, kept close to Sadie Adams, muttering mechanically, “Don’t be alarmed, Miss Sadie. Don’t be at all alarmed!” though his own limbs were twitching with agitation. Monsieur Fardet stamped about with a guttural rolling of r’s, glancing angrily at his companions, as if they had in some way betrayed him, while the fat clergyman stood with his umbrella up, staring stolidly with big, frightened eyes at the camel-men. Cecil Brown curled his small, prim moustache, and looked white but contemptuous. The Colonel, Belmont, and the young Harvard graduate were the three most cool-headed and resourceful members of the party.

“Better stick together,” said the Colonel. “There’s no escape for us, so we may as well remain united.”

“They’ve halted,” said Belmont. “They are reconnoitring us. They know very well that there is no escape from them, and they are taking their time. I don’t see what we can do.”

“Suppose we hide the women,” Headingly suggested. “They can’t know how many of us are here. When they have taken us, the women can come out of their hiding-place and make their way back to the boat.”

“Admirable!” cried Colonel Cochrane. “Admirable! This way, please, Miss Adams. Bring the ladies here, Mansoor. There is not an instant to be lost.”

There was a part of the plateau which was invisible from the plain, and here in feverish haste they built a little cairn. Many flaky slabs of stone were lying about, and it did not take long to prop the largest of these against a rock, so as to make a lean-to, and then to put two side-pieces to complete it. The slabs were of the same colour as the rock, so that to a casual glance the hiding-place was not very visible. The two ladies were squeezed into this, and they crouched together, Sadie’s arms thrown round her aunt. When they had walled them up, the men turned with lighter hearts to see what was going on. As they did so there rang out the sharp, peremptory crack of a rifleshot from the escort, followed by another and another, but these isolated shots were drowned in the long, spattering roll of an irregular volley from the plain, and the air was full of the phit-phit-phit of the bullets. The tourists all huddled behind the rocks, with the exception of the Frenchman, who still stamped angrily about, striking his sun-hat with his clenched hand. Belmont and Cochrane crawled down to where the Soudanese soldiers were firing slowly and steadily, resting their rifles upon the boulders in front of them.

The Arabs had halted about five hundred yards away, and it was evident from their leisurely movements that they were perfectly aware that there was no possible escape for the travellers. They had paused to ascertain their number before closing in upon them. Most of them were firing from the backs of their camels, but a few had dismounted and were kneeling here and there, — little shimmering white spots against the golden background. Their shots came sometimes singly in quick, sharp throbs, and sometimes in a rolling volley, with a sound like a boy’s stick drawn across iron railings. The hill buzzed like a bee-hive, and the bullets made a sharp, crackling sound as they struck against the rocks.

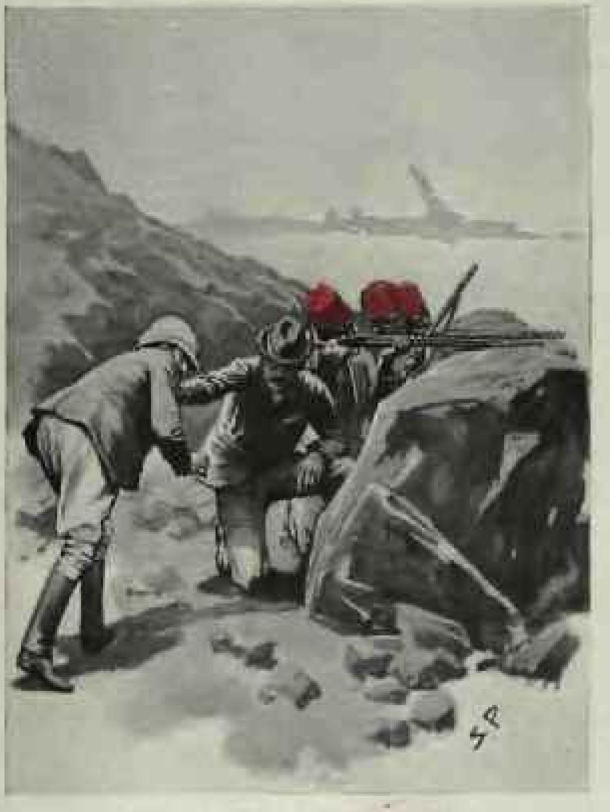

"You do no good by exposing yourself."

“You do no good by exposing yourself,” said Belmont, drawing Colonel Cochrane behind a large jagged boulder, which already furnished a shelter for three of the Soudanese.

“A bullet is the best we have to hope for,” said Cochrane, grimly. “What an infernal fool I have been, Belmont, not to protest more energetically against this ridiculous expedition! I deserve whatever I get, but it *is* hard on these poor souls who never knew the danger.”

“I suppose there’s no help for us?”

“Not the faintest.”

“Don’t you think this firing might bring the troops up from Haifa?”

“They’ll never hear it. It is a good six miles from here to the steamer. From that to Haifa would be another five.”

“Well, when we don’t return, the steamer will give the alarm.”

“And where shall we be by that time?”

“My poor Norah! My poor little Norah!” muttered Belmont, in the depths of his grizzled moustache.

“What do you suppose that they will do with us, Cochrane,” he asked after a pause.

“They may cut our throats, or they may take us as slaves to Khartoum. I don’t know that there is much to choose. There’s one of us out of his troubles, anyhow.”

The soldier next them had sat down abruptly, and leaned forward over his knees. His movement and attitude were so natural that it was hard to realise that he had been shot through the head. He neither stirred nor groaned. His comrades bent over him for a moment, and then, shrugging their shoulders, they turned their dark faces to the Arabs once more. Belmont picked up the dead man’s Martini and his ammunition-pouch.

“Only three more rounds, Cochrane,” said he, with the little brass cylinders upon the palm of his hand. “We’ve let them shoot too soon, and too often. We should have waited for the rush.”

“You’re a famous shot, Belmont,” cried the Colonel. “I’ve heard of you as one of the cracks. Don’t, you think you could pick off their leader?” “Which is he?”

“As far as I can make out, it is that one on the white camel on their right front. I mean the fellow who is peering at us from under his two hands.”

Belmont thrust in his cartridge and altered the sights. “It’s a shocking bad light for judging distance,” said he. “This is where the low point-blank trajectory of the Lee-Metford comes in useful. Well, we’ll try him at five hundred.” He fired, but there was no change in the white camel or the peering rider.

“Did you see any sand fly?”

“No; I saw nothing.” “I fancy I took my sight a trifle too full.” “Try him again.” Man and rifle and rock were equally steady, but again the camel and chief remained unharmed. The third shot must have been nearer, for he moved a *few* paces to the right, as if he were becoming restless.

Belmont threw the empty rifle down with an exclamation of disgust.

“It’s this confounded light,” he cried, and his cheeks flushed with annoyance. “Think of my wasting three cartridges in that fashion! If I had him at Bisley I’d shoot the turban off him, but this vibrating glare means refraction. What’s the matter with the Frenchman?”

Monsieur Fardet was stamping about the plateau with the gestures of a man who has been stung by a wasp. “*S’cré nom! S’cré nom!*” he shouted, showing his strong white teeth under his black waxed moustache. He wrung his right hand violently, and as he did so he sent a little spray of blood from his finger-tips. A bullet had chipped his wrist. Headingly ran out from the cover where he had been crouching, with the intention of dragging the demented Frenchman into a place of safety, but he had not taken three paces before he was himself hit in the loins, and fell with a dreadful crash among the stones. He staggered to his feet, and then fell again in the same place, floundering up and down like a horse which has broken its back. “I’m done!” he whispered, as the Colonel ran to his aid, and then he lay still, with his china-white cheek against the black stones. When, but a year before, he had wandered under the elms of Cambridge, surely the last fate upon this earth which he could have predicted for himself would be that he should be slain by the bullet of a fanatical Mohammedan in the wilds of the Libyan desert.

Meanwhile the fire of the escort had ceased, for they had shot away their last cartridge. A second man had been killed, and a third — who was the corporal in charge — had received a bullet in his thigh. He sat upon a stone, tying up his injury with a grave, preoccupied look upon his wrinkled black face, like an old woman piecing together a broken plate. The three others fastened their bayonets with a determined metallic rasp and snap, and the air of men who intended to sell their lives dearly.

“They’re coming!” cried Belmont, looking over the plain.

“Let them come!” the Colonel answered, putting his hands into his trouser-pockets. Suddenly he pulled one fist out, and shook it furiously in the air. “Oh, the cads! die confounded cads!” he shouted, and his eyes were congested with rage.

It was the fate of the poor donkey-boys which had carried the self-contained soldier out of his usual calm. During the firing they had remained huddled, a pitiable group, among the rocks at the base of the hill. Now upon the conviction that the charge of the Dervishes must come first upon them, they had sprung upon their animals with shrill, inarticulate cries of fear, and had galloped off across the plain. A small flanking-party of eight or ten camel-men had worked round while the firing had been going on, and these dashed in among the flying donkey-boys, hacking and hewing with a cold-blooded, deliberate ferocity. One little boy, in a flapping Galabeeah, kept ahead of his pursuers for a time, but the long stride of the camels ran him down, and an Arab thrust his spear into the middle of his stooping back. The small, white-clad corpses looked like a flock of sheep trailing over the desert.

But the people upon the rock had no time to think of the cruel fate of the donkey-boys. Even the Colonel, after that first indignant outburst, had forgotten all about them. The advancing camel-men had trotted to the bottom of the hill, had dismounted, and, leaving their camels kneeling, had rushed furiously onward. Fifty of them were clambering up the path and over the rocks together, their red turbans appearing and vanishing again as they scrambled over the boulders. Without a shot or a pause they surged over the three black soldiers, killing one and stamping the other two down under their hurrying feet. So they burst on to the plateau at the top, where an unexpected resistance checked them for an instant.

The travellers, nestling up against one another, had awaited, each after his own fashion, the coming of the Arabs. The Colonel, with his hands back in his trouser-pockets, tried to whistle out of his dry lips. Belmont folded his arms and leaned against a rock, with a sulky frown upon his lowering face. So strangely do our minds act that his three successive misses and the tarnish to his reputation as a marksman was troubling him more than his impending fate. Cecil Brown stood erect, and plucked nervously at the upturned points of his little prim moustache. Monsieur Fardet groaned over his wounded wrist. Mr. Stephens, in sombre impotence, shook his head slowly, the living embodiment of prosaic law and order. Mr. Stuart stood, his umbrella still over him, with no expression upon his heavy face or in his staring brown eyes. Headingly lay with that china-white cheek resting motionless upon the stones. His sun-hat had fallen off, and he looked quite boyish with his ruffled yellow hair and his unlined, clean-cut face. The dragoman sat upon a stone and played nervously with his donkey-whip. So the Arabs found them when they reached the summit of the hill.

And then, just as the foremost rushed to lay hands upon them, a most unexpected incident arrested them. From the time of the first appearance of the Dervishes the fat clergyman of Birmingham had looked like a man in a cataleptic trance. He had neither moved nor spoken. But now he suddenly woke at a bound into strenuous and heroic energy. It may have been the mania of fear, or it may have been the blood of some Berserk ancestor which stirred suddenly in his veins; but he broke into a wild shout, and, catching up a stick, he struck right and left among the Arabs with a fury which was more savage than their own. One who helped to draw up this narrative has left it upon record that of all the pictures which have been burned into his brain, there is none so clear as that of this man, his large face shining with perspiration, and his great body dancing about with unwieldy agility, as he struck at the shrinking, snarling savages.

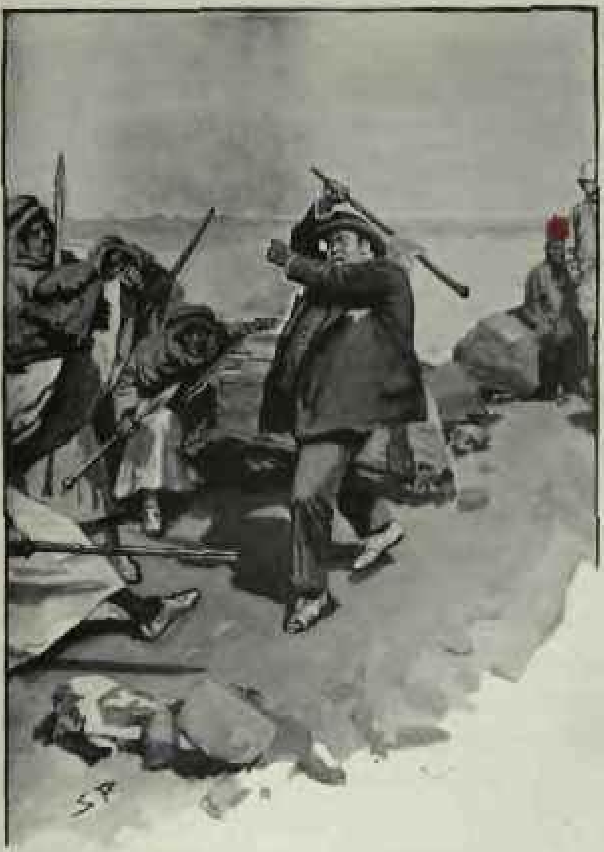

He struck at the shrinking, snarling savages.

Then a spear-head flashed from behind a rock with a quick, vicious upward thrust, the clergyman fell upon his hands and knees, and the horde poured over him to seize their unresisting victims. Knives glimmered before their eyes, rude hands clutched at their wrists and at their throats, and then, with brutal and unreasoning violence, they were hauled and pushed down the steep, winding path to where the camels were waiting below. The Frenchman waved his unwounded hand as he walked. “Vive le Khalifa!

Vive le Madhi!” he shouted, until a blow from behind with the butt-end of a Remington beat him into silence.

And now they were herded in at the base of the Abousir Rock, this little group of modern types who had fallen into the rough clutch of the seventh century, — for in all save the rifles in their hands there was nothing to distinguish these men from the desert warriors who first carried the crescent flag out of Arabia. The East does not change, and the Dervish raiders were not less brave, less cruel, or less fanatical than their forebears. They stood in a circle, leaning upon their guns and spears, and looking with exultant eyes at the dishevelled group of captives. They were clad in some approach to a uniform, red turbans gathered around the neck as well as the head, so that the fierce face looked out of a scarlet frame; yellow, untanned shoes, and white tunics with square, brown patches let into them. All carried rifles, and one had a small, discoloured bugle slung over his shoulder. Half of them were negroes — fine, muscular men, with the limbs of a jet Hercules; and the other half were Baggara Arabs — small, brown, and wiry, with little, vicious eyes, and thin, cruel lips. The chief was also a Baggara, but he was a taller man than the others, with a black beard which came down over his chest, and a pair of hard, cold eyes, which gleamed like glass from under his thick, black brows. They were fixed now upon his captives, and his features were grave with thought. Mr. Stuart had been brought down, his hat gone, his face still flushed with anger, and his trousers sticking in one part to his leg. The two surviving Soudanese soldiers, their black faces and blue coats blotched with crimson, stood silently at attention upon one side of this forlorn group of castaways.

The chief stood for some minutes, stroking his black beard, while his fierce eyes glanced from one pale face to another along the miserable line of his captives. In a harsh, imperious voice he said something which brought Mansoor, the dragoman, to the front, with bent back and outstretched, supplicating palms. To his employers there had always seemed to be something comic in that flapping skirt and short cover-coat above it; but now, under the glare of the mid-day sun, with those faces gathered round them, it appeared rather to add a grotesque horror to the scene. The dragoman salaamed like some ungainly, automatic doll, and then, as the chief rasped out a curt word or two, he fell suddenly upon his face, rubbing his forehead into the sand, and flapping upon it with his hands.

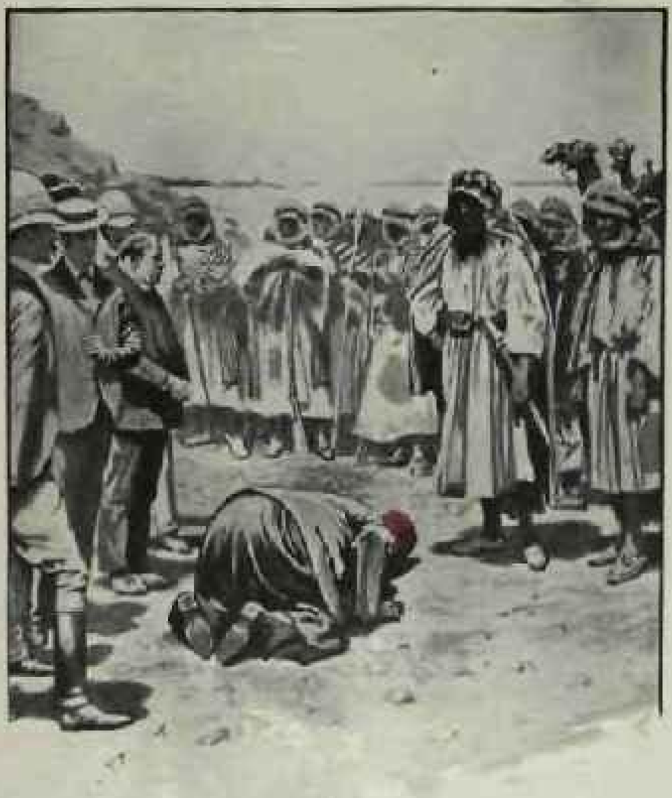

He fell suddenly upon his face.

“What’s that, Cochrane?” asked Belmont. “Why is he making an exhibition of himself?”

“As far as I can understand, it is all up with us,” the Colonel answered.

“But this is absurd,” cried the Frenchman, excitedly; “why should these people wish any harm to me? I have never injured them. On the other hand, I have always been their friend. If I could but speak to them, I would make them comprehend. Hola, dragoman, Mansoor!”

The excited gestures of Monsieur Fardet drew the sinister eyes of the Baggara chief upon him. Again he asked a curt question, and Mansoor, kneeling in front of him, answered it.

“Tell him that I am a Frenchman, dragoman. Tell him that I am a friend of the Khalifa. Tell him that my countrymen have never had any quarrel with him, but that his enemies are also ours.”

“The chief asks what religion you call your own,” said Mansoor. “The Khalifa, he says, has no necessity for any friendship from those who are infidels and unbelievers.”

“Tell him that in France we look upon all religions as good.”

“The chief says that none but a blaspheming dog and the son of a dog would say that all religions are one as good as the other. He says that if you are indeed the friend of the Khalifa, you will accept the Koran and become a true believer upon the spot. If you will do so, he will promise on his side to send you alive to Khartoum.”

“And if not?”

“You will fare in the same way as the others.”

“Then you may make my compliments to monsieur the chief, and tell him that it is not the custom for Frenchmen to change their religion under compulsion.”

The chief said a few words, and then turned to consult with a short, sturdy Arab at his elbow.

“He says, Monsieur Fardet,” said the dragoman, “that if you speak again he will make a trough out of you for the dogs to feed from. Say nothing to anger him, sir, for he is now talking what is to be done with us.”

“Who is he?” asked the Colonel.

“It is Ali Wad Ibrahim, the same who raided last year, and killed all of the Nubian village.”

“I’ve heard of him,” said the Colonel.

“He has the name of being one of the boldest and the most fanatical of all the Khalifa’s leaders. Thank God that the women are out of his clutches.”

The two Arabs had been talking in that stern, restrained fashion which comes so strangely from a southern race. Now they both turned to the dragoman, who was still kneeling upon the sand. They plied him with questions, pointing first to one and then to another of their prisoners. Then they conferred together once more, and finally said something to Mansoor, with a contemptuous wave of the hand to indicate that he might convey it to the others.

“Thank Heaven, gentlemen, I think that we are saved for the present time,” said Mansoor, wiping away the sand which had stuck to his perspiring forehead. “Ali Wad Ibrahim says that though an unbeliever should have only the edge of the sword from one of the sons of the Prophet, yet it might be of more profit to the beit-el-mal at Omdurman if it had the gold which your people will pay for you. Until it comes you can work as the slaves of the Khalifa; unless he should decide to put you to death. You are to mount yourselves upon the spare; camels and to ride with the party."

The chief had waited for the end of the explanation. Now he gave a brief order, and a negro stepped forward with a long, dull-coloured sword in his hand. The dragoman squealed like a rabbit who sees a ferret, and threw himself frantically down upon the sand once more.

"What is it, Cochrane?" asked Cecil Brown, — for the Colonel had served in the East, and was the only one of the travellers who had a smattering of Arabic.

"As far as I can make out, he says there is no use keeping the dragoman, as no one would trouble to pay a ransom for him, and he is too fat to make a good slave."

"Poor devil!" cried Brown. "Here, Cochrane, tell them to let him go. We can't let him be butchered like this in front of us. Say that we will find the money amongst us. I will be answerable for any reasonable sum."

"I'll stand in as far as my means will allow," cried Belmont.

"We will sign a joint bond or indemnity," said, the lawyer. "If I had a paper and pencil I could throw it into shape in an instant, and the chief could rely upon its being perfectly correct and valid."

But the Colonel's Arabic was insufficient, and Mansoor himself was too maddened by fear to understand the offer which was being made for him. The negro looked a question at the chief, and then his long black arm swung upwards and his sword hissed over his shoulder. But the dragoman had screamed out something which arrested the blow, and which brought the chief and the lieutenant to his side with a new interest upon their swarthy faces. The others crowded in also, and formed a dense circle around the grovelling, pleading man.

The Colonel had not understood this sudden change, nor had the others fathomed the reason of it, but some instinct flashed it upon Stephens's horrified perceptions.

"Oh, you villain!" he cried, furiously.

"Hold your tongue, you miserable creature! Be silent! Better die — a thousand times better die!"

But it was too late, and already they could all see the base design by which the coward hoped to save his own life. He was about to betray the women. They saw the chief, with a brave man's contempt upon his stern face, make a sign of haughty assent, and then Mansoor spoke rapidly and earnestly, pointing up the hill. At a word from the Baggara, a dozen of the raiders rushed up the path and were lost to view upon the top. Then came a shrill cry, a horrible, strenuous scream of surprise and terror, and an instant later the party streamed into sight again, dragging the women in their midst. Sadie, with her young, active limbs, kept up with them as they sprang down the slope, encouraging her aunt all the while over her shoulder. The older lady, struggling amid the rushing white figures, looked with her thin limbs and open mouth like a chicken being dragged from a coop.

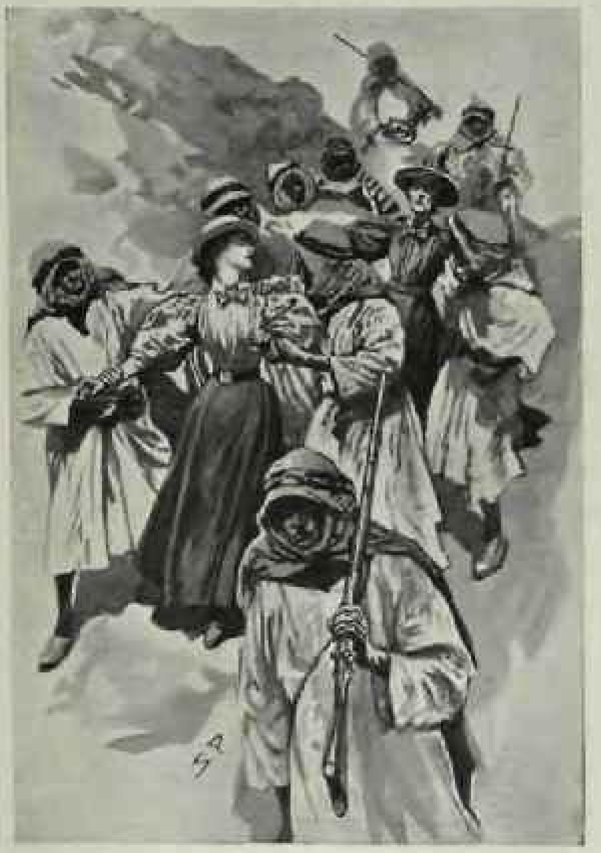

The party streamed into sight again.

The chief’s dark eyes glanced indifferently at Miss Adams, but gazed with a smouldering fire at the younger woman. Then he gave an abrupt order, and the prisoners were hurried in a miserable, hopeless drove to the cluster of kneeling camels. Their pockets had already been ransacked, and the contents thrown into one of the camel-food bags, the neck of which was tied up by Ali Wad Ibrahim’s own hands.

“I say, Cochrane,” whispered Belmont, looking with smouldering eyes at the wretched Mansoor, “I’ve got a little hip revolver which they have not discovered. Shall I shoot that cursed dragoman for giving away the women?”

The Colonel shook his head.

“You had better keep it,” said he, with a sombre face. “The women may find some other use for it before all is over.”

CHAPTER V

The camels, some brown and some white, were kneeling in a long line, their champing jaws moving rhythmically from side to side, and their gracefully poised heads turning to right and left in a mincing, self-conscious fashion. Most of them were beautiful creatures, true Arabian trotters, with the slim limbs and finely turned necks which mark the breed; but amongst them were a few of the slower, heavier beasts, with un-groomed skins, disfigured by the black scars of old firings. These were loaded with the doora and the water-skins of the raiders, but a few minutes sufficed to redistribute their loads and to make place for the prisoners. None of these had been bound with the exception of Mr. Stuart, — for the Arabs, understanding that he was a clergyman, and accustomed to associate religion with violence, had looked upon his fierce outburst as quite natural, and regarded him now as the most dangerous and enterprising of their captives. His hands were therefore tied together with a plaited camel-halter, but the others, including the dragoman and the two wounded blacks, were allowed to mount without any precaution against their escape, save that which was afforded by the slowness of their beasts. Then, with a shouting of men and a roaring of camels, the creatures were jolted on to their legs, and the long, straggling procession set off with its back to the homely river, and its face to the shimmering, violet haze, which hung round the huge sweep of beautiful, terrible desert, striped tiger-fashion with black rock and with golden sand.

None of the white prisoners with the exception of Colonel Cochrane had ever been upon a camel before. It seemed an alarming distance to the ground when they looked down, and the curious swaying motion, with the insecurity of the saddle, made them sick and frightened. But their bodily discomfort was forgotten in the turmoil of bitter thoughts within. What a chasm gaped between their old life and their new! And yet how short was the time and space which divided them! Less than an hour ago they had stood upon the summit of that rock and had laughed and chattered, or grumbled at the heat and flies, becoming peevish at small discomforts. Headingly had been hypercritical over the tints of Nature. They could not forget his own tint as he lay with his cheek upon the black stone. Sadie had chattered about tailor-made dresses and Parisian chiffons. Now she was clinging, half-crazy, to the pommel of a wooden saddle, with suicide rising as a red star of hope in her mind. Humanity, reason, argument, — all were gone, and there remained the brutal humiliation of force. And all the time, down there by the second rocky point, their steamer was waiting for them, — their saloon, with the white napery and the glittering glasses, the latest novel, and the London papers. The least imaginative of them could see it so clearly: the white awning, Mrs. Shlesinger with her yellow sun-hat, Mrs. Belmont lying back in the canvas chair. There it lay almost in sight of them, that little floating chip broken off from home, and every silent, ungainly step of the camels was carrying them more hopelessly away from it. That very morning how beneficent Providence had appeared, how pleasant was life! — a little commonplace, perhaps, but so soothing and restful, And now!

The red head-gear, patched jibbehs, and yellow boots had already shown to the Colonel that these men were no wandering party of robbers, but a troop from the regular army of the Khalifa. Now, as they struck across the desert, they showed that they possessed the rude discipline which their work demanded. A mile ahead, and far out on either flank, rode their scouts, dipping and rising among the yellow sand-hills. Ali Wad Ibrahim headed the caravan, and his short, sturdy lieutenant brought up the rear. The main party straggled over a couple of hundred yards, and in the middle was the little, dejected clump of prisoners. No attempt was made to keep them apart, and Mr. Stephens soon contrived that his camel should be between those of the two ladies.

“Don’t be down-hearted, Miss Adams,” said he. “This is a most indefensible outrage, but there can be no question that steps will be taken in the proper quarter to set the matter right. I am convinced that we shall be subjected to nothing worse than a temporary inconvenience. If it had not been for that villain Mansoor, you need not have appeared at all.”

It was shocking to see the change in the little Bostonian lady, for she had shrunk to an old woman in an hour. Her swarthy cheeks had fallen in, and her eyes shone wildly from sunken, darkened sockets. Her frightened glances were continually turned upon Sadie. There is surely some wrecker angel which can only gather her best treasures in moments of disaster. For here were all these worldlings going to their doom, and already frivolity and selfishness had passed away from them, and each was thinking and grieving only for the other. Sadie thought of her aunt, her aunt thought of Sadie, the men thought of the women, Belmont thought of his wife, — and then he thought of something else also, and he kicked his camel's shoulder with his heel until he found himself upon the near side of Miss Adams.

"I've got something for you here," he whispered. "We may be separated soon, so it is as well to make our arrangements."

"Separated!" wailed Miss Adams.

"Don't speak loud, for that infernal Mansoor may give us away again. I hope it won't be so, but it might. We must be prepared for the worst. For example, they might determine to get rid of us men and to keep you."

Miss Adams shuddered.

"What am I to do? For God's sake, tell me what I am to do, Mr. Belmont! I am an old woman. I have had my day. I could stand it if it was only myself. But Sadie — I am clean crazed when I think of her. There's her mother waiting at home, and I — —" She clasped her thin hands together in the agony of her thoughts.

"Put your hand out under your dust-cloak," said Belmont, sidling his camel up against hers. "Don't miss your grip of it. There! Now hide it in your dress, and you'll always have a key to unlock any door."

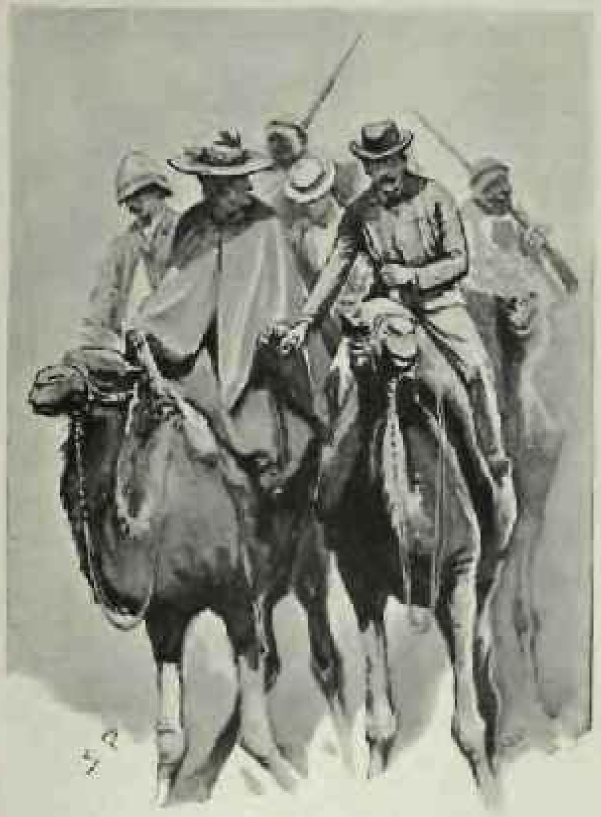

"Don't miss your grip of it."

Miss Adams felt what it was which he had slipped into her hand, and she looked at him for a moment in bewilderment. Then she pursed up her lips and shook her stern, brown face in disapproval. But she pushed the little pistol into its hiding-place, all the same, and she rode with her thoughts in a whirl. Could this indeed be she, Eliza Adams, of Boston, whose narrow, happy life had oscillated between the comfortable house in Commonwealth Avenue and the Tremont Presbyterian Church? Here she was, hunched upon a camel, with her hand upon the butt of a pistol, and her mind weighing the justifications of murder. Oh, life, sly, sleek, treacherous life, how are we ever to trust you? Show us your worst and we can face it, but it is when you are sweetest and smoothest that we have most to fear from you.

"At the worst, Miss Sadie, it will only be a question of ransom," said Stephens, arguing against his own convictions. "Besides, we are still close to Egypt, far away from the Dervish country. There is sure to be an energetic pursuit. You must try not to lose your courage, and to hope for the best."

"No, I am not scared, Mr. Stephens," said Sadie, turning towards him a blanched face which belied her words. "We're all in God's hands, and surely He won't be cruel to us. It is easy to talk about trusting Him when things are going well, but now is the real test. If He's up there behind that blue heaven — —"

"He is," said a voice behind them, and they found that the Birmingham clergyman had joined the party. His tied hands clutched on to his Makloofa saddle, and his fat body swayed dangerously from side to side with every stride of the camel. His wounded leg was oozing with blood and clotted with flies, and the burning desert sun beat down upon his bare head, for he had lost both hat and umbrella in the scuffle. A rising fever flecked his large, white cheeks with a touch of colour, and brought a light into his brown ox-eyes. He had always seemed a somewhat gross and vulgar person to his fellow-travellers. Now, this bitter healing draught of sorrow had transformed him. He was purified, spiritualised, exalted. He had become so calmly strong that he made the others feel stronger as they looked upon him. He spoke of life and of death, of the present, and their hopes of the future; and the black cloud of their misery began to show a golden rift or two. Cecil Brown shrugged his shoulders, for he could not change in an hour the convictions of his life; but the others, even Fardet, the Frenchman, were touched and strengthened. They all took off their hats when he prayed. Then the Colonel made a turban out of his red silk cummerbund, and insisted that Mr. Stuart should wear it. With his homely dress and gorgeous head-gear, he looked like a man who has dressed up to amuse the children.

And now the dull, ceaseless, insufferable torment of thirst was added to the aching weariness which came from the motion of the camels. The sun glared down upon them, and then up again from the yellow sand, and the great plain shimmered and glowed until they felt as if they were riding over a cooling sheet of molten metal. Their lips were parched and dried, and their tongues like tags of leather. They lisped curiously in their speech, for it was only the vowel sounds which would come without an effort. Miss Adams's chin had dropped upon her chest, and her great hat concealed her face.

"Auntie will faint if she does not get water," said Sadie. "Oh, Mr. Stephens, is there nothing we could do?"

The Dervishes riding near were all Baggara with the exception of one negro, — an uncouth fellow with a face pitted with smallpox. His expression seemed good-natured when compared with that of his Arab comrades, and Stephens ventured to touch his elbow and to point to his water-skin, and then to the exhausted lady. The negro shook his head brusquely, but at the same time he glanced significantly towards the Arabs, as if to say that, if it were not for them, he might act differently. Then he laid his black forefinger upon the breast of his jibbeh.

"Tippy Tilly," said he.

"What's that?" asked Colonel Cochrane.

"Tippy Tilly," repeated the negro, sinking his voice as if he wished only the prisoners to hear him.

The Colonel shook his head.

"My Arabic won't bear much strain. I don't know what he is saying," said he.

"Tippy Tilly. Hicks Pasha," the negro repeated.

"I believe the fellow is friendly to us, but I can't quite make him out," said Cochrane to Belmont. "Do you think that he means that his name is Tippy Tilly, and that he killed Hicks Pasha?"

The negro showed his great white teeth at hearing his own words coming back to him. "Aiwa!" said he. "Tippy Tilly — Bimbashi Mormer — Bourn!"

"By Jove, I got it!" cried Belmont.

"He's trying to speak English. Tippy Tilly is as near as he can get to Egyptian Artillery. He has served in the Egyptian Artillery under Bimbashi Mortimer. He was taken prisoner when Hicks Pasha was destroyed, and had to turn Dervish to save his skin. How's that?"

The Colonel said a few words of Arabic and received a reply, but two of the Arabs closed up, and the negro quickened his pace and left them.

"You are quite right," said the Colonel. "The fellow is friendly to us, and would rather fight for the Khedive than for the Khalifa. I don't know that he can do us any good, but I've been in worse holes than this, and come out right side up. After all, we are not out of reach of pursuit, and won't be for another forty-eight hours."

Belmont calculated the matter out in his slow, deliberate fashion.

"It was about twelve that we were on the rock," said he. "They would become alarmed aboard the steamer if we did not appear at two."

"Yes," the Colonel interrupted, "that was to be our lunch hour. I remember saying that when I came back I would have —— Oh, Lord, it's best not to think about it!"

"The reis was a sleepy old crock," Belmont continued; "but I have absolute confidence in the promptness and decision of my wife. She would insist upon an immediate alarm being given. Suppose they started back at two-thirty, they should be at Haifa by three, since the journey is down stream. How long did they say that it took to turn out the Camel Corps?"

"Give them an hour."

"And another hour to get them across the river. They would be at the Abousir Rock and pick up the tracks by six o'clock. After that it is a clear race. We are only four hours ahead, and some of these beasts are very spent. We may be saved yet, Cochrane!"

"Some of us may. I don't expect to see the padre alive to-morrow, nor Miss Adams either. They are not made for this sort of thing, either of them. Then, again, we must not forget that these people have a trick of murdering their prisoners when they think that there is a chance of a rescue. See here, Belmont, in case you get back and I don't, there's a matter of a mortgage that I want you to set right for me." They rode on with their shoulders inclined to each other, deep in the details of business.

The friendly negro who had talked of himself as Tippy Tilly had managed to slip a piece of cloth soaked in water into the hand of Mr. Stephens, and Miss Adams had moistened her lips with it. Even the few drops had given her renewed strength, and, now that the first crushing shock was over, her wiry, elastic, Yankee nature began to reassert itself.

"These people don't look as if they would harm us, Mr. Stephens," said she. "I guess they have a working religion of their own, such as it is, and that what's wrong to us is wrong to them."

Stephens shook his head in silence. He had seen the death of the donkey-boys, and she had not.

"Maybe we are sent to guide them into a better path," said the old lady. "Maybe we are specially singled out for a good work among them."

If it were not for her niece her energetic and enterprising temperament was capable of glorying in the chance of evangelising Khartoum, and turning Omdurman into a little well-drained, broad-avenued replica of a New England town.

"Do you know what I am thinking of all the time?" said Sadie. "You remember that temple that we saw, — when was it? Why, it was this morning."

They gave an exclamation of surprise, all three of them. Yes, it had been this morning; and it seemed away and away in some dim past experience of their lives, so vast was the change, so new and so overpowering the thoughts which had come between them. They rode in silence, full of this strange expansion of time, until at last Stephens reminded Sadie that she had left her remark unfinished.

"Oh, yes; it was the wall picture on that temple that I was thinking of. Do you remember the poor string of prisoners who are being dragged along to the feet of the great king, — how dejected they looked among the warriors who led them? Who could, — who *could* have thought that within three hours the same fate should be our own? And Mr. Headingly —— ," she turned her face away and began to cry.

"Don't take on, Sadie," said her aunt; "remember what the minister said just now, that we are all right there in the hollow of God's hand. Where do you think we are going, Mr. Stephens?"

The red edge of his Baedeker still projected from the lawyer's pocket, for it had not been worth their captor's while to take it. He glanced down at it.

"If they will only leave me this, I will look up a few references when we halt. I have a general idea of the country, for I drew a small map of it the other day. The river runs from south to north, so we must be travelling almost due west. I suppose they feared pursuit if they kept too near the Nile bank. There is a caravan route, I remember, which runs parallel to the river, about seventy miles inland. If we continue in this direction for a day we ought to come to it. There is a line of wells through which it passes. It comes out at Assiout, if I remember right, upon the Egyptian side. On the other side, it leads away into the Dervish country, — so, perhaps — —"

His words were interrupted by a high, eager voice which broke suddenly into a torrent of jostling words, words without meaning, pouring strenuously out in angry assertions and foolish repetitions. The pink had deepened to scarlet upon Mr. Stuart's cheeks, his eyes were vacant but brilliant, and he gabbled, gabbled, gabbled as he rode. Kindly mother Nature! she will not let her children be mishandled too far. "This is too much," she says; "this wounded leg, these crusted lips, this anxious, weary mind. Come away for a time, until your body becomes more habitable."

And so she coaxes the mind away into the Nirvana of delirium, while the little cell-workers tinker and toil within to get things better for its home-coming. When you see the veil of cruelty which nature wears, try and peer through it, and you will sometimes catch a glimpse of a very homely, kindly face behind.

The Arab guards looked askance at this sudden outbreak of the clergyman, for it verged upon lunacy, and lunacy is to them a fearsome and supernatural thing. One of them rode forward and spoke with the Emir. When he returned he said something to his comrades, one of whom closed in upon each side of the minister’s camel, so as to prevent him from falling. The friendly negro sidled his beast up to the Colonel, and whispered to him.

“We are going to halt presently, Belmont,” said Cochrane.

“Thank God! They may give us some water. We can’t go on like this.”

“I told Tippy Tilly that, if he could help us, we would turn him into a Bimbashi when we got him back into Egypt. I think he’s willing enough if he only had the power. By Jove, Belmont, do look back at the river.”

Their route, which had lain through sand-strewn khors with jagged, black edges, — places up which one would hardly think it possible that a camel could climb, — opened out now on to a hard, rolling plain, covered thickly with rounded pebbles, dipping and rising to the violet hills upon the horizon. So regular were the long, brown pebble-strewn curves, that they looked like the dark rollers of some monstrous ground-swell. Here and there a little straggling sage-green tuft of camel-grass sprouted up between the stones. Brown plains and violet hills, — nothing else in front of them! Behind lay the black jagged rocks through which they had passed with orange slopes of sand, and then far away a thin line of green to mark the course of the river. How cool and beautiful that green looked in the stark, abominable wilderness! On one side they could see the high rock, — the accursed rock which had tempted them to their ruin. On the other the river curved, and the sun gleamed upon the water. Oh, that liquid gleam, and the insurgent animal cravings, the brutal primitive longings, which for the instant took the soul out of all of them! They had lost families, countries, liberty, everything, but it was only of water, water, water, that they could think. Mr. Stuart, in his delirium, began roaring for oranges, and it was insufferable for them to have to listen to him. Only the rough, sturdy Irishman rose superior to that bodily craving. That gleam of river must be somewhere near Haifa, and his wife might be upon the very water at which he looked. He pulled his hat over his eyes, and rode in gloomy silence, biting at his strong, iron-grey moustache.

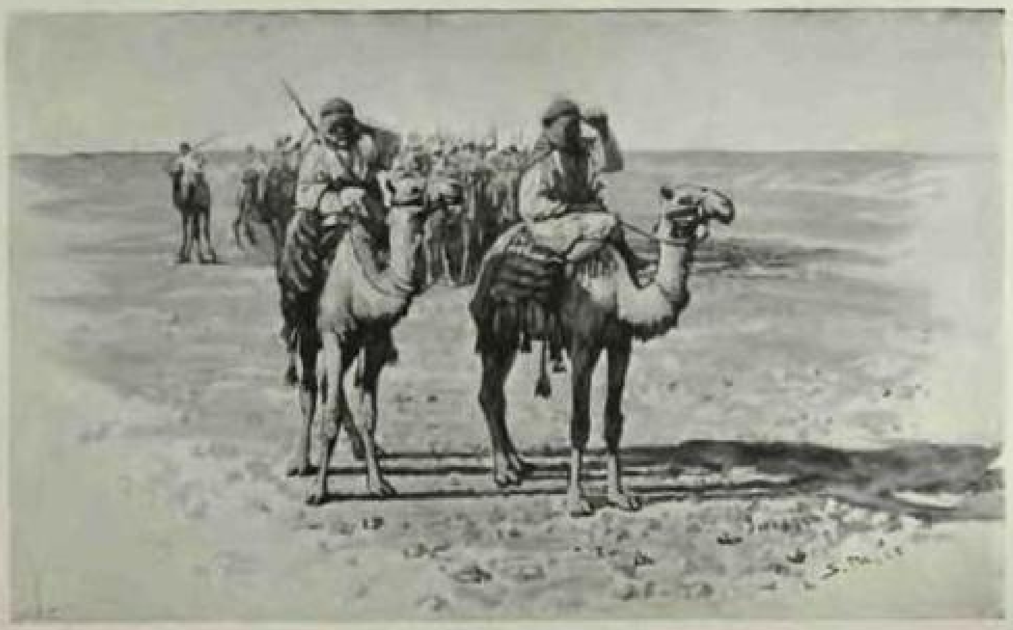

Looking for some landmark.

Slowly the sun sank towards the west, and their shadows began to trail along the path where their hearts would go. It was cooler, and a desert breeze had sprung up, whispering over the rolling, stone-strewed plain. The Emir at their head had called his lieutenant to his side, and the pair had peered about, their eyes shaded by their hands, looking for some landmark. Then, with a satisfied grunt, the chiefs camel had seemed to break short off at its knees, and then at its hocks, going down in three curious, broken-jointed jerks until its stomach was stretched upon the ground. As each succeeding camel reached the spot it lay down also, until they were all stretched in one long line. The riders sprang off, and laid out the chopped tibbin upon cloths in front of them, for no well-bred camel will eat from the ground. In their gentle eyes, their quiet, leisurely way of eating, and their condescending, mincing manner, there was something both feminine and genteel, as though a party of prim old maids had foregathered in the heart of the Libyan desert.

There was no interference with the prisoners, either male or female, for how could they escape in the centre of that huge plain? The Emir came towards them once, and stood combing out his blue-black beard with his fingers, and looking thoughtfully at them out of his dark, sinister eyes. Miss Adams saw with a shudder that it was always upon Sadie that his gaze was fixed. Then, seeing their distress, he gave an order, and a negro brought a water-skin, from which he gave each of them about half a tumblerful. It was hot and muddy and tasted of leather, but, oh, how delightful it was to their parched palates! The Emir said a few abrupt words to the dragoman and left.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Mansoor began, with something of his old consequential manner; but a glare from the Colonel’s eyes struck the words from his lips, and he broke away into a long, whimpering excuse for his conduct.

“How could I do anything otherwise,” he wailed, “with the very knife at my throat?”

“You will have the very rope round your throat if we all see Egypt again,” growled Cochrane, savagely. “In the meantime—”

“That’s all right, Colonel,” said Belmont. “But for our own sakes we ought to know what the chief has said.”

“For my part I’ll have nothing to do with the blackguard.”

“I think that that is going too far. We are bound to hear what he has to say.”

Cochrane shrugged his shoulders. Privations had made him irritable, and he had to bite his lip to keep down a bitter answer. He walked slowly away, with his straight-legged military stride.

“What did he say then?” asked Belmont, looking at the dragoman with an eye which was as stern as the Colonel’s.

“He seems to be in a somewhat better manner than before. He said that if he had more water you should have it, but that he is himself short in supply. He said that tomorrow we shall come to the wells of Selimah, and everybody shall have plenty — and the camels too.”

“Did he say how long we stopped here?”

“Very little rest, he said, and then forwards! Oh, Mr. Belmont — —”

“Hold your tongue!” snapped the Irishman, and began once more to count times and distances. If it all worked out as he expected, if his wife had insisted upon the indolent reis giving an instant alarm at Haifa, then the pursuers should be already upon their track. The Camel Corps or the Egyptian Horse would travel by moonlight better and faster than in the daytime. He knew that it was the custom at Haifa to keep at least a squadron of them all ready to start at any instant. He had dined at the mess, and the officers had told him how quickly they could take the field. They had shown him the water-tanks and the food beside each beast, and he had admired the completeness of the arrangements, with little thought as to what it might mean to him in the future. It would be at least an hour before they would all get started again from their present halting-place. That would be a clear hour gained. Perhaps by next morning ——

And then, suddenly, his thoughts were terribly interrupted. The Colonel, raving like a madman, appeared upon the crest of the nearest slope, with an Arab hanging on to each of his wrists. His face was purple with rage and excitement, and he tugged and bent and writhed in his furious efforts to get free. "You cursed murderers!" he shrieked, and then, seeing the others in front of him, "Belmont," he cried, "they've killed Cecil Brown."

What had happened was this. In his conflict with his own ill-humour, Cochrane had strolled over this nearest crest, and had found a group of camels in the hollow beyond, with a little knot of angry, loud-voiced men beside them. Brown was the centre of the group, pale, heavy-eyed, with his upturned, spiky moustache and listless manner. They had searched his pockets before, but now they were determined to tear off all his clothes in the hope of finding something which he had secreted. A hideous negro, with silver bangles in his ears, grinned and jabbered in the young diplomatist's impassive face. There seemed to the Colonel to be something heroic and almost inhuman in that white calm, and those abstracted eyes. His coat was already open, and the negro's great black paw flew up to his neck and tore his shirt down to the waist. And at the sound of that r-r-rip, and at the abhorrent touch of those coarse fingers, this man about town, this finished product of the nineteenth century, dropped his life-traditions and became a savage facing a savage.

His face flushed, his lips curled back, he chattered, his teeth like an ape, and his eyes — those indolent eyes which had always twinkled so placidly — were gorged and frantic. He threw himself upon the negro, and struck him again and again, feebly but viciously, in his broad, black face. He hit like a girl, round arm, with an open palm. The man winced away for an instant, appalled by this sudden blaze of passion. Then with an impatient, snarling cry he slid a knife from his long loose sleeve and struck upwards under the whirling arm. Brown sat down at the blow and began to cough — to cough as a man coughs who has choked at dinner, furiously, ceaselessly, spasm after spasm. Then the angry red cheeks turned to a mottled pallor, there were liquid sounds in his throat, and, clapping his hand to his mouth, he rolled over on to his side.

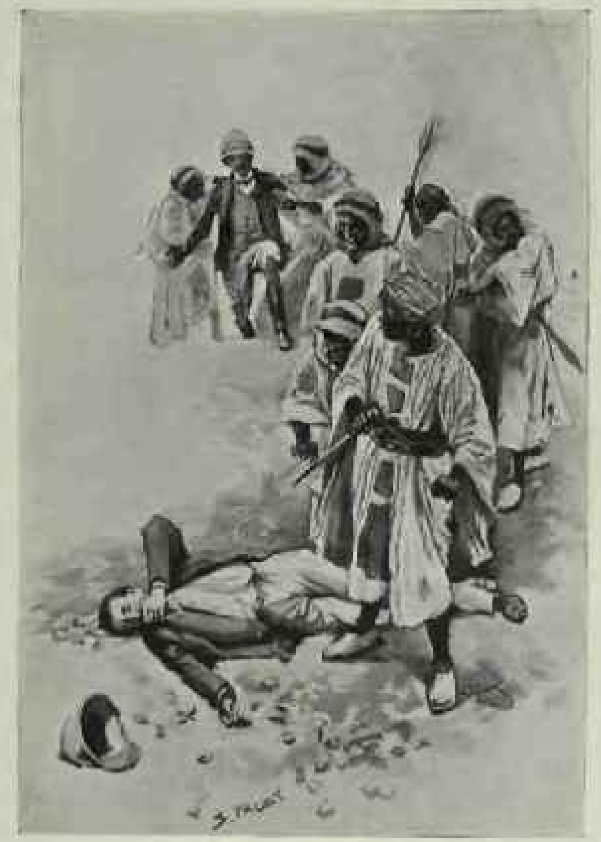

He rolled over on to his side.

The negro, with a brutal grunt of contempt, slid his knife up his sleeve once more, while the Colonel, frantic with impotent anger, was seized by the bystanders, and dragged, raving with fury, back to his forlorn party. His hands were lashed with a camel-halter, and he lay at last, in bitter silence, beside the delirious Nonconformist.

So Headingly was gone, and Cecil Brown was gone, and their haggard eyes were turned from one pale face to another, to know which they should lose next of that frieze of light-hearted riders who had stood out so clearly against the blue morning sky, when viewed from the deck-chairs of the *Korosko*. Two gone out of ten, and a third out of his mind. The pleasure trip was drawing to its climax.

Fardet, the Frenchman, was sitting alone with his chin resting upon his hands, and his elbows upon his knees, staring miserably out over the desert, when Belmont saw him start suddenly and prick up his head like a dog who hears a strange step. Then, with clenched fingers, he bent his face forward and stared fixedly towards the black eastern hills through which they had passed. Belmont followed his gaze, and, yes — yes — there was something moving there! He saw the twinkle of metal, and the sudden gleam and flutter of some white garment.

A Dervish vedette upon the flank turned his camel twice round as a danger signal, and discharged his rifle in the air. The echo of the crack had hardly died away before they were all in their saddles, Arabs and negroes. Another instant, and the camels were on their feet and moving slowly towards the point of alarm. Several armed men surrounded the prisoners, slipping cartridges into their Remingtons as a hint to them to remain still.

“By Heaven, they are men on camels!” cried Cochrane, his troubles all forgotten as he strained his eyes to catch sight of these new-comers. “I do believe that it is our own people.” In the confusion he had tugged his hands free from the halter which bound them.

“They’ve been smarter than I gave them credit for,” said Belmont, his eyes shining from under his thick brows. “They are here a long two hours before we could have reasonably expected them. Hurrah, Monsieur Fardet, *ça va bien, n’est ce pas?*”

“Hurrah, hurrah! *merveilleusement bien! Vivent les Anglais! Vivent les Anglais!*” yelled the excited Frenchman, as the head of a column of camelry began to wind out from among the rocks.

“See here, Belmont,” cried the Colonel. “These fellows will want to shoot us if they see it is all up. I know their ways, and we must be ready for it. Will you be ready to jump on the fellow with the blind eye, and I’ll take the big nigger, if I can get my arms around him. Stephens, you must do what you can. You, Fardet, *comprenez vous? Il est nécessaire* to plug these Johnnies before they can hurt us. You, dragoman, tell those two Soudanese soldiers that they must be ready — but, but — —” his words died into a murmur and he swallowed once or twice. “These are Arabs,” said he, and it sounded like another voice.

Of all the bitter day, it was the very bitterest moment. Happy Mr. Stuart lay upon the pebbles with his back against the ribs of his camel, and chuckled consumedly at some joke which those busy little cell-workers had come across in their repairs.

His fat face was wreathed and creased with merriment. But the others, how sick, how heart-sick, were they all! The women cried. The men turned away in that silence which is beyond tears. Monsieur Fardet fell upon his face, and shook with dry sobbings.

The Arabs were firing their rifles as a welcome to their friends, and the others as they trotted their camels across the open returned the salutes and waved their rifles and lances in the air. They were a smaller band than the first one, — not more than thirty, — but dressed in the same red head-gear and patched jibbehs. One of them carried a small white banner with a scarlet text scrawled across it. But there was something there which drew the eyes and the thoughts of the tourists away from everything else. The same fear gripped at each of their hearts, and the same impulse kept each of them silent. They stared at a swaying white figure half seen amidst the ranks of the desert warriors.

“What’s that they have in the middle of them?” cried Stephens at last. “Look, Miss Adams! Surely it is a woman!”

There was something there upon a camel, but it was difficult to catch a glimpse of it. And then suddenly, as the two bodies met, the riders opened out, and they saw it plainly. “It’s a white woman!” “The steamer has been taken!” Belmont gave a cry that sounded high above everything.

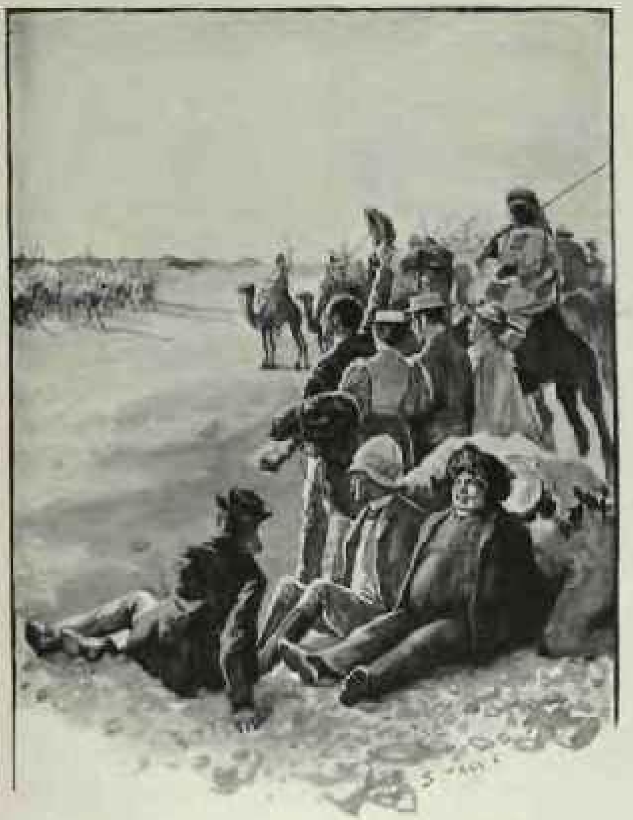

“Norah, darling,” he shouted, “keep your heart up!”

“Norah, darling,” he shouted, “keep your heart up! I’m here, and it is all well!”

CHAPTER VI

So the *Korosko* had been taken, and the chances of rescue upon which they had reckoned — all those elaborate calculations of hours and distances — were as unsubstantial as the mirage which shimmered upon the horizon. There would be no alarm at Haifa until it was found that the steamer did not return in the evening. Even now, when the Nile was only a thin green band upon the farthest horizon, the pursuit had probably not begun. In a hundred miles or even less they would be in the Dervish country. How small, then, was the chance that the Egyptian forces could overtake them. They all sank into a silent, sulky despair, with the exception of Belmont, who was held back by the guards as he strove to go to his wife's assistance.

The two bodies of camel-men had united, and the Arabs, in their grave, dignified fashion, were exchanging salutations and experiences, while the negroes grinned, chattered, and shouted, with the careless good-humour which even the Koran has not been able to alter. The leader of the new-comers was a greybeard, a worn, ascetic, high-nosed old man, abrupt and fierce in his manner, and soldierly in his bearing. The dragoman groaned when he saw him, and flapped his hands miserably with the air of a man who sees trouble accumulating upon trouble.

"It is the Emir Abderrahman," said he. "I fear now that we shall never come to Khartoum alive."

The name meant nothing to the others, but Colonel Cochrane had heard of him as a monster of cruelty and fanaticism, a red-hot Moslem of the old fighting, preaching dispensation, who never hesitated to carry the fierce doctrines of the Koran to their final conclusions. He and the Emir Wad Ibrahim conferred gravely together, their camels side by side, and their red turbans inclined inwards, so that the black beard mingled with the white one. Then they both turned and stared long and fixedly at the poor, head-hanging huddle of prisoners. The younger man pointed and explained, while his senior listened with a sternly impassive face.

"Who's that nice-looking old gentleman in the white beard?" asked Miss Adams, who had been the first to rally from the bitter disappointment.

"That is their leader now," Cochrane answered.

"You don't say that he takes command over that other one?"

“Yes, lady,” said the dragoman; “he is now the head of all.”

“Well, that’s good for us. He puts me in mind of Elder Mathews, who was at the Presbyterian Church in minister Scott’s time. Anyhow, I had rather be in his power than in the hands of that black-haired one with the flint eyes. Sadie, dear, you feel better now its cooler, don’t you?”

“Yes, Auntie; don’t you fret about me. How are you yourself?”

“Well, I’m stronger in faith than I was.

“They haven’t hurt you, Norah, have they?”

“I set you a poor example, Sadie, for I was clean crazed at first at the suddenness of it all, and at thinking of what your mother, who trusted you to me, would think about it. My land, there’ll be some headlines in the *Boston Herald* over this! I guess somebody will have to suffer for it.”

“Poor Mr. Stuart!” cried Sadie, as the monotonous, droning voice of the delirious man came again to their ears. “Come, Auntie, and see if we cannot do something to relieve him.”

“I’m uneasy about Mrs. Shlesinger and the child,” said Colonel Cochrane. “I can see your wife, Belmont, but I can see no one else.”

“They are bringing her over,” cried he. “Thank God! We shall hear all about it. They haven’t hurt you, Norah, have they?” He ran forward to grasp and kiss the hand which his wife held down to him as he helped her from the camel.

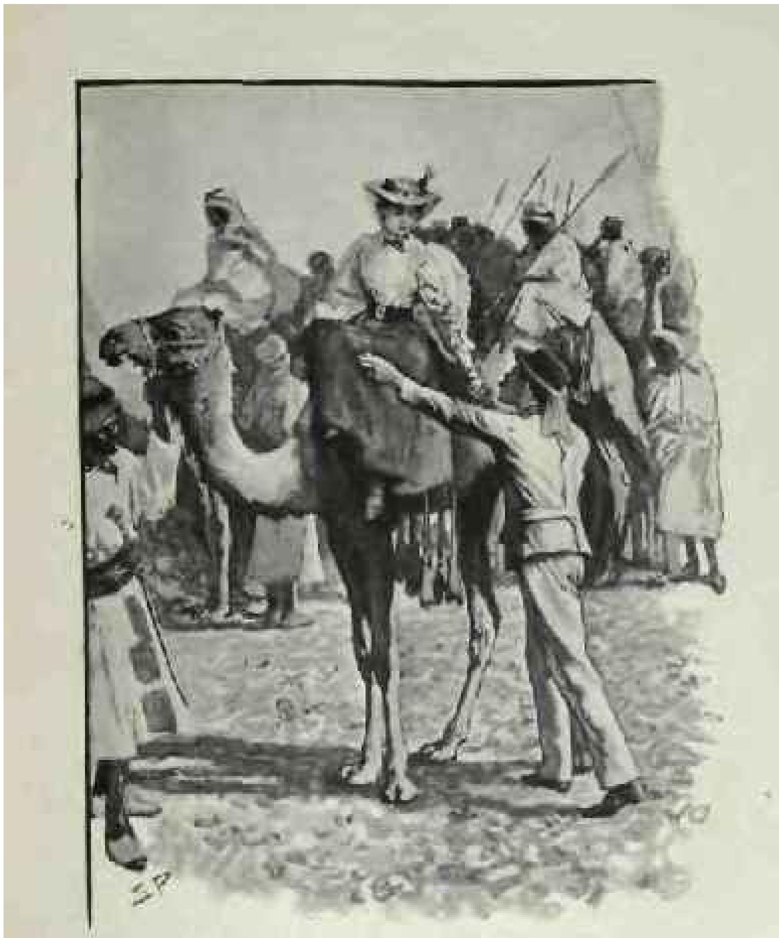

"They haven't hurt you, Norah, have they?"

The kind, grey eyes and calm, sweet face of the Irishwoman brought comfort and hope to the whole party. She was a devout Roman Catholic, and it is a creed which forms an excellent prop in hours of danger. To her, to the Anglican Colonel, to the Nonconformist minister, to the Presbyterian American, even to the two Pagan black riflemen, religion in its various forms was fulfilling the same beneficent office, — whispering always that the worst which the world can do is a small thing, and that, however harsh the ways of Providence may seem, it is, on the whole, the wisest and best thing for us that we should go cheerfully whither the Great Hand guides us. They had not a dogma in common, these fellows in misfortune, but they held the intimate, deep-lying spirit, the calm, essential fatalism which is the world-old framework of religion, with fresh crops of dogmas growing like ephemeral lichens upon its granite surface.

“You poor things,” she said. “I can see that you have had a much worse time than I have. No, really, John, dear, I am quite well, — not even very thirsty, for our party filled their waterskins at the Nile, and they let me have as much as I wanted. But I don’t see Mr. Headingly and Mr. Brown. And poor Mr. Stuart, — what a state he has been reduced to!”

“Headingly and Brown are out of their troubles,” her husband answered. “You don’t know how often I have thanked God to-day, Norah, that you were not with us. And here you are, after all.”

“Where should I be but by my husband’s side? I had much, *much* rather be here than safe at Haifa.”

“Has any news gone to the town?” asked the Colonel.

“One boat escaped. Mrs. Shlesinger and her child and maid were in it. I was downstairs in my cabin when the Arabs rushed on to the vessel. Those on deck had time to escape, for the boat was alongside. I don’t know whether any of them were hit. The Arabs fired at them for some time.”

“Did they?” cried Belmont, exultantly, his responsive Irish nature catching the sunshine in an instant. “Then, be Jove, we’ll do them yet, for the garrison must have heard the firing. What d’ye think, Cochrane? They must be full cry upon our scent this four hours. Any minute we might see the white puggaree of a British officer coming over that rise.”

But disappointment had left the Colonel cold and sceptical.

“They need not come at all unless they come strong,” said he. “These fellows are picked men with good leaders, and on their own ground they will take a lot of beating.” Suddenly he paused and looked at the Arabs. “By George!” said he, “that’s a sight worth seeing!”

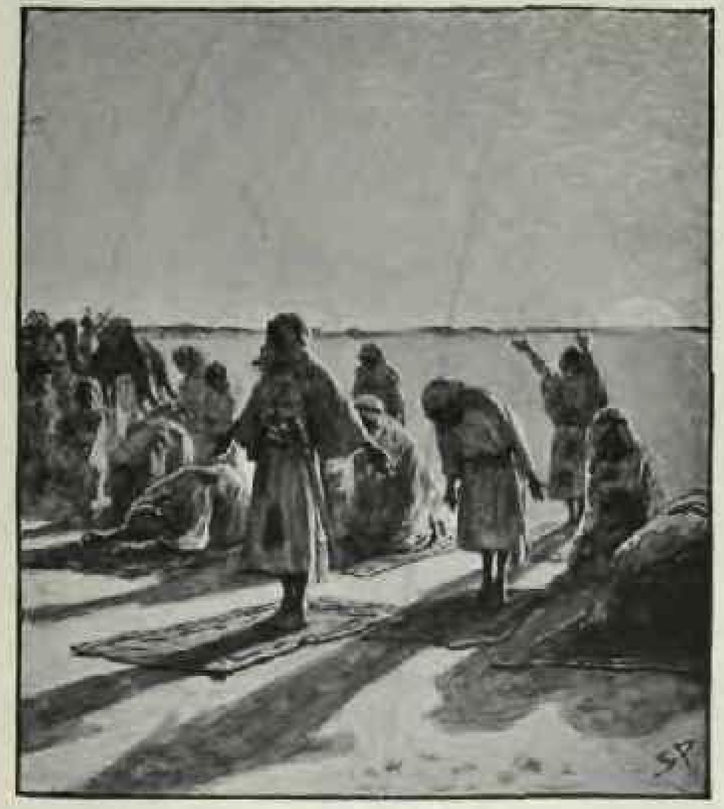

It was the hour of Arab prayer.

The great red sun was down with half its disc slipped behind the violet bank upon the horizon. It was the hour of Arab prayer. An older and more learned civilisation would have turned to that magnificent thing upon the skyline and adored *that*. But these wild children of the desert were nobler in essentials than the polished Persian. To them the ideal was higher than the material, and it was with their backs to the sun and their faces to the central shrine of their religion that they prayed. And how they prayed, these fanatical Moslems! Wrapt, absorbed, with yearning eyes and shining faces, rising, stooping, grovelling with their foreheads upon their praying carpets. Who could doubt, as he watched their strenuous, heart-whole devotion, that here was a great living power in the world, reactionary but tremendous, countless millions all thinking as one from Cape Juby to the confines of China? Let a common wave pass over them, let a great soldier or organiser arise among them to use the grand material at his hand, and who shall say that this may not be the besom with which Providence may sweep the rotten, decadent, impossible, half-hearted south of Europe, as it did a thousand years ago, until it makes room for a sounder stock?

And now as they rose to their feet the bugle rang out, and the prisoners understood that, having travelled all day, they were fated to travel all night also. Belmont groaned, for he had reckoned upon the pursuers catching them up before they left this camp. But the others had already got into the way of accepting the inevitable. A flat Arab loaf had been given to each of them — what effort of the *chef* of the post-boat had ever tasted like that dry brown bread? — and then, luxury of luxuries, they had a second ration of a glass of water, for the fresh-filled bags of the new-comers had provided an ample supply. If the body would but follow the lead of the soul as readily as the soul does that of the body, what a heaven the earth might be! Now, with their base material wants satisfied for the instant, their spirits began to sing within them, and they mounted their camels with some sense of the romance of their position. Mr. Stuart remained babbling upon the ground, and the Arabs made no effort to lift him into his saddle. His large, white, upturned face glimmered through the gathering darkness.

“Hi, dragoman, tell them that they are forgetting Mr. Stuart,” cried the Colonel.

“No use, sir,” said Mansoor. “They say that he is too fat, and that they will not take him any farther. He will die, they say, and why should they trouble about him?”

“Not take him!” cried Cochrane. “Why, the man will perish of hunger and thirst. Where’s the Emir? Hi!” he shouted, as the black-bearded Arab passed, with a tone like that in which he used to summon a dilatory donkey-boy. The chief did not deign to answer him, but said something to one of the guards, who dashed the butt of his Remington into the Colonel’s ribs.

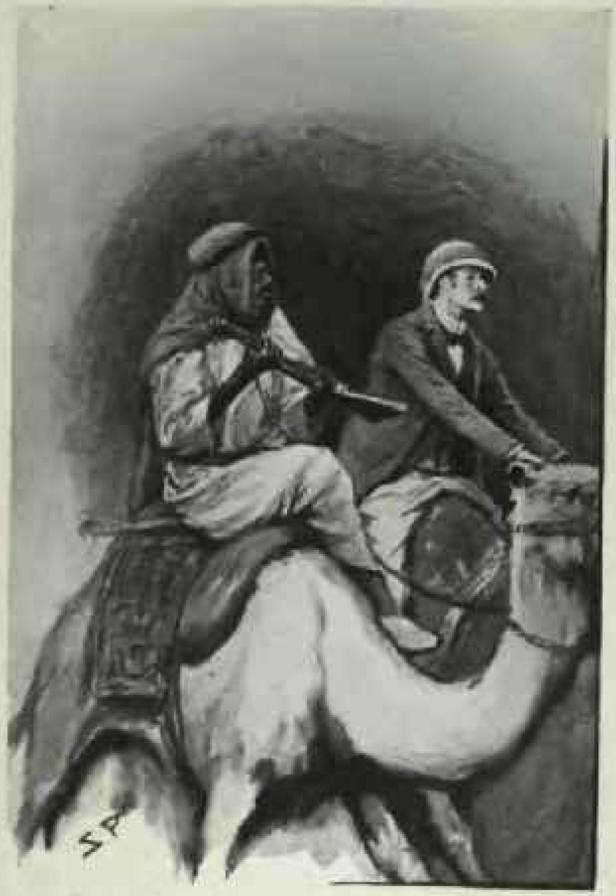

The old soldier fell forward gasping.

The old soldier fell forward gasping, and was carried on half senseless, clutching at the pommel of his saddle. The women began to cry, and the men with muttered curses and clenched hands writhed in that hell of impotent passion, where brutal injustice and ill-usage have to go without check or even remonstrance. Belmont gripped at his hip-pocket for his little revolver, and then remembered that he had already given it to Miss Adams. If his hot hand had clutched it, it would have meant the death of the Emir and the massacre of the party.

And now as they rode onwards they saw one of the most singular of the phenomena of the Egyptian desert in front of them, though the ill treatment of their companion had left them in no humour for appreciating its beauty. When the sun had sunk, the horizon had remained of a slaty-violet hue. But now this began to lighten and to brighten until a curious false dawn developed, and it seemed as if a vacillating sun was coming back along the path which it had just abandoned. A rosy pink hung over the west, with beautifully delicate sea-green tints along the upper edge of it. Slowly these faded into slate again, and the night had come. It was but twenty-four hours since they had sat in their canvas chairs discussing politics by starlight on the saloon deck of the *Korosko*; only twelve since they had breakfasted there and had started spruce and fresh upon their last pleasure trip. What a world of fresh impressions had come upon them since then! How rudely they had been jostled out of their take-it-for-granted complacency! The same shimmering silver stars as they had looked upon last night, the same thin crescent of moon — but they, what a chasm lay between that old pampered life and this!

The long line of camels moved as noiselessly as ghosts across the desert. Before and behind were the silent swaying white figures of the Arabs. Not a sound anywhere, not the very faintest sound, until far away behind them they heard a human voice singing in a strong, droning, unmusical fashion. It had the strangest effect, this far-away voice, in that huge inarticulate wilderness. And then there came a well-known rhythm into that distant chant, and they could almost hear the words: We nightly pitch our moving tent A day's march nearer home.

Was Mr. Stuart in his right mind again, or was it some coincidence of his delirium, that he should have chosen this for his song? With moist eyes his friends looked back through the darkness, for well they knew that home was very near to this wanderer. Gradually the voice died away into a hum, and was absorbed once more into the masterful silence of the desert.

"My dear old chap, I hope you're not hurt?" said Belmont, laying his hand upon Cochrane's knee.

The Colonel had straightened himself, though he still gasped a little in his breathing.

"I am all right again, now. Would you kindly show me which was the man who struck me?"

"It was the fellow in front there — with his camel beside Fardet's."

"The young fellow with the moustache — I can't see him very well in this light, but I think I could pick him out again. Thank you, Belmont!"

"But I thought some of your ribs were gone."

"No; it only knocked the wind out of me."

"You must be made of iron. It was a frightful blow. How could you rally from it so quickly?"

The Colonel cleared his throat and hummed and stammered.

"The fact is, my dear Belmont — I'm sure you would not let it go further — above all not to the ladies; but I am rather older than I used to be, and rather than lose the military carriage which has always been dear to me, I — —"

"Stays, be Jove!" cried the astonished Irishman.

"Well, some slight artificial support," said the Colonel, stiffly, and switched the conversation off to the chances of the morrow.

It still comes back in their dreams to those who are left, that long night's march in the desert. It was like a dream itself, the silence of it as they were borne forward upon those soft, shuffling sponge feet, and the flitting, flickering figures which oscillated upon every side of them. The whole universe seemed to be hung as a monstrous time-dial in front of them. A star would glimmer like a lantern on the very level of their path. They looked again, and it was a hand's-breadth up, and another was shining beneath it. Hour after hour the broad stream flowed sedately across the deep blue background, worlds and systems drifting majestically overhead, and pouring over the dark horizon. In their vastness and their beauty there was a vague consolation to the prisoners for their own fate, and their own individuality seemed trivial and unimportant amid the play of such tremendous forces. Slowly the grand procession swept across the heaven, first climbing, then hanging long with little apparent motion, and then sinking grandly downwards, until away in the east the first cold grey glimmer appeared, and their own haggard faces shocked each other's sight.

The day had tortured them with its heat, and now the night had brought the even more intolerable discomfort of cold. The Arabs swathed themselves in their gowns and wrapped up their heads. The prisoners beat their hands together and shivered miserably. Miss Adams felt it most, for she was very thin, with the impaired circulation of age. Stephens slipped off his Norfolk jacket and threw it over her shoulders. He rode beside Sadie, and whistled and chatted to make her believe that her aunt was really relieving him by carrying his jacket for him, but the attempt was too boisterous not to be obvious. And yet it was so far true that he probably felt the cold less than any of the party, for the old, old fire was burning in his heart, and a curious joy was inextricably mixed with all his misfortunes, so that he would have found it hard to say if this adventure had been the greatest evil or the greatest blessing of his lifetime. Aboard the boat, Sadie's youth, her beauty, her intelligence and humour, all made him realise that she could at the best only be expected to charitably endure him. But now he felt that he was really of some use to her, that every hour she was learning to turn to him as one turns to one's natural protector; and above all, he had begun to find himself — to understand that there really was a strong, reliable man behind all the tricks of custom which had built up an artificial nature, which had imposed even upon himself. A little glow of self-respect began to warm his blood. He had missed his youth when he was young, and now in his middle age it was coming up like some beautiful belated flower.

"I do believe that you are all the time enjoying it, Mr. Stephens," said Sadie, with some bitterness.

"I would not go so far as to say that," he answered. "But I am quite certain that I would not leave you here."

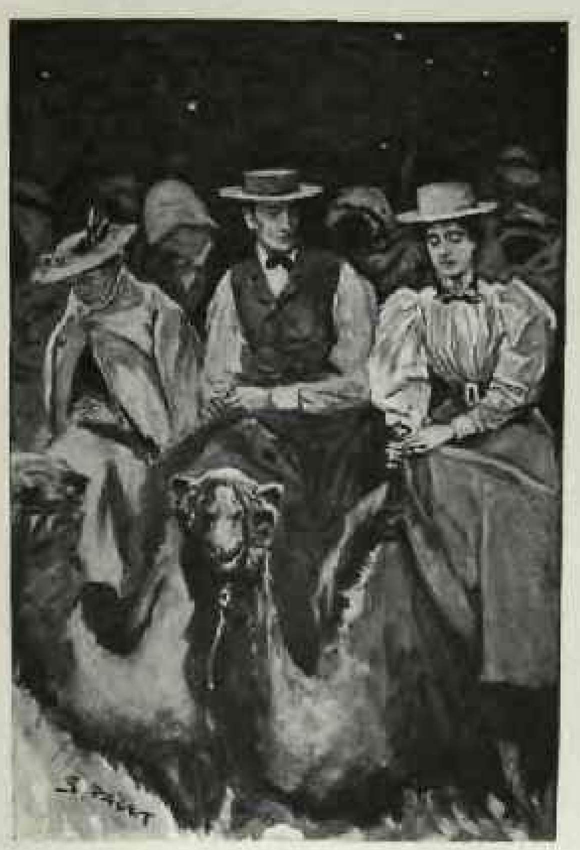

"I am quite certain that I would not leave you."

It was the nearest approach to tenderness which he had ever put into a speech, and the girl looked at him in surprise.

“I think I’ve been a very wicked girl all my life,” she said, after a pause. “Because I have had a good time myself, I never thought of those who were unhappy. This has struck me serious. If ever I get back I shall be a better woman — a more earnest woman — in the future.”

“And I a better man. I suppose it is just for that that trouble comes to us. Look how it has brought out the virtues of all our friends. Take poor Mr. Stuart, for example. Should we ever have known what a noble, constant man he was? And see Belmont and his wife, in front of us, there, going fearlessly forward, hand in hand, thinking only of each other. And Cochrane, who always seemed on board the boat to be a rather stand-offish, narrow sort of man! Look at his courage, and his unselfish indignation when any one is ill used. Fardet, too, is as brave as a lion. I think misfortune has done us all good.”

Sadie sighed.

“Yes, if it would end right here one might say so. But if it goes on and on for a few weeks or months of misery, and then ends in death, I don’t know where we reap the benefit of those improvements of character which it brings. Suppose you escape, what will you do’?”

The lawyer hesitated, but his professional instincts were still strong.

“I will consider whether an action lies, and against whom. It should be with the organisers of the expedition for taking us to the Abousir Rock — or else with the Egyptian Government for not protecting their frontiers. It will be a nice legal question. And what will you do, Sadie?”

It was the first time that he had ever dropped the formal Miss, but the girl was too much in earnest to notice it.

“I will be more tender to others,” she said. “I will try to make some one else happy in memory of the miseries which I have endured.”

“You have done nothing all your life but made others happy. You cannot help doing it,” said he. The darkness made it more easy for him to break through the reserve which was habitual with him. “You need this rough schooling far less than any of us. How could your character be changed for the better?”

“You show how little you know me. I have been very selfish and thoughtless.”

“At least you had no need for all these strong emotions. You were sufficiently alive without them. Now it has been different with me.”

“Why did you need emotions, Mr. Stephens’?”

“Because anything is better than stagnation. Pain is better than stagnation. I have only just begun to live. Hitherto I have been a machine upon the earth’s surface. I was a one-ideaed man, and a one-ideaed man is only one remove from a dead man. That is what I have only just begun to realise. For all these years I have never been stirred, never felt a real throb of human emotion pass through me. I had no time for it. I had observed it in others, and I had vaguely wondered whether there was some want in me which prevented my sharing the experience of my fellow-mortals. But now these last few days have taught me how keenly I can live — that I can have warm hopes and deadly fears — that I can hate and that I can — well, that I can have every strong feeling which the soul can experience. I have come to life. I may be on the brink of the grave, but at least I can say now that I have lived.”

“And why did you lead this soul-killing life in England?”

“I was ambitious — I wanted to get on. And then there were my mother and my sisters to be thought of. Thank Heaven, here is the morning coming. Your aunt and you will soon cease to feel the cold.”

“And you without your coat?”

“Oh, I have a very good circulation. I can manage very well in my shirt-sleeves.”

And now the long, cold, weary night was over, and the deep blue-black sky had lightened to a wonderful mauve-violet, with the larger stars still glinting brightly out of it. Behind them the grey line had crept higher and higher, deepening into a delicate rose-pink, with the fan-like rays of the invisible sun shooting and quivering across it. Then, suddenly, they felt its warm touch upon their backs, and there were hard black shadows upon the sand in front of them. The Dervishes loosened their cloaks and proceeded to talk cheerily among themselves. The prisoners also began to thaw, and eagerly ate the doora which was served out for their breakfasts. A short halt had been called, and a cup of water handed to each.

“Can I speak to you, Colonel Cochrane?” asked the dragoman.

“No, you can’t,” snapped the Colonel.

“But it is very important — all our safety may come from it.”

The Colonel frowned and pulled at his moustache.

“Well, what is it?” he asked, at last.

“You must trust to me, for it is as much to me as to you to get back to Egypt. My wife and home, and children, are on one part, and a slave for life upon the other. You have no cause to doubt it.”

“Well, go on!”

“You know the black man who spoke with you — the one who had been with Hicks?”

“Yes, what of him?”

“He has been speaking with me during the night. I have had a long talk with him. He said that he could not very well understand you, nor you him, and so he came to me.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that there were eight Egyptian soldiers among the Arabs — six black and two fellaheen. He said that he wished to have your promise that they should all have very good reward if they helped you to escape.”

“Of course they shall.”

“They asked for one hundred Egyptian pounds each.”

“They shall have it.”

“I told him that I would ask you, but that I was sure that you would agree to it.”

“What do they purpose to do?”

“They could promise nothing, but what they thought best was that they should ride their camels not very far from you, so that if any chance should come they would be ready to take advantage.”

“Well, you can go to him and promise two hundred pounds each if they will help us. You do not think we could buy over some Arabs?”

Mansoor shook his head. “Too much danger to try,” said he. “Suppose you try and fail, then that will be the end to all of us. I will go tell what you have said.” He strolled off to where the old negro gunner was grooming his camel and waiting for his reply.

The Emirs had intended to halt for a half-hour at the most, but the baggage-camels which bore the prisoners were so worn out with the long, rapid march, that it was clearly impossible that they should move for some time. They had laid their long necks upon the ground, which is the last symptom of fatigue. The two chiefs shook their heads when they inspected them, and the terrible old man looked with his hard-lined, rock features at the captives. Then he said something to Mansoor, whose face turned a shade more sallow as he listened.

“The Emir Abderrahman says that if you do not become Moslem, it is not worth while delaying the whole caravan in order to carry you upon the baggage-camels. If it were not for you, he says that we could travel twice as fast. He wishes to know therefore, once for ever, if you will accept the Koran.” Then in the same tone, as if he were still translating, he continued: “You had far better consent, for if you do not he will most certainly put you all to death.”

The unhappy prisoners looked at each other in despair. The two Emirs stood gravely watching them.

“For my part,” said Cochrane, “I had as soon die now as be a slave in Khartoum!”

“What do you say, Norah?” asked Belmont.

“If we die together, John, I don’t think I shall be afraid.”

“It is absurd that I should die for that in which I have never had belief,” said Fardet. “And yet it is not possible for the honour of a Frenchman that he should be converted in this fashion.” He drew himself up, with his wounded wrist stuck into the front of his jacket, “*Je suis Chrétien. J’y reste,*” he cried, a gallant falsehood in each sentence.

“What do you say, Mr. Stephens?” asked Mansoor, in a beseeching voice. “If one of you would change, it might place them in a good humour. I implore you that you do what they ask.”

“No, I can’t,” said the lawyer, quietly.

“Well then, you, Miss Sadie? You, Miss Adams? It is only just to say it once, and you will be saved.”

“Oh, Auntie, do you think we might?” whimpered the frightened girl. “Would it be so very wrong if we said it?”

The old lady threw her arms round her.

“No, no, my own dear little Sadie,” she whispered. “You’ll be strong! You would just hate yourself for ever after. Keep your grip of me, dear, and pray if you find your strength is leaving you. Don’t forget that your old aunt Eliza has you all the time by the hand.”

For an instant they were heroic, this line of dishevelled, bedraggled pleasure-seekers. They were all looking Death in the face, and the closer they looked the less they feared him. They were conscious rather of a feeling of curiosity, together with the nervous tingling with which one approaches a dentist’s chair. The dragoman made a motion of his hands and shoulders, as one who has tried and failed. The Emir Abderrahman said something to a negro, who hurried away.

“What does he want a scissors for?” asked the Colonel.

“He is going to hurt the women,” said Mansoor, with the same gesture of impotence.

A cold chill fell upon them all. They stared about them in helpless horror. Death in the abstract was one thing, but these insufferable details were another. Each had been braced to endure any evil in his own person, but their hearts were still soft for each other. The women said nothing, but the men were all buzzing together.

“There’s the pistol, Miss Adams,” said Belmont.

“Give it here! We won’t be tortured! We won’t stand it!”

“Offer them money, Mansoor! Offer them anything!” cried Stephens. “Look. here, I’ll turn Mohammedan if they’ll promise to leave the women alone. After all, it isn’t binding — it’s under compulsion. But I can’t see the women hurt.”

“No, wait a bit, Stephens!” said the Colonel. “We mustn’t lose our heads. I think I see a way out. See here, dragoman! You tell that grey-bearded old devil that we know nothing about his cursed tinpot religion. Put it smooth when you translate it. Tell him that he cannot expect us to adopt it until we know what particular brand of rot it is that he wants us to believe. Tell him that if he will instruct us, we are perfectly willing to listen to his teaching, and you can add that any creed which turns out such beauties as him, and that other bounder with the black beard, must claim the attention of every one.”

With bows and suppliant sweepings of his hands the dragoman explained that the Christians were already full of doubt, and that it needed but a little more light of knowledge to guide them on to the path of Allah. The two Emirs stroked their beards and gazed suspiciously at them. Then Abderrahman spoke in his crisp, stern fashion to the dragoman, and the two strode away together. An instant later the bugle rang out as a signal to mount.

“What he says is this,” Mansoor explained, as he rode in the middle of the prisoners. “We shall reach the wells by mid-day, and there will be a rest. His own Moolah, a very good and learned man, will come to give you an hour of teaching. At the end of that time you will choose one way or the other. When you have chosen, it will be decided whether you are to go to Khartoum or to be put to death. That is his last word.”

“They won’t take ransom?”

“Wad Ibrahim would, but the Emir Abderrahman is a terrible man. I advise you to give in to him.”

“What have you done yourself? You are a Christian, too.”

Mansoor blushed as deeply as his complexion would allow.

“I was yesterday morning. Perhaps I will be to-morrow morning. I serve the Lord as long as what He ask seem reasonable; but this is very otherwise.”

He rode onwards amongst the guards with a freedom which showed that his change of faith had put him upon a very different footing to the other prisoners.

So they were to have a reprieve of a few hours, though they rode in that dark shadow of death which was closing in upon them.

What is there in life that we should cling to it so? It is not the pleasures, for those whose hours are one long pain shrink away screaming when they see merciful Death holding his soothing arms out for them. It is not the associations, for we will change all of them before we walk of our own free wills down that broad road which every son and daughter of man must tread. Is it the fear of losing the I, that dear, intimate I, which we think we know so well, although it is eternally doing things which surprise us? Is it that which makes the deliberate suicide cling madly to the bridge-pier as the river sweeps him by? Or is it that Nature is so afraid that all her weary workmen may suddenly throw down their tools and strike, that she has invented this fashion of keeping them constant to their present work? But there it is, and all these tired, harassed, humiliated folk rejoiced in the few more hours of suffering which were left to them.

CHAPTER VII

There was nothing to show them as they journeyed onwards that they were not on the very spot that they had passed at sunset upon the evening before. The region of fantastic black hills and orange sand which bordered the river had long been left behind, and everywhere now was the same brown, rolling, gravelly plain, the ground-swell with the shining rounded pebbles upon its surface, and the occasional little sprouts of sage-green camel-grass. Behind and before it extended, to where far away in front of them it sloped upwards towards a line of violet hills. The sun was not high enough yet to cause the tropical shimmer, and the wide landscape, brown with its violet edging, stood out with a hard clearness in that dry, pure air. The long caravan straggled along at the slow swing of the baggage-camels. Far out on the flanks rode the vedettes, halting at every rise, and peering backwards with their hands shading their eyes. In the distance their spears and rifles seemed to stick out of them, straight and thin, like needles in knitting.

"How far do you suppose we are from the Nile?" asked Cochrane. He rode with his chin on his shoulder and his eyes straining wistfully to the eastern sky-line.

"A good fifty miles," Belmont answered.

"Not so much as that," said the Colonel. "We could not have been moving more than fourteen or fifteen hours, and a camel seldom goes more than two and a half miles an hour unless he is trotting. That would give about forty miles, but still it is, I fear, rather far for a rescue. I don't know that we are much the better for this postponement. What have we to hope for? We may just as well take our gruel."

"Never say die!" cried the cheery Irishman. "There's plenty of time between this and mid-day. Hamilton and Hedley of the Camel Corps are good boys, and they'll be after us like a streak. They'll have no baggage-camels to hold them back, you can lay your life on that! Little did I think, when I dined with them at mess that last night, and they were telling me all their precautions against a raid, that I should depend upon them for our lives."

"Well, we'll play the game out, but I'm not very hopeful," said Cochrane. "Of course, we must keep the best face we can before the women. I see that

Tippy Tilly is as good as his word, for those five niggers and the two brown Johnnies must be the men he speaks of. They all ride together and keep well up, but I can't see how they are going to help us."

"I've got my pistol back," whispered Belmont, and his square chin and strong mouth set like granite. "If they try any games on the women, I mean to shoot them all three with my own hand, and then we'll die with our minds easy."

"Good man!" said Cochrane, and they rode on in silence. None of them spoke much. A curious, dreamy, irresponsible feeling crept over them. It was as if they had all taken some narcotic drug — the merciful anodyne which Nature uses when a great crisis has fretted the nerves too far. They thought of their friends and of their past lives in the comprehensive way in which one views that which is completed. A subtle sweetness mingled with the sadness of their fate. They were filled with the quiet serenity of despair.

"It's devilish pretty," said the Colonel, looking about him. "I always had an idea that I should like to die in a real, good, yellow London fog. You couldn't change for the worse."

"I should have liked to have died in my sleep," said Sadie. "How beautiful to wake up and find yourself in the other world! There was a piece that Hetty Smith used to say at the college, 'Say not good-night, but in some brighter world wish me good-morning.'"

The Puritan aunt shook her head at the idea. "It's a terrible thing to go unprepared into the presence of your Maker," said she.

"It's the loneliness of death that is terrible," said Mrs. Belmont. "If we and those whom we loved all passed over simultaneously, we should think no more of it than of changing our house."

"If the worst comes to the worst, we won't be lonely," said her husband. "We'll all go together, and we shall find Brown and Headingly and Stuart waiting on the other side."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. He had no belief in survival after death, but he envied the two Catholics the quiet way in which they took things for granted. He chuckled to think of what his friends in the Café Cubat would say if they learned that he had laid down his life for the Christian faith. Sometimes it amused and sometimes it maddened him, and he rode onwards with alternate gusts of laughter and of fury, nursing his wounded wrist all the time like a mother with a sick baby.

Across the brown of the hard, pebbly desert there had been visible for some time a single long, thin, yellow streak, extending north and south as far as they could see. It was a band of sand not more than a few hundred yards across, and rising at the highest to eight or ten feet. But the prisoners were astonished to observe that the Arabs pointed at this with an air of the utmost concern, and they halted when they came to the edge of it like men upon the brink of an unfordable river. It was very light, dusty sand, and every wandering breath of wind sent it dancing into the air like a whirl of midges. The Emir Abderrahman tried to force his camel into it, but the creature, after a step or two, stood still and shivered with terror.

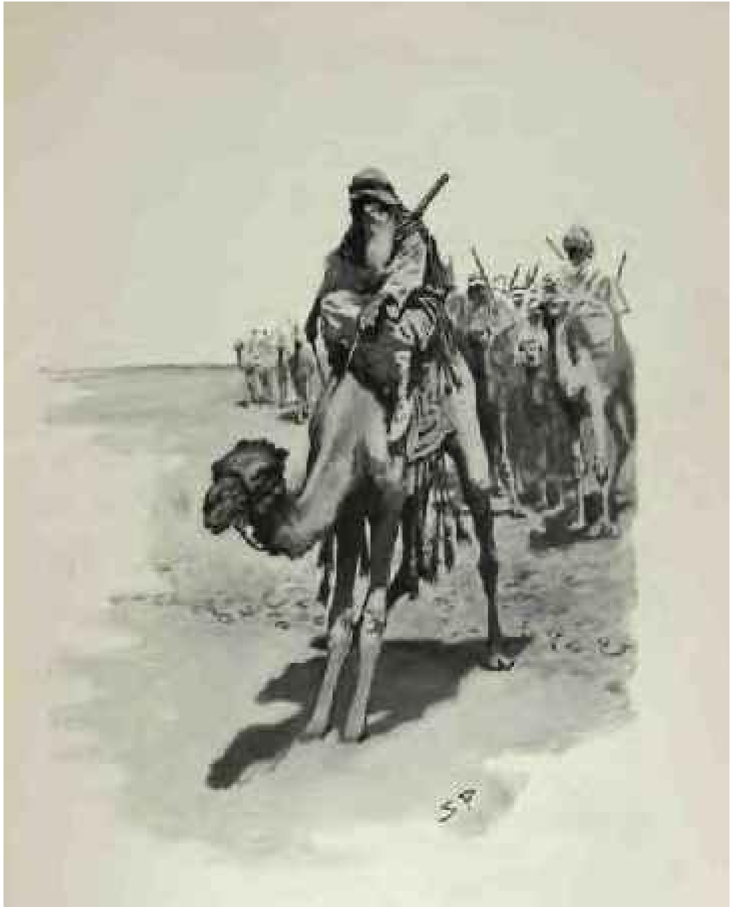

The creature, after a step or two, stood still.

The two chiefs talked for a little, and then the whole caravan trailed off with their heads for the north, and the streak of sand upon their left.

“What is it?” asked Belmont, who found the dragoman riding at his elbow. “Why are we going out of our course?”

“Drift sand,” Mansoor answered. “Every sometimes the wind bring it all in one long place like that. To-morrow, if a wind comes, perhaps there will not be one grain left, but all will be carried up into the air again. An Arab will sometimes have to go fifty or a hundred miles to go round a drift. Suppose he tries to cross, his camel breaks its legs, and he himself is sucked in and swallowed.”

“How long will this be?”

“No one can say.”

“Well, Cochrane, it’s all in our favour. The longer the chase the better chance for the fresh camels!” and for the hundredth time he looked back at the long, hard skyline behind them. There was the great, empty, dun-coloured desert, but where the glint of steel or the twinkle of white helmet for which he yearned?

And soon they cleared the obstacle in their front. It spindled away into nothing, as a streak of dust would which has been blown across an empty room. It was curious to see that when it was so narrow that one could almost jump it, the Arabs would still go for many hundreds of yards rather than risk the crossing. Then, with good, hard country before them once more, the tired beasts were whipped up, and they ambled on with a double-jointed jog-trot, which set the prisoners nodding and bowing in grotesque and ludicrous misery. It was fun at first, and they smiled at each other, but soon the fun had become tragedy as the terrible camel-ache seized them by spine and waist, with its deep, dull throb, which rises gradually to a splitting agony.

“I can’t stand it, Sadie,” cried Miss Adams, suddenly. “I’ve done my best. I’m going to fall.”

“No, no, Auntie, you’ll break your limbs if you do. Hold up, just a little, and maybe they’ll stop.”

“Lean back, and hold your saddle behind,” said the Colonel. “There, you’ll find that will ease the strain.” He took the puggaree from his hat, and, tying the ends together, he slung it over her front pommel. “Put your foot in the loop,” said he. “It will steady you like a stirrup.”

The relief was instant, so Stephens did the same for Sadie. But presently one of the weary doora camels came down with a crash, its limbs starred out as if it had split asunder, and the caravan had to come down to its old sober gait.

“Is this another belt of drift sand?” asked the Colonel, presently.

“No, it’s white,” said Belmont. “Here, Mansoor, what is that in front of us?”

But the dragoman shook his head.

“I don’t know what it is, sir. I never saw the same thing before.”

Right across the desert, from north to south, there was drawn a white line, as straight and clear as if it had been slashed with chalk across a brown table. It was very thin, but it extended without a break from horizon to horizon. Tippy Tilly said something to the dragoman.

“It’s the great caravan route,” said Mansoor.

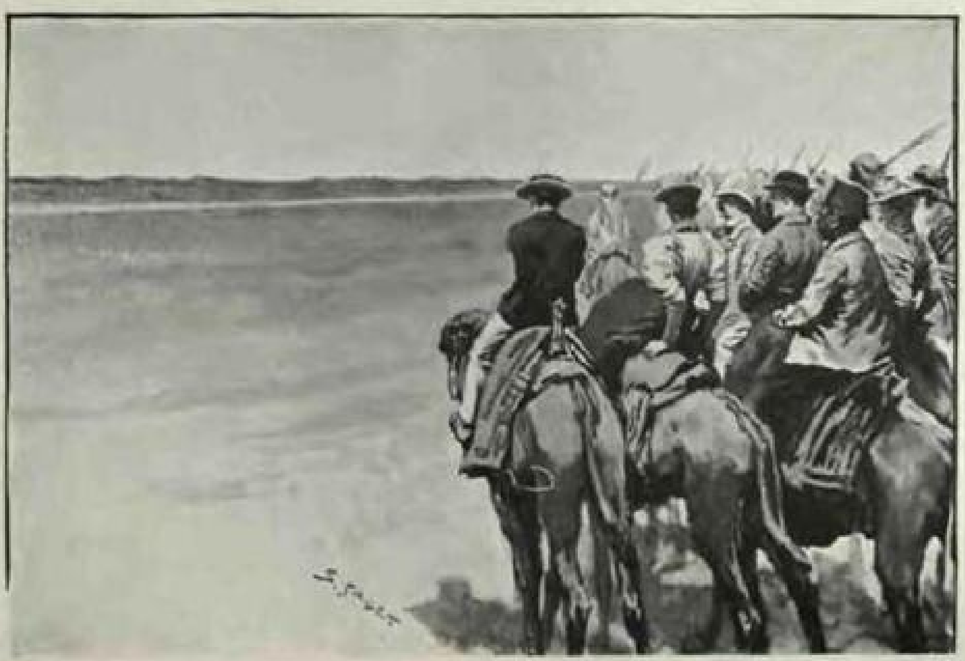

The great caravan route.

“What makes it white, then?”

“The bones.”

It seemed incredible, and yet it was true, for as they drew nearer they saw that it was indeed a beaten track across the desert, hollowed out by long usage, and so covered with bones that they gave the impression of a continuous white ribbon. Long, snouty heads were scattered everywhere, and the lines of ribs were so continuous that it looked in places like the framework of a monstrous serpent. The endless road gleamed in the sun as if it were paved with ivory. For thousands of years this had been the highway over the desert, and during all that time no animal of all those countless caravans had died there without being preserved by the dry, antiseptic air. No wonder, then, that it was hardly possible to walk down it now without treading upon their skeletons.

"This must be the route I spoke of," said Stephens. "I remember marking it upon the map I made for you, Miss Adams. Baedeker says that it has been disused on account of the cessation of all trade which followed the rise of the Dervishes, but that it used to be the main road by which the skins and gums of Darfur found their way down to Lower Egypt."

They looked at it with a listless curiosity, for there was enough to engross them at present in their own fates. The caravan struck to the south along the old desert track, and this Golgotha of a road seemed to be a fitting avenue for that which awaited them at the end of it. Weary camels and weary riders dragged on together towards their miserable goal.

And now, as the critical moment approached which was to decide their fate, Colonel Cochrane, weighed down by his fears lest something terrible should befall the women, put his pride aside to the extent of asking the advice, of the renegade dragoman. The fellow was a villain and a coward, but at least he was an Oriental, and he understood the Arab point of view. His change of religion had brought him into closer contact with the Dervishes, and he had overheard their intimate talk. Cochrane's stiff, aristocratic nature fought hard before he could bring himself to ask advice from such a man, and when he at last did so, it was in the gruffest and most unconciliatory voice.

"You know the rascals, and you have the same way of looking at things," said he. "Our object is to keep things going for another twenty-four hours. After that it does not much matter what befalls us, for we shall be out of the reach of rescue. But how can we stave them off for another day?"

"You know my advice," the dragoman answered; "I have already answered it to you. If you will all become as I have, you will certainly be carried to Khartoum alive. If you do not, you will never leave our next camping-place alive."

The Colonel's well-curved nose took a higher tilt, and an angry flush reddened his thin cheeks. He rode in silence for a little, for his Indian service had left him with a curried-prawn temper, which had had an extra touch of cayenne added to it by his recent experiences. It was some minutes before he could trust himself to reply.

"We'll set that aside," said he, at last.

"Some things are possible and some are not. This is not."

"You need only pretend."

"That's enough," said the Colonel, abruptly.

Mansoor shrugged his shoulders.

"What is the use of asking me, if you become angry when I answer? If you do not wish to do what I say, then try your own attempt. At least you cannot say that I have not done all I could to save you."

"I'm not angry," the Colonel answered, after a pause, in a more conciliatory voice, "but this is climbing down rather farther than we care to go. Now, what I thought is this. You might, if you chose, give this priest, or Moolah, who is coming to us, a hint that we really are softening a bit upon the point. I don't think, considering the hole that we are in, that there can be very much objection to that. Then, when he comes, we might play up and take an interest and ask for more instruction, and in that way hold the matter over for a day or two. Don't you think that would be the best game?"

"You will do as you like," said Mansoor. "I have told you once for ever what I think. If you wish that I speak to the Moolah, I will do so. It is the fat, little man with the grey beard, upon the brown camel in front there. I may tell you that he has a name among them for converting the infidel, and he has a great pride in it, so that he would certainly prefer that you were not injured if he thought that he might bring you into Islam."

"Tell him that our minds are open then," said the Colonel. "I don't suppose the *padre* would have gone so far, but now that he is dead I think we may stretch a point. You go to him, Mansoor, and if you work it well we will agree to forget what is past. By the way, has Tippy Tilly said anything?"

"No, sir. He has kept his men together, but he does not understand yet how he can help you."

"Neither do I. Well, you go to the Moolah, and I'll tell the others what we have agreed."

The prisoners all acquiesced in the Colonel's plan, with the exception of the old New England lady, who absolutely refused even to show any interest in the Mohammedan creed. "I guess I am too old to bow the knee to Baal," she said. The most that she would concede was that she would not openly interfere with anything which her companions might say or do.

"And who is to argue with the priest?" asked Fardet, as they all rode together, talking the matter over. "It is very important that it should be done in a natural way, for if he thought that we were only trying to gain time he would refuse to have any more to say to us.”

“I think Cochrane should do it, as the proposal is his,” said Belmont.

“Pardon me!” cried the Frenchman. “I will not say a word against our friend the Colonel, but it is not possible that a man should be fitted for everything. It will all come to nothing if he attempts it. The priest will see through the Colonel.”

“Will he?” said the Colonel, with dignity.

“Yes, my friend, he will, for like most of your countrymen, you are very wanting in sympathy for the ideas of other people, and it is the great fault which I find with you as a nation.”

“Oh, drop the politics!” cried Belmont, impatiently.

“I do not talk politics. What I say is very practical. How can Colonel Cochrane pretend to this priest that he is really interested in his religion when, in effect, there is no religion in the world to him outside some little church in which he has been born and bred? I will say this for the Colonel, that I do not believe he is at all a hypocrite, and I am sure that he could not act well enough to deceive such a man as this priest.”

The Colonel sat with a very stiff back and the blank face of a man who is not quite sure whether he is being complimented or insulted.

“You can do the talking yourself if you like,” said he at last. “I should be very glad to be relieved of it.”

“I think that I am best fitted for it, since I am equally interested in all creeds. When I ask for information, it is because in verity I desire it, and not because I am playing a part.”

“I certainly think that it would be much better if Monsieur Fardet would undertake it,” said Mrs. Belmont, with decision, and so the matter was arranged.

The sun was now high, and it shone with dazzling brightness upon the bleached bones which lay upon the road. Again the torture of thirst fell upon the little group of survivors, and again, as they rode with withered tongues and crusted lips, a vision of the saloon of the *Korosko* danced like a mirage before their eyes, and they saw the white napery, the wine-cards by the places, the long necks of the bottles, the siphons upon the sideboard. Sadie, who had borne up so well, became suddenly hysterical, and her shrieks of senseless laughter jarred horribly upon their nerves. Her aunt on one side of her and Mr. Stephens on the other did all they could to soothe her, and at last the weary, over-strung girl relapsed into something between a sleep and a faint, hanging limp over her pommel, and only kept from falling by the friends who clustered round her. The baggage-camels were as weary as their riders, and again and again they had to jerk at their nose-ropes to prevent them from lying down. From horizon to horizon stretched that one hugh arch of speckless blue, and up its monstrous concavity crept the inexorable sun, like some splendid but barbarous deity, who claimed a tribute of human suffering as his immemorial right.

Their course still lay along the old trade route, but their progress was very slow, and more than once the two Emirs rode back together and shook their heads as they looked at the weary baggage-camels on which the prisoners were perched. The greatest laggard of all was one which was ridden by a wounded Soudanese soldier. It was limping badly with a strained tendon, and it was only by constant prodding that it could be kept with the others. The Emir Wad Ibraham raised his Remington, as the creature hobbled past, and sent a bullet through its brain. The wounded man flew forwards out of the high saddle, and fell heavily upon the hard track. His companions in misfortune, looking back, saw him stagger to his feet with a dazed face. At the same instant a Baggara slipped down from his camel with a sword in his hand.

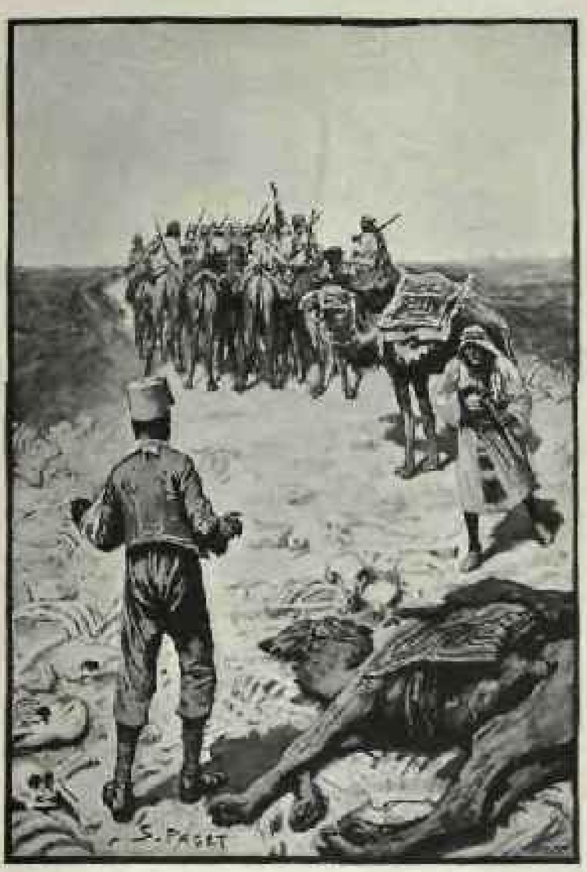

A Baggara slipped down from his camel with a sword in his hand.

“Don’t look! don’t look!” cried Belmont to the ladies, and they all rode on with their faces to the south. They heard no sound, but the Baggara passed them a few minutes afterwards. He was cleaning his sword upon the hairy neck of his camel, and he glanced at them with a quick, malicious gleam of his teeth as he trotted by. But those who are at the lowest pitch of human misery are at least secured against the future. That vicious, threatening smile which might once have thrilled them left them now unmoved — or stirred them at most to vague resentment.

There were many things to interest them in this old trade route, had they been in a condition to take notice of them. Here and there along its course were the crumbling remains of ancient buildings, so old that no date could be assigned to them, but designed in some far-off civilisation to give the travellers shade from the sun or protection from the ever-lawless children of the desert. The mud bricks with which these refuges were constructed showed that the material had been carried over from the distant Nile. Once, upon the top of a little knoll, they saw the shattered plinth of a pillar of red Assouan granite, with the wide-winged symbol of the Egyptian god across it, and the cartouche of the second Rameses beneath. After three thousand years one cannot get away from the ineffaceable footprints of the warrior-king. It is surely the most wonderful survival of history that one should still be able to gaze upon him, high-nosed and masterful, as he lies with his powerful arms crossed upon his chest, majestic even in decay, in the Gizeh Museum. To the captives, the cartouche was a message of hope, as a sign that they were not outside the sphere of Egypt. “They’ve left their card here once, and they may again,” said Belmont, and they all tried to smile.

And now they came upon one of the most satisfying sights on which the human eye can ever rest. Here and there, in the depressions at either side of the road, there had been a thin scurf of green, which meant that water was not very far from the surface. And then, quite suddenly, the track dipped down into a bowl-shaped hollow, with a most dainty group of palm-trees, and a lovely greensward at the bottom of it. The sun gleaming upon that brilliant patch of clear, restful colour, with the dark glow of the bare desert around it, made it shine like the purest emerald in a setting of burnished copper. And then it was not its beauty only, but its promise for the future: water, shade, all that weary travellers could ask for. Even Sadie was revived by the cheery sight, and the spent camels snorted and stepped out more briskly, stretching their long necks and sniffing the air as they went. After the unhomely harshness of the desert, it seemed to all of them that they had never seen anything more beautiful than this. They looked below at the greensward with the dark, starlike shadows of the palm-crowns, and then they looked up at those deep green leaves against the rich blue of the sky, and they forgot their impending death in the beauty of that Nature to whose bosom they were about to return.

The wells in the centre of the grove consisted of seven large and two small saucerlike cavities filled with peat-coloured water enough to form a plentiful supply for any caravan. Camels and men drank it greedily, though it was tainted by the all-pervading natron. The camels were picketed, the Arabs threw their sleeping-mats down in the shade, and the prisoners, after receiving a ration of dates and of doora, were told that they might do what they would during the heat of the day, and that the Moolah would come to them before sunset. The ladies were given the thicker shade of an acacia tree, and the men lay down under the palms. The great green leaves swished slowly above them; they heard the low hum of the Arab talk, and the dull champing of the camels, and then in an instant, by that most mysterious and least understood of miracles, one was in a green Irish valley, and another saw the long straight line of Commonwealth Avenue, and a third was dining at a little round table opposite to the bust of Nelson in the Army and Navy Club, and for him the swishing of the palm branches had been transformed into the long-drawn hum of Pall Mall. So the spirits went their several ways, wandering back along strange, untraced tracks of the memory, while the weary, grimy bodies lay senseless under the palm-trees in the Oasis of the Libyan Desert.

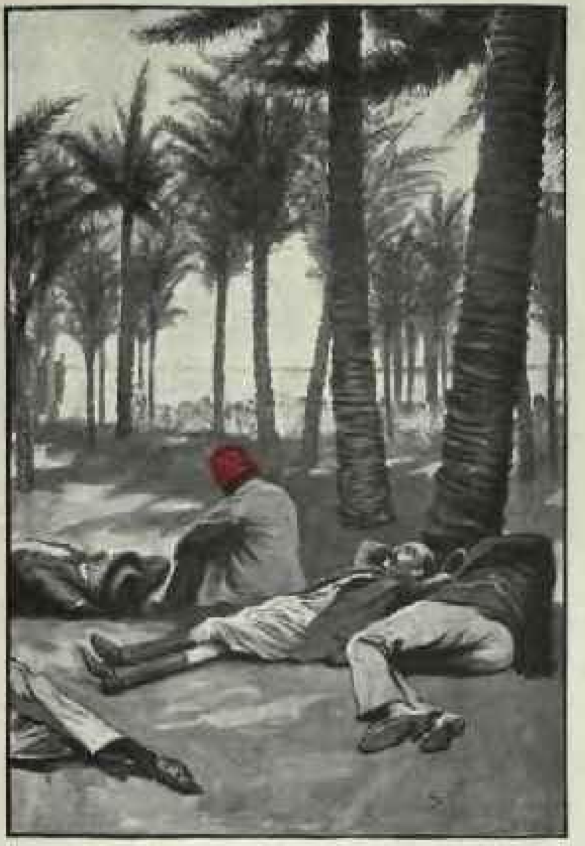

The weary, grimy bodies lay senseless under the palm-trees.

CHAPTER VIII

Colonel Cochrane was awakened from his slumber by some one pulling at his shoulder. As his eyes opened they fell upon the black, anxious face of Tippy Tilly, the old Egyptian gunner. His crooked finger was laid upon his thick, liver-coloured lips, and his dark eyes glanced from left to right with ceaseless vigilance.

"Lie quiet! Do not move!" he whispered, in Arabic. "I will lie here beside you, and they cannot tell me from the others. You can understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, if you will talk slowly."

"Very good. I have no great trust in this black man, Mansoor. I had rather talk direct with the Miralai."

"What have you to say?"

"I have waited long, until they should all be asleep, and now in another hour we shall be called to evening prayer. First of all, here is a pistol, that you may not say that you are without arms."

It was a clumsy, old-fashioned thing, but the Colonel saw the glint of a percussion-cap upon the nipple, and knew that it was loaded. He slipped it into the inner pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

"Thank you," said he; "speak slowly, so that I may understand you."

"There are eight of us who wish to go to Egypt. There are also four men in your party. One of us, Mehemet Ali, has fastened twelve camels together, which are the fastest of all save only those which are ridden by the Emirs. There are guards upon watch, but they are scattered in all directions. The twelve camels are close beside us here, — those twelve behind the acacia-tree. If we can only get mounted and started, I do not think that many can overtake us, and we shall have our rifles for them. The guards are not strong enough to stop so many of us. The waterskins are all filled, and we may see the Nile again by to-morrow night."

The Colonel could not follow it all, "That is excellent," said he. "But what are we to do about the three ladies?"

The black soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"Mefeesh!" said he. "One of them is old, and in any case there are plenty more women if we get back to Egypt. These will not come to any hurt, but they will be placed in the harem of the Khalija."

"What you say is nonsense," said the Colonel, sternly. "We shall take our women with us, or we shall not go at all."

"I think it is rather you who talk the thing without sense," the black man answered, angrily. "How can you ask my companions and me to do that which must end in failure? For years we have waited for such a chance as this, and now that it has come, you wish us to throw it away owing to this foolishness about the women."

He understood enough to set a little spring of hope bubbling in his heart. The last terrible day had left its mark in his livid face and his hair, which was turning rapidly to grey. He might have been the father of the spruce, well-preserved soldier who had paced with straight back and military stride up and down the saloon deck of the *Korosko*.

"What have we promised you if we come back to Egypt?" asked Cochrane.

"Two hundred Egyptian pounds and promotion in the army, — all upon the word of an Englishman."

"Very good. Then you shall have three hundred each if you can make some new plan by which you can take the women with you."

Tippy Tilly scratched his woolly head in his perplexity.

"We might, indeed, upon some excuse, bring three more of the faster camels round to this place. Indeed, there are three very good camels among those which are near the cooking-fire. But how are we to get the women upon them? — and if we had them upon them, we know very well that they would fall off when they began to gallop. I fear that you men will fall off, for it is no easy matter to remain upon a galloping camel; but as to the women, it is impossible. No, we shall leave the women, and if you will not leave the women, then we shall leave all of you and start by ourselves."

"Very good! Go!" said the Colonel, abruptly, and settled down as if to sleep once more. He knew that with Orientals it is the silent man who is most likely to have his way.

The negro turned and crept away for some little distance, where he was met by one of his fellaheen comrades, Mehemet Ali, who had charge of the camels. The two argued for some little time, — for those three hundred golden pieces were not to be lightly resigned. Then the negro crept back to Colonel Cochrane.

“Mehemet Ali has agreed,” said he. “He has gone to put the nose-rope upon three more of the camels. But it is foolishness, and we are all going to our death. Now come with me, and we shall awaken the women and tell them.”

The Colonel shook his companions and whispered to them what was in the wind. Belmont and Fardet were ready for any risk. Stephens, to whom the prospect of a passive death presented little terror, was seized with a convulsion of fear when he thought of any active exertion to avoid it, and shivered in all his long, thin limbs. Then he pulled out his Baedeker and began to write his will upon the fly-leaf, but his hand twitched so that he was hardly legible. By some strange gymnastic of the legal mind, a death, even by violence, if accepted quietly, had a place in the established order of things, while a death which overtook one galloping frantically over a desert was wholly irregular and discomposing. It was not dissolution which he feared, but the humiliation and agony of a fruitless struggle against it.

Colonel Cochrane and Tippy Tilly had crept together under the shadow of the great acacia tree to the spot where the women were lying. Sadie and her aunt lay with their arms round each other, the girl’s head pillowed upon the old woman’s bosom. Mrs. Belmont was awake, and entered into the scheme in an instant.

“But you must leave me,” said Miss Adams, earnestly. “What does it matter at my age, anyhow?”

“No, no, Aunt Eliza; I won’t move without you! Don’t you think it!” cried the girl. “You’ve got to come straight away, or else we both stay right here where we are.”

“Come, come, ma’am, there is no time for arguing,” said the Colonel, roughly. “Our lives all depend upon your making an effort, and we cannot possibly leave you behind.”

“But I will fall off.”

“I’ll tie you on with my puggaree. I wish I had the cummerbund which I lent poor Stuart. Now, Tippy, I think we might make a break for it!”

But the black soldier had been staring with a disconsolate face out over the desert, and he turned upon his heel with an oath.

“There!” said he, sullenly. “You see what comes of all your foolish talking! You have ruined our chances as well as your own!”

Half a dozen mounted camel-men had appeared suddenly over the lip of the bowl-shaped hollow, standing out hard and clear against the evening sky, where the copper basin met its great blue lid. They were travelling fast, and waved their rifles as they came. An instant later the bugle sounded an alarm, and the camp was up with a buzz like an overturned bee-hive. The Colonel ran back to his companions, and the black soldier to his camel. Stephens looked relieved, and Belmont sulky, while Monsieur Fardet raved, with his one uninjured hand in the air.

"Sacred name of a dog!" he cried. "Is there no end to it, then? Are we never to come out of the hands of these accursed Dervishes?"

"Oh, they really are Dervishes, are they?" said the Colonel, in an acid voice. "You seem to be altering your opinions. I thought they were an invention of the British Government."

The poor fellows' tempers were getting frayed and thin. The Colonel's sneer was like a match to a magazine, and in an instant the Frenchman was dancing in front of him with a broken torrent of angry words. His hand was clutching at Cochrane's throat before Belmont and Stephens could pull him off.

"If it were not for your grey hairs — —" he said.

"Damn your impudence!" cried the Colonel.

"If we have to die, let us die like gentlemen, and not like so many corner-boys," said Belmont, with dignity.

"I only said I was glad to see that Monsieur Fardet had learned something from his adventures," the Colonel sneered.

"Shut up, Cochrane! What do you want to aggravate him for?" cried the Irishman.

"Upon my word, Belmont, you forget yourself! I do not permit people to address me in this fashion."

"You should look after your own manners, then."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, here are the ladies!" cried Stephens, and the angry, overstrained men relapsed into a gloomy silence, pacing up and down, and jerking viciously at their moustaches. It is a very catching thing, ill-temper, for even Stephens began to be angry at their anger, and to scowl at them as they passed him. Here they were at a crisis in their fate, with the shadow of death above them, and yet their minds were all absorbed in some personal grievance so slight that they could hardly put it into words. Misfortune brings the human spirit to a rare height, but the pendulum still swings.

But soon their attention was drawn away to more important matters. A council of war was being held beside the wells, and the two Emirs, stern and composed, were listening to a voluble report from the leader of the patrol. The prisoners noticed that, though the fierce, old man stood like a graven image, the younger Emir passed his hand over his beard once or twice with a nervous gesture, the thin, brown fingers twitching among the long, black hair.

“I believe the Gippies are after us,” said Belmont. “Not very far off either, to judge by the fuss they are making.”

“It looks like it. Something has scared them.”

“Now he’s giving orders. What can it be? Here, Mansoor, what is the matter?”

The dragoman came running up with the light of hope shining upon his brown face.

“I think they have seen something to frighten them. I believe that the soldiers are behind us. They have given the order to fill the waterskins, and be ready for a start when the darkness comes. But I am ordered to gather you together, for the Moolah is coming to convert you all. I have already told him that you are all very much inclined to think the same with him.”

How far Mansoor may have gone with his assurances may never be known, but the Mussulman preacher came walking towards them at this moment with a paternal and contented smile upon his face, as one who has a pleasant and easy task before him. He was a one-eyed man, with a fringe of grizzled beard and a face which was fat, but which looked as if it had once been fatter, for it was marked with many folds and creases. He had a green turban upon his head, which marked him as a Mecca pilgrim. In one hand he carried a small brown carpet, and in the other a parchment copy of the Koran. Laying his carpet upon the ground, he motioned Mansoor to his side, and then gave a circular sweep of his arm to signify that the prisoners should gather round him, and a downward wave which meant that they should be seated. So they grouped themselves round him, sitting on the short green sward under the palm-tree, these seven forlorn representatives of an alien creed, and in the midst of them sat the fat little preacher, his one eye dancing from face to face as he expounded the principles of his newer, cruder, and more earnest faith. They listened attentively and nodded their heads as Mansoor translated the exhortation, and with each sign of their acquiescence the Moolah became more amiable in his manner and more affectionate in his speech.

"For why should you die, my sweet lambs, when all that is asked of you is that you should set aside that which will carry you to everlasting Gehenna, and accept the law of Allah as written by His prophet, which will assuredly bring you unimaginable joys, as is promised in the Book of the Camel? For what says the chosen one?" — and he broke away into one of those dogmatic texts which pass in every creed as an argument. "Besides, is it not clear that God is with us, since from the beginning, when we had but sticks against the rifles of the Turks, victory has always been with us? Have we not taken El Obeid, and taken Khartoum, and destroyed Hicks and slain Gordon, and prevailed against every one who has come against us? How, then, can it be said that the blessing of Allah does not rest upon us?"

The Colonel had been looking about him during the long exhortation of the Moolah, and he had observed that the Dervishes were cleaning their guns, counting their cartridges, and making all the preparations of men who expected that they might soon be called upon to fight. The two Emirs were conferring together with grave faces, and the leader of the patrol pointed, as he spoke to them, in the direction of Egypt. It was evident that there was at least a chance of a rescue if they could only keep things going for a few more hours. The camels were not recovered yet from their long march, and the pursuers, if they were indeed close behind, were almost certain to overtake them.

"For God's sake, Fardet, try and keep him in play," said he. "I believe we have a chance if we can only keep the ball rolling for another hour or so."

But a Frenchman's wounded dignity is not so easily appeased. Monsieur Fardet sat moodily with his back against the palm-tree, and his black brows drawn down. He said nothing, but he still pulled at his thick, strong moustache.

"Come on, Fardet! We depend upon you," said Belmont.

"Let Colonel Cochrane do it," the Frenchman answered, snappishly. "He takes too much upon himself, this Colonel Cochrane."

"There! there!" said Belmont, soothingly, as if he were speaking to a fractious child. "I am quite sure that the Colonel will express his regret at what has happened, and will acknowledge that he was in the wrong — —"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," snapped the Colonel.

“Besides, that is merely a personal quarrel,” Belmont continued, hastily. “It is for the good of the whole party that we wish you to speak with the Moolah, because we all feel that you are the best man for the job.”

But the Frenchman only shrugged his shoulders and relapsed into a deeper gloom.

The Moolah looked from one to the other, and the kindly expression began to fade away from his large, baggy face. His mouth drew down at the corners, and became hard and severe.

“Have these infidels been playing with us, then?” said he to the dragoman. “Why is it that they talk among themselves and have nothing to say to me?”

“He is getting impatient about it,” said Cochrane. “Perhaps I had better do what I can, Belmont, since this damned fellow has left us in the lurch.”

But the ready wit of a woman saved the situation.

“I am sure, Monsieur Fardet,” said Mrs. Belmont, “that you, who are a Frenchman, and therefore a man of gallantry and honour, would not permit your own wounded feelings to interfere with the fulfilment of your promise and your duty towards three helpless ladies.”

Fardet was on his feet in an instant, with his hand over his heart.

“You understand my nature, madame,” he cried. “I am incapable of abandoning a lady. I will do all that I can in this matter. Now, Mansoor, you may tell the holy man that I am ready to discuss through you the high matters of his faith with him.”

And he did it with an ingenuity which amazed his companions. He took the tone of a man who is strongly attracted, and yet has one single remaining shred of doubt to hold him back. Yet as that one shred was torn away by the Moolah, there was always some other stubborn little point which prevented his absolute acceptance of the faith of Islam. And his questions were all so mixed up with personal compliments to the priest and self-congratulations that they should have come under the teachings of so wise a man and so profound a theologian, that the hanging pouches under the Moolah’s eyes quivered with his satisfaction, and he was led happily and hopefully onwards from explanation to explanation, while the blue overhead turned into violet, and the green leaves into black, until the great serene stars shone out once more between the crowns of the palm-trees.

“As to the learning of which you speak, my lamb,” said the Moolah, in answer to some argument of Fardet’s, “I have myself studied at the

University of El Azhar at Cairo, and I know that to which you allude. But the learning of the faithful is not as the learning of the unbeliever, and it is not fitting that we pry too deeply into the ways of Allah. Some stars have tails, O my sweet lamb, and some have not; but what does it profit us to know which are which? For God made them all, and they are very safe in His hands. Therefore, my friend, be not puffed up by the foolish learning of the West, and understand that there is only one wisdom, which consists in following the will of Allah as His chosen prophet has laid it down for us in this book. And now, my lambs, I see that you are ready to come into Islam, and it is time, for that bugle tells that we are about to march, and it was the order of the excellent Emir Abderrahman that your choice should be taken, one way or the other, before ever we left the wells."

"Yet, my father, there are other points upon which I would gladly have instruction," said the Frenchman, "for, indeed, it is a pleasure to hear your clear words after the cloudy accounts which we have had from other teachers."

But the Moolah had risen, and a gleam of suspicion twinkled in his single eye.

"This further instruction may well come afterwards," said he, "since we shall travel together as far as Khartoum, and it will be a joy to me to see you grow in wisdom and in virtue as we go." He walked over to the fire, and stooping down, with the pompous slowness of a stout man, he returned with two half-charred sticks, which he laid crosswise upon the ground. The Dervishes came clustering over to see the new converts admitted into the fold. They stood round in the dim light, tall and fantastic, with the high necks and supercilious heads of the camels swaying above them.

"Now," said the Moolah, and his voice had lost its conciliatory and persuasive tone, "there is no more time for you. Here upon the ground I have made out of two sticks the foolish and superstitious symbol of your former creed. You will trample upon it, as a sign that you renounce it, and you will kiss the Koran, as a sign that you accept it, and what more you need in the way of instruction shall be given to you as you go."

They stood up, the four men and the three women, to meet the crisis of their fate. None of them, except perhaps Miss Adams and Mrs. Belmont, had any deep religious convictions. All of them were children of this world, and some of them disagreed with everything which that symbol upon the earth represented. But there was the European pride, the pride of the white race which swelled within them, and held them to the faith of their countrymen. It was a sinful, human, un-Christian motive, and yet it was about to make them public martyrs to the Christian creed. In the hush and tension of their nerves low sounds grew suddenly loud upon their ears. Those swishing palm-leaves above them were like a swift-flowing river, and far away they could hear the dull, soft thudding of a galloping camel.

“There’s something coming,” whispered Cochrane. “Try and stave them off for five minutes longer, Fardet.”

The Frenchman stepped out with a courteous wave of his uninjured arm, and the air of a man who is prepared to accommodate himself to anything.

“You will tell this holy man that I am quite ready to accept his teaching, and so I am sure are all my friends,” said he to the dragoman. “But there is one thing which I should wish him to do in order to set at rest any possible doubts which may remain in our hearts. Every true religion can be told by the miracles which those who profess it can bring about. Even I, who am but a humble Christian, can, by virtue of my religion, do some of these. But you, since your religion is superior, can no doubt do far more, and so I beg you to give us a sign that we may be able to say that we know that the religion of Islam is the more powerful.”

Behind all his dignity and reserve, the Arab has a good fund of curiosity. The hush among the listening Arabs showed how the words of the Frenchman as translated by Mansoor appealed to them.

“Such things are in the hands of Allah,” said the priest. “It is not for us to disturb His laws. But if you have yourself such powers as you claim, let us be witnesses to them.”

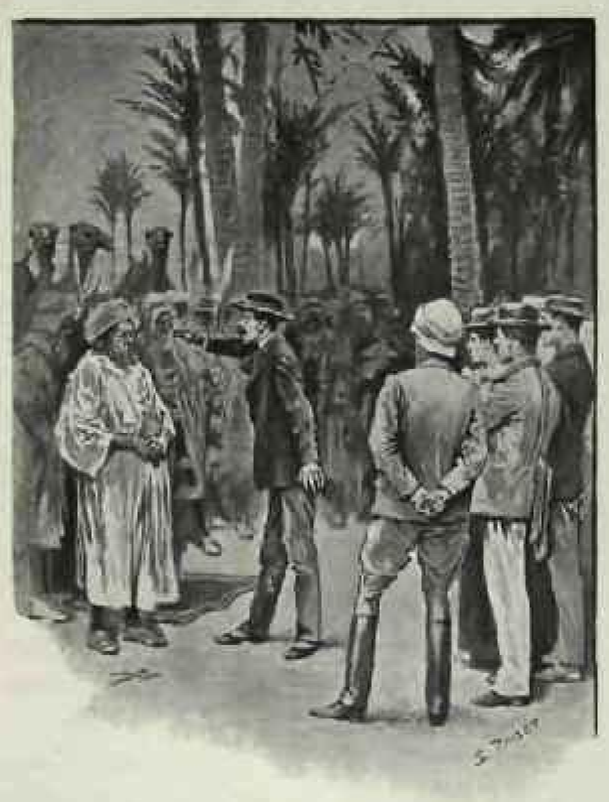

He took a large, shining date out of the Moolah's beard.

The Frenchman stepped forward, and raising his hand he took a large, shining date out of the Moolah’s beard. This he swallowed and immediately produced once more from his left elbow. He had often given his little conjuring entertainment on board the boat, and his fellow-passengers had had some good-natured laughter at his expense, for he was not quite skilful enough to deceive the critical European intelligence. But now it looked as if this piece of obvious palming might be the point upon which all their fates would hang. A deep hum of surprise rose from the ring of Arabs, and deepened as the Frenchman drew another date from the nostril of a camel and tossed it into the air, from which, apparently, it never descended. That gaping sleeve was obvious enough to his companions, but the dim light was all in favour of the performer. So delighted and interested was the audience that they paid little heed to a mounted camel-man who trotted swiftly between the palm trunks. All might have been well had not Fardet, carried away by his own success, tried to repeat his trick once more, with the result that the date fell out of his palm and the deception stood revealed. In vain he tried to pass on at once to another of his little stock. The Moolah said something, and an Arab struck Fardet across the shoulders with the thick shaft of his spear.

"We have had enough child's play," said the angry priest. "Are we men or babes, that you should try to impose upon us in this manner? Here is the cross and the Koran — which shall it be?"

Fardet looked helplessly round at his companions.

"I can do no more; you asked for five minutes. You have had them," said he to Colonel Cochrane.

"And perhaps it is enough," the soldier answered. "Here are the Emirs."

The camel-man, whose approach they had heard from afar, had made for the two Arab chiefs, and had delivered a brief report to them, stabbing with his forefinger in the direction from which he had come. There was a rapid exchange of words between the Emirs, and then they strode forward together to the group around the prisoners. Bigots and barbarians, they were none the less two most majestic men, as they advanced through the twilight of the palm grove. The fierce old greybeard raised his hand and spoke swiftly in short, abrupt sentences, and his savage followers yelped to him like hounds to a huntsman. The fire that smouldered in his arrogant eyes shone back at him from a hundred others. Here were to be read the strength and danger of the Mahdi movement; here in these convulsed faces, in that fringe of waving arms, in these frantic, red-hot souls, who asked nothing better than a bloody death, if their own hands might be bloody when they met it.

"Have the prisoners embraced the true faith?" asked the Emir Abderrahman, looking at them with his cruel eyes.

The Moolah had his reputation to preserve, and it was not for him to confess to a failure.

"They were about to embrace it, when — —"

"Let it rest for a little time, O Moolah." He gave an order, and the Arabs all sprang for their camels. The Emir Wad Ibrahim filed off at once with nearly half the party. The others were mounted and ready, with their rifles unslung.

"What's happened?" asked Belmont.

“Things are looking up,” cried the Colonel. “By George, I think we are going to come through all right. The Gippy Camel Corps are hot on our trail.”

“How do you know?”

“What else could have scared them?”

“O Colonel, do you really think we shall be saved?” sobbed Sadie. The dull routine of misery through which they had passed had deadened all their nerves until they seemed incapable of any acute sensation, but now this sudden return of hope brought agony with it like the recovery of a frostbitten limb. Even the strong, self-contained Belmont was filled with doubts and apprehensions. He had been hopeful when there was no sign of relief, and now the approach of it set him trembling.

“Surely they wouldn’t come very weak,” he cried. “Be Jove, if the Commandant let them come weak, he should be court-martialled.”

“Sure, we’re in God’s hands, anyway,” said his wife, in her soothing, Irish voice. “Kneel down with me, John, dear, if it’s the last time, and pray that, earth or heaven, we may not be divided.”

“Don’t do that! Don’t!” cried the Colonel, anxiously, for he saw that the eye of the Moolah was upon them. But it was too late, for the two Roman Catholics had dropped upon their knees and crossed themselves. A spasm of fury passed over the face of the Mussulman priest at this public testimony to the failure of his missionary efforts. He turned and said something to the Emir.

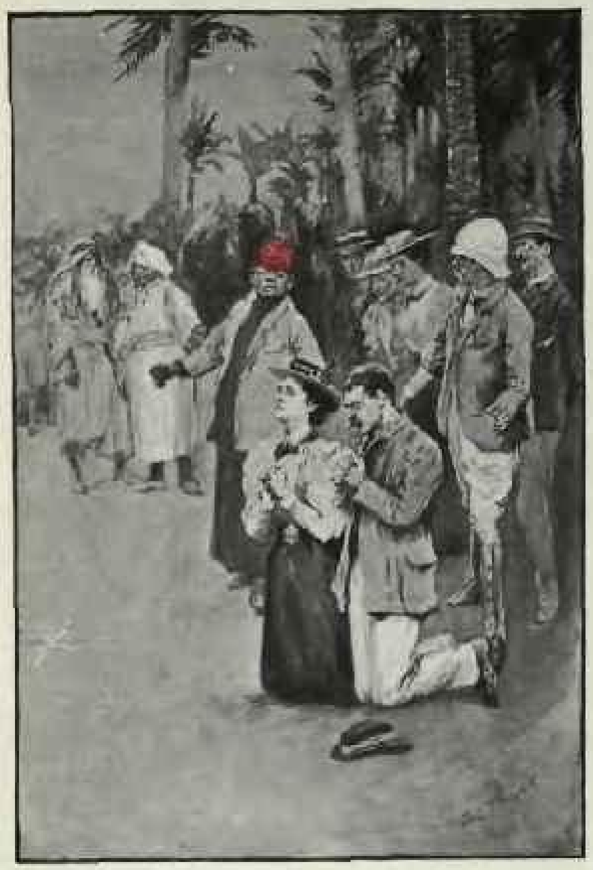

“Stand up!” cried Mansoor. “Stand up!”

“Stand up!” cried Mansoor. “For your life’s sake, stand up! He is asking for leave to put you to death.”

“Let him do what he likes!” said the obstinate Irishman; “we will rise when our prayers are finished, and not before.”

The Emir stood listening to the Moolah, with his baleful gaze upon the two kneeling figures. Then he gave one or two rapid orders, and four camels were brought forward. The baggage-camels which they had hitherto ridden were standing unsaddled where they had been tethered.

“Don’t be a fool, Belmont!” cried the Colonel; “everything depends upon our humouring them. Do get up, Mrs. Belmont! You are only putting their backs up!”

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders as he looked at them. “*Mon Dieu!*” he cried, “were there ever such impracticable people? *Voilà!*” he added, with a shriek, as the two American ladies fell upon their knees beside Mrs. Belmont. “It is like the camels — one down, all down! Was ever anything so absurd?”

But Mr. Stephens had knelt down beside Sadie and buried his haggard face in his long, thin hands. Only the Colonel and Monsieur Fardet remained standing. Cochrane looked at the Frenchman with an interrogative eye.

“After all,” said he, “it is stupid to pray all your life, and not to pray now when we have nothing to hope for except through the goodness of Providence.” He dropped upon his knees with a rigid, military back, but his grizzled, unshaven chin upon his chest. The Frenchman looked at his kneeling companions, and then his eyes travelled onwards to the angry faces of the Emir and Moolah.

“*Sapristi!*” he growled. “Do they suppose that a Frenchman is afraid of them?” and so, with an ostentatious sign of the cross, he took his place upon his knees beside the others. Foul, bedraggled, and wretched, the seven figures knelt and waited humbly for their fate under the black shadow of the palm-tree.

The Emir turned to the Moolah with a mocking smile, and pointed at the results of his ministrations. Then he gave an order, and in an instant the four men were seized.

A couple of deft turns with a camel-halter secured each of their wrists. Fardet screamed out, for the rope had bitten into his open wound. The others took it with the dignity of despair.

“You have ruined everything. I believe you have ruined me also!” cried Mansoor, wringing his hands. “The women are to get upon these three camels.”

“Never!” cried Belmont. “We won’t be separated!” He plunged madly, but he was weak from privation, and two strong men held him by each elbow.

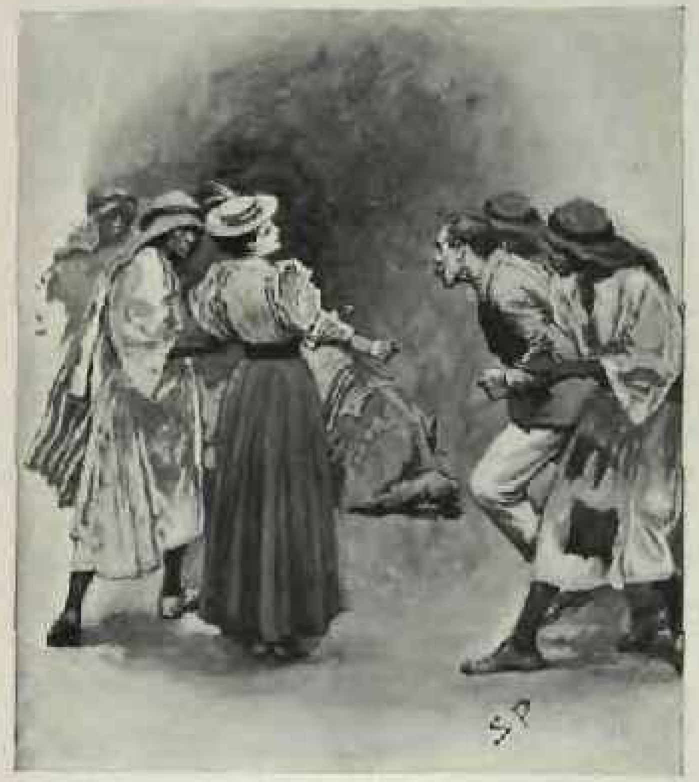

"Don't fret, John," cried his wife.

“Don’t fret, John!” cried his wife, as they hurried her towards the camel. “No harm shall come to me. Don’t struggle, or they’ll hurt you, dear.”

The four men writhed as they saw the women dragged away from them. All their agonies had been nothing to this. Sadie and her aunt appeared to be half senseless from fear. Only Mrs. Belmont kept a brave face. When they were seated the camels rose, and were led under the tree behind where the four men were standing.

“I’ve a pistol in me pocket,” said Belmont, looking up at his wife. “I would give me soul to be able to pass it to you.”

“Keep it, John, and it may be useful yet. I have no fears. Ever since we prayed I have felt as if our guardian angels had their wings round us.” She was like a guardian angel herself as she turned to the shrinking Sadie, and coaxed some little hope back into her despairing heart.

The short, thick Arab, who had been in command of Wad Ibrahim’s rearguard, had joined the Emir and the Moolah; the three consulted together, with occasional oblique glances towards the prisoners. Then the Emir spoke to Mansoor.

“The chief wishes to know which of you four is the richest man?” said the dragoman. His fingers were twitching with nervousness and plucking incessantly at the front of his cover-coat.

“Why does he wish to know?” asked the Colonel.

“I do not know.”

“But it is evident,” cried Monsieur Fardet.

“He wishes to know which is the best worth keeping for his ransom.”

“I think we should see this thing through together,” said the Colonel. “It’s really for you to decide, Stephens, for I have no doubt that you are the richest of us.”

“I don’t know that I am,” the lawyer answered; “but, in any case, I have no wish to be placed upon a different footing to the others.”

The Emir spoke again in his harsh, rasping voice.

“He says,” Mansoor translated, “that the baggage-camels are spent, and that there is only one beast left which can keep up. It is ready now for one of you, and you have to decide among yourselves which is to have it. If one is richer than the others, he will have the preference.”

“Tell him that we are all equally rich.”

“In that case he says that you are to choose at once which is to have the camel.”

“And the others?”

The dragoman shrugged his shoulders.

“Well,” said the Colonel, “if only one of us is to escape, I think you fellows will agree with me that it ought to be Belmont, since he is the married man.”

“Yes, yes, let it be Monsieur Belmont,” cried Fardet.

“I think so also,” said Stephens.

But the Irishman would not hear of it.

“No, no, share and share alike,” he cried. “All sink or all swim, and the devil take the flincher.”

They wrangled among themselves until they became quite heated in this struggle of unselfishness. Some one had said that the Colonel should go because he was the oldest, and the Colonel was a very angry man.

"One would think I was an octogenarian," he cried. "These remarks are quite uncalled for."

"Well, then," said Belmont, "let us all refuse to go."

"But this is not very wise," cried the Frenchman. "See, my friends! Here are the ladies being carried off alone. Surely it would be far better that one of us should be with them to advise them."

They looked at one another in perplexity. What Fardet said was obviously true, but how could one of them desert his comrades? The Emir himself suggested the solution.

"The chief says," said Mansoor, "that if you cannot settle who is to go, you had better leave it to Allah and draw lots."

"I don't think we can do better," said the Colonel, and his three companions nodded their assent.

It was the Moolah who approached them with four splinters of palm-bark protruding from between his fingers.

"He says that he who draws the longest has the camel," says Mansoor.

"We must agree to abide absolutely by this," said Cochrane, and again his companions nodded.

The Dervishes had formed a semicircle in front of them, with a fringe of the oscillating heads of the camels. Before them was a cooking fire, which threw its red light over the group. The Emir was standing with his back to it, and his fierce face towards the prisoners. Behind the four men was a line of guards, and behind them again the three women, who looked down from their camels upon this tragedy. With a malicious smile, the fat, one-eyed Moolah advanced with his fist closed, and the four little brown spicules protruding from between his fingers.

It was to Belmont that he held them first. The Irishman gave an involuntary groan, and his wife gasped behind him, for the splinter came away in his hand. Then it was the Frenchman's turn, and his was half an inch longer than Belmont's. Then came Colonel Cochrane, whose piece was longer than the two others put together. Stephen's was no bigger than Belmont's. The Colonel was the winner of this terrible lottery.

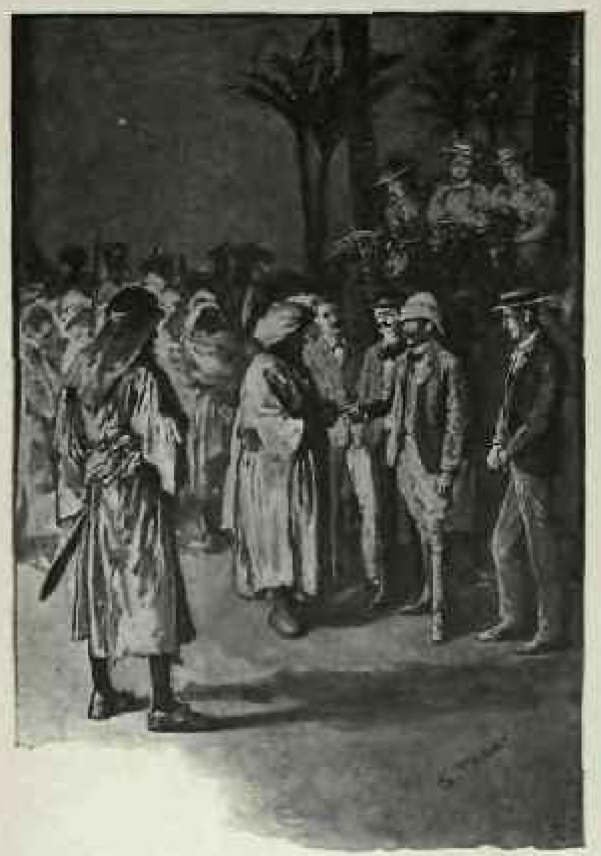

The Colonel was the winner of this terrible lottery.

“You’re welcome to my place, Belmont,” said he. “I’ve neither wife nor child, and hardly a friend in the world. Go with your wife, and I’ll stay.”

“No, indeed! An agreement is an agreement. It’s all fair play, and the prize to the luckiest.”

“The Emir says that you are to mount at once,” said Mansoor, and an Arab dragged the Colonel by his wrist-rope to the waiting camel.

“He will stay with the rearguard,” said the Emir to his lieutenant. “You can keep the women with you also.”

“And this dragoman dog?”

“Put him with the others.”

“And they?”

“Put them all to death.”

CHAPTER IX

As none of the three could understand Arabic, the order of the Emir would have been unintelligible to them had it not been for the conduct of Mansoor. The unfortunate dragoman, after all his treachery and all his subservience and apostasy, found his worst fears realised when the Dervish leader gave his curt command. With a shriek of fear the poor wretch threw himself forward upon his face, and clutched at the Arab’s jibbeh, clawing with his brown fingers at the edge of the cotton skirt. The Emir tugged to free himself, and then, finding that he was still held by that convulsive grip, he turned and kicked at Mansoor with the vicious impatience with which one drives off a pestering cur. The dragoman’s high red tarboosh flew up into the air, and he lay groaning upon his face where the stunning blow of the Arab’s horny foot had left him.

All was bustle and movement in the camp, for the old Emir had mounted his camel, and some of his party were already beginning to follow their companions. The squat lieutenant, the Moolah, and about a dozen Dervishes surrounded the prisoners. They had not mounted their camels, for they were told off to be the ministers of death. The three men understood as they looked upon their faces that the sand was running very low in the glass of their lives. Their hands were still bound, but their guards had ceased to hold them. They turned round, all three, and said good-bye to the women upon the camels.

“All up now, Norah,” said Belmont. “It’s hard luck when there was a chance of a rescue, but we’ve done our best.”

For the first time his wife had broken down. She was sobbing convulsively, with her face between her hands.

“Don’t cry, little woman! We’ve had a good time together. Give my love to all my friends at Bray! Remember me to Amy McCarthy and to the Blessingtons. You’ll find there is enough and to spare, but I would take Rogers’s advice about the investments. Mind that!”

“O John, I won’t live without you!” Sorrow for her sorrow broke the strong man down, and he buried his face in the hairy side of her camel. The two of them sobbed helplessly together.

Stephens meanwhile had pushed his way to Sadie’s beast. She saw his worn, earnest face looking up at her through the dim light.

“Don’t be afraid for your aunt and for yourself,” said he. “I am sure that you will escape. Colonel Cochrane will look after you. The Egyptians cannot be far behind. I do hope you will have a good drink before you leave the wells. I wish I could give your aunt my jacket, for it will be cold tonight. I’m afraid I can’t get it off. She should keep some of the bread, and eat it in the early morning.”

He spoke quite quietly, like a man who is arranging the details of a picnic. A sudden glow of admiration for this quietly consistent man warmed her impulsive heart.

“How unselfish you are!” she cried. “I never saw any one like you. Talk about saints! There you stand in the very presence of death, and you think only of us.”

“I want to say a last word to you, Sadie, if you don’t mind. I should die so much happier. I have often wanted to speak to you, but I thought that perhaps you would laugh, for you never took anything very seriously, did you? That was quite natural, of course, with your high spirits, but still it was very serious to me. But now I am really a dead man, so it does not matter very much what I say.”

“Oh, don’t, Mr. Stephens!” cried the girl.

“I won’t, if it is very painful to you. As I said, it would make me die happier, but I don’t want to be selfish about it. If I thought it would darken your life afterwards or be a sad recollection to you I would not say another word.”

“What did you wish to say?”

“It was only to tell you how I loved you. I always loved you. From the first I was a different man when I was with you. But of course it was absurd, I knew that well enough. I never said anything, and I tried not to make myself ridiculous. But I just want you to know about it now that it can’t matter one way or the other. You’ll understand that I really do love you when I tell you that, if it were not that I knew you were frightened and unhappy, these last two days in which we have been always together would have been infinitely the happiest of my life.”

The girl sat pale and silent, looking down with wondering eyes at his upturned face. She did not know what to do or say in the solemn presence of this love which burned so brightly under the shadow of death. To her child’s heart it seemed incomprehensible, — and yet she understood that it was sweet and beautiful also.

“I won’t say any more,” said he; “I can see that it only bothers you. But I wanted you to know, and now you do know, so it is all right. Thank you for listening so patiently and gently. Good-bye, little Sadie! I can’t put my hand up. Will you put yours down?”

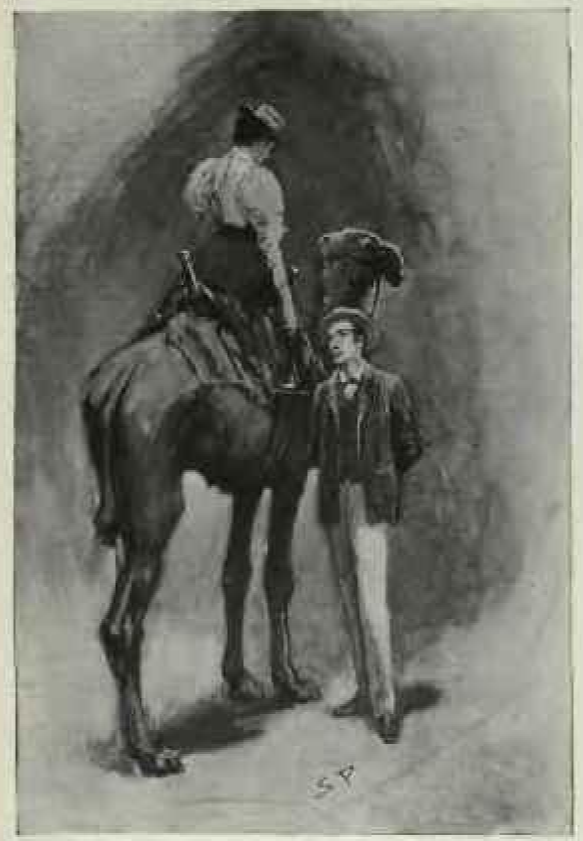

“Good-bye, little Sadie.”

She did so and Stephens kissed it. Then he turned and took his place once more between Belmont and Fardet. In his whole life of struggle and success he had never felt such a glow of quiet contentment as suffused him at that instant when the grip of death was closing upon him. There is no arguing about love. It is the innermost fact of life, the one which obscures and changes all the others, the only one which is absolutely satisfying and complete. Pain is pleasure, and want is comfort, and death is sweetness when once that golden mist is round it. So it was that Stephens could have sung with joy as he faced his murderers. He really had not time to think about them. The important, all-engrossing, delightful thing was that she could not look upon him as a casual acquaintance any more. Through all her life she would think of him — she would know.

Colonel Cochrane's camel was at one side, and the old soldier, whose wrists had been freed, had been looking down upon the scene, and wondering in his tenacious way whether all hope must really be abandoned. It was evident that the Arabs who were grouped round the victims were to remain behind with them, while the others who were mounted would guard the three women and himself. He could not understand why the throats of his companions had not been already cut, unless it were that with an Eastern refinement of cruelty this rearguard would wait until the Egyptians were close to them, so that the warm bodies of their victims might be an insult to the pursuers. No doubt that was the right explanation. The Colonel had heard of such a trick before.

But in that case there would not be more than twelve Arabs with the prisoners. Were there any of the friendly ones among them? If Tippy Tilly and six of his men were there, and if Belmont could get his arms free and his hand upon his revolver, they might come through yet. The Colonel craned his neck and groaned in his disappointment. He could see the faces of the guards in the firelight. They were all Baggara Arabs, men who were beyond either pity or bribery. Tippy Tilly and the others must have gone on with the advance. For the first time the stiff old soldier abandoned hope.

"Good-bye, you fellows! God bless you!" he cried, as a negro pulled at his camel's nose-ring and made him follow the others. The women came after him, in a misery too deep for words. Their departure was a relief to the three men who were left.

"I am glad they are gone," said Stephens, from his heart.

"Yes, yes, it is better," cried Fardet. "How long are we to wait?"

"Not very long now," said Belmont, grimly, as the Arabs closed in around them.

The Colonel and the three women gave one backward glance when they came to the edge of the oasis. Between the straight stems of the palms they saw the gleam of the fire, and above the group of Arabs they caught a last glimpse of the three white hats. An instant later, the camels began to trot, and when they looked back once more the palm grove was only a black clump with the vague twinkle of a light somewhere in the heart of it. As with yearning eyes they gazed at that throbbing red point in the darkness, they passed over the edge of the depression, and in an instant the huge, silent, moonlit desert was round them without a sign of the oasis which they had left. On every side the velvet, blue-black sky, with its blazing stars, sloped downwards to the vast, dun-coloured plain. The two were blurred into one at their point of junction.

The women had sat in the silence of despair, and the Colonel had been silent also — for what could he say? — but suddenly all four started in their saddles, and Sadie gave a sharp cry of dismay. In the hush of the night there had come from behind them the petulant crack of a rifle, then another, then several together, with a brisk rat-tat-tat, and then, after an interval, one more.

"It may be the rescuers! It may be the Egyptians!" cried Mrs. Belmont, with a sudden flicker of hope. "Colonel Cochrane, don't you think it may be the Egyptians?"

"Yes, yes," Sadie whimpered. "It must be the Egyptians."

The Colonel had listened expectantly, but all was silent again. Then he took his hat off with a solemn gesture.

"There is no use deceiving ourselves, Mrs. Belmont," said he; "we may as well face the truth. Our friends are gone from us, but they have met their end like brave men."

"But why should they fire their guns? They had —— they had spears." She shuddered as she said it.

"That is true," said the Colonel. "I would not for the world take away any real grounds of hope which you may have; but, on the other hand, there is no use in preparing bitter disappointments for ourselves. If we had been listening to an attack, we should have heard some reply. Besides, an Egyptian attack would have been an attack in force. No doubt it *is*, as you say, a little strange that they should have wasted their cartridges, — by Jove, look at that!"

He was pointing over the eastern desert. Two figures were moving across its expanse, swiftly and stealthily, furtive dark shadows against the lighter ground. They saw them dimly, dipping and rising over the rolling desert, now lost, now reappearing in the uncertain light. They were flying away from the Arabs. And then, suddenly they halted upon the summit of a sand-hill, and the prisoners could see them outlined plainly against the sky. They were camel-men, but they sat their camels astride as a horseman sits his horse.

“Gippy Camel Corps!” cried the Colonel.

“Two men,” said Miss Adams, in a voice of despair.

“Only a vedette, ma’am! Throwing feelers out all over the desert. This is one of them. Main body ten miles off, as likely as not. There they go giving the alarm! Good old Camel Corps!”

The self-contained, methodical soldier had suddenly turned almost inarticulate with his excitement. There was a red flash upon the top of the sand-hill, and then another, followed by the crack of the rifles. Then with a whisk the two figures were gone, as swiftly and silently as two trout in a stream.

The Arabs had halted for an instant, as if uncertain whether they should delay their journey to pursue them or not. There was nothing left to pursue now, for amid the undulations of the sand-drift the vedettes might have gone in any direction. The Emir galloped back along the line, with exhortations and orders. Then the camels began to trot, and the hopes of the prisoners were dulled by the agonies of the terrible jolt. Mile after mile and mile after mile they sped onwards over that vast expanse, the women clinging as best they might to the pommels, the Colonel almost as spent as they, but still keenly on the lookout for any sign of the pursuers.

“I think —— I think,” cried Mrs. Belmont, “that something is moving in front of us.”

The Colonel raised himself upon his saddle, and screened his eyes from the moonshine.

“By Jove, you’re right there, ma’am. There are men over yonder.”

They could all see them now, a straggling line of riders far ahead of them in the desert.

“They are going in the same direction as we,” cried Mrs. Belmont, whose eyes were very much better than the Colonel’s.

Cochrane muttered an oath into his moustache.

“Look at the tracks there,” said he; “of course, it’s our own vanguard who left the palm grove before us. The chief keeps us at this infernal pace in order to close up with them.”

As they drew closer they could see plainly that it was indeed the other body of Arabs, and presently the Emir Wad Ibrahim came trotting back to take counsel with the Emir Abderrahman. They pointed in the direction in which the vedettes had appeared, and shook their heads like men who have many and grave misgivings. Then the raiders joined into one long, straggling line, and the whole body moved steadily on towards the Southern Cross, which was twinkling just over the skyline in front of them. Hour after hour the dreadful trot continued, while the fainting ladies clung on convulsively, and Cochrane, worn out but indomitable, encouraged them to hold out, and peered backwards over the desert for the first glad signs of their pursuers. The blood throbbed in his temples, and he cried that he heard the roll of drums coming out of the darkness. In his feverish delirium he saw clouds of pursuers at their very heels, and during the long night he was for ever crying glad tidings which ended in disappointment and heartache. The rise of the sun showed the desert stretching away around them, with nothing moving upon its monstrous face except themselves. With dull eyes and heavy hearts they stared round at that huge and empty expanse. Their hopes thinned away like the light morning mist upon the horizon.

It was shocking to the ladies to look at their companion and to think of the spruce, hale old soldier who had been their fellow-passenger from Cairo. As in the case of Miss Adams, old age seemed to have pounced upon him in one spring. His hair, which had grizzled hour by hour during his privations, was now of a silvery white. White stubble, too, had obscured the firm, clean line of his chin and throat. The veins of his fare were injected and his features were shot with heavy wrinkles. He rode with his back arched and his chin sunk upon his breast, for the old, time-rotted body was worn out, but in his bright, alert eyes there was always a trace of the gallant tenant who lived in the shattered house. Delirious, spent, and dying, he preserved his chivalrous, protecting air as he turned to the ladies, shot little scraps of advice and encouragement at them, and peered back continually for the help which never came.

An hour after sunrise the raiders called a halt, and food and water were served out to all. Then at a more moderate pace they pursued their southern journey, their long, straggling line trailing out over a quarter of a mile of desert. From their more careless bearing and the way in which they chatted as they rode, it was clear that they thought that they had shaken off their pursuers. Their direction now was east as well as south, and it was evidently their intention after this long detour to strike the Nile again at some point far above the Egyptian outposts. Already the character of the scenery was changing, and they were losing the long levels of the pebbly desert, and coming once more upon those fantastic, sunburned black rocks and that rich orange sand through which they had already passed. On every side of them rose the scaly, conical hills with their loose, slaglike *débris*, and jagged-edged khors, with sinuous streams of sand running like watercourses down their centre. The camels followed each other, twisting in and out among the boulders, and scrambling with their adhesive, spongy feet over places which would have been impossible for horses. Among the broken rocks those behind could sometimes only see the long, undulating, darting necks of the creatures in front, as if it were some nightmare procession of serpents. Indeed, it had much the effect of a dream upon the prisoners, for there was no sound, save the soft, dull padding and shuffling of the feet. The strange, wild frieze moved slowly and silently onwards amid a setting of black stone and yellow sand, with the one arch of vivid blue spanning the rugged edges of the ravine.

Miss Adams, who had been frozen into silence during the long cold night, began to thaw now in the cheery warmth of the rising sun. She looked about her, and rubbed her thin hands together.

"Why, Sadie," she remarked, "I thought I heard you in the night, dear, and now I see that you have been crying."

"I have been thinking, Auntie." "Well, we must try and think of others, dearie, and not of ourselves." "It's not of myself, Auntie." "Never fret about me, Sadie." "No, Auntie, I was not thinking of you." "Was it of any one in particular." "Of Mr. Stephens, Auntie. How gentle he was, and how brave! To think of him fixing up every little thing for us, and trying to pull his jacket over his poor roped-up hands, with those murderers waiting all round his. He's my saint and hero from now ever after."

"Well, he's out of his troubles anyhow," said Miss Adams, with that bluntness which the years bring with them.

"Then I wish I was also."

"I don't see how that would help him."

"Well, I think he might feel less lonesome," said Sadie, and drooped her saucy little chin upon her breast.

The four had been riding in silence for some little time, when the Colonel clapped his hand to his brow with a gesture of dismay.

"Good God!" he cried, "I am going off my head."

Again and again they had perceived it during the night, but he had seemed quite rational since daybreak. They were shocked, therefore, at this sudden outbreak, and tried to calm him with soothing words.

"Mad as a hatter," he shouted. "Whatever do you think I saw?"

"Don't trouble about it, whatever it was," said Mrs. Belmont, laying her hand soothingly upon his as the camels closed together. "It is no wonder that you are overdone. You have thought and worked for all of us so long. We shall halt presently, and a few hours' sleep will quite restore you."

But the Colonel looked up again, and again he cried out in his agitation and surprise.

"I never saw anything plainer in my life," he groaned. "It is on the point of rock on our right front, — poor old Stuart with my red cummerbund round his head just the same as we left him."

The ladies had followed the direction of the Colonel's frightened gaze, and in an instant they were all as amazed as he.

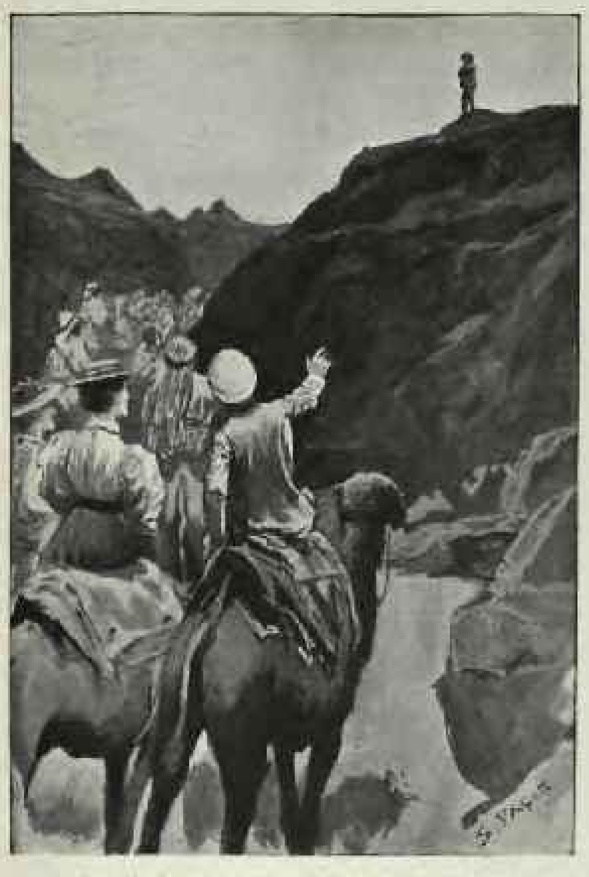

On this pinnacle stood a solitary, motionless figure.

There was a black, bulging ridge like a bastion upon the right side of the terrible khor up which the camels were winding. At one point it rose into a small pinnacle. On this pinnacle stood a solitary, motionless figure clad entirely in black, save for a brilliant dash of scarlet upon his head. There could not surely be two such short, sturdy figures or such large, colourless faces in the Libyan desert. His shoulders were stooping forward, and he seemed to be staring intently down into the ravine. His pose and outline were like a caricature of the great Napoleon.

"Can it possibly be he?"

"It must be. It is!" cried the ladies. "You see he is looking towards us and waving his hand."

"Good Heavens! They'll shoot him! Get down, you fool, or you'll be shot!" roared the Colonel. But his dry throat would only emit a discordant croaking.

Several of the Dervishes had seen the singular apparition upon the hill, and had un-slung their Remingtons, but a long arm suddenly shot up behind the figure of the Birmingham clergyman, a brown hand seized upon his skirts, and he disappeared with a snap. Higher up the pass, just below the spot where Mr. Stuart had been standing, appeared the tall figure of the Emir Abderrahman. He had sprung upon a boulder, and was shouting and waving his arms, but the shouts were drowned in a long, rippling roar of musketry from each side of the khor. The bastion-like cliff was fringed with gun-barrels, with red tarbooshes drooping over the triggers. From the other lip also came the long spurts of flame and the angry clatter of the rifles. The raiders were caught in an ambuscade. The Emir fell, but was up again and waving. There was a splotch of blood upon his long white beard. He kept pointing and gesticulating, but his scattered followers could not understand what he wanted. Some of them came tearing down the pass, and some from behind were pushing to the front. A few dismounted and tried to climb up sword in hand to that deadly line of muzzles, but one by one they were hit, and came rolling from rock to rock to the bottom of the ravine. The shooting was not very good. One negro made his way unharmed up the whole side, only to have his brains dashed out with the butt-end of a Martini at the top. The Emir had fallen off his rock and lay in a crumpled heap, like a brown and white patch-work quilt at the bottom of it. And then when half of them were down it became evident, even to those exalted fanatical souls, that there was no chance for them, and that they must get out of these fatal rocks and into the desert again. They galloped down the pass, and it is a frightful thing to see a camel galloping over broken ground. The beast's own terror, his ungainly bounds, the sprawl of his four legs all in the air together, his hideous cries, and the yells of his rider who is bucked high from his saddle with every spring, make a picture which is not to be forgotten. The women screamed as this mad torrent of frenzied creatures came pouring past them, but the Colonel edged his camel and theirs farther and farther in among the rocks and away from the retreating Arabs. The air was full of whistling bullets, and they could hear them smacking loudly against the stones all round them.

"Keep quiet, and they'll pass us," whispered the Colonel, who was all himself again now that the hour for action had arrived. "I wish to Heaven I could see Tippy Tilly or any of his friends. Now is the time for them to help us." He watched the mad stream of fugitives as they flew past upon their shambling, squattering, loose-jointed beasts, but the black face of the Egyptian gunner was not among them.

And now it really did seem as if the whole body of them, in their haste to get clear of the ravine, had not a thought to spend upon the prisoners. The rush was past, and only stragglers were running the gauntlet of the fierce fire which poured upon them from above. The last of all, a young Baggara with a black moustache and pointed beard, looked up as he passed and shook his sword in impotent passion at the Egyptian riflemen. At the same instant a bullet struck his camel, and the creature collapsed, all neck and legs, upon the ground. The young Arab sprang off its back, and, seizing its nose-ring, he beat it savagely with the flat of his sword to make it stand up. But the dim, glazing eye told its own tale, and in desert warfare the death of the beast is the death of the rider. The Baggara glared round like a lion at bay, his dark eyes flashing murderously from under his red turban. A crimson spot, and then another, sprang out upon his dark skin, but he never winced at the bullet wounds. His fierce gaze had fallen upon the prisoners, and with an exultant shout he was dashing towards them, his broad-bladed sword gleaming above his head. Miss Adams was the nearest to him, but at the sight of the rushing figure and the maniac face she threw herself off the camel upon the far side. The Arab bounded on to a rock and aimed a thrust at Mrs. Belmont, but before the point could reach her the Colonel leaned forward with his pistol and blew the man's head in. Yet with a concentrated rage, which was superior even to the agony of death, the fellow lay kicking and striking, bounding about among the loose stones like a fish upon the shingle.

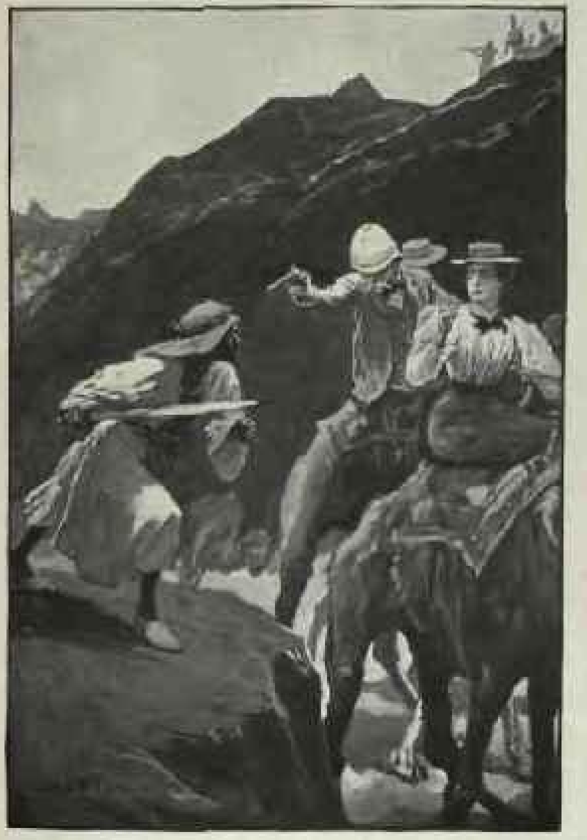

The Colonel leaned forward with his pistol.

“Don’t be frightened, ladies,” cried the Colonel. “He is quite dead, I assure you. I am so sorry to have done this in your presence, but the fellow was dangerous. I had a little score of my own to settle with him, for he was the man who tried to break my ribs with his Remington. I hope you are not hurt, Miss Adams! One instant, and I will come down to you.”

But the old Boston lady was by no means hurt, for the rocks had been so high that she had a very short distance to fall from her saddle. Sadie, Mrs. Belmont, and Colonel Cochrane had all descended by slipping on to the boulders and climbing down from them. But they found Miss Adams on her feet, and waving the remains of her green veil in triumph.

“Hurrah, Sadie! Hurrah, my own darling Sadie!” she was shrieking. “We are saved, my girl, we are saved after all.”

"By George, so we are!" cried the Colonel, and they all shouted in an ecstasy together.

But Sadie had learned to think more about others during those terrible days of schooling. Her arms were round Mrs. Belmont, and her cheek against hers.

"You dear, sweet angel," she cried, "how can we have the heart to be glad when you — when you — —"

"But I don't believe it is so," cried the brave Irishwoman. "No, I'll never believe it until I see John's body lying before me. And when I see that, I don't want to live to see anything more."

The last Dervish had clattered down the khor, and now above them on either cliff they could see the Egyptians — tall, thin, square-shouldered figures, looking, when outlined against the blue sky, wonderfully like the warriors in the ancient bas-reliefs. Their camels were in the background, and they were hurrying to join them. At the same time others began to ride down from the farther end of the ravine, their dark faces flushed and their eyes shining with the excitement of victory and pursuit. A very small Englishman, with a straw-coloured moustache and a weary manner, was riding at the head of them. He halted his camel beside the fugitives and saluted the ladies. He wore brown boots and brown belts with steel buckles, which looked trim and workmanlike against his kharki uniform.

"Had 'em that time — had 'em proper!" said he. "Very glad to have been of any assistance, I'm Shaw. Hope you're none the worse for it all. What I mean, it's rather rough work for ladies."

"You're from Haifa, I suppose?" asked the Colonel.

"No, we're from the other show. We're the Sarras crowd, you know. We met in the desert, and we headed 'em off, and the other Johnnies headed them behind. We've got 'em on toast, I tell you. Get up on that rock and you'll see things happen. It's going to be a knockout in one round this time."

"We left some of our people at the wells. We are very uneasy about them," said the Colonel. "I suppose you have not heard anything of them?"

The young officer looked serious and shook his head. "Bad job that!" said he. "They're a poisonous crowd when you put 'em in a corner. What I mean, we never expected to see you alive; and we're very glad to pull any of you out of the fire. The most we hoped was that we might revenge you."

“Any other Englishman with you?” “Archer is with the flanking party. He’ll have to come past, for I don’t think there is any other way down. We’ve got one of your chaps up there — a funny old bird with a red topknot. See you later, I hope! Good day, ladies!” He touched his helmet, tapped his camel, and trotted on after his men.

“We can’t do better than stay where we are until they are all past,” said the Colonel, for it was evident now that the men from above would have to come round. In a broken single file they went past, black men and brown, Soudanese and fellaheen, but all of the best, for the Camel Corps is the *corps d’elite* of the Egyptian army. Each had a brown bandolier over his chest and his rifle held across his thigh. A large man with a drooping black moustache and a pair of binoculars in his hand was riding at the side of them.

“Hulloa, Archer!” croaked the Colonel.

The officer looked at him with the vacant, unresponsive eye of a complete stranger.

“I’m Cochrane, you know! We travelled up together.”

“Excuse me, sir, but you have the advantage of me,” said the officer. “I knew a Colonel Cochrane, but you are not the man. He was three inches taller than you, with black hair and — —”

“That’s all right,” cried the Colonel, testily. “You try a few days with the Dervishes, and see if your friends will recognise you!”

“Good God, Cochrane, is it really you? I could not have believed it. Great Scott, what you must have been through! I’ve heard before of fellows going grey in a night, but, by Jove — —”

“Quite so,” said the Colonel, flushing. “Allow me to hint to you, Archer, that if you could get some food and drink for these ladies, instead of discussing my personal appearance, it would be much more practical.”

“That’s all right,” said Captain Archer.

“Your friend Stuart knows that you are here, and he is bringing some stuff round for you. Poor fare, ladies, but the best we have! You’re an old soldier, Cochrane. Get up on the rocks presently, and you’ll see a lovely sight. No time to stop, for we shall be in action again in five minutes. Anything I can do before I go?”

“You haven’t got such a thing as a cigar?” asked the Colonel, wistfully.

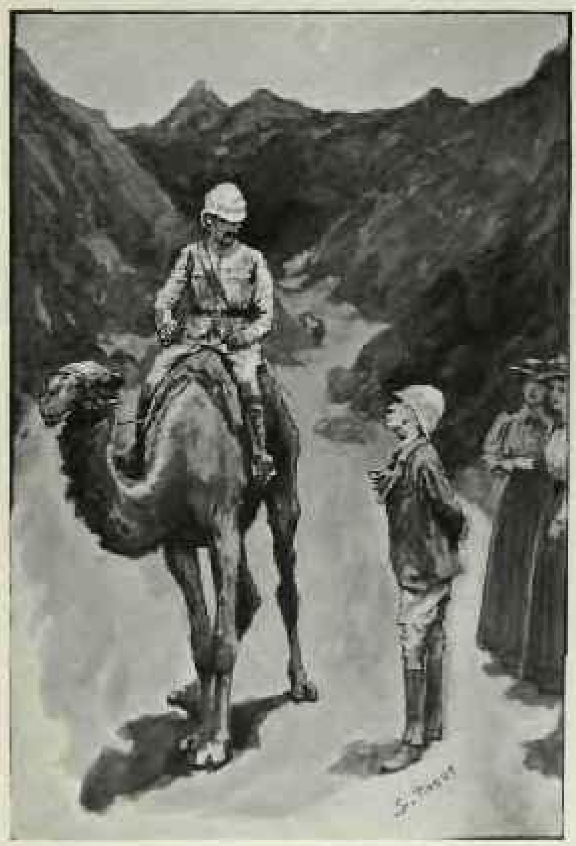

"You haven't got such a thing as a cigar?" asked the Colonel.

Archer drew a thick satisfying partaga from his case and handed it down, with half-a-dozen wax vestas. Then he cantered after his men, and the old soldier leaned back against the rock and drew in the fragrant smoke. It was then that his jangled nerves knew the full virtue of tobacco, the gentle anodyne which stays the failing strength and soothes the worrying brain. He watched the dim, blue reek swirling up from him, and he felt the pleasant, aromatic bite upon his palate, while a restful languor crept over his weary and harassed body. The three ladies sat together upon a flat rock.

"Good land, what a sight you are, Sadie!" cried Miss Adams, suddenly, and it was the first reappearance of her old self. "What *would* your mother say if she saw you? Why, sakes alive, your hair is full of straw and your frock clean crazy!"

"I guess we all want some setting to right," said Sadie, in a voice which was much more subdued than that of the Sadie of old. "Mrs. Belmont, you look just too perfectly sweet anyhow, but if you’ll allow me, I’ll fix your dress for you.”

But Mrs. Belmont’s eyes were far away, and she shook her head sadly as she gently put the girl’s hands aside.

“I do not care how I look. I cannot think of it,” said she; “could *you*, if you had left the man you love behind you, as I have mine?”

“I’m begin — beginning to think I have,” sobbed poor Sadie, and buried her hot face in Mrs. Belmont’s motherly bosom.

CHAPTER X

The Camel Corps had all passed onwards down the khor in pursuit of the retreating Dervishes, and for a few minutes the escaped prisoners had been left alone. But now there came a cheery voice calling upon them, and a red turban bobbed about among the rocks, with the large white face of the Nonconformist minister smiling from beneath it. He had a thick lance with which to support his injured leg, and this murderous crutch combined with his peaceful appearance to give him a most incongruous aspect, — as of a sheep which has suddenly developed claws. Behind him were two negroes with a basket and a water-skin.

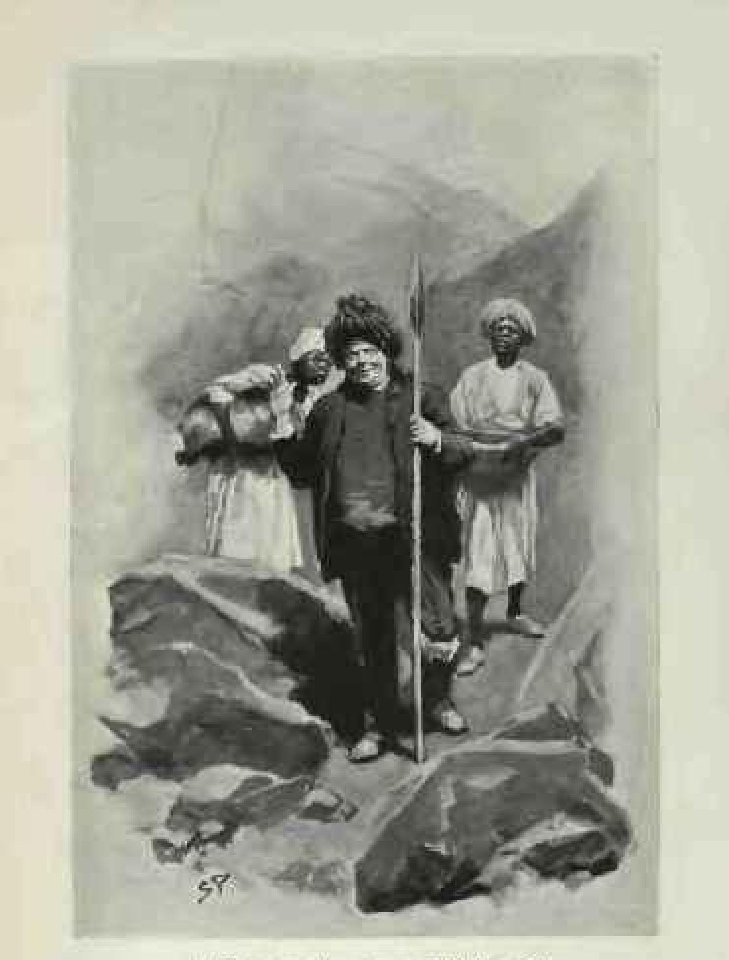

"Not a word! not a word!" he cried.

"Not a word! Not a word!" he cried, as he stumped up to them. "I know exactly how you feel. I've been there myself. Bring the water, Ali! Only half a cup, Miss Adams; you shall have some more presently. Now your turn, Mrs. Belmont! Dear me, dear me, you poor souls, how my heart does bleed for you! There's bread and meat in the basket, but you must be very moderate at first." He chuckled with joy, and slapped his fat hands together as he watched them.

"But the others?" he asked, his face turning grave again.

The Colonel shook his head. "We left them behind at the wells. I fear that it is all over with them."

"Tut, tut!" cried the clergyman, in a boisterous voice, which could not cover the despondency of his expression; "you thought, no doubt, that it was all over with me, but here I am in spite of it. Never lose heart, Mrs. Belmont. Your husband's position could not possibly be as hopeless as mine was."

"When I saw you standing on that rock up yonder, I put it down to delirium," said the Colonel. "If the ladies had not seen you, I should never have ventured to believe it."

"I am afraid that I behaved very badly. Captain Archer says that I nearly spoiled all their plans, and that I deserved to be tried by a drumhead court-trial and shot. The fact is that, when I heard the Arabs beneath me, I forgot myself in my anxiety to know if any of you were left."

"I wonder that you were not shot without any drumhead court-martial," said the Colonel. "But how in the world did you get here?"

"The Haifa people were close upon our track at the time when I was abandoned, and they picked me up in the desert. I must have been delirious, I suppose, for they tell me that they heard my voice, singing hymns, a long way off, and it was that, under the providence of God, which brought them to me. They had a camel ambulance, and I was quite myself again by next day. I came with the Sarras people after we met them, because they have the doctor with them. My wound is nothing, and he says that a man of my habit will be the better for the loss of blood. And now, my friends," — his big, brown eyes lost their twinkle, and became very solemn and reverent,—"we have all been upon the very confines of death, and our dear companions may be so at this instant. The same power which saved us may save them, and let us pray together that it may be so, always remembering that if, in spite of our prayers, it should *not* be so, then that also must be accepted as the best and wisest thing."

So they knelt together among the black rocks, and prayed as some of them had never prayed before. It was very well to discuss prayer and treat it lightly and philosophically upon the deck of the *Korosko*. It was easy to feel strong and self-confident in the comfortable deck-chair, with the slippered Arab handing round the coffee and liqueurs. But they had been swept out of that placid stream of existence, and dashed against the horrible, jagged facts of life. Battered and shaken, they must have something to cling to. A blind, inexorable destiny was too horrible a belief. A chastening power, acting intelligently and for a purpose, — a living, working power, tearing them out of their grooves, breaking down their small sectarian ways, forcing them into the better path, — that was what they had learned to realise during these days of horror. Great hands had closed suddenly upon them and had moulded them into new shapes, and fitted them for new uses. Could such a power be deflected by any human supplication? It was that or nothing, — the last court of appeal, left open to injured humanity. And so they all prayed, as lover loves, or a poet writes, from the very inside of their souls, and they rose with that singular, illogical feeling of inward peace and satisfaction which prayer only can give.

"Hush!" said Cochrane. "Listen!" The sound of a volley came crackling up the narrow khor, and then another and another. The Colonel was fidgeting about like an old horse which hears the bugle of the hunt and the yapping of the pack. "Where can we see what is going on?" "Come this way! This way, if you please! There is a path up to the top. If the ladies will come after me, they will be spared the sight of anything painful."

The clergyman led them along the side to avoid the bodies which were littered thickly down the bottom of the khor. It was hard walking over the shingly, slaggy stones, but they made their way to the summit at last. Beneath them lay the vast expanse of the rolling desert, and in the foreground such a scene as none of them are ever likely to forget. In that perfectly dry and clear light, with the unvarying brown tint of the hard desert as a background, every detail stood out as clearly as if these were toy figures arranged upon a table within hand's touch of them.

The Dervishes — or what was left of them — were riding slowly some little distance out in a confused crowd, their patchwork jibbehs and red turbans swaying with the motion of their camels. They did not present the appearance of men who were defeated, for their movements were very deliberate, but they looked about them and changed their formation as if they were uncertain what their tactics ought to be. It was no wonder that they were puzzled, for upon their spent camels their situation was as hopeless as could be conceived. The Sarras men had all emerged from the khor, and had dismounted, the beasts being held in groups of four, while the riflemen knelt in a long line with a woolly, curling fringe of smoke, sending volley after volley at the Arabs, who shot back in a desultory fashion from the backs of their camels. But it was not upon the sullen group of Dervishes, nor yet upon the long line of kneeling riflemen, that the eyes of the spectators were fixed. Far out upon the desert, three squadrons of the Haifa Camel Corps were coming up in a dense close column, which wheeled beautifully into a widespread semicircle as it approached. The Arabs were caught between two fires.

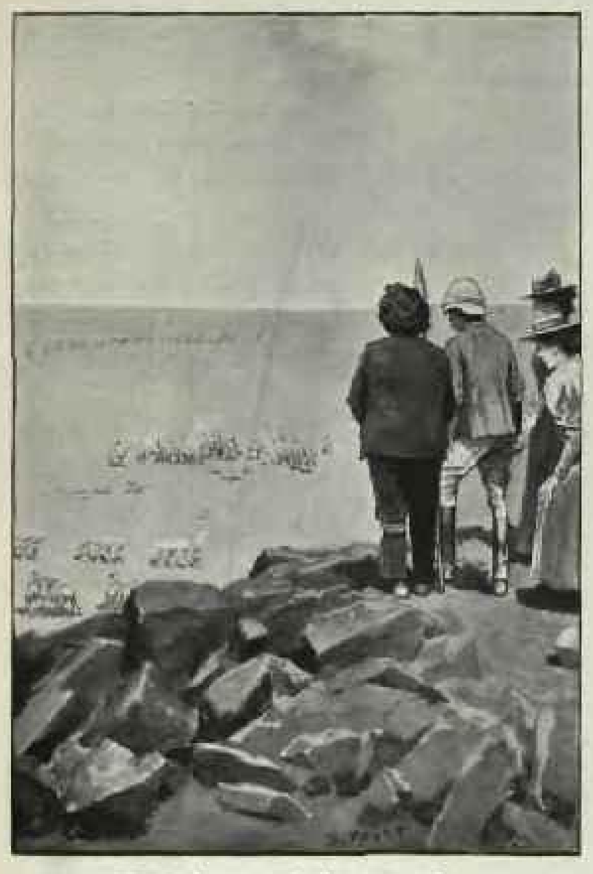

The Arabs were caught between two fires.

“By Jove!” cried the Colonel. “See that!”

The camels of the Dervishes had all knelt down simultaneously, and the men had sprung from their backs. In front of them was a tall, stately figure, who could only be the Emir Wad Ibrahim. They saw him kneel for an instant in prayer. Then he rose, and taking something from his saddle he placed it very deliberately upon the sand and stood upon it.

“Good man!” cried the Colonel. “He is standing upon his sheepskin.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Stuart.

“Every Arab has a sheepskin upon his saddle. When he recognises that his position is perfectly hopeless, and yet is determined to fight to the death, he takes his sheepskin off and stands upon it until he dies. See, they are all upon their sheepskins. They will neither give nor take quarter now.”

The drama beneath them was rapidly approaching its climax. The Haifa Corps was well up, and a ring of smoke and flame surrounded the clump of kneeling Dervishes, who answered it as best they could. Many of them were already down, but the rest loaded and fired with the unflinching courage which has always made them worthy antagonists. A dozen kharki-dressed figures upon the sand showed that it was no bloodless victory for the Egyptians. But now there was a stirring bugle-call from the Sarras men, and another answered it from the Haifa Corps. Their camels were down also, and the men had formed up into a single long curved line. One last volley and they were charging inwards with the wild inspiriting yell which the blacks had brought with them from their central African wilds. For a minute there was a mad vortex of rushing figures, rifle-butts rising and falling, spearheads gleaming and darting among the rolling dust cloud. Then the bugle rang out once more, the Egyptians fell back and formed up with the quick precision of highly disciplined troops, and there in the centre, each upon his sheepskin, lay the gallant barbarian and his raiders. The nineteenth century had been revenged upon the seventh.

The three women had stared horror-stricken and yet fascinated at the stirring scene before them. Now Sadie and her aunt were sobbing together. The Colonel had turned to them with some cheering words when his eyes fell upon the face of Mrs. Belmont. It was as white and set as if it were carved from ivory, and her large grey eyes were fixed as if she were in a trance.

“Good Heavens, Mrs. Belmont, what *is* the matter?” he cried.

For answer she pointed out over the desert. Far away, miles on the other side of the scene of the fight, a small body of men were riding towards them.

"By Jove, yes; there's some one there. Who can it be?"

They were all straining their eyes, but the distance was so great that they could only be sure that they were camel-men and about a dozen in number.

"It's those devils who were left behind in the palm grove," said Cochrane. "There's no one else it can be. One consolation, they can't get away again. They've walked right into the lion's mouth."

But Mrs. Belmont was still gazing with the same fixed intensity and the same ivory face. Now, with a wild shriek of joy, she threw her two hands into the air. "It's they!" she screamed. "They are saved! It's they, Colonel, it's they! O Miss Adams, Miss Adams, it is they!" She capered about on the top of the hill with wild eyes like an excited child.

Her companions would not believe her, for they could see nothing, but there are moments when our mortal senses are more acute than those who have never put their whole heart and soul into them can ever realise. Mrs. Belmont had already run down the rocky path, on the way to her camel, before they could distinguish that which had long before carried its glad message to her. In the van of the approaching party, three white dots shimmered in the sun, and they could only come from the three European hats. The riders were travelling swiftly, and by the time their comrades had started to meet them they could plainly see that it was indeed Belmont, Fardet, and Stephens, with the dragoman Mansoor, and the wounded Soudanese rifleman. As they came together they saw that their escort consisted of Tippy Tilly and the other old Egyptian soldiers. Belmont rushed onwards to meet his wife, but Fardet stopped to grasp the Colonel's hand.

"*Vive la France! Vivent les Anglais!*" he was yelling. "*Tout va bien, n'est ce pas*, Colonel? Ah, *canaille! Vivent les croix et les Chrétiens!*" He was incoherent in his delight.

The Colonel, too, was as enthusiastic as his Anglo-Saxon standard would permit. He could not gesticulate, but he laughed in the nervous, crackling way which was his top-note of emotion.

"My dear boy, I am deuced glad to see you all again. I gave you up for lost. Never was as pleased at anything in my life! How did you get away?"

"It was all your doing."

“Mine?”

“Yes, my friend, and I have been quarrelling with you, — ungrateful wretch that I am!”

“But how did I save you?”

“It was you who arranged with this excellent Tippy Tilly and the others that they should have so much if they brought us alive into Egypt again. They slipped away in the darkness and hid themselves in the grove. Then, when we were left, they crept up with their rifles and shot the men who were about to murder us. That cursed Moolah, I am sorry they shot him, for I believe that I could have persuaded him to be a Christian. And now, with your permission, I will hurry on and embrace Miss Adams, for Belmont has his wife, and Stephens has Miss Sadie, so I think it is very evident that the sympathy of Miss Adams is reserved for me.”

A fortnight had passed away, and the special boat which had been placed at the disposal of the rescued tourists was already far north of Assiout. Next morning they would find themselves at Baliani, where one takes the express for Cairo. It was, therefore, their last evening together. Mrs. Shlesinger and her child who had escaped unhurt had already been sent down from the frontier. Miss Adams had been very ill after her privations, and this was the first time that she had been allowed to come upon deck after dinner. She sat now in a lounge-chair, thinner, sterner, and kindlier than ever, while Sadie stood beside her and tucked the rugs around her shoulders. Mr. Stephens was carrying over the coffee and placing it on the wicker-table beside them. On the other side of the deck Belmont and his wife were seated together in silent sympathy and contentment. Monsieur Fardet was leaning against the rail and arguing about the remissness of the British Government in not taking a more complete control of the Egyptian frontier, while the Colonel stood very erect in front of him, with the red end of a cigar-stump protruding from under his moustache.

But what was the matter with the Colonel? Who would have recognised him who had only seen the broken old man in the Libyan desert? There might be some little grizzling about the moustache, but the hair was back once more at the fine glossy black which had been so much admired upon the voyage up. With a stony face and an unsympathetic manner he had received, upon his return to Haifa, all the commiserations about the dreadful way in which his privations had blanched him, and then diving into his cabin, he had reappeared within an hour exactly as he had been before that fatal moment when he had been cut off from the manifold resources of civilisation. And he looked in such a sternly questioning manner at every one who stared at him, that no one had the moral courage to make any remark about this modern miracle. It was observed from that time forward that, if the Colonel had only to ride a hundred yards into the desert, he always began his preparations by putting a small black bottle with a pink label into the side-pocket of his coat. But those who knew him best at times when a man may be best known, said that the old soldier had a young man's heart and a young man's spirit, — so that if he wished to keep a young man's colour also it was not very unreasonable after all. It was very soothing and restful up there on the saloon deck, with no sound but the gentle lipping of the water as it rippled against the sides of the steamer. The red after-glow was in the western sky, and it mottled the broad, smooth river with crimson. Dimly they could discern the tall figures of herons standing upon the sandbanks, and farther off the line of river-side date-palms glided past them in a majestic procession. Once more the silver stars were twinkling out, the same clear, placid, inexorable stars to which their weary eyes had been so often upturned during the long nights of their desert martyrdom.

"Where do you put up in Cairo, Miss Adams?" asked Mrs. Belmont, at last.

"Shepheard's, I think."

"And you, Mr. Stephens?"

"Oh, Shepheard's, decidedly."

"We are staying at the Continental. I hope we shall not lose sight of you."

"I don't want ever to lose sight of you, Mrs. Belmont," cried Sadie. "Oh, you must come to the States, and we'll give you just a lovely time."

Mrs. Belmont laughed, in her pleasant, mellow fashion.

"We have our duty to do in Ireland, and we have been too long away from it already. My husband has his business, and I have my home, and they are both going to rack and ruin. Besides," she added, slyly, "it is just possible that if we did come to the States we might not find you there."

"We must all meet again," said Belmont, "if only to talk our adventures over once more. It will be easier in a year or two. We are still too near them."

"And yet how far away and dream-like it all seems!" remarked his wife. "Providence is very good in softening disagreeable remembrances in our minds. All this feels to me as if it had happened in some previous existence.”

Fardet held up his wrist with a cotton bandage still round it.

“The body does not forget as quickly as the mind. This does not look very dreamlike or far away, Mrs. Belmont.”

“How hard it is that some should be spared, and some not! If only Mr. Brown and Mr. Headingly were with us, then I should not have one care in the world,” cried Sadie. “Why should they have been taken, and we left?”

Mr. Stuart had limped on to the deck with an open book in his hand, a thick stick supporting his injured leg.

“Why is the ripe fruit picked, and the unripe left?” said he in answer to the young girl’s exclamation. “We know nothing of the spiritual state of these poor dear young fellows, but the great Master Gardener plucks His fruit according to His own knowledge. I brought you up a passage to read to you.”

There was a lantern upon the table, and he sat down beside it. The yellow light shone upon his heavy cheek and the red edges of his book. The strong, steady voice rose above the wash of the water.

“‘Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed and delivered from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. They went astray in the wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. So they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to the city where they dwelt. Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men.’

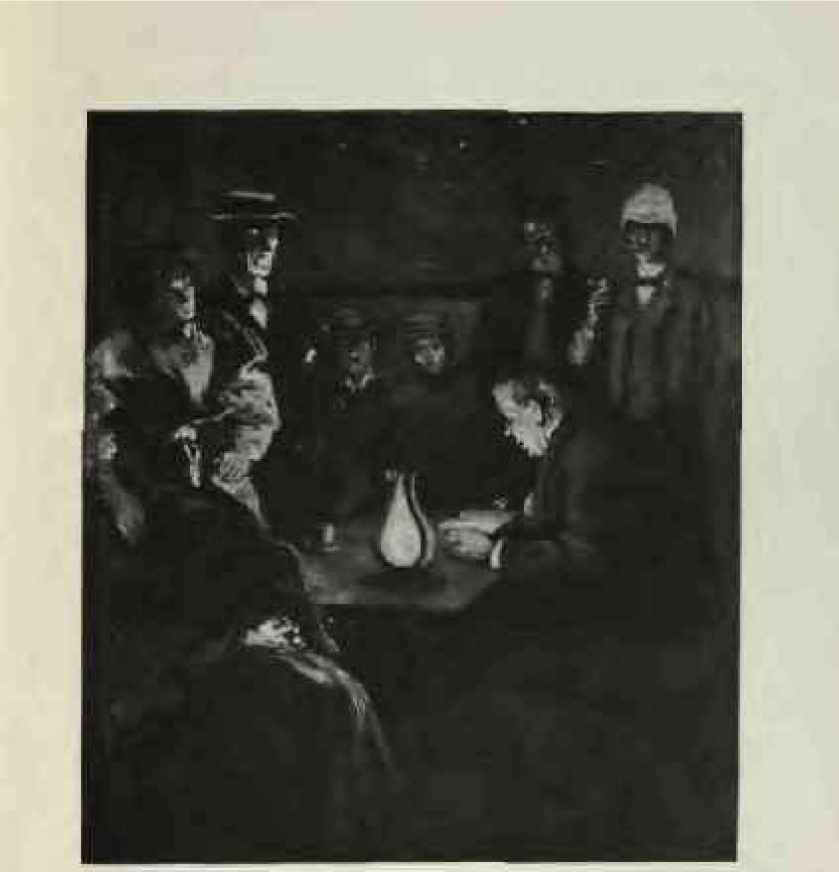

"He delivered them from their distress."

"It sounds as if it were composed for us, and yet it was written two thousand years ago," said the clergyman, as he closed the book. "In every age man has been forced to acknowledge the guiding hand which leads him. For my part I don't believe that inspiration stopped two thousand years ago. When Tennyson wrote with such fervour and conviction, —

> 'Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill.'

he was repeating the message which had been given to him, just as Micah or Ezekiel when the world was younger repeated some cruder and more elementary lesson."

"That is all very well, Mr. Stuart," said the Frenchman; "you ask me to praise God for taking me out of danger and pain, but what I want to know is why, since He has arranged all things, He ever put me into that pain and danger. I have in my opinion more occasion to blame than to praise. You would not thank me for pulling you out of that river if it was also I who pushed you in. The most which you can claim for your Providence is that it has healed the wound which its own hand inflicted.”

“I don’t deny the difficulty,” said the clergyman, slowly; “no one who is not self-deceived *can* deny the difficulty. Look how boldly Tennyson faced it in that same poem, the grandest and deepest and most obviously inspired in our language. Remember the effect which it had upon him.

‘I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world’s altar stairs,
Which slope through darkness up to God,

‘I stretch lame hands of faith and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.’

It is the central mystery of mysteries — the problem of sin and suffering, the one huge difficulty which the reasoner has to solve in order to vindicate the dealings of God with man. But take our own case as an example. I, for one, am very clear what I have got out of our experience. I say it with all humility, but I have a clearer view of my duties than ever I had before. It has taught me to be less remiss in saying what I think to be true, less indolent in doing what I feel to be rightful.”

“And I,” cried Sadie. “It has taught me more than all my life put together. I have learned so much and unlearned so much. I am a different girl.”

“I never understood my own nature before,” said Stephens. “I can hardly say that I had a nature to understand. I lived for what was unimportant, and I neglected what was vital.”

“Oh, a good shake-up does nobody any harm,” the Colonel remarked. “Too much of the feather-bed-and-four-meals-a-day life is not good for man or woman.”

“It is my firm belief,” said Mrs. Belmont, gravely, “that there was not one of us who did not rise to a greater height during those days in the desert than ever before or since. When our sins come to be weighed, much may be forgiven us for the sake of those unselfish days.”

They all sat in thoughtful silence for a little while the scarlet streaks turned to carmine, and the grey shadows deepened, and the wild-fowl flew past in dark straggling V’s over the dull metallic surface of the great smooth-flowing Nile. A cold wind had sprung up from the eastward, and some of the party rose to leave the deck. Stephens leaned forward to Sadie.

“Do you remember what you promised when you were in the desert?” he whispered.

“What was that?”

“You said that if you escaped you would try in future to make some one else happy.”

“Then I must do so.”

“You have,” said he, and their hands met under the shadow of the table.

THE END

A DUET

First published in 1899, this epistolary novel draws on Conan Doyle’s personal life and his first marriage experiences.

Louise Conan Doyle, the author's first wife

A DUET

WITH AN OCCASIONAL CHORUS

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TO MRS. MAUDE CROSSE

Dear Maude, - All the little two-oared boats which put out into the great ocean have need of some chart which will show them how to lay their course. Each starts full of happiness and confidence, and yet we know how many founder, for it is no easy voyage, and there are rocks and sandbanks upon the way. So I give a few pages of your own private log, which tell of days of peace, and days of storm - such storms as seem very petty from the deck of a high ship, but are serious for the two-oared boats. If your peace should help another to peace, or your storm console another who is storm-tossed, then I know that you will feel repaid for this intrusion upon your privacy. May all your voyage be like the outset, and when at last the oars fall from your hands, and those of Frank, may other loving ones be ready to take their turn of toil - and so, *bon voyage*!

Ever your friend,
THE AUTHOR.
Jan. 20, 1899.

CHAPTER I - THE OVERTURE - ABOUT THAT DATE

These are the beginnings of some of the letters which they wrote about that time.

Woking, May 20th.

My Dearest Maude, - You know that your mother suggested, and we agreed, that we should be married about the beginning of September. Don't you think that we might say the 3rd of August? It is a Wednesday, and in every sense suitable. Do try to change the date, for it would in many ways be preferable to the other. I shall be eager to hear from you about it. And now, dearest Maude . . . (The rest is irrelevant.)

St. Albans, May 22nd.

My Dearest Frank, - Mother sees no objection to the 3rd of August, and I am ready to do anything which will please you and her. Of course there are the guests to be considered, and the dressmakers and other arrangements, but I have no doubt that we shall be able to change the date all right. O Frank . . . (What follows is beside the point.)

Woking, May 25th.

My Dearest Maude, - I have been thinking over that change of date, and I see one objection which had not occurred to me when I suggested it. August the 1st is Bank holiday, and travelling is not very pleasant about that time. My idea now is that we should bring it off before that date. Fancy, for example, how unpleasant it would be for your Uncle Joseph if he had to travel all the way from Edinburgh with a Bank-holiday crowd. It would be selfish of us if we did not fit in our plans so as to save our relatives from inconvenience. I think therefore, taking everything into consideration, that the 20th of July, a Wednesday, would be the very best day that we could select. I do hope that you will strain every nerve, my darling, to get your mother to consent to this change. When I think . . . (A digression follows.)

St. Albans, May 27th.

My Dearest Frank, - I think that what you say about the date is very reasonable, and it is so sweet and unselfish of you to think about Uncle Joseph. Of course it would be very unpleasant for him to have to travel at such a time, and we must strain every nerve to prevent it. There is only one serious objection which my mother can see. Uncle Percival (that is my mother's second brother) comes back from Rangoon about the end of July, and will miss the wedding (O Frank, think of its being *our* wedding!) unless we delay it. He has always been very fond of me, and he might be hurt if we were married so immediately before his arrival. Don't you think it would be as well to wait? Mother leaves it all in your hands, and we shall do exactly as you advise. O Frank . . . (The rest is confidential.)

Woking, May 29th.

My Own Dearest, - I think that it would be unreasonable upon the part of your Uncle Percival to think that we ought to have changed the date of a matter so important to ourselves, simply in order that he should be present. I am sure that on second thoughts your mother and yourself will see the thing in this light. I must say, however, that in one point I think you both show great judgment. It would certainly be invidious to be married *immediately* before his arrival. I really think that he would have some cause for complaint if we did that. To prevent any chance of hurting his feelings, I think that it would be far best, if your mother and you agree with me, that we should be married upon July 7th. I see that it is a Thursday, and in every way suitable. When I read your last letter . . . (The remainder is unimportant.)

St. Albans, June 1st.

Dearest Frank, - I am sure that you are right in thinking that it would be as well not to have the ceremony too near the date of Uncle Percival's arrival in England. We should be so sorry to hurt his feelings in any way. Mother has been down to Madame Mortimer's about the dresses, and she thinks that everything could be hurried up so as to be ready by July 7th. She is so obliging, and her skirts *do* hang so beautifully. O Frank, it is only a few weeks' time, and then . . .

Woking, June 3rd.

My Own Darling Maude, - How good you are - and your mother also - in falling in with my suggestions! Please, please don't bother your dear self about dresses. You only want the one travelling-dress to be married in, and the rest we can pick up as we go. I am sure that white dress with the black stripe - the one you were playing tennis with at the Arlingtons' - would do splendidly. You looked simply splendid that day. I am inclined to think that it is my favourite of all your dresses, with the exception of the dark one with the light-green front. That shows off your figure so splendidly. I am very fond also of the grey Quaker-like alpaca dress. What a little dove you do look in it! I think those dresses, and of course your satin evening-dress, are my favourites. On second thoughts, they are the only dresses I have ever seen you in. But I like the grey best, because you wore it the first time I ever - you remember! You must *never* get rid of those dresses. They are too full of associations. I want to see you in them for years, and years, and years.

What I wanted to say was that you have so many charming dresses, that we may consider ourselves independent of Madame Mortimer. If her things should be late, they will come in very usefully afterwards. I don't want to be selfish or inconsiderate, my own dearest girlie, but it would be rather too much if we allowed my tailor or your dressmaker to be obstacles to our union. I just want you - your dainty little self - if you had only your 'wee coatie,' as Burns says. Now look here! I want you to bring your influence to bear upon your mother, and so make a small change in our plans. The earlier we can have our honeymoon, the more pleasant the hotels will be. I do want your first experiences with me to be without a shadow of discomfort. In July half the world starts for its holiday. If we could get away at the end of this mouth, we should just be ahead of them. This month, this very month! Oh, do try to manage this, my own dearest girl. The 30th of June is a Tuesday, and in every way suitable. They could spare me from the office most excellently. This would just give us time to have the banns three times, beginning with next Sunday. I leave it in your hands, dear. Do try to work it.

St. Albans, June 4th.

My Dearest Frank, - We nearly called in the doctor after your dear old preposterous letter. My mother gasped upon the sofa while I read her some extracts. That I, the daughter of the house, should be married in my old black and white tennis-dress, which I wore at the Arlingtons' to save my nice one! Oh, you are simply splendid sometimes! And the learned way in which you alluded to my alpaca. As a matter of fact, it's a merino, but that doesn't matter. Fancy your remembering my wardrobe like that! And wanting me to wear them all for years! So I shall, dear, secretly, when we are quite quite alone. But they are all out of date already, and if in a year or so you saw your poor dowdy wife with tight sleeves among a roomful of puff-shouldered young ladies, you would not be consoled even by the memory that it was in that dress that you first . . . you know!

As a matter of fact, I *must* have my dress to be married in. I don't think mother would regard it as a legal marriage if I hadn't, and if you knew how nice it will be, you would not have the heart to interfere with it. Try to picture it, silver-grey - I know how fond you are of greys - a little white chiffon at neck and wrists, and the prettiest pearl trimming. Then the hat *en suite*, pale-grey lisse, white feather and brilliant buckle. All these details are wasted upon you, sir, but you will like it when you see it. It fulfils your ideal of tasteful simplicity, which men always imagine to be an economical method of dressing, until they have wives and milliners' bills of their own.

And now I have kept the biggest news to the last. Mother has been to Madame, and she says that if she works all night, she will have everything ready for the 30th. O Frank, does it not seem incredible! Next Tuesday three weeks. And the banns! Oh my goodness, I am frightened when I think about it! Dear old boy, you won't tire of me, will you? Whatever should I do if I thought you had tired of me! And the worst of it is, that you don't know me a bit. I have a hundred thousand faults, and you arc blinded by your love and cannot see them. But then some day the scales will fall from your eyes, and you will perceive the whole hundred thousand at once. Oh, what a reaction there will be! You will see me as I am, frivolous, wilful, idle, petulant, and altogether horrid. But I do love you, Frank, with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and you'll count that on the other side, won't you? Now I am so glad I have said all this, because it is best that you should know what you should expect. It will be nice for you to look back and to say, 'She gave me fair warning, and she is no worse than she said.' O Frank, think of the 30th.

P.S. - I forgot to say that I had a grey silk cape, lined with cream, to go with the dress. It is just sweet!

So that is how they arranged about the date.

CHAPTER II - THE OVERTURE CONTINUED - IN A MINOR KEY

Woking, June 7th.

My Own Dearest Maude, - How I wish you were here, for I have been down, down, down, in the deepest state of despondency all day. I have longed to hear the sound of your voice, or to feel the touch of your hand! How can I be despondent, when in three weeks I shall be the husband of the dearest girl in England? That is what I ask myself, and then the answer comes that it is just exactly on that account that my wretched conscience is gnawing at me. I feel that I have not used you well; I owe you reparation, and I don't know what to do.

In your last dear letter you talk about being frivolous. *You* have never been frivolous. But I have been frivolous - for ever since I have learned to love you, I have been so wrapped up in my love, with my happiness gilding everything about me, that I have never really faced the prosaic facts of life or discussed with you what our marriage will really necessitate. And now, at this eleventh hour, I realise that I have led you on in ignorance to an act which will perhaps take a great deal of the sunshine out of your life. What have I to offer you in exchange for the sacrifice which you will make for me? Myself, my love, and all that I have - but how little it all amounts to! You are a girl in a thousand, in ten thousand - bright, beautiful, sweet, the dearest lady in all the land. And I an average man - or perhaps hardly that - with little to boast of in the past, and vague ambitions for the future. It is a poor bargain for you, a most miserable bargain. You have still time. Count the cost, and if it be too great, then draw back even now without fear of one word or inmost thought of reproach from me. Your whole life is at stake. How can I hold you to a decision which was taken before you realised what it meant? Now I shall place the facts before you, and then, come what may, my conscience will be at rest, and I shall be sure that you are acting with your eyes open.

You have to compare your life as it is, and as it will be. Your father is rich, or at least comfortably off, and you have been accustomed all your life to have whatever you desired. From what I know of your mother's kindness, I should imagine that no wish of yours has ever remained ungratified. You have lived well, dressed well, a sweet home, a lovely garden, your collie, your canary, your maid. Above all, you have never had anxiety, never had to worry about the morrow. I can see all your past life so well. In the mornings, your music, your singing, your gardening, your reading. In the afternoons, your social duties, the visit and the visitor. In the evening, tennis, a walk, music again, your father's return from the City, the happy family-circle, with occasionally the dinner, the dance, and the theatre. And so smoothly on, month after month, and year after year, your own sweet, kindly, joyous nature, and your bright face, making every one round you happy, and so reacting upon your own happiness. Why should you bother about money? That was your father's business. Why should you trouble about housekeeping? That was your mother's duty. You lived like the birds and the flowers, and had no need to take heed for the future. Everything which life could offer was yours.

And now you must turn to what is in store for you, if you are still content to face the future with me. Position I have none to offer. What is the exact position of the wife of the assistant-accountant of the Co-operative Insurance Office? It is indefinable. What are my prospects? I may become head-accountant. If Dinton died - and I hope he won't, for he is an excellent fellow - I should probably get his berth. Beyond that I have no career. I have some aspirations after literature - a few critical articles in the monthlies - but I don't suppose they will ever lead to anything of consequence.

And my income, £400 a year with a commission on business I introduce. But that amounts to hardly anything. You have £50. Our total, then, is certainly under £500. Have you considered what it will mean to leave that charming house at St. Albans - the breakfast-room, the billiard-room, the lawn - and to live in the little £50 a year house at Woking, with its two sitting-rooms and pokey garden? Have I a right to ask you to do such a thing? And then the housekeeping, the planning, the arranging, the curtailing, the keeping up appearances upon a limited income. I have made myself miserable, because I feel that you are marrying me without a suspicion of the long weary uphill struggle which lies before you. O Maude, my darling Maude, I feel that you sacrifice too much for me! If I were a man I should say to you, 'Forget me - forget it all! Let our relations be a closed chapter in your life. You can do better. I and my cares come like a great cloud-bank to keep the sunshine from your young life. You who are so tender and dainty! How can I bear to see you exposed to the drudgery and sordid everlasting cares of such a household! I think of your graces, your pretty little ways, the elegancies of your life, and how charmingly you carry them off. You are born and bred for just such an atmosphere as the one which you breathe. And I take advantage of my good-fortune in winning your love to drag you down, to take the beauty and charm from your life, to fill it with small and vulgar cares, never-ending and soul-killing. Selfish beast that I am, why should I allow you to come down into the stress and worry of life, when I found you so high above it? And what can I offer you in exchange?' These are the thoughts which come back and back all day, and leave me in the blackest fit of despondency. I confessed to you that I had dark humours, but never one so hopeless as this. I do not wish my worst enemy to be as unhappy as I have been to-day.

Write to me, my own darling Maude, and tell me all you think, your very inmost soul, in this matter. Am I right? Have I asked too much of you? Does the change frighten you? You will have this in the morning, and I should have my answer by the evening post. I shall meet the postman. How hard I shall try not to snatch the letter from him, or to give myself away. Wilson has been in worrying me with foolish talk, while my thoughts were all of our affairs. He worked me up into a perfectly homicidal frame of mind, but I hope that I kept on smiling and was not discourteous to him. I wonder which is right, to be polite but hypocritical, or to be inhospitable but honest.

Good-bye, my own dearest sweetheart - all the dearer when I feel that I may lose you. - Ever your devoted

FRANK.

St. Albans, June 8th.

Frank, tell me for Heaven's sake what your letter means! You use words of love, and yet you talk of parting. You speak as if our love were a thing which we might change or suppress. O Frank, you cannot take my love away from me. You don't know what you are to me, my heart, my life, my all. I would give my life for you willingly, gladly - every beat of my heart is for you. You don't know what you have become to me. My every thought is yours, and has been ever since that night at the Arlingtons'. My love is so deep and strong, it rules my whole life, my every action from morning to night. It is the very breath and heart of my life - unchangeable.

I could not alter my love any more than I could stop my heart from beating. How could you, could you suggest such a thing! I know that you really love me just as much as I love you, or I should not open my heart like this. I should be too proud to give myself away. But I feel that pride is out of place when any mistake or misunderstanding may mean lifelong misery to both of us. I would only say good-bye if I thought your love had changed or grown less. But I know that it has not. O my darling, if you only knew what terrible agony the very thought of parting is, you would never have let such an idea even for an instant, on any pretext, enter your mind. The very possibility is too awful to think of. When I read your letter just now up in my room, I nearly fainted. I can't write. O Frank, don't take my love away from me. I can't bear it. Oh no, it is my everything. If I could only see you now, I know that you would kiss these heart-burning tears away. I feel so lonely and tired. I cannot follow all your letter. I only know that you talked of parting, and that I am weary and miserable.

MAUDE.

(COPY OF TELEGRAM)

From Frank Crosse, to *Miss Maude Selby,*
The Laurels, St. Albans

Coming up eight-fifteen, arrive midnight.

June 10th.

How good of you, dear old boy, to come racing across two counties at a minute's notice, simply in order to console me and clear away my misunderstandings. Of course it was most ridiculous of me to take your letter so much to heart, but when I read any suggestion about our parting, it upset me so dreadfully, that I was really incapable of reasoning about anything else. Just that one word PART seemed to be written in letters of fire right across the page, to the exclusion of everything else. So then I wrote an absurd letter to my boy, and the dear came scampering right across the South of England, and arrived at midnight in the most demoralised state. It was just sweet of you to come, dear, and I shall never forget it.

I am so sorry that I have been so foolish, but you must confess, sir, that you have been just a little bit foolish also. The idea of supposing that when I love a man my love can be affected by the size of his house or the amount of his income. It makes me smile to think of it. Do you suppose a woman's happiness is affected by whether she has a breakfast-room, or a billiard-board, or a collie dog, or any of the other luxuries which you enumerated?

But these things are all the merest trimmings of life. They are not the essentials. *You* and your love are the essentials. Some one who will love me with all his heart. Some one whom I can love with all my heart. Oh the difference it makes in life! How it changes everything! It glorifies and beautifies everything. I always felt that I was capable of a great love - and now I have it.

Fancy your imagining that you had come into my life in order to darken it. Why, you *are* my life. If you went out of it, what would be left? You talk about my happiness before I met you - but oh, how empty it all was! I read, and played, and sang as you say, but what a void there was! I did it to please mother, but there really seemed no very clear reason why I should continue to do it. Then you came, and everything was changed. I read because you are fond of reading and because I wanted to talk about books with you. I played because you are fond of music. I sang in the hope that it might please you. Whatever I did, you were always in my mind. I tried and tried to become a better and nobler woman, because I wanted to be worthy of the love you bore me. I have changed, and developed, and improved more in the last three months than in all my life before. And then you come and tell me that you have darkened my life. You know better now. My life has become full and rich, for Love fills my life. It is the keynote of my nature, the foundation, the motive power. It inspires me to make the most of any gift or talent that I have. How could I tell you all this if I did not know that your own feeling was as deep. I could not have given the one, great, and only love of my life in exchange for a half-hearted affection from you. But you will never again make the mistake of supposing that any material consideration can affect our love.

And now we won’t be serious any longer. Dear mother was very much astounded by your tumultuous midnight arrival, and equally precipitate departure next morning. Dear old boy, it was so nice of you! But you won’t ever have horrid black humours and think miserable things any more, will you? But if you must have dark days, now is your time, for I can’t possibly permit any after the 30th. - Ever your own

MAUDE.

Woking, June 11th.

My Own Dearest Girlie, - How perfectly sweet you are! I read and re-read your letter, and I understand more and more how infinitely your nature is above mine. And your conception of love - how lofty and unselfish it is!

How could I lower it by thinking that any worldly thing could be weighed for an instant against it! And yet it was just my jealous love for you, and my keenness that you should never be the worse through me, which led me to write in that way, so I will not blame myself too much. I am really glad that the cloud came, for the sunshine is so much brighter afterwards. And I seem to know you so much better, and to see so much more deeply into your nature. I knew that my own passion for you was the very essence of my soul - oh, how hard it is to put the extreme of emotion into the terms of human speech! - but I did not dare to hope that your feelings were as deep. I hardly ventured to tell even you how I really felt. Somehow, in these days of lawn-tennis and afternoon tea, a strong strong passion, such a passion as one reads of in books and poems, seems out of place. I thought that it would surprise, even frighten you, perhaps, if I were to tell you all that I felt. And now you have written me two letters, which contain all that I should have said if I had spoken from my heart. It is all my own inmost thought, and there is not a feeling that I do not share. O Maude, I may write lightly and speak lightly, perhaps, sometimes, but there never was a woman, never, never in all the story of the world, who was loved more passionately than you are loved by me. Come what may, while the world lasts and the breath of life is between my lips, you are the one woman to me. If we are together, I care nothing for what the future may bring. If we are not together, all the world cannot fill the void.

You say that I have given an impulse to your life: that you read more, study more, take a keener interest in everything. You could not possibly have said a thing which could have given me more pleasure than that. It is splendid! It justifies me in aspiring to you. It satisfies my conscience over everything which I have done. It must be right if that is the effect. I have felt so happy and light-hearted ever since you said it. It is rather absurd to think that *I* should improve you, but if you in your sweet frankness say that it is so, why, I can only marvel and rejoice.

But you must not study and work too hard. You say that you do it to please me, but that would not please me. I'll tell you an anecdote as a dreadful example. I had a friend who was a great lover of Eastern literature, Sanskrit, and so on. He loved a lady. The lady to please him worked hard at these subjects also. In a month she had shattered her nervous system, and will perhaps never be the same again. It was impossible. She was not meant for it, and yet she made herself a martyr over it. I don't mean by this parable that it will be a strain upon your intellect to keep up with mine. But I do mean that a woman's mind is *different* from a man's. A dainty rapier is a finer thing than a hatchet, but it is not adapted for cutting down trees all the same.

Rupton Hale, the architect, one of the few friends I have down here, has some most deplorable views about women. I played a round of the Byfleet Golf Links with him upon Wednesday afternoon, and we discussed the question of women's intellects. He would have it that they have never a light of their own, but are always the reflectors of some other light which you cannot see. He would allow that they were extraordinarily quick in assimilating another person's views, but that was all. I quoted some very shrewd remarks which a lady had made to me at dinner. 'Those are the traces of the last man,' said he. According to his preposterous theory, you could in conversation with a woman reconstruct the last man who had made an impression to her. 'She will reflect you upon the next person she talks to,' said he. It was ungallant, but it was ingenious.

Dearest sweetheart, before I stop, let me tell you that if I have brought any happiness into your life, you have brought far, far more into mine. My soul seemed to come into full being upon the day when I loved you. It was so small, and cramped, and selfish, before - and life was so hard, and stupid, and purposeless. To live, to sleep, to eat, for some years, and then to die - it was so trivial and so material. But now the narrow walls seem in an instant to have fallen, and a boundless horizon stretches around me. And everything appears beautiful. London Bridge, King William Street, Abchurch Lane, the narrow stair, the office with the almanacs and the shining desks, it has all become glorified, tinged with a golden haze. I am stronger: I step out briskly and breathe more deeply. And I am a better man too. God knows there was room for it. But I do try to make an ideal, and to live up to it. I feel such a fraud when I think of being put upon a pedestal by you, when some little hole where I am out of sight is my true place. I am like the man in Browning who mourned over the spots upon his 'speckled hide,' but rejoiced in the swansdown of his lady. And so, my own dear sweet little swansdown lady, good-night to you, with my heart's love now and for ever from your true lover,

FRANK.

Saturday! Saturday! Saturday! oh, how I am longing for Saturday, when I shall see you again! We will go on Sunday and hear the banns together.

CHAPTER III - THE OVERTURE CONCLUDED

St. Albans, June 14th.

Dearest Frank, - What a dreadful thing it is to have your name shouted out in public! And what a voice the man had! He simply bellowed ‘Maude Selby of this parish’ as if he meant all this parish to know about it. And then he let you off so easily. I suppose he thought that there was no local interest in Frank Crosse of Woking. But when he looked round expectantly, after asking whether there was any known cause or just impediment why we should not be joined together, it gave me quite a thrill. I felt as if some one would jump up like a Jack-in-the-box and make a scene in the church. How relieved I was when he changed the subject! I sank my face in my hands, but I know that I was blushing all down my neck. Then I looked at you between my fingers, and there you were sitting quite cool and cheerful, as if you rather liked it. I think that we shall go to evening-service next week. Papa has given up going altogether since the new organist came. He says he cannot face the music.

What a sweet time we had together. I shall never, never forget it! O Frank, how good you are to me! And how I hope you won’t regret what you are doing. It is all very well just now, when I am young and you think that I am pretty. I love that you should think so, but I am compelled to tell you that it is not really so. I can’t imagine how you came to think it! I suppose it was from seeing me so often beside papa. If you saw me near Nelly Sheridan, or any other *really* pretty girl, you would at once see the difference. It just happens that you like grey eyes and brown hair, and the other things, but that does not mean that I am really pretty. I should be so sorry if there were any misunderstanding about this, and you only found out when too late. You ought to keep this letter for reference, as papa always says, and then it will be interesting to you afterwards.

I should like you to see me now - or rather I wouldn’t have you see me for the world. I am so flushed and untidy, for I have been cooking. Is it not absurd, if you come to think of it, that we girls should be taught the irregular French verbs, and the geography of China, and never to cook the simplest thing? It really does seem ridiculous.

But it is never too late to mend, so I went into the kitchen this morning and made a tart. You can’t imagine what a lot of things one needs even for such a simple thing as that. I thought cook was joking when she put them all down in front of me. It was like a conjurer giving his performance. There was an empty bowl, and a bowl full of sliced apples, and a big board, and a rolling-pin, and eggs, and butter, and sugar, and cloves, and of course flour. We broke eggs and put them into a bowl - you can’t think what a mess an egg makes when it misses the bowl. Then we stirred them up with flour and butter and things. I stirred until I was perfectly exhausted. No wonder a cook has usually a great thick arm. Then when it had formed a paste, we rolled it out, and put the apples in the dish, and roofed it in, and trimmed the edges, and stuck flat leaves made of paste all over it, and the dearest little crown in the middle. Then we put it into the oven until it was brown. It looked a very nice tart, and mamma said that I had made it very solidly. It certainly did feel very heavy for its size. Mamma would not taste it, because she said that she thought Dr. Tristram would not approve of her doing so, but I had a piece, and really it was not so bad. Mamma said the servants might have it at dinner, but the servants said that the poor window-cleaner had a large family, and so we gave it to him. It is so sweet to feel that one is of any use to any one.

What do you think happened this morning? Two wedding-presents arrived. The first was a very nice fish slice and fork in a case. It was from dear old Mrs. Jones Beyrick, on whom we really had no claim whatever. We all think it so kind of her, and such a nice fish-slice. The other was a beautiful travelling-bag from Uncle Arthur. Stamped in gold upon it were the letters M.C., I said, ‘Oh, what a pity! They have put the wrong initials.’ That made mamma laugh. I suppose one soon gets used to it. Fancy how you would feel if it were the other way about, and you changed your name to mine. They might call you Selby, but you would continue to feel Crosse. I didn’t mean that for a joke, but women make jokes without intending it. The other day the curate drove up in his donkey-cart, and mother said, ‘Oh, what a nice tandem!’ I think that she meant to say ‘turn-out’; but papa said it was the neatest thing he had heard for a long time, so mamma is very pleased, but I am sure that she does not know even now why it should be so funny.

What stupid letters I write! Doesn't it frighten you when you read them and think that is the person with whom I have to spend my life. Yet you never seem alarmed about it. I think it is so *brave* of you. That reminds me that I never finished what I wanted to say at the beginning of this letter. Even supposing that I am pretty (and my complexion sometimes is simply awful), you must bear in mind how quickly the years slip by, and how soon a woman alters. Why, we shall hardly be married before you will find me full of wrinkles, and without a tooth in my head. Poor boy, how dreadful for you! Men seem to change so little and so slowly. Besides, it does not matter for them, for nobody marries a man because he is pretty. But you must marry me, Frank, not for what I look but for what I am - for my inmost, inmost self, so that if I had no body at all, you would love me just the same. That is how I love you, but I do prefer you with your body on all the same. I don't know how I love you, dear. I only know that I am in a dream when you are near me - just a beautiful dream. I live for those moments. - Ever your own little

MAUDE.

P.S. - Papa gave us such a fright, for he came in just now and said that the window-cleaner and all his family were very ill. This was a joke, because the coachman had told him about my tart. Wasn't it horrid of him?

Woking, June 17*th.*

My own sweetest Maude, - I do want you to come up to town on Saturday morning. Then I will see you home to St. Albans in the evening, and we shall have another dear delightful week end. I think of nothing else, and I count the hours. Now please to manage it, and don't let anything stop you. You know that you can always get your way. Oh yes, you can, miss! I know.

We shall meet at the bookstall at Charing Cross railway station at one o'clock, but if anything should go wrong, send me a wire to the Club. Then we can do some shopping together, and have some fun also. Tell your mother that we shall be back in plenty of time for dinner. Make another tart, and I shall eat it. Things are slack at the office just now, and I could be spared for a few days.

So you have had a fish-slice. It is so strange, because on that very day I had my first present, and it was a fish-slice also. We shall have fish at each end when we give a dinner. If we get another fish-slice, then we shall give a fish-dinner - or keep one of the slices to give to your friend Nelly Sheridan when *she* gets married. They will always come in useful. And I have had two more presents. One is a Tantalus spirit-stand from my friends in the office. The other is a pair of bronzes from the cricket club. They got it up without my knowing anything about it, and I was amazed when a deputation came up to my rooms with them last night. ‘May your innings be long and your partnership unbroken until you each make a hundred not out.’ That was the inscription upon a card.

I have something very grave to tell you. I’ve been going over my bills and things, and I owe ever so much more than I thought. I have always been so careless, and never known exactly how I stood. It did not matter when one was a bachelor, for one always felt that one could live quite simply for a few months, and so set matters straight. But now it is more serious. The bills come to more than a hundred pounds; the biggest one is forty-two pounds to Snell and Walker, the Conduit Street tailors. However, I am ordering my marriage-suit from them, and that will keep them quiet. I have enough on hand to pay most of the others. But we must not run short upon our honeymoon - what an awful idea! Perhaps there may be some cheques among our presents. We will hope for the best.

But there is a more serious thing upon which I want to consult you. You asked me never to have any secrets from you, or else I should not bother you about such things. I should have kept it for Saturday when we meet, but I want you to have time to think about it, so that we may come to some decision then.

I am surety to a man for an indefinite sum of money. It sounds rather dreadful, does it not? But it is not so bad as it sounds, for there is no harm done yet. But the question is what we should do in the future about it, and the answer is not a very easy one. He is a very pleasant fellow, an insurance agent, and he got into some trouble about his accounts last year. The office would have dismissed him, but as I knew his wife and his family, I became surety that he should not go wrong again, and so I saved him from losing his situation. His name is Farintosh. He is one of those amiable, weak, good fellows whom you cannot help loving, although you never can trust them. Of course we could give notice that we should not be responsible any longer, but it would be a thunderbolt to this poor family, and the man would certainly be ruined. We don’t want to begin our own happiness by making any one else unhappy, do we? But we shall talk it over, and I shall do what you advise. You understand that we are only liable in case he defaults, and surely it is very unlikely that he will do so after the lesson that he has already had.

I think the house will do splendidly. The Lindens is the name, and it is on the Maybury Road, not more than a quarter of a mile from the station. If your mother and you could come down on Tuesday or Wednesday, I should get a half-day off, and you would be able to inspect it. Such a nice little lawn in front, and garden behind. A conservatory, if you please, dining-room and drawing-room. You can never assemble more than four or five guests. On your at-home days, we shall put up little placards as they do outside the theatres, 'Drawing-room full,' 'Dining-room full,' 'Room in the Conservatory.' There are two good bedrooms, one large maid's room, and a lumber-room. One cook and one housemaid could run it beautifully. Rent £50 on a three years' lease - with taxes, about £62. I think it was just built for us. Rupton Hale says that we must be careful not to brush against the walls, and that it would be safer to go outside to sneeze - but that is only his fun.

What a dull, stupid letter! I do hope that I shall be in good form on Saturday. I am a man of moods - worse luck! and they come quite regardless of how I wish to be, or even of how I have cause to be. I do hope that I shall make your day bright for you - the last day that we shall have together before *the* day. There have been times when I have been such bad company to you, just when I wished to be at my best. But you are always so sweet and patient and soothing. Until Saturday, then, my own darling. - Ever your lover, FRANK.

P.S. - I open this to tell you that such a gorgeous fish-knife, with our monograms upon it, has just arrived from Mrs. Preston, my father's old friend. I went to the Goldsmith's Company in Regent Street yesterday afternoon, and I bought - what do you think? It looks so beautiful upon its snow-white cotton wadding. I like them very broad and rather flat. I do hope you will think it all right. It fills me with the strangest feelings when I look at it. Come what may, foul weather or fair, sorrow or joy, that little strip of gold will still be with us - we shall see it until we can see no more.

P.P.S. - Saturday! Saturday!! Saturday!!!

CHAPTER IV - THE TWO SOLOS

Their tryst was at the Charing Cross bookstall at one o’clock, and so Mr. Frank Crosse was there at quarter-past twelve, striding impatiently up and down, and stopping dead whenever a woman emerged from the entrance, like a pointer dog before a partridge. Before he came he had been haunted by the idea that possibly Maude might have an impulse to come early - and what if she were to arrive and not find him there! Every second of her company was so dear to him, that when driving to meet her he had sometimes changed from one cab to another upon the way, because the second seemed to have the faster horse. But now that he was on the ground he realised that she was very exact to her word, and that she would neither be early nor late. And yet, in the illogical fashion of a lover, he soon forgot that it was he who was too soon, and he chafed and chafed as the minutes passed, until at about quarter to one he was striding gloomily about with despondent features and melancholy forebodings, imagining a thousand miserable reasons for her inexplicable delay. A good many people stared at him as they passed, and we may do so among the number.

In person Frank Crosse was neither tall nor short, five feet eight and a half to be exact, with the well-knit frame and springy step of a young man who had been an athlete from his boyhood. He was slim, but wiry, and carried his head with a half-defiant backward slant which told of pluck and breed. His face was tanned brown, in spite of his City hours, but his hair and slight moustache were flaxen, and his eyes, which were his best features, were of a delicate blue, and could vary in expression from something very tender to something particularly hard. He was an orphan, and had inherited nothing from his parents save a dash of the artist from his mother. It was not enough to help him to earn a living, but it transformed itself into a keen appreciation and some ambitions in literature, and it gave a light and shade to his character which made him rather complex, and therefore interesting. His best friends could not deny the shade, and yet it was but the shadow thrown by the light. Strength, virility, emotional force, power of deep feeling - these are traits which have to be paid for. There was sometimes just a touch of the savage, or at least there were indications of the possibility of a touch of the savage, in Frank Crosse. His intense love of the open air and of physical exercise was a sign of it. He left upon women the impression, not altogether unwelcome, that there were unexplored recesses of his nature to which the most intimate of them had never penetrated. In those dark corners of the spirit either a saint or a sinner might be lurking, and there was a pleasurable excitement in peering into them, and wondering which it was. No woman ever found him dull. Perhaps it would have been better for him if they had, for his impulsive nature had never been long content with a chilly friendship. He was, as we may see, a man with a past, but it *was* a past, now that Maude Selby had come like an angel of light across the shadowed path of his life. In age he was nearly twenty-seven.

There are one or two things which might be said for him which he would not have said for himself. He was an only child and an orphan, but he had adopted his grandparents, who had been left penniless through his father's death, and through all his struggles he had managed to keep them happy and comfortable in a little cottage in Worcestershire. Nor did he ever tell them that he had a struggle - fearing lest it should make their position painful; and so when their quarterly cheque arrived, they took it as a kindly but not remarkable act of duty upon the part of their wealthy grandson in the City, with no suspicion as to the difference which their allowance was making to him. Nor did he himself look upon his action as a virtuous one, but simply as a thing which must obviously be done. In the meantime, he had stuck closely to his work, had won rapid promotion in the Insurance Office in which he had started as junior clerk, had gained the goodwill of his superiors through his frank, unaffected ways, and had been asked to play for the second Surrey eleven at cricket. So without going the length of saying that he was worthy of Maude Selby, one might perhaps claim - if it could be done without endangering that natural modesty which was one of his charms - that he was as worthy as any other young man who was available.

That unfortunate artistic soul of his, which had been in the tropics of expectation, and was now in the arctic of reaction, had just finally settled down to black despair, with a grim recognition of the fact that Maude had certainly and absolutely given him up, when one boomed from the station clock, and on the very stroke she hurried on to the platform. How could he have strained his eyes after other women, as if a second glance were ever needed when it was really she! The perfectly graceful figure, the trimness and neatness of it, the beautiful womanly poise of the head, the quick elastic step, he could have sworn to her among ten thousand. His heart gave a bound at the sight of her, but he had the English aversion to giving himself away, and so he walked quickly forward to meet her with an impassive face, but with a look in his eyes which was all that she wanted.

'How are you?'

'How do you do?'

He stood for a few moments looking at her in silence. She had on the dress which he loved so much, a silver-grey merino skirt and jacket, with a blouse of white pongee silk showing in front. Some lighter coloured trimming fringed the cloth. She wore a grey toque, with a dash of white at the side, and a white veil which softened without concealing the dark brown curls and fresh girlish face beneath it. Her gloves were of grey suède, and the two little pointed tan shoes peeping from the edge of her skirt were the only touches of a darker tint in her attire. Crosse had the hereditary artist's eye, and he could only stand and stare and enjoy it. He was filled with admiration, with reverence, and with wonder that this perfect thing should really proclaim itself to be all his own. Whatever had he done, or could he do, to deserve it?

She looked up at him in a roguish sidelong way, with the bright mischievous smile which was one of her charms.

'Well, sir, do you approve?'

'By Jove, it is splendid - beautiful!'

'So glad! I hoped you would, since you are so fond of greys. Besides, it is cooler in this weather. I hope you have not been waiting.'

'Oh no, that's all right.'

'You looked so solemn when first I saw you.'

'Did I?'

'And then you just jumped.'

'Did I? I'm sorry.'

'Why?'

'I don't know. I like our feelings to be our very very own, and never to show them to any one else at all. I dare say it is absurd, but that is my instinct.'

'Never mind, dear, it wasn't such a big jump as all that. Where are we going?'

'Come here, Maude, into the waiting-room.'

She followed him into the gloomy, smoky, dingy room. Bare yellow benches framed an empty square of brown linoleum. A labouring man with his wife and a child sat waiting with the stolid patience of the poor in one corner. They were starting on some Saturday afternoon excursion, and had mistimed their train. Maude Selby and Frank Crosse took the other corner. He drew a jeweller's box from his pocket and removed the lid. Something sparkled among the wadding.

'O Frank! Is that really it?'

'Do you like it?'

'What a broad one it is! Mother's is quite thin.'

'They wear thin in time.'

'It is beautiful. Shall I try it on?'

'No, don't. There is some superstition about it.'

'But suppose it won't fit?'

'That is quite safe. I measured it with your sapphire ring.'

'I haven't half scolded you enough about that sapphire ring. How could you go and give twenty-two guineas for a ring? - oh yes, sir, that was the price, for I saw a duplicate yesterday in the Goldsmith's Company. You dear extravagant old boy!'

'I had saved the money.'

'But not for that!'

'For nothing half or quarter as important. But I had the other to the same size, so it is sure to fit.'

Maude had pushed up her veil, and sat with the little golden circlet in her hand, looking down at it, while the dim watery London sunlight poured through the window, and tagged all her wandering curls with a coppery gleam. It was a face beautiful in itself, but more beautiful for its expression - sensitive, refined, womanly, full of innocent archness and girlish mischief, but with a depth of expression in the eyes, and a tender delicacy about the mouth, which spoke of a great spirit with all its capacities for suffering and devotion within. The gross admirer of merely physical charms might have passed her over unnoticed. So might the man who is attracted only by outward and obvious signs of character. But to the man who could see, to the man whose own soul had enough of spirituality to respond to hers, and whose eye could appreciate the subtlety of a beauty which is of the mind as well as of the body, there was not in all wide London upon that midsummer day a sweeter girl than Maude Selby, as she sat in her grey merino dress with the London sun tagging her brown curls with that coppery glimmer.

She handed back the ring, and a graver expression passed over her mobile face.

'I feel as you said in your letter, Frank. There *is* something tragic in it. It will be with me for ever. All the future will arrange itself round that little ring.'

'Are you afraid of it?'

'Afraid!' her grey glove rested for an instant upon the back of his hand. 'I *couldn't* be afraid of anything if you were with me. It is really extraordinary, for by nature I am so easily frightened. But if I were with you in a railway accident or anywhere, it would be just the same. You see I become for the time part of you, as it were, and you are brave enough for two.'

'I don't profess to be so brave as all that,' said Frank. 'I expect I have as many nerves as my neighbours.'

Maude's grey toque nodded up and down. 'I know all about that,' said she.

'You have such a false idea of me. It makes me happy at the time and miserable afterwards, for I feel such a rank impostor. You imagine me to be a hero, and a genius, and all sorts of things, while I *know* that I am about as ordinary a young fellow as walks the streets of London, and no more worthy of you than - well, than any one else is.'

She laughed with shining eyes.

'I like to hear you talk like that,' said she. 'That is just what is so beautiful about you.'

It is hopeless to prove that you are not a hero when your disclaimers are themselves taken as a proof of heroism. Frank shrugged his shoulders.

'I only hope you'll find me out gradually and not suddenly,' said he. 'Now, Maude, we have all day and all London before us. What shall we do? I want you to choose.'

'I am quite happy whatever we do. I am content to sit here with you until evening.'

Her idea of a happy holiday set them both laughing.

'Come along,' said he, 'we shall discuss it as we go.'

The workman's family was still waiting, and Maude handed the child a shilling as she went out. She was so happy herself that she wanted every one else to be happy also. The people turned to look at her as she passed. With the slight flush upon her cheeks and the light in her eyes, she seemed the personification of youth, and life, and love. One tall old gentleman started as he looked, and watched her with a rapt face until she disappeared. Some cheek had flushed and some eye had brightened at his words once, and sweet old days had for an instant lived again.

‘Shall we have a cab?’

‘O Frank, we must learn to be economical. Let us walk.’

‘I can’t and won’t be economical to-day.’

‘There now! See what a bad influence I have upon you.’

‘Most demoralising! But we have not settled yet where we are to go to.’

‘What *does* it matter, if we are together?’

‘There is a good match at the Oval, the Australians against Surrey. Would you care to see that?’

‘Yes, dear, if you would.’

‘And there are matinées at all the theatres.’

‘You would rather be in the open air.’

‘All I want is that you should enjoy yourself.’

‘Never fear. I shall do that.’

‘Well, then, first of all I vote that we go and have some lunch.’

They started across the station yard, and passed the beautiful old stone cross. Among the hansoms and the four-wheelers, the hurrying travellers, and the lounging cabmen, there rose that lovely reconstruction of mediævalism, the pious memorial of a great Plantagenet king to his beloved wife.

‘Six hundred years ago,’ said Frank, as they paused and looked up, ‘that old stone cross was completed, with heralds and armoured knights around it to honour her whose memory was honoured by the king. Now the corduroyed porters stand where the knights stood, and the engines whistle where the heralds trumpeted, but the old cross is the same as ever in the same old place. It is a little thing of that sort which makes one realise the unbroken history of our country.’

Maude insisted upon hearing about Queen Eleanor, and Frank imparted the little that he knew as they walked out into the crowded Strand.

‘She was Edward the First’s wife, and a splendid woman. It was she, you remember, who sucked the wound when he was stabbed with a poisoned dagger. She died somewhere in the north, and he had the body carried south to bury it in Westminster Abbey. Wherever it rested for a night he built a cross, and so you have a line of crosses all down England to show where that sad journey was broken.'

They had turned down Whitehall, and passed the big cuirassiers upon their black chargers at the gate of the Horse Guards. Frank pointed to one of the windows of the old banqueting-hall.

'You've seen a memorial of a queen of England,' said he. 'That window is the memorial of a king.'

'Why so, Frank?'

'I believe that it was through that window that Charles the First passed out to the scaffold when his head was cut off. It was the first time that the people had ever shown that they claimed authority over their king.'

'Poor fellow!' said Maude. 'He was so handsome, and such a good husband and father.'

'It is the good kings who may be the dangerous ones.'

'O Frank!'

'If a king thinks only of pleasure, then he does not interfere with matters of state. But if he is conscientious, he tries to do what he imagines to be his duty, and so he causes trouble. Look at Charles, for example. He was a very good man, and yet he caused a civil war. George the Third was a most exemplary character, but his stupidity lost us America, and nearly lost us Ireland. They were each succeeded by thoroughly bad men, who did far less harm.'

They had reached the end of Whitehall, and the splendid panorama of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament lay before them. The most stately of ancient English buildings was contrasted with the most beautiful of modern ones. How anything so graceful came to be built by this tasteless and utilitarian nation must remain a marvel to the traveller. The sun was shining upon the gold-work of the roof, and the grand towers sprang up amid the light London haze, like some gorgeous palace in a dream. It was a fit centre for the rule to whose mild sway one-fifth of the human race acquiesces - a rule upheld by so small a force that only the consent of the governed can sustain it.

Frank and Maude stood together looking up at it.

'How beautiful it is!' she cried. 'How the gilding lights up the whole building!'

‘And how absurd it is not to employ it more in our gloomy London architecture!’ said Frank. ‘Imagine how grand a gilded dome of St. Paul’s would look, hanging like a rising sun over the City. But here is our restaurant, Maude, and Big Ben says that it is a quarter to two.

CHAPTER V - IN BRITAIN’S VALHALLA

They had discussed the rooms in their new house, and the bridesmaids’ dresses, and Maude’s cooking, and marriage-presents, and the merits of Brighton, and the nature of love, and volleying at tennis (Maude was the lady-champion of a tennis club), and season tickets, and the destiny of the universe - to say nothing of a small bottle of Perrier Jouet. It was reprehensibly extravagant, but this would be their last unmarried excursion, and so they drank to the dear days of the past, and the dearer ones of the future. Good comrades as well as lovers, they talked freely, and with pleasure. Frank never made the common mistake of talking down, and Maude justified his confidence by eagerly keeping up. To both of them silence was preferable to conventional small talk.

‘We’ll just get down there after lunch,’ said Frank, as he paid his bill. ‘You have not seen the Australians, have you?’

‘Yes, dear, I saw them at Clifton four years ago.’

‘But this is a new lot. There are nine of the present team who have never played in England before.’

‘They are very good, are they not?’

‘Very good indeed. And the dry summer has helped them. It is the sticky English wickets which put them off. The wickets are very fast over there. Giffen is their best all-round man, but Darling and Iredale and young Hill are good enough for anything. Well, then - O Lord, what a pity!’

He had turned towards the window as he rose, and saw one of those little surprises by which Nature relieves the monotony of life in these islands. The sun had gone, a ragged slate-coloured cloud was drifting up from over the river, and the rain was falling with a soft persistency which is more fatal than the most boisterous shower. There would be no more cricket that day.

‘Two coffees and two benedictines,’ cried Frank, and they relapsed into their chairs. But a half-hour passed and the grey cloud was thicker and the rain more heavy. The cheerless leaden river flowed slowly under drifting skies. Beyond an expanse of shining pavement the great black Abbey towered amidst the storm.

‘Have you ever done the Abbey, Maude?’

‘No, Frank; I should love to.’

‘I have only been once - more shame to me to say so! Is it not a sin that we young Englishmen should be familiar with every music-hall in London and should know so little of this which is the centre of the British race, the most august and tremendous monument that ever a nation owned. Six hundred years ago the English looked upon it as their holiest and most national shrine, and since then our kings and our warriors and our thinkers and our poets have all been laid there, until there is such an accumulation that the huge Abbey has hardly space for another monument. Let us spend an hour inside it.’

They made for Solomon’s porch, since it was the nearest and they had but the one umbrella. Under its shelter they brushed themselves dry before they entered.

‘Whom does the Abbey belong to, Frank?’

‘To you and me!’

‘Now you are joking!’

‘Not at all. It belongs in the long-run to the British taxpayer. You have heard the story of the Scotch visitor who came on board one of our battleships and asked to see the captain. “Who shall I say?” said the sentry. “One of the proprietors,” said the Scotchman. That’s *our* position towards the Abbey. Let us inspect our property.’

They were smiling as they entered, but the smile faded from their lips as the door closed behind them. In this holy of holies, this inner sanctuary of the race, there was a sense of serene and dignified solemnity which would have imposed itself upon the most thoughtless. Frank and Maude stood in mute reverence. The high arches shot up in long rows upon either side of them, straight and slim as beautiful trees, until they curved off far up near the clerestory and joined their sister curves to form the lightest, most delicate tracery of stone. In front of them a great rose-window of stained glass, splendid with rich purples and crimsons, shone through a subdued and reverent gloom. Here and there in the aisles a few spectators moved among the shadows, but all round along the walls two and three deep were ranged the illustrious dead, the perishable body within, the lasting marble without, and the more lasting name beneath. It was very silent in the home of the great dead - only a distant footfall or a subdued murmur here and there. Maude knelt down and sank her face in her hands. Frank prayed also with that prayer which is a feeling rather than an utterance.

Then they began to move round the short transept in which they found themselves - a part of the Abbey reserved for the great statesmen. Frank tried to quote the passage in which Macaulay talks about the men worn out by the stress and struggle of the neighbouring parliament-hall, and coming hither for peace and rest. Here were the men who had been strong enough to grasp the helm, and who, sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly, but always honestly, had tried to keep the old ship before the wind. Canning and Peel were there, with Pitt, Fox, Grattan and Beaconsfield. Governments and oppositions moulder behind the walls. Beaconsfield alone among all the statues showed the hard-lined face of the self-made man. These others look so plump and smooth one can hardly realise how strong they were, but they sprang from those ruling castes to whom strength came by easy inheritance. Frank told Maude the little which he knew of each of them - of Grattan, the noblest Irishman of them all, of Castlereagh, whose coffin was pursued to the gates of the Abbey by a raging mob who wished to tear out his corpse, of Fox the libertine philosopher, of Palmerston the gallant sportsman, who rode long after he could walk. They marvelled together at the realism of the sculptor who had pitted Admiral Warren with the smallpox, and at the absurdity of that other one who had clad Robert Peel in a Roman toga.

Then turning to the right at the end of the Statesmen’s Transept, they wandered aimlessly down the huge nave. It was overwhelming, the grandeur of the roof above and of the contents below. Any one of hundreds of these tombs was worth a devout pilgrimage, but how could one raise his soul to the appreciation of them all. Here was Darwin who revolutionised zoology, and here was Isaac Newton who gave a new direction to astronomy. Here were old Ben Jonson, and Stephenson the father of railways, and Livingstone of Africa, and Wordsworth, and Kingsley, and Arnold. Here were the soldiers of the mutiny - Clyde and Outram and Lawrence, - and painters, and authors, and surgeons, and all the good sons who in their several degrees had done loyal service to the old mother. And when their service was done the old mother had stretched out that long arm of hers and had brought them home, and always for every good son brought home she had sent another forth, and her loins were ever fruitful, and her children loving and true. Go into the Abbey and think, and as the nation’s past is borne in upon you, you will have no fear for its future.

Frank was delighted with some of the monuments and horrified by others, and he communicated both his joy and his anger to Maude. They noticed together how the moderns and the Elizabethans had much in common in their types of face, their way of wearing the hair, and their taste in monuments, while between them lie the intolerable affectations - which culminated towards the end of last century.

'It all rings false - statue, inscription, everything,' said Frank. 'These insufferable allegorical groups sprawling round a dead hero are of the same class as the pompous and turgid prose of Doctor Johnson. The greatest effects are the simplest effects, and so it always was and so it always will be. But that little bit of Latin is effective, I confess.'

It was a very much defaced inscription underneath a battered Elizabethan effigy, whose feet had been knocked off, and whose features were blurred into nothing. Two words of the inscription had caught Frank's eye.

'*Moestissima uxor*! It was his "most sad wife" who erected it! Look at it now! The poor battered monument of a woman's love. Now, Maude, come with me, and we shall visit the famous Poets' Corner.'

What an assembly it would be if at some supreme day each man might stand forth from the portals of his tomb. Tennyson, the last and almost the greatest of that illustrious line, lay under the white slab upon the floor. Maude and Frank stood reverently beside it.

'"Sunset and evening Star
And one clear call for me."'

Frank quoted. 'What lines for a very old man to write! I should put him second only to Shakespeare had I the marshalling of them.'

'I have read so little,' said Maude.

'We will read it all together after next week. But it makes your reading so much more real and intimate when you have stood at the grave of the man who wrote. That's Chaucer, the big tomb there. He is the father of British poetry. Here is Browning beside Tennyson - united in life and in death. He was the more profound thinker, but music and form are essential also.'

'What a splendid face!' cried Maude.

'It is a bust to Longfellow, the American.' They read the inscription. 'This bust was placed among the memorials of the poets of England by

English admirers of an American poet.’

‘I am so glad to have seen that. I know his poems so well,’ said Maude.

‘I believe he is more read than any poet in England.’

‘Who is that standing figure?’

‘It is Dryden. What a clever face, and what a modern type. Here is Walter Scott beside the door. How kindly and humorous his expression was! And see how high his head was from the ear to the crown. It was a great brain. There is Burns, the other famous Scot. Don’t you think there is a resemblance between the faces? And here are Dickens, and Thackeray, and Macaulay. I wonder whether, when Macaulay was writing his essays, he had a premonition that he would be buried in Westminster Abbey. He is continually alluding to the Abbey and its graves. I always think that we have a vague intuition as to what will occur to us in life.’

‘We can guess what is probable.’

‘It amounts to more than that. I had an intuition that I should marry you from the first day that I saw you, and yet it did not seem probable. But deep down in my soul I knew that I should marry you.’

‘I knew that I should marry you, Frank, or else that I should never marry at all.’

‘There now! We both had it. Well, that *is* really wonderful!’

They stood among the memorials of all those great people, marvelling at the mysteries of their own small lives. A voice at their elbows brought them back to the present.

‘This way, if you please, for the kings,’ said the voice. ‘They are now starting for the kings.’

‘They’ proved to be a curiously mixed little group of people who were waiting at the entrance through the enclosure for the arrival of the official guide. There were a tall red-bearded man with a very Scotch accent and a small gentle wife, also an American father with his two bright and enthusiastic daughters, a petty-officer of the navy in his uniform, two young men whose attention was cruelly distracted from the monuments by the American girls, and a dozen other travellers of various sexes and ages. Just as Maude and Frank joined them the guide, a young fresh-faced fellow, came striding up, and they passed through the opening into the royal burying-ground.

‘This way, ladies and gentlemen,’ cried the hurrying guide, and they all clattered over the stone pavement. He stopped beside a tomb upon which a lady with a sad worn face was lying. ‘Mary, Queen of Scots,’ said he, ‘the greatest beauty of her day. This monument was erected by her son, James the First.’

‘Isn’t she just perfectly sweet?’ said one of the American girls.

‘Well, I don’t know. I expected more of her than that,’ the other answered.

‘I reckon,’ remarked the father, ‘that if any one went through as much as that lady did, it would not tend to improve her beauty. Now what age might the lady be, sir?’

‘Forty-four years of age at the time of her execution,’ said the guide.

‘Ah weel, she’s young for her years,’ muttered the Scotchman, and the party moved on. Frank and Maude lingered to have a further look at the unfortunate princess, the bright French butterfly, who wandered from the light and warmth into that grim country, a land of blood and of psalms.

‘She was as hard as nails under all her gentle grace,’ said Frank. ‘She rode eighty miles and hardly drew rein after the battle of Langside.’

‘She looks as if she were tired, poor dear!’ said Maude; ‘I don’t think that she was sorry to be at rest.’

The guide was narrating the names of the owners of the tombs at the further end of the chapel. ‘Queen Anne is here, and Mary the wife of William the Third is beside her. And here is William himself. The king was very short and the queen very tall, so in the sculptures the king is depicted standing upon a stool so as to bring their heads level. In the vaults beyond there are thirty-eight Stuarts.’

Thirty-eight Stuarts! Princes, bishops, generals, once the salt of the earth, the mightiest of men, and now lumped carelessly together as thirty-eight Stuarts. So Death the Republican and Time the Radical can drag down the highest from his throne.

They had followed the guide into another small chapel, which bore the name of Henry VII. upon the door. Surely they were great builders and great designers in those days! Had stone been as pliable as wax it could not have been twisted and curved into more exquisite spirals and curls, so light, so delicate, so beautiful, twining and turning along the walls, and drooping from the ceiling. Never did the hand of man construct anything more elaborately ornate, nor the brain of man think out a design more absolutely harmonious and lovely. In the centre, with all the pomp of mediæval heraldry, starred and spangled with the Tudor badges, the two bronze figures of Henry and his wife lay side by side upon their tomb. The guide read out the quaint directions in the king’s will, by which they were to be buried ‘with some respect to their Royal dignity, but avoiding damnable pomp and outrageous superfluities!’ There was, as Frank remarked, a fine touch of the hot Tudor blood in the adjectives. One could guess where Henry the Eighth got his masterful temper. Yet it was an ascetic and priest-like face which looked upwards from the tomb.

They passed the rifled tombs of Cromwell, Blake, and Ireton - the despicable revenge of the men who did not dare to face them in the field, - and they marked the grave of James the First, who erected no monument to himself, and so justified in death the reputation for philosophy which he had aimed at in his life. Then they inspected the great tomb of Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, as surprising and as magnificent as his history, cast a glance at the covering of plucky little George the Second, the last English king to lead his own army into battle, and so onwards to see the corner of the Innocents, where rest the slender bones of the poor children murdered in the Tower.

But now the guide had collected his little flock around him again, with the air of one who has something which is not to be missed. ‘You will stand upon the step to see the profile,’ said he, as he indicated a female figure upon a tomb. ‘It is the great Queen Elizabeth.’

It was a profile and a face worth seeing - the face of a queen who was worthy of her Shakespeares upon the land and her Drakes upon the sea. Had the Spanish king seen her, he would have understood that she was not safe to attack - this grim old lady with the eagle nose and the iron lips. You could understand her grip upon her cash-box, you could explain her harshness to her lovers, you could realise the confidence of her people, you could read it all in that wonderful face.

‘She’s splendid,’ said Frank.

‘She’s terrible,’ said Maude.

‘Did I understand you to say, sir,’ asked the American, ‘that it was this lady who beheaded the other lady, Queen of Scotland, whom we saw ‘way back in the other compartment?’

‘Yes, sir, she did.’

‘Well, I guess if there was any beheading to be done, this was the lady to see that it was put through with promptness and despatch. Not a married lady, I gather?’

‘No, sir.’

‘And a fortunate thing for somebody. That woman’s husband would have a mean time of it, sir, in my opinion.’

‘Hush, poppa,’ said the two daughters, and the procession moved on. They were entering the inner chapel of all, the oldest and the holiest, in which, amid the ancient Plantagenet kings, there lies that one old Saxon monarch, confessor and saint, the holy Edward, round whose honoured body the whole of this great shrine has gradually risen. A singular erection once covered with mosaic work, but now bare and gaunt, stood in the centre.

‘The body of Edward the Confessor is in a case up at the top,’ said the guide. ‘This hollow place below was filled with precious relics, and the pilgrims used to kneel in these niches, which are just large enough to hold a man upon his knees. The mosaic work has been picked out by the pilgrims.’

‘What is the date of the shrine?’ asked Frank.

‘About 1250, sir. The early kings were all buried as near to it as they could get, for it was their belief in those days that the devil might carry off the body, and so the nearer they got to the shrine the safer they felt. Henry the Fifth, who won the battle of Agincourt, is there. Those are the actual helmet, shield, and saddle which he used in the battle upon the crossbeam yonder. That king with the grave face and the beard is Edward the Third, the father of the Black Prince. The Black Prince never lived to ascend the throne, but he was the father of the unfortunate Richard the Second, who lies here - this clean-shaven king with the sharp features. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will turn this way, I will show you one of the most remarkable objects in the Abbey.’

The object in question proved to be nothing more singular than a square block of stone placed under an old chair. And yet as the guide continued to speak, they felt that he had justified his words.

‘This is the sacred stone of Scone upon which the kings of Scotland have been crowned from time immemorial. When Edward the First overran Scotland 600 years ago, he had it brought here, and since then every monarch of England has also sat upon it when crowned.’

‘The present Queen?’ asked some one.

‘Yes, she also. The legend was that it was the stone upon which Jacob rested his head when he dreamed, but the geologists have proved that it is red sandstone of Scotland.'

'Then I understand, sir, that this other throne is the Scottish throne,' said the American gentleman.

'No, sir, the Scottish throne and the English throne are the same throne. But at the time of William and Mary it was necessary to crown her as well as him, and so a second throne was needed. But that of course was modern.'

'Only a couple of hundred years ago. I wonder they let it in. But I guess they might have taken better care of it. Some one has carved his name upon it.'

'A Westminster boy bet his schoolfellows that he would sleep among the tombs, and to prove that he had done it, he carved his name upon the throne.'

'You don't say!' cried the American. 'Well, I guess that boy ended pretty high up.'

'As high as the gallows, perhaps,' said Frank, and every one tittered, but the guide hurried on with a grave face, for the dignity of the Abbey was in his keeping.

'This tomb is that of Queen Eleanor,' said he.

Frank twitched Maude by the sleeve. 'Eleanor of Charing Cross,' said he. 'See how one little bit of knowledge links on with another.'

'And here is the tomb of her husband, Edward the First. It was he who brought the stone from Scone. At the time of his death the conquest of Scotland was nearly done, and he gave orders that his burial should be merely temporary until Scotland was thoroughly subdued. He is still, as you perceive, in his temporary tomb.'

The big Scotchman laughed loudly and derisively. All the others looked sadly at him with the pitying gaze which the English use towards the more excitable races when their emotion gets the better of them. A stream from a garden hose could not have damped him more.

'They opened the grave last century,' said the guide. 'Inside was an inscription, which said, "Here lies the hammer of the Scots." He was a fine man, six feet two inches from crown to sole.'

They wandered out of the old shrine where the great Plantagenet kings lie like a bodyguard round the Saxon saint. Abbots lay on one side of them as they passed, and dead crusaders with their legs crossed, upon the other.

And then, in an instant, they were back in comparatively modern times again.

‘This is the tomb of Wolfe, who died upon the Heights of Abraham,’ said the guide. ‘It was due to him and to his soldiers that all America belongs to the English-speaking races. There is a picture of his Highlanders going up to the battle along the winding path which leads from Wolfe’s Cove. He died in the moment of victory.’

It was bewildering, the way in which they skipped from age to age. The history of England appeared to be not merely continuous, but simultaneous, as they turned in an instant from the Georgian to the Elizabethan, the one monument as well preserved as the other. They passed the stately de Vere, his armour all laid out in fragments upon a marble slab, as a proof that he died at peace with all men; and they saw the terrible statue of the onslaught of Death, which, viewed in the moonlight, made a midnight robber drop his booty and fly panic-stricken out of the Abbey. So awful and yet so fascinating is it, that the shuffling feet of the party of sightseers had passed out of hearing before Maude and Frank could force themselves away from it.

In the base of the statue is an iron door, which has been thrown open, and the sculptor’s art has succeeded wonderfully in convincing you that it has been thrown open violently. The two leaves of it seem still to quiver with the shock, and one could imagine that one heard the harsh clang of the metal. Out of the black opening had sprung a dreadful thing, something muffled in a winding-sheet, one bony hand clutching the edge of the pedestal, the other upraised to hurl a dart at the woman above him. She, a young bride of twenty-seven, has fallen fainting, while her husband, with horror in his face, is springing forward, his hand outstretched, to get between his wife and her loathsome assailant.

‘I shall dream of this,’ said Maude. She had turned pale, as many a woman has before this monument.

‘It is awful!’ Frank walked backwards, unable to take his eyes from it. ‘What pluck that sculptor had! It is an effect which must be either ludicrous or great, and he has made it great.’

‘Roubillac is his name,’ said Maude, reading it from the pedestal.

‘A Frenchman, or a man of French descent. Isn’t that characteristic! In the whole great Abbey the one monument which has impressed us with its genius and imagination is by a foreigner. We haven’t got it in us. We are too much afraid of letting ourselves go and of giving ourselves away. We are heavy-handed and heavy-minded.'

'If we can't produce the monuments, we can produce the men who deserve them,' said Maude, and Frank wrote the aphorism down upon his shirt-cuff.

'We are too severe both in sculpture and architecture,' said he. 'More fancy and vigour in our sculptors, more use of gold and more ornament in our architects - that is what we want. But I think it is past praying for. It would be better to subdivide the work of the world, according to the capacity of the different nations. Let Italy and France embellish us. We might do something in exchange - organise the French colonies, perhaps, or the Italian exchequer. That is our legitimate work, but we will never do anything at the other.'

The guide had already reached the end of his round, an iron gate corresponding to that by which they had entered, and they found him waiting impatiently and swinging his keys. But Maude's smile and word of thanks as she passed him brought content into his face once more. A ray of living sunshine is welcome to the man who spends his days among the tombs.

They walked down the North Transept and out through Solomon's Porch. The rain-cloud had swept over, and the summer sun was shining upon the wet streets, turning them all to gold. This might have been that fabled London of which young Whittington dreamed. In front of them lay the lawns of vivid green, with the sunlit raindrops gleaming upon the grass. The air was full of the chirping of the sparrows. Across their vision, from the end of Whitehall to Victoria Street, the black ribbon of traffic whirled and circled, one of the great driving-belts of the huge city. Over it all, to their right, towered those glorious Houses of Parliament, the very sight of which made Frank repent his bitter words about English architecture. They stood in the old porch gazing at the scene. It was so wonderful to come back at one stride from the great country of the past to the greater country of the present. Here was the very thing which these dead men lived and died to build.

'It's not much past three,' said Frank. 'What a gloomy place to take you to! Good heavens, we have one day together, and I take you to a cemetery! Shall we go to a matinée to counteract it?'

But Maude laid her hand upon his arm.

‘I don’t think, Frank, that I was ever more impressed, or learned more in so short a time, in my life. It was a grand hour - an hour never to be forgotten. And you must not think that I am ever with you to be amused. I am with you to accompany you in whatever seems to you to be highest and best. Now before we leave the dear old Abbey, promise me that you will always live your own highest and never come down to me.’

‘I can very safely promise that I will never come down to you,’ said Frank. ‘I may climb all my life, and yet there are parts of your soul which will be like snow-peaks in the clouds to me. But you will be now and always my own dear comrade as well as my sweetest wife. And now, Maude, what shall it be, the theatre or the Australians?’

‘Do you wish to go to either very much?’

‘Not unless you do.’

‘Well, then, I feel as if either would be a profanation. Let us walk together down to the Embankment, and sit on one of the benches there, and watch the river flowing in the sunshine, and talk and think of all that we have seen.’

CHAPTER VI - TWO SOLOS AND A DUET

The night before the wedding, Frank Crosse and his best man, Rupton Hale, dined at the Raleigh Club with Maude's brother, Jack Selby, who was a young lieutenant in a Hussar regiment. Jack was a horsy, slangy young sportsman who cared nothing about Frank's worldly prospects, but had given the match his absolute approval from the moment that he realised that his future brother had played for the Surrey Second. 'What more can you want?' said he. 'You won't exactly be a Mrs. W. G., but you will be on the edge of first-class cricket.' And Maude, who rejoiced in his approval, without quite understanding the grounds for it, kissed him, and called him the best of brothers.

The marriage was to be at eleven o'clock at St. Monica's Church, and the Selbys were putting up at the Langham. Frank stayed at the Metropole, and so did Rupton Hale. They were up early, their heads and nerves none the better for Jack Selby's hospitality of the night before.

Frank could eat no breakfast, and he shunned publicity in his wedding-garments, so they remained in the upstairs sitting-room. He stood by the window, drumming his fingers upon the pane, and looking down into Northumberland Avenue. He had often pictured this day, and associated it with sunshine and flowers and every emblem of joy. But Nature had not risen to the occasion. A thick vapour, half smoke half cloud, drifted along the street, and a thin persistent rain was falling steadily. It pit-patted upon the windows, splashed upon the sills, and gurgled in the water-pipes. Far down beneath him on the drab-coloured slimy road stood the lines of wet cabs, looking like beetles with glistening backs. Round black umbrellas hurried along the shining pavements. A horse had fallen at the door of the Constitutional Club, and an oil-skinned policeman was helping the cabman to raise it. Frank watched it until the harness had been refastened, and it had vanished into Trafalgar Square. Then he turned and examined himself in the mirror. His trim black frock-coat and pearl grey trousers set off his alert athletic figure to advantage. His glossy hat, too, his lavender gloves, and dark-blue tie, were all absolutely irreproachable. And yet he was not satisfied with himself. Maude ought to have something better than that. What a fool he had been to take so much wine last night! On this day of all days in their lives she surely had a right to find him at his best. He was restless, and his nerves were all quivering. He would have given anything for a cigarette, but he did not wish to scent himself with tobacco. He had cut himself in shaving, and his nose was peeling from a hot day on the cricket-field. What a silly thing to expose his nose to the sun before his wedding! Perhaps when Maude saw it she would - well, she could hardly break it off, but at least she might be ashamed of him. He worked himself into a fever over that unfortunate nose.

‘You are off colour, Crosse,’ said his best man.

‘I was just thinking that my nose was. It’s very kind of you to come and stand by me.’

‘That’s all right. We shall see it through together.’

Hale was a despondent man, though the most loyal of friends, and he spoke in a despondent way. His gloomy manner, the London drizzle, and the nervousness proper to the occasion, were all combining to make Frank more and more wretched. Fortunately Jack Selby burst like a gleam of sunshine into the room. The sight of his fresh-coloured smiling face - or it may have been some reminder of Maude which he found in it - brought consolation to the bridegroom.

‘How are you, Crosse? How do, Hale? Excuse my country manners! The old Christmas-tree in the hall wanted to send for you, but I knew your number. You’re looking rather green about the gills, old chap.’

‘I feel a little chippy to-day.’

‘That’s the worst of these cheap champagnes. Late hours are bad for the young. Have a whisky and soda with me. No? Hale, you must buck him up, for they’ll all be down on you if you don’t bring your man up to time in the pink of condition. We certainly did ourselves up to the top hole last night. Couldn’t face your breakfast, eh? Neither could I. A strawberry and a bucket of soda-water.’

‘How are they all at the Langham?’ asked Frank eagerly.

‘Oh, splendid! At least I haven’t seen Maude. She’s been getting into parade order. But mother is full of beans. We had to take her up one link in the curb, or there would have been no holding her.’

Frank’s eyes kept turning to the slow-moving minute-hand. It was not ten o’clock yet.

‘Don’t you think that I might go round to the Langham and see them?’

‘Good Lord, no! Clean against regulations. Stand by his head, Hale! Wo, boy, steady!’

‘It won’t do, Crosse, it really won’t!’ said Hale solemnly.

‘What rot it is! Here am I doing nothing, and I might be of some use or encouragement to her. Let’s get a cab!’

‘Wo, laddie, wo then, boy! Keep him in hand, Hale! Get to his head.’

Frank flung himself down into an armchair, and muttered about absurd conventions.

‘It can’t be helped, my boy. It is correct.’

‘Buck up, Crosse, buck up! We’ll make the thing go with a buzz when we do begin. Two of our Johnnies are coming, regular fizzers, and full of blood both of them. We’ll paint the Langham a fine bright solferino, when the church parade is over.’

Frank sat rather sulkily watching the slow minute-hand, and listening to the light-hearted chatter of the boy-lieutenant, and the more deliberate answers of his best man. At last he jumped up and seized his hat and gloves.

‘Half-past,’ said he. ‘Come on. I can’t wait any longer. I must do *something*. It is time we went to the church.’

‘Fall in for the church!’ cried Jack. ‘Wait a bit! I know this game, for I was best man myself last month. Inspect his kit, Hale. See that he’s according to regulations. Ring? All right. Parson’s money? Right oh! Small change? Good! By the right, quick march!’

Frank soon recovered his spirits now that he had something to do. Even that drive through the streaming streets, with the rain pattering upon the top of their four-wheeler, could not depress him any longer. He rose to the level of Jack Selby, and they chattered gaily together.

‘Ain’t we bringing him up fighting fit?’ cried Jack exultingly. ‘Shows that all the care we have taken of him in the last twenty-four hours has not been wasted. That’s the sort I like - game as a pebble! You can’t buy ‘em, you have to breed ‘em. A regular fizzer *he* is, and full of blood. And here we are on the ground.’

It was a low, old-fashioned, grey church, with a Gothic entrance and two niches on either side, which spoke of pre-Lutheran days. Cheap modern shops, which banked it in, showed up the quaint dignity of the ancient front. The side-door was open, and they passed into its dim-lit interior, with high carved pews, and rich, old, stained glass. Huge black oak beams curved over their heads, and dim inscriptions of mediæval Latin curled and writhed upon the walls. A single step seemed to have taken them from the atmosphere of the nineteenth to that of the fifteenth century.

‘What a ripping old church!’ Jack whispered.

‘You can’t buy ‘em. But it’s as festive as an ice-house. There’s a friendly native coming down the aisle. He’s your man, Hale, if you want the news.’

The verger was not in the best of tempers. ‘It’s at a quarter to four,’ said he, as Hale met him.

‘No, no, at eleven.’

‘Quarter to four, I tell you. The vicar says so.’

‘Why, it’s not possible.’

‘We have them at all hours.’

‘Have what?’

‘Buryin’s.’

‘But this is a marriage.’

‘I’m sure I beg your pardon, sir. I thought when I looked at you as you was the party about the child’s funeral.’

‘Good heavens, no.’

‘It was something in your expression, sir, but now that I can see the colour of your clothes, why of course I know better. There’s three marriages - which was it?’

‘Crosse and Selby are the names.’

The verger consulted an old crumpled notebook.

‘Yes, sir, I have it here. Mr. or Miss Crosse to Mr. or Miss Selby. Eleven o’clock, sir, *sharp*. The vicar’s a terrible punctual man, and I should advise you to take your places.’

‘Any hitch?’ asked Frank nervously, as Hale returned.

‘No, no.’

‘What was he talking about?’

‘Oh, nothing. Some little confusion of ideas.’

‘Shall we go up?’

‘Yes, I think that we had better.’

Their steps clattered and reverberated through the empty church as they passed up the aisle. They stood in an aimless way before the altar rails. Frank fidgeted about, and made sure that the ring was in his ticket-pocket. He also took a five-pound note and placed it where he knew he could lay his hands upon it easily. Then he sprang round with a flush upon his cheeks, for one of the side-doors had been flung open with a great bustle and clanging. A stout charwoman entered with a tin pail and a mop.

‘Put up the wrong bird that time,’ whispered Jack, and sniggered at Frank’s change of expression.

But almost at the same instant, the Selbys entered the church at the further end. Mr. Selby, with his red face and fluffy side-whiskers, had Maude upon his arm. She looked very pale and very sweet, with downcast eyes and solemn mouth, while behind her walked her younger sister Mary and her pretty friend Nelly Sheridan, both in pink dresses with broad pink hats and white curling feathers. The bride was herself in the grey travelling-dress with which Frank was already familiar by its description in her letter. Its gentle tint and her tenderly grave expression made a charming effect. Behind them was the mother, still young and elegant, with something of Maude’s grace in her figure and carriage. As the party came up the aisle, Frank was to be restrained no longer. ‘Get to his head!’ cried Jack to Hale in an excited whisper, but their man was already hurrying to shake hands with Maude. He walked up on her right, and they took their position in two little groups, the happy couple in the centre. At the same moment the clang of the church-clock sounded above them, and the vicar, shrugging his shoulders to get his white surplice into position, came bustling out of the vestry. To him it was all the most usual, commonplace, and unimportant thing in the world, and both Frank and Maude were filled with amazement at the nonchalant way in which he whipped out a prayer-book, and began to rapidly perform the ceremony. It was all so new and solemn and all-important to them, that they had expected something mystic and overpowering in the function, and yet here was this brisk little man, with an obvious cold in his head, tying them up in as business-like a fashion as a grocer uniting two parcels. After all, he had to do it a thousand times a year, and so he could not be extravagant in his emotions.

The singular service was read out to them, the exhortations, and the explanations, sometimes stately, sometimes beautiful, sometimes odious. Then the little vicar turned upon Frank - ‘*Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God’s ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her as long as ye both shall live*?’

‘*I will,’* cried Frank, with conviction.

‘*And wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God’s ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live*?’

‘*I will,’* said Maude, from her heart.

‘*Who giveth this woman to be married to this man*?’

‘*I do*. Mr. John Selby - her father, you know.’

And then in turn they repeated the fateful words - ‘*I take thee to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and obey, till death us do part, according to God’s holy ordinance, and thereto I give thee my troth*.’

‘Ring! Ring!’ said Hale.

‘Ring, you Juggins!’ whispered Jack Selby.

Frank thrust his hands frantically into all his pockets. The ring was in the last one which he attempted. But the bank-note was not to be found. He remembered that he had put it in some safe place. Where could it have been? Was it in his boot, or in the lining of his hat? No, surely he could not have done anything so infatuated. Again he took his pockets two at a time, while a dreadful pause came in the ceremony.

‘Vestry - afterwards,’ whispered the clergyman.

‘Here you are!’ gasped Frank. He had come upon it in a last desperate dive into his watch-pocket, in which he never by any chance kept anything. Of course it was for that very reason, that it might be alone and accessible, that he had placed it there. Ring and note were handed to the vicar, who deftly concealed the one and returned the other. Then Maude’s little white hand was outstretched, and over the third finger Frank slipped the circlet of gold.

‘*With this ring I thee wed,’* said Frank, ‘*and with my body I thee worship* (he paused, and made a mental emendation of ‘with my soul also’), *and with all my worldly goods I thee endow*.’

There was a prayer, and then the vicar joined the two hands, the muscular sunburned one and the dainty white one, with the new ring gleaming upon it.

‘*Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder,’* said he. ‘*Forasmuch as Francis Crosse and Maude Selby have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this* *company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife together*.’

There now, it was done! They were one, never more to part until the coffin-lid closed over one or the other. They were kneeling together now, and the vicar was rapidly repeating some psalms and prayers. But Frank’s mind was not with the ritual. He looked slantwise at the graceful, girlish figure by his side. Her hair hung beautifully over her white neck, and the reverent droop of her head was lovely to his eyes. So gentle, so humble, so good, so beautiful, and all his, his sworn life-companion for ever! A gush of tenderness flowed through his heart for her. His love had always been passionate, but, for the instant, it was heroic, tremendous in its unselfishness. Might he bring her happiness, the highest which woman could wish for! God grant that he might do so! But if he were to make her unhappy, or to take anything from her beauty and her goodness, then he prayed that he might die now, at this supreme moment, kneeling at her side before the altar rails. So intense was his prayer that he looked up expectantly at the altar, as if in the presence of an imminent catastrophe. But every one had risen to their feet, and the service was at an end. The vicar led the way, and they all followed him, into the vestry. There was a general murmur all round them of congratulation and approval.

‘Heartiest congratulations, Crosse!’ said Hale.

‘Bravo, Maude, you looked ripping!’ cried Jack, kissing his sister. ‘By Jove, it simply went with a buzz from the word “go.”’

‘You sign it here and here,’ said the vicar, ‘and the witnesses here and here. Thank you very much. I am sure that I wish you every happiness. I need not detain you by any further formality.’

And so, with a curious dream-like feeling, Frank Crosse and Maude found themselves walking down the aisle, he very proud and erect, she very gentle and shy, while the organ thundered the wedding-march. Carriages were waiting: he handed in his wife, stepped in after her, and they drove off, amidst a murmur of sympathy from a little knot of idlers who had gathered in the porch, partly from curiosity, and partly to escape the rain.

Maude had often driven alone with Frank before, but now she felt suddenly constrained and shy. The marriage-service, with all its half-understood allusions and exhortations, had depressed and frightened her.

She hardly dared to glance at her husband. But he soon led her out of her graver humour.

'Name, please?' said he.

'O Frank!'

'Name, if *you* please?'

'Why, you know.'

'Say it.'

'Maude.'

'That all?'

'Maude Crosse - O Frank!'

'You blessing! How grand it sounds! O Maude, what a jolly old world it is! Isn't it pretty to see the rain falling? And aren't the shining pavements lovely? And isn't everything splendid, and am I not the luckiest - the most incredibly lucky of men. Dear girlie, give me your hand! I can feel *it* under the glove. Now, sweetheart, you are not frightened, are you?'

'Not now.'

'You were?'

'Yes, I was a little. O Frank, you won't tire of me, will you? I should break my heart if you did.'

'Tire of you! Good heavens! Now you'll never guess what I was doing while the parson was telling us about what Saint Paul said to the Colossians, and all the rest of it.'

'I know perfectly well what you were doing. And you shouldn't have done it.'

'What was I doing, then?'

'You were staring at me.'

'Oh, you saw that, did you?'

'I felt it.'

'Well, I was. But I was praying also.'

'Were you, Frank?'

'When I saw you kneeling there, so sweet and pure and good, I seemed to realise how you had been given into my keeping for life, and I prayed with all my heart that if I should ever injure you in thought, or word, or deed, I might drop dead now before I had time to do it.'

'O Frank, what a dreadful prayer!'

'But I felt it and I wished it, and I could not help it. My own darling, there you are just a living angel, the gentlest, most sensitive, and beautiful living creature that walks the earth, and please God I shall keep you so, and ever higher and higher if such a thing is possible, and if ever I say a word or do a deed that seems to lower you, then remind me of this moment, and send me back to try to live up to our highest ideal again. And I for my part will try to improve myself and to live up to you, and to bridge more and more the gap that is between us, that I may feel myself not altogether unworthy of our love. And so we shall act and re-act upon each other, ever growing better and wiser, and dating what is best and brightest in our minds and souls from the day that we were married. And that's *my* idea of a marriage-service, and here endeth the first lesson, and the windows are blurred with rain, and hang the coachman, and it's hard lines if a man may not kiss his own wife - you blessing!'

A broad-brimmed hat with a curling feather is not a good shape for driving with an ardent young bridegroom in a discreetly rain-blurred carriage. Frank demonstrated the fact, and it took them all the way to the Langham to get those pins driven home again. And then after an abnormal meal, which was either a very late breakfast or a very early lunch, they drove on to Victoria Station, from which they were to start for Brighton. Jack Selby and the two regimental fizzers, who had secured immortality for the young couple, if the deep and constant drinking of healths could have done it, had provided themselves with packages of rice, old slippers, and other time-honoured missiles. On a hint from Maude, however, that she would prefer a quiet departure, Frank coaxed the three back into the luncheon-room with a perfectly guileless face, and then locking the door on the outside, handed the key and a half-sovereign to the head-waiter, with instructions to release the prisoners when the carriage had gone - an incident which in itself would cause the judicious observer to think that, given the opportunity, Mister Frank Crosse had it in him to go pretty far in life. And so, quietly and soberly, they rolled away upon their first journey - the journey which was the opening of that life's journey, the goal of which no man may see.

CHAPTER VII - KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

It was in the roomy dining-room of the Hotel Metropole at Brighton. Maude and Frank were seated at the favourite small round table near the window, where they always lunched. Their immediate view was a snowy-white tablecloth with a shining centre dish of foppish little cutlets, each with a wisp of ornamental paper, and a surrounding bank of mashed potatoes. Beyond, from the very base of the window, as it seemed, there stretched the huge expanse of the deep blue sea, its soothing mass of colour broken only by a few white leaning sails upon the furthest horizon. Along the sky-line the white clouds lay in carelessly piled cumuli, like snow thrown up from a clearing. It was restful and beautiful, that distant view, but just at the moment it was the near one which interested them most. Though they lose from this moment onwards the sympathy of every sentimental reader, the truth must be told that they were thoroughly enjoying their lunch.

With the wonderful adaptability of women - a hereditary faculty, which depends upon the fact that from the beginning of time the sex has been continually employed in making the best of situations which were not of their own choosing - Maude carried off her new character easily and gracefully. In her trim blue serge dress and sailor hat, with the warm tint of yesterday's sun upon her cheeks, she was the very picture of happy and healthy womanhood. Frank was also in a blue serge boating-suit, which was appropriate enough, for they spent most of their time upon the water, as a glance at his hands would tell. Their conversation was unhappily upon a very much lower plane than when we overheard them last.

'I've got such an appetite!'

'So have I, Frank.'

'Capital. Have another cutlet.'

'Thank you, dear.'

'Potatoes?'

'Please.'

'I always thought that people on their honeymoon lived on love.'

'Yes, isn't it dreadful, Frank? We must be so material.'

‘Good old mother Nature! Cling on to her skirt and you never lose your way. One wants a healthy physical basis for a healthy spiritual emotion. Might I trouble you for the pickles?’

‘Are you happy, Frank?’

‘Absolutely and completely.’

‘Quite, *quite* sure?’

‘I never was quite so sure of anything.’

‘It makes me so happy to hear you say so.’

‘And you?’

‘O Frank, I am just floating upon golden clouds in a dream. But your poor hands! Oh, how they must pain you!’

‘Not a bit.’

‘It was that heavy oar.’

‘I get no practice at rowing. There is no place to row in at Woking, unless one used the canal. But it was worth a blister or two. By Jove, wasn’t it splendid, coming back in the moonlight with that silver lane flickering on the water in front of us? We were so completely alone. We might have been up in the interstellar spaces, you and I, travelling from Sirius to Arcturus in one of those profound gulfs of the void which Hardy talks about. It was overpowering.’

‘I can never forget it.’

‘We’ll go again to-night.’

‘But the blisters!’

‘Hang the blisters! And we’ll take some bait with us and try to catch something.’

‘What fun!’

‘And we’ll drive to Rottingdean this afternoon, if you feel inclined. Have this last cutlet, dear!’

‘No, thank you.’

‘Well, it seems a pity to waste it. Here goes! By the way, Maude, I must speak very severely to you. I can’t if you look at me like that. But really, joking apart, you must be more careful before the waiters.’

‘Why, dear?’

‘Well, we have carried it off splendidly so far. No one has found us out yet, and no one will if we are reasonably careful. The fat waiter is convinced that we are veterans. But last night at dinner you very nearly gave the thing away.’

‘Did I, Frank?’

‘Don’t look so sweetly penitent, you blessing. The fact is that you make a shocking bad conspirator. Now I have a kind of talent for that, as I have for every other sort of depravity, so it will be pretty safe in my hands. You are as straight as a line by nature, and you can’t be crooked when you try.’

‘But what did I say? Oh, I *am* so sorry! I tried to be so careful.’

‘Well, about the curry, you know. It was an error of judgment to ask if I took chutnee. And then . . . ‘

‘Something else?’

‘About the boots. Did I get them in London or Woking.’

‘Oh dear, dear!’

‘And then . . . ‘

‘Not another! O Frank!’

‘Well, the use of the word “my.” You must give that word up. It should be “our.”’

‘I know, I know. It was when I said that the salt water had taken the curl out of the feather in my - no, in our - well, in *the* hat.’

‘That was all right. But it is *our* luggage, you know, and *our* room, and so on.’

‘Of course it is. How foolish I am! Then the waiter knows! O Frank, what shall we do?’

‘Not he. He knows nothing. I am sure of it. He is a dull sort of person. I had my eye on him all the time. Besides, I threw in a few remarks just to set the thing right.’

‘That was when you spoke about our travels in the Tyrol?’

‘Yes.’

‘O Frank, how *could* you? And you said how lonely it was when we were the only visitors at the Swiss hotel.’

‘That was an inspiration. That finished him.’

‘And about the closeness of the Atlantic staterooms. I blushed to hear you.’

‘But he listened eagerly to it all. I could see it.’

‘I wonder if he really believed it. I have noticed that the maids and the waiters seem to look at us with a certain interest.’

‘My dear girlie, you will find as you go through life that every man will always look at you with a certain interest.’

Maude smiled, but was unconvinced.

‘Cheese, dear?’

‘A little butter, please.’

‘Some butter, waiter, and the Stilton. You know the real fact is, that we make the mistake of being much too nice to each other in public. Veterans don’t do that. They take the small courtesies for granted - which is all wrong, but it shows that they *are* veterans. That is where we give ourselves away.’

‘That never occurred to me.’

‘If you want to settle that waiter for ever, and remove the last lingering doubt from his mind, the thing is for you to be rude to me.’

‘Or you to me, Frank.’

‘Sure you won’t mind?’

‘Not a bit.’

‘Oh, hang it, I can’t - not even for so good an object.’

‘Well, then, I can’t either.’

‘But this is absurd. It is only acting.’

‘Quite so. It is only fun.’

‘Then why won’t you do it?’

‘Why won’t you?’

‘He’ll be back before we settle it. Look here! I’ve a shilling under my hand. Heads or tails, and the loser has to be rude. Do you agree?’

‘Very well.’

‘Your call.’

‘Heads.’

‘It’s tails.’

‘Oh goodness!’

‘You’ve got to be rude. Now mind you are. Here he comes.’

The waiter had come up the room bearing the pride of the hotel, the grand green Stilton with the beautiful autumn leaf heart shading away to rich plum-coloured cavities. He placed it on the table with a solemn air.

‘It’s a beautiful Stilton,’ Frank remarked.

Maude tried desperately to be rude.

‘Well, dear, I don’t think it is so very beautiful,’ was the best that she could do.

It was not much, but it had a surprising effect upon the waiter. He turned and hurried away.

‘There now, you’ve shocked him?’ cried Frank.

‘Where *has* he gone, Frank?’

‘To complain to the management about your language.’

‘No, Frank. Please tell me! Oh, I wish I hadn’t been so rude. Here he is again.’

‘All right. Sit tight,’ said Frank.

A sort of procession was streaming up the hall. There was their fat waiter in front with a large covered cheese-dish. Behind him was another with two smaller ones, and a third with some yellow powder upon a plate was bringing up the rear.

‘This is Gorgonzola, main,’ said the waiter, with a severe manner. ‘And there’s Camembert and Gruyère behind, and powdered Parmesan as well. I’m sorry that the Stilton don’t give satisfaction.’

Maude helped herself to Gorgonzola and looked very guilty and uncomfortable. Frank began to laugh.

‘I meant you to be rude to *me*, not to the cheese,’ said he, when the procession had withdrawn.

‘I did my best, Frank. I contradicted you.’

‘Oh, it was a shocking display of temper.’

‘And I hurt the poor waiter’s feelings.’

‘Yes, you’ll have to apologise to his Stilton before he will forgive you.’

‘And I don’t believe he is a bit more convinced that we are veterans than he was before.’

‘All right, dear; leave him to me. Those reminiscences of mine must have settled him. If they didn’t, then I feel it is hopeless.’

It was as well for his peace of mind that Frank could not hear the conversation between the fat waiter and their chambermaid, for whom he nourished a plethoric attachment. They had half an hour off in the afternoon, and were comparing notes.

‘Nice-lookin’ couple, ain’t they, John?’ said the maid, with the air of an expert. ‘I don’t know as we’ve ‘ad a better since the spring weddin’s.’

‘I don’t know as I’d go as far as that,’ said the fat waiter critically. ‘‘E’d pass all right. ‘E’s an upstandin’ young man with a good sperrit in ‘im.’

‘What’s wrong with ‘er, then?’

‘It’s a matter of opinion,’ said the waiter. ‘I likes ‘em a bit more full-flavoured myself. And as to ‘er taste, why there, if you ‘ad seen ‘er turn up ‘er nose at the Stilton at lunch.’

‘Turn up ‘er nose, did she? Well, she seemed to me a very soft-spoken, obligin’ young lady.’

‘So she may be, but they’re a queer couple, I tell you. It’s as well they are married at last.’

‘Why?’

‘Because they ‘ave been goin’ on most owdacious before’and. I ‘ave it from their own lips, and it fairly made me blush to listen to it. Awful, it was, *awful*!’

‘You don’t say that, John!’

‘I tell you, Jane, I couldn’t ‘ardly believe my ears. They was married on Tuesday last, as we know well, and to-day’s *Times* to prove it, and yet if you’ll believe me, they was talkin’ about ‘ow they ‘ad travelled alone abroad - ‘

‘Never, John!’

‘And alone in a Swiss ‘otel!’

‘My goodness!’

‘And a steamer too.’

‘Well, there! I’ll never trust any one again.’

‘Oh, a perfec’ pair of scorchers. But I’ll let ‘im see as I knows it. I’ll put that *Times* before ‘im to-night at dinner as sure as my name’s John.’

‘And a good lesson to them, too! If you didn’t say you’d ‘eard it from their own lips, John, I never could ‘ave believed it. It’s things like that as shakes your trust in ‘uman nature.’

Maude and Frank were lingering at the *table d’hôte* over their walnuts and a glass of port wine, when their waiter came softly behind them.

‘Beg pardon, sir, but did you see it in the *Times*?’

‘See what?’

‘*That,* sir. I thought that it might be of interest to you and to your good lady to see it.’

He had laid one page of the paper before them, with his forefinger upon an item in the left-hand top corner. Then he discreetly withdrew. Frank stared at it in horror.

‘Maude, your people have gone and put it in.’

‘Our marriage!’

‘Here it is! Listen! “Crosse - Selby. 30th June, at St. Monica’s Church, by the Rev. John Tudwell, M.A., Vicar of St. Monica’s, Frank Crosse, of

Maybury Road, Woking, to Maude Selby, eldest daughter of Robert Selby, Esq., of St. Albans.” Great Scot, Maude! what shall we do?’

‘Well, dear, does it matter?’

‘Matter! It’s simply awful!’

‘I don’t mind much if they do know.’

‘But my reminiscences, Maude! The travels in the Tyrol! The Swiss Hotel! The Stateroom! Great goodness, how I have put my foot into it.’

Maude burst out laughing.

‘You old dear!’ she cried, ‘I don’t believe you are a bit better as a conspirator than I am. There’s only one thing you can do. Give the waiter half a crown, tell him the truth, and don’t conspire any more.’

And so ignominiously ended the attempt which so many have made, and at which so many have failed. Take warning, gentle reader, and you also, gentler reader still, when your own turn comes.

CHAPTER VIII - THE HOME-COMING

The days of holiday were over, and for each of them the duties of life were waiting. For him it was his work, and for her, her housekeeping. They both welcomed the change, for there was a rush and a want of privacy about the hotel life which had been amusing at first, but was now becoming irksome. It was pleasant, as they rolled out of Waterloo Station that summer night, to know that their cosy little home was awaiting them just five-and-twenty miles down the line. They had a first-class carriage to themselves - it is astonishing how easy it is for two people to fit into one of those armchair partitions, - and they talked all the way down about their plans for the future. Golden visions of youth, how they can glorify even a suburban villa and four hundred a year! They exulted together over the endless vista of happy days which stretched before them.

Mrs. Watson, Frank's trusty housekeeper, had been left in charge of The Lindens, and he had sent her a telegram the evening before to tell her that they were coming. She had already engaged the two servants, so everything would be ready for them. They pictured her waiting at the door, the neat little rooms with all their useful marriage-presents in their proper places, the lamplight and the snowy cloth laid for supper in the dining-room. It would be ten o'clock before they got there, and that supper would be a welcome sight. It was all delightful to look forward to, and this last journey was the happiest of all their wanderings. Maude wanted to see her kitchen. Frank wanted to see his books. Both were eager for the fight.

But they found a small annoyance waiting for them at Woking. A crowded train had preceded them, and there was not a single cab left at the station. Some would be back soon, but nobody could tell when.

'You don't mind walking, Maude?'

'I should prefer it.'

So a friendly porter took charge of their trunks, and promised to send them up when a conveyance had arrived. In the meantime they started off together down an ill-lit and ill-kept road, which opened into that more important thoroughfare in which their own villa was situated. They walked quickly, full of eager anticipations.

‘It’s just past the third lamp-post on the right,’ said Frank. ‘Now it’s only the second lamp-post. You see it will not be far from the station. Those windows among the trees are where Hale lives - my best man, you know! Now it is only one lamp-post!’ They quickened their pace almost to a run, and so arrived at the gate of The Lindens.

It was a white gate leading into a short path - ‘carriage sweep’ the house-agent called it, - and so to a low but comfortable-looking little house. The night was so dark that one could only see its outline. To their surprise, there was no sign of a light either above the door or at any of the windows.

‘Well, I’m blessed!’ cried Frank.

‘Never mind, dear. They live at the back, no doubt.’

‘But I gave them the hour. This is too bad. I am so sorry.’

‘It will be all the more cosy inside. What a dear little gate this is! The whole place is perfectly charming.’

But in spite of her brave attempts at making the best of it, it could not be denied that this black house was not what they had pictured in their dreams. Frank strode angrily up the path and pulled at the bell. There was no answer, so he knocked violently. Then he knocked with one hand while he rang with the other, but no sound save that of the clanging bell came from the gloomy house. As they stood forlornly in front of their own hall-door, a soft rain began to rustle amidst the bushes. At this climax of their troubles Maude burst into such a quiet, hearty, irresistible fit of laughter, that the angry Frank was forced to laugh also.

‘My word, it will be no laughing matter for Mrs. Watson if she cannot give a good reason for it,’ said he.

‘Perhaps the poor woman is ill.’

‘But there should be two other people, the cook and the housemaid. It is just as well that we did not bring up our trunks, or we should have had to dump them down in the front garden. You wait here, dear, under the shelter of the porch, and I will walk round and see if I can burgle it.’

He tried the back, but it was as dark as the front, and the kitchen-door was locked. Then he prowled unhappily in the rain from window to window. They were all fastened. He came back to the kitchen-door, poked his stick through the glass which formed the upper panel, and then putting his hand through the hole, he turned the key, and so stumbled into the obscurity of his own hall. He passed through it, unlocked the front door, and received Maude into his open arms.

‘Welcome to your home, my own darling girl. May you never have one sad hour under this roof! What a dismal home-coming! What can I do to make amends? But good comes out of evil, you see, for in no other possible way could I have been inside to welcome you when you entered.’

They stayed in the hall in the dark some time, these wet and foolish young people. Then Frank struck a match, and tried to light the hall-lamp. There was no oil in it. He muttered something vigorous, and carried his burning vesta into the dining-room. Two candles were standing on the sideboard. He lit them both, and things began to look a little more cheerful. They took a candle each and began to explore their own deserted house.

The dining-room was excellent - small, but very snug. The Tantalus spirit-stand - stood upon the walnut sideboard, and the bronzes from the cricket-club looked splendid upon each side of the mantelpiece. Beside the clock in the centre lay an open telegram. Frank seized it eagerly.

‘There now!’ he cried. ‘Listen to this. “Expect us on Thursday evening about ten.” It was *Tuesday* evening, I said. That’s the telegraphic clerk. We’ve come two days before our time.’

It was good to have any sort of explanation, although it left a great deal unexplained. They passed through the hall with its shining linoleum, and into the drawing-room. It was not a very good room, too square for elegance, but they were in no humour for criticism, and it was charming to see all the old knick-knacks, and the photographs of friends in their frames. A big wrought-iron and brass-work standing lamp towered up near the fireplace, but again there was no oil.

‘I think that Mrs. Watson has arranged it all splendidly,’ said Maude, whose active fingers were already beginning to reconstruct. ‘But where can she be?’

‘She must be out, for, of course, she lives in the house. But it is the absence of the servants which amazes me, for I understood that they had arrived. What would you like to do?’

‘Aren’t you hungry, Frank?’

‘Simply starving.’

‘So am I.’

‘Well, then, let us forage and see if we cannot find something to eat.’

So hand in hand, and each with a candle in the other hand, like a pair of young penitents, they continued their explorations with more purpose than before. The kitchen, into which they penetrated, had clearly been much used of late, for there were dirty dishes scattered about, and the fire had been lighted, though it was now out. In one corner was what seemed to be a pile of drab-coloured curtains. In the other, an armchair lay upon its side with legs projecting. A singular disorder, very alien to Mrs. Watson's habits, pervaded the apartment. A dresser with a cupboard over it claimed the first attention of the hungry pair. With a cheer from Frank and hand-clapping from Maude, they brought out a new loaf of bread, some butter, some cheese, a tin of cocoa, and a bowl full of eggs. Maude tied an apron over her pretty russet dress, seized some sticks and paper, and had a fire crackling in a very few minutes.

'Put some water in the kettle, Frank.'

'Here you are! Anything else?'

'Some in the small saucepan for the eggs.'

'I believe they are "cookers,"' said he, sniffing at them suspiciously.

'Hold them up to the light, sir. There, they are quite bright and nice. In with them! Now, if you will cut some bread and butter it, we shall soon have our supper ready.'

'It's too new to cut,' cried Frank, sawing away upon the kitchen table. 'Besides, new bread is better in chunks. Here are some cloths and knives and forks in the dresser drawer. I will go and lay the table.'

'And leave me here alone. No please, Frank, if I am cook, you must be scullery-maid. Get the cups down and put the cocoa in them. What fun it all is! I think it is simply *splendid* to be mistress of a house.'

'With one scullery-maid.'

'And she perfectly incompetent, and much given to embracing her mistress. I must take my hat off. Get the sugar for the cocoa out of the cupboard. The kettle is singing, so it won't be long. Do you know, Frank' - she paused, listening, with the egg-saucepan in her hands. 'There's a dog or something in the room.'

They had both become aware of a sort of sibilant breathing, and they looked round them in bewilderment.

'Where is it?' asked Maude. 'Frank, I believe it's a mouse.'

'Hope for the best. Don't frighten yourself unnecessarily. I fancy it comes from under these curtains.' He approached them with his candle, and was suddenly aware of a boot which was projecting from them. 'Great Scot!' he cried, 'there's a woman here asleep.'

Reassured as to the mouse, Maude approached with her saucepan still clutched in her hand. There could be no doubt either as to the woman or the sleep. She lay in an untidy heap, her head under the table, and her figure sprawling. She appeared to be a very large woman.

‘Hullo!’ cried Frank, shaking her by the shoulder. ‘Hullo, you there!’

But the woman slumbered peacefully on.

‘Heh, wake up, wake up!’ he shouted, and pulled her up into a sitting position. But she slept as soundly sitting as lying.

‘The poor thing must be ill,’ said Maude. ‘O Frank, shall I run for a doctor?’

‘Wake up, woman, wake up!’ Frank yelled, and danced her up and down. She flopped about like a sawdust doll, with her arms swinging in front of her. He panted with his exertions, but she was serenely unconscious. At last he had to lower her on to the floor again, putting a footstool under her head.

‘It’s no go,’ said he. ‘I can make nothing of her. She will sleep it off.’

‘You don’t mean to say, Frank, that she is - ‘

‘Indeed I do.’

‘How horrible!’

‘That kettle is boiling now. Suppose we have our supper.’

‘Dear Frank, I could not enjoy my supper with that unfortunate woman lying there. O Frank, I know that you could not either.’

‘Bless her!’ said Frank bitterly, as he gazed at the inert lump. ‘I really don’t see why we should put ourselves out for her. She is quite comfortable.’

‘Oh I couldn’t, Frank. It would seem inhuman.’

‘What are we to do, then?’

‘We must put her to bed.’

‘Great heavens!’

‘Yes, dear, it is our duty to put her to bed.’

‘But look here, my dear girl, we must be practical. The woman weighs half a ton, and the bedrooms are at the top of the house. It’s simply impossible.’

‘Don’t you think, Frank, that if you took her head and I took her feet, we might get her up?’

‘Not up the stair, dear. She is enormous.’

‘Well, then, on to the drawing-room sofa,’ said Maude. ‘I could have my supper, if I knew that she was safe upon the sofa.’

So Frank, seeing that there was no help for it, seized her under the arms, and Maude took her ankles, and they bore her, bulging but serene, down the passage. They staggered exhausted into the drawing-room, and the new sofa groaned beneath the weight. It was a curious and unsavoury inaugural ceremony. Maude put a rug over the prostrate form, and they returned to their boiling kettle and their uncooked eggs. Then they laid the table, and served the supper, and enjoyed this picnic meal of their own creating as no conventional meal could ever have been enjoyed. Everything seemed beautiful to the young wife - the wall-paper, the pictures, the carpet, the rug; but to him, she was so beautiful in mind, and soul, and body, that her presence turned the little room into an enchanted chamber. They sat long together, and marvelled at their own happiness - that pure serene happiness of mere companionship, which is so much more intimate and deeper than all the transports of passion.

But suddenly he sprang from his chair. There was the sound of steps, of several steps, outside upon the gravel path. Then a key clicked, and a burst of cold air told them that the door was open.

‘It’s agin’ the law for me to enter,’ said a gruff voice.

‘I tell you she’s very strong and violent,’ said a second voice, which Frank recognised as that of Mrs. Watson. ‘She chased the maid out of the house, and I can do nothing with her.’

‘Very sorry, mum, but it’s clean agin’ the law of England. Give me a warrant, and in I come. If you will bring her to the doorstep, I will be answerable for her removal.’

‘She’s in the dining-room. I can see the lights,’ said Mrs. Watson; and then, ‘Good Lord, Mr. Crosse, what a fright you gave me! Oh dear me, that you should have come when I was out, and I not expecting you for another two days yet. Well, now, I shall never forgive myself for this.’

But all the mistakes and misfortunes were very quickly explained. The telegram was the root of the evil. And then the new cook had proved to be a violent, intermittent drunkard. She had chased the other maid out of the house, and then, while Mrs. Watson rushed for the police, she had drunk herself into the stupor in which she had been found. But now, in the nick of time, the station cab came up with the luggage, and so the still placidly slumbering culprit was carried out to it, and sent off in the charge of the policeman. Such was the first entry of Mr. and Mrs. Crosse into their home at The Lindens.

CHAPTER IX - LAYING A COURSE

Frank Crosse was a methodical young man - his enemies might sometimes have called him pedantic, - and he loved to reduce his life to rule and order. It was one of his peculiarities. But how about this new life into which he was entering? It took two to draw up the rules for that. The little two-oared craft who put out upon that voyage have to lay their own course, each for itself; and all round them, as they go, they see the floating timbers and broken keels of other little boats, which had once started out full of hope and confidence. There are currents and eddies, low sand-banks and sunken reefs, and happy the crews who see them ahead, and trim their course to avoid them. Frank brooded over it all. He had seen something of life, for his years. He was observant and reflective. He had watched his friends who were happy, and he had watched his friends who were not. And now, as a result of all this wise cogitation, he sat down at a table one evening, with a solemn face, and a sheet of foolscap.

'Now, Maude,' said he, 'I want to have a serious talk.'

Maude looked up in surprise from the linen which she was marking.

'Oh dear!' she cried.

'Why "oh dear"?'

'There's something wrong?'

'Nothing in the world.'

'You looked so solemn, Frank. I thought you had been looking at the tradesman's books. What is it, dear?'

'Well, Maude, I have been thinking of married life in general. Don't you think it would be a good thing if we were to make some resolutions as to how it should be conducted - some fundamental principles, as it were?'

'Oh do, dear, do! What fun it will be!'

'But it's serious, Maude.'

'Yes, dear, I am quite serious.'

'It seemed to me, that if we could reduce it to certain rules, then, whatever came upon us in the future, we should always know exactly how to act.'

'What are the rules, dear?'

‘Well, we can only arrive at them by talking it over between ourselves. I could not draw up a set of rules, and ask you to submit to them. That is not my idea of a partnership. But if we found that we were agreed upon certain points, then we could both adopt them by mutual consent.’

‘How charming, Frank! Do please tell me some of the points.’

‘I have a few in my mind, and I should like to hear any which you may have - any ideas, you know, how to get the very highest and best out of our life. Now, first of all, there is the subject of quarrelling.’

‘O Frank, how horrid!’

‘Dear girl, we must look into the future. We are going to live all our lives together. We must foresee and prepare for all the chances of life.’

‘But that is absurd.’

‘You can’t live all your life and never be in a bad temper!’

‘But not with *you*, Frank.’

‘Oh, I can be very aggravating sometimes. Now, my idea is this. Ill-humour passes and hurts nobody. But if two people are ill-humoured, then each excites the other, and they say ever so much more than they mean. Let us make a compact never both to be ill-humoured at the same time. If *you* are cross, then it is your turn, and I stand clear. If *I* am cross, you let me work it off. When either hoists the danger-signal, the other is on guard. What do you think of that?’

‘I think you are the funniest old boy - ‘

‘Do you agree?’

‘Yes, dear, of course I agree.’

‘Article number one,’ said Frank, and scribbled upon his paper.

‘Your turn, now.’

‘No, dear, I have not thought of anything.’

‘Well, then, here is another point. Never take each other for granted.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘Never relax those attentions which one lover shows to another. Some husbands seem to forget that their wives are ladies. Some wives speak to their husbands with less courtesy and consideration than to any casual male visitor. They mean no harm, but they get into a slack way. We must not do that.’

‘I don’t think we are likely to.’

‘People get into it unconsciously. Pull me up sharply at the first sign.’

‘Yes, sir, I will.’

‘The next point that I have noted is an extension of the last. Let each strive to be worthy of the love of the other. People get slovenly and slipshoddy, as if it didn’t matter now that they were married. If each were very keen to please the other, that would not be so. How many women neglect their music after marriage.’

‘My goodness, I haven’t practised for a week!’ cried Maude.

‘And their dress and their hair’ - Maude’s hand flew up to her curls. ‘My darling, yours is just perfect. But you know how often a woman grows careless. “He will love me anyhow,” she says to herself, and perhaps she is right, but still it is not as it should be.’

‘Why, Frank, I had no idea you knew so much.’

‘I have heard my friends’ experiences. - And the man too: he should consider his wife’s feelings as much as he did his sweetheart’s. If she dislikes smoke, he should not smoke. He should not yawn in her presence. He should keep himself well-groomed and attractive. Look at that dirty cuff! I have no business to have it.’

‘As if it could make any difference to me.’

‘There now! That is what is so demoralising. You should stand out for the highest. When I came to you at St Albans, I had not dirty cuffs.’

‘You forgive me the music, Frank, and I’ll forgive you the cuff. But I agree to all you say. I think it is so wise and good. Now I’ve got something to add.’

‘Good. What is it?’

‘Each should take an interest in the other’s department.’

‘Why, of course they should.’

‘But it is not done.’

‘Why naturally, dear, you take an interest in my City work.’

‘Yes, sir, but do you take as keen an interest in my housekeeping?’

‘Perhaps I have been a little thoughtless.’

‘No, no, dear, you haven’t. You are always full of consideration. But I have noticed it with mother, and with others also. The husband pulls out his cheque-book at the end of the week or month, and he says, “Well, this is rather more than we can afford,” or “This is less than I expected,” but he never really takes any interest in his wife’s efforts to keep things nice on a little. He does not see it with her eyes and try to realise her difficulties. Oh, I wish I could express myself better, but I know that the interest is one-sided.’

‘I think what you say is quite right. I’ll try to remember that. How shall we enter it upon our list?’

‘That Interests should be mutual.’

‘Quite right. I have it down. Well, any more points?’

‘It is your turn.’

‘Well, there is this, and I feel that it is just the holiest thing in matrimony, and its greatest justification - that love should never degenerate into softness, that each should consciously stimulate the better part of the other and discourage the worse, that there should be a discipline in our life, and that we should brace each other up to a higher ideal. The love that says, “I know it is wrong, but I love him or her so much that I can’t refuse,” is a poor sort of love for the permanent use of married life. The self-respect which refuses to let the most lofty ideal of love down by an inch is a far nobler thing, and it wears better too.’

‘How will you express all that?’

‘Mutual respect is necessary for mutual love.’

‘Yes, I am sure that that is right.’

‘It sounds obvious, but the very intensity of love makes love soft and blind. Now I have another, which I am convinced that you will not agree with.’

‘Let me hear it.’

‘I have put it in this way, “The tight cord is the easiest to snap.”’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, I mean that married couples should give each other a certain latitude and freedom. If they don’t, one or other will sooner or later chafe at the restriction. It is only human nature, which is an older and more venerable thing than marriage.’

‘I don’t like that at all, Frank.’

‘I feared you wouldn’t, dear, but I believe you’ll see it with me when I explain what I mean. If you don’t, then I must try to see it with you. When one talks of freedom in married life, it means, as a rule, freedom only for the man. He does what he likes, but still claims to be a strict critic of his wife. That, I am sure, is wrong. To take an obvious example of what I mean, has a husband a right to read his wife’s letters? Certainly not, any more than she has a right to read his without his permission. To read them as a matter of course would be stretching the chain too tight.’

‘Chain is a horrid word, Frank.’

‘Well, it is only a metaphor. Or take the subject of friendships. Is a married man to be debarred from all friendship and intimacy with another woman?’

Maude looked doubtful.

‘I should like to see the woman first,’ she said.

‘Or is a married woman to form no friendship with another man who might interest or improve her? There is such a want of mutual confidence in such a view. People who are sure of each other should give each other every freedom in that. If they don’t, they are again stretching it tight.’

‘If they do, it may become so slack that it might as well not be there at all.’

‘I felt sure that we should have an argument over this. But I have seen examples. Look at the Wardrops. *There* were a couple who were never apart. It was their boast that everything was in common with them. If he was not in, she opened his letters, and he hers. And then there came a most almighty smash. The tight cord had snapped. Now, I believe that for some people, it is a most excellent thing that they should take their holidays at different times.’

‘O Frank!’

‘Yes, I do. No, not for us, by Jove! I am generalising now. But for some couples, I am sure that it is right. They reconsider each other from a distance, and they like each other the better.’

‘Yes, but these rules are for our guidance, not for that of other people.’

‘Quite right, dear. I was off the rails. “As you were,” as your brother Jack would say. But I am afraid that I am not going to convince you over this point.’

Maude looked charmingly mutinous.

‘No, Frank, you are not. I don’t think marriage can be too close. I believe that every hope, and thought, and aspiration should be in common. I could never get as near to your heart and soul as I should wish to do. I want every year to draw me closer and closer, until we really are as nearly the same person as it is possible to be upon earth.’

When you have to surrender, it is well to do so gracefully. Frank stooped down and kissed his wife’s hand, and apologised. ‘The wisdom of the heart is greater than the wisdom of the brain,’ said he. But the love of man comes from the brain, far more than the love of woman, and so it is that there will always be some points upon which they will never quite see alike.

‘Then we scratch out that item.’

‘No, dear. ‘Put “The cord which is held tight is the easiest to snap.” That will be all right. The cord of which I speak is never held at all. The moment it is necessary to hold it, it is of no value. It must be voluntary, natural, unavoidable.’

So Frank amended his aphorism.

‘Anything more, dear?’

‘Yes, I have thought of one other,’ said she. ‘It is that if ever you had to find fault with me about anything, it should be when we are alone.’

‘And the same in your case with me. That is excellent. What can be more vulgar and degrading than a public difference of opinion? People do it half in fun sometimes, but it is wrong all the same. Duly entered upon the minutes. Anything else?’

‘Only material things.’

‘Yes, but they count also. Now, in the matter of money, I feel that every husband should allow his wife a yearly sum of her own, to be paid over to her, and kept by her, so that she may make her own arrangements for herself. It is degrading to a woman to have to apply to her husband every time she wants a sovereign. On the other hand, if the wife has any money, she should have the spending of it. If she chooses to spend part of it in helping the establishment, that is all right, but I am sure that she should have her own separate account, and her own control of it.’

‘If a woman really loves a man, Frank, how can she grudge him everything she has? If my little income would take one worry from your mind, what a joy it would be to me to feel that you were using it!’

‘Yes, but the man has his self-respect to think of. In a great crisis one might fall back upon one’s wife - since our interests are the same, but only that could justify it. So much for the wife’s money. Now for the question of housekeeping.’

‘That terrible question!’

‘It is only hard because people try to do so much upon a little. Why should they try to do so much? The best pleasures of life are absolutely inexpensive. Books, music, pleasant intimate evenings, the walk among the heather, the delightful routine of domestic life, my cricket and my golf - these things cost very little.’

‘But you must eat and drink, Frank. And as to Jemima and the cook, it is really extraordinary the amount which they consume.’

‘But the tendency is for meals to become much too elaborate. Why that second vegetable?’

‘There now! I knew that you were going to say something against that poor vegetable. It costs so little.’

‘On an average, I have no doubt that it costs threepence a day. Come now, confess that it does. Do you know what threepence a day comes to in a year? There is no use in having an accountant for a husband, if you can’t get at figures easily. It is four pounds eleven shillings and threepence.’

‘It does not seem very much.’

‘But for that money, and less, one could become a member of the London Library, with the right to take out fifteen books at a time, and all the world’s literature to draw from. Now just picture it: on one side, all the books in the world, all the words of the wise, and great, and witty; on the other side, a lot of cauliflowers and vegetable-marrows and French beans. Which is the better bargain?’

‘Good gracious, we shall never have a second vegetable again!’

‘And pudding?’

‘My dear, you always eat the pudding.’

‘I know I do. It seems an obvious thing to do when the pudding is there in front of me. But if it were not there, I should neither eat it nor miss it, and I know that you care nothing about it. There would be another five or six pounds a year.’

‘We’ll have a compromise, dear. Second vegetable one day, pudding the next.’

‘Very good.’

‘I notice that it is always after you have had a substantial meal that you discuss economy in food. I wonder if you will feel the same when you come back starving from the City to-morrow? Now, sir, any other economy?’

‘I don’t think money causes happiness. But debt causes unhappiness. And so we must cut down every expense until we have a reserve fund to meet any unexpected call. If you see any way in which I could save, or any money I spend which you think is unjustifiable, I do wish that you would tell me. I got into careless ways in my bachelor days.’

‘That red golfing-coat.’

‘I know. It was idiotic of me.’

‘Never mind, dear. You look very nice in it. After all, it was only thirty shillings. Can you show me any extravagance of mine?’

‘Well, dear, I looked at that dressmaker’s bill yesterday.’

‘O Frank, it is such a pretty dress, and you said you liked it, and you have to pay for a good cut, and you said yourself that a wife must not become dowdy after marriage, and it would have cost double as much in Regent Street.’

‘I didn’t think the dress dear.’

‘What was it, then?’

‘The silk lining of the skirt.’

‘You funny boy!’

‘It cost thirty shillings extra. Now, what can it matter if it is lined with silk or not?’

‘Oh, doesn’t it? Just you try one and see.’

‘But no one can know that it is lined with silk.’

‘When I rustle into a room, dear, every woman in it knows that my skirt is lined with silk.’

Frank felt that he had ventured out of his depth, so he struck out for land again.

‘There’s only one economy which I don’t think is justifiable,’ said he, ‘and that is, to cut down your subscriptions to charities. It is such a very cheap way of doing things. Not that I do much in that line - too little, perhaps. But to say that because *we* want to economise, therefore some poor people are to suffer, is a very poor argument. We must save at our own expense.’

So now Frank, in his methodical fashion, had all his results tabulated upon his sheet of foolscap. It was not a very brilliant production, but it might serve as a chart for the little two-oared boats until a better one is forthcoming. It ran in this way -

Maxims for the Married

1. Since you *are* married, you may as well make the best of it.
2. So make some maxims and try to live up to them.
3. And don’t be discouraged if you fail. You *will* fail, but perhaps you won’t always fail.
4. Never both be cross at the same time. Wait your turn.
5. Never cease to be lovers. If you cease, some one else may begin.

6. You were gentleman and lady before you were husband and wife. Don’t forget it.

7. Keep yourself at your best. It is a compliment to your partner.

8. Keep your ideal high. You may miss it, but it is better to miss a high one than to hit a low one.

9. A blind love is a foolish love. Encourage the best in each other’s nature.

10. Permanent mutual respect is necessary for a permanent mutual love. A woman can love without respect, but a man cannot.

11. The tight cord is the easiest to snap.

12. Let there be one law for both.

13. There is only one thing worse than quarrels in public. That is caresses.

14. Money is not essential to happiness, but happy people usually have enough.

15. So save some.

16. The easiest way of saving is to do without things.

17. If you can’t, then you had better do without a wife.

18. The man who respects his wife does not turn her into a mendicant. Give her a purse of her own.

19. If you save, save at your own expense.

20. In all matters of money, prepare always for the worst and hope for the best.

Such was their course as far as this ambitious young couple could lay it. They may correct it by experience, and improve it by use, but it is good enough to guide them safely out to sea.

CHAPTER X - CONFESSIONS

‘Tell me, Frank, did you ever love any one before me?’

‘How badly trimmed the lamp is to-night!’ said he. It was so bad that he went off instantly into the dining-room to get another. It was some time before he returned.

She waited inexorably until he had settled down again.

‘Did you, Frank?’ she asked.

‘Did I what?’

‘Ever love any one else?’

‘My dear Maude, what *is* the use of asking questions like that?’

‘You said that there were no secrets between us.’

‘No, but there are some things better left alone.’

‘That is what I should call a secret.’

‘Of course, if you make a point of it - ‘

‘I do.’

‘Well, then, I am ready to answer anything that you ask. But you must not blame me if you do not like my answers.’

‘Who was she, Frank?’

‘Which?’

‘O Frank, more than one!’

‘I told you that you would not like it.’

‘Oh, I wish I had not asked you!’

‘Then do let us drop it.’

‘No, I can’t drop it now, Frank. You have gone too far. You must tell me everything.’

‘Everything?’

‘Yes, everything, Frank.’

‘I am not sure that I can.’

‘Is it so dreadful as that?’

‘No, there is another reason.’

‘Do tell me, Frank.’

‘There is a good deal of it. You know how a modern poet excused himself to his wife for all his pre-matrimonial experiences. He said that he was looking for her.’

‘Well, I do like that!’ she cried indignantly.

‘I was looking for you.’

‘You seem to have looked a good deal.’

‘But I found you at last.’

‘I had rather you had found me at first, Frank.’ He said something about supper, but she was not to be turned.

‘How many did you really love?’ she asked. ‘Please don’t joke about it, Frank. I really want to know.’

‘If I choose to tell you a lie - ‘

‘But you won’t!’

‘No, I won’t. I could never feel the same again.’

‘Well, then, how many did you love?’

‘Don’t exaggerate what I say, Maude, or take it to heart. You see it depends upon what you mean by love. There are all sorts and degrees of love, some just the whim of a moment, and others the passion of a lifetime; some are founded on mere physical passion, and some on intellectual sympathy, and some on spiritual affinity.’

‘Which do you love me with?’

‘All three.’

‘Sure?’

‘Perfectly sure.’

She came over and the cross-examination was interrupted. But in a few minutes she had settled down to it again.

‘Well, now - the first?’ said she.

‘Oh, I can’t, Maude - don’t.’

‘Come, sir - her name?’

‘No, no, Maude, that is going a little too far. Even to you, I should never mention another woman’s name.’

‘Who was she, then?’

‘Please don’t let us go into details. It is perfectly *horrible*. Let me tell things in my own way.’

She made a little grimace.

‘You are wriggling, sir. But I won’t be hard upon you. Tell it your own way.’

‘Well, in a word, Maude, I was always in love with some one.’

Her face clouded over.

‘Your love must be very cheap,’ said she.

‘It’s almost a necessity of existence for a healthy young man who has imagination and a warm heart. It was all - or nearly all - quite superficial.’

‘I should think all your love was superficial, if it can come so easily.’

‘Don’t be cross, Maude. I had never seen you at the time. I owed no duty to you.’

‘You owed a duty to your own self-respect.’

‘There, I knew we should have trouble over it. What do you want to ask such questions for? I dare say I am a fool to be so frank.’

She sat for a little with her face quite cold and set. In his inmost heart Frank was glad that she should be jealous, and he watched her out of the corner of his eye.

‘Well!’ said she at last.

‘Must I go on?’

‘Yes, I may as well hear it.’

‘You’ll only be cross.’

‘We’ve gone too far to stop. And I’m not cross, Frank. Only pained a little. But I do appreciate your frankness. I had no idea you were such a - such a Mormon.’ She began to laugh.

‘I used to take an interest in every woman.’

‘“Take an interest” is good.’

‘That was how it began. And then if circumstances were favourable the interest deepened, until at last, naturally - well, you can understand.’

‘How many did you take an interest in?’

‘Well, in pretty nearly all of them.’

‘And how many deepened?’

‘Oh, I don’t know.’

‘Twenty?’

‘Well - rather more than that, I think.’

‘Thirty?’

‘Quite thirty.’

‘Forty?’

‘Not more than forty, I think.’

Maude sat aghast at the depths of his depravity.

‘Let me see: you are twenty-seven now, so you have loved four women a year since you were seventeen.’

‘If you reckon it that way,’ said Frank, ‘I am afraid that it must have been more than forty.’

‘It’s dreadful,’ said Maude, and began to cry.

Frank knelt down in front of her and kissed her hands. She had sweet little plump hands, very soft and velvety.

‘You make me feel such a brute,’ said he. ‘Anyhow, I love you now with all my heart and mind and soul.’

‘Forty-firstly and lastly,’ she sobbed, half laughing and half crying. Then she pulled his hair to reassure him.

‘I can’t be angry with you,’ said she. ‘Besides, it would be ungenerous to be angry when you tell me things of your own free will. You are not forced to tell me. It is very honourable of you. But I do wish you had taken an interest in me first.’

‘Well, it was not so fated. I suppose there are some men who are quite good when they are bachelors. But I don’t believe they are the best men. They are either archangels upon earth - young Gladstones and Newmans - or else they are cold, calculating, timid, un-virile creatures, who will never do any good. The first class must be splendid. I never met one except in memoirs. The others I don’t want to meet.’

Women are not interested in generalities.

‘Were they nicer than me?’ she asked.

‘Who?’

‘Those forty women.’

‘No, dear, of course not. Why are you laughing?’

‘Well, it came into my head how funny it would be, if the forty were all gathered into one room, and you were turned loose in the middle of them.’

‘Funny!’ Frank ejaculated. Women have such extraordinary ideas of humour. Maude laughed until she was quite tired.

‘It doesn’t strike you as comic?’ she cried at last.

‘No, it doesn’t,’ he answered coldly.

‘Of course it wouldn’t,’ said she, and went off into another ripple of pretty contralto laughter. There is a soft, deep, rich laugh, which some women have, that is the sweetest sound in Nature.

‘When you have quite finished,’ said he huffily. Her jealousy was much more complimentary than her ridicule.

‘All right now. Don’t be cross. If I didn’t laugh I should cry. I’m so sorry if I have annoyed you.’ He had gone back to his chair, so she paid him a flying visit. ‘Satisfied?’

‘Not quite.’

‘Now?’

‘All right. I forgive you.’

‘That’s funny too. Fancy *you* forgiving *me* after all these confessions. But you never loved one of them all as you love me.’

‘Never.’

‘Swear it.’

‘I do swear it.’

‘Morally, and what do you call it, and the other?’

‘Not one of them.’

‘And never will again?’

‘Never.’

‘Good boy for ever and ever?’

‘For ever and ever.’

‘And the forty were horrid?’

‘No, hang it, Maude, I can’t say that.’

She pouted and hung her head.

‘You do like them better, then?’

‘How absurd you are, Maude! If I had liked one better, I should have married her.’

‘Well, yes, I suppose you would. You must have taken a deeper interest in me than in the others, since you married me. I hadn’t thought of that.’

‘Silly old girl! Of course I liked you best. Let us drop the thing, and never talk about it any more.’

‘Have you their photographs?’

‘No.’

‘None of them?’

‘No.’

‘What did you do with them?’

‘I never had most of them.’

‘And the others?’

‘I destroyed some when I married.’

‘That was nice of you. Aren’t you sorry?’

‘No, I thought it was only right.’

‘Were you fondest of dark women or fair?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. *I* was never pernickety in *my* tastes. You know those lines I read you from Henley: “Handsome, ugly - all are women.” That’s a bachelor’s sentiment.’

‘But do you mean to say, sir - now, you are speaking on your honour, that out of all these forty, there was not one who was prettier than I am?’

‘Do let us talk of something else.’

‘And not one as clever?’

‘How absurd you are to-night, Maude!’

‘Come, answer me.’

‘I’ve answered you already.’

‘I did not hear you.’

‘Oh yes, you did. I said that I had married you, and that shows that I liked you best. I don’t compare you quality for quality against every one in the world. That would be absurd. What I say is that your combination of qualities is the one which is most dear to me.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Maude dubiously. ‘How nice and frank you are!’

‘Now I’ve hurt you!’

‘Oh no, not in the least. I like you to be frank. I should hate to think that there was anything you did not dare to tell me.’

‘And you, Maude - would you be equally frank with me?’

‘Yes, dear, I will. I feel that I owe it to you after your confidence in me. I have had my little experiences too.’

‘You!’

‘Perhaps you would rather that I said nothing about them. What good can there be in raking up these old stories?’

‘No, I had rather you told me.’

‘You won’t be hurt?’

‘No, no - certainly not.’

‘You may take it from me, Frank, that if any married woman ever tells her husband that until she saw him she never felt any emotion at the sight of another man, it is simple nonsense. There may be women of that sort about, but I never met them. I don’t think I should like them, for they must be dry, cold, unsympathetic, unemotional, unwomanly creatures.’

‘Maude, you have loved some one else!’

‘I won’t deny that I have been interested deeply interested in several men.’

‘Several!’

‘It was before I had met you, dear. I owed you no duty.’

‘You have loved several men.’

‘The feeling was for the most part quite superficial. There are many different sorts and degrees of love.’

‘Good God, Maude! How many men inspired this feeling in you?’

‘The truth is, Frank, that a healthy young woman who has imagination and a warm heart is attracted by every young man. I know that you wish me to be frank and to return your confidence. But there is a certain kind of young man with whom I always felt my interest deepen.’

‘Oh, you did discriminate?’

‘Now you are getting bitter. I will say no more.’

‘You have said too much. You must go on now.’

‘Well, I was only going to say that dark men always had a peculiar fascination for me. I don’t know what it is, but the feeling is quite overpowering.’

‘Is that why you married a man with flaxen hair?’

‘Well, I couldn’t expect to find every quality in my husband, could I? It would not be reasonable. I assure you, dear, that taking your *tout ensemble*, I like you far the best of all. You may not be the handsomest, and you may not be the cleverest - one cannot expect one’s absolute ideal, - but I love you far, far the best of any. I do hope I haven’t hurt you by anything I have said.’

‘I am sorry I am not your ideal, Maude. It would be absurd to suppose myself anybody’s ideal, but I hoped always that the eyes of love transfigured an object and made it seem all right. My hair is past praying for, but if you can point out anything that I can mend - ‘

‘No, no, I want you just as you are. If I hadn’t liked you best, I shouldn’t have married you, Frank, should I?’

‘But those other experiences?’

‘Oh, we had better drop them. What good can it possibly do to discuss my old experiences? It will only annoy you.’

‘Not at all. I honour you for your frankness in speaking out, although I acknowledge that it is a little unexpected. Go on.’

‘I forget where I was.’

‘You had just remarked that before your marriage you had love-affairs with a number of men.’

‘How horrid it sounds, doesn’t it?’

‘Well, it did strike me in that way.’

‘But that’s because you exaggerate what I said. I said that I had been attracted by several men.’

‘And that dark men thrilled you.’

‘Exactly.’

‘I had hoped that I was the first.’

‘It was not fated to be so. I could easily tell you a lie, Frank, and say that you were, but I should never forgive myself if I were to do such a thing. You see I left school at seventeen, and I was twenty-three when I became engaged to you. There are six years. Imagine all the dances, picnics, parties, visitings of six years. I could not help meeting young men continually. A good many were interested in me, and I - ‘

‘You were interested in them.’

‘It was natural, Frank.’

‘Oh yes, perfectly natural. And then I understand that the interest deepened.’

‘Sometimes. When you met a young man who was interested several times running, at a dance, then in the street, then in the garden, then a walk home at night - of course your interest began to deepen.’

‘Yes.’

‘And then - ‘

‘Well, what was the next stage?’

‘Sure you’re not angry?’

‘No, no, not at all. Why don’t you keep the key in the spirit-stand?’

‘It might tempt Jemima. Shall I get it?’

‘No, no, go on! The next stage was?’

‘Well, when you have been deeply interested some time, then you begin to have experiences.’

‘Ah!’

‘Don’t shout, Frank.’

‘Did I shout? Never mind. Go on! You had experiences.’

‘Why go into details?’

‘You must go on. You have said too much to stop. I insist upon hearing the experiences.’

‘Not if you ask for them in that way, Frank.’ Maude had a fine dignity of her own when she liked.

‘Well, I don’t insist. I beg you to have confidence in me, and tell me some of your experiences.’

She leaned back in her armchair with her eyes half closed, and a quiet retrospective smile upon her face.

‘Well, if you would really like to hear, Frank, as a proof of my confidence and trust, I will tell you. You will remember that I had not seen you at the time.’

‘I will make every excuse.’

‘I will tell you a single experience. It was my first of the sort, and stands out very clearly in my memory. It all came through my being left alone with a gentleman who was visiting my mother.’

‘Yes!’

‘Well, we were alone in the room, you understand.’

‘Yes, yes, go on!’

‘And he paid me many little compliments: kept saying how pretty I was, and that he had never seen a sweeter girl, and so on. You know what gentlemen would say?’

‘And you?’

‘Oh, I hardly answered him, but of course I was young and inexperienced, and I could not help being flattered and pleased at his words. I may have shown him what I felt, for he suddenly - ‘

‘Kissed you!’

‘Exactly. He kissed me. Don’t walk up and down the room, dear. It fidgets me.’

‘All right. Go on. Don’t stop. After this outrage what happened next?’

‘You really want to know?’

‘I must know. What did you do?’

‘I am so sorry that I ever began, for I can see that it is exciting you. Light your pipe, dear, and let us talk of something else. It will only make you cross if I tell you the truth.’

‘I won’t be cross. Go on. What did you do?’

‘Well, Frank, since you insist - I kissed him back.’

‘You - you kissed him back!’

‘You’ll have Jemima up if you go on like that.’

‘You kissed him back!’

‘Yes, dear; it may be wrong, but I did.’

‘Good God! why did you do that?’

‘Well, I liked him.’

‘A dark man?’

‘Yes, he was dark.’

‘O Maude! Maude! Well, don’t stop. What then?’

‘Then he kissed me several times.’

‘Of course he would, if you kissed him. What else could you expect? And then?’

‘O Frank, I can’t.’

‘Go on. I am ready for anything!’

‘Well, do sit down, and don’t run about the room. I am only agitating you.’

‘There, I am sitting. You can see that I am not agitated. For Heaven’s sake, go on!’

‘He asked me if I would sit upon his knee.’

‘Yek!’

Maude began to laugh.

‘Why, Frank, you are croaking like a frog.’

‘I am glad you think it a laughing matter. Go on! Go on! You yielded to his very moderate and natural request. You sat upon his knee.’

‘Well, Frank, I did.’

‘Good heavens!’

‘Don’t be so excitable, dear. It was long before I ever saw you.’

‘You mean to sit there and tell me in cold blood that you sat upon this ruffian’s knee!’

‘What else could I do?’

‘What could you do? You could have screamed, you could have rung the bell, you could have struck him - you could have risen in the dignity of your insulted womanhood and walked out of the room.’

‘It was not so easy for me to walk out of the room.’

‘He held you?’

‘Yes, he held me.’

‘Oh, if I had been there!’

‘And there was another reason.’

‘What was that?’

‘Well, I wasn’t very good at walking at that time. You see, I was only three years old.’

Frank sat for a few minutes absorbing it.

‘You little wretch!’ he said at last.

‘Oh you dear old goose! I feel so much better.’

‘You horror!’

‘I had to get level with you over my forty predecessors. You old Bluebeard! But I did harrow you a little - didn’t I?’

‘Harrow me! I’m raw all over. It’s a nightmare. O Maude, how could you have the heart?’

‘Oh, it was lovely - beautiful!’

‘It was dreadful.’

‘And how jealous you were! Oh, I *am* so glad!’

‘I don’t think,’ said Frank, as he put his arms round her, ‘that I ever quite realised before - ‘

And just then Jemima came in with the tray.

CHAPTER XI - CONCERNING MRS. BEETON

Frank Crosse had only been married some months when he first had occasion to suspect that his wife had some secret sorrow. There was a sadness and depression about her at times, for which he was unable to account. One Saturday afternoon he happened to come home earlier than he was expected, and entering her bedroom suddenly, he found her seated in the basket-chair in the window, with a large book upon her knees. Her face, as she looked up at him with a mixed expression of joy and of confusion, was stained by recent tears. She put the book hastily down upon the dressing-stand.

'Maude, you've been crying.'

'No, Frank, no!'

'O Maude, you fibber! Remove those tears instantly.' He knelt down beside her and helped. 'Better now?'

'Yes, dearest, I am quite happy.'

'Tears all gone?'

'Quite gone.'

'Well, then, explain!'

'I didn't mean to tell you, Frank!' She gave the prettiest, most provocative little wriggles as her secret was drawn from her. 'I wanted to do it without your knowing. I thought it would be a surprise for you. But I begin to understand now that my ambition was much too high. I am not clever enough for it. But it is disappointing all the same.'

Frank took the bulky book off the table. It was Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management*. The open page was headed, 'General Observations on the Common Hog,' and underneath was a single large tear-drop. It had fallen upon a woodcut of the Common Hog, in spite of which Frank solemnly kissed it, and turned Maude's trouble into laughter.

'Now you are all right again. I do hate to see you crying, though you never look more pretty. But tell me, dear, what was your ambition?'

'To know as much as any woman in England about housekeeping. To know as much as Mrs. Beeton. I wanted to master every page of it, from the first to the last.'

'There are 1641 of them,' said Frank, turning them over.

‘I know. I felt that I should be quite old before I had finished. But the last part, you see, is all about wills, and bequests, and homeopathy, and things of that kind. We could do it later. It is the early part that I want to learn now - but it *is* so hard.’

‘But why do you wish to do it, Maude?’

‘Because I want you to be as happy as Mr. Beeton.’

‘I’ll bet I am.’

‘No, no, you can’t be, Frank. It says somewhere here that the happiness and comfort of the husband depend upon the housekeeping of the wife. Mrs. Beeton must have been the finest housekeeper in the world. Therefore, Mr. Beeton must have been the happiest and most comfortable man. But why should Mr. Beeton be happier and more comfortable than my Frank? From the hour I read that I determined that he shouldn’t be - and he won’t be.’

‘And he isn’t.’

‘Oh, you think so. But then you know nothing about it. You think it right because I do it. But if you were visiting Mrs. Beeton, you would soon see the difference.’

‘What an awkward trick you have of always sitting in a window,’ said Frank, after an interval. ‘I’ll swear that the wise Mrs. Beeton never advocates that - with half a dozen other windows within point-blank range.’

‘Well, then, you shouldn’t do it.’

‘Well, then, you shouldn’t be so nice.’

‘You really still think that I am nice?’

‘Fishing!’

‘After all these months?’

‘Nicer and nicer every day.’

‘Not a bit tired?’

‘You blessing! When I am tired of you, I shall be tired of life.’

‘How wonderful it all seems!’

‘Does it not?’

‘To think of that first day at the tennis-party. “I hope you are not a very good player, Mr. Crosse!” - “No, Miss Selby, but I shall be happy to make one in a set.” That’s how we began. And now!’

‘Yes, it is wonderful.’

‘And at dinner afterwards. “Do you like Irving’s acting?” - “Yes, I think that he is a great genius.” How formal and precise we were! And now I sit curling your hair in a bedroom window.'

'It *does* seem funny. But I suppose, if you come to think of it, something of the same kind must have happened to one or two people before.'

'But never quite like us.'

'Oh no, never quite like us. But with a kind of family resemblance, you know. Married people do usually end by knowing each other a little better than on the first day they met.'

'What *did* you think of me, Frank?'

'I've told you often.'

'Well, tell me again.'

'What's the use when you know?'

'But I like to hear.'

'Well, it's just spoiling you.'

'I love to be spoiled.'

'Well, then, I thought to myself - If I can only have that woman for my own, I believe I will do something in life yet. And I also thought - If I don't get that woman for my own, I will never, never be the same man again.'

'Really, Frank, the very first day you saw me?'

'Yes, the very first day.'

'And then?'

'And then, day by day, and week by week, that feeling grew deeper and stronger, until at last you swallowed up all my other hopes, and ambitions, and interests. I hardly dare think, Maude, what would have happened to me if you had refused me.'

She laughed aloud with delight.

'How sweet it is to hear you say so! And the wonderful thing is that you have never seemed disappointed. I always expected that some day after marriage - not immediately, perhaps, but at the end of a week or so - you would suddenly give a start, like those poor people who are hypnotised, and you would say, "Why, I used to think that she was pretty! I used to think that she was sweet! How could I be so infatuated over a little, insignificant, ignorant, selfish, uninteresting - " O Frank, the neighbours will see you?'

'Well, then, you mustn't provoke me.'

'What *will* Mrs. Potter think?'

'You should pull down the blinds before you make speeches of that sort.'

'Now do sit quiet and be a good boy.'

'Well, then, tell me what you thought.'

‘I thought you were a very good tennis-player.’

‘Anything else?’

‘And you talked nicely.’

‘Did I? I never felt such a stick in my life. I was as nervous as a cat.’

‘That was so delightful. I do hate people who are very cool and assured. I saw that you were disturbed, and I even thought - ‘

‘Yes?’

‘Well, I thought that perhaps it was I who disturbed you.’

‘And you liked me?’

‘I was very interested in you.’

‘Well, that is the blessed miracle which I can never get over. You, with your beauty, and your grace, and your rich father, and every young man at your feet, and I, a fellow with neither good looks, nor learning, nor prospects, nor - ‘

‘Be quiet, sir! Yes, you shall! Now?’

‘By Jove, there *is* old Mrs. Potter at the window! We’ve done it this time. Let us get back to serious conversation again.’

‘How did we leave it?’

‘It was that hog, I believe. And then Mr. Beeton. But where does the hog come in? Why should you weep over him? And what are the Lady’s Observations on the Common Hog?’

‘Read them for yourself.’

Frank read out aloud: ‘“The hog belongs to the order Mammalia, the genus *sus scrofa,* and the species *pachydermata,* or thick-skinned. Its generic characters are a long, flexible snout, forty-two teeth, cloven feet, furnished with four toes, and a tail, which is small, short, and twisted, while, in some varieties, this appendage is altogether wanting.” - But what on earth has all this to do with housekeeping?’

‘That’s what *I* want to know. It is so disheartening to have to remember such things. What does it matter if the hog *has* forty-two toes. And yet, if Mrs. Beeton knew it, one feels that one ought to know it also. If once I began to skip, there would be no end to it. But it really is such a splendid book in other ways. It doesn’t matter what you want, you will find it here. Take the index anywhere. Cream. If you want cream, it’s all there. Croup. If you want - I mean, if you don’t want croup, it will teach you how not to get it. Crumpets - all about them. Crullers - I’m sure you don’t know what a cruller is, Frank.’

‘No, I don’t.’

‘Neither do I. But I could look it up and learn. Here it is - paragraph 2847. It is a sort of pancake, you see. That’s how you learn things.’

Frank Crosse took the book and dropped it. It fell with a sulky thud upon the floor.

‘Nothing that it can teach you, dear, can ever make up to me if it makes you cry, and bothers you. - You bloated, pedantic thing!’ he cried, in sudden fury, aiming a kick at the squat volume. ‘It is to you I owe all those sad, tired looks which I have seen upon my wife’s face. I know my enemy now. You pompous, fussy old humbug, I’ll kick the red cover off you!’

But Maude snatched it up, and gathered it to her bosom. ‘No, no, Frank, I don’t know what I should do without it. You have no idea what a wise old book it is. Now, sit there on the footstool at my feet, and I will read to you.’

‘Do, dear; it’s delightful.’

‘Sit quiet, then, and be good. Now listen to this pearl of wisdom: “As with the commander of an army, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment, and, just in proportion as she performs her duties thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path.”’

‘From which it follows,’ said her husband, ‘that Jemima must be a perfect paragon.’

‘On the contrary, it explains all Jemima’s shortcomings. Listen to this: “Early rising is one of the most essential qualities. When a mistress is an early riser, it is almost certain that her house will be orderly and well managed.”’

‘Well, you are down at nine - what more do you want?’

‘At nine! I am sure that Mrs. Beeton was always up at six.’

‘I have my doubts about Mrs. B. Methinks the lady doth protest too much. I should not be very much surprised to learn that she had breakfast in bed every morning.’

‘O Frank! You have no reverence for anything.’

‘Let us have some more wisdom.’

‘“Frugality and Economy are home virtues without which no household can prosper. Dr. Johnson says, ‘Frugality may be termed - ‘“

‘Oh, bother Dr. Johnson! Who cares for a man’s opinion. Now, if it had been Mrs. Johnson -!’

‘Johnson kept house for himself for years - and a queer job he made of it.’

‘So I should think.’ Maude tossed her pretty curls. ‘Mrs. Beeton is all right, but I will not be lectured by Dr. Johnson. Where was I? Oh yes - “‘We must always remember that to manage a little well, is a great merit in housekeeping.”’

‘Hurrah! Down with the second vegetable! No pudding on fish days. *Vive la bière de Pilsen*!’

‘What a noisy boy you are!’

‘This book excites me. Anything more?’

“Friendships should not be hastily formed, nor the heart given at once to every newcomer - “‘

‘Well, I should hope not! Don’t let me catch you at it! You don’t mind my cigarette? Has Mrs. Beeton a paragraph about smoking in bedrooms?’

‘Such an enormity never occurred to her as a remote possibility. If she had known you, dear, she would have had to write an appendix to her book to meet all the new problems which you would suggest. Shall I go on?’

‘Please do!’

‘She next treats conversation. “In conversation, trifling occurrences such as small disappointments, petty annoyances, and other everyday incidents, should never be mentioned to friends. If the mistress be a wife, never let a word in connection with her husband’s failings pass her lips - “‘

‘By Jove, this book has more wisdom to the square inch than any work of man,’ cried Frank, in enthusiasm.

‘I thought that would please you. “Good temper should be cultivated by every mistress, as upon it the welfare of the household may be said to turn.”’

‘Excellent!’

‘“In starting a household, it is always best in the long-run to get the very best articles of their kind.”’

‘That is why I got you, Maude.’

‘Thank you, sir. We have a dissertation then upon dress and fashion, another upon engaging domestics, another about daily duties, another about visiting, another about fresh air and exercise - ‘

‘The most essential of any,’ cried Frank, jumping up, and pulling his wife by the arms out of her low wicker-chair. ‘There is just time for nine holes at golf before it is dark, if you wilt come exactly as you are. But listen to this, young lady. If ever again I see you fretting or troubling yourself about your household affairs - ‘

‘No, no, Frank, I won’t!’

‘Well, if you do, Mrs. Beeton goes into the kitchen-fire. Now remember?’

‘You are sure you don’t envy Mr. Beeton?’

‘I don’t envy a man upon earth.’

‘Then why should I try to be Mrs. Beeton?’

‘Why indeed?’

‘O Frank, what a load off my mind! Those sixteen hundred pages have just lain upon it for months. Dear old boy! come on!’

And they clattered downstairs for their golf-clubs.

CHAPTER XII - MR. SAMUEL PEPYS

There were few things which Maude liked so much as a long winter evening when Frank and she dined together, and then sat beside the fire and made good cheer. It would be an exaggeration to say that she preferred it to a dance, but next to that supreme joy, and higher even than the theatre in her scale of pleasures, were those serene and intimate evenings when they talked at their will, and were silent at their will, within their home brightened by those little jokes and endearments and allusions which make up that inner domestic masonry which is close-tiled for ever to the outsider. Five or six evenings a week, she with her sewing and Frank with his book, settled down to such enjoyment as men go to the ends of the earth to seek, while it awaits them, if they will but atune their souls to sympathy, beside their own hearthstones. Now and again their sweet calm would be broken by a ring at the bell, when some friend of Frank's would come round to pay them an evening visit. At the sound Maude would say 'bother,' and Frank something shorter and stronger, but, as the intruder appeared, they would both break into, 'Well, really now it *was* good of you to drop in upon us in this homely way.' Without such hypocrisy, the world would be a hard place to live in.

I may have mentioned somewhere that Frank had a catholic taste in literature. Upon a shelf in their bedroom - a relic of his bachelor days - there stood a small line of his intimate books, the books which filled all the chinks of his life when no new books were forthcoming. They were all volumes which he had read in his youth, and many times since, until they had become the very tie-beams of his mind. His tastes were healthy and obvious without being fine. Macaulay's *Essays,* Holmes' *Autocrat,* Gibbons' *History,* Jefferies' *Story of my Heart,* Carlyle's Life, Pepys' *Diary,* and Borrow's *Lavengro* were among his inner circle of literary friends. The sturdy East Anglian, half prize-fighter, half missionary, was a particular favourite of his, and so was the garrulous Secretary of the Navy. One day it struck him that it would be a pleasant thing to induce his wife to share his enthusiasms, and he suggested that the evenings should be spent in reading selections from these old friends of his. Maude was delighted. If he had proposed to read the rig-vedas in the original Sanskrit, Maude would have listened with a smiling face. It is in such trifles that a woman’s love is more than a man’s.

That night Frank came downstairs with a thick well-thumbed volume in his hand.

‘This is Mr. Pepys,’ said he solemnly.

‘What a funny name!’ cried Maude. ‘It makes me think of indigestion. Why? Oh yes, pepsine, of course.’

‘We shall take a dose of him every night after dinner to complete the resemblance. But seriously, dear, I think that now that we have taken up a course of reading, we should try to approach it in a grave spirit, and endeavour to realise - Oh, I say, don’t!’

‘I *am* so sorry, dear! I do hope I didn’t hurt, you!’

‘You did - considerably.’

‘It all came from my having the needle in my hand at the time - and you looked so solemn - and - well, I couldn’t help it.’

‘Little wretch -!’

‘No, dear; Jemima may come in any moment with the coffee. Now, do sit down and read about Mr Pepys to me. And first of all, would you mind explaining all about the gentleman, from the beginning, and taking nothing for granted, just as if I had never heard of him before.’

‘I don’t believe - ‘

‘Never mind, sir! Be a good boy and do exactly what you are told. Now begin!’

‘Well, Maude, Mr. Pepys was born - ‘

‘What was his first name?’

‘Samuel.’

‘Oh dear, I’m sure I should not have liked him.’

‘Well, it’s too late to change that. He was born - I could see by looking, but it really doesn’t matter, does it? He was born somewhere in sixteen hundred and something or other, and I forget what his father was.’

‘I must try to remember what you tell me.’

‘Well, it all amounts to this, that he got on very well in the world, that he became at last a high official of the navy in the time of Charles the Second, and that he died in fairly good circumstances, and left his library, which was a fine one, to one of the universities, I can’t remember which.’

‘There is an accuracy about your information, Frank - ‘

‘I know, dear, but it really does not matter. All this has nothing to do with the main question.’

‘Go on, then!’

‘Well, this library was left as a kind of dust-catcher, as such libraries are, until one day, more than a hundred years after the old boy’s death, some enterprising person seems to have examined his books, and he found a number of volumes of writing which were all in cipher, so that no one could make head or tail of them.’

‘Dear me, how very interesting!’

‘Yes, it naturally excited curiosity. Why should a man write volumes of cipher? Imagine the labour of it! So some one set to work to solve the cipher. This was about the year 1820. After three years they succeeded.’

‘How in the world did they do it?’

‘Well, they say that human ingenuity never yet invented a cipher which human ingenuity could not also solve. Anyhow, they did succeed. And when they had done so, and copied it all out clean, they found they had got hold of such a book as was never heard of before in the whole history of literature.’

Maude laid her sewing on her lap, and looked across with her lips parted and her eyebrows raised.

‘They found that it was an inner Diary of the life of this man, with all his impressions, and all his doings, and all his thoughts - not his ought-to-be thoughts, but his real, real thoughts, just as he thought then at the back of his soul. You see this man, and you know him very much better than his own wife knew him. It is not only that he tells of his daily doings, and gives us such an intimate picture of life in those days, as could by no other means have been conveyed, but it is as a piece of psychology that the thing is so valuable. Remember the dignity of the man, a high government official, an orator, a writer, a patron of learning, and here you have the other side, the little thoughts, the mean ideas which may lurk under a bewigged head, and behind a solemn countenance. Not that he is worse than any of us. Not a bit. But he is frank. And that is why the book is really a consoling one, for every sinner who reads it can say to himself, “Well, if this man who did so well, and was so esteemed, felt like this, it is no very great wonder that I do.”’

Maude looked at the fat brown book with curiosity. ‘Is it really all there?’ she asked.

‘No, dear, it will never all be published. A good deal of it is, I believe, quite impossible. And when he came to the impossible places, he doubled and trebled his cipher, so as to make sure that it should never be made out. But all that is usually published is here.’ Frank turned over the leaves, which were marked here and there with pencilings.

‘Why are you smiling, Frank?’

‘Only at his way of referring to his wife.’

‘Oh, he was married?’

‘Yes, to a very charming girl. She must have been a sweet creature. He married her at fifteen on account of her beauty. He had a keen eye for beauty had old Pepys.’

‘Were they happy?’

‘Oh yes, fairly so. She was only twenty-nine when she died!’

‘Poor girl!’

‘She was happy in her life - though he *did* blacken her eye once.’

‘Not really?’

‘Yes, he did. And kicked the housemaid.’

‘Oh, the brute!’

‘But on the whole he was a good husband. He had a few very good points about him.’

‘But how does he allude to his wife?’

‘He has a trick of saying, “my wife, poor wretch!”’

‘Impertinent! Frank, you said to-night that other men think what this odious Mr. Pepys says. Yes, you did! Don’t deny it! Does that mean that you always think of me as “poor wretch”?’

‘We have come along a little since then. But how these passages take you back to the homely life of those days!’

‘Do read some.’

‘Well, listen to this, “And then to bed without prayers, to-morrow being washing-day.” Fancy such a detail coming down to us through two centuries.’

‘Why no prayers?’

‘I don’t know. I suppose they had to get up early on washing-days, and so they wanted to go to sleep soon.’

‘I’m afraid, dear, you do the same without as good an excuse. Read another!’

‘He goes to dine with some one - his uncle, I think. He says, “An excellent dinner, but the venison pasty was palpable beef, which was not handsome.”’

‘How beautiful! Mrs. Hunt Mortimer’s sole last week was palpable plaice. Mr. Pepys is right. It was not handsome.’

‘Here’s another grand entry: “Talked with my wife of the poorness and meanness of all that the people about us do, compared with what we do.” I dare say he was right, for they did things very well. When he dined out, he says that his host gave him “the meanest dinner of beef, shoulder and umbles of venison, and a few pigeons, and all in the meanest manner that ever I did see, to the basest degree.”

‘What are umbles, dear?’

‘I have no idea.’

‘Well, whatever they are, it sounds to me a very good dinner. People must have lived very well in those days.’

‘They habitually over-ate and over-drank themselves. But Pepys gives us the menu of one of his own entertainments. I’ve marked it somewhere. Yes, here it is. “Fricassee of rabbits and chickens, a leg of mutton boiled, three carps in a dish, a great dish of a side of lamb, a dish of roasted pigeons, a dish of four lobsters, three tarts, a lamprey pie (a most rare pie!), a dish of anchovies, good wine of several sorts, and all things mighty noble and to my great content.”’

‘Good gracious! I told you that I associated him with indigestion.’

‘He did them pretty well that time.’

‘Who cooked all this?’

‘The wife helped in those days.’

‘No wonder she died at twenty-nine. Poor dear! What a splendid kitchen-range they must have had! I never understood before why they had such enormous grates in the old days. Naturally, if you have six pigeons, and a lamprey, and a lobster, and a side of lamb, and a leg of mutton, and all these other things cooking at the same time, you would need a huge fire.’

‘The wonderful thing about Pepys,’ said Frank, looking thoughtfully over the pages, ‘is that he is capable of noting down the mean little impulses of human nature, which most men would be so ashamed of, that they would hasten to put them out of their mind. His occasional shabbiness in money matters, his jealousies, his envies, all his petty faults, which are despicable on account of their pettiness. Fancy any man writing this. He is describing how he visited a friend and was reading a book from his library. “A very good book,” says he, “especially one letter of advice to a courtier, most true and good, which made me once resolve to tear out the two leaves that it was writ in, but I forbore it.” Imagine recording such a vile thought.’

‘But what you have never explained to me yet, dear, or if you did, I didn’t understand - you don’t mind my being a little stupid, do you? - is, what object Mr. Pepys had in putting down all this in such a form that no one could read it.’

‘Well, you must bear in mind, dear, that he could read it himself. Besides he was a fellow with a singularly methodical side to his mind. He was, for example, continually adding up how much money he had, or cataloguing and indexing his library, and so on. He liked to have everything shipshape. And so with his life, it pleased him to have an exact record which he could turn to. And yet, after all, I don’t know that that is a sufficient explanation.’

‘No, indeed, it is not. My experience of man - ‘

‘*Your* experience, indeed!’

‘Yes, sir, my experience of men - how rude you are, Frank! - tells me that they have funny little tricks and vanities which take the queerest shapes.’

‘Indeed! Have I any?’

‘You - you are compounded of them. Not vanity - no, I don’t mean that. But pride - you are as proud as Lucifer, and much too proud to show it. That is the most subtle form of pride. Oh yes, I know perfectly well what I mean. But in this man’s case, it took the form of wishing to make a sensation after his death. He could not publish such a thing when he lived, could he?’

‘Rather not.’

‘Well, then, he had to do it after his death. He had to write it in cipher, or else some one would have found him out during his lifetime. But, very likely, he left a key to the cipher, so that every one might read it when he was gone, but the key and his directions were in some way lost.’

‘Well, it is very probable.’

The fire had died down, so Maude shipped off her chair, and sat on the black fur rug, with her back against Frank’s knees. ‘Now, dear, read away!’ said she.

But the lamp shone down upon her dainty head, and it gleamed upon her white neck, and upon the fluffy, capricious, untidy, adorable, little curlets, which broke out along the edges of the gathered strands of her chestnut hair. And so, after the fashion of men, his thoughts flew away from Mr. Pepys and the seventeenth century, and all that is lofty and instructive, and could fix upon nothing except those dear little wandering tendrils, and the white column on which they twined. Alas, that so small a thing can bring the human mind from its empyrean flights! Alas, that vague emotions can drag down the sovereign intellect! Alas, that even for an hour, a man should prefer the material to the spiritual!

But the man who doesn’t misses a good deal.

CHAPTER XIII - A VISIT TO MR. SAMUEL PEPYS

There are several unjustifiable extravagances which every normal man commits. There are also several unjustifiable economies. Among others, there is that absurd eagerness to save the striking of a second match, which occasions so many burned fingers, and such picturesque language. And again, there is the desire to compress a telegraphic message into the minimum sixpennyworth, and so send an ambiguous and cryptic sentence, when sevenpence would have made it as clear as light. We all tend to be stylists in our telegrams.

A week after the conversation about Mr. Pepys, when some progress had been made with the reading of the *Diary,* Maude received the following wire from Frank -

‘Mrs. Crosse. Woking. - Pepys buttered toast suède gloves four Monument wait late.’

As a sixpennyworth it was a success, but as a message it seemed to leave something to be desired. Maude puzzled over it, and tried every possible combination of the words. The nearest approach to sense was when it was divided in this way - Pepys - buttered toast - suède gloves - four - Monument, wait late.

She wrote it out in this form, and took it section by section. ‘Pepys,’ that was unintelligible. ‘Buttered toast,’ no sense in that. ‘Suède gloves,’ yes, she had told Frank that when she came to town, she would buy some suède gloves at a certain shop in the City, where she could get for three and threepence a pair which would cost her three and ninepence in Woking. Maude was so conscientiously economical, that she was always prepared to spend two shillings in railway fares to reach a spot where a sixpence was to be saved, and to lavish her nerve and energy freely in the venture. Here, then, in the suède gloves, was a central point of light. And then her heart bounded with joy, as she realised that the last part could only mean that she was to meet Frank at the Monument at four, and that she was to wait for him if he were late.

So, now, returning to the opening of the message, with the light which shone from the ending, she realised that buttered toast might refer to a queer little City hostel, remarkable for that luxury, where Frank had already taken her twice to tea. And so leaving Mr. Pepys to explain himself later, Maude gave hurried orders to Jemima and the cook, and dashed upstairs to put on her new fawn-coloured walking-dress - a garment which filled her with an extraordinary mixture of delight and remorse, for it was very smart, cost seven guineas, and had not yet been paid for.

The rendezvous was evidently a sudden thought upon the part of Frank, for he had left very little time for her to reach the trysting-place. However, she was fortunate in catching a train to Waterloo, and another thence to the City, and so reached the Monument at five minutes to four. The hour was just striking when Frank, with his well-brushed top-hat and immaculate business frock-coat, came rushing from the direction of King William Street. Maude held out her hand and he shook it, and then they both laughed at the formality.

'I am so glad you were able to come, dearest. How you do brighten up the old City!'

'Do I? I felt quite lonely until you came. Nothing but droves of men - and all staring.'

'It's your dress.'

'Oh, thank you, sir!'

'Entirely that pretty brown - '

'Brown! Fawn colour.'

'Well, that's brown. Anyhow, it looks charming. And so do you - by Jove you do, Maude! Come this way!'

'Where are we going?'

'By underground. Here we are. - Two second singles, Mark Lane, please! - No, that's for the west-end trains. Down here! Next train, the man says.'

They were in the mephitic cellar, with the two long wooden platforms where the subterranean trains land or load their freights. A strangling gas tickled their throats and set them coughing. It was all dank and dark and gloomy. But little youth and love care for that! They were bubbling over with the happiness of this abnormal meeting. Both talked together in their delight, and Maude patted Frank's sleeve with every remark. They could even illuminate all that was around them, by the beauty and brightness of their own love. It went the length of open praise for their abominable surroundings.

‘Isn’t it grand and solemn?’ said Maude. ‘Look at the black shadows.’

‘When they come to excavate all this some thousands of years hence, they will think it was constructed by a race of giants,’ Frank answered.

‘The modern works for the benefit of the community are really far greater than those which sprang from the caprice of kings. The London and North-Western Railway is an infinitely grander thing than the pyramids. Look at the two headlights in the dark!’

Two sullen crimson discs glowed in the black arch of the tunnel. With a menacing and sinister speed, they grew and grew until roaring they sprang out of the darkness, and the long, dingy train, with a whining of brakes, drew up at the platform.

‘Here’s one nearly empty,’ said Frank, with his hand on the handle.

‘Don’t you think - ‘ said Maude.

‘Yes, I do,’ cried Frank.

And they got into one which was quite empty. For the underground railway is blessed as regards privacy above all other lines, and where could a loving couple be more happy, who have been torn apart by cruel fate for seven long hours or so? It was with a groan that Frank remarked that they had reached Mark Lane.

‘Bother!’ said Maude, and wondered if there were any shop near where she could buy hairpins. As every lady knows, or will know, there is a very intimate connection between hairpins and a loving husband.

‘Now, Frank, about your telegram.’

‘All right, dear. Come along where I lead you, and you will understand all about it.’

They passed out of Mark Lane Station and down a steep and narrow street to the right. At the bottom lay an old smoke-stained church with a square tower, and a small open churchyard beside it.

‘That’s the church of Saint Olave,’ said Frank. ‘We are going into it.’

He pushed open a folding oaken door, and they found themselves inside it. Rows of modern seats filled the body of it, but the walls and windows gave an impression of great antiquity. The stained glass - especially that which surmounted the altar - contained those rich satisfying purples and deep deep crimsons which only go with age. It was a bright and yet a mellow light, falling in patches of vivid colour upon the brown woodwork and the grey floors. Here and there upon the walls were marble inscriptions in the Latin tongue, with pompous allegorical figures with trumpets, for our ancestors blew them in stone as well as in epitaphs over their tombs. They loved to die, as they had lived, with dignity and with affectation. White statues glimmered in the shadows of the corners. As Frank and his wife passed down the side-aisle, their steps clanged through the empty and silent church.

‘Here he is!’ said Frank, and faced to the wall.

He was looking up at the modern representation of a gentleman in a full and curly wig. It was a well-rounded and comely face, with shrewd eyes and a sensitive mouth. The face of a man of affairs, and a good fellow, with just that saving touch of sensuality about it which makes an expression human and lovable. Underneath was printed -

SAMUEL PEPYS
Erected by public subscription
1883.

‘Oh, isn’t he nice?’ said Maude.

‘He’s not a bad-looking chap, is he?’

‘I don’t believe that man ever could have struck his wife or kicked the maid.’

‘That’s calling him a liar.’

‘Oh dear, I forgot that he said so himself. Then I suppose he must have done it. What a pity it seems.’

‘Cheer up! We must say what the old heathen lady said when they read the gospels to her.’

‘What did she say?’

‘She said, “Well, it was a long time ago, and we’ll hope that it wasn’t true!”’

‘O Frank, how can you tell such stories in a church. Do you really suppose that Mr. Pepys is in that wall?’

‘I presume that the monument marks the grave.’

‘There’s a little bit of plaster loose. Do you think I might take it?’

‘It isn’t quite the thing.’

‘But it can’t matter, and it isn’t wrong, and we are quite alone.’ She picked off the little flake of plaster, and her heart sprang into her mouth as she did so, for there came an indignant snort from her very elbow, and there was a queer little smoke-dried, black-dressed person who seemed to have risen, like the Eastern genii or a modern genius, in a single instant. A pair of black list slippers explained the silence of his approach.

‘Put that back, young lady,’ said he severely.

Poor Maude held out her guilty relic on the palm of her hand. ‘I am so sorry,’ said she. ‘I am afraid I cannot put it back.’

‘We’ll ‘ave the ‘ole church picked to pieces at this rate,’ said the clerk. ‘You shouldn’t ‘ave done it, and it was very wrong.’ He snorted and shook his head.

‘It’s of no consequence,’ said Frank. ‘The plaster was hanging, and must have fallen in any case. Don’t make a fuss about a trifle.’

The clerk looked at the young gentleman and saw defiance in one of his eyes and half a crown in the other.

‘Well, well!’ he grumbled. ‘It shows as the young lady takes an interest, and that’s more than most. Why, sir, if you’ll believe me, there’s not one in a hundred that comes to this church that ever ‘eard of Pepys. “Pepys!” says they. “‘Oo’s Pepys?” “The Diarist,” says I. “Diarist!” says they, “wot’s a Diarist?” I could sit down sometimes an’ cry. But maybe, miss, you thought as you were picking that plaster off ‘is grave?’

‘Yes, I thought so.’

The clerk chuckled.

‘Well, it ain’t so. I’ll tell you where ‘e really lies, if you’ll promise you won’t pick another chunk off that. Well, then, it’s there - beside the communion. I saw ‘im lyin’ there with these very eyes, and ‘is wife in the coffin beneath ‘im.’

‘You saw him?’

‘Yes, sir, I saw ‘im, an’ that’s more than any livin’ man could say, for there were only four of us, and the other three are as dead as Pepys by now.’

‘Oh do tell us about it!’ cried Maude.

‘Well, it was like this, miss. We ‘ad to examine to see ‘ow much room there was down there, and so we came upon them.’

‘And what did you see?’

‘Well, miss, ‘is coffin lay above, and ‘is wife’s below, as might be expected, seeing that she died thirty years or so before ‘im. The coffins was very much broken, an’ we could see ‘im as clear us I can see you. When we first looked in I saw ‘im lying quite plain - a short thick figure of a man

- with ‘is ‘ands across ‘is chest. And then, just as we looked at ‘im, ‘e crumbled in, as you might say, across ‘is breast bone, an’ just quietly settled down into a ‘uddle of dust. It’s a way they ‘as when the fresh air strikes ‘em. An’ she the same, an’ ‘is dust just fell through the chinks o’ the wood and mixed itself with ‘ers.’

‘O Frank!’ Maude’s ready tears sprang to her eyes. She put her hand upon her husband’s and was surprised to find how cold it was. Women never realise that the male sex is the more sensitive. He had not said, ‘O Maude!’ because he could not.

‘They used some powder like pepper for embalmin’ in those days,’ said the clerk. ‘And the vicar - it was in old Bellamy’s time - ‘e took a sniff into the grave, an’ ‘e sneezed an’ sneezed till we thought we should ‘ave to fetch a doctor. ‘Ave you seen Mrs. Pepys’ tomb?’

‘No, we have only just come.’

‘That’s it on the left of the common.’

‘With the woman leaning forward?’

‘Yes, sir. That’s Mrs. Pepys herself.’

It was an arch laughing face, the face of a quite young woman; the sculptor had depicted her as leaning forward in an animated and natural attitude. Below was engraved -

Obiit
Xo Novembris
Ætatis 29
Conjugii 15
Anno Domini 1669.

‘Poor dear!’ whispered Maude.

‘It was hard that she should die just as her husband was becoming famous and successful,’ said Frank. ‘She who had washed his shirts, and made up the coal fires, when they lived in a garret together. What a pity that she could not have a good time!’

‘Ah well, if she loved him, dear, she had a good time in the garret.’

Maude was leaning forward with her face raised to look at the bust of the dead woman, which also leaned forward as if to look down upon her. A pair of marble skulls flanked the lady’s grave. A red glow from the evening sun struck through a side-window and bathed the whole group in its ruddy light. As Frank, standing back in the shadow, ran his eyes from the face of the dead young wife to that of his own sweet, girlish bride, with those sinister skulls between, there came over him like a wave, a realisation of the horror which lies in things, the grim close of the passing pageant, the black gloom, which swallows up the never-ending stream of life. Will the spirit wear better than the body; and if not, what infernal practical joke is this to which we are subjected!

‘It will. It must,’ he said.

‘*Why*, Frank - Frank dear, what is the matter? You are quite pale.’

‘Come out into the air, Maude. I have had enough of this stuffy old church.’

‘Stuffy!’ said the clerk. ‘Well, we’ve ‘ad the Lord Mayor ‘ere at least once a year, an’ ‘e never found it stuffy. A cleaner, fresher church you won’t find in the city of London. It’s ‘ad its day, I’ll allow. There was a time - and I can remember it - when folk used to spend their money where they made it, and the plate would be full of paper and gold, where now we find it ‘ard enough to get coppers. That was fifty year ago, when I was a young clerk. You might not think it, but I’ve seen a Lord Mayor, a past Lord Mayor, and a Lord Mayor elect of the city of London, all sitting on one bench in this very church. And *you* call it stuffy!’

Frank soothed the wounded feelings of the old clerk, and explained that by stuffy he meant interesting. He also shook hands with him in a peculiar way as he held his palm upturned in the small of his back. Then Maude and he retraced their steps up the narrow street which is called Seething Lane.

‘Poor old boy! What was it, then?’ asked Maude, looking up with her sympathetic eyes. It is at such moments that a man realises what the companionship of women means. The clouds melted before the sun.

‘What an ass I was! I began to think of all sorts of horrible things. Never mind, Maude! We are out for a holiday. Hang the future! Let us live in the present.’

‘I always do,’ said Maude, and she spoke for her sex.

‘Well, what now? Buttered toast or suède gloves?’

‘Business first!’ said Maude primly, and so proceeded to save her sixpence on the gloves. As she was tempted, however (‘such a civil obliging shopman, Frank!’), to buy four yards of so-called Astrakhan trimming, a frill of torchon lace, six dear little festooned handkerchiefs, and four pairs of open-work stockings - none of which were contemplated when she entered the shop - her sixpenny saving was not as brilliant a piece of finance as she imagined.

And then they finished their excursion in the dark, wainscotted, low-ceilinged coffee-room of an old-fashioned inn, once the mother of many coaches, and now barren and deserted, but with a strange cunning in the matter of buttered toast which had come down from more prosperous days. It was a new waiter who served them, and he imagined them to be lovers and scented an intrigue; but when they called for a second plate of toast and a jug of boiling water, he recognised the healthy appetite of the married. And then, instead of going home like a good little couple, Maude suddenly got it into her head that it would cheer away the last traces of Frank's gloom if they went to see 'Charley's Aunt' at the Globe. So they loitered and shopped for a couple of hours, and then squeezed into the back of the pit; and wedged in among honest, hearty folk who were not ashamed to show their emotions, they laughed until they were tired. And so home, as their friend Pepys would have said, after such a day as comes into the memory, shining golden among the drab, when old folk look back, and think of the dear dead past. May you and I, reader, if ever we also come to sit in our final armchairs in the chimney corners, have many such to which our minds may turn, sweet and innocent and fragrant, to cheer us in those darksome hours to come.

CHAPTER XIV - TROUBLE

One evening Frank came home with a clouded face. His wife said nothing, but after dinner she sat on a footstool beside his chair and waited. She knew that if it were for the best, he would tell her everything, and she had confidence enough in his judgment to acquiesce in his silence if he thought it best to be silent. As a matter of fact, it was just this telling her which made his trouble hard to bear. And yet he thought it wiser to tell.

‘I’ve had something to worry me, dear.’

‘Poor old boy, I know you have. What was it?’

‘Why should I bother you with it?’

‘A nice wife I should be, if I shared all your joys and none of your sorrows! Anyhow, I had rather share sorrow with you than joy within any one else.’ She snuggled her head up against his knee. ‘Tell me about it, Frank.’

‘You remember my telling you just before our marriage that I was surety for a man?’

‘I remember perfectly well.’

‘His name was Farintosh. He was an insurance-agent, and I became surety for him in order to save his situation.’

‘Yes, dear, it was so noble of you.’

‘Well, Maude, he was on the platform this morning, and when he saw me, he turned on his heel and hurried out of the station. I read guilt in his eyes. I am sure that his accounts are wrong again.’

‘Oh, what an ungrateful wretch!’

‘Poor devil, I dare say he has had a bad time. But I was a fool not to draw out of that. It was all very well when I was a bachelor. But here I am as a married man faced with an indefinite liability and nothing to meet it with. I don’t know what is to become of us, Maude.’

‘How much is it, dearest?’

‘I don’t know. That is the worst of it.’

‘But surely your own office would not be so hard upon you?’

‘It is not my own office. It is another office - the Hotspur.’

‘Oh dear! What have you done about it, Frank?’

‘I called at their office in my lunch-hour, and I requested them to send down an accountant to examine Farintosh’s books. He will be here to-morrow morning, and I have leave of absence for the day.’

And so they were to spend an evening and a night without knowing whether they were merely crippled or absolutely ruined. Frank’s nature was really a very proud one, and the thought of failing in his engagements wounded his self-respect most deeply. His nerves winced and quivered before it. But her sweet, strong soul rose high above all fear, and bore him up with her, into the serenity of love and trust and confidence. The really precious things, the things of the spirit, were permanent, and could not be lost. What matter if they lived in an eight-roomed villa, or in a tent out on the heath? What matter if they had two servants, or if she worked for him herself? All this was the merest trifle, the outside of life. But the intimate things, their love, their trust, their pleasures of mind and soul, these could not be taken away from them while they had life to enjoy them. And so she soothed Frank with sweet caresses and gentle words, until this night of gloom had turned to the most beautiful of all his life, and he had learned to bless the misfortune which had taught him to know the serene courage and the wholehearted devotion which can only be felt, like the scent of a fragrant leaf, when Fate gives us a crush between its iron fingers.

Shortly after breakfast Mr. Wingfield, the accountant from London, arrived - a tall, gentlemanly man, with a formal manner.

‘I’m sorry about this business, Mr. Crosse,’ said he.

Frank made a grimace. ‘It can’t be helped.’

‘We will hope that the amount is not very serious. We have warned Mr. Farintosh that his books will be inspected to-day. When you are ready we shall go round.’

The agent lived in a side-street not far off. A brass plate, outside a small brick house, marked it out from the line of other small brick houses. A sad-faced woman opened the door, and Farintosh himself, haggard and white, was seated among his ledgers in the little front room. A glance at the man’s helpless face turned all Frank’s resentment to pity.

They sat down at the table, the accountant in the centre, Farintosh on the right, and Frank on the left. There was no talk save an occasional abrupt question and answer. For two hours the swish and rustle of the great blue pages of the ledgers were the chief sound, with the scratching of Mr. Wingfield’s pen as he totalled up long columns of figures. Frank’s heart turned to water as he saw the huge sums which had passed through this man’s hands. How much had remained there? His whole future depended upon the answer to that question. How prosaic and undramatic are the moments in which a modern career is made or marred! In this obscure battlefield, the squire no longer receives his accolade in public for his work well done, nor do we see the butcher’s cleaver as it hacks off the knightly spurs, but failure and success come strangely and stealthily, determined by trifles, and devoid of dignity. Here was the crisis of Frank’s young life, in this mean front room, amongst the almanacs and the account-books.

‘Can I rely upon these figures?’ asked Wingfield at last.

‘You can, sir.’

‘In that case I congratulate you, Mr. Crosse. I can only find a deficiency of fifty pounds.’

Only enough to swallow the whole of their little savings, which they had carefully invested! However, it was good news, and Frank shook the proffered hand of the accountant.

‘I will stay for another hour to check these figures,’ said Wingfield. ‘But there is no need to detain you.’

‘You will come round and lunch with us?’

‘With pleasure.’

‘*Au revoir*, then.’ Frank ran all the way home, and burst in upon his wife. ‘It is not so very bad, dear - only fifty pounds.’ They danced about in their joy like two children.

But Wingfield came to his lunch within a solemn face.

‘I am very sorry to disappoint you,’ he said, ‘but the matter is more serious than I thought. We have entered some sums as unpaid which he has really received, but the receipts for which he has held back. They amount to another hundred pounds.’

Maude felt inclined to cry as she glanced at Frank, and saw his resolute effort to look unconcerned.

‘Then it’s a hundred and fifty.’

‘Certainly not less. I have marked the items down upon this paper for your inspection.’

Frank glanced his practised eyes over the results of the accountant’s morning’s work.

‘You have credited him within a hundred and twenty pounds in the bank, I see.’

‘Yes, his bank-book shows a balance of that amount.’

‘When was it made out?’

‘Last Saturday.’

‘He may have drawn it since them.’

‘It is certainly possible.’

‘We might go round after lunch and make sure.’

‘Very good.’

‘And in any case, as it is the Company’s money, don’t you think we had better take it out of his hands?’

‘Yes, I think you are right.’

It was a miserable meal, and they were all glad when it was finished. Maude drew Frank into the other room before he started.

‘I could not let you go without *that,* dearest. Keep a brave heart, my own laddie, for I know so well that we shall come through it all right.’

So Frank set out with a higher courage, and they both returned to the agent’s house. His white face turned a shade whiter when he understood their errand.

‘Is this necessary, Mr. Wingfield?’ he pleaded. ‘Won’t you take my word for this money?’

‘I am sorry to have to say it, sir, but we have trusted in your word too often.’

‘But the money is there, I swear it.’

‘It is the Company’s money, and we must have it.’

‘It will ruin my credit locally if I draw out my whole account under compulsion.’

‘Then let him keep ten pounds in,’ said Frank. Farintosh agreed with an ill grace to the compromise, and they all started off for the bank. When they reached the door the agent turned upon them with an appealing face.

‘Don’t come in with me, gentlemen. I could never hold up my head again.’

‘It is for Mr. Crosse to decide.’

‘I don’t want to be unreasonable, Farintosh. Go in alone and draw the money.’

They could never understand why he begged for that extra five minutes. Perhaps it was that he had some mad hope of persuading the bank manager to allow him to overdraw to that amount. If so, the refusal was a curt one, for he reappeared with a ghastly face and walked up to Frank.

‘I may as well confess to you, Mr. Crosse, I have nothing in the bank.’

Frank whistled and turned upon his heel. He could not by reproaches add to the wretched man’s humiliation. After all, he had himself to blame. He had incurred a risk with his eyes open, and he was not the man to whine now that the thing had gone against him. Wingfield walked home with him and murmured some words of sympathy. At the gate the accountant left him and went on to the station.

So their liability had risen from fifty to two hundred and seventy pounds. Even Maude was for an instant daunted by the sum. The sale of their furniture would hardly meet it. It was the blackest hour of their lives, and yet, always a strange sweet undercurrent of joy was running through it, for it is only sorrow, fairly shared and bravely borne, which can weld two human souls together.

Dinner was over when there came a ring at the bell.

‘If you please, sir, Mr. Farintosh would like to see you,’ said the maid Jemima.

‘Show him in here.’

‘Don’t you think, Frank, that I had better go?’

‘No, I don’t. I never asked him to come. If he comes, let him face us both. I have not made much of my dealings with him alone.’

He was shown in, downcast, shifty-eyed, and ill at ease. He laid his hat upon the floor, and crept humbly towards the chair which Frank pushed towards him.

‘Well, Farintosh?’

‘Well, Mr. Crosse, I have come round to tell you, and you too, missus, the sorrow I feel that I have brought this trouble upon you. I hoped all would have gone right after that last time, but I’ve had to pay up back debts, and that’s what has put me wrong. I’ve never had what one may call a fair chance. But I’m really sorry, sir, that you who have, as one might say, befriended me, should have to suffer for it in this way.’

‘Words won’t mend it, Farintosh. I only blame you for not coming to me when first things began to go wrong.’

‘Well, sir, I was always hoping that I could turn them right again, so as you wouldn’t need to be troubled at all. And so it went from bad to worse until we find ourselves here. But what I wanted to ask you, Mr. Crosse, was what you meant to do about it?’

Frank writhed before this home question.

‘Well, I suppose I am responsible,’ said he.

‘You mean to pay the money, sir?’

‘Well, somebody must pay it.’

‘Do you remember the wording of the bond, Mr. Crosse?’

‘Not the exact wording.’

‘Well, sir, I should advise you to get your lawyer to read it. In my opinion, sir, you are not liable at all.’

‘Not liable!’ Frank felt as if his heart had turned suddenly from a round-shot to an air-balloon. ‘Why not liable?’

‘You were a little slapdashy, if one might say so, in matters of business, sir, and perhaps you read that bond less carefully than I did. There was a clause in it by which the Company agreed frequently and periodically to audit my accounts, so as to prevent your liability being at any time a very high one.’

‘So there was!’ cried Frank. ‘Well, didn’t they?’

‘No, sir, they didn’t.’

‘By Jove - Maude, do you hear that? - if that is right, they brought their own misfortunes upon themselves. Do you mean to say they never audited you?’

‘Yes, sir, they did so four times.’

‘In how long?’

‘In fourteen months.’

The air-balloon was gone and the cannon-ball back in its place once more.

‘That will be held to exonerate them.’

‘No, sir, I think not. “Frequently and periodically” does not mean four times in fourteen months.’

‘A jury might take it so.’

‘Consider, sir, that the object was that your liability should be limited. Thousands of pounds were passing through my hands in that time, and therefore these four audits were, as one might say, insufficient for the object of the bond.’

‘So I think,’ cried Maude, with conviction. ‘Frank, we’ll have the best advice upon the subject to-morrow.’

‘And meanwhile, Mr. Crosse,’ said Farintosh, rising from his chair, ‘I am your witness, whether the Company prosecutes me or not. And I hope that this will be some humble atonement for the trouble that I have brought you.'

And so a first rift of light began to shine in the dark place. But it was not broadened by the letter which he found waiting upon his breakfast-table -

Re Farintosh's Accounts.

HOTSPUR INSURANCE OFFICE.

Dear Sir, - On arriving in London I came here at once, and checked Farintosh's accounts from the books of the head office. I am sorry to say that I find a further discrepancy of seventy pounds. I am able, however, to assure you that we have now touched bottom. The total amount is three hundred and forty pounds, and a cheque for that sum at your early convenience would oblige us, as we are anxious to bring so unpleasant a business to a conclusion. - Yours truly,

JAMES WINGFIELD.

To which Frank and Maude in collaboration -

Dear Sir, - I note your claim for £340 on account of the affairs of your agent Farintosh. I am advised, however, that there have been certain irregularities in the matter, about which I must make some investigation before paying the claim. - Yours truly,

Frank Crosse.

To which the Hotspur Insurance Office -

Sir, - Had your letter been a plea for more time to fulfil your engagement, we should have been content to wait; but since you appear disposed to dispute your liability, we have no alternative but to take immediate steps to enforce payment. -

Yours truly, JOHN WATERS, *Secretary.*

To which Frank and Maude -

Sir, - My solicitor, A. C. R. Owen, of 14 Shirley Lane, E.C., will be happy to accept service.

Which is the correct legal English for ‘You may go to the devil!’

But this is an anticipation. In the meantime, having received the original letter and answered it, Frank went up to town as usual, while Maude played the more difficult part of waiting quietly at home. In his lunch-hour Frank went to see his friend and solicitor, who in turn obtained leave to see the bond, and came back with a grave face.

‘You have a case,’ said he, ‘but by no means a certainty. It all depends upon how the judge might read the document. I think that it would strengthen our case very materially if we had counsel’s opinion. I’ll copy the bond and show it to Manners, and have his opinion before you go back to-night.’

So Frank went round again after office-hours, and found Owen waiting in very low spirits, for their relations were closer than those of mere solicitor and client.

‘Very sorry,’ said he.

‘Opinion against us.’

‘Dead against us.’

Frank tried to look as if he didn’t mind.

‘Let me see it.’

It was a long blue document with the heading, ‘The Hotspur Insurance Company, Limited, *v*. Frank Crosse.’

‘I have perused the case submitted to me, and the papers accompanying the same,’ said the learned counsel, ‘and in my opinion the Hotspur Insurance Company, Limited, are entitled to recover from Mr. Crosse under his guarantee, the sum of £340, being monies received by Mr. Farintosh, and not paid over by him to the said Company.’ There was a great deal more, but it was anticlimax.

‘Well, what shall we do?’ asked Frank helplessly. The British law makes one feel so.

‘Well, I should stand out, if I were you. There is certainly a chance.’

‘Look here, old chap,’ said Frank, ‘I may as well be honest with you. If this thing goes against me, I am stony broke. I don’t know where your costs are coming from.’

‘Don’t bother about that,’ said Owen kindly. ‘After all, Manners is not infallible. Let us have Holland, and see what he can make of it.’

So twenty-four hours later Frank found Owen radiant with another opinion in his hand.

‘Dead for us this time. Look here!’

And he read out, ‘I have carefully considered the case submitted to me for my opinion, and the documents sent therewith. In my opinion the Hotspur Insurance Company, Limited, are not entitled to recover against Mr. Crosse the sum claimed by them or any part thereof, as there has been a breach on their part of an essential condition of the guarantee.’ ‘He reads “frequently and periodically” as we do,’ continued Owen, glancing over the long document, ‘and he is very clear as to our case.’

‘Suppose we have another, and try the best of three,’ said Frank.

‘It’s too expensive a game. No, Holland is a sound man, and his opinion would weigh with any judge. I think we have enough to go on with.’

‘And you think it is safe?’

‘No, no, nothing is ever safe in the law. But we can make a fight of it now.’

And now Frank was to learn what it meant to be entangled in an intricate clumsy old machine, incredibly cumbrous and at the same time incredibly powerful, jolting along with its absurd forms and abominable English towards an end which might or might not be just, but was most certainly ruinously expensive. The game began by a direct letter from the Queen, of all people, an honour which Frank had never aspired to before, and certainly never did again.

Victoria, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, remarked abruptly to Frank Crosse of Woking, in the county of Surrey, ‘We command you that within eight days of the service of this writ on you, inclusive of the day of such service, you cause an appearance to be entered for you in an action at the suit of the Hotspur Insurance Company, Limited.’ If he didn’t do so, Her Majesty remarked that several very unpleasant things might occur, and Hardinge Stanley, Earl of Halsbury, corroborated Her Majesty. Maude was frightened to death when she saw the document, and felt as if unawares they must have butted up against the British Constitution, but Owen explained that it was only a little legal firework, which meant that there might be some trouble later.

‘Well, at any rate,’ said Frank, ‘it means that in eight days it will all be over.’

Owen laughed heartily at the remark.

‘It means,’ said he, ‘that in eight days we must promise that at some future date we will begin to make preparations for something to happen in the future. That is about the meaning of it. All you can do now is to be perfectly philosophic, and leave the rest to me.’

But how is a man with a capital of fifty pounds going to be philosophic when he is fighting an opponent whose assets, as a certain hoarding near Clapham Junction told him every morning, exceeded three millions of pounds. He treated it lightly to Maude, and she to him, but each suffered horribly, and each was well aware of the other’s real feelings. Sometimes there was a lull, and they could almost believe that the whole thing was over. And then the old machine gave a creak, and the rusty cog-wheels took one more turn, and they both felt the horrid thing which held them.

First of all, they had to enter appearances, which meant that they would dispute the action. Then the other side had to make an affidavit verifying their claim. Then a Master had to pronounce whether the action should be treated offhand, or whether he would listen to what they had to say about it. He decided to listen to what was to be said. Then each side claimed to see the other’s documents, ‘discovery’ they called it, as if the documents were concealed, and they had to hunt for them stealthily with lanterns. Then each made remarks about the other’s documents, and claimed to see the remarks so made. Then the lawyers of the Company made a statement of their claim, and when she read it Maude burst into tears, and said that it was all over, and they must make the best of it, and she should never forgive herself for that new dress in the spring. And then Frank’s lawyer drew up a defence, and when Frank heard it, he said, ‘Why, what a silly business it seems! They have not got a leg to stand upon.’ And so, after all these flourishes and prancings, the two parties did actually begin to show signs of coming to a hearing after all, and a day was fixed for the trial. By a coincidence it was Frank’s birthday. ‘There’s a good omen!’ cried Maude.

The first herald of the approaching conflict was a seedy person, who thrust a paper into Frank’s hand as he emerged from The Lindens in the morning. It was another letter from Her Majesty, in which sub pœnâ (Her Majesty has not a gracious way of putting things in these documents), Mr. Frank Crosse had ‘to attend at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, at the sittings of the Queen’s Bench Division of our High Court of Justice, to give evidence on behalf of the Hotspur Company.’

This seemed to Frank to be a most unexpected and fearsome stroke, but Owen simply laughed.

‘That is mere bluff,’ said he. ‘It makes me think that they are weakening. They want to frighten you.’

‘They did,’ said Frank.

‘Two can play at that game. We must keep a bold front.’

‘What do you mean to do?’

‘To subpœna all their crowd.’

‘Capital!’ cried Frank. So a clerk was sent across to the Hotspur office with a whole bundle of subpœnas, and served them liberally out. And in two days’ time was the day of battle.

CHAPTER XV - A RESCUE

As the day fixed for the hearing drew near, Ruin lived with them by day and slept with them by night. Its dark shadow covered their lives, and they moved in the gloom of its presence. If the trial went against them, and Owen in his most hopeful moods did not disguise from them that it might, they would have to pay the double costs as well as the original claim. All that they possessed would not cover it. On the other hand, if they won, this rich Company might carry the matter to a higher Appeal Court, and so involve them in a fresh succession of anxieties and expenses. Do what they would, there was always danger. Frank said little, and he slept little also.

One night, just before the trial, Wingfield, the accountant of the Society, came down to Woking. He had managed the case all through for the directors. His visit was a sort of ultimatum.

‘We are still ready to pay our own law-costs,’ said he, ‘if you will allow the original claim.’

‘I can’t do that,’ said Frank doggedly.

‘The costs are piling up at a furious rate, and some one will have to pay them.’

‘I hope that it will be you.’

‘Well, don’t say afterwards that I did not warn you. My dear Crosse, I assure you that you are being misled, and that you have not really got a leg to stand upon.’

‘That’s what the trial is about,’ said Frank.

He kept a bold face to the enemy, but after Wingfield’s departure, Maude saw that his confidence was greatly shaken.

‘He seemed very sure of their case,’ said he. ‘He would not speak like that if he did not know.’

But Maude took quite another view.

‘If they know that they can recover their money in court, why should they send Mr. Wingfield down in this way.’

‘He is such a good chap - he wants to save us expense.’

Maude was less trusting.

‘He is doing the best for his own side,’ said she. ‘It is his duty, and we can’t blame him. But if he thought it best to get behind his own lawyers and come down here, then he must have some doubts about going into court. Perhaps he would be willing to consider some compromise.'

But Frank only shook his head.

'We have drawn the cork, and we must drink the wine,' said he. 'We have gone too far to stop. Any compromise which they would accept would be as much out of our power to pay as the whole sum would be, and so we may just as well see it through.' But for once Maude did not take his opinion as final, but lay awake all night and thought it over. She had determined to begin acting upon her own account, and she was so eager to try what she could do that she lay longing for the morning to break. When she came down to breakfast, her plan of campaign was formed.

'I am coming up to town with you, Frank.'

'Delighted to hear it, dear.' When she had shopping to do, she frequently went up with him, so it did not surprise him. What would have surprised him was to know that she had despatched three telegrams, by means of Jemima, before he was up.

'To John Selby, 53 Fenchurch Street, E.C. Will call eleven o'clock. Important business. -

MAUDE.'

'To Lieutenant Selby, the Depôt, Canterbury. Please come up next train, meet me Fenchurch Street, eleven thirty. Important. -

MAUDE.'

'To Owen, 14 Shirley Lane, E.C. Will call twelve o'clock. Important. - MRS. CROSSE.'

So she had opened her campaign.

'By the way, Frank,' said she, as they travelled up together, 'to-morrow is your birthday.'

'Yes, dear, it is,' he answered lugubriously.

'Dear me! What shall I give my boy for a birthday present? Nothing you particularly want?'

'I have all I want,' said he, looking at her.

'Oh, but I think I could find something. I must look round when I am in town.'

She began her looking round by a visit to her father in Fenchurch Street. It was something new for him to get telegrams from Maude upon business, and he was very much surprised.

‘Looking remarkably well, my dear. Your appearance is a certificate of character to your husband. Well, and how is all at Woking? I hope the second cook proved to be a success.’

But Maude was not there for small talk. ‘Dear dad,’ said she, ‘I want you to stand by me, for I am in trouble. Now, my dear good dad, please see things from my point of view, and don’t make objections, and do exactly what I ask you.’ She threw her arms round his neck and gave him a hearty squeeze.

‘Now I call that exerting undue pressure,’ said he, extricating his white head. ‘If this sort of thing is allowed in the city of London, there is an end of all business.’ However, his eyes twinkled and looked as if he liked it. ‘Now madame, what can I do for you?’

‘I’m going to be perfectly business-like,’ said she, and gave him another squeeze before sitting down. ‘Look here, dad. You give me an income of fifty pounds a year, don’t you?’

‘My dear girl, I can’t raise it. Jack’s expenses in the Hussars - ‘

‘I don’t want you to raise it.’

‘What do you want?’

‘I seem to remember, dad, that you told me that this fifty pounds was the interest on a thousand pounds which was invested for me.’

‘So it is - five per cent. debentures.’

‘Well, dad, if I were content with an income of twenty-five pounds a year instead of fifty pounds, then I could take five hundred pounds out of my money, and nobody would be the worse.’

‘Except yourself.’

Maude laughed at that.

‘I want the use of the money just for one day. I certainly won’t need it all. I just want to feel that I have as much as that in case I need it. Now, my dear old daddy, do please not ask any questions, but be very nice and good, and tell me how I can get these five hundred pounds.’

‘And you won’t tell me why you want them?’

‘I had rather not - but I will if you insist.’

Old Selby looked into the brave, clear eyes of his daughter, and he did not insist.

‘Look here! You’ve got your own little banking account, have you not?’

‘Yes, dad.’

‘That’s right. Never mix it up with your husband’s.’ He scribbled a cheque. ‘Pay that in! It is for five hundred pounds. I will sell half your debentures and charge you with brokerage. I believe in strict business between relatives. When you pay back the five hundred pounds, your allowance will be fifty a year once more.’

Maude then and there endorsed the cheque and posted it to her bank. Then with a final embrace to her father, she hastened out to further victories. Jack Selby was smoking a cigarette upon the doorstep.

‘Hullo, Maude! Calling up the reserves? What’s the matter? Jolly lucky it wasn’t my day on duty. You girls think a soldier has nothing to do. It was so once, but we are all scientific blokes now. No, thank you, I won’t see the dad! He’d think I had come for money, and it would upset him for the day.’

Maude took her brother in the cab with her, and told him the whole story of Frank’s misfortune, with some account of her own intentions. Jack was vastly interested.

‘What did dad say about it?’

‘I didn’t tell him. I thought Frank would rather not.’

‘Quite right. He won’t mind me. He knows I’m a bit of a business man myself. Only signed a paper once in my life, and quite a small paper too, and I haven’t heard the last of it yet. The thing wasn’t much bigger than a postcard, but the fuss those people made afterwards! I suppose they’ve been worrying Frank.’

‘We have had no peace for months.’

‘Worry is bad for the young. But he should not mind. He should go on fizzing like I did. Now we’ll put this thing through together, Maude. I see your line, and I’ll ride it with you.’

They found Mr. Owen at home, and Maude did the talking.

‘I am convinced, Mr. Owen, that they don’t want to go into court. Mr. Wingfield coming down like that proves it. My husband is too proud to bargain with them, but I have no scruples. Don’t you think that I might go to Mr. Wingfield myself, and pay the three hundred and forty pounds, and so have done with the worry for ever?’

‘Speaking as a lawyer,’ said Owen, ‘I think that it is very irregular. Speaking as a man, I think no harm could come of it. But I should not like you to offer the whole sum. Simply say that you are prepared for a reasonable compromise, and ask them to suggest what is the lowest sum which the office would accept to close the business.'

'You leave it with me,' said Jack, winking at the lawyer. 'I am seeing her through. I'll keep her on the rails. I am Number 1, Class A, at business. We'll take 'em up one link in the curb if they try any games with us! Come on, Maude, and get it over.'

He was an excellent companion for her, for his buoyancy turned the whole thing into fun. She could not take it too seriously in his company. They called at the Hotspur office and asked to see Mr. Wingfield. He was engaged, but Mr. Waters, the secretary, a very fat, pompous man, came in to them.

'I am very sorry,' said he, 'very sorry, indeed, Mrs. Crosse, but it is too late for any compromise of the sort. We have our costs to consider, and there is no alternative but for the case to go into court.'

Poor Maude nearly burst into tears.

'But suppose that we were to offer - '

'To give you an hour to think it over,' cried Jack.

Mr. Waters shook, his head despondently.

'I do not think that we should alter our decision. However, Mr. Wingfield will be here presently, and he will, of course, listen to any representations which you may have to make. In the meantime you must excuse me, as I have matters of importance to attend to.'

'Why, Maude, you little Juggins,' cried Jack, when the door was shut, 'you were just going to offer to pay their costs. I only just headed you off in time.'

'Well, I was going to inquire about it.'

'Great Scot, it's lucky you've got a business man at your elbow. I couldn't stand that chap at any price. A bit too hairy in the fetlocks for my taste. Couldn't you see that he was only bluffing?'

'How do you know, Jack?'

'It was shining all over him. Do you suppose a man has bought as many hairies as I have, and can't tell when a dealer is bluffing? He was piling it on so that when the next Christmas-tree comes along, he may find a soft job waiting for him. I tell you you want a friendly native, like me, when you get into this kind of country. Now ride this one on the curb, and don't let him have his head for a moment.'

Mr. Wingfield had entered, and his manner was very different to that of the secretary. He had great sympathy with the Crosses, and no desire to wash the Company's dirty linen in public. He was, therefore, more anxious than he dared to show to come to some arrangement.

'It is rather irregular for me to see you. I should refer you to our solicitors,' said he.

'Well, we saw you when you came to Woking,' said Maude. 'I believe that we are much more likely to come to an arrangement if we talk it over ourselves.'

'I am sure I earnestly hope so,' Wingfield answered. 'I shall be delighted to listen to anything which you may suggest. Do you, in the first place, admit your liability?'

'To some extent,' said Maude, 'if the Company will admit that they are in the wrong also.'

'Well, we may go so far as to say that we wish the books had been inspected more often, and that we regret our misplaced confidence in our agent. That should satisfy you, Mrs. Crosse. And now that you admit *some* liability, that is a great step in advance. We have no desire to be unreasonable, but as long as no liability was admitted, we had no course open to us but litigation. We now come to the crucial point, which is, how much liability should fall upon you. My own idea is, that each should pay their own costs, and that you should, in addition, pay over to the Company - '

'Forty pounds,' said Jack firmly.

Maude expected Mr. Wingfield to rise up and leave the room. As he did not do so, nor show any signs of violence, she said, 'Yes, forty pounds.'

He shook his head.

'Dear me, Mrs. Crosse, this is a very small sum.'

'Forty pounds is our offer,' said Jack.

'But on what is this offer based?'

'We have worked it out,' said Jack, 'and we find that forty pounds is right.'

Mr. Wingfield rose from his chair.

'Well,' said he, 'of course any offer is better than no offer. I cannot say what view the directors may take of this proposal, but they will hold a board meeting this afternoon, and I will lay it before them.'

'And when shall we know?'

‘I could send you round a line by hand to your solicitor.’

‘No hurry about it! Quite at your own convenience!’ said Jack. When he got outside, in the privacy of their hansom, he was convulsed with the sense of his own achievements.

‘Class A, Number 1, and mentioned at the Agricultural Hall,’ he cried, hugging himself in his delight. His sister hugged him also, so he was a much-embraced young man. ‘Am I not a man of business, Maude? You can’t buy ‘em - you must breed ‘em. One shilling with the basket. I shook him in the first round, and he never rallied after.’

‘You are a dear good boy. You did splendidly.’

‘That’s the way to handle ‘em. He saw that I was a real fizzer and full of blood. One business man can tell another at a glance.’

Maude laughed, for Jack, with his cavalry swagger and a white weal all round his sunburned face to show where his chin-strap hung, looked the most unbusiness-like of mortals.

‘Why did you offer forty pounds?’ she asked.

‘Well, you have to begin somewhere.’

‘But why forty?’

‘Because it is what we offer when we are buying the hairies - trooper’s chargers, you know. It’s a great thing to have a fixed rule in business. I never go higher than forty - rule one, section one, and no exceptions in the margin.’

They lunched together at the Holborn, and Jack took Maude afterwards to what he called ‘a real instructive show,’ which proved to be a horse-sale at Tattersall’s. They then drove back to the lawyer’s, and there they found a letter waiting addressed to Mrs. Crosse. Maude tore it open.

‘Dear Mrs. Crosse,’ said this delightful note, ‘I am happy to be able to inform you that the directors have decided to stop the legal proceedings, and to accept your offer of forty pounds in full satisfaction of all claims due against your husband.’

Maude, Jack, and the good Owen performed a triumphant *pas de trois.*

‘You have done splendidly, Mrs. Crosse, splendidly!’ cried Owen. ‘I never heard a better day’s work in my life. Now, if you will give me your cheque and wait here, I will go over and settle everything.’

‘And please bring the bond back with you,’ said Maude.

So it was that Frank, coming down upon the morning of his birthday, perceived a pretty silver cigarette-box laid in front of his plate.

‘Is this for me, my darling?’

‘Yes, Frank, a wee present from your wife.’

‘How sweet of you! I never saw such a lovely case. Why, there’s something inside it.’

‘Cigarettes, I suppose.

‘No, it is a paper of some kind. “Hotspur Insurance Company.” Good Lord, I never seem for one instant to be able to shake that infernal thing off! How on earth did it get in there? What’s this? - “I hereby guarantee to you - “ What’s this? Maude, Maude, what have you been doing?’

‘Dear old boy,’ she cried, as she put her arms round him. ‘Dear old boy! Oh, I *do* feel so happy!’

CHAPTER XVI - THE BROWNING SOCIETY

It all began by Mrs. Hunt Mortimer, the smart little up-to-date wife of the solicitor, saying to Mrs. Beecher, the young bride of the banker, that in a place like Woking it was very hard to get any mental friction, or to escape from the same eternal grooves of thought and conversation. The same idea, it seemed, had occurred to Mrs. Beecher, fortified by a remark from the *Lady's Journal* that an internal intellectual life was the surest method by which a woman could preserve her youth. She turned up the article - for the conversation occurred in her drawing-room - and she read extracts from it. 'Shakespeare as a Cosmetic' was the title. Maude was very much struck, and before they separated they had formed themselves into a Literary Society which should meet and discuss classical authors every Wednesday afternoon at each other's houses. That one hour of concentrated thought and lofty impulse should give a dignity and a tone to the whole dull provincial week.

What should they read? It was well that they should decide it before they separated, so as to start fair upon the next Wednesday. Maude suggested Shakespeare, but Mrs. Hunt Mortimer thought that a good deal of it was improper.

'Does it matter?' said Mrs. Beecher. 'We are all married.'

'Still I don't think it would be quite nice,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. She belonged to the extreme right on matters of propriety.

'But surely Mr. Bowdler made Shakespeare quite respectable,' Mrs. Beecher argued.

'He did his work very carelessly. He left in much that might be dispensed with, and he omitted a good deal which was quite innocent.'

'How do you know?'

'Because I once got two copies and read all the omissions.'

'Why did you do that?' asked Maude mischievously.

'Because I wanted to make sure that they *had* been omitted,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer severely.

Mrs. Beecher stooped and picked an invisible hairpin out of the rug. Mrs. Hunt Mortimer continued.

'There is Byron, of course. But he is so very suggestive. There are passages in his works - '

'I could never see any harm in them,' said Mrs. Beecher.

'That is because you did not know where to look,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. 'If you have a copy in the house, Mrs. Beecher, I will undertake to make it abundantly clear to you that he is to be eschewed by those who wish to keep their thoughts unsullied. Not? I fancy that even quoting from memory I could convince you that it is better to avoid him.'

'Pass Byron,' said Mrs. Beecher, who was a very pretty little kittenish person, with no apparent need of any cosmetics, literary or otherwise. 'How about Shelley?'

'Frank raves about Shelley,' observed Maude.

Mrs. Hunt Mortimer shook her head.

'His work has some dreadful tendencies. He was, I am informed, either a theist or an atheist, I cannot for the moment recall which - I think that we should make our little course as improving as possible.'

'Tennyson,' Maude suggested.

'I have been told that his meaning is too clear to entitle him to rank among the great thinkers of our race. The lofty thought is necessarily obscure. There is no merit in following a poem which is perfectly intelligible. Which leads us to - '

'Browning!' cried the other ladies.

'Exactly. We might form a little Browning Society of our own.'

'Charming! Charming!'

And so it was agreed.

There was only one other point to be settled at this their inaugural meeting, which was, to choose the other ladies who should be admitted into their literary circle. There were to be no men.

'They do distract one so,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer.

The great thing was to admit no one save those earnest spirits who would aspire to get the full benefit from their studies. Mrs. Fortescue could not be thought of, she was much too talkative. And Mrs. Jones had such a frivolous mind. Mrs. Charles could think and talk of nothing but her servants. And Mrs. Patt-Beatson always wanted to lay down the law. Perhaps on the whole it would be better to start the society quietly among themselves, and then gradually to increase it. The first meeting should be next Wednesday, at Mrs. Crosse's house, and Mrs. Hunt Mortimer would bring her complete two-volume edition with her. Mrs. Beecher thought that one volume would be enough just at first, but Mrs. Hunt Mortimer said that it was better to have a wide choice. Maude went home and told Frank in the evening. He was pleased, but rather sceptical.

‘You must begin with the simpler things first,’ said he. ‘I should recommend *Hervé Riel* and *Gold Hair*.’

But Maude put on the charming air of displeasure which became her so well.

‘We are serious students, sir,’ said she. ‘We want the very hardest poem in the book. I assure you, Frank, that one of your little faults is that you always underrate a woman’s intelligence. Mrs. Hunt Mortimer says that though we may be less original than men, we are more assim - more assmun - ‘

‘Assimulative.’

‘That’s what I say - assimulative. Now, you always talk as if - oh yes, you do! No, you mustn’t! How absurd you are, Frank! Whenever I try to speak seriously to you, you always do that and spoil everything. How would you like to discuss Browning if at the end of every sentence somebody came and kissed you? You wouldn’t mind! No, I dare say not. But you would feel that you were not being taken seriously. Wait till the next time *you* are in earnest about anything - you’ll see!’

The meeting was to be at three o’clock, and at ten minutes to the hour Mrs. Hunt Mortimer arrived with two large brown volumes under her arm. She had come early, she said, because there was to be a rehearsal of the amateur theatricals at the Dixons’ at a quarter-past four. Mrs. Beecher did not appear until five minutes after the hour. Her cook had quarrelled with the housemaid, and given instantaneous notice, with five people coming to dinner on Saturday. It had upset the lady very much, and she explained that she would not have come if she had not promised. It was so difficult to follow poetry when you were thinking about the entrée all the time.

‘Why the entrée?’ asked Mrs. Hunt Mortimer, looking up from the book which she held open in front of her.

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Beecher, who had the art of saying the most simple things as if they were profoundly confidential secrets, - ‘My dear, my parlourmaid is really an excellent cook, and I shall rely upon her if Martha really goes. But she is limited, very limited, and entrées and savouries are the two things in which I cannot entirely trust her. I must, therefore, find some dish which is well within her capacity.'

Mrs. Hunt Mortimer prided herself upon her housekeeping, so the problem interested her. Maude also began to feel the meeting less dull than she had expected.

'Of course there are many things to be considered,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer, with the air of a Q.C. giving an opinion. 'Oyster patties or oyster vol-au-vents - '

'Oysters are out of season,' said Maude.

'I was about to say,' Mrs. Hunt Mortimer continued, with admirable presence of mind, 'that these entrées of oysters are inadmissible because they are out of season. Now curried prawns - '

'My husband loathes them.'

'Well, well! What do you say to sweetbreads en caisse? All you want are chopped mushrooms, shalots, parsley, nutmeg, pepper, salt, breadcrumb, bacon fat - '

'No, no,' cried Mrs. Beecher despairingly. 'Anne would never remember all that.'

'Cutlets à la Constance,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. 'I am sure that they are simple enough. Cutlets, butter, fowls' livers, cocks' combs, mushrooms - '

'My dear, my dear, remember that she is only a parlourmaid. It is unreasonable.'

'Ragout of fowl, chicken patties, croquettes of veal with a little browning - '

'We've got back to Browning after all,' cried Maude.

'Dear me,' said Mrs. Beecher, 'it is all my fault, and I am so sorry. Now, Mrs. Hunt Mortimer, do please read us a little of that delightful poetry.'

'You can always get small entrées sent down from the Stores,' cried Maude, as a happy thought.

'You dear, good girl, how sweet of you to think of it. Of course one can. That is really an admirable idea. There now, we may consider the entrée as being removed, so we proceed to - '

'The *pièce de résistance,*' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer solemnly, glancing down the index of the first volume. 'I confess that my acquaintance with the poet has up to now been rather superficial. Our ambition must be to so master him that he becomes from this time forward part and parcel of ourselves. I fancy that the difficulties in understanding him have been very much exaggerated, and that with goodwill and perseverance we shall manage to overcome them.'

It was a relief to Mrs. Beecher and to Maude to realise that Mrs. Hunt Mortimer knew no more about the matter than themselves. They both ventured upon a less diffident air now that it was clear that it might be done in safety. Maude frowned thoughtfully, and Mrs. Beecher cast up her pretty brown eyes at the curtain-rod, as if she were running over in her memory the whole long catalogue of the poet's works.

'I will tell you what we should do,' said she. 'We must make a vow that we shall never pass a line until we understand it. We will go over it again and again until we grasp its meaning.'

'What an excellent idea!' cried Maude, with one of her little bursts of enthusiasm. 'Now that is really splendid, Mrs. Beecher.'

'My friends always call me Nellie,' said the little brunette.

'How nice of you to say so! I should love to call you so, if you don't mind. It is such a pretty name too. Only you must call me Maude.'

'You look like a Maude,' said Mrs. Beecher. 'I always picture a Maude as bright and pretty and blonde. Isn't it strange how names associate themselves with characters. Mary is always domestic, and Rose is a flirt, and Elizabeth is dutiful, and Evelyn is dashing, and Alice is colourless, and Helen is masterful - '

'And Matilda is impatient,' said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer, laughing. 'Matilda has reason to be, seated here with an index in front of her while you two are exchanging compliments.'

'Why, we were waiting for you to begin,' said Mrs. Beecher reproachfully. 'Do let us have something, for really the time is slipping away.'

'It would be a pity to begin at the beginning, because that represents his immature genius,' remarked Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. 'I think that on this the opening day of the Society, we should have the poet at his best.'

'How are we to know which *is* his best?' Maude asked.

'I should be inclined to choose something with a title which suggests profundity - "A Pretty Woman," "Love in a Life," "Any Wife to any Husband" - '

'Oh, what *did* she say to him?' cried Maude.

'Well, I was about to say that all these subjects rather suggested frivolity.'

‘Besides, it really is a very absurd title,’ remarked Mrs. Beecher, who was fond of generalising from her six months’ experience of matrimony. ‘*A* husband to *a* wife’ would be intelligible, but how can you know what *any* husband would say to *any* wife? No one can really foretell what a man will do. They really are such extraordinary creatures.’

But Mrs. Hunt Mortimer had been married for five years, and felt as competent to lay down the law about husbands as about entrées.

‘When you have had a larger experience of them, dear, you will find that there is usually a reason, or at least a primitive instinct of some sort, at the root of their actions. But, seriously, we must really concentrate our attention upon the poet, for my other engagement will call me away at four, which only leaves me ten minutes to reach Maybury.’

Mrs. Beecher and Maude settled down with anxious attention upon their faces.

‘Do please go on!’ they cried.

‘Here is “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.”’

‘Now that interests me more than I can tell,’ cried Maude, with her eyes shining with pleasure. ‘Do please read us everything there is about that dear piper.’

‘Why so?’ asked her two companions.

‘Well, the fact is,’ said Maude, ‘Frank - my husband, you know - came to a fancy-dress at St. Albans as the Pied Piper. I had no idea that it came from Browning.’

‘How did he dress for it?’ asked Mrs. Beecher. ‘We are invited to the Aston’s dress ball, and I want something suitable for George.’

‘It was a most charming dress. Red and black all over, something like Mephistopheles, you know, and a peaked hat with a bell at the top. Then he had a flute, of course, and a thin wire from his waist with a stuffed rat at the end of it.’

‘A rat! How horrid!’

‘Well, that was the story, you know. The rats all followed the Pied Piper, and so this rat followed Frank. He put it in his pocket when he danced, but once he forgot, and so it got stood upon, and the sawdust came out all over the floor.’

Mrs. Hunt Mortimer was also invited to the dress ball, and her thoughts flew away from the book in front of her.

‘How did you go, Mrs. Crosse?’ she asked.

‘I went as “Night.”’

‘What! you with your brown hair!’

‘Well, father said that I was not a very dark night. I was in black, you know, just my ordinary black silk dinner-dress. Then I had a silver half-moon over my head, and black veils round my hair, and stars all over my bodice and skirt, with a long comet right across the front. Father upset a cup of milk over me at supper, and said afterwards that it was the milky way.’

‘It is simply maddening how men *will* make jokes about the most important subjects,’ said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. ‘But I have no doubt, dear, that your dress was an exceedingly effective one. Now, for my own part, I had some idea of going as the “Duchess of Devonshire.”’

‘Charming!’ cried Mrs. Beecher and Maude.

‘It is not a very difficult costume, you know. I have some old Point d’Alençon lace which has been in the family for a century. I make it the starting-point of my costume. The gown need not be very elaborate - ‘

‘Silk?’ asked Mrs. Beecher.

‘Well, I thought that perhaps a white-flowered brocade - ‘

‘Oh yes, with pearl trimming.’

‘No, no, dear, with my lace for trimming.’

‘Of course. You said so.’

‘And then a muslin fichu coming over here.’

‘How perfectly sweet!’ cried Maude.

‘And the waist cut high, and ruffles at the sleeves. And, of course, a picture hat - you know what I mean - with a curling ostrich feather.’

‘Powdered hair, of course?’ said Mrs. Beecher.

‘Powdered in ringlets.’

‘It will suit you admirably - beautifully. You are tall enough to carry it off, and you have the figure also. How I wish I was equally certain about my own!’

‘What had you thought of, dear?’

‘Well, I had some idea about “Ophelia.” Do you think that it would do?’

‘Certainly. Had you worked it out at all?’

‘Well, my dear,’ said Mrs. Beecher, relapsing into her pleasant confidential manner. ‘I had some views, but, of course, I should be so glad to have your opinion about it. I only saw *Hamlet* once, and the lady was dressed in white, with a gauzy light nun’s-veiling over it. I thought that with white pongee silk as an under-dress, and then some sort of delicate - ‘

‘Crepe de Chine,’ Maude suggested.

‘But in Ophelia’s day such a thing had never been heard of,’ said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. ‘A net of silver thread - ‘

‘Exactly,’ cried Mrs. Beecher, ‘with some sort of jewelling upon it. That was just what I had imagined. Of course it should be cut classically and draped - my dressmaker is such a treasure - and I should have a gold embroidery upon the white silk.’

‘Crewel work,’ said Maude.

‘Or a plain cross-stitch pattern. Then a tiara of pearls on the head. Shakespeare - ‘

At the name of the poet their three consciences pricked simultaneously. They looked at each other and then at the clock with dismay.

‘We must - we really *must* go on with our reading,’ cried Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. ‘How did we get talking about these dresses?’

‘It was my fault,’ said Mrs. Beecher, looking contrite.

‘No, dear, it was mine,’ said Maude. ‘You remember it all came from my saying that Frank had gone to the ball as the Pied Piper.’

‘I am going to read the very first poem that I open,’ said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer remorselessly. ‘I am afraid that it is almost time that I started, but we may still be able to skim over a few pages. Now then! There! *Setebos*! What a funny name!’

‘What *does* it mean?’ asked Maude.

‘We shall find out, no doubt, as we proceed,’ said Mrs. Hunt Mortimer. ‘We shall take it line by line and draw the full meaning from it. The first line is -

‘Will sprawl now that the heat of day is best - ‘

‘Who will?’ asked Mrs. Beecher.

‘I don’t know. That’s what it says.’

‘The next line will explain, no doubt.’

‘Flat on his - ‘

‘Dear me, I had no idea that Browning was like this!’

'Do read it, dear.'

'I couldn't possibly think of doing so. With your permission we will pass on to the next paragraph.'

'But we vowed not to skip.'

'But why read what cannot instruct or elevate us. Let us begin this next stanza, and hope for something better. The first line is - I wonder if it really can be as it is written.'

'Do please read it!'

'Setebos and Setebos and Setebos.'

The three students looked sadly at each other. 'This is worse than anything I could have imagined,' said the reader.

'We mast skip that line.'

'But we are skipping everything.'

'It's a person's name,' said Mrs. Beecher.

'Or three persons.'

'No, only one, I think.'

'But why should he repeat it three times?'

'For emphasis!'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Beecher, 'it was Mr. Setebos, and Mrs. Setebos, and a little Setebos.'

'Now, if you are going to make fun, I won't read. But I think we were wrong to say that we would take it line by line. It would be easier sentence by sentence.'

'Quite so.'

'Then we will include the next line, which finishes the sentence. It is, "thinketh he dwelleth in the cold of the moon."'

'Then it *was* only one Setebos!' cried Maude.

'So it appears. It is easy to understand if one will only put it into ordinary language. This person Setebos was under the impression that his life was spent in the moonlight.'

'But what nonsense it is!' cried Mrs. Beecher. Mrs. Hunt Mortimer looked at her reproachfully. 'It is very easy to call everything which we do not understand "nonsense,"' said she. 'I have no doubt that Browning had a profound meaning in this.'

'What was it, then?'

Mrs. Hunt Mortimer looked at the clock.

‘I am very sorry to have to go,’ said she, ‘but really I have no choice in the matter. Just as we were getting on so nicely - it is really most vexatious. You’ll come to my house next Wednesday, Mrs. Crosse, won’t you? And you also, Mrs. Beecher. Good-bye, and thanks for *such* a pleasant afternoon!’

But her skirts had hardly ceased to rustle in the passage before the Browning Society had been dissolved by a two-thirds’ vote of the total membership.

‘What is the use?’ cried Mrs. Beecher. ‘Two lines have positively made my head ache, and there are two volumes.’

‘We must change our poet.’

‘His verbosity!’ cried Mrs. Beecher.

‘His Setebosity!’ cried Maude.

‘And dear Mrs. Hunt Mortimer pretending to like him! Shall we propose Tennyson next week?’

‘It would be far better.’

‘But Tennyson is quite simple, is he not?’

‘Perfectly.’

‘Then why should we meet to discuss him if there is nothing to discuss?’

‘You mean that we might as well each read him for herself.’

‘I think it would be easier.’

‘Why, of course it would.’

And so after one hour of precarious life, Mrs. Hunt Mortimer’s Mutual Improvement Society for the elucidation of Browning came to an untimely end.

CHAPTER XVII - AN INVESTMENT

‘I want your advice, Maude.’

She was looking very sweet and fresh in the morning sunlight. She wore a flowered, French print blouse - little sprigs of roses on a white background - and a lace frill round her pretty, white, smooth throat. The buckle of her brown leather belt just gleamed over the edge of the table-cloth. In front of her were a litter of correspondence, a white cup of coffee, and two empty eggshells - for she was a perfectly healthy young animal with an excellent appetite.

‘Well, dear, what is it?’

‘I shall take the later train. Then I need not hurry, and can walk down at my ease.’

‘How nice of you!’

‘I am not sure that Dinton will think so.’

‘Only one little hour of difference - what can it matter?’

‘They don’t run offices on those lines. An hour means a good deal in the City of London.’

‘Oh, I do hate the City of London! It is the only thing which ever comes between us.’

‘I suppose that it separates a good many loving couples every morning.’

He had come across and an egg-cup had been upset. Then he had been scolded, and they sat together laughing upon the sofa. When he had finished admiring her little, shining, patent-leather, Louis shoes and the two charming curves of open-work black stocking, she reminded him that he had asked for her advice.

‘Yes, dear, what was it?’ She knitted her brows and tried to look as her father did when he considered a matter of business. But then her father was not hampered by having a young man’s arm round his neck. It is so hard to be business-like when any one is curling one’s hair round his finger.

‘I have some money to invest.’

‘O Frank, how clever of you!’

‘It is only fifty pounds.’

‘Never mind, dear, it is a beginning.’

‘That is what I feel. It is the foundation-stone of our fortunes. And so I want Her Majesty to lay it - mustn’t wrinkle your brow though - that is not allowed.’

‘But it is a great responsibility, Frank.’

‘Yes, we must not lose it.’

‘No, dear, we must not lose it. Suppose we invest it in one of those modern fifty-guinea pianos. Our dear old Broadwood was an excellent piano when I was a girl, but it is getting so squeaky in the upper notes. Perhaps they would allow us something for it.’

He shook his head.

‘I know that we want one very badly, dear. And such a musician as you are should have the best instrument that money can buy. I promise you that when we have a little to turn round on, you shall have a beauty. But in the meantime we must not buy anything with this money - I mean nothing for ourselves - we must invest it. We cannot tell what might happen. I might fall ill. I might die.’

‘O Frank, how horrid you are this morning!’

‘Well, we have to be ready for anything. So I want to put this where we can get it on an emergency, and where in the meantime it will bring us some interest. Now what shall we buy?’

‘Papa always bought a house.’

‘But we have not enough.’

‘Not a little house?’

‘No, not the smallest.’

‘A mortgage, then?’

‘The sum is too small.’

‘Government stock, Frank - if you think it is safe.’

‘Oh, it is safe enough. But the interest is so low.’

‘How much should we get?’

‘Well, I suppose the fifty pounds would bring us in about thirty shillings a year.’

‘Thirty shillings! O Frank!’

‘Rather less than more.’

‘Fancy a great rich nation like ours taking our fifty pounds and treating us like that. How *mean* of them! Don’t let them have it, Frank.’

‘No, I won’t.’

‘If they want it, they can make us a fair offer for it.’

‘I think we’ll try something else.’

‘Well, they have only themselves to thank. But you have some plan in your head, Frank. What is it?’

He brought the morning paper over from the table. Then he folded it so as to bring the financial columns to the top.

‘I saw a fellow in the City yesterday who knows a great deal about gold-mining. I only had a few minutes’ talk, but he strongly advised me to have some shares in the El Dorado Proprietary Gold Mine.’

‘What a nice name! I wonder if they would let us have any?’

‘Oh yes, they are to be bought in the open market. It is like this, Maude. The mine was a very good one, and paid handsome dividends. Then it had some misfortunes. First, there was no water, and then there was too much water, and the workings were flooded. So, of course, the price of the shares fell. Now they are getting the mine all right again, but the shares are still low. It certainly seems a very good chance to pick a few of them up.’

‘Are they very dear, Frank?’

‘I looked them up in the *Mining Register* before I came home yesterday. The original price of each share was ten shillings, but as they have had these misfortunes, one would expect to find them rather lower.’

‘Ten shillings! It does not seem much to pay for a share in a thing with a name like that.’

‘Here it is,’ said he, pointing with a pencil to one name in a long printed list. ‘This one, between the Royal Bonanza and the Alabaster Consols. You see - El Dorado Proprietary! Then after it you have printed, 4¾ - 4.875. I don’t profess to know much about these things, but that of course means the price.’

‘Yes, dear, it is printed at the top of the column - “Yesterday’s prices.”’

‘Quito so. Well, we know that the original price of each share was ten shillings, and of course they must have dropped with a flood in the mine, so that these figures must mean that the price yesterday was four shillings and nine-pence, or thereabouts.’

‘What a clear head for business you have, dear!’

‘I think we can’t do wrong in buying at that price. You see, with our fifty pounds we could buy two hundred of them, and then if they went up again we could sell, and take our profit.’

‘How delightful! But suppose they don’t go up.’

‘Well, they can’t go down. I should not think that a share at four shillings and ninepence *could* go down very much. There is no room. But it may go up to any extent.’

‘Besides, your friend said that they would go up.’

‘Yes, he seemed quite confident about it. Well, what do you think, Maude? Is it good enough or not?’

‘O Frank, I hardly dare advise you. Just imagine if we were to lose it all. Do you think it would be wiser to get a hundred shares, and then we could buy twenty-five pounds’ worth of Royal Bonanza as well. It would be impossible for them both to go wrong.’

‘The Royal Bonanza shares are dear, and then we have had no information about it. I think we had better back our own opinion.’

‘All right, Frank.’

‘Then that is settled. I have a telegraph-form here.’

‘Could you not buy them yourself when you are in town?’

‘No, you can’t buy things yourself. You have to do it through a broker.’

‘I always thought a broker was a horrid man, who came and took your furniture away.’

‘Ah, that’s another kind of broker. He comes afterwards. I promised Harrison that he should have any business which I could put in his way, so here goes. How is that?’ -

‘Harrison, 13a Throgmorton Street, E.C. - Buy two hundred El Dorado Proprietaries.

‘CROSSE, Woking.’

‘Doesn’t it sound rather peremptory, Frank?’

‘No, no, that is mere business.’

‘I hope he won’t be offended.’

‘I think I can answer for that.’

‘You have not said the price.’

‘One cannot say the price because one does not know it. You see, it is always going up and down. By this time it may be a little higher or a little lower than yesterday. There cannot be much change, that is certain. Great Scot, Maude, it is ten-fifteen. Three and a half minutes for a quarter of a mile. Good-bye, darling! I just love you in that bodice. O Lord - good-bye!’

‘Well, has anything happened?’

‘Yes, you have come back. Oh I am so glad to see you, you dear old boy!’

‘Take care of that window, darling!’

‘Oh, my goodness, I hope he didn’t see. No, it’s all right. He was looking the other way. We have the gold shares all right.’

‘Harrison has telegraphed?’

‘Yes, here it is.’ -

‘Crosse, The Lindens, Woking. - Bought two hundred El Dorados at 4¾.
HARRISON.’

‘That is capital. I rather expected to see Harrison in the train. I shouldn’t be surprised if he calls on his way from the station. He has to pass our door, you know, on his way to Maybury.’

‘He is sure to call.’

‘What are you holding there?’

‘It’s a paper.’

‘What paper?’

‘Who is it who talks about woman’s curiosity?’

‘Let me see it.’

‘Well, sir, if you must know, it is the *Financial Whisper.’*

‘Where in the world did you get it?’

‘I knew that the Montresors took a financial paper. I remember Mrs. Montresor saying once how dreadfully dry it was. So when you were gone I sent Jemima round and borrowed it, and I have read it right through to see if there was anything about our mine in it - *our* mine, Frank; does it not sound splendid?’

‘Well, is there anything?’

She clapped her hands with delight.

‘Yes, there is. “This prosperous mine - “ that is what it says. Look here, it is under the heading of Australian Notes,’ she held out the paper and pointed, but his face fell as he looked.

‘O Maude, it’s preposterous.’

‘What is preposterous?’

‘The word is preposterous and not prosperous - “this preposterous mine.”’

‘Frank!’ She turned her face away.

‘Never mind, dear! What’s the odds?’

‘O Frank, our first investment - our fifty pounds! And to think that I should have kept the paper as a surprise for you!’

‘Well, the print is a little slurred, and it was a very natural mistake. After all, the paper may be wrong. Oh don’t, Maude, please don’t! It’s not worth it - all the gold on the earth is not worth it. There’s a sweet girlie! Now, are you better? Oh, damn those open curtains!’

A tall and brisk young man with a glossy hat was coming through the garden. An instant later Jemima had ushered him in.

‘Hullo, Harrison!’

‘How do you do, Crosse? How are you, Mrs. Crosse?’

‘How do you do? I’ll just order tea if you will excuse me.’

Ordering tea seemed to involve a good deal of splashing water. Maude came back with a merrier face.

‘Is this a good paper, Mr. Harrison?’

‘What is it? *Financial Whisper*! No, the most venal rag in the city.’

‘Oh, I am so glad!’

‘Why?’

‘Well, you know, we bought some shares to-day, and it calls our mine a preposterous one.’

‘Oh, is that all. Who cares what the *Financial Whisper* says! It would call the Bank of England a preposterous institution if it thought it could bear Consols by doing so. Its opinion is not worth a halfpenny. By the way, Crosse, it was about those shares that I called.’

‘I thought you might. I have only just got back myself, and I saw by your wire that you had bought them all right.’

‘Yes, I thought I had better let you have your contract at once. Settling day is on Monday, you know.’

‘All right. Thank you. I will let you have a cheque. What - what’s this?’

The contract had been laid face upwards upon the table. Frank Crosse’s face grew whiter and his eyes larger as he stared at it. It ran in this way -

13a THROGMORTON STREET.

Bought for Francis Crosse, Esq.

(Subject to the Specific Rules and Regulations of the Stock Exchange.)

200 El Dorado Proprietaries at 4¾	£950 0 0
Stamps and Fees	4 17 6
Commission	7 10 0
	£962 7 6

For the 7th inst.

‘I fancy there is some mistake here, Harrison,’ said he, speaking with a very dry pair of lips.

‘A mistake!’

‘Yes, this is not at all what I expected.’

‘O Frank! Nearly a thousand pounds!’ gasped Maude.

Harrison glanced from one of them to the other. He saw that the matter was serious.

‘I am very sorry if there has been any mistake. I tried to obey your instructions. You wanted two hundred El Dorados, did you not?’

‘Yes, at four and ninepence.’

‘Four and ninepence! They are four pound fifteen each.’

‘But I read that they were only ten shillings originally, and that they had been falling.’

‘Yes, they have been falling for months. But they were as high as ten pounds once. They are down at four pound fifteen now.’

‘Why on earth could the paper not say so?’

‘When a fraction is used, it always means a fraction of a pound.’

‘Good heavens! And I have to find this sum before Monday.’

‘Monday is settling day.’

‘I can’t do it, Harrison. It is impossible.’

‘Then there is the obvious alternative.’

‘No, I had rather die. I will never go bankrupt - never!’

Harrison began to laugh, and then turned stonily solemn as he met a pair of reproachful grey eyes.

‘It strikes me that you have not done much at this game, Crosse.’

‘Never before - and by Heaven, never again!’

‘You take it much too hard. When I spoke of an alternative, I never dreamed of bankruptcy. All you have to do is to sell your stock to-morrow morning, and pay the difference.’

‘Can I do that?’

‘Rather. Why not?’

‘What would the difference be?’

Harrison took an evening paper from his pocket. ‘We deal in rails chiefly, and I don’t profess to keep in touch with the mining market. We’ll find the quotation here. By Jove!’ He whistled between his teeth.

‘Well!’ said Frank, and felt his wife’s little warm palm fall upon his hand under the table.

‘The difference is in your favour.’

‘In my favour?’

‘Yes, listen to this. “The mining markets, both the South African and the Australian, opened dull, but grew more animated as the day proceeded, prices closing at the best. Out crops upon the Rand mark a general advance of one-sixteenth to one-eighth. The chief feature in the Australian section was a sharp advance of five-eighths in El Dorados, upon a telegram that the workings had been pumped dry.” Crosse, I congratulate you.’

‘I can really sell them for more than I gave?’

‘I should think so. You have two hundred of them, and a profit of ten shillings on each.’

‘Maude, we’ll have the whisky and the soda. Harrison, you must have a drink. Why, that’s a hundred pounds.’

‘More than a hundred.’

‘Without my paying anything?’

‘Not a penny.’

‘When does the Exchange open to-morrow?’

‘The rattle goes at eleven.’

‘Well, be there at eleven, Harrison. Sell them at once.’

‘You won’t hold on and watch the market?’

‘No, no - I won’t have an easy moment until they are sold.’

‘All right, my boy. You can rely upon me. You will get a cheque for your balance on Tuesday or Wednesday. Good evening! I am so glad that it has all ended well.’

‘And the joke of it is, Maude,’ said her husband, after they had talked over the whole adventure from the beginning. ‘The joke of it is that we have still to find an investment for our original fifty pounds. I am inclined to put it into Consols after all.’

‘Well,’ said Maude, ‘perhaps it would be the patriotic thing to do.’

Two days later the poor old Broadwood with the squeaky treble and the wheezy bass was banished for ever from The Lindens, and there arrived in its place a ninety-five-guinea cottage grand, all dark walnut and gilding, with notes in it so deep and rich and resonant that Maude could sit before it by the hour and find music enough in simply touching one here and one there, and listening to the soft, sweet, reverberant tones which came swelling from its depths. Her El Dorado piano, she called it, and tried to explain to lady visitors how her husband had been so clever at business that he had earned it in a single day. As she was never very clear in her own mind how the thing had occurred, she never succeeded in explaining it to any one else, but a vague and solemn impression became gradually diffused abroad that young Mr. Frank Crosse was a very remarkable man, and that he had done something exceedingly clever in the matter of an Australian mine.

CHAPTER XVIII - A THUNDERCLOUD

Blue skies and shining sun, but far down on the horizon one dark cloud gathers and drifts slowly upwards unobserved. Frank Crosse was aware of its shadow when coming down to breakfast he saw an envelope with a well-remembered handwriting beside his plate. How he had loved that writing once, how his heart had warmed and quickened at the sight of it, how eagerly he had read it - and now a viper coiled upon the white table-cloth would hardly have given him a greater shock. Contradictory, incalculable, whimsical life! A year ago how scornfully he would have laughed, what contemptuous unbelief would have filled his soul, if he had been told that any letter of hers could have struck him cold with the vague apprehension of coming misfortune. He tore off the envelope and threw it into the fire. But before he could glance at the letter there was the quick patter of his wife’s feet upon the stair, and she burst, full of girlish health and high spirits, into the little room. She wore a pink crepon dressing-gown, with cream guipure lace at the neck and wrists. Pink ribbon outlined her trim waist. The morning sun shone upon her, and she seemed to him to be the daintiest, sweetest tiling upon earth. He had thrust his letter into his pocket as she entered.

‘You will excuse the dressing-gown, Frank.’

‘I just love you in it. No, you mustn’t pass. Now you can go.’

‘I was so afraid that you would breakfast without me that I had no time to dress. I shall have the whole day to finish in when you are gone. There now - Jemima has forgotten to warm the plates again! And your coffee is cold. I wish you had not waited.’

‘Better cold coffee with Maude’s society.’

‘I always thought men gave up complimenting their wives after they married them. I am so glad you don’t. I think on the whole that women’s ideas of men are unfair and severe. The reason is that the women who have met unpleasant men run about and make a noise, but the women who are happy just keep quiet and enjoy themselves. For example, I have not time to write a book explaining to every one how nice Frank Crosse is; but if he were nasty my life would be empty, and so of course I should write my book.’

‘I feel such a fraud when you talk like that.’

‘That is part of your niceness.’

‘Oh don’t, Maude! It really hurts me.’

‘Why, Frank, what is the matter with you to-day?’

‘Nothing, dear.’

‘Oh yes, there is. I can tell easily.’

‘Perhaps I am not quite myself.’

‘No, I am sure that you are not. I believe that you have a cold coming on. O Frank, do take some ammoniated quinine.’

‘Good heavens, no!’

‘Please! Please!’

‘My dear girlie, there is nothing the matter with me.’

‘But it is such splendid stuff.’

‘Yes, I know. But really I don’t want it.’

‘Have you had any letters, Frank?’

‘Yes, one.’

‘Anything important?’

‘I have hardly glanced at it yet.’

‘Glance at it now.’

‘Oh, I will keep it for the train. Good-bye, dearest. It is time that I was off.’

‘If you would only take the ammoniated quinine. You men are so proud and obstinate. Good-bye, darling. Eight hours, and then I shall begin to live again.’

He had a quiet corner of a carriage to himself, so he unfolded his letter and read it. Then he read it again with frowning brows and compressed lips. It ran in this way -

My Dearest Frankie, - I suppose that I should not address you like this now that you are a good little married man, but the force of custom is strong, and, after all, I knew you long before she did. I don’t suppose you were aware of it, but there was a time when I could very easily have made you marry me, in spite of all you may know about my trivial life and adventures, but I thought it all over very carefully, and I came to the conclusion that it was not good enough. You were always a dear good chap yourself, but your prospects were not quite dashing enough for your festive Violet. I believe in a merry time even if it is a short one. But if I had really wanted to settle down in a humdrum sort of way, you are the man whom I should have chosen out of the whole batch of them. I hope what I say won't make you conceited, for one of your best points used to be your modesty.

But for all that, my dear Frankie, I by no means give you up altogether, and don't you make any mistake about that. It was only yesterday that I saw Charlie Scott, and he told me all about you, and gave me your address. Don't you bless him? And yet I don't know. Perhaps you have still a kindly thought of your old friend, and would like to see her.

But you are going to see her whether you like or not, my dear boy, so make up your mind to that. You know how you used to chaff me about my whims. Well, I've got a whim now, and I'll have my way as usual. I am going to see you to-morrow, and if you won't see me under my conditions in London, I shall call at Woking in the evening. Oh my goodness, what a bombshell! But you know that I am always as good as my word. So look out!

Now I'll give you your orders for the day, and don't you forget them. To-morrow (Thursday, 14th, no excuses about the date) you will leave your office at 3.30. I know that you can when you like. You will drive to Mariani's, and you will find me at the door. We shall go up to our old private room, and we shall have tea together, and a dear old chat about all sorts of things. So come! But if you don't, there is a train which leaves Waterloo at 6.10 and reaches Woking at 7. I will come by it and be just in time for dinner. What a joke it will be!

Good-bye, old boy! I hope your wife does not read your letters, or this will rather give her fits.

- Yours as ever, VIOLET WRIGHT.

At the first reading this letter filled him with anger. To be wooed by a very pretty woman is pleasant even to the most austere of married men (and never again trust the one who denies it), but to be wooed with a very dangerous threat mixed up with the wooing is no such pleasant experience. And it was no empty threat. Violet was a woman who prided herself upon being as good as her word. She had laughingly said with her accustomed frankness upon one occasion that it was her sole remaining virtue. If he did not go to Mariani's, she would certainly come to Woking. He shuddered to think of Maude being annoyed by her. It was one thing to speak in a general way to his wife of prematrimonial experiences, and it was another to have this woman forcing herself upon her and making a scene. The idea was so vulgar. The sweet, pure atmosphere of The Lindens would never be the same again.

No, there was no getting out of it. He must go to Mariani's. He was sufficiently master of himself to know that no harm could come of that. His absolute love for his wife shielded him from all danger. The very thought of infidelity nauseated him. And then, as the idea became more familiar to him, other emotions succeeded that of anger. There was an audacity about his old flame, a spirit and devilment, which appealed to his sporting instincts. Besides, it was complimentary to him, and flattering to his masculine vanity, that she should not give him up without a struggle. Merely as a friend it would not be disagreeable to see her again. Before he had reached Clapham Junction his anger had departed, and by the time that he arrived at Waterloo he was surprised to find himself looking forward to the interview.

Mariani's is a quiet restaurant, famous for its *lachryma christi spumante,* and situated in the network of sombre streets between Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The fact of its being in a by-street was not unfavourable to its particular class of business. Its customers were very free from the modern vice of self-advertisement, and would even take some trouble to avoid publicity. Nor were they gregarious or luxurious in their tastes. A small, simple apartment was usually more to their taste than a crowded salon, and they were even prepared to pay a higher sum for it.

It was five minutes to four when Frank arrived, and the lady had not yet appeared. He stood near the door and waited. Presently a hansom rattled into the narrow street, and there she sat framed in its concavity. A pretty woman never looks prettier than in a hansom, with the shadows behind to give their Rembrandt effect to the face in front. She raised a yellow kid hand, and flashed a smile at him.

'Just the same as ever,' said she, as he handed her down.

'So are you.'

'So glad you think so. I am afraid I can't quite agree with you. Thirty-four yesterday. It's simply awful. Thank you, I have some change. All right, cabby. Well, have you got a room?'

'No.'

'But you'll come?'

‘Oh yes, I should like to have a chat.’

The clean-shaven, round-faced manager, a man of suave voice and diplomatic manner, was standing in the passage. His strange life was spent in standing in the passage. He remembered the pair at once, and smiled paternally.

‘Not seen you for some time, sir!’

‘No, I have been engaged.’

‘Married,’ said the lady.

‘Dear me!’ said the proprietor. ‘Tea, sir?’

‘And muffins. You used to like the muffins.’

‘Oh yes, muffins by all means.’

‘Number ten,’ said the proprietor, and a waiter showed them upstairs. ‘All meals nine shillings each,’ he whispered, as Frank passed him at the door. He was a new waiter, and so mistook every one for a new customer, which is an error which runs through life.

It was a dingy little room with a round table covered by a soiled cloth in the middle. Two windows, discreetly blinded, let in a dim London light. An armchair stood at each side of the empty fireplace, and an uncomfortable, old-fashioned, horsehair sofa lined the opposite wall. There were pink vases upon the mantelpiece, and a portrait of Garibaldi above it.

The lady sat down and took off her gloves. Frank stood by the window and smoked a cigarette. The waiter rattled and banged and jingled with the final effect of producing a tea-tray and a hot-water dish. ‘You’ll ring if you want me, sir,’ said he, and shut the door with ostentatious completeness.

‘Now we can talk,’ said Frank, throwing his cigarette into the fireplace. ‘That waiter was getting on my nerves.’

‘I say, I hope you’re not angry.’

‘What at?’

‘Well, my saying I should come down to Woking, and all that.’

‘I should have been angry if I thought you had meant it.’

‘Oh, I meant it right enough.’

‘But with what object?’

‘Just to get level with you, Frankie, if you threw me over too completely. Hang it all, she has three hundred and sixty-five days in the year! Am I to be grudged a single hour?’

‘Well, Violet, we won’t quarrel about it. You see I came all right. Pull up your chair and have some tea.’

‘You haven’t even looked at me yet. I won’t take any tea until you do.’

She stood up in front of him, and pushed up her veil. It was a face and a figure worth looking at. Hazel eyes, dark chestnut hair, a warm flush of pink in her cheeks, the features and outline of an old Grecian goddess, but with more of Juno than of Venus, for she might perhaps err a little upon the side of opulence. There was a challenge and defiance dancing in those dark devil-may-care eyes of hers which might have roused a more cold-blooded man than her companion. Her dress was simple and dark, but admirably cut. She was clever enough to know that a pretty woman should concentrate attention upon herself, and a plain one divert it to her adornments.

‘Well?’

‘By Jove, Violet, you look splendid.’

‘Well?’

‘The muffins are getting cold.’

‘Frankie, what *is* the matter with you?’

‘Nothing is the matter.’

‘Well?’

She put out her two hands and took hold of his. That well-remembered sweet, subtle scent of hers rose to his nostrils. There is nothing more insidious than a scent which carries suggestions and associations. ‘Frankie, you have not kissed me yet.’

She turned her smiling face upwards and sideways, and for an instant he leaned forward towards it. But he had himself in hand again in a moment. It gave him confidence to find how quickly and completely he could do it. With a laugh, still holding her two hands, he pushed her back into the chair by the table.

‘There’s a good girl!’ said he. ‘Now we’ll have some tea, and I’ll give you a small lecture while we do so.’

‘You are a nice one to give lectures.’

‘Oh, there’s no such preacher as a converted sinner.’

‘You really are converted then?’

‘Rather. Two lumps, if I remember right. You ought to do this, not I. No milk, and very strong - how you keep your complexion I can’t imagine. But you do keep it; my word, you do! Now please don’t look so crossly at me.’

Her flushed cheeks and resentful eyes had drawn forth the remonstrance.

‘You *are* changed,’ she said, with surprise as well as anger in her voice.

‘Why, of course I am. I am married.’

‘For that matter Charlie Scott is married.’

‘Don’t give Charlie Scott away.’

‘I think I give myself away. So you have lost all your love for me. I thought it was to last for ever.’

‘Now, do be sensible, Violet.’

‘Sensible! How I loathe that word! A man only uses it when he is going to do something cold-blooded and mean. It is always the beginning of the end.’

‘What do you want me to do?’

‘I want you to be my own Frankie - just the same as before. Ah do, Franck - don’t leave me! You know I would give any of them up for you. And you have a good influence over me - you have really! You call’t think how hard I am with other people. Ask Charlie Scott. He will tell you. I’ve been so different since I have lost sight of you. Now, Frankie, don’t be horrid to me! Kiss and be nice!’ Again her soft warm hand was upon his, and the faint sweet smell of violets went to his blood like wine. He jumped up, lit another cigarette, and paced about the room.

‘You shan’t have a cigarette, Frankie.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you said once it helped you to control yourself. I don’t want you to control yourself. I want you to feel as I feel.’

‘Do sit down, like a good girl!’

‘Cigarette out!’

‘Don’t be absurd, Violet!’

‘Come, out with it, sir.’

‘No, no, leave it alone!’

She had snatched it from his lips and thrown it into the grate.

‘What is the use of that? I have a case full.’

‘They shall all follow the first.’

‘Well, then, I won’t smoke.’

‘I’ll see that you don’t.’

‘Well, what the better are you for that?’

‘Now, be nice.’

‘Go back to your chair and have some more tea.’

‘Oh, bother the tea!’

‘Well, I won’t speak to you unless you sit down and behave yourself.’

‘There now! Speak away.’

‘Look here, dear Violet, you must not talk about this any more. Some things are possible and some are impossible. This is absolutely, finally impossible. We can never go back upon the past. It is finished and done with.’

‘Then what did you come here for?’

‘To bid you good-bye.’

‘A Platonic good-bye.’

‘Of course.’

‘In a private room at Mariani’s.’

‘Why not?’

She laughed bitterly.

‘You were always a little mad, Frankie.’

He leaned earnestly over the table.

‘Look here, Violet, the chances are that we shall never meet again.’

‘It takes two to say that.’

‘Well, I mean that after to-day I should not meet you again. If you were not quite what you are it would be easier. But as it is I find it a little too much of a test. No, don’t mistake me or think that I am weakening. That is impossible. But all the same I don’t want to go through it again.’

‘So sorry if I have upset you.’

He disregarded her irony.

‘We have been very good friends, Violet. Why should we part as enemies?’

‘Why should we part at all?’

‘We won’t go back over that. Now do please look facts in the face and help me to do the right thing, for it would be so much easier if you would help me. If you were a very good and kind girl you would shake my hand, like any other old pal, and wish me joy of my marriage. You know that I should do so if I knew that you were going to be married.’

But the lady was not to be so easily appeased. She took her tea in silence or answered his remarks with monosyllables, while the occasional flash of her dark eyes as she raised them was like the distant lightning which heralds the storm. Suddenly, with a swift rustle of skirts, she was between the door and his chair.

‘Now, Frankie, we have had about enough of this nonsense,’ said she. ‘Don’t imagine that you are going to get out of this thing so easily. I’ve got you, and I'll keep you.'

He faced round in his chair and looked helplessly at her with a hand upon each knee.

'O Lord! Don't begin it all over again,' said he.

'No, I won't,' she answered with an angry laugh. 'I'll try another line this time, Master Frank. I'm not the sort of woman who lets a thing go easily when once I have set my heart upon it. I won't try coaxing any longer - '

'So glad,' he murmured.

'You may say what you like, but you can't do it, my boy. I knew you before she did, and I'll keep you, or else I'll make such a row that you will be sorry that you ever put my back up. It's all very fine to sit there and preach, but it won't do, Frankie. You can't slip out of things as easily as all that.'

'Why should you turn nasty like this, Violet? What do you think you will gain by it?'

'I mean to gain *you*. I like you, Frankie. I'm not sure that I don't really love you - real, real love, you know. Any way, I don't intend to let you go, and if you go against my will I give you my word that I shall make it pretty sultry for you down at Woking.'

He stared moodily into his teacup.

'Besides, what rot it all is!' she continued, laying her hand upon his shoulder. 'When did you begin to ride the high moral horse? You were just as cheerful as the rest of them when last I saw you. You speak as if a man ceased to live just because he is married. What has changed you?'

'I'll tell you what has changed me,' said he, looking up. 'My wife has changed me.'

'Oh, bother your wife!'

A look which was new to her came over his face.

'Stop that!' said he sharply.

'Oh, no harm! How has your wife made this wonderful change?'

His mood softened as his thoughts flew back to Woking.

'By her own goodness - the atmosphere that she makes round her. If you knew how wholesome she was, how delicate in her most intimate thoughts, how fresh and how sweet and how pure, you would understand that the thought of being false to her is horrible. When I think of her as she sat at breakfast this morning, so loving and so innocent - '

He would have been more discreet if he had been less eloquent. The lady's temper suddenly overflowed.

'Innocent!' she cried. 'As innocent as I am.'

He sprang to his feet with eyes which were more angry than her own.

'Hold your tongue! How dare you talk against my wife! You are not fit to mention her name.'

'I'll go to Woking,' she gasped.

'You can go to the devil!' said he, and rang the bell for his bill. She stared at him with a surprise which had eclipsed her anger, while she pulled on her gloves with little sharp twitches. This was a new Frank Crosse to her. As long as a woman gets on very well with a man, she is apt, at the back of her soul, to suspect him of weakness. It is only when she differs from him that she can see the other side, and it always comes as a surprise. She liked him better than ever for the revelation.

'I'm not joking,' she whispered, as they went down the stair. 'I'll go, as sure as fate.'

He took no notice, but passed on down the street without a word of farewell. When he came to the turning he looked back. She was standing by the curb, with her proud head high in the air, while the manager screamed loudly upon a whistle. A cab swung round a distant corner. Crosse reached her before it did.

'I hope I haven't hurt your feelings,' said he. 'I spoke too roughly.'

'Trying to coax me away from Woking,' she sneered. 'I'm coming all the same.'

'That's your affair,' said he, as he handed her into the cab.

CHAPTER XIX - DANGER

Again the bright little dining-room, with the morning sun gleaming upon the high silver coffee pot and the electro-plated toast-rack - everything the same, down to the plates which Jemima had once again forgotten to warm. Maude, with the golden light playing upon the fringes of her curls, and throwing two little epaulettes of the daintiest pink across her shoulders, sat in silence, glancing across from time to time with interrogative eyes at her husband. He ate his breakfast moodily, for he was very ill at ease. There was a struggle within him, for his conscience was pulling him one way and his instincts the other. Instincts are a fine old conservative force, while conscience is a thing of yesterday, so it is usually safe to prophesy which will sway the other.

The matter at issue was whether he should tell Maude about Violet Wright. If she were going to carry out her threat, then certainly it would be better to prepare her. But after all, his arguments of yesterday might prevail with her when her first impetuous fit of passion was over. Why should he go half-way to meet danger? If it came, nothing which he could say would ward it off. If it did not come, there was no need for saying anything. Conscience told him that it would be better to be perfectly straight with his wife. Instinct told him that though she would probably be sweet and sympathetic over it, yet it would rankle in her mind and poison her thoughts. And perhaps for once, Instinct may have been better than Conscience. Do not ask too many questions, you young wife! Do not be too free with your reminiscences, you young husband. There are things which can be forgiven, but never, never, can they be forgotten. That highest thing on earth, the heart of a loving woman, is too tender, too sacred, to be bruised by a wanton confidence. You are hers. She is yours. The future lies with both of you. It is wiser to leave the past alone. The couples who boast that they have never had a secret are sometimes happy because the boast is sometimes untrue.

‘You won’t be late to-day, Frank,’ said Maude at last, peeping round the tall coffee-pot.

‘No, dear, I won’t.’

‘You were yesterday, you know.’

‘Yes, I know I was.’

‘Were you kept at the office?’

‘No, I had tea with a friend.’

‘At his house?’

‘No, no, at a restaurant. Where has Jemima put my boots? I wonder if she has cleaned them. I can never tell by looking. Here they are. And my coat? Anything I can get you in town? Well, good-bye, dear, good-bye!’ Maude had never seen him make so hurried an exit.

It is always a mystery to the City man how his wife puts in the seven hours a day of loneliness while the E.C. has claimed him for its own. She cannot explain it to him, for she can hardly explain it to herself. It is frittered away in a thousand little tasks, each trivial in itself, and yet making in their sum the difference between a well-ordered and a neglected household. Under the illustrious guidance of the omniscient Mrs. Beeton there is the usual routine to be gone through. The cook has to be seen, the larder examined, the remains cunningly transformed into new and attractive shapes, the dinner to be ordered (anything will do for lunch), and the new supplies to be got in. The husband accepts the excellent little dinner, the fried sole, the *ris de veau en caisse*, the lemon pudding, as if they had grown automatically out of the table-cloth. He knows nothing of the care, the judgment, the prevision which ring the changes with every season, which never relax and never mistake. He enjoys the fruits, but he ignores the work which raised them. And yet the work goes cheerfully and uncomplainingly on.

Then when every preparation has been made for the dinner - that solemn climax of the British day, there is plenty for Maude to do. There is the white chiffon to be taken out of the neck of that dress, and the pink to be put in. Amateur dressmaking is always going on at The Lindens, and Frank has become more careful in his caresses since he found one evening that his wife had a row of pins between her lips - which is not a pleasant discovery to make with your own. Then there are drawers to be tidied, and silver to be cleaned, and the leaves of the gutta-percha plant to be washed, and the feather which was damped yesterday to be re-curled before the fire. That leaves just time before lunch to begin the new novel by glancing at the last two pages to see what *did* happen, and then the three minutes lunch of a lonely woman. So much for business, now for the more trying social duties. The pink dressing-gown is shed and a trim little walking dress -

French grey cloth with white lisse in front and a grey zouave jacket - takes its place. Visiting strangers is not nearly so hard when you are pleased with your dress, and even entertaining becomes more easy when your costumière lives in Regent Street. On Tuesdays Maude is at home. Every other day she hunts through her plate of cards, and is overwhelmed by the sense of her rudeness towards her neighbours. But her task is never finished, though day after day she comes back jaded with her exertions. Strangers still call upon her - 'hope it is not too late to do the right thing, and to welcome,' etc., etc. - and they have to be re-visited. While she is visiting them, other cards appear upon her hall table, and so the foolish and tiresome convention continues to exhaust the time and the energies of its victim.

Those original receptions were really very difficult. Jemima announced a name which might or might not bear some relation to the visitor's. The lady entered. Her name might perhaps be Mrs. Baker. Maude had no means of knowing who Mrs. Baker might be. The visitor seldom descended to an explanation. Ten minutes of desultory and forced conversation about pinewoods and golf and cremation. A cup of tea and a departure. Then Maude would rush to the card-tray to try to find out whom it was that she had been talking to, and what it was all about.

Maude did not intend to go visiting that particular day, and she had hoped that no one might visit her. The hours of danger were almost past, and it was close upon four o'clock, when there came a brisk pull at the bell.

'Mrs. White,' said Jemima, opening the drawing-room door.

'Wright,' said the visitor, as she walked in - 'Mrs. Violet Wright.'

Maude rose with her pleasant smile. It was a peculiarly sweet and kindly smile, for it was inspired by a gentle womanly desire to make things pleasant for all who were around her. Amiability was never artificial with her, for she had the true instincts of a lady - those instincts so often spoken of, so seldom, so very seldom seen. Like a gentleman, or a Christian, or any other ideal, it is but a poor approximation which is commonly attained.

But the visitor did not respond to the pretty gesture of welcome, nor did her handsome face return that sympathetic smile. They stood for an instant looking at each other, the one tall, masterful, mature, the other sweet, girlish, and self-distrustful, but each beautiful and engaging in her own way. Lucky Master Frank, whose past and present could take such a form; but luckier still if he could have closed the past when the present opened. The visitor was silent, but her dark eyes looked critically and fixedly at her rival. Maude, setting the silence down to the shyness of a first visit, tried to make matters easier.

‘Please try this armchair. No doubt you have had a tiring walk. It is still very warm in the afternoons. I think it was so kind of you to call.’

A faint smile flickered upon the dark face.

‘Kind of me to call!’ said she.

‘Yes; for in a rising place like Woking, with so many new arrivals, it must be quite a task for the older inhabitants to welcome them. I have been so surprised by the kindness which every one has shown.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said her visitor, ‘you think that I live here. I have really just come down from London.’

‘Indeed,’ said Maude, and awaited an explanation. As none was forthcoming, she added, ‘You will find Woking a very nice place.’

‘A nice place to be buried in, alive or dead,’ said her visitor.

There was something peculiarly ungracious in her tone and manner. It seemed to Maude that she had never before been alone with so singular a person. There was, in the first place, her striking and yet rather sinister and voluptuous beauty.

Then there was the absolute carelessness of her manner, the quiet assumption that she was outside the usual conventionalities of life. It is a manner only to be met in English life, among some of the highest of the high world, and some of the highest of the half world. It was new to Maude, and it made her uncomfortable, while mingled with it there was something else which made her feel for the first time in her life that she had incurred the hostility of a fellow-mortal. It chilled her, and made her unhappy.

The visitor made no effort to sustain the conversation, but leaned back in her chair and stared at her hostess with a very critical and searching glance. Those two questioning dark eyes played eagerly over her from her brown curls down to the little shining shoe-tips which peeped from under the grey skirt. Especially they dwelt upon her face, reading it and rereading it. Never had Maude been so inspected, and her instinct told her that the inspection was not altogether a friendly one.

Violet Wright having examined her rival, proceeded now with the same cool attention to take in her surroundings. She looked round deliberately at the furniture of the room, and reconstructed in her own mind the life of the people who owned it. Maude ventured upon one or two conventional remarks, but her visitor was not to be diverted to the weather or to the slowness of the South-Western train service. She continued her quiet and silent inspection. Suddenly she rose and swept across to the side-table. A photograph of Frank in his volunteer uniform stood upon it.

‘This is your husband, Mr. Frank Crosse?’

‘Yes, do you know him?’

‘Slightly. We have mutual friends.’ An ambiguous smile played across her face as she spoke. ‘This must have been taken after I saw him.’

‘It was taken just after our marriage.’

‘Quite so. He looks like a good little married man. The photograph is flattering.’

‘Oh, you think so!’ said Maude coldly. ‘My own impression is that it fails to do him justice.’

Her visitor laughed. ‘Of course that *would* be your impression,’ said she.

Maude’s gentle soul began to rise in anger.

‘It is the truth,’ she cried.

‘It is right that you should think so,’ the other answered, with the same irritating laugh.

‘You must have known him very slightly if you can’t see that it is the truth.’

‘Then I must have known him very slightly.’

Maude was very angry indeed. She began to find sides to her own nature the very existence of which she had never suspected. She tapped her little shoe upon the ground, and she sat with a pale face, and compressed lips, and bright eyes, quite prepared to be very rude indeed to this eccentric woman who ventured to criticise her Frank in so free and easy a style. Her visitor watched her, and a change had come over her expression. Maude’s evident anger seemed to amuse and interest her. Her eyes lost their critical coldness, and softened into approval. She suddenly put her hand upon the other’s shoulder with so natural and yet masterful a gesture, that Maude found it impossible to resent it.

‘He is a lucky man to have such a warm little champion,’ said she.

Her strong character and greater knowledge of the world gave her an ascendency over the girlish wife such as age has over youth. There were not ten years between them, and yet Maude felt that for some reason the conversation between them could not quite be upon equal terms. The quiet assurance of her visitor, whatever its cause, made resentment or remonstrance difficult. Besides, they were a pair of very kindly as well as of very shrewd eyes which now looked down into hers.

‘You love him very much, then?’

‘Of course I love him. He is my husband.’

‘Does it always follow?’

‘You are married yourself. Don’t you love yours?’

‘Oh, never mind mine. *He’s* all right. Did you ever love any one else?’

‘No, not really.’

Maude was astonished at herself, and yet the questions were so frankly put that a frank answer came naturally to them. It pleased her to lose that cold chill of dislike, and to feel that for some reason her strange visitor had become more friendly to her.

‘You lucky girl, you actually married the one love of your life!’

Maude smiled and nodded.

‘What a splendid thing to do! I thought it only happened in books. How happy you must be!’

‘I *am* very, very happy.’

‘Well, I dare say you deserve to be. Besides, you really are very pretty. If ever you had a rival, I should think that it must be some consolation to her to know that it was so charming a person who cut her out.’

Maude laughed at the thought.

‘I never had a rival,’ said she. ‘My husband never *really* loved until he met me.’

‘Did he - oh yes, quite so! That is so nice that you should both start with a clean sheet! I thought you were very handsome just now when you were angry with me, but you are quite delightful with that little flush upon your cheeks. If I had been a man, your husband would certainly have had one rival in his wooing. And so he really never loved any one but you? I thought that also only happened in books.’

There was a hard and ironic tone in the last sentences which jarred upon Maude’s sensitive nature. She glanced up quickly and was surprised at the look of pain which had come upon her companion’s face. It relaxed into a serious serenity.

‘That fits in beautifully,’ said she. ‘But there’s one bit of advice which I should like to give you, if you won’t think it a liberty. Don’t be selfish in your married life.’

‘Selfish!’

‘Yes, there is a kind of family selfishness which is every bit as bad - I am not sure that it is not worse - than personal selfishness. People love each other, and they shut out the world, and have no thought for any one else, and the whole universe can slide to perdition so long as their love is not disturbed. That is what I call family selfishness. It’s a sin and a shame.’

Maude looked at this strange woman in amazement. She was speaking fast and hotly, like one whose bitter thoughts have been long penned up for want of a suitable listener.

‘Remember the women who have been less fortunate than you. Remember the thousands who are starving, dying, for want of love, and no love comes their way; whose hearts yearn and faint for that which Nature owes them, but Nature never pays her debt. Remember the plain women. Remember the lonely women. Above all, remember your unfortunate sisters; they, the most womanly of all, who have been ruined by their own kindliness and trust and loving weakness. It is that family selfishness which turns every house in the land into a fort to be held against these poor wanderers. They make them evil, and then they revile the very evil which they have made. When I look back - ‘

She stopped with a sudden sob. Her forearm fell upon the mantelpiece, and her forehead upon her forearm. In an instant Maude was by her side, the tears running down her cheeks, for the sight of grief was always grief to her, and her nerves were weakened by this singular interview.

‘Dear Mrs. Wright, don’t cry!’ she whispered, and her little white hand passed in a soothing, hesitating gesture over the coil of rich chestnut hair. ‘Don’t cry! I am afraid you have suffered. Oh, how I wish I could help you! Do tell me how I can help you.’

But Violet’s occasional fits of weakness were never of a very long duration. She dashed her hand impatiently across her eyes, straightened her tall figure, and laughed as she glanced at herself in the mirror.

‘Madame Celandine would be surprised if she could see how I have treated one of her masterpieces,’ said she, as she straightened her crushed hat, and arranged her hair with those quick little deft pats of the palm with which women can accomplish so much in so short a time. Rumpled finery sets the hands of every woman within sight of it fidgeting, so Maude joined in at the patting and curling and forgot all about her tears.

‘There, that will have to do,’ said Violet at last. ‘I am so sorry to have made such a fool of myself. I don’t err upon the sentimental side as a rule.

I suppose it is about time that I thought of catching my train for town. I have a theatre engagement which I must not miss.'

'How strange it is!' said Maude, looking at her own pretty tear-marked face in the mirror. 'You have only been here a few minutes, as time goes, and yet I feel that in some things I am more intimate with you than with any woman I have ever met. How can it be? What bond can there be to draw us together like this? And it is the more extraordinary, because I felt that you disliked me when you entered the room, and I am sure that you won't be offended if I say that when you had been here a little I thought that I disliked you. But I don't. On the contrary, I wish you could come every day. And I want to come and see you also when I am in town.'

Maude, for all her amiability, was not gushing by nature, and this long speech caused her great astonishment when she looked back upon it. But at the moment it came so naturally from her heart that she never paused to think of its oddity. Her enthusiasm was a little chilled, however, by the way in which her advances were received. Violet Wright's eyes were more kindly than ever, but she shook her head.

'No, I don't suppose we shall ever meet again. I don't think I could ask you to visit me in London. I wanted to see you, and I have seen you, but that, I fear, must be the end of it.'

Maude's lip trembled in a way which it had when she was hurt.

'Why did you wish to see me, then?' she asked.

'On account of that slight acquaintance with your husband. I thought it would be interesting to see what sort of wife he had chosen.'

'I hope you are not disappointed,' said Maude, making a roguish face.

'He has done very well - better than I expected.'

'You had not much respect for his taste, then?'

'Oh yes, I always thought highly of his taste.'

'You have such a pretty way of putting things. You know my husband very slightly, but still I can see that you know the world very well. I often wonder if I am really the best kind of woman that he could have married. Do you think I am, Mrs. Wright?'

Her visitor looked in silence for a little at the gentle grace and dainty sympathetic charm of the woman before her.

'Yes,' she said slowly, as one who weighs her words. 'I think you are. You are a lady with a lady's soul in you. A woman can draw a man down very low, or she can make him live at his very highest. Don't be soft with him. Don’t give way when you know that your way is the higher way. Pull him up, don’t let him ever pull you down. Then his respect for you will strengthen his love for you, and the two together are so much greater than either one apart. Your instinct would be to do this, and therefore you are the best sort of woman for him.’

Her opinion was given with so much thought, and yet so much decision, that Maude glowed with pride and with pleasure. There was knowledge and authority behind the words of this unaccountable woman.

‘How sweet you are!’ she cried. ‘I feel that what you say is true. I feel that that is what a wife should be to her husband. Please God, I will be so to Frank!’

‘And one other piece of advice before I leave you,’ said Violet Wright. ‘Don’t ever take your husband for granted. Don’t ever accept his kiss or caress as a routine thing. Don’t ever relax those little attentions which you showed him in the earliest days. Don’t let the freshness go out of love, for the love may soon follow it, even when duty keeps the man true. It is the commonest mistake which married women make. It has caused more unhappiness than any other. They do not realise it until it is too late. Be keenly watchful for your husband’s wants and comforts. It is not the comfort but the attention which he values. If it is not there he will say nothing, if he is a good fellow, but he notices it all the same. She has changed, he thinks. And from that moment he will begin to change also. Be on your guard against that. It is very unselfish of me to give you all this wise counsel.’

‘It is very good of you, and I feel that it is all so true. But why is it unselfish of you?’

‘I only meant that I had no interest in the matter. What does it matter to me whether you keep his love or not. And yet I don’t know.’ She suddenly put her arms round Maude, and kissed her upon the cheek. ‘You are a good little sort, and I hope you will be happy.’

Frank Crosse had disentangled himself from the rush of City men emerging from the Woking station, and he was walking swiftly through the gathering gloom along the vile, deeply-rutted road, which formed a short cut to The Lindens. Suddenly, with a sinking heart, he was aware of a tall graceful figure which was sweeping towards him. There could not be two women of that height, who carried themselves in that fashion.

‘Violet!’

‘Hullo, Frankie! I thought it might be you, but those tall hats and black overcoats make every one alike. Your wife will be glad to see you.’

‘Violet! You have ruined our happiness. How could you have the heart to do it! It is not for myself I speak, God knows. But to think of her feelings being so abused, her confidence so shaken - ‘

‘All right, Frankie, there is nothing to be tragic about.’

‘Haven’t you been to my house?’

‘Yes, I have.’

‘And seen her?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well then - ‘

‘I didn’t give you away, my boy. I was a model of discretion. I give you my word that it is all right. And she’s a dear little soul, Frankie. You’re not worthy to varnish those pretty patent leathers of hers. You know you’re not. And by Jove, Frankie, if you had stayed with me yesterday I should never have forgiven you - no, never! I’ll resign in her favour. I will. But in no one else’s, and if ever I hear of your going wrong, my boy, or doing anything but the best with that sweet trusting woman, I’ll make you curse the day that ever you knew me - I will, by the living Jingo.’

‘Do, Violet - you have my leave.’

‘All right. The least said the soonest mended. Give me a kiss before we part.’

She raised her veil, and he kissed her. He was wearing some withered flower in his overcoat, and she took it from him.

‘It’s a souvenir of our friendship, Frankie, and rather a good emblem of it also. So-long!’ said she, as she turned down the weary road which leads to the station. A young golfer, getting in at Byfleet, was surprised to see a handsome woman weeping bitterly in the corner of a second-class carriage. ‘Comm’ up from roastin’ somebody at that damned crematory place,’ was his explanation to his companion.

Frank had a long and animated account from Maude of the extraordinary visitor whom she had entertained. ‘It’s such a pity, dear, that you don’t know her well, for I should really like to hear every detail about her. At first I thought she was mad, and then I thought she was odious, and then finally she seemed to be the very wisest and kindest woman that I had ever known. She made me angry, and frightened, and grieved, and grateful, and affectionate, one after the other, and I never in my life was so taken out of myself by any one. She *is* so sensible!'

'Sensible, is she?'

'And she said that I was - oh! I can't repeat it - everything that is nice.'

'Then she *is* sensible.'

'And such a high opinion of your taste.'

'Had she indeed.'

'Do you know, Frank, I really believe that in a quiet, secret, retiring sort of way she has been fond of you herself.'

'O Maude, what funny ideas you get sometimes! I say, if we are going out for dinner, it is high time that we began to dress.'

CHAPTER XX - NO. 5 CHEYNE ROW

Frank had brought home the *Life of Carlyle,* and Maude had been dipping into it in the few spare half-hours which the many duties of a young housekeeper left her. At first it struck her as dry, but from the moment that she understood that this was, among other things, an account of the inner life of a husband and a wife, she became keenly interested, and a passionate and unreasonable partisan. For Frederick and Cromwell and the other great issues her feelings were tolerant but lukewarm. But the great sex-questions of 'How did he treat her?' and of 'How did she stand it?' filled her with that eternal and personal interest with which they affect every woman. Her gentle nature seldom disliked any one, but certainly amongst those whom she liked least, the gaunt figure of the Chelsea sage began to bulk largely. One night, as Frank sat reading in front of the fire, he suddenly found his wife on her knees upon the rug, and a pair of beseeching eyes upon his face.

'Frank, dear, I want you to make me a promise.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Will you grant it?'

'How can I tell you when I have not heard it?'

'How horrid you are, Frank! A year ago you would have promised first and asked afterwards.'

'But I am a shrewd old married man now. Well, let me hear it.'

'I want you to promise me that you will never be a Carlyle.'

'No, no, never.'

'Really?'

'Really and truly.'

'You swear it?'

'Yes, I do.'

'O Frank, you can't think what a relief that is to me. That dear, good, helpful, little lady - it really made me cry this morning when I thought how she had been used.'

'How, then?'

'I have been reading that green-covered book of yours, and he seemed so cold and so sarcastic and so unsympathetic. He never seemed to appreciate all that she did for him. He had no thought for her. He lived in his books and never in her - such a harsh, cruel man!'

Frank went upstairs, and returned with a volume in his hand.

'When you have finished the 'Life,' you must read this, dear.'

'What is it?'

'It is her letters. They were arranged for publication after her death, while her husband was still alive. You know that - '

'Please take it for granted, darling, that I know nothing. It is so jolly to have some one before whom it is not necessary to keep up appearances. Now, begin at the beginning and go ahead.' She pillowed her head luxuriously against his knees.

'There's nothing to tell - or very little. As you say, they had their troubles in life. The lady could take particularly good care of herself, I believe. She had a tongue like a lancet when she chose to use it. He, poor chap, was all liver and nerves, porridge-poisoned in his youth. No children to take the angles off them. Half a dozen little buffer states would have kept them at peace. However, to hark back to what I was about to say, he outlived her by fifteen years or so. During that time he collected these letters, and he has annotated them. You can read those notes here, and the man who wrote those notes loved his wife and cherished her memory, if ever a man did upon earth.'

The graceful head beside his knee shook impatiently.

'What is the use of that to the poor dead woman? Why could not he show his love by kindness and thought for her while she was alive?'

'I tell you, Maude, there were two sides to that. Don't be so prejudiced! And remember that no one has ever blamed Carlyle as bitterly as he has blamed himself. I could read you bits of these notes - '

'Well, do.'

'Here's the first letter, in which she is talking about how they first moved into the house at Cheyne Row. They spent their early years in Scotland, you know, and he was a man going on to the forties when he came to London. The success of *Sartor Resartus* encouraged them to the step. Her letter describes all the incoming. Here is his comment, written after her death: "In about a week all was swept and garnished, fairly habitable; and continued incessantly to get itself polished, civilised, and beautified to a degree that surprised one. I have elsewhere alluded to all that, and to my little Jeannie's conduct of it; heroic, lovely, pathetic, mournfully beautiful as in the light of Eternity that little scene of time now looks to me. From birth upwards she had lived in opulence, and now became poor for me - so nobly poor. No such house for beautiful thrift, quiet, spontaneous, nay, as it were, unconscious minimum of money reconciled to human comfort and human dignity, have I anywhere looked upon where I have been." Now, Maude, did that man appreciate his wife?'

But the obstinate head still shook.

'Words, words,' said she.

'Yes, but words with the ring of truth in them. Can't you tell real feeling from sham? I don't believe women can, or they would not be so often taken in. Here's the heading of the next letter: "Mournfully beautiful is this letter to me, a clear little household light shining pure and brilliant in the dark obstructive places of the past" - a little later comes the note: "Oh my poor little woman - become poor for me."'

'I like to hear him talk like that. Yes, I do like him better after what you have said, Frank.'

'You must remember two things about him, Maude. The first, that he was a Scotchman, who are of all men the least likely to wear their hearts upon their sleeves; the other, that his mind was always grappling with some far-away subject which made him forget the smaller things close by him.'

'But the smaller things are everything to a woman,' said Maude. 'If ever you forget those smaller things, sir, to be as courteous to your wife as you would be to any other lady, to be loving and thoughtful and sympathetic, it will be no consolation to me to know that you have written the grandest book that ever was. I should just hate that book, and I believe that in her inmost heart this poor lady hated all the books that had taken her husband away from her. I wonder if their house is still standing.'

'Certainly it is. Would you like to visit it?'

'I don't think there is anything I should like more.'

'Why, Maude, we are getting quite a distinguished circle of acquaintances. Mr. Pepys last month - and now the Carlyles. Well, we could not spend a Saturday afternoon better, so if you will meet me to-morrow at Charing Cross, we shall have a cosy little lunch together at Gatti's, and then go down to Chelsea.'

Maude was a rigid economist, and so was Frank in his way, for with the grand self-respect of the middle classes the thought of debt was unendurable to them. A cab in preference to a ‘bus gave both of them a feeling of dissipation, but none the less they treated themselves to one on the occasion of this, their little holiday. It is a delightful thing to snuggle up in, is a hansom; but in order to be really trim and comfortable one has to put one’s arm round one’s companion’s waist. No one can observe it there, for the vehicle is built upon intelligent principles. The cabman, it is true, can overlook you through a hole in the roof. This cabman did so, and chuckled in his cravat. ‘If that cove’s wife could see him - huddup, then!’ said the cabman.

He was an intelligent cabman too, for having heard Frank say ‘Thomas Carlyle’s house’ after giving the address 5 Cheyne Row, he pulled up on the Thames Embankment. Right ahead of them was Chelsea Bridge, seen through a dim, soft London haze - monstrous, Cyclopean, giant arches springing over a vague river of molten metal, the whole daintily blurred, as though out of focus. The glamour of the London haze, what is there upon earth so beautiful? But it was not to admire it that the cabman had halted.

‘I beg your pardin’, sir,’ said he, in the softly insinuating way of the Cockney, ‘but I thought that maybe the lidy would like to see Mr. Carlyle’s statue. That’s ‘im, sir, a-sittin’ in the overcoat with the book in ‘is ‘and.’

Frank and Maude got out and entered the small railed garden, in the centre of which the pedestal rose. It was very simple and plain - an old man in a dressing-gown, with homely wornout boots, a book upon his knee, his eyes and thoughts far away. No more simple statue in all London, but human to a surprising degree. They stood for five minutes and stared at it.

‘Well,’ said Frank at last, ‘small as it is, I think it is worthy of the man.’

‘It is so natural.’

‘You can see him think. By Jove, it is splendid!’ Frank had enough of the true artist to be able to feel that rush of enthusiasm which adequate work should cause. That old man, with his head shamefully defiled by birds, was a positive joy to him. Among the soulless, pompous, unspeakable London statues, here at last there was one over which it is pleasant to linger.

‘What other one is there?’

‘Gordon in Trafalgar Square.’

‘Well, Gordon, perhaps. But our Nelsons and Napiers and Havelocks - to think that we could do no better than that for them! Now, dear, we have seen the man - let us look at the house!’

It had evidently been an old-fashioned building when first they came to it. 1708 was the date at the corner of the street. Six or seven drab-coloured, flat-chested, dim-windowed houses stood in a line - theirs wedged in the middle of them. A poor medallion with a profile head of him had been clumsily let into the wall. Several worn steps led to the thin high door with an old-fashioned fanlight above it. Frank rang the bell, and a buxom cheerful matron came at the call.

‘Names in this book, sir - *and* address, if you please,’ said the cheery matron. ‘One shilling each - thank you, sir. First door to the left, sir! This was the dining-room, sir - ‘

But Frank had come to a dead stop in the dim, dull, wood-panelled hall. In front of them rose the stairs with old-fashioned banisters, cracked, warped, and dusty.

‘It’s awful to think of, Maude - awful! To think that she ran up those stairs as a youngish woman - that he took them two at a time as an active man, and then that they hobbled and limped down them, old and weary and broken, and now both dead and gone for ever, and the stairs standing, the very rails, the very treads - I don’t know that I ever felt so strongly what bubbles of the air we are, so fragile, so utterly dissolved when the prick comes.’

‘How *could* they be happy in such a house?’ said Maude. ‘I can feel that there have been sorrow and trouble here. There is an atmosphere of gloom.’

The matron-attendant approved of emotion, but in its due order. One should be affected in the dining-room first, and then in the hall. And so at her summons they followed her into the long, low, quaint room in which this curious couple had lived their everyday life. Little of the furniture was left, and the walls were lined with collected pictures bearing upon the life of the Carlyles.

‘There’s the fireplace that he smoked his pipe up,’ said Frank.

‘Why up the fireplace?’

‘She did not like the smell in the room. He often at night took his friends down into the kitchen.’

‘Fancy my driving you into the kitchen.’

‘Well, the habit of smoking was looked upon much less charitably at that time.’

‘And besides, he smoked clay pipes,’ said the matron. ‘This is considered a good print of Mrs. Carlyle.’

It was a peaky eager face, with a great spirit looking out of it, and possibilities of passion both for good and evil in the keen, alert features. Just beside her was the dour, grim outline of her husband. Their life-histories were in those two portraits.

‘Poor dear!’ said Maude.

‘Ay, you may say so,’ said the matron, whose accent showed that she was from the north of the Tweed. ‘He was gey ill to live wi’. His own mither said so. Now, what think you that room was for?’

It was little larger than a cupboard, without window or skylight, opening out of the end of the dining-room.

‘I can’t imagine.’

‘Well, sir, it was the powdering-room in the days when folk wore wigs. The powder made such a mess that they just had a room for nothing else. There was a hole in the door, and the man put his head through the hole, and the barber on the other side powdered him out of the flour-dredger.’

It was curious to be brought back in this fashion to those far-off days, and to suddenly realise how many other people had played their tragi-comedies within these walls. Wigs! Only the dressy people wore wigs. So people of fashion in the days of the early Georges trod these same rooms where Carlyle grumbled and his wife fretted. And they too had grumbled and fretted - or worse perhaps. It was a ghostly old house.

‘This,’ said the matron, when they had passed up the stair, ‘used to be the drawing-room. That’s their sofa.’

‘Not *the* sofa,’ said Frank.

‘Yes, sir, the sofa that is mentioned in the letters.’

‘She was so proud of it, Maude. Gave eighteen shillings for it, and covered and stuffed it herself. And that, I suppose, is *the* screen. She was a great housekeeper - brought up a spoiled child, according to her own account, but a great housekeeper all the same. What’s that writing in the case?’

‘It is the history that he was at work on when he died - something about the kings of Norway, sir. Those are his corrections in blue.’

‘I can’t read them.’

‘No more could any one else, sir. Perhaps that’s why the book has never been published. Those are the portraits of the kings of Prussia, about whom he wrote a book.'

Frank looked with interest at the old engravings, one of the schoolmaster face of the great Frederick, the other of the frog-like features of Frederick William, the half-mad recruiter of the big Potsdam grenadiers. When he had finished, the matron had gone down to open the door, and they were alone. Maude's hand grasped his.

'Is it not strange, dear?' she said. 'Here they lived, the most talented couple in the world, and yet with all their wisdom they missed what we have got - what perhaps that good woman who showed us round has got - the only thing, as it seems to me, that is really worth living for. What are all the wit and all the learning and all the insight into things compared to love.'

'By Jove, little woman, in all this house of wise sayings, no wiser or deeper saying has been said than that. Well, thank God, we have that anyhow!' And he kissed his wife, while six grand electors of Brandenburg and kings of Prussia looked fiercely out upon them from the wall.

They sat down together in two old chairs in the window, and they looked out into the dingy street, and Frank tried to recount all the great men - 'the other great men, as Maude said, half chaffing and half earnest - who had looked through those panes. Tennyson, Ruskin, Emerson, Mill, Froude, Mazzini, Leigh Hunt - he had got so far when the matron returned.

There was a case in the corner with some of the wreckage from those vanished vessels. Notes from old Goethe in a singularly neat boyish writing inscribed upon little ornamented cards. Here, too, were small inscriptions which had lain upon presents from Carlyle to his wife. It was pleasant among all that jangling of the past to think of the love which had written them, and that other love which had so carefully preserved them. On one was written: 'All good attend my darling through this gulf of time and through the long ocean it is leading to. Amen. Amen. T. C.' On another, dated 1850, and attached evidently to some birthday present, was: 'Many years to my poor little Jeannie, and may the worst of them be past. No good that is in me to give her shall ever be wanting while I live. May God bless her.' How strange that this apostle of reticence should have such privacies as these laid open before the curious public within so few years of his death!

'This is her bedroom,' said the matron.

'And here is the old red bed,' cried Frank. It looked bare and gaunt and dreary with its uncurtained posts.

‘The bed belonged to Mrs. Carlyle’s mother,’ the matron explained. ‘It’s the same bed that Mrs. Carlyle talks about in her letters when she says how she pulled it to pieces.’

‘Why did she pull it to pieces?’ asked Maude.

‘Better not inquire, dear.’

‘Indeed you’re right, sir. If you get them into these old houses, it is very hard to get them out. A cleaner woman than Mrs. Carlyle never came out of Scotland. This little room behind was his dressing-room. There’s his stick in the corner. Look what’s written upon the window!’

Decidedly it was a ghostly house. Scratched upon one of the panes with a diamond was the following piece of information - ‘John Harbel Knowles cleaned all the windows in this house, and painted part, in the eighteenth year of age. *March 7th*, 1794.’

‘Who was *he*?’ asked Maude.

‘Nobody knows, miss!’ It was characteristic of Maude that she was so gentle in her bearing that every one always took it for granted that she was Miss. Frank examined the writing carefully.

‘He was the son of the house and a young aristocrat who had never done a stroke of work before in his life,’ said he.

The matron was surprised.

‘What makes you say that, sir?’

‘What would a workman do with such a name as John Harbel Knowles, or with a diamond ring for that matter? And who would dare to disfigure a window so, if he were not of the family? And why should he be so proud of his work, unless work was a new and wondrous thing to him. To paint *part* of the windows also sounds like the amateur and not the workman. So I repeat that it was the first achievement of the son of the house.’

‘Well, indeed, I dare say you are right, though I never thought of it before,’ said the matron. ‘Now this, up here, is Carlyle’s own room, in which he slept for forty-seven years. In the case is a cast of his head taken after death.’

It was strange and rather ghastly to see a plaster head in this room where the head of flesh had so often lain. Maude and Frank stood beside it, and gazed long and silently while the matron, half-bored and half-sympathetic, waited for them to move on. It was an aquiline face, very different from any picture which they had seen, sunken cheeks, an old man's toothless mouth, a hawk nose, a hollow eye - the gaunt timbers of what had once been a goodly house. There was repose, and something of surprise also, in the features - also a very subtle serenity and dignity.

'The distance from the ear to the forehead is said to be only equalled by Napoleon and by Gladstone. That's what they *say*,' said the matron, with Scotch caution.

'It's the face of a noble man when all is said and done,' said Frank. 'I believe that the true Thomas Carlyle without the dyspepsia, and the true Jane Welsh without the nerves, are knowing and loving each other in some further life.'

'It is sweet to think so,' cried Maude. 'Oh, I do hope that it is so! How dear death would be if we could only be certain of that!'

The matron smiled complacently in the superior wisdom of the Shorter Catechism. 'There is neither marriage nor giving in marriage,' said she, shaking her head. 'This is the spare bedroom, sir, where Mr. Emerson slept when he was here. And now if you will step this way I will show you the study.'

It was the singular room which Carlyle had constructed in the hopes that he could shut out all the noises of the universe, the crowing of cocks, and the jingling of a young lady's five-finger exercise in particular. It had cost him a hundred odd pounds, and had ended in being unendurably hot in summer, impossibly cold in winter, and so constructed acoustically that it reverberated every sound in the neighbourhood. For once even his wild and whirling words could hardly match the occasion - not all his *kraft sprachen* would be too much. For the rest it was at least a roomy and lofty apartment, with space for many books, and for an irritable man to wander to and fro. Prints there were of many historical notables, and slips of letters and of memoranda in a long glass case.

'That is one of his clay pipes,' said the matron. 'He had them all sent through to him from Glasgow. And that is the pen with which he wrote *Frederick*.'

It was a worn, stubby old quill, much the worse for its monstrous task. It at least of all quill pens might rest content with having done its work in the world. Some charred paper beside it caught Frank's eye.

'Oh look, Maude,' he cried. 'This is a little bit of the burned *French Revolution*.'

‘Oh, I remember. He lent the only copy to a friend, and it was burned by mistake.’

‘What a blow! What a frightful blow! And to think that his first comment to his wife was, “Well, Mill, poor fellow, is very much cut up about this.” There is Carlyle at his best. And here is actually a shred of the old manuscript. How beautifully he wrote in those days!’

‘Read this, sir,’ said the matron.

It was part of a letter from Carlyle to his publisher about his ruined work. ‘Do not pity me,’ said he; ‘forward me rather as a runner that is tripped but will not lie there, but run and run again.’

‘See what positive misfortune can do for a man,’ said Frank. ‘It raised him to a hero. And yet he could not stand the test of a crowing cock. How infinitely complex is the human soul - how illimitably great and how pitiably small! Now, if ever I have a study of my own, this is what I want engraved upon the wall. This alone is well worth our pilgrimage to Chelsea.’

It was a short exclamation which had caught his eye.

‘Rest! Rest! Shall I not have all eternity to rest in!’ That serene plaster face down yonder gave force to the brave words. Frank copied them down onto the back of one of Maude’s cards.

And now they had finished the rooms, but the matron, catching a glow from these enthusiastic pilgrims, had yet other things to show them. There was the back garden. Here was the green pottery seat upon which the unphilosophic philosopher had smoked his pipe - a singularly cold and uncomfortable perch. And here was where Mrs. Carlyle had tried to build a tent and to imagine herself in the country. And here was the famous walnut tree - or at least the stumpy bole thereof. And here was where the dog Nero was buried, best known of small white mongrels.

And last of all there was the subterranean and gloomy kitchen, in which there had lived that long succession of serving-maids of whom we gain shadowy glimpses in the *Letters* and in the *Journal*. Poor souls, dwellers in the gloom, working so hard for others, so bitterly reviled when by chance some weakness of humanity comes to break, for an instant, the routine of their constant labour, so limited in their hopes and in their pleasures, they are of all folk upon this planet those for whom a man’s heart may most justly soften. So said Frank as he gazed around him in the dark-cornered room. ‘And never one word of sympathy for them, or of anything save scorn in all his letters. His pen upholding human dignity, but where was the dignity of these poor girls for whom he has usually one bitter line of biography in his notes to his wife's letters? It's the worst thing I have against him.'

'Jemima wouldn't have stood it,' said Maude.

It was pleasant to be out in the open air once more, but they were in the pine groves of Woking before Maude had quite shaken off the gloom of that dark, ghost-haunted house. 'After all, you are only twenty-seven,' she remarked as they walked up from the station. She had a way of occasionally taking a subject by the middle in that way.

'What then, dear?'

'When Carlyle was only twenty-seven I don't suppose he knew he was going to do all this.'

'No, I don't suppose so.'

'And his wife - if he were married then - would feel as I do to you.'

'No doubt.'

'Then what guarantee have I that you won't do it after all?'

'Do what?'

'Why, turn out a second Carlyle.'

'Hear me swear!' cried Frank, and they turned laughing into their own little gateway at the Lindens.

CHAPTER XXI - THE LAST NOTE OF THE DUET

Our young married couples may feel that two is company and three is none, but there comes a little noisy intruder to break into their sweet intimacy. The coming of the third is the beginning of a new life for them as well as for it - a life which is more useful and more permanent, but never so concentrated as before. That little pink thing with the blinking eyes will divert some of the love and some of the attention, and the very trouble which its coming has caused will set its mother’s heart yearning over it. Not so the man. Some vague resentment mixes with his pride of paternity, and his wife’s sufferings rankle in his memory when she has herself forgotten them. His pity, his fears, his helplessness, and his discomfort, give him a share in the domestic tragedy. It is not without cause that in some societies it is the man and not the woman who receives the condolence and the sympathy.

There came a time when Maude was bad, and there came months when she was better, and then there were indications that a day was approaching, the very thought of which was a shadow upon her husband’s life. For her part, with the steadfast, gentle courage of a woman, she faced the future with a sweet serenity. But to him it was a nightmare - an actual nightmare which brought him up damp and quivering in those gray hours of the dawn, when dark shadows fall upon the spirit of man. He had a steady nerve for that which affected himself, a nerve which would keep him quiet and motionless in a dentist’s chair, but what philosophy or hardihood can steel one against the pain which those whom we love have to endure. He fretted and chafed, and always with the absurd delusion that his fretting and chafing were successfully concealed. A hundred failures never convince a man how impossible it is to deceive a woman who loves him. Maude watched him demurely, and made her plans.

‘Do you know, dear,’ said she, one evening, ‘if you can get a week of your holidays now, I think it would be a very good thing for you to accept that invitation of Mr. Mildmay’s, and spend a few days in golfing at Norwich.’

Frank stared at her open-eyed.

'What! Now!'

'Yes, dear, now - at once.'

'But *now* of all times.'

Maude looked at him with that glance of absolute obvious candour which a woman never uses unless she has intent to deceive.

'Yes, dear - but only next week. I thought it would brace you up for - well, for the week afterwards.'

'You think the week afterwards?'

'Yes, dear. It would help me so, if I knew that you were in your best form.'

'*I*! What can it matter what form *I* am in. But in any case, it is out of the question.'

'But you could get leave.'

'Oh yes, easily enough.'

'Then do go.'

'And leave you at such a time!'

'No, no, you would be back.'

'You can't be so sure of that. No, Maude, I should never forgive myself. Such an idea would never enter my head.'

'But for my sake -!'

'That's enough, Maude. It is settled.'

Master Frank had a heavy foot when he did bring it down, and his wife recognised a decisive thud this time. With a curious double current of feeling, she was pleased and disappointed at the same time, but more pleased than disappointed, so she kissed the marrer of her plots.

'What an obstinate old boy it is! But of course you know best, and I should much rather have you at home. As you say, one can never be certain.'

In a conflict of wits the woman may lose a battle, but the odds are that she will win the campaign. The man dissipates over many things, while she concentrates upon the one. Maude had made up her mind absolutely upon one point, and she meant to attain it. She tried here, she tried there, through a friend, through her mother, but Frank was still immovable. The ordeal coming upon herself never disturbed her for an instant. But the thought that Frank would suffer was unendurable. She put herself in his place, and realised what it would be to him if he were in the house at such a time.

With many cunning devices she tried to lure him off, but still, in his stubborn way, he refused to be misled. And then suddenly she realised that it was too late.

It was early one morning that the conviction came home to her, but he, at her side, knew nothing of it. He came up to her before he left for the City.

'You have not eaten anything, dear.'

'No, Frank, I am not hungry.'

'Perhaps, after you get up - '

'Well, dear, I thought of staying in bed.'

'You are not -?'

'What nonsense, dear! I want to keep very quiet until next week, when I may need all my strength.'

'Dear girl, I would gladly give ten years of my life to have next week past.'

'Silly old boy! But I do think it would be wiser if I were to keep in bed.'

'Yes, yes, do.'

'I have a little headache. Nothing to speak of, but just a little.'

'Don't you think Dr. Jordan had better give you something for it.'

'Do you think so? Well, just as you like. You might call as you pass, and tell him to step up.'

And so, upon a false mission, the doctor was summoned to her side, but found a very real mission waiting for him when he got there. She had written a note for Frank the moment that he had left the house, and he found both it and a conspiracy of silence waiting for him when he returned in the late afternoon. The note was upon the hall-table, and he eagerly tore it open.

'My dear boy,' said this mendacious epistle, 'my head is still rather bad, and Dr. Jordan thought that it would be wiser if I were to have an undisturbed rest, but I will send down to you when I feel better. Until then I had best, perhaps, remain alone. Mr. Harrison sent round to say that he would come to help you to pot the bulbs, so that will give you something to do. Don't bother about me, for I only want a little rest. - MAUDE.'

It seemed very unnatural to him to come back and not to hear the swift rustle of the dress which followed always so quickly upon the creak of his latch-key that they might have been the same sound. The hall and dining-room seemed unhomely without the bright welcoming face. He wandered about in a discontented fashion upon his tiptoes, and then, looking through the window, he saw Harrison his neighbour coming up the path with a straw basket in his hand. He opened the door for him with his finger upon his lips.

'Don't make a row, Harrison,' said he, 'my wife's bad.'

Harrison whistled softly.

'Not -?'

'No, no, not that. Only a headache, but she is not to be disturbed. We expect *that* next week. Come in here and smoke a pipe with me. It was very kind of you to bring the bulbs.'

'I am going back for some more.'

'Wait a little. You can go back presently. Sit down and light your pipe. There is some one moving about upstairs. It must be that heavy-footed Jemima. I hope she won't wake Maude up. I suppose one must expect such attacks at such a time.'

'Yes, my wife was just the same. No, thank you, I've just had some tea. You look worried, Crosse. Don't take things too hard.'

'I can't get the thought of next week out of my head. If anything goes wrong - well there, what can I do? I never knew how a man's nerves may be harrowed before. And she is such a saint, Harrison - such an absolutely unselfish saint! You'll never guess what she tried to do.'

'What, then?'

'She knew what it would mean to me - what it will mean to me - to sit here in impotence while she goes through this horrible business. She guessed in some extraordinary way what my secret feelings were about it. And she actually tried to deceive me as to when it was to occur - tried to get me out of the house on one pretext or another until it was all over. That was her plot, and, by Jove, she tried it so cleverly that she would have managed it if something had not put me on my guard. She was a little too eager, unnaturally so, and I saw through her game. But think of it, the absolute unselfishness of it. To consider *me* at such a time, and to face her trouble alone and unsupported in order to make it easier for me. She wanted me to go to Norwich and play golf.'

'She must have thought you pretty guileless, Crosse, to be led away so easily.'

'Yes, it was a hopeless attempt to deceive me on such a point, or to dream for an instant that my instincts would not tell me when she had need of me.

But none the less it was beautiful and characteristic. You don't mind my talking of these things, Harrison?'

'My dear chap, it is just what you need. You have been bottling things up too much. Your health will break down under it. After all, it is not so serious as all that. The danger is very much exaggerated.'

'You think so.'

'I've had the experience twice now. You'll go to the City some fine morning, and when you come back the whole thing will be over.'

'Indeed it won't. I have made arrangements at the office, and from the hour that she first seems bad I will never stir from the house. For all she may say, I know very well that it gives her strength and courage to feel that I am there.'

'You may not know that it is coming on?'

Frank laughed incredulously.

'We'll see about that,' said he. 'And you think from your experience, Harrison, that it is not so very bad after all?'

'Oh no. It soon passes.'

'Soon! What do you mean by soon?'

'Jordan was there six hours the first time.'

'Good God! Six hours!' Frank wiped his forehead. 'They must have seemed six years.'

'They *were* rather long. I kept on working in the garden. That's the tip. Keep on doing something and it helps you along wonderfully.'

'That's a good suggestion, Harrison. What a curious smell there is in the air! Do you notice a sort of low, sweetish, spirity kind of scent? Well, perhaps it's my imagination. I dare say that my nerves are a bit strung up these days. But that is a capital idea of yours about having some work to do. I should like to work madly for those hours. Have everything up out of the back garden and plant it all again in the front.'

Harrison laughed.

'I'll tell you something less heroic,' said he; 'you could keep all these bulbs, and pot them then. By the way, I'll go round and get the others. Don't bother about the door. I shall leave it open, for I won't be five minutes.'

'And I'll put these in the greenhouse,' said Frank. He took the basket of bulbs and he laid them all out on the wooden shelf of the tiny conservatory which leaned against the back of the house. When he came out there was a kitten making a noise somewhere. It was a low sound, but persistent, coming in burst after burst. He took the rake and jabbed with the handle amongst the laurel bushes under their bedroom window. The beast might waken Maude, and so it was worth some trouble to dislodge it. He could not see it, but when he had poked among the bushes and cried 'Skat!' several times, the crying died away, and he carried his empty basket into the dining-room. There he lit his pipe again, and waited for Harrison's return.

There was that bothersome kitten again. He could hear it mewing away somewhere. It did not sound so loud as in the garden, so perhaps it would not matter. He felt very much inclined to steal upstairs upon tiptoe and see if Maude were stirring yet. After all, if Jemima, or whoever it was, could go clumping about in heavy boots over his head, there was no fear that he could do any harm. And yet she had said that she would ring or send word the moment she could see him, and so perhaps he had better wait where he was. He put his head out of the window and cried 'Shoo!' into the laurel bushes several times. Then he sat in the armchair with his back to the door. Steps came heavily along the hall, and he saw dimly with the back corner of his eye that some one was in the doorway carrying something. He thought that really Harrison might have brought the bulbs in more quietly, and so he treated him with some coldness, and did not turn round to him.

'Put it in the out-house,' said he.

'Why the out-house?'

'We keep them there. But you can put it under the sideboard, or in the coal-scuttle, or where you like as long as you don't make any more noise.'

'Why, surely, Crosse - ' But Frank suddenly sprang out of his chair.

'I'm blessed if that infernal kitten isn't somewhere in the room!'

And there when he turned was the grim, kindly face of old Doctor Jordan facing him. He carried in the crook of his arm a brown shawl with something round and small muffled up in it. There was one slit in front, and through this came a fist about the size of a marble, the thumb doubled under the tiny fingers, and the whole limb giving circular waves, as if the owner were cheering lustily at his own successful arrival. 'Here am I, good people, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!' cried the waving hand. Then as the slit in the shawl widened Frank saw that behind the energetic fist there was a huge open mouth, a little button of a nose, and two eyes which were so resolutely screwed up that it seemed as if the owner had made a resolution never under any circumstances to take the least notice of this new world into which it had been transported. Frank dropped his pipe and stood staring at this apparition.

‘What! What’s that?’

‘The baby!’

‘Baby? Whose baby?’

‘Your baby, of course.’

‘My baby! Where - where did you get it?’

Doctor Jordan burst out laughing.

‘You are like a man who has just been wakened out of his sleep,’ said he. ‘Why, Crosse, your wife has been bad all day, but she’s all right now, and here’s your son and heir - a finer lad of the age I never saw - fighting weight about seven pounds.’

Frank was a very proud man at the roots of his nature. He did not readily give himself away. Perhaps if he had been quite alone he might at that moment, as the great wave of joy washed through his soul, bearing all his fears and forebodings away upon its crest, have dropped upon his knees in prayer. But prayer comes not from the knee but from the heart, and the whole strength of his nature breathed itself out in silent thanks to that great Fate which goes its way regardless either of thanks or reproaches. The doctor saw a pale self-contained young man before him, and thought him strangely wanting in emotion.

‘Well!’ said he, impatiently. ‘Is she all right?’

‘Yes. Won’t you take your son?’

‘Could she see me?’

‘I don’t suppose five minutes would do any harm.’

Dr. Jordan said afterwards that it was three steps which took Frank up the fifteen stairs. The nurse who met him at the corner looks back on it as the escape of her lifetime. Maude lay in bed with a face as pale as the pillow which framed it. Her lips were bloodless but smiling.

‘Frank!’

‘My own dear sweet girlie!’

‘You never knew. Did you, Frank? Tell me that you never knew.’

And at that anxious question the foolish pride which keeps the emotions of the strong man buried down in his soul as though they were the least honourable part of his nature, fell suddenly to nothing, and Frank dropped with his head beside the white face upon the pillow, and lay with his arm across the woman whom he loved, and sobbed as he had not sobbed since his childhood. Her cheek was wet with his tears. He never saw the doctor until he came beside him and touched him on the shoulder.

'I think you had better go now,' said he.

'Sorry to be a fool, doctor,' said Frank, blushing hotly in his clumsy English fashion. 'It's just more than I can stand.'

'Sir,' the doctor answered, 'I owe you an apology, for I had done you an injustice. Meanwhile your son is about to be dressed, and there is hardly room for three men in one bedroom.'

So Frank went down into the darkening room below, and mechanically lighting his pipe, he sat with his elbows upon his knees and stared out into the gathering gloom where one bright evening star twinkled in a violet sky. The gentle hush of the gloaming was around him, and some late bird was calling outside amongst the laurels. Above he heard the shuffling of feet, the murmur of voices, and then amid it all those thin glutinous cries, *his* voice, the voice of this new man with all a man's possibilities for good and for evil, who had taken up his dwelling with them. And as he listened to those cries, a gentle sadness was mixed with his joy, for he felt that things were now for ever changed - that whatever sweet harmonies of life might still be awaiting him, from this hour onwards, they might form themselves into the subtlest and loveliest of chords, but it must always be as a trio, and never as the dear duet of the past.

CHAPTER XXII - THE TRIO

(*Extract from a letter to the Author from Mrs. Frank Crosse*.)

'It is very singular that you should say with such confidence that you know that our baby is a splendid one, and further on you say that in some ways it differs from any other baby. It is so true, but neither Frank nor I can imagine how you knew. We both think it so *clever* of you to have found it out. When you write to us, do please tell us how you discovered it.

'I want to tell you something about baby, since you so kindly ask me, but Frank says there is no use my beginning as there is only one quire of paper in the house. As a matter of fact, I shall be quite short, which is not because I have not plenty to say - you cannot think what a *dear* he is - but because he may wake up at any moment. After that happens I can only write with one hand, while I wave a feather fan with the other, and it is so difficult then to say exactly what you mean. In any case you know that I have not the habit of collecting and writing down my ideas, so please forgive me if this seems a stupid letter. Frank could have done it splendidly. But he has so many sweet and quite *remarkable* ways, that I ought to be able to put some of them down for you.

'It will be easier perhaps if I imagine a day of him - and one of his days is very much like another. No one could ever say that he was irregular in his habits. First thing in the morning I go over to his cot to see if he is awake yet - though, of course, I know that he can't be, for he always lets us know - the darling! However, I go over all the same, and I find everything quiet and nothing visible of baby, but a tiny, turned-up nose. It is so exactly Frank's nose, only that his is curved the other way. Then, as I bend over his cot, there is a small sigh, such a soft, comfortable sound! Then a sort of earthquake takes place under the eider down, and a tightly clenched fist appears and is waved in the air. He has such a pleasant, cheerful way of waving his fists. Then one eye is half opened, as if he were looking round to see if it were safe to open the other one, and then he gives a long, sorrowful wail as he realises that his bottle is not where he left it when he went to sleep. In a moment he is in my arms and quite happy again, playing with the lace round the neck of my pink dressing-gown. When he finds that his nice warm bath is all ready for him, he becomes quite jovial, and laughs and chuckles to himself. Something awfully funny must have happened to him before ever he came into this world at all, for nothing that has occurred since could account for the intense expression of amusement that one can often see in his eyes. When he laughs, Frank says that he looks like some jolly old clean-shaven toothless friar - so chubby and good-humoured. He takes the greatest interest in everything in the room, watches the nurse moving about, looks out of the window, and examines my hair and my dress very critically. He loves to see untidy hair and a bright tie, or a brooch will often catch his eye, and make him smile. His smile is the most wonderful thing! As he lies gazing with his great serious blue eyes, his whole face suddenly lights up, his mouth turns up at one corner in the most irresistible way, and his cheeks all go off into dimples. He looks so sweet and innocent, and at the same time so humorous and wicked, that his foolish mother wants to laugh at him and to weep over him at the same time.

'Then comes his bath, and there is a sad display of want of faith upon his part. He enjoys the process, but he is convinced that only his own exertions keep him from drowning, so his little fists are desperately clenched, his legs kick up and down the whole time, and he watches every movement of mother and nurse with suspicion. He enjoys being dressed, and smiles at first, and then he suddenly remembers that he has not had his breakfast. Then the smiles vanish, the small round face grows so red and angry, and all covered with little wrinkles, and there is a dismal wailing - poor darling! If the bottle is not instantly forthcoming he will howl loudly, and beat the air with his fists until he gets it. He *does* remind me so of his father sometimes. He is always hunting for his bottle, and will seize my finger, or a bit of my dress, or anything, and carry it to his mouth, and when he finds it isn't what he wants, he throws it away very angrily. When finally he does get the bottle, he becomes at once the most contented being in the whole world, and sucks away with such great long pulls, and such dear little grunts in between. Then afterwards, a well-washed, well-fed atom, he is ready to look about him and observe things. I am sure that he has his father's brains, and that he is storing up all sorts of impressions and observations for future use, for he notices *everything*. I used to think that babies were stupid and indifferent - and perhaps other babies are - but *he* is never indifferent. Sometimes he is pleased and amused, and sometimes angry, and sometimes gravely interested, but he is always wide awake and taking things in. When

I go into his room, he always looks at my head, and if I have my garden hat with the flowers, he is so pleased. He much prefers chiffon to silk.

‘Almost the first thing that struck me when I saw him, and it strikes me more and more, was, how could any one have got the idea of original sin? The people who believe in it can never have looked into a baby’s eyes. I love to watch them, and sometimes fancy I can see a faint shade of reminiscence in them, as if he had still some memories of another life, and could tell me things if he could only speak. One day as I sat beside his cot - Oh dear! I hear his Majesty calling. So sorry! Good-bye. - Yours very truly,

MAUDE CROSSE.’

P.S. - I have not time to read this over, but I may say, in case I omitted it before, that he really is a very remarkable baby.’

THE MARACOT DEEP

This 1929 novel is about the discovery of a sunken city of Atlantis by a team of explorers led by Professor Maracot. He is accompanied by Cyrus Headley, a young research zoologist and Bill Scanlan, an expert mechanic working with an iron works in Philadelphia who is in charge of the construction of the submersible which the team takes to the bottom of the Atlantic.

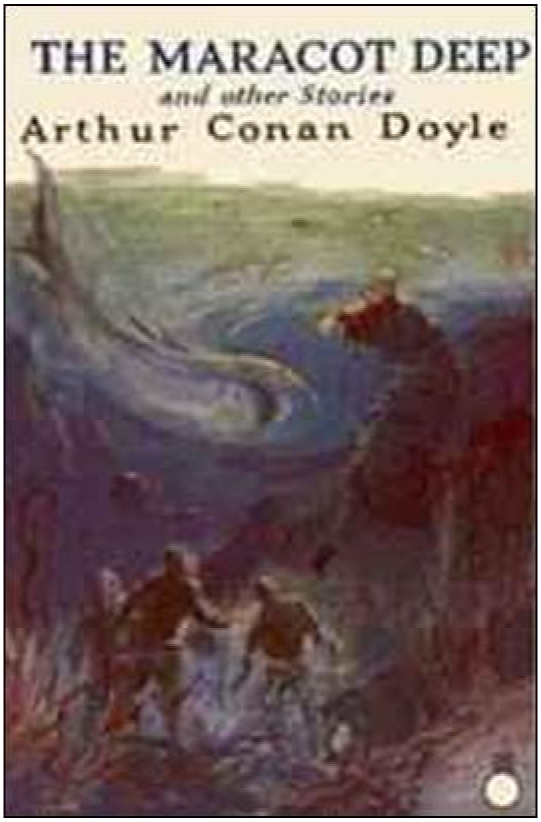
THE MARACOT DEEP
and other Stories
Arthur Conan Doyle

The first edition

THE MARACOT DEEP

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CHAPTER 1

Since these papers have been put into my hands to edit, I will begin by reminding the public of the sad loss of the steamship *Stratford*, which started a year ago upon a voyage for the purpose of oceanography and the study of deep-sea life. The expedition had been organized by Dr. Maracot, the famous author of Pseudo-Coralline Formations and The Morphology of the Lamellibranchs. Dr. Maracot had with him Mr. Cyrus Headley, formerly assistant at the Zoological Institute of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the time of the voyage Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. Captain Howie, an experienced navigator, was in charge of the vessel, and there was a crew of twenty-three men, including an American mechanic from the Merribank Works, Philadelphia.

This whole party has utterly disappeared, and the only word ever heard of the ill-fated steamer was from the report of a Norwegian barque which actually saw a ship, closely corresponding with her description, go down in the great gale of the autumn of 1926. A lifeboat marked *Stratford* was found later in the neighbourhood of the tragedy, together with some deck gratings, a lifebuoy, and a spar. This, coupled with the long silence, seemed to make it absolutely sure that the vessel and her crew would never be heard of more. Her fate is rendered more certain by the strange wireless message received at the time, which, though incomprehensible in parts, left little doubt as to the fate of the vessel. This I will quote later.

There were some remarkable points about the voyage of the *Stratford* which caused comment at the time. One was the curious secrecy observed by Professor Maracot. He was famous for his dislike and distrust of the Press, but it was pushed to an extreme upon this occasion, when he would neither give information to reporters nor would he permit the representative of any paper to set foot in the vessel during the weeks that it lay in the Albert Dock. There were rumours abroad of some curious and novel construction of the ship which would fit it for deep-sea work, and these rumours were confirmed from the yard of Hunter and Company of West Hartlepool, where the structural changes had actually been carried out. It was at one time said that the whole bottom of the vessel was detachable, a report which attracted the attention of the underwriters at Lloyd’s, who were, with some difficulty, satisfied upon the point. The matter was soon forgotten, but it assumed an importance now when the fate of the expedition has been brought once more in so extraordinary manner to the notice of the public.

So much for the beginning of the voyage of the *Stratford*. There are now four documents which cover the facts so far as they are known. The first is the letter which was written by Mr. Cyrus Headley, from the capital of the Grand Canary, to his friend, Sir James Talbot, of Trinity College, Oxford, upon the only occasion, so far as is known, when the *Stratford* touched land after leaving the Thames. The second is the strange wireless call to which I have alluded. The third is that portion of the log of the Arabella Knowles which deals with the vitreous ball. The fourth and last is the amazing contents of that receptacle, which either represent a most cruel and complex mystification, or else open up a fresh chapter in human experience the importance of which cannot be exaggerated. With this preamble I will now give Mr. Headley's letter, which I owe to the courtesy of Sir James Talbot, and which has not previously been published. It is dated October 1st, 1926.

I am mailing this, my dear Talbot, from Porta de la Luz, where we have put in for a few days of rest. My principal companion in the voyage has been Bill Scanlan, the head mechanic, who, as a fellow-countryman and also as a very entertaining character, has become my natural associate. However, I am alone this morning as he has what he describes as 'a date with a skirt'. You see, he talks as Englishmen expect every real American to talk. He would be accepted as the true breed. The mere force of suggestion makes me 'guess' and 'reckon' when I am with my English friends. I feel that they would never really understand that I was a Yankee if I did not. However, I am not on those terms with you, so let me assure you right now that you will not find anything but pure Oxford in the epistle which I am now mailing to you.

You met Maracot at the Mitre, so you know the dry chip of a man that he is. I told you, I think, how he came to pitch upon me for the job. He inquired from old Somerville of the Zoological Institute, who sent him my prize essay on the pelagic crabs, and that did the trick. Of course, it is splendid to be on such a congenial errand, but I wish it wasn't with such an animated mummy as Maracot. He is inhuman in his isolation and his devotion to his work. 'The world's stiffest stiff,' says Bill Scanlan: And yet you can't but admire such complete devotion. Nothing exists outside his own science. I remember that you laughed when I asked him what I ought to read as a preparation, and he said that for serious study I should read the collected edition of his own works, but for relaxation Haeckel's Plankton-Studien.

I know him no better now than I did in that little parlour looking out on the Oxford High. He says nothing, and his gaunt, austere face — the face of a Savonarola, or rather, perhaps, of a Torquemada — never relapses into geniality. The long, thin, aggressive nose, the two small gleaming grey eyes set closely together under a thatch of eyebrows, the thin-lipped, compressed mouth, the cheeks worn into hollows by constant thought and ascetic life, are all uncompanionable. He lives on some mental mountaintop, out of reach of ordinary mortals. Sometimes I think he is a little mad. For example, this extraordinary instrument that he has made ... but I'll tell things in their due order and then you can judge for yourself.

I'll take our voyage from the start. The *Stratford* is a fine seaworthy little boat, specially fitted for her job. She is twelve hundred tons, with clear decks and a good broad beam, furnished with every possible appliance for sounding, trawling, dredging and tow-netting. She has, of course, powerful steam winches for hauling the trawls, and a number of other gadgets of various kinds, some of which are familiar enough, and some are strange. Below these are comfortable quarters with a well — fitted laboratory for our special studies.

We had the reputation of being a mystery ship before we started, and I soon found that it was not undeserved. Our first proceedings were commonplace enough. We took a turn up the North Sea and dropped our trawls for a scrape or two, but, as the average depth is not much over sixty feet and we were specially fitted for very deep-sea work, it seemed rather a waste of time. Anyhow, save for familiar table fish, dog-fish, squids, jelly-fish and some terrigenous bottom deposits of the usual alluvial clay-mud, we got nothing worth writing home about. Then we rounded Scotland, sighted the Faroes, and came down the Wyville-Thomson Ridge, where we had better luck. Thence we worked south to our proper cruising-ground, which was between the African coast and these islands. We nearly grounded on Fuert-Eventura one moonless night, but save for that our voyage was uneventful.

During these first weeks I tried to make friends with Maracot, but it was not easy work. First of all, he is the most absorbed and absent-minded man in the world. You will remember how you smiled when he gave the elevator boy a penny under the impression that he was in a street car. Half the time he is utterly lost in his thoughts, and seems hardly aware of where he is or what he is doing. Then in the second place he is secretive to the last degree. He is continually working at papers and charts, which he shuffles away when I happen to enter the cabin. It is my firm belief that the man has some secret project in his mind, but that so long as we are due to touch at any port he will keep it to himself. That is the impression which I have received, and I find that Bill Scanlan is of the same opinion.

‘Say, Mr. Headley,’ said he one evening, when I was seated in the laboratory testing out the salinity of samples from our hydrographic soundings, ‘what d’you figure out that this guy has in his mind? What d’you reckon that he means to do?’

‘I suppose,’ said I, ‘that we shall do what the Challenger and a dozen other exploring ships have done before us, and add a few more species to the list of fish and a few more entries to the bathymetric chart.’

‘Not on your life,’ said he. ‘If that’s your opinion you’ve got to guess again. First of all, what am I here for, anyhow?’

‘In case the machinery goes wrong,’ I hazarded.

‘Machinery nothing! The ship’s machinery is in charge of MacLaren, the Scotch engineer. No, sir, it wasn’t to run a donkey-engine that the Merribank folk sent out their star performer. If I pull down fifty bucks a week it’s not for nix. Come here, and I’ll make you wise to it..’

He took a key from his pocket and opened a door at the back of the laboratory which led us down a companion ladder to a section of the hold which was cleared right across save for four large glittering objects half-exposed amid the straw of their huge packing-cases. They were flat sheets of steel with elaborate bolts and rivets along the edges. Each sheet was about ten feet square and an inch and a half thick, with a circular gap of eighteen inches in the middle.

‘What in thunder is it?’ I asked.

Bill Scanlan’s queer face — he looks half-way between a vaudeville comic and a prize-fighter — broke into a grin at my astonishment.

‘That’s my baby, sir,’ he quoted. ‘Yes, Mr. Headley, that’s what I am here for. There is a steel bottom to the thing. It’s in that big case yonder. Then there is a top, kind of arched, and a great ring for a chain or rope. Now, look here at the bottom of the ship.’

There was a square wooden platform there, with projecting screws at each corner which showed that it was detachable.

‘There is a double bottom,’ said Scanlan. ‘It may be that this guy is clean loco, or it may be that he has more in his block than we know, but if I read him right he means to build up a kind of room — the windows are in storage here — and lower it through the bottom of the ship. He’s got electric searchlights here, and I allow that he plans to shine ‘em through the round portholes and see what’s goin’ on around.’

‘He could have put a crystal sheet into the ship, like the Catalina Island boats, if that was all that was in his mind,’ said I.

‘You’ve said a mouthful,’ said Bill Scanlan, scratching his head. ‘I can’t figger it out nohow. The only one sure thing is, that I’ve been sent to be under his orders and to help him with the darn fool thing all I can. He has said nothin’ up to now, so I’ve said the same, but I’ll just snoop around, and if I wait long enough I’ll learn all there is to know.’

So that was how I first got on to the edge of our mystery. We ran into some dirty weather after that, and then we got to work doing some deep-sea trawling north-west of Cape Juba, just outside the Continental Slope, and taking temperature readings and salinity records. It’s a sporting proposition, this deep-sea dragging with a Peterson otter trawl gaping twenty feet wide for everything that comes its way — sometimes down a quarter of a mile and bringing up one lot of fish, sometimes half a mile and quite a different lot, every stratum of ocean with its own inhabitants as separate as so many continents. Sometimes from the bottom we would just bring up half a ton of clear pink jelly, the raw material of life, or, maybe, it would be a scoop of pteropod ooze, breaking up under the microscope into millions of tiny round reticulated balls with amorphous mud between. I won’t bore you with all the brotulids and macrurids, the ascidians and holothurians and polyzoa and echinoderms — anyhow, you can reckon that there is a great harvest in the sea, and that we have been diligent reapers. But always I had the same feeling that the heart of Maracot was not in the job, and that other plans were in that queer high, narrow Egyptian mummy of a head. It all seemed to me to be a try-out of men and things until the real business got going.

I had got as far as this in my letter when I went ashore to have a last stretch, for we sail in the early morning. It’s as well, perhaps, that I did go, for there was no end of a barney going on upon the pier, with Maracot and Bill Scanlan right in the heart of it. Bill is a bit of a scrapper, and has what he calls a mean wallop in both mitts, but with half a dozen Dagoes with knives all round them things looked ugly, and it was time that I butted in. It seems that the Doctor had hired one of the things they call cabs, and had driven half over the island inspecting the geology, but had clean forgotten that he had no money on him. When it came to paying, he could not make these country hicks understand, and the cabman had grabbed his watch so as to make sure. That brought Bill Scanlan into action, and they would have both been on the floor with their backs like pin-cushions if I had not squared the matter up, with a dollar or two over for the driver and a five-dollar bonus for the chap with the mouse under his eye. So all ended well, and Maracot was more human than ever I saw him yet. When we got to the ship he called me into the little cabin which he reserves for himself and he thanked me.

‘By the way, Mr. Headley,’ he said, ‘I understand that you are not a married man?’

‘No,’ said I, ‘I am not.’

‘No one depending upon you?’

‘No.’

‘Good!’ said he. ‘I have not spoken of the object of this voyage because I have, for my own reasons, desired it to be secret. One of those reasons was that I feared to be forestalled. When scientific plans get about one may be served as Scott was served by Amundsen. Had Scott kept his counsel as I have done, it would be he and not Amundsen who would have been the first at the South Pole. For my part, I have quite as important a destination as the South Pole, and so I have been silent. But now we are on the eve of our great adventure and no rival has time to steal my plans. Tomorrow we start for our real goal.’

‘And what is that?’ I asked.

He leaned forward, his ascetic face all lit up with the enthusiasm of the fanatic.

‘Our goal,’ said he, ‘is the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.’

And right here I ought to stop, for I expect it has taken away your breath as it did mine. If I were a story-writer, I guess I should leave it at that. But as I am just a chronicler of what occurred, I may tell you that I stayed another hour in the cabin of old man Maracot, and that I learned a lot, which there is still just time for me to tell you before the last shore boat leaves.

‘Yes, young man,’ said he, ‘you may write freely now, for by the time your letter reaches England we shall have made the plunge.’

This started him sniggering, for he has a queer dry sense of humour of his own.

‘Yes, sir, the plunge is the right word on this occasion, a plunge which will be historic in the annals of Science. Let me tell you, in the first place, that I am well convinced that the current doctrine as to the extreme pressure of the ocean at great depths is entirely misleading. It is perfectly clear that other factors exist which neutralise the effect, though I am not yet prepared to say what those factors may be. That is one of the problems which we may settle. Now, what pressure, may I ask, have you been led to expect under a mile of water?’ He glowered at me through his big horn spectacles.

‘Not less than a ton to the square inch,’ I answered. ‘Surely that has been clearly shown.’

‘The task of the pioneer has always been to disprove the thing which has been clearly shown. Use your brains, young man. You have been for the last month fishing up some of the most delicate Bathic forms of life, creatures so delicate that you could hardly transfer them from the net to the tank without marring their sensitive shapes. Did you find that there was evidence upon them of this extreme pressure?’

‘The pressure,’ said I, ‘equalised itself. It was the same within as without.’

‘Words — mere words!’ he cried, shaking his lean head impatiently. ‘You have brought up round fish, such fish as Gastro-stomus globulus. Would they not have been squeezed flat had the pressure been as you imagine? Or look at our otter-boards. They are not squeezed together at the mouth of the trawl.’

‘But the experience of divers?’

‘Certainly it holds good up to a point. They do find a sufficient increase of pressure to influence what is perhaps the most sensitive organ of the body, the interior of the ear. But as I plan it, we shall not be exposed to any pressure at all. We shall be lowered in a steel cage with crystal windows on each side for observation. If the pressure is not strong enough to break in an inch and a half of toughened double-nickelled steel, then it cannot hurt us. It is an extension of the experiment of the Williamson Brothers at Nassau, with which no doubt you are familiar. If my calculation is wrong — well, you say that no one is dependent upon you. We shall die in a great adventure. Of course, if you would rather stand clear, I can go alone.'

It seemed to me the maddest kind of scheme, and yet you know how difficult it is to refuse a dare. I played for time while I thought it over.

'How deep do you propose to go, sir?' I asked.

He had a chart pinned upon the table, and he placed the end of his compasses upon a point which lies to the south-west of the Canaries.

'Last year I did some sounding in this part,' said he.

'There is a pit of great depth. We got twenty-five thousand feet there. I was the first to report it. Indeed, I trust that you will find it on the charts of the future as the "Maracot Deep".'

'But, good God, sir!' I cried, 'you don't propose to descend into an abyss like that?'

'No, no,' he answered, smiling. 'Neither our lowering chain nor our air tubes reach beyond half a mile. But I was going to explain to you that round this deep crevasse, which has no doubt been formed by volcanic forces long ago, there is a varied ridge or narrow plateau, which is not more than three hundred fathoms under the surface.'

'Three hundred fathoms! A third of a mile!'

'Yes, roughly a third of a mile. It is my present intention that we shall be lowered in our little pressure-proof look-out station on to this submarine bank. There we shall make such observations as we can. A speaking-tube will connect us with the ship so that we can give our directions. There should be no difficulty in the mater. When we wish to be hauled up we have only to say so.'

'And the air?'

'Will be pumped down to us.'

'But it will be pitch-dark.'

'That, I fear, is undoubtedly true. The experiments of Fol and Sarasin at the Lake of Geneva show that even the ultra-violet rays are absent at that depth. But does it matter? We shall be provided with the powerful electric illumination from the ship's engines, supplemented by six two-volt Hellesens dry cells connected together so as to give a current of twelve volts. That, with a Lucas army signalling lamp as a movable reflector, should serve our turn. Any other difficulties?'

'If our air lines tangle?'

‘They won’t tangle. And as a reserve we have compressed air in tubes which would last us twenty — four hours. Well, have I satisfied you? Will you come?’

It was not an easy decision. The brain works quickly and imagination is a mighty vivid thing. I seemed to realise that black box down in the primeval depths, to feel the foul twice-breathed air, and then to see the walls sagging, bulging inwards, rending at the joints with the water spouting in at every rivet-hole and crevice and crawling up from below. It was a slow, dreadful death to die. But I looked up, and there were the old man’s fiery eyes fixed upon me with the exaltation of a martyr to Science. It’s catching, that sort of enthusiasm, and if it be crazy, it is at least noble and unselfish. I caught fire from his great flame, and I sprang to my feet with my hand out.

‘Doctor, I’m with you to the end,’ said I.

‘I knew it,’ said he. ‘It was not for your smattering of learning that I picked you, my young friend, nor,’ he added, smiling, ‘for your intimate acquaintance with the pelagic crabs. There are other qualities which may be more immediately useful, and they are loyalty and courage.’

So with that little bit of sugar I was dismissed, with my future pledged and my whole scheme of life in ruins. Well, the last shore boat is leaving. They are calling for the mail. You will either not hear from me again, my dear Talbot, or you will get a letter worth reading. If you don’t hear you can have a floating headstone and drop it somewhere south of the Canaries with the inscription :

‘Here, or Hereabouts, lies all that the fishes have left of my friend, CYRUS J. HEADLEY.’

The second document in the case is the unintelligible wireless message which was intercepted by several vessels, including the Royal Mail steamer Arroya. It was received at 3 p.m. October 3rd, 1926, which shows that it was dispatched only two days after the *Stratford* left the Grand Canary, as shown in the previous letter, and it corresponds roughly with the time when the Norwegian barque saw a steamer founder in a cyclone two hundred miles to the south-west of Porta de la Luz. It ran thus :

Blown on our beam ends. Fear position hopeless. Have already lost Maracot, Headley, Scanlan. Situation incomprehensible. Headley handkerchief end of deep sea sounding wire. God help us! S. S. *Stratford*.

This was the last, incoherent message which came from the ill-fated vessel, and part of it was so strange that it was put down to delirium on the part of the operator. It seemed, however, to leave no doubt as to the fate of the ship.

The explanation — if it can be accepted as an explanation — of the matter is to be found in the narrative concealed inside the vitreous ball, and first it would be as well to amplify the very brief account which has hitherto appeared in the Press of the finding of the ball. I take it verbatim from the log of the Arabella Knowles, master Amos Green, outward bound with coals from Cardiff to Buenos Aires :

‘Wednesday, Jan. 5th, 1927. Lat. 27.14, Long. 28 West. Calm weather. Blue sky with low banks of cirrus clouds. Sea like glass. At two bells of the middle watch the first officer reported that he had seen a shining object bound high out of the sea, and then fall back into it. His first impression was that it was some strange fish, but on examination with his glasses he observed that it was a silvery globe, or ball, which was so light that it lay, rather than floated, on the surface of the water. I was called and saw it, as large as a football, gleaming brightly about half a mile off on our starboard beam. I stopped the engines and called away the quarter-boat under the second mate, who picked the thing up and brought it aboard.

‘On examination it proved to be a ball made of some sort of very tough glass, and filled with a substance so light that when it was tossed in the air it wavered about like a child’s balloon. It was nearly transparent, and we could see what looked like a roll of paper inside it. The material was so tough, however, that we had the greatest possible difficulty in breaking the ball open and getting at the contents. A hammer would not crack it, and it was only when the chief engineer nipped it in the throw of the engine that we were able to smash it. Then I am sorry to say that it dissolved into sparkling dust, so that it was impossible to collect any good-sized piece for examination. We got the paper, however, and, having examined it and concluded that it was of great importance, we laid it aside with the intention of handing it over to the British Consul when we reached the Plate River. Man and boy, I have been at sea for five-and-thirty years, but this is the strangest thing that ever befell me, and so says every man aboard this ship. I leave the meaning of it all to wiser heads than mine.’

So much for the genesis of the narrative of Cyrus J. Headley, which we will now give exactly as written :

Whom am I writing to? Well, I suppose I may say to the whole wide world, but as that is rather a vague address I’ll aim at my friend Sir James

Talbot, of Oxford University, for the reason that my last letter was to him and this may be regarded as a continuation. I expect the odds are a hundred to one that this ball, even if it should see the light of day and not be gulped by a shark in passing, will toss about on the waves and never catch the eye of the passing sailor, and yet it's worth trying, and Maracot is sending up another, so, between us, it may be that we shall get our wonderful story to the world. Whether the world will believe it is another matter, I guess, but when folk look at the ball with its vitrine cover and note its contents of levigen gas, they will surely see for themselves that there is something here that is out of the ordinary. You at any rate, Talbot, will not throw it aside unread.

If anyone wants to know how the thing began, and what we were trying to do, he can find it all in a letter I wrote you on October 1st last year, the night before we left Porta de la Luz. By George! If I had known what was in store for us, I think I should have sneaked into a shore boat that night. And yet — well, maybe, even with my eyes open I would have stood by the Doctor and seen it through. On second thoughts I have not a doubt that I would.

Well, starting from the day that we left Grand Canary I will carry on with my experiences.

The moment we were clear, of the port, old man Maracot fairly broke into flames. The time for action had come at last and all the damped-down energy of the man came flaring up. I tell you he took hold of that ship and of everyone and everything in it, and bent it all to his will. The dry, creaking, absent-minded scholar had suddenly vanished, and instead there emerged a human electrical machine, crackling with vitality and quivering from the great driving force within. His eyes gleamed behind his glasses like flames in a lantern. He seemed to be everywhere at once, working out distances on his chart, comparing reckonings with the skipper, driving Bill Scanlan along, setting me on to a hundred odd jobs, but it was all full of method and with a definite end. He developed an unexpected knowledge of electricity and of mechanics and spent much of his time working at the machinery which Scanlan, under his supervision, was now carefully piecing together.

'Say, Mr. Headley, it's just dandy,' said Bill, on the morning of the second day. 'Come in here and have a look. The Doc. is a regular fellow and a whale of a slick mechanic.'

I had a most unpleasant impression that it was my own coffin at which I was gazing, but, even so, I had to admit that it was a very adequate mausoleum. The floor had been clamped to the four steel walls, and the porthole windows screwed into the centre of each. A small trapdoor at the top gave admission, and there was a second one at the base. The steel cage was supported by a thin but very powerful steel hawser, which ran over a drum, and was paid out or rolled in by the strong engine which we used for our deep-sea trawls. The hawser, as I understood, was nearly half a mile in length, the slack of it coiled round bollards on the deck. The rubber breathing-tubes were of the same length, and the telephone wire was connected with them, and also the wire by which the electric lights within could be operated from the ship's batteries, though we had an independent instalment as well.

It was on the evening of that day that the engines were stopped. The glass was low, and a thick black cloud rising upon the horizon gave warning of coming trouble. The only ship in sight was a barque flying the Norwegian colours, and we observed that it was reefed down, as if expecting trouble. For the moment, however, all was propitious and the *Stratford* rolled gently upon a deep blue ocean, white-capped here and there from the breath of the trade wind. Bill Scanlan came to me in my laboratory with more show of excitement than his easy-going temperament had ever permitted him to show.

'Look it here, Mr. Headley,' said he, 'they've lowered that contraption into a well in the bottom of the ship. D'you figure that the Boss is going down in it?'

'Certain sure, Bill. And I am going with him.'

'Well, well, you are sure bughouse, the two of you, to think of such a thing. But I'd feel a cheap skate if I let you go alone.'

'It is no business of yours, Bill.!

'Well, I just feel that it is. Sure, I'd be as yellow as a Chink with the jaundice if I let you go alone. Merribanks sent me here to look after the machinery, and if the machinery is down at the bottom of the sea, then it's a sure thing that it's me for the bottom. Where those steel castings are — that's the address of Bill Scanlan — whether the folk round him are crazy or no.'

It was useless to argue with him, so one more was added to our little suicide club and we just waited for our orders.

All night they were hard at work upon the fittings, and it was after an early breakfast that we descended into the hold ready for our adventure. The steel cage had been half lowered into the false bottom, and we now descended one by one through the upper trap-door, which was closed and screwed down behind us, Captain Howie with a most lugubrious face having shaken hands with each of us as we passed him. We were then lowered a few more feet, the shutter drawn above our heads, and the water admitted to test how far we were really seaworthy. The cage stood the trial well, every joint fitted exactly, and there was no sign of any leakage. Then the lower flap in the hold was loosened and we hung suspended in the ocean beneath the level of the keel.

It was really a very snug little room, and I marvelled at the skill and foresight with which everything had been arranged. The electric illumination had not been turned on, but the semi — tropical sun shone brightly through the bottle-green water at either porthole. Some small fish were flickering here and there, streaks of silver against the green background. Inside there was a settee round the little room, with a bathymetric dial, a thermometer, and other instruments ranged above it. Beneath the settee was a row of pipes which represented our reserve supply of compressed air in case the tubes should fail us. Those tubes opened out above our heads, and the telephonic apparatus hung beside them. We could all hear the mournful voice of the captain outside.

‘Are you really determined to go?’ he asked.

‘We are quite all right,’ the Doctor answered, impatiently. ‘You will lower slowly and have someone at the receiver all the time. I will report conditions. When we reach the bottom, remain as you are until I give instructions. It will not do to put too much strain upon the hawser, but a slow movement of a couple of knots an hour should be well within its strength. And now “Lower away!” ‘

He yelled out the two words with the scream of a lunatic. It was the supreme moment of his life, the fruition of all his brooding dreams. For an instant I was shaken by the thought that we were really in the power of a cunning, plausible monomaniac. Bill Scanlan had the same thought, for he looked across at me with a rueful grin and touched his forehead. But after that one wild outburst our leader was instantly his sober, self-contained self once more. Indeed, one had but to look at the order and forethought which showed itself in every detail around us to be reassured as to the power of his mind.

But now all our attention was diverted to the wonderful new experience which every instant was providing. Slowly the cage was sinking into the depths of the ocean. Light green water turned to dark olive. That again deepened into a wonderful blue, a rich deep blue gradually thickening to a dusky purple. Lower and lower we sank — a hundred feet, two hundred feet, three hundred. The valves were acting to perfection. Our breathing was as free and natural as upon the deck of the vessel. Slowly the bathymeter needle moved round the luminous dial. Four hundred, five hundred, six hundred. 'How are you?' roared an anxious voice from above us.

'Nothing could be better,' cried Maracot in reply. But the light was failing. There was now only a dim grey twilight which rapidly changed to utter darkness. 'Stop her!' shouted our leader. We ceased to move and hung suspended at seven hundred feet below the surface of the ocean. I heard the click of the switch, and the next instant we were flooded with glorious golden light which poured out through each of our side windows and sent long glimmering vistas into the waste of waters round us. With our faces against the thick glass, each at our own porthole, we gazed out into such a prospect as man had never seen.

Up to now we had known these strata by the sight of the few fish which had been too slow to avoid our clumsy trawl, or too stupid to escape a drag-net. Now we saw the wonderful world of water as it really was. If the object of creation was the production of man, it is strange that the ocean is so much more populous than the land. Broadway on a Saturday night, Lombard Street on a week-day afternoon, are not more crowded than the great sea spaces which lay before us. We had passed those surface strata where fish are either colourless or of the true maritime tints of ultramarine above and silver below. Here there were creatures of every conceivable tint and form which pelagic life can show. Delicate leptocephali or eel larva shot like streaks of burnished silver across the tunnel of radiance. The slow snake-like form of muroena, the deepsea lamprey, writhed and twisted by, or the black ceratia, all spikes and mouth, gaped foolishly back at our peering faces. Sometimes it was the squat cuttlefish which drifted across and glanced at us with human sinister eyes, sometimes it was some crystal-clear pelagic form of life, cystoma or glaucus, which lent a flower — like charm to the scene. One huge caranx, or horse mackerel, butted savagely again and again against our window until the dark shadow of a seven-foot shark came across him, and he vanished into its gaping jaws. Dr. Maracot sat entranced, his notebook upon his knee, scribbling down his observations and keeping up a muttered monologue of scientific comment. 'What's that? What's that?' I would hear. 'Yes, yes, chimoera mirabilis as taken by the Michael Sars. Dear me, there is lepidion, but a new species as I should judge. Observe that macrurus, Mr. Headley; its colouring is quite different to what we get in the net.' Once only was he taken quite aback. It was when a long oval object shot with great speed past his window from above, and left a vibrating tail behind it which extended as far as we could see above us and below. I admit that I was as puzzled for the moment as the Doctor, and it was Bill Scanlan who solved the mystery.

'I guess that boob, John Sweeney, has heaved his lead alongside of us. Kind of a joke, maybe, to prevent us from feeling lonesome.'

'To be sure! To be sure!' said Maracot, sniggering. 'Plumbus longicaudatus — a new genus, Mr. Headley, with a piano-wire tail and lead in its nose. But, indeed, it is very necessary they should take soundings so as to keep above the bank, which is circumscribed in size. All well, Captain!' he shouted. 'You may drop us down.'

And down we went. Dr. Maracot turned off the electric light and all was pitch-darkness once more save for the bathymeter's luminous face, which ticked off our steady fall. There was a gentle sway, but otherwise we were hardly conscious of any motion. Only that moving hand upon the dial told us of our terrific, our inconceivable, position. Now we were at the thousand-foot level, and the air had become distinctly foul. Scanlan oiled the valve of the discharge tube and things were better. At fifteen hundred feet we stopped and swung in mid-ocean with our lights blazing once more. Some great dark mass passed us here, but whether swordfish or deep-sea shark, or monster of unknown breed, was more than we could determine. The Doctor hurriedly turned off the lights. 'There lies our chief danger,' said he; 'there are creatures in the deep before whose charge this steel-plated room would have as much chance as a beehive before the rush of a rhinoceros.'

'Whales, maybe,' said Scanlan.

'Whales may sound to a great depth,' the savant answered. 'A Greenland whale has been known to take out nearly a mile of line in a perpendicular dive. But unless hurt or badly frightened no whale would descend so low. It may have been a giant squid: They are found at every level.'

'Well, I guess squids are too soft to hurt us. The laugh would be with the squid if he could claw a hole in Merribanks' nickel steel.'

'Their bodies may be soft,' the Professor answered, 'but the beak of a large squid would sheer through a bar of iron, and one peck of that beak might go through these inch-thick windows as if they were parchment.'

'Gee Whittaker!' cried Bill, as we resumed our downward journey.

And then at last, quite softly and gently, we came to rest. So delicate was the impact that we should hardly have known of it had it not been that the light when turned on showed great coils of the hawser all around us. The wire was a danger to our breathing tubes, for it might foul them, and at the urgent cry of Maracot it was pulled taut from above once more. The dial marked eighteen hundred feet. We lay motionless on a volcanic ridge at the bottom of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER 2

For a time I think that we all had the same feeling. We did not want to do anything or to see anything. We just wanted to sit quiet and try to realise the wonder of it — that we should be resting in the plumb centre of one of the great oceans of the world. But soon the strange scene round us, illuminated in all directions by our lights, drew us to the windows.

We had settled upon a bed of high algae (‘Cutleria multifida,’ said Maracot), the yellow fronds of which waved around us, moved by some deep-sea current, exactly as branches would move in a summer breeze. They were not long enough to obscure our view, though their great flat leaves, deep golden in the light, flowed occasionally across our vision. Beyond them lay slopes of some blackish slag-like material which were dotted with lovely coloured creatures, holothurians, ascidians, echini and echinoderms, as thickly as ever an English spring time bank was sprinkled with hyacinths and primroses. These living flowers of the sea, vivid scarlet, rich purple and delicate pink, were spread in profusion upon that coal-black background. Here and there great sponges bristled out from the crevices of the dark rocks, and a few fish of the middle depths, themselves showing up as flashes of colour, shot across our circle of vivid radiance. We were gazing enraptured at the fairy scene when an anxious voice came down the tube:

‘Well, how do you like the bottom? Is all well with you? Don’t be too long, for the glass is dropping and I don’t like the look of it. Giving you air enough? Anything more we can do?’

‘All right, Captain!’ cried Maracot, cheerily. ‘We won’t be long. You are nursing us well. We are quite as comfortable as in our own cabin. Stand by presently to move us slowly forwards.’

We had come into the region of the luminous fishes, and it amused us to turn out our own lights, and in the absolute pitch-darkness — a darkness in which a sensitive plate can be suspended for an hour without a trace even of the ultra-violet ray — to look out at the phosphorescent activity of the ocean. As against a black velvet curtain one saw little points of brilliant light moving steadily along as a liner at night might shed light through its long line of portholes. One terrifying creature had luminous teeth which gnashed in Biblical fashion in the outer darkness. Another had long golden antennae, and yet another a plume of flame above its head. As far as our vision carried, brilliant points flashed in the darkness, each little being bent upon its own business, and lighting up its own course as surely as the nightly taxicab at the theatre-hour in the Strand. Soon we had our own lights up again and the Doctor was making his observations of the sea-bottom.

‘Deep as we are, we are not deep enough to get any of the characteristic Bathic deposits,’ said he. ‘These are entirely beyond our possible range. Perhaps on another occasion with a longer hawser-’

‘Cut it out!’ growled Bill. ‘Forget it!’

Maracot smiled. ‘You will soon get acclimatized to the depths, Scanlan. This will not be our only descent.’

‘The Hell you say!’ muttered Bill.

‘You will think no more of it than of going down into the hold of the *Stratford*. You will observe, Mr. Headley, that the groundwork here, so far as we can observe it through the dense growth of hydrozoa and silicious sponges, is pumicestone and the black slag of basalt, pointing to ancient plutonic activities. Indeed, I am inclined to think that it confirms my previous view that this ridge is part of a volcanic formation and that the Maracot Deep,’ he rolled out the words as if he loved them, ‘represents the outer slope of the mountain. It has struck me that it would be an interesting experiment to move our cage slowly onwards until we come to the edge of the Deep, and see exactly what the formation may be at that point. I should expect to find a precipice of majestic dimensions extending downwards at a sharp angle into the extreme depths of the ocean.’

The experiment seemed to me to be a dangerous one, for who could say how far our thin hawser could bear the strain of lateral movement; but with Maracot danger, either to himself or to anyone else, simply did not exist when a scientific observation had to be made. I held my breath, and so I observed did Bill Scanlan, when a slow movement of our steel shell, brushing aside the waving fronds of seaweed, showed that the full strain was upon the line. It stood it nobly, however, and with a very gentle sweeping progression we began to glide over the bottom of the ocean, Maracot, with a compass in the hollow of his hand, shouting his direction as to the course to follow, and occasionally ordering the shell to be raised so as to avoid some obstacle in our path.

‘This basaltic ridge can hardly be more than a mile across,’ he explained. ‘I had marked the abyss as being to the west of the point where we took our plunge. At this rate, we should certainly reach it in a very short time.’

We slid without any check over the volcanic plain, all feathered by the waving golden algae and made beautiful by the gorgeous jewels of Nature’s cutting, flaming out from their setting of jet. Suddenly the Doctor dashed to the telephone.

‘Stop her!’ he cried. ‘We are there!’

A monstrous gap had opened suddenly before us. It was a fearsome place, the vision of a nightmare. Black shining cliffs of basalt fell sheer down into the unknown. Their edges were fringed with dangling laminaria as ferns might overhang some earthly gorge, but beneath that tossing, vibrating rim there were only the black gleaming walls of the chasm. The rocky edge curved away from us, but the abyss might be of any breadth, for our lights failed to penetrate the gloom which lay before us. When a Lucas signalling lamp was turned downwards it shot out a long golden lane of parallel beams extending down, down, down until it was quenched in the gloom of the terrible chasm beneath us.

‘It is indeed wonderful!’ cried Maracot, gazing out with a pleased proprietary expression upon his thin, eager face. ‘For depth I need not say that it has often been exceeded. There is the Challenger Deep of twenty-six thousand feet near the Ladrone Islands, the Planet Deep of thirty-two thousand feet off the Philippines, and many others, but it is probable that the Maracot Deep stands alone in the declivity of its descent, and is remarkable also for its escape from the observation of so many hydrographic explorers who have charted the Atlantic. It can hardly be doubted-’

He had stopped in the middle of a sentence and a look of intense interest and surprise had frozen upon his face. Bill Scanlan and I, gazing over his shoulders, were petrified by that which met our startled eyes.

Some great creature was coming up the tunnel of light which we had projected into the abyss. Far down where it tailed off into the darkness of the pit we could dimly see the vague black lurchings and heavings of some monstrous body in slow upward progression. Paddling in clumsy fashion, it was rising with dim flickerings to the edge of the gulf. Now, as it came nearer, it was right in the beam, and we could see its dreadful form more clearly. It was a beast unknown to Science, and yet with an analogy to much with which we are familiar. Too long for a huge crab and too short for a giant lobster, it was moulded more upon the lines of the crayfish, with two monstrous nippers outstretched on either side, and a pair of sixteen-foot antennae which quivered in front of its black dull sullen eyes. The carapace, light yellow in colour, may have been ten feet across, and its total length, apart from the antennae, must have been not less than thirty.

‘Wonderful!’ cried Maracot, scribbling desperately in his notebook. ‘Semi-pediculated eyes, elastic lamellae, family crustacea, species unknown. Crustaceus Maracoti — why not? Why not?’

‘By gosh, I’ll pass its name, but it seems to me it’s coming our way!’ cried Bill. ‘Say, Doc, what about putting our light out?’

‘Just one moment while I note the reticulations!’ cried the naturalist. ‘Yes, yes, that will do.’ He clicked off the switch and we were back in our inky darkness, with only the darting lights outside like meteors on a moonless night.

‘That beast is sure the world’s worst,’ said Bill, wiping his forehead. ‘I felt like the morning after a bottle of Prohibition Hoosh.’

‘It is certainly terrible to look at,’ Maracot remarked, ‘and perhaps terrible to deal with also if we were really exposed to those monstrous claws. But inside our steel case we can afford to examine him in safety and at our ease.’

He had hardly spoken when there came a rap as from a pickaxe upon our outer wall. Then there was a long drawn rasping and scratching, ending in another sharp rap.

‘Say, he wants to come in!’ cried Bill Scanlan in alarm. ‘By gosh! we want “No Admission” painted on this shack.’ His shaking voice showed how forced was his merriment, and I confess that my own knees were knocking together as I was aware of the stealthy monster closing up with an even blacker darkness each of our windows in succession, as he explored this strange shell which, could he but crack it, might contain his food.

‘He can’t hurt us,’ said Maracot, but there was less assurance in his tone. ‘Maybe it would be as well to shake the brute off.’ He hailed the Captain up the tube.

‘Pull us up twenty or thirty feet,’ he cried.

A few seconds later we rose from the lava plain and swung gently in the still water. But the terrible beast was pertinacious. After a very short interval we heard once more the raspings of his feelers and the sharp tappings of his claws as he felt us round. It was terrible to sit silently in the dark and know that death was so near. If that mighty claw fell upon the window, would it stand the strain? That was the unspoken question in each of our minds.

But suddenly an unexpected and more urgent danger presented itself. The tappings had gone to the roof of our little dwelling, and now we began to sway with a rhythmic movement to and fro.

‘Good God!’ I cried. ‘It has hold of the hawser. It will surely snap it.’

‘Say, Doc, it’s mine for the surface. I guess we’ve seen what we came to see, and it’s home, sweet home for Bill Scanlan. Ring up the elevator and get her going.’

‘But our work is not half done,’ croaked Maracot. ‘We have only begun to explore the edges of the Deep. Let us at least see how broad it is. When we have reached the other side I shall be content to return.’ Then up the tube: ‘All well, Captain. Move on at two knots until I call for a stop.’

We moved slowly out over the edge of the abyss. Since darkness had not saved us from attack we now turned on our lights. One of the portholes was entirely obscured by what appeared to be the creature’s lower stomach. Its head and its great nippers were at work above us, and we still swayed like a clanging bell. The strength of the beast must have been enormous. Were ever mortals placed in such a situation, with five miles of water beneath — and that deadly monster above? The oscillations became more and more violent. An excited shout came down the tube from the Captain as he became aware of the jerks upon the hawser, and Maracot sprang to his feet with his hands thrown upwards in despair. Even within the shell we were aware of the jar of the broken wires, and an instant later we were falling into the mighty gulf beneath us.

As I look back at that awful moment I can remember hearing a wild cry from Maracot.

‘The hawser has parted! You can do nothing! We are all dead men!’ he yelled, grabbing at the telephone tube, and then, ‘Good-bye, Captain, good-bye to all.’ They were our last words to the world of men.

We did not fall swiftly down, as you might have imagined. In spite of our weight our hollow shell gave us some sustaining buoyancy, and we sank slowly and gently into the abyss. I heard the long scrape as we slid through the claws of the horrible creature who had been our ruin, and then with a smooth gyration we went circling downwards into the abysmal depths. It may have been fully five minutes, and it seemed like an hour, before we reached the limit of our telephone wire and snapped it like a thread. Our air tube broke off at almost the same moment and the salt water came spouting through the vents. With quick, deft hands Bill Scanlan tied cords round each of the rubber tubes and so stopped the inrush, while the Doctor released the top of our compressed air which came hissing forth from the tubes. The lights had gone out when the wire snapped, but even in the dark the Doctor was able to connect up the Hellesens dry cells which lit a number of lamps in the roof.

‘It should last us a week,’ he said, with a wry smile. ‘We shall at least have light to die in.’ Then he shook his head sadly and a kindly smile came over his gaunt features. ‘It is all right for me. I am an old man and have done my work in the world. My one regret is that I should have allowed you two young fellows to come with me. I should have taken the risk alone.’

I simply shook his hand in reassurance, for indeed there was nothing I could say. Bill Scanlan, too, was silent. Slowly we sank, marking our pace by the dark fish shadows which flitted past our windows. It seemed as if they were flying upwards rather than that we were sinking down. We still oscillated, and there was nothing so far as I could see to prevent us from falling on our side, or even turning upside down. Our weight, however, was, fortunately, very evenly balanced and we kept a level floor. Glancing up at the bathymeter I saw that we had already reached the depth of a mile.

‘You see, it is as I said,’ remarked Maracot, with some complacency. ‘You may have seen my paper in the Proceedings of the Oceanographical Society upon the relation of pressure and depth. I wish I could get one word back to the world, if only to confute Bulow of Giessen, who ventured to contradict me.’

‘My gosh! If I could get a word back to the world I wouldn’t waste it on a square-head highbrow,’ said the mechanic. ‘There is a little wren in Philadelphia that will have tears in her pretty eyes when she hears that Bill Scanlan has passed out. Well, it sure does seem a darned queer way of doing it, anyhow.’

‘You should never have come,’ I said, putting my hand on his.

‘What sort of tin-horn sport should I have been if I had quitted?’ he answered. ‘No, it’s my job, and I am glad I stuck it.’

‘How long have we?’ I asked the Doctor, after a pause.

He shrugged his shoulders.

‘We shall have time to see the real bottom of the ocean, anyhow,’ said he. ‘There is air enough in our tubes for the best part of a day. Our trouble is with the waste products. That is what is going to choke us. If we could get rid of our carbon dioxide-’

‘That I can see is impossible.’

‘There is one tube of pure oxygen. I put it in in case of accidents. A little of that from time to time will help to keep us alive. You will observe that we are now more than two miles deep.’

‘Why should we try to keep ourselves alive? The sooner it is over the better,’ said I.

‘That’s the dope,’ cried Scanlan. ‘Cut loose and have done with it.’ .

‘And miss the most wonderful sight that man’s eye has ever seen!’ said Maracot. ‘It would be treason to Science. Let us record facts to the end, even if they should be for ever buried with our bodies. Play the game out.’

‘Some sport, the Doc!’ cried Scanlan. ‘I guess he has the best guts of the bunch. Let us see the spiel to an end.’

We sat patiently on the settee, the three of us, gripping the edges of it with strained fingers as it swayed and rocked, while the fishes still flashed swiftly upwards athwart the portholes.

‘It is now three miles,’ remarked Maracot. ‘I will turn on the oxygen, Mr. Headley, for it is certainly very close. There is one thing,’ he added, with his dry, cackling laugh, ‘it will certainly be the Maracot Deep from this time onwards. When Captain Howie takes back the news my colleagues will see to it that my grave is also my monument. Even Bulow of Giessen-’ He babbled on about some unintelligible scientific grievance.

We sat in silence again, watching the needle as it crawled on to its fourth mile. At one point we struck something heavy, which shook us so violently that I feared that we would turn upon our side. It may have been a huge fish, or conceivably we may have bumped upon some projection of the cliff over the edge of which we had been precipitated. That edge had seemed to us at the time to be such a wondrous depth, and now looking back at it from our dreadful abyss it might almost have been the surface. Still we swirled and circled lower and lower through the dark green waste of waters. Twenty-five thousand feet now was registered upon the dial.

‘We are nearly at our journey’s end,’ said Maracot. ‘My Scott’s recorder gave me twenty-six thousand seven hundred last year at the deepest point.

We shall know our fate within a few minutes. It may be that the shock will crush us. It may be—'

And at that moment we landed.

There was never a babe lowered by its mother on to a feather-bed who nestled down more gently than we on to the extreme bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The soft thick elastic ooze upon which we lit was a perfect buffer, which saved us from the slightest jar. We hardly moved upon our seats, and it is as well that we did not, for we had perched upon some sort of a projecting hummock, clothed thickly with the viscous gelatinous mud, and there we were balanced rocking gently with nearly half our base projecting and unsupported. There was a danger that we would tip over on our side, but finally we steadied down and remained motionless. As we did so Dr. Maracot, staring out through his porthole, gave a cry of surprise and hurriedly turned out our electric light.

To our amazement we could still see clearly. There was a dim, misty light outside which streamed through our porthole, like the cold radiance of a winter morning. We looked out at the strange scene, and with no help from our own lights we could see clearly for some hundred yards in each direction. It was impossible, inconceivable, but none the less the evidence of our senses told us that it was a fact. The great ocean floor is luminous.

'Why not?' cried Maracot, when we had stood for a minute or two in silent wonder. 'Should I not have foreseen it? What is this pteropod or globigerina ooze? Is it not the product of decay, the mouldering bodies of a billion billion organic creatures? And is decay not associated with phosphorescent luminosity? Where, in all creation, would it be seen if it were not here? Ah! It is indeed hard that we should have such a demonstration and be unable to send our knowledge back to the world.'

'And yet,' I remarked, 'we have scooped half a ton of radiolarian jelly at a time and detected no such radiance.'

'It would lose it, doubtless, in its long journey to the surface. And what is half a ton compared to these far-stretching plains of slow putrescence? And see, see,' he cried in uncontrollable excitement, 'the deep-sea creatures graze upon this organic carpet even as our herds on land graze upon the meadows!'

As he spoke a flock of big black fish, heavy and squat, came slowly over the ocean bed towards us, nuzzling among the spongy growths and nibbling away as they advanced. Another huge red creature, like a foolish cow of the ocean, was chewing the cud in front of my porthole, and others were grazing here and there, raising their heads from, time to time to gaze at this strange object which had so suddenly appeared among them.

I could only marvel at Maracot, who in that foul atmosphere, seated under the very shadow of death, still obeyed the call of Science and scribbled his observations in his notebook. Without following his precise methods, I none the less made my own mental notes, which will remain for ever as a picture stamped upon my brain. The lowest plains of ocean consist of red clay, but here it was overlaid by the grey bathybian slime which formed an undulating plain as far as our eyes could reach. This plain was not smooth, but was broken by numerous strange rounded hillocks like that upon which we had perched, all glimmering in the spectral light. Between these little hills there darted great clouds of strange fish, many of them quite unknown to Science, exhibiting every shade of colour, but black and red predominating. Maracot watched them with suppressed excitement and chronicled them in his notes.

The air had become very foul, and again we were only able to save ourselves by a fresh emission of oxygen. Curiously enough, we were all hungry — I should rather say ravenous — and we fell upon the potted beef with bread and butter, washed down by whisky and water, which the foresight of Maracot had provided. With my perceptions stimulated by this refreshment, I was seated at my lookout portal and longing for a last cigarette, when my eyes caught something which sent a whirl of strange thoughts and anticipations through my mind.

I have said that the undulating grey plain on every side of us was studded with what seemed like hummocks. A particularly large one was in front of my porthole, and I looked out at it within a range of thirty feet. There was some peculiar mark upon the side of it, and as I glanced along I saw to my surprise that this mark was repeated again and again until it was lost round the curve. When one is so near death it takes much to give one a thrill about anything connected with this world, but my breath failed me for a moment and my heart stood still as I suddenly realised that it was a frieze at which I was looking and that, barnacled and worn as it was, the hand of man had surely at some time carved these faded figures. Maracot and Scanlan crowded to my porthole and gazed out in utter amazement at these signs of the omnipresent energies of man.

‘It is carving, for sure!’ cried Scanlan. ‘I guess this dump has been the roof of a building. Then these other ones are buildings also. Say, boss, we’ve dropped plumb on to a regular burg.’

‘It is, indeed, an ancient city,’ said Maracot. ‘Geology teaches that the seas have once been continents and the continents seas, but I have always distrusted the idea that in times so recent as the quaternary there could have been an Atlantic subsidence. Plato’s report of Egyptian gossip had then a foundation of fact. These volcanic formations confirm the view that this subsidence was due to seismic activity.’

‘There is regularity about these domes,’ I remarked. ‘I begin to think that they are not separate houses, but that they are cupolas and form the ornaments of the roof of some huge building.’

‘I guess you are right,’ said Scanlan. ‘There are four big ones at the corners and the small ones in lines between. It’s some building, if we could see the whole of it! You could put the whole Merribank plant inside it — and then some.’

‘It has been buried up to the roof by the constant dropping from above,’ said Maracot. ‘On the other hand, it has not decayed. We have a constant temperature of a little over 32° Fahrenheit in the great depths, which would arrest destructive processes. Even the dissolution of the Bathic remains which pave the floor of the ocean and incidentally give us this luminosity must be a very slow one. But, dear me! this marking is not a frieze but an inscription.’

There was no doubt that he was right. The same symbol recurred every here and there. These marks were unquestionably letters of some archaic alphabet.

‘I have made a study of Phoenician antiquities, and there is certainly something suggestive and familiar in these characters,’ said our leader. ‘Well, we have seen a buried city of ancient days, my friends, and we carry a wonderful piece of knowledge with us to the grave. There is no more to be learned. Our book of knowledge is closed. I agree with you that the sooner the end comes the better.’

It could not now be long delayed. The air was stagnant and dreadful. So heavy was it with carbon products that the oxygen could hardly force its way out against the pressure. By standing on the settee one was able to get a gulp of purer air, but the mephitic reek was slowly rising. Dr. Maracot folded his arms with an air of resignation and sank his head upon his breast.

Scanlan was now overpowered by the fumes and was already sprawling upon the floor. My own head was swimming, and I felt an intolerable weight at my chest. I closed my eyes and my senses were rapidly slipping away. Then I opened them for one last glimpse of that world which I was leaving, and as I did so I staggered to my feet with a hoarse scream of amazement.

A human face was looking in at us through the porthole!

Was it my delirium? I clutched at the shoulder of Maracot and shook him violently. He sat up and stared, wonder-struck and speechless at this apparition. If he saw it as well as I, it was no figment of the brain. The face was long and thin, dark in complexion, with a short, pointed beard, and two vivid eyes darting here and there in quick, questioning glances which took in every detail of our situation. The utmost amazement was visible upon the man's face. Our lights were now full on, and it must indeed have been a strange and vivid picture which presented itself to his gaze in that tiny chamber of death, where one man lay senseless and two others glared out at him with the twisted, contorted features of dying men, cyanosed by incipient asphyxiation. We both had our hands to our throats, and our heaving chests carried their message of despair. The man gave a wave of his hand and hurried away.

'He has deserted us!' cried Maracot.

'Or gone for help. Let us get Scanlan on the couch. It's death for him down there.'

We dragged the mechanic on to the settee and propped his head against the cushions. His face was grey and he murmured in delirium, but his pulse was still perceptible.

'There is hope for us yet,' I croaked.

'But it is madness!' cried Maracot. 'How can man live at the bottom of the ocean? How can he breathe? It is collective hallucination. My young friend, we are going mad.'

Looking out at the bleak, lonely grey landscape in the dreary spectral light, I felt that it might be as Maracot said. Then suddenly I was aware of movement. Shadows were flitting through the distant water. They hardened and thickened into moving figures. A crowd of people were hurrying across the ocean bed in our direction. An instant later they had assembled in front of the porthole and were pointing and gesticulating in animated debate. There were several women in the crowd, but the greater part were men, one of whom, a powerful figure with a very large head and a full black beard, was clearly a person of authority. He made a swift inspection of our steel shell, and, since the edge of our base projected over the place on which we rested, he was able to see that there was a hinged trap-door at the bottom. He now sent a messenger flying back, while he made energetic and commanding signs to us to open the door from within.

‘Why not?’ I asked. ‘We may as well be drowned as be smothered. I can stand it no longer.’

‘We may not be drowned,’ said Maracot. ‘The water entering from below cannot rise above the level of the compressed air. Give Scanlan some brandy. He must make an effort, if it is his last one.’

I forced a drink down the mechanic’s throat. He gulped and looked round him with wondering eyes. Between us we got him erect on the settee and stood on either side of him. He was still half-dazed, but in a few words I explained the situation.

‘There is a chance of chlorine poisoning if the water reaches the batteries,’ said Maracot. ‘Open every air tube, for the more pressure we can get the less water may enter. Now help me while I pull upon the lever.’

We bent our weight upon it and yanked up the circular plate from the bottom of our little home, though I felt like a suicide as I did so. The green water, sparkling and gleaming under our light, came gurgling and surging in. It rose rapidly to our feet, to our knees, to our waists, and there it stopped. But the pressure of the air was intolerable. Our heads buzzed and the drums of our ears were bursting. We could not have lived in such an atmosphere for long. Only by clutching at the rack could we save ourselves from falling back into the waters beneath us.

From our higher position we could no longer see through the portholes, nor could we imagine what steps were being taken for our deliverance. Indeed, that any effective help could come to us seemed beyond the power of thought, and yet there was a commanding and purposeful air about these people, and especially about that squat bearded chieftain, which inspired vague hopes. Suddenly we were aware of his face looking up at us through the water beneath and an instant later he had passed through the circular opening and had clambered on to the settee, so that he was standing by our side — a short sturdy figure, not higher than my shoulder, but surveying us with large brown eyes, which were full of a half-amused confidence, as who should say, ‘You poor devils; you think you are in a very bad way, but I can clearly see the road out.’

Only now was I aware of a very amazing thing. The man, if indeed he was of the same humanity as ourselves, had a transparent envelope all round him which enveloped his head and body, while his arms and legs were free. So translucent was it that no one could detect it in the water, but now that he was in the air beside us it glistened like silver, though it remained as clear as the finest glass. On either shoulder he had a curious rounded projection beneath the clear protective sheath. It looked like an oblong box pierced with many holes, and gave him an appearance as if he were wearing epaulettes.

When our new friend had joined us another face appeared in the aperture of the bottom and thrust through it what seemed like a great bubble of glass. Three of these in succession were passed in and floated upon the surface of the water. Then six small boxes were handed up and our new acquaintance tied one with the straps attached to them to each of our shoulders, whence they stood up like his own. Already I began to surmise that no infraction of natural law was involved in the life of these strange people, and that while one box in some new fashion was a producer of air the other was an absorber of waste products. He now passed the transparent suits over our heads, and we felt that they clasped us tightly in the upper arm and waist by elastic bands, so that no water could penetrate. Within we breathed with perfect ease, and it was a joy to me to see Maracot looking out at me with his eyes twinkling as of old behind his glasses, while Bill Scanlan’s grin assured me that the life-giving oxygen had done its work, and that he was his cheerful self once more. Our rescuer looked from one to another of us with grave satisfaction, and then motioned to us to follow him through the trap-door and out on to the floor of the ocean. A dozen willing hands were outstretched to pull us through and to sustain our first faltering steps as we staggered with our feet deep in the slimy ooze.

Even now I cannot get past the marvel of it! There we were, the three of us, unhurt and at our ease at the bottom of a five-mile abyss of water. Where was that terrific pressure which had exercised the imagination of so many scientists? We were no more affected by it than were the dainty fish which swam around us. It is true that, so far as our bodies were concerned, we were protected by these delicate bells of vitrine, which were in truth tougher than the strongest steel, but even our limbs, which were exposed, felt no more than a firm constriction from the water which one learned in time to disregard. It was wonderful to stand together and to look back at the shell from which we had emerged. We had left the batteries at work, and it was a wondrous object with its streams of yellow light flooding out from each side, while clouds of fishes gathered at each window. As we watched it the leader took Maracot by the hand, and we followed them both across the watery morass, clumping heavily through the sticky surface.

And now a most surprising incident occurred, which was clearly as astonishing to these strange new companions of ours as to ourselves. Above our heads there appeared a small, dark object, descending from the darkness above us and swinging down until it reached the bed of the ocean within a very short distance from where we stood. It was, of course, the deep-sea lead from the *Stratford* above us, making a sounding of that watery gulf with which the name of the expedition was to be associated. We had seen it already upon its downward path, and we could well understand that the tragedy of our disappearance had suspended the operation, but that after a pause it had been concluded, with little thought that it would finish almost at our feet. They were unconscious, apparently, that they had touched bottom, for the lead lay motionless in the ooze. Above me stretched the taut piano wire which connected me through five miles of water with the deck of our vessel. Oh, that it were possible to write a note and to attach it! The idea was absurd, and yet could I not send some message which would show them that we were still conscious? My coat was covered by my glass bell and the pockets were unapproachable, but I was free below the waist and my handkerchief chanced to be in my trousers pocket. I pulled it out and tied it above the top of the lead. The weight at once disengaged itself by its automatic mechanism, and presently I saw my white wisp of linen flying upwards to that world which I may never see again. Our new acquaintances examined the seventy-five pounds of lead with great interest, and finally carried it off with us as we went upon our way.

We had only walked a couple of hundred yards, threading our way among the hummocks, when we halted before a small square-cut door with solid pillars on either side and an inscription across the lintel. It was open, and we passed through it into a large, bare chamber. There was a sliding partition worked by a crank from within, and this was drawn across behind us. We could, of course, hear nothing in our glass helmets, but after standing a few minutes we were aware that a powerful pump must be at work, for we saw the level of the water sinking rapidly above us. In less than a quarter of an hour we were standing upon a sloppy stone-flagged pavement, while our new friends were busy in undoing the fastenings of our transparent suits. An instant later there we stood, breathing perfectly pure air in a warm, well-lighted atmosphere, while the dark people of the abyss, smiling and chattering, crowded round us with hand-shakings and friendly pattings. It was a strange, rasping tongue that they spoke, and no word of it was intelligible to us, but the smile on the face and the light of friendship in the eye are understandable even in the waters under the earth. The glass suits were hung on numbered pegs upon the wall, and the kindly folk half led and half pushed us to an inner door which opened on to a long downward-sloping corridor. When it closed again behind us there was nothing to remind us of the stupendous fact that we were the involuntary guests of an unknown race at the bottom of the Atlantic ocean and cut off for ever from the world to which we belonged.

Now that the terrific strain had been so suddenly eased we were all exhausted. Even Bill Scanlan, who was a pocket Hercules, dragged his feet along the floor, while Maracot and I were only too glad to lean heavily upon our guides. Yet, weary as I was, I took in every detail as we passed. That the air came from some air-making machine was very evident, for it issued in puffs from circular openings in the walls. The light was diffused and was clearly an extension of that fluor system which was already engaging the attention of our European engineers when the filament and lamp were dispensed with. It shone from long cylinders of clear glass which were suspended along the cornices of the passages. So much I had observed when our descent was checked and we were ushered into a large sitting-room, thickly carpeted and well furnished with gilded chairs and sloping sofas which brought back vague memories of Egyptian tombs. The crowd had been dismissed and only the bearded man with two attendants remained. ‘Manda’ he repeated several times, tapping himself upon the chest. Then he pointed to each of us in turn and repeated the words Maracot, Headley and Scanlan until he had them perfect. He then motioned us to be seated and said a word to one of the attendants, who left the room and returned presently, escorting a very ancient gentleman, white-haired and long-bearded, with a curious conical cap of black cloth upon his head. I should have said that all these folk were dressed in coloured tunics, which extended to their knees, with high boots of fish skin or shagreen. The venerable newcomer was clearly a physician, for he examined each of us in turn, placing his hand upon our brows and closing his own eyes as if receiving a mental impression as to our condition. Apparently he was by no means satisfied, for he shook his head and said a few grave words to Manda. The latter at once sent the attendant out once more, and he brought in a tray of eatables and a flask of wine, which were laid before us. We were too weary to ask ourselves what they were, but we felt the better for the meal. We were then led to another room, where three beds had been prepared, and on one of these I flung myself down. I have a dim recollection of Bill Scanlan coming across and sitting beside me.

‘Say, Bo, that jolt of brandy saved my life,’ said he. ‘But where are we, anyhow?’

‘I know no more than you do.’

‘Well, I am ready to hit the hay,’ he said, sleepily, as he turned to his bed. ‘Say, that wine was fine. Thank God, Volstead never got down here.’ They were the last words I heard as I sank into the most profound sleep that I can ever recall.

CHAPTER 3

When I came to myself I could not at first imagine where I was. The events of the previous day were like some blurred nightmare, and I could not believe that I had to accept them as facts. I looked round in bewilderment at the large, bare, windowless room with drab-coloured walls, at the lines of quivering purplish light which flowed along the cornices, at the scattered articles of furniture, and finally at the two other beds, from one of which came the high-pitched, strident snore which I had learned aboard the *Stratford*, to associate with Maracot. It was too grotesque to be true, and it was only when I fingered my bed cover and observed the curious woven material, the dried fibres of some sea plant, from which it was made, that I was able to realise this inconceivabl eadventure which had befallen us. I was still pondering it when there came a loud explosion of laughter, and Bill Scanlan sat up in bed.

'Mornin', Bo!' he cried, amid his chuckles, on seeing that I was awake.

'You seem in good spirits,' said I, rather testily. 'I can't see that we have much to laugh about.'

'Well, I had a grouch on me, the same as you, when first I woke up,' he answered. 'Then came a real cute idea, and it was that that made me laugh.'

'I could do with a laugh myself,' said I. 'What's the idea?'

'Well, Bo, I thought how durned funny it would have been if we had all tied ourselves on to that deep-sea line. I allow with those glass dinguses we could have kept breathing all right. Then when old man Howie looked over the side there would have been the whole bunch of us comin' up at him through the water. He would have figured that he had hooked us, sure. Gee, what a spiel!'

Our united laughter woke the Doctor, who sat up in bed with the same amazed expression upon his face which had previously been upon my own. I forgot our troubles as I listened in amusement to his disjointed comments, which alternated between ecstatic joy at the prospect of such a field of study, and profound sorrow that he could never hope to convey his results to his scientific confreres of the earth. Finally he got back to the actual needs of the moment.

‘It is nine o’clock,’ he said, looking at his watch. We all registered the same hour, but there was nothing to show if it was night or morning.

‘We must keep our own calendar,’ said Maracot; ‘we descended upon October 3rd. We reached this place on the evening of the same day. How long have we slept?’

‘My gosh, it may have been a month,’ said Scanlan, ‘I’ve not been so deep since Mickey Scott got me on the point in the six round try-out at the Works.’

We dressed and washed, for every civilised convenience was at hand. The door, however, was fastened, and it was clear that we were prisoners for the time. In spite of the apparent absence of any ventilation, the atmosphere kept perfectly sweet, and we found that this was due to a current of air which came through small holes in the wall. There was some source of central heating, too, for though no stove was visible, the temperature was pleasantly warm. Presently I observed a knob upon one of the walls, and pressed it. This was, as I expected, a bell, for the door instantly opened, and a small, dark man, dressed in a yellow robe, appeared in the aperture. He looked at us inquiringly, with large brown, kindly eyes.

‘We are hungry,’ said Maracot; ‘can you get us some food?’

The man shook his head and smiled. It was clear that the words were incomprehensible to him.

Scanlan tried his luck with a flow of American slang, which was received with the same blank smile. When, however, I opened my mouth and thrust my finger into it, our visitor nodded vigorously and hurried away.

Ten minutes later the door opened and two of the yellow attendants appeared, rolling a small table before them. Had we been at the Biltmore Hotel we could not have had better fare. There were coffee, hot milk, rolls, delicious flat fish, and honey. For half an hour we were far too busy to discuss what we ate or whence it was obtained. At the end of that time the two servants appeared once more, rolled out the tray, and closed the door carefully behind them.

‘I’m fair black and blue with pinching myself,’ said Scanlan. ‘Is this a pipe dream or what? Say, Doc, you got us down here, and I guess it is up to you to tell us just how you size it all up.’

The Doctor shook his head.

‘It is like a dream to me also, but it is a glorious dream! What a story for the world if we could but get it to them!’

‘One thing is clear,’ said I, ‘there was certainly truth in this legend of Atlantis, and some of the folk have in a marvellous way managed to carry on.’

‘Well, even if they carried on,’ cried Bill Scanlan, scratching his bullet head, ‘I am darned if I can understand how they could get air and fresh water and the rest. Maybe if that queer duck with the beard that we saw last night comes to give us a once-over he will put us wise to it.’

‘How can he do that when we have no common language?’

‘Well, we shall use our own observation,’ said Maracot. ‘One thing I can already understand. I learned it from the honey at breakfast. That was clearly synthetic honey, such as we have already learned to make upon the earth. But if synthetic honey, why not synthetic coffee, or flour? The molecules of the elements are like bricks, and these bricks lie all around us. We have only to learn how to pull out certain bricks — sometimes just a single brick — in order to make a fresh substance. Sugar becomes starch, or either becomes alcohol, just by a shifting of the bricks. What is it that shifts them? Heat. Electricity. Other things perhaps of which we know nothing. Some of them will shift themselves, and radium becomes lead or uranium becomes radium without our touching them.’

‘You think, then, that they have an advanced chemistry?’

‘I’m sure of it. After all there is no elemental brick which is not ready to their hands. Hydrogen and oxygen come readily from the sea water. There are nitrogen and carbon in those masses of sea vegetation, and there are phosphorus and calcium in the bathybic deposit. With skilful management and adequate knowledge, what is there which could not be produced?’

The Doctor had launched upon a chemical lecture when the door opened and Manda entered, giving us a friendly greeting. There came with him the same old gentleman of venerable appearance whom we had met the night before. He may have had a reputation for learning, for he tried several sentences, which were probably different languages, upon us, but all were equally unintelligible. Then he shrugged his shoulders and spoke to Manda, who gave an order to the two yellow-clad servants, still waiting at the door. They vanished, but returned presently with a curious screen, supported by two side posts. It was exactly like one of our cinema screens, but it was coated with some sparkling material which glittered and shimmered in the light. This was placed against one of the walls. The old man then paced out very carefully a certain distance, and marked it upon the floor. Standing at this point he turned to Maracot and touched his forehead, pointing to the screen.

‘Clean dippy,’ said Scanlan. ‘Bats in the belfry.’

Maracot shook his head to show that we were nonplussed. So was the old man for a moment. An idea struck him, however, and he pointed to his own figure. Then he turned towards the screen, fixed his eyes upon it, and seemed to concentrate his attention. In an instant a reflection of himself appeared on the screen before us. Then he pointed to us, and a moment later our own little group took the place of his image. It was not particularly like us. Scanlan looked like a comic Chinaman and Maracot like a decayed corpse, but it was clearly meant to be ourselves as we appeared in the eyes of the operator.

‘It’s a reflection of thought,’ I cried.

‘Exactly,’ said Maracot. ‘This is certainly a most marvellous invention, and yet it is but a combination of such telepathy and television as we dimly comprehend upon earth.’

‘I never thought I’d live to see myself on the movies, if that cheese-faced Chink is really meant for me,’ said Scanlan. ‘Say, if we could get all this news to the editor of the Ledger he’d cough up enough to keep me for life. We’ve sure got the goods if we could deliver them.’

‘That’s the trouble,’ said I. ‘By George, we could stir the whole world if we could only get back to it. But what is he beckoning about?’

‘The old guy wants you to try your hand at it, Doc.’

Maracot took the place indicated, and his strong, clear-cut brain focused his picture to perfection. We saw an image of Manda, and then another one of the *Stratford* as we had left her.

Both Manda and the old scientist nodded their great approval at the sight of the ship, and Manda made a sweeping gesture with his hands, pointing first to us and then to the screen.

‘To tell them all about it — that’s the idea,’ I cried. ‘They want to know in pictures who we are, and how we got here.’

Maracot nodded to Manda to show that he understood, and had begun to throw an image of our voyage, when Manda held up his hand and stopped him. At an order the attendants removed the screen, and the two Atlanteans beckoned that we should follow them.

It was a huge building, and we proceeded down corridor after corridor until we came at last to a large hall with seats arranged in tiers like a lecture room. At one side was a broad screen of the same nature as that which we had seen. Facing it there was assembled an audience of at least a thousand people, who set up a murmur of welcome as we entered. They were of both sexes and of all ages, the men dark and bearded, the women beautiful in youth and dignified in age. We had little time to observe them, for we were led to seats in the front row, and Maracot was then placed on a stand opposite the screen, the lights were in some fashion turned down, and he had the signal to begin.

And excellently well he played his part. We first saw our vessel sailing forth from the Thames, and a buzz of excitement went up from the tense audience at this authentic glimpse of a real modern city. Then a map appeared which marked her course. Then was seen the steel shell with its fittings, which was greeted with a murmur of recognition. We saw ourselves once more descending, and reaching the edge of the abyss. Then came the appearance of the monster who had wrecked us. ‘Marax! Marax!’ cried the people, as the beast appeared. It was clear that they had learned to know and to fear it. There was a terrified hush as the creature fumbled with our hawser, and a groan of horror as the wires parted and we dropped into the gulf. In a month of explanation we could not have made our plight so clear as in that half-hour of visible demonstration.

As the audience broke up they showered every sign of sympathy upon us, crowding round us and patting our backs to show that we were welcome. We were presented in turn to some of the chiefs, but the chieftainship seemed to lie in wisdom alone, for all appeared to be on the same social scale, and were dressed in much the same way. The men wore tunics of a saffron colour coming down to the knees, with belts and high boots of a scaly tough material which must have been the hide of some sea beast. The women were beautifully draped in classical style, their flowing robes of every tint of pink and blue and green, ornamented with clusters of pearl or opalescent sheets of shell. Many of them were lovely beyond any earthly comparison. There was one — but why should I mix my private feelings up with this public narrative? Let me say only that Mona is the only daughter of Manda, one of the leaders of the people, and that from that first day of meeting I read in her dark eyes a message of sympathy and of understanding which went home to my heart, as my gratitude and admiration may have gone to hers. I need not say more at present about this exquisite lady. Suffice it that a new and strong influence had come into my life. When I saw Maracot gesticulating with unwonted animation to one kindly lady, while Scanlan stood conveying his admiration in pantomime in the centre of a group of laughing girls, I realised that my companions also had begun to find that there was a lighter side to our tragic position. If we were dead to the world we had at least found a life beyond, which promised some compensation for what we had lost.

Later in the day we were guided by Manda and other friends round some portions of the immense building. It had been so embedded in the sea-floor by the accumulations of ages that it was only through the roof that it could be entered, and from this point the passages led down and down until the floor level was reached several hundred feet below the entrance chamber. The floor in turn had been excavated, and we saw in all directions passages which sloped downwards into the bowels of the earth. We were shown the air-making apparatus with the pumps which circulated it through the building. Maracot pointed out with wonder and admiration that not only was the oxygen united with the nitrogen, but that smaller retorts supplied other gases which could only be the argon, neon, and other little-known constituents of the atmosphere which we are only just beginning to understand. The distilling vats for making fresh water and the enormous electrical instalments were other objects of interest, but much of the machinery was so intricate that it was difficult for us to follow the details. I can only say that I saw with my own eyes, and tested with my own palate, that chemicals in gaseous and liquid forms were poured into various machines, that they were treated by heat, by pressure, and by electricity, and that flour, tea, coffee, or wine was collected as the product.

There was one consideration which was very quickly forced upon us by our examination, on various occasions, of as much of this building as was open to our inspection. This was that the exposure to the sea had been foreseen and the protection against the inrush of the water had been prepared long before the land sank beneath the waves. Of course, it stood to reason, and needed no proof, that such precautions could not have been taken after the event, but we were witnesses now of the signs that the whole great building had from the first been constructed with the one idea of being an enduring ark of refuge. The huge retorts and vats in which the air, the food, the distilled water, and the other necessary products were made were all built into the walls, and were evidently integral parts of the original construction. So, too, with the exit chambers, the silica works where the vitrine bells were constructed, and the huge pumps which controlled the water. Every one of these things had been prepared by the skill and the foresight of that wonderful far-away people who seemed, from what we could learn, to have thrown out one arm to Central America and one to Egypt, and so left traces of themselves even upon this earth when their own land went down into the Atlantic. As to these, their descendants, we judged that they had probably degenerated, as was but natural, and that at the most they had been stagnant and only preserved some of the science and knowledge of their ancestors without having the energy to add to it. They possessed wonderful powers and yet seemed to us to be strangely wanting in initiative, and had added nothing to that wonderful legacy which they had inherited. I am sure that Maracot, using this knowledge, would very soon have attained greater results. As to Scanlan, with his quick brain and mechanical skill, he was continually putting in touches which probably seemed as remarkable to them as their powers to us. He had a beloved mouth-organ in his coat-pocket when we made our descent, and his use of this was a perpetual joy to our companions, who sat around in entranced groups, as we might listen to a Mozart, while he handed out to them the crooning coon songs of his native land.

I have said that the whole building was not open to our inspection, and I might give a little further detail upon that subject. There was one well-worn corridor down which we saw folk continually passing, but which was always avoided by our guides in our excursions. As was natural our curiosity was aroused, and we determined one evening that we would take a chance and do a little exploring upon our own account. We slipped out of our room, therefore, and made our way to the unknown quarter at a time when few people were about.

The passage led us to a high arched door, which appeared to be made of solid gold. When we pushed it open we found ourselves in a huge room, forming a square of not less than two hundred feet. All around, the walls were painted with vivid colours and adorned with extraordinary pictures and statues of grotesque creatures with enormous head-dresses, like the full dress regalia of our American Indians. At the end of this great hall there was one huge seated figure, the legs crossed like a Buddha, but with none of the benignity of aspect which is seen on the Buddha’s placid features. On the contrary, this was a creature of Wrath, open-mouthed and fierce-eyed, the latter being red, and their effect exaggerated by two electric lights which shone through them. On his lap was a great oven, which we observed, as we approached it, to be filled with ashes.

‘Moloch!’ said Maracot. ‘Moloch or Baal — the old god of the Phoenician races.’

‘Good heavens!’ I cried, with recollections of old Carthage before me. ‘Don’t tell me that these gentle folk could go in for human sacrifice.’

‘Look it here, Bo!’ said Scanlan, anxiously. ‘I hope they keep it in the family, anyhow. We don’t want them to pull no such dope on us.’

‘No, I guess they have learned their lesson,’ said I. ‘It’s misfortune that teaches folk to have pity for others.’

‘That’s right,’ Maracot remarked, poking about among the ashes, ‘it is the old hereditary god, but it is surely a gentler cult. These are burned loaves and the like. But perhaps there was a time—’

But our speculations were interrupted by a stern voice at our elbow, and we found several men in yellow garments and high hats, who were clearly the priests of the Temple. From the expression on their faces I should judge that we were very near to being the last victims to Baal, and one of them had actually drawn a knife from his girdle. With fierce gestures and cries they drove us roughly out of their sacred shrine.

‘By gosh!’ cried Scanlan, ‘I’ll sock that duck if he keeps crowding me! Look it here, you Bindlestiff, keep your hands off my coat.’

For a moment I feared that we should have had what Scanlan called a ‘rough house’ within the sacred precincts. However, we got the angry mechanic away without blows and regained the shelter of our room, but we could tell from the demeanour of Manda and others of our friends that our escapade was known and resented.

But there was another shrine which was freely shown to us and which had a very unexpected result, for it opened up a slow and imperfect method of communication between our companions and ourselves. This was a room in the lower quarter of the Temple, with no decorations or distinction save that at one end there stood a statue of ivory yellow with age, representing a woman holding a spear, with an owl perched upon her shoulder. A very old man was the guardian of the room, and in spite of his age it was clear to us that he was of a very different race, and one of a finer, larger type than the men of the Temple. As we stood gazing at the ivory statue, Maracot and I, both wondering where we had seen something like it, the old man addressed us.

‘Thea,’ said he, pointing to the figure.

‘By George!’ I cried, ‘he is speaking Greek.’

‘Thea! Athena!’ repeated the man.

There was not a doubt of it. ‘Goddess — Athena,’ the words were unmistakable. Maracot, whose wonderful brain had absorbed something from every branch of human knowledge, began at once to ask questions in Classical Greek which were only partly understood and were answered in a dialect so archaic that it was almost incomprehensible. Still, he acquired some knowledge, and he found an intermediary through whom he could dimly convey something to our companions.

‘It is a remarkable proof,’ said Maracot that evening, in his high neighing voice and in the tones of one addressing a large class, ‘of the reliability of legend. There is always a basis of fact even if in the course of the years it should become distorted. You are aware — or probably you are not aware’ — (‘Bet your life!’ from Scanlan)—’that a war was going on between the primitive Greeks and, the Atlanteans at the time of the destruction of the great island. The fact is recorded in Solon’s description of what he learned from the priests of Sais. We may conjecture that there were Greek prisoners in the hands of the Atlanteans at the time, that some of them were in the service of the Temple, and that they carried their own religion with them. That man was, so far as I could understand, the old hereditary priest of the cult, and perhaps when we know more we shall see something of these ancient people.’

‘Well, I hand it to them for good sense,’ said Scanlan. ‘I guess if you want a plaster god it is better to have a fine woman than that blatherskite with the red eyes and the coal-bunker on his knees.’

‘Lucky they can’t understand your views,’ I remarked. ‘If they did you might end up as a Christian martyr.’

‘Not so long as I can play them jazz,’ he answered, ‘I guess they’ve got used to me now, and they couldn’t do without me.’

They were a cheerful crowd, and it was a happy life, but there were and are times when one’s whole heart goes out to the homelands which we have lost, and visions of the dear old quadrangles of Oxford, or of the ancient elms and the familiar campus of Harvard, came up before my mind. In those early days they seemed as far from me as some landscape in the moon, and only now in a dim uncertain fashion does the hope of seeing them once more begin to grow in my soul.

CHAPTER 4

It was a few days after our arrival that our hosts or our captors — we were dubious sometimes as to which to call them — took us out for an expedition upon the bottom of the ocean. Six of them came with us, including Manda, the chief. We assembled in the same exit chamber in which we had originally been received, and we were now in a condition to examine it a little more closely. It was a very large place, at least a hundred feet each way, and its low walls and ceiling were green with marine growths and dripping with moisture. A long row of pegs, with marks which I presume were numbers, ran round the whole room, and on each was hung one of the semi-transparent bells of vitrine and a pair of the shoulder batteries which ensured respiration. The floor was of flagged stone worn into concavities, the footsteps of many generations, these hollows now lying as pools of shallow water. The whole was highly illuminated by fluor tubes round the cornice. We were fastened into our vitrine coverings, and a stout pointed staff made of some light metal was handed to each of us. Then, by signals, Manda ordered us to take a grip of a rail which ran round the room, he and his friends setting us an example. The object of this soon became evident, for as the outer door swung slowly open the sea water came pouring in with such force that we should have been swept from our feet but for this precaution. It rose rapidly, however, to above the level of our heads, and the pressure upon us was eased. Manda led the way to the door, and an instant afterwards we were out on the ocean bed once more, leaving the portal open behind us ready for our return.

Looking round us in the cold, flickering, spectral light which illuminates the bathybian plain, we could see for a radius of at least a quarter of a mile in every direction.

What amazed us was to observe, on the very limit of what was visible, a very brilliant glow of radiance. It was towards this that our leader turned his steps, our party walking in single file behind him. It was slow going, for there was the resistance of the water, and our feet were buried deeply in the soft slush with every step; but soon we were able to see clearly what the beacon was which had attracted us. It was our own shell, our last reminder of terrestrial life, which lay tilted upon one of the cupolas of the far-flung building, with all its lights still blazing. It was three-quarters full of water, but the imprisoned air still preserved that portion in which our electric instalment lay. It was strange indeed as we gazed into it to see the familiar interior with our settees and instruments still in position, while several good-sized fish like minnows in a bottle swam round and round inside it. One after the other our party clambered in through the open flap, Maracot to rescue a book of notes which floated on the surface, Scanlan and I to pick up some personal belongings. Manda came also with one or two of his comrades, examining with the greatest interest the bathometer and thermometer with the other instruments which were attached to the wall. The latter we detached and took away with us. It may interest scientists to know that forty degrees Fahrenheit represents the temperature at the greatest sea depths to which man has ever descended, and that it is higher, on account of the chemical decomposition of the ooze, than the upper strata of the sea.

Our little expedition had, it seems, a definite object besides that of allowing us a little exercise upon the bed of the ocean. We were hunting for food. Every now and then I saw our comrades strike sharply down with their pointed sticks, impaling each time a large brown flat fish, not unlike a turbot, which was numerous, but lay so closely in the ooze that it took practised eyes to detect it. Soon each of the little men had two or three of these dangling at his side. Scanlan and I soon got the knack of it, and captured a couple each, but Maracot walked as one in a dream, quite lost in his wonder at the ocean beauties around him and making long and excited speeches which were lost to the ear, but visible to the eyes from the contortion of his features.

Our first impression had been one of monotony, but we soon found that the grey plains were broken up into varied formations by the action of the deep-sea currents which flowed like submarine rivers across them. These streams cut channels in the soft slime and exposed the beds which lay beneath. The floor of these banks consisted of red clay which forms the base of all things on the surface of the bed of the ocean, and they were thickly studded with white objects which I imagined to be shells, but which proved, when we examined them, to be the ear bones of whales and the teeth of sharks and the other sea monsters. One of these teeth which I picked up was fifteen inches long, and we could but be thankful that so fearful a monster frequented the higher levels of ocean. It belonged, according to Maracot, to a giant-killing grampus or Orca gladiator. It recalled the observation of Mitchell Hedges that even the most terrible sharks that he had caught bore upon their bodies the marks which showed that they had encountered creatures larger and more formidable than themselves.

There was one peculiarity of the ocean depths which impresses itself upon the observer. There is, as I have said, a constant cold light rising up from the slow phosphorescent decay of the great masses of organic matter. But above, all is black as night. The effect is that of a dim winter day, with a heavy black thundercloud lying low above the earth. Out of this black canopy there falls slowly an incessant snowstorm of tiny white flakes, which glimmer against the sombre background. These are the shells of sea snails and other small creatures who live and die in the five miles of water which separate us from the surface, and though many of these are dissolved as they fall and add to the lime salts in the ocean, the rest go in the course of ages to form that deposit which had entombed the great city in the upper part of which we now dwelt.

Leaving our last link with earth beneath us, we pushed on into the gloom of the submarine world and soon we were met by a completely new development. A moving patch appeared in front of us, which broke up as we approached it into a crowd of men, each in his vitrine envelope, who were dragging behind them broad sledges heaped with coal. It was heavy work, and the poor devils were bending and straining, tugging hard at the sharkskin ropes which served as traces. With each gang of men there was one who appeared to be in authority, and it interested us to see that the leaders and the workers were clearly of a different race. The latter were tall men, fair, with blue eyes and powerful bodies. The others were, as already described, dark and almost negroid, with squat, broad frames. We could not inquire into the mystery at that moment, but the impression was left upon my mind that the one race represented the hereditary slaves of the other, and Maracot was of the opinion that they may have been the descendants of those Greek prisoners whose goddess we had seen in the Temple.

Several droves of these men, each drawing its load of coal, were met by us before we came to the mine itself. At this point the deep-sea deposits and the sandy formations which lay beneath them had been cut away, and a great pit exposed, which consisted of alternate layers of clay and coal, representing strata in the old perished world of long ago which now lay at the bottom of the Atlantic. At the various levels of this huge excavation we could see gangs of men at work hewing the coal, while others gathered it into loads and placed it in baskets, by means of which it was hoisted up to the level above. The whole mine was on so vast a scale that we could not see the other side of the enormous pit which so many generations of workers had scooped in the bed of the ocean. This, then, transmuted into electric force, was the source of the motive power by which the whole machinery of Atlantis was run. It is interesting, by the way, to record that the name of the old city had been correctly preserved in the legends, for when we had mentioned it to Manda and others they first looked greatly surprised that we should know it, and then nodded their heads vigorously to show that they understood.

Passing the great coal pit — or, rather, branching away from it to the right — we came on a line of low cliffs of basalt, their surface as clear and shining as on the day when they were shot up from the bowels of the earth, while their summit; some hundreds of feet above us, loomed up against the dark background. The base of these volcanic cliffs was draped in a deep jungle of high seaweed, growing out of tangled masses of crinoid corals laid down in the old terrestrial days. Along the edge of this thick undergrowth we wandered for some time, our companions beating it with their sticks and driving out for our amusement an extraordinary assortment of strange fishes and crustacea, now and again securing a specimen for their own tables. For a mile or more we wandered along in this happy fashion, when I saw Manda stop suddenly and look round him with gestures of alarm and surprise. These submarine gestures formed a language in themselves, for in a moment his companions understood the cause of his trouble, and then with a shock we realised it also. Dr. Maracot had disappeared.

He had certainly been with us at the coal pit, and he had come as far as the basalt cliffs. It was inconceivable that he had got ahead of us, so it was evident that he must be somewhere along the line of jungle in our rear. Though our friends were disturbed, Scanlan and I, who knew something of the good man’s absent-minded eccentricities were confident that there was no cause for alarm, and that we should soon find him loitering over some sea form which had attracted him. We all turned to retrace our steps, and had hardly gone a hundred yards before we caught sight of him.

But he was running — running with an agility which I should have thought impossible for a man of his habits. Even the least athletic can run, however, when fear is the pacemaker. His hands were outstretched for help, and he stumbled and blundered forward with clumsy energy. He had good cause to exert himself, for three horrible creatures were close at his heels. They were tiger crabs, striped black and white, each about the size of a Newfoundland dog. Fortunately they were themselves not very swift travellers, and were scurrying along the soft sea bottom in a curious sidelong fashion which was little faster than that of the terrified fugitive.

Their wind was better, however, and they would probably have had their horrible claws upon him in a very few minutes had not our friends intervened. They dashed forward with their pointed sticks, and Manda flashed a power electric lantern, which he carried in his belt, in the face of the loathsome monsters, who scuttled into the jungle and were lost to view. Our comrade sat down on a lump of coral and his face showed that he was exhausted by his adventure. He told us afterwards that he had penetrated the jungle in the hope of securing what seemed to him to be a rare specimen of the deep-sea Chimoera, and that he had blundered into the nest of these fierce tiger crabs, who had instantly dashed after him. It was only after a long rest that he was able to resume the journey.

Our next stage after skirting the basalt cliffs led us to our goal. The grey plain in front of us was covered at this point by irregular hummocks and tall projections which told us that the great city of old lay beneath it. It would all have been completely buried for ever by the ooze, as Herculaneum has been by lava or Pompeii by ashes, had an entrance to it not been excavated by the survivors of the Temple. This entrance was a long, downward cutting, which ended up in a broad street with buildings exposed on either side. The walls of these buildings were occasionally cracked and shattered, for they were not of the solid construction which had preserved the Temple, but the interiors were in most cases exactly as they had been when the catastrophe occurred, save that sea changes of all sorts, beautiful and rare in some cases and horrifying in others, had modified the appearances of the rooms. Our guides did not encourage us to examine the first ones which we reached, but hurried us onwards until we came to that which had clearly been the great central citadel or palace round which the whole town centred. The pillars and columns and vast sculptured cornices and friezes and staircases of this building exceeded anything which I have ever seen upon earth.

Its nearest approach seemed to me to be the remains of the Temple of Karnak at Luxor in Egypt, and, strange to say, the decorations and half-effaced engravings resembled in detail those of the great ruin beside the Nile, and the lotus-shaped capitals of the columns were the same. It was an amazing experience to stand on the marble tessellated floors of those vast halls, with great statues looming high above one on every side, and to see, as we saw that day, huge silvery eels gliding above our heads and frightened fish darting away in every direction from the light which was projected before us. From room to room we wandered, marking every sign of luxury and occasionally of that lascivious folly which is said, by the lingering legend, to have drawn God’s curse upon the people. One small room was wonderfully enamelled with mother-of-pearl, so that even now it gleamed with brilliant opalescent tints when the light played across it. An ornamented platform of yellow metal and a similar couch lay in one corner, and one felt that it may well have been the bedchamber of a queen, but beside the couch there lay now a loathsome black squid, its foul body rising and falling in a slow, stealthy rhythm so that it seemed like some evil heart which still beat in the very centre of the wicked palace. I was glad, and so, I learned, were my companions, when our guides led the way out once more, glancing for a moment at a ruined amphitheatre and again at a pier with a lighthouse at the end, which showed that the city had been a seaport. Soon we had emerged from these places of ill omen and were out on the familiar bathybian plain once more.

Our adventures were not quite over, for there was one more which was as alarming to our companions as to ourselves. We had nearly made our way home when one of our guides pointed upwards with alarm. Gazing in that direction we saw an extraordinary sight. Out of the black gloom of the waters a huge, dark figure was emerging, falling rapidly downwards. At first it seemed a shapeless mass, but as it came more clearly into the light we could see that it was the dead body of a monstrous fish, which had burst so that the entrails were streaming up behind it as it fell. No doubt the gases had buoyed it up in the higher reaches of the ocean until, having been released by putrefaction or by the ravages of sharks, there was nothing left but dead weight, which sent it hurtling down to the bottom of the sea. Already in our walk we had observed several of these great skeletons picked clean by the fish, but this creature was still, save for its disembowelment, even as it had lived. Our guides seized us with the intention of dragging us out of the path of the falling mass, but presently they were reassured and stood still, for it was clear that it would miss us. Our vitrine helmets prevented our hearing the thud, but it must have been prodigious when the huge body struck the floor of the ocean, and we saw the globigerina ooze fly upwards as the mud splashes when a heavy stone is hurled into it. It was a sperm whale, some seventy feet long, and from the excited and joyful gestures of the submarine folk I gathered that they would find plenty of use for the spermaceti and the fat. For the moment, however, we left the derelict creature, and with joyful hearts, for we unpractised visitors were weary and aching, found ourselves once more in front of the engraved portal of the roof, and finally standing safe and sound, divested of our vitrine bells, on the sloppy floor of the entrance chamber.

A few days — as we reckon time — after the occasion when we had given the community a cinema view of our own proceedings, we were present at a very much more solemn and august exhibition of the same sort, which gave us in a clear and wonderful way the past history of this remarkable people. I cannot flatter myself that it was given entirely on our behalf, for I rather think that the events were publicly rehearsed from time to time in order to carry on the record, and that the part to which we were admitted was only some intermezzo of a long religious ceremony. However that may be, I will describe it exactly as it occurred.

We were led to the same great hall or theatre where Dr. Maracot had thrown our own adventures upon the screen. There the whole community was assembled, and we were given, as before, places of honour in front of the great luminous screen. Then, after a long song, which may have been some sort of patriotic chant, a very old white-haired man, the historian or chronicler of the nation, advanced amid much applause to the focus point and threw upon the bright surface before him a series of pictures to represent the rise and fall of his own people. I wish I could convey to you their vividness and drama. My two companions and I lost all sense of time and place, so absorbed were we in the contemplation, while the audience was moved to its depths and groaned or wept as the tragedy unfolded, which depicted the ruin of their fatherland, the destruction of their race.

In the first series of scenes we saw the old continent in its glory, as its memory had been handed down by these historical records passed from fathers to sons. We had a bird’s-eye view of a glorious rolling country, enormous in extent, well watered and cleverly irrigated, with great fields of grain, waving orchards, lovely streams and woody hills, still lakes and occasional picturesque mountains. It was studded with villages and covered with farm-houses and beautiful private residences. Then our attention was carried to the capital, a wonderful and gorgeous city upon the sea-shore, the harbour crammed with galleys, her quays piled with merchandise, and her safety assured by high walls with towering battlements and circular moats, all on the most gigantic scale. The houses stretched inland for many miles, and in the centre of the city was a crenellated castle or citadel, so widespread and commanding that it was like some creation of a dream. We were then shown the faces of those who lived in that golden age, wise and venerable old men, virile warriors, saintly priests, beautiful and dignified women, lovely children, an apotheosis of the human race.

Then came pictures of another sort. We saw wars, constant wars, war by land and war by sea. We saw naked and defenceless races trampled down and over-ridden by great chariots or the rush of mailed horsemen. We saw treasures heaped upon the victors, but even as the riches increased the faces upon the screen became more animal and more cruel. Down, down they sank from one generation to another. We were shown signs of lascivious dissipation or moral degeneracy, of the accretion of matter and decline of spirit. Brutal sports at the expense of others had taken the place of the manly exercises of old. There was no longer the quiet and simple family life, nor the cultivation of the mind, but we had a glimpse of a people who were restless and shallow, rushing from one pursuit to another, grasping ever at pleasure, for ever missing it, and yet imagining always that in some more complex and unnatural form it might still be found. There had arisen on the one hand an over-rich class who sought only sensual gratification, and on the other hand an over-poor residue whose whole function in life was to minister to the wants of their masters, however evil those wants might be.

And now once again a new note was struck. There were reformers at work who were trying to turn the nation from its evil ways, and to direct it back into those higher paths which it had forsaken. We saw them, grave and earnest men, reasoning and pleading with the people, but we saw them scorned and jeered at by those whom they were trying to save. Especially we could see that it was the priests of Baal, priests who had gradually allowed forms and show and outward ceremonies to take the place of unselfish spiritual development, who led the opposition to the reformers.

But the latter were not to be bullied or browbeaten. They continued to try for the salvation of the people, and their faces assumed a graver and even a terror-inspiring aspect, as those of men who had a fearsome warning to give which was like some dreadful vision before their own minds. Of their auditors some few seemed to heed and be terrified at the words, but others turned away laughing and plunged ever deeper into their morass of sin. There came a time at last when the reformers turned away also as men who could do no more, and left this degenerate people to its fate.

Then we saw a strange sight. There was one reformer, a man of singular strength of mind and body, who gave a lead to all the others. He had wealth and influence and powers, which latter seemed to be not entirely of this earth. We saw him in what seemed to be a trance, communing with higher spirits. It was he who brought all the science of his land — science which far outshone anything known by us moderns — to the task of building an ark of refuge against the coming troubles. We saw myriads of workmen at work, and the walls rising while crowds of careless citizens looked on and made merry at such elaborate and useless precautions. We saw others who seemed to reason with him and to say to him that if he had fears it would be easier for him to fly to some safer land. His answer, so far as we could follow it, was that there were some who must be saved at the last moment, and that for their sake he must remain in the new Temple of safety. Meanwhile he collected in it those who had followed him, and he held them there, for he did not himself know the day nor the hour, though forces beyond mortal had assured him of the coming fact. So when the ark was ready and the water-tight doors were finished and tested, he waited upon doom, with his family, his friends, his followers, and his servants.

And doom came. It was a terrible thing even in a picture. God knows what it could be like in reality. We first saw a huge sleek mountain of water rise to an incredible height out of a calm ocean. Then we saw it travel, sweeping on and on, mile after mile, a great glistening hill, topped with foam, at an ever-increasing rate. Two little ships tossing among the snowy fringe upon the summit became, as the wave rolled towards us, a couple of shattered galleys. Then we saw it strike the shore and sweep over the city, while the houses went down before it like a field of corn before a tornado. We saw the folk upon the house-tops glaring out at the approaching death, their faces twisted with horror, their eyes staring, their mouths contorted, gnawing at their hands and gibbering in an insanity of terror. The very men and women who had mocked at the warning were now screaming to Heaven for mercy, grovelling with their faces on the ground, or kneeling with frenzied arms raised in wild appeal. There was no time now to reach the ark, which stood beyond the city, but thousands dashed up to the Citadel, which stood upon higher ground, and the battlement walls were black with people. Then suddenly the Castle began to sink. Everything began to sink. The water had poured down into the remote recesses of the earth, the central fires had expanded it into steam, and the very foundations of the land were blown apart. Down went the city and ever down, while a cry went up from ourselves and the audience at the terrible sight. The pier broke in two and vanished. The high Pharus collapsed under the waves. The roofs looked for a while like successive reefs of rock forming lines of spouting breakers until they, too, went under.

The Citadel was left alone upon the surface, like some monstrous ship, and then it also slid sideways down into the abyss, with a fringe of helpless waving hands upon its summit. The awful drama was over, and an unbroken sea lay across the whole continent, a sea which bore no life upon it, but which among its huge smoking swirls and eddies showed all the wrack of the tragedy tossed hither and thither, dead men and animals, chairs, tables, articles of clothing, floating hats and bales of goods, all bobbing and heaving in one huge liquid fermentation. Slowly we saw it die away, and a great wide expanse as smooth and bright as quicksilver, with a murky sun low on the horizon, showed us the grave of the land that God had weighed and found wanting.

The story was complete. We could ask for no more, since our own brains and imagination could supply the rest. We realised the slow remorseless descent of that great land lower and lower into the abyss of the ocean amid volcanic convulsions which threw up submarine peaks around it. We saw it in our mind’s eye stretched out, over miles of what was now the bed of the Atlantic, the shattered city lying alongside of the ark or refuge in which the handful of nerve-shattered survivors were assembled. And then finally we understood how these had carried on their lives, how they had used the various devices with which the foresight and science of their great leader had endowed them, how he had taught them all his arts before he passed away, and how some fifty or sixty survivors had grown now into a large community, which had to dig its way into the bowels of the earth in order to get room to expand. No library of information could make it clearer than that series of pictures and the inferences which we could draw from them. Such was the fate, and such the causes of the fate, which overwhelmed the great land of Atlantis. Some day far distant, when this bathybian ooze has turned to chalk, this great city will be thrown up once more by some fresh expiration of Nature, and the geologist of the future, delving in the quarry, will exhume not flints nor shells, but the remains of a vanished civilization, and the traces of an old-world catastrophe.

Only one point had remained undecided, and that was the length of time since the tragedy had occurred. Dr. Maracot discovered a rough method of making an estimate. Among the many annexes of the great building there was one huge vault, which was the burial-place of the chiefs. As in Egypt and in Yucatan, the practice of mummifying had been usual, and in niches in the walls there were endless rows of these grim relics of the past. Manda pointed proudly to the next one in the succession, and gave us to understand that it was specially arranged for himself.

‘If you take an average of the European kings,’ said Maracot, in his best professional manner, ‘you will find that they run to above five in the century. We may adopt the same figure here. We cannot hope for scientific accuracy, but it will give us an approximation. I have counted the mummies, and they are four hundred in number.’

‘Then it would be eight thousand years?’

‘Exactly. And this agrees to some extent with Plato’s estimate. It certainly occurred before the Egyptian written records begin, and they go back between six and seven thousand years from the present date. Yes, I think we may say that our eyes have seen the reproduction of a tragedy which occurred at least eight thousand years ago. But, of course, to build up such a civilization as we see the traces of, must in itself have taken many thousands of years.

‘Thus,’ he concluded — and I pass the claim on to you — we have extended the horizon of ascertained human history as no men have ever done since history began.’

CHAPTER 5

It was about a month, according to our calculations, after our visit to the buried city that the most amazing and unexpected thing of all occurred. We had thought by this time that we were immune to shocks and that nothing new could really stagger us, but this actual fact went far beyond anything for which our imagination might have prepared us.

It was Scanlan who brought the news that something momentous had happened. You must realise that by this time we were, to some extent, at home in the great building; that we knew where the common rest rooms and recreation rooms were situated; that we attended concerts (their music was very strange and elaborate) and theatrical entertainments, where the unintelligible words were translated by very vivid and dramatic gestures; and that, speaking generally, we were part of the community. We visited various families in their own private rooms, and our lives — I can speak for my own, at any rate — were made the brighter by the glamour of these strange people, especially of that one dear young lady whose name I have already mentioned. Mona was the daughter of one of the leaders of the tribe, and I found in his family a warm and kindly welcome which rose above all differences of race or language. When it comes to the most tender language of all, I did not find that there was so much between old Atlantis and modern America. I guess that what would please a Massachusetts girl of Brown's College is just about what would please my lady under the waves.

But I must get back to the fact that Scanlan came into our room with news of some great happening.

'Say, there is one of them just blown in, and he's that excited that he clean forgot to take his glass lid off, and he was jabbering for some minutes before he understood that no one could hear him. Then it was Blah Blah Blah as long as his breath would hold, and they are all following him now to the jumping-off place. It's me for the water, for there is sure something worth our seeing.'

Running out, we found our friends all hurrying down the corridor with excited gestures, and we, joining the procession, soon formed part of the crowd who were hurrying across the sea bottom, led by the excited messenger. They drove along at a rate which made it no easy matter for us to keep up, but they carried their electric lanterns with them, and even though we fell behind we were able to follow the gleam. The route lay as before, along the base of the basalt cliffs until we came to a spot where a set of steps, concave from long usage, led up to the top. Ascending these, we found ourselves in broken country, with many jagged pinnacles of rock and deep crevasses which made it difficult travelling. Emerging from this tangle of ancient lava, we came out on a circular plain, brilliant by the phosphorescent light, and there in the very centre of it lay an object which set me gasping. As I looked at my companions I could see from their amazed expression how fully they shared my emotion.

Half embedded in the slime there lay a good-sized steamer. It was tilted upon its side, the funnel had broken and was hanging at a strange angle, and the foremast had snapped off short, but otherwise the vessel was intact and as clean and fresh as if she had just left the dock. We hurried towards her and found ourselves under the stern. You can imagine how we felt when we read the name '*Stratford*, London'. Our ship had followed ourselves into the Maracot Deep.

Of course, after the first shock the affair did not seem so incomprehensible. We remembered the falling glass, the reefed sails of the experienced Norwegian skipper, the strange black cloud upon the horizon. Clearly there had been a sudden cyclone of phenomenal severity and the *Stratford* had been blown over. It was too evident that all her people were dead, for most of the boats were trailing in different states of destruction from the davits, and in any case what boat could live in such a hurricane? The tragedy had occurred, no doubt, within an hour or two of our own disaster. Perhaps the sounding-line which we had seen had only just been wound in before the blow fell. It was terrible, but whimsical, that we should be still alive, while those who were mourning our destruction had themselves been destroyed. We had no means of telling whether the ship had drifted in the upper levels of the ocean or whether she had lain for some time where we found her before she was discovered by the Atlantean.

Poor Howie, the captain, or what was left of him, was still at his post upon the bridge, the rail grasped firmly in his stiffened hands. His body and that of three stokers in the engine-room were the only ones which had sunk with the ship. They were each removed under our direction and buried under the ooze with a wreath of sea-flowers over their remains. I give this detail in the hope that it may be some comfort to Mrs. Howie in her bereavement. The names of the stokers were unknown to us.

Whilst we had been performing this duty the little men had swarmed over the ship. Looking up, we saw them everywhere, like mice upon a cheese. Their excitement and curiosity made it clear to us that it was the first modern ship — possibly the first steamer — which had ever come down to them. We found out later that their oxygen apparatus inside their vitrine bells would not allow of a longer absence from the recharging station than a few hours, and so their chances of learning anything of what was on the sea-bed were limited to so many miles from their central base. They set to work at once breaking up the wreck and removing all that would be of use to them, a very long process, which is hardly accomplished yet. We were glad also to make our way to our cabins and to get many of those articles of clothing and books which were not ruined beyond redemption.

Among the other things which we rescued from the *Stratford* was the ship's log, which had been written up to the last day by the captain in view of our own catastrophe. It was strange indeed that we should be reading it and that he should be dead. The day's entry ran thus:

'Oct. 3. The three brave but foolhardy adventurers have today, against my will and advice, descended in their apparatus to the bottom of the ocean, and the accident which I had foreseen has occurred. God rest their souls. They went down at eleven a.m. and I had some doubts about permitting them, as a squall seemed to be coming up. I would that I had acted upon my impulse, but it would only have postponed the inevitable tragedy. I bade each of them farewell with the conviction that I would see them no more. For a time all was well, and at eleven forty-five they had reached a depth of three hundred fathoms, where they had found bottom. Dr. Maracot sent several messages to me and all seemed to be in order, when suddenly I heard his voice in agitation, and there was considerable agitation of the wire hawser. An instant later it snapped. It would appear that they were by this time over a deep chasm, for at the Doctor's request the ship had steamed very slowly forwards. The air tubes continued to run out for a distance which I should estimate at half a mile, and then they also snapped. It is the last which we can ever hope to hear of Dr. Maracot, Mr. Headley, or Mr. Scanlan.

'And yet a most extraordinary thing must be recorded, the meaning of which I have not had time to weigh, for with this foul weather coming up there is much to distract me. A deep-sea sounding was taken at the same time, and the depth recorded was twenty-six thousand six hundred feet. The weight was, of course, left at the bottom, but the wire has just been drawn in and, incredible as it may seem, above the porcelain sample cup there was found Mr. Headley's handkerchief with his name marked upon it. The ship's company were all amazed, and no one can suggest how such a thing could have occurred. In my next entry I may have more to say about this. We have lingered a few hours in the hope of something coming to the surface, and we have pulled up the hawser, which shows a jagged end. Now I must look to the ship, for I have never seen a worse sky and the barometer is at a8.5 and sinking fast.'

So it was that we got the final news of our former companions. A terrific cyclone must have struck her and destroyed her immediately afterwards.

We stayed at the wreck until a certain stuffiness within our vitrine bells and a feeling of increasing weight upon our chests warned us that it was high time to begin our return. Then it was, on our homeward journey, that we had an adventure which showed us the sudden dangers to which these submarine folk are exposed, and which may explain why their numbers, in spite of the lapse of time, were not greater than they were. Including the Grecian slaves we cannot reckon those numbers at more than four or five thousand at the most. We had descended the staircase and were making our way along the edge of the jungle which skirts the basalt cliffs, when Manda pointed excitedly upwards and beckoned furiously to one of our party who was some distance out in the open. At the same time he and those around him ran to the side of some high boulders, pulling us along with them. It was only when we were in their shelter that we saw the cause of the alarm. Some distance above us, but descending rapidly, was a huge fish of a most peculiar shape. It might have been a great floating feather-bed, soft and bulging, with a white under-surface and a long red fringe, the vibration of which propelled it through the water. It appeared to have neither mouth nor eyes, but it soon showed that it was formidably alert. The member of our party who was out in the open ran for the same shelter that we had taken, but he was too late. I saw his face convulsed with terror as he realised his fate.

The horrible creature descended upon him, enveloped him on all sides, and lay upon him, pulsing in a dreadful way as if it were thrusting his body against the coral rocks and grinding it to pieces. The tragedy was taking place within a few yards of us, and yet our companions were so overcome by the suddenness of it that they seemed to be bereft of all power of action. It was Scanlan who rushed out and, jumping on the creature’s broad back, blotched with red and brown markings, dug the sharp end of his metal staff into its soft tissues.

I had followed Scanlan’s example, and finally Maracot and all of them attacked the monster, which glided slowly off, leaving a trail of oily and glutinous excretion behind it. Our help had come too late, however, for the impact of the great fish had broken the vitrine bell of the Atlantean and he had been drowned. It was a day of mourning when we carried his body back into the Refuge, but it was also a day of triumph for us, for our prompt action had raised us greatly in the estimation of our companions. As to the strange fish, we had Dr. Maracot’s assurance that it was a specimen of the blanket fish, well known to ichthyologists, but of a size such as had never entered into his dreams.

I speak of this creature because it chanced to bring about a tragedy, but I could, and perhaps will, write a book upon the wonderful life which we have seen here. Red and black are the prevailing colours in deep-sea life, while the vegetation is of the palest olive, and is of so tough a fibre that it is seldom dragged up by our trawls, so that Science has come to believe that the bed of the ocean is bare. Many of the marine forms are of surpassing loveliness, and others so grotesque in their horror that they are like the images of delirium and of a danger such as no land animal can rival. I have seen a black sting-ray thirty feet long with a horrible fang upon its tail, one blow of which would kill any living creature. I have seen, too, a frog-like beast with protruding green eyes, which is simply a gaping mouth with a huge stomach behind it. To meet it is death unless one has an electric flash with which to repel it. I have seen the blind red eel which lies among the rocks and kills by the emission of poison, and I have seen also the giant sea-scorpion, one of the terrors of the deep, and the hag fish, which lurks among the sea jungle.

Once, too, it was my privilege to see the real sea-serpent, a creature which has seldom appeared before the human eye, for it lives in the extreme depths and is seen on the surface only when some submarine convulsion has driven it out of its haunts. Two of them swam, or rather glided, past us one day while Mona and I cowered among the bunches of lamellaria. They were enormous — some ten feet in height and two hundred in length, black above, silver-white below, with a high fringe upon the back, and small eyes no larger than those of an ox. Of these and many other such things an account will be found in the paper of Dr. Maracot, should it ever reach your hands.

Week glided into week in our new life. It had become a very pleasant one, and we were slowly picking up enough of this long-forgotten tongue to enable us to converse a little with our companions. There were endless subjects both for study and for amusement in the Refuge, and already Maracot has mastered so much of the old chemistry that he declares that he can revolutionize all worldly ideas if he can only transmit his knowledge. Among other things they have learned to split the atom, and though the energy released is less than our scientists had anticipated, it is still sufficient to supply them with a great reservoir of power. Their acquaintance with the power and nature of the ether is also far ahead of ours, and indeed that strange translation of thought into pictures, by which we had told them our story and they theirs, was due to an etheric impression translated back into terms of matter.

And yet, in spite of their knowledge, there were points connected with modern scientific developments which had been overlooked by their ancestors.

It was left to Scanlan to demonstrate the fact. For weeks he was in a state of suppressed excitement, bursting with some great secret, and chuckling continually at his own thoughts. We only saw him occasionally during this time, for he was extremely busy and his one friend and confidant was a fat and jovial Atlantean named Berbrix, who was in charge of some of the machinery. Scanlan and Berbrix, though their intercourse was carried on chiefly by signs and mutual back-slapping, had become very close friends, and were now continually closeted together. One evening Scanlan came in radiant.

‘Look here, Doc,’ he said to Maracot, ‘I’ve a dope of my own that I want to hand to these folk. They’ve shown us a thing or two and I figure that it is up to us to return it. What’s the matter with calling them together tomorrow night for a show?’

‘Jazz or the Charleston?’ I asked.

‘Charleston nothing. Wait till you see it. Man, it’s the greatest stunt — but there, I won’t say a word more. Just this, Bo. I won’t let you down, for I’ve got the goods, and I mean to deliver them.’

Accordingly, the community were assembled next evening in the familiar hall. Scanlan and Berbrix were on the platform, beaming with pride. One or other of them touched a button, and then — well, to use Scanlan’s own language, ‘I hand it to him, for he did surprise us some!’

‘2L.O. calling,’ cried a clear voice. ‘London calling the British Isles. Weather forecast.’ Then followed the usual sentence about depressions and anticyclones. ‘First News Bulletin. His Majesty the King this morning opened the new wing of the Children’s Hospital in Hammersmith—’ and so on and on, in the familiar strain. For the first time we were back in a workaday England once more, plodding bravely through its daily task, with its stout back bowed under its war debts. Then we heard the foreign news, the sporting news. The old world was droning on the same as ever. Our friends the Atlanteans listened in amazement, but without comprehension. When, however, as the first item after the news, the Guards’ band struck up the march from Lohengrin a positive shout of delight broke from the people, and it was funny to see them rush upon the platform, and turn over the curtains, and look behind the screens to find the source of the music. Yes, we have left our mark for ever upon the submarine civilization.

‘No, sir,’ said Scanlan, afterwards. ‘I could not make an issuing station. They have not the material, and I have not the brains. But down at home I rigged a two-valve set of my own with the aerial beside the clothes line in the yard, and I learned to handle it, and to pick up any station in the States. It seemed to me funny if, with all this electricity to hand, and with their glasswork ahead of ours, we couldn’t vamp up something that would catch an ether wave, and a wave would sure travel through water just as easy as through air. Old Berbrix nearly threw a fit when we got the first call, but he is wise to it now, and I guess it’s a permanent institution.’

Among the discoveries of the Atlantean chemists is a gas which is nine times lighter than hydrogen and which Maracot has named levigen. It was his experiments with this which gave us the idea of sending glass balls with information as to our fate to the surface of the ocean.

‘I have made Manda understand the idea,’ said he. ‘He has given orders to the silica workers, and in a day or two the globes will be ready.’

‘But how can we get our news inside?’ I asked.

‘There is a small aperture left through which the gas is inserted. Into this we can push the papers. Then these skilful workers can seal up the hole. I am assured that when we release them they will shoot up to the surface.’

‘And bob about unseen for a year.’

‘That might be. But the ball would reflect the sun’s rays. It would surely attract attention. We were on the line of shipping between Europe and South America. I see no reason why, if we send several, one at least may not be found.’

And this, my dear Talbot, or you others who read this narrative, is how it comes into your hands. But a far more fateful scheme may lie behind it. The idea came from the fertile brain of the American mechanic.

‘Say friends,’ said he, as we sat alone in our chamber, ‘it’s dandy down here, and the drink is good and the eats are good, and I’ve met a wren that makes anything in Philadelphia look like two cents, but all the same there are times when I want to feel that I might see God’s own country once more.’

‘We may all feel that way,’ said I, ‘but I don’t see how you can hope to make it.’

‘Look it here, Bo! If these balls of gas could carry up our message, maybe they could carry us up also. Don’t think I’m joshing, for I’ve figured it out to. rights. We will suppose we put three or four of them together so as to get a good lift. See? Then we have our vitrine bells on and harness ourselves on to the balls. When the bell rings we cut loose and up we go. What is going to stop us between here and the surface?’

‘A shark, maybe.’

‘Blah! Sharks nothing! We would streak past any shark so’s he’d hardly know we was there. He’d think we was three flashes of light and we’d get such a lick on that we’d shoot fifty feet up in the air at the other end. I tell you the goof that sees us come up is going to say his prayers over it.’

‘But suppose it is possible, what will happen afterwards!’

‘For Pete’s sake, leave afterwards out of it! Let us chance our luck, or we are here for keeps. It’s me for cutting loose and having a dash at it.’

‘I certainly greatly desire to return to the world, if only to lay our results before the learned societies,’ said Maracot. ‘It is only my personal influence which can make them realise the fund of new knowledge which I have acquired. I should be quite in favour of any such attempt as Scanlan has indicated.’

There were good reasons, as I will tell later, which made me the least eager of the three.

‘It would be perfect madness as you propose it. Unless we had someone expecting us on the surface we should infallibly drift about and perish from hunger and thirst.’

‘Shucks, man, how could we have someone expecting us?’

‘Perhaps even that could be managed,’ said Maracot. ‘We can give within a mile or two the exact latitude and longitude of our position.’

‘And they would let down a ladder,’ said I, with some bitterness.

‘Ladder nothing! The boss is right. See here, Mr. Headley, you put in that letter that you are going to send the universe — my! don’t I see the scare lines in the journals! — that we are at 27 North Latitude and 28.14 West Longitude, or whatever other figure is the right one, Got that? Then you say that three of the most important folk in history, the great man of Science, Maracot, and the rising-star bug-collector, Headley, and Bob Scanlan, a peach of a mechanic and the pride of Merribank’s; are all yellin’ and whoopin’ for help from the bottom of the sea. Follow my idea?’

‘Well, what then?’

‘Well, then it’s up to them, you see. It’s kind of a challenge that they can’t forget. Same as I’ve read of Stanley finding Livingstone and the like. It’s for them to find some way to yank us out or to catch us at the other end if we can take the jump ourselves.’

‘We could suggest the way ourselves,’ said the Professor. ‘Let them drop a deep-sea line into these waters and we will look out for it. When it comes we can tie a message to it and bid them stand by for us.’

‘You’ve said a mouthful!’ cried Bob Scanlan. ‘That is sure the way to do it.’

‘And if any lady cared to share our fortunes four would be as easy as three,’ said Maracot, with a roguish smile at me.

‘For that matter, five is as easy as four,’ said Scanlan. ‘But you’ve got it now, Mr. Headley. You write that down, and in six months we shall be back in London River once more.’

So now we launch our two balls into that water which is to us what the air is to you. Our two little balloons will go aloft. Will both be lost on the way? It is possible. Or may we hope that one will get through? We leave it on the knees of the gods. If nothing can be done for us, then let those who care for us know that in any case we are safe and happy. If, on the other hand, this suggestion could be carried out and the money and energy for our rescue should be forthcoming, we have given you the means by which it can be done. Meanwhile, good-bye — or is it au revoir?

So ended the narrative in the vitrine ball.

The preceding narrative covers the facts so far as they were available when the account was first drawn up. While the script was in the hands of the printer there came an epilogue of the most unexpected and sensational description. I refer to the rescue of the adventurers by Mr. Faverger’s steam yacht Marion and the account sent out by the wireless transmitter of that vessel, and picked up by the cable station at the Cape de Verde Islands, which has just forwarded it to Europe and America. This account was drawn up by Mr. Key Osborne, the well-known representative of the Associated Press.

It would appear that immediately upon the first narrative of the plight of Dr. Maracot and his friends reaching Europe an expedition was quietly and effectively fitted up in the hope of bringing about a rescue. Mr. Faverger generously placed his famous steam yacht at the disposal of the party, which he accompanied in person. The Marion sailed from Cherbourg in June, picked up Mr. Key Osborne and a motion-picture operator at Southampton, and set forth at once for the tract of ocean which was indicated in the original document. This was reached upon the first of July.

A deep-sea piano-wire line was lowered, and was dragged slowly along the bottom of the ocean. At the end of this line, beside the heavy lead, there was suspended a bottle containing a message. The message ran:

‘Your account has been received by the world, and we are here to help you. We duplicate this message by our wireless transmitter in the hope that it may reach you. We will slowly traverse your region. When you have detached this bottle, please replace your own message in it. We will act upon your instructions.’

For two days the Marion cruised slowly to and fro without result. On the third a very great surprise awaited the rescue party. A small, highly luminous ball shot out of the water a few hundred yards from the ship, and proved to be a vitreous message-bearer of the sort which had been described in the original document. Having been broken with some difficulty, the following message was read:

‘Thanks, dear friends. We greatly appreciate your grand loyalty and energy. We receive your wireless messages with facility, and are in a position to answer you in this fashion. We have endeavoured to get possession of your line, but the currents lift it high, and it sweeps along rather faster than even the most active of us can move against the resistance of the water. We propose to make our venture at six tomorrow morning, which should, according to our reckoning, be Tuesday, July 5th. We will come one at a time, so that any advice arising from our experience can be wirelessed back to those who come later. Once again heartfelt thanks.

Maracot. Headley. Scanlan.’

Mr. Key Osborne now takes up the narrative:

‘It was a perfect morning, and the deep sapphire sea lay as smooth as a lake, with the glorious arch of the deep blue sky unbroken by the smallest cloud. The whole crew of the Marion was early astir, and awaited events with the most tense interest. As the hour of six drew near our anticipation was painful. A look-out had been placed upon our signal mast, and it was just five minutes to the hour when we heard him shouting, and saw him pointing to the water on our port bow. We all crowded to that side of the deck, and I was able to perch myself on one of the boats, from which I had a clear view. I saw through the still water something which looked like a silver bubble ascending with great rapidity from the depths of the ocean. It broke the surface about two hundred yards from the ship, and soared straight up into the air, a beautiful shining globe some three feet in diameter, rising to a great height and then drifting away in some slight current of wind exactly as a toy balloon would do. It was a marvellous sight, but it filled us with apprehension, for it seemed as if the harness might have come loose, and the burden which this tractor should have borne through the waters had been shaken loose upon the way. A wireless was at once dispatched:

“‘Your messenger has appeared close to the vessel. It had nothing attached and has flown away.” Meanwhile we lowered a boat so as to be ready for any development.

‘Just after six o’clock there was another signal from our watchman, and an instant later I caught sight of another silver globe, which was swimming up from the depths very much more slowly than the last. On reaching the surface it floated in the air, but its burden was supported upon the water. This burden proved upon examination to be a great bundle of books, papers, and miscellaneous objects all wrapped in a casing of fish skin. It was hoisted dripping upon the deck, and was acknowledged by wireless, while we eagerly awaited the next arrival.

‘This was not long in coming. Again the silver bubble, again the breaking of the surface, but this time the glistening ball shot high into the air, suspending under it, to our amazement, the slim figure of a woman. It was but the impetus which had carried her into the air, and an instant later she had been towed to the side of the vessel. A leather circlet had been firmly fastened round the upper curve of the glass ball, and from this long straps depended which were attached to a broad leather belt round her dainty waist. The upper part of her body was covered by a peculiar pear-shaped glass shade — I call it glass, but it was of the same tough light material as the vitreous ball. It was almost transparent, with silvery veins running through its substance. This glass covering had tight elastic attachments at the waist and shoulders, which made it perfectly watertight, while it was provided within, as has been described in Headley’s original manuscript, with novel but very light and practical chemical apparatus for the renovation of air. With some difficulty the breathing bell was removed and the lady hoisted upon deck. She lay there in a deep faint, but her regular breathing encouraged us to think that she would soon recover from the effects of her rapid journey and from the change of pressure, which had been minimized by the fact that the density of the air inside the protective sheath was considerably higher than our atmosphere, so that it may be said to have represented that half-way point at which human divers are wont to pause.

‘Presumably this is the Atlantean woman referred to in the first message as Mona, and if we may take her as a sample they are indeed a race worth reintroducing to earth. She is dark in complexion, beautifully clear-cut and high-bred in feature, with long black hair, and magnificently hazel eyes which looked round her presently in a charming amazement. Sea-shells and mother-of-pearl were worked into her cream-coloured tunic, and tangled in her dark hair. A more perfect Naiad of the Deep could not be imagined, the very personification of the mystery and the glamour of the sea. We could see complete consciousness coming back into those marvellous eyes, and then she sprang suddenly to her feet with the activity of a young doe and ran to the side of the vessel. “Cyrus! Cyrus!” she cried.

‘We had already removed the anxiety of those below by a wireless. But now in quick succession each of them arrived, shooting thirty or forty feet into the air, and then falling back into the sea, from which we quickly raised them. All three were unconscious, and Scanlan was bleeding at the nose and ears, but within an hour all were able to totter to their feet: The first action of each was, I imagine, characteristic. Scanlan was led off by a laughing group to the bar, from which shouts of merriment are now resounding, much to the detriment of this composition. Dr. Maracot seized the bundle of papers, tore out one which consisted entirely, so far as I could judge, of algebraic symbols, and disappeared downstairs, while Cyrus Headley ran to the side of his strange maiden, and looks, by last reports, as if he had no intention of ever quitting it. Thus the matter stands, and we trust our weak wireless will carry our message as far as the Cape de Verde station. The fuller details of this wonderful adventure will come later, as is fitting, from the adventurers themselves.’

CHAPTER 6

There are very many people who have written both to me, Cyrus Headley, Rhodes Scholar of Oxford, and to Professor Maracot, and even to Bill Scanlan, since our very remarkable experience at the bottom of the Atlantic, where we were able at a point 200 miles south-west of the Canaries to make a submarine descent which has not only led to a revision of our views concerning deep-sea life and pressures, but has also established the survival of an old civilization under incredibly difficult conditions. In these letters we have been continually asked to give further details about our experiences. It will be understood that my original document was a very superficial one, and yet it covered most of the facts. There were some, however, which were withheld, and above all the tremendous episode of the Lords of the Dark Face. This involved some facts and some conclusions of so utterly extraordinary a nature that we all thought it was best to suppress it entirely for the present. Now, however, that Science has accepted our conclusions — and I may add since Society has accepted my bride — our general veracity is established and we may perhaps venture upon a narrative which might have repulsed public sympathy in the first instance.

Before I get to the one tremendous happening I would lead up to it by some reminiscences of those wonderful months in the buried home of the Atlanteans, who by means of their vitrine oxygen bells are able to walk the ocean floor with the same ease as those Londoners whom I see now from my windows in the Hyde Park Hotel are strolling among the flower-beds.

When first we were taken in by these people after our dreadful fall from the surface we were in the position of prisoners rather than of guests. I wish now to set upon record how this came to change and how through the splendour of Dr. Maracot we have left such a name down there that the memory of us will go down in their annals as of some celestial visitation. They knew nothing of our leaving, which they would certainly have prevented if they could, so that no doubt there is already a legend that we have returned to some heavenly sphere, taking with us the sweetest and choicest flower of their flock.

I would wish now to set down in their order some of the strange things of this wonderful world, and also some of the adventures which befell us until

I came to the supreme adventure of all — one which will leave a mark upon each of us for ever — the coming of the Lord of the Dark Face. In some ways I wish that we could have stayed longer in the Maracot Deep for there were many mysteries there, and up to the end there were things which we could not understand. Also we were rapidly learning something of their language, so that soon we should have had much more information.

Experience had taught these people what was terrible and what was innocent. One day, I remember, that there was a sudden alarm and that we all ran out in our oxygen bells on to the ocean bed, though why we ran or what we meant to do was a mystery to us. There could be no mistake, however, as to the horror and distraction upon the faces of those around us. When we got out on to the plain we met a number of the Greek coal-workers who were hastening towards the door of our Colony. They had come at such a pace, and were so weary that they kept falling down in the ooze, and it was clear that we were really a rescue party for the purpose of picking up these cripples, and hurrying up the laggards. We saw no sign of weapons and no show of resistance against the coming danger. Soon the colliers were hustled along, and when the last one had been shoved through the door we looked back along the line that they had traversed. All that we could see was a couple of greenish wisp-like clouds, luminous in the centre and ragged at the edges, which were drifting rather than moving in our direction. At the clear sight of them, though they were quite half a mile away, my companions were filled with panic and beat at the door so as to get in the sooner. It was surely nervous work to see these mysterious centres of trouble draw nearer, but the pumps acted swiftly and we were soon in safety once more. There was a great block of transparent crystal, ten feet long and two feet broad, above the lintel of the door, with lights so arranged that they threw a strong glare outside. Mounted on the ladders kept for the purpose, several of us, including myself, looked through this rude window. I saw the strange shimmering green circles of light pause before the door. As they did so the Atlanteans on either side of me simply gibbered with fear. Then one of the shadowy creatures outside came flicking up through the water and made for our crystal window. Instantly my companions pulled me down below the level of vision, but it seems that in my carelessness some of my hair did not get clear from whatever the maleficent influence may be which these strange creatures send forth. There is a patch there which is withered and white to this day.

It was not for a long time that the Atlanteans dared to open their door, and when at last a scout was sent forth he went amid hand-shakings and slaps on the back as one who does a gallant deed. His report was that all was clear, and soon joy had returned to the community, and this strange visitation seemed to have been forgotten. We only gathered from the word ‘Praxa’, repeated in various tones of horror, that this was the name of the creature. The only person who derived real joy from the incident was Professor Maracot, who could hardly be restrained from sallying out with a small net and a glass vase. ‘A new order of life, partly organic, partly gaseous, but clearly intelligent,’ was his general comment. ‘A freak out of Hell,’ was Scanlan’s less scientific description.

Two days afterwards, when we were out on what we called a shrimping expedition, when we walked among the deep-sea foliage and captured in our hand-nets specimens of the smaller fish, we came suddenly upon the body of one of the coal-workers, who had no doubt been overtaken in his flight by these strange creatures. The glass bell had been broken — a matter which called for enormous strength, for this vitrine substance is extraordinarily tough, as you realised when you attempted to reach my first documents. The man’s eyes had been tom out, but otherwise he had been uninjured.

‘A dainty feeder!’ said the Professor after our return. ‘There is a hawk parrot in New Zealand which will kill the lamb in order to get at a particular morsel of fat above the kidney. So this creature will slay the man for his eyes. In the heavens above and in the waters below Nature knows but one law, and it is, alas! remorseless cruelty.’

We had many examples of that terrible law down there in the depths of the ocean. I can remember, for example, that many times we observed a curious groove upon the soft bathybian mud, as if a barrel had been rolled along it. We pointed it out to our Atlantean companions, and when we could interrogate them we tried to get from them some account of what this creature could be. As to its name our friends gave some of those peculiar clicking sounds which come into the Atlantean speech, and which cannot be reproduced either by the European tongue or by the European alphabet. Krixchok is, perhaps, an approximation to it. But as to its appearance we could always in such cases make use of the Atlantean thought reflector by which our friends were able to give a very clear vision of whatever was in their own minds. By this means they conveyed to us a picture of a very strange marine creature which the Professor could only classify as a gigantic sea slug. It seemed to be of great size, sausage shaped with eyes at the ends of stems, and a thick coating of coarse hair or bristles. When showing this apparition, our friends by their gestures expressed the greatest horror and repulsion.

But this, as anyone could predicate who knew Maracot, only served to inflame his scientific passions and to make him the more eager to determine the exact species and sub-species of this unknown monster. Accordingly I was not surprised when, on the occasion of our next excursion, he stopped at the point where we clearly saw the mark of the brute upon the slime, and turned deliberately towards the tangle of seaweed and basaltic blocks out of which it seemed to have come. The moment we left the plain the traces of course ceased, and yet there seemed to be a natural gully amid the rocks which clearly led to the den of the monster. We were all three armed with the pikes which the Atlanteans usually carried, but they seemed to me to be frail things with which to face unknown dangers. The Professor trudged ahead, however, and we could but follow after.

The rocky gorge ran upwards, its sides formed of huge clusters of volcanic debris and draped with a profusion of the long red and black forms of lamellaria which are characteristic of the extreme depths of Ocean. A thousand beautiful ascidians and echinoderms of every joyous colour and fantastic shape peeped out from amid this herbage, which was alive with strange crustaceans and low forms of creeping life. Our progress was slow, for walking is never easy in the depths, and the angle up which we toiled was an acute one. Suddenly, however, we saw the creature whom we hunted, and the sight was not a reassuring one.

It was half protruded from its lair, which was a hollow in a basaltic pile. About five feet of hairy body was visible, and we perceived its eyes, which were as large as saucers, yellow in colour, and glittering like agates, moving round slowly upon their long pedicles as it heard the sound of our approach. Then slowly it began to unwind itself from its burrow, waving its heavy body along in caterpillar fashion. Once it reared up its head some four feet from the rocks, so as to have a better look at us, and I observed, as it did so, that it had what looked like the corrugated soles of tennis shoes fastened on either side of its neck, the same colour, size, and striped appearance. What this might mean I could not conjecture, but we were soon to have an object lesson in their use.

The Professor had braced himself with his pike projecting forward and a most determined expression upon his face. It was clear that the hope of a rare specimen had swept all fear from his mind. Scanlan and I were by no means so sure of ourselves, but we could not abandon the old man, so we stood our ground on either side of him.

The creature, after that one long stare, began slowly and clumsily to make its way down the slope, worming its path among the rocks, and raising its pedicled eyes from time to time to see what we were about. It came so slowly that we seemed safe enough, since we could always outdistance it. And yet, had we only known it, we were standing very near to death.

It was surely Providence that sent us our warning. The beast was still making its lumbering approach, and may have been sixty yards from us, when a very large fish, a deep-sea groper, shot out from the algae-jungle on our side of the gorge and swam slowly across it. It had reached the centre, and was about midway between the creature and ourselves when it gave a convulsive leap, turned belly upwards, and sank dead to the bottom of the ravine. At the same moment each of us felt an extraordinary and most unpleasant tingling pass over our whole bodies, while our knees seemed to give way beneath us. Old Maracot was as wary as he was audacious, and in an instant he had sized up the situation and realised that the game was up. We were faced by some creature which threw out electric waves to kill its prey, and our pikes were of no more use against it than against a machine-gun. Had it not been for the lucky chance that the fish drew its fire, we should have waited until it was near enough to loose off its full battery, which would infallibly have destroyed us. We blundered off as swiftly as we could, with the resolution to leave the giant electric sea-worm severely alone for the future.

These were some of the more terrible of the dangers of the deep.. Yet another was the little black Hydrops ferox, as the Professor named him. He was a red fish not much longer than a herring, with a large mouth and a formidable row of teeth. He was harmless in ordinary circumstances, but the shedding of blood, even the very smallest amount of it, attracted him in an instant, and there was no possible salvation for the victim, who was torn to pieces by swarms of attackers. We saw a horrible sight once at the colliery pits, where a slave worker had the misfortune to cut his hand. In an instant, coming from all quarters, thousands of these fish were on to him. In vain he threw himself down and struggled; in vain his horrified companions beat them away with their picks and shovels. The lower part of him, beneath his bell, dissolved before our eyes amid the cloud of vibrant life which surrounded him. One instant we saw a man. The next there was a red mass with white protruding bones. A minute later the bones only were left below the waist and half a clean-picked skeleton was lying at the bottom of the sea. The sight was so horrifying that we were all ill, and the hard-boiled Scanlan actually fell down in a faint and we had some difficulty in getting him home.

But the strange sights which we saw were not always horrifying. I have in mind one which will never fade from our memory. It was on one of those excursions which we delighted to take, sometimes with an Atlantean guide, and sometimes by ourselves when our hosts had learned that we did not need constant attendance and nursing. We were passing over a portion of the plain with which we were quite familiar, when we perceived, to our surprise, that a great patch of light yellow sand, half an acre or so in extent, had been laid down or uncovered since our last visit. We were standing in some surprise, wondering what submarine current or seismic movement could have brought this about, when to our absolute amazement the whole thing rose up and swam with slow undulations immediately above our heads. It was so huge that the great canopy took some appreciable time, a minute or two, to pass from over us. It was a gigantic flat fish, not different, so far as the Professor could observe, from one of our own little dabs, but grown to this enormous size upon the nutritious food which the bathybian deposits provide. It vanished away into the darkness above us, a great, glimmering, flickering white — and yellow expanse, and we saw it no more.

There was one other phenomenon of the deep sea which was very unexpected. That was the tornadoes which frequently occur. They seem to be caused by the periodical arrival of violent submarine currents which set in with little warning and are terrific while they last, causing as much confusion and destruction as the highest wind would do upon land. No doubt without these visitations there would be that putridity and stagnation which absolute immobility must give, so that, as in all Nature’s processes, there was an excellent object in view; but the experience none the less was an alarming one.

On the first occasion when I was caught in such a watery cyclone, I had gone out with that very dear lady to whom I have alluded, Mona, the daughter of Manda. There was a very beautiful bank loaded with algae of a thousand varied colours which lay a mile or so from the Colony. This was Mona’s very special garden which she greatly loved, a tangle of pink serpularia, purple ophiurids and red holothurians. On this day she had taken me to see it, and it was while we were standing before it that the storm burst. So strong was the current which suddenly flowed upon us that it was only by holding together and getting behind the shelter of rocks that we could save ourselves from being washed away. I observed that this rushing stream of water was quite warm, almost as warm as one could bear, which may show that there is a volcanic origin in these disturbances and that they are the wash from some submarine disturbance in some far-off region of the ocean bed. The mud of the great plain was stirred up by the rush of the current, and the light was darkened by the thick cloud of matter suspended in the water around us. To find our way back was impossible, for we had lost all sense of direction, and in any case could hardly move against the rush of the water. Then on the top of all else a slowly increasing heaviness of the chest and difficulty in breathing warned me that our oxygen supply was beginning to fail us.

It is at such times, when we are in the immediate presence of death, that the great primitive passions float to the surface and submerge all our lesser emotions. It was only at that moment that I knew that I loved my gentle companion, loved her with all my heart and soul, loved her with a love which was rooted deep down and was part of my very self. How strange a thing is a love like that! How impossible to analyse! It was not for her face or figure, lovely as they were. It was not for her voice, though it was more musical than any I have known, nor was it for mental communion, since I could only learn her thoughts from her sensitive ever-changing face. No, it was something at the back of her dark dreamy eyes, something in the very depths of her soul as of mine which made us mates for all time. I held out my hand and clasped her own, reading in her face that there was no thought or emotion of mine which was not flooding her own receptive mind and flushing her lovely cheek. Death at my side would present no terror to her, and as for myself my heart throbbed at the very thought.

But it was not to be. One would think that our glass coverings excluded sounds, but as a matter of fact the throb of certain air vibrations penetrated them easily, or by their impact started similar vibrations within. There was a loud beat, a reverberating clang, like that of a distant gong. I had no idea what it might mean, but my companion was in no doubt. Still holding my hand, she rose from our shelter, and after listening intently she crouched down and began to make her way against the storm. It was a race against death, for every instant the terrible oppression on my chest became more unbearable. I saw her dear face peering most anxiously into mine, and I staggered on in the direction to which she led me. Her appearance and her movements showed that her oxygen supply was less exhausted than mine. I held on as long as Nature would allow, and then suddenly everything swam around me. I threw out my arms and fell senseless upon the soft ocean floor.

When I came to myself I was lying on my own couch inside the Atlantean Palace. The old yellow — clad priest was standing beside me, a phial of some stimulant in his hand. Maracot and Scanlan, with distressed faces, were bending over me, while Mona knelt at the bottom of the bed with tender anxiety upon her features. It seems that the brave girl had hastened on to the community door, from which on occasions of this sort it was the custom to beat a great gong as a guide to any wanderers who might be lost. There she had explained my position and had guided back the rescue party, including my two comrades who had brought me back in their arms. Whatever I may do in life, it is truly Mona who will do it, for that life has been a gift from her.

Now that by a miracle she has come to join me in the upper world, the human world under the sky, it is strange to reflect upon the fact that my love was such that I was willing, most willing, to remain for ever in the depths so long as she should be all my own. For long I could not understand that deep, deep intimate bond which held us together, and which was felt, as I could see, as strongly by her as by me. It was Manda, her father, who gave me an explanation which was as unexpected as it was satisfying.

He had smiled gently over our love affair — smiled with the indulgent, half-amused air of one who sees that come to pass which he had already anticipated. Then one day he led me aside and in his own chamber he placed that silver screen upon which his thoughts and knowledge could be reflected. Never while the breath of life is in my body can I forget that which he showed me — and her. Seated side by side, our hands clasped together, we watched entranced while the pictures flickered up before our eyes, formed and projected by that racial memory of the past which these Atlanteans possess.

There was a rocky peninsula jutting out into a lovely blue ocean. I may not have told you before that in these thought cinemas, if I may use the expression, colour is produced as well as form. On this headland was a house of quaint design, wide-spread, red-roofed, white-walled, and beautiful. A grove of palm trees surrounded it. In this grove there appeared to be a camp, for we could see the white sheen of tents and here and there the glimmer of arms as of some sentinel keeping ward. Out of this grove there walked a middle-aged man clad in mail armour, with a round light shield on his arm. He carried something in his other hand, but whether sword or javelin I could not see. He turned his face towards us once, and I saw at once that he was of the same breed as the Atlantean men who were around me. Indeed, he might have been the twin brother of Manda, save that his features were harsh and menacing — a brute man, but one who was brutal not from ignorance but from the trend of his own nature. The brute and the brain are surely the most dangerous of all combinations. In this high forehead and sardonic, bearded mouth one sensed the very essence of evil. If this were indeed some previous incarnation of Manda himself, and by his gestures he seemed to wish us to understand that it was, then in soul, if not in mind, he has risen far since then.

As he approached the house, we saw in the picture that a young woman came out to meet him. She was clad as the old Greeks were clad, in a long clinging white garment, the simplest and yet the most beautiful and dignified dress that woman has ever yet devised. Her manner as she approached the man was one of submission and reverence — the manner of a dutiful daughter to a father. He repulsed her savagely, however, raising his hand as if to strike her As she shrank back from him, the sun lit up her beautiful, tearful face and I saw that it was my Mona.

The silver screen blurred, and an instant later another scene was forming. It was a rock-bound cove, which I sensed to belong to that very peninsula which I had already seen. A strange-shaped boat with high pointed ends was in the foreground. It was night, but the moon shone very brightly on the water. The familiar stars, the same to Atlantis as to us, glittered in the sky. Slowly and cautiously the boat drew in. There were two rowers, and in the bows a man enveloped in a dark cloak. As he came close to the shore he stood up and looked eagerly around him. I saw his pale, earnest face in the clear moonlight. It did not need the convulsive clasp of Mona or the ejaculation of Manda to explain that strange intimate thrill which shot over me as I looked. The man was myself.

Yes, I, Cyrus Headley, now of New York and of Oxford; I, the latest product of modern culture, had myself once been part of this mighty civilization of old. I understood now why many of the symbols and hieroglyphs which I had seen around had impressed me with a vague familiarity. Again and again I had felt like a man who strains his memory because he feels that he is on the edge of some great discovery, which is always awaiting him, and yet is always just outside his grasp. Now, too, I understood that deep soul thrill which I had encountered when my eyes met those of Mona. They came from the depths of my own subconscious self where the memories of twelve thousand years still lingered.

Now the boat had touched the shore, and out of the bushes above there had come a glimmering white figure. My arms were outstretched to enfold it. After one hurried embrace I had half lifted, half carried her into the boat. But now there was a sudden alarm. With frantic gestures I beckoned to the rowers to push out. It was too late. Men swarmed out of the bushes. Eager hands seized the side of the boat. In vain I tried to beat them off. An axe gleamed in the air and crashed down upon my head. I fell forward dead upon the lady bathing her white robe in my blood. I saw her screaming, wild-eyed and open-mouthed, while her father dragged her by her long black hair from underneath my body. Then the curtain closed down.

Once again a picture flickered up upon the silver screen. It was inside the house of refuge which had been built by the wise Atlantean for a place of refuge on the day of doom — that very house in which we now stood. I saw its crowded, terrified inmates at the moment of the catastrophe. Then I saw my Mona once again, and there also was her father who had learned better and wiser ways so that he was now included among those who might be saved. We saw the great hall rocking like a ship in a storm, while the awestruck refugees clung to the pillars or fell upon the floor. Then we saw the lurch and fall as it descended through the waves. Once more the scene died away, and Manda turned smiling to show that all was over.

Yes, we had lived before, the whole group of us, Manda and Mona and I, and perhaps shall live again, acting and reacting down the long chain of our lives. I had died in the upper world, and so my own reincarnations had been upon that plane. Manda and Mona had died under, the waves, and so it was there that their cosmic destiny had been worked out. We had for a moment seen a corner lifted in the great dark veil of Nature and had one passing gleam of truth amid the mysteries which surround us. Each life is but one chapter in a story which God has designed. You cannot judge its wisdom or its justice until in some supreme day, from some pinnacle of knowledge, you look back and see at last the cause and the effect, acting and reacting, down all the long chronicles of Time.

This new-found and delightful relationship of mine may have saved us all a little later when the only serious quarrel which we ever had broke out between us and the community with which we dwelt. As it was, it might have gone ill with us had not a far greater matter come to engage the attention of all, and to place us on a pinnacle in their estimation. It came about thus.

One morning, if such a term can be used where the time of day could only be judged by our occupations, the Professor and I were seated in our large common room. He had fitted one corner of it as a laboratory and was busily engaged in dissecting a gastrostomus which he had netted the day before. On his table were scattered a litter of amphipods and copepods with specimens of Valella, Ianthina, Physalia, and a hundred other creatures whose smell was by no means as attractive as their appearance. I was seated near him studying an Atlantean grammar, for our friends had plenty of books, printed in curious right to left fashion upon what I thought was parchment but which proved to be the bladders of fishes, pressed and preserved. I was bent on getting the key which would unlock all this knowledge, and therefore I spent much of my time over the alphabet and the elements of the language.

Suddenly, however, our peaceful pursuits were rudely interrupted by an extraordinary procession which rushed into the room. First came Bill Scanlan, very red and excited, one arm waving in the air, and, to our amazement, a plump and noisy baby under the other. Behind him was Berbrix, the Atlantean engineer who had helped Scanlan to erect the wireless receiver. He was a large stout jovial man as a rule, but now his big fat face was convulsed with grief. Behind him again was a woman whose straw-coloured hair and blue eyes showed that she was no Atlantean but one of the subordinate race which we traced to the ancient Greeks.

‘Look it here, boss,’ cried the excited Scanlan. ‘This guy Berbrix, who is a regular fellar, is going clean goofie and so is this skirt whom he has married, and I guess it is up to us to see that they get a square deal. Far as I understand it she is like a nigger would be down South, and he said a mouthful when he asked her to marry him, but I reckon that's the guy's own affair and nothing to us.'

'Of course it is his own affair,' said I. 'What on earth has bitten you, Scanlan?'

'It's like this, boss. Here ha! a baby come along. It seems the folk here don't want a breed of that sort nohow, and the Priests are out to offer up the baby to that darn image down yonder. The chief high muck-a-muck got hold of the baby and was sailin' off with it but Berbrix yanked it away, and I threw him down on his ear-hole, and now the whole pack are at our heels and—'

Scanlan got no further with his explanation, for there was a shouting and a rush of feet in the passage, our door was flung open, and several of the yellow-clad attendants of the Temple rushed into the room. Behind them, fierce and austere, came the high-nosed formidable Priest. He, beckoned with his hand, and his servants rushed forward to seize the child. They halted, however, in indecision as they saw Scanlan throw the baby down among the specimens on the table behind him, and pick up a pike with which he confronted his assailants. They had drawn their knives, so I also ran with a pike to Scanlan's aid, while Berbrix did the same. So menacing were we that the Temple servants shrank back and things seemed to have come to a deadlock.

'Mr. Headley, sir, you speak a bit of their lingo,' cried: Scanlan. 'Tell them there ain't no soft pickings here. Tell them we ain't givin' away no babies this morning, thank you. Tell them there will be such a rough house as they never saw if they don't vamose the ranche. There now, you asked for it and you've got it good and plenty and I wish you joy.'

The latter part of Scanlan's speech was caused by the fact that Dr. Maracot had suddenly plunged the scalpel with which he was performing his dissection into the arm of one of the attendants who had crept round and had raised his knife to stab Scanlan. The man howled and danced about in fear and pain while his comrades, incited by the old Priest, prepared to make a rush. Heaven only knows what would have happened if Manda and Mona had not entered the room. He stared with amazement at the scene and asked a number of eager questions of the High Priest. Mona had come over to me, and with a happy inspiration I picked up the baby and placed it in her arms, where it settled down and cooed most contentedly.

Manda's brow was overcast and it was clear that he was greatly puzzled what to do. He sent the Priest and his satellites back to the Temple, and then he entered into a long explanation, only a part of which I could understand and pass on to my companions.

'You are to give up the baby,' I said to Scanlan.

'Give it up! No, sir. Nothin' doing!'

'This lady is to take charge of mother and child.'

'That's another matter. If Miss Mona takes it on, I am contented. But if that bindlestiff of a priest—'

'No, no, he cannot interfere. The matter is to be referred to the Council. It is very serious, for I understand Manda to say that the Priest is within his rights and that it is an old-established custom of the nation. They could never, he says, distinguish between the upper and lower races if they had all sorts of intermediates in between. If children are born they must die. That is the law.'

'Well, this baby won't die anyhow.'

'I hope not. He said he would do all he could with the Council. But it will be a week or two before they meet. So it's safe up to then, and who knows what may happen in the meantime.'

Yes, who knew what might happen. Who could have dreamed what did happen. Out of this is fashioned the next chapter of our adventures.

CHAPTER 7

I have already said that within a short distance of the underground dwelling of the Atlanteans, prepared beforehand to meet the catastrophe which overwhelmed their native land, there lay the ruins of that great city of which their dwelling had once been part. I have described also how with the vitrine bells charged with oxygen upon our heads we were taken to visit this place, and I tried to convey how deep were our emotions as we viewed it. No words can describe the tremendous impression produced by those colossal ruins, the huge carved pillars and gigantic buildings, all lying stark and silent in the grey phosphorescent light of the bathybian deeps, with no movement save the slow wash of the giant fronds in the deep-sea currents, or the flickering shadows of the great fish which passed through the gaping doors or flitted round the dismantled chambers. It was a favourite haunt of ours, and under the guidance of our friend Manda we passed many an hour examining the strange architecture and all the other remains of that vanished civilization which bore every sign of having been, so far as material knowledge goes, far ahead of our own.

I have said material knowledge. Soon we were to have proof that in spiritual culture there was a vast chasm which separated them from us. The lesson which we carry from their rise and their fall is that the greatest danger which can come to a state is when its intellect outruns its soul. It destroyed this old civilization, and it may yet be the ruin of our own.

We had observed that in one part of the ancient city there was a large building which must have stood upon a hill, for it was still considerably elevated above the general level. A long flight of broad steps constructed from black marble led up to it, and the same material had been used in most of the building, but it was nearly obscured now by a horrible yellow fungus, a fleshy leprous mass, which hung down from every cornice and projection. Above the main doorway, carved also in black marble, was a terrible Medusa-like head with radiating serpents, and the same symbol was repeated here and there upon the walls. Several times we had wished to explore this sinister building, but on each occasion our friend Manda had shown the greatest agitation and by frantic gestures had implored us to turn away. It was clear that so long as he was in our company we should never have our way, and yet a great curiosity urged us to penetrate the secret of this ominous place. We held a council on the matter one morning, Bill Scanlan and I.

‘Look it here, Bo,’ said he, ‘there is something there that this guy does not want us to see, and the more he hides it the more of a hunch have I that I want to be set wise to it. We don’t need no guides any more, you or I. I guess we can put on our own glass tops and walk out of the front door same as any other citizen. Let us go down and explore.’

‘Why not?’ said I, for I was as curious about the matter as Scanlan. ‘Do you see any objection, sir?’ I asked, for Dr. Maracot had entered the room. ‘Perhaps you would care to come down with us and fathom the mystery of the Palace of Black Marble.’

‘It may be the Palace of Black Magic as well,’ said he. ‘Did you ever hear of the Lord of the Dark Face?’

I confessed that I never did. I forget if I have said before that the Professor was a world-famed specialist on Comparative Religions and ancient primitive beliefs. Even the distant Atlantis was not beyond the range of his learning.

‘Our knowledge of the conditions there came to us chiefly by way of Egypt,’ said he. ‘It is what the Priests of the Temple at Sais told Solon which is the solid nucleus round which all the rest, part fact and part fiction, has gathered.’

‘And what wisecracks did the priests say?’ asked Scanlan.

‘Well, they said a good deal. But among other things they handed down a legend of the Lord of the Dark Face. I can’t help thinking that he may have been the Master of the Black Marble Palace. Some say that there were several Lords of the Dark Face — but one at least is on record.’

‘And what sort of a duck was he?’ asked Scanlan.,

‘Well, by all accounts, he was more than a man, both in his power and in his wickedness. Indeed, it was on account of these things, and on account of the utter corruption which he had brought upon the people, that the whole land was destroyed.’

‘Like Sodom and Gomorrah.’

‘Exactly. There would seem to be a point where things become impossible. Nature’s patience is exhausted, and the only course open is to smear it all out and begin again. This creature, one can hardly call him a man, had trafficked in unholy arts and had acquired magic powers of the most far — reaching sort which he turned to evil ends. That is the legend of the Lord of the Dark Face. It would explain why his house is still a thing of horror to these poor people and why they dread that we should go near it.'

'Which makes me the more eager to do so,' I cried.

'Same here, Bo,' Bill added.

'I confess that I, too, should be interested to examine it,' said the Professor. 'I cannot see that our kind hosts here will be any the worse if we make a little expedition of our own, since their superstition makes it difficult for them to accompany us. We will take our opportunity and do so.'

It was some little time before that opportunity came, for our small community was so closely knit that there was little privacy in life. It chanced, however, one morning — so far as we could with our rough calendar reckon night and morning — there was some religious observance which assembled them all and took up all their attention. The chance was too good for us to miss and having assured the two janitors who worked the great pumps of the entrance chamber that all was right we soon found ourselves alone upon the ocean bed and bound for the old city. Progress is slow through the heavy medium of salt water, and even a short walk is wearying, but within an hour we found ourselves in front of the huge black building which had excited our curiosity. With no friendly guide to check us, and no presentiment of danger, we ascended the marble stair and passed through the huge carved portals of this palace of evil.

It was far better preserved than the other buildings of the old city — so much so, indeed, that the stone shell was in no way altered, and only the furniture and the hangings had long decayed and vanished. Nature, however, had brought her own hangings, and very horrible they were. It was a gloomy shadowy place at the best, but in those hideous shadows lurked the obscene shapes of monstrous polyps and strange, misformed fish which were like the creations of a nightmare. Especially I remember an enormous purple sea-slug which crawled, in great numbers, everywhere and large black flat fish which lay like mats upon the floor, with long waving tentacles tipped with flame vibrating above them in the water. We had to step carefully, for the whole building was filled with hideous creatures which might well prove to be as poisonous as they looked.

There were richly ornamented passages with small side rooms leading out from them, but the centre of the building was taken up by one magnificent hall, which in the days of its grandeur must have been one of the most wonderful chambers ever erected by human hands. In that gloomy light we could see neither the roof nor the full sweep of the walls, but as we walked round, our lamps casting tunnels of light before us, we appreciated its huge proportions and the marvellous decorations of the walls. These decorations took the form of statues and ornaments, carved with the highest perfection of art, but horrible and revolting in their subjects. All that the most depraved human mind could conceive of Sadic cruelty and bestial lust was reproduced upon the walls. Through the shadows monstrous images and horrible imaginings loomed round us on every side. If ever the devil had a Temple erected in his honour, it was there. So too was the devil himself, for at one end of the room, under a canopy of discoloured metal which may well have been gold, and on a high throne of red marble, there was seated a dreadful deity, the very impersonation of evil, savage, scowling and relentless, modelled upon the same lines as the Baal whom we had seen in the Atlantean Colony, but infinitely stranger and more repulsive. There was a fascination in the wonderful vigour of that terrible countenance, and we were standing with our lamps playing upon it, absorbed in our reflections, when the most amazing, the most incredible thing came to break in upon our reflections. From behind us there came the sound of a loud, derisive human laugh.

Our heads were, as I have explained, enclosed in our glass bells, from which all sound was excluded, nor was it possible for anyone wearing a bell to utter any sound. And yet that mocking laugh fell clear upon the ears of each of us. We sprang round and stood amazed at what was before us.

Against one of the pillars of the hall a man was leaning, his arms folded upon his chest, and his malevolent eyes fixed with a threatening glare upon ourselves. I have called him a man, but he was unlike any man whom I have ever seen, and the fact that he both breathed and talked as no man could breathe or talk, and made his voice carry as no human voice could carry, told us that he had that in him which made him very different from ourselves. Outwardly he was a magnificent creature, not less than seven feet in height and built upon the lines of a perfect athlete, which was more noticeable as he wore a costume which fitted tightly upon his figure, and seemed to consist of black glazed leather. His face was that of a bronze statue — a statue wrought by some master craftsman in order to depict all the power and also all the evil which the human features could portray. It was not bloated or sensual, for such characteristics would have meant weakness and there was no trace of weakness there. On the contrary, it was extraordinarily clean-cut and aquiline, with an eagle nose, dark bristling brows, and smouldering black eyes which flashed and glowed with an inner fire. It was those remorseless, malignant eyes, and the beautiful but cruel straight hard-lipped mouth, set like fate, which gave the terror to his face. One felt, as one looked at him, that magnificent as he was in his person, he was evil to the very marrow, his glance a threat, his smile a sneer, his laugh a mockery:

‘Well, gentlemen,’ he said, talking excellent English in a voice which sounded as clear as if we were all back upon earth, ‘you have had a remarkable adventure in the past and are likely to have an even more exciting one in the future, though it may be my pleasant task to bring it to a sudden end. This, I fear, is a rather one-sided conversation, but as I am perfectly well able to read your thoughts, and as I know all about you, you need not fear any misunderstanding. But you have a great deal — a very great deal to learn.’

We looked at each other in helpless amazement. It was hard, indeed, to be prevented from comparing notes as to our reactions to this amazing development. Again we heard that rasping laugh.

‘Yes, it is indeed hard. But you can talk when you return, for I wish you to return and to take a message with you. If it were not for that message, I think that this visit to my home would have been your end. But first of all I have a few things which I wished to say to you. I will address you, Dr. Maracot, as the oldest and presumably the wisest of the party, though none could have been very wise to make such an excursion as this. You hear me very well, do you not? That is right, a nod or a shake is all I ask.

‘Of course you know who I am. I fancy you discovered me lately. No one can speak or think of me that I do not know it. No one can come into this my old home, my innermost intimate shrine, that I am not summoned. That is why these poor wretches down yonder avoid it, and wanted you to avoid it also. You would have been wiser if you had followed their advice. You have brought me to you, and when once I am brought I do not readily leave.

‘Your mind with its little grain of earth science is worrying itself over the problems which I present. How is it that I can live here without oxygen? I do not live here. I live in the great world of men under the light of the sun. I only come here when I am called as you have called me. But I am an ether-breathing creature. There is as much ether here as on a mountain top. Some of your own people can live without air. The cataleptic lies for months and never breathes. I’m even as he, but I remain, as you see me, conscious and active.

‘Now you worry as to how you can hear me. Is it not the very essence of wireless transmission that it turns from the ether to the air? So I, too, can turn my words from my etheric utterance to impinge upon your ears through the air which fills those clumsy bells of yours.

‘And my English? Well, I hope it is fairly good. I have lived some time on earth, oh a weary, weary time. How long is it? Is this the eleventh thousand or the twelfth thousand year? The latter, I think. I have had time to learn all human tongues. My English is no better than the rest.

‘Have I resolved some of your doubts? That is right. I can see if I cannot hear you. But now I have something more serious to say.

‘I am Baal-seepa. I am the Lord of the Dark Face. I am he who went so far into the inner secrets of Nature that I could defy death himself. I have so handled things that I could not die if I would. Some will stronger than my own is to be found if I am ever to die. Oh, mortals, never pray to be delivered from death. It may seem terrible, but eternal life is infinitely more so. To go on and on and on while the endless procession of humanity goes past you. To sit ever at the wayside of history and to see it go, ever moving onwards and leaving you behind. Is it a wonder that my heart is black and bitter, and that I curse the whole foolish drove of them? I injure them when I can. Why should I not?

‘You wonder how I can injure them. I have powers, and they are not small ones. I can sway the minds of men. I am the master of the mob. Where evil has been planned there have I ever been. I was with the Huns when they laid half Europe in ruins. I was with the Saracens when under the name of religion they put to the sword all who gainsayed them. I was out on Bartholomew’s night. I lay behind the slave trade. It was my whisper which burned ten thousand old crones whom the fools called witches. I was the tall dark man who led the mob in Paris when the streets swam in blood. Rare times those, but they have been even better of late in Russia. That is whence I have come. I had half forgotten this colony of sea-rats who burrow under the mud and carry on a few of the arts and legends of that grand land where life flourished as never since. It is you who reminded me of them, for this old home of mine is still united, by personal vibrations of which your science knows nothing, to the man who built and loved it. I knew that strangers had entered it. I inquired, and here I am. So now since I am here — and it is the first time for a thousand years —— it has reminded me of these people. They have lingered long enough. It is time for them to go. They are sprung from the power of one who defied me in his life, and who built up this means of escape from the catastrophe which engulfed all but his people and myself. His wisdom saved them and my powers saved me. But now my powers will crush those whom he saved, and the story will be complete.'

He put his hand into his breast and he took out a piece of script. 'You will give this to the chief of the water-rats,' said he. 'I regret that you gentlemen should share their fate, but since you are the primary cause of their misfortune it is only justice, after all. I will see you again later. Meanwhile I would commend a study of these pictures and carvings, which will give you some idea of the height to which I had raised Atlantis during the days of my rule. Here you will find some record of the manners and customs of the people when under my influence. Life was very varied, very highly coloured, very many-sided. In these drab days they would call it an orgy of wickedness. Well, call it what you will, I brought it about, I rejoiced in it, and I have no regrets. Had I my time again, I would do even so and more, save only for this fatal gift of eternal life. Warda, whom I curse and whom I should have killed before he grew strong enough to turn people against me, was wiser than I in this. He still revisits earth, but it is as a spirit, not a man. And now I go. You came here from curiosity, my friends. I can but trust that that curiosity is satisfied.'

And then we saw him disappear. Yes, before our very eyes he vanished. It was not done in an instant. He stood clear of the pillar against which he had been leaning. His splendid towering figure seemed blurred at the edges. The light died out of his eyes and his features grew indistinct. Then in a moment he had become a dark whirling cloud which swept upwards through the stagnant water of this dreadful hall. Then he was gone, and we stood gazing at each other and marvelling at the strange possibilities of life.

We did not linger in that horrible palace. It was not a safe place in which to loiter. As it was, I picked one of those noxious purple slugs off the shoulder of Bill Scanlan, and I was myself badly stung in the hand by the venom spat at me by a great yellow lamelli branch. As we staggered out I had one last impression of those dreadful carvings, the devil's own handiwork, upon the walls, and then we almost ran down the darksome passage, cursing the day that ever we had been fools enough to enter it. It was joy indeed to be out in the phosphorescent light of the bathybian plain, and to see the clear translucent water once again around us. Within an hour we were back in our home once more. With our helmets removed, we met in consultation in our own chamber. The Professor and I were too overwhelmed with it all to be able to put our thoughts into words. It was only the irrepressible vitality of Bill Scanlan which rose superior.

‘Holy smoke!’ said he. ‘We are up against it now. I guess this guy is the big noise out of hell. Seems to me, with his pictures and statues and the rest, he would make the wardsman of a red light precinct look like two cents. How to handle him — that’s the question.’

Dr. Maracot was lost in thought. Then he rang the bell and summoned our yellow-clad attendant. ‘Manda,’ said he. A minute later our friend was in the room. Maracot handed him the fateful letter.

Never have I admired a man as I did Manda at that moment. We had brought threatened ruin upon his people and himself by our unjustifiable curiosity — we, the strangers whom he had rescued when everything was hopelessly lost. And yet, though he turned a ghastly colour as he read the message, there was no touch of reproach upon the sad brown eyes which turned upon us. He shook his head, and despair was in every gesture. ‘Baal-seepa! Baal-seepa!’ he cried, and pressed his hands convulsively to his eyes, as if shutting out some horrible vision. He ran about the room like a man distracted with his grief, and finally rushed away to read the fatal message to the community. We heard a few minutes later the clang of the great bell which summoned them all to conference in the Central Hall.

‘Shall we go?’ I asked.

Dr. Maracot shook his head.

‘What can we do? For that matter, what can they do? What chance have they against one who has the powers of a demon?’

‘As much chance as a bunch of rabbits against a weasel,’ said Scanlan. ‘But, by Gosh, it’s up to us to find a way out. I guess we can’t go out of our way to raise the devil and then pass the buck to the folk that saved us.’

‘What do you suggest?’ I asked eagerly, for behind all his slang and his levity I recognised the strong, practical ability of this modern man of his hands.

‘Well, you can search me,’ said he. ‘And yet maybe this guy is not as safe as he thinks. A bit of it may have got worn out with age, and he’s getting on in years if we can take his word for it.'

'You think we might attack him?'

'Lunacy!' interjected the doctor.

Scanlan went to his locker. When he faced round he had a big six-shooter in his hand.

'What about this?' he said. 'I laid hold of it when we got our chance at the wreck. I thought maybe it might come useful. I've a dozen shells here. Maybe if I made as many holes in the big stiff it would let out some of his Magic. Lord save us! What is it?'

The revolver clattered down upon the floor, and Scanlan was writhing in agonies of pain, his left hand clasping his right wrist. Terrible cramps had seized his arm, and as we tried to alleviate them we could feel the muscles knotted up as hard as the roots of a tree. The sweat of agony streamed down the poor fellow's brow. Finally, utterly cowed and exhausted, he fell upon his bed.

'That lets me out,' he said. 'I'm through. Yes, thank you, the pain is better. But it is K.O. to William Scanlan. I've learned my lesson. You don't fight hell with six-shooters, and it's no use to try. I give him best from now onwards.'

'Yes, you have had your lesson,' said Maracot, 'and it has been a severe one.'

'Then you think our case is hopeless?'

'What can we do when, as it would seem, he is aware of every word and action? And yet we will not despair.' He sat in thought for a few moments. 'I think,' he resumed, 'that you, Scanlan, had best lie where you are for a time. You have had a shock from which it will take you some time to recover.'

'If there is anything doing, count me in, though I guess we can cut out the rough stuff,' said our comrade bravely, but his drawn face and shaking limbs showed what he had endured.

'There is nothing doing so far as you are concerned. We at least have learned what is the wrong way to go to work. All violence is useless. We are working on another plane — the plane of spirit. Do you remain here, Headley. I am going to the room which I use as a study. Perhaps if I were alone I could see a little more clearly what we should do.'

Both Scanlan and I had learned to have a great confidence in Maracot. If any human brain could solve our difficulties, it would be his. And yet surely we had reached a point which was beyond all human capacity. We were as helpless as children in the face of forces which we could neither understand nor control. Scanlan had fallen into a troubled sleep. My own one thought as I sat beside him was not how we should escape, but rather what form the blow would take and when it would fall. At any moment I was prepared to see the solid roof above us sink in, the walls collapse, and the dark waters of the lowest deep close in upon those who had defied them so long.

Then suddenly the great bell pealed out once more. Its harsh clamour jarred upon every nerve. I sprang to my feet, and Scanlan sat up in bed. It was no ordinary summons which rang through the old palace. The agitated tumultuous ringing, broken and irregular, was calling an alarm. All had to come, and at once. It was menacing and insistent. ‘Come now! Come at once! Leave everything and come!’ cried the bell.

‘Say, Bo, we should be with them,’ said Scanlan. ‘guess they’re up against it now.’

‘And yet what can we do?’

‘Maybe just the sight of us will give them a bit of heart. Anyhow, they must not think that we are quitters. Where is the Doc?’

‘He went to his study. But you are right, Scanlan. We should be with the others and let them see that we are ready to share their fate.’

‘The poor boobs seem to lean on us in a way. It may be that they know more than we, but we seem to have more sand in our craw than they. I guess they have taken what was given to them, and we have had to find things for ourselves. Well, it’s me for the deluge — if the deluge has got to be.’

But as we approached the door a most unexpected interruption detained us. Dr. Maracot stood before us. But was it indeed the Dr. Maracot whom we had known — this self-assured man with strength and resolution shining from every feature of his masterful face? The quiet scholar had been submerged, and here was a superman, a great leader, a dominant soul who might mould mankind to his desires.

‘Yes, friends, we shall be needed. All may yet be well. But come at once, or it may be too late. I will explain everything later — if there is any later for us. Yes, yes, we are coming.’

The latter words, with appropriate gesture, were spoken to some terrified Atlanteans who had appeared at the door and were eagerly beckoning to us to come. It was a fact, as Scanlan had said, that we had shown ourselves several times to be stronger in character and prompter in action than these secluded people, and at this hour of supreme danger they seemed to cling to us. I could hear a subdued murmur of satisfaction and relief as we entered the crowded hall, and took the places reserved for us in the front row.

It was time that we came, if we were indeed to bring any help. The terrible presence was already standing upon the dais and facing with a cruel, thin-lipped, demoniacal smile the cowering folk before him. Scanlan’s simile of a bunch of rabbits before a weasel came back to my memory as I looked round at them. They sank together, holding on to each other in their terror, and gazing wide — eyed at the mighty figure which towered above them and the ruthless granite-hewed face which looked down upon them. Never can I forget the impression of those semi-circular rows, tier above tier, of haggard, wide-eyed faces with their horrified gaze all directed towards the central dais. It would seem that he had already pronounced their doom and that they stood in the shadow of death waiting for its fulfilment. Manda was standing in abject submission, pleading in broken accents for his people, but one could see that the words only gave an added zest to the monster who stood sneering before him. The creature interrupted him with a few rasping words, and raised his right hand in the air, while a cry of despair rose from the assembly.

And at that moment Dr. Maracot sprang upon the dais. It was amazing to watch him. Some miracle seemed to have altered the man. He had the gait and the gesture of a youth, and yet upon his face there was a look of such power as I have never seen upon human features yet. He strode up to the swarthy giant, who glared down at him in amazement.

‘Well, little man, what have you to say?’ he asked.

‘I have this to say,’ said Maracot. ‘Your time has come. You have overstayed it. Go down! Go down into the Hell that has been waiting for you so long. You are a prince of darkness. Go where the darkness is.’

The demon’s eyes shot dark fire as he answered:

‘When my time comes, if it should ever come, it will not be from the lips of a wretched mortal that I shall learn it,’ said he. ‘What power have you that you could oppose for a moment one who is in the secret places of Nature? I could blast you where you stand.’

Maracot looked into those terrible eyes without blenching. It seemed to me that it was the giant who flinched away from his gaze.

‘Unhappy being,’ said Maracot. ‘It is I who have the power and the will to blast you where you stand. Too long have you cursed the world with your presence. You have been a plague-spot infecting all that was beautiful and good. The hearts of men will be lighter when you are gone, and the sun will shine more brightly.’

‘What is this? Who are you? What is it that you are saying?’ stammered the creature.

‘You speak of secret knowledge. Shall I tell you that which is at the very base of it? It is that on every plane the good of that plane can be stronger than the evil. The angel will still beat the devil. For the moment I am on the same plane on which you have so long been, and I hold the power of the conqueror. It has been given to me. So again I say: Down with you! Down to Hell to which you belong! Down, sir! Down, I say! Down!’

And then the miracle occurred. For a minute or more — how can one count time at such moments? — the two beings, the mortal and the demon, faced each other as rigid as statues, glaring into each other’s eyes, with inexorable will upon the two faces, the dark one and the fair. Then suddenly the great creature flinched. His face convulsed with rage, he threw two clawing hands up into the air. ‘It is you, Warda, you cursed one! I recognise your handiwork. Oh, curse you, Warda. Curse you! Curse you!’ His voice died away, his long dark figure became blurred in its outline, his head drooped upon his chest, his knees sagged under him, down he sank and down, and as he sank he changed his shape. At first it was a crouching human being, then it was a dark formless mass, and then with sudden collapse it had become a semi-liquid heap of black and horrible putrescence which stained the dais and poisoned the air. At the same time Scanlan and I dashed forward on to the platform, for Dr. Maracot, with a deep groan, his powers exhausted, had fallen forward in helpless collapse. ‘We have won! We have won!’ he muttered, and an instant later his senses had left him and he lay half dead upon the floor.

*

Thus it was that the Atlantean colony was saved from the most horrible danger that could threaten it, and that an evil presence was banished for ever from the world. It was not for some days that Dr. Maracot could tell his story, and when he did it was of such a character that if we had not seen the results we should have put it down as the delirium of his illness. I may say that his power had left him with the occasion which had called it forth, and that he was now the same quiet, gentle man of science whom we had known.

‘That it should have happened to me!’ he cried. ‘To me, a materialist, a man so immersed in matter that the invisible did not exist in my philosophy. The theories of a whole lifetime have crumbled about my ears.’

‘I guess we have all been to school again,’ said Scanlan, ‘If ever I get back to the little home town, I shall have something to tell the boys.’

‘The less you tell them the better, unless you want to get the name of being the greatest liar that ever came out of America,’ said I. ‘Would you or I have believed it all if someone else had told us?’

‘Maybe not. But say, Doc, you had the dope right enough. That great black stiff got his ten and out as neat as ever I saw. There was no come-back there. You clean pushed him off the map. I don’t know on what other map he has found his location, but it is no place for Bill Scanlan anyhow.’

‘I will tell you exactly what occurred,’ said the Doctor. ‘You will remember that I left you and retired into my study. I had little hope in my heart, but I had read a good deal at different times about black magic and occult arts. I was aware that white can always dominate black if it can but reach the same plane. He was on a much stronger — I will not say higher — plane than we. That was the fatal fact.

‘I saw no way of getting over it. I flung myself down on the settee and I prayed — yes, I, the hardened materialist, prayed — for help. When one is at the very end of all human power, what can one do save to stretch appealing hands into the mists which gird us round? I prayed — and my prayer was most wonderfully answered.

‘I was suddenly aware of the fact that I was not alone in the room. There stood before me a tall figure, as swarthy as the evil presence whom we fought, but with a kindly, bearded face which shone with benevolence and love. The sense of power which he conveyed was not less than the other, but it was the power of good, the power within the influence of which evil would shred away as the mists do before the sun. He looked at me with kindly eyes, and I sat, too amazed to speak, staring up at him. Something within me, some inspiration or intuition, told me that this was the spirit of that great and wise Atlantean who had fought the evil while he lived, and who, when he could not prevent the destruction of his country, took such steps as would ensure that the more worthy should survive even though they should be sunk to the depths of the Ocean. This wondrous being was now interposing to prevent the ruin of his work and the destruction of his children. With a sudden gush of hope I realised all this as clearly as if he had said it. Then, still smiling, he advanced, and he laid his two hands upon my head. It was his own virtue and strength, no doubt, which he was transferring to me. I felt it coursing like fire down my veins. Nothing in the world seemed impossible at that moment. I had the will and the might to do miracles. Then at that moment I heard the bell clang out, which told me that the crisis had come. As I rose from the couch the spirit, smiling his encouragement, vanished before me. Then I joined you, and the rest you know.'

'Well, sir,' said I, 'I think you have made your reputation. If you care to set up as a god down here, I expect you would find no difficulty.'

'You got away with it better than I did, Doc,' said Scanlan in a rueful voice. 'How is it this guy didn't know what you were doing? He was quick enough on to me when I laid hand on a gun. And yet you had him guessing.'

'I suppose that you were on the plane of matter, and that, for the moment, we were upon that of spirit,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'Such things teach one humility. It is only when you touch the higher that you realise how low we may be among the possibilities of creation. I have had my lesson. May my future life show that I have learned it.'

So this was the end of our supreme experience. It was but a little time later that we conceived the idea of sending news of ourselves to the surface, and that later by means of vitrine balls filled with levigen, we ascended ourselves to be met in the manner already narrated. Dr. Maracot actually talks of going back. There is some point of Ichthyology upon which he wants more precise information. But Scanlan has, I hear, married his wren in Philadelphia, and has been promoted as works manager of Merribanks, so he seeks no further adventure, while I — well, the deep sea has given me a precious pearl, and I ask for no more.

THE END

The Short Story Collections

HOTEL
REGINA

Conan Doyle, Paris, 1925

THE CAPTAIN OF THE POLESTAR AND OTHER TALES.

TO
MY FRIEND
MAJOR-GENERAL A. W. DRAYSON
AS A SLIGHT TOKEN
OF
MY ADMIRATION FOR HIS GREAT
AND AS YET UNRECOGNISED SERVICES TO ASTRONOMY
This little Volume
IS
DEDICATED

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JOHN BARRINGTON COWLES.
ELIAS B. HOPKINS, THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.

PREFACE

For the use of some of the following Tales I am indebted to the courtesy of the Proprietors of “Cornhill,” “Temple Bar,” “Belgravia,” “London Society,” “Cassell’s,” and “The Boy’s Own Paper.”

A. CONAN DOYLE, M.D.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE “POLE-STAR.”

[Being an extract from the singular journal of JOHN M’ALISTER RAY, student of medicine.]

September 11th. — Lat. 81 degrees 40’ N.; long. 2 degrees E. Still lying-to amid enormous ice fields. The one which stretches away to the north of us, and to which our ice-anchor is attached, cannot be smaller than an English county. To the right and left unbroken sheets extend to the horizon. This morning the mate reported that there were signs of pack ice to the southward. Should this form of sufficient thickness to bar our return, we shall be in a position of danger, as the food, I hear, is already running somewhat short. It is late in the season, and the nights are beginning to reappear.

This morning I saw a star twinkling just over the fore-yard, the first since the beginning of May. There is considerable discontent among the crew, many of whom are anxious to get back home to be in time for the herring season, when labour always commands a high price upon the Scotch coast. As yet their displeasure is only signified by sullen countenances and black looks, but I heard from the second mate this afternoon that they contemplated sending a deputation to the Captain to explain their grievance. I much doubt how he will receive it, as he is a man of fierce temper, and very sensitive about anything approaching to an infringement of his rights. I shall venture after dinner to say a few words to him upon the subject. I have always found that he will tolerate from me what he would resent from any other member of the crew. Amsterdam Island, at the north-west corner of Spitzbergen, is visible upon our starboard quarter — a rugged line of volcanic rocks, intersected by white seams, which represent glaciers. It is curious to think that at the present moment there is probably no human being nearer to us than the Danish settlements in the south of Greenland — a good nine hundred miles as the crow flies. A captain takes a great responsibility upon himself when he risks his vessel under such circumstances. No whaler has ever remained in these latitudes till so advanced a period of the year.

9 P.M, — I have spoken to Captain Craigie, and though the result has been hardly satisfactory, I am bound to say that he listened to what I had to say very quietly and even deferentially. When I had finished he put on that air of iron determination which I have frequently observed upon his face,

and paced rapidly backwards and forwards across the narrow cabin for some minutes. At first I feared that I had seriously offended him, but he dispelled the idea by sitting down again, and putting his hand upon my arm with a gesture which almost amounted to a caress. There was a depth of tenderness too in his wild dark eyes which surprised me considerably. “Look here, Doctor,” he said, “I’m sorry I ever took you — I am indeed — and I would give fifty pounds this minute to see you standing safe upon the Dundee quay. It’s hit or miss with me this time. There are fish to the north of us. How dare you shake your head, sir, when I tell you I saw them blowing from the masthead?” — this in a sudden burst of fury, though I was not conscious of having shown any signs of doubt. “Two-and-twenty fish in as many minutes as I am a living man, and not one under ten foot. Now, Doctor, do you think I can leave the country when there is only one infernal strip of ice between me and my fortune? If it came on to blow from the north to-morrow we could fill the ship and be away before the frost could catch us. If it came on to blow from the south — well, I suppose the men are paid for risking their lives, and as for myself it matters but little to me, for I have more to bind me to the other world than to this one. I confess that I am sorry for you, though. I wish I had old Angus Tait who was with me last voyage, for he was a man that would never be missed, and you — you said once that you were engaged, did you not?”

[A whale is measured among whalers not by the length of its body, but by the length of its whalebone.]

“Yes,” I answered, snapping the spring of the locket which hung from my watch-chain, and holding up the little vignette of Flora.

“Curse you!” he yelled, springing out of his seat, with his very beard bristling with passion. “What is your happiness to me? What have I to do with her that you must dangle her photograph before my eyes?” I almost thought that he was about to strike me in the frenzy of his rage, but with another imprecation he dashed open the door of the cabin and rushed out upon deck, leaving me considerably astonished at his extraordinary violence. It is the first time that he has ever shown me anything but courtesy and kindness. I can hear him pacing excitedly up and down overhead as I write these lines.

I should like to give a sketch of the character of this man, but it seems presumptuous to attempt such a thing upon paper, when the idea in my own mind is at best a vague and uncertain one. Several times I have thought that I grasped the clue which might explain it, but only to be disappointed by his presenting himself in some new light which would upset all my conclusions. It may be that no human eye but my own shall ever rest upon these lines, yet as a psychological study I shall attempt to leave some record of Captain Nicholas Craigie.

A man’s outer case generally gives some indication of the soul within. The Captain is tall and well-formed, with dark, handsome face, and a curious way of twitching his limbs, which may arise from nervousness, or be simply an outcome of his excessive energy. His jaw and whole cast of countenance is manly and resolute, but the eyes are the distinctive feature of his face. They are of the very darkest hazel, bright and eager, with a singular mixture of recklessness in their expression, and of something else which I have sometimes thought was more allied with horror than any other emotion. Generally the former predominated, but on occasions, and more particularly when he was thoughtfully inclined, the look of fear would spread and deepen until it imparted a new character to his whole countenance. It is at these times that he is most subject to tempestuous fits of anger, and he seems to be aware of it, for I have known him lock himself up so that no one might approach him until his dark hour was passed. He sleeps badly, and I have heard him shouting during the night, but his cabin is some little distance from mine, and I could never distinguish the words which he said.

This is one phase of his character, and the most disagreeable one. It is only through my close association with him, thrown together as we are day after day, that I have observed it. Otherwise he is an agreeable companion, well-read and entertaining, and as gallant a seaman as ever trod a deck. I shall not easily forget the way in which he handled the ship when we were caught by a gale among the loose ice at the beginning of April. I have never seen him so cheerful, and even hilarious, as he was that night, as he paced backwards and forwards upon the bridge amid the flashing of the lightning and the howling of the wind. He has told me several times that the thought of death was a pleasant one to him, which is a sad thing for a young man to say; he cannot be much more than thirty, though his hair and moustache are already slightly grizzled. Some great sorrow must have overtaken him and blighted his whole life. Perhaps I should be the same if I lost my Flora —

God knows! I think if it were not for her that I should care very little whether the wind blew from the north or the south to-morrow.

There, I hear him come down the companion, and he has locked himself up in his room, which shows that he is still in an unamiable mood. And so to bed, as old Pepys would say, for the candle is burning down (we have to use them now since the nights are closing in), and the steward has turned in, so there are no hopes of another one.

September 12th. — Calm, clear day, and still lying in the same position. What wind there is comes from the south-east, but it is very slight. Captain is in a better humour, and apologised to me at breakfast for his rudeness. He still looks somewhat distrait, however, and retains that wild look in his eyes which in a Highlander would mean that he was "fey" — at least so our chief engineer remarked to me, and he has some reputation among the Celtic portion of our crew as a seer and expounder of omens.

It is strange that superstition should have obtained such mastery over this hard-headed and practical race. I could not have believed to what an extent it is carried had I not observed it for myself. We have had a perfect epidemic of it this voyage, until I have felt inclined to serve out rations of sedatives and nerve-tonics with the Saturday allowance of grog. The first symptom of it was that shortly after leaving Shetland the men at the wheel used to complain that they heard plaintive cries and screams in the wake of the ship, as if something were following it and were unable to overtake it. This fiction has been kept up during the whole voyage, and on dark nights at the beginning of the seal-fishing it was only with great difficulty that men could be induced to do their spell. No doubt what they heard was either the creaking of the rudder-chains, or the cry of some passing sea-bird. I have been fetched out of bed several times to listen to it, but I need hardly say that I was never able to distinguish anything unnatural.

The men, however, are so absurdly positive upon the subject that it is hopeless to argue with them. I mentioned the matter to the Captain once, but to my surprise he took it very gravely, and indeed appeared to be considerably disturbed by what I told him. I should have thought that he at least would have been above such vulgar delusions.

All this disquisition upon superstition leads me up to the fact that Mr. Manson, our second mate, saw a ghost last night — or, at least, says that he did, which of course is the same thing. It is quite refreshing to have some new topic of conversation after the eternal routine of bears and whales which has served us for so many months. Manson swears the ship is haunted, and that he would not stay in her a day if he had any other place to go to. Indeed the fellow is honestly frightened, and I had to give him some chloral and bromide of potassium this morning to steady him down. He seemed quite indignant when I suggested that he had been having an extra glass the night before, and I was obliged to pacify him by keeping as grave a countenance as possible during his story, which he certainly narrated in a very straight-forward and matter-of-fact way.

“I was on the bridge,” he said, “about four bells in the middle watch, just when the night was at its darkest. There was a bit of a moon, but the clouds were blowing across it so that you couldn’t see far from the ship. John M’Leod, the harpooner, came aft from the foc’sle-head and reported a strange noise on the starboard bow.

“I went forrard and we both heard it, sometimes like a bairn crying and sometimes like a wench in pain. I’ve been seventeen years to the country and I never heard seal, old or young, make a sound like that. As we were standing there on the foc’sle-head the moon came out from behind a cloud, and we both saw a sort of white figure moving across the ice field in the same direction that we had heard the cries. We lost sight of it for a while, but it came back on the port bow, and we could just make it out like a shadow on the ice. I sent a hand aft for the rifles, and M’Leod and I went down on to the pack, thinking that maybe it might be a bear. When we got on the ice I lost sight of M’Leod, but I pushed on in the direction where I could still hear the cries. I followed them for a mile or maybe more, and then running round a hummock I came right on to the top of it standing and waiting for me seemingly. I don’t know what it was. It wasn’t a bear any way. It was tall and white and straight, and if it wasn’t a man nor a woman, I’ll stake my davy it was something worse. I made for the ship as hard as I could run, and precious glad I was to find myself aboard. I signed articles to do my duty by the ship, and on the ship I’ll stay, but you don’t catch me on the ice again after sundown.”

That is his story, given as far as I can in his own words. I fancy what he saw must, in spite of his denial, have been a young bear erect upon its hind legs, an attitude which they often assume when alarmed. In the uncertain light this would bear a resemblance to a human figure, especially to a man whose nerves were already somewhat shaken. Whatever it may have been, the occurrence is unfortunate, for it has produced a most unpleasant effect upon the crew. Their looks are more sullen than before, and their discontent more open. The double grievance of being debarred from the herring fishing and of being detained in what they choose to call a haunted vessel, may lead them to do something rash. Even the harpooners, who are the oldest and steadiest among them, are joining in the general agitation.

Apart from this absurd outbreak of superstition, things are looking rather more cheerful. The pack which was forming to the south of us has partly cleared away, and the water is so warm as to lead me to believe that we are lying in one of those branches of the gulf-stream which run up between Greenland and Spitzbergen. There are numerous small Medusse and sealemons about the ship, with abundance of shrimps, so that there is every possibility of “fish” being sighted. Indeed one was seen blowing about dinner-time, but in such a position that it was impossible for the boats to follow it.

September 13th. — Had an interesting conversation with the chief mate, Mr. Milne, upon the bridge. It seems that our Captain is as great an enigma to the seamen, and even to the owners of the vessel, as he has been to me. Mr. Milne tells me that when the ship is paid off, upon returning from a voyage, Captain Craigie disappears, and is not seen again until the approach of another season, when he walks quietly into the office of the company, and asks whether his services will be required. He has no friend in Dundee, nor does any one pretend to be acquainted with his early history. His position depends entirely upon his skill as a seaman, and the name for courage and coolness which he had earned in the capacity of mate, before being entrusted with a separate command. The unanimous opinion seems to be that he is not a Scotchman, and that his name is an assumed one. Mr. Milne thinks that he has devoted himself to whaling simply for the reason that it is the most dangerous occupation which he could select, and that he courts death in every possible manner. He mentioned several instances of this, one of which is rather curious, if true. It seems that on one occasion he did not put in an appearance at the office, and a substitute had to be selected in his place. That was at the time of the last Russian and Turkish war. When he turned up again next spring he had a puckered wound in the side of his neck which he used to endeavour to conceal with his cravat. Whether the mate’s inference that he had been engaged in the war is true or not I cannot say. It was certainly a strange coincidence.

The wind is veering round in an easterly direction, but is still very slight. I think the ice is lying closer than it did yesterday. As far as the eye can reach on every side there is one wide expanse of spotless white, only broken by an occasional rift or the dark shadow of a hummock. To the south there is the narrow lane of blue water which is our sole means of escape, and which is closing up every day. The Captain is taking a heavy responsibility upon himself. I hear that the tank of potatoes has been finished, and even the biscuits are running short, but he preserves the same impassible countenance, and spends the greater part of the day at the crow's nest, sweeping the horizon with his glass. His manner is very variable, and he seems to avoid my society, but there has been no repetition of the violence which he showed the other night.

7.30 P.M. — My deliberate opinion is that we are commanded by a madman. Nothing else can account for the extraordinary vagaries of Captain Craigie. It is fortunate that I have kept this journal of our voyage, as it will serve to justify us in case we have to put him under any sort of restraint, a step which I should only consent to as a last resource. Curiously enough it was he himself who suggested lunacy and not mere eccentricity as the secret of his strange conduct. He was standing upon the bridge about an hour ago, peering as usual through his glass, while I was walking up and down the quarterdeck. The majority of the men were below at their tea, for the watches have not been regularly kept of late. Tired of walking, I leaned against the bulwarks, and admired the mellow glow cast by the sinking sun upon the great ice fields which surround us. I was suddenly aroused from the reverie into which I had fallen by a hoarse voice at my elbow, and starting round I found that the Captain had descended and was standing by my side. He was staring out over the ice with an expression in which horror, surprise, and something approaching to joy were contending for the mastery. In spite of the cold, great drops of perspiration were coursing down his forehead, and he was evidently fearfully excited.

His limbs twitched like those of a man upon the verge of an epileptic fit, and the lines about his mouth were drawn and hard.

"Look!" he gasped, seizing me by the wrist, but still keeping his eyes upon the distant ice, and moving his head slowly in a horizontal direction, as if following some object which was moving across the field of vision. "Look! There, man, there! Between the hummocks! Now coming out from behind the far one! You see her — you MUST see her! There still! Flying from me, by God, flying from me — and gone!”

He uttered the last two words in a whisper of concentrated agony which shall never fade from my remembrance. Clinging to the ratlines he endeavoured to climb up upon the top of the bulwarks as if in the hope of obtaining a last glance at the departing object. His strength was not equal to the attempt, however, and he staggered back against the saloon skylights, where he leaned panting and exhausted. His face was so livid that I expected him to become unconscious, so lost no time in leading him down the companion, and stretching him upon one of the sofas in the cabin. I then poured him out some brandy, which I held to his lips, and which had a wonderful effect upon him, bringing the blood back into his white face and steadying his poor shaking limbs. He raised himself up upon his elbow, and looking round to see that we were alone, he beckoned to me to come and sit beside him.

“You saw it, didn’t you?” he asked, still in the same subdued awesome tone so foreign to the nature of the man.

“No, I saw nothing.”

His head sank back again upon the cushions. “No, he wouldn’t without the glass,” he murmured. “He couldn’t. It was the glass that showed her to me, and then the eyes of love — the eyes of love.

“I say, Doc, don’t let the steward in! He’ll think I’m mad. Just bolt the door, will you!”

I rose and did what he had commanded.

He lay quiet for a while, lost in thought apparently, and then raised himself up upon his elbow again, and asked for some more brandy.

“You don’t think I am, do you, Doc?” he asked, as I was putting the bottle back into the after-locker. “Tell me now, as man to man, do you think that I am mad?”

“I think you have something on your mind,” I answered, “which is exciting you and doing you a good deal of harm.”

“Right there, lad!” he cried, his eyes sparkling from the effects of the brandy. “Plenty on my mind — plenty! But I can work out the latitude and the longitude, and I can handle my sextant and manage my logarithms. You couldn’t prove me mad in a court of law, could you, now?” It was curious to hear the man lying back and coolly arguing out the question of his own sanity.

"Perhaps not," I said; "but still I think you would be wise to get home as soon as you can, and settle down to a quiet life for a while."

"Get home, eh?" he muttered, with a sneer upon his face. "One word for me and two for yourself, lad. Settle down with Flora — pretty little Flora. Are bad dreams signs of madness?"

"Sometimes," I answered.

"What else? What would be the first symptoms?"

"Pains in the head, noises in the ears flashes before the eyes, delusions" ——

"Ah! what about them?" he interrupted. "What would you call a delusion?"

"Seeing a thing which is not there is a delusion."

"But she WAS there!" he groaned to himself. "She WAS there!" and rising, he unbolted the door and walked with slow and uncertain steps to his own cabin, where I have no doubt that he will remain until to-morrow morning. His system seems to have received a terrible shock, whatever it may have been that he imagined himself to have seen. The man becomes a greater mystery every day, though I fear that the solution which he has himself suggested is the correct one, and that his reason is affected. I do not think that a guilty conscience has anything to do with his behaviour. The idea is a popular one among the officers, and, I believe, the crew; but I have seen nothing to support it. He has not the air of a guilty man, but of one who has had terrible usage at the hands of fortune, and who should be regarded as a martyr rather than a criminal.

The wind is veering round to the south to-night. God help us if it blocks that narrow pass which is our only road to safety! Situated as we are on the edge of the main Arctic pack, or the "barrier" as it is called by the whalers, any wind from the north has the effect of shredding out the ice around us and allowing our escape, while a wind from the south blows up all the loose ice behind us and hems us in between two packs. God help us, I say again!

September 14th. — Sunday, and a day of rest. My fears have been confirmed, and the thin strip of blue water has disappeared from the southward. Nothing but the great motionless ice fields around us, with their weird hummocks and fantastic pinnacles. There is a deathly silence over their wide expanse which is horrible. No lapping of the waves now, no cries of seagulls or straining of sails, but one deep universal silence in which the murmurs of the seamen, and the creak of their boots upon the white shining deck, seem discordant and out of place. Our only visitor was an Arctic fox, a rare animal upon the pack, though common enough upon the land. He did not come near the ship, however, but after surveying us from a distance fled rapidly across the ice. This was curious conduct, as they generally know nothing of man, and being of an inquisitive nature, become so familiar that they are easily captured. Incredible as it may seem, even this little incident produced a bad effect upon the crew. “Yon puir beastie kens mair, ay, an’ sees mair nor you nor me!” was the comment of one of the leading harpooners, and the others nodded their acquiescence. It is vain to attempt to argue against such puerile superstition. They have made up their minds that there is a curse upon the ship, and nothing will ever persuade them to the contrary.

The Captain remained in seclusion all day except for about half an hour in the afternoon, when he came out upon the quarterdeck. I observed that he kept his eye fixed upon the spot where the vision of yesterday had appeared, and was quite prepared for another outburst, but none such came. He did not seem to see me although I was standing close beside him. Divine service was read as usual by the chief engineer. It is a curious thing that in whaling vessels the Church of England Prayer-book is always employed, although there is never a member of that Church among either officers or crew. Our men are all Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, the former predominating. Since a ritual is used which is foreign to both, neither can complain that the other is preferred to them, and they listen with all attention and devotion, so that the system has something to recommend it.

A glorious sunset, which made the great fields of ice look like a lake of blood. I have never seen a finer and at the same time more weird effect. Wind is veering round. If it will blow twenty-four hours from the north all will yet be well.

September 15th. — To-day is Flora’s birthday. Dear lass! it is well that she cannot see her boy, as she used to call me, shut up among the ice fields with a crazy captain and a few weeks’ provisions. No doubt she scans the shipping list in the Scotsman every morning to see if we are reported from Shetland. I have to set an example to the men and look cheery and unconcerned; but God knows, my heart is very heavy at times.

The thermometer is at nineteen Fahrenheit to-day. There is but little wind, and what there is comes from an unfavourable quarter. Captain is in an excellent humour; I think he imagines he has seen some other omen or vision, poor fellow, during the night, for he came into my room early in the morning, and stooping down over my bunk, whispered, “It wasn’t a delusion, Doc; it’s all right!” After breakfast he asked me to find out how much food was left, which the second mate and I proceeded to do. It is even less than we had expected. Forward they have half a tank full of biscuits, three barrels of salt meat, and a very limited supply of coffee beans and sugar. In the after-hold and lockers there are a good many luxuries, such as tinned salmon, soups, haricot mutton, &c., but they will go a very short way among a crew of fifty men. There are two barrels of flour in the store-room, and an unlimited supply of tobacco. Altogether there is about enough to keep the men on half rations for eighteen or twenty days — certainly not more. When we reported the state of things to the Captain, he ordered all hands to be piped, and addressed them from the quarterdeck. I never saw him to better advantage. With his tall, well-knit figure, and dark animated face, he seemed a man born to command, and he discussed the situation in a cool sailor-like way which showed that while appreciating the danger he had an eye for every loophole of escape.

“My lads,” he said, “no doubt you think I brought you into this fix, if it is a fix, and maybe some of you feel bitter against me on account of it. But you must remember that for many a season no ship that comes to the country has brought in as much oil-money as the old Pole-Star, and every one of you has had his share of it. You can leave your wives behind you in comfort while other poor fellows come back to find their lasses on the parish. If you have to thank me for the one you have to thank me for the other, and we may call it quits. We’ve tried a bold venture before this and succeeded, so now that we’ve tried one and failed we’ve no cause to cry out about it. If the worst comes to the worst, we can make the land across the ice, and lay in a stock of seals which will keep us alive until the spring. It won’t come to that, though, for you’ll see the Scotch coast again before three weeks are out. At present every man must go on half rations, share and share alike, and no favour to any. Keep up your hearts and you’ll pull through this as you’ve pulled through many a danger before.” These few simple words of his had a wonderful effect upon the crew. His former unpopularity was forgotten, and the old harpooner whom I have already mentioned for his superstition, led off three cheers, which were heartily joined in by all hands.

September 16th. — The wind has veered round to the north during the night, and the ice shows some symptoms of opening out. The men are in a good humour in spite of the short allowance upon which they have been placed. Steam is kept up in the engine-room, that there may be no delay should an opportunity for escape present itself. The Captain is in exuberant spirits, though he still retains that wild “fey” expression which I have already remarked upon. This burst of cheerfulness puzzles me more than his former gloom. I cannot understand it. I think I mentioned in an early part of this journal that one of his oddities is that he never permits any person to enter his cabin, but insists upon making his own bed, such as it is, and performing every other office for himself. To my surprise he handed me the key to-day and requested me to go down there and take the time by his chronometer while he measured the altitude of the sun at noon. It is a bare little room, containing a washing-stand and a few books, but little else in the way of luxury, except some pictures upon the walls. The majority of these are small cheap oleographs, but there was one water-colour sketch of the head of a young lady which arrested my attention. It was evidently a portrait, and not one of those fancy types of female beauty which sailors particularly affect. No artist could have evolved from his own mind such a curious mixture of character and weakness. The languid, dreamy eyes, with their drooping lashes, and the broad, low brow, unruffled by thought or care, were in strong contrast with the clean-cut, prominent jaw, and the resolute set of the lower lip. Underneath it in one of the corners was written, “M. B., aet. 19.” That any one in the short space of nineteen years of existence could develop such strength of will as was stamped upon her face seemed to me at the time to be well-nigh incredible. She must have been an extraordinary woman. Her features have thrown such a glamour over me that, though I had but a fleeting glance at them, I could, were I a draughtsman, reproduce them line for line upon this page of the journal. I wonder what part she has played in our Captain’s life. He has hung her picture at the end of his berth, so that his eyes continually rest upon it. Were he a less reserved man I should make some remark upon the subject. Of the other things in his cabin there was nothing worthy of mention — uniform coats, a camp-stool, small looking-glass, tobacco-box, and numerous pipes, including an oriental hookah — which, by-the-bye, gives some colour to Mr. Milne’s story about his participation in the war, though the connection may seem rather a distant one.

11.20 P.M. — Captain just gone to bed after a long and interesting conversation on general topics. When he chooses he can be a most fascinating companion, being remarkably well-read, and having the power of expressing his opinion forcibly without appearing to be dogmatic. I hate to have my intellectual toes trod upon. He spoke about the nature of the soul, and sketched out the views of Aristotle and Plato upon the subject in a masterly manner. He seems to have a leaning for metempsychosis and the doctrines of Pythagoras. In discussing them we touched upon modern spiritualism, and I made some joking allusion to the impostures of Slade, upon which, to my surprise, he warned me most impressively against confusing the innocent with the guilty, and argued that it would be as logical to brand Christianity as an error because Judas, who professed that religion, was a villain. He shortly afterwards bade me good-night and retired to his room.

The wind is freshening up, and blows steadily from the north. The nights are as dark now as they are in England. I hope to-morrow may set us free from our frozen fetters.

September 17th. — The Bogie again. Thank Heaven that I have strong nerves! The superstition of these poor fellows, and the circumstantial accounts which they give, with the utmost earnestness and self-conviction, would horrify any man not accustomed to their ways. There are many versions of the matter, but the sum-total of them all is that something uncanny has been flitting round the ship all night, and that Sandie M’Donald of Peterhead and “lang” Peter Williamson of Shetland saw it, as also did Mr. Milne on the bridge — so, having three witnesses, they can make a better case of it than the second mate did. I spoke to Milne after breakfast, and told him that he should be above such nonsense, and that as an officer he ought to set the men a better example. He shook his weatherbeaten head ominously, but answered with characteristic caution, “Mebbe aye, mebbe na, Doctor,” he said; “I didna ca’ it a ghaist. I canna’ say I preen my faith in sea-bogles an’ the like, though there’s a mony as claims to ha’ seen a’ that and waur. I’m no easy feared, but maybe your ain bluid would run a bit cauld, mun, if instead o’ speerin’ aboot it in daylicht ye were wi’ me last night, an’ seed an awfu’ like shape, white an’ gruesome, whiles here, whiles there, an’ it greetin’ and ca’ing in the darkness like a bit lambie that hae lost its mither. Ye would na’ be sae ready to put it a’ doon to auld wives’ clavers then, I’m thinkin’.” I saw it was hopeless to reason with him, so contented myself with begging him as a personal favour to call me up the next time the spectre appeared — a request to which he acceded with many ejaculations expressive of his hopes that such an opportunity might never arise.

As I had hoped, the white desert behind us has become broken by many thin streaks of water which intersect it in all directions. Our latitude to-day was 80 degrees 52’ N., which shows that there is a strong southerly drift upon the pack. Should the wind continue favourable it will break up as rapidly as it formed. At present we can do nothing but smoke and wait and hope for the best. I am rapidly becoming a fatalist. When dealing with such uncertain factors as wind and ice a man can be nothing else. Perhaps it was the wind and sand of the Arabian deserts which gave the minds of the original followers of Mahomet their tendency to bow to kismet.

These spectral alarms have a very bad effect upon the Captain. I feared that it might excite his sensitive mind, and endeavoured to conceal the absurd story from him, but unfortunately he overheard one of the men making an allusion to it, and insisted upon being informed about it. As I had expected, it brought out all his latent lunacy in an exaggerated form. I can hardly believe that this is the same man who discoursed philosophy last night with the most critical acumen and coolest judgment. He is pacing backwards and forwards upon the quarterdeck like a caged tiger, stopping now and again to throw out his hands with a yearning gesture, and stare impatiently out over the ice. He keeps up a continual mutter to himself, and once he called out, “But a little time, love — but a little time!” Poor fellow, it is sad to see a gallant seaman and accomplished gentleman reduced to such a pass, and to think that imagination and delusion can cow a mind to which real danger was but the salt of life. Was ever a man in such a position as I, between a demented captain and a ghost-seeing mate? I sometimes think I am the only really sane man aboard the vessel — except perhaps the second engineer, who is a kind of ruminant, and would care nothing for all the fiends in the Red Sea so long as they would leave him alone and not disarrange his tools.

The ice is still opening rapidly, and there is every probability of our being able to make a start to-morrow morning. They will think I am inventing when I tell them at home all the strange things that have befallen me.

12 P.M. — I have been a good deal startled, though I feel steadier now, thanks to a stiff glass of brandy. I am hardly myself yet, however, as this

handwriting will testify. The fact is, that I have gone through a very strange experience, and am beginning to doubt whether I was justified in branding every one on board as madmen because they professed to have seen things which did not seem reasonable to my understanding. Pshaw! I am a fool to let such a trifle unnerve me; and yet, coming as it does after all these alarms, it has an additional significance, for I cannot doubt either Mr. Manson's story or that of the mate, now that I have experienced that which I used formerly to scoff at.

After all it was nothing very alarming — a mere sound, and that was all. I cannot expect that any one reading this, if any one ever should read it, will sympathise with my feelings, or realise the effect which it produced upon me at the time. Supper was over, and I had gone on deck to have a quiet pipe before turning in. The night was very dark — so dark that, standing under the quarter-boat, I was unable to see the officer upon the bridge. I think I have already mentioned the extraordinary silence which prevails in these frozen seas. In other parts of the world, be they ever so barren, there is some slight vibration of the air — some faint hum, be it from the distant haunts of men, or from the leaves of the trees, or the wings of the birds, or even the faint rustle of the grass that covers the ground. One may not actively perceive the sound, and yet if it were withdrawn it would be missed. It is only here in these Arctic seas that stark, unfathomable stillness obtrudes itself upon you in all its gruesome reality. You find your tympanum straining to catch some little murmur, and dwelling eagerly upon every accidental sound within the vessel. In this state I was leaning against the bulwarks when there arose from the ice almost directly underneath me a cry, sharp and shrill, upon the silent air of the night, beginning, as it seemed to me, at a note such as prima donna never reached, and mounting from that ever higher and higher until it culminated in a long wail of agony, which might have been the last cry of a lost soul. The ghastly scream is still ringing in my ears. Grief, unutterable grief, seemed to be expressed in it, and a great longing, and yet through it all there was an occasional wild note of exultation. It shrilled out from close beside me, and yet as I glared into the darkness I could discern nothing. I waited some little time, but without hearing any repetition of the sound, so I came below, more shaken than I have ever been in my life before. As I came down the companion I met Mr. Milne coming up to relieve the watch. "Weel, Doctor," he said, "maybe that's auld wives' clavers tae? Did ye no hear it skirling? Maybe that's a supersteetion? What d’ye think o’t noo?” I was obliged to apologise to the honest fellow, and acknowledge that I was as puzzled by it as he was. Perhaps to-morrow things may look different. At present I dare hardly write all that I think. Reading it again in days to come, when I have shaken off all these associations, I should despise myself for having been so weak.

September 18th. — Passed a restless and uneasy night, still haunted by that strange sound. The Captain does not look as if he had had much repose either, for his face is haggard and his eyes bloodshot. I have not told him of my adventure of last night, nor shall I. He is already restless and excited, standing up, sitting down, and apparently utterly unable to keep still.

A fine lead appeared in the pack this morning, as I had expected, and we were able to cast off our ice-anchor, and steam about twelve miles in a west-sou’-westerly direction. We were then brought to a halt by a great floe as massive as any which we have left behind us. It bars our progress completely, so we can do nothing but anchor again and wait until it breaks up, which it will probably do within twenty-four hours, if the wind holds. Several bladder-nosed seals were seen swimming in the water, and one was shot, an immense creature more than eleven feet long. They are fierce, pugnacious animals, and are said to be more than a match for a bear. Fortunately they are slow and clumsy in their movements, so that there is little danger in attacking them upon the ice.

The Captain evidently does not think we have seen the last of our troubles, though why he should take a gloomy view of the situation is more than I can fathom, since every one else on board considers that we have had a miraculous escape, and are sure now to reach the open sea.

“I suppose you think it’s all right now, Doctor?” he said, as we sat together after dinner.

“I hope so,” I answered.

“We mustn’t be too sure — and yet no doubt you are right. We’ll all be in the arms of our own true loves before long, lad, won’t we? But we mustn’t be too sure — we mustn’t be too sure.”

He sat silent a little, swinging his leg thoughtfully backwards and forwards. “Look here,” he continued; “it’s a dangerous place this, even at its best — a treacherous, dangerous place. I have known men cut off very suddenly in a land like this. A slip would do it sometimes — a single slip, and down you go through a crack, and only a bubble on the green water to show where it was that you sank. It’s a queer thing,” he continued with a nervous laugh, “but all the years I’ve been in this country I never once thought of making a will — not that I have anything to leave in particular, but still when a man is exposed to danger he should have everything arranged and ready — don’t you think so?”

“Certainly,” I answered, wondering what on earth he was driving at.

“He feels better for knowing it’s all settled,” he went on. “Now if anything should ever befall me, I hope that you will look after things for me. There is very little in the cabin, but such as it is I should like it to be sold, and the money divided in the same proportion as the oil-money among the crew. The chronometer I wish you to keep yourself as some slight remembrance of our voyage. Of course all this is a mere precaution, but I thought I would take the opportunity of speaking to you about it. I suppose I might rely upon you if there were any necessity?”

“Most assuredly,” I answered; “and since you are taking this step, I may as well” ——

“You! you!” he interrupted. “YOU’RE all right. What the devil is the matter with YOU? There, I didn’t mean to be peppery, but I don’t like to hear a young fellow, that has hardly began life, speculating about death. Go up on deck and get some fresh air into your lungs instead of talking nonsense in the cabin, and encouraging me to do the same.”

The more I think of this conversation of ours the less do I like it. Why should the man be settling his affairs at the very time when we seem to be emerging from all danger? There must be some method in his madness. Can it be that he contemplates suicide? I remember that upon one occasion he spoke in a deeply reverent manner of the heinousness of the crime of self-destruction. I shall keep my eye upon him, however, and though I cannot obtrude upon the privacy of his cabin, I shall at least make a point of remaining on deck as long as he stays up.

Mr. Milne pooh-poohs my fears, and says it is only the “skipper’s little way.” He himself takes a very rosy view of the situation. According to him we shall be out of the ice by the day after to-morrow, pass Jan Meyen two days after that, and sight Shetland in little more than a week. I hope he may not be too sanguine. His opinion may be fairly balanced against the gloomy precautions of the Captain, for he is an old and experienced seaman, and weighs his words well before uttering them.

The long-impending catastrophe has come at last. I hardly know what to write about it. The Captain is gone. He may come back to us again alive, but I fear me — I fear me. It is now seven o’clock of the morning of the 19th of September. I have spent the whole night traversing the great ice-floe in front of us with a party of seamen in the hope of coming upon some trace of him, but in vain. I shall try to give some account of the circumstances which attended upon his disappearance. Should any one ever chance to read the words which I put down, I trust they will remember that I do not write from conjecture or from hearsay, but that I, a sane and educated man, am describing accurately what actually occurred before my very eyes. My inferences are my own, but I shall be answerable for the facts.

The Captain remained in excellent spirits after the conversation which I have recorded. He appeared to be nervous and impatient, however, frequently changing his position, and moving his limbs in an aimless choreic way which is characteristic of him at times. In a quarter of an hour he went upon deck seven times, only to descend after a few hurried paces. I followed him each time, for there was something about his face which confirmed my resolution of not letting him out of my sight. He seemed to observe the effect which his movements had produced, for he endeavoured by an over-done hilarity, laughing boisterously at the very smallest of jokes, to quiet my apprehensions.

After supper he went on to the poop once more, and I with him. The night was dark and very still, save for the melancholy soughing of the wind among the spars. A thick cloud was coming up from the northwest, and the ragged tentacles which it threw out in front of it were drifting across the face of the moon, which only shone now and again through a rift in the wrack. The Captain paced rapidly backwards and forwards, and then seeing me still dogging him, he came across and hinted that he thought I should be better below — which, I need hardly say, had the effect of strengthening my resolution to remain on deck.

I think he forgot about my presence after this, for he stood silently leaning over the taffrail, and peering out across the great desert of snow, part of which lay in shadow, while part glittered mistily in the moonlight. Several times I could see by his movements that he was referring to his watch, and once he muttered a short sentence, of which I could only catch the one word “ready.” I confess to having felt an eerie feeling creeping over me as I watched the loom of his tall figure through the darkness, and noted how completely he fulfilled the idea of a man who is keeping a tryst. A tryst with whom? Some vague perception began to dawn upon me as I pieced one fact with another, but I was utterly unprepared for the sequel.

By the sudden intensity of his attitude I felt that he saw something. I crept up behind him. He was staring with an eager questioning gaze at what seemed to be a wreath of mist, blown swiftly in a line with the ship. It was a dim, nebulous body, devoid of shape, sometimes more, sometimes less apparent, as the light fell on it. The moon was dimmed in its brilliancy at the moment by a canopy of thinnest cloud, like the coating of an anemone.

“Coming, lass, coming,” cried the skipper, in a voice of unfathomable tenderness and compassion, like one who soothes a beloved one by some favour long looked for, and as pleasant to bestow as to receive.

What followed happened in an instant. I had no power to interfere.

He gave one spring to the top of the bulwarks, and another which took him on to the ice, almost to the feet of the pale misty figure. He held out his hands as if to clasp it, and so ran into the darkness with outstretched arms and loving words. I still stood rigid and motionless, straining my eyes after his retreating form, until his voice died away in the distance. I never thought to see him again, but at that moment the moon shone out brilliantly through a chink in the cloudy heaven, and illuminated the great field of ice. Then I saw his dark figure already a very long way off, running with prodigious speed across the frozen plain. That was the last glimpse which we caught of him — perhaps the last we ever shall. A party was organised to follow him, and I accompanied them, but the men’s hearts were not in the work, and nothing was found. Another will be formed within a few hours. I can hardly believe I have not been dreaming, or suffering from some hideous nightmare, as I write these things down.

7.30 P.M. — Just returned dead beat and utterly tired out from a second unsuccessful search for the Captain. The floe is of enormous extent, for though we have traversed at least twenty miles of its surface, there has been no sign of its coming to an end. The frost has been so severe of late that the overlying snow is frozen as hard as granite, otherwise we might have had the footsteps to guide us. The crew are anxious that we should cast off and steam round the floe and so to the southward, for the ice has opened up during the night, and the sea is visible upon the horizon. They argue that Captain Craigie is certainly dead, and that we are all risking our lives to no purpose by remaining when we have an opportunity of escape. Mr. Milne and I have had the greatest difficulty in persuading them to wait until to-morrow night, and have been compelled to promise that we will not under any circumstances delay our departure longer than that. We propose therefore to take a few hours' sleep, and then to start upon a final search.

September 20th, evening. — I crossed the ice this morning with a party of men exploring the southern part of the floe, while Mr. Milne went off in a northerly direction. We pushed on for ten or twelve miles without seeing a trace of any living thing except a single bird, which fluttered a great way over our heads, and which by its flight I should judge to have been a falcon. The southern extremity of the ice field tapered away into a long narrow spit which projected out into the sea. When we came to the base of this promontory, the men halted, but I begged them to continue to the extreme end of it, that we might have the satisfaction of knowing that no possible chance had been neglected.

We had hardly gone a hundred yards before M'Donald of Peterhead cried out that he saw something in front of us, and began to run. We all got a glimpse of it and ran too. At first it was only a vague darkness against the white ice, but as we raced along together it took the shape of a man, and eventually of the man of whom we were in search. He was lying face downwards upon a frozen bank. Many little crystals of ice and feathers of snow had drifted on to him as he lay, and sparkled upon his dark seaman's jacket. As we came up some wandering puff of wind caught these tiny flakes in its vortex, and they whirled up into the air, partially descended again, and then, caught once more in the current, sped rapidly away in the direction of the sea. To my eyes it seemed but a snow-drift, but many of my companions averred that it started up in the shape of a woman, stooped over the corpse and kissed it, and then hurried away across the floe. I have learned never to ridicule any man's opinion, however strange it may seem. Sure it is that Captain Nicholas Craigie had met with no painful end, for there was a bright smile upon his blue pinched features, and his hands were still outstretched as though grasping at the strange visitor which had summoned him away into the dim world that lies beyond the grave.

We buried him the same afternoon with the ship's ensign around him, and a thirty-two pound shot at his feet. I read the burial service, while the rough sailors wept like children, for there were many who owed much to his kind heart, and who showed now the affection which his strange ways had repelled during his lifetime. He went off the grating with a dull, sullen splash, and as I looked into the green water I saw him go down, down, down until he was but a little flickering patch of white hanging upon the outskirts of eternal darkness. Then even that faded away, and he was gone. There he shall lie, with his secret and his sorrows and his mystery all still buried in his breast, until that great day when the sea shall give up its dead, and Nicholas Craigie come out from among the ice with the smile upon his face, and his stiffened arms outstretched in greeting. I pray that his lot may be a happier one in that life than it has been in this.

I shall not continue my journal. Our road to home lies plain and clear before us, and the great ice field will soon be but a remembrance of the past. It will be some time before I get over the shock produced by recent events. When I began this record of our voyage I little thought of how I should be compelled to finish it. I am writing these final words in the lonely cabin, still starting at times and fancying I hear the quick nervous step of the dead man upon the deck above me. I entered his cabin to-night, as was my duty, to make a list of his effects in order that they might be entered in the official log. All was as it had been upon my previous visit, save that the picture which I have described as having hung at the end of his bed had been cut out of its frame, as with a knife, and was gone. With this last link in a strange chain of evidence I close my diary of the voyage of the Pole-Star.

[NOTE by Dr. John M'Alister Ray, senior. — I have read over the strange events connected with the death of the Captain of the Pole-Star, as narrated in the journal of my son. That everything occurred exactly as he describes it I have the fullest confidence, and, indeed, the most positive certainty, for I know him to be a strong-nerved and unimaginative man, with the strictest regard for veracity. Still, the story is, on the face of it, so vague and so improbable, that I was long opposed to its publication. Within the last few days, however, I have had independent testimony upon the subject which throws a new light upon it. I had run down to Edinburgh to attend a meeting of the British Medical Association, when I chanced to come across Dr. P —— , an old college chum of mine, now practising at Saltash, in Devonshire. Upon my telling him of this experience of my son's, he declared to me that he was familiar with the man, and proceeded, to my no small surprise, to give me a description of him, which tallied remarkably well with that given in the journal, except that he depicted him as a younger man. According to his account, he had been engaged to a young lady of singular beauty residing upon the Cornish coast. During his absence at sea his betrothed had died under circumstances of peculiar horror.]

F. HABAKUK JEPHSON’S STATEMENT.

In the month of December in the year 1873, the British ship Dei Gratia steered into Gibraltar, having in tow the derelict brigantine Marie Celeste, which had been picked up in latitude 38 degrees 40’, longitude 17 degrees 15’ W. There were several circumstances in connection with the condition and appearance of this abandoned vessel which excited considerable comment at the time, and aroused a curiosity which has never been satisfied. What these circumstances were was summed up in an able article which appeared in the Gibraltar Gazette. The curious can find it in the issue for January 4, 1874, unless my memory deceives me. For the benefit of those, however, who may be unable to refer to the paper in question, I shall subjoin a few extracts which touch upon the leading features of the case.

“We have ourselves,” says the anonymous writer in the Gazette, “been over the derelict Marie Celeste, and have closel questioned the officers of the Dei Gratia on every point which might throw light on the affair. They are of opinion that she had been abandoned several days, or perhaps weeks, before being picked up. The official log, which was found in the cabin, states that the vessel sailed from Boston to Lisbon, starting upon October 16. It is, however, most imperfectly kept, and affords little information. There is no reference to rough weather, and, indeed, the state of the vessel’s paint and rigging excludes the idea that she was abandoned for any such reason. She is perfectly watertight. No signs of a struggle or of violence are to be detected, and there is absolutely nothing to account for the disappearance of the crew. There are several indications that a lady was present on board, a sewing-machine being found in the cabin and some articles of female attire. These probably belonged to the captain’s wife, who is mentioned in the log as having accompanied her husband. As an instance of the mildness of the weather, it may be remarked that a bobbin of silk was found standing upon the sewing-machine, though the least roll of the vessel would have precipitated it to the floor. The boats were intact and slung upon the davits; and the cargo, consisting of tallow and American clocks, was untouched. An old-fashioned sword of curious workmanship was discovered among some lumber in the forecastle, and this weapon is said to exhibit a longitudinal striation on the steel, as if it had been recently wiped. It has been placed in the hands of the police, and submitted to Dr. Monaghan, the analyst, for inspection. The result of his examination has not yet been published. We may remark, in conclusion, that Captain Dalton, of the Dei Gratia, an able and intelligent seaman, is of opinion that the Marie Celeste may have been abandoned a considerable distance from the spot at which she was picked up, since a powerful current runs up in that latitude from the African coast. He confesses his inability, however, to advance any hypothesis which can reconcile all the facts of the case. In the utter absence of a clue or grain of evidence, it is to be feared that the fate of the crew of the Marie Celeste will be added to those numerous mysteries of the deep which will never be solved until the great day when the sea shall give up its dead. If crime has been committed, as is much to be suspected, there is little hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice."

I shall supplement this extract from the Gibraltar Gazette by quoting a telegram from Boston, which went the round of the English papers, and represented the total amount of information which had been collected about the Marie Celeste. "She was," it said, "a brigantine of 170 tons burden, and belonged to White, Russell & White, wine importers, of this city. Captain J. W. Tibbs was an old servant of the firm, and was a man of known ability and tried probity. He was accompanied by his wife, aged thirty-one, and their youngest child, five years old. The crew consisted of seven hands, including two coloured seamen, and a boy. There were three passengers, one of whom was the well-known Brooklyn specialist on consumption, Dr. Habakuk Jephson, who was a distinguished advocate for Abolition in the early days of the movement, and whose pamphlet, entitled "Where is thy Brother?" exercised a strong influence on public opinion before the war. The other passengers were Mr. J. Harton, a writer in the employ of the firm, and Mr. Septimius Goring, a half-caste gentleman, from New Orleans. All investigations have failed to throw any light upon the fate of these fourteen human beings. The loss of Dr. Jephson will be felt both in political and scientific circles."

I have here epitomised, for the benefit of the public, all that has been hitherto known concerning the Marie Celeste and her crew, for the past ten years have not in any way helped to elucidate the mystery. I have now taken up my pen with the intention of telling all that I know of the ill-fated voyage. I consider that it is a duty which I owe to society, for symptoms which I am familiar with in others lead me to believe that before many months my tongue and hand may be alike incapable of conveying information. Let me remark, as a preface to my narrative, that I am Joseph

Habakuk Jephson, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Harvard, and ex-Consulting Physician of the Samaritan Hospital of Brooklyn.

Many will doubtless wonder why I have not proclaimed myself before, and why I have suffered so many conjectures and surmises to pass unchallenged. Could the ends of justice have been served in any way by my revealing the facts in my possession I should unhesitatingly have done so. It seemed to me, however, that there was no possibility of such a result; and when I attempted, after the occurrence, to state my case to an English official, I was met with such offensive incredulity that I determined never again to expose myself to the chance of such an indignity. I can excuse the discourtesy of the Liverpool magistrate, however, when I reflect upon the treatment which I received at the hands of my own relatives, who, though they knew my unimpeachable character, listened to my statement with an indulgent smile as if humouring the delusion of a monomaniac. This slur upon my veracity led to a quarrel between myself and John Vanburger, the brother of my wife, and confirmed me in my resolution to let the matter sink into oblivion — a determination which I have only altered through my son's solicitations. In order to make my narrative intelligible, I must run lightly over one or two incidents in my former life which throw light upon subsequent events.

My father, William K. Jephson, was a preacher of the sect called Plymouth Brethren, and was one of the most respected citizens of Lowell. Like most of the other Puritans of New England, he was a determined opponent to slavery, and it was from his lips that I received those lessons which tinged every action of my life. While I was studying medicine at Harvard University, I had already made a mark as an advanced Abolitionist; and when, after taking my degree, I bought a third share of the practice of Dr. Willis, of Brooklyn, I managed, in spite of my professional duties, to devote a considerable time to the cause which I had at heart, my pamphlet, "Where is thy Brother?" (Swarburgh, Lister & Co., 1859) attracting considerable attention.

When the war broke out I left Brooklyn and accompanied the 113th New York Regiment through the campaign. I was present at the second battle of Bull's Run and at the battle of Gettysburg. Finally, I was severely wounded at Antietam, and would probably have perished on the field had it not been for the kindness of a gentleman named Murray, who had me carried to his house and provided me with every comfort. Thanks to his charity, and to the nursing which I received from his black domestics, I was soon able to get about the plantation with the help of a stick. It was during this period of convalescence that an incident occurred which is closely connected with my story.

Among the most assiduous of the negresses who had watched my couch during my illness there was one old crone who appeared to exert considerable authority over the others. She was exceedingly attentive to me, and I gathered from the few words that passed between us that she had heard of me, and that she was grateful to me for championing her oppressed race.

One day as I was sitting alone in the verandah, basking in the sun, and debating whether I should rejoin Grant's army, I was surprised to see this old creature hobbling towards me. After looking cautiously around to see that we were alone, she fumbled in the front of her dress and produced a small chamois leather bag which was hung round her neck by a white cord.

"Massa," she said, bending down and croaking the words into my ear, "me die soon. Me very old woman. Not stay long on Massa Murray's plantation."

"You may live a long time yet, Martha," I answered. "You know I am a doctor. If you feel ill let me know about it, and I will try to cure you."

"No wish to live — wish to die. I'm gwine to join the heavenly host." Here she relapsed into one of those half-heathenish rhapsodies in which negroes indulge. "But, massa, me have one thing must leave behind me when I go. No able to take it with me across the Jordan. That one thing very precious, more precious and more holy than all thing else in the world. Me, a poor old black woman, have this because my people, very great people, 'spose they was back in the old country. But you cannot understand this same as black folk could. My fader give it me, and his fader give it him, but now who shall I give it to? Poor Martha hab no child, no relation, nobody. All round I see black man very bad man. Black woman very stupid woman. Nobody worthy of the stone. And so I say, Here is Massa Jephson who write books and fight for coloured folk — he must be good man, and he shall have it though he is white man, and nebber can know what it mean or where it came from." Here the old woman fumbled in the chamois leather bag and pulled out a flattish black stone with a hole through the middle of it. "Here, take it," she said, pressing it into my hand; "take it. No harm nebber come from anything good. Keep it safe — nebber lose it!" and with a warning gesture the old crone hobbled away in the same cautious way as she had come, looking from side to side to see if we had been observed.

I was more amused than impressed by the old woman’s earnestness, and was only prevented from laughing during her oration by the fear of hurting her feelings. When she was gone I took a good look at the stone which she had given me. It was intensely black, of extreme hardness, and oval in shape — just such a flat stone as one would pick up on the seashore if one wished to throw a long way. It was about three inches long, and an inch and a half broad at the middle, but rounded off at the extremities. The most curious part about it were several well-marked ridges which ran in semicircles over its surface, and gave it exactly the appearance of a human ear. Altogether I was rather interested in my new possession, and determined to submit it, as a geological specimen, to my friend Professor Shroeder of the New York Institute, upon the earliest opportunity. In the meantime I thrust it into my pocket, and rising from my chair started off for a short stroll in the shrubbery, dismissing the incident from my mind.

As my wound had nearly healed by this time, I took my leave of Mr. Murray shortly afterwards. The Union armies were everywhere victorious and converging on Richmond, so that my assistance seemed unnecessary, and I returned to Brooklyn. There I resumed my practice, and married the second daughter of Josiah Vanburger, the well-known wood engraver. In the course of a few years I built up a good connection and acquired considerable reputation in the treatment of pulmonary complaints. I still kept the old black stone in my pocket, and frequently told the story of the dramatic way in which I had become possessed of it. I also kept my resolution of showing it to Professor Shroeder, who was much interested both by the anecdote and the specimen. He pronounced it to be a piece of meteoric stone, and drew my attention to the fact that its resemblance to an ear was not accidental, but that it was most carefully worked into that shape. A dozen little anatomical points showed that the worker had been as accurate as he was skilful. “I should not wonder,” said the Professor, “if it were broken off from some larger statue, though how such hard material could be so perfectly worked is more than I can understand. If there is a statue to correspond I should like to see it!” So I thought at the time, but I have changed my opinion since.

The next seven or eight years of my life were quiet and uneventful.

Summer followed spring, and spring followed winter, without any variation in my duties. As the practice increased I admitted J. S. Jackson as partner, he to have one-fourth of the profits. The continued strain had told upon my constitution, however, and I became at last so unwell that my wife insisted upon my consulting Dr. Kavanagh Smith, who was my colleague at the Samaritan Hospital.

That gentleman examined me, and pronounced the apex of my left lung to be in a state of consolidation, recommending me at the same time to go through a course of medical treatment and to take a long sea-voyage.

My own disposition, which is naturally restless, predisposed me strongly in favour of the latter piece of advice, and the matter was clinched by my meeting young Russell, of the firm of White, Russell & White, who offered me a passage in one of his father's ships, the Marie Celeste, which was just starting from Boston. "She is a snug little ship," he said, "and Tibbs, the captain, is an excellent fellow. There is nothing like a sailing ship for an invalid." I was very much of the same opinion myself, so I closed with the offer on the spot.

My original plan was that my wife should accompany me on my travels. She has always been a very poor sailor, however, and there were strong family reasons against her exposing herself to any risk at the time, so we determined that she should remain at home. I am not a religious or an effusive man; but oh, thank God for that! As to leaving my practice, I was easily reconciled to it, as Jackson, my partner, was a reliable and hard-working man.

I arrived in Boston on October 12, 1873, and proceeded immediately to the office of the firm in order to thank them for their courtesy. As I was sitting in the counting-house waiting until they should be at liberty to see me, the words Marie Celeste suddenly attracted my attention. I looked round and saw a very tall, gaunt man, who was leaning across the polished mahogany counter asking some questions of the clerk at the other side. His face was turned half towards me, and I could see that he had a strong dash of negro blood in him, being probably a quadroon or even nearer akin to the black. His curved aquiline nose and straight lank hair showed the white strain; but the dark restless eye, sensuous mouth, and gleaming teeth all told of his African origin. His complexion was of a sickly, unhealthy yellow, and as his face was deeply pitted with small-pox, the general impression was so unfavourable as to be almost revolting. When he spoke, however, it was in a soft, melodious voice, and in well-chosen words, and he was evidently a man of some education.

"I wished to ask a few questions about the Marie Celeste," he repeated, leaning across to the clerk. "She sails the day after to-morrow, does she not?"

"Yes, sir," said the young clerk, awed into unusual politeness by the glimmer of a large diamond in the stranger's shirt front.

"Where is she bound for?"

"Lisbon."

"How many of a crew?"

"Seven, sir."

"Passengers?"

"Yes, two. One of our young gentlemen, and a doctor from New York."

"No gentleman from the South?" asked the stranger eagerly.

"No, none, sir."

"Is there room for another passenger?"

"Accommodation for three more," answered the clerk.

"I'll go," said the quadroon decisively; "I'll go, I'll engage my passage at once. Put it down, will you — Mr. Septimius Goring, of New Orleans."

The clerk filled up a form and handed it over to the stranger, pointing to a blank space at the bottom. As Mr. Goring stooped over to sign it I was horrified to observe that the fingers of his right hand had been lopped off, and that he was holding the pen between his thumb and the palm. I have seen thousands slain in battle, and assisted at every conceivable surgical operation, but I cannot recall any sight which gave me such a thrill of disgust as that great brown sponge-like hand with the single member protruding from it. He used it skilfully enough, however, for, dashing off his signature, he nodded to the clerk and strolled out of the office just as Mr. White sent out word that he was ready to receive me.

I went down to the Marie Celeste that evening, and looked over my berth, which was extremely comfortable considering the small size of the vessel. Mr. Goring, whom I had seen in the morning, was to have the one next mine. Opposite was the captain's cabin and a small berth for Mr. John Harton, a gentleman who was going out in the interests of the firm. These little rooms were arranged on each side of the passage which led from the main-deck to the saloon. The latter was a comfortable room, the panelling tastefully done in oak and mahogany, with a rich Brussels carpet and luxurious settees. I was very much pleased with the accommodation, and also with Tibbs the captain, a bluff, sailor-like fellow, with a loud voice and hearty manner, who welcomed me to the ship with effusion, and insisted upon our splitting a bottle of wine in his cabin. He told me that he intended to take his wife and youngest child with him on the voyage, and that he hoped with good luck to make Lisbon in three weeks. We had a pleasant chat and parted the best of friends, he warning me to make the last of my preparations next morning, as he intended to make a start by the midday tide, having now shipped all his cargo. I went back to my hotel, where I found a letter from my wife awaiting me, and, after a refreshing night's sleep, returned to the boat in the morning. From this point I am able to quote from the journal which I kept in order to vary the monotony of the long sea-voyage. If it is somewhat bald in places I can at least rely upon its accuracy in details, as it was written conscientiously from day to day.

October 16. — Cast off our warps at half-past two and were towed out into the bay, where the tug left us, and with all sail set we bowled along at about nine knots an hour. I stood upon the poop watching the low land of America sinking gradually upon the horizon until the evening haze hid it from my sight. A single red light, however, continued to blaze balefully behind us, throwing a long track like a trail of blood upon the water, and it is still visible as I write, though reduced to a mere speck. The Captain is in a bad humour, for two of his hands disappointed him at the last moment, and he was compelled to ship a couple of negroes who happened to be on the quay. The missing men were steady, reliable fellows, who had been with him several voyages, and their non-appearance puzzled as well as irritated him. Where a crew of seven men have to work a fair-sized ship the loss of two experienced seamen is a serious one, for though the negroes may take a spell at the wheel or swab the decks, they are of little or no use in rough weather. Our cook is also a black man, and Mr. Septimius Goring has a little darkie servant, so that we are rather a piebald community. The accountant, John Harton, promises to be an acquisition, for he is a cheery, amusing young fellow. Strange how little wealth has to do with happiness! He has all the world before him and is seeking his fortune in a far land, yet he is as transparently happy as a man can be. Goring is rich, if I am not mistaken, and so am I; but I know that I have a lung, and Goring has some deeper trouble still, to judge by his features. How poorly do we both contrast with the careless, penniless clerk!

October 17. — Mrs. Tibbs appeared upon deck for the first time this morning — a cheerful, energetic woman, with a dear little child just able to walk and prattle. Young Harton pounced on it at once, and carried it away to his cabin, where no doubt he will lay the seeds of future dyspepsia in the child’s stomach. Thus medicine doth make cynics of us all! The weather is still all that could be desired, with a fine fresh breeze from the west-sou’-west. The vessel goes so steadily that you would hardly know that she was moving were it not for the creaking of the cordage, the bellying of the sails, and the long white furrow in our wake. Walked the quarter-deck all morning with the Captain, and I think the keen fresh air has already done my breathing good, for the exercise did not fatigue me in any way. Tibbs is a remarkably intelligent man, and we had an interesting argument about Maury’s observations on ocean currents, which we terminated by going down into his cabin to consult the original work. There we found Goring, rather to the Captain’s surprise, as it is not usual for passengers to enter that sanctum unless specially invited. He apologised for his intrusion, however, pleading his ignorance of the usages of ship life; and the good-natured sailor simply laughed at the incident, begging him to remain and favour us with his company. Goring pointed to the chronometers, the case of which he had opened, and remarked that he had been admiring them. He has evidently some practical knowledge of mathematical instruments, as he told at a glance which was the most trustworthy of the three, and also named their price within a few dollars. He had a discussion with the Captain too upon the variation of the compass, and when we came back to the ocean currents he showed a thorough grasp of the subject. Altogether he rather improves upon acquaintance, and is a man of decided culture and refinement. His voice harmonises with his conversation, and both are the very antithesis of his face and figure.

The noonday observation shows that we have run two hundred and twenty miles. Towards evening the breeze freshened up, and the first mate ordered reefs to be taken in the topsails and top-gallant sails in expectation of a windy night. I observe that the barometer has fallen to twenty-nine. I trust our voyage will not be a rough one, as I am a poor sailor, and my health would probably derive more harm than good from a stormy trip, though I have the greatest confidence in the Captain’s seamanship and in the soundness of the vessel. Played cribbage with Mrs. Tibbs after supper, and Harton gave us a couple of tunes on the violin.

October 18. — The gloomy prognostications of last night were not fulfilled, as the wind died away again, and we are lying now in a long greasy swell, ruffled here and there by a fleeting catspaw which is insufficient to fill the sails. The air is colder than it was yesterday, and I have put on one of the thick woollen jerseys which my wife knitted for me. Harton came into my cabin in the morning, and we had a cigar together. He says that he remembers having seen Goring in Cleveland, Ohio, in ‘69. He was, it appears, a mystery then as now, wandering about without any visible employment, and extremely reticent on his own affairs. The man interests me as a psychological study. At breakfast this morning I suddenly had that vague feeling of uneasiness which comes over some people when closely stared at, and, looking quickly up, I met his eyes bent upon me with an intensity which amounted to ferocity, though their expression instantly softened as he made some conventional remark upon the weather. Curiously enough, Harton says that he had a very similar experience yesterday upon deck. I observe that Goring frequently talks to the coloured seamen as he strolls about — a trait which I rather admire, as it is common to find half-breeds ignore their dark strain and treat their black kinsfolk with greater intolerance than a white man would do. His little page is devoted to him, apparently, which speaks well for his treatment of him. Altogether, the man is a curious mixture of incongruous qualities, and unless I am deceived in him will give me food for observation during the voyage.

The Captain is grumbling about his chronometers, which do not register exactly the same time. He says it is the first time that they have ever disagreed. We were unable to get a noonday observation on account of the haze. By dead reckoning, we have done about a hundred and seventy miles in the twenty-four hours. The dark seamen have proved, as the skipper prophesied, to be very inferior hands, but as they can both manage the wheel well they are kept steering, and so leave the more experienced men to work the ship. These details are trivial enough, but a small thing serves as food for gossip aboard ship. The appearance of a whale in the evening caused quite a flutter among us. From its sharp back and forked tail, I should pronounce it to have been a rorqual, or “finner,” as they are called by the fishermen.

October 19. — Wind was cold, so I prudently remained in my cabin all day, only creeping out for dinner. Lying in my bunk I can, without moving, reach my books, pipes, or anything else I may want, which is one advantage of a small apartment. My old wound began to ache a little to-day, probably from the cold. Read “Montaigne’s Essays” and nursed myself. Harton came in in the afternoon with Doddy, the Captain’s child, and the skipper himself followed, so that I held quite a reception.

October 20 and 21. — Still cold, with a continual drizzle of rain, and I have not been able to leave the cabin. This confinement makes me feel weak and depressed. Goring came in to see me, but his company did not tend to cheer me up much, as he hardly uttered a word, but contented himself with staring at me in a peculiar and rather irritating manner. He then got up and stole out of the cabin without saying anything. I am beginning to suspect that the man is a lunatic. I think I mentioned that his cabin is next to mine. The two are simply divided by a thin wooden partition which is cracked in many places, some of the cracks being so large that I can hardly avoid, as I lie in my bunk, observing his motions in the adjoining room. Without any wish to play the spy, I see him continually stooping over what appears to be a chart and working with a pencil and compasses. I have remarked the interest he displays in matters connected with navigation, but I am surprised that he should take the trouble to work out the course of the ship. However, it is a harmless amusement enough, and no doubt he verifies his results by those of the Captain.

I wish the man did not run in my thoughts so much. I had a nightmare on the night of the 20th, in which I thought my bunk was a coffin, that I was laid out in it, and that Goring was endeavouring to nail up the lid, which I was frantically pushing away. Even when I woke up, I could hardly persuade myself that I was not in a coffin. As a medical man, I know that a nightmare is simply a vascular derangement of the cerebral hemispheres, and yet in my weak state I cannot shake off the morbid impression which it produces.

October 22. — A fine day, with hardly a cloud in the sky, and a fresh breeze from the sou’-west which wafts us gaily on our way. There has evidently been some heavy weather near us, as there is a tremendous swell on, and the ship lurches until the end of the fore-yard nearly touches the water. Had a refreshing walk up and down the quarter-deck, though I have hardly found my sea-legs yet. Several small birds — chaffinches, I think — perched in the rigging.

4.40 P.M. — While I was on deck this morning I heard a sudden explosion from the direction of my cabin, and, hurrying down, found that I had very nearly met with a serious accident. Goring was cleaning a revolver, it seems, in his cabin, when one of the barrels which he thought was unloaded went off. The ball passed through the side partition and imbedded itself in the bulwarks in the exact place where my head usually rests. I have been under fire too often to magnify trifles, but there is no doubt that if I had been in the bunk it must have killed me. Goring, poor fellow, did not know that I had gone on deck that day, and must therefore have felt terribly frightened. I never saw such emotion in a man's face as when, on rushing out of his cabin with the smoking pistol in his hand, he met me face to face as I came down from deck. Of course, he was profuse in his apologies, though I simply laughed at the incident.

11 P.M. — A misfortune has occurred so unexpected and so horrible that my little escape of the morning dwindles into insignificance. Mrs. Tibbs and her child have disappeared — utterly and entirely disappeared. I can hardly compose myself to write the sad details.

About half-past eight Tibbs rushed into my cabin with a very white face and asked me if I had seen his wife. I answered that I had not. He then ran wildly into the saloon and began groping about for any trace of her, while I followed him, endeavouring vainly to persuade him that his fears were ridiculous. We hunted over the ship for an hour and a half without coming on any sign of the missing woman or child. Poor Tibbs lost his voice completely from calling her name. Even the sailors, who are generally stolid enough, were deeply affected by the sight of him as he roamed bareheaded and dishevelled about the deck, searching with feverish anxiety the most impossible places, and returning to them again and again with a piteous pertinacity. The last time she was seen was about seven o'clock, when she took Doddy on to the poop to give him a breath of fresh air before putting him to bed. There was no one there at the time except the black seaman at the wheel, who denies having seen her at all. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. My own theory is that while Mrs. Tibbs was holding the child and standing near the bulwarks it gave a spring and fell overboard, and that in her convulsive attempt to catch or save it, she followed it. I cannot account for the double disappearance in any other way. It is quite feasible that such a tragedy should be enacted without the knowledge of the man at the wheel, since it was dark at the time, and the peaked skylights of the saloon screen the greater part of the quarter-deck. Whatever the truth may be it is a terrible catastrophe, and has cast the darkest gloom upon our voyage. The mate has put the ship about, but of course there is not the slightest hope of picking them up. The Captain is lying in a state of stupor in his cabin. I gave him a powerful dose of opium in his coffee that for a few hours at least his anguish may be deadened.

October 23. — Woke with a vague feeling of heaviness and misfortune, but it was not until a few moments' reflection that I was able to recall our loss of the night before. When I came on deck I saw the poor skipper standing gazing back at the waste of waters behind us which contains everything dear to him upon earth. I attempted to speak to him, but he turned brusquely away, and began pacing the deck with his head sunk upon his breast. Even now, when the truth is so clear, he cannot pass a boat or an unbent sail without peering under it. He looks ten years older than he did yesterday morning. Harton is terribly cut up, for he was fond of little Doddy, and Goring seems sorry too. At least he has shut himself up in his cabin all day, and when I got a casual glance at him his head was resting on his two hands as if in a melancholy reverie. I fear we are about as dismal a crew as ever sailed. How shocked my wife will be to hear of our disaster! The swell has gone down now, and we are doing about eight knots with all sail set and a nice little breeze. Hyson is practically in command of the ship, as Tibbs, though he does his best to bear up and keep a brave front, is incapable of applying himself to serious work.

October 24. — Is the ship accursed? Was there ever a voyage which began so fairly and which changed so disastrously? Tibbs shot himself through the head during the night. I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by an explosion, and immediately sprang out of bed and rushed into the Captain's cabin to find out the cause, though with a terrible presentiment in my heart. Quickly as I went, Goring went more quickly still, for he was already in the cabin stooping over the dead body of the Captain. It was a hideous sight, for the whole front of his face was blown in, and the little room was swimming in blood. The pistol was lying beside him on the floor, just as it had dropped from his hand. He had evidently put it to his mouth before pulling the trigger. Goring and I picked him reverently up and laid him on his bed. The crew had all clustered into his cabin, and the six white men were deeply grieved, for they were old hands who had sailed with him many years. There were dark looks and murmurs among them too, and one of them openly declared that the ship was haunted. Harton helped to lay the poor skipper out, and we did him up in canvas between us. At twelve o’clock the foreyard was hauled aback, and we committed his body to the deep, Goring reading the Church of England burial service. The breeze has freshened up, and we have done ten knots all day and sometimes twelve. The sooner we reach Lisbon and get away from this accursed ship the better pleased shall I be. I feel as though we were in a floating coffin.

Little wonder that the poor sailors are superstitious when I, an educated man, feel it so strongly.

October 25. — Made a good run all day. Feel listless and depressed.

October 26. — Goring, Harton, and I had a chat together on deck in the morning. Harton tried to draw Goring out as to his profession, and his object in going to Europe, but the quadroon parried all his questions and gave us no information. Indeed, he seemed to be slightly offended by Harton’s pertinacity, and went down into his cabin. I wonder why we should both take such an interest in this man! I suppose it is his striking appearance, coupled with his apparent wealth, which piques our curiosity. Harton has a theory that he is really a detective, that he is after some criminal who has got away to Portugal, and that he chooses this peculiar way of travelling that he may arrive unnoticed and pounce upon his quarry unawares. I think the supposition is rather a far-fetched one, but Harton bases it upon a book which Goring left on deck, and which he picked up and glanced over. It was a sort of scrap-book it seems, and contained a large number of newspaper cuttings. All these cuttings related to murders which had been committed at various times in the States during the last twenty years or so. The curious thing which Harton observed about them, however, was that they were invariably murders the authors of which had never been brought to justice. They varied in every detail, he says, as to the manner of execution and the social status of the victim, but they uniformly wound up with the same formula that the murderer was still at large, though, of course, the police had every reason to expect his speedy capture. Certainly the incident seems to support Harton’s theory, though it may be a mere whim of Gorings, or, as I suggested to Harton, he may be collecting materials for a book which shall outvie De Quincey. In any case it is no business of ours.

October 27, 28. — Wind still fair, and we are making good progress. Strange how easily a human unit may drop out of its place and be forgotten! Tibbs is hardly ever mentioned now; Hyson has taken possession of his cabin, and all goes on as before. Were it not for Mrs. Tibbs’s sewing-machine upon a side-table we might forget that the unfortunate family had ever existed. Another accident occurred on board to-day, though fortunately not a very serious one. One of our white hands had gone down the afterhold to fetch up a spare coil of rope, when one of the hatches which he had removed came crashing down on the top of him. He saved his life by springing out of the way, but one of his feet was terribly crushed, and he will be of little use for the remainder of the voyage. He attributes the accident to the carelessness of his negro companion, who had helped him to shift the hatches. The latter, however, puts it down to the roll of the ship. Whatever be the cause, it reduces our shorthanded crew still further. This run of ill-luck seems to be depressing Harton, for he has lost his usual good spirits and joviality. Goring is the only one who preserves his cheerfulness. I see him still working at his chart in his own cabin. His nautical knowledge would be useful should anything happen to Hyson — which God forbid!

October 29, 30. — Still bowling along with a fresh breeze. All quiet and nothing of note to chronicle.

October 31. — My weak lungs, combined with the exciting episodes of the voyage, have shaken my nervous system so much that the most trivial incident affects me. I can hardly believe that I am the same man who tied the external iliac artery, an operation requiring the nicest precision, under a heavy rifle fire at Antietam. I am as nervous as a child. I was lying half dozing last night about four bells in the middle watch trying in vain to drop into a refreshing sleep. There was no light inside my cabin, but a single ray of moonlight streamed in through the port hole, throwing a silvery flickering circle upon the door. As I lay I kept my drowsy eyes upon this circle, and was conscious that it was gradually becoming less well-defined as my senses left me, when I was suddenly recalled to full wakefulness by the appearance of a small dark object in the very centre of the luminous disc. I lay quietly and breathlessly watching it. Gradually it grew larger and plainer, and then I perceived that it was a human hand which had been cautiously inserted through the chink of the half-closed door — a hand which, as I observed with a thrill of horror, was not provided with fingers. The door swung cautiously backwards, and Goring’s head followed his hand. It appeared in the centre of the moonlight, and was framed as it were in a ghastly uncertain halo, against which his features showed out plainly. It seemed to me that I had never seen such an utterly fiendish and merciless expression upon a human face. His eyes were dilated and glaring, his lips drawn back so as to show his white fangs, and his straight black hair appeared to bristle over his low forehead like the hood of a cobra. The sudden and noiseless apparition had such an effect upon me that I sprang up in bed trembling in every limb, and held out my hand towards my revolver. I was heartily ashamed of my hastiness when he explained the object of his intrusion, as he immediately did in the most courteous language. He had been suffering from toothache, poor fellow! and had come in to beg some laudanum, knowing that I possessed a medicine chest. As to a sinister expression he is never a beauty, and what with my state of nervous tension and the effect of the shifting moonlight it was easy to conjure up something horrible. I gave him twenty drops, and he went off again with many expressions of gratitude. I can hardly say how much this trivial incident affected me. I have felt unstrung all day.

A week's record of our voyage is here omitted, as nothing eventful occurred during the time, and my log consists merely of a few pages of unimportant gossip.

November 7. — Harton and I sat on the poop all the morning, for the weather is becoming very warm as we come into southern latitudes. We reckon that we have done two-thirds of our voyage. How glad we shall be to see the green banks of the Tagus, and leave this unlucky ship for ever! I was endeavouring to amuse Harton to-day and to while away the time by telling him some of the experiences of my past life. Among others I related to him how I came into the possession of my black stone, and as a finale I rummaged in the side pocket of my old shooting coat and produced the identical object in question. He and I were bending over it together, I pointing out to him the curious ridges upon its surface, when we were conscious of a shadow falling between us and the sun, and looking round saw Goring standing behind us glaring over our shoulders at the stone. For some reason or other he appeared to be powerfully excited, though he was evidently trying to control himself and to conceal his emotion. He pointed once or twice at my relic with his stubby thumb before he could recover himself sufficiently to ask what it was and how I obtained it — a question put in such a brusque manner that I should have been offended had I not known the man to be an eccentric. I told him the story very much as I had told it to Harton. He listened with the deepest interest, and then asked me if I had any idea what the stone was. I said I had not, beyond that it was meteoric. He asked me if I had ever tried its effect upon a negro. I said I had not. “Come,” said he, “we’ll see what our black friend at the wheel thinks of it.” He took the stone in his hand and went across to the sailor, and the two examined it carefully. I could see the man gesticulating and nodding his head excitedly as if making some assertion, while his face betrayed the utmost astonishment, mixed I think with some reverence. Goring came across the deck to us presently, still holding the stone in his hand. “He says it is a worthless, useless thing,” he said, “and fit only to be chucked overboard,” with which he raised his hand and would most certainly have made an end of my relic, had the black sailor behind him not rushed forward and seized him by the wrist. Finding himself secured Goring dropped the stone and turned away with a very bad grace to avoid my angry remonstrances at his breach of faith. The black picked up the stone and handed it to me with a low bow and every sign of profound respect. The whole affair is inexplicable. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that Goring is a maniac or something very near one. When I compare the effect produced by the stone upon the sailor, however, with the respect shown to Martha on the plantation, and the surprise of Goring on its first production, I cannot but come to the conclusion that I have really got hold of some powerful talisman which appeals to the whole dark race. I must not trust it in Goring’s hands again.

November 8, 9. — What splendid weather we are having! Beyond one little blow, we have had nothing but fresh breezes the whole voyage. These two days we have made better runs than any hitherto.

It is a pretty thing to watch the spray fly up from our prow as it cuts through the waves. The sun shines through it and breaks it up into a number of miniature rainbows—”sun-dogs,” the sailors call them. I stood on the fo’csle-head for several hours to-day watching the effect, and surrounded by a halo of prismatic colours.

The steersman has evidently told the other blacks about my wonderful stone, for I am treated by them all with the greatest respect. Talking about optical phenomena, we had a curious one yesterday evening which was pointed out to me by Hyson. This was the appearance of a triangular well-defined object high up in the heavens to the north of us. He explained that it was exactly like the Peak of Teneriffe as seen from a great distance — the peak was, however, at that moment at least five hundred miles to the south. It may have been a cloud, or it may have been one of those strange reflections of which one reads. The weather is very warm. The mate says that he never knew it so warm in these latitudes. Played chess with Harton in the evening.

November 10. — It is getting warmer and warmer. Some land birds came and perched in the rigging today, though we are still a considerable way from our destination. The heat is so great that we are too lazy to do anything but lounge about the decks and smoke. Goring came over to me to-day and asked me some more questions about my stone; but I answered him rather shortly, for I have not quite forgiven him yet for the cool way in which he attempted to deprive me of it.

November 11, 12. — Still making good progress. I had no idea Portugal was ever as hot as this, but no doubt it is cooler on land. Hyson himself seemed surprised at it, and so do the men.

November 13. — A most extraordinary event has happened, so extraordinary as to be almost inexplicable. Either Hyson has blundered wonderfully, or some magnetic influence has disturbed our instruments. Just about daybreak the watch on the fo’csle-head shouted out that he heard the sound of surf ahead, and Hyson thought he saw the loom of land. The ship was put about, and, though no lights were seen, none of us doubted that we had struck the Portuguese coast a little sooner than we had expected. What was our surprise to see the scene which was revealed to us at break of day! As far as we could look on either side was one long line of surf, great, green billows rolling in and breaking into a cloud of foam. But behind the surf what was there! Not the green banks nor the high cliffs of the shores of Portugal, but a great sandy waste which stretched away and away until it blended with the skyline. To right and left, look where you would, there was nothing but yellow sand, heaped in some places into fantastic mounds, some of them several hundred feet high, while in other parts were long stretches as level apparently as a billiard board. Harton and I, who had come on deck together, looked at each other in astonishment, and Harton burst out laughing. Hyson is exceedingly mortified at the occurrence, and protests that the instruments have been tampered with. There is no doubt that this is the mainland of Africa, and that it was really the Peak of Teneriffe which we saw some days ago upon the northern horizon. At the time when we saw the land birds we must have been passing some of the Canary Islands. If we continued on the same course, we are now to the north of Cape Blanco, near the unexplored country which skirts the great

Sahara. All we can do is to rectify our instruments as far as possible and start afresh for our destination.

8.30 P.M. — Have been lying in a calm all day. The coast is now about a mile and a half from us. Hyson has examined the instruments, but cannot find any reason for their extraordinary deviation.

This is the end of my private journal, and I must make the remainder of my statement from memory. There is little chance of my being mistaken about facts which have seared themselves into my recollection. That very night the storm which had been brewing so long burst over us, and I came to learn whither all those little incidents were tending which I had recorded so aimlessly. Blind fool that I was not to have seen it sooner! I shall tell what occurred as precisely as I can.

I had gone into my cabin about half-past eleven, and was preparing to go to bed, when a tap came at my door. On opening it I saw Goring's little black page, who told me that his master would like to have a word with me on deck. I was rather surprised that he should want me at such a late hour, but I went up without hesitation. I had hardly put my foot on the quarter-deck before I was seized from behind, dragged down upon my back, and a handkerchief slipped round my mouth. I struggled as hard as I could, but a coil of rope was rapidly and firmly wound round me, and I found myself lashed to the davit of one of the boats, utterly powerless to do or say anything, while the point of a knife pressed to my throat warned me to cease my struggles. The night was so dark that I had been unable hitherto to recognise my assailants, but as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and the moon broke out through the clouds that obscured it, I made out that I was surrounded by the two negro sailors, the black cook, and my fellow-passenger Goring. Another man was crouching on the deck at my feet, but he was in the shadow and I could not recognise him.

All this occurred so rapidly that a minute could hardly have elapsed from the time I mounted the companion until I found myself gagged and powerless. It was so sudden that I could scarce bring myself to realise it, or to comprehend what it all meant. I heard the gang round me speaking in short, fierce whispers to each other, and some instinct told me that my life was the question at issue. Goring spoke authoritatively and angrily — the others doggedly and all together, as if disputing his commands. Then they moved away in a body to the opposite side of the deck, where I could still hear them whispering, though they were concealed from my view by the saloon skylights.

All this time the voices of the watch on deck chatting and laughing at the other end of the ship were distinctly audible, and I could see them gathered in a group, little dreaming of the dark doings which were going on within thirty yards of them. Oh! that I could have given them one word of warning, even though I had lost my life in doing it I but it was impossible. The moon was shining fitfully through the scattered clouds, and I could see the silvery gleam of the surge, and beyond it the vast weird desert with its fantastic sand-hills. Glancing down, I saw that the man who had been crouching on the deck was still lying there, and as I gazed at him, a flickering ray of moonlight fell full upon his upturned face. Great Heaven! even now, when more than twelve years have elapsed, my hand trembles as I write that, in spite of distorted features and projecting eyes, I recognised the face of Harton, the cheery young clerk who had been my companion during the voyage. It needed no medical eye to see that he was quite dead, while the twisted handkerchief round the neck, and the gag in his mouth, showed the silent way in which the hell-hounds had done their work. The clue which explained every event of our voyage came upon me like a flash of light as I gazed on poor Harton’s corpse. Much was dark and unexplained, but I felt a great dim perception of the truth.

I heard the striking of a match at the other side of the skylights, and then I saw the tall, gaunt figure of Goring standing up on the bulwarks and holding in his hands what appeared to be a dark lantern. He lowered this for a moment over the side of the ship, and, to my inexpressible astonishment, I saw it answered instantaneously by a flash among the sand-hills on shore, which came and went so rapidly, that unless I had been following the direction of Goring’s gaze, I should never have detected it. Again he lowered the lantern, and again it was answered from the shore. He then stepped down from the bulwarks, and in doing so slipped, making such a noise, that for a moment my heart bounded with the thought that the attention of the watch would be directed to his proceedings. It was a vain hope. The night was calm and the ship motionless, so that no idea of duty kept them vigilant. Hyson, who after the death of Tibbs was in command of both watches, had gone below to snatch a few hours’ sleep, and the boatswain who was left in charge was standing with the other two men at the foot of the foremast. Powerless, speechless, with the cords cutting into my flesh and the murdered man at my feet, I awaited the next act in the tragedy.

The four ruffians were standing up now at the other side of the deck. The cook was armed with some sort of a cleaver, the others had knives, and Goring had a revolver. They were all leaning against the rail and looking out over the water as if watching for something. I saw one of them grasp another's arm and point as if at some object, and following the direction I made out the loom of a large moving mass making towards the ship. As it emerged from the gloom I saw that it was a great canoe crammed with men and propelled by at least a score of paddles. As it shot under our stern the watch caught sight of it also, and raising a cry hurried aft. They were too late, however. A swarm of gigantic negroes clambered over the quarter, and led by Goring swept down the deck in an irresistible torrent. All opposition was overpowered in a moment, the unarmed watch were knocked over and bound, and the sleepers dragged out of their bunks and secured in the same manner.

Hyson made an attempt to defend the narrow passage leading to his cabin, and I heard a scuffle, and his voice shouting for assistance. There was none to assist, however, and he was brought on to the poop with the blood streaming from a deep cut in his forehead. He was gagged like the others, and a council was held upon our fate by the negroes. I saw our black seamen pointing towards me and making some statement, which was received with murmurs of astonishment and incredulity by the savages. One of them then came over to me, and plunging his hand into my pocket took out my black stone and held it up. He then handed it to a man who appeared to be a chief, who examined it as minutely as the light would permit, and muttering a few words passed it on to the warrior beside him, who also scrutinised it and passed it on until it had gone from hand to hand round the whole circle. The chief then said a few words to Goring in the native tongue, on which the quadroon addressed me in English. At this moment I seem to see the scene. The tall masts of the ship with the moonlight streaming down, silvering the yards and bringing the network of cordage into hard relief; the group of dusky warriors leaning on their spears; the dead man at my feet; the line of white-faced prisoners, and in front of me the loathsome half-breed, looking in his white linen and elegant clothes a strange contrast to his associates.

"You will bear me witness," he said in his softest accents, "that I am no party to sparing your life. If it rested with me you would die as these other men are about to do. I have no personal grudge against either you or them, but I have devoted my life to the destruction of the white race, and you are the first that has ever been in my power and has escaped me. You may thank that stone of yours for your life. These poor fellows reverence it, and indeed if it really be what they think it is they have cause. Should it prove when we get ashore that they are mistaken, and that its shape and material is a mere chance, nothing can save your life. In the meantime we wish to treat you well, so if there are any of your possessions which you would like to take with you, you are at liberty to get them." As he finished he gave a sign, and a couple of the negroes unbound me, though without removing the gag. I was led down into the cabin, where I put a few valuables into my pockets, together with a pocket-compass and my journal of the voyage. They then pushed me over the side into a small canoe, which was lying beside the large one, and my guards followed me, and shoving off began paddling for the shore. We had got about a hundred yards or so from the ship when our steersman held up his hand, and the paddlers paused for a moment and listened. Then on the silence of the night I heard a sort of dull, moaning sound, followed by a succession of splashes in the water. That is all I know of the fate of my poor shipmates. Almost immediately afterwards the large canoe followed us, and the deserted ship was left drifting about — a dreary, spectre-like hulk. Nothing was taken from her by the savages. The whole fiendish transaction was carried through as decorously and temperately as though it were a religious rite.

The first grey of daylight was visible in the east as we passed through the surge and reached the shore. Leaving half-a-dozen men with the canoes, the rest of the negroes set off through the sand-hills, leading me with them, but treating me very gently and respectfully. It was difficult walking, as we sank over our ankles into the loose, shifting sand at every step, and I was nearly dead beat by the time we reached the native village, or town rather, for it was a place of considerable dimensions. The houses were conical structures not unlike bee-hives, and were made of compressed seaweed cemented over with a rude form of mortar, there being neither stick nor stone upon the coast nor anywhere within many hundreds of miles. As we entered the town an enormous crowd of both sexes came swarming out to meet us, beating tom-toms and howling and screaming. On seeing me they redoubled their yells and assumed a threatening attitude, which was instantly quelled by a few words shouted by my escort. A buzz of wonder succeeded the war-cries and yells of the moment before, and the whole dense mass proceeded down the broad central street of the town, having my escort and myself in the centre.

My statement hitherto may seem so strange as to excite doubt in the minds of those who do not know me, but it was the fact which I am now about to relate which caused my own brother-in-law to insult me by disbelief. I can but relate the occurrence in the simplest words, and trust to chance and time to prove their truth. In the centre of this main street there was a large building, formed in the same primitive way as the others, but towering high above them; a stockade of beautifully polished ebony rails was planted all round it, the framework of the door was formed by two magnificent elephant’s tusks sunk in the ground on each side and meeting at the top, and the aperture was closed by a screen of native cloth richly embroidered with gold. We made our way to this imposing-looking structure, but, on reaching the opening in the stockade, the multitude stopped and squatted down upon their hams, while I was led through into the enclosure by a few of the chiefs and elders of the tribe, Goring accompanying us, and in fact directing the proceedings. On reaching the screen which closed the temple — for such it evidently was — my hat and my shoes were removed, and I was then led in, a venerable old negro leading the way carrying in his hand my stone, which had been taken from my pocket. The building was only lit up by a few long slits in the roof, through which the tropical sun poured, throwing broad golden bars upon the clay floor, alternating with intervals of darkness.

The interior was even larger than one would have imagined from the outside appearance. The walls were hung with native mats, shells, and other ornaments, but the remainder of the great space was quite empty, with the exception of a single object in the centre. This was the figure of a colossal negro, which I at first thought to be some real king or high priest of titanic size, but as I approached it I saw by the way in which the light was reflected from it that it was a statue admirably cut in jet-black stone. I was led up to this idol, for such it seemed to be, and looking at it closer I saw that though it was perfect in every other respect, one of its ears had been broken short off. The grey-haired negro who held my relic mounted upon a small stool, and stretching up his arm fitted Martha’s black stone on to the jagged surface on the side of the statue’s head. There could not be a doubt that the one had been broken off from the other. The parts dovetailed together so accurately that when the old man removed his hand the ear stuck in its place for a few seconds before dropping into his open palm. The group round me prostrated themselves upon the ground at the sight with a cry of reverence, while the crowd outside, to whom the result was communicated, set up a wild whooping and cheering.

In a moment I found myself converted from a prisoner into a demi-god. I was escorted back through the town in triumph, the people pressing forward to touch my clothing and to gather up the dust on which my foot had trod. One of the largest huts was put at my disposal, and a banquet of every native delicacy was served me. I still felt, however, that I was not a free man, as several spearmen were placed as a guard at the entrance of my hut. All day my mind was occupied with plans of escape, but none seemed in any way feasible. On the one side was the great arid desert stretching away to Timbuctoo, on the other was a sea untraversed by vessels. The more I pondered over the problem the more hopeless did it seem.

I little dreamed how near I was to its solution.

Night had fallen, and the clamour of the negroes had died gradually away. I was stretched on the couch of skins which had been provided for me, and was still meditating over my future, when Goring walked stealthily into the hut. My first idea was that he had come to complete his murderous holocaust by making away with me, the last survivor, and I sprang up upon my feet, determined to defend myself to the last. He smiled when he saw the action, and motioned me down again while he seated himself upon the other end of the couch.

“What do you think of me?” was the astonishing question with which he commenced our conversation.

“Think of you!” I almost yelled. “I think you the vilest, most unnatural renegade that ever polluted the earth. If we were away from these black devils of yours I would strangle you with my hands!”

“Don’t speak so loud,” he said, without the slightest appearance of irritation. “I don’t want our chat to be cut short. So you would strangle me, would you!” he went on, with an amused smile. “I suppose I am returning good for evil, for I have come to help you to escape.”

“You!” I gasped incredulously.

“Yes, I,” he continued.

"Oh, there is no credit to me in the matter. I am quite consistent. There is no reason why I should not be perfectly candid with you. I wish to be king over these fellows — not a very high ambition, certainly, but you know what Caesar said about being first in a village in Gaul. Well, this unlucky stone of yours has not only saved your life, but has turned all their heads so that they think you are come down from heaven, and my influence will be gone until you are out of the way. That is why I am going to help you to escape, since I cannot kill you" — this in the most natural and dulcet voice, as if the desire to do so were a matter of course.

"You would give the world to ask me a few questions," he went on, after a pause; "but you are too proud to do it. Never mind, I'll tell you one or two things, because I want your fellow white men to know them when you go back — if you are lucky enough to get back. About that cursed stone of yours, for instance. These negroes, or at least so the legend goes, were Mahometans originally. While Mahomet himself was still alive, there was a schism among his followers, and the smaller party moved away from Arabia, and eventually crossed Africa. They took away with them, in their exile, a valuable relic of their old faith in the shape of a large piece of the black stone of Mecca. The stone was a meteoric one, as you may have heard, and in its fall upon the earth it broke into two pieces. One of these pieces is still at Mecca. The larger piece was carried away to Barbary, where a skilful worker modelled it into the fashion which you saw to-day. These men are the descendants of the original seceders from Mahomet, and they have brought their relic safely through all their wanderings until they settled in this strange place, where the desert protects them from their enemies."

"And the ear?" I asked, almost involuntarily.

"Oh, that was the same story over again. Some of the tribe wandered away to the south a few hundred years ago, and one of them, wishing to have good luck for the enterprise, got into the temple at night and carried off one of the ears. There has been a tradition among the negroes ever since that the ear would come back some day. The fellow who carried it was caught by some slaver, no doubt, and that was how it got into America, and so into your hands — and you have had the honour of fulfilling the prophecy."

He paused for a few minutes, resting his head upon his hands, waiting apparently for me to speak. When he looked up again, the whole expression of his face had changed. His features were firm and set, and he changed the air of half levity with which he had spoken before for one of sternness and almost ferocity.

"I wish you to carry a message back," he said, "to the white race, the great dominating race whom I hate and defy. Tell them that I have battened on their blood for twenty years, that I have slain them until even I became tired of what had once been a joy, that I did this unnoticed and unsuspected in the face of every precaution which their civilisation could suggest. There is no satisfaction in revenge when your enemy does not know who has struck him. I am not sorry, therefore, to have you as a messenger. There is no need why I should tell you how this great hate became born in me. See this," and he held up his mutilated hand; "that was done by a white man's knife. My father was white, my mother was a slave. When he died she was sold again, and I, a child then, saw her lashed to death to break her of some of the little airs and graces which her late master had encouraged in her. My young wife, too, oh, my young wife!" a shudder ran through his whole frame. "No matter! I swore my oath, and I kept it. From Maine to Florida, and from Boston to San Francisco, you could track my steps by sudden deaths which baffled the police. I warred against the whole white race as they for centuries had warred against the black one. At last, as I tell you, I sickened of blood. Still, the sight of a white face was abhorrent to me, and I determined to find some bold free black people and to throw in my lot with them, to cultivate their latent powers, and to form a nucleus for a great coloured nation. This idea possessed me, and I travelled over the world for two years seeking for what I desired. At last I almost despaired of finding it. There was no hope of regeneration in the slave-dealing Soudanese, the debased Fantee, or the Americanised negroes of Liberia. I was returning from my quest when chance brought me in contact with this magnificent tribe of dwellers in the desert, and I threw in my lot with them. Before doing so, however, my old instinct of revenge prompted me to make one last visit to the United States, and I returned from it in the Marie Celeste.

"As to the voyage itself, your intelligence will have told you by this time that, thanks to my manipulation, both compasses and chronometers were entirely untrustworthy. I alone worked out the course with correct instruments of my own, while the steering was done by my black friends under my guidance. I pushed Tibbs's wife overboard. What! You look surprised and shrink away. Surely you had guessed that by this time. I would have shot you that day through the partition, but unfortunately you were not there. I tried again afterwards, but you were awake. I shot Tibbs. I think the idea of suicide was carried out rather neatly. Of course when once we got on the coast the rest was simple. I had bargained that all on board should die; but that stone of yours upset my plans. I also bargained that there should be no plunder. No one can say we are pirates. We have acted from principle, not from any sordid motive."

I listened in amazement to the summary of his crimes which this strange man gave me, all in the quietest and most composed of voices, as though detailing incidents of every-day occurrence. I still seem to see him sitting like a hideous nightmare at the end of my couch, with the single rude lamp flickering over his cadaverous features.

"And now," he continued, "there is no difficulty about your escape. These stupid adopted children of mine will say that you have gone back to heaven from whence you came. The wind blows off the land. I have a boat all ready for you, well stored with provisions and water. I am anxious to be rid of you, so you may rely that nothing is neglected. Rise up and follow me."

I did what he commanded, and he led me through the door of the hut.

The guards had either been withdrawn, or Goring had arranged matters with them. We passed unchallenged through the town and across the sandy plain. Once more I heard the roar of the sea, and saw the long white line of the surge. Two figures were standing upon the shore arranging the gear of a small boat. They were the two sailors who had been with us on the voyage.

"See him safely through the surf," said Goring. The two men sprang in and pushed off, pulling me in after them. With mainsail and jib we ran out from the land and passed safely over the bar. Then my two companions without a word of farewell sprang overboard, and I saw their heads like black dots on the white foam as they made their way back to the shore, while I scudded away into the blackness of the night. Looking back I caught my last glimpse of Goring. He was standing upon the summit of a sand-hill, and the rising moon behind him threw his gaunt angular figure into hard relief. He was waving his arms frantically to and fro; it may have been to encourage me on my way, but the gestures seemed to me at the time to be threatening ones, and I have often thought that it was more likely that his old savage instinct had returned when he realised that I was out of his power. Be that as it may, it was the last that I ever saw or ever shall see of Septimius Goring.

There is no need for me to dwell upon my solitary voyage. I steered as well as I could for the Canaries, but was picked up upon the fifth day by the British and African Steam Navigation Company's boat Monrovia. Let me take this opportunity of tendering my sincerest thanks to Captain Stornoway and his officers for the great kindness which they showed me from that time till they landed me in Liverpool, where I was enabled to take one of the Guion boats to New York.

From the day on which I found myself once more in the bosom of my family I have said little of what I have undergone. The subject is still an intensely painful one to me, and the little which I have dropped has been discredited. I now put the facts before the public as they occurred, careless how far they may be believed, and simply writing them down because my lung is growing weaker, and I feel the responsibility of holding my peace longer. I make no vague statement. Turn to your map of Africa. There above Cape Blanco, where the land trends away north and south from the westernmost point of the continent, there it is that Septimius Goring still reigns over his dark subjects, unless retribution has overtaken him; and there, where the long green ridges run swiftly in to roar and hiss upon the hot yellow sand, it is there that Harton lies with Hyson and the other poor fellows who were done to death in the Marie Celeste.

THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT.

Of all the sciences which have puzzled the sons of men, none had such an attraction for the learned Professor von Baumgarten as those which relate to psychology and the ill-defined relations between mind and matter. A celebrated anatomist, a profound chemist, and one of the first physiologists in Europe, it was a relief for him to turn from these subjects and to bring his varied knowledge to bear upon the study of the soul and the mysterious relationship of spirits. At first, when as a young man he began to dip into the secrets of mesmerism, his mind seemed to be wandering in a strange land where all was chaos and darkness, save that here and there some great unexplainable and disconnected fact loomed out in front of him. As the years passed, however, and as the worthy Professor’s stock of knowledge increased, for knowledge begets knowledge as money bears interest, much which had seemed strange and unaccountable began to take another shape in his eyes. New trains of reasoning became familiar to him, and he perceived connecting links where all had been incomprehensible and startling.

By experiments which extended over twenty years, he obtained a basis of facts upon which it was his ambition to build up a new exact science which should embrace mesmerism, spiritualism, and all cognate subjects. In this he was much helped by his intimate knowledge of the more intricate parts of animal physiology which treat of nerve currents and the working of the brain; for Alexis von Baumgarten was Regius Professor of Physiology at the University of Keinplatz, and had all the resources of the laboratory to aid him in his profound researches.

Professor von Baumgarten was tall and thin, with a hatchet face and steel-grey eyes, which were singularly bright and penetrating. Much thought had furrowed his forehead and contracted his heavy eyebrows, so that he appeared to wear a perpetual frown, which often misled people as to his character, for though austere he was tender-hearted. He was popular among the students, who would gather round him after his lectures and listen eagerly to his strange theories. Often he would call for volunteers from amongst them in order to conduct some experiment, so that eventually there was hardly a lad in the class who had not, at one time or another, been thrown into a mesmeric trance by his Professor.

Of all these young devotees of science there was none who equalled in enthusiasm Fritz von Hartmann. It had often seemed strange to his fellow-students that wild, reckless Fritz, as dashing a young fellow as ever hailed from the Rhinelands, should devote the time and trouble which he did in reading up abstruse works and in assisting the Professor in his strange experiments. The fact was, however, that Fritz was a knowing and long-headed fellow. Months before he had lost his heart to young Elise, the blue-eyed, yellow-haired daughter of the lecturer. Although he had succeeded in learning from her lips that she was not indifferent to his suit, he had never dared to announce himself to her family as a formal suitor. Hence he would have found it a difficult matter to see his young lady had he not adopted the expedient of making himself useful to the Professor. By this means he frequently was asked to the old man's house, where he willingly submitted to be experimented upon in any way as long as there was a chance of his receiving one bright glance from the eyes of Elise or one touch of her little hand.

Young Fritz von Hartmann was a handsome lad enough. There were broad acres, too, which would descend to him when his father died. To many he would have seemed an eligible suitor; but Madame frowned upon his presence in the house, and lectured the Professor at times on his allowing such a wolf to prowl around their lamb. To tell the truth, Fritz had an evil name in Keinplatz. Never was there a riot or a duel, or any other mischief afoot, but the young Rhinelander figured as a ringleader in it. No one used more free and violent language, no one drank more, no one played cards more habitually, no one was more idle, save in the one solitary subject.

No wonder, then, that the good Frau Professorin gathered her Fraulein under her wing, and resented the attentions of such a mauvais sujet. As to the worthy lecturer, he was too much engrossed by his strange studies to form an opinion upon the subject one way or the other.

For many years there was one question which had continually obtruded itself upon his thoughts. All his experiments and his theories turned upon a single point. A hundred times a day the Professor asked himself whether it was possible for the human spirit to exist apart from the body for a time and then to return to it once again. When the possibility first suggested itself to him his scientific mind had revolted from it. It clashed too violently with preconceived ideas and the prejudices of his early training. Gradually, however, as he proceeded farther and farther along the pathway of original research, his mind shook off its old fetters and became ready to face any conclusion which could reconcile the facts. There were many things which made him believe that it was possible for mind to exist apart from matter. At last it occurred to him that by a daring and original experiment the question might be definitely decided.

“It is evident,” he remarked in his celebrated article upon invisible entities, which appeared in the Keinplatz wochenliche Medicalschrift about this time, and which surprised the whole scientific world—”it is evident that under certain conditions the soul or mind does separate itself from the body. In the case of a mesmerised person, the body lies in a cataleptic condition, but the spirit has left it. Perhaps you reply that the soul is there, but in a dormant condition. I answer that this is not so, otherwise how can one account for the condition of clairvoyance, which has fallen into disrepute through the knavery of certain scoundrels, but which can easily be shown to be an undoubted fact. I have been able myself, with a sensitive subject, to obtain an accurate description of what was going on in another room or another house. How can such knowledge be accounted for on any hypothesis save that the soul of the subject has left the body and is wandering through space? For a moment it is recalled by the voice of the operator and says what it has seen, and then wings its way once more through the air. Since the spirit is by its very nature invisible, we cannot see these comings and goings, but we see their effect in the body of the subject, now rigid and inert, now struggling to narrate impressions which could never have come to it by natural means. There is only one way which I can see by which the fact can be demonstrated. Although we in the flesh are unable to see these spirits, yet our own spirits, could we separate them from the body, would be conscious of the presence of others. It is my intention, therefore, shortly to mesmerise one of my pupils. I shall then mesmerise myself in a manner which has become easy to me. After that, if my theory holds good, my spirit will have no difficulty in meeting and communing with the spirit of my pupil, both being separated from the body. I hope to be able to communicate the result of this interesting experiment in an early number of the Keinplatz wochenliche Medicalschrilt.”

When the good Professor finally fulfilled his promise, and published an account of what occurred, the narrative was so extraordinary that it was received with general incredulity. The tone of some of the papers was so offensive in their comments upon the matter that the angry savant declared that he would never open his mouth again or refer to the subject in any way — a promise which he has faithfully kept. This narrative has been compiled, however, from the most authentic sources, and the events cited in it may be relied upon as substantially correct.

It happened, then, that shortly after the time when Professor von Baumgarten conceived the idea of the above-mentioned experiment, he was walking thoughtfully homewards after a long day in the laboratory, when he met a crowd of roystering students who had just streamed out from a beer-house. At the head of them, half-intoxicated and very noisy, was young Fritz von Hartmann. The Professor would have passed them, but his pupil ran across and intercepted him.

“Heh! my worthy master,” he said, taking the old man by the sleeve, and leading him down the road with him. “There is something that I have to say to you, and it is easier for me to say it now, when the good beer is humming in my head, than at another time.”

“What is it, then, Fritz?” the physiologist asked, looking at him in mild surprise.

“I hear, mein herr, that you are about to do some wondrous experiment in which you hope to take a man’s soul out of his body, and then to put it back again. Is it not so?”

“It is true, Fritz.”

“And have you considered, my dear sir, that you may have some difficulty in finding some one on whom to try this? Potztausend! Suppose that the soul went out and would not come back. That would be a bad business. Who is to take the risk?”

“But, Fritz,” the Professor cried, very much startled by this view of the matter, “I had relied upon your assistance in the attempt. Surely you will not desert me. Consider the honour and glory.”

“Consider the fiddlesticks!” the student cried angrily. “Am I to be paid always thus? Did I not stand two hours upon a glass insulator while you poured electricity into my body? Have you not stimulated my phrenic nerves, besides ruining my digestion with a galvanic current round my stomach? Four-and-thirty times you have mesmerised me, and what have I got from all this? Nothing. And now you wish to take my soul out, as you would take the works from a watch. It is more than flesh and blood can stand.”

“Dear, dear!” the Professor cried in great distress. “That is very true, Fritz. I never thought of it before. If you can but suggest how I can compensate you, you will find me ready and willing.”

“Then listen,” said Fritz solemnly. “If you will pledge your word that after this experiment I may have the hand of your daughter, then I am willing to assist you; but if not, I shall have nothing to do with it. These are my only terms.”

“And what would my daughter say to this?” the Professor exclaimed, after a pause of astonishment.

“Elise would welcome it,” the young man replied. “We have loved each other long.”

“Then she shall be yours,” the physiologist said with decision, “for you are a good-hearted young man, and one of the best neurotic subjects that I have ever known — that is when you are not under the influence of alcohol. My experiment is to be performed upon the fourth of next month. You will attend at the physiological laboratory at twelve o’clock. It will be a great occasion, Fritz. Von Gruben is coming from Jena, and Hinterstein from Basle. The chief men of science of all South Germany will be there.

“I shall be punctual,” the student said briefly; and so the two parted. The Professor plodded homeward, thinking of the great coming event, while the young man staggered along after his noisy companions, with his mind full of the blue-eyed Elise, and of the bargain which he had concluded with her father.

The Professor did not exaggerate when he spoke of the widespread interest excited by his novel psychophysiological experiment. Long before the hour had arrived the room was filled by a galaxy of talent. Besides the celebrities whom he had mentioned, there had come from London the great Professor Lurcher, who had just established his reputation by a remarkable treatise upon cerebral centres. Several great lights of the Spiritualistic body had also come a long distance to be present, as had a Swedenborgian minister, who considered that the proceedings might throw some light upon the doctrines of the Rosy Cross.

There was considerable applause from this eminent assembly upon the appearance of Professor von Baumgarten and his subject upon the platform. The lecturer, in a few well-chosen words, explained what his views were, and how he proposed to test them. “I hold,” he said, “that when a person is under the influence of mesmerism, his spirit is for the time released from his body, and I challenge any one to put forward any other hypothesis which will account for the fact of clairvoyance. I therefore hope that upon mesmerising my young friend here, and then putting myself into a trance, our spirits may be able to commune together, though our bodies lie still and inert. After a time nature will resume her sway, our spirits will return into our respective bodies, and all will be as before. With your kind permission, we shall now proceed to attempt the experiment."

The applause was renewed at this speech, and the audience settled down in expectant silence. With a few rapid passes the Professor mesmerised the young man, who sank back in his chair, pale and rigid. He then took a bright globe of glass from his pocket, and by concentrating his gaze upon it and making a strong mental effort, he succeeded in throwing himself into the same condition. It was a strange and impressive sight to see the old man and the young sitting together in the same cataleptic condition. Whither, then, had their souls fled? That was the question which presented itself to each and every one of the spectators.

Five minutes passed, and then ten, and then fifteen, and then fifteen more, while the Professor and his pupil sat stiff and stark upon the platform. During that time not a sound was heard from the assembled savants, but every eye was bent upon the two pale faces, in search of the first signs of returning consciousness. Nearly an hour had elapsed before the patient watchers were rewarded. A faint flush came back to the cheeks of Professor von Baumgarten. The soul was coming back once more to its earthly tenement. Suddenly he stretched out his long thin arms, as one awaking from sleep, and rubbing his eyes, stood up from his chair and gazed about him as though he hardly realised where he was. "Tausend Teufel!" he exclaimed, rapping out a tremendous South German oath, to the great astonishment of his audience and to the disgust of the Swedenborgian. "Where the Henker am I then, and what in thunder has occurred? Oh yes, I remember now. One of these nonsensical mesmeric experiments. There is no result this time, for I remember nothing at all since I became unconscious; so you have had all your long journeys for nothing, my learned friends, and a very good joke too;" at which the Regius Professor of Physiology burst into a roar of laughter and slapped his thigh in a highly indecorous fashion. The audience were so enraged at this unseemly behaviour on the part of their host, that there might have been a considerable disturbance, had it not been for the judicious interference of young Fritz von Hartmann, who had now recovered from his lethargy. Stepping to the front of the platform, the young man apologised for the conduct of his companion. “I am sorry to say,” he said, “that he is a harum-scarum sort of fellow, although he appeared so grave at the commencement of this experiment. He is still suffering from mesmeric reaction, and is hardly accountable for his words. As to the experiment itself, I do not consider it to be a failure. It is very possible that our spirits may have been communing in space during this hour; but, unfortunately, our gross bodily memory is distinct from our spirit, and we cannot recall what has occurred. My energies shall now be devoted to devising some means by which spirits may be able to recollect what occurs to them in their free state, and I trust that when I have worked this out, I may have the pleasure of meeting you all once again in this hall, and demonstrating to you the result.” This address, coming from so young a student, caused considerable astonishment among the audience, and some were inclined to be offended, thinking that he assumed rather too much importance. The majority, however, looked upon him as a young man of great promise, and many comparisons were made as they left the hall between his dignified conduct and the levity of his professor, who during the above remarks was laughing heartily in a corner, by no means abashed at the failure of the experiment.

Now although all these learned men were filing out of the lecture-room under the impression that they had seen nothing of note, as a matter of fact one of the most wonderful things in the whole history of the world had just occurred before their very eyes Professor von Baumgarten had been so far correct in his theory that both his spirit and that of his pupil had been for a time absent from his body. But here a strange and unforeseen complication had occurred. In their return the spirit of Fritz von Hartmann had entered into the body of Alexis von Baumgarten, and that of Alexis von Baumgarten had taken up its abode in the frame of Fritz von Hartmann. Hence the slang and scurrility which issued from the lips of the serious Professor, and hence also the weighty words and grave statements which fell from the careless student. It was an unprecedented event, yet no one knew of it, least of all those whom it concerned.

The body of the Professor, feeling conscious suddenly of a great dryness about the back of the throat, sallied out into the street, still chuckling to himself over the result of the experiment, for the soul of Fritz within was reckless at the thought of the bride whom he had won so easily. His first impulse was to go up to the house and see her, but on second thoughts he came to the conclusion that it would be best to stay away until Madame Baumgarten should be informed by her husband of the agreement which had been made. He therefore made his way down to the Graner Mann, which was one of the favourite trysting-places of the wilder students, and ran, boisterously waving his cane in the air, into the little parlour, where sat Spiegler and Muller and half a dozen other boon companions.

"Ha, ha! my boys," he shouted. "I knew I should find you here. Drink up, every one of you, and call for what you like, for I'm going to stand treat to-day."

Had the green man who is depicted upon the signpost of that well-known inn suddenly marched into the room and called for a bottle of wine, the students could not have been more amazed than they were by this unexpected entry of their revered professor. They were so astonished that for a minute or two they glared at him in utter bewilderment without being able to make any reply to his hearty invitation.

"Donner und Blitzen!" shouted the Professor angrily. "What the deuce is the matter with you, then? You sit there like a set of stuck pigs staring at me. What is it, then?"

"It is the unexpected honour," stammered Spiegel, who was in the chair.

"Honour — rubbish!" said the Professor testily. "Do you think that just because I happen to have been exhibiting mesmerism to a parcel of old fossils, I am therefore too proud to associate with dear old friends like you? Come out of that chair, Spiegel my boy, for I shall preside now. Beer, or wine, or shnapps, my lads — call for what you like, and put it all down to me."

Never was there such an afternoon in the Gruner Mann. The foaming flagons of lager and the green-necked bottles of Rhenish circulated merrily. By degrees the students lost their shyness in the presence of their Professor. As for him, he shouted, he sang, he roared, he balanced a long tobacco-pipe upon his nose, and offered to run a hundred yards against any member of the company. The Kellner and the barmaid whispered to each other outside the door their astonishment at such proceedings on the part of a Regius Professor of the ancient university of Kleinplatz. They had still more to whisper about afterwards, for the learned man cracked the Kellner's crown, and kissed the barmaid behind the kitchen door.

“Gentlemen,” said the Professor, standing up, albeit somewhat totteringly, at the end of the table, and balancing his high old-fashioned wine glass in his bony hand, “I must now explain to you what is the cause of this festivity.”

“Hear! hear!” roared the students, hammering their beer glasses against the table; “a speech, a speech! — silence for a speech!”

“The fact is, my friends,” said the Professor, beaming through his spectacles, “I hope very soon to be married.”

“Married!” cried a student, bolder than the others “Is Madame dead, then?”

“Madame who?”

“Why, Madame von Baumgarten, of course.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed the Professor; “I can see, then, that you know all about my former difficulties. No, she is not dead, but I have reason to believe that she will not oppose my marriage.”

“That is very accommodating of her,” remarked one of the company.

“In fact,” said the Professor, “I hope that she will now be induced to aid me in getting a wife. She and I never took to each other very much; but now I hope all that may be ended, and when I marry she will come and stay with me.”

“What a happy family!” exclaimed some wag.

“Yes, indeed; and I hope you will come to my wedding, all of you. I won’t mention names, but here is to my little bride!” and the Professor waved his glass in the air.

“Here’s to his little bride!” roared the roysterers, with shouts of laughter. “Here’s her health. Sie soll leben — Hoch!” And so the fun waxed still more fast and furious, while each young fellow followed the Professor’s example, and drank a toast to the girl of his heart.

While all this festivity had been going on at the Graner Mann, a very different scene had been enacted elsewhere. Young Fritz von Hartmann, with a solemn face and a reserved manner, had, after the experiment, consulted and adjusted some mathematical instruments; after which, with a few peremptory words to the janitors, he had walked out into the street and wended his way slowly in the direction of the house of the Professor. As he walked he saw Von Althaus, the professor of anatomy, in front of him, and quickening his pace he overtook him.

“I say, Von Althaus,” he exclaimed, tapping him on the sleeve, “you were asking me for some information the other day concerning the middle coat of the cerebral arteries. Now I find — —”

“Donnerwetter!” shouted Von Althaus, who was a peppery old fellow. “What the deuce do you mean by your impertinence! I’ll have you up before the Academical Senate for this, sir;” with which threat he turned on his heel and hurried away. Von Hartmann was much surprised at this reception. “It’s on account of this failure of my experiment,” he said to himself, and continued moodily on his way.

Fresh surprises were in store for him, however. He was hurrying along when he was overtaken by two students. These youths, instead of raising their caps or showing any other sign of respect, gave a wild whoop of delight the instant that they saw him, and rushing at him, seized him by each arm and commenced dragging him along with them.

“Gott in himmel!” roared Von Hartmann. “What is the meaning of this unparalleled insult? Where are you taking me?”

“To crack a bottle of wine with us,” said the two students. “Come along! That is an invitation which you have never refused.”

“I never heard of such insolence in my life!” cried Von Hartmann. “Let go my arms! I shall certainly have you rusticated for this. Let me go, I say!” and he kicked furiously at his captors.

“Oh, if you choose to turn ill-tempered, you may go where you like,” the students said, releasing him. “We can do very well without you.”

“I know you. I’ll pay you out,” said Von Hartmann furiously, and continued in the direction which he imagined to be his own home, much incensed at the two episodes which had occurred to him on the way.

Now, Madame von Baumgarten, who was looking out of the window and wondering why her husband was late for dinner, was considerably astonished to see the young student come stalking down the road. As already remarked, she had a great antipathy to him, and if ever he ventured into the house it was on sufferance, and under the protection of the Professor. Still more astonished was she, therefore, when she beheld him undo the wicket-gate and stride up the garden path with the air of one who is master of the situation.

She could hardly believe her eyes, and hastened to the door with all her maternal instincts up in arms. From the upper windows the fair Elise had also observed this daring move upon the part of her lover, and her heart beat quick with mingled pride and consternation.

"Good day, sir," Madame Baumgarten remarked to the intruder, as she stood in gloomy majesty in the open doorway.

"A very fine day indeed, Martha," returned the other. "Now, don't stand there like a statue of Juno, but bustle about and get the dinner ready, for I am well-nigh starved."

"Martha! Dinner!" ejaculated the lady, falling back in astonishment.

"Yes, dinner, Martha, dinner!" howled Von Hartmann, who was becoming irritable. "Is there anything wonderful in that request when a man has been out all day? I'll wait in the dining-room. Anything will do. Schinken, and sausage, and prunes — any little thing that happens to be about. There you are, standing staring again. Woman, will you or will you not stir your legs?"

This last address, delivered with a perfect shriek of rage, had the effect of sending good Madame Baumgarten flying along the passage and through the kitchen, where she locked herself up in the scullery and went into violent hysterics. In the meantime Von Hartmann strode into the room and threw himself down upon the sofa in the worst of tempers.

"Elise!" he shouted. "Confound the girl! Elise!"

Thus roughly summoned, the young lady came timidly downstairs and into the presence of her lover. "Dearest!" she cried, throwing her arms round him, "I know this is all done for my sake! It is a RUSE in order to see me."

Von Hartmann's indignation at this fresh attack upon him was so great that he became speechless for a minute from rage, and could only glare and shake his fists, while he struggled in her embrace. When he at last regained his utterance, he indulged in such a bellow of passion that the young lady dropped back, petrified with fear, into an armchair.

"Never have I passed such a day in my life," Von Hartmann cried, stamping upon the floor. "My experiment has failed. Von Althaus has insulted me. Two students have dragged me along the public road. My wife nearly faints when I ask her for dinner, and my daughter flies at me and hugs me like a grizzly bear."

"You are ill, dear," the young lady cried. "Your mind is wandering. You have not even kissed me once."

“No, and I don’t intend to either,” Von Hartmann said with decision. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why don’t you go and fetch my slippers, and help your mother to dish the dinner?”

“And is it for this,” Elise cried, burying her face in her handkerchief—”is it for this that I have loved you passionately for upwards of ten months? Is it for this that I have braved my mother’s wrath? Oh, you have broken my heart; I am sure you have!” and she sobbed hysterically.

“I can’t stand much more of this,” roared Von Hartmann furiously. “What the deuce does the girl mean? What did I do ten months ago which inspired you with such a particular affection for me? If you are really so very fond, you would do better to run away down and find the schinken and some bread, instead of talking all this nonsense.”

“Oh, my darling!” cried the unhappy maiden, throwing herself into the arms of what she imagined to be her lover, “you do but joke in order to frighten your little Elise.”

Now it chanced that at the moment of this unexpected embrace Von Hartmann was still leaning back against the end of the sofa, which, like much German furniture, was in a somewhat rickety condition. It also chanced that beneath this end of the sofa there stood a tank full of water in which the physiologist was conducting certain experiments upon the ova of fish, and which he kept in his drawing-room in order to insure an equable temperature. The additional weight of the maiden, combined with the impetus with which she hurled herself upon him, caused the precarious piece of furniture to give way, and the body of the unfortunate student was hurled backwards into the tank, in which his head and shoulders were firmly wedged, while his lower extremities flapped helplessly about in the air. This was the last straw. Extricating himself with some difficulty from his unpleasant position, Von Hartmann gave an inarticulate yell of fury, and dashing out of the room, in spite of the entreaties of Elise, he seized his hat and rushed off into the town, all dripping and dishevelled, with the intention of seeking in some inn the food and comfort which he could not find at home.

As the spirit of Von Baumgarten encased in the body of Von Hartmann strode down the winding pathway which led down to the little town, brooding angrily over his many wrongs, he became aware that an elderly man was approaching him who appeared to be in an advanced state of intoxication. Von Hartmann waited by the side of the road and watched this individual, who came stumbling along, reeling from one side of the road to the other, and singing a student song in a very husky and drunken voice. At first his interest was merely excited by the fact of seeing a man of so venerable an appearance in such a disgraceful condition, but as he approached nearer, he became convinced that he knew the other well, though he could not recall when or where he had met him. This impression became so strong with him, that when the stranger came abreast of him he stepped in front of him and took a good look at his features.

"Well, sonny," said the drunken man, surveying Von Hartmann and swaying about in front of him, "where the Henker have I seen you before? I know you as well as I know myself. Who the deuce are you?"

"I am Professor von Baumgarten," said the student. "May I ask who you are? I am strangely familiar with your features."

"You should never tell lies, young man," said the other. "You're certainly not the Professor, for he is an ugly snuffy old chap, and you are a big broad-shouldered young fellow. As to myself, I am Fritz von Hartmann at your service."

"That you certainly are not," exclaimed the body of Von Hartmann. "You might very well be his father. But hullo, sir, are you aware that you are wearing my studs and my watch-chain?"

"Donnerwetter!" hiccoughed the other. "If those are not the trousers for which my tailor is about to sue me, may I never taste beer again."

Now as Von Hartmann, overwhelmed by the many strange things which had occurred to him that day, passed his hand over his forehead and cast his eyes downwards, he chanced to catch the reflection of his own face in a pool which the rain had left upon the road. To his utter astonishment he perceived that his face was that of a youth, that his dress was that of a fashionable young student, and that in every way he was the antithesis of the grave and scholarly figure in which his mind was wont to dwell. In an instant his active brain ran over the series of events which had occurred and sprang to the conclusion. He fairly reeled under the blow.

"Himmel!" he cried, "I see it all. Our souls are in the wrong bodies. I am you and you are I. My theory is proved — but at what an expense! Is the most scholarly mind in Europe to go about with this frivolous exterior? Oh the labours of a lifetime are ruined!" and he smote his breast in his despair.

"I say," remarked the real Von Hartmann from the body of the Professor, "I quite see the force of your remarks, but don't go knocking my body about like that. You received it in excellent condition, but I perceive that you have wet it and bruised it, and spilled snuff over my ruffled shirt-front.”

“It matters little,” the other said moodily. “Such as we are so must we stay. My theory is triumphantly proved, but the cost is terrible.”

“If I thought so,” said the spirit of the student, “it would be hard indeed. What could I do with these stiff old limbs, and how could I woo Elise and persuade her that I was not her father? No, thank Heaven, in spite of the beer which has upset me more than ever it could upset my real self, I can see a way out of it.”

“How?” gasped the Professor.

“Why, by repeating the experiment. Liberate our souls once more, and the chances are that they will find their way back into their respective bodies.”

No drowning man could clutch more eagerly at a straw than did Von Baumgarten’s spirit at this suggestion. In feverish haste he dragged his own frame to the side of the road and threw it into a mesmeric trance; he then extracted the crystal ball from the pocket, and managed to bring himself into the same condition.

Some students and peasants who chanced to pass during the next hour were much astonished to see the worthy Professor of Physiology and his favourite student both sitting upon a very muddy bank and both completely insensible. Before the hour was up quite a crowd had assembled, and they were discussing the advisability of sending for an ambulance to convey the pair to hospital, when the learned savant opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him. For an instant he seemed to forget how he had come there, but next moment he astonished his audience by waving his skinny arms above his head and crying out in a voice of rapture, “Gott sei gedanket! I am myself again. I feel I am!” Nor was the amazement lessened when the student, springing to his feet, burst into the same cry, and the two performed a sort of pas de joie in the middle of the road.

For some time after that people had some suspicion of the sanity of both the actors in this strange episode. When the Professor published his experiences in the Medicalschrift as he had promised, he was met by an intimation, even from his colleagues, that he would do well to have his mind cared for, and that another such publication would certainly consign him to a madhouse. The student also found by experience that it was wisest to be silent about the matter.

When the worthy lecturer returned home that night he did not receive the cordial welcome which he might have looked for after his strange adventures. On the contrary, he was roundly upbraided by both his female relatives for smelling of drink and tobacco, and also for being absent while a young scapegrace invaded the house and insulted its occupants. It was long before the domestic atmosphere of the lecturer’s house resumed its normal quiet, and longer still before the genial face of Von Hartmann was seen beneath its roof. Perseverance, however, conquers every obstacle, and the student eventually succeeded in pacifying the enraged ladies and in establishing himself upon the old footing. He has now no longer any cause to fear the enmity of Madame, for he is Hauptmann von Hartmann of the Emperor’s own Uhlans, and his loving wife Elise has already presented him with two little Uhlans as a visible sign and token of her affection.

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL.

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote down the following words in my note-book — the result of much mental perturbation and conflict: —

“The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death — a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John M’Vittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic disks, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even — save the mark! — puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance.”

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. At last, however, came a time when my uncle, M’Vittie of Glencairn, died — the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England. Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the coast of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, grey-stone building — when erected or wherefore none could tell me — and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the M’Leods, who were fisher-folk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir-trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that

Dalton’s atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant — all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who, while digging for gold, have turned up many worms, and then exhibit them exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the “mad laird o’ Mansie.” It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathise with? There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in, with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jagged back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the “ragged reef o’ Mansie.” When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and peering over the edge I

have seen far down the flickering, ghostly forms of great fish — fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalist never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored over, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o’clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and seaweed were pattering up against my attic window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when,

about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the wheezy voice of my house-keeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

“Eh, maister, maister!” she screamed in her hateful dialect. “Come doun, mun; come doun! There’s a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a’ yammerin’ and ca’in’ for help — and I doobt they’ll a’ be drooned. Oh, Maister M’Vittie, come doun!”

“Hold your tongue, you hag!” I shouted back in a passion. “What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone.” I turned in again and drew the blankets over me. “Those men out there,” I said to myself, “have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best therefore that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution.” With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man’s eternal and everchanging career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrollable impulse, I rose, dressed, and having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me, dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and shading my eyes with my hands to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to

such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man, who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back and his head was sunk upon his breast, but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety, but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where he could see my dark figure upon the beach, his self-respect or some other reason forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman,

with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this, but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and leaning over he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger. I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madness had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over, I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me. I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of fagots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of, “Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie!” from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young — at the most nineteen, with a pale somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge’s garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I strode heavily up the pathway, she put out her hands with a pretty child-like gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt, and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully. “What country do you come from?” I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

“Francais?” I asked. “Deutsch?” “Espagnol?” — each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality.

Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat, and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word “Archangel,” painted in strange, quaint lettering.

“So,” I thought, as I paddled slowly back, “this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!” It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house, I pronounced the word “Archangel” several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognise it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at mid-day for some food she was sitting by the table with a needle and thread, mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of the chair with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive shrill voice some uncouth barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, “Come in, you young fiend, come in and be silent!” but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words “Sophie Ramusine” upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young, hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent information to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me and pry, and peep, and chatter — a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw to my great surprise a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair, and short, curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden earrings in his ears — the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red-flannel shirt, and high sea boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognised him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

“Hullo!” I said, in an aggrieved voice. “You got ashore all right, then?”

“Yes,” he answered, in good English. “It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!”

There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. “Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me; yet I could not honestly thank them for it.”

“Ho! ho!” thought I, “here is a man of my own kidney. Why do you wish to be drowned?” I asked.

“Because,” he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, “there — there in that blue smiling bay, lies my soul, my treasure — everything that I loved and lived for.”

“Well, well,” I said. “People are ruined every day, but there’s no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough.”

“One of us?” he gasped.

“Yes — if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful.”

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realise what I said, and then with a wild cry he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and as I came nearer the sound of a man’s bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in the girl, Sophie Ramusine, was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate pleading words. He made a step forward to her as I entered, but she writhed still further away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weasel has him by the throat.

“Here!” I said, pulling him back from her. “This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?”

“Oh, sir,” he said, “excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life.”

“Who are you?” I asked roughly.

“I am a man from Archangel,” he said simply; “a Russian man.”

“What is your name?”

“Ourganeff.”

“Ourganeff! — and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring.”

“We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven,” he said solemnly, looking upwards. “We are bound by higher laws than those of earth.” As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. “Give me up my wife, sir,” he went on. “Let me take her away from here.”

"Look here, you — whatever your name is," I said sternly; "I don't want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won't do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again."

"You won't give her up to me?" he said hoarsely.

"I'll see you damned first!" I answered.

"Suppose I take her," he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flushed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. "Go," I said, in a low voice; "go quick, or I may do you an injury." He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

"Have a heed what you do," he said. "The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman."

"We shall see that," I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work in my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, or bottles, and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine, I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each window in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk, she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from Archangel was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea, and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squatted there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but, as I gazed, my resentment changed into pity and contempt. “Poor fool,” I said to myself, “is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambition centred upon this wretched slip of a girl — a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you. Most women would love you — were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of yours — and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you.” As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so long as he was gone by the morning. As I expected, when I rose and went out there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping, and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty, I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

“I wish to speak a few words to you,” he said gravely.

“Hurry up, then!” I answered, glancing at my watch. “I have no time to listen to chatter.”

“Chatter!” he repeated angrily. “Ah, but there. You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lie kind honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good, too, in spite of your roughness.”

“In the name of the devil,” I said, “say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you.”

“Can I not soften you in any way?” he cried. “Ah, see — see here” — he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. “Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem.”

“I am not so sure of that,” I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"You are a very strange man," he said at last. "I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman — how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul! You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted — you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that," he cried wildly. "I am deep — too deep — already. Anything rather than that."

"You would do better to go back to your country," I said, "than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me."

"And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?" he asked. "Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why, man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?"

"I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so," I answered. "I give no man reasons for my conduct."

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. "If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl — if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her — as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands." The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

"Stand off," I said, putting my hand on my pistol. "If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you."

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs.

No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

"I told you," he said in a quieter voice, "that my name is Ourganeff — Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from Archangel to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that the party had actually gone to the church. In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat's crew — all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of Archangel sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet. You, sir," he said wistfully, "look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?"

"I am tired of your story," I said, turning away. "For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter." With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

“I have told you the beginning of my story,” he said, “and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go.”

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again some minutes later he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from Archangel had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realise my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of any one else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before — a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous waters were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen’s wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the waters for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29 degrees. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red, and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. “I had better push on,” I thought to myself, “or the wind may rise before I can get back.”

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again — a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over the sands and echoed back from the hills behind me — a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sand-hill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building — there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door, the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog, who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water’s edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms.

I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognised it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also and darkness settled over it — a darkness which should never more be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No — a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My heart was untouched. But my pride — ah, there I had been cruelly wounded.

To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. “If he would but come back again!” I cried with clenched hands; “if he would but come back!”

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky, and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little further on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with seaweed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea'd man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman's fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why too should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye, in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times, and when I pass on my daily walk and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar, and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.

“All aboard?” said the captain.

“All aboard, sir!” said the mate.

“Then stand by to let her go.”

It was nine o’clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship Spartan was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice; the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landsmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight, a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship Spartan. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours I should even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

“Time’s up!” said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. “Time’s up!” said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared, running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. “Look sharp!” shouted the crowd.

“Hold hard!” cried the captain. “Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!” and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight’s voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my compagnons de voyage. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to “Yurrup,” a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the olla podrida of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel’s side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. “Here’s a quiet place,” said the voice. “Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.”

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. "This is just the place," I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

"Well, Muller," said the taller of the two, "we've got it aboard right enough."

"Yes," assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller, "it's safe aboard."

"It was rather a near go."

"It was that, Flannigan."

"It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship."

"No, it would have put our plans out."

"Ruined them entirely," said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

"I've got it here," he said at last.

"Let me see it."

"Is no one looking?"

"No, they are nearly all below."

"We can't be too careful where so much is at stake," said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this, and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

“It seems right enough,” he said at last.

“I tried not to shake it,” said his companion.

“Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller.”

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

“Nothing much wrong there,” said Flannigan.

“Right as a trivet,” answered his companion.

“Look out! here’s some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn’t do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake.”

“Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off,” said Muller.

“They’d be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger,” said the taller, with a sinister laugh. “Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It’s not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself.”

“No,” said Muller. “I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own.”

“We should take out a patent.”

And the two men laughed again with a cold harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package, and concealed it in Muller’s voluminous overcoat.

“Come down, and we’ll stow it in our berth,” said Flannigan. “We won’t need it until to-night, and it will be safe there.”

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

“Do you mind moving out of that, sir?” he said. “We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.”

His bluff manner and ruddy healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted — solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of “Flannigan” smacked of Fenianism, while “Muller” suggested nothing but socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake — could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, who intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the Captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

“Is that you, Hammond?” said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

“God bless me,” I said, as I turned round, “it can’t be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?”

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

“Hullo!” he said, in his kindly way, “what’s put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. Mal de mer, eh?”

“No, not that altogether,” said I. “Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm.”

Supporting myself on Dick’s stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

“Have a cigar,” said he, breaking the silence.

“No, thanks,” said I. “Dick, we shall be all corpses to-night.”

“That’s no reason against your having a cigar now,” said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

“No,” I continued, “it’s no laughing matter; and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;” and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. “There, Dick,” I said, as I concluded, “what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?”

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

“I’d be frightened,” he said, “if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares’ nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror. Why, man,” he continued, “what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine.”

“Nothing of the sort, sir,” said I, rather touchily “You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.”

“You’d make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,” said Dick, “if that is to be your only test.”

“The man’s name was Flannigan,” I continued.

“I don’t think that would go very far in a court of law,” said Dick; “but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.”

“All right,” I answered; “I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don’t look hard at them, though, for I don’t want them to think that they are being watched.”

“Trust me,” said Dick; “I’ll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;” and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth, but there was no sign of them. “Heavens!” thought I, “perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!” It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

“Steward,” said Dick, “are there any other gentlemen about?”

“There’s two in the smoking-room, sir,” answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snuggery, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was “Napoleon.” Both were adepts at it, and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath, and refused to go on.

“No, I’m hanged if I do,” he said; “I haven’t had more than two of a suit for five hands.”

“Never mind,” said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; “a few dollars one way or the other won’t go very far after to-night’s work.”

I was astonished at the rascal’s audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily —

“Nonsense! Why shouldn’t I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.”

“I believe you want it not to come off,” said Flannigan.

“You believe nothing of the sort,” said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. “You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won’t have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man. I have as much interest in our success as you have — more, I hope.”

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart, but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards, as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion and turned towards me.

“Can you tell me, sir,” he said, “when this ship will be heard of again?”

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered —

“I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour.”

"Ha, ha!" laughed the angry little man, "I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan, I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir," he continued, turning to me, "utterly wrong."

"Some passing ship, perhaps," suggested Dick.

"No, nor that either."

"The weather is fine," I said; "why should we not be heard of at our destination."

"I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. Possibly we may not, and in any case that is not where we shall be heard of first."

"Where then?" asked Dick.

"That you shall never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!" and he chuckled once again.

"Come on deck!" growled his comrade; "you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!" and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

"Well, what do you think now?" I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

"Think!" he said; "why, I think what his companion thinks, that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy."

"Nonsense, Dick I you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue."

"Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible."

"O Dick, Dick," I cried, "how can you be so blind! Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?"

"Humbug, man!" said Dick; "you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do you make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?"

"I'll tell you what he meant, Dick," I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. "He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant."

“I didn’t think you were such a fool, Hammond,” said Dick Merton testily. “If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good.”

“If ever I see the end of this one,” I groaned, “I’ll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it’s hardly worth while my going up. I’ll stay below and unpack my things.”

“I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind,” said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine — so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

“Now, ladies,” said our genial Captain, “I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in eight days, or in nine at the very latest.”

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the Captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

“May I ask, Captain,” I said, bending forward and speaking very distinctly, “what you think of Fenian manifestoes?”

The Captain’s ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

“They are poor cowardly things,” he said, “as silly as they are wicked.”

“The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,” said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

“O Captain!” said the fat lady at my side, “you don’t really think they would blow up a ship?”

“I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they shall never blow up mine.”

“May I ask what precautions are taken against them?” asked an elderly man at the end of the table.

“All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,” said Captain Dowie.

“But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?” I suggested.

“They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.”

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now and looked at the Captain.

“Don’t you think you are rather underrating them?” he said. “Every secret society has produced desperate men — why shouldn’t the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.”

“Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody’s eyes,” said the little clergyman.

“The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,” said Flannigan; “yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word ‘murder’ into the more euphonious one of ‘war.’ It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn’t dynamite seem so to the Fenian?”

“At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,” said the Captain.

“Excuse me,” returned Flannigan, “but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the Dotterel? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.”

“Then they lied,” said the Captain. “It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas — but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;” and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and Captain? Should I demand a few minutes’ conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It was grand but appalling. A single star was twinkling faintly above our mainmast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It was hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

“After all,” I thought, as I gazed into the blue depths beneath me, “if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land.” A man’s life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

“Well, old man,” he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, “we’ve not been blown up yet.”

“No, not yet,” said I; “but that’s no proof that we are not going to be.”

“Nonsense, man!” said Dick; “I can’t conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks.”

“Dick,” I said, “I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse.”

“Well, if you really think so,” said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, “it is your duty to let the Captain know of your suspicions.”

“You are right,” I said; “I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.”

“Well, go and do it now,” said Dick; “but for goodness’ sake don’t mix me up in the matter.”

“I’ll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,” I answered; “and in the meantime I don’t mean to lose sight of them.”

"Let me know of the result," said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the Captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now, so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The Captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the edge of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side, and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

"This place will do," said a voice.

"Yes, the leeward side is best."

"I wonder if the trigger will act?"

"I am sure it will."

"We were to let it off at ten, were we not?"

"Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet." There was a pause. Then the voice began again —

"They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?"

“It doesn’t matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent its going off.”

“That’s true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won’t there?”

“Rather. How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?”

“The first news will get in at about midnight at earliest.”

“That will be my doing.”

“No, mine.”

“Ha, ha! we’ll settle that.”

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller’s voice in a ghastly whisper, “There’s only five minutes more.”

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

“It’ll make a sensation on land,” said a voice.

“Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.”

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The Captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

“Three minutes more,” he said. “Put it down upon the deck.”

“No, put it here on the bulwarks.”

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular — the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

“A minute and a half more,” he said. “Shall you or I pull the string?”

“I will pull it,” said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

“Stop!” I screamed, springing to my feet. “Stop misguided and unprincipled men!”

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

“Cain was damned,” I cried, “and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souis?”

“He’s mad!” said Flannigan. “Time’s up. Let it off, Muller.” I sprang down upon the deck.

“You shan’t do it!” I said.

“By what right do you prevent us?”

“By every right, human and divine.”

“It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this.”

“Never!” said I.

“Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.”

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

“Now,” he said, “look sharp. He can’t prevent us.”

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off — TWO GREY CARRIER PIGEONS!

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the New York Herald fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America: —

“Pigeon-flying Extraordinary. — A novel match has been brought off last week between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Lowell. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship Spartan, at ten o’clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as some captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock.

"Muller's bird arrived in Lowell in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following morning, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years."

JOHN HUXFORD’S HIATUS.

Strange it is and wonderful to mark how upon this planet of ours the smallest and most insignificant of events set a train of consequences in motion which act and react until their final results are portentous and incalculable. Set a force rolling, however small; and who can say where it shall end, or what it may lead to! Trifles develop into tragedies, and the bagatelle of one day ripens into the catastrophe of the next. An oyster throws out a secretion to surround a grain of sand, and so a pearl comes into being; a pearl diver fishes it up, a merchant buys it and sells it to a jeweller, who disposes of it to a customer. The customer is robbed of it by two scoundrels who quarrel over the booty. One slays the other, and perishes himself upon the scaffold. Here is a direct chain of events with a sick mollusc for its first link, and a gallows for its last one. Had that grain of sand not chanced to wash in between the shells of the bivalve, two living breathing beings with all their potentialities for good and for evil would not have been blotted out from among their fellows. Who shall undertake to judge what is really small and what is great?

Thus when in the year 1821 Don Diego Salvador bethought him that if it paid the heretics in England to import the bark of his cork oaks, it would pay him also to found a factory by which the corks might be cut and sent out ready made, surely at first sight no very vital human interests would appear to be affected. Yet there were poor folk who would suffer, and suffer acutely — women who would weep, and men who would become sallow and hungry-looking and dangerous in places of which the Don had never heard, and all on account of that one idea which had flashed across him as he strutted, cigarettiferous, beneath the grateful shadow of his limes. So crowded is this old globe of ours, and so interlaced our interests, that one cannot think a new thought without some poor devil being the better or the worse for it.

Don Diego Salvador was a capitalist, and the abstract thought soon took the concrete form of a great square plastered building wherein a couple of hundred of his swarthy countrymen worked with deft nimble fingers at a rate of pay which no English artisan could have accepted. Within a few months the result of this new competition was an abrupt fall of prices in the trade, which was serious for the largest firms and disastrous for the smaller ones. A few old-established houses held on as they were, others reduced their establishments and cut down their expenses, while one or two put up their shutters and confessed themselves beaten. In this last unfortunate category was the ancient and respected firm of Fairbairn Brothers of Brisport.

Several causes had led up to this disaster, though Don Diego’s debut as a corkcutter had brought matters to a head. When a couple of generations back the original Fairbairn had founded the business, Brisport was a little fishing town with no outlet or occupation for her superfluous population. Men were glad to have safe and continuous work upon any terms. All this was altered now, for the town was expanding into the centre of a large district in the west, and the demand for labour and its remuneration had proportionately increased. Again, in the old days, when carriage was ruinous and communication slow, the vintners of Exeter and of Barnstaple were glad to buy their corks from their neighbour of Brisport; but now the large London houses sent down their travellers, who competed with each other to gain the local custom, until profits were cut down to the vanishing point. For a long time the firm had been in a precarious position, but this further drop in prices settled the matter, and compelled Mr. Charles Fairbairn, the acting manager, to close his establishment.

It was a murky, foggy Saturday afternoon in November when the hands were paid for the last time, and the old building was to be finally abandoned. Mr. Fairbairn, an anxious-faced, sorrow-worn man, stood on a raised dais by the cashier while he handed the little pile of hardly-earned shillings and coppers to each successive workman as the long procession filed past his table. It was usual with the employees to clatter away the instant that they had been paid, like so many children let out of school; but to-day they waited, forming little groups over the great dreary room, and discussing in subdued voices the misfortune which had come upon their employers, and the future which awaited themselves. When the last pile of coins had been handed across the table, and the last name checked by the cashier, the whole throng faced silently round to the man who had been their master, and waited expectantly for any words which he might have to say to them.

Mr. Charles Fairbairn had not expected this, and it embarrassed him. He had waited as a matter of routine duty until the wages were paid, but he was a taciturn, slow-witted man, and he had not foreseen this sudden call upon his oratorical powers. He stroked his thin cheek nervously with his long white fingers, and looked down with weak watery eyes at the mosaic of upturned serious faces.

"I am sorry that we have to part, my men," he said at last in a crackling voice. "It's a bad day for all of us, and for Brisport too. For three years we have been losing money over the works. We held on in the hope of a change coming, but matters are going from bad to worse. There's nothing for it but to give it up before the balance of our fortune is swallowed up. I hope you may all be able to get work of some sort before very long. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

"God bless you, sir! God bless you!" cried a chorus of rough voices. "Three cheers for Mr. Charles Fairbairn!" shouted a bright-eyed, smart young fellow, springing up upon a bench and waving his peaked cap in the air. The crowd responded to the call, but their huzzas wanted the true ring which only a joyous heart can give. Then they began to flock out into the sunlight, looking back as they went at the long deal tables and the cork-strewn floor — above all at the sad-faced, solitary man, whose cheeks were flecked with colour at the rough cordiality of their farewell.

"Huxford," said the cashier, touching on the shoulder the young fellow who had led the cheering; "the governor wants to speak to you."

The workman turned back and stood swinging his cap awkwardly in front of his ex-employer, while the crowd pushed on until the doorway was clear, and the heavy fog-wreaths rolled unchecked into the deserted factory.

"Ah, John!" said Mr. Fairbairn, coming suddenly out of his reverie and taking up a letter from the table. "You have been in my service since you were a boy, and you have shown that you merited the trust which I have placed in you. From what I have heard I think I am right in saying that this sudden want of work will affect your plans more than it will many of my other hands."

"I was to be married at Shrovetide," the man answered, tracing a pattern upon the table with his horny forefinger. "I'll have to find work first."

"And work, my poor fellow, is by no means easy to find. You see you have been in this groove all your life, and are unfit for anything else. It's true you've been my foreman, but even that won't help you, for the factories all over England are discharging hands, and there's not a vacancy to be had. It's a bad outlook for you and such as you."

"What would you advise, then, sir?" asked John Huxford.

"That's what I was coming to. I have a letter here from Sheridan and Moore, of Montreal, asking for a good hand to take charge of a workroom. If you think it will suit you, you can go out by the next boat. The wages are far in excess of anything which I have been able to give you."

"Why, sir, this is real kind of you," the young workman said earnestly. "She — my girl — Mary, will be as grateful to you as I am. I know what you say is right, and that if I had to look for work I should be likely to spend the little that I have laid by towards housekeeping before I found it. But, sir, with your leave I'd like to speak to her about it before I made up my mind. Could you leave it open for a few hours?"

"The mail goes out to-morrow," Mr. Fairbairn answered. "If you decide to accept you can write tonight. Here is their letter, which will give you their address."

John Huxford took the precious paper with a grateful heart. An hour ago his future had been all black, but now this rift of light had broken in the west, giving promise of better things. He would have liked to have said something expressive of his feelings to his employer, but the English nature is not effusive, and he could not get beyond a few choking awkward words which were as awkwardly received by his benefactor. With a scrape and a bow, he turned on his heel, and plunged out into the foggy street.

So thick was the vapour that the houses over the way were only a vague loom, but the foreman hurried on with springy steps through side streets and winding lanes, past walls where the fishermen's nets were drying, and over cobble-stoned alleys redolent of herring, until he reached a modest line of whitewashed cottages fronting the sea. At the door of one of these the young man tapped, and then without waiting for a response, pressed down the latch and walked in.

An old silvery-haired woman and a young girl hardly out of her teens were sitting on either side of the fire, and the latter sprang to her feet as he entered.

"You've got some good news, John," she cried, putting her hands upon his shoulders, and looking into his eyes. "I can tell it from your step. Mr. Fairbairn is going to carry on after all."

"No, dear, not so good as that," John Huxford answered, smoothing back her rich brown hair; "but I have an offer of a place in Canada, with good money, and if you think as I do, I shall go out to it, and you can follow with the granny whenever I have made all straight for you at the other side. What say you to that, my lass?"

"Why, surely, John, what you think is right must be for the best," said the girl quietly, with trust and confidence in her pale plain face and loving hazel eyes. "But poor granny, how is she to cross the seas?"

"Oh, never mind about me," the old woman broke in cheerfully. "I'll be no drag on you. If you want granny, granny's not too old to travel; and if you don't want her, why she can look after the cottage, and have an English home ready for you whenever you turn back to the old country."

"Of course we shall need you, granny," John Huxford said, with a cheery laugh. "Fancy leaving granny behind! That would never do! Mary! But if you both come out, and if we are married all snug and proper at Montreal, we'll look through the whole city until we find a house something like this one, and we'll have creepers on the outside just the same, and when the doors are shut and we sit round the fire on the winter's nights, I'm hanged if we'll be able to tell that we're not at home. Besides, Mary, it's the same speech out there, and the same king and the same flag; it's not like a foreign country."

"No, of course not," Mary answered with conviction. She was an orphan with no living relation save her old grandmother, and no thought in life but to make a helpful and worthy wife to the man she loved. Where these two were she could not fail to find happiness. If John went to Canada, then Canada became home to her, for what had Brisport to offer when he was gone?

"I'm to write to-night then and accept?" the young man asked. "I knew you would both be of the same mind as myself, but of course I couldn't close with the offer until we had talked it over. I can get started in a week or two, and then in a couple of months I'll have all ready for you on the other side."

"It will be a weary, weary time until we hear from you, dear John," said Mary, clasping his hand; "but it's God's will, and we must be patient. Here's pen and ink. You can sit at the table and write the letter which is to take the three of us across the Atlantic." Strange how Don Diego's thoughts were moulding human lives in the little Devon village.

The acceptance was duly despatched, and John Huxford began immediately to prepare for his departure, for the Montreal firm had intimated that the vacancy was a certainty, and that the chosen man might come out without delay to take over his duties. In a very few days his scanty outfit was completed, and he started off in a coasting vessel for Liverpool, where he was to catch the passenger ship for Quebec.

“Remember, John,” Mary whispered, as he pressed her to his heart upon the Brisport quay, “the cottage is our own, and come what may, we have always that to fall back upon. If things should chance to turn out badly over there, we have always a roof to cover us. There you will find me until you send word to us to come.”

“And that will be very soon, my lass,” he answered cheerfully, with a last embrace. “Good-bye, granny, good-bye.” The ship was a mile and more from the land before he lost sight of the figures of the straight slim girl and her old companion, who stood watching and waving to him from the end of the grey stone quay. It was with a sinking heart and a vague feeling of impending disaster that he saw them at last as minute specks in the distance, walking townward and disappearing amid the crowd who lined the beach.

From Liverpool the old woman and her granddaughter received a letter from John announcing that he was just starting in the barque St. Lawrence, and six weeks afterwards a second longer epistle informed them of his safe arrival at Quebec, and gave them his first impressions of the country. After that a long unbroken silence set in. Week after week and month after month passed by, and never a word came from across the seas. A year went over their heads, and yet another, but no news of the absentee. Sheridan and Moore were written to, and replied that though John Huxford’s letter had reached them, he had never presented himself, and they had been forced to fill up the vacancy as best they could. Still Mary and her grandmother hoped against hope, and looked out for the letter-carrier every morning with such eagerness, that the kind-hearted man would often make a detour rather than pass the two pale anxious faces which peered at him from the cottage window. At last, three years after the young foreman’s disappearance, old granny died, and Mary was left alone, a broken sorrowful woman, living as best she might on a small annuity which had descended to her, and eating her heart out as she brooded over the mystery which hung over the fate of her lover.

Among the shrewd west-country neighbours there had long, however, ceased to be any mystery in the matter. Huxford arrived safely in Canada — so much was proved by his letter. Had he met with his end in any sudden way during the journey between Quebec and Montreal, there must have been some official inquiry, and his luggage would have sufficed to have established his identity. Yet the Canadian police had been communicated with, and had returned a positive answer that no inquest had been held, or any body found, which could by any possibility be that of the young Englishman. The only alternative appeared to be that he had taken the first opportunity to break all the old ties, and had slipped away to the backwoods or to the States to commence life anew under an altered name. Why he should do this no one professed to know, but that he had done it appeared only too probable from the facts. Hence many a deep growl of righteous anger rose from the brawny smacksmen when Mary with her pale face and sorrow-sunken head passed along the quays on her way to her daily marketing; and it is more than likely that if the missing man had turned up in Brisport he might have met with some rough words or rougher usage, unless he could give some very good reason for his strange conduct. This popular view of the case never, however, occurred to the simple trusting heart of the lonely girl, and as the years rolled by her grief and her suspense were never for an instant tinged with a doubt as to the good faith of the missing man. From youth she grew into middle age, and from that into the autumn of her life, patient, long-suffering, and faithful, doing good as far as lay in her power, and waiting humbly until fate should restore either in this world or the next that which it had so mysteriously deprived her of.

In the meantime neither the opinion held by the minority that John Huxford was dead, nor that of the majority, which pronounced him to be faithless, represented the true state of the case. Still alive, and of stainless honour, he had yet been singled out by fortune as her victim in one of those strange freaks which are of such rare occurrence, and so beyond the general experience, that they might be put by as incredible, had we not the most trustworthy evidence of their occasional possibility.

Landing at Quebec, with his heart full of hope and courage, John selected a dingy room in a back street, where the terms were less exorbitant than elsewhere, and conveyed thither the two boxes which contained his worldly goods. After taking up his quarters there he had half a mind to change again, for the landlady and the fellow-lodgers were by no means to his taste; but the Montreal coach started within a day or two, and he consoled himself by the thought that the discomfort would only last for that short time. Having written home to Mary to announce his safe arrival, he employed himself in seeing as much of the town as was possible, walking about all day, and only returning to his room at night.

It happened, however, that the house on which the unfortunate youth had pitched was one which was notorious for the character of its inmates. He had been directed to it by a pimp, who found regular employment in hanging about the docks and decoying new-comers to this den. The fellow’s specious manner and proffered civility had led the simple-hearted west-countryman into the toils, and though his instinct told him that he was in unsafe company, he refrained, unfortunately, from at once making his escape. He contented himself with staying out all day, and associating as little as possible with the other inmates. From the few words which he did let drop, however, the landlady gathered that he was a stranger without a single friend in the country to inquire after him should misfortune overtake him.

The house had an evil reputation for the hocussing of sailors, which was done not only for the purpose of plundering them, but also to supply outgoing ships with crews, the men being carried on board insensible, and not coming to until the ship was well down the St. Lawrence. This trade caused the wretches who followed it to be experts in the use of stupefying drugs, and they determined to practise their arts upon their friendless lodger, so as to have an opportunity of ransacking his effects, and of seeing what it might be worth their while to purloin. During the day he invariably locked his door and carried off the key in his pocket, but if they could render him insensible for the night they could examine his boxes at their leisure, and deny afterwards that he had ever brought with him the articles which he missed. It happened, therefore, upon the eve of Huxford’s departure from Quebec, that he found, upon returning to his lodgings, that his landlady and her two ill-favoured sons, who assisted her in her trade, were waiting up for him over a bowl of punch, which they cordially invited him to share. It was a bitterly cold night, and the fragrant steam overpowered any suspicions which the young Englishman may have entertained, so he drained off a bumper, and then, retiring to his bedroom, threw himself upon his bed without undressing, and fell straight into a dreamless slumber, in which he still lay when the three conspirators crept into his chamber, and, having opened his boxes, began to investigate his effects.

It may have been that the speedy action of the drug caused its effect to be evanescent, or, perhaps, that the strong constitution of the victim threw it off with unusual rapidity. Whatever the cause, it is certain that John Huxford suddenly came to himself, and found the foul trio squatted round their booty, which they were dividing into the two categories of what was of value and should be taken, and what was valueless and might therefore be left. With a bound he sprang out of bed, and seizing the fellow nearest him by the collar, he slung him through the open doorway. His brother rushed at him, but the young Devonshire man met him with such a facer that he dropped in a heap upon the ground. Unfortunately, the violence of the blow caused him to overbalance himself, and, tripping over his prostrate antagonist, he came down heavily upon his face. Before he could rise, the old hag sprang upon his back and clung to him, shrieking to her son to bring the poker. John managed to shake himself clear of them both, but before he could stand on his guard he was felled from behind by a crashing blow from an iron bar, which stretched him senseless upon the floor.

"You've hit too hard, Joe," said the old woman, looking down at the prostrate figure. "I heard the bone go."

"If I hadn't fetched him down he'd ha' been too many for us," said the young villain sulkily.

"Still, you might ha' done it without killing him, clumsy," said his mother. She had had a large experience of such scenes, and knew the difference between a stunning blow and a fatal one.

"He's still breathing," the other said, examining him; "the back o' his head's like a bag o' dice though. The skull's all splintered. He can't last. What are we to do?"

"He'll never come to himself again," the other brother remarked. "Sarve him right. Look at my face! Let's see, mother; who's in the house?"

"Only four drunk sailors."

"They wouldn't turn out for any noise. It's all quiet in the street. Let's carry him down a bit, Joe, and leave him there. He can die there, and no one think the worse of us."

"Take all the papers out of his pocket, then," the mother suggested; "they might help the police to trace him. His watch, too, and his money — L3 odd; better than nothing. Now carry him softly and don't slip."

Kicking off their shoes, the two brothers carried the dying man down stairs and along the deserted street for a couple of hundred yards. There they laid him among the snow, where he was found by the night patrol, who carried him on a shutter to the hospital. He was duly examined by the resident surgeon, who bound up the wounded head, but gave it as his opinion that the man could not possibly live for more than twelve hours.

Twelve hours passed, however, and yet another twelve, but John Huxford still struggled hard for his life. When at the end of three days he was found to be still breathing, the interest of the doctors became aroused at his extraordinary vitality, and they bled him, as the fashion was in those days, and surrounded his shattered head with icebags. It may have been on account of these measures, or it may have been in spite of them, but at the end of a week's deep trance the nurse in charge was astonished to hear a gabbling noise, and to find the stranger sitting up upon the couch and staring about him with wistful, wondering eyes. The surgeons were summoned to behold the phenomenon, and warmly congratulated each other upon the success of their treatment.

"You have been on the brink of the grave, my man," said one of them, pressing the bandaged head back on to the pillow; "you must not excite yourself. What is your name?"

No answer, save a wild stare.

"Where do you come from?"

Again no answer.

"He is mad," one suggested. "Or a foreigner," said another. "There were no papers on him when he came in. His linen is marked 'J. H.' Let us try him in French and German."

They tested him with as many tongues as they could muster among them, but were compelled at last to give the matter over and to leave their silent patient, still staring up wild-eyed at the whitewashed hospital ceiling.

For many weeks John lay in the hospital, and for many weeks efforts were made to gain some clue as to his antecedents, but in vain. He showed, as the time rolled by, not only by his demeanour, but also by the intelligence with which he began to pick up fragments of sentences, like a clever child learning to talk, that his mind was strong enough in the present, though it was a complete blank as to the past. The man's memory of his whole life before the fatal blow was entirely and absolutely erased. He neither knew his name, his language, his home, his business, nor anything else. The doctors held learned consultations upon him, and discoursed upon the centre of memory and depressed tables, deranged nerve-cells and cerebral congestions, but all their polysyllables began and ended at the fact that the man's memory was gone, and that it was beyond the power of science to restore it. During the weary months of his convalescence he picked up reading and writing, but with the return of his strength came no return of his former life. England, Devonshire, Brisport, Mary, Granny — the words brought no recollection to his mind. All was absolute darkness. At last he was discharged, a friendless, tradeless, penniless man, without a past, and with very little to look to in the future. His very name was altered, for it had been necessary to invent one. John Huxford had passed away, and John Hardy took his place among mankind. Here was a strange outcome of a Spanish gentleman's tobacco-inspired meditations.

John's case had aroused some discussion and curiosity in Quebec, so that he was not suffered to drift into utter helplessness upon emerging from the hospital. A Scotch manufacturer named M'Kinlay found him a post as porter in his establishment, and for a long time he worked at seven dollars a week at the loading and unloading of vans. In the course of years it was noticed, however, that his memory, however defective as to the past, was extremely reliable and accurate when concerned with anything which had occurred since his accident. From the factory he was promoted into the counting-house, and the year 1835 found him a junior clerk at a salary of L120 a year. Steadily and surely John Hardy fought his way upward from post to post, with his whole heart and mind devoted to the business. In 1840 he was third clerk, in 1845 he was second, and in 1852 he became manager of the whole vast establishment, and second only to Mr. M'Kinlay himself.

There were few who grudged John this rapid advancement, for it was obviously due to neither chance nor favouritism, but entirely to his marvellous powers of application and industry. From early morning until late in the night he laboured hard in the service of his employer, checking, overlooking, superintending, setting an example to all of cheerful devotion to duty. As he rose from one post to another his salary increased, but it caused no alteration in his mode of living, save that it enabled him to be more open-handed to the poor. He signalised his promotion to the managership by a donation of L1000 to the hospital in which he had been treated a quarter of a century before. The remainder of his earnings he allowed to accumulate in the business, drawing a small sum quarterly for his sustenance, and still residing in the humble dwelling which he had occupied when he was a warehouse porter. In spite of his success he was a sad, silent, morose man, solitary in his habits, and possessed always of a vague undefined yearning, a dull feeling of dissatisfaction and of craving which never abandoned him. Often he would strive with his poor crippled brain to pierce the curtain which divided him from the past, and to solve the enigma of his youthful existence, but though he sat many a time by the fire until his head throbbed with his efforts, John Hardy could never recall the least glimpse of John Huxford's history.

On one occasion he had, in the interests of the firm, to journey to Quebec, and to visit the very cork factory which had tempted him to leave England. Strolling through the workroom with the foreman, John automatically, and without knowing what he was doing, picked up a square piece of the bark, and fashioned it with two or three deft cuts of his penknife into a smooth tapering cork. His companion picked it out of his hand and examined it with the eye of an expert. “This is not the first cork which you have cut by many a hundred, Mr. Hardy,” he remarked. “Indeed you are wrong,” John answered, smiling; “I never cut one before in my life.” “Impossible!” cried the foreman. “Here's another bit of cork. Try again.” John did his best to repeat the performance, but the brains of the manager interfered with the trained muscles of the corkcutter. The latter had not forgotten their cunning, but they needed to be left to themselves, and not directed by a mind which knew nothing of the matter. Instead of the smooth graceful shape, he could produce nothing but rough-hewn clumsy cylinders. “It must have been chance,” said the foreman, “but I could have sworn that it was the work of an old hand!”

As the years passed John's smooth English skin had warped and crinkled until he was as brown and as seamed as a walnut. His hair, too, after many years of iron-grey, had finally become as white as the winters of his adopted country. Yet he was a hale and upright old man, and when he at last retired from the manager-ship of the firm with which he had been so long connected, he bore the weight of his seventy years lightly and bravely. He was in the peculiar position himself of not knowing his own age, as it was impossible for him to do more than guess at how old he was at the time of his accident.

The Franco-German War came round, and while the two great rivals were destroying each other, their more peaceful neighbours were quietly ousting them out of their markets and their commerce. Many English ports benefited by this condition of things, but none more than Brisport. It had long ceased to be a fishing village, but was now a large and prosperous town, with a great breakwater in place of the quay on which Mary had stood, and a frontage of terraces and grand hotels where all the grandees of the west country came when they were in need of a change. All these extensions had made Brisport the centre of a busy trade, and her ships found their way into every harbour in the world. Hence it was no wonder, especially in that very busy year of 1870, that several Brisport vessels were lying in the river and alongside the wharves of Quebec.

One day John Hardy, who found time hang a little on his hands since his retirement from business, strolled along by the water’s edge listening to the clanking of the steam winches, and watching the great barrels and cases as they were swung ashore and piled upon the wharf. He had observed the coming in of a great ocean steamer, and having waited until she was safely moored, he was turning away, when a few words fell upon his ear uttered by some one on board a little weather-beaten barque close by him. It was only some commonplace order that was bawled out, but the sound fell upon the old man’s ears with a strange mixture of disuse and familiarity. He stood by the vessel and heard the seamen at their work, all speaking with the same broad, pleasant jingling accent. Why did it send such a thrill through his nerves to listen to it? He sat down upon a coil of rope and pressed his hands to his temples, drinking in the long-forgotten dialect, and trying to piece together in his mind the thousand half-formed nebulous recollections which were surging up in it. Then he rose, and walking along to the stern he read the name of the ship, The Sunlight, Brisport. Brisport! Again that flush and tingle through every nerve. Why was that word and the men’s speech so familiar to him? He walked moodily home, and all night he lay tossing and sleepless, pursuing a shadowy something which was ever within his reach, and yet which ever evaded him.

Early next morning he was up and down on the wharf listening to the talk of the west-country sailors. Every word they spoke seemed to him to revive his memory and bring him nearer to the light. From time to time they paused in their work, and seeing the white-haired stranger sitting so silently and attentively, they laughed at him and broke little jests upon him. And even these jests had a familiar sound to the exile, as they very well might, seeing that they were the same which he had heard in his youth, for no one ever makes a new joke in England. So he sat through the long day, bathing himself in the west-country speech, and waiting for the light to break.

And it happened that when the sailors broke off for their mid-day meal, one of them, either out of curiosity or good nature, came over to the old watcher and greeted him. So John asked him to be seated on a log by his side, and began to put many questions to him about the country from which he came, and the town. All which the man answered glibly enough, for there is nothing in the world that a sailor loves to talk of so much as of his native place, for it pleases him to show that he is no mere wanderer, but that he has a home to receive him whenever he shall choose to settle down to a quiet life. So the seaman prattled away about the Town Hall and the Martello Tower, and the Esplanade, and Pitt Street and the High Street, until his companion suddenly shot out a long eager arm and caught him by the wrist. “Look here, man,” he said, in a low quick whisper. “Answer me truly as you hope for mercy. Are not the streets that run out of the High Street, Fox Street, Caroline Street, and George Street, in the order named?” “They are,” the sailor answered, shrinking away from the wild flashing eyes. And at that moment John’s memory came back to him, and he saw clear and distinct his life as it had been and as it should have been, with every minutest detail traced as in letters of fire. Too stricken to cry out, too stricken to weep, he could only hurry away homewards wildly and aimlessly; hurry as fast as his aged limbs would carry him, as if, poor soul! there were some chance yet of catching up the fifty years which had gone by. Staggering and tremulous he hastened on until a film seemed to gather over his eyes, and throwing his arms into the air with a great cry, “Oh, Mary, Mary! Oh, my lost, lost life!” he fell senseless upon the pavement.

The storm of emotion which had passed through him, and the mental shock which he had undergone, would have sent many a man into a raging fever, but John was too strong-willed and too practical to allow his strength to be wasted at the very time when he needed it most. Within a few days he realised a portion of his property, and starting for New York, caught the first mail steamer to England. Day and night, night and day, he trod the quarter-deck, until the hardy sailors watched the old man with astonishment, and marvelled how any human being could do so much upon so little sleep. It was only by this unceasing exercise, by wearing down his vitality until fatigue brought lethargy, that he could prevent himself from falling into a very frenzy of despair. He hardly dared ask himself what was the object of this wild journey? What did he expect? Would Mary be still alive? She must be a very old woman. If he could but see her and mingle his tears with hers he would be content. Let her only know that it had been no fault of his, and that they had both been victims to the same cruel fate. The cottage was her own, and she had said that she would wait for him there until she heard from him. Poor lass, she had never reckoned on such a wait as this.

At last the Irish lights were sighted and passed, Land's End lay like a blue fog upon the water, and the great steamer ploughed its way along the bold Cornish coast until it dropped its anchor in Plymouth Bay. John hurried to the railway station, and within a few hours he found himself back once more in his native town, which he had quitted a poor corkcutter, half a century before.

But was it the same town? Were it not for the name engraved all over the station and on the hotels, John might have found a difficulty in believing it. The broad, well-paved streets, with the tram lines laid down the centre, were very different from the narrow winding lanes which he could remember. The spot upon which the station had been built was now the very centre of the town, but in the old days it would have been far out in the fields. In every direction, lines of luxurious villas branched away in streets and crescents bearing names which were new to the exile. Great warehouses, and long rows of shops with glittering fronts, showed him how enormously Brisport had increased in wealth as well as in dimensions. It was only when he came upon the old High Street that John began to feel at home. It was much altered, but still it was recognisable, and some few of the buildings were just as he had left them. There was the place where Fairbairn's cork works had been. It was now occupied by a great brand-new hotel. And there was the old grey Town Hall. The wanderer turned down beside it, and made his way with eager steps but a sinking heart in the direction of the line of cottages which he used to know so well.

It was not difficult for him to find where they had been. The sea at least was as of old, and from it he could tell where the cottages had stood. But alas, where were they now! In their place an imposing crescent of high stone houses reared their tall front to the beach. John walked wearily down past their palatial entrances, feeling heart-sore and despairing, when suddenly a thrill shot through him, followed by a warm glow of excitement and of hope, for, standing a little back from the line, and looking as much out of place as a bumpkin in a ballroom, was an old whitewashed cottage, with wooden porch and walls bright with creeping plants. He rubbed his eyes and stared again, but there it stood with its diamond-paned windows and white muslin curtains, the very same down to the smallest details, as it had been on the day when he last saw it. Brown hair had become white, and fishing hamlets had changed into cities, but busy hands and a faithful heart had kept granny's cottage unchanged and ready for the wanderer.

And now, when he had reached his very haven of rest, John Huxford's mind became more filled with apprehension than ever, and he came over so deadly sick, that he had to sit down upon one of the beach benches which faced the cottage. An old fisherman was perched at one end of it, smoking his black clay pipe, and he remarked upon the wan face and sad eyes of the stranger.

"You have overtired yourself," he said. "It doesn't do for old chaps like you and me to forget our years."

"I'm better now, thank you," John answered. "Can you tell me, friend, how that one cottage came among all those fine houses?"

"Why," said the old fellow, thumping his crutch energetically upon the ground, "that cottage belongs to the most obstinate woman in all England. That woman, if you'll believe me, has been offered the price of the cottage ten times over, and yet she won't part with it. They have even promised to remove it stone by stone, and put it up on some more convenient place, and pay her a good round sum into the bargain, but, God bless you! she wouldn't so much as hear of it."

"And why was that?" asked John.

"Well, that's just the funny part of it. It's all on account of a mistake. You see her spark went away when I was a youngster, and she's got it into her head that he may come back some day, and that he won't know where to go unless the cottage is there. Why, if the fellow were alive he would be as old as you, but I've no doubt he's dead long ago. She's well quit of him, for he must have been a scamp to abandon her as he did."

"Oh, he abandoned her, did he?"

"Yes — went off to the States, and never so much as sent a word to bid her good-bye. It was a cruel shame, it was, for the girl has been a-waiting and a-pining for him ever since. It's my belief that it's fifty years' weeping that blinded her."

"She is blind!" cried John, half rising to his feet.

"Worse than that," said the fisherman. "She's mortal ill, and not expected to live. Why, look ye, there's the doctor's carriage a-waiting at her door."

At this evil tidings old John sprang up and hurried over to the cottage, where he met the physician returning to his brougham.

"How is your patient, doctor?" he asked in a trembling voice.

“Very bad, very bad,” said the man of medicine pompously. “If she continues to sink she will be in great danger; but if, on the other hand, she takes a turn, it is possible that she may recover,” with which oracular answer he drove away in a cloud of dust.

John Huxford was still hesitating at the doorway, not knowing how to announce himself, or how far a shock might be dangerous to the sufferer, when a gentleman in black came bustling up.

“Can you tell me, my man, if this is where the sick woman is?” he asked.

John nodded, and the clergyman passed in, leaving the door half open. The wanderer waited until he had gone into the inner room, and then slipped into the front parlour, where he had spent so many happy hours. All was the same as ever, down to the smallest ornaments, for Mary had been in the habit whenever anything was broken of replacing it with a duplicate, so that there might be no change in the room. He stood irresolute, looking about him, until he heard a woman’s voice from the inner chamber, and stealing to the door he peeped in.

The invalid was reclining upon a couch, propped up with pillows, and her face was turned full towards John as he looked round the door. He could have cried out as his eyes rested upon it, for there were Mary’s pale, plain, sweet homely features as smooth and as unchanged as though she were still the half child, half woman, whom he had pressed to his heart on the Brisport quay. Her calm, eventless, unselfish life had left none of those rude traces upon her countenance which are the outward emblems of internal conflict and an unquiet soul. A chaste melancholy had refined and softened her expression, and her loss of sight had been compensated for by that placidity which comes upon the faces of the blind. With her silvery hair peeping out beneath her snow-white cap, and a bright smile upon her sympathetic face, she was the old Mary improved and developed, with something ethereal and angelic superadded.

“You will keep a tenant in the cottage,” she was saying to the clergyman, who sat with his back turned to the observer. “Choose some poor deserving folk in the parish who will be glad of a home free. And when he comes you will tell him that I have waited for him until I have been forced to go on, but that he will find me on the other side still faithful and true. There’s a little money too — only a few pounds — but I should like him to have it when he comes, for he may need it, and then you will tell the folk you put in to be kind to him, for he will be grieved, poor lad, and to tell him that I was cheerful and happy up to the end. Don’t let him know that I ever fretted, or he may fret too.”

Now John listened quietly to all this from behind the door, and more than once he had to put his hand to his throat, but when she had finished, and when he thought of her long, blameless, innocent life, and saw the dear face looking straight at him, and yet unable to see him, it became too much for his manhood, and he burst out into an irrepressible choking sob which shook his very frame. And then occurred a strange thing, for though he had spoken no word, the old woman stretched out her arms to him, and cried, “Oh, Johnny, Johnny! Oh dear, dear Johnny, you have come back to me again,” and before the parson could at all understand what had happened, those two faithful lovers were in each other’s arms, weeping over each other, and patting each other’s silvery heads, with their hearts so full of joy that it almost compensated for all that weary fifty years of waiting.

It is hard to say how long they rejoiced together. It seemed a very short time to them and a very long one to the reverend gentleman, who was thinking at last of stealing away, when Mary recollected his presence and the courtesy which was due to him. “My heart is full of joy, sir,” she said; “it is God’s will that I should not see my Johnny, but I can call his image up as clear as if I had my eyes. Now stand up, John, and I will let the gentleman see how well I remember you. He is as tall, sir, as the second shelf, as straight as an arrow, his face brown, and his eyes bright and clear. His hair is well-nigh black, and his moustache the same — I shouldn’t wonder if he had whiskers as well by this time. Now, sir, don’t you think I can do without my sight?” The clergyman listened to her description, and looking at the battered, white-haired man before him, he hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

But it all proved to be a laughing matter in the end, for, whether it was that her illness had taken some natural turn, or that John’s return had startled it away, it is certain that from that day Mary steadily improved until she was as well as ever. “No special license for me,” John had said sturdily. “It looks as if we were ashamed of what we are doing, as though we hadn’t the best right to be married of any two folk in the parish.” So the banns were put up accordingly, and three times it was announced that John Huxford, bachelor, was going to be united to Mary Howden, spinster, after which, no one objecting, they were duly married accordingly. “We may not have very long in this world," said old John, "but at least we shall start fair and square in the next."

John's share in the Quebec business was sold out, and gave rise to a very interesting legal question as to whether, knowing that his name was Huxford, he could still sign that of Hardy, as was necessary for the completion of the business. It was decided, however, that on his producing two trustworthy witnesses to his identity all would be right, so the property was duly realised and produced a very handsome fortune. Part of this John devoted to building a pretty villa just outside Brisport, and the heart of the proprietor of Beach Terrace leaped within him when he learned that the cottage was at last to be abandoned, and that it would no longer break the symmetry and impair the effect of his row of aristocratic mansions.

And there in their snug new home, sitting out on the lawn in the summer-time, and on either side of the fire in the winter, that worthy old couple continued for many years to live as innocently and as happily as two children. Those who knew them well say that there was never a shadow between them, and that the love which burned in their aged hearts was as high and as holy as that of any young couple who ever went to the altar. And through all the country round, if ever man or woman were in distress and fighting against hard times, they had only to go up to the villa to receive help, and that sympathy which is more precious than help. So when at last John and Mary fell asleep in their ripe old age, within a few hours of each other, they had all the poor and the needy and the friendless of the parish among their mourners, and in talking over the troubles which these two had faced so bravely, they learned that their own miseries also were but passing things, and that faith and truth can never miscarry, either in this existence or the next.

CYPRIAN OVERBECK WELLS — A LITERARY MOSAIC.

From my boyhood I have had an intense and overwhelming conviction that my real vocation lay in the direction of literature. I have, however, had a most unaccountable difficulty in getting any responsible person to share my views. It is true that private friends have sometimes, after listening to my effusions, gone the length of remarking, “Really, Smith, that’s not half bad!” or, “You take my advice, old boy, and send that to some magazine!” but I have never on these occasions had the moral courage to inform my adviser that the article in question had been sent to well-nigh every publisher in London, and had come back again with a rapidity and precision which spoke well for the efficiency of our postal arrangements.

Had my manuscripts been paper boomerangs they could not have returned with greater accuracy to their unhappy dispatcher. Oh, the vileness and utter degradation of the moment when the stale little cylinder of closely written pages, which seemed so fresh and full of promise a few days ago, is handed in by a remorseless postman! And what moral depravity shines through the editor’s ridiculous plea of “want of space!” But the subject is a painful one, and a digression from the plain statement of facts which I originally contemplated.

From the age of seventeen to that of three-and-twenty I was a literary volcano in a constant state of eruption. Poems and tales, articles and reviews, nothing came amiss to my pen. From the great sea-serpent to the nebular hypothesis, I was ready to write on anything or everything, and I can safely say that I seldom handled a subject without throwing new lights upon it. Poetry and romance, however, had always the greatest attractions for me. How I have wept over the pathos of my heroines, and laughed at the comicalities of my buffoons! Alas! I could find no one to join me in my appreciation, and solitary admiration for one’s self, however genuine, becomes satiating after a time. My father remonstrated with me too on the score of expense and loss of time, so that I was finally compelled to relinquish my dreams of literary independence and to become a clerk in a wholesale mercantile firm connected with the West African trade.

Even when condemned to the prosaic duties which fell to my lot in the office, I continued faithful to my first love. I have introduced pieces of word-painting into the most commonplace business letters which have, I am told, considerably astonished the recipients. My refined sarcasm has made defaulting creditors writhe and wince. Occasionally, like the great Silas Wegg, I would drop into poetry, and so raise the whole tone of the correspondence. Thus what could be more elegant than my rendering of the firm's instructions to the captain of one of their vessels. It ran in this way:—

"From England, Captain, you must steer a
Course directly to Madeira,
Land the casks of salted beef,
Then away to Teneriffe.
Pray be careful, cool, and wary
With the merchants of Canary.
When you leave them make the most
Of the trade winds to the coast.
Down it you shall sail as far
As the land of Calabar,
And from there you'll onward go
To Bonny and Fernando Po" ——

and so on for four pages. The captain, instead of treasuring up this little gem, called at the office next day, and demanded with quite unnecessary warmth what the thing meant, and I was compelled to translate it all back into prose. On this, as on other similar occasions, my employer took me severely to task — for he was, you see, a man entirely devoid of all pretensions to literary taste!

All this, however, is a mere preamble, and leads up to the fact that after ten years or so of drudgery I inherited a legacy which, though small, was sufficient to satisfy my simple wants. Finding myself independent, I rented a quiet house removed from the uproar and bustle of London, and there I settled down with the intention of producing some great work which should single me out from the family of the Smiths, and render my name immortal. To this end I laid in several quires of foolscap, a box of quill pens, and a sixpenny bottle of ink, and having given my housekeeper injunctions to deny me to all visitors, I proceeded to look round for a suitable subject.

I was looking round for some weeks. At the end of that time I found that I had by constant nibbling devoured a large number of the quills, and had spread the ink out to such advantage, what with blots, spills, and abortive commencements, that there appeared to be some everywhere except in the bottle. As to the story itself, however, the facility of my youth had deserted me completely, and my mind remained a complete blank; nor could I, do what I would, excite my sterile imagination to conjure up a single incident or character.

In this strait I determined to devote my leisure to running rapidly through the works of the leading English novelists, from Daniel Defoe to the present day, in the hope of stimulating my latent ideas and of getting a good grasp of the general tendency of literature. For some time past I had avoided opening any work of fiction because one of the greatest faults of my youth had been that I invariably and unconsciously mimicked the style of the last author whom I had happened to read. Now, however, I made up my mind to seek safety in a multitude, and by consulting ALL the English classics to avoid?? the danger of imitating any one too closely. I had just accomplished the task of reading through the majority of the standard novels at the time when my narrative commences.

It was, then, about twenty minutes to ten on the night of the fourth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-six, that, after disposing of a pint of beer and a Welsh rarebit for my supper, I seated myself in my arm-chair, cocked my feet upon a stool, and lit my pipe, as was my custom. Both my pulse and my temperature were, as far as I know, normal at the time. I would give the state of the barometer, but that unlucky instrument had experienced an unprecedented fall of forty-two inches — from a nail to the ground — and was not in a reliable condition. We live in a scientific age, and I flatter myself that I move with the times.

Whilst in that comfortable lethargic condition which accompanies both digestion and poisoning by nicotine, I suddenly became aware of the extraordinary fact that my little drawing-room had elongated into a great salon, and that my humble table had increased in proportion. Round this colossal mahogany were seated a great number of people who were talking earnestly together, and the surface in front of them was strewn with books and pamphlets. I could not help observing that these persons were dressed in a most extraordinary mixture of costumes, for those at the end nearest to me wore peruke wigs, swords, and all the fashions of two centuries back; those about the centre had tight knee-breeches, high cravats, and heavy bunches of seals; while among those at the far side the majority were dressed in the most modern style, and among them I saw, to my surprise, several eminent men of letters whom I had the honour of knowing. There were two or three women in the company. I should have risen to my feet to greet these unexpected guests, but all power of motion appeared to have deserted me, and I could only lie still and listen to their conversation, which I soon perceived to be all about myself.

“Egad!” exclaimed a rough, weather-beaten man, who was smoking a long churchwarden pipe at my end of the table, “my heart softens for him. Why, gossips, we’ve been in the same straits ourselves. Gadzooks, never did mother feel more concern for her eldest born than I when Rory Random went out to make his own way in the world.”

“Right, Tobias, right!” cried another man, seated at my very elbow.

“By my troth, I lost more flesh over poor Robin on his island, than had I the sweating sickness twice told. The tale was well-nigh done when in swaggers my Lord of Rochester — a merry gallant, and one whose word in matters literary might make or mar. ‘How now, Defoe,’ quoth he, ‘hast a tale on hand?’ ‘Even so, your lordship,’ I returned. ‘A right merry one, I trust,’ quoth he. ‘Discourse unto me concerning thy heroine, a comely lass, Dan, or I mistake.’ ‘Nay,’ I replied, ‘there is no heroine in the matter.’ ‘Split not your phrases,’ quoth he; ‘thou weighest every word like a scald attorney. Speak to me of thy principal female character, be she heroine or no.’ ‘My lord,’ I answered, ‘there is no female character.’ ‘Then out upon thyself and thy book too!’ he cried. ‘Thou hadst best burn it!’ — and so out in great dudgeon, whilst I fell to mourning over my poor romance, which was thus, as it were, sentenced to death before its birth. Yet there are a thousand now who have read of Robin and his man Friday, to one who has heard of my Lord of Rochester.”

“Very true, Defoe,” said a genial-looking man in a red waistcoat, who was sitting at the modern end of the table. “But all this won’t help our good friend Smith in making a start at his story, which, I believe, was the reason why we assembled.”

“The Dickens it is!” stammered a little man beside him, and everybody laughed, especially the genial man, who cried out, “Charley Lamb, Charley Lamb, you’ll never alter. You would make a pun if you were hanged for it.”

“That would be a case of haltering,” returned the other, on which everybody laughed again.

By this time I had begun to dimly realise in my confused brain the enormous honour which had been done me. The greatest masters of fiction in every age of English letters had apparently made a rendezvous beneath my roof, in order to assist me in my difficulties. There were many faces at the table whom I was unable to identify; but when I looked hard at others I often found them to be very familiar to me, whether from paintings or from mere description. Thus between the first two speakers, who had betrayed themselves as Defoe and Smollett, there sat a dark, saturnine corpulent old man, with harsh prominent features, who I was sure could be none other than the famous author of Gulliver. There were several others of whom I was not so sure, sitting at the other side of the table, but I conjecture that both Fielding and Richardson were among them, and I could swear to the lantern-jaws and cadaverous visage of Lawrence Sterne. Higher up I could see among the crowd the high forehead of Sir Walter Scott, the masculine features of George Eliott, and the flattened nose of Thackeray; while amongst the living I recognised James Payn, Walter Besant, the lady known as "Ouida," Robert Louis Stevenson, and several of lesser note. Never before, probably, had such an assemblage of choice spirits gathered under one roof.

"Well," said Sir Walter Scott, speaking with a pronounced accent, "ye ken the auld proverb, sirs, 'Ower mony cooks,' or as the Border minstrel sang —

'Black Johnstone wi' his troopers ten
  Might mak' the heart turn cauld,
But Johnstone when he's a' alane
  Is waur ten thoosand fauld.'

The Johnstones were one of the Redesdale families, second cousins of the Armstrongs, and connected by marriage to — —"

"Perhaps, Sir Walter," interrupted Thackeray, "you would take the responsibility off our hands by yourself dictating the commencement of a story to this young literary aspirant."

"Na, na!" cried Sir Walter; "I'll do my share, but there's Chairlie over there as full o' wut as a Radical's full o' treason. He's the laddie to give a cheery opening to it."

Dickens was shaking his head, and apparently about to refuse the honour, when a voice from among the moderns — I could not see who it was for the crowd — said:

"Suppose we begin at the end of the table and work round, any one contributing a little as the fancy seizes him?"

"Agreed! agreed!" cried the whole company; and every eye was turned on Defoe, who seemed very uneasy, and filled his pipe from a great tobacco-box in front of him.

"Nay, gossips," he said, "there are others more worthy — —" But he was interrupted by loud cries of "No! no!" from the whole table; and Smollett shouted out, "Stand to it, Dan — stand to it! You and I and the Dean here will make three short tacks just to fetch her out of harbour, and then she may drift where she pleases." Thus encouraged, Defoe cleared his throat, and began in this way, talking between the puffs of his pipe: —

"My father was a well-to-do yeoman of Cheshire, named Cyprian Overbeck, but, marrying about the year 1617, he assumed the name of his wife's family, which was Wells; and thus I, their eldest son, was named Cyprian Overbeck Wells. The farm was a very fertile one, and contained some of the best grazing land in those parts, so that my father was enabled to lay by money to the extent of a thousand crowns, which he laid out in an adventure to the Indies with such surprising success that in less than three years it had increased fourfold. Thus encouraged, he bought a part share of the trader, and, fitting her out once more with such commodities as were most in demand (viz., old muskets, hangers and axes, besides glasses, needles, and the like), he placed me on board as supercargo to look after his interests, and despatched us upon our voyage.

"We had a fair wind as far as Cape de Verde, and there, getting into the north-west trade-winds, made good progress down the African coast. Beyond sighting a Barbary rover once, whereat our mariners were in sad distress, counting themselves already as little better than slaves, we had good luck until we had come within a hundred leagues of the Cape of Good Hope, when the wind veered round to the southward and blew exceeding hard, while the sea rose to such a height that the end of the mainyard dipped into the water, and I heard the master say that though he had been at sea for five-and-thirty years he had never seen the like of it, and that he had little expectation of riding through it. On this I fell to wringing my hands and bewailing myself, until the mast going by the board with a crash, I thought that the ship had struck, and swooned with terror, falling into the scuppers and lying like one dead, which was the saving of me, as will appear in the sequel. For the mariners, giving up all hope of saving the ship, and being in momentary expectation that she would founder, pushed off in the long-boat, whereby I fear that they met the fate which they hoped to avoid, since I have never from that day heard anything of them. For my own part, on recovering from the swoon into which I had fallen, I found that, by the mercy of Providence, the sea had gone down, and that I was alone in the vessel. At which last discovery I was so terror-struck that I could but stand wringing my hands and bewailing my sad fate, until at last taking heart, I fell to comparing my lot with that of my unhappy camerados, on which I became more cheerful, and descending to the cabin, made a meal off such dainties as were in the captain's locker."

Having got so far, Defoe remarked that he thought he had given them a fair start, and handed over the story to Dean Swift, who, after premising that he feared he would find himself as much at sea as Master Cyprian Overbeck Wells, continued in this way: —

"For two days I drifted about in great distress, fearing that there should be a return of the gale, and keeping an eager look-out for my late companions. Upon the third day, towards evening, I observed to my extreme surprise that the ship was under the influence of a very powerful current, which ran to the north-east with such violence that she was carried, now bows on, now stern on, and occasionally drifting sideways like a crab, at a rate which I cannot compute at less than twelve or fifteen knots an hour. For several weeks I was borne away in this manner, until one morning, to my inexpressible joy, I sighted an island upon the starboard quarter. The current would, however, have carried me past it had I not made shift, though single-handed, to set the flying-jib so as to turn her bows, and then clapping on the sprit-sail, studding-sail, and fore-sail, I clewed up the halliards upon the port side, and put the wheel down hard a-starboard, the wind being at the time north-east-half-east."

At the description of this nautical manoeuvre I observed that Smollett grinned, and a gentleman who was sitting higher up the table in the uniform of the Royal Navy, and who I guessed to be Captain Marryat, became very uneasy and fidgeted in his seat.

"By this means I got clear of the current and was able to steer within a quarter of a mile of the beach, which indeed I might have approached still nearer by making another tack, but being an excellent swimmer, I deemed it best to leave the vessel, which was almost waterlogged, and to make the best of my way to the shore.

"I had had my doubts hitherto as to whether this new-found country was inhabited or no, but as I approached nearer to it, being on the summit of a great wave, I perceived a number of figures on the beach, engaged apparently in watching me and my vessel. My joy, however, was considerably lessened when on reaching the land I found that the figures consisted of a vast concourse of animals of various sorts who were standing about in groups, and who hurried down to the water's edge to meet me. I had scarce put my foot upon the sand before I was surrounded by an eager crowd of deer, dogs, wild boars, buffaloes, and other creatures, none of whom showed the least fear either of me or of each other, but, on the contrary, were animated by a common feeling of curiosity, as well as, it would appear, by some degree of disgust."

"A second edition," whispered Lawrence Sterne to his neighbour; "Gulliver served up cold."

"Did you speak, sir?" asked the Dean very sternly, having evidently overheard the remark.

"My words were not addressed to you, sir," answered Sterne, looking rather frightened.

"They were none the less insolent," roared the Dean. "Your reverence would fain make a Sentimental Journey of the narrative, I doubt not, and find pathos in a dead donkey — though faith, no man can blame thee for mourning over thy own kith and kin."

"Better that than to wallow in all the filth of Yahoo-land," returned Sterne warmly, and a quarrel would certainly have ensued but for the interposition of the remainder of the company. As it was, the Dean refused indignantly to have any further hand in the story, and Sterne also stood out of it, remarking with a sneer that he was loth to fit a good blade on to a poor handle. Under these circumstances some further unpleasantness might have occurred had not Smollett rapidly taken up the narrative, continuing it in the third person instead of the first: —

"Our hero, being considerably alarmed at this strange reception, lost little time in plunging into the sea again and regaining his vessel, being convinced that the worst which might befall him from the elements would be as nothing compared to the dangers of this mysterious island. It was as well that he took this course, for before nightfall his ship was overhauled and he himself picked up by a British man-of-war, the Lightning, then returning from the West Indies, where it had formed part of the fleet under the command of Admiral Benbow. Young Wells, being a likely lad enough, well-spoken and high-spirited, was at once entered on the books as officer's servant, in which capacity he both gained great popularity on account of the freedom of his manners, and found an opportunity for indulging in those practical pleasantries for which he had all his life been famous.

"Among the quartermasters of the Lightning there was one named Jedediah Anchorstock, whose appearance was so remarkable that it quickly attracted the attention of our hero. He was a man of about fifty, dark with exposure to the weather, and so tall that as he came along the 'tween decks he had to bend himself nearly double. The most striking peculiarity of this individual was, however, that in his boyhood some evil-minded person had tattooed eyes all over his countenance with such marvellous skill that it was difficult at a short distance to pick out his real ones among so many counterfeits. On this strange personage Master Cyprian determined to exercise his talents for mischief, the more so as he learned that he was extremely superstitious, and also that he had left behind him in Portsmouth a strong-minded spouse of whom he stood in mortal terror. With this object he secured one of the sheep which were kept on board for the officers' table, and pouring a can of rumbo down its throat, reduced it to a state of utter intoxication. He then conveyed it to Anchorstock's berth, and with the assistance of some other imps, as mischievous as himself, dressed it up in a high nightcap and gown, and covered it over with the bedclothes.

"When the quartermaster came down from his watch our hero met him at the door of his berth with an agitated face. 'Mr. Anchorstock,' said he, 'can it be that your wife is on board?' 'Wife!' roared the astonished sailor. 'Ye white-faced swab, what d'ye mean?' 'If she's not here in the ship it must be her ghost,' said Cyprian, shaking his head gloomily. 'In the ship! How in thunder could she get into the ship? Why, master, I believe as how you're weak in the upper works, d'ye see? to as much as think o' such a thing. My Poll is moored head and starn, behind the point at Portsmouth, more'n two thousand mile away.' 'Upon my word,' said our hero, very earnestly, 'I saw a female look out of your cabin not five minutes ago.' 'Ay, ay, Mr. Anchorstock,' joined in several of the conspirators. 'We all saw her — a spanking-looking craft with a dead-light mounted on one side.' 'Sure enough,' said Anchorstock, staggered by this accumulation of evidence, 'my Polly's starboard eye was doused for ever by long Sue Williams of the Hard. But if so be as she be there I must see her, be she ghost or quick;' with which the honest sailor, in much perturbation and trembling in every limb, began to shuffle forward into the cabin, holding the light well in front of him. It chanced, however, that the unhappy sheep, which was quietly engaged in sleeping off the effects of its unusual potations, was awakened by the noise of this approach, and finding herself in such an unusual position, sprang out of the bed and rushed furiously for the door, bleating wildly, and rolling about like a brig in a tornado, partly from intoxication and partly from the night-dress which impeded her movements. As Anchorstock saw this extraordinary apparition bearing down upon him, he uttered a yell and fell flat upon his face, convinced that he had to do with a supernatural visitor, the more so as the confederates heightened the effect by a chorus of most ghastly groans and cries.

“The joke had nearly gone beyond what was originally intended, for the quartermaster lay as one dead, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could be brought to his senses. To the end of the voyage he stoutly asserted that he had seen the distant Mrs. Anchorstock, remarking with many oaths that though he was too woundily scared to take much note of the features, there was no mistaking the strong smell of rum which was characteristic of his better half.

“It chanced shortly after this to be the king’s birthday, an event which was signalised aboard the Lightening by the death of the commander under singular circumstances. This officer, who was a real fair-weather Jack, hardly knowing the ship’s keel from her ensign, had obtained his position through parliamentary interest, and used it with such tyranny and cruelty that he was universally execrated. So unpopular was he that when a plot was entered into by the whole crew to punish his misdeeds with death, he had not a single friend among six hundred souls to warn him of his danger. It was the custom on board the king’s ships that upon his birthday the entire ship’s company should be drawn up upon deck, and that at a signal they should discharge their muskets into the air in honour of his Majesty. On this occasion word had been secretly passed round for every man to slip a slug into his firelock, instead of the blank cartridge provided. On the boatswain blowing his whistle the men mustered upon deck and formed line, whilst the captain, standing well in front of them, delivered a few words to them. ‘When I give the word,’ he concluded, ‘you shall discharge your pieces, and by thunder, if any man is a second before or a second after his fellows I shall trice him up to the weather rigging!’ With these words he roared ‘Fire!’ on which every man levelled his musket straight at his head and pulled the trigger. So accurate was the aim and so short the distance, that more than five hundred bullets struck him simultaneously, blowing away his head and a large portion of his body. There were so many concerned in this matter, and it was so hopeless to trace it to any individual, that the officers were unable to punish any one for the affair — the more readily as the captain's haughty ways and heartless conduct had made him quite as hateful to them as to the men whom they commanded.

"By his pleasantries and the natural charm of his manners our hero so far won the good wishes of the ship's company that they parted with infinite regret upon their arrival in England. Filial duty, however, urged him to return home and report himself to his father, with which object he posted from Portsmouth to London, intending to proceed thence to Shropshire. As it chanced, however, one of the horses sprained his off foreleg while passing through Chichester, and as no change could be obtained, Cyprian found himself compelled to put up at the Crown and Bull for the night.

"Ods bodikins!" continued Smollett, laughing, "I never could pass a comfortable hostel without stopping, and so, with your permission, I'll e'en stop here, and whoever wills may lead friend Cyprian to his further adventures. Do you, Sir Walter, give us a touch of the Wizard of the North."

With these words Smollett produced a pipe, and filling it at Defoe's tobacco-pot, waited patiently for the continuation of the story.

"If I must, I must," remarked the illustrious Scotchman, taking a pinch of snuff; "but I must beg leave to put Mr. Wells back a few hundred years, for of all things I love the true mediaeval smack. To proceed then: —

"Our hero, being anxious to continue his journey, and learning that it would be some time before any conveyance would be ready, determined to push on alone mounted on his gallant grey steed. Travelling was particularly dangerous at that time, for besides the usual perils which beset wayfarers, the southern parts of England were in a lawless and disturbed state which bordered on insurrection. The young man, however, having loosened his sword in his sheath, so as to be ready for every eventuality, galloped cheerily upon his way, guiding himself to the best of his ability by the light of the rising moon.

"He had not gone far before he realised that the cautions which had been impressed upon him by the landlord, and which he had been inclined to look upon as self-interested advice, were only too well justified. At a spot where the road was particularly rough, and ran across some marsh land, he perceived a short distance from him a dark shadow, which his practised eye detected at once as a body of crouching men. Reining up his horse within a few yards of the ambuscade, he wrapped his cloak round his bridle-arm and summoned the party to stand forth.

"'What ho, my masters!' he cried. 'Are beds so scarce, then, that ye must hamper the high road of the king with your bodies? Now, by St. Ursula of Alpuxerra, there be those who might think that birds who fly o' nights were after higher game than the moorhen or the woodcock!'

"'Blades and targets, comrades!' exclaimed a tall powerful man, springing into the centre of the road with several companions, and standing in front of the frightened horse. 'Who is this swashbuckler who summons his Majesty's lieges from their repose? A very soldado, o' truth. Hark ye, sir, or my lord, or thy grace, or whatsoever title your honour's honour may be pleased to approve, thou must curb thy tongue play, or by the seven witches of Gambleside thou may find thyself in but a sorry plight.'

"'I prythee, then, that thou wilt expound to me who and what ye are,' quoth our hero, 'and whether your purpose be such as an honest man may approve of. As to your threats, they turn from my mind as your caitiffly weapons would shiver upon my hauberk from Milan.'

"'Nay, Allen,' interrupted one of the party, addressing him who seemed to be their leader; 'this is a lad of mettle, and such a one as our honest Jack longs for. But we lure not hawks with empty hands. Look ye, sir, there is game afoot which it may need such bold hunters as thyself to follow. Come with us and take a firkin of canary, and we will find better work for that glaive of thine than getting its owner into broil and bloodshed; for, by my troth! Milan or no Milan, if my curtel axe do but ring against that morion of thine it will be an ill day for thy father's son.'

"For a moment our hero hesitated as to whether it would best become his knightly traditions to hurl himself against his enemies, or whether it might not be better to obey their requests. Prudence, mingled with a large share of curiosity, eventually carried the day, and dismounting from his horse, he intimated that he was ready to follow his captors.

"'Spoken like a man!' cried he whom they addressed as Allen. 'Jack Cade will be right glad of such a recruit. Blood and carrion! but thou hast the thews of a young ox; and I swear, by the haft of my sword, that it might have gone ill with some of us hadst thou not listened to reason!'

"'Nay, not so, good Allen — not so,' squeaked a very small man, who had remained in the background while there was any prospect of a fray, but who now came pushing to the front. 'Hadst thou been alone it might indeed have been so, perchance, but an expert swordsman can disarm at pleasure such a one as this young knight. Well I remember in the Palatinate how I clove to the chine even such another — the Baron von Slogstaff. He struck at me, look ye, so; but I, with buckler and blade, did, as one might say, deflect it; and then, countering in carte, I returned in tierce, and so — St. Agnes save us! who comes here?'

"The apparition which frightened the loquacious little man was sufficiently strange to cause a qualm even in the bosom of the knight. Through the darkness there loomed a figure which appeared to be of gigantic size, and a hoarse voice, issuing apparently some distance above the heads of the party, broke roughly on the silence of the night.

"'Now out upon thee, Thomas Allen, and foul be thy fate if thou hast abandoned thy post without good and sufficient cause. By St. Anselm of the Holy Grove, thou hadst best have never been born than rouse my spleen this night. Wherefore is it that you and your men are trailing over the moor like a flock of geese when Michaelmas is near?'

"'Good captain,' said Allen, doffing his bonnet, an example followed by others of the band, 'we have captured a goodly youth who was pricking it along the London road. Methought that some word of thanks were meet reward for such service, rather than taunt or threat.'

"'Nay, take it not to heart, bold Allen,' exclaimed their leader, who was none other than the great Jack Cade himself. 'Thou knowest of old that my temper is somewhat choleric, and my tongue not greased with that unguent which oils the mouths of the lip-serving lords of the land. And you,' he continued, turning suddenly upon our hero, 'are you ready to join the great cause which will make England what it was when the learned Alfred reigned in the land? Zounds, man, speak out, and pick not your phrases.'

"'I am ready to do aught which may become a knight and a gentleman,' said the soldier stoutly.

"'Taxes shall be swept away!' cried Cade excitedly—'the impost and the anpost — the tithe and the hundred-tax. The poor man's salt-box and flour-bin shall be as free as the nobleman's cellar. Ha! what sayest thou?'

"'It is but just,' said our hero.

"'Ay, but they give us such justice as the falcon gives the leveret!' roared the orator. 'Down with them, I say — down with every man of them! Noble and judge, priest and king, down with them all!'

"'Nay,' said Sir Overbeck Wells, drawing himself up to his full height, and laying his hand upon the hilt of his sword, 'there I cannot follow thee, but must rather defy thee as traitor and faineant, seeing that thou art no true man, but one who would usurp the rights of our master the king, whom may the Virgin protect!'

"At these bold words, and the defiance which they conveyed, the rebels seemed for a moment utterly bewildered; but, encouraged by the hoarse shout of their leader, they brandished their weapons and prepared to fall upon the knight, who placed himself in a posture for defence and awaited their attack.

"There now!" cried Sir Walter, rubbing his hands and chuckling, "I've put the chiel in a pretty warm corner, and we'll see which of you moderns can take him oot o't. Ne'er a word more will ye get frae me to help him one way or the other."

"You try your hand, James," cried several voices, and the author in question had got so far as to make an allusion to a solitary horseman who was approaching, when he was interrupted by a tall gentleman a little farther down with a slight stutter and a very nervous manner.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I fancy that I may be able to do something here. Some of my humble productions have been said to excel Sir Walter at his best, and I was undoubtedly stronger all round. I could picture modern society as well as ancient; and as to my plays, why Shakespeare never came near 'The Lady of Lyons' for popularity. There is this little thing — —" (Here he rummaged among a great pile of papers in front of him). "Ah! that's a report of mine, when I was in India! Here it is. No, this is one of my speeches in the House, and this is my criticism on Tennyson. Didn't I warm him up? I can't find what I wanted, but of course you have read them all —'Rienzi,' and 'Harold,' and 'The Last of the Barons.' Every schoolboy knows them by heart, as poor Macaulay would have said. Allow me to give you a sample: —

"In spite of the gallant knight's valiant resistance the combat was too unequal to be sustained. His sword was broken by a slash from a brown bill, and he was borne to the ground. He expected immediate death, but such did not seem to be the intention of the ruffians who had captured him. He was placed upon the back of his own charger and borne, bound hand and foot, over the trackless moor, in the fastnesses of which the rebels secreted themselves.

"In the depths of these wilds there stood a stone building which had once been a farm-house, but having been for some reason abandoned had fallen into ruin, and had now become the headquarters of Cade and his men. A large cowhouse near the farm had been utilised as sleeping quarters, and some rough attempts had been made to shield the principal room of the main building from the weather by stopping up the gaping apertures in the walls. In this apartment was spread out a rough meal for the returning rebels, and our hero was thrown, still bound, into an empty outhouse, there to await his fate."

Sir Walter had been listening with the greatest impatience to Bulwer Lytton's narrative, but when it had reached this point he broke in impatiently.

"We want a touch of your own style, man," he said. "The animal-magnetico-electro-hysterical-biological-mysterious sort of story is all your own, but at present you are just a poor copy of myself, and nothing more."

There was a murmur of assent from the company, and Defoe remarked, "Truly, Master Lytton, there is a plaguey resemblance in the style, which may indeed be but a chance, and yet methinks it is sufficiently marked to warrant such words as our friend hath used."

"Perhaps you will think that this is an imitation also," said Lytton bitterly, and leaning back in his chair with a morose countenance, he continued the narrative in this way: —

"Our unfortunate hero had hardly stretched himself upon the straw with which his dungeon was littered, when a secret door opened in the wall and a venerable old man swept majestically into the apartment. The prisoner gazed upon him with astonishment not unmixed with awe, for on his broad brow was printed the seal of much knowledge — such knowledge as it is not granted to the son of man to know. He was clad in a long white robe, crossed and chequered with mystic devices in the Arabic character, while a high scarlet tiara marked with the square and circle enhanced his venerable appearance. 'My son,' he said, turning his piercing and yet dreamy gaze upon Sir Overbeck, 'all things lead to nothing, and nothing is the foundation of all things. Cosmos is impenetrable. Why then should we exist?'

"Astounded at this weighty query, and at the philosophic demeanour of his visitor, our hero made shift to bid him welcome and to demand his name and quality. As the old man answered him his voice rose and fell in musical cadences, like the sighing of the east wind, while an ethereal and aromatic vapour pervaded the apartment.

"'I am the eternal non-ego,' he answered. 'I am the concentrated negative — the everlasting essence of nothing. You see in me that which existed before the beginning of matter many years before the commencement of time. I am the algebraic *x* which represents the infinite divisibility of a finite particle.'

"Sir Overbeck felt a shudder as though an ice-cold hand had been placed upon his brow. 'What is your message?' he whispered, falling prostrate before his mysterious visitor.

"'To tell you that the eternities beget chaos, and that the immensities are at the mercy of the divine ananke. Infinitude crouches before a personality. The mercurial essence is the prime mover in spirituality, and the thinker is powerless before the pulsating inanity. The cosmical procession is terminated only by the unknowable and unpronounceable' ——

"May I ask, Mr. Smollett, what you find to laugh at?"

"Gad zooks, master," cried Smollett, who had been sniggering for some time back. "It seems to me that there is little danger of any one venturing to dispute that style with you."

"It's all your own," murmured Sir Walter.

"And very pretty, too," quoth Lawrence Sterne, with a malignant grin. "Pray sir, what language do you call it?"

Lytton was so enraged at these remarks, and at the favour with which they appeared to be received, that he endeavoured to stutter out some reply, and then, losing control of himself completely, picked up all his loose papers and strode out of the room, dropping pamphlets and speeches at every step. This incident amused the company so much that they laughed for several minutes without cessation. Gradually the sound of their laughter sounded more and more harshly in my ears, the lights on the table grew dim and the company more misty, until they and their symposium vanished away altogether. I was sitting before the embers of what had been a roaring fire, but was now little more than a heap of grey ashes, and the merry laughter of the august company had changed to the recriminations of my wife, who was shaking me violently by the shoulder and exhorting me to choose some more seasonable spot for my slumbers. So ended the wondrous adventures of Master Cyprian Overbeck Wells, but I still live in the hopes that in some future dream the great masters may themselves finish that which they have begun.

JOHN BARRINGTON COWLES.

It might seem rash of me to say that I ascribe the death of my poor friend, John Barrington Cowles, to any preternatural agency. I am aware that in the present state of public feeling a chain of evidence would require to be strong indeed before the possibility of such a conclusion could be admitted.

I shall therefore merely state the circumstances which led up to this sad event as concisely and as plainly as I can, and leave every reader to draw his own deductions. Perhaps there may be some one who can throw light upon what is dark to me.

I first met Barrington Cowles when I went up to Edinburgh University to take out medical classes there. My landlady in Northumberland Street had a large house, and, being a widow without children, she gained a livelihood by providing accommodation for several students.

Barrington Cowles happened to have taken a bedroom upon the same floor as mine, and when we came to know each other better we shared a small sitting-room, in which we took our meals. In this manner we originated a friendship which was unmarred by the slightest disagreement up to the day of his death.

Cowles’ father was the colonel of a Sikh regiment and had remained in India for many years. He allowed his son a handsome income, but seldom gave any other sign of parental affection — writing irregularly and briefly.

My friend, who had himself been born in India, and whose whole disposition was an ardent tropical one, was much hurt by this neglect. His mother was dead, and he had no other relation in the world to supply the blank.

Thus he came in time to concentrate all his affection upon me, and to confide in me in a manner which is rare among men. Even when a stronger and deeper passion came upon him, it never infringed upon the old tenderness between us.

Cowles was a tall, slim young fellow, with an olive, Velasquez-like face, and dark, tender eyes. I have seldom seen a man who was more likely to excite a woman’s interest, or to captivate her imagination. His expression was, as a rule, dreamy, and even languid; but if in conversation a subject arose which interested him he would be all animation in a moment. On such occasions his colour would heighten, his eyes gleam, and he could speak with an eloquence which would carry his audience with him.

In spite of these natural advantages he led a solitary life, avoiding female society, and reading with great diligence. He was one of the foremost men of his year, taking the senior medal for anatomy, and the Neil Arnott prize for physics.

How well I can recollect the first time we met her! Often and often I have recalled the circumstances, and tried to remember what the exact impression was which she produced on my mind at the time.

After we came to know her my judgment was warped, so that I am curious to recollect what my unbiassed{sic} instincts were. It is hard, however, to eliminate the feelings which reason or prejudice afterwards raised in me.

It was at the opening of the Royal Scottish Academy in the spring of 1879. My poor friend was passionately attached to art in every form, and a pleasing chord in music or a delicate effect upon canvas would give exquisite pleasure to his highly-strung nature. We had gone together to see the pictures, and were standing in the grand central salon, when I noticed an extremely beautiful woman standing at the other side of the room. In my whole life I have never seen such a classically perfect countenance. It was the real Greek type — the forehead broad, very low, and as white as marble, with a cloudlet of delicate locks wreathing round it, the nose straight and clean cut, the lips inclined to thinness, the chin and lower jaw beautifully rounded off, and yet sufficiently developed to promise unusual strength of character.

But those eyes — those wonderful eyes! If I could but give some faint idea of their varying moods, their steely hardness, their feminine softness, their power of command, their penetrating intensity suddenly melting away into an expression of womanly weakness — but I am speaking now of future impressions!

There was a tall, yellow-haired young man with this lady, whom I at once recognised as a law student with whom I had a slight acquaintance.

Archibald Reeves — for that was his name — was a dashing, handsome young fellow, and had at one time been a ringleader in every university escapade; but of late I had seen little of him, and the report was that he was engaged to be married. His companion was, then, I presumed, his fiancee. I seated myself upon the velvet settee in the centre of the room, and furtively watched the couple from behind my catalogue.

The more I looked at her the more her beauty grew upon me. She was somewhat short in stature, it is true; but her figure was perfection, and she bore herself in such a fashion that it was only by actual comparison that one would have known her to be under the medium height.

As I kept my eyes upon them, Reeves was called away for some reason, and the young lady was left alone. Turning her back to the pictures, she passed the time until the return of her escort in taking a deliberate survey of the company, without paying the least heed to the fact that a dozen pair of eyes, attracted by her elegance and beauty, were bent curiously upon her. With one of her hands holding the red silk cord which railed off the pictures, she stood languidly moving her eyes from face to face with as little self-consciousness as if she were looking at the canvas creatures behind her. Suddenly, as I watched her, I saw her gaze become fixed, and, as it were, intense. I followed the direction of her looks, wondering what could have attracted her so strongly.

John Barrington Cowles was standing before a picture — one, I think, by Noel Paton — I know that the subject was a noble and ethereal one. His profile was turned towards us, and never have I seen him to such advantage. I have said that he was a strikingly handsome man, but at that moment he looked absolutely magnificent. It was evident that he had momentarily forgotten his surroundings, and that his whole soul was in sympathy with the picture before him. His eyes sparkled, and a dusky pink shone through his clear olive cheeks. She continued to watch him fixedly, with a look of interest upon her face, until he came out of his reverie with a start, and turned abruptly round, so that his gaze met hers. She glanced away at once, but his eyes remained fixed upon her for some moments. The picture was forgotten already, and his soul had come down to earth once more.

We caught sight of her once or twice before we left, and each time I noticed my friend look after her. He made no remark, however, until we got out into the open air, and were walking arm-in-arm along Princes Street.

“Did you notice that beautiful woman, in the dark dress, with the white fur?” he asked.

“Yes, I saw her,” I answered.

“Do you know her?” he asked eagerly. “Have you any idea who she is?”

“I don’t know her personally,” I replied. “But I have no doubt I could find out all about her, for I believe she is engaged to young Archie Reeves, and he and I have a lot of mutual friends.”

“Engaged!” ejaculated Cowles.

“Why, my dear boy,” I said, laughing, “you don’t mean to say you are so susceptible that the fact that a girl to whom you never spoke in your life is engaged is enough to upset you?”

“Well, not exactly to upset me,” he answered, forcing a laugh. “But I don’t mind telling you, Armitage, that I never was so taken by any one in my life. It wasn’t the mere beauty of the face — though that was perfect enough — but it was the character and the intellect upon it. I hope, if she is engaged, that it is to some man who will be worthy of her.”

“Why,” I remarked, “you speak quite feelingly. It is a clear case of love at first sight, Jack. However, to put your perturbed spirit at rest, I’ll make a point of finding out all about her whenever I meet any fellow who is likely to know.”

Barrington Cowles thanked me, and the conversation drifted off into other channels. For several days neither of us made any allusion to the subject, though my companion was perhaps a little more dreamy and distraught than usual. The incident had almost vanished from my remembrance, when one day young Brodie, who is a second cousin of mine, came up to me on the university steps with the face of a bearer of tidings.

“I say,” he began, “you know Reeves, don’t you?”

“Yes. What of him?”

“His engagement is off.”

“Off!” I cried. “Why, I only learned the other day that it was on.”

“Oh, yes — it’s all off. His brother told me so. Deucedly mean of Reeves, you know, if he has backed out of it, for she was an uncommonly nice girl.”

“I’ve seen her,” I said; “but I don’t know her name.”

“She is a Miss Northcott, and lives with an old aunt of hers in Abercrombie Place. Nobody knows anything about her people, or where she comes from. Anyhow, she is about the most unlucky girl in the world, poor soul!”

“Why unlucky?”

“Well, you know, this was her second engagement,” said young Brodie, who had a marvellous knack of knowing everything about everybody. “She was engaged to Prescott — William Prescott, who died. That was a very sad affair. The wedding day was fixed, and the whole thing looked as straight as a die when the smash came.”

“What smash?” I asked, with some dim recollection of the circumstances.

“Why, Prescott’s death. He came to Abercrombie Place one night, and stayed very late. No one knows exactly when he left, but about one in the morning a fellow who knew him met him walking rapidly in the direction of the Queen’s Park. He bade him good night, but Prescott hurried on without heeding him, and that was the last time he was ever seen alive. Three days afterwards his body was found floating in St. Margaret’s Loch, under St. Anthony’s Chapel. No one could ever understand it, but of course the verdict brought it in as temporary insanity.”

“It was very strange,” I remarked.

“Yes, and deucedly rough on the poor girl,” said Brodie. “Now that this other blow has come it will quite crush her. So gentle and ladylike she is too!”

“You know her personally, then!” I asked.

“Oh, yes, I know her. I have met her several times. I could easily manage that you should be introduced to her.”

“Well,” I answered, “it’s not so much for my own sake as for a friend of mine. However, I don’t suppose she will go out much for some little time after this. When she does I will take advantage of your offer.”

We shook hands on this, and I thought no more of the matter for some time.

The next incident which I have to relate as bearing at all upon the question of Miss Northcott is an unpleasant one. Yet I must detail it as accurately as possible, since it may throw some light upon the sequel. One cold night, several months after the conversation with my second cousin which I have quoted above, I was walking down one of the lowest streets in the city on my way back from a case which I had been attending. It was very late, and I was picking my way among the dirty loungers who were clustering round the doors of a great gin-palace, when a man staggered out from among them, and held out his hand to me with a drunken leer. The gaslight fell full upon his face, and, to my intense astonishment, I recognised in the degraded creature before me my former acquaintance, young Archibald Reeves, who had once been famous as one of the most dressy and particular men in the whole college. I was so utterly surprised that for a moment I almost doubted the evidence of my own senses; but there was no mistaking those features, which, though bloated with drink, still retained something of their former comeliness. I was determined to rescue him, for one night at least, from the company into which he had fallen.

“Holloa, Reeves!” I said. “Come along with me. I’m going in your direction.”

He muttered some incoherent apology for his condition, and took my arm. As I supported him towards his lodgings I could see that he was not only suffering from the effects of a recent debauch, but that a long course of intemperance had affected his nerves and his brain. His hand when I touched it was dry and feverish, and he started from every shadow which fell upon the pavement. He rambled in his speech, too, in a manner which suggested the delirium of disease rather than the talk of a drunkard.

When I got him to his lodgings I partially undressed him and laid him upon his bed. His pulse at this time was very high, and he was evidently extremely feverish. He seemed to have sunk into a doze; and I was about to steal out of the room to warn his landlady of his condition, when he started up and caught me by the sleeve of my coat.

“Don’t go!” he cried. “I feel better when you are here. I am safe from her then.”

“From her!” I said. “From whom?”

“Her! her!” he answered peevishly. “Ah! you don’t know her. She is the devil! Beautiful — beautiful; but the devil!”

“You are feverish and excited,” I said. “Try and get a little sleep. You will wake better.”

“Sleep!” he groaned. “How am I to sleep when I see her sitting down yonder at the foot of the bed with her great eyes watching and watching hour after hour? I tell you it saps all the strength and manhood out of me. That’s what makes me drink. God help me — I’m half drunk now!”

“You are very ill,” I said, putting some vinegar to his temples; “and you are delirious. You don’t know what you say.”

“Yes, I do,” he interrupted sharply, looking up at me. “I know very well what I say. I brought it upon myself. It is my own choice. But I couldn’t — no, by heaven, I couldn’t — accept the alternative. I couldn’t keep my faith to her. It was more than man could do.”

I sat by the side of the bed, holding one of his burning hands in mine, and wondering over his strange words. He lay still for some time, and then, raising his eyes to me, said in a most plaintive voice —

"Why did she not give me warning sooner? Why did she wait until I had learned to love her so?"

He repeated this question several times, rolling his feverish head from side to side, and then he dropped into a troubled sleep. I crept out of the room, and, having seen that he would be properly cared for, left the house. His words, however, rang in my ears for days afterwards, and assumed a deeper significance when taken with what was to come.

My friend, Barrington Cowles, had been away for his summer holidays, and I had heard nothing of him for several months. When the winter session came on, however, I received a telegram from him, asking me to secure the old rooms in Northumberland Street for him, and telling me the train by which he would arrive. I went down to meet him, and was delighted to find him looking wonderfully hearty and well.

"By the way," he said suddenly, that night, as we sat in our chairs by the fire, talking over the events of the holidays, "you have never congratulated me yet!"

"On what, my boy?" I asked.

"What! Do you mean to say you have not heard of my engagement?"

"Engagement! No!" I answered. "However, I am delighted to hear it, and congratulate you with all my heart."

"I wonder it didn't come to your ears," he said. "It was the queerest thing. You remember that girl whom we both admired so much at the Academy?"

"What!" I cried, with a vague feeling of apprehension at my heart. "You don't mean to say that you are engaged to her?"

"I thought you would be surprised," he answered. "When I was staying with an old aunt of mine in Peterhead, in Aberdeenshire, the Northcotts happened to come there on a visit, and as we had mutual friends we soon met. I found out that it was a false alarm about her being engaged, and then — well, you know what it is when you are thrown into the society of such a girl in a place like Peterhead. Not, mind you," he added, "that I consider I did a foolish or hasty thing. I have never regretted it for a moment. The more I know Kate the more I admire her and love her. However, you must be introduced to her, and then you will form your own opinion."

I expressed my pleasure at the prospect, and endeavoured to speak as lightly as I could to Cowles upon the subject, but I felt depressed and anxious at heart. The words of Reeves and the unhappy fate of young Prescott recurred to my recollection, and though I could assign no tangible reason for it, a vague, dim fear and distrust of the woman took possession of me. It may be that this was foolish prejudice and superstition upon my part, and that I involuntarily contorted her future doings and sayings to fit into some half-formed wild theory of my own. This has been suggested to me by others as an explanation of my narrative. They are welcome to their opinion if they can reconcile it with the facts which I have to tell.

I went round with my friend a few days afterwards to call upon Miss Northcott. I remember that, as we went down Abercrombie Place, our attention was attracted by the shrill yelping of a dog — which noise proved eventually to come from the house to which we were bound. We were shown upstairs, where I was introduced to old Mrs. Merton, Miss Northcott's aunt, and to the young lady herself. She looked as beautiful as ever, and I could not wonder at my friend's infatuation. Her face was a little more flushed than usual, and she held in her hand a heavy dog-whip, with which she had been chastising a small Scotch terrier, whose cries we had heard in the street. The poor brute was cringing up against the wall, whining piteously, and evidently completely cowed.

"So Kate," said my friend, after we had taken our seats, "you have been falling out with Carlo again."

"Only a very little quarrel this time," she said, smiling charmingly. "He is a dear, good old fellow, but he needs correction now and then." Then, turning to me, "We all do that, Mr. Armitage, don't we? What a capital thing if, instead of receiving a collective punishment at the end of our lives, we were to have one at once, as the dogs do, when we did anything wicked. It would make us more careful, wouldn't it?"

I acknowledged that it would.

"Supposing that every time a man misbehaved himself a gigantic hand were to seize him, and he were lashed with a whip until he fainted" — she clenched her white fingers as she spoke, and cut out viciously with the dog-whip—"it would do more to keep him good than any number of high-minded theories of morality."

"Why, Kate," said my friend, "you are quite savage to-day."

"No, Jack," she laughed. "I'm only propounding a theory for Mr. Armitage's consideration."

The two began to chat together about some Aberdeenshire reminiscence, and I had time to observe Mrs. Merton, who had remained silent during our short conversation. She was a very strange-looking old lady. What attracted attention most in her appearance was the utter want of colour which she exhibited. Her hair was snow-white, and her face extremely pale. Her lips were bloodless, and even her eyes were of such a light tinge of blue that they hardly relieved the general pallor. Her dress was a grey silk, which harmonised with her general appearance. She had a peculiar expression of countenance, which I was unable at the moment to refer to its proper cause.

She was working at some old-fashioned piece of ornamental needlework, and as she moved her arms her dress gave forth a dry, melancholy rustling, like the sound of leaves in the autumn. There was something mournful and depressing in the sight of her. I moved my chair a little nearer, and asked her how she liked Edinburgh, and whether she had been there long.

When I spoke to her she started and looked up at me with a scared look on her face. Then I saw in a moment what the expression was which I had observed there. It was one of fear — intense and overpowering fear. It was so marked that I could have staked my life on the woman before me having at some period of her life been subjected to some terrible experience or dreadful misfortune.

“Oh, yes, I like it,” she said, in a soft, timid voice; “and we have been here long — that is, not very long. We move about a great deal.” She spoke with hesitation, as if afraid of committing herself.

“You are a native of Scotland, I presume?” I said.

“No — that is, not entirely. We are not natives of any place. We are cosmopolitan, you know.” She glanced round in the direction of Miss Northcott as she spoke, but the two were still chatting together near the window. Then she suddenly bent forward to me, with a look of intense earnestness upon her face, and said —

“Don’t talk to me any more, please. She does not like it, and I shall suffer for it afterwards. Please, don’t do it.”

I was about to ask her the reason for this strange request, but when she saw I was going to address her, she rose and walked slowly out of the room. As she did so I perceived that the lovers had ceased to talk and that Miss Northcott was looking at me with her keen, grey eyes.

“You must excuse my aunt, Mr. Armitage,” she said; “she is odd, and easily fatigued. Come over and look at my album.”

We spent some time examining the portraits. Miss Northcott’s father and mother were apparently ordinary mortals enough, and I could not detect in either of them any traces of the character which showed itself in their daughter’s face. There was one old daguerreotype, however, which arrested my attention. It represented a man of about the age of forty, and strikingly handsome. He was clean shaven, and extraordinary power was expressed upon his prominent lower jaw and firm, straight mouth. His eyes were somewhat deeply set in his head, however, and there was a snake-like flattening at the upper part of his forehead, which detracted from his appearance. I almost involuntarily, when I saw the head, pointed to it, and exclaimed —

“There is your prototype in your family, Miss Northcott.”

“Do you think so?” she said. “I am afraid you are paying me a very bad compliment. Uncle Anthony was always considered the black sheep of the family.”

“Indeed,” I answered; “my remark was an unfortunate one, then.”

“Oh, don’t mind that,” she said; “I always thought myself that he was worth all of them put together. He was an officer in the Forty-first Regiment, and he was killed in action during the Persian War — so he died nobly, at any rate.”

“That’s the sort of death I should like to die,” said Cowles, his dark eyes flashing, as they would when he was excited; “I often wish I had taken to my father’s profession instead of this vile pill-compounding drudgery.”

“Come, Jack, you are not going to die any sort of death yet,” she said, tenderly taking his hand in hers.

I could not understand the woman. There was such an extraordinary mixture of masculine decision and womanly tenderness about her, with the consciousness of something all her own in the background, that she fairly puzzled me. I hardly knew, therefore, how to answer Cowles when, as we walked down the street together, he asked the comprehensive question —

“Well, what do you think of her?”

“I think she is wonderfully beautiful,” I answered guardedly.

“That, of course,” he replied irritably. “You knew that before you came!”

“I think she is very clever too,” I remarked.

Barrington Cowles walked on for some time, and then he suddenly turned on me with the strange question —

“Do you think she is cruel? Do you think she is the sort of girl who would take a pleasure in inflicting pain?”

“Well, really,” I answered, “I have hardly had time to form an opinion.”

We then walked on for some time in silence.

“She is an old fool,” at length muttered Cowles. “She is mad.”

“Who is?” I asked.

“Why, that old woman — that aunt of Kate’s — Mrs. Merton, or whatever her name is.”

Then I knew that my poor colourless friend had been speaking to Cowles, but he never said anything more as to the nature of her communication.

My companion went to bed early that night, and I sat up a long time by the fire, thinking over all that I had seen and heard. I felt that there was some mystery about the girl — some dark fatality so strange as to defy conjecture. I thought of Prescott’s interview with her before their marriage, and the fatal termination of it. I coupled it with poor drunken Reeves’ plaintive cry, “Why did she not tell me sooner?” and with the other words he had spoken. Then my mind ran over Mrs. Merton’s warning to me, Cowles’ reference to her, and even the episode of the whip and the cringing dog.

The whole effect of my recollections was unpleasant to a degree, and yet there was no tangible charge which I could bring against the woman. It would be worse than useless to attempt to warn my friend until I had definitely made up my mind what I was to warn him against. He would treat any charge against her with scorn. What could I do? How could I get at some tangible conclusion as to her character and antecedents? No one in Edinburgh knew them except as recent acquaintances. She was an orphan, and as far as I knew she had never disclosed where her former home had been. Suddenly an idea struck me. Among my father’s friends there was a Colonel Joyce, who had served a long time in India upon the staff, and who would be likely to know most of the officers who had been out there since the Mutiny. I sat down at once, and, having trimmed the lamp, proceeded to write a letter to the Colonel. I told him that I was very curious to gain some particulars about a certain Captain Northcott, who had served in the Forty-first Foot, and who had fallen in the Persian War. I described the man as well as I could from my recollection of the daguerreotype, and then, having directed the letter, posted it that very night, after which, feeling that I had done all that could be done, I retired to bed, with a mind too anxious to allow me to sleep.

PART II.

I got an answer from Leicester, where the Colonel resided, within two days. I have it before me as I write, and copy it verbatim.

"DEAR BOB," it said, "I remember the man well. I was with him at Calcutta, and afterwards at Hyderabad. He was a curious, solitary sort of mortal; but a gallant soldier enough, for he distinguished himself at Sobraon, and was wounded, if I remember right. He was not popular in his corps — they said he was a pitiless, cold-blooded fellow, with no geniality in him. There was a rumour, too, that he was a devil-worshipper, or something of that sort, and also that he had the evil eye, which, of course, was all nonsense. He had some strange theories, I remember, about the power of the human will and the effects of mind upon matter.

"How are you getting on with your medical studies? Never forget, my boy, that your father's son has every claim upon me, and that if I can serve you in any way I am always at your command. — Ever affectionately yours,

"EDWARD JOYCE.

"P.S. — By the way, Northcott did not fall in action. He was killed after peace was declared in a crazy attempt to get some of the eternal fire from the sun-worshippers' temple. There was considerable mystery about his death."

I read this epistle over several times — at first with a feeling of satisfaction, and then with one of disappointment. I had come on some curious information, and yet hardly what I wanted. He was an eccentric man, a devil-worshipper, and rumoured to have the power of the evil eye. I could believe the young lady's eyes, when endowed with that cold, grey shimmer which I had noticed in them once or twice, to be capable of any evil which human eye ever wrought; but still the superstition was an effete one. Was there not more meaning in that sentence which followed—"He had theories of the power of the human will and of the effect of mind upon matter"? I remember having once read a quaint treatise, which I had imagined to be mere charlatanism at the time, of the power of certain human minds, and of effects produced by them at a distance.

Was Miss Northcott endowed with some exceptional power of the sort?

The idea grew upon me, and very shortly I had evidence which convinced me of the truth of the supposition.

It happened that at the very time when my mind was dwelling upon this subject, I saw a notice in the paper that our town was to be visited by Dr. Messinger, the well-known medium and mesmerist. Messinger was a man whose performance, such as it was, had been again and again pronounced to be genuine by competent judges. He was far above trickery, and had the reputation of being the soundest living authority upon the strange pseudo-sciences of animal magnetism and electro-biology. Determined, therefore, to see what the human will could do, even against all the disadvantages of glaring footlights and a public platform, I took a ticket for the first night of the performance, and went with several student friends.

We had secured one of the side boxes, and did not arrive until after the performance had begun. I had hardly taken my seat before I recognised Barrington Cowles, with his fiancee and old Mrs. Merton, sitting in the third or fourth row of the stalls. They caught sight of me at almost the same moment, and we bowed to each other. The first portion of the lecture was somewhat commonplace, the lecturer giving tricks of pure legerdemain, with one or two manifestations of mesmerism, performed upon a subject whom he had brought with him. He gave us an exhibition of clairvoyance too, throwing his subject into a trance, and then demanding particulars as to the movements of absent friends, and the whereabouts of hidden objects all of which appeared to be answered satisfactorily. I had seen all this before, however. What I wanted to see now was the effect of the lecturer's will when exerted upon some independent member of the audience.

He came round to that as the concluding exhibition in his performance. "I have shown you," he said, "that a mesmerised subject is entirely dominated by the will of the mesmeriser. He loses all power of volition, and his very thoughts are such as are suggested to him by the master-mind. The same end may be attained without any preliminary process. A strong will can, simply by virtue of its strength, take possession of a weaker one, even at a distance, and can regulate the impulses and the actions of the owner of it. If there was one man in the world who had a very much more highly-developed will than any of the rest of the human family, there is no reason why he should not be able to rule over them all, and to reduce his fellow-creatures to the condition of automatons. Happily there is such a dead level of mental power, or rather of mental weakness, among us that such a catastrophe is not likely to occur; but still within our small compass there are variations which produce surprising effects. I shall now single out one of the audience, and endeavour ‘by the mere power of will’ to compel him to come upon the platform, and do and say what I wish. Let me assure you that there is no collusion, and that the subject whom I may select is at perfect liberty to resent to the uttermost any impulse which I may communicate to him.”

With these words the lecturer came to the front of the platform, and glanced over the first few rows of the stalls. No doubt Cowles’ dark skin and bright eyes marked him out as a man of a highly nervous temperament, for the mesmerist picked him out in a moment, and fixed his eyes upon him. I saw my friend give a start of surprise, and then settle down in his chair, as if to express his determination not to yield to the influence of the operator. Messinger was not a man whose head denoted any great brain-power, but his gaze was singularly intense and penetrating. Under the influence of it Cowles made one or two spasmodic motions of his hands, as if to grasp the sides of his seat, and then half rose, but only to sink down again, though with an evident effort. I was watching the scene with intense interest, when I happened to catch a glimpse of Miss Northcott’s face. She was sitting with her eyes fixed intently upon the mesmerist, and with such an expression of concentrated power upon her features as I have never seen on any other human countenance. Her jaw was firmly set, her lips compressed, and her face as hard as if it were a beautiful sculpture cut out of the whitest marble. Her eyebrows were drawn down, however, and from beneath them her grey eyes seemed to sparkle and gleam with a cold light.

I looked at Cowles again, expecting every moment to see him rise and obey the mesmerist’s wishes, when there came from the platform a short, gasping cry as of a man utterly worn out and prostrated by a prolonged struggle. Messinger was leaning against the table, his hand to his forehead, and the perspiration pouring down his face. “I won’t go on,” he cried, addressing the audience. “There is a stronger will than mine acting against me. You must excuse me for to-night.” The man was evidently ill, and utterly unable to proceed, so the curtain was lowered, and the audience dispersed, with many comments upon the lecturer’s sudden indisposition.

I waited outside the hall until my friend and the ladies came out. Cowles was laughing over his recent experience.

“He didn’t succeed with me, Bob,” he cried triumphantly, as he shook my hand. “I think he caught a Tartar that time.”

"Yes," said Miss Northcott, "I think that Jack ought to be very proud of his strength of mind; don't you! Mr. Armitage?"

"It took me all my time, though," my friend said seriously. "You can't conceive what a strange feeling I had once or twice. All the strength seemed to have gone out of me — especially just before he collapsed himself."

I walked round with Cowles in order to see the ladies home. He walked in front with Mrs. Merton, and I found myself behind with the young lady. For a minute or so I walked beside her without making any remark, and then I suddenly blurted out, in a manner which must have seemed somewhat brusque to her —

"You did that, Miss Northcott."

"Did what?" she asked sharply.

"Why, mesmerised the mesmeriser — I suppose that is the best way of describing the transaction."

"What a strange idea!" she said, laughing. "You give me credit for a strong will then?"

"Yes," I said. "For a dangerously strong one."

"Why dangerous?" she asked, in a tone of surprise.

"I think," I answered, "that any will which can exercise such power is dangerous — for there is always a chance of its being turned to bad uses."

"You would make me out a very dreadful individual, Mr. Armitage," she said; and then looking up suddenly in my face—"You have never liked me. You are suspicious of me and distrust me, though I have never given you cause."

The accusation was so sudden and so true that I was unable to find any reply to it. She paused for a moment, and then said in a voice which was hard and cold —

"Don't let your prejudice lead you to interfere with me, however, or say anything to your friend, Mr. Cowles, which might lead to a difference between us. You would find that to be very bad policy."

There was something in the way she spoke which gave an indescribable air of a threat to these few words.

"I have no power," I said, "to interfere with your plans for the future. I cannot help, however, from what I have seen and heard, having fears for my friend."

"Fears!" she repeated scornfully. "Pray what have you seen and heard. Something from Mr. Reeves, perhaps — I believe he is another of your friends?”

“He never mentioned your name to me,” I answered, truthfully enough. “You will be sorry to hear that he is dying.” As I said it we passed by a lighted window, and I glanced down to see what effect my words had upon her. She was laughing — there was no doubt of it; she was laughing quietly to herself. I could see merriment in every feature of her face. I feared and mistrusted the woman from that moment more than ever.

We said little more that night. When we parted she gave me a quick, warning glance, as if to remind me of what she had said about the danger of interference. Her cautions would have made little difference to me could I have seen my way to benefiting Barrington Cowles by anything which I might say. But what could I say? I might say that her former suitors had been unfortunate. I might say that I believed her to be a cruel-hearted woman. I might say that I considered her to possess wonderful, and almost preternatural powers. What impression would any of these accusations make upon an ardent lover — a man with my friend’s enthusiastic temperament? I felt that it would be useless to advance them, so I was silent.

And now I come to the beginning of the end. Hitherto much has been surmise and inference and hearsay. It is my painful task to relate now, as dispassionately and as accurately as I can, what actually occurred under my own notice, and to reduce to writing the events which preceded the death of my friend.

Towards the end of the winter Cowles remarked to me that he intended to marry Miss Northcott as soon as possible — probably some time in the spring. He was, as I have already remarked, fairly well off, and the young lady had some money of her own, so that there was no pecuniary reason for a long engagement. “We are going to take a little house out at Corstorphine,” he said, “and we hope to see your face at our table, Bob, as often as you can possibly come.” I thanked him, and tried to shake off my apprehensions, and persuade myself that all would yet be well.

It was about three weeks before the time fixed for the marriage, that Cowles remarked to me one evening that he feared he would be late that night. “I have had a note from Kate,” he said, “asking me to call about eleven o’clock to-night, which seems rather a late hour, but perhaps she wants to talk over something quietly after old Mrs. Merton retires.”

It was not until after my friend’s departure that I suddenly recollected the mysterious interview which I had been told of as preceding the suicide of young Prescott. Then I thought of the ravings of poor Reeves, rendered more tragic by the fact that I had heard that very day of his death. What was the meaning of it all? Had this woman some baleful secret to disclose which must be known before her marriage? Was it some reason which forbade her to marry? Or was it some reason which forbade others to marry her? I felt so uneasy that I would have followed Cowles, even at the risk of offending him, and endeavoured to dissuade him from keeping his appointment, but a glance at the clock showed me that I was too late.

I was determined to wait up for his return, so I piled some coals upon the fire and took down a novel from the shelf. My thoughts proved more interesting than the book, however, and I threw it on one side. An indefinable feeling of anxiety and depression weighed upon me. Twelve o’clock came, and then half-past, without any sign of my friend. It was nearly one when I heard a step in the street outside, and then a knocking at the door. I was surprised, as I knew that my friend always carried a key — however, I hurried down and undid the latch. As the door flew open I knew in a moment that my worst apprehensions had been fulfilled. Barrington Cowles was leaning against the railings outside with his face sunk upon his breast, and his whole attitude expressive of the most intense despondency. As he passed in he gave a stagger, and would have fallen had I not thrown my left arm around him. Supporting him with this, and holding the lamp in my other hand, I led him slowly upstairs into our sitting-room. He sank down upon the sofa without a word. Now that I could get a good view of him, I was horrified to see the change which had come over him. His face was deadly pale, and his very lips were bloodless. His cheeks and forehead were clammy, his eyes glazed, and his whole expression altered. He looked like a man who had gone through some terrible ordeal, and was thoroughly unnerved.

“My dear fellow, what is the matter?” I asked, breaking the silence. “Nothing amiss, I trust? Are you unwell?”

“Brandy!” he gasped. “Give me some brandy!”

I took out the decanter, and was about to help him, when he snatched it from me with a trembling hand, and poured out nearly half a tumbler of the spirit. He was usually a most abstemious man, but he took this off at a gulp without adding any water to it.

It seemed to do him good, for the colour began to come back to his face, and he leaned upon his elbow.

"My engagement is off, Bob," he said, trying to speak calmly, but with a tremor in his voice which he could not conceal. "It is all over."

"Cheer up!" I answered, trying to encourage him.

"Don't get down on your luck. How was it? What was it all about?"

"About?" he groaned, covering his face with his hands. "If I did tell you, Bob, you would not believe it. It is too dreadful — too horrible — unutterably awful and incredible! O Kate, Kate!" and he rocked himself to and fro in his grief; "I pictured you an angel and I find you a — —"

"A what?" I asked, for he had paused.

He looked at me with a vacant stare, and then suddenly burst out, waving his arms: "A fiend!" he cried. "A ghoul from the pit! A vampire soul behind a lovely face! Now, God forgive me!" he went on in a lower tone, turning his face to the wall; "I have said more than I should. I have loved her too much to speak of her as she is. I love her too much now."

He lay still for some time, and I had hoped that the brandy had had the effect of sending him to sleep, when he suddenly turned his face towards me.

"Did you ever read of wehr-wolves?" he asked.

I answered that I had.

"There is a story," he said thoughtfully, "in one of Marryat's books, about a beautiful woman who took the form of a wolf at night and devoured her own children. I wonder what put that idea into Marryat's head?"

He pondered for some minutes, and then he cried out for some more brandy. There was a small bottle of laudanum upon the table, and I managed, by insisting upon helping him myself, to mix about half a drachm with the spirits. He drank it off, and sank his head once more upon the pillow. "Anything better than that," he groaned. "Death is better than that. Crime and cruelty; cruelty and crime. Anything is better than that," and so on, with the monotonous refrain, until at last the words became indistinct, his eyelids closed over his weary eyes, and he sank into a profound slumber. I carried him into his bedroom without arousing him; and making a couch for myself out of the chairs, I remained by his side all night.

In the morning Barrington Cowles was in a high fever. For weeks he lingered between life and death. The highest medical skill of Edinburgh was called in, and his vigorous constitution slowly got the better of his disease. I nursed him during this anxious time; but through all his wild delirium and ravings he never let a word escape him which explained the mystery connected with Miss Northcott. Sometimes he spoke of her in the tenderest words and most loving voice. At others he screamed out that she was a fiend, and stretched out his arms, as if to keep her off. Several times he cried that he would not sell his soul for a beautiful face, and then he would moan in a most piteous voice, “But I love her — I love her for all that; I shall never cease to love her.”

When he came to himself he was an altered man. His severe illness had emaciated him greatly, but his dark eyes had lost none of their brightness. They shone out with startling brilliancy from under his dark, overhanging brows. His manner was eccentric and variable — sometimes irritable, sometimes recklessly mirthful, but never natural. He would glance about him in a strange, suspicious manner, like one who feared something, and yet hardly knew what it was he dreaded. He never mentioned Miss Northcott’s name — never until that fatal evening of which I have now to speak.

In an endeavour to break the current of his thoughts by frequent change of scene, I travelled with him through the highlands of Scotland, and afterwards down the east coast. In one of these peregrinations of ours we visited the Isle of May, an island near the mouth of the Firth of Forth, which, except in the tourist season, is singularly barren and desolate. Beyond the keeper of the lighthouse there are only one or two families of poor fisher-folk, who sustain a precarious existence by their nets, and by the capture of cormorants and solan geese. This grim spot seemed to have such a fascination for Cowles that we engaged a room in one of the fishermen’s huts, with the intention of passing a week or two there. I found it very dull, but the loneliness appeared to be a relief to my friend’s mind. He lost the look of apprehension which had become habitual to him, and became something like his old self.

He would wander round the island all day, looking down from the summit of the great cliffs which gird it round, and watching the long green waves as they came booming in and burst in a shower of spray over the rocks beneath.

One night — I think it was our third or fourth on the island — Barrington Cowles and I went outside the cottage before retiring to rest, to enjoy a little fresh air, for our room was small, and the rough lamp caused an unpleasant odour. How well I remember every little circumstance in connection with that night! It promised to be tempestuous, for the clouds were piling up in the north-west, and the dark wrack was drifting across the face of the moon, throwing alternate belts of light and shade upon the rugged surface of the island and the restless sea beyond.

We were standing talking close by the door of the cottage, and I was thinking to myself that my friend was more cheerful than he had been since his illness, when he gave a sudden, sharp cry, and looking round at him I saw, by the light of the moon, an expression of unutterable horror come over his features. His eyes became fixed and staring, as if riveted upon some approaching object, and he extended his long thin forefinger, which quivered as he pointed.

“Look there!” he cried. “It is she! It is she! You see her there coming down the side of the brae.” He gripped me convulsively by the wrist as he spoke. “There she is, coming towards us!”

“Who?” I cried, straining my eyes into the darkness.

“She — Kate — Kate Northcott!” he screamed. “She has come for me. Hold me fast, old friend. Don’t let me go!”

“Hold up, old man,” I said, clapping him on the shoulder. “Pull yourself together; you are dreaming; there is nothing to fear.”

“She is gone!” he cried, with a gasp of relief. “No, by heaven! there she is again, and nearer — coming nearer. She told me she would come for me, and she keeps her word.”

“Come into the house,” I said. His hand, as I grasped it, was as cold as ice.

“Ah, I knew it!” he shouted. “There she is, waving her arms. She is beckoning to me. It is the signal. I must go. I am coming, Kate; I am coming!”

I threw my arms around him, but he burst from me with superhuman strength, and dashed into the darkness of the night. I followed him, calling to him to stop, but he ran the more swiftly. When the moon shone out between the clouds I could catch a glimpse of his dark figure, running rapidly in a straight line, as if to reach some definite goal. It may have been imagination, but it seemed to me that in the flickering light I could distinguish a vague something in front of him — a shimmering form which eluded his grasp and led him onwards. I saw his outlines stand out hard against the sky behind him as he surmounted the brow of a little hill, then he disappeared, and that was the last ever seen by mortal eye of Barrington Cowles.

The fishermen and I walked round the island all that night with lanterns, and examined every nook and corner without seeing a trace of my poor lost friend. The direction in which he had been running terminated in a rugged line of jagged cliffs overhanging the sea. At one place here the edge was somewhat crumbled, and there appeared marks upon the turf which might have been left by human feet. We lay upon our faces at this spot, and peered with our lanterns over the edge, looking down on the boiling surge two hundred feet below. As we lay there, suddenly, above the beating of the waves and the howling of the wind, there rose a strange wild screech from the abyss below. The fishermen — a naturally superstitious race — averred that it was the sound of a woman's laughter, and I could hardly persuade them to continue the search. For my own part I think it may have been the cry of some sea-fowl startled from its nest by the flash of the lantern. However that may be, I never wish to hear such a sound again.

And now I have come to the end of the painful duty which I have undertaken. I have told as plainly and as accurately as I could the story of the death of John Barrington Cowles, and the train of events which preceded it. I am aware that to others the sad episode seemed commonplace enough. Here is the prosaic account which appeared in the Scotsman a couple of days afterwards: —

"Sad Occurrence on the Isle of May. — The Isle of May has been the scene of a sad disaster. Mr. John Barrington Cowles, a gentleman well known in University circles as a most distinguished student, and the present holder of the Neil Arnott prize for physics, has been recruiting his health in this quiet retreat. The night before last he suddenly left his friend, Mr. Robert Armitage, and he has not since been heard of. It is almost certain that he has met his death by falling over the cliffs which surround the island. Mr. Cowles' health has been failing for some time, partly from over study and partly from worry connected with family affairs. By his death the University loses one of her most promising alumni."

I have nothing more to add to my statement. I have unburdened my mind of all that I know. I can well conceive that many, after weighing all that I have said, will see no ground for an accusation against Miss Northcott. They will say that, because a man of a naturally excitable disposition says and does wild things, and even eventually commits self-murder after a sudden and heavy disappointment, there is no reason why vague charges should be advanced against a young lady. To this, I answer that they are welcome to their opinion. For my own part, I ascribe the death of William Prescott, of Archibald Reeves, and of John Barrington Cowles to this woman with as much confidence as if I had seen her drive a dagger into their hearts.

You ask me, no doubt, what my own theory is which will explain all these strange facts. I have none, or, at best, a dim and vague one. That Miss Northcott possessed extraordinary powers over the minds, and through the minds over the bodies, of others, I am convinced, as well as that her instincts were to use this power for base and cruel purposes. That some even more fiendish and terrible phase of character lay behind this — some horrible trait which it was necessary for her to reveal before marriage — is to be inferred from the experience of her three lovers, while the dreadful nature of the mystery thus revealed can only be surmised from the fact that the very mention of it drove from her those who had loved her so passionately. Their subsequent fate was, in my opinion, the result of her vindictive remembrance of their desertion of her, and that they were forewarned of it at the time was shown by the words of both Reeves and Cowles. Above this, I can say nothing. I lay the facts soberly before the public as they came under my notice. I have never seen Miss Northcott since, nor do I wish to do so. If by the words I have written I can save any one human being from the snare of those bright eyes and that beautiful face, then I can lay down my pen with the assurance that my poor friend has not died altogether in vain.

ELIAS B. HOPKINS, THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.

He was known in the Gulch as the Reverend Elias B. Hopkins, but it was generally understood that the title was an honorary one, extorted by his many eminent qualities, and not borne out by any legal claim which he could adduce. “The Parson” was another of his sobriquets, which was sufficiently distinctive in a land where the flock was scattered and the shepherds few. To do him justice, he never pretended to have received any preliminary training for the ministry, or any orthodox qualification to practise it. “We’re all working in the claim of the Lord,” he remarked one day, “and it don’t matter a cent whether we’re hired for the job or whether we waltzes in on our own account,” a piece of rough imagery which appealed directly to the instincts of Jackman’s Gulch. It is quite certain that during the first few months his presence had a marked effect in diminishing the excessive use both of strong drinks and of stronger adjectives which had been characteristic of the little mining settlement. Under his tuition, men began to understand that the resources of their native language were less limited than they had supposed, and that it was possible to convey their impressions with accuracy without the aid of a gaudy halo of profanity.

We were certainly in need of a regenerator at Jackman’s Gulch about the beginning of ‘53. Times were flush then over the whole colony, but nowhere flusher than there. Our material prosperity had had a bad effect upon our morals. The camp was a small one, lying rather better than a hundred and twenty miles to the north of Ballarat, at a spot where a mountain torrent finds its way down a rugged ravine on its way to join the Arrowsmith River. History does not relate who the original Jackman may have been, but at the time I speak of the camp it contained a hundred or so adults, many of whom were men who had sought an asylum there after making more civilised mining centres too hot to hold them. They were a rough, murderous crew, hardly leavened by the few respectable members of society who were scattered among them.

Communication between Jackman’s Gulch and the outside world was difficult and uncertain. A portion of the bush between it and Ballarat was infested by a redoubtable outlaw named Conky Jim, who, with a small band as desperate as himself, made travelling a dangerous matter. It was customary, therefore, at the Gulch, to store up the dust and nuggets obtained from the mines in a special store, each man’s share being placed in a separate bag on which his name was marked. A trusty man, named Woburn, was deputed to watch over this primitive bank. When the amount deposited became considerable, a waggon was hired, and the whole treasure was conveyed to Ballarat, guarded by the police and by a certain number of miners, who took it in turn to perform the office. Once in Ballarat, it was forwarded on to Melbourne by the regular gold waggons. By this plan the gold was often kept for months in the Gulch before being despatched, but Conky Jim was effectually checkmated, as the escort party were far too strong for him and his gang. He appeared, at the time of which I write, to have forsaken his haunts in disgust, and the road could be traversed by small parties with impunity.

Comparative order used to reign during the daytime at Jackman's Gulch, for the majority of the inhabitants were out with crowbar and pick among the quartz ledges, or washing clay and sand in their cradles by the banks of the little stream. As the sun sank down, however, the claims were gradually deserted, and their unkempt owners, clay-bespattered and shaggy, came lounging into camp, ripe for any form of mischief. Their first visit was to Woburn's gold store, where their clean-up of the day was duly deposited, the amount being entered in the storekeeper's book, and each miner retaining enough to cover his evening's expenses. After that, all restraint was at an end, and each set to work to get rid of his surplus dust with the greatest rapidity possible. The focus of dissipation was the rough bar, formed by a couple of hogsheads spanned by planks, which was dignified by the name of the "Britannia Drinking Saloon." Here Nat Adams, the burly bar-keeper, dispensed bad whisky at the rate of two shillings a noggin, or a guinea a bottle, while his brother Ben acted as croupier in a rude wooden shanty behind, which had been converted into a gambling hell, and was crowded every night. There had been a third brother, but an unfortunate misunderstanding with a customer had shortened his existence. "He was too soft to live long," his brother Nathaniel feelingly observed, on the occasion of his funeral. "Many's the time I've said to him, 'If you're arguin' a pint with a stranger, you should always draw first, then argue, and then shoot, if you judge that he's on the shoot.' Bill was too purlite. He must needs argue first and draw after, when he might just as well have kivered his man before talkin' it over with him." This amiable weakness of the deceased Bill was a blow to the firm of Adams, which became so short-handed that the concern could hardly be worked without the admission of a partner, which would mean a considerable decrease in the profits.

Nat Adams had had a roadside shanty in the Gulch before the discovery of gold, and might, therefore, claim to be the oldest inhabitant. These keepers of shanties were a peculiar race, and at the cost of a digression it may be interesting to explain how they managed to amass considerable sums of money in a land where travellers were few and far between. It was the custom of the "bushmen," i.e., bullock-drivers, sheep tenders, and the other white hands who worked on the sheep-runs up country, to sign articles by which they agreed to serve their master for one, two, or three years at so much per year and certain daily rations. Liquor was never included in this agreement, and the men remained, per force, total abstainers during the whole time. The money was paid in a lump sum at the end of the engagement. When that day came round, Jimmy, the stockman, would come slouching into his master's office, cabbage-tree hat in hand.

"Morning, master!" Jimmy would say. "My time's up. I guess I'll draw my cheque and ride down to town."

"You'll come back, Jimmy?"

"Yes, I'll come back. Maybe I'll be away three weeks, maybe a month. I want some clothes, master, and my bloomin' boots are well-nigh off my feet."

"How much, Jimmy?" asks his master, taking up his pen.

"There's sixty pound screw," Jimmy answers thoughtfully; "and you mind, master, last March, when the brindled bull broke out o' the paddock. Two pound you promised me then. And a pound at the dipping. And a pound when Millar's sheep got mixed with ourn;" and so he goes on, for bushmen can seldom write, but they have memories which nothing escapes.

His master writes the cheque and hands it across the table. "Don't get on the drink, Jimmy," he says.

"No fear of that, master," and the stockman slips the cheque into his leather pouch, and within an hour he is ambling off upon his long-limbed horse on his hundred-mile journey to town.

Now Jimmy has to pass some six or eight of the above-mentioned roadside shanties in his day's ride, and experience has taught him that if he once breaks his accustomed total abstinence, the unwonted stimulant has an overpowering effect upon his brain. Jimmy shakes his head warily as he determines that no earthly consideration will induce him to partake of any liquor until his business is over. His only chance is to avoid temptation; so, knowing that there is the first of these houses some half-mile ahead, he plunges into a byepath through the bush which will lead him out at the other side.

Jimmy is riding resolutely along this narrow path, congratulating himself upon a danger escaped, when he becomes aware of a sunburned, black-bearded man who is leaning unconcernedly against a tree beside the track. This is none other than the shanty-keeper, who, having observed Jimmy's manoeuvre in the distance, has taken a short cut through the bush in order to intercept him.

"Morning, Jimmy!" he cries, as the horseman comes up to him.

"Morning, mate; morning!"

"Where are ye off to to-day then?"

"Off to town," says Jimmy sturdily.

"No, now — are you though? You'll have bully times down there for a bit. Come round and have a drink at my place. Just by way of luck."

"No," says Jimmy, "I don't want a drink."

"Just a little damp."

"I tell ye I don't want one," says the stockman angrily.

"Well, ye needn't be so darned short about it. It's nothin' to me whether you drinks or not. Good mornin'."

"Good mornin'," says Jimmy, and has ridden on about twenty yards when he hears the other calling on him to stop.

"See here, Jimmy!" he says, overtaking him again. "If you'll do me a kindness when you're up in town I'd be obliged."

"What is it?"

"It's a letter, Jim, as I wants posted. It's an important one too, an' I wouldn't trust it with every one; but I knows you, and if you'll take charge on it it'll be a powerful weight off my mind."

"Give it here," Jimmy says laconically.

"I hain't got it here. It's round in my caboose. Come round for it with me. It ain't more'n quarter of a mile."

Jimmy consents reluctantly. When they reach the tumble-down hut the keeper asks him cheerily to dismount and to come in.

"Give me the letter," says Jimmy.

"It ain't altogether wrote yet, but you sit down here for a minute and it'll be right," and so the stockman is beguiled into the shanty.

At last the letter is ready and handed over. “Now, Jimmy,” says the keeper, “one drink at my expense before you go.”

“Not a taste,” says Jimmy.

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” the other says in an aggrieved tone. “You’re too damned proud to drink with a poor cove like me. Here — give us back that letter. I’m cursed if I’ll accept a favour from a man whose too almighty big to have a drink with me.”

“Well, well, mate, don’t turn rusty,” says Jim. “Give us one drink an’ I’m off.”

The keeper pours out about half a pannikin of raw rum and hands it to the bushman. The moment he smells the old familiar smell his longing for it returns, and he swigs it off at a gulp. His eyes shine more brightly and his face becomes flushed. The keeper watches him narrowly. “You can go now, Jim,” he says.

“Steady, mate, steady,” says the bushman. “I’m as good a man as you. If you stand a drink I can stand one too, I suppose.” So the pannikin is replenished, and Jimmy’s eyes shine brighter still.

“Now, Jimmy, one last drink for the good of the house,” says the keeper, “and then it’s time you were off.” The stockman has a third gulp from the pannikin, and with it all his scruples and good resolutions vanish for ever.

“Look here,” he says somewhat huskily, taking his cheque out of his pouch. “You take this, mate. Whoever comes along this road, ask ‘em what they’ll have, and tell them it’s my shout. Let me know when the money’s done.”

So Jimmy abandons the idea of ever getting to town, and for three weeks or a month he lies about the shanty in a state of extreme drunkenness, and reduces every wayfarer upon the road to the same condition. At last one fine morning the keeper comes to him. “The coin’s done, Jimmy,” he says; “it’s about time you made some more.” So Jimmy has a good wash to sober him, straps his blanket and his billy to his back, and rides off through the bush to the sheeprun, where he has another year of sobriety, terminating in another month of intoxication.

All this, though typical of the happy-go-lucky manners of the inhabitants, has no direct bearing upon Jackman’s Gulch, so we must return to that Arcadian settlement. Additions to the population there were not numerous, and such as came about the time of which I speak were even rougher and fiercer than the original inhabitants. In particular, there came a brace of ruffians named Phillips and Maule, who rode into camp one day, and started a claim upon the other side of the stream. They outgulched the Gulch in the virulence and fluency of their blasphemy, in the truculence of their speech and manner, and in their reckless disregard of all social laws. They claimed to have come from Bendigo, and there were some amongst us who wished that the redoubted Conky Jim was on the track once more, as long as he would close it to such visitors as these. After their arrival the nightly proceedings at the Britannia bar and at the gambling hell behind it became more riotous than ever. Violent quarrels, frequently ending in bloodshed, were of constant occurrence. The more peaceable frequenters of the bar began to talk seriously of lynching the two strangers who were the principal promoters of disorder. Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when our evangelist, Elias B. Hopkins, came limping into the camp, travel-stained and footsore, with his spade strapped across his back, and his Bible in the pocket of his moleskin jacket.

His presence was hardly noticed at first, so insignificant was the man. His manner was quiet and unobtrusive, his face pale, and his figure fragile. On better acquaintance, however, there was a squareness and firmness about his clean-shaven lower jaw, and an intelligence in his widely-opened blue eyes, which marked him as a man of character. He erected a small hut for himself, and started a claim close to that occupied by the two strangers who had preceded him. This claim was chosen with a ludicrous disregard for all practical laws of mining, and at once stamped the newcomer as being a green hand at his work. It was piteous to observe him every morning as we passed to our work, digging and delving with the greatest industry, but, as we knew well, without the smallest possibility of any result. He would pause for a moment as we went by, wipe his pale face with his bandanna handkerchief, and shout out to us a cordial morning greeting, and then fall to again with redoubled energy. By degrees we got into the way of making a half-pitying, half-contemptuous inquiry as to how he got on. “I hain’t struck it yet, boys,” he would answer cheerily, leaning on his spade, “but the bedrock lies deep just hereabouts, and I reckon we’ll get among the pay gravel to-day.” Day after day he returned the same reply with unvarying confidence and cheerfulness.

It was not long before he began to show us the stuff that was in him. One night the proceedings were unusually violent at the drinking saloon. A rich pocket had been struck during the day, and the striker was standing treat in a lavish and promiscuous fashion which had reduced three parts of the settlement to a state of wild intoxication. A crowd of drunken idlers stood or lay about the bar, cursing, swearing, shouting, dancing, and here and there firing their pistols into the air out of pure wantonness. From the interior of the shanty behind there came a similar chorus. Maule, Phillips, and the roughs who followed them were in the ascendant, and all order and decency was swept away.

Suddenly, amid this tumult of oaths and drunken cries, men became conscious of a quiet monotone which underlay all other sounds and obtruded itself at every pause in the uproar. Gradually first one man and then another paused to listen, until there was a general cessation of the hubbub, and every eye was turned in the direction whence this quiet stream of words flowed. There, mounted upon a barrel, was Elias B. Hopkins, the newest of the inhabitants of Jackman’s Gulch, with a good-humoured smile upon his resolute face.

He held an open Bible in his hand, and was reading aloud a passage taken at random — an extract from the Apocalypse, if I remember right. The words were entirely irrelevant and without the smallest bearing upon the scene before him, but he plodded on with great unction, waving his left hand slowly to the cadence of his words.

There was a general shout of laughter and applause at this apparition, and Jackman’s Gulch gathered round the barrel approvingly, under the impression that this was some ornate joke, and that they were about to be treated to some mock sermon or parody of the chapter read. When, however, the reader, having finished the chapter, placidly commenced another, and having finished that rippled on into another one, the revellers came to the conclusion that the joke was somewhat too long-winded. The commencement of yet another chapter confirmed this opinion, and an angry chorus of shouts and cries, with suggestions as to gagging the reader or knocking him off the barrel, rose from every side. In spite of roars and hoots, however, Elias B. Hopkins plodded away at the Apocalypse with the same serene countenance, looking as ineffably contented as though the babel around him were the most gratifying applause. Before long an occasional boot pattered against the barrel or whistled past our parson’s head; but here some of the more orderly of the inhabitants interfered in favour of peace and order, aided curiously enough by the afore-mentioned Maule and Phillips, who warmly espoused the cause of the little Scripture reader. “The little cus has got grit in him,” the latter explained, rearing his bulky red-shirted form between the crowd and the object of its anger. “His ways ain’t our ways, and we’re all welcome to our opinions, and to sling them round from barrels or otherwise if so minded. What I says and Bill says is, that when it comes to slingin’ boots instead o’ words it’s too steep by half, an’ if this man’s wronged we’ll chip in an’ see him righted.” This oratorical effort had the effect of checking the more active signs of disapproval, and the party of disorder attempted to settle down once more to their carouse, and to ignore the shower of Scripture which was poured upon them. The attempt was hopeless. The drunken portion fell asleep under the drowsy refrain, and the others, with many a sullen glance at the imperturbable reader, slouched off to their huts, leaving him still perched upon the barrel. Finding himself alone with the more orderly of the spectators, the little man rose, closed his book, after methodically marking with a lead pencil the exact spot at which he stopped, and descended from his perch. “To-morrow night, boys,” he remarked in his quiet voice, “the reading will commence at the 9th verse of the 15th chapter of the Apocalypse,” with which piece of information, disregarding our congratulations, he walked away with the air of a man who has performed an obvious duty.

We found that his parting words were no empty threat. Hardly had the crowd begun to assemble next night before he appeared once more upon the barrel and began to read with the same monotonous vigour, tripping over words! muddling up sentences, but still boring along through chapter after chapter. Laughter, threats, chaff — every weapon short of actual violence — was used to deter him, but all with the same want of success. Soon it was found that there was a method in his proceedings. When silence reigned, or when the conversation was of an innocent nature, the reading ceased. A single word of blasphemy, however, set it going again, and it would ramble on for a quarter of an hour or so, when it stopped, only to be renewed upon similar provocation. The reading was pretty continuous during that second night, for the language of the opposition was still considerably free. At least it was an improvement upon the night before.

For more than a month Elias B. Hopkins carried on this campaign. There he would sit, night after night, with the open book upon his knee, and at the slightest provocation off he would go, like a musical box when the spring is touched. The monotonous drawl became unendurable, but it could only be avoided by conforming to the parson's code. A chronic swearer came to be looked upon with disfavour by the community, since the punishment of his transgression fell upon all. At the end of a fortnight the reader was silent more than half the time, and at the end of the month his position was a sinecure.

Never was a moral revolution brought about more rapidly and more completely. Our parson carried his principle into private life. I have seen him, on hearing an unguarded word from some worker in the gulches, rush across, Bible in hand, and perching himself upon the heap of red clay which surmounted the offender's claim, drawl through the genealogical tree at the commencement of the New Testament in a most earnest and impressive manner, as though it were especially appropriate to the occasion. In time, an oath became a rare thing amongst us. Drunkenness was on the wane too. Casual travellers passing through the Gulch used to marvel at our state of grace, and rumours of it went as far as Ballarat, and excited much comment therein.

There were points about our evangelist which made him especially fitted for the work which he had undertaken. A man entirely without redeeming vices would have had no common basis on which to work, and no means of gaining the sympathy of his flock. As we came to know Elias B. Hopkins better, we discovered that in spite of his piety there was a leaven of old Adam in him, and that he had certainly known unregenerate days. He was no teetotaler. On the contrary, he could choose his liquor with discrimination, and lower it in an able manner. He played a masterly hand at poker, and there were few who could touch him at "cut-throat euchre." He and the two ex-ruffians, Phillips and Maule, used to play for hours in perfect harmony, except when the fall of the cards elicited an oath from one of his companions. At the first of these offences the parson would put on a pained smile, and gaze reproachfully at the culprit. At the second he would reach for his Bible, and the game was over for the evening. He showed us he was a good revolver shot too, for when we were practising at an empty brandy bottle outside Adams' bar, he took up a friend's pistol and hit it plumb in the centre at twenty-four paces. There were few things he took up that he could not make a show at apparently, except gold-digging, and at that he was the veriest duffer alive. It was pitiful to see the little canvas bag, with his name printed across it, lying placid and empty upon the shelf at Woburn's store, while all the other bags were increasing daily, and some had assumed quite a portly rotundity of form, for the weeks were slipping by, and it was almost time for the gold-train to start off for Ballarat. We reckoned that the amount which we had stored at the time represented the greatest sum which had ever been taken by a single convoy out of Jackman's Gulch.

Although Elias B. Hopkins appeared to derive a certain quiet satisfaction from the wonderful change which he had effected in the camp, his joy was not yet rounded and complete. There was one thing for which he still yearned. He opened his heart to us about it one evening.

"We'd have a blessing on the camp, boys," he said, "if we only had a service o' some sort on the Lord's day. It's a temptin' o' Providence to go on in this way without takin' any notice of it, except that maybe there's more whisky drunk and more card playin' than on any other day."

"We hain't got no parson," objected one of the crowd.

"Ye fool!" growled another, "hain't we got a man as is worth any three parsons, and can splash texts around like clay out o' a cradle. What more d'ye want?"

"We hain't got no church!" urged the same dissentient.

"Have it in the open air," one suggested.

"Or in Woburn's store," said another.

"Or in Adams' saloon."

The last proposal was received with a buzz of approval, which showed that it was considered the most appropriate locality.

Adams' saloon was a substantial wooden building in the rear of the bar, which was used partly for storing liquor and partly for a gambling saloon. It was strongly built of rough-hewn logs, the proprietor rightly judging, in the unregenerate days of Jackman's Gulch, that hogsheads of brandy and rum were commodities which had best be secured under lock and key. A strong door opened into each end of the saloon, and the interior was spacious enough, when the table and lumber were cleared away, to accommodate the whole population. The spirit barrels were heaped together at one end by their owner, so as to make a very fair imitation of a pulpit.

At first the Gulch took but a mild interest in the proceedings, but when it became known that Elias B. Hopkins intended, after reading the service, to address the audience, the settlement began to warm up to the occasion. A real sermon was a novelty to all of them, and one coming from their own parson was additionally so. Rumour announced that it would be interspersed with local hits, and that the moral would be pointed by pungent personalities. Men began to fear that they would be unable to gain seats, and many applications were made to the brothers Adams. It was only when conclusively shown that the saloon could contain them all with a margin that the camp settled down into calm expectancy.

It was as well that the building was of such a size, for the assembly upon the Sunday morning was the largest which had ever occurred in the annals of Jackman’s Gulch. At first it was thought that the whole population was present, but a little reflection showed that this was not so. Maule and Phillips had gone on a prospecting journey among the hills, and had not returned as yet, and Woburn, the gold-keeper, was unable to leave his store. Having a very large quantity of the precious metal under his charge, he stuck to his post, feeling that the responsibility was too great to trifle with. With these three exceptions the whole of the Gulch, with clean red shirts, and such other additions to their toilet as the occasion demanded, sauntered in a straggling line along the clayey pathway which led up to the saloon.

The interior of the building had been provided with rough benches, and the parson, with his quiet good-humoured smile, was standing at the door to welcome them. “Good morning, boys,” he cried cheerily, as each group came lounging up. “Pass in; pass in. You’ll find this is as good a morning’s work as any you’ve done. Leave your pistols in this barrel outside the door as you pass; you can pick them out as you come out again, but it isn’t the thing to carry weapons into the house of peace.” His request was good-humouredly complied with, and before the last of the congregation filed in, there was a strange assortment of knives and firearms in this depository. When all had assembled, the doors were shut, and the service began — the first and the last which was ever performed at Jackman’s Gulch.

The weather was sultry and the room close, yet the miners listened with exemplary patience. There was a sense of novelty in the situation which had its attractions. To some it was entirely new, others were wafted back by it to another land and other days. Beyond a disposition which was exhibited by the uninitiated to applaud at the end of certain prayers, by way of showing that they sympathised with the sentiments expressed, no audience could have behaved better. There was a murmur of interest, however, when Elias B. Hopkins, looking down on the congregation from his rostrum of casks, began his address.

He had attired himself with care in honour of the occasion. He wore a velveteen tunic, girt round the waist with a sash of china silk, a pair of moleskin trousers, and held his cabbage-tree hat in his left hand. He began speaking in a low tone, and it was noticed at the time that he frequently glanced through the small aperture which served for a window which was placed above the heads of those who sat beneath him.

"I've put you straight now," he said, in the course of his address; "I've got you in the right rut if you will but stick in it." Here he looked very hard out of the window for some seconds. "You've learned soberness and industry, and with those things you can always make up any loss you may sustain. I guess there isn't one of ye that won't remember my visit to this camp." He paused for a moment, and three revolver shots rang out upon the quiet summer air. "Keep your seats, damn ye!" roared our preacher, as his audience rose in excitement. "If a man of ye moves down he goes! The door's locked on the outside, so ye can't get out anyhow. Your seats, ye canting, chuckle-headed fools! Down with ye, ye dogs, or I'll fire among ye!"

Astonishment and fear brought us back into our seats, and we sat staring blankly at our pastor and each other. Elias B. Hopkins, whose whole face and even figure appeared to have undergone an extraordinary alteration, looked fiercely down on us from his commanding position, with a contemptuous smile on his stern face.

"I have your lives in my hands," he remarked; and we noticed as he spoke that he held a heavy revolver in his hand, and that the butt of another one protruded from his sash. "I am armed and you are not. If one of you moves or speaks he is a dead man. If not, I shall not harm you. You must wait here for an hour. Why, you FOOLS" (this with a hiss of contempt which rang in our ears for many a long day), "do you know who it is that has stuck you up? Do you know who it is that has been playing it upon you for months as a parson and a saint? Conky Jim, the bushranger, ye apes. And Phillips and Maule were my two right-hand men. They're off into the hills with your gold —— Ha! would ye?" This to some restive member of the audience, who quieted down instantly before the fierce eye and the ready weapon of the bushranger. "In an hour they will be clear of any pursuit, and I advise you to make the best of it, and not to follow, or you may lose more than your money. My horse is tethered outside this door behind me. When the time is up I shall pass through it, lock it on the outside, and be off. Then you may break your way out as best you can. I have no more to say to you, except that ye are the most cursed set of asses that ever trod in boot-leather.”

We had time to endorse mentally this outspoken opinion during the long sixty minutes which followed; we were powerless before the resolute desperado. It is true that if we made a simultaneous rush we might bear him down at the cost of eight or ten of our number. But how could such a rush be organised without speaking, and who would attempt it without a previous agreement that he would be supported? There was nothing for it but submission. It seemed three hours at the least before the ranger snapped up his watch, stepped down from the barrel, walked backwards, still covering us with his weapon, to the door behind him, and then passed rapidly through it. We heard the creaking of the rusty lock, and the clatter of his horse’s hoofs, as he galloped away.

It has been remarked that an oath had, for the last few weeks, been a rare thing in the camp. We made up for our temporary abstention during the next half-hour. Never was heard such symmetrical and heartfelt blasphemy. When at last we succeeded in getting the door off its hinges all sight of both rangers and treasure had disappeared, nor have we ever caught sight of either the one or the other since. Poor Woburn, true to his trust, lay shot through the head across the threshold of his empty store. The villains, Maule and Phillips, had descended upon the camp the instant that we had been enticed into the trap, murdered the keeper, loaded up a small cart with the booty, and got safe away to some wild fastness among the mountains, where they were joined by their wily leader.

Jackman’s Gulch recovered from this blow, and is now a flourishing township. Social reformers are not in request there, however, and morality is at a discount. It is said that an inquest has been held lately upon an unoffending stranger who chanced to remark that in so large a place it would be advisable to have some form of Sunday service. The memory of their one and only pastor is still green among the inhabitants, and will be for many a long year to come.

THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT AND OTHER TALES OF TWILIGHT AND THE UNSEEN

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THE BROWN HAND

Every one knows that Sir Dominick Holden, the famous Indian surgeon, made me his heir, and that his death changed me in an hour from a hard-working and impecunious medical man to a well-to-do landed proprietor. Many know also that there were at least five people between the inheritance and me, and that Sir Dominick's selection appeared to be altogether arbitrary and whimsical. I can assure them, however, that they are quite mistaken, and that, although I only knew Sir Dominick in the closing years of his life, there were none the less very real reasons why he should show his goodwill towards me. As a matter of fact, though I say it myself, no man ever did more for another than I did for my Indian uncle. I cannot expect the story to be believed, but it is so singular that I should feel that it was a breach of duty if I did not put it upon record — so here it is, and your belief or incredulity is your own affair.

Sir Dominick Holden, C.B., K.C.S.I., and I don't know what besides, was the most distinguished Indian surgeon of his day. In the Army originally, he afterwards settled down into civil practice in Bombay, and visited as a consultant every part of India. His name is best remembered in connection with the Oriental Hospital, which he founded and supported. The time came, however, when his iron constitution began to show signs of the long strain to which he had subjected it, and his brother practitioners (who were not, perhaps, entirely disinterested upon the point) were unanimous in recommending him to return to England. He held on so long as he could, but at last he developed nervous symptoms of a very pronounced character, and so came back, a broken man, to his native county of Wiltshire. He bought a considerable estate with an ancient manor-house upon the edge of Salisbury Plain, and devoted his old age to the study of Comparative Pathology, which had been his learned hobby all his life, and in which he was a foremost authority.

We of the family were, as may be imagined, much excited by the news of the return of this rich and childless uncle to England. On his part, although by no means exuberant in his hospitality, he showed some sense of his duty to his relations, and each of us in turn had an invitation to visit him. From the accounts of my cousins it appeared to be a melancholy business, and it was with mixed feelings that I at last received my own summons to appear at Rodenhurst. My wife was so carefully excluded in the invitation that my first impulse was to refuse it, but the interests of the children had to be considered, and so, with her consent, I set out one October afternoon upon my visit to Wiltshire, with little thought of what that visit was to entail.

My uncle's estate was situated where the arable land of the plains begins to swell upwards into the rounded chalk hills which are characteristic of the county. As I drove from Dinton Station in the waning light of that autumn day, I was impressed by the weird nature of the scenery. The few scattered cottages of the peasants were so dwarfed by the huge evidences of prehistoric life, that the present appeared to be a dream and the past to be the obtrusive and masterful reality. The road wound through the valleys, formed by a succession of grassy hills, and the summit of each was cut and carved into the most elaborate fortifications, some circular, and some square, but all on a scale which has defied the winds and the rains of many centuries. Some call them Roman and some British, but their true origin and the reasons for this particular tract of country being so interlaced with entrenchments have never been finally made clear. Here and there on the long, smooth, olive-coloured slopes there rose small rounded barrows or tumuli. Beneath them lie the cremated ashes of the race which cut so deeply into the hills, but their graves tell us nothing save that a jar full of dust represents the man who once laboured under the sun.

It was through this weird country that I approached my uncle's residence of Rodenhurst, and the house was, as I found, in due keeping with its surroundings. Two broken and weather-stained pillars, each surmounted by a mutilated heraldic emblem, flanked the entrance to a neglected drive. A cold wind whistled through the elms which lined it, and the air was full of the drifting leaves. At the far end, under the gloomy arch of trees, a single yellow lamp burned steadily. In the dim half-light of the coming night I saw a long, low building stretching out two irregular wings, with deep eaves, a sloping gambrel roof, and walls which were criss-crossed with timber balks in the fashion of the Tudors. The cheery light of a fire flickered in the broad, latticed window to the left of the low-porched door, and this, as it proved, marked the study of my uncle, for it was thither that I was led by his butler in order to make my host's acquaintance.

He was cowering over his fire, for the moist chill of an English autumn had set him shivering. His lamp was unlit, and I only saw the red glow of the embers beating upon a huge, craggy face, with a Red Indian nose and cheek, and deep furrows and seams from eye to chin, the sinister marks of hidden volcanic fires. He sprang up at my entrance with something of an old-world courtesy and welcomed me warmly to Rodenhurst. At the same time I was conscious, as the lamp was carried in, that it was a very critical pair of light-blue eyes which looked out at me from under shaggy eyebrows, like scouts beneath a bush, and that this outlandish uncle of mine was carefully reading off my character with all the ease of a practised observer and an experienced man of the world.

For my part I looked at him, and looked again, for I had never seen a man whose appearance was more fitted to hold one's attention. His figure was the framework of a giant, but he had fallen away until his coat dangled straight down in a shocking fashion from a pair of broad and bony shoulders. All his limbs were huge and yet emaciated, and I could not take my gaze from his knobby wrists, and long, gnarled hands. But his eyes — those peering light-blue eyes — they were the most arrestive of any of his peculiarities. It was not their colour alone, nor was it the ambush of hair in which they lurked; but it was the expression which I read in them. For the appearance and bearing of the man were masterful, and one expected a certain corresponding arrogance in his eyes, but instead of that I read the look which tells of a spirit cowed and crushed, the furtive, expectant look of the dog whose master has taken the whip from the rack. I formed my own medical diagnosis upon one glance at those critical and yet appealing eyes. I believed that he was stricken with some mortal ailment, that he knew himself to be exposed to sudden death, and that he lived in terror of it. Such was my judgment — a false one, as the event showed; but I mention it that it may help you to realise the look which I read in his eyes.

My uncle's welcome was, as I have said, a courteous one, and in an hour or so I found myself seated between him and his wife at a comfortable dinner, with curious pungent delicacies upon the table, and a stealthy, quick-eyed Oriental waiter behind his chair. The old couple had come round to that tragic imitation of the dawn of life when husband and wife, having lost or scattered all those who were their intimates, find themselves face to face and alone once more, their work done, and the end nearing fast. Those who have reached that stage in sweetness and love, who can change their winter into a gentle Indian summer, have come as victors through the ordeal of life. Lady Holden was a small, alert woman with a kindly eye, and her expression as she glanced at him was a certificate of character to her husband. And yet, though I read a mutual love in their glances, I read also mutual horror, and recognised in her face some reflection of that stealthy fear which I had detected in his. Their talk was sometimes merry and sometimes sad, but there was a forced note in their merriment and a naturalness in their sadness which told me that a heavy heart beat upon either side of me.

We were sitting over our first glass of wine, and the servants had left the room, when the conversation took a turn which produced a remarkable effect upon my host and hostess. I cannot recall what it was which started the topic of the supernatural, but it ended in my showing them that the abnormal in psychical experiences was a subject to which I had, like many neurologists, devoted a great deal of attention. I concluded by narrating my experiences when, as a member of the Psychical Research Society, I had formed one of a committee of three who spent the night in a haunted house. Our adventures were neither exciting nor convincing, but, such as it was, the story appeared to interest my auditors in a remarkable degree. They listened with an eager silence, and I caught a look of intelligence between them which I could not understand. Lady Holden immediately afterwards rose and left the room.

Sir Dominick pushed the cigar-box over to me, and we smoked for some little time in silence. That huge bony hand of his was twitching as he raised it with his cheroot to his lips, and I felt that the man’s nerves were vibrating like fiddle-strings. My instincts told me that he was on the verge of some intimate confidence, and I feared to speak lest I should interrupt it. At last he turned towards me with a spasmodic gesture like a man who throws his last scruple to the winds.

“From the little that I have seen of you it appears to me, Dr. Hardacre,” said he, “that you are the very man I have wanted to meet.”

“I am delighted to hear it, sir.”

“Your head seems to be cool and steady. You will acquit me of any desire to flatter you, for the circumstances are too serious to permit of insincerities. You have some special knowledge upon these subjects, and you evidently view them from that philosophical standpoint which robs them of all vulgar terror. I presume that the sight of an apparition would not seriously discompose you?”

“I think not, sir.”

“Would even interest you, perhaps?”

“Most intensely.”

“As a psychical observer, you would probably investigate it in as impersonal a fashion as an astronomer investigates a wandering comet?”

“Precisely.”

He gave a heavy sigh.

“Believe me, Dr. Hardacre, there was a time when I could have spoken as you do now. My nerve was a by-word in India. Even the Mutiny never shook it for an instant. And yet you see what I am reduced to — the most timorous man, perhaps, in all this county of Wiltshire. Do not speak too bravely upon this subject, or you may find yourself subjected to as long-drawn a test as I am — a test which can only end in the madhouse or the grave.”

I waited patiently until he should see fit to go farther in his confidence. His preamble had, I need not say, filled me with interest and expectation.

“For some years, Dr. Hardacre,” he continued, “my life and that of my wife have been made miserable by a cause which is so grotesque that it borders upon the ludicrous. And yet familiarity has never made it more easy to bear — on the contrary, as time passes my nerves become more worn and shattered by the constant attrition. If you have no physical fears, Dr. Hardacre, I should very much value your opinion upon this phenomenon which troubles us so.”

“For what it is worth my opinion is entirely at your service. May I ask the nature of the phenomenon?”

“I think that your experiences will have a higher evidential value if you are not told in advance what you may expect to encounter. You are yourself aware of the quibbles of unconscious cerebration and subjective impressions with which a scientific sceptic may throw a doubt upon your statement. It would be as well to guard against them in advance.”

“What shall I do, then?”

“I will tell you. Would you mind following me this way?” He led me out of the dining-room and down a long passage until we came to a terminal door. Inside there was a large bare room fitted as a laboratory, with numerous scientific instruments and bottles. A shelf ran along one side, upon which there stood a long line of glass jars containing pathological and anatomical specimens.

“You see that I still dabble in some of my old studies,” said Sir Dominick. “These jars are the remains of what was once a most excellent collection, but unfortunately I lost the greater part of them when my house was burned down in Bombay in ‘92. It was a most unfortunate affair for me — in more ways than one. I had examples of many rare conditions, and my splenic collection was probably unique. These are the survivors.”

I glanced over them, and saw that they really were of a very great value and rarity from a pathological point of view: bloated organs, gaping cysts, distorted bones, odious parasites — a singular exhibition of the products of India.

“There is, as you see, a small settee here,” said my host. “It was far from our intention to offer a guest so meagre an accommodation, but since affairs have taken this turn, it would be a great kindness upon your part if you would consent to spend the night in this apartment. I beg that you will not hesitate to let me know if the idea should be at all repugnant to you.”

“On the contrary,” I said, “it is most acceptable.”

“My own room is the second on the left, so that if you should feel that you are in need of company a call would always bring me to your side.”

“I trust that I shall not be compelled to disturb you.”

“It is unlikely that I shall be asleep. I do not sleep much. Do not hesitate to summon me.”

And so with this agreement we joined Lady Holden in the drawing-room and talked of lighter things.

It was no affectation upon my part to say that the prospect of my night’s adventure was an agreeable one. I had no pretence to greater physical courage than my neighbours, but familiarity with a subject robs it of those vague and undefined terrors which are the most appalling to the imaginative mind. The human brain is capable of only one strong emotion at a time, and if it be filled with curiosity or scientific enthusiasm, there is no room for fear. It is true that I had my uncle’s assurance that he had himself originally taken this point of view, but I reflected that the breakdown of his nervous system might be due to his forty years in India as much as to any psychical experiences which had befallen him. I at least was sound in nerve and brain, and it was with something of the pleasurable thrill of anticipation with which the sportsman takes his position beside the haunt of his game that I shut the laboratory door behind me, and partially undressing, lay down upon the rug-covered settee.

It was not an ideal atmosphere for a bedroom. The air was heavy with many chemical odours, that of methylated spirit predominating. Nor were the decorations of my chamber very sedative. The odious line of glass jars with their relics of disease and suffering stretched in front of my very eyes. There was no blind to the window, and a three-quarter moon streamed its white light into the room, tracing a silver square with filigree lattices upon the opposite wall. When I had extinguished my candle this one bright patch in the midst of the general gloom had certainly an eerie and discomposing aspect. A rigid and absolute silence reigned throughout the old house, so that the low swish of the branches in the garden came softly and smoothly to my ears. It may have been the hypnotic lullaby of this gentle susurrus, or it may have been the result of my tiring day, but after many dozings and many efforts to regain my clearness of perception, I fell at last into a deep and dreamless sleep.

I was awakened by some sound in the room, and I instantly raised myself upon my elbow on the couch. Some hours had passed, for the square patch upon the wall had slid downwards and sideways until it lay obliquely at the end of my bed. The rest of the room was in deep shadow. At first I could see nothing, presently, as my eyes became accustomed to the faint light, I was aware, with a thrill which all my scientific absorption could not entirely prevent, that something was moving slowly along the line of the wall. A gentle, shuffling sound, as of soft slippers, came to my ears, and I dimly discerned a human figure walking stealthily from the direction of the door. As it emerged into the patch of moonlight I saw very clearly what it was and how it was employed. It was a man, short and squat, dressed in some sort of dark-grey gown, which hung straight from his shoulders to his feet. The moon shone upon the side of his face, and I saw that it was chocolate-brown in colour, with a ball of black hair like a woman's at the back of his head. He walked slowly, and his eyes were cast upwards towards the line of bottles which contained those gruesome remnants of humanity. He seemed to examine each jar with attention, and then to pass on to the next. When he had come to the end of the line, immediately opposite my bed, he stopped, faced me, threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and vanished from my sight.

I have said that he threw up his hands, but I should have said his arms, for as he assumed that attitude of despair I observed a singular peculiarity about his appearance. He had only one hand! As the sleeves drooped down from the upflung arms I saw the left plainly, but the right ended in a knobby and unsightly stump. In every other way his appearance was so natural, and I had both seen and heard him so clearly, that I could easily have believed that he was an Indian servant of Sir Dominick's who had come into my room in search of something. It was only his sudden disappearance which suggested anything more sinister to me. As it was I sprang from my couch, lit a candle, and examined the whole room carefully. There were no signs of my visitor, and I was forced to conclude that there had really been something outside the normal laws of Nature in his appearance. I lay awake for the remainder of the night, but nothing else occurred to disturb me.

I am an early riser, but my uncle was an even earlier one, for I found him pacing up and down the lawn at the side of the house. He ran towards me in his eagerness when he saw me come out from the door.

"Well, well!" he cried. "Did you see him?"

"An Indian with one hand?"

"Precisely."

"Yes, I saw him" — and I told him all that occurred. When I had finished, he led the way into his study. "We have a little time before breakfast," said he. "It will suffice to give you an explanation of this extraordinary affair — so far as I can explain that which is essentially inexplicable. In the first place, when I tell you that for four years I have never passed one single night, either in Bombay, aboard ship, or here in England without my sleep being broken by this fellow, you will understand why it is that I am a wreck of my former self. His programme is always the same. He appears by my bedside, shakes me roughly by the shoulder, passes from my room into the laboratory, walks slowly along the line of my bottles, and then vanishes. For more than a thousand times he has gone through the same routine."

"What does he want?"

"He wants his hand."

"His hand?"

"Yes, it came about in this way. I was summoned to Peshawur for a consultation some ten years ago, and while there I was asked to look at the hand of a native who was passing through with an Afghan caravan. The fellow came from some mountain tribe living away at the back of beyond somewhere on the other side of Kaffiristan. He talked a bastard Pushtoo, and it was all I could do to understand him. He was suffering from a soft sarcomatous swelling of one of the metacarpal joints, and I made him realise that it was only by losing his hand that he could hope to save his life. After much persuasion he consented to the operation, and he asked me, when it was over, what fee I demanded. The poor fellow was almost a beggar, so that the idea of a fee was absurd, but I answered in jest that my fee should be his hand, and that I proposed to add it to my pathological collection.

"To my surprise he demurred very much to the suggestion, and he explained that according to his religion it was an all-important matter that the body should be reunited after death, and so make a perfect dwelling for the spirit. The belief is, of course, an old one, and the mummies of the Egyptians arose from an analogous superstition. I answered him that his hand was already off, and asked him how he intended to preserve it. He replied that he would pickle it in salt and carry it about with him. I suggested that it might be safer in my keeping than his, and that I had better means than salt for preserving it. On realising that I really intended to carefully keep it, his opposition vanished instantly. 'But remember, sahib,' said he, 'I shall want it back when I am dead.' I laughed at the remark, and so the matter ended. I returned to my practice, and he no doubt in the course of time was able to continue his journey to Afghanistan.

"Well, as I told you last night, I had a bad fire in my house at Bombay. Half of it was burned down, and, among other things, my pathological collection was largely destroyed. What you see are the poor remains of it. The hand of the hillman went with the rest, but I gave the matter no particular thought at the time. That was six years ago.

"Four years ago — two years after the fire — I was awakened one night by a furious tugging at my sleeve. I sat up under the impression that my favourite mastiff was trying to arouse me. Instead of this, I saw my Indian patient of long ago, dressed in the long grey gown which was the badge of his people. He was holding up his stump and looking reproachfully at me. He then went over to my bottles, which at that time I kept in my room, and he examined them carefully, after which he gave a gesture of anger and vanished. I realised that he had just died, and that he had come to claim my promise that I should keep his limb in safety for him.

"Well, there you have it all, Dr. Hardacre. Every night at the same hour for four years this performance has been repeated. It is a simple thing in itself, but it has worn me out like water dropping on a stone. It has brought a vile insomnia with it, for I cannot sleep now for the expectation of his coming. It has poisoned my old age and that of my wife, who has been the sharer in this great trouble. But there is the breakfast gong, and she will be waiting impatiently to know how it fared with you last night. We are both much indebted to you for your gallantry, for it takes something from the weight of our misfortune when we share it, even for a single night, with a friend, and it reassures us as to our sanity, which we are sometimes driven to question."

This was the curious narrative which Sir Dominick confided to me — a story which to many would have appeared to be a grotesque impossibility, but which, after my experience of the night before, and my previous knowledge of such things, I was prepared to accept as an absolute fact. I thought deeply over the matter, and brought the whole range of my reading and experience to bear upon it. After breakfast, I surprised my host and hostess by announcing that I was returning to London by the next train.

"My dear doctor," cried Sir Dominick in great distress, "you make me feel that I have been guilty of a gross breach of hospitality in intruding this unfortunate matter upon you. I should have borne my own burden."

"It is, indeed, that matter which is taking me to London," I answered; "but you are mistaken, I assure you, if you think that my experience of last night was an unpleasant one to me. On the contrary, I am about to ask your permission to return in the evening and spend one more night in your laboratory. I am very eager to see this visitor once again."

My uncle was exceedingly anxious to know what I was about to do, but my fears of raising false hopes prevented me from telling him. I was back in my own consulting-room a little after luncheon, and was confirming my memory of a passage in a recent book upon occultism which had arrested my attention when I had read it.

"In the case of earth-bound spirits," said my authority, "some one dominant idea obsessing them at the hour of death is sufficient to hold them in this material world. They are the amphibia of this life and of the next, capable of passing from one to the other as the turtle passes from land to water. The causes which may bind a soul so strongly to a life which its body has abandoned are any violent emotion. Avarice, revenge, anxiety, love, and pity have all been known to have this effect. As a rule it springs from some unfulfilled wish, and when the wish has been fulfilled the material bond relaxes. There are many cases upon record which show the singular persistence of these visitors, and also their disappearance when their wishes have been fulfilled, or in some cases when a reasonable compromise has been effected."

"*A reasonable compromise effected*" — those were the words which I had brooded over all the morning, and which I now verified in the original. No actual atonement could be made here — but a reasonable compromise! I made my way as fast as a train could take me to the Shadwell Seamen's Hospital, where my old friend Jack Hewett was house-surgeon. Without explaining the situation I made him understand what it was that I wanted.

"A brown man's hand!" said he, in amazement. "What in the world do you want that for?"

"Never mind. I'll tell you some day. I know that your wards are full of Indians."

"I should think so. But a hand — —" He thought a little and then struck a bell.

"Travers," said he to a student-dresser, "what became of the hands of the Lascar which we took off yesterday? I mean the fellow from the East India Dock who got caught in the steam winch."

"They are in the *post-mortem* room, sir."

"Just pack one of them in antiseptics and give it to Dr. Hardacre."

And so I found myself back at Rodenhurst before dinner with this curious outcome of my day in town. I still said nothing to Sir Dominick, but I slept that night in the laboratory, and I placed the Lascar's hand in one of the glass jars at the end of my couch.

So interested was I in the result of my experiment that sleep was out of the question. I sat with a shaded lamp beside me and waited patiently for my visitor. This time I saw him clearly from the first. He appeared beside the door, nebulous for an instant, and then hardening into as distinct an outline as any living man. The slippers beneath his grey gown were red and heelless, which accounted for the low, shuffling sound which he made as he walked. As on the previous night he passed slowly along the line of bottles until he paused before that which contained the hand. He reached up to it, his whole figure quivering with expectation, took it down, examined it eagerly, and then, with a face which was convulsed with disappointment, he hurled it down on the floor. There was a crash which resounded through the house, and when I looked up the mutilated Indian had disappeared. A moment later my door flew open and Sir Dominick rushed in.

"You are not hurt?" he cried.

"No — but deeply disappointed."

He looked in astonishment at the splinters of glass, and the brown hand lying upon the floor.

“Good God!” he cried. “What is this?”

I told him my idea and its wretched sequel. He listened intently, but shook his head.

“It was well thought of,” said he, “but I fear that there is no such easy end to my sufferings. But one thing I now insist upon. It is that you shall never again upon any pretext occupy this room. My fears that something might have happened to you — when I heard that crash — have been the most acute of all the agonies which I have undergone. I will not expose myself to a repetition of it.”

He allowed me, however, to spend the remainder of the night where I was, and I lay there worrying over the problem and lamenting my own failure. With the first light of morning there was the Lascar’s hand still lying upon the floor to remind me of my fiasco. I lay looking at it — and as I lay suddenly an idea flew like a bullet through my head and brought me quivering with excitement out of my couch. I raised the grim relic from where it had fallen. Yes, it was indeed so. The hand was the *left* hand of the Lascar.

By the first train I was on my way to town, and hurried at once to the Seamen’s Hospital. I remembered that both hands of the Lascar had been amputated, but I was terrified lest the precious organ which I was in search of might have been already consumed in the crematory. My suspense was soon ended. It had still been preserved in the *post-mortem* room. And so I returned to Rodenhurst in the evening with my mission accomplished and the material for a fresh experiment.

But Sir Dominick Holden would not hear of my occupying the laboratory again. To all my entreaties he turned a deaf ear. It offended his sense of hospitality, and he could no longer permit it. I left the hand, therefore, as I had done its fellow the night before, and I occupied a comfortable bedroom in another portion of the house, some distance from the scene of my adventures.

But in spite of that my sleep was not destined to be uninterrupted. In the dead of night my host burst into my room, a lamp in his hand. His huge gaunt figure was enveloped in a loose dressing-gown, and his whole appearance might certainly have seemed more formidable to a weak-nerved man than that of the Indian of the night before. But it was not his entrance so much as his expression which amazed me. He had turned suddenly younger by twenty years at the least. His eyes were shining, his features radiant, and he waved one hand in triumph over his head. I sat up astounded, staring sleepily at this extraordinary visitor. But his words soon drove the sleep from my eyes.

“We have done it! We have succeeded!” he shouted. “My dear Hardacre, how can I ever in this world repay you?”

“You don’t mean to say that it is all right?”

“Indeed I do. I was sure that you would not mind being awakened to hear such blessed news.”

“Mind! I should think not indeed. But is it really certain?”

“I have no doubt whatever upon the point. I owe you such a debt, my dear nephew, as I have never owed a man before, and never expected to. What can I possibly do for you that is commensurate? Providence must have sent you to my rescue. You have saved both my reason and my life, for another six months of this must have seen me either in a cell or a coffin. And my wife — it was wearing her out before my eyes. Never could I have believed that any human being could have lifted this burden off me.” He seized my hand and wrung it in his bony grip.

“It was only an experiment — a forlorn hope — but I am delighted from my heart that it has succeeded. But how do you know that it is all right? Have you seen something?”

He seated himself at the foot of my bed.

“I have seen enough,” said he. “It satisfies me that I shall be troubled no more. What has passed is easily told. You know that at a certain hour this creature always comes to me. To-night he arrived at the usual time, and aroused me with even more violence than is his custom. I can only surmise that his disappointment of last night increased the bitterness of his anger against me. He looked angrily at me, and then went on his usual round. But in a few minutes I saw him, for the first time since this persecution began, return to my chamber. He was smiling. I saw the gleam of his white teeth through the dim light. He stood facing me at the end of my bed, and three times he made the low Eastern salaam which is their solemn leave-taking. And the third time that he bowed he raised his arms over his head, and I saw his *two* hands outstretched in the air. So he vanished, and, as I believe, for ever.”

So that is the curious experience which won me the affection and the gratitude of my celebrated uncle, the famous Indian surgeon. His anticipations were realised, and never again was he disturbed by the visits of the restless hillman in search of his lost member. Sir Dominick and Lady Holden spent a very happy old age, unclouded, so far as I know, by any trouble, and they finally died during the great influenza epidemic within a few weeks of each other. In his lifetime he always turned to me for advice in everything which concerned that English life of which he knew so little; and I aided him also in the purchase and development of his estates. It was no great surprise to me, therefore, that I found myself eventually promoted over the heads of five exasperated cousins, and changed in a single day from a hard-working country doctor into the head of an important Wiltshire family. I at least have reason to bless the memory of the man with the brown hand, and the day when I was fortunate enough to relieve Rodenhurst of his unwelcome presence.

THE USHER OF LEA HOUSE SCHOOL

Mr. Lumsden, the senior partner of Lumsden and Westmacott, the well-known scholastic and clerical agents, was a small, dapper man, with a sharp, abrupt manner, a critical eye, and an incisive way of speaking.

“Your name, sir?” said he, sitting pen in hand with his long, red-lined folio in front of him.

“Harold Weld.”

“Oxford or Cambridge?”

“Cambridge.”

“Honours?”

“No, sir.”

“Athlete?”

“Nothing remarkable, I am afraid.”

“Not a Blue?”

“Oh no.”

Mr. Lumsden shook his head despondently and shrugged his shoulders in a way which sent my hopes down to zero. “There is a very keen competition for masterships, Mr. Weld,” said he. “The vacancies are few and the applicants innumerable. A first-class athlete, oar, or cricketer, or a man who has passed very high in his examinations, can usually find a vacancy — I might say always in the case of the cricketer. But the average man — if you will excuse the description, Mr. Weld — has a very great difficulty, almost an insurmountable difficulty. We have already more than a hundred such names upon our lists, and if you think it worth while our adding yours, I dare say that in the course of some years we may possibly be able to find you some opening which — —”

He paused on account of a knock at the door. It was a clerk with a note. Mr. Lumsden broke the seal and read it.

“Why, Mr. Weld,” said he, “this is really rather an interesting coincidence. I understand you to say that Latin and English are your subjects, and that you would prefer for a time to accept a place in an elementary establishment, where you would have time for private study?”

“Quite so.”

“This note contains a request from an old client of ours, Dr. Phelps McCarthy, of Willow Lea House Academy, West Hampstead, that I should at once send him a young man who should be qualified to teach Latin and

English to a small class of boys under fourteen years of age. His vacancy appears to be the very one which you are looking for. The terms are not munificent — sixty pounds, board, lodging, and washing — but the work is not onerous, and you would have the evenings to yourself."

"That would do," I cried, with all the eagerness of the man who sees work at last after weary months of seeking.

"I don't know that it is quite fair to these gentlemen whose names have been so long upon our list," said Mr. Lumsden, glancing down at his open ledger. "But the coincidence is so striking that I feel we must really give you the refusal of it."

"Then I accept it, sir, and I am much obliged to you."

"There is one small provision in Dr. McCarthy's letter. He stipulates that the applicant must be a man with an imperturbable good temper."

"I am the very man," said I, with conviction.

"Well," said Mr. Lumsden, with some hesitation, "I hope that your temper is really as good as you say, for I rather fancy that you may need it."

"I presume that every elementary school-master does."

"Yes, sir, but it is only fair to you to warn you that there may be some especially trying circumstances in this particular situation. Dr. Phelps McCarthy does not make such a condition without some very good and pressing reason."

There was a certain solemnity in his speech which struck a chill in the delight with which I had welcomed this providential vacancy.

"May I ask the nature of these circumstances?" I asked.

"We endeavour to hold the balance equally between our clients, and to be perfectly frank with all of them. If I knew of objections to you I should certainly communicate them to Dr. McCarthy, and so I have no hesitation in doing as much for you. I find," he continued, glancing over the pages of his ledger, "that within the last twelve months we have supplied no fewer than seven Latin masters to Willow Lea House Academy, four of them having left so abruptly as to forfeit their month's salary, and none of them having stayed more than eight weeks."

"And the other masters? Have they stayed?"

"There is only one other residential master, and he appears to be unchanged. You can understand, Mr. Weld," continued the agent, closing both the ledger and the interview, "that such rapid changes are not desirable from a master's point of view, whatever may be said for them by an agent working on commission. I have no idea why these gentlemen have resigned their situations so early. I can only give you the facts, and advise you to see Dr. McCarthy at once and to form your own conclusions."

Great is the power of the man who has nothing to lose, and it was therefore with perfect serenity, but with a good deal of curiosity, that I rang early that afternoon the heavy wrought-iron bell of the Willow Lea House Academy. The building was a massive pile, square and ugly, standing in its own extensive grounds, with a broad carriage-sweep curving up to it from the road. It stood high, and commanded a view on the one side of the grey roofs and bristling spires of Northern London, and on the other of the well-wooded and beautiful country which fringes the great city. The door was opened by a boy in buttons, and I was shown into a well-appointed study, where the principal of the academy presently joined me.

The warnings and insinuations of the agent had prepared me to meet a choleric and overbearing person — one whose manner was an insupportable provocation to those who worked under him. Anything further from the reality cannot be imagined. He was a frail, gentle creature, clean-shaven and round-shouldered, with a bearing which was so courteous that it became almost deprecating. His bushy hair was thickly shot with grey, and his age I should imagine to verge upon sixty. His voice was low and suave, and he walked with a certain mincing delicacy of manner. His whole appearance was that of a kindly scholar, who was more at home among his books than in the practical affairs of the world.

"I am sure that we shall be very happy to have your assistance, Mr. Weld," said he, after a few professional questions. "Mr. Percival Manners left me yesterday, and I should be glad if you could take over his duties to-morrow."

"May I ask if that is Mr. Percival Manners of Selwyn?" I asked.

"Precisely. Did you know him?"

"Yes; he is a friend of mine."

"An excellent teacher, but a little hasty in his disposition. It was his only fault. Now, in your case, Mr. Weld, is your own temper under good control? Supposing for argument's sake that I were to so far forget myself as to be rude to you or to speak roughly or to jar your feelings in any way, could you rely upon yourself to control your emotions?"

I smiled at the idea of this courteous, little, mincing creature ruffling my nerves.

"I think that I could answer for it, sir," said I.

"Quarrels are very painful to me," said he. "I wish every one to live in harmony under my roof. I will not deny Mr. Percival Manners had provocation, but I wish to find a man who can raise himself above provocation, and sacrifice his own feelings for the sake of peace and concord."

"I will do my best, sir."

"You cannot say more, Mr. Weld. In that case I shall expect you to-night, if you can get your things ready so soon."

I not only succeeded in getting my things ready, but I found time to call at the Benedict Club in Piccadilly, where I knew that I should find Manners if he were still in town. There he was sure enough in the smoking-room, and I questioned him, over a cigarette, as to his reasons for throwing up his recent situation.

"You don't tell me that you are going to Dr. Phelps McCarthy's Academy?" he cried, staring at me in surprise. "My dear chap, it's no use. You can't possibly remain there."

"But I saw him, and he seemed the most courtly, inoffensive fellow. I never met a man with more gentle manners."

"He! oh, he's all right. There's no vice in him. Have you seen Theophilus St. James?"

"I have never heard the name. Who is he?"

"Your colleague. The other master."

"No, I have not seen him."

"*He's* the terror. If you can stand him, you have either the spirit of a perfect Christian or else you have no spirit at all. A more perfect bounder never bounded."

"But why does McCarthy stand it?"

My friend looked at me significantly through his cigarette smoke, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You will form your own conclusions about that. Mine were formed very soon, and I never found occasion to alter them."

"It would help me very much if you would tell me them."

"When you see a man in his own house allowing his business to be ruined, his comfort destroyed, and his authority defied by another man in a subordinate position, and calmly submitting to it without so much as a word of protest, what conclusion do you come to?"

"That the one has a hold over the other."

Percival Manners nodded his head.

"There you are! You've hit it first barrel. It seems to me that there's no other explanation which will cover the facts. At some period in his life the little Doctor has gone astray. *Humanum est errare.* I have even done it myself. But this was something serious, and the other man got a hold of it and has never let go. That's the truth. Blackmail is at the bottom of it. But he had no hold over me, and there was no reason why *I* should stand his insolence, so I came away — and I very much expect to see you do the same."

For some time he talked over the matter, but he always came to the same conclusion — that I should not retain my new situation very long.

It was with no very pleasant feelings after this preparation that I found myself face to face with the very man of whom I had received so evil an account. Dr. McCarthy introduced us to each other in his study on the evening of that same day immediately after my arrival at the school.

"This is your new colleague, Mr. St. James," said he, in his genial, courteous fashion. "I trust that you will mutually agree, and that I shall find nothing but good feeling and sympathy beneath this roof."

I shared the good Doctor's hope, but my expectations of it were not increased by the appearance of my *confrère*. He was a young, bull-necked fellow about thirty years of age, dark-eyed and black-haired, with an exceedingly vigorous physique. I have never seen a more strongly built man, though he tended to run to fat in a way which showed that he was in the worst of training. His face was coarse, swollen, and brutal, with a pair of small black eyes deeply sunken in his head. His heavy jowl, his projecting ears, and his thick bandy legs all went to make up a personality which was as formidable as it was repellent.

"I hear you've never been out before," said he, in a rude, brusque fashion. "Well, it's a poor life: hard work and starvation pay, as you'll find out for yourself."

"But it has some compensations," said the principal. "Surely you will allow that, Mr. St. James?"

"Has it? I never could find them. What do you call compensations?"

"Even to be in the continual presence of youth is a privilege. It has the effect of keeping youth in one's own soul, for one reflects something of their high spirits and their keen enjoyment of life."

"Little beasts!" cried my colleague.

"Come, come, Mr. St. James, you are too hard upon them."

"I hate the sight of them! If I could put them and their blessed copybooks and lexicons and slates into one bonfire I'd do it to-night."

"This is Mr. St. James's way of talking," said the principal, smiling nervously as he glanced at me. "You must not take him too seriously. Now, Mr. Weld, you know where your room is, and no doubt you have your own little arrangements to make. The sooner you make them the sooner you will feel yourself at home."

It seemed to me that he was only too anxious to remove me at once from the influence of this extraordinary colleague, and I was glad to go, for the conversation had become embarrassing.

And so began an epoch which always seems to me as I look back to it to be the most singular in all my experience. The school was in many ways an excellent one. Dr. Phelps McCarthy was an ideal principal. His methods were modern and rational. The management was all that could be desired. And yet in the middle of this well-ordered machine there intruded the incongruous and impossible Mr. St. James, throwing everything into confusion. His duties were to teach English and mathematics, and how he acquitted himself of them I do not know, as our classes were held in separate rooms. I can answer for it, however, that the boys feared him and loathed him, and I know that they had good reason to do so, for frequently my own teaching was interrupted by his bellowing of anger, and even by the sound of his blows. Dr. McCarthy spent most of his time in his class, but it was, I suspect, to watch over the master rather than the boys, and to try to moderate his ferocious temper when it threatened to become dangerous.

It was in his bearing to the head master, however, that my colleague's conduct was most outrageous. The first conversation which I have recorded proved to be typical of their intercourse. He domineered over him openly and brutally. I have heard him contradict him roughly before the whole school. At no time would he show him any mark of respect, and my temper often rose within me when I saw the quiet acquiescence of the old Doctor, and his patient tolerance of this monstrous treatment. And yet the sight of it surrounded the principal also with a certain vague horror in my mind, for supposing my friend's theory to be correct — and I could devise no better one — how black must have been the story which could be held over his head by this man and, by fear of its publicity, force him to undergo such humiliations. This quiet, gentle Doctor might be a profound hypocrite, a criminal, a forger possibly, or a poisoner. Only such a secret as this could account for the complete power which the younger man held over him.

Why else should he admit so hateful a presence into his house and so harmful an influence into his school? Why should he submit to degradations which could not be witnessed, far less endured, without indignation?

And yet, if it were so, I was forced to confess that my principal carried it off with extraordinary duplicity. Never by word or sign did he show that the young man’s presence was distasteful to him. I have seen him look pained, it is true, after some peculiarly outrageous exhibition, but he gave me the impression that it was always on account of the scholars or of me, never on account of himself. He spoke to and of St. James in an indulgent fashion, smiling gently at what made my blood boil within me. In his way of looking at him and addressing him, one could see no trace of resentment, but rather a sort of timid and deprecating good will. His company he certainly courted, and they spent many hours together in the study and the garden.

As to my own relations with Theophilus St. James, I made up my mind from the beginning that I should keep my temper with him, and to that resolution I steadfastly adhered. If Dr. McCarthy chose to permit this disrespect, and to condone these outrages, it was his affair and not mine. It was evident that his one wish was that there should be peace between us, and I felt that I could help him best by respecting this desire. My easiest way to do so was to avoid my colleague, and this I did to the best of my ability. When we were thrown together I was quiet, polite, and reserved. He, on his part, showed me no ill-will, but met me rather with a coarse joviality, and a rough familiarity which he meant to be ingratiating. He was insistent in his attempts to get me into his room at night, for the purpose of playing euchre and of drinking.

“Old McCarthy doesn’t mind,” said he. “Don’t you be afraid of him. We’ll do what we like, and I’ll answer for it that he won’t object.” Once only I went, and when I left, after a dull and gross evening, my host was stretched dead drunk upon the sofa. After that I gave the excuse of a course of study, and spent my spare hours alone in my own room.

One point upon which I was anxious to gain information was as to how long these proceedings had been going on. When did St. James assert his hold over Dr. McCarthy? From neither of them could I learn how long my colleague had been in his present situation. One or two leading questions upon my part were eluded or ignored in a manner so marked that it was easy to see that they were both of them as eager to conceal the point as I was to know it. But at last one evening I had the chance of a chat with Mrs.

Carter, the matron — for the Doctor was a widower — and from her I got the information which I wanted. It needed no questioning to get at her knowledge, for she was so full of indignation that she shook with passion as she spoke of it, and raised her hands into the air in the earnestness of her denunciation, as she described the grievances which she had against my colleague.

"It was three years ago, Mr. Weld, that he first darkened this doorstep," she cried. "Three bitter years they have been to me. The school had fifty boys then. Now it has twenty-two. That's what he has done for us in three years. In another three there won't be one. And the Doctor, that angel of patience, you see how he treats him, though he is not fit to lace his boots for him. If it wasn't for the Doctor, you may be sure that I wouldn't stay an hour under the same roof with such a man, and so I told him to his own face, Mr. Weld. If the Doctor would only pack him about his business — but I know that I am saying more than I should!" She stopped herself with an effort, and spoke no more upon the subject. She had remembered that I was almost a stranger in the school, and she feared that she had been indiscreet.

There were one or two very singular points about my colleague. The chief one was that he rarely took any exercise. There was a playing-field within the college grounds, and that was his farthest point. If the boys went out, it was I or Dr. McCarthy who accompanied them. St. James gave as a reason for this that he had injured his knee some years before, and that walking was painful to him. For my own part I put it down to pure laziness upon his part, for he was of an obese, heavy temperament. Twice, however, I saw him from my window stealing out of the grounds late at night, and the second time I watched him return in the grey of the morning and slink in through an open window. These furtive excursions were never alluded to, but they exposed the hollowness of his story about his knee, and they increased the dislike and distrust which I had of the man. His nature seemed to be vicious to the core.

Another point, small but suggestive, was that he hardly ever during the months that I was at Willow Lea House received any letters, and on those few occasions they were obviously tradesmen's bills. I am an early riser, and used every morning to pick my own correspondence out of the bundle upon the hall table. I could judge therefore how few were ever there for Mr. Theophilus St. James. There seemed to me to be something peculiarly ominous in this. What sort of a man could he be who during thirty years of his life had never made a single friend, high or low, who cared to continue to keep in touch with him? And yet the sinister fact remained that the head master not only tolerated, but was even intimate with him. More than once on entering a room I had found them talking confidentially together, and they would walk arm in arm in deep conversation up and down the garden paths. So curious did I become to know what the tie was which bound them, that I found it gradually push out my other interests and become the main purpose of my life. In school and out of school, at meals and at play, I was perpetually engaged in watching Dr. Phelps McCarthy and Mr. Theophilus St. James, and in endeavouring to solve the mystery which surrounded them.

But, unfortunately, my curiosity was a little too open. I had not the art to conceal the suspicions which I felt about the relations which existed between these two men and the nature of the hold which the one appeared to have over the other. It may have been my manner of watching them, it may have been some indiscreet question, but it is certain that I showed too clearly what I felt. One night I was conscious that the eyes of Theophilus St. James were fixed upon me in a surly and menacing stare. I had a foreboding of evil, and I was not surprised when Dr. McCarthy called me next morning into his study.

“I am very sorry, Mr. Weld,” said he, “but I am afraid that I shall be compelled to dispense with your services.”

“Perhaps you would give me some reason for dismissing me,” I answered, for I was conscious of having done my duties to the best of my power, and knew well that only one reason could be given.

“I have no fault to find with you,” said he, and the colour came to his cheeks.

“You send me away at the suggestion of my colleague.”

His eyes turned away from mine.

“We will not discuss the question, Mr. Weld. It is impossible for me to discuss it. In justice to you, I will give you the strongest recommendation for your next situation. I can say no more. I hope that you will continue your duties here until you have found a place elsewhere.”

My whole soul rose against the injustice of it, and yet I had no appeal and no redress. I could only bow and leave the room, with a bitter sense of ill-usage at my heart.

My first instinct was to pack my boxes and leave the house. But the head master had given me permission to remain until I had found another situation. I was sure that St. James desired me to go, and that was a strong reason why I should stay. If my presence annoyed him, I should give him as much of it as I could. I had begun to hate him and to long to have my revenge upon him. If he had a hold over our principal, might not I in turn obtain one over him? It was a sign of weakness that he should be so afraid of my curiosity. He would not resent it so much if he had not something to fear from it. I entered my name once more upon the books of the agents, but meanwhile I continued to fulfil my duties at Willow Lea House, and so it came about that I was present at the *dénouement* of this singular situation.

During that week — for it was only a week before the crisis came — I was in the habit of going down each evening, after the work of the day was done, to inquire about my new arrangements. One night, it was a cold and windy evening in March, I had just stepped out from the hall door when a strange sight met my eyes. A man was crouching before one of the windows of the house. His knees were bent and his eyes were fixed upon the small line of light between the curtain and the sash. The window threw a square of brightness in front of it, and in the middle of this the dark shadow of this ominous visitor showed clear and hard. It was but for an instant that I saw him, for he glanced up and was off in a moment through the shrubbery. I could hear the patter of his feet as he ran down the road, until it died away in the distance.

It was evidently my duty to turn back and to tell Dr. McCarthy what I had seen. I found him in his study. I had expected him to be disturbed at such an incident, but I was not prepared for the state of panic into which he fell. He leaned back in his chair, white and gasping, like one who has received a mortal blow.

“Which window, Mr. Weld?” he asked, wiping his forehead. “Which window was it?”

“The next to the dining-room — Mr. St. James’s window.”

“Dear me! Dear me! This is, indeed, unfortunate! A man looking through Mr. St. James’s window!” He wrung his hands like a man who is at his wits’ end what to do.

“I shall be passing the police-station, sir. Would you wish me to mention the matter?”

“No, no,” he cried, suddenly, mastering his extreme agitation; “I have no doubt that it was some poor tramp who intended to beg. I attach no importance to the incident — none at all. Don’t let me detain you, Mr. Weld, if you wish to go out.”

I left him sitting in his study with reassuring words upon his lips, but with horror upon his face. My heart was heavy for my little employer as I started off once more for town. As I looked back from the gate at the square of light which marked the window of my colleague, I suddenly saw the black outline of Dr. McCarthy's figure passing against the lamp. He had hastened from his study then to tell St. James what he had heard. What was the meaning of it all, this atmosphere of mystery, this inexplicable terror, these confidences between two such dissimilar men? I thought and thought as I walked, but do what I would I could not hit upon any adequate conclusion. I little knew how near I was to the solution of the problem.

It was very late — nearly twelve o'clock — when I returned, and the lights were all out save one in the Doctor's study. The black, gloomy house loomed before me as I walked up the drive, its sombre bulk broken only by the one glimmering point of brightness. I let myself in with my latch-key, and was about to enter my own room when my attention was arrested by a short, sharp cry like that of a man in pain. I stood and listened, my hand upon the handle of my door.

All was silent in the house save for a distant murmur of voices which came, I knew, from the Doctor's room. I stole quietly down the corridor in that direction. The sound resolved itself now into two voices, the rough bullying tones of St. James and the lower tone of the Doctor, the one apparently insisting and the other arguing and pleading. Four thin lines of light in the blackness showed me the door of the Doctor's room, and step by step I drew nearer to it in the darkness. St. James's voice within rose louder and louder, and his words came plainly to my ear.

"I'll have every pound of it. If you won't give it me I'll take it. Do you hear?"

Dr. McCarthy's reply was inaudible, but the angry voice broke in again.

"Leave you destitute! I leave you this little goldmine of a school, and that's enough for one old man, is it not? How am I to set up in Australia without money? Answer me that!"

Again the Doctor said something in a soothing voice, but his answer only roused his companion to a higher pitch of fury.

"Done for me! What have you ever done for me except what you couldn't help doing? It was for your good name, not for my safety, that you cared. But enough cackle! I must get on my way before morning. Will you open your safe or will you not?"

“Oh, James, how can you use me so?” cried a wailing voice, and then there came a sudden little scream of pain. At the sound of that helpless appeal from brutal violence I lost for once that temper upon which I had prided myself. Every bit of manhood in me cried out against any further neutrality. With my walking cane in my hand I rushed into the study. As I did so I was conscious that the hall-door bell was violently ringing.

“You villain!” I cried, “let him go!”

The two men were standing in front of a small safe, which stood against one wall of the Doctor’s room. St. James held the old man by the wrist, and he had twisted his arm round in order to force him to produce the key. My little head master, white but resolute, was struggling furiously in the grip of the burly athlete. The bully glared over his shoulder at me with a mixture of fury and terror upon his brutal features. Then, realising that I was alone, he dropped his victim and made for me with a horrible curse.

“You infernal spy!” he cried. “I’ll do for you anyhow before I leave.”

I am not a very strong man, and I realised that I was helpless if once at close quarters. Twice I cut at him with my stick, but he rushed in at me with a murderous growl, and seized me by the throat with both his muscular hands. I fell backwards and he on the top of me, with a grip which was squeezing the life from me. I was conscious of his malignant yellow-tinged eyes within a few inches of my own, and then with a beating of pulses in my head and a singing in my ears, my senses slipped away from me. But even in that supreme moment I was aware that the door-bell was still violently ringing.

When I came to myself, I was lying upon the sofa in Dr. McCarthy’s study, and the Doctor himself was seated beside me. He appeared to be watching me intently and anxiously, for as I opened my eyes and looked about me he gave a great cry of relief. “Thank God!” he cried. “Thank God!”

“Where is he?” I asked, looking round the room. As I did so, I became aware that the furniture was scattered in every direction, and that there were traces of an even more violent struggle than that in which I had been engaged.

The Doctor sank his face between his hands.

“They have him,” he groaned. “After these years of trial they have him again. But how thankful I am that he has not for a second time stained his hands in blood.”

As the Doctor spoke I became aware that a man in the braided jacket of an inspector of police was standing in the doorway.

"Yes, sir," he remarked, "you have had a pretty narrow escape. If we had not got in when we did, you would not be here to tell the tale. I don't know that I ever saw any one much nearer to the undertaker."

I sat up with my hands to my throbbing head.

"Dr. McCarthy," said I, "this is all a mystery to me. I should be glad if you could explain to me who this man is, and why you have tolerated him so long in your house."

"I owe you an explanation, Mr. Weld — and the more so since you have, in so chivalrous a fashion, almost sacrificed your life in my defence. There is no reason now for secrecy. In a word, Mr. Weld, this unhappy man's real name is James McCarthy, and he is my only son."

"Your son?"

"Alas, yes. What sin have I ever committed that I should have such a punishment? He has made my whole life a misery from the first years of his boyhood. Violent, headstrong, selfish, unprincipled, he has always been the same. At eighteen he was a criminal. At twenty, in a paroxysm of passion, he took the life of a boon companion and was tried for murder. He only just escaped the gallows, and he was condemned to penal servitude. Three years ago he succeeded in escaping, and managed, in face of a thousand obstacles, to reach my house in London. My wife's heart had been broken by his condemnation, and as he had succeeded in getting a suit of ordinary clothes, there was no one here to recognise him. For months he lay concealed in the attics until the first search of the police should be over. Then I gave him employment here, as you have seen, though by his rough and overbearing manners he made my own life miserable, and that of his fellow-masters unbearable. You have been with us for four months, Mr. Weld, but no other master endured him so long. I apologise now for all you have had to submit to, but I ask you what else could I do? For his dead mother's sake I could not let harm come to him as long as it was in my power to fend it off. Only under my roof could he find a refuge — the only spot in all the world — and how could I keep him here without it exciting remark unless I gave him some occupation? I made him English master therefore, and in that capacity I have protected him here for three years. You have no doubt observed that he never during the daytime went beyond the college grounds. You now understand the reason. But when to-night you came to me with your report of a man who was looking through his window, I understood that his retreat was at last discovered. I besought him to fly at once, but he had been drinking, the unhappy fellow, and my words fell upon deaf ears. When at last he made up his mind to go he wished to take from me in his flight every shilling which I possessed. It was your entrance which saved me from him, while the police in turn arrived only just in time to rescue you. I have made myself amenable to the law by harbouring an escaped prisoner, and remain here in the custody of the inspector, but a prison has no terrors for me after what I have endured in this house during the last three years."

"It seems to me, Doctor," said the inspector, "that, if you have broken the law, you have had quite enough punishment already."

"God knows I have!" cried Dr. McCarthy, and sank his haggard face upon his hands.

I told my story when I was taken, and no one would listen to me. Then I told it again at the trial — the whole thing absolutely as it happened, without so much as a word added. I set it all out truly, so help me God, all that Lady Mannering said and did, and then all that I had said and done, just as it occurred. And what did I get for it? “The prisoner put forward a rambling and inconsequential statement, incredible in its details, and unsupported by any shred of corroborative evidence.” That was what one of the London papers said, and others let it pass as if I had made no defence at all. And yet, with my own eyes I saw Lord Mannering murdered, and I am as guiltless of it as any man on the jury that tried me.

Now, sir, you are there to receive the petitions of prisoners. It all lies with you. All I ask is that you read it — just read it — and then that you make an inquiry or two about the private character of this “lady” Mannering, if she still keeps the name that she had three years ago, when to my sorrow and ruin I came to meet her. You could use a private inquiry agent or a good lawyer, and you would soon learn enough to show you that my story is the true one. Think of the glory it would be to you to have all the papers saying that there would have been a shocking miscarriage of justice if it had not been for your perseverance and intelligence! That must be your reward, since I am a poor man and can offer you nothing. But if you don’t do it, may you never lie easy in your bed again! May no night pass that you are not haunted by the thought of the man who rots in gaol because you have not done the duty which you are paid to do! But you will do it, sir, I know. Just make one or two inquiries, and you will soon find which way the wind blows. Remember, also, that the only person who profited by the crime was herself, since it changed her from an unhappy wife to a rich young widow. There’s the end of the string in your hand, and you only have to follow it up and see where it leads to.

Mind you, sir, I make no complaint as far as the burglary goes. I don’t whine about what I have deserved, and so far I have had no more than I have deserved. Burglary it was, right enough, and my three years have gone to pay for it. It was shown at the trial that I had had a hand in the Merton Cross business, and did a year for that, so my story had the less attention on that account. A man with a previous conviction never gets a really fair trial. I own to the burglary, but when it comes to the murder which brought me a lifer — any judge but Sir James might have given me the gallows — then I tell you that I had nothing to do with it, and that I am an innocent man. And now I'll take that night, the 13th of September, 1894, and I'll give you just exactly what occurred, and may God's hand strike me down if I go one inch over the truth.

I had been at Bristol in the summer looking for work, and then I had a notion that I might get something at Portsmouth, for I was trained as a skilled mechanic, so I came tramping my way across the south of England, and doing odd jobs as I went. I was trying all I knew to keep off the cross, for I had done a year in Exeter Gaol, and I had had enough of visiting Queen Victoria. But it's cruel hard to get work when once the black mark is against your name, and it was all I could do to keep soul and body together. At last, after ten days of wood-cutting and stone-breaking on starvation pay, I found myself near Salisbury with a couple of shillings in my pocket, and my boots and my patience clean wore out. There's an alehouse called "The Willing Mind," which stands on the road between Blandford and Salisbury, and it was there that night I engaged a bed. I was sitting alone in the taproom just about closing time, when the inn-keeper — Allen his name was — came beside me and began yarning about the neighbours. He was a man that liked to talk and to have some one to listen to his talk, so I sat there smoking and drinking a mug of ale which he had stood me; and I took no great interest in what he said until he began to talk (as the devil would have it) about the riches of Mannering Hall.

"Meaning the large house on the right before I came to the village?" said I. "The one that stands in its own park?"

"Exactly," said he — and I am giving all our talk so that you may know that I am telling you the truth and hiding nothing. "The long white house with the pillars," said he. "At the side of the Blandford Road."

Now I had looked at it as I passed, and it had crossed my mind, as such thoughts will, that it was a very easy house to get into with that great row of grand windows and glass doors. I had put the thought away from me, and now here was this landlord bringing it back with his talk about the riches within. I said nothing, but I listened, and as luck would have it, he would always come back to this one subject.

"He was a miser young, so you can think what he is now in his age," said he. "Well, he's had some good out of his money."

"What good can he have had if he does not spend it?" said I.

“Well, it bought him the prettiest wife in England, and that was some good that he got out of it. She thought she would have the spending of it, but she knows the difference now.”

“Who was she then?” I asked, just for the sake of something to say.

“She was nobody at all until the old Lord made her his Lady,” said he. “She came from up London way, and some said that she had been on the stage there, but nobody knew. The old Lord was away for a year, and when he came home he brought a young wife back with him, and there she has been ever since. Stephens, the butler, did tell me once that she was the light of the house when fust she came, but what with her husband’s mean and aggravatin’ way, and what with her loneliness — for he hates to see a visitor within his doors; and what with his bitter words — for he has a tongue like a hornet’s sting, her life all went out of her, and she became a white, silent creature, moping about the country lanes. Some say that she loved another man, and that it was just the riches of the old Lord which tempted her to be false to her lover, and that now she is eating her heart out because she has lost the one without being any nearer to the other, for she might be the poorest woman in the parish for all the money that she has the handling of.”

Well, sir, you can imagine that it did not interest me very much to hear about the quarrels between a Lord and a Lady. What did it matter to me if she hated the sound of his voice, or if he put every indignity upon her in the hope of breaking her spirit, and spoke to her as he would never have dared to speak to one of his servants? The landlord told me of these things, and of many more like them, but they passed out of my mind, for they were no concern of mine. But what I did want to hear was the form in which Lord Mannering kept his riches. Title-deeds and stock certificates are but paper, and more danger than profit to the man who takes them. But metal and stones are worth a risk. And then, as if he were answering my very thoughts, the landlord told me of Lord Mannering’s great collection of gold medals, that it was the most valuable in the world, and that it was reckoned that if they were put into a sack the strongest man in the parish would not be able to raise them. Then his wife called him, and he and I went to our beds.

I am not arguing to make out a case for myself, but I beg you, sir, to bear all the facts in your mind, and to ask yourself whether a man could be more sorely tempted than I was. I make bold to say that there are few who could have held out against it. There I lay on my bed that night, a desperate man without hope or work, and with my last shilling in my pocket. I had tried to be honest, and honest folk had turned their backs upon me. They taunted me for theft; and yet they pushed me towards it. I was caught in the stream and could not get out. And then it was such a chance: the great house all lined with windows, the golden medals which could so easily be melted down. It was like putting a loaf before a starving man and expecting him not to eat it. I fought against it for a time, but it was no use. At last I sat up on the side of my bed, and I swore that that night I should either be a rich man and able to give up crime for ever, or that the irons should be on my wrists once more. Then I slipped on my clothes, and, having put a shilling on the table — for the landlord had treated me well, and I did not wish to cheat him — I passed out through the window into the garden of the inn.

There was a high wall round this garden, and I had a job to get over it, but once on the other side it was all plain sailing. I did not meet a soul upon the road, and the iron gate of the avenue was open. No one was moving at the lodge. The moon was shining, and I could see the great house glimmering white through an archway of trees. I walked up it for a quarter of a mile or so, until I was at the edge of the drive, where it ended in a broad, gravelled space before the main door. There I stood in the shadow and looked at the long building, with a full moon shining in every window and silvering the high stone front. I crouched there for some time, and I wondered where I should find the easiest entrance. The corner window of the side seemed to be the one which was least overlooked, and a screen of ivy hung heavily over it. My best chance was evidently there. I worked my way under the trees to the back of the house, and then crept along in the black shadow of the building. A dog barked and rattled his chain, but I stood waiting until he was quiet, and then I stole on once more until I came to the window which I had chosen.

It is astonishing how careless they are in the country, in places far removed from large towns, where the thought of burglars never enters their heads. I call it setting temptation in a poor man's way when he puts his hand, meaning no harm, upon a door, and finds it swing open before him. In this case it was not so bad as that, but the window was merely fastened with the ordinary catch, which I opened with a push from the blade of my knife. I pulled up the window as quickly as possible, then I thrust the knife through the slit in the shutter and prized it open. They were folding shutters, and I shoved them before me and walked into the room.

“Good evening, sir! You are very welcome!” said a voice.

I’ve had some starts in my life, but never one to come up to that one. There, in the opening of the shutters, within reach of my arm, was standing a woman with a small coil of wax taper burning in her hand. She was tall and straight and slender, with a beautiful white face that might have been cut out of clear marble, but her hair and eyes were as black as night. She was dressed in some sort of white dressing-gown which flowed down to her feet, and what with this robe and what with her face, it seemed as if a spirit from above was standing in front of me. My knees knocked together, and I held on to the shutter with one hand to give me support. I should have turned and run away if I had had the strength, but I could only just stand and stare at her.

She soon brought me back to myself once more.

“Don’t be frightened!” said she, and they were strange words for the mistress of a house to have to use to a burglar. “I saw you out of my bedroom window when you were hiding under those trees, so I slipped downstairs, and then I heard you at the window. I should have opened it for you if you had waited, but you managed it yourself just as I came up.”

I still held in my hand the long clasp-knife with which I had opened the shutter. I was unshaven and grimed from a week on the roads. Altogether, there are few people who would have cared to face me alone at one in the morning; but this woman, if I had been her lover meeting her by appointment, could not have looked upon me with a more welcoming eye. She laid her hand upon my sleeve and drew me into the room.

“What’s the meaning of this, ma’am? Don’t get trying any little games upon me,” said I, in my roughest way — and I can put it on rough when I like. “It’ll be the worse for you if you play me any trick,” I added, showing her my knife.

“I will play you no trick,” said she. “On the contrary, I am your friend, and I wish to help you.”

“Excuse me, ma’am, but I find it hard to believe that,” said I. “Why should you wish to help me?”

“I have my own reasons,” said she; and then suddenly, with those black eyes blazing out of her white face: “It’s because I hate him, hate him, hate him! Now you understand.”

I remembered what the landlord had told me, and I did understand. I looked at her Ladyship's face, and I knew that I could trust her. She wanted to revenge herself upon her husband. She wanted to hit him where it would hurt him most — upon the pocket. She hated him so that she would even lower her pride to take such a man as me into her confidence if she could gain her end by doing so. I've hated some folk in my time, but I don't think I ever understood what hate was until I saw that woman's face in the light of the taper.

"You'll trust me now?" said she, with another coaxing touch upon my sleeve.

"Yes, your Ladyship."

"You know me, then?"

"I can guess who you are."

"I dare say my wrongs are the talk of the county. But what does he care for that? He only cares for one thing in the whole world, and that you can take from him this night. Have you a bag?"

"No, your Ladyship."

"Shut the shutter behind you. Then no one can see the light. You are quite safe. The servants all sleep in the other wing. I can show you where all the most valuable things are. You cannot carry them all, so we must pick the best."

The room in which I found myself was long and low, with many rugs and skins scattered about on a polished wood floor. Small cases stood here and there, and the walls were decorated with spears and swords and paddles, and other things which find their way into museums. There were some queer clothes, too, which had been brought from savage countries, and the lady took down a large leather sack-bag from among them.

"This sleeping-sack will do," said she. "Now come with me and I will show you where the medals are."

It was like a dream to me to think that this tall, white woman was the lady of the house, and that she was lending me a hand to rob her own home. I could have burst out laughing at the thought of it, and yet there was something in that pale face of hers which stopped my laughter and turned me cold and serious. She swept on in front of me like a spirit, with the green taper in her hand, and I walked behind with my sack until we came to a door at the end of this museum. It was locked, but the key was in it, and she led me through.

The room beyond was a small one, hung all round with curtains which had pictures on them. It was the hunting of a deer that was painted on it, as I remember, and in the flicker of that light you'd have sworn that the dogs and the horses were streaming round the walls. The only other thing in the room was a row of cases made of walnut, with brass ornaments. They had glass tops, and beneath this glass I saw the long lines of those gold medals, some of them as big as a plate and half an inch thick, all resting upon red velvet and glowing and gleaming in the darkness. My fingers were just itching to be at them, and I slipped my knife under the lock of one of the cases to wrench it open.

"Wait a moment," said she, laying her hand upon my arm. "You might do better than this."

"I am very well satisfied, ma'am," said I, "and much obliged to your Ladyship for kind assistance."

"You can do better," she repeated. "Would not golden sovereigns be worth more to you than these things?"

"Why, yes," said I. "That's best of all."

"Well," said she. "He sleeps just above our head. It is but one short staircase. There is a tin box with money enough to fill this bag under his bed."

"How can I get it without waking him?"

"What matter if he does wake?" She looked very hard at me as she spoke. "You could keep him from calling out."

"No, no, ma'am, I'll have none of that."

"Just as you like," said she. "I thought that you were a stout-hearted sort of man by your appearance, but I see that I made a mistake. If you are afraid to run the risk of one old man, then of course you cannot have the gold which is under his bed. You are the best judge of your own business, but I should think that you would do better at some other trade."

"I'll not have murder on my conscience."

"You could overpower him without harming him. I never said anything about murder. The money lies under the bed. But if you are faint-hearted, it is better that you should not attempt it."

She worked upon me so, partly with her scorn and partly with this money that she held before my eyes, that I believe I should have yielded and taken my chances upstairs, had it not been that I saw her eyes following the struggle within me in such a crafty, malignant fashion, that it was evident she was bent upon making me the tool of her revenge, and that she would leave me no choice but to do the old man an injury or to be captured by him. She felt suddenly that she was giving herself away, and she changed her face to a kindly, friendly smile, but it was too late, for I had had my warning.

"I will not go upstairs," said I. "I have all I want here."

She looked her contempt at me, and there never was a face which could look it plainer.

"Very good. You can take these medals. I should be glad if you would begin at this end. I suppose they will all be the same value when melted down, but these are the ones which are the rarest, and therefore, the most precious to him. It is not necessary to break the locks. If you press that brass knob you will find that there is a secret spring. So! Take that small one first — it is the very apple of his eye."

She had opened one of the cases, and the beautiful things all lay exposed before me. I had my hand upon the one which she had pointed out, when suddenly a change came over her face, and she held up one finger as a warning. "Hist!" she whispered. "What is that?"

Far away in the silence of the house we heard a low, dragging, shuffling sound, and the distant tread of feet. She closed and fastened the case in an instant.

"It's my husband!" she whispered. "All right. Don't be alarmed. I'll arrange it. Here! Quick, behind the tapestry!"

She pushed me behind the painted curtains upon the wall, my empty leather bag still in my hand. Then she took her taper and walked quickly into the room from which we had come. From where I stood I could see her through the open door.

"Is that you, Robert?" she cried.

The light of a candle shone through the door of the museum, and the shuffling steps came nearer. Then I saw a face in the doorway, a great, heavy face, all lines and creases, with a huge curving nose, and a pair of gold glasses fixed across it. He had to throw his head back to see through the glasses, and that great nose thrust out in front of him like the beak of some sort of fowl. He was a big man, very tall and burly, so that in his loose dressing-gown his figure seemed to fill up the whole doorway. He had a pile of grey, curling hair all round his head, but his face was clean-shaven. His mouth was thin and small and prim, hidden away under his long, masterful nose. He stood there, holding the candle in front of him, and looking at his wife with a queer, malicious gleam in his eyes. It only needed that one look to tell me that he was as fond of her as she was of him.

“How’s this?” he asked. “Some new tantrum? What do you mean by wandering about the house? Why don’t you go to bed?”

“I could not sleep,” she answered. She spoke languidly and wearily. If she was an actress once, she had not forgotten her calling.

“Might I suggest,” said he, in the same mocking kind of voice, “that a good conscience is an excellent aid to sleep?”

“That cannot be true,” she answered, “for you sleep very well.”

“I have only one thing in my life to be ashamed of,” said he, and his hair bristled up with anger until he looked like an old cockatoo. “You know best what that is. It is a mistake which has brought its own punishment with it.”

“To me as well as to you. Remember that!”

“You have very little to whine about. It was I who stooped and you who rose.”

“Rose!”

“Yes, rose. I suppose you do not deny that it is a promotion to exchange the music-hall for Mannering Hall. Fool that I was ever to take you out of your true sphere!”

“If you think so, why do you not separate?”

“Because private misery is better than public humiliation. Because it is easier to suffer for a mistake than to own to it. Because also I like to keep you in my sight, and to know that you cannot go back to him.”

“You villain! You cowardly villain!”

“Yes, yes, my lady. I know your secret ambition, but it shall never be while I live, and if it happens after my death I will at least take care that you go to him as a beggar. You and dear Edward will never have the satisfaction of squandering my savings, and you may make up your mind to that, my lady. Why are those shutters and the window open?”

“I found the night very close.”

“It is not safe. How do you know that some tramp may not be outside? Are you aware that my collection of medals is worth more than any similar collection in the world? You have left the door open also. What is there to prevent any one from rifling the cases?”

“I was here.”

“I know you were. I heard you moving about in the medal room, and that was why I came down. What were you doing?”

“Looking at the medals. What else should I be doing?”

“This curiosity is something new.” He looked suspiciously at her and moved on towards the inner room, she walking beside him.

It was at this moment that I saw something which startled. I had laid my clasp-knife open upon the top of one of the cases, and there it lay in full view. She saw it before he did, and with a woman’s cunning she held her taper out so that the light of it came between Lord Mannering’s eyes and the knife. Then she took it with her left hand and held it against her gown out of his sight. He looked about from case to case — I could have put my hand at one time upon his long nose — but there was nothing to show that the medals had been tampered with, and so, still snarling and grumbling, he shuffled off into the other room once more.

And now I have to speak of what I heard rather than of what I saw, but I swear to you, as I shall stand some day before my Maker, that what I say is the truth.

When they passed into the outer room I saw him lay his candle upon the corner of one of the tables, and he sat himself down, but in such a position that he was just out of my sight. She moved behind him, as I could tell from the fact that the light of her taper threw his long, lumpy shadow upon the floor in front of him. Then he began talking about this man whom he called Edward, and every word that he said was like a blistering drop of vitriol. He spoke low, so that I could not hear it all, but from what I heard I should guess that she would as soon have been lashed with a whip. At first she said some hot words in reply, but then she was silent, and he went on and on in that cold, mocking voice of his, nagging and insulting and tormenting, until I wondered that she could bear to stand there in silence and listen to it. Then suddenly I heard him say in a sharp voice, “Come from behind me! Leave go of my collar! What! would you dare to strike me?” There was a sound like a blow, just a soft sort of thud, and then I heard him cry out, “My God, it’s blood!” He shuffled with his feet as if he was getting up, and then I heard another blow, and he cried out, “Oh, you she-devil!” and was quiet, except for a dripping and splashing upon the floor.

I ran out from behind my curtain at that, and rushed into the other room, shaking all over with the horror of it. The old man had slipped down in the chair, and his dressing-gown had rucked up until he looked as if he had a monstrous hump to his back. His head, with the gold glasses still fixed on his nose, was lolling over upon one side, and his little mouth was open just like a dead fish. I could not see where the blood was coming from, but I could still hear it drumming upon the floor. She stood behind him with the candle shining full upon her face. Her lips were pressed together and her eyes shining, and a touch of colour had come into each of her cheeks. It just wanted that to make her the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life.

“You’ve done it now!” said I.

“Yes,” said she, in her quiet way, “I’ve done it now.”

“What are you going to do?” I asked. “They’ll have you for murder as sure as fate.”

“Never fear about me. I have nothing to live for, and it does not matter. Give me a hand to set him straight in the chair. It is horrible to see him like this!”

I did so, though it turned me cold all over to touch him. Some of his blood came on my hand and sickened me.

“Now,” said she, “you may as well have the medals as any one else. Take them and go.”

“I don’t want them. I only want to get away. I was never mixed up with a business like this before.”

“Nonsense!” said she. “You came for the medals, and here they are at your mercy. Why should you not have them? There is no one to prevent you.”

I held the bag still in my hand. She opened the case, and between us we threw a hundred or so of the medals into it. They were all from the one case, but I could not bring myself to wait for any more. Then I made for the window, for the very air of this house seemed to poison me after what I had seen and heard. As I looked back, I saw her standing there, tall and graceful, with the light in her hand just as I had seen her first. She waved good-bye, and I waved back at her and sprang out into the gravel drive.

I thank God that I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that I have never done a murder, but perhaps it would be different if I had been able to read that woman’s mind and thoughts. There might have been two bodies in the room instead of one if I could have seen behind that last smile of hers. But I thought of nothing but of getting safely away, and it never entered my head how she might be fixing the rope round my neck. I had not taken five steps out from the window skirting down the shadow of the house in the way that I had come, when I heard a scream that might have raised the parish, and then another and another.

“Murder!” she cried. “Murder! Murder! Help!” and her voice rang out in the quiet of the night-time and sounded over the whole country-side. It went through my head, that dreadful cry. In an instant lights began to move and windows to fly up, not only in the house behind me, but at the lodge and in the stables in front. Like a frightened rabbit I bolted down the drive, but I heard the clang of the gate being shut before I could reach it. Then I hid my bag of medals under some dry fagots, and I tried to get away across the park, but some one saw me in the moonlight, and presently I had half a dozen of them with dogs upon my heels. I crouched down among the brambles, but those dogs were too many for me, and I was glad enough when the men came up and prevented me from being torn into pieces. They seized me, and dragged me back to the room from which I had come.

“Is this the man, your Ladyship?” asked the oldest of them — the same whom I found out afterwards to be the butler.

She had been bending over the body, with her handkerchief to her eyes, and now she turned upon me with the face of a fury. Oh, what an actress that woman was!

“Yes, yes, it is the very man,” she cried. “Oh, you villain, you cruel villain, to treat an old man so!”

There was a man there who seemed to be a village constable. He laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“What do you say to that?” said he.

“It was she who did it,” I cried, pointing at the woman, whose eyes never flinched before mine.

“Come! come! Try another!” said the constable, and one of the men-servants struck at me with his fist.

“I tell you that I saw her do it. She stabbed him twice with a knife. She first helped me to rob him, and then she murdered him.”

The footman tried to strike me again, but she held up her hand.

“Do not hurt him,” said she. “I think that his punishment may safely be left to the law.”

“I’ll see to that, your Ladyship,” said the constable. “Your Ladyship actually saw the crime committed, did you not?”

"Yes, yes, I saw it with my own eyes. It was horrible. We heard the noise and we came down. My poor husband was in front. The man had one of the cases open, and was filling a black leather bag which he held in his hand. He rushed past us, and my husband seized him. There was a struggle, and he stabbed him twice. There you can see the blood upon his hands. If I am not mistaken, his knife is still in Lord Mannering's body."

"Look at the blood upon her hands!" I cried.

"She has been holding up his Lordship's head, you lying rascal," said the butler.

"And here's the very sack her Ladyship spoke of," said the constable, as a groom came in with the one which I had dropped in my flight. "And here are the medals inside it. That's good enough for me. We will keep him safe here to-night, and to-morrow the inspector and I can take him into Salisbury."

"Poor creature," said the woman. "For my own part, I forgive him any injury which he has done me. Who knows what temptation may have driven him to crime? His conscience and the law will give him punishment enough without any reproach of mine rendering it more bitter."

I could not answer — I tell you, sir, I could not answer, so taken aback was I by the assurance of the woman. And so, seeming by my silence to agree to all that she had said, I was dragged away by the butler and the constable into the cellar, in which they locked me for the night.

There, sir, I have told you the whole story of the events which led up to the murder of Lord Mannering by his wife upon the night of September the 14th, in the year 1894. Perhaps you will put my statement on one side as the constable did at Mannering Towers, or the judge afterwards at the county assizes. Or perhaps you will see that there is the ring of truth in what I say, and you will follow it up, and so make your name for ever as a man who does not grudge personal trouble where justice is to be done. I have only you to look to, sir, and if you will clear my name of this false accusation, then I will worship you as one man never yet worshipped another. But if you fail me, then I give you my solemn promise that I will rope myself up, this day month, to the bar of my window, and from that time on I will come to plague you in your dreams if ever yet one man was able to come back and to haunt another. What I ask you to do is very simple. Make inquiries about this woman, watch her, learn her past history, find out what she is making of the money which has come to her, and whether there is not a man

Edward as I have stated. If from all this you learn anything which shows you her real character, or which seems to you to corroborate the story which I have told you, then I am sure that I can rely upon your goodness of heart to come to the rescue of an innocent man.

THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT

Of all the sciences which have puzzled the sons of men, none had such an attraction for the learned Professor von Baumgarten as those which relate to psychology and the ill-defined relations between mind and matter. A celebrated anatomist, a profound chemist, and one of the first physiologists in Europe, it was a relief for him to turn from these subjects and to bring his varied knowledge to bear upon the study of the soul and the mysterious relationship of spirits. At first, when as a young man he began to dip into the secrets of mesmerism, his mind seemed to be wandering in a strange land where all was chaos and darkness, save that here and there some great unexplainable and disconnected fact loomed out in front of him. As the years passed, however, and as the worthy Professor's stock of knowledge increased, for knowledge begets knowledge as money bears interest, much which had seemed strange and unaccountable began to take another shape in his eyes. New trains of reasoning became familiar to him, and he perceived connecting links where all had been incomprehensible and startling. By experiments which extended over twenty years, he obtained a basis of facts upon which it was his ambition to build up a new exact science which should embrace mesmerism, spiritualism, and all cognate subjects. In this he was much helped by his intimate knowledge of the more intricate parts of animal physiology which treat of nerve currents and the working of the brain; for Alexis von Baumgarten was Regius Professor of Physiology at the University of Keinplatz, and had all the resources of the laboratory to aid him in his profound researches.

Professor von Baumgarten was tall and thin, with a hatchet face and steel-grey eyes, which were singularly bright and penetrating. Much thought had furrowed his forehead and contracted his heavy eyebrows, so that he appeared to wear a perpetual frown, which often misled people as to his character, for though austere he was tender-hearted. He was popular among the students, who would gather round him after his lectures and listen eagerly to his strange theories. Often he would call for volunteers from amongst them in order to conduct some experiment, so that eventually there was hardly a lad in the class who had not, at one time or another, been thrown into a mesmeric trance by his Professor.

Of all these young devotees of science there was none who equalled in enthusiasm Fritz von Hartmann. It had often seemed strange to his fellow-students that wild, reckless Fritz, as dashing a young fellow as ever hailed from the Rhinelands, should devote the time and trouble which he did in reading up abstruse works and in assisting the Professor in his strange experiments. The fact was, however, that Fritz was a knowing and long-headed fellow. Months before he had lost his heart to young Elise, the blue-eyed, yellow-haired daughter of the lecturer. Although he had succeeded in learning from her lips that she was not indifferent to his suit, he had never dared to announce himself to her family as a formal suitor. Hence he would have found it a difficult matter to see his young lady had he not adopted the expedient of making himself useful to the Professor. By this means he frequently was asked to the old man's house, where he willingly submitted to be experimented upon in any way as long as there was a chance of his receiving one bright glance from the eyes of Elise or one touch of her little hand.

Young Fritz von Hartmann was a handsome lad enough. There were broad acres, too, which would descend to him when his father died. To many he would have seemed an eligible suitor; but Madame frowned upon his presence in the house, and lectured the Professor at times on his allowing such a wolf to prowl around their lamb. To tell the truth, Fritz had an evil name in Keinplatz. Never was there a riot or a duel, or any other mischief afoot, but the young Rhinelander figured as a ringleader in it. No one used more free and violent language, no one drank more, no one played cards more habitually, no one was more idle, save in the one solitary subject. No wonder, then, that the good Frau Professorin gathered her Fräulein under her wing, and resented the attentions of such a *mauvais sujet*. As to the worthy lecturer, he was too much engrossed by his strange studies to form an opinion upon the subject one way or the other.

For many years there was one question which had continually obtruded itself upon his thoughts. All his experiments and his theories turned upon a single point. A hundred times a day the Professor asked himself whether it was possible for the human spirit to exist apart from the body for a time and then to return to it once again. When the possibility first suggested itself to him his scientific mind had revolted from it. It clashed too violently with preconceived ideas and the prejudices of his early training. Gradually, however, as he proceeded farther and farther along the pathway of original research, his mind shook off its old fetters and became ready to face any conclusion which could reconcile the facts. There were many things which made him believe that it was possible for mind to exist apart from matter. At last it occurred to him that by a daring and original experiment the question might be definitely decided.

"It is evident," he remarked in his celebrated article upon invisible entities, which appeared in the *Keinplatz wochentliche Medicalschrift* about this time, and which surprised the whole scientific world—"it is evident that under certain conditions the soul or mind does separate itself from the body. In the case of a mesmerised person, the body lies in a cataleptic condition, but the spirit has left it. Perhaps you reply that the soul is there, but in a dormant condition. I answer that this is not so, otherwise how can one account for the condition of clairvoyance, which has fallen into disrepute through the knavery of certain scoundrels, but which can easily be shown to be an undoubted fact. I have been able myself, with a sensitive subject, to obtain an accurate description of what was going on in another room or another house. How can such knowledge be accounted for on any hypothesis save that the soul of the subject has left the body and is wandering through space? For a moment it is recalled by the voice of the operator and says what it has seen, and then wings its way once more through the air. Since the spirit is by its very nature invisible, we cannot see these comings and goings, but we see their effect in the body of the subject, now rigid and inert, now struggling to narrate impressions which could never have come to it by natural means. There is only one way which I can see by which the fact can be demonstrated. Although we in the flesh are unable to see these spirits, yet our own spirits, could we separate them from the body, would be conscious of the presence of others. It is my intention, therefore, shortly to mesmerise one of my pupils. I shall then mesmerise myself in a manner which has become easy to me. After that, if my theory holds good, my spirit will have no difficulty in meeting and communing with the spirit of my pupil, both being separated from the body. I hope to be able to communicate the result of this interesting experiment in an early number of the *Keinplatz wochenliche Medicalschrift*.”

When the good Professor finally fulfilled his promise, and published an account of what occurred, the narrative was so extraordinary that it was received with general incredulity. The tone of some of the papers was so offensive in their comments upon the matter that the angry savant declared that he would never open his mouth again, or refer to the subject in any way — a promise which he has faithfully kept. This narrative has been compiled, however, from the most authentic sources, and the events cited in it may be relied upon as substantially correct.

It happened, then, that shortly after the time when Professor von Baumgarten conceived the idea of the above-mentioned experiment, he was walking thoughtfully homewards after a long day in the laboratory, when he met a crowd of roystering students who had just streamed out from a beer-house. At the head of them, half-intoxicated and very noisy, was young Fritz von Hartmann. The Professor would have passed them, but his pupil ran across and intercepted him.

“Heh! my worthy master,” he said, taking the old man by the sleeve, and leading him down the road with him. “There is something that I have to say to you, and it is easier for me to say it now, when the good beer is humming in my head, than at another time.”

“What is it, then, Fritz?” the physiologist asked, looking at him in mild surprise.

“I hear, mein Herr, that you are about to do some wondrous experiment in which you hope to take a man’s soul out of his body, and then to put it back again. Is it not so?”

"It is true, Fritz."

"And have you considered, my dear sir, that you may have some difficulty in finding some one on whom to try this? Potztausend! Suppose that the soul went out and would not come back. That would be a bad business. Who is to take the risk?"

"But, Fritz," the Professor cried, very much startled by this view of the matter, "I had relied upon your assistance in the attempt. Surely you will not desert me. Consider the honour and glory."

"Consider the fiddlesticks!" the student cried angrily. "Am I to be paid always thus? Did I not stand two hours upon a glass insulator while you poured electricity into my body? Have you not stimulated my phrenic nerves, besides ruining my digestion with a galvanic current round my stomach? Four-and-thirty times you have mesmerised me, and what have I got from all this? Nothing. And now you wish to take my soul out, as you would take the works from a watch. It is more than flesh and blood can stand."

"Dear, dear!" the Professor cried in great distress. "That is very true, Fritz. I never thought of it before. If you can but suggest how I can compensate you, you will find me ready and willing."

"Then listen," said Fritz solemnly. "If you will pledge your word that after this experiment I may have the hand of your daughter, then I am willing to assist you; but if not, I shall have nothing to do with it. These are my only terms."

"And what would my daughter say to this?" the Professor exclaimed, after a pause of astonishment.

"Elise would welcome it," the young man replied. "We have loved each other long."

"Then she shall be yours," the physiologist said with decision, "for you are a good-hearted young man, and one of the best neurotic subjects that I have ever known — that is when you are not under the influence of alcohol. My experiment is to be performed upon the fourth of next month. You will attend at the physiological laboratory at twelve o'clock. It will be a great occasion, Fritz. Von Gruben is coming from Jena, and Hinterstein from Basle. The chief men of science of all South Germany will be there."

"I shall be punctual," the student said briefly; and so the two parted. The Professor plodded homeward, thinking of the great coming event, while the young man staggered along after his noisy companions, with his mind full of the blue-eyed Elise, and of the bargain which he had concluded with her father.

The Professor did not exaggerate when he spoke of the widespread interest excited by his novel psychological experiment. Long before the hour had arrived the room was filled by a galaxy of talent. Besides the celebrities whom he had mentioned, there had come from London the great Professor Lurcher, who had just established his reputation by a remarkable treatise upon cerebral centres. Several great lights of the Spiritualistic body had also come a long distance to be present, as had a Swedenborgian minister, who considered that the proceedings might throw some light upon the doctrines of the Rosy Cross.

There was considerable applause from this eminent assembly upon the appearance of Professor von Baumgarten and his subject upon the platform. The lecturer, in a few well-chosen words, explained what his views were, and how he proposed to test them. “I hold,” he said, “that when a person is under the influence of mesmerism, his spirit is for the time released from his body, and I challenge any one to put forward any other hypothesis which will account for the fact of clairvoyance. I therefore hope that upon mesmerising my young friend here, and then putting myself into a trance, our spirits may be able to commune together, though our bodies lie still and inert. After a time nature will resume her sway, our spirits will return into our respective bodies, and all will be as before. With your kind permission, we shall now proceed to attempt the experiment.”

The applause was renewed at this speech, and the audience settled down in expectant silence. With a few rapid passes the Professor mesmerised the young man, who sank back in his chair, pale and rigid. He then took a bright globe of glass from his pocket, and by concentrating his gaze upon it and making a strong mental effort, he succeeded in throwing himself into the same condition. It was a strange and impressive sight to see the old man and the young sitting together in the same cataleptic condition. Whither, then, had their souls fled? That was the question which presented itself to each and every one of the spectators.

Five minutes passed, and then ten, and then fifteen, and then fifteen more, while the Professor and his pupil sat stiff and stark upon the platform. During that time not a sound was heard from the assembled savants, but every eye was bent upon the two pale faces, in search of the first signs of returning consciousness. Nearly an hour had elapsed before the patient watchers were rewarded. A faint flush came back to the cheeks of Professor von Baumgarten. The soul was coming back once more to its earthly tenement. Suddenly he stretched out his long thin arms, as one awaking from sleep, and rubbing his eyes, stood up from his chair and gazed about him as though he hardly realised where he was. “Tausend Teufel!” he exclaimed, rapping out a tremendous South German oath, to the great astonishment of his audience and to the disgust of the Swedenborgian. “Where the Henker am I then, and what in thunder has occurred? Oh yes, I remember now. One of these nonsensical mesmeric experiments. There is no result this time, for I remember nothing at all since I became unconscious; so you have had all your long journeys for nothing, my learned friends, and a very good joke too”; at which the Regius Professor of Physiology burst into a roar of laughter and slapped his thigh in a highly indecorous fashion. The audience were so enraged at this unseemly behaviour on the part of their host, that there might have been a considerable disturbance, had it not been for the judicious interference of young Fritz von Hartmann, who had now recovered from his lethargy. Stepping to the front of the platform, the young man apologised for the conduct of his companion. “I am sorry to say,” he said, “that he is a harum-scarum sort of fellow, although he appeared so grave at the commencement of this experiment. He is still suffering from mesmeric reaction, and is hardly accountable for his words. As to the experiment itself, I do not consider it to be a failure. It is very possible that our spirits may have been communing in space during this hour; but, unfortunately, our gross bodily memory is distinct from our spirit, and we cannot recall what has occurred. My energies shall now be devoted to devising some means by which spirits may be able to recollect what occurs to them in their free state, and I trust that when I have worked this out, I may have the pleasure of meeting you all once again in this hall, and demonstrating to you the result.” This address, coming from so young a student, caused considerable astonishment among the audience, and some were inclined to be offended, thinking that he assumed rather too much importance. The majority, however, looked upon him as a young man of great promise, and many comparisons were made as they left the hall between his dignified conduct and the levity of his professor, who during the above remarks was laughing heartily in a corner, by no means abashed at the failure of the experiment.

Now although all these learned men were filing out of the lecture-room under the impression that they had seen nothing of note, as a matter of fact one of the most wonderful things in the whole history of the world had just occurred before their very eyes. Professor von Baumgarten had been so far correct in his theory that both his spirit and that of his pupil had been for a time absent from the body. But here a strange and unforeseen complication had occurred. In their return the spirit of Fritz von Hartmann had entered into the body of Alexis von Baumgarten, and that of Alexis von Baumgarten had taken up its abode in the frame of Fritz von Hartmann. Hence the slang and scurrility which issued from the lips of the serious Professor, and hence also the weighty words and grave statements which fell from the careless student. It was an unprecedented event, yet no one knew of it, least of all those whom it concerned.

The body of the Professor, feeling conscious suddenly of a great dryness about the back of the throat, sallied out into the street, still chuckling to himself over the result of the experiment, for the soul of Fritz within was reckless at the thought of the bride whom he had won so easily. His first impulse was to go up to the house and see her, but on second thought he came to the conclusion that it would be best to stay away until Madame Baumgarten should be informed by her husband of the agreement which had been made. He therefore made his way down to the Grüner Mann, which was one of the favourite trysting-places of the wilder students, and ran, boisterously waving his cane in the air, into the little parlour, where sat Spiegle and Müller and half a dozen other boon companions.

“Ha, ha! my boys,” he shouted. “I knew I should find you here. Drink up, every one of you, and call for what you like, for I’m going to stand treat to-day.”

Had the green man who is depicted upon the signpost of that well-known inn suddenly marched into the room and called for a bottle of wine, the students could not have been more amazed than they were by this unexpected entry of their revered professor. They were so astonished that for a minute or two they glared at him in utter bewilderment without being able to make any reply to his hearty invitation.

“Donner und Blitzen!” shouted the Professor angrily. “What the deuce is the matter with you, then? You sit there like a set of stuck pigs staring at me. What is it then?”

“It is the unexpected honour,” stammered Spiegel, who was in the chair.

"Honour — rubbish!" said the Professor testily. "Do you think that just because I happen to have been exhibiting mesmerism to a parcel of old fossils, I am therefore too proud to associate with dear old friends like you? Come out of that chair, Spiegel, my boy, for I shall preside now. Beer, or wine, or schnapps, my lads — call for what you like, and put it all down to me."

Never was there such an afternoon in the Grüner Mann. The foaming flagons of lager and the green-necked bottles of Rhenish circulated merrily. By degrees the students lost their shyness in the presence of their Professor. As for him, he shouted, he sang, he roared, he balanced a long tobacco-pipe upon his nose, and offered to run a hundred yards against any member of the company. The Kellner and the barmaid whispered to each other outside the door their astonishment at such proceedings on the part of a Regius Professor of the ancient university of Keinplatz. They had still more to whisper about afterwards, for the learned man cracked the Kellner's crown, and kissed the barmaid behind the kitchen door.

"Gentlemen," said the Professor, standing up, albeit somewhat totteringly, at the end of the table, and balancing his high old-fashioned wine glass in his bony hand, "I must now explain to you what is the cause of this festivity."

"Hear! hear!" roared the students, hammering their beer glasses against the table; "a speech, a speech! — silence for a speech!"

"The fact is, my friends," said the Professor, beaming through his spectacles, "I hope very soon to be married."

"Married!" cried a student, bolder than the others. "Is Madame dead, then?"

"Madame who?"

"Why, Madame von Baumgarten, of course."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Professor; "I can see, then, that you know all about my former difficulties. No, she is not dead, but I have reason to believe that she will not oppose my marriage."

"That is very accommodating of her," remarked one of the company.

"In fact," said the Professor, "I hope that she will now be induced to aid me in getting a wife. She and I never took to each other very much; but now I hope all that may be ended, and when I marry she will come and stay with me."

"What a happy family!" exclaimed some wag.

“Yes, indeed; and I hope you will come to my wedding, all of you. I won’t mention names, but here is to my little bride!” and the Professor waved his glass in the air.

“Here’s to his little bride!” roared the roysterers, with shouts of laughter. “Here’s her health. Sie soll leben — Hoch!” And so the fun waxed still more fast and furious, while each young fellow followed the Professor’s example, and drank a toast to the girl of his heart.

While all this festivity had been going on at the Grüner Mann, a very different scene had been enacted elsewhere. Young Fritz von Hartmann, with a solemn face and a reserved manner, had, after the experiment, consulted and adjusted some mathematical instruments; after which, with a few peremptory words to the janitor, he had walked out into the street and wended his way slowly in the direction of the house of the Professor. As he walked he saw Von Althaus, the professor of anatomy, in front of him, and quickening his pace he overtook him.

“I say, Von Althaus,” he exclaimed, tapping him on the sleeve, “you were asking me for some information the other day concerning the middle coat of the cerebral arteries. Now I find — —”

“Donnerwetter!” shouted Von Althaus, who was a peppery old fellow. “What the deuce do you mean by your impertinence! I’ll have you up before the Academical Senate for this, sir”; with which threat he turned on his heel and hurried away. Von Hartmann was much surprised at this reception. “It’s on account of this failure of my experiment,” he said to himself, and continued moodily on his way.

Fresh surprises were in store for him, however. He was hurrying along when he was overtaken by two students. These youths, instead of raising their caps or showing any other sign of respect, gave a wild whoop of delight the instant that they saw him, and rushing at him, seized him by each arm and commenced dragging him along with them.

“Gott in Himmel!” roared Von Hartmann. “What is the meaning of this unparalleled insult? Where are you taking me?”

“To crack a bottle of wine with us,” said the two students. “Come along! That is an invitation which you have never refused.”

“I never heard of such insolence in my life!” cried Von Hartmann. “Let go my arms! I shall certainly have you rusticated for this. Let me go, I say!” and he kicked furiously at his captors.

“Oh, if you choose to turn ill-tempered, you may go where you like,” the students said, releasing him. “We can do very well without you.”

“I know you. I’ll pay you out,” said Von Hartmann furiously, and continued in the direction which he imagined to be his own home, much incensed at the two episodes which had occurred to him on the way.

Now, Madame von Baumgarten, who was looking out of the window and wondering why her husband was late for dinner, was considerably astonished to see the young student come stalking down the road. As already remarked, she had a great antipathy to him, and if ever he ventured into the house it was on sufferance, and under the protection of the Professor. Still more astonished was she, therefore, when she beheld him undo the wicket-gate and stride up the garden path with the air of one who is master of the situation. She could hardly believe her eyes, and hastened to the door with all her maternal instincts up in arms. From the upper windows the fair Elise had also observed this daring move upon the part of her lover, and her heart beat quick with mingled pride and consternation.

“Good day, sir,” Madame von Baumgarten remarked to the intruder, as she stood in gloomy majesty in the open doorway.

“A very fine day indeed, Martha,” returned the other. “Now, don’t stand there like a statue of Juno, but bustle about and get the dinner ready, for I am well-nigh starved.”

“Martha! Dinner!” ejaculated the lady, falling back in astonishment.

“Yes, dinner, Martha, dinner!” howled Von Hartmann, who was becoming irritable. “Is there anything wonderful in that request when a man has been out all day? I’ll wait in the dining-room. Anything will do. Schinken, and sausage, and prunes — any little thing that happens to be about. There you are, standing staring again. Woman, will you or will you not stir your legs?”

This last address, delivered with a perfect shriek of rage, had the effect of sending good Madame von Baumgarten flying along the passage and through the kitchen, where she locked herself up in the scullery and went into violent hysterics. In the meantime Von Hartmann strode into the room and threw himself down upon the sofa in the worst of tempers.

“Elise!” he shouted. “Confound the girl! Elise!”

Thus roughly summoned, the young lady came timidly downstairs and into the presence of her lover. “Dearest!” she cried, throwing her arms round him, “I know this is all done for my sake. It is a *ruse* in order to see me.”

Von Hartmann’s indignation at this fresh attack upon him was so great that he became speechless for a minute from rage, and could only glare and shake his fists, while he struggled in her embrace. When he at last regained his utterance, he indulged in such a bellow of passion that the young lady dropped back, petrified with fear, into an arm-chair.

“Never have I passed such a day in my life,” Von Hartmann cried, stamping upon the floor. “My experiment has failed. Von Althaus has insulted me. Two students have dragged me along the public road. My wife nearly faints when I ask her for dinner, and my daughter flies at me and hugs me like a grizzly bear.”

“You are ill, dear,” the young lady cried. “Your mind is wandering. You have not even kissed me once.”

“No, and I don’t intend to either,” Von Hartmann said with decision. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why don’t you go and fetch my slippers, and help your mother to dish the dinner?”

“And is it for this,” Elise cried, burying her face in her handkerchief—”is it for this that I have loved you passionately for upwards of ten months? Is it for this that I have braved my mother’s wrath? Oh, you have broken my heart; I am sure you have!” and she sobbed hysterically.

“I can’t stand much more of this,” roared Von Hartmann furiously. “What the deuce does the girl mean? What did I do ten months ago which inspired you with such a particular affection for me? If you are really so very fond, you would do better to run away down and find the Schinken and some bread, instead of talking all this nonsense.”

“Oh, my darling!” cried the unhappy maiden, throwing herself into the arms of what she imagined to be her lover, “you do but joke in order to frighten your little Elise.”

Now it chanced that at the moment of this unexpected embrace Von Hartmann was still leaning back against the end of the sofa, which, like much German furniture, was in a somewhat rickety condition. It also chanced that beneath this end of the sofa there stood a tank full of water in which the physiologist was conducting certain experiments upon the ova of fish, and which he kept in his drawing-room in order to ensure an equable temperature. The additional weight of the maiden, combined with the impetus with which she hurled herself upon him, caused the precarious piece of furniture to give way, and the body of the unfortunate student was hurled backwards into the tank, in which his head and shoulders were firmly wedged, while his lower extremities flapped helplessly about in the air. This was the last straw. Extricating himself with some difficulty from his unpleasant position, Von Hartmann gave an inarticulate yell of fury, and dashing out of the room, in spite of the entreaties of Elise, he seized his hat and rushed off into the town, all dripping and dishevelled, with the intention of seeking in some inn the food and comfort which he could not find at home.

As the spirit of Von Baumgarten encased in the body of Von Hartmann strode down the winding pathway which led down to the little town, brooding angrily over his many wrongs, he became aware that an elderly man was approaching him who appeared to be in an advanced state of intoxication. Von Hartmann waited by the side of the road and watched this individual, who came stumbling along, reeling from one side of the road to the other, and singing a student song in a very husky and drunken voice. At first his interest was merely excited by the fact of seeing a man of so venerable an appearance in such a disgraceful condition, but as he approached nearer, he became convinced that he knew the other well, though he could not recall when or where he had met him. This impression became so strong with him, that when the stranger came abreast of him he stepped in front of him and took a good look at his features.

“Well, sonny,” said the drunken man, surveying Von Hartmann and swaying about in front of him, “where the Henker have I seen you before? I know you as well as I know myself. Who the deuce are you?”

“I am Professor von Baumgarten,” said the student. “May I ask who you are? I am strangely familiar with your features.”

“You should never tell lies, young man,” said the other. “You’re certainly not the Professor, for he is an ugly snuffy old chap, and you are a big broad-shouldered young fellow. As to myself, I am Fritz von Hartmann at your service.”

“That you certainly are not,” exclaimed the body of Von Hartmann. “You might very well be his father. But hullo, sir, are you aware that you are wearing my studs and my watch-chain?”

“Donnerwetter!” hiccoughed the other. “If those are not the trousers for which my tailor is about to sue me, may I never taste beer again.”

Now as Von Hartmann, overwhelmed by the many strange things which had occurred to him that day, passed his hand over his forehead and cast his eyes downwards, he chanced to catch the reflection of his own face in a pool which the rain had left upon the road. To his utter astonishment he perceived that his face was that of a youth, that his dress was that of a fashionable young student, and that in every way he was the antithesis of the grave and scholarly figure in which his mind was wont to dwell. In an instant his active brain ran over the series of events which had occurred and sprang to the conclusion. He fairly reeled under the blow.

"Himmel!" he cried, "I see it all. Our souls are in the wrong bodies. I am you and you are I. My theory is proved — but at what an expense! Is the most scholarly mind in Europe to go about with this frivolous exterior? Oh the labours of a lifetime are ruined!" and he smote his breast in his despair.

"I say," remarked the real Von Hartmann from the body of the Professor, "I quite see the force of your remarks, but don't go knocking my body about like that. You received it in an excellent condition, but I perceive that you have wet it and bruised it, and spilled snuff over my ruffled shirt-front."

"It matters little," the other said moodily. "Such as we are so must we stay. My theory is triumphantly proved, but the cost is terrible."

"If I thought so," said the spirit of the student, "it would be hard indeed. What could I do with these stiff old limbs, and how could I woo Elise and persuade her that I was not her father? No, thank Heaven, in spite of the beer which has upset me more than ever it could upset my real self, I can see a way out of it."

"How?" gasped the Professor.

"Why, by repeating the experiment. Liberate our souls once more, and the chances are that they will find their way back into their respective bodies."

No drowning man could clutch more eagerly at a straw than did Von Baumgarten's spirit at this suggestion. In feverish haste he dragged his own frame to the side of the road and threw it into a mesmeric trance; he then extracted the crystal ball from the pocket, and managed to bring himself into the same condition.

Some students and peasants who chanced to pass during the next hour were much astonished to see the worthy Professor of Physiology and his favourite student both sitting upon a very muddy bank and both completely insensible. Before the hour was up quite a crowd had assembled, and they were discussing the advisability of sending for an ambulance to convey the pair to hospital, when the learned savant opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him. For an instant he seemed to forget how he had come there, but next moment he astonished his audience by waving his skinny arms above his head and crying out in a voice of rapture, "Gott sei gedanket! I am myself again. I feel I am!" Nor was the amazement lessened when the student, springing to his feet, burst into the same cry, and the two performed a sort of *pas de joie* in the middle of the road.

For some time after that people had some suspicion of the sanity of both the actors in this strange episode. When the Professor published his experiences in the *Medicalschrift* as he had promised, he was met by an intimation, even from his colleagues, that he would do well to have his mind cared for, and that another such publication would certainly consign him to a madhouse. The student also found by experience that it was wisest to be silent about the matter.

When the worthy lecturer returned home that night he did not receive the cordial welcome which he might have looked for after his strange adventures. On the contrary, he was roundly upbraided by both his female relatives for smelling of drink and tobacco, and also for being absent while a young scapegrace invaded the house and insulted its occupants. It was long before the domestic atmosphere of the lecturer’s house resumed its normal quiet, and longer still before the genial face of Von Hartmann was seen beneath its roof. Perseverance, however, conquers every obstacle, and the student eventually succeeded in pacifying the enraged ladies and in establishing himself upon the old footing. He has now no longer any cause to fear the enmity of Madame, for he is Hauptmann von Hartmann of the Emperor’s own Uhlans, and his loving wife Elise has already presented him with two little Uhlans as a visible sign and token of her affection.

CYPRIAN OVERBECK WELLS

A LITERARY MOSAIC

From my boyhood I have had an intense and overwhelming conviction that my real vocation lay in the direction of literature. I have, however, had a most unaccountable difficulty in getting any responsible person to share my views. It is true that private friends have sometimes, after listening to my effusions, gone the length of remarking, “Really, Smith, that’s not half bad!” or, “You take my advice, old boy, and send that to some magazine!” but I have never on these occasions had the moral courage to inform my adviser that the article in question had been sent to well-nigh every publisher in London, and had come back again with a rapidity and precision which spoke well for the efficiency of our postal arrangements.

Had my manuscripts been paper boomerangs they could not have returned with greater accuracy to their unhappy despatcher. Oh, the vileness and utter degradation of the moment when the stale little cylinder of closely written pages, which seemed so fresh and full of promise a few days ago, is handed in by a remorseless postman! And what moral depravity shines through the editor’s ridiculous plea of “want of space!” But the subject is a painful one, and a digression from the plain statement of facts which I originally contemplated.

From the age of seventeen to that of three-and-twenty I was a literary volcano in a constant state of eruption. Poems and tales, articles and reviews, nothing came amiss to my pen. From the great sea-serpent to the nebular hypothesis, I was ready to write on anything or everything, and I can safely say that I seldom handled a subject without throwing new lights upon it. Poetry and romance, however, had always the greatest attractions for me. How I have wept over the pathos of my heroines, and laughed at the comicalities of my buffoons! Alas! I could find no one to join me in my appreciation, and solitary admiration for one’s self, however genuine, becomes satiating after a time. My father remonstrated with me too on the score of expense and loss of time, so that I was finally compelled to relinquish my dreams of literary independence and to become a clerk in a wholesale mercantile firm connected with the West African trade.

Even when condemned to the prosaic duties which fell to my lot in the office, I continued faithful to my first love. I have introduced pieces of word-painting into the most commonplace business letters which have, I am told, considerably astonished the recipients. My refined sarcasm has made defaulting creditors writhe and wince. Occasionally, like the great Silas Wegg, I would drop into poetry, and so raise the whole tone of the correspondence. Thus what could be more elegant than my rendering of the firm’s instructions to the captain of one of their vessels. It ran in this way: —

“From England, Captain, you must steer a
Course directly to Madeira,
Land the casks of salted beef,
Then away to Teneriffe.
Pray be careful, cool, and wary
With the merchants of Canary.
When you leave them make the most
Of the trade winds to the coast.
Down it you shall sail as far
As the land of Calabar,
And from there you’ll onward go
To Bonny and Fernando Po” ——

and so on for four pages. The captain, instead of treasuring up this little gem, called at the office next day, and demanded with quite unnecessary warmth what the thing meant, and I was compelled to translate it all back into prose. On this, as on other similar occasions, my employer took me severely to task — for he was, you see, a man entirely devoid of all pretensions to literary taste!

All this, however, is a mere preamble, and leads up to the fact that after ten years or so of drudgery I inherited a legacy which, though small, was sufficient to satisfy my simple wants. Finding myself independent, I rented a quiet house removed from the uproar and bustle of London, and there I settled down with the intention of producing some great work which should single me out from the family of the Smiths, and render my name immortal. To this end I laid in several quires of foolscap, a box of quill pens, and a sixpenny bottle of ink, and having given my housekeeper injunctions to deny me to all visitors, I proceeded to look round for a suitable subject.

I was looking round for some weeks. At the end of that time I found that I had by constant nibbling devoured a large number of the quills, and had spread the ink out to such advantage, what with blots, spills, and abortive commencements, that there appeared to be some everywhere except in the bottle. As to the story itself, however, the facility of my youth had deserted me completely, and my mind remained a complete blank; nor could I, do what I would, excite my sterile imagination to conjure up a single incident or character.

In this strait I determined to devote my leisure to running rapidly through the works of the leading English novelists, from Daniel Defoe to the present day, in the hope of stimulating my latent ideas and of getting a good grasp of the general tendency of literature. For some time past I had avoided opening any work of fiction because one of the greatest faults of my youth had been that I invariably and unconsciously mimicked the style of the last author whom I had happened to read. Now, however, I made up my mind to seek safety in a multitude, and by consulting *all* the English classics to avoid the danger of imitating any one too closely. I had just accomplished the task of reading through the majority of the standard novels at the time when my narrative commences.

It was, then, about twenty minutes to ten on the night of the fourth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-six, that, after disposing of a pint of beer and a Welsh rarebit for my supper, I seated myself in my arm-chair, cocked my feet upon a stool, and lit my pipe, as was my custom. Both my pulse and my temperature were, as far as I know, normal at the time. I would give the state of the barometer, but that unlucky instrument had experienced an unprecedented fall of forty-two inches — from a nail to the ground — and was not in a reliable condition. We live in a scientific age, and I flatter myself that I move with the times.

Whilst in that comfortable lethargic condition which accompanies both digestion and poisoning by nicotine, I suddenly became aware of the extraordinary fact that my little drawing-room had elongated into a great *salon*, and that my humble table had increased in proportion. Round this colossal mahogany were seated a great number of people who were talking earnestly together, and the surface in front of them was strewn with books and pamphlets. I could not help observing that these persons were dressed in a most extraordinary mixture of costumes, for those at the end nearest to me wore peruke wigs, swords, and all the fashions of two centuries back; those about the centre had tight knee-breeches, high cravats, and heavy bunches of seals; while among those at the far side the majority were dressed in the most modern style, and among them I saw, to my surprise, several eminent men of letters whom I had the honour of knowing. There were two or three women in the company. I should have risen to my feet to greet these unexpected guests, but all power of motion appeared to have deserted me, and I could only lie still and listen to their conversation, which I soon perceived to be all about myself.

“Egad!” exclaimed a rough, weather-beaten man, who was smoking a long church-warden pipe at my end of the table, “my heart softens for him. Why, gossips, we’ve been in the same straits ourselves. Gadzooks, never did mother feel more concern for her eldest born than I when Rory Random went out to make his own way in the world.”

“Right, Tobias, right!” cried another man, seated at my very elbow. “By my troth, I lost more flesh over poor Robin on his island, than had I the sweating sickness twice told. The tale was well-nigh done when in swaggers my Lord of Rochester — a merry gallant, and one whose word in matters literary might make or mar. ‘How now, Defoe,’ quoth he, ‘hast a tale on hand?’ ‘Even so, your lordship,’ I returned. ‘A right merry one, I trust,’ quoth he. ‘Discourse unto me concerning thy heroine, a comely lass, Dan, or I mistake.’ ‘Nay,’ I replied, ‘there is no heroine in the matter.’ ‘Split not your phrases,’ quoth he; ‘thou weighest every word like a scald attorney. Speak to me of thy principal female character, be she heroine or no.’ ‘My lord,’ I answered, ‘there is no female character.’ ‘Then out upon thyself and thy book too!’ he cried. ‘Thou hadst best burn it!’ — and so out in great dudgeon, whilst I fell to mourning over my poor romance, which was thus, as it were, sentenced to death before its birth. Yet there are a thousand now who have heard of Robin and his man Friday, to one who has heard of my Lord of Rochester.”

“Very true, Defoe,” said a genial-looking man in a red waistcoat, who was sitting at the modern end of the table. “But all this won’t help our good friend Smith in making a start at his story, which, I believe, was the reason why we assembled.”

“The Dickens it is!” stammered a little man beside him, and everybody laughed, especially the genial man, who cried out, “Charley Lamb, Charley Lamb, you’ll never alter. You would make a pun if you were hanged for it.”

“That would be a case of haltering,” returned the other, on which everybody laughed again.

By this time I had begun to dimly realise in my confused brain the enormous honour which had been done me. The greatest masters of fiction in every age of English letters had apparently made a rendezvous beneath my roof, in order to assist me in my difficulties. There were many faces at the table whom I was unable to identify; but when I looked hard at others I often found them to be very familiar to me, whether from paintings or from mere description. Thus between the first two speakers, who had betrayed themselves as Defoe and Smollett, there sat a dark, saturnine, corpulent old man, with harsh prominent features, who I was sure could be none other than the famous author of Gulliver. There were several others of whom I was not so sure, sitting at the other side of the table, but I conjecture that both Fielding and Richardson were among them, and I could swear to the lantern-jaws and cadaverous visage of Lawrence Sterne. Higher up I could see among the crowd the high forehead of Sir Walter Scott, the masculine features of George Eliot, and the flattened nose of Thackeray; while amongst the living I recognised James Payn, Walter Besant, the lady known as “Ouida,” Robert Louis Stevenson, and several of lesser note. Never before, probably, had such an assemblage of choice spirits gathered under one roof.

“Well,” said Sir Walter Scott, speaking with a very pronounced accent, “ye ken the auld proverb, sirs, ‘Ower mony cooks,’ or as the Border minstrel sang —

‘Black Johnstone wi’ his troopers ten
Might mak’ the heart turn cauld,
But Johnstone when he’s a’ alane
Is waur ten thoosand fauld.’

The Johnstones were one of the Redesdale families, second cousins of the Armstrongs, and connected by marriage to — —”

“Perhaps, Sir Walter,” interrupted Thackeray, “you would take the responsibility off our hands by yourself dictating the commencement of a story to this young literary aspirant.”

“Na, na!” cried Sir Walter; “I’ll do my share, but there’s Chairlie over there as full o’ wut as a Radical’s full o’ treason. He’s the laddie to give a cheery opening to it.”

Dickens was shaking his head, and apparently about to refuse the honour, when a voice from among the moderns — I could not see who it was for the crowd — said:

“Suppose we begin at the end of the table and work round, any one contributing a little as the fancy seizes him?”

“Agreed! agreed!” cried the whole company; and every eye was turned on Defoe, who seemed very uneasy, and filled his pipe from a great tobacco-box in front of him.

“Nay, gossips,” he said, “there are others more worthy — —” But he was interrupted by loud cries of “No! no!” from the whole table; and Smollett shouted out, “Stand to it, Dan — stand to it! You and I and the Dean here will make three short tacks just to fetch her out of harbour, and then she may drift where she pleases.” Thus encouraged, Defoe cleared his throat, and began in this way, talking between the puffs of his pipe: —

“My father was a well-to-do yeoman of Cheshire, named Cyprian Overbeck, but, marrying about the year 1617, he assumed the name of his wife’s family, which was Wells; and thus I, their eldest son, was named Cyprian Overbeck Wells. The farm was a very fertile one, and contained some of the best grazing land in those parts, so that my father was enabled to lay by money to the extent of a thousand crowns, which he laid out in an adventure to the Indies with such surprising success that in less than three years it had increased fourfold. Thus encouraged, he bought a part share of the trader, and, fitting her out once more with such commodities as were most in demand (viz. old muskets, hangers and axes, besides glasses, needles, and the like), he placed me on board as supercargo to look after his interests, and despatched us upon our voyage.

“We had a fair wind as far as Cape de Verde, and there, getting into the north-west trade-winds, made good progress down the African coast. Beyond sighting a Barbary rover once, whereat our mariners were in sad distress, counting themselves already as little better than slaves, we had good luck until we had come within a hundred leagues of the Cape of Good Hope, when the wind veered round to the southward and blew exceeding hard, while the sea rose to such a height that the end of the mainyard dipped into the water, and I heard the master say that though he had been at sea for five-and-thirty years he had never seen the like of it, and that he had little expectation of riding through it. On this I fell to wringing my hands and bewailing myself, until the mast going by the board with a crash, I thought that the ship had struck, and swooned with terror, falling into the scuppers and lying like one dead, which was the saving of me, as will appear in the sequel. For the mariners, giving up all hope of saving the ship, and being in momentary expectation that she would founder, pushed off in the long-boat, whereby I fear that they met the fate which they hoped to avoid, since I have never from that day heard anything of them. For my own part, on recovering from the swoon into which I had fallen, I found that, by the mercy of Providence, the sea had gone down, and that I was alone in the vessel. At which last discovery I was so terror-struck that I could but stand wringing my hands and bewailing my sad fate, until at last taking heart, I fell to comparing my lot with that of my unhappy camerados, on which I became more cheerful, and descending to the cabin, made a meal off such dainties as were in the captain's locker."

Having got so far, Defoe remarked that he thought he had given them a fair start, and handed over the story to Dean Swift, who, after premising that he feared he would find himself as much at sea as Master Cyprian Overbeck Wells, continued in this way: —

"For two days I drifted about in great distress, fearing that there should be a return of the gale, and keeping an eager look-out for my late companions. Upon the third day, towards evening, I observed to my extreme surprise that the ship was under the influence of a very powerful current, which ran to the north-east with such violence that she was carried, now bows on, now stern on, and occasionally drifting sideways like a crab, at a rate which I cannot compute at less than twelve or fifteen knots an hour. For several weeks I was borne away in this manner, until one morning, to my inexpressible joy, I sighted an island upon the starboard quarter. The current would, however, have carried me past it had I not made shift, though single-handed, to set the flying-jib so as to turn her bows, and then clapping on the sprit-sail, studding-sail, and fore-sail, I clewed up the halliards upon the port side, and put the wheel down hard a-starboard, the wind being at the time north-east-half-east."

At the description of this nautical manœuvre I observed that Smollett grinned, and a gentleman who was sitting higher up the table in the uniform of the Royal Navy, and who I guessed to be Captain Marryat, became very uneasy and fidgeted in his seat.

"By this means I got clear of the current and was able to steer within a quarter of a mile of the beach, which indeed I might have approached still nearer by making another tack, but being an excellent swimmer, I deemed it best to leave the vessel, which was almost waterlogged, and to make the best of my way to the shore.

"I had had my doubts hitherto as to whether this new-found country was inhabited or no, but as I approached nearer to it, being on the summit of a great wave, I perceived a number of figures on the beach, engaged apparently in watching me and my vessel. My joy, however, was considerably lessened when on reaching the land I found that the figures consisted of a vast concourse of animals of various sorts who were standing about in groups, and who hurried down to the water's edge to meet me. I had scarce put my foot upon the sand before I was surrounded by an eager crowd of deer, dogs, wild boars, buffaloes, and other creatures, none of whom showed the least fear either of me or of each other, but, on the contrary, were animated by a common feeling of curiosity, as well as, it would appear, by some degree of disgust."

"A second edition," whispered Lawrence Sterne to his neighbour; "Gulliver served up cold."

"Did you speak, sir?" asked the Dean very sternly, having evidently overheard the remark.

"My words were not addressed to you, sir," answered Sterne, looking rather frightened.

"They were none the less insolent," roared the Dean. "Your reverence would fain make a Sentimental Journey of the narrative, I doubt not, and find pathos in a dead donkey — though faith, no man can blame thee for mourning over thy own kith and kin."

"Better that than to wallow in all the filth of Yahooland," returned Sterne warmly, and a quarrel would certainly have ensued but for the interposition of the remainder of the company. As it was, the Dean refused indignantly to have any further hand in the story, and Sterne also stood out of it, remarking with a sneer that he was loth to fit a good blade on to a poor handle. Under these circumstances some further unpleasantness might have occurred had not Smollett rapidly taken up the narrative, continuing it in the third person instead of the first: —

"Our hero, being considerably alarmed at this strange reception, lost little time in plunging into the sea again and regaining his vessel, being convinced that the worst which might befall him from the elements would be as nothing compared to the dangers of this mysterious island. It was as well that he took this course, for before nightfall his ship was overhauled and he himself picked up by a British man-of-war, the *Lightning* (74), then returning from the West Indies, where it had formed part of the fleet under the command of Admiral Benbow. Young Wells, being a likely lad enough, well-spoken and high-spirited, was at once entered on the books as officer's servant, in which capacity he both gained great popularity on account of the freedom of his manners, and found an opportunity for indulging in those practical pleasantries for which he had all his life been famous.

"Among the quartermasters of the *Lightning* there was one named Jedediah Anchorstock, whose appearance was so remarkable that it quickly attracted the attention of our hero. He was a man of about fifty, dark with exposure to the weather, and so tall that as he came along the ‘tween decks he had to bend himself nearly double. The most striking peculiarity of this individual was, however, that in his boyhood some evil-minded person had tattooed eyes all over his countenance with such marvellous skill that it was difficult at a short distance to pick out his real ones among so many counterfeits. On this strange personage Master Cyprian determined to exercise his talents for mischief, the more so as he learned that he was extremely superstitious, and also that he had left behind him in Portsmouth a strong-minded spouse of whom he stood in mortal terror. With this object he secured one of the sheep which were kept on board for the officers’ table, and pouring a can of rumbo down its throat, reduced it to a state of utter intoxication. He then conveyed it to Anchorstock’s berth, and with the assistance of some other imps, as mischievous as himself, dressed it up in a high nightcap and gown, and covered it over with the bedclothes.

“When the quartermaster came down from his watch our hero met him at the door of his berth with an agitated face. ‘Mr. Anchorstock,’ said he, ‘can it be that your wife is on board?’ ‘Wife!’ roared the astonished sailor. ‘Ye white-faced swab, what d’ye mean?’ ‘If she’s not here in the ship it must be her ghost,’ said Cyprian, shaking his head gloomily. ‘In the ship! How in thunder could she get into the ship? Why, master, I believe as how you’re weak in the upper works, d’ye see? to as much as think o’ such a thing. My Poll is moored head and starn, behind the point at Portsmouth, more’n two thousand mile away.’ ‘Upon my word,’ said our hero, very earnestly, ‘I saw a female look out of your cabin not five minutes ago.’ ‘Ay, ay, Mr. Anchorstock,’ joined in several of the conspirators. ‘We all saw her — a spanking-looking craft with a dead-light mounted on one side.’ ‘Sure enough,’ said Anchorstock, staggered by this accumulation of evidence, ‘my Polly’s starboard eye was doused for ever by long Sue Williams of the Hard. But if so be as she be there I must see her, be she ghost or quick’; with which the honest sailor, in much perturbation and trembling in every limb, began to shuffle forward into the cabin, holding the light well in front of him. It chanced, however, that the unhappy sheep, which was quietly engaged in sleeping off the effects of its unusual potations, was awakened by the noise of his approach, and finding herself in such an unusual position, sprang out of bed and rushed furiously for the door, bleating wildly, and rolling about like a brig in a tornado, partly from intoxication and partly from the night-dress which impeded her movements. As Anchorstock saw this extraordinary apparition bearing down upon him, he uttered a yell and fell flat upon his face, convinced that he had to do with a supernatural visitor, the more so as the confederates heightened the effect by a chorus of most ghastly groans and cries. The joke had nearly gone beyond what was originally intended, for the quartermaster lay as one dead, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could be brought to his senses. To the end of the voyage he stoutly asserted that he had seen the distant Mrs. Anchorstock, remarking with many oaths that though he was too woundily scared to take much note of the features, there was no mistaking the strong smell of rum which was characteristic of his better half.

"It chanced shortly after this to be the king's birthday, an event which was signalised aboard the *Lightning* by the death of the commander under singular circumstances. This officer, who was a real fairweather Jack, hardly knowing the ship's keel from her ensign, had obtained his position through parliamentary interest, and used it with such tyranny and cruelty that he was universally execrated. So unpopular was he that when a plot was entered into by the whole crew to punish his misdeeds with death, he had not a single friend among six hundred souls to warn him of his danger. It was the custom on board the king's ships that upon his birthday the entire ship's company should be drawn up upon deck, and that at a signal they should discharge their muskets into the air in honour of his Majesty. On this occasion word had been secretly passed round for every man to slip a slug into his firelock, instead of the blank cartridge provided. On the boatswain blowing his whistle the men mustered upon deck and formed line, whilst the captain, standing well in front of them, delivered a few words to them. 'When I give the word,' he concluded, 'you shall discharge your pieces, and by thunder, if any man is a second before or a second after his fellows I shall trice him up to the weather rigging!' With these words he roared 'Fire!' on which every man levelled his musket straight at his head and pulled the trigger. So accurate was the aim and so short the distance, that more than five hundred bullets struck him simultaneously, blowing away his head and a large portion of his body. There were so many concerned in this matter, and it was so hopeless to trace it to any individual, that the officers were unable to punish any one for the affair — the more readily as the captain's haughty ways and heartless conduct had made him quite as hateful to them as to the men whom he commanded.

"By his pleasantries and the natural charm of his manners our hero so far won the good wishes of the ship's company that they parted with infinite regret upon their arrival in England. Filial duty, however, urged him to return home and report himself to his father, with which object he posted from Portsmouth to London, intending to proceed thence to Shropshire. As it chanced, however, one of the horses sprained his off foreleg while passing through Chichester, and as no change could be obtained, Cyprian found himself compelled to put up at the Crown and Bull for the night.

"Ods bodikins!" continued Smollett, laughing, "I never could pass a comfortable hostel without stopping and so, with your permission, I'll e'en stop here, and whoever wills may lead friend Cyprian to his further adventures. Do you, Sir Walter, give us a touch of the Wizard of the North."

With these words Smollett produced a pipe, and filling it at Defoe's tobacco-pot, waited patiently for the continuation of the story.

"If I must, I must," remarked the illustrious Scotchman, taking a pinch of snuff; "but I must beg leave to put Mr. Wells back a few hundred years, for of all things I love the true mediæval smack. To proceed then: —

"Our hero, being anxious to continue his journey, and learning that it would be some time before any conveyance would be ready, determined to push on alone mounted on his gallant grey steed. Travelling was particularly dangerous at that time, for besides the usual perils which beset wayfarers, the southern parts of England were in a lawless and disturbed state which bordered on insurrection. The young man, however, having loosened his sword in his sheath, so as to be ready for every eventuality, galloped cheerily upon his way, guiding himself to the best of his ability by the light of the rising moon.

"He had not gone far before he realised that the cautions which had been impressed upon him by the landlord, and which he had been inclined to look upon as self-interested advice, were only too well justified. At a spot where the road was particularly rough, and ran across some marsh land, he perceived a short distance from him a dark shadow, which his practised eye detected at once as a body of crouching men. Reining up his horse within a few yards of the ambuscade, he wrapped his cloak round his bridle-arm and summoned the party to stand forth.

"'What ho, my masters!' he cried. 'Are beds so scarce, then, that ye must hamper the high road of the king with your bodies? Now, by St. Ursula of Alpuxerra, there be those who might think that birds who fly o' nights were after higher game than the moorhen or the woodcock!'

"'Blades and targets, comrades!' exclaimed a tall powerful man, springing into the centre of the road with several companions, and standing in front of the frightened horse. 'Who is this swashbuckler who summons his Majesty's lieges from their repose? A very soldado, o' truth. Hark ye, sir, or my lord, or thy grace, or whatsoever title your honour's honour may be pleased to approve, thou must curb thy tongue play, or by the seven witches of Gambleside thou may find thyself in but a sorry plight.'

"'I prythee, then, that thou wilt expound to me who and what ye are,' quoth our hero, 'and whether your purpose be such as an honest man may approve of. As to your threats, they turn from my mind as your caitiffly weapons would shiver upon my hauberk from Milan.'

"'Nay, Allen,' interrupted one of the party, addressing him who seemed to be their leader; 'this is a lad of mettle, and such a one as our honest Jack longs for. But we lure not hawks with empty hands. Look ye, sir, there is game afoot which it may need such bold hunters as thyself to follow. Come with us and take a firkin of canary, and we will find better work for that glaive of thine than getting its owner into broil and bloodshed; for, by my troth! Milan or no Milan, if my curtel axe do but ring against that morion of thine it will be an ill day for thy father's son.'

"For a moment our hero hesitated as to whether it would best become his knightly traditions to hurl himself against his enemies, or whether it might not be better to obey their requests. Prudence, mingled with a large share of curiosity, eventually carried the day, and dismounting from his horse, he intimated that he was ready to follow his captors.

"'Spoken like a man!' cried he whom they addressed as Allen. 'Jack Cade will be right glad of such a recruit. Blood and carrion! but thou hast the thews of a young ox; and I swear, by the haft of my sword, that it might have gone ill with some of us hadst thou not listened to reason!'

"'Nay, not so, good Allen — not so,' squeaked a very small man, who had remained in the background while there was any prospect of a fray, but who now came pushing to the front. 'Hadst thou been alone it might indeed have been so, perchance, but an expert swordsman can disarm at pleasure such a one as this young knight. Well I remember in the Palatinate how I clove to the chine even such another — the Baron von Slogstaff. He struck at me, look ye, so; but I, with buckler and blade, did, as one might say, deflect it; and then, countering in carte, I returned in tierce, and so — St. Agnes save us! who comes here?’

“The apparition which frightened the loquacious little man was sufficiently strange to cause a qualm even in the bosom of the knight. Through the darkness there loomed a figure which appeared to be of gigantic size, and a hoarse voice, issuing apparently some distance above the heads of the party, broke roughly on the silence of the night.

“‘Now, out upon thee, Thomas Allen, and foul be thy fate if thou hast abandoned thy post without good and sufficient cause. By St. Anselm of the Holy Grove, thou hadst best have never been born than rouse my spleen this night. Wherefore is it that you and your men are trailing over the moor like a flock of geese when Michaelmas is near?’

“‘Good captain,’ said Allen, doffing his bonnet, an example followed by others of the band, ‘we have captured a goodly youth who was pricking it along the London road. Methought that some word of thanks were meet reward for such service, rather than taunt or threat.’

“‘Nay, take it not to heart, bold Allen,’ exclaimed their leader, who was none other than the great Jack Cade himself. ‘Thou knowest of old that my temper is somewhat choleric, and my tongue not greased with that unguent which oils the mouths of the lip-serving lords of the land. And you,’ he continued, turning suddenly upon our hero, ‘are you ready to join the great cause which will make England what it was when the learned Alfred reigned in the land? Zounds, man, speak out, and pick not your phrases.’

“‘I am ready to do aught which may become a knight and a gentleman,’ said the soldier stoutly.

“‘Taxes shall be swept away!’ cried Cade excitedly—’the impost and the anpost — the tithe and the hundred-tax. The poor man’s salt-box and flour-bin shall be as free as the nobleman’s cellar. Ha! what sayest thou?’

“‘It is but just,’ said our hero.

“‘Ay, but they give us such justice as the falcon gives the leveret!’ roared the orator. ‘Down with them, I say — down with every man of them! Noble and judge, priest and king, down with them all!’

“‘Nay,’ said Sir Overbeck Wells, drawing himself up to his full height, and laying his hand upon the hilt of his sword, ‘there I cannot follow thee, but must rather defy thee as traitor and faineant, seeing that thou art no true man, but one who would usurp the rights of our master the king, whom may the Virgin protect!’

“At these bold words, and the defiance which they conveyed, the rebels seemed for a moment utterly bewildered; but, encouraged by the hoarse shout of their leader, they brandished their weapons and prepared to fall upon the knight, who placed himself in a posture for defence and awaited their attack.

“There now!” cried Sir Walter, rubbing his hands and chuckling, “I’ve put the chiel in a pretty warm corner, and we’ll see which of you moderns can take him oot o’t. Ne’er a word more will ye get frae me to help him one way or the other.”

“You try your hand, James,” cried several voices, and the author in question had got so far as to make an allusion to a solitary horseman who was approaching, when he was interrupted by a tall gentleman a little farther down with a slight stutter and a very nervous manner.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but I fancy that I may be able to do something here. Some of my humble productions have been said to excel Sir Walter at his best, and I was undoubtedly stronger all round. I could picture modern society as well as ancient; and as to my plays, why Shakespeare never came near *The Lady of Lyons* for popularity. There is this little thing — —” (Here he rummaged among a great pile of papers in front of him.) “Ah! that’s a report of mine, when I was in India. Here it is. No, this is one of my speeches in the House, and this is my criticism on Tennyson. Didn’t I warm him up? I can’t find what I wanted, but of course you have read them all — *Rienzi* and *Harold*, and *The Last of the Barons*. Every schoolboy knows them by heart, as poor Macaulay would have said. Allow me to give you a sample: —

“In spite of the gallant knight’s valiant resistance the combat was too unequal to be sustained. His sword was broken by a slash from a brown bill, and he was borne to the ground. He expected immediate death, but such did not seem to be the intention of the ruffians who had captured him. He was placed upon the back of his own charger and borne, bound hand and foot, over the trackless moor, in the fastnesses of which the rebels secreted themselves.

“In the depths of these wilds there stood a stone building which had once been a farmhouse, but having been for some reason abandoned had fallen into ruin, and had now become the headquarters of Cade and his men. A large cowhouse near the farm had been utilised as sleeping quarters, and some rough attempts had been made to shield the principal room of the main building from the weather by stopping up the gaping apertures in the walls. In this apartment was spread out a rough meal for the returning rebels, and our hero was thrown, still bound, into an empty outhouse, there to await his fate.”

Sir Walter had been listening with the greatest impatience to Bulwer Lytton’s narrative, but when it had reached this point he broke in impatiently.

“We want a touch of your own style, man,” he said. “The animal-magnetico-electro-hysterical-biological-mysterious sort of story is all your own, but at present you are just a poor copy of myself, and nothing more.”

There was a murmur of assent from the company, and Defoe remarked, “Truly, Master Lytton, there is a plaguey resemblance in the style, which may indeed be but a chance, and yet methinks it is sufficiently marked to warrant such words as our friend hath used.”

“Perhaps you will think that this is an imitation also,” said Lytton bitterly, and leaning back in his chair with a morose countenance, he continued the narrative in this way: —

“Our unfortunate hero had hardly stretched himself upon the straw with which his dungeon was littered, when a secret door opened in the wall and a venerable old man swept majestically into the apartment. The prisoner gazed upon him with astonishment not unmixed with awe, for on his broad brow was printed the seal of much knowledge — such knowledge as it is not granted to a son of man to know. He was clad in a long white robe, crossed and chequered with mystic devices in the Arabic character, while a high scarlet tiara marked with the square and circle enhanced his venerable appearance. ‘My son,’ he said, turning his piercing and yet dreamy gaze upon Sir Overbeck, ‘all things lead to nothing, and nothing is the foundation of all things. Cosmos is impenetrable. Why then should we exist?’

“Astounded at this weighty query, and at the philosophic demeanour of his visitor, our hero made shift to bid him welcome and to demand his name and quality. As the old man answered him his voice rose and fell in musical cadences, like the sighing of the east wind, while an ethereal and aromatic vapour pervaded the apartment.

“‘I am the eternal non-ego,’ he answered. ‘I am the concentrated negative — the everlasting essence of nothing. You see in me that which existed before the beginning of matter many years before the commencement of time. I am the algebraic *x* which represents the infinite divisibility of a finite particle.’

“Sir Overbeck felt a shudder as though an ice-cold hand had been placed upon his brow. ‘What is your message?’ he whispered, falling prostrate before his mysterious visitor.

"'To tell you that the eternities beget chaos, and that the immensities are at the mercy of the divine ananke. Infinitude crouches before a personality. The mercurial essence is the prime mover in spirituality, and the thinker is powerless before the pulsating inanity. The cosmical procession is terminated only by the unknowable and unpronounceable' ——

"May I ask, Mr. Smollett, what you find to laugh at?"

"Gadzooks, master," cried Smollett, who had been sniggering for some time back. "It seems to me that there is little danger of any one venturing to dispute that style with you."

"It's all your own," murmured Sir Walter.

"And very pretty, too," quoth Lawrence Sterne, with a malignant grin. "Pray sir, what language do you call it?"

Lytton was so enraged at these remarks, and at the favour with which they appeared to be received, that he endeavoured to stutter out some reply, and then, losing control of himself completely, picked up all his loose papers and strode out of the room, dropping pamphlets and speeches at every step. This incident amused the company so much that they laughed for several minutes without cessation. Gradually the sound of their laughter sounded more and more harshly in my ears, the lights on the table grew dim and the company more misty, until they and their symposium vanished away altogether. I was sitting before the embers of what had been a roaring fire, but was now little more than a heap of grey ashes, and the merry laughter of the august company had changed to the recriminations of my wife, who was shaking me violently by the shoulder and exhorting me to choose some more seasonable spot for my slumbers. So ended the wondrous adventures of Master Cyprian Overbeck Wells, but I still live in the hopes that in some future dream the great masters may themselves finish that which they have begun.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

I cannot pretend to say what occurred on the 14th of April last at No. 17, Badderly Gardens. Put down in black and white, my surmise might seem too crude, too grotesque, for serious consideration. And yet that something did occur, and that it was of a nature which will leave its mark upon every one of us for the rest of our lives, is as certain as the unanimous testimony of five witnesses can make it. I will not enter into any argument or speculation. I will only give a plain statement, which will be submitted to John Moir, Harvey Deacon, and Mrs. Delamere, and withheld from publication unless they are prepared to corroborate every detail. I cannot obtain the sanction of Paul Le Duc, for he appears to have left the country.

It was John Moir (the well-known senior partner of Moir, Moir, and Sanderson) who had originally turned our attention to occult subjects. He had, like many very hard and practical men of business, a mystic side to his nature, which had led him to the examination, and eventually to the acceptance, of those elusive phenomena which are grouped together with much that is foolish, and much that is fraudulent, under the common heading of spiritualism. His researches, which had begun with an open mind, ended unhappily in dogma, and he became as positive and fanatical as any other bigot. He represented in our little group the body of men who have turned these singular phenomena into a new religion.

Mrs. Delamere, our medium, was his sister, the wife of Delamere, the rising sculptor. Our experience had shown us that to work on these subjects without a medium was as futile as for an astronomer to make observations without a telescope. On the other hand, the introduction of a paid medium was hateful to all of us. Was it not obvious that he or she would feel bound to return some result for money received, and that the temptation to fraud would be an overpowering one? No phenomena could be relied upon which were produced at a guinea an hour. But, fortunately, Moir had discovered that his sister was mediumistic — in other words, that she was a battery of that animal magnetic force which is the only form of energy which is subtle enough to be acted upon from the spiritual plane as well as from our own material one. Of course, when I say this, I do not mean to beg the question; but I am simply indicating the theories upon which we were ourselves, rightly or wrongly, explaining what we saw. The lady came, not altogether with the approval of her husband, and though she never gave indications of any very great psychic force, we were able, at least, to obtain those usual phenomena of message-tilting which are at the same time so puerile and so inexplicable. Every Sunday evening we met in Harvey Deacon's studio at Badderly Gardens, the next house to the corner of Merton Park Road.

Harvey Deacon's imaginative work in art would prepare any one to find that he was an ardent lover of everything which was *outré* and sensational. A certain picturesqueness in the study of the occult had been the quality which had originally attracted him to it, but his attention was speedily arrested by some of those phenomena to which I have referred, and he was coming rapidly to the conclusion that what he had looked upon as an amusing romance and an after-dinner entertainment was really a very formidable reality. He is a man with a remarkably clear and logical brain — a true descendant of his ancestor, the well-known Scotch professor — and he represented in our small circle the critical element, the man who has no prejudices, is prepared to follow facts as far as he can see them, and refuses to theorise in advance of his data. His caution annoyed Moir as much as the latter's robust faith amused Deacon, but each in his own way was equally keen upon the matter.

And I? What am I to say that I represented? I was not the devotee. I was not the scientific critic. Perhaps the best that I can claim for myself is that I was the dilettante man about town, anxious to be in the swim of every fresh movement, thankful for any new sensation which would take me out of myself and open up fresh possibilities of existence. I am not an enthusiast myself, but I like the company of those who are. Moir's talk, which made me feel as if we had a private pass-key through the door of death, filled me with a vague contentment. The soothing atmosphere of the séance with the darkened lights was delightful to me. In a word, the thing amused me, and so I was there.

It was, as I have said, upon the 14th of April last that the very singular event which I am about to put upon record took place. I was the first of the men to arrive at the studio, but Mrs. Delamere was already there, having had afternoon tea with Mrs. Harvey Deacon. The two ladies and Deacon himself were standing in front of an unfinished picture of his upon the easel. I am not an expert in art, and I have never professed to understand what Harvey Deacon meant by his pictures; but I could see in this instance that it was all very clever and imaginative, fairies and animals and allegorical figures of all sorts. The ladies were loud in their praises, and indeed the colour effect was a remarkable one.

“What do you think of it, Markham?” he asked.

“Well, it’s above me,” said I. “These beasts — what are they?”

“Mythical monsters, imaginary creatures, heraldic emblems — a sort of weird, bizarre procession of them.”

“With a white horse in front!”

“It’s not a horse,” said he, rather testily — which was surprising, for he was a very good-humoured fellow as a rule, and hardly ever took himself seriously.

“What is it, then?”

“Can’t you see the horn in front? It’s a unicorn. I told you they were heraldic beasts. Can’t you recognise one?”

“Very sorry, Deacon,” said I, for he really seemed to be annoyed.

He laughed at his own irritation.

“Excuse me, Markham!” said he; “the fact is that I have had an awful job over the beast. All day I have been painting him in and painting him out, and trying to imagine what a real live, ramping unicorn would look like. At last I got him, as I hoped; so when you failed to recognise it, it took me on the raw.”

“Why, of course it’s a unicorn,” said I, for he was evidently depressed at my obtuseness. “I can see the horn quite plainly, but I never saw a unicorn except beside the Royal Arms, and so I never thought of the creature. And these others are griffins and cockatrices, and dragons of sorts?”

“Yes, I had no difficulty with them. It was the unicorn which bothered me. However, there’s an end of it until to-morrow.” He turned the picture round upon the easel, and we all chatted about other subjects.

Moir was late that evening, and when he did arrive he brought with him, rather to our surprise, a small, stout Frenchman, whom he introduced as Monsieur Paul Le Duc. I say to our surprise, for we held a theory that any intrusion into our spiritual circle deranged the conditions, and introduced an element of suspicion. We knew that we could trust each other, but all our results were vitiated by the presence of an outsider. However, Moir soon reconciled us to the innovation. Monsieur Paul Le Duc was a famous student of occultism, a seer, a medium, and a mystic. He was travelling in England with a letter of introduction to Moir from the President of the Parisian brothers of the Rosy Cross. What more natural than that he should bring him to our little séance, or that we should feel honoured by his presence?

He was, as I have said, a small, stout man, undistinguished in appearance, with a broad, smooth, clean-shaven face, remarkable only for a pair of large, brown, velvety eyes, staring vaguely out in front of him. He was well dressed, with the manners of a gentleman, and his curious little turns of English speech set the ladies smiling. Mrs. Deacon had a prejudice against our researches and left the room, upon which we lowered the lights, as was our custom, and drew up our chairs to the square mahogany table which stood in the centre of the studio. The light was subdued, but sufficient to allow us to see each other quite plainly. I remember that I could even observe the curious, podgy little square-topped hands which the Frenchman laid upon the table.

"What a fun!" said he. "It is many years since I have sat in this fashion, and it is to me amusing. Madame is medium. Does madame make the trance?"

"Well, hardly that," said Mrs. Delamere. "But I am always conscious of extreme sleepiness."

"It is the first stage. Then you encourage it, and there comes the trance. When the trance comes, then out jumps your little spirit and in jumps another little spirit, and so you have direct talking or writing. You leave your machine to be worked by another. *Hein?* But what have unicorns to do with it?"

Harvey Deacon started in his chair. The Frenchman was moving his head slowly round and staring into the shadows which draped the walls.

"What a fun!" said he. "Always unicorns. Who has been thinking so hard upon a subject so bizarre?"

"This is wonderful!" cried Deacon. "I have been trying to paint one all day. But how could you know it?"

"You have been thinking of them in this room."

"Certainly."

"But thoughts are things, my friend. When you imagine a thing you make a thing. You did not know it, *hein*? But I can see your unicorns because it is not only with my eye that I can see."

"Do you mean to say that I create a thing which has never existed by merely thinking of it?"

"But certainly. It is the fact which lies under all other facts. That is why an evil thought is also a danger."

"They are, I suppose, upon the astral plane?" said Moir.

"Ah, well, these are but words, my friends. They are there — somewhere — everywhere — I cannot tell myself. I see them. I could touch them."

"You could not make *us* see them."

"It is to materialise them. Hold! It is an experiment. But the power is wanting. Let us see what power we have, and then arrange what we shall do. May I place you as I wish?"

"You evidently know a great deal more about it than we do," said Harvey Deacon; "I wish that you would take complete control."

"It may be that the conditions are not good. But we will try what we can do. Madame will sit where she is, I next, and this gentleman beside me. Meester Moir will sit next to madame, because it is well to have blacks and blondes in turn. So! And now with your permission I will turn the lights all out."

"What is the advantage of the dark?" I asked.

"Because the force with which we deal is a vibration of ether and so also is light. We have the wires all for ourselves now — *hein*? You will not be frightened in the darkness, madame? What a fun is such a séance!"

At first the darkness appeared to be absolutely pitchy, but in a few minutes our eyes became so far accustomed to it that we could just make out each other's presence — very dimly and vaguely, it is true. I could see nothing else in the room — only the black loom of the motionless figures. We were all taking the matter much more seriously than we had ever done before.

"You will place your hands in front. It is hopeless that we touch, since we are so few round so large a table. You will compose yourself, madame, and if sleep should come to you you will not fight against it. And now we sit in silence and we expect — *hein*?"

So we sat in silence and expected, staring out into the blackness in front of us. A clock ticked in the passage. A dog barked intermittently far away. Once or twice a cab rattled past in the street, and the gleam of its lamps through the chink in the curtains was a cheerful break in that gloomy vigil. I felt those physical symptoms with which previous séances had made me familiar — the coldness of the feet, the tingling in the hands, the glow of the palms, the feeling of a cold wind upon the back. Strange little shooting pains came in my forearms, especially as it seemed to me in my left one, which was nearest to our visitor — due no doubt to disturbance of the vascular system, but worthy of some attention all the same. At the same time I was conscious of a strained feeling of expectancy which was almost painful. From the rigid, absolute silence of my companions I gathered that their nerves were as tense as my own.

And then suddenly a sound came out of the darkness — a low, sibilant sound, the quick, thin breathing of a woman. Quicker and thinner yet it came, as between clenched teeth, to end in a loud gasp with a dull rustle of cloth.

"What's that? Is all right?" some one asked in the darkness.

"Yes, all is right," said the Frenchman. "It is madame. She is in her trance. Now, gentlemen, if you will wait quiet you will see something, I think, which will interest you much."

Still the ticking in the hall. Still the breathing, deeper and fuller now, from the medium. Still the occasional flash, more welcome than ever, of the passing lights of the hansoms. What a gap we were bridging, the half-raised veil of the eternal on the one side and the cabs of London on the other. The table was throbbing with a mighty pulse. It swayed steadily, rhythmically, with an easy swooping, scooping motion under our fingers. Sharp little raps and cracks came from its substance, file-firing, volley-firing, the sounds of a fagot burning briskly on a frosty night.

"There is much power," said the Frenchman. "See it on the table!"

I had thought it was some delusion of my own, but all could see it now. There was a greenish-yellow phosphorescent light — or I should say a luminous vapour rather than a light — which lay over the surface of the table. It rolled and wreathed and undulated in dim glimmering folds, turning and swirling like clouds of smoke. I could see the white, square-ended hands of the French medium in this baleful light.

"What a fun!" he cried. "It is splendid!"

"Shall we call the alphabet?" asked Moir.

"But no — for we can do much better," said our visitor. "It is but a clumsy thing to tilt the table for every letter of the alphabet, and with such a medium as madame we should do better than that."

"Yes, you will do better," said a voice.

"Who was that? Who spoke? Was that you, Markham?"

"No, I did not speak."

"It was madame who spoke."

"But it was not her voice."

"Is that you, Mrs. Delamere?"

"It is not the medium, but it is the power which uses the organs of the medium," said the strange, deep voice.

"Where is Mrs. Delamere? It will not hurt her, I trust."

“The medium is happy in another plane of existence. She has taken my place, as I have taken hers.”

“Who are you?”

“It cannot matter to you who I am. I am one who has lived as you are living, and who has died as you will die.”

We heard the creak and grate of a cab pulling up next door. There was an argument about the fare, and the cabman grumbled hoarsely down the street. The green-yellow cloud still swirled faintly over the table, dull elsewhere, but glowing into a dim luminosity in the direction of the medium. It seemed to be piling itself up in front of her. A sense of fear and cold struck into my heart. It seemed to me that lightly and flippantly we had approached the most real and august of sacraments, that communion with the dead of which the fathers of the Church had spoken.

“Don’t you think we are going too far? Should we not break up this séance?” I cried.

But the others were all earnest to see the end of it. They laughed at my scruples.

“All the powers are made for use,” said Harvey Deacon. “If we *can* do this, we *should* do this. Every new departure of knowledge has been called unlawful in its inception. It is right and proper that we should inquire into the nature of death.”

“It is right and proper,” said the voice.

“There, what more could you ask?” cried Moir, who was much excited. “Let us have a test. Will you give us a test that you are really there?”

“What test do you demand?”

“Well, now — I have some coins in my pocket. Will you tell me how many?”

“We come back in the hope of teaching and of elevating, and not to guess childish riddles.”

“Ha, ha, Meester Moir, you catch it that time,” cried the Frenchman. “But surely this is very good sense what the Control is saying.”

“It is a religion, not a game,” said the cold, hard voice.

“Exactly — the very view I take of it,” cried Moir. “I am sure I am very sorry if I have asked a foolish question. You will not tell me who you are?”

“What does it matter?”

“Have you been a spirit long?”

“Yes.”

“How long?”

“We cannot reckon time as you do. Our conditions are different.”

“Are you happy?”

“Yes.”

“You would not wish to come back to life?”

“No — certainly not.”

“Are you busy?”

“We could not be happy if we were not busy.”

“What do you do?”

“I have said that the conditions are entirely different.”

“Can you give us no idea of your work?”

“We labour for our own improvement and for the advancement of others.”

“Do you like coming here to-night?”

“I am glad to come if I can do any good by coming.”

“Then to do good is your object?”

“It is the object of all life on every plane.”

“You see, Markham, that should answer your scruples.”

It did, for my doubts had passed and only interest remained.

“Have you pain in your life?” I asked.

“No; pain is a thing of the body.”

“Have you mental pain?”

“Yes; one may always be sad or anxious.”

“Do you meet the friends whom you have known on earth?”

“Some of them.”

“Why only some of them?”

“Only those who are sympathetic.”

“Do husbands meet wives?”

“Those who have truly loved.”

“And the others?”

“They are nothing to each other.”

“There must be a spiritual connection?”

“Of course.”

“Is what we are doing right?”

“If done in the right spirit.”

“What is the wrong spirit?”

“Curiosity and levity.”

“May harm come of that?”

“Very serious harm.”

“What sort of harm?”

“You may call up forces over which you have no control.”

“Evil forces?”

“Undeveloped forces.”

“You say they are dangerous. Dangerous to body or mind?”

“Sometimes to both.”

There was a pause, and the blackness seemed to grow blacker still, while the yellow-green fog swirled and smoked upon the table.

“Any questions you would like to ask, Moir?” said Harvey Deacon.

“Only this — do you pray in your world?”

“One should pray in every world.”

“Why?”

“Because it is the acknowledgment of forces outside ourselves.”

“What religion do you hold over there?”

“We differ exactly as you do.”

“You have no certain knowledge?”

“We have only faith.”

“These questions of religion,” said the Frenchman, “they are of interest to you serious English people, but they are not so much fun. It seems to me that with this power here we might be able to have some great experience — *hein*? Something of which we could talk.”

“But nothing could be more interesting than this,” said Moir.

“Well, if you think so, that is very well,” the Frenchman answered, peevishly. “For my part, it seems to me that I have heard all this before, and that to-night I should weesh to try some experiment with all this force which is given to us. But if you have other questions, then ask them, and when you are finish we can try something more.”

But the spell was broken. We asked and asked, but the medium sat silent in her chair. Only her deep, regular breathing showed that she was there. The mist still whirled upon the table.

“You have disturbed the harmony. She will not answer.”

“But we have learned already all that she can tell — *hein*? For my part I wish to see something I have never seen before.”

“What then?”

“You will let me try?”

“What would you do?”

"I have said to you that thoughts are things. Now I wish to *prove* it to you, and to show you that which is only a thought. Yes, yes, I can do it and you will see. Now I ask you only to sit still and say nothing, and keep ever your hands quiet upon the table."

The room was blacker and more silent than ever. The same feeling of apprehension which had lain heavily upon me at the beginning of the séance was back at my heart once more. The roots of my hair were tingling.

"It is working! It is working!" cried the Frenchman, and there was a crack in his voice as he spoke which told me that he also was strung to his tightest.

The luminous fog drifted slowly off the table, and wavered and flickered across the room. There in the farther and darkest corner it gathered and glowed, hardening down into a shining core — a strange, shifty, luminous, and yet non-illuminating patch of radiance, bright itself, but throwing no rays into the darkness. It had changed from a greenish-yellow to a dusky sullen red. Then round this centre there coiled a dark, smoky substance, thickening, hardening, growing denser and blacker. And then the light went out, smothered in that which had grown round it.

"It has gone."

"Hush — there's something in the room."

We heard it in the corner where the light had been, something which breathed deeply and fidgeted in the darkness.

"What is it? Le Duc, what have you done?"

"It is all right. No harm will come." The Frenchman's voice was treble with agitation.

"Good heavens, Moir, there's a large animal in the room. Here it is, close by my chair! Go away! Go away!"

It was Harvey Deacon's voice, and then came the sound of a blow upon some hard object. And then ... And then ... how can I tell you what happened then?

Some huge thing hurtled against us in the darkness, rearing, stamping, smashing, springing, snorting. The table was splintered. We were scattered in every direction. It clattered and scrambled amongst us, rushing with horrible energy from one corner of the room to another. We were all screaming with fear, grovelling upon our hands and knees to get away from it. Something trod upon my left hand, and I felt the bones splinter under the weight.

"A light! A light!" some one yelled.

"Moir, you have matches, matches!"

"No, I have none. Deacon, where are the matches? For God's sake, the matches!"

"I can't find them. Here, you Frenchman, stop it!"

"It is beyond me. Oh, *mon Dieu*, I cannot stop it. The door! Where is the door?"

My hand, by good luck, lit upon the handle as I groped about in the darkness. The hard-breathing, snorting, rushing creature tore past me and butted with a fearful crash against the oaken partition. The instant that it had passed I turned the handle, and next moment we were all outside, and the door shut behind us. From within came a horrible crashing and rending and stamping.

"What is it? In Heaven's name, what is it?"

"A horse. I saw it when the door opened. But Mrs. Delamere —— ?"

"We must fetch her out. Come on, Markham; the longer we wait the less we shall like it."

He flung open the door and we rushed in. She was there on the ground amidst the splinters of her chair. We seized her and dragged her swiftly out, and as we gained the door I looked over my shoulder into the darkness. There were two strange eyes glowing at us, a rattle of hoofs, and I had just time to slam the door when there came a crash upon it which split it from top to bottom.

"It's coming through! It's coming!"

"Run, run for your lives!" cried the Frenchman.

Another crash, and something shot through the riven door. It was a long white spike, gleaming in the lamplight. For a moment it shone before us, and then with a snap it disappeared again.

"Quick! Quick! This way!" Harvey Deacon shouted. "Carry her in! Here! Quick!"

We had taken refuge in the dining-room, and shut the heavy oak door. We laid the senseless woman upon the sofa, and as we did so, Moir, the hard man of business, drooped and fainted across the hearth-rug. Harvey Deacon was as white as a corpse, jerking and twitching like an epileptic. With a crash we heard the studio door fly to pieces, and the snorting and stamping were in the passage, up and down, shaking the house with their fury. The Frenchman had sunk his face on his hands, and sobbed like a frightened child.

"What shall we do?" I shook him roughly by the shoulder. "Is a gun any use?"

"No, no. The power will pass. Then it will end."

"You might have killed us all — you unspeakable fool — with your infernal experiments."

"I did not know. How could I tell that it would be frightened? It is mad with terror. It was his fault. He struck it."

Harvey Deacon sprang up. "Good heavens!" he cried.

A terrible scream sounded through the house.

"It's my wife! Here, I'm going out. If it's the Evil One himself I am going out!"

He had thrown open the door and rushed out into the passage. At the end of it, at the foot of the stairs, Mrs. Deacon was lying senseless, struck down by the sight which she had seen. But there was nothing else.

With eyes of horror we looked about us, but all was perfectly quiet and still. I approached the black square of the studio door, expecting with every slow step that some atrocious shape would hurl itself out of it. But nothing came, and all was silent inside the room. Peeping and peering, our hearts in our mouths, we came to the very threshold, and stared into the darkness. There was still no sound, but in one direction there was also no darkness. A luminous, glowing cloud, with an incandescent centre, hovered in the corner of the room. Slowly it dimmed and faded, growing thinner and fainter, until at last the same dense, velvety blackness filled the whole studio. And with the last flickering gleam of that baleful light the Frenchman broke into a shout of joy.

"What a fun!" he cried. "No one is hurt, and only the door broken, and the ladies frightened. But, my friends, we have done what has never been done before."

"And as far as I can help," said Harvey Deacon, "it will certainly never be done again."

And that was what befell on the 14th of April last at No. 17 Badderly Gardens. I began by saying that it would seem too grotesque to dogmatise as to what it was which actually did occur; but I give my impressions, *our* impressions (since they are corroborated by Harvey Deacon and John Moir), for what they are worth. You may, if it pleases you, imagine that we were the victims of an elaborate and extraordinary hoax. Or you may think with us that we underwent a very real and a very terrible experience. Or perhaps you may know more than we do of such occult matters, and can inform us of some similar occurrence. In this latter case a letter to William Markham, 146m, the Albany, would help to throw a light upon that which is very dark to us.

THE RING OF THOTH

Mr. John Vansittart Smith, F.R.S., of 147-a Gower Street, was a man whose energy of purpose and clearness of thought might have placed him in the very first rank of scientific observers. He was the victim, however, of a universal ambition which prompted him to aim at distinction in many subjects rather than pre-eminence in one. In his early days he had shown an aptitude for zoology and for botany which caused his friends to look upon him as a second Darwin, but when a professorship was almost within his reach he had suddenly discontinued his studies and turned his whole attention to chemistry. Here his researches upon the spectra of the metals had won him his fellowship in the Royal Society; but again he played the coquette with his subject, and after a year's absence from the laboratory he joined the Oriental Society, and delivered a paper on the Hieroglyphic and Demotic inscriptions of El Kab, thus giving a crowning example both of the versatility and of the inconstancy of his talents.

The most fickle of wooers, however, is apt to be caught at last, and so it was with John Vansittart Smith. The more he burrowed his way into Egyptology the more impressed he became by the vast field which it opened to the inquirer, and by the extreme importance of a subject which promised to throw a light upon the first germs of human civilisation and the origin of the greater part of our arts and sciences. So struck was Mr. Smith that he straightway married an Egyptological young lady who had written upon the sixth dynasty, and having thus secured a sound base of operations he set himself to collect materials for a work which should unite the research of Lepsius and the ingenuity of Champollion. The preparation of this *magnum opus* entailed many hurried visits to the magnificent Egyptian collections of the Louvre, upon the last of which, no longer ago than the middle of last October, he became involved in a most strange and noteworthy adventure.

The trains had been slow and the Channel had been rough, so that the student arrived in Paris in a somewhat befogged and feverish condition. On reaching the Hôtel de France, in the Rue Laffitte, he had thrown himself upon a sofa for a couple of hours, but finding that he was unable to sleep, he determined, in spite of his fatigue, to make his way to the Louvre, settle the point which he had come to decide, and take the evening train back to Dieppe. Having come to this conclusion, he donned his greatcoat, for it was a raw rainy day, and made his way across the Boulevard des Italiens and down the Avenue de l'Opéra. Once in the Louvre he was on familiar ground, and he speedily made his way to the collection of papyri which it was his intention to consult.

The warmest admirers of John Vansittart Smith could hardly claim for him that he was a handsome man. His high-beaked nose and prominent chin had something of the same acute and incisive character which distinguished his intellect. He held his head in a birdlike fashion, and birdlike, too, was the pecking motion with which, in conversation, he threw out his objections and retorts. As he stood, with the high collar of his greatcoat raised to his ears, he might have seen from the reflection in the glass-case before him that his appearance was a singular one. Yet it came upon him as a sudden jar when an English voice behind him exclaimed in very audible tones, “What a queer-looking mortal!”

The student had a large amount of petty vanity in his composition which manifested itself by an ostentatious and overdone disregard of all personal considerations. He straightened his lips and looked rigidly at the roll of papyrus, while his heart filled with bitterness against the whole race of travelling Britons.

“Yes,” said another voice, “he really is an extraordinary fellow.”

“Do you know,” said the first speaker, “one could almost believe that by the continual contemplation of mummies the chap has become half a mummy himself?”

“He has certainly an Egyptian cast of countenance,” said the other.

John Vansittart Smith spun round upon his heel with the intention of shaming his countrymen by a corrosive remark or two. To his surprise and relief, the two young fellows who had been conversing had their shoulders turned towards him, and were gazing at one of the Louvre attendants who was polishing some brass-work at the other side of the room.

“Carter will be waiting for us at the Palais Royal,” said one tourist to the other, glancing at his watch, and they clattered away, leaving the student to his labours.

“I wonder what these chatterers call an Egyptian cast of countenance,” thought John Vansittart Smith, and he moved his position slightly in order to catch a glimpse of the man’s face. He started as his eyes fell upon it. It was indeed the very face with which his studies had made him familiar. The regular statuesque features, broad brow, well-rounded chin, and dusky complexion were the exact counterpart of the innumerable statues, mummy-cases, and pictures which adorned the walls of the apartment. The thing was beyond all coincidence. The man must be an Egyptian. The national angularity of the shoulders and narrowness of the hips were alone sufficient to identify him.

John Vansittart Smith shuffled towards the attendant with some intention of addressing him. He was not light of touch in conversation, and found it difficult to strike the happy mean between the brusqueness of the superior and the geniality of the equal. As he came nearer, the man presented his side face to him, but kept his gaze still bent upon his work. Vansittart Smith, fixing his eyes upon the fellow’s skin, was conscious of a sudden impression that there was something inhuman and preternatural about its appearance. Over the temple and cheek-bone it was as glazed and as shiny as varnished parchment. There was no suggestion of pores. One could not fancy a drop of moisture upon that arid surface. From brow to chin, however, it was cross-hatched by a million delicate wrinkles, which shot and interlaced as though Nature in some Maori mood had tried how wild and intricate a pattern she could devise.

“Où est la collection de Memphis?” asked the student with the awkward air of a man who is devising a question merely for the purpose of opening a conversation.

“C’est là,” replied the man brusquely, nodding his head at the other side of the room.

“Vous êtes un Egyptien, n’est-ce pas?” asked the Englishman.

The attendant looked up and turned his strange dark eyes upon his questioner. They were vitreous, with a misty dry shininess, such as Smith had never seen in a human head before. As he gazed into them he saw some strong emotion gather in their depths, which rose and deepened until it broke into a look of something akin both to horror and to hatred.

“Non, monsieur; je suis français.” The man turned abruptly and bent low over his polishing. The student gazed at him for a moment in astonishment, and then turning to a chair in a retired corner behind one of the doors he proceeded to make notes of his researches among the papyri. His thoughts, however, refused to return into their natural groove. They would run upon the enigmatical attendant with the sphinx-like face and the parchment skin.

“Where have I seen such eyes?” said Vansittart Smith to himself. “There is something saurian about them, something reptilian. There’s the membrana nictitans of the snakes,” he mused, bethinking himself of his zoological studies. “It gives a shiny effect. But there was something more here. There was a sense of power, of wisdom — so I read them — and of weariness, utter weariness, and ineffable despair. It may be all imagination, but I never had so strong an impression. By Jove, I must have another look at them!” He rose and paced round the Egyptian rooms, but the man who had excited his curiosity had disappeared.

The student sat down again in his quiet corner, and continued to work at his notes. He had gained the information which he required from the papyri, and it only remained to write it down while it was still fresh in his memory. For a time his pencil travelled rapidly over the paper, but soon the lines became less level, the words more blurred, and finally the pencil tinkled down upon the floor, and the head of the student dropped heavily forward upon his chest. Tired out by his journey, he slept so soundly in his lonely post behind the door that neither the clanking civil guard, nor the footsteps of sightseers, nor even the loud hoarse bell which gives the signal for closing, were sufficient to arouse him.

Twilight deepened into darkness, the bustle from the Rue de Rivoli waxed and then waned, distant Notre Dame clanged out the hour of midnight, and still the dark and lonely figure sat silently in the shadow. It was not until close upon one in the morning that, with a sudden gasp and an intaking of the breath, Vansittart Smith returned to consciousness. For a moment it flashed upon him that he had dropped asleep in his study-chair at home. The moon was shining fitfully through the unshuttered window, however, and as his eye ran along the lines of mummies and the endless array of polished cases, he remembered clearly where he was and how he came there. The student was not a nervous man. He possessed that love of a novel situation which is peculiar to his race. Stretching out his cramped limbs, he looked at his watch, and burst into a chuckle as he observed the hour. The episode would make an admirable anecdote to be introduced into his next paper as a relief to the graver and heavier speculations. He was a little cold, but wide awake and much refreshed. It was no wonder that the guardians had overlooked him, for the door threw its heavy black shadow right across him.

The complete silence was impressive. Neither outside nor inside was there a creak or a murmur. He was alone with the dead men of a dead civilisation. What though the outer city reeked of the garish nineteenth century! In all this chamber there was scarce an article, from the shrivelled ear of wheat to the pigment-box of the painter, which had not held its own against four thousand years. Here was the flotsam and jetsam washed up by the great ocean of time from that far-off empire. From stately Thebes, from lordly Luxor, from the great temples of Heliopolis, from a hundred rifled tombs, these relics had been brought. The student glanced round at the long silent figures who flickered vaguely up through the gloom, at the busy toilers who were now so restful, and he fell into a reverent and thoughtful mood. An unwonted sense of his own youth and insignificance came over him. Leaning back in his chair, he gazed dreamily down the long vista of rooms, all silvery with the moonshine, which extend through the whole wing of the widespread building. His eyes fell upon the yellow glare of a distant lamp.

John Vansittart Smith sat up on his chair with his nerves all on edge. The light was advancing slowly towards him, pausing from time to time, and then coming jerkily onwards. The bearer moved noiselessly. In the utter silence there was no suspicion of the pat of a footfall. An idea of robbers entered the Englishman’s head. He snuggled up further into the corner. The light was two rooms off. Now it was in the next chamber, and still there was no sound. With something approaching to a thrill of fear the student observed a face, floating in the air as it were, behind the flare of the lamp. The figure was wrapped in shadow, but the light fell full upon the strange eager face. There was no mistaking the metallic glistening eyes and the cadaverous skin. It was the attendant with whom he had conversed.

Vansittart Smith’s first impulse was to come forward and address him. A few words of explanation would set the matter clear, and lead doubtless to his being conducted to some side door from which he might make his way to his hotel. As the man entered the chamber, however, there was something so stealthy in his movements, and so furtive in his expression, that the Englishman altered his intention. This was clearly no ordinary official walking the rounds. The fellow wore felt-soled slippers, stepped with a rising chest, and glanced quickly from left to right, while his hurried gasping breathing thrilled the flame of his lamp. Vansittart Smith crouched silently back into the corner and watched him keenly, convinced that his errand was one of secret and probably sinister import.

There was no hesitation in the other’s movements. He stepped lightly and swiftly across to one of the great cases, and, drawing a key from his pocket, he unlocked it. From the upper shelf he pulled down a mummy, which he bore away with him, and laid it with much care and solicitude upon the ground. By it he placed his lamp, and then squatting down beside it in

Eastern fashion he began with long quivering fingers to undo the cerecloths and bandages which girt it round. As the crackling rolls of linen peeled off one after the other, a strong aromatic odour filled the chamber, and fragments of scented wood and of spices pattered down upon the marble floor.

It was clear to John Vansittart Smith that this mummy had never been unswathed before. The operation interested him keenly. He thrilled all over with curiosity, and his birdlike head protruded further and further from behind the door. When, however, the last roll had been removed from the four-thousand-year-old head, it was all that he could do to stifle an outcry of amazement. First, a cascade of long, black, glossy tresses poured over the workman's hands and arms. A second turn of the bandage revealed a low, white forehead, with a pair of delicately arched eyebrows. A third uncovered a pair of bright, deeply fringed eyes, and a straight, well-cut nose, while a fourth and last showed a sweet, full, sensitive mouth, and a beautifully curved chin. The whole face was one of extraordinary loveliness, save for the one blemish that in the centre of the forehead there was a single irregular, coffee-coloured splotch. It was a triumph of the embalmer's art. Vansittart Smith's eyes grew larger and larger as he gazed upon it, and he chirruped in his throat with satisfaction.

Its effect upon the Egyptologist was as nothing, however, compared with that which it produced upon the strange attendant. He threw his hands up into the air, burst into a harsh clatter of words, and then, hurling himself down upon the ground beside the mummy, he threw his arms round her, and kissed her repeatedly upon the lips and brow. "Ma petite!" he groaned in French. "Ma pauvre petite!" His voice broke with emotion, and his innumerable wrinkles quivered and writhed, but the student observed in the lamplight that his shining eyes were still dry and tearless as two beads of steel. For some minutes he lay, with a twitching face, crooning and moaning over the beautiful head. Then he broke into a sudden smile, said some words in an unknown tongue, and sprang to his feet with the vigorous air of one who has braced himself for an effort.

In the centre of the room there was a large circular case which contained, as the student had frequently remarked, a magnificent collection of early Egyptian rings and precious stones. To this the attendant strode, and, unlocking it, threw it open. On the edge at the side he placed his lamp, and beside it a small earthenware jar which he had drawn from his pocket. He then took a handful of rings from the case, and with the most serious and anxious face he proceeded to smear each in turn with some liquid substance from the earthen pot, holding them to the light as he did so. He was clearly disappointed with the first lot, for he threw them petulantly back into the case and drew out some more. One of these, a massive ring with a large crystal set in it, he seized and eagerly tested with the contents of the jar. Instantly he uttered a cry of joy, and threw out his arms in a wild gesture which upset the pot and sent the liquid streaming across the floor to the very feet of the Englishman. The attendant drew a red handkerchief from his bosom, and, mopping up the mess, he followed it into the corner, where in a moment he found himself face to face with his observer.

"Excuse me," said John Vansittart Smith, with all imaginable politeness; "I have been unfortunate enough to fall asleep behind this door."

"And you have been watching me?" the other asked in English, with a most venomous look on his corpse-like face.

The student was a man of veracity. "I confess," said he, "that I have noticed your movements, and that they have aroused my curiosity and interest in the highest degree."

The man drew a long flamboyant-bladed knife from his bosom. "You have had a very narrow escape," he said; "had I seen you ten minutes ago, I should have driven this through your heart. As it is, if you touch me or interfere with me in any way you are a dead man."

"I have no wish to interfere with you," the student answered. "My presence here is entirely accidental. All I ask is that you will have the extreme kindness to show me out through some side door." He spoke with great suavity, for the man was still pressing the tip of his dagger against the palm of his left hand, as though to assure himself of its sharpness, while his face preserved its malignant expression.

"If I thought — —" said he. "But no, perhaps it is as well. What is your name?"

The Englishman gave it.

"Vansittart Smith," the other repeated. "Are you the same Vansittart Smith who gave a paper in London upon El Kab? I saw a report of it. Your knowledge of the subject is contemptible."

"Sir!" cried the Egyptologist.

"Yet it is superior to that of many who make even greater pretensions. The whole keystone of our old life in Egypt was not the inscriptions or monuments of which you make so much, but was our hermetic philosophy and mystic knowledge of which you say little or nothing.”

“Our old life!” repeated the scholar, wide-eyed; and then suddenly, “Good God, look at the mummy’s face!”

The strange man turned and flashed his light upon the dead woman, uttering a long doleful cry as he did so. The action of the air had already undone all the art of the embalmer. The skin had fallen away, the eyes had sunk inwards, the discoloured lips had writhed away from the yellow teeth, and the brown mark upon the forehead alone showed that it was indeed the same face which had shown such youth and beauty a few short minutes before.

The man flapped his hands together in grief and horror. Then mastering himself by a strong effort he turned his hard eyes once more upon the Englishman.

“It does not matter,” he said, in a shaking voice. “It does not really matter. I came here to-night with the fixed determination to do something. It is now done. All else is as nothing. I have found my quest. The old curse is broken. I can rejoin her. What matter about her inanimate shell so long as her spirit is awaiting me at the other side of the veil!”

“These are wild words,” said Vansittart Smith. He was becoming more and more convinced that he had to do with a madman.

“Time presses, and I must go,” continued the other. “The moment is at hand for which I have waited this weary time. But I must show you out first. Come with me.”

Taking up the lamp, he turned from the disordered chamber, and led the student swiftly through the long series of the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Persian apartments. At the end of the latter he pushed open a small door let into the wall and descended a winding stone stair. The Englishman felt the cold fresh air of the night upon his brow. There was a door opposite him which appeared to communicate with the street. To the right of this another door stood ajar, throwing a spurt of yellow light across the passage. “Come in here!” said the attendant shortly.

Vansittart Smith hesitated. He had hoped that he had come to the end of his adventure. Yet his curiosity was strong within him. He could not leave the matter unsolved, so he followed his strange companion into the lighted chamber.

It was a small room, such as is devoted to a *concierge*. A wood fire sparkled in the grate. At one side stood a truckle bed, and at the other a coarse wooden chair, with a round table in the centre, which bore the remains of a meal. As the visitor's eye glanced round he could not but remark with an ever-recurring thrill that all the small details of the room were of the most quaint design and antique workmanship. The candlesticks, the vases upon the chimneypiece, the fire-irons, the ornaments upon the walls, were all such as he had been wont to associate with the remote past. The gnarled heavy-eyed man sat himself down upon the edge of the bed, and motioned his guest into the chair.

"There may be design in this," he said, still speaking excellent English. "It may be decreed that I should leave some account behind as a warning to all rash mortals who would set their wits up against workings of Nature. I leave it with you. Make such use as you will of it. I speak to you now with my feet upon the threshold of the other world.

"I am, as you surmised, an Egyptian — not one of the down-trodden race of slaves who now inhabit the Delta of the Nile, but a survivor of that fiercer and harder people who tamed the Hebrew, drove the Ethiopian back into the southern deserts, and built those mighty works which have been the envy and the wonder of all after generations. It was in the reign of Tuthmosis, sixteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, that I first saw the light. You shrink away from me. Wait, and you will see that I am more to be pitied than to be feared.

"My name was Sosra. My father had been the chief priest of Osiris in the great temple of Abaris, which stood in those days upon the Bubastic branch of the Nile. I was brought up in the temple and was trained in all those mystic arts which are spoken of in your own Bible. I was an apt pupil. Before I was sixteen I had learned all which the wisest priest could teach me. From that time on I studied Nature's secrets for myself, and shared my knowledge with no man.

"Of all the questions which attracted me there were none over which I laboured so long as over those which concern themselves with the nature of life. I probed deeply into the vital principle. The aim of medicine had been to drive away disease when it appeared. It seemed to me that a method might be devised which should so fortify the body as to prevent weakness or death from ever taking hold of it. It is useless that I should recount my researches. You would scarce comprehend them if I did. They were carried out partly upon animals, partly upon slaves, and partly on myself. Suffice it that their result was to furnish me with a substance which, when injected into the blood, would endow the body with strength to resist the effects of time, of violence, or of disease. It would not indeed confer immortality, but its potency would endure for many thousands of years. I used it upon a cat, and afterwards drugged the creature with the most deadly poisons. That cat is alive in Lower Egypt at the present moment. There was nothing of mystery or magic in the matter. It was simply a chemical discovery, which may well be made again.

"Love of life runs high in the young. It seemed to me that I had broken away from all human care now that I had abolished pain and driven death to such a distance. With a light heart I poured the accursed stuff into my veins. Then I looked round for some one whom I could benefit. There was a young priest of Thoth, Parmes by name, who had won my goodwill by his earnest nature and his devotion to his studies. To him I whispered my secret, and at his request I injected him with my elixir. I should now, I reflected, never be without a companion of the same age as myself.

"After this grand discovery I relaxed my studies to some extent, but Parmes continued his with redoubled energy. Every day I could see him working with his flasks and his distiller in the Temple of Thoth, but he said little to me as to the result of his labours. For my own part, I used to walk through the city and look around me with exultation as I reflected that all this was destined to pass away, and that only I should remain. The people would bow to me as they passed me, for the fame of my knowledge had gone abroad.

"There was war at this time, and the Great King had sent down his soldiers to the eastern boundary to drive away the Hyksos. A Governor, too, was sent to Abaris, that he might hold it for the King. I had heard much of the beauty of the daughter of this Governor, but one day as I walked out with Parmes we met her, borne upon the shoulders of her slaves. I was struck with love as with lightning. My heart went out from me. I could have thrown myself beneath the feet of her bearers. This was my woman. Life without her was impossible. I swore by the head of Horus that she should be mine. I swore it to the Priest of Thoth. He turned away from me with a brow which was as black as midnight.

"There is no need to tell you of our wooing. She came to love me even as I loved her. I learned that Parmes had seen her before I did, and had shown her that he too loved her, but I could smile at his passion, for I knew that her heart was mine. The white plague had come upon the city and many were stricken, but I laid my hands upon the sick and nursed them without fear or scathe. She marvelled at my daring. Then I told her my secret, and begged her that she would let me use my art upon her.

"'Your flower shall then be unwithered, Atma,' I said. 'Other things may pass away, but you and I, and our great love for each other, shall outlive the tomb of King Chefru.'

"But she was full of timid, maidenly objections. 'Was it right?' she asked, 'was it not a thwarting of the will of the gods? If the great Osiris had wished that our years should be so long, would he not himself have brought it about?'

"With fond and loving words I overcame her doubts, and yet she hesitated. It was a great question, she said. She would think it over for this one night. In the morning I should know of her resolution. Surely one night was not too much to ask. She wished to pray to Isis for help in her decision.

"With a sinking heart and a sad foreboding of evil I left her with her tirewomen. In the morning, when the early sacrifice was over, I hurried to her house. A frightened slave met me upon the steps. Her mistress was ill, she said, very ill. In a frenzy I broke my way through the attendants, and rushed through hall and corridor to my Atma's chamber. She lay upon her couch, her head high upon the pillow, with a pallid face and a glazed eye. On her forehead there blazed a single angry purple patch. I knew that hell-mark of old. It was the scar of the white plague, the sign-manual of death.

"Why should I speak of that terrible time? For months I was mad, fevered, delirious, and yet I could not die. Never did an Arab thirst after the sweet wells as I longed after death. Could poison or steel have shortened the thread of my existence, I should soon have rejoined my love in the land with the narrow portal. I tried, but it was of no avail. The accursed influence was too strong upon me. One night as I lay upon my couch, weak and weary, Parmes, the priest of Thoth, came to my chamber. He stood in the circle of the lamplight, and he looked down upon me with eyes which were bright with a mad joy.

"'Why did you let the maiden die?' he asked; 'why did you not strengthen her as you strengthened me?'

"'I was too late,' I answered. 'But I had forgot. You also loved her. You are my fellow in misfortune. Is it not terrible to think of the centuries which must pass ere we look upon her again? Fools, fools, that we were to take death to be our enemy!’

“‘You may say that,’ he cried with a wild laugh; ‘the words come well from your lips. For me they have no meaning.’

“‘What mean you?’ I cried, raising myself upon my elbow. ‘Surely, friend, this grief has turned your brain.’ His face was aflame with joy, and he writhed and shook like one who hath a devil.

“‘Do you know whither I go?’ he asked.

“‘Nay,’ I answered, ‘I cannot tell.’

“‘I go to her,’ said he. ‘She lies embalmed in the further tomb by the double palm-tree beyond the city wall.’

“‘Why do you go there?’ I asked.

“‘To die!’ he shrieked, ‘to die! I am not bound by earthen fetters.’

“‘But the elixir is in your blood,’ I cried.

“‘I can defy it,’ said he; ‘I have found a stronger principle which will destroy it. It is working in my veins at this moment, and in an hour I shall be a dead man. I shall join her, and you shall remain behind.’

“As I looked upon him I could see that he spoke words of truth. The light in his eye told me that he was indeed beyond the power of the elixir.

“‘You will teach me!’ I cried.

“‘Never!’ he answered.

“‘I implore you, by the wisdom of Thoth, by the majesty of Anubis!’

“‘It is useless,? he said coldly.

“‘Then I will find it out,’ I cried.

“‘You cannot,’ he answered; ‘it came to me by chance. There is one ingredient which you can never get. Save that which is in the ring of Thoth, none will ever more be made.’

“‘In the ring of Thoth!’ I repeated, ‘where then is the ring of Thoth?’

“‘That also you shall never know,’ he answered. ‘You won her love. Who has won in the end? I leave you to your sordid earth life. My chains are broken. I must go!’ He turned upon his heel and fled from the chamber. In the morning came the news that the Priest of Thoth was dead.

“My days after that were spent in study. I must find this subtle poison which was strong enough to undo the elixir. From early dawn to midnight I bent over the test-tube and the furnace. Above all, I collected the papyri and the chemical flasks of the Priest of Thoth. Alas! they taught me little. Here and there some hint or stray expression would raise hope in my bosom, but no good ever came of it. Still, month after month, I struggled on. When my heart grew faint I would make my way to the tomb by the palm-trees. There, standing by the dead casket from which the jewel had been rifled, I would feel her sweet presence, and would whisper to her that I would rejoin her if mortal wit could solve the riddle.

"Parmes had said that his discovery was connected with the ring of Thoth. I had some remembrance of the trinket. It was a large and weighty circlet, made, not of gold, but of a rarer and heavier metal brought from the mines of Mount Harbal. Platinum, you call it. The ring had, I remembered, a hollow crystal set in it, in which some few drops of liquid might be stored. Now, the secret of Parmes could not have to do with the metal alone, for there were many rings of that metal in the Temple. Was it not more likely that he had stored his precious poison within the cavity of the crystal? I had scarce come to this conclusion before, in hunting through his papers, I came upon one which told me that it was indeed so, and that there was still some of the liquid unused.

"But how to find the ring? It was not upon him when he was stripped for the embalmer. Of that I made sure. Neither was it among his private effects. In vain I searched every room that he had entered, every box and vase and chattel that he had owned. I sifted the very sand of the desert in the place where he had been wont to walk; but, do what I would, I could come upon no traces of the ring of Thoth. Yet it may be that my labours would have overcome all obstacles had it not been for a new and unlooked-for misfortune.

"A great war had been waged against the Hyksos, and the Captains of the Great King had been cut off in the desert, with all their bowmen and horsemen. The shepherd tribes were upon us like the locusts in a dry year. From the wilderness of Shur to the great bitter lake there was blood by day and fire by night. Abaris was the bulwark of Egypt, but we could not keep the savages back. The city fell. The Governor and the soldiers were put to the sword, and I, with many more, was led away into captivity.

"For years and years I tended cattle in the great plains by the Euphrates. My master died, and his son grew old, but I was still as far from death as ever. At last I escaped upon a swift camel, and made my way back to Egypt. The Hyksos had settled in the land which they had conquered, and their own King ruled over the country. Abaris had been torn down, the city had been burned, and of the great Temple there was nothing left save an unsightly mound. Everywhere the tombs had been rifled and the monuments destroyed. Of my Atma's grave no sign was left. It was buried in the sands of the desert, and the palm-trees which marked the spot had long disappeared. The papers of Parmes and the remains of the Temple of Thoth were either destroyed or scattered far and wide over the deserts of Syria. All search after them was vain.

"From that time I gave up all hope of ever finding the ring or discovering the subtle drug. I set myself to live as patiently as might be until the effect of the elixir should wear away. How can you understand how terrible a thing time is, you who have experience only of the narrow course which lies between the cradle and the grave! I know it to my cost, I who have floated down the whole stream of history. I was old when Ilium fell. I was very old when Herodotus came to Memphis. I was bowed down with years when the new gospel came upon earth. Yet you see me much as other men are, with the cursed elixir still sweetening my blood, and guarding me against that which I would court. Now at last, at last I have come to the end of it!

"I have travelled in all lands and I have dwelt with all nations. Every tongue is the same to me. I learned them all to help pass the weary time. I need not tell you how slowly they drifted by, the long dawn of modern civilisation, the dreary middle years, the dark times of barbarism. They are all behind me now. I have never looked with the eyes of love upon another woman. Atma knows that I have been constant to her.

"It was my custom to read all that the scholars had to say upon Ancient Egypt. I have been in many positions, sometimes affluent, sometimes poor, but I have always found enough to enable me to buy the journals which deal with such matters. Some nine months ago I was in San Francisco, when I read an account of some discoveries made in the neighbourhood of Abaris. My heart leapt into my mouth as I read it. It said that the excavator had busied himself in exploring some tombs recently unearthed. In one there had been found an unopened mummy with an inscription upon the outer case setting forth that it contained the body of the daughter of the Governor of the city in the days of Tuthmosis. It added that on removing the outer case there had been exposed a large platinum ring set with a crystal, which had been laid upon the breast of the embalmed woman. This, then, was where Parmes had hid the ring of Thoth. He might well say that it was safe, for no Egyptian would ever stain his soul by moving even the outer case of a buried friend.

"That very night I set off from San Francisco, and in a few weeks I found myself once more at Abaris, if a few sand-heaps and crumbling walls may retain the name of the great city. I hurried to the Frenchmen who were digging there and asked them for the ring. They replied that both the ring and the mummy had been sent to the Boulak Museum at Cairo. To Boulak I went, but only to be told that Mariette Bey had claimed them and had shipped them to the Louvre. I followed them, and there at last, in the Egyptian chamber, I came, after close upon four thousand years, upon the remains of my Atma, and upon the ring for which I had sought so long.

"But how was I to lay hands upon them? How was I to have them for my very own? It chanced that the office of attendant was vacant. I went to the Director. I convinced him that I knew much about Egypt. In my eagerness I said too much. He remarked that a Professor's chair would suit me better than a seat in the conciergerie. I knew more, he said, than he did. It was only by blundering, and letting him think that he had over-estimated my knowledge, that I prevailed upon him to let me move the few effects which I have retained into this chamber. It is my first and my last night here.

"Such is my story, Mr. Vansittart Smith. I need not say more to a man of your perception. By a strange chance you have this night looked upon the face of the woman whom I loved in those far-off days. There were many rings with crystals in the case, and I had to test for the platinum to be sure of the one which I wanted. A glance at the crystal has shown me that the liquid is indeed within it, and that I shall at last be able to shake off that accursed health which has been worse to me than the foulest disease. I have nothing more to say to you. I have unburdened myself. You may tell my story or you may withhold it at your pleasure. The choice rests with you. I owe you some amends, for you have had a narrow escape of your life this night. I was a desperate man, and not to be baulked in my purpose. Had I seen you before the thing was done, I might have put it beyond your power to oppose me or to raise an alarm. This is the door. It leads into the Rue de Rivoli. Good-night."

The Englishman glanced back. For a moment the lean figure of Sosra the Egyptian stood framed in the narrow doorway. The next the door had slammed, and the heavy rasping of a bolt broke on the silent night.

It was on the second day after his return to London that Mr. John Vansittart Smith saw the following concise narrative in the Paris correspondence of the *Times*: —

"*Curious Occurrence in the Louvre.* — Yesterday morning a strange discovery was made in the principal Eastern chamber. The *ouvriers* who are employed to clean out the rooms in the morning found one of the attendants lying dead upon the floor with his arms round one of the mummies. So close was his embrace that it was only with the utmost difficulty that they were separated. One of the cases containing valuable rings had been opened and rifled. The authorities are of opinion that the man was bearing away the mummy with some idea of selling it to a private collector, but that he was struck down in the very act by long-standing disease of the heart. It is said that he was a man of uncertain age and eccentric habits, without any living relations to mourn over his dramatic and untimely end."

THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO

I used to be the leading practitioner of Los Amigos. Of course, every one has heard of the great electrical generating gear there. The town is wide spread, and there are dozens of little townlets and villages all around, which receive their supply from the same centre, so that the works are on a very large scale. The Los Amigos folk say that they are the largest upon earth, but then we claim that for everything in Los Amigos except the gaol and the death-rate. Those are said to be the smallest.

Now, with so fine an electrical supply, it seemed to be a sinful waste of hemp that the Los Amigos criminals should perish in the old-fashioned manner. And then came the news of the electrocutions in the East, and how the results had not after all been so instantaneous as had been hoped. The Western engineers raised their eyebrows when they read of the puny shocks by which these men had perished, and they vowed in Los Amigos that when an irreclaimable came their way he should be dealt handsomely by, and have the run of all the big dynamos. There should be no reserve, said the engineers, but he should have all that they had got. And what the result of that would be none could predict, save that it must be absolutely blasting and deadly. Never before had a man been so charged with electricity as they would charge him. He was to be smitten by the essence of ten thunderbolts. Some prophesied combustion, and some disintegration and disappearance. They were waiting eagerly to settle the question by actual demonstration, and it was just at that moment that Duncan Warner came that way.

Warner had been wanted by the law, and by nobody else, for many years. Desperado, murderer, train robber, and road agent, he was a man beyond the pale of human pity. He had deserved a dozen deaths, and the Los Amigos folk grudged him so gaudy a one as that. He seemed to feel himself to be unworthy of it, for he made two frenzied attempts at escape. He was a powerful, muscular man, with a lion heart, tangled black locks, and a sweeping beard which covered his broad chest. When he was tried, there was no finer head in all the crowded court. It’s no new thing to find the best face looking from the dock. But his good looks could not balance his bad deeds. His advocate did all he knew, but the cards lay against him, and Duncan Warner was handed over to the mercy of the big Los Amigos dynamos.

I was there at the committee meeting when the matter was discussed. The town council had chosen four experts to look after the arrangements. Three of them were admirable. There was Joseph M'Connor, the very man who had designed the dynamos, and there was Joshua Westmacott, the chairman of the Los Amigos Electrical Supply Company, Limited. Then there was myself as the chief medical man, and lastly an old German of the name of Peter Stulpnagel. The Germans were a strong body at Los Amigos, and they all voted for their man. That was how he got on the committee. It was said that he had been a wonderful electrician at home, and he was eternally working with wires and insulators and Leyden jars; but, as he never seemed to get any further, or to have any results worth publishing, he came at last to be regarded as a harmless crank, who had made science his hobby. We three practical men smiled when we heard that he had been elected as our colleague, and at the meeting we fixed it all up very nicely among ourselves without much thought of the old fellow who sat with his ears scooped forward in his hands, for he was a trifle hard of hearing, taking no more part in the proceedings than the gentlemen of the press who scribbled their notes on the back benches.

We did not take long to settle it all. In New York a strength of some two thousand volts had been used, and death had not been instantaneous. Evidently their shock had been too weak. Los Amigos should not fall into that error. The charge should be six times greater, and therefore, of course, it would be six times more effective. Nothing could possibly be more logical. The whole concentrated force of the great dynamos should be employed on Duncan Warner.

So we three settled it, and had already risen to break up the meeting, when our silent companion opened his mouth for the first time.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you appear to me to show an extraordinary ignorance upon the subject of electricity. You have not mastered the first principles of its actions upon a human being."

The committee was about to break into an angry reply to this brusque comment, but the chairman of the Electrical Company tapped his forehead to claim its indulgence for the crankiness of the speaker.

"Pray tell us, sir," said he, with an ironical smile, "what is there in our conclusions with which you find fault?"

"With your assumption that a large dose of electricity will merely increase the effect of a small dose. Do you not think it possible that it might have an entirely different result? Do you know anything, by actual experiment, of the effect of such powerful shocks?”

“We know it by analogy,” said the chairman pompously. “All drugs increase their effect when they increase their dose; for example — for example — —”

“Whisky,” said Joseph M’Connor.

“Quite so. Whisky. You see it there.”

Peter Stulpnagel smiled and shook his head.

“Your argument is not very good,” said he. “When I used to take whisky, I used to find that one glass would excite me, but that six would send me to sleep, which is just the opposite. Now, suppose that electricity were to act in just the opposite way also, what then?”

We three practical men burst out laughing. We had known that our colleague was queer, but we never had thought that he would be as queer as this.

“What then?” repeated Peter Stulpnagel.

“We’ll take our chances,” said the chairman.

“Pray consider,” said Peter, “that workmen who have touched the wires, and who have received shocks of only a few hundred volts, have died instantly. The fact is well known. And yet when a much greater force was used upon a criminal at New York, the man struggled for some little time. Do you not clearly see that the smaller dose is the more deadly?”

“I think, gentlemen, that this discussion has been carried on quite long enough,” said the chairman, rising again. “The point, I take it, has already been decided by the majority of the committee, and Duncan Warner shall be electrocuted on Tuesday by the full strength of the Los Amigos dynamos. Is it not so?”

“I agree,” said Joseph M’Connor.

“I agree,” said I.

“And I protest,” said Peter Stulpnagel.

“Then the motion is carried, and your protest will be duly entered in the minutes,” said the chairman, and so the sitting was dissolved.

The attendance at the electrocution was a very small one. We four members of the committee were, of course, present with the executioner, who was to act under their orders. The others were the United States Marshal, the governor of the gaol, the chaplain, and three members of the press. The room was a small brick chamber, forming an out-house to the

Central Electrical station. It had been used as a laundry, and had an oven and copper at one side, but no other furniture save a single chair for the condemned man. A metal plate for his feet was placed in front of it, to which ran a thick insulated wire. Above, another wire depended from the ceiling, which could be connected with a small metallic rod projecting from a cap which was to be placed upon his head. When this connection was established Duncan Warner's hour was come.

There was a solemn hush as we waited for the coming of the prisoner. The practical engineers looked a little pale, and fidgeted nervously with the wires. Even the hardened Marshal was ill at ease, for a mere hanging was one thing, and this blasting of flesh and blood a very different one. As to the pressmen, their faces were whiter than the sheets which lay before them. The only man who appeared to feel none of the influence of these preparations was the little German crank, who strolled from one to the other with a smile on his lips and mischief in his eyes. More than once he even went so far as to burst into a shout of laughter, until the chaplain sternly rebuked him for his ill-timed levity.

"How can you so far forget yourself, Mr. Stulpnagel," said he, "as to jest in the presence of death?"

But the German was quite unabashed.

"If I were in the presence of death I should not jest," said he, "but since I am not I may do what I choose."

This flippant reply was about to draw another and a sterner reproof from the chaplain, when the door was swung open and two warders entered leading Duncan Warner between them. He glanced round him with a set face, stepped resolutely forward, and seated himself upon the chair.

"Touch her off!" said he.

It was barbarous to keep him in suspense. The chaplain murmured a few words in his ear, the attendant placed the cap upon his head, and then, while we all held our breath, the wire and the metal were brought in contact.

"Great Scott!" shouted Duncan Warner.

He had bounded in his chair as the frightful shock crashed through his system. But he was not dead. On the contrary, his eyes gleamed far more brightly than they had done before. There was only one change, but it was a singular one. The black had passed from his hair and beard as the shadow passes from a landscape. They were both as white as snow. And yet there was no other sign of decay. His skin was smooth and plump and lustrous as a child's.

The Marshal looked at the committee with a reproachful eye.

"There seems to be some hitch here, gentlemen," said he.

We three practical men looked at each other.

Peter Stulpnagel smiled pensively.

"I think that another one should do it," said I.

Again the connection was made, and again Duncan Warner sprang in his chair and shouted, but, indeed, were it not that he still remained in the chair none of us would have recognised him. His hair and his beard had shredded off in an instant, and the room looked like a barber's shop on a Saturday night. There he sat, his eyes still shining, his skin radiant with the glow of perfect health, but with a scalp as bald as a Dutch cheese, and a chin without so much as a trace of down. He began to revolve one of his arms, slowly and doubtfully at first, but with more confidence as he went on.

"That joint," said he, "has puzzled half the doctors on the Pacific slope. It's as good as new, and as limber as a hickory twig."

"You are feeling pretty well?" asked the old German.

"Never better in my life," said Duncan Warner cheerily.

The situation was a painful one. The Marshal glared at the committee. Peter Stulpnagel grinned and rubbed his hands. The engineers scratched their heads. The bald-headed prisoner revolved his arm and looked pleased.

"I think that one more shock — —" began the chairman.

"No, sir," said the Marshal; "we've had foolery enough for one morning. We are here for an execution, and an execution we'll have."

"What do you propose?"

"There's a hook handy upon the ceiling. Fetch a rope, and we'll soon set this matter straight."

There was another awkward delay while the warders departed for the cord. Peter Stulpnagel bent over Duncan Warner, and whispered something in his ear. The desperado stared in surprise.

"You don't say?" he asked.

The German nodded.

"What! No ways?"

Peter shook his head, and the two began to laugh as though they shared some huge joke between them.

The rope was brought, and the Marshal himself slipped the noose over the criminal's neck. Then the two warders, the assistant and he swung their victim into the air. For half an hour he hung — a dreadful sight — from the ceiling. Then in solemn silence they lowered him down, and one of the warders went out to order the shell to be brought round. But as he touched ground again what was our amazement when Duncan Warner put his hands up to his neck, loosened the noose, and took a long, deep breath.

"Paul Jefferson's sale is goin' well," he remarked, "I could see the crowd from up yonder," and he nodded at the hook in the ceiling.

"Up with him again!" shouted the Marshal, "we'll get the life out of him somehow."

In an instant the victim was up at the hook once more.

They kept him there for an hour, but when he came down he was perfectly garrulous.

"Old man Plunket goes too much to the Arcady Saloon," said he. "Three times he's been there in an hour; and him with a family. Old man Plunket would do well to swear off."

It was monstrous and incredible, but there it was. There was no getting round it. The man was there talking when he ought to have been dead. We all sat staring in amazement, but United States Marshal Carpenter was not a man to be euchred so easily. He motioned the others to one side, so that the prisoner was left standing alone.

"Duncan Warner," said he slowly, "you are here to play your part, and I am here to play mine. Your game is to live if you can, and my game is to carry out the sentence of the law. You've beat us on electricity, I'll give you one there. And you've beat us on hanging, for you seem to thrive on it. But it's my turn to beat you now, for my duty has to be done."

He pulled a six-shooter from his coat as he spoke, and fired all the shots through the body of the prisoner. The room was so filled with smoke that we could see nothing, but when it cleared the prisoner was still standing there, looking down in disgust at the front of his coat.

"Coats must be cheap where you come from," said he. "Thirty dollars it cost me, and look at it now. The six holes in front are bad enough, but four of the balls have passed out, and a pretty fine state the back must be in."

The Marshal's revolver fell from his hand, and he dropped his arms to his sides, a beaten man.

"Maybe some of you gentlemen can tell me what this means," said he, looking helplessly at the committee.

Peter Stulpnagel took a step forward.

"I'll tell you all about it," said he.

"You seem to be the only person who knows anything."

"I *am* the only person who knows anything. I should have warned these gentlemen; but, as they would not listen to me, I have allowed them to learn by experience. What you have done with your electricity is that you have increased the man's vitality until he can deny death for centuries."

"Centuries!"

"Yes, it will take the wear of hundreds of years to exhaust the enormous nervous energy with which you have drenched him. Electricity is life, and you have charged him with it to the utmost. Perhaps in fifty years you might execute him, but I am not sanguine about it."

"Great Scott! What shall I do with him?" cried the unhappy Marshal.

Peter Stulpnagel shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that it does not much matter what you do with him now," said he.

"Maybe we could drain the electricity out of him again. Suppose we hang him up by the heels?"

"No, no, it's out of the question."

"Well, well, he shall do no more mischief in Los Amigos, anyhow," said the Marshal, with decision. "He shall go into the new gaol. The prison will wear him out."

"On the contrary," said Peter Stulpnagel, "I think that it is much more probable that he will wear out the prison."

It was rather a fiasco, and for years we didn't talk more about it than we could help, but it's no secret now, and I thought you might like to jot down the facts in your case-book.

HOW IT HAPPENED

She was a writing medium. This is what she wrote: —

I can remember some things upon that evening most distinctly, and others are like some vague, broken dreams. That is what makes it so difficult to tell a connected story. I have no idea now what it was that had taken me to London and brought me back so late. It just merges into all my other visits to London. But from the time that I got out at the little country station everything is extraordinarily clear. I can live it again — every instant of it.

I remember so well walking down the platform and looking at the illuminated clock at the end which told me that it was half-past eleven. I remember also my wondering whether I could get home before midnight. Then I remember the big motor, with its glaring headlights and glitter of polished brass, waiting for me outside. It was my new thirty-horse-power Robur, which had only been delivered that day. I remember also asking Perkins, my chauffeur, how she had gone, and his saying that he thought she was excellent.

"I'll try her myself," said I, and I climbed into the driver's seat.

"The gears are not the same," said he. "Perhaps, sir, I had better drive."

"No; I should like to try her," said I.

And so we started on the five-mile drive for home.

My old car had the gears as they used always to be in notches on a bar. In this car you passed the gear-lever through a gate to get on the higher ones. It was not difficult to master, and soon I thought that I understood it. It was foolish, no doubt, to begin to learn a new system in the dark, but one often does foolish things, and one has not always to pay the full price for them. I got along very well until I came to Claystall Hill. It is one of the worst hills in England, a mile and a half long and one in six in places, with three fairly sharp curves. My park gates stand at the very foot of it upon the main London road.

We were just over the brow of this hill, where the grade is steepest, when the trouble began. I had been on the top speed, and wanted to get her on the free; but she stuck between gears, and I had to get her back on the top again. By this time she was going at a great rate, so I clapped on both brakes, and one after the other they gave way. I didn't mind so much when I felt my footbrake snap, but when I put all my weight on my side-brake, and the lever clanged to its full limit without a catch, it brought a cold sweat out of me. By this time we were fairly tearing down the slope. The lights were brilliant, and I brought her round the first curve all right. Then we did the second one, though it was a close shave for the ditch. There was a mile of straight then with the third curve beneath it, and after that the gate of the park. If I could shoot into that harbour all would be well, for the slope up to the house would bring her to a stand.

Perkins behaved splendidly. I should like that to be known. He was perfectly cool and alert. I had thought at the very beginning of taking the bank, and he read my intention.

“I wouldn’t do it, sir,” said he. “At this pace it must go over and we should have it on the top of us.”

Of course he was right. He got to the electric switch and had it off, so we were in the free; but we were still running at a fearful pace. He laid his hands on the wheel.

“I’ll keep her steady,” said he, “if you care to jump and chance it. We can never get round that curve. Better jump, sir.”

“No,” said I; “I’ll stick it out. You can jump if you like.”

“I’ll stick it with you, sir,” said he.

If it had been the old car I should have jammed the gear-lever into the reverse, and seen what would happen. I expect she would have stripped her gears or smashed up somehow, but it would have been a chance. As it was, I was helpless. Perkins tried to climb across, but you couldn’t do it going at that pace. The wheels were whirring like a high wind and the big body creaking and groaning with the strain. But the lights were brilliant, and one could steer to an inch. I remember thinking what an awful and yet majestic sight we should appear to any one who met us. It was a narrow road, and we were just a great, roaring, golden death to any one who came in our path.

We got round the corner with one wheel three feet high upon the bank. I thought we were surely over, but after staggering for a moment she righted darted onwards. That was the third corner and the last one. There was only the park gate now. It was facing us, but, as luck would have it, not facing us directly. It was about twenty yards to the left up the main road into which we ran. Perhaps I could have done it, but I expect that the steering-gear had been jarred when we ran on the bank. The wheel did not turn easily. We shot out of the lane. I saw the open gate on the left. I whirled round my wheel with all the strength of my wrists. Perkins and I threw our bodies across, and then the next instant, going at fifty miles an hour, my right front wheel struck full on the right-hand pillar of my own gate. I heard the crash. I was conscious of flying through the air, and then — and then —— !

* * *

When I became aware of my own existence once more I was among some brushwood in the shadow of the oaks upon the lodge side of the drive. A man was standing beside me. I imagined at first that it was Perkins, but when I looked again I saw that it was Stanley, a man whom I had known at college some years before, and for whom I had a really genuine affection. There was always something peculiarly sympathetic to me in Stanley's personality; and I was proud to think that I had some similar influence upon him. At the present moment I was surprised to see him, but I was like a man in a dream, giddy and shaken and quite prepared to take things as I found them without questioning them.

"What a smash!" I said. "Good Lord, what an awful smash!"

He nodded his head, and even in the gloom I could see that he was smiling the gentle, wistful smile which I connected with him.

I was quite unable to move. Indeed, I had not any desire to try to move. But my senses were exceedingly alert. I saw the wreck of the motor lit up by the moving lanterns. I saw the little group of people and heard the hushed voices. There were the lodge-keeper and his wife, and one or two more. They were taking no notice of me, but were very busy round the car. Then suddenly I heard a cry of pain.

"The weight is on him. Lift it easy," cried a voice.

"It's only my leg!" said another one, which I recognised as Perkins's. "Where's master?" he cried.

"Here I am," I answered, but they did not seem to hear me. They were all bending over something which lay in front of the car.

Stanley laid his hand upon my shoulder, and his touch was inexpressibly soothing. I felt light and happy, in spite of all.

"No pain, of course?" said he.

"None," said I.

"There never is," said he.

And then suddenly a wave of amazement passed over me. Stanley! Stanley! Why, Stanley had surely died of enteric at Bloemfontein in the Boer War!

“Stanley!” I cried, and the words seemed to choke my throat—”Stanley, you are dead.”

He looked at me with the same old gentle, wistful smile.

“So are you,” he answered.

LOT NO. 249

Of the dealings of Edward Bellingham with William Monkhouse Lee, and of the cause of the great terror of Abercrombie Smith, it may be that no absolute and final judgment will ever be delivered. It is true that we have the full and clear narrative of Smith himself, and such corroboration as he could look for from Thomas Styles the servant, from the Reverend Plumptree Peterson, Fellow of Old’s, and from such other people as chanced to gain some passing glance at this or that incident in a singular chain of events. Yet, in the main, the story must rest upon Smith alone, and the most will think that it is more likely that one brain, however outwardly sane, has some subtle warp in its texture, some strange flaw in its workings, than that the path of Nature has been overstepped in open day in so famed a centre of learning and light as the University of Oxford. Yet when we think how narrow and how devious this path of Nature is, how dimly we can trace it, for all our lamps of science, and how from the darkness which girds it round great and terrible possibilities loom ever shadowly upwards, it is a bold and confident man who will put a limit to the strange by-paths into which the human spirit may wander.

In a certain wing of what we will call Old College in Oxford there is a corner turret of an exceeding great age. The heavy arch which spans the open door has bent downwards in the centre under the weight of its years, and the grey, lichen-blotched blocks of stone are bound and knitted together with withes and strand of ivy, as though the old mother had set herself to brace them up against wind and weather. From a door a stone stair curves upwards spirally, passing two landings, and terminating in a third one, its steps all shapeless and hollowed by the tread of so many generations of the seekers after knowledge. Life has flowed like water down this winding stair, and, waterlike, has left these smooth-worn grooves behind it. From the long-gowned, pedantic scholars of Plantagenet days down to the young bloods of a later age, how full and strong had been that tide of young English life. And what was left now of all those hopes, those strivings, those fiery energies, save here and there in some old-world churchyard a few scratches upon a stone, and perchance a handful of dust in a mouldering coffin? Yet here were the silent stair and the grey old wall, with bend and saltire and many another heraldic device still to be read upon its surface, like grotesque shadows thrown back from the days that had passed.

In the month of May, in the year 1884, three young men occupied the sets of rooms which opened on to the separate landings of the old stair. Each set consisted simply of a sitting-room and a bedroom, while the two corresponding rooms upon the ground-floor were used, the one as a coal-cellar, and the other as the living-room of the servant, or scout, Thomas Styles, whose duty it was to wait upon the three men above him. To right and to left was a line of lecture-rooms and of offices, so that the dwellers in the old turret enjoyed a certain seclusion, which made the chambers popular among the more studious undergraduates. Such were the three who occupied them now — Abercrombie Smith above, Edward Bellingham beneath him, and William Monkhouse Lee upon the lowest story.

It was ten o’clock on a bright spring night, and Abercrombie Smith lay back in his armchair, his feet upon the fender, and his briar-root pipe between his lips. In a similar chair, and equally at his ease, there lounged on the other side of the fireplace his old school friend Jephro Hastie. Both men were in flannels, for they had spent their evening upon the river, but apart from their dress no one could look at their hard-cut, alert faces without seeing that they were open-air men — men whose minds and tastes turned naturally to all that was manly and robust. Hastie, indeed, was stroke of his college boat, and Smith was an even better oar, but a coming examination had already cast its shadow over him and held him to his work, save for the few hours a week which health demanded. A litter of medical books upon the table, with scattered bones, models, and anatomical plates, pointed to the extent as well as the nature of his studies, while a couple of single-sticks and a set of boxing-gloves above the mantelpiece hinted at the means by which, with Hastie’s help, he might take his exercise in its most compressed and least distant form. They knew each other very well — so well that they could sit now in that soothing silence which is the very highest development of companionship.

“Have some whisky,” said Abercrombie Smith at last between two cloudbursts. “Scotch in the jug and Irish in the bottle.”

“No, thanks. I’m in for the sculls. I don’t liquor when I’m training. How about you?”

“I’m reading hard. I think it best to leave it alone.”

Hastie nodded, and they relapsed into a contented silence.

“By the way, Smith,” asked Hastie, presently, “have you made the acquaintance of either of the fellows on your stair yet?”

“Just a nod when we pass. Nothing more.”

“Hum! I should be inclined to let it stand at that. I know something of them both. Not much, but as much as I want. I don’t think I should take them to my bosom if I were you. Not that there’s much amiss with Monkhouse Lee.”

“Meaning the thin one?”

“Precisely. He is a gentlemanly little fellow. I don’t think there is any vice in him. But then you can’t know him without knowing Bellingham.”

“Meaning the fat one?”

“Yes, the fat one. And he’s a man whom I, for one, would rather not know.”

Abercrombie Smith raised his eyebrows and glanced across at his companion.

“What’s up, then?” he asked. “Drink? Cards? Cad? You used not to be censorious.”

“Ah! you evidently don’t know the man, or you wouldn’t ask. There’s something damnable about him — something reptilian. My gorge always rises at him. I should put him down as a man with secret vices — an evil liver. He’s no fool, though. They say that he is one of the best men in his line that they have ever had in the college.”

“Medicine or classics?”

“Eastern languages. He’s a demon at them. Chillingworth met him somewhere above the second cataract last long, and he told me that he just prattled to the Arabs as if he had been born and nursed and weaned among them. He talked Coptic to the Copts, and Hebrew to the Jews, and Arabic to the Bedouins, and they were all ready to kiss the hem of his frock-coat. There are some old hermit Johnnies up in those parts who sit on rocks and scowl and spit at the casual stranger. Well, when they saw this chap Bellingham, before he had said five words they just lay down on their bellies and wriggled. Chillingworth said that he never saw anything like it. Bellingham seemed to take it as his right, too, and strutted about among them and talked down to them like a Dutch uncle. Pretty good for an undergrad. of Old’s, wasn’t it?”

“Why do you say you can’t know Lee without knowing Bellingham?”

“Because Bellingham is engaged to his sister Eveline. Such a bright little girl, Smith! I know the whole family well. It’s disgusting to see that brute with her. A toad and a dove, that’s what they always remind me of.”

Abercrombie Smith grinned and knocked his ashes out against the side of the grate.

"You show every card in your hand, old chap," said he. "What a prejudiced, green-eyed, evil-thinking old man it is! You have really nothing against the fellow except that."

"Well, I've known her ever since she was as long as that cherry-wood pipe, and I don't like to see her taking risks. And it is a risk. He looks beastly. And he has a beastly temper, a venomous temper. You remember his row with Long Norton?"

"No; you always forget that I am a freshman."

"Ah, it was last winter. Of course. Well, you know the towpath along by the river. There were several fellows going along it, Bellingham in front, when they came on an old market-woman coming the other way. It had been raining — you know what those fields are like when it has rained — and the path ran between the river and a great puddle that was nearly as broad. Well, what does this swine do but keep the path, and push the old girl into the mud, where she and her marketings came to terrible grief. It was a blackguard thing to do, and Long Norton, who is as gentle a fellow as ever stepped, told him what he thought of it. One word led to another, and it ended in Norton laying his stick across the fellow's shoulders. There was the deuce of a fuss about it, and it's a treat to see the way in which Bellingham looks at Norton when they meet now. By Jove, Smith, it's nearly eleven o'clock!"

"No hurry. Light your pipe again."

"Not I. I'm supposed to be in training. Here I've been sitting gossiping when I ought to have been safely tucked up. I'll borrow your skull, if you can share it. Williams has had mine for a month. I'll take the little bones of your ear, too, if you are sure you won't need them. Thanks very much. Never mind a bag, I can carry them very well under my arm. Good-night, my son, and take my tip as to your neighbour."

When Hastie, bearing his anatomical plunder, had clattered off down the winding stair, Abercrombie Smith hurled his pipe into the wastepaper basket, and drawing his chair nearer to the lamp, plunged into a formidable green-covered volume, adorned with great coloured maps of that strange internal kingdom of which we are the hapless and helpless monarchs. Though a freshman at Oxford, the student was not so in medicine, for he had worked for four years at Glasgow and at Berlin, and this coming examination would place him finally as a member of his profession. With his firm mouth, broad forehead, and clear-cut, somewhat hard-featured face, he was a man who, if he had no brilliant talent, was yet so dogged, so patient, and so strong that he might in the end overtop a more showy genius. A man who can hold his own among Scotchmen and North Germans is not a man to be easily set back. Smith had left a name at Glasgow and at Berlin, and he was bent now upon doing as much at Oxford, if hard work and devotion could accomplish it.

He had sat reading for about an hour, and the hands of the noisy carriage clock upon the side table were rapidly closing together upon the twelve, when a sudden sound fell upon the student's ear — a sharp, rather shrill sound, like the hissing intake of a man's breath who gasps under some strong emotion. Smith laid down his book and slanted his ear to listen. There was no one on either side or above him, so that the interruption came certainly from the neighbour beneath — the same neighbour of whom Hastie had given so unsavory an account. Smith knew him only as a flabby, pale-faced man of silent and studious habits, a man whose lamp threw a golden bar from the old turret even after he had extinguished his own. This community in lateness had formed a certain silent bond between them. It was soothing to Smith when the hours stole on towards dawning to feel that there was another so close who set as small a value upon his sleep as he did. Even now, as his thoughts turned towards him, Smith's feelings were kindly. Hastie was a good fellow, but he was rough, strong-fibred, with no imagination or sympathy. He could not tolerate departures from what he looked upon as the model type of manliness. If a man could not be measured by a public-school standard, then he was beyond the pale with Hastie. Like so many who are themselves robust, he was apt to confuse the constitution with the character, to ascribe to want of principle what was really a want of circulation. Smith, with his stronger mind, knew his friend's habit, and made allowance for it now as his thoughts turned towards the man beneath him.

There was no return of the singular sound, and Smith was about to turn to his work once more, when suddenly there broke out in the silence of the night a hoarse cry, a positive scream — the call of a man who is moved and shaken beyond all control. Smith sprang out of his chair and dropped his book. He was a man of fairly firm fibre, but there was something in this sudden, uncontrollable shriek of horror which chilled his blood and pringled in his skin. Coming in such a place and at such an hour, it brought a thousand fantastic possibilities into his head. Should he rush down, or was it better to wait? He had all the national hatred of making a scene, and he knew so little of his neighbour that he would not lightly intrude upon his affairs. For a moment he stood in doubt and even as he balanced the matter there was a quick rattle of footsteps upon the stairs, and young Monkhouse Lee, half dressed and as white as ashes, burst into his room.

"Come down!" he gasped. "Bellingham's ill."

Abercrombie Smith followed him closely downstairs into the sitting-room which was beneath his own, and intent as he was upon the matter in hand, he could not but take an amazed glance around him as he crossed the threshold. It was such a chamber as he had never seen before — a museum rather than a study. Walls and ceiling were thickly covered with a thousand strange relics from Egypt and the East. Tall, angular figures bearing burdens or weapons stalked in an uncouth frieze round the apartments. Above were bull-headed, stork-headed, cat-headed, owl-headed statues, with viper-crowned, almond-eyed monarchs, and strange, beetle-like deities cut out of the blue Egyptian lapis lazuli. Horus and Isis and Osiris peeped down from every niche and shelf, while across the ceiling a true son of Old Nile, a great, hanging-jawed crocodile, was slung in a double noose.

In the centre of this singular chamber was a large, square table, littered with papers, bottles, and the dried leaves of some graceful, palm-like plant. These varied objects had all been heaped together in order to make room for a mummy case, which had been conveyed from the wall, as was evident from the gap there, and laid across the front of the table. The mummy itself, a horrid, black, withered thing, like a charred head on a gnarled bush, was lying half out of the case, with its clawlike hand and bony forearm resting upon the table. Propped up against the sarcophagus was an old yellow scroll of papyrus, and in front of it, in a wooden armchair, sat the owner of the room, his head thrown back, his widely-opened eyes directed in a horrified stare to the crocodile above him, and his blue, thick lips puffing loudly with every expiration.

"My God! he's dying!" cried Monkhouse Lee distractedly.

He was a slim, handsome young fellow, olive-skinned and dark-eyed, of a Spanish rather than of an English type, with a Celtic intensity of manner which contrasted with the Saxon phlegm of Abercrombie Smith.

“Only a faint, I think,” said the medical student. “Just give me a hand with him. You take his feet. Now on to the sofa. Can you kick all those little wooden devils off? What a litter it is! Now he will be all right if we undo his collar and give him some water. What has he been up to at all?”

“I don’t know. I heard him cry out. I ran up. I know him pretty well, you know. It is very good of you to come down.”

“His heart is going like a pair of castanets,” said Smith, laying his hand on the breast of the unconscious man. “He seems to me to be frightened all to pieces. Chuck the water over him! What a face he has got on him!”

It was indeed a strange and most repellent face, for colour and outline were equally unnatural. It was white, not with the ordinary pallor of fear, but with an absolutely bloodless white, like the under side of a sole. He was very fat, but gave the impression of having at some time been considerably fatter, for his skin hung loosely in creases and folds, and was shot with a meshwork of wrinkles. Short, stubbly brown hair bristled up from his scalp, with a pair of thick, wrinkled ears protruding at the sides. His light grey eyes were still open, the pupils dilated and the balls projecting in a fixed and horrid stare. It seemed to Smith as he looked down upon him that he had never seen Nature’s danger signals flying so plainly upon a man’s countenance, and his thoughts turned more seriously to the warning which Hastie had given him an hour before.

“What the deuce can have frightened him so?” he asked.

“It’s the mummy.”

“The mummy? How, then?”

“I don’t know. It’s beastly and morbid. I wish he would drop it. It’s the second fright he has given me. It was the same last winter. I found him just like this, with that horrid thing in front of him.”

“What does he want with the mummy, then?”

“Oh, he’s a crank, you know. It’s his hobby. He knows more about these things than any man in England. But I wish he wouldn’t! Ah, he’s beginning to come to.”

A faint tinge of colour had begun to steal back into Bellingham’s ghastly cheeks, and his eyelids shivered like a sail after a calm. He clasped and unclasped his hands, drew a long, thin breath between his teeth, and suddenly jerking up his head, threw a glance of recognition around him. As his eyes fell upon the mummy, he sprang off the sofa, seized the roll of papyrus, thrust it into a drawer, turned the key, and then staggered back on to the sofa.

"What's up?" he asked. "What do you chaps want?"

"You've been shrieking out and making no end of a fuss," said Monkhouse Lee. "If our neighbour here from above hadn't come down, I'm sure I don't know what I should have done with you."

"Ah, it's Abercrombie Smith," said Bellingham, glancing up at him. "How very good of you to come in! What a fool I am! Oh, my God, what a fool I am!"

He sunk his head on to his hands, and burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter.

"Look here! Drop it!" cried Smith, shaking him roughly by the shoulder.

"Your nerves are all in a jangle. You must drop these little midnight games with mummies, or you'll be going off your chump. You're all on wires now."

"I wonder," said Bellingham, "whether you would be as cool as I am if you had seen — —"

"What then?"

"Oh, nothing. I meant that I wonder if you could sit up at night with a mummy without trying your nerves. I have no doubt that you are quite right. I dare say that I have been taking it out of myself too much lately. But I am all right now. Please don't go, though. Just wait for a few minutes until I am quite myself."

"The room is very close," remarked Lee, throwing open the window and letting in the cool night air.

"It's balsamic resin," said Bellingham. He lifted up one of the dried palmate leaves from the table and frizzled it over the chimney of the lamp. It broke away into heavy smoke wreaths, and a pungent, biting odour filled the chamber. "It's the sacred plant — the plant of the priests," he remarked. "Do you know anything of Eastern languages, Smith?"

"Nothing at all. Not a word."

The answer seemed to lift a weight from the Egyptologist's mind.

"By the way," he continued, "how long was it from the time that you ran down, until I came to my senses?"

"Not long. Some four or five minutes."

"I thought it could not be very long," said he, drawing a long breath. "But what a strange thing unconsciousness is! There is no measurement to it. I could not tell from my own sensations if it were seconds or weeks. Now that gentleman on the table was packed up in the days of the eleventh dynasty, some forty centuries ago, and yet if he could find his tongue, he would tell us that this lapse of time has been but a closing of the eyes and a reopening of them. He is a singularly fine mummy, Smith."

Smith stepped over to the table and looked down with a professional eye at the black and twisted form in front of him. The features, though horribly discoloured, were perfect, and two little nut-like eyes still lurked in the depths of the black, hollow sockets. The blotched skin was drawn tightly from bone to bone, and a tangled wrap of black coarse hair fell over the ears. Two thin teeth, like those of a rat, overlay the shrivelled lower lip. In its crouching position, with bent joints and craned head, there was a suggestion of energy about the horrid thing which made Smith's gorge rise. The gaunt ribs, with their parchment-like covering, were exposed, and the sunken, leaden-hued abdomen, with the long slit where the embalmer had left his mark; but the lower limbs were wrapped round with coarse yellow bandages. A number of little clove-like pieces of myrrh and of cassia were sprinkled over the body, and lay scattered on the inside of the case.

"I don't know his name," said Bellingham, passing his hand over the shrivelled head. "You see the outer sarcophagus with the inscriptions is missing. Lot 249 is all the title he has now. You see it printed on his case. That was his number in the auction at which I picked him up."

"He has been a very pretty sort of fellow in his day," remarked Abercrombie Smith.

"He has been a giant. His mummy is six feet seven in length, and that would be a giant over there, for they were never a very robust race. Feel these great knotted bones, too. He would be a nasty fellow to tackle."

"Perhaps these very hands helped to build the stones into the pyramids," suggested Monkhouse Lee, looking down with disgust in his eyes at the crooked, unclean talons.

"No fear. This fellow has been pickled in natron, and looked after in the most approved style. They did not serve hodsmen in that fashion. Salt or bitumen was enough for them. It has been calculated that this sort of thing cost about seven hundred and thirty pounds in our money. Our friend was a noble at the least. What do you make of that small inscription near his feet, Smith?"

"I told you that I know no Eastern tongue."

“Ah, so you did. It is the name of the embalmer, I take it. A very conscientious worker he must have been. I wonder how many modern works will survive four thousand years?”

He kept on speaking lightly and rapidly, but it was evident to Abercrombie Smith that he was still palpitating with fear. His hands shook, his lower lip trembled, and look where he would, his eye always came sliding round to his gruesome companion. Through all his fear, however, there was a suspicion of triumph in his tone and manner. His eyes shone, and his footstep, as he paced the room, was brisk and jaunty. He gave the impression of a man who has gone through an ordeal, the marks of which he still bears upon him, but which has helped him to his end.

“You’re not going yet?” he cried, as Smith rose from the sofa.

At the prospect of solitude, his fears seemed to crowd back upon him, and he stretched out a hand to detain him.

“Yes, I must go. I have my work to do. You are all right now. I think that with your nervous system you should take up some less morbid study.”

“Oh, I am not nervous as a rule; and I have unwrapped mummies before.”

“You fainted last time,” observed Monkhouse Lee.

“Ah, yes, so I did. Well, I must have a nerve tonic or a course of electricity. You are not going, Lee?”

“I’ll do whatever you wish, Ned.”

“Then I’ll come down with you and have a shakedown on your sofa. Good-night, Smith. I am so sorry to have disturbed you with my foolishness.”

They shook hands, and as the medical student stumbled up the spiral and irregular stair he heard a key turn in a door, and the steps of his two new acquaintances as they descended to the lower floor.

* * *

In this strange way began the acquaintance between Edward Bellingham and Abercrombie Smith, an acquaintance which the latter, at least, had no desire to push forward. Bellingham, however, appeared to have taken a fancy to his rough-spoken neighbour, and made his advances in such a way that he could hardly be repulsed without absolute brutality. Twice he called to thank Smith for his assistance, and many times afterwards he looked in with books, papers and such other civilities as two bachelor neighbours can offer each other. He was, as Smith soon found, a man of wide reading, with catholic tastes and an extraordinary memory. His manner, too, was so pleasing and suave that one came, after a time, to overlook his repellent appearance. For a jaded and wearied man he was no unpleasant companion, and Smith found himself, after a time, looking forward to his visits, and even returning them.

Clever as he undoubtedly was, however, the medical student seemed to detect a dash of insanity in the man. He broke out at times into a high, inflated style of talk which was in contrast with the simplicity of his life.

“It is a wonderful thing,” he cried, “to feel that one can command powers of good and of evil — a ministering angel or a demon of vengeance.” And again, of Monkhouse Lee, he said,—”Lee is a good fellow, an honest fellow, but he is without strength or ambition. He would not make a fit partner for a man with a great enterprise. He would not make a fit partner for me.”

At such hints and innuendoes stolid Smith, puffing solemnly at his pipe, would simply raise his eyebrows and shake his head, with little interjections of medical wisdom as to earlier hours and fresher air.

One habit Bellingham had developed of late which Smith knew to be a frequent herald of a weakening mind. He appeared to be for ever talking to himself. At late hours of the night, when there could be no visitor with him, Smith could still hear his voice beneath him in a low, muffled monologue, sunk almost to a whisper, and yet very audible in the silence. This solitary babbling annoyed and distracted the student, so that he spoke more than once to his neighbour about it. Bellingham, however, flushed up at the charge, and denied curtly that he had uttered a sound; indeed, he showed more annoyance over the matter than the occasion seemed to demand.

Had Abercrombie Smith had any doubt as to his own ears he had not to go far to find corroboration. Tom Styles, the little wrinkled man-servant who had attended to the wants of the lodgers in the turret for a longer time than any man’s memory could carry him, was sorely put to it over the same matter.

“If you please, sir,” said he, as he tidied down the top chamber one morning, “do you think Mr. Bellingham is all right, sir?”

“All right, Styles?”

“Yes, sir. Right in his head, sir.”

“Why should he not be, then?”

“Well, I don’t know, sir. His habits has changed of late. He’s not the same man he used to be, though I make free to say that he was never quite one of my gentlemen, like Mr. Hastie or yourself, sir. He’s took to talkin’ to himself something awful. I wonder it don’t disturb you. I don’t know what to make of him, sir.”

“I don’t know what business it is of yours, Styles.”

“Well, I takes an interest, Mr. Smith. It may be forward of me, but I can’t help it. I feel sometimes as if I was mother and father to my young gentlemen. It all falls on me when things go wrong and the relations come. But Mr. Bellingham, sir. I want to know what it is that walks about his room sometimes when he’s out and when the door’s locked on the outside.”

“Eh? you’re talking nonsense, Styles.”

“Maybe so, sir; but I heard it more’n once with my own ears.”

“Rubbish, Styles.”

“Very good, sir. You’ll ring the bell if you want me.”

Abercrombie Smith gave little heed to the gossip of the old man-servant, but a small incident occurred a few days later which left an unpleasant effect upon his mind, and brought the words of Styles forcibly to his memory.

Bellingham had come up to see him late one night, and was entertaining him with an interesting account of the rock tombs of Beni Hassan in Upper Egypt, when Smith, whose hearing was remarkably acute, distinctly heard the sound of a door opening on the landing below.

“There’s some fellow gone in or out of your room,” he remarked.

Bellingham sprang up and stood helpless for a moment, with the expression of a man who is half incredulous and half afraid.

“I surely locked it. I am almost positive that I locked it,” he stammered. “No one could have opened it.”

“Why, I hear some one coming up the steps now,” said Smith.

Bellingham rushed out through the door, slammed it loudly behind him, and hurried down the stairs. About half-way down Smith heard him stop, and thought he caught the sound of whispering. A moment later the door beneath him shut, a key creaked in a lock, and Bellingham, with beads of moisture upon his pale face, ascended the stairs once more, and re-entered the room.

“It’s all right,” he said, throwing himself down in a chair. “It was that fool of a dog. He had pushed the door open. I don’t know how I came to forget to lock it.”

“I didn’t know you kept a dog,” said Smith, looking very thoughtfully at the disturbed face of his companion.

“Yes, I haven’t had him long. I must get rid of him. He’s a great nuisance.”

“He must be, if you find it so hard to shut him up. I should have thought that shutting the door would have been enough, without locking it.”

“I want to prevent old Styles from letting him out. He’s of some value, you know, and it would be awkward to lose him.”

“I am a bit of a dog-fancier myself,” said Smith, still gazing hard at his companion from the corner of his eyes. “Perhaps you’ll let me have a look at it.”

“Certainly. But I am afraid it cannot be to-night; I have an appointment. Is that clock right? Then I am a quarter of an hour late already. You’ll excuse me, I am sure.”

He picked up his cap and hurried from the room. In spite of his appointment, Smith heard him re-enter his own chamber and lock his door upon the inside.

This interview left a disagreeable impression upon the medical student’s mind. Bellingham had lied to him, and lied so clumsily that it looked as if he had desperate reasons for concealing the truth. Smith knew that his neighbour had no dog. He knew, also, that the step which he had heard upon the stairs was not the step of an animal. But if it were not, then what could it be? There was old Styles’s statement about the something which used to pace the room at times when the owner was absent. Could it be a woman? Smith rather inclined to the view. If so, it would mean disgrace and expulsion to Bellingham if it were discovered by the authorities, so that his anxiety and falsehoods might be accounted for. And yet it was inconceivable that an undergraduate could keep a woman in his rooms without being instantly detected. Be the explanation what it might, there was something ugly about it, and Smith determined, as he turned to his books, to discourage all further attempts at intimacy on the part of his soft-spoken and ill-favoured neighbour.

But his work was destined to interruption that night. He had hardly caught up the broken threads when a firm, heavy footfall came three steps at a time from below, and Hastie, in blazer and flannels, burst into the room.

“Still at it!” said he, plumping down into his wonted arm-chair. “What a chap you are to stew! I believe an earthquake might come and knock

Oxford into a cocked hat, and you would sit perfectly placid with your books among the ruins. However, I won't bore you long. Three whiffs of baccy, and I am off."

"What's the news, then?" asked Smith, cramming a plug of bird's-eye into his briar with his forefinger.

"Nothing very much. Wilson made 70 for the freshmen against the eleven. They say that they will play him instead of Buddicomb, for Buddicomb is clean off colour. He used to be able to bowl a little, but it's nothing but half-volleys and long hops now."

"Medium right," suggested Smith, with the intense gravity which comes upon a 'varsity man when he speaks of athletics.

"Inclining to fast, with a work from leg. Comes with the arm about three inches or so. He used to be nasty on a wet wicket. Oh, by-the-way, have you heard about Long Norton?"

"What's that?"

"He's been attacked."

"Attacked?"

"Yes, just as he was turning out of the High Street, and within a hundred yards of the gate of Old's."

"But who — —"

"Ah, that's the rub! If you said 'what,' you would be more grammatical. Norton swears that it was not human, and, indeed, from the scratches on his throat, I should be inclined to agree with him."

"What, then? Have we come down to spooks?"

Abercrombie Smith puffed his scientific contempt.

"Well, no; I don't think that is quite the idea, either. I am inclined to think that if any showman has lost a great ape lately, and the brute is in these parts, a jury would find a true bill against it. Norton passes that way every night, you know, about the same hour. There's a tree that hangs low over the path — the big elm from Rainy's garden. Norton thinks the thing dropped on him out of the tree. Anyhow, he was nearly strangled by two arms, which, he says, were as strong and as thin as steel bands. He saw nothing; only those beastly arms that tightened and tightened on him. He yelled his head nearly off, and a couple of chaps came running, and the thing went over the wall like a cat. He never got a fair sight of it the whole time. It gave Norton a shake up, I can tell you. I tell him it has been as good as a change at the seaside for him."

“A garrotter, most likely,” said Smith.

“Very possible. Norton says not; but we don’t mind what he says. The garrotter had long nails, and was pretty smart at swinging himself over walls. By-the-way, your beautiful neighbour would be pleased if he heard about it. He had a grudge against Norton, and he’s not a man, from what I know of him, to forget his little debts. But hallo, old chap, what have you got in your noddle?”

“Nothing,” Smith answered curtly.

He had started in his chair, and the look had flashed over his face which comes upon a man who is struck suddenly by some unpleasant idea.

“You looked as if something I had said had taken you on the raw. By-the-way, you have made the acquaintance of Master B. since I looked in last, have you not? Young Monkhouse Lee told me something to that effect.”

“Yes; I know him slightly. He has been up here once or twice.”

“Well, you’re big enough and ugly enough to take care of yourself. He’s not what I should call exactly a healthy sort of Johnny, though, no doubt, he’s very clever, and all that. But you’ll soon find out for yourself. Lee is all right; he’s a very decent little fellow. Well, so long, old chap! I row Mullins for the Vice-Chancellor’s pot on Wednesday week, so mind you come down, in case I don’t see you before.”

Bovine Smith laid down his pipe and turned stolidly to his books once more. But with all the will in the world, he found it very hard to keep his mind upon his work. It would slip away to brood upon the man beneath him, and upon the little mystery which hung round his chambers. Then his thoughts turned to this singular attack of which Hastie had spoken, and to the grudge which Bellingham was said to owe the object of it. The two ideas would persist in rising together in his mind, as though there were some close and intimate connection between them. And yet the suspicion was so dim and vague that it could not be put down in words.

“Confound the chap!” cried Smith, as he shied his book on pathology across the room. “He has spoiled my night’s reading, and that’s reason enough, if there were no other, why I should steer clear of him in the future.”

For ten days the medical student confined himself so closely to his studies that he neither saw nor heard anything of either of the men beneath him. At the hours when Bellingham had been accustomed to visit him, he took care to sport his oak, and though he more than once heard a knocking at his outer door, he resolutely refused to answer it. One afternoon, however, he was descending the stairs when, just as he was passing it, Bellingham's door flew open, and young Monkhouse Lee came out with his eyes sparkling and a dark flush of anger upon his olive cheeks. Close at his heels followed Bellingham, his fat, unhealthy face all quivering with malignant passion.

"You fool!" he hissed. "You'll be sorry."

"Very likely," cried the other. "Mind what I say. It's off! I won't hear of it!"

"You've promised, anyhow."

"Oh, I'll keep that! I won't speak. But I'd rather little Eva was in her grave. Once for all, it's off. She'll do what I say. We don't want to see you again."

So much Smith could not avoid hearing, but he hurried on, for he had no wish to be involved in their dispute. There had been a serious breach between them, that was clear enough, and Lee was going to cause the engagement with his sister to be broken off. Smith thought of Hastie's comparison of the toad and the dove, and was glad to think that the matter was at an end. Bellingham's face when he was in a passion was not pleasant to look upon. He was not a man to whom an innocent girl could be trusted for life. As he walked, Smith wondered languidly what could have caused the quarrel, and what the promise might be which Bellingham had been so anxious that Monkhouse Lee should keep.

It was the day of the sculling match between Hastie and Mullins, and a stream of men were making their way down to the banks of the Isis. A May sun was shining brightly, and the yellow path was barred with the black shadows of the tall elm-trees. On either side the grey colleges lay back from the road, the hoary old mothers of minds looking out from their high, mullioned windows at the tide of young life which swept so merrily past them. Black-clad tutors, prim officials, pale reading men, brown-faced, straw-hatted young athletes in white sweaters or many-coloured blazers, all were hurrying towards the blue winding river which curves through the Oxford meadows.

Abercrombie Smith, with the intuition of an old oarsman, chose his position at the point where he knew that the struggle, if there were a struggle, would come. Far off he heard the hum which announced the start, the gathering roar of the approach, the thunder of running feet, and the shouts of the men in the boats beneath him. A spray of half-clad, deep-breathing runners shot past him, and craning over their shoulders, he saw Hastie pulling a steady thirty-six, while his opponent, with a jerky forty, was a good boat's length behind him. Smith gave a cheer for his friend, and pulling out his watch, was starting off again for his chambers, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and found that young Monkhouse Lee was beside him.

"I saw you there," he said, in a timid, deprecating way. "I wanted to speak to you, if you could spare me a half-hour. This cottage is mine. I share it with Harrington of King's. Come in and have a cup of tea."

"I must be back presently," said Smith. "I am hard on the grind at present. But I'll come in for a few minutes with pleasure. I wouldn't have come out only Hastie is a friend of mine."

"So he is of mine. Hasn't he a beautiful style? Mullins wasn't in it. But come into the cottage. It's a little den of a place, but it is pleasant to work in during the summer months."

It was a small, square, white building, with green doors and shutters, and a rustic trellis-work porch, standing back some fifty yards from the river's bank. Inside, the main room was roughly fitted up as a study — deal table, unpainted shelves with books, and a few cheap oleographs upon the wall. A kettle sang upon a spirit-stove, and there were tea things upon a tray on the table.

"Try that chair and have a cigarette," said Lee. "Let me pour you out a cup of tea. It's so good of you to come in, for I know that your time is a good deal taken up. I wanted to say to you that, if I were you, I should change my rooms at once."

"Eh?"

Smith sat staring with a lighted match in one hand and his unlit cigarette in the other.

"Yes; it must seem very extraordinary, and the worst of it is that I cannot give my reasons, for I am under a solemn promise — a very solemn promise. But I may go so far as to say that I don't think Bellingham is a very safe man to live near. I intend to camp out here as much as I can for a time."

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"Ah, that's what I mustn't say. But do take my advice, and move your rooms. We had a grand row to-day. You must have heard us, for you came down the stairs."

"I saw that you had fallen out."

"He's a horrible chap, Smith. That is the only word for him. I have had doubts about him ever since that night when he fainted — you remember, when you came down. I taxed him to-day, and he told me things that made my hair rise, and wanted me to stand in with him. I'm not strait-laced, but I am a clergyman's son, you know, and I think there are some things which are quite beyond the pale. I only thank God that I found him out before it was too late, for he was to have married into my family."

"This is all very fine, Lee," said Abercrombie Smith curtly. "But either you are saying a great deal too much or a great deal too little."

"I give you a warning."

"If there is real reason for warning, no promise can bind you. If I see a rascal about to blow a place up with dynamite no pledge will stand in my way of preventing him."

"Ah, but I cannot prevent him, and I can do nothing but warn you."

"Without saying what you warn me against."

"Against Bellingham."

"But that is childish. Why should I fear him, or any man?"

"I can't tell you. I can only entreat you to change your rooms. You are in danger where you are. I don't even say that Bellingham would wish to injure you. But it might happen, for he is a dangerous neighbour just now."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," said Smith, looking keenly at the young man's boyish, earnest face. "Suppose I tell you that some one else shares Bellingham's rooms."

Monkhouse Lee sprang from his chair in uncontrollable excitement.

"You know, then?" he gasped.

"A woman."

Lee dropped back again with a groan.

"My lips are sealed," he said. "I must not speak."

"Well, anyhow," said Smith, rising, "it is not likely that I should allow myself to be frightened out of rooms which suit me very nicely. It would be a little too feeble for me to move out all my goods and chattels because you say that Bellingham might in some unexplained way do me an injury. I think that I'll just take my chance, and stay where I am, and as I see that it's nearly five o'clock, I must ask you to excuse me."

He bade the young student adieu in a few curt words, and made his way homeward through the sweet spring evening, feeling half-ruffled, half-amused, as any other strong, unimaginative man might who has been menaced by a vague and shadowy danger.

There was one little indulgence which Abercrombie Smith always allowed himself, however closely his work might press upon him. Twice a week, on the Tuesday and the Friday, it was his invariable custom to walk over to Farlingford, the residence of Doctor Plumptree Peterson, situated about a mile and a half out of Oxford. Peterson had been a close friend of Smith's elder brother Francis, and as he was a bachelor, fairly well-to-do, with a good cellar and a better library, his house was a pleasant goal for a man who was in need of a brisk walk. Twice a week, then, the medical student would swing out there along the dark country roads, and spend a pleasant hour in Peterson's comfortable study, discussing, over a glass of old port, the gossip of the 'varsity or the latest developments of medicine or of surgery.

On the day which followed his interview with Monkhouse Lee, Smith shut up his books at a quarter past eight, the hour when he usually started for his friend's house. As he was leaving his room, however, his eyes chanced to fall upon one of the books which Bellingham had lent him, and his conscience pricked him for not having returned it. However repellent the man might be, he should not be treated with discourtesy. Taking the book, he walked downstairs and knocked at his neighbour's door. There was no answer; but on turning the handle he found that it was unlocked. Pleased at the thought of avoiding an interview, he stepped inside, and placed the book with his card upon the table.

The lamp was turned half down, but Smith could see the details of the room plainly enough. It was all much as he had seen it before — the frieze, the animal-headed gods, the hanging crocodile, and the table littered over with papers and dried leaves. The mummy case stood upright against the wall, but the mummy itself was missing. There was no sign of any second occupant of the room, and he felt as he withdrew that he had probably done Bellingham an injustice. Had he a guilty secret to preserve, he would hardly leave his door open so that all the world might enter.

The spiral stair was as black as pitch, and Smith was slowly making his way down its irregular steps, when he was suddenly conscious that something had passed him in the darkness. There was a faint sound, a whiff of air, a light brushing past his elbow, but so slight that he could scarcely be certain of it. He stopped and listened, but the wind was rustling among the ivy outside, and he could hear nothing else.

"Is that you, Styles?" he shouted.

There was no answer, and all was still behind him. It must have been a sudden gust of air, for there were crannies and cracks in the old turret. And yet he could almost have sworn that he heard a footfall by his very side. He had emerged into the quadrangle, still turning the matter over in his head, when a man came running swiftly across the smooth-cropped lawn.

"Is that you, Smith?"

"Hullo, Hastie!"

"For God's sake come at once! Young Lee is drowned! Here's Harrington of King's with the news. The doctor is out. You'll do, but come along at once. There may be life in him."

"Have you brandy?"

"No."

"I'll bring some. There's a flask on my table."

Smith bounded up the stairs, taking three at a time, seized the flask, and was rushing down with it, when, as he passed Bellingham's room, his eyes fell upon something which left him gasping and staring upon the landing.

The door, which he had closed behind him, was now open, and right in front of him, with the lamp-light shining upon it, was the mummy case. Three minutes ago it had been empty. He could swear to that. Now it framed the lank body of its horrible occupant, who stood, grim and stark, with his black shrivelled face towards the door. The form was lifeless and inert, but it seemed to Smith as he gazed that there still lingered a lurid spark of vitality, some faint sign of consciousness in the little eyes which lurked in the depths of the hollow sockets. So astounded and shaken was he that he had forgotten his errand, and was still staring at the lean, sunken figure when the voice of his friend below recalled him to himself.

"Come on, Smith!" he shouted. "It's life and death, you know. Hurry up! Now, then," he added, as the medical student reappeared, "let us do a sprint. It is well under a mile, and we should do it in five minutes. A human life is better worth running for than a pot."

Neck and neck they dashed through the darkness, and did not pull up until panting and spent, they had reached the little cottage by the river. Young Lee, limp and dripping like a broken water-plant, was stretched upon the sofa, the green scum of the river upon his black hair, and a fringe of white foam upon his leaden-hued lips. Beside him knelt his fellow student, Harrington, endeavouring to chafe some warmth back into his rigid limbs.

"I think there's life in him," said Smith, with his hand to the lad's side. "Put your watch glass to his lips. Yes, there's dimming on it. You take one arm, Hastie. Now work it as I do, and we'll soon pull him round."

For ten minutes they worked in silence, inflating and depressing the chest of the unconscious man. At the end of that time a shiver ran through his body, his lips trembled, and he opened his eyes. The three students burst out into an irrepressible cheer.

"Wake up, old chap. You've frightened us quite enough."

"Have some brandy. Take a sip from the flask."

"He's all right now," said his companion Harrington. "Heavens, what a fright I got! I was reading here, and had gone out for a stroll as far as the river, when I heard a scream and a splash. Out I ran, and by the time I could find him and fish him out, all life seemed to have gone. Then Simpson couldn't get a doctor, for he has a game-leg, and I had to run, and I don't know what I'd have done without you fellows. That's right, old chap. Sit up."

Monkhouse Lee had raised himself on his hands, and looked wildly about him.

"What's up?" he asked. "I've been in the water. Ah, yes; I remember."

A look of fear came into his eyes, and he sank his face into his hands.

"How did you fall in?"

"I didn't fall in."

"How then?"

"I was thrown in. I was standing by the bank, and something from behind picked me up like a feather and hurled me in. I heard nothing, and I saw nothing. But I know what it was, for all that."

"And so do I," whispered Smith.

Lee looked up with a quick glance of surprise.

"You've learned, then?" he said. "You remember the advice I gave you?"

"Yes, and I begin to think that I shall take it."

"I don't know what the deuce you fellows are talking about," said Hastie, "but I think, if I were you, Harrington, I should get Lee to bed at once. It will be time enough to discuss the why and the wherefore when he is a little stronger. I think, Smith, you and I can leave him alone now. I am walking back to college; if you are coming in that direction, we can have a chat."

But it was little chat that they had upon their homeward path. Smith's mind was too full of the incidents of the evening, the absence of the mummy from his neighbour's rooms, the step that passed him on the stair, the reappearance — the extraordinary, inexplicable reappearance of the grisly thing — and then this attack upon Lee, corresponding so closely to the previous outrage upon another man against whom Bellingham bore a grudge. All this settled in his thoughts, together with the many little incidents which had previously turned him against his neighbour, and the singular circumstances under which he was first called in to him. What had been a dim suspicion, a vague, fantastic conjecture, had suddenly taken form, and stood out in his mind as a grim fact, a thing not to be denied. And yet, how monstrous it was! how unheard of! how entirely beyond all bounds of human experience. An impartial judge, or even the friend who walked by his side, would simply tell him that his eyes had deceived him, that the mummy had been there all the time, that young Lee had tumbled into the river as any other man tumbles into a river, and that blue pill was the best thing for a disordered liver. He felt that he would have said as much if the positions had been reversed. And yet he could swear that Bellingham was a murderer at heart, and that he wielded a weapon such as no man had ever used in all the grim history of crime.

Hastie had branched off to his rooms with a few crisp and emphatic comments upon his friend's unsociability, and Abercrombie Smith crossed the quadrangle to his corner turret with a strong feeling of repulsion for his chambers and their associations. He would take Lee's advice, and move his quarters as soon as possible, for how could a man study when his ear was ever straining for every murmur or footstep in the room below? He observed, as he crossed over the lawn, that the light was still shining in Bellingham's window, and as he passed up the staircase the door opened, and the man himself looked out at him. With his fat, evil face he was like some bloated spider fresh from the weaving of his poisonous web.

"Good-evening," said he. "Won't you come in?"

"No," cried Smith fiercely.

"No? You are busy as ever? I wanted to ask you about Lee. I was sorry to hear that there was a rumour that something was amiss with him."

His features were grave, but there was the gleam of a hidden laugh in his eyes as he spoke. Smith saw it, and he could have knocked him down for it.

“You’ll be sorrier still to hear that Monkhouse Lee is doing very well, and is out of all danger,” he answered. “Your hellish tricks have not come off this time. Oh, you needn’t try to brazen it out. I know all about it.”

Bellingham took a step back from the angry student, and half-closed the door as if to protect himself.

“You are mad,” he said. “What do you mean? Do you assert that I had anything to do with Lee’s accident?”

“Yes,” thundered Smith. “You and that bag of bones behind you; you worked it between you. I tell you what it is, Master B., they have given up burning folk like you, but we still keep a hangman, and, by George! if any man in this college meets his death while you are here, I’ll have you up, and if you don’t swing for it, it won’t be my fault. You’ll find that your filthy Egyptian tricks won’t answer in England.”

“You’re a raving lunatic,” said Bellingham.

“All right. You just remember what I say, for you’ll find that I’ll be better than my word.”

The door slammed, and Smith went fuming up to his chamber, where he locked the door upon the inside, and spent half the night in smoking his old briar and brooding over the strange events of the evening.

Next morning Abercrombie Smith heard nothing of his neighbour, but Harrington called upon him in the afternoon to say that Lee was almost himself again. All day Smith stuck fast to his work, but in the evening he determined to pay the visit to his friend Doctor Peterson upon which he had started the night before. A good walk and a friendly chat would be welcome to his jangled nerves.

Bellingham’s door was shut as he passed, but glancing back when he was some distance from the turret, he saw his neighbour’s head at the window outlined against the lamp-light, his face pressed apparently against the glass as he gazed out into the darkness. It was a blessing to be away from all contact with him, if but for a few hours, and Smith stepped out briskly, and breathed the soft spring air into his lungs. The half-moon lay in the west between two Gothic pinnacles, and threw upon the silvered street a dark tracery from the stone-work above. There was a brisk breeze, and light, fleecy clouds drifted swiftly across the sky. Old’s was on the very border of the town, and in five minutes Smith found himself beyond the houses and between the hedges of a May-scented Oxfordshire lane.

It was a lonely and little frequented road which led to his friend's house. Early as it was, Smith did not meet a single soul upon his way. He walked briskly along until he came to the avenue gate, which opened into the long gravel drive leading up to Farlingford. In front of him he could see the cosy red light of the windows glimmering through the foliage. He stood with his hand upon the iron latch of the swinging gate, and he glanced back at the road along which he had come. Something was coming swiftly down it.

It moved in the shadow of the hedge, silently and furtively, a dark, crouching figure, dimly visible against the black background. Even as he gazed back at it, it had lessened its distance by twenty paces, and was fast closing upon him. Out of the darkness he had a glimpse of a scraggy neck, and of two eyes that will ever haunt him in his dreams. He turned, and with a cry of terror he ran for his life up the avenue. There were the red lights, the signals of safety, almost within a stone's-throw of him. He was a famous runner, but never had he run as he ran that night.

The heavy gate had swung into place behind him, but he heard it dash open again before his pursuer. As he rushed madly and wildly through the night, he could hear a swift, dry patter behind him, and could see, as he threw back a glance, that this horror was bounding like a tiger at his heels, with blazing eyes and one stringy arm out-thrown. Thank God, the door was ajar. He could see the thin bar of light which shot from the lamp in the hall. Nearer yet sounded the clatter from behind. He heard a hoarse gurgling at his very shoulder. With a shriek he flung himself against the door, slammed and bolted it behind him, and sank half-fainting on to the hall chair.

"My goodness, Smith, what's the matter?" asked Peterson, appearing at the door of his study.

"Give me some brandy."

Peterson disappeared, and came rushing out again with a glass and a decanter.

"You need it," he said, as his visitor drank off what he poured out for him. "Why, man, you are as white as a cheese."

Smith laid down his glass, rose up, and took a deep breath.

"I am my own man again now," said he. "I was never so unmanned before. But, with your leave, Peterson, I will sleep here to-night, for I don't think I could face that road again except by daylight. It’s weak, I know, but I can’t help it.”

Peterson looked at his visitor with a very questioning eye.

“Of course you shall sleep here if you wish. I’ll tell Mrs. Burney to make up the spare bed. Where are you off to now?”

“Come up with me to the window that overlooks the door. I want you to see what I have seen.”

They went up to the window of the upper hall whence they could look down upon the approach to the house. The drive and the fields on either side lay quiet and still, bathed in the peaceful moonlight.

“Well, really, Smith,” remarked Peterson, “it is well that I know you to be an abstemious man. What in the world can have frightened you?”

“I’ll tell you presently. But where can it have gone? Ah, now, look, look! See the curve of the road just beyond your gate.”

“Yes, I see; you needn’t pinch my arm off. I saw some one pass. I should say a man, rather thin, apparently, and tall, very tall. But what of him? And what of yourself? You are still shaking like an aspen leaf.”

“I have been within hand-grip of the devil, that’s all. But come down to your study, and I shall tell you the whole story.”

He did so. Under the cheery lamp-light, with a glass of wine on the table beside him, and the portly form and florid face of his friend in front, he narrated, in their order, all the events, great and small, which had formed so singular a chain, from the night on which he had found Bellingham fainting in front of the mummy case until this horrid experience of an hour ago.

“There now,” he said as he concluded, “that’s the whole black business. It is monstrous and incredible, but it is true.”

Doctor Plumptree Peterson sat for some time in silence with a very puzzled expression upon his face.

“I never heard of such a thing in my life, never!” he said at last. “You have told me the facts. Now tell me your inferences.”

“You can draw your own.”

“But I should like to hear yours. You have thought over the matter, and I have not.”

“Well, it must be a little vague in detail, but the main points seem to me to be clear enough. This fellow Bellingham, in his Eastern studies, has got hold of some infernal secret by which a mummy — or possibly only this particular mummy — can be temporarily brought to life. He was trying this disgusting business on the night when he fainted. No doubt the sight of the creature moving had shaken his nerve, even though he had expected it. You remember that almost the first words he said were to call out upon himself as a fool. Well, he got more hardened afterwards, and carried the matter through without fainting. The vitality which he could put into it was evidently only a passing thing, for I have seen it continually in its case as dead as this table. He has some elaborate process, I fancy, by which he brings the thing to pass. Having done it, he naturally bethought him that he might use the creature as an agent. It has intelligence and it has strength. For some purpose he took Lee into his confidence; but Lee, like a decent Christian, would have nothing to do with such a business. Then they had a row, and Lee vowed that he would tell his sister of Bellingham's true character. Bellingham's game was to prevent him, and he nearly managed it, by setting this creature of his on his track. He had already tried its powers upon another man — Norton — towards whom he had a grudge. It is the merest chance that he has not two murders upon his soul. Then, when I taxed him with the matter, he had the strongest reasons for wishing me out of the way, before I could convey my knowledge to any one else. He got his chance when I went out, for he knew my habits and where I was bound for. I have had a narrow shave, Peterson, and it is mere luck you didn't find me on your doorstep in the morning. I'm not a nervous man as a rule, and I never thought to have the fear of death put upon me as it was to-night."

"My dear boy, you take the matter too seriously," said his companion. "Your nerves are out of order with your work, and you make too much of it. How could such a thing as this stride about the streets of Oxford, even at night, without being seen?"

"It has been seen. There is quite a scare in the town about an escaped ape, as they imagine the creature to be. It is the talk of the place."

"Well, it's a striking chain of events. And yet, my dear fellow, you must allow that each incident in itself is capable of a more natural explanation."

"What! even my adventure of to-night?"

"Certainly. You come out with your nerves all unstrung, and your head full of this theory of yours. Some gaunt, half-famished tramp steals after you, and seeing you run, is emboldened to pursue you. Your fears and imagination do the rest."

"It won't do, Peterson; it won't do."

“And again, in the instance of your finding the mummy case empty, and then a few moments later with an occupant, you know that it was lamp-light, that the lamp was half turned down, and that you had no special reason to look hard at the case. It is quite possible that you may have overlooked the creature in the first instance.”

“No, no; it is out of the question.”

“And then Lee may have fallen into the river, and Norton been garrotted. It is certainly a formidable indictment that you have against Bellingham; but if you were to place it before a police magistrate, he would simply laugh in your face.”

“I know he would. That is why I mean to take the matter into my own hands.”

“Eh?”

“Yes; I feel that a public duty rests upon me, and, besides, I must do it for my own safety, unless I choose to allow myself to be hunted by this beast out of the college, and that would be a little too feeble. I have quite made up my mind what I shall do. And first of all, may I use your paper and pens for an hour?”

“Most certainly. You will find all that you want upon that side-table.”

Abercrombie Smith sat down before a sheet of foolscap, and for an hour, and then for a second hour his pen travelled swiftly over it. Page after page was finished and tossed aside while his friend leaned back in his arm-chair, looking across at him with patient curiosity. At last, with an exclamation of satisfaction, Smith sprang to his feet, gathered his papers up into order, and laid the last one upon Peterson’s desk.

“Kindly sign this as a witness,” he said.

“A witness? Of what?”

“Of my signature, and of the date. The date is the most important. Why, Peterson, my life might hang upon it.”

“My dear Smith, you are talking wildly. Let me beg you to go to bed.”

“On the contrary, I never spoke so deliberately in my life. And I will promise to go to bed the moment you have signed it.”

“But what is it?”

“It is a statement of all that I have been telling you to-night. I wish you to witness it.”

“Certainly,” said Peterson, signing his name under that of his companion. “There you are! But what is the idea?”

“You will kindly retain it, and produce it in case I am arrested.”

“Arrested? For what?”

“For murder. It is quite on the cards. I wish to be ready for every event. There is only one course open to me, and I am determined to take it.”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t do anything rash!”

“Believe me, it would be far more rash to adopt any other course. I hope that we won’t need to bother you, but it will ease my mind to know that you have this statement of my motives. And now I am ready to take your advice and to go to roost, for I want to be at my best in the morning.”

Abercrombie Smith was not an entirely pleasant man to have as an enemy. Slow and easy-tempered, he was formidable when driven to action. He brought to every purpose in life the same deliberate resoluteness which had distinguished him as a scientific student. He had laid his studies aside for a day, but he intended that the day should not be wasted. Not a word did he say to his host as to his plans, but by nine o’clock he was well on his way to Oxford.

In the High Street he stopped at Clifford’s the gunmaker’s, and bought a heavy revolver, with a box of central-fire cartridges. Six of them he slipped into the chambers, and half-cocking the weapon, placed it in the pocket of his coat. He then made his way to Hastie’s rooms, where the big oarsman was lounging over his breakfast, with the *Sporting Times* propped up against the coffee-pot.

“Hullo! What’s up?” he asked. “Have some coffee?”

“No, thank you. I want you to come with me, Hastie, and do what I ask you.”

“Certainly, my boy.”

“And bring a heavy stick with you.”

“Hullo!” Hastie stared. “Here’s a hunting crop that would fell an ox.”

“One other thing. You have a box of amputating knives. Give me the longest of them.”

“There you are. You seem to be fairly on the war trail. Anything else?”

“No; that will do.” Smith placed the knife inside his coat, and led the way to the quadrangle. “We are neither of us chickens, Hastie,” said he. “I think I can do this job alone, but I take you as a precaution. I am going to have a little talk with Bellingham. If I have only him to deal with, I won’t, of course, need you. If I shout, however, up you come, and lam out with your whip as hard as you can lick. Do you understand?”

“All right. I’ll come if I hear you bellow.”

"Stay here, then. I may be a little time, but don't budge until I come down."

"I'm a fixture."

Smith ascended the stairs, opened Bellingham's door and stepped in. Bellingham was seated behind his table, writing. Beside him, among his litter of strange possessions, towered the mummy case, with its sale number 249 still stuck upon its front, and its hideous occupant stiff and stark within it. Smith looked very deliberately round him, closed the door, and then stepping across to the fire-place, struck a match and set the fire alight. Bellingham sat staring, with amazement and rage upon his bloated face.

"Well, really now, you make yourself at home," he gasped.

Smith sat himself deliberately down, placing his watch upon the table, drew out his pistol, cocked it, and laid it in his lap. Then he took the long amputating knife from his bosom, and threw it down in front of Bellingham.

"Now, then," said he, "just get to work and cut up that mummy."

"Oh, is that it?" said Bellingham with a sneer.

"Yes, that is it. They tell me that the law can't touch you. But I have a law that will set matters straight. If in five minutes you have not set to work, I swear by the God who made me that I will put a bullet through your brain!"

"You would murder me?"

Bellingham had half risen, and his face was the colour of putty.

"Yes."

"And for what?"

"To stop your mischief. One minute has gone."

"But what have I done?"

"I know and you know."

"This is mere bullying."

"Two minutes are gone."

"But you must give reasons. You are a madman — a dangerous madman. Why should I destroy my own property? It is a valuable mummy."

"You must cut it up, and you must burn it."

"I will do no such thing."

"Four minutes are gone."

Smith took up the pistol and he looked towards Bellingham with an inexorable face. As the secondhand stole round, he raised his hand, and the finger twitched upon the trigger.

“There! there! I’ll do it!” screamed Bellingham.

In frantic haste he caught up the knife and hacked at the figure of the mummy, ever glancing round to see the eye and the weapon of his terrible visitor bent upon him. The creature crackled and snapped under every stab of the keen blade. A thick yellow dust rose up from it. Spices and dried essences rained down upon the floor. Suddenly, with a rending crack, its backbone snapped asunder, and it fell, a brown heap of sprawling limbs, upon the floor.

“Now into the fire!” said Smith.

The flames leaped and roared as the dried and tinder-like debris was piled upon it. The little room was like the stoke-hole of a steamer and the sweat ran down the faces of the two men; but still the one stooped and worked, while the other sat watching him with a set face. A thick, fat smoke oozed out from the fire, and a heavy smell of burned rosin and singed hair filled the air. In a quarter of an hour a few charred and brittle sticks were all that was left of Lot No. 249.

“Perhaps that will satisfy you,” snarled Bellingham, with hate and fear in his little grey eyes as he glanced back at his tormentor.

“No; I must make a clean sweep of all your materials. We must have no more devil’s tricks. In with all these leaves! They may have something to do with it.”

“And what now?” asked Bellingham, when the leaves also had been added to the blaze.

“Now the roll of papyrus which you had on the table that night. It is in that drawer, I think.”

“No, no,” shouted Bellingham. “Don’t burn that! Why, man, you don’t know what you do. It is unique; it contains wisdom which is nowhere else to be found.”

“Out with it!”

“But look here, Smith, you can’t really mean it. I’ll share the knowledge with you. I’ll teach you all that is in it. Or, stay, let me only copy it before you burn it!”

Smith stepped forward and turned the key in the drawer. Taking out the yellow, curled roll of paper, he threw it into the fire, and pressed it down with his heel. Bellingham screamed, and grabbed at it; but Smith pushed him back and stood over it until it was reduced to a formless grey ash.

“Now, Master B.,” said he, “I think I have pretty well drawn your teeth. You’ll hear from me again, if you return to your old tricks. And now good-morning, for I must go back to my studies.”

And such is the narrative of Abercrombie Smith as to the singular events which occurred in Old College, Oxford, in the spring of ‘84. As Bellingham left the university immediately afterwards, and was last heard of in the Soudan, there is no one who can contradict his statement. But the wisdom of men is small, and the ways of Nature are strange, and who shall put a bound to the dark things which may be found by those who seek for them?

DE PROFUNDIS

So long as the oceans are the ligaments which bind together the great broadcast British Empire, so long will there be a dash of romance in our minds. For the soul is swayed by the waters, as the waters are by the moon, and when the great highways of an empire are along such roads as these, so full of strange sights and sounds, with danger ever running like a hedge on either side of the course, it is a dull mind indeed which does not bear away with it some trace of such a passage. And now, Britain lies far beyond herself, for the three-mile limit of every seaboard is her frontier, which has been won by hammer and loom and pick rather than by arts of war. For it is written in history that neither king nor army can bar the path to the man who having twopence in his strong box, and knowing well where he can turn it to threepence, sets his mind to that one end. And as the frontier has broadened the mind of Britain has broadened too, spreading out until all men can see that the ways of the island are continental, even as those of the Continent are insular.

But for this a price must be paid, and the price is a grievous one. As the beast of old must have one young human life as a tribute every year, so to our Empire we throw from day to day the pick and flower of our youth. The engine is world-wide and strong, but the only fuel that will drive it is the lives of British men. Thus it is that in the grey old cathedrals, as we look round upon the brasses on the walls, we see strange names, such names as they who reared those walls had never heard, for it is in Peshawur, and Umballah, and Korti, and Fort Pearson that the youngsters die, leaving only a precedent and a brass behind them. But if every man had his obelisk, even where he lay, then no frontier line need be drawn, for a cordon of British graves would ever show how high the Anglo-Celtic tide had lapped.

This, then, as well as the waters which join us to the world, has done something to tinge us with romance. For when so many have their loved ones over the seas, walking amid hillmen’s bullets, or swamp malaria, where death is sudden and distance great, then mind communes with mind, and strange stories arise of dream, presentiment, or vision, where the mother sees her dying son, and is past the first bitterness of her grief ere the message comes which should have broken the news. The learned have of late looked into the matter and have even labelled it with a name; but what can we know more of it save that a poor stricken soul, when hard-pressed and driven, can shoot across the earth some ten-thousand-mile-distant picture of its trouble to the mind which is most akin to it. Far be it from me to say that there lies no such power within us, for of all things which the brain will grasp the last will be itself; but yet it is well to be very cautious over such matters, for once at least I have known that which was within the laws of Nature seem to be far upon the further side of them.

John Vansittart was the younger partner of the firm of Hudson and Vansittart, coffee exporters of the Island of Ceylon, three-quarters Dutchman by descent, but wholly English in his sympathies. For years I had been his agent in London, and when in ‘72 he came over to England for a three months’ holiday, he turned to me for the introductions which would enable him to see something of town and country life. Armed with seven letters he left my offices, and for many weeks scrappy notes from different parts of the country let me know that he had found favour in the eyes of my friends. Then came word of his engagement to Emily Lawson, of a cadet branch of the Hereford Lawsons, and at the very tail of the first flying rumour the news of his absolute marriage, for the wooing of a wanderer must be short, and the days were already crowding on towards the date when he must be upon his homeward journey. They were to return together to Colombo in one of the firm’s own thousand-ton barque-rigged sailing ships, and this was to be their princely honeymoon, at once a necessity and a delight.

Those were the royal days of coffee-planting in Ceylon, before a single season and a rotting fungus drove a whole community through years of despair to one of the greatest commercial victories which pluck and ingenuity ever won. Not often is it that men have the heart when their one great industry is withered to rear up in a few years another as rich to take its place, and the tea-fields of Ceylon are as true a monument to courage as is the lion at Waterloo. But in ‘72 there was no cloud yet above the skyline, and the hopes of the planters were as high and as bright as the hill-sides on which they reared their crops. Vansittart came down to London with his young and beautiful wife. I was introduced, dined with them, and it was finally arranged that I, since business called me also to Ceylon, should be a fellow-passenger with them on the *Eastern Star*, which was timed to sail on the following Monday.

It was on the Sunday evening that I saw him again. He was shown up into my rooms about nine o’clock at night, with the air of a man who is bothered and out of sorts. His hand, as I shook it, was hot and dry.

“I wish, Atkinson,” said he, “that you could give me a little lime-juice and water. I have a beastly thirst upon me, and the more I take the more I seem to want.”

I rang and ordered a caraffe and glasses. “You are flushed,” said I. “You don’t look the thing.”

“No, I’m clean off colour. Got a touch of rheumatism in my back, and don’t seem to taste my food. It is this vile London that is choking me. I’m not used to breathing air which has been used up by four million lungs all sucking away on every side of you.” He flapped his crooked hands before his face, like a man who really struggles for his breath.

“A touch of the sea will soon set you right.”

“Yes, I’m of one mind with you there. That’s the thing for me. I want no other doctor. If I don’t get to sea to-morrow I’ll have an illness. There are no two ways about it.” He drank off the tumbler of lime-juice, and clapped his two hands with his knuckles doubled up into the small of his back.

“That seems to ease me,” said he, looking at me with a filmy eye. “Now I want your help, Atkinson, for I am rather awkwardly placed.”

“As how?”

“This way. My wife’s mother got ill and wired for her. I couldn’t go — you know best yourself how tied I have been — so she had to go alone. Now I’ve had another wire to say that she can’t come to-morrow, but that she will pick up the ship at Falmouth on Wednesday. We put in there, you know, though I count it hard, Atkinson, that a man should be asked to believe in a mystery, and cursed if he can’t do it. Cursed, mind you, no less.” He leaned forward and began to draw a catchy breath like a man who is poised on the very edge of a sob.

Then first it came into my mind that I had heard much of the hard-drinking life of the island, and that from brandy came these wild words and fevered hands. The flushed cheek and the glazing eye were those of one whose drink is strong upon him. Sad it was to see so noble a young man in the grip of that most bestial of all the devils.

“You should lie down,” I said, with some severity.

He screwed up his eyes like a man who is striving to wake himself, and looked up with an air of surprise.

“So I shall presently,” said he, quite rationally. “I felt quite swimmy just now, but I am my own man again now. Let me see, what was I talking about? Oh, ah, of course, about the wife. She joins the ship at Falmouth. Now I want to go round by water. I believe my health depends upon it. I just want a little clean first-lung air to set me on my feet again. I ask you, like a good fellow, to go to Falmouth by rail, so that in case we should be late you may be there to look after the wife. Put up at the Royal Hotel, and I will wire her that you are there. Her sister will bring her down, so that it will be all plain sailing."

"I'll do it with pleasure," said I. "In fact, I would rather go by rail, for we shall have enough and to spare of the sea before we reach Colombo. I believe too that you badly need a change. Now, I should go and turn in, if I were you."

"Yes, I will. I sleep aboard to-night. You know," he continued, as the film settled down again over his eyes, "I've not slept well the last few nights. I've been troubled with theolololog — that is to say, theolological — hang it," with a desperate effort, "with the doubts of theolologicians. Wondering why the Almighty made us, you know, and why He made our heads swimmy, and fixed little pains into the small of our backs. Maybe I'll do better to-night." He rose and steadied himself with an effort against the corner of the chair back.

"Look here, Vansittart," said I gravely, stepping up to him, and laying my hand upon his sleeve, "I can give you a shakedown here. You are not fit to go out. You are all over the place. You've been mixing your drinks."

"Drinks!" He stared at me stupidly.

"You used to carry your liquor better than this."

"I give you my word, Atkinson, that I have not had a drain for two days. It's not drink. I don't know what it is. I suppose you think this is drink." He took up my hand in his burning grasp, and passed it over his own forehead.

"Great Lord!" said I.

His skin felt like a thin sheet of velvet beneath which lies a close-packed layer of small shot. It was smooth to the touch at any one place, but to a finger passed along it, rough as a nutmeg-grater.

"It's all right," said he, smiling at my startled face. "I've had the prickly heat nearly as bad."

"But this is never prickly heat."

"No, it's London. It's breathing bad air. But to-morrow it'll be all right. There's a surgeon aboard, so I shall be in safe hands. I must be off now."

"Not you," said I, pushing him back into a chair. "This is past a joke. You don't move from here until a doctor sees you. Just stay where you are."

I caught up my hat and rushing round to the house of a neighbouring physician, I brought him back with me. The room was empty and Vansittart gone. I rang the bell. The servant said that the gentleman had ordered a cab the instant that I had left, and had gone off in it. He had told the cabman to drive to the docks.

"Did the gentleman seem ill?" I asked.

"Ill!" The man smiled. "No, sir, he was singin' his 'ardest all the time."

The information was not as reassuring as my servant seemed to think, but I reflected that he was going straight back to the *Eastern Star*, and that there was a doctor aboard of her, so that there was nothing which I could do in the matter. None the less, when I thought of his thirst, his burning hands, his heavy eye, his tripping speech, and lastly, of that leprous forehead, I carried with me to bed an unpleasant memory of my visitor and his visit.

At eleven o'clock next day I was at the docks, but the *Eastern Star* had already moved down the river, and was nearly at Gravesend. To Gravesend I went by train, but only to see her topmasts far off, with a plume of smoke from a tug in front of her. I would hear no more of my friend until I rejoined him at Falmouth. When I got back to my offices, a telegram was awaiting me from Mrs. Vansittart, asking me to meet her; and next evening found us both at the Royal Hotel, Falmouth, where we were to wait for the *Eastern Star*. Ten days passed, and there came no news of her.

They were ten days which I am not likely to forget. On the very day that the *Eastern Star* had cleared from the Thames, a furious easterly gale had sprung up, and blew on from day to day for the greater part of a week without the sign of a lull. Such a screaming, raving, long-drawn storm has never been known on the southern coast. From our hotel windows the sea view was all banked in haze, with a little rain-swept half-circle under our very eyes, churned and lashed into one tossing stretch of foam. So heavy was the wind upon the waves that little sea could rise, for the crest of each billow was torn shrieking from it, and lashed broadcast over the bay. Clouds, wind, sea, all were rushing to the west, and there, looking down at this mad jumble of elements, I waited on day after day, my sole companion a white, silent woman, with terror in her eyes, her forehead pressed ever against the window, her gaze from early morning to the fall of night fixed upon that wall of grey haze through which the loom of a vessel might come. She said nothing, but that face of hers was one long wail of fear.

On the fifth day I took counsel with an old seaman.

I should have preferred to have done so alone, but she saw me speak with him, and was at our side in an instant, with parted lips and a prayer in her eyes.

"Seven days out from London," said he, "and five in the gale. Well, the Channel's swept clear by this wind. There's three things for it. She may have popped into port on the French side. That's like enough."

"No, no; he knew we were here. He would have telegraphed."

"Ah, yes, so he would. Well, then, he might have run for it, and if he did that he won't be very far from Madeira by now. That'll be it, marm, you may depend."

"Or else? You said there was a third chance."

"Did I, marm? No, only two, I think. I don't think I said anything of a third. Your ship's out there, depend upon it, away out in the Atlantic, and you'll hear of it time enough, for the weather is breaking. Now don't you fret, marm, and wait quiet, and you'll find a real blue Cornish sky to-morrow."

The old seaman was right in his surmise, for the next day broke calm and bright, with only a low dwindling cloud in the west to mark the last trailing wreaths of the storm-wrack. But still there came no word from the sea, and no sign of the ship. Three more weary days had passed, the weariest that I have ever spent, when there came a seafaring man to the hotel with a letter. I gave a shout of joy. It was from the captain of the *Eastern Star*. As I read the first lines of it I whisked my hand over it, but she laid her own upon it and drew it away. "I have seen it," said she, in a cold, quiet voice. "I may as well see the rest, too."

"Dear Sir," said the letter,

"Mr. Vansittart is down with the smallpox, and we are blown so far on our course that we don't know what to do, he being off his head and unfit to tell us. By dead reckoning we are but three hundred miles from Funchal, so I take it that it is best that we should push on there, get Mr. V. into hospital, and wait in the Bay until you come. There's a sailing-ship due from Falmouth to Funchal in a few days' time, as I understand. This goes by the brig *Marian* of Falmouth, and five pounds is due to the master,

"Yours respectfully,

"Jno. Hines."

She was a wonderful woman that, only a chit of a girl fresh from school, but as quiet and strong as a man. She said nothing — only pressed her lips together tight, and put on her bonnet.

"You are going out?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Can I be of use?"

"No; I am going to the doctor's."

"To the doctor's?"

"Yes. To learn how to nurse a small-pox case."

She was busy at that all the evening, and next morning we were off with a fine ten-knot breeze in the barque *Rose of Sharon* for Madeira. For five days we made good time, and were no great way from the island; but on the sixth there fell a calm, and we lay without motion on a sea of oil, heaving slowly, but making not a foot of way.

At ten o'clock that night Emily Vansittart and I stood leaning on the starboard railing of the poop, with a full moon shining at our backs, and casting a black shadow of the barque, and of our own two heads, upon the shining water. From the shadow a broadening path of moonshine stretched away to the lonely skyline, flickering and shimmering in the gentle heave of the swell. We were talking with bent heads, chatting of the calm, of the chances of wind, of the look of the sky, when there came a sudden plop, like a rising salmon, and there, in the clear light, John Vansittart sprang out of the water and looked up at us.

I never saw anything clearer in my life than I saw that man. The moon shone full upon him, and he was but three oars' length away. His face was more puffed than when I had seen him last, mottled here and there with dark scabs, his mouth and eyes open as one who is struck with some overpowering surprise. He had some white stuff streaming from his shoulders, and one hand was raised to his ear, the other crooked across his breast. I saw him leap from the water into the air, and in the dead calm the waves of his coming lapped up against the sides of the vessel. Then his figure sank back into the water again, and I heard a rending, crackling sound like a bundle of brushwood snapping in the fire on a frosty night. There were no signs of him when I looked again, but a swift swirl and eddy on the still sea still marked the spot where he had been. How long I stood there, tingling to my finger-tips, holding up an unconscious woman with one hand, clutching at the rail of the vessel with the other, was more than I could afterwards tell. I had been noted as a man of slow and unresponsive emotions, but this time at least I was shaken to the core. Once and twice I struck my foot upon the deck to be certain that I was indeed the master of my own senses, and that this was not some mad prank of an unruly brain. As I stood, still marvelling, the woman shivered, opened her eyes, gasped, and then standing erect with her hands upon the rail, looked out over the moonlit sea with a face which had aged ten years in a summer night.

"You saw his vision?" she murmured.

"I saw something."

"It was he! It was John! He is dead!"

I muttered some lame words of doubt.

“Doubtless he died at this hour,” she whispered. “In hospital at Madeira. I have read of such things. His thoughts were with me. His vision came to me. Oh, my John, my dear, dear, lost John!”

She broke out suddenly into a storm of weeping, and I led her down into her cabin, where I left her with her sorrow. That night a brisk breeze blew up from the east, and in the evening of the next day we passed the two islets of Los Desertos, and dropped anchor at sundown in the Bay of Funchal. The *Eastern Star* lay no great distance from us, with the quarantine flag flying from her main, and her Jack half-way up her peak.

“You see,” said Mrs. Vansittart quickly. She was dry-eyed now, for she had known how it would be.

That night we received permission from the authorities to move on board the *Eastern Star*. The captain, Hines, was waiting upon deck with confusion and grief contending upon his bluff face as he sought for words with which to break this heavy tidings, but she took the story from his lips.

“I know that my husband is dead,” she said. “He died yesterday night, about ten o’clock, in hospital at Madeira, did he not?”

The seaman stared aghast. “No, marm, he died eight days ago at sea, and we had to bury him out there, for we lay in a belt of calm, and could not say when we might make the land.”

Well, those are the main facts about the death of John Vansittart, and his appearance to his wife somewhere about lat. 35 N. and long. 15 W. A clearer case of a wraith has seldom been made out, and since then it has been told as such, and put into print as such, and endorsed by a learned society as such, and so floated off with many others to support the recent theory of telepathy. For myself, I hold telepathy to be proved, but I would snatch this one case from amid the evidence, and say that I do not think that it was the wraith of John Vansittart, but John Vansittart himself whom we saw that night leaping into the moonlight out of the depths of the Atlantic. It has ever been my belief that some strange chance — one of those chances which seem so improbable and yet so constantly occur — had becalmed us over the very spot where the man had been buried a week before. For the rest, the surgeon tells me that the leaden weight was not too firmly fixed, and that seven days bring about changes which fetch a body to the surface. Coming from the depth to which the weight would have sunk it, he explains that it might well attain such a velocity as to carry it clear of the water. Such is my own explanation of the matter, and if you ask me what then became of the body, I must recall to you that snapping, crackling sound, with the swirl in the water. The shark is a surface feeder and is plentiful in those parts.

THE LIFT

Flight-Commander Stangate should have been happy. He had come safely through the war without a hurt, and with a good name in the most heroic of services. He had only just turned thirty, and a great career seemed to lie ahead of him. Above all, beautiful Mary MacLean was walking by his side, and he had her promise that she was there for life. What could a young man ask for more? And yet there was a heavy load upon his heart.

He could not explain it himself, and endeavoured to reason himself out of it. There was the blue sky above him, the blue sea in front, the beautiful gardens with their throngs of happy pleasure-seekers around. Above all, there was that sweet face turned upon him with questioning concern. Why could he not raise himself to so joyful an environment? He made effort after effort, but they were not convincing enough to deceive the quick instinct of a loving woman.

“What is it, Tom?” she asked anxiously. “I can see that something is clouding you. Do tell me if I can help you in any way.”

He laughed in shame-faced fashion.

“It is such a sin to spoil our little outing,” he said. “I could kick myself round these gardens when I think of it. Don’t worry, my darling, for I know the cloud will roll off. I suppose I am a creature of nerves, though I should have got past that by now. The Flying Service is supposed either to break you or to warrant you for life.”

“It is nothing definite, then?”

“No, it is nothing definite. That’s the worst of it. You could fight it more easily if it was. It’s just a dead, heavy depression here in my chest and across my forehead. But do forgive me, dear girl! What a brute I am to shadow you like this.”

“But I love to share even the smallest trouble.”

“Well, it’s gone — vamosed — vanished. We will talk about it no more.”

She gave him a swift, penetrating glance.

“No, no, Tom; your brow shows, as well as feels. Tell me, dear, have you often felt like this? You really look very ill. Sit here, dear, in the shade and tell me of it.”

They sat together in the shadow of the great latticed Tower which reared itself six hundred feet high beside them.

“I have an absurd faculty,” said he; “I don’t know that I have ever mentioned it to any one before. But when imminent danger is threatening me I get these strange forebodings. Of course it is absurd to-day in these peaceful surroundings. It only shows how queerly these things work. But it is the first time that it has deceived me.”

“When had you it before?”

“When I was a lad it seized me one morning. I was nearly drowned that afternoon. I had it when the burglar came to Morton Hall and I got a bullet through my coat. Then twice in the war when I was overmatched and escaped by a miracle, I had this strange feeling before ever I climbed into my machine. Then it lifts quite suddenly, like a mist in the sunshine. Why, it is lifting now. Look at me! Can’t you see that it is so?”

She could indeed. He had turned in a minute from a haggard man to a laughing boy. She found herself laughing in sympathy. A rush of high spirits and energy had swept away his strange foreboding and filled his whole soul with the vivid, dancing joy of youth.

“Thank goodness!” he cried. “I think it is your dear eyes that have done it. I could not stand that wistful look in them. What a silly, foolish nightmare it all has been! There’s an end for ever in my belief in presentiments. Now, dear girl, we have just time for one good turn before luncheon. After that the gardens get so crowded that it is hopeless to do anything. Shall we have a side show, or the great wheel, or the flying boat, or what?”

“What about the Tower?” she asked, glancing upwards. “Surely that glorious air and the view from the top would drive the last wisps of cloud out of your mind.”

He looked at his watch.

“Well, it’s past twelve, but I suppose we could do it all in an hour. But it doesn’t seem to be working. What about it, conductor?”

The man shook his head and pointed to a little knot of people who were assembled at the entrance.

“They’ve all been waiting, sir. It’s hung up, but the gear is being overhauled, and I expect the signal every minute. If you join the others I promise it won’t be long.”

They had hardly reached the group when the steel face of the lift rolled aside — a sign that there was hope in the future. The motley crowd drifted through the opening and waited expectantly upon the wooden platform.

They were not numerous, for the gardens are not crowded until the afternoon, but they were fair samples of the kindly, good-humoured north-country folk who take their annual holiday at Northam. Their faces were all upturned now, and they were watching with keen interest a man who was descending the steel framework. It seemed a dangerous, precarious business, but he came as swiftly as an ordinary mortal upon a staircase.

“My word!” said the conductor, glancing up. “Jim has got a move on this morning.”

“Who is he?” asked Commander Stangate.

“That’s Jim Barnes, sir, the best workman that ever went on a scaffold. He fair lives up there. Every bolt and rivet are under his care. He’s a wonder, is Jim.”

“But don’t argue religion with him,” said one of the group.

The attendant laughed.

“Ah, you know him, then,” said he. “No, don’t argue religion with him.”

“Why not?” asked the officer.

“Well, he takes it very hard, he does. He’s the shining light of his sect.”

“It ain’t hard to be that,” said the knowing one. “I’ve heard there are only six folk in the fold. He’s one of those who picture heaven as the exact size of their own back street conventicle and every one else left outside it.”

“Better not tell him so while he’s got that hammer in his hand,” said the conductor, in a hurried whisper. “Hallo, Jim, how goes it this morning?”

The man slid swiftly down the last thirty feet, and then balanced himself on a cross-bar while he looked at the little group in the lift. As he stood there, clad in a leather suit, with his pliers and other tools dangling from his brown belt, he was a figure to please the eye of an artist. The man was very tall and gaunt, with great straggling limbs and every appearance of giant strength. His face was a remarkable one, noble and yet sinister, with dark eyes and hair, a prominent hooked nose, and a beard which flowed over his chest. He steadied himself with one knotted hand, while the other held a steel hammer dangling by his knee.

“It’s all ready aloft,” said he. “I’ll go up with you if I may.” He sprang down from his perch and joined the others in the lift.

“I suppose you are always watching it,” said the young lady.

“That is what I am engaged for, miss. From morning to night, and often from night to morning, I am up here. There are times when I feel as if I were not a man at all, but a fowl of the air. They fly round me, the creatures, as I lie out on the girders, and they cry to me until I find myself crying back to the poor soulless things."

"It's a great charge," said the Commander, glancing up at the wonderful tracery of steel outlined against the deep blue sky.

"Aye, sir, and there is not a nut nor a screw that is riot in my keeping. Here's my hammer to ring them true and my spanner to wrench them tight. As the Lord over the earth, so am I — even I — over the Tower, with power of life and power of death, aye of death and of life."

The hydraulic machinery had begun to work and the lift very slowly ascended. As it mounted, the glorious panorama of the coast and bay gradually unfolded itself. So engrossing was the view that the passengers hardly noticed it when the platform stopped abruptly between stages at the five hundred foot level. Barnes, the workman, muttered that something must be amiss, and springing like a cat across the gap which separated them from the trellis-work of metal he clambered out of sight. The motley little party, suspended in mid-air, lost something of their British shyness under such unwonted conditions and began to compare notes with each other. One couple, who addressed each other as Dolly and Billy, announced to the company that they were the particular stars of the Hippodrome bill, and kept their neighbours tittering with their rather obvious wit. A buxom mother, her precocious son, and two married couples upon holiday formed an appreciative audience.

"You'd like to be a sailor, would you?" said Billy the comedian, in answer to some remark of the boy. "Look 'ere, my nipper, you'll end up as a blooming corpse if you ain't careful. See 'im standin' at the edge. At this hour of the morning I can't bear to watch it."

"What's the hour got to do with it?" asked a stout commercial traveller.

"My nerves are worth nothin' before midday. Why, lookin' down there, and seem' those folks like dots, puts me all in a twitter. My family is all alike in the mornin'."

"I expect," said Dolly, a high-coloured young woman, "that they're all alike the evening before."

There was a general laugh, which was led by the comedian.

"You got it across that time, Dolly. It's K.O. for Battling Billy — still senseless when last heard of. If my family is laughed at I'll leave the room."

"It's about time we did," said the commercial traveller, who was a red-faced, choleric person. "It's a disgrace the way they hold us up. I'll write to the company.”

“Where’s the bell-push?” said Billy. “I’m goin’ to ring.”

“What for — the waiter?” asked the lady.

“For the conductor, the chauffeur, whoever it is that drives the old bus up and down. Have they run out of petrol, or broke the mainspring, or what?”

“We have a fine view, anyhow,” said the Commander.

“Well, I’ve had that,” remarked Billy. “I’m done with it, and I’m for getting on.”

“I’m getting nervous,” cried the stout mother. “I do hope there is nothing wrong with the lift.”

“I say, hold on to the slack of my coat, Dolly. I’m going to look over and chance it. Oh, Lord, it makes me sick and giddy! There’s a horse down under, and it ain’t bigger than a mouse. I don’t see any one lookin’ after us. Where’s old Isaiah the prophet who came up with us?”

“He shinned out of it mighty quick when he thought trouble was coming.”

“Look here,” said Dolly, looking very perturbed, “this is a nice thing, I don’t think. Here we are five hundred foot up, and stuck for the day as like as not. I’m due for the *matinée* at the Hippodrome. I’m sorry for the company if they don’t get me down in time for that. I’m billed all over the town for a new song.”

“A new one! What’s that, Dolly?”

“A real pot o’ ginger, I tell you. It’s called ‘On the Road to Ascot.’ I’ve got a hat four foot across to sing it in.”

“Come on, Dolly, let’s have a rehearsal while we wait.”

“No, no; the young lady here wouldn’t understand.”

“I’d be very glad to hear it,” cried Mary MacLean. “Please don’t let me prevent you.”

“The words were written to the hat. I couldn’t sing the verses without the hat. But there’s a nailin’ good chorus to it:

“‘If you want a little mascot
When you’re on the way to Ascot,
Try the lady with the cartwheel hat.’”

She had a tuneful voice and a sense of rhythm which set every one nodding. “Try it now all together,” she cried; and the strange little haphazard company sang it with all their lungs.

"I say," said Billy, "that ought to wake somebody up. What? Let's try a shout all together."

It was a fine effort, but there was no response. It was clear that the management down below was quite ignorant or impotent. No sound came back to them.

The passengers became alarmed. The commercial traveller was rather less rubicund. Billy still tried to joke, but his efforts were not well received. The officer in his blue uniform at once took his place as rightful leader in a crisis. They all looked to him and appealed to him.

"What would you advise, sir? You don't think there's any danger of it coming down, do you?"

"Not the least. But it's awkward to be stuck here all the same. I think I could jump across on to that girder. Then perhaps I could see what is wrong."

"No, no, Tom; for goodness' sake, don't leave us!"

"Some people have a nerve," said Billy. "Fancy jumping across a five-hundred-foot drop!"

"I dare say the gentleman did worse things in the war."

"Well, I wouldn't do it myself — not if they starred me in the bills. It's all very well for old Isaiah. It's his job, and I wouldn't do him out of it."

Three sides of the lift were shut in with wooden partitions, pierced with windows for the view. The fourth side, facing the sea, was clear. Stangate leaned as far as he could and looked upwards. As he did so there came from above him a peculiar sonorous metallic twang, as if a mighty harp-string had been struck. Some distance up — a hundred feet, perhaps — he could see a long brown corded arm, which was working furiously among the wire cordage above. The form was beyond his view, but he was fascinated by this bare sinewy arm which tugged and pulled and sagged and stabbed.

"It's all right," he said, and a general sigh of relief broke from his strange comrades at his words. "There is some one above us setting things right."

"It's old Isaiah," said Billy, stretching his neck round the corner. "I can't see him, but it's his arm for a dollar. What's he got in his hand? Looks like a screwdriver or something. No, by George, it's a file."

As he spoke there came another sonorous twang from above. There was a troubled frown upon the officer's brow.

"I say, dash it all, that's the very sound our steel hawser made when it parted, strand by strand, at Dix-mude. What the deuce is the fellow about?

Hey, there! what are you trying to do?"

The man had ceased his work and was now slowly descending the iron trellis.

"All right, he's coming," said Stangate to his startled companions. "It's all right, Mary. Don't be frightened, any of you. It's absurd to suppose he would really weaken the cord that holds us."

A pair of high boots appeared from above. Then came the leathern breeches, the belt with its dangling tools, the muscular form, and, finally, the fierce, swarthy, eagle face of the workman. His coat was off and his shirt open, showing the hairy chest. As he appeared there came another sharp snapping vibration from above. The man made his way down in leisurely fashion, and then, balancing himself upon the cross-girder and leaning against the side piece, he stood with folded arms, looking from under his heavy black brows at the huddled passengers upon the platform.

"Hallo!" said Stangate. "What's the matter?"

The man stood impassive and silent, with something indescribably menacing in his fixed, unwinking stare.

The flying officer grew angry.

"Hallo! Are you deaf?" he cried. "How long do you mean to have us stuck here?"

The man stood silent. There was something devilish in his appearance.

"I'll complain of you, my lad," said Billy, in a quivering voice. "This won't stop here, I can promise you."

"Look here!" cried the officer. "We have ladies here and you are alarming them. Why are we stuck here? Has the machinery gone wrong?"

"You are here," said the man, "because I have put a wedge against the hawser above you."

"You fouled the line! How dared you do such a thing! What right have you to frighten the women and put us all to this inconvenience? Take that wedge out this instant, or it will be the worse for you."

The man was silent.

"Do you hear what I say? Why the devil don't you answer? Is this a joke or what? We've had about enough of it, I tell you."

Mary MacLean had gripped her lover by the arm in agony of sudden panic.

"Oh, Tom!" she cried. "Look at his eyes — look at his horrible eyes! The man is a maniac."

The workman stirred suddenly into sinister life. His dark face broke into writhing lines of passion, and his fierce eyes glowed like embers, while he shook one long arm in the air.

“Behold,” he cried, “those who are mad to the children of this world are in very truth the Lord’s anointed and the dwellers in the inner temple. Lo, I am one who is prepared to testify even to the uttermost, for of a verity the day has now come when the humble will be exalted and the wicked will be cut off in their sins!”

“Mother! Mother!” cried the little boy, in terror.

“There, there! It’s all right, Jack,” said the buxom woman, and then, in a burst of womanly wrath, “What d’you want to make the child cry for? You’re a pretty man, you are!”

“Better he should cry now than in the outer darkness. Let him seek safety while there is yet time.”

The officer measured the gap with a practised eye. It was a good eight feet across, and the fellow could push him over before he could steady himself. It would be a desperate thing to attempt. He tried soothing words once more.

“See here, my lad, you’ve carried this joke too far. Why should you wish to injure us? Just shin up and get that wedge out, and we will agree to say no more about it.”

Another rending snap came from above.

“By George, the hawser is going!” cried Stangate. “Here! Stand aside! I’m coming over to see to it.”

The workman had plucked the hammer from his belt, and waved it furiously in the air.

“Stand back, young man! Stand back! Or come — if you would hasten your end.”

“Tom, Tom, for God’s sake, don’t spring! Help! Help!”

The passengers all joined in the cry for aid. The man smiled malignantly as he watched them.

“There is no one to help. They could not come if they would. You would be wiser to turn to your own souls that ye be not cast to the burning. Lo, strand by strand the cable snaps which holds you. There is yet another, and with each that goes there is more strain upon the rest. Five minutes of time, and all eternity beyond.”

A moan of fear rose from the prisoners in the lift. Stangate felt a cold sweat upon his brow as he passed his arm round the shrinking girl. If this vindictive devil could only be coaxed away for an instant he would spring across and take his chance in a hand-to-hand fight.

"Look here, my friend! We give you best!" he cried. "We can do nothing. Go up and cut the cable if you wish. Go on — do it now, and get it over!"

"That you may come across unharmed. Having set my hand to the work, I will not draw back from it."

Fury seized the young officer.

"You devil!" he cried. "What do you stand there grinning for? I'll give you something to grin about. Give me a stick, one of you."

The man waved his hammer.

"Come, then! Come to judgment!" he howled.

"He'll murder you, Tom! Oh, for God's sake, don't! If we must die, let us die together."

"I wouldn't try it, sir," cried Billy. "He'll strike you down before you get a footing. Hold up, Dolly, my dear! Faintin' won't 'elp us. You speak to him, miss. Maybe he'll listen to you."

"Why should you wish to hurt us?" said Mary. "What have we ever done to you? Surely you will be sorry afterwards if we are injured. Now do be kind and reasonable and help us to get back to the ground."

For a moment there may have been some softening in the man's fierce eyes as he looked at the sweet face which was upturned to him. Then his features set once more into their grim lines of malice.

"My hand is set to the work, woman. It is not for the servant to look back from his task."

"But why should this be your task?"

"Because there is a voice within me which tells me so. In the night-time I have heard it, and in the daytime too, when I have lain out alone upon the girders and seen the wicked dotting the streets beneath me, each busy on his own evil intent. 'John Barnes, John Barnes,' said the voice. 'You are here that you may give a sign to a sinful generation — such a sign as shall show them that the Lord liveth and that there is a judgment upon sin.' Who am I that I should disobey the voice of the Lord?"

"The voice of the devil," said Stangate. "What is the sin of this lady, or of these others, that you should seek their lives?"

"You are as the others, neither better nor worse. All day they pass me, load by load, with foolish cries and empty songs and vain babble of voices. Their thoughts are set upon the things of the flesh. Too long have I stood aside and watched and refused to testify. But now the day of wrath is come and the sacrifice is ready. Think not that a woman's tongue can turn me from my task."

"It is useless!" Mary cried. "Useless! I read death in his eyes."

Another cord had snapped.

"Repent! Repent!" cried the madman. "One more, and it is over!"

Commander Stangate felt as if it were all some extraordinary dream — some monstrous nightmare. Could it be possible that he, after all his escapes of death in warfare, was now, in the heart of peaceful England, at the mercy of a homicidal lunatic, and that his dear girl, the one being whom he would shield from the very shadow of danger, was helpless before this horrible man? All his energy and manhood rose up in him for one last effort.

"Here, we won't be killed like sheep in the shambles!" he cried, throwing himself against the wooden wall of the lift and kicking with all his force. "Come on, boys! Kick it! Beat it! It's only matchboarding, and it is giving. Smash it down! Well done! Once more all together! There she goes! Now for the side! Out with it! Splendid!"

First the back and then the side of the little compartment had been knocked out, and the splinters dropped down into the abyss. Barnes danced upon his girder, his hammer in the air.

"Strive not!" he shrieked. "It avails not. The day is surely come."

"It's not two feet from the side girder," cried the officer. "Get across! Quick! Quick! All of you. I'll hold this devil off!" He had seized a stout stick from the commercial traveller and faced the madman, daring him to spring across.

"Your turn now, my friend!" he hissed. "Come on, hammer and all! I'm ready for you."

Above him he heard another snap, and the frail platform began to rock. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that his companions were all safe upon the side girder. A strange line of terrified castaways they appeared as they clung in an ungainly row to the trellis-work of steel. But their feet were on the iron support. With two quick steps and a spring he was at their side. At the same instant the murderer, hammer in hand, jumped the gap. They had one vision of him there — a vision which will haunt their dreams — the convulsed face, the blazing eyes, the wind-tossed raven locks. For a moment he balanced himself upon the swaying platform. The next, with a rending crash, he and it were gone. There was a long silence and then, far down, the thud and clatter of a mighty fall.

With white faces, the forlorn group clung to the cold steel bars and gazed down into the terrible abyss. It was the Commander who broke the silence.

“They’ll send for us now. It’s all safe,” he cried, wiping his brow. “But, by Jove, it was a close call!”

MY FRIEND THE MURDERER AND OTHER MYSTERIES AND ADVENTURES

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ELIAS B. HOPKINS, THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.

He was known in the Gulch as the Reverend Elias B. Hopkins, but it was generally understood that the title was an honorary one, extorted by his many eminent qualities, and not borne out by any legal claim which he could adduce. “The Parson” was another of his sobriquets, which was sufficiently distinctive in a land where the flock was scattered and the shepherds few. To do him justice, he never pretended to have received any preliminary training for the ministry, or any orthodox qualification to practise it. “We’re all working in the claim of the Lord,” he remarked one day, “and it don’t matter a cent whether we’re hired for the job or whether we waltzes in on our own account,” a piece of rough imagery which appealed directly to the instincts of Jackman’s Gulch. It is quite certain that during the first few months his presence had a marked effect in diminishing the excessive use both of strong drinks and of stronger adjectives which had been characteristic of the little mining settlement. Under his tuition, men began to understand that the resources of their native language were less limited than they had supposed, and that it was possible to convey their impressions with accuracy without the aid of a gaudy halo of profanity.

We were certainly in need of a regenerator at Jackman’s Gulch about the beginning of ‘53. Times were flush then over the whole colony, but nowhere flusher than there. Our material prosperity had had a bad effect upon our morals. The camp was a small one, lying rather better than a hundred and twenty miles to the north of Ballarat, at a spot where a mountain torrent finds its way down a rugged ravine on its way to join the Arrowsmith River. History does not relate who the original Jackman may have been, but at the time I speak of the camp it contained a hundred or so adults, many of whom were men who had sought an asylum there after making more civilised mining centres too hot to hold them. They were a rough, murderous crew, hardly leavened by the few respectable members of society who were scattered among them.

Communication between Jackman’s Gulch and the outside world was difficult and uncertain. A portion of the bush between it and Ballarat was infested by a redoubtable outlaw named Conky Jim, who, with a small band as desperate as himself, made travelling a dangerous matter. It was customary, therefore, at the Gulch, to store up the dust and nuggets obtained from the mines in a special store, each man's share being placed in a separate bag on which his name was marked. A trusty man, named Woburn, was deputed to watch over this primitive bank. When the amount deposited became considerable, a waggon was hired, and the whole treasure was conveyed to Ballarat, guarded by the police and by a certain number of miners, who took it in turn to perform the office. Once in Ballarat, it was forwarded on to Melbourne by the regular gold waggons. By this plan the gold was often kept for months in the Gulch before being despatched, but Conky Jim was effectually checkmated, as the escort party were far too strong for him and his gang. He appeared, at the time of which I write, to have forsaken his haunts in disgust, and the road could be traversed by small parties with impunity.

Comparative order used to reign during the daytime at Jackman's Gulch, for the majority of the inhabitants were out with crowbar and pick among the quartz ledges, or washing clay and sand in their cradles by the banks of the little stream. As the sun sank down, however, the claims were gradually deserted, and their unkempt owners, clay-bespattered and shaggy, came lounging into camp, ripe for any form of mischief. Their first visit was to Woburn's gold store, where their clean-up of the day was duly deposited, the amount being entered in the storekeeper's book, and each miner retaining enough to cover his evening's expenses. After that, all restraint was at an end, and each set to work to get rid of his surplus dust with the greatest rapidity possible. The focus of dissipation was the rough bar, formed by a couple of hogsheads spanned by planks, which was dignified by the name of the "Britannia Drinking Saloon." Here Nat Adams, the burly bar-keeper, dispensed bad whisky at the rate of two shillings a noggin, or a guinea a bottle, while his brother Ben acted as croupier in a rude wooden shanty behind, which had been converted into a gambling hell, and was crowded every night. There had been a third brother, but an unfortunate misunderstanding with a customer had shortened his existence. "He was too soft to live long," his brother Nathaniel feelingly observed, on the occasion of his funeral. "Many's the time I've said to him, 'If you're arguin' a pint with a stranger, you should always draw first, then argue, and then shoot, if you judge that he's on the shoot.' Bill was too purlite.

He must needs argue first and draw after, when he might just as well have kivered his man before talkin' it over with him. This amiable weakness of the deceased Bill was a blow to the firm of Adams, which became so short-handed that the concern could hardly be worked without the admission of a partner, which would mean a considerable decrease in the profits.

Nat Adams had had a roadside shanty in the Gulch before the discovery of gold, and might, therefore, claim to be the oldest inhabitant. These keepers of shanties were a peculiar race, and at the cost of a digression it may he interesting to explain how they managed to amass considerable sums of money in a land where travellers were few and far between. It was the custom of the "bushmen," i.e., bullock-drivers, sheep tenders, and the other white hands who worked on the sheep-runs up country, to sign articles by which they agreed to serve their master for one, two, or three years at so much per year and certain daily rations. Liquor was never included in this agreement, and the men remained, per force, total abstainers during the whole time. The money was paid in a lump sum at the end of the engagement. When that day came round, Jimmy, the stockman, would come slouching into his master's office, cabbage-tree hat in hand.

"Morning, master!" Jimmy would say. "My time's up. I guess I'll draw my cheque and ride down to town."

"You'll come back, Jimmy?"

"Yes, I'll come back. Maybe I'll be away three weeks, maybe a month. I want some clothes, master, and my bloomin' boots are well-nigh off my feet."

"How much, Jimmy?" asks his master, taking up his pen.

"There's sixty pound screw," Jimmy answers thoughtfully; "and you mind, master, last March, when the brindled bull broke out o' the paddock. Two pound you promised me then. And a pound at the dipping. And a pound when Millar's sheep got mixed with ourn;" and so he goes on, for bushmen can seldom write, but they have memories which nothing escapes.

His master writes the cheque and hands it across the table. "Don't get on the drink, Jimmy," he says.

"No fear of that, master," and the stockman slips the cheque into his leather pouch, and within an hour he is ambling off upon his long-limbed horse on his hundred-mile journey to town.

Now Jimmy has to pass some six or eight of the above-mentioned roadside shanties in his day's ride, and experience has taught him that if he once breaks his accustomed total abstinence, the unwonted stimulant has an overpowering effect upon his brain. Jimmy shakes his head warily as he determines that no earthly consideration will induce him to partake of any liquor until his business is over. His only chance is to avoid temptation; so, knowing that there is the first of these houses some half-mile ahead, he plunges into a byepath through the bush which will lead him out at the other side.

Jimmy is riding resolutely along this narrow path, congratulating himself upon a danger escaped, when he becomes aware of a sunburned, black-bearded man who is leaning unconcernedly against a tree beside the track. This is none other than the shanty-keeper, who, having observed Jimmy's manoeuvre in the distance, has taken a short cut through the bush in order to intercept him.

"Morning, Jimmy!" he cries, as the horseman comes up to him.

"Morning, mate; morning!"

"Where are ye off to to-day then?"

"Off to town," says Jimmy sturdily.

"No, now — are you though? You'll have bully times down there for a bit. Come round and have a drink at my place. Just by way of luck."

"No," says Jimmy, "I don't want a drink."

"Just a little damp."

"I tell ye I don't want one," says the stockman angrily.

"Well, ye needn't be so darned short about it. It's nothin' to me whether you drinks or not. Good mornin'."

"Good mornin'," says Jimmy, and has ridden on about twenty yards when he hears the other calling on him to stop.

"See here, Jimmy!" he says, overtaking him again. "If you'll do me a kindness when you're up in town I'd be obliged."

"What is it?"

"It's a letter, Jim, as I wants posted. It's an important one too, an' I wouldn't trust it with every one; but I knows you, and if you'll take charge on it it'll be a powerful weight off my mind."

"Give it here," Jimmy says laconically.

"I hain't got it here. It's round in my caboose. Come round for it with me. It ain't more'n quarter of a mile."

Jimmy consents reluctantly. When they reach the tumble-down hut the keeper asks him cheerily to dismount and to come in.

"Give me the letter," says Jimmy.

"It ain't altogether wrote yet, but you sit down here for a minute and it'll be right," and so the stockman is beguiled into the shanty.

At last the letter is ready and handed over. "Now, Jimmy," says the keeper, "one drink at my expense before you go."

"Not a taste," says Jimmy.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the other says in an aggrieved tone. "You're too damned proud to drink with a poor cove like me. Here — give us back that letter. I'm cursed if I'll accept a favour from a man whose too almighty big to have a drink with me."

"Well, well, mate, don't turn rusty," says Jim. "Give us one drink an' I'm off."

The keeper pours out about half a pannikin of raw rum and hands it to the bushman. The moment he smells the old familiar smell his longing for it returns, and he swigs it off at a gulp. His eyes shine more brightly and his face becomes flushed. The keeper watches him narrowly. "You can go now, Jim," he says.

"Steady, mate, steady," says the bushman. "I'm as good a man as you. If you stand a drink I can stand one too, I suppose." So the pannikin is replenished, and Jimmy's eyes shine brighter still.

"Now, Jimmy, one last drink for the good of the house," says the keeper, "and then it's time you were off." The stockman has a third gulp from the pannikin, and with it all his scruples and good resolutions vanish for ever.

"Look here," he says somewhat huskily, taking his cheque out of his pouch. "You take this, mate. Whoever comes along this road, ask 'em what they'll have, and tell them it's my shout. Let me know when the money's done."

So Jimmy abandons the idea of ever getting to town, and for three weeks or a month he lies about the shanty in a state of extreme drunkenness, and reduces every wayfarer upon the road to the same condition. At last one fine morning the keeper comes to him. "The coin's done, Jimmy," he says; "it's about time you made some more." So Jimmy has a good wash to sober him, straps his blanket and his billy to his back, and rides off through the bush to the sheeprun, where he has another year of sobriety, terminating in another month of intoxication.

All this, though typical of the happy-go-lucky manners of the inhabitants, has no direct bearing upon Jackman's Gulch, so we must return to that Arcadian settlement. Additions to the population there were not numerous, and such as came about the time of which I speak were even rougher and fiercer than the original inhabitants. In particular, there came a brace of ruffians named Phillips and Maule, who rode into camp one day, and started a claim upon the other side of the stream. They outgulched the Gulch in the virulence and fluency of their blasphemy, in the truculence of their speech and manner, and in their reckless disregard of all social laws. They claimed to have come from Bendigo, and there were some amongst us who wished that the redoubted Conky Jim was on the track once more, as long as he would close it to such visitors as these. After their arrival the nightly proceedings at the Britannia bar and at the gambling hell behind it became more riotous than ever. Violent quarrels, frequently ending in bloodshed, were of constant occurrence. The more peaceable frequenters of the bar began to talk seriously of lynching the two strangers who were the principal promoters of disorder. Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when our evangelist, Elias B. Hopkins, came limping into the camp, travel-stained and footsore, with his spade strapped across his back, and his Bible in the pocket of his moleskin jacket.

His presence was hardly noticed at first, so insignificant was the man. His manner was quiet and unobtrusive, his face pale, and his figure fragile. On better acquaintance, however, there was a squareness and firmness about his clean-shaven lower jaw, and an intelligence in his widely-opened blue eyes, which marked him as a man of character. He erected a small hut for himself, and started a claim close to that occupied by the two strangers who had preceded him. This claim was chosen with a ludicrous disregard for all practical laws of mining, and at once stamped the newcomer as being a green hand at his work. It was piteous to observe him every morning as we passed to our work, digging and delving with the greatest industry, but, as we knew well, without the smallest possibility of any result. He would pause for a moment as we went by, wipe his pale face with his bandanna handkerchief, and shout out to us a cordial morning greeting, and then fall to again with redoubled energy. By degrees we got into the way of making a half-pitying, half-contemptuous inquiry as to how he got on. “I hain’t struck it yet, boys,” he would answer cheerily, leaning on his spade, “but the bedrock lies deep just hereabouts, and I reckon we’ll get among the pay gravel to-day.” Day after day he returned the same reply with unvarying confidence and cheerfulness.

It was not long before he began to show us the stuff that was in him. One night the proceedings were unusually violent at the drinking saloon. A rich pocket had been struck during the day, and the striker was standing treat in a lavish and promiscuous fashion which had reduced three parts of the settlement to a state of wild intoxication. A crowd of drunken idlers stood or lay about the bar, cursing, swearing, shouting, dancing, and here and there firing their pistols into the air out of pure wantonness. From the interior of the shanty behind there came a similar chorus. Maule, Phillips, and the roughs who followed them were in the ascendant, and all order and decency was swept away.

Suddenly, amid this tumult of oaths and drunken cries, men became conscious of a quiet monotone which underlay all other sounds and obtruded itself at every pause in the uproar. Gradually first one man and then another paused to listen, until there was a general cessation of the hubbub, and every eye was turned in the direction whence this quiet stream of words flowed. There, mounted upon a barrel, was Elias B. Hopkins, the newest of the inhabitants of Jackman’s Gulch, with a good-humoured smile upon his resolute face.

He held an open Bible in his hand, and was reading aloud a passage taken at random — an extract from the Apocalypse, if I remember right. The words were entirely irrelevant and without the smallest bearing upon the scene before him, but he plodded on with great unction, waving his left hand slowly to the cadence of his words.

There was a general shout of laughter and applause at this apparition, and Jackman’s Gulch gathered round the barrel approvingly, under the impression that this was some ornate joke, and that they were about to be treated to some mock sermon or parody of the chapter read. When, however, the reader, having finished the chapter, placidly commenced another, and having finished that rippled on into another one, the revellers came to the conclusion that the joke was somewhat too long-winded. The commencement of yet another chapter confirmed this opinion, and an angry chorus of shouts and cries, with suggestions as to gagging the reader or knocking him off the barrel, rose from every side. In spite of roars and hoots, however, Elias B. Hopkins plodded away at the Apocalypse with the same serene countenance, looking as ineffably contented as though the babel around him were the most gratifying applause. Before long an occasional boot pattered against the barrel or whistled past our parson’s head; but here some of the more orderly of the inhabitants interfered in favour of peace and order, aided curiously enough by the afore-mentioned Maule and Phillips, who warmly espoused the cause of the little Scripture reader. “The little cus has got grit in him,” the latter explained, rearing his bulky red-shirted form between the crowd and the object of its anger. “His ways ain’t our ways, and we’re all welcome to our opinions, and to sling them round from barrels or otherwise if so minded. What I says and Bill says is, that when it comes to slingin’ boots instead o’ words it’s too steep by half, an’ if this man’s wronged we’ll chip in an’ see him righted.” This oratorical effort had the effect of checking the more active signs of disapproval, and the party of disorder attempted to settle down once more to their carouse, and to ignore the shower of Scripture which was poured upon them. The attempt was hopeless. The drunken portion fell asleep under the drowsy refrain, and the others, with many a sullen glance at the imperturbable reader, slouched off to their huts, leaving him still perched upon the barrel. Finding himself alone with the more orderly of the spectators, the little man rose, closed his book, after methodically marking with a lead pencil the exact spot at which he stopped, and descended from his perch. “To-morrow night, boys,” he remarked in his quiet voice, “the reading will commence at the 9th verse of the 15th chapter of the Apocalypse,” with which piece of information, disregarding our congratulations, he walked away with the air of a man who has performed an obvious duty.

We found that his parting words were no empty threat. Hardly had the crowd begun to assemble next night before he appeared once more upon the barrel and began to read with the same monotonous vigour, tripping over words! muddling up sentences, but still boring along through chapter after chapter. Laughter, threats, chaff — every weapon short of actual violence — was used to deter him, but all with the same want of success. Soon it was found that there was a method in his proceedings. When silence reigned, or when the conversation was of an innocent nature, the reading ceased. A single word of blasphemy, however, set it going again, and it would ramble on for a quarter of an hour or so, when it stopped, only to be renewed upon similar provocation. The reading was pretty continuous during that second night, for the language of the opposition was still considerably free. At least it was an improvement upon the night before.

For more than a month Elias B. Hopkins carried on this campaign. There he would sit, night after night, with the open book upon his knee, and at the slightest provocation off he would go, like a musical box when the spring is touched. The monotonous drawl became unendurable, but it could only be avoided by conforming to the parson's code. A chronic swearer came to be looked upon with disfavour by the community, since the punishment of his transgression fell upon all. At the end of a fortnight the reader was silent more than half the time, and at the end of the month his position was a sinecure.

Never was a moral revolution brought about more rapidly and more completely. Our parson carried his principle into private life. I have seen him, on hearing an unguarded word from some worker in the gulches, rush across, Bible in hand, and perching himself upon the heap of red clay which surmounted the offender's claim, drawl through the genealogical tree at the commencement of the New Testament in a most earnest and impressive manner, as though it were especially appropriate to the occasion. In time, an oath became a rare thing amongst us. Drunkenness was on the wane too. Casual travellers passing through the Gulch used to marvel at our state of grace, and rumours of it went as far as Ballarat, and excited much comment therein.

There were points about our evangelist which made him especially fitted for the work which he had undertaken. A man entirely without redeeming vices would have had no common basis on which to work, and no means of gaining the sympathy of his flock. As we came to know Elias B. Hopkins better, we discovered that in spite of his piety there was a leaven of old Adam in him, and that he had certainly known unregenerate days. He was no teetotaler. On the contrary, he could choose his liquor with discrimination, and lower it in an able manner. He played a masterly hand at poker, and there were few who could touch him at "cut-throat euchre." He and the two ex-ruffians, Phillips and Maule, used to play for hours in perfect harmony, except when the fall of the cards elicited an oath from one of his companions. At the first of these offences the parson would put on a pained smile, and gaze reproachfully at the culprit. At the second he would reach for his Bible, and the game was over for the evening. He showed us he was a good revolver shot too, for when we were practising at an empty brandy bottle outside Adams' bar, he took up a friend's pistol and hit it plumb in the centre at twenty-four paces. There were few things he took up that he could not make a show at apparently, except gold-digging, and at that he was the veriest duffer alive. It was pitiful to see the little canvas bag, with his name printed across it, lying placid and empty upon the shelf at Woburn's store, while all the other bags were increasing daily, and some had assumed quite a portly rotundity of form, for the weeks were slipping by, and it was almost time for the gold-train to start off for Ballarat. We reckoned that the amount which we had stored at the time represented the greatest sum which had ever been taken by a single convoy out of Jackman's Gulch.

Although Elias B. Hopkins appeared to derive a certain quiet satisfaction from the wonderful change which he had effected in the camp, his joy was not yet rounded and complete. There was one thing for which he still yearned. He opened his heart to us about it one evening.

"We'd have a blessing on the camp, boys," he said, "if we only had a service o' some sort on the Lord's day. It's a temptin' o' Providence to go on in this way without takin' any notice of it, except that maybe there's more whisky drunk and more card playin' than on any other day."

"We hain't got no parson," objected one of the crowd.

"Ye fool!" growled another, "hain't we got a man as is worth any three parsons, and can splash texts around like clay out o' a cradle. What more d'ye want?"

"We hain't got no church!" urged the same dissentient.

"Have it in the open air," one suggested.

"Or in Woburn's store," said another.

"Or in Adams' saloon."

The last proposal was received with a buzz of approval, which showed that it was considered the most appropriate locality.

Adams' saloon was a substantial wooden building in the rear of the bar, which was used partly for storing liquor and partly for a gambling saloon. It was strongly built of rough-hewn logs, the proprietor rightly judging, in the unregenerate days of Jackman's Gulch, that hogsheads of brandy and rum were commodities which had best be secured under lock and key. A strong door opened into each end of the saloon, and the interior was spacious enough, when the table and lumber were cleared away, to accommodate the whole population. The spirit barrels were heaped together at one end by their owner, so as to make a very fair imitation of a pulpit.

At first the Gulch took but a mild interest in the proceedings, but when it became known that Elias B. Hopkins intended, after reading the service, to address the audience, the settlement began to warm up to the occasion. A real sermon was a novelty to all of them, and one coming from their own parson was additionally so. Rumour announced that it would be interspersed with local hits, and that the moral would be pointed by pungent personalities. Men began to fear that they would be unable to gain seats, and many applications were made to the brothers Adams. It was only when conclusively shown that the saloon could contain them all with a margin that the camp settled down into calm expectancy.

It was as well that the building was of such a size, for the assembly upon the Sunday morning was the largest which had ever occurred in the annals of Jackman's Gulch. At first it was thought that the whole population was present, but a little reflection showed that this was not so. Maule and Phillips had gone on a prospecting journey among the hills, and had not returned as yet, and Woburn, the gold-keeper, was unable to leave his store. Having a very large quantity of the precious metal under his charge, he stuck to his post, feeling that the responsibility was too great to trifle with. With these three exceptions the whole of the Gulch, with clean red shirts, and such other additions to their toilet as the occasion demanded, sauntered in a straggling line along the clayey pathway which led up to the saloon.

The interior of the building had been provided with rough benches, and the parson, with his quiet good-humoured smile, was standing at the door to welcome them. "Good morning, boys," he cried cheerily, as each group came lounging up. "Pass in; pass in. You'll find this is as good a morning's work as any you've done. Leave your pistols in this barrel outside the door as you pass; you can pick them out as you come out again, but it isn't the thing to carry weapons into the house of peace." His request was good-humouredly complied with, and before the last of the congregation filed in, there was a strange assortment of knives and firearms in this depository. When all had assembled, the doors were shut, and the service began — the first and the last which was ever performed at Jackman's Gulch.

The weather was sultry and the room close, yet the miners listened with exemplary patience. There was a sense of novelty in the situation which had its attractions. To some it was entirely new, others were wafted back by it to another land and other days. Beyond a disposition which was exhibited by the uninitiated to applaud at the end of certain prayers, by way of showing that they sympathised with the sentiments expressed, no audience could have behaved better. There was a murmur of interest, however, when Elias B. Hopkins, looking down on the congregation from his rostrum of casks, began his address.

He had attired himself with care in honour of the occasion. He wore a velveteen tunic, girt round the waist with a sash of china silk, a pair of moleskin trousers, and held his cabbage-tree hat in his left hand. He began speaking in a low tone, and it was noticed at the time that he frequently glanced through the small aperture which served for a window which was placed above the heads of those who sat beneath him.

"I've put you straight now," he said, in the course of his address; "I've got you in the right rut if you will but stick in it." Here he looked very hard out of the window for some seconds. "You've learned soberness and industry, and with those things you can always make up any loss you may sustain. I guess there isn't one of ye that won't remember my visit to this camp." He paused for a moment, and three revolver shots rang out upon the quiet summer air. "Keep your seats, damn ye!" roared our preacher, as his audience rose in excitement. "If a man of ye moves down he goes! The door's locked on the outside, so ye can't get out anyhow. Your seats, ye canting, chuckle-headed fools! Down with ye, ye dogs, or I'll fire among ye!"

Astonishment and fear brought us back into our seats, and we sat staring blankly at our pastor and each other. Elias B. Hopkins, whose whole face and even figure appeared to have undergone an extraordinary alteration, looked fiercely down on us from his commanding position, with a contemptuous smile on his stern face.

"I have your lives in my hands," he remarked; and we noticed as he spoke that he held a heavy revolver in his hand, and that the butt of another one protruded from his sash. "I am armed and you are not. If one of you moves or speaks he is a dead man. If not, I shall not harm you. You must wait here for an hour. Why, you FOOLS" (this with a hiss of contempt which rang in our ears for many a long day), "do you know who it is that has stuck you up? Do you know who it is that has been playing it upon you for months as a parson and a saint? Conky Jim, the bushranger, ye apes. And Phillips and Maule were my two right-hand men. They're off into the hills with your gold —— Ha! would ye?" This to some restive member of the audience, who quieted down instantly before the fierce eye and the ready weapon of the bushranger. "In an hour they will be clear of any pursuit, and I advise you to make the best of it, and not to follow, or you may lose more than your money. My horse is tethered outside this door behind me. When the time is up I shall pass through it, lock it on the outside, and be off. Then you may break your way out as best you can. I have no more to say to you, except that ye are the most cursed set of asses that ever trod in boot-leather."

We had time to endorse mentally this outspoken opinion during the long sixty minutes which followed; we were powerless before the resolute desperado. It is true that if we made a simultaneous rush we might bear him down at the cost of eight or ten of our number. But how could such a rush be organised without speaking, and who would attempt it without a previous agreement that he would be supported? There was nothing for it but submission. It seemed three hours at the least before the ranger snapped up his watch, stepped down from the barrel, walked backwards, still covering us with his weapon, to the door behind him, and then passed rapidly through it. We heard the creaking of the rusty lock, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs, as he galloped away.

It has been remarked that an oath had, for the last few weeks, been a rare thing in the camp. We made up for our temporary abstention during the next half-hour. Never was heard such symmetrical and heartfelt blasphemy. When at last we succeeded in getting the door off its hinges all sight of both rangers and treasure had disappeared, nor have we ever caught sight of either the one or the other since. Poor Woburn, true to his trust, lay shot through the head across the threshold of his empty store. The villains, Maule and Phillips, had descended upon the camp the instant that we had been enticed into the trap, murdered the keeper, loaded up a small cart with the booty, and got safe away to some wild fastness among the mountains, where they were joined by their wily leader.

Jackman's Gulch recovered from this blow, and is now a flourishing township. Social reformers are not in request there, however, and morality is at a discount. It is said that an inquest has been held lately upon an unoffending stranger who chanced to remark that in so large a place it would be advisable to have some form of Sunday service. The memory of their one and only pastor is still green among the inhabitants, and will be for many a long year to come.

MY FRIEND THE MURDERER

"Number 43 is no better, doctor," said the head warder, in a slightly reproachful accent, looking in round the corner of my door.

"Confound 43!" I responded from behind the pages of the Australian Sketcher.

"And 61 says his tubes are paining him. Couldn't you do anything for him?"

"He is a walking drug-shop," said I. "He has the whole British pharmacopoeia inside him. I believe his tubes are as sound as yours are."

"Then there's 7 and 108, they are chronic," continued the warder, glancing down a blue slip of paper "And 28 knocked off work yesterday — said lifting things gave him a stitch in his side. I want you to have a look at him, if you don't mind, doctor. There's 31 too — him that killed John Adamson in the Corinthian brig — he's been carrying on awful in the night, shrieking and yelling, he has, and no stopping him either."

"All right, I'll have a look at him afterward," I said, tossing my paper carelessly aside, and pouring myself a cup of coffee. "Nothing else to report, I suppose, warder?"

The official protruded his head a little further into the room. "Beg pardon, doctor," he said, in a confidential tone, "but I notice as 82 has a bit of a cold, and it would be a good excuse for you to visit him and have a chat, maybe."

The cup of coffee was arrested half-way to my lips as I stared in amazement at the man's serious face.

"An excuse?" I said. "An excuse? What the deuce are you talking about, McPherson? You see me trudging about all day at my practice, when I'm not looking after the prisoners, and coming back every night as tired as a dog, and you talk about finding an excuse for doing more work."

"You'd like it, doctor," said Warder McPherson, insinuating one of his shoulders into the room. "That man's story's worth listening to if you could get him to tell it, though he's not what you'd call free in his speech. Maybe you don't know who 82 is?"

"No, I don't, and I don't care either," I answered, in the conviction that some local ruffian was about to be foisted upon me as a celebrity.

“He’s Maloney,” said the warder, “him that turned Queen’s evidence after the murders at blue-mansdyke.”

“You don’t say so?” I ejaculated, laying down my cup in astonishment. I had heard of this ghastly series of murders, and read an account of them in a London magazine long before setting foot in the colony. I remembered that the atrocities committed had thrown the Burke and Hare crimes completely into the shade, and that one of the most villainous of the gang had saved his own skin by betraying his companions. “Are you sure?” I asked.”

“Oh, yes, it’s him right enough. Just you draw him out a bit, and he’ll astonish you. He’s a man to know, is Maloney; that’s to say, in moderation;” and the head grinned, bobbed, and disappeared, leaving me to finish my breakfast and ruminate over what I had heard.

The surgeonship of an Australian prison is not an enviable position. It may be endurable in Melbourne or Sydney, but the little town of Perth has few attractions to recommend it, and those few had been long exhausted. The climate was detestable, and the society far from congenial. Sheep and cattle were the staple support of the community; and their prices, breeding, and diseases the principal topic of conversation. Now as I, being an outsider, possessed neither the one nor the other, and was utterly callous to the new “dip” and the “rot” and other kindred topics, I found myself in a state of mental isolation, and was ready to hail anything which might relieve the monotony of my existence. Maloney, the murderer, had at least some distinctiveness and individuality in his character, and might act as a tonic to a mind sick of the commonplaces of existence. When, therefore, I went upon my usual matutinal round, I turned the lock of the door which bore the convict’s number upon it, and walked into the cell.

The man was lying in a heap upon his rough bed as I entered, but, uncoiling his long limbs, he started up and stared at me with an insolent look of defiance on his face which augured badly for our interview. He had a pale, set face, with sandy hair and a steely-blue eye, with something feline in its expression. His frame was tall and muscular, though there was a curious bend in his shoulders, which almost amounted to a deformity. An ordinary observer meeting him in the street might have put him down as a well-developed man, fairly handsome, and of studious habits — even in the hideous uniform of the rottenest convict establishment he imparted a certain refinement to his carriage which marked him out among the inferior ruffians around him.

"I'm not on the sick-list," he said, gruffly. There was something in the hard, rasping voice which dispelled all softer illusions, and made me realise that I was face to face with the man of the Lena Valley and Bluemansdyke, the bloodiest bushranger that ever stuck up a farm or cut the throats of its occupants.

"I know you're not," I answered. "Warder McPherson told me you had a cold, though, and I thought I'd look in and see you."

"Blast Warder McPherson, and blast you, too!" yelled the convict, in a paroxysm of rage. "Oh, that's right," he added in a quieter voice; "hurry away; report me to the governor, do! Get me another six months or so — that's your game."

"I'm not going to report you," I said.

"Eight square feet of ground," he went on, disregarding my protest, and evidently working himself into a fury again. "Eight square feet, and I can't have that without being talked to and stared at, and — oh, blast the whole crew of you!" and he raised his two clinched hands above his head and shook them in passionate invective.

"You've got a curious idea of hospitality," I remarked, determined not to lose my temper, and saying almost the first thing that came to my tongue.

To my surprise the words had an extraordinary effect upon him. He seemed completely staggered at my assuming the proposition for which he had been so fiercely contending — namely, that the room in which he stood was his own."

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I didn't mean to be rude. Won't you take a seat?" and he motioned toward a rough trestle, which formed the headpiece of his couch.

I sat down, rather astonished at the sudden change. I don't know that I liked Maloney better under this new aspect. The murderer had, it is true, disappeared for the nonce, but there was something in the smooth tones and obsequious manner which powerfully suggested that the witness of the queen, who had stood up and sworn away the lives of his companions in crime.

"How's your chest?" I asked, putting on my professional air.

"Come, drop it, doctor — drop it!" he answered, showing a row of white teeth as he resumed his seat upon the side of the bed. "It wasn't anxiety after my precious health that brought you along here; that story won't wash at all. You came to have a look at Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, murderer, Sydney-slider, ranger, and government peach. That's about my figure, ain't it? There it is, plain and straight; there's nothing mean about me."

He paused as if he expected me to say something; but I remained silent, he repeated once or twice, "There's nothing mean about me."

"And why shouldn't I?" he suddenly yelled, his eyes gleaming and his whole satanic nature reasserting itself. "We were bound to swing, one and all, and they were none the worse if I saved myself by turning against them. Every man for himself, say I, and the devil take the luckiest. You haven't a plug of tobacco, doctor, have you?"

He tore at the piece of "Barrett's" which I handed him, as ravenously as a wild beast. It seemed to have the effect of soothing his nerves, for he settled himself down in the bed and reassumed his former deprecating manner.

"You wouldn't like it yourself, you know, doctor," he said: "it's enough to make any man a little queer in his temper. I'm in for six months this time for assault, and very sorry I shall be to go out again, I can tell you. My mind's at ease in here; but when I'm outside, what with the government and what with Tattooed Tom, of Hawkesbury, there's no chance of a quiet life."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He's the brother of John Grimthorpe, the same that was condemned on my evidence; and an infernal scamp he was, too! Spawn of the devil, both of them! This tattooed one is a murderous ruffian, and he swore to have my blood after that trial. It's seven years ago, and he's following me yet; I know he is, though he lies low and keeps dark. He came up to me in Ballarat in '75: you can see on the back of my hand here where the bullet chipped me. He tried again in '76, at Port Philip, but I got the drop on him and wounded him badly. He knifed me in '79, though, in a bar at Adelaide, and that made our account about level. He's loafing round again now, and he'll let daylight into me — unless — unless by some extraordinary chance some one does as much for him." And Maloney gave me a very ugly smile.

"I don't complain of him so much," he continued. "Looking at it in his way, no doubt it is a sort of family mater that can hardly be neglected. It's the government that fetches me. When I think of what I've done for this country, and then of what this country has done for me, it makes me fairly wild — clean drives me off my head. There's no gratitude nor common decency left, doctor!"

He brooded over his wrongs for a few minutes, and then proceeded to lay them before me in detail.

“Here’s nine men,” he said; “they’ve been murdering and killing for a matter of three years, and maybe a life a week wouldn’t more than average the work that they’ve done. The government tries them, but they can’t convict; and why? — because the witnesses have all had their throats cut, and the whole job’s been very neatly done. What happens then? Up comes a citizen called Wolf Tone Maloney; he says ‘The country needs me, and here I am.’ And with that he gives his evidence, convicts the lot, and enables the beaks to hang them. That’s what I did. There’s nothing mean about me! And now what does the country do in return? Dogs me, sir, spies on me, watches me night and day, turns against the very man that worked so very hard for it. There’s something mean about that, anyway. I didn’t expect them to knight me, nor to make me colonial secretary; but, blast it! I did expect that they would let me alone!”

“Well,” I remonstrated, “if you choose to break laws and assault people, you can’t expect it to be looked over on account of former services.”

“I don’t refer to my present imprisonment, sir,” said Maloney, with dignity. “It’s the life I’ve been leading since that cursed trial that takes the soul out of me. Just you sit there on that trestle, and I’ll tell you all about it; and then look me in the face and tell me that I’ve been treated fair by the police.”

I shall endeavor to transcribe the experience of the convict in his own words, as far as I can remember them, preserving his curious perversions of right and wrong. I can answer for the truth of his facts, whatever may be said for his deductions from them. Months afterward, Inspector H. W. Hann, formerly governor of the jail at Dunedin, showed me entries in his ledger which corroborated every statement. Maloney reeled the story off in a dull, monotonous voice, with his head sunk upon his breast and his hands between his knees. The glitter of his serpent-like eyes was the only sign of the emotions which were stirred up by the recollection of the events which he narrated.

You’ve read of Bluemansdyke (he began, with some pride in his tone). We made it hot while it lasted; but they ran us to earth at last, and a trap called Braxton, with a damned Yankee, took the lot of us. That was in New Zealand, of course, and they took us down to Dunedin, and there they were convicted and hanged. One and all they put up their hands in the dock, and cursed me till your blood would have run cold to hear them — which was scurvy treatment, seeing that we had all been pals together; but they were a blackguard lot, and thought only of themselves. I think it is as well that they were hung.

They took me back to Dunedin Jail, and clamped me into the old cell. The only difference they made was, that I had no work to do and was well fed. I stood this for a week or two, until one day the governor was making his rounds, and I put the matter to him.

"How's this?" I said. "My conditions were a free pardon, and you're keeping me here against the law."

He gave a sort of a smile. "Should you like very much to get out?" he asked.

"So much," said I, "that unless you open that door I'll have an action against you for illegal detention."

He seemed a bit astonished by my resolution.

"You're very anxious to meet your death," he said.

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Come here, and you'll know what I mean," he answered. And he led me down the passage to a window that overlooked the door of the prison. "Look at that!" said he.

I looked out, and there were a dozen or so rough-looking fellows standing outside the street, some of them smoking, some playing cards on the pavement. When they saw me they gave a yell and crowded round the door, shaking their fists and hooting.

"They wait for you, watch and watch about," said the governor. "They're the executive of the vigilance committee. However, since you are determined to go, I can't stop you."

"D'ye call this a civilised land," I cried, "and let a man be murdered in cold blood in open daylight?"

When I said this the governor and the warder and every fool in the place grinned, as if a man's life was a rare good joke.

"You've got the law on your side," says the governor; "so we won't detain you any longer. Show him out, warder."

He'd have done it, too, the black-hearted villain, if I hadn't begged and prayed and offered to pay for my board and lodging, which is more than any prisoner ever did before me. He let me stay on those conditions; and for three months I was caged up there with every larrikin in the township clamoring at the other side of the wall. That was pretty treatment for a man that had served his country!

At last, one morning up came the governor again.

“Well, Maloney,” he said, “how long are you going to honor us with your society?”

I could have put a knife into his cursed body, and would, too, if we had been alone in the bush; but I had to smile, and smooth him and flatter, for I feared that he might have me sent out.

“You’re an infernal rascal,” he said; those were his very words, to a man that had helped him all he knew how. “I don’t want any rough justice here, though; and I think I see my way to getting you out of Dunedin.”

“I’ll never forget you, governor,” said I’ and, by God! I never will!

“I don’t want your thanks nor your gratitude,” he answered; “it’s not for your sake that I do it, but simply to keep order in the town. There’s a steamer starts from the West Quay to Melbourne to-morrow, and we’ll get you aboard it. She is advertised at five in the morning, so have yourself in readiness.”

I packed up the few things I had, and was smuggled out by a back door, just before daybreak. I hurried down, took my ticket under the name of Isaac Smith, and got safely aboard the Melbourne boat. I remember hearing her screw grinding into the water as the warps were cast loose, and looking back at the lights of Dunedin as I leaned upon the bulwarks, with the pleasant thought that I was leaving them behind me forever. It seemed to me that a new world was before me, and that all my troubles had been cast off. I went down below and had some coffee, and came up again feeling better than I had done since the morning that I woke to find that cursed Irishman that took me standing over me with a six-shooter.

Day had dawned by that time, and we were steaming along by the coast, well out of sight of Dunedin. I loafed about for a couple of hours, and when the sun got well up some of the other passengers came on deck and joined me. One of them, a little perky sort of fellow, took a good long look at me, and then came over and began talking.

“Mining, I suppose?” says he.

“Yes,” I says.

“Made your pile?” he says.

“Pretty fair,” says I.

“I was at it myself,” he says; “I worked at the Nelson fields for three months, and spent all I made in buying a salted claim which busted up the second day. I went at it again, though, and struck it rich; but when the gold wagon was going down to the settlements, it was stuck up by those cursed rangers, and not a red cent left."

"That was a bad job," I says.

"Broke me — ruined me clean. Never mind, I've seen them all hanged for it; that makes it easier to bear. There's only one left — the villain that gave the evidence. I'd die happy if I could come across him. There were two things I have to do if I meet him."

"What's that?" says I, carelessly.

"I've got to ask him where the money lies — they never had time to make away with it, and it's cached somewhere in the mountains — and then I've got to stretch his neck for him, and send his soul down to join the men that he betrayed."

It seemed to me that I knew something about that cache, and I felt like laughing; but he was watching me, and it struck me that he had a nasty, vindictive kind of mind.

"I'm going up on the bridge," I said, for he was not a man whose acquaintance I cared much about making.

He wouldn't hear of my leaving him, though.

"We're both miners," he says, "and we're pals for the voyage. Come down to the bar. I'm not too poor to shout."

I couldn't refuse him well, and we went down together; and that was the beginning of the trouble.. What harm was I doing any one on the ship? All I asked for was a quiet life, leaving others alone and getting left alone myself. No man could ask fairer than that. And now just you listen to what came of it.

We were passing the front of the ladies' cabin, on our way to the saloon, when out comes a servant lass — a freckled currency she-devil — with a baby in her arms. We were brushing past her, when she gave a scream like a railway whistle, and nearly dropped the kid. My nerves gave a sort of jump when I heard that scream, but I turned and begged her pardon, letting on that I thought I might have trod on her foot. I knew the game was up, though, when I saw her white face, and her leaning against the door and pointing.

"It's him!" she cried; "It's him! I saw him in the court-house. Oh, don't let him hurt the baby!"

"Who is it?" asked the steward and half a dozen others in a breath.

“It’s him — Maloney — Maloney, the murderer — oh, take him away — take him away!”

I don’t rightly remember what happened just at that moment. The furniture and me seemed to get kind of mixed, and there was cursing, and smashing, and some one shouting for his gold, and a general stamping round. When I got steadied a bit, I found somebody’s hand in my mouth. From what I gathered afterward, I concluded that it belonged to that same little man with the vicious way of talking. He got some of it out again, but that was because the others were choking me. A poor chap can get no fair play in this world when once he is down — still, I think he will remember me till the day of his death — longer, I hope.

They dragged me out on to the poop and held a damned court-martial — on me, mind you that had thrown over my pals in order to serve them. What were they to do with me? Some said this, some said that; but it ended by the captain deciding to send me ashore. The ship stopped, they lowered a boat, and I was hoisted in, the whole gang of them hooting at me from over the bulwarks. I saw the man I spoke of tying up his hand, though, and I felt that things might be worse.

I changed my opinion before we got to land. I had reckoned on the shore being deserted, and that I might make my way inland; but the ship had stopped too near the Heads, and a dozen beachcombers and such like had come down to the water’s edge and were staring at us, wondering what the boat was after. When we got to the edge of the surf the cockswain hailed them, and after singing out who I was, he and his men threw me into the water. You may well look surprised — neck and crop into ten feet of water, with sharks as thick as green parrots in the bush, and I heard them laughing as I floundered to the shore.

I soon saw it was a worse job than ever. As I came scrambling out through the weeds, I was collared by a big chap with a velveteen coat, and half a dozen others got round me and held me fast. Most of them looked simple fellows enough, and I was not afraid of them; but there was one in a cabbage-tree hat that had a very nasty expression on his face, and the big man seemed to be chummy with him.

The dragged me up the beach, and then they let go their hold of me and stood round in a circle.

“Well, mate,” says the man with the hat, “we’ve been looking out for you some time in these parts.”

“And very good of you, too,” I answers.

“None of your jaw,” says he, “Come, boys what shall it be — hanging, drowning, or shooting? Look sharp!”

This looked a bit too like business. “No, you don’t” I said. “I’ve got government protection and it’ll be murder.”

“That’s what they call it,” answered the one in the velveteen coat, as cheery as a piping crow.

“And you’re going to murder me for being a ranger?”

“Ranger be damned!” said the man. “We’re going to hang you for peaching against your pals; and that’s an end of the palaver.”

They slung a rope round my neck and dragged me up to the edge of the bush. There were some big she-oaks and blue-gums, and they pitched on one of these for the wicked deed. They ran the rope over a branch, tied my hands, and told me to say my prayers. It seemed as if it was all up; but Providence interfered to save me. It sounds nice enough sitting here and telling about it, sir; but it was sick work to stand with nothing but the beach in front of you, and the long white line of surf, with the steamer in the distance, and a set of bloody-minded villains round you thirsting for your life.

I never thought I’d owe anything good to the police; but they saved me that time. A troop of them were riding from Hawkes Point Station to Dunedin, and hearing that something was up, they came down through the bush and interrupted the proceedings. I’ve heard some bands in my time, doctor, but I never heard music like the jingle of those traps’ spurs and harness as they galloped out on to the open. They tried to hang me even then, but the police were too quick for them; and the man with the hat got one over the head with the flat of a sword. I was clapped on to a horse, and before evening I found myself in my old quarters in the city jail.

The governor wasn’t to be done, though. He was determined to get rid of me, and I was equally anxious to see the last of him. He waited a week or so until the excitement had begun to die away, and then he smuggled me aboard a three-mastered schooner bound to Sydney with tallow and hides.

We got far away to sea without a hitch, and things began to look a bit more rosy. I made sure that I had seen the last of the prison, anyway. The crew had a sort of an idea who I was, and if there’d been any rough weather, they’d have hove me overboard, like enough; for they were a rough, ignorant lot, and had a notion that I brought bad luck to the ship. We had a good passage, however, and I was landed safe and sound upon Sydney Quay.

Now just you listen to what happened next. You'd have thought they would have been sick of ill-using me and following me by this time — wouldn't you, now? Well, just you listen. It seems that a cursed steamer started from Dunedin to Sydney on the very day we left, and got in before us, bringing news that I was coming. Blessed if they hadn't called a meeting — a regular mass-meeting — at the docks to discuss about it, and I was marched right into it when I landed. They didn't take long about arresting me, and I listened to all the speeches and resolutions. If I'd been a prince there couldn't have been more excitement. The end of all was that they agreed that it wasn't right that New Zealand should be allowed to foist her criminals upon her neighbours, and that I was to be sent back again by the next boat. So they posted me off again as if I was a damned parcel; and after another eight-hundred-mile journey I found myself back for the third time moving in the place that I was started from.

By the time I had begun to think that I was going to spend the rest of my existence traveling about from one port to another. Every man's hand seemed turned against me, and there was no peace or quiet in any direction. I was about sick of it by the time I had come back; and if I could have taken to the bush I'd have done it, and chanced it with my old pals. They were too quick for me, though, and kept me under lock and key; but I managed, in spite of them, to negotiate that cache I told you of, and sewed the gold up in my belt. I spent another month in jail, and then they shipped me abroad a bark that was bound for England.

This time the crew never knew who I was, but the captain had a pretty good idea, though he didn't let on to me that he had any suspicions. I guessed from the first that the man was a villain. We had a fair passage, except a gale or two off the Cape; and I began to feel like a free man when I saw the blue loom of the old country, and the saucy little pilot-boat from Falmouth dancing toward us over the waves. We ran down the Channel, and before we reached Gravesend I had agreed with the pilot that he should take me ashore with him when he left. It was at this time that the captain showed me that I was right in thinking him a meddling, disagreeable man. I got my things packed, such as they were, and left him talking earnestly to the pilot, while I went below for my breakfast. When I came up again we were fairly into the mouth of the river, and the boat in which I was to have gone ashore had left us. The skipper said the pilot had forgotten me; but that was too thin, and I began to fear that all my old troubles were going to commence once more.

It was not long before my suspicions were confirmed. A boat darted out from the side of the river, and a tall cove with a long black beard came aboard. I heard him ask the mate whether they didn't need a mud-pilot to take them up in the reaches, but it seemed to me that he was a man who would know a deal more about handcuffs than he did about steering, so I kept away from him. He came across the deck, however, and made some remark to me, taking a good look at me the while. I didn't like inquisitive people at any time, but an inquisitive stranger with glue about the roots of his beard is the worst of all to stand, especially under the circumstances. I began to feel that it was time for me to go.

I soon got a chance, and made good use of it. A big collier came athwart the bows of our steamer, and we had to slacken down to dead slow. There was a barge astern, and I slipped down by a rope and was into the barge before any one missed me. Of course I had to leave my luggage behind me, but I had the belt with the nuggets round my waist, and the chance of shaking the police off my track was worth more than a couple of boxes. It was clear to me now that the pilot had been a traitor, as well as the captain, and had set the detectives after me. I often wish I could drop across those two men again.

I hung about the barge all day as she drifted down the stream. There was one man in her, but she was a big, ugly craft, and his hands were too full for much looking about. Toward evening, when it got a bit dusky, I struck out for the shore, and found myself in a sort of marsh place, a good many miles to the east of London. I was soaking wet and half dead with hunger, but I trudged into the town, got a new rig-out at a slop-hot, and after having some supper, engaged a bed at the quietest lodgings I could find.

I woke pretty early — a habit you pick up in the bush — and lucky for me that I did so. The very first thing I saw when I took a look through a chink in the shutter was one of those infernal policemen, standing right opposite and staring up at the windows. He hadn't epaulets nor a sword, like our traps, but for all that there was a sort of family likeness, and the same busybody expression. Whether they followed me all the time, or whether the woman that let me the bed didn't like the looks of me, is more than I have ever been able to find out. He came across as I was watching him, and noted down the address of the house in a book. I was afraid that he was going to ring at the bell, but I suppose his orders were simply to keep an eye on me, for after another good look at the windows he moved on down the street.

I saw that my only chance was to act at once. I threw on my clothes, opened the window softly, and, after making sure that there was nobody about, dropped out onto the ground and made off as hard as I could run. I traveled a matter of two or three miles, when my wind gave out; and as I saw a big building with people going in and out, I went in too, and found that it was a railway station. A train was just going off for Dover to meet the French boat, so I took a ticket and jumped into a third-class carriage.

There were a couple of other chaps in the carriage, innocent-looking young beggars, both of them. They began speaking about his and that, while I sat quiet in the corner and listened. Then they started on England and foreign countries, and such like. Look ye now, doctor, this is a fact. One of them begins jawing about the justice of England's laws. "It's all fair and above-board," says he; "there ain't any secret police, nor spying, like they have abroad," and a lot more of the same sort of wash. Rather rough on me, wasn't it, listening to the damned young fool, with the police following me about like my shadow?

I got to Paris right enough, and there I changed some of my gold, and for a few days I imagined I'd shaken them off, and began to think of settling down for a bit of rest. I needed it by that time, for I was looking more like a ghost than a man. You've never had the police after you, I suppose? Well, you needn't look offended, I didn't mean any harm. If ever you had you'd know that it wastes a man away like a sheep with the rot.

I went to the opera one night and took a box, for I was coming out between the acts when I met a fellow lounging along in the passage. The light fell on his face, and I saw that it was the mud-pilot that had boarded us in the Thames. His beard was gone, but I recognised the man at a glance, for I've a good memory for faces.

I tell you, doctor, I felt desperate for a moment. I could have knifed him if we had been alone, but he knew me well enough never to give me the chance. It was more then I could stand any longer, so I went right up to him and drew him aside, where we'd be free from all the lundgers and theater-goers.

"How long are you going to keep it up?" I asked him.

He seemed a bit flustered for a moment, but then he saw there was no use beating about the bush, so he answered straight;

"Until you go back to Australia," he said.

"Don't you know," I said, "that I have served the government and got a free pardon?"

He grinned all over his ugly face when I said this.

"We know all about you, Maloney," he answered. "If you want a quiet life, just you go back where you came from. If you stay here, you're a marked man; and when you are found tripping it'll be a lifer for you, at the least. Free trade's a fine thing but the market's too full of men like you for us to need to import any."

It seemed to me that there was something in what he said, though he had a nasty way of putting it. For some days back I'd been feeling a sort of home sick. The ways of the people weren't my ways. They stared at me in the street; and if I dropped into a oar, they'd stop talking and edge away a bit, as if I was a wild beast. I'd sooner have had a pint of old Stringybark, too, than a bucketful of their rot-gut liquors. There was too much damned propriety. What was the use of having money if you couldn't dress as you liked, nor bust in properly? There was no sympathy for a man if he shot about a little when he was half-over. I've seen a man dropped at Nelson many a time with less row than they'd make over a broken window-pane. The thing was slow, and I was sick of it.

"You want me to go back?" I said.

"I've my order to stick fast to you until you do," he answered.

"Well," I said, "I don't care if I do. All I bargain is that you keep your mouth shut and don't let on who I am, so that I may have a fair start when I get there."

He agreed to this, and we went over to Southampton the very next day, where he saw me safely off once more. I took a passage round to Adelaide, where no one was likely to know me; and there I settled, right under the nose of the police. Id been there ever since, leading a quiet life,' but for little difficulties like the one I'm in for now, and for that devil, Tattooed Tom, of Hawkesbury. I don't know what made me tell you all this, doctor, unless it is that being lonely makes a man inclined to jaw when he gets a chance. Just you take warning from me, though. Never put yourself out to serve your country; for your country will do precious little for you. Just you let them look after their own affairs; and if they find difficulty in hanging a set of scoundrels, never mind chipping in, but let them alone to do as best they can. Maybe they'll remember how they treated me after I'm dead, and be sorry for neglecting me. I was rude to you when you came in, and swore a trifle promiscuous: but don't you mind me, it's only my way. You'll allow, though, that I have cause to be a bit touchy now and again when I think of all that's passed. You're not going, are you? Well, if you must, you must; but I hope you will look me up at odd times when you are going your rounds. Oh, I say, you've left the balance of that cake of tobacco behind you, haven't you? No: it's in your pocket — that's all right. Thank ye doctor, you're a good sort, and as quick as a hint as any man I've met.

A couple of months after narrating his experiences, Wolf Tone Maloney finished his term, and was released. For a long time I neither saw him nor heard of him, and he had almost slipped from my memory, until I was reminded, in a somewhat tragic manner, of his existence. I had been attending a patient some distance off in the country, and was riding back, guiding my tired horse among the boulders which strewed the pathway, and endeavoring to see my way through the gathering darkness, when I came suddenly upon a little wayside inn. As I walked my horse up toward the door, intending to make sure of my bearings before proceeding further, I heard the sound of a violent altercation within the little bar. There seemed to be a chorus of expostulation or remonstrance, above which two powerful voices rang out loud and angry. As I listened, there was a momentary hush, two pistol shots sounded almost simultaneously, and with a crash the door burst open and a pair of dark figures staggered out into the moonlight. They struggled for a moment in a deadly wrestle, and then went down together among the loose stones. I had sprung off my horse, and, with the help of half a dozen rough fellows from the bar, dragged them away from one another.

A glance was sufficient to convince me that one of them was drying fast. He was a thick-set burly fellow, with a determined cast of countenance. The blood was welling from a deep stab in his throat, and it was evident that an important artery had been divided. I turned away from him in despair, and walked over to where his antagonist was lying. He was shot through the lungs, but managed to raise himself up on his hand as I approached, and peered anxiously up into my face. To my surprise, I saw before me the haggard features and flaxen hair of my prison acquaintance, Maloney.

"Ah, doctor!" he said, recognising me. "How is he? Will he die?"

He asked the question so earnestly that I imagined he had softened at the last moment, and feared to leave the world with another homicide upon his conscience. Truth, however, compelled me to shake my head mournfully, and to intimate that the wound would prove a mortal one.

Maloney gave a wild cry of triumph, which brought the blood welling out from between his lips. “Here, boys,” he gasped to the little group around him. “There’s money in my inside pocket. Damn the expense! Drinks round. There’s nothing mean about me. I’d drink with you, but I’m going. Give the doc my share, for he’s as good — -” Here his head fell back with a thud, his eye glazed, and the soul of Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, convict, ranger, murderer, and government peach, drifted away into the Great Unknown.

I cannot conclude without borrowing the account of the fatal quarrel which appeared in the columns of the West Australian Sentinel. The curious will find it in the issue of October 4, 1881:

“FATAL AFFRAY. — W. T. Maloney, a well-known citizen of New Montrose, and proprietor of the Yellow Boy gambling saloon, has met with his death under rather painful circumstances. Mr. Maloney was a man who had led a checkered existence, and whose past history is replete with interest. Some of our readers may recall the Lena Village murders, in which he figured as the principal criminal. It is conjectured that during the seven months that he owned a bar in that region, from twenty to thirty travelers were hocussed and made away with. He succeeded, however, in evading the vigilance of the officers of the law, and allied himself with the bushrangers of Bluemansdyke, whose heroic capture and subsequent execution are matters of history. Maloney extricated himself from the fate which awaited him by turning Queen’s evidence. He afterward visited Europe, but returned to West Australia, where he has long played a prominent part in local matters. On Friday evening he encountered an old enemy, Thomas Grimthorpe, commonly known as Tattooed Tom, of Hawkesbury. Shots were exchanged, and both were badly wounded, only surviving a few minutes. Mr. Maloney had the reputation of being not only the most wholesale murderer that ever lived, but also of having a finish and attention to detail in matters of evidence which has been unapproached by any European criminal. Sic transit gloria mundi!”

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, I being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote down the following words in my note-book — the result of much mental perturbation and conflict:

“The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death — a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John M’Vittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic discs, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even — save the mark! — puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance.”

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. At last, however, came a time when my uncle, M’Vittie of Glencairn, died — the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time the owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast, of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England: Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the coast of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, greystone building — when erected or wherefore none could tell me — and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the M’Leods, who were fisherfolk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir-trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that

Dalton’s atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant — all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who, while digging for gold, have turned up many worms, and then exhibit them exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the “mad laird o’ Mansie.” It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathize with There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in, with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jagged back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the “ragged reef o’ Mansie.” When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and peering over the edge I

have seen far down the flickering, ghostly forms of great fish — fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalist never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored o’er, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o’clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and seaweed were pattering up against my attic window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when,

about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the wheezy voice of my housekeeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

"Eh, maister, maister!" she screamed in her hateful dialect. "Come doun, mun; come doun! There's a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a' yammerin' and ca'in' for help — and I doobt they'll a' be drooned. Oh, Maister M'Vittie, come down!"

"Hold your tongue, you hag!" I shouted, back in a passion. "What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone." I turned in again and drew the blankets over me. "Those men out there," I said to myself, "have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best therefore that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution." With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man's eternal and ever-changing career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrollable impulse, I rose, dressed, and having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me, dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and shading my eyes with my hands to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to

such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man, who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back and his head was sunk upon his breast, but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety, but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where he could see my dark figure upon the beach, his self-respect or some other reason forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman,

with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this, but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and leaning over he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger? I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madness had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over, I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me, I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of fagots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of, “Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie” from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young — at the most nineteen, with a pale somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge’s garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I strode heavily up the pathway, she put out her hands with a pretty child-like gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt; and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully. “What country do you come from?” I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

“Francais?” I asked. “Deutsch?” “Espagnol?” — each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality. Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat, and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word “Archangel,” painted in strange, quaint lettering. “So,” I thought, as I paddled slowly back, “this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!” It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house, I pronounced the word “Archangel” several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognise it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at mid-day for some food she was sitting by the table with a needle and thread, mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of her chair with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive shrill voice some uncouth barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, “Come in, you young fiend, come in and be silent”, but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words “Sophie Ramusine” upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young, hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent information to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me and pry, and peep, and chatter — a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw to my great surprise a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair, and short, curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden earrings in his ears — the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red-flannel shirt, and high sea boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognised him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

“Hullo” I said, in an aggrieved voice. “You got ashore all right, then?”

“Yes,” he answered, in good English. “It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!” There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. “Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me; yet I could not honestly thank them for it.”

“Ho! ho!” thought I, “here is a man of my own kidney. Why do you wish to be drowned?” I asked.

“Because,” he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, “there — there in that blue smiling bay, lies my soul, my treasure — everything that I loved and lived for.”

“Well, well,” I said. “People are ruined every day, but there’s no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough."

"One of us?" he gasped.

"Yes — if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful."

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realise what I said, and then with a wild cry he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and as I came nearer the sound of a man's bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in the girl, Sophie Ramusine, was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate pleading words. He made a step forward to her as I entered, but she writhed still farther away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weasel has him by the throat.

"Here!" I said, pulling him back from her. "This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?"

"Oh, sir," he said, "excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life."

"Who are you?" I asked roughly.

"I am a man from Archangel," he said simply; "a Russian man."

"What is your name?"

"Ourganeff."

"Ourganeff! — and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring."

"We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven," he said solemnly, looking upwards. "We are bound by higher laws than those of earth." As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. "Give me up my wife, sir," he went on. "Let me take her away from here."

"Look here, you — whatever your name is," I said sternly; "I don't want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won't do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again."

"You won't give her up to me?" he said hoarsely.

"I'll see you damned first!" I answered.

"Suppose I take her," he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flashed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. "Go," I said, in a low voice; "go quick, or I may do you an injury." He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

"Have a heed what you do," he said. "The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman."

"We shall see that," I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work in my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by, degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, or bottles and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each window in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk, she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from Archangel was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea, and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice, still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squatted there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but, as I gazed, my resentment changed into pity and contempt. “Poor fool,” I said to myself, “is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambition centred upon this wretched slip of a girl — a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you? Most women would love you — were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of yours — and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you.” As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so long as he was gone by the morning. As I expected, when I rose and went out there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping, and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty, I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh-water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

“I wish to speak a few words to you,” he said gravely.

“Hurry up, then!” I answered, glancing at my watch. “I have no time to listen to chatter.”

“Chatter!” he repeated angrily. “Ah, \but there. You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lie kind honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good, too, in spite of your roughness.”

“In the name of the devil,” I said, “say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you.”

“Can I not soften you in any way?” he cried. “Ah, see — see here “ — he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. “Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem.”

“I am not so sure of that,” I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"You are a very strange man," he said at last. "I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman — how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul! You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted — you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that," he cried wildly. "I am deep — too deep — already. Anything rather than that."

"You would do better to go back to your country," I said, "than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me."

"And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?" he asked. "Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why, man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?"

"I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so," I answered. "I give no man reasons for my conduct."

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. "If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl — if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her — as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands." The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

"Stand off," I said, putting my hand on my pistol. "If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you."

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs. No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

"I told you," he said in a quieter voice, "that my name is Ourganeff — Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from Archangel to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to, return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that the party had actually gone to the church, In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat's crew — all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of Archangel sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet."

"You, sir," he said wistfully, "look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?"

"I am tired of your story," I said, turning away. "For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter." With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

"I have told you the beginning of my story," he said, "and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go."

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again some minutes later he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from Archangel had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realise my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of anyone else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before — a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous waters were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen’s wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the waters for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29ý. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red, and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. “I had better push on,” I thought to myself, “or the wind may rise before I can get back.”

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again — a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over the sands and echoed back from the hills behind me — a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sand-hill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building — there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door, the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog, who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water’s edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms. I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognised it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also and darkness settled over it — a darkness which should never be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No — a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My heart was untouched. But my pride — ah, there I had been cruelly wounded. To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. “If he would but come back again!” I cried, with clenched hands; “if he would but come back!”

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky, and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little farther on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with seaweed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea'd man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman's fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why too should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye, in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times, and when I pass on my daily walk and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar, and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.

"All aboard?" said the captain.

"All aboard, sir!" said the mate.

"Then stand by to let her go."

It was nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship Spartan was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice; the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash,

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landsmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight, a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship Spartan. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours I should even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

"Time's up!" said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. "Time's up!" said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared, running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. "Look sharp!" shouted the crowd.

"Hold hard!" cried the captain. "Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!" and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight's voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my compagnons de voyage. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to "Yurrup," a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the olla podrida of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel's side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. "Here's a quiet place," said the voice. "Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety."

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. "This is just the place," I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

"Well, Muller," said the taller of the two, "we've got it aboard right enough."

"Yes," assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller, "it's safe aboard."

"It was rather a near go."

"It was that, Flannigan."

"It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship."

"No, it would have put our plans out."

"Ruined them entirely," said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

"I've got it here," he said at last.

"Let me see it."

"Is no one looking?"

"No, they are nearly all below."

"We can't be too careful where so much is at stake," said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this, and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

"It seems right enough," he said at last.

"I tried not to shake it," said his companion.

"Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller."

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

"Nothing much wrong there," said Flannigan.

"Right as a trivet," answered his companion.

"Look out! here's some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn't do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake."

"Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off," said Muller.

"They'd be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger," said the taller, with a sinister laugh. "Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It's not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself."

"No," said Muller. "I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn't it?"

"Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own."

"We should take out a patent."

And the two men laughed again with a cold harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package, and concealed it in Muller's voluminous overcoat.

"Come down, and we'll stow it in our berth," said Flannigan. "We won't need it until to-night, and it will be safe there."

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

"Do you mind moving out of that, sir?" he said. "We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck."

His bluff manner and ruddy healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted — solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of "Flannigan" smacked of Fenianism, while "Muller" suggested nothing but socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake — could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, who intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the Captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

“Is that you, Hammond?” said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

“God bless me,” I said, as I turned round, “it can’t be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?”

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

"Hullo!" he said, in his kindly way, "what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. Mal de mer, eh?"

"No, not that altogether," said I. "Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm."

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

"Have a cigar," said he, breaking the silence.

"No, thanks," said I. "Dick, we shall be all corpses to-night."

"That's no reason against your having a cigar now," said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

"No," I continued, "it's no laughing matter; and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;" and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. "There, Dick," I said, as I concluded, "what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?"

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I'd be frightened," he said, "if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror. Why, man," he continued, "what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine."

"Nothing of the sort, sir," said I, rather touchily "You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it."

"You'd make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo," said Dick, "if that is to be your only test."

"The man's name was Flannigan," I continued.

"I don't think that would go very far in a court of law," said Dick; "but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin."

"All right," I answered; "I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don't look hard at them, though, for I don't want them to think that they are being watched."

"Trust me," said Dick; "I'll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;" and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth, but there was no sign of them. "Heavens!" thought I, "perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!" It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

"Steward," said Dick, "are there any other gentlemen about?"

"There's two in the smoking-room, sir," answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snuggery, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was

“Napoleon.” Both were adepts at it, and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath, and refused to go on.

“No, I’m hanged if I do,” he said; “I haven’t had more than two of a suit for five hands.”

“Never mind,” said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; “a few dollars one way or the other won’t go very far after to-night’s work.”

I was astonished at the rascal’s audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily —

“Nonsense! Why shouldn’t I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.”

“I believe you want it not to come off,” said Flannigan.

“You believe nothing of the sort,” said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. “You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won’t have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man. I have as much interest in our success as you have — more, I hope.”

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart, but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards, as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion and turned towards me.

“Can you tell me, sir,” he said, “when this ship will be heard of again?”

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered —

"I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the angry little man, "I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan, I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir," he continued, turning to me, "utterly wrong."

"Some passing ship, perhaps," suggested Dick.

"No, nor that either."

"The weather is fine," I said; "why should we not be heard of at our destination."

"I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. Possibly we may not, and in any case that is not where we shall be heard of first."

"Where then?" asked Dick.

"That you shall never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!" and he chuckled once again.

"Come on deck!" growled his comrade; "you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!" and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

"Well, what do you think now?" I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

"Think!" he said; "why, I think what his companion thinks, that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy."

"Nonsense, Dick I you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue."

"Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible."

"O Dick, Dick," I cried, "how can you be so blind! Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?"

"Humbug, man!" said Dick; "you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do you make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?"

"I'll tell you what he meant, Dick," I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. "He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant."

"I didn't think you were such a fool, Hammond," said Dick Merton testily. "If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good."

"If ever I see the end of this one," I groaned, "I'll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it's hardly worth while my going up. I'll stay below and unpack my things."

"I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind," said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine — so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

"Now, ladies," said our genial Captain, "I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here's to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in eight days, or in nine at the very latest."

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former's thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the Captain's thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

"May I ask, Captain," I said, bending forward and speaking very distinctly, "what you think of Fenian manifestoes?"

The Captain's ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

"They are poor cowardly things," he said, "as silly as they are wicked."

"The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels," said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

"O Captain!" said the fat lady at my side, "you don't really think they would blow up a ship?"

"I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they shall never blow up mine."

"May I ask what precautions are taken against them?" asked an elderly man at the end of the table.

"All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined," said Captain Dowie.

"But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?" I suggested.

"They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way."

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now and looked at the Captain.

"Don't you think you are rather underrating them?" he said. "Every secret society has produced desperate men — why shouldn't the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong"

"Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody's eyes," said the little clergyman.

"The bombardment of Paris was nothing else," said Flannigan; "yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word `murder' into the more euphonious one of `war.' It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn't dynamite seem so to the Fenian?"

"At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet," said the Captain.

"Excuse me," returned Flannigan, "but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the Dotterel? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel."

"Then they lied," said the Captain. "It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas — but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;" and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and Captain? Should I demand a few minutes' conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It was grand but appalling. A single star was twinkling faintly above our mainmast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It was hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

"After all," I thought, as I gazed into the blue depths beneath me, "if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land." A man's life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

"Well, old man," he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, "we've not been blown up yet."

"No, not yet," said I; "but that's no proof that we are not going to be."

"Nonsense, man!" said Dick; "I can't conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks."

"Dick," I said, "I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse."

"Well, if you really think so," said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, "it is your duty to let the Captain know of your suspicions."

"You are right," I said; "I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him."

“Well, go and do it now,” said Dick; “but for goodness’ sake don’t mix me up in the matter.”

“I’ll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,” I answered; “and in the meantime I don’t mean to lose sight of them.”

“Let me know of the result,” said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the Captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now, so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The Captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the edge of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side, and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

“This place will do,” said a voice.

“Yes, the leeward side is best.”

“I wonder if the trigger will act?”

“I am sure it will.”

"We were to let it off at ten, were we not?"

"Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet." There was a pause. Then the voice began again —

"They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?"

"It doesn't matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent its going off."

"That's true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won't there?"

"Rather. How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?"

"The first news will get in at about midnight at earliest."

"That will be my doing."

"No, mine."

"Ha, ha! we'll settle that."

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller's voice in a ghastly whisper, "There's only five minutes more."

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

"It'll make a sensation on land," said a voice.

"Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers."

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The Captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

"Three minutes more," he said. "Put it down upon the deck."

"No, put it here on the bulwarks."

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular — the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

"A minute and a half more," he said. "Shall you or I pull the string?"

"I will pull it," said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

“Stop!” I screamed, springing to my feet. “Stop misguided and unprincipled men!”

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

“Cain was damned,” I cried, “and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souis?”

“He’s mad!” said Flannigan. “Time’s up. Let it off, Muller.” I sprang down upon the deck.

“You shan’t do it!” I said.

“By what right do you prevent us?”

“By every right, human and divine.”

“It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this.”

“Never!” said I.

“Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.”

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

“Now,” he said, “look sharp. He can’t prevent us.”

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off — TWO GREY CARRIER PIGEONS!

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the New York Herald fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America: —

“Pigeon-flying Extraordinary. — A novel match has been brought off last week between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Lowell. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship Spartan, at ten o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as some captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock.

"Muller's bird arrived in Lowell in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following morning, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years."

THE AMERICAN’S TALE

“It air strange, it air,” he was saying as I opened the door of the room where our social little semi-literary society met; “but I could tell you queerer things than that ‘ere — almighty queer things. You can’t learn everything out of books, sirs, nohow. You see it ain’t the men as can string English together and as has had good eddications as finds themselves in the queer places I’ve been in. They’re mostly rough men, sirs, as can scarce speak aright, far less tell with pen and ink the things they’ve seen; but if they could they’d make some of your European’s har riz with astonishment. They would, sirs, you bet!”

His name was Jefferson Adams, I believe; I know his initials were J.A., for you may see them yet deeply whittled on the right-hand upper panel of our smoking-room door. He left us this legacy, and also some artistic patterns done in tobacco juice upon our Turkey carpet; but beyond these reminiscences our American storyteller has vanished from our ken. He gleamed across our ordinary quiet conviviality like some brilliant meteor, and then was lost in the outer darkness. That night, however, our Nevada friend was in full swing; and I quietly lit my pipe and dropped into the nearest chair, anxious not to interrupt his story.

“Mind you,” he continued, “I hain’t got no grudge against your men of science. I likes and respects a chap as can match every beast and plant, from a huckleberry to a grizzly with a jawbreakin’ name; but if you wants real interestin’ facts, something a bit juicy, you go to your whalers and your frontiersmen, and your scouts and Hudson Bay men, chaps who mostly can scarce sign their names.”

There was a pause here, as Mr. Jefferson Adams produced a long cheroot and lit it. We preserved a strict silence in the room, for we had already learned that on the slightest interruption our Yankee drew himself into his shell again. He glanced round with a self-satisfied smile as he remarked our expectant looks, and continued through a halo of smoke,

“Now which of you gentlemen has even been in Arizona? None, I’ll warrant. And of all English or Americans as can put pen to paper, how many has been in Arizona? Precious few, I calc’late. I’ve been there, sirs, lived there for years; and when I think of what I’ve seen there, why, I can scarce get myself to believe it now.

“Ah, there’s a country! I was one of Walker’s filibusters, as they chose to call us; and after we’d busted up, and the chief was shot, some on us made tracks and located down there. A reg’lar English and American colony, we was, with our wives and children, and all complete. I reckon there’s some of the old folk there yet, and that they hain’t forgotten what I’m agoing to tell you. No, I warrant they hain’t, never on this side of the grave, sirs.

“I was talking about the country, though; and I guess I could astonish you considerable if I spoke of nothing else. To think of such a land being built for a few ‘Greasers’ and half-breeds! It’s a misusing of the gifts of Providence, that’s what I calls it. Grass as hung over a chap’s head as he rode through it, and trees so thick that you couldn’t catch a glimpse of blue sky for leagues and leagues, and orchids like umbrellas! Maybe some on you has seen a plant as they calls the ‘fly-catcher,’ in some parts of the States?”

“Diancea muscipula,” murmured Dawson, our scientific man par excellence.

“Ah, ‘Die near a municipal,’ that’s him! You’ll see a fly stand on that ‘ere plant, and then you’ll see the two sides of a leaf snap up together and catch it between them, and grind it up and mash it to bits, for all the world like some great sea squid with its beak; and hours after, if you open the leaf, you’ll see the body lying half-digested, and in bits. Well, I’ve seen those flytraps in Arizona with leaves eight and ten feet long, and thorns or teeth a foot or more; why, they could — But darn it, I’m going too fast!

“It’s about the death of Joe Hawkins I was going to tell you; ‘bout as queer a thing, I reckon, as ever you heard tell on. There wasn’t nobody in Montana as didn’t know of Joe Hawkins—’Alabama’ Joe, as he was called there. A reg’lar out and outer, he was, ‘bout the darndest skunk as even man clapt eyes on. He was a good chap enough, mind ye, as long as you stroked him the right way; but rile him anyhow, and he were worse nor a wild-cat. I’ve seen him empty his six-shooter into a crowd as chanced to jostle him agoing into Simpson’s bar when there was a dance on; and he bowied Tom Hooper ‘cause he spilt his liquor over his weskit by mistake. No, he didn’t stick at murder, Joe didn’t; and he weren’t a man to be trusted further nor you could see him.

“Now at the time I tell on, when Joe Hawkins was swaggerin’ about the town and layin’ down the law with his shootin’-irons, there was an Englishman there of the name of Scott — Tom Scott, if I rec’lects aright.

This chap Scott was a thorough Britisher (beggin’ the present company’s pardon), and yet he didn’t freeze much to the British set there, or they didn’t freeze much to him. He was a quiet simple man, Scott was — rather too quiet for a rough set like that; sneakin’ they called him, but he weren’t that. He kept hisself mostly apart, an’ didn’t interfere with nobody so long as he were left alone. Some said as how he’d been kinder ill-treated at home — been a Chartist, or something of that sort, and had to up sticks and run; but he never spoke of it hisself, an’ never complained. Bad luck or good, that chap kept a stiff lip on him.

“This chap Scott was a sort o’ butt among the men about Montana, for he was so quiet an’ simple-like. There was no party either to take up his grievances; for, as I’ve been saying, the Britishers hardly counted him one of them, and many a rough joke they played on him. He never cut up rough, but was polite to all hisself. I think the boys got to think he hadn’t much grit in him till he showed ‘em their mistake.

“It was in Simpson’s bar as the row got up, an’ that led to the queer thing I was going to tell you of. Alabama Joe and one or two other rowdies were dead on the Britishers in those days, and they spoke their opinions pretty free, though I warned them as there’d be an almighty muss. That partic’lar night Joe was nigh half drunk, an’ he swaggered about the town with his six-shooter, lookin’ out for a quarrel. Then he turned into the bar where he know’d he’d find some o’ the English as ready for one as he was hisself. Sure enough, there was half a dozen lounging about, an’ Tom Scott standin’ alone before the stove. Joe sat down by the table, and put his revolver and bowie down in front of him. ‘Them’s my arguments, Jeff,’ he says to me, ‘if any white-livered Britisher dares give me the lie.’ I tried to stop him, sirs; but he weren’t a man as you could easily turn, an’ he began to speak in a way as no chap could stand. Why, even a ‘Greaser’ would flare up if you said as much of Greaserland! There was a commotion at the bar, an’ every man laid his hands on his wepins; but afore they could draw we heard a quiet voice from the stove: ‘Say your prayers, Joe Hawkins; for, by Heaven, you’re a dead man!’ Joe turned round, and looked like grabbin’ at his iron; but it weren’t no manner of use. Tom Scott was standing up, covering him with his Derringer; a smile on his white face, but the very devil shining in his eye. ‘It ain’t that the old country has used me over-well,’ he says, ‘but no man shall speak agin it afore me, and live.’ For a second or two I could see his finger tighten round the trigger, an’ then he gave a laugh, an’ threw the pistol on the floor. ‘No,’ he says, ‘I can’t shoot a half-drunk man. Take your dirty life, Joe, an’ use it better nor you have done. You’ve been nearer the grave this night than you will be agin until your time comes. You’d best make tracks now, I guess. Nay, never look black at me, man; I’m not afeard at your shootin’-iron. A bully’s nigh always a coward.’ And he swung contemptuously round, and relit his half-smoked pipe from the stove; while Alabama slunk out o’ the bar, with the laughs of the Britishers ringing in his ears. I saw his face as he passed me, and on it I saw murder, sirs — murder, as plain as ever I seed anything in my life.

“I stayed in the bar after the row, and watched Tom Scott as he shook hands with the men about. It seemed kinder queer to me to see him smilin’ and cheerful-like; for I knew Joe’s bloodthirsty mind, and that the Englishman had small chance of ever seeing the morning. He lived in an out-of-the-way sort of place, you see, clean off the trail, and had to pass through the Flytrap Gulch to get to it. This here gulch was a marshy gloomy place, lonely enough during the day even; for it were always a creepy sort o’ thing to see the great eight- and ten-foot leaves snapping up if aught touched them; but at night there were never a soul near. Some parts of the marsh, too, were soft and deep, and a body thrown in would be gone by the morning. I could see Alabama Joe crouchin’ under the leaves of the great Flytrap in the darkest part of the gulch, with a scowl on his face and a revolver in his hand; I could see it, sirs, as plain as with my two eyes.

“‘Bout midnight Simpson shuts up his bar, so out we had to go. Tom Scott started off for his three-mile walk at a slashing pace. I just dropped him a hint as he passed me, for I kinder liked the chap. ‘Keep your Derringer loose in your belt, sir,’ I says, ‘for you might chance to need it.’ He looked round at me with his quiet smile, and then I lost sight of him in the gloom. I never thought to see him again. He’d hardly gone afore Simpson comes up to me and says, ‘There’ll be a nice job in the Flytrap Gulch to-night, Jeff; the boys say that Hawkins started half an hour ago to wait for Scott and shoot him on sight. I calc’late the coroner be wanted to-morrow.’

“What passed in the gulch that night? It were a question as were asked pretty free next morning. A half-breed was in Ferguson’s store after daybreak, and he said as he’d chanced to be near the gulch ‘bout one in the morning. It warn’t easy to get at his story, he seemed so uncommon scared; but he told us, at last, as he’d heard the fearfulest screams in the stillness of the night. There weren't no shots, he said, but scream after scream, kinder muffled, like a man with a serape over his head, an' in mortal pain. Abner Brandon and me, and a few more, was in the store at the time; so we mounted and rode out to Scott's house, passing through the gulch on the way. There weren't nothing partic'lar to be seen there — no blood nor marks of a fight, nor nothing; and when we gets up to Scott's house, out he comes to meet us as fresh as a lark. 'Hullo, Jeff!' says he, 'no need for the pistols after all. Come in an' have a cocktail, boys.' `Did you see or hear nothing as you came home last night?' says I. 'No,' says he; 'all was quiet enough. An owl kinder moaning in the Flytrap Gulch — that was all. Come, jump off and have a glass.' `Thank ye,' says Abner. So off we gets, and Tom Scott rode into the settlement with us when we went back.

"An allfired commotion was on in Main-street as we rode into it. The 'Merican party seemed to have gone clean crazed. Alabama Joe was gone, not a darned particle of him left. Since he went out to the gulch nary eye had seen him. As we got off our horses there was a considerable crowd in front of Simpson's, and some ugly looks at Tom Scott, I can tell you. There was a clickin' of pistols, and I saw as Scott had his hand in his bosom too. There weren't a single English face about. 'Stand aside, Jeff Adams,' says Zebb Humphrey, as great a scoundrel as ever lived, 'you hain't got no hand in this game. Say, boys, are we, free Americans, to be murdered by any darned Britisher?' It was the quickest thing as ever I seed. There was a rush an' a crack; Zebb was down, with Scott's ball in his thigh, and Scott hisself was on the ground with a dozen men holding him. It weren't no use struggling, so he lay quiet. They seemed a bit uncertain what to do with him at first, but then one of Alabama's special chums put them up to it. Joe's gone,' he said; 'nothing ain't surer nor that, an' there lies the man as killed him. Some on you knows as Joe went on business to the gulch last night; he never came back. That 'ere Britisher passed through after he'd gone; they'd had a row, screams is heard 'mong the great flytraps. I say agin he has played poor Joe some o' his sneakin' tricks, an' thrown him into the swamp. It ain't no wonder as the body is gone. But air we to stan'by and see English murderin' our own chums? I guess not. Let Judge Lynch try him, that's what I say.' `Lynch him!' shouted a hundred angry voices — for all the rag-tag an' bobtail o' the settlement was round us by this time. 'Here, boys, fetch a rope, and swing him up. Up with him over Simpson's door!' `See here though,' says another, coming forrards; 'let's hang him by the great flytrap in the gulch. Let Joe see as he's revenged, if so be as he's buried 'bout theer.' There was a shout for this, an' away they went, with Scott tied on his mustang in the middle, and a mounted guard, with cocked revolvers, round him; for we knew as there was a score or so Britishers about, as didn't seem to recognise Judge Lynch, and was dead on a free fight.

"I went out with them, my heart bleedin' for Scott, though he didn't seem a cent put out, he didn't. He were game to the backbone. Seems kinder queer, sirs, hangin' a man to a flytrap; but our'n were a reg'lar tree, and the leaves like a brace of boats with a hinge between 'em and thorns at the bottom.

"We passed down the gulch to the place where the great one grows, and there we seed it with the leaves, some open, some shut. But we seed something worse nor that. Standin' round the tree was some thirty men, Britishers all, an' armed to the teeth. They was waitin' for us evidently, an' had a businesslike look about 'em, as if they'd come for something and meant to have it. There was the raw material there for about as warm a scrimmidge as ever I seed. As we rode up, a great red-bearded Scotchman — Cameron were his name — stood out afore the rest, his revolver cocked in his hand. 'See here, boys,' he says, 'you've got no call to hurt a hair of that man's head. You hain't proved as Joe is dead yet; and if you had, you hain't proved as Scott killed him. Anyhow, it were in self-defence; for you all know as he was lying in wait for Scott, to shoot him on sight; so I say agin, you hain't got no call to hurt that man; and what's more, I've got thirty six-barrelled arguments against your doin' it.' `It's an interestin' pint, and worth arguin' out,' said the man as was Alabama Joe's special chum. There was a clickin' of pistols, and a loosenin' of knives, and the two parties began to draw up to one another, an' it looked like a rise in the mortality of Montana. Scott was standing behind with a pistol at his ear if he stirred, lookin' quiet and composed as having no money on the table, when sudden he gives a start an' a shout as rang in our ears like a trumpet. 'Joe!' he cried, Joe! Look at him! In the flytrap!' We all turned an' looked where he was pointin'. Jerusalem! I think we won't get that picter out of our minds agin. One of the great leaves of the flytrap, that had been shut and touchin' the ground as it lay, was slowly rolling back upon its hinges. There, lying like a child in its cradle, was Alabama Joe in the hollow of the leaf. The great thorns had been slowly driven through his heart as it shut upon him. We could see as he’d tried to cut his way out, for there was slit in the thick fleshy leaf, an’ his bowie was in his hand; but it had smothered him first. He’d lain down on it likely to keep the damp off while he were awaitin’ for Scott, and it had closed on him as you’ve seen your little hothouse ones do on a fly; an’ there he were as we found him, torn and crushed into pulp by the great jagged teeth of the man-eatin’ plant. There, sirs, I think you’ll own as that’s a curious story.”

“And what became of Scott?” asked Jack Sinclair.

“Why, we carried him back on our shoulders, we did, to Simpson’s bar, and he stood us liquors round. Made a speech too — a darned fine speech — from the counter. Somethin’ about the British lion an’ the ‘Merican eagle walkin’ arm in arm for ever an’ a day. And now, sirs, that yarn was long, and my cheroot’s out, so I reckon I’ll make tracks afore it’s later;” and with a “Good-night!” he left the room.

“A most extraordinary narrative!” said Dawson. “Who would have thought a Diancea had such power!”

“Deuced rum yarn!” said young Sinclair.

“Evidently a matter-of-fact truthful man,” said the doctor. “Or the most original liar that ever lived,” said I.

I wonder which he was.

BONES. THE APRIL FOOL OF HARVEY’S SLUICE

Abe Durton’s cabin was not beautiful. People have been heard to assert that it was ugly, and, even after the fashion of Harvey’s Sluice, have gone the length of prefixing their adjective with a forcible expletive which emphasised their criticism. Abe, however, was a stolid and easygoing man, on whose mind the remarks of an unappreciative public made but little impression. He had built the house himself, and it suited his partner and him, and what more did they want? Indeed he was rather touchy upon the subject. “Though I says it as raised it,” he remarked, “it’ll lay over any shanty in the valley. Holes? Well, of course there are holes. You wouldn’t get fresh air without holes. There’s nothing stuffy about my house. Rain? Well, if it does let the rain in, ain’t it an advantage to know its rainin’ without gettin’ up to unbar the door. I wouldn’t own a house that didn’t leak some. As to its bein’ off the perpendic’lar, I like a house with a bit of a tilt. Anyways it pleases my pard, Boss Morgan, and what’s good enough for him is good enough for you, I suppose.” At which approach to personalities his antagonist usually sheered off, and left the honours of the field to the indignant architect.

But whatever difference of opinion might exist as to the beauty of the establishment, there could be no question as to its utility. To the tired wayfarer, plodding along the Buckhurst-road in the direction of the Sluice, the warm glow upon the summit of the hill was a beacon of hope and of comfort. Those very holes at which the neighbours sneered helped to diffuse a cheery atmosphere of light around, which was doubly acceptable on such a night as the present.

There was only one man inside the hut, and that was the proprietor, Abe Durton himself, or “Bones,” as he had been christened with the rude heraldry of the camp. He was sitting in front of the great wood fire, gazing moodily into its glowing depths, and occasionally giving a faggot a kick of remonstrance when it showed any indication of dying into a smoulder. His fair Saxon face, with its bold simple eyes and crisp yellow beard, stood out sharp and clear against the darkness as the flickering light played over it. It was a manly resolute countenance, and yet the physiognomist might have detected something in the lines of the mouth which showed a weakness somewhere, an indecision which contrasted strangely with his herculean shoulders and massive limbs. Abe's was one of those trusting simple natures which are as easy to lead as they are impossible to drive; and it was this happy pliability of disposition which made him at once the butt and the favourite of the dwellers in the Sluice. Badinage in that primitive settlement was of a somewhat ponderous character, yet no amount of chaff had ever brought a dark look on Bones's face, or an unkind thought into his honest heart. It was only when his aristocratic partner was, as he thought, being put upon, that an ominous tightness about his lower lip and an angry light in his blue eyes caused even the most irrepressible humorist in the colony to nip his favourite joke in the bud, in order to diverge into an earnest and all-absorbing dissertation upon the state of the weather.

"The Boss is late to-night," he muttered as he rose from his chair and stretched himself in a colossal yawn. "My stars, how it does rain and blow! Don't it, Blinky?" Slinky was a demure and meditative owl, whose comfort and welfare was a chronic subject of solicitude to its master, and who at present contemplated him gravely from one of the rafters. "Pity you can't speak, Blinky," continued Abe, glancing up at his feathered companion. "There's a powerful deal of sense in your face. Kinder melancholy too. Crossed in love, maybe, when you was young. Talkin' of love," he added, "I've not seen Susan to-day;" and lighting the candle which stood in a black bottle upon the table, he walked across the room and peered earnestly at one of the many pictures from stray illustrated papers, which had been cut out by the occupants and posted up upon the walls.

The particular picture which attracted him was one which represented a very tawdrily-dressed actress simpering over a bouquet at an imaginary audience. This sketch had, for some inscrutable reason, made a deep impression upon the susceptible heart of the miner. He had invested the young lady with a human interest by solemnly, and without the slightest warrant, christening her as Susan Banks, and had then installed her as his standard of female beauty.

"You see my Susan," he would say, when some wanderer from Buckhurst, or even from Melbourne, would describe some fair Circe whom he had left behind him. "There ain't a girl like my Sue. If ever you go to the old country again, just you ask to see her. Susan Banks is her name, and I've got her picture up at the shanty."

Abe was still gazing at his charmer when the rough door was flung open, and a blinding cloud of sleet and rain came driving into the cabin, almost obscuring for the moment a young man who sprang in and proceeded to bar the entrance behind him, an operation which the force of the wind rendered no easy matter. He might have passed for the genius of the storm, with the water dripping from his long hair and running down his pale refined face.

"Well," he said, in a slightly peevish voice, "haven't you got any supper?"

"Waiting and ready," said his companion cheerily, pointing to a large pot which bubbled by the side of the fire. "You seem sort of damp."

"Damp be hanged! I'm soaked, man, thoroughly saturated. It's a night that I wouldn't have a dog out, at least not a dog that I had any respect for. Hand over that dry coat from the peg."

Jack Morgan, or Boss, as he was usually called, belonged to a type which was commoner in the mines during the flush times of the first great rush than would be supposed. He was a man of good blood, liberally educated, and a graduate of an English university. Boss should, in the natural course of things, have been an energetic curate, or struggling professional man, had not some latent traits cropped out in his character, inherited possibly from old Sir Henry Morgan, who had founded the family with Spanish pieces of eight gallantly won upon the high seas. It was this wild strain of blood no doubt which had caused him to drop from the bedroom-window of the ivy-clad English parsonage, and leave home and friends behind him, to try his luck with pick and shovel in the Australian fields. In spite of his effeminate face and dainty manners, the rough dwellers in Harvey's Sluice had gradually learned that the little man was possessed of a cool courage and unflinching resolution, which won respect in a community where pluck was looked upon as the highest of human attributes. No one ever knew how it was that Bones and he had become partners; yet partners they were, and the large simple nature of the stronger man looked with an almost superstitious reverence upon the clear decisive mind of his companion.

"That's better," said the Boss, as he dropped into the vacant chair before the fire and watched Abe laying out the two metal plates, with the horn-handled knives and abnormally pronged forks. "Take your mining boots off, Bones; there's no use filling the cabin with red clay. Come here and sit down."

His gigantic partner came meekly over and perched himself upon the top of a barrel.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Shares are up," said his companion. "That's what's up. Look here," and he extracted a crumpled paper from the pocket of the steaming coat. "Here's the Buckhurst Sentinel. Read this article — this one here about a paying lead in the Conemara mine. We hold pretty heavily in that concern, my boy. We might sell out to-day and clear something — but I think we'll hold on."

Abe Durton in the mean time was laboriously spelling out the article in question, following the lines with his great forefinger, and muttering under his tawny moustache.

"Two hundred dollars a foot," he said, looking up. "Why, pard, we hold a hundred feet each. It would give us twenty thousand dollars! We might go home on that."

"Nonsense!" said his companion; "we've come out here for something better than a beggarly couple of thousand pounds. The thing is bound to pay. Sinclair the assayer has been over there, and says there's a ledge of the richest quartz he ever set eyes on. It is just a case of getting the machinery to crush it. By the way, what was to-days' take like?"

Abe extracted a small wooden box from his pocket and handed it to his comrade. It contained what appeared to be about a teaspoonful of sand and one or two little metallic granules not larger than a pea. Boss Morgan laughed, and returned it to his companion.

"We sha'n't make our fortune at that rate, Bones," he remarked; and there was a pause in the conversation as the two men listened to the wind as it screamed and whistled past the little cabin.

"Any news from Buckhurst?" asked Abe, rising and proceeding to extract their supper from the pot.

"Nothing much," said his companion. "Cock-eyed Joe has been shot by Bill Reid in McFarlane's Store."

"Ah," said Abe, with listless interest.

"Bushrangers have been around and stuck up the Rochdale station. They say they are coming over here."

The miner whistled as he poured some whisky into a jug. "Anything more?" he asked.

"Nothing of importance except that the blacks have been showing a bit down New Sterling way, and that the assayer has bought a piano and is going to have his daughter out from Melbourne to live in the new house opposite on the other side of the road. So you see we are going to have something to look at, my boy,” he added as he sat down, and began attacking the food set before him. “They say she is a beauty, Bones.”

“She won’t be a patch on my Sue,” returned the other decisively.

His partner smiled as he glanced round at the flaring print upon the wall. Suddenly he dropped his knife and seemed to listen. Amid the wild uproar of the wind and the rain there was a low rumbling sound which was evidently not dependent upon the elements.

“What’s that?”

“Darned if I know.”

The two men made for the door and peered out earnestly into the darkness. Far away along the Buckhurst road they could see a moving light, and the dull sound was louder than before.

“It’s a buggy coming down,” said Abe.

“Where is it going to?”

“Don’t know. Across the ford, I s’pose.”

“Why, man, the ford will be six feet deep to-night, and running like a mill-stream.”

The light was nearer now, coming rapidly round the curve of the road. There was a wild sound of galloping with the rattle of the wheels.

“Horses have bolted, by thunder!”

“Bad job for the man inside.”

There was a rough individuality about the inhabitants of Harvey’s Sluice, in virtue of which every man bore his misfortunes upon his own shoulders, and had very little sympathy for those of his neighbours. The predominant feeling of the two men was one of pure curiosity as they watched the swinging swaying lanterns coming down the winding road.

“If he don’t pull ‘em up before they reach the ford he’s a goner,” remarked Abe Durton resignedly.

Suddenly there came a lull in the sullen splash of the rain. It was but for a moment, but in that moment there came down on the breeze a long cry which caused the two men to start and stare at each other, and then to rush frantically down the steep incline towards the road below.

“A woman, by Heaven!” gasped Abe, as he sprang across the gaping shaft of a mine in the recklessness of his haste.

Morgan was the lighter and more active man. He drew away rapidly from his stalwart companion. Within a minute he was standing panting and bare-headed in the middle of the soft muddy road, while his partner was still toiling down the side of the declivity.

The carriage was close on him now. He could see in the light of the lamps the raw-boned Australian horse as, terrified by the storm and by its own clatter, it came tearing down the declivity which led to the ford. The man who was driving seemed to see the pale set face in the pathway in front of him, for he yelled out some incoherent words of warning, and made a last desperate attempt to pull up. There was a shout, an oath, and a jarring crash, and Abe, hurrying down, saw a wild infuriated horse rearing madly in the air with the slim dark figure hanging on to its bridle. Boss, with the keen power of calculation which had made him the finest cricketer at Rugby in his day, had caught the rein immediately below the bit, and clung to it with silent concentration. Once he was down with a heavy thud in the roadway as the horse jerked its head violently forwards, but when, with a snort of exultation, the animal pressed on, it was only to find that the prostrate man beneath its forehoofs still maintained his unyielding grasp.

“Hold it, Bones,” he said, as a tall figure hurled itself into the road and seized the other rein.

“All right, old man, I’ve got him;” and the horse, cowed by the sight of a fresh assailant, quieted down, and stood shivering with terror. “Get up, Boss, it’s safe now.”

But poor Boss lay groaning in the mud.

“I can’t do it, Bones.” There was a catch in the voice as of pain. “There’s something wrong, old chap, but don’t make a fuss. It’s only a shake; give me a lift up.”

Abe bent tenderly over his prostrate companion. He could see that he was very white, and breathing with difficulty.

“Cheer up, old Boss,” he murmured. “Hullo! my stars!”

The last two exclamations were shot out of the honest miner’s bosom as if they were impelled by some irresistible force, and he took a couple of steps backward in sheer amazement. There at the other side of the fallen man, and half shrouded in the darkness, stood what appeared to Abe’s simple soul to be the most beautiful vision that ever had appeared upon earth. To eyes accustomed to rest upon nothing more captivating than the ruddy faces and rough beards of the miners in the Sluice, it seemed that that fair delicate countenance must belong to a wanderer from some better world. Abe gazed at it with a wondering reverence, oblivious for the moment even of his injured friend upon the ground.

“0 papa,” said the apparition, in great distress, “he is hurt, the gentleman is hurt,” and with a quick feminine gesture of sympathy, she bent her lithe figure over Boss Morgan’s prostrate figure.

“Why, it’s Abe Durton and his partner,” said the driver of the buggy, coming forward and disclosing the grizzled features of Mr. Joshua Sinclair, the assayer to the mines. “I don’t know how to thank you, boys. The infernal brute got the bit between his teeth, and I should have had to have thrown Carrie out and chanced it in another minute. That’s right,” he continued as Morgan staggered to his feet. “Not much hurt, I hope.”

“I can get up to the hut now,” said the young man, steadying himself upon his partner’s shoulder. “How are you going to get Miss Sinclair home?”

“Oh, we can walk,” said the young lady, shaking off the effects of her fright with all the elasticity of youth.

“We can drive and take the road round the bank so as to avoid the ford,” said her father. “The horse seems cowed enough now; you need not be afraid of it, Carrie. I hope we shall see you at the house, both of you. Neither of us can easily forget this night’s work.”

Miss Carrie said nothing, but she managed to shoot a little demure glance of gratitude from under her long lashes, to have won which honest Abe felt that he would have cheerfully undertaken to stop a runaway locomotive.

There was a cheery shout of “Good-night,” a crack of the whip, and the buggy rattled away in the darkness.

“You told me the men were rough and nasty, pa,” said Miss Carrie Sinclair, after a long silence, when the two dark shadows had died away in the distance, and the carriage was speeding along by the turbulent stream. “I don’t think so. I think they were very nice.” And Carrie was unusually quiet for the remainder of her journey, and seemed more reconciled to the hardship of leaving her dear friend Amelia in the far-off boarding school at Melbourne.

That did not prevent her from writing a full, true, and particular account of their little adventure to the same young lady upon that very night.

“They stopped the horse, darling, and one poor fellow was hurt. And 0, Amy, if you had seen the other one in a red shirt, with a pistol at his waist! I couldn’t help thinking of you, dear. He was just your idea. You remember, a yellow moustache and great blue eyes. And how he did stare at poor me! You never see such men in Burke-street, Amy;” and so on, for four pages of pretty feminine gossip.

In the mean time poor Boss, badly shaken, had been helped up the hill by his partner and regained the shelter of the shanty. Abe doctored him out of the rude pharmacopoeia of the camp, and bandaged up his strained arm. Both were men of few words, and neither made any allusion to what had taken place. It was noticed, however, by Blinky that his master failed to pay his usual nightly orisons before the shrine of Susan Banks. Whether this sagacious fowl drew any deductions from this, and from the fact that Bones sat long and earnestly smoking by the smouldering fire, I know not. Suffice it that as the candle died away and the miner rose from his chair, his feathered friend flew down upon his shoulder, and was only prevented from giving vent to a sympathetic hoot by Abe’s warning finger, and its own strong inherent sense of propriety.

A casual visitor dropping into the straggling township of Harvey’s Sluice shortly after Miss Carrie Sinclair’s arrival would have noticed a considerable alteration in the manners and customs of its inhabitants. Whether it was the refining influence of a woman’s presence, or whether it sprang from an emulation excited by the brilliant appearance of Abe Durton, it is hard to say — probably from a blending of the two. Certain it is that that young man had suddenly developed an affection for cleanliness and a regard for the conventionalities of civilisation, which aroused the astonishment and ridicule of his companions. That Boss Morgan should pay attention to his personal appearance had long been set down as a curious and inexplicable phenomenon, depending upon early education; but that loose-limbed easy-going Bones should flaunt about in a clean shirt was regarded by every grimy denizen of the Sluice as a direct and premeditated insult. In self-defence, therefore, there was a general cleaning up after working hours, and such a run upon the grocery establishment, that soap went up to an unprecedented figure, and a fresh consignment had to be ordered from McFarlane’s store in Buckhurst.

“Is this here a free minin’ camp, or is it a darned Sunday-school?” had been the indignant query of Long McCoy, a prominent member of the reactionary party, who had failed to advance with the times, having been absent during the period of regeneration. But his remonstrance met with but little sympathy; and at the end of a couple of days a general turbidity of the creek announced his surrender, which was confirmed by his appearance in the Colonial Bar with a shining and bashful face, and hair which was redolent of bear’s grease.

“I felt kinder lonesome,” he remarked apologetically, “so I thought as I’d have a look what was under the clay,” and he viewed himself approvingly in the cracked mirror which graced the select room of the establishment.

Our casual visitor would have noticed a remarkable change also in the conversation of the community. Somehow, when a certain dainty little bonnet with a sweet girlish figure beneath it was seen in the distance among the disused shafts and mounds of red earth which disfigured the sides of the valley, there was a warning murmur, and a general clearing off of the cloud of blasphemy, which was, I regret to state, an habitual characteristic of the working population of Harvey’s Sluice. Such things only need a beginning; and it was noticeable that long after Miss Sinclair had vanished from sight there was a decided rise in the moral barometer of the gulches. Men found by experience that their stock of adjectives was less limited than they had been accustomed to suppose, and that the less forcible were sometimes even more adapted for conveying their meaning.

Abe had formerly been considered one of the most experienced valuators of an ore in the settlement. It had been commonly supposed that he was able to estimate the amount of gold in a fragment of quartz with remarkable exactness. This, however, was evidently a mistake, otherwise he would never have incurred the useless expense of having so many worthless specimens assayed as he now did. Mr. Joshua Sinclair found himself inundated with such a flood of fragments of mica, and lumps of rock containing decimal percentages of the precious metals, that he began to form a very low opinion of the young man’s mining capabilities. It is even asserted that Abe shuffled up to the house one morning with a hopeful smile, and, after some fumbling, produced half a brick from the bosom of his jersey, with the stereotyped remark “that he thought he’d struck it at last, and so had dropped in to ask him to cipher out an estimate.” As this anecdote rests, however, upon the unsupported evidence of Jim Struggles, the humorist of the camp, there may be some slight inaccuracy of detail.

It is certain that what with professional business in the morning and social visits at night, the tall figure of the miner was a familiar object in the little drawing room of Azalea Villa, as the new house of the assayer had been magniloquently named. He seldom ventured upon a remark in the presence of its female occupant; but would sit on the extreme edge of his chair in a state of speechless admiration while she rattled off some lively air upon the newly-imported piano. Many were the strange and unexpected places in which his feet turned up. Miss Carrie had gradually come to the conclusion that they were entirely independent of his body, and had ceased to speculate upon the manner in which she would trip over them on one side of the table while the blushing owner was apologising from the other. There was only one cloud on honest Bones's mental horizon, and that was the periodical appearance of Black Tom Ferguson, of Rochdale Ferry. This clever young scamp had managed to ingratiate himself with old Joshua, and was a constant visitor at the villa. There were evil rumours abroad about Black Tom. He was known to be a gambler, and shrewdly suspected to be worse. Harvey's Sluice was not censorious, and yet there was a general feeling that Ferguson was a man to be avoided. There was a reckless ýlan about his bearing, however, and a sparkle in his conversation, which had an indescribable charm, and even induced the Boss, who was particular in such matters, to cultivate his acquaintance while forming a correct estimate of his character. Miss Carrie seemed to hail his appearance as a relief, and chattered away for hours about books and music and the gaieties of Melbourne. It was on these occasions that poor simple Bones would sink into the very lowest depths of despondency, and either slink away, or sit glaring at his rival with an earnest malignancy which seemed to cause that gentleman no small amusement.

The miner made no secret to his partner of the admiration which he entertained for Miss Sinclair. If he was silent in her company, he was voluble enough when she was the subject of discourse. Loiterers upon the Buckhurst road might have heard a stentorian voice upon the hillside bellowing forth a vocabulary of female charms. He submitted his difficulties to the superior intelligence of the Boss.

"That loafer from Rochdale," he said, "he seems to reel it off kinder nat'ral, while for the life of me I can't say a word. Tell me, Boss, what would you say to a girl like that?"

"Why, talk about what would interest her," said his companion. "Ah, that's where it lies."

"Talk about the customs of the place and the country," said the Boss, pulling meditatively at his pipe. "Tell her stories of what you have seen in the mines, and that sort of thing.”

“Eh? You’d do that, would you?” responded his comrade more hopefully. “If that’s the hang of it I am right. I’ll go up now and tell her about Chicago Bill, an’ how he put them two bullets in the man from the bend the night of the dance.”

Boss Morgan laughed.

“That’s hardly the thing,” he said. “You’d frighten her if you told her that. Tell her something lighter, you know; something to amuse her, something funny.”

“Funny?” said the anxious lover, with less confidence in his voice. “How you and me made Mat Houlahan drunk and put him in the pulpit of the Baptist church, and he wouldn’t let the preacher in in the morning. How would that do, eh?”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t say anything of the sort,” said his Mentor, in great consternation. “She’d never speak to either of us again. No, what I mean is that you should tell about the habits of the mines, how men live and work and die there. If she is a sensible girl that ought to interest her.”

“How they live at the mines? Pard, you are good to me. How they live? There’s a thing I can talk of as glib as Black Tom or any man. I’ll try it on her when I see her.”

“By the way,” said his partner listlessly, “just keep an eye on that man Ferguson. His hands aren’t very clean, you know and he’s not scrupulous when he is aiming for anything. You remember how Dick Williams, of English Town, was found dead in the bush. Of course it was rangers that did it. They do say, however, that Black Tom owed him a deal more money than he could ever have paid. There’s been one or two queer things about him. Keep your eye on him, Abe. Watch what he does.”

“I will,” said his companion.

And he did. He watched him that very night. Watched him stride out of the house of the assayer with anger and baffled pride on every feature of his handsome swarthy face. Watched him clear the garden paling at a bound, pass in long rapid strides down the side of the valley, gesticulating wildly with his hands, and vanish into the bushland beyond. All this Abe Durton watched, and with a thoughtful look upon his face he relit his pipe and strolled slowly backward to the hut upon the hill.

March was drawing to a close in Harvey’s Sluice, and the glare and heat of the antipodean summer had toned down into the rich mellow hues of autumn. It was never a lovely place to look upon. There was something hopelessly prosaic in the two bare rugged ridges, seamed and scarred by the hand of man, with iron arms of windlasses, and broken buckets projecting everywhere through the endless little hillocks of red earth. Down the middle ran the deeply rutted road from Buckhurst, winding along and crossing the sluggish tide of Harper's Creek by a crumbling wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge lay the cluster of little huts with the Colonial Bar and the Grocery towering in all the dignity of whitewash among the humble dwellings around. The assayer's verandah-lined house lay above the gulches on the side of the slope nearly opposite the dilapidated specimen of architecture of which our friend Abe was so unreasonably proud.

There was one other building which might have come under the category of what an inhabitant of the Sluice would have described as a "public edifice" with a comprehensive wave of his pipe which conjured up images of an endless vista of colonnades and minarets. This was the Baptist chapel, a modest little shingle-roofed erection on the bend of the river about a mile above the settlement. It was from this that the town looked at its best, when the harsh outlines and crude colours were somewhat softened by distance. On that particular morning the stream looked pretty as it meandered down the valley; pretty, too, was the long rising upland behind, with its luxuriant green covering; and prettiest of all was Miss Carrie Sinclair, as she laid down the basket of ferns which she was carrying, and stopped upon the summit of the rising ground.

Something seemed to be amiss with that young lady. There was a look of anxiety upon her face which contrasted strangely with her usual appearance of piquant insouciance. Some recent annoyance had left its traces upon her. Perhaps it was to walk it off that she had rambled down the valley; certain it is that she inhaled the fresh breezes of the woodlands as if their resinous fragrance bore with them some antidote for human sorrow.

She stood for some time gazing at the view before her. She could see her father's house, like a white dot upon the hillside, though strangely enough it was a blue reek of smoke upon the opposite slope which seemed to attract the greater part of her attention. She lingered there, watching it with a wistful look in her hazel eyes. Then the loneliness of her situation seemed to strike her, and she felt one of those spasmodic fits of unreasoning terror to which the bravest women are subject. Tales of natives and of bushrangers, their daring and their cruelty, flashed across her. She glanced at the great mysterious stretch of silent bushland beside her, and stooped to pick up her basket with the intention of hurrying along the road in the direction of the gulches. She started round, and hardly suppressed a scream as a long red-flannelled arm shot out from behind her and withdrew the basket from her very grasp.

The figure which met her eye would to some have seemed little calculated to allay her fears. The high boots, the rough shirt, and the broad girdle with its weapons of death were, however, too familiar to Miss Carrie to be objects of terror; and when above them all she saw a pair of tender blue eyes looking down upon her, and a half-abashed smile lurking under a thick yellow moustache, she knew that for the remainder of that walk ranger and black would be equally powerless to harm her.

"0 Mr. Durton," she said, "how you did startle me!"

"I'm sorry, miss," said Abe, in great trepidation at having caused his idol one moment's uneasiness. "You see," he continued, with simple cunning, "the weather bein' fine and my partner gone prospectin', I thought I'd walk up to Hagley's Hill and round back by the bend, and there I sees you accidental-like and promiscuous a-standin' on a hillock." This astounding falsehood was reeled off by the miner with great fluency, and an artificial sincerity which at once stamped it as a fabrication. Bones had concocted and rehearsed it while tracking the little footsteps in the clay, and looked upon it as the very depth of human guile. Miss Carrie did not venture upon a remark, but there was a gleam of amusement in her eyes which puzzled her lover.

Abe was in good spirits this morning. It may have been the sunshine, or it may have been the rapid rise of shares in the Conemara, which lightened his heart. I am inclined to think, however, that it was referable to neither of these causes. Simple as he was, the scene which he had witnessed the night before could only lead to one conclusion. He pictured himself walking as wildly down the valley under similar circumstances, and his heart was touched with pity for his rival. He felt very certain that the ill-omened face of Mr. Thomas Ferguson of Rochdale Ferry would never more be seen within the walls of Azalea Villa. Then why did she refuse him? He was handsome, he was fairly rich. Could it — ? no, it couldn't; of course it couldn't; how could it! The idea was ridiculous — so very ridiculous that it had fermented in the young man's brain all night, and that he could do nothing but ponder over it in the morning, and cherish it in his perturbed bosom.

They passed down the red pathway together, and along by the river's bank. Abe had relapsed into his normal condition of taciturnity. He had made one gallant effort to hold forth upon the subject of ferns, stimulated by the basket which he held in his hand, but the theme was not a thrilling one, and after a spasmodic flicker he had abandoned the attempt. While coming along he had been full of racy anecdotes and humorous observations. He had rehearsed innumerable remarks which were to be poured into Miss Sinclair's appreciative ear. But now his brain seemed of a sudden to have become a vacuum, and utterly devoid of any idea save an insane and overpowering impulse to comment upon the heat of the sun. No astronomer who ever reckoned a parallax was so entirely absorbed in the condition of the celestial bodies as honest Bones while he trudged along by the slow-flowing Australian river.

Suddenly his conversation with his partner came back into his mind. What was it Boss had said upon the subject? "Tell her how they live at the mines." He revolved it in his brain. It seemed a curious thing to talk about; but Boss had said it, and Boss was always right. He would take the plunge; so with a premonitory hem he blurted out,

"They live mostly on bacon and beans in the valley."

He could not see what effect this communication had upon his companion. He was too tall to be able to peer under the little straw bonnet. She did not answer. He would try again.

"Mutton on Sundays," he said.

Even this failed to arouse any enthusiasm. In fact she seemed to be laughing. Boss was evidently wrong. The young man was in despair. The sight of a ruined hut beside the pathway conjured up a fresh idea. He grasped at it as a drowning man to a straw.

"Cockney Jack built that," he remarked. "Lived there till he died."

"What did he die of?" asked his companion.

"Three star brandy," said Abe decisively. "I used to come over of a night when he was bad and sit with him. Poor chap! he had a wife and two children in Putney. He'd rave, and call me Polly, by the hour. He was cleaned out, hadn't a red cent; but the boys collected rough gold enough to see him through. He's buried there in that shaft; that was his claim, so we just dropped him down it an’ filled it up. Put down his pick too, an’ a spade an’ a bucket, so’s he’d feel kinder perky and at home.”

Miss Carrie seemed more interested now.

“Do they often die like that?” she asked.

“Well, brandy kills many; but there’s more gets dropped — shot, you know.”

“I don’t mean that. Do many men die alone and miserable down there, with no one to care for them?” and she pointed to the cluster of houses beneath them. “Is there any one dying now? It is awful to think of.”

“There’s none as I knows on likely to throw up their hand.”

“I wish you wouldn’t use so much slang, Mr. Durton,” said Carrie, looking up at him reprovingly out of her voilet eyes. It was strange what an air of proprietorship this young lady was gradually assuming towards her gigantic companion. “You know it isn’t polite. You should get a dictionary and learn the proper words.”

“Ah, that’s it,” said Bones apologetically. “It’s gettin’ your hand on the proper one. When you’ve not got a steam drill, you’ve got to put up with a pick.”

“Yes, but it’s easy if you really try. You could say that a man was `dying,’ or ‘moribund,’ if you like.”

“That’s it,” said the miner enthusiastically. “‘Moribund!’ That’s a word. Why, you could lay over Boss Morgan in the matter of words. ‘Moribund!’ There’s some sound about that.”

Carrie laughed.

“It’s not the sound you must think of, but whether it will express your meaning. Seriously, Mr. Durton, if any one should be ill in the camp you must let me know. I can nurse, and I might be of use. You will, won’t you?”

Abe readily acquiesced, and relapsed into silence as he pondered over the possibility of inoculating himself with some long and tedious disease. There was a mad dog reported from Buckhurst. Perhaps something might be done with that.

“And now I must say good-morning,” said Carrie, as they came to the spot where a crooked pathway branched off from the track and wound up to Azalea Villa. “Thank you ever so much for escorting me.”

In vain Abe pleaded for the additional hundred yards, and adduced the overwhelming weight of the diminutive basket as a cogent reason. The young lady was inexorable. She had taken him too far out of his way already. She was ashamed of herself; she wouldn't hear of it.

So poor Bones departed in a mixture of many opposite feelings. He had interested her. She had spoken kindly to him. But then she had sent him away before there was any necessity; she couldn't care much about him if she would do that. I think he might have felt a little more cheerful, however, had he seen Miss Carrie Sinclair as she watched his retiring figure from the garden-gate with a loving look upon her saucy face, and a mischievous smile at his bent head and desponding appearance.

The Colonial Bar was the favourite haunt of the inhabitants of Harvey's Sluice in their hours of relaxation. There had been a fierce competition between it and the rival establishment termed the Grocery, which, in spite of its innocent appellation, aspired also to dispense spirituous refreshments. The importation of chairs into the latter had led to the appearance of a settee in the former. Spittoons appeared in the Grocery against a picture in the Bar, and, as the frequenters expressed it, the honours were even. When, however, the Grocery led a window-curtain, and its opponent returned a snuggery and a mirror, the game was declared to be in favour of the latter, and Harvey's Sluice showed its sense of the spirit of the proprietor by withdrawing their custom from his opponent.

Though every man was at liberty to swagger into the Bar itself, and bask in the shimmer of its many coloured bottles, there was a general feeling that the snuggery, or special apartment, should be reserved for the use of the more prominent citizens. It was in this room that committees met, that opulent companies were conceived and born, and that inquests were generally held. The latter, I regret to state, was, in 1861, a pretty frequent ceremony at the Sluice; and the findings of the coroner were sometimes characterised by a fine breezy originality. Witness when Bully Burke, a notorious desperado, was shot down by a quiet young medical man, and a sympathetic jury brought in that "the deceased had met his death in an ill-advised attempt to stop a pistol-ball while in motion," a verdict which was looked upon as a triumph of jurisprudence in the camp, as simultaneously exonerating the culprit, and adhering to the rigid and undeniable truth.

On this particular evening there was an assemblage of notabilities in the snuggery, though no such pathological ceremony had called them together. Many changes had occurred of late which merited discussion; and it was in this chamber, gorgeous in all the effete luxury of the mirror and settee, that

Harvey's Sluice was wont to exchange ideas. The recent cleaning of the population was still causing some ferment in men's minds. Then there was Miss Sinclair and her movements to be commented on, and the paying lead in the Conemara, and the recent rumours of bushrangers. It was no wonder that the leading men in the township had come together in the Colonial Bar.

The rangers were the present subject of discussion. For some few days rumours of their presence had been flying about, and an uneasy feeling had pervaded the colony. Physical fear was a thing little known in Harvey's Sluice. The miners would have turned out to hunt down the desperadoes with as much zest as if they had been so many kangaroos. It was the presence of a large quantity of gold in the town which caused anxiety. It was felt that the fruits of their labour must be secured at any cost. Messages had been sent over to Buckhurst for as many troopers as could be spared, and in the mean time the main street of the Sluice was paraded at night by volunteer sentinels.

A fresh impetus had been given to the panic by the report brought in to-day by Jim Struggles. Jim was of an ambitious and aspiring turn of mind, and after gazing in silent disgust at his last week's clean up, he had metaphorically shaken the clay of Harvey's Sluice from his feet, and had started off into the woods with the intention of prospecting round until he could hit upon some likely piece of ground for himself. Jim's story was that he was sitting upon a fallen trunk eating his midday damper and rusty bacon, when his trained ear had caught the clink of horses' hoofs. He had hardly time to take the precaution of rolling off the tree and crouching down behind it, before a troop of men came riding down through the bush, and passed within a stone-throw of him.

"There was Bill Smeaton and Murphy Duff," said Struggles, naming two notorious ruffians; "and there was three more that I couldn't rightly see. And they took the trail to the right, and looked like business all over, with their guns in their hands."

Jim was submitted to a searching cross-examination that evening; but nothing could shake his testimony or throw a further light upon what he had seen. He told the story several times and at long intervals; and though there might be a pleasing variety in the minor incidents, the main facts were always identically the same. The matter began to look serious.

There were a few, however, who were loudly sceptical as to the existence of the rangers, and the most prominent of these was a young man who was perched on a barrel in the centre of the room, and was evidently one of the leading spirits in the community. We have already seen that dark curling hair, lack-lustre eye, and thin cruel lip, in the person of Black Tom Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Sinclair. He was easily distinguishable from the rest of the party by a tweed coat, and other symptoms of effeminacy in his dress, which might have brought him into disrepute had he not, like Abe Durton's partner, early established the reputation of being a quietly desperate man. On the present occasion he seemed somewhat under the influence of liquor, a rare occurrence with him, and probably to be ascribed to his recent disappointment. He was almost fierce in his denunciation of Jim Struggles and his story.

"It's always the same," he said; "if a man meets a few travellers in the bush, he's bound to come back raving about rangers. If they'd seen Struggles there, they would have gone off with a long yarn about a ranger crouching behind a tree. As to recognising people riding fast among tree trunks — it is an impossibility."

Struggles, however, stoutly maintained his original assertion, and all the sarcasms and arguments of his opponent were thrown away upon his stolid complacency. It was noticed that Ferguson seemed unaccountably put out about the whole matter. Something seemed to be on his mind, too; for occasionally he would spring off his perch and pace up and down the room with an abstracted and very forbidding look upon his swarthy face. It was a relief to every one when suddenly catching up his hat, and wishing the company a curt "Good-night," he walked off through the bar, and into the street beyond.

"Seems kinder put out," remarked Long McCoy.

"He can't be afeard of the rangers, surely," said Joe Shamus, another man of consequence, and principal shareholder of the El Dorado.

"No, he's not the man to be afraid," answered another. "There's something queer about him the last day or two. He's been long trips in the woods without any tools. They do say that the assayer's daughter has chucked him over."

"Quite right too. A darned sight too good for him," remarked several voices.

"It's odds but he has another try," said Shamus. "He's a hard man to beat when he's set his mind on a thing."

“Abe Durton’s the horse to win,” remarked Houlahan, a little bearded Irishman. “It’s sivin to four I’d be willin’ to lay on him.” “And you’d be afther losing your money, a-vich,” said a young man with a laugh. “She’ll want more brains than ever Bones had in his skull, you bet.”

“Who’s seen Bones to-day?” asked McCoy.

“I’ve seen him,” said the young miner. “He came round all through the camp asking for a dictionary — wanted to write a letter likely.”

“I saw him readin’ it,” said Shamus. “He came over to me an’ told me he’d struck something good at the first show. Showed me a word about as long as your arm—’abdicate,’ or something.” “It’s a rich man he is now, I suppose,” said the Irishman. “Well, he’s about made his pile. He holds a hundred feet of the Conemara, and the shares go up every hour. If he’d sell out he’d he about fit to go home.”

“Guess he wants to take somebody home with him,” said another. “Old Joshua wouldn’t object, seein’ that the money is there.”

I think it has been already recorded in this narrative that Jim Struggles, the wandering prospector, had gained the reputation of being the wit of the camp. It was not only in airy badinage, but in the conception and execution of more pretentious practical pleasantries that Jim had earned his reputation. His adventure in the morning had caused a certain stagnation in his usual flow of humour; but the company and his potations were gradually restoring him to a more cheerful state of mind. He had been brooding in silence over some idea since the departure of Ferguson, and he now proceeded to evolve it to his expectant companions.

“Say, boys,” he began. “What day’s this?”

“Friday, ain’t it?”

“No, not that. What day of the month?”

“Darned if I know!”

“Well, I’ll tell you now. It’s the first o’ April. I’ve got a calendar in the hut as says so.”

“What if it is?” said several voices.

“Well, don’t you see, it’s All Fools’ day. Couldn’t we fix up some little joke on some one, eh? Couldn’t we get a laugh out of it? Now there’s old Bones, for instance; he’ll never smell a rat. Couldn’t we send him off somewhere and watch him go maybe? We’d have something to chaff him on for a month to come, eh?”

There was a general murmur of assent. A joke, however poor, was always welcome to the Sluice. The broader the point, the more thoroughly was it appreciated. There was no morbid delicacy of feeling in the gulches.

“Where shall we send him?” was the query.

Jim Struggles was buried in thought for a moment. Then an unhallowed inspiration seemed to come over him, and he laughed uproariously, rubbing his hands between his knees in the excess of his delight.

“Well, what is it?” asked the eager audience.

“See here, boys. There’s Miss Sinclair. You was saying as Abe’s gone on her. She don’t fancy him much you think. Suppose we write him a note — send it him to-night, you know.”

“Well, what then?” said McCoy.

“Well, pretend the note is from her, d’ye see? Put her name at the bottom. Let on as she wants him to come up an’ meet her in the garden at twelve. He’s bound to go. He’ll think she wants to go off with him. It’ll be the biggest thing played this year.”

There was a roar of laughter. The idea conjured up of honest Bones mooning about in the garden, and of old Joshua coming out to remonstrate with a double-barrelled shot-gun, was irresistibly comic. The plan was approved of unanimously.

“Here’s pencil and here’s paper,” said the humorist. “Who’s goin’ to write the letter?”

“Write it yourself, Jim,” said Shamus.

“Well, what shall I say?”

“Say what you think right.”

“I don’t know how she’d put it,” said Jim, scratching his head in great perplexity. “However, Bones will never know the differ. How will this do? ‘Dear old man. Come to the garden at twelve to-night, else I’ll never speak to you again,’ eh?”

“No, that’s not the style,” said the young miner. “Mind, she’s a lass of eddication. She’d put it kinder flowery and soft.” “Well, write it yourself,” said Jim sulkily, handing him over the pencil.

“This is the sort of thing,” said the miner, moistening the point of it in his mouth. “‘When the moon is in the sky—’” “There it is. That’s bully,” from the company.

“‘And the stars a-shinin’ bright, meet, 0 meet me, Adolphus, by the garden-gate at twelve.’”

"His name isn't Adolphus," objected a critic.

"That's how the poetry comes in," said the miner. "It's kinder fanciful, d'ye see. Sounds a darned sight better than Abe. Trust him for guessing who she means. I'll sign it Carrie. There!" This epistle was gravely passed round the room from hand to hand, and reverentially gazed upon as being a remarkable production of the human brain. It was then folded up and committed to the care of a small boy, who was solemnly charged under dire threats to deliver it at the shanty, and to make off before any awkward questions were asked him. It was only after he had disappeared in the darkness that some slight compunction visited one or two of the company.

"Ain't it playing it rather low on the girl?" said Shamus. "And rough on old Bones?" suggested another.

However, these objections were overruled by the majority, and disappeared entirely upon the appearance of a second jorum of whisky. The matter had almost been forgotten by the time that Abe had received his note, and was spelling it out with a palpitating heart under the light of his solitary candle.

That night has long been remembered in Harvey's Sluice. A fitful breeze was sweeping down from the distant mountains, moaning and sighing among the deserted claims. Dark clouds were hurrying across the moon, one moment throwing a shadow over the landscape, and the next allowing the silvery radiance to shine down, cold and clear, upon the little valley, and bathe in a weird mysterious light the great stretch of bushland on either side of it. A great loneliness seemed to rest on the face of Nature. Men remarked afterwards on the strange eerie atmosphere which hung over the little town.

It was in the darkness that Abe Durton sallied out from his little shanty. His partner, Boss Morgan, was still absent in the bush, so that beyond the ever-watchful Blinky there was no living being to observe his movements. A feeling of mild surprise filled his simple soul that his angel's delicate fingers could have formed those great straggling hieroglyphics; however, there was the name at the foot, and that was enough for him. She wanted him, no matter for what, and with a heart as pure and as heroic as any knight-errant, this rough miner went forth at the summons of his love.

He groped his way up the steep winding track which led to Azalea Villa. There was a little clump of small trees and shrubs about fifty yards from the entrance of the garden. Abe stopped for a moment when he had reached them in order to collect himself. It was hardly twelve yet, so that he had a few minutes to spare. He stood under their dark canopy peering at the white house vaguely outlined in front of him. A plain enough little dwelling-place to any prosaic mortal, but girt with reverence and awe in the eyes of the lover.

The miner paused under the shade of the trees, and then moved on to the garden-gate. There was no one there. He was evidently rather early. The moon was shining brightly now-, and the country round was as clear as day. Abe looked past the little villa at the road which ran like a white winding streak over the brow of the hill. A watcher behind could have seen his square athletic figure standing out sharp and clear. Then he gave a start as if he had been shot, and staggered up against the little gate beside him.

He had seen something which caused even his sunburned face to become a shade paler as he thought of the girl so near him. Just at the bend of the road, not two hundred yards away, he saw a dark moving mass coming round the curve, and lost in the shadow of the hill. It was but for a moment; yet in that moment the quick perception of the practised woodman had realised the whole situation. It was a band of horsemen bound for the villa; and what horsemen would ride so by night save the terror of the woodlands — the dreaded rangers of the bush?

It is true that on ordinary occasions Abe was as sluggish in his intellect as he was heavy in his movements. In the hour of danger, however, he was as remarkable for cool deliberation as for prompt and decisive action. As he advanced up the garden he rapidly reckoned up the chances against him. There were half a dozen of the assailants at the most moderate computation, all desperate and fearless men. The question was whether he could keep them at bay for a short time and prevent their forcing a passage into the house. We have already mentioned that sentinels had been placed in the main street of the town. Abe reckoned that help would be at hand within ten minutes of the firing of the first shot.

Were he inside the house he could confidently reckon on holding his own for a longer period than that. Before he could rouse the sleepers and gain admission, however, the rangers would be upon him. He must content himself with doing his utmost. At any rate he would show Carrie that if he could not talk to her he could at least die for her. The thought gave him quite a glow of pleasure, as he crept under the shadow of the house. He cocked his revolver. Experience had taught him the advantage of the first shot.

The road along which the rangers were coming ended at a wooden gate opening into the upper part of the assayer's little garden. This gate had a high acacia hedge on either side of it, and opened into a short walk also lined by impassable thorny walls. Abe knew the place well. One resolute man might, he thought, hold the passage for a few minutes until the assailants broke through elsewhere and took him in the rear. At any rate, it was his best chance. He passed the front door, but forbore to give any alarm. Sinclair was an elderly man, and would be of little assistance in such a desperate struggle as was before him, and the appearance of lights in the house would warn the rangers of the resistance awaiting them. 0 for his partner the Boss, for Chicago Bill, for any one of twenty gallant men who would have come at his call and stood by him in such a quarrel! He turned into the narrow pathway. There was the well-remembered wooden gate; and there, perched upon the gate, languidly swinging his legs backwards and forwards, and peering down the road in front of him, was Mr. John Morgan, the very man for whom Abe had been longing from the bottom of his heart.

There was short time for explanations. A few hurried words announced that the Boss, returning from his little tour, had come across the rangers riding on their mission of darkness, and overhearing their destination, had managed by hard running and knowledge of the country to arrive before them. "No time to alarm any one," he explained, still panting from his exertions; "must stop them ourselves — not come for swag — come for your girl. Only over our bodies, Bones," and with these few broken words the strangely assorted friends shook hands and looked lovingly into each other's eyes, while the tramp of the horses came down to them on the fragrant breeze of the woods.

There were six rangers in all. One who appeared to be leader rode in front, while the others followed in a body. They flung themselves off their horses when they were opposite the house, and after a few muttered words from their captain, tethered the animals to a small tree, and walked confidently towards the gate.

Boss Morgan and Abe were crouching down under the shadow of the hedge, at the extreme end of the narrow passage. They were invisible to the rangers, who evidently reckoned on meeting little resistance in this isolated house. As the first man came forwards and half turned to give some order to his comrades both the friends recognised the stern profile and heavy moustache of Black Tom Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Carrie

Sinclair. Honest Abe made a mental vow that he at least should never reach the door alive.

The ruffian stepped up to the gate and put his hand upon the latch. He started as a stentorian “Stand back!” came thundering out from among the bushes. In war, as in love, the miner was a man of few words.

“There’s no road this way,” explained another voice with an infinite sadness and gentleness about it which was characteristic of its owner when the devil was rampant in his soul. The ranger recognised it. He remembered the soft languid address which he had listened to in the billiard-room of the Buckhurst Arms, and which had wound up by the mild orator putting his back against the door, drawing a derringer, and asking to see the sharper who would dare to force a passage. “It’s that infernal fool Durton,” he said, “and his white-faced friend.”

Both were well-known names in the country round. But the rangers were reckless and desperate men. They drew up to the gate in a body.

“Clear out of that!” said their leader in a grim whisper; “you can’t save the girl. Go off with whole skins while you have the chance.”

The partners laughed.

“Then curse you, come on!”

The gate was flung open and the party fired a struggling volley, and made a fierce rush towards the gravelled walk.

The revolvers cracked merrily in the silence of the night from the bushes at the other end. It was hard to aim with precision in the darkness. The second man sprang convulsively into the air, and fell upon his face with his arms extended, writhing horribly in the moonlight. The third was grazed in the leg and stopped. The others stopped out of sympathy. After all, the girl was not for them, and their heart was hardly in the work. Their captain rushed madly on, like a valiant blackguard as he was, but was met by a crashing blow from the butt of Abe Durton’s pistol, delivered with a fierce energy which sent him reeling back among his comrades with the blood streaming from his shattered jaw, and his capacity for cursing cut short at the very moment when he needed to draw upon it most.

“Don’t go yet,” said the voice in the darkness.

However, they had no intention of going yet. A few minutes must elapse, they knew, before Harvey’s Sluice could be upon them. There was still time to force the door if they could succeed in mastering the defenders. What Abe had feared came to pass. Black Ferguson knew the ground as well as he did. He ran rapidly along the hedge, and the five crashed through it where there was some appearance of a gap. The two friends glanced at each other. Their flank was turned. They stood up like men who knew their fate and did not fear to meet it.

There was a wild medley of dark figures in the moonlight, and a ringing cheer from well-known voices. The humorists of Harvey's Sluice had found something even more practical than the joke which they had come to witness. The partners saw the faces of friends beside them — Shamus, Struggles, McCoy. There was a desperate rally, a sweeping fiery rush, a cloud of smoke, with pistol-shots and fierce oaths ringing out of it, and when it lifted, a single dark shadow flying for dear life to the shelter of the broken hedge was the only ranger upon his feet within the little garden. But there was no sound of triumph among the victors; a strange hush had come over them, and a murmur as of grief — for there, lying across the threshold which he had fought so gallantly to defend, lay poor Abe, the loyal and simple hearted, breathing heavily with a bullet through his lungs.

He was carried inside with all the rough tenderness of the mines. There were men there, I think, who would have borne his hurt to have had the love of that white girlish figure, which bent over the blood-stained bed and whispered so softly and so tenderly in his ear. Her voice seemed to rouse him. He opened his dreamy blue eyes and looked about him. They rested on her face.

"Played out," he murmured; "pardon, Carrie, morib—" and with a faint smile he sank back upon the pillow.

However, Abe failed for once to be as good as his word. His hardy constitution asserted itself, and he shook off what might in a weaker man have proved a deadly wound. Whether it was the balmy air of the woodlands which came sweeping over a thousand miles of forest into the sick man's room, or whether it was the little nurse who tended him so gently, certain it is that within two months we heard that he had realised his shares in the Conemara, and gone from Harvey's Sluice and the little shanty upon the hill for ever.

I had the advantage a short time afterwards of seeing an extract from the letter of a young lady named Amelia, to whom we have made a casual allusion in the course of our narrative. We have already broken the privacy of one feminine epistle, so we shall have fewer scruples in glancing at another. "I was bridesmaid," she remarks, "and Carrie looked charming" (underlined) “in the veil and orange blossoms. Such a man, he is, twice as big as your Jack, and he was so funny, and blushed, and dropped the prayer-book. And when they asked the question you could have heard him roar `I do!’ at the other end of George street. His best man was a darling” (twice underlined). “So quiet and handsome and nice. Too gentle to take care of himself among those rough men, I am sure.” I think it quite possible that in the fullness of time Miss Amelia managed to take upon herself the care of our old friend Mr. Jack Morgan, commonly known as the Boss.

A tree is still pointed out at the bend as Ferguson’s gum-tree. There is no need to enter into unsavoury details. Justice is short and sharp in primitive colonies, and the dwellers in Harvey’s Sluice were a serious and practical race.

It is still the custom for a select party to meet on a Saturday evening in the snuggery of the Colonial Bar. On such occasions, if there be a stranger or guest to be entertained, the same solemn ceremony is always observed. Glasses are charged in silence; there is a tapping of the same upon the table, and then, with a deprecating cough, Jim Struggles comes forward and tells the tale of the April joke, and of what came of it. There is generally conceded to be something very artistic in the way in which he breaks off suddenly at the close of his narrative by waving his bumper in the air with “An’ here’s to Mr. and Mrs. Bones. God bless ‘em!” a sentiment in which the stranger, if he is a prudent man, will most cordially acquiesce.

THE MYSTERY OF SASASSA VALLEY

Do I know why Tom Donahue is called “Lucky Tom?” Yes; I do; and that is more than one in ten of those who call him so can say. I have knocked about a deal in my time, and seen some strange sights, but none stranger than the way in which Tom gained that sobriquet and his fortune with it. For I was with him at the time. — Tell it? Oh, certainly; but it is a longish story and a very strange one; so fill up your glass again, and light another cigar while I try to reel it off. Yes; a very strange one; beats some fairy stories I have heard; but it’s true sir, every word of it. There are men alive at Cape Colony now who’ll remember it and confirm what I say. Many a time has the tale been told round the fire in Boers’ cabins from Orange State to Griqualand; yes, and out in the Bush and at the Diamond Fields too.

I’m roughish now sir; but I was entered at the Middle Temple once, and studied for the Bar. Tom — worse luck! — was one of my fellow-students; and a wildish time we had of it, until at last our finances ran short, and we were compelled to give up our so-called studies, and look about for some part of the world where two young fellows with strong arms and sound constitutions might make their mark. In those days the tide of emigration had scarcely begun to set in towards Africa, and so we thought our best chance would be down at Cape Colony. Well — to make a long story short — we set sail, and were deposited in Cape Town with less than five pounds in our pockets; and there we parted. We each tried our hands at many things, and had ups and downs; but when, at the end of three years, chance led each of us up-country and we met again, we were, I regret to say, in almost as bad a plight as when we started.

Well, this was not much of a commencement; and very disheartened we were, so disheartened that Tom spoke of going back to England and getting a clerkship. For you see we didn’t know that we had played out all our small cards, and that the trumps were going to turn up. No; we thought our “hands” were bad all through. It was a very lonely part of the country that we were in, inhabited by a few scattered farmers, whose houses were stockaded and fenced in to defend them against the Kaffirs. Tom Donahue and I had a little hut right out in the Bush; but we were known to possess nothing, and to be handy with our revolvers, so we had little to fear. There we waited doing odd jobs, and hoping that something would turn up. Well, after we had been there about a month something did turn up upon a certain night, something which was the making of both of us; and it’s about that night sir, that I’m going to tell you. I remember it well. The wind was howling past our cabin, and the rain threatened to burst in our rude window. We had a great wood-fire crackling and sputtering on the hearth, by which I was sitting mending a whip, while Tom was lying in his bunk groaning disconsolately at the chance which had led him to such a place.

“Cheer up, Tom — cheer up,” said I. “No man ever knows what may be awaiting him.”

“III-luck, ill-luck, Jack,” he answered. “I always was an unlucky dog. Here have I been three years in this abominable country; and I see lads fresh from England jingling the money in their pockets, while I am as poor as when I landed. Ah, Jack, if you want to keep your head above water, old friend, you must try your fortune away from me.”

“Nonsense, Tom; you’re down in your luck to-night. But hark! Here’s some one coming outside. Dick Wharton, by the tread; he’ll rouse you, if any man can.”

Even as I spoke the door was flung open, and honest Dick Wharton, with the water pouring from him, stepped in, his hearty red face looking through the haze like a harvest-moon. He shook himself, and after greeting us sat down by the fire to warm himself.

“Whereaway, Dick, on such a night as this?” said I. “You’ll find the rheumatism a worse foe than the Kaffirs, unless you keep more regular hours.”

Dick was looking unusually serious, almost frightened, one would say, if one did not know the man. “Had to go,” he replied—”had to go. One of Madison’s cattle has been straying down Sasassa Valley, and of course none of our blacks would go down that Valley at night; and if we lad waited till morning, the brute would have been in Kaffirland.”

“Why wouldn’t they go down Sasassa Valley at night?” asked Tom.

“Kaffirs, I suppose,” said I.

“Ghosts,” said Dick.

We both laughed.

“I suppose they didn’t give such a matter-of-fact fellow as you a sight of their charms?” said Tom from the bunk.

“Yes,” said Dick seriously—”yes; I saw what the niggers talk about; and I promise you, lads, I don’t want ever to see it again.”

Tom sat up in his bed. “Nonsense, Dick; you’re joking, man! Come, tell us all about it. The legend first, and your own experience afterwards. — Pass him over the bottle, Jack.”

“Well, as to the legend,” began Dick “ — it seems that the niggers have had it handed down to them that Sasassa Valley is haunted by a frightful fiend. Hunters and wanderers passing down the defile have seen its glowing eyes under the shadows of the cliff; and the story goes that whoever has chanced to encounter that baleful glare, has had his after-life blighted by the malignant power of this creature. Whether that be true or not,” continued Dick ruefully, “I may have an opportunity of judging for myself.”

“Go on, Dick — go on,” cried Tom. “Let’s hear about what you saw.”

“Well, I was groping down the Valley, looking for that cow of Madison’s, and I had, I suppose, got half-way down, where a black craggy cliff juts into the ravine on the right, when I halted to have a pull at my flask. I had my eye fixed at the time upon the projecting cliff I have mentioned, and noticed nothing unusual about it. I then put up my flask and took a step or two forward, when in a moment there burst apparently from the base of the rock, about eight feet from the ground and a hundred yards from me, a strange lurid glare, flickering and oscillating, gradually dying away and then reappearing again. — No, no; I’ve seen many a glow-worm and firefly — nothing of that sort. There it was burning away, and I suppose I gazed at it, trembling in every limb, for fully ten minutes. Then I took a step forwards, when instantly it vanished, vanished like a candle blown out. I stepped back again; but it was some time before I could find the exact spot and position from which it was visible. At last, there it was, the weird reddish light, flickering away as before. Then I screwed up my courage, and made for the rock; but the ground was so uneven that it was impossible to steer straight; and though I walked along the whole base of the cliff, I could see nothing. Then I made tracks for home; and I can tell you, boys, that until you remarked it, I never knew it was raining, the whole way along. — But hollo! what’s the matter with Tom?”

What indeed? Tom was now sitting with his legs over the side of the bunk, and his whole face betraying excitement so intense as to be almost painful. “The fiend would have two eyes. How many lights did you see, Dick? Speak out!”

“Only one.”

“Hurrah!” cried Tom—”that’s better!” Whereupon he kicked the blankets into the middle of the room, and began pacing up and down with long feverish strides. Suddenly he stopped opposite Dick, and laid his hand upon his shoulder: “I say, Dick, could we get to Sasassa Valley before sunrise?”

“Scarcely,” said Dick.

“Well, look here; we are old friends, Dick Wharton, you and I. Now, don’t you tell any other man what you have told us, for a week. You’ll promise that; won’t you?”

I could see by the look on Dick’s face as he acquiesced that he considered poor Tom to be mad; and indeed I was myself completely mystified by his conduct. I had, however, seen so many proofs of my friend’s good sense and quickness of apprehension, that I thought it quite possible that Wharton’s story had had a meaning in his eyes which I was too obtuse to take in.

All night Tom Donahue was greatly excited, and when Wharton left he begged him to remember his promise, and also elicited from him a description of the exact spot at which he had seen the apparition, as well as the hour at which it appeared. After his departure, which must have been about four in the morning, I turned into my bunk and watched Tom sitting by the fire splicing two sticks together, until I fell asleep. I suppose I must have slept about two hours; but when I awoke, Tom was still sitting working away in almost the same position. He had fixed the one stick across the top of the other so as to form a rough T, and was now busy in fitting a smaller stick into the angle between them, by manipulating which, the cross one could be either cocked up or depressed to any extent. He had cut notches too in the perpendicular stick, so that by the aid of the small prop, the cross one could be kept in any position for an indefinite time.

“Look here, Jack!” he cried, whenever he saw that I was awake, “Come, and give me your opinion. Suppose I put this cross-stick pointing straight at a thing, and arranged this small one so as to keep it so, and left it, I could find that thing again if I wanted it — don’t you think I could, Jack — don’t you think so?” he continued nervously, clutching me by the arm.

“Well,” I answered, “it would depend on how far off the thing was, and how accurately it was pointed. If it were any distance, I’d cut sights on your cross-stick; then a string tied to the end of it, and held in a plumb-line forwards, would lead you pretty near what you wanted. But surely, Tom, you don’t intend to localise the ghost in that way?”

"You'll see to-night, old friend — you'll see tonight. I'll carry this to the Sasassa Valley. You get the loan of Madison's crowbar, and come with me; but mind you tell no man where you are going, or what you want it for."

All day Tom was walking up and down the room, or working hard at the apparatus. His eyes were glistening, his cheek hectic, and he had all the symptoms of high fever. "Heaven grant that Dick's diagnosis be not correct!" I thought, as I returned with the crowbar; and yet, as evening drew near, I found myself imperceptibly sharing the excitement.

About six o'clock Tom sprang to his feet and seized his sticks. "I can stand it no longer, Jack," he cried; "up with your crowbar, and hey for Sasassa Valley! To-night's work, my lad, will either make us or mar us! Take your six-shooter, in case we meet the Kaffirs. I daren't take mine, Jack," he continued, putting his hands upon my shoulders—"I daren't take mine; for if my ill-luck sticks to me to-night, I don't know what I might not do with it."

Well, having filled our pockets with provisions, we set out, and as we took our wearisome way towards the Sasassa Valley, I frequently attempted to elicit from my companion some clue as to his intentions. But his only answer was: "Let us hurry on, Jack. Who knows how many have heard of Wharton's adventure by this time! Let us hurry on, or we may not be first in the field!"

Well sir, we struggled on through the hills for a matter of ten miles; till at last, after descending a crag, we saw opening out in front of us a ravine so sombre and dark that it might have been the gate of Hades itself; cliffs many hundred feet high shut in on every side the gloomy boulder-studded passage which led through the haunted defile into Kaffirland. The moon rising above the crags, threw into strong relief the rough irregular pinnacles of rock by which they were topped, while all below was dark as Erebus.

"The Sasassa Valley?" said I.

"Yes," said Tom.

I looked at him. He was calm now; the flush and feverishness had passed away; his actions were deliberate and slow. Yet there was a certain rigidity in his face and glitter in his eye which shewed that a crisis had come.

We entered the pass, stumbling along amid the great boulders. Suddenly I heard a short quick exclamation from Tom. "That's the crag!" he cried, pointing to a great mass looming before us in the darkness. "Now Jack, for any favour use your eyes! We're about a hundred yards from that cliff, I take it; so you move slowly towards one side, and I’ll do the same towards the other. When you see anything, stop, and call out. Don’t take more than twelve inches in a step, and keep your eye fixed on the cliff about eight feet from the ground. Are you ready?”

“Yes.” I was even more excited than Tom by this time. What his intention or object was, I could not conjecture, beyond that he wanted to examine by daylight the part of the cliff from which the light came. Yet the influence of the romantic situation and of my companion’s suppressed excitement was so great, that I could feel the blood coursing through my veins and count the pulses throbbing at my temples.

“Start!” cried Tom; and we moved off, he to the right, Ito the left, each with our eyes fixed intently on the base of the crag. I had moved perhaps twenty feet, when in a moment it burst upon me. Through the growing darkness there shone a small ruddy glowing point, the light from which waned and increased, flickered and oscillated, each change producing a more weird effect than the last. The old Kaffir superstition came into my mind, and I felt a cold shudder pass over me. In my excitement, I stepped a pace backwards, when instantly the light went out, leaving utter darkness in its place; but when I advanced again, there was the ruddy glare glowing from the base of the cliff. “Tom, Tom!” I cried.

“Ay, ay!” I heard him exclaim, as he hurried over towards me.

“There it is — there, up against the cliff!”

Tom was at my elbow. “I see nothing,” said he.

“Why, there, there, man, in front of you!” I stepped to the right as I spoke, when the light instantly vanished from my eyes.

But from Tom’s ejaculations of delight it was clear that from my former position it was visible to him also. “Jack,” he cried, as he turned and wrung my hand—”Jack, you and I can never complain of our luck again. Now heap up a few stones where we are standing. — That’s right. Now we must fix my sign-post firmly in at the top. There! It would take a strong wind to blow that down; and we only need it to hold out till morning. 0 Jack, my boy, to think that only yesterday we were talking of becoming clerks, and you saying that no man knew what was awaiting him too! By Jove, Jack, it would make a good story!”

By this time we had firmly fixed the perpendicular stick in between two large stones; and Tom bent down and peered along the horizontal one. For fully a quarter of an hour he was alternately raising and depressing it, until at last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he fixed the prop into the angle, and stood up. “Look along, Jack,” he said. “You have as straight an eye to take a sight as any man I know of.”

I looked along. There, beyond the further sight was the ruddy scintillating speck, apparently at the end of the stick itself, so accurately had it been adjusted. “And now, my boy,” said Tom, “let’s have some supper, and a sleep. There’s nothing more to be done to-night; but we’ll need all our wits and strength to-morrow. Get some sticks, and kindle a fire here, and then we’ll be able to keep an eye on our signal-post, and see that nothing happens to it during the night.”

Well sir, we kindled a fire, and had supper with the Sasassa demon’s eye rolling and glowing in front of us the whole night through. Not always in the same place though; for after supper, when I glanced along the sights to have another look at it, it was nowhere to be seen. The information did not, however, seem to disturb Tom in any way. He merely remarked: “It’s the moon, not the thing, that has shifted;” and coiling himself up, went to sleep.

By early dawn we were both up, and gazing along our pointer at the cliff; but we could make out nothing save one dead monotonous slaty surface, rougher perhaps at the part we were examining than elsewhere, but otherwise presenting nothing remarkable.

“Now for your idea, Jack!” said Tom Donahue, unwinding a long thin cord from round his waist. “You fasten it, and guide me while I take the other end.” So saying he walked off to the base of the cliff, holding one end of the cord, while I drew the other taut, and wound it round the middle of the horizontal stick, passing it through the sight at the end. By this means I could direct Tom to the right or left, until we had our string stretching from the point of attachment, through the sight, and on to the rock, which it struck about eight feet from the ground. Tom drew a chalk circle of about three feet diameter round the spot, and then called to me to come and join him. “We’ve managed this business together, Jack,” he said, “and we’ll find what we are to find, together.” The circle he had drawn embraced a part of the rock smoother than the rest, save that about the centre there were a few rough protuberances or knobs. One of these Tom pointed to with a cry of delight. It was a roughish brownish mass about the size of a man’s closed fist, and looking like a bit of dirty glass let into the wall of the cliff. “That’s it!” he cried—”that’s it!”

“That’s what?”

“Why, man, a diamond, and such a one as there isn’t a monarch in Europe but would envy Tom Donahue the possession of. Up with your crowbar, and we’ll soon exorcise the demon of Sasassa Valley!”

I was so astounded that for a moment I stood speechless with surprise, gazing at the treasure which had so unexpectedly fallen into our hands.

“Here, hand me the crowbar,” said Tom. “Now, by using this little round knob which projects from the cliff here, as a fulcrum, we may be able to lever it off. — Yes; there it goes. I never thought it could have come so easily. Now, Jack, the sooner we get back to our hut and then down to Cape Town, the better.”

We wrapped up our treasure, and made our way across the hills, towards home. On the way, Tom told me how, while a law-student in the Middle Temple, he had come upon a dusty pamphlet in the library, by one Jans van Hounym, which told of an experience very similar to ours, which had befallen that worthy Duchman in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and which resulted in the discovery of a luminous diamond. This tale it was which had come into Tom’s head as he listened to honest Dick Wharton’s ghost-story; while the means which he had adopted to verify his supposition sprang from his own fertile Irish brain.

“We’ll take it down to Cape Town,” continued Tom, “and if we can’t dispose of it with advantage there, it will be worth our while to ship for London with it. Let us go along to Madison’s first, though; he knows something of these things, and can perhaps give us some idea of what we may consider a fair price for our treasure.”

We turned off from the track accordingly, before reaching our hut, and kept along the narrow path leading to Madison’s farm. He was at lunch when we entered; and in a minute we were seated at each side of him, enjoying South African hospitality.

“Well,” he said, after the servants were gone, “what’s in the wind now? I see you have something to say to me. What is it?”

Tom produced his packet, and solemnly untied the handkerchiefs which enveloped it. “There!” he said, putting his crystal on the table; “what would you say was a fair price for that?”

Madison took it up and examined it critically. “Well,” he said, laying it down again, “in its crude state about twelve shillings per ton.”

“Twelve shillings!” cried Tom, starting to his feet. “Don’t you see what it is?”

“Rock-salt!”

“Rock fiddle; a diamond.”

“Taste it!” said Madison.

Torn put it to his lips, dashed it down with a dreadful exclamation, and rushed out of the room.

I felt sad and disappointed enough myself; but presently remembering what Tom had said about the pistol, I, too, left the house, and made for the hut, leaving Madison open-mouthed with astonishment. When I got in, I found Tom lying in his bunk with his face to the wall, too dispirited apparently to answer my consolations. Anathematising Dick and Madison, the Sasassa demon, and everything else, I strolled out of the hut, and refreshed myself with a pipe after our wearisome adventure. I was about fifty yards away from the hut, when I heard issuing from it the sound which of all others I least expected to hear. Had it been a groan or an oath, I should have taken it as a matter of course; but the sound which caused me to stop and take the pipe out of my mouth was a hearty roar of laughter! Next moment, Tom himself emerged from the door, his whole face radiant with delight. “Game for another ten-mile walk, old fellow?”

“What! for another lump of rock-salt, at twelve shillings a ton?”

“‘No more of that, Hal, an you love me,’” grinned Tom. “Now look here, Jack. What blessed fools we are to be so floored by a trifle! Just sit on this stump for five minutes, and I’ll make it as clear as daylight. You’ve seen many a lump of rock-salt stuck in a crag, and so have I, though we did make such a mull of this one. Now, Jack, did any of the pieces you have ever seen shine in the darkness brighter than any fire-fly?”

“Well, I can’t say they ever did.”

“I’d venture to prophesy that if we waited until night, which we won’t do, we would see that light still glimmering among the rocks. Therefore, Jack, when we took away this worthless salt, we took the wrong crystal. It is no very strange thing in these hills that a piece of rock-salt should be lying within a foot of a diamond. It caught our eyes, and we were excited, and so we made fools of ourselves, and left the real stone behind. Depend upon it, Jack, the Sasassa gem is lying within this magic circle of chalk upon the face of yonder cliff. Come, old fellow, light your pipe and stow your revolver, and we’ll be off before that fellow Madison has time to put two and two together.”

I don’t know that I was very sanguine this time. I had begun in fact to look upon the diamond as a most unmitigated nuisance. However, rather than throw a damper on Tom’s expectations, I announced myself eager to start. What a walk it was! Tom was always a good mountaineer, but his excitement seemed to lend him wings that day, while I scrambled along after him as best I could. When we got within half a mile he broke into the “double,” and never pulled up until he reached the round white circle upon the cliff. Poor old Tom! when I came up, his mood had changed, and he was standing with his hands in his pockets, gazing vacantly before him with a rueful countenance.

“Look!” he said—”look!” and he pointed at the cliff. Not a sign of anything in the least resembling a diamond there. The circle included nothing but flat slate-coloured stone, with one large hole, where we had extracted the rock-salt, and one or two smaller depressions. No sign of the gem. “I’ve been over every inch of it,” said poor Tom. “It’s not there. Some one has been here and noticed the chalk, and taken it. Come home, Jack; I feel sick and tired. Oh! had any man ever luck like mine!”

I turned to go, but took one last look at the cliff first. Tom was already ten paces off.

“Honor!” I cried, “don’t you see any change in that circle since yesterday?”

“What d’ye mean?” said Tom.

“Don’t you miss a thing that was there before?”

“The rock-salt?” said Tom.

“No; but the little round knob that we used for a fulcrum. I suppose we must have wrenched it off in using the lever. Let’s have a look at what it’s made of.”

Accordingly, at the foot of the cliff we searched about among the loose stones.

“Here you are, Jack! We’ve done it at last! We’re made men!”

I turned round, and there was Tom radiant with delight, and with a little corner of black rock in his hand. At first sight it seemed to be merely a chip from the cliff; but near the base there was projecting from it an object which Tom was now exultingly pointing out. It looked at first something like a glass eye; but there was a depth and brilliancy about it such as glass never exhibited. There was no mistake this time; we had certainly got possession of a jewel of great value; and with light hearts we turned from the valley, bearing away with us the “fiend” which had so long reigned there.

There sir; I’ve spun my story out too long, and tired you perhaps. You see when I get talking of those rough old days, I kind of see the little cabin again, and the brook beside it, and the bush around, and seem to hear Tom’s honest voice once more. There’s little for me to say now. We prospered on the gem. Tom Donahue, as you know, has set up here, and is well known about town. I have done well, farming and ostrich-raising in Africa. We set old Dick Wharton up in business, and he is one of our nearest neighbours. If you should ever be coming up our way sir, you’ll not forget to ask for Jack Turnbull — Jack Turnbull of Sasassa Farm.

OUR DERBY SWEEPSTAKES

“Bob!” I shouted.

No answer.

“Bob!”

A rapid crescendo of snores ending in a prolonged gasp. “Wake up, Bob!”

“What the deuce is the row?” said a very sleepy voice. “It’s nearly breakfast-time,” I explained.

“Bother breakfast-time!” said the rebellious spirit in the bed. “And here’s a letter, Bob,” said I.

“Why on earth couldn’t you say so at once? Come on with it;” on which cordial invitation I marched into my brother’s room, and perched myself upon the side of his bed.

“Here you are,” said I. “Indian stamp — Brindisi postmark. Who is it from?”

“Mind your own business, Stumpy,” said my brother, as he pushed back his curly tangled locks and, after rubbing his eyes, proceeded to break the seal. Now if there is one appellation for which above all others I have a profound contempt, it is this one of “Stumpy.” Some miserable nurse, impressed by the relative proportions of my round grave face and little mottled legs, had dubbed me with the odious nickname in the days of my childhood. I am not really a bit more stumpy than any other girl of seventeen. On the present occasion I rose in all the dignity of wrath, and was about to dump my brother on the head with the pillow by way of remonstrance, when a look of interest in his face stopped me.

“Who do you think is coming, Nelly?” he said. “An old friend of yours.”

“What! from India? Not Jack Hawthorne?”

“Even so,” said Bob. “Jack is coming back and going to stay with us. He says he will be here almost as soon as his letter. Now don’t dance about like that. You’ll knock down the guns, or do some damage. Keep quiet like a good girl, and sit down here again.” Bob spoke with all the weight of the two-and-twenty summers which had passed over his towsy head, so I calmed down and settled into my former position.

“Won’t it be jolly?” I cried. “But, Bob, the last time he was here he was a boy, and now he is a man. He won’t be the same Jack at all.”

“Well, for that matter,” said Bob, “you were only a girl then — a nasty little girl with ringlets, while now—”

“What now?” I asked.

Bob seemed actually on the eve of paying me a compliment. “Well, you haven’t got the ringlets, and you are ever so much bigger, you see, and nastier.”

Brothers are a blessing for one thing. There is no possibility of any young lady getting unreasonably conceited if she be endowed with them.

I think they were all glad at breakfast-time to hear of Jack Hawthorne’s promised advent. By “all” I mean my mother and Elsie and Bob. Our cousin Solomon Barker looked anything but overjoyed when I made the announcement in breathless triumph. I never thought of it before, but perhaps that young man is getting fond of Elsie, and is afraid of a rival; otherwise I don’t see why such a simple thing should have caused him to push away his egg, and declare that he had done famously, in an aggressive manner which at once threw doubt upon his proposition. Grace Maberly, Elsie’s friend, seemed quietly contented, as is her wont.

As for me, I was in a riotous state of delight. Jack and I had been children together. He was like an elder brother to me until he became a cadet and left us. How often Bob and he had climbed old Brown’s apple-trees, while I stood beneath and collected the spoil in my little white pinafore! There was hardly a scrape or adventure which I could remember in which Jack did not figure as a prominent character. But he was “Lieutenant” Hawthorne now, had been through the Afghan War, and was, as Bob said, “quite the warrior.” What ever would he look like? Somehow the “warrior” had conjured up an idea of Jack in full armour with plumes on his head, thirsting for blood, and hewing at somebody with an enormous sword. After doing that sort of thing I was afraid he would never descend to romps and charades and the other stock amusements of Hatherley House.

Cousin Sol was certainly out of spirits during the next few days. He could be hardly persuaded to make a fourth at lawn-tennis, but showed an extraordinary love of solitude and strong tobacco. We used to come across him in the most unexpected places, in the shrubbery and down by the river, on which occasions, if there was any possibility of avoiding us, he would gaze rigidly into the distance, and utterly ignore feminine shouts and the waving of parasols. It was certainly very rude of him. I got hold of him one evening before dinner, and drawing myself up to my full height of five feet four and a half inches, I proceeded to give him a piece of my mind, a process which Bob characterises as the height of charity, since it consists in my giving away what I am most in need of myself.

Cousin Sol was lounging in a rocking-chair with the Times before him, gazing moodily over the top of it into the fire. I ranged up alongside and poured in my broadside.

“We seem to have given you some offence, Mr. Barker,” I remarked, with lofty courtesy.

“What do you mean, Nell?” asked my cousin, looking up at me in surprise. He had a very curious way of looking at me, had cousin Sol.

“You appear to have dropped our acquaintance,” I remarked; and then suddenly descending from my heroics, “You are stupid, Sol! What’s been the matter with you?”

“Nothing, Nell, at least, nothing of any consequence. You know my medical examination is in two months, and I am reading for it.

“0,” said I, in a bristle of indignation, “if that’s it, there’s no more to be said. Of course if you prefer bones to your female relations, it’s all right. There are young men who would rather make themselves agreeable than mope in corners and learn how to prod people with knives.” With which epitome of the noble science of surgery I proceeded to straighten some refractory antimacassars with unnecessary violence.

I could see Sol looking with an amused smile at the angry little blue-eyed figure in front of him. “Don’t blow me up, Nell,” he said, “I have been plucked once, you know. Besides,” looking grave, “you’ll have amusement enough when this — what is his name? — Lieutenant Hawthorne comes.”

“Jack won’t go and associate with mummies and skeletons, at any rate,” I remarked.

“Do you always call him Jack?” asked the student. “Of course I do. John sounds so stiff.”

“0, it does, does it?” said my companion doubtfully.

I still had my theory about Elsie running in my head. I thought I might try and set the matter in a more cheerful light. Sol had got up, and was staring out of the open window. I went over to him and glanced up timidly into his usually good-humoured face, which was now looking very dark and discontented. He was a shy man as a rule, but I thought that with a little leading he might be brought to confess.

“You’re a jealous old thing,” I remarked.

The young man coloured and looked down at me.

"I know your secret," said I boldly.

"What secret?" said he, colouring even more.

"Never you mind. I know it. Let me tell you this," I added, getting bolder, "that Jack and Elsie never got on very well. There is far more chance of Jack's falling in love with me. We were always friends."

If I had stuck the knitting-needle which I held in my hand into cousin Sol he could not have given a greater jump. "Good heavens!" he said, and I could see his dark eyes staring at me through the twilight. "Do you really think that it is your sister that I care for?"

"Certainly," said I stoutly, with a feeling that I was nailing my colours to a mast.

Never did a single word produce such an effect. Cousin Sol wheeled round with a gasp of astonishment, and sprang right out of the window. He always had curious ways of expressing his feelings, but this one struck me as being so entirely original that I was utterly bereft of any idea save that of wonder. I stood staring out into the gathering darkness. Then there appeared looking in at me from the lawn a very much abashed and still rather astonished face. "It's you I care for, Nell," said the face, and at once vanished, while I heard the noise of somebody running at the top of his speed down the avenue. He certainly was a most extraordinary young man.

Things went on very much the same at Hatherley House in spite of cousin Sol's characteristic declaration of affection. He never sounded me as to my sentiments in regard to him, nor did he allude to the matter for several days. He evidently thought that he had done all which was needed in such cases. He used to discompose me dreadfully at times, however, by coming and planting himself opposite me, and staring at me with a stony rigidity which was absolutely appalling.

"Don't do that, Sol," I said to him one day; "you give me the creeps all over."

"Why do I give you the creeps, Nelly?" said he. "Don't you like me?"

"0 yes. I like you well enough," said I. "I like Lord Nelson, for that matter; but I shouldn't like his monument to come and stare at me by the hour. It makes me feel quite all-overish."

"What on earth put Lord Nelson into your head?" said my cousin.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Do you like me the same way you like Lord Nelson, Nell?"

“Yes,” I said, “only more.” With which small ray of encouragement poor Sol had to be content, as Elsie and Miss Maberley came rustling into the room and put an end to our tete-a-tete.

I certainly did like my cousin. I knew what a simple true nature lay beneath his quiet exterior. The idea of having Sol Barker for a lover, however — Sol, whose very name was synonymous with bashfulness — was too incredible. Why couldn’t he fall in love with Grace or with Elsie? They might have known what to do with him; they were older than I, and could encourage him, or snub him, as they thought best. Gracie, however, was carrying on a mild flirtation with my brother Bob, and Elsie seemed utterly unconscious of the whole matter. I have one characteristic recollection of my cousin which I cannot help introducing here, though it has nothing to do with the thread of the narrative. It was on the occasion of his first visit to Hatherley House. The wife of the Rector called one day, and the responsibility of entertaining her rested with Sol and myself. We got on very well at first. Sol was unusually lively and talkative. Unfortunately a hospitable impulse came upon him; and in spite of many warning nods and winks, he asked the visitor if he might offer her a glass of wine. Now, as ill luck would have it, our supply had just been finished, and though we had written to London, a fresh consignment had not yet arrived. I listened breathlessly for the answer, trusting she would refuse; but to my horror she accepted with alacrity. “Never mind ringing, Nell,” said Sol, “I’ll act as butler;” and with a confident smile he marched into the little cupboard in which the decanters were usually kept. It was not until he was well in that he suddenly recollected having heard us mention in the morning that there was none in the house. His mental anguish was so great that he spent the remainder of Mrs. Salter’s visit in the cupboard, utterly refusing to come out until after her departure. Had there been any possibility of the winepress having another egress, or leading anywhere, matters would not have been so bad; but I knew that old Mrs. Salter was as well up in the geography of the house as I was myself. She stayed for three-quarters of an hour waiting for Sol’s reappearance, and then went away in high dudgeon. “My dear,” she said, recounting the incident to her husband, and breaking into semi-scriptural language in the violence of her indignation, “the cupboard seemed to open and swallow him!”

“Jack is coming down by the two o’clock train,” said Bob one morning, coming in to breakfast with a telegram in his hand.

I could see Sol looking at me reproachfully; but that did not prevent me from showing my delight at the intelligence. “We’ll have awful fun when he comes,” said Bob. “We’ll drag the fish-pond, and have no end of a lark. Won’t it be jolly, Sol?”

Sol’s opinion of its jollity was evidently too great to be expressed in words; for he gave an inarticulate grunt as answer.

I had a long cogitation on the subject of Jack in the garden that morning. After all, I was becoming a big girl, as Bob had forcibly reminded me. I must be circumspect in my conduct now. A real live man had actually looked upon me with the eyes of love. It was all very well when I was a child to have Jack following me about and kissing me; but I must keep him at a distance now. I remembered how he presented me with a dead fish once which he had taken out of the Hatherley Brook, and how I treasured it up among my most precious possessions, until an insidious odour in the house had caused the mother to send an abusive letter to Mr. Burton, who had pronounced our drainage to be all that could be desired. I must learn to be formal and distant. I pictured our meeting to myself, and went through a rehearsal of it. The holly-bush represented Jack, and I approached it solemnly, made it a stately curtsey, and held out my hand with, “So glad to see you, Lieutenant Hawthorne!” Elsie came out while I was doing it, but made no remark. I heard her ask Sol at luncheon, however, whether idiocy generally ran in families, or was simply confined to individuals; at which poor Sol blushed furiously, and became utterly incoherent in his attempts at an explanation.

Our farmyard opens upon the avenue about half-way between Hatherley House and the lodge. Sol and I and Mr. Nicholas Cronin, the son of a neighbouring squire, went down there after lunch. This imposing demonstration was for the purpose of quelling a mutiny which had broken out in the henhouse. The earliest tidings of the rising had been conveyed to the house by young Bayliss, son and heir of the henkeeper, and my presence had been urgently requested. Let me remark in parenthesis that fowls were my special department in domestic economy, and that no step was ever taken in their management without my advice and assistance. Old Bayliss hobbled out upon our arrival, and informed us of the full extent of the disturbance. It seems that the crested hen and the Bantam cock had developed such length of wing that they were enabled to fly over into the park; and that the example of these ringleaders had been so contagious, that even such steady old matrons as the bandy-legged Cochin China had developed roving propensities, and pushed their way into forbidden ground. A council of war was held in the yard, and it was unanimously decided that the wings of the recalcitrants must be clipped.

What a scamper we had! By “we” I mean Mr. Cronin and myself; while cousin Sol hovered about in the background with the scissors, and cheered us on. The two culprits clearly knew that they were wanted; for they rushed under the hayricks and over the coops, until there seemed to be at least half a dozen crested hens and Bantam cocks dodging about in the yard. The other hens were mildly interested in the proceedings, and contented themselves with an occasional derisive cluck, with the exception of the favourite wife of the Bantam, who abused us roundly from the top of the coop. The ducks were the most aggravating portion of the community; for though they had nothing to do with the original disturbance, they took a warm interest in the fugitives, waddling behind them as fast as their little yellow legs would carry them, and getting in the way of the pursuers.

“We have it!” I gasped, as the crested hen was driven into a corner. “Catch it, Mr. Cronin! 0, you’ve missed it! you’ve missed it! Get in the way, Sol. 0 dear, it’s coming to me!”

“Well done, Miss Montague!” cried Mr. Cronin, as I seized the wretched fowl by the leg as it fluttered past me, and proceeded to tuck it under my arm to prevent any possibility of escape. “Let me carry it for you.”

“No, no; I want you to catch the cock. There it goes! There — behind the hayrick. You go to one side, and I’ll go to the other.” “It’s going through the gate!” shouted Sol.

“Shoo!” cried I. “Shoo! 0, it’s gone!” and we both made a dart into the park in pursuit, tore round the corner into the avenue, and there I found myself face to face with a sunburned young man in a tweed suit, who was lounging along in the direction of the house.

There was no mistaking those laughing grey eyes, though I think if I had never looked at him some instinct would have told me that it was Jack. How could I be dignified with the crested hen tucked under my arm? I tried to pull myself up; but the miserable bird seemed to think that it had found a protector at last, for it began to cluck with redoubled vehemence. I had to give it up in despair, and burst into a laugh, while Jack did the same.

“How are you, Nell?” he said, holding out his hand; and then in an astonished voice, “Why, you’re not a bit the same as when I saw you last!”

"Well, I hadn't a hen under my arm then," said I.

"Who would have thought that little Nell would have developed into a woman?" said Jack, still lost in amazement. "You didn't expect me to develop into a man, did you?" said I in high indignation; and then, suddenly dropping all reserve, "We're awfully glad you've come, Jack. Never mind going up to the house. Come and help us to catch that Bantam cock."

"Right you are," said Jack in his old cheery way, still keeping his eyes firmly fixed upon my countenance. "Come on!" and away the three of us scampered across the park, with poor Sol aiding and abetting with the scissors and the prisoner in the rear. Jack was a very crumpled-looking visitor by the time he paid his respects to the mother that afternoon, and my dreams of dignity and reserve were scattered to the winds.

We had quite a party at Hatherley House that May. There were Bob, and Sol, and Jack Hawthorne, and Mr. Nicholas Cronin; then there were Miss Maberley, and Elsie, and mother, and myself. On an emergency we could always muster half a dozen visitors from the houses round, so as to have an audience when charades or private theatricals were attempted. Mr. Cronin, an easy-going athletic young Oxford man, proved to be a great acquisition, having wonderful powers of organisation and execution. Jack was not nearly as lively as he used to be, in fact we unanimously accused him of being in love; at which he looked as silly as young men usually do on such occasions, but did not attempt to deny the soft impeachment.

"What shall we do to-day?" said Bob one morning. "Can anybody make a suggestion?"

"Drag the pond," said Mr. Cronin.

"Haven't men enough," said Bob; "anything else?"

"We must get up a sweepstakes for the Derby," remarked Jack. "0, there's plenty of time for that. It isn't run till the week after next. Anything else?"

"Lawn-tennis," said Sol dubiously.

"Bother lawn-tennis!"

"You might make a picnic to Hatherley Abbey," said I. "Capital!" cried Mr. Cronin. "The very thing. What do you think, Bob?"

"First class," said my brother grasping eagerly at the idea.

Picnics are very dear to those who are in the first stage of the tender passion.

"Well, how are we to go, Nell?" asked Elsie.

“I won’t go at all,” said I; “I’d like to awfully, but I have to plant those ferns Sol got me. You had better walk. It is only three miles and young Bayliss can be sent over with the basket of provisions.”

“You’ll come, Jack?” said Bob.

Here was another impediment. The Lieutenant had twisted his ankle yesterday. He had not mentioned it to any one at the time; but it was beginning to pain him now.

“Couldn’t do it, really,” said Jack. “Three miles there and three back!”

“Come on. Don’t be lazy,” said Bob.

“My dear fellow,” answered the Lieutenant, “I have had walking enough to last me the rest of my life. If you had seen how that energetic general of ours bustled me along from Cabul to Candahar, you’d sympathise with me.”

“Leave the veteran alone,” said Mr. Nicholas Cronin. “Pity the war-worn soldier,” remarked Bob.

“None of your chaff,” said Jack. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he added, brightening up. “You let me have the trap, Bob, and I’ll drive over with Nell as soon as she has finished planting her ferns. We can take the basket with us. You’ll come, won’t you, Nell?”

“All right,” said I. And Bob having given his assent to the arrangement, and everybody being pleased, except Mr. Solomon Barker, who glared with mild malignancy at the soldier, the matter was finally settled, and the whole party proceeded to get ready, and finally departed down the avenue.

It was an extraordinary thing how that ankle improved after the last of the troop had passed round the curve of the hedge. By the time the ferns were planted and the gig got ready Jack was as active and lively as ever he was in his life.

“You seem to have got better very suddenly,” I remarked, as we drove down the narrow winding country lane.

“Yes,” said Jack. “The fact is, Nell, there never was anything the matter with me. I wanted to have a talk with you.”

“You don’t mean to say you would tell a lie in order to have a talk with me?” I remonstrated.

“Forty,” said Jack stoutly.

I was too lost in contemplation of the depths of guile in Jack’s nature to make any further remark. I wondered whether Elsie would be flattered or indignant were anyone to offer to tell so many lies in her behalf.

“We used to be good friends when we were children, Nell,” remarked my companion.

“Yes,” said I, looking down at the rug which was thrown over my knees. I was beginning to be quite an experienced young lady by this time, you see, and to understand certain inflections of the masculine voice, which are only to be acquired by practice.

“You don’t seem to care for me now as much as you did then,” said Jack.

I was still intensely absorbed in the leopard’s skin in front of me.

“Do you know, Nelly,” continued Jack, “that when I have been camping out in the frozen passes of the Himalayas, when I have seen the hostile array in front of me; in fact,” suddenly dropping into bathos, “all the time I was in that beastly hole Afghanistan, I used to think of the little girl I had left in England.”

“Indeed!” I murmured.

“Yes,” said Jack, “I bore the memory of you in my heart, and then when I came back you were a little girl no longer. I found you a beautiful woman, Nelly, and I wondered whether you had forgotten the days that were gone.”

Jack was becoming quite poetical in his enthusiasm. By this time he had left the old bay pony entirely to its own devices, and it was indulging in its chronic propensity of stopping and admiring the view.

“Look here, Nelly,” said Jack, with a gasp like a man who is about to pull the string of his shower-bath, “one of the things you learn in campaigning is to secure a good thing whenever you see it. Never delay or hesitate, for you never know that some other fellow may not carry it off while you are making up your mind.”

“It’s coming now,” I thought in despair, “and there’s no window for Jack to escape by after he has made the plunge.” I had gradually got to associate the ideas of love and jumping out of windows, ever since poor Sol’s confession.

“Do you think, Nell,” said Jack, “that you could ever care for me enough to share my lot for ever? could you ever be my wife, Nell?”

He didn’t even jump out of the trap. He sat there beside me, looking at me with his eager gray eyes, while the pony strolled along, cropping the wild flowers on either side of the road. It was quite evident that he intended having an answer. Somehow as I looked down I seemed to see a pale shy face looking in at me from a dark background, and to hear Sol’s voice as he declared his love. Poor fellow! he was first in the field at any rate.

"Could you, Nell?" asked Jack once more.

"I like you very much, Jack," said I, looking up at him nervously; "but" — how his face changed at that monosyllable!—"I don't think I like you enough for that. Besides, I'm so young, you know. I suppose I ought to be very much complimented and that sort of thing by your offer; but you mustn't think of me in that light any more."

"You refuse me, then?" said Jack, turning a little white. "Why don't you go and ask Elsie?" cried I in despair. "Why should you all come to me?"

"I don't want Elsie," cried Jack, giving the pony a cut with his whip which rather astonished that easy-going quadruped. "What do you mean by 'all,' Nell?"

No answer.

"I see how it is," said Jack bitterly; "I've noticed how that cousin of yours has been hanging round you ever since I have been here. You are engaged to him."

"No, I'm not," said I.

"Thank God for that!" responded Jack devoutly. "There is some hope yet. Perhaps you will come to think better of it in time. Tell me, Nelly, are you fond of that fool of a medical student?"

"He isn't a fool," said I indignantly, "and I am quite as fond of him as I shall ever be of you."

"You might not care for him much and still be that," said Jack sulkily; and neither of us spoke again until a joint bellow from Bob and Mr. Cronin announced the presence of the rest of the company.

If the picnic was a success, it was entirely due to the exertions of the latter gentleman. Three lovers out of four was an undue proportion, and it took all his convivial powers to make up for the shortcomings of the rest. Bob seemed entirely absorbed in Miss Maberley's charms, poor Elsie was left out in the cold, while my two admirers spent their time in glaring alternately at me and at each other. Mr. Cronin, however, fought gallantly against the depression, making himself agreeable to all, and exploring ruins or drawing corks with equal vehemence and energy.

Cousin Sol was particularly disheartened and out of spirits. He thought, no doubt, that my solitary ride with Jack had been a prearranged thing between us. There was more sorrow than anger in his eyes, however, while Jack, I regret to say, was decidedly ill-tempered. It was this fact which made me choose out my cousin as my companion in the ramble through the woods which succeeded our lunch. Jack had been assuming a provoking air of proprietorship lately, which I was determined to quash once for all. I felt angry with him, too, for appearing to consider himself ill used at my refusal, and for trying to disparage poor Sol behind his back. I was far from loving either the one or the other, but somehow my girlish ideas of fair play revolted at either of them taking what I considered an unfair advantage. I felt that if Jack had not come I should, in the fulness of time, have ended by accepting my cousin; on the other hand, if it had not been for Sol, I might never have refused Jack. At present I was too fond of them both to favour either. “How in the world is it to end?” thought I. I must do something decisive one way or the other; or perhaps the best thing would be to wait and see what the future might bring forth.

Sol seemed mildly surprised at my having selected him as my companion, but accepted the offer with a grateful smile. His mind seemed to have been vastly relieved.

“So I haven’t lost you yet, Nell,” he murmured, as we branched off among the great tree-trunks and heard the voices of the party growing fainter in the distance.

“Nobody can lose me,” said I, “for nobody has won me yet. For goodness’ sake don’t talk about it any more. Why can’t you talk like your old self two years ago, and not be so dreadfully sentimental?”

“You’ll know why some day, Nell,” said the student reproachfully. “Wait until you are in love yourself, and you will understand it.”

I gave a little incredulous sniff.

“Sit here, Nell,” said cousin Sol, manoeuvring me into a little bank of wild strawberries and mosses, and perching himself upon a stump of a tree beside me. “Now all I ask you to do is to answer one or two questions, and I’ll never bother you any more.”

I sat resignedly, with my hands in my lap.

“Are you engaged to Lieutenant Hawthorne?”

“No!” said I energetically.

“Are you fonder of him than of me?”

“No, I’m not.”

Sol’s thermometer of happiness up to a hundred in the shade at the least.

“Are you fonder of me than of him, Nelly?” in a very tender voice.

“No.”

Thermometer down below zero again.

“Do you mean to say that we are exactly equal in your eyes?”

“Yes.”

“But you must choose between us some time, you know,” said cousin Sol with mild reproach in his voice.

“I do wish you wouldn’t bother me so!” I cried, getting angry, as women usually do when they are in the wrong. “You don’t care for me much or you wouldn’t plague me. I believe the two of you will drive me mad between you.”

Here there were symptoms of sobs on my part, and utter consternation and defeat among the Barker faction.

“Can’t you see how it is, Sol?” said I, laughing through my tears at his woe-begone appearance. “Suppose you were brought up with two girls and had got to like them both very much, but had never preferred one to the other and never dreamed of marrying either, and then all of a sudden you are told you must choose one, and so make the other very unhappy, you wouldn’t find it an easy thing to do, would you?”

“I suppose not,” said the student.

“Then you can’t blame me.”

“I don’t blame you, Nelly,” he answered, attacking a great purple toadstool with his stick. “I think you are quite right to be sure of your own mind. It seems to me,” he continued, speaking rather gaspily, but saying his mind like the true English gentleman that he was, “it seems to me that Hawthorne is an excellent fellow. He has seen more of the world than I have, and always does and says the right thing in the right place, which certainly isn’t one of my characteristics. Then he is well born and has good prospects. I think I should be very grateful to you for your hesitation, Nell, and look upon it as a sign of your good-heartedness.”

“We won’t talk about it any more,” said I, thinking in my heart what a very much finer fellow he was than the man he was praising. “Look here, my jacket is all stained with horrid fungi and things. We’d better go after the rest of the party, hadn’t we? I wonder where they are by this time?”

It didn’t take very long to find that out. At first we heard shouting and laughter coming echoing through the long glades, and then, as we made our way in that direction, we were astonished to meet the usually phlegmatic Elsie careering through the wood at the top of her speed, her hat off, and her hair streaming in the wind. My first idea was that some frightful catastrophe had occurred — brigands possibly, or a mad dog — and I saw my companion’s big hand close round his stick; but on meeting the fugitive it proved to be nothing more tragic than a game of hide-and-seek which the indefatigable Mr. Cronin had organised. What fun we had, crouching and running and dodging among the Hatherley oaks! and how horrified the prim old abbot who planted them would have been, and the long series of black-coated brethren who have muttered their orisons beneath the welcome shade! Jack refused to play on the excuse of his weak ankle, and lay smoking under a tree in high dudgeon, glaring in a baleful and gloomy fashion at Mr. Solomon Barker; while the latter gentleman entered enthusiastically into the game, and distinguished himself by always getting caught, and never by any possibility catching anybody else.

Poor Jack! He was certainly unfortunate that day. Even an accepted lover would have been rather put out, I think, by an incident which occurred during our return home. It was agreed that all of us should walk, as the trap had been already sent off with the empty basket, so we started down Thorny Lane and through the fields. We were just getting over a stile to cross old Brown’s ten-acre lot, when Mr. Cronin pulled up, and remarked that he thought we had better get into the road.

“Road?” said Jack. “Nonsense! We save a quarter of a mile by the field.”

“Yes, but it’s rather dangerous. We’d better go round.”

“Where’s the danger?” said our military man, contemptuously twisting his moustache.

“0, nothing,” said Cronin. “That quadruped in the middle of the field is a bull, and not a very good-tempered one either. That’s all. I don’t think that the ladies should be allowed to go.”

“We won’t go,” said the ladies in chorus.

“Then come round by the hedge and get into the road,” suggested Sol.

“You may go as you like,” said Jack rather testily; “but I am going across the field.”

“Don’t be a fool, Jack,” said my brother.

“You fellows may think it right to turn tail at an old cow, but I don’t. It hurts my self-respect, you see, so I shall join you at the other side of the farm.” With which speech Jack buttoned up his coat in a truculent manner, waved his cane jauntily, and swaggered off into the ten-acre lot.

We clustered about the stile and watched the proceedings with anxiety. Jack tried to look as if he were entirely absorbed in the view and in the probable state of the weather, for he gazed about him and up into the clouds in an abstracted manner. His gaze generally began and ended, however, somewhere in the direction of the bull. That animal, after regarding the intruder with a prolonged stare, had retreated into the shadow of the hedge at one side, while Jack was walking up the long axis of the field.

"It's all right," said I. "It's got out of his way."

"I think it's leading him on," said Mr. Nicholas Cronin. "It's a vicious cunning brute."

Mr. Cronin had hardly spoken before the bull emerged from the hedge, and began pawing the ground, and tossing its wicked black head in the air. Jack was in the middle of the field by this time, and affected to take no notice of his companion, though he quickened his pace slightly. The bull's next manoeuvre was to run rapidly round in two or three small circles; and then it suddenly stopped, bellowed, put down its head, elevated its tail, and made for Jack at the very top of its speed.

There was no use pretending to ignore its existence any longer. Jack faced round and gazed at it for a moment. He had only his little cane in his hand to oppose to the half ton of irate beef which was charging towards him. He did the only thing that was possible, namely to make for the hedge at the other side of the field.

At first Jack hardly condescended to run, but went off with a languid contemptuous trot, a sort of compromise between his dignity and his fear, which was so ludicrous that, frightened as we were, we burst into a chorus of laughter. By degrees, however, as he heard the galloping of hoofs sounding nearer and nearer, he quickened his pace, until ultimately he was in full flight for shelter, with his hat gone and his coat-tails fluttering in the breeze, while his pursuer was not ten yards behind him. If all Ayoub Khan's cavalry had been in his rear, our Afghan hero could not have done the distance in a shorter time. Quickly as he went, the bull went quicker still, and the two seemed to gain the hedge almost at the same moment. We saw Jack spring boldly into it, and the next moment he came flying out at the other side as if he had been discharged from a cannon, while the bull indulged in a series of triumphant bellows through the hole which he had made. It was a relief to us all to see Jack gather himself up and start off for home without a glance in our direction. He had retired to his room by the time we arrived, and did not appear until breakfast next morning, when he limped in with a very crestfallen expression. None of us was hard-hearted enough to allude to the subject, however, and by judicious treatment we restored him before lunch-time to his usual state of equanimity.

It was a couple of days after the picnic that our great Derby sweepstakes was to come off. This was an annual ceremony never omitted at Hatherley House, where, between visitors and neighbours, there were generally quite as many candidates for tickets as there were horses entered.

“The sweepstakes, ladies and gentlemen, comes off to-night,” said Bob in his character of head of the house. “The subscription is ten shillings. Second gets quarter of the pool, and third has his money returned. No one is allowed to have more than one ticket, or to sell his ticket after drawing it. The drawing will be at seven thirty.” All of which Bob delivered in a very pompous and official voice, though the effect was rather impaired by a sonorous “Amen!” from Mr. Nicholas Cronin.

I must now drop the personal style of narrative for a time. Hitherto my little story has consisted simply in a series of extracts from my own private journal; but now I have to tell of a scene which only came to my ears after many months.

Lieutenant Hawthorne, or Jack, as I cannot help calling him, had been very quiet since the day of the picnic, and given himself up to reverie. Now, as luck would have it, Mr. Solomon Barker sauntered into the smoking-room after luncheon on the day of the sweepstakes, and found the Lieutenant puffing moodily in solitary grandeur upon one of the settees. It would have seemed cowardly to retreat, so the student sat down in silence, and began turning over the pages of the Graphic. Both the rivals felt the situation to be an awkward one. They had been in the habit of studiously avoiding each other’s society, and now they found themselves thrown together suddenly, with no third person to act as a buffer. The silence began to be oppressive. The Lieutenant yawned and coughed with over-acted nonchalance, while honest Sol felt very hot and uncomfortable, and continued to stare gloomily at the paper in his hand. The ticking of the clock, and the click of the billiard-balls across the passage, seemed to grow unendurably loud and monotonous. Sol glanced across once; but catching his companion’s eye in an exactly similar action, the two young men seemed simultaneously to take a deep and all-absorbing interest in the pattern of the cornice.

“Why should I quarrel with him?” thought Sol to himself. “After all, I want nothing but fair play. Probably I shall be snubbed; but I may as well give him an opening."

Sol's cigar had gone out; the opportunity was too good to be neglected.

"Could you oblige me with a fusee, Lieutenant?" he asked. The Lieutenant was sorry — extremely sorry — but he was not in possession of a fusee.

This was a bad beginning. Chilly politeness was even more repulsing than absolute rudeness. But Mr. Solomon Barker, like many other shy men, was audacity itself when the ice had once been broken. He would have no more bickerings or misunderstandings. Now was the time to come to some definite arrangement. He pulled his armchair across the room, and planted himself in front of the astonished soldier.

"You're in love with Miss Nelly Montague," he remarked. Jack sprang off the settee with as much rapidity as if Farmer Brown's bull were coming in through the window.

"And if I am, sir," he said, twisting his tawny moustache, "what the devil is that to you?"

"Don't lose your temper," said Sol. "Sit down again, and talk the matter over like a reasonable Christian. I am in love with her too."

"What the deuce is the fellow driving at?" thought Jack, as he resumed his seat, still simmering after his recent explosion.

"So the long and the short of it is that we are both in love with her," continued Sol, emphasising his remarks with his bony forefinger.

"What then?" said the Lieutenant, showing some symptoms of a relapse. "I suppose that the best man will win, and that the young lady is quite able to choose for herself. You don't expect me to stand out of the race just because you happen to want the prize, do you?"

"That's just it," cried Sol. "One of us will have to stand out. You've hit the right idea there. You see, Nelly — Miss Montague, I mean — is, as far as I can see, rather fonder of you than of me, but still fond enough of me not to wish to grieve me by a positive refusal."

"Honesty compels me to state," said Jack, in a more conciliatory voice than he had made use of hitherto, "that Nelly — Miss Montague, I mean — is rather fonder ofyou than of me; but still, as you say, fond enough of me not to prefer my rival openly in my presence."

"I don't think you're right," said the student. "In fact I know you are not; for she told me as much with her own lips. However, what you say makes it easier for us to come to an understanding. It is quite evident that as long as we show ourselves to be equally fond of her, neither of us can have the slightest hope of winning her.”

“There’s some sense in that,” said the Lieutenant reflectively; “but what do you propose?”

“I propose that one of us stand out, to use your own expression. There is no alternative.”

“But who is to stand out?” asked Jack.

“Ah, that is the question.”

“I can claim to have known her longest.”

“I can claim to have loved her first.”

Matters seemed to have come to a deadlock. Neither of the young men was in the least inclined to abdicate in favour of his rival.

“Look here,” said the student, “let us decide the matter by lot.” This seemed fair, and was agreed to by both. A new difficulty arose, however. Both of them felt sentimental objections towards risking their angel upon such a paltry chance as the turn of a coin or the length of a straw. It was at this crisis that an inspiration came upon Lieutenant Hawthorne.

“I’ll tell you how we will decide it,” he said. “You and I are both entered for our Derby sweepstakes. If your horse beats mine, I give up my chance; if mine beats yours, you leave Miss Montague for ever. Is that a bargain?”

“I have only one stipulation to make,” said Sol. “It is ten days yet before the race will be run. During that time neither of us must attempt to take an unfair advantage of the other. We shall both agree not to press our suit until the matter is decided.”

“Done!” said the soldier.

“Done!” said Solomon.

And they shook hands upon the agreement.

I had, as I have already observed, no knowledge of the conversation which had taken place between my suitors. I may mention incidentally that during the course of it I was in the library, listening to Tennyson, read aloud in the deep musical voice of Mr. Nicholas Cronin. I observed, however, in the evening that these two young men seemed remarkably excited about their horses, and that neither of them was in the least inclined to make himself agreeable to me, for which crime I am happy to say that they were both punished by drawing rank outsiders. Eurydice, I think, was the name of Sol’s; while Jack’s was Bicycle. Mr. Cronin drew an American horse named Iroquois, and all the others seemed fairly well pleased. I peeped into the smoking-room before going to bed, and was amused to see Jack consulting the sporting prophet of the Field, while Sol was deeply immersed in the Gazette. This sudden mania for the Turf seemed all the more strange, since I knew that if my cousin could distinguish a horse from a cow, it was as much as any of his friends would give him credit for.

The ten succeeding days were voted very slow by various members of the household. I cannot say that I found them so. Perhaps that was because I discovered something very unexpected and pleasing in the course of that period. It was a relief to be free of any fear of wounding the susceptibilities of either of my former lovers. I could say what I chose and do what I liked now; for they had deserted me completely, and handed me over to the society of my brother Bob and Mr. Nicholas Cronin. The new excitement of horse-racing seemed to have driven their former passion completely out of their minds. Never was a house so deluged with special tips and every vile print which could by any possibility have a word bearing upon the training of the horses or their antecedents. The very grooms in the stable were tired of recounting how Bicycle was descended from Velocipede, or explaining to the anxious medical student how Eurydice was by Orpheus out of Hades. One of them discovered that her maternal grandmother had come in third for the Ebor Handicap; but the curious way in which he stuck the half crown which he received into his left eye, while he winked at the coachman with his right, throws some doubt upon the veracity of his statement. As he remarked in a beery whisper that evening, “The bloke’ll never know the differ, and it’s worth ‘arf a dollar for him to think as it’s true.”

As the day drew nearer the excitement increased. Mr. Cronin and I used to glance across at each other and smile as Jack and Sol precipitated themselves upon the papers at breakfast, and devoured the list of the betting. But matters culminated upon the evening immediately preceding the race. The Lieutenant had run down to the station to secure the latest intelligence, and now he came rushing in, waving a crushed paper frantically over his head.

“Eurydice is scratched!” he yelled. “Your horse is done for, Barker!”

“What!” roared Sol.

“Done for — utterly broken down in training — won’t run at all!” “Let me see,” groaned my cousin, seizing the paper; and then, dropping it, he rushed out of the room, and banged down the stairs, taking four at a time. We saw no more of him until late at night, when he slunk in, looking very dishevelled, and crept quietly off to his room. Poor fellow, I should have condoled with him had it not been for his recent disloyal conduct towards myself.

Jack seemed a changed man from that moment. He began at once to pay me marked attention, very much to the annoyance of myself and of someone else in the room. He played and sang and proposed round games, and, in fact, quite usurped the role usually played by Mr. Nicholas Cronin.

I remember that it struck me as remarkable that on the morning of the Derby-day the Lieutenant should have entirely lost his interest in the race. He was in the greatest spirits at breakfast, but did not even open the paper in front of him. It was Mr. Cronin who unfolded it at last and glanced over its columns. "What's the news, Nick?" asked my brother Bob.

"Nothing much. 0 yes, here's something. Another railway accident. Collision apparently. Westinghouse brake gone wrong. Two killed, seven hurt, and — by Jove! listen to this: 'Among the victims was one of the competitors in the equine Olympiad of to-day. A sharp splinter had penetrated its side, and the valuable animal had to be sacrified upon the shrine of humanity. The name of the horse is Bicycle.' Hullo, you've gone and spilt your coffee all over the cloth, Hawthorne! Ah, I forgot, Bicycle was your horse, wasn't it? Your chance is gone, I am afraid. I see that Iroquois, who started low, has come to be first favourite now."

Ominous words, reader, as no doubt your nice discernment has taught you during, at the least, the last three pages. Don't call me a flirt and a coquette until you have weighed the facts. Consider my pique at the sudden desertion of my admirers, think of my delight at the confession from a man whom I had tried to conceal from myself even that I loved, think of the opportunities which he enjoyed during the time that Jack and Sol were systematically avoiding me, in accordance with their ridiculous agreement. Weigh all this, and then which among you will throw the first stone at the blushing little prize of the Derby Sweep?

Here it is as it appeared at the end of three short months in the Morning Post: "August 12th. — At Hatherley Church, Nicholas Cronin, Esq., eldest son of Nicholas Cronin, Esq., of the Woodlands, Cropshire, to Miss Eleanor Montague, daughter of the late James Montague, Esq., J.P., of Hatherley House."

Jack set off with the declared intention of volunteering for a ballooning expedition to the North Pole. He came back, however, in three days, and said that he had changed his mind, but intended to walk in Stanley's footsteps across Equatorial Africa. Since then he has dropped one or two gloomy allusions to forlorn hopes and the unutterable joys of death; but on the whole he is coming round very nicely and has been heard to grumble of late on such occasions as the under-doing of the mutton and the over-doing of the beef, which may be fairly set down as a very healthy sympton.

Sol took it more quietly, but I fear the iron went deeper into his soul. However, he pulled himself together like a dear brave fellow as he is, and actually had the hardihood to propose the bridesmaids, on which occasion he became inextricably mixed up in the labyrinth of words. He washed his hands of the mutinous sentence, however, and resumed his seat in the middle of it, overwhelmed with blushes and applause. I hear that he has confided his woes and his disappointments to Grace Maberley's sister, and met with the sympathy which he expected. Bob and Gracie are to be married in a few months, so possibly there may be another wedding about that time.

SELECTING A GHOST. THE GHOSTS OF GORESTHORPE GRANGE

I am sure that Nature never intended me to be a self-made man. There are times when I can hardly bring myself to realise that twenty years of my life were spent behind the counter of a grocer’s shop in the East End of London, and that it was through such an avenue that I reached a wealthy independence and the possession of Goresthorpe Grange. My habits are conservative, and my tastes refined and aristocratic. I have a soul which spurns the vulgar herd. Our family, the D’Odds, date back to a prehistoric era, as is to be inferred from the fact that their advent into British history is not commented on by any trustworthy historian. Some instinct tells me that the blood of a Crusader runs in my veins. Even now, after the lapse of so many years, such exclamations as “By’r Lady!” rise naturally to my lips, and I feel that, should circumstances require it, I am capable of rising in my stirrups and dealing an infidel a blow — say with a mace — which would considerably astonish him.

Goresthorpe Grange is a feudal mansion — or so it was termed in the advertisement which originally brought it under my notice. Its right to this adjective had a most remarkable effect upon its price, and the advantages gained may possibly be more sentimental than real. Still, it is soothing to me to know that I have slits in my staircase through which I can discharge arrows; and there is a sense of power in the fact of possessing a complicated apparatus by means of which I am enabled to pour molten lead upon the head of the casual visitor. These things chime in with my peculiar humour, and I do not grudge to pay for them. I am proud of my battlements and of the circular uncovered sewer which girds me round. I am proud of my portcullis and donjon and keep. There is but one thing wanting to round off the mediaevalism of my abode, and to render it symmetrically and completely antique. Goresthorpe Grange is not provided with a ghost.

Any man with old-fashioned tastes and ideas as to how such establishments should be conducted, would have been disappointed at the omission. In my case it was particularly unfortunate. From my childhood I had been an earnest student of the supernatural, and a firm believer in it. I have revelled in ghostly literature until there is hardly a tale bearing upon the subject which I have not perused. I learned the German language for the sole purpose of mastering a book upon demonology. When an infant I had secreted myself in dark rooms in the hope of seeing some of those bogies with which my nurse used to threaten me; and the same feeling is as strong in me now as then. It was a proud moment when I felt that a ghost was one of the luxuries which money might command.

It is true that there was no mention of an apparition in the advertisement. On reviewing the mildewed walls, however, and the shadowy corridors, I had taken it for granted that there was such a thing on the premises. As the presence of a kennel presupposes that of a dog, so I imagined that it was impossible that such desirable quarters should be untenanted by one or more restless shades. Good heavens, what can the noble family from whom I purchased it have been doing during these hundreds of years! Was there no member of it spirited enough to make away with his sweetheart, or take some other steps calculated to establish a hereditary spectre? Even now I can hardly write with patience upon the subject.

For a long time I hoped against hope. Never did rat squeak behind the wainscot, or rain drip upon the attic floor, without a wild thrill shooting through me as I thought that at last I had come upon traces of some unquiet soul. I felt no touch of fear upon these occasions. If it occurred in the night-time, I would send Mrs. D’Odd — who is a strong-minded woman — to investigate the matter, while I covered up my head with the bedclothes and indulged in an ecstacy of expectation. Alas, the result was always the same! The suspicious sound would be traced to some cause so absurdly natural and commonplace that the most fervid imagination could not clothe it with any of the glamour of romance.

I might have reconciled myself to this state of things, had it not been for Jorrocks of Havistock Farm. Jorrocks is a coarse, burly, matter-of-fact fellow, whom I only happened to know through the accidental circumstance of his fields adjoining my demesne. Yet this man, though utterly devoid of all appreciation of archaeological unities, is in possession of a well-authenticated and undeniable spectre. Its existence only dates back, I believe, to the reign of the Second George, when a young lady cut her throat upon hearing of the death of her lover at the battle of Dettingen. Still, even that gives the house an air of respectability, especially when coupled with blood stains upon the floor. Jorrocks is densely unconscious of his good fortune; and his language when he reverts to the apparition is painful to listen to. He little dreams how I covet every one of those moans and nocturnal wails which he describes with unnecessary objurgation. Things are indeed coming to a pretty pass when democratic spectres are allowed to desert the landed proprietors and annul every social distinction by taking refuge in the houses of the great unrecognised.

I have a large amount of perseverance. Nothing else could have raised me into my righful sphere, considering the uncongenial atmosphere in which I spent the earlier part of my life. I felt now that a ghost must be secured, but how to set about securing one was more than either Mrs. D'Odd or myself was able to determine. My reading taught me that such phenomena are usually the outcome of crime. What crime was to be done, then, and who was to do it? A wild idea entered my mind that Watkins, the house-steward, might be prevailed upon — for a consideration — to immolate himself or someone else in the interests of the establishment. I put the matter to him in a half-jesting manner; but it did not seem to strike him in a favourable light. The other servants sympathised with him in his opinion — at least, I cannot account in any other way for their having left the house in a body the same afternoon.

"My dear," Mrs. D'Odd remarked to me one day after dinner, as I sat moodily sipping a cup of sack — I love the good old names—"my dear, that odious ghost of Jorrocks' has been gibbering again."

"Let it gibber!" I answered, recklessly.

Mrs. D'Odd struck a few chords on her virginal and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I'll tell you what it is, Argentine," she said at last, using the pet name which we usually substituted for Silas, "we must have a ghost sent down from London."

"How can you be so idiotic, Matilda?" I remarked, severely. "Who could get us such a thing?"

"My cousin, Jack Brocket, could," she answered, confidently.

Now, this cousin of Matilda's was rather a sore subject between us. He was a rakish, clever young fellow, who had tried his hand at many things, but wanted perseverance to succeed at any. He was, at that time, in chambers in London, professing to be a general agent, and really living, to a great extent, upon his wits. Matilda managed so that most of our business should pass through his hands, which certainly saved me a great deal of trouble; but I found that Jack's commission was generally considerably larger than all the other items of the bill put together. It was this fact which made me feel inclined to rebel against any further negotiations with the young gentleman.

“0 yes, he could,” insisted Mrs. D., seeing the look of disapprobation upon my face. “You remember how well he managed that business about the crest?”

“It was only a resuscitation of the old family coat-of-arms, my dear,” I protested.

Matilda smiled in an irritating manner. “There was a resuscitation of the family portraits, too, dear,” she remarked. “You must allow that Jack selected them very judiciously.”

I thought of the long line of faces which adorned the walls of my banqueting-hall, from the burly Norman robber, through every gradation of casque, plume, and ruff, to the sombre Chesterfieldian individual who appears to have staggered against a pillar in his agony at the return of a maiden MS. which he grips convulsively in his right hand. I was fain to confess that in that instance he had done his work well, and that it was only fair to give him an order — with the usual commission — for a family spectre should such a thing be attainable.

It is one of my maxims to act promptly when once my mind is made up. Noon of the next day found me ascending the spiral stone staircase which leads to Mr. Brocket’s chambers, and admiring the succession of arrows and fingers upon the whitewashed wall, all indicating the direction of that gentleman’s sanctum. As it happened, artificial aids of the sort were entirely unnecessary, as an animated flap-dance overhead could proceed from no other quarter, though it was replaced by a deathly silence as I groped my way up the stair. The door was opened by a youth evidently astounded at the appearance of a client, and I was ushered into the presence of my young friend, who was writing furiously in a large ledger — upside down, as I afterwards discovered.

After the first greetings, I plunged into business at once. “Look here, Jack,” I said, “I want you to get me a spirit, if you can.”

“Spirits you mean!” shouted my wife’s cousin, plunging his hand into the waste-paper basket and producing a bottle with the celerity of a conjuring trick. “Let’s have a drink!”

I held up my hand as a mute appeal against such a proceeding so early in the day; but on lowering it again I found that I had almost involuntarily closed my fingers round the tumbler which my adviser had pressed upon me. I drank the contents hastily off, lest anyone should come in upon us and set me down as a toper. After all there was something very amusing about the young fellow's eccentricities.

"Not spirits," I explained, smilingly; "an apparition — a ghost. If such a thing is to be had, I should be very willing to negotiate."

"A ghost for Goresthorpe Grange?" inquired Mr. Brocket, with as much coolness as if I had asked for a drawing-room suite.

"Quite so," I answered.

"Easiest thing in the world," said my companion, filling up my glass again in spite of my remonstrance. "Let us see!" Here he took down a large red note-book, with all the letters of the alphabet in a fringe down the edge. "A ghost you said, didn't you? That's G. G — gems — gimlets — gas-pipes — gauntlets — guns — galleys. Ah, here we are. Ghosts. Volume nine, section six, page forty-one. Excuse me!" And Jack ran up a ladder and began rummaging among the pile of ledgers on a high shelf. I felt half inclined to empty my glass into the spittoon when his back was turned; but on second thoughts I disposed of it in a legitimate way.

"Here it is!" cried my London agent, jumping off the ladder with a crash, and depositing an enormous volume of manuscript upon the table. "I have all these things tabulated, so that I may lay my hands upon them in a moment. It's all right — it's quite weak" (here he filled our glasses again). "What were we looking up, again?"

"Ghosts," I suggested.

"Of course; page 41. Here we are. T.H. Fowler & Son, Dunkel Street, suppliers of mediums to the nobility and gentry; charms sold — love philtres — mummies — horoscopes cast.' Nothing in your line there, I suppose."

I shook my head despondently.

"'Frederick Tabb,'" continued my wife's cousin, "'sole channel of communication between the living and the dead. Proprietor of the spirits of Byron, Kirke White, Grimaldi, Tom Cribb, and Inigo Jones.' That's about the figure!"

"Nothing romantic enough there," I objected. "Good heavens! Fancy a ghost with a black eye and a handkerchief tied round its waist, or turning summersaults, and saying, 'How are you tomorrow?'" The very idea made me so warm that I emptied my glass and filled it again.

“Here is another,” said my companion, “‘Christopher McCarthy; bi-weekly seances — attended by all the eminent spirits of ancient and modern times. Nativities — charms — abracadabras, messages from the dead.’ He might be able to help us. However, I shall have a hunt round myself to-morrow, and see some of these fellows. I know their haunts, and it’s odd if I can’t pick up something cheap. So there’s an end of business,” he concluded, hurling the ledger into the corner, “and now we’ll have something to drink.”

We had several things to drink — so many that my inventive faculties were dulled next morning, and I had some little difficulty in explaining to Mrs. D’Odd why it was that I hung my boots and spectacles upon a peg along with my other garments before retiring to rest. The new hopes excited by the confident manner in which my agent had undertaken the commission, caused me to rise superior to alcoholic reaction, and I paced about the rambling corridors and old-fashioned rooms, picturing to myself the appearance of my expected acquisition, and deciding what part of the building would harmonise best with its presence. After much consideration, I pitched upon the banqueting-hall as being, on the whole, most suitable for its reception. It was a long low room, hung round with valuable tapestry and interesting relics of the old family to whom it had belonged. Coats of mail and implements of war glimmered fitfully as the light of the fire played over them, and the wind crept under the door, moving the hangings to and fro with a ghastly rustling. At one end there was the raised dais, on which in ancient times the host and his guests used to spread their table, while a descent of a couple of steps led to the lower part of the hall, where the vassals and retainers held wassail. The floor was uncovered by any sort of carpet, but a layer of rushes had been scattered over it by my direction. In the whole room there was nothing to remind one of the nineteenth century; except, indeed, my own solid silver plate, stamped with the resuscitated family arms, which was laid out upon an oak table in the centre. This, I determined, should be the haunted room, supposing my wife’s cousin to succeed in his negotiation with the spirit-mongers. There was nothing for it now but to wait patiently until I heard some news of the result of his inquiries.

A letter came in the course of a few days, which, if it was short, was at least encouraging. It was scribbled in pencil on the back of a playbill, and sealed apparently with a tobacco-stopper. “Am on the track,” it said.

“Nothing of the sort to be had from any professional spiritualist, but picked up a fellow in a pub yesterday who says he can manage it for you. Will send him down unless you wire to the contrary. Abrahams is his name, and he has done one or two of these jobs before.” The letter wound up with some incoherent allusions to a cheque, and was signed by my affectionate cousin, John Brocket.

I need hardly say that I did not wire, but awaited the arrival of Mr. Abrahams with all impatience. In spite of my belief in the supernatural, I could scarcely credit the fact that any mortal could have such a command over the spirit-world as to deal in them and barter them against mere earthly gold. Still, I had Jack’s word for it that such a trade existed; and here was a gentleman with a Judaical name ready to demonstrate it by proof positive. How vulgar and commonplace Jorrocks’ eighteenth-century ghost would appear should I succeed in securing a real mediaeval apparition! I almost thought that one had been sent down in advance, for, as I walked round the moat that night before retiring to rest, I came upon a dark figure engaged in surveying the machinery of my portcullis and drawbridge. His start of surprise, however, and the manner in which he hurried off into the darkness, speedily convinced me of his earthly origin, and I put him down as some admirer of one of my female retainers mourning over the muddy Hellespont which divided him from his love. Whoever he may have been, he disappeared and did not return, though I loitered about for some time in the hope of catching a glimpse of him and exercising my feudal rights upon his person.

Jack Brocket was as good as his word. The shades of another evening were beginning to darken round Goresthorpe Grange, when a peal at the outer bell, and the sound of a fly pulling up, announced the arrival of Mr. Abrahams. I hurried down to meet him, half expecting to see a choice assortment of ghosts crowding in at his rear. Instead, however, of being the sallow-faced, melancholy-eyed man that I had pictured to myself, the ghost-dealer was a sturdy little podgy fellow, with a pair of wonderfully keen sparkling eyes and a mouth which was constantly stretched in a good-humoured, if somewhat artificial, grin. His sole stock-intrade seemed to consist of a small leather bag jealously locked and strapped, which emitted a metallic chink upon being placed on the stone flags in the hall.

“And ‘ow are you, sir?” he asked, wringing my hand with the utmost effusion. “And the missus, ‘ow is she? And all the others—’ow’s all their ‘ealth?”

I intimated that we were all as well as could reasonably be expected, but Mr. Abrahams happened to catch a glimpse of Mrs. D’Odd in the distance, and at once plunged at her with another string of inquiries as to her health, delivered so volubly and with such an intense earnestness, that I half expected to see him terminate his cross-examination by feeling her pulse and demanding a sight of her tongue. All this time his little eyes rolled round and round, shifting perpetually from the floor to the ceiling, and from the ceiling to the walls, taking in apparently every article of furniture in a single comprehensive glance.

Having satisfied himself that neither of us was in a pathological condition, Mr. Abrahams suffered me to lead him upstairs, where a repast had been laid out for him to which he did ample justice. The mysterious little bag he carried along with him, and deposited it under his chair during the meal. It was not until the table had been cleared and we were left together that he broached the matter on which he had come down.

“I hunderstand,” he remarked, puffing at a trichinopoly, “that you want my ‘elp in fitting up this ‘ere ‘ouse with a happarition.”

I acknowledged the correctness of his surmise, while mentally wondering at those restless eyes of his, which still danced about the room as if he were making an inventory of the contents.

“And you won’t find a better man for the job, though I says it as shouldn’t,” continued my companion. “Wot did I say to the young gent wot spoke to me in the bar of the Lame Dog? ‘Can you do it?’ says he. ‘Try me,’ says I, ‘me and my bag. Just try me.’ I couldn’t say fairer than that.”

My respect for Jack Brocket’s business capacities began to go up very considerably. He certainly seemed to have managed the matter wonderfully well. “You don’t mean to say that you carry ghosts about in bags?” I remarked, with diffidence.

Mr. Abrahams smiled a smile of superior knowledge. “You wait,” he said; “give me the right place and the right hour, with a little of the essence of Lucoptolycus” — here he produced a small bottle from his waistcoat pocket—”and you won’t find no ghost that I ain’t up to. You’ll see them yourself, and pick your own, and I can’t say fairer than that.”

As all Mr. Abrahams’ protestations of fairness were accompanied by a cunning leer and a wink from one or other of his wicked little eyes, the impression of candour was somewhat weakened.

“When are you going to do it?” I asked, reverentially.

“Ten minutes to one in the morning,” said Mr. Abrahams, with decision. “Some says midnight, but I says ten to one, when there ain’t such a crowd, and you can pick your own ghost. And now,” he continued, rising to his feet, “suppose you trot me round the premises, and let me see where you wants it; for there’s some places as attracts ‘em, and some as they won’t hear of — not if there was no other place in the world.”

Mr. Abrahams inspected our corridors and chambers with a most critical and observant eye, fingering the old tapestry with the air of a connoisseur, and remarking in an undertone that it would “match uncommon nice.” It was not until he reached the banqueting-hall, however, which I had myself picked out, that his admiration reached the pitch of enthusiasm. “‘Ere’s the place!” he shouted, dancing, bag in hand, round the table on which my plate was lying, and looking not unlike some quaint little goblin himself. “‘Ere’s the place; we won’t get nothin’ to beat this! A fine room — noble, solid, none of your electro-plate trash! That’s the way as things ought to be done, sir. Plenty of room for ‘em to glide here. Send up some brandy and the box of weeds; I’ll sit here by the fire and do the preliminaries, which is more trouble than you’d think; for them ghosts carries on hawful at times, before they finds out who they’ve got to deal with. If you was in the room they’d tear you to pieces as like as not. You leave me alone to tackle them, and at half-past twelve come in, and I lay they’ll be quiet enough by then.”

Mr. Abrahams’ request struck me as a reasonable one, so I left him with his feet upon the mantelpiece, and his chair in front of the fire, fortifying himself with stimulants against his refractory visitors. From the room beneath, in which I sat with Mrs. D’Odd, I could hear that, after sitting for some time, he rose up and paced about the hall with quick impatient steps. We then heard him try the lock of the door, and afterward drag some heavy article of furniture in the direction of the window, on which, apparently, he mounted, for I heard the creaking of the rusty hinges as the diamond-paned casement folded backward, and I knew it to be situated several feet above the little man’s reach. Mrs. D’Odd says that she could distinguish his voice speaking in low and rapid whispers after this, but that may have been her imagination. I confess that I began to feel more impressed than I had deemed it possible to be. There was something awesome in the thought of the solitary mortal standing by the open window and summoning in from the gloom outside the spirits of the nether world. It was with a trepidation which I could hardly disguise from Matilda that I observed that the clock was pointing to half-past twelve, and that the time had come for me to share the vigil of my visitor.

He was sitting in his old position when I entered, and there were no signs of the mysterious movements which I had overheard, though his chubby face was flushed as with recent exertion.

“Are you succeeding all right?” I asked as I came in, putting on as careless an air as possible, but glancing involuntarily round the room to see if we were alone.

“Only your help is needed to complete the matter,” said Mr. Abrahams, in a solemn voice. “You shall sit by me and partake of the essence of Lucoptolycus, which removes the scales from our earthly eyes. Whatever you may chance to ‘see, speak not and make no movement, lest you break the spell.” His manner was subdued, and his usual cockney vulgarity had entirely disappeared. I took the chair which he indicated, and awaited the result.

My companion cleared the rushes from the floor in our neighbourhood, and, going down upon his hands and knees, described a half-circle with chalk, which enclosed the fireplace and ourselves. Round the edge of this half-circle he drew several hieroglyphics, not unlike the signs of the zodiac. He then stood up and uttered a long invocation, delivered so rapidly that it sounded like a single gigantic word in some uncouth guttural language. Having finished this prayer, if prayer it was, he pulled out the small bottle which he had produced before, and poured a couple of teaspoonfuls of clear transparent fluid into a phial, which he handed to me with an intimation that I should drink it.

The liquid had a faintly sweet odour, not unlike the aroma of certain sorts of apples. I hesitated a moment before applying it to my lips, but an impatient gesture from my companion overcame my scruples, and I tossed it off. The taste was not unpleasant; and, as it gave rise to no immediate effects, I leaned back in my chair and composed myself for what was to come. Mr. Abrahams seated himself beside me, and I felt that he was watching my face from time to time, while repeating some more of the invocations in which he had indulged before.

A sense of delicious warmth and languor began gradually to steal over me, partly, perhaps, from the heat of the fire, and partly from some unexplained cause. An uncontrollable impulse to sleep weighed down my eyelids, while at the same time my brain worked actively, and a hundred beautiful and pleasing ideas flitted through it. So utterly lethargic did I feel that, though I was aware that my companion put his hand over the region of my heart, as if to feel how it were beating, I did not attempt to prevent him, nor did I even ask him for the reason of his action. Everything in the room appeared to be reeling slowly round in a drowsy dance, of which I was the centre. The great elk's head at the far end wagged solemnly backward and forward, while the massive salvers on the tables performed cotillons with the claret-cooler and the epergne. My head fell upon my breast from sheer heaviness, and I should have become unconscious had I not been recalled to myself by the opening of the door at the other end of the hall.

This door led on to the raised dais, which, as I have mentioned, the heads of the house used to reserve for their own use. As it swung slowly back upon its hinges, I sat up in my chair, clutching at the arms, and staring with a horrified glare at the dark passage outside. Something was coming down it — something unformed and intangible, but still a something. Dim and shadowy, I saw it flit across the threshold, while a blast of ice-cold air swept down the room, which seemed to blow through me, chilling my very heart. I was aware of the mysterious presence, and then I heard it speak in a voice like the sighing of an east wind among pine-trees on the banks of a desolate sea.

It said: "I am the invisible nonentity. I have affinities and am subtle. I am electric, magnetic, and spiritualistic. I am the great ethereal sigh-heaver. I kill dogs. Mortal, wilt thou choose me?"

I was about to speak, but the words seemed to be choked in my throat; and, before I could get them out, the shadow flitted across the hall and vanished in the darkness at the other side, while a long-drawn melancholy sigh quivered through the apartment.

I turned my eyes toward the door once more, and beheld, to my astonishment, a very small old woman, who hobbled along the corridor and into the hall. She passed backward and forward several times, and then, crouching down at the very edge of the circle upon the floor, she disclosed a face the horrible malignity of which shall never be banished from my recollection. Every foul passion appeared to have left its mark upon that hideous countenance.

"Ha! ha!" she screamed, holding out her wizened hands like the talons of an unclean bird. "You see what I am. I am the fiendish old woman. I wear snuff-coloured silks. My curse descends on people. Sir Walter was partial to me. Shall I be thine, mortal?”

I endeavoured to shake my head in horror; on which she aimed a blow at me with her crutch, and vanished with an eldritch scream.

By this time my eyes turned naturally toward the open door, and I was hardly surprised to see a man walk in of tall and noble stature. His face was deadly pale, but was surmounted by a fringe of dark hair which fell in ringlets down his back. A short pointed beard covered his chin. He was dressed in loose-fitting clothes, made apparently of yellow satin, and a large white ruff surrounded his neck. He paced across the room with slow and majestic strides. Then turning, he addressed me in a sweet, exquisitely modulated voice.

“I am the cavalier,” he remarked. “I pierce and am pierced. Here is my rapier. I clink steel. This is a blood stain over my heart. I can emit hollow groans. I am patronised by many old Conservative families. I am the original manor-house apparition. I work alone, or in company with shrieking damsels.”

He bent his head courteously, as though awaiting my reply, but the same choking sensation prevented me from speaking; and, with a deep bow, he disappeared.

He had hardly gone before a feeling of intense horror stole over me, and I was aware of the presence of a ghastly creature in the room, of dim outlines and uncertain proportions. One moment it seemed to pervade the entire apartment, while at another it would become invisible, but always leaving behind it a distinct consciousness of its presence. Its voice, when it spoke, was quavering and gusty. It said: “I am the leaver of footsteps and the spiller of gouts of blood. I tramp upon corridors. Charles Dickens has alluded to me. I make strange and disagreeable noises. I snatch letters and place invisible hands on people’s wrists. I am cheerful. I burst into peals of hideous laughter. Shall I do one now?” I raised my hand in a deprecating way, but too late to prevent one discordant outbreak which echoed through the room. Before I could lower it the apparition was gone.

I turned my head toward the door in time to see a man come hastily and stealthily into the chamber. He was a sunburnt powerfully built fellow, with ear-rings in his ears and a Barcelona handkerchief tied loosely round his neck. His head was bent upon his chest, and his whole aspect was that of one afflicted by intolerable remorse. He paced rapidly backward and forward like a caged tiger, and I observed that a drawn knife glittered in one of his hands, while he grasped what appeared to be a piece of parchment in the other. His voice, when he spoke, was deep and sonorous. He said, “I am a murderer. I am a ruffian. I crouch when I walk. I step noiselessly. I know something of the Spanish Main. I can do the lost treasure business. I have charts. Am able-bodied and a good walker. Capable of haunting a large park.” He looked toward me beseechingly, but before I could make a sign I was paralysed by the horrible sight which appeared at the door.

It was a very tall man, if, indeed, it might be called a man, for the gaunt bones were protruding through the corroding flesh, and the features were of a leaden hue. A winding-sheet was wrapped round the figure, and formed a hood over the head, from under the shadow of which two fiendish eyes, deep set in their grisly sockets, blazed and sparkled like red-hot coals. The lower jaw had fallen upon the breast, disclosing a withered, shrivelled tongue and two lines of black and jagged fangs. I shuddered and drew back as this fearful apparition advanced to the edge of the circle.

“I am the American blood-curdler,” it said, in a voice which seemed to come in a hollow murmur from the earth beneath it. “None other is genuine. I am the embodiment of Edgar Allan Poe. I am circumstantial and horrible. I am a low-caste spirit-subduing spectre. Observe my blood and my bones. I am grisly and nauseous. No depending on artificial aid. Work with grave-clothes, a coffin-lid, and a galvanic battery. Turn hair white in a night.” The creature stretched out its fleshless arms to me as if in entreaty, but I shook my head; and it vanished, leaving a low, sickening, repulsive odour behind it. I sank back in my chair, so overcome by terror and disgust that I would have very willingly resigned myself to dispensing with a ghost altogether, could I have been sure that this was the last of the hideous procession.

A faint sound of trailing garments warned me that it was not so. I looked up, and beheld a white figure emerging from the corridor into the light. As it stepped across the threshold I saw that it was that of a young and beautiful woman dressed in the fashion of a bygone day. Her hands were clasped in front of her, and her pale proud face bore traces of passion and of suffering. She crossed the hall with a gentle sound, like the rustling of autumn leaves, and then, turning her lovely and unutterably sad eyes upon me, she said. “I am the plaintive and sentimental, the beautiful and ill-used. I have been forsaken and betrayed. I shriek in the night-time and glide down passages. My antecedents are highly respectable and generally aristocratic. My tastes are aesthetic. Old oak furniture like this would do, with a few more coats of mail and plenty of tapestry. Will you not take me?”

Her voice died away in a beautiful cadence as she concluded, and she held out her hands as if in supplication. I am always sensitive to female influences. Besides, what would Jorrocks’s ghost be to this? Could anything be in better taste? Would I not be exposing myself to the chance of injuring my nervous system by interviews with such creatures as my last visitor, unless I decided at once? She gave me a seraphic smile, as if she knew what was passing in my mind. That smile settled the matter. “She will do!” I cried; “I choose this one;” and as, in my enthusiasm, I took a step toward her I passed over the magic circle which had girdled me round.

“Argentine, we have been robbed!”

I had an indistinct consciousness of these words being spoken, or rather screamed, in my ear a great number of times without my being able to grasp their meaning. A violent throbbing in my head seemed to adapt itself to their rhythm, and I closed my eyes to the lullaby of “Robbed, robbed, robbed.” A vigorous shake caused me to open them again, however, and the sight of Mrs. D’Odd in the scantiest of costumes and most furious of tempers was sufficiently impressive to recall all my scattered thoughts, and make me realise that I was lying on my back on the floor, with my head among the ashes which had fallen from last night’s fire, and a small glass phial in my hand.

I staggered to my feet, but felt so weak and giddy that I was compelled to fall back into a chair. As my brain became clearer, stimulated by the exclamations of Matilda, I began gradually to recollect the events of the night. There was the door through which my supernatural visitors had filed. There was the circle of chalk with the hieroglyphics round the edge. There was the cigar-box and brandy-bottle which had been honoured by the attentions of Mr. Abrahams. But the seer himself — where was he? and what was this open window with a rope running out of it? And where, 0 where, was the pride of Goresthorpe Grange, the glorious plate which was to have been the delectation of generations of D’Odds? And why was Mrs. D. standing in the grey light of dawn, wringing her hands and repeating her monotonous refrain? It was only very gradually that my misty brain took these things in, and grasped the connection between them.

Reader, I have never seen Mr. Abrahams since; I have never seen the plate stamped with the resuscitated family crest; hardest of all, I have never caught a glimpse of the melancholy spectre with the trailing garments, nor do I expect that I ever shall. In fact my night's experiences have cured me of my mania for the supernatural, and quite reconciled me to inhabiting the humdrum nineteenth-century edifice on the outskirts of London which Mrs. D. has long had in her mind's eye.

As to the explanation of all that occurred — that is a matter which is open to several surmises. That Mr. Abrahams, the ghost-hunter, was identical with Jemmy Wilson, alias the Nottingham crackster, is considered more than probable at Scotland Yard, and certainly the description of that remarkable burglar tallied very well with the appearance of my visitor. The small bag which I have described was picked up in a neighbouring field next day, and found to contain a choice assortment of jemmies and centre-bits. Footmarks deeply imprinted in the mud on either side of the moat showed that an accomplice from below had received the sack of precious metals which had been let down through the open window. No doubt the pair of scoundrels, while looking round for a job, had overheard Jack Brocket's indiscreet inquiries, and promptly availed themselves of the tempting opening.

And now as to my less substantial visitors, and the curious grotesque vision which I had enjoyed — am Ito lay it down to any real power over occult matters possessed by my Nottingham friend? For a long time I was doubtful upon the point, and eventually endeavoured to solve it by consulting a well-known analyst and medical man, sending him the few drops of the so-called essence of Lucoptolycus which remained in my phial. I append the letter which I received from him, only too happy to have the opportunity of winding up my little narrative by the weighty words of a man of learning:

“ARUNDEL STREET

“Dear Sir: Your very singular case has interested me extremely. The bottle which you sent contained a strong solution of chloral, and the quantity which you describe yourself as having swallowed must have amounted to at least eighty grains of the pure hydrate. This would of course have reduced you to a partial state of insensibility, gradually going on to complete coma. In this semi-unconscious state ofchloralism it is not unusual for circumstantial and bizarre visions to present themselves — more especially to individuals unaccustomed to the use of the drug. You tell me in your note that your mind was saturated with ghostly literature, and that you had long taken a morbid interest in classifying and recalling the various forms in which apparitions have been said to appear. You must also remember that you were expecting to see something of that very nature, and that your nervous system was worked up to an unnatural state of tension. Under the circumstances, I think that, far from the sequel being an astonishing one, it would have been very surprising indeed to any one versed in narcotics had you not experienced some such effects. — I remain, dear sir, sincerely yours,

“T. E. STUBE, M.D.

“Argentine D’Odd, Esq. “The Elms, Brixton.”

THE END

THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE AND OTHER STORIES

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THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE.

A TRUE COLONIAL STORY.

Broadhurst’s store was closed, but the little back room looked very comfortable that night. The fire cast a ruddy glow on ceiling and walls, reflecting itself cheerily on the polished flasks and shot-guns which adorned them. Yet a gloom rested on the two men who sat at either side of the hearth, which neither the fire nor the black bottle upon the table could alleviate.

“Twelve o’clock,” said old Tom, the storeman glancing up at the wooden timepiece which had come out with him in ‘42. “It’s a queer thing, George, they haven’t come.”

“It’s a dirty night,” said his companion, reaching out his arm for a plug of tobacco. “The Wawirra’s in flood, maybe; or maybe their horses is broke down; or they’ve put it off, perhaps. Great Lord, how it thunders! Pass us over a coal, Tom.”

He spoke in a tone which was meant to appear easy, but with a painful thrill in it which was not lost upon his mate. He glanced uneasily at him from under his grizzled eyebrows.

“You think it’s all right, George?” he said, after a pause.

“Think what’s all right?”

“Why, that the lads are safe.”

“Safe! Of course they’re safe. What the devil is to harm them?”

“Oh, nothing; nothing, to be sure,” said old Tom. “You see, George, since the old woman died, Maurice has been all to me; and it makes me kinder anxious. It’s a week since they started from the mine, and you’d ha’ thought they’d be here now. But it’s nothing unusual, I s’pose; nothing at all. Just my darned folly.”

“What’s to harm them?” repeated George Hutton again, arguing to convince himself rather than his comrade. “It’s a straight road from the diggin’s to Rathurst, and then through the hills past Bluemansdyke, and over the Wawirra by the ford, and so down to Trafalgar by the bush track. There’s nothin’ deadly in all that, is there? My son Allan’s as dear to me as Maurice can be to you, mate,” he continued; “but they know the ford well, and there’s no other bad place. They’ll be here to-morrow night, certain.”

“Please God they may!” said Broadhurst; and the two men lapsed into silence for some time, moodily staring into the glow of the fire, and pulling at their short clays.

It was indeed, as Hutton had said, a dirty night. The wind was howling down through the gorges of the western mountains, and whirling and eddying among the streets of Trafalgar; whistling through the chinks in the rough wood cabins, and tearing away the frail shingles which formed the roofs. The streets were deserted, save for one or two stragglers from the drinking shanties, who wrapped their cloaks around them and staggered home through the wind and rain towards their own cabins.

The silence was broken by Broadhurst, who was evidently still ill at ease.

“Say, George,” he said, “what’s become of Josiah Mapleton?”

“Went to the diggin’s.”

“Ay; but he sent word he was coming back.”

“But he never came.”

“An’ what’s become of Jos Humphrey?” he resumed, after a pause.

“He went diggin’, too.”

“Well, did he come back?”

“Drop it, Broadhurst; drop it, I say,” said Hutton, springing to his feet and pacing up and down the narrow room. “You’re trying to make a coward of me! You know the men must have gone up country prospectin’ or farmin’, maybe. What is it to us where they went? You don’t think I have a register of every man in the colony, as Inspector Burton has of the lags.”

“Sit down, George, and listen,” said old Tom. “There’s something queer about that road; something I don’t understand, and don’t like. Maybe you remember how Maloney, the one-eyed scoundrel, made his money in the early mining days. He’d a half-way drinking shanty on the main road up on a kind of bluff, where the Lena comes down from the hills. You’ve heard, George, how they found a sort of wooden slide from his little back room down to the river; an’ how it came out that man after man had had his drink doctored, and been shot down that into eternity, like a bale of goods. No one will ever know how many were done away with there. *They* were all supposed to be farmin’ and prospectin’, and the like, till their bodies were picked out of the rapids. It’s no use mincing matters, George; we’ll have the troopers along to the diggin’s if those lads don’t turn up by to-morrow night.”

“As you like, Tom,” said Hutton.

“By the way, talking of Maloney — it’s a strange thing,” said Broadhurst, “that Jack Haldane swears he saw a man as like Maloney with ten years added to him as could be. It was in the bush on Monday morning. Chance, I suppose; but you’d hardly think there could be two pair of shoulders in the world carrying such villainous mugs on the top of them.”

“Jack Haldane’s a fool,” growled Hutton, throwing open the door and peering anxiously out into the darkness, while the wind played with his long grizzled beard, and sent a train of glowing sparks from his pipe down the street.

“A terrible night!” he said, as he turned back towards the fire.

Yes, a wild, tempestuous night; a night for birds of darkness and for beasts of prey. A strange night for seven men to lie out in the gully at Bluemansdyke, with revolvers in their hands, and the devil in their hearts.

The sun was rising after the storm. A thick, heavy steam reeked up from the saturated ground, and hung like a pall over the flourishing little town of Trafalgar. A bluish mist lay in wreaths over the wide track of bushland around, out of which the western mountains loomed like great islands in a sea of vapour.

Something was wrong in the town. The most casual glance would have detected that. There was a shouting and a hurrying of feet. Doors were slammed and rude windows thrown open. A trooper of police came clattering down with his carbine unslung. It was past the time for Joe Buchan’s saw-mill to commence work, but the great wheel was motionless, for the hands had not appeared.

There was a surging, pushing crowd in the main street before old Tom Broadhurst’s house, and a mighty clattering of tongues. “What was it?” demanded the new-comers, panting and breathless. “Broadhurst has shot his mate.” “He has cut his own throat.” “He has struck gold in the clay floor of his kitchen.” “No; it was his son Maurice who had come home rich.” “Who had not come back at all.” “Whose horse had come back without him.” At last the truth had come out; and there was the old sorrel horse in question whinnying and rubbing his neck against the familiar door of the stable, as if entreating entrance; while two haggard, grey-haired men held him by either bridle, and gazed blankly at his reeking sides.

“God help me,” said old Tom Broadhurst; “it is as I feared!”

“Cheer up, mate,” said Hutton, drawing his rough straw hat down over his brow. “There’s hope yet.”

A sympathetic and encouraging murmur ran through the crowd.

“Horse ran away, likely.”

“Or been stolen.”

“Or he’s swum the Wawirra an’ been washed off,” suggested one Job’s comforter.

“He ain’t got no marks of bruising,” said another, more hopeful.

“Rider fallen off drunk, maybe,” said a bluff old sheep-farmer. “I kin remember,” he continued, “coming into town ‘bout this hour myself, with my head in my holster, an’ thinking I was a six-chambered revolver — mighty drunk I was.”

“Maurice had a good seat; he’d never be washed off.”

“Not he.”

“The horse has a weal on its off fore-quarter,” remarked another, more observant than the rest.

“A blow from a whip, maybe.”

“It would be a darned hard one.”

“Where’s Chicago Bill?” said someone; “he’ll know.”

Thus invoked, a strange, gaunt figure stepped out in front of the crowd. He was an extremely tall and powerful man, with the red shirt and high boots of a miner. The shirt was thrown open, showing the sinewy throat and massive chest. His face was seamed and scarred with many a conflict, both with Nature and his brother man; yet beneath his ruffianly exterior there lay something of the quiet dignity of the gentleman. This man was a veteran gold-hunter; a real old Californian ‘forty-niner, who had left the fields in disgust when private enterprise began to dwindle before the formation of huge incorporated companies with their ponderous machinery. But the red clay with the little shining points had become to him as the very breath of his nostrils, and he had come half-way round the world to seek it once again.

“Here’s Chicago Bill,” he said; “what is it?”

Bill was naturally regarded as an oracle, in virtue of his prowess and varied experience. Every eye was turned on him as Braxton, the young Irish trooper of constabulary, said, “What do you make of the horse, Bill?”

The Yankee was in no hurry to commit himself. He surveyed the animal for some time with his shrewd little grey eye. He bent and examined the girths; then he felt the mane carefully. He stooped once more and examined the hoofs and then the quarters. His eye rested on the blue wheal already mentioned. This seemed to put him on a scent, for he gave a long, low whistle, and proceeded at once to examine the hair on either side of the saddle. He saw something conclusive apparently, for, with a sidelong glance under his shaggy eyebrows at the two old men beside him, he turned and fell back among the crowd.

“Well, what d’ye think?” cried a dozen voices.

“A job for you,” said Bill, looking up at the young Irish trooper.

“Why, what is it? What’s become of young Broadhurst?”

“He’s done what better men has done afore. He has sunk a shaft for gold and panned out a coffin.”

“Speak out, man! what have you seen?” cried a husky voice.

“I’ve seen the graze of a bushranger’s bullet on the horse’s quarter, an’ I’ve seen a drop of the rider’s blood on the edge of the saddle — Here, hold the old man up, boys; don’t let him drop. Give him a swig of brandy an’ lead him inside. Say,” he continued, in a whisper, gripping the trooper by the wrist, “mind, I’m in it. You an’ I play this hand together. I’m dead on sich varmin. We’ll do as they do in Nevada, strike while the iron is hot. Get any men you can together. I s’pose you’re game to come yourself?”

“Yes, I’ll come,” said young Braxton, with a quiet smile.

The American looked at him approvingly. He had learned in his wanderings that an Irishman who grows quieter when deeply stirred is a very dangerous specimen of the genus *homo*.

“Good lad!” he muttered; and the two went down the street together towards the station-house, followed by half-a-dozen of the more resolute of the crowd.

One word before we proceed with our story, or our chronicle rather, as every word of it is based upon fact. The colonial trooper of fifteen or twenty years ago was a very different man from his representative of to-day. Not that I would imply any slur upon the courage of the latter; but for reckless dare-devilry and knight-errantry the old constabulary has never been equalled. The reason is a simple one. Men of gentle blood, younger sons and wild rakes who had outrun the constable, were sent off to Australia with some wild idea of making their fortunes. On arriving they found Melbourne by no means the El Dorado they expected; they were unfit for any employment, their money was soon dissipated, and they unerringly gravitated into the mounted police. Thus a sort of colonial "Maison Rouge" became formed, where the lowest private had as much pride of birth and education as his officers. They were men who might have swayed the fate of empires, yet who squandered away their lives in many a lone wild fight with native and bushranger, where nothing but a mouldering blue-ragged skeleton was left to tell the tale.

It was a glorious sunset. The whole western sky was a blaze of flame, throwing a purple tint upon the mountains, and gilding the sombre edges of the great forest which spreads between Trafalgar and the river Wawirra. It stretched out, a primeval, unbroken wilderness, save at the one point where a rough track had been formed by the miners and their numerous camp-followers. This wound amid the great trunks in a zigzag direction, occasionally making a long detour to avoid some marshy hollow or especially dense clump of vegetation. Often it could be hardly discerned from the ground around save by the scattered hoof-marks and an occasional rut.

About fifteen miles from Trafalgar there stands a little knoll, well sheltered and overlooking the road. On this knoll a man was lying as the sun went down that Friday evening. He appeared to shun observation, for he had chosen that part in which the foliage was thickest; yet he seemed decidedly at his ease, as he lolled upon his back with his pipe between his teeth, and a broad hat down over his face. It was a face that it was well to cover in the presence of so peaceful a scene — a face pitted with the scars of an immaterial smallpox. The forehead was broad and low; one eye had apparently been gouged out, leaving a ghastly cavity; the other was deep-set, cunning, and vindictive. The mouth was hard and cruel; a rough beard covered the chin. It was the cut of face which, seen in a lonely street, would instinctively make one shift the grasp of one's stick from the knob end to the ferrule — the face of a bold and unscrupulous man.

Some unpleasing thought seemed to occur to him, for he rose with a curse and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "A darned fine thing," he muttered, "that I should have to lie out like this! It was Barrett's fault the job wasn't a clean one, an' now he picks me out to get the swamp-fever. If he'd shot the horse as I did the man, we wouldn't need a watch on this side of the Wawirra. He always was a poor white-livered cuss. Well," he continued, picking up a gun which lay in the grass behind him, "there's no use my waiting longer; they wouldn't start during the night. Maybe the horse never got home, maybe they gave them up as drowned; anyhow it's another man's turn to-morrow, so I'll just give them five minutes and then make tracks." He sat down on the stump of a tree as he spoke and hummed the verse of a song. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he plunged his hand into his pocket, and after some searching extracted a pack of playing cards wrapped in a piece of dirty brown paper. He gazed earnestly at their greasy faces for some time. Then he took a pin from his sleeve and pricked a small hole in the corner of each ace and knave. He chuckled as he shuffled them up, and replaced them in his pocket. "I'll have my share of the swag," he growled. "They're sharp, but they'll not spot that when the liquor is in them. By the Lord, here they are!"

He had sprung to his feet and was bending to the ground, holding his breath as he listened. To the unpractised ear all was as still as before — the hum of a passing insect, the chirp of a bird, the rustle of the leaves; but the bushranger rose with the air of a man who has satisfied himself. "Good-bye to Bluemansdyke," said he; "I reckon it will be too hot to hold us for a time. That thundering idiot! he's spoilt as nice a lay as ever was, an' risked our necks into the bargain. I'll see their number an' who they are, though," he continued; and, choosing a point where a rough thicket formed an effectual screen, he coiled himself up, and lay like some venomous snake, occasionally raising his head and peering between the trunks at the reddish streak which marked the Trafalgar Road.

There could be no question now as to the approach of a body of horsemen. By the time our friend was fairly ensconced in his hiding-place the sound of voices and the clatter of hoofs was distinctly audible, and in another moment a troop of mounted men came sweeping round the curve of the road. They were eleven all told, armed to the teeth, and evidently well on the alert. Two rode in front with rifles unslung, leisurely scanning every bush which might shelter an enemy. The main body kept about fifty yards behind them, while a solitary horseman brought up the rear. The ranger scanned them narrowly as they passed. He seemed to recognise most of them. Some were his natural enemies the troopers; the majority were miners who had volunteered to get rid of an evil which affected their interests so closely. They were a fine bronzed set of men, with a deliberate air about them, as if they had come for a purpose and meant to attain it. As the last rider passed before his hiding-place the solitary watcher started and growled a curse in his beard. “I know his darned face,” he said; “it’s Bill Hanker, the man who got the drop on Long Nat Smeaton in Silver City in ‘53; what the thunder brought him here? I must be off by the back track, though, an’ let the boys know.” So saying, he picked up his gun, and with a scowl after the distant party, he crouched down and passed rapidly and silently out of sight into the very thickest part of the bush.

The expedition had started from Trafalgar on the afternoon of the same day that Maurice Broadhurst’s horse, foam-flecked and frightened, had galloped up to the old stable-door. Burton, the inspector of constabulary, an energetic and able man, as all who knew him can testify, was in command. He had detached Braxton, the young Irishman, and Thompson, another trooper, as a vanguard. He himself rode with the main body, grey-whiskered and lean, but as straight in the back as when he and I built a shanty in ‘39 in what is now Burke Street, Melbourne. With him were McGillivray, Foley, and Anson of the Trafalgar force, Hartley the sheep-farmer, Murdoch and Summerville, who had made their pile at the mines, and Dan Murphy, who was cleaned out when the clay of the “Orient” turned to gravel, and had been yearning for a solid square fight ever since. Chicago Bill formed the rear-guard, and the whole party presented an appearance which, though far from military, was decidedly warlike.

They camped out that night seventeen miles from Trafalgar, and next day pushed on as far as where the Stirling Road runs across. The third morning brought them to the northern bank of the Wawirra, which they forded. Here a council of war was held, for they were entering what they regarded as enemy’s country. The bush track, though wild, was occasionally traversed both by shepherds and sportsmen. It would hardly be the home of a gang of desperate bushrangers. But beyond the Wawirra the great rugged range of the Tápu mountains towered up to the clouds, and across a wild spur of these the mining track passed up to Bluemansdyke. It was here they decided at the council that the scene of the late drama lay. The question now was what means were to be taken to attack the murderers; for that murder had been done no man doubted.

All were of one mind as to what the main line of action should be. To go for them straight, shoot as many as possible on sight, and hang the balance in Trafalgar: that was plain sailing. But how to get at them was the subject of much debate. The troopers were for pushing on at once, and trusting to Fortune to put the rangers in their way. The miners proposed rather to gain some neighbouring peak, from which a good view of the country could be obtained, and some idea gained of their whereabouts. Chicago Bill took rather a gloomy view of things. “Nary one will we see,” said he; “they’ve dusted out of the district ‘fore this. They’d know the horse would go home, and likely as not they’ve had a watch on the road to warn them. I guess, boys, we’d best move on an’ do our best.” There was some discussion, but Chicago’s opinion carried the day, and the expedition pushed on in a body.

After passing the second upland station the scenery becomes more and more grand and rugged. Great peaks two and three thousand feet high rose sheer up at each side of the narrow track. The heavy wind and rain of the storm had brought down much *débris*, and the road was almost impassable in places. They were frequently compelled to dismount and to lead the horses. “We haven’t far now, boys,” said the inspector cheerily, as they struggled on; and he pointed to a great dark cleft which yawned in front of them between two almost perpendicular cliffs. “They are there,” he said, “or nowhere.” A little higher the road became better and their progress was more rapid. A halt was called, guns were unslung, and their pistols loosened in their belts, for the great gully of Bluemansdyke — the wildest part of the whole Tápu range — was gaping before them. But not a thing was to be seen; all was as still as the grave. The horses were picketed in a quiet little ravine, and the whole party crept on on foot. The Southern sun glared down hot and clear on the yellow bracken and banks of fern which lined the narrow winding track. Still not a sign of life. Then came a clear low whistle from the two advanced troopers, announcing that something had been discovered, and the main body hurried up. It was a spot for deeds of blood. On one side of the road there lowered a black gnarled precipice, on the other was the sullen mouth of the rugged gully. The road took a sharp turn at this spot. Just at the angle several large boulders were scattered, lining and overlooking the track. It was at this angle that a little bed of mud and trampled red clay betokened a recent struggle. There could be no question that they were at the scene of the murder of the two young miners. The outline of a horse could still be seen in the soft ground, and the prints of its hoofs as it kicked out in its death-agony were plainly marked. Behind one of the rocks were the tracks of several feet, and some pistol wadding was found in a tuft of ferns. The whole tragedy lay unclosed before them. Two men, careless in the pride of their youth and their strength, had swept round that fatal curve. Then a crash, a groan, a brutal laugh, the galloping of a frightened horse, and all was over.

What was to be done now? The rocks around were explored, but nothing fresh discovered. Some six days had elapsed, and the birds were apparently flown. The party separated and hunted about among the boulders. Then the American, who could follow a trail like a bloodhound, found tracks leading towards a rugged pile of rocks on the north side of the gully. In a crevice here the remains of three horses were found. Close to them the rim of an old straw hat projected through the loose loam. Hartley, the sheep-farmer, sprang over to pick it up; he started back in the act of stooping, and said in an awe-struck whisper to his friend Murphy, "There's a head under it, Dan!" A few strokes of a spade disclosed a face familiar to most of the group — that of a poor travelling photographer well known in the colony by the *sobriquet* of "Stooping Johnny," who had disappeared some time before. It was now in an advanced stage of putrefaction. Close to him another body was discovered, and another beside that. In all, thirteen victims of these English Thugs were lying under the shadow of the great north wall of the Bluemansdyke gully. It was there, standing in silent awe round the remains of these poor fellows, hurried into eternity and buried like dogs, that the search-party registered a vow to sacrifice all interests and comforts for the space of one month to the single consideration of revenge. The inspector uncovered his grizzled head as he solemnly swore it, and his comrades followed his example. The bodies were then, with a brief prayer, consigned to a deeper grave, a rough cairn was erected over them, and the eleven men set forth upon their mission of stern justice.

Three weeks had passed — three weeks and two days. The sun was sinking over the great waste of bushland, unexplored and unknown, which stretches away from the eastern slope of the Tápu mountains. Save some eccentric sportsman or bold prospector, no colonist had ever ventured into that desolate land; yet on this autumn evening two men were standing in a little glade in the very heart of it. They were engaged tying up their horses, and apparently making preparations for camping out for the night. Though haggard, unkempt, and worn, one still might recognise two of our former acquaintances — the young Irish trooper and the American Chicago Bill.

This was the last effort of the avenging party. They had traversed the mountain gorges, they had explored every gully and ravine, and now they had split into several small bands, and, having named a trysting-place, they were scouring the country in the hope of hitting upon some trace of the murderers. Foley and Anson had remained among the hills, Murdoch and Dan Murphy were exploring towards Rathurst, Summerville and the inspector had ascended along the Wawirra, while the others in three parties were wandering through the eastern bushland.

Both the trooper and the miner seemed dejected and weary. The one had set out with visions of glory, and hopes of a short cut to the coveted stripes which would put him above his fellows; the other had obeyed a rough wild sense of justice; and each was alike disappointed. The horses were picketed, and the men threw themselves heavily upon the ground. There was no need to light a fire; a few dampers and some rusty bacon were their whole provisions. Braxton produced them, and handed his share to his comrade. They ate their rough meal without a word. Braxton was the first to break the silence.

“We’re playing our last card,” he said.

“And a darned poor one at that,” replied his comrade.

“Why, mate,” he continued, “if we did knock up agin these all-fired varmin, ye don’t suppose you and I would go for them? I guess I’d up an’ shove for Trafalgar first.”

Braxton smiled. Chicago’s reckless courage was too well known in the colony for any words of his to throw a doubt upon it. Miners still tell how, during the first great rush in ‘52, a blustering ruffian, relying upon some similar remark of the pioneer’s, had tried to establish a reputation by an unprovoked assault upon him; and the narrators then glide imperceptibly into an account of Bill’s handsome conduct towards the widow — how he had given her his week’s clean-up to start her in a drinking shanty. Braxton thought of this as he smiled at Chicago’s remarks, and glanced at the massive limbs and weather-beaten face.

“We’d best see where we are before it grows darker,” he said; and rising, he stacked his gun against the trunk of a blue gum-tree, and seizing some of the creepers which hung down from it, began rapidly and silently to ascend it.

"His soul's too big for his body," growled the American, as he watched the dark lithe figure standing out against the pale-blue evening sky.

"What d'ye see, Jack?" he shouted; for the trooper had reached the topmost branch by this time, and was taking a survey of the country.

"Bush, bush; nothing but bush," said the voice among the leaves. "Wait a bit, though; there's a kind of hill about three miles off away to the nor'-east. I see it above the trees right over there. Not much good to us, though," he continued, after a pause, "for it seems a barren, stony sort of place."

Chicago paced about at the bottom of the tree.

"He seems an almighty long time prospectin' it," he muttered, after ten minutes had elapsed. "Ah, here he is!" and the trooper came swinging down and landed panting just in front of him.

"Why, what's come over him? What's the matter, Jack?"

Something was the matter. That was very evident. There was a light in Braxton's blue eyes, and a flush on the pale cheek.

"Bill," he said, putting his hand on his comrade's shoulder, "it's about time you made tracks for the settlements."

"What d'ye mean?" said Chicago.

"Why, I mean that the murderers are within a league of us, and that I intend going for them. There, don't be huffed, old man," he added; "of course I knew you were only joking. But they are there, Bill; I saw smoke on the top of that hill, and it wasn't good, honest smoke, mind you; it was dry-wood smoke, and meant to be hid. I thought it was mist at first; but no, it was smoke. I'll swear it. It could only be them: who else would camp on the summit of a desolate hill? We've got them, Bill; we have them as sure as Fate."

"Or they've got us," growled the American. "But here, lad, here's my glass; run up and have a look at them."

"It's too dark now," said Braxton; "we'll camp out to-night. No fear of them stirring. They're lying by there until the whole thing blows over, depend upon it; so we'll make sure of them in the morning."

The miner looked plaintively up at the tree, and then down at his fourteen stone of solid muscle.

“I guess I must take your word for it,” he grumbled; “but you are bushman enough to tell smoke from mist, and a dry-wood fire from an open one. We can’t do anything to-night till we feel our way, so I allow we’d best water the horses an’ have a good night’s rest.”

Braxton seemed to be of the same mind; so after a few minutes’ preparation the two men wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay, two little dark spots, on the great green carpet of the primeval bush.

With the first grey light of dawn Chicago sat up and roused his comrade. A heavy mist bung over the bushland. They could hardly see the loom of the trees across the little glade. Their clothes glistened with the little shining beads of moisture. They brushed each other down, and squatted in bush fashion over their rough breakfast. The haze seemed to be lifting a little now; they could see fifty yards in every direction. The miner paced up and down in silence, ruminating over a plug of “Barrett’s twist.” Braxton sat on a fallen tree sponging and oiling his revolver. Suddenly a single beam of sunshine played over the great blue gum. It widened and spread, and then in a moment the mist melted away, and the yellow leaves glowed like flakes of copper in the glare of the morning sun. Braxton cheerily snapped the lock of the pistol, loaded it, and replaced it in his belt. Chicago began to whistle, and stopped in the middle of his walk.

“Now, young un,” he said, “here’s the glass.”

Braxton slung it round his neck, and ascended the tree as he had done the night before. It was child’s-play to the trooper — a splendid climber, as I can testify; for I saw him two years later swarming up the topmost backstay of the *Hector* frigate in a gale of wind for a bet of a bottle of wine. He soon reached the summit, and shuffling along a naked branch two hundred feet from the ground, he gained a point where no leaves could obstruct his view. Here he sat straddle-legged; and, unslinging the glass, he proceeded to examine the hill, bush by bush and stone by stone.

An hour passed without his moving. Another had almost elapsed before he descended. His face was grave and thoughtful.

“Are they there?” was the eager query.

“Yes; they are there.”

“How many?”

“I’ve only seen five; but there may be more. Wait till I think it out, Bill.”

The miner gazed at him with all the reverence matter has towards mind. Thinking things out was not his strong point.

“Blamed if I can help you,” he said apologetically. “It kinder don’t come nat’ral to me to be plottin’ and plannin’. Want o’ eddication, likely. My father was allowed to be the hardest-headed man in the States. Judge Jeffers let on as how the old man wanted to hand in his checks; so he down an’ put his head on the line when the first engine as ran from Vermont was comin’ up. They fined him a hundred dollars for upsettin’ that ‘ere locomotive; an’ the old man got the cussedest headache as ever was.”

Braxton hardly seemed to hear this family anecdote; he was deep in thought.

“Look here, old man,” said he; “sit down by me on the trunk and listen to what I say. Remember that you are here as a volunteer, Bill — you’ve no call to come; now, I am here in the course of duty. Your name is known through the settlement; you were a marked man when I was in the nursery. Now, Bill, it’s a big thing I am going to ask you. If you and I go in and take these men, it will be another feather in your cap, and in yours only. What do men know of Jack Braxton, the private of police? He’d hardly be mentioned in the matter. Now, I want to make my name this day. We’ll have to secure these men by a surprise after dusk, and it will be as easy for one resolute man to do it as for two; perhaps easier, for there is less chance of detection. Bill, I want you to stay with the horses, and let me go alone.”

Chicago sprang to his feet with a snarl of indignation, and paced up and down in front of the fallen trees. Then he seemed to master himself, for he sat down again.

“They’d chaw you up, lad,” he said, putting his hand on Braxton’s shoulder. “It wouldn’t wash.”

“Not they,” said the trooper. “I’d take your pistol as well as my own, and I’d need a deal of chawing.”

“My character would be ruined,” said Bill.

“It’s beyond the reach of calumny. You can afford to give me one fair chance.”

Bill buried his face in his hands, and thought a little.

“Well, lad,” he said, looking up, “I’ll look after the horses.”

Braxton wrung him by the hand. “There are few men would have done it, Bill; you are a friend worth having. Now, we’ll spend our day as best we can, old man, and lie close till evening; for I won’t start till an hour after dusk; so we have plenty of time on our hands.”

The day passed slowly. The trooper lay among the mosses below the great blue gum in earnest thought. Once or twice he imagined he heard the subterranean chuckle and slap of the thigh which usually denoted amusement on the part of the miner; but on glancing up at that individual, the expression of his face was so solemn, not to say funereal, that it was evidently an illusion. They partook of their scanty dinner and supper cheerfully and with hearty appetites. The former listlessness had given place to briskness and activity, now that their object was in view. Chicago blossomed out into many strange experiences and racy reminiscences of Western life. The hours passed rapidly and cheerily. The trooper produced a venerable pack of cards from his holster and proposed euchre; but their gregariousness, and the general difficulty of distinguishing the king of clubs from the ace of hearts, exercised a depressing influence upon the players. Gradually the sun went down on the great wilderness. The shadow fell on the little glade, while the distant hill was still tipped with gold; then that too became purplish, a star twinkled over the Tápu range, and night crept over the scene.

"Good-bye, old man," said Braxton. "I won't take my carbine; it would only be in the way. I can't thank you enough for letting me have this chance. If they wipe me out, Bill, you'll not lose sight of them, I know; and you'll say I died like a man. I've got no friends and no message, and nothing in the world but this pack of cards. Keep them, Bill; they were a fine pack in '51. If you see a smoke on the hill in the morning you'll know all's well, and you'll bring up the horses at once. If you don't, you'll ride to Fallen Pine, where we were to meet, — ride day and night, Bill, — tell Inspector Burton that you know where the rangers are, that Private Braxton is dead, and that he said he was to bring up his men, else he'd come back from the grave and lead them up himself. Do that, Bill. Good-bye."

A great quiet rested over the heart of that desolate woodland. The croak of a frog, the gurgle of a little streamlet half hidden in the long grass — no other sound. Then a wakeful jay gave a shrill chatter, another joined, and another; a bluefinch screamed; a wombat rushed past to gain its burrow. Something had disturbed them; yet all was apparently as peaceful as before. Had you been by the jay's nest, however, and peered downwards, you would have seen something gliding like a serpent through the brushwood, and caught a glimpse, perhaps, of a pale, resolute face, and the glint of a pocket-compass pointing north-by-east.

It was a long and weary night for Trooper Braxton. Any moment he might come on an outpost of the rangers, so every step had to be taken slowly and with care. But he was an experienced woodman, and hardly a twig snapped as he crawled along. A morass barred his progress, and he was compelled to make a long detour. Then he found himself in thick brushwood, and once more had to go out of his way. It was very dark here in the depth of the forest. There was a heavy smell, and a dense steam laden with miasma rose from the ground. In the dim light he saw strange creeping things around him. A bushmaster writhed across the path in front of him, a cold, dank lizard crawled over his hand as he crouched down; but the trooper thought only of the human reptiles in front, and made steadily for his goal. Once he seemed to be pursued by some animal; he heard a creaking behind him, but it ceased when he stopped and listened, so he continued his way.

It was when he reached the base of the hill which he had seen from the distance that the real difficulty of his undertaking began. It was almost conical in shape, and very steep. The sides were covered with loose stones and an occasional large boulder. One false step here would send a shower of these tell-tale fragments clattering down the hill. The trooper stripped off his high leather boots and turned up his trousers; then he began cautiously to climb, cowering down behind every boulder.

There was a little patch of light far away on the horizon, a very little grey patch, but it caused the figure of a man who was moving upon the crest of the hill to loom out dim and large. He was a sentry apparently, for he carried a gun under his arm. The top of the hill was formed by a little plateau about a hundred yards in circumference. Along the edge of this the man was pacing, occasionally stopping to peer down into the great dusky sea beneath him. From this raised edge the plateau curved down from every side, so as to form a crater-like depression. In the centre of this hollow stood a large white tent. Several horses were picketed around it, and the ground was littered with bundles of dried grass and harness. You could see these details now from the edge of the plateau, for the grey patch in the east had become white, and was getting longer and wider. You could see the sentry’s face, too, as he paced round and round. A handsome, weak-minded face, with more of the fool than the devil impressed on it. He seemed cheerful, for the birds were beginning to sing, and their thousand voices rose from the bush below. He forgot the forged note, I think, and the dreary voyage, and the wild escape, and the dark gully away beyond the Tápu range; for his eye glistened, and he hummed a quaint little Yorkshire country air. He was back again in the West Riding village, and the rough boulder in front shaped itself into the hill behind which Nelly lived before he broke her heart, and he saw the ivied church that crowned it. He would have seen something else had he looked again — something which was not in his picture: a white passionless face which glared at him over the boulder, as he turned upon his heel, still singing, and unconscious that the bloodhounds of justice were close at his heels.

The trooper's time for action had come. He had reached the last boulder; nothing lay between the plateau and himself but a few loose stones. He could hear the song of the sentry dying away in the distance; he drew his regulation sword, and, with his Adams in his left, he rose and sprang like a tiger over the ridge and down into the hollow.

The sentry was startled from his dream of the past by a clatter and a rattling of stones. He sprang round and cocked his gun. No wonder that he gasped, and that a change passed over his bronzed face. A painter would need a dash of ultramarine in his flesh-tints to represent it now. No wonder, I say; for that dark active figure with the bare feet and the brass buttons meant disgrace and the gallows to him. He saw him spring across to the tent; he saw the gleam of a sword, and heard a crash as the tent-pole was severed, and the canvas came down with a run upon the heads of the sleepers. And then above oaths and shouts he heard a mellow Irish voice —"I've twelve shots in my hands. I have ye, every mother's son. Up with your arms! up, I say, before there is blood upon my soul. One move, and ye stand before the throne." Braxton had stooped and parted the doorway of the fallen tent, and was now standing over six ruffians who occupied it. They lay as they had wakened, but with their hands above their heads, for there was no resisting that quiet voice, backed up by the two black muzzles. They imagined they were surrounded and hopelessly outmatched. Not one of them dreamed that the whole attacking force stood before them. It was the sentry who first began to realise the true state of the case. There was no sound or sign of any reinforcement. He looked to see that the cap was pressed well down on the nipple, and crept towards the tent. He was a good shot, as many a keeper on Braidagarth and the Yorkshire fells could testify. He raised his gun to his shoulder. Braxton heard the click, but dared not remove his eye or his weapon from his six prisoners. The sentry looked along the sights. He knew his life depended upon that shot. There was more of the devil than the fool in his face now. He paused a moment to make sure of his aim, and then came a crash and the thud of a falling body. Braxton was still standing over the prisoners, but the sentry's gun was unfired, and he himself was writhing on the ground with a bullet through his lungs. "Ye see," said Chicago, as he rose from behind a rock with his gun still smoking in his hand, "it seemed a powerful mean thing to leave you, Jack; so I thought as I'd kinder drop around promiscus, and wade in if needed, which I was, as you can't deny. No, ye don't," he added, as the sentry stretched out his hand to grasp his fallen gun; "leave the wepin alone, young man; it ain't in your way as it lies there."

"I'm a dead man!" groaned the ranger.

"Then lie quiet like a respectable corpse," said the miner, "an' don't go a-squirmin' towards yer gun. That's ornary uneddicated conduct."

"Come here, Bill," cried Braxton, "and bring the ropes those horses are picketed with. Now," he continued, as the American, having abstracted the sentry's gun, appeared with an armful of ropes, "you tie these fellows up, and I'll kill any man who moves."

"A pleasant division of labour, eh, old Blatherskite," said Chicago, playfully tapping the one-eyed villain Maloney on the head. "Come on; the ugliest first!" So saying, he began upon him and fastened him securely.

One after another the rangers were tied up; all except the wounded man, who was too helpless to need securing. Then Chicago went down and brought up the horses, while Braxton remained on guard; and by mid-day the cavalcade was in full march through the forest *en route* for Fallen Pine, the rendezvous of the search-party. The wounded man was tied on to a horse in front, the other rangers followed on foot for safety, while the trooper and Chicago brought up the rear.

There was a sad assemblage at Fallen Pine. One by one they had dropped in, tanned with the sun, torn by briers, weakened by the poisonous miasma of the marshlands, all with the same tale of privation and failure. Summerville and the inspector had fallen in with blacks above the upper ford, and had barely escaped with their lives. Troopers Foley and Anson were well, though somewhat gaunt from privation. Hartley had lost his horse from the bite of a bushmaster. Murdoch and Murphy had scoured the bush as far as Rathurst, but without success. All were dejected and weary. They only waited the arrival of two of their number to set out on their return to Trafalgar.

It was mid-day, and the sun was beating down with a pitiless glare on the little clearing. The men were lying about on the shady side of the trunks, some smoking, some with their hats over their faces and half asleep. The horses were tethered here and there, looking as listless as their masters. Only the inspector's old charger seemed superior to the weather — a shrewd, *blasé* old horse, that had seen the world, and was nearly as deeply versed in woodcraft as his master. As Chicago said, "Short of climbin' a tree, there weren't nothin' that horse couldn't do; an' it would make a darned good try at that if it was pushed." Old "Sawback" seemed ill at ease this afternoon. Twice he had pricked up his ears, and once he had raised his head as if to neigh, but paused before committing himself. The inspector looked at him curiously and put his meerschaum back into its case. Meerschaums were always a weakness of poor Jim Burton's. "Demme it, sir," I have heard him say, "a gentleman is known by his pipe. When he comes down in the world his pipe has most vitality." He put the case inside his uniform and went over to the horse. The ears were still twitching.

"He hears something," said the inspector. "By Jove, so do I! Here, boys, jump up; there's a body of men coming!" Every man sprang to his horse's head. "I hear hoofs, and I hear the tramp of men on foot. They must be a large party. They're heading straight for us. Get under cover, boys, and have your guns loose." The men wheeled right and left, and in a very few moments the glade was deserted. Only the brown barrel of a gun here and there among the long grass and the ferns showed where they were crouching. "Steady, boys!" said Burton; "if they are enemies, don't fire till I give the word. Then one by one aim low, and let the smoke clear. Rangers, by Jove!" he added, as a horseman broke into the clearing some way down, with his head hanging down over his horse's neck. "More," he growled, as several men emerged from the bush at the same point. "By the living powers, they are taken! I see the ropes. Hurrah!" And next moment Braxton and Chicago were mobbed by nine shouting, dancing men, who pulled them and tugged at them, and slapped them on the back, and dragged them about in such a way, that Maloney whispered with a scowl —

"If we'd had the grit to do as much, we'd have been free men this day!"

And now our story is nearly done. We have chronicled a fact which we think is worthy of a wider circulation than the colonial drinking-bar and the sheep-farmer’s fireside, for Trooper Braxton and his capture of the Bluemansdyke murderers have long been household words among our brothers in the England of the Southern seas.

We need not detail that joyful ride to Trafalgar, nor the welcome, nor the attempt at lynching; nor how Maloney, the arch criminal, turned Queen’s evidence, and so writhed away from the gallows. All that may be read in the colonial press more graphically than I can tell it. My friend Jack Braxton is an officer now, as his father was before him, and still in the Trafalgar force. Bill I saw last in ‘61, when he came over to London in charge of the barque of the *Wellingtonia* for the International Exhibition. He is laying on flesh, I fear, since he took to sheep-farming; for he was barely brought up by seventeen stone, and his fighting weight used to be fourteen; but he looks well and hearty. Maloney was lynched in Placerville — at least so I heard. I had a letter last mail from the old inspector; he has left the police, and has a farm at Rathurst. I think, stout-hearted as he is, he must give a little bit of a shudder when he rides down to Trafalgar for the Thursday market, and comes round that sharp turn of the road where the boulders lie, and the furze looks so yellow against the red clay.

THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.

He was known in the Gulch as the Reverend Elias B. Hopkins, but it was generally understood that the title was an honorary one, extorted by his many eminent qualities, and not borne out by any legal claim which he could adduce. “The Parson” was another of his *sobriquets*, which was sufficiently distinctive in a land where the flock was scattered and the shepherds few. To do him justice, he never pretended to have received any preliminary training for the ministry or any orthodox qualification to practise it. “We’re all working in the claim of the Lord,” he remarked one day, “and it don’t matter a cent whether we’re hired for the job or whether we waltzes in on our own account,” a piece of rough imagery which appealed directly to the instincts of Jackman’s Gulch. It is quite certain that during the first few months his presence had a marked effect in diminishing the excessive use both of strong drinks and of stronger adjectives which had been characteristic of the little mining settlement. Under his tuition, men began to understand that the resources of their native language were less limited than they had supposed, and that it was possible to convey their impressions with accuracy without the aid of a gaudy halo of profanity.

We were certainly in need of a regenerator at Jackman’s Gulch about the beginning of ‘53. Times were flush then over the whole colony, but nowhere flusher than there. Our material prosperity had had a bad effect upon our morals. The camp was a small one, lying rather better than a hundred and twenty miles to the south of Ballarat, at a spot where a mountain torrent finds its way down a rugged ravine on its way to join the Arrowsmith River. History does not relate who the original Jackman may have been, but at the time I speak of the camp it contained a hundred or so adults, many of whom were men who had sought an asylum there after making more civilised mining centres too hot to hold them. They were a rough, murderous crew, hardly leavened by the few respectable members of society who were scattered among them.

Communication between Jackman’s Gulch and the outside world was difficult and uncertain. A portion of the bush between it and Ballarat was infested by a redoubtable outlaw named Conky Jim, who, with a small gang as desperate as himself, made travelling a dangerous matter. It was customary, therefore, at the Gulch, to store up the dust and nuggets obtained from the mines in a special store, each man's share being placed in a separate bag on which his name was marked. A trusty man, named Woburn, was deputed to watch over this primitive bank. When the amount deposited became considerable, a waggon was hired, and the whole treasure was conveyed to Ballarat, guarded by the police and by a certain number of miners, who took it in turn to perform the office. Once in Ballarat, it was forwarded on to Melbourne by the regular gold waggons. By this plan, the gold was often kept for months in the Gulch before being despatched, but Conky Jim was effectually checkmated, as the escort party were far too strong for him and his gang. He appeared, at the time of which I write, to have forsaken his haunts in disgust, and the road could be traversed by small parties with impunity.

Comparative order used to reign during the daytime at Jackman's Gulch, for the majority of the inhabitants were out with crowbar and pick among the quartz ledges, or washing clay and sand in their cradles by the banks of the little stream. As the sun sank down, however, the claims were gradually deserted, and their unkempt owners, clay-bespattered and shaggy, came lounging into camp, ripe for any form of mischief. Their first visit was to Woburn's gold store, where their clean-up of the day was duly deposited, the amount being entered in the store-keeper's book, and each miner retaining enough to cover his evening's expenses. After that all restraint was at an end, and each set to work to get rid of his surplus dust with the greatest rapidity possible. The focus of dissipation was the rough bar, formed by a couple of hogsheads spanned by planks, which was dignified by the name of the "Britannia drinking saloon." Here, Nat Adams, the burly bar-keeper, dispensed bad whisky at the rate of two shillings a noggin, or a guinea a bottle, while his brother Ben acted as croupier in a rude wooden shanty behind, which had been converted into a gambling hell, and was crowded every night. There had been a third brother, but an unfortunate misunderstanding with a customer had shortened his existence. "He was too soft to live long," his brother Nathaniel feelingly observed on the occasion of his funeral. "Many's the time I've said to him, 'If you're arguin' a pint with a stranger, you should always draw first, then argue, and then shoot, if you judge that he's on the shoot.' Bill was too purlite. He must needs argue first and draw after, when he might just as well have kivered his man before talkin' it over with him." This amiable weakness of the deceased Bill was a blow to the firm of Adams, which became so short-handed that the concern could hardly be worked without the admission of a partner, which would mean a considerable decrease in the profits.

Nat Adams had had a roadside shanty in the Gulch before the discovery of gold, and might, therefore, claim to be the oldest inhabitant. These keepers of shanties were a peculiar race, and, at the cost of a digression, it may be interesting to explain how they managed to amass considerable sums of money in a land where travellers were few and far between. It was the custom of the "bushmen," *i.e.* bullock drivers, sheep tenders, and the other white hands who worked on the sheep-runs up country, to sign articles by which they agreed to serve their master for one, two, or three years at so much per year and certain daily rations. Liquor was never included in this agreement, and the men remained, per force, total abstainers during the whole time. The money was paid in a lump sum at the end of the engagement. When that day came round, Jimmy, the stockman, would come slouching into his master's office, cabbage-tree hat in hand.

"Morning, master!" Jimmy would say. "My time's up. I guess I'll draw my cheque and ride down to town."

"You'll come back, Jimmy."

"Yes, I'll come back. Maybe I'll be away three weeks, maybe a month. I want some clothes, master, and my bloomin' boots are well-nigh off my feet."

"How much, Jimmy?" asks his master, taking up his pen.

"There's sixty pound screw," Jimmy answers thoughtfully; "and you mind, master, last March, when the brindled bull broke out o' the paddock. Two pound you promised me then. And a pound at the dipping. And a pound when Millar's sheep got mixed with ourn;" and so he goes on, for bushmen can seldom write, but they have memories which nothing escapes.

His master writes the cheque and hands it across the table. "Don't get on the drink, Jimmy," he says.

"No fear of that, master," and the stockman slips the cheque into his leather pouch, and within an hour he is ambling off upon his long-limbed horse on his hundred mile journey to town.

Now Jimmy has to pass some six or eight of the above-mentioned roadside shanties in his day's ride, and experience has taught him that if he once breaks his accustomed total abstinence, the unwonted stimulant has an overpowering effect upon his brain. Jimmy shakes his head warily as he determines that no earthly consideration will induce him to partake of any liquor until his business is over. His only chance is to avoid temptation; so, knowing that there is the first of these houses some half mile ahead, he plunges into a by-path through the bush which will lead him out at the other side.

Jimmy is riding resolutely along this narrow path, congratulating himself upon a danger escaped, when he becomes aware of a sunburned, black-bearded man who is leaning unconcernedly against a tree beside the track. This is none other than the shanty-keeper, who, having observed Jimmy's manœuvre in the distance, has taken a short cut through the bush in order to intercept him.

"Morning, Jimmy!" he cries, as the horseman comes up to him.

"Morning, mate; morning!"

"Where are ye off to to-day then?"

"Off to town," says Jimmy sturdily.

"No, now — are you though? You'll have bully times down there for a bit. Come round and have a drink at my place. Just by way of luck."

"No," says Jimmy, "I don't want a drink."

"Just a little damp."

"I tell ye I don't want one," says the stockman angrily.

"Well, ye needn't be so darned short about it. It's nothin' to me whether you drinks or not. Good mornin'."

"Good mornin'," says Jimmy, and has ridden on about twenty yards when he hears the other calling on him to stop.

"See here, Jimmy!" he says, overtaking him again. "If you'll do me a kindness when you're up in town I'd be obliged."

"What is it?"

"It's a letter, Jim, as I wants posted. It's an important one too, an' I wouldn't trust it with every one; but I knows you, and if you'll take charge on it it'll be a powerful weight off my mind."

"Give it here," Jimmy says laconically.

"I hain't got it here. It's round in my caboose. Come round for it with me. It ain't more'n quarter of a mile."

Jimmy consents reluctantly. When they reach the tumble-down hut the keeper asks him cheerily to dismount and to come in.

“Give me the letter,” says Jimmy.

“It ain’t altogether wrote yet, but you sit down here for a minute and it’ll be right,” and so the stockman is beguiled into the shanty.

At last the letter is ready and handed over. “Now, Jimmy,” says the keeper, “one drink at my expense before you go.”

“Not a taste,” says Jimmy.

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” the other says in an aggrieved tone. “You’re too damned proud to drink with a poor cove like me. Here — give us back that letter. I’m cursed if I’ll accept a favour from a man whose too almighty big to have a drink with me.”

“Well, well, mate, don’t turn rusty,” says Jim. “Give us one drink an’ I’m off.”

The keeper pours out about half a pannikin of raw rum and hands it to the bushman. The moment he smells the old familiar smell his longing for it returns, and he swigs it off at a gulp. His eyes shine more brightly, and his face becomes flushed. The keeper watches him narrowly. “You can go now, Jim,” he says.

“Steady, mate, steady,” says the bushman. “I’m as good a man as you. If you stand a drink, I can stand one too, I suppose.” So the pannikin is replenished, and Jimmy’s eyes shine brighter still.

“Now, Jimmy, one last drink for the good of the house,” says the keeper, “and then it’s time you were off.” The stockman has a third gulp from the pannikin, and with it all his scruples and good resolutions vanish for ever.

“Look here,” he says somewhat huskily, taking his cheque out of his pouch. “You take this, mate. Whoever comes along this road, ask ‘em what they’ll have, and tell them it’s my shout. Let me know when the money’s done.”

So Jimmy abandons the idea of ever getting to town, and for three weeks or a month he lies about the shanty in a state of extreme drunkenness, and reduces every wayfarer upon the road to the same condition. At last one fine morning the keeper comes to him. “The coin’s done, Jimmy,” he says; “it’s about time you made some more.” So Jimmy has a good wash to sober him, straps his blanket and his billy to his back, and rides off through the bush to the sheep-run, where he has another year of sobriety, terminating in another month of intoxication.

All this, though typical of the happy-go-lucky manners of the inhabitants, has no direct bearing upon Jackman’s Gulch, so we must return to that Arcadian settlement. Additions to the population there were not numerous, and such as came about the time of which I speak were even rougher and fiercer than the original inhabitants. In particular, there came a brace of ruffians named Phillips and Maule, who rode into camp one day and started a claim upon the other side of the stream. They outgulched the Gulch in the virulence and fluency of their blasphemy, in the truculence of their speech and manner, and in their reckless disregard of all social laws. They claimed to have come from Bendigo, and there were some amongst us who wished that the redoubted Conky Jim was on the track once more, as long as he would close it to such visitors as these. After their arrival the nightly proceedings at the “Britannia Bar” and at the gambling hell behind became more riotous than ever. Violent quarrels, frequently ending in bloodshed, were of constant occurrence. The more peaceable frequenters of the bar began to talk seriously of lynching the two strangers who were the principal promoters of disorder. Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when our evangelist, Elias B. Hopkins, came limping into the camp, travel-stained and footsore, with his spade strapped across his back and his Bible in the pocket of his moleskin jacket.

His presence was hardly noticed at first, so insignificant was the man. His manner was quiet and unobtrusive, his face pale, and his figure fragile. On better acquaintance, however, there was a squareness and firmness about his clean-shaven lower jaw, and an intelligence in his widely-opened blue eyes, which marked him as a man of character. He erected a small hut for himself, and started a claim close to that occupied by the two strangers who had preceded him. This claim was chosen with a ludicrous disregard for all practical laws of mining, and at once stamped the new-comer as being a green hand at his work. It was piteous to observe him every morning as we passed to our work, digging and delving with the greatest industry, but, as we knew well, without the smallest possibility of any result. He would pause for a moment as we went by, wipe his pale face with his bandanna handkerchief, and shout out to us a cordial morning greeting, and then fall to again with redoubled energy. By degrees we got into the way of making a half-pitying, half-contemptuous inquiry as to how he got on. “I hain’t struck it yet, boys," he would answer cheerily, leaning on his spade, "but the bed-rock lies deep just hereabouts, and I reckon we'll get among the pay gravel to-day." Day after day he returned the same reply with unvarying confidence and cheerfulness.

It was not long before he began to show us the stuff that was in him. One night the proceedings were unusually violent at the drinking saloon. A rich pocket had been struck during the day, and the striker was standing treat in a lavish and promiscuous fashion, which had reduced three parts of the settlement to a state of wild intoxication. A crowd of drunken idlers stood or lay about the bar, cursing, swearing, shouting, dancing, and here and there firing their pistols into the air out of pure wantonness. From the interior of the shanty behind there came a similar chorus. Maule, Phillips, and the roughs who followed them were in the ascendant, and all order and decency was swept away.

Suddenly, amid this tumult of oaths and drunken cries, men became conscious of a quiet monotone which underlay all other sounds and obtruded itself at every pause in the uproar. Gradually first one man and then another paused to listen, until there was a general cessation of the hubbub, and every eye was turned in the direction whence this quiet stream of words flowed. There, mounted upon a barrel, was Elias B. Hopkins, the newest of the inhabitants of Jackman's Gulch, with a good-humoured smile upon his resolute face. He held an open Bible in his hand, and was reading aloud a passage taken at random — an extract from the Apocalypse, if I remember right. The words were entirely irrelevant, and without the smallest bearing upon the scene before him; but he plodded on with great unction, waving his left hand slowly to the cadence of his words.

There was a general shout of laughter and applause at this apparition, and Jackman's Gulch gathered round the barrel approvingly, under the impression that this was some ornate joke, and that they were about to be treated to some mock sermon or parody of the chapter read. When, however, the reader, having finished the chapter, placidly commenced another, and having finished that rippled on into another one, the revellers came to the conclusion that the joke was somewhat too long-winded. The commencement of yet another chapter confirmed this opinion, and an angry chorus of shouts and cries, with suggestions as to gagging the reader, or knocking him off the barrel, rose from every side. In spite of roars and hoots, however, Elias B. Hopkins plodded away at the Apocalypse with the same serene countenance, looking as ineffably contented as though the babel around him were the most gratifying applause. Before long an occasional boot pattered against the barrel, or whistled past our parson's head; but here some of the more orderly of the inhabitants interfered in favour of peace and order, aided curiously enough by the afore-mentioned Maule and Phillips, who warmly espoused the cause of the little Scripture-reader. "The little cuss has got grit in him," the latter explained, rearing his bulky red-shirted form between the crowd and the object of its anger. "His ways ain't our ways, and we're all welcome to our opinions, and to sling them round from barrels or otherwise, if so minded. What I says, and Bill says, is, that when it comes to slingin' boots instead o' words it's too steep by half; an' if this man's wronged we'll chip in an' see him righted." This oratorical effort had the effect of checking the more active signs of disapproval, and the party of disorder attempted to settle down once more to their carouse, and to ignore the shower of Scripture which was poured upon them. The attempt was hopeless. The drunken portion fell asleep under the drowsy refrain, and the others, with many a sullen glance at the imperturbable reader, slouched off to their huts, leaving him still perched upon the barrel. Finding himself alone with the more orderly of the spectators, the little man rose, closed his book, after methodically marking with a lead pencil the exact spot at which he stopped, and descended from his perch. "To-morrow night, boys," he remarked in his quiet voice, "the reading will commence at the 9th verse of the 15th chapter of the Apocalypse," with which piece of information, disregarding our congratulations, he walked away with the air of a man who has performed an obvious duty.

We found that his parting words were no empty threat. Hardly had the crowd begun to assemble next night before he appeared once more upon the barrel and began to read with the same monotonous vigour, tripping over words, muddling up sentences, but still boring along through chapter after chapter. Laughter, threats, chaff — every weapon short of actual violence — was used to deter him, but all with the same want of success. Soon it was found that there was a method in his proceedings. When silence reigned, or when the conversation was of an innocent nature, the reading ceased. A single word of blasphemy, however, set it going again, and it would ramble on for a quarter of an hour or so, when it stopped, only to be renewed upon similar provocation. The reading was pretty continuous during that second night, for the language of the opposition was still considerably free. At least it was an improvement upon the night before.

For more than a month Elias B. Hopkins carried on this campaign. There he would sit, night after night, with the open book upon his knee, and at the slightest provocation off he would go, like a musical box when the spring is touched. The monotonous drawl became unendurable, but it could only be avoided by conforming to the parson’s code. A chronic swearer came to be looked upon with disfavour by the community, since the punishment of his transgression fell upon all. At the end of a fortnight the reader was silent more than half the time, and at the end of the month his position was a sinecure.

Never was a moral revolution brought about more rapidly and more completely. Our parson carried his principle into private life. I have seen him, on hearing an unguarded word from some worker in the gulches, rush across, Bible in hand, and perching himself upon the heap of red clay which surmounted the offender’s claim, drawl through the genealogical tree at the commencement of the New Testament in a most earnest and impressive manner, as though it were especially appropriate to the occasion. In time an oath became a rare thing amongst us. Drunkenness was on the wane too. Casual travellers passing through the Gulch used to marvel at our state of grace, and rumours of it went as far as Ballarat, and excited much comment therein.

There were points about our evangelist which made him especially fitted for the work which he had undertaken. A man entirely without redeeming vices would have had no common basis on which to work, and no means of gaining the sympathy of his flock. As we came to know Elias B. Hopkins better, we discovered that in spite of his piety there was a leaven of old Adam in him, and that he had certainly known unregenerate days. He was no teetotaler. On the contrary, he could choose his liquor with discrimination, and lower it in an able manner. He played a masterly hand at poker, and there were few who could touch him at “cut-throat euchre.” He and the two ex-ruffians, Phillips and Maule, used to play for hours in perfect harmony, except when the fall of the cards elicited an oath from one of his companions. At the first of these offences the parson would put on a pained smile and gaze reproachfully at the culprit. At the second he would reach for his Bible, and the game was over for the evening. He showed us he was a good revolver shot too, for when we were practising at an empty brandy bottle outside Adams' bar, he took up a friend's pistol and hit it plumb in the centre at twenty-four paces. There were few things he took up that he could not make a show at apparently, except gold-digging, and at that he was the veriest duffer alive. It was pitiful to see the little canvas bag, with his name printed across it, lying placid and empty upon the shelf at Woburn's store, while all the other bags were increasing daily, and some had assumed quite a portly rotundity of form, for the weeks were slipping by, and it was almost time for the gold-train to start off for Ballarat. We reckoned that the amount which we had stored at the time represented the greatest sum which had ever been taken by a single convoy out of Jackman's Gulch.

Although Elias B. Hopkins appeared to derive a certain quiet satisfaction from the wonderful change which he had effected in the camp, his joy was not yet rounded and complete. There was one thing for which he still yearned. He opened his heart to us about it one evening.

"We'd have a blessing on the camp, boys," he said, "if we only had a service o' some sort on the Lord's day. It's a temptin' o' Providence to go on in this way without takin' any notice of it, except that maybe there's more whisky drunk and more card-playin' than on any other day."

"We hain't got no parson," objected one of the crowd.

"Ye fool!" growled another, "hain't we got a man as is worth any three parsons, and can splash texts around like clay out o' a cradle? What more d'ye want?"

"We hain't got no church!" urged the same dissentient.

"Have it in the open air," one suggested.

"Or in Woburn's store," said another.

"Or in Adams' saloon."

The last proposal was received with a buzz of approval, which showed that it was considered the most appropriate locality.

Adams' saloon was a substantial wooden building in the rear of the bar, which was used partly for storing liquor and partly for a gambling saloon. It was strongly built of rough-hewn logs, the proprietor rightly judging, in the unregenerate days of Jackman's Gulch, that hogsheads of brandy and rum were commodities which had best be secured under lock and key. A strong door opened into each end of the saloon, and the interior was spacious enough, when the table and lumber were cleared away, to accommodate the whole population. The spirit barrels were heaped together at one end by their owner, so as to make a very fair imitation of a pulpit.

At first the Gulch took but a mild interest in the proceedings, but when it became known that Elias B. Hopkins intended, after reading the service, to address the audience, the settlement began to warm up to the occasion. A real sermon was a novelty to all of them, and one coming from their own parson was additionally so. Rumour announced that it would be interspersed with local hits, and that the moral would be pointed by pungent personalities. Men began to fear that they would be unable to gain seats, and many applications were made to the brothers Adams. It was only when conclusively shown that the saloon could contain them all with a margin that the camp settled down into calm expectancy.

It was as well that the building was of such a size, for the assembly upon the Sunday morning was the largest which had ever occurred in the annals of Jackman’s Gulch. At first it was thought that the whole population was present, but a little reflection showed that this was not so. Maule and Phillips had gone on a prospecting journey among the hills, and had not returned as yet; and Woburn, the gold-keeper, was unable to leave his store. Having a very large quantity of the precious metal under his charge, he stuck to his post, feeling that the responsibility was too great to trifle with. With these three exceptions the whole of the Gulch, with clean red shirts, and such other additions to their toilet as the occasion demanded, sauntered in a straggling line along the clayey pathway which led up to the saloon.

The interior of the building had been provided with rough benches; and the parson, with his quiet, good-humoured smile, was standing at the door to welcome them. “Good morning, boys,” he cried cheerily, as each group came lounging up. “Pass in! pass in. You’ll find this is as good a morning’s work as any you’ve done. Leave your pistols in this barrel outside the door as you pass; you can pick them out as you come out again; but it isn’t the thing to carry weapons into the house of peace.” His request was good-humouredly complied with, and before the last of the congregation filed in there was a strange assortment of knives and firearms in this depository. When all had assembled the doors were shut and the service began — the first and the last which was ever performed at Jackman’s Gulch.

The weather was sultry and the room close, yet the miners listened with exemplary patience. There was a sense of novelty in the situation which had its attractions. To some it was entirely new, others were wafted back by it to another land and other days. Beyond a disposition which was exhibited by the uninitiated to applaud at the end of certain prayers, by way of showing that they sympathised with the sentiments expressed, no audience could have behaved better. There was a murmur of interest, however, when Elias B. Hopkins, looking down on the congregation from his rostrum of casks, began his address.

He had attired himself with care in honour of the occasion. He wore a velveteen tunic, girt round the waist with a sash of china silk, a pair of moleskin trousers, and held his cabbage-tree hat in his left hand. He began speaking in a low tone, and it was noticed at the time that he frequently glanced through the small aperture which served for a window, which was placed above the heads of those who sat beneath him.

“I’ve put you straight now,” he said, in the course of his address; “I’ve got you in the right rut, if you will but stick in it.” Here he looked very hard out of the window for some seconds. “You’ve learned soberness and industry, and with those things you can always make up any loss you may sustain. I guess there isn’t one of ye that won’t remember my visit to this camp.” He paused for a moment, and three revolver shots rang out upon the quiet summer air. “Keep your seats, damn ye!” roared our preacher, as his audience rose in excitement. “If a man of ye moves, down he goes! The door’s locked on the outside, so ye can’t get out anyhow. Your seats, ye canting, chuckle-headed fools! Down with ye, ye dogs, or I’ll fire among ye!”

Astonishment and fear brought us back into our seats, and we sat staring blankly at our pastor and each other. Elias B. Hopkins, whose whole face and even figure appeared to have undergone an extraordinary alteration, looked fiercely down on us from his commanding position with a contemptuous smile on his stern face.

“I have your lives in my hands,” he remarked; and we noticed as he spoke that he held a heavy revolver in his hand, and that the butt of another one protruded from his sash. “I am armed and you are not. If one of you moves or speaks, he is a dead man. If not, I shall not harm you. You must wait here for an hour. Why, you *fools*” (this with a hiss of contempt which rang in our ears for many a long day), “do you know who it is that has stuck you up? Do you know who it is that has been playing it upon you for months as a parson and a saint? Conky Jim, the bushranger, ye apes! And Phillips and Maule were my two right-hand men. They're off into the hills with your gold —— Ha! would ye?" This to some restive member of the audience, who quieted down instantly before the fierce eye and the ready weapon of the bushranger. "In an hour they will be clear of any pursuit, and I advise you to make the best of it and not to follow, or you may lose more than your money. My horse is tethered outside this door behind me. When the time is up I shall pass through it, lock it on the outside, and be off. Then you may break your way out as best you can. I have no more to say to you, except that ye are the most cursed set of asses that ever trod in boot-leather."

We had time to endorse mentally this outspoken opinion during the long sixty minutes which followed; we were powerless before the resolute desperado. It is true that if we made a simultaneous rush we might bear him down at the cost of eight or ten of our number. But how could such a rush be organised without speaking, and who would attempt it without a previous agreement that he would be supported? There was nothing for it but submission. It seemed three hours at the least before the ranger snapped up his watch, stepped down from the barrel, walked backwards, still covering us with his weapon, to the door behind him, and then passed rapidly through it. We heard the creaking of the rusty lock, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs as he galloped away.

It has been remarked that an oath had for the last few weeks been a rare thing in the camp. We made up for our temporary abstention during the next half-hour. Never was heard such symmetrical and heartfelt blasphemy. When at last we succeeded in getting the door off its hinges all sight of both rangers and treasure had disappeared, nor have we ever caught sight of either the one or the other since. Poor Woburn, true to his trust, lay shot through the head across the threshold of his empty store. The villains, Maule and Phillips, had descended upon the camp the instant that we had been enticed into the trap, murdered the keeper, loaded up a small cart with the booty, and got safe away to some wild fastness among the mountains, where they were joined by their wily leader.

Jackman's Gulch recovered from this blow, and is now a flourishing township. Social reformers are not in request there, however, and morality is at a discount. It is said that an inquest has been held lately upon an unoffending stranger who chanced to remark that in so large a place it would be advisable to have some form of Sunday service. The memory of their one and only pastor is still green among the inhabitants, and will be for many a long year to come.

MY FRIEND THE MURDERER.

“Number 43 is no better, Doctor,” said the head-warder in a slightly reproachful accent, looking in round the corner of my door.

“Confound 43!” I responded from behind the pages of the *Australian Sketcher*.

“And 61 says his tubes are paining him. Couldn’t you do anything for him?”

“He’s a walking drug shop,” said I. “He has the whole British pharmacopœia inside him. I believe his tubes are as sound as yours are.”

“Then there’s 7 and 108, they are chronic,” continued the warder, glancing down a blue slip of paper. “And 28 knocked off work yesterday — said lifting things gave him a stitch in the side. I want you to have a look at him, if you don’t mind, Doctor. There’s 31, too — him that killed John Adamson in the *Corinthian* brig — he’s been carrying on awful in the night, shrieking and yelling, he has, and no stopping him neither.”

“All right, I’ll have a look at him afterwards,” I said, tossing my paper carelessly aside, and pouring myself out a cup of coffee. “Nothing else to report, I suppose, warder?”

The official protruded his head a little further into the room. “Beg pardon, Doctor,” he said, in a confidential tone, “but I notice as 82 has a bit of a cold, and it would be a good excuse for you to visit him and have a chat, maybe.”

The cup of coffee was arrested half-way to my lips as I stared in amazement at the man’s serious face.

“An excuse?” I said. “An excuse? What the deuce are you talking about, McPherson? You see me trudging about all day at my practice, when I’m not looking after the prisoners, and coming back every night as tired as a dog, and you talk about finding an excuse for doing more work.”

“You’d like it, Doctor,” said Warder McPherson, insinuating one of his shoulders into the room. “That man’s story’s worth listening to if you could get him to tell it, though he’s not what you’d call free in his speech. Maybe you don’t know who 82 is?”

“No, I don’t, and I don’t care either,” I answered, in the conviction that some local ruffian was about to be foisted upon me as a celebrity.

“He’s Maloney,” said the warder, “him that turned Queen’s evidence after the murders at Bluemansdyke.”

“You don’t say so?” I ejaculated, laying down my cup in astonishment. I had heard of this ghastly series of murders, and read an account of them in a London magazine long before setting foot in the colony. I remembered that the atrocities committed had thrown the Burke and Hare crimes completely into the shade, and that one of the most villainous of the gang had saved his own skin by betraying his companions. “Are you sure?” I asked.

“Oh yes, it’s him right enough. Just you draw him out a bit, and he’ll astonish you. He’s a man to know, is Maloney; that’s to say, in moderation;” and the head grinned, bobbed, and disappeared, leaving me to finish my breakfast and ruminate over what I had heard.

The surgeonship of an Australian prison is not an enviable position. It may be endurable in Melbourne or Sydney, but the little town of Perth has few attractions to recommend it, and those few had been long exhausted. The climate was detestable, and the society far from congenial. Sheep and cattle were the staple support of the community; and their prices, breeding, and diseases the principal topic of conversation. Now as I, being an outsider, possessed neither the one nor the other, and was utterly callous to the new “dip” and the “rot” and other kindred topics, I found myself in a state of mental isolation, and was ready to hail anything which might relieve the monotony of my existence. Maloney, the murderer, had at least some distinctiveness and individuality in his character, and might act as a tonic to a mind sick of the commonplaces of existence. I determined that I should follow the warder’s advice, and take the excuse for making his acquaintance. When, therefore, I went upon my usual matutinal round, I turned the lock of the door which bore the convict’s number upon it, and walked into the cell.

The man was lying in a heap upon his rough bed as I entered, but, uncoiling his long limbs, he started up and stared at me with an insolent look of defiance on his face which augured badly for our interview. He had a pale set face, with sandy hair and a steelly-blue eye, with something feline in its expression. His frame was tall and muscular, though there was a curious bend in his shoulders, which almost amounted to a deformity. An ordinary observer meeting him in the street might have put him down as a well-developed man, fairly handsome, and of studious habits — even in the hideous uniform of the rottenest convict establishment he imparted a certain refinement to his carriage which marked him out among the inferior ruffians around him.

“I’m not on the sick-list,” he said gruffly. There was something in the hard, rasping voice which dispelled all softer allusions, and made me realise that I was face to face with the man of the Lena Valley and Bluemansdyke, the bloodiest bushranger that ever stuck up a farm or cut the throats of its occupants.

“I know you’re not,” I answered. “Warder McPherson told me you had a cold, though, and I thought I’d look in and see you.”

“Blast Warder McPherson, and blast you, too!” yelled the convict, in a paroxysm of rage. “Oh, that’s right,” he added, in a quieter voice; “hurry away; report me to the governor, do! Get me another six months or so — that’s your game.”

“I’m not going to report you,” I said.

“Eight square feet of ground,” he went on, disregarding my protest, and evidently working himself into a fury again. “Eight square feet, and I can’t have that without being talked to and stared at, and — oh, blast the whole crew of you!” and he raised his two clenched hands above his head and shook them in passionate invective.

“You’ve got a curious idea of hospitality,” I remarked, determined not to lose my temper, and saying almost the first thing that came to my tongue.

To my surprise the words had an extraordinary effect upon him. He seemed completely staggered at my assuming the proposition for which he had been so fiercely contending — namely, that the room in which we stood was his own.

“I beg your pardon,” he said; “I didn’t mean to be rude. Won’t you take a seat?” and he motioned towards a rough trestle, which formed the headpiece of his couch.

I sat down rather astonished at the sudden change. I don’t know that I liked Maloney better under his new aspect. The murderer had, it is true, disappeared for the nonce, but there was something in the smooth tones and obsequious manner which powerfully suggested the witness of the Queen, who had stood up and sworn away the lives of his companions in crime.

“How’s your chest?” I asked, putting on my professional air.

“Come, drop it, Doctor, drop it!” he answered, showing a row of white teeth as he resumed his seat upon the side of the bed. “It wasn’t anxiety after my precious health that brought you along here; that story won’t wash at all. You came to have a look at Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, murderer, Sydney-slider, ranger, and Government peach. That’s about my figure, ain’t it? There it is, plain and straight; there’s nothing mean about me.”

He paused as if he expected me to say something; but as I remained silent, he repeated once or twice, “There’s nothing mean about me.”

“And why shouldn’t I?” he suddenly yelled, his eyes gleaming and his whole satanic nature reasserting itself. “We were bound to swing, one and all, and they were none the worse if I saved myself by turning against them. Every man for himself, say I, and the devil take the luckiest. You haven’t a plug of tobacco, Doctor, have you?”

He tore at the piece of “Barrett’s” which I handed him as ravenously as a wild beast. It seemed to have the effect of soothing his nerves, for he settled himself down in the bed, and reassumed his former deprecating manner.

“You wouldn’t like it yourself, you know, Doctor,” he said; “it’s enough to make any man a little queer in his temper. I’m in for six months this time for assault, and very sorry I shall be to go out again, I can tell you. My mind’s at ease in here; but when I’m outside, what with the Government, and what with Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury, there’s no chance of a quiet life.”

“Who is he?” I asked.

“He’s the brother of John Grimthorpe; the same that was condemned on my evidence, and an infernal scamp he was too! Spawn of the devil, both of them! This tattooed one is a murderous ruffian, and he swore to have my blood after that trial. It’s seven year ago, and he’s following me yet; I know he is, though he lies low and keeps dark. He came up to me in Ballarat in ‘75; you can see on the back of my hand here where the bullet clipped me. He tried again in ‘76, at Port Philip, but I got the drop on him and wounded him badly. He knifed me in ‘79 though, in a bar at Adelaide, and that made our account about level. He’s loafing round again now, and he’ll let daylight into me — unless — unless by some extraordinary chance some one does as much for him.” And Maloney gave a very ugly smile.

“I don’t complain of *him* so much,” he continued. “Looking at it in his way, no doubt it is a sort of family matter that can hardly be neglected. It’s the Government that fetches me. When I think of what I’ve done for this country, and then of what this country has done for me, it makes me fairly wild — clean drives me off my head. There’s no gratitude nor common decency left, Doctor!”

He brooded over his wrongs for a few minutes, and then proceeded to lay them before me in detail.

“Here’s nine men,” he said, “they’ve been murdering and killing for a matter of three years, and maybe a life a week wouldn’t more than average the work that they’ve done. The Government catches them and the Government tries them, but they can’t convict; and why? — because the witnesses have all had their throats cut, and the whole job’s been very neatly done. What happens then? Up comes a citizen called Wolf Tone Maloney; he says, ‘The country needs me, and here I am.’ And with that he gives his evidence, convicts the lot, and enables the beaks to hang them. That’s what I did. There’s nothing mean about me! And now what does the country do in return? Dogs me, sir, spies on me, watches me night and day, turns against the very man that worked so hard for it. There’s something mean about that, anyway. I didn’t expect them to knight me, nor to make me Colonial Secretary; but, damn it, I did expect that they would let me alone!”

“Well,” I remonstrated, “if you choose to break laws and assault people, you can’t expect it to be looked over on account of former services.”

“I don’t refer to my present imprisonment, sir,” said Maloney, with dignity. “It’s the life I’ve been leading since that cursed trial that takes the soul out of me. Just you sit there on that trestle, and I’ll tell you all about it; and then look me in the face and tell me that I’ve been treated fair by the police.”

I shall endeavour to transcribe the experiences of the convict in his own words, as far as I can remember them, preserving his curious perversions of right and wrong. I can answer for the truth of his facts, whatever may be said for his deductions from them. Months afterwards, Inspector H. W. Hann, formerly governor of the gaol at Dunedin, showed me entries in his ledger which corroborated every statement. Maloney reeled the story off in a dull, monotonous voice, with his head sunk upon his breast and his hands between his knees. The glitter of his serpent-like eyes was the only sign of the emotions which were stirred up by the recollection of the events which he narrated.

You’ve read of Bluemansdyke (he began, with some pride in his tone). We made it hot while it lasted; but they ran us to earth at last, and a trap called Braxton, with a damned Yankee, took the lot of us. That was in New Zealand, of course, and they took us down to Dunedin, and there they were convicted and hanged. One and all they put up their hands in the dock, and cursed me till your blood would have run cold to hear them, which was scurvy treatment, seeing that we had all been pals together; but they were a blackguard lot, and thought only of themselves. I think it is as well that they were hung.

They took me back to Dunedin gaol, and clapped me into the old cell. The only difference they made was, that I had no work to do, and was well fed. I stood this for a week or two, until one day the governor was making his round, and I put the matter to him.

“How’s this?” I said. “My conditions were a free pardon, and you’re keeping me here against the law.”

He gave a sort of a smile. “Should you like very much to go out?” he asked.

“So much,” said I, “that, unless you open that door, I’ll have an action against you for illegal detention.”

He seemed a bit astonished by my resolution. “You’re very anxious to meet your death,” he said.

“What d’ye mean?” I asked.

“Come here, and you’ll know what I mean,” he answered. And he led me down the passage to a window that overlooked the door of the prison. “Look at that!” said he.

I looked out, and there were a dozen or so rough-looking fellows standing outside in the street, some of them smoking, some playing cards on the pavement. When they saw me they gave a yell, and crowded round the door, shaking their fists and hooting.

“They wait for you, watch and watch about,” said the governor. “They’re the executive of the vigilance committee. However, since you are determined to go, I can’t stop you.”

“D’ye call this a civilised land,” I cried, “and let a man be murdered in cold blood in open daylight?”

When I said this the governor and the warder and every fool in the place grinned, as if a man’s life was a rare good joke.

“You’ve got the law on your side,” says the governor; “so we won’t detain you any longer. Show him out, warder.”

He’d have done it too, the black-hearted villain, if I hadn’t begged and prayed and offered to pay for my board and lodging, which is more than any prisoner ever did before me. He let me stay on those conditions; and for three months I was caged up there with every larrikin in the township clamouring at the other side of the wall. That was pretty treatment for a man that had served his country!

At last, one morning, up came the governor again.

“Well, Maloney,” he said, “how long are you going to honour us with your society?”

I could have put a knife into his cursed body, and would, too, if we had been alone in the bush; but I had to smile, and smooth him and flatter, for I feared that he might have me sent out.

“You’re an infernal rascal,” he said; those were his very words to a man that had helped him all he knew how. “I don’t want any rough justice here, though; and I think I see my way to getting you out of Dunedin.”

“I’ll never forget you, governor,” said I; and, by God, I never will.

“I don’t want your thanks nor your gratitude,” he answered; “it’s not for your sake that I do it, but simply to keep order in the town. There’s a steamer starts from the West Quay to Melbourne to-morrow, and we’ll get you aboard it. She is advertised at five in the morning, so have yourself in readiness.”

I packed up the few things I had, and was smuggled out by a back door just before daybreak. I hurried down, took my ticket, under the name of Isaac Smith, and got safely aboard the Melbourne boat. I remember hearing her screw grinding into the water as the warps were cast loose, and looking back at the lights of Dunedin, as I leaned upon the bulwarks, with the pleasant thought that I was leaving them behind me for ever. It seemed to me that a new world was before me, and that all my troubles had been cast off. I went down below and had some coffee, and came up again feeling better than I had done since the morning that I woke to find that cursed Irishman that took me standing over me with a six-shooter.

Day had dawned by that time, and we were steaming along by the coast, well out of sight of Dunedin. I loafed about for a couple of hours, and when the sun got well up some of the other passengers came on deck and joined me. One of them, a little perky sort of fellow, took a good long look at me, and then came over and began talking.

"Mining, I suppose?" says he.

"Yes," I says.

"Made your pile?" he asks.

"Pretty fair," says I.

"I was at it myself," he says; "I worked at the Nelson fields for three months, and spent all I made in buying a salted claim which busted up the second day. I went at it again, though, and struck it rich; but when the gold waggon was going down to the settlements, it was stuck up by those cursed rangers, and not a red cent left."

"That was a bad job," I says.

"Broke me — ruined me clean. Never mind, I've seen them all hanged for it; that makes it easier to bear. There's only one left — the villain that gave the evidence. I'd die happy if I could come across him. There are two things I have to do if I meet him."

"What's that?" says I carelessly.

"I've got to ask him where the money lies — they never had time to make away with it, and it's *cachéd* somewhere in the mountains — and then I've got to stretch his neck for him, and send his soul down to join the men that he betrayed."

It seemed to me that I knew something about that *caché*, and I felt like laughing; but he was watching me, and it struck me that he had a nasty, vindictive kind of mind.

"I'm going up on the bridge," I said, for he was not a man whose acquaintance I cared much about making.

He wouldn't hear of my leaving him, though. "We're both miners," he says, "and we're pals for the voyage. Come down to the bar. I'm not too poor to shout."

I couldn't refuse him well, and we went down together; and that was the beginning of the trouble. What harm was I doing any one on the ship? All I asked for was a quiet life, leaving others alone, and getting left alone myself. No man could ask fairer than that. And now just you listen to what came of it.

We were passing the front of the ladies' cabins, on our way to the saloon, when out comes a servant lass — a freckled currency she-devil — with a baby in her arms. We were brushing past her, when she gave a scream like a railway whistle, and nearly dropped the kid. My nerves gave a sort of a jump when I heard that scream, but I turned and begged her pardon, letting on that I thought I might have trod on her foot. I knew the game was up though, when I saw her white face, and her leaning against the door and pointing.

“It’s him!” she cried; “it’s him! I saw him in the court-house. Oh, don’t let him hurt the baby!”

“Who is it?” asks the steward and half-a-dozen others in a breath.

“It’s him — Maloney — Maloney, the murderer — oh, take him away — take him away!”

I don’t rightly remember what happened just at that moment. The furniture and me seemed to get kind of mixed, and there was cursing, and smashing, and some one shouting for his gold, and a general stamp round. When I got steadied a bit, I found somebody’s hand in my mouth. From what I gathered afterwards, I conclude that it belonged to that same little man with the vicious way of talking. He got some of it out again, but that was because the others were choking me. A poor chap can get no fair-play in this world when once he is down — still I think he will remember me till the day of his death — longer, I hope.

They dragged me out into the poop and held a damned court-martial — on *me*, mind you; *me*, that had thrown over my pals in order to serve them. What were they to do with me? Some said this, some said that; but it ended by the captain deciding to send me ashore. The ship stopped, they lowered a boat, and I was hoisted in, the whole gang of them hooting at me from over the bulwarks. I saw the man I spoke of tying up his hand though, and I felt that things might be worse.

I changed my opinion before we got to the land. I had reckoned on the shore being deserted, and that I might make my way inland; but the ship had stopped too near the Heads, and a dozen beach-combers and such like had come down to the water’s edge, and were staring at us, wondering what the boat was after. When we got to the edge of the surf the coxswain hailed them, and after singing out who I was, he and his men threw me into the water. You may well look surprised — neck and crop into ten feet of water, with shark as thick as green parrots in the bush, and I heard them laughing as I floundered to the shore.

I soon saw it was a worse job than ever. As I came scrambling out through the weeds, I was collared by a big chap with a velveteen coat, and half-a-dozen others got round me and held me fast. Most of them looked simple fellows enough, and I was not afraid of them; but there was one in a cabbage-tree hat that had a very nasty expression on his face, and the big man seemed to be chummy with him.

They dragged me up the beach, and then they let go their hold of me and stood round in a circle.

“Well, mate,” says the man with the hat, “we’ve been looking out for you some time in these parts.”

“And very good of you too,” I answers.

“None of your jaw,” says he. “Come, boys, what shall it be — hanging, drowning, or shooting? Look sharp!”

This looked a bit too like business. “No you don’t!” I said. “I’ve got Government protection, and it’ll be murder.”

“That’s what they call it,” answered the one in the velveteen coat as cheery as a piping crow.

“And you’re going to murder me for being a ranger?”

“Ranger be damned!” said the man. “We’re going to hang you for peaching against your pals; and that’s an end of the palaver.”

They slung a rope round my neck and dragged me up to the edge of the bush. There were some big she-oaks and blue-gums, and they pitched on one of these for the wicked deed. They ran the rope over a branch, tied my hands, and told me to say my prayers. It seemed as if it was all up; but Providence interfered to save me. It sounds nice enough sitting here and telling about it, sir; but it was sick work to stand with nothing but the beach in front of you, and the long white line of surf, with the steamer in the distance, and a set of bloody-minded villains round you thirsting for your life.

I never thought I’d owe anything good to the police; but they saved me that time. A troop of them were riding from Hawkes Point Station to Dunedin, and hearing that something was up, they came down through the bush, and interrupted the proceedings. I’ve heard some bands in my time, Doctor, but I never heard music like the jingle of those traps’ spurs and harness as they galloped out on to the open. They tried to hang me even then, but the police were too quick for them; and the man with the hat got one over the head with the flat of a sword. I was clapped on to a horse, and before evening I found myself in my old quarters in the city gaol.

The governor wasn’t to be done, though. He was determined to get rid of me, and I was equally anxious to see the last of him. He waited a week or so until the excitement had begun to die away, and then he smuggled me aboard a three-masted schooner bound to Sydney with tallow and hides.

We got fair away to sea without a hitch, and things began to look a bit more rosy. I made sure that I had seen the last of the prison, anyway. The crew had a sort of an idea who I was, and if there’d been any rough weather, they’d have hove me overboard like enough; for they were a rough, ignorant lot, and had a notion that I brought bad luck to the ship. We had a good passage, however, and I was landed safe and sound upon Sydney Quay.

Now just you listen to what happened next. You’d have thought they would have been sick of ill-using me and following me by this time — wouldn’t you, now? Well, just you listen. It seems that a cursed steamer started from Dunedin to Sydney on the very day we left, and got in before us, bringing news that I was coming. Blessed if they hadn’t called a meeting — a regular mass meeting — at the docks to discuss about it, and I marched right into it when I landed. They didn’t take long about arresting me, and I listened to all the speeches and resolutions. If I’d been a prince there couldn’t have been more excitement. The end of it all was that they agreed that it wasn’t right that New Zealand should be allowed to foist her criminals upon her neighbours, and that I was to be sent back again by the next boat. So they posted me off again as if I was a damned parcel; and after another eight hundred mile journey I found myself back for the third time moving in the place that I started from.

By this time I had begun to think that I was going to spend the rest of my existence travelling about from one port to another. Every man’s hand seemed turned against me, and there was no peace or quiet in any direction. I was about sick of it by the time I had come back; and if I could have taken to the bush I’d have done it, and chanced it with my old pals. They were too quick for me, though, and kept me under lock and key; but I managed, in spite of them, to negotiate that *caché* I told you of, and sewed the gold up in my belt. I spent another month in gaol, and then they slipped me aboard a barque that was bound for England.

This time the crew never knew who I was, but the captain had a pretty good idea, though he didn’t let on to me that he had any suspicions. I guessed from the first that the man was a villain. We had a fair passage, except a gale or two off the Cape; and I began to feel like a free man when I saw the blue loom of the old country, and the saucy little pilot-boat from Falmouth dancing towards us over the waves. We ran down the Channel, and before we reached Gravesend I had agreed with the pilot that he should take me ashore with him when he left. It was at this time that the captain showed me that I was right in thinking him a meddling, disagreeable man. I got my things packed, such as they were, and left him talking earnestly to the pilot, while I went below for my breakfast. When I came up again we were fairly into the mouth of the river, and the boat in which I was to have gone ashore had left us. The skipper said the pilot had forgotten me; but that was too thin, and I began to fear that all my old troubles were going to commence once more.

It was not long before my suspicions were confirmed. A boat darted out from the side of the river, and a tall cove with a long black beard came aboard. I heard him ask the mate whether they didn’t need a mud-pilot to take them up the reaches, but it seemed to me that he was a man who would know a deal more about handcuffs than he did about steering, so I kept away from him. He came across the deck, however, and made some remark to me, taking a good look at me the while. I don’t like inquisitive people at any time, but an inquisitive stranger with glue about the roots of his beard is the worst of all to stand, especially under the circumstances. I began to feel that it was time for me to go.

I soon got a chance, and made good use of it. A big collier came athwart the bows of our steamer, and we had to slacken down to dead slow. There was a barge astern, and I slipped down by a rope and was into the barge before any one had missed me. Of course I had to leave my luggage behind me, but I had the belt with the nuggets round my waist, and the chance of shaking the police off my track was worth more than a couple of boxes. It was clear to me now that the pilot had been a traitor, as well as the captain, and had set the detectives after me. I often wish I could drop across those two men again.

I hung about the barge all day as she drifted down the stream. There was one man in her, but she was a big, ugly craft, and his hands were too full for much looking about. Towards evening, when it got a bit dusky, I struck out for the shore, and found myself in a sort of marsh place, a good many miles to the east of London. I was soaking wet and half dead with hunger, but I trudged into the town, got a new rig-out at a slop-shop, and after having some supper, engaged a bed at the quietest lodgings I could find.

I woke pretty early — a habit you pick up in the bush — and lucky for me that I did so. The very first thing I saw when I took a look through a chink in the shutter was one of these infernal policemen standing right opposite, and staring up at the windows. He hadn't epaulettes nor a sword, like our traps, but for all that there was a sort of family likeness, and the same busybody expression. Whether they'd followed me all the time, or whether the woman that let me the bed didn't like the looks of me, is more than I have ever been able to find out. He came across as I was watching him, and noted down the address of the house in a book. I was afraid that he was going to ring at the bell, but I suppose his orders were simply to keep an eye on me, for after another good look at the windows he moved on down the street.

I saw that my only chance was to act at once. I threw on my clothes, opened the window softly, and, after making sure that there was nobody about, dropped out on to the ground and made off as hard as I could run. I travelled a matter of two or three miles, when my wind gave out; and as I saw a big building with people going in and out, I went in too, and found that it was a railway station. A train was just going off for Dover to meet the French boat, so I took a ticket and jumped into a third-class carriage.

There were a couple of other chaps in the carriage, innocent-looking young beggars, both of them. They began speaking about this and that, while I sat quiet in the corner and listened. Then they started on England and foreign countries, and such like. Look ye now, Doctor, this is a fact. One of them begins jawing about the justice of England's laws. “It's all fair and above-board,” says he; “there ain't any secret police, nor spying, like they have abroad,” and a lot more of the same sort of wash. Rather rough on me, wasn't it, listening to the damned young fool, with the police following me about like my shadow?

I got to Paris right enough, and there I changed some of my gold, and for a few days I imagined I'd shaken them off, and began to think of settling down for a bit of a rest. I needed it by that time, for I was looking more like a ghost than a man. You've never had the police after you, I suppose? Well, you needn't look offended, I didn't mean any harm. If ever you had you'd know that it wastes a man away like a sheep with the rot.

I went to the opera one night and took a box, for I was very flush. I was coming out between the acts when I met a fellow lounging along in the passage. The light fell on his face, and I saw that it was the mud-pilot that had boarded us in the Thames. His beard was gone, but I recognised the man at a glance, for I've a good memory for faces.

I tell you, Doctor, I felt desperate for a moment. I could have knifed him if we had been alone, but he knew me well enough never to give me the chance. It was more than I could stand any longer, so I went right up to him and drew him aside, where we'd be free from all the loungers and theatre-goers.

"How long are you going to keep it up?" I asked him.

He seemed a bit flustered for a moment, but then he saw there was no use beating about the bush, so he answered straight —

"Until you go back to Australia," he said.

"Don't you know," I said, "that I have served the Government and got a free pardon?"

He grinned all over his ugly face when I said this.

"We know all about you, Maloney," he answered. "If you want a quiet life, just you go back where you came from. If you stay here, you're a marked man; and when you are found tripping it'll be a lifer for you, at the least. Free trade's a fine thing, but the market's too full of men like you for us to need to import any!"

It seemed to me that there was something in what he said, though he had a nasty way of putting it. For some days back I'd been feeling a sort of home-sick. The ways of the people weren't my ways. They stared at me in the street; and if I dropped into a bar, they'd stop talking and edge away a bit, as if I was a wild beast. I'd sooner have had a pint of old Stringybark, too, than a bucketful of their rotgut liquors. There was too much damned propriety. What was the use of having money if you couldn't dress as you liked, nor bust it properly? There was no sympathy for a man if he shot about a little when he was half-over. I've seen a man dropped at Nelson many a time with less row than they'd make over a broken window-pane. The thing was slow, and I was sick of it.

"You want me to go back?" I said.

"I've my orders to stick fast to you until you do," he answered.

“Well,” I said, “I don’t care if I do. All I bargain is that you keep your mouth shut, and don’t let on who I am, so that I may have a fair start when I get there.”

He agreed to this, and we went over to Southampton the very next day, where he saw me safely off once more. I took a passage round to Adelaide, where no one was likely to know me; and there I settled, right under the nose of the police. I’ve been there ever since, leading a quiet life, but for little difficulties like the one I’m in for now, and for that devil, Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. I don’t know what made me tell you all this, Doctor, unless it is that being kind of lonely makes a man inclined to jaw when he gets a chance. Just you take warning from me, though. Never put yourself out to serve your country; for your country will do precious little for you. Just you let them look after their own affairs; and if they find a difficulty in hanging a set of scoundrels, never mind chipping in, but let them alone to do as best they can. Maybe they’ll remember how they treated me after I’m dead, and be sorry for neglecting me. I was rude to you when you came in, and swore a trifle promiscuous; but don’t you mind me, it’s only my way. You’ll allow, though, that I have cause to be a bit touchy now and again when I think of all that’s passed. You’re not going, are you? Well, if you must, you must; but I hope you will look me up at odd times when you are going your round. Oh, I say, you’ve left the balance of that cake of tobacco behind you, haven’t you? No; it’s in your pocket — that’s all right. Thank ye, Doctor, you’re a good sort, and as quick at a hint as any man I’ve met.

A couple of months after narrating his experiences, Wolf Tone Maloney finished his term, and was released. For a long time I neither saw him nor heard of him; and he had almost slipped from my memory, until I was reminded, in a somewhat tragic manner, of his existence. I had been attending a patient some distance off in the country, and was riding back, guiding my tired horse among the boulders which strewed the pathway, and endeavouring to see my way through the gathering darkness, when I came suddenly upon a little wayside inn. As I walked my horse up towards the door, intending to make sure of my bearings before proceeding further, I heard the sound of a violent altercation within the little bar. There seemed to be a chorus of expostulation or remonstrance, above which two powerful voices rang out loud and angry. As I listened, there was a momentary hush, two pistol shots sounded almost simultaneously, and, with a crash, the door burst open, and a pair of dark figures staggered out into the moonlight. They struggled for a moment in a deadly wrestle, and then went down together among the loose stones. I had sprung off my horse, and, with the help of half-a-dozen rough fellows from the bar, dragged them away from one another.

A glance was sufficient to convince me that one of them was dying fast. He was a thick-set, burly fellow, with a determined cast of countenance. The blood was welling from a deep stab in his throat, and it was evident that an important artery had been divided. I turned away from him in despair, and walked over to where his antagonist was lying. He was shot through the lungs, but managed to raise himself upon his hand as I approached, and peered anxiously up into my face. To my surprise I saw before me the haggard features and flaxen hair of my prison acquaintance, Maloney.

“Ah, Doctor!” he said, recognising me. “How is he? Will he die?”

He asked the question so earnestly that I imagined he had softened at the last moment, and feared to leave the world with another homicide upon his conscience. Truth, however, compelled me to shake my head mournfully, and to intimate that the wound would prove a mortal one.

Maloney gave a wild cry of triumph, which brought the blood welling out from between his lips. “Here, boys,” he gasped to the little group around him. “There’s money in my inside pocket. Damn the expense! Drinks round. There’s nothing mean about me. I’d drink with you, but I’m going. Give the Doc. my share, for he’s as good — —” Here his head fell back with a thud, his eye glazed, and the soul of Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, convict, ranger, murderer, and Government peach, drifted away into the Great Unknown.

I cannot conclude without borrowing the account of the fatal quarrel which appeared in the columns of the *West Australian Sentinel*. The curious will find it in the issue of the 4th of October 1881: —

“Fatal Affray. — W. T. Maloney, a well-known citizen of New Montrose, and proprietor of the Yellow Boy gambling saloon, has met with his death under rather painful circumstances. Mr. Maloney was a man who had led a chequered existence, and whose past history is replete with interest. Some of our readers may recall the Lena Valley murders, in which he figured as the principal criminal. It is conjectured that, during the seven months that he owned a bar in that region, from twenty to thirty travellers were hocussed and made away with. He succeeded, however, in evading the vigilance of the officers of the law, and allied himself with the bushrangers of Bluemansdyke, whose heroic capture and subsequent execution are matters of history. Maloney extricated himself from the fate which awaited him by turning Queen’s evidence. He afterwards visited Europe, but returned to West Australia, where he has long played a prominent part in local matters. On Friday evening he encountered an old enemy, Thomas Grimthorpe, commonly known as Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. Shots were exchanged, and both men were badly wounded, only surviving a few minutes. Mr. Maloney had the reputation of being, not only the most wholesale murderer that ever lived, but also of having a finish and attention to detail in matters of evidence which has been unapproached by any European criminal. *Sic transit gloriâ mundi!*”

THE SILVER HATCHET.

On the 3rd of December 1861, Dr. Otto von Hopstein, Regius Professor of Comparative Anatomy of the University of Buda-Pesth, and Curator of the Academical Museum, was foully and brutally murdered within a stone-throw of the entrance to the college quadrangle.

Besides the eminent position of the victim and his popularity amongst both students and townsfolk, there were other circumstances which excited public interest very strongly, and drew general attention throughout Austria and Hungary to this murder. The *Pesther Abendblatt* of the following day had an article upon it, which may still be consulted by the curious, and from which I translate a few passages giving a succinct account of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the peculiar features in the case which puzzled the Hungarian police.

“It appears,” said that very excellent paper, “that Professor von Hopstein left the University about half-past four in the afternoon, in order to meet the train which is due from Vienna at three minutes after five. He was accompanied by his old and dear friend, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger, sub-Curator of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry. The object of these two gentlemen in meeting this particular train was to receive the legacy bequeathed by Graf von Schulling to the University of Buda-Pesth. It is well known that this unfortunate nobleman, whose tragic fate is still fresh in the recollection of the public, left his unique collection of mediæval weapons, as well as several priceless black-letter editions, to enrich the already celebrated museum of his Alma Mater. The worthy Professor was too much of an enthusiast in such matters to intrust the reception or care of this valuable legacy to any subordinate; and, with the assistance of Herr Schlessinger, he succeeded in removing the whole collection from the train, and stowing it away in a light cart which had been sent by the University authorities. Most of the books and more fragile articles were packed in cases of pine-wood, but many of the weapons were simply done round with straw, so that considerable labour was involved in moving them all. The Professor was so nervous, however, lest any of them should be injured, that he refused to allow any of the railway employés (*Eisenbahn-diener*) to assist. Every article was carried across the platform by Herr Schlessinger, and handed to Professor von Hopstein in the cart, who packed it away. When everything was in, the two gentlemen, still faithful to their charge, drove back to the University, the Professor being in excellent spirits, and not a little proud of the physical exertion which he had shown himself capable of. He made some joking allusion to it to Reinmaul, the janitor, who, with his friend Schiffer, a Bohemian Jew, met the cart on its return and unloaded the contents. Leaving his curiosities safe in the store-room, and locking the door, the Professor handed the key to his sub-curator, and, bidding every one good evening, departed in the direction of his lodgings. Schlessinger took a last look to reassure himself that all was right, and also went off, leaving Reinmaul and his friend Schiffer smoking in the janitor's lodge.

"At eleven o'clock, about an hour and a half after Von Hopstein's departure, a soldier of the 14th regiment of Jäger, passing the front of the University on his way to barracks, came upon the lifeless body of the Professor lying a little way from the side of the road. He had fallen upon his face, with both hands stretched out. His head was literally split in two halves by a tremendous blow, which, it is conjectured, must have been struck from behind, there remaining a peaceful smile upon the old man's face, as if he had been still dwelling upon his new archæological acquisition when death had overtaken him. There is no other mark of violence upon the body, except a bruise over the left patella, caused probably by the fall. The most mysterious part of the affair is that the Professor's purse, containing forty-three gulden, and his valuable watch have been untouched. Robbery cannot, therefore, have been the incentive to the deed, unless the assassins were disturbed before they could complete their work.

"This idea is negatived by the fact that the body must have lain at least an hour before any one discovered it. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. Dr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, has pronounced that the wound is such as might have been inflicted by a heavy sword-bayonet wielded by a powerful arm. The police are extremely reticent upon the subject, and it is suspected that they are in possession of a clue which may lead to important results."

Thus far the *Pesther Abendblatt*. The researches of the police failed, however, to throw the least glimmer of light upon the matter. There was absolutely no trace of the murderer, nor could any amount of ingenuity invent any reason which could have induced any one to commit the dreadful deed. The deceased Professor was a man so wrapped in his own studies and pursuits that he lived apart from the world, and had certainly never raised the slightest animosity in any human breast. It must have been some fiend, some savage, who loved blood for its own sake, who struck that merciless blow.

Though the officials were unable to come to any conclusions upon the matter, popular suspicion was not long in pitching upon a scapegoat. In the first published accounts of the murder the name of one Schiffer had been mentioned as having remained with the janitor after the Professor’s departure. This man was a Jew, and Jews have never been popular in Hungary. A cry was at once raised for Schiffer’s arrest; but as there was not the slightest grain of evidence against him, the authorities very properly refused to consent to so arbitrary a proceeding. Reinmaul, who was an old and most respected citizen, declared solemnly that Schiffer was with him until the startled cry of the soldier had caused them both to run out to the scene of the tragedy. No one ever dreamed of implicating Reinmaul in such a matter; but still, it was rumoured that his ancient and well-known friendship for Schiffer might have induced him to tell a falsehood in order to screen him. Popular feeling ran very high upon the subject, and there seemed a danger of Schiffer’s being mobbed in the street, when an incident occurred which threw a very different light upon the matter.

On the morning of the 12th of December, just nine days after the mysterious murder of the Professor, Schiffer the Bohemian Jew was found lying in the north-western corner of the Grand Platz stone dead, and so mutilated that he was hardly recognisable. His head was cloven open in very much the same way as that of Von Hopstein, and his body exhibited numerous deep gashes, as if the murderer had been so carried away and transported with fury that he had continued to hack the lifeless body. Snow had fallen heavily the day before, and was lying at least a foot deep all over the square; some had fallen during the night, too, as was evidenced by a thin layer lying like a winding-sheet over the murdered man. It was hoped at first that this circumstance might assist in giving a clue by enabling the footsteps of the assassin to be traced; but the crime had been committed, unfortunately, in a place much frequented during the day, and there were innumerable tracks in every direction. Besides, the newly-fallen snow had blurred the footsteps to such an extent that it would have been impossible to draw trustworthy evidence from them.

In this case there was exactly the same impenetrable mystery and absence of motive which had characterised the murder of Professor von Hopstein. In the dead man's pocket there was found a note-book containing a considerable sum in gold and several very valuable bills, but no attempt had been made to rifle him. Supposing that any one to whom he had lent money (and this was the first idea which occurred to the police) had taken this means of evading his debt, it was hardly conceivable that he would have left such a valuable spoil untouched. Schiffer lodged with a widow named Gruga, at 49 Marie Theresa Strasse, and the evidence of his landlady and her children showed that he had remained shut up in his room the whole of the preceding day in a state of deep dejection, caused by the suspicion which the populace had fastened upon him. She had heard him go out about eleven o'clock at night for his last and fatal walk, and as he had a latch-key she had gone to bed without waiting for him. His object in choosing such a late hour for a ramble obviously was that he did not consider himself safe if recognised in the streets.

The occurrence of this second murder so shortly after the first threw not only the town of Buda-Pesth, but the whole of Hungary, into a terrible state of excitement, and even of terror. Vague dangers seemed to hang over the head of every man. The only parallel to this intense feeling was to be found in our own country at the time of the Williams murders described by De Quincey. There were so many resemblances between the cases of Von Hopstein and of Schiffer that no one could doubt that there existed a connection between the two. The absence of object and of robbery, the utter want of any clue to the assassin, and, lastly, the ghastly nature of the wounds, evidently inflicted by the same or a similar weapon, all pointed in one direction. Things were in this state when the incidents which I am now about to relate occurred, and in order to make them intelligible I must lead up to them from a fresh point of departure.

Otto von Schlegel was a younger son of the old Silesian family of that name. His father had originally destined him for the army, but at the advice of his teachers, who saw the surprising talent of the youth, had sent him to the University of Buda-Pesth to be educated in medicine. Here young Schlegel carried everything before him, and promised to be one of the most brilliant graduates turned out for many a year. Though a hard reader, he was no bookworm, but an active, powerful young fellow, full of animal spirits and vivacity, and extremely popular among his fellow-students.

The New Year examinations were at hand, and Schlegel was working hard — so hard that even the strange murders in the town, and the general excitement in men’s minds, failed to turn his thoughts from his studies. Upon Christmas Eve, when every house was illuminated, and the roar of drinking songs came from the Bierkeller in the Student-quartier, he refused the many invitations to roystering suppers which were showered upon him, and went off with his books under his arm to the rooms of Leopold Strauss, to work with him into the small hours of the morning.

Strauss and Schlegel were bosom friends. They were both Silesians, and had known each other from boyhood. Their affection had become proverbial in the University. Strauss was almost as distinguished a student as Schlegel, and there had been many a tough struggle for academic honours between the two fellow-countrymen, which had only served to strengthen their friendship by a bond of mutual respect. Schlegel admired the dogged pluck and never-failing good temper of his old playmate; while the latter considered Schlegel, with his many talents and brilliant versatility, the most accomplished of mortals.

The friends were still working together, the one reading from a volume on anatomy, the other holding a skull and marking off the various parts mentioned in the text, when the deep-toned bell of St. Gregory’s church struck the hour of midnight.

“Hark to that!” said Schlegel, snapping up the book and stretching out his long legs towards the cheery fire. “Why, it’s Christmas morning, old friend! May it not be the last that we spend together!”

“May we have passed all these confounded examinations before another one comes!” answered Strauss. “But see here, Otto, one bottle of wine will not be amiss. I have laid one up on purpose;” and with a smile on his honest South German face, he pulled out a long-necked bottle of Rhenish from amongst a pile of books and bones in the corner.

“It is a night to be comfortable indoors,” said Otto von Schlegel, looking out at the snowy landscape, “for ‘tis bleak and bitter enough outside. Good health, Leopold!”

“*Lebe hoch!*” replied his companion. “It is a comfort indeed to forget sphenoid bones and ethmoid bones, if it be but for a moment. And what is the news of the corps, Otto? Has Graube fought the Swabian?”

“They fight to-morrow,” said Von Schlegel. “I fear that our man will lose his beauty, for he is short in the arm. Yet activity and skill may do much for him. They say his hanging guard is perfection.”

“And what else is the news amongst the students?” asked Strauss.

“They talk, I believe, of nothing but the murders. But I have worked hard of late, as you know, and hear little of the gossip.”

“Have you had time,” inquired Strauss, “to look over the books and the weapons which our dear old Professor was so concerned about the very day he met his death? They say they are well worth a visit.”

“I saw them to-day,” said Schlegel, lighting his pipe. “Reinmaul, the janitor, showed me over the store-room, and I helped to label many of them from the original catalogue of Graf Schulling’s museum. As far as we can see, there is but one article missing of all the collection.”

“One missing!” exclaimed Strauss. “That would grieve old Von Hopstein’s ghost. Is it anything of value?”

“It is described as an antique hatchet, with a head of steel and a handle of chased silver. We have applied to the railway company, and no doubt it will be found.”

“I trust so,” echoed Strauss; and the conversation drifted off into other channels. The fire was burning low and the bottle of Rhenish was empty before the two friends rose from their chairs, and Von Schlegel prepared to depart.

“Ugh! It’s a bitter night!” he said, standing on the doorstep and folding his cloak round him. “Why, Leopold, you have your cap on. You are not going out, are you?”

“Yes, I am coming with you,” said Strauss, shutting the door behind him. “I feel heavy,” he continued, taking his friend’s arm, and walking down the street with him. “I think a walk as far as your lodgings, in the crisp frosty air, is just the thing to set me right.”

The two students went down Stephen Strasse together and across Julien Platz, talking on a variety of topics. As they passed the corner of the Grand Platz, however, where Schiffer had been found dead, the conversation turned naturally upon the murder.

“That’s where they found him,” remarked Von Schlegel, pointing to the fatal spot.

“Perhaps the murderer is near us now,” said Strauss. “Let us hasten on.”

They both turned to go, when Von Schlegel gave a sudden cry of pain and stooped down.

“Something has cut through my boot!” he cried; and feeling about with his hand in the snow, he pulled out a small glistening battle-axe, made apparently entirely of metal. It had been lying with the blade turned slightly upwards, so as to cut the foot of the student when he trod upon it.

“The weapon of the murderer!” he ejaculated.

“The silver hatchet from the museum!” cried Strauss in the same breath.

There could be no doubt that it was both the one and the other. There could not be two such curious weapons, and the character of the wounds was just such as would be inflicted by a similar instrument. The murderer had evidently thrown it aside after committing the dreadful deed, and it had lain concealed in the snow some twenty mètres from the spot ever since. It was extraordinary that of all the people who had passed and repassed none had discovered it; but the snow was deep, and it was a little off the beaten track.

“What are we to do with it?” said Von Schlegel, holding it in his hand. He shuddered as he noticed by the light of the moon that the head of it was all dabbled with dark-brown stains.

“Take it to the Commissary of Police,” suggested Strauss.

“He’ll be in bed now. Still, I think you are right. But it is nearly four o’clock. I will wait until morning, and take it round before breakfast. Meanwhile, I must carry it with me to my lodgings.”

“That is the best plan,” said his friend; and the two walked on together talking of the remarkable find which they had made. When they came to Schlegel’s door, Strauss said good-bye, refusing an invitation to go in, and walked briskly down the street in the direction of his own lodgings.

Schlegel was stooping down putting the key into the lock, when a strange change came over him. He trembled violently, and dropped the key from his quivering fingers. His right hand closed convulsively round the handle of the silver hatchet, and his eye followed the retreating figure of his friend with a vindictive glare. In spite of the coldness of the night the perspiration streamed down his face. For a moment he seemed to struggle with himself, holding his hand up to his throat as if he were suffocating. Then, with crouching body and rapid, noiseless steps, he crept after his late companion.

Strauss was plodding sturdily along through the snow, humming snatches of a student song, and little dreaming of the dark figure which pursued him. At the Grand Platz it was forty yards behind him; at the Julien Platz it was but twenty; in Stephen Strasse it was ten, and gaining on him with panther-like rapidity. Already it was almost within arm's length of the unsuspecting man, and the hatchet glittered coldly in the moonlight, when some slight noise must have reached Strauss's ears, for he faced suddenly round upon his pursuer. He started and uttered an exclamation as his eye met the white set face, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, which seemed to be suspended in the air behind him.

"What, Otto!" he exclaimed, recognising his friend. "Art thou ill? You look pale. Come with me to my —— Ah! hold, you madman, hold! Drop that axe! Drop it, I say, or by heaven I'll choke you!"

Von Schlegel had thrown himself upon him with a wild cry and uplifted weapon; but the student was stout-hearted and resolute. He rushed inside the sweep of the hatchet and caught his assailant round the waist, narrowly escaping a blow which would have cloven his head. The two staggered for a moment in a deadly wrestle, Schlegel endeavouring to shorten his weapon; but Strauss with a desperate wrench managed to bring him to the ground, and they rolled together in the snow, Strauss clinging to the other's right arm and shouting frantically for assistance. It was as well that he did so, for Schlegel would certainly have succeeded in freeing his arm had it not been for the arrival of two stalwart gendarmes, attracted by the uproar. Even then the three of them found it difficult to overcome the maniacal strength of Schlegel, and they were utterly unable to wrench the silver hatchet from his grasp. One of the gendarmes, however, had a coil of rope round his waist, with which he rapidly secured the student's arms to his sides. In this way, half pushed, half dragged, he was conveyed, in spite of furious cries and frenzied struggles, to the central police station.

Strauss assisted in coercing his former friend, and accompanied the police to the station; protesting loudly at the same time against any unnecessary violence, and giving it as his opinion that a lunatic asylum would be a more fitting place for the prisoner. The events of the last half-hour had been so sudden and inexplicable that he felt quite dazed himself. What did it all mean? It was certain that his old friend from boyhood had attempted to murder him, and had nearly succeeded. Was Von Schlegel then the murderer of Professor von Hopstein and of the Bohemian Jew? Strauss felt that it was impossible, for the Jew was not even known to him, and the Professor had been his especial favourite. He followed mechanically to the police station, lost in grief and amazement.

Inspector Baumgarten, one of the most energetic and best known of the police officials, was on duty in the absence of the Commissary. He was a wiry little active man, quiet and retiring in his habits, but possessed of great sagacity and a vigilance which never relaxed. Now, though he had had a six hours' vigil, he sat as erect as ever, with his pen behind his ear, at his official desk, while his friend, Sub-inspector Winkel, snored in a chair at the side of the stove. Even the inspector's usually immovable features betrayed surprise, however, when the door was flung open and Von Schlegel was dragged in with pale face and disordered clothes, the silver hatchet still grasped firmly in his hand. Still more surprised was he when Strauss and the gendarmes gave their account, which was duly entered in the official register.

"Young man, young man," said Inspector Baumgarten, laying down his pen and fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner, "this is pretty work for Christmas morning; why have you done this thing?"

"God knows!" cried Von Schlegel, covering his face with his hands and dropping the hatchet. A change had come over him, his fury and excitement were gone, and he seemed utterly prostrated with grief.

"You have rendered yourself liable to a strong suspicion of having committed the other murders which have disgraced our city."

"No, no, indeed!" said Von Schlegel earnestly. "God forbid!"

"At least you are guilty of attempting the life of Herr Leopold Strauss."

"The dearest friend I have in the world," groaned the student. "Oh, how could I! How could I!"

"His being your friend makes your crime ten times more heinous," said the inspector severely. "Remove him for the remainder of the night to the —— But steady! Who comes here?"

The door was pushed open, and a man came into the room, so haggard and careworn that he looked more like a ghost than a human being. He tottered as he walked, and had to clutch at the backs of the chairs as he approached the inspector's desk. It was hard to recognise in this miserable-looking object the once cheerful and rubicund sub-curator of the museum and privat-docent of chemistry, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. The practised eye of Baumgarten, however, was not to be baffled by any change.

"Good morning, mein herr," he said; "you are up early. No doubt the reason is that you have heard that one of your students, Von Schlegel, is arrested for attempting the life of Leopold Strauss?"

"No; I have come for myself," said Schlessinger, speaking huskily, and putting his hand up to his throat. "I have come to ease my soul of the weight of a great sin, though, God knows, an unmeditated one. It was I who —— But, merciful heavens! there it is — the horrid thing! Oh, that I had never seen it!"

He shrank back in a paroxysm of terror, glaring at the silver hatchet where it lay upon the floor, and pointing at it with his emaciated hand.

"There it lies!" he yelled. "Look at it! It has come to condemn me. See that brown rust on it! Do you know what that is? That is the blood of my dearest, best friend, Professor von Hopstein. I saw it gush over the very handle as I drove the blade through his brain. Mein Gott, I see it now!"

"Sub-inspector Winkel," said Baumgarten, endeavouring to preserve his official austerity, "you will arrest this man, charged on his own confession with the murder of the late Professor. I also deliver into your hands Von Schlegel here, charged with a murderous assault upon Herr Strauss. You will also keep this hatchet" — here he picked it from the floor—"which has apparently been used for both crimes."

Wilhelm Schlessinger had been leaning against the table, with a face of ashy paleness. As the inspector ceased speaking, he looked up excitedly.

"What did you say?" he cried. "Von Schlegel attack Strauss! The two dearest friends in the college! I slay my old master! It is magic, I say; it is a charm! There is a spell upon us! It is — Ah, I have it! It is that hatchet — that thrice accursed hatchet!" and he pointed convulsively at the weapon which Inspector Baumgarten still held in his hand.

The inspector smiled contemptuously.

"Restrain yourself, mein herr," he said. "You do but make your case worse by such wild excuses for the wicked deed you confess to. Magic and charms are not known in the legal vocabulary, as my friend Winkel will assure you."

"I know not," remarked his sub-inspector, shrugging his broad shoulders. "There are many strange things in the world. Who knows but that — —"

“What!” roared Inspector Baumgarten furiously. “You would undertake to contradict me! You would set up your opinion! You would be the champion of these accursed murderers! Fool, miserable fool, your hour has come!” and rushing at the astounded Winkel, he dealt a blow at him with the silver hatchet which would certainly have justified his last assertion had it not been that, in his fury, he overlooked the lowness of the rafters above his head. The blade of the hatchet struck one of these, and remained there quivering, while the handle was splintered into a thousand pieces.

“What have I done?” gasped Baumgarten, falling back into his chair. “What have I done?”

“You have proved Herr Schlessinger’s words to be correct,” said Von Schlegel, stepping forward, for the astonished policemen had let go their grasp of him. “That is what you have done. Against reason, science, and everything else though it be, there is a charm at work. There must be! Strauss, old boy, you know I would not, in my right senses, hurt one hair of your head. And you, Schlessinger, we both know you loved the old man who is dead. And you, Inspector Baumgarten, you would not willingly have struck your friend the sub-inspector?”

“Not for the whole world,” groaned the inspector, covering his face with his hands.

“Then is it not clear? But now, thank Heaven, the accursed thing is broken, and can never do harm again. But see, what is that?”

Right in the centre of the room was lying a thin brown cylinder of parchment. One glance at the fragments of the handle of the weapon showed that it had been hollow. This roll of paper had apparently been hidden away inside the metal case thus formed, having been introduced through a small hole, which had been afterwards soldered up. Von Schlegel opened the document. The writing upon it was almost illegible from age; but as far as they could make out it stood thus, in mediæval German —

“Diese Waffe benutzte Max von Erlichingen um Joanna Bodeck zu ermorden, deshalb beschuldige Ich, Johann Bodeck, mittelst der macht welche mir als mitglied des Concils des rothen Kreuzes verliehan wurde, dieselbe mit dieser unthat. Mag sie anderen denselben schmerz verursachen den sie mir verursacht hat. Mag Jede hand die sie ergreift mit dem blut eines freundes geröthet sein.

“ ‘Immer übel — niemals gut,
Geröthet mit des freundes blut.’ “

Which may be roughly translated —

“This weapon was used by Max von Erlichingen for the murder of Joanna Bodeck. Therefore do I, Johann Bodeck, accurse it by the power which has been bequeathed to me as one of the Council of the Rosy Cross. May it deal to others the grief which it has dealt to me! May every hand that grasps it be reddened in the blood of a friend!

“ ‘Ever evil, never good,
Reddened with a loved one’s blood.’ “

There was a dead silence in the room when Von Schlegel had finished spelling out this strange document. As he put it down Strauss laid his hand affectionately upon his arm.

“No such proof is needed by me, old friend,” he said. “At the very moment that you struck at me I forgave you in my heart. I well know that if the poor Professor were in the room he would say as much to Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger.”

“Gentlemen,” remarked the inspector, standing up and resuming his official tones, “this affair, strange as it is, must be treated according to rule and precedent. Sub-inspector Winkel, as your superior officer, I command you to arrest me upon a charge of murderously assaulting you. You will commit me to prison for the night, together with Herr von Schlegel and Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. We shall take our trial at the coming sitting of the judges. In the meantime take care of that piece of evidence” — pointing to the piece of parchment—”and, while I am away, devote your time and energy to utilising the clue you have obtained in discovering who it was who slew Herr Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew.”

The one missing link in the chain of evidence was soon supplied. On the 28th of December the wife of Reinmaul the janitor, coming into the bedroom after a short absence, found her husband hanging lifeless from a hook in the wall. He had tied a long bolster-case round his neck and stood upon a chair in order to commit the fatal deed. On the table was a note in which he confessed to the murder of Schiffer the Jew, adding that the deceased had been his oldest friend, and that he had slain him without premeditation, in obedience to some incontrollable impulse. Remorse and grief, he said, had driven him to self-destruction; and he wound up his confession by commending his soul to the mercy of Heaven.

The trial which ensued was one of the strangest which ever occurred in the whole history of jurisprudence. It was in vain that the prosecuting council urged the improbability of the explanation offered by the prisoners, and deprecated the introduction of such an element as magic into a nineteenth-century law-court. The chain of facts was too strong, and the prisoners were unanimously acquitted. “This silver hatchet,” remarked the judge in his summing up, “has hung untouched upon the wall in the mansion of the Graf von Schulling for nearly two hundred years. The shocking manner in which he met his death at the hands of his favourite house steward is still fresh in your recollection. It has come out in evidence that, a few days before the murder, the steward had overhauled the old weapons and cleaned them. In doing this he must have touched the handle of this hatchet. Immediately afterwards he slew his master, whom he had served faithfully for twenty years. The weapon then came, in conformity with the Count’s will, to Buda-Pesth, where, at the station, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger grasped it, and, within two hours, used it against the person of the deceased Professor. The next man whom we find touching it is the janitor Reinmaul, who helped to remove the weapons from the cart to the store-room. At the first opportunity he buried it in the body of his friend Schiffer. We then have the attempted murder of Strauss by Schlegel, and of Winkel by Inspector Baumgarten, all immediately following the taking of the hatchet into the hand. Lastly, comes the providential discovery of the extraordinary document which has been read to you by the clerk of the court. I invite your most careful consideration, gentlemen of the jury, to this chain of facts, knowing that you will find a verdict according to your consciences without fear and without favour.”

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence to the English reader, though it found few supporters among the Hungarian audience, was that of Dr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, who has written text-books upon metallurgy and toxicology. He said —

“I am not so sure, gentlemen, that there is need to fall back upon necromancy or the black art for an explanation of what has occurred. What I say is merely a hypothesis, without proof of any sort, but in a case so extraordinary every suggestion may be of value. The Rosicrucians, to whom allusion is made in this paper, were the most profound chemists of the early Middle Ages, and included the principal alchemists whose names have descended to us. Much as chemistry has advanced, there are some points in which the ancients were ahead of us, and in none more so than in the manufacture of poisons of subtle and deadly action. This man Bodeck, as one of the elders of the Rosicrucians, possessed, no doubt, the recipe of many such mixtures, some of which, like the *aqua tofana* of the Medicis, would poison by penetrating through the pores of the skin. It is conceivable that the handle of this silver hatchet has been anointed by some preparation which is a diffusible poison, having the effect upon the human body of bringing on sudden and acute attacks of homicidal mania. In such attacks it is well known that the madman's rage is turned against those whom he loved best when sane. I have, as I remarked before, no proof to support me in my theory, and simply put it forward for what it is worth."

With this extract from the speech of the learned and ingenious professor, we may close the account of this famous trial.

The broken pieces of the silver hatchet were thrown into a deep pond, a clever poodle being employed to carry them in his mouth, as no one would touch them for fear some of the infection might still hang about them. The piece of parchment was preserved in the museum of the University. As to Strauss and Schlegel, Winkel and Baumgarten, they continued the best of friends, and are so still for all I know to the contrary. Schlessinger became surgeon of a cavalry regiment; and was shot at the battle of Sadowa five years later, while rescuing the wounded under a heavy fire. By his last injunctions his little patrimony was to be sold to erect a marble obelisk over the grave of Professor von Hopstein.

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL.

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, I being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote the following words in my note-book, the result of much mental perturbation and conflict: —

“The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death — a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John McVittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic disks, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even — save the mark! — puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance.”

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. Every day for seven months I read over my words, and every day when I had finished them I said to myself, “Well done, John McVittie; you have said the thought which was in you. You have reduced things to their least common measure!” At last came a time when my uncle, McVittie of Glencairn, died — the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England. Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the coast of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, grey-stone building — when erected or wherefore none could tell me — and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the McLeods, who were fisher-folk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that Dalton’s atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant — all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who while digging for gold have turned up many worms, and then exhibit them exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the “mad laird o’ Mansie.” It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathise with? There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in, with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jagged back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the “ragged reef o’ Mansie.” When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and, peering over the edge, I have seen far down the flickering ghostly forms of great fish — fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalists never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow-men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored over, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o’clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and sea-weed was pattering up against my attic-window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when, about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the wheezy voice of my housekeeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

"Eh, maister, maister!" she screamed in her hateful dialect. "Come doun, mun; come doun! There's a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a' yammerin' and ca'in' for help — and I doobt they'll a' be drooned. Oh, Maister McVittie, come doun!"

"Hold your tongue, you hag!" I shouted back in a passion. "What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone." I turned in again, and drew the blankets over me. "Those men out there," I said to myself, "have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best, therefore, that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution." With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man's eternal and ever-changing career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrollable impulse, I rose, dressed, and, having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and, shading my eyes with my hand to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large, two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his head was sunk upon his breast; but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety; but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where he could see my dark figure upon the beach, his self-respect, or some other reason, forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed, but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman, with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this; but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and, leaning over, he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger? I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac, and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half-full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madness had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me. I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of faggots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman, as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of “Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie!” from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young — at the most nineteen, with a pale, somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge’s garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I strode heavily up the pathway she put out her hands with a pretty childlike gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt, and the tears sprang into her eyes; but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully. “What country do you come from?” I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

“Francais?” I asked. “Deutsch?” “Espagnol?” — each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality. Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word “Archangel,” painted in strange, quaint lettering. “So,” I thought, as I paddled slowly back, “this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar, and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!” It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house I pronounced the word “Archangel” several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognise it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at mid-day for some food, she was sitting by the table with a needle and thread mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of the chair, with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive, shrill voice some uncouth, barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, “Come in, you young fiend; come in, and be silent!” but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words “Sophie Ramusine” upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent information to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me, and pry, and peep, and chatter — a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw, to my great surprise, a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair and short curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden earrings in his ears — the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red flannel shirt, and high sea-boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognised him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

“Hullo!” I said, in an aggrieved voice. “You got ashore all right, then?”

“Yes,” he answered, in good English. “It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!” There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. “Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me — yet I could not honestly thank them for it.”

“Ho! ho!” thought I, “here is a man of my own kidney. Why do you wish to be drowned?” I asked.

“Because,” he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, “there — there in that blue smiling bay lies my soul, my treasure — everything that I loved and lived for.”

“Well, well,” I said. “People are ruined every day, but there’s no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough.”

“One of us?” he gasped.

“Yes — if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful.”

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realise what I said, and then, with a wild cry, he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and, as I came nearer, the sound of the man’s bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in, the girl Sophie Ramusine was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate, pleading words. He made a step forward to her as I entered, but she writhed still further away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weazel has him by the throat.

“Here!” I said, pulling him back from her. “This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?”

“Oh, sir,” he said, “excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life.”

“Who are you?” I asked roughly.

“I am a man from Archangel,” he said simply: “a Russian man.”

“What is your name?”

“Ourganeff.”

“Ourganeff! — and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring.”

“We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven,” he said solemnly, looking upwards. “We are bound by higher laws than those of earth.” As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. “Give me up my wife, sir,” he went on. “Let me take her away from here.”

“Look here, you — whatever your name is,” I said sternly, “I don’t want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won’t do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again.”

“You won’t give her up to me?” he said hoarsely.

“I’ll see you damned first!” I answered.

“Suppose I take her,” he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flushed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. “Go,” I said, in a low voice; “go quick, or I may do you an injury.” He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

“Have a heed what you do,” he said. “The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman.”

“We shall see that,” I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work at my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until, after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, bottles, etc., and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine, I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each window, in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from Archangel was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night, I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squatted there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but as I gazed my resentment changed into pity and contempt. “Poor fool,” I said to myself, “is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambition centred upon this wretched slip of a girl — a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you! Most women would love you — were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of yours — and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you.” As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so long as he was gone by the morning. As I expected, when I rose and went out there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty, I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when, rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst, I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

“I wish to speak a few words to you,” he said gravely.

“Hurry up, then!” I answered, glancing at my watch. “I have no time to listen to chatter.”

“Chatter!” he repeated angrily. “Ah, but there! You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lies kind, honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good too, in spite of your roughness."

"In the name of the devil," I said, "say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you."

"Can I not soften you in any way?" he cried. "Ah, see — see here" — he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. "Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem."

"I am not so sure of that," I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"You are a very strange man," he said at last. "I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman — how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul. You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted — you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that," he cried wildly. "I am deep — too deep — already. Anything rather than that."

"You would do better to go back to your country," I said, "than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away, I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me."

"And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?" he asked. "Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why, man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?"

"I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so," I answered. "I give no man reasons for my conduct."

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. "If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl — if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her — as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands." The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

“Stand off!” I said, putting my hand on my pistol. “If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you.”

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought that he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs. No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

“I told you,” he said in a quieter voice, “that my name is Ourganeff — Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from Archangel to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly, I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that the party had actually gone to the church. In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat’s crew — all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers-on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor, we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of Archangel sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet. You, sir,” he said wistfully, “look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?” “I am tired of your story,” I said, turning away. “For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away, you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter.” With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

“I have told you the beginning of my story,” he said, “and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go.”

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again, some minutes later, he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from Archangel had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realise my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of any one else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before — a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous waters were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen's wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the waters for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29°. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. "I had better push on," I thought to myself, "or the wind may rise before I get back."

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again — a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over the sands and echoed back from the hills behind me — a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sandhill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building — there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door — the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog, who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water's edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms. I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognised it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also, and darkness settled over it — a darkness which should never more be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No — a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My heart was untouched. But my pride — ah, there I had been cruelly wounded. To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers, and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. "If he would but come back again!” I cried, with clenched hands; “if he would but come back!”

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little farther on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with sea-weed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea’d man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman’s fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why, too, should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times; and when I pass on my daily walk, and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.

“All aboard?” said the captain.

“All aboard, sir!” said the mate.

“Then stand by to let her go.”

It was nine o’clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice, the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landsmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight — a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours, I would even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

“Time’s up!” said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. “Time’s up!” said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. “Look sharp!” shouted the crowd. “Hold hard!” cried the captain. “Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!” and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight’s voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to “Yurrup,” a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida* of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel’s side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. “Here’s a quiet place,” said the voice. “Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.”

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short, plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. “This is just the place,” I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

“Well, Muller,” said the taller of the two, “we’ve got it aboard right enough.”

“Yes,” assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller; “it’s safe aboard.”

“It was rather a near go.”

“It was that, Flannigan.”

“It wouldn’t have done to have missed the ship.”

“No; it would have put our plans out.”

“Ruined them entirely,” said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

“I’ve got it here,” he said at last.

“Let me see it.”

“Is no one looking?”

“No; they are nearly all below.”

“We can’t be too careful where so much is at stake,” said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

“It seems right enough,” he said at last.

“I tried not to shake it,” said his companion.

“Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller.”

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

“Nothing much wrong there,” said Flannigan.

“Right as a trivet,” answered his companion.

“Look out! here’s some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn’t do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake.”

“Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off,” said Muller.

“They’d be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger,” said the taller, with a sinister laugh. “Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It’s not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself.”

“No,” said Muller. “I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own.”

“We should take out a patent.”

And the two men laughed again with a cold, harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package and concealed it in Muller’s voluminous overcoat.

“Come down, and we’ll stow it in our berth,” said Flannigan. “We won’t need it until to-night, and it will be safe there.”

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

“Do you mind moving out of that, sir?” he said. “We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.”

His bluff manner and ruddy, healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl, which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted — solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and, climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizzen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of “Flannigan” smacked of Fenianism, while “Muller” suggested nothing but Socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake — could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, and intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable, or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

“Is that you, Hammond?” said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

“God bless me,” I said as I turned round, “it can’t be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?”

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

"Hullo!" he said, in his kindly way, "what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. *Mal de mer*, eh?"

"No, not that altogether," said I. "Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm."

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

"Have a cigar," said he, breaking the silence.

"No, thanks," said I. "Dick, we shall all be corpses to-night."

"That's no reason against your having a cigar now," said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

"No," I continued; "it's no laughing matter, and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;" and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. "There, Dick," I said, as I concluded, "what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?"

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I'd be frightened," he said, "if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man," he continued, "what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine."

“Nothing of the sort, sir,” said I, rather touchily. “You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.”

“You’d make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,” said Dick, “if that is to be your only test.”

“The man’s name was Flannigan,” I continued.

“I don’t think that would go very far in a court of law,” said Dick; “but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.”

“All right,” I answered; “I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don’t look hard at them, though; for I don’t want them to think that they are being watched.”

“Trust me,” said Dick; “I’ll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;” and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth; but there was no sign of them. “Heavens!” thought I, “perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!” It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

“Steward,” said Dick, “are there any other gentlemen about?”

“There’s two in the smoking-room, sir,” answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snuggery, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was “Napoleon.” Both were adepts at it; and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath and refused to go on.

“No, I’m hanged if I do!” he said; “I haven’t had more than two of a suit for five hands.”

“Never mind,” said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; “a few dollars one way or the other won’t go very far after to-night’s work.”

I was astonished at the rascal’s audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily —

“Nonsense! Why shouldn’t I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.”

“I believe you want it not to come off,” said Flannigan.

“You believe nothing of the sort,” said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. “You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won’t have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man; I have as much interest in our success as you have — more, I hope.”

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for a few minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart; but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion, and turned towards me.

“Can you tell me, sir,” he said, “when this ship will be heard of again?”

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered —

"I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the angry little man; "I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan; I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir," he continued, turning to me; "utterly wrong."

"Some passing ship, perhaps," suggested Dick.

"No, nor that either."

"The weather is fine," I said; "why should we not be heard of at our destination?"

"I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. No doubt we shall in the course of time; but that is not where we shall be heard of first."

"Where then?" asked Dick.

"That you will never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!" and he chuckled once again.

"Come on deck!" growled his comrade; "you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!" and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

"Well, what do you think now?" I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

"Think!" he said; "why, I think what his companion thinks — that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy."

"Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue."

"Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible."

"Oh, Dick, Dick," I cried; "how can you be so blind? Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?"

"Humbug, man!" said Dick; "you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?"

"I'll tell you what he meant, Dick," I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. "He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant."

"I didn't think you were such a fool, Hammond," said Dick Merton testily. "If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good."

"If ever I see the end of this one," I groaned, "I'll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it's hardly worth while my going up. I'll stay below and finish my smoke."

"I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind," said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances, I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine — so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

“Now, ladies,” said our genial captain, “I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in twelve days, or a fortnight at the very latest.”

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

“May I ask, captain,” I said, bending forward, and speaking very distinctly, “what you think of Fenian manifestoes?”

The captain’s ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

“They are poor cowardly things,” he said, “as silly as they are wicked.”

“The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,” said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

“Oh, captain!” said the fat lady at my side, “you don’t really think they would blow up a ship?”

“I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they will never blow up mine.”

“May I ask what precautions are taken against them?” said an elderly man at the end of the table.

“All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,” said Captain Dowie.

“But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?” said I.

“They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.”

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now, and looked at the captain.

“Don’t you think you are rather underrating them?” he said. “Every secret society has produced desperate men — why shouldn’t the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.”

“Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody’s eyes,” said the little clergyman.

“The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,” said Flannigan; “yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word ‘murder’ into the more euphonious one of ‘war.’ It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn’t dynamite seem so to the Fenian?”

“At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,” said the captain.

“Excuse me,” returned Flannigan, “but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the *Dotterel*? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.”

“Then they lied,” said the captain. “It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas — but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;” and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and captain? Should I demand a few minutes’ conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence, and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It seemed like a sea of blood. A single star was twinkling faintly above our main-mast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It seemed hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

"After all," I thought, as I gazed upon the blue depths beneath me, "if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land." A man's life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

"Well, old man," he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, "we've not been blown up yet."

"No, not yet," said I; "but that's no proof that we are not going to be."

"Nonsense, man!" said Dick; "I can't conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks."

"Dick," I said, "I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse."

“Well, if you really think so,” said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, “it is your duty to let the captain know of your suspicions.”

“You are right,” I said; “I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.”

“Well, go and do it now,” said Dick; “but for goodness’ sake don’t mix me up in the matter.”

“I’ll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,” I answered; “and in the meantime I don’t mean to lose sight of them.”

“Let me know of the result,” said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now — so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the side of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

“This place will do,” said a voice.

“Yes, the leeward side is best.”

“I wonder if the trigger will act?”

“I am sure it will.”

“We were to let it off at ten, were we not?”

“Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet.” There was a pause. Then the voice began again —

“They’ll hear the drop of the trigger, won’t they?”

“It doesn’t matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent its going off.”

“That’s true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won’t there?”

“Rather! How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?”

“The first news will get in in about twenty-four hours.”

“That will be mine.”

“No, mine.”

“Ha, ha! we’ll settle that.”

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller’s voice in a ghastly whisper, “There’s only five minutes more.”

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

“It’ll make a sensation on land,” said a voice.

“Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.”

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

“Three minutes more,” he said. “Put it down upon the deck.”

“No, put it here on the bulwarks.”

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular — the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

“A minute and a half more,” he said. “Shall you or I pull the string?”

“I will pull it,” said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

“Stop!” I screamed, springing to my feet. “Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!”

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

“Cain was damned,” I cried, “and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?”

“He’s mad!” said Flannigan. “Time’s up! Let it off, Muller.”

I sprang down upon the deck.

“You shan’t do it!” I said.

“By what right do you prevent us?”

“By every right, human and divine.”

“It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this!”

“Never!” said I.

“Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.”

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

“Now,” he said, “look sharp. He can’t prevent us.”

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off — *two grey carrier-pigeons*!

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the *New York Herald* fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America: —

"Pigeon-flying Extraordinary. — A novel match has been brought off, last week, between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Ashport. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship *Spartan*, at ten o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as British captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Ashport in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following afternoon, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years."

A NIGHT AMONG THE NIHILISTS.

"Robinson, the boss wants you!"

"The dickens he does!" thought I; for Mr. Dickson, Odessa agent of Bailey & Co., corn merchants, was a bit of a Tartar, as I had learned to my cost. "What's the row now?" I demanded of my fellow-clerk; "has he got scent of our Nicolaieff escapade, or what is it?"

"No idea," said Gregory: "the old boy seems in a good enough humour; some business matter, probably. But don't keep him waiting." So summoning up an air of injured innocence, to be ready for all contingencies, I marched into the lion's den.

Mr. Dickson was standing before the fire in a Briton's time-honoured attitude, and motioned me into a chair in front of him. "Mr. Robinson," he said, "I have great confidence in your discretion and common sense. The follies of youth will break out, but I think that you have a sterling foundation to your character underlying any superficial levity."

I bowed.

"I believe," he continued, "that you can speak Russian pretty fluently."

I bowed again.

"I have, then," he proceeded, "a mission which I wish you to undertake, and on the success of which your promotion may depend. I would not trust it to a subordinate, were it not that duty ties me to my post at present."

"You may depend upon my doing my best, sir," I replied.

"Right, sir; quite right! What I wish you to do is briefly this: The line of railway has just been opened to Solteff, some hundred miles up the country. Now, I wish to get the start of the other Odessa firms in securing the produce of that district, which I have reason to believe may be had at very low prices. You will proceed by rail to Solteff, and interview a Mr. Dimidoff, who is the largest landed proprietor in the town. Make as favourable terms as you can with him. Both Mr. Dimidoff and I wish the whole thing to be done as quietly and secretly as possible — in fact, that nothing should be known about the matter until the grain appears in Odessa. I desire it for the interests of the firm, and Mr. Dimidoff on account of the prejudice his peasantry entertain against exportation. You will find yourself expected at the end of your journey, and will start to-night. Money shall be ready for your expenses. Good-morning, Mr. Robinson; I hope you won’t fail to realise the good opinion I have of your abilities.”

“Gregory,” I said, as I strutted into the office, “I’m off on a mission — a secret mission, my boy; an affair of thousands of pounds. Lend me your little portmanteau — mine’s too imposing — and tell Ivan to pack it. A Russian millionaire expects me at the end of my journey. Don’t breathe a word of it to any of Simpkins’s people, or the whole game will be up. Keep it dark!”

I was so charmed at being, as it were, behind the scenes, that I crept about the office all day in a sort of cloak-and-bloody-dagger style, with responsibility and brooding care marked upon every feature; and when at night I stepped out and stole down to the station, the unprejudiced observer would certainly have guessed, from my general behaviour, that I had emptied the contents of the strong-box before starting into that little valise of Gregory’s. It was imprudent of him, by the way, to leave English labels pasted all over it. However, I could only hope that the “Londons” and “Birminghams” would attract no attention, or at least that no rival corn-merchant might deduce from them who I was and what my errand might be.

Having paid the necessary roubles and got my ticket, I ensconced myself in the corner of a snug Russian car, and pondered over my extraordinary good fortune. Dickson was growing old now, and if I could make my mark in this matter it might be a great thing for me. Dreams arose of a partnership in the firm. The noisy wheels seemed to clank out “Bailey, Robinson & Co.,” “Bailey, Robinson & Co.,” in a monotonous refrain, which gradually sank into a hum, and finally ceased as I dropped into a deep sleep. Had I known the experience which awaited me at the end of my journey it would hardly have been so peaceable.

I awoke with an uneasy feeling that some one was watching me closely; nor was I mistaken. A tall dark man had taken up his position on the seat opposite, and his black sinister eyes seemed to look through me and beyond me, as if he wished to read my very soul. Then I saw him glance down at my little trunk.

“Good heavens!” thought I, “here’s Simpkins’s agent, I suppose. It was careless of Gregory to leave those confounded labels on the valise.”

I closed my eyes for a time, but on reopening them I again caught the stranger’s earnest gaze.

"From England, I see," he said in Russian, showing a row of white teeth in what was meant to be an amiable smile.

"Yes," I replied, trying to look unconcerned, but painfully aware of my failure.

"Travelling for pleasure, perhaps?" said he.

"Yes," I answered eagerly. "Certainly for pleasure; nothing else."

"Of course not," said he, with a shade of irony in his voice. "Englishmen always travel for pleasure, don't they? Oh, no; nothing else."

His conduct was mysterious, to say the least of it. It was only explainable upon two hypotheses — he was either a madman, or he was the agent of some firm bound upon the same errand as myself, and determined to show me that he guessed my little game. They were about equally unpleasant, and, on the whole, I was relieved when the train pulled up in the tumble-down shed which does duty for a station in the rising town of Solteff — Solteff, whose resources I was about to open out, and whose commerce I was to direct into the great world channels. I almost expected to see a triumphal arch as I stepped on to the platform.

I was to be expected at the end of my journey, so Mr. Dickson had informed me. I looked about among the motley crowd, but saw no Mr. Dimidoff. Suddenly a slovenly, unshaved man passed me rapidly, and glanced first at me and then at my trunk — that wretched trunk, the cause of all my woes. He disappeared in the crowd; but in a little time came strolling past me again, and contrived to whisper as he did so, "Follow me, but at some distance," immediately setting off out of the station and down the street at a rapid pace. Here was mystery with a vengeance! I trotted along in his rear with my valise, and on turning the corner found a rough droschky waiting for me. My unshaven friend opened the door, and I stepped in.

"Is Mr. Dim — —" I was beginning.

"Hush!" he cried. "No names, no names; the very walls have ears. You will hear all to-night;" and with that assurance he closed the door, and, seizing the reins, we drove off at a rapid pace — so rapid that I saw my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway carriage gazing after us in surprise until we were out of sight.

I thought over the whole matter as we jogged along in that abominable springless conveyance.

"They say the nobles are tyrants in Russia," I mused; "but it seems to me to be the other way about, for here's this poor Mr. Dimidoff, who evidently thinks his ex-serfs will rise and murder him if he raises the price of grain in the district by exporting some out of it. Fancy being obliged to have recourse to all this mystery and deception in order to sell one's own property! Why, it's worse than an Irish landlord. It is monstrous! Well, he doesn't seem to live in a very aristocratic quarter either," I soliloquised, as I gazed out at the narrow crooked streets and the unkempt dirty Muscovites whom we passed. "I wish Gregory or some one was with me, for it's a cut-throat-looking shop! By Jove, he's pulling up; we must be there!"

We *were* there, to all appearance; for the droschky stopped, and my driver's shaggy head appeared through the aperture.

"It is here, most honoured master," he said, as he helped me to alight.

"Is Mr. Dimi — —" I commenced; but he interrupted me again.

"Anything but names," he whispered; "anything but that. You are too used to a land that is free. Caution, oh sacred one!" and he ushered me down a stone-flagged passage, and up a stair at the end of it. "Sit for a few minutes in this room," he said, opening a door, "and a repast will be served for you;" and with that he left me to my own reflections.

"Well," thought I, "whatever Mr. Dimidoff's house may be like, his servants are undoubtedly well trained. 'Oh sacred one!' and 'revered master!' I wonder what he'd call old Dickson himself, if he is so polite to the clerk! I suppose it wouldn't be the thing to smoke in this little crib; but I could do a pipe nicely. By the way, how confoundedly like a cell it looks!"

It certainly did look like a cell. The door was an iron one, and enormously strong, while the single window was closely barred. The floor was of wood, and sounded hollow and insecure as I strode across it. Both floor and walls were thickly splashed with coffee or some other dark liquid. On the whole, it was far from being a place where one would be likely to become unreasonably festive.

I had hardly concluded my survey when I heard steps approaching down the corridor, and the door was opened by my old friend of the droschky. He announced that my dinner was ready, and, with many bows and apologies for leaving me in what he called the "dismissal room," he led me down the passage, and into a large and beautifully furnished apartment. A table was spread for two in the centre of it, and by the fire was standing a man very little older than myself. He turned as I came in, and stepped forward to meet me with every symptom of profound respect.

“So young and yet so honoured!” he exclaimed; and then seeming to recollect himself, he continued, “Pray sit at the head of the table. You must be fatigued by your long and arduous journey. We dine *tête-à-tête*; but the others assemble afterwards.”

“Mr. Dimidoff, I presume?” said I.

“No, sir,” said he, turning his keen grey eyes upon me. “My name is Petrokine; you mistake me perhaps for one of the others. But now, not a word of business until the council meets. Try your *chef’s* soup; you will find it excellent, I think.”

Who Mr. Petrokine or the others might be I could not conceive. Land stewards of Dimidoff’s, perhaps; though the name did not seem familiar to my companion. However, as he appeared to shun any business questions at present, I gave in to his humour, and we conversed on social life in England — a subject in which he displayed considerable knowledge and acuteness. His remarks, too, on Malthus and the laws of population were wonderfully good, though savouring somewhat of Radicalism.

“By the way,” he remarked, as we smoked a cigar over our wine, “we should never have known you but for the English labels on your luggage; it was the luckiest thing in the world that Alexander noticed them. We had had no personal description of you; indeed we were prepared to expect a somewhat older man. You are young indeed, sir, to be entrusted with such a mission.”

“My employer trusts me,” I replied; “and we have learned in our trade that youth and shrewdness are not incompatible.”

“Your remark is true, sir,” returned my newly-made friend; “but I am surprised to hear you call our glorious association a trade! Such a term is gross indeed to apply to a body of men banded together to supply the world with that which it is yearning for, but which, without our exertions, it can never hope to attain. A spiritual brotherhood would be a more fitting term.”

“By Jove!” thought I, “how pleased the boss would be to hear him! He must have been in the business himself, whoever he is.”

“Now, sir,” said Mr. Petrokine, “the clock points to eight, and the council must be already sitting. Let us go up together, and I will introduce you. I need hardly say that the greatest secrecy is observed, and that your appearance is anxiously awaited.”

I turned over in my mind as I followed him how I might best fulfil my mission and secure the most advantageous terms. They seemed as anxious as I was in the matter, and there appeared to be no opposition, so perhaps the best thing would be to wait and see what they would propose.

I had hardly come to this conclusion when my guide swung open a large door at the end of a passage, and I found myself in a room larger and even more gorgeously fitted up than the one in which I had dined. A long table, covered with green baize and strewn with papers, ran down the middle, and round it were sitting fourteen or fifteen men conversing earnestly. The whole scene reminded me forcibly of a gambling hell I had visited some time before.

Upon our entrance the company rose and bowed. I could not but remark that my companion attracted no attention, while every eye was turned upon me with a strange mixture of surprise and almost servile respect. A man at the head of the table, who was remarkable for the extreme pallor of his face as contrasted with his blue-black hair and moustache, waved his hand to a seat beside him, and I sat down.

“I need hardly say,” said Mr. Petrokine, “that Gustave Berger, the English agent, is now honouring us with his presence. He is young, indeed, Alexis,” he continued to my pale-faced neighbour, “and yet he is of European reputation.”

“Come, draw it mild!” thought I, adding aloud, “If you refer to me, sir, though I am indeed acting as English agent, my name is not Berger, but Robinson — Mr. Tom Robinson, at your service.”

A laugh ran round the table.

“So be it, so be it,” said the man they called Alexis. “I commend your discretion, most honoured sir. One cannot be too careful. Preserve your English *sobriquet* by all means. I regret that any painful duty should be performed upon this auspicious evening; but the rules of our association must be preserved at any cost to our feelings, and a dismissal is inevitable to-night.”

“What the deuce is the fellow driving at?” thought I. “What is it to me if he does give his servant the sack? This Dimidoff, wherever he is, seems to keep a private lunatic asylum.”

“*Take out the gag!*” The words fairly shot through me, and I started in my chair. It was Petrokine who spoke. For the first time I noticed that a burly stout man, sitting at the other end of the table, had his arms tied behind his chair and a handkerchief round his mouth. A horrible suspicion began to creep into my heart. Where was I? Was I in Mr. Dimidoff's? Who were these men, with their strange words?

"Take out the gag!" repeated Petrokine; and the handkerchief was removed.

"Now, Paul Ivanovitch," said he, "what have you to say before you go?"

"Not a dismissal, sirs," he pleaded; "not a dismissal: anything but that! I will go into some distant land, and my mouth shall be closed for ever. I will do anything that the society asks; but pray, pray do not dismiss me."

"You know our laws, and you know your crime," said Alexis, in a cold, harsh voice. "Who drove us from Odessa by his false tongue and his double face? Who wrote the anonymous letter to the Governor? Who cut the wire that would have destroyed the arch-tyrant? You did, Paul Ivanovitch; and you must die."

I leaned back in my chair and fairly gasped.

"Remove him!" said Petrokine; and the man of the droschky, with two others, forced him out.

I heard the footsteps pass down the passage, and then a door open and shut. Then came a sound as of a struggle, ended by a heavy, crunching blow and a dull thud.

"So perish all who are false to their oath," said Alexis solemnly; and a hoarse "Amen" went up from his companions.

"Death alone can dismiss us from our order," said another man further down; "but Mr. Berg — Mr. Robinson is pale. The scene has been too much for him after his long journey from England."

"Oh, Tom, Tom," thought I, "if ever you get out of this scrape you'll turn over a new leaf. You're not fit to die, and that's a fact." It was only too evident to me now that by some strange misconception I had got in among a gang of cold-blooded Nihilists, who mistook me for one of their order. I felt, after what I had witnessed, that my only chance of life was to try to play the *rôle* thus forced upon me until an opportunity for escape should present itself; so I tried hard to regain my air of self-possession, which had been so rudely shaken.

"I am indeed fatigued," I replied; "but I feel stronger now. Excuse my momentary weakness."

"It was but natural," said a man with a thick beard at my right hand. "And now, most honoured sir, how goes the cause in England?"

"Remarkably well," I answered.

"Has the great commissioner condescended to send a missive to the Solteff branch?" asked Petrokine.

"Nothing in writing," I replied.

"But he has spoken of it?"

"Yes: he said he had watched it with feelings of the liveliest satisfaction," I returned.

"'Tis well! 'tis well!" ran round the table.

I felt giddy and sick from the critical nature of my position. Any moment a question might be asked which would show me in my true colours. I rose and helped myself from a decanter of brandy which stood on a side table. The potent liquor flew to my excited brain, and as I sat down I felt reckless enough to be half amused at my position, and inclined to play with my tormentors. I still, however, had all my wits about me.

"You have been to Birmingham?" asked the man with the beard.

"Many times," said I.

"Then you have of course seen the private workshop and arsenal?"

"I have been over them both more than once."

"It is still, I suppose, entirely unsuspected by the police?" continued my interrogator.

"Entirely," I replied.

"Can you tell us how it is that so large a concern is kept so completely secret?"

Here was a poser; but my native impudence and the brandy seemed to come to my aid.

"That is information," I replied, "which I do not feel justified in divulging even here. In withholding it I am acting under the direction of the chief commissioner."

"You are right — perfectly right," said my original friend Petrokine. "You will no doubt make your report to the central office at Moscow before entering into such details."

"Exactly so," I replied, only too happy to get a lift out of my difficulty.

"We have heard," said Alexis, "that you were sent to inspect the *Livadia*. Can you give us any particulars about it?"

"Anything you ask I will endeavour to answer," I replied, in desperation.

"Have any orders been made in Birmingham concerning it?"

"None when I left England."

"Well, well, there's plenty of time yet," said the man with the beard—"many months. Will the bottom be of wood or iron?"

"Of wood," I answered at random.

"'Tis well!" said another voice. "And what is the breadth of the Clyde below Greenock?"

"It varies much," I replied; "on an average about eighty yards."

"How many men does she carry?" asked an anæmic-looking youth at the foot of the table, who seemed more fit for a public school than this den of murder.

"About three hundred," said I.

"A floating coffin!" said the young Nihilist, in a sepulchral voice.

"Are the store-rooms on a level with or underneath the state-cabins?" asked Petrokine.

"Underneath," said I decisively, though I need hardly say I had not the smallest conception.

"And now, most honoured sir," said Alexis, "tell us what was the reply of Bauer, the German socialist, to Ravinsky's proclamation."

Here was a deadlock with a vengeance. Whether my cunning would have extricated me from it or not was never decided, for Providence hurried me from one dilemma into another and a worse one.

A door slammed downstairs, and rapid footsteps were heard approaching. Then came a loud tap outside, followed by two smaller ones.

"The sign of the society!" said Petrokine; "and yet we are all present; who can it be?"

The door was thrown open, and a man entered, dusty and travel-stained, but with an air of authority and power stamped on every feature of his harsh but expressive face. He glanced round the table, scanning each countenance carefully. There was a start of surprise in the room. He was evidently a stranger to them all.

"What means this intrusion, sir?" said my friend with the beard.

"Intrusion!" said the stranger. "I was given to understand that I was expected, and had looked forward to a warmer welcome from my fellow-associates. I am personally unknown to you, gentlemen, but I am proud to think that my name should command some respect among you. I am

Gustave Berger, the agent from England, bearing letters from the chief commissioner to his well-beloved brothers of Solteff."

One of their own bombs could hardly have created greater surprise had it been fired in the midst of them. Every eye was fixed alternately on me and upon the newly-arrived agent.

"If you are indeed Gustave Berger," said Petrokine, "who is this?"

"That I am Gustave Berger these credentials will show," said the stranger, as he threw a packet upon the table. "Who that man may be I know not; but if he has intruded himself upon the lodge under false pretences, it is clear that he must never carry out of the room what he has learned. Speak, sir," he added, addressing me: "who and what are you?"

I felt that my time had come. My revolver was in my hip-pocket; but what was that against so many desperate men? I grasped the butt of it, however, as a drowning man clings to a straw, and I tried to preserve my coolness as I glanced round at the cold, vindictive faces turned towards me.

"Gentlemen," I said, "the *rôle* I have played to-night has been a purely involuntary one on my part. I am no police spy, as you seem to suspect; nor, on the other hand, have I the honour to be a member of your association. I am an inoffensive corn-dealer, who by an extraordinary mistake has been forced into this unpleasant and awkward position."

I paused for a moment. Was it my fancy that there was a peculiar noise in the street — a noise as of many feet treading softly? No, it had died away; it was but the throbbing of my own heart.

"I need hardly say," I continued, "that anything I may have heard to-night will be safe in my keeping. I pledge my solemn honour as a gentleman that not one word of it shall transpire through me."

The senses of men in great physical danger become strangely acute, or their imagination plays them curious tricks. My back was towards the door as I sat, but I could have sworn that I heard heavy breathing behind it. Was it the three minions whom I had seen before in the performance of their hateful functions, and who, like vultures, had sniffed another victim?

I looked round the table. Still the same hard, cruel faces. Not one glance of sympathy. I cocked the revolver in my pocket.

There was a painful silence, which was broken by the harsh, grating voice of Petrokine.

"Promises are easily made and easily broken," he said. "There is but one way of securing eternal silence. It is our lives or yours. Let the highest among us speak.”

“You are right, sir,” said the English agent; “there is but one course open. He must be dismissed.”

I knew what that meant in their confounded jargon, and sprang to my feet.

“By Heaven,” I shouted, putting my back against the door, “you shan’t butcher a free Englishman like a sheep! The first among you who stirs, drops!”

A man sprang at me. I saw along the sights of my Derringer the gleam of a knife and the demoniacal face of Gustave Berger. Then I pulled the trigger, and, with his hoarse scream sounding in my ears, I was felled to the ground by a crashing blow from behind. Half unconscious, and pressed down by some heavy weight, I heard the noise of shouts and blows above me, and then I fainted away.

When I came to myself I was lying among the *débris* of the door, which had been beaten in on the top of me. Opposite were a dozen of the men who had lately sat in judgment upon me, tied two and two, and guarded by a score of Russian soldiers. Beside me was the corpse of the ill-fated English agent, the whole face blown in by the force of the explosion. Alexis and Petrokine were both lying on the floor like myself, bleeding profusely.

“Well, young fellow, you’ve had a narrow escape,” said a hearty voice in my ear.

I looked up, and recognised my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway carriage.

“Stand up,” he continued: “you’re only a bit stunned; no bones broken. It’s no wonder I mistook you for the Nihilist agent, when the very lodge itself was taken in. Well, you’re the only stranger who ever came out of this den alive. Come downstairs with me. I know who you are, and what you are after now; I’ll take you to Mr. Dimidoff. Nay, don’t go in there,” he cried, as I walked towards the door of the cell into which I had been originally ushered. “Keep out of that: you’ve seen evil sights enough for one day. Come down and have a glass of liquor.”

He explained as we walked back to the hotel that the police of Solteff, of which he was the chief, had had warning and been on the look-out during some time for this Nihilist emissary. My arrival in so unfrequented a place, coupled with my air of secrecy and the English labels on that confounded portmanteau of Gregory’s, had completed the business.

I have little more to tell. My Socialistic acquaintances were all either transported to Siberia or executed. My mission was performed to the satisfaction of my employers. My conduct during the whole business has won me promotion, and my prospects for life have been improved since that horrible night, the remembrance of which still makes me shiver.

ROUND THE RED LAMP

BEING FACTS AND FANCIES OF MEDICAL LIFE

THE PREFACE.

[Being an extract from a long and animated correspondence with a friend in America.]

I quite recognise the force of your objection that an invalid or a woman in weak health would get no good from stories which attempt to treat some features of medical life with a certain amount of realism. If you deal with this life at all, however, and if you are anxious to make your doctors something more than marionettes, it is quite essential that you should paint the darker side, since it is that which is principally presented to the surgeon or physician. He sees many beautiful things, it is true, fortitude and heroism, love and self-sacrifice; but they are all called forth (as our nobler qualities are always called forth) by bitter sorrow and trial. One cannot write of medical life and be merry over it.

Then why write of it, you may ask? If a subject is painful why treat it at all? I answer that it is the province of fiction to treat painful things as well as cheerful ones. The story which wiles away a weary hour fulfils an obviously good purpose, but not more so, I hold, than that which helps to emphasise the graver side of life. A tale which may startle the reader out of his usual grooves of thought, and shocks him into seriousness, plays the part of the alterative and tonic in medicine, bitter to the taste but bracing in the result. There are a few stories in this little collection which might have such an effect, and I have so far shared in your feeling that I have reserved them from serial publication. In book-form the reader can see that they are medical stories, and can, if he or she be so minded, avoid them.

Yours very truly,
A. CONAN DOYLE.

P. S. — You ask about the Red Lamp. It is the usual sign of the general practitioner in England.

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BEHIND THE TIMES.

My first interview with Dr. James Winter was under dramatic circumstances. It occurred at two in the morning in the bedroom of an old country house. I kicked him twice on the white waistcoat and knocked off his gold spectacles, while he with the aid of a female accomplice stifled my angry cries in a flannel petticoat and thrust me into a warm bath. I am told that one of my parents, who happened to be present, remarked in a whisper that there was nothing the matter with my lungs. I cannot recall how Dr. Winter looked at the time, for I had other things to think of, but his description of my own appearance is far from flattering. A fluffy head, a body like a trussed goose, very bandy legs, and feet with the soles turned inwards — those are the main items which he can remember.

From this time onwards the epochs of my life were the periodical assaults which Dr. Winter made upon me. He vaccinated me; he cut me for an abscess; he blistered me for mumps. It was a world of peace and he the one dark cloud that threatened. But at last there came a time of real illness — a time when I lay for months together inside my wickerwork-basket bed, and then it was that I learned that that hard face could relax, that those country-made creaking boots could steal very gently to a bedside, and that that rough voice could thin into a whisper when it spoke to a sick child.

And now the child is himself a medical man, and yet Dr. Winter is the same as ever. I can see no change since first I can remember him, save that perhaps the brindled hair is a trifle whiter, and the huge shoulders a little more bowed. He is a very tall man, though he loses a couple of inches from his stoop. That big back of his has curved itself over sick beds until it has set in that shape. His face is of a walnut brown, and tells of long winter drives over bleak country roads, with the wind and the rain in his teeth. It looks smooth at a little distance, but as you approach him you see that it is shot with innumerable fine wrinkles like a last year’s apple. They are hardly to be seen when he is in repose; but when he laughs his face breaks like a starred glass, and you realise then that though he looks old, he must be older than he looks.

How old that is I could never discover. I have often tried to find out, and have struck his stream as high up as George IV and even the Regency, but without ever getting quite to the source. His mind must have been open to impressions very early, but it must also have closed early, for the politics of the day have little interest for him, while he is fiercely excited about questions which are entirely prehistoric. He shakes his head when he speaks of the first Reform Bill and expresses grave doubts as to its wisdom, and I have heard him, when he was warmed by a glass of wine, say bitter things about Robert Peel and his abandoning of the Corn Laws. The death of that statesman brought the history of England to a definite close, and Dr. Winter refers to everything which had happened since then as to an insignificant anticlimax.

But it was only when I had myself become a medical man that I was able to appreciate how entirely he is a survival of a past generation. He had learned his medicine under that obsolete and forgotten system by which a youth was apprenticed to a surgeon, in the days when the study of anatomy was often approached through a violated grave. His views upon his own profession are even more reactionary than in politics. Fifty years have brought him little and deprived him of less. Vaccination was well within the teaching of his youth, though I think he has a secret preference for inoculation. Bleeding he would practise freely but for public opinion. Chloroform he regards as a dangerous innovation, and he always clicks with his tongue when it is mentioned. He has even been known to say vain things about Laennec, and to refer to the stethoscope as “a new-fangled French toy.” He carries one in his hat out of deference to the expectations of his patients, but he is very hard of hearing, so that it makes little difference whether he uses it or not.

He reads, as a duty, his weekly medical paper, so that he has a general idea as to the advance of modern science. He always persists in looking upon it as a huge and rather ludicrous experiment. The germ theory of disease set him chuckling for a long time, and his favourite joke in the sick room was to say, “Shut the door or the germs will be getting in.” As to the Darwinian theory, it struck him as being the crowning joke of the century. “The children in the nursery and the ancestors in the stable,” he would cry, and laugh the tears out of his eyes.

He is so very much behind the day that occasionally, as things move round in their usual circle, he finds himself, to his bewilderment, in the front of the fashion. Dietetic treatment, for example, had been much in vogue in his youth, and he has more practical knowledge of it than any one whom I have met. Massage, too, was familiar to him when it was new to our generation. He had been trained also at a time when instruments were in a rudimentary state, and when men learned to trust more to their own fingers. He has a model surgical hand, muscular in the palm, tapering in the fingers, “with an eye at the end of each.” I shall not easily forget how Dr. Patterson and I cut Sir John Sirwell, the County Member, and were unable to find the stone. It was a horrible moment. Both our careers were at stake. And then it was that Dr. Winter, whom we had asked out of courtesy to be present, introduced into the wound a finger which seemed to our excited senses to be about nine inches long, and hooked out the stone at the end of it. “It’s always well to bring one in your waistcoat-pocket,” said he with a chuckle, “but I suppose you youngsters are above all that.”

We made him president of our branch of the British Medical Association, but he resigned after the first meeting. “The young men are too much for me,” he said. “I don’t understand what they are talking about.” Yet his patients do very well. He has the healing touch — that magnetic thing which defies explanation or analysis, but which is a very evident fact none the less. His mere presence leaves the patient with more hopefulness and vitality. The sight of disease affects him as dust does a careful housewife. It makes him angry and impatient. “Tut, tut, this will never do!” he cries, as he takes over a new case. He would shoo Death out of the room as though he were an intrusive hen. But when the intruder refuses to be dislodged, when the blood moves more slowly and the eyes grow dimmer, then it is that Dr. Winter is of more avail than all the drugs in his surgery. Dying folk cling to his hand as if the presence of his bulk and vigour gives them more courage to face the change; and that kindly, windbeaten face has been the last earthly impression which many a sufferer has carried into the unknown.

When Dr. Patterson and I — both of us young, energetic, and up-to-date — settled in the district, we were most cordially received by the old doctor, who would have been only too happy to be relieved of some of his patients. The patients themselves, however, followed their own inclinations — which is a reprehensible way that patients have — so that we remained neglected, with our modern instruments and our latest alkaloids, while he was serving out senna and calomel to all the countryside. We both of us loved the old fellow, but at the same time, in the privacy of our own intimate conversations, we could not help commenting upon this deplorable lack of judgment. “It’s all very well for the poorer people,” said Patterson. “But after all the educated classes have a right to expect that their medical man will know the difference between a mitral murmur and a bronchitic rale. It’s the judicial frame of mind, not the sympathetic, which is the essential one.”

I thoroughly agreed with Patterson in what he said. It happened, however, that very shortly afterwards the epidemic of influenza broke out, and we were all worked to death. One morning I met Patterson on my round, and found him looking rather pale and fagged out. He made the same remark about me. I was, in fact, feeling far from well, and I lay upon the sofa all the afternoon with a splitting headache and pains in every joint. As evening closed in, I could no longer disguise the fact that the scourge was upon me, and I felt that I should have medical advice without delay. It was of Patterson, naturally, that I thought, but somehow the idea of him had suddenly become repugnant to me. I thought of his cold, critical attitude, of his endless questions, of his tests and his tappings. I wanted something more soothing — something more genial.

“Mrs. Hudson,” said I to my housekeeper, “would you kindly run along to old Dr. Winter and tell him that I should be obliged to him if he would step round?”

She was back with an answer presently. “Dr. Winter will come round in an hour or so, sir; but he has just been called in to attend Dr. Patterson.”

HIS FIRST OPERATION.

It was the first day of the winter session, and the third year's man was walking with the first year's man. Twelve o'clock was just booming out from the Tron Church.

"Let me see," said the third year's man. "You have never seen an operation?"

"Never."

"Then this way, please. This is Rutherford's historic bar. A glass of sherry, please, for this gentleman. You are rather sensitive, are you not?"

"My nerves are not very strong, I am afraid."

"Hum! Another glass of sherry for this gentleman. We are going to an operation now, you know."

The novice squared his shoulders and made a gallant attempt to look unconcerned.

"Nothing very bad — eh?"

"Well, yes — pretty bad."

"An — an amputation?"

"No; it's a bigger affair than that."

"I think — I think they must be expecting me at home."

"There's no sense in funking. If you don't go to-day, you must to-morrow. Better get it over at once. Feel pretty fit?"

"Oh, yes; all right!" The smile was not a success.

"One more glass of sherry, then. Now come on or we shall be late. I want you to be well in front."

"Surely that is not necessary."

"Oh, it is far better! What a drove of students! There are plenty of new men among them. You can tell them easily enough, can't you? If they were going down to be operated upon themselves, they could not look whiter."

"I don't think I should look as white."

"Well, I was just the same myself. But the feeling soon wears off. You see a fellow with a face like plaster, and before the week is out he is eating his lunch in the dissecting rooms. I'll tell you all about the case when we get to the theatre."

The students were pouring down the sloping street which led to the infirmary — each with his little sheaf of note-books in his hand. There were pale, frightened lads, fresh from the high schools, and callous old chronics, whose generation had passed on and left them. They swept in an unbroken, tumultuous stream from the university gate to the hospital. The figures and gait of the men were young, but there was little youth in most of their faces. Some looked as if they ate too little — a few as if they drank too much. Tall and short, tweed-coated and black, round-shouldered, bespectacled, and slim, they crowded with clatter of feet and rattle of sticks through the hospital gate. Now and again they thickened into two lines, as the carriage of a surgeon of the staff rolled over the cobblestones between.

"There's going to be a crowd at Archer's," whispered the senior man with suppressed excitement. "It is grand to see him at work. I've seen him jab all round the aorta until it made me jumpy to watch him. This way, and mind the whitewash."

They passed under an archway and down a long, stone-flagged corridor, with drab-coloured doors on either side, each marked with a number. Some of them were ajar, and the novice glanced into them with tingling nerves. He was reassured to catch a glimpse of cheery fires, lines of white-counterpaned beds, and a profusion of coloured texts upon the wall. The corridor opened upon a small hall, with a fringe of poorly clad people seated all round upon benches. A young man, with a pair of scissors stuck like a flower in his buttonhole and a note-book in his hand, was passing from one to the other, whispering and writing.

"Anything good?" asked the third year's man.

"You should have been here yesterday," said the out-patient clerk, glancing up. "We had a regular field day. A popliteal aneurism, a Colles' fracture, a spina bifida, a tropical abscess, and an elephantiasis. How's that for a single haul?"

"I'm sorry I missed it. But they'll come again, I suppose. What's up with the old gentleman?"

A broken workman was sitting in the shadow, rocking himself slowly to and fro, and groaning. A woman beside him was trying to console him, patting his shoulder with a hand which was spotted over with curious little white blisters.

"It's a fine carbuncle," said the clerk, with the air of a connoisseur who describes his orchids to one who can appreciate them. "It's on his back and the passage is draughty, so we must not look at it, must we, daddy? Pemphigus," he added carelessly, pointing to the woman's disfigured hands. "Would you care to stop and take out a metacarpal?"

"No, thank you. We are due at Archer's. Come on!" and they rejoined the throng which was hurrying to the theatre of the famous surgeon.

The tiers of horseshoe benches rising from the floor to the ceiling were already packed, and the novice as he entered saw vague curving lines of faces in front of him, and heard the deep buzz of a hundred voices, and sounds of laughter from somewhere up above him. His companion spied an opening on the second bench, and they both squeezed into it.

"This is grand!" the senior man whispered. "You'll have a rare view of it all."

Only a single row of heads intervened between them and the operating table. It was of unpainted deal, plain, strong, and scrupulously clean. A sheet of brown water-proofing covered half of it, and beneath stood a large tin tray full of sawdust. On the further side, in front of the window, there was a board which was strewed with glittering instruments — forceps, tenacula, saws, canulas, and trocars. A line of knives, with long, thin, delicate blades, lay at one side. Two young men lounged in front of this, one threading needles, the other doing something to a brass coffee-pot-like thing which hissed out puffs of steam.

"That's Peterson," whispered the senior, "the big, bald man in the front row. He's the skin-grafting man, you know. And that's Anthony Browne, who took a larynx out successfully last winter. And there's Murphy, the pathologist, and Stoddart, the eye-man. You'll come to know them all soon."

"Who are the two men at the table?"

"Nobody — dressers. One has charge of the instruments and the other of the puffing Billy. It's Lister's antiseptic spray, you know, and Archer's one of the carbolic-acid men. Hayes is the leader of the cleanliness-and-cold-water school, and they all hate each other like poison."

A flutter of interest passed through the closely packed benches as a woman in petticoat and bodice was led in by two nurses. A red woolen shawl was draped over her head and round her neck. The face which looked out from it was that of a woman in the prime of her years, but drawn with suffering, and of a peculiar beeswax tint. Her head drooped as she walked, and one of the nurses, with her arm round her waist, was whispering consolation in her ear. She gave a quick side-glance at the instrument table as she passed, but the nurses turned her away from it.

"What ails her?" asked the novice.

"Cancer of the parotid. It's the devil of a case; extends right away back behind the carotids. There's hardly a man but Archer would dare to follow it. Ah, here he is himself!"

As he spoke, a small, brisk, iron-grey man came striding into the room, rubbing his hands together as he walked. He had a clean-shaven face, of the naval officer type, with large, bright eyes, and a firm, straight mouth. Behind him came his big house-surgeon, with his gleaming pince-nez, and a trail of dressers, who grouped themselves into the corners of the room.

"Gentlemen," cried the surgeon in a voice as hard and brisk as his manner, "we have here an interesting case of tumour of the parotid, originally cartilaginous but now assuming malignant characteristics, and therefore requiring excision. On to the table, nurse! Thank you! Chloroform, clerk! Thank you! You can take the shawl off, nurse."

The woman lay back upon the water-proofed pillow, and her murderous tumour lay revealed. In itself it was a pretty thing — ivory white, with a mesh of blue veins, and curving gently from jaw to chest. But the lean, yellow face and the stringy throat were in horrible contrast with the plumpness and sleekness of this monstrous growth. The surgeon placed a hand on each side of it and pressed it slowly backwards and forwards.

"Adherent at one place, gentlemen," he cried. "The growth involves the carotids and jugulars, and passes behind the ramus of the jaw, whither we must be prepared to follow it. It is impossible to say how deep our dissection may carry us. Carbolic tray. Thank you! Dressings of carbolic gauze, if you please! Push the chloroform, Mr. Johnson. Have the small saw ready in case it is necessary to remove the jaw."

The patient was moaning gently under the towel which had been placed over her face. She tried to raise her arms and to draw up her knees, but two dressers restrained her. The heavy air was full of the penetrating smells of carbolic acid and of chloroform. A muffled cry came from under the towel, and then a snatch of a song, sung in a high, quavering, monotonous voice:

"He says, says he,
If you fly with me

You'll be mistress of the ice-cream van.
You'll be mistress of the — —"

It mumbled off into a drone and stopped. The surgeon came across, still rubbing his hands, and spoke to an elderly man in front of the novice.

"Narrow squeak for the Government," he said.

"Oh, ten is enough."

"They won't have ten long. They'd do better to resign before they are driven to it."

"Oh, I should fight it out."

"What's the use. They can't get past the committee even if they got a vote in the House. I was talking to — —"

"Patient's ready, sir," said the dresser.

"Talking to McDonald — but I'll tell you about it presently." He walked back to the patient, who was breathing in long, heavy gasps. "I propose," said he, passing his hand over the tumour in an almost caressing fashion, "to make a free incision over the posterior border, and to take another forward at right angles to the lower end of it. Might I trouble you for a medium knife, Mr. Johnson?"

The novice, with eyes which were dilating with horror, saw the surgeon pick up the long, gleaming knife, dip it into a tin basin, and balance it in his fingers as an artist might his brush. Then he saw him pinch up the skin above the tumour with his left hand. At the sight his nerves, which had already been tried once or twice that day, gave way utterly. His head swain round, and he felt that in another instant he might faint. He dared not look at the patient. He dug his thumbs into his ears lest some scream should come to haunt him, and he fixed his eyes rigidly upon the wooden ledge in front of him. One glance, one cry, would, he knew, break down the shred of self-possession which he still retained. He tried to think of cricket, of green fields and rippling water, of his sisters at home — of anything rather than of what was going on so near him.

And yet somehow, even with his ears stopped up, sounds seemed to penetrate to him and to carry their own tale. He heard, or thought that he heard, the long hissing of the carbolic engine. Then he was conscious of some movement among the dressers. Were there groans, too, breaking in upon him, and some other sound, some fluid sound, which was more dreadfully suggestive still? His mind would keep building up every step of the operation, and fancy made it more ghastly than fact could have been. His nerves tingled and quivered. Minute by minute the giddiness grew more marked, the numb, sickly feeling at his heart more distressing. And then suddenly, with a groan, his head pitching forward, and his brow cracking sharply upon the narrow wooden shelf in front of him, he lay in a dead faint.

When he came to himself, he was lying in the empty theatre, with his collar and shirt undone. The third year’s man was dabbing a wet sponge over his face, and a couple of grinning dressers were looking on.

“All right,” cried the novice, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. “I’m sorry to have made an ass of myself.”

“Well, so I should think,” said his companion.

“What on earth did you faint about?”

“I couldn’t help it. It was that operation.”

“What operation?”

“Why, that cancer.”

There was a pause, and then the three students burst out laughing. “Why, you juggins!” cried the senior man, “there never was an operation at all! They found the patient didn’t stand the chloroform well, and so the whole thing was off. Archer has been giving us one of his racy lectures, and you fainted just in the middle of his favourite story.”

A STRAGGLER OF ‘15.

It was a dull October morning, and heavy, rolling fog-wreaths lay low over the wet grey roofs of the Woolwich houses. Down in the long, brick-lined streets all was sodden and greasy and cheerless. From the high dark buildings of the arsenal came the whirr of many wheels, the thudding of weights, and the buzz and babel of human toil. Beyond, the dwellings of the workingmen, smoke-stained and unlovely, radiated away in a lessening perspective of narrowing road and dwindling wall.

There were few folk in the streets, for the toilers had all been absorbed since break of day by the huge smoke-spouting monster, which sucked in the manhood of the town, to belch it forth weary and work-stained every night. Little groups of children straggled to school, or loitered to peep through the single, front windows at the big, gilt-edged Bibles, balanced upon small, three-legged tables, which were their usual adornment. Stout women, with thick, red arms and dirty aprons, stood upon the whitened doorsteps, leaning upon their brooms, and shrieking their morning greetings across the road. One stouter, redder, and dirtier than the rest, had gathered a small knot of cronies around her and was talking energetically, with little shrill titters from her audience to punctuate her remarks.

“Old enough to know better!” she cried, in answer to an exclamation from one of the listeners. “If he hain’t no sense now, I ‘specs he won’t learn much on this side o’ Jordan. Why, ‘ow old is he at all? Blessed if I could ever make out.”

“Well, it ain’t so hard to reckon,” said a sharp-featured pale-faced woman with watery blue eyes. “He’s been at the battle o’ Waterloo, and has the pension and medal to prove it.”

“That were a ter’ble long time agone,” remarked a third. “It were afore I were born.”

“It were fifteen year after the beginnin’ of the century,” cried a younger woman, who had stood leaning against the wall, with a smile of superior knowledge upon her face. “My Bill was a-saying so last Sabbath, when I spoke to him o’ old Daddy Brewster, here.”

“And suppose he spoke truth, Missus Simpson, ‘ow long agone do that make it?”

“It’s eighty-one now,” said the original speaker, checking off the years upon her coarse red fingers, “and that were fifteen. Ten and ten, and ten, and ten, and ten — why, it’s only sixty-and-six year, so he ain’t so old after all.”

“But he weren’t a newborn babe at the battle, silly!” cried the young woman with a chuckle. “S’pose he were only twenty, then he couldn’t be less than six-and-eighty now, at the lowest.”

“Aye, he’s that — every day of it,” cried several.

“I’ve had ‘bout enough of it,” remarked the large woman gloomily. “Unless his young niece, or grandniece, or whatever she is, come to-day, I’m off, and he can find some one else to do his work. Your own ‘ome first, says I.”

“Ain’t he quiet, then, Missus Simpson?” asked the youngest of the group.

“Listen to him now,” she answered, with her hand half raised and her head turned slantwise towards the open door. From the upper floor there came a shuffling, sliding sound with a sharp tapping of a stick. “There he go back and forrards, doing what he call his sentry go. ‘Arf the night through he’s at that game, the silly old juggins. At six o’clock this very mornin there he was beatin’ with a stick at my door. ‘Turn out, guard!’ he cried, and a lot more jargon that I could make nothing of. Then what with his coughin’ and ‘awkin’ and spittin’, there ain’t no gettin’ a wink o’ sleep. Hark to him now!”

“Missus Simpson, Missus Simpson!” cried a cracked and querulous voice from above.

“That’s him!” she cried, nodding her head with an air of triumph. “He do go on somethin’ scandalous. Yes, Mr. Brewster, sir.”

“I want my morning ration, Missus Simpson.”

“It’s just ready, Mr. Brewster, sir.”

“Blessed if he ain’t like a baby cryin’ for its pap,” said the young woman.

“I feel as if I could shake his old bones up sometimes!” cried Mrs. Simpson viciously. “But who’s for a ‘arf of fourpenny?”

The whole company were about to shuffle off to the public house, when a young girl stepped across the road and touched the housekeeper timidly upon the arm. “I think that is No. 56 Arsenal View,” she said. “Can you tell me if Mr. Brewster lives here?”

The housekeeper looked critically at the newcomer. She was a girl of about twenty, broad-faced and comely, with a turned-up nose and large, honest grey eyes. Her print dress, her straw hat, with its bunch of glaring poppies, and the bundle she carried, had all a smack of the country.

"You're Norah Brewster, I s'pose," said Mrs. Simpson, eyeing her up and down with no friendly gaze.

"Yes, I've come to look after my Granduncle Gregory."

"And a good job too," cried the housekeeper, with a toss of her head. "It's about time that some of his own folk took a turn at it, for I've had enough of it. There you are, young woman! In you go and make yourself at home. There's tea in the caddy and bacon on the dresser, and the old man will be about you if you don't fetch him his breakfast. I'll send for my things in the evenin'." With a nod she strolled off with her attendant gossips in the direction of the public house.

Thus left to her own devices, the country girl walked into the front room and took off her hat and jacket. It was a low-roofed apartment with a sputtering fire upon which a small brass kettle was singing cheerily. A stained cloth lay over half the table, with an empty brown teapot, a loaf of bread, and some coarse crockery. Norah Brewster looked rapidly about her, and in an instant took over her new duties. Ere five minutes had passed the tea was made, two slices of bacon were frizzling on the pan, the table was rearranged, the antimacassars straightened over the sombre brown furniture, and the whole room had taken a new air of comfort and neatness. This done she looked round curiously at the prints upon the walls. Over the fireplace, in a small, square case, a brown medal caught her eye, hanging from a strip of purple ribbon. Beneath was a slip of newspaper cutting. She stood on her tiptoes, with her fingers on the edge of the mantelpiece, and craned her neck up to see it, glancing down from time to time at the bacon which simmered and hissed beneath her. The cutting was yellow with age, and ran in this way:

"On Tuesday an interesting ceremony was performed at the barracks of the Third Regiment of Guards, when, in the presence of the Prince Regent, Lord Hill, Lord Saltoun, and an assemblage which comprised beauty as well as valour, a special medal was presented to Corporal Gregory Brewster, of Captain Haldane's flank company, in recognition of his gallantry in the recent great battle in the Lowlands. It appears that on the ever-memorable 18th of June four companies of the Third Guards and of the Coldstreams, under the command of Colonels Maitland and Byng, held the important farmhouse of Hougoumont at the right of the British position.

At a critical point of the action these troops found themselves short of powder. Seeing that Generals Foy and Jerome Buonaparte were again massing their infantry for an attack on the position, Colonel Byng dispatched Corporal Brewster to the rear to hasten up the reserve ammunition. Brewster came upon two powder tumbrils of the Nassau division, and succeeded, after menacing the drivers with his musket, in inducing them to convey their powder to Hougoumont. In his absence, however, the hedges surrounding the position had been set on fire by a howitzer battery of the French, and the passage of the carts full of powder became a most hazardous matter. The first tumbril exploded, blowing the driver to fragments. Daunted by the fate of his comrade, the second driver turned his horses, but Corporal Brewster, springing upon his seat, hurled the man down, and urging the powder cart through the flames, succeeded in forcing his way to his companions. To this gallant deed may be directly attributed the success of the British arms, for without powder it would have been impossible to have held Hougoumont, and the Duke of Wellington had repeatedly declared that had Hougoumont fallen, as well as La Haye Sainte, he would have found it impossible to have held his ground. Long may the heroic Brewster live to treasure the medal which he has so bravely won, and to look back with pride to the day when, in the presence of his comrades, he received this tribute to his valour from the august hands of the first gentleman of the realm."

The reading of this old cutting increased in the girl’s mind the veneration which she had always had for her warrior kinsman. From her infancy he had been her hero, and she remembered how her father used to speak of his courage and his strength, how he could strike down a bullock with a blow of his fist and carry a fat sheep under either arm. True, she had never seen him, but a rude painting at home which depicted a square-faced, clean shaven, stalwart man with a great bearskin cap, rose ever before her memory when she thought of him.

She was still gazing at the brown medal and wondering what the “Dulce et decorum est” might mean, which was inscribed upon the edge, when there came a sudden tapping and shuffling upon the stair, and there at the door was standing the very man who had been so often in her thoughts.

But could this indeed be he? Where was the martial air, the flashing eye, the warrior face which she had pictured? There, framed in the doorway, was a huge twisted old man, gaunt and puckered, with twitching hands and shuffling, purposeless feet. A cloud of fluffy white hair, a red-veined nose, two thick tufts of eyebrow and a pair of dimly questioning, watery blue eyes — these were what met her gaze. He leaned forward upon a stick, while his shoulders rose and fell with his crackling, rasping breathing.

"I want my morning rations," he crooned, as he stumped forward to his chair. "The cold nips me without 'em. See to my fingers!" He held out his distorted hands, all blue at the tips, wrinkled and gnarled, with huge, projecting knuckles.

"It's nigh ready," answered the girl, gazing at him with wonder in her eyes. "Don't you know who I am, granduncle? I am Norah Brewster from Witham."

"Rum is warm," mumbled the old man, rocking to and fro in his chair, "and schnapps is warm, and there's 'eat in soup, but it's a dish o' tea for me. What did you say your name was?"

"Norah Brewster."

"You can speak out, lass. Seems to me folk's voices isn't as loud as they used."

"I'm Norah Brewster, uncle. I'm your grandniece come down from Essex way to live with you."

"You'll be brother Jarge's girl! Lor, to think o' little Jarge having a girl!" He chuckled hoarsely to himself, and the long, stringy sinews of his throat jerked and quivered.

"I am the daughter of your brother George's son," said she, as she turned the bacon.

"Lor, but little Jarge was a rare un!" he continued. "Eh, by Jimini, there was no chousing Jarge. He's got a bull pup o' mine that I gave him when I took the bounty. You've heard him speak of it, likely?"

"Why, grandpa George has been dead this twenty year," said she, pouring out the tea.

"Well, it was a bootiful pup — aye, a well-bred un, by Jimini! I'm cold for lack o' my rations. Rum is good, and so is schnapps, but I'd as lief have tea as either."

He breathed heavily while he devoured his food. "It's a middlin' goodish way you've come," said he at last. "Likely the stage left yesternight."

"The what, uncle?"

"The coach that brought you."

"Nay, I came by the mornin' train."

"Lor, now, think o' that! You ain't afeard o' those newfangled things! By Jimini, to think of you comin' by railroad like that! What's the world a-comin' to!"

There was silence for some minutes while Norah sat stirring her tea and glancing sideways at the bluish lips and champing jaws of her companion.

"You must have seen a deal o' life, uncle," said she. "It must seem a long, long time to you!"

"Not so very long neither. I'm ninety, come Candlemas; but it don't seem long since I took the bounty. And that battle, it might have been yesterday. Eh, but I get a power o' good from my rations!" He did indeed look less worn and colourless than when she first saw him. His face was flushed and his back more erect.

"Have you read that?" he asked, jerking his head towards the cutting.

"Yes, uncle, and I'm sure you must be proud of it."

"Ah, it was a great day for me! A great day! The Regent was there, and a fine body of a man too! 'The ridgment is proud of you,' says he. 'And I'm proud of the ridgment,' say I. 'A damned good answer too!' says he to Lord Hill, and they both bu'st out a-laughin'. But what be you a-peepin' out o' the window for?"

"Oh, uncle, here's a regiment of soldiers coming down the street with the band playing in front of them."

"A ridgment, eh? Where be my glasses? Lor, but I can hear the band, as plain as plain! Here's the pioneers an' the drum-major! What be their number, lass?" His eyes were shining and his bony yellow fingers, like the claws of some fierce old bird, dug into her shoulder.

"They don't seem to have no number, uncle. They've something wrote on their shoulders. Oxfordshire, I think it be."

"Ah, yes!" he growled. "I heard as they'd dropped the numbers and given them newfangled names. There they go, by Jimini! They're young mostly, but they hain't forgot how to march. They have the swing-aye, I'll say that for them. They've got the swing." He gazed after them until the last files had turned the corner and the measured tramp of their marching had died away in the distance.

He had just regained his chair when the door opened and a gentleman stepped in.

"Ah, Mr. Brewster! Better to-day?" he asked.

“Come in, doctor! Yes, I’m better. But there’s a deal o’ bubbling in my chest. It’s all them toobes. If I could but cut the phlegm, I’d be right. Can’t you give me something to cut the phlegm?”

The doctor, a grave-faced young man, put his fingers to the furrowed, blue-corded wrist.

“You must be careful,” he said. “You must take no liberties.” The thin tide of life seemed to thrill rather than to throb under his finger.

The old man chuckled.

“I’ve got brother Jarge’s girl to look after me now. She’ll see I don’t break barracks or do what I hadn’t ought to. Why, darn my skin, I knew something was amiss!

“With what?”

“Why, with them soldiers. You saw them pass, doctor — eh? They’d forgot their stocks. Not one on ‘em had his stock on.” He croaked and chuckled for a long time over his discovery. “It wouldn’t ha’ done for the Dook!” he muttered. “No, by Jimini! the Dook would ha’ had a word there.”

The doctor smiled. “Well, you are doing very well,” said he. “I’ll look in once a week or so, and see how you are.” As Norah followed him to the door, he beckoned her outside.

“He is very weak,” he whispered. “If you find him failing you must send for me.”

“What ails him, doctor?”

“Ninety years ails him. His arteries are pipes of lime. His heart is shrunken and flabby. The man is worn out.”

Norah stood watching the brisk figure of the young doctor, and pondering over these new responsibilities which had come upon her. When she turned a tall, brown-faced artilleryman, with the three gold chevrons of sergeant upon his arm, was standing, carbine in hand, at her elbow.

“Good-morning, miss,” said he, raising one thick finger to his jaunty, yellow-banded cap. “I b’lieve there’s an old gentleman lives here of the name of Brewster, who was engaged in the battle o’ Waterloo?”

“It’s my granduncle, sir,” said Norah, casting down her eyes before the keen, critical gaze of the young soldier. “He is in the front parlour.”

“Could I have a word with him, miss? I’ll call again if it don’t chance to be convenient.”

“I am sure that he would be very glad to see you, sir. He’s in here, if you’ll step in. Uncle, here’s a gentleman who wants to speak with you.”

“Proud to see you, sir — proud and glad, sir,” cried the sergeant, taking three steps forward into the room, and grounding his carbine while he raised his hand, palm forwards, in a salute. Norah stood by the door, with her mouth and eyes open, wondering if her granduncle had ever, in his prime, looked like this magnificent creature, and whether he, in his turn, would ever come to resemble her granduncle.

The old man blinked up at his visitor, and shook his head slowly. “Sit ye down, sergeant,” said he, pointing with his stick to a chair. “You’re full young for the stripes. Lordy, it’s easier to get three now than one in my day. Gunners were old soldiers then and the grey hairs came quicker than the three stripes.”

“I am eight years’ service, sir,” cried the sergeant. “Macdonald is my name — Sergeant Macdonald, of H Battery, Southern Artillery Division. I have called as the spokesman of my mates at the gunner’s barracks to say that we are proud to have you in the town, sir.”

Old Brewster chuckled and rubbed his bony hands. “That were what the Regent said,” he cried. “‘The ridgment is proud of ye,’ says he. ‘And I am proud of the ridgment,’ says I. ‘And a damned good answer too,’ says he, and he and Lord Hill bu’st out a-laughin’.”

“The non-commissioned mess would be proud and honoured to see you, sir,” said Sergeant Macdonald; “and if you could step as far you’ll always find a pipe o’ baccy and a glass o’ grog a-waitin’ you.”

The old man laughed until he coughed. “Like to see me, would they? The dogs!” said he. “Well, well, when the warm weather comes again I’ll maybe drop in. Too grand for a canteen, eh? Got your mess just the same as the orficers. What’s the world a-comin’ to at all!”

“You was in the line, sir, was you not?” asked the sergeant respectfully.

“The line?” cried the old man, with shrill scorn. “Never wore a shako in my life. I am a guardsman, I am. Served in the Third Guards — the same they call now the Scots Guards. Lordy, but they have all marched away — every man of them — from old Colonel Byng down to the drummer boys, and here am I a straggler — that’s what I am, sergeant, a straggler! I’m here when I ought to be there. But it ain’t my fault neither, for I’m ready to fall in when the word comes.”

"We've all got to muster there," answered the sergeant. "Won't you try my baccy, sir?" handing over a sealskin pouch.

Old Brewster drew a blackened clay pipe from his pocket, and began to stuff the tobacco into the bowl. In an instant it slipped through his fingers, and was broken to pieces on the floor. His lip quivered, his nose puckered up, and he began crying with the long, helpless sobs of a child. "I've broke my pipe," he cried.

"Don't, uncle; oh, don't!" cried Norah, bending over him, and patting his white head as one soothes a baby. "It don't matter. We can easy get another."

"Don't you fret yourself, sir," said the sergeant. "'Ere's a wooden pipe with an amber mouth, if you'll do me the honour to accept it from me. I'd be real glad if you will take it."

"Jimini!" cried he, his smiles breaking in an instant through his tears. "It's a fine pipe. See to my new pipe, Norah. I lay that Jarge never had a pipe like that. You've got your firelock there, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. I was on my way back from the butts when I looked in."

"Let me have the feel of it. Lordy, but it seems like old times to have one's hand on a musket. What's the manual, sergeant, eh? Cock your firelock — look to your priming — present your firelock — eh, sergeant? Oh, Jimini, I've broke your musket in halves!"

"That's all right, sir," cried the gunner laughing. "You pressed on the lever and opened the breech-piece. That's where we load 'em, you know."

"Load 'em at the wrong end! Well, well, to think o' that! And no ramrod neither! I've heard tell of it, but I never believed it afore. Ah! it won't come up to brown Bess. When there's work to be done, you mark my word and see if they don't come back to brown Bess."

"By the Lord, sir!" cried the sergeant hotly, "they need some change out in South Africa now. I see by this mornin's paper that the Government has knuckled under to these Boers. They're hot about it at the non-com. mess, I can tell you, sir."

"Eh — eh," croaked old Brewster. "By Jimini! it wouldn't ha' done for the Dook; the Dook would ha' had a word to say over that."

"Ah, that he would, sir!" cried the sergeant; "and God send us another like him. But I've wearied you enough for one sitting. I'll look in again, and I'll bring a comrade or two with me, if I may, for there isn't one but would be proud to have speech with you."

So, with another salute to the veteran and a gleam of white teeth at Norah, the big gunner withdrew, leaving a memory of blue cloth and of gold braid behind him. Many days had not passed, however, before he was back again, and during all the long winter he was a frequent visitor at Arsenal View. There came a time, at last, when it might be doubted to which of the two occupants his visits were directed, nor was it hard to say by which he was most anxiously awaited. He brought others with him; and soon, through all the lines, a pilgrimage to Daddy Brewster's came to be looked upon as the proper thing to do. Gunners and sappers, linesmen and dragoons, came bowing and bobbing into the little parlour, with clatter of side arms and clink of spurs, stretching their long legs across the patchwork rug, and hunting in the front of their tunics for the screw of tobacco or paper of snuff which they had brought as a sign of their esteem.

It was a deadly cold winter, with six weeks on end of snow on the ground, and Norah had a hard task to keep the life in that time-worn body. There were times when his mind would leave him, and when, save an animal outcry when the hour of his meals came round, no word would fall from him. He was a white-haired child, with all a child's troubles and emotions. As the warm weather came once more, however, and the green buds peeped forth again upon the trees, the blood thawed in his veins, and he would even drag himself as far as the door to bask in the life-giving sunshine.

"It do hearten me up so," he said one morning, as he glowed in the hot May sun. "It's a job to keep back the flies, though. They get owdacious in this weather, and they do plague me cruel."

"I'll keep them off you, uncle," said Norah.

"Eh, but it's fine! This sunshine makes me think o' the glory to come. You might read me a bit o' the Bible, lass. I find it wonderful soothing."

"What part would you like, uncle?"

"Oh, them wars."

"The wars?"

"Aye, keep to the wars! Give me the Old Testament for choice. There's more taste to it, to my mind. When parson comes he wants to get off to something else; but it's Joshua or nothing with me. Them Israelites was good soldiers — good growed soldiers, all of 'em."

"But, uncle," pleaded Norah, "it's all peace in the next world."

"No, it ain't, gal."

"Oh, yes, uncle, surely!"

The old corporal knocked his stick irritably upon the ground. "I tell ye it ain't, gal. I asked parson."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said there was to be a last fight. He even gave it a name, he did. The battle of Arm — Arm — —"

"Armageddon."

"Aye, that's the name parson said. I 'specs the Third Guards'll be there. And the Dook — the Dook'll have a word to say."

An elderly, grey-whiskered gentleman had been walking down the street, glancing up at the numbers of the houses. Now as his eyes fell upon the old man, he came straight for him.

"Hullo!" said he; "perhaps you are Gregory Brewster?"

"My name, sir," answered the veteran.

"You are the same Brewster, as I understand, who is on the roll of the Scots Guards as having been present at the battle of Waterloo?"

"I am that man, sir, though we called it the Third Guards in those days. It was a fine ridgment, and they only need me to make up a full muster."

"Tut, tut! they'll have to wait years for that," said the gentleman heartily. "But I am the colonel of the Scots Guards, and I thought I would like to have a word with you."

Old Gregory Brewster was up in an instant, with his hand to his rabbit-skin cap. "God bless me!" he cried, "to think of it! to think of it!"

"Hadn't the gentleman better come in?" suggested the practical Norah from behind the door.

"Surely, sir, surely; walk in, sir, if I may be so bold." In his excitement he had forgotten his stick, and as he led the way into the parlour his knees tottered, and he threw out his hands. In an instant the colonel had caught him on one side and Norah on the other.

"Easy and steady," said the colonel, as he led him to his armchair.

"Thank ye, sir; I was near gone that time. But, Lordy I why, I can scarce believe it. To think of me the corporal of the flank company and you the colonel of the battalion! How things come round, to be sure!"

"Why, we are very proud of you in London," said the colonel. "And so you are actually one of the men who held Hougoumont." He looked at the bony, trembling hands, with their huge, knotted knuckles, the stringy throat, and the heaving, rounded shoulders. Could this, indeed, be the last of that band of heroes? Then he glanced at the half-filled phials, the blue liniment bottles, the long-spouted kettle, and the sordid details of the sick room. “Better, surely, had he died under the blazing rafters of the Belgian farmhouse,” thought the colonel.

“I hope that you are pretty comfortable and happy,” he remarked after a pause.

“Thank ye, sir. I have a good deal o’ trouble with my toobes — a deal o’ trouble. You wouldn’t think the job it is to cut the phlegm. And I need my rations. I gets cold without ‘em. And the flies! I ain’t strong enough to fight against them.”

“How’s the memory?” asked the colonel.

“Oh, there ain’t nothing amiss there. Why, sir, I could give you the name of every man in Captain Haldane’s flank company.”

“And the battle — you remember it?”

“Why, I sees it all afore me every time I shuts my eyes. Lordy, sir, you wouldn’t hardly believe how clear it is to me. There’s our line from the paregoric bottle right along to the snuff box. D’ye see? Well, then, the pill box is for Hougoumont on the right — where we was — and Norah’s thimble for La Haye Sainte. There it is, all right, sir; and here were our guns, and here behind the reserves and the Belgians. Ach, them Belgians!” He spat furiously into the fire. “Then here’s the French, where my pipe lies; and over here, where I put my baccy pouch, was the Proosians a-comin’ up on our left flank. Jimini, but it was a glad sight to see the smoke of their guns!”

“And what was it that struck you most now in connection with the whole affair?” asked the colonel.

“I lost three half-crowns over it, I did,” crooned old Brewster. “I shouldn’t wonder if I was never to get that money now. I lent ‘em to Jabez Smith, my rear rank man, in Brussels. ‘Only till pay-day, Grig,’ says he. By Gosh! he was stuck by a lancer at Quatre Bras, and me with not so much as a slip o’ paper to prove the debt! Them three half-crowns is as good as lost to me.”

The colonel rose from his chair laughing. “The officers of the Guards want you to buy yourself some little trifle which may add to your comfort,” he said. “It is not from me, so you need not thank me.” He took up the old man’s tobacco pouch and slipped a crisp banknote inside it.

“Thank ye kindly, sir. But there’s one favour that I would like to ask you, colonel.”

“Yes, my man.”

“If I’m called, colonel, you won’t grudge me a flag and a firing party? I’m not a civilian; I’m a guardsman — I’m the last of the old Third Guards.”

“All right, my man, I’ll see to it,” said the colonel. “Good-bye; I hope to have nothing but good news from you.”

“A kind gentleman, Norah,” croaked old Brewster, as they saw him walk past the window; “but, Lordy, he ain’t fit to hold the stirrup o’ my Colonel Byng!”

It was on the very next day that the old corporal took a sudden change for the worse. Even the golden sunlight streaming through the window seemed unable to warm that withered frame. The doctor came and shook his head in silence. All day the man lay with only his puffing blue lips and the twitching of his scraggy neck to show that he still held the breath of life. Norah and Sergeant Macdonald had sat by him in the afternoon, but he had shown no consciousness of their presence. He lay peacefully, his eyes half closed, his hands under his cheek, as one who is very weary.

They had left him for an instant and were sitting in the front room, where Norah was preparing tea, when of a sudden they heard a shout that rang through the house. Loud and clear and swelling, it pealed in their ears — a voice full of strength and energy and fiery passion. “The Guards need powder!” it cried; and yet again, “The Guards need powder!”

The sergeant sprang from his chair and rushed in, followed by the trembling Norah. There was the old man standing up, his blue eyes sparkling, his white hair bristling, his whole figure towering and expanding, with eagle head and glance of fire. “The Guards need powder!” he thundered once again, “and, by God, they shall have it!” He threw up his long arms, and sank back with a groan into his chair. The sergeant stooped over him, and his face darkened.

“Oh, Archie, Archie,” sobbed the frightened girl, “what do you think of him?”

The sergeant turned away. “I think,” said he, “that the Third Guards have a full muster now.”

THE THIRD GENERATION.

Scudamore Lane, sloping down riverwards from just behind the Monument, lies at night in the shadow of two black and monstrous walls which loom high above the glimmer of the scattered gas lamps. The footpaths are narrow, and the causeway is paved with rounded cobblestones, so that the endless drays roar along it like breaking waves. A few old-fashioned houses lie scattered among the business premises, and in one of these, half-way down on the left-hand side, Dr. Horace Selby conducts his large practice. It is a singular street for so big a man; but a specialist who has an European reputation can afford to live where he likes. In his particular branch, too, patients do not always regard seclusion as a disadvantage.

It was only ten o'clock. The dull roar of the traffic which converged all day upon London Bridge had died away now to a mere confused murmur. It was raining heavily, and the gas shone dimly through the streaked and dripping glass, throwing little circles upon the glistening cobblestones. The air was full of the sounds of the rain, the thin swish of its fall, the heavier drip from the eaves, and the swirl and gurgle down the two steep gutters and through the sewer grating. There was only one figure in the whole length of Scudamore Lane. It was that of a man, and it stood outside the door of Dr. Horace Selby.

He had just rung and was waiting for an answer. The fanlight beat full upon the gleaming shoulders of his waterproof and upon his upturned features. It was a wan, sensitive, clear-cut face, with some subtle, nameless peculiarity in its expression, something of the startled horse in the white-rimmed eye, something too of the helpless child in the drawn cheek and the weakening of the lower lip. The man-servant knew the stranger as a patient at a bare glance at those frightened eyes. Such a look had been seen at that door many times before.

"Is the doctor in?"

The man hesitated.

"He has had a few friends to dinner, sir. He does not like to be disturbed outside his usual hours, sir."

"Tell him that I MUST see him. Tell him that it is of the very first importance. Here is my card." He fumbled with his trembling fingers in trying to draw one from his case. “Sir Francis Norton is the name. Tell him that Sir Francis Norton, of Deane Park, must see him without delay.”

“Yes, sir.” The butler closed his fingers upon the card and the half-sovereign which accompanied it. “Better hang your coat up here in the hall. It is very wet. Now if you will wait here in the consulting-room, I have no doubt that I shall be able to send the doctor in to you.”

It was a large and lofty room in which the young baronet found himself. The carpet was so soft and thick that his feet made no sound as he walked across it. The two gas jets were turned only half-way up, and the dim light with the faint aromatic smell which filled the air had a vaguely religious suggestion. He sat down in a shining leather armchair by the smouldering fire and looked gloomily about him. Two sides of the room were taken up with books, fat and sombre, with broad gold lettering upon their backs. Beside him was the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece of white marble — the top of it strewed with cotton wadding and bandages, graduated measures, and little bottles. There was one with a broad neck just above him containing bluestone, and another narrower one with what looked like the ruins of a broken pipestem and “Caustic” outside upon a red label. Thermometers, hypodermic syringes bistouries and spatulas were scattered about both on the mantelpiece and on the central table on either side of the sloping desk. On the same table, to the right, stood copies of the five books which Dr. Horace Selby had written upon the subject with which his name is peculiarly associated, while on the left, on the top of a red medical directory, lay a huge glass model of a human eye the size of a turnip, which opened down the centre to expose the lens and double chamber within.

Sir Francis Norton had never been remarkable for his powers of observation, and yet he found himself watching these trifles with the keenest attention. Even the corrosion of the cork of an acid bottle caught his eye, and he wondered that the doctor did not use glass stoppers. Tiny scratches where the light glinted off from the table, little stains upon the leather of the desk, chemical formulae scribbled upon the labels of the phials — nothing was too slight to arrest his attention. And his sense of hearing was equally alert. The heavy ticking of the solemn black clock above the mantelpiece struck quite painfully upon his ears. Yet in spite of it, and in spite also of the thick, old-fashioned wooden partition, he could hear voices of men talking in the next room, and could even catch scraps of their conversation. “Second hand was bound to take it.” “Why, you drew the last of them yourself!”

“How could I play the queen when I knew that the ace was against me?” The phrases came in little spurts falling back into the dull murmur of conversation. And then suddenly he heard the creaking of a door and a step in the hall, and knew with a tingling mixture of impatience and horror that the crisis of his life was at hand.

Dr. Horace Selby was a large, portly man with an imposing presence. His nose and chin were bold and pronounced, yet his features were puffy, a combination which would blend more freely with the wig and cravat of the early Georges than with the close-cropped hair and black frock-coat of the end of the nineteenth century. He was clean shaven, for his mouth was too good to cover — large, flexible, and sensitive, with a kindly human softening at either corner which with his brown sympathetic eyes had drawn out many a shame-struck sinner’s secret. Two masterful little bushy side-whiskers bristled out from under his ears spindling away upwards to merge in the thick curves of his brindled hair. To his patients there was something reassuring in the mere bulk and dignity of the man. A high and easy bearing in medicine as in war bears with it a hint of victories in the past, and a promise of others to come. Dr. Horace Selby’s face was a consolation, and so too were the large, white, soothing hands, one of which he held out to his visitor.

“I am sorry to have kept you waiting. It is a conflict of duties, you perceive — a host’s to his guests and an adviser’s to his patient. But now I am entirely at your disposal, Sir Francis. But dear me, you are very cold.”

“Yes, I am cold.”

“And you are trembling all over. Tut, tut, this will never do! This miserable night has chilled you. Perhaps some little stimulant — —”

“No, thank you. I would really rather not. And it is not the night which has chilled me. I am frightened, doctor.”

The doctor half-turned in his chair, and he patted the arch of the young man’s knee, as he might the neck of a restless horse.

“What then?” he asked, looking over his shoulder at the pale face with the startled eyes.

Twice the young man parted his lips. Then he stooped with a sudden gesture, and turning up the right leg of his trousers he pulled down his sock and thrust forward his shin. The doctor made a clicking noise with his tongue as he glanced at it.

"Both legs?"

"No, only one."

"Suddenly?"

"This morning."

"Hum."

The doctor pouted his lips, and drew his finger and thumb down the line of his chin. "Can you account for it?" he asked briskly.

"No."

A trace of sternness came into the large brown eyes.

"I need not point out to you that unless the most absolute frankness — —"

The patient sprang from his chair. "So help me God!" he cried, "I have nothing in my life with which to reproach myself. Do you think that I would be such a fool as to come here and tell you lies. Once for all, I have nothing to regret." He was a pitiful, half-tragic and half-grotesque figure, as he stood with one trouser leg rolled to the knee, and that ever present horror still lurking in his eyes. A burst of merriment came from the card-players in the next room, and the two looked at each other in silence.

"Sit down," said the doctor abruptly, "your assurance is quite sufficient." He stooped and ran his finger down the line of the young man's shin, raising it at one point. "Hum, serpiginous," he murmured, shaking his head. "Any other symptoms?"

"My eyes have been a little weak."

"Let me see your teeth." He glanced at them, and again made the gentle, clicking sound of sympathy and disapprobation.

"Now your eye." He lit a lamp at the patient's elbow, and holding a small crystal lens to concentrate the light, he threw it obliquely upon the patient's eye. As he did so a glow of pleasure came over his large expressive face, a flush of such enthusiasm as the botanist feels when he packs the rare plant into his tin knapsack, or the astronomer when the long-sought comet first swims into the field of his telescope.

"This is very typical — very typical indeed," he murmured, turning to his desk and jotting down a few memoranda upon a sheet of paper. "Curiously enough, I am writing a monograph upon the subject. It is singular that you should have been able to furnish so well-marked a case." He had so forgotten the patient in his symptom, that he had assumed an almost congratulatory air towards its possessor. He reverted to human sympathy again, as his patient asked for particulars.

“My dear sir, there is no occasion for us to go into strictly professional details together,” said he soothingly. “If, for example, I were to say that you have interstitial keratitis, how would you be the wiser? There are indications of a strumous diathesis. In broad terms, I may say that you have a constitutional and hereditary taint.”

The young baronet sank back in his chair, and his chin fell forwards upon his chest. The doctor sprang to a side-table and poured out half a glass of liqueur brandy which he held to his patient’s lips. A little fleck of colour came into his cheeks as he drank it down.

“Perhaps I spoke a little abruptly,” said the doctor, “but you must have known the nature of your complaint. Why, otherwise, should you have come to me?”

“God help me, I suspected it; but only today when my leg grew bad. My father had a leg like this.”

“It was from him, then —— ?”

“No, from my grandfather. You have heard of Sir Rupert Norton, the great Corinthian?”

The doctor was a man of wide reading with a retentive, memory. The name brought back instantly to him the remembrance of the sinister reputation of its owner — a notorious buck of the thirties — who had gambled and duelled and steeped himself in drink and debauchery, until even the vile set with whom he consorted had shrunk away from him in horror, and left him to a sinister old age with the barmaid wife whom he had married in some drunken frolic. As he looked at the young man still leaning back in the leather chair, there seemed for the instant to flicker up behind him some vague presentiment of that foul old dandy with his dangling seals, many-wreathed scarf, and dark satyric face. What was he now? An armful of bones in a mouldy box. But his deeds — they were living and rotting the blood in the veins of an innocent man.

“I see that you have heard of him,” said the young baronet. “He died horribly, I have been told; but not more horribly than he had lived. My father was his only son. He was a studious man, fond of books and canaries and the country; but his innocent life did not save him.”

“His symptoms were cutaneous, I understand.”

"He wore gloves in the house. That was the first thing I can remember. And then it was his throat. And then his legs. He used to ask me so often about my own health, and I thought him so fussy, for how could I tell what the meaning of it was. He was always watching me — always with a sidelong eye fixed upon me. Now, at last, I know what he was watching for."

"Had you brothers or sisters?"

"None, thank God."

"Well, well, it is a sad case, and very typical of many which come in my way. You are no lonely sufferer, Sir Francis. There are many thousands who bear the same cross as you do."

"But where is the justice of it, doctor?" cried the young man, springing from his chair and pacing up and down the consulting-room. "If I were heir to my grandfather's sins as well as to their results, I could understand it, but I am of my father's type. I love all that is gentle and beautiful — music and poetry and art. The coarse and animal is abhorrent to me. Ask any of my friends and they would tell you that. And now that this vile, loathsome thing — ach, I am polluted to the marrow, soaked in abomination! And why? Haven't I a right to ask why? Did I do it? Was it my fault? Could I help being born? And look at me now, blighted and blasted, just as life was at its sweetest. Talk about the sins of the father — how about the sins of the Creator?" He shook his two clinched hands in the air — the poor impotent atom with his pin-point of brain caught in the whirl of the infinite.

The doctor rose and placing his hands upon his shoulders he pressed him back into his chair once more. "There, there, my dear lad," said he; "you must not excite yourself. You are trembling all over. Your nerves cannot stand it. We must take these great questions upon trust. What are we, after all? Half-evolved creatures in a transition stage, nearer perhaps to the Medusa on the one side than to perfected humanity on the other. With half a complete brain we can't expect to understand the whole of a complete fact, can we, now? It is all very dim and dark, no doubt; but I think that Pope's famous couplet sums up the whole matter, and from my heart, after fifty years of varied experience, I can say — —"

But the young baronet gave a cry of impatience and disgust. "Words, words, words! You can sit comfortably there in your chair and say them — and think them too, no doubt. You've had your life, but I've never had mine. You've healthy blood in your veins; mine is putrid. And yet I am as innocent as you. What would words do for you if you were in this chair and I in that? Ah, it's such a mockery and a make-believe! Don't think me rude, though, doctor. I don't mean to be that. I only say that it is impossible for you or any other man to realise it. But I've a question to ask you, doctor. It's one on which my whole life must depend." He writhed his fingers together in an agony of apprehension.

"Speak out, my dear sir. I have every sympathy with you."

"Do you think — do you think the poison has spent itself on me? Do you think that if I had children they would suffer?"

"I can only give one answer to that. 'The third and fourth generation,' says the trite old text. You may in time eliminate it from your system, but many years must pass before you can think of marriage."

"I am to be married on Tuesday," whispered the patient.

It was the doctor's turn to be thrilled with horror. There were not many situations which would yield such a sensation to his seasoned nerves. He sat in silence while the babble of the card-table broke in upon them again. "We had a double ruff if you had returned a heart." "I was bound to clear the trumps." They were hot and angry about it.

"How could you?" cried the doctor severely. "It was criminal."

"You forget that I have only learned how I stand to-day." He put his two hands to his temples and pressed them convulsively. "You are a man of the world, Dr. Selby. You have seen or heard of such things before. Give me some advice. I'm in your hands. It is all very sudden and horrible, and I don't think I am strong enough to bear it."

The doctor's heavy brows thickened into two straight lines, and he bit his nails in perplexity.

"The marriage must not take place."

"Then what am I to do?"

"At all costs it must not take place."

"And I must give her up?"

"There can be no question about that."

The young man took out a pocketbook and drew from it a small photograph, holding it out towards the doctor. The firm face softened as he looked at it.

"It is very hard on you, no doubt. I can appreciate it more now that I have seen that. But there is no alternative at all. You must give up all thought of it."

"But this is madness, doctor — madness, I tell you. No, I won't raise my voice. I forgot myself. But realise it, man. I am to be married on Tuesday. This coming Tuesday, you understand. And all the world knows it. How can I put such a public affront upon her. It would be monstrous."

"None the less it must be done. My dear lad, there is no way out of it."

"You would have me simply write brutally and break the engagement at the last moment without a reason. I tell you I couldn't do it."

"I had a patient once who found himself in a somewhat similar situation some years ago," said the doctor thoughtfully. "His device was a singular one. He deliberately committed a penal offence, and so compelled the young lady's people to withdraw their consent to the marriage."

The young baronet shook his head. "My personal honour is as yet unstained," said he. "I have little else left, but that, at least, I will preserve."

"Well, well, it is a nice dilemma, and the choice lies with you."

"Have you no other suggestion?"

"You don't happen to have property in Australia?"

"None."

"But you have capital?"

"Yes."

"Then you could buy some. To-morrow morning would do. A thousand mining shares would be enough. Then you might write to say that urgent business affairs have compelled you to start at an hour's notice to inspect your property. That would give you six months, at any rate."

"Well, that would be possible. Yes, certainly, it would be possible. But think of her position. The house full of wedding presents — guests coming from a distance. It is awful. And you say that there is no alternative."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then, I might write it now, and start to-morrow — eh? Perhaps you would let me use your desk. Thank you. I am so sorry to keep you from your guests so long. But I won't be a moment now."

He wrote an abrupt note of a few lines. Then with a sudden impulse he tore it to shreds and flung it into the fireplace.

"No, I can't sit down and tell her a lie, doctor," he said rising. "We must find some other way out of this. I will think it over and let you know my decision. You must allow me to double your fee as I have taken such an unconscionable time. Now good-bye, and thank you a thousand times for your sympathy and advice."

“Why, dear me, you haven’t even got your prescription yet. This is the mixture, and I should recommend one of these powders every morning, and the chemist will put all directions upon the ointment box. You are placed in a cruel situation, but I trust that these may be but passing clouds. When may I hope to hear from you again?”

“To-morrow morning.”

“Very good. How the rain is splashing in the street! You have your waterproof there. You will need it. Good-bye, then, until to-morrow.”

He opened the door. A gust of cold, damp air swept into the hall. And yet the doctor stood for a minute or more watching the lonely figure which passed slowly through the yellow splotches of the gas lamps, and into the broad bars of darkness between. It was but his own shadow which trailed up the wall as he passed the lights, and yet it looked to the doctor’s eye as though some huge and sombre figure walked by a manikin’s side and led him silently up the lonely street.

Dr. Horace Selby heard again of his patient next morning, and rather earlier than he had expected. A paragraph in the Daily News caused him to push away his breakfast untasted, and turned him sick and faint while he read it. “A Deplorable Accident,” it was headed, and it ran in this way:

“A fatal accident of a peculiarly painful character is reported from King William Street. About eleven o’clock last night a young man was observed while endeavouring to get out of the way of a hansom to slip and fall under the wheels of a heavy, two-horse dray. On being picked up his injuries were found to be of the most shocking character, and he expired while being conveyed to the hospital. An examination of his pocketbook and cardcase shows beyond any question that the deceased is none other than Sir Francis Norton, of Deane Park, who has only within the last year come into the baronetcy. The accident is made the more deplorable as the deceased, who was only just of age, was on the eve of being married to a young lady belonging to one of the oldest families in the South. With his wealth and his talents the ball of fortune was at his feet, and his many friends will be deeply grieved to know that his promising career has been cut short in so sudden and tragic a fashion.”

A FALSE START.

"Is Dr. Horace Wilkinson at home?"

"I am he. Pray step in."

The visitor looked somewhat astonished at having the door opened to him by the master of the house.

"I wanted to have a few words."

The doctor, a pale, nervous young man, dressed in an ultra-professional, long black frock-coat, with a high, white collar cutting off his dapper side-whiskers in the centre, rubbed his hands together and smiled. In the thick, burly man in front of him he scented a patient, and it would be his first. His scanty resources had begun to run somewhat low, and, although he had his first quarter's rent safely locked away in the right-hand drawer of his desk, it was becoming a question with him how he should meet the current expenses of his very simple housekeeping. He bowed, therefore, waved his visitor in, closed the hall door in a careless fashion, as though his own presence thereat had been a purely accidental circumstance, and finally led the burly stranger into his scantily furnished front room, where he motioned him to a seat. Dr. Wilkinson planted himself behind his desk, and, placing his finger-tips together, he gazed with some apprehension at his companion. What was the matter with the man? He seemed very red in the face. Some of his old professors would have diagnosed his case by now, and would have electrified the patient by describing his own symptoms before he had said a word about them. Dr. Horace Wilkinson racked his brains for some clue, but Nature had fashioned him as a plodder — a very reliable plodder and nothing more. He could think of nothing save that the visitor's watch-chain had a very brassy appearance, with a corollary to the effect that he would be lucky if he got half-a-crown out of him. Still, even half-a-crown was something in those early days of struggle.

Whilst the doctor had been running his eyes over the stranger, the latter had been plunging his hands into pocket after pocket of his heavy coat. The heat of the weather, his dress, and this exercise of pocket-rummaging had all combined to still further redden his face, which had changed from brick to beet, with a gloss of moisture on his brow. This extreme ruddiness brought a clue at last to the observant doctor. Surely it was not to be attained without alcohol. In alcohol lay the secret of this man’s trouble. Some little delicacy was needed, however, in showing him that he had read his case aright — that at a glance he had penetrated to the inmost sources of his ailments.

“It’s very hot,” observed the stranger, mopping his forehead.

“Yes, it is weather which tempts one to drink rather more beer than is good for one,” answered Dr. Horace Wilkinson, looking very knowingly at his companion from over his finger-tips.

“Dear, dear, you shouldn’t do that.”

“I! I never touch beer.”

“Neither do I. I’ve been an abstainer for twenty years.”

This was depressing. Dr. Wilkinson blushed until he was nearly as red as the other. “May I ask what I can do for you?” he asked, picking up his stethoscope and tapping it gently against his thumb-nail.

“Yes, I was just going to tell you. I heard of your coming, but I couldn’t get round before — —” He broke into a nervous little cough.

“Yes?” said the doctor encouragingly.

“I should have been here three weeks ago, but you know how these things get put off.” He coughed again behind his large red hand.

“I do not think that you need say anything more,” said the doctor, taking over the case with an easy air of command. “Your cough is quite sufficient. It is entirely bronchial by the sound. No doubt the mischief is circumscribed at present, but there is always the danger that it may spread, so you have done wisely to come to me. A little judicious treatment will soon set you right. Your waistcoat, please, but not your shirt. Puff out your chest and say ninety-nine in a deep voice.”

The red-faced man began to laugh. “It’s all right, doctor,” said he. “That cough comes from chewing tobacco, and I know it’s a very bad habit. Nine-and-ninepence is what I have to say to you, for I’m the officer of the gas company, and they have a claim against you for that on the metre.”

Dr. Horace Wilkinson collapsed into his chair. “Then you’re not a patient?” he gasped.

“Never needed a doctor in my life, sir.”

“Oh, that’s all right.” The doctor concealed his disappointment under an affectation of facetiousness. “You don’t look as if you troubled them much. I don’t know what we should do if every one were as robust. I shall call at the company’s offices and pay this small amount.”

"If you could make it convenient, sir, now that I am here, it would save trouble — —"

"Oh, certainly!" These eternal little sordid money troubles were more trying to the doctor than plain living or scanty food. He took out his purse and slid the contents on to the table. There were two half-crowns and some pennies. In his drawer he had ten golden sovereigns. But those were his rent. If he once broke in upon them he was lost. He would starve first.

"Dear me!" said he, with a smile, as at some strange, unheard-of incident. "I have run short of small change. I am afraid I shall have to call upon the company, after all."

"Very well, sir." The inspector rose, and with a practised glance around, which valued every article in the room, from the two-guinea carpet to the eight-shilling muslin curtains, he took his departure.

When he had gone Dr. Wilkinson rearranged his room, as was his habit a dozen times in the day. He laid out his large Quain's Dictionary of Medicine in the forefront of the table so as to impress the casual patient that he had ever the best authorities at his elbow. Then he cleared all the little instruments out of his pocket-case — the scissors, the forceps, the bistouries, the lancets — and he laid them all out beside the stethoscope, to make as good a show as possible. His ledger, day-book, and visiting-book were spread in front of him. There was no entry in any of them yet, but it would not look well to have the covers too glossy and new, so he rubbed them together and daubed ink over them. Neither would it be well that any patient should observe that his name was the first in the book, so he filled up the first page of each with notes of imaginary visits paid to nameless patients during the last three weeks. Having done all this, he rested his head upon his hands and relapsed into the terrible occupation of waiting.

Terrible enough at any time to the young professional man, but most of all to one who knows that the weeks, and even the days during which he can hold out are numbered. Economise as he would, the money would still slip away in the countless little claims which a man never understands until he lives under a rooftree of his own. Dr. Wilkinson could not deny, as he sat at his desk and looked at the little heap of silver and coppers, that his chances of being a successful practitioner in Sutton were rapidly vanishing away.

And yet it was a bustling, prosperous town, with so much money in it that it seemed strange that a man with a trained brain and dexterous fingers should be starved out of it for want of employment. At his desk, Dr. Horace Wilkinson could see the never-ending double current of people which ebbed and flowed in front of his window. It was a busy street, and the air was forever filled with the dull roar of life, the grinding of the wheels, and the patter of countless feet. Men, women, and children, thousands and thousands of them passed in the day, and yet each was hurrying on upon his own business, scarce glancing at the small brass plate, or wasting a thought upon the man who waited in the front room. And yet how many of them would obviously, glaringly have been the better for his professional assistance. Dyspeptic men, anemic women, blotched faces, bilious complexions — they flowed past him, they needing him, he needing them, and yet the remorseless bar of professional etiquette kept them forever apart. What could he do? Could he stand at his own front door, pluck the casual stranger by the sleeve, and whisper in his ear, “Sir, you will forgive me for remarking that you are suffering from a severe attack of acne rosacea, which makes you a peculiarly unpleasant object. Allow me to suggest that a small prescription containing arsenic, which will not cost you more than you often spend upon a single meal, will be very much to your advantage.” Such an address would be a degradation to the high and lofty profession of Medicine, and there are no such sticklers for the ethics of that profession as some to whom she has been but a bitter and a grudging mother.

Dr. Horace Wilkinson was still looking moodily out of the window, when there came a sharp clang at the bell. Often it had rung, and with every ring his hopes had sprung up, only to dwindle away again, and change to leaden disappointment, as he faced some beggar or touting tradesman. But the doctor’s spirit was young and elastic, and again, in spite of all experience, it responded to that exhilarating summons. He sprang to his feet, cast his eyes over the table, thrust out his medical books a little more prominently, and hurried to the door. A groan escaped him as he entered the hall. He could see through the half-glazed upper panels that a gypsy van, hung round with wicker tables and chairs, had halted before his door, and that a couple of the vagrants, with a baby, were waiting outside. He had learned by experience that it was better not even to parley with such people.

“I have nothing for you,” said he, loosing the latch by an inch. “Go away!”

He closed the door, but the bell clanged once more. “Get away! Get away!” he cried impatiently, and walked back into his consulting-room. He had hardly seated himself when the bell went for the third time. In a towering passion he rushed back, flung open the door.

“What the —— ?”

“If you please, sir, we need a doctor.”

In an instant he was rubbing his hands again with his blandest professional smile. These were patients, then, whom he had tried to hunt from his doorstep — the very first patients, whom he had waited for so impatiently. They did not look very promising. The man, a tall, lank-haired gypsy, had gone back to the horse’s head. There remained a small, hard-faced woman with a great bruise all round her eye. She wore a yellow silk handkerchief round her head, and a baby, tucked in a red shawl, was pressed to her bosom.

“Pray step in, madam,” said Dr. Horace Wilkinson, with his very best sympathetic manner. In this case, at least, there could be no mistake as to diagnosis. “If you will sit on this sofa, I shall very soon make you feel much more comfortable.”

He poured a little water from his carafe into a saucer, made a compress of lint, fastened it over the injured eye, and secured the whole with a spica bandage, secundum artem.

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” said the woman, when his work was finished; “that’s nice and warm, and may God bless your honour. But it wasn’t about my eye at all that I came to see a doctor.”

“Not your eye?” Dr. Horace Wilkinson was beginning to be a little doubtful as to the advantages of quick diagnosis. It is an excellent thing to be able to surprise a patient, but hitherto it was always the patient who had surprised him.

“The baby’s got the measles.”

The mother parted the red shawl, and exhibited a little dark, black-eyed gypsy baby, whose swarthy face was all flushed and mottled with a dark-red rash. The child breathed with a rattling sound, and it looked up at the doctor with eyes which were heavy with want of sleep and crusted together at the lids.

“Hum! Yes. Measles, sure enough — and a smart attack.”

“I just wanted you to see her, sir, so that you could signify.”

“Could what?”

"Signify, if anything happened."

"Oh, I see — certify."

"And now that you've seen it, sir, I'll go on, for Reuben — that's my man — is in a hurry."

"But don't you want any medicine?"

"Oh, now you've seen it, it's all right. I'll let you know if anything happens."

"But you must have some medicine. The child is very ill." He descended into the little room which he had fitted as a surgery, and he made up a two-ounce bottle of cooling medicine. In such cities as Sutton there are few patients who can afford to pay a fee to both doctor and chemist, so that unless the physician is prepared to play the part of both he will have little chance of making a living at either.

"There is your medicine, madam. You will find the directions upon the bottle. Keep the child warm and give it a light diet."

"Thank you kindly, sir." She shouldered her baby and marched for the door.

"Excuse me, madam," said the doctor nervously. "Don't you think it too small a matter to make a bill of? Perhaps it would be better if we had a settlement at once."

The gypsy woman looked at him reproachfully out of her one uncovered eye.

"Are you going to charge me for that?" she asked. "How much, then?"

"Well, say half-a-crown." He mentioned the sum in a half-jesting way, as though it were too small to take serious notice of, but the gypsy woman raised quite a scream at the mention of it.

"'Arf-a-crown! for that?"

"Well, my good woman, why not go to the poor doctor if you cannot afford a fee?"

She fumbled in her pocket, craning awkwardly to keep her grip upon the baby.

"Here's sevenpence," she said at last, holding out a little pile of copper coins. "I'll give you that and a wicker footstool."

"But my fee is half-a-crown." The doctor's views of the glory of his profession cried out against this wretched haggling, and yet what was he to do? "Where am I to get 'arf-a-crown? It is well for gentlefolk like you who sit in your grand houses, and can eat and drink what you like, an' charge ‘arf-a-crown for just saying as much as, ‘‘Ow d’ye do?’ We can’t pick up’ arf-crowns like that. What we gets we earns ‘ard. This sevenpence is just all I’ve got. You told me to feed the child light. She must feed light, for what she’s to have is more than I know.”

Whilst the woman had been speaking, Dr. Horace Wilkinson’s eyes had wandered to the tiny heap of money upon the table, which represented all that separated him from absolute starvation, and he chuckled to himself at the grim joke that he should appear to this poor woman to be a being living in the lap of luxury. Then he picked up the odd coppers, leaving only the two half-crowns upon the table.

“Here you are,” he said brusquely. “Never mind the fee, and take these coppers. They may be of some use to you. Good-bye!” He bowed her out, and closed the door behind her. After all she was the thin edge of the wedge. These wandering people have great powers of recommendation. All large practices have been built up from such foundations. The hangers-on to the kitchen recommend to the kitchen, they to the drawing-room, and so it spreads. At least he could say now that he had had a patient.

He went into the back room and lit the spirit-kettle to boil the water for his tea, laughing the while at the recollection of his recent interview. If all patients were like this one it could easily be reckoned how many it would take to ruin him completely. Putting aside the dirt upon his carpet and the loss of time, there were twopence gone upon the bandage, fourpence or more upon the medicine, to say nothing of phial, cork, label, and paper. Then he had given her fivepence, so that his first patient had absorbed altogether not less than one sixth of his available capital. If five more were to come he would be a broken man. He sat down upon the portmanteau and shook with laughter at the thought, while he measured out his one spoonful and a half of tea at one shilling eightpence into the brown earthenware teapot. Suddenly, however, the laugh faded from his face, and he cocked his ear towards the door, standing listening with a slanting head and a sidelong eye. There had been a rasping of wheels against the curb, the sound of steps outside, and then a loud peal at the bell. With his teaspoon in his hand he peeped round the corner and saw with amazement that a carriage and pair were waiting outside, and that a powdered footman was standing at the door. The spoon tinkled down upon the floor, and he stood gazing in bewilderment. Then, pulling himself together, he threw open the door.

“Young man,” said the flunky, “tell your master, Dr. Wilkinson, that he is wanted just as quick as ever he can come to Lady Millbank, at the Towers. He is to come this very instant. We’d take him with us, but we have to go back to see if Dr. Mason is home yet. Just you stir your stumps and give him the message.”

The footman nodded and was off in an instant, while the coachman lashed his horses and the carriage flew down the street.

Here was a new development. Dr. Horace Wilkinson stood at his door and tried to think it all out. Lady Millbank, of the Towers! People of wealth and position, no doubt. And a serious case, or why this haste and summoning of two doctors? But, then, why in the name of all that is wonderful should he be sent for?

He was obscure, unknown, without influence. There must be some mistake. Yes, that must be the true explanation; or was it possible that some one was attempting a cruel hoax upon him? At any rate, it was too positive a message to be disregarded. He must set off at once and settle the matter one way or the other.

But he had one source of information. At the corner of the street was a small shop where one of the oldest inhabitants dispensed newspapers and gossip. He could get information there if anywhere. He put on his well-brushed top hat, secreted instruments and bandages in all his pockets, and without waiting for his tea closed up his establishment and started off upon his adventure.

The stationer at the corner was a human directory to every one and everything in Sutton, so that he soon had all the information which he wanted. Sir John Millbank was very well known in the town, it seemed. He was a merchant prince, an exporter of pens, three times mayor, and reported to be fully worth two millions sterling.

The Towers was his palatial seat, just outside the city. His wife had been an invalid for some years, and was growing worse. So far the whole thing seemed to be genuine enough. By some amazing chance these people really had sent for him.

And then another doubt assailed him, and he turned back into the shop.

“I am your neighbour, Dr. Horace Wilkinson,” said he. “Is there any other medical man of that name in the town?”

No, the stationer was quite positive that there was not.

That was final, then. A great good fortune had come in his way, and he must take prompt advantage of it. He called a cab and drove furiously to the Towers, with his brain in a whirl, giddy with hope and delight at one moment, and sickened with fears and doubts at the next lest the case should in some way be beyond his powers, or lest he should find at some critical moment that he was without the instrument or appliance that was needed. Every strange and outre case of which he had ever heard or read came back into his mind, and long before he reached the Towers he had worked himself into a positive conviction that he would be instantly required to do a trephining at the least.

The Towers was a very large house, standing back amid trees, at the head of a winding drive. As he drove up the doctor sprang out, paid away half his worldly assets as a fare, and followed a stately footman who, having taken his name, led him through the oak-panelled, stained-glass hall, gorgeous with deers' heads and ancient armour, and ushered him into a large sitting-room beyond. A very irritable-looking, acid-faced man was seated in an armchair by the fireplace, while two young ladies in white were standing together in the bow window at the further end.

"Hullo! hullo! hullo! What's this — heh?" cried the irritable man. "Are you Dr. Wilkinson? Eh?"

"Yes, sir, I am Dr. Wilkinson."

"Really, now. You seem very young — much younger than I expected. Well, well, well, Mason's old, and yet he don't seem to know much about it. I suppose we must try the other end now. You're the Wilkinson who wrote something about the lungs? Heh?"

Here was a light! The only two letters which the doctor had ever written to The Lancet — modest little letters thrust away in a back column among the wrangles about medical ethics and the inquiries as to how much it took to keep a horse in the country — had been upon pulmonary disease. They had not been wasted, then. Some eye had picked them out and marked the name of the writer. Who could say that work was ever wasted, or that merit did not promptly meet with its reward?

"Yes, I have written on the subject."

"Ha! Well, then, where's Mason?"

"I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"No? — that's queer too. He knows you and thinks a lot of your opinion. You're a stranger in the town, are you not?"

“Yes, I have only been here a very short time.”

“That was what Mason said. He didn’t give me the address. Said he would call on you and bring you, but when the wife got worse of course I inquired for you and sent for you direct. I sent for Mason, too, but he was out. However, we can’t wait for him, so just run away upstairs and do what you can.”

“Well, I am placed in a rather delicate position,” said Dr. Horace Wilkinson, with some hesitation. “I am here, as I understand, to meet my colleague, Dr. Mason, in consultation. It would, perhaps, hardly be correct for me to see the patient in his absence. I think that I would rather wait.”

“Would you, by Jove! Do you think I’ll let my wife get worse while the doctor is coolly kicking his heels in the room below? No, sir, I am a plain man, and I tell you that you will either go up or go out.”

The style of speech jarred upon the doctor’s sense of the fitness of things, but still when a man’s wife is ill much may be overlooked. He contented himself by bowing somewhat stiffly. “I shall go up, if you insist upon it,” said he.

“I do insist upon it. And another thing, I won’t have her thumped about all over the chest, or any hocus-pocus of the sort. She has bronchitis and asthma, and that’s all. If you can cure it well and good. But it only weakens her to have you tapping and listening, and it does no good either.”

Personal disrespect was a thing that the doctor could stand; but the profession was to him a holy thing, and a flippant word about it cut him to the quick.

“Thank you,” said he, picking up his hat. “I have the honour to wish you a very good day. I do not care to undertake the responsibility of this case.”

“Hullo! what’s the matter now?”

“It is not my habit to give opinions without examining my patient. I wonder that you should suggest such a course to a medical man. I wish you good day.”

But Sir John Millbank was a commercial man, and believed in the commercial principle that the more difficult a thing is to attain the more valuable it is. A doctor’s opinion had been to him a mere matter of guineas. But here was a young man who seemed to care nothing either for his wealth or title. His respect for his judgment increased amazingly.

“Tut! tut!” said he; “Mason is not so thin-skinned. There! there! Have your way! Do what you like and I won’t say another word. I’ll just run upstairs and tell Lady Millbank that you are coming.”

The door had hardly closed behind him when the two demure young ladies darted out of their corner, and fluttered with joy in front of the astonished doctor.

“Oh, well done! well done!” cried the taller, clapping her hands.

“Don’t let him bully you, doctor,” said the other. “Oh, it was so nice to hear you stand up to him. That’s the way he does with poor Dr. Mason. Dr. Mason has never examined mamma yet. He always takes papa’s word for everything. Hush, Maude; here he comes again.” They subsided in an instant into their corner as silent and demure as ever.

Dr. Horace Wilkinson followed Sir John up the broad, thick-carpeted staircase, and into the darkened sick room. In a quarter of an hour he had sounded and sifted the case to the uttermost, and descended with the husband once more to the drawing-room. In front of the fireplace were standing two gentlemen, the one a very typical, clean-shaven, general practitioner, the other a striking-looking man of middle age, with pale blue eyes and a long red beard.

“Hullo, Mason, you’ve come at last!”

“Yes, Sir John, and I have brought, as I promised, Dr. Wilkinson with me.”

“Dr. Wilkinson! Why, this is he.”

Dr. Mason stared in astonishment. “I have never seen the gentleman before!” he cried.

“Nevertheless I am Dr. Wilkinson — Dr. Horace Wilkinson, of 114 Canal View.”

“Good gracious, Sir John!” cried Dr. Mason.

“Did you think that in a case of such importance I should call in a junior local practitioner! This is Dr. Adam Wilkinson, lecturer on pulmonary diseases at Regent’s College, London, physician upon the staff of the St. Swithin’s Hospital, and author of a dozen works upon the subject. He happened to be in Sutton upon a visit, and I thought I would utilise his presence to have a first-rate opinion upon Lady Millbank.”

“Thank you,” said Sir John, dryly. “But I fear my wife is rather tired now, for she has just been very thoroughly examined by this young gentleman. I think we will let it stop at that for the present; though, of course, as you have had the trouble of coming here, I should be glad to have a note of your fees.”

When Dr. Mason had departed, looking very disgusted, and his friend, the specialist, very amused, Sir John listened to all the young physician had to say about the case.

“Now, I’ll tell you what,” said he, when he had finished. “I’m a man of my word, d’ye see? When I like a man I freeze to him. I’m a good friend and a bad enemy. I believe in you, and I don’t believe in Mason. From now on you are my doctor, and that of my family. Come and see my wife every day. How does that suit your book?”

“I am extremely grateful to you for your kind intentions toward me, but I am afraid there is no possible way in which I can avail myself of them.”

“Heh! what d’ye mean?”

“I could not possibly take Dr. Mason’s place in the middle of a case like this. It would be a most unprofessional act.”

“Oh, well, go your own way!” cried Sir John, in despair. “Never was such a man for making difficulties. You’ve had a fair offer and you’ve refused it, and now you can just go your own way.”

The millionaire stumped out of the room in a huff, and Dr. Horace Wilkinson made his way homeward to his spirit-lamp and his one-and-eightpenny tea, with his first guinea in his pocket, and with a feeling that he had upheld the best traditions of his profession.

And yet this false start of his was a true start also, for it soon came to Dr. Mason’s ears that his junior had had it in his power to carry off his best patient and had forborne to do so. To the honour of the profession be it said that such forbearance is the rule rather than the exception, and yet in this case, with so very junior a practitioner and so very wealthy a patient, the temptation was greater than is usual. There was a grateful note, a visit, a friendship, and now the well-known firm of Mason and Wilkinson is doing the largest family practice in Sutton.

THE CURSE OF EVE.

Robert Johnson was an essentially commonplace man, with no feature to distinguish him from a million others. He was pale of face, ordinary in looks, neutral in opinions, thirty years of age, and a married man. By trade he was a gentleman’s outfitter in the New North Road, and the competition of business squeezed out of him the little character that was left. In his hope of conciliating customers he had become cringing and pliable, until working ever in the same routine from day to day he seemed to have sunk into a soulless machine rather than a man. No great question had ever stirred him. At the end of this snug century, self-contained in his own narrow circle, it seemed impossible that any of the mighty, primitive passions of mankind could ever reach him. Yet birth, and lust, and illness, and death are changeless things, and when one of these harsh facts springs out upon a man at some sudden turn of the path of life, it dashes off for the moment his mask of civilisation and gives a glimpse of the stranger and stronger face below.

Johnson’s wife was a quiet little woman, with brown hair and gentle ways. His affection for her was the one positive trait in his character. Together they would lay out the shop window every Monday morning, the spotless shirts in their green cardboard boxes below, the neckties above hung in rows over the brass rails, the cheap studs glistening from the white cards at either side, while in the background were the rows of cloth caps and the bank of boxes in which the more valuable hats were screened from the sunlight. She kept the books and sent out the bills. No one but she knew the joys and sorrows which crept into his small life. She had shared his exultations when the gentleman who was going to India had bought ten dozen shirts and an incredible number of collars, and she had been as stricken as he when, after the goods had gone, the bill was returned from the hotel address with the intimation that no such person had lodged there. For five years they had worked, building up the business, thrown together all the more closely because their marriage had been a childless one. Now, however, there were signs that a change was at hand, and that speedily. She was unable to come downstairs, and her mother, Mrs. Peyton, came over from Camberwell to nurse her and to welcome her grandchild.

Little qualms of anxiety came over Johnson as his wife’s time approached. However, after all, it was a natural process. Other men’s wives went through it unharmed, and why should not his? He was himself one of a family of fourteen, and yet his mother was alive and hearty. It was quite the exception for anything to go wrong. And yet in spite of his reasonings the remembrance of his wife’s condition was always like a sombre background to all his other thoughts.

Dr. Miles of Bridport Place, the best man in the neighbourhood, was retained five months in advance, and, as time stole on, many little packets of absurdly small white garments with frill work and ribbons began to arrive among the big consignments of male necessities. And then one evening, as Johnson was ticketing the scarfs in the shop, he heard a bustle upstairs, and Mrs. Peyton came running down to say that Lucy was bad and that she thought the doctor ought to be there without delay.

It was not Robert Johnson’s nature to hurry. He was prim and staid and liked to do things in an orderly fashion. It was a quarter of a mile from the corner of the New North Road where his shop stood to the doctor’s house in Bridport Place. There were no cabs in sight so he set off upon foot, leaving the lad to mind the shop. At Bridport Place he was told that the doctor had just gone to Harman Street to attend a man in a fit. Johnson started off for Harman Street, losing a little of his primness as he became more anxious. Two full cabs but no empty ones passed him on the way. At Harman Street he learned that the doctor had gone on to a case of measles, fortunately he had left the address — 69 Dunstan Road, at the other side of the Regent’s Canal. Robert’s primness had vanished now as he thought of the women waiting at home, and he began to run as hard as he could down the Kingsland Road. Some way along he sprang into a cab which stood by the curb and drove to Dunstan Road. The doctor had just left, and Robert Johnson felt inclined to sit down upon the steps in despair.

Fortunately he had not sent the cab away, and he was soon back at Bridport Place. Dr. Miles had not returned yet, but they were expecting him every instant. Johnson waited, drumming his fingers on his knees, in a high, dim lit room, the air of which was charged with a faint, sickly smell of ether. The furniture was massive, and the books in the shelves were sombre, and a squat black clock ticked mournfully on the mantelpiece. It told him that it was half-past seven, and that he had been gone an hour and a quarter. Whatever would the women think of him! Every time that a distant door slammed he sprang from his chair in a quiver of eagerness. His ears strained to catch the deep notes of the doctor’s voice. And then, suddenly, with a gush of joy he heard a quick step outside, and the sharp click of the key in the lock. In an instant he was out in the hall, before the doctor’s foot was over the threshold.

“If you please, doctor, I’ve come for you,” he cried; “the wife was taken bad at six o’clock.”

He hardly knew what he expected the doctor to do. Something very energetic, certainly — to seize some drugs, perhaps, and rush excitedly with him through the gaslit streets. Instead of that Dr. Miles threw his umbrella into the rack, jerked off his hat with a somewhat peevish gesture, and pushed Johnson back into the room.

“Let’s see! You DID engage me, didn’t you?” he asked in no very cordial voice.

“Oh, yes, doctor, last November. Johnson the outfitter, you know, in the New North Road.”

“Yes, yes. It’s a bit overdue,” said the doctor, glancing at a list of names in a note-book with a very shiny cover. “Well, how is she?”

“I don’t — —”

“Ah, of course, it’s your first. You’ll know more about it next time.”

“Mrs. Peyton said it was time you were there, sir.”

“My dear sir, there can be no very pressing hurry in a first case. We shall have an all-night affair, I fancy. You can’t get an engine to go without coals, Mr. Johnson, and I have had nothing but a light lunch.”

“We could have something cooked for you — something hot and a cup of tea.”

“Thank you, but I fancy my dinner is actually on the table. I can do no good in the earlier stages. Go home and say that I am coming, and I will be round immediately afterwards.”

A sort of horror filled Robert Johnson as he gazed at this man who could think about his dinner at such a moment. He had not imagination enough to realise that the experience which seemed so appallingly important to him, was the merest everyday matter of business to the medical man who could not have lived for a year had he not, amid the rush of work, remembered what was due to his own health. To Johnson he seemed little better than a monster. His thoughts were bitter as he sped back to his shop.

“You’ve taken your time,” said his mother-in-law reproachfully, looking down the stairs as he entered.

“I couldn’t help it!” he gasped. “Is it over?”

“Over! She’s got to be worse, poor dear, before she can be better. Where’s Dr. Miles!”

“He’s coming after he’s had dinner.” The old woman was about to make some reply, when, from the half-opened door behind a high whinnying voice cried out for her. She ran back and closed the door, while Johnson, sick at heart, turned into the shop. There he sent the lad home and busied himself frantically in putting up shutters and turning out boxes. When all was closed and finished he seated himself in the parlour behind the shop. But he could not sit still. He rose incessantly to walk a few paces and then fell back into a chair once more. Suddenly the clatter of china fell upon his ear, and he saw the maid pass the door with a cup on a tray and a smoking teapot.

“Who is that for, Jane?” he asked.

“For the mistress, Mr. Johnson. She says she would fancy it.”

There was immeasurable consolation to him in that homely cup of tea. It wasn’t so very bad after all if his wife could think of such things. So light-hearted was he that he asked for a cup also. He had just finished it when the doctor arrived, with a small black leather bag in his hand.

“Well, how is she?” he asked genially.

“Oh, she’s very much better,” said Johnson, with enthusiasm.

“Dear me, that’s bad!” said the doctor. “Perhaps it will do if I look in on my morning round?”

“No, no,” cried Johnson, clutching at his thick frieze overcoat. “We are so glad that you have come. And, doctor, please come down soon and let me know what you think about it.”

The doctor passed upstairs, his firm, heavy steps resounding through the house. Johnson could hear his boots creaking as he walked about the floor above him, and the sound was a consolation to him. It was crisp and decided, the tread of a man who had plenty of self-confidence. Presently, still straining his ears to catch what was going on, he heard the scraping of a chair as it was drawn along the floor, and a moment later he heard the door fly open and someone come rushing downstairs. Johnson sprang up with his hair bristling, thinking that some dreadful thing had occurred, but it was only his mother-in-law, incoherent with excitement and searching for scissors and some tape. She vanished again and Jane passed up the stairs with a pile of newly aired linen. Then, after an interval of silence, Johnson heard the heavy, creaking tread and the doctor came down into the parlour.

"That's better," said he, pausing with his hand upon the door. "You look pale, Mr. Johnson."

"Oh no, sir, not at all," he answered deprecatingly, mopping his brow with his handkerchief.

"There is no immediate cause for alarm," said Dr. Miles. "The case is not all that we could wish it. Still we will hope for the best."

"Is there danger, sir?" gasped Johnson.

"Well, there is always danger, of course. It is not altogether a favourable case, but still it might be much worse. I have given her a draught. I saw as I passed that they have been doing a little building opposite to you. It's an improving quarter. The rents go higher and higher. You have a lease of your own little place, eh?"

"Yes, sir, yes!" cried Johnson, whose ears were straining for every sound from above, and who felt none the less that it was very soothing that the doctor should be able to chat so easily at such a time. "That's to say no, sir, I am a yearly tenant."

"Ah, I should get a lease if I were you. There's Marshall, the watchmaker, down the street. I attended his wife twice and saw him through the typhoid when they took up the drains in Prince Street. I assure you his landlord sprung his rent nearly forty a year and he had to pay or clear out."

"Did his wife get through it, doctor?"

"Oh yes, she did very well. Hullo! hullo!"

He slanted his ear to the ceiling with a questioning face, and then darted swiftly from the room.

It was March and the evenings were chill, so Jane had lit the fire, but the wind drove the smoke downwards and the air was full of its acrid taint. Johnson felt chilled to the bone, though rather by his apprehensions than by the weather. He crouched over the fire with his thin white hands held out to the blaze. At ten o'clock Jane brought in the joint of cold meat and laid his place for supper, but he could not bring himself to touch it. He drank a glass of the beer, however, and felt the better for it. The tension of his nerves seemed to have reacted upon his hearing, and he was able to follow the most trivial things in the room above. Once, when the beer was still heartening him, he nerved himself to creep on tiptoe up the stair and to listen to what was going on. The bedroom door was half an inch open, and through the slit he could catch a glimpse of the clean-shaven face of the doctor, looking wearier and more anxious than before. Then he rushed downstairs like a lunatic, and running to the door he tried to distract his thoughts by watching what; was going on in the street. The shops were all shut, and some rollicking boon companions came shouting along from the public-house. He stayed at the door until the stragglers had thinned down, and then came back to his seat by the fire. In his dim brain he was asking himself questions which had never intruded themselves before. Where was the justice of it? What had his sweet, innocent little wife done that she should be used so? Why was nature so cruel? He was frightened at his own thoughts, and yet wondered that they had never occurred to him before.

As the early morning drew in, Johnson, sick at heart and shivering in every limb, sat with his great coat huddled round him, staring at the grey ashes and waiting hopelessly for some relief. His face was white and clammy, and his nerves had been numbed into a half conscious state by the long monotony of misery. But suddenly all his feelings leapt into keen life again as he heard the bedroom door open and the doctor’s steps upon the stair. Robert Johnson was precise and unemotional in everyday life, but he almost shrieked now as he rushed forward to know if it were over.

One glance at the stern, drawn face which met him showed that it was no pleasant news which had sent the doctor downstairs. His appearance had altered as much as Johnson’s during the last few hours. His hair was on end, his face flushed, his forehead dotted with beads of perspiration. There was a peculiar fierceness in his eye, and about the lines of his mouth, a fighting look as befitted a man who for hours on end had been striving with the hungriest of foes for the most precious of prizes. But there was a sadness too, as though his grim opponent had been overmastering him. He sat down and leaned his head upon his hand like a man who is fagged out.

“I thought it my duty to see you, Mr. Johnson, and to tell you that it is a very nasty case. Your wife’s heart is not strong, and she has some symptoms which I do not like. What I wanted to say is that if you would like to have a second opinion I shall be very glad to meet anyone whom you might suggest.”

Johnson was so dazed by his want of sleep and the evil news that he could hardly grasp the doctor’s meaning. The other, seeing him hesitate, thought that he was considering the expense.

"Smith or Hawley would come for two guineas," said he. "But I think Pritchard of the City Road is the best man."

"Oh, yes, bring the best man," cried Johnson.

"Pritchard would want three guineas. He is a senior man, you see."

"I'd give him all I have if he would pull her through. Shall I run for him?"

"Yes. Go to my house first and ask for the green baize bag. The assistant will give it to you. Tell him I want the A. C. E. mixture. Her heart is too weak for chloroform. Then go for Pritchard and bring him back with you."

It was heavenly for Johnson to have something to do and to feel that he was of some use to his wife. He ran swiftly to Bridport Place, his footfalls clattering through the silent streets and the big dark policemen turning their yellow funnels of light on him as he passed. Two tugs at the night-bell brought down a sleepy, half-clad assistant, who handed him a stoppered glass bottle and a cloth bag which contained something which clinked when you moved it. Johnson thrust the bottle into his pocket, seized the green bag, and pressing his hat firmly down ran as hard as he could set foot to ground until he was in the City Road and saw the name of Pritchard engraved in white upon a red ground. He bounded in triumph up the three steps which led to the door, and as he did so there was a crash behind him. His precious bottle was in fragments upon the pavement.

For a moment he felt as if it were his wife's body that was lying there. But the run had freshened his wits and he saw that the mischief might be repaired. He pulled vigorously at the night-bell.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked a gruff voice at his elbow. He started back and looked up at the windows, but there was no sign of life. He was approaching the bell again with the intention of pulling it, when a perfect roar burst from the wall.

"I can't stand shivering here all night," cried the voice. "Say who you are and what you want or I shut the tube."

Then for the first time Johnson saw that the end of a speaking-tube hung out of the wall just above the bell. He shouted up it, —

"I want you to come with me to meet Dr. Miles at a confinement at once."

"How far?" shrieked the irascible voice.

"The New North Road, Hoxton."

"My consultation fee is three guineas, payable at the time."

"All right," shouted Johnson. "You are to bring a bottle of A. C. E. mixture with you."

"All right! Wait a bit!"

Five minutes later an elderly, hard-faced man, with grizzled hair, flung open the door. As he emerged a voice from somewhere in the shadows cried, —

"Mind you take your cravat, John," and he impatiently growled something over his shoulder in reply.

The consultant was a man who had been hardened by a life of ceaseless labour, and who had been driven, as so many others have been, by the needs of his own increasing family to set the commercial before the philanthropic side of his profession. Yet beneath his rough crust he was a man with a kindly heart.

"We don't want to break a record," said he, pulling up and panting after attempting to keep up with Johnson for five minutes. "I would go quicker if I could, my dear sir, and I quite sympathise with your anxiety, but really I can't manage it."

So Johnson, on fire with impatience, had to slow down until they reached the New North Road, when he ran ahead and had the door open for the doctor when he came. He heard the two meet outside the bed-room, and caught scraps of their conversation. "Sorry to knock you up — nasty case — decent people." Then it sank into a mumble and the door closed behind them.

Johnson sat up in his chair now, listening keenly, for he knew that a crisis must be at hand. He heard the two doctors moving about, and was able to distinguish the step of Pritchard, which had a drag in it, from the clean, crisp sound of the other's footfall. There was silence for a few minutes and then a curious drunken, mumbling sing-song voice came quavering up, very unlike anything which he had heard hitherto. At the same time a sweetish, insidious scent, imperceptible perhaps to any nerves less strained than his, crept down the stairs and penetrated into the room. The voice dwindled into a mere drone and finally sank away into silence, and Johnson gave a long sigh of relief, for he knew that the drug had done its work and that, come what might, there should be no more pain for the sufferer.

But soon the silence became even more trying to him than the cries had been. He had no clue now as to what was going on, and his mind swarmed with horrible possibilities. He rose and went to the bottom of the stairs again. He heard the clink of metal against metal, and the subdued murmur of the doctors' voices. Then he heard Mrs. Peyton say something, in a tone as of fear or expostulation, and again the doctors murmured together. For twenty minutes he stood there leaning against the wall, listening to the occasional rumbles of talk without being able to catch a word of it. And then of a sudden there rose out of the silence the strangest little piping cry, and Mrs. Peyton screamed out in her delight and the man ran into the parlour and flung himself down upon the horse-hair sofa, drumming his heels on it in his ecstasy.

But often the great cat Fate lets us go only to clutch us again in a fiercer grip. As minute after minute passed and still no sound came from above save those thin, glutinous cries, Johnson cooled from his frenzy of joy, and lay breathless with his ears straining. They were moving slowly about. They were talking in subdued tones. Still minute after minute passing, and no word from the voice for which he listened. His nerves were dulled by his night of trouble, and he waited in limp wretchedness upon his sofa. There he still sat when the doctors came down to him — a bedraggled, miserable figure with his face grimy and his hair unkempt from his long vigil. He rose as they entered, bracing himself against the mantelpiece.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"Doing well," answered the doctor.

And at the words that little conventional spirit which had never known until that night the capacity for fierce agony which lay within it, learned for the second time that there were springs of joy also which it had never tapped before. His impulse was to fall upon his knees, but he was shy before the doctors.

"Can I go up?"

"In a few minutes."

"I'm sure, doctor, I'm very — I'm very — —" he grew inarticulate. "Here are your three guineas, Dr. Pritchard. I wish they were three hundred."

"So do I," said the senior man, and they laughed as they shook hands.

Johnson opened the shop door for them and heard their talk as they stood for an instant outside.

"Looked nasty at one time."

"Very glad to have your help."

"Delighted, I'm sure. Won't you step round and have a cup of coffee?"

“No, thanks. I’m expecting another case.”

The firm step and the dragging one passed away to the right and the left. Johnson turned from the door still with that turmoil of joy in his heart. He seemed to be making a new start in life. He felt that he was a stronger and a deeper man. Perhaps all this suffering had an object then. It might prove to be a blessing both to his wife and to him. The very thought was one which he would have been incapable of conceiving twelve hours before. He was full of new emotions. If there had been a harrowing there had been a planting too.

“Can I come up?” he cried, and then, without waiting for an answer, he took the steps three at a time.

Mrs. Peyton was standing by a soapy bath with a bundle in her hands. From under the curve of a brown shawl there looked out at him the strangest little red face with crumpled features, moist, loose lips, and eyelids which quivered like a rabbit’s nostrils. The weak neck had let the head topple over, and it rested upon the shoulder.

“Kiss it, Robert!” cried the grandmother. “Kiss your son!”

But he felt a resentment to the little, red, blinking creature. He could not forgive it yet for that long night of misery. He caught sight of a white face in the bed and he ran towards it with such love and pity as his speech could find no words for.

“Thank God it is over! Lucy, dear, it was dreadful!”

“But I’m so happy now. I never was so happy in my life.”

Her eyes were fixed upon the brown bundle.

“You mustn’t talk,” said Mrs. Peyton.

“But don’t leave me,” whispered his wife.

So he sat in silence with his hand in hers. The lamp was burning dim and the first cold light of dawn was breaking through the window. The night had been long and dark but the day was the sweeter and the purer in consequence. London was waking up. The roar began to rise from the street. Lives had come and lives had gone, but the great machine was still working out its dim and tragic destiny.

SWEETHEARTS.

It is hard for the general practitioner who sits among his patients both morning and evening, and sees them in their homes between, to steal time for one little daily breath of cleanly air. To win it he must slip early from his bed and walk out between shuttered shops when it is chill but very clear, and all things are sharply outlined, as in a frost. It is an hour that has a charm of its own, when, but for a postman or a milkman, one has the pavement to oneself, and even the most common thing takes an ever-recurring freshness, as though causeway, and lamp, and signboard had all wakened to the new day. Then even an inland city may seem beautiful, and bear virtue in its smoke-tainted air.

But it was by the sea that I lived, in a town that was unlovely enough were it not for its glorious neighbour. And who cares for the town when one can sit on the bench at the headland, and look out over the huge, blue bay, and the yellow scimitar that curves before it. I loved it when its great face was freckled with the fishing boats, and I loved it when the big ships went past, far out, a little hillock of white and no hull, with topsails curved like a bodice, so stately and demure. But most of all I loved it when no trace of man marred the majesty of Nature, and when the sun-bursts slanted down on it from between the drifting rainclouds. Then I have seen the further edge draped in the gauze of the driving rain, with its thin grey shading under the slow clouds, while my headland was golden, and the sun gleamed upon the breakers and struck deep through the green waves beyond, showing up the purple patches where the beds of seaweed are lying. Such a morning as that, with the wind in his hair, and the spray on his lips, and the cry of the eddying gulls in his ear, may send a man back braced afresh to the reek of a sick-room, and the dead, drab weariness of practice.

It was on such another day that I first saw my old man. He came to my bench just as I was leaving it. My eye must have picked him out even in a crowded street, for he was a man of large frame and fine presence, with something of distinction in the set of his lip and the poise of his head. He limped up the winding path leaning heavily upon his stick, as though those great shoulders had become too much at last for the failing limbs that bore them. As he approached, my eyes caught Nature’s danger signal, that faint bluish tinge in nose and lip which tells of a labouring heart.

“The brae is a little trying, sir,” said I. “Speaking as a physician, I should say that you would do well to rest here before you go further.”

He inclined his head in a stately, old-world fashion, and seated himself upon the bench. Seeing that he had no wish to speak I was silent also, but I could not help watching him out of the corners of my eyes, for he was such a wonderful survival of the early half of the century, with his low-crowned, curly-brimmed hat, his black satin tie which fastened with a buckle at the back, and, above all, his large, fleshy, clean-shaven face shot with its mesh of wrinkles. Those eyes, ere they had grown dim, had looked out from the box-seat of mail coaches, and had seen the knots of navvies as they toiled on the brown embankments. Those lips had smiled over the first numbers of “Pickwick,” and had gossiped of the promising young man who wrote them. The face itself was a seventy-year almanack, and every seam an entry upon it where public as well as private sorrow left its trace. That pucker on the forehead stood for the Mutiny, perhaps; that line of care for the Crimean winter, it may be; and that last little sheaf of wrinkles, as my fancy hoped, for the death of Gordon. And so, as I dreamed in my foolish way, the old gentleman with the shining stock was gone, and it was seventy years of a great nation’s life that took shape before me on the headland in the morning.

But he soon brought me back to earth again. As he recovered his breath he took a letter out of his pocket, and, putting on a pair of horn-rimmed eye-glasses, he read it through very carefully. Without any design of playing the spy I could not help observing that it was in a woman’s hand. When he had finished it he read it again, and then sat with the corners of his mouth drawn down and his eyes staring vacantly out over the bay, the most forlorn-looking old gentleman that ever I have seen. All that is kindly within me was set stirring by that wistful face, but I knew that he was in no humour for talk, and so, at last, with my breakfast and my patients calling me, I left him on the bench and started for home.

I never gave him another thought until the next morning, when, at the same hour, he turned up upon the headland, and shared the bench which I had been accustomed to look upon as my own. He bowed again before sitting down, but was no more inclined than formerly to enter into conversation. There had been a change in him during the last twenty-four hours, and all for the worse. The face seemed more heavy and more wrinkled, while that ominous venous tinge was more pronounced as he panted up the hill. The clean lines of his cheek and chin were marred by a day’s growth of grey stubble, and his large, shapely head had lost something of the brave carriage which had struck me when first I glanced at him. He had a letter there, the same, or another, but still in a woman’s hand, and over this he was moping and mumbling in his senile fashion, with his brow puckered, and the corners of his mouth drawn down like those of a fretting child. So I left him, with a vague wonder as to who he might be, and why a single spring day should have wrought such a change upon him.

So interested was I that next morning I was on the look out for him. Sure enough, at the same hour, I saw him coming up the hill; but very slowly, with a bent back and a heavy head. It was shocking to me to see the change in him as he approached.

“I am afraid that our air does not agree with you, sir,” I ventured to remark.

But it was as though he had no heart for talk. He tried, as I thought, to make some fitting reply, but it slurred off into a mumble and silence. How bent and weak and old he seemed — ten years older at the least than when first I had seen him! It went to my heart to see this fine old fellow wasting away before my eyes. There was the eternal letter which he unfolded with his shaking fingers. Who was this woman whose words moved him so? Some daughter, perhaps, or granddaughter, who should have been the light of his home instead of —— I smiled to find how bitter I was growing, and how swiftly I was weaving a romance round an unshaven old man and his correspondence. Yet all day he lingered in my mind, and I had fitful glimpses of those two trembling, blue-veined, knuckly hands with the paper rustling between them.

I had hardly hoped to see him again. Another day’s decline must, I thought, hold him to his room, if not to his bed. Great, then, was my surprise when, as I approached my bench, I saw that he was already there. But as I came up to him I could scarce be sure that it was indeed the same man. There were the curly-brimmed hat, and the shining stock, and the horn glasses, but where were the stoop and the grey-stubbled, pitiable face? He was clean-shaven and firm lipped, with a bright eye and a head that poised itself upon his great shoulders like an eagle on a rock. His back was as straight and square as a grenadier’s, and he switched at the pebbles with his stick in his exuberant vitality. In the button-hole of his well-brushed black coat there glinted a golden blossom, and the corner of a dainty red silk handkerchief lapped over from his breast pocket. He might have been the eldest son of the weary creature who had sat there the morning before.

"Good morning, Sir, good morning!" he cried with a merry waggle of his cane.

"Good morning!" I answered, "how beautiful the bay is looking."

"Yes, Sir, but you should have seen it just before the sun rose."

"What, have you been here since then?"

"I was here when there was scarce light to see the path."

"You are a very early riser."

"On occasion, sir; on occasion!" He cocked his eye at me as if to gauge whether I were worthy of his confidence. "The fact is, sir, that my wife is coming back to me to day."

I suppose that my face showed that I did not quite see the force of the explanation. My eyes, too, may have given him assurance of sympathy, for he moved quite close to me and began speaking in a low, confidential voice, as if the matter were of such weight that even the sea-gulls must be kept out of our councils.

"Are you a married man, Sir?"

"No, I am not."

"Ah, then you cannot quite understand it. My wife and I have been married for nearly fifty years, and we have never been parted, never at all, until now."

"Was it for long?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. This is the fourth day. She had to go to Scotland. A matter of duty, you understand, and the doctors would not let me go. Not that I would have allowed them to stop me, but she was on their side. Now, thank God! it is over, and she may be here at any moment."

"Here!"

"Yes, here. This headland and bench were old friends of ours thirty years ago. The people with whom we stay are not, to tell the truth, very congenial, and we have, little privacy among them. That is why we prefer to meet here. I could not be sure which train would bring her, but if she had come by the very earliest she would have found me waiting."

"In that case — —" said I, rising.

"No, sir, no," he entreated, "I beg that you will stay. It does not weary you, this domestic talk of mine?"

"On the contrary."

"I have been so driven inwards during these few last days! Ah, what a nightmare it has been! Perhaps it may seem strange to you that an old fellow like me should feel like this."

"It is charming."

"No credit to me, sir! There's not a man on this planet but would feel the same if he had the good fortune to be married to such a woman. Perhaps, because you see me like this, and hear me speak of our long life together, you conceive that she is old, too."

He laughed heartily, and his eyes twinkled at the humour of the idea.

"She's one of those women, you know, who have youth in their hearts, and so it can never be very far from their faces. To me she's just as she was when she first took my hand in hers in '45. A wee little bit stouter, perhaps, but then, if she had a fault as a girl, it was that she was a shade too slender. She was above me in station, you know — I a clerk, and she the daughter of my employer. Oh! it was quite a romance, I give you my word, and I won her; and, somehow, I have never got over the freshness and the wonder of it. To think that that sweet, lovely girl has walked by my side all through life, and that I have been able — —"

He stopped suddenly, and I glanced round at him in surprise. He was shaking all over, in every fibre of his great body. His hands were clawing at the woodwork, and his feet shuffling on the gravel. I saw what it was. He was trying to rise, but was so excited that he could not. I half extended my hand, but a higher courtesy constrained me to draw it back again and turn my face to the sea. An instant afterwards he was up and hurrying down the path.

A woman was coming towards us. She was quite close before he had seen her — thirty yards at the utmost. I know not if she had ever been as he described her, or whether it was but some ideal which he carried in his brain. The person upon whom I looked was tall, it is true, but she was thick and shapeless, with a ruddy, full-blown face, and a skirt grotesquely gathered up. There was a green ribbon in her hat, which jarred upon my eyes, and her blouse-like bodice was full and clumsy. And this was the lovely girl, the ever youthful! My heart sank as I thought how little such a woman might appreciate him, how unworthy she might be of his love.

She came up the path in her solid way, while he staggered along to meet her. Then, as they came together, looking discreetly out of the furthest corner of my eye, I saw that he put out both his hands, while she, shrinking from a public caress, took one of them in hers and shook it. As she did so I saw her face, and I was easy in my mind for my old man. God grant that when this hand is shaking, and when this back is bowed, a woman’s eyes may look so into mine.

A PHYSIOLOGIST’S WIFE.

Professor Ainslie Grey had not come down to breakfast at the usual hour. The presentation chiming-clock which stood between the terra-cotta busts of Claude Bernard and of John Hunter upon the dining-room mantelpiece had rung out the half-hour and the three-quarters. Now its golden hand was verging upon the nine, and yet there were no signs of the master of the house.

It was an unprecedented occurrence. During the twelve years that she had kept house for him, his youngest sister had never known him a second behind his time. She sat now in front of the high silver coffee-pot, uncertain whether to order the gong to be resounded or to wait on in silence. Either course might be a mistake. Her brother was not a man who permitted mistakes.

Miss Ainslie Grey was rather above the middle height, thin, with peering, puckered eyes, and the rounded shoulders which mark the bookish woman. Her face was long and spare, flecked with colour above the cheek-bones, with a reasonable, thoughtful forehead, and a dash of absolute obstinacy in her thin lips and prominent chin. Snow white cuffs and collar, with a plain dark dress, cut with almost Quaker-like simplicity, bespoke the primness of her taste. An ebony cross hung over her flattened chest. She sat very upright in her chair, listening with raised eyebrows, and swinging her eye-glasses backwards and forwards with a nervous gesture which was peculiar to her.

Suddenly she gave a sharp, satisfied jerk of the head, and began to pour out the coffee. From outside there came the dull thudding sound of heavy feet upon thick carpet. The door swung open, and the Professor entered with a quick, nervous step. He nodded to his sister, and seating himself at the other side of the table, began to open the small pile of letters which lay beside his plate.

Professor Ainslie Grey was at that time forty-three years of age — nearly twelve years older than his sister. His career had been a brilliant one. At Edinburgh, at Cambridge, and at Vienna he had laid the foundations of his great reputation, both in physiology and in zoology.

His pamphlet, On the Mesoblastic Origin of Excitomotor Nerve Roots, had won him his fellowship of the Royal Society; and his researches, Upon the Nature of Bathybius, with some Remarks upon Lithococci, had been translated into at least three European languages. He had been referred to by one of the greatest living authorities as being the very type and embodiment of all that was best in modern science. No wonder, then, that when the commercial city of Birchespool decided to create a medical school, they were only too glad to confer the chair of physiology upon Mr. Ainslie Grey. They valued him the more from the conviction that their class was only one step in his upward journey, and that the first vacancy would remove him to some more illustrious seat of learning.

In person he was not unlike his sister. The same eyes, the same contour, the same intellectual forehead. His lips, however, were firmer, and his long, thin, lower jaw was sharper and more decided. He ran his finger and thumb down it from time to time, as he glanced over his letters.

“Those maids are very noisy,” he remarked, as a clack of tongues sounded in the distance.

“It is Sarah,” said his sister; “I shall speak about it.”

She had handed over his coffee-cup, and was sipping at her own, glancing furtively through her narrowed lids at the austere face of her brother.

“The first great advance of the human race,” said the Professor, “was when, by the development of their left frontal convolutions, they attained the power of speech. Their second advance was when they learned to control that power. Woman has not yet attained the second stage.”

He half closed his eyes as he spoke, and thrust his chin forward, but as he ceased he had a trick of suddenly opening both eyes very wide and staring sternly at his interlocutor.

“I am not garrulous, John,” said his sister.

“No, Ada; in many respects you approach the superior or male type.”

The Professor bowed over his egg with the manner of one who utters a courtly compliment; but the lady pouted, and gave an impatient little shrug of her shoulders.

“You were late this morning, John,” she remarked, after a pause.

“Yes, Ada; I slept badly. Some little cerebral congestion, no doubt due to over-stimulation of the centers of thought. I have been a little disturbed in my mind.”

His sister stared across at him in astonishment. The Professor’s mental processes had hitherto been as regular as his habits. Twelve years’ continual intercourse had taught her that he lived in a serene and rarefied atmosphere of scientific calm, high above the petty emotions which affect humbler minds.

“You are surprised, Ada,” he remarked. “Well, I cannot wonder at it. I should have been surprised myself if I had been told that I was so sensitive to vascular influences. For, after all, all disturbances are vascular if you probe them deep enough. I am thinking of getting married.”

“Not Mrs. O’James” cried Ada Grey, laying down her egg-spoon.

“My dear, you have the feminine quality of receptivity very remarkably developed. Mrs. O’James is the lady in question.”

“But you know so little of her. The Esdailes themselves know so little. She is really only an acquaintance, although she is staying at The Lindens. Would it not be wise to speak to Mrs. Esdaile first, John?”

“I do not think, Ada, that Mrs. Esdaile is at all likely to say anything which would materially affect my course of action. I have given the matter due consideration. The scientific mind is slow at arriving at conclusions, but having once formed them, it is not prone to change. Matrimony is the natural condition of the human race. I have, as you know, been so engaged in academical and other work, that I have had no time to devote to merely personal questions. It is different now, and I see no valid reason why I should forego this opportunity of seeking a suitable helpmate.”

“And you are engaged?”

“Hardly that, Ada. I ventured yesterday to indicate to the lady that I was prepared to submit to the common lot of humanity. I shall wait upon her after my morning lecture, and learn how far my proposals meet with her acquiescence. But you frown, Ada!”

His sister started, and made an effort to conceal her expression of annoyance. She even stammered out some few words of congratulation, but a vacant look had come into her brother’s eyes, and he was evidently not listening to her.

“I am sure, John, that I wish you the happiness which you deserve. If I hesitated at all, it is because I know how much is at stake, and because the thing is so sudden, so unexpected.” Her thin white hand stole up to the black cross upon her bosom. “These are moments when we need guidance, John. If I could persuade you to turn to spiritual — —”

The Professor waved the suggestion away with a deprecating hand.

"It is useless to reopen that question," he said. "We cannot argue upon it. You assume more than I can grant. I am forced to dispute your premises. We have no common basis."

His sister sighed.

"You have no faith," she said.

"I have faith in those great evolutionary forces which are leading the human race to some unknown but elevated goal."

"You believe in nothing."

"On the contrary, my dear Ada, I believe in the differentiation of protoplasm."

She shook her head sadly. It was the one subject upon which she ventured to dispute her brother's infallibility.

"This is rather beside the question," remarked the Professor, folding up his napkin. "If I am not mistaken, there is some possibility of another matrimonial event occurring in the family. Eh, Ada? What!"

His small eyes glittered with sly facetiousness as he shot a twinkle at his sister. She sat very stiff, and traced patterns upon the cloth with the sugar-tongs.

"Dr. James M'Murdo O'Brien — —" said the Professor, sonorously.

"Don't, John, don't!" cried Miss Ainslie Grey.

"Dr. James M'Murdo O'Brien," continued her brother inexorably, "is a man who has already made his mark upon the science of the day. He is my first and my most distinguished pupil. I assure you, Ada, that his 'Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin,' is likely to live as a classic. It is not too much to say that he has revolutionised our views about urobilin."

He paused, but his sister sat silent, with bent head and flushed cheeks. The little ebony cross rose and fell with her hurried breathings.

"Dr. James M'Murdo O'Brien has, as you know, the offer of the physiological chair at Melbourne. He has been in Australia five years, and has a brilliant future before him. To-day he leaves us for Edinburgh, and in two months' time, he goes out to take over his new duties. You know his feeling towards you. It, rests with you as to whether he goes out alone. Speaking for myself, I cannot imagine any higher mission for a woman of culture than to go through life in the company of a man who is capable of such a research as that which Dr. James M'Murdo O'Brien has brought to a successful conclusion."

“He has not spoken to me,” murmured the lady.

“Ah, there are signs which are more subtle than speech,” said her brother, wagging his head. “But you are pale. Your vasomotor system is excited. Your arterioles have contracted. Let me entreat you to compose yourself. I think I hear the carriage. I fancy that you may have a visitor this morning, Ada. You will excuse me now.”

With a quick glance at the clock he strode off into the hall, and within a few minutes he was rattling in his quiet, well-appointed brougham through the brick-lined streets of Birchespool.

His lecture over, Professor Ainslie Grey paid a visit to his laboratory, where he adjusted several scientific instruments, made a note as to the progress of three separate infusions of bacteria, cut half-a-dozen sections with a microtome, and finally resolved the difficulties of seven different gentlemen, who were pursuing researches in as many separate lines of inquiry. Having thus conscientiously and methodically completed the routine of his duties, he returned to his carriage and ordered the coachman to drive him to The Lindens. His face as he drove was cold and impassive, but he drew his fingers from time to time down his prominent chin with a jerky, twitchy movement.

The Lindens was an old-fashioned, ivy-clad house which had once been in the country, but was now caught in the long, red-brick feelers of the growing city. It still stood back from the road in the privacy of its own grounds. A winding path, lined with laurel bushes, led to the arched and porticoed entrance. To the right was a lawn, and at the far side, under the shadow of a hawthorn, a lady sat in a garden-chair with a book in her hands. At the click of the gate she started, and the Professor, catching sight of her, turned away from the door, and strode in her direction.

“What! won’t you go in and see Mrs. Esdaile?” she asked, sweeping out from under the shadow of the hawthorn.

She was a small woman, strongly feminine, from the rich coils of her light-coloured hair to the dainty garden slipper which peeped from under her cream-tinted dress. One tiny well-gloved hand was outstretched in greeting, while the other pressed a thick, green-covered volume against her side. Her decision and quick, tactful manner bespoke the mature woman of the world; but her upraised face had preserved a girlish and even infantile expression of innocence in its large, fearless, grey eyes, and sensitive, humorous mouth. Mrs. O'James was a widow, and she was two-and-thirty years of age; but neither fact could have been deduced from her appearance.

"You will surely go in and see Mrs. Esdaile," she repeated, glancing up at him with eyes which had in them something between a challenge and a caress.

"I did not come to see Mrs. Esdaile," he answered, with no relaxation of his cold and grave manner; "I came to see you."

"I am sure I should be highly honoured," she said, with just the slightest little touch of brogue in her accent. "What are the students to do without their Professor?"

"I have already completed my academic duties. Take my arm, and we shall walk in the sunshine. Surely we cannot wonder that Eastern people should have made a deity of the sun. It is the great beneficent force of Nature — man's ally against cold, sterility, and all that is abhorrent to him. What were you reading?"

"Hale's Matter and Life."

The Professor raised his thick eyebrows.

"Hale!" he said, and then again in a kind of whisper, "Hale!"

"You differ from him?" she asked.

"It is not I who differ from him. I am only a monad — a thing of no moment. The whole tendency of the highest plane of modern thought differs from him. He defends the indefensible. He is an excellent observer, but a feeble reasoner. I should not recommend you to found your conclusions upon Hale."

"I must read Nature's Chronicle to counteract his pernicious influence," said Mrs. O'James, with a soft, cooing laugh.

Nature's Chronicle was one of the many books in which Professor Ainslie Grey had enforced the negative doctrines of scientific agnosticism.

"It is a faulty work," said he; "I cannot recommend it. I would rather refer you to the standard writings of some of my older and more eloquent colleagues."

There was a pause in their talk as they paced up and down on the green, velvet-like lawn in the genial sunshine.

"Have you thought at all," he asked at last, "of the matter upon which I spoke to you last night?"

She said nothing, but walked by his side with her eyes averted and her face aslant.

"I would not hurry you unduly," he continued. "I know that it is a matter which can scarcely be decided off-hand. In my own case, it cost me some thought before I ventured to make the suggestion. I am not an emotional man, but I am conscious in your presence of the great evolutionary instinct which makes either sex the complement of the other."

"You believe in love, then?" she asked, with a twinkling, upward glance.

"I am forced to."

"And yet you can deny the soul?"

"How far these questions are psychic and how far material is still sub judice," said the Professor, with an air of toleration. "Protoplasm may prove to be the physical basis of love as well as of life."

"How inflexible you are!" she exclaimed; "you would draw love down to the level of physics."

"Or draw physics up to the level of love."

"Come, that is much better," she cried, with her sympathetic laugh. "That is really very pretty, and puts science in quite a delightful light."

Her eyes sparkled, and she tossed her chin with the pretty, wilful air of a woman who is mistress of the situation.

"I have reason to believe," said the Professor, "that my position here will prove to be only a stepping-stone to some wider scene of scientific activity. Yet, even here, my chair brings me in some fifteen hundred pounds a year, which is supplemented by a few hundreds from my books. I should therefore be in a position to provide you with those comforts to which you are accustomed. So much for my pecuniary position. As to my constitution, it has always been sound. I have never suffered from any illness in my life, save fleeting attacks of cephalalgia, the result of too prolonged a stimulation of the centres of cerebration. My father and mother had no sign of any morbid diathesis, but I will not conceal from you that my grandfather was afflicted with podagra."

Mrs. O'James looked startled.

"Is that very serious?" she asked.

"It is gout," said the Professor.

"Oh, is that all? It sounded much worse than that."

"It is a grave taint, but I trust that I shall not be a victim to atavism. I have laid these facts before you because they are factors which cannot be overlooked in forming your decision. May I ask now whether you see your way to accepting my proposal?"

He paused in his walk, and looked earnestly and expectantly down at her.

A struggle was evidently going on in her mind. Her eyes were cast down, her little slipper tapped the lawn, and her fingers played nervously with her chatelain. Suddenly, with a sharp, quick gesture which had in it something of ABANDON and recklessness, she held out her hand to her companion.

“I accept,” she said.

They were standing under the shadow of the hawthorn. He stooped gravely down, and kissed her glove-covered fingers.

“I trust that you may never have cause to regret your decision,” he said.

“I trust that you never may,” she cried, with a heaving breast.

There were tears in her eyes, and her lips twitched with some strong emotion.

“Come into the sunshine again,” said he. “It is the great restorative. Your nerves are shaken. Some little congestion of the medulla and pons. It is always instructive to reduce psychic or emotional conditions to their physical equivalents. You feel that your anchor is still firm in a bottom of ascertained fact.”

“But it is so dreadfully unromantic,” said Mrs. O’James, with her old twinkle.

“Romance is the offspring of imagination and of ignorance. Where science throws her calm, clear light there is happily no room for romance.”

“But is not love romance?” she asked.

“Not at all. Love has been taken away from the poets, and has been brought within the domain of true science. It may prove to be one of the great cosmic elementary forces. When the atom of hydrogen draws the atom of chlorine towards it to form the perfected molecule of hydrochloric acid, the force which it exerts may be intrinsically similar to that which draws me to you. Attraction and repulsion appear to be the primary forces. This is attraction.”

“And here is repulsion,” said Mrs. O’James, as a stout, florid lady came sweeping across the lawn in their direction. “So glad you have come out, Mrs. Esdaile! Here is Professor Grey.”

“How do you do, Professor?” said the lady, with some little pomposity of manner. “You were very wise to stay out here on so lovely a day. Is it not heavenly?”

“It is certainly very fine weather,” the Professor answered.

“Listen to the wind sighing in the trees!” cried Mrs. Esdaile, holding up one finger. “It is Nature’s lullaby. Could you not imagine it, Professor Grey, to be the whisperings of angels?”

“The idea had not occurred to me, madam.”

“Ah, Professor, I have always the same complaint against you. A want of rapport with the deeper meanings of nature. Shall I say a want of imagination. You do not feel an emotional thrill at the singing of that thrush?”

“I confess that I am not conscious of one, Mrs. Esdaile.”

“Or at the delicate tint of that background of leaves? See the rich greens!”

“Chlorophyll,” murmured the Professor.

“Science is so hopelessly prosaic. It dissects and labels, and loses sight of the great things in its attention to the little ones. You have a poor opinion of woman’s intellect, Professor Grey. I think that I have heard you say so.”

“It is a question of avoirdupois,” said the Professor, closing his eyes and shrugging his shoulders. “The female cerebrum averages two ounces less in weight than the male. No doubt there are exceptions. Nature is always elastic.”

“But the heaviest thing is not always the strongest,” said Mrs. O’James, laughing. “Isn’t there a law of compensation in science? May we not hope to make up in quality for what we lack in quantity?”

“I think not,” remarked the Professor, gravely. “But there is your luncheon-gong. No, thank you, Mrs. Esdaile, I cannot stay. My carriage is waiting. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs. O’James.”

He raised his hat and stalked slowly away among the laurel bushes.

“He has no taste,” said Mrs. Esdaile—”no eye for beauty.”

“On the contrary,” Mrs. O’James answered, with a saucy little jerk of the chin. “He has just asked me to be his wife.”

As Professor Ainslie Grey ascended the steps of his house, the hall-door opened and a dapper gentleman stepped briskly out. He was somewhat sallow in the face, with dark, beady eyes, and a short, black beard with an aggressive bristle. Thought and work had left their traces upon his face, but he moved with the brisk activity of a man who had not yet bade good-bye to his youth.

“I’m in luck’s way,” he cried. “I wanted to see you.”

“Then come back into the library,” said the Professor; “you must stay and have lunch with us.”

The two men entered the hall, and the Professor led the way into his private sanctum. He motioned his companion into an arm-chair.

“I trust that you have been successful, O’Brien,” said he. “I should be loath to exercise any undue pressure upon my sister Ada; but I have given her to understand that there is no one whom I should prefer for a brother-in-law to my most brilliant scholar, the author of Some Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin.”

“You are very kind, Professor Grey — you have always been very kind,” said the other. “I approached Miss Grey upon the subject; she did not say No.”

“She said Yes, then?”

“No; she proposed to leave the matter open until my return from Edinburgh. I go to-day, as you know, and I hope to commence my research to-morrow.”

“On the comparative anatomy of the vermiform appendix, by James M’Murdo O’Brien,” said the Professor, sonorously. “It is a glorious subject — a subject which lies at the very root of evolutionary philosophy.”

“Ah! she is the dearest girl,” cried O’Brien, with a sudden little spurt of Celtic enthusiasm—”she is the soul of truth and of honour.”

“The vermiform appendix — —” began the Professor.

“She is an angel from heaven,” interrupted the other. “I fear that it is my advocacy of scientific freedom in religious thought which stands in my way with her.”

“You must not truckle upon that point. You must be true to your convictions; let there be no compromise there.”

“My reason is true to agnosticism, and yet I am conscious of a void — a vacuum. I had feelings at the old church at home between the scent of the incense and the roll of the organ, such as I have never experienced in the laboratory or the lecture-room.”

“Sensuous-purely sensuous,” said the Professor, rubbing his chin. “Vague hereditary tendencies stirred into life by the stimulation of the nasal and auditory nerves.”

“Maybe so, maybe so,” the younger man answered thoughtfully. “But this was not what I wished to speak to you about. Before I enter your family, your sister and you have a claim to know all that I can tell you about my career. Of my worldly prospects I have already spoken to you. There is only one point which I have omitted to mention. I am a widower.”

The Professor raised his eyebrows.

"This is news indeed," said he.

"I married shortly after my arrival in Australia. Miss Thurston was her name. I met her in society. It was a most unhappy match."

Some painful emotion possessed him. His quick, expressive features quivered, and his white hands tightened upon the arms of the chair. The Professor turned away towards the window.

"You are the best judge," he remarked "but I should not think that it was necessary to go into details."

"You have a right to know everything — you and Miss Grey. It is not a matter on which I can well speak to her direct. Poor Jinny was the best of women, but she was open to flattery, and liable to be misled by designing persons. She was untrue to me, Grey. It is a hard thing to say of the dead, but she was untrue to me. She fled to Auckland with a man whom she had known before her marriage. The brig which carried them foundered, and not a soul was saved."

"This is very painful, O'Brien," said the Professor, with a deprecatory motion of his hand. "I cannot see, however, how it affects your relation to my sister."

"I have eased my conscience," said O'Brien, rising from his chair; "I have told you all that there is to tell. I should not like the story to reach you through any lips but my own."

"You are right, O'Brien. Your action has been most honourable and considerate. But you are not to blame in the matter, save that perhaps you showed a little precipitancy in choosing a life-partner without due care and inquiry."

O'Brien drew his hand across his eyes.

"Poor girl!" he cried. "God help me, I love her still! But I must go."

"You will lunch with us?"

"No, Professor; I have my packing still to do. I have already bade Miss Grey adieu. In two months I shall see you again."

"You will probably find me a married man."

"Married!"

"Yes, I have been thinking of it."

"My dear Professor, let me congratulate you with all my heart. I had no idea. Who is the lady?"

“Mrs. O’James is her name — a widow of the same nationality as yourself. But to return to matters of importance, I should be very happy to see the proofs of your paper upon the vermiform appendix. I may be able to furnish you with material for a footnote or two.”

“Your assistance will be invaluable to me,” said O’Brien, with enthusiasm, and the two men parted in the hall. The Professor walked back into the dining-room, where his sister was already seated at the luncheon-table.

“I shall be married at the registrar’s,” he remarked; “I should strongly recommend you to do the same.”

Professor Ainslie Grey was as good as his word. A fortnight’s cessation of his classes gave him an opportunity which was too good to let pass. Mrs. O’James was an orphan, without relations and almost without friends in the country. There was no obstacle in the way of a speedy wedding. They were married, accordingly, in the quietest manner possible, and went off to Cambridge together, where the Professor and his charming wife were present at several academic observances, and varied the routine of their honeymoon by incursions into biological laboratories and medical libraries. Scientific friends were loud in their congratulations, not only upon Mrs. Grey’s beauty, but upon the unusual quickness and intelligence which she displayed in discussing physiological questions. The Professor was himself astonished at the accuracy of her information. “You have a remarkable range of knowledge for a woman, Jeannette,” he remarked upon more than one occasion. He was even prepared to admit that her cerebrum might be of the normal weight.

One foggy, drizzling morning they returned to Birchespool, for the next day would re-open the session, and Professor Ainslie Grey prided himself upon having never once in his life failed to appear in his lecture-room at the very stroke of the hour. Miss Ada Grey welcomed them with a constrained cordiality, and handed over the keys of office to the new mistress. Mrs. Grey pressed her warmly to remain, but she explained that she had already accepted an invitation which would engage her for some months. The same evening she departed for the south of England.

A couple of days later the maid carried a card just after breakfast into the library where the Professor sat revising his morning lecture. It announced the re-arrival of Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien. Their meeting was effusively genial on the part of the younger man, and coldly precise on that of his former teacher.

“You see there have been changes,” said the Professor.

“So I heard. Miss Grey told me in her letters, and I read the notice in the British Medical Journal. So it’s really married you are. How quickly and quietly you have managed it all!”

“I am constitutionally averse to anything in the nature of show or ceremony. My wife is a sensible woman — I may even go the length of saying that, for a woman, she is abnormally sensible. She quite agreed with me in the course which I have adopted.”

“And your research on Vallisneria?”

“This matrimonial incident has interrupted it, but I have resumed my classes, and we shall soon be quite in harness again.”

“I must see Miss Grey before I leave England. We have corresponded, and I think that all will be well. She must come out with me. I don’t think I could go without her.”

The Professor shook his head.

“Your nature is not so weak as you pretend,” he said. “Questions of this sort are, after all, quite subordinate to the great duties of life.”

O’Brien smiled.

“You would have me take out my Celtic soul and put in a Saxon one,” he said. “Either my brain is too small or my heart is too big. But when may I call and pay my respects to Mrs. Grey? Will she be at home this afternoon?”

“She is at home now. Come into the morning-room. She will be glad to make your acquaintance.”

They walked across the linoleum-paved hall. The Professor opened the door of the room, and walked in, followed by his friend. Mrs. Grey was sitting in a basket-chair by the window, light and fairy-like in a loose-flowing, pink morning-gown. Seeing a visitor, she rose and swept towards them. The Professor heard a dull thud behind him. O’Brien had fallen back into a chair, with his hand pressed tight to his side.

“Jinny!” he gasped—”Jinny!”

Mrs. Grey stopped dead in her advance, and stared at him with a face from which every expression had been struck out, save one of astonishment and horror. Then with a sharp intaking of the breath she reeled, and would have fallen had the Professor not thrown his long, nervous arm round her.

“Try this sofa,” said he.

She sank back among the cushions with the same white, cold, dead look upon her face. The Professor stood with his back to the empty fireplace and glanced from the one to the other.

“So, O’Brien,” he said at last, “you have already made the acquaintance of my wife!”

“Your wife,” cried his friend hoarsely. “She is no wife of yours. God help me, she is MY wife.”

The Professor stood rigidly upon the hearthrug. His long, thin fingers were intertwined, and his head sunk a little forward. His two companions had eyes only for each other.

“Jinny!” said he.

“James!”

“How could you leave me so, Jinny? How could you have the heart to do it? I thought you were dead. I mourned for your death — ay, and you have made me mourn for you living. You have withered my life.”

She made no answer, but lay back among her cushions with her eyes still fixed upon him.

“Why do you not speak?”

“Because you are right, James. I HAVE treated you cruelly — shamefully. But it is not as bad as you think.”

“You fled with De Horta.”

“No, I did not. At the last moment my better nature prevailed. He went alone. But I was ashamed to come back after what I had written to you. I could not face you. I took passage alone to England under a new name, and here I have lived ever since. It seemed to me that I was beginning life again. I knew that you thought I was drowned. Who could have dreamed that fate would throw us together again! When the Professor asked me — —”

She stopped and gave a gasp for breath.

“You are faint,” said the Professor—”keep the head low; it aids the cerebral circulation.” He flattened down the cushion. “I am sorry to leave you, O’Brien; but I have my class duties to look to. Possibly I may find you here when I return.”

With a grim and rigid face he strode out of the room. Not one of the three hundred students who listened to his lecture saw any change in his manner and appearance, or could have guessed that the austere gentleman in front of them had found out at last how hard it is to rise above one’s humanity. The lecture over, he performed his routine duties in the laboratory, and then drove back to his own house. He did not enter by the front door, but passed through the garden to the folding glass casement which led out of the morning-room. As he approached he heard his wife’s voice and O’Brien’s in loud and animated talk. He paused among the rose-bushes, uncertain whether to interrupt them or no. Nothing was further from his nature than play the eavesdropper; but as he stood, still hesitating, words fell upon his ear which struck him rigid and motionless.

“You are still my wife, Jinny,” said O’Brien; “I forgive you from the bottom of my heart. I love you, and I have never ceased to love you, though you had forgotten me.”

“No, James, my heart was always in Melbourne. I have always been yours. I thought that it was better for you that I should seem to be dead.”

“You must choose between us now, Jinny. If you determine to remain here, I shall not open my lips. There shall be no scandal. If, on the other hand, you come with me, it’s little I care about the world’s opinion. Perhaps I am as much to blame as you. I thought too much of my work and too little of my wife.”

The Professor heard the cooing, caressing laugh which he knew so well.

“I shall go with you, James,” she said.

“And the Professor —— ?”

“The poor Professor! But he will not mind much, James; he has no heart.”

“We must tell him our resolution.”

“There is no need,” said Professor Ainslie Grey, stepping in through the open casement. “I have overheard the latter part of your conversation. I hesitated to interrupt you before you came to a conclusion.”

O’Brien stretched out his hand and took that of the woman. They stood together with the sunshine on their faces. The Professor paused at the casement with his hands behind his back, and his long black shadow fell between them.

“You have come to a wise decision,” said he. “Go back to Australia together, and let what has passed be blotted out of your lives.”

“But you — you — —” stammered O’Brien.

The Professor waved his hand.

“Never trouble about me,” he said.

The woman gave a gasping cry.

“What can I do or say?” she wailed. “How could I have foreseen this? I thought my old life was dead. But it has come back again, with all its hopes and its desires. What can I say to you, Ainslie? I have brought shame and disgrace upon a worthy man. I have blasted your life. How you must hate and loathe me! I wish to God that I had never been born!”

“I neither hate nor loathe you, Jeannette,” said the Professor, quietly. “You are wrong in regretting your birth, for you have a worthy mission before you in aiding the life-work of a man who has shown himself capable of the highest order of scientific research. I cannot with justice blame you personally for what has occurred. How far the individual monad is to be held responsible for hereditary and engrained tendencies, is a question upon which science has not yet said her last word.”

He stood with his finger-tips touching, and his body inclined as one who is gravely expounding a difficult and impersonal subject. O’Brien had stepped forward to say something, but the other’s attitude and manner froze the words upon his lips. Condolence or sympathy would be an impertinence to one who could so easily merge his private griefs in broad questions of abstract philosophy.

“It is needless to prolong the situation,” the Professor continued, in the same measured tones. “My brougham stands at the door. I beg that you will use it as your own. Perhaps it would be as well that you should leave the town without unnecessary delay. Your things, Jeannette, shall be forwarded.”

O’Brien hesitated with a hanging head.

“I hardly dare offer you my hand,” he said.

“On the contrary. I think that of the three of us you come best out of the affair. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Your sister — —”

“I shall see that the matter is put to her in its true light. Good-bye! Let me have a copy of your recent research. Good-bye, Jeannette!”

“Good-bye!”

Their hands met, and for one short moment their eyes also. It was only a glance, but for the first and last time the woman’s intuition cast a light for itself into the dark places of a strong man’s soul. She gave a little gasp, and her other hand rested for an instant, as white and as light as thistle-down, upon his shoulder.

“James, James!” she cried. “Don’t you see that he is stricken to the heart?”

He turned her quietly away from him.

“I am not an emotional man,” he said. “I have my duties — my research on Vallisneria. The brougham is there. Your cloak is in the hall. Tell John where you wish to be driven. He will bring you anything you need. Now go.”

His last two words were so sudden, so volcanic, in such contrast to his measured voice and mask-like face, that they swept the two away from him. He closed the door behind them and paced slowly up and down the room. Then he passed into the library and looked out over the wire blind. The carriage was rolling away. He caught a last glimpse of the woman who had been his wife. He saw the feminine droop of her head, and the curve of her beautiful throat.

Under some foolish, aimless impulse, he took a few quick steps towards the door. Then he turned, and throwing himself into his study-chair he plunged back into his work.

There was little scandal about this singular domestic incident. The Professor had few personal friends, and seldom went into society. His marriage had been so quiet that most of his colleagues had never ceased to regard him as a bachelor. Mrs. Esdaile and a few others might talk, but their field for gossip was limited, for they could only guess vaguely at the cause of this sudden separation.

The Professor was as punctual as ever at his classes, and as zealous in directing the laboratory work of those who studied under him. His own private researches were pushed on with feverish energy. It was no uncommon thing for his servants, when they came down of a morning, to hear the shrill scratchings of his tireless pen, or to meet him on the staircase as he ascended, grey and silent, to his room. In vain his friends assured him that such a life must undermine his health. He lengthened his hours until day and night were one long, ceaseless task.

Gradually under this discipline a change came over his appearance. His features, always inclined to gauntness, became even sharper and more pronounced. There were deep lines about his temples and across his brow. His cheek was sunken and his complexion bloodless. His knees gave under him when he walked; and once when passing out of his lecture-room he fell and had to be assisted to his carriage.

This was just before the end of the session and soon after the holidays commenced the professors who still remained in Birchespool were shocked to hear that their brother of the chair of physiology had sunk so low that no hopes could be entertained of his recovery. Two eminent physicians had consulted over his case without being able to give a name to the affection from which he suffered. A steadily decreasing vitality appeared to be the only symptom — a bodily weakness which left the mind unclouded. He was much interested himself in his own case, and made notes of his subjective sensations as an aid to diagnosis. Of his approaching end he spoke in his usual unemotional and somewhat pedantic fashion. “It is the assertion,” he said, “of the liberty of the individual cell as opposed to the cell-commune. It is the dissolution of a co-operative society. The process is one of great interest.”

And so one grey morning his co-operative society dissolved. Very quietly and softly he sank into his eternal sleep. His two physicians felt some slight embarrassment when called upon to fill in his certificate.

“It is difficult to give it a name,” said one.

“Very,” said the other.

“If he were not such an unemotional man, I should have said that he had died from some sudden nervous shock — from, in fact, what the vulgar would call a broken heart.”

“I don’t think poor Grey was that sort of a man at all.”

“Let us call it cardiac, anyhow,” said the older physician.

So they did so.

THE CASE OF LADY SANNOX.

The relations between Douglas Stone and the notorious Lady Sannox were very well known both among the fashionable circles of which she was a brilliant member, and the scientific bodies which numbered him among their most illustrious confreres. There was naturally, therefore, a very widespread interest when it was announced one morning that the lady had absolutely and for ever taken the veil, and that the world would see her no more. When, at the very tail of this rumour, there came the assurance that the celebrated operating surgeon, the man of steel nerves, had been found in the morning by his valet, seated on one side of his bed, smiling pleasantly upon the universe, with both legs jammed into one side of his breeches and his great brain about as valuable as a cap full of porridge, the matter was strong enough to give quite a little thrill of interest to folk who had never hoped that their jaded nerves were capable of such a sensation.

Douglas Stone in his prime was one of the most remarkable men in England. Indeed, he could hardly be said to have ever reached his prime, for he was but nine-and-thirty at the time of this little incident. Those who knew him best were aware that, famous as he was as a surgeon, he might have succeeded with even greater rapidity in any of a dozen lines of life. He could have cut his way to fame as a soldier, struggled to it as an explorer, bullied for it in the courts, or built it out of stone and iron as an engineer. He was born to be great, for he could plan what another man dare not do, and he could do what another man dare not plan. In surgery none could follow him. His nerve, his judgment, his intuition, were things apart. Again and again his knife cut away death, but grazed the very springs of life in doing it, until his assistants were as white as the patient. His energy, his audacity, his full-blooded self-confidence — does not the memory of them still linger to the south of Marylebone Road and the north of Oxford Street?

His vices were as magnificent as his virtues, and infinitely more picturesque. Large as was his income, and it was the third largest of all professional men in London, it was far beneath the luxury of his living. Deep in his complex nature lay a rich vein of sensualism, at the sport of which he placed all the prizes of his life. The eye, the ear, the touch, the palate — all were his masters. The bouquet of old vintages, the scent of rare exotics, the curves and tints of the daintiest potteries of Europe — it was to these that the quick-running stream of gold was transformed. And then there came his sudden mad passion for Lady Sannox, when a single interview with two challenging glances and a whispered word set him ablaze. She was the loveliest woman in London, and the only one to him. He was one of the handsomest men in London, but not the only one to her. She had a liking for new experiences, and was gracious to most men who wooed her. It may have been cause or it may have been effect that Lord Sannox looked fifty, though he was but six-and-thirty.

He was a quiet, silent, neutral-tinted man, this lord, with thin lips and heavy eyelids, much given to gardening, and full of home-like habits. He had at one time been fond of acting, had even rented a theatre in London, and on its boards had first seen Miss Marion Dawson, to whom he had offered his hand, his title, and the third of a county. Since his marriage this early hobby had become distasteful to him. Even in private theatricals it was no longer possible to persuade him to exercise the talent which he had often shown that he possessed. He was happier with a spud and a watering-can among his orchids and chrysanthemums.

It was quite an interesting problem whether he was absolutely devoid of sense, or miserably wanting in spirit. Did he know his lady’s ways and condone them, or was he a mere blind, doting fool? It was a point to be discussed over the teacups in snug little drawing-rooms, or with the aid of a cigar in the bow windows of clubs. Bitter and plain were the comments among men upon his conduct. There was but one who had a good word to say for him, and he was the most silent member in the smoking-room. He had seen him break in a horse at the university, and it seemed to have left an impression upon his mind.

But when Douglas Stone became the favourite, all doubts as to Lord Sannox’s knowledge or ignorance were set for ever at rest. There, was no subterfuge about Stone. In his high-handed, impetuous fashion, he set all caution and discretion at defiance. The scandal became notorious. A learned body intimated that his name had been struck from the list of its vice-presidents. Two friends implored him to consider his professional credit. He cursed them all three, and spent forty guineas on a bangle to take with him to the lady. He was at her house every evening, and she drove in his carriage in the afternoons. There was not an attempt on either side to conceal their relations; but there came at last a little incident to interrupt them.

It was a dismal winter’s night, very cold and gusty, with the wind whooping in the chimneys and blustering against the window-panes. A thin spatter of rain tinkled on the glass with each fresh sough of the gale, drowning for the instant the dull gurgle and drip from the eves. Douglas Stone had finished his dinner, and sat by his fire in the study, a glass of rich port upon the malachite table at his elbow. As he raised it to his lips, he held it up against the lamplight, and watched with the eye of a connoisseur the tiny scales of beeswing which floated in its rich ruby depths. The fire, as it spurted up, threw fitful lights upon his bold, clear-cut face, with its widely-opened grey eyes, its thick and yet firm lips, and the deep, square jaw, which had something Roman in its strength and its animalism. He smiled from time to time as he nestled back in his luxurious chair. Indeed, he had a right to feel well pleased, for, against the advice of six colleagues, he had performed an operation that day of which only two cases were on record, and the result had been brilliant beyond all expectation. No other man in London would have had the daring to plan, or the skill to execute, such a heroic measure.

But he had promised Lady Sannox to see her that evening and it was already half-past eight. His hand was outstretched to the bell to order the carriage when he heard the dull thud of the knocker. An instant later there was the shuffling of feet in the hall, and the sharp closing of a door.

“A patient to see you, sir, in the consulting-room, said the butler.

“About himself?”

“No, sir; I think he wants you to go out.”

“It is too late,” cried Douglas Stone peevishly. “I won’t go.”

“This is his card, sir.”

The butler presented it upon the gold salver which had been given to his master by the wife of a Prime Minister.

“‘Hamil Ali, Smyrna.’ Hum! The fellow is a Turk, I suppose.”

“Yes, sir. He seems as if he came from abroad, sir. And he’s in a terrible way.”

“Tut, tut! I have an engagement. I must go somewhere else. But I’ll see him. Show him in here, Pim.”

A few moments later the butler swung open the door and ushered in a small and decrepit man, who walked with a bent back and with the forward push of the face and blink of the eyes which goes with extreme short sight. His face was swarthy, and his hair and beard of the deepest black. In one hand he held a turban of white muslin striped with red, in the other a small chamois leather bag.

"Good-evening," said Douglas Stone, when the butler had closed the door. "You speak English, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. I am from Asia Minor, but I speak English when I speak slow."

"You wanted me to go out, I understand?"

"Yes, sir. I wanted very much that you should see my wife."

"I could come in the morning, but I have an engagement which prevents me from seeing your wife to-night."

The Turk's answer was a singular one. He pulled the string which closed the mouth of the chamois leather bag, and poured a flood of gold on to the table.

"There are one hundred pounds there," said he, "and I promise you that it will not take you an hour. I have a cab ready at the door."

Douglas Stone glanced at his watch. An hour would not make it too late to visit Lady Sannox. He had been there later. And the fee was an extraordinarily high one. He had been pressed by his creditors lately, and he could not afford to let such a chance pass. He would go.

"What is the case?" he asked.

"Oh, it is so sad a one! So sad a one! You have not, perhaps, heard of the daggers of the Almohades?"

"Never."

"Ah, they are Eastern daggers of a great age and of a singular shape, with the hilt like what you call a stirrup. I am a curiosity dealer, you understand, and that is why I have come to England from Smyrna, but next week I go back once more. Many things I brought with me, and I have a few things left, but among them, to my sorrow, is one of these daggers."

"You will remember that I have an appointment, sir," said the surgeon, with some irritation. "Pray confine yourself to the necessary details."

"You will see that it is necessary. To-day my wife fell down in a faint in the room in which I keep my wares, and she cut her lower lip upon this cursed dagger of Almohades."

"I see," said Douglas Stone, rising. "And you wish me to dress the wound?"

"No, no, it is worse than that."

"What then?"

"These daggers are poisoned."

"Poisoned!"

"Yes, and there is no man, East or West, who can tell now what is the poison or what the cure. But all that is known I know, for my father was in this trade before me, and we have had much to do with these poisoned weapons."

"What are the symptoms?"

"Deep sleep, and death in thirty hours."

"And you say there is no cure. Why then should you pay me this considerable fee?"

"No drug can cure, but the knife may."

"And how?"

"The poison is slow of absorption. It remains for hours in the wound."

"Washing, then, might cleanse it?"

"No more than in a snake-bite. It is too subtle and too deadly."

"Excision of the wound, then?"

"That is it. If it be on the finger, take the finger off. So said my father always. But think of where this wound is, and that it is my wife. It is dreadful!"

But familiarity with such grim matters may take the finer edge from a man's sympathy. To Douglas Stone this was already an interesting case, and he brushed aside as irrelevant the feeble objections of the husband.

"It appears to be that or nothing," said he brusquely. "It is better to lose a lip than a life."

"Ah, yes, I know that you are right. Well, well, it is kismet, and must be faced. I have the cab, and you will come with me and do this thing."

Douglas Stone took his case of bistouries from a drawer, and placed it with a roll of bandage and a compress of lint in his pocket. He must waste no more time if he were to see Lady Sannox.

"I am ready," said he, pulling on his overcoat. "Will you take a glass of wine before you go out into this cold air?"

His visitor shrank away, with a protesting hand upraised.

"You forget that I am a Mussulman, and a true follower of the Prophet," said he. "But tell me what is the bottle of green glass which you have placed in your pocket?"

"It is chloroform."

"Ah, that also is forbidden to us. It is a spirit, and we make no use of such things."

"What! You would allow your wife to go through an operation without an anaesthetic?"

"Ah! she will feel nothing, poor soul. The deep sleep has already come on, which is the first working of the poison. And then I have given her of our Smyrna opium. Come, sir, for already an hour has passed."

As they stepped out into the darkness, a sheet of rain was driven in upon their faces, and the hall lamp, which dangled from the arm of a marble caryatid, went out with a fluff. Pim, the butler, pushed the heavy door to, straining hard with his shoulder against the wind, while the two men groped their way towards the yellow glare which showed where the cab was waiting. An instant later they were rattling upon their journey.

"Is it far?" asked Douglas Stone.

"Oh, no. We have a very little quiet place off the Euston Road."

The surgeon pressed the spring of his repeater and listened to the little tings which told him the hour. It was a quarter past nine. He calculated the distances, and the short time which it would take him to perform so trivial an operation. He ought to reach Lady Sannox by ten o'clock. Through the fogged windows he saw the blurred gas-lamps dancing past, with occasionally the broader glare of a shop front. The rain was pelting and rattling upon the leathern top of the carriage and the wheels swashed as they rolled through puddle and mud. Opposite to him the white headgear of his companion gleamed faintly through the obscurity. The surgeon felt in his pockets and arranged his needles, his ligatures and his safety-pins, that no time might be wasted when they arrived. He chafed with impatience and drummed his foot upon the floor.

But the cab slowed down at last and pulled up. In an instant Douglas Stone was out, and the Smyrna merchant's toe was at his very heel.

"You can wait," said he to the driver.

It was a mean-looking house in a narrow and sordid street. The surgeon, who knew his London well, cast a swift glance into the shadows, but there was nothing distinctive — no shop, no movement, nothing but a double line of dull, flat-faced houses, a double stretch of wet flagstones which gleamed in the lamplight, and a double rush of water in the gutters which swirled and gurgled towards the sewer gratings. The door which faced them was blotched and discoloured, and a faint light in the fan pane above it served to show the dust and the grime which covered it. Above, in one of the bedroom windows, there was a dull yellow glimmer. The merchant knocked loudly, and, as he turned his dark face towards the light, Douglas Stone could see that it was contracted with anxiety. A bolt was drawn, and an elderly woman with a taper stood in the doorway, shielding the thin flame with her gnarled hand.

"Is all well?" gasped the merchant.

"She is as you left her, sir."

"She has not spoken?"

"No; she is in a deep sleep."

The merchant closed the door, and Douglas Stone walked down the narrow passage, glancing about him in some surprise as he did so. There was no oilcloth, no mat, no hat-rack. Deep grey dust and heavy festoons of cobwebs met his eyes everywhere. Following the old woman up the winding stair, his firm footfall echoed harshly through the silent house. There was no carpet.

The bedroom was on the second landing. Douglas Stone followed the old nurse into it, with the merchant at his heels. Here, at least, there was furniture and to spare. The floor was littered and the corners piled with Turkish cabinets, inlaid tables, coats of chain mail, strange pipes, and grotesque weapons. A single small lamp stood upon a bracket on the wall. Douglas Stone took it down, and picking his way among the lumber, walked over to a couch in the corner, on which lay a woman dressed in the Turkish fashion, with yashmak and veil. The lower part of the face was exposed, and the surgeon saw a jagged cut which zigzagged along the border of the under lip.

"You will forgive the yashmak," said the Turk. "You know our views about woman in the East."

But the surgeon was not thinking about the yashmak. This was no longer a woman to him. It was a case. He stooped and examined the wound carefully.

"There are no signs of irritation," said he. "We might delay the operation until local symptoms develop."

The husband wrung his hands in incontrollable agitation.

"Oh! sir, sir!" he cried. "Do not trifle. You do not know. It is deadly. I know, and I give you my assurance that an operation is absolutely necessary. Only the knife can save her."

“And yet I am inclined to wait,” said Douglas Stone.

“That is enough!” the Turk cried, angrily. “Every minute is of importance, and I cannot stand here and see my wife allowed to sink. It only remains for me to give you my thanks for having come, and to call in some other surgeon before it is too late.”

Douglas Stone hesitated. To refund that hundred pounds was no pleasant matter. But of course if he left the case he must return the money. And if the Turk were right and the woman died, his position before a coroner might be an embarrassing one.

“You have had personal experience of this poison?” he asked.

“I have.”

“And you assure me that an operation is needful.”

“I swear it by all that I hold sacred.”

“The disfigurement will be frightful.”

“I can understand that the mouth will not be a pretty one to kiss.”

Douglas Stone turned fiercely upon the man. The speech was a brutal one. But the Turk has his own fashion of talk and of thought, and there was no time for wrangling. Douglas Stone drew a bistoury from his case, opened it and felt the keen straight edge with his forefinger. Then he held the lamp closer to the bed. Two dark eyes were gazing up at him through the slit in the yashmak. They were all iris, and the pupil was hardly to be seen.

“You have given her a very heavy dose of opium.”

“Yes, she has had a good dose.”

He glanced again at the dark eyes which looked straight at his own. They were dull and lustreless, but, even as he gazed, a little shifting sparkle came into them, and the lips quivered.

“She is not absolutely unconscious,” said he.

“Would it not be well to use the knife while it would be painless?”

The same thought had crossed the surgeon’s mind. He grasped the wounded lip with his forceps, and with two swift cuts he took out a broad V-shaped piece. The woman sprang up on the couch with a dreadful gurgling scream. Her covering was torn from her face. It was a face that he knew. In spite of that protruding upper lip and that slobber of blood, it was a face that he knew. She kept on putting her hand up to the gap and screaming. Douglas Stone sat down at the foot of the couch with his knife and his forceps. The room was whirling round, and he had felt something go like a ripping seam behind his ear. A bystander would have said that his face was the more ghastly of the two. As in a dream, or as if he had been looking at something at the play, he was conscious that the Turk's hair and beard lay upon the table, and that Lord Sannox was leaning against the wall with his hand to his side, laughing silently. The screams had died away now, and the dreadful head had dropped back again upon the pillow, but Douglas Stone still sat motionless, and Lord Sannox still chuckled quietly to himself.

"It was really very necessary for Marion, this operation," said he, "not physically, but morally, you know, morally."

Douglas Stone stooped forwards and began to play with the fringe of the coverlet. His knife tinkled down upon the ground, but he still held the forceps and something more.

"I had long intended to make a little example," said Lord Sannox, suavely. "Your note of Wednesday miscarried, and I have it here in my pocket-book. I took some pains in carrying out my idea. The wound, by the way, was from nothing more dangerous than my signet ring."

He glanced keenly at his silent companion, and cocked the small revolver which he held in his coat pocket. But Douglas Stone was still picking at the coverlet.

"You see you have kept your appointment after all," said Lord Sannox.

And at that Douglas Stone began to laugh. He laughed long and loudly. But Lord Sannox did not laugh now. Something like fear sharpened and hardened his features. He walked from the room, and he walked on tiptoe. The old woman was waiting outside.

"Attend to your mistress when she awakes," said Lord Sannox.

Then he went down to the street. The cab was at the door, and the driver raised his hand to his hat.

"John," said Lord Sannox, "you will take the doctor home first. He will want leading downstairs, I think. Tell his butler that he has been taken ill at a case."

"Very good, sir."

"Then you can take Lady Sannox home."

"And how about yourself, sir?"

"Oh, my address for the next few months will be Hotel di Roma, Venice. Just see that the letters are sent on. And tell Stevens to exhibit all the purple chrysanthemums next Monday and to wire me the result."

A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY.

The Foreign Minister was down with the gout. For a week he had been confined to the house, and he had missed two Cabinet Councils at a time when the pressure upon his department was severe. It is true that he had an excellent undersecretary and an admirable staff, but the Minister was a man of such ripe experience and of such proven sagacity that things halted in his absence. When his firm hand was at the wheel the great ship of State rode easily and smoothly upon her way; when it was removed she yawed and staggered until twelve British editors rose up in their omniscience and traced out twelve several courses, each of which was the sole and only path to safety. Then it was that the Opposition said vain things, and that the harassed Prime Minister prayed for his absent colleague.

The Foreign Minister sat in his dressing-room in the great house in Cavendish Square. It was May, and the square garden shot up like a veil of green in front of his window, but, in spite of the sunshine, a fire crackled and sputtered in the grate of the sick-room. In a deep-red plush armchair sat the great statesman, his head leaning back upon a silken pillow, one foot stretched forward and supported upon a padded rest. His deeply-lined, finely-chiselled face and slow-moving, heavily-pouched eyes were turned upwards towards the carved and painted ceiling, with that inscrutable expression which had been the despair and the admiration of his Continental colleagues upon the occasion of the famous Congress when he had made his first appearance in the arena of European diplomacy. Yet at the present moment his capacity for hiding his emotions had for the instant failed him, for about the lines of his strong, straight mouth and the puckers of his broad, overhanging forehead, there were sufficient indications of the restlessness and impatience which consumed him.

And indeed there was enough to make a man chafe, for he had much to think of and yet was bereft of the power of thought. There was, for example, that question of the Dobrutscha and the navigation of the mouths of the Danube which was ripe for settlement. The Russian Chancellor had sent a masterly statement upon the subject, and it was the pet ambition of our Minister to answer it in a worthy fashion. Then there was the blockade of Crete, and the British fleet lying off Cape Matapan, waiting for instructions which might change the course of European history. And there were those three unfortunate Macedonian tourists, whose friends were momentarily expecting to receive their ears or their fingers in default of the exorbitant ransom which had been demanded. They must be plucked out of those mountains, by force or by diplomacy, or an outraged public would vent its wrath upon Downing Street. All these questions pressed for a solution, and yet here was the Foreign Minister of England, planted in an arm-chair, with his whole thoughts and attention riveted upon the ball of his right toe! It was humiliating — horribly humiliating! His reason revolted at it. He had been a respecter of himself, a respecter of his own will; but what sort of a machine was it which could be utterly thrown out of gear by a little piece of inflamed gristle? He groaned and writhed among his cushions.

But, after all, was it quite impossible that he should go down to the House? Perhaps the doctor was exaggerating the situation. There was a Cabinet Council that day. He glanced at his watch. It must be nearly over by now. But at least he might perhaps venture to drive down as far as Westminster. He pushed back the little round table with its bristle of medicine-bottles, and levering himself up with a hand upon either arm of the chair, he clutched a thick oak stick and hobbled slowly across the room. For a moment as he moved, his energy of mind and body seemed to return to him. The British fleet should sail from Matapan. Pressure should be brought to bear upon the Turks. The Greeks should be shown — Ow! In an instant the Mediterranean was blotted out, and nothing remained but that huge, undeniable, intrusive, red-hot toe. He staggered to the window and rested his left hand upon the ledge, while he propped himself upon his stick with his right. Outside lay the bright, cool, square garden, a few well-dressed passers-by, and a single, neatly-appointed carriage, which was driving away from his own door. His quick eye caught the coat-of-arms on the panel, and his lips set for a moment and his bushy eyebrows gathered ominously with a deep furrow between them. He hobbled back to his seat and struck the gong which stood upon the table.

“Your mistress!” said he as the serving-man entered.

It was clear that it was impossible to think of going to the House. The shooting up his leg warned him that his doctor had not overestimated the situation. But he had a little mental worry now which had for the moment eclipsed his physical ailments. He tapped the ground impatiently with his stick until the door of the dressing-room swung open, and a tall, elegant lady of rather more than middle age swept into the chamber. Her hair was touched with grey, but her calm, sweet face had all the freshness of youth, and her gown of green shot plush, with a sparkle of gold passementerie at her bosom and shoulders, showed off the lines of her fine figure to their best advantage.

"You sent for me, Charles?"

"Whose carriage was that which drove away just now?"

"Oh, you've been up!" she cried, shaking an admonitory forefinger. "What an old dear it is! How can you be so rash? What am I to say to Sir William when he comes? You know that he gives up his cases when they are insubordinate."

"In this instance the case may give him up," said the Minister, peevishly; "but I must beg, Clara, that you will answer my question."

"Oh! the carriage! It must have been Lord Arthur Sibthorpe's."

"I saw the three chevrons upon the panel," muttered the invalid.

His lady had pulled herself a little straighter and opened her large blue eyes.

"Then why ask?" she said. "One might almost think, Charles, that you were laying a trap! Did you expect that I should deceive you? You have not had your lithia powder."

"For Heaven's sake, leave it alone! I asked because I was surprised that Lord Arthur should call here. I should have fancied, Clara, that I had made myself sufficiently clear on that point. Who received him?"

"I did. That is, I and Ida."

"I will not have him brought into contact with Ida. I do not approve of it. The matter has gone too far already."

Lady Clara seated herself on a velvet-topped footstool, and bent her stately figure over the Minister's hand, which she patted softly between her own.

"Now you have said it, Charles," said she. "It has gone too far — I give you my word, dear, that I never suspected it until it was past all mending. I may be to blame — no doubt I am; but it was all so sudden. The tail end of the season and a week at Lord Donnythorne's. That was all. But oh! Charlie, she loves him so, and she is our only one! How can we make her miserable?"

"Tut, tut!" cried the Minister impatiently, slapping on the plush arm of his chair. "This is too much. I tell you, Clara, I give you my word, that all my official duties, all the affairs of this great empire, do not give me the trouble that Ida does."

"But she is our only one, Charles."

"The more reason that she should not make a mesalliance."

"Mesalliance, Charles! Lord Arthur Sibthorpe, son of the Duke of Tavistock, with a pedigree from the Heptarchy. Debrett takes them right back to Morcar, Earl of Northumberland."

The Minister shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord Arthur is the fourth son of the poorest duke in England," said he. "He has neither prospects nor profession."

"But, oh! Charlie, you could find him both."

"I do not like him. I do not care for the connection."

"But consider Ida! You know how frail her health is. Her whole soul is set upon him. You would not have the heart, Charles, to separate them?"

There was a tap at the door. Lady Clara swept towards it and threw it open.

"Yes, Thomas?"

"If you please, my lady, the Prime Minister is below."

"Show him up, Thomas."

"Now, Charlie, you must not excite yourself over public matters. Be very good and cool and reasonable, like a darling. I am sure that I may trust you."

She threw her light shawl round the invalid's shoulders, and slipped away into the bed-room as the great man was ushered in at the door of the dressing-room.

"My dear Charles," said he cordially, stepping into the room with all the boyish briskness for which he was famous, "I trust that you find yourself a little better. Almost ready for harness, eh? We miss you sadly, both in the House and in the Council. Quite a storm brewing over this Grecian business. The Times took a nasty line this morning."

"So I saw," said the invalid, smiling up at his chief. "Well, well, we must let them see that the country is not entirely ruled from Printing House Square yet. We must keep our own course without faltering."

"Certainly, Charles, most undoubtedly," assented the Prime Minister, with his hands in his pockets.

"It was so kind of you to call. I am all impatience to know what was done in the Council."

“Pure formalities, nothing more. By-the-way, the Macedonian prisoners are all right.”

“Thank Goodness for that!”

“We adjourned all other business until we should have you with us next week. The question of a dissolution begins to press. The reports from the provinces are excellent.”

The Foreign Minister moved impatiently and groaned.

“We must really straighten up our foreign business a little,” said he. “I must get Novikoff’s Note answered. It is clever, but the fallacies are obvious. I wish, too, we could clear up the Afghan frontier. This illness is most exasperating. There is so much to be done, but my brain is clouded. Sometimes I think it is the gout, and sometimes I put it down to the colchicum.”

“What will our medical autocrat say?” laughed the Prime Minister. “You are so irreverent, Charles. With a bishop one may feel at one’s ease. They are not beyond the reach of argument. But a doctor with his stethoscope and thermometer is a thing apart. Your reading does not impinge upon him. He is serenely above you. And then, of course, he takes you at a disadvantage. With health and strength one might cope with him. Have you read Hahnemann? What are your views upon Hahnemann?”

The invalid knew his illustrious colleague too well to follow him down any of those by-paths of knowledge in which he delighted to wander. To his intensely shrewd and practical mind there was something repellent in the waste of energy involved in a discussion upon the Early Church or the twenty-seven principles of Mesmer. It was his custom to slip past such conversational openings with a quick step and an averted face.

“I have hardly glanced at his writings,” said he. “By-the-way, I suppose that there was no special departmental news?”

“Ah! I had almost forgotten. Yes, it was one of the things which I had called to tell you. Sir Algernon Jones has resigned at Tangier. There is a vacancy there.”

“It had better be filled at once. The longer delay the more applicants.”

“Ah, patronage, patronage!” sighed the Prime Minister. “Every vacancy makes one doubtful friend and a dozen very positive enemies. Who so bitter as the disappointed place-seeker? But you are right, Charles. Better fill it at once, especially as there is some little trouble in Morocco. I understand that the Duke of Tavistock would like the place for his fourth son, Lord Arthur Sibthorpe. We are under some obligation to the Duke.”

The Foreign Minister sat up eagerly.

“My dear friend,” he said, “it is the very appointment which I should have suggested. Lord Arthur would be very much better in Tangier at present than in — in — —”

“Cavendish Square?” hazarded his chief, with a little arch query of his eyebrows.

“Well, let us say London. He has manner and tact. He was at Constantinople in Norton’s time.”

“Then he talks Arabic?”

“A smattering. But his French is good.”

“Speaking of Arabic, Charles, have you dipped into Averroes?”

“No, I have not. But the appointment would be an excellent one in every way. Would you have the great goodness to arrange the matter in my absence?”

“Certainly, Charles, certainly. Is there anything else that I can do?”

“No. I hope to be in the House by Monday.”

“I trust so. We miss you at every turn. The Times will try to make mischief over that Grecian business. A leader-writer is a terribly irresponsible thing, Charles. There is no method by which he may be confuted, however preposterous his assertions. Good-bye! Read Porson! Goodbye!”

He shook the invalid’s hand, gave a jaunty wave of his broad-brimmed hat, and darted out of the room with the same elasticity and energy with which he had entered it.

The footman had already opened the great folding door to usher the illustrious visitor to his carriage, when a lady stepped from the drawing-room and touched him on the sleeve. From behind the half-closed portiere of stamped velvet a little pale face peeped out, half-curious, half-frightened.

“May I have one word?”

“Surely, Lady Clara.”

“I hope it is not intrusive. I would not for the world overstep the limits — —”

“My dear Lady Clara!” interrupted the Prime Minister, with a youthful bow and wave.

"Pray do not answer me if I go too far. But I know that Lord Arthur Sibthorpe has applied for Tangier. Would it be a liberty if I asked you what chance he has?"

"The post is filled up."

"Oh!"

In the foreground and background there was a disappointed face.

"And Lord Arthur has it."

The Prime Minister chuckled over his little piece of roguery.

"We have just decided it," he continued.

"Lord Arthur must go in a week. I am delighted to perceive, Lady Clara, that the appointment has your approval. Tangier is a place of extraordinary interest. Catherine of Braganza and Colonel Kirke will occur to your memory. Burton has written well upon Northern Africa. I dine at Windsor, so I am sure that you will excuse my leaving you. I trust that Lord Charles will be better. He can hardly fail to be so with such a nurse."

He bowed, waved, and was off down the steps to his brougham. As he drove away, Lady Clara could see that he was already deeply absorbed in a paper-covered novel.

She pushed back the velvet curtains, and returned into the drawing-room. Her daughter stood in the sunlight by the window, tall, fragile, and exquisite, her features and outline not unlike her mother's, but frailer, softer, more delicate. The golden light struck one half of her high-bred, sensitive face, and glimmered upon her thickly-coiled flaxen hair, striking a pinkish tint from her closely-cut costume of fawn-coloured cloth with its dainty cinnamon ruchings. One little soft frill of chiffon nestled round her throat, from which the white, graceful neck and well-poised head shot up like a lily amid moss. Her thin white hands were pressed together, and her blue eyes turned beseechingly upon her mother.

"Silly girl! Silly girl!" said the matron, answering that imploring look. She put her hands upon her daughter's sloping shoulders and drew her towards her. "It is a very nice place for a short time. It will be a stepping stone."

"But oh! mamma, in a week! Poor Arthur!"

"He will be happy."

"What! happy to part?"

"He need not part. You shall go with him."

"Oh! mamma!"

“Yes, I say it.”

“Oh! mamma, in a week?”

“Yes indeed. A great deal may be done in a week. I shall order your trousseau to-day.”

“Oh! you dear, sweet angel! But I am so frightened! And papa? Oh! dear, I am so frightened!”

“Your papa is a diplomatist, dear.”

“Yes, ma.”

“But, between ourselves, he married a diplomatist too. If he can manage the British Empire, I think that I can manage him, Ida. How long have you been engaged, child?”

“Ten weeks, mamma.”

“Then it is quite time it came to a head. Lord Arthur cannot leave England without you. You must go to Tangier as the Minister’s wife. Now, you will sit there on the settee, dear, and let me manage entirely. There is Sir William’s carriage! I do think that I know how to manage Sir William. James, just ask the doctor to step in this way!”

A heavy, two-horsed carriage had drawn up at the door, and there came a single stately thud upon the knocker. An instant afterwards the drawing-room door flew open and the footman ushered in the famous physician. He was a small man, clean-shaven, with the old-fashioned black dress and white cravat with high-standing collar. He swung his golden pince-nez in his right hand as he walked, and bent forward with a peering, blinking expression, which was somehow suggestive of the dark and complex cases through which he had seen.

“Ah,” said he, as he entered. “My young patient! I am glad of the opportunity.”

“Yes, I wish to speak to you about her, Sir William. Pray take this arm-chair.”

“Thank you, I will sit beside her,” said he, taking his place upon the settee. “She is looking better, less anaemic unquestionably, and a fuller pulse. Quite a little tinge of colour, and yet not hectic.”

“I feel stronger, Sir William.”

“But she still has the pain in the side.”

“Ah, that pain!” He tapped lightly under the collar-bones, and then bent forward with his biaural stethoscope in either ear. “Still a trace of dulness — still a slight crepitation,” he murmured.

“You spoke of a change, doctor.”

“Yes, certainly a judicious change might be advisable.”

“You said a dry climate. I wish to do to the letter what you recommend.”

“You have always been model patients.”

“We wish to be. You said a dry climate.”

“Did I? I rather forget the particulars of our conversation. But a dry climate is certainly indicated.”

“Which one?”

“Well, I think really that a patient should be allowed some latitude. I must not exact too rigid discipline. There is room for individual choice — the Engadine, Central Europe, Egypt, Algiers, which you like.”

“I hear that Tangier is also recommended.”

“Oh, yes, certainly; it is very dry.”

“You hear, Ida? Sir William says that you are to go to Tangier.”

“Or any — —”

“No, no, Sir William! We feel safest when we are most obedient. You have said Tangier, and we shall certainly try Tangier.”

“Really, Lady Clara, your implicit faith is most flattering. It is not everyone who would sacrifice their own plans and inclinations so readily.”

“We know your skill and your experience, Sir William. Ida shall try Tangier. I am convinced that she will be benefited.”

“I have no doubt of it.”

“But you know Lord Charles. He is just a little inclined to decide medical matters as he would an affair of State. I hope that you will be firm with him.”

“As long as Lord Charles honours me so far as to ask my advice I am sure that he would not place me in the false position of having that advice disregarded.”

The medical baronet whirled round the cord of his pince-nez and pushed out a protesting hand.

“No, no, but you must be firm on the point of Tangier.”

“Having deliberately formed the opinion that Tangier is the best place for our young patient, I do not think that I shall readily change my conviction.”

“Of course not.”

“I shall speak to Lord Charles upon the subject now when I go upstairs.”

“Pray do.”

“And meanwhile she will continue her present course of treatment. I trust that the warm African air may send her back in a few months with all her energy restored.”

He bowed in the courteous, sweeping, old-world fashion which had done so much to build up his ten thousand a year, and, with the stealthy gait of a man whose life is spent in sick-rooms, he followed the footman upstairs.

As the red velvet curtains swept back into position, the Lady Ida threw her arms round her mother’s neck and sank her face on to her bosom.

“Oh! mamma, you ARE a diplomatist!” she cried.

But her mother’s expression was rather that of the general who looked upon the first smoke of the guns than of one who had won the victory.

“All will be right, dear,” said she, glancing down at the fluffy yellow curls and tiny ear. “There is still much to be done, but I think we may venture to order the trousseau.”

“Oh I how brave you are!”

“Of course, it will in any case be a very quiet affair. Arthur must get the license. I do not approve of hole-and-corner marriages, but where the gentleman has to take up an official position some allowance must be made. We can have Lady Hilda Edgecombe, and the Trevors, and the Grevilles, and I am sure that the Prime Minister would run down if he could.”

“And papa?”

“Oh, yes; he will come too, if he is well enough. We must wait until Sir William goes, and, meanwhile, I shall write to Lord Arthur.”

Half an hour had passed, and quite a number of notes had been dashed off in the fine, bold, park-paling handwriting of the Lady Clara, when the door clashed, and the wheels of the doctor’s carriage were heard grating outside against the kerb. The Lady Clara laid down her pen, kissed her daughter, and started off for the sick-room. The Foreign Minister was lying back in his chair, with a red silk handkerchief over his forehead, and his bulbous, cotton-wadded foot still protruding upon its rest.

“I think it is almost liniment time,” said Lady Clara, shaking a blue crinkled bottle. “Shall I put on a little?”

“Oh! this pestilent toe!” groaned the sufferer. “Sir William won’t hear of my moving yet. I do think he is the most completely obstinate and pig-headed man that I have ever met. I tell him that he has mistaken his profession, and that I could find him a post at Constantinople. We need a mule out there.”

"Poor Sir William!" laughed Lady Clara. "But how has he roused your wrath?"

"He is so persistent-so dogmatic."

"Upon what point?"

"Well, he has been laying down the law about Ida. He has decreed, it seems, that she is to go to Tangier."

"He said something to that effect before he went up to you."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

The slow-moving, inscrutable eye came sliding round to her.

Lady Clara's face had assumed an expression of transparent obvious innocence, an intrusive candour which is never seen in nature save when a woman is bent upon deception.

"He examined her lungs, Charles. He did not say much, but his expression was very grave."

"Not to say owlish," interrupted the Minister.

"No, no, Charles; it is no laughing matter. He said that she must have a change. I am sure that he thought more than he said. He spoke of dulness and crepitation, and the effects of the African air. Then the talk turned upon dry, bracing health resorts, and he agreed that Tangier was the place. He said that even a few months there would work a change."

"And that was all?"

"Yes, that was all."

Lord Charles shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who is but half convinced.

"But of course," said Lady Clara, serenely, "if you think it better that Ida should not go she shall not. The only thing is that if she should get worse we might feel a little uncomfortable afterwards. In a weakness of that sort a very short time may make a difference. Sir William evidently thought the matter critical. Still, there is no reason why he should influence you. It is a little responsibility, however. If you take it all upon yourself and free me from any of it, so that afterwards — —"

"My dear Clara, how you do croak!"

"Oh! I don't wish to do that, Charles. But you remember what happened to Lord Bellamy's child. She was just Ida's age. That was another case in which Sir William's advice was disregarded."

Lord Charles groaned impatiently.

"I have not disregarded it," said he.

"No, no, of course not. I know your strong sense, and your good heart too well, dear. You were very wisely looking at both sides of the question. That is what we poor women cannot do. It is emotion against reason, as I have often heard you say. We are swayed this way and that, but you men are persistent, and so you gain your way with us. But I am so pleased that you have decided for Tangier."

"Have I?"

"Well, dear, you said that you would not disregard Sir William."

"Well, Clara, admitting that Ida is to go to Tangier, you will allow that it is impossible for me to escort her?

"Utterly."

"And for you?

"While you are ill my place is by your side."

"There is your sister?"

"She is going to Florida."

"Lady Dumbarton, then?"

"She is nursing her father. It is out of the question."

"Well, then, whom can we possibly ask? Especially just as the season is commencing. You see, Clara, the fates fight against Sir William."

His wife rested her elbows against the back of the great red chair, and passed her fingers through the statesman's grizzled curls, stooping down as she did so until her lips were close to his ear.

"There is Lord Arthur Sibthorpe," said she softly.

Lord Charles bounded in his chair, and muttered a word or two such as were more frequently heard from Cabinet Ministers in Lord Melbourne's time than now.

"Are you mad, Clara!" he cried. "What can have put such a thought into your head?"

"The Prime Minister."

"Who? The Prime Minister?"

"Yes, dear. Now do, do be good! Or perhaps I had better not speak to you about it any more."

"Well, I really think that you have gone rather too far to retreat."

"It was the Prime Minister, then, who told me that Lord Arthur was going to Tangier."

"It is a fact, though it had escaped my memory for the instant."

“And then came Sir William with his advice about Ida. Oh! Charlie, it is surely more than a coincidence!”

“I am convinced,” said Lord Charles, with his shrewd, questioning gaze, “that it is very much more than a coincidence, Lady Clara. You are a very clever woman, my dear. A born manager and organiser.”

Lady Clara brushed past the compliment.

“Think of our own young days, Charlie,” she whispered, with her fingers still toying with his hair. “What were you then? A poor man, not even Ambassador at Tangier. But I loved you, and believed in you, and have I ever regretted it? Ida loves and believes in Lord Arthur, and why should she ever regret it either?”

Lord Charles was silent. His eyes were fixed upon the green branches which waved outside the window; but his mind had flashed back to a Devonshire country-house of thirty years ago, and to the one fateful evening when, between old yew hedges, he paced along beside a slender girl, and poured out to her his hopes, his fears, and his ambitious. He took the white, thin hand and pressed it to his lips.

“You, have been a good wife to me, Clara,” said he.

She said nothing. She did not attempt to improve upon her advantage. A less consummate general might have tried to do so, and ruined all. She stood silent and submissive, noting the quick play of thought which peeped from his eyes and lip. There was a sparkle in the one and a twitch of amusement in the other, as he at last glanced up at her.

“Clara,” said he, “deny it if you can! You have ordered the trousseau.”

She gave his ear a little pinch.

“Subject to your approval,” said she.

“You have written to the Archbishop.”

“It is not posted yet.”

“You have sent a note to Lord Arthur.”

“How could you tell that?”

“He is downstairs now.”

“No; but I think that is his brougham.”

Lord Charles sank back with a look of half-comical despair.

“Who is to fight against such a woman?” he cried. “Oh! if I could send you to Novikoff! He is too much for any of my men. But, Clara, I cannot have them up here.”

“Not for your blessing?”

“No, no!”

“It would make them so happy.”

“I cannot stand scenes.”

“Then I shall convey it to them.”

“And pray say no more about it — to-day, at any rate. I have been weak over the matter.”

“Oh! Charlie, you who are so strong!”

“You have outflanked me, Clara. It was very well done. I must congratulate you.”

“Well,” she murmured, as she kissed him, “you know I have been studying a very clever diplomatist for thirty years.”

A MEDICAL DOCUMENT.

Medical men are, as a class, very much too busy to take stock of singular situations or dramatic events. Thus it happens that the ablest chronicler of their experiences in our literature was a lawyer. A life spent in watching over death-beds — or over birth-beds which are infinitely more trying — takes something from a man's sense of proportion, as constant strong waters might corrupt his palate. The overstimulated nerve ceases to respond. Ask the surgeon for his best experiences and he may reply that he has seen little that is remarkable, or break away into the technical. But catch him some night when the fire has spurted up and his pipe is reeking, with a few of his brother practitioners for company and an artful question or allusion to set him going. Then you will get some raw, green facts new plucked from the tree of life.

It is after one of the quarterly dinners of the Midland Branch of the British Medical Association. Twenty coffee cups, a dozer liqueur glasses, and a solid bank of blue smoke which swirls slowly along the high, gilded ceiling gives a hint of a successful gathering. But the members have shredded off to their homes. The line of heavy, bulge-pocketed overcoats and of stethoscope-bearing top hats is gone from the hotel corridor. Round the fire in the sitting-room three medicos are still lingering, however, all smoking and arguing, while a fourth, who is a mere layman and young at that, sits back at the table. Under cover of an open journal he is writing furiously with a stylographic pen, asking a question in an innocent voice from time to time and so flickering up the conversation whenever it shows a tendency to wane.

The three men are all of that staid middle age which begins early and lasts late in the profession. They are none of them famous, yet each is of good repute, and a fair type of his particular branch. The portly man with the authoritative manner and the white, vitriol splash upon his cheek is Charley Manson, chief of the Wormley Asylum, and author of the brilliant monograph — Obscure Nervous Lesions in the Unmarried. He always wears his collar high like that, since the half-successful attempt of a student of Revelations to cut his throat with a splinter of glass. The second, with the ruddy face and the merry brown eyes, is a general practitioner, a man of vast experience, who, with his three assistants and his five horses, takes twenty-five hundred a year in half-crown visits and shilling consultations out of the poorest quarter of a great city. That cheery face of Theodore Foster is seen at the side of a hundred sick-beds a day, and if he has one-third more names on his visiting list than in his cash book he always promises himself that he will get level some day when a millionaire with a chronic complaint — the ideal combination — shall seek his services. The third, sitting on the right with his dress shoes shining on the top of the fender, is Hargrave, the rising surgeon. His face has none of the broad humanity of Theodore Foster's, the eye is stern and critical, the mouth straight and severe, but there is strength and decision in every line of it, and it is nerve rather than sympathy which the patient demands when he is bad enough to come to Hargrave's door. He calls himself a jawman "a mere jawman" as he modestly puts it, but in point of fact he is too young and too poor to confine himself to a specialty, and there is nothing surgical which Hargrave has not the skill and the audacity to do.

"Before, after, and during," murmurs the general practitioner in answer to some interpolation of the outsider's. "I assure you, Manson, one sees all sorts of evanescent forms of madness."

"Ah, puerperal!" throws in the other, knocking the curved grey ash from his cigar. "But you had some case in your mind, Foster."

"Well, there was only one last week which was new to me. I had been engaged by some people of the name of Silcoe. When the trouble came round I went myself, for they would not hear of an assistant. The husband who was a policeman, was sitting at the head of the bed on the further side. 'This won't do,' said I. 'Oh yes, doctor, it must do,' said she. 'It's quite irregular and he must go,' said I. 'It's that or nothing,' said she. 'I won't open my mouth or stir a finger the whole night,' said he. So it ended by my allowing him to remain, and there he sat for eight hours on end. She was very good over the matter, but every now and again HE would fetch a hollow groan, and I noticed that he held his right hand just under the sheet all the time, where I had no doubt that it was clasped by her left. When it was all happily over, I looked at him and his face was the colour of this cigar ash, and his head had dropped on to the edge of the pillow. Of course I thought he had fainted with emotion, and I was just telling myself what I thought of myself for having been such a fool as to let him stay there, when suddenly I saw that the sheet over his hand was all soaked with blood; I whisked it down, and there was the fellow’s wrist half cut through. The woman had one bracelet of a policeman’s handcuff over her left wrist and the other round his right one. When she had been in pain she had twisted with all her strength and the iron had fairly eaten into the bone of the man’s arm. ‘Aye, doctor,’ said she, when she saw I had noticed it. ‘He’s got to take his share as well as me. Turn and turn,’ said she.”

“Don’t you find it a very wearing branch of the profession?” asks Foster after a pause.

“My dear fellow, it was the fear of it that drove me into lunacy work.”

“Aye, and it has driven men into asylums who never found their way on to the medical staff. I was a very shy fellow myself as a student, and I know what it means.”

“No joke that in general practice,” says the alienist.

“Well, you hear men talk about it as though it were, but I tell you it’s much nearer tragedy. Take some poor, raw, young fellow who has just put up his plate in a strange town. He has found it a trial all his life, perhaps, to talk to a woman about lawn tennis and church services. When a young man IS shy he is shyer than any girl. Then down comes an anxious mother and consults him upon the most intimate family matters. ‘I shall never go to that doctor again,’ says she afterwards. ‘His manner is so stiff and unsympathetic.’ Unsympathetic! Why, the poor lad was struck dumb and paralysed. I have known general practitioners who were so shy that they could not bring themselves to ask the way in the street. Fancy what sensitive men like that must endure before they get broken in to medical practice. And then they know that nothing is so catching as shyness, and that if they do not keep a face of stone, their patient will be covered with confusion. And so they keep their face of stone, and earn the reputation perhaps of having a heart to correspond. I suppose nothing would shake YOUR nerve, Manson.”

“Well, when a man lives year in year out among a thousand lunatics, with a fair sprinkling of homicidals among them, one’s nerves either get set or shattered. Mine are all right so far.”

“I was frightened once,” says the surgeon. “It was when I was doing dispensary work. One night I had a call from some very poor people, and gathered from the few words they said that their child was ill. When I entered the room I saw a small cradle in the corner. Raising the lamp I walked over and putting back the curtains I looked down at the baby. I tell you it was sheer Providence that I didn’t drop that lamp and set the whole place alight. The head on the pillow turned and I saw a face looking up at me which seemed to me to have more malignancy and wickedness than ever I had dreamed of in a nightmare. It was the flush of red over the cheekbones, and the brooding eyes full of loathing of me, and of everything else, that impressed me. I’ll never forget my start as, instead of the chubby face of an infant, my eyes fell upon this creature. I took the mother into the next room. ‘What is it?’ I asked. ‘A girl of sixteen,’ said she, and then throwing up her arms, ‘Oh, pray God she may be taken!’ The poor thing, though she spent her life in this little cradle, had great, long, thin limbs which she curled up under her. I lost sight of the case and don’t know what became of it, but I’ll never forget the look in her eyes.”

“That’s creepy,” says Dr. Foster. “But I think one of my experiences would run it close. Shortly after I put up my plate I had a visit from a little hunch-backed woman who wished me to come and attend to her sister in her trouble. When I reached the house, which was a very poor one, I found two other little hunched-backed women, exactly like the first, waiting for me in the sitting-room. Not one of them said a word, but my companion took the lamp and walked upstairs with her two sisters behind her, and me bringing up the rear. I can see those three queer shadows cast by the lamp upon the wall as clearly as I can see that tobacco pouch. In the room above was the fourth sister, a remarkably beautiful girl in evident need of my assistance. There was no wedding ring upon her finger. The three deformed sisters seated themselves round the room, like so many graven images, and all night not one of them opened her mouth. I’m not romancing, Hargrave; this is absolute fact. In the early morning a fearful thunderstorm broke out, one of the most violent I have ever known. The little garret burned blue with the lightning, and thunder roared and rattled as if it were on the very roof of the house. It wasn’t much of a lamp I had, and it was a queer thing when a spurt of lightning came to see those three twisted figures sitting round the walls, or to have the voice of my patient drowned by the booming of the thunder. By Jove! I don’t mind telling you that there was a time when I nearly bolted from the room. All came right in the end, but I never heard the true story of the unfortunate beauty and her three crippled sisters.”

“That’s the worst of these medical stories,” sighs the outsider. “They never seem to have an end.”

"When a man is up to his neck in practice, my boy, he has no time to gratify his private curiosity. Things shoot across him and he gets a glimpse of them, only to recall them, perhaps, at some quiet moment like this. But I've always felt, Manson, that your line had as much of the terrible in it as any other."

"More," groans the alienist. "A disease of the body is bad enough, but this seems to be a disease of the soul. Is it not a shocking thing — a thing to drive a reasoning man into absolute Materialism — to think that you may have a fine, noble fellow with every divine instinct and that some little vascular change, the dropping, we will say, of a minute spicule of bone from the inner table of his skull on to the surface of his brain may have the effect of changing him to a filthy and pitiable creature with every low and debasing tendency? What a satire an asylum is upon the majesty of man, and no less upon the ethereal nature of the soul."

"Faith and hope," murmurs the general practitioner.

"I have no faith, not much hope, and all the charity I can afford," says the surgeon. "When theology squares itself with the facts of life I'll read it up."

"You were talking about cases," says the outsider, jerking the ink down into his stylographic pen.

"Well, take a common complaint which kills many thousands every year, like G. P. for instance."

"What's G. P.?"

"General practitioner," suggests the surgeon with a grin.

"The British public will have to know what G. P. is," says the alienist gravely. "It's increasing by leaps and bounds, and it has the distinction of being absolutely incurable. General paralysis is its full title, and I tell you it promises to be a perfect scourge. Here's a fairly typical case now which I saw last Monday week. A young farmer, a splendid fellow, surprised his fellows by taking a very rosy view of things at a time when the whole country-side was grumbling. He was going to give up wheat, give up arable land, too, if it didn't pay, plant two thousand acres of rhododendrons and get a monopoly of the supply for Covent Garden — there was no end to his schemes, all sane enough but just a bit inflated. I called at the farm, not to see him, but on an altogether different matter. Something about the man's way of talking struck me and I watched him narrowly. His lip had a trick of quivering, his words slurred themselves together, and so did his handwriting when he had occasion to draw up a small agreement. A closer inspection showed me that one of his pupils was ever so little larger than the other. As I left the house his wife came after me. ‘Isn’t it splendid to see Job looking so well, doctor,’ said she; ‘he’s that full of energy he can hardly keep himself quiet.’ I did not say anything, for I had not the heart, but I knew that the fellow was as much condemned to death as though he were lying in the cell at Newgate. It was a characteristic case of incipient G. P.”

“Good heavens!” cries the outsider. “My own lips tremble. I often slur my words. I believe I’ve got it myself.”

Three little chuckles come from the front of the fire.

“There’s the danger of a little medical knowledge to the layman.”

“A great authority has said that every first year’s student is suffering in silent agony from four diseases,” remarks the surgeon. “One is heart disease, of course; another is cancer of the parotid. I forget the two other.”

“Where does the parotid come in?”

“Oh, it’s the last wisdom tooth coming through!”

“And what would be the end of that young farmer?” asks the outsider.

“Paresis of all the muscles, ending in fits, coma, and death. It may be a few months, it may be a year or two. He was a very strong young man and would take some killing.”

“By-the-way,” says the alienist, “did I ever tell you about the first certificate I signed? I came as near ruin then as a man could go.”

“What was it, then?”

“I was in practice at the time. One morning a Mrs. Cooper called upon me and informed me that her husband had shown signs of delusions lately. They took the form of imagining that he had been in the army and had distinguished himself very much. As a matter of fact he was a lawyer and had never been out of England. Mrs. Cooper was of opinion that if I were to call it might alarm him, so it was agreed between us that she should send him up in the evening on some pretext to my consulting-room, which would give me the opportunity of having a chat with him and, if I were convinced of his insanity, of signing his certificate. Another doctor had already signed, so that it only needed my concurrence to have him placed under treatment. Well, Mr. Cooper arrived in the evening about half an hour before I had expected him, and consulted me as to some malarious symptoms from which he said that he suffered. According to his account he had just returned from the Abyssinian Campaign, and had been one of the first of the British forces to enter Magdala. No delusion could possibly be more marked, for he would talk of little else, so I filled in the papers without the slightest hesitation. When his wife arrived, after he had left, I put some questions to her to complete the form. ‘What is his age?’ I asked. ‘Fifty,’ said she. ‘Fifty!’ I cried. ‘Why, the man I examined could not have been more than thirty! And so it came out that the real Mr. Cooper had never called upon me at all, but that by one of those coincidences which take a man’s breath away another Cooper, who really was a very distinguished young officer of artillery, had come in to consult me. My pen was wet to sign the paper when I discovered it,” says Dr. Manson, mopping his forehead.

“We were talking about nerve just now,” observes the surgeon. “Just after my qualifying I served in the Navy for a time, as I think you know. I was on the flag-ship on the West African Station, and I remember a singular example of nerve which came to my notice at that time. One of our small gunboats had gone up the Calabar river, and while there the surgeon died of coast fever. On the same day a man’s leg was broken by a spar falling upon it, and it became quite obvious that it must be taken off above the knee if his life was to be saved. The young lieutenant who was in charge of the craft searched among the dead doctor’s effects and laid his hands upon some chloroform, a hip-joint knife, and a volume of Grey’s Anatomy. He had the man laid by the steward upon the cabin table, and with a picture of a cross section of the thigh in front of him he began to take off the limb. Every now and then, referring to the diagram, he would say: ‘Stand by with the lashings, steward. There’s blood on the chart about here.’ Then he would jab with his knife until he cut the artery, and he and his assistant would tie it up before they went any further. In this way they gradually whittled the leg off, and upon my word they made a very excellent job of it. The man is hopping about the Portsmouth Hard at this day.

“It’s no joke when the doctor of one of these isolated gunboats himself falls ill,” continues the surgeon after a pause. “You might think it easy for him to prescribe for himself, but this fever knocks you down like a club, and you haven’t strength left to brush a mosquito off your face. I had a touch of it at Lagos, and I know what I am telling you. But there was a chum of mine who really had a curious experience. The whole crew gave him up, and, as they had never had a funeral aboard the ship, they began rehearsing the forms so as to be ready. They thought that he was unconscious, but he swears he could hear every word that passed. ‘Corpse comin' up the latchway!' cried the Cockney sergeant of Marines. 'Present harms!' He was so amused, and so indignant too, that he just made up his mind that he wouldn't be carried through that hatchway, and he wasn't, either."

"There's no need for fiction in medicine," remarks Foster, "for the facts will always beat anything you can fancy. But it has seemed to me sometimes that a curious paper might be read at some of these meetings about the uses of medicine in popular fiction."

"How?"

"Well, of what the folk die of, and what diseases are made most use of in novels. Some are worn to pieces, and others, which are equally common in real life, are never mentioned. Typhoid is fairly frequent, but scarlet fever is unknown. Heart disease is common, but then heart disease, as we know it, is usually the sequel of some foregoing disease, of which we never hear anything in the romance. Then there is the mysterious malady called brain fever, which always attacks the heroine after a crisis, but which is unknown under that name to the text books. People when they are over-excited in novels fall down in a fit. In a fairly large experience I have never known anyone do so in real life. The small complaints simply don't exist. Nobody ever gets shingles or quinsy, or mumps in a novel. All the diseases, too, belong to the upper part of the body. The novelist never strikes below the belt."

"I'll tell you what, Foster," says the alienist, "there is a side of life which is too medical for the general public and too romantic for the professional journals, but which contains some of the richest human materials that a man could study. It's not a pleasant side, I am afraid, but if it is good enough for Providence to create, it is good enough for us to try and understand. It would deal with strange outbursts of savagery and vice in the lives of the best men, curious momentary weaknesses in the record of the sweetest women, known but to one or two, and inconceivable to the world around. It would deal, too, with the singular phenomena of waxing and of waning manhood, and would throw a light upon those actions which have cut short many an honoured career and sent a man to a prison when he should have been hurried to a consulting-room. Of all evils that may come upon the sons of men, God shield us principally from that one!"

"I had a case some little time ago which was out of the ordinary," says the surgeon. "There's a famous beauty in London society — I mention no names — who used to be remarkable a few seasons ago for the very low dresses which she would wear. She had the whitest of skins and most beautiful of shoulders, so it was no wonder. Then gradually the frilling at her neck lapped upwards and upwards, until last year she astonished everyone by wearing quite a high collar at a time when it was completely out of fashion. Well, one day this very woman was shown into my consulting-room. When the footman was gone she suddenly tore off the upper part of her dress. ‘For Gods sake do something for me!’ she cried. Then I saw what the trouble was. A rodent ulcer was eating its way upwards, coiling on in its serpiginous fashion until the end of it was flush with her collar. The red streak of its trail was lost below the line of her bust. Year by year it had ascended and she had heightened her dress to hide it, until now it was about to invade her face. She had been too proud to confess her trouble, even to a medical man.”

“And did you stop it?”

“Well, with zinc chloride I did what I could. But it may break out again. She was one of those beautiful white-and-pink creatures who are rotten with struma. You may patch but you can’t mend.”

“Dear! dear! dear!” cries the general practitioner, with that kindly softening of the eyes which had endeared him to so many thousands. “I suppose we mustn’t think ourselves wiser than Providence, but there are times when one feels that something is wrong in the scheme of things. I’ve seen some sad things in my life. Did I ever tell you that case where Nature divorced a most loving couple? He was a fine young fellow, an athlete and a gentleman, but he overdid athletics. You know how the force that controls us gives us a little tweak to remind us when we get off the beaten track. It may be a pinch on the great toe if we drink too much and work too little. Or it may be a tug on our nerves if we dissipate energy too much. With the athlete, of course, it’s the heart or the lungs. He had bad phthisis and was sent to Davos. Well, as luck would have it, she developed rheumatic fever, which left her heart very much affected. Now, do you see the dreadful dilemma in which those poor people found themselves? When he came below four thousand feet or so, his symptoms became terrible. She could come up about twenty-five hundred and then her heart reached its limit. They had several interviews half way down the valley, which left them nearly dead, and at last, the doctors had to absolutely forbid it. And so for four years they lived within three miles of each other and never met. Every morning he would go to a place which overlooked the chalet in which she lived and would wave a great white cloth and she answer from below. They could see each other quite plainly with their field glasses, and they might have been in different planets for all their chance of meeting.”

“And one at last died,” says the outsider.

“No, sir. I’m sorry not to be able to clinch the story, but the man recovered and is now a successful stockbroker in Drapers Gardens. The woman, too, is the mother of a considerable family. But what are you doing there?”

“Only taking a note or two of your talk.”

The three medical men laugh as they walk towards their overcoats.

“Why, we’ve done nothing but talk shop,” says the general practitioner. “What possible interest can the public take in that?”

LOT NO. 249.

Of the dealings of Edward Bellingham with William Monkhouse Lee, and of the cause of the great terror of Abercrombie Smith, it may be that no absolute and final judgment will ever be delivered. It is true that we have the full and clear narrative of Smith himself, and such corroboration as he could look for from Thomas Styles the servant, from the Reverend Plumptree Peterson, Fellow of Old's, and from such other people as chanced to gain some passing glance at this or that incident in a singular chain of events. Yet, in the main, the story must rest upon Smith alone, and the most will think that it is more likely that one brain, however outwardly sane, has some subtle warp in its texture, some strange flaw in its workings, than that the path of Nature has been overstepped in open day in so famed a centre of learning and light as the University of Oxford. Yet when we think how narrow and how devious this path of Nature is, how dimly we can trace it, for all our lamps of science, and how from the darkness which girds it round great and terrible possibilities loom ever shadowly upwards, it is a bold and confident man who will put a limit to the strange by-paths into which the human spirit may wander.

In a certain wing of what we will call Old College in Oxford there is a corner turret of an exceeding great age. The heavy arch which spans the open door has bent downwards in the centre under the weight of its years, and the grey, lichen-blotched blocks of stone are, bound and knitted together with withes and strands of ivy, as though the old mother had set herself to brace them up against wind and weather. From the door a stone stair curves upward spirally, passing two landings, and terminating in a third one, its steps all shapeless and hollowed by the tread of so many generations of the seekers after knowledge. Life has flowed like water down this winding stair, and, waterlike, has left these smooth-worn grooves behind it. From the long-gowned, pedantic scholars of Plantagenet days down to the young bloods of a later age, how full and strong had been that tide of young English life. And what was left now of all those hopes, those strivings, those fiery energies, save here and there in some old-world churchyard a few scratches upon a stone, and perchance a handful of dust in a mouldering coffin? Yet here were the silent stair and the grey old wall, with bend and saltire and many another heraldic device still to be read upon its surface, like grotesque shadows thrown back from the days that had passed.

In the month of May, in the year 1884, three young men occupied the sets of rooms which opened on to the separate landings of the old stair. Each set consisted simply of a sitting-room and of a bedroom, while the two corresponding rooms upon the ground-floor were used, the one as a coal-cellar, and the other as the living-room of the servant, or gyp, Thomas Styles, whose duty it was to wait upon the three men above him. To right and to left was a line of lecture-rooms and of offices, so that the dwellers in the old turret enjoyed a certain seclusion, which made the chambers popular among the more studious undergraduates. Such were the three who occupied them now — Abercrombie Smith above, Edward Bellingham beneath him, and William Monkhouse Lee upon the lowest storey.

It was ten o'clock on a bright spring night, and Abercrombie Smith lay back in his arm-chair, his feet upon the fender, and his briar-root pipe between his lips. In a similar chair, and equally at his ease, there lounged on the other side of the fireplace his old school friend Jephro Hastie. Both men were in flannels, for they had spent their evening upon the river, but apart from their dress no one could look at their hard-cut, alert faces without seeing that they were open-air men — men whose minds and tastes turned naturally to all that was manly and robust. Hastie, indeed, was stroke of his college boat, and Smith was an even better oar, but a coming examination had already cast its shadow over him and held him to his work, save for the few hours a week which health demanded. A litter of medical books upon the table, with scattered bones, models and anatomical plates, pointed to the extent as well as the nature of his studies, while a couple of single-sticks and a set of boxing-gloves above the mantelpiece hinted at the means by which, with Hastie's help, he might take his exercise in its most compressed and least distant form. They knew each other very well — so well that they could sit now in that soothing silence which is the very highest development of companionship.

"Have some whisky," said Abercrombie Smith at last between two cloudbursts. "Scotch in the jug and Irish in the bottle."

"No, thanks. I'm in for the sculls. I don't liquor when I'm training. How about you?"

"I'm reading hard. I think it best to leave it alone."

Hastie nodded, and they relapsed into a contented silence.

"By-the-way, Smith," asked Hastie, presently, "have you made the acquaintance of either of the fellows on your stair yet?"

"Just a nod when we pass. Nothing more."

"Hum! I should be inclined to let it stand at that. I know something of them both. Not much, but as much as I want. I don't think I should take them to my bosom if I were you. Not that there's much amiss with Monkhouse Lee."

"Meaning the thin one?"

"Precisely. He is a gentlemanly little fellow. I don't think there is any vice in him. But then you can't know him without knowing Bellingham."

"Meaning the fat one?"

"Yes, the fat one. And he's a man whom I, for one, would rather not know."

Abercrombie Smith raised his eyebrows and glanced across at his companion.

"What's up, then?" he asked. "Drink? Cards? Cad? You used not to be censorious."

"Ah! you evidently don't know the man, or you wouldn't ask. There's something damnable about him — something reptilian. My gorge always rises at him. I should put him down as a man with secret vices — an evil liver. He's no fool, though. They say that he is one of the best men in his line that they have ever had in the college."

"Medicine or classics?"

"Eastern languages. He's a demon at them. Chillingworth met him somewhere above the second cataract last long, and he told me that he just prattled to the Arabs as if he had been born and nursed and weaned among them. He talked Coptic to the Copts, and Hebrew to the Jews, and Arabic to the Bedouins, and they were all ready to kiss the hem of his frock-coat. There are some old hermit Johnnies up in those parts who sit on rocks and scowl and spit at the casual stranger. Well, when they saw this chap Bellingham, before he had said five words they just lay down on their bellies and wriggled. Chillingworth said that he never saw anything like it. Bellingham seemed to take it as his right, too, and strutted about among them and talked down to them like a Dutch uncle. Pretty good for an undergrad. of Old's, wasn't it?"

"Why do you say you can't know Lee without knowing Bellingham?"

“Because Bellingham is engaged to his sister Eveline. Such a bright little girl, Smith! I know the whole family well. It’s disgusting to see that brute with her. A toad and a dove, that’s what they always remind me of.”

Abercrombie Smith grinned and knocked his ashes out against the side of the grate.

“You show every card in your hand, old chap,” said he. “What a prejudiced, green-eyed, evil-thinking old man it is! You have really nothing against the fellow except that.”

“Well, I’ve known her ever since she was as long as that cherry-wood pipe, and I don’t like to see her taking risks. And it is a risk. He looks beastly. And he has a beastly temper, a venomous temper. You remember his row with Long Norton?”

“No; you always forget that I am a freshman.”

“Ah, it was last winter. Of course. Well, you know the towpath along by the river. There were several fellows going along it, Bellingham in front, when they came on an old market-woman coming the other way. It had been raining — you know what those fields are like when it has rained — and the path ran between the river and a great puddle that was nearly as broad. Well, what does this swine do but keep the path, and push the old girl into the mud, where she and her marketings came to terrible grief. It was a blackguard thing to do, and Long Norton, who is as gentle a fellow as ever stepped, told him what he thought of it. One word led to another, and it ended in Norton laying his stick across the fellow’s shoulders. There was the deuce of a fuss about it, and it’s a treat to see the way in which Bellingham looks at Norton when they meet now. By Jove, Smith, it’s nearly eleven o’clock!”

“No hurry. Light your pipe again.”

“Not I. I’m supposed to be in training. Here I’ve been sitting gossiping when I ought to have been safely tucked up. I’ll borrow your skull, if you can share it. Williams has had mine for a month. I’ll take the little bones of your ear, too, if you are sure you won’t need them. Thanks very much. Never mind a bag, I can carry them very well under my arm. Good-night, my son, and take my tip as to your neighbour.”

When Hastie, bearing his anatomical plunder, had clattered off down the winding stair, Abercrombie Smith hurled his pipe into the wastepaper basket, and drawing his chair nearer to the lamp, plunged into a formidable green-covered volume, adorned with great coloured maps of that strange internal kingdom of which we are the hapless and helpless monarchs. Though a freshman at Oxford, the student was not so in medicine, for he had worked for four years at Glasgow and at Berlin, and this coming examination would place him finally as a member of his profession. With his firm mouth, broad forehead, and clear-cut, somewhat hard-featured face, he was a man who, if he had no brilliant talent, was yet so dogged, so patient, and so strong that he might in the end overtop a more showy genius. A man who can hold his own among Scotchmen and North Germans is not a man to be easily set back. Smith had left a name at Glasgow and at Berlin, and he was bent now upon doing as much at Oxford, if hard work and devotion could accomplish it.

He had sat reading for about an hour, and the hands of the noisy carriage clock upon the side table were rapidly closing together upon the twelve, when a sudden sound fell upon the student's ear — a sharp, rather shrill sound, like the hissing intake of a man's breath who gasps under some strong emotion. Smith laid down his book and slanted his ear to listen. There was no one on either side or above him, so that the interruption came certainly from the neighbour beneath — the same neighbour of whom Hastie had given so unsavoury an account. Smith knew him only as a flabby, pale-faced man of silent and studious habits, a man, whose lamp threw a golden bar from the old turret even after he had extinguished his own. This community in lateness had formed a certain silent bond between them. It was soothing to Smith when the hours stole on towards dawning to feel that there was another so close who set as small a value upon his sleep as he did. Even now, as his thoughts turned towards him, Smith's feelings were kindly. Hastie was a good fellow, but he was rough, strong-fibred, with no imagination or sympathy. He could not tolerate departures from what he looked upon as the model type of manliness. If a man could not be measured by a public-school standard, then he was beyond the pale with Hastie. Like so many who are themselves robust, he was apt to confuse the constitution with the character, to ascribe to want of principle what was really a want of circulation. Smith, with his stronger mind, knew his friend's habit, and made allowance for it now as his thoughts turned towards the man beneath him.

There was no return of the singular sound, and Smith was about to turn to his work once more, when suddenly there broke out in the silence of the night a hoarse cry, a positive scream — the call of a man who is moved and shaken beyond all control. Smith sprang out of his chair and dropped his book. He was a man of fairly firm fibre, but there was something in this sudden, uncontrollable shriek of horror which chilled his blood and pringled in his skin. Coming in such a place and at such an hour, it brought a thousand fantastic possibilities into his head. Should he rush down, or was it better to wait? He had all the national hatred of making a scene, and he knew so little of his neighbour that he would not lightly intrude upon his affairs. For a moment he stood in doubt and even as he balanced the matter there was a quick rattle of footsteps upon the stairs, and young Monkhouse Lee, half dressed and as white as ashes, burst into his room.

"Come down!" he gasped. "Bellingham's ill."

Abercrombie Smith followed him closely down stairs into the sitting-room which was beneath his own, and intent as he was upon the matter in hand, he could not but take an amazed glance around him as he crossed the threshold. It was such a chamber as he had never seen before — a museum rather than a study. Walls and ceiling were thickly covered with a thousand strange relics from Egypt and the East. Tall, angular figures bearing burdens or weapons stalked in an uncouth frieze round the apartments. Above were bull-headed, stork-headed, cat-headed, owl-headed statues, with viper-crowned, almond-eyed monarchs, and strange, beetle-like deities cut out of the blue Egyptian lapis lazuli. Horus and Isis and Osiris peeped down from every niche and shelf, while across the ceiling a true son of Old Nile, a great, hanging-jawed crocodile, was slung in a double noose.

In the centre of this singular chamber was a large, square table, littered with papers, bottles, and the dried leaves of some graceful, palm-like plant. These varied objects had all been heaped together in order to make room for a mummy case, which had been conveyed from the wall, as was evident from the gap there, and laid across the front of the table. The mummy itself, a horrid, black, withered thing, like a charred head on a gnarled bush, was lying half out of the case, with its clawlike hand and bony forearm resting upon the table. Propped up against the sarcophagus was an old yellow scroll of papyrus, and in front of it, in a wooden armchair, sat the owner of the room, his head thrown back, his widely-opened eyes directed in a horrified stare to the crocodile above him, and his blue, thick lips puffing loudly with every expiration.

"My God! he's dying!" cried Monkhouse Lee distractedly.

He was a slim, handsome young fellow, olive-skinned and dark-eyed, of a Spanish rather than of an English type, with a Celtic intensity of manner which contrasted with the Saxon phlegm of Abercombie Smith.

"Only a faint, I think," said the medical student. "Just give me a hand with him. You take his feet. Now on to the sofa. Can you kick all those little wooden devils off? What a litter it is! Now he will be all right if we undo his collar and give him some water. What has he been up to at all?"

"I don't know. I heard him cry out. I ran up. I know him pretty well, you know. It is very good of you to come down."

"His heart is going like a pair of castanets," said Smith, laying his hand on the breast of the unconscious man. "He seems to me to be frightened all to pieces. Chuck the water over him! What a face he has got on him!"

It was indeed a strange and most repellent face, for colour and outline were equally unnatural. It was white, not with the ordinary pallor of fear but with an absolutely bloodless white, like the under side of a sole. He was very fat, but gave the impression of having at some time been considerably fatter, for his skin hung loosely in creases and folds, and was shot with a meshwork of wrinkles. Short, stubbly brown hair bristled up from his scalp, with a pair of thick, wrinkled ears protruding on either side. His light grey eyes were still open, the pupils dilated and the balls projecting in a fixed and horrid stare. It seemed to Smith as he looked down upon him that he had never seen nature's danger signals flying so plainly upon a man's countenance, and his thoughts turned more seriously to the warning which Hastie had given him an hour before.

"What the deuce can have frightened him so?" he asked.

"It's the mummy."

"The mummy? How, then?"

"I don't know. It's beastly and morbid. I wish he would drop it. It's the second fright he has given me. It was the same last winter. I found him just like this, with that horrid thing in front of him."

"What does he want with the mummy, then?"

"Oh, he's a crank, you know. It's his hobby. He knows more about these things than any man in England. But I wish he wouldn't! Ah, he's beginning to come to."

A faint tinge of colour had begun to steal back into Bellingham's ghastly cheeks, and his eyelids shivered like a sail after a calm. He clasped and unclasped his hands, drew a long, thin breath between his teeth, and suddenly jerking up his head, threw a glance of recognition around him. As his eyes fell upon the mummy, he sprang off the sofa, seized the roll of papyrus, thrust it into a drawer, turned the key, and then staggered back on to the sofa.

"What's up?" he asked. "What do you chaps want?"

"You've been shrieking out and making no end of a fuss," said Monkhouse Lee. "If our neighbour here from above hadn't come down, I'm sure I don't know what I should have done with you."

"Ah, it's Abercrombie Smith," said Bellingham, glancing up at him. "How very good of you to come in! What a fool I am! Oh, my God, what a fool I am!"

He sunk his head on to his hands, and burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter.

"Look here! Drop it!" cried Smith, shaking him roughly by the shoulder.

"Your nerves are all in a jangle. You must drop these little midnight games with mummies, or you'll be going off your chump. You're all on wires now."

"I wonder," said Bellingham, "whether you would be as cool as I am if you had seen — —"

"What then?"

"Oh, nothing. I meant that I wonder if you could sit up at night with a mummy without trying your nerves. I have no doubt that you are quite right. I dare say that I have been taking it out of myself too much lately. But I am all right now. Please don't go, though. Just wait for a few minutes until I am quite myself."

"The room is very close," remarked Lee, throwing open the window and letting in the cool night air.

"It's balsamic resin," said Bellingham. He lifted up one of the dried palmate leaves from the table and frizzled it over the chimney of the lamp. It broke away into heavy smoke wreaths, and a pungent, biting odour filled the chamber. "It's the sacred plant — the plant of the priests," he remarked. "Do you know anything of Eastern languages, Smith?"

"Nothing at all. Not a word."

The answer seemed to lift a weight from the Egyptologist's mind.

"By-the-way," he continued, "how long was it from the time that you ran down, until I came to my senses?"

"Not long. Some four or five minutes."

"I thought it could not be very long," said he, drawing a long breath. "But what a strange thing unconsciousness is! There is no measurement to it. I could not tell from my own sensations if it were seconds or weeks. Now that gentleman on the table was packed up in the days of the eleventh dynasty, some forty centuries ago, and yet if he could find his tongue he would tell us that this lapse of time has been but a closing of the eyes and a reopening of them. He is a singularly fine mummy, Smith."

Smith stepped over to the table and looked down with a professional eye at the black and twisted form in front of him. The features, though horribly discoloured, were perfect, and two little nut-like eyes still lurked in the depths of the black, hollow sockets. The blotched skin was drawn tightly from bone to bone, and a tangled wrap of black coarse hair fell over the ears. Two thin teeth, like those of a rat, overlay the shrivelled lower lip. In its crouching position, with bent joints and craned head, there was a suggestion of energy about the horrid thing which made Smith's gorge rise. The gaunt ribs, with their parchment-like covering, were exposed, and the sunken, leaden-hued abdomen, with the long slit where the embalmer had left his mark; but the lower limbs were wrapt round with coarse yellow bandages. A number of little clove-like pieces of myrrh and of cassia were sprinkled over the body, and lay scattered on the inside of the case.

"I don't know his name," said Bellingham, passing his hand over the shrivelled head. "You see the outer sarcophagus with the inscriptions is missing. Lot 249 is all the title he has now. You see it printed on his case. That was his number in the auction at which I picked him up."

"He has been a very pretty sort of fellow in his day," remarked Abercrombie Smith.

"He has been a giant. His mummy is six feet seven in length, and that would be a giant over there, for they were never a very robust race. Feel these great knotted bones, too. He would be a nasty fellow to tackle."

"Perhaps these very hands helped to build the stones into the pyramids," suggested Monkhouse Lee, looking down with disgust in his eyes at the crooked, unclean talons.

"No fear. This fellow has been pickled in natron, and looked after in the most approved style. They did not serve hodsmen in that fashion. Salt or bitumen was enough for them. It has been calculated that this sort of thing cost about seven hundred and thirty pounds in our money. Our friend was a noble at the least. What do you make of that small inscription near his feet, Smith?"

"I told you that I know no Eastern tongue."

"Ah, so you did. It is the name of the embalmer, I take it. A very conscientious worker he must have been. I wonder how many modern works will survive four thousand years?"

He kept on speaking lightly and rapidly, but it was evident to Abercrombie Smith that he was still palpitating with fear. His hands shook, his lower lip trembled, and look where he would, his eye always came sliding round to his gruesome companion. Through all his fear, however, there was a suspicion of triumph in his tone and manner. His eye shone, and his footstep, as he paced the room, was brisk and jaunty. He gave the impression of a man who has gone through an ordeal, the marks of which he still bears upon him, but which has helped him to his end.

"You're not going yet?" he cried, as Smith rose from the sofa.

At the prospect of solitude, his fears seemed to crowd back upon him, and he stretched out a hand to detain him.

"Yes, I must go. I have my work to do. You are all right now. I think that with your nervous system you should take up some less morbid study."

"Oh, I am not nervous as a rule; and I have unwrapped mummies before."

"You fainted last time," observed Monkhouse Lee.

"Ah, yes, so I did. Well, I must have a nerve tonic or a course of electricity. You are not going, Lee?"

"I'll do whatever you wish, Ned."

"Then I'll come down with you and have a shake-down on your sofa. Good-night, Smith. I am so sorry to have disturbed you with my foolishness."

They shook hands, and as the medical student stumbled up the spiral and irregular stair he heard a key turn in a door, and the steps of his two new acquaintances as they descended to the lower floor.

In this strange way began the acquaintance between Edward Bellingham and Abercrombie Smith, an acquaintance which the latter, at least, had no desire to push further. Bellingham, however, appeared to have taken a fancy to his rough-spoken neighbour, and made his advances in such a way that he could hardly be repulsed without absolute brutality. Twice he called to thank Smith for his assistance, and many times afterwards he looked in with books, papers, and such other civilities as two bachelor neighbours can offer each other. He was, as Smith soon found, a man of wide reading, with catholic tastes and an extraordinary memory. His manner, too, was so pleasing and suave that one came, after a time, to overlook his repellent appearance. For a jaded and wearied man he was no unpleasant companion, and Smith found himself, after a time, looking forward to his visits, and even returning them.

Clever as he undoubtedly was, however, the medical student seemed to detect a dash of insanity in the man. He broke out at times into a high, inflated style of talk which was in contrast with the simplicity of his life.

“It is a wonderful thing,” he cried, “to feel that one can command powers of good and of evil — a ministering angel or a demon of vengeance.” And again, of Monkhouse Lee, he said,—”Lee is a good fellow, an honest fellow, but he is without strength or ambition. He would not make a fit partner for a man with a great enterprise. He would not make a fit partner for me.”

At such hints and innuendoes stolid Smith, puffing solemnly at his pipe, would simply raise his eyebrows and shake his head, with little interjections of medical wisdom as to earlier hours and fresher air.

One habit Bellingham had developed of late which Smith knew to be a frequent herald of a weakening mind. He appeared to be forever talking to himself. At late hours of the night, when there could be no visitor with him, Smith could still hear his voice beneath him in a low, muffled monologue, sunk almost to a whisper, and yet very audible in the silence. This solitary babbling annoyed and distracted the student, so that he spoke more than once to his neighbour about it. Bellingham, however, flushed up at the charge, and denied curtly that he had uttered a sound; indeed, he showed more annoyance over the matter than the occasion seemed to demand.

Had Abercrombie Smith had any doubt as to his own ears he had not to go far to find corroboration. Tom Styles, the little wrinkled man-servant who had attended to the wants of the lodgers in the turret for a longer time than any man’s memory could carry him, was sorely put to it over the same matter.

“If you please, sir,” said he, as he tidied down the top chamber one morning, “do you think Mr. Bellingham is all right, sir?”

“All right, Styles?”

“Yes sir. Right in his head, sir.”

“Why should he not be, then?”

“Well, I don’t know, sir. His habits has changed of late. He’s not the same man he used to be, though I make free to say that he was never quite one of my gentlemen, like Mr. Hastie or yourself, sir. He’s took to talkin’ to himself something awful. I wonder it don’t disturb you. I don’t know what to make of him, sir.”

“I don’t know what business it is of yours, Styles.”

“Well, I takes an interest, Mr. Smith. It may be forward of me, but I can’t help it. I feel sometimes as if I was mother and father to my young gentlemen. It all falls on me when things go wrong and the relations come. But Mr. Bellingham, sir. I want to know what it is that walks about his room sometimes when he’s out and when the door’s locked on the outside.”

“Eh! you’re talking nonsense, Styles.”

“Maybe so, sir; but I heard it more’n once with my own ears.”

“Rubbish, Styles.”

“Very good, sir. You’ll ring the bell if you want me.”

Abercrombie Smith gave little heed to the gossip of the old man-servant, but a small incident occurred a few days later which left an unpleasant effect upon his mind, and brought the words of Styles forcibly to his memory.

Bellingham had come up to see him late one night, and was entertaining him with an interesting account of the rock tombs of Beni Hassan in Upper Egypt, when Smith, whose hearing was remarkably acute, distinctly heard the sound of a door opening on the landing below.

“There’s some fellow gone in or out of your room,” he remarked.

Bellingham sprang up and stood helpless for a moment, with the expression of a man who is half incredulous and half afraid.

“I surely locked it. I am almost positive that I locked it,” he stammered. “No one could have opened it.”

“Why, I hear someone coming up the steps now,” said Smith.

Bellingham rushed out through the door, slammed it loudly behind him, and hurried down the stairs. About half-way down Smith heard him stop, and thought he caught the sound of whispering. A moment later the door beneath him shut, a key creaked in a lock, and Bellingham, with beads of moisture upon his pale face, ascended the stairs once more, and re-entered the room.

“It’s all right,” he said, throwing himself down in a chair. “It was that fool of a dog. He had pushed the door open. I don’t know how I came to forget to lock it."

"I didn't know you kept a dog," said Smith, looking very thoughtfully at the disturbed face of his companion.

"Yes, I haven't had him long. I must get rid of him. He's a great nuisance."

"He must be, if you find it so hard to shut him up. I should have thought that shutting the door would have been enough, without locking it."

"I want to prevent old Styles from letting him out. He's of some value, you know, and it would be awkward to lose him."

"I am a bit of a dog-fancier myself," said Smith, still gazing hard at his companion from the corner of his eyes. "Perhaps you'll let me have a look at it."

"Certainly. But I am afraid it cannot be to-night; I have an appointment. Is that clock right? Then I am a quarter of an hour late already. You'll excuse me, I am sure."

He picked up his cap and hurried from the room. In spite of his appointment, Smith heard him re-enter his own chamber and lock his door upon the inside.

This interview left a disagreeable impression upon the medical student's mind. Bellingham had lied to him, and lied so clumsily that it looked as if he had desperate reasons for concealing the truth. Smith knew that his neighbour had no dog. He knew, also, that the step which he had heard upon the stairs was not the step of an animal. But if it were not, then what could it be? There was old Styles's statement about the something which used to pace the room at times when the owner was absent. Could it be a woman? Smith rather inclined to the view. If so, it would mean disgrace and expulsion to Bellingham if it were discovered by the authorities, so that his anxiety and falsehoods might be accounted for. And yet it was inconceivable that an undergraduate could keep a woman in his rooms without being instantly detected. Be the explanation what it might, there was something ugly about it, and Smith determined, as he turned to his books, to discourage all further attempts at intimacy on the part of his soft-spoken and ill-favoured neighbour.

But his work was destined to interruption that night. He had hardly caught tip the broken threads when a firm, heavy footfall came three steps at a time from below, and Hastie, in blazer and flannels, burst into the room.

“Still at it!” said he, plumping down into his wonted arm-chair. “What a chap you are to stew! I believe an earthquake might come and knock Oxford into a cocked hat, and you would sit perfectly placid with your books among the rains. However, I won’t bore you long. Three whiffs of baccy, and I am off.”

“What’s the news, then?” asked Smith, cramming a plug of bird’s-eye into his briar with his forefinger.

“Nothing very much. Wilson made 70 for the freshmen against the eleven. They say that they will play him instead of Buddicomb, for Buddicomb is clean off colour. He used to be able to bowl a little, but it’s nothing but half-vollies and long hops now.”

“Medium right,” suggested Smith, with the intense gravity which comes upon a ‘varsity man when he speaks of athletics.

“Inclining to fast, with a work from leg. Comes with the arm about three inches or so. He used to be nasty on a wet wicket. Oh, by-the-way, have you heard about Long Norton?”

“What’s that?”

“He’s been attacked.”

“Attacked?”

“Yes, just as he was turning out of the High Street, and within a hundred yards of the gate of Old’s.”

“But who — —”

“Ah, that’s the rub! If you said ‘what,’ you would be more grammatical. Norton swears that it was not human, and, indeed, from the scratches on his throat, I should be inclined to agree with him.”

“What, then? Have we come down to spooks?”

Abercrombie Smith puffed his scientific contempt.

“Well, no; I don’t think that is quite the idea, either. I am inclined to think that if any showman has lost a great ape lately, and the brute is in these parts, a jury would find a true bill against it. Norton passes that way every night, you know, about the same hour. There’s a tree that hangs low over the path — the big elm from Rainy’s garden. Norton thinks the thing dropped on him out of the tree. Anyhow, he was nearly strangled by two arms, which, he says, were as strong and as thin as steel bands. He saw nothing; only those beastly arms that tightened and tightened on him. He yelled his head nearly off, and a couple of chaps came running, and the thing went over the wall like a cat. He never got a fair sight of it the whole time. It gave Norton a shake up, I can tell you. I tell him it has been as good as a change at the sea-side for him."

"A garrotter, most likely," said Smith.

"Very possibly. Norton says not; but we don't mind what he says. The garrotter had long nails, and was pretty smart at swinging himself over walls. By-the-way, your beautiful neighbour would be pleased if he heard about it. He had a grudge against Norton, and he's not a man, from what I know of him, to forget his little debts. But hallo, old chap, what have you got in your noddle?"

"Nothing," Smith answered curtly.

He had started in his chair, and the look had flashed over his face which comes upon a man who is struck suddenly by some unpleasant idea.

"You looked as if something I had said had taken you on the raw. By-the-way, you have made the acquaintance of Master B. since I looked in last, have you not? Young Monkhouse Lee told me something to that effect."

"Yes; I know him slightly. He has been up here once or twice."

"Well, you're big enough and ugly enough to take care of yourself. He's not what I should call exactly a healthy sort of Johnny, though, no doubt, he's very clever, and all that. But you'll soon find out for yourself. Lee is all right; he's a very decent little fellow. Well, so long, old chap! I row Mullins for the Vice-Chancellor's pot on Wednesday week, so mind you come down, in case I don't see you before."

Bovine Smith laid down his pipe and turned stolidly to his books once more. But with all the will in the world, he found it very hard to keep his mind upon his work. It would slip away to brood upon the man beneath him, and upon the little mystery which hung round his chambers. Then his thoughts turned to this singular attack of which Hastie had spoken, and to the grudge which Bellingham was said to owe the object of it. The two ideas would persist in rising together in his mind, as though there were some close and intimate connection between them. And yet the suspicion was so dim and vague that it could not be put down in words.

"Confound the chap!" cried Smith, as he shied his book on pathology across the room. "He has spoiled my night's reading, and that's reason enough, if there were no other, why I should steer clear of him in the future."

For ten days the medical student confined himself so closely to his studies that he neither saw nor heard anything of either of the men beneath him. At the hours when Bellingham had been accustomed to visit him, he took care to sport his oak, and though he more than once heard a knocking at his outer door, he resolutely refused to answer it. One afternoon, however, he was descending the stairs when, just as he was passing it, Bellingham's door flew open, and young Monkhouse Lee came out with his eyes sparkling and a dark flush of anger upon his olive cheeks. Close at his heels followed Bellingham, his fat, unhealthy face all quivering with malignant passion.

"You fool!" he hissed. "You'll be sorry."

"Very likely," cried the other. "Mind what I say. It's off! I won't hear of it!"

"You've promised, anyhow."

"Oh, I'll keep that! I won't speak. But I'd rather little Eva was in her grave. Once for all, it's off. She'll do what I say. We don't want to see you again."

So much Smith could not avoid hearing, but he hurried on, for he had no wish to be involved in their dispute. There had been a serious breach between them, that was clear enough, and Lee was going to cause the engagement with his sister to be broken off. Smith thought of Hastie's comparison of the toad and the dove, and was glad to think that the matter was at an end. Bellingham's face when he was in a passion was not pleasant to look upon. He was not a man to whom an innocent girl could be trusted for life. As he walked, Smith wondered languidly what could have caused the quarrel, and what the promise might be which Bellingham had been so anxious that Monkhouse Lee should keep.

It was the day of the sculling match between Hastie and Mullins, and a stream of men were making their way down to the banks of the Isis. A May sun was shining brightly, and the yellow path was barred with the black shadows of the tall elm-trees. On either side the grey colleges lay back from the road, the hoary old mothers of minds looking out from their high, mullioned windows at the tide of young life which swept so merrily past them. Black-clad tutors, prim officials, pale reading men, brown-faced, straw-hatted young athletes in white sweaters or many-coloured blazers, all were hurrying towards the blue winding river which curves through the Oxford meadows.

Abercrombie Smith, with the intuition of an old oarsman, chose his position at the point where he knew that the struggle, if there were a struggle, would come. Far off he heard the hum which announced the start, the gathering roar of the approach, the thunder of running feet, and the shouts of the men in the boats beneath him. A spray of half-clad, deep-breathing runners shot past him, and craning over their shoulders, he saw Hastie pulling a steady thirty-six, while his opponent, with a jerky forty, was a good boat's length behind him. Smith gave a cheer for his friend, and pulling out his watch, was starting off again for his chambers, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and found that young Monkhouse Lee was beside him.

"I saw you there," he said, in a timid, deprecating way. "I wanted to speak to you, if you could spare me a half-hour. This cottage is mine. I share it with Harrington of King's. Come in and have a cup of tea."

"I must be back presently," said Smith. "I am hard on the grind at present. But I'll come in for a few minutes with pleasure. I wouldn't have come out only Hastie is a friend of mine."

"So he is of mine. Hasn't he a beautiful style? Mullins wasn't in it. But come into the cottage. It's a little den of a place, but it is pleasant to work in during the summer months."

It was a small, square, white building, with green doors and shutters, and a rustic trellis-work porch, standing back some fifty yards from the river's bank. Inside, the main room was roughly fitted up as a study — deal table, unpainted shelves with books, and a few cheap oleographs upon the wall. A kettle sang upon a spirit-stove, and there were tea things upon a tray on the table.

"Try that chair and have a cigarette," said Lee. "Let me pour you out a cup of tea. It's so good of you to come in, for I know that your time is a good deal taken up. I wanted to say to you that, if I were you, I should change my rooms at once."

"Eh?"

Smith sat staring with a lighted match in one hand and his unlit cigarette in the other.

"Yes; it must seem very extraordinary, and the worst of it is that I cannot give my reasons, for I am under a solemn promise — a very solemn promise. But I may go so far as to say that I don't think Bellingham is a very safe man to live near. I intend to camp out here as much as I can for a time."

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"Ah, that's what I mustn't say. But do take my advice, and move your rooms. We had a grand row to-day. You must have heard us, for you came down the stairs."

"I saw that you had fallen out."

"He's a horrible chap, Smith. That is the only word for him. I have had doubts about him ever since that night when he fainted — you remember, when you came down. I taxed him to-day, and he told me things that made my hair rise, and wanted me to stand in with him. I'm not strait-laced, but I am a clergyman's son, you know, and I think there are some things which are quite beyond the pale. I only thank God that I found him out before it was too late, for he was to have married into my family."

"This is all very fine, Lee," said Abercrombie Smith curtly. "But either you are saying a great deal too much or a great deal too little."

"I give you a warning."

"If there is real reason for warning, no promise can bind you. If I see a rascal about to blow a place up with dynamite no pledge will stand in my way of preventing him."

"Ah, but I cannot prevent him, and I can do nothing but warn you."

"Without saying what you warn me against."

"Against Bellingham."

"But that is childish. Why should I fear him, or any man?"

"I can't tell you. I can only entreat you to change your rooms. You are in danger where you are. I don't even say that Bellingham would wish to injure you. But it might happen, for he is a dangerous neighbour just now."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," said Smith, looking keenly at the young man's boyish, earnest face. "Suppose I tell you that some one else shares Bellingham's rooms."

Monkhouse Lee sprang from his chair in uncontrollable excitement.

"You know, then?" he gasped.

"A woman."

Lee dropped back again with a groan.

"My lips are sealed," he said. "I must not speak."

"Well, anyhow," said Smith, rising, "it is not likely that I should allow myself to be frightened out of rooms which suit me very nicely. It would be a little too feeble for me to move out all my goods and chattels because you say that Bellingham might in some unexplained way do me an injury. I think that I’ll just take my chance, and stay where I am, and as I see that it’s nearly five o’clock, I must ask you to excuse me.”

He bade the young student adieu in a few curt words, and made his way homeward through the sweet spring evening feeling half-ruffled, half-amused, as any other strong, unimaginative man might who has been menaced by a vague and shadowy danger.

There was one little indulgence which Abercrombie Smith always allowed himself, however closely his work might press upon him. Twice a week, on the Tuesday and the Friday, it was his invariable custom to walk over to Farlingford, the residence of Dr. Plumptree Peterson, situated about a mile and a half out of Oxford. Peterson had been a close friend of Smith’s elder brother Francis, and as he was a bachelor, fairly well-to-do, with a good cellar and a better library, his house was a pleasant goal for a man who was in need of a brisk walk. Twice a week, then, the medical student would swing out there along the dark country roads, and spend a pleasant hour in Peterson’s comfortable study, discussing, over a glass of old port, the gossip of the ‘varsity or the latest developments of medicine or of surgery.

On the day which followed his interview with Monkhouse Lee, Smith shut up his books at a quarter past eight, the hour when he usually started for his friend’s house. As he was leaving his room, however, his eyes chanced to fall upon one of the books which Bellingham had lent him, and his conscience pricked him for not having returned it. However repellent the man might be, he should not be treated with discourtesy. Taking the book, he walked downstairs and knocked at his neighbour’s door. There was no answer; but on turning the handle he found that it was unlocked. Pleased at the thought of avoiding an interview, he stepped inside, and placed the book with his card upon the table.

The lamp was turned half down, but Smith could see the details of the room plainly enough. It was all much as he had seen it before — the frieze, the animal-headed gods, the banging crocodile, and the table littered over with papers and dried leaves. The mummy case stood upright against the wall, but the mummy itself was missing. There was no sign of any second occupant of the room, and he felt as he withdrew that he had probably done Bellingham an injustice. Had he a guilty secret to preserve, he would hardly leave his door open so that all the world might enter.

The spiral stair was as black as pitch, and Smith was slowly making his way down its irregular steps, when he was suddenly conscious that something had passed him in the darkness. There was a faint sound, a whiff of air, a light brushing past his elbow, but so slight that he could scarcely be certain of it. He stopped and listened, but the wind was rustling among the ivy outside, and he could hear nothing else.

"Is that you, Styles?" he shouted.

There was no answer, and all was still behind him. It must have been a sudden gust of air, for there were crannies and cracks in the old turret. And yet he could almost have sworn that he heard a footfall by his very side. He had emerged into the quadrangle, still turning the matter over in his head, when a man came running swiftly across the smooth-cropped lawn.

"Is that you, Smith?"

"Hullo, Hastie!"

"For God's sake come at once! Young Lee is drowned! Here's Harrington of King's with the news. The doctor is out. You'll do, but come along at once. There may be life in him."

"Have you brandy?"

"No."

"I'll bring some. There's a flask on my table."

Smith bounded up the stairs, taking three at a time, seized the flask, and was rushing down with it, when, as he passed Bellingham's room, his eyes fell upon something which left him gasping and staring upon the landing.

The door, which he had closed behind him, was now open, and right in front of him, with the lamp-light shining upon it, was the mummy case. Three minutes ago it had been empty. He could swear to that. Now it framed the lank body of its horrible occupant, who stood, grim and stark, with his black shrivelled face towards the door. The form was lifeless and inert, but it seemed to Smith as he gazed that there still lingered a lurid spark of vitality, some faint sign of consciousness in the little eyes which lurked in the depths of the hollow sockets. So astounded and shaken was he that he had forgotten his errand, and was still staring at the lean, sunken figure when the voice of his friend below recalled him to himself.

"Come on, Smith!" he shouted. "It's life and death, you know. Hurry up! Now, then," he added, as the medical student reappeared, "let us do a sprint. It is well under a mile, and we should do it in five minutes. A human life is better worth running for than a pot."

Neck and neck they dashed through the darkness, and did not pull up until, panting and spent, they had reached the little cottage by the river.

Young Lee, limp and dripping like a broken water-plant, was stretched upon the sofa, the green scum of the river upon his black hair, and a fringe of white foam upon his leaden-hued lips. Beside him knelt his fellow-student Harrington, endeavouring to chafe some warmth back into his rigid limbs.

"I think there's life in him," said Smith, with his hand to the lad's side. "Put your watch glass to his lips. Yes, there's dimming on it. You take one arm, Hastie. Now work it as I do, and we'll soon pull him round."

For ten minutes they worked in silence, inflating and depressing the chest of the unconscious man. At the end of that time a shiver ran through his body, his lips trembled, and he opened his eyes. The three students burst out into an irrepressible cheer.

"Wake up, old chap. You've frightened us quite enough."

"Have some brandy. Take a sip from the flask."

"He's all right now," said his companion Harrington. "Heavens, what a fright I got! I was reading here, and he had gone for a stroll as far as the river, when I heard a scream and a splash. Out I ran, and by the time that I could find him and fish him out, all life seemed to have gone. Then Simpson couldn't get a doctor, for he has a game-leg, and I had to run, and I don't know what I'd have done without you fellows. That's right, old chap. Sit up."

Monkhouse Lee had raised himself on his hands, and looked wildly about him.

"What's up?" he asked. "I've been in the water. Ah, yes; I remember."

A look of fear came into his eyes, and he sank his face into his hands.

"How did you fall in?"

"I didn't fall in."

"How, then?"

"I was thrown in. I was standing by the bank, and something from behind picked me up like a feather and hurled me in. I heard nothing, and I saw nothing. But I know what it was, for all that."

"And so do I," whispered Smith.

Lee looked up with a quick glance of surprise. "You've learned, then!" he said. "You remember the advice I gave you?"

"Yes, and I begin to think that I shall take it."

"I don't know what the deuce you fellows are talking about," said Hastie, "but I think, if I were you, Harrington, I should get Lee to bed at once. It will be time enough to discuss the why and the wherefore when he is a little stronger. I think, Smith, you and I can leave him alone now. I am walking back to college; if you are coming in that direction, we can have a chat."

But it was little chat that they had upon their homeward path. Smith's mind was too full of the incidents of the evening, the absence of the mummy from his neighbour's rooms, the step that passed him on the stair, the reappearance — the extraordinary, inexplicable reappearance of the grisly thing — and then this attack upon Lee, corresponding so closely to the previous outrage upon another man against whom Bellingham bore a grudge. All this settled in his thoughts, together with the many little incidents which had previously turned him against his neighbour, and the singular circumstances under which he was first called in to him. What had been a dim suspicion, a vague, fantastic conjecture, had suddenly taken form, and stood out in his mind as a grim fact, a thing not to be denied. And yet, how monstrous it was! how unheard of! how entirely beyond all bounds of human experience. An impartial judge, or even the friend who walked by his side, would simply tell him that his eyes had deceived him, that the mummy had been there all the time, that young Lee had tumbled into the river as any other man tumbles into a river, and that a blue pill was the best thing for a disordered liver. He felt that he would have said as much if the positions had been reversed. And yet he could swear that Bellingham was a murderer at heart, and that he wielded a weapon such as no man had ever used in all the grim history of crime.

Hastie had branched off to his rooms with a few crisp and emphatic comments upon his friend's unsociability, and Abercrombie Smith crossed the quadrangle to his corner turret with a strong feeling of repulsion for his chambers and their associations. He would take Lee's advice, and move his quarters as soon as possible, for how could a man study when his ear was ever straining for every murmur or footstep in the room below? He observed, as he crossed over the lawn, that the light was still shining in Bellingham's window, and as he passed up the staircase the door opened, and the man himself looked out at him. With his fat, evil face he was like some bloated spider fresh from the weaving of his poisonous web.

"Good-evening," said he. "Won't you come in?"

"No," cried Smith, fiercely.

"No? You are busy as ever? I wanted to ask you about Lee. I was sorry to hear that there was a rumour that something was amiss with him."

His features were grave, but there was the gleam of a hidden laugh in his eyes as he spoke. Smith saw it, and he could have knocked him down for it.

"You'll be sorrier still to hear that Monkhouse Lee is doing very well, and is out of all danger," he answered. "Your hellish tricks have not come off this time. Oh, you needn't try to brazen it out. I know all about it."

Bellingham took a step back from the angry student, and half-closed the door as if to protect himself.

"You are mad," he said. "What do you mean? Do you assert that I had anything to do with Lee's accident?"

"Yes," thundered Smith. "You and that bag of bones behind you; you worked it between you. I tell you what it is, Master B., they have given up burning folk like you, but we still keep a hangman, and, by George! if any man in this college meets his death while you are here, I'll have you up, and if you don't swing for it, it won't be my fault. You'll find that your filthy Egyptian tricks won't answer in England."

"You're a raving lunatic," said Bellingham.

"All right. You just remember what I say, for you'll find that I'll be better than my word."

The door slammed, and Smith went fuming up to his chamber, where he locked the door upon the inside, and spent half the night in smoking his old briar and brooding over the strange events of the evening.

Next morning Abercrombie Smith heard nothing of his neighbour, but Harrington called upon him in the afternoon to say that Lee was almost himself again. All day Smith stuck fast to his work, but in the evening he determined to pay the visit to his friend Dr. Peterson upon which he had started upon the night before. A good walk and a friendly chat would be welcome to his jangled nerves.

Bellingham's door was shut as he passed, but glancing back when he was some distance from the turret, he saw his neighbour's head at the window outlined against the lamp-light, his face pressed apparently against the glass as he gazed out into the darkness. It was a blessing to be away from all contact with him, but if for a few hours, and Smith stepped out briskly, and breathed the soft spring air into his lungs. The half-moon lay in the west between two Gothic pinnacles, and threw upon the silvered street a dark tracery from the stone-work above. There was a brisk breeze, and light, fleecy clouds drifted swiftly across the sky. Old's was on the very border of the town, and in five minutes Smith found himself beyond the houses and between the hedges of a May-scented Oxfordshire lane.

It was a lonely and little frequented road which led to his friend's house. Early as it was, Smith did not meet a single soul upon his way. He walked briskly along until he came to the avenue gate, which opened into the long gravel drive leading up to Farlingford. In front of him he could see the cosy red light of the windows glimmering through the foliage. He stood with his hand upon the iron latch of the swinging gate, and he glanced back at the road along which he had come. Something was coming swiftly down it.

It moved in the shadow of the hedge, silently and furtively, a dark, crouching figure, dimly visible against the black background. Even as he gazed back at it, it had lessened its distance by twenty paces, and was fast closing upon him. Out of the darkness he had a glimpse of a scraggy neck, and of two eyes that will ever haunt him in his dreams. He turned, and with a cry of terror he ran for his life up the avenue. There were the red lights, the signals of safety, almost within a stone's throw of him. He was a famous runner, but never had he run as he ran that night.

The heavy gate had swung into place behind him, but he heard it dash open again before his pursuer. As he rushed madly and wildly through the night, he could hear a swift, dry patter behind him, and could see, as he threw back a glance, that this horror was bounding like a tiger at his heels, with blazing eyes and one stringy arm outthrown. Thank God, the door was ajar. He could see the thin bar of light which shot from the lamp in the hall. Nearer yet sounded the clatter from behind. He heard a hoarse gurgling at his very shoulder. With a shriek he flung himself against the door, slammed and bolted it behind him, and sank half-fainting on to the hall chair.

"My goodness, Smith, what's the matter?" asked Peterson, appearing at the door of his study.

"Give me some brandy!"

Peterson disappeared, and came rushing out again with a glass and a decanter.

"You need it," he said, as his visitor drank off what he poured out for him. "Why, man, you are as white as a cheese."

Smith laid down his glass, rose up, and took a deep breath.

"I am my own man again now," said he. "I was never so unmanned before. But, with your leave, Peterson, I will sleep here to-night, for I don't think I could face that road again except by daylight. It’s weak, I know, but I can’t help it.”

Peterson looked at his visitor with a very questioning eye.

“Of course you shall sleep here if you wish. I’ll tell Mrs. Burney to make up the spare bed. Where are you off to now?”

“Come up with me to the window that overlooks the door. I want you to see what I have seen.”

They went up to the window of the upper hall whence they could look down upon the approach to the house. The drive and the fields on either side lay quiet and still, bathed in the peaceful moonlight.

“Well, really, Smith,” remarked Peterson, “it is well that I know you to be an abstemious man. What in the world can have frightened you?”

“I’ll tell you presently. But where can it have gone? Ah, now look, look! See the curve of the road just beyond your gate.”

“Yes, I see; you needn’t pinch my arm off. I saw someone pass. I should say a man, rather thin, apparently, and tall, very tall. But what of him? And what of yourself? You are still shaking like an aspen leaf.”

“I have been within hand-grip of the devil, that’s all. But come down to your study, and I shall tell you the whole story.”

He did so. Under the cheery lamplight, with a glass of wine on the table beside him, and the portly form and florid face of his friend in front, he narrated, in their order, all the events, great and small, which had formed so singular a chain, from the night on which he had found Bellingham fainting in front of the mummy case until his horrid experience of an hour ago.

“There now,” he said as he concluded, “that’s the whole black business. It is monstrous and incredible, but it is true.”

Dr. Plumptree Peterson sat for some time in silence with a very puzzled expression upon his face.

“I never heard of such a thing in my life, never!” he said at last. “You have told me the facts. Now tell me your inferences.”

“You can draw your own.”

“But I should like to hear yours. You have thought over the matter, and I have not.”

“Well, it must be a little vague in detail, but the main points seem to me to be clear enough. This fellow Bellingham, in his Eastern studies, has got hold of some infernal secret by which a mummy — or possibly only this particular mummy — can be temporarily brought to life. He was trying this disgusting business on the night when he fainted. No doubt the sight of the creature moving had shaken his nerve, even though he had expected it. You remember that almost the first words he said were to call out upon himself as a fool. Well, he got more hardened afterwards, and carried the matter through without fainting. The vitality which he could put into it was evidently only a passing thing, for I have seen it continually in its case as dead as this table. He has some elaborate process, I fancy, by which he brings the thing to pass. Having done it, he naturally bethought him that he might use the creature as an agent. It has intelligence and it has strength. For some purpose he took Lee into his confidence; but Lee, like a decent Christian, would have nothing to do with such a business. Then they had a row, and Lee vowed that he would tell his sister of Bellingham's true character. Bellingham's game was to prevent him, and he nearly managed it, by setting this creature of his on his track. He had already tried its powers upon another man — Norton — towards whom he had a grudge. It is the merest chance that he has not two murders upon his soul. Then, when I taxed him with the matter, he had the strongest reasons for wishing to get me out of the way before I could convey my knowledge to anyone else. He got his chance when I went out, for he knew my habits, and where I was bound for. I have had a narrow shave, Peterson, and it is mere luck you didn't find me on your doorstep in the morning. I'm not a nervous man as a rule, and I never thought to have the fear of death put upon me as it was to-night."

"My dear boy, you take the matter too seriously," said his companion. "Your nerves are out of order with your work, and you make too much of it. How could such a thing as this stride about the streets of Oxford, even at night, without being seen?"

"It has been seen. There is quite a scare in the town about an escaped ape, as they imagine the creature to be. It is the talk of the place."

"Well, it's a striking chain of events. And yet, my dear fellow, you must allow that each incident in itself is capable of a more natural explanation."

"What! even my adventure of to-night?"

"Certainly. You come out with your nerves all unstrung, and your head full of this theory of yours. Some gaunt, half-famished tramp steals after you, and seeing you run, is emboldened to pursue you. Your fears and imagination do the rest."

"It won't do, Peterson; it won't do."

“And again, in the instance of your finding the mummy case empty, and then a few moments later with an occupant, you know that it was lamplight, that the lamp was half turned down, and that you had no special reason to look hard at the case. It is quite possible that you may have overlooked the creature in the first instance.”

“No, no; it is out of the question.”

“And then Lee may have fallen into the river, and Norton been garrotted. It is certainly a formidable indictment that you have against Bellingham; but if you were to place it before a police magistrate, he would simply laugh in your face.”

“I know he would. That is why I mean to take the matter into my own hands.”

“Eh?”

“Yes; I feel that a public duty rests upon me, and, besides, I must do it for my own safety, unless I choose to allow myself to be hunted by this beast out of the college, and that would be a little too feeble. I have quite made up my mind what I shall do. And first of all, may I use your paper and pens for an hour?”

“Most certainly. You will find all that you want upon that side table.”

Abercrombie Smith sat down before a sheet of foolscap, and for an hour, and then for a second hour his pen travelled swiftly over it. Page after page was finished and tossed aside while his friend leaned back in his arm-chair, looking across at him with patient curiosity. At last, with an exclamation of satisfaction, Smith sprang to his feet, gathered his papers up into order, and laid the last one upon Peterson’s desk.

“Kindly sign this as a witness,” he said.

“A witness? Of what?”

“Of my signature, and of the date. The date is the most important. Why, Peterson, my life might hang upon it.”

“My dear Smith, you are talking wildly. Let me beg you to go to bed.”

“On the contrary, I never spoke so deliberately in my life. And I will promise to go to bed the moment you have signed it.”

“But what is it?”

“It is a statement of all that I have been telling you to-night. I wish you to witness it.”

“Certainly,” said Peterson, signing his name under that of his companion. “There you are! But what is the idea?”

“You will kindly retain it, and produce it in case I am arrested.”

“Arrested? For what?”

“For murder. It is quite on the cards. I wish to be ready for every event. There is only one course open to me, and I am determined to take it.”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t do anything rash!”

“Believe me, it would be far more rash to adopt any other course. I hope that we won’t need to bother you, but it will ease my mind to know that you have this statement of my motives. And now I am ready to take your advice and to go to roost, for I want to be at my best in the morning.”

Abercrombie Smith was not an entirely pleasant man to have as an enemy. Slow and easytempered, he was formidable when driven to action. He brought to every purpose in life the same deliberate resoluteness which had distinguished him as a scientific student. He had laid his studies aside for a day, but he intended that the day should not be wasted. Not a word did he say to his host as to his plans, but by nine o’clock he was well on his way to Oxford.

In the High Street he stopped at Clifford’s, the gun-maker’s, and bought a heavy revolver, with a box of central-fire cartridges. Six of them he slipped into the chambers, and half-cocking the weapon, placed it in the pocket of his coat. He then made his way to Hastie’s rooms, where the big oarsman was lounging over his breakfast, with the Sporting Times propped up against the coffeepot.

“Hullo! What’s up?” he asked. “Have some coffee?”

“No, thank you. I want you to come with me, Hastie, and do what I ask you.”

“Certainly, my boy.”

“And bring a heavy stick with you.”

“Hullo!” Hastie stared. “Here’s a hunting-crop that would fell an ox.”

“One other thing. You have a box of amputating knives. Give me the longest of them.”

“There you are. You seem to be fairly on the war trail. Anything else?”

“No; that will do.” Smith placed the knife inside his coat, and led the way to the quadrangle. “We are neither of us chickens, Hastie,” said he. “I think I can do this job alone, but I take you as a precaution. I am going to have a little talk with Bellingham. If I have only him to deal with, I won’t, of course, need you. If I shout, however, up you come, and lam out with your whip as hard as you can lick. Do you understand?”

“All right. I’ll come if I hear you bellow.”

“Stay here, then. It may be a little time, but don’t budge until I come down.”

“I’m a fixture.”

Smith ascended the stairs, opened Bellingham’s door and stepped in. Bellingham was seated behind his table, writing. Beside him, among his litter of strange possessions, towered the mummy case, with its sale number 249 still stuck upon its front, and its hideous occupant stiff and stark within it. Smith looked very deliberately round him, closed the door, locked it, took the key from the inside, and then stepping across to the fireplace, struck a match and set the fire alight. Bellingham sat staring, with amazement and rage upon his bloated face.

“Well, really now, you make yourself at home,” he gasped.

Smith sat himself deliberately down, placing his watch upon the table, drew out his pistol, cocked it, and laid it in his lap. Then he took the long amputating knife from his bosom, and threw it down in front of Bellingham.

“Now, then,” said he, “just get to work and cut up that mummy.”

“Oh, is that it?” said Bellingham with a sneer.

“Yes, that is it. They tell me that the law can’t touch you. But I have a law that will set matters straight. If in five minutes you have not set to work, I swear by the God who made me that I will put a bullet through your brain!”

“You would murder me?”

Bellingham had half risen, and his face was the colour of putty.

“Yes.”

“And for what?”

“To stop your mischief. One minute has gone.”

“But what have I done?”

“I know and you know.”

“This is mere bullying.”

“Two minutes are gone.”

“But you must give reasons. You are a madman — a dangerous madman. Why should I destroy my own property? It is a valuable mummy.”

“You must cut it up, and you must burn it.”

“I will do no such thing.”

“Four minutes are gone.”

Smith took up the pistol and he looked towards Bellingham with an inexorable face. As the second-hand stole round, he raised his hand, and the finger twitched upon the trigger.

"There! there! I'll do it!" screamed Bellingham.

In frantic haste he caught up the knife and hacked at the figure of the mummy, ever glancing round to see the eye and the weapon of his terrible visitor bent upon him. The creature crackled and snapped under every stab of the keen blade. A thick yellow dust rose up from it. Spices and dried essences rained down upon the floor. Suddenly, with a rending crack, its backbone snapped asunder, and it fell, a brown heap of sprawling limbs, upon the floor.

"Now into the fire!" said Smith.

The flames leaped and roared as the dried and tinderlike debris was piled upon it. The little room was like the stoke-hole of a steamer and the sweat ran down the faces of the two men; but still the one stooped and worked, while the other sat watching him with a set face. A thick, fat smoke oozed out from the fire, and a heavy smell of burned rosin and singed hair filled the air. In a quarter of an hour a few charred and brittle sticks were all that was left of Lot No. 249.

"Perhaps that will satisfy you," snarled Bellingham, with hate and fear in his little grey eyes as he glanced back at his tormenter.

"No; I must make a clean sweep of all your materials. We must have no more devil's tricks. In with all these leaves! They may have something to do with it."

"And what now?" asked Bellingham, when the leaves also had been added to the blaze.

"Now the roll of papyrus which you had on the table that night. It is in that drawer, I think."

"No, no," shouted Bellingham. "Don't burn that! Why, man, you don't know what you do. It is unique; it contains wisdom which is nowhere else to be found."

"Out with it!"

"But look here, Smith, you can't really mean it. I'll share the knowledge with you. I'll teach you all that is in it. Or, stay, let me only copy it before you burn it!"

Smith stepped forward and turned the key in the drawer. Taking out the yellow, curled roll of paper, he threw it into the fire, and pressed it down with his heel. Bellingham screamed, and grabbed at it; but Smith pushed him back, and stood over it until it was reduced to a formless grey ash.

“Now, Master B.,” said he, “I think I have pretty well drawn your teeth. You’ll hear from me again, if you return to your old tricks. And now good-morning, for I must go back to my studies.”

And such is the narrative of Abercrombie Smith as to the singular events which occurred in Old College, Oxford, in the spring of ‘84. As Bellingham left the university immediately afterwards, and was last heard of in the Soudan, there is no one who can contradict his statement. But the wisdom of men is small, and the ways of nature are strange, and who shall put a bound to the dark things which may be found by those who seek for them?

THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO.

I used to be the leading practitioner of Los Amigos. Of course, everyone has heard of the great electrical generating gear there. The town is wide spread, and there are dozens of little townlets and villages all round, which receive their supply from the same centre, so that the works are on a very large scale. The Los Amigos folk say that they are the largest upon earth, but then we claim that for everything in Los Amigos except the gaol and the death-rate. Those are said to be the smallest.

Now, with so fine an electrical supply, it seemed to be a sinful waste of hemp that the Los Amigos criminals should perish in the old-fashioned manner. And then came the news of the eleotrocutions in the East, and how the results had not after all been so instantaneous as had been hoped. The Western Engineers raised their eyebrows when they read of the puny shocks by which these men had perished, and they vowed in Los Amigos that when an irreclaimable came their way he should be dealt handsomely by, and have the run of all the big dynamos. There should be no reserve, said the engineers, but he should have all that they had got. And what the result of that would be none could predict, save that it must be absolutely blasting and deadly. Never before had a man been so charged with electricity as they would charge him. He was to be smitten by the essence of ten thunderbolts. Some prophesied combustion, and some disintegration and disappearance. They were waiting eagerly to settle the question by actual demonstration, and it was just at that moment that Duncan Warner came that way.

Warner had been wanted by the law, and by nobody else, for many years. Desperado, murderer, train robber and road agent, he was a man beyond the pale of human pity. He had deserved a dozen deaths, and the Los Amigos folk grudged him so gaudy a one as that. He seemed to feel himself to be unworthy of it, for he made two frenzied attempts at escape. He was a powerful, muscular man, with a lion head, tangled black locks, and a sweeping beard which covered his broad chest. When he was tried, there was no finer head in all the crowded court. It’s no new thing to find the best face looking from the dock. But his good looks could not balance his bad deeds. His advocate did all he knew, but the cards lay against him, and

Duncan Warner was handed over to the mercy of the big Los Amigos dynamos.

I was there at the committee meeting when the matter was discussed. The town council had chosen four experts to look after the arrangements. Three of them were admirable. There was Joseph M’Conner, the very man who had designed the dynamos, and there was Joshua Westmacott, the chairman of the Los Amigos Electrical Supply Company, Limited. Then there was myself as the chief medical man, and lastly an old German of the name of Peter Stulpnagel. The Germans were a strong body at Los Amigos, and they all voted for their man. That was how he got on the committee. It was said that he had been a wonderful electrician at home, and he was eternally working with wires and insulators and Leyden jars; but, as he never seemed to get any further, or to have any results worth publishing he came at last to be regarded as a harmless crank, who had made science his hobby. We three practical men smiled when we heard that he had been elected as our colleague, and at the meeting we fixed it all up very nicely among ourselves without much thought of the old fellow who sat with his ears scooped forward in his hands, for he was a trifle hard of hearing, taking no more part in the proceedings than the gentlemen of the press who scribbled their notes on the back benches.

We did not take long to settle it all. In New York a strength of some two thousand volts had been used, and death had not been instantaneous. Evidently their shock had been too weak. Los Amigos should not fall into that error. The charge should be six times greater, and therefore, of course, it would be six times more effective. Nothing could possibly be more logical. The whole concentrated force of the great dynamos should be employed on Duncan Warner.

So we three settled it, and had already risen to break up the meeting, when our silent companion opened his month for the first time.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “you appear to me to show an extraordinary ignorance upon the subject of electricity. You have not mastered the first principles of its actions upon a human being.”

The committee was about to break into an angry reply to this brusque comment, but the chairman of the Electrical Company tapped his forehead to claim its indulgence for the crankiness of the speaker.

“Pray tell us, sir,” said he, with an ironical smile, “what is there in our conclusions with which you find fault?”

“With your assumption that a large dose of electricity will merely increase the effect of a small dose. Do you not think it possible that it might have an entirely different result? Do you know anything, by actual experiment, of the effect of such powerful shocks?”

“We know it by analogy,” said the chairman, pompously. “All drugs increase their effect when they increase their dose; for example — for example — —”

“Whisky,” said Joseph M’Connor.

“Quite so. Whisky. You see it there.”

Peter Stulpnagel smiled and shook his head.

“Your argument is not very good,” said he. “When I used to take whisky, I used to find that one glass would excite me, but that six would send me to sleep, which is just the opposite. Now, suppose that electricity were to act in just the opposite way also, what then?”

We three practical men burst out laughing. We had known that our colleague was queer, but we never had thought that he would be as queer as this.

“What then?” repeated Philip Stulpnagel.

“We’ll take our chances,” said the chairman.

“Pray consider,” said Peter, “that workmen who have touched the wires, and who have received shocks of only a few hundred volts, have died instantly. The fact is well known. And yet when a much greater force was used upon a criminal at New York, the man struggled for some little time. Do you not clearly see that the smaller dose is the more deadly?”

“I think, gentlemen, that this discussion has been carried on quite long enough,” said the chairman, rising again. “The point, I take it, has already been decided by the majority of the committee, and Duncan Warner shall be electrocuted on Tuesday by the full strength of the Los Amigos dynamos. Is it not so?”

“I agree,” said Joseph M’Connor.

“I agree,” said I.

“And I protest,” said Peter Stulpnagel.

“Then the motion is carried, and your protest will be duly entered in the minutes,” said the chairman, and so the sitting was dissolved.

The attendance at the electrocution was a very small one. We four members of the committee were, of course, present with the executioner, who was to act under their orders. The others were the United States

Marshal, the governor of the gaol, the chaplain, and three members of the press. The room was a small brick chamber, forming an outhouse to the Central Electrical station. It had been used as a laundry, and had an oven and copper at one side, but no other furniture save a single chair for the condemned man. A metal plate for his feet was placed in front of it, to which ran a thick, insulated wire. Above, another wire depended from the ceiling, which could be connected with a small metallic rod projecting from a cap which was to be placed upon his head. When this connection was established Duncan Warner's hour was come.

There was a solemn hush as we waited for the coming of the prisoner. The practical engineers looked a little pale, and fidgeted nervously with the wires. Even the hardened Marshal was ill at ease, for a mere hanging was one thing, and this blasting of flesh and blood a very different one. As to the pressmen, their faces were whiter than the sheets which lay before them. The only man who appeared to feel none of the influence of these preparations was the little German crank, who strolled from one to the other with a smile on his lips and mischief in his eyes. More than once he even went so far as to burst into a shout of laughter, until the chaplain sternly rebuked him for his ill-timed levity.

"How can you so far forget yourself, Mr. Stulpnagel," said he, "as to jest in the presence of death?"

But the German was quite unabashed.

"If I were in the presence of death I should not jest," said he, "but since I am not I may do what I choose."

This flippant reply was about to draw another and a sterner reproof from the chaplain, when the door was swung open and two warders entered leading Duncan Warner between them. He glanced round him with a set face, stepped resolutely forward, and seated himself upon the chair.

"Touch her off!" said he.

It was barbarous to keep him in suspense. The chaplain murmured a few words in his ear, the attendant placed the cap upon his head, and then, while we all held our breath, the wire and the metal were brought in contact.

"Great Scott!" shouted Duncan Warner.

He had bounded in his chair as the frightful shock crashed through his system. But he was not dead. On the contrary, his eyes gleamed far more brightly than they had done before. There was only one change, but it was a singular one. The black had passed from his hair and beard as the shadow passes from a landscape. They were both as white as snow. And yet there was no other sign of decay. His skin was smooth and plump and lustrous as a child’s.

The Marshal looked at the committee with a reproachful eye.

“There seems to be some hitch here, gentlemen,” said he.

We three practical men looked at each other.

Peter Stulpnagel smiled pensively.

“I think that another one should do it,” said I.

Again the connection was made, and again Duncan Warner sprang in his chair and shouted, but, indeed, were it not that he still remained in the chair none of us would have recognised him. His hair and his beard had shredded off in an instant, and the room looked like a barber’s shop on a Saturday night. There he sat, his eyes still shining, his skin radiant with the glow of perfect health, but with a scalp as bald as a Dutch cheese, and a chin without so much as a trace of down. He began to revolve one of his arms, slowly and doubtfully at first, but with more confidence as he went on.

“That jint,” said he, “has puzzled half the doctors on the Pacific Slope. It’s as good as new, and as limber as a hickory twig.”

“You are feeling pretty well?” asked the old German.

“Never better in my life,” said Duncan Warner cheerily.

The situation was a painful one. The Marshal glared at the committee. Peter Stulpnagel grinned and rubbed his hands. The engineers scratched their heads. The bald-headed prisoner revolved his arm and looked pleased.

“I think that one more shock — —” began the chairman.

“No, sir,” said the Marshal “we’ve had foolery enough for one morning. We are here for an execution, and a execution we’ll have.”

“What do you propose?”

“There’s a hook handy upon the ceiling. Fetch in a rope, and we’ll soon set this matter straight.”

There was another awkward delay while the warders departed for the cord. Peter Stulpnagel bent over Duncan Warner, and whispered something in his ear. The desperado started in surprise.

“You don’t say?” he asked.

The German nodded.

“What! Noways?”

Peter shook his head, and the two began to laugh as though they shared some huge joke between them.

The rope was brought, and the Marshal himself slipped the noose over the criminal’s neck. Then the two warders, the assistant and he swung their victim into the air. For half an hour he hung — a dreadful sight — from the ceiling. Then in solemn silence they lowered him down, and one of the warders went out to order the shell to be brought round. But as he touched ground again what was our amazement when Duncan Warner put his hands up to his neck, loosened the noose, and took a long, deep breath.

“Paul Jefferson’s sale is goin’ well,” he remarked, “I could see the crowd from up yonder,” and he nodded at the hook in the ceiling.

“Up with him again!” shouted the Marshal, “we’ll get the life out of him somehow.”

In an instant the victim was up at the hook once more.

They kept him there for an hour, but when he came down he was perfectly garrulous.

“Old man Plunket goes too much to the Arcady Saloon,” said he. “Three times he’s been there in an hour; and him with a family. Old man Plunket would do well to swear off.”

It was monstrous and incredible, but there it was. There was no getting round it. The man was there talking when he ought to have been dead. We all sat staring in amazement, but United States Marshal Carpenter was not a man to be euchred so easily. He motioned the others to one side, so that the prisoner was left standing alone.

“Duncan Warner,” said he, slowly, “you are here to play your part, and I am here to play mine. Your game is to live if you can, and my game is to carry out the sentence of the law. You’ve beat us on electricity. I’ll give you one there. And you’ve beat us on hanging, for you seem to thrive on it. But it’s my turn to beat you now, for my duty has to be done.”

He pulled a six-shooter from his coat as he spoke, and fired all the shots through the body of the prisoner. The room was so filled with smoke that we could see nothing, but when it cleared the prisoner was still standing there, looking down in disgust at the front of his coat.

“Coats must be cheap where you come from,” said he. “Thirty dollars it cost me, and look at it now. The six holes in front are bad enough, but four of the balls have passed out, and a pretty state the back must be in.”

The Marshal’s revolver fell from his hand, and he dropped his arms to his sides, a beaten man.

“Maybe some of you gentlemen can tell me what this means,” said he, looking helplessly at the committee.

Peter Stulpnagel took a step forward.

“I’ll tell you all about it,” said he.

“You seem to be the only person who knows anything.”

“I AM the only person who knows anything. I should have warned these gentlemen; but, as they would not listen to me, I have allowed them to learn by experience. What you have done with your electricity is that you have increased this man’s vitality until he can defy death for centuries.”

“Centuries!”

“Yes, it will take the wear of hundreds of years to exhaust the enormous nervous energy with which you have drenched him. Electricity is life, and you have charged him with it to the utmost. Perhaps in fifty years you might execute him, but I am not sanguine about it.”

“Great Scott! What shall I do with him?” cried the unhappy Marshal.

Peter Stulpnagel shrugged his shoulders.

“It seems to me that it does not much matter what you do with him now,” said he.

“Maybe we could drain the electricity out of him again. Suppose we hang him up by the heels?”

“No, no, it’s out of the question.”

“Well, well, he shall do no more mischief in Los Amigos, anyhow,” said the Marshal, with decision. “He shall go into the new gaol. The prison will wear him out.”

“On the contrary,” said Peter Stulpnagel, “I think that it is much more probable that he will wear out the prison.”

It was rather a fiasco and for years we didn’t talk more about it than we could help, but it’s no secret now and I thought you might like to jot down the facts in your case-book.

THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND.

Dr. James Ripley was always looked upon as an exceedingly lucky dog by all of the profession who knew him. His father had preceded him in a practice in the village of Hoyland, in the north of Hampshire, and all was ready for him on the very first day that the law allowed him to put his name at the foot of a prescription. In a few years the old gentleman retired, and settled on the South Coast, leaving his son in undisputed possession of the whole country side. Save for Dr. Horton, near Basingstoke, the young surgeon had a clear run of six miles in every direction, and took his fifteen hundred pounds a year, though, as is usual in country practices, the stable swallowed up most of what the consulting-room earned.

Dr. James Ripley was two-and-thirty years of age, reserved, learned, unmarried, with set, rather stern features, and a thinning of the dark hair upon the top of his head, which was worth quite a hundred a year to him. He was particularly happy in his management of ladies. He had caught the tone of bland sternness and decisive suavity which dominates without offending. Ladies, however, were not equally happy in their management of him. Professionally, he was always at their service. Socially, he was a drop of quicksilver. In vain the country mammas spread out their simple lures in front of him. Dances and picnics were not to his taste, and he preferred during his scanty leisure to shut himself up in his study, and to bury himself in Virchow's Archives and the professional journals.

Study was a passion with him, and he would have none of the rust which often gathers round a country practitioner. It was his ambition to keep his knowledge as fresh and bright as at the moment when he had stepped out of the examination hall. He prided himself on being able at a moment's notice to rattle off the seven ramifications of some obscure artery, or to give the exact percentage of any physiological compound. After a long day's work he would sit up half the night performing iridectomies and extractions upon the sheep's eyes sent in by the village butcher, to the horror of his housekeeper, who had to remove the debris next morning. His love for his work was the one fanaticism which found a place in his dry, precise nature.

It was the more to his credit that he should keep up to date in his knowledge, since he had no competition to force him to exertion. In the seven years during which he had practised in Hoyland three rivals had pitted themselves against him, two in the village itself and one in the neighbouring hamlet of Lower Hoyland. Of these one had sickened and wasted, being, as it was said, himself the only patient whom he had treated during his eighteen months of ruralising. A second had bought a fourth share of a Basingstoke practice, and had departed honourably, while a third had vanished one September night, leaving a gutted house and an unpaid drug bill behind him. Since then the district had become a monopoly, and no one had dared to measure himself against the established fame of the Hoyland doctor.

It was, then, with a feeling of some surprise and considerable curiosity that on driving through Lower Hoyland one morning he perceived that the new house at the end of the village was occupied, and that a virgin brass plate glistened upon the swinging gate which faced the high road. He pulled up his fifty guinea chestnut mare and took a good look at it. "Verrinder Smith, M. D.," was printed across it in very neat, small lettering. The last man had had letters half a foot long, with a lamp like a fire-station. Dr. James Ripley noted the difference, and deduced from it that the new-comer might possibly prove a more formidable opponent. He was convinced of it that evening when he came to consult the current medical directory. By it he learned that Dr. Verrinder Smith was the holder of superb degrees, that he had studied with distinction at Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and finally that he had been awarded a gold medal and the Lee Hopkins scholarship for original research, in recognition of an exhaustive inquiry into the functions of the anterior spinal nerve roots. Dr. Ripley passed his fingers through his thin hair in bewilderment as he read his rival's record. What on earth could so brilliant a man mean by putting up his plate in a little Hampshire hamlet.

But Dr. Ripley furnished himself with an explanation to the riddle. No doubt Dr. Verrinder Smith had simply come down there in order to pursue some scientific research in peace and quiet. The plate was up as an address rather than as an invitation to patients. Of course, that must be the true explanation. In that case the presence of this brilliant neighbour would be a splendid thing for his own studies. He had often longed for some kindred mind, some steel on which he might strike his flint. Chance had brought it to him, and he rejoiced exceedingly.

And this joy it was which led him to take a step which was quite at variance with his usual habits. It is the custom for a new-comer among medical men to call first upon the older, and the etiquette upon the subject is strict. Dr. Ripley was pedantically exact on such points, and yet he deliberately drove over next day and called upon Dr. Verrinder Smith. Such a waiving of ceremony was, he felt, a gracious act upon his part, and a fit prelude to the intimate relations which he hoped to establish with his neighbour.

The house was neat and well appointed, and Dr. Ripley was shown by a smart maid into a dapper little consulting room. As he passed in he noticed two or three parasols and a lady's sun bonnet hanging in the hall. It was a pity that his colleague should be a married man. It would put them upon a different footing, and interfere with those long evenings of high scientific talk which he had pictured to himself. On the other hand, there was much in the consulting room to please him. Elaborate instruments, seen more often in hospitals than in the houses of private practitioners, were scattered about. A sphygmograph stood upon the table and a gasometer-like engine, which was new to Dr. Ripley, in the corner. A book-case full of ponderous volumes in French and German, paper-covered for the most part, and varying in tint from the shell to the yoke of a duck's egg, caught his wandering eyes, and he was deeply absorbed in their titles when the door opened suddenly behind him. Turning round, he found himself facing a little woman, whose plain, palish face was remarkable only for a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes of a blue which had two shades too much green in it. She held a pince-nez in her left hand, and the doctor's card in her right.

"How do you do, Dr. Ripley?" said she.

"How do you do, madam?" returned the visitor. "Your husband is perhaps out?"

"I am not married," said she simply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I meant the doctor — Dr. Verrinder Smith."

"I am Dr. Verrinder Smith."

Dr. Ripley was so surprised that he dropped his hat and forgot to pick it up again.

"What!" he grasped, "the Lee Hopkins prizeman! You!"

He had never seen a woman doctor before, and his whole conservative soul rose up in revolt at the idea. He could not recall any Biblical injunction that the man should remain ever the doctor and the woman the nurse, and yet he felt as if a blasphemy had been committed. His face betrayed his feelings only too clearly.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said the lady drily.

"You certainly have surprised me," he answered, picking up his hat.

"You are not among our champions, then?"

"I cannot say that the movement has my approval."

"And why?"

"I should much prefer not to discuss it."

"But I am sure you will answer a lady's question."

"Ladies are in danger of losing their privileges when they usurp the place of the other sex. They cannot claim both."

"Why should a woman not earn her bread by her brains?"

Dr. Ripley felt irritated by the quiet manner in which the lady cross-questioned him.

"I should much prefer not to be led into a discussion, Miss Smith."

"Dr. Smith," she interrupted.

"Well, Dr. Smith! But if you insist upon an answer, I must say that I do not think medicine a suitable profession for women and that I have a personal objection to masculine ladies."

It was an exceedingly rude speech, and he was ashamed of it the instant after he had made it. The lady, however, simply raised her eyebrows and smiled.

"It seems to me that you are begging the question," said she. "Of course, if it makes women masculine that WOULD be a considerable deterioration."

It was a neat little counter, and Dr. Ripley, like a pinked fencer, bowed his acknowledgment.

"I must go," said he.

"I am sorry that we cannot come to some more friendly conclusion since we are to be neighbours," she remarked.

He bowed again, and took a step towards the door.

"It was a singular coincidence," she continued, "that at the instant that you called I was reading your paper on 'Locomotor Ataxia,' in the Lancet."

"Indeed," said he drily.

"I thought it was a very able monograph."

"You are very good."

"But the views which you attribute to Professor Pitres, of Bordeaux, have been repudiated by him."

"I have his pamphlet of 1890," said Dr. Ripley angrily.

"Here is his pamphlet of 1891." She picked it from among a litter of periodicals. "If you have time to glance your eye down this passage — —"

Dr. Ripley took it from her and shot rapidly through the paragraph which she indicated. There was no denying that it completely knocked the bottom out of his own article. He threw it down, and with another frigid bow he made for the door. As he took the reins from the groom he glanced round and saw that the lady was standing at her window, and it seemed to him that she was laughing heartily.

All day the memory of this interview haunted him. He felt that he had come very badly out of it. She had showed herself to be his superior on his own pet subject. She had been courteous while he had been rude, self-possessed when he had been angry. And then, above all, there was her presence, her monstrous intrusion to rankle in his mind. A woman doctor had been an abstract thing before, repugnant but distant. Now she was there in actual practice, with a brass plate up just like his own, competing for the same patients. Not that he feared competition, but he objected to this lowering of his ideal of womanhood. She could not be more than thirty, and had a bright, mobile face, too. He thought of her humorous eyes, and of her strong, well-turned chin. It revolted him the more to recall the details of her education. A man, of course, could come through such an ordeal with all his purity, but it was nothing short of shameless in a woman.

But it was not long before he learned that even her competition was a thing to be feared. The novelty of her presence had brought a few curious invalids into her consulting rooms, and, once there, they had been so impressed by the firmness of her manner and by the singular, new-fashioned instruments with which she tapped, and peered, and sounded, that it formed the core of their conversation for weeks afterwards. And soon there were tangible proofs of her powers upon the country side. Farmer Eyton, whose callous ulcer had been quietly spreading over his shin for years back under a gentle regime of zinc ointment, was painted round with blistering fluid, and found, after three blasphemous nights, that his sore was stimulated into healing. Mrs. Crowder, who had always regarded the birthmark upon her second daughter Eliza as a sign of the indignation of the Creator at a third helping of raspberry tart which she had partaken of during a critical period, learned that, with the help of two galvanic needles, the mischief was not irreparable. In a month Dr. Verrinder Smith was known, and in two she was famous.

Occasionally, Dr. Ripley met her as he drove upon his rounds. She had started a high dogcart, taking the reins herself, with a little tiger behind. When they met he invariably raised his hat with punctilious politeness, but the grim severity of his face showed how formal was the courtesy. In fact, his dislike was rapidly deepening into absolute detestation. “The unsexed woman,” was the description of her which he permitted himself to give to those of his patients who still remained staunch. But, indeed, they were a rapidly-decreasing body, and every day his pride was galled by the news of some fresh defection. The lady had somehow impressed the country folk with almost superstitious belief in her power, and from far and near they flocked to her consulting room.

But what galled him most of all was, when she did something which he had pronounced to be impracticable. For all his knowledge he lacked nerve as an operator, and usually sent his worst cases up to London. The lady, however, had no weakness of the sort, and took everything that came in her way. It was agony to him to hear that she was about to straighten little Alec Turner’s club foot, and right at the fringe of the rumour came a note from his mother, the rector’s wife, asking him if he would be so good as to act as chloroformist. It would be inhumanity to refuse, as there was no other who could take the place, but it was gall and wormwood to his sensitive nature. Yet, in spite of his vexation, he could not but admire the dexterity with which the thing was done. She handled the little wax-like foot so gently, and held the tiny tenotomy knife as an artist holds his pencil. One straight insertion, one snick of a tendon, and it was all over without a stain upon the white towel which lay beneath. He had never seen anything more masterly, and he had the honesty to say so, though her skill increased his dislike of her. The operation spread her fame still further at his expense, and self-preservation was added to his other grounds for detesting her. And this very detestation it was which brought matters to a curious climax.

One winter’s night, just as he was rising from his lonely dinner, a groom came riding down from Squire Faircastle’s, the richest man in the district, to say that his daughter had scalded her hand, and that medical help was needed on the instant. The coachman had ridden for the lady doctor, for it mattered nothing to the Squire who came as long as it were speedily. Dr.

Ripley rushed from his surgery with the determination that she should not effect an entrance into this stronghold of his if hard driving on his part could prevent it. He did not even wait to light his lamps, but sprang into his gig and flew off as fast as hoof could rattle. He lived rather nearer to the Squire's than she did, and was convinced that he could get there well before her.

And so he would but for that whimsical element of chance, which will for ever muddle up the affairs of this world and dumbfound the prophets. Whether it came from the want of his lights, or from his mind being full of the thoughts of his rival, he allowed too little by half a foot in taking the sharp turn upon the Basingstoke road. The empty trap and the frightened horse clattered away into the darkness, while the Squire's groom crawled out of the ditch into which he had been shot. He struck a match, looked down at his groaning companion, and then, after the fashion of rough, strong men when they see what they have not seen before, he was very sick.

The doctor raised himself a little on his elbow in the glint of the match. He caught a glimpse of something white and sharp bristling through his trouser leg half way down the shin.

"Compound!" he groaned. "A three months' job," and fainted.

When he came to himself the groom was gone, for he had scudded off to the Squire's house for help, but a small page was holding a gig-lamp in front of his injured leg, and a woman, with an open case of polished instruments gleaming in the yellow light, was deftly slitting up his trouser with a crooked pair of scissors.

"It's all right, doctor," said she soothingly. "I am so sorry about it. You can have Dr. Horton to-morrow, but I am sure you will allow me to help you to-night. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you by the roadside."

"The groom has gone for help," groaned the sufferer.

"When it comes we can move you into the gig. A little more light, John! So! Ah, dear, dear, we shall have laceration unless we reduce this before we move you. Allow me to give you a whiff of chloroform, and I have no doubt that I can secure it sufficiently to — —"

Dr. Ripley never heard the end of that sentence. He tried to raise a hand and to murmur something in protest, but a sweet smell was in his nostrils, and a sense of rich peace and lethargy stole over his jangled nerves. Down he sank, through clear, cool water, ever down and down into the green shadows beneath, gently, without effort, while the pleasant chiming of a great belfry rose and fell in his ears. Then he rose again, up and up, and ever up, with a terrible tightness about his temples, until at last he shot out of those green shadows and was in the light once more. Two bright, shining, golden spots gleamed before his dazed eyes. He blinked and blinked before he could give a name to them. They were only the two brass balls at the end posts of his bed, and he was lying in his own little room, with a head like a cannon ball, and a leg like an iron bar. Turning his eyes, he saw the calm face of Dr. Verrinder Smith looking down at him.

“Ah, at last!” said she. “I kept you under all the way home, for I knew how painful the jolting would be. It is in good position now with a strong side splint. I have ordered a morphia draught for you. Shall I tell your groom to ride for Dr. Horton in the morning?”

“I should prefer that you should continue the case,” said Dr. Ripley feebly, and then, with a half hysterical laugh,—”You have all the rest of the parish as patients, you know, so you may as well make the thing complete by having me also.”

It was not a very gracious speech, but it was a look of pity and not of anger which shone in her eyes as she turned away from his bedside.

Dr. Ripley had a brother, William, who was assistant surgeon at a London hospital, and who was down in Hampshire within a few hours of his hearing of the accident. He raised his brows when he heard the details.

“What! You are pestered with one of those!” he cried.

“I don’t know what I should have done without her.”

“I’ve no doubt she’s an excellent nurse.”

“She knows her work as well as you or I.”

“Speak for yourself, James,” said the London man with a sniff. “But apart from that, you know that the principle of the thing is all wrong.”

“You think there is nothing to be said on the other side?”

“Good heavens! do you?”

“Well, I don’t know. It struck me during the night that we may have been a little narrow in our views.”

“Nonsense, James. It’s all very fine for women to win prizes in the lecture room, but you know as well as I do that they are no use in an emergency. Now I warrant that this woman was all nerves when she was setting your leg. That reminds me that I had better just take a look at it and see that it is all right.”

"I would rather that you did not undo it," said the patient. "I have her assurance that it is all right."

Brother William was deeply shocked.

"Of course, if a woman's assurance is of more value than the opinion of the assistant surgeon of a London hospital, there is nothing more to be said," he remarked.

"I should prefer that you did not touch it," said the patient firmly, and Dr. William went back to London that evening in a huff.

The lady, who had heard of his coming, was much surprised on learning his departure.

"We had a difference upon a point of professional etiquette," said Dr. James, and it was all the explanation he would vouchsafe.

For two long months Dr. Ripley was brought in contact with his rival every day, and he learned many things which he had not known before. She was a charming companion, as well as a most assiduous doctor. Her short presence during the long, weary day was like a flower in a sand waste. What interested him was precisely what interested her, and she could meet him at every point upon equal terms. And yet under all her learning and her firmness ran a sweet, womanly nature, peeping out in her talk, shining in her greenish eyes, showing itself in a thousand subtle ways which the dullest of men could read. And he, though a bit of a prig and a pedant, was by no means dull, and had honesty enough to confess when he was in the wrong.

"I don't know how to apologise to you," he said in his shame-faced fashion one day, when he had progressed so far as to be able to sit in an arm-chair with his leg upon another one; "I feel that I have been quite in the wrong."

"Why, then?"

"Over this woman question. I used to think that a woman must inevitably lose something of her charm if she took up such studies."

"Oh, you don't think they are necessarily unsexed, then?" she cried, with a mischievous smile.

"Please don't recall my idiotic expression."

"I feel so pleased that I should have helped in changing your views. I think that it is the most sincere compliment that I have ever had paid me."

"At any rate, it is the truth," said he, and was happy all night at the remembrance of the flush of pleasure which made her pale face look quite comely for the instant.

For, indeed, he was already far past the stage when he would acknowledge her as the equal of any other woman. Already he could not disguise from himself that she had become the one woman. Her dainty skill, her gentle touch, her sweet presence, the community of their tastes, had all united to hopelessly upset his previous opinions. It was a dark day for him now when his convalescence allowed her to miss a visit, and darker still that other one which he saw approaching when all occasion for her visits would be at an end. It came round at last, however, and he felt that his whole life's fortune would hang upon the issue of that final interview. He was a direct man by nature, so he laid his hand upon hers as it felt for his pulse, and he asked her if she would be his wife.

"What, and unite the practices?" said she.

He started in pain and anger.

"Surely you do not attribute any such base motive to me!" he cried. "I love you as unselfishly as ever a woman was loved."

"No, I was wrong. It was a foolish speech," said she, moving her chair a little back, and tapping her stethoscope upon her knee. "Forget that I ever said it. I am so sorry to cause you any disappointment, and I appreciate most highly the honour which you do me, but what you ask is quite impossible."

With another woman he might have urged the point, but his instincts told him that it was quite useless with this one. Her tone of voice was conclusive. He said nothing, but leaned back in his chair a stricken man.

"I am so sorry," she said again. "If I had known what was passing in your mind I should have told you earlier that I intended to devote my life entirely to science. There are many women with a capacity for marriage, but few with a taste for biology. I will remain true to my own line, then. I came down here while waiting for an opening in the Paris Physiological Laboratory. I have just heard that there is a vacancy for me there, and so you will be troubled no more by my intrusion upon your practice. I have done you an injustice just as you did me one. I thought you narrow and pedantic, with no good quality. I have learned during your illness to appreciate you better, and the recollection of our friendship will always be a very pleasant one to me."

And so it came about that in a very few weeks there was only one doctor in Hoyland. But folks noticed that the one had aged many years in a few months, that a weary sadness lurked always in the depths of his blue eyes, and that he was less concerned than ever with the eligible young ladies whom chance, or their careful country mammas, placed in his way.

THE SURGEON TALKS.

“Men die of the diseases which they have studied most,” remarked the surgeon, snipping off the end of a cigar with all his professional neatness and finish. “It’s as if the morbid condition was an evil creature which, when it found itself closely hunted, flew at the throat of its pursuer. If you worry the microbes too much they may worry you. I’ve seen cases of it, and not necessarily in microbic diseases either. There was, of course, the well-known instance of Liston and the aneurism; and a dozen others that I could mention. You couldn’t have a clearer case than that of poor old Walker of St. Christopher’s. Not heard of it? Well, of course, it was a little before your time, but I wonder that it should have been forgotten. You youngsters are so busy in keeping up to the day that you lose a good deal that is interesting of yesterday.

“Walker was one of the best men in Europe on nervous disease. You must have read his little book on sclerosis of the posterior columns. It’s as interesting as a novel, and epoch-making in its way. He worked like a horse, did Walker — huge consulting practice — hours a day in the clinical wards — constant original investigations. And then he enjoyed himself also. ‘De mortuis,’ of course, but still it’s an open secret among all who knew him. If he died at forty-five, he crammed eighty years into it. The marvel was that he could have held on so long at the pace at which he was going. But he took it beautifully when it came.

“I was his clinical assistant at the time. Walker was lecturing on locomotor ataxia to a wardful of youngsters. He was explaining that one of the early signs of the complaint was that the patient could not put his heels together with his eyes shut without staggering. As he spoke, he suited the action to the word. I don’t suppose the boys noticed anything. I did, and so did he, though he finished his lecture without a sign.

“When it was over he came into my room and lit a cigarette.

“‘Just run over my reflexes, Smith,’ said he.

“There was hardly a trace of them left. I tapped away at his knee-tendon and might as well have tried to get a jerk out of that sofa-cushion. He stood with his eyes shut again, and he swayed like a bush in the wind.

“‘So,’ said he, ‘it was not intercostal neuralgia after all.’

“Then I knew that he had had the lightning pains, and that the case was complete. There was nothing to say, so I sat looking at him while he puffed and puffed at his cigarette. Here he was, a man in the prime of life, one of the handsomest men in London, with money, fame, social success, everything at his feet, and now, without a moment’s warning, he was told that inevitable death lay before him, a death accompanied by more refined and lingering tortures than if he were bound upon a Red Indian stake. He sat in the middle of the blue cigarette cloud with his eyes cast down, and the slightest little tightening of his lips. Then he rose with a motion of his arms, as one who throws off old thoughts and enters upon a new course.

“‘Better put this thing straight at once,’ said he. ‘I must make some fresh arrangements. May I use your paper and envelopes?’

“He settled himself at my desk and he wrote half a dozen letters. It is not a breach of confidence to say that they were not addressed to his professional brothers. Walker was a single man, which means that he was not restricted to a single woman. When he had finished, he walked out of that little room of mine, leaving every hope and ambition of his life behind him. And he might have had another year of ignorance and peace if it had not been for the chance illustration in his lecture.

“It took five years to kill him, and he stood it well. If he had ever been a little irregular he atoned for it in that long martyrdom. He kept an admirable record of his own symptoms, and worked out the eye changes more fully than has ever been done. When the ptosis got very bad he would hold his eyelid up with one hand while he wrote. Then, when he could not co-ordinate his muscles to write, he dictated to his nurse. So died, in the odour of science, James Walker, aet. 45.

“Poor old Walker was very fond of experimental surgery, and he broke ground in several directions. Between ourselves, there may have been some more ground-breaking afterwards, but he did his best for his cases. You know M’Namara, don’t you? He always wears his hair long. He lets it be understood that it comes from his artistic strain, but it is really to conceal the loss of one of his ears. Walker cut the other one off, but you must not tell Mac I said so.

“It was like this. Walker had a fad about the portio dura — the motor to the face, you know — and he thought paralysis of it came from a disturbance of the blood supply. Something else which counterbalanced that disturbance might, he thought, set it right again. We had a very obstinate case of Bell’s paralysis in the wards, and had tried it with every conceivable thing, blistering, tonics, nerve-stretching, galvanism, needles, but all without result. Walker got it into his head that removal of the ear would increase the blood supply to the part, and he very soon gained the consent of the patient to the operation.

“Well, we did it at night. Walker, of course, felt that it was something of an experiment, and did not wish too much talk about it unless it proved successful. There were half-a-dozen of us there, M’Namara and I among the rest. The room was a small one, and in the centre was in the narrow table, with a macintosh over the pillow, and a blanket which extended almost to the floor on either side. Two candles, on a side-table near the pillow, supplied all the light. In came the patient, with one side of his face as smooth as a baby’s, and the other all in a quiver with fright. He lay down, and the chloroform towel was placed over his face, while Walker threaded his needles in the candle light. The chloroformist stood at the head of the table, and M’Namara was stationed at the side to control the patient. The rest of us stood by to assist.

“Well, the man was about half over when he fell into one of those convulsive flurries which come with the semi-unconscious stage. He kicked and plunged and struck out with both hands. Over with a crash went the little table which held the candles, and in an instant we were left in total darkness. You can think what a rush and a scurry there was, one to pick up the table, one to find the matches, and some to restrain the patient who was still dashing himself about. He was held down by two dressers, the chloroform was pushed, and by the time the candles were relit, his incoherent, half-smothered shoutings had changed to a stertorous snore. His head was turned on the pillow and the towel was still kept over his face while the operation was carried through. Then the towel was withdrawn, and you can conceive our amazement when we looked upon the face of M’Namara.

“How did it happen? Why, simply enough. As the candles went over, the chloroformist had stopped for an instant and had tried to catch them. The patient, just as the light went out, had rolled off and under the table. Poor M’Namara, clinging frantically to him, had been dragged across it, and the chloroformist, feeling him there, had naturally claped the towel across his mouth and nose. The others had secured him, and the more he roared and kicked the more they drenched him with chloroform. Walker was very nice about it, and made the most handsome apologies. He offered to do a plastic on the spot, and make as good an ear as he could, but M’Namara had had enough of it. As to the patient, we found him sleeping placidly under the table, with the ends of the blanket screening him on both sides. Walker sent M’Namara round his ear next day in a jar of methylated spirit, but Mac’s wife was very angry about it, and it led to a good deal of ill-feeling.

“Some people say that the more one has to do with human nature, and the closer one is brought in contact with it, the less one thinks of it. I don’t believe that those who know most would uphold that view. My own experience is dead against it. I was brought up in the miserable-mortal-clay school of theology, and yet here I am, after thirty years of intimate acquaintance with humanity, filled with respect for it. The evil lies commonly upon the surface. The deeper strata are good. A hundred times I have seen folk condemned to death as suddenly as poor Walker was. Sometimes it was to blindness or to mutilations which are worse than death. Men and women, they almost all took it beautifully, and some with such lovely unselfishness, and with such complete absorption in the thought of how their fate would affect others, that the man about town, or the frivolously-dressed woman has seemed to change into an angel before my eyes. I have seen death-beds, too, of all ages and of all creeds and want of creeds. I never saw any of them shrink, save only one poor, imaginative young fellow, who had spent his blameless life in the strictest of sects. Of course, an exhausted frame is incapable of fear, as anyone can vouch who is told, in the midst of his sea-sickness, that the ship is going to the bottom. That is why I rate courage in the face of mutilation to be higher than courage when a wasting illness is fining away into death.

“Now, I’ll take a case which I had in my own practice last Wednesday. A lady came in to consult me — the wife of a well-known sporting baronet. The husband had come with her, but remained, at her request, in the waiting-room. I need not go into details, but it proved to be a peculiarly malignant case of cancer. ‘I knew it,’ said she. ‘How long have I to live?’ ‘I fear that it may exhaust your strength in a few months,’ I answered. ‘Poor old Jack!’ said she. ‘I’ll tell him that it is not dangerous.’ ‘Why should you deceive him?’ I asked. ‘Well, he’s very uneasy about it, and he is quaking now in the waiting-room. He has two old friends to dinner to-night, and I haven’t the heart to spoil his evening. To-morrow will be time enough for him to learn the truth.’ Out she walked, the brave little woman, and a moment later her husband, with his big, red face shining with joy came plunging into my room to shake me by the hand. No, I respected her wish and I did not undeceive him. I dare bet that evening was one of the brightest, and the next morning the darkest, of his life.

"It's wonderful how bravely and cheerily a woman can face a crushing blow. It is different with men. A man can stand it without complaining, but it knocks him dazed and silly all the same. But the woman does not lose her wits any more than she does her courage. Now, I had a case only a few weeks ago which would show you what I mean. A gentleman consulted me about his wife, a very beautiful woman. She had a small tubercular nodule upon her upper arm, according to him. He was sure that it was of no importance, but he wanted to know whether Devonshire or the Riviera would be the better for her. I examined her and found a frightful sarcoma of the bone, hardly showing upon the surface, but involving the shoulder-blade and clavicle as well as the humerus. A more malignant case I have never seen. I sent her out of the room and I told him the truth. What did he do? Why, he walked slowly round that room with his hands behind his back, looking with the greatest interest at the pictures. I can see him now, putting up his gold pince-nez and staring at them with perfectly vacant eyes, which told me that he saw neither them nor the wall behind them. 'Amputation of the arm?' he asked at last. 'And of the collar-bone and shoulder-blade,' said I. 'Quite so. The collar-bone and shoulder-blade,' he repeated, still staring about him with those lifeless eyes. It settled him. I don't believe he'll ever be the same man again. But the woman took it as bravely and brightly as could be, and she has done very well since. The mischief was so great that the arm snapped as we drew it from the night-dress. No, I don't think that there will be any return, and I have every hope of her recovery.

"The first patient is a thing which one remembers all one's life. Mine was commonplace, and the details are of no interest. I had a curious visitor, however, during the first few months after my plate went up. It was an elderly woman, richly dressed, with a wickerwork picnic basket in her hand. This she opened with the tears streaming down her face, and out there waddled the fattest, ugliest, and mangiest little pug dog that I have ever seen. 'I wish you to put him painlessly out of the world, doctor,' she cried. 'Quick, quick, or my resolution may give way.' She flung herself down, with hysterical sobs, upon the sofa. The less experienced a doctor is, the higher are his notions of professional dignity, as I need not remind you, my young friend, so I was about to refuse the commission with indignation, when I bethought me that, quite apart from medicine, we were gentleman and lady, and that she had asked me to do something for her which was evidently of the greatest possible importance in her eyes. I led off the poor little doggie, therefore, and with the help of a saucerful of milk and a few drops of prussic acid his exit was as speedy and painless as could be desired. ‘Is it over?’ she cried as I entered. It was really tragic to see how all the love which should have gone to husband and children had, in default of them, been centred upon this uncouth little animal. She left, quite broken down, in her carriage, and it was only after her departure that I saw an envelope sealed with a large red seal, and lying upon the blotting pad of my desk. Outside, in pencil, was written: ‘I have no doubt that you would willingly have done this without a fee, but I insist upon your acceptance of the enclosed.’ I opened it with some vague notions of an eccentric millionaire and a fifty-pound note, but all I found was a postal order for four and sixpence. The whole incident struck me as so whimsical that I laughed until I was tired. You’ll find there’s so much tragedy in a doctor’s life, my boy, that he would not be able to stand it if it were not for the strain of comedy which comes every now and then to leaven it.

“And a doctor has very much to be thankful for also. Don’t you ever forget it. It is such a pleasure to do a little good that a man should pay for the privilege instead of being paid for it. Still, of course, he has his home to keep up and his wife and children to support. But his patients are his friends — or they should be so. He goes from house to house, and his step and his voice are loved and welcomed in each. What could a man ask for more than that? And besides, he is forced to be a good man. It is impossible for him to be anything else. How can a man spend his whole life in seeing suffering bravely borne and yet remain a hard or a vicious man? It is a noble, generous, kindly profession, and you youngsters have got to see that it remains so.”

THE GREEN FLAG AND OTHER STORIES

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THE GREEN FLAG

When Jack Conolly, of the Irish Shotgun Brigade, the Rory of the Hills Inner Circle, and the extreme left wing of the Land League, was incontinently shot by Sergeant Murdoch of the constabulary, in a little moonlight frolic near Kanturk, his twin-brother Dennis joined the British Army. The countryside had become too hot for him; and, as the seventy-five shillings were wanting which might have carried him to America, he took the only way handy of getting himself out of the way. Seldom has Her Majesty had a less promising recruit, for his hot Celtic blood seethed with hatred against Britain and all things British. The sergeant, however, smiling complacently over his 6 ft. of brawn and his 44 in. chest, whisked him off with a dozen other of the boys to the depot at Fermoy, whence in a few weeks they were sent on, with the spade-work kinks taken out of their backs, to the first battalion of the Royal Mallows, at the top of the roster for foreign service.

The Royal Mallows, at about that date, were as strange a lot of men as ever were paid by a great empire to fight its battles. It was the darkest hour of the land struggle, when the one side came out with crow-bar and battering-ram by day, and the other with mask and with shot-gun by night. Men driven from their homes and potato-patches found their way even into the service of the Government, to which it seemed to them that they owed their troubles, and now and then they did wild things before they came. There were recruits in the Irish regiments who would forget to answer to their own names, so short had been their acquaintance with them. Of these the Royal Mallows had their full share; and, while they still retained their fame as being one of the smartest corps in the army, no one knew better than their officers that they were dry-rotted with treason and with bitter hatred of the flag under which they served.

And the centre of all the disaffection was C Company, in which Dennis Conolly found himself enrolled. They were Celts, Catholics, and men of the tenant class to a man; and their whole experience of the British Government had been an inexorable landlord, and a constabulary who seemed to them to be always on the side of the rent-collector. Dennis was not the only moonlighter in the ranks, nor was he alone in having an intolerable family blood-feud to harden his heart. Savagery had begotten savagery in that veiled civil war. A landlord with an iron mortgage weighing down upon him had small bowels for his tenantry. He did but take what the law allowed, and yet, with men like Jim Holan, or Patrick McQuire, or Peter Flynn, who had seen the roofs torn from their cottages and their folk huddled among their pitiable furniture upon the roadside, it was ill to argue about abstract law. What matter that in that long and bitter struggle there was many another outrage on the part of the tenant, and many another grievance on the side of the landowner! A stricken man can only feel his own wound, and the rank and file of the C Company of the Royal Mallows were sore and savage to the soul. There were low whisperings in barrack-rooms and canteens, stealthy meetings in public-house parlours, bandying of passwords from mouth to mouth, and many other signs which made their officers right glad when the order came which sent them to foreign, and better still, to active service.

For Irish regiments have before now been disaffected, and have at a distance looked upon the foe as though he might, in truth, be the friend; but when they have been put face on to him, and when their officers have dashed to the front with a wave and halloo, those rebel hearts have softened and their gallant Celtic blood has boiled with the mad Joy of the fight, until the slower Britons have marvelled that they ever could have doubted the loyalty of their Irish comrades. So it would be again, according to the officers, and so it would not be if Dennis Conolly and a few others could have their way.

It was a March morning upon the eastern fringe of the Nubian desert. The sun had not yet risen, but a tinge of pink flushed up as far as the cloudless zenith, and the long strip of sea lay like a rosy ribbon across the horizon. From the coast inland stretched dreary sand-plains, dotted over with thick clumps at mimosa scrub and mottled patches of thorny bush. No tree broke the monotony of that vast desert. The dull, dusty hue of the thickets, and the yellow glare of the sand, were the only colours, save at one point, where, from a distance, it seemed that a land-slip of snow-white stones had shot itself across a low foot-hill. But as the traveller approached he saw, with a thrill, that these were no stones, but the bleaching bones of a slaughtered army. With its dull tints, its gnarled, viprous bushes, its arid, barren soil, and this death streak trailed across it, it was indeed a nightmare country.

Some eight or ten miles inland the rolling plain curved upwards with a steeper slope until it ran into a line of red basaltic rock which zigzagged from north to south, heaping itself up at one point into a fantastic knoll. On the summit of this there stood upon that March morning three Arab chieftains — the Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowas, Moussa Wad Aburhegel, who led the Berber dervishes, and Hamid Wad Hussein, who had come northward with his fighting men from the land of the Baggaras. They had all three just risen from their praying-carpets, and were peering out, with fierce, high-nosed faces thrust forwards, at the stretch of country revealed by the spreading dawn.

The red rim of the sun was pushing itself now above the distant sea, and the whole coast-line stood out brilliantly yellow against the rich deep blue beyond. At one spot lay a huddle of white-walled houses, a mere splotch in the distance; while four tiny cock-boats, which lay beyond, marked the position of three of Her Majesty’s 10,000-ton troopers and the admiral’s flagship. But it was not upon the distant town, nor upon the great vessels, nor yet upon the sinister white litter which gleamed in the plain beneath them, that the Arab chieftains gazed. Two miles from where they stood, amid the sand-hills and the mimosa scrub, a great parallelogram had been marked by piled-up bushes. From the inside of this dozens of tiny blue smoke-reeks curled up into the still morning air; while there rose from it a confused deep murmur, the voices of men and the gruntings of camels blended into the same insect buzz.

“The unbelievers have cooked their morning food,” said the Baggara chief, shading his eyes with his tawny, sinewy hand. “Truly their sleep has been scanty; for Hamid and a hundred of his men have fired upon them since the rising of the moon.”

“So it was with these others,” answered the Sheik Kadra, pointing with his sheathed sword towards the old battle-field. “They also had a day of little water and a night of little rest, and the heart was gone out of them ere ever the sons of the Prophet had looked them in the eyes. This blade drank deep that day, and will again before the sun has travelled from the sea to the hill.”

“And yet these are other men,” remarked the Berber dervish. “Well, I know that Allah has placed them in the clutch of our fingers, yet it may be that they with the big hats will stand firmer than the cursed men of Egypt.”

“Pray Allah that it may be so,” cried the fierce Baggara, with a flash of his black eyes. “It was not to chase women that I brought 700 men from the river to the coast. See, my brother, already they are forming their array.”

A fanfare of bugle-calls burst from the distant camp. At the same time the bank of bushes at one side had been thrown or trampled down, and the little army within began to move slowly out on to the plain. Once clear of the camp they halted, and the slant rays of the sun struck flashes from bayonet and from gun-barrel as the ranks closed up until the big pith helmets joined into a single long white ribbon. Two streaks of scarlet glowed on either side of the square, but elsewhere the fringe of fighting-men was of the dull yellow khaki tint which hardly shows against the desert sand. Inside their array was a dense mass of camels and mules bearing stores and ambulance needs. Outside a twinkling clump of cavalry was drawn up on each flank, and in front a thin, scattered line of mounted infantry was already slowly advancing over the bush-strewn plain, halting on every eminence, and peering warily round as men might who have to pick their steps among the bones of those who have preceded them.

The three chieftains still lingered upon the knoll, looking down with hungry eyes and compressed lips at the dark steel-tipped patch.
“They are slower to start than the men of Egypt,” the Sheik of the Hadendowas growled in his beard.

“Slower also to go back, perchance, my brother,” murmured the dervish.

“And yet they are not many — 3,000 at the most.”

“And we 10,000, with the Prophet’s grip upon our spear-hafts and his words upon our banner. See to their chieftain, how he rides upon the right and looks up at us with the glass that sees from afar! It may be that he sees this also.” The Arab shook his sword at the small clump of horsemen who had spurred out from the square.

“Lo! he beckons,” cried the dervish; “and see those others at the corner, how they bend and heave. Ha! by the Prophet, I had thought it.” As he spoke, a little woolly puff of smoke spurted up at the corner of the square, and a 7 lb. shell burst with a hard metallic smack just over their heads. The splinters knocked chips from the red rocks around them.

“Bismillah!” cried the Hadendowa; “if the gun can carry thus far, then ours can answer to it. Ride to the left, Moussa, and tell Ben Ali to cut the skin from the Egyptians if they cannot hit yonder mark. And you, Hamid, to the right, and see that 3,000 men lie close in the wady that we have chosen. Let the others beat the drum and show the banner of the Prophet, for by the black stone their spears will have drunk deep ere they look upon the stars again."

A long, straggling, boulder-strewn plateau lay on the summit of the red hills, sloping very precipitously to the plain, save at one point, where a winding gully curved downwards, its mouth choked with sand-mounds and olive-hued scrub. Along the edge of this position lay the Arab host — a motley crew of shock-headed desert clansmen, fierce predatory slave dealers of the interior, and wild dervishes from the Upper Nile, all blent together by their common fearlessness and fanaticism. Two races were there, as wide as the poles apart — the thin-lipped, straight-haired Arab and the thick-lipped, curly negro — yet the faith of Islam had bound them closer than a blood tie. Squatting among the rocks, or lying thickly in the shadow, they peered out at the slow-moving square beneath them, while women with water-skins and bags of dhoora fluttered from group to group, calling out to each other those fighting texts from the Koran which in the hour of battle are maddening as wine to the true believer. A score of banners waved over the ragged, valiant crew, and among them, upon desert horses and white Bishareen camels, were the Emirs and Sheiks who were to lead them against the infidels.

As the Sheik Kadra sprang into his saddle and drew his sword there was a wild whoop and a clatter of waving spears, while the one-ended war-drums burst into a dull crash like a wave upon shingle. For a moment 10,000 men were up on the rocks with brandished arms and leaping figures; the next they were under cover again, waiting sternly and silently for their chieftain's orders. The square was less than half a mile from the ridge now, and shell after shell from the 7 lb. guns were pitching over it. A deep roar on the right, and then a second one showed that the Egyptian Krupps were in action. Sheik Kadra's hawk eyes saw that the shells burst far beyond the mark, and he spurred his horse along to where a knot of mounted chiefs were gathered round the two guns, which were served by their captured crews.

"How is this, Ben Ali?" he cried. "It was not thus that the dogs fired when it was their own brothers in faith at whom they aimed!"

A chieftain reined his horse back, and thrust a blood-smeared sword into its sheath. Beside him two Egyptian artillerymen with their throats cut were sobbing out their lives upon the ground. "Who lays the gun this time?"

asked the fierce chief, glaring at the frightened gunners.” Here, thou black-browed child of Shaitan, aim, and aim for thy life.”

It may have been chance, or it may have been skill, but the third and fourth shells burst over the square. Sheik Kadra smiled grimly and galloped back to the left, where his spearmen were streaming down into the gully. As he joined them a deep growling rose from the plain beneath, like the snarling of a sullen wild beast, and a little knot of tribesmen fell into a struggling heap, caught in the blast of lead from a Gardner. Their comrades pressed on over them, and sprang down into the ravine. From all along the crest burst the hard, sharp crackle of Remington fire.

The square had slowly advanced, rippling over the low sandhills, and halting every few minutes to re-arrange its formation. Now, having made sure that there was no force of the enemy in the scrub, it changed its direction, and began to take a line parallel to the Arab position. It was too steep to assail from the front, and if they moved far enough to the right the general hoped that he might turn it. On the top of those ruddy hills lay a baronetcy for him, and a few extra hundreds in his pension, and he meant having them both that day. The Remington fire was annoying, and so were those two Krupp guns; already there were more cacolets full than he cared to see. But on the whole he thought it better to hold his fire until he had more to aim at than a few hundred of fuzzy heads peeping over a razor-back ridge. He was a bulky, red-faced man, a fine whist-player, and a soldier who knew his work. His men believed in him, and he had good reason to believe in them, for he had excellent stuff under him that day. Being an ardent champion of the short-service system, he took particular care to work with veteran first battalions, and his little force was the compressed essence of an army corps.

The left front of the square was formed by four companies of the Royal Wessex, and the right by four of the Royal Mallows. On either side the other halves of the same regiments marched in quarter column of companies. Behind them, on the right was a battalion of Guards, and on the left one of Marines, while the rear was closed in by a Rifle battalion. Two Royal Artillery 7 lb. screw-guns kept pace with the square, and a dozen white-bloused sailors, under their blue-coated, tight-waisted officers, trailed their Gardner in front, turning every now and then to spit up at the draggled banners which waved over the cragged ridge. Hussars and Lancers scouted in the scrub at each side, and within moved the clump of camels, with humorous eyes and supercilious lips, their comic faces a contrast to the blood-stained men who already lay huddled in the cacolets on either side.

The square was now moving slowly on a line parallel with the rocks, stopping every few minutes to pick up wounded, and to allow the screw-guns and Gardner to make themselves felt. The men looked serious, for that spring on to the rocks of the Arab army had given them a vague glimpse of the number and ferocity of their foes; but their faces were set like stone, for they knew to a man that they must win or they must die — and die, too, in a particularly unlovely fashion. But most serious of all was the general, for he had seen that which brought a flush to his cheeks and a frown to his brow.

"I say, Stephen," said he to his galloper, "those Mallows seem a trifle jumpy. The right flank company bulged a bit when the niggers showed on the hill."

"Youngest troops in the square, sir," murmured the aide, looking at them critically through his eye-glass.

"Tell Colonel Flanagan to see to it, Stephen," said the general; and the galloper sped upon his way. The colonel, a fine old Celtic warrior, was over at C Company in an instant.

"How are the men, Captain Foley?"

"Never better, sir," answered the senior captain, in the spirit that makes a Madras officer look murder if you suggest recruiting his regiment from the Punjab.

"Stiffen them up!" cried the colonel. As he rode away a colour-sergeant seemed to trip, and fell forward into a mimosa bush. He made no effort to rise, but lay in a heap among the thorns.

"Sergeant O'Rooke's gone, sorr," cried a voice. "Never mind, lads," said Captain Foley. "He's died like a soldier, fighting for his Queen."

"Down with the Queen!" shouted a hoarse voice from the ranks.

But the roar of the Gardner and the typewriter-like clicking of the hopper burst in at the tail of the words. Captain Foley heard them, and Subalterns Grice and Murphy heard them; but there are times when a deaf ear is a gift from the gods.

"Steady, Mallows!" cried the captain, in a pause of the grunting machine-gun. "We have the honour of Ireland to guard this day."

"And well we know how to guard it, captin!" cried the same ominous voice; and there was a buzz from the length of the company.

The captain and the two subs. came together behind the marching line.

“They seem a bit out of hand,” murmured the captain.

“Bedad,” said the Galway boy, “they mean to scoot like redshanks.”

“They nearly broke when the blacks showed on the hill,” said Grice.

“The first man that turns, my sword is through him,” cried Foley, loud enough to be heard by five files on either side of him. Then, in a lower voice, “It’s a bitter drop to swallow, but it’s my duty to report what you think to the chief, and have a company of Jollies put behind us.” He turned away with the safety of the square upon his mind, and before he had reached his goal the square had ceased to exist.

In their march in front of what looked like a face of cliff, they had come opposite to the mouth of the gully, in which, screened by scrub and boulders, 3,000 chosen dervishes, under Hamid Wad Hussein, of the Baggaras, were crouching. Tat, tat, tat, went the rifles of three mounted infantrymen in front of the left shoulder of the square, and an instant later they wore spurring it for their lives, crouching over the manes of their horses, and pelting over the sandhills with thirty or forty galloping chieftains at their heels. Rocks and scrub and mimosa swarmed suddenly into life. Rushing black figures came and went in the gaps of the bushes. A howl that drowned the shouts of the officers, a long quavering yell, burst from the ambuscade. Two rolling volleys from the Royal Wessex, one crash from the screw-gun firing shrapnel, and then before a second cartridge could be rammed in, a living, glistening black wave, tipped with steel, had rolled over the gun, the Royal Wessex had been dashed back among the camels, and 1,000 fanatics were hewing and hacking in the heart of what had been the square.

The camels and mules in the centre, jammed more and more together as their leaders flinched from the rush of the tribesmen, shut out the view of the other three faces, who could only tell that the Arabs had got in by the yells upon Allah, which rose ever nearer and nearer amid the clouds of sand-dust, the struggling animals, and the dense mass of swaying, cursing men. Some of the Wessex fired back at the Arabs who had passed them, as excited Tommies will, and it is whispered among doctors that it was not always a Remington bullet which was cut from a wound that day. Some rallied in little knots, stabbing furiously with their bayonets at the rushing spearmen. Others turned at bay with their backs against the camels, and others round the general and his staff, who, revolver in hand, had flung themselves into the heart of it. But the whole square was sidling slowly away from the gorge, pushed back by the pressure at the shattered corner.

The officers and men at the other faces were glancing nervously to the rear, uncertain what was going on, and unable to take help to their comrades without breaking the formation.

“By Jove, they’ve got through the Wessex!” cried Grice of the Mallows.

“The divils have hurrooshed us, Ted,” said his brother subaltern, cocking his revolver.

The ranks were breaking, and crowding towards Private Conolly, all talking together as the officers peered back through the veil of dust. The sailors had run their Gardner out, and she was squirting death out of her five barrels into the flank of the rushing stream of savages. “Oh, this bloody gun!” shouted a voice. “She’s jammed again.” The fierce metallic grunting had ceased, and her crew were straining and hauling at the breech.

“This damned vertical feed!” cried an officer.

“The spanner, Wilson! — the spanner! Stand to your cutlasses, boys, or they’re into us.” His voice rose into a shriek as he ended, for a shovel-headed spear had been buried in his chest. A second wave of dervishes lapped over the hillocks, and burst upon the machine-gun and the right front of the line. The sailors were overborne in an instant, but the Mallows, with their fighting blood aflame, met the yell of the Moslem with an even wilder, fiercer cry, and dropped two hundred of them with a single point-blank volley. The howling, leaping crew swerved away to the right, and dashed on into the gap which had already been made for them.

But C Company had drawn no trigger to stop that fiery rush. The men leaned moodily upon their Martinis. Some had even thrown them upon the ground. Conolly was talking fiercely to those about him. Captain Foley, thrusting his way through the press, rushed up to him with a revolver in his hand.

“This is your doing, you villain!” he cried.

“If you raise your pistol, Captin, your brains will be over your coat,” said a low voice at his side.

He saw that several rifles were turned on him. The two subs. had pressed forward, and were by his side. “What is it, then?” he cried, looking round from one fierce mutinous face to another. “Are you Irishmen? Are you soldiers? What are you here for but to fight for your country?”

“England is no country of ours,” cried several.

"You are not fighting for England. You are fighting for Ireland, and for the Empire of which it as part."

"A black curse on the Impire!" shouted Private McQuire, throwing down his rifle. "'Twas the Impire that backed the man that druv me onto the roadside. May me hand stiffen before I draw trigger for it.

"What's the Impire to us, Captain Foley, and what's the Widdy to us ayther?" cried a voice.

"Let the constabulary foight for her."

"Ay, be God, they'd be better imployed than pullin' a poor man's thatch about his ears."

"Or shootin' his brother, as they did mine."

"It was the Impire laid my groanin' mother by the wayside. Her son will rot before he upholds it, and ye can put that in the charge-sheet in the next coort-martial."

In vain the three officers begged, menaced, persuaded. The square was still moving, ever moving, with the same bloody fight raging in its entrails. Even while they had been speaking they had been shuffling backwards, and the useless Gardner, with her slaughtered crew, was already a good hundred yards from them. And the pace was accelerating. The mass of men, tormented and writhing, was trying, by a common instinct, to reach some clearer ground where they could re-form. Three faces were still intact, but the fourth had been caved in, and badly mauled, without its comrades being able to help it. The Guards had met a fresh rush of the Hadendowas, and had blown back the tribesmen with a volley, and the cavalry had ridden over another stream of them, as they welled out of the gully. A litter of hamstrung horses, and haggled men behind them, showed that a spearman on his face among the bushes can show some sport to the man who charges him. But, in spite of all, the square was still reeling swiftly backwards, trying to shake itself clear of this torment which clung to its heart. Would it break or would it re-form? The lives of five regiments and the honour of the flag hung upon the answer.

Some, at least, were breaking. The C Company of the Mallows had lost all military order, and was pushing back in spite of the haggard officers, who cursed, and shoved, and prayed in the vain attempt to hold them. The captain and the subs. were elbowed and jostled, while the men crowded towards Private Conolly for their orders. The confusion had not spread, for the other companies, in the dust and smoke and turmoil, had lost touch with their mutinous comrades. Captain Foley saw that even now there might be time to avert a disaster. “Think what you are doing, man,” he yelled, rushing towards the ringleader. “There are a thousand Irish in the square, and they are dead men if we break.”

The words alone might have had little effect on the old moonlighter. It is possible that, in his scheming brain, he had already planned how he was to club his Irish together and lead them to the sea. But at that moment the Arabs broke through the screen of camels which had fended them off. There was a Struggle, a screaming, a mule rolled over, a wounded man sprang up in a cacolet with a spear through him, and then through the narrow gap surged a stream of naked savages, mad with battle, drunk with slaughter, spotted and splashed with blood — blood dripping from their spears, their arms, their faces. Their yells, their bounds, their crouching, darting figures, the horrid energy of their spear-thrusts, made them look like a blast of fiends from the pit. And were these the Allies of Ireland? Were these the men who were to strike for her against her enemies? Conolly’s soul rose up in loathing at the thought.

He was a man of firm purpose, and yet at the first sight of those howling fiends that purpose faltered, and at the second it was blown to the winds. He saw a huge coal-black negro seize a shrieking camel-driver and saw at his throat with a knife. He saw a shock-headed tribesman plunge his great spear through the back of their own little bugler from Mill-street. He saw a dozen deeds of blood — the murder of the wounded, the hacking of the unarmed — and caught, too, in a glance, the good wholesome faces of the faced-about rear rank of the Marines. The Mallows, too, had faced about, and in an instant Conolly had thrown himself into the heart of C Company, striving with the officers to form the men up with their comrades.

But the mischief had gone too far. The rank and file had no heart in their work. They had broken before, and this last rush of murderous savages was a hard thing for broken men to stand against. They flinched from the furious faces and dripping forearms. Why should they throw away their lives for a flag for which they cared nothing? Why should their leader urge them to break, and now shriek to them to re-form? They would not re-form. They wanted to get to the sea and to safety. He flung himself among them with outstretched arms, with words of reason, with shouts, with gaspings. It was useless; the tide was beyond his control. They were shredding out into the desert with their faces set for the coast.

“Bhoys, will ye stand for this?” screamed a voice. It was so ringing, so strenuous, that the breaking Mallows glanced backwards. They were held by what they saw. Private Conolly had planted his rifle-stock downwards in a mimosa bush. From the fixed bayonet there fluttered a little green flag with the crownless harp. God knows for what black mutiny, for what signal of revolt, that flag had been treasured up within the corporal’s tunic! Now its green wisp stood amid the rush, while three proud regimental colours were reeling slowly backwards.

“What for the flag?” yelled the private.

“My heart’s blood for it! and mine! and mine!” cried a score of voices.
“God bless it! The flag, boys — the flag!”

C Company were rallying upon it. The stragglers clutched at each other, and pointed. “Here, McQuire, Flynn, O’Hara,” ran the shoutings. “Close on the flag! Back to the flag!” The three standards reeled backwards, and the seething square strove for a clearer space where they could form their shattered ranks; but C Company, grim and powder-stained, choked with enemies and falling fast, still closed in on the little rebel ensign that flapped from the mimosa bush.

It was a good half-hour before the square, having disentangled itself from its difficulties and dressed its ranks, began to slowly move forwards over the ground, across which in its labour and anguish it had been driven. The long trail of Wessex men and Arabs showed but too clearly the path they had come.

“How many got into us, Stephen?” asked the general, tapping his snuff-box.

“I should put them down at a thousand or twelve hundred, sir.”

“I did not see any get out again. What the devil were the Wessex thinking about? The Guards stood well, though; so did the Mallows.”

“Colonel Flanagan reports that his front flank company was cut off, sir.”

“Why, that’s the company that was out of hand when we advanced!”

“Colonel Flanagan reports, sir, that the company took the whole brunt of the attack, and gave the square time to re-form.”

“Tell the Hussars to ride forward, Stephen,” said the general, “and try if they can see anything of them. There’s no firing, and I fear that the Mallows will want to do some recruiting. Let the square take ground by the right, and then advance!”

But the Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowas saw from his knoll that the men with the big hats had rallied, and that they were coming back in the quiet business fashion of men whose work was before them. He took counsel with Moussa the Dervish and Hussein the Baggara, and a woestruck man was he when he learned that the third of his men were safe in the Moslem Paradise. So, having still some signs of victory to show, he gave the word, and the desert warriors flitted off unseen and unheard, even as they had come.

A red rock plateau, a few hundred spears and Remingtons, and a plain which for the second time was strewn with slaughtered men, was all that his day's fighting gave to the English general.

It was a squadron of Hussars which came first to the spot where the rebel flag had waved. A dense litter of Arab dead marked the place. Within, the flag waved no longer, but the rifle stood in the mimosa bush, and round it, with their wounds in front, lay the Fenian private and the silent ranks of the Irishry. Sentiment is not an English failing, but the Hussar captain raised his hilt in a salute as he rode past the blood-soaked ring.

The British general sent home dispatches to his Government, and so did the chief of the Hadendowas, though the style and manner differed somewhat in each.

The Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowa people to Mohammed Ahmed, the chosen of Allah, homage and greeting, (began the latter). Know by this that on the fourth day of this moon we gave battle to the Kaffirs who call themselves Inglees, having with us the Chief Hussein with ten thousand of the faithful. By the blessing of Allah we have broken them, and chased them for a mile, though indeed these infidels are different from the dogs of Egypt, and have slain very many of our men. Yet we hope to smite them again ere the new moon be come, to which end I trust that thou wilt send us a thousand Dervishes from Omdurman. In token of our victory I send you by this messenger a flag which we have taken. By the colour it might well seem to have belonged to those of the true faith, but the Kaffirs gave their blood freely to save it, and so we think that, though small, it is very dear to them.

CAPTAIN SHARKEY.

I

HOW THE GOVERNOR OF SAINT KITT’S CAME HOME.

When the great wars of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen, and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation, they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness, and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer, and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship *Morning Star*, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt’s was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the twenty-gun pirate barque, *Happy Delivery*, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity. From the Bahamas to the Main his coal-black barque, with the ambiguous name, had been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship, and her full and valuable lading, that he struck out to the west as far as Bird's Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, "as provisions for the voyage," but the seaman had at once committed it to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame until, at the last moment, the *Morning Star* had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought of him lay heavily upon the seaman's mind as he watched the agent's boat shooting out from the Custom-house quay.

"I'll lay you a wager, Morgan," said he to the first mate, "that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips."

"Well, captain, I'll have you a silver dollar, and chance it," said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder. "Welcome, Captain Scarrow!" he cried. "Have you heard about Sharkey?"

The captain grinned at the mate.

"What devilry has he been up to now?" he asked.

"Devilry! You've not heard, then? Why, we've got him safe under lock and key at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning."

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to Heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

"Sharkey to be hanged!" he cried. "You don't know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?"

"Stand back!" cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. "I'll pay that dollar, Captain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?"

"Why, as to that, he became more than his own comrades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little Governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. 'He's my meat,' said he, 'and I claim the cooking of it.' If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you'll see the joint swinging."

"I wish I could," said the captain, wistfully, "but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide."

"That you can't do," said the agent with decision. "The Governor is going back with you."

"The Governor!"

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains.”

“Well, well!” cried the captain in some perplexity, “I’m a plain seaman, and I don’t know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don’t remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it’s in King George’s service, and he asks a cast in the *Morning Star* as far as London, I’ll do what I can for him. There’s my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it’s lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week; but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste.”

“You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow,” said the agent. “Sir Charles is in weak health just now, only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life into him. He has a great spirit in him, though, and you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech.”

“He may say what he likes, and do what he likes, so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship,” said the captain. “He is Governor of St. Kitt’s, but I am Governor of the *Morning Star*, and, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George.”

“He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves.”

“The early morning tide, then.”

“Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night; and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt’s without seeing Sharkey do the rogue’s hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey.”

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the Governor’s baggage began to arrive — great iron-bound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or the sword within. And then there came a note, with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard that the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle's coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

"There is a keg of Trinidad."

"You play a hand at picquet?"

"Passably well, sir."

"Then anchor up, and to sea!"

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limpid the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter rail.

"You are on Government service now, captain," said he. "They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?"

"Every inch, Sir Charles."

"Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage."

"I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency's society," said the captain. "But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted."

"Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out."

"I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague."

"Yes; I have had a pyrexy, which has reduced me much."

"We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon."

"Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!" He raised his ring-covered band in the air. From far astern there came the low, deep thunder of cannon.

"It is from the island!" cried the captain in astonishment. "Can it be a signal for us to put back?"

The Governor laughed. "You have heard that Sharkey, the pirate, is to be hanged this morning. I ordered the batteries to salute when the rascal was kicking his last, so that I might know of it out at sea. There's an end of Sharkey!"

"There's an end of Sharkey!" cried the captain; and the crew took up the cry as they gathered in little knots upon the deck and stared back at the low, purple line of the vanishing land.

It was a cheering omen for their start across the Western Ocean, and the invalid Governor found himself a popular man on board, for it was generally understood that but for his insistence upon an immediate trial and sentence, the villain might have played upon some more venal judge and so escaped. At dinner that day Sir Charles gave many anecdotes of the deceased pirate; and so affable was he, and so skilful in adapting his conversation to men of lower degree, that captain, mate, and Governor smoked their long pipes, and drank their claret as three good comrades should.

"And what figure did Sharkey cut in the dock?" asked the captain.

"He is a man of some presence," said the Governor.

"I had always understood that he was an ugly, sneering devil," remarked the mate.

"Well, I dare say he could look ugly upon occasions," said the Governor.

"I have heard a New Bedford whaleman say that he could not forget his eyes," said Captain Scarrow. "They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?"

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the adjutant-general said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury was so foolish as to be visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head."

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink to a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on the top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off — the one to his watch, and the other to his bunk. But when, after his four hours' spell, the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor, in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown, still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the *Morning Star* was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were halfway across the Atlantic, he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet be would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sails and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman — he who had been cast away in the boat — should lead him about, and, above all, that he should sit beside him when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed forefinger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulders. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of a mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. “Give me a knife and a bucket!” he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt’s, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long, dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the King’s ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw his cards down, and swept all the money into the pocket of his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

"The game's mine!" said he.

"Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!" cried Captain Scarrow; "you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers."

"Sink you for a liar!" said the Governor. "I tell you I *have* played out the hand, and that you *are* a loser." He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

"Good God!" cried the mate. "It's Sharkey!"

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh. "Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen," said he, "and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the *Happy Delivery*. We made it hot, and so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs — you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs — we hold you at the end of our pistols!"

"You may shoot, or you may not!" cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. "If it's my last breath, Sharkey, I tell you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!"

"There's a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he's going to make a very pretty death of it!" cried Sharkey. "There's no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you'll need it soon. Is the dinghy astern, Ned?"

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"And the other boats scuttled?"

"I bored them all in three places."

"Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow. You look as if you hadn't quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

"I believe you're the devil himself!" cried the captain. "Where is the Governor of St. Kitt's?"

"When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends — for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port — that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah, and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I have ruffled it as a governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them."

"Help! help! Watch ahoy!" yelled the mate; but the butt of the pirate's pistol crashed down on his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm round his waist.

"No use, Master Scarrow," said Sharkey. "Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life."

"I'll see you—" cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

"Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?"

"No; not if you twist it off."

"Put an inch of your knife into him."

"You may put six inches, and then I won't."

"Sink me, but I like his spirit!" cried Sharkey. "Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You've saved your skin, Scarrow, and it's a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow, since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned."

"To the stove, captain?"

"Tut, tut! there's a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I'll let you know which of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table."

"Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!" said the quartermaster.
"You surely do not mean to let him go?"

"If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?"

"Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!" said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spread-eagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed underneath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt's.

“Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you,” said the pirate. “If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he has a barque he’ll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own — so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the *Morning Star*.”

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their footsteps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dinghy hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

“Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage, Wilson!” he screamed. “Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dinghy. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo’sun, and tumble into the boats, all hands.”

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

“The boats are scuttled!” they cried. “They are leaking like a sieve.”

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net. Close to them was the little dinghy, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

“They are dead men!” cried the captain. “A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger.” But it was too late. At that very moment the dinghy shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence. The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

THE DEALINGS OF CAPTAIN SHARKEY WITH STEPHEN CRADDOCK

Careening was a very necessary operation for the old pirate. On his superior speed he depended both for overhauling the trader and escaping the man-of-war. But it was impossible to retain his sailing qualities unless he periodically — once a year, at the least — cleared his vessel’s bottom from the long, trailing plants and crusting barnacles which gather so rapidly in the tropical seas. For this purpose he lightened his vessel, thrust her into some narrow inlet where she would be left high and dry at low water, fastened blocks and tackles to her masts to pull her over on to her bilge, and then scraped her thoroughly from rudder-post to cut-water.

During the weeks which were thus occupied the ship was, of course, defenceless; but, on the other hand, she was unapproachable by anything heavier than an empty hull, and the place for careening was chosen with an eye to secrecy, so that there was no great danger. So secure did the captains feel, that it was not uncommon for them, at such times, to leave their ships under a sufficient guard, and to start off in the long-boat, either upon a sporting expedition or, more frequently, upon a visit to some outlying town, where they burned the heads of the women by their swaggering gallantry, or broached pipes of wine in the market square, with a threat to pistol all who would not drink with them.

Sometimes they would even appear in cities of the size of Charleston, and walk the streets with their clattering side-arms — an open scandal to the whole law-abiding colony. Such visits were not always paid with impunity. It was one of them, for example, which provoked Lieutenant Maynard to hack off Blackbeard’s head, and to spear it upon the end of his bowsprit. But, as a rule, the pirate ruffled and bullied and drabbed without let or hindrance, until it was time for him to go back to his ship once more.

There was one pirate, however, who never crossed even the skirts of civilisation, and that was the sinister Sharkey, of the barque *Happy Delivery*. It may have been from his morose and solitary temper, or, as is more probable, that he knew that his name upon the coast was such that outraged humanity would, against all odds, have thrown themselves upon him, but never once did he show his face in a settlement.

When his ship was laid up he would leave her under the charge of Ned Galloway — her New England quartermaster — and would take long voyages in his boat, sometimes, it was said, for the purpose of burying his share of the plunder, and sometimes to shoot the wild oxen of Hispaniola, which, when dressed and barbecued, provided provisions for his next voyage. In the latter case the barque would come round to some pre-arranged spot to pick him up, and take on board what he had shot.

There had always been a hope in the islands that Sharkey might be taken on one of these occasions; and at last there came news to Kingston which seemed to justify an attempt upon him. It was brought by an elderly logwood-cutter who had fallen into the pirate’s hands, and in some freak of drunken benevolence had been allowed to get away with nothing worse than a slit nose and a drubbing. His account was recent and definite. The *Happy Delivery* was careening at Torbec on the south-west of Hispaniola. Sharkey, with four men, was buccaneering on the outlying island of La Vache. The blood of a hundred murdered crews was calling out for vengeance, and now at last it seemed as if it might not call in vain.

Sir Edward Compton, the high-nosed, red-faced Governor, sitting in solemn conclave with the commandant and the head of the council, was sorely puzzled in his mind as to how he should use this chance. There was no man-of-war nearer than Jamestown, and she was a clumsy old fly-boat, which could neither overhaul the pirate on the seas, nor reach her in a shallow inlet. There were forts and artillerymen both at Kingston and Port Royal, but no soldiers available for an expedition.

A private venture might be fitted out — and there were many who had a blood-feud with Sharkey — but what could a private venture do? The pirates were numerous and desperate. As to taking Sharkey and his four companions, that, of course, would be easy if they could get at them; but how were they to get at them on a large well-wooded island like La Vache, full of wild hills and impenetrable jungles? A reward was offered to whoever could find a solution, and that brought a man to the front who had a singular plan, and was himself prepared to carry it out.

Stephen Craddock had been that most formidable person, the Puritan gone wrong. Sprung from a decent Salem family, his ill-doing seemed to be a recoil from the austerity of their religion, and he brought to vice all the physical strength and energy with which the virtues of his ancestors had endowed him. He was ingenious, fearless, and exceedingly tenacious of purpose, so that when he was still young, his name became notorious upon the American coast. He was the same Craddock who was tried for his life in Virginia for the slaying of the Seminole Chief, and, though he escaped, it was well known that he had corrupted the witnesses and bribed the judge.

Afterwards, as a slaver, and even, as it was hinted, as a pirate, he had left an evil name behind him in the Bight of Benin. Finally he had returned to Jamaica with a considerable fortune, and had settled down to a life of sombre dissipation. This was the man, gaunt, austere, and dangerous, who now waited upon the Governor with a plan for the extirpation of Sharkey. Sir Edward received him with little enthusiasm, for in spite of some rumours of conversion and reformation, he had always regarded him as an infected sheep who might taint the whole of his little flock. Craddock saw the Governor's mistrust under his thin veil of formal and restrained courtesy.

"You've no call to fear me, sir," said he; "I'm a changed man from what you've known. I've seen the light again of late, after losing sight of it for many a black year. It was through the ministration of the Rev. John Simons, of our own people. Sir, if your spirit should be in need of quickening, you would find a very sweet savour in his discourse."

The Governor cocked his episcopalian nose at him.

"You came here to speak of Sharkey, Master Craddock," said he.

"The man Sharkey is a vessel of wrath," said Craddock. "His wicked horn has been exalted over long, and it is borne in upon me that if I can cut him off and utterly destroy him, it will be a goodly deed, and one which may atone for many backslidings in the past. A plan has been given to me whereby I may encompass his destruction."

The Governor was keenly interested, for there was a grim and practical air about the man's freckled face which showed that he was in earnest. After all, he was a seaman and a fighter, and, if it were true that he was eager to atone for his past, no better man could be chosen for the business.

"This will be a dangerous task, Master Craddock," said he.

"If I meet my death at it, it may be that it will cleanse the memory of an ill-spent life. I have much to atone for."

The Governor did not see his way to contradict him.

"What was your plan?" he asked.

"You have heard that Sharkey's barque, the *Happy Delivery*, came from this very port of Kingston?"

“It belonged to Mr. Codrington, and it was taken by Sharkey, who scuttled his own sloop and moved into her because she was faster,” said Sir Edward.

“Yes; but it may be that you have lever heard that Mr. Codrington has a sister ship, the *White Rose*, which lies even now in the harbour, and which is so like the pirate, that, if it were not for a white paint line, none could tell them apart.”

“Ah! and what of that?” asked the Governor keenly, with the air of one who is just on the edge of an idea.

“By the help of it this man shall be delivered into our hands.”

“And how?”

“I will paint out the streak upon the *White Rose*, and make it in all things like the *Happy Delivery*. Then I will set sail for the Island of La Vache, where this man is slaying the wild oxen. When he sees me he will surely mistake me for his own vessel which he is awaiting, and he will come on board to his own undoing.”

It was a simple plan, and yet it seemed to the Governor that it might be effective. Without hesitation he gave Craddock permission to carry it out, and to take any steps he liked in order to further the object which he had in view. Sir Edward was not very sanguine, for many attempts had been made upon Sharkey, and their results had shown that he was as cunning as he was ruthless. But this gaunt Puritan with the evil record was cunning aid ruthless also. The contest of wits between two such men as Sharkey and Craddock appealed to the Governor’s acute sense of sport, and though he was inwardly convinced that the chances were against him, he backed his man with the same loyalty which he would have shown to his horse or his cock.

Haste was, above all things, necessary, for upon any day the careening might be finished, and the pirates out at sea once more. But there was not very much to do, and there were many willing hands to do it, so the second day saw the *White Rose* beating out for the open sea. There were many seamen in the port who knew the lines and rig of the pirate barque, and not one of them could see the slightest difference in this counterfeit. Her white side line had been painted out, her masts and yards were smoked, to give them the dingy appearance of the weather-beaten rover, and a large diamond-shaped patch was let into her foretopsail. Her crew were volunteers, many of them being men who had sailed with Stephen

Craddock before — the mate, Joshua Hird, an old slaver, had been his accomplice in many voyages, and came now at the bidding of his chief.

The avenging barque sped across the Caribbean Sea, and, at the sight of that patched topsail, the little craft which they met flew left and right like frightened trout in a pool. On the fourth evening Point Abacou bore five miles to the north and east of them. On the fifth they were at anchor in the Bay of Tortoises at the Island of La Vache, where Sharkey and his four men had been hunting. It was a well-wooded place, with the palms and underwood growing down to the thin crescent of silver sand which skirted the shore. They had hoisted the black flag and the red pennant, but no answer came from the shore. Craddock strained his eyes, hoping every instant to see a boat shoot out to them with Sharkey seated in the sheets. But the night passed away, and a day and yet another night, without any sign of the men whom they were endeavouring to trap. It looked as if they were already gone.

On the second morning Craddock went ashore in search of some proof whether Sharkey and his men were still upon the island. What he found reassured him greatly. Close to the shore was a boucan of green wood, such as was used for preserving the meat, and a great store of barbecued strips of ox-flesh was hung upon lines all round it. The pirate ship had not taken off her provisions, and therefore the hunters were still upon the island.

Why had they not shown themselves? Was it that they had detected that this was not their own ship? Or was it that they were hunting in the interior of the island, and were not on the look-out for a ship yet? Craddock was still hesitating between the two alternatives, when a Carib Indian came down with information. The pirates were in the island, he said, and their camp was a day’s march from the Sea. They had stolen his wife, and the marks of their stripes were still pink upon his brown back. Their enemies were his friends, and he would lead them to where they lay.

Craddock could not have asked for anything better; so early next morning, with a small party armed to the teeth, he set off, under the guidance of the Carib. All day they struggled through brushwood and clambered over rocks, pushing their way further and further into the desolate heart of the island. Here and there they found traces of the hunters, the bones of a slain ox, or the marks of feet in a morass, and once, towards evening, it seemed to some of them that they heard the distant rattle of guns.

That night they spent under the trees, and pushed on again with the earliest light. About noon they came to the huts of bark, which, the Carib told them, were the camp of the hunters, but they were silent and deserted. No doubt their occupants were away at the hunt and would return in the evening, so Craddock and his men lay in ambush in the brushwood around them. But no one came, and another night was spent in the forest. Nothing more could be done, and it seemed to Craddock that after the two days' absence it was time that he returned to his ship once more.

The return journey was less difficult, as they had already blazed a path for themselves. Before evening they found themselves once more at the Bay of Palms, and saw their ship riding at anchor where they had left her. Their boat and oars had been hauled up among the bushes, so they launched it and pulled out to the barque.

"No luck, then!" cried Joshua Hird, the mate, looking down with a pale face from the poop.

"His camp was empty, but he may come down to us yet," said Craddock, with his hand on the ladder.

Somebody upon deck began to laugh. "I think," said the mate, "that these men had better stay in the boat."

"Why so?"

"If you will come aboard, sir, you will understand it." He spoke in a curious, hesitating fashion.

The blood flushed to Craddock's gaunt face. "How is this, Master Hird?" he cried, springing up the side. "What mean you by giving orders to my boat's crew?"

But as he passed over the bulwarks, with one foot upon the deck and one knee upon the rail, a tow-bearded man, whom he had never before observed aboard his vessel, grabbed suddenly at his pistol. Craddock clutched at the fellow's wrist, but at the same instant his mate snatched the cutlass from his side.

"What roguery is this?" shouted Craddock, looking furiously around him. But the crew stood in knots about the deck, laughing and whispering amongst themselves without showing any desire to go to his assistance. Even in that hurried glance Craddock noticed that they were dressed in the most singular manner, with long riding-coats, full-skirted velvet gowns and coloured ribands at their knees, more like men of fashion than seamen.

As he looked at their grotesque figures he struck his brow with his clenched fist to be sure that he was awake. The deck seemed to be much dirtier than when he had left it, and there were strange, sun-blackened faces turned upon him from every side. Not one of them did he know save only Joshua Hird. Had the ship been captured in his absence? Were these Sharkey's men who were around him? At the thought he broke furiously away and tried to climb over to his boat, but a dozen hands were on him in an instant, and he was pushed aft through the open door of his own cabin.

And it was all different to the cabin which he had left. The floor was different, the ceiling was different, the furniture was different. His had been plain and austere. This was sumptuous and yet dirty, hung with rare velvet curtains splashed with wine-stains, and panelled with costly woods which were pocked with pistol-marks.

On the table was a great chart of the Caribbean Sea, and beside it, with compasses in his hand, sat a clean-shaven, pale-faced man with a fur cap and a claret-coloured coat of damask. Craddock turned white under his freckles as he looked upon the long, thin high-nostrilled nose and the red-rimmed eyes which were turned upon him with the fixed, humorous gaze of the master player who has left his opponent without a move. "Sharkey!" cried Craddock.

Sharkey's thin lips opened, and he broke into his high, sniggering laugh.

"You fool!" he cried, and, leaning over, he stabbed Craddock's shoulder again and again with his compasses. "You poor, dull-witted fool, would you match yourself against me?"

It was not the pain of the wounds, but it was the contempt in Sharkey's voice which turned Craddock into a savage madman. He flew at the pirate, roaring with rage, striking, kicking, writhing, foaming. It took six men to drag him down on to the floor amidst the splintered remains of the table — and not one of the six who did not bear the prisoner's mark upon him. But Sharkey still surveyed him with the same contemptuous eye. From outside there came the crash of breaking wood and the clamour of startled voices.

"What is that?" asked Sharkey.

"They have stove the boat with cold shot, and the men are in the water."

"Let them stay there," said the pirate. "Now, Craddock, you know where you are. You are aboard my ship, the *Happy Delivery*, and you lie at my mercy. I knew you for a stout seaman, you rogue, before you took to this long-shore canting. Your hands then were no cleaner than my own. Will you sign articles, as your mate has done, and join us, or shall I heave you over to follow your ship's company?"

"Where is my ship?" asked Craddock.

"Scuttled in the bay."

"And the hands?"

"In the bay, too."

"Then I'm for the bay, also."

"Hock him and heave him over," said Sharkey.

Many rough hands had dragged Craddock out upon deck, and Galloway, the quartermaster, had already drawn his hanger to cripple him, when Sharkey came hurrying from his cabin with an eager face. "We can do better with the hound!" he cried. "Sink me if it is not a rare plan. Throw him into the sail-room with the irons on, and do you come here, quartermaster, that I may tell you what I have in my mind."

So Craddock, bruised and wounded in soul and body, was thrown into the dark sail-room, so fettered that he could not stir hand or foot, but his Northern blood was running strong in his veins, and his grim spirit aspired only to make such an ending as might go some way towards atoning for the evil of his life. All night he lay in the curve of the bilge listening to the rush of the water and the straining of the timbers which told him that the ship was at sea and driving fast. In the early morning someone came crawling to him in the darkness over the heap of sails.

"Here's rum and biscuits," said the voice of his late mate. "It's at the risk of my life, Master Craddock, that I bring them to you."

"It was you who trapped me and caught me as in a snare!" cried Craddock. "How shall you answer for what you have done?"

"What I did I did with the point of a knife betwixt my blade-bones."

"God forgive you for a coward, Joshua Hird. How came you into their hands?"

"Why, Master Craddock, the pirate ship came back from its careening upon the very day that you left us. They laid us aboard, and, short-handed as we were, with the best of the men ashore with you, we could offer but a poor defence. Some were cut down, and they were the happiest. The others were killed afterwards. As to me, I saved my life by signing on with them."

"And they scuttled my ship?"

"They scuttled her, and then Sharkey and his men, who had been watching us from the brushwood, came off to the ship. His mainyard had been cracked and fished last voyage, so he had suspicions of us, seeing that ours was whole. Then he thought of laying the same trap for you which you had set for him."

Craddock groaned. "How came I not to see that fished mainyard?" he muttered. "But whither are we bound?"

"We are running north and west."

"North and west! Then we are heading back towards Jamaica."

"With an eight-knot wind."

"Have you heard what they mean to do with me?"

"I have not heard. If you would but sign the articles—"

"Enough, Joshua Hird! I have risked my soul too often."

"As you wish. I have done what I could. Farewell!"

All that night and the next day the *Happy Delivery* ran before the easterly trades, and Stephen Craddock lay in the dark of the sail-room working patiently at his wrist-irons. One he had slipped off at the cost of a row of broken and bleeding knuckles, but, do what he would, he could not free the other, and his ankles were securely fastened. From hour to hour he heard the swish of the water, and knew that the barque must be driving with all set in front of the trade wind. In that case they must be nearly back again to Jamaica by now. What plan could Sharkey have in his head, and what use did he hope to make of him? Craddock set his teeth, and vowed that if he had once been a villain from choice he would, at least, never be one by compulsion.

On the second morning Craddock became aware that sail had been reduced in the vessel, and that she was tacking slowly, with a light breeze on her beam. The varying slope of the sail room and the sounds from the deck told his practised senses exactly what she was doing. The short reaches showed him that she was manoeuvring near shore, and making for some definite point. If so, she must have reached Jamaica. But what could she be doing there?

And then suddenly there was a burst of hearty cheering from the deck, and then the crash of a gun above his head, and then the answering booming of guns from far over the water. Craddock sat up and strained his ears. Was the ship in action? Only the one gun had been fired, and though many had answered, there were none of the crashings which told of a shot coming home. Then, if it was not an action, it must be a salute. But who would salute Sharkey, the pirate? It could only be another pirate ship which would do so. So Craddock lay back again with a groan, and continued to work at the manacle which still held his right wrist. But suddenly there came the shuffling of steps outside, and he had hardly time to wrap the loose links round his free hand, when the door was unbolted and two pirates came in.

“Got your hammer, carpenter?” asked one, whom Craddock recognised as the big quartermaster.

“Knock off his leg shackles, then. Better leave the bracelets — he’s safer with them on.”

With hammer and chisel the carpenter loosened the irons.

“What are you going to do with me?” asked Craddock.

“Come on deck and you’ll see.”

The sailor seized him by the arm and dragged him roughly to the foot of the companion. Above him was a square of blue sky cut across by the mizzen gaff, with the colours flying at the peak. But it was the sight of those colours which struck the breath from Stephen Craddock’s lips. For there were two of them, and the British ensign was flying above the Jolly Rodger — the honest flag above that of the rogue.

For an instant Craddock stopped in amazement, but a brutal push from the pirates behind drove him up the companion ladder. As he stepped out upon deck, his eyes turned up to the main, and there again were the British colours flying above the red pennant, and all the shrouds and rigging were garlanded with streamers.

Had the ship been taken, then? But that was impossible, for there were the pirates clustering in swarms along the port bulwarks, and waving their hats joyously in the air. Most prominent of all was the renegade mate, standing on the foc’sle head, and gesticulating wildly. Craddock looked over the side to see what they were cheering at, and then in a flash he saw how critical was the moment.

On the port bow, and about a mile off, lay the white houses and forts of Port Royal, with flags breaking out everywhere over their roofs. Right ahead was the opening of the palisades leading to the town of Kingston. Not more than a quarter of a mile off was a small sloop working out against the very slight wind. The British ensign was at her peak, and her rigging was all decorated. On her deck could be seen a dense crowd of people cheering and waving their hats, and the gleam of scarlet told that there were officers of the garrison among them.

In an instant, with the quick perception of a man of action, Craddock saw through it all. Sharkey, with that diabolical cunning and audacity which were among his main characteristics, was simulating the part which Craddock would himself have played had he come back victorious. It was in *his* honour that the salutes were firing and the flags flying. It was to welcome *him* that this ship with the Governor, the commandant, and the chiefs of the island were approaching. In another ten minutes they would all be under the guns of the *Happy Delivery*, and Sharkey would have won the greatest stake that ever a pirate played for yet.

“Bring him forward,” cried the pirate captain, as Craddock appeared between the carpenter and the quartermaster. “Keep the ports closed, but clear away the port guns, and stand by for a broadside. Another two cable lengths and we have them.”

“They are edging away,” said the boatswain. “I think they smell us.”

“That’s soon set right,” said Sharkey, turning his filmy eyes upon Craddock. “Stand there, you — right there, where they can recognise you, with your hand on the guy, and wave your hat to them. Quick, or your brains will be over your coat. Put an inch of your knife into him, Ned. Now, will you wave your hat? Try him again, then. Hey, shoot him! Stop him!”

But it was too late. Relying upon the manacles, the quartermaster had taken his hands for a moment off Craddock’s arm. In that instant he had flung off the carpenter, and, amid a spatter of pistol bullets, had sprung the bulwarks and was swimming for his life. He had been hit and hit again, but it takes many pistols to kill a resolute and powerful man who has his mind set upon doing something before he dies. He was a strong swimmer, and, in spite of the red trail which he left in the water behind him, he was rapidly increasing his distance from the pirate. “Give me a musket!” cried Sharkey, with a savage oath.

He was a famous shot, and his iron nerves never failed him in an emergency. The dark head appearing on the crest of a roller, and then swooping down on the other side, was already half-way to the sloop. Sharkey dwelt long upon his aim before he fired. With the crack of the gun the swimmer reared himself up in the water, waved his hands in a gesture of warning, and roared out in a voice which rang over the bay. Then, as the sloop swung round her head-sails, and the pirate fired an impotent broadside, Stephen Craddock, smiling grimly in his death agony, sank slowly down to that golden couch which glimmered far beneath him.

HOW COPLEY BANKS SLEW CAPTAIN SHARKEY

The Buccaneers were something higher than a mere band of marauders. They were a floating republic, with laws, usages, and discipline of their own. In their endless and remorseless quarrel with the Spaniards they had some semblance of right upon their side. Their bloody harryings of the cities of the Main were not more barbarous than the inroads of Spain upon the Netherlands — or upon the Caribs in these same American lands.

The chief of the Buccaneers, were he English or French, a Morgan or a Granmont, was still a responsible person, whose country might countenance him, or even praise him, so long as he refrained from any deed which might shock the leathery seventeenth-century conscience too outrageously. Some of them were touched with religion, and it is still remembered how Sawkins threw the dice overboard upon the Sabbath, and Daniel pistolled a man before the altar for irreverence.

But there came a day when the fleets of the Buccaneers no longer mustered at the Tortugas, and the solitary and outlawed pirate took their place. Yet even with him the tradition of restraint and of discipline still lingered; and among the early pirates, the Avorys, the Englands, and the Robertses, there remained some respect for human sentiment. They were more dangerous to the merchant than to the seaman. But they in turn were replaced by more savage and desperate men, who frankly recognised that they would get no quarter in their war with the human race, and who swore that they would give as little as they got. Of their histories we know little that is trustworthy. They wrote no memoirs and left no trace, save an occasional blackened and blood-stained derelict adrift upon the face of the Atlantic. Their deeds could only be surmised from the long roll of ships who never made their port.

Searching the records of history, it is only here and there in an old-world trial that the veil that shrouds them seems for an instant to be lifted, and we catch a glimpse of some amazing and grotesque brutality behind. Such was the breed of Ned Low, of Gow the Scotchman, and of the infamous Sharkey, whose coal-black barque, the *Happy Delivery*, was known from the Newfoundland Banks to the mouths of the Orinoco as the dark forerunner of misery and of death.

There were many men, both among the islands and on the Main, who had a blood feud with Sharkey, but not one who had suffered more bitterly than Copley Banks, of Kingston. Banks had been one of the leading sugar merchants of the West Indies. He was a man of position, a member of the Council, the husband of a Percival, and the cousin of the Governor of Virginia. His two sons had been sent to London to be educated, and their mother had gone over to bring them back. On their return voyage the ship, the *Duchess of Cornwall*, fell into the hands of Sharkey, and the whole family met with an infamous death.

Copley Banks said little when he heard the news, but he sank into a morose and enduring melancholy. He neglected his business, avoided his friends, and spent much of his time in the low taverns of the fishermen and seamen. There, amidst riot and devilry, he sat silently puffing at his pipe, with a set face and a smouldering eye. It was generally supposed that his misfortunes had shaken his wits, and his old friends looked at him askance, for the company which he kept was enough to bar him from honest men.

From time to time there came rumours of Sharkey over the sea. Sometimes it was from some schooner which had seen a great flame upon the horizon, and approaching to offer help to the burning ship, had fled away at the sight of the sleek, black barque, lurking like a wolf near a mangled sheep. Sometimes it was a frightened trader, which had come tearing in with her canvas curved like a lady’s bodice, because she had seen a patched foretopsail rising slowly above the violet water-line. Sometimes it was from a coaster, which had found a waterless Bahama cay littered with sun-dried bodies. Once there came a man who had been mate of a Guineaman, and who had escaped from the pirate’s hands. He could not speak — for reasons which Sharkey could best supply — but he could write, and he did write, to the very great interest of Copley Banks. For hours they sat together over the map, and the dumb man pointed here and there to outlying reefs and tortuous inlets, while his companion sat smoking in silence, with his unvarying face and his fiery eyes.

One morning, some two years after his misfortunes, Mr. Copley Banks strode into his own office with his old air of energy and alertness. The manager stared at him in surprise, for it was months since he had shown any interest in business.

“Good morning, Mr. Banks!” said he.

“Good morning, Freeman. I see that *Ruffling Harry* is in the Bay.”

“Yes, sir; she clears for the Windward Islands on Wednesday.”

“I have other plans for her, Freeman. I have determined upon a slaving venture to Whydah.”

“But her cargo is ready, sir.”

“Then it must come out again, Freeman. My mind is made up, and the *Ruffling Harry* must go slaving to Whydah.”

All argument and persuasion were vain, so the manager had dolefully to clear the ship once more. And then Copley Banks began to make preparations for his African voyage. It appeared that he relied upon force rather than barter for the filling of his hold, for he carried none of those showy trinkets which savages love, but the brig was fitted with eight nine-pounder guns, and racks full of muskets and cutlasses. The after-sailroom next the cabin was transformed into a powder magazine, and she carried as many round shot as a well-found privateer. Water and provisions were shipped for a long voyage.

But the preparation of his ship’s company was most surprising. It made Freeman, the manager, realise that there was truth in the rumour that his master had taken leave of his senses. For, under one pretext or another, he began to dismiss the old and tried hands, who had served the firm for years, and in their place he embarked the scum of the port — men whose reputations were so vile that the lowest crimp would have been ashamed to furnish them. There was Birthmark Sweetlocks, who was known to have been present at the killing of the logwood-cutters, so that his hideous scarlet disfigurement was put down by the fanciful as being a red afterglow from that great crime. He was first mate, and under him was Israel Martin, a little sun-wilted fellow who had served with Howell Davies at the taking of Cape Coast Castle.

The crew were chosen from amongst those whom Banks had met and known in their own infamous haunts, and his own table-steward was a haggard-faced man, who gobbled at you when he tried to talk. His beard had been shaved, and it was impossible to recognise him as the same man whom Sharkey had placed under the knife, and who had escaped to tell his experiences to Copley Banks. These doings were not unnoticed, nor yet uncommented upon in the town of Kingston. The Commandant of the troops — Major Harvey of the Artillery — made serious representations to the Governor.

“She is not a trader, but a small warship,” said he.

“I think it would be as well to arrest Copley Banks and to seize the vessel.”

“What do you suspect?” asked the Governor, who was a slow-witted man, broken down with fevers and port wine.

“I suspect,” said the soldier, “that it is Stede Bonnet over again.”

Now, Stede Bonnet was a planter of high reputation and religious character who, from some sudden and overpowering freshet of wildness in his blood, had given up everything in order to start off pirating in the Caribbean Sea. The example was a recent one, and it had caused the utmost consternation in the islands. Governors had before now been accused of being in league with pirates, and of receiving commissions upon their plunder, so that any want of vigilance was open to a sinister construction.

“Well, Major Harvey,” said he, “I am vastly sorry to do anything which may offend my friend Copley Banks, for many a time have my knees been under his mahogany, but in face of what you say there is no choice for me but to order you to board the vessel and to satisfy yourself as to her character and destination.”

So at one in the morning Major Harvey, with a launchful of his soldiers, paid a surprise visit to the *Ruffling Harry*, with the result that they picked up nothing more solid than a hempen cable floating at the moorings. It had been slipped by the brig, whose owner had scented danger. She had already passed the Palisades, and was beating out against the north-east trades on a course for the Windward Passage.

When upon the next morning the brig had left Morant Point a mere haze upon the Southern horizon, the men were called aft, and Copley Banks revealed his plans to them. He had chosen them, he said, as brisk boys and lads of spirit, who would rather run some risk upon the sea than starve for a living upon the shore. King’s ships were few and weak, and they could master any trader who might come their way. Others had done well at the business, and with a handy, well-found vessel, there was no reason why they should not turn their tarry jackets into velvet coats. If they were prepared to sail under the black flag, he was ready to command them; but if any wished to withdraw, they might have the gig and row back to Jamaica.

Four men out of six-and-forty asked for their discharge, went over the ship's side into the boat, and rowed away amidst the jeers and howlings of the crew. The rest assembled aft, and drew up the articles of their association. A square of black tarpaulin had the white skull painted upon it, and was hoisted amidst cheering at the main.

Officers were elected, and the limits of their authority fixed. Copley Banks was chosen captain, but, as there are no mates upon a pirate craft, Birthmark Sweetlocks became quartermaster, and Israel Martin the boatswain. There was no difficulty in knowing what was the custom of the brotherhood, for half the men at least had served upon pirates before. Food should be the same for all, and no man should interfere with another man's drink! The captain should have a cabin, but all hands should be welcome to enter it when they chose.

All should share and share alike, save only the captain, quartermaster, boatswain, carpenter, and master-gunner, who had from a quarter to a whole share extra. He who saw a prize first should have the best weapon taken out of her. He who boarded her first should have the richest suit of clothes aboard of her. Every man might treat his own prisoner, be it man or woman, after his own fashion. If a man flinched from his gun, the quartermaster should pistol him. These were some of the rules which the crew of the *Ruffling Harry* subscribed by putting forty-two crosses at the foot of the paper upon which they had been drawn.

So a new rover was afloat upon the seas, and her name before a year was over became as well known as that of the *Happy Delivery*. From the Bahamas to the Leewards, and from the Leewards to the Windwards, Copley Banks became the rival of Sharkey and the terror of traders. For a long time the barque and the brig never met, which was the more singular as the *Ruffling Harry* was for ever looking in at Sharkey's resorts; but at last one day, when she was passing down the inlet of Coxon's Hole, at the east end of Cuba, with the intention of careening, there was the *Happy Delivery*, with her blocks and tackle-falls already rigged for the same purpose. Copley Banks fired a shotted salute and hoisted the green trumpeter ensign, as the custom was among gentlemen of the sea. Then he dropped his boat and went aboard.

Captain Sharkey was not a man of a genial mood, nor had he any kindly sympathy for those who were of the same trade as himself. Copley Banks found him seated astride upon one of the after guns, with his New England quartermaster, Ned Galloway, and a crowd of roaring ruffians standing about him. Yet none of them roared with quite such assurance when Sharkey’s pale face and filmy blue eyes were tuned upon him. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with his cambric frills breaking through his open red satin long-flapped vest. The scorching sun seemed to have no power upon his fleshless frame, for he wore a low fur cap, as though it had been winter. A many-coloured band of silk passed across his body and supported a short, murderous sword, while his broad, brass-buckled belt was stuffed with pistols.

“Sink you for a poacher!” he cried, as Copley Banks passed over the bulwarks. “I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! What mean you by fishing in my waters?”

Copley Banks looked at him, and his eyes were like those of a traveller who sees his home at last. “I am glad that we are of one mind,” said he, “for I am myself of opinion that the seas are not large enough for the two of us. But if you will take your sword and pistols and come upon a sand-bank with me, then the world will be rid of a damned villain, whichever way it goes.”

“Now, this is talking!” said Sharkey, jumping off the gun and holding out his hand. “I have not met many who could look John Sharkey in the eyes and speak with a full breath. May the devil seize me if I do not choose you as a consort! But if you play me false, then I will come aboard of you and gut you upon your own poop.”

“And I pledge you the same!” said Copley Banks, and so the two pirates became sworn comrades to each other.

That summer they went north as far as the Newfoundland Banks, and harried the New York traders and the whale ships from New England. It was Copley Banks who captured the Liverpool ship, *House of Hanover*, but it was Sharkey who fastened her master to the windlass and pelted him to death with empty claret-bottles.

Together they engaged the King’s ship *Royal Fortune*, which had been sent in search of them, and beat her off after a night action of five hours, the drunken, raving crews fighting naked in the light of the battle-lanterns, with a bucket of rum and a pannikin laid by the tackles of every gun. They ran to Topsail Inlet in North Carolina to refit, and then in the spring they were at the Grand Caicos, ready for a long cruise down the West Indies.

By this time Sharkey and Copley Banks had become very excellent friends, for Sharkey loved a whole-hearted villain, and he loved a man of metal, and it seemed to him that the two met in the captain of the *Ruffling Harry*. It was long before he gave his confidence to him, for cold suspicion lay deep in his character. Never once would he trust himself outside his own ship and away from his own men. But Copley Banks came often on board the *Happy Delivery*, and joined Sharkey in many of his morose debauches, so that at last any lingering misgivings of the latter were set at rest. He knew nothing of the evil that he had done to his new boon companion, for of his many victims how could he remember the woman and the two boys whom he had slain with such levity so long ago! When, therefore, he received a challenge to himself and to his quartermaster for a carouse upon the last evening of their stay at the Caicos Bank he saw no reason to refuse.

A well-found passenger ship had been rifled the week before, so their fare was of the best, and after supper five of them drank deeply together. There were the two captains, Birthmark Sweetlocks, Ned Galloway, and Israel Martin, the old buccaneers-man. To wait upon them was the dumb steward, whose head Sharkey split with a glass, because he had been too slow in the filling of it. The quarter-master has slipped Sharkey’s pistols away from him, for it was an old joke with him to fire them cross-handed under the table and see who was the luckiest man. It was a pleasantry which had cost his boatswain his leg, so now, when the table was cleared, they would coax Sharkey’s weapons away from him on the excuse of the heat, and lay them out of his reach.

The captain’s cabin of the *Ruffling Harry* was in a deck-house upon the poop, and a stern-chaser gun was mounted at the back of it. Round shot were racked round the wall, and three great hogsheads of powder made a stand for dishes and for bottles. In this grim room the five pirates sang and roared and drank, while the silent steward still filled up their glasses, and passed the box and the candle round for their tobacco-pipes. Hour after hour the talk became fouler, the voices hoarser, the curses and shoutings more incoherent, until three of the five had closed their blood-shot eyes, and dropped their swimming heads upon the table.

Copley Banks and Sharkey were left face to face, the one because he had drunk the least, the other because no amount of liquor would ever shake his iron nerve or warm his sluggish blood. Behind him stood the watchful steward, for ever filling up his waning glass. From without came the low lapping of the tide, and from over the water a sailor’s chanty from the barque. In the windless tropical night the words came clearly to their ears: —

A trader sailed from Stepney Town,
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the mainsail!
A trader sailed from Stepney Town
With a keg full of gold and a velvet gown.
Ho, the bully Rover Jack,
Waiting with his yard aback
Out upon the Lowland Sea.

The two boon companions sat listening in silence. Then Copley Banks glanced at the steward, and the man took a coil of rope from the shot-rack behind him.

“Captain Sharkey,” said Copley Banks, “do you remember the *Duchess of Cornwall*, hailing from London, which you took and sank three years ago off the Statira Shoal?”

“Curse me if I can bear their names in mind,” said Sharkey. “We did as many as ten ships a week about that time.”

“There were a mother and two sons among the passengers. Maybe that will bring it back to your mind.”

Captain Sharkey leant back in thought, with his huge thin beak of a nose jutting upwards. Then he burst suddenly into a high treble, neighing laugh. He remembered it, he said, and he added details to prove it. “But burn me if it had not slipped from my mind!” he cried. “How came you to think of it?”

“It was of interest to me,” said Copley Banks, “for the woman was my wife, and the lads were my only sons.”

Sharkey stared across at his companion, and saw that the smouldering fire which lurked always in his eyes had burned up into a lurid flame. He read their menace, and he clapped his hands to his empty belt. Then he turned to seize a weapon, but the bight of a rope was cast round him, and in an instant his arms were bound to his side. He fought like a wild cat, and screamed for help. “Ned!” he yelled. “Ned! Wake up! Here’s damned villainy! Help, Ned! — help!”

But the three men were far too deeply sunk in their swinish sleep for any voice to wake them. Round and round went the rope, until Sharkey was swathed like a mummy from ankle to neck. They propped him stiff and helpless against a powder barrel, and they gagged him with a handkerchief, but his filmy, red-rimmed eyes still looked curses at them. The dumb man chattered in his exultation, and Sharkey winced for the first time when he saw the empty mouth before him. He understood that vengeance, slow and patient, had dogged him long, and clutched him at last.

The two captors had their plans all arranged, and they were somewhat elaborate. First of all they stove the heads of two of the great powder barrels, and they heaped the contents out upon the table and floor. They piled it round and under the three drunken men, until each sprawled in a heap of it. Then they carried Sharkey to the gun and they triced him sitting over the port-hole, with his body about a foot from the muzzle. Wriggle as he would he could not move an inch either to the right or left, and the dumb man trussed him up with a sailor’s cunning, so that there was no chance that he should work free.

“Now, you bloody devil,” said Copley Banks, softly, “you must listen to what I have to say to you, for they are the last words that you will hear. You are my man now, and I have bought you at a price, for I have given all that a man can give here below, and I have given my soul as well.

“To reach you I have had to sink to your level. For two years I strove against it, hoping that some other way might come, but I learnt that there was no other. I’ve robbed and I have murdered — worse still, I have laughed and lived with you — and all for the one end. And now my time has come, and you will die as I would have you die, seeing the shadow creeping upon you and the devil waiting for you in the shadow.”

Sharkey could hear the hoarse voices of his rovers singing their chanty over the water.

Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stick a-bending!
Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
His gold’s on the capstan, his blood’s on his gown,
All for bully Rover Jack,
Reaching on the weather tack
Right across the Lowland Sea.

The words came clear to his ear, and just outside he could hear two men pacing backwards and forwards upon the deck. And yet he was helpless, staring down the mouth of the nine-pounder, unable to move an inch or to utter so much as a groan. Again there came the burst of voices from the deck of the barque.

So it’s up and it’s over to Stornoway Bay,
Pack it on! Crack it on! Try her with stunsails!
It’s off on a bowline to Stornoway Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay,
Waiting for their bully Jack,
Watching for him sailing back,
Right across the Lowland Sea.

To the dying pirate the jovial words and rollicking tune made his own fate seem the harsher, but there was no softening in those venomous blue eyes. Copley Banks had brushed away the priming of the gun, and had sprinkled fresh powder over the touch-hole. Then he had taken up the candle and cut it to the length of about an inch. This he placed upon the loose powder at the breach of the gun. Thin he scattered powder thickly over the floor beneath, so that when the candle fell at the recoil it must explode the huge pile in which the three drunkards were wallowing.

“You’ve made others look death in the face, Sharkey,” said he; “now it has come to be your own turn. You and these swine here shall go together!” He lit the candle-end as he spoke, and blew out the other lights upon the table. Then he passed out with the dumb man, and locked the cabin door upon the outer side. But before he closed it he took an exultant look backwards, and received one last curse from those unconquerable eyes. In the single dim circle of light that ivory-white face, with the gleam of moisture upon the high, bald forehead, was the last that was ever seen of Sharkey.

There was a skiff alongside, and in it Copley Banks and the dumb steward made their way to the beach, and looked back upon the brig riding in the moon-light just outside the shadow of the palm trees. They waited and waited watching that dim light which shone through the stem port. And then at last there came the dull thud of a gun, and an instant later the shattering crash of an explosion. The long, sleek, black barque, the sweep of white sand, and the fringe of nodding feathery palm trees sprang into dazzling light and back into darkness again. Voices screamed and called upon the bay.

Then Copley Banks, his heart singing within him, touched his companion upon the shoulder, and they plunged together into the lonely jungle of the Caicos.

THE CROXLEY MASTER

Mr. Robert Montgomery was seated at his desk, his head upon his hands, in a state of the blackest despondency. Before him was the open ledger with the long columns of Dr. Oldacre's prescriptions. At his elbow lay the wooden tray with the labels in various partitions, the cork box, the lumps of twisted sealing-wax, while in front a rank of bottles waited to be filled. But his spirits were too low for work. He sat in silence with his fine shoulders bowed and his head upon his hands.

Outside, through the grimy surgery window over a foreground of blackened brick and slate, a line of enormous chimneys like Cyclopean pillars upheld the lowering, dun-coloured cloud-bank. For six days in the week they spouted smoke, but to-day the furnace fires were banked, for it was Sunday. Sordid and polluting gloom hung over a district blighted and blasted by the greed of man. There was nothing in the surroundings to cheer a desponding soul, but it was more than his dismal environment which weighed upon the medical assistant. His trouble was deeper and more personal. The winter session was approaching. He should be back again at the University completing the last year which would give him his medical degree; but, alas! he had not the money with which to pay his class fees, nor could he imagine how he could procure it. Sixty pounds were wanted to make his career, and it might have been as many thousand for any chance there seemed to be of his obtaining it. He was roused from his black meditation by the entrance of Dr. Oldacre himself, a large, clean-shaven, respectable man, with a prim manner and an austere face. He had prospered exceedingly by the support of the local Church interest, and the rule of his life was never by word or action to run a risk of offending the sentiment which had made him. His standard of respectability and of dignity was exceedingly high, and he expected the same from his assistants. His appearance and words were always vaguely benevolent. A sudden impulse came over the despondent student. He would test the reality of this philanthropy.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Oldacre," said he, rising from his chair;
"I have a great favour to ask of you."

The doctor’s appearance was not encouraging. His mouth suddenly tightened, and his eyes fell.

“Yes, Mr. Montgomery?”

“You are aware, sir, that I need only one more session to complete my course.”

“So you have told me.”

“It is very important to me, sir.”

“Naturally.”

“The fees, Dr. Oldacre, would amount to about sixty pounds.”

“I am afraid that my duties call me elsewhere, Mr. Montgomery.”

“One moment, sir! I had hoped, sir, that perhaps, if I signed a paper promising you interest upon your money, you would advance this sum to me. I will pay you back, sir, I really will. Or, if you like, I will work it off after I am qualified.”

The doctor’s lips had thinned into a narrow line. His eyes were raised again, and sparkled indignantly.

“Your request is unreasonable, Mr. Montgomery. I am surprised that you should have made it. Consider, sir, how many thousands of medical students there are in this country. No doubt there are many of them who have a difficulty in finding their fees. Am I to provide for them all? Or why should I make an exception in your favour? I am grieved and disappointed, Mr. Montgomery, that you should have put me into the painful position of having to refuse you.” He turned upon his heel, and walked with offended dignity out of the surgery.

The student smiled bitterly, and turned to his work of making up the morning prescriptions. It was poor and unworthy work — work which any weakling might have done as well, and this was a man of exceptional nerve and sinew. But, such as it was, it brought him his board and One pound a week — enough to help him during the summer months and let him save a few pounds towards his winter keep. But those class fees! Where were they to come from? He could not save them out of his scanty wage. Dr. Oldacre would not advance them. He saw no way of earning them. His brains were fairly good, but brains of that quality were a drug in the market. He only excelled in his strength, and where was he to find a customer for that? But the ways of Fate are strange, and his customer was at hand.

“Look y’ere!” said a voice at the door. Montgomery looked up, for the voice was a loud and rasping one. A young man stood at the entrance — a stocky, bull-necked young miner, in tweed Sunday clothes and an aggressive neck-tie. He was a sinister-looking figure, with dark, insolent eyes, and the jaw and throat of a bulldog.

"Look y'ere!" said he again. "Why hast thou not sent t' medicine oop as thy master ordered?"

Montgomery had become accustomed to the brutal frankness of the northern worker. At first it had enraged him, but after a time he had grown callous to it, and accepted it as it was meant. But this was something different. It was insolence — brutal, overbearing insolence, with physical menace behind it.

"What name?" he asked coldly.

"Barton. Happen I may give thee cause to mind that name, yoong man. Mak' oop t' wife's medicine this very moment, look ye, or it will be the worse for thee."

Montgomery smiled. A pleasant sense of relief thrilled softly through him. What blessed safety-valve was this through which his jangled nerves might find some outlet. The provocation was so gross, the insult so unprovoked, that he could have none of those qualms which take the edge off a man's mettle. He finished sealing the bottle upon which he was occupied, and he addressed it and placed it carefully in the rack. "Look here!" said he, turning round to the miner, "your medicine will be made up in its turn and sent down to you. I don't allow folk in the surgery. Wait outside in the waiting-room if you wish to wait at all."

"Yoong man," said the miner, "thou's got to mak' t' wife's medicine here, and now, and quick, while I wait and watch thee, or else happen thou might need some medicine thysel' before all is over."

"I shouldn't advise you to fasten a quarrel upon me." Montgomery was speaking in the hard, staccato voice of a man who is holding himself in with difficulty. "You'll save trouble if you'll go quietly. If you don't you'll be hurt. Ah, you would? Take it, then!"

The blows were almost simultaneous — a savage swing which whistled past Montgomery's ear, and a straight drive which took the workman on the chin. Luck was with the assistant. That single whizzing uppercut, and the way in which it was delivered, warned him that he had a formidable man to deal with. But if he had underrated his antagonist, his antagonist had also underrated him, and had laid himself open to a fatal blow.

The miner’s head had come with a crash against the corner of the surgery shelves, and he had dropped heavily on to the ground. There he lay with his bandy legs drawn up and his hands thrown abroad, the blood trickling over the surgery tiles.

“Had enough?” asked the assistant, breathing fiercely through his nose.

But no answer came. The man was insensible. And then the danger of his position came upon Montgomery, and he turned as white as his antagonist. A Sunday, the immaculate Dr. Oldacre with his pious connection, a savage brawl with a patient; he would irretrievably lose his situation if the facts came out. It was not much of a situation, but he could not get another without a reference, and Oldacre might refuse him one. Without money for his classes, and without a situation — what was to become of him? It was absolute ruin.

But perhaps he could escape exposure after all. He seized his insensible adversary, dragged him out into the centre of he room, loosened his collar, and squeezed the surgery sponge over his face. He sat up at last with a gasp and a scowl. “Domn thee, thou’s spoilt my neck-tie,” said he, mopping up the water from his breast.

“I’m sorry I hit you so hard,” said Montgomery, apologetically.

“Thou hit me hard! I could stan’ such fly-flappin’ all day. ‘Twas this here press that cracked my pate for me, and thou art a looky man to be able to boast as thou hast outed me. And now I’d be obliged to thee if thou wilt give me t’ wife’s medicine.”

Montgomery gladly made it up and handed it to the miner.

“You are weak still,” said he. “Won’t you stay awhile and rest?”

“T’ wife wants her medicine,” said the man, and lurched out at the door.

The assistant, looking after him, saw him rolling, with an uncertain step, down the street, until a friend met him, and they walked on arm in arm. The man seemed in his rough Northern fashion to bear no grudge, and so Montgomery’s fears left him. There was no reason why the doctor should know anything about it. He wiped the blood from the floor, put the surgery in order, and went on with his interrupted task, hoping that he had come scathless out of a very dangerous business.

Yet all day he was aware of a sense of vague uneasiness, which sharpened into dismay when, late in the afternoon, he was informed that three gentlemen had called and were waiting for him in the surgery. A coroner’s inquest, a descent of detectives, an invasion of angry relatives —

all sorts of possibilities rose to scare him. With tense nerves and a rigid face he went to meet his visitors.

They were a very singular trio. Each was known to him by sight; but what on earth the three could be doing together, and, above all, what they could expect from *him*, was a most inexplicable problem. The first was Sorley Wilson, the son of the owner of the Nonpareil Coalpit. He was a young blood of twenty, heir to a fortune, a keen sportsman, and down for the Easter Vacation from Magdalene College. He sat now upon the edge of the surgery table, looking in thoughtful silence at Montgomery and twisting the ends of his small, black, waxed moustache. The second was Purvis, the publican, owner of the chief beer-shop, and well known as the local bookmaker. He was a coarse, clean-shaven man, whose fiery face made a singular contrast with his ivory-white bald head. He had shrewd, light-blue eyes with foxy lashes, and he also leaned forward in silence from his chair, a fat, red hand upon either knee, and stared critically at the young assistant. So did the third visitor, Fawcett, the horse-breaker, who leaned back, his long, thin legs, with their boxcloth riding-gaiters, thrust out in front of him, tapping his protruding teeth with his riding-whip, with anxious thought in every line of his rugged, bony face. Publican, exquisite, and horse-breaker were all three equally silent, equally earnest, and equally critical. Montgomery seated in the midst of them, looked from one to the other.

"Well, gentlemen?" he observed, but no answer came.

The position was embarrassing.

"No," said the horse-breaker, at last. "No. It's off. It's nowt."

"Stand oop, lad; let's see thee standin'." It was the publican who spoke. Montgomery obeyed. He would learn all about it, no doubt, if he were patient. He stood up and turned slowly round, as if in front of his tailor.

"It's off! It's off!" cried the horse-breaker. "Why, mon, the Master would break him over his knee."

"Oh, that be hanged for a yarn!" said the young Cantab. "You can drop out if you like, Fawcett, but I'll see this thing through, if I have to do it alone. I don't hedge a penny. I like the cut of him a great deal better than I liked Ted Barton."

"Look at Barton's shoulders, Mr. Wilson."

"Lumpiness isn't always strength. Give me nerve and fire and breed. That's what wins."

"Ay, sir, you have it theer — you have it theer!" said the fat, red-faced publican, in a thick suety voice. "It's the same wi' poops. Get 'em clean-bred an' fine, an' they'll yark the thick 'uns — yark 'em out o' their skins."

"He's ten good pund on the light side," growled the horse-breaker.

"He's a welter weight, anyhow."

"A hundred and thirty."

"A hundred and fifty, if he's an ounce."

"Well, the Master doesn't scale much more than that."

"A hundred and seventy-five."

"That was when he was hog-fat and living high. Work the grease out of him and I lay there's no great difference between them. Have you been weighed lately, Mr. Montgomery?"

It was the first direct question which had been asked him. He had stood in the midst of them like a horse at a fair, and he was just beginning to wonder whether he was more angry or amused.

"I am just eleven stone," said he.

"I said that he was a welter weight."

"But suppose you was trained?" said the publican. "Wot then?"

"I am always in training."

"In a manner of speakin', no doubt, he *is* always in trainin'," remarked the horse-breaker. "But trainin' for everyday work ain't the same as trainin' with a trainer; and I dare bet, with all respec' to your opinion, Mr. Wilson, that there's half a stone of tallow on him at this minute."

The young Cantab put his fingers on the assistant's upper arm, then with his other hand on his wrist, he bent the forearm sharply, and felt the biceps, as round and hard as a cricket-ball, spring up under his fingers.

"Feel that!" said he.

The publican and horse-breaker felt it with an air of reverence. "Good lad! He'll do yet!" cried Purvis.

"Gentlemen," said Montgomery, "I think that you will acknowledge that I have boon very patient with you. I have listened to all that you have to say about my personal appearance, and now I must really beg that you will have the goodness to tell me what is the matter."

They all sat down in their serious, business-like way.

"That's easy done, Mr. Montgomery," said the fat-voiced publican. "But before sayin' anything we had to wait and see whether, in a way of speakin’, there was any need for us to say anything at all. Mr. Wilson thinks there is. Mr. Fawcett, who has the same right to his opinion, bein’ also a backer and one o’ the committee, thinks the other way.”

“I thought him too light built, and I think so now,” said the horse-breaker, still tapping his prominent teeth with the metal head of his riding-whip. “But happen he may pull through, and he’s a fine-made, buirdly young chap, so if you mean to back him, Mr. Wilson —

“Which I do.”

“And you, Purvis?”

“I ain’t one to go back, Fawcett.”

“Well, I’ll stan’ to my share of the purse.”

“And well I knew you would,” said Purvis, “for it would be somethin’ new to find Isaac Fawcett as a spoil-sport. Well, then, we will make up the hundred for the stake among us, and the fight stands — always supposin’ the young man is willin’.”

“Excuse all this rot, Mr. Montgomery,” said the University man, in a genial voice. “We’ve begun at the wrong end, I know, but we’ll soon straighten it out, and I hope that you will see your way to falling in with our views. In the first place, you remember the man whom you knocked out this morning? He is Barton — the famous Ted Barton.”

“I’m sure, sir, you may well be proud to have outed him in one round,” said the publican. “Why, it took Morris, the ten-stone-six champion, a deal more trouble than that before he put Barton to sleep. You’ve done a fine performance, sir, and happen you’ll do a finer, if you give yourself the chance.”

“I never heard of Ted Barton, beyond seeing the name on a medicine label,” said the assistant.

“Well, you may take it from me that he’s a slaughterer,” said the horse-breaker. “You’ve taught him a lesson that he needed, for it was always a word and a blow with him, and the word alone was worth five shillin’ in a public court. He won’t be so ready now to shake his nief in the face of everyone he meets. However, that’s neither here nor there.”

Montgomery looked at them in bewilderment.

“For goodness’ sake, gentlemen, tell me what it is you want me to do!” he cried.

“We want you to fight Silas Craggs, better known as the Master of
Croxley.”

“But why?”

“Because Ted Barton was to have fought him next Saturday. He was the champion of the Wilson coal-pits, and the other was the Master of the iron-folk down at the Croxley smelters. We’d matched our man for a purse of a hundred against the Master. But you’ve queered our man, and he can’t face such a battle with a two-inch cut at the back of his head. There’s only one thing to be done, sir, and that is for you to take his place. If you can lick Ted Barton you may lick the Master of Croxley, but if you don’t we’re done, for there’s no one else who is in the same street with him in this district. It’s twenty rounds, two-ounce gloves, Queensberry rules, and a decision on points if you fight to the finish.”

For a moment the absurdity of the thing drove every other thought out of Montgomery’s head. But then there came a sudden revulsion. A hundred pounds! — all he wanted to complete his education was lying there ready to his hand, if only that hand were strong enough to pick it up. He had thought bitterly that morning that there was no market for his strength, but here was one where his muscle might earn more in an hour than his brains in a year. But a chill of doubt came over him. “How can I fight for the coal-pits?” said he. “I am not connected with them.”

“Eh, lad, but thou art!” cried old Purvis. “We’ve got it down in
writin’, and it’s clear enough ‘Anyone connected with the coal-pits.’
Doctor Oldacre is the coal-pit club doctor; thou art his assistant.
What more can they want?”

“Yes, that’s right enough,” said the Cantab. “It would be a very sporting thing of you, Mr. Montgomery, if you would come to our help when we are in such a hole. Of course, you might not like to take the hundred pounds; but I have no doubt that, in the case of your winning, we could arrange that it should take the form of a watch or piece of plate, or any other shape which might suggest itself to you. You see, you are responsible for our having lost our champion, so we really feel that we have a claim upon you.”

“Give me a moment, gentlemen. It is very unexpected. I am afraid the doctor would never consent to my going — in fact, I am sure that he would not.”

“But he need never know — not before the fight, at any rate. We are not bound to give the name of our man. So long as he is within the weight limits on the day of the fight, that is all that concerns anyone.”

The adventure and the profit would either of them have attracted Montgomery. The two combined were irresistible. “Gentlemen,” said he, “I’ll do it!”

The three sprang from their seats. The publican had seized his right hand, the horse-dealer his left, and the Cantab slapped him on the back.

“Good lad! good lad!” croaked the publican. “Eh, mon, but if thou yark him, thou’ll rise in one day from being just a common doctor to the best-known mon ‘twixt here and Bradford. Thou art a witherin’ tyke, thou art, and no mistake; and if thou beat the Master of Croxley, thou’ll find all the beer thou want for the rest of thy life waiting for thee at the ‘Four Sacks.’”

“It is the most sporting thing I ever heard of in my life,” said young Wilson. “By George, sir, if you pull it off, you’ve got the constituency in your pocket, if you care to stand. You know the out-house in my garden?”

“Next the road?”

“Exactly. I turned it into a gymnasium for Ted Barton. You’ll find all you want there: clubs, punching ball, bars, dumb-bells, everything. Then you’ll want a sparring partner. Ogilvy has been acting for Barton, but we don’t think that he is class enough. Barton bears you no grudge. He’s a good-hearted fellow, though cross-grained with strangers. He looked upon you as a stranger this morning, but he says he knows you now. He is quite ready to spar with you for practice, and he will come any hour you will name.”

“Thank you; I will let you know the hour,” said Montgomery; and so the committee departed jubilant upon their way.

The medical assistant sat for a time in the surgery turning it over a little in his mind. He had been trained originally at the University by the man who had been middle-weight champion in his day. It was true that his teacher was long past his prime, slow upon his feet, and stiff in his joints, but even so he was still a tough antagonist; but Montgomery had found at last that he could more than hold his own with him. He had won the University medal, and his teacher, who had trained so many students, was emphatic in his opinion that he had never had one who was in the same class with him. He had been exhorted to go in for the Amateur Championships, but he had no particular ambition in that direction. Once he had put on the gloves with Hammer Tunstall in a booth at a fair and had fought three rattling rounds, in which he had the worst of it, but had made the prize fighter stretch himself to the uttermost. There was his whole record, and was it enough to encourage him to stand up to the Master of Croxley? He had never heard of the Master before, but then he had lost touch of the ring during the last few years of hard work. After all, what did it matter? If he won, there was the money, which meant so much to him. If he lost, it would only mean a thrashing. He could take punishment without flinching, of that he was certain. If there were only one chance in a hundred of pulling it off, then it was worth his while to attempt it.

Dr. Oldacre, new come from church, with an ostentatious Prayer-book in his kid-gloved hand, broke in upon his meditation.

“You don’t go to service, I observe, Mr. Montgomery” said he, coldly.

“No, sir; I have had some business to detain me.”

“It is very near to my heart that my household should set a good example. There are so few educated people in this district that a great responsibility devolves upon us. If we do not live up to the highest, how can we expect these poor workers to do so? It is a dreadful thing to reflect that the parish takes a great deal more interest in an approaching glove fight than in their religious duties.”

“A glove fight, sir?” said Montgomery, guiltily.

“I believe that to be the correct term. One of my patients tells me that it is the talk of the district. A local ruffian, a patient of ours, by the way, matched against a pugilist over at Croxley. I cannot understand why the law does not step in and stop so degrading an exhibition. It is really a prize fight.”

“A glove fight, you said.”

“I am informed that a 2oz. glove is an evasion by which they dodge the law, and make it difficult for the police to interfere. They contend for a sum of money. It seems dreadful and almost incredible — does it not? — to think that such scenes can be enacted within a few miles of our peaceful home. But you will realise, Mr. Montgomery, that while there are such influences for us to counteract, it is very necessary that we should live up to our highest.”

The doctor’s sermon would have had more effect if the assistant had not once or twice had occasion to test his highest, and come upon it at unexpectedly humble elevations. It is always so particularly easy to “compound for sins we’re most inclined to by damning those we have no mind to.” In any case, Montgomery felt that of all the men concerned in such a fight — promoters, backers, spectators — it is the actual fighter who holds the strongest and most honourable position. His conscience gave him no concern upon the subject. Endurance and courage are virtues, not vices, and brutality is, at least, better than effeminacy.

There was a little tobacco-shop at the corner of the street, where Montgomery got his bird’s-eye and also his local information, for the shopman was a garrulous soul, who knew everything about the affairs of the district. The assistant strolled down there after tea and asked, in a casual way, whether the tobacconist had ever heard of the Master of Croxley.

“Heard of him! Heard of him!” the little man could hardly articulate in his astonishment. “Why, sir, he’s the first mon o’ the district, an’ his name’s as well known in the West Riding as the winner o’ t’ Derby. But Lor,’ sir,” — here he stopped and rummaged among a heap of papers. “They are makin’ a fuss about him on account o’ his fight wi’ Ted Barton, and so the *Croxley Herald* has his life an’ record, an’ here it is, an’ thou canst read it for thysel’”

The sheet of the paper which he held up was a lake of print around an islet of illustration. The latter was a coarse wood-cut of a pugilist’s head and neck set in a cross-barred jersey. It was a sinister but powerful face, the face of a debauched hero, clean-shaven, strongly eye-browed, keen-eyed, with huge, aggressive jaw, and an animal dewlap beneath it. The long, obstinate cheeks ran flush up to the narrow, sinister eyes. The mighty neck came down square from the ears and curved outwards into shoulders, which had lost nothing at the hands of the local artist. Above was written “Silas Craggs,” and beneath, “The Master of Croxley.”

“Thou’ll find all about him there, sir,” said the tobacconist. “He’s a witherin’ tyke, he is, and we’re proud to have him in the county. If he hadn’t broke his leg he’d have been champion of England.”

“Broke his leg, has he?”

“Yes, and it set badly. They ca’ him owd K, behind his back, for that is how his two legs look. But his arms — well, if they was both stropped to a bench, as the sayin’ is, I wonder where the champion of England would be then.”

“I’ll take this with me,” said Montgomery; and putting the paper into his pocket he returned home.

It was not a cheering record which he read there. The whole history of the Croxley Master was given in full, his many victories, his few defeats.

Born in 1857 (said the provincial biographer), Silas Craggs, better known in sporting circles as the Master of Croxley, is now in his fortieth year.

“Hang it, I’m only twenty-three!” said Montgomery to himself, and read on more cheerfully.

Having in his youth shown a surprising aptitude for the game, he fought his way up among his comrades, until he became the recognised champion of the district and won the proud title which he still holds. Ambitious of a more than local fame, he secured a patron, and fought his first fight against Jack Barton, of Birmingham, in May 1880, at the old Loiterers’ Club. Craggs, who fought at ten stone-two at the time, had the better of fifteen rattling rounds, and gained an award on points against the Midlander. Having disposed of James Dunn, of Rotherhithe, Cameron, of Glasgow, and a youth named Fernie, he was thought so highly of by the fancy that he was matched against Ernest Willox, at that time middle-weight champion of the North of England, and defeated him in a hard-fought battle, knocking him out in the tenth round after a punishing contest. At this period it looked as if the very highest honours of the ring were within the reach of the young Yorkshireman, but he was laid upon the shelf by a most unfortunate accident. The kick of a horse broke his thigh, and for a year he was compelled to rest himself. When he returned to his work the fracture had set badly, and his activity was much impaired. It was owing to this that he was defeated in seven rounds by Willox, the man whom he had previously beaten, and afterwards by James Shaw, of London, though the latter acknowledged that he had found the toughest customer of his career. Undismayed by his reverses, the Master adapted the style of his fighting to his physical disabilities and resumed his career of victory — defeating Norton (the black), Hobby Wilson, and Levi Cohen, the latter a heavy-weight. Conceding two stone, he fought a draw with the famous Billy McQuire, and afterwards, for a purse of fifty pounds, he defeated Sam Hare at the Pelican Club, London. In 1891 a decision was given against him upon a foul when fighting a winning fight against Jim Taylor, the Australian middle weight, and so mortified was he by the decision, that he withdrew from the ring. Since then he has hardly fought at all save to accommodate any local aspirant who may wish to learn the difference between a bar-room scramble and a scientific contest. The latest of these ambitious souls comes from the Wilson coal-pits, which have undertaken to put up a stake of 100 pounds and back their local champion. There are various rumours afloat as to who their representative is to be, the name of Ted Barton being freely mentioned; but the betting, which is seven to one on the Master against any untried man, is a fair reflection of the feeling of the community.

Montgomery read it over twice, and it left him with a very serious face. No light matter this which he had undertaken; no battle with a rough-and-tumble fighter who presumed upon a local reputation. The man's record showed that he was first-class — or nearly so. There were a few points in his favour, and he must make the most of them. There was age — twenty-three against forty. There was an old ring proverb that "Youth will be served," but the annals of the ring offer a great number of exceptions. A hard veteran full of cool valour and ring-craft, could give ten or fifteen years and a beating to most striplings. He could not rely too much upon his advantage in age. But then there was the lameness; that must surely count for a great deal. And, lastly, there was the chance that the Master might underrate his opponent, that he might be remiss in his training, and refuse to abandon his usual way of life, if he thought that he had an easy task before him. In a man of his age and habits this seemed very possible. Montgomery prayed that it might be so. Meanwhile, if his opponent were the best man who ever jumped the ropes into a ring, his own duty was clear. He must prepare himself carefully, throw away no chance, and do the very best that he could. But he knew enough to appreciate the difference which exists in boxing, as in every sport, between the amateur and the professional. The coolness, the power of hitting, above all the capability of taking punishment, count for so much. Those specially developed, gutta-percha-like abdominal muscles of the hardened pugilist will take without flinching a blow which would leave another man writhing on the ground. Such things are not to be acquired in a week, but all that could be done in a week should be done.

The medical assistant had a good basis to start from. He was 5ft. 11 ins. — tall enough for anything on two legs, as the old ring men used to say — lithe and spare, with the activity of a panther, and a strength which had hardly yet ever found its limitations. His muscular development was finely hard, but his power came rather from that higher nerve-energy which counts for nothing upon a measuring tape. He had the well-curved nose and the widely opened eye which never yet were seen upon the face of a craven, and behind everything he had the driving force, which came from the knowledge that his whole career was at stake upon the contest. The three backers rubbed their hands when they saw him at work punching the ball in the gymnasium next morning; and Fawcett, the horse-breaker, who had written to Leeds to hedge his bets, sent a wire to cancel the letter, and to lay another fifty at the market price of seven to one.

Montgomery's chief difficulty was to find time for his training without any interference from the doctor. His work took him a large part of the day, but as the visiting was done on foot, and considerable distances had to be traversed, it was a training in itself. For the rest, he punched the swinging ball and worked with the dumb-bells for an hour every morning and evening, and boxed twice a day with Ted Barton in the gymnasium, gaining as much profit as could be got from a rushing, two-handed slogger. Barton was full of admiration for his cleverness and quickness, but doubtful about his strength. Hard hitting was the feature of his own style, and he exacted it from others.

"Lord, sir, that's a turble poor poonch for an eleven-stone man!" he would cry. "Thou wilt have to hit harder than that afore t' Master will know that thou art theer. All, thot's better, mon, thot's fine!" he would add, as his opponent lifted him across the room on the end of a right counter. "Thot's how I likes to feel 'em. Happen thou'lt pull through yet." He chuckled with joy when Montgomery knocked him into a corner. "Eh, mon, thou art coming along grand. Thou hast fair yarked me off my legs. Do it again, lad, do it again!"

The only part of Montgomery's training which came within the doctor's observation was his diet, and that puzzled him considerably.

"You will excuse my remarking, Mr. Montgomery, that you are becoming rather particular in your tastes. Such fads are not to be encouraged in one's youth. Why do you eat toast with every meal?"

"I find that it suits me better than bread, sir."

"It entails unnecessary work upon the cook. I observe, also, that you have turned against potatoes."

"Yes, sir; I think that I am better without them."

"And you no longer drink your beer?"

"No, sir."

"These causeless whims and fancies are very much to be deprecated, Mr. Montgomery. Consider how many there are to whom these very potatoes and this very beer would be most acceptable.”

“No doubt, sir, but at present I prefer to do without them.”

They were sitting alone at lunch, and the assistant thought that it would be a good opportunity of asking leave for the day of the fight.

“I should be glad if you could let me have leave for Saturday, Dr. Oldacre.”

“It is very inconvenient upon so busy a day.”

“I should do a double day’s work on Friday so as to leave everything in order. I should hope to be back in the evening.”

“I am afraid I cannot spare you, Mr. Montgomery.”

This was a facer. If he could not get leave he would go without it.

“You will remember, Dr. Oldacre, that when I came to you it was understood that I should have a clear day every month. I have never claimed one. But now there are reasons why I wish to have a holiday upon Saturday.”

Dr. Oldacre gave in with a very bad grace. “Of course, if you insist upon your formal rights, there is no more to be said, Mr. Montgomery, though I feel that it shows a certain indifference to my comfort and the welfare of the practice. Do you still insist?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very good. Have your way.”

The doctor was boiling over with anger, but Montgomery was a valuable assistant — steady, capable, and hardworking — and he could not afford to lose him. Even if he had been prompted to advance those class fees, for which his assistant had appealed, it would have been against his interests to do so, for he did not wish him to qualify, and he desired him to remain in his subordinate position, in which he worked so hard for so small a wage. There was something in the cool insistence of the young man, a quiet resolution in his voice as he claimed his Saturday, which aroused his curiosity.

“I have no desire to interfere unduly with your affairs, Mr. Montgomery, but were you thinking of having a day in Leeds upon Saturday?”

“No, sir.

“In the country?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are very wise. You will find a quiet day among the wild flowers a very valuable restorative. Have you thought of any particular direction?”

“I am going over Croxley way.”

“Well, there is no prettier country when once you are past the iron-works. What could be more delightful than to lie upon the Fells, basking in the sunshine, with perhaps some instructive and elevating book as your companion? I should recommend a visit to the ruins of St. Bridget’s Church, a very interesting relic of the early Norman era. By the way, there is one objection which I see to your going to Croxley on Saturday. It is upon that date, as I am informed, that that ruffianly glove fight takes place. You may find yourself molested by the blackguards whom it will attract.”

“I will take my chance of that, sir,” said the assistant.

On the Friday night, which was the last night before the fight, Montgomery’s three backers assembled in the gymnasium and inspected their man as he went through some light exercises to keep his muscles supple. He was certainly in splendid condition, his skin shining with health, and his eyes with energy and confidence. The three walked round him and exulted.

“He’s simply ripping!” said the undergraduate.

“By gad, you’ve come out of it splendidly. You’re as hard as a pebble, and fit to fight for your life.”

“Happen he’s a trifle on the fine side,” said the publican. “Runs a bit light at the loins, to my way of thinking’.”

“What weight to-day?”

“Ten stone eleven,” the assistant answered.

“That’s only three pund off in a week’s trainin’,” said the horse-breaker. “He said right when he said that he was in condition. Well, it’s fine stuff all there is of it, but I’m none so sure as there is enough.” He kept poking his finger into Montgomery as if he were one of his horses. “I hear that the Master will scale a hundred and sixty odd at the ring-side.”

“But there’s some of that which he’d like well to pull off and leave behind wi’ his shirt,” said Purvis. “I hear they’ve had a rare job to get him to drop his beer, and if it had not been for that great red-headed wench of his they’d never ha’ done it. She fair scratted the face off a potman that had brought him a gallon from t’ ‘Chequers.’ They say the hussy is his sparrin’ partner, as well as his sweetheart, and that his poor wife is just breakin’ her heart over it. Hullo, young ‘un, what do you want?”

The door of the gymnasium had opened and a lad, about sixteen, grimy and black with soot and iron, stepped into the yellow glare of the oil lamp. Ted Barton seized him by the collar.

"See here, thou yoong whelp, this is private, and we want noan o' thy spyin'!"

"But I maun speak to Mr. Wilson."

The young Cantab stepped forward.

"Well, my lad, what is it?"

"It's aboot t' fight, Mr. Wilson, sir. I wanted to tell your mon somethin' aboot t' Maister."

"We've no time to listen to gossip, my boy. We know all about the Master."

"But thou doan't, sir. Nobody knows but me and mother, and we thought as we'd like thy mon to know, sir, for we want him to fair bray him."

"Oh, you want the Master fair brayed, do you? So do we. Well, what have you to say?"

"Is this your mon, sir?"

"Well, suppose it is?"

"Then it's him I want to tell aboot it. T' Maister is blind o' the left eye."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir. Not stone blind, but rarely fogged. He keeps it secret, but mother knows, and so do I. If thou slip him on the left side he can't cop thee. Thou'll find it right as I tell thee. And mark him when he sinks his right. 'Tis his best blow, his right upper-cut. T' Maister's finisher, they ca' it at t' works. It's a turble blow when it do come home."

"Thank you, my boy. This is information worth having about his sight," said Wilson. "How came you to know so much? Who are you?"

"I'm his son, sir."

Wilson whistled.

"And who sent you to us?"

"My mother. I maun get back to her again."

"Take this half-crown."

"No, sir, I don't seek money in comin' here. I do it—"

"For love?" suggested the publican.

"For hate!" said the boy, and darted off into the darkness.

"Seems to me t' red-headed wench may do him more harm than good, after all," remarked the publican. "And now, Mr. Montgomery, sir, you've done enough for this evenin', an' a nine-hours' sleep is the best trainin' before a battle. Happen this time to-morrow night you'll be safe back again with your 100 pound in your pocket."

II

Work was struck at one o'clock at the coal-pits and the iron-works, and the fight was arranged for three. From the Croxley Furnaces, from Wilson's Coal-pits, from the Heartsease Mine, from the Dodd Mills, from the Leverworth Smelters the workmen came trooping, each with his fox-terrier or his lurcher at his heels. Warped with labour and twisted by toil, bent double by week-long work in the cramped coal galleries or half-blinded with years spent in front of white-hot fluid metal, these men still gilded their harsh and hopeless lives by their devotion to sport. It was their one relief, the only thing which could distract their minds from sordid surroundings, and give them an interest beyond the blackened circle which enclosed them. Literature, art, science, all these things were beyond their horizon; but the race, the football match, the cricket, the fight, these were things which they could understand, which they could speculate upon in advance and comment upon afterwards. Sometimes brutal, sometimes grotesque, the love of sport is still one of the great agencies which make for the happiness of our people. It lies very deeply in the springs of our nature, and when it has been educated out, a higher, more refined nature may be left, but it will not be of that robust British type which has left its mark so deeply on the world. Every one of these raddled workers, slouching with his dog at his heels to see something of the fight, was a true unit of his race.

It was a squally May day, with bright sunbursts and driving showers. Montgomery worked all morning in the surgery getting his medicine made up.

"The weather seems so very unsettled, Mr. Montgomery," remarked the doctor, "that I am inclined to think that you had better postpone your little country excursion until a later date."

"I am afraid that I must go to-day, sir."

"I have just had an intimation that Mrs. Potter, at the other side of Angleton, wishes to see me. It is probable that I shall be there all day. It will be extremely inconvenient to leave the house empty so long."

"I am very sorry, sir, but I must go," said the assistant, doggedly.

The doctor saw that it would be useless to argue, and departed in the worst of bad tempers upon mission. Montgomery felt easier now that he was gone. He went up to his room, and packed his running-shoes, his fighting-drawers, and his cricket sash into a hand-bag. When he came down, Mr. Wilson was waiting for him in the surgery. "I hear the doctor has gone."

"Yes; he is likely to be away all day."

"I don't see that it matters much. It's bound to come to his ears by to-night."

"Yes; it's serious with me, Mr. Wilson. If I win, it's all right. I don't mind telling you that the hundred pounds will make all the difference to me. But if I lose, I shall lose my situation, for, as you say, I can't keep it secret."

"Never mind. We'll see you through among us. I only wonder the doctor has not heard, for it's all over the country that you are to fight the Croxley Champion. We've had Armitage up about it already. He's the Master's backer, you know. He wasn't sure that you were eligible. The Master said he wanted you whether you were eligible or not. Armitage has money on, and would have made trouble if he could. But I showed him that you came within the conditions of the challenge, and he agreed that it was all right. They think they have a soft thing on."

"Well, I can only do my best," said Montgomery.

They lunched together; a silent and rather nervous repast, for Montgomery's mind was full of what was before him, and Wilson had himself more money at stake than he cared to lose.

Wilson's carriage and pair were at the door, the horses with blue and white rosettes at their ears, which were the colours of the Wilson Coal-pits, well known, on many a football field. At the avenue gate a crowd of some hundred pit-men and their wives gave a cheer as the carriage passed. To the assistant it all seemed dream-like and extraordinary — the strangest experience of his life, but with a thrill of human action and interest in it which made it passionately absorbing. He lay back in the open carriage and saw the fluttering handkerchiefs from the doors and windows of the miners' cottages. Wilson had pinned a blue and white rosette upon his coat, and everybody knew him as their champion. "Good luck, sir! good luck to thee!" they shouted from the roadside. He felt that it was like some unromantic knight riding down to sordid lists, but there was something of chivalry in it all the same. He fought for others as well as for himself. He might fail from want of skill or strength, but deep in his sombre soul he vowed that it should never be for want of heart.

Mr. Fawcett was just mounting into his high-wheeled, spidery dogcart, with his little bit of blood between the shafts. He waved his whip and fell in behind the carriage. They overtook Purvis, the tomato-faced publican, upon the road, with his wife in her Sunday bonnet. They also dropped into the procession, and then, as they traversed the seven miles of the high road to Croxley, their two-horsed, rosetted carriage became gradually the nucleus of a comet with a loosely radiating tail. From every side-road came the miners' carts, the humble, ramshackle traps, black and bulging, with their loads of noisy, foul-tongued, open-hearted partisans. They trailed for a long quarter of a mile behind them — cracking, whipping, shouting, galloping, swearing. Horsemen and runners were mixed with the vehicles. And then suddenly a squad of the Sheffield Yeomanry, who were having their annual training in those parts, clattered and jingled out of a field, and rode as an escort to the carriage. Through the dust-clouds round him Montgomery saw the gleaming brass helmets, the bright coats, and the tossing heads of the chargers, the delighted brown faces of the troopers. It was more dream-like than ever.

And then, as they approached the monstrous, uncouth line of bottle-shaped buildings which marked the smelting-works of Croxley, their long, writhing snake of dust was headed off by another but longer one which wound across their path. The main road into which their own opened was filled by the rushing current of traps. The Wilson contingent halted until the others should get past. The iron-men cheered and groaned, according to their humour, as they whirled past their antagonist. Rough chaff flew back and forwards like iron nuts and splinters of coal. “Brought him up, then!” “Got t' hearse for to fetch him back?” “Where's t' owd K-legs?” “Mon, mon, have thy photograph took—'twill mind thee of what thou used to look!” “He fight? — he's nowt but a half-baked doctor!” “Happen he'll doctor thy Croxley Champion afore he's through wi't.”

So they flashed at each other as the one side waited and the other passed. Then there came a rolling murmur swelling into a shout, and a great brake with four horses came clattering along, all streaming with salmon-pink ribbons. The driver wore a white hat with pink rosette, and beside him, on the high seat, were a man and a woman-she with her arm round his waist.

Montgomery had one glimpse of them as they flashed past; he with a furry cap drawn low over his brow, a great frieze coat and a pink comforter round his throat; she brazen, red-headed, bright-coloured, laughing excitedly. The Master, for it was he, turned as he passed, gazed hard at Montgomery, and gave him a menacing, gap-toothed grin. It was a hard, wicked face, blue-jowled and craggy, with long, obstinate cheeks and inexorable eyes. The brake behind was full of patrons of the sport-flushed iron-foremen, heads of departments, managers. One was drinking from a metal flask, and raised it to Montgomery as he passed; and then the crowd thinned, and the Wilson cortege with their dragoons swept in at the rear of the others.

The road led away from Croxley, between curving green hills, gashed and polluted by the searchers for coal and iron. The whole country had been gutted, and vast piles of refuse and mountains of slag suggested the mighty chambers which the labour of man had burrowed beneath. On the left the road curved up to where a huge building, roofless and dismantled, stood crumbling and forlorn, with the light shining through the windowless squares.

"That's the old Arrowsmith's factory. That's where the fight is to be," said Wilson. "How are you feeling now?"

"Thank you, I was never better in my life," Montgomery answered.

"By Gad, I like your nerve!" said Wilson, who was himself flushed and uneasy. "You'll give us a fight for our money, come what may. That place on the right is the office, and that has been set aside as the dressing and weighing room."

The carriage drove up to it amidst the shouts of the folk upon the hillside. Lines of empty carriages and traps curved down upon the winding road, and a black crowd surged round the door of the ruined factory. The seats, as a huge placard announced, were five shillings, three shillings, and a shilling, with half-price for dogs. The takings, deducting expenses, were to go to the winner, and it was already evident that a larger stake than a hundred pounds was in question. A babel of voices rose from the door, The workers wished to bring their dogs in free. The men scuffled. The dogs barked. The crowd was a whirling, eddying pool surging with a roar up to the narrow cleft which was its only outlet.

The brake, with its salmon-coloured streamers and four reeking horses, stood empty before the door of the office; Wilson, Purvis, Fawcett and Montgomery passed in.

There was a large, bare room inside with square, clean patches upon the grimy walls, where pictures and almanacs had once hung. Worn linoleum covered the floor, but there was no furniture save some benches and a deal table with an ewer and a basin upon it. Two of the corners were curtained off. In the middle of the room was a weighing-chair. A hugely fat man, with a salmon tie and a blue waistcoat with birds'-eye spots, came bustling up to them. It was Armitage, the butcher and grazier, well known for miles round as a warm man, and the most liberal patron of sport in the Riding. "Well, well," he grunted, in a thick, fussy, wheezy voice, "you have come, then. Got your man? Got your man?

"Here he is, fit and well. Mr. Montgomery, let me present you to Mr. Armitage."

"Glad to meet you, sir. Happy to make your acquaintance. I make bold to say, sir, that we of Croxley admire your courage, Mr. Montgomery, and that our only hope is a fair fight and no favour, and the best man win. That's our sentiments at Croxley."

"And it is my sentiment, also," said the assistant.

"Well, you can't say fairer than that, Mr. Montgomery. You've taken a large contrac' in hand, but a large contrac' may be carried through, sir, as anyone that knows my dealings could testify. The Master is ready to weigh in!"

"So am I."

"You must weigh in the buff." Montgomery looked askance at the tall, red-headed woman who was standing gazing out of the window.

"That's all right," said Wilson. "Get behind the curtain and put on your fighting kit."

He did so, and came out the picture of an athlete, in white, loose drawers, canvas shoes, and the sash of a well-known cricket club round his waist. He was trained to a hair, his skin gleaming like silk, and every muscle rippling down his broad shoulders and along his beautiful arms as he moved them. They bunched into ivory knobs, or slid into long, sinuous curves, as he raised or lowered his hands.

"What thinkest thou o' that?" asked Ted Barton, his second, of the woman in the window.

She glanced contemptuously at the young athlete. "It's but a poor kindness thou dost him to put a thread-paper yoong gentleman like yon against a mon as is a mon. Why, my Jock would throttle him wi’ one bond lashed behind him.”

“Happen he may — happen not,” said Barton. “I have but twa pund in the world, but it’s on him, every penny, and no hedgin’. But here’s t’ Maister, and rarely fine he do look.”

The prize-fighter had come out from his curtain, a squat, formidable figure, monstrous in chest and arms, limping slightly on his distorted leg. His skin bad none of the freshness and clearness of Montgomery’s, but was dusky and mottled, with one huge mole amid the mat of tangled black hair which thatched his mighty breast. His weight bore no relation to his strength, for those huge shoulders and great arms, with brown, sledge-hammer fists, would have fitted the heaviest man that ever threw his cap into a ring. But his loins and legs were slight in proportion. Montgomery, on the other hand, was as symmetrical as a Greek statue. It would be an encounter between a man who was specially fitted for one sport, and one who was equally capable of any. The two looked curiously at each other: a bull-dog, and a high-bred clean-limbed terrier, each full of spirit.

“How do you do?”

“How do?” The Master grinned again, and his three jagged front teeth gleamed for an instant. The rest had been beaten out of him in twenty years of battle. He spat upon the floor. “We have a rare fine day for’t.”

“Capital,” said Montgomery.

“That’s the good feelin’ I like,” wheezed the fat butcher. “Good lads, both of them! — prime lads! — hard meat an’ good bone. There’s no ill-feelin’.”

“If he downs me, Gawd bless him!” said the Master,

“An’ if we down him, Gawd help him!” interrupted the woman.

“Haud thy tongue, wench!” said the Master, impatiently. “Who art thou to put in thy word? Happen I might draw my hand across thy face.”

The woman did not take the threat amiss. “Wilt have enough for thy hand to do, Jock,” said she. “Get quit o’ this gradely man afore thou turn on me.”

The lovers’ quarrel was interrupted by the entrance of a newcomer, a gentleman with a fur-collared overcoat and a very shiny top-hat — a top-hat of a degree of glossiness which is seldom seen five miles from Hyde Park. This hat he wore at the extreme back of his head, so that the lower surface of the brim made a kind of frame for his high, bald forehead, his, keen eyes, his rugged and yet kindly face. He bustled in with the quiet air of possession with which the ring master enters the circus.

"It's Mr. Stapleton, the referee from London," said Wilson.

"How do you do, Mr. Stapleton? I was introduced to you at the big fight at the Corinthian Club in Piccadilly."

"Ah! I dare say," said the other, shaking hands. "Fact is, I'm introduced to so many that I can't undertake to carry their names. Wilson, is it? Well, Mr. Wilson, glad to see you. Couldn't get a fly at the station, and that's why I'm late."

"I'm sure, sir," said Armitage, "we should be proud that anyone so well known in the boxing world should come down to our little exhibition."

"Not at all. Not at all. Anything in the interests of boxin'. All ready? Men weighed?"

"Weighing now, sir."

"Ah! Just as well that I should see it done. Seen you before, Craggs. Saw you fight your second battle against Willox. You had beaten him once, but he came back on you. What does the indicator say — 163lbs. — two off for the kit — 161lbs. Now, my lad, you jump. My goodness, what colours are you wearing?"

"The Anonymi Cricket Club."

"What right have you to wear them? I belong to the club myself."

"So do I."

"You an amateur?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are fighting for a money prize?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know what you are doing? You realise that you're a professional pug from this onwards, and that if ever you fight again—"

"I'll never fight again."

"Happen you won't," said the woman, and the Master turned a terrible eye upon her.

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best. Up you jump. One hundred and fifty-one, minus two, 149 — 12lbs. difference, but youth and condition on the other scale. Well, the sooner we get to work the better, for I wish to catch the seven o'clock express at Hellifield. Twenty three-minute rounds, with one-minute intervals, and Queensberry rules. Those are the conditions, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, then — we may go across."

The two combatants had overcoats thrown over their shoulders, and the whole party, backers, fighters, seconds, and the referee filed out of the room. A police inspector was waiting for them in the road. He had a note-book in his hand — that terrible weapon which awes even the London cabman.

“I must take your names, gentlemen, in case it should be necessary to proceed for breach of peace.”

“You don’t mean to stop the fight?” cried Armitage, in a passion of indignation. “I’m Mr. Armitage, of Croxley, and this is Mr. Wilson, and we’ll be responsible that all is fair and as it should be.”

“I’ll take the names in case it should be necessary to proceed,” said the inspector, impassively.

“But you know me well.”

“If you was a dook or even a judge it would be all’ the same,” said the inspector. “It’s the law, and there’s an end. I’ll not take upon myself to stop the fight, seeing that gloves are to be used, but I’ll take the names of all concerned. Silas Craggs, Robert Montgomery, Edward Barton, James Stapleton, of London. Who seconds Silas Craggs?”

“I do,” said the woman. “Yes, you can stare, but it’s my job, and no one else’s. Anastasia’s the name — four a’s.”

“Craggs?”

“Johnson — Anastasia Johnson. If you jug him you can jug me.”

“Who talked of juggin’, ye fool?” growled the Master. “Coom on, Mr. Armitage, for I’m fair sick o’ this loiterin’.”

The inspector fell in with the procession, and proceeded, as they walked up the hill, to bargain in his official capacity for a front seat, where he could safeguard the interests of the law, and in his private capacity to lay out thirty shillings at seven to one with Mr. Armitage. Through the door they passed, down a narrow lane walled with a dense bank of humanity, up a wooden ladder to a platform, over a rope which was slung waist-high from four corner-stakes, and then Montgomery realised that he was in that ring in which his immediate destiny was to be worked out. On the stake at one corner there hung a blue-and-white streamer. Barton led him across, the overcoat dangling loosely from his shoulders, and he sat down on a wooden stool. Barton and another man, both wearing white sweaters, stood beside him. The so-called ring was a square, twenty feet each way. At the opposite angle was the sinister figure of the Master, with his red-headed woman and a rough-faced friend to look after him. At each corner were metal basins, pitchers of water, and sponges.

During the hubbub and uproar of the entrance Montgomery was too bewildered to take things in. But now there was a few minutes' delay, for the referee had lingered behind, and so he looked quietly about him. It was a sight to haunt him for a lifetime. Wooden seats had been built in, sloping upwards to the tops of the walls. Above, instead of a ceiling, a great flight of crows passed slowly across a square of grey cloud. Right up to the topmost benches the folk were banked — broadcloth in front, corduroys and fustian behind; faces turned everywhere upon him. The grey reek of the pipes filled the building, and the air was pungent with the acrid smell of cheap, strong tobacco. Everywhere among the human faces were to be seen the heads of the dogs. They growled and yapped from the back benches. In that dense mass of humanity, one could hardly pick out individuals, but Montgomery's eyes caught the brazen gleam of the helmets held upon the knees of the ten yeomen of his escort. At the very edge of the platform sat the reporters, five of them — three locals and two all the way from London. But where was the all-important referee? There was no sign of him, unless he were in the centre of that angry swirl of men near the door.

Mr. Stapleton had stopped to examine the gloves which wore to be used, and entered the building after the combatants. He had started to come down that narrow lane with the human walls which led to the ring. But already it had gone abroad that the Wilson champion was a gentleman, and that another gentleman had been appointed as referee. A wave of suspicion passed through the Croxley folk. They would have one of their own people for a referee. They would not have a stranger. His path was stopped as he made for the ring. Excited men flung themselves in front of him; they waved their fists in his face and cursed him. A woman howled vile names in his ear. Somebody struck at him with an umbrella. "Go thou back to Lunnon. We want noan o' thee. Go thou back!" they yelled.

Stapleton, with his shiny hat cocked backwards, and his large, bulging forehead swelling from under it, looked round him from beneath his bushy brows. He was in the centre of a savage and dangerous mob. Then he drew his watch from his pocket and held it dial upwards in his palm.

"In three minutes," said he, "I will declare the fight off."

They raged round him. His cool face and that aggressive top-hat irritated them. Grimy hands were raised. But it was difficult, somehow, to strike a man who was so absolutely indifferent.

"In two minutes I declare the fight off."

They exploded into blasphemy. The breath of angry men smoked into his placid face. A gnarled, grimy fist vibrated at the end of his nose. "We tell thee we want noan o' thee. Get thou back where thou com'st from."

"In one minute I declare the fight off."

Then the calm persistence of the man conquered the swaying, mutable, passionate crowd.

"Let him through, mon. Happen there'll be no fight after a'."

"Let him through."

"Bill, thou loomp, let him pass. Dost want the fight declared off?"

"Make room for the referee! — room for the Lunnon referee!"

And half pushed, half carried, he was swept up to the ring. There were two chairs by the side of it, one for him and one for the timekeeper. He sat down, his hands on his knees, his hat at a more wonderful angle than ever, impassive but solemn, with the aspect of one who appreciates his responsibilities.

Mr. Armitage, the portly butcher, made his way into the ring and held up two fat hands, sparkling with rings, as a signal for silence.

"Gentlemen!" he yelled. And then in a crescendo shriek, "Gentlemen!"

"And ladies!" cried somebody, for, indeed, there was a fair sprinkling of women among the crowd. "Speak up, owd man!" shouted another. "What price pork chops?" cried somebody at the back. Everybody laughed, and the dogs began to bark. Armitage waved his hands amidst the uproar as if he were conducting an orchestra. At last the babel thinned into silence.

"Gentlemen," he yelled, "the match is between Silas Craggs, whom we call the Master of Croxley, and Robert Montgomery, of the Wilson Coal-pits. The match was to be under eleven-eight. When they were weighed just now, Craggs weighed eleven-seven, and Montgomery ten-nine. The conditions of the contest are — the best of twenty three-minute rounds with two-ounce gloves. Should the fight run to its full length, it will, of course, be decided upon points. Mr. Stapleton, the well-known London referee, has kindly consented to see fair play. I wish to say that Mr. Wilson and I, the chief backers of the two men, have every confidence in Mr. Stapleton, and that we beg that you will accept his rulings without dispute."

He then turned from one combatant to the other, with a wave of his hand.

III

“Montgomery — Craggs!” said he.

A great hush fell over the huge assembly. Even the dogs stopped yapping; one might have thought that the monstrous room was empty. The two men had stood up, the small white gloves over their hands They advanced from their corners and shook hands, Montgomery gravely, Craggs with a smile. Then they fell into position. The crowd gave a long sigh — the intake of a thousand excited breaths. The referee tilted his chair on to its back legs, and looked moodily critical from the one to the other.

It was strength against activity — that was evident from the first. The Master stood stolidly upon his K leg. It gave him a tremendous pedestal; one could hardly imagine his being knocked down. And he could pivot round upon it with extraordinary quickness; but his advance or retreat was ungainly. His frame, however, was so much larger and broader than that of the student, and his brown, massive face looked so resolute and menacing that the hearts of the Wilson party sank within them. There was one heart, however, which had not done so. It was that of Robert Montgomery.

Any nervousness which he may have had completely passed away now that he had his work before him. Here was something definite — this hard-faced, deformed Hercules to beat, with a career as the price of beating him. He glowed with the joy of action; it thrilled through his nerves. He faced his man with little in-and-out steps, breaking to the left, breaking to the right, feeling his way, while Craggs, with a dull, malignant eye, pivoted slowly upon his weak leg, his left arm half extended, his right sunk low across the mark. Montgomery led with his left, and then led again, getting lightly home each time. He tried again, but the Master had his counter ready, and Montgomery reeled back from a harder blow than he had given. Anastasia, the woman, gave a shrill cry of encouragement, and her man let fly his right. Montgomery ducked under it, and in an instant the two were in each other’s arms.

“Break away! Break away!” said the referee.

The Master struck upwards on the break, and shook Montgomery with the blow. Then it was “time.” It had been a spirited opening round. The people buzzed into comment and applause. Montgomery was quite fresh, but the hairy chest of the Master was rising and falling. The man passed a sponge over his head while Anastasia flapped the towel before him. “Good lass! good lass!” cried the crowd, and cheered her.

The men were up again, the Master grimly watchful, Montgomery as alert as a kitten. The Master tried a sudden rush, squattering along with his awkward gait, but coming faster than one would think. The student slipped aside and avoided him. The Master stopped, grinned, and shook his head. Then he motioned with his hand as an invitation to Montgomery to come to him. The student did so and led with his left, but got a swinging right counter in the ribs in exchange. The heavy blow staggered him, and the Master came scrambling in to complete his advantage; but Montgomery, with his greater activity, kept out of danger until the call of “time.” A tame round, and the advantage with the Master.

“T’ Maister’s too strong for him,” said a smelter to his neighbour.

“Ay; but t’other’s a likely lad. Happen we’ll see some sport yet.
He can joomp rarely.”

“But t’ Maister can stop and hit rarely. Happen he’ll mak’ him joomp when he gets his nief upon him.”

They were up again, the water glistening upon their faces. Montgomery led instantly, and got his right home with a sounding smack upon the master’s forehead. There was a shout from the colliers, and “Silence! Order!” from the referee. Montgomery avoided the counter, and scored with his left. Fresh applause, and the referee upon his feet in indignation..

“No comments, gentlemen, if *you* please, during the rounds.”

“Just bide a bit!” growled the Master.

“Don’t talk — fight!” said the referee, angrily.

Montgomery rubbed in the point by a flush hit upon the mouth, and the Master shambled back to his corner like an angry bear, having had all the worst of the round.

“Where’s thot seven to one?” shouted Purvis, the publican. “I’ll take six to one!”

There were no answers.

“Five to one!”

There were givers at that. Purvis booked them in a tattered notebook.

Montgomery began to feel happy. He lay back with his legs outstretched, his back against the corner-post, and one gloved hand upon each rope. What a delicious minute it was between each round. If he could only keep out of harm’s way, he must surely wear this man out before the end of twenty rounds. He was so slow that all his strength went for nothing.

“You’re fightin’ a winnin’ fight — a winnin’ fight,” Ted Barton whispered in his ear. “Go canny; tak’ no chances; you have him proper.”

But the Master was crafty. He had fought so many battles with his maimed limb that he knew how to make the best of it. Warily and slowly he manoeuvred round Montgomery, stepping forward and yet again forward until he had imperceptibly backed him into his corner. The student suddenly saw a flash of triumph upon the grim face, and a gleam in the dull, malignant eyes. The Master was upon him. He sprang aside and was on the ropes. The Master smashed in one of his terrible upper-cuts, and Montgomery half broke it with his guard. The student sprang the other way and was against the other converging rope. He was trapped in the angle. The Master sent in another with a hoggish grunt which spoke of the energy behind it. Montgomery ducked, but got a jab from the left upon the mark. He closed with his man.

“Break away! Break away!” cried the referee. Montgomery disengaged, and got a swinging blow on the ear as he did so. It had been a damaging round for him, and the Croxley people were shouting their delight. “Gentlemen, I will *not* have this noise!” Stapleton roared. “I have been accustomed to preside at a well-conducted club, and not at a bear-garden.” This little man, with the tilted hat and the bulging forehead, dominated the whole assembly. He was like a head-master among his boys. He glared round him, and nobody cared to meet his eye. Anastasia had kissed the Master when he resumed his seat.

“Good lass. Do’t again!” cried the laughing crowd, and the angry Master shook his glove at her, as she flapped her towel in front of him. Montgomery was weary and a little sore, but not depressed. He had learned something. He would not again be tempted into danger.

For three rounds the honours were fairly equal. The student’s hitting was the quicker, the Master’s the harder. Profiting by his lesson, Montgomery kept himself in the open, and refused to be herded into a corner. Sometimes the Master succeeded in rushing him to the side-ropes, but the younger man slipped away, or closed and then disengaged. The monotonous “Break away! Break away!” of the referee broke in upon the quick, low patter of rubber-soled shoes, the dull thud of the blows, and the sharp, hissing breath of two tired men.

The ninth round found both of them in fairly good condition. Montgomery’s head was still singing from the blow that he had in the corner, and one of his thumbs pained him acutely and seemed to be dislocated. The Master showed no sign of a touch, but his breathing was the more laboured, and a long line of ticks upon the referee’s paper showed that the student had a good show of points. But one of this iron-man’s blows was worth three of his, and he knew that without the gloves he could not have stood for three rounds against him. All the amateur work that he had done was the merest tapping and flapping when compared to those frightful blows, from arms toughened by the shovel and the crowbar.

It was the tenth round, and the fight was half over. The betting now was only three to one, for the Wilson champion had held his own much better than had been expected. But those who knew the ring-craft as well as the staying power of the old prize-fighter knew that the odds were still a long way in his favour.

“Have a care of him!” whispered Barton, as he sent his man up to the scratch. “Have a care! He’ll play thee a trick, if he can.”

But Montgomery saw, or imagined he saw, that his antagonist was tiring. He looked jaded and listless, and his hands drooped a little from their position. His own youth and condition were beginning to tell. He sprang in and brought off a fine left-handed lead. The Master’s return lacked his usual fire. Again Montgomery led, and again he got home. Then he tried his right upon the mark, and the Master guarded it downwards.

“Too low! Too low! A foul! A foul!” yelled a thousand voices.

The referee rolled his sardonic eyes slowly round. “Seems to me this buildin’ is chock-full of referees,” said he. The people laughed and applauded, but their favour was as immaterial to him as their anger. “No applause, please! This is not a theatre!” he yelled.

Montgomery was very pleased with himself. His adversary was evidently in a bad way. He was piling on his points and establishing a lead. He might as well make hay while the sun shone. The Master was looking all abroad. Montgomery popped one upon his blue jowl and got away without a return. And then the Master suddenly dropped both his hands and began rubbing his thigh. Ah! that was it, was it? He had muscular cramp.

“Go in! Go in!” cried Teddy Barton.

Montgomery sprang wildly forward, and the next instant was lying half senseless, with his neck nearly broken, in the middle of the ring.

The whole round had been a long conspiracy to tempt him within reach of one of those terrible right-hand upper-cuts for which the Master was famous. For this the listless, weary bearing, for this the cramp in the thigh. When Montgomery had sprung in so hotly he had exposed himself to such a blow as neither flesh nor blood could stand. Whizzing up from below with a rigid arm, which put the Master's eleven stone into its force, it struck him under the jaw; he whirled half round, and fell a helpless and half-paralysed mass. A vague groan and murmur, inarticulate, too excited for words, rose from the great audience. With open mouths and staring eyes they gazed at the twitching and quivering figure.

"Stand back! Stand right back!" shrieked the referee, for the Master was standing over his man ready to give him the *coup-de-grace* as he rose.

"Stand back, Craggs, this instant!" Stapleton repeated.

The Master sank his hands sulkily and walked backwards to the rope with his ferocious eyes fixed upon his fallen antagonist. The timekeeper called the seconds. If ten of them passed before Montgomery rose to his feet, the fight was ended. Ted Barton wrung his hands and danced about in an agony in his corner.

As if in a dream — a terrible nightmare — the student could hear the voice of the timekeeper — three — four — five — he got up on his hand — six — seven — he was on his knee, sick, swimming, faint, but resolute to rise. Eight — he was up, and the Master was on him like a tiger, lashing savagely at him with both hands. Folk held their breath as they watched those terrible blows, and anticipated the pitiful end — so much more pitiful where a game but helpless man refuses to accept defeat.

Strangely automatic is the human brain. Without volition, without effort, there shot into the memory of this bewildered, staggering, half-stupefied man the one thing which could have saved him — that blind eye of which the Master's son had spoken. It was the same as the other to look at, but Montgomery remembered that he had said that it was the left. He reeled to the left side, half felled by a drive which lit upon his shoulder. The Master pivoted round upon his leg and was at him in an instant.

"Yark him, lad! Yark him!" screamed the woman.

"Hold your tongue!" said the referee.

Montgomery slipped to the left again and yet again, but the Master was too quick and clever for him. He struck round and got him full on the face as he tried once more to break away. Montgomery's knees weakened under him, and he fell with a groan on the floor. This time he knew that he was done. With bitter agony he realised, as he groped blindly with his hands, that he could not possibly raise himself. Far away and muffled he heard, amid the murmurs of the multitude, the fateful voice of the timekeeper counting off the seconds.

"One — two — three — four — five — six—"

"Time!" said the referee.

Then the pent-up passion of the great assembly broke loose. Croxley gave a deep groan of disappointment. The Wilsons were on their feet, yelling with delight. There was still a chance for them. In four more seconds their man would have been solemnly counted out. But now he had a minute in which to recover. The referee looked round with relaxed features and laughing eyes. He loved this rough game, this school for humble heroes, and it was pleasant to him to intervene as a *Deus ex machina* at so dramatic a moment. His chair and his hat were both tilted at an extreme angle; he and the timekeeper smiled at each other. Ted Barton and the other second had rushed out and thrust an arm each under Montgomery's knee, the other behind his loins, and so carried him back to his stool. His head lolled upon his shoulder, but a douche of cold water sent a shiver through him, and he started and looked round him.

"He's a' right!" cried the people round. "He's a rare brave lad. Good lad! Good lad!" Barton poured some brandy into his mouth. The mists cleared a little, and he realised where he was and what he had to do. But he was still very weak, and he hardly dared to hope that he could survive another round.

"Seconds out of the ring!" cried the referee. "Time!"

The Croxley Master sprang eagerly off his stool.

"Keep clear of him! Go easy for a bit," said Barton, and Montgomery walked out to meet his man once more.

He had had two lessons — the one when the Master got him into his corner, the other when he had been lured into mixing it up with so powerful an antagonist. Now he would be wary. Another blow would finish him; he could afford to run no risks. The Master was determined to follow up his advantage, and rushed at him, slogging furiously right and left. But Montgomery was too young and active to be caught. He was strong upon his legs once more, and his wits had all come back to him. It was a gallant sight — the line-of-battleship trying to pour its overwhelming broadside into the frigate, and the frigate manoeuvring always so as to avoid it. The

Master tried all his ring-craft. He coaxed the student up by pretended inactivity; he rushed at him with furious rushes towards the ropes. For three rounds he exhausted every wile in trying to get at him. Montgomery during all this time was conscious that his strength was minute by minute coming back to him. The spinal jar from an upper-cut is overwhelming, but evanescent. He was losing all sense of it beyond a great stiffness of the neck. For the first round after his downfall he had been content to be entirely on the defensive, only too happy if he could stall off the furious attacks of the Master. In the second he occasionally ventured upon a light counter. In the third he was smacking back merrily where he saw an opening. His people yelled their approval of him at the end of every round. Even the iron-workers cheered him with that fine unselfishness which true sport engenders. To most of them, unspiritual and unimaginative, the sight of this clean-limbed young Apollo, rising above disaster and holding on while consciousness was in him to his appointed task, was the greatest thing their experience had ever known.

But the Master’s naturally morose temper became more and more murderous at this postponement of his hopes. Three rounds ago the battle had been in his hands; now it was all to do over again. Round by round his man was recovering his strength. By the fifteenth he was strong again in wind and limb. But the vigilant Anastasia saw something which encouraged her.

“That bash in t’ ribs is telling on him, Jock,” she whispered. “Why else should he be gulping t’ brandy? Go in, lad, and thou hast him yet.”

Montgomery had suddenly taken the flask from Barton’s hand, and had a deep pull at the contents. Then, with his face a little flushed, and with a curious look of purpose, which made the referee stare hard at him, in his eyes, he rose for the sixteenth round.

“Game as a pairtridge!” cried the publican, as he looked at the hard-set face.

“Mix it oop, lad! Mix it oop!” cried the iron-men to their Master. And then a hum of exultation ran through their ranks as they realised that their tougher, harder, stronger man held the vantage, after all. Neither of the men showed much sign of punishment. Small gloves crush and numb, but they do not cut. One of the Master’s eyes was even more flush with his cheek than Nature had made it. Montgomery had two or three livid marks upon his body, and his face was haggard, save for that pink spot which the brandy had brought into either cheek. He rocked a little as he stood opposite his man, and his hands drooped as if he felt the gloves to be an unutterable weight. It was evident that he was spent and desperately weary. If he received one other blow it must surely be fatal to him. If he brought one home, what power could there be behind it, and what chance was there of its harming the colossus in front of him? It was the crisis of the fight. This round must decide it. “Mix it oop, lad! Mix it oop!” the iron-men whooped. Even the savage eyes of the referee were unable to restrain the excited crowd.

Now, at last, the chance had come for Montgomery. He had learned a lesson from his more experienced rival. Why should he not play his own game upon him? He was spent, but not nearly so spent as he pretended. That brandy was to call up his reserves, to let him have strength to take full advantage of the opening when it came. It was thrilling and tingling through his veins at the very moment when he was lurching and rocking like a beaten man. He acted his part admirably. The Master felt that there was an easy task before him, and rushed in with ungainly activity to finish it once for all. He slap-banged away left and right, boring Montgomery up against the ropes, swinging in his ferocious blows with those animal grunts which told of the vicious energy behind them.

But Montgomery was too cool to fall a victim to any of those murderous upper-cuts. He kept out of harm’s way with a rigid guard, an active foot, and a head which was swift to duck. And yet he contrived to present the same appearance of a man who is hopelessly done. The Master, weary from his own shower of blows, and fearing nothing from so weak a man, dropped his hand for an instant, and at that instant Montgomery’s right came home.

It was a magnificent blow, straight, clean, crisp, with the force of the loins and the back behind it. And it landed where he had meant it to — upon the exact point of that blue-grained chin. Flesh and blood could not stand such a blow in such a place. Neither valour nor hardihood can save the man to whom it comes. The Master fell backwards, flat, prostrate, striking the ground with so simultaneous a clap that it was like a shutter falling from a wall. A yell, which no referee could control, broke from the crowded benches as the giant went down. He lay upon his back, his knees a little drawn up, his huge chest panting. He twitched and shook, but could not move. His feet pawed convulsively once or twice. It was no use. He was done. “Eight — nine — ten!” said the time-keeper, and the roar of a thousand voices, with a deafening clap like the broad-side of a ship, told that the Master of Croxley was the Master no more.

Montgomery stood half dazed, looking down at the huge, prostrate figure. He could hardly realise that it was indeed all over. He saw the referee motion towards him with his hand. He heard his name bellowed in triumph from every side. And then he was aware of someone rushing towards him; he caught a glimpse of a flushed face and an aureole of flying red hair, a gloveless fist struck him between the eyes, and he was on his back in the ring beside his antagonist, while a dozen of his supporters were endeavouring to secure the frantic Anastasia. He heard the angry shouting of the referee, the screaming of the furious woman, and the cries of the mob. Then something seemed to break like an over-stretched banjo string, and he sank into the deep, deep, mist-girt abyss of unconsciousness.

The dressing was like a thing in a dream, and so was a vision of the Master with the grin of a bulldog upon his face, and his three teeth amiably protruded. He shook Montgomery heartily by the hand.

“I would have been rare pleased to shake thee by the throttle, lad, a short while syne,” said he. “But I bear no ill-feeling again’ thee. It was a rare poonch that brought me down — I have not had a better since my second fight wi’ Billy Edwards in ‘89. Happen thou might think o’ goin’ further wi’ this business. If thou dost, and want a trainer, there’s not much inside t’ ropes as I don’t know. Or happen thou might like to try it wi’ me old style and bare knuckles. Thou hast but to write to t’ ironworks to find me.”

But Montgomery disclaimed any such ambition. A canvas bag with his share — 190 sovereigns — was handed to him, of which he gave ten to the Master, who also received some share of the gate-money. Then, with young Wilson escorting him on one side, Purvis on the other, and Fawcett carrying his bag behind, he went in triumph to his carriage, and drove amid a long roar, which lined the highway like a hedge for the seven miles, back to his starting-point.

“It’s the greatest thing I ever saw in my life. By George, it’s ripping!” cried Wilson, who had been left in a kind of ecstasy by the events of the day. “There’s a chap over Barnsley way who fancies himself a bit. Let us spring you on him, and let him see what he can make of you. We’ll put up a purse — won’t we, Purvis? You shall never want a backer.”

“At his weight,” said the publican, “I’m behind him, I am, for twenty rounds, and no age, country, or colour barred.”

"So am I," cried Fawcett; "middle-weight champion of the world, that's what he is — here, in the same carriage with us."

But Montgomery was not to be beguiled.

"No; I have my own work to do now."

"And what may that be?"

"I'll use this money to get my medical degree."

"Well, we've plenty of doctors, but you're the only man in the Riding that could smack the Croxley Master off his legs. However, I suppose you know your own business best. When you're a doctor, you'd best come down into these parts, and you'll always find a job waiting for you at the Wilson Coal-pits."

Montgomery had returned by devious ways to the surgery. The horses were smoking at the door, and the doctor was just back from his long journey. Several patients had called in his absence, and he was in the worst of tempers.

"I suppose I should be glad that you have come back at all, Mr. Montgomery!" he snarled. "When next you elect to take a holiday, I trust it will not be at so busy a time."

"I am sorry, sir, that you should have been inconvenienced."

"Yes, sir, I have been exceedingly inconvenienced." Here, for the first time, he looked hard at the assistant. "Good Heavens, Mr. Montgomery, what have you been doing with your left eye?"

It was where Anastasia had lodged her protest. Montgomery laughed.

"It is nothing, sir," said he.

"And you have a livid mark under your jaw. It is, indeed, terrible that my representative should be going about in so disreputable a condition. How did you receive these injuries?"

"Well, sir, as you know, there was a little glove-fight to-day over at Croxley."

"And you got mixed up with that brutal crowd?"

"I *was* rather mixed up with them."

"And who assaulted you?"

"One of the fighters."

"Which of them?"

"The Master of Croxley."

"Good Heavens! Perhaps you interfered with him?"

“Well, to tell the truth, I did a little.”

“Mr. Montgomery, in such a practice as mine, intimately associated as it is with the highest and most progressive elements of our small community, it is impossible—”

But just then the tentative bray of a cornet-player searching for his key-note jarred upon their ears, and an instant later the Wilson Colliery brass band was in full cry with, “See the Conquering Hero Comes,” outside the surgery window. There was a banner waving, and a shouting crowd of miners.

“What is it? What does it mean?” cried the angry doctor.

“It means, sir, that I have, in the only way which was open to me, earned the money which is necessary for my education. It is my duty, Dr. Oldacre, to warn you that I am about to return to the University, and that you should lose no time in appointing my successor.”

THE LORD OF CHATEAU NOIR

It was in the days when the German armies had broken their way across France, and when the shattered forces of the young Republic had been swept away to the north of the Aisne and to the south of the Loire. Three broad streams of armed men had rolled slowly but irresistibly from the Rhine, now meandering to the north, now to the south, dividing, coalescing, but all uniting to form one great lake round Paris. And from this lake there welled out smaller streams — one to the north, one southward, to Orleans, and a third westward to Normandy. Many a German trooper saw the sea for the first time when he rode his horse girth-deep into the waves at Dieppe.

Black and bitter were the thoughts of Frenchmen when they saw this weal of dishonour slashed across the fair face of their country. They had fought and they had been overborne. That swarming cavalry, those countless footmen, the masterful guns — they had tried and tried to make head against them. In battalions their invaders were not to be beaten, but man to man, or ten to ten, they were their equals. A brave Frenchman might still make a single German rue the day that he had left his own bank of the Rhine. Thus, unchronicled amid the battles and the sieges, there broke out another war, a war of individuals, with foul murder upon the one side and brutal reprisal on the other.

Colonel von Gramm, of the 24th Posen Infantry, had suffered severely during this new development. He commanded in the little Norman town of Les Andelys, and his outposts stretched amid the hamlets and farmhouses of the district round. No French force was within fifty miles of him, and yet morning after morning he had to listen to a black report of sentries found dead at their posts, or of foraging parties which had never returned. Then the colonel would go forth in his wrath, and farmsteadings would blaze and villages tremble; but next morning there was still that same dismal tale to be told. Do what he might, he could not shake off his invisible enemies. And yet it should not have been so hard, for, from certain signs in common, in the plan and in the deed, it was certain that all these outrages came from a single source.

Colonel von Gramm had tried violence, and it had failed. Gold might be more successful. He published it abroad over the countryside that 500frs. would be paid for information. There was no response. Then 800frs. The peasants were incorruptible. Then, goaded on by a murdered corporal, he rose to a thousand, and so bought the soul of Francois Rejane, farm labourer, whose Norman avarice was a stronger passion than his French hatred.

“You say that you know who did these crimes?” asked the Prussian colonel, eyeing with loathing the blue-bloused, rat-faced creature before him.

“Yes, colonel.”

“And it was — ?”

“Those thousand francs, colonel—”

“Not a sou until your story has been tested. Come! Who is it who has murdered my men?”

“It is Count Eustace of Chateau Noir.”

“You lie!” cried the colonel, angrily. “A gentleman and a nobleman could not have done such crimes.”

The peasant shrugged his shoulders. “It is evident to me that you do not know the count. It is this way, colonel. What I tell you is the truth, and I am not afraid that you should test it. The Count of Chateau Noir is a hard man, even at the best time he was a hard man. But of late he has been terrible. It was his son’s death, you know. His son was under Douay, and he was taken, and then in escaping from Germany he met his death. It was the count’s only child, and indeed we all think that it has driven him mad. With his peasants he follows the German armies. I do not know how many he has killed, but it is he who cut the cross upon the foreheads, for it is the badge of his house.”

It was true. The murdered sentries had each had a saltire cross slashed across their brows, as by a hunting-knife. The colonel bent his stiff back and ran his forefinger over the map which lay upon the table.

“The Chateau Noir is not more than four leagues,” he said.

“Three and a kilometre, colonel.”

“You know the place?”

“I used to work there.”

Colonel von Gramm rang the bell.

“Give this man food and detain him,” said he to the sergeant.

“Why detain me, colonel? I can tell you no more.”

“We shall need you as guide.”

“As guide? But the count? If I were to fall into his hands?
Ah, colonel—”

The Prussian commander waved him away. “Send Captain Baumgarten to me at once,” said he.

The officer who answered the summons was a man of middle-age, heavy-jawed, blue-eyed, with a curving yellow moustache, and a brick-red face which turned to an ivory white where his helmet had sheltered it. He was bald, with a shining, tightly stretched scalp, at the back of which, as in a mirror, it was a favourite mess-joke of the subalterns to trim their moustaches. As a soldier he was slow, but reliable and brave. The colonel could trust him where a more dashing officer might be in danger.

“You will proceed to Chateau Noir to-night, captain,” said he. “A guide has been provided. You will arrest the count and bring him back. If there is an attempt at rescue, shoot him at once.”

“How many men shall I take, colonel?”

“Well, we are surrounded by spies, and our only chance is to pounce upon him before he knows that we are on the way. A large force will attract attention. On the other hand, you must not risk being cut off.”

“I might march north, colonel, as if to join General Goeben. Then I could turn down this road which I see upon your map, and get to Chateau Noir before they could hear of us. In that case, with twenty men—”

“Very good, captain. I hope to see you with your prisoner to-morrow morning.”

It was a cold December night when Captain Baumgarten marched out of Les Andelys with his twenty Poseners, and took the main road to the north west. Two miles out he turned suddenly down a narrow, deeply rutted track, and made swiftly for his man. A thin, cold rain was falling, swishing among the tall poplar trees and rustling in the fields on either side. The captain walked first with Moser, a veteran sergeant, beside him. The sergeant’s wrist was fastened to that of the French peasant, and it had been whispered in his ear that in case of an ambush the first bullet fired would be through his head. Behind them the twenty infantrymen plodded along through the darkness with their faces sunk to the rain, and their boots squeaking in the soft, wet clay. They knew where they were going, and why, and the thought upheld them, for they were bitter at the loss of their comrades. It was a cavalry job, they knew, but the cavalry were all on with the advance, and, besides, it was more fitting that the regiment should avenge its own dead men.

It was nearly eight when they left Les Andelys. At half-past eleven their guide stopped at a place where two high pillars, crowned with some heraldic stonework, flanked a huge iron gate. The wall in which it had been the opening had crumbled away, but the great gate still towered above the brambles and weeds which had overgrown its base. The Prussians made their way round it and advanced stealthily, under the shadow of a tunnel of oak branches, up the long avenue, which was still cumbered by the leaves of last autumn. At the top they halted and reconnoitred.

The black chateau lay in front of them. The moon had shone out between two rain-clouds, and threw the old house into silver and shadow. It was shaped like an L, with a low arched door in front, and lines of small windows like the open ports of a man-of-war. Above was a dark roof, breaking at the corners into little round overhanging turrets, the whole lying silent in the moonshine, with a drift of ragged clouds blackening the heavens behind it. A single light gleamed in one of the lower windows.

The captain whispered his orders to his men. Some were to creep to the front door, some to the back. Some were to watch the east, and some the west. He and the sergeant stole on tiptoe to the lighted window.

It was a small room into which they looked, very meanly furnished. An elderly man, in the dress of a menial, was reading a tattered paper by the light of a guttering candle. He leaned back in his wooden chair with his feet upon a box, while a bottle of white wine stood with a half-filled tumbler upon a stool beside him. The sergeant thrust his needle-gun through the glass, and the man sprang to his feet with a shriek.

“Silence, for your life! The house is surrounded, and you cannot escape. Come round and open the door, or we will show you no mercy when we come in.”

“For God’s sake, don’t shoot! I will open it! I will open it!” He rushed from the room with his paper still crumpled up in his hand. An instant later, with a groaning of old locks and a rasping of bars, the low door swung open, and the Prussians poured into the stone-flagged passage.

“Where is Count Eustace de Chateau Noir?”

“My master! He is out, sir.”

“Out at this time of night? Your life for a lie!”

“It is true, sir. He is out!”

“Where?”

“I do not know.”

“Doing what?”

“I cannot tell. No, it is no use your cocking your pistol, sir. You may kill me, but you cannot make me tell you that which I do not know.”

“Is he often out at this hour?”

“Frequently.”

“And when does he come home?”

“Before daybreak.”

Captain Baumgarten rasped out a German oath. He had had his journey for nothing, then. The man’s answers were only too likely to be true. It was what he might have expected. But at least he would search the house and make sure. Leaving a picket at the front door and another at the back, the sergeant and he drove the trembling butler in front of them — his shaking candle sending strange, flickering shadows over the old tapestries and the low, oak-raftered ceilings. They searched the whole house, from the huge stone-flagged kitchen below to the dining-hall on the second floor, with its gallery for musicians, and its panelling black with age, but nowhere was there a living creature. Up above, in an attic, they found Marie, the elderly wife of the butler; but the owner kept no other servants, and of his own presence there was no trace.

It was long, however, before Captain Baumgarten had satisfied himself upon the point. It was a difficult house to search. Thin stairs, which only one man could ascend at a time, connected lines of tortuous corridors. The walls were so thick that each room was cut off from its neighbour. Huge fireplaces yawned in each, while the windows were 6ft. deep in the wall. Captain Baumgarten stamped with his feet, tore down curtains, and struck with the pommel of his sword. If there were secret hiding-places, he was not fortunate enough to find them.

“I have an idea,” said he, at last, speaking in German to the sergeant. “You will place a guard over this fellow, and make sure that he communicates with no one.”

“Yes, captain.”

“And you will place four men in ambush at the front and at the back. It is likely enough that about daybreak our bird may return to the nest.”

“And the others, captain?”

“Let them have their suppers in the kitchen. The fellow will serve you with meat and wine. It is a wild night, and we shall be better here than on the country road.”

“And yourself, captain?”

“I will take my supper up here in the dining-hall. The logs are laid and we can light the fire. You will call me if there is any alarm. What can you give me for supper — you?”

“Alas, monsieur, there was a time when I might have answered, ‘What you wish!’ but now it is all that we can do to find a bottle of new claret and a cold pullet.”

“That will do very well. Let a guard go about with him, sergeant, and let him feel the end of a bayonet if he plays us any tricks.”

Captain Baumgarten was an old campaigner. In the Eastern provinces, and before that in Bohemia, he had learned the art of quartering himself upon the enemy. While the butler brought his supper he occupied himself in making his preparations for a comfortable night. He lit the candelabrum of ten candles upon the centre table. The fire was already burning up, crackling merrily, and sending spurts of blue, pungent smoke into the room. The captain walked to the window and looked out. The moon had gone in again, and it was raining heavily. He could hear the deep sough of the wind, and see the dark loom of the trees, all swaying in the one direction. It was a sight which gave a zest to his comfortable quarters, and to the cold fowl and the bottle of wine which the butler had brought up for him. He was tired and hungry after his long tramp, so he threw his sword, his helmet, and his revolver-belt down upon a chair, and fell to eagerly upon his supper. Then, with his glass of wine before him and his cigar between his lips, he tilted his chair back and looked about him.

He sat within a small circle of brilliant light which gleamed upon his silver shoulder-straps, and threw out his terra-cotta face, his heavy eyebrows, and his yellow moustache. But outside that circle things were vague and shadowy in the old dining-hall. Two sides were oak-panelled and two were hung with faded tapestry, across which huntsmen and dogs and stags were still dimly streaming. Above the fireplace were rows of heraldic shields with the blazonings of the family and of its alliances, the fatal saltire cross breaking out on each of them.

Four paintings of old seigneurs of Chateau Noir faced the fireplace, all men with hawk noses and bold, high features, so like each other that only the dress could distinguish the Crusader from the Cavalier of the Fronde. Captain Baumgarten, heavy with his repast, lay back in his chair looking up at them through the clouds of his tobacco smoke, and pondering over the strange chance which had sent him, a man from the Baltic coast, to eat his supper in the ancestral hall of these proud Norman chieftains. But the fire was hot, and the captain's eyes were heavy. His chin sank slowly upon his chest, and the ten candles gleamed upon the broad, white scalp.

Suddenly a slight noise brought him to his feet. For an instant it seemed to his dazed senses that one of the pictures opposite had walked from its frame. There, beside the table, and almost within arm's length of him, was standing a huge man, silent, motionless, with no sign of life save his fierce-glinting eyes. He was black-haired, olive-skinned, with a pointed tuft of black beard, and a great, fierce nose, towards which all his features seemed to run. His cheeks were wrinkled like a last year's apple, but his sweep of shoulder, and bony, corded hands, told of a strength which was unsapped by age. His arms were folded across his arching chest, and his mouth was set in a fixed smile.

"Pray do not trouble yourself to look for your weapons," he said, as the Prussian cast a swift glance at the empty chair in which they had been laid. "You have been, if you will allow me to say so, a little indiscreet to make yourself so much at home in a house every wall of which is honeycombed with secret passages. You will be amused to hear that forty men were watching you at your supper. Ah! what then?"

Captain Baumgarten had taken a step forward with clenched fists. The Frenchman held up tho revolver which he grasped in his right hand, while with the left he hurled the German back into his chair.

"Pray keep your seat," said he. "You have no cause to trouble about your men. They have already been provided for. It is astonishing with these stone floors how little one can hear what goes on beneath. You have been relieved of your command, and have now only to think of yourself. May I ask what your name is?"

"I am Captain Baumgarten of, the 24th Posen Regiment."

"Your French is excellent, though you incline, like most of your countrymen, to turn the 'p' into a 'b.' I have been amused to hear them cry '*Avez bitie sur moi!*' You know, doubtless, who it is who addresses you."

"The Count of Chateau Noir."

"Precisely. It would have been a misfortune if you had visited my chateau and I had been unable to have a word with you. I have had to do with many German soldiers, but never with an officer before. I have much to talk to you about."

Captain Baumgarten sat still in his chair. Brave as he was, there was something in this man's manner which made his skin creep with apprehension. His eyes glanced to right and to left, but his weapons were gone, and in a struggle he saw that he was but a child to this gigantic adversary. The count had picked up the claret bottle and held it to the light.

"Tut! tut!" said he. "And was this the best that Pierre could do for you? I am ashamed to look you in the face, Captain Baumgarten. We must improve upon this."

He blew a call upon a whistle which hung from his shooting-jacket.
The old manservant was in the room in an instant.

"Chambertin from bin 15!" he cried, and a minute later a grey bottle, streaked with cobwebs, was carried in as a nurse bears an infant. The count filled two glasses to the brim.

"Drink!" said he. "It is the very best in my cellars, and not to be matched between Rouen and Paris. Drink, sir, and be happy! There are cold joints below. There are two lobsters, fresh from Honfleur. Will you not venture upon a second and more savoury supper?"

The German officer shook his head. He drained the glass, however, and his host filled it once more, pressing him to give an order for this or that dainty.

"There is nothing in my house which is not at your disposal. You have but to say the word. Well, then, you will allow me to tell you a story while you drink your wine. I have so longed to tell it to some German officer. It is about my son, my only child, Eustace, who was taken and died in escaping. It is a curious little story, and I think that I can promise you that you will never forget it.

"You must know, then, that my boy was in the artillery — a fine young fellow, Captain Baumgarten, and the pride of his mother. She died within a week of the news of his death reaching us. It was brought by a brother officer who was at his side throughout, and who escaped while my lad died. I want to tell you all that he told me.

"Eustace was taken at Weissenburg on the 4th of August. The prisoners were broken up into parties, and sent back into Germany by different routes. Eustace was taken upon the 5th to a village called Lauterburg, where he met with kindness from the German officer in command. This good colonel had the hungry lad to supper, offered him the best he had, opened a bottle of good wine, as I have tried to do for you, and gave him a cigar from his own case. Might I entreat you to take one from mine?"

The German again shook his head. His horror of his companion had increased as he sat watching the lips that smiled and the eyes that glared.

"The colonel, as I say, was good to my boy. But, unluckily, the prisoners were moved next day across the Rhine into Ettlingen. They were not equally fortunate there. The officer who guarded them was a ruffian and a villain, Captain Baumgarten. He took a pleasure in humiliating and ill-treating the brave men who had fallen into his power. That night upon my son answering fiercely back to some taunt of his, he struck him in the eye, like this!"

The crash of the blow rang through the hall. The German's face fell forward, his hand up, and blood oozing through his fingers. The count settled down in his chair once more.

"My boy was disfigured by the blow, and this villain made his appearance the object of his jeers. By the way, you look a little comical yourself at the present moment, captain, and your colonel would certainly say that you had been getting into mischief. To continue, however, my boy's youth and his destitution — for his pockets were empty — moved the pity of a kind-hearted major, and he advanced him ten Napoleons from his own pocket without security of any kind. Into your hands, Captain Baumgarten, I return these ten gold pieces, since I cannot learn the name of the lender. I am grateful from my heart for this kindness shown to my boy.

"The vile tyrant who commanded the escort accompanied the prisoners to Durlack, and from there to Carlsruhe. He heaped every outrage upon my lad, because the spirit of the Chateau Noirs would not stoop to turn away his wrath by a feigned submission. Ay, this cowardly villain, whose heart's blood shall yet clot upon this hand, dared to strike my son with his open hand, to kick him, to tear hairs from his moustache — to use him thus — and thus — and thus!"

The German writhed and struggled. He was helpless in the hands of this huge giant whose blows were raining upon him. When at last, blinded and half-senseless, he staggered to his feet, it was only to be hurled back again into the great oaken chair. He sobbed in his impotent anger and shame.

"My boy was frequently moved to tears by the humiliation of his position," continued the count. "You will understand me when I say that it is a bitter thing to be helpless in the hands of an insolent and remorseless enemy. On arriving at Carlsruhe, however, his face, which had been wounded by the brutality of his guard, was bound up by a young Bavarian subaltern who was touched by his appearance. I regret to see that your eye is bleeding so. Will you permit me to bind it with my silk handkerchief?"

He leaned forward, but the German dashed his hand aside.

"I am in your power, you monster!" he cried; "I can endure your brutalities, but not your hypocrisy."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"I am taking things in their order, just as they occurred," said he. "I was under vow to tell it to the first German officer with whom I could talk *tete-a-tete*. Let me see, I had got as far as the young Bavarian at Carlsruhe. I regret extremely that you will not permit me to use such slight skill in surgery as I possess. At Carlsruhe, my lad was shut up in the old caserne, where he remained for a fortnight. The worst pang of his captivity was that some unmannerly curs in the garrison would taunt him with his position as he sat by his window in the evening. That reminds me, captain, that you are not quite situated upon a bed of roses yourself, are you now? You came to trap a wolf, my man, and now the beast has you down with his fangs in your throat. A family man, too, I should judge, by that well-filled tunic. Well, a widow the more will make little matter, and they do not usually remain widows long. Get back into the chair, you dog!

"Well, to continue my story — at the end of a fortnight my son and his friend escaped. I need not trouble you with the dangers which they ran, or with the privations which they endured. Suffice it that to disguise themselves they had to take the clothes of two peasants, whom they waylaid in a wood. Hiding by day and travelling by night, they had got as far into France as Remilly, and were within a mile — a single mile, captain — of crossing the German lines when a patrol of Uhlans came right upon them. Ah! it was hard, was it not, when they had come so far and were so near to safety?" The count blew a double call upon his whistle, and three hard-faced peasants entered the room.

“These must represent my Uhlans,” said he. “Well, then, the captain in command, finding that these men were French soldiers in civilian dress within the German lines, proceeded to hang them without trial or ceremony. I think, Jean, that the centre beam is the strongest.”

The unfortunate soldier was dragged from his chair to where a noosed rope had been flung over one of the huge oaken rafters which spanned the room. The cord was slipped over his head, and he felt its harsh grip round his throat. The three peasants seized the other end, and looked to the count for his orders. The officer, pale, but firm, folded his arms and stared defiantly at the man who tortured him.

“You are now face to face with death, and I perceive from your lips that you are praying. My son was also face to face with death, and he prayed, also. It happened that a general officer came up, and he heard the lad praying for his mother, and it moved him so — he being himself a father — that he ordered his Uhlans away, and he remained with his aide-de-camp only, beside the condemned men. And when he heard all the lad had to tell — that he was the only child of an old family, and that his mother was in failing health — he threw off the rope as I throw off this, and he kissed him on either cheek, as I kiss you, and he bade him go, as I bid you go, and may every kind wish of that noble general, though it could not stave off the fever which slew my son, descend now upon your head.”

And so it was that Captain Baumgarten, disfigured, blinded, and bleeding, staggered out into the wind and the rain of that wild December dawn.

THE STRIPED CHEST

"What do you make of her, Allardyce?" I asked.

My second mate was standing beside me upon the poop, with his short, thick legs astretch, for the gale had left a considerable swell behind it, and our two quarter-boats nearly touched the water with every roll. He steadied his glass against the mizzen-shrouds, and he looked long and hard at this disconsolate stranger every time she came reeling up on to the crest of a roller and hung balanced for a few seconds before swooping down upon the other side. She lay so low in the water that I could only catch an occasional glimpse of a pea-green line of bulwark. She was a brig, but her mainmast had been snapped short off some 10ft. above the deck, and no effort seemed to have been made to cut away the wreckage, which floated, sails and yards, like the broken wing of a wounded gull upon the water beside her. The foremast was still standing, but the foretopsail was flying loose, and the headsails were streaming out in long, white pennons in front of her. Never have I seen a vessel which appeared to have gone through rougher handling. But we could not be surprised at that, for there had been times during the last three days when it was a question whether our own barque would ever see land again. For thirty-six hours we had kept her nose to it, and if the *Mary Sinclair* had not been as good a seaboat as ever left the Clyde, we could not have gone through. And yet here we were at the end of it with the loss only of our gig and of part of the starboard bulwark. It did not astonish us, however, when the smother had cleared away, to find that others had been less lucky, and that this mutilated brig staggering about upon a blue sea and under a cloudless sky, had been left, like a blinded man after a lightning flash, to tell of the terror which is past. Allardyce, who was a slow and methodical Scotchman, stared long and hard at the little craft, while our seamen lined the bulwark or clustered upon the fore shrouds to have a view of the stranger. In latitude 20 degrees and longitude 10 degrees, which were about our bearings, one becomes a little curious as to whom one meets, for one has left the main lines of Atlantic commerce to the north. For ten days we had been sailing over a solitary sea.

"She's derelict, I'm thinking," said the second mate.

I had come to the same conclusion, for I could see no signs of life upon her deck, and there was no answer to the friendly wavings from our seamen.

The crew had probably deserted her under the impression that she was about to founder.

"She can't last long," continued Allardyce, in his measured way. "She may put her nose down and her tail up any minute. The water's lipping up to the edge of her rail."

"What's her flag?" I asked.

"I'm trying to make out. It's got all twisted and tangled with the halyards. Yes, I've got it now, clear enough. It's the Brazilian flag, but it's wrong side up."

She had hoisted a signal of distress, then, before her people had abandoned her. Perhaps they had only just gone. I took the mate's glass and looked round over the tumultuous face of the deep blue Atlantic, still veined and starred with white lines and spoutings of foam. But nowhere could I see anything human beyond ourselves.

"There may be living men aboard," said I.

"There may be salvage," muttered the second mate.

"Then we will run down upon her lee side, and lie to." We were not more than a hundred yards from her when we swung our foreyard aback, and there we were, the barque and the brig, ducking and bowing like two clowns in a dance.

"Drop one of the quarter-boats," said I. "Take four men, Mr. Allardyce, and see what you can learn of her."

But just at that moment my first officer, Mr. Armstrong, came on deck, for seven bells had struck, and it was but a few minutes off his watch. It would interest me to go myself to this abandoned vessel and to see what there might be aboard of her. So, with a word to Armstrong, I swung myself over the side, slipped down the falls, and took my place in the sheets of the boat.

It was but a little distance, but it took some time to traverse, and so heavy was the roll that often when we were in the trough of the sea, we could not see either the barque which we had left or the brig which we were approaching. The sinking sun did not penetrate down there, and it was cold and dark in the hollows of the waves, but each passing billow heaved us up into the warmth and the sunshine once more. At each of these moments, as we hung upon a white-capped ridge between the two dark valleys, I caught a glimpse of the long, pea-green line, and the nodding foremast of the brig, and I steered so as to come round by her stern, so that we might determine which was the best way of boarding her. As we passed her we saw the name *Nossa Sehnora da Vittoria* painted across her dripping counter.

"The weather side, sir," said the second mate. "Stand by with the boat-hook, carpenter!" An instant later we had jumped over the bulwarks, which were hardly higher than our boat, and found ourselves upon the deck of the abandoned vessel. Our first thought was to provide for our own safety in case — as seemed very probable — the vessel should settle down beneath our feet. With this object two of our men held on to the painter of the boat, and fended her off from the vessel's side, so that she might be ready in case we had to make a hurried retreat. The carpenter was sent to find out how much water there was, and whether it was still gaming, while the other seaman, Allardyce and myself, made a rapid inspection of the vessel and her cargo.

The deck was littered with wreckage and with hen-coops, in which the dead birds were washing about. The boats were gone, with the exception of one, the bottom of which had been stove, and it was certain that the crew had abandoned the vessel. The cabin was in a deck-house, one side of which had been beaten in by a heavy sea. Allardyce and I entered it, and found the captain's table as he had left it, his books and papers — all Spanish or Portuguese — scattered over it, with piles of cigarette ash everywhere. I looked about for the log, but could not find it.

"As likely as not he never kept one," said Allardyce. "Things are pretty slack aboard a South American trader, and they don't do more than they can help. If there was one it must have been taken away with him in the boat."

"I should like to take all these books and papers," said I. "Ask the carpenter how much time we have."

His report was reassuring. The vessel was full of water, but some of the cargo was buoyant, and there was no immediate danger of her sinking. Probably she would never sink, but would drift about as one of those terrible unmarked reefs which have sent so many stout vessels to the bottom.

"In that case there is no danger in your going below, Mr. Allardyce," said I. "See what you can make of her and find out how much of her cargo may be saved. I'll look through these papers while you are gone."

The bills of lading, and some notes and letters which lay upon the desk, sufficed to inform me that the Brazilian brig *Nossa Sehnora da Vittoria* had cleared from Bahia a month before. The name of the captain was Texeira, but there was no record as to the number of the crew. She was bound for London, and a glance at the bills of lading was sufficient to show me that we were not likely to profit much in the way of salvage. Her cargo consisted of nuts, ginger, and wood, the latter in the shape of great logs of valuable tropical growths. It was these, no doubt, which had prevented the ill-fated vessel from going to the bottom, but they were of such a size as to make it impossible for us to extract them. Besides these, there were a few fancy goods, such as a number of ornamental birds for millinery purposes, and a hundred cases of preserved fruits. And then, as I turned over the papers, I came upon a short note in English, which arrested my attention.

It is requested (said the note) that the various old Spanish and Indian curiosities, which came out of the Santarem collection, and which are consigned to Prontfoot & Neuman of Oxford Street, London, should be put in some place where there may be no danger of these very valuable and unique articles being injured or tampered with. This applies most particularly to the treasure-chest of Don Ramirez di Leyra, which must on no account be placed where anyone can get at it.

The treasure-chest of Don Ramirez! Unique and valuable articles! Here was a chance of salvage after all. I had risen to my feet with the paper in my hand when my Scotch mate appeared in the doorway.

“I’m thinking all isn’t quite as it should be aboard of this ship, sir,” said he. He was a hard-faced man, and yet I could see that he had been startled.

“What’s the matter?”

“Murder’s the matter, sir. There’s a man here with his brains beaten out.”

“Killed in the storm?” said I.

“May be so, sir, but I’ll be surprised if you think so after you have seen him.”

“Where is he, then?”

“This way, sir; here in the maindeck house.”

There appeared to have been no accommodation below in the brig, for there was the after-house for the captain, another by the main hatchway, with the cook’s galley attached to it, and a third in the forecastle for the men. It was to this middle one that the mate led me. As you entered, the galley, with its litter of tumbled pots and dishes, was upon the right, and upon the left was a small room with two bunks for the officers. Then beyond there was a place about 12ft. square, which was littered with flags and spare canvas. All round the walls were a number of packets done up in coarse cloth and carefully lashed to the woodwork. At the other end was a great box, striped red and white, though the red was so faded and the white so dirty that it was only where the light fell directly upon it that one could see the colouring. The box was, by subsequent measurement, 4ft. 3ins. in length, 3ft. 2ins. in height, and 3ft. across — considerably larger than a seaman’s chest. But it was not to the box that my eyes or my thoughts were turned as I entered the store-room. On the floor, lying across the litter of bunting, there was stretched a small, dark man with a short, curling beard. He lay as far as it was possible from the box, with his feet towards it and his head away. A crimson patch was printed upon the white canvas on which his head was resting, and little red ribbons wreathed themselves round his swarthy neck and trailed away on to the floor, but there was no sign of a wound that I could see, and his face was as placid as that of a sleeping child. It was only when I stooped that I could perceive his injury, and then I turned away with an exclamation of horror. He had been pole-axed; apparently by some person standing behind him. A frightful blow had smashed in the top of his head and penetrated deeply into his brains. His face might well be placid, for death must have been absolutely instantaneous, and the position of the wound showed that he could never have seen the person who had inflicted it.

“Is that foul play or accident, Captain Barclay?” asked my second mate, demurely.

“You are quite right, Mr. Allardyce. The man has been murdered — struck down from above by a sharp and heavy weapon. But who was he, and why did they murder him?”

“He was a common seaman, sir,” said the mate. “You can see that if you look at his fingers.” He turned out his pockets as he spoke and brought to light a pack of cards, some tarred string, and a bundle of Brazilian tobacco.

“Hello, look at this!” said he.

It was a large, open knife with a stiff spring blade which he had picked up from the floor. The steel was shining and bright, so that we could not associate it with the crime, and yet the dead man had apparently held it in his hand when he was struck down, for it still lay within his grasp.

“It looks to me, sir, as if he knew he was in danger and kept his knife handy,” said the mate. “However, we can’t help the poor beggar now. I can’t make out these things that are lashed to the wall. They seem to be idols and weapons and curios of all sorts done up in old sacking.”

“That’s right,” said I. “They are the only things of value that we are likely to get from the cargo. Hail the barque and tell them to send the other quarter-boat to help us to get the stuff aboard.”

While he was away I examined this curious plunder which had come into our possession. The curiosities were so wrapped up that I could only form a general idea as to their nature, but the striped box stood in a good light where I could thoroughly examine it. On the lid, which was clamped and cornered with metal-work, there was engraved a complex coat of arms, and beneath it was a line of Spanish which I was able to decipher as meaning, “The treasure-chest of Don Ramirez di Leyra, Knight of the Order of Saint James, Governor and Captain-General of Terra Firma and of the Province of Veraquas.” In one corner was the date, 1606, and on the other a large white label, upon which was written in English, “You are earnestly requested, upon no account, to open this box.” The same warning was repeated underneath in Spanish. As to the lock, it was a very complex and heavy one of engraved steel, with a Latin motto, which was above a seaman’s comprehension. By the time I had finished this examination of the peculiar box, the other quarter-boat with Mr. Armstrong, the first officer, had come alongside, and we began to carry out and place in her the various curiosities which appeared to be the only objects worth moving from the derelict ship. When she was full I sent her back to the barque, and then Allardyce and I, with the carpenter and one seaman, shifted the striped box, which was the only thing left, to our boat, and lowered it over, balancing it upon the two middle thwarts, for it was so heavy that it would have given the boat a dangerous tilt had we placed it at either end. As to the dead man, we left him where we had found him. The mate had a theory that, at the moment of the desertion of the ship, this fellow had started plundering, and that the captain, in an attempt to preserve discipline, had struck him down with a hatchet or some other heavy weapon. It seemed more probable than any other explanation, and yet it did not entirely satisfy me either. But the ocean is full of mysteries, and we were content to leave the fate of the dead seaman of the Brazilian brig to be added to that long list which every sailor can recall.

The heavy box was slung up by ropes on to the deck of the *Mary Sinclair*, and was carried by four seamen into the cabin, where, between the table and the after-lockers, there was just space for it to stand. There it remained during supper, and after that meal the mates remained with me, and discussed over a glass of grog the event of the day. Mr. Armstrong was a long, thin, vulture-like man, an excellent seaman, but famous for his nearness and cupidity. Our treasure-trove had excited him greatly, and already he had begun with glistening eyes to reckon up how much it might be worth to each of us when the shares of the salvage came to be divided.

"If the paper said that they were unique, Mr. Barclay, then they may be worth anything that you like to name. You wouldn't believe the sums that the rich collectors give. A thousand pounds is nothing to them. We'll have something to show for our voyage, or I am mistaken."

"I don't think that," said I. "As far as I can see, they are not very different from any other South American curios."

"Well, sir, I've traded there for fourteen voyages, and I have never seen anything like that chest before. That's worth a pile of money, just as it stands. But it's so heavy that surely there must be something valuable inside it. Don't you think that we ought to open it and see?"

"If you break it open you will spoil it, as likely as not," said the second mate.

Armstrong squatted down in front of it, with his head on one side, and his long, thin nose within a few inches of the lock.

"The wood is oak," said he, "and it has shrunk a little with age. If I had a chisel or a strong-bladed knife I could force the lock back without doing any damage at all."

The mention of a strong-bladed knife made me think of the dead seaman upon the brig.

"I wonder if he could have been on the job when someone came to interfere with him," said I.

"I don't know about that, sir, but I am perfectly certain that I could open the box. There's a screwdriver here in the locker. Just hold the lamp, Allardyce, and I'll have it done in a brace of shakes."

"Wait a bit," said I, for already, with eyes which gleamed with curiosity and with avarice, he was stooping over the lid. "I don't see that there is any hurry over this matter. You've read that card which warns us not to open it. It may mean anything or it may mean nothing, but somehow I feel inclined to obey it. After all, whatever is in it will keep, and if it is valuable it will be worth as much if it is opened in the owner's offices as in the cabin of the *Mary Sinclair*."

The first officer seemed bitterly disappointed at my decision.

“Surely, sir, you are not superstitious about it,” said he, with a slight sneer upon his thin lips. “If it gets out of our own hands, and we don’t see for ourselves what is inside it, we may be done out of our rights; besides—”

“That’s enough, Mr. Armstrong,” said I, abruptly. “You may have every confidence that you will get your rights, but I will not have that box opened to-night.”

“Why, the label itself shows that the box has been examined by Europeans,” Allardyce added. “Because a box is a treasure-box is no reason that it has treasures inside it now. A good many folk have had a peep into it since the days of the old Governor of Terra Firma.”

Armstrong threw the screwdriver down upon the table and shrugged his shoulders.

“Just as you like,” said he; but for the rest of the evening, although we spoke upon many subjects, I noticed that his eyes were continually coming round, with the same expression of curiosity and greed, to the old striped box.

And now I come to that portion of my story which fills me even now with a shuddering horror when I think of it. The main cabin had the rooms of the officers round it, but mine was the farthest away from it at the end of the little passage which led to the companion. No regular watch was kept by me, except in cases of emergency, and the three mates divided the watches among them. Armstrong had the middle watch, which ends at four in the morning, and he was relieved by Allardyce. For my part I have always been one of the soundest of sleepers, and it is rare for anything less than a hand upon my shoulder to arouse me.

And yet I was aroused that night, or rather in the early grey of the morning. It was just half-past four by my chronometer when something caused me to sit up in my berth wide awake and with every nerve tingling. It was a sound of some sort, a crash with a human cry at the end of it, which still jarred on my ears. I sat listening, but all was now silent. And yet it could not have been imagination, that hideous cry, for the echo of it still rang in my head, and it seemed to have come from some place quite close to me. I sprang from my bunk, and, pulling on some clothes, I made my way into the cabin. At first I saw nothing unusual there. In the cold, grey light I made out the red-clothed table, the six rotating chairs, the walnut lockers, the swinging barometer, and there, at the end, the big striped chest. I was turning away, with the intention of going upon deck and asking the second mate if he had heard anything, when my eyes fell suddenly upon something which projected from under the table. It was the leg of a man — a leg with a long sea-boot upon it. I stooped, and there was a figure sprawling upon his face, his arms thrown forward and his body twisted. One glance told me that it was Armstrong, the first officer, and a second that he was a dead man. For a few moments I stood gasping. Then I rushed on to the deck, called Allardyce to my assistance, and came back with him into the cabin.

Together we pulled the unfortunate fellow from under the table, and as we looked at his dripping head we exchanged glances, and I do not know which was the paler of the two.

"The same as the Spanish sailor," said I.

"The very same. God preserve us! It's that infernal chest! Look at Armstrong's hand!"

He held up the mate's right hand, and there was the screwdriver which he had wished to use the night before.

"He's been at the chest, sir. He knew that I was on deck and you were asleep. He knelt down in front of it, and he pushed the lock back with that tool. Then something happened to him, and he cried out so that you heard him."

"Allardyce," I whispered, "what *could* have happened to him?"

The second mate put his hand upon my sleeve and drew me into his cabin.

"We can talk here, sir, and we don't know who may be listening to us in there. What do you suppose is in that box, Captain Barclay?"

"I give you my word, Allardyce, that I have no idea."

"Well, I can only find one theory which will fit all the facts. Look at the size of the box. Look at all the carving and metal-work which may conceal any number of holes. Look at the weight of it; it took four men to carry it. On top of that, remember that two men have tried to open it, and both have come to their end through it. Now, sir, what can it mean except one thing?"

"You mean there is a man in it?"

"Of course there is a man in it. You know how it is in these South American States, sir. A man may be president one week and hunted like a dog the next — they are for ever flying for their lives. My idea is that there is some fellow in hiding there, who is armed and desperate, and who will fight to the death before he is taken."

"But his food and drink?"

"It's a roomy chest, sir, and he may have some provisions stowed away. As to his drink, he had a friend among the crew upon the brig who saw that he had what he needed."

"You think, then, that the label asking people not to open the box was simply written in his interest?"

"Yes, sir, that is my idea. Have you any other way of explaining the facts?"

I had to confess that I had not.

"The question is what we are to do?" I asked.

"The man's a dangerous ruffian, who sticks at nothing. I'm thinking it wouldn't be a bad thing to put a rope round the chest and tow it alongside for half an hour; then we could open it at our ease. Or if we just tied the box up and kept him from getting any water maybe that would do as well. Or the carpenter could put a coat of varnish over it and stop all the blow-holes."

"Come, Allardyce," said I, angrily. "You don't seriously mean to say that a whole ship's company are going to be terrorised by a single man in a box. If he's there, I'll engage to fetch him out!" I went to my room and came back with my revolver in my hand. "Now, Allardyce," said I, "do you open the lock, and I'll stand on guard."

"For God's sake, think what you are doing, sir!" cried the mate. "Two men have lost their lives over it, and the blood of one not yet dry upon the carpet."

"The more reason why we should revenge him."

"Well, sir, at least let me call the carpenter. Three are better than two, and he is a good stout man."

He went off in search of him, and I was left alone with the striped chest in the cabin. I don't think that I'm a nervous man, but I kept the table between me and this solid old relic of the Spanish Main. In the growing light of morning the red and white striping was beginning to appear, and the curious scrolls and wreaths of metal and carving which showed the loving pains which cunning craftsmen had expended upon it. Presently the carpenter and the mate came back together, the former with a hammer in his hand.

“It’s a bad business, this, sir,” said he, shaking his head, as he looked at the body of the mate. “And you think there’s someone hiding in the box?”

“There’s no doubt about it,” said Allardyce, picking up the screwdriver and setting his jaw like a man who needs to brace his courage. “I’ll drive the lock back if you will both stand by. If he rises let him have it on the head with your hammer, carpenter. Shoot at once, sir, if he raises his hand. Now!”

He had knelt down in front of the striped chest, and passed the blade of the tool under the lid. With a sharp snick the lock flew back. “Stand by!” yelled the mate, and with a heave he threw open the massive top of the box. As it swung up we all three sprang back, I with my pistol levelled, and the carpenter with the hammer above his head. Then, as nothing happened, we each took a step forward and peeped in. The box was empty.

Not quite empty either, for in one corner was lying an old yellow candlestick, elaborately engraved, which appeared to be as old as the box itself. Its rich yellow tone and artistic shape suggested that it was an object of value. For the rest there was nothing more weighty or valuable than dust in the old striped treasure-chest.

“Well, I’m blessed!” cried Allardyce, staring blankly into it.
“Where does the weight come in, then?”

“Look at the thickness of the sides, and look at the lid. Why, it’s five inches through. And see that great metal spring across it.”

“That’s for holding the lid up,” said the mate. “You see, it won’t lean back. What’s that German printing on the inside?”

“It means that it was made by Johann Rothstein of Augsburg, in 1606.”

“And a solid bit of work, too. But it doesn’t throw much light on what has passed, does it, Captain Barclay? That candlestick looks like gold. We shall have something for our trouble after all.”

He leant forward to grasp it, and from that moment I have never doubted as to the reality of inspiration, for on the instant I caught him by the collar and pulled him straight again. It may have been some story of the Middle Ages which had come back to my mind, or it may have been that my eye had caught some red which was not that of rust upon the upper part of the lock, but to him and to me it will always seem an inspiration, so prompt and sudden was my action.

"There's devilry here," said I. "Give me the crooked stick from the corner."

It was an ordinary walking-cane with a hooked top. I passed it over the candlestick and gave it a pull. With a flash a row of polished steel fangs shot out from below the upper lip, and the great striped chest snapped at us like a wild animal. Clang came the huge lid into its place, and the glasses on the swinging rack sang and tinkled with the shock. The mate sat down on the edge of the table and shivered like a frightened horse.

"You've saved my life, Captain Barclay!" said he.

So this was the secret of the striped treasure-chest of old Don Ramirez di Leyra, and this was how he preserved his ill-gotten gains from the Terra Firma and the Province of Veraquas. Be the thief ever so cunning he could not tell that golden candlestick from the other articles of value, and the instant that he laid hand upon it the terrible spring was unloosed and the murderous steel pikes were driven into his brain, while the shock of the blow sent the victim backward and enabled the chest to automatically close itself. How many, I wondered, had fallen victims to the ingenuity of the mechanic of Ausgburg? And as I thought of the possible history of that grim striped chest my resolution was very quickly taken.

"Carpenter, bring three men, and carry this on deck."

"Going to throw it overboard, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Allardyce. I'm not superstitious as a rule, but there are some things which are more than a sailor can be called upon to stand."

"No wonder that brig made heavy weather, Captain Barclay, with such a thing on board. The glass is dropping fast, sir, and we are only just in time."

So we did not even wait for the three sailors, but we carried it out, the mate, the carpenter, and I, and we pushed it with our own hands over the bulwarks. There was a white spout of water, and it was gone. There it lies, the striped chest, a thousand fathoms deep, and if, as they say, the sea will some day be dry land, I grieve for the man who finds that old box and tries to penetrate into its secret.

A SHADOW BEFORE

The 15th of July, 1870, found John Worlington Dodds a ruined gamester of the Stock Exchange. Upon the 17th he was a very opulent man. And yet he had effected the change without leaving the penurious little Irish townlet of Dunsloe, which could have been bought outright for a quarter of the sum which he had earned during the single day that he was within its walls. There is a romance of finance yet to be written, a story of huge forces which are for ever waxing and waning, of bold operations, of breathless suspense, of agonised failure, of deep combinations which are baffled by others still more subtle. The mighty debts of each great European Power stand like so many columns of mercury, for ever rising and falling to indicate the pressure upon each. He who can see far enough into the future to tell how that ever-varying column will stand to-morrow is the man who has fortune within his grasp.

John Worlington Dodds had many of the gifts which lead a speculator to success. He was quick in observing, just in estimating, prompt and fearless in acting. But in finance there is always the element of luck, which, however one may eliminate it, still remains, like the blank at roulette, a constantly present handicap upon the operator. And so it was that Worlington Dodds had come to grief. On the best advices he had dabbled in the funds of a South American Republic in the days before South American Republics had been found out. The Republic defaulted, and Dodds lost his money. He had bulled the shares of a Scotch railway, and a four months' strike had hit him hard. He had helped to underwrite a coffee company in the hope that the public would come along upon the feed and gradually nibble away some of his holding, but the political sky had been clouded and the public had refused to invest. Everything which he had touched had gone wrong, and now, on the eve of his marriage, young, clear-headed, and energetic, he was actually a bankrupt had his creditors chosen to make him one. But the Stock Exchange is an indulgent body. What is the case of one to-day may be that of another to-morrow, and everyone is interested in seeing that the stricken man is given time to rise again. So the burden of Worlington Dodds was lightened for him; many shoulders helped to bear it, and he was able to go for a little summer tour into Ireland, for the doctors had ordered him rest and change of air to restore his shaken nervous system. Thus it was that upon the 15th of July, 1870, he found himself at his breakfast in the fly-blown coffee-room of the “George Hotel” in the market square of Dunsloe. It is a dull and depressing coffee-room, and one which is usually empty, but on this particular day it was as crowded and noisy as that of any London hotel. Every table was occupied, and a thick smell of fried bacon and of fish hung in the air. Heavily booted men clattered in and out, spurs jingled, riding-crops were stacked in corners, and there was a general atmosphere of horse. The conversation, too, was of nothing else. From every side Worlington Dodds heard of yearlings, of windgalls, of roarers, of spavins, of cribsuckers, of a hundred other terms which were as unintelligible to him as his own Stock Exchange jargon would have been to the company. He asked the waiter for the reason of it all, and the waiter was an astonished man that there should be any man in this world who did not know it.

“Shure it’s the Dunsloe horse fair, your honour — the greatest horse-fair in all Oireland. It lasts for a wake, and the folk come from far an’ near — from England an’ Scotland an’ iverywhere. If you look out of the winder, your honour, you’ll see the horses, and it’s asy your honour’s conscience must be, or you wouldn’t slape so sound that the creatures didn’t rouse you with their clatter.”

Dodds had a recollection that he had heard a confused murmur, which had interwoven itself with his dreams — a sort of steady rhythmic beating and clanking — and now, when he looked through the window, he saw the cause of it. The square was packed with horses from end to end — greys, bays, browns, blacks, chestnuts — young ones and old, fine ones and coarse, horses of every conceivable sort and size. It seemed a huge function for so small a town, and he remarked as much to the waiter.

“Well, you see, your honour, the horses don’t live in the town, an’ they don’t vex their heads how small it is. But it’s in the very centre of the horse-bradin’ districts of Oireland, so where should they come to be sould if it wasn’t to Dunsloe?” The waiter had a telegram in his hand, and he turned the address to Worlington Dodds. “Shure I niver heard such a name, sorr. Maybe you could tell me who owns it?”

Dodds looked at the envelope. Strellenhaus was the name. “No, I don’t know,” said he. “I never heard it before. It’s a foreign name. Perhaps if you were—”

But at that moment a little round-faced, ruddy-cheeked gentleman, who was breakfasting at the next table, leaned forward and interrupted him.

"Did you say a foreign name, sir?" said he.

"Strellenhaus is the name."

"I am Mr. Strellenhaus — Mr. Julius Strellenhaus, of Liverpool. I was expecting a telegram. Thank you very much."

He sat so near that Dodds, without any wish to play the spy, could not help to some extent overlooking him as he opened the envelope. The message was a very long one. Quite a wad of melon-tinted paper came out from the tawny envelope. Mr. Strellenhaus arranged the sheets methodically upon the table-cloth in front of him, so that no eye but his own could see them. Then he took out a note-book, and, with an anxious face, he began to make entries in it, glancing first at the telegram and then at the book, and writing apparently one letter or figure at a time. Dodds was interested, for he knew exactly what the man was doing. He was working out a cipher. Dodds had often done it himself. And then suddenly the little man turned very pale, as if the full purport of the message had been a shock to him. Dodds had done that also, and his sympathies were all with his neighbours. Then the stranger rose, and, leaving his breakfast untasted, he walked out of the room.

"I'm thinkin' that the gintleman has had bad news, sorr," said the confidential waiter.

"Looks like it," Dodds answered; and at that moment his thoughts were suddenly drawn off into another direction.

The boots had entered the room with a telegram in his hand. "Where's Mr. Mancune?" said he to the waiter.

"Well, there are some quare names about. What was it you said?"

"Mr. Mancune," said the boots, glancing round him. "Ah, there he is!" and he handed the telegram to a gentleman who was sitting reading the paper in a corner.

Dodds's eyes had already fallen upon this man, and he had wondered vaguely what he was doing in such company. He was a tall, white-haired, eagle-nosed gentleman, with a waxed moustache and a carefully pointed beard — an aristocratic type which seemed out of its element among the rough, hearty, noisy dealers who surrounded him. This, then, was Mr. Mancune, for whom the second telegram was intended.

As he opened it, tearing it open with a feverish haste, Dodds could perceive that it was as bulky as the first one. He observed also, from the delay in reading it, that it was also in some sort of cipher. The gentleman did not write down any translation of it, but he sat for some time with his nervous, thin fingers twitching amongst the hairs of his white beard, and his shaggy brows bent in the deepest and most absorbed attention whilst he mastered the meaning of it. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet, his eyes flashed, his cheeks flushed, and in his excitement he crumpled the message up in his hand. With an effort he mastered his emotion, put the paper into his pocket, and walked out of the room.

This was enough to excite a less astute and imaginative man than Worlington Dodds. Was there any connection between these two messages, or was it merely a coincidence? Two men with strange names receive two telegrams within a few minutes of each other, each of considerable length, each in cipher, and each causing keen emotion to the man who received it. One turned pale. The other sprang excitedly to his feet. It might be a coincidence, but it was a very curious one. If it was not a coincidence, then what could it mean? Were they confederates who pretended to work apart, but who each received identical orders from some person at a distance? That was possible, and yet there were difficulties in the way. He puzzled and puzzled, but could find no satisfactory solution to the problem. All breakfast he was turning it over in his mind.

When breakfast was over he sauntered out into the market square, where the horse sale was already in progress. The yearlings were being sold first — tall, long-legged, skittish, wild-eyed creatures, who had run free upon the upland pastures, with ragged hair and towsie manes, but hardy, inured to all weathers, and with the makings of splendid hunters and steeplechasers when corn and time had brought them to maturity. They were largely of thoroughbred blood, and were being bought by English dealers, who would invest a few pounds now on what they might sell for fifty guineas in a year, if all went well. It was legitimate speculation, for the horse is a delicate creature, he is afflicted with many ailments, the least accident may destroy his value, he is a certain expense and an uncertain profit, and for one who comes safely to maturity several may bring no return at all. So the English horse-dealers took their risks as they bought up the shaggy Irish yearlings. One man with a ruddy face and a yellow overcoat took them by the dozen, with as much *sang froid* as if they had been oranges, entering each bargain in a bloated note-book. He bought forty or fifty during the time that Dodds was watching him.

"Who is that?" he asked his neighbour, whose spurs and gaiters showed that he was likely to know.

The man stared in astonishment at the stranger's ignorance. "Why, that's Jim Holloway, the great Jim Holloway," said he; then, seeing by the blank look upon Dodds's face that even this information had not helped him much, he went into details. "Sure he's the head of Holloway & Morland, of London," said he. "He's the buying partner, and he buys cheap; and the other stays at home and sells, and he sells dear. He owns more horses than any man in the world, and asks the best money for them. I dare say you'll find that half of what are sold at the Dunsloe fair this day will go to him, and he's got such a purse that there's not a man who can bid against him."

Worlington Dodds watched the doings of the great dealer with interest. He had passed on now to the two-year-olds and three-year-olds, full-grown horses, but still a little loose in the limb and weak in the bone. The London buyer was choosing his animals carefully, but having chosen them, the vigour of his competition drove all other bidders out of it. With a careless nod he would run the figure up five pounds at a time, until he was left in possession of the field. At the same time he was a shrewd observer, and when, as happened more than once, he believed that someone was bidding against him simply in order to run him up, the head would cease suddenly to nod, the note-book would be closed with a snap, and the intruder would be left with a purchase which he did not desire upon his hands. All Dodds's business instincts were aroused by the tactics of this great operator, and he stood in the crowd watching with the utmost interest all that occurred.

It is not to buy young horses, however, that the great dealers come to Ireland, and the real business of the fair commenced when the four and five-year-olds were reached; the full-grown, perfect horses, at their prime, and ready for any work or any fatigue. Seventy magnificent creatures had been brought down by a single breeder, a comfortable- looking, keen-eyed, ruddy-cheeked gentleman who stood beside the sales-man and whispered cautions and precepts into his ear.

"That's Flynn of Kildare," said Dodds's informant. "Jack Flynn has brought down that string of horses, and the other large string over yonder belongs to Tom Flynn, his brother. The two of them together are the two first breeders in Ireland." A crowd had gathered in front of the horses. By common consent a place had been made for Mr. Holloway, and Dodds could catch a glimpse of his florid face and yellow covert-coat in the front rank. He had opened his note-book, and was tapping his teeth reflectively with his pencil as he eyed the horses.

“You’ll see a fight now between the first seller and the first buyer in the country,” said Dodds’s acquaintance. “They are a beautiful string, anyhow. I shouldn’t be surprised if he didn’t average five-and-thirty pound apiece for the lot as they stand.”

The salesman had mounted upon a chair, and his keen, clean-shaven face overlooked the crowd. Mr. Jack Flynn’s grey whiskers were at his elbow, and Mr. Holloway immediately in front.

“You’ve seen these horses, gentlemen,” said the salesman, with a backward sweep of his hand towards the line of tossing heads and streaming manes. “When you know that they are bred by Mr. Jack Flynn, at his place in Kildare, you will have a guarantee of their quality. They are the best that Ireland can produce, and in this class of horse the best that Ireland can produce are the best in the world, as every riding man knows well. Hunters or carriage horses, all warranted sound, and bred from the best stock. There are seventy in Mr. Jack Flynn’s string, and he bids me say that if any wholesale dealer would make one bid for the whole lot, to save time, he would have the preference over any purchaser.”

There was a pause and a whisper from the crowd in front, with some expressions of discontent. By a single sweep all the small dealers had been put out of it. It was only a long purse which could buy on such a scale as that. The salesman looked round him inquiringly.

“Come, Mr. Holloway,” said he, at last. “You didn’t come over here for the sake of the scenery. You may travel the country and not see such another string of horses. Give us a starting bid.”

The great dealer was still rattling his pencil upon his front teeth. “Well,” said he, at last, “they *are* a fine lot of horses, and I won’t deny it. They do you credit, Mr. Flynn, I am sure. All the same I didn’t mean to fill a ship at a single bid in this fashion. I like to pick and choose my horses.”

“In that case Mr. Flynn is quite prepared to sell them in smaller lots,” said the salesman. “It was rather for the convenience of a wholesale customer that he was prepared to put them all up together. But if no gentleman wishes to bid—”

“Wait a minute,” said a voice. “They are very fine horses, these, and I will give you a bid to start you. I will give you twenty pounds each for the string of seventy.”

There was a rustle as the crowd all swayed their heads to catch a glimpse of the speaker. The salesman leaned forward. “May I ask your name, sir?”

“Strellenhaus — Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool.”

“It’s a new firm,” said Dodds’s neighbour. “I thought I knew them all, but I never heard of him before.”

The salesman’s head had disappeared, for he was whispering with the breeder. Now he suddenly straightened himself again. “Thank you for giving us a lead, sir,” said he. “Now, gentlemen, you have heard the offer of Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool. It will give us a base to start from. Mr. Strellenhaus has offered twenty pounds a head.”

“Guineas,” said Holloway.

“Bravo, Mr. Holloway! I knew that you would take a hand. You are not the man to let such a string of horses pass away from you. The bid is twenty guineas a head.”

“Twenty-five pounds,” said Mr. Strellenhaus.

“Twenty-six.”

“Thirty.”

It was London against Liverpool, and it was the head of the trade against an outsider. Still, the one man had increased his bids by fives and the other only by ones. Those fives meant determination and also wealth. Holloway had ruled the market so long that the crowd was delighted at finding someone who would stand up to him.

“The bid now stands at thirty pounds a head,” said the salesman.
“The word lies with you, Mr. Holloway.”

The London dealer was glancing keenly at his unknown opponent, and he was asking himself whether this was a genuine rival, or whether it was a device of some sort — an agent of Flynn’s perhaps — for running up the price. Little Mr. Strellenhaus, the same apple-faced gentleman whom Dodds had noticed in the coffee-room, stood looking at the horses with the sharp, quick glances of a man who knows what he is looking for.

“Thirty-one,” said Holloway, with the air of a man who has gone to his extreme limit.

“Thirty-two,” said Strellenhaus, promptly.

Holloway grew angry at this persistent opposition. His red face flushed redder still.

“Thirty-three!” he shouted.

“Thirty-four,” said Strellenhaus.

Holloway became thoughtful, and entered a few figures in his note-book. There were seventy horses. He knew that Flynn’s stock was always of the highest quality. With the hunting season coming on he might rely upon selling them at an average of from forty-five to fifty. Some of them might carry a heavy weight, and would run to three figures. On the other hand, there was the feed and keep of them for three months, the danger of the voyage, the chance of influenza or some of those other complaints which run through an entire stable as measles go through a nursery. Deducting all this, it was a question whether at the present price any profit would be left upon the transaction. Every pound that he bid meant seventy out of his pocket. And yet he could not submit to be beaten by this stranger without a struggle. As a business matter it was important to him to be recognised as the head of his profession. He would make one more effort, if he sacrificed his profit by doing so.

“At the end of your rope, Mr. Holloway?” asked the salesman, with the suspicion of a sneer.

“Thirty-five,” cried Holloway gruffly.

“Thirty-six,” said Strellenhaus.

“Then I wish you joy of your bargain,” said Holloway. “I don’t buy at that price, but I should be glad to sell you some.”

Mr. Strellenhaus took no notice of the irony. He was still looking critically at the horses. The salesman glanced round him in a perfunctory way.

“Thirty-six pounds bid,” said he. “Mr. Jack Flynn’s lot is going to Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool, at thirty-six pounds a head. Going — going—”

“Forty!” cried a high, thin, clear voice.

A buzz rose from the crowd, and they were all on tiptoe again, trying to catch a glimpse of this reckless buyer. Being a tall man, Dodds could see over the others, and there, at the side of Holloway, he saw the masterful nose and aristocratic beard of the second stranger in the coffee-room. A sudden personal interest added itself to the scene. He felt that he was on the verge of something — something dimly seen — which he could himself turn to account. The two men with strange names, the telegrams, the horses — what was underlying it all? The salesman was all animation again, and Mr. Jack Flynn was sitting up with his white whiskers bristling and his eyes twinkling. It was the best deal which he had ever made in his fifty years of experience.

"What name, sir?" asked the salesman.

"Mr. Mancune."

"Address?"

"Mr. Mancune of Glasgow."

"Thank you for your bid, sir. Forty pounds a head has been bid by Mr. Mancune of Glasgow. Any advance upon forty?"

"Forty-one," said Strellenhaus.

"Forty-five," said Mancune.

The tactics had changed, and it was the turn of Strellenhaus now to advance by ones, while his rival sprang up by fives. But the former was as dogged as ever.

"Forty-six," said he.

"Fifty!" cried Mancune.

It was unheard of. The most that the horses could possibly average at a retail price was as much as these men were willing to pay wholesale.

"Two lunatics from Bedlam," whispered the angry Holloway. "If I was Flynn I would see the colour of their money before I went any further."

The same thought had occurred to the salesman. "As a mere matter of business, gentlemen," said he, "it is usual in such cases to put down a small deposit as a guarantee of *bona fides*. You will understand how I am placed, and that I have not had the pleasure of doing business with either of you before."

"How much?" asked Strellenhaus, briefly.

"Should we say five hundred?"

"Here is a note for a thousand pounds."

"And here is another," said Mancune.

"Nothing could be more handsome, gentlemen," said the salesman. "It's a treat to see such a spirited competition. The last bid was fifty pounds a head from Mancune. The word lies with you, Mr. Strellenhaus."

Mr. Jack Flynn whispered something to the salesman. “Quite so! Mr. Flynn suggests, gentlemen, that as you are both large buyers, it would, perhaps, be a convenience to you if he was to add the string of Mr. Tom Flynn, which consists of seventy animals of precisely the same quality, making one hundred and forty in all. Have you any objection, Mr. Mancune?”

“No, sir.”

“And you, Mr. Strellenhaus?”

“I should prefer it.”

“Very handsome! Very handsome indeed!” murmured the salesman. “Then I understand, Mr. Mancune, that your offer of fifty pounds a head extends to the whole of these horses?”

“Yes, sir.”

A long breath went up from the crowd. Seven thousand pounds at one deal. It was a record for Dunsloe.

“Any advance, Mr. Strellenhaus?”

“Fifty-one.”

“Fifty-five.”

“Fifty-six.”

“Sixty.”

They could hardly believe their ears. Holloway stood with his mouth open, staring blankly in front of him. The salesman tried hard to look as if such bidding and such prices were nothing unusual. Jack Flynn of Kildare smiled benignly and rubbed his hands together. The crowd listened in dead silence.

“Sixty-one,” said Strellenhaus. From the beginning he had stood without a trace of emotion upon his round face, like a little automatic figure which bid by clockwork. His rival was of a more excitable nature. His eyes were shining, and he was for ever twitching at his beard.

“Sixty-five,” he cried.

“Sixty-six.”

“Seventy.”

But the clockwork had run down. No answering bid came from Mr. Strellenhaus.

“Seventy bid, sir.”

Mr. Strellenhaus shrugged his shoulders.

"I am buying for another, and I have reached his limit," said he. "If you will permit me to send for instructions—"

"I am afraid, sir, that the sale must proceed."

"Then the horses belong to this gentleman." For the first time he turned towards his rival, and their glances crossed like sword-blades. "It is possible that I may see the horses again."

"I hope so," said Mr. Mancune; and his white, waxed moustache gave a feline upward bristle.

So, with a bow, they separated. Mr. Strellenhaus walked, down to the telegraph-office, where his message was delayed because Mr. Worlington Dodds was already at the end of the wires, for, after dim guesses and vague conjecture, he had suddenly caught a clear view of this coming event which had cast so curious a shadow before it in this little Irish town. Political rumours, names, appearances, telegrams, seasoned horses at any price, there could only be one meaning to it. He held a secret, and he meant to use it.

Mr. Warner, who was the partner of Mr. Worlington Dodds, and who was suffering from the same eclipse, had gone down to the Stock Exchange, but had found little consolation there, for the European system was in a ferment, and rumours of peace and of war were succeeding each other with such rapidity and assurance that it was impossible to know which to trust. It was obvious that a fortune lay either way, for every rumour set the funds fluctuating; but without special information it was impossible to act, and no one dared to plunge heavily upon the strength of newspaper surmise and the gossip of the street. Warner knew that an hour's work might resuscitate the fallen fortunes of himself and his partner, and yet he could not afford to make a mistake. He returned to his office in the afternoon, half inclined to back the chances of peace, for of all war scares not one in ten comes to pass. As he entered the office a telegram lay upon the table. It was from Dunsloe, a place of which he had never heard, and was signed by his absent partner. The message was in cipher, but he soon translated it, for it was short and crisp.

"I am a bear of everything German and French. Sell, sell, sell, keep on selling."

For a moment Warner hesitated. What could Worlington Dodds know at Dunsloe which was not known in Throgmorton Street? But he remembered the quickness and decision of his partner. He would not have sent such a message without very good grounds. If he was to act at all he must act at once, so, hardening his heart, he went down to the house, and, dealing upon that curious system by which a man can sell what he has not got, and what he could not pay for if he had it, he disposed of heavy parcels of French and German securities. He had caught the market in one of its little spasms of hope, and there was no lack of buying until his own persistent selling caused others to follow his lead, and so brought about a reaction. When Warner returned to his offices it took him some hours to work out his accounts, and he emerged into the streets in the evening with the absolute certainty that the next settling-day would leave him either hopelessly bankrupt or exceedingly prosperous.

It all depended upon Worlington Dodds's information. What could he possibly have found out at Dunsloe?

And then suddenly he saw a newspaper boy fasten a poster upon a lamp-post, and a little crowd had gathered round it in an instant One of them waved his hat in the air; another shouted to a friend across the street. Warner hurried up and caught a glimpse of the poster between two craning heads —

"FRANCE DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY."

"By Jove!" cried Warner. "Old Dodds was right, after all."

THE KING OF THE FOXES

It was after a hunting dinner, and there were as many scarlet coats as black ones round the table. The conversation over the cigars had turned, therefore, in the direction of horses and horsemen, with reminiscences of phenomenal runs where foxes had led the pack from end to end of a county, and been overtaken at last by two or three limping hounds and a huntsman on foot, while every rider in the field had been pounded. As the port circulated the runs became longer and more apocryphal, until we had the whips inquiring their way and failing to understand the dialect of the people who answered them. The foxes, too, became mere eccentric, and we had foxes up pollard willows, foxes which were dragged by the tail out of horses' mangers, and foxes which had raced through an open front door and gone to ground in a lady's bonnet-box. The master had told one or two tall reminiscences, and when he cleared his throat for another we were all curious, for he was a bit of an artist in his way, and produced his effects in a *crescendo* fashion. His face wore the earnest, practical, severely accurate expression which heralded some of his finest efforts.

"It was before I was master," said he. "Sir Charles Adair had the hounds at that time, and then afterwards they passed to old Lathom, and then to me. It may possibly have been just after Lathom took them over, but my strong impression is that it was in Adair's time. That would be early in the seventies — about seventy-two, I should say.

"The man I mean has moved to another part of the country, but I daresay that some of you can remember him. Danbury was the name — Walter Danbury, or Wat Danbury, as the people used to call him. He was the son of old Joe Danbury, of High Ascombe, and when his father died he came into a very good thing, for his only brother was drowned when the *Magna Charta* foundered, so he inherited the whole estate. It was but a few hundred acres, but it was good arable land, and those were the great days of farming. Besides, it was freehold, and a yeoman farmer without a mortgage was a warmish man before the great fall in wheat came. Foreign wheat and barbed wire — those are the two curses of this country, for the one spoils the farmer's work and the other spoils his play.

"This young Wat Danbury was a very fine fellow, a keen rider, and a thorough sportsman, but his head was a little turned at having come, when so young, into a comfortable fortune, and he went the pace for a year or two. The lad had no vice in him, but there was a hard-drinking set in the neighbourhood at that time, and Danbury got drawn in among them; and, being an amiable fellow who liked to do what his friends were doing, he very soon took to drinking a great deal more than was good for him. As a rule, a man who takes his exercise may drink as much as he likes in the evening, and do himself no very great harm, if he will leave it alone during the day. Danbury had too many friends for that, however, and it really looked as if the poor chap was going to the bad, when a very curious thing happened which pulled him up with such a sudden jerk that he never put his hand upon the neck of a whisky bottle again.

"He had a peculiarity which I have noticed in a good many other men, that though he was always playing tricks with his own health, he was none the less very anxious about it, and was extremely fidgety if ever he had any trivial symptom. Being a tough, open-air fellow, who was always as hard as a nail, it was seldom that there was anything amiss with him; but at last the drink began to tell, and he woke one morning with his hands shaking and all his nerves tingling like over-stretched fiddle-strings. He had been dining at some very wet house the night before, and the wine had, perhaps, been more plentiful than choice; at any rate, there he was, with a tongue like a bath towel and a head that ticked like an eight-day clock. He was very alarmed at his own condition, and he sent for Doctor Middleton, of Ascombe, the father of the man who practises there now.

"Middleton had been a great friend of old Danbury's, and he was very sorry to see his son going to the devil; so he improved the occasion by taking his case very seriously, and lecturing him upon the danger of his ways. He shook his head and talked about the possibility of *delirium tremens*, or even of mania, if he continued to lead such a life. Wat Danbury was horribly frightened.

"'Do you think I am going to get anything of the sort?' he wailed.

"'Well, really, I don't know,' said the doctor gravely. 'I cannot undertake to say that you are out of danger. Your system is very much out of order. At any time during the day you might have those grave symptoms of which I warn you.'

"'You think I shall be safe by evening?'

"'If you drink nothing during the day, and have no nervous symptoms before evening, I think you may consider yourself safe," the doctor answered. A little fright would, he thought, do his patient good, so he made the most of the matter.

"'What symptoms may I expect?' asked Danebury.

"'It generally takes the form of optical delusions.'

"'I see specks floating all about.'

"'That is mere biliousness,' said the doctor soothingly, for he saw that the lad was highly strung, and he did not wish to overdo it. 'I daresay that you will have no symptoms of the kind, but when they do come they usually take the shape of insects, or reptiles, or curious animals.'

"'And if I see anything of the kind?'

"'If you do, you will at once send for me;' and so, with a promise of medicine, the doctor departed.

"Young Wat Danbury rose and dressed and moped about the room feeling very miserable and unstrung, with a vision of the County Asylum for ever in his mind. He had the doctor's word for it that if he could get through to evening in safety he would be all right; but it is not very exhilarating to be waiting for symptoms, and to keep on glancing at your bootjack to see whether it is still a bootjack or whether it has begun to develop antennae and legs. At last he could stand it no longer, and an overpowering longing for the fresh air and the green grass came over him. Why should he stay indoors when the Ascombe Hunt was meeting within half a mile of him? If he was going to have these delusions which the doctor talked of, he would not have them the sooner nor the worse because he was on horseback in the open. He was sure, too, it would ease his aching head. And so it came about that in ten minutes he was in his hunting-kit, and in ten more he was riding out of his stable-yard with his roan mare 'Matilda' between his knees. He was a little unsteady in his saddle just at first, but the farther he went the better he felt, until by the time he reached the meet his head was almost clear, and there was nothing troubling him except those haunting words of the doctor's about the possibility of delusions any time before nightfall.

"But soon he forgot that also, for as he came up the hounds were thrown off, and they drew the Gravel Hanger, and afterwards the Hickory Copse. It was just the morning for a scent — no wind to blow it away, no water to wash it out, and just damp enough to make it cling. There was a field of forty, all keen men and good riders, so when they came to the Black Hanger they knew that there would be some sport, for that's a cover which never draws blank. The woods were thicker in those days than now, and the foxes were thicker also, and that great dark oak-grove was swarming with them. The only difficulty was to make them break, for it is, as you know, a very close country, and you must coax them out into the open before you can hope for a run.

“When they came to the Black Hanger the field took their positions along the cover-side wherever they thought that they were most likely to get a good start. Some went in with the hounds, some clustered at the ends of the drives, and some kept outside in the hope of the fox breaking in that direction. Young Wat Danbury knew the country like the palm of his hand, so he made for a place where several drives intersected, and there he waited. He had a feeling that the faster and the farther he galloped the better he should be, and so he was chafing to be off. His mare, too, was in the height of fettle and one of the fastest goers in the county. Wat was a splendid lightweight rider — under ten stone with his saddle — and the mare was a powerful creature, all quarters and shoulders, fit to carry a lifeguardsman; and so it was no wonder that there was hardly a man in the field who could hope to stay with him. There he waited and listened to the shouting of the huntsman and the whips, catching a glimpse now and then in the darkness of the wood of a whisking tail, or the gleam of a white-and-tan side amongst the underwood. It was a well-trained pack, and there was not so much as a whine to tell you that forty hounds were working all round you.

“And then suddenly there came one long-drawn yell from one of them, and it was taken up by another, and another, until within a few seconds the whole pack was giving tongue together and running on a hot scent. Danbury saw them stream across one of the drives and disappear upon the other side, and an instant later the three red coats of the hunt servants flashed after them upon the same line. He might have made a shorter cut down one of the other drives, but he was afraid of heading the fox, so he followed the lead of the huntsman. Right through the wood they went in a bee-line, galloping with their faces brushed by their horses’ manes as they stooped under the branches.

“It’s ugly going, as you know, with the roots all wriggling about in the darkness, but you can take a risk when you catch an occasional glimpse of the pack running with a breast-high scent; so in and out they dodged until the wood began to thin at the edges, and they found themselves in the long bottom where the river runs. It is clear going there upon grassland, and the hounds were running very strong about two hundred yards ahead, keeping parallel with the stream. The field, who had come round the wood instead of going through, were coming hard over the fields upon the left; but Danbury, with the hunt servants, had a clear lead, and they never lost it.

“Two of the field got on terms with them — Parson Geddes on a big seventeen-hand bay which he used to ride in those days, and Squire Foley, who rode as a feather-weight, and made his hunters out of cast thoroughbreds from the Newmarket sales; but the others never had a look-in from start to finish, for there was no check and no pulling, and it was clear cross-country racing from start to finish. If you had drawn a line right across the map with a pencil you couldn’t go straighter than that fox ran, heading for the South Downs and the sea, and the hounds ran as surely as if they were running to view, and yet from the beginning no one ever saw the fox, and there was never a hallo forrard to tell them that he had been spied. This, however, is not so surprising, for if you’ve been over that line of country you will know that there are not very many people about.

“There were six of them then in the front row — Parson Geddes, Squire Foley, the huntsman, two whips, and Wat Danbury, who had forgotten all about his head and the doctor by this time, and had not a thought for anything but the run. All six were galloping just as hard as they could lay hoofs to the ground. One of the whips dropped back, however, as some of the hounds were tailing off, and that brought them down to five. Then Foley’s thoroughbred strained herself, as these slim-legged, dainty-fetlocked thoroughbreds will do when the going is rough, and he had to take a back seat. But the other four were still going strong, and they did four or five miles down the river flat at a rasping pace. It had been a wet winter, and the waters had been out a little time before, so there was a deal of sliding and splashing; but by the time they came to the bridge the whole field was out of sight, and these four had the hunt to themselves.

“The fox had crossed the bridge — for foxes do not care to swim a chilly river any more than humans do — and from that point he had streaked away southward as hard as he could tear. It is broken country, rolling heaths, down one slope and up another, and it’s hard to say whether the up or the down is the more trying for the horses. This sort of switchback work is all right for a cobby, short-backed, short-legged little horse, but it is killing work for a big, long-striding hunter such as one wants in the Midlands. Anyhow, it was too much for Parson Geddes’ seventeen-hand bay, and though he tried the Irish trick — for he was a rare keen sportsman — of running up the hills by his horse’s head, it was all to no use, and he had to give it up. So then there were only the huntsman, the whip, and Wat Danbury — all going strong.

“But the country got worse and worse and the hills were steeper and more thickly covered in heather and bracken. The horses were over their hocks all the time, and the place was pitted with rabbit-holes; but the hounds were still streaming along, and the riders could not afford to pick their steps. As they raced down one slope, the hounds were always flowing up the opposite one, until it looked like that game where the one figure in falling makes the other one rise.

“But never a glimpse did they get of the fox, although they knew very well that he must be only a very short way ahead for the scent to be so strong. And then Wat Danbury heard a crash and a thud at his elbow, and looking round he saw a pair of white cords and top-boots kicking out of a tussock of brambles. The whip’s horse had stumbled, and the whip was out of the running. Danbury and the huntsman eased down for an instant; and then, seeing the man staggering to his feet all right, they turned and settled into their saddles once more.

“Joe Clarke, the huntsman, was a famous old rider, known for five counties round; but he reckoned upon his second horse, and the second horses had all been left many miles behind. However, the one he was riding was good enough for anything with such a horseman upon his back, and he was going as well as when he started. As to Wat Danbury, he was going better. With every stride his own feelings improved, and the mind of the rider had its influence upon the mind of the horse. The stout little roan was gathering its muscular limbs under it, and stretching to the gallop as if it were steel and whale-bone instead of flesh and blood. Wat had never come to the end of its powers yet, and to-day he had such a chance of testing them as he had never had before.

“There was a pasture country beyond the heather slopes, and for several miles the two riders were either losing ground as they fumbled with their crop-handles at the bars of gates, or gaining it again as they galloped over the fields. Those were the days before this accursed wire came into the country, and you could generally break a hedge where you could not fly it, so they did not trouble the gates more than they could help. Then they were down in a hard lane, where they had to slacken their pace, and through a farm where a man came shouting excitedly after them; but they had no time to stop and listen to him, for the hounds were on some ploughland, only two fields ahead. It was sloping upwards, that ploughland, and the horses were over their fetlocks in the red, soft soil.

"When they reached the top they were blowing badly, but a grand valley sloped before them, leading up to the open country of the South Downs. Between, there lay a belt of pine-woods, into which the hounds were streaming, running now in a long, straggling line, and shedding one here and one there as they ran. You could see the white-and-tan dots here and there where the limpers were tailing away. But half the pack were still going well, though the pace and distance had both been tremendous — two clear hours now without a check.

"There was a drive through the pine-wood — one of those green, slightly rutted drives where a horse can get the last yard out of itself, for the ground is hard enough to give him clean going and yet springy enough to help him. Wat Danbury got alongside of the huntsman and they galloped together with their stirrup-irons touching, and the hounds within a hundred yards of them.

"'We have it all to ourselves,' said he.

"'Yes, sir, we've shook on the lot of 'em this time,' said old Joe Clarke. 'If we get this fox it's worth while 'aving 'im skinned an' stuffed, for 'e's a curiosity 'e is.'

"'It's the fastest run I ever had in my life!' cried Danbury.

"'And the fastest that ever I 'ad, an' that means more,' said the old huntsman. 'But what licks me is that we've never 'ad a look at the beast. 'E must leave an amazin' scent be'ind 'im when these 'ounds can follow 'im like this, and yet none of us have seen 'im when we've 'ad a clear 'alf mile view in front of us.'

"'I expect we'll have a view of him presently,' said Danbury; and in his mind he added, 'at least, I shall,' for the huntsman's horse was gasping as it ran, and the white foam was pouring down it like the side of a washing-tub.

"They had followed the hounds on to one of the side tracks which led out of the main drive, and that divided into a smaller track still, where the branches switched across their faces as they went, and there was barely room for one horse at a time. Wat Danbury took the lead, and he heard the huntsman's horse clumping along heavily behind him, while his own mare was going with less spring than when she had started. She answered to a touch of his crop or spur, however, and he felt that there was something still left to draw upon. And then he looked up, and there was a heavy wooden stile at the end of the narrow track, with a lane of stiff young saplings leading down to it, which was far too thick to break through. The hounds were running clear upon the grassland on the other side, and you were bound either to get over that stile or lose sight of them, for the pace was too hot to let you go round.

“Well, Wat Danbury was not the lad to flinch, and at it he went full split, like a man who means what he is doing. She rose gallantly to it, rapped it hard with her front hoof, shook him on to her withers, recovered herself, and was over. Wat had hardly got back into his saddle when there was a clatter behind him like the fall of a woodstack, and there was the top bar in splinters, the horse on its belly, and the huntsman on hands and knees half a dozen yards in front of him. Wat pulled up for an instant, for the fall was a smasher; but he saw old Joe spring to his feet and get to his horse’s bridle. The horse staggered up, but the moment it put one foot in front of the other, Wat saw that it was hopelessly lame — a slipped shoulder and a six weeks’ job. There was nothing he could do, and Joe was shouting to him not to lose the hounds, so off he went again, the one solitary survivor of the whole hunt. When a man finds himself there, he can retire from fox-hunting, for he has tasted the highest which it has to offer. I remember once when I was out with the Royal Surrey — but I’ll tell you that story afterwards.

“The pack, or what was left of them, had got a bit ahead during this time; but he had a clear view of them on the downland, and the mare seemed full of pride at being the only one left, for she was stepping out rarely and tossing her head as she went. They were two miles over the green shoulder of a hill, a rattle down a stony, deep-rutted country lane, where the mare stumbled and nearly came down, a jump over a 5ft. brook, a cut through a hazel copse, another dose of heavy ploughland, a couple of gates to open, and then the green, unbroken Downs beyond.

“‘Well,’ said Wat Danbury to himself, ‘I’ll see this fox run into or I shall see it drowned, for it’s all clear going now between this and the chalk cliffs which line the sea.’ But he was wrong in that, as he speedily discovered. In all the little hollows of the downs at that part there are plantations of fir-woods, some of which have grown to a good size. You do not see them until you come upon the edge of the valleys in which they lie. Danbury was galloping hard over the short, springy turf when he came over the lip of one of these depressions, and there was the dark clump of wood lying in front of and beneath him. There were only a dozen hounds still running, and they were just disappearing among the trees. The sunlight was shining straight upon the long olive-green slopes which curved down towards this wood, and Danbury, who had the eyes of a hawk, swept them over this great expanse; but there was nothing moving upon it. A few sheep were grazing far up on the right, but there was no other sight of any living creature. He was certain then that he was very near to the end, for either the fox must have gone to ground in the wood or the hounds' noses must be at his very brush. The mare seemed to know also what that great empty sweep of countryside meant, for she quickened her stride, and a few minutes afterwards Danbury was galloping into the fir-wood.

"He had come from bright sunshine, but the wood was very closely planted, and so dim that he could hardly see to right or to left out of the narrow path down which he was riding. You know what a solemn, churchyardy sort of place a fir-wood is. I suppose it is the absence of any undergrowth, and the fact that the trees never move at all. At any rate a kind of chill suddenly struck Wat Danbury, and it flashed through his mind that there had been some very singular points about this run — its length and its straightness, and the fact that from the first find no one had ever caught a glimpse of the creature. Some silly talk which had been going round the country about the king of the foxes — a sort of demon fox, so fast that it could outrun any pack, and so fierce that they could do nothing with it if they overtook it — suddenly came back into his mind, and it did not seem so laughable now in the dim fir-wood as it had done when the story had been told over the wine and cigars. The nervousness which had been on him in the morning, and which he had hoped that he had shaken off, swept over him again in an overpowering wave. He had been so proud of being alone, and yet he would have given 10 pounds now to have had Joe Clarke's homely face beside him. And then, just at that moment, there broke out from the thickest part of the wood the most frantic hullabaloo that ever he had heard in his life. The hounds had run into their fox.

"Well, you know, or you ought to know, what your duty is in such a case. You have to be whip, huntsman, and everything else if you are the first man up. You get in among the hounds, lash them off, and keep the brush and pads from being destroyed. Of course, Wat Danbury knew all about that, and he tried to force his mare through the trees to the place where all this hideous screaming and howling came from, but the wood was so thick that it was impossible to ride it. He sprang off, therefore, left the mare standing, and broke his way through as best he could with his hunting-lash ready over his shoulder.

"But as he ran forward he felt his flesh go cold and creepy all over. He had heard hounds run into foxes many times before, but he had never heard such sounds as these. They were not the cries of triumph, but of fear. Every now and then came a shrill yelp of mortal agony. Holding his breath, he ran on until he broke through the interlacing branches, and found himself in a little, clearing with the hounds all crowding round a patch of tangled bramble at the further end.

"When he first caught sight of them the hounds were standing in a half-circle round this bramble patch, with their backs bristling and their jaws gaping. In front of the brambles lay one of them with his throat torn out, all crimson and white-and-tan. Wat came running out into the clearing, and at the sight of him the hounds took heart again, and one of them sprang with a growl into the bushes. At the same instant, a creature the size of a donkey jumped on to its feet, a huge grey head, with monstrous glistening fangs and tapering fox jaws, shot out from among the branches, and the hound was thrown several feet into the air, and fell howling among the cover. Then there was a clashing snap, like a rat-trap closing, and the howls sharpened into a scream and then were still.

"Danbury had been on the look-out for symptoms all day, and now he had found them. He looked once more at the thicket, saw a pair of savage red eyes fixed upon him, and fairly took to his heels. It might only be a passing delusion, or it might be the permanent mania of which the doctor had spoken, but anyhow, the thing to do was to get back to bed and to quiet, and to hope for the best.

"He forgot the hounds, the hunt, and everything else in his desperate fears for his own reason. He sprang upon his mare, galloped her madly over the downs, and only stopped when he found himself at a country station. There he left his mare at the inn, and made back for home as quickly as steam would take him. It was evening before he got there, shivering with apprehension, and seeing those red eyes and savage teeth at every turn. He went straight to bed and sent for Dr. Middleton.

"'I've got 'em, doctor,' said he. 'It came about exactly as you said — strange creatures, optical delusions, and everything. All I ask you now is to save my reason.’ The doctor listened to his story, and was shocked as he heard it.

“‘It appears to be a very clear case,’ said he. ‘This must be a lesson to you for life.’

“‘Never a drop again if I only come safely through this,’ cried Wat Danbury.

“‘Well, my dear boy, if you will stick to that it may prove a blessing in disguise. But the difficulty in this case is to know where fact ends and fancy begins. You see, it is not as if there was only one delusion. There have been several. The dead dogs, for example, must have been one as well as the creature in the bush.’

“‘I saw it all as clearly as I see you.’

“‘One of the characteristics of this form of delirium is that what you see is even clearer than reality. I was wondering whether the whole run was not a delusion also.’

“Wat Danbury pointed to his hunting boots still lying upon the floor, necked with the splashings of two counties.

“‘Hum! that looks very real, certainly. No doubt, in your weak state, you over-exerted yourself and so brought this attack upon yourself. Well, whatever the cause, our treatment is clear. You will take the soothing mixture which I will send to you, and we shall put two leeches upon your temples to-night to relieve any congestion of the brain.’

“So Wat Danbury spent the night in tossing about and reflecting what a sensitive thing this machinery of ours is, and how very foolish it is to play tricks with what is so easily put out of gear and so difficult to mend. And so he repeated and repeated his oath that this first lesson should be his last, and that from that time forward he would be a sober, hard-working yeoman as his father had been before him. So he lay, tossing and still repentant, when his door flew open in the morning and in rushed the doctor with a newspaper crumpled up in his hand.

“‘My dear boy,’ he cried, ‘I owe you a thousand apologies. You’re the most ill-used lad and I the greatest numskull in the county. Listen to this!’ And he sat down upon the side of the bed, flattened out his paper upon his knee, and began to read.

“The paragraph was headed, ‘Disaster to the Ascombe Hounds,’ and it went on to say that four of the hounds, shockingly torn and mangled, had been found in Winton Fir Wood upon the South Downs. The run had been so severe that half the pack were lamed; but the four found in the wood were actually dead, although the cause of their extraordinary injuries was still unknown.

"'So, you see,' said the doctor, looking up, 'that I was wrong when I put the dead hounds among the delusions.'

"'But the cause?' cried Wat.

"'Well, I think we may guess the cause from an item which has been inserted just as the paper went to press: —

"Late last night, Mr. Brown, of Smither's Farm, to the east of Hastings, perceived what he imagined to be an enormous dog worrying one of his sheep. He shot the creature, which proves to be a grey Siberian wolf of the variety known as *Lupus Giganticus*. It is supposed to have escaped from some travelling menagerie.

"That's the story, gentlemen, and Wat Danbury stuck to his good resolutions, for the fright which he had cured him of all wish to run such a risk again; and he never touches anything stronger than lime-juice — at least, he hadn't before he left this part of the country, five years ago next Lady Day."

THE THREE CORRESPONDENTS

There was only the one little feathery clump of dom palms in all that great wilderness of black rocks and orange sand. It stood high on the bank, and below it the brown Nile swirled swiftly towards the Ambigole Cataract, fitting a little frill of foam round each of the boulders which studded its surface. Above, out of a naked blue sky, the sun was beating down upon the sand, and up again from the sand under the brims of the pith-hats of the horsemen with the scorching glare of a blast-furnace. It had risen so high that the shadows of the horses were no larger than themselves.

"Whew!" cried Mortimer, mopping his forehead, "you'd pay five shillings for this at the hummums."

"Precisely," said Scott. "But you are not asked to ride twenty miles in a Turkish bath with a field-glass and a revolver, and a water-bottle and a whole Christmas-treeful of things dangling from you. The hot-house at Kew is excellent as a conservatory, but not adapted for exhibitions upon the horizontal bar. I vote for a camp in the palm-grove and a halt until evening."

Mortimer rose on his stirrups and looked hard to the southward. Everywhere were the same black burned rocks and deep orange sand. At one spot only an intermittent line appeared to have been cut through the rugged spurs which ran down to the river. It was the bed of the old railway, long destroyed by the Arabs, but now in process of reconstruction by the advancing Egyptians. There was no other sign of man's handiwork in all that desolate scene.

"It's palm trees or nothing," said Scott.

"Well, I suppose we must; and yet I grudge every hour until we catch the force up. What *would* our editors say if we were late for the action?"

"My dear chap, an old bird like you doesn't need to be told that no sane modern general would ever attack until the Press is up."

"You don't mean that?" said young Anerley. "I thought we were looked upon as an unmitigated nuisance."

"'Newspaper correspondents and travelling gentlemen, and all that tribe of useless drones' — being an extract from Lord Wolseley's 'Soldier's Pocket-Book,'" cried Scott. "We know all about *that*, Anerley;" and he winked behind his blue spectacles. "If there was going to be a battle we should very soon have an escort of cavalry to hurry us up. I’ve been in fifteen, and I never saw one where they had not arranged for a reporter’s table.”

“That’s very well; but the enemy may be less considerate,” said Mortimer.

“They are not strong enough to force a battle.”

“A skirmish, then?”

“Much more likely to be a raid upon the rear. In that case we are just where we should be.”

“So we are! What a score over Reuter’s man up with the advance! Well, we’ll outspan and have our tiffin under the palms.”

There were three of them, and they stood for three great London dailies. Reuter’s was thirty miles ahead; two evening pennies upon camels were twenty miles behind. And among them they represented the eyes and ears of the public — the great silent millions and millions who had paid for everything, and who waited so patiently to know the result of their outlay.

They were remarkable men these body-servants of the Press; two of them already veterans in camps, the other setting out upon his first campaign, and full of deference for his famous comrades.

This first one, who had just dismounted from his bay polo-pony, was Mortimer, of the *Intelligence* — tall, straight, and hawk-faced, with khaki tunic and riding-breeches, drab putties, a scarlet cummerbund, and a skin tanned to the red of a Scotch fir by sun and wind, and mottled by the mosquito and the sand-fly. The other — small, quick, mercurial, with blue-black, curling beard and hair, a fly-switch for ever flicking in his left hand — was Scott, of the *Courier*, who had come through more dangers and brought off more brilliant *coups* than any man in the profession, save the eminent Chandler, now no longer in a condition to take the field. They were a singular contrast, Mortimer and Scott, and it was in their differences that the secret of their close friendship lay. Each dovetailed into the other. The strength of each was in the other’s weakness. Together they formed a perfect unit. Mortimer was Saxon — slow, conscientious, and deliberate; Scott was Celtic — quick, happy-go-lucky, and brilliant. Mortimer was the more solid, Scott the more attractive. Mortimer was the deeper thinker, Scott the brighter talker. By a curious coincidence, though each had seen much of warfare, their campaigns had never coincided. Together they covered all recent military history. Scott had done Plevna, the Shipka, the Zulus, Egypt, Suakim; Mortimer had seen the Boer War, the Chilian, the Bulgaria and Servian, the Gordon relief, the Indian frontier, Brazilian rebellion, and Madagascar. This intimate personal knowledge gave a peculiar flavour to their talk. There was none of the second-hand surmise and conjecture which form so much of our conversation; it was all concrete and final. The speaker had been there, had seen it, and there was an end of it.

In spite of their friendship there was the keenest professional rivalry between the two men. Either would have sacrificed himself to help his companion, but either would also have sacrificed his companion to help his paper. Never did a jockey yearn for a winning mount as keenly as each of them longed to have a full column in a morning edition whilst every other daily was blank. They were perfectly frank about the matter. Each professed himself ready to steal a march on his neighbour, and each recognised that the other's duty to his employer was far higher than any personal consideration.

The third man was Anerley, of the *Gazette* — young, inexperienced, and rather simple-looking. He had a droop of the lip, which some of his more intimate friends regarded as a libel upon his character, and his eyes were so slow and so sleepy that they suggested an affectation. A leaning towards soldiering had sent him twice to autumn manoeuvres, and a touch of colour in his descriptions had induced the proprietors of the *Gazette* to give him a trial as a war-special. There was a pleasing diffidence about his bearing which recommended him to his experienced companions, and if they had a smile sometimes at his guileless ways, it was soothing to them to have a comrade from whom nothing was to be feared. From the day that they left the telegraph-wire behind them at Sarras, the man who was mounted upon a 15-guinea 13-4 Syrian was delivered over into the hands of the owners of the two fastest polo-ponies that ever shot down the Ghezireh ground. The three had dismounted and led their beasts under the welcome shade. In the brassy, yellow glare every branch above threw so black and solid a shadow that the men involuntarily raised their feet to step over them.

"The palm makes an excellent hat-rack," said Scott, slinging his revolver and his water-bottle over the little upward-pointing pegs which bristle from the trunk. “As a shade tree, however, it isn’t an unqualified success. Curious that in the universal adaptation of means to ends something a little less flimsy could not have been devised for the tropics.”

“Like the banyan in India.”

“Or the fine hardwood trees in Ashantee, where a whole regiment could picnic under the shade.”

“The teak tree isn’t bad in Burmah, either. By Jove, the baccy has all come loose in the saddle-bag! That long-cut mixture smokes rather hot for this climate. How about the baggles, Anerley?”

“They’ll be here in five minutes.”

Down the winding path which curved among the rocks the little train of baggage-camels was daintily picking its way. They came mincing and undulating along, turning their heads slowly from side to side with the air of a self-conscious woman. In front rode the three Berberee body-servants upon donkeys, and behind walked the Arab camel-boys. They had been travelling for nine long hours, ever since the first rising of the moon, at the weary camel-drag of two and a half miles an hour, but now they brightened, both beasts and men, at the sight of the grove and the riderless horses. In a few minutes the loads were unstrapped, the animals tethered, a fire lighted, fresh water carried up from the river, and each camel-boy provided with his own little heap of tibbin laid in the centre of the table-cloth, without which no well-bred Arabian will condescend to feed. The dazzling light without, the subdued half-tones within, the green palm-fronds outlined against the deep blue sky, the flitting, silent-footed Arab servants, the crackling of sticks, the reek of a lighting fire, the placid supercilious heads of the camels, they all come back in their dreams to those who have known them.

Scott was breaking eggs into a pan and rolling out a love-song in his rich, deep voice. Anerley, with his head and arms buried in a deal packing-case, was working his way through strata of tinned soups, bully beef, potted chicken, and sardines to reach the jams which lay beneath. The conscientious Mortimer, with his notebook upon his knee, was jotting down what the railway engineer had told him at the line-end the day before. Suddenly he raised his eyes and saw the man himself on his chestnut pony, dipping and rising over the broken ground.

“Hullo! Here’s Merryweather!”

“A pretty lather his pony is in! He’s had her at that hand-gallop for hours, by the look of her. Hullo, Merryweather, hullo!”

The engineer, a small, compact man with a pointed red beard, had made as though he would ride past their camp without word or halt. Now he swerved, and easing his pony down to a canter, he headed her to-wards them.

"For God's sake, a drink!" he croaked. "My tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth."

Mortimer ran with the water-bottle, Scott with the whisky-flask, and Anerley with the tin pannikin. The engineer drank until his breath failed him.

"Well, I must be off," said he, striking the drops from his red moustache.

"Any news?"

"A hitch in the railway construction. I must see the general.
It's the devil not having a telegraph."

"Anything we can report?" Out came three notebooks.

"I'll tell you after I've seen the general."

"Any dervishes?"

"The usual shaves. Hud-up, Jinny! Good-bye!"

With a soft thudding upon the sand, and a clatter among the stones the weary pony was off upon her journey once more.

"Nothing serious, I suppose?" said Mortimer, staring after him.

"Deuced serious," cried Scott. "The ham and eggs are burned! No — it's all right — saved, and done to a turn! Pull the box up, Anerley. Come on, Mortimer, stow that notebook! The fork is mightier than the pen just at present. What's the matter with you, Anerley?"

"I was wondering whether what we have just seen was worth a telegram."

"Well, it's for the proprietors to say if it's worth it. Sordid money considerations are not for us. We must wire about something just to justify our khaki coats and our putties."

"But what is there to say?"

Mortimer's long, austere face broke into a smile over the youngster's innocence. "It's not quite usual in our profession to give each other tips," said he. "However, as my telegram is written, I've no objection to your reading it. You may be sure that I would not show it to you if it were of the slightest importance."

Anerley took up the slip of paper and read: —

Merryweather obstacles stop journey confer general stop nature difficulties later stop rumours dervishes.

“This is very condensed,” said Anerley, with wrinkled brows.

“Condensed!” cried Scott. “Why, it’s sinfully garrulous. If my old man got a wire like that his language would crack the lamp-shades. I’d cut out half this; for example, I’d have out ‘journey,’ and ‘nature,’ and ‘rumours.’ But my old man would make a ten-line paragraph of it for all that.”

“How?”

“Well, I’ll do it myself just to show you. Lend me that stylo.” He scribbled for a minute in his notebook. “It works out somewhat on these lines”: —

Mr. Charles H. Merryweather, the eminent railway engineer, who is at present engaged in superintending the construction of the line from Sarras to the front, has met with considerable obstacles to the rapid completion of his important task —

“Of course the old man knows who Merryweather is, and what he is about, so the word ‘obstacles’ would suggest all that to him.”

He has to-day been compelled to make a journey of forty miles to the front, in order to confer with the general upon the steps which are necessary in order to facilitate the work. Further particulars of the exact nature of the difficulties met with will be made public at a later date. All is quiet upon the line of communications, though the usual persistent rumours of the presence of dervishes in the Eastern desert continue to circulate. — *Our own correspondent*.

“How’s that?” cried Scott, triumphantly, and his white teeth gleamed suddenly through his black beard. “That’s the sort of flapdoodle for the dear old public.”

“Will it interest them?”

“Oh, everything interests them. They want to know all about it; and they like to think that there is a man who is getting a hundred a month simply in order to tell it to them.”

“It’s very kind of you to teach me all this.”

“Well, it is a little unconventional, for, after all, we are here to score over each other if we can. There are no more eggs, and you must take it out in jam. Of course, as Mortimer says, such a telegram as this is of no importance one way or another, except to prove to the office that we *are* in the Soudan, and not at Monte Carlo. But when it comes to serious work it must be every man for himself.”

“Is that quite necessary?”

“Why, of course it is.”

“I should have thought if three men were to combine and to share their news, they would do better than if they were each to act for himself, and they would have a much pleasanter time of it.”

The two older men sat with their bread-and-jam in their hands, and an expression of genuine disgust upon their faces.

“We are not here to have a pleasant time,” said Mortimer, with a flash through his glasses. “We are here to do our best for our papers. How can they score over each other if we do not do the same? If we all combine we might as well amalgamate with Reuter at once.”

“Why, it would take away the whole glory of the profession!” cried Scott. “At present the smartest man gets his stuff first on the wires. What inducement is there to be smart if we all share and share alike?”

“And at present the man with the best equipment has the best chance,” remarked Mortimer, glancing across at the shot-silk polo ponies and the cheap little Syrian grey. “That is the fair reward of foresight and enterprise. Every man for himself, and let the best man win.”

“That’s the way to find who the best man is. Look at Chandler. He would never have got his chance if he had not played always off his own bat. You’ve heard how he pretended to break his leg, sent his fellow-correspondent off for the doctor, and so got a fair start for the telegraph-office.”

“Do you mean to say that was legitimate?”

“Everything is legitimate. It’s your wits against my wits.”

“I should call it dishonourable.”

“You may call it what you like. Chandler’s paper got the battle and the other’s didn’t. It made Chandler’s name.”

“Or take Westlake,” said Mortimer, cramming the tobacco into his pipe. “Hi, Abdul, you may have the dishes! Westlake brought his stuff down by pretending to be the Government courier, and using the relays of Government horses. Westlake’s paper sold half a million.”

“Is that legitimate also?” asked Anerley, thoughtfully.

“Why not?”

“Well, it looks a little like horse-stealing and lying.”

“Well, *I* think I should do a little horse-stealing and lying if I could have a column to myself in a London daily. What do you say, Scott?”

“Anything short of manslaughter.”

“And I’m not sure that I’d trust you there.”

“Well, I don’t think I should be guilty of newspaper-man-slaughter. That I regard as a distinct breach of professional etiquette. But if any outsider comes between a highly charged correspondent and an electric wire, he does it at his peril. My dear Anerley, I tell you frankly that if you are going to handicap yourself with scruple you may just as well be in Fleet Street as in the Soudan. Our life is irregular. Our work has never been systematised. No doubt it will be some day, but the time is not yet. Do what you can and how you can, and be first on the wires; that’s my advice to you; and also, that when next you come upon a campaign you bring with you the best horse that money can buy. Mortimer may beat me or I may beat Mortimer, but at least we know that between us we have the fastest ponies in the country. We have neglected no chance.”

“I am not so certain of that,” said Mortimer, slowly. “You are aware, of course, that though a horse beats a camel on twenty miles, a camel beats a horse on thirty.”

“What, one of those camels?” cried Anerley in astonishment. The two seniors burst out laughing.

“No, no, the real high-bred trotter — the kind of beast the dervishes ride when they make their lightning raids.”

“Faster than a galloping horse?” “Well, it tires a horse down. It goes the same gait all the way, and it wants neither halt nor drink, and it takes rough ground much better than a horse. They used to have long distance races at Haifa, and the camel always won at thirty.”

“Still, we need not reproach ourselves, Scott, for we are not very likely to have to carry a thirty-mile message, they will have the field telegraph next week.”

“Quite so. But at the present moment—”

“I know, my dear chap; but there is no motion of urgency before the house. Load baggles at five o’clock; so you have Just three hours clear. Any sign of the evening pennies?”

Mortimer swept the northern horizon with his binoculars. “Not in sight yet.”

“They are quite capable of travelling during the heat of the day. Just the sort of thing evening pennies *would* do. Take care of your match, Anerley. These palm groves go up like a powder magazine if you set them alight. Bye-bye.” The two men crawled under their mosquito-nets and sank instantly into the easy sleep of those whose lives are spent in the open.

Young Anerley stood with his back against a palm tree and his briar between his lips, thinking over the advice which he had received. After all, they were the heads of the profession, these men, and it was not for him, the newcomer, to reform their methods. If they served their papers in this fashion, then he must do the same. They had at least been frank and generous in teaching him the rules of the game. If it was good enough for them it was good enough for him.

It was a broiling afternoon, and those thin frills of foam round the black, glistening necks of the Nile boulders looked delightfully cool and alluring. But it would not be safe to bathe for some hours to come. The air shimmered and vibrated over the baking stretch of sand and rock. There was not a breath of wind, and the droning and piping of the insects inclined one for sleep. Somewhere above a hoopoe was calling. Anerley knocked out his ashes, and was turning towards his couch, when his eye caught something moving in the desert to the south. It was a horseman riding towards them as swiftly as the broken ground would permit. A messenger from the army, thought Anerley; and then, as he watched, the sun suddenly struck the man on the side of the head, and his chin flamed into gold. There could not be two horsemen with beards of such a colour. It was Merryweather, the engineer, and he was returning. What on earth was he returning for? He had been so keen to see the general, and yet he was coming back with his mission unaccomplished. Was it that his pony was hopelessly foundered? It seemed to be moving well. Anerley picked up Mortimer’s binoculars, and a foam-bespattered horse and a weary koorbash-cracking man came cantering up the centre of the field. But there was nothing in his appearance to explain the mystery of his return. Then as he watched them they dipped into a hollow and disappeared. He could see that it was one of those narrow khors which led to the river, and he waited, glass in hand, for their immediate reappearance. But minute passed after minute and there was no sign of them. That narrow gully appeared to have swallowed them up. And then with a curious gulp and start he saw a little grey cloud wreathe itself slowly from among the rocks and drift in a long, hazy shred over the desert. In an instant he had torn Scott and Mortimer from their slumbers.

"Get up, you chaps!" he cried. "I believe Merryweather has been shot by dervishes."

"And Reuter not here!" cried the two veterans, exultantly clutching at their notebooks. "Merryweather shot! Where? When? How?"

In a few words Anerley explained what he had seen.

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Well, a shot loses itself very easily among rocks. By George, look at the buzzards!"

Two large brown birds were soaring in the deep blue heaven. As Scott spoke they circled down and dropped into the little khor.

"That's good enough," said Mortimer, with his nose between the leaves of his book. "'Merryweather headed dervishes stop return stop shot mutilated stop raid communications.' How's that?"

"You think he was headed off?"

"Why else should he return?"

"In that case, if they were out in front of him and others cut him off, there must be several small raiding parties."

"I should judge so."

"How about the 'mutilated'?"

"I've fought against Arabs before."

"Where are you off to?"

"Sarras."

"I think I'll race you in," said Scott.

Anerley stared in astonishment at the absolutely impersonal way in which these men regarded the situation. In their zeal for news it had apparently never struck them that they, their camp, and their servants were all in the lion's mouth. But even as they talked there came the harsh, importunate rat-tat-tat of an irregular volley from among the rocks, and the high, keening whistle of bullets over their heads. A palm spray fluttered down amongst them. At the same instant the six frightened servants came running wildly in for protection.

It was the cool-headed Mortimer who organised the defence, for Scott's Celtic soul was so aflame at all this "copy" in hand and more to come that he was too exuberantly boisterous for a commander. The other, with his spectacles and his stern face, soon had the servants in hand. "*Tali henna! Egri!* What the deuce are you frightened about? Put the camels between the palm trunks. That's right. Now get the knee-tethers on them. *Quies*! Did you never hear bullets before? Now put the donkeys here. Not much — you don't get my polo-pony to make a zareba with. Picket the ponies between the grove and the river out of danger's way. These fellows seem to fire even higher than they did in '85."

"That's got home, anyhow," said Scott, as they heard a soft, splashing thud like a stone in a mud-bank.

"Who's hit, then?"

"The brown camel that's chewing the cud." As he spoke the creature, its jaw still working, laid its long neck along the ground and closed its large dark eyes.

"That shot cost me 15 pounds," said Mortimer, ruefully. "How many of them do you make?"

"Four, I think."

"Only four Bezingers, at any rate; there may be some spearmen."

"I think not; it is a little raiding-party of rifle-men. By the way, Anerley, you've never been under fire before, have you?"

"Never," said the young pressman, who was conscious of a curious feeling of nervous elation.

"Love and poverty and war, they are all experiences necessary to make a complete life. Pass over those cartridges. This is a very mild baptism that you are undergoing, for behind these camels you are as safe as if you were sitting in the back room of the Authors' Club."

"As safe, but hardly as comfortable," said Scott. "A long glass of hock and seltzer would be exceedingly acceptable. But oh, Mortimer, what a chance! Think of the general's feelings when he hears that the first action of the war has been fought by the Press column. Think of Reuter, who has been stewing at the front for a week! Think of the evening pennies just too late for the fun. By George, that slug brushed a mosquito off me!"

"And one of the donkeys is hit."

“This is sinful. It will end in our having to carry our own kits to Khartoum.”

“Never mind, my boy, it all goes to make copy. I can see the headlines—’Raid on Communications’; ‘Murder of British Engineer’: ‘Press Column Attacked.’ Won’t it be ripping?”

“I wonder what the next line will be,” said Anerley.

“‘Our Special Wounded’!” cried Scott, rolling over on to his back. “No harm done,” he added, gathering himself up again; “only a chip off my knee. This is getting sultry. I confess that the idea of that back room at the Authors’ Club begins to grow upon me.”

“I have some diachylon.”

“Afterwards will do. We’re having a ‘appy day with Fuzzy on the rush. I wish he *would* rush.”

“They’re coming nearer.”

“This is an excellent revolver of mine if it didn’t throw so devilish high. I always aim at a man’s toes if I want to stimulate his digestion. O Lord, there’s our kettle gone!” With a boom like a dinner-gong a Remington bullet had passed through the kettle, and a cloud of steam hissed up from the fire. A wild shout came from the rocks above.

“The idiots think that they have blown us up. They’ll rush us now, as sure as fate; then it will be our turn to lead. Got your revolver, Anerley?”

“I have this double-barrelled fowling-piece.”

“Sensible man! It’s the best weapon in the world at this sort of rough-and-tumble work. What cartridges?”

“Swan-shot.”

“That will do all right. I carry this big bore double-barrelled pistol loaded with slugs. You might as well try to stop one of these fellows with a pea-shooter as with a service revolver.”

“There are ways and means,” said Scott. “The Geneva Convention does not hold south of the first cataract. It’s easy to make a bullet mushroom by a little manipulation of the tip of it. When I was in the broken square at Tamai—”

“Wait a bit,” cried Mortimer, adjusting his glasses. “I think they are coming now.”

“The time,” said Scott, snapping up his watch, “being exactly seventeen minutes past four.”

Anerley had been lying behind a camel staring with an interest which bordered upon fascination at the rocks opposite. Here was a little woolly puff of smoke, and there was another one, but never once had they caught a glimpse of the attackers. To him there was something weird and awesome in these unseen, persistent men who, minute by minute, were drawing closer to them. He had heard them cry out when the kettle was broken, and once, immediately afterwards, an enormously strong voice had roared something which had set Scott shrugging his shoulders.

“They’ve got to take us first,” said he, and Anerley thought his nerve might be better if he did not ask for a translation.

The firing had begun at a distance of some 100 yards, which put it out of the question for them, with their lighter weapons, to make any reply to it. Had their antagonists continued to keep that range the defenders must either have made a hopeless sally or tried to shelter themselves behind their zareba as best they might on the chance that the sound might bring up help. But, luckily for them, the African has never taken kindly to the rifle, and his primitive instinct to close with his enemy is always too strong for his sense of strategy. They were drawing in, therefore, and now, for the first time, Anerley caught sight of a face looking at them from over a rock. It was a huge, virile, strong-jawed head of a pure negro type, with silver trinkets gleaming in the ears. The man raised a great arm from behind the rock, and shook his Remington at them.

“Shall I fire?” asked Anerley.

“No, no; it is too far. Your shot would scatter all over the place.”

“It’s a picturesque ruffian,” said Scott. “Couldn’t you kodak him, Mortimer? There’s another!” A fine-featured brown Arab, with a black, pointed beard, was peeping from behind another boulder. He wore the green turban which proclaimed him hadji, and his face showed the keen, nervous exultation of the religious fanatic.

“They seem a piebald crowd,” said Scott.

“That last is one of the real fighting Baggara,” remarked Mortimer.
“He’s a dangerous man.”

“He looks pretty vicious. There’s another negro!”

“Two more! Dingas, by the look of them. Just the same chaps we get our own black battalions from. As long as they get a fight they don’t mind who it’s for; but if the idiots had only sense enough to understand, they would know that the Arab is their hereditary enemy, and we their hereditary friends. Look at the silly juggins, gnashing his teeth at the very men who put down the slave trade!”

“Couldn’t you explain?”

“I’ll explain with this pistol when he comes a little nearer. Now sit tight, Anerley. They’re off!”

They were indeed. It was the brown man with the green turban who headed the rush. Close at his heels was the negro with the silver ear-rings — a giant of a man, and the other two were only a little behind. As they sprang over the rocks one after the other, it took Anerley back to the school sports when he held the tape for the hurdle-race. It was magnificent, the wild spirit and abandon of it, the flutter of the chequered galabeeahs, the gleam of steel, the wave of black arms, the frenzied faces, the quick pitter-patter of the rushing feet. The law-abiding Briton is so imbued with the idea of the sanctity of human life that it was hard for the young pressman to realise that these men had every intention of killing him, and that he was at perfect liberty to do as much for them. He lay staring as if this were a show and he a spectator.

“Now, Anerley, now! Take the Arab!” cried somebody.

He put up the gun and saw the brown fierce face at the other end of the barrel. He tugged at the trigger, but the face grew larger and fiercer with every stride. Again and again he tugged. A revolver-shot rang out at his elbow, then another one, and he saw a red spot spring out on the Arab’s brown breast. But he was still coming on.

“Shoot, you ass, shoot!” screamed Scott.

Again he strained unavailingly at the trigger. There were two more pistol-shots, and the big negro had fallen and risen and fallen again.

“Cock it, you fool!” shouted a furious voice; and at the same instant, with a rush and flutter, the Arab bounded over the prostrate camel and came down with his bare feet upon Anerley’s chest. In a dream he seemed to be struggling frantically with someone upon the ground, then he was conscious of a tremendous explosion in his very face, and so ended for him the first action of the war.

"Good-bye, old chap. You'll be all right. Give yourself time." It was Mortimer's voice, and he became dimly conscious of a long, spectacled face, and of a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Sorry to leave you. We'll be lucky now if we are in time for the morning editions." Scott was tightening his girth as he spoke.

"We'll put in our wire that you have been hurt, so your people will know why they don't hear from you. If Reuter or the evening pennies come up, don't give the thing away. Abbas will look after you, and we'll be back to-morrow afternoon. Bye-bye!"

Anerley heard it all, though he did not feel energy enough to answer. Then, as he watched two sleek, brown ponies with their yellow-clad riders dwindling among the rocks, his memory cleared suddenly, and he realised that the first great journalistic chance of his life was slipping away from him. It was a small fight, but it was the first of the war, and the great public at home were all athirst for news. They would have it in the *Courier*; they would have it in the *Intelligence*, and not a word in the *Gazette*. The thought brought him to his feet, though he had to throw his arm round the stem of the palm tree to steady his swimming head. There was a big black man lying where he had fallen, his huge chest pocked with bullet-marks, every wound rosetted with its circle of flies. The Arab was stretched out within a few yards of him, with two hands clasped over the dreadful thing which had been his head. Across him was lying Anerley's fowling-piece, one barrel discharged, the other at half cock.

"Scott effendi shoot him your gun," said a voice. It was Abbas, his English-speaking body-servant.

Anerley groaned at the disgrace of it. He had lost his head so completely that he had forgotten to cock his gun; and yet he knew that it was not fear but interest which had so absorbed him. He put his hand up to his head and felt that a wet handkerchief was bound round his forehead.

"Where are the two other dervishes?"

"They ran away. One got shot in arm."

"What's happened to me?"

"Effendi got cut on head. Effendi catch bad man by arms, and Scott effendi shot him. Face burn very bad."

Anerley became conscious suddenly that there was a pringling about his skin and an overpowering smell of burned hair under his nostrils. He put his hand to his moustache. It was gone. His eyebrows too? He could not find them. His head, no doubt, was very near to the dervish's when they were rolling upon the ground together, and this was the effect of the explosion of his own gun. Well, he would have time to grow some more hair before he saw Fleet Street again. But the cut, perhaps, was a more serious matter. Was it enough to prevent him getting to the telegraph-office at Sarras? The only way was to try and see. But there was only that poor little Syrian grey of his. There it stood in the evening sunshine, with a sunk head and a bent knee, as if its morning's work was still heavy upon it. What hope was there of being able to do thirty-five miles of heavy going upon that? It would be a strain upon the splendid ponies of his companions — and they were the swiftest and most enduring in the country. The most enduring? There was one creature more enduring, and that was a real trotting camel. If he had had one he might have got to the wires first after all, for Mortimer had said that over thirty miles they have the better of any horse. Yes, if he had only had a real trotting camel! And then like a flash came Mortimer's words, "It is the kind of beast that the dervishes ride when they make their lightning raids."

The beasts the dervishes ride! What had these dead dervishes ridden? In an instant he was clambering up the rocks, with Abbas protesting at his heels. Had the two fugitives carried away all the camels, or had they been content to save themselves? The brass gleam from a litter of empty Remington cases caught his eye, and showed where the enemy had been crouching. And then he could have shouted for joy, for there, in the hollow, some little distance off, rose the high, graceful white neck and the elegant head of such a camel as he had never set eyes upon before — a swanlike, beautiful creature, as far from the rough, clumsy baggles as the cart-horse is from the racer.

The beast was kneeling under the shelter of the rocks with its waterskin and bag of doora slung over its shoulders, and its forelegs tethered Arab fashion with a rope around the knees. Anerley threw his leg over the front pommel while Abbas slipped off the cord. Forward flew Anerley towards the creature's neck, then violently backwards, clawing madly at anything which might save him, and then, with a jerk which nearly snapped his loins, he was thrown forward again. But the camel was on its legs now, and the young pressman was safely seated upon one of the fliers of the desert. It was as gentle as it was swift, and it stood oscillating its long neck and gazing round with its large brown eyes, whilst Anerley coiled his legs round the peg and grasped the curved camel-stick which Abbas had handed up to him. There were two bridle-cords, one from the nostril and one from the neck, but he remembered that Scott had said that it was the servant's and not the house-bell which had to be pulled, so he kept his grasp upon the lower. Then he touched the long, vibrating neck with his stick, and in an instant Abbas' farewell seemed to come from far behind him, and the black rocks and yellow sand were dancing past on either side.

It was his first experience of a trotting camel, and at first the motion, although irregular and abrupt, was not unpleasant. Having no stirrup or fixed point of any kind, he could not rise to it, but he gripped as tightly as be could with his knee, and he tried to sway backwards and forwards as he had seen the Arabs do. It was a large, very concave Makloofa saddle, and he was conscious that he was bouncing about on it with as little power of adhesion as a billiard-ball upon a tea-tray. He gripped the two sides with his hands to hold himself steady. The creature had got into its long, swinging, stealthy trot, its sponge-like feet making no sound upon the hard sand. Anerley leaned back with his two hands gripping hard behind him, and he whooped the creature on. The sun had already sunk behind the line of black volcanic peaks, which look like huge slag-heaps at the mouth of a mine. The western sky had taken that lovely light green and pale pink tint which makes evening beautiful upon the Nile, and the old brown river itself, swirling down amongst the black rocks, caught some shimmer of the colours above. The glare, the heat, and the piping of the insects had all ceased together. In spite of his aching head, Anerley could have cried out for pure physical joy as the swift creature beneath him flew along with him through that cool, invigorating air, with the virile north wind soothing his pringling face.

He had looked at his watch, and now he made a swift calculation of times and distances. It was past six when he had left the camp. Over broken ground it was impossible that he could hope to do more than seven miles an hour — less on bad parts, more on the smooth. His recollection of the track was that there were few smooth and many bad. He would be lucky, then, if he reached Sarras anywhere from twelve to one. Then the messages took a good two hours to go through, for they had to be transcribed at Cairo. At the best he could only hope to have told his story in Fleet Street at two or three in the morning. It was possible that he might manage it, but the chances seemed enormously against him. About three the morning edition would be made up, and his chance gone for ever. The one thing clear was that only the first man at the wires would have any chance at all, and Anerley meant to be first if hard riding could do it. So he tapped away at the bird-like neck, and the creature's long, loose limbs went faster and faster at every tap. Where the rocky spurs ran down to the river, horses would have to go round, while camels might get across, so that Anerley felt that he was always gaining upon his companions.

But there was a price to be paid for the feeling. He had heard of men who had burst when on camel journeys, and he knew that the Arabs swathe their bodies tightly in broad cloth bandages when they prepare for a long march. It had seemed unnecessary and ridiculous when he first began to speed over the level track, but now, when he got on the rocky paths, he understood what it meant. Never for an instant was he at the same angle. Backwards, forwards he swung, with a tingling jar at the end of each sway, until he ached from his neck to his knees. It caught him across the shoulders, it caught him down the spine, it gripped him over the loins, it marked the lower line of his ribs with one heavy, dull throb. He clutched here and there with his hand to try and ease the strain upon his muscles. He drew up his knees, altered his seat, and set his teeth with a grim determination to go through with it should it kill him. His head was splitting, his flayed face smarting, and every joint in his body aching as if it were dislocated. But he forgot all that when, with the rising of the moon, he heard the clinking of horses' hoofs down upon the track by the river, and knew that, unseen by them, he had already got well abreast of his companions. But he was hardly halfway, and the time already eleven.

All day the needles had been ticking away without intermission in the little corrugated iron hut which served as a telegraph station at Sarras. With its bare walls and its packing-case seats, it was none the less for the moment one of the vital spots upon the earth's surface, and the crisp, importunate ticking might have come from the world-old clock of Destiny. Many august people had been at the other end of those wires, and had communed with the moist-faced military clerk. A French Premier had demanded a pledge, and an English marquis had passed on the request to the General in command, with a question as to how it would affect the situation. Cipher telegrams had nearly driven the clerk out of his wits, for of all crazy occupations the taking of a cipher message, when you are without the key to the cipher, is the worst. Much high diplomacy had been going on all day in the innermost chambers of European chancellories, and the results of it had been whispered into this little corrugated-iron hut. About two in the morning an enormous despatch had come at last to an end, and the weary operator had opened the door, and was lighting his pipe in the cool, fresh air, when he saw a camel plump down in the dust, and a man, who seemed to be in the last stage of drunkenness, come rolling towards him.

“What’s the time?” he cried, in a voice which appeared to be the only sober thing about him.

It was on the clerk’s lips to say that it was time that the questioner was in his bed, but it is not safe upon a campaign to be ironical at the expense of khaki-clad men. He contented himself, therefore, with the bald statement that it was after two. But no retort that he could have devised could have had a more crushing effect. The voice turned drunken also, and the man caught at the door-post to uphold him.

“Two o’clock! I’m done after all!” said he. His head was tied up in a bloody handkerchief, his face was crimson, and he stood with his legs crooked as if the pith had all gone out of his back. The clerk began to realise that something out of the ordinary was in the wind.

“How long does it take to get a wire to London?”

“About two hours.”

“And it’s two now. I could not get it there before four.”

“Before three.”

“Four.”

“No, three.”

“But you said two hours.”

“Yes, but there’s more than an hour’s difference in longitude.”

“By Heaven, I’ll do it yet!” cried Anerley, and staggering to a packing-case, he began the dictation of his famous despatch.

And so it came about that the *Gazette* had a long column, with headlines like an epitaph, when the sheets of the *Intelligence* and the *Courier* were as blank as the faces of their editors. And so, too, it happened that when two weary men, upon two foundered horses, arrived about four in the morning at the Sarras post-office, they looked at each other in silence and departed noiselessly, with the conviction that there are some situations with which the English language is not capable of dealing.

The New Catacomb

“Look here, Burger,” said Kennedy, “I do wish that you would confide in me.”

The two famous students of Roman remains sat together in Kennedy’s comfortable room overlooking the Corso. The night was cold, and they had both pulled up their chairs to the unsatisfactory Italian stove which threw out a zone of stuffiness rather than of warmth.

Outside under the bright winter stars lay the modern Rome, the long, double chain of the electric lamps, the brilliantly lighted *cafes*, the rushing carriages, and the dense throng upon the footpaths. But inside, in the sumptuous chamber of the rich young English archaeologist, there was only old Rome to be seen. Cracked and time-worn friezes hung upon the walls, grey old busts of senators and soldiers with their fighting heads and their hard, cruel faces peered out from the corners. On the centre table, amidst a litter of inscriptions, fragments, and ornaments, there stood the famous reconstruction by Kennedy of the Baths of Caracalla, which excited such interest and admiration when it was exhibited in Berlin.

Amphorae hung from the ceiling, and a litter of curiosities strewed the rich red Turkey carpet. And of them all there was not one which was not of the most unimpeachable authenticity, and of the utmost rarity and value; for Kennedy, though little more than thirty, had a European reputation in this particular branch of research, and was, moreover, provided with that long purse which either proves to be a fatal handicap to the student’s energies, or, if his mind is still true to its purpose, gives him an enormous advantage in the race for fame. Kennedy had often been seduced by whim and pleasure from his studies, but his mind was an incisive one, capable of long and concentrated efforts which ended in sharp reactions of sensuous languor. His handsome face, with its high, white forehead, its aggressive nose, and its somewhat loose and sensuous mouth, was a fair index of the compromise between strength and weakness in his nature.

Of a very different type was his companion, Julius Burger. He came of a curious blend, a German father and an Italian mother, with the robust qualities of the North mingling strangely with the softer graces of the South. Blue Teutonic eyes lightened his sun-browned face, and above them rose a square, massive forehead, with a fringe of close yellow curls lying round it. His strong, firm jaw was clean-shaven, and his companion had frequently remarked how much it suggested those old Roman busts which peered out from the shadows in the corners of his chamber. Under its bluff German strength there lay always a suggestion of Italian subtlety, but the smile was so honest, and the eyes so frank, that one understood that this was only an indication of his ancestry, with no actual bearing upon his character.

In age and in reputation he was on the same level as his English companion, but his life and his work had both been far more arduous. Twelve years before he had come as a poor student to Rome, and had lived ever since upon some small endowment for research which had been awarded to him by the University of Bonn.

Painfully, slowly, and doggedly, with extraordinary tenacity and singlemindedness, he had climbed from rung to rung of the ladder of fame, until now he was a member of the Berlin Academy, and there was every reason to believe that he would shortly be promoted to the Chair of the greatest of German Universities. But the singleness of purpose which had brought him to the same high level as the rich and brilliant Englishman, had caused him in everything outside their work to stand infinitely below him. He had never found a pause in his studies in which to cultivate the social graces. It was only when he spoke of his own subject that his face was filled with life and soul. At other times he was silent and embarrassed, too conscious of his own limitations in larger subjects, and impatient of that small talk which is the conventional refuge of those who have no thoughts to express.

And yet for some years there had been an acquaintanceship which appeared to be slowly ripening into a friendship between these two very different rivals. The base and origin of this lay in the fact that in their own studies each was the only one of the younger men who had knowledge and enthusiasm enough to properly appreciate the other. Their common interests and pursuits had brought them together, and each had been attracted by the other’s knowledge. And then gradually something had been added to this. Kennedy had been amused by the frankness and simplicity of his rival, while Burger in turn had been fascinated by the brilliancy and vivacity which had made Kennedy such a favourite in Roman society. I say “had,” because just at the moment the young Englishman was somewhat under a cloud.

A love affair, the details of which had never quite come out, had indicated a heartlessness and callousness upon his part which shocked many of his friends. But in the bachelor circles of students and artists in which he preferred to move there is no very rigid code of honour in such matters, and though a head might be shaken or a pair of shoulders shrugged over the flight of two and the return of one, the general sentiment was probably one of curiosity and perhaps of envy rather than of reprobation.

“Look here, Burger,” said Kennedy, looking hard at the placid face of his companion, “I do wish that you would confide in me.”

As he spoke he waved his hand in the direction of a rug which lay upon the floor.

On the rug stood a long, shallow fruit-basket of the light wicker-work which is used in the Campagna, and this was heaped with a litter of objects, inscribed tiles, broken inscriptions, cracked mosaics, torn papyri, rusty metal ornaments, which to the uninitiated might have seemed to have come straight from a dustman’s bin, but which a specialist would have speedily recognised as unique of their kind.

The pile of odds and ends in the flat wicker-work basket supplied exactly one of those missing links of social development which are of such interest to the student. It was the German who had brought them in, and the Englishman’s eyes were hungry as he looked at them.

“I won’t interfere with your treasure-trove, but I should very much like to hear about it,” he continued, while Burger very deliberately lit a cigar. “It is evidently a discovery of the first importance. These inscriptions will make a sensation throughout Europe.”

“For every one here there are a million there!” said the German. “There are so many that a dozen savants might spend a lifetime over them, and build up a reputation as solid as the Castle of St. Angelo.”

Kennedy was thinking with his fine forehead wrinkled and his fingers playing with his long, fair moustache.

“You have given yourself away, Burger!” said he at last. “Your words can only apply to one thing. You have discovered a new catacomb.”

“I had no doubt that you had already come to that conclusion from an examination of these objects.”

“Well, they certainly appeared to indicate it, but your last remarks make it certain. There is no place except a catacomb which could contain so vast a store of relics as you describe.”

“Quite so. There is no mystery about that. I *have* discovered a new catacomb.”

“Where?”

“Ah, that is my secret, my dear Kennedy! Suffice it that it is so situated that there is not one chance in a million of anyone else coming upon it. Its date is different from that of any known catacomb, and it has been reserved for the burial of the highest Christians, so that the remains and the relics are quite different from anything which has ever been seen before. If I was not aware of your knowledge and of your energy, my friend, I would not hesitate, under the pledge of secrecy, to tell you everything about it. But as it is I think that I must certainly prepare my own report of the matter before I expose myself to such formidable competition.”

Kennedy loved his subject with a love which was almost a mania — a love which held him true to it, amidst all the distractions which come to a wealthy and dissipated young man. He had ambition, but his ambition was secondary to his mere abstract joy and interest in everything which concerned the old life and history of the city. He yearned to see this new underworld which his companion had discovered.

“Look here, Burger,” said he, earnestly, “I assure you that you can trust me most implicitly in the matter. Nothing would induce me to put pen to paper about anything which I see until I have your express permission. I quite understand your feeling, and I think it is most natural, but you have really nothing whatever to fear from me. On the other hand, if you don’t tell me I shall make a systematic search, and I shall most certainly discover it. In that case, of course, I should make what use I liked of it, since I should be under no obligation to you.”

Burger smiled thoughtfully over his cigar.

“I have noticed, friend Kennedy,” said he, “that when I want information over any point you are not always so ready to supply it.”

“When did you ever ask me anything that I did not tell you? You remember, for example, my giving you the material for your paper about the temple of the Vestals.”

“Ah, well, that was not a matter of much importance. If I were to question you upon some intimate thing, would you give me an answer, I wonder! This new catacomb is a very intimate thing to me, and I should certainly expect some sign of confidence in return.”

“What you are driving at I cannot imagine,” said the Englishman, “but if you mean that you will answer my question about the catacomb if I answer any question which you may put to me, I can assure you that I will certainly do so.”

"Well, then," said Burger, leaning luxuriously back in his settee, and puffing a blue tree of cigar-smoke into the air, "tell me all about your relations with Miss Mary Saunderson."

Kennedy sprang up in his chair and glared angrily at his impassive companion.

"What the devil do you mean?" he cried. "What sort of a question is this? You may mean it as a joke, but you never made a worse one."

"No, I don't mean it as a joke," said Burger, simply. "I am really rather interested in the details of the matter. I don't know much about the world and women and social life and that sort of thing, and such an incident has the fascination of the unknown for me. I know you, and I knew her by sight — I had even spoken to her once or twice. I should very much like to hear from your own lips exactly what it was which occurred between you."

"I won't tell you a word."

"That's all right. It was only my whim to see if you would give up a secret as easily as you expected me to give up my secret of the new catacomb. You wouldn't, and I didn't expect you to. But why should you expect otherwise of me? There's St. John's clock striking ten. It is quite time that I was going home."

"No, wait a bit, Burger," said Kennedy; "this is really a ridiculous caprice of yours to wish to know about an old love affair which has burned out months ago. You know we look upon a man who kisses and tells as the greatest coward and villain possible."

"Certainly," said the German, gathering up his basket of curiosities, "when he tells anything about a girl which is previously unknown, he must be so. But in this case, as you must be aware, it was a public matter which was the common talk of Rome, so that you are not really doing Miss Mary Saunderson any injury by discussing her case with me. But still, I respect your scruples; and so good night!"

"Wait a bit, Burger," said Kennedy, laying his hand upon the other's arm; "I am very keen upon this catacomb business, and I can't let it drop quite so easily. Would you mind asking me something else in return — something not quite so eccentric this time?"

"No, no; you have refused, and there is an end of it," said Burger, with his basket on his arm. "No doubt you are quite right not to answer, and no doubt I am quite right also — and so again, my dear Kennedy, good night!"

The Englishman watched Burger cross the room, and he had his hand on the handle of the door before his host sprang up with the air of a man who is making the best of that which cannot be helped. “Hold on, old fellow,” said he. “I think you are behaving in a most ridiculous fashion, but still, if this is your condition, I suppose that I must submit to it. I hate saying anything about a girl, but, as you say, it is all over Rome, and I don’t suppose I can tell you anything which you do not know already. What was it you wanted to know?”

The German came back to the stove, and, laying down his basket, he sank into his chair once more. “May I have another cigar?” said he. “Thank you very much! I never smoke when I work, but I enjoy a chat much more when I am under the influence of tobacco. Now, as regards this young lady, with whom you had this little adventure. What in the world has become of her?”

“She is at home with her own people.”

“Oh, really — in England?”

“Yes.”

“What part of England — London?”

“No, Twickenham.”

“You must excuse my curiosity, my dear Kennedy, and you must put it down to my ignorance of the world. No doubt it is quite a simple thing to persuade a young lady to go off with you for three weeks or so, and then to hand her over to her own family at — what did you call the place?”

“Twickenham.”

“Quite so — at Twickenham. But it is something so entirely outside my own experience that I cannot even imagine how you set about it. For example, if you had loved this girl your love could hardly disappear in three weeks, so I presume that you could not have loved her at all. But if you did not love her why should you make this great scandal which has damaged you and ruined her?”

Kennedy looked moodily into the red eye of the stove. “That’s a logical way of looking at it, certainly,” said he. “Love is a big word, and it represents a good many different shades of feeling. I liked her, and — well, you say you’ve seen her — you know how charming she can look. But still I am willing to admit, looking back, that I could never have really loved her.”

“Then, my dear Kennedy, why did you do it?”

“The adventure of the thing had a great deal to do with it.”

“What! You are so fond of adventures!”

“Where would the variety of life be without them? It was for an adventure that I first began to pay my attentions to her. I’ve chased a good deal of game in my time, but there’s no chase like that of a pretty woman. There was the piquant difficulty of it also, for, as she was the companion of Lady Emily Rood it was almost impossible to see her alone. On the top of all the other obstacles which attracted me, I learned from her own lips very early in the proceedings that she was engaged.”

“Mein Gott! To whom?”

“She mentioned no names.”

“I do not think that anyone knows that. So that made the adventure more alluring, did it?”

“Well, it did certainly give a spice to it. Don’t you think so?”

“I tell you that I am very ignorant about these things.”

“My dear fellow, you can remember that the apple you stole from your neighbour’s tree was always sweeter than that which fell from your own. And then I found that she cared for me.”

“What — at once?”

“Oh, no, it took about three months of sapping and mining. But at last I won her over. She understood that my judicial separation from my wife made it impossible for me to do the right thing by her — but she came all the same, and we had a delightful time, as long as it lasted.”

“But how about the other man?”

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders. “I suppose it is the survival of the fittest,” said he. “If he had been the better man she would not have deserted him. Let’s drop the subject, for I have had enough of it!”

“Only one other thing. How did you get rid of her in three weeks?”

“Well, we had both cooled down a bit, you understand. She absolutely refused, under any circumstances, to come back to face the people she had known in Rome. Now, of course, Rome is necessary to me, and I was already pining to be back at my work — so there was one obvious cause of separation. Then, again, her old father turned up at the hotel in London, and there was a scene, and the whole thing became so unpleasant that really — though I missed her dreadfully at first — I was very glad to slip out of it. Now, I rely upon you not to repeat anything of what I have said.”

“My dear Kennedy, I should not dream of repeating it. But all that you say interests me very much, for it gives me an insight into your way of looking at things, which is entirely different from mine, for I have seen so little of life. And now you want to know about my new catacomb. There's no use my trying to describe it, for you would never find it by that. There is only one thing, and that is for me to take you there."

"That would be splendid."

"When would you like to come?"

"The sooner the better. I am all impatience to see it."

"Well, it is a beautiful night — though a trifle cold. Suppose we start in an hour. We must be very careful to keep the matter to ourselves. If anyone saw us hunting in couples they would suspect that there was something going on."

"We can't be too cautious," said Kennedy. "Is it far?"

"Some miles."

"Not too far to walk?"

"Oh, no, we could walk there easily."

"We had better do so, then. A cabman's suspicions would be aroused if he dropped us both at some lonely spot in the dead of the night."

"Quite so. I think it would be best for us to meet at the Gate of the Appian Way at midnight. I must go back to my lodgings for the matches and candles and things."

"All right, Burger! I think it is very kind of you to let me into this secret, and I promise you that I will write nothing about it until you have published your report. Good-bye for the present! You will find me at the Gate at twelve."

The cold, clear air was filled with the musical chimes from that city of clocks as Burger, wrapped in an Italian overcoat, with a lantern hanging from his hand, walked up to the rendezvous. Kennedy stepped out of the shadow to meet him.

"You are ardent in work as well as in love!" said the German, laughing.

"Yes; I have been waiting here for nearly half an hour."

"I hope you left no clue as to where we were going."

"Not such a fool! By Jove, I am chilled to the bone! Come on, Burger, let us warm ourselves by a spurt of hard walking."

Their footsteps sounded loud and crisp upon the rough stone paving of the disappointing road which is all that is left of the most famous highway of the world. A peasant or two going home from the wine-shop, and a few carts of country produce coming up to Rome, were the only things which they met. They swung along, with the huge tombs looming up through the darkness upon each side of them, until they had come as far as the Catacombs of St. Calixtus, and saw against a rising moon the great circular bastion of Cecilia Metella in front of them. Then Burger stopped with his hand to his side. “Your legs are longer than mine, and you are more accustomed to walking,” said he, laughing. “I think that the place where we turn off is somewhere here. Yes, this is it, round the corner of the trattoria. Now, it is a very narrow path, so perhaps I had better go in front, and you can follow.” He had lit his lantern, and by its light they were enabled to follow a narrow and devious track which wound across the marshes of the Campagna. The great Aqueduct of old Rome lay like a monstrous caterpillar across the moonlit landscape, and their road led them under one of its huge arches, and past the circle of crumbling bricks which marks the old arena. At last Burger stopped at a solitary wooden cowhouse, and he drew a key from his pocket.

“Surely your catacomb is not inside a house!” cried Kennedy.

“The entrance to it is. That is just the safeguard which we have against anyone else discovering it.”

“Does the proprietor know of it?”

“Not he. He had found one or two objects which made me almost certain that his house was built on the entrance to such a place. So I rented it from him, and did my excavations for myself. Come in, and shut the door behind you.”

It was a long, empty building, with the mangers of the cows along one wall. Burger put his lantern down on the ground, and shaded its light in all directions save one by draping his overcoat round it. “It might excite remark if anyone saw a light in this lonely place,” said he. “Just help me to move this boarding.” The flooring was loose in the corner, and plank by plank the two savants raised it and leaned it against the wall. Below there was a square aperture and a stair of old stone steps which led away down into the bowels of the earth.

“Be careful!” cried Burger, as Kennedy, in his impatience, hurried down them. “It is a perfect rabbits’-warren below, and if you were once to lose your way there, the chances would be a hundred to one against your ever coming out again. Wait until I bring the light.”

“How do you find your own way if it is so complicated?”

"I had some very narrow escapes at first, but I have gradually learned to go about. There is a certain system to it, but it is one which a lost man, if he were in the dark, could not possibly find out. Even now I always spin out a ball of string behind me when I am going far into the catacomb. You can see for yourself that it is difficult, but every one of these passages divides and subdivides a dozen times before you go a hundred yards." They had descended some twenty feet from the level of the byre, and they were standing now in a square chamber cut out of the soft tufa. The lantern cast a flickering light, bright below and dim above, over the cracked brown walls. In every direction were the black openings of passages which radiated from this common centre.

"I want you to follow me closely, my friend," said Burger. "Do not loiter to look at anything upon the way, for the place to which I will take you contains all that you can see, and more. It will save time for us to go there direct." He led the way down one of the corridors, and the Englishman followed closely at his heels. Every now and then the passage bifurcated, but Burger was evidently following some secret marks of his own, for he neither stopped nor hesitated. Everywhere along the walls, packed like the berths upon an emigrant ship, lay the Christians of old Rome. The yellow light flickered over the shrivelled features of the mummies, and gleamed upon rounded skulls and long, white arm-bones crossed over fleshless chests. And everywhere as he passed Kennedy looked with wistful eyes upon inscriptions, funeral vessels, pictures, vestments, utensils, all lying as pious hands had placed them so many centuries ago. It was apparent to him, even in those hurried, passing glances, that this was the earliest and finest of the catacombs, containing such a storehouse of Roman remains as had never before come at one time under the observation of the student. "What would happen if the light went out?" he asked, as they hurried on.

"I have a spare candle and a box of matches in my pocket. By the way, Kennedy, have you any matches?"

"No; you had better give me some."

"Oh, that is all right. There is no chance of our separating."

"How far are we going? It seems to me that we have walked at least a quarter of a mile."

"More than that, I think. There is really no limit to the tombs — at least, I have never been able to find any. This is a very difficult place, so I think that I will use our ball of string.” He fastened one end of it to a projecting stone and he carried the coil in the breast of his coat, paying it out as he advanced. Kennedy saw that it was no unnecessary precaution, for the passages had become more complexed and tortuous than ever, with a perfect network of intersecting corridors. But these all ended in one large circular hall with a square pedestal of tufa topped with a slab of marble at one end of it. “By Jove!” cried Kennedy in an ecstasy, as Burger swung his lantern over the marble. “It is a Christian altar — probably the first one in existence. Here is the little consecration cross cut upon the corner of it. No doubt this circular space was used as a church.”

“Precisely,” said Burger. “If I had more time I should like to show you all the bodies which are buried in these niches upon the walls, for they are the early popes and bishops of the Church, with their mitres, their croziers, and full canonicals. Go over to that one and look at it!” Kennedy went across, and stared at the ghastly head which lay loosely on the shredded and mouldering mitre.

“This is most interesting,” said he, and his voice seemed to boom against the concave vault. “As far as my experience goes, it is unique. Bring the lantern over, Burger, for I want to see them all.” But the German had strolled away, and was standing in the middle of a yellow circle of light at the other side of the hall.

“Do you know how many wrong turnings there are between this and the stairs?” he asked. “There are over two thousand. No doubt it was one of the means of protection which the Christians adopted. The odds are two thousand to one against a man getting out, even if he had a light; but if he were in the dark it would, of course, be far more difficult.”

“So I should think.”

“And the darkness is something dreadful. I tried it once for an experiment. Let us try it again!” He stooped to the lantern, and in an instant it was as if an invisible hand was squeezed tightly over each of Kennedy’s eyes. Never had he known what such darkness was. It seemed to press upon him and to smother him. It was a solid obstacle against which the body shrank from advancing. He put his hands out to push it back from him. “That will do, Burger,” said he, “let’s have the light again.”

But his companion began to laugh, and in that circular room the sound seemed to come from every side at once. “You seem uneasy, friend Kennedy,” said he.

“Go on, man, light the candle!” said Kennedy, impatiently.

“It’s very strange, Kennedy, but I could not in the least tell by the sound in which direction you stand. Could you tell where I am?”

“No; you seem to be on every side of me.”

“If it were not for this string which I hold in my hand I should not have a notion which way to go.”

“I dare say not. Strike a light, man, and have an end of this nonsense.”

“Well, Kennedy, there are two things which I understand that you are very fond of. The one is adventure, and the other is an obstacle to surmount. The adventure must be the finding of your way out of this catacomb. The obstacle will be the darkness and the two thousand wrong turns which make the way a little difficult to find. But you need not hurry, for you have plenty of time, and when you halt for a rest now and then, I should like you just to think of Miss Mary Saunderson, and whether you treated her quite fairly.”

“You devil, what do you mean?” roared Kennedy. He was running about in little circles and clasping at the solid blackness with both hands.

“Good-bye,” said the mocking voice, and it was already at some distance. “I really do not think, Kennedy, even by your own showing that you did the right thing by that girl. There was only one little thing which you appeared not to know, and I can supply it. Miss Saunderson was engaged to a poor, ungainly devil of a student, and his name was Julius Burger.” There was a rustle somewhere — the vague sound of a foot striking a stone — and then there fell silence upon that old Christian church — a stagnant heavy silence which closed round Kennedy and shut him in like water round a drowning man.

Some two months afterwards the following paragraph made the round of the European Press: —

One of the most interesting discoveries of recent years is that of the new catacomb in Rome, which lies some distance to the east of the well-known vaults of St. Calixtus. The finding of this important burial-place, which is exceedingly rich in most interesting early Christian remains, is due to the energy and sagacity of Dr. Julius Burger, the young German specialist, who is rapidly taking the first place as an authority upon ancient Rome. Although the first to publish his discovery, it appears that a less fortunate adventurer had anticipated Dr. Burger. Some months ago Mr. Kennedy, the well-known English student, disappeared suddenly from his rooms in the “Corso”, and it was conjectured that his association with a recent scandal had driven him to leave Rome. It appears now that he had in reality fallen a victim to that fervid love of archaeology which had raised him to a distinguished place among living scholars. His body was discovered in the heart of the new catacomb, and it was evident from the condition of his feet and boots that he had tramped for days through the tortuous corridors which make these subterranean tombs so dangerous to explorers. The deceased gentleman had, with inexplicable rashness, made his way into this labyrinth without, as far as can be discovered, taking with him either candles or matches, so that his sad fate was the natural result of his own temerity. What makes the matter more painful is that Dr. Julius Burger was an intimate friend of the deceased. His joy at the extraordinary find which he has been so fortunate as to make has been greatly marred by the terrible fate of his comrade and fellow-worker.

THE DEBUT OF BIMBASHI JOYCE

It was in the days when the tide of Mahdism, which had swept in such a flood from the great Lakes and Darfur to the confines of Egypt, had at last come to its full, and even begun, as some hoped, to show signs of a turn. At its outset it had been terrible. It had engulfed Hicks's army, swept over Gordon and Khartoum, rolled behind the British forces as they retired down the river, and finally cast up a spray of raiding parties as far north as Assouan. Then it found other channels to east and west, to Central Africa and to Abyssinia, and retired a little on the side of Egypt. For ten years there ensued a lull, during which the frontier garrisons looked out upon those distant blue hills of Dongola. Behind the violet mists which draped them lay a land of blood and horror. From time to time some adventurer went south towards those haze-girt mountains, tempted by stories of gum and ivory, but none ever returned. Once a mutilated Egyptian and once a Greek woman, mad with thirst and fear, made their way to the lines. They were the only exports of that country of darkness. Sometimes the sunset would turn those distant mists into a bank of crimson, and the dark mountains would rise from that sinister reek like islands in a sea of blood. It seemed a grim symbol in the southern heaven when seen from the fort-capped hills by Wady Halfa. Ten years of lust in Khartoum, ten years of silent work in Cairo, and then all was ready, and it was time for civilisation to take a trip south once more, travelling as her wont is in an armoured train. Everything was ready, down to the last pack-saddle of the last camel, and yet no one suspected it, for an unconstitutional Government has its advantage. A great administrator had argued, and managed, and cajoled; a great soldier had organised and planned, and made piastres do the work of pounds. And then one night these two master spirits met and clasped hands, and the soldier vanished away upon some business of his own. And just at that very time, Bimbashi Hilary Joyce, seconded from the Royal Mallow Fusiliers, and temporarily attached to the Ninth Soudanese, made his first appearance in Cairo.

Napoleon had said, and Hilary Joyce had noted, that great reputations are only to be made in the East. Here he was in the East with four tin cases of baggage, a Wilkinson sword, a Bond's slug-throwing pistol, and a copy of "Green's Introduction to the Study of Arabic." With such a start, and the blood of youth running hot in his veins, everything seemed easy. He was a little frightened of the general; he had heard stories of his sternness to young officers, but with tact and suavity he hoped for the best. So, leaving his effects at "Shepherd's Hotel," he reported himself at headquarters. It was not the general, but the head of the Intelligence Department who received him, the chief being still absent upon that business which had called him. Hilary Joyce found himself in the presence of a short, thick-set officer, with a gentle voice and a placid expression which covered a remarkably acute and energetic spirit. With that quiet smile and guileless manner he had undercut and outwitted the most cunning of Orientals. He stood, a cigarette between his fingers, looking at the newcomer. "I heard that you had come. Sorry the chief isn't here to see you. Gone up to the frontier, you know."

"My regiment is at Wady Halfa. I suppose, sir, that I should report myself there at once?"

"No; I was to give you your orders." He led the way to a map upon the wall, and pointed with the end of his cigarette. "You see this place. It's the Oasis of Kurkur — a little quiet, I am afraid, but excellent air. You are to get out there as quick as possible. You'll find a company of the Ninth, and half a squadron of cavalry. You will be in command."

Hilary Joyce looked at the name, printed at the intersection of two black lines without another dot upon the map for several inches around it. "A village, sir?"

"No, a well. Not very good water, I'm afraid, but you soon get accustomed to natron. It's an important post, as being at the junction of two caravan routes. All routes are closed now, of course, but still you never know who *might* come along them."

"We are there, I presume, to prevent raiding?"

"Well, between you and me, there's really nothing to raid. You are there to intercept messengers. They must call at the wells. Of course you have only just come out, but you probably understand already enough about the conditions of this country to know that there is a great deal of disaffection about, and that the Khalifa is likely to try and keep in touch with his adherents. Then, again, Senoussi lives up that way" — he waved his cigarette to the westward—"the Khalifa might send a message to him along that route. Anyhow, your duty is to arrest everyone coming along, and get some account of him before you let him go. You don’t talk Arabic, I suppose?”

“I am learning, sir.”

“Well, well, you’ll have time enough for study there. And you’ll have a native officer, Ali something or other, who speaks English, and can interpret for you. Well, good-bye — I’ll tell the chief that you reported yourself. Get on to your post now as quickly as you can.”

Railway to Baliani, the post-boat to Assouan, and then two days on a camel in the Libyan desert, with an Ababdeh guide, and three baggage-camels to tie one down to their own exasperating pace. However, even two and a half miles an hour mount up in time, and at last, on the third evening, from the blackened slag-heap of a hill which is called the Jebel Kurkur, Hilary Joyce looked down upon a distant clump of palms, and thought that this cool patch of green in the midst of the merciless blacks and yellows was the fairest colour effect that he had ever seen. An hour later he had ridden into the little camp, the guard had turned out to salute him, his native subordinate had greeted him in excellent English, and he had fairly entered into his own. It was not an exhilarating place for a lengthy residence. There was one large, bowl-shaped, grassy depression sloping down to the three pits of brown and brackish water. There was the grove of palm trees also, beautiful to look upon, but exasperating in view of the fact that Nature has provided her least shady trees on the very spot where shade is needed most. A single wide-spread acacia did something to restore the balance. Here Hilary Joyce slumbered in the heat, and in the cool he inspected his square-shouldered, spindle-shanked Soudanese, with their cheery black faces and their funny little pork-pie forage caps. Joyce was a martinet at drill, and the blacks loved being drilled, so the Bimbashi was soon popular among them. But one day was exactly like another. The weather, the view, the employment, the food — everything was the same. At the end of three weeks he felt that he had been there for interminable years. And then at last there came something to break the monotony.

One evening, as the sun was sinking, Hilary Joyce rode slowly down the old caravan road. It had a fascination for him, this narrow track, winding among the boulders and curving up the nullahs, for he remembered how in the map it had gone on and on, stretching away into the unknown heart of Africa. The countless pads of innumerable camels through many centuries had beaten it smooth, so that now, unused and deserted, it still wound away, the strangest of roads, a foot broad, and perhaps two thousand miles in length. Joyce wondered as he rode how long it was since any traveller had journeyed up it from the south, and then he raised his eyes, and there was a man coming along the path. For an instant Joyce thought that it might be one of his own men, but a second glance assured him that this could not be so. The stranger was dressed in the flowing robes of an Arab, and not in the close-fitting khaki of a soldier. He was very tall, and a high turban made him seem gigantic. He strode swiftly along, with head erect, and the bearing of a man who knows no fear.

Who could he be, this formidable giant coming out of the unknown? The precursor possibly of a horde of savage spearmen. And where could he have walked from? The nearest well was a long hundred miles down the track. At any rate the frontier post of Kurkur could not afford to receive casual visitors. Hilary Joyce whisked round his horse, galloped into camp, and gave the alarm. Then, with twenty horsemen at his back, he rode out again to reconnoitre. The man was still coming on in spite of these hostile preparations. For an instant he hesitated when first he saw the cavalry, but escape was out of the question, and he advanced with the air of one who makes the best of a bad job. He made no resistance, and said nothing when the hands of two troopers clutched at his shoulders, but walked quietly between their horses into camp. Shortly afterwards the patrol came in again. There were no signs of any dervishes. The man was alone. A splendid trotting camel had been found lying dead a little way down the track. The mystery of the stranger’s arrival was explained. But why, and whence, and whither? — these were questions for which a zealous officer must find an answer.

Hilary Joyce was disappointed that there were no dervishes. It would have been a great start for him in the Egyptian army had he fought a little action on his own account. But even as it was, he had a rare chance of impressing the authorities. He would love to show his capacity to the head of the Intelligence, and even more to that grim Chief who never forgot what was smart, or forgave what was slack. The prisoner’s dress and bearing showed that he was of importance. Mean men do not ride pure-bred trotting camels. Joyce sponged his head with cold water, drank a cup of strong coffee, put on an imposing official tarboosh instead of his sun-helmet, and formed himself into a court of inquiry and judgment under the acacia tree. He would have liked his people to have seen him now, with his two black orderlies in waiting, and his Egyptian native officer at his side. He sat behind a camp-table, and the prisoner, strongly guarded, was led up to him. The man was a handsome fellow, with bold grey eyes and a long black beard.

"Why!" cried Joyce, "the rascal is making faces at me." A curious contraction had passed over the man's features, but so swiftly that it might have been a nervous twitch. He was now a model of Oriental gravity. "Ask him who he is, and what he wants?" The native officer did so, but the stranger made no reply, save that the same sharp spasm passed once more over his face. "Well, I'm blessed!" cried Hilary Joyce. "Of all the impudent scoundrels! He keeps on winking at me. Who are you, you rascal? Give an account of yourself! D'ye hear?" But the tall Arab was as impervious to English as to Arabic. The Egyptian tried again and again. The prisoner looked at Joyce with his inscrutable eyes, and occasionally twitched his face at him, but never opened his mouth. The Bimbashi scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Look here, Mahomet Ali, we've got to get some sense out of this fellow.
You say there are no papers on him?"

"No, sir; we found no papers."

"No clue of any kind?"

"He has come far, sir. A trotting camel does not die easily. He has come from Dongola, at least."

"Well, we must get him to talk."

"It is possible that he is deaf and dumb."

"Not he. I never saw a man look more all there in my life."

"You might send him across to Assouan."

"And give someone else the credit? No, thank you. This is my bird.
But how are we going to get him to find his tongue?"

The Egyptian's dark eyes skirted the encampment and rested on the cook's fire. "Perhaps," said he, "if the Bimbashi thought fit—" He looked at the prisoner and then at the burning wood.

"No, no; it wouldn't do. No, by Jove, that's going too far."

"A very little might do it."

“No, no. It’s all very well here, but it would sound just awful if ever it got as far as Fleet Street. But, I say,” he whispered, “we might frighten him a bit. There’s no harm in that.”

“No, sir.”

“Tell them to undo the man’s galabeeah. Order them to put a horseshoe in the fire and make it red-hot.” The prisoner watched the proceedings with an air which had more of amusement than of uneasiness. He never winced as the black sergeant approached with the glowing shoe held upon two bayonets.

“Will you speak now?” asked the Bimbashi, savagely. The prisoner smiled gently and stroked his beard.

“Oh, chuck the infernal thing away!” cried Joyce, jumping up in a passion. “There’s no use trying to bluff the fellow. He knows we won’t do it. But I *can* and I *will* flog him, and you can tell him from me that if he hasn’t found his tongue by to-morrow morning I’ll take the skin off his back as sure as my name’s Joyce. Have you said all that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you can sleep upon it, you beauty, and a good night’s rest may it give you!” He adjourned the Court, and the prisoner, as imperturbable as ever, was led away by the guard to his supper of rice and water. Hilary Joyce was a kind-hearted man, and his own sleep was considerably disturbed by the prospect of the punishment which he must inflict next day. He had hopes that the mere sight of the koorbash and the thongs might prevail over his prisoner’s obstinacy. And then, again, he thought how shocking it would be if the man proved to be really dumb after all. The possibility shook him so that he had almost determined by daybreak that he would send the stranger on unhurt to Assouan. And yet what a tame conclusion it would be to the incident! He lay upon his angareeb still debating it when the question suddenly and effectively settled itself. Ali Mahomet rushed into his tent.

“Sir,” he cried, “the prisoner is gone!”

“Gone!”

“Yes, sir, and your own best riding camel as well. There is a slit cut in the tent, and he got away unseen in the early morning.”

The Bimbashi acted with all energy. Cavalry rode along every track; scouts examined the soft sand of the wadys for signs of the fugitive, but no trace was discovered. The man had utterly disappeared. With a heavy heart, Hilary Joyce wrote an official report of the matter and forwarded it to Assouan. Five days later there came a curt order from the chief that he should report himself there. He feared the worst from the stern soldier, who spared others as little as he spared himself. And his worst forebodings were realised. Travel-stained and weary, he reported himself one night at the general's quarters. Behind a table piled with papers and strewn with maps the famous soldier and his Chief of Intelligence were deep in plans and figures. Their greeting was a cold one.

"I understand, Captain Joyce," said the general, "that you have allowed a very important prisoner to slip through your fingers."

"I am sorry, sir."

"No doubt. But that will not mend matters. Did you ascertain anything about him before you lost him?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"I could get nothing out of him, sir."

"Did you try?"

"Yes, sir; I did what I could."

"What did you do?"

"Well, sir, I threatened to use physical force."

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing."

"What was he like?"

"A tall man, sir. Rather a desperate character, I should think."

"Any way by which we could identify him?"

"A long black beard, sir. Grey eyes. And a nervous way of twitching his face."

"Well, Captain Joyce," said the general, in his stern, inflexible voice, "I cannot congratulate you upon your first exploit in the Egyptian army. You are aware that every English officer in this force is a picked man. I have the whole British army from which to draw. It is necessary, therefore, that I should insist upon the very highest efficiency. It would be unfair upon the others to pass over any obvious want of zeal or intelligence. You are seconded from the Royal Mallows, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no doubt that your colonel will be glad to see you fulfilling your regimental duties again." Hilary Joyce's heart was too heavy for words. He was silent. “I will let you know my final decision to-morrow morning.” Joyce saluted and turned upon his heel.”

“You can sleep upon that, you beauty, and a good night’s rest may it give you!”

Joyce turned in bewilderment. Where had those words been used before? Who was it who had used them? The general was standing erect. Both he and the Chief of the Intelligence were laughing. Joyce stared at the tall figure, the erect bearing, the inscrutable grey eyes.

“Good Lord!” he gasped.

“Well, well, Captain Joyce, we are quits!” said the general, holding out his hand. “You gave me a bad ten minutes with that infernal red-hot horseshoe of yours. I’ve done as much for you. I don’t think we can spare you for the Royal Mallows just yet awhile.”

“But, sir; but — !”

“The fewer questions the better, perhaps. But of course it must seem rather amazing. I had a little private business with the Kabbabish. It must be done in person. I did it, and came to your post in my return. I kept on winking at you as a sign that I wanted a word with you alone.”

“Yes, yes. I begin to understand.”

“I couldn’t give it away before all those blacks, or where should I have been the next time I used my false beard and Arab dress? You put me in a very awkward position. But at last I had a word alone with your Egyptian officer, who managed my escape all right.”

“He! Mahomet Ali!”

“I ordered him to say nothing. I had a score to settle with you.
But we dine at eight, Captain Joyce. We live plainly here, but I think
I can do you a little better than you did me at Kurkur.”

A FOREIGN OFFICE ROMANCE

There are many folk who knew Alphonse Lacour in his old age. From about the time of the Revolution of ‘48 until he died in the second year of the Crimean War he was always to be found in the same corner of the Cafe de Provence, at the end of the Rue St. Honore, coming down about nine in the evening, and going when he could find no one to talk with. It took some self-restraint to listen to the old diplomatist, for his stories were beyond all belief, and yet he was quick at detecting the shadow of a smile or the slightest little raising of the eyebrows. Then his huge, rounded back would straighten itself, his bull-dog chin would project, and his r’s would burr like a kettledrum. When he got as far as, “Ah, monsieur r-r-r-rit!” or “Vous ne me cr-r-r-royez pas donc!” it was quite time to remember that you had a ticket for the opera.

There was his story of Talleyrand and the five oyster-shells, and there was his utterly absurd account of Napoleon’s second visit to Ajaccio. Then there was that most circumstantial romance (which he never ventured upon until his second bottle had been uncorked) of the Emperor’s escape from St. Helena — how he lived for a whole year in Philadelphia, while Count Herbert de Bertrand, who was his living image, personated him at Longwood. But of all his stories there was none which was more notorious than that of the Koran and the Foreign Office messenger. And yet when Monsieur Otto’s memoirs were written it was found that there really was some foundation for old Lacour’s incredible statement.

“You must know, monsieur,” he would say, “that I left Egypt after Kleber’s assassination. I would gladly have stayed on, for I was engaged in a translation of the Koran, and between ourselves I had thoughts at the time of embracing Mahometanism, for I was deeply struck by the wisdom of their views about marriage. They had made an incredible mistake, however, upon the subject of wine, and this was what the Mufti who attempted to convert me could never get over. Then when old Kleber died and Menou came to the top, I felt that it was time for me to go. It is not for me to speak of my own capacities, monsieur, but you will readily understand that the man does not care to be ridden by the mule. I carried my Koran and my papers to London, where Monsieur Otto had been sent by the First Consul to arrange a treaty of peace; for both nations were very weary of the war, which had already lasted ten years. Here I was most useful to Monsieur Otto on account of my knowledge of the English tongue, and also, if I may say so, on account of my natural capacity. They were happy days during which I lived in the square of Bloomsbury. The climate of monsieur's country is, it must be confessed, detestable. But then what would you have? Flowers grow best in the rain. One has but to point to monsieur's fellow country-women to prove it.

"Well, Monsieur Otto, our Ambassador, was kept terribly busy over that treaty, and all of his staff were worked to death. We had not Pitt to deal with, which was, perhaps, as well for us. He was a terrible man that Pitt, and wherever half a dozen enemies of France were plotting together, there was his sharp-pointed nose right in the middle of them. The nation, however, had been thoughtful enough to put him out of office, and we had to do with Monsieur Addington. But Milord Hawkesbury was the Foreign Minister, and it was with him that we were obliged to do our bargaining.

"You can understand that it was no child's play. After ten years of war each nation had got hold of a great deal which had belonged to the other, or to the other's allies. What was to be given back, and what was to be kept? Is this island worth that peninsula? If we do this at Venice, will you do that at Sierra Leone? If we give up Egypt to the Sultan, will you restore the Cape of Good Hope, which you have taken from our allies the Dutch? So we wrangled and wrestled, and I have seen Monsieur Otto come back to the Embassy so exhausted that his secretary and I had to help him from his carriage to his sofa. But at last things adjusted themselves, and the night came round when the treaty was to be finally signed. Now, you must know that the one great card which we held, and which we played, played, played at every point of the game, was that we had Egypt. The English were very nervous about our being there. It gave us a foot at each end of the Mediterranean, you see. And they were not sure that that wonderful little Napoleon of ours might not make it the base of an advance against India. So whenever Lord Hawkesbury proposed to retain anything, we had only to reply, 'In *that* case, of course, we cannot consent to evacuate Egypt,' and in this way we quickly brought him to reason. It was by the help of Egypt that we gained terms which were remarkably favourable, and especially that we caused the English to consent to give up the Cape of Good Hope. We did not wish your people, monsieur, to have any foothold in South Africa, for history has taught us that the British foothold of one half-century is the

British Empire of the next. It is not your army or your navy against which we have to guard, but it is your terrible younger son and your man in search of a career. When we French have a possession across the seas, we like to sit in Paris and to felicitate ourselves upon it. With you it is different. You take your wives and your children, and you run away to see what kind of place this may be, and after that we might as well try to take that old Square of Bloomsbury away from you.

“Well, it was upon the first of October that the treaty was finally to be signed. In the morning I was congratulating Monsieur Otto upon the happy conclusion of his labours. He was a little pale shrimp of a man, very quick and nervous, and he was so delighted now at his own success that he could not sit still, but ran about the room chattering and laughing, while I sat on a cushion in the corner, as I had learned to do in the East. Suddenly, in came a messenger with a letter which had been forwarded from Paris. Monsieur Otto cast his eye upon it, and then, without a word, his knees gave way, and he fell senseless upon the floor. I ran to him, as did the courier, and between us we carried him to the sofa. He might have been dead from his appearance, but I could still feel his heart thrilling beneath my palm. ‘What is this, then?’ I asked.

“‘I do not know,’ answered the messenger. ‘Monsieur Talleyrand told me to hurry as never man hurried before, and to put this letter into the hands of Monsieur Otto. I was in Paris at midday yesterday.’

“I know that I am to blame, but I could not help glancing at the letter, picking it out of the senseless hand of Monsieur Otto. My God! the thunderbolt that it was! I did not faint, but I sat down beside my chief and I burst into tears. It was but a few words, but they told us that Egypt had been evacuated by our troops a month before. All our treaty was undone then, and the one consideration which had induced our enemies to give us good terms had vanished. In twelve hours it would not have mattered. But now the treaty was not yet signed. We should have to give up the Cape. We should have to let England have Malta. Now that Egypt was gone we had nothing left to offer in exchange.

“But we are not so easily beaten, we Frenchmen. You English misjudge us when you think that because we show emotions which you conceal, that we are therefore of a weak and womanly nature. You cannot read your histories and believe that. Monsieur Otto recovered his senses presently, and we took counsel what we should do.

"'It is useless to go on, Alphonse,' said he. 'This Englishman will laugh at me when I ask him to sign.'

"'Courage!' I cried; and then a sudden thought coming into my head —'How do we know that the English will have news of this? Perhaps they may sign the treaty before they know of it.'

"Monsieur Otto sprang from the sofa and flung himself into my arms.

"'Alphonse,' he cried, 'you have saved me! Why should they know about it? Our news has come from Toulon to Paris, and thence straight to London. Theirs will come by sea through the Straits of Gibraltar. At this moment it is unlikely that anyone in Paris knows of it, save only Talleyrand and the First Consul. If we keep our secret, we may still get our treaty signed.'

"Ah! monsieur, you can imagine the horrible uncertainty in which we spent the day. Never, never shall I forget those slow hours during which we sat together, starting at every distant shout, lest it should be the first sign of the rejoicing which this news would cause in London. Monsieur Otto passed from youth to age in a day. As for me, I find it easier to go out and meet danger than to wait for it. I set forth, therefore, towards evening. I wandered here, and wandered there. I was in the fencing-rooms of Monsieur Angelo, and in the salon-de-boxe of Monsieur Jackson, and in the club of Brooks, and in the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies, but nowhere did I hear any news. Still, it was possible that Milord Hawkesbury had received it himself just as we had. He lived in Harley Street, and there it was that the treaty was to be finally signed that night at eight. I entreated Monsieur Otto to drink two glasses of Burgundy before he went, for I feared lest his haggard face and trembling, hands should rouse suspicion in the English minister.

"Well, we went round together in one of the Embassy's carriages about half-past seven. Monsieur Otto went in alone; but presently, on excuse of getting his portfolio, he came out again, with his cheeks flushed with joy, to tell me that all was well.

"'He knows nothing,' he whispered. 'Ah, if the next half-hour were over!'

"'Give me a sign when it is settled,' said I.

"'For what reason?'

"'Because until then no messenger shall interrupt you. I give you my promise — I, Alphonse Lacour.'

"He clasped my hand in both of his.

"'I shall make an excuse to move one of the candles on to the table in the window,' said he, and hurried into the house, whilst I was left waiting beside the carriage.

"Well, if we could but secure ourselves from interruption for a single half-hour the day would be our own. I had hardly begun to form my plans when I saw the lights of a carriage coming swiftly from the direction of Oxford Street. Ah! if it should be the messenger! What could I do? I was prepared to kill him — yes, even to kill him — rather than at this last moment allow our work to be undone. Thousands die to make a glorious war. Why should not one die to make a glorious peace? What though they hurried me to the scaffold? I should have sacrificed myself for my country. I had a little curved Turkish knife strapped to my waist. My hand was on the hilt of it when the carriage which had alarmed me so rattled safely past me.

"But another might come. I must be prepared. Above all, I must not compromise the Embassy. I ordered our carriage to move on, and I engaged what you call a hackney coach. Then I spoke to the driver, and gave him a guinea. He understood that it was a special service.

"'You shall have another guinea if you do what you are told,' said I.

"'All right, master,' said he, turning his slow eyes upon me without a trace of excitement or curiosity.

"' If I enter your coach with another gentleman, you will drive up and down Harley Street, and take no orders from anyone but me. When I get out, you will carry the other gentleman to Watier's Club, in Bruton Street.'

"'All right, master,' said he again.

"So I stood outside Milord Hawkesbury's house, and you can think how often my eyes went up to that window in the hope of seeing the candle twinkle in it. Five minutes passed, and another five. Oh, how slowly they crept along! It was a true October night, raw and cold, with a white fog crawling over the wet, shining cobblestones, and blurring the dim oil-lamps. I could not see fifty paces in either direction, but my ears were straining, straining, to catch the rattle of hoofs or the rumble of wheels. It is not a cheering place, monsieur, that street of Harley, even upon a sunny day. The houses are solid and very respectable over yonder, but there is nothing of the feminine about them. It is a city to be inhabited by males. But on that raw night, amid the damp and the fog, with the anxiety gnawing at my heart, it seemed the saddest, weariest spot in the whole wide world. I paced up and down slapping my hands to keep them warm, and still straining my ears. And then suddenly out of the dull hum of the traffic down in Oxford Street I heard a sound detach itself, and grow louder and louder, and clearer and clearer with every instant, until two yellow lights came flashing through the fog, and a light cabriolet whirled up to the door of the Foreign Minister. It had not stopped before a young fellow sprang out of it and hurried to the steps, while the driver turned his horse and rattled off into the fog once more.

“Ah, it is in the moment of action that I am best, monsieur. You, who only see me when I am drinking my wine in the Cafe de Provence, cannot conceive the heights to which I rise. At that moment, when I knew that the fruits of a ten years’ war were at stake, I was magnificent. It was the last French campaign and I the general and army in one.

“‘Sir,” said I, touching him upon the arm, ‘are you the messenger for Lord Hawkesbury?’

“‘Yes,’ said he.

“‘I have been waiting for you half an hour,’ said I. ‘You are to follow me at once. He is with the French Ambassador.’

“I spoke with such assurance that he never hesitated for an instant. When he entered the hackney coach and I followed him in, my heart gave such a thrill of joy that I could hardly keep from shouting aloud. He was a poor little creature, this Foreign Office messenger, not much bigger than Monsieur Otto, and I — monsieur can see my hands now, and imagine what they were like when I was seven-and-twenty years of age.

“Well, now that I had him in my coach, the question was what I should do with him. I did not wish to hurt him if I could help it.

“‘This is a pressing business,’ said he. ‘I have a despatch which I must deliver instantly.’

“Our coach had rattled down Harley Street now, in accordance with my instruction, it turned and began to go up again.

“‘Hullo!’ he cried. ‘What’s this?’

“‘What then? ‘I asked.

“‘We are driving back. Where is Lord Hawkesbury?’

“‘We shall see him presently.’

“‘Let me out!’ he shouted. ‘There’s some trickery in this. Coachman, stop the coach! Let me out, I say!’

"I dashed him back into his seat as he tried to turn the handle of the door. He roared for help. I clapped my palm across his mouth. He made his teeth meet through the side of it. I seized his own cravat and bound it over his lips. He still mumbled and gurgled, but the noise was covered by the rattle of our wheels. We were passing the minister's house, and there was no candle in the window.

"The messenger sat quiet for a little, and I could see the glint of his eyes as he stared at me through the gloom. He was partly stunned, I think, by the force with which I had hurled him into his seat. And also he was pondering, perhaps, what he should do next. Presently he got his mouth partly free from the cravat.

"'You shall have my watch and my purse if you will let me go,' said he.

"'Sir,' said I, 'I am as honourable a man as you are yourself.'

"'Who are you, then?'

"'My name is of no importance.'

"'What do you want with me?'

"It is a bet.'

"'A bet? What d'you mean? Do you understand that I am on the Government service, and that you will see the inside of a gaol for this?'

"'That is the bet. That is the sport, said I.'

"'You may find it poor sport before you finish,' he cried. 'What is this insane bet of yours then?'

"'I have bet,' I answered, 'that I will recite a chapter of the Koran to the first gentleman whom I should meet in the street.'

"I do not know what made me think of it, save that my translation was always running in my head. He clutched at the door-handle, and again I had to hurl him back into his seat.

"'How long will it take?' he gasped.

"'It depends on the chapter,' I answered.

"'A short one, then, and let me go!'

"'But is it fair?' I argued. 'When I say a chapter, I do not mean the shortest chapter, but rather one which should be of average length.'

"'Help! help! help!' he squealed, and I was compelled again to adjust his cravat.

"'A little patience,' said I, 'and it will soon be over. I should like to recite the chapter which would be of most interest to yourself. You will confess that I am trying to make things as pleasant as I can for you?"

He slipped his mouth free again.

"'Quick, then, quick!' he groaned.

"'The Chapter of the Camel?' I suggested.

"'Yes, yes.'

"'Or that of the Fleet Stallion?'

"'Yes, yes. Only proceed!'

"We had passed the window and there was no candle. I settled down to recite the Chapter of the Stallion to him. Perhaps you do not know your Koran very well, monsieur? Well, I knew it by heart then, as I know it by heart now. The style is a little exasperating for anyone who is in a hurry. But, then, what would you have? The people in the East are never in a hurry, and it was written for them. I repeated it all with the dignity and solemnity which a sacred book demands, and the young Englishman he wriggled and groaned.

"'When the horses, standing on three feet and placing the tip of their fourth foot upon the ground, were mustered in front of him in the evening, he said, I have loved the love of earthly good above the remembrance of things on high, and have spent the time in viewing these horses. Bring the horses back to me. And when they were brought back he began to cut off their legs and—'

"It was at this moment that the young Englishman sprang at me. My God! how little can I remember of the next few minutes! He was a boxer, this shred of a man. He had been trained to strike. I tried to catch him by the hands. Pac, pac, he came upon my nose and upon my eye. I put down my head and thrust at him with it. Pac, he came from below. But ah! I was too much for him. I hurled myself upon him, and he had no place where he could escape from my weight. He fell flat upon the cushions and I seated myself upon him with such conviction that the wind flew from him as from a burst bellows.

"Then I searched to see what there was with which I could tie him. I drew the strings from my shoes, and with one I secured his wrists, and with another his ankles. Then I tied the cravat round his mouth again, so that he could only lie and glare at me. When I had done all this, and had stopped the bleeding of my own nose, I looked out of the coach and ah, monsieur, the very first thing which caught my eyes was that candle — that dear little candle — glimmering in the window of the minister. Alone, with these two hands, I had retrieved the capitulation of an army and the loss of a province.

Yes, monsieur, what Abercrombie and 5,000 men had done upon the beach at Aboukir was undone by me, single-handed, in a hackney coach in Harley Street.

“Well, I had no time to lose, for at any moment Monsieur Otto might be down. I shouted to my driver, gave him his second guinea, and allowed him to proceed to Watier’s. For myself, I sprang into our Embassy’s carriage, and a moment later the door of the minister opened. He had himself escorted Monsieur Otto downstairs, and now so deep was he in talk that he walked out bareheaded as far as the carriage. As he stood there by the open door, there came the rattle of wheels, and a man rushed down the pavement.

“‘A despatch of great importance for Milord Hawkesbury!’ he cried.

“I could see that it was not my messenger, but a second one. Milord Hawkesbury caught the paper from his hand, and read it by the light of the carriage lamp. His face, monsieur, was as white as this plate, before he had finished.

“‘Monsieur Otto,’ he cried, ‘we have signed this treaty upon a false understanding. Egypt is in our hands.’

“‘What!’ cried Monsieur Otto. ‘Impossible!’

“‘It is certain. It fell to Abercrombie last month.’

“‘In that case,’ said Monsieur Otto, ‘it is very fortunate that the treaty is signed.’

“‘Very fortunate for you, sir,’ cried Milord Hawkesbury, as he turned back to the house.

“Next day, monsieur, what they call the Bow Street runners were after me, but they could not run across salt water, and Alphonse Lacour was receiving the congratulations of Monsieur Talleyrand and the First Consul before ever his pursuers had got as far as Dover.”

THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD

This is a series of comic short stories. The hero, Etienne Gerard, is a Hussar in the French Army during the Napoleonic Wars. Gerard’s most notable attribute is his vanity - he is utterly convinced that he is the bravest soldier, greatest swordsman, accomplished horseman and gallant lover in all France. Gerard is not entirely wrong since he displays notable bravery on many occasions, but his self-satisfaction undercuts this quite often. Obsessed with honour and glory, he is always ready with a stirring speech or a gallant remark to a lady. Doyle satirises both the stereotypical English view of the French, and - by presenting them from Gerard’s baffled point of view - English manners and attitudes.

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HOW THE BRIGADIER CAME TO THE CASTLE OF GLOOM

You do very well, my friends, to treat me with some little reverence, for in honouring me you are honouring both France and yourselves. It is not merely an old, grey-moustached officer whom you see eating his omelette or draining his glass, but it is a fragment of history. In me you see one of the last of those wonderful men, the men who were veterans when they were yet boys, who learned to use a sword earlier than a razor, and who during a hundred battles had never once let the enemy see the colour of their knapsacks. For twenty years we were teaching Europe how to fight, and even when they had learned their lesson it was only the thermometer, and never the bayonet, which could break the Grand Army down. Berlin, Naples, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, Moscow — we stabled our horses in them all. Yes, my friends, I say again that you do well to send your children to me with flowers, for these ears have heard the trumpet calls of France, and these eyes have seen her standards in lands where they may never be seen again.

Even now, when I doze in my arm-chair, I can see those great warriors stream before me — the green-jacketed chasseurs, the giant cuirassiers, Poniatowsky’s lancers, the white-mantled dragoons, the nodding bearskins of the horse grenadiers. And then there comes the thick, low rattle of the drums, and through wreaths of dust and smoke I see the line of high bonnets, the row of brown faces, the swing and toss of the long, red plumes amid the sloping lines of steel. And there rides Ney with his red head, and Lefebvre with his bulldog jaw, and Lannes with his Gascon swagger; and then amidst the gleam of brass and the flaunting feathers I catch a glimpse of *him*, the man with the pale smile, the rounded shoulders, and the far-off eyes. There is an end of my sleep, my friends, for up I spring from my chair, with a cracked voice calling and a silly hand outstretched, so that Madame Titaux has one more laugh at the old fellow who lives among the shadows.

Although I was a full Chief of Brigade when the wars came to an end, and had every hope of soon being made a General of Division, it is still rather to my earlier days that I turn when I wish to talk of the glories and the trials of a soldier’s life. For you will understand that when an officer has so many men and horses under him, he has his mind full of recruits and remounts, fodder and farriers, and quarters, so that even when he is not in the face of the enemy, life is a very serious matter for him. But when he is only a lieutenant or a captain he has nothing heavier than his epaulettes upon his shoulders, so that he can clink his spurs and swing his dolman, drain his glass and kiss his girl, thinking of nothing save of enjoying a gallant life. That is the time when he is likely to have adventures, and it is often to that time that I shall turn in the stories which I may have for you. So it will be tonight when I tell you of my visit to the Castle of Gloom; of the strange mission of Sub-Lieutenant Duroc, and of the horrible affair of the man who was once known as Jean Carabin, and afterwards as the Baron Straubenthal.

You must know, then, that in the February of 1807, immediately after the taking of Danzig, Major Legendre and I were commissioned to bring four hundred remounts from Prussia into Eastern Poland.

The hard weather, and especially the great battle at Eylau, had killed so many of the horses that there was some danger of our beautiful Tenth of Hussars becoming a battalion of light infantry. We knew, therefore, both the Major and I, that we should be very welcome at the front. We did not advance very rapidly, however, for the snow was deep, the roads detestable, and we had but twenty returning invalids to assist us. Besides, it is impossible, when you have a daily change of forage, and sometimes none at all, to move horses faster than a walk. I am aware that in the story-books the cavalry whirls past at the maddest of gallops; but for my own part, after twelve campaigns, I should be very satisfied to know that my brigade could always walk upon the march and trot in the presence of the enemy. This I say of the hussars and chasseurs, mark you, so that it is far more the case with cuirassiers or dragoons.

For myself I am fond of horses, and to have four hundred of them, of every age and shade and character, all under my own hands, was a very great pleasure to me. They were from Pomerania for the most part, though some were from Normandy and some from Alsace, and it amused us to notice that they differed in character as much as the people of those provinces. We observed also, what I have often proved since, that the nature of a horse can be told by his colour, from the coquettish light bay, full of fancies and nerves, to the hardy chestnut, and from the docile roan to the pig-headed rusty-black. All this has nothing in the world to do with my story, but how is an officer of cavalry to get on with his tale when he finds four hundred horses waiting for him at the outset? It is my habit, you see, to talk of that which interests myself and so I hope that I may interest you.

We crossed the Vistula opposite Marienwerder, and had got as far as Riesenberg, when Major Legendre came into my room in the post-house with an open paper in his hand.

‘You are to leave me,’ said he, with despair upon his face.

It was no very great grief to me to do that, for he was, if I may say so, hardly worthy to have such a subaltern. I saluted, however, in silence.

‘It is an order from General Lasalle,’ he continued; ‘you are to proceed to Rossel instantly, and to report yourself at the headquarters of the regiment.’

No message could have pleased me better. I was already very well thought of by my superior officers. It was evident to me, therefore, that this sudden order meant that the regiment was about to see service once more, and that Lasalle understood how incomplete my squadron would be without me. It is true that it came at an inconvenient moment, for the keeper of the post-house had a daughter — one of those ivory-skinned, black-haired Polish girls — with whom I had hoped to have some further talk. Still, it is not for the pawn to argue when the fingers of the player move him from the square; so down I went, saddled my big black charger, Rataplan, and set off instantly upon my lonely journey.

My word, it was a treat for those poor Poles and Jews, who have so little to brighten their dull lives, to see such a picture as that before their doors! The frosty morning air made Rataplan’s great black limbs and the beautiful curves of his back and sides gleam and shimmer with every gambade. As for me, the rattle of hoofs upon a road, and the jingle of bridle chains which comes with every toss of a saucy head, would even now set my blood dancing through my veins. You may think, then, how I carried myself in my five-and-twentieth year — I, Etienne Gerard, the picked horseman and surest blade in the ten regiments of hussars. Blue was our colour in the Tenth — a sky-blue dolman and pelisse with a scarlet front — and it was said of us in the army that we could set a whole population running, the women towards us, and the men away. There were bright eyes in the Riesenberg windows that morning which seemed to beg me to tarry; but what can a soldier do, save to kiss his hand and shake his bridle as he rides upon his way?

It was a bleak season to ride through the poorest and ugliest country in Europe, but there was a cloudless sky above, and a bright, cold sun, which shimmered on the huge snowfields. My breath reeked into the frosty air, and Rataplan sent up two feathers of steam from his nostrils, while the icicles drooped from the side-irons of his bit. I let him trot to warm his limbs, while for my own part I had too much to think of to give much heed to the cold. To north and south stretched the great plains, mottled over with dark clumps of fir and lighter patches of larch. A few cottages peeped out here and there, but it was only three months since the Grand Army had passed that way, and you know what that meant to a country. The Poles were our friends, it was true, but out of a hundred thousand men, only the Guard had waggons, and the rest had to live as best they might. It did not surprise me, therefore, to see no signs of cattle and no smoke from the silent houses. A weal had been left across the country where the great host had passed, and it was said that even the rats were starved wherever the Emperor had led his men.

By midday I had got as far as the village of Saalfeldt, but as I was on the direct road for Osterode, where the Emperor was wintering, and also for the main camp of the seven divisions of infantry, the highway was choked with carriages and carts. What with artillery caissons and waggons and couriers, and the ever-thickening stream of recruits and stragglers, it seemed to me that it would be a very long time before I should join my comrades. The plains, however, were five feet deep in snow, so there was nothing for it but to plod upon our way. It was with joy, therefore, that I found a second road which branched away from the other, trending through a fir-wood towards the north. There was a small auberge at the cross-roads, and a patrol of the Third Hussars of Conflans — the very regiment of which I was afterwards colonel — were mounting their horses at the door. On the steps stood their officer, a slight, pale young man, who looked more like a young priest from a seminary than a leader of the devil-may-care rascals before him.

‘Good-day, sir,’ said he, seeing that I pulled up my horse.

‘Good-day,’ I answered. ‘I am Lieutenant Etienne Gerard, of the Tenth.’

I could see by his face that he had heard of me. Everybody had heard of me since my duel with the six fencing masters. My manner, however, served to put him at his ease with me.

‘I am Sub-Lieutenant Duroc, of the Third,’ said he.

‘Newly joined?’ I asked.

‘Last week.’

I had thought as much, from his white face and from the way in which he let his men lounge upon their horses. It was not so long, however, since I had learned myself what it was like when a schoolboy has to give orders to veteran troopers. It made me blush, I remember, to shout abrupt commands to men who had seen more battles than I had years, and it would have come more natural for me to say, ‘With your permission, we shall now wheel into line,’ or, ‘If you think it best, we shall trot.’ I did not think the less of the lad, therefore, when I observed that his men were somewhat out of hand, but I gave them a glance which stiffened them in their saddles.

‘May I ask, monsieur, whether you are going by this northern road?’ I asked.

‘My orders are to patrol it as far as Arensdorf,’ said he.

‘Then I will, with your permission, ride so far with you,’ said I. ‘It is very clear that the longer way will be the faster.’

So it proved, for this road led away from the army into a country which was given over to Cossacks and marauders, and it was as bare as the other was crowded. Duroc and I rode in front, with our six troopers clattering in the rear. He was a good boy, this Duroc, with his head full of the nonsense that they teach at St Cyr, knowing more about Alexander and Pompey than how to mix a horse’s fodder or care for a horse’s feet. Still, he was, as I have said, a good boy, unspoiled as yet by the camp. It pleased me to hear him prattle away about his sister Marie and about his mother in Amiens. Presently we found ourselves at the village of Hayenau. Duroc rode up to the post-house and asked to see the master.

‘Can you tell me,’ said he, ‘whether the man who calls himself the Baron Straubenthal lives in these parts?’

The postmaster shook his head, and we rode upon our way. I took no notice of this, but when, at the next village, my comrade repeated the same question, with the same result, I could not help asking him who this Baron Straubenthal might be.

‘He is a man,’ said Duroc, with a sudden flush upon his boyish face, ‘to whom I have a very important message to convey.’

Well, this was not satisfactory, but there was something in my companion’s manner which told me that any further questioning would be distasteful to him. I said nothing more, therefore, but Duroc would still ask every peasant whom we met whether he could give him any news of the Baron Straubenthal.

For my own part I was endeavouring, as an officer of light cavalry should, to form an idea of the lay of the country, to note the course of the streams, and to mark the places where there should be fords. Every step was taking us farther from the camp round the flanks of which we were travelling. Far to the south a few plumes of grey smoke in the frosty air marked the position of some of our outposts. To the north, however, there was nothing between ourselves and the Russian winter quarters. Twice on the extreme horizon I caught a glimpse of the glitter of steel, and pointed it out to my companion. It was too distant for us to tell whence it came, but we had little doubt that it was from the lance-heads of marauding Cossacks.

The sun was just setting when we rode over a low hill and saw a small village upon our right, and on our left a high black castle, which jutted out from amongst the pine-woods. A farmer with his cart was approaching us — a matted-haired, downcast fellow, in a sheepskin jacket.

‘What village is this?’ asked Duroc.

‘It is Arensdorf,’ he answered, in his barbarous German dialect.

‘Then here I am to stay the night,’ said my young companion. Then, turning to the farmer, he asked his eternal question, ‘Can you tell me where the Baron Straubenthal lives?’

‘Why, it is he who owns the Castle of Gloom,’ said the farmer, pointing to the dark turrets over the distant fir forest.

Duroc gave a shout like the sportsman who sees his game rising in front of him. The lad seemed to have gone off his head — his eyes shining, his face deathly white, and such a grim set about his mouth as made the farmer shrink away from him. I can see him now, leaning forward on his brown horse, with his eager gaze fixed upon the great black tower.

‘Why do you call it the Castle of Gloom?’ I asked.

‘Well, it’s the name it bears upon the countryside,’ said the farmer. ‘By all accounts there have been some black doings up yonder. It’s not for nothing that the wickedest man in Poland has been living there these fourteen years past.’

‘A Polish nobleman?’ I asked.

‘Nay, we breed no such men in Poland,’ he answered.

‘A Frenchman, then?’ cried Duroc.

‘They say that he came from France.’

‘And with red hair?’

‘As red as a fox.’

‘Yes, yes, it is my man,’ cried my companion, quivering all over in his excitement. ‘It is the hand of Providence which has led me here. Who can say that there is not justice in this world? Come, Monsieur Gerard, for I must see the men safely quartered before I can attend to this private matter.’

He spurred on his horse, and ten minutes later we were at the door of the inn of Arensdorf, where his men were to find their quarters for the night.

Well, all this was no affair of mine, and I could not imagine what the meaning of it might be. Rossel was still far off, but I determined to ride on for a few hours and take my chance of some wayside barn in which I could find shelter for Rataplan and myself. I had mounted my horse, therefore, after tossing off a cup of wine, when young Duroc came running out of the door and laid his hand upon my knee.

‘Monsieur Gerard,’ he panted, ‘I beg of you not to abandon me like this!’

‘My good sir,’ said I, ‘if you would tell me what is the matter and what you would wish me to do, I should be better able to tell you if I could be of any assistance to you.’

‘You can be of the very greatest,’ he cried. ‘Indeed, from all that I have heard of you, Monsieur Gerard, you are the one man whom I should wish to have by my side tonight.’

‘You forget that I am riding to join my regiment.’

‘You cannot, in any case, reach it tonight. Tomorrow will bring you to Rossel. By staying with me you will confer the very greatest kindness upon me, and you will aid me in a matter which concerns my own honour and the honour of my family. I am compelled, however, to confess to you that some personal danger may possibly be involved.’

It was a crafty thing for him to say. Of course, I sprang from Rataplan’s back and ordered the groom to lead him back into the stables.

‘Come into the inn,’ said I, ‘and let me know exactly what it is that you wish me to do.’

He led the way into a sitting-room, and fastened the door lest we should be interrupted. He was a well-grown lad, and as he stood in the glare of the lamp, with the light beating upon his earnest face and upon his uniform of silver grey, which suited him to a marvel, I felt my heart warm towards him. Without going so far as to say that he carried himself as I had done at his age, there was at least similarity enough to make me feel in sympathy with him.

‘I can explain it all in a few words,’ said he. ‘If I have not already satisfied your very natural curiosity, it is because the subject is so painful a one to me that I can hardly bring myself to allude to it. I cannot, however, ask for your assistance without explaining to you exactly how the matter lies.

‘You must know, then, that my father was the well-known banker, Christophe Duroc, who was murdered by the people during the September massacres. As you are aware, the mob took possession of the prisons, chose three so-called judges to pass sentence upon the unhappy aristocrats, and then tore them to pieces when they were passed out into the street. My father had been a benefactor of the poor all his life. There were many to plead for him. He had the fever, too, and was carried in, half-dead, upon a blanket. Two of the judges were in favour of acquitting him; the third, a young Jacobin, whose huge body and brutal mind had made him a leader among these wretches, dragged him, with his own hands, from the litter, kicked him again and again with his heavy boots, and hurled him out of the door, where in an instant he was torn limb from limb under circumstances which are too horrible for me to describe. This, as you perceive, was murder, even under their own unlawful laws, for two of their own judges had pronounced in my father’s favour.

‘Well, when the days of order came back again, my elder brother began to make inquiries about this man. I was only a child then, but it was a family matter, and it was discussed in my presence. The fellow’s name was Carabin. He was one of Sansterre’s Guard, and a noted duellist. A foreign lady named the Baroness Straubenthal having been dragged before the Jacobins, he had gained her liberty for her on the promise that she with her money and estates should be his. He had married her, taken her name and title, and escaped out of France at the time of the fall of Robespierre. What had become of him we had no means of learning.

‘You will think, doubtless, that it would be easy for us to find him, since we had both his name and his title. You must remember, however, that the Revolution left us without money, and that without money such a search is very difficult. Then came the Empire, and it became more difficult still, for, as you are aware, the Emperor considered that the 18th Brumaire brought all accounts to a settlement, and that on that day a veil had been drawn across the past. None the less, we kept our own family story and our own family plans.

'My brother joined the army, and passed with it through all Southern Europe, asking everywhere for the Baron Straubenthal. Last October he was killed at Jena, with his mission still unfulfilled. Then it became my turn, and I have the good fortune to hear of the very man of whom I am in search at one of the first Polish villages which I have to visit, and within a fortnight of joining my regiment. And then, to make the matter even better, I find myself in the company of one whose name is never mentioned throughout the army save in connection with some daring and generous deed.'

This was all very well, and I listened to it with the greatest interest, but I was none the clearer as to what young Duroc wished me to do.

'How can I be of service to you?' I asked.

'By coming up with me.'

'To the Castle?'

'Precisely.'

'When?'

'At once.'

'But what do you intend to do?'

'I shall know what to do. But I wish you to be with me, all the same.'

Well, it was never in my nature to refuse an adventure, and, besides, I had every sympathy with the lad's feelings. It is very well to forgive one's enemies, but one wishes to give them something to forgive also. I held out my hand to him, therefore.

'I must be on my way for Rossel tomorrow morning, but tonight I am yours,' said I.

We left our troopers in snug quarters, and, as it was but a mile to the Castle, we did not disturb our horses. To tell the truth, I hate to see a cavalry man walk, and I hold that just as he is the most gallant thing upon earth when he has his saddle-flaps between his knees, so he is the most clumsy when he has to loop up his sabre and his sabre-tasche in one hand and turn in his toes for fear of catching the rowels of his spurs. Still, Duroc and I were of the age when one can carry things off, and I dare swear that no woman at least would have quarrelled with the appearance of the two young hussars, one in blue and one in grey, who set out that night from the Arensdorf post-house. We both carried our swords, and for my own part I slipped a pistol from my holster into the inside of my pelisse, for it seemed to me that there might be some wild work before us.

The track which led to the Castle wound through a pitch-black fir-wood, where we could see nothing save the ragged patch of stars above our heads. Presently, however, it opened up, and there was the Castle right in front of us, about as far as a carbine would carry. It was a huge, uncouth place, and bore every mark of being exceedingly old, with turrets at every corner, and a square keep on the side which was nearest to us. In all its great shadow there was no sign of light save from a single window, and no sound came from it. To me there was something awful in its size and its silence, which corresponded so well with its sinister name. My companion pressed on eagerly, and I followed him along the ill-kept path which led to the gate.

There was no bell or knocker upon the great iron-studded door, and it was only by pounding with the hilts of our sabres that we could attract attention. A thin, hawk-faced man, with a beard up to his temples, opened it at last. He carried a lantern in one hand, and in the other a chain which held an enormous black hound. His manner at the first moment was threatening, but the sight of our uniforms and of our faces turned it into one of sulky reserve.

‘The Baron Straubenthal does not receive visitors at so late an hour,’ said he, speaking in very excellent French.

‘You can inform Baron Straubenthal that I have come eight hundred leagues to see him, and that I will not leave until I have done so,’ said my companion. I could not myself have said it with a better voice and manner.

The fellow took a sidelong look at us, and tugged at his black beard in his perplexity.

‘To tell the truth, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘the Baron has a cup or two of wine in him at this hour, and you would certainly find him a more entertaining companion if you were to come again in the morning.’

He had opened the door a little wider as he spoke, and I saw by the light of the lamp in the hall behind him that three other rough fellows were standing there, one of whom held another of these monstrous hounds. Duroc must have seen it also, but it made no difference to his resolution.

‘Enough talk,’ said he, pushing the man to one side. ‘It is with your master that I have to deal.’

The fellows in the hall made way for him as he strode in among them, so great is the power of one man who knows what he wants over several who are not sure of themselves. My companion tapped one of them upon the shoulder with as much assurance as though he owned him.

‘Show me to the Baron,’ said he.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and answered something in Polish. The fellow with the beard, who had shut and barred the front door, appeared to be the only one among them who could speak French.

‘Well, you shall have your way,’ said he, with a sinister smile. ‘You shall see the Baron. And perhaps, before you have finished, you will wish that you had taken my advice.’

We followed him down the hall, which was stone-flagged and very spacious, with skins scattered upon the floor, and the heads of wild beasts upon the walls. At the farther end he threw open a door, and we entered.

It was a small room, scantily furnished, with the same marks of neglect and decay which met us at every turn. The walls were hung with discoloured tapestry, which had come loose at one corner, so as to expose the rough stonework behind. A second door, hung with a curtain, faced us upon the other side. Between lay a square table, strewn with dirty dishes and the sordid remains of a meal. Several bottles were scattered over it. At the head of it, and facing us, there sat a huge man with a lion-like head and a great shock of orange-coloured hair. His beard was of the same glaring hue; matted and tangled and coarse as a horse’s mane. I have seen some strange faces in my time, but never one more brutal than that, with its small, vicious, blue eyes, its white, crumpled cheeks, and the thick, hanging lip which protruded over his monstrous beard. His head swayed about on his shoulders, and he looked at us with the vague, dim gaze of a drunken man. Yet he was not so drunk but that our uniforms carried their message to him.

‘Well, my brave boys,’ he hiccoughed. ‘What is the latest news from Paris, eh? You’re going to free Poland, I hear, and have meantime all become slaves yourselves — slaves to a little aristocrat with his grey coat and his three-cornered hat. No more citizens either, I am told, and nothing but monsieur and madame. My faith, some more heads will have to roll into the sawdust basket some of these mornings.’

Duroc advanced in silence, and stood by the ruffian’s side.

‘Jean Carabin,’ said he.

The Baron started, and the film of drunkenness seemed to be clearing from his eyes.

‘Jean Carabin,’ said Duroc, once more.

He sat up and grasped the arms of his chair.

‘What do you mean by repeating that name, young man?’ he asked.

‘Jean Carabin, you are a man whom I have long wished to meet.’

‘Supposing that I once had such a name, how can it concern you, since you must have been a child when I bore it?’

‘My name is Duroc.’

‘Not the son of —— ?’

‘The son of the man you murdered.’

The Baron tried to laugh, but there was terror in his eyes.

‘We must let bygones be bygones, young man,’ he cried. ‘It was our life or theirs in those days: the aristocrats or the people. Your father was of the Gironde. He fell. I was of the mountain. Most of my comrades fell. It was all the fortune of war. We must forget all this and learn to know each other better, you and I.’ He held out a red, twitching hand as he spoke.

‘Enough,’ said young Duroc. ‘If I were to pass my sabre through you as you sit in that chair, I should do what is just and right. I dishonour my blade by crossing it with yours. And yet you are a Frenchman, and have even held a commission under the same flag as myself. Rise, then, and defend yourself!’

‘Tut, tut!’ cried the Baron. ‘It is all very well for you young bloods—’

Duroc’s patience could stand no more. He swung his open hand into the centre of the great orange beard. I saw a lip fringed with blood, and two glaring blue eyes above it.

‘You shall die for that blow.’

‘That is better,’ said Duroc.

‘My sabre!’ cried the other. ‘I will not keep you waiting, I promise you!’ and he hurried from the room.

I have said that there was a second door covered with a curtain. Hardly had the Baron vanished when there ran from behind it a woman, young and beautiful. So swiftly and noiselessly did she move that she was between us in an instant, and it was only the shaking curtains which told us whence she had come.

‘I have seen it all,’ she cried. ‘Oh, sir, you have carried yourself splendidly.’ She stooped to my companion’s hand, and kissed it again and again ere he could disengage it from her grasp.

‘Nay, madame, why should you kiss my hand?’ he cried.

‘Because it is the hand which struck him on his vile, lying mouth. Because it may be the hand which will avenge my mother. I am his step-daughter. The woman whose heart he broke was my mother. I loathe him, I fear him. Ah, there is his step!’ In an instant she had vanished as suddenly as she had come. A moment later, the Baron entered with a drawn sword in his hand, and the fellow who had admitted us at his heels.

‘This is my secretary,’ said he. ‘He will be my friend in this affair. But we shall need more elbow-room than we can find here. Perhaps you will kindly come with me to a more spacious apartment.’

It was evidently impossible to fight in a chamber which was blocked by a great table. We followed him out, therefore, into the dimly-lit hall. At the farther end a light was shining through an open door.

‘We shall find what we want in here,’ said the man with the dark beard. It was a large, empty room, with rows of barrels and cases round the walls. A strong lamp stood upon a shelf in the corner. The floor was level and true, so that no swordsman could ask for more. Duroc drew his sabre and sprang into it. The Baron stood back with a bow and motioned me to follow my companion. Hardly were my heels over the threshold when the heavy door crashed behind us and the key screamed in the lock. We were taken in a trap.

For a moment we could not realise it. Such incredible baseness was outside all our experiences. Then, as we understood how foolish we had been to trust for an instant a man with such a history, a flush of rage came over us, rage against his villainy and against our own stupidity. We rushed at the door together, beating it with our fists and kicking with our heavy boots. The sound of our blows and of our execrations must have resounded through the Castle. We called to this villain, hurling at him every name which might pierce even into his hardened soul. But the door was enormous — such a door as one finds in mediaeval castles — made of huge beams clamped together with iron. It was as easy to break as a square of the Old Guard. And our cries appeared to be of as little avail as our blows, for they only brought for answer the clattering echoes from the high roof above us. When you have done some soldiering, you soon learn to put up with what cannot be altered. It was I, then, who first recovered my calmness, and prevailed upon Duroc to join with me in examining the apartment which had become our dungeon.

There was only one window, which had no glass in it, and was so narrow that one could not so much as get one's head through. It was high up, and Duroc had to stand upon a barrel in order to see from it.

'What can you see?' I asked.

'Fir-woods and an avenue of snow between them,' said he. 'Ah!' he gave a cry of surprise.

I sprang upon the barrel beside him. There was, as he said, a long, clear strip of snow in front. A man was riding down it, flogging his horse and galloping like a madman. As we watched, he grew smaller and smaller, until he was swallowed up by the black shadows of the forest.

'What does that mean?' asked Duroc.

'No good for us,' said I. 'He may have gone for some brigands to cut our throats. Let us see if we cannot find a way out of this mouse-trap before the cat can arrive.'

The one piece of good fortune in our favour was that beautiful lamp. It was nearly full of oil, and would last us until morning. In the dark our situation would have been far more difficult. By its light we proceeded to examine the packages and cases which lined the walls. In some places there was only a single line of them, while in one corner they were piled nearly to the ceiling. It seemed that we were in the storehouse of the Castle, for there were a great number of cheeses, vegetables of various kinds, bins full of dried fruits, and a line of wine barrels. One of these had a spigot in it, and as I had eaten little during the day, I was glad of a cup of claret and some food. As to Duroc, he would take nothing, but paced up and down the room in a fever of anger and impatience. 'I'll have him yet!' he cried, every now and then. 'The rascal shall not escape me!'

This was all very well, but it seemed to me, as I sat on a great round cheese eating my supper, that this youngster was thinking rather too much of his own family affairs and too little of the fine scrape into which he had got me. After all, his father had been dead fourteen years, and nothing could set that right; but here was Etienne Gerard, the most dashing lieutenant in the whole Grand Army, in imminent danger of being cut off at the very outset of his brilliant career. Who was ever to know the heights to which I might have risen if I were knocked on the head in this hole-and-corner business, which had nothing whatever to do with France or the Emperor? I could not help thinking what a fool I had been, when I had a fine war before me and everything which a man could desire, to go off on a hare-brained expedition of this sort, as if it were not enough to have a quarter of a million Russians to fight against, without plunging into all sorts of private quarrels as well.

‘That is all very well,’ I said at last, as I heard Duroc muttering his threats. ‘You may do what you like to him when you get the upper hand. At present the question rather is, what is *he* going to do to us?’

‘Let him do his worst!’ cried the boy. ‘I owe a duty to my father.’

‘That is mere foolishness,’ said I. ‘If you owe a duty to your father, I owe one to my mother, which is to get out of this business safe and sound.’

My remark brought him to his senses.

‘I have thought too much of myself!’ he cried. ‘Forgive me, Monsieur Gerard. Give me your advice as to what I should do.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘it is not for our health that they have shut us up here among the cheeses. They mean to make an end of us if they can. That is certain. They hope that no one knows that we have come here, and that none will trace us if we remain. Do your hussars know where you have gone to?’

‘I said nothing.’

‘Hum! It is clear that we cannot be starved here. They must come to us if they are to kill us. Behind a barricade of barrels we could hold our own against the five rascals whom we have seen. That is, probably, why they have sent that messenger for assistance.’

‘We must get out before he returns.’

‘Precisely, if we are to get out at all.’

‘Could we not burn down this door?’ he cried.

‘Nothing could be easier,’ said I. ‘There are several casks of oil in the corner. My only objection is that we should ourselves be nicely toasted, like two little oyster pâtés.’

‘Can you not suggest something?’ he cried, in despair. ‘Ah, what is that?’

There had been a low sound at our little window, and a shadow came between the stars and ourselves. A small, white hand was stretched into the lamplight. Something glittered between the fingers.

‘Quick! quick!’ cried a woman’s voice.

We were on the barrel in an instant.

‘They have sent for the Cossacks. Your lives are at stake. Ah, I am lost! I am lost!’

There was the sound of rushing steps, a hoarse oath, a blow, and the stars were once more twinkling through the window. We stood helpless upon the barrel with our blood cold with horror. Half a minute afterwards we heard a smothered scream, ending in a choke. A great door slammed somewhere in the silent night.

‘Those ruffians have seized her. They will kill her,’ I cried.

Duroc sprang down with the inarticulate shouts of one whose reason has left him. He struck the door so frantically with his naked hands that he left a blotch of blood with every blow.

Here is the key!’ I shouted, picking one from the floor. ‘She must have thrown it in at the instant that she was torn away.’

My companion snatched it from me with a shriek of joy. A moment later he dashed it down upon the boards. It was so small that it was lost in the enormous lock. Duroc sank upon one of the boxes with his head between his hands. He sobbed in his despair. I could have sobbed, too, when I thought of the woman and how helpless we were to save her.

But I am not easily baffled. After all, this key must have been sent to us for a purpose. The lady could not bring us that of the door, because this murderous step-father of hers would most certainly have it in his pocket. Yet this other must have a meaning, or why should she risk her life to place it in our hands? It would say little for our wits if we could not find out what that meaning might be.

I set to work moving all the cases out from the wall, and Duroc, gaining new hope from my courage, helped me with all his strength. It was no light task, for many of them were large and heavy. On we went, working like maniacs, slinging barrels, cheeses, and boxes pell-mell into the middle of the room. At last there only remained one huge barrel of vodka, which stood in the corner. With our united strength we rolled it out, and there was a little low wooden door in the wainscot behind it. The key fitted, and with a cry of delight we saw it swing open before us. With the lamp in my hand, I squeezed my way in, followed by my companion.

We were in the powder-magazine of the Castle — a rough, walled cellar, with barrels all round it, and one with the top staved in in the centre. The powder from it lay in a black heap upon the floor. Beyond there was another door, but it was locked.

‘We are no better off than before,’ cried Duroc. ‘We have no key.’

‘We have a dozen!’ I cried.

‘Where?’

I pointed to the line of powder barrels.

‘You would blow this door open?’

‘Precisely.’

‘But you would explode the magazine.’

It was true, but I was not at the end of my resources.

‘We will blow open the store-room door,’ I cried.

I ran back and seized a tin box which had been filled with candles. It was about the size of my busby — large enough to hold several pounds of powder. Duroc filled it while I cut off the end of a candle. When we had finished, it would have puzzled a colonel of engineers to make a better petard. I put three cheeses on the top of each other and placed it above them, so as to lean against the lock. Then we lit our candle-end and ran for shelter, shutting the door of the magazine behind us.

It is no joke, my friends, to be among all those tons of powder, with the knowledge that if the flame of the explosion should penetrate through one thin door our blackened limbs would be shot higher than the Castle keep. Who could have believed that a half-inch of candle could take so long to burn? My ears were straining all the time for the thudding of the hoofs of the Cossacks who were coming to destroy us. I had almost made up my mind that the candle must have gone out when there was a smack like a bursting bomb, our door flew to bits, and pieces of cheese, with a shower of turnips, apples, and splinters of cases, were shot in among us. As we rushed out we had to stagger through an impenetrable smoke, with all sorts of débris beneath our feet, but there was a glimmering square where the dark door had been. The petard had done its work.

In fact, it had done more for us than we had even ventured to hope. It had shattered gaolers as well as gaol. The first thing that I saw as I came out into the hall was a man with a butcher’s axe in his hand, lying flat upon his back, with a gaping wound across his forehead. The second was a huge dog, with two of its legs broken, twisting in agony upon the floor. As it raised itself up I saw the two broken ends flapping like flails. At the same instant I heard a cry, and there was Duroc, thrown against the wall, with the other hound’s teeth in his throat. He pushed it off with his left hand, while again and again he passed his sabre through its body, but it was not until I blew out its brains with my pistol that the iron jaws relaxed, and the fierce, bloodshot eyes were glazed in death.

There was no time for us to pause. A woman’s scream from in front — a scream of mortal terror — told us that even now we might be too late. There were two other men in the hall, but they cowered away from our drawn swords and furious faces. The blood was streaming from Duroc’s neck and dyeing the grey fur of his pelisse. Such was the lad’s fire, however, that he shot in front of me, and it was only over his shoulder that I caught a glimpse of the scene as we rushed into the chamber in which we had first seen the master of the Castle of Gloom.

The Baron was standing in the middle of the room, his tangled mane bristling like an angry lion. He was, as I have said, a huge man with enormous shoulders; and as he stood there, with his face flushed with rage and his sword advanced, I could not but think that, in spite of all his villainies, he had a proper figure for a grenadier. The lady lay cowering in a chair behind him. A weal across one of her white arms and a dog-whip upon the floor were enough to show that our escape had hardly been in time to save her from his brutality. He gave a howl like a wolf as we broke in, and was upon us in an instant, hacking and driving, with a curse at every blow.

I have already said that the room gave no space for swordsmanship. My young companion was in front of me in the narrow passage between the table and the wall, so that I could only look on without being able to aid him. The lad knew something of his weapon, and was as fierce and active as a wild cat, but in so narrow a space the weight and strength of the giant gave him the advantage. Besides, he was an admirable swordsman. His parade and riposte were as quick as lightning. Twice he touched Duroc upon the shoulder, and then, as the lad slipped on a lunge, he whirled up his sword to finish him before he could recover his feet. I was quicker than he, however, and took the cut upon the pommel of my sabre.

‘Excuse me,’ said I, ‘but you have still to deal with Etienne Gerard.’

He drew back and leaned against the tapestry-covered wall, breathing in little, hoarse gasps, for his foul living was against him.

‘Take your breath,’ said I. ‘I will await your convenience.’

‘You have no cause of quarrel against me,’ he panted.

‘I owe you some little attention,’ said I, ‘for having shut me up in your store-room. Besides, if all other were wanting, I see cause enough upon that lady’s arm.’

‘Have your way, then!’ he snarled, and leaped at me like a madman. For a minute I saw only the blazing blue eyes, and the red glazed point which stabbed and stabbed, rasping off to right or to left, and yet ever back at my throat and my breast. I had never thought that such good sword-play was to be found at Paris in the days of the Revolution. I do not suppose that in all my little affairs I have met six men who had a better knowledge of their weapon. But he knew that I was his master. He read death in my eyes, and I could see that he read it. The flush died from his face. His breath came in shorter and in thicker gasps. Yet he fought on, even after the final thrust had come, and died still hacking and cursing, with foul cries upon his lips, and his blood clotting upon his orange beard. I who speak to you have seen so many battles, that my old memory can scarce contain their names, and yet of all the terrible sights which these eyes have rested upon, there is none which I care to think of less than of that orange beard with the crimson stain in the centre, from which I had drawn my sword-point.

It was only afterwards that I had time to think of all this. His monstrous body had hardly crashed down upon the floor before the woman in the corner sprang to her feet, clapping her hands together and screaming out in her delight. For my part I was disgusted to see a woman take such delight in a deed of blood, and I gave no thought as to the terrible wrongs which must have befallen her before she could so far forget the gentleness of her sex. It was on my tongue to tell her sharply to be silent, when a strange, choking smell took the breath from my nostrils, and a sudden, yellow glare brought out the figures upon the faded hangings.

‘Duroc, Duroc!’ I shouted, tugging at his shoulder. ‘The Castle is on fire!’

The boy lay senseless upon the ground, exhausted by his wounds. I rushed out into the hall to see whence the danger came. It was our explosion which had set alight to the dry frame-work of the door. Inside the store-room some of the boxes were already blazing. I glanced in, and as I did so my blood was turned to water by the sight of the powder barrels beyond, and of the loose heap upon the floor. It might be seconds, it could not be more than minutes, before the flames would be at the edge of it. These eyes will be closed in death, my friends, before they cease to see those crawling lines of fire and the black heap beyond.

How little I can remember what followed. Vaguely I can recall how I rushed into the chamber of death, how I seized Duroc by one limp hand and dragged him down the hall, the woman keeping pace with me and pulling at the other arm. Out of the gateway we rushed, and on down the snow-covered path until we were on the fringe of the fir forest. It was at that moment that I heard a crash behind me, and, glancing round, saw a great spout of fire shoot up into the wintry sky. An instant later there seemed to come a second crash, far louder than the first. I saw the fir trees and the stars whirling round me, and I fell unconscious across the body of my comrade.

* * *

It was some weeks before I came to myself in the post-house of Arensdorf, and longer still before I could be told all that had befallen me. It was Duroc, already able to go soldiering, who came to my bedside and gave me an account of it. He it was who told me how a piece of timber had struck me on the head and laid me almost dead upon the ground. From him, too, I learned how the Polish girl had run to Arensdorf, how she had roused our hussars, and how she had only just brought them back in time to save us from the spears of the Cossacks who had been summoned from their bivouac by that same black-bearded secretary whom we had seen galloping so swiftly over the snow. As to the brave lady who had twice saved our lives, I could not learn very much about her at that moment from Duroc, but when I chanced to meet him in Paris two years later, after the campaign of Wagram, I was not very much surprised to find that I needed no introduction to his bride, and that by the queer turns of fortune he had himself, had he chosen to use it, that very name and title of the Baron Straubenthal, which showed him to be the owner of the blackened ruins of the Castle of Gloom.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote A: The term Brigadier is used throughout in its English and not in its French sense.]

HOW THE BRIGADIER SLEW THE BROTHERS OF AJACCIO

When the Emperor needed an agent he was always very ready to do me the honour of recalling the name of Etienne Gerard, though it occasionally escaped him when rewards were to be distributed. Still, I was a colonel at twenty-eight, and the chief of a brigade at thirty-one, so that I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my career. Had the wars lasted another two or three years I might have grasped my bâton, and the man who had his hand upon that was only one stride from a throne. Murat had changed his hussar’s cap for a crown, and another light cavalry man might have done as much. However, all those dreams were driven away by Waterloo, and, although I was not able to write my name upon history, it is sufficiently well known by all who served with me in the great wars of the Empire.

What I want to tell you tonight is about the very singular affair which first started me upon my rapid upward course, and which had the effect of establishing a secret bond between the Emperor and myself.

There is just one little word of warning which I must give you before I begin. When you hear me speak, you must always bear in mind that you are listening to one who has seen history from the inside. I am talking about what my ears have heard and my eyes have seen, so you must not try to confute me by quoting the opinions of some student or man of the pen, who has written a book of history or memoirs. There is much which is unknown by such people, and much which never will be known by the world. For my own part, I could tell you some very surprising things were it discreet to do so. The facts which I am about to relate to you tonight were kept secret by me during the Emperor’s lifetime, because I gave him my promise that it should be so, but I do not think that there can be any harm now in my telling the remarkable part which I played.

You must know, then, that at the time of the Treaty of Tilsit I was a simple lieutenant in the 10th Hussars, without money or interest. It is true that my appearance and my gallantry were in my favour, and that I had already won a reputation as being one of the best swordsmen in the army; but amongst the host of brave men who surrounded the Emperor it needed more than this to insure a rapid career. I was confident, however, that my chance would come, though I never dreamed that it would take so remarkable a form.

When the Emperor returned to Paris, after the declaration of peace in the year 1807, he spent much of his time with the Empress and the Court at Fontainebleau. It was the time when he was at the pinnacle of his career. He had in three successive campaigns humbled Austria, crushed Prussia, and made the Russians very glad to get upon the right side of the Niemen. The old Bulldog over the Channel was still growling, but he could not get very far from his kennel. If we could have made a perpetual peace at that moment, France would have taken a higher place than any nation since the days of the Romans. So I have heard the wise folk say, though for my part I had other things to think of. All the girls were glad to see the army back after its long absence, and you may be sure that I had my share of any favours that were going. You may judge how far I was a favourite in those days when I say that even now, in my sixtieth year — but why should I dwell upon that which is already sufficiently well known?

Our regiment of hussars was quartered with the horse chasseurs of the guard at Fontainebleau. It is, as you know, but a little place, buried in the heart of the forest, and it was wonderful at this time to see it crowded with Grand Dukes and Electors and Princes, who thronged round Napoleon like puppies round their master, each hoping that some bone might be thrown to him. There was more German than French to be heard in the street, for those who had helped us in the late war had come to beg for a reward, and those who had opposed us had come to try and escape their punishment.

And all the time our little man, with his pale face and his cold, grey eyes, was riding to the hunt every morning, silent and brooding, all of them following in his train, in the hope that some word would escape him. And then, when the humour seized him, he would throw a hundred square miles to that man, or tear as much off the other, round off one kingdom by a river, or cut off another by a chain of mountains. That was how he used to do business, this little artilleryman, whom we had raised so high with our sabres and our bayonets. He was very civil to us always, for he knew where his power came from. We knew also, and showed it by the way in which we carried ourselves. We were agreed, you understand, that he was the finest leader in the world, but we did not forget that he had the finest men to lead.

Well, one day I was seated in my quarters playing cards with young Morat, of the horse chasseurs, when the door opened and in walked Lasalle, who was our Colonel. You know what a fine, swaggering fellow he was, and the sky-blue uniform of the Tenth suited him to a marvel. My faith, we youngsters were so taken by him that we all swore and diced and drank and played the deuce whether we liked it or no, just that we might resemble our Colonel! We forgot that it was not because he drank or gambled that the Emperor was going to make him the head of the light cavalry, but because he had the surest eye for the nature of a position or for the strength of a column, and the best judgment as to when infantry could be broken, or whether guns were exposed, of any man in the army. We were too young to understand all that, however, so we waxed our moustaches and clicked our spurs and let the ferrules of our scabbards wear out by trailing them along the pavement in the hope that we should all become Lasalles. When he came clanking into my quarters, both Morat and I sprang to our feet.

'My boy,' said he, clapping me on the shoulder, 'the Emperor wants to see you at four o'clock.'

The room whirled round me at the words, and I had to lean my hands upon the edge of the card-table.

'What?' I cried. 'The Emperor!'

'Precisely,' said he, smiling at my astonishment.

'But the Emperor does not know of my existence, Colonel,' I protested. 'Why should he send for me?'

'Well, that's just what puzzles me,' cried Lasalle, twirling his moustache. 'If he wanted the help of a good sabre, why should he descend to one of my lieutenants when he might have found all that he needed at the head of the regiment? However,' he added, clapping me on the shoulder again in his hearty fashion, 'every man has his chance. I have had mine, otherwise I should not be Colonel of the Tenth. I must not grudge you yours. Forwards, my boy, and may it be the first step towards changing your busby for a cocked hat.'

It was but two o'clock, so he left me, promising to come back and to accompany me to the palace. My faith, what a time I passed, and how many conjectures did I make as to what it was that the Emperor could want of me! I paced up and down my little room in a fever of anticipation. Sometimes I thought that perhaps he had heard of the guns which we had taken at Austerlitz; but, then, there were so many who had taken guns at Austerlitz, and two years had passed since the battle. Or it might be that he wished to reward me for my affair with the *aide-de-camp* of the Russian Emperor. But then again a cold fit would seize me, and I would fancy that he had sent for me to reprimand me. There were a few duels which he might have taken in ill part, and there were one or two little jokes in Paris since the peace.

But, no! I considered the words of Lasalle. ‘If he had need of a brave man,’ said Lasalle.

It was obvious that my Colonel had some idea of what was in the wind. If he had not known that it was to my advantage, he would not have been so cruel as to congratulate me. My heart glowed with joy as this conviction grew upon me, and I sat down to write to my mother and to tell her that the Emperor was waiting, at that very moment, to have my opinion upon a matter of importance. It made me smile as I wrote it to think that, wonderful as it appeared to me, it would probably only confirm my mother in her opinion of the Emperor’s good sense.

At half-past three I heard a sabre come clanking against every step of my wooden stair. It was Lasalle, and with him was a lame gentleman, very neatly dressed in black with dapper ruffles and cuffs. We did not know many civilians, we of the army, but, my word, this was one whom we could not afford to ignore! I had only to glance at those twinkling eyes, the comical, upturned nose, and the straight, precise mouth, to know that I was in the presence of the one man in France whom even the Emperor had to consider.

‘This is Monsieur Etienne Gerard, Monsieur de Talleyrand,’ said Lasalle.

I saluted, and the statesman took me in from the top of my panache to the rowel of my spur, with a glance that played over me like a rapier point.

‘Have you explained to the lieutenant the circumstances under which he is summoned to the Emperor’s presence?’ he asked, in his dry, creaking voice.

They were such a contrast, these two men, that I could not help glancing from one to the other of them: the black, sly politician, and the big, sky-blue hussar with one fist on his hip and the other on the hilt of his sabre. They both took their seats as I looked, Talleyrand without a sound, and Lasalle with a clash and a jingle like a prancing charger.

‘It’s this way, youngster,’ said he, in his brusque fashion; ‘I was with the Emperor in his private cabinet this morning when a note was brought in to him. He opened it, and as he did so he gave such a start that it fluttered down on to the floor. I handed it up to him again, but he was staring at the wall in front of him as if he had seen a ghost. “Fratelli dell’ Ajaccio,” he muttered; and then again, “Fratelli dell’ Ajaccio.” I don’t pretend to know more Italian than a man can pick up in two campaigns, and I could make nothing of this. It seemed to me that he had gone out of his mind; and you would have said so also, Monsieur de Talleyrand, if you had seen the look in his eyes. He read the note, and then he sat for half an hour or more without moving.’

‘And you?’ asked Talleyrand.

‘Why, I stood there not knowing what I ought to do. Presently he seemed to come back to his senses.

‘“I suppose, Lasalle,” said he, “that you have some gallant young officers in the Tenth?”

‘“They are all that, sire,” I answered.

‘“If you had to pick one who was to be depended upon for action, but who would not think too much — you understand me, Lasalle — which would you select?” he asked.

‘I saw that he needed an agent who would not penetrate too deeply into his plans.

‘“I have one,” said I, “who is all spurs and moustaches, with never a thought beyond women and horses.”

‘“That is the man I want,” said Napoleon. “Bring him to my private cabinet at four o’clock.”

‘So, youngster, I came straight away to you at once, and mind that you do credit to the 10th Hussars.’

I was by no means flattered by the reasons which had led to my Colonel’s choice, and I must have shown as much in my face, for he roared with laughter and Talleyrand gave a dry chuckle also.

‘Just one word of advice before you go, Monsieur Gerard,’ said he: ‘you are now coming into troubled waters, and you might find a worse pilot than myself. We have none of us any idea as to what this little affair means, and, between ourselves, it is very important for us, who have the destinies of France upon our shoulders, to keep ourselves in touch with all that goes on. You understand me, Monsieur Gerard?’

I had not the least idea what he was driving at, but I bowed and tried to look as if it was clear to me.

‘Act very guardedly, then, and say nothing to anybody,’ said Talleyrand. ‘Colonel de Lasalle and I will not show ourselves in public with you, but we will await you here, and we will give you our advice when you have told us what has passed between the Emperor and yourself. It is time that you started now, for the Emperor never forgives unpunctuality.’

Off I went on foot to the palace, which was only a hundred paces off. I made my way to the ante-chamber, where Duroc, with his grand new scarlet and gold coat, was fussing about among the crowd of people who were waiting. I heard him whisper to Monsieur de Caulaincourt that half of them were German Dukes who expected to be made Kings, and the other half German Dukes who expected to be made paupers. Duroc, when he heard my name, showed me straight in, and I found myself in the Emperor’s presence.

I had, of course, seen him in camp a hundred times, but I had never been face to face with him before. I have no doubt that if you had met him without knowing in the least who he was, you would simply have said that he was a sallow little fellow with a good forehead and fairly well-turned calves. His tight white cashmere breeches and white stockings showed off his legs to advantage. But even a stranger must have been struck by the singular look of his eyes, which could harden into an expression which would frighten a grenadier. It is said that even Auguereau, who was a man who had never known what fear was, quailed before Napoleon’s gaze, at a time, too, when the Emperor was but an unknown soldier. He looked mildly enough at me, however, and motioned me to remain by the door. De Meneval was writing to his dictation, looking up at him between each sentence with his spaniel eyes.

‘That will do. You can go,’ said the Emperor, abruptly. Then, when the secretary had left the room, he strode across with his hands behind his back, and he looked me up and down without a word. Though he was a small man himself, he was very fond of having fine-looking fellows about him, and so I think that my appearance gave him pleasure. For my own part, I raised one hand to the salute and held the other upon the hilt of my sabre, looking straight ahead of me, as a soldier should.

‘Well, Monsieur Gerard,’ said he, at last, tapping his forefinger upon one of the brandebourgs of gold braid upon the front of my pelisse, ‘I am informed that you are a very deserving young officer. Your Colonel gives me an excellent account of you.’

I wished to make a brilliant reply, but I could think of nothing save Lasalle’s phrase that I was all spurs and moustaches, so it ended in my saying nothing at all. The Emperor watched the struggle which must have shown itself upon my features, and when, finally, no answer came he did not appear to be displeased.

‘I believe that you are the very man that I want,’ said he. ‘Brave and clever men surround me upon every side. But a brave man who — —’ He did not finish his sentence, and for my own part I could not understand what he was driving at. I contented myself with assuring him that he could count upon me to the death.

‘You are, as I understand, a good swordsman?’ said he.

‘Tolerable, sire,’ I answered.

‘You were chosen by your regiment to fight the champion of the Hussars of Chambarant?’ said he.

I was not sorry to find that he knew so much of my exploits.

‘My comrades, sire, did me that honour,’ said I.

‘And for the sake of practice you insulted six fencing masters in the week before your duel?’

‘I had the privilege of being out seven times in as many days, sire,’ said I.

‘And escaped without a scratch?’

‘The fencing master of the 23rd Light Infantry touched me on the left elbow, sire.’

‘Let us have no more child’s play of the sort, monsieur,’ he cried, turning suddenly to that cold rage of his which was so appalling. ‘Do you imagine that I place veteran soldiers in these positions that you may practise quarte and tierce upon them? How am I to face Europe if my soldiers turn their points upon each other? Another word of your duelling, and I break you between these fingers.’

I saw his plump white hands flash before my eyes as he spoke, and his voice had turned to the most discordant hissing and growling. My word, my skin pringled all over as I listened to him, and I would gladly have changed my position for that of the first man in the steepest and narrowest breach that ever swallowed up a storming party. He turned to the table, drank off a cup of coffee, and then when he faced me again every trace of this storm had vanished, and he wore that singular smile which came from his lips but never from his eyes.

‘I have need of your services, Monsieur Gerard,’ said he. ‘I may be safer with a good sword at my side, and there are reasons why yours should be the one which I select. But first of all I must bind you to secrecy. Whilst I live what passes between us today must be known to none but ourselves.’

I thought of Talleyrand and of Lasalle, but I promised.

‘In the next place, I do not want your opinions or conjectures, and I wish you to do exactly what you are told.’

I bowed.

‘It is your sword that I need, and not your brains. I will do the thinking. Is that clear to you?’

‘Yes, sire.’

‘You know the Chancellor’s Grove, in the forest?’

I bowed.

‘You know also the large double fir-tree where the hounds assembled on Tuesday?’

Had he known that I met a girl under it three times a week, he would not have asked me. I bowed once more without remark.

‘Very good. You will meet me there at ten o’clock tonight.’

I had got past being surprised at anything which might happen. If he had asked me to take his place upon the imperial throne I could only have nodded my busby.

‘We shall then proceed into the wood together,’ said the Emperor. ‘You will be armed with a sword, but not with pistols. You must address no remark to me, and I shall say nothing to you. We will advance in silence. You understand?’

‘I understand, sire.’

‘After a time we shall see a man, or more probably two men, under a certain tree. We shall approach them together. If I signal to you to defend me, you will have your sword ready. If, on the other hand, I speak to these men, you will wait and see what happens. If you are called upon to draw, you must see that neither of them, in the event of there being two, escapes from us. I shall myself assist you.’

‘Sire,’ I cried, ‘I have no doubt that two would not be too many for my sword; but would it not be better that I should bring a comrade than that you should be forced to join in such a struggle?’

‘Ta, ta, ta,’ said he. ‘I was a soldier before I was an Emperor. Do you think, then, that artillerymen have not swords as well as the hussars? But I ordered you not to argue with me. You will do exactly what I tell you. If swords are once out, neither of these men is to get away alive.'

'They shall not, sire,' said I.

'Very good. I have no more instructions for you. You can go.'

I turned to the door, and then an idea occurring to me I turned.

'I have been thinking, sire—' said I.

He sprang at me with the ferocity of a wild beast. I really thought he would have struck me.

'Thinking!' he cried. 'You, *you*! Do you imagine I chose you out because you could think? Let me hear of your doing such a thing again! You, the one man — but, there! You meet me at the fir-tree at ten o'clock.'

My faith, I was right glad to get out of the room. If I have a good horse under me, and a sword clanking against my stirrup-iron, I know where I am. And in all that relates to green fodder or dry, barley and oats and rye, and the handling of squadrons upon the march, there is no one who can teach me very much. But when I meet a Chamberlain and a Marshal of the Palace, and have to pick my words with an Emperor, and find that everybody hints instead of talking straight out, I feel like a troop-horse who has been put in a lady's calèche. It is not my trade, all this mincing and pretending. I have learned the manners of a gentleman, but never those of a courtier. I was right glad then to get into the fresh air again, and I ran away up to my quarters like a schoolboy who has just escaped from the seminary master.

But as I opened the door, the very first thing that my eye rested upon was a long pair of sky-blue legs with hussar boots, and a short pair of black ones with knee breeches and buckles. They both sprang up together to greet me.

'Well, what news?' they cried, the two of them.

'None,' I answered.

'The Emperor refused to see you?'

'No, I have seen him.'

'And what did he say?'

'Monsieur de Talleyrand,' I answered, 'I regret to say that it is quite impossible for me to tell you anything about it. I have promised the Emperor.'

'Pooh, pooh, my dear young man,' said he, sidling up to me, as a cat does when it is about to rub itself against you. 'This is all among friends, you understand, and goes no farther than these four walls. Besides, the Emperor never meant to include me in this promise.’

‘It is but a minute’s walk to the palace, Monsieur de Talleyrand,’ I answered; ‘if it would not be troubling you too much to ask you to step up to it and bring back the Emperor’s written statement that he did not mean to include you in this promise, I shall be happy to tell you every word that passed.’

He showed his teeth at me then like the old fox that he was.

‘Monsieur Gerard appears to be a little puffed up,’ said he. ‘He is too young to see things in their just proportion. As he grows older he may understand that it is not always very discreet for a subaltern of cavalry to give such very abrupt refusals.’

I did not know what to say to this, but Lasalle came to my aid in his downright fashion.

‘The lad is quite right,’ said he. ‘If I had known that there was a promise I should not have questioned him. You know very well, Monsieur de Talleyrand, that if he had answered you, you would have laughed in your sleeve and thought as much about him as I think of the bottle when the burgundy is gone. As for me, I promise you that the Tenth would have had no room for him, and that we should have lost our best swordsman if I had heard him give up the Emperor’s secret.’

But the statesman became only the more bitter when he saw that I had the support of my Colonel.

‘I have heard, Colonel de Lasalle,’ said he, with an icy dignity, ‘that your opinion is of great weight upon the subject of light cavalry. Should I have occasion to seek information about that branch of the army, I shall be very happy to apply to you. At present, however, the matter concerns diplomacy, and you will permit me to form my own views upon that question. As long as the welfare of France and the safety of the Emperor’s person are largely committed to my care, I will use every means in my power to secure them, even if it should be against the Emperor’s own temporary wishes. I have the honour, Colonel de Lasalle, to wish you a very good-day!’

He shot a most unamiable glance in my direction, and, turning upon his heel, he walked with little, quick, noiseless steps out of the room.

I could see from Lasalle’s face that he did not at all relish finding himself at enmity with the powerful Minister. He rapped out an oath or two, and then, catching up his sabre and his cap, he clattered away down the stairs.

As I looked out of the window I saw the two of them, the big blue man and the limping black one, going up the street together. Talleyrand was walking very rigidly, and Lasalle was waving his hands and talking, so I suppose he was trying to make his peace.

The Emperor had told me not to think, and I endeavoured to obey him. I took up the cards from the table where Morat had left them, and I tried to work out a few combinations at écarté. But I could not remember which were trumps, and I threw them under the table in despair. Then I drew my sabre and practised giving point until I was weary, but it was all of no use at all. My mind *would* work, in spite of myself. At ten o'clock I was to meet the Emperor in the forest. Of all extraordinary combinations of events in the whole world, surely this was the last which would have occurred to me when I rose from my couch that morning. But the responsibility — - the dreadful responsibility! It was all upon my shoulders. There was no one to halve it with me. It made me cold all over. Often as I have faced death upon the battle-field, I have never known what real fear was until that moment. But then I considered that after all I could but do my best like a brave and honourable gentleman, and above all obey the orders which I had received, to the very letter. And, if all went well, this would surely be the foundation of my fortunes. Thus, swaying between my fears and my hopes, I spent the long, long evening until it was time to keep my appointment.

I put on my military overcoat, as I did not know how much of the night I might have to spend in the woods, and I fastened my sword outside it. I pulled off my hussar boots also, and wore a pair of shoes and gaiters, that I might be lighter upon my feet. Then I stole out of my quarters and made for the forest, feeling very much easier in my mind, for I am always at my best when the time of thought has passed and the moment for action arrived.

I passed the barracks of the Chasseurs of the Guards, and the line of cafes all filled with uniforms. I caught a glimpse as I went by of the blue and gold of some of my comrades, amid the swarm of dark infantry coats and the light green of the Guides. There they sat, sipping their wine and smoking their cigars, little dreaming what their comrade had on hand. One of them, the chief of my squadron, caught sight of me in the lamplight, and came shouting after me into the street. I hurried on, however, pretending not to hear him, so he, with a curse at my deafness, went back at last to his wine bottle.

It is not very hard to get into the forest at Fontainebleau. The scattered trees steal their way into the very streets, like the tirailleurs in front of a column. I turned into a path, which led to the edge of the woods, and then I pushed rapidly forward towards the old fir-tree. It was a place which, as I have hinted, I had my own reasons for knowing well, and I could only thank the Fates that it was not one of the nights upon which Léonie would be waiting for me. The poor child would have died of terror at sight of the Emperor. He might have been too harsh with her — and worse still, he might have been too kind.

There was a half moon shining, and, as I came up to our trysting-place, I saw that I was not the first to arrive. The Emperor was pacing up and down, his hands behind him and his face sunk somewhat forward upon his breast. He wore a grey great-coat with a capote over his head. I had seen him in such a dress in our winter campaign in Poland, and it was said that he used it because the hood was such an excellent disguise. He was always fond, whether in the camp or in Paris, of walking round at night, and overhearing the talk in the cabarets or round the fires. His figure, however, and his way of carrying his head and his hands were so well known that he was always recognised, and then the talkers would say whatever they thought would please him best.

My first thought was that he would be angry with me for having kept him waiting, but as I approached him, we heard the big church clock of Fontainebleau clang out the hour of ten. It was evident, therefore, that it was he who was too soon, and not I too late. I remembered his order that I should make no remark, so contented myself with halting within four paces of him, clicking my spurs together, grounding my sabre, and saluting. He glanced at me, and then without a word he turned and walked slowly through the forest, I keeping always about the same distance behind him. Once or twice he seemed to me to look apprehensively to right and to left, as if he feared that someone was observing us. I looked also, but although I have the keenest sight, it was quite impossible to see anything except the ragged patches of moonshine between the great black shadows of the trees. My ears are as quick as my eyes, and once or twice I thought that I heard a twig crack; but you know how many sounds there are in a forest at night, and how difficult it is even to say what direction they come from.

We walked for rather more than a mile, and I knew exactly what our destination was, long before we got there. In the centre of one of the glades, there is the shattered stump of what must at some time have been a most gigantic tree. It is called the Abbot's Beech, and there are so many ghostly stories about it, that I know many a brave soldier who would not care about mounting sentinel over it. However, I cared as little for such folly as the Emperor did, so we crossed the glade and made straight for the old broken trunk. As we approached, I saw that two men were waiting for us beneath it.

When I first caught sight of them they were standing rather behind it, as if they were not anxious to be seen, but as we came nearer they emerged from its shadow and walked forward to meet us. The Emperor glanced back at me, and slackened his pace a little so that I came within arm's length of him. You may think that I had my hilt well to the front, and that I had a very good look at these two people who were approaching us.

The one was tall, remarkably so, and of very spare frame, while the other was rather below the usual height, and had a brisk, determined way of walking. They each wore black cloaks, which were slung right across their figures, and hung down upon one side, like the mantles of Murat's dragoons. They had flat black caps, like those I have since seen in Spain, which threw their faces into darkness, though I could see the gleam of their eyes from beneath them. With the moon behind them and their long black shadows walking in front, they were such figures as one might expect to meet at night near the Abbot's Beech. I can remember that they had a stealthy way of moving, and that as they approached, the moonshine formed two white diamonds between their legs and the legs of their shadows.

The Emperor had paused, and these two strangers came to a stand also within a few paces of us. I had drawn up close to my companion's elbow, so that the four of us were facing each other without a word spoken. My eyes were particularly fixed upon the taller one, because he was slightly the nearer to me, and I became certain as I watched him that he was in the last state of nervousness. His lean figure was quivering all over, and I heard a quick, thin panting like that of a tired dog. Suddenly one of them gave a short, hissing signal. The tall man bent his back and his knees like a diver about to spring, but before he could move, I had jumped with drawn sabre in front of him. At the same instant the smaller man bounded past me, and buried a long poniard in the Emperor's heart.

My God! the horror of that moment! It is a marvel that I did not drop dead myself. As in a dream, I saw the grey coat whirl convulsively round, and caught a glimpse in the moonlight of three inches of red point which jutted out from between the shoulders. Then down he fell with a dead man’s gasp upon the grass, and the assassin, leaving his weapon buried in his victim, threw up both his hands and shrieked with joy. But I — I drove my sword through his midriff with such frantic force, that the mere blow of the hilt against the end of his breast-bone sent him six paces before he fell, and left my reeking blade ready for the other. I sprang round upon him with such a lust for blood upon me as I had never felt, and never have felt, in all my days. As I turned, a dagger flashed before my eyes, and I felt the cold wind of it pass my neck and the villain’s wrist jar upon my shoulder. I shortened my sword, but he winced away from me, and an instant afterwards was in full flight, bounding like a deer across the glade in the moonlight.

But he was not to escape me thus. I knew that the murderer’s poniard had done its work. Young as I was, I had seen enough of war to know a mortal blow. I paused but for an instant to touch the cold hand.

‘Sire! Sire!’ I cried, in an agony; and then as no sound came back and nothing moved, save an ever-widening dark circle in the moonlight, I knew that all was indeed over. I sprang madly to my feet, threw off my great-coat, and ran at the top of my speed after the remaining assassin.

Ah, how I blessed the wisdom which had caused me to come in shoes and gaiters! And the happy thought which had thrown off my coat. He could not get rid of his mantle, this wretch, or else he was too frightened to think of it. So it was that I gained upon him from the beginning. He must have been out of his wits, for he never tried to bury himself in the darker parts of the woods, but he flew on from glade to glade, until he came to the heath-land which leads up to the great Fontainebleau quarry. There I had him in full sight, and knew that he could not escape me. He ran well, it is true — ran as a coward runs when his life is the stake. But I ran as Destiny runs when it gets behind a man’s heels. Yard by yard I drew in upon him. He was rolling and staggering. I could hear the rasping and crackling of his breath. The great gulf of the quarry suddenly yawned in front of his path, and glancing at me over his shoulder, he gave a shriek of despair. The next instant he had vanished from my sight.

Vanished utterly, you understand. I rushed to the spot, and gazed down into the black abyss. Had he hurled himself over? I had almost made up my mind that he had done so, when a gentle sound rising and falling came out of the darkness beneath me. It was his breathing once more, and it showed me where he must be. He was hiding in the tool-house.

At the edge of the quarry and beneath the summit there is a small platform upon which stands a wooden hut for the use of the labourers. It was into this, then, that he had darted. Perhaps he had thought, the fool, that, in the darkness, I would not venture to follow him. He little knew Etienne Gerard. With a spring I was on the platform, with another I was through the doorway, and then, hearing him in the corner, I hurled myself down upon the top of him.

He fought like a wild cat, but he never had a chance with his shorter weapon. I think that I must have transfixed him with that first mad lunge, for, though he struck and struck, his blows had no power in them, and presently his dagger tinkled down upon the floor. When I was sure that he was dead, I rose up and passed out into the moonlight. I climbed on to the heath again, and wandered across it as nearly out of my mind as a man could be.

With the blood singing in my ears, and my naked sword still clutched in my hand, I walked aimlessly on until, looking round me, I found that I had come as far as the glade of the Abbot’s Beech, and saw in the distance that gnarled stump which must ever be associated with the most terrible moment of my life. I sat down upon a fallen trunk with my sword across my knees and my head between my hands, and I tried to think about what had happened and what would happen in the future.

The Emperor had committed himself to my care. The Emperor was dead. Those were the two thoughts which clanged in my head, until I had no room for any other ones. He had come with me and he was dead. I had done what he had ordered when living. I had revenged him when dead. But what of all that? The world would look upon me as responsible. They might even look upon me as the assassin. What could I prove? What witnesses had I? Might I not have been the accomplice of these wretches? Yes, yes, I was eternally dishonoured — the lowest, most despicable creature in all France. This, then, was the end of my fine military ambitions — of the hopes of my mother. I laughed bitterly at the thought. And what was I to do now? Was I to go into Fontainebleau, to wake up the palace, and to inform them that the great Emperor had been murdered within a pace of me? I could not do it — no, I could not do it! There was but one course for an honourable gentleman whom Fate had placed in so cruel a position. I would fall upon my dishonoured sword, and so share, since I could not avert, the Emperor’s fate. I rose with my nerves strung to this last piteous deed, and as I did so, my eyes fell upon something which struck the breath from my lips. The Emperor was standing before me!

He was not more than ten yards off, with the moon shining straight upon his cold, pale face. He wore his grey overcoat, but the hood was turned back, and the front open, so that I could see the green coat of the Guides, and the white breeches. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his chin sunk forward upon his breast, in the way that was usual with him.

‘Well,’ said he, in his hardest and most abrupt voice, ‘what account do you give of yourself?’

I believe that, if he had stood in silence for another minute, my brain would have given way. But those sharp military accents were exactly what I needed to bring me to myself. Living or dead, here was the Emperor standing before me and asking me questions. I sprang to the salute.

‘You have killed one, I see,’ said he, jerking his head towards the beech.

‘Yes, sire.’

‘And the other escaped?’

‘No, sire, I killed him also.’

‘What!’ he cried. ‘Do I understand that you have killed them both?’ He approached me as he spoke with a smile which set his teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

‘One body lies there, sire,’ I answered. ‘The other is in the tool-house at the quarry.’

‘Then the Brothers of Ajaccio are no more,’ he cried, and after a pause, as if speaking to himself: ‘The shadow has passed me for ever.’ Then he bent forward and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

‘You have done very well, my young friend,’ said he. ‘You have lived up to your reputation.’

He was flesh and blood, then, this Emperor. I could feel the little, plump palm that rested upon me. And yet I could not get over what I had seen with my own eyes, and so I stared at him in such bewilderment that he broke once more into one of his smiles.

‘No, no, Monsieur Gerard,’ said he, ‘I am not a ghost, and you have not seen me killed. You will come here, and all will be clear to you.’

He turned as he spoke, and led the way towards the great beech stump.

The bodies were still lying upon the ground, and two men were standing beside them. As we approached I saw from the turbans that they were Roustem and Mustafa, the two Mameluke servants. The Emperor paused when he came to the grey figure upon the ground, and turning back the hood which shrouded the features, he showed a face which was very different from his own.

'Here lies a faithful servant who has given up his life for his master,' said he. 'Monsieur de Goudin resembles me in figure and in manner, as you must admit.'

What a delirium of joy came upon me when these few words made everything clear to me. He smiled again as he saw the delight which urged me to throw my arms round him and to embrace him, but he moved a step away, as if he had divined my impulse.

'You are unhurt?' he asked.

'I am unhurt, sire. But in another minute I should in my despair — —'

'Tut, tut!' he interrupted. 'You did very well. He should himself have been more on his guard. I saw everything which passed.'

'You saw it, sire!'

'You did not hear me follow you through the wood, then? I hardly lost sight of you from the moment that you left your quarters until poor De Goudin fell. The counterfeit Emperor was in front of you and the real one behind. You will now escort me back to the palace.'

He whispered an order to his Mamelukes, who saluted in silence and remained where they were standing. For my part, I followed the Emperor with my pelisse bursting with pride. My word, I have always carried myself as a hussar should, but Lasalle himself never strutted and swung his dolman as I did that night. Who should clink his spurs and clatter his sabre if it were not I — I, Etienne Gerard — the confidant of the Emperor, the chosen swordsman of the light cavalry, the man who slew the would-be assassins of Napoleon? But he noticed my bearing and turned upon me like a blight.

'Is that the way you carry yourself on a secret mission?' he hissed, with that cold glare in his eyes. 'Is it thus that you will make your comrades believe that nothing remarkable has occurred? Have done with this nonsense, monsieur, or you will find yourself transferred to the sappers, where you would have harder work and duller plumage.'

That was the way with the Emperor. If ever he thought that anyone might have a claim upon him, he took the first opportunity to show him the gulf that lay between. I saluted and was silent, but I must confess to you that it hurt me after all that had passed between us. He led on to the palace, where we passed through the side door and up into his own cabinet. There were a couple of grenadiers at the staircase, and their eyes started out from under their fur caps, I promise you, when they saw a young lieutenant of hussars going up to the Emperor's room at midnight. I stood by the door, as I had done in the afternoon, while he flung himself down in an arm-chair, and remained silent so long that it seemed to me that he had forgotten all about me. I ventured at last upon a slight cough to remind him.

'Ah, Monsieur Gerard,' said he, 'you are very curious, no doubt, as to the meaning of all this?'

'I am quite content, sire, if it is your pleasure not to tell me,' I answered.

'Ta, ta, ta,' said he impatiently. 'These are only words. The moment that you were outside that door you would begin making inquiries about what it means. In two days your brother officers would know about it, in three days it would be all over Fontainebleau, and it would be in Paris on the fourth. Now, if I tell you enough to appease your curiosity, there is some reasonable hope that you may be able to keep the matter to yourself.'

He did not understand me, this Emperor, and yet I could only bow and be silent.

'A few words will make it clear to you,' said he, speaking very swiftly and pacing up and down the room. 'They were Corsicans, these two men. I had known them in my youth. We had belonged to the same society — Brothers of Ajaccio, as we called ourselves. It was founded in the old Paoli days, you understand, and we had some strict rules of our own which were not infringed with impunity.'

A very grim look came over his face as he spoke, and it seemed to me that all that was French had gone out of him, and that it was the pure Corsican, the man of strong passions and of strange revenges, who stood before me. His memory had gone back to those early days of his, and for five minutes, wrapped in thought, he paced up and down the room with his quick little tiger steps. Then with an impatient wave of his hands he came back to his palace and to me.

'The rules of such a society,' he continued, 'are all very well for a private citizen. In the old days there was no more loyal brother than I. But circumstances change, and it would be neither for my welfare nor for that of France that I should now submit myself to them. They wanted to hold me to it, and so brought their fate upon their own heads. These were the two chiefs of the order, and they had come from Corsica to summon me to meet them at the spot which they named. I knew what such a summons meant. No man had ever returned from obeying one. On the other hand, if I did not go, I was sure that disaster would follow. I am a brother myself, you remember, and I know their ways.'

Again there came that hardening of his mouth and cold glitter of his eyes.

'You perceive my dilemma, Monsieur Gerard,' said he. 'How would you have acted yourself, under such circumstances?'

'Given the word to the l0th Hussars, sire,' I cried. 'Patrols could have swept the woods from end to end, and brought these two rascals to your feet.'

He smiled, but he shook his head.

'I had very excellent reasons why I did not wish them taken alive,' said he. 'You can understand that an assassin's tongue might be as dangerous a weapon as an assassin's dagger. I will not disguise from you that I wished to avoid scandal at all cost. That was why I ordered you to take no pistols with you. That also is why my Mamelukes will remove all traces of the affair, and nothing more will be heard about it. I thought of all possible plans, and I am convinced that I selected the best one. Had I sent more than one guard with De Goudin into the woods, then the brothers would not have appeared. They would not change their plans nor miss their chance for the sake of a single man. It was Colonel Lasalle's accidental presence at the moment when I received the summons which led to my choosing one of his hussars for the mission. I selected you, Monsieur Gerard, because I wanted a man who could handle a sword, and who would not pry more deeply into the affair than I desired. I trust that, in this respect, you will justify my choice as well as you have done in your bravery and skill.'

'Sire,' I answered, 'you may rely upon it.'

'As long as I live,' said he, 'you never open your lips upon this subject.'

'I dismiss it entirely from my mind, sire. I will efface it from my recollection as if it had never been. I will promise you to go out of your cabinet at this moment exactly as I was when I entered it at four o'clock.'

'You cannot do that,' said the Emperor, smiling. 'You were a lieutenant at that time. You will permit me, Captain, to wish you a very good-night.'

HOW THE BRIGADIER HELD THE KING

Here, upon the lapel of my coat, you may see the ribbon of my decoration, but the medal itself I keep in a leathern pouch at home, and I never venture to take it out unless one of the modern peace generals, or some foreigner of distinction who finds himself in our little town, takes advantage of the opportunity to pay his respects to the well-known Brigadier Gerard. Then I place it upon my breast, and I give my moustache the old Marengo twist which brings a grey point into either eye. Yet with it all I fear that neither they, nor you either, my friends, will ever realise the man that I was. You know me only as a civilian — with an air and a manner, it is true — but still merely as a civilian. Had you seen me as I stood in the doorway of the inn at Alamo, on the 1st of July, in the year 1810, you would then have known what the hussar may attain to.

For a month I had lingered in that accursed village, and all on account of a lance-thrust in my ankle, which made it impossible for me to put my foot to the ground. There were three besides myself at first: old Bouvet, of the Hussars of Bercheny, Jacques Regnier, of the Cuirassiers, and a funny little voltigeur captain whose name I forget; but they all got well and hurried on to the front, while I sat gnawing my fingers and tearing my hair, and even, I must confess, weeping from time to time as I thought of my Hussars of Conflans, and the deplorable condition in which they must find themselves when deprived of their colonel. I was not a chief of brigade yet, you understand, although I already carried myself like one, but I was the youngest colonel in the whole service, and my regiment was wife and children to me. It went to my heart that they should be so bereaved. It is true that Villaret, the senior major, was an excellent soldier; but still, even among the best there are degrees of merit.

Ah, that happy July day of which I speak, when first I limped to the door and stood in the golden Spanish sunshine! It was but the evening before that I had heard from the regiment. They were at Pastores, on the other side of the mountains, face to face with the English — not forty miles from me by road. But how was I to get to them? The same thrust which had pierced my ankle had slain my charger. I took advice both from Gomez, the landlord, and from an old priest who had slept that night in the inn, but neither of them could do more than assure me that there was not so much as a colt left upon the whole countryside.

The landlord would not hear of my crossing the mountains without an escort, for he assured me that El Cuchillo, the Spanish guerilla chief, was out that way with his band, and that it meant a death by torture to fall into his hands. The old priest observed, however, that he did not think a French hussar would be deterred by that, and if I had had any doubts, they would of course have been decided by his remark.

But a horse! How was I to get one? I was standing in the doorway, plotting and planning, when I heard the clink of shoes, and, looking up, I saw a great bearded man, with a blue cloak frogged across in military fashion, coming towards me. He was riding a big black horse with one white stocking on his near fore-leg.

‘Halloa, comrade!’ said I, as he came up to me.

‘Halloa!’ said he.

‘I am Colonel Gerard, of the Hussars,’ said I. ‘I have lain here wounded for a month, and I am now ready to rejoin my regiment at Pastores.’

‘I am Monsieur Vidal, of the commissariat,’ he answered, ‘and I am myself upon my way to Pastores. I should be glad to have your company, Colonel, for I hear that the mountains are far from safe.’

‘Alas,’ said I, ‘I have no horse. But if you will sell me yours, I will promise that an escort of hussars shall be sent back for you.’

He would not hear of it, and it was in vain that the landlord told him dreadful stories of the doings of El Cuchillo, and that I pointed out the duty which he owed to the army and to the country. He would not even argue, but called loudly for a cup of wine. I craftily asked him to dismount and to drink with me, but he must have seen something in my face, for he shook his head; and then, as I approached him with some thought of seizing him by the leg, he jerked his heels into his horse’s flanks, and was off in a cloud of dust.

My faith! it was enough to make a man mad to see this fellow riding away so gaily to join his beef-barrels, and his brandy-casks, and then to think of my five hundred beautiful hussars without their leader. I was gazing after him with bitter thoughts in my mind, when who should touch me on the elbow but the little priest whom I have mentioned.

‘It is I who can help you,’ he said. ‘I am myself travelling south.’

I put my arms about him and, as my ankle gave way at the same moment, we nearly rolled upon the ground together.

‘Get me to Pastores,’ I cried, ‘and you shall have a rosary of golden beads.’ I had taken one from the Convent of Spiritu Santo. It shows how necessary it is to take what you can when you are upon a campaign, and how the most unlikely things may become useful.

‘I will take you,’ he said, in very excellent French, ‘not because I hope for any reward, but because it is my way always to do what I can to serve my fellow-man, and that is why I am so beloved wherever I go.’

With that he led me down the village to an old cow-house, in which we found a tumble-down sort of diligence, such as they used to run early in this century, between some of our remote villages. There were three old mules, too, none of which were strong enough to carry a man, but together they might draw the coach. The sight of their gaunt ribs and spavined legs gave me more delight than the whole two hundred and twenty hunters of the Emperor which I have seen in their stalls at Fontainebleau. In ten minutes the owner was harnessing them into the coach, with no very good will, however, for he was in mortal dread of this terrible Cuchillo. It was only by promising him riches in this world, while the priest threatened him with perdition in the next, that we at last got him safely upon the box with the reins between his fingers. Then he was in such a hurry to get off, out of fear lest we should find ourselves in the dark in the passes, that he hardly gave me time to renew my vows to the innkeeper’s daughter. I cannot at this moment recall her name, but we wept together as we parted, and I can remember that she was a very beautiful woman. You will understand, my friends, that when a man like me, who has fought the men and kissed the women in fourteen separate kingdoms, gives a word of praise to the one or the other, it has a little meaning of its own.

The little priest had seemed a trifle grave when we kissed good-bye, but he soon proved himself the best of companions in the diligence. All the way he amused me with tales of his little parish up in the mountains, and I in my turn told him stories about the camp; but, my faith, I had to pick my steps, for when I said a word too much he would fidget in his seat and his face would show the pain that I had given him. And of course it is not the act of a gentleman to talk in anything but a proper manner to a religious man, though, with all the care in the world, one’s words may get out of hand sometimes.

He had come from the north of Spain, as he told me, and was going to see his mother in a village of Estremadura, and as he spoke about her little peasant home, and her joy in seeing him, it brought my own mother so vividly to my thoughts that the tears started to my eyes. In his simplicity he showed me the little gifts which he was taking to her, and so kindly was his manner that I could readily believe him when he said he was loved wherever he went. He examined my own uniform with as much curiosity as a child, admiring the plume of my busby, and passing his fingers through the sable with which my dolman was trimmed. He drew my sword, too, and then when I told him how many men I had cut down with it, and set my finger on the notch made by the shoulder-bone of the Russian Emperor's aide-de-camp, he shuddered and placed the weapon under the leathern cushion, declaring that it made him sick to look at it.

Well, we had been rolling and creaking on our way whilst this talk had been going forward, and as we reached the base of the mountains we could hear the rumbling of cannon far away upon the right. This came from Massena, who was, as I knew, besieging Ciudad Rodrigo. There was nothing I should have wished better than to have gone straight to him, for if, as some said, he had Jewish blood in his veins, he was the best Jew that I have heard of since Joshua's time. If you were in sight of his beaky nose and bold, black eyes, you were not likely to miss much of what was going on. Still, a siege is always a poor sort of a pick-and-shovel business, and there were better prospects with my hussars in front of the English. Every mile that passed, my heart grew lighter and lighter, until I found myself shouting and singing like a young ensign fresh from St Cyr, just to think of seeing all my fine horses and my gallant fellows once more.

As we penetrated the mountains the road grew rougher and the pass more savage. At first we had met a few muleteers, but now the whole country seemed deserted, which is not to be wondered at when you think that the French, the English, and the guerillas had each in turn had command over it. So bleak and wild was it, one great brown wrinkled cliff succeeding another, and the pass growing narrower and narrower, that I ceased to look out, but sat in silence, thinking of this and that, of women whom I had loved and of horses which I had handled. I was suddenly brought back from my dreams, however, by observing the difficulties of my companion, who was trying with a sort of brad-awl, which he had drawn out, to bore a hole through the leathern strap which held up his water-flask. As he worked with twitching fingers the strap escaped his grasp, and the wooden bottle fell at my feet. I stooped to pick it up, and as I did so the priest silently leaped upon my shoulders and drove his brad-awl into my eye!

My friends, I am, as you know, a man steeled to face every danger. When one has served from the affair of Zurich to that last fatal day of Waterloo, and has had the special medal, which I keep at home in a leathern pouch, one can afford to confess when one is frightened. It may console some of you, when your own nerves play you tricks, to remember that you have heard even me, Brigadier Gerard, say that I have been scared. And besides my terror at this horrible attack, and the maddening pain of my wound, there was a sudden feeling of loathing such as you might feel were some filthy tarantula to strike its fangs into you.

I clutched the creature in both hands, and, hurling him on to the floor of the coach, I stamped on him with my heavy boots. He had drawn a pistol from the front of his soutane, but I kicked it out of his hand, and again I fell with my knees upon his chest. Then, for the first time, he screamed horribly, while I, half blinded, felt about for the sword which he had so cunningly concealed. My hand had just lighted upon it, and I was dashing the blood from my face to see where he lay that I might transfix him, when the whole coach turned partly over upon its side, and my weapon was jerked out of my grasp by the shock.

Before I could recover myself the door was burst open, and I was dragged by the heels on to the road. But even as I was torn out on to the flint stones, and realised that thirty ruffians were standing around me, I was filled with joy, for my pelisse had been pulled over my head in the struggle and was covering one of my eyes, and it was with my wounded eye that I was seeing this gang of brigands. You see for yourself by this pucker and scar how the thin blade passed between socket and ball, but it was only at that moment, when I was dragged from the coach, that I understood that my sight was not gone for ever. The creature’s intention, doubtless, was to drive it through into my brain, and indeed he loosened some portion of the inner bone of my head, so that I afterwards had more trouble from that wound than from any one of the seventeen which I have received.

They dragged me out, these sons of dogs, with curses and execrations, beating me with their fists and kicking me as I lay upon the ground. I had frequently observed that the mountaineers wore cloth swathed round their feet, but never did I imagine that I should have so much cause to be thankful for it. Presently, seeing the blood upon my head, and that I lay quiet, they thought that I was unconscious, whereas I was storing every ugly face among them into my memory, so that I might see them all safely hanged if ever my chance came round. Brawny rascals they were, with yellow handkerchiefs round their heads, and great red sashes stuffed with weapons. They had rolled two rocks across the path, where it took a sharp turn, and it was these which had torn off one of the wheels of the coach and upset us. As to this reptile, who had acted the priest so cleverly and had told me so much of his parish and his mother, he, of course, had known where the ambuscade was laid, and had attempted to put me beyond all resistance at the moment when we reached it.

I cannot tell you how frantic their rage was when they drew him out of the coach and saw the state to which I had reduced him. If he had not got all his deserts, he had, at least, something as a souvenir of his meeting with Etienne Gerard, for his legs dangled aimlessly about, and though the upper part of his body was convulsed with rage and pain, he sat straight down upon his feet when they tried to set him upright. But all the time his two little black eyes, which had seemed so kindly and so innocent in the coach, were glaring at me like a wounded cat, and he spat, and spat, and spat in my direction. My faith! when the wretches jerked me on to my feet again, and when I was dragged off up one of the mountain paths, I understood that a time was coming when I was to need all my courage and resource. My enemy was carried upon the shoulders of two men behind me, and I could hear his hissing and his reviling, first in one ear and then in the other, as I was hurried up the winding track.

I suppose that it must have been for an hour that we ascended, and what with my wounded ankle and the pain from my eye, and the fear lest this wound should have spoiled my appearance, I have made no journey to which I look back with less pleasure. I have never been a good climber at any time, but it is astonishing what you can do, even with a stiff ankle, when you have a copper-coloured brigand at each elbow and a nine-inch blade within touch of your whiskers.

We came at last to a place where the path wound over a ridge, and descended upon the other side through thick pine-trees into a valley which opened to the south. In time of peace I had little doubt that the villains were all smugglers, and that these were the secret paths by which they crossed the Portuguese frontier. There were many mule-tracks, and once I was surprised to see the marks of a large horse where a stream had softened the track. These were explained when, on reaching a place where there was a clearing in the fir wood, I saw the animal itself haltered to a fallen tree. My eyes had hardly rested upon it, when I recognised the great black limbs and the white near fore-leg. It was the very horse which I had begged for in the morning.

What, then, had become of Commissariat Vidal? Was it possible that there was another Frenchman in as perilous a plight as myself? The thought had hardly entered my head when our party stopped and one of them uttered a peculiar cry. It was answered from among the brambles which lined the base of a cliff at one side of a clearing, and an instant later ten or a dozen more brigands came out from amongst them, and the two parties greeted each other. The new-comers surrounded my friend of the brad-awl with cries of grief and sympathy, and then, turning upon me, they brandished their knives and howled at me like the gang of assassins that they were. So frantic were their gestures that I was convinced that my end had come, and was just bracing myself to meet it in a manner which should be worthy of my past reputation, when one of them gave an order and I was dragged roughly across the little glade to the brambles from which this new band had emerged.

A narrow pathway led through them to a deep grotto in the side of the cliff. The sun was already setting outside, and in the cave itself it would have been quite dark but for a pair of torches which blazed from a socket on either side. Between them there was sitting at a rude table a very singular-looking person, whom I saw instantly, from the respect with which the others addressed him, could be none other than the brigand chief who had received, on account of his dreadful character, the sinister name of El Cuchillo.

The man whom I had injured had been carried in and placed upon the top of a barrel, his helpless legs dangling about in front of him, and his cat’s eyes still darting glances of hatred at me. I understood, from the snatches of talk which I could follow between the chief and him, that he was the lieutenant of the band, and that part of his duties was to lie in wait with his smooth tongue and his peaceful garb for travellers like myself. When I thought of how many gallant officers may have been lured to their death by this monster of hypocrisy, it gave me a glow of pleasure to think that I had brought his villainies to an end — though I feared it would be at the price of a life which neither the Emperor nor the army could well spare.

As the injured man still supported upon the barrel by two comrades, was explaining in Spanish all that had befallen him, I was held by several of the villains in front of the table at which the chief was seated, and had an excellent opportunity of observing him. I have seldom seen any man who was less like my idea of a brigand, and especially of a brigand with such a reputation that in a land of cruelty he had earned so dark a nickname. His face was bluff and broad and bland, with ruddy cheeks and comfortable little tufts of side-whiskers, which gave him the appearance of a well-to-do grocer of the Rue St Antoine. He had not any of those flaring sashes or gleaming weapons which distinguished his followers, but on the contrary he wore a good broadcloth coat like a respectable father of a family, and save for his brown leggings there was nothing to indicate a life among the mountains. His surroundings, too, corresponded with himself, and beside his snuff-box upon the table there stood a great brown book, which looked like a commercial ledger. Many other books were ranged along a plank between two powder-casks, and there was a great litter of papers, some of which had verses scribbled upon them. All this I took in while he, leaning indolently back in his chair, was listening to the report of his lieutenant. Having heard everything, he ordered the cripple to be carried out again, and I was left with my three guards, waiting to hear my fate. He took up his pen, and tapping his forehead with the handle of it, he pursed up his lips and looked out of the corner of his eyes at the roof of the grotto.

‘I suppose,’ said he at last, speaking very excellent French, ‘that you are not able to suggest a rhyme for the word Covilha.’

I answered him that my acquaintance with the Spanish language was so limited that I was unable to oblige him.

‘It is a rich language,’ said he, ‘but less prolific in rhymes than either the German or the English. That is why our best work has been done in blank verse, a form of composition which is capable of reaching great heights. But I fear that such subjects are somewhat outside the range of a hussar.’

I was about to answer that if they were good enough for a guerilla, they could not be too much for the light cavalry, but he was already stooping over his half-finished verse. Presently he threw down the pen with an exclamation of satisfaction, and declaimed a few lines which drew a cry of approval from the three ruffians who held me. His broad face blushed like a young girl who receives her first compliment.

‘The critics are in my favour, it appears,’ said he; ‘we amuse ourselves in our long evenings by singing our own ballads, you understand. I have some little facility in that direction, and I do not at all despair of seeing some of my poor efforts in print before long, and with “Madrid” upon the title-page, too. But we must get back to business. May I ask what your name is?’

‘Etienne Gerard.’

‘Rank?’

‘Colonel.’

‘Corps?’

‘The Third Hussars of Conflans.’

‘You are young for a colonel.’

‘My career has been an eventful one.’

‘Tut, that makes it the sadder,’ said he, with his bland smile.

I made no answer to that, but I tried to show him by my bearing that I was ready for the worst which could befall me.

‘By the way, I rather fancy that we have had some of your corps here,’ said he, turning over the pages of his big brown register. ‘We endeavour to keep a record of our operations. Here is a heading under June 24th. Have you not a young officer named Soubiron, a tall, slight youth with light hair?’

‘Certainly.’

‘I see that we buried him upon that date.’

‘Poor lad!’ I cried. ‘And how did he die?’

‘We buried him.’

‘But before you buried him?’

‘You misunderstand me, Colonel. He was not dead before we buried him.’

‘You buried him alive!’

For a moment I was too stunned to act. Then I hurled myself upon the man, as he sat with that placid smile of his upon his lips, and I would have torn his throat out had the three wretches not dragged me away from him. Again and again I made for him, panting and cursing, shaking off this man and that, straining and wrenching, but never quite free. At last, with my jacket torn nearly off my back and blood dripping from my wrists, I was hauled backwards in the bight of a rope and cords passed round my ankles and my arms.

‘You sleek hound!’ I cried. ‘If ever I have you at my sword’s point, I will teach you to maltreat one of my lads. You will find, you bloodthirsty beast, that my Emperor has long arms, and though you lie here like a rat in its hole, the time will come when he will tear you out of it, and you and your vermin will perish together.’

My faith, I have a rough side to my tongue, and there was not a hard word that I had learned in fourteen campaigns which I did not let fly at him; but he sat with the handle of his pen tapping against his forehead and his eyes squinting up at the roof as if he had conceived the idea of some new stanza. It was this occupation of his which showed me how I might get my point into him.

‘You spawn!’ said I; ‘you think that you are safe here, but your life may be as short as that of your absurd verses, and God knows that it could not be shorter than that.’

Ah, you should have seen him bound from his chair when I said the words. This vile monster, who dispensed death and torture as a grocer serves out his figs, had one raw nerve then which I could prod at pleasure. His face grew livid, and those little bourgeois side-whiskers quivered and thrilled with passion.

‘Very good, Colonel. You have said enough,’ he cried, in a choking voice. ‘You say that you have had a very distinguished career. I promise you also a very distinguished ending. Colonel Etienne Gerard of the Third Hussars shall have a death of his own.’

‘And I only beg,’ said I, ‘that you will not commemorate it in verse.’ I had one or two little ironies to utter, but he cut me short by a furious gesture which caused my three guards to drag me from the cave.

Our interview, which I have told you as nearly as I can remember it, must have lasted some time, for it was quite dark when we came out, and the moon was shining very clearly in the heavens. The brigands had lighted a great fire of the dried branches of the fir-trees; not, of course, for warmth, since the night was already very sultry, but to cook their evening meal. A huge copper pot hung over the blaze, and the rascals were lying all round in the yellow glare, so that the scene looked like one of those pictures which Junot stole out of Madrid. There are some soldiers who profess to care nothing for art and the like, but I have always been drawn towards it myself, in which respect I show my good taste and my breeding. I remember, for example, that when Lefebvre was selling the plunder after the fall of Danzig, I bought a very fine picture, called ‘Nymphs Surprised in a Wood,’ and I carried it with me through two campaigns, until my charger had the misfortune to put his hoof through it.

I only tell you this, however, to show you that I was never a mere rough soldier like Rapp or Ney. As I lay in that brigands’ camp, I had little time or inclination to think about such matters. They had thrown me down under a tree, the three villains squatting round and smoking their cigarettes within hands’ touch of me. What to do I could not imagine. In my whole career I do not suppose that I have ten times been in as hopeless a situation. ‘But courage,’ thought I. ‘Courage, my brave boy! You were not made a Colonel of Hussars at twenty-eight because you could dance a cotillon. You are a picked man, Etienne; a man who has come through more than two hundred affairs, and this little one is surely not going to be the last.’ I began eagerly to glance about for some chance of escape, and as I did so I saw something which filled me with great astonishment.

I have already told you that a large fire was burning in the centre of the glade. What with its glare, and what with the moonlight, everything was as clear as possible. On the other side of the glade there was a single tall fir-tree which attracted my attention because its trunk and lower branches were discoloured, as if a large fire had recently been lit underneath it. A clump of bushes grew in front of it which concealed the base. Well, as I looked towards it, I was surprised to see projecting above the bush, and fastened apparently to the tree, a pair of fine riding boots with the toes upwards. At first I thought that they were tied there, but as I looked harder I saw that they were secured by a great nail which was hammered through the foot of each. And then, suddenly, with a thrill of horror, I understood that these were not empty boots; and moving my head a little to the right, I was able to see who it was that had been fastened there, and why a fire had been lit beneath the tree. It is not pleasant to speak or to think of horrors, my friends, and I do not wish to give any of you bad dreams tonight — but I cannot take you among the Spanish guerillas without showing you what kind of men they were, and the sort of warfare that they waged. I will only say that I understood why Monsieur Vidal’s horse was waiting masterless in the grove, and that I hoped he had met this terrible fate with sprightliness and courage, as a good Frenchman ought.

It was not a very cheering sight for me, as you can imagine. When I had been with their chief in the grotto I had been so carried away by my rage at the cruel death of young Soubiron, who was one of the brightest lads who ever threw his thigh over a charger, that I had never given a thought to my own position. Perhaps it would have been more politic had I spoken the ruffian fair, but it was too late now. The cork was drawn and I must drain the wine. Besides, if the harmless commissariat man were put to such a death, what hope was there for me, who had snapped the spine of their lieutenant? No, I was doomed in any case, and it was as well perhaps that I should have put the best face on the matter. This beast could bear witness that Etienne Gerard had died as he had lived, and that one prisoner at least had not quailed before him. I lay there thinking of the various girls who would mourn for me, and of my dear old mother, and of the deplorable loss which I should be, both to my regiment and to the Emperor, and I am not ashamed to confess to you that I shed tears as I thought of the general consternation which my premature end would give rise to.

But all the time I was taking the very keenest notice of everything which might possibly help me. I am not a man who would lie like a sick horse waiting for the farrier sergeant and the pole-axe. First I would give a little tug at my ankle cords, and then another at those which were round my wrists, and all the time that I was trying to loosen them I was peering round to see if I could find something which was in my favour. There was one thing which was very evident. A hussar is but half formed without a horse, and there was my other half quietly grazing within thirty yards of me. Then I observed yet another thing. The path by which we had come over the mountains was so steep that a horse could only be led across it slowly and with difficulty, but in the other direction the ground appeared to be more open, and to lead straight down into a gently-sloping valley. Had I but my feet in yonder stirrups and my sabre in my hand, a single bold dash might take me out of the power of these vermin of the rocks.

I was still thinking it over and straining with my wrists and my ankles, when their chief came out from his grotto, and after some talk with his lieutenant, who lay groaning near the fire, they both nodded their heads and looked across at me. He then said some few words to the band, who clapped their hands and laughed uproariously. Things looked ominous, and I was delighted to feel that my hands were so far free that I could easily slip them through the cords if I wished. But with my ankles I feared that I could do nothing, for when I strained it brought such pain into my lance-wound that I had to gnaw my moustache to keep from crying out. I could only lie still, half-free and half-bound, and see what turn things were likely to take.

For a little I could not make out what they were after. One of the rascals climbed up a well-grown fir-tree upon one side of the glade, and tied a rope round the top of the trunk. He then fastened another rope in the same fashion to a similar tree upon the other side. The two loose ends were now dangling down, and I waited with some curiosity, and just a little trepidation also, to see what they would do next. The whole band pulled upon one of the ropes until they had bent the strong young tree down into a semi-circle, and they then fastened it to a stump, so as to hold it so. When they had bent the other tree down in a similar fashion, the two summits were within a few feet of each other, though, as you understand, they would each spring back into their original position the instant that they were released. I already saw the diabolical plan which these miscreants had formed.

‘I presume that you are a strong man, Colonel,’ said the chief, coming towards me with his hateful smile.

‘If you will have the kindness to loosen these cords,’ I answered, ‘I will show you how strong I am.’

‘We were all interested to see whether you were as strong as these two young saplings,’ said he. ‘It is our intention, you see, to tie one end of each rope round your ankles and then let the trees go. If you are stronger than the trees, then, of course, no harm would be done; if, on the other hand, the trees are stronger than you, why, in that case, Colonel, we may have a souvenir of you upon each side of our little glade.’

He laughed as he spoke, and at the sight of it the whole forty of them laughed also. Even now if I am in my darker humour, or if I have a touch of my old Lithuanian ague, I see in my sleep that ring of dark, savage faces, with their cruel eyes, and the firelight flashing upon their strong white teeth.

It is astonishing — and I have heard many make the same remark — how acute one’s senses become at such a crisis as this. I am convinced that at no moment is one living so vividly, so acutely, as at the instant when a violent and foreseen death overtakes one. I could smell the resinous fagots, I could see every twig upon the ground, I could hear every rustle of the branches, as I have never smelled or seen or heard save at such times of danger. And so it was that long before anyone else, before even the time when the chief had addressed me, I had heard a low, monotonous sound, far away indeed, and yet coming nearer at every instant. At first it was but a murmur, a rumble, but by the time he had finished speaking, while the assassins were untying my ankles in order to lead me to the scene of my murder, I heard, as plainly as ever I heard anything in my life, the clinking of horseshoes and the jingling of bridle-chains, with the clank of sabres against stirrup-irons. Is it likely that I, who had lived with the light cavalry since the first hair shaded my lip, would mistake the sound of troopers on the march?

‘Help, comrades, help!’ I shrieked, and though they struck me across the mouth and tried to drag me up to the trees, I kept on yelling, ‘Help me, my brave boys! Help me, my children! They are murdering your colonel!’

For the moment my wounds and my troubles had brought on a delirium, and I looked for nothing less than my five hundred hussars, kettle-drums and all, to appear at the opening of the glade.

But that which really appeared was very different to anything which I had conceived. Into the clear space there came galloping a fine young man upon a most beautiful roan horse. He was fresh-faced and pleasant-looking, with the most debonair bearing in the world and the most gallant way of carrying himself — a way which reminded me somewhat of my own. He wore a singular coat which had once been red all over, but which was now stained to the colour of a withered oak-leaf wherever the weather could reach it. His shoulder-straps, however, were of golden lace, and he had a bright metal helmet upon his head, with a coquettish white plume upon one side of its crest. He trotted his horse up the glade, while behind him rode four cavaliers in the same dress — all clean-shaven, with round, comely faces, looking to me more like monks than dragoons. At a short, gruff order they halted with a rattle of arms, while their leader cantered forward, the fire beating upon his eager face and the beautiful head of his charger. I knew, of course, by the strange coats that they were English. It was the first sight that I had ever had of them, but from their stout bearing and their masterful way I could see at a glance that what I had always been told was true, and that they were excellent people to fight against.

‘Well, well, well!’ cried the young officer, in sufficiently bad French, ‘what game are you up to here? Who was that who was yelling for help, and what are you trying to do to him?’

It was at that moment that I learned to bless those months which Obriant, the descendant of the Irish kings, had spent in teaching me the tongue of the English. My ankles had just been freed, so that I had only to slip my hands out of the cords, and with a single rush I had flown across, picked up my sabre where it lay by the fire, and hurled myself on to the saddle of poor Vidal's horse. Yes, for all my wounded ankle, I never put foot to stirrup, but was in the seat in a single bound. I tore the halter from the tree, and before these villains could so much as snap a pistol at me I was beside the English officer.

'I surrender to you, sir,' I cried; though I daresay my English was not very much better than his French. 'If you will look at that tree to the left you will see what these villains do to the honourable gentlemen who fall into their hands.'

The fire had flared up at that moment, and there was poor Vidal exposed before them, as horrible an object as one could see in a nightmare. 'Godam!' cried the officer, and 'Godam!' cried each of the four troopers, which is the same as with us when we cry 'Mon Dieu!' Out rasped the five swords, and the four men closed up. One, who wore a sergeant's chevrons, laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

'Fight for your skin, froggy,' said he.

Ah, it was so fine to have a horse between my thighs and a weapon in my grip. I waved it above my head and shouted in my exultation. The chief had come forward with that odious smiling face of his.

'Your excellency will observe that this Frenchman is our prisoner,' said he.

'You are a rascally robber,' said the Englishman, shaking his sword at him. 'It is a disgrace to us to have such allies. By my faith, if Lord Wellington were of my mind we would swing you up on the nearest tree.'

'But my prisoner?' said the brigand, in his suave voice.

'He shall come with us to the British camp.'

'Just a word in your ear before you take him.'

He approached the young officer, and then turning as quick as a flash, he fired his pistol in my face. The bullet scored its way through my hair and burst a hole on each side of my busby. Seeing that he had missed me, he raised the pistol and was about to hurl it at me when the English sergeant, with a single back-handed cut, nearly severed his head from his body. His blood had not reached the ground, nor the last curse died on his lips, before the whole horde was upon us, but with a dozen bounds and as many slashes we were all safely out of the glade, and galloping down the winding track which led to the valley.

It was not until we had left the ravine far behind us and were right out in the open fields that we ventured to halt, and to see what injuries we had sustained. For me, wounded and weary as I was, my heart was beating proudly, and my chest was nearly bursting my tunic to think that I, Etienne Gerard, had left this gang of murderers so much by which to remember me. My faith, they would think twice before they ventured again to lay hands upon one of the Third Hussars. So carried away was I that I made a small oration to these brave Englishmen, and told them who it was that they had helped to rescue. I would have spoken of glory also, and of the sympathies of brave men, but the officer cut me short.

‘That’s all right,’ said he. ‘Any injuries, Sergeant?’

‘Trooper Jones’s horse hit with a pistol bullet on the fetlock.’

‘Trooper Jones to go with us. Sergeant Halliday, with troopers Harvey and Smith, to keep to the right until they touch the vedettes of the German Hussars.’

So these three jingled away together, while the officer and I, followed at some distance by the trooper whose horse had been wounded, rode straight down in the direction of the English camp. Very soon we had opened our hearts, for we each liked the other from the beginning. He was of the nobility, this brave lad, and he had been sent out scouting by Lord Wellington to see if there were any signs of our advancing through the mountains. It is one advantage of a wandering life like mine, that you learn to pick up those bits of knowledge which distinguish the man of the world. I have, for example, hardly ever met a Frenchman who could repeat an English title correctly. If I had not travelled I should not be able to say with confidence that this young man’s real name was Milor the Hon. Sir Russell, Bart., this last being an honourable distinction, so that it was as the Bart that I usually addressed him, just as in Spanish one might say ‘the Don.’

As we rode beneath the moonlight in the lovely Spanish night, we spoke our minds to each other, as if we were brothers. We were both of an age, you see, both of the light cavalry also (the Sixteenth Light Dragoons was his regiment), and both with the same hopes and ambitions. Never have I learned to know a man so quickly as I did the Bart. He gave me the name of a girl whom he had loved at a garden called Vauxhall, and, for my own part, I spoke to him of little Coralie, of the Opera. He took a lock of hair from his bosom, and I a garter. Then we nearly quarrelled over hussar and dragoon, for he was absurdly proud of his regiment, and you should have seen him curl his lip and clap his hand to his hilt when I said that I hoped it might never be its misfortune to come in the way of the Third. Finally, he began to speak about what the English call sport, and he told such stories of the money which he had lost over which of two cocks could kill the other, or which of two men could strike the other the most in a fight for a prize, that I was filled with astonishment. He was ready to bet upon anything in the most wonderful manner, and when I chanced to see a shooting star he was anxious to bet that he would see more than me, twenty-five francs a star, and it was only when I explained that my purse was in the hands of the brigands that he would give over the idea.

Well, we chatted away in this very amiable fashion until the day began to break, when suddenly we heard a great volley of musketry from somewhere in front of us. It was very rocky and broken ground, and I thought, although I could see nothing, that a general engagement had broken out. The Bart laughed at my idea, however, and explained that the sound came from the English camp, where every man emptied his piece each morning so as to make sure of having a dry priming.

‘In another mile we shall be up with the outposts,’ said he.

I glanced round at this, and I perceived that we had trotted along at so good a pace during the time that we were keeping up our pleasant chat, that the dragoon with the lame horse was altogether out of sight. I looked on every side, but in the whole of that vast rocky valley there was no one save only the Bart and I — both of us armed, you understand, and both of us well mounted. I began to ask myself whether after all it was quite necessary that I should ride that mile which would bring me to the British outposts.

Now, I wish to be very clear with you on this point, my friends, for I would not have you think that I was acting dishonourably or ungratefully to the man who had helped me away from the brigands. You must remember that of all duties the strongest is that which a commanding officer owes to his men. You must also bear in mind that war is a game which is played under fixed rules, and when these rules are broken one must at once claim the forfeit. If, for example, I had given a parole, then I should have been an infamous wretch had I dreamed of escaping. But no parole had been asked of me. Out of over-confidence, and the chance of the lame horse dropping behind, the Bart had permitted me to get upon equal terms with him. Had it been I who had taken him, I should have used him as courteously as he had me, but, at the same time, I should have respected his enterprise so far as to have deprived him of his sword, and seen that I had at least one guard beside myself. I reined up my horse and explained this to him, asking him at the same time whether he saw any breach of honour in my leaving him.

He thought about it, and several times repeated that which the English say when they mean ‘Mon Dieu.’

‘You would give me the slip, would you?’ said he.

‘If you can give no reason against it.’

‘The only reason that I can think of,’ said the Bart, ‘is that I should instantly cut your head off if you were to attempt it.’

‘Two can play at that game, my dear Bart,’ said I.

‘Then we’ll see who can play at it best,’ he cried, pulling out his sword.

I had drawn mine also, but I was quite determined not to hurt this admirable young man who had been my benefactor.

‘Consider,’ said I, ‘you say that I am your prisoner. I might with equal reason say that you are mine. We are alone here, and though I have no doubt that you are an excellent swordsman, you can hardly hope to hold your own against the best blade in the six light cavalry brigades.’

His answer was a cut at my head. I parried and shore off half of his white plume. He thrust at my breast. I turned his point and cut away the other half of his cockade.

‘Curse your monkey-tricks!’ he cried, as I wheeled my horse away from him.

‘Why should you strike at me?’ said I. ‘You see that I will not strike back.’

‘That’s all very well,’ said he; ‘but you’ve got to come along with me to the camp.’

‘I shall never see the camp,’ said I.

‘I’ll lay you nine to four you do,’ he cried, as he made at me, sword in hand.

But those words of his put something new into my head. Could we not decide the matter in some better way than fighting? The Bart was placing me in such a position that I should have to hurt him, or he would certainly hurt me. I avoided his rush, though his sword-point was within an inch of my neck.

‘I have a proposal,’ I cried. ‘We shall throw dice as to which is the prisoner of the other.’

He smiled at this. It appealed to his love of sport.

‘Where are your dice?’ he cried.

‘I have none.’

‘Nor I. But I have cards.’

‘Cards let it be,’ said I.

‘And the game?’

‘I leave it to you.’

‘Écarté, then — the best of three.’

I could not help smiling as I agreed, for I do not suppose that there were three men in France who were my masters at the game. I told the Bart as much as we dismounted. He smiled also as he listened.

‘I was counted the best player at Watier’s,’ said he. ‘With even luck you deserve to get off if you beat me.’

So we tethered our two horses and sat down one on either side of a great flat rock. The Bart took a pack of cards out of his tunic, and I had only to see him shuffle to convince me that I had no novice to deal with. We cut, and the deal fell to him.

My faith, it was a stake worth playing for. He wished to add a hundred gold pieces a game, but what was money when the fate of Colonel Etienne Gerard hung upon the cards? I felt as though all those who had reason to be interested in the game — my mother, my hussars, the Sixth Corps d’Armée, Ney, Massena, even the Emperor himself — were forming a ring round us in that desolate valley. Heavens, what a blow to one and all of them should the cards go against me! But I was confident, for my écarté play was as famous as my swordsmanship, and save old Bouvet of the Hussars of Bercheny, who won seventy-six out of one hundred and fifty games off me, I have always had the best of a series.

The first game I won right off, though I must confess that the cards were with me, and that my adversary could have done no more. In the second, I never played better and saved a trick by a finesse, but the Bart voled me once, marked the king, and ran out in the second hand. My faith, we were so excited that he laid his helmet down beside him and I my busby.

‘I’ll lay my roan mare against your black horse,’ said he.

‘Done!’ said I.

‘Sword against sword.’

‘Done!’ said I.

‘Saddle, bridle, and stirrups!’ he cried.

‘Done!’ I shouted.

I had caught this spirit of sport from him. I would have laid my hussars against his dragoons had they been ours to pledge.

And then began the game of games. Oh, he played, this Englishman — he played in a way that was worthy of such a stake. But I, my friends, I was superb! Of the five which I had to make to win, I gained three on the first hand. The Bart bit his moustache and drummed his hands, while I already felt myself at the head of my dear little rascals. On the second, I turned the king, but lost two tricks — and my score was four to his two. When I saw my next hand I could not but give a cry of delight. ‘If I cannot gain my freedom on this,’ thought I, ‘I deserve to remain for ever in chains.’

Give me the cards, landlord, and I will lay them out on the table for you.

Here was my hand: knave and ace of clubs, queen and knave of diamonds, and king of hearts. Clubs were trumps, mark you, and I had but one point between me and freedom. He knew it was the crisis, and he undid his tunic. I threw my dolman on the ground. He led the ten of spades. I took it with my ace of trumps. One point in my favour. The correct play was to clear the trumps, and I led the knave. Down came the queen upon it, and the game was equal. He led the eight of spades, and I could only discard my queen of diamonds. Then came the seven of spades, and the hair stood straight up on my head. We each threw down a king at the final. He had won two points, and my beautiful hand had been mastered by his inferior one. I could have rolled on the ground as I thought of it. They used to play very good écarté at Watier’s in the year ‘10. I say it — I, Brigadier Gerard.

The last game was now four all. This next hand must settle it one way or the other. He undid his sash, and I put away my sword-belt. He was cool, this Englishman, and I tried to be so also, but the perspiration would trickle into my eyes. The deal lay with him, and I may confess to you, my friends, that my hands shook so that I could hardly pick my cards from the rock. But when I raised them, what was the first thing that my eyes rested upon? It was the king, the king, the glorious king of trumps! My mouth was open to declare it when the words were frozen upon my lips by the appearance of my comrade.

He held his cards in his hand, but his jaw had fallen, and his eyes were staring over my shoulder with the most dreadful expression of consternation and surprise. I whisked round, and I was myself amazed at what I saw.

Three men were standing quite close to us — fifteen mètres at the farthest. The middle one was of a good height, and yet not too tall — about the same height, in fact, that I am myself. He was clad in a dark uniform with a small cocked hat, and some sort of white plume upon the side. But I had little thought of his dress. It was his face, his gaunt cheeks, his beak-like nose, his masterful blue eyes, his thin, firm slit of a mouth which made one feel that this was a wonderful man, a man of a million. His brows were tied into a knot, and he cast such a glance at my poor Bart from under them that one by one the cards came fluttering down from his nerveless fingers. Of the two other men, one, who had a face as brown and hard as though it had been carved out of old oak, wore a bright red coat, while the other, a fine portly man with bushy side-whiskers, was in a blue jacket with gold facings. Some little distance behind, three orderlies were holding as many horses, and an escort of dragoons was waiting in the rear.

‘Heh, Crauford, what the deuce is this?’ asked the thin man.

‘D’you hear, sir?’ cried the man with the red coat. ‘Lord Wellington wants to know what this means.’

My poor Bart broke into an account of all that had occurred, but that rock-face never softened for an instant.

‘Pretty fine, ‘pon my word, General Crauford,’ he broke in. ‘The discipline of this force must be maintained, sir. Report yourself at headquarters as a prisoner.’

It was dreadful to me to see the Bart mount his horse and ride off with hanging head. I could not endure it. I threw myself before this English General. I pleaded with him for my friend. I told him how I, Colonel Gerard, would witness what a dashing young officer he was. Ah, my eloquence might have melted the hardest heart; I brought tears to my own eyes, but none to his. My voice broke, and I could say no more.

‘What weight do you put on your mules, sir, in the French service?’ he asked. Yes, that was all this phlegmatic Englishman had to answer to these burning words of mine. That was his reply to what would have made a Frenchman weep upon my shoulder.

‘What weight on a mule?’ asked the man with the red coat.

‘Two hundred and ten pounds,’ said I.

‘Then you load them deucedly badly,’ said Lord Wellington. ‘Remove the prisoner to the rear.’

His dragoons closed in upon me, and I — I was driven mad, as I thought that the game had been in my hands, and that I ought at that moment to be a free man. I held the cards up in front of the General.

‘See, my lord!’ I cried; ‘I played for my freedom and I won, for, as you perceive, I hold the king.’

For the first time a slight smile softened his gaunt face.

‘On the contrary,’ said he, as he mounted his horse, ‘it is I who won, for, as you perceive, my King holds you.’

HOW THE KING HELD THE BRIGADIER

Murat was undoubtedly an excellent cavalry officer, but he had too much swagger, which spoils many a good soldier. Lasalle, too, was a very dashing leader, but he ruined himself with wine and folly. Now I, Etienne Gerard, was always totally devoid of swagger, and at the same time I was very abstemious, except, maybe, at the end of a campaign, or when I met an old comrade-in-arms. For these reasons I might, perhaps, had it not been for a certain diffidence, have claimed to be the most valuable officer in my own branch of the Service. It is true that I never rose to be more than a chief of brigade, but then, as everyone knows, no one had a chance of rising to the top unless he had the good fortune to be with the Emperor in his early campaigns. Except Lasalle, and Labau, and Drouet, I can hardly remember any one of the generals who had not already made his name before the Egyptian business. Even I, with all my brilliant qualities, could only attain the head of my brigade, and also the special medal of honour, which I received from the Emperor himself, and which I keep at home in a leathern pouch.

But though I never rose higher than this, my qualities were very well known to those who had served with me, and also to the English. After they had captured me in the way which I described to you the other night, they kept a very good guard over me at Oporto, and I promise you that they did not give such a formidable opponent a chance of slipping through their fingers. It was on the 10th of August that I was escorted on board the transport which was to take us to England, and behold me before the end of the month in the great prison which had been built for us at Dartmoor!

‘L’hôtel Français, et Pension,’ we used to call it, for you understand that we were all brave men there, and that we did not lose our spirits because we were in adversity.

It was only those officers who refused to give their parole who were confined at Dartmoor, and most of the prisoners were seamen, or from the ranks. You ask me, perhaps, why it was that I did not give this parole, and so enjoy the same good treatment as most of my brother officers. Well, I had two reasons, and both of them were sufficiently strong.

In the first place, I had so much confidence in myself, that I was quite convinced that I could escape. In the second, my family, though of good repute, has never been wealthy, and I could not bring myself to take anything from the small income of my mother. On the other hand, it would never do for a man like me to be outshone by the bourgeois society of an English country town, or to be without the means of showing courtesies and attentions to those ladies whom I should attract. It was for these reasons that I preferred to be buried in the dreadful prison of Dartmoor. I wish now to tell you of my adventures in England, and how far Milor Wellington's words were true when he said that his King would hold me.

And first of all I may say that if it were not that I have set off to tell you about what befell myself, I could keep you here until morning with my stories about Dartmoor itself, and about the singular things which occurred there. It was one of the very strangest places in the whole world, for there, in the middle of that great desolate waste, were herded together seven or eight thousand men — warriors, you understand, men of experience and courage. Around there were a double wall and a ditch, and warders and soldiers; but, my faith! you could not coop men like that up like rabbits in a hutch! They would escape by twos and tens and twenties, and then the cannon would boom, and the search parties run, and we, who were left behind, would laugh and dance and shout 'Vive l'Empereur' until the warders would turn their muskets upon us in their passion. And then we would have our little mutinies, too, and up would come the infantry and the guns from Plymouth, and that would set us yelling 'Vive l'Empereur' once more, as though we wished them to hear us in Paris. We had lively moments at Dartmoor, and we contrived that those who were about us should be lively also.

You must know that the prisoners there had their own Courts of Justice, in which they tried their own cases, and inflicted their own punishments. Stealing and quarrelling were punished — but most of all treachery. When I came there first there was a man, Meunier, from Rheims, who had given information of some plot to escape. Well, that night, owing to some form or other which had to be gone through, they did not take him out from among the other prisoners, and though he wept and screamed, and grovelled upon the ground, they left him there amongst the comrades whom he had betrayed. That night there was a trial with a whispered accusation and a whispered defence, a gagged prisoner, and a judge whom none could see. In the morning, when they came for their man with papers for his release, there was not as much of him left as you could put upon your thumb-nail. They were ingenious people, these prisoners, and they had their own way of managing.

We officers, however, lived in a separate wing, and a very singular group of people we were. They had left us our uniforms, so that there was hardly a corps which had served under Victor, or Massena, or Ney, which was not represented there, and some had been there from the time when Junot was beaten at Vimiera. We had chasseurs in their green tunics, and hussars, like myself, and blue-coated dragoons, and white-fronted lancers, and voltigeurs, and grenadiers, and the men of the artillery and engineers. But the greater part were naval officers, for the English had had the better of us upon the seas. I could never understand this until I journeyed myself from Oporto to Plymouth, when I lay for seven days upon my back, and could not have stirred had I seen the eagle of the regiment carried off before my eyes. It was in perfidious weather like this that Nelson took advantage of us.

I had no sooner got into Dartmoor than I began to plan to get out again, and you can readily believe that, with wits sharpened by twelve years of warfare, it was not very long before I saw my way.

You must know, in the first place, that I had a very great advantage in having some knowledge of the English language. I learned it during the months that I spent before Danzig, from Adjutant Obriant, of the Regiment Irlandais, who was sprung from the ancient kings of the country. I was quickly able to speak it with some facility, for I do not take long to master anything to which I set my mind. In three months I could not only express my meaning, but I could use the idioms of the people. It was Obriant who taught me to say ‘Be jabers,’ just as we might say ‘Ma foi’; and also ‘The curse of Crummle!’ which means ‘Ventre bleu!’ Many a time I have seen the English smile with pleasure when they have heard me speak so much like one of themselves.

We officers were put two in a cell, which was very little to my taste, for my room-mate was a tall, silent man named Beaumont, of the Flying Artillery, who had been taken by the English cavalry at Astorga.

It is seldom I meet a man of whom I cannot make a friend, for my disposition and manners are — as you know them. But this fellow had never a smile for my jests, nor an ear for my sorrows, but would sit looking at me with his sullen eyes, until sometimes I thought that his two years of captivity had driven him crazy. Ah, how I longed that old Bouvet, or any of my comrades of the hussars, was there, instead of this mummy of a man. But such as he was I had to make the best of him, and it was very evident that no escape could be made unless he were my partner in it, for what could I possibly do without him observing me? I hinted at it, therefore, and then by degrees I spoke more plainly, until it seemed to me that I had prevailed upon him to share my lot.

I tried the walls, and I tried the floor, and I tried the ceiling, but though I tapped and probed, they all appeared to be very thick and solid. The door was of iron, shutting with a spring lock, and provided with a small grating, through which a warder looked twice in every night. Within there were two beds, two stools, two washstands — nothing more. It was enough for my wants, for when had I had as much during those twelve years spent in camps? But how was I to get out? Night after night I thought of my five hundred hussars, and had dreadful nightmares, in which I fancied that the whole regiment needed shoeing, or that my horses were all bloated with green fodder, or that they were foundered from bogland, or that six squadrons were clubbed in the presence of the Emperor. Then I would awake in a cold sweat, and set to work picking and tapping at the walls once more; for I knew very well that there is no difficulty which cannot be overcome by a ready brain and a pair of cunning hands.

There was a single window in our cell, which was too small to admit a child. It was further defended by a thick iron bar in the centre. It was not a very promising point of escape, as you will allow, but I became more and more convinced that our efforts must be directed towards it. To make matters worse, it only led out into the exercise yard, which was surrounded by two high walls. Still, as I said to my sullen comrade, it is time to talk of the Vistula when you are over the Rhine. I got a small piece of iron, therefore, from the fittings of my bed, and I set to work to loosen the plaster at the top and the bottom of the bar. Three hours I would work, and then leap into my bed upon the sound of the warder’s step. Then another three hours, and then very often another yet, for I found that Beaumont was so slow and clumsy at it that it was on myself only that I could rely.

I pictured to myself my Third of Hussars waiting just outside that window, with kettle-drums and standards and leopard-skin schabraques all complete. Then I would work like a madman, until my iron was crusted with blood, as if with rust. And so, night by night, I loosened that stony plaster, and hid it away in the stuffing of my pillow, until the hour came when the iron shook; and then with one good wrench it came off in my hand, and my first step had been made towards freedom.

You will ask me what better off I was, since, as I have said, a child could not have fitted through the opening. I will tell you. I had gained two things — a tool and a weapon. With the one I might loosen the stone which flanked the window. With the other I might defend myself when I had scrambled through. So now I turned my attention to that stone, and I picked and picked with the sharpened end of my bar until I had worked out the mortar all round. You understand, of course, that during the day I replaced everything in its position, and that the warder was never permitted to see a speck upon the floor. At the end of three weeks I had separated the stone, and had the rapture of drawing it through, and seeing a hole left with ten stars shining through it, where there had been but four before. All was ready for us now, and I had replaced the stone, smearing the edges of it round with a little fat and soot, so as to hide the cracks where the mortar should have been. In three nights the moon would be gone, and that seemed the best time for our attempt.

I had now no doubt at all about getting into the yards, but I had very considerable misgivings as to how I was to get out again. It would be too humiliating, after trying here, and trying there, to have to go back to my hole again in despair, or to be arrested by the guards outside, and thrown into those damp underground cells which are reserved for prisoners who are caught in escaping. I set to work, therefore, to plan what I should do. I have never, as you know, had the chance of showing what I could do as a general. Sometimes, after a glass or two of wine, I have found myself capable of thinking out surprising combinations, and have felt that if Napoleon had intrusted me with an army corps, things might have gone differently with him. But however that may be, there is no doubt that in the small stratagems of war, and in that quickness of invention which is so necessary for an officer of light cavalry, I could hold my own against anyone. It was now that I had need of it, and I felt sure that it would not fail me.

The inner wall which I had to scale was built of bricks, 12ft. high, with a row of iron spikes, 3in. apart upon the top. The outer I had only caught a glimpse of once or twice, when the gate of the exercise yard was open. It appeared to be about the same height, and was also spiked at the top. The space between the walls was over twenty feet, and I had reason to believe that there were no sentries there, except at the gates. On the other hand, I knew that there was a line of soldiers outside. Behold the little nut, my friends, which I had to open with no crackers, save these two hands.

One thing upon which I relied was the height of my comrade Beaumont. I have already said that he was a very tall man, six feet at least, and it seemed to me that if I could mount upon his shoulders, and get my hands upon the spikes, I could easily scale the wall. Could I pull my big companion up after me? That was the question, for when I set forth with a comrade, even though it be one for whom I bear no affection, nothing on earth would make me abandon him. If I climbed the wall and he could not follow me, I should be compelled to return to him. He did not seem to concern himself much about it, however, so I hoped that he had confidence in his own activity.

Then another very important matter was the choice of the sentry who should be on duty in front of my window at the time of our attempt. They were changed every two hours to insure their vigilance, but I, who watched them closely each night out of my window, knew that there was a great difference between them. There were some who were so keen that a rat could not cross the yard unseen, while others thought only of their own ease, and could sleep as soundly leaning upon a musket as if they were at home upon a feather bed. There was one especially, a fat, heavy man, who would retire into the shadow of the wall and doze so comfortably during his two hours, that I have dropped pieces of plaster from my window at his very feet, without his observing it. By good luck, this fellow’s watch was due from twelve to two upon the night which we had fixed upon for our enterprise.

As the last day passed, I was so filled with nervous agitation that I could not control myself, but ran ceaselessly about my cell, like a mouse in a cage. Every moment I thought that the warder would detect the looseness of the bar, or that the sentry would observe the unmortared stone, which I could not conceal outside, as I did within. As for my companion, he sat brooding upon the end of his bed, looking at me in a sidelong fashion from time to time, and biting his nails like one who is deep in thought.

‘Courage, my friend!’ I cried, slapping him upon the shoulder. ‘You will see your guns before another month be past.’

‘That is very well,’ said he. ‘But whither will you fly when you get free?’

‘To the coast,’ I answered. ‘All comes right for a brave man, and I shall make straight for my regiment.’

‘You are more likely to make straight for the underground cells, or for the Portsmouth hulks,’ said he.

‘A soldier takes his chances,’ I remarked. ‘It is only the poltroon who reckons always upon the worst.’

I raised a flush in each of his sallow cheeks at that, and I was glad of it, for it was the first sign of spirit which I had ever observed in him. For a moment he put his hand out towards his water-jug, as though he would have hurled it at me, but then he shrugged his shoulders and sat in silence once more, biting his nails, and scowling down at the floor. I could not but think, as I looked at him, that perhaps I was doing the Flying Artillery a very bad service by bringing him back to them.

I never in my life have known an evening pass as slowly as that one. Towards nightfall a wind sprang up, and as the darkness deepened it blew harder and harder, until a terrible gale was whistling over the moor. As I looked out of my window I could not catch a glimpse of a star, and the black clouds were flying low across the heavens. The rain was pouring down, and what with its hissing and splashing, and the howling and screaming of the wind, it was impossible for me to hear the steps of the sentinels. ‘If I cannot hear them,’ thought I, ‘then it is unlikely that they can hear me’; and I waited with the utmost impatience until the time when the inspector should have come round for his nightly peep through our grating. Then having peered through the darkness, and seen nothing of the sentry, who was doubtless crouching in some corner out of the rain, I felt that the moment was come. I removed the bar, pulled out the stone, and motioned to my companion to pass through.

‘After you, Colonel,’ said he.

‘Will you not go first?’ I asked.

‘I had rather you showed me the way.’

‘Come after me, then, but come silently, as you value your life.’

In the darkness I could hear the fellow’s teeth chattering, and I wondered whether a man ever had such a partner in a desperate enterprise. I seized the bar, however, and mounting upon my stool, I thrust my head and shoulders into the hole. I had wriggled through as far as my waist, when my companion seized me suddenly by the knees, and yelled at the top of his voice: ‘Help! Help! A prisoner is escaping!’

Ah, my friends, what did I not feel at that moment! Of course, I saw in an instant the game of this vile creature. Why should he risk his skin in climbing walls when he might be sure of a free pardon from the English for having prevented the escape of one so much more distinguished than himself? I had recognised him as a poltroon and a sneak, but I had not understood the depth of baseness to which he could descend. One who has spent his life among gentlemen and men of honour does not think of such things until they happen.

The blockhead did not seem to understand that he was lost more certainly than I. I writhed back in the darkness, and seizing him by the throat, I struck him twice with my iron bar. At the first blow he yelped as a little cur does when you tread upon its paw. At the second, down he fell with a groan upon the floor. Then I seated myself upon my bed, and waited resignedly for whatever punishment my gaolers might inflict upon me.

But a minute passed and yet another, with no sound save the heavy, snoring breathing of the senseless wretch upon the floor. Was it possible, then, that amid the fury of the storm his warning cries had passed unheeded? At first it was but a tiny hope, another minute and it was probable, another and it was certain. There was no sound in the corridor, none in the courtyard. I wiped the cold sweat from my brow, and asked myself what I should do next.

One thing seemed certain. The man on the floor must die. If I left him I could not tell how short a time it might be before he gave the alarm. I dare not strike a light, so I felt about in the darkness until my hand came upon something wet, which I knew to be his head. I raised my iron bar, but there was something, my friends, which prevented me from bringing it down. In the heat of fight I have slain many men — men of honour, too, who had done me no injury. Yet here was this wretch, a creature too foul to live, who had tried to work me so great a mischief, and yet I could not bring myself to crush his skull in. Such deeds are very well for a Spanish partida — or for that matter a sansculotte of the Faubourg St Antoine — but not for a soldier and a gentleman like me.

However, the heavy breathing of the fellow made me hope that it might be a very long time before he recovered his senses. I gagged him, therefore, and bound him with strips of blanket to the bed, so that in his weakened condition there was good reason to think that, in any case, he might not get free before the next visit of the warder. But now again I was faced with new difficulties, for you will remember that I had relied upon his height to help me over the walls. I could have sat down and shed tears of despair had not the thought of my mother and of the Emperor come to sustain me. ‘Courage!’ said I. ‘If it were anyone but Etienne Gerard he would be in a bad fix now; that is a young man who is not so easily caught.’

I set to work therefore upon Beaumont’s sheet as well as my own, and by tearing them into strips and then plaiting them together, I made a very excellent rope. This I tied securely to the centre of my iron bar, which was a little over a foot in length. Then I slipped out into the yard, where the rain was pouring and the wind screaming louder than ever. I kept in the shadow of the prison wall, but it was as black as the ace of spades, and I could not see my own hand in front of me. Unless I walked into the sentinel I felt that I had nothing to fear from him. When I had come under the wall I threw up my bar, and to my joy it stuck the very first time between the spikes at the top. I climbed up my rope, pulled it after me, and dropped down on the other side. Then I scaled the second wall, and was sitting astride among the spikes upon the top, when I saw something twinkle in the darkness beneath me. It was the bayonet of the sentinel below, and so close was it (the second wall being rather lower than the first) that I could easily, by leaning over, have unscrewed it from its socket. There he was, humming a tune to himself, and cuddling up against the wall to keep himself warm, little thinking that a desperate man within a few feet of him was within an ace of stabbing him to the heart with his own weapon. I was already bracing myself for the spring when the fellow, with an oath, shouldered his musket, and I heard his steps squelching through the mud as he resumed his beat. I slipped down my rope, and, leaving it hanging, I ran at the top of my speed across the moor.

Heavens, how I ran! The wind buffeted my face and buzzed in my nostrils. The rain pringled upon my skin and hissed past my ears. I stumbled into holes. I tripped over bushes. I fell among brambles. I was torn and breathless and bleeding. My tongue was like leather, my feet like lead, and my heart beating like a kettle-drum. Still I ran, and I ran, and I ran.

But I had not lost my head, my friends. Everything was done with a purpose. Our fugitives always made for the coast. I was determined to go inland, and the more so as I had told Beaumont the opposite. I would fly to the north, and they would seek me in the south. Perhaps you will ask me how I could tell which was which on such a night. I answer that it was by the wind. I had observed in the prison that it came from the north, and so, as long as I kept my face to it, I was going in the right direction.

Well, I was rushing along in this fashion when, suddenly, I saw two yellow lights shining out of the darkness in front of me. I paused for a moment, uncertain what I should do. I was still in my hussar uniform, you understand, and it seemed to me that the very first thing that I should aim at was to get some dress which should not betray me. If these lights came from a cottage, it was probable enough that I might find what I wanted there. I approached, therefore, feeling very sorry that I had left my iron bar behind; for I was determined to fight to the death before I should be retaken.

But very soon I found that there was no cottage there. The lights were two lamps hung upon each side of a carriage, and by their glare I saw that a broad road lay in front of me. Crouching among the bushes, I observed that there were two horses to the equipage, that a small post-boy was standing at their heads, and that one of the wheels was lying in the road beside him. I can see them now, my friends: the steaming creatures, the stunted lad with his hands to their bits, and the big, black coach, all shining with the rain, and balanced upon its three wheels. As I looked, the window was lowered, and a pretty little face under a bonnet peeped out from it.

‘What shall I do?’ the lady cried to the post-boy, in a voice of despair. ‘Sir Charles is certainly lost, and I shall have to spend the night upon the moor.’

‘Perhaps I can be of some assistance to madame,’ said I, scrambling out from among the bushes into the glare of the lamps. A woman in distress is a sacred thing to me, and this one was beautiful. You must not forget that, although I was a colonel, I was only eight-and-twenty years of age.

My word, how she screamed, and how the post-boy stared! You will understand that after that long race in the darkness, with my shako broken in, my face smeared with dirt, and my uniform all stained and torn with brambles, I was not entirely the sort of gentleman whom one would choose to meet in the middle of a lonely moor. Still, after the first surprise, she soon understood that I was her very humble servant, and I could even read in her pretty eyes that my manner and bearing had not failed to produce an impression upon her.

‘I am sorry to have startled you, madame,’ said I. ‘I chanced to overhear your remark, and I could not refrain from offering you my assistance.’ I bowed as I spoke. You know my bow, and can realise what its effect was upon the lady.

‘I am much indebted to you, sir,’ said she. ‘We have had a terrible journey since we left Tavistock. Finally, one of our wheels came off, and here we are helpless in the middle of the moor. My husband, Sir Charles, has gone on to get help, and I much fear that he must have lost his way.’

I was about to attempt some consolation, when I saw beside the lady a black travelling coat, faced with astrakhan, which her companion must have left behind him. It was exactly what I needed to conceal my uniform. It is true that I felt very much like a highway robber, but then, what would you have? Necessity has no law, and I was in an enemy’s country.

‘I presume, madame, that this is your husband’s coat,’ I remarked. ‘You will, I am sure, forgive me, if I am compelled to—’ I pulled it through the window as I spoke.

I could not bear to see the look of surprise and fear and disgust which came over her face.

‘Oh, I have been mistaken in you!’ she cried. ‘You came to rob me, then, and not to help me. You have the bearing of a gentleman, and yet you steal my husband’s coat.’

‘Madame,’ said I, ‘I beg that you will not condemn me until you know everything. It is quite necessary that I should take this coat, but if you will have the goodness to tell me who it is who is fortunate enough to be your husband, I shall see that the coat is sent back to him.’

Her face softened a little, though she still tried to look severe. ‘My husband,’ she answered, ‘is Sir Charles Meredith, and he is travelling to Dartmoor Prison, upon important Government business. I only ask you, sir, to go upon your way, and to take nothing which belongs to him.’

‘There is only one thing which belongs to him that I covet,’ said I.

‘And you have taken it from the carriage,’ she cried.

‘No,’ I answered. ‘It still remains there.’

She laughed in her frank English way.

‘If, instead of paying me compliments, you were to return my husband’s coat—’ she began.

‘Madame,’ I answered, ‘what you ask is quite impossible. If you will allow me to come into the carriage, I will explain to you how necessary this coat is to me.’

Heaven knows into what foolishness I might have plunged myself had we not, at this instant, heard a faint halloa in the distance, which was answered by a shout from the little post-boy. In the rain and the darkness, I saw a lantern some distance from us, but approaching rapidly.

‘I am sorry, madame, that I am forced to leave you,’ said I. ‘You can assure your husband that I shall take every care of his coat.’ Hurried as I was, I ventured to pause a moment to salute the lady’s hand, which she snatched through the window with an admirable pretence of being offended at my presumption. Then, as the lantern was quite close to me, and the post-boy seemed inclined to interfere with my flight, I tucked my precious overcoat under my arm, and dashed off into the darkness.

And now I set myself to the task of putting as broad a stretch of moor between the prison and myself as the remaining hours of darkness would allow. Setting my face to the wind once more, I ran until I fell from exhaustion. Then, after five minutes of panting among the heather, I made another start, until again my knees gave way beneath me. I was young and hard, with muscles of steel, and a frame which had been toughened by twelve years of camp and field. Thus I was able to keep up this wild flight for another three hours, during which I still guided myself, you understand, by keeping the wind in my face. At the end of that time I calculated that I had put nearly twenty miles between the prison and myself. Day was about to break, so I crouched down among the heather upon the top of one of those small hills which abound in that country, with the intention of hiding myself until nightfall. It was no new thing for me to sleep in the wind and the rain, so, wrapping myself up in my thick warm cloak, I soon sank into a doze.

But it was not a refreshing slumber. I tossed and tumbled amid a series of vile dreams, in which everything seemed to go wrong with me. At last, I remember, I was charging an unshaken square of Hungarian Grenadiers, with a single squadron upon spent horses, just as I did at Elchingen. I stood in my stirrups to shout ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ and as I did so, there came the answering roar from my hussars, ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ I sprang from my rough bed, with the words still ringing in my ears, and then, as I rubbed my eyes, and wondered if I were mad, the same cry came again, five thousand voices in one long-drawn yell. I looked out from my screen of brambles, and saw in the clear light of morning the very last thing that I should either have expected or chosen.

It was Dartmoor Prison! There it stretched, grim and hideous, within a furlong of me. Had I run on for a few more minutes in the dark, I should have butted my shako against the wall. I was so taken aback at the sight, that I could scarcely realise what had happened. Then it all became clear to me, and I struck my head with my hands in my despair. The wind had veered from north to south during the night, and I, keeping my face always towards it, had run ten miles out and ten miles in, winding up where I had started. When I thought of my hurry, my falls, my mad rushing and jumping, all ending in this, it seemed so absurd, that my grief changed suddenly to amusement, and I fell among the brambles, and laughed, and laughed, until my sides were sore. Then I rolled myself up in my cloak and considered seriously what I should do.

One lesson which I have learned in my roaming life, my friends, is never to call anything a misfortune until you have seen the end of it. Is not every hour a fresh point of view? In this case I soon perceived that accident had done for me as much as the most profound cunning. My guards naturally commenced their search from the place where I had taken Sir Charles Meredith’s coat, and from my hiding-place I could see them hurrying along the road to that point. Not one of them ever dreamed that I could have doubled back from there, and I lay quite undisturbed in the little bush-covered cup at the summit of my knoll. The prisoners had, of course, learned of my escape, and all day exultant yells, like that which had aroused me in the morning, resounded over the moor, bearing a welcome message of sympathy and companionship to my ears. How little did they dream that on the top of that very mound, which they could see from their windows, was lying the comrade whose escape they were celebrating? As for me — I could look down upon this poor herd of idle warriors, as they paced about the great exercise yard, or gathered in little groups, gesticulating joyfully over my success. Once I heard a howl of execration, and I saw Beaumont, his head all covered with bandages, being led across the yard by two of the warders. I cannot tell you the pleasure which this sight gave me, for it proved that I had not killed him, and also that the others knew the true story of what had passed. They had all known me too well to think that I could have abandoned him.

All that long day I lay behind my screen of bushes, listening to the bells which struck the hours below.

My pockets were filled with bread which I had saved out of my allowance, and on searching my borrowed overcoat I came upon a silver flask, full of excellent brandy and water, so that I was able to get through the day without hardship. The only other things in the pockets were a red silk handkerchief, a tortoise-shell snuff-box, and a blue envelope, with a red seal, addressed to the Governor of Dartmoor Prison. As to the first two, I determined to send them back when I should return the coat itself.

The letter caused me more perplexity, for the Governor had always shown me every courtesy, and it offended my sense of honour that I should interfere with his correspondence. I had almost made up my mind to leave it under a stone upon the roadway within musket-shot of the gate. This would guide them in their search for me, however, and so, on the whole, I saw no better way than just to carry the letter with me in the hope that I might find some means of sending it back to him. Meanwhile I packed it safely away in my inner-most pocket.

There was a warm sun to dry my clothes, and when night fell I was ready for my journey. I promise you that there were no mistakes this time. I took the stars for my guides, as every hussar should be taught to do, and I put eight good leagues between myself and the prison. My plan now was to obtain a complete suit of clothes from the first person whom I could waylay, and I should then find my way to the north coast, where there were many smugglers and fishermen who would be ready to earn the reward which was paid by the Emperor to those who brought escaping prisoners across the Channel. I had taken the panache from my shako so that it might escape notice, but even with my fine overcoat I feared that sooner or later my uniform would betray me. My first care must be to provide myself with a complete disguise.

When day broke, I saw a river upon my right and a small town upon my left — the blue smoke reeking up above the moor. I should have liked well to have entered it, because it would have interested me to see something of the customs of the English, which differ very much from those of other nations. Much as I should have wished, however, to have seen them eat their raw meat and sell their wives, it would have been dangerous until I had got rid of my uniform. My cap, my moustache, and my speech would all help to betray me. I continued to travel towards the north therefore, looking about me continually, but never catching a glimpse of my pursuers.

About midday I came to where, in a secluded valley, there stood a single small cottage without any other building in sight. It was a neat little house, with a rustic porch and a small garden in front of it, with a swarm of cocks and hens. I lay down among the ferns and watched it, for it seemed to be exactly the kind of place where I might obtain what I wanted. My bread was finished, and I was exceedingly hungry after my long journey; I determined, therefore, to make a short reconnaissance, and then to march up to this cottage, summon it to surrender, and help myself to all that I needed. It could at least provide me with a chicken and with an omelette. My mouth watered at the thought.

As I lay there, wondering who could live in this lonely place, a brisk little fellow came out through the porch, accompanied by another older man, who carried two large clubs in his hands. These he handed to his young companion, who swung them up and down, and round and round, with extraordinary swiftness. The other, standing beside him, appeared to watch him with great attention, and occasionally to advise him. Finally he took a rope, and began skipping like a girl, the other still gravely observing him. As you may think, I was utterly puzzled as to what these people could be, and could only surmise that the one was a doctor, and the other a patient who had submitted himself to some singular method of treatment.

Well, as I lay watching and wondering, the older man brought out a great-coat, and held it while the other put it on and buttoned it to his chin. The day was a warmish one, so that this proceeding amazed me even more than the other. 'At least,' thought I, 'it is evident that his exercise is over'; but, far from this being so, the man began to run, in spite of his heavy coat, and as it chanced, he came right over the moor in my direction. His companion had re-entered the house, so that this arrangement suited me admirably. I would take the small man's clothing, and hurry on to some village where I could buy provisions. The chickens were certainly tempting, but still there were at least two men in the house, so perhaps it would be wiser for me, since I had no arms, to keep away from it.

I lay quietly then among the ferns. Presently I heard the steps of the runner, and there he was quite close to me, with his huge coat, and the perspiration running down his face. He seemed to be a very solid man — but small — so small that I feared that his clothes might be of little use to me. When I jumped out upon him he stopped running, and looked at me in the greatest astonishment.

‘Blow my dickey,’ said he, ‘give it a name, guv’nor! Is it a circus, or what?’

That was how he talked, though I cannot pretend to tell you what he meant by it.

‘You will excuse me, sir,’ said I, ‘but I am under the necessity of asking you to give me your clothes.’

‘Give you what?’ he cried.

‘Your clothes.’

‘Well, if this don’t lick cock-fighting!’ said he. ‘What am I to give you my clothes for?’

‘Because I need them.’

‘And suppose I won’t?’

‘Be jabers,’ said I, ‘I shall have no choice but to take them.’

He stood with his hands in the pockets of his great-coat, and a most amused smile upon his square-jawed, clean-shaven face.

‘You’ll take them, will you?’ said he. ‘You’re a very leery cove, by the look of you, but I can tell you that you’ve got the wrong sow by the ear this time. I know who you are. You’re a runaway Frenchy, from the prison yonder, as anyone could tell with half an eye. But you don’t know who I am, else you wouldn’t try such a plant as that. Why, man, I’m the Bristol Bustler, nine stone champion, and them’s my training quarters down yonder.’

He stared at me as if this announcement of his would have crushed me to the earth, but I smiled at him in my turn, and looked him up and down, with a twirl of my moustache.

‘You may be a very brave man, sir,’ said I, ‘but when I tell you that you are opposed to Colonel Etienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans, you will see the necessity of giving up your clothes without further parley.’

‘Look here, mounseer, drop it!’ he cried; ‘this’ll end by your getting pepper.’

‘Your clothes, sir, this instant!’ I shouted, advancing fiercely upon him.

For answer he threw off his heavy great-coat, and stood in a singular attitude, with one arm out, and the other across his chest, looking at me with a curious smile. For myself, I knew nothing of the methods of fighting which these people have, but on horse or on foot, with arms or without them, I am always ready to take my own part. You understand that a soldier cannot always choose his own methods, and that it is time to howl when you are living among wolves. I rushed at him, therefore, with a warlike shout, and kicked him with both my feet. At the same moment my heels flew into the air, I saw as many flashes as at Austerlitz, and the back of my head came down with a crash upon a stone. After that I can remember nothing more.

When I came to myself I was lying upon a truckle-bed, in a bare, half-furnished room. My head was ringing like a bell, and when I put up my hand, there was a lump like a walnut over one of my eyes. My nose was full of a pungent smell, and I soon found that a strip of paper soaked in vinegar was fastened across my brow. At the other end of the room this terrible little man was sitting with his knee bare, and his elderly companion was rubbing it with some liniment. The latter seemed to be in the worst of tempers, and he kept up a continual scolding, which the other listened to with a gloomy face.

‘Never heard tell of such a thing in my life,’ he was saying. ‘In training for a month with all the weight of it on my shoulders, and then when I get you as fit as a trout, and within two days of fighting the likeliest man on the list, you let yourself into a by-battle with a foreigner.’

‘There, there! Stow your gab!’ said the other, sulkily. ‘You’re a very good trainer, Jim, but you’d be better with less jaw.’

‘I should think it was time to jaw,’ the elderly man answered. ‘If this knee don’t get well before next Wednesday, they’ll have it that you fought a cross, and a pretty job you’ll have next time you look for a backer.’

‘Fought a cross!’ growled the other. ‘I’ve won nineteen battles, and no man ever so much as dared to say the word “cross” in my hearin’. How the deuce was I to get out of it when the cove wanted the very clothes off my back?’

‘Tut, man; you knew that the beak and the guards were within a mile of you. You could have set them on to him as well then as now. You’d have got your clothes back again all right.’

‘Well, strike me!’ said the Bustler. ‘I don’t often break my trainin’, but when it comes to givin’ up my clothes to a Frenchy who couldn’t hit a dint in a pat o’ butter, why, it’s more than I can swaller.’

‘Pooh, man, what are the clothes worth? D’you know that Lord Rufton alone has five thousand pounds on you? When you jump the ropes on Wednesday, you’ll carry every penny of fifty thousand into the ring. A pretty thing to turn up with a swollen knee and a story about a Frenchman!’

‘I never thought he’d ha’ kicked,’ said the Bustler.

‘I suppose you expected he’d fight Broughton’s rules, and strict P.R.? Why, you silly, they don’t know what fighting is in France.’

‘My friends,’ said I, sitting up on my bed, ‘I do not understand very much of what you say, but when you speak like that it is foolishness. We know so much about fighting in France, that we have paid our little visit to nearly every capital in Europe, and very soon we are coming to London. But we fight like soldiers, you understand, and not like gamins in the gutter. You strike me on the head. I kick you on the knee. It is child’s play. But if you will give me a sword, and take another one, I will show you how we fight over the water.’

They both stared at me in their solid, English way.

‘Well, I’m glad you’re not dead, mounseer,’ said the elder one at last. ‘There wasn’t much sign of life in you when the Bustler and me carried you down. That head of yours ain’t thick enough to stop the crook of the hardest hitter in Bristol.’

‘He’s a game cove, too, and he came for me like a bantam,’ said the other, still rubbing his knee. ‘I got my old left-right in, and he went over as if he had been pole-axed. It wasn’t my fault, mounseer. I told you you’d get pepper if you went on.’

‘Well, it’s something to say all your life, that you’ve been handled by the finest light-weight in England,’ said the older man, looking at me with an expression of congratulation upon his face. ‘You’ve had him at his best, too — in the pink of condition, and trained by Jim Hunter.’

‘I am used to hard knocks,’ said I, unbuttoning my tunic, and showing my two musket wounds. Then I bared my ankle also, and showed the place in my eye where the guerilla had stabbed me.

‘He can take his gruel,’ said the Bustler.

‘What a glutton he’d have made for the middle-weights,’ remarked the trainer; ‘with six months’ coaching he’d astonish the fancy. It’s a pity he’s got to go back to prison.’

I did not like that last remark at all. I buttoned up my coat and rose from the bed.

‘I must ask you to let me continue my journey,’ said I.

‘There’s no help for it, mounseer,’ the trainer answered. ‘It’s a hard thing to send such a man as you back to such a place, but business is business, and there’s a twenty pound reward. They were here this morning, looking for you, and I expect they’ll be round again.’

His words turned my heart to lead.

‘Surely, you would not betray me!’ I cried. ‘I will send you twice twenty pounds on the day that I set foot upon France. I swear it upon the honour of a French gentleman.’

But I only got head-shakes for a reply. I pleaded, I argued, I spoke of the English hospitality and the fellowship of brave men, but I might as well have been addressing the two great wooden clubs which stood balanced upon the floor in front of me. There was no sign of sympathy upon their bull-faces.

‘Business is business, mounseer,’ the old trainer repeated. ‘Besides, how am I to put the Bustler into the ring on Wednesday if he’s jugged by the beak for aidin’ and abettin’ a prisoner of war? I’ve got to look after the Bustler, and I take no risks.’

This, then, was the end of all my struggles and strivings. I was to be led back again like a poor silly sheep who has broken through the hurdles. They little knew me who could fancy that I should submit to such a fate. I had heard enough to tell me where the weak point of these two men was, and I showed, as I have often showed before, that Etienne Gerard is never so terrible as when all hope seems to have deserted him. With a single spring I seized one of the clubs and swung it over the head of the Bustler.

‘Come what may,’ I cried, ‘*you* shall be spoiled for Wednesday.’

The fellow growled out an oath, and would have sprung at me, but the other flung his arms round him and pinned him to the chair.

‘Not if I know it, Bustler,’ he screamed. ‘None of your games while I am by. Get away out of this, Frenchy. We only want to see your back. Run away, run away, or he’ll get loose!’

It was good advice, I thought, and I ran to the door, but as I came out into the open air my head swam round and I had to lean against the porch to save myself from falling. Consider all that I had been through, the anxiety of my escape, the long, useless flight in the storm, the day spent amid wet ferns, with only bread for food, the second journey by night, and now the injuries which I had received in attempting to deprive the little man of his clothes. Was it wonderful that even I should reach the limits of my endurance?

I stood there in my heavy coat and my poor battered shako, my chin upon my chest, and my eyelids over my eyes. I had done my best, and I could do no more. It was the sound of horses' hoofs which made me at last raise my head, and there was the grey-moustached Governor of Dartmoor Prison not ten paces in front of me, with six mounted warders behind him!

'So, Colonel,' said he, with a bitter smile, 'we have found you once more.'

When a brave man has done his utmost, and has failed, he shows his breeding by the manner in which he accepts his defeat. For me, I took the letter which I had in my pocket, and stepping forward, I handed it with such grace of manner as I could summon to the Governor.

'It has been my misfortune, sir, to detain one of your letters,' said I.

He looked at me in amazement, and beckoned to the warders to arrest me. Then he broke the seal of the letter. I saw a curious expression come over his face as he read it.

'This must be the letter which Sir Charles Meredith lost,' said he.

'It was in the pocket of his coat.'

'You have carried it for two days?'

'Since the night before last.'

'And never looked at the contents?'

I showed him by my manner that he had committed an indiscretion in asking a question which one gentleman should not have put to another.

To my surprise he burst out into a roar of laughter.

'Colonel,' said he, wiping the tears from his eyes, 'you have really given both yourself and us a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Allow me to read the letter which you carried with you in your flight.'

And this was what I heard: —

'On receipt of this you are directed to release Colonel Etienne Gerard, of the 3rd Hussars, who has been exchanged against Colonel Mason, of the Horse Artillery, now in Verdun.'

And as he read it, he laughed again, and the warders laughed, and the two men from the cottage laughed, and then, as I heard this universal merriment, and thought of all my hopes and fears, and my struggles and dangers, what could a debonair soldier do but lean against the porch once more, and laugh as heartily as any of them? And of them all was it not I who had the best reason to laugh, since in front of me I could see my dear France, and my mother, and the Emperor, and my horsemen; while behind lay the gloomy prison, and the heavy hand of the English King?

HOW THE BRIGADIER TOOK THE FIELD AGAINST THE MARSHAL MILLEFLEURS

Massena was a thin, sour little fellow, and after his hunting accident he had only one eye, but when it looked out from under his cocked hat there was not much upon a field of battle which escaped it. He could stand in front of a battalion, and with a single sweep tell you if a buckle or a gaiter button were out of place. Neither the officers nor the men were very fond of him, for he was, as you know, a miser, and soldiers love that their leaders should be free-handed. At the same time, when it came to work they had a very high respect for him, and they would rather fight under him than under anyone except the Emperor himself, and Lannes, when he was alive. After all, if he had a tight grasp upon his money-bags, there was a day also, you must remember, when that same grip was upon Zurich and Genoa. He clutched on to his positions as he did to his strong box, and it took a very clever man to loosen him from either.

When I received his summons I went gladly to his headquarters, for I was always a great favourite of his, and there was no officer of whom he thought more highly. That was the best of serving with those good old generals, that they knew enough to be able to pick out a fine soldier when they saw one. He was seated alone in his tent, with his chin upon his hand, and his brow as wrinkled as if he had been asked for a subscription. He smiled, however, when he saw me before him.

‘Good day, Colonel Gerard.’

‘Good day, Marshal.’

‘How is the Third of Hussars?’

‘Seven hundred incomparable men upon seven hundred excellent horses.’

‘And your wounds — are they healed?’

‘My wounds never heal, Marshal,’ I answered.

‘And why?’

‘Because I have always new ones.’

‘General Rapp must look to his laurels,’ said he, his face all breaking into wrinkles as he laughed. ‘He has had twenty-one from the enemy’s bullets, and as many from Larrey’s knives and probes. Knowing that you were hurt, Colonel, I have spared you of late.’

‘Which hurt me most of all.’

‘Tut, tut! Since the English got behind these accursed lines of Torres Vedras, there has been little for us to do. You did not miss much during your imprisonment at Dartmoor. But now we are on the eve of action.’

‘We advance?’

‘No, retire.’

My face must have shown my dismay. What, retire before this sacred dog of a Wellington — he who had listened unmoved to my words, and had sent me to his land of fogs? I could have sobbed as I thought of it.

‘What would you have?’ cried Massena impatiently. ‘When one is in check, it is necessary to move the king.’

‘Forwards,’ I suggested.

He shook his grizzled head.

‘The lines are not to be forced,’ said he. ‘I have already lost General St. Croix and more men than I can replace. On the other hand, we have been here at Santarem for nearly six months. There is not a pound of flour nor a jug of wine on the countryside. We must retire.’

‘There are flour and wine in Lisbon,’ I persisted.

‘Tut, you speak as if an army could charge in and charge out again like your regiment of hussars. If Soult were here with thirty thousand men — but he will not come. I sent for you, however, Colonel Gerard, to say that I have a very singular and important expedition which I intend to place under your direction.’

I pricked up my ears, as you can imagine. The Marshal unrolled a great map of the country and spread it upon the table. He flattened it out with his little, hairy hands.

‘This is Santarem,’ he said pointing.

I nodded.

‘And here, twenty-five miles to the east, is Almeixal, celebrated for its vintages and for its enormous Abbey.’

Again I nodded; I could not think what was coming.

‘Have you heard of the Marshal Millefleurs?’ asked Massena.

‘I have served with all the Marshals,’ said I, ‘but there is none of that name.’

‘It is but the nickname which the soldiers have given him,’ said Massena. ‘If you had not been away from us for some months, it would not be necessary for me to tell you about him. He is an Englishman, and a man of good breeding. It is on account of his manners that they have given him his title. I wish you to go to this polite Englishman at Almeixal.’

‘Yes, Marshal.’

‘And to hang him to the nearest tree.’

‘Certainly, Marshal.’

I turned briskly upon my heels, but Massena recalled me before I could reach the opening of his tent.

‘One moment, Colonel,’ said he; ‘you had best learn how matters stand before you start. You must know, then, that this Marshal Millefleurs, whose real name is Alexis Morgan, is a man of very great ingenuity and bravery. He was an officer in the English Guards, but having been broken for cheating at cards, he left the army. In some manner he gathered a number of English deserters round him and took to the mountains. French stragglers and Portuguese brigands joined him, and he found himself at the head of five hundred men. With these he took possession of the Abbey of Almeixal, sent the monks about their business, fortified the place, and gathered in the plunder of all the country round.’

‘For which it is high time he was hanged,’ said I, making once more for the door.

‘One instant!’ cried the Marshal, smiling at my impatience. ‘The worst remains behind. Only last week the Dowager Countess of La Ronda, the richest woman in Spain, was taken by these ruffians in the passes as she was journeying from King Joseph’s Court to visit her grandson. She is now a prisoner in the Abbey, and is only protected by her — —’

‘Grandmotherhood,’ I suggested.

‘Her power of paying a ransom,’ said Massena. ‘You have three missions, then: To rescue this unfortunate lady; to punish this villain; and, if possible, to break up this nest of brigands. It will be a proof of the confidence which I have in you when I say that I can only spare you half a squadron with which to accomplish all this.’

My word, I could hardly believe my ears! I thought that I should have had my regiment at the least.

‘I would give you more,’ said he, ‘but I commence my retreat today, and Wellington is so strong in horse that every trooper becomes of importance. I cannot spare you another man. You will see what you can do, and you will report yourself to me at Abrantes not later than tomorrow night.’

It was very complimentary that he should rate my powers so high, but it was also a little embarrassing. I was to rescue an old lady, to hang an Englishman, and to break up a band of five hundred assassins — all with fifty men. But after all, the fifty men were Hussars of Conflans, and they had an Etienne Gerard to lead them. As I came out into the warm Portuguese sunshine my confidence had returned to me, and I had already begun to wonder whether the medal which I had so often deserved might not be waiting for me at Almeixal.

You may be sure that I did not take my fifty men at hap-hazard. They were all old soldiers of the German wars, some of them with three stripes, and most of them with two. Oudet and Papilette, two of the best sub-officers in the regiment, were at their head. When I had them formed up in fours, all in silver grey and upon chestnut horses, with their leopard skin shabracks and their little red panaches, my heart beat high at the sight. I could not look at their weather-stained faces, with the great moustaches which bristled over their chin-straps, without feeling a glow of confidence, and, between ourselves, I have no doubt that that was exactly how they felt when they saw their young Colonel on his great black war-horse riding at their head.

Well, when we got free of the camp and over the Tagus, I threw out my advance and my flankers, keeping my own place at the head of the main body. Looking back from the hills above Santarem, we could see the dark lines of Massena’s army, with the flash and twinkle of the sabres and bayonets as he moved his regiments into position for their retreat. To the south lay the scattered red patches of the English outposts, and behind the grey smoke-cloud which rose from Wellington’s camp — thick, oily smoke, which seemed to our poor starving fellows to bear with it the rich smell of seething camp-kettles. Away to the west lay a curve of blue sea flecked with the white sails of the English ships.

You will understand that as we were riding to the east, our road lay away from both armies. Our own marauders, however, and the scouting parties of the English, covered the country, and it was necessary with my small troop that I should take every precaution. During the whole day we rode over desolate hill-sides, the lower portions covered by the budding vines, but the upper turning from green to grey, and jagged along the skyline like the back of a starved horse. Mountain streams crossed our path, running west to the Tagus, and once we came to a deep, strong river, which might have checked us had I not found the ford by observing where houses had been built opposite each other upon either bank. Between them, as every scout should know, you will find your ford. There was none to give us information, for neither man nor beast, nor any living thing except great clouds of crows, was to be seen during our journey.

The sun was beginning to sink when we came to a valley clear in the centre, but shrouded by huge oak trees upon either side. We could not be more than a few miles from Almeixal, so it seemed to me to be best to keep among the groves, for the spring had been an early one and the leaves were already thick enough to conceal us. We were riding then in open order among the great trunks, when one of my flankers came galloping up.

‘There are English across the valley, Colonel,’ he cried, as he saluted.

‘Cavalry or infantry?’

‘Dragoons, Colonel,’ said he; ‘I saw the gleam of their helmets, and heard the neigh of a horse.’

Halting my men I hastened to the edge of the wood. There could be no doubt about it. A party of English cavalry was travelling in a line with us, and in the same direction. I caught a glimpse of their red coats and of their flashing arms glowing and twinkling among the tree-trunks. Once, as they passed through a small clearing, I could see their whole force, and I judged that they were of about the same strength as my own — a half squadron at the most.

You who have heard some of my little adventures will give me credit for being quick in my decisions, and prompt in carrying them out. But here I must confess that I was in two minds. On the one hand there was the chance of a fine cavalry skirmish with the English. On the other hand, there was my mission at the Abbey of Almeixal, which seemed already to be so much above my power. If I were to lose any of my men, it was certain that I should be unable to carry out my orders. I was sitting my horse, with my chin in my gauntlet, looking across at the rippling gleams of light from the further wood, when suddenly one of these red-coated Englishmen rode out from the cover, pointing at me and breaking into a shrill whoop and halloa as if I had been a fox. Three others joined him, and one who was a bugler sounded a call, which brought the whole of them into the open. They were, as I had thought, a half squadron, and they formed a double line with a front of twenty-five, their officer — the one who had whooped at me — at their head.

For my own part, I had instantly brought my own troopers into the same formation, so that there we were, hussars and dragoons, with only two hundred yards of grassy sward between us. They carried themselves well, those red-coated troopers, with their silver helmets, their high white plumes, and their long, gleaming swords; while, on the other hand, I am sure that they would acknowledge that they had never looked upon finer light horsemen than the fifty hussars of Conflans who were facing them. They were heavier, it is true, and they may have seemed the smarter, for Wellington used to make them burnish their metal work, which was not usual among us. On the other hand, it is well known that the English tunics were too tight for the sword-arm, which gave our men an advantage. As to bravery, foolish, inexperienced people of every nation always think that their own soldiers are braver than any others. There is no nation in the world which does not entertain this idea. But when one has seen as much as I have done, one understands that there is no very marked difference, and that although nations differ very much in discipline, they are all equally brave — except that the French have rather more courage than the rest.

Well, the cork was drawn and the glasses ready, when suddenly the English officer raised his sword to me as if in a challenge, and cantered his horse across the grassland. My word, there is no finer sight upon earth than that of a gallant man upon a gallant steed! I could have halted there just to watch him as he came with such careless grace, his sabre down by his horse's shoulder, his head thrown back, his white plume tossing — youth and strength and courage, with the violet evening sky above and the oak trees behind. But it was not for me to stand and stare. Etienne Gerard may have his faults, but, my faith, he was never accused of being backward in taking his own part. The old horse, Rataplan, knew me so well that he had started off before ever I gave the first shake to the bridle.

There are two things in this world that I am very slow to forget: the face of a pretty woman, and the legs of a fine horse. Well, as we drew together, I kept on saying, ‘Where have I seen those great roan shoulders? Where have I seen that dainty fetlock?’ Then suddenly I remembered, and as I looked up at the reckless eyes and the challenging smile, whom should I recognise but the man who had saved me from the brigands and played me for my freedom — he whose correct title was Milor the Hon. Sir Russell Bart!

‘Bart!’ I shouted.

He had his arm raised for a cut, and three parts of his body open to my point, for he did not know very much about the use of the sword. As I brought my hilt to the salute he dropped his hand and stared at me.

‘Halloa!’ said he. ‘It’s Gerard!’ You would have thought by his manner that I had met him by appointment. For my own part, I would have embraced him had he but come an inch of the way to meet me.

‘I thought we were in for some sport,’ said he. ‘I never dreamed that it was you.’

I found this tone of disappointment somewhat irritating. Instead of being glad at having met a friend, he was sorry at having missed an enemy.

‘I should have been happy to join in your sport, my dear Bart,’ said I. ‘But I really cannot turn my sword upon a man who saved my life.’

‘Tut, never mind about that.’

‘No, it is impossible. I should never forgive myself.’

‘You make too much of a trifle.’

‘My mother’s one desire is to embrace you. If ever you should be in Gascony — —’

‘Lord Wellington is coming there with 60,000 men.’

‘Then one of them will have a chance of surviving,’ said I, laughing. ‘In the meantime, put your sword in your sheath!’

Our horses were standing head to tail, and the Bart put out his hand and patted me on the thigh.

‘You’re a good chap, Gerard,’ said he. ‘I only wish you had been born on the right side of the Channel.’

‘I was,’ said I.

‘Poor devil!’ he cried, with such an earnestness of pity that he set me laughing again. ‘But look here, Gerard,’ he continued; ‘this is all very well, but it is not business, you know. I don’t know what Massena would say to it, but our Chief would jump out of his riding-boots if he saw us. We weren’t sent out here for a picnic — either of us.’

‘What would you have?’

‘Well, we had a little argument about our hussars and dragoons, if you remember. I’ve got fifty of the Sixteenth all chewing their carbine bullets behind me. You’ve got as many fine-looking boys over yonder, who seem to be fidgeting in their saddles. If you and I took the right flanks we should not spoil each other’s beauty — though a little blood-letting is a friendly thing in this climate.’

There seemed to me to be a good deal of sense in what he said. For the moment Mr Alexis Morgan and the Countess of La Ronda and the Abbey of Almeixal went right out of my head, and I could only think of the fine level turf and of the beautiful skirmish which we might have.

‘Very good, Bart,’ said I. ‘We have seen the front of your dragoons. We shall now have a look at their backs.’

‘Any betting?’ he asked.

‘The stake,’ said I, ‘is nothing less than the honour of the Hussars of Conflans.’

‘Well, come on!’ he answered. ‘If we break you, well and good — if you break us, it will be all the better for Marshal Millefleurs.’

When he said that I could only stare at him in astonishment.

‘Why for Marshal Millefleurs?’ I asked.

‘It is the name of a rascal who lives out this way. My dragoons have been sent by Lord Wellington to see him safely hanged.’

‘Name of a name!’ I cried. ‘Why, my hussars have been sent by Massena for that very object.’

We burst out laughing at that, and sheathed our swords. There was a whirr of steel from behind us as our troopers followed our example.

‘We are allies!’ he cried.

‘For a day.’

‘We must join forces.’

‘There is no doubt of it.’

And so, instead of fighting, we wheeled our half squadrons round and moved in two little columns down the valley, the shakos and the helmets turned inwards, and the men looking their neighbours up and down, like old fighting dogs with tattered ears who have learned to respect each other’s teeth. The most were on the broad grin, but there were some on either side who looked black and challenging, especially the English sergeant and my own sub-officer Papilette. They were men of habit, you see, who could not change all their ways of thinking in a moment. Besides, Papilette had lost his only brother at Busaco. As for the Bart and me, we rode together at the head and chatted about all that had occurred to us since that famous game of écarté of which I have told you.

For my own part, I spoke to him of my adventures in England. They are a very singular people, these English. Although he knew that I had been engaged in twelve campaigns, yet I am sure that the Bart thought more highly of me because I had had an affair with the Bristol Bustler. He told me, too, that the Colonel who presided over his court-martial for playing cards with a prisoner acquitted him of neglect of duty, but nearly broke him because he thought that he had not cleared his trumps before leading his suit. Yes, indeed, they are a singular people.

At the end of the valley the road curved over some rising ground before winding down into another wider valley beyond. We called a halt when we came to the top; for there, right in front of us, at the distance of about three miles, was a scattered, grey town, with a single enormous building upon the flank of the mountain which overlooked it. We could not doubt that we were at last in sight of the Abbey that held the gang of rascals whom we had come to disperse. It was only now, I think, that we fully understood what a task lay in front of us, for the place was a veritable fortress, and it was evident that cavalry should never have been sent out upon such an errand.

‘That’s got nothing to do with us,’ said the Bart; Wellington and Massena can settle that between them.’

‘Courage!’ I answered. ‘Piré took Leipzig with fifty hussars.’

‘Had they been dragoons,’ said the Bart, laughing, ‘he would have had Berlin. But you are senior officer; give us a lead, and we’ll see who will be the first to flinch.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘whatever we do must be done at once, for my orders are to be on my way to Abrantes by tomorrow night. But we must have some information first, and here is someone who should be able to give it to us.’

There was a square, whitewashed house standing by the roadside, which appeared, from the bush hanging over the door, to be one of those wayside tabernas which are provided for the muleteers. A lantern was hung in the porch, and by its light we saw two men, the one in the brown habit of a Capuchin monk, and the other girt with an apron, which showed him to be the landlord. They were conversing together so earnestly that we were upon them before they were aware of us. The innkeeper turned to fly, but one of the Englishmen seized him by the hair, and held him tight.

‘For mercy’s sake, spare me,’ he yelled. ‘My house has been gutted by the French and harried by the English, and my feet have been burned by the brigands. I swear by the Virgin that I have neither money nor food in my inn, and the good Father Abbot, who is starving upon my doorstep, will be witness to it.’

‘Indeed, sir,’ said the Capuchin, in excellent French, ‘what this worthy man says is very true. He is one of the many victims to these cruel wars, although his loss is but a feather-weight compared to mine. Let him go,’ he added, in English, to the trooper, ‘he is too weak to fly, even if he desired to.’

In the light of the lantern I saw that this monk was a magnificent man, dark and bearded, with the eyes of a hawk, and so tall that his cowl came up to Rataplan’s ears. He wore the look of one who had been through much suffering, but he carried himself like a king, and we could form some opinion of his learning when we each heard him talk our own language as fluently as if he were born to it.

‘You have nothing to fear,’ said I, to the trembling innkeeper. ‘As to you, father, you are, if I am not mistaken, the very man who can give us the information which we require.’

‘All that I have is at your service, my son. But,’ he added, with a wan smile, ‘my Lenten fare is always somewhat meagre, and this year it has been such that I must ask you for a crust of bread if I am to have the strength to answer your questions.’

We bore two days’ rations in our haversacks, so that he soon had the little he asked for. It was dreadful to see the wolfish way in which he seized the piece of dried goat’s flesh which I was able to offer him.

‘Time presses, and we must come to the point,’ said I. ‘We want your advice as to the weak points of yonder Abbey, and concerning the habits of the rascals who infest it.’

He cried out something which I took to be Latin, with his hands clasped and his eyes upturned. ‘The prayer of the just availeth much,’ said he, ‘and yet I had not dared to hope that mine would have been so speedily answered. In me you see the unfortunate Abbot of Almeixal, who has been cast out by this rabble of three armies with their heretical leader. Oh! to think of what I have lost!’ his voice broke, and the tears hung upon his lashes.

‘Cheer up, sir,’ said the Bart. ‘I’ll lay nine to four that we have you back again by tomorrow night.’

It is not of my own welfare that I think,’ said he, ‘nor even of that of my poor, scattered flock. But it is of the holy relics which are left in the sacrilegious hands of these robbers.’

‘It’s even betting whether they would ever bother their heads about them,’ said the Bart. ‘But show us the way inside the gates, and we’ll soon clear the place out for you.’

In a few short words the good Abbot gave us the very points that we wished to know. But all that he said only made our task more formidable. The walls of the Abbey were forty feet high. The lower windows were barricaded, and the whole building loopholed for musketry fire. The gang preserved military discipline, and their sentries were too numerous for us to hope to take them by surprise. It was more than ever evident that a battalion of grenadiers and a couple of breaching pieces were what was needed. I raised my eyebrows, and the Bart began to whistle.

‘We must have a shot at it, come what may,’ said he.

The men had already dismounted, and, having watered their horses, were eating their suppers. For my own part I went into the sitting-room of the inn with the Abbot and the Bart, that we might talk about our plans.

I had a little cognac in my *sauve vie*, and I divided it among us — just enough to wet our moustaches.

‘It is unlikely,’ said I, ‘that those rascals know anything about our coming. I have seen no signs of scouts along the road. My own plan is that we should conceal ourselves in some neighbouring wood, and then, when they open their gates, charge down upon them and take them by surprise.’

The Bart was of opinion that this was the best that we could do, but, when we came to talk it over, the Abbot made us see that there were difficulties in the way.

‘Save on the side of the town, there is no place within a mile of the Abbey where you could shelter man or horse,’ said he. ‘As to the townsfolk, they are not to be trusted. I fear, my son, that your excellent plan would have little chance of success in the face of the vigilant guard which these men keep.’

‘I see no other way,’ answered I. ‘Hussars of Conflans are not so plentiful that I can afford to run half a squadron of them against a forty-foot wall with five hundred infantry behind it.’

‘I am a man of peace,’ said the Abbot, ‘and yet I may, perhaps, give a word of counsel. I know these villains and their ways. Who should do so better, seeing that I have stayed for a month in this lonely spot, looking down in weariness of heart at the Abbey which was my own? I will tell you now what I should myself do if I were in your place.'

'Pray tell us, father,' we cried, both together.

'You must know that bodies of deserters, both French and English, are continually coming in to them, carrying their weapons with them. Now, what is there to prevent you and your men from pretending to be such a body, and so making your way into the Abbey?'

I was amazed at the simplicity of the thing, and I embraced the good Abbot. The Bart, however, had some objections to offer.

'That is all very well,' said he, 'but if these fellows are as sharp as you say, it is not very likely that they are going to let a hundred armed strangers into their crib. From all I have heard of Mr Morgan, or Marshal Millefleurs, or whatever the rascal's name is, I give him credit for more sense than that.'

'Well, then,' I cried, 'let us send fifty in, and let them at daybreak throw open the gates to the other fifty, who will be waiting outside.'

We discussed the question at great length and with much foresight and discretion. If it had been Massena and Wellington instead of two young officers of light cavalry, we could not have weighed it all with more judgment. At last we agreed, the Bart and I, that one of us should indeed go with fifty men, under pretence of being deserters, and that in the early morning he should gain command of the gate and admit the others. The Abbot, it is true, was still of opinion that it was dangerous to divide our force, but finding that we were both of the same mind, he shrugged his shoulders and gave in.

'There is only one thing that I would ask,' said he. 'If you lay hands upon this Marshal Millefleurs — this dog of a brigand — what will you do with him?'

'Hang him,' I answered.

'It is too easy a death,' cried the Capuchin, with a vindictive glow in his dark eyes. 'Had I my way with him — but, oh, what thoughts are these for a servant of God to harbour!' He clapped his hands to his forehead like one who is half demented by his troubles, and rushed out of the room.

There was an important point which we had still to settle, and that was whether the French or the English party should have the honour of entering the Abbey first. My faith, it was asking a great deal of Etienne Gerard that he should give place to any man at such a time! But the poor Bart pleaded so hard, urging the few skirmishes which he had seen against my four-and-seventy engagements, that at last I consented that he should go. We had just clasped hands over the matter when there broke out such a shouting and cursing and yelling from the front of the inn, that out we rushed with our drawn sabres in our hands, convinced that the brigands were upon us.

You may imagine our feelings when, by the light of the lantern which hung from the porch, we saw a score of our hussars and dragoons all mixed in one wild heap, red coats and blue, helmets and busbies, pommelling each other to their hearts' content. We flung ourselves upon them, imploring, threatening, tugging at a lace collar, or at a spurred heel, until, at last, we had dragged them all apart. There they stood, flushed and bleeding, glaring at each other, and all panting together like a line of troop horses after a ten-mile chase. It was only with our drawn swords that we could keep them from each other's throats. The poor Capuchin stood in the porch in his long brown habit, wringing his hands and calling upon all the saints for mercy.

He was, indeed, as I found upon inquiry, the innocent cause of all the turmoil, for, not understanding how soldiers look upon such things, he had made some remark to the English sergeant that it was a pity that his squadron was not as good as the French. The words were not out of his mouth before a dragoon knocked down the nearest hussar, and then, in a moment, they all flew at each other like tigers. We would trust them no more after that, but the Bart moved his men to the front of the inn, and I mine to the back, the English all scowling and silent, and our fellows shaking their fists and chattering, each after the fashion of their own people.

Well, as our plans were made, we thought it best to carry them out at once, lest some fresh cause of quarrel should break out between our followers. The Bart and his men rode off, therefore, he having first torn the lace from his sleeves, and the gorget and sash from his uniform, so that he might pass as a simple trooper. He explained to his men what it was that was expected of them, and though they did not raise a cry or wave their weapons as mine might have done, there was an expression upon their stolid and clean-shaven faces which filled me with confidence. Their tunics were left unbuttoned, their scabbards and helmets stained with dirt, and their harness badly fastened, so that they might look the part of deserters, without order or discipline. At six o'clock next morning they were to gain command of the main gate of the Abbey, while at that same hour my hussars were to gallop up to it from outside. The Bart and I pledged our words to it before he trotted off with his detachment. My sergeant, Papilette, with two troopers, followed the English at a distance, and returned in half an hour to say that, after some parley, and the flashing of lanterns upon them from the grille, they had been admitted into the Abbey.

So far, then, all had gone well. It was a cloudy night with a sprinkling of rain, which was in our favour, as there was the less chance of our presence being discovered. My vedettes I placed two hundred yards in every direction, to guard against a surprise, and also to prevent any peasant who might stumble upon us from carrying the news to the Abbey. Oudin and Papilette were to take turns of duty, while the others with their horses had snug quarters in a great wooden granary. Having walked round and seen that all was as it should be, I flung myself upon the bed which the innkeeper had set apart for me, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

No doubt you have heard my name mentioned as being the beau-ideal of a soldier, and that not only by friends and admirers like our fellow-townsfolk, but also by old officers of the great wars who have shared the fortunes of those famous campaigns with me. Truth and modesty compel me to say, however, that this is not so. There are some gifts which I lack — very few, no doubt — but, still, amid the vast armies of the Emperor there may have been some who were free from those blemishes which stood between me and perfection. Of bravery I say nothing. Those who have seen me in the field are best fitted to speak about that. I have often heard the soldiers discussing round the camp-fires as to who was the bravest man in the Grand Army. Some said Murat, and some said Lasalle, and some Ney; but for my own part, when they asked me, I merely shrugged my shoulders and smiled. It would have seemed mere conceit if I had answered that there was no man braver than Brigadier Gerard. At the same time, facts are facts, and a man knows best what his own feelings are. But there are other gifts besides bravery which are necessary for a soldier, and one of them is that he should be a light sleeper. Now, from my boyhood onwards, I have been hard to wake, and it was this which brought me to ruin upon that night.

It may have been about two o’clock in the morning that I was suddenly conscious of a feeling of suffocation. I tried to call out, but there was something which prevented me from uttering a sound. I struggled to rise, but I could only flounder like a hamstrung horse. I was strapped at the ankles, strapped at the knees, and strapped again at the wrists. Only my eyes were free to move, and there at the foot of my couch, by the light of a Portuguese lamp, whom should I see but the Abbot and the innkeeper!

The latter’s heavy, white face had appeared to me when I looked upon it the evening before to express nothing but stupidity and terror. Now, on the contrary, every feature bespoke brutality and ferocity. Never have I seen a more dreadful-looking villain. In his hand he held a long, dull-coloured knife. The Abbot, on the other hand, was as polished and as dignified as ever. His Capuchin gown had been thrown open, however, and I saw beneath it a black, frogged coat, such as I have seen among the English officers. As our eyes met he leaned over the wooden end of the bed and laughed silently until it creaked again.

‘You will, I am sure, excuse my mirth, my dear Colonel Gerard,’ said he. ‘The fact is, that the expression upon your face when you grasped the situation was just a little funny. I have no doubt that you are an excellent soldier, but I hardly think that you are fit to measure wits with the Marshal Millefleurs, as your fellows have been good enough to call me. You appear to have given me credit for singularly little intelligence, which argues, if I may be allowed to say so, a want of acuteness upon your own part. Indeed, with the single exception of my thick-headed compatriot, the British dragoon, I have never met anyone who was less competent to carry out such a mission.’

You can imagine how I felt and how I looked, as I listened to this insolent harangue, which was all delivered in that flowery and condescending manner which had gained this rascal his nickname. I could say nothing, but they must have read my threat in my eyes, for the fellow who had played the part of the innkeeper whispered something to his companion.

‘No, no, my dear Chenier, he will be infinitely more valuable alive,’ said he. ‘By the way, Colonel, it is just as well that you are a sound sleeper, for my friend here, who is a little rough in his ways, would certainly have cut your throat if you had raised any alarm. I should recommend you to keep in his good graces, for Sergeant Chenier, late of the 7th Imperial Light Infantry, is a much more dangerous person than Captain Alexis Morgan, of His Majesty’s foot-guards.’

Chenier grinned and shook his knife at me, while I tried to look the loathing which I felt at the thought that a soldier of the Emperor could fall so low.

‘It may amuse you to know,’ said the Marshal, in that soft, suave voice of his, ‘that both your expeditions were watched from the time that you left your respective camps. I think that you will allow that Chenier and I played our parts with some subtlety. We had made every arrangement for your reception at the Abbey, though we had hoped to receive the whole squadron instead of half. When the gates are secured behind them, our visitors will find themselves in a very charming little mediaeval quadrangle, with no possible exit, commanded by musketry fire from a hundred windows. They may choose to be shot down; or they may choose to surrender. Between ourselves, I have not the slightest doubt that they have been wise enough to do the latter. But since you are naturally interested in the matter, we thought that you would care to come with us and to see for yourself. I think I can promise you that you will find your titled friend waiting for you at the Abbey with a face as long as your own.’

The two villains began whispering together, debating, as far as I could hear, which was the best way of avoiding my vedettes.

‘I will make sure that it is all clear upon the other side of the barn,’ said the Marshal at last. ‘You will stay here, my good Chenier, and if the prisoner gives any trouble you will know what to do.’

So we were left together, this murderous renegade and I — he sitting at the end of the bed, sharpening his knife upon his boot in the light of the single smoky little oil-lamp. As to me, I only wonder now, as I look back upon it, that I did not go mad with vexation and self-reproach as I lay helplessly upon the couch, unable to utter a word or move a finger, with the knowledge that my fifty gallant lads were so close to me, and yet with no means of letting them know the straits to which I was reduced. It was no new thing for me to be a prisoner; but to be taken by these renegades, and to be led into their Abbey in the midst of their jeers, befooled and out-witted by their insolent leaders — that was indeed more than I could endure. The knife of the butcher beside me would cut less deeply than that.

I twitched softly at my wrists, and then at my ankles, but whichever of the two had secured me was no bungler at his work. I could not move either of them an inch. Then I tried to work the handkerchief down over my mouth, but the ruffian beside me raised his knife with such a threatening snarl that I had to desist. I was lying still looking at his bull neck, and wondering whether it would ever be my good fortune to fit it for a cravat, when I heard returning steps coming down the inn passage and up the stair.

What word would the villain bring back? If he found it impossible to kidnap me, he would probably murder me where I lay. For my own part, I was indifferent which it might be, and I looked at the doorway with the contempt and defiance which I longed to put into words. But you can imagine my feelings, my dear friends, when, instead of the tall figure and dark, sneering face of the Capuchin, my eyes fell upon the grey pelisse and huge moustaches of my good little sub-officer, Papilette!

The French soldier of those days had seen too much to be ever taken by surprise. His eyes had hardly rested upon my bound figure and the sinister face beside me before he had seen how the matter lay.

‘Sacred name of a dog!’ he growled, and out flashed his great sabre. Chenier sprang forward at him with his knife, and then, thinking better of it, he darted back and stabbed frantically at my heart. For my own part, I had hurled myself off the bed on the side opposite to him, and the blade grazed my side before ripping its way through blanket and sheet. An instant later I heard the thud of a heavy fall, and then almost simultaneously a second object struck the floor — something lighter but harder, which rolled under the bed. I will not horrify you with details, my friends. Suffice it that Papilette was one of the strongest swordsmen in the regiment, and that his sabre was heavy and sharp. It left a red blotch upon my wrists and my ankles, as it cut the thongs which bound me.

When I had thrown off my gag, the first use which I made of my lips was to kiss the sergeant’s scarred cheeks. The next was to ask him if all was well with the command. Yes, they had had no alarms. Oudin had just relieved him, and he had come to report. Had he seen the Abbot? No, he had seen nothing of him. Then we must form a cordon and prevent his escape. I was hurrying out to give the orders, when I heard a slow and measured step enter the door below, and come creaking up the stairs.

Papilette understood it all in an instant. ‘You are not to kill him,’ I whispered, and thrust him into the shadow on one side of the door; I crouched on the other. Up he came, up and up, and every footfall seemed to be upon my heart. The brown skirt of his gown was not over the threshold before we were both on him, like two wolves on a buck. Down we crashed, the three of us, he fighting like a tiger, and with such amazing strength that he might have broken away from the two of us. Thrice he got to his feet, and thrice we had him over again, until Papilette made him feel that there was a point to his sabre. He had sense enough then to know that the game was up, and to lie still while I lashed him with the very cords which had been round my own limbs.

'There has been a fresh deal, my fine fellow,' said I, 'and you will find that I have some of the trumps in *my* hand this time.'

'Luck always comes to the aid of a fool,' he answered. 'Perhaps it is as well, otherwise the world would fall too completely into the power of the astute. So, you have killed Chenier, I see. He was an insubordinate dog, and always smelt abominably of garlic. Might I trouble you to lay me upon the bed? The floor of these Portuguese tabernas is hardly a fitting couch for anyone who has prejudices in favour of cleanliness.'

I could not but admire the coolness of the man, and the way in which he preserved the same insolent air of condescension in spite of this sudden turning of the tables. I dispatched Papilette to summon a guard, whilst I stood over our prisoner with my drawn sword, never taking my eyes off him for an instant, for I must confess that I had conceived a great respect for his audacity and resource.

'I trust,' said he, 'that your men will treat me in a becoming manner.'

'You will get your deserts — you may depend upon that.'

'I ask nothing more. You may not be aware of my exalted birth, but I am so placed that I cannot name my father without treason, nor my mother without a scandal. I cannot *claim* Royal honours, but these things are so much more graceful when they are conceded without a claim. The thongs are cutting my skin. Might I beg you to loosen them?'

'You do not give me credit for much intelligence,' I remarked, repeating his own words.

'*Touché,'* he cried, like a pinked fencer. 'But here come your men, so it matters little whether you loosen them or not.'

I ordered the gown to be stripped from him and placed him under a strong guard. Then, as morning was already breaking, I had to consider what my next step was to be. The poor Bart and his Englishmen had fallen victims to the deep scheme which might, had we adopted all the crafty suggestions of our adviser, have ended in the capture of the whole instead of the half of our force. I must extricate them if it were still possible. Then there was the old lady, the Countess of La Ronda, to be thought of. As to the Abbey, since its garrison was on the alert it was hopeless to think of capturing that. All turned now upon the value which they placed upon their leader. The game depended upon my playing that one card. I will tell you how boldly and how skilfully I played it.

It was hardly light before my bugler blew the assembly, and out we trotted on to the plain. My prisoner was placed on horseback in the very centre of the troops. It chanced that there was a large tree just out of musket-shot from the main gate of the Abbey, and under this we halted. Had they opened the great doors in order to attack us, I should have charged home upon them; but, as I had expected, they stood upon the defensive, lining the long wall and pouring down a torrent of hootings and taunts and derisive laughter upon us. A few fired their muskets, but finding that we were out of reach they soon ceased to waste their powder. It was the strangest sight to see that mixture of uniforms, French, English, and Portuguese, cavalry, infantry, and artillery, all wagging their heads and shaking their fists at us.

My word, their hubbub soon died away when we opened our ranks, and showed whom we had got in the midst of us! There was silence for a few seconds, and then such a howl of rage and grief! I could see some of them dancing like mad-men upon the wall. He must have been a singular person, this prisoner of ours, to have gained the affection of such a gang.

I had brought a rope from the inn, and we slung it over the lower bough of the tree.

‘You will permit me, monsieur, to undo your collar,’ said Papilette, with mock politeness.

‘If your hands are perfectly clean,’ answered our prisoner, and set the whole half-squadron laughing.

There was another yell from the wall, followed by a profound hush as the noose was tightened round Marshal Millefleurs’ neck. Then came a shriek from a bugle, the Abbey gates flew open, and three men rushed out waving white cloths in their hands. Ah, how my heart bounded with joy at the sight of them. And yet I would not advance an inch to meet them, so that all the eagerness might seem to be upon their side. I allowed my trumpeter, however, to wave a handkerchief in reply, upon which the three envoys came running towards us. The Marshal, still pinioned, and with the rope round his neck, sat his horse with a half smile, as one who is slightly bored and yet strives out of courtesy not to show it. If I were in such a situation I could not wish to carry myself better, and surely I can say no more than that.

They were a singular trio, these ambassadors. The one was a Portuguese caçadore in his dark uniform, the second a French chasseur in the lightest green, and the third a big English artilleryman in blue and gold. They saluted, all three, and the Frenchman did the talking.

‘We have thirty-seven English dragoons in our hands,’ said he. ‘We give you our most solemn oath that they shall all hang from the Abbey wall within five minutes of the death of our Marshal.’

‘Thirty-seven!’ I cried. ‘You have fifty-one.’

‘Fourteen were cut down before they could be secured.’

‘And the officer?’

‘He would not surrender his sword save with his life. It was not our fault. We would have saved him if we could.’

Alas for my poor Bart! I had met him but twice, and yet he was a man very much after my heart. I have always had a regard for the English for the sake of that one friend. A braver man and a worse swordsman I have never met.

I did not, as you may think, take these rascals’ word for anything. Papilette was dispatched with one of them, and returned to say that it was too true. I had now to think of the living.

‘You will release the thirty-seven dragoons if I free your leader?’

‘We will give you ten of them.’

‘Up with him!’ I cried.

‘Twenty,’ shouted the chasseur.

‘No more words,’ said I. ‘Pull on the rope!’

‘All of them,’ cried the envoy, as the cord tightened round the Marshal’s neck.

‘With horses and arms?’

They could see that I was not a man to jest with.

‘All complete,’ said the chasseur, sulkily.

‘And the Countess of La Ronda as well?’ said I.

But here I met with firmer opposition. No threats of mine could induce them to give up the Countess. We tightened the cord. We moved the horse. We did all but leave the Marshal suspended. If once I broke his neck the dragoons were dead men. It was as precious to me as to them.

‘Allow me to remark,’ said the Marshal, blandly, ‘that you are exposing me to a risk of a quinsy. Do you not think, since there is a difference of opinion upon this point, that it would be an excellent idea to consult the lady herself? We would neither of us, I am sure, wish to override her own inclinations.’

Nothing could be more satisfactory. You can imagine how quickly I grasped at so simple a solution. In ten minutes she was before us, a most stately dame, with her grey curls peeping out from under her mantilla. Her face was as yellow as though it reflected the countless doubloons of her treasury.

‘This gentleman,’ said the Marshal, ‘is exceedingly anxious to convey you to a place where you will never see us more. It is for you to decide whether you would wish to go with him, or whether you prefer to remain with me.’

She was at his horse’s side in an instant. ‘My own Alexis,’ she cried, ‘nothing can ever part us.’

He looked at me with a sneer upon his handsome face.

‘By the way, you made a small slip of the tongue, my dear Colonel,’ said he. ‘Except by courtesy, no such person exists as the Dowager Countess of La Ronda. The lady whom I have the honour to present to you is my very dear wife, Mrs Alexis Morgan — or shall I say Madame la Marèchale Millefleurs?’

It was at this moment that I came to the conclusion that I was dealing with the cleverest, and also the most unscrupulous, man whom I had ever met. As I looked upon this unfortunate old woman my soul was filled with wonder and disgust. As for her, her eyes were raised to his face with such a look as a young recruit might give to the Emperor.

‘So be it,’ said I at last; ‘give me the dragoons and let me go.’

They were brought out with their horses and weapons, and the rope was taken from the Marshal’s neck.

‘Good-bye, my dear Colonel,’ said he. ‘I am afraid that you will have rather a lame account to give of your mission, when you find your way back to Massena, though, from all I hear, he will probably be too busy to think of you. I am free to confess that you have extricated yourself from your difficulties with greater ability than I had given you credit for. I presume that there is nothing which I can do for you before you go?’

‘There is one thing.’

‘And that is?’

‘To give fitting burial to this young officer and his men.’

‘I pledge my word to it.’

‘And there is one other.’

‘Name it.’

‘To give me five minutes in the open with a sword in your hand and a horse between your legs.’

‘Tut, tut!’ said he. ‘I should either have to cut short your promising career, or else to bid adieu to my own bonny bride. It is unreasonable to ask such a request of a man in the first joys of matrimony.’

I gathered my horsemen together and wheeled them into column.

‘Au revoir,’ I cried, shaking my sword at him. ‘The next time you may not escape so easily.’

‘Au revoir,’ he answered. ‘When you are weary of the Emperor, you will always find a commission waiting for you in the service of the Marshal Millefleurs.’

HOW THE BRIGADIER PLAYED FOR A KINGDOM

It has sometimes struck me that some of you, when you have heard me tell these little adventures of mine, may have gone away with the impression that I was conceited. There could not be a greater mistake than this, for I have always observed that really fine soldiers are free from this failing. It is true that I have had to depict myself sometimes as brave, sometimes as full of resource, always as interesting; but, then, it really was so, and I had to take the facts as I found them. It would be an unworthy affectation if I were to pretend that my career has been anything but a fine one. The incident which I will tell you tonight, however, is one which you will understand that only a modest man would describe. After all, when one has attained such a position as mine, one can afford to speak of what an ordinary man might be tempted to conceal.

You must know, then, that after the Russian campaign the remains of our poor army were quartered along the western bank of the Elbe, where they might thaw their frozen blood and try, with the help of the good German beer, to put a little between their skin and their bones. There were some things which we could not hope to regain, for I daresay that three large commissariat fourgons would not have sufficed to carry the fingers and the toes which the army had shed during that retreat. Still, lean and crippled as we were, we had much to be thankful for when we thought of our poor comrades whom we had left behind, and of the snowfields — the horrible, horrible snowfields. To this day, my friends, I do not care to see red and white together. Even my red cap thrown down upon my white counterpane has given me dreams in which I have seen those monstrous plains, the reeling, tortured army, and the crimson smears which glared upon the snow behind them. You will coax no story out of me about that business, for the thought of it is enough to turn my wine to vinegar and my tobacco to straw.

Of the half-million who crossed the Elbe in the autumn of the year ‘12 about forty thousand infantry were left in the spring of ‘13. But they were terrible men, these forty thousand: men of iron, eaters of horses, and sleepers in the snow; filled, too, with rage and bitterness against the

Russians. They would hold the Elbe until the great army of conscripts, which the Emperor was raising in France, should be ready to help them to cross it once more.

But the cavalry was in a deplorable condition. My own hussars were at Borna, and when I paraded them first, I burst into tears at the sight of them. My fine men and my beautiful horses — it broke my heart to see the state to which they were reduced. ‘But, courage,’ I thought, ‘they have lost much, but their Colonel is still left to them.’ I set to work, therefore, to repair their disasters, and had already constructed two good squadrons, when an order came that all colonels of cavalry should repair instantly to the depôts of the regiments in France to organize the recruits and the remounts for the coming campaign.

You will think, doubtless, that I was over-joyed at this chance of visiting home once more. I will not deny that it was a pleasure to me to know that I should see my mother again, and there were a few girls who would be very glad at the news; but there were others in the army who had a stronger claim. I would have given my place to any who had wives and children whom they might not see again. However, there is no arguing when the blue paper with the little red seal arrives, so within an hour I was off upon my great ride from the Elbe to the Vosges. At last I was to have a period of quiet. War lay behind my mare’s tail and peace in front of her nostrils. So I thought, as the sound of the bugles died in the distance, and the long, white road curled away in front of me through plain and forest and mountain, with France somewhere beyond the blue haze which lay upon the horizon.

It is interesting, but it is also fatiguing, to ride in the rear of an army. In the harvest time our soldiers could do without supplies, for they had been trained to pluck the grain in the fields as they passed, and to grind it for themselves in their bivouacs. It was at that time of year, therefore, that those swift marches were performed which were the wonder and the despair of Europe. But now the starving men had to be made robust once more, and I was forced to draw into the ditch continually as the Coburg sheep and the Bavarian bullocks came streaming past with waggon loads of Berlin beer and good French cognac. Sometimes, too, I would hear the dry rattle of the drums and the shrill whistle of the fifes, and long columns of our good little infantry men would swing past me with the white dust lying thick upon their blue tunics. These were old soldiers drawn from the garrisons of our

German fortresses, for it was not until May that the new conscripts began to arrive from France.

Well, I was rather tired of this eternal stopping and dodging, so that I was not sorry when I came to Altenburg to find that the road divided, and that I could take the southern and quieter branch. There were few wayfarers between there and Greiz, and the road wound through groves of oaks and beeches, which shot their branches across the path. You will think it strange that a Colonel of hussars should again and again pull up his horse in order to admire the beauty of the feathery branches and the little, green, new-budded leaves, but if you had spent six months among the fir trees of Russia you would be able to understand me.

There was something, however, which pleased me very much less than the beauty of the forests, and that was the words and looks of the folk who lived in the woodland villages. We had always been excellent friends with the Germans, and during the last six years they had never seemed to bear us any malice for having made a little free with their country. We had shown kindnesses to the men and received them from the women, so that good, comfortable Germany was a second home to all of us. But now there was something which I could not understand in the behaviour of the people. The travellers made no answer to my salute; the foresters turned their heads away to avoid seeing me; and in the villages the folk would gather into knots in the roadway and would scowl at me as I passed. Even women would do this, and it was something new for me in those days to see anything but a smile in a woman’s eyes when they were turned upon me.

It was in the hamlet of Schmolin, just ten miles out of Altenburg, that the thing became most marked. I had stopped at the little inn there just to damp my moustache and to wash the dust out of poor Violette’s throat. It was my way to give some little compliment, or possibly a kiss, to the maid who served me; but this one would have neither the one nor the other, but darted a glance at me like a bayonet-thrust. Then when I raised my glass to the folk who drank their beer by the door they turned their backs on me, save only one fellow, who cried, ‘Here’s a toast for you, boys! Here’s to the letter T!’ At that they all emptied their beer mugs and laughed; but it was not a laugh that had good-fellowship in it.

I was turning this over in my head and wondering what their boorish conduct could mean, when I saw, as I rode from the village, a great T new carved upon a tree. I had already seen more than one in my morning’s ride, but I had given no thought to them until the words of the beer-drinker gave them an importance. It chanced that a respectable-looking person was riding past me at the moment, so I turned to him for information.

‘Can you tell me, sir,’ said I, ‘what this letter T is?’

He looked at it and then at me in the most singular fashion. ‘Young man,’ said he, ‘it is not the letter N.’ Then before I could ask further he clapped his spurs into his horses ribs and rode, stomach to earth, upon his way.

At first his words had no particular significance in my mind, but as I trotted onwards Violette chanced to half turn her dainty head, and my eyes were caught by the gleam of the brazen N’s at the end of the bridle-chain. It was the Emperor’s mark. And those T’s meant something which was opposite to it. Things had been happening in Germany, then, during our absence, and the giant sleeper had begun to stir. I thought of the mutinous faces that I had seen, and I felt that if I could only have looked into the hearts of these people I might have had some strange news to bring into France with me. It made me the more eager to get my remounts, and to see ten strong squadrons behind my kettle-drums once more.

While these thoughts were passing through my head I had been alternately walking and trotting, as a man should who has a long journey before, and a willing horse beneath, him. The woods were very open at this point, and beside the road there lay a great heap of fagots. As I passed there came a sharp sound from among them, and, glancing round, I saw a face looking out at me — a hot, red face, like that of a man who is beside himself with excitement and anxiety. A second glance told me that it was the very person with whom I had talked an hour before in the village.

‘Come nearer!’ he hissed. ‘Nearer still! Now dismount and pretend to be mending the stirrup leather. Spies may be watching us, and it means death to me if I am seen helping you.’

‘Death!’ I whispered. ‘From whom?’

‘From the Tugendbund. From Lutzow’s night-riders. You Frenchmen are living on a powder magazine, and the match has been struck that will fire it.’

‘But this is all strange to me,’ said I, still fumbling at the leathers of my horse. ‘What is this Tugendbund?’

‘It is the secret society which has planned the great rising which is to drive you out of Germany, just as you have been driven out of Russia.’

‘And these T’s stand for it?’

‘They are the signal. I should have told you all this in the village, but I dared not be seen speaking with you. I galloped through the woods to cut you off, and concealed both my horse and myself.’

‘I am very much indebted to you,’ said I, ‘and the more so as you are the only German that I have met today from whom I have had common civility.’

‘All that I possess I have gained through contracting for the French armies,’ said he. ‘Your Emperor has been a good friend to me. But I beg that you will ride on now, for we have talked long enough. Beware only of Lutzow’s night-riders!’

‘Banditti?’ I asked.

‘All that is best in Germany,’ said he. ‘But for God’s sake ride forwards, for I have risked my life and exposed my good name in order to carry you this warning.’

Well, if I had been heavy with thought before, you can think how I felt after my strange talk with the man among the fagots. What came home to me even more than his words was his shivering, broken voice, his twitching face, and his eyes glancing swiftly to right and left, and opening in horror whenever a branch cracked upon a tree. It was clear that he was in the last extremity of terror, and it is possible that he had cause, for shortly after I had left him I heard a distant gunshot and a shouting from somewhere behind me. It may have been some sportsman halloaing to his dogs, but I never again heard of or saw the man who had given me my warning.

I kept a good look-out after this, riding swiftly where the country was open, and slowly where there might be an ambuscade. It was serious for me, since 500 good miles of German soil lay in front of me; but somehow I did not take it very much to heart, for the Germans had always seemed to me to be a kindly, gentle people, whose hands closed more readily round a pipe-stem than a sword-hilt — not out of want of valour, you understand, but because they are genial, open souls, who would rather be on good terms with all men. I did not know then that beneath that homely surface there lurks a devilry as fierce as, and far more persistent than, that of the Castilian or the Italian.

And it was not long before I had shown to me that there was something more serious abroad than rough words and hard looks. I had come to a spot where the road runs upwards through a wild tract of heath-land and vanishes into an oak wood. I may have been half-way up the hill when, looking forward, I saw something gleaming under the shadow of the tree-trunks, and a man came out with a coat which was so slashed and spangled with gold that he blazed like a fire in the sunlight. He appeared to be very drunk, for he reeled and staggered as he came towards me. One of his hands was held up to his ear and clutched a great red handkerchief, which was fixed to his neck.

I had reined up the mare and was looking at him with some disgust, for it seemed strange to me that one who wore so gorgeous a uniform should show himself in such a state in broad daylight. For his part, he looked hard in my direction and came slowly onwards, stopping from time to time and swaying about as he gazed at me. Suddenly, as I again advanced, he screamed out his thanks to Christ, and, lurching forwards, he fell with a crash upon the dusty road. His hands flew forward with the fall, and I saw that what I had taken for a red cloth was a monstrous wound, which had left a great gap in his neck, from which a dark blood-clot hung, like an epaulette upon his shoulder.

‘My God!’ I cried, as I sprang to his aid. ‘And I thought that you were drunk!’

‘Not drunk, but dying,’ said he. ‘But thank Heaven that I have seen a French officer while I have still strength to speak.’

I laid him among the heather and poured some brandy down his throat. All round us was the vast countryside, green and peaceful, with nothing living in sight save only the mutilated man beside me.

‘Who has done this?’ I asked, ‘and what are you? You are French, and yet the uniform is strange to me.’

‘It is that of the Emperor’s new guard of honour. I am the Marquis of Château St Arnaud, and I am the ninth of my blood who has died in the service of France. I have been pursued and wounded by the night-riders of Lutzow, but I hid among the brushwood yonder, and waited in the hope that a Frenchman might pass. I could not be sure at first if you were friend or foe, but I felt that death was very near, and that I must take the chance.’

‘Keep your heart up, comrade,’ said I; ‘I have seen a man with a worse wound who has lived to boast of it.’

‘No, no,’ he whispered; ‘I am going fast.’ He laid his hand upon mine as he spoke, and I saw that his finger-nails were already blue. ‘But I have papers here in my tunic which you must carry at once to the Prince of Saxe-Felstein, at his Castle of Hof. He is still true to us, but the Princess is our deadly enemy. She is striving to make him declare against us. If he does so, it will determine all those who are wavering, for the King of Prussia is his uncle and the King of Bavaria his cousin. These papers will hold him to us if they can only reach him before he takes the last step. Place them in his hands tonight, and, perhaps, you will have saved all Germany for the Emperor. Had my horse not been shot, I might, wounded as I am — —' He choked, and the cold hand tightened into a grip, which left mine as bloodless as itself. Then, with a groan, his head jerked back, and it was all over with him.

Here was a fine start for my journey home. I was left with a commission of which I knew little, which would lead me to delay the pressing needs of my hussars, and which at the same time was of such importance that it was impossible for me to avoid it. I opened the Marquis's tunic, the brilliance of which had been devised by the Emperor in order to attract those young aristocrats from whom he hoped to raise these new regiments of his Guard. It was a small packet of papers which I drew out, tied up with silk, and addressed to the Prince of Saxe-Felstein. In the corner, in a sprawling, untidy hand, which I knew to be the Emperor's own, was written: 'Pressing and most important.' It was an order to me, those four words — an order as clear as if it had come straight from the firm lips with the cold grey eyes looking into mine. My troopers might wait for their horses, the dead Marquis might lie where I had laid him amongst the heather, but if the mare and her rider had a breath left in them the papers should reach the Prince that night.

I should not have feared to ride by the road through the wood, for I have learned in Spain that the safest time to pass through a guerilla country is after an outrage, and that the moment of danger is when all is peaceful. When I came to look upon my map, however, I saw that Hof lay further to the south of me, and that I might reach it more directly by keeping to the moors. Off I set, therefore, and had not gone fifty yards before two carbine shots rang out of the brushwood and a bullet hummed past me like a bee. It was clear that the night-riders were bolder in their ways than the brigands of Spain, and that my mission would have ended where it had begun if I had kept to the road.

It was a mad ride, that — a ride with a loose rein, girth-deep in heather and in gorse, plunging through bushes, flying down hill-sides, with my neck at the mercy of my dear little Violette. But she — she never slipped, she never faltered, as swift and as surefooted as if she knew that her rider carried the fate of all Germany beneath the buttons of his pelisse. And I — I had long borne the name of being the best horseman in the six brigades of light cavalry, but I never rode as I rode then. My friend the Bart had told me of how they hunt the fox in England, but the swiftest fox would have been captured by me that day. The wild pigeons which flew overhead did not take a straighter course than Violette and I below. As an officer, I have always been ready to sacrifice myself for my men, though the Emperor would not have thanked me for it, for he had many men, but only one — well, cavalry leaders of the first class are rare.

But here I had an object which was indeed worth a sacrifice, and I thought no more of my life than of the clods of earth that flew from my darling's heels.

We struck the road once more as the light was failing, and galloped into the little village of Lobenstein. But we had hardly got upon the cobblestones when off came one of the mare's shoes, and I had to lead her to the village smithy. His fire was low, and his day's work done, so that it would be an hour at the least before I could hope to push on to Hof. Cursing at the delay, I strode into the village inn and ordered a cold chicken and some wine to be served for my dinner. It was but a few miles to Hof, and I had every hope that I might deliver my papers to the Prince on that very night, and be on my way for France next morning with despatches for the Emperor in my bosom. I will tell you now what befell me in the inn of Lobenstein.

The chicken had been served and the wine drawn, and I had turned upon both as a man may who has ridden such a ride, when I was aware of a murmur and a scuffling in the hall outside my door. At first I thought that it was some brawl between peasants in their cups, and I left them to settle their own affairs. But of a sudden there broke from among the low, sullen growl of the voices such a sound as would send Etienne Gerard leaping from his death-bed. It was the whimpering cry of a woman in pain. Down clattered my knife and my fork, and in an instant I was in the thick of the crowd which had gathered outside my door.

The heavy-cheeked landlord was there and his flaxen-haired wife, the two men from the stables, a chambermaid, and two or three villagers. All of them, women and men, were flushed and angry, while there in the centre of them, with pale cheeks and terror in her eyes, stood the loveliest woman that ever a soldier would wish to look upon. With her queenly head thrown back, and a touch of defiance mingled with her fear, she looked as she gazed round her like a creature of a different race from the vile, coarse-featured crew who surrounded her. I had not taken two steps from my door before she sprang to meet me, her hand resting upon my arm and her blue eyes sparkling with joy and triumph.

‘A French soldier and gentleman!’ she cried. ‘Now at last I am safe.’

‘Yes, madam, you are safe,’ said I, and I could not resist taking her hand in mine in order that I might reassure her. ‘You have only to command me,’ I added, kissing the hand as a sign that I meant what I was saying.

‘I am Polish,’ she cried; ‘the Countess Palotta is my name. They abuse me because I love the French. I do not know what they might have done to me had Heaven not sent you to my help.’

I kissed her hand again lest she should doubt my intentions. Then I turned upon the crew with such an expression as I know how to assume. In an instant the hall was empty.

‘Countess,’ said I, ‘you are now under my protection. You are faint, and a glass of wine is necessary to restore you.’ I offered her my arm and escorted her into my room, where she sat by my side at the table and took the refreshment which I offered her.

How she blossomed out in my presence, this woman, like a flower before the sun! She lit up the room with her beauty. She must have read my admiration in my eyes, and it seemed to me that I also could see something of the sort in her own. Ah! my friends, I was no ordinary-looking man when I was in my thirtieth year. In the whole light cavalry it would have been hard to find a finer pair of whiskers. Murat’s may have been a shade longer, but the best judges are agreed that Murat’s were a shade too long. And then I had a manner. Some women are to be approached in one way and some in another, just as a siege is an affair of fascines and gabions in hard weather and of trenches in soft. But the man who can mix daring with timidity, who can be outrageous with an air of humility, and presumptuous with a tone of deference, that is the man whom mothers have to fear. For myself, I felt that I was the guardian of this lonely lady, and knowing what a dangerous man I had to deal with, I kept strict watch upon myself. Still, even a guardian has his privileges, and I did not neglect them.

But her talk was as charming as her face. In a few words she explained that she was travelling to Poland, and that her brother who had been her escort had fallen ill upon the way. She had more than once met with ill-treatment from the country folk because she could not conceal her good-will towards the French. Then turning from her own affairs she questioned me about the army, and so came round to myself and my own exploits. They were familiar to her, she said, for she knew several of Poniatowski's officers, and they had spoken of my doings. Yet she would be glad to hear them from my own lips. Never have I had so delightful a conversation. Most women make the mistake of talking rather too much about their own affairs, but this one listened to my tales just as you are listening now, ever asking for more and more and more. The hours slipped rapidly by, and it was with horror that I heard the village clock strike eleven, and so learned that for four hours I had forgotten the Emperor's business.

'Pardon me, my dear lady,' I cried, springing to my feet, 'but I must go on instantly to Hof.'

She rose also, and looked at me with a pale, reproachful face. 'And me?' she said. 'What is to become of me?'

'It is the Emperor's affair. I have already stayed far too long. My duty calls me, and I must go.'

'You must go? And I must be abandoned alone to these savages? Oh, why did I ever meet you? Why did you ever teach me to rely upon your strength?' Her eyes glazed over, and in an instant she was sobbing upon my bosom.

Here was a trying moment for a guardian! Here was a time when he had to keep a watch upon a forward young officer. But I was equal to it. I smoothed her rich brown hair and whispered such consolations as I could think of in her ear, with one arm round her, it is true, but that was to hold her lest she should faint. She turned her tear-stained face to mine. 'Water,' she whispered. 'For God's sake, water!'

I saw that in another moment she would be senseless. I laid the drooping head upon the sofa, and then rushed furiously from the room, hunting from chamber to chamber for a carafe. It was some minutes before I could get one and hurry back with it. You can imagine my feelings to find the room empty and the lady gone.

Not only was she gone, but her cap and silver-mounted riding switch which had lain upon the table were gone also. I rushed out and roared for the landlord. He knew nothing of the matter, had never seen the woman before, and did not care if he never saw her again. Had the peasants at the door seen anyone ride away? No, they had seen nobody. I searched here and searched there, until at last I chanced to find myself in front of a mirror, where I stood with my eyes staring and my jaw as far dropped as the chin-strap of my shako would allow.

Four buttons of my pelisse were open, and it did not need me to put my hand up to know that my precious papers were gone. Oh! the depth of cunning that lurks in a woman's heart. She had robbed me, this creature, robbed me as she clung to my breast. Even while I smoothed her hair, and whispered kind words into her ear, her hands had been at work beneath my dolman. And here I was, at the very last step of my journey, without the power of carrying out this mission which had already deprived one good man of his life, and was likely to rob another one of his credit. What would the Emperor say when he heard that I had lost his despatches? Would the army believe it of Etienne Gerard? And when they heard that a woman's hand had coaxed them from me, what laughter there would be at mess-table and at camp-fire! I could have rolled upon the ground in my despair.

But one thing was certain — all this affair of the fracas in the hall and the persecution of the so-called Countess was a piece of acting from the beginning. This villainous innkeeper must be in the plot. From him I might learn who she was and where my papers had gone. I snatched my sabre from the table and rushed out in search of him. But the scoundrel had guessed what I would do, and had made his preparations for me. It was in the corner of the yard that I found him, a blunderbuss in his hands and a mastiff held upon a leash by his son. The two stable-hands, with pitchforks, stood upon either side, and the wife held a great lantern behind him, so as to guide his aim.

'Ride away, sir, ride away!' he cried, with a crackling voice. 'Your horse is at the door, and no one will meddle with you if you go your way; but if you come against us, you are alone against three brave men.'

I had only the dog to fear, for the two forks and the blunderbuss were shaking about like branches in a wind. Still, I considered that, though I might force an answer with my sword-point at the throat of this fat rascal, still I should have no means of knowing whether that answer was the truth. It would be a struggle, then, with much to lose and nothing certain to gain. I looked them up and down, therefore, in a way that set their foolish weapons shaking worse than ever, and then, throwing myself upon my mare, I galloped away with the shrill laughter of the landlady jarring upon my ears.

I had already formed my resolution. Although I had lost my papers, I could make a very good guess as to what their contents would be, and this I would say from my own lips to the Prince of Saxe-Felstein, as though the Emperor had commissioned me to convey it in that way. It was a bold stroke and a dangerous one, but if I went too far I could afterwards be disavowed. It was that or nothing, and when all Germany hung on the balance the game should not be lost if the nerve of one man could save it.

It was midnight when I rode into Hof, but every window was blazing, which was enough it itself, in that sleepy country, to tell the ferment of excitement in which the people were. There was hooting and jeering as I rode through the crowded streets, and once a stone sang past my head, but I kept upon my way, neither slowing nor quickening my pace, until I came to the palace. It was lit from base to battlement, and the dark shadows, coming and going against the yellow glare, spoke of the turmoil within. For my part, I handed my mare to a groom at the gate, and striding in I demanded, in such a voice as an ambassador should have, to see the Prince instantly, upon business which would brook no delay.

The hall was dark, but I was conscious as I entered of a buzz of innumerable voices, which hushed into silence as I loudly proclaimed my mission. Some great meeting was being held then — a meeting which, as my instincts told me, was to decide this very question of war and peace. It was possible that I might still be in time to turn the scale for the Emperor and for France. As to the major-domo, he looked blackly at me, and showing me into a small ante-chamber he left me. A minute later he returned to say that the Prince could not be disturbed at present, but that the Princess would take my message.

The Princess! What use was there in giving it to her? Had I not been warned that she was German in heart and soul, and that it was she who was turning her husband and her State against us?

‘It is the Prince that I must see,’ said I.

‘Nay, it is the Princess,’ said a voice at the door, and a woman swept into the chamber. ‘Von Rosen, you had best stay with us. Now, sir, what is it that you have to say to either Prince or Princess of Saxe-Felstein?’

At the first sound of the voice I had sprung to my feet. At the first glance I had thrilled with anger. Not twice in a lifetime does one meet that noble figure, that queenly head, and those eyes as blue as the Garonne, and as chilling as her winter waters.

‘Time presses, sir!’ she cried, with an impatient tap of her foot. ‘What have you to say to me?’

‘What have I to say to you?’ I cried. ‘What can I say, save that you have taught me never to trust a woman more? You have ruined and dishonoured me for ever.’

She looked with arched brows at her attendant.

‘Is this the raving of fever, or does it come from some less innocent cause?’ said she. ‘Perhaps a little blood-letting—’

‘Ah, you can act!’ I cried. ‘You have shown me that already.’

‘Do you mean that we have met before?’

‘I mean that you have robbed me within the last two hours.’

‘This is past all bearing,’ she cried, with an admirable affectation of anger. ‘You claim, as I understand, to be an ambassador, but there are limits to the privileges which such an office brings with it.’

‘You brazen it admirably,’ said I. ‘Your Highness will not make a fool of me twice in one night.’ I sprang forward and, stooping down, caught up the hem of her dress. ‘You would have done well to change it after you had ridden so far and so fast,’ said I.

It was like the dawn upon a snow-peak to see her ivory cheeks flush suddenly to crimson.

‘Insolent!’ she cried. ‘Call the foresters and have him thrust from the palace’

‘I will see the Prince first.’

‘You will never see the Prince. Ah! Hold him, Von Rosen, hold him.’

She had forgotten the man with whom she had to deal — was it likely that I would wait until they could bring their rascals? She had shown me her cards too soon. Her game was to stand between me and her husband. Mine was to speak face to face with him at any cost. One spring took me out of the chamber. In another I had crossed the hall. An instant later I had burst into the great room from which the murmur of the meeting had come. At the far end I saw a figure upon a high chair under a daïs. Beneath him was a line of high dignitaries, and then on every side I saw vaguely the heads of a vast assembly. Into the centre of the room I strode, my sabre clanking, my shako under my arm.

‘I am the messenger of the Emperor,’ I shouted. ‘I bear his message to His Highness the Prince of Saxe-Felstein.’

The man beneath the daïs raised his head, and I saw that his face was thin and wan, and that his back was bowed as though some huge burden was balanced between his shoulders.

‘Your name, sir?’ he asked.

‘Colonel Etienne Gerard, of the Third Hussars.’

Every face in the gathering was turned upon me, and I heard the rustle of the innumerable necks and saw countless eyes without meeting one friendly one amongst them. The woman had swept past me, and was whispering, with many shakes of her head and dartings of her hands, into the Prince’s ear. For my own part I threw out my chest and curled my moustache, glancing round in my own debonair fashion at the assembly. They were men, all of them, professors from the college, a sprinkling of their students, soldiers, gentlemen, artisans, all very silent and serious. In one corner there sat a group of men in black, with riding-coats drawn over their shoulders. They leaned their heads to each other, whispering under their breath, and with every movement I caught the clank of their sabres or the clink of their spurs.

‘The Emperor’s private letter to me informs me that it is the Marquis Château St Arnaud who is bearing his despatches,’ said the Prince.

‘The Marquis has been foully murdered,’ I answered, and a buzz rose up from the people as I spoke. Many heads were turned, I noticed, towards the dark men in the cloaks.

‘Where are your papers?’ asked the Prince.

‘I have none.’

A fierce clamour rose instantly around me. ‘He is a spy! He plays a part!’ they cried. ‘Hang him!’ roared a deep voice from the corner, and a dozen others took up the shout. For my part, I drew out my handkerchief and nicked the dust from the fur of my pelisse. The Prince held out his thin hands, and the tumult died away.

‘Where, then, are your credentials, and what is your message?’

‘My uniform is my credential, and my message is for your private ear.’

He passed his hand over his forehead with the gesture of a weak man who is at his wits’ end what to do. The Princess stood beside him with her hand upon his throne, and again whispered in his ear.

‘We are here in council together, some of my trusty subjects and myself,’ said he. ‘I have no secrets from them, and whatever message the Emperor may send to me at such a time concerns their interests no less than mine.’

There was a hum of applause at this, and every eye was turned once more upon me. My faith, it was an awkward position in which I found myself, for it is one thing to address eight hundred hussars, and another to speak to such an audience on such a subject. But I fixed my eyes upon the Prince, and tried to say just what I should have said if we had been alone, shouting it out, too, as though I had my regiment on parade.

‘You have often expressed friendship for the Emperor,’ I cried. ‘It is now at last that this friendship is about to be tried. If you will stand firm, he will reward you as only he can reward. It is an easy thing for him to turn a Prince into a King and a province into a power. His eyes are fixed upon you, and though you can do little to harm him, you can ruin yourself. At this moment he is crossing the Rhine with two hundred thousand men. Every fortress in the country is in his hands. He will be upon you in a week, and if you have played him false, God help both you and your people. You think that he is weakened because a few of us got the chilblains last winter. Look there!’ I cried, pointing to a great star which blazed through the window above the Prince’s head. ‘That is the Emperor’s star. When it wanes, he will wane — but not before.’

You would have been proud of me, my friends, if you could have seen and heard me, for I clashed my sabre as I spoke, and swung my dolman as though my regiment was picketed outside in the courtyard. They listened to me in silence, but the back of the Prince bowed more and more as though the burden which weighed upon it was greater than his strength. He looked round with haggard eyes.

‘We have heard a Frenchman speak for France,’ said he. ‘Let us have a German speak for Germany.’

The folk glanced at each other, and whispered to their neighbours. My speech, as I think, had its effect, and no man wished to be the first to commit himself in the eyes of the Emperor. The Princess looked round her with blazing eyes, and her clear voice broke the silence.

‘Is a woman to give this Frenchman his answer?’ she cried. ‘Is it possible, then, that among the night-riders of Lutzow there is none who can use his tongue as well as his sabre?’

Over went a table with a crash, and a young man had bounded upon one of the chairs. He had the face of one inspired — pale, eager, with wild hawk eyes, and tangled hair. His sword hung straight from his side, and his riding-boots were brown with mire.

‘It is Korner!’ the people cried. ‘It is young Korner, the poet! Ah, he will sing, he will sing.’

And he sang! It was soft, at first, and dreamy, telling of old Germany, the mother of nations, of the rich, warm plains, and the grey cities, and the fame of dead heroes. But then verse after verse rang like a trumpet-call. It was of the Germany of now, the Germany which had been taken unawares and overthrown, but which was up again, and snapping the bonds upon her giant limbs. What was life that one should covet it? What was glorious death that one should shun it? The mother, the great mother, was calling. Her sigh was in the night wind. She was crying to her own children for help. Would they come? Would they come? Would they come?

Ah, that terrible song, the spirit face and the ringing voice! Where were I, and France, and the Emperor? They did not shout, these people — they howled. They were up on the chairs and the tables. They were raving, sobbing, the tears running down their faces. Korner had sprung from the chair, and his comrades were round him with their sabres in the air. A flush had come into the pale face of the Prince, and he rose from his throne.

‘Colonel Gerard,’ said he, ‘you have heard the answer which you are to carry to your Emperor. The die is cast, my children. Your Prince and you must stand or fall together.’

He bowed to show that all was over, and the people with a shout made for the door to carry the tidings into the town. For my own part, I had done all that a brave man might, and so I was not sorry to be carried out amid the stream. Why should I linger in the palace? I had had my answer and must carry it, such as it was. I wished neither to see Hof nor its people again until I entered it at the head of a vanguard. I turned from the throng, then, and walked silently and sadly in the direction in which they had led the mare.

It was dark down there by the stables, and I was peering round for the hostler, when suddenly my two arms were seized from behind. There were hands at my wrists and at my throat, and I felt the cold muzzle of a pistol under my ear.

‘Keep your lips closed, you French dog,’ whispered a fierce voice. ‘We have him, captain.’

‘Have you the bridle?’

‘Here it is.’

‘Sling it over his head.’

I felt the cold coil of leather tighten round my neck. An hostler with a stable lantern had come out and was gazing upon the scene. In its dim light I saw stern faces breaking everywhere through the gloom, with the black caps and dark cloaks of the night-riders.

‘What would you do with him, captain?’ cried a voice.

‘Hang him at the palace gate.’

‘An ambassador?’

‘An ambassador without papers.’

‘But the Prince?’

‘Tut, man, do you not see that the Prince will then be committed to our side? He will be beyond all hope of forgiveness. At present he may swing round tomorrow as he has done before. He may eat his words, but a dead hussar is more than he can explain.’

‘No, no, Von Strelitz, we cannot do it,’ said another voice.

‘Can we not? I shall show you that!’ and there came a jerk on the bridle which nearly pulled me to the ground. At the same instant a sword flashed and the leather was cut through within two inches of my neck.

‘By Heaven, Korner, this is rank mutiny,’ cried the captain. ‘You may hang yourself before you are through with it.’

‘I have drawn my sword as a soldier and not as a brigand,’ said the young poet. ‘Blood may dim its blade, but never dishonour. Comrades, will you stand by and see this gentleman mishandled?’

A dozen sabres flew from their sheaths, and it was evident that my friends and my foes were about equally balanced. But the angry voices and the gleam of steel had brought the folk running from all parts.

‘The Princess!’ they cried. ‘The Princess is coming!’

And even as they spoke I saw her in front of us, her sweet face framed in the darkness. I had cause to hate her, for she had cheated and befooled me, and yet it thrilled me then and thrills me now to think that my arms have embraced her, and that I have felt the scent of her hair in my nostrils. I know not whether she lies under her German earth, or whether she still lingers, a grey-haired woman in her Castle of Hof, but she lives ever, young and lovely, in the heart and memory of Etienne Gerard.

‘For shame!’ she cried, sweeping up to me, and tearing with her own hands the noose from my neck. ‘You are fighting in God’s own quarrel, and yet you would begin with such a devil’s deed as this. This man is mine, and he who touches a hair of his head will answer for it to me.’

They were glad enough to slink off into the darkness before those scornful eyes. Then she turned once more to me.

‘You can follow me, Colonel Gerard,’ she said. ‘I have a word that I would speak to you.’

I walked behind her to the chamber into which I had originally been shown. She closed the door, and then looked at me with the archest twinkle in her eyes.

‘Is it not confiding of me to trust myself with you?’ said she. ‘You will remember that it is the Princess of Saxe-Felstein and not the poor Countess Palotta of Poland.’

‘Be the name what it might,’ I answered, ‘I helped a lady whom I believed to be in distress, and I have been robbed of my papers and almost of my honour as a reward.’

‘Colonel Gerard,’ said she, ‘we have been playing a game, you and I, and the stake was a heavy one. You have shown by delivering a message which was never given to you that you would stand at nothing in the cause of your country. My heart is German and yours is French, and I also would go all lengths, even to deceit and to theft, if at this crisis I could help my suffering fatherland. You see how frank I am.’

‘You tell me nothing that I have not seen.’

‘But now that the game is played and won, why should we bear malice? I will say this, that if ever I were in such a plight as that which I pretended in the inn of Lobenstein, I should never wish to meet a more gallant protector or a truer-hearted gentleman than Colonel Etienne Gerard. I had never thought that I could feel for a Frenchman as I felt for you when I slipped the papers from your breast.’

‘But you took them, none the less.’

‘They were necessary to me and to Germany. I knew the arguments which they contained and the effect which they would have upon the Prince. If they had reached him all would have been lost.’

‘Why should your Highness descend to such expedients when a score of these brigands, who wished to hang me at your castle gate, would have done the work as well?’

‘They are not brigands, but the best blood of Germany,’ she cried, hotly. ‘If you have been roughly used, you will remember the indignities to which every German has been subjected, from the Queen of Prussia downwards. As to why I did not have you waylaid upon the road, I may say that I had parties out on all sides, and that I was waiting at Lobenstein to hear of their success. When instead of their news you yourself arrived I was in despair, for there was only the one weak woman betwixt you and my husband. You see the straits to which I was driven before I used the weapon of my sex.'

'I confess that you have conquered me, your Highness, and it only remains for me to leave you in possession of the field.'

'But you will take your papers with you.' She held them out to me as she spoke. 'The Prince has crossed the Rubicon now, and nothing can bring him back. You can return these to the Emperor, and tell him that we refused to receive them. No one can accuse you then of having lost your despatches. Good-bye, Colonel Gerard, and the best I can wish you is that when you reach France you may remain there. In a year's time there will be no place for a Frenchman upon this side of the Rhine.'

And thus it was that I played the Princess of Saxe-Felstein with all Germany for a stake, and lost my game to her. I had much to think of as I walked my poor, tired Violette along the highway which leads westward from Hof. But amid all the thoughts there came back to me always the proud, beautiful face of the German woman, and the voice of the soldier-poet as he sang from the chair. And I understood then that there was something terrible in this strong, patient Germany — this mother root of nations — and I saw that such a land, so old and so beloved, never could be conquered. And as I rode I saw that the dawn was breaking, and that the great star at which I had pointed through the palace window was dim and pale in the western sky.

HOW THE BRIGADIER WON HIS MEDAL

The Duke of Tarentum, or Macdonald, as his old comrades prefer to call him, was, as I could perceive, in the vilest of tempers. His grim, Scotch face was like one of those grotesque door-knockers which one sees in the Faubourg St Germain. We heard afterwards that the Emperor had said in jest that he would have sent him against Wellington in the South, but that he was afraid to trust him within the sound of the pipes. Major Charpentier and I could plainly see that he was smouldering with anger.

‘Brigadier Gerard of the Hussars,’ said he, with the air of the corporal with the recruit.

I saluted.

‘Major Charpentier of the Horse Grenadiers.’

My companion answered to his name.

‘The Emperor has a mission for you.’

Without more ado he flung open the door and announced us.

I have seen Napoleon ten times on horseback to once on foot, and I think that he does wisely to show himself to the troops in this fashion, for he cuts a very good figure in the saddle. As we saw him now he was the shortest man out of six by a good hand’s breadth, and yet I am no very big man myself, though I ride quite heavy enough for a hussar. It is evident, too, that his body is too long for his legs. With his big, round head, his curved shoulders, and his clean-shaven face, he is more like a Professor at the Sorbonne than the first soldier in France. Every man to his taste, but it seems to me that, if I could clap a pair of fine light cavalry whiskers, like my own, on to him, it would do him no harm. He has a firm mouth, however, and his eyes are remarkable. I have seen them once turned on me in anger, and I had rather ride at a square on a spent horse than face them again. I am not a man who is easily daunted, either.

He was standing at the side of the room, away from the window, looking up at a great map of the country which was hung upon the wall. Berthier stood beside him, trying to look wise, and just as we entered, Napoleon snatched his sword impatiently from him and pointed with it on the map. He was talking fast and low, but I heard him say, ‘The valley of the Meuse,’ and twice he repeated ‘Berlin.’ As we entered, his aide-de-camp advanced to us, but the Emperor stopped him and beckoned us to his side.

‘You have not yet received the cross of honour, Brigadier Gerard?’ he asked.

I replied that I had not, and was about to add that it was not for want of having deserved it, when he cut me short in his decided fashion.

‘And you, Major?’ he asked.

‘No, sire.’

‘Then you shall both have your opportunity now.’

He led us to the great map upon the wall and placed the tip of Berthier’s sword on Rheims.

‘I will be frank with you, gentlemen, as with two comrades. You have both been with me since Marengo, I believe?’ He had a strangely pleasant smile, which used to light up his pale face with a kind of cold sunshine. ‘Here at Rheims are our present headquarters on this the 14th of March. Very good. Here is Paris, distant by road a good twenty-five leagues. Blucher lies to the north, Schwarzenberg to the south.’ He prodded at the map with the sword as he spoke.

‘Now,’ said he, ‘the further into the country these people march, the more completely I shall crush them. They are about to advance upon Paris. Very good. Let them do so. My brother, the King of Spain, will be there with a hundred thousand men. It is to him that I send you. You will hand him this letter, a copy of which I confide to each of you. It is to tell him that I am coming at once, in two days’ time, with every man and horse and gun to his relief. I must give them forty-eight hours to recover. Then straight to Paris! You understand me, gentlemen?’

Ah, if I could tell you the glow of pride which it gave me to be taken into the great man’s confidence in this way. As he handed our letters to us I clicked my spurs and threw out my chest, smiling and nodding to let him know that I saw what he would be after. He smiled also, and rested his hand for a moment upon the cape of my dolman. I would have given half my arrears of pay if my mother could have seen me at that instant.

‘I will show you your route,’ said he, turning back to the map. ‘Your orders are to ride together as far as Bazoches. You will then separate, the one making for Paris by Oulchy and Neuilly, and the other to the north by Braine, Soissons, and Senlis. Have you anything to say, Brigadier Gerard?’

I am a rough soldier, but I have words and ideas. I had begun to speak about glory and the peril of France when he cut me short.

‘And you, Major Charpentier?’

‘If we find our route unsafe, are we at liberty to choose another?’ said he.

‘Soldiers do not choose, they obey.’ He inclined his head to show that we were dismissed, and turned round to Berthier. I do not know what he said, but I heard them both laughing.

Well, as you may think, we lost little time in getting upon our way. In half an hour we were riding down the High Street of Rheims, and it struck twelve o’clock as we passed the Cathedral. I had my little grey mare, Violette, the one which Sebastiani had wished to buy after Dresden. It is the fastest horse in the six brigades of light cavalry, and was only beaten by the Duke of Rovigo’s racer from England. As to Charpentier, he had the kind of horse which a horse grenadier or a cuirassier would be likely to ride: a back like a bedstead, you understand, and legs like the posts. He is a hulking fellow himself, so that they looked a singular pair. And yet in his insane conceit he ogled the girls as they waved their handkerchiefs to me from the windows, and he twirled his ugly red moustache up into his eyes, just as if it were to him that their attention was addressed.

When we came out of the town we passed through the French camp, and then across the battle-field of yesterday, which was still covered both by our own poor fellows and by the Russians. But of the two the camp was the sadder sight. Our army was thawing away. The Guards were all right, though the young guard was full of conscripts. The artillery and the heavy cavalry were also good if there were more of them, but the infantry privates with their under officers looked like schoolboys with their masters. And we had no reserves. When one considered that there were 80,000 Prussians to the north and 150,000 Russians and Austrians to the south, it might make even the bravest man grave.

For my own part, I confess that I shed a tear until the thought came that the Emperor was still with us, and that on that very morning he had placed his hand upon my dolman and had promised me a medal of honour. This set me singing, and I spurred Violette on, until Charpentier had to beg me to have mercy on his great, snorting, panting camel. The road was beaten into paste and rutted two feet deep by the artillery, so that he was right in saying that it was not the place for a gallop.

I have never been very friendly with this Charpentier; and now for twenty miles of the way I could not draw a word from him. He rode with his brows puckered and his chin upon his breast, like a man who is heavy with thought. More than once I asked him what was on his mind, thinking that, perhaps, with my quicker intelligence I might set the matter straight. His answer always was that it was his mission of which he was thinking, which surprised me, because, although I had never thought much of his intelligence, still it seemed to me to be impossible that anyone could be puzzled by so simple and soldierly a task.

Well, we came at last to Bazoches, where he was to take the southern road and I the northern. He half turned in his saddle before he left me, and he looked at me with a singular expression of inquiry in his face.

‘What do you make of it, Brigadier?’ he asked.

‘Of what?’

‘Of our mission.’

‘Surely it is plain enough.’

‘You think so? Why should the Emperor tell us his plans?’

‘Because he recognised our intelligence.’

My companion laughed in a manner which I found annoying.

‘May I ask what you intend to do if you find these villages full of Prussians?’ he asked.

‘I shall obey my orders.’

‘But you will be killed.’

‘Very possibly.’

He laughed again, and so offensively that I clapped my hand to my sword. But before I could tell him what I thought of his stupidity and rudeness he had wheeled his horse, and was lumbering away down the other road. I saw his big fur cap vanish over the brow of the hill, and then I rode upon my way, wondering at his conduct. From time to time I put my hand to the breast of my tunic and felt the paper crackle beneath my fingers. Ah, my precious paper, which should be turned into the little silver medal for which I had yearned so long. All the way from Braine to Sermoise I was thinking of what my mother would say when she saw it.

I stopped to give Violette a meal at a wayside auberge on the side of a hill not far from Soissons — a place surrounded by old oaks, and with so many crows that one could scarce hear one’s own voice. It was from the innkeeper that I learned that Marmont had fallen back two days before, and that the Prussians were over the Aisne. An hour later, in the fading light, I saw two of their vedettes upon the hill to the right, and then, as darkness gathered, the heavens to the north were all glimmering from the lights of a bivouac.

When I heard that Blucher had been there for two days, I was much surprised that the Emperor should not have known that the country through which he had ordered me to carry my precious letter was already occupied by the enemy. Still, I thought of the tone of his voice when he said to Charpentier that a soldier must not choose, but must obey. I should follow the route he had laid down for me as long as Violette could move a hoof or I a finger upon her bridle. All the way from Sermoise to Soissons, where the road dips up and down, curving among fir woods, I kept my pistol ready and my sword-belt braced, pushing on swiftly where the path was straight, and then coming slowly round the corners in the way we learned in Spain.

When I came to the farmhouse which lies to the right of the road just after you cross the wooden bridge over the Crise, near where the great statue of the Virgin stands, a woman cried to me from the field, saying that the Prussians were in Soissons. A small party of their lancers, she said, had come in that very afternoon, and a whole division was expected before midnight. I did not wait to hear the end of her tale, but clapped spurs into Violette, and in five minutes was galloping her into the town.

Three Uhlans were at the mouth of the main street, their horses tethered, and they gossiping together, each with a pipe as long as my sabre. I saw them well in the light of an open door, but of me they could have seen only the flash of Violette’s grey side and the black flutter of my cloak. A moment later I flew through a stream of them rushing from an open gateway. Violette’s shoulder sent one of them reeling, and I stabbed at another but missed him. Pang, pang, went two carbines, but I had flown round the curve of the street, and never so much as heard the hiss of the balls. Ah, we were great, both Violette and I. She lay down to it like a coursed hare, the fire flying from her hoofs. I stood in my stirrups and brandished my sword. Someone sprang for my bridle. I sliced him through the arm, and I heard him howling behind me. Two horsemen closed upon me. I cut one down and outpaced the other. A minute later I was clear of the town, and flying down a broad white road with the black poplars on either side. For a time I heard the rattle of hoofs behind me, but they died and died until I could not tell them from the throbbing of my own heart. Soon I pulled up and listened, but all was silent. They had given up the chase.

Well, the first thing that I did was to dismount and to lead my mare into a small wood through which a stream ran. There I watered her and rubbed her down, giving her two pieces of sugar soaked in cognac from my flask. She was spent from the sharp chase, but it was wonderful to see how she came round with a half-hour’s rest. When my thighs closed upon her again, I could tell by the spring and the swing of her that it would not be her fault if I did not win my way safe to Paris.

I must have been well within the enemy’s lines now, for I heard a number of them shouting one of their rough drinking songs out of a house by the roadside, and I went round by the fields to avoid it. At another time two men came out into the moonlight (for by this time it was a cloudless night) and shouted something in German, but I galloped on without heeding them, and they were afraid to fire, for their own hussars are dressed exactly as I was. It is best to take no notice at these times, and then they put you down as a deaf man.

It was a lovely moon, and every tree threw a black bar across the road. I could see the countryside just as if it were daytime, and very peaceful it looked, save that there was a great fire raging somewhere in the north. In the silence of the night-time, and with the knowledge that danger was in front and behind me, the sight of that great distant fire was very striking and awesome. But I am not easily clouded, for I have seen too many singular things, so I hummed a tune between my teeth and thought of little Lisette, whom I might see in Paris. My mind was full of her when, trotting round a corner, I came straight upon half-a-dozen German dragoons, who were sitting round a brushwood fire by the roadside.

I am an excellent soldier. I do not say this because I am prejudiced in my own favour, but because I really am so. I can weigh every chance in a moment, and decide with as much certainty as though I had brooded for a week. Now I saw like a flash that, come what might, I should be chased, and on a horse which had already done a long twelve leagues. But it was better to be chased onwards than to be chased back. On this moonlit night, with fresh horses behind me, I must take my risk in either case; but if I were to shake them off, I preferred that it should be near Senlis than near Soissons.

All this flashed on me as if by instinct, you understand. My eyes had hardly rested on the bearded faces under the brass helmets before my rowels had touched Violette, and she was off with a rattle like a pas-de-charge. Oh, the shouting and rushing and stamping from behind us! Three of them fired and three swung themselves on to their horses. A bullet rapped on the crupper of my saddle with a noise like a stick on a door. Violette sprang madly forward, and I thought she had been wounded, but it was only a graze above the near fore-fetlock. Ah, the dear little mare, how I loved her when I felt her settle down into that long, easy gallop of hers, her hoofs going like a Spanish girl's castanets. I could not hold myself. I turned on my saddle and shouted and raved, 'Vive l'Empereur!' I screamed and laughed at the gust of oaths that came back to me.

But it was not over yet. If she had been fresh she might have gained a mile in five. Now she could only hold her own with a very little over. There was one of them, a young boy of an officer, who was better mounted than the others. He drew ahead with every stride. Two hundred yards behind him were two troopers, but I saw every time that I glanced round that the distance between them was increasing. The other three who had waited to shoot were a long way in the rear.

The officer's mount was a bay — a fine horse, though not to be spoken of with Violette; yet it was a powerful brute, and it seemed to me that in a few miles its freshness might tell. I waited until the lad was a long way in front of his comrades, and then I eased my mare down a little — a very, very little, so that he might think he was really catching me. When he came within pistol-shot of me I drew and cocked my own pistol, and laid my chin upon my shoulder to see what he would do. He did not offer to fire, and I soon discerned the cause. The silly boy had taken his pistols from his holsters when he had camped for the night. He wagged his sword at me now and roared some threat or other. He did not seem to understand that he was at my mercy. I eased Violette down until there was not the length of a long lance between the grey tail and the bay muzzle.

'Rendez-vous!' he yelled.

'I must compliment monsieur upon his French,' said I, resting the barrel of my pistol upon my bridle-arm, which I have always found best when shooting from the saddle. I aimed at his face, and could see, even in the moonlight, how white he grew when he understood that it was all up with him. But even as my finger pressed the trigger I thought of his mother, and I put my ball through his horse's shoulder. I fear he hurt himself in the fall, for it was a fearful crash, but I had my letter to think of, so I stretched the mare into a gallop once more.

But they were not so easily shaken off, these brigands. The two troopers thought no more of their young officer than if he had been a recruit thrown in the riding-school. They left him to the others and thundered on after me. I had pulled up on the brow of a hill, thinking that I had heard the last of them; but, my faith, I soon saw there was no time for loitering, so away we went, the mare tossing her head and I my shako, to show what we thought of two dragoons who tried to catch a hussar. But at this moment, even while I laughed at the thought, my heart stood still within me, for there at the end of the long white road was a black patch of cavalry waiting to receive me. To a young soldier it might have seemed the shadow of the trees, but to me it was a troop of hussars, and, turn where I could, death seemed to be waiting for me.

Well, I had the dragoons behind me and the hussars in front. Never since Moscow have I seemed to be in such peril. But for the honour of the brigade I had rather be cut down by a light cavalryman than by a heavy. I never drew bridle, therefore, or hesitated for an instant, but I let Violette have her head. I remember that I tried to pray as I rode, but I am a little out of practice at such things, and the only words I could remember were the prayer for fine weather which we used at the school on the evening before holidays. Even this seemed better than nothing, and I was pattering it out, when suddenly I heard French voices in front of me. Ah, mon Dieu, but the joy went through my heart like a musket-ball. They were ours — our own dear little rascals from the corps of Marmont. Round whisked my two dragoons and galloped for their lives, with the moon gleaming on their brass helmets, while I trotted up to my friends with no undue haste, for I would have them understand that though a hussar may fly, it is not in his nature to fly very fast. Yet I fear that Violette's heaving flanks and foam-spattered muzzle gave the lie to my careless bearing.

Who should be at the head of the troop but old Bouvet, whom I saved at Leipzig! When he saw me his little pink eyes filled with tears, and, indeed, I could not but shed a few myself at the sight of his joy. I told him of my mission, but he laughed when I said that I must pass through Senlis.

'The enemy is there,' said he. 'You cannot go.'

'I prefer to go where the enemy is,' I answered.

‘But why not go straight to Paris with your despatch? Why should you choose to pass through the one place where you are almost sure to be taken or killed?’

‘A soldier does not choose — he obeys,’ said I, just as I had heard Napoleon say it.

Old Bouvet laughed in his wheezy way, until I had to give my moustachios a twirl and look him up and down in a manner which brought him to reason.

‘Well’, said he, ‘you had best come along with us, for we are all bound for Senlis. Our orders are to reconnoitre the place. A squadron of Poniatowski’s Polish Lancers are in front of us. If you must ride through it, it is possible that we may be able to go with you.’

So away we went, jingling and clanking through the quiet night until we came up with the Poles — fine old soldiers all of them, though a trifle heavy for their horses. It was a treat to see them, for they could not have carried themselves better if they had belonged to my own brigade. We rode together, until in the early morning we saw the lights of Senlis. A peasant was coming along with a cart, and from him we learned how things were going there.

His information was certain, for his brother was the Mayor’s coachman, and he had spoken with him late the night before. There was a single squadron of Cossacks — or a polk, as they call it in their frightful language — quartered upon the Mayor’s house, which stands at the corner of the market-place, and is the largest building in the town. A whole division of Prussion infantry was encamped in the woods to the north, but only the Cossacks were in Senlis. Ah, what a chance to avenge ourselves upon these barbarians, whose cruelty to our poor countryfolk was the talk at every camp fire.

We were into the town like a torrent, hacked down the vedettes, rode over the guard, and were smashing in the doors of the Mayor’s house before they understood that there was a Frenchman within twenty miles of them. We saw horrid heads at the windows — heads bearded to the temples, with tangled hair and sheepskin caps, and silly, gaping mouths. ‘Hourra! Hourra!’ they shrieked, and fired with their carbines, but our fellows were into the house and at their throats before they had wiped the sleep out of their eyes. It was dreadful to see how the Poles flung themselves upon them, like starving wolves upon a herd of fat bucks — for, as you know, the

Poles have a blood feud against the Cossacks. The most were killed in the upper rooms, whither they had fled for shelter, and the blood was pouring down into the hall like rain from a roof. They are terrible soldiers, these Poles, though I think they are a trifle heavy for their horses. Man for man, they are as big as Kellerman's cuirassiers. Their equipment is, of course, much lighter, since they are without the cuirass, back-plate, and helmet.

Well, it was at this point that I made an error — a very serious error it must be admitted. Up to this moment I had carried out my mission in a manner which only my modesty prevents me from describing as remarkable. But now I did that which an official would condemn and a soldier excuse.

There is no doubt that the mare was spent, but still it is true that I might have galloped on through Senlis and reached the country, where I should have had no enemy between me and Paris. But what hussar can ride past a fight and never draw rein? It is to ask too much of him. Besides, I thought that if Violette had an hour of rest I might have three hours the better at the other end. Then on the top of it came those heads at the windows, with their sheepskin hats and their barbarous cries. I sprang from my saddle, threw Violette's bridle over a rail-post, and ran into the house with the rest. It is true that I was too late to be of service, and that I was nearly wounded by a lance-thrust from one of these dying savages. Still, it is a pity to miss even the smallest affair, for one never knows what opportunity for advancement may present itself. I have seen more soldierly work in outpost skirmishes and little gallop-and-hack affairs of the kind than in any of the Emperor's big battles.

When the house was cleared I took a bucket of water out for Violette, and our peasant guide showed me where the good Mayor kept his fodder. My faith, but the little sweetheart was ready for it. Then I sponged down her legs, and leaving her still tethered I went back into the house to find a mouthful for myself, so that I should not need to halt again until I was in Paris.

And now I come to the part of my story which may seem singular to you, although I could tell you at least ten things every bit as queer which have happened to me in my lifetime. You can understand that, to a man who spends his life in scouting and vedette duties on the bloody ground which lies between two great armies, there are many chances of strange experiences. I'll tell you, however, exactly what occurred.

Old Bouvet was waiting in the passage when I entered, and he asked me whether we might not crack a bottle of wine together. ‘My faith, we must not be long,’ said he. ‘There are ten thousand of Theilmann’s Prussians in the woods up yonder.’

‘Where is the wine?’ I asked.

‘Ah, you may trust two hussars to find where the wine is,’ said he, and taking a candle in his hand, he led the way down the stone stairs into the kitchen.

When we got there we found another door, which opened on to a winding stair with the cellar at the bottom. The Cossacks had been there before us, as was easily seen by the broken bottles littered all over it. However, the Mayor was a *bon-vivant*, and I do not wish to have a better set of bins to pick from. Chambertin, Graves, Alicant, white wine and red, sparkling and still, they lay in pyramids peeping coyly out of sawdust. Old Bouvet stood with his candle looking here and peeping there, purring in his throat like a cat before a milk-pail. He had picked upon a Burgundy at last, and had his hand outstretched to the bottle when there came a roar of musketry from above us, a rush of feet, and such a yelping and screaming as I have never listened to. The Prussians were upon us!

Bouvet is a brave man: I will say that for him. He flashed out his sword and away he clattered up the stone steps, his spurs clinking as he ran. I followed him, but just as we came out into the kitchen passage a tremendous shout told us that the house had been recaptured.

‘It is all over,’ I cried, grasping at Bouvet’s sleeve.

‘There is one more to die,’ he shouted, and away he went like a madman up the second stair. In effect, I should have gone to my death also had I been in his place, for he had done very wrong in not throwing out his scouts to warn him if the Germans advanced upon him. For an instant I was about to rush up with him, and then I bethought myself that, after all, I had my own mission to think of, and that if I were taken the important letter of the Emperor would be sacrificed. I let Bouvet die alone, therefore, and I went down into the cellar again, closing the door behind me.

Well, it was not a very rosy prospect down there either. Bouvet had dropped the candle when the alarm came, and I, pawing about in the darkness, could find nothing but broken bottles. At last I came upon the candle, which had rolled under the curve of a cask, but, try as I would with my tinderbox, I could not light it. The reason was that the wick had been wet in a puddle of wine, so suspecting that this might be the case, I cut the end off with my sword. Then I found that it lighted easily enough. But what to do I could not imagine. The scoundrels upstairs were shouting themselves hoarse, several hundred of them from the sound, and it was clear that some of them would soon want to moisten their throats. There would be an end to a dashing soldier, and of the mission and of the medal. I thought of my mother and I thought of the Emperor. It made me weep to think that the one would lose so excellent a son and the other the best light cavalry officer he ever had since Lasalle's time. But presently I dashed the tears from my eyes. 'Courage!' I cried, striking myself upon the chest. 'Courage, my brave boy. Is it possible that one who has come safely from Moscow without so much as a frost-bite will die in a French wine-cellar?' At the thought I was up on my feet and clutching at the letter in my tunic, for the crackle of it gave me courage.

My first plan was to set fire to the house, in the hope of escaping in the confusion. My second to get into an empty wine-cask. I was looking round to see if I could find one, when suddenly, in the corner, I espied a little low door, painted of the same grey colour as the wall, so that it was only a man with quick sight who would have noticed it. I pushed against it, and at first I imagined that it was locked. Presently, however, it gave a little, and then I understood that it was held by the pressure of something on the other side. I put my feet against a hogshead of wine, and I gave such a push that the door flew open and I came down with a crash upon my back, the candle flying out of my hands, so that I found myself in darkness once more. I picked myself up and stared through the black archway into the gloom beyond.

There was a slight ray of light coming from some slit or grating. The dawn had broken outside, and I could dimly see the long, curving sides of several huge casks, which made me think that perhaps this was where the Mayor kept his reserves of wine while they were maturing. At any rate, it seemed to be a safer hiding-place than the outer cellar, so gathering up my candle, I was just closing the door behind me, when I suddenly saw something which filled me with amazement, and even, I confess, with the smallest little touch of fear.

I have said that at the further end of the cellar there was a dim grey fan of light striking downwards from somewhere near the roof. Well, as I peered through the darkness, I suddenly saw a great, tall man skip into this belt of daylight, and then out again into the darkness at the further end. My word, I gave such a start that my shako nearly broke its chin-strap! It was only a glance, but, none the less, I had time to see that the fellow had a hairy Cossack cap on his head, and that he was a great, long-legged, broad-shouldered brigand, with a sabre at his waist. My faith, even Etienne Gerard was a little staggered at being left alone with such a creature in the dark.

But only for a moment. ‘Courage!’ I thought. ‘Am I not a hussar, a brigadier, too, at the age of thirty-one, and the chosen messenger of the Emperor?’ After all, this skulker had more cause to be afraid of me than I of him. And then suddenly I understood that he was afraid — horribly afraid. I could read it from his quick step and his bent shoulders as he ran among the barrels, like a rat making for its hole. And, of course, it must have been he who had held the door against me, and not some packing-case or wine-cask as I had imagined. He was the pursued then, and I the pursuer. Aha, I felt my whiskers bristle as I advanced upon him through the darkness! He would find that he had no chicken to deal with, this robber from the North. For the moment I was magnificent.

At first I had feared to light my candle lest I should make a mark of myself, but now, after cracking my shin over a box, and catching my spurs in some canvas, I thought the bolder course the wiser. I lit it, therefore, and then I advanced with long strides, my sword in my hand. ‘Come out, you rascal!’ I cried. ‘Nothing can save you. You will at last meet with your deserts.’

I held my candle high, and presently I caught a glimpse of the man’s head staring at me over a barrel. He had a gold chevron on his black cap, and the expression of his face told me in an instant that he was an officer and a man of refinement.

‘Monsieur,’ he cried, in excellent French, ‘I surrender myself on a promise of quarter. But if I do not have your promise, I will then sell my life as dearly as I can.’

‘Sir,’ said I, ‘a Frenchman knows how to treat an unfortunate enemy. Your life is safe.’ With that he handed his sword over the top of the barrel, and I bowed with the candle on my heart. ‘Whom have I the honour of capturing?’ I asked.

‘I am the Count Boutkine, of the Emperor’s own Don Cossacks,’ said he. ‘I came out with my troop to reconnoitre Senlis, and as we found no sign of your people we determined to spend the night here.’

‘And would it be an indiscretion,’ I asked, ‘if I were to inquire how you came into the back cellar?’

‘Nothing more simple,’ said he. ‘It was our intention to start at early dawn. Feeling chilled after dressing, I thought that a cup of wine would do me no harm, so I came down to see what I could find. As I was rummaging about, the house was suddenly carried by assault so rapidly that by the time I had climbed the stairs it was all over. It only remained for me to save myself, so I came down here and hid myself in the back cellar, where you have found me.’

I thought of how old Bouvet had behaved under the same conditions, and the tears sprang to my eyes as I contemplated the glory of France. Then I had to consider what I should do next. It was clear that this Russian Count, being in the back cellar while we were in the front one, had not heard the sounds which would have told him that the house was once again in the hands of his own allies. If he should once understand this the tables would be turned, and I should be his prisoner instead of he being mine. What was I to do? I was at my wits’ end, when suddenly there came to me an idea so brilliant that I could not but be amazed at my own invention.

‘Count Boutkine,’ said I, ‘I find myself in a most difficult position.’

‘And why?’ he asked.

‘Because I have promised you your life.’

His jaw dropped a little.

‘You would not withdraw your promise?’ he cried.

‘If the worst comes to the worst I can die in your defence,’ said I; ‘but the difficulties are great.’

‘What is it, then?’ he asked.

‘I will be frank with you,’ said I. ‘You must know that our fellows, and especially the Poles, are so incensed against the Cossacks that the mere sight of the uniform drives them mad. They precipitate themselves instantly upon the wearer and tear him limb from limb. Even their officers cannot restrain them.’

The Russian grew pale at my words and the way in which I said them.

‘But this is terrible,’ said he.

‘Horrible!’ said I. ‘If we were to go up together at this moment I cannot promise how far I could protect you.’

‘I am in your hands,’ he cried. ‘What would you suggest that we should do? Would it not be best that I should remain here?’

‘That worst of all.’

‘And why?’

‘Because our fellows will ransack the house presently, and then you would be cut to pieces. No, no, I must go and break it to them. But even then, when once they see that accursed uniform, I do not know what may happen.’

‘Should I then take the uniform off?’

‘Excellent!’ I cried. ‘Hold, we have it! You will take your uniform off and put on mine. That will make you sacred to every French soldier.’

‘It is not the French I fear so much as the Poles.’

‘But my uniform will be a safeguard against either.’

‘How can I thank you?’ he cried. ‘But you — what are you to wear?’

‘I will wear yours.’

‘And perhaps fall a victim to your generosity?’

‘It is my duty to take the risk,’ I answered; ‘but I have no fears. I will ascend in your uniform. A hundred swords will be turned upon me. “Hold!” I will shout, “I am the Brigadier Gerard!” Then they will see my face. They will know me. And I will tell them about you. Under the shield of these clothes you will be sacred.’

His fingers trembled with eagerness as he tore off his tunic. His boots and breeches were much like my own, so there was no need to change them, but I gave him my hussar jacket, my dolman, my shako, my sword-belt, and my sabre-tasche, while I took in exchange his high sheepskin cap with the gold chevron, his fur-trimmed coat, and his crooked sword. Be it well understood that in changing the tunics I did not forget to change my thrice-precious letter also from my old one to my new.

‘With your leave,’ said I, ‘I shall now bind you to a barrel.’

He made a great fuss over this, but I have learned in my soldiering never to throw away chances, and how could I tell that he might not, when my back was turned, see how the matter really stood, and break in upon my plans? He was leaning against a barrel at the time, so I ran six times round it with a rope, and then tied it with a big knot behind. If he wished to come upstairs he would, at least, have to carry a thousand litres of good French wine for a knapsack. I then shut the door of the back cellar behind me, so that he might not hear what was going forward, and tossing the candle away I ascended the kitchen stair.

There were only about twenty steps, and yet, while I came up them, I seemed to have time to think of everything that I had ever hoped to do. It was the same feeling that I had at Eylau when I lay with my broken leg and saw the horse artillery galloping down upon me. Of course, I knew that if I were taken I should be shot instantly as being disguised within the enemy's lines. Still, it was a glorious death — in the direct service of the Emperor — and I reflected that there could not be less than five lines, and perhaps seven, in the *Moniteur* about me. Palaret had eight lines, and I am sure that he had not so fine a career.

When I made my way out into the hall, with all the nonchalance in my face and manner that I could assume, the very first thing that I saw was Bouvet's dead body, with his legs drawn up and a broken sword in his hand. I could see by the black smudge that he had been shot at close quarters. I should have wished to salute as I went by, for he was a gallant man, but I feared lest I should be seen, and so I passed on.

The front of the hall was full of Prussian infantry, who were knocking loopholes in the wall, as though they expected that there might be yet another attack. Their officer, a little man, was running about giving directions. They were all too busy to take much notice of me, but another officer, who was standing by the door with a long pipe in his mouth, strode across and clapped me on the shoulder, pointing to the dead bodies of our poor hussars, and saying something which was meant for a jest, for his long beard opened and showed every fang in his head. I laughed heartily also, and said the only Russian words that I knew. I learned them from little Sophie, at Wilna, and they meant: 'If the night is fine we shall meet under the oak tree, but if it rains we shall meet in the byre.' It was all the same to this German, however, and I have no doubt that he gave me credit for saying something very witty indeed, for he roared laughing, and slapped me on my shoulder again. I nodded to him and marched out of the hall-door as coolly as if I were the commandant of the garrison.

There were a hundred horses tethered about outside, most of them belonging to the Poles and hussars. Good little Violette was waiting with the others, and she whinnied when she saw me coming towards her. But I would not mount her. No. I was much too cunning for that. On the contrary, I chose the most shaggy little Cossack horse that I could see, and I sprang upon it with as much assurance as though it had belonged to my father before me. It had a great bag of plunder slung over its neck, and this I laid upon Violette’s back, and led her along beside me. Never have you seen such a picture of the Cossack returning from the foray. It was superb.

Well, the town was full of Prussians by this time. They lined the side-walks and pointed me out to each other, saying, as I could judge from their gestures, ‘There goes one of those devils of Cossacks. They are the boys for foraging and plunder.’

One or two officers spoke to me with an air of authority, but I shook my head and smiled, and said, ‘If the night is fine we shall meet under the oak tree, but if it rains we shall meet in the byre,’ at which they shrugged their shoulders and gave the matter up. In this way I worked along until I was beyond the northern outskirt of the town. I could see in the roadway two lancer vedettes with their black and white pennons, and I knew that when I was once past these I should be a free man once more. I made my pony trot, therefore, Violette rubbing her nose against my knee all the time, and looking up at me to ask how she had deserved that this hairy doormat of a creature should be preferred to her. I was not more than a hundred yards from the Uhlans when, suddenly, you can imagine my feelings when I saw a real Cossack coming galloping along the road towards me.

Ah, my friend, you who read this, if you have any heart, you will feel for a man like me, who had gone through so many dangers and trials, only at this very last moment to be confronted with one which appeared to put an end to everything. I will confess that for a moment I lost heart, and was inclined to throw myself down in my despair, and to cry out that I had been betrayed. But, no; I was not beaten even now. I opened two buttons of my tunic so that I might get easily at the Emperor’s message, for it was my fixed determination when all hope was gone to swallow the letter and then die sword in hand. Then I felt that my little, crooked sword was loose in its sheath, and I trotted on to where the vedettes were waiting. They seemed inclined to stop me, but I pointed to the other Cossack, who was still a couple of hundred yards off, and they, understanding that I merely wished to meet him, let me pass with a salute.

I dug my spurs into my pony then, for if I were only far enough from the lancers I thought I might manage the Cossack without much difficulty. He was an officer, a large, bearded man, with a gold chevron in his cap, just the same as mine. As I advanced he unconsciously aided me by pulling up his horse, so that I had a fine start of the vedettes. On I came for him, and I could see wonder changing to suspicion in his brown eyes as he looked at me and at my pony, and at my equipment. I do not know what it was that was wrong, but he saw something which was as it should not be. He shouted out a question, and then when I gave no answer he pulled out his sword. I was glad in my heart to see him do so, for I had always rather fight than cut down an unsuspecting enemy. Now I made at him full tilt, and, parrying his cut, I got my point in just under the fourth button of his tunic. Down he went, and the weight of him nearly took me off my horse before I could disengage. I never glanced at him to see if he were living or dead, for I sprang off my pony and on to Violette, with a shake of my bridle and a kiss of my hand to the two Uhlans behind me. They galloped after me, shouting, but Violette had had her rest, and was just as fresh as when she started. I took the first side road to the west and then the first to the south, which would take me away from the enemy’s country. On we went and on, every stride taking me further from my foes and nearer to my friends. At last, when I reached the end of a long stretch of road, and looking back from it could see no sign of any pursuers, I understood that my troubles were over.

And it gave me a glow of happiness, as I rode, to think that I had done to the letter what the Emperor had ordered. What would he say when he saw me? What could he say which would do justice to the incredible way in which I had risen above every danger? He had ordered me to go through Sermoise, Soissons, and Senlis, little dreaming that they were all three occupied by the enemy. And yet I had done it. I had borne his letter in safety through each of these towns. Hussars, dragoons, lancers, Cossacks, and infantry — I had run the gauntlet of all of them, and had come out unharmed.

When I had got as far as Dammartin I caught a first glimpse of our own outposts. There was a troop of dragoons in a field, and of course I could see from the horsehair crests that they were French. I galloped towards them in order to ask them if all was safe between there and Paris, and as I rode I felt such a pride at having won my way back to my friends again, that I could not refrain from waving my sword in the air.

At this a young officer galloped out from among the dragoons, also brandishing his sword, and it warmed my heart to think that he should come riding with such ardour and enthusiasm to greet me. I made Violette caracole, and as we came together I brandished my sword more gallantly than ever, but you can imagine my feelings when he suddenly made a cut at me which would certainly have taken my head off if I had not fallen forward with my nose in Violette’s mane. My faith, it whistled just over my cap like an east wind. Of course, it came from this accursed Cossack uniform which, in my excitement, I had forgotten all about, and this young dragoon had imagined that I was some Russian champion who was challenging the French cavalry. My word, he was a frightened man when he understood how near he had been to killing the celebrated Brigadier Gerard.

Well, the road was clear, and about three o’clock in the afternoon I was at St Denis, though it took me a long two hours to get from there to Paris, for the road was blocked with commissariat waggons and guns of the artillery reserve, which was going north to Marmont and Mortier. You cannot conceive the excitement which my appearance in such a costume made in Paris, and when I came to the Rue de Rivoli I should think I had a quarter of a mile of folk riding or running behind me. Word had got about from the dragoons (two of whom had come with me), and everybody knew about my adventures and how I had come by my uniform. It was a triumph — men shouting and women waving their handkerchiefs and blowing kisses from the windows.

Although I am a man singularly free from conceit, still I must confess that, on this one occasion, I could not restrain myself from showing that this reception gratified me. The Russian’s coat had hung very loose upon me, but now I threw out my chest until it was as tight as a sausage-skin. And my little sweetheart of a mare tossed her mane and pawed with her front hoofs, frisking her tail about as though she said, ‘We’ve done it together this time. It is to us that commissions should be intrusted.’ When I kissed her between the nostrils as I dismounted at the gate of the Tuileries, there was as much shouting as if a bulletin had been read from the Grand Army.

I was hardly in costume to visit a King; but, after all, if one has a soldierly figure one can do without all that. I was shown up straight away to Joseph, whom I had often seen in Spain. He seemed as stout, as quiet, and as amiable as ever. Talleyrand was in the room with him, or I suppose I should call him the Duke of Benevento, but I confess that I like old names best. He read my letter when Joseph Buonaparte handed it to him, and then he looked at me with the strangest expression in those funny little, twinkling eyes of his.

‘Were you the only messenger?’ he asked.

‘There was one other, sir,’ said I. ‘Major Charpentier, of the Horse Grenadiers.’

‘He has not yet arrived,’ said the King of Spain.

‘If you had seen the legs of his horse, sire, you would not wonder at it,’ I remarked.

‘There may be other reasons,’ said Talleyrand, and he gave that singular smile of his.

Well, they paid me a compliment or two, though they might have said a good deal more and yet have said too little. I bowed myself out, and very glad I was to get away, for I hate a Court as much as I love a camp. Away I went to my old friend Chaubert, in the Rue Miromesnil, and there I got his hussar uniform, which fitted me very well. He and Lisette and I supped together in his rooms, and all my dangers were forgotten. In the morning I found Violette ready for another twenty-league stretch. It was my intention to return instantly to the Emperor’s headquarters, for I was, as you may well imagine, impatient to hear his words of praise, and to receive my reward.

I need not say that I rode back by a safe route, for I had seen quite enough of Uhlans and Cossacks. I passed through Meaux and Château Thierry, and so in the evening I arrived at Rheims, where Napoleon was still lying. The bodies of our fellows and of St Prest’s Russians had all been buried, and I could see changes in the camp also. The soldiers looked better cared for; some of the cavalry had received remounts, and everything was in excellent order. It was wonderful what a good general can effect in a couple of days.

When I came to the headquarters I was shown straight into the Emperor’s room. He was drinking coffee at a writing-table, with a big plan drawn out on paper in front of him. Berthier and Macdonald were leaning, one over each shoulder, and he was talking so quickly that I don’t believe that either of them could catch a half of what he was saying. But when his eyes fell upon me he dropped the pen on to the chart, and he sprang up with a look in his pale face which struck me cold.

‘What the deuce are you doing here?’ he shouted. When he was angry he had a voice like a peacock.

‘I have the honour to report to you, sire,’ said I, ‘that I have delivered your despatch safely to the King of Spain.’

‘What!’ he yelled, and his two eyes transfixed me like bayonets. Oh, those dreadful eyes, shifting from grey to blue, like steel in the sunshine. I can see them now when I have a bad dream.

‘What has become of Charpentier?’ he asked.

‘He is captured,’ said Macdonald.

‘By whom?’

‘The Russians.’

‘The Cossacks?’

‘No, a single Cossack.’

‘He gave himself up?’

‘Without resistance.’

‘He is an intelligent officer. You will see that the medal of honour is awarded to him.’

When I heard those words I had to rub my eyes to make sure that I was awake.

‘As to you,’ cried the Emperor, taking a step forward as if he would have struck me, ‘you brain of a hare, what do you think that you were sent upon this mission for? Do you conceive that I would send a really important message by such a hand as yours, and through every village which the enemy holds? How you came through them passes my comprehension; but if your fellow-messenger had had but as little sense as you, my whole plan of campaign would have been ruined. Can you not see, coglione, that this message contained false news, and that it was intended to deceive the enemy whilst I put a very different scheme into execution?’

When I heard those cruel words and saw the angry, white face which glared at me, I had to hold the back of a chair, for my mind was failing me and my knees would hardly bear me up. But then I took courage as I reflected that I was an honourable gentleman, and that my whole life had been spent in toiling for this man and for my beloved country.

‘Sire,’ said I, and the tears would trickle down my cheeks whilst I spoke, ‘when you are dealing with a man like me you would find it wiser to deal openly. Had I known that you had wished the despatch to fall into the hands of the enemy, I would have seen that it came there. As I believed that I was to guard it, I was prepared to sacrifice my life for it. I do not believe, sire, that any man in the world ever met with more toils and perils than I have done in trying to carry out what I thought was your will.’

I dashed the tears from my eyes as I spoke, and with such fire and spirit as I could command I gave him an account of it all, of my dash through Soissons, my brush with the dragoons, my adventure in Senlis, my rencontre with Count Boutkine in the cellar, my disguise, my meeting with the Cossack officer, my flight, and how at the last moment I was nearly cut down by a French dragoon. The Emperor, Berthier, and Macdonald listened with astonishment on their faces. When I had finished Napoleon stepped forward and he pinched me by the ear.

‘There, there!’ said he. ‘Forget anything which I may have said. I would have done better to trust you. You may go.’

I turned to the door, and my hand was upon the handle, when the Emperor called upon me to stop.

‘You will see,’ said he, turning to the Duke of Tarentum, ‘that Brigadier Gerard has the special medal of honour, for I believe that if he has the thickest head he has also the stoutest heart in my army.’

HOW THE BRIGADIER WAS TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL

The spring is at hand, my friends. I can see the little green spear-heads breaking out once more upon the chestnut trees, and the cafe tables have all been moved into the sunshine. It is more pleasant to sit there, and yet I do not wish to tell my little stories to the whole town. You have heard my doings as a lieutenant, as a squadron officer, as a colonel, as the chief of a brigade. But now I suddenly become something higher and more important. I become history.

If you have read of those closing years of the life of the Emperor which were spent in the Island of St Helena, you will remember that, again and again, he implored permission to send out one single letter which should be unopened by those who held him. Many times he made this request, and even went so far as to promise that he would provide for his own wants and cease to be an expense to the British Government if it were granted to him. But his guardians knew that he was a terrible man, this pale, fat gentleman in the straw hat, and they dared not grant him what he asked. Many have wondered who it was to whom he could have had anything so secret to say. Some have supposed that it was to his wife, and some that it was to his father-in-law; some that it was to the Emperor Alexander, and some to Marshal Soult. What will you think of me, my friends, when I tell you it was to me — to me, the Brigadier Gerard — that the Emperor wished to write? Yes, humble as you see me, with only my 100 francs a month of half-pay between me and hunger, it is none the less true that I was always in the Emperor’s mind, and that he would have given his left hand for five minutes’ talk with me. I will tell you tonight how this came about.

It was after the Battle of Fére-Champenoise where the conscripts in their blouses and their sabots made such a fine stand, that we, the more long-headed of us, began to understand that it was all over with us. Our reserve ammunition had been taken in the battle, and we were left with silent guns and empty caissons. Our cavalry, too, was in a deplorable condition, and my own brigade had been destroyed in the charge at Craonne. Then came the news that the enemy had taken Paris, that the citizens had mounted the white cockade; and finally, most terrible of all, that Marmont and his corps had gone over to the Bourbons. We looked at each other and asked how many more of our generals were going to turn against us. Already there were Jourdan, Marmont, Murat, Bernadotte, and Jomini — though nobody minded much about Jomini, for his pen was always sharper than his sword. We had been ready to fight Europe, but it looked now as though we were to fight Europe and half of France as well.

We had come to Fontainebleau by a long, forced march, and there we were assembled, the poor remnants of us, the corps of Ney, the corps of my cousin Gerard, and the corps of Macdonald: twenty-five thousand in all, with seven thousand of the guard. But we had our prestige, which was worth fifty thousand, and our Emperor, who was worth fifty thousand more. He was always among us, serene, smiling, confident, taking his snuff and playing with his little riding-whip. Never in the days of his greatest victories have I admired him as much as I did during the Campaign of France.

One evening I was with a few of my officers, drinking a glass of wine of Suresnes. I mention that it was wine of Suresnes just to show you that times were not very good with us. Suddenly I was disturbed by a message from Berthier that he wished to see me. When I speak of my old comrades-in-arms, I will, with your permission, leave out all the fine foreign titles which they had picked up during the wars. They are excellent for a Court, but you never heard them in the camp, for we could not afford to do away with our Ney, our Rapp, or our Soult — names which were as stirring to our ears as the blare of our trumpets blowing the reveille. It was Berthier, then, who sent to say that he wished to see me.

He had a suite of rooms at the end of the gallery of Francis the First, not very far from those of the Emperor. In the ante-chamber were waiting two men whom I knew well: Colonel Despienne, of the 57th of the line, and Captain Tremeau, of the Voltigeurs. They were both old soldiers — Tremeau had carried a musket in Egypt — and they were also both famous in the army for their courage and their skill with weapons. Tremeau had become a little stiff in the wrist, but Despienne was capable at his best of making me exert myself. He was a tiny fellow, about three inches short of the proper height for a man — he was exactly three inches shorter than myself — but both with the sabre and with the small-sword he had several times almost held his own against me when we used to exhibit at Verron's

Hall of Arms in the Palais Royal. You may think that it made us sniff something in the wind when we found three such men called together into one room. You cannot see the lettuce and dressing without suspecting a salad.

‘Name of a pipe!’ said Tremeau, in his barrack-room fashion. ‘Are we then expecting three champions of the Bourbons?’

To all of us the idea appeared not improbable. Certainly in the whole army we were the very three who might have been chosen to meet them.

‘The Prince of Neufchâtel desires to speak with the Brigadier Gerard,’ said a footman, appearing at the door.

In I went, leaving my two companions consumed with impatience behind me. It was a small room, but very gorgeously furnished. Berthier was seated opposite to me at a little table, with a pen in his hand and a note-book open before him. He was looking weary and slovenly — very different from that Berthier who used to give the fashion to the army, and who had so often set us poorer officers tearing our hair by trimming his pelisse with fur one campaign, and with grey astrakhan the next. On his clean-shaven, comely face there was an expression of trouble, and he looked at me as I entered his chamber in a way which had in it something furtive and displeasing.

‘Chief of Brigade Gerard!’ said he.

‘At your service, your Highness!’ I answered.

‘I must ask you, before I go further, to promise me, upon your honour as a gentleman and a soldier, that what is about to pass between us shall never be mentioned to any third person.’

My word, this was a fine beginning! I had no choice but to give the promise required.

‘You must know, then, that it is all over with the Emperor,’ said he, looking down at the table and speaking very slowly, as if he had a hard task in getting out the words. ‘Jourdan at Rouen and Marmont at Paris have both mounted the white cockade, and it is rumoured that Talleyrand has talked Ney into doing the same. It is evident that further resistance is useless, and that it can only bring misery upon our country. I wish to ask you, therefore, whether you are prepared to join me in laying hands upon the Emperor’s person, and bringing the war to a conclusion by delivering him over to the allies?’

I assure you that when I heard this infamous proposition put forward by the man who had been the earliest friend of the Emperor, and who had received greater favours from him than any of his followers, I could only stand and stare at him in amazement. For his part he tapped his pen-handle against his teeth, and looked at me with a slanting head.

‘Well?’ he asked.

‘I am a little deaf on one side,’ said I, coldly. ‘There are some things which I cannot hear. I beg that you will permit me to return to my duties.’

‘Nay, but you must not be headstrong,’ rising up and laying his hand upon my shoulder. ‘You are aware that the Senate has declared against Napoleon, and that the Emperor Alexander refuses to treat with him.’

‘Sir,’ I cried, with passion, ‘I would have you know that I do not care the dregs of a wine-glass for the Senate or for the Emperor Alexander either.’

‘Then for what do you care?’

‘For my own honour and for the service of my glorious master, the Emperor Napoleon.’

‘That is all very well,’ said Berthier, peevishly, shrugging his shoulders. ‘Facts are facts, and as men of the world, we must look them in the face. Are we to stand against the will of the nation? Are we to have civil war on the top of all our misfortunes? And, besides, we are thinning away. Every hour comes the news of fresh desertions. We have still time to make our peace, and, indeed, to earn the highest regard, by giving up the Emperor.’

I shook so with passion that my sabre clattered against my thigh.

‘Sir,’ I cried, ‘I never thought to have seen the day when a Marshal of France would have so far degraded himself as to put forward such a proposal. I leave you to your own conscience; but as for me, until I have the Emperor’s own order, there shall always be the sword of Etienne Gerard between his enemies and himself.’

I was so moved by my own words and by the fine position which I had taken up, that my voice broke, and I could hardly refrain from tears. I should have liked the whole army to have seen me as I stood with my head so proudly erect and my hand upon my heart proclaiming my devotion to the Emperor in his adversity. It was one of the supreme moments of my life.

‘Very good,’ said Berthier, ringing a bell for the lackey. ‘You will show the Chief of Brigade Gerard into the salon.’

The footman led me into an inner room, where he desired me to be seated. For my own part, my only desire was to get away, and I could not understand why they should wish to detain me. When one has had no change of uniform during a whole winter's campaign, one does not feel at home in a palace.

I had been there about a quarter of an hour when the footman opened the door again, and in came Colonel Despienne. Good heavens, what a sight he was! His face was as white as a guardsman's gaiters, his eyes projecting, the veins swollen upon his forehead, and every hair of his moustache bristling like those of an angry cat. He was too angry to speak, and could only shake his hands at the ceiling and make a gurgling in his throat. 'Parricide! Viper!' those were the words that I could catch as he stamped up and down the room.

Of course it was evident to me that he had been subjected to the same infamous proposals as I had, and that he had received them in the same spirit. His lips were sealed to me, as mine were to him, by the promise which we had taken, but I contented myself with muttering 'Atrocious! Unspeakable!' — so that he might know that I was in agreement with him.

Well, we were still there, he striding furiously up and down, and I seated in the corner, when suddenly a most extraordinary uproar broke out in the room which we had just quitted. There was a snarling, worrying growl, like that of a fierce dog which has got his grip. Then came a crash and a voice calling for help. In we rushed, the two of us, and, my faith, we were none too soon.

Old Tremeau and Berthier were rolling together upon the floor, with the table upon the top of them. The Captain had one of his great, skinny yellow hands upon the Marshal's throat, and already his face was lead-coloured, and his eyes were starting from their sockets. As to Tremeau, he was beside himself, with foam upon the corners of his lips, and such a frantic expression upon him that I am convinced, had we not loosened his iron grip, finger by finger, that it would never have relaxed while the Marshal lived. His nails were white with the power of his grasp.

'I have been tempted by the devil!' he cried, as he staggered to his feet. 'Yes, I have been tempted by the devil!'

As to Berthier, he could only lean against the wall, and pant for a couple of minutes, putting his hands up to his throat and rolling his head about. Then, with an angry gesture, he turned to the heavy blue curtain which hung behind his chair.

The curtain was torn to one side and the Emperor stepped out into the room. We sprang to the salute, we three old soldiers, but it was all like a scene in a dream to us, and our eyes were as far out as Berthier's had been. Napoleon was dressed in his green-coated chasseur uniform, and he held his little, silver-headed switch in his hand. He looked at us each in turn, with a smile upon his face — that frightful smile in which neither eyes nor brow joined — and each in turn had, I believe, a pringling on his skin, for that was the effect which the Emperor's gaze had upon most of us. Then he walked across to Berthier and put his hand upon his shoulder.

'You must not quarrel with blows, my dear Prince,' said he; 'they are your title to nobility.' He spoke in that soft, caressing manner which he could assume. There was no one who could make the French tongue sound so pretty as the Emperor, and no one who could make it more harsh and terrible.

'I believe he would have killed me,' cried Berthier, still rolling his head about.

'Tut, tut! I should have come to your help had these officers not heard your cries. But I trust that you are not really hurt!' He spoke with earnestness, for he was in truth very fond of Berthier — more so than of any man, unless it were of poor Duroc.

Berthier laughed, though not with a very good grace.

'It is new for me to receive my injuries from French hands,' said he.

'And yet it was in the cause of France,' returned the Emperor. Then, turning to us, he took old Tremeau by the ear. 'Ah, old grumbler,' said he, 'you were one of my Egyptian grenadiers, were you not, and had your musket of honour at Marengo. I remember you very well, my good friend. So the old fires are not yet extinguished! They still burn up when you think that your Emperor is wronged. And you, Colonel Despienne, you would not even listen to the tempter. And you, Gerard, your faithful sword is ever to be between me and my enemies. Well, well, I have had some traitors about me, but now at last we are beginning to see who are the true men.'

You can fancy, my friends, the thrill of joy which it gave us when the greatest man in the whole world spoke to us in this fashion. Tremeau shook until I thought he would have fallen, and the tears ran down his gigantic moustache. If you had not seen it, you could never believe the influence which the Emperor had upon those coarse-grained, savage old veterans.

'Well, my faithful friends,' said he, 'if you will follow me into this room, I will explain to you the meaning of this little farce which we have been acting. I beg, Berthier, that you will remain in this chamber, and so make sure that no one interrupts us.’

It was new for us to be doing business, with a Marshal of France as sentry at the door. However, we followed the Emperor as we were ordered, and he led us into the recess of the window, gathering us around him and sinking his voice as he addressed us.

‘I have picked you out of the whole army,’ said he, ‘as being not only the most formidable but also the most faithful of my soldiers. I was convinced that you were all three men who would never waver in your fidelity to me. If I have ventured to put that fidelity to the proof, and to watch you while attempts were at my orders made upon your honour, it was only because, in the days when I have found the blackest treason amongst my own flesh and blood, it is necessary that I should be doubly circumspect. Suffice it that I am well convinced now that I can rely upon your valour.’

‘To the death, sire!’ cried Tremeau, and we both repeated it after him.

Napoleon drew us all yet a little closer to him, and sank his voice still lower.

‘What I say to you now I have said to no one — not to my wife or my brothers; only to you. It is all up with us, my friends. We have come to our last rally. The game is finished, and we must make provision accordingly.’

My heart seemed to have changed to a nine-pounder ball as I listened to him. We had hoped against hope, but now when he, the man who was always serene and who always had reserves — when he, in that quiet, impassive voice of his, said that everything was over, we realised that the clouds had shut for ever, and the last gleam gone. Tremeau snarled and gripped at his sabre, Despienne ground his teeth, and for my own part I threw out my chest and clicked my heels to show the Emperor that there were some spirits which could rise to adversity.

‘My papers and my fortune must be secured,’ whispered the Emperor. ‘The whole course of the future may depend upon my having them safe. They are our base for the next attempt — for I am very sure that these poor Bourbons would find that my footstool is too large to make a throne for them. Where am I to keep these precious things? My belongings will be searched — so will the houses of my supporters. They must be secured and concealed by men whom I can trust with that which is more precious to me than my life. Out of the whole of France, you are those whom I have chosen for this sacred trust.

‘In the first place, I will tell you what these papers are. You shall not say that I have made you blind agents in the matter. They are the official proof of my divorce from Josephine, of my legal marriage to Marie Louise, and of the birth of my son and heir, the King of Rome. If we cannot prove each of these, the future claim of my family to the throne of France falls to the ground. Then there are securities to the value of forty millions of francs — an immense sum, my friends, but of no more value than this riding-switch when compared to the other papers of which I have spoken. I tell you these things that you may realise the enormous importance of the task which I am committing to your care. Listen, now, while I inform you where you are to get these papers, and what you are to do with them.

‘They were handed over to my trusty friend, the Countess Walewski, at Paris, this morning. At five o’clock she starts for Fontainebleau in her blue berline. She should reach here between half-past nine and ten. The papers will be concealed in the berline, in a hiding-place which none know but herself. She has been warned that her carriage will be stopped outside the town by three mounted officers, and she will hand the packet over to your care. You are the younger man, Gerard, but you are of the senior grade. I confide to your care this amethyst ring, which you will show the lady as a token of your mission, and which you will leave with her as a receipt for her papers.

‘Having received the packet, you will ride with it into the forest as far as the ruined dove-house — the Colombier. It is possible that I may meet you there — but if it seems to me to be dangerous, I will send my body-servant, Mustapha, whose directions you may take as being mine. There is no roof to the Colombier, and tonight will be a full moon. At the right of the entrance you will find three spades leaning against the wall. With these you will dig a hole three feet deep in the north-eastern corner — that is, in the corner to the left of the door, and nearest to Fontainebleau. Having buried the papers, you will replace the soil with great care, and you will then report to me at the palace.’

These were the Emperor’s directions, but given with an accuracy and minuteness of detail such as no one but himself could put into an order. When he had finished, he made us swear to keep his secret as long as he lived, and as long as the papers should remain buried. Again and again he made us swear it before he dismissed us from his presence.

Colonel Despienne had quarters at the ‘Sign of the Pheasant,’ and it was there that we supped together. We were all three men who had been trained to take the strangest turns of fortune as part of our daily life and business, yet we were all flushed and moved by the extraordinary interview which we had had, and by the thought of the great adventure which lay before us. For my own part, it had been my fate three several times to take my orders from the lips of the Emperor himself, but neither the incident of the Ajaccio murderers nor the famous ride which I made to Paris appeared to offer such opportunities as this new and most intimate commission.

‘If things go right with the Emperor,’ said Despienne, ‘we shall all live to be marshals yet.’

We drank with him to our future cocked hats and our bâtons.

It was agreed between us that we should make our way separately to our rendezvous, which was to be the first mile-stone upon the Paris road. In this way we should avoid the gossip which might get about if three men who were so well known were to be seen riding out together. My little Violette had cast a shoe that morning, and the farrier was at work upon her when I returned, so that my comrades were already there when I arrived at the trysting-place. I had taken with me not only my sabre, but also my new pair of English rifled pistols, with a mallet for knocking in the charges. They had cost me a hundred and fifty francs at Trouvel’s, in the Rue de Rivoli, but they would carry far further and straighter than the others. It was with one of them that I had saved old Bouvet’s life at Leipzig.

The night was cloudless, and there was a brilliant moon behind us, so that we always had three black horsemen riding down the white road in front of us. The country is so thickly wooded, however, that we could not see very far. The great palace clock had already struck ten, but there was no sign of the Countess. We began to fear that something might have prevented her from starting.

And then suddenly we heard her in the distance. Very faint at first were the birr of wheels and the tat-tat-tat of the horses’ feet. Then they grew louder and clearer and louder yet, until a pair of yellow lanterns swung round the curve, and in their light we saw the two big brown horses tearing along the high, blue carriage at the back of them. The postilion pulled them up panting and foaming within a few yards of us. In a moment we were at the window and had raised our hands in a salute to the beautiful pale face which looked out at us.

‘We are the three officers of the Emperor, madame,’ said I, in a low voice, leaning my face down to the open window. ‘You have already been warned that we should wait upon you.’

The Countess had a very beautiful, cream-tinted complexion of a sort which I particularly admire, but she grew whiter and whiter as she looked up at me. Harsh lines deepened upon her face until she seemed, even as I looked at her, to turn from youth into age.

‘It is evident to me,’ she said, ‘that you are three impostors.’

If she had struck me across the face with her delicate hand she could not have startled me more. It was not her words only, but the bitterness with which she hissed them out.

‘Indeed, madame,’ said I. ‘You do us less than justice. These are the Colonel Despienne and Captain Tremeau. For myself, my name is Brigadier Gerard, and I have only to mention it to assure anyone who has heard of me that — —’

‘Oh, you villains!’ she interrupted. ‘You think that because I am only a woman I am very easily to be hoodwinked! You miserable impostors!’

I looked at Despienne, who had turned white with anger, and at Tremeau, who was tugging at his moustache.

‘Madame,’ said I, coldly, ‘when the Emperor did us the honour to intrust us with this mission, he gave me this amethyst ring as a token. I had not thought that three honourable gentlemen would have needed such corroboration, but I can only confute your unworthy suspicions by placing it in your hands.’

She held it up in the light of the carriage lamp, and the most dreadful expression of grief and of horror contorted her face.

‘It is his!’ she screamed, and then, ‘Oh, my God, what have I done? What have I done?’

I felt that something terrible had befallen. ‘Quick, madame, quick!’ I cried. ‘Give us the papers!’

‘I have already given them.’

‘Given them! To whom?’

‘To three officers.’

‘When?’

‘Within the half-hour.’

‘Where are they?’

'God help me, I do not know. They stopped the berline, and I handed them over to them without hesitation, thinking that they had come from the Emperor.'

It was a thunder-clap. But those are the moments when I am at my finest.

'You remain here,' said I, to my comrades. 'If three horsemen pass you, stop them at any hazard. The lady will describe them to you. I will be with you presently.' One shake of the bridle, and I was flying into Fontainebleau as only Violette could have carried me. At the palace I flung myself off, rushed up the stairs, brushed aside the lackeys who would have stopped me, and pushed my way into the Emperor's own cabinet. He and Macdonald were busy with pencil and compasses over a chart. He looked up with an angry frown at my sudden entry, but his face changed colour when he saw that it was I.

'You can leave us, Marshal,' said he, and then, the instant the door was closed: 'What news about the papers?'

'They are gone!' said I, and in a few curt words I told him what had happened. His face was calm, but I saw the compasses quiver in his hand.

'You must recover them, Gerard!' he cried. 'The destinies of my dynasty are at stake. Not a moment is to be lost! To horse, sir, to horse!'

'Who are they, sire?'

'I cannot tell. I am surrounded with treason. But they will take them to Paris. To whom should they carry them but to the villain Talleyrand? Yes, yes, they are on the Paris road, and may yet be overtaken. With the three best mounts in my stables and — —'

I did not wait to hear the end of the sentence. I was already clattering down the stairs. I am sure that five minutes had not passed before I was galloping Violette out of the town with the bridle of one of the Emperor's own Arab chargers in either hand. They wished me to take three, but I should have never dared to look my Violette in the face again. I feel that the spectacle must have been superb when I dashed up to my comrades and pulled the horses on to their haunches in the moonlight.

'No one has passed?'

'No one.'

'Then they are on the Paris road. Quick! Up and after them!'

They did not take long, those good soldiers. In a flash they were upon the Emperor's horses, and their own left masterless by the roadside. Then away we went upon our long chase, I in the centre, Despienne upon my right, and

Tremeau a little behind, for he was the heavier man. Heavens, how we galloped! The twelve flying hoofs roared and roared along the hard, smooth road. Poplars and moon, black bars and silver streaks, for mile after mile our course lay along the same chequered track, with our shadows in front and our dust behind. We could hear the rasping of bolts and the creaking of shutters from the cottages as we thundered past them, but we were only three dark blurs upon the road by the time that the folk could look after us. It was just striking midnight as we raced into Corbail; but an hostler with a bucket in either hand was throwing his black shadow across the golden fan which was cast from the open door of the inn.

‘Three riders!’ I gasped. ‘Have they passed?’

‘I have just been watering their horses,’ said he. ‘I should think they ——’

‘On, on, my friends!’ and away we flew, striking fire from the cobblestones of the little town. A gendarme tried to stop up, but his voice was drowned by our rattle and clatter. The houses slid past, and we were out on the country road again, with a clear twenty miles between ourselves and Paris. How could they escape us, with the finest horses in France behind them? Not one of the three had turned a hair, but Violette was always a head and shoulders to the front. She was going within herself too, and I knew by the spring of her that I had only to let her stretch herself, and the Emperor’s horses would see the colour of her tail.

‘There they are!’ cried Despienne.

‘We have them!’ growled Tremeau.

‘On, comrades, on!’ I shouted, once more.

A long stretch of white road lay before us in the moonlight. Far away down it we could see three cavaliers, lying low upon their horses’ necks. Every instant they grew larger and clearer as we gained upon them. I could see quite plainly that the two upon either side were wrapped in mantles and rode upon chestnut horses, whilst the man between them was dressed in a chasseur uniform and mounted upon a grey. They were keeping abreast, but it was easy enough to see from the way in which he gathered his legs for each spring that the centre horse was far the fresher of the three. And the rider appeared to be the leader of the party, for we continually saw the glint of his face in the moonshine as he looked back to measure the distance between us. At first it was only a glimmer, then it was cut across with a moustache, and at last when we began to feel their dust in our throats I could give a name to my man.

‘Halt, Colonel de Montluc!’ I shouted. ‘Halt, in the Emperor’s name!’

I had known him for years as a daring officer and an unprincipled rascal. Indeed, there was a score between us, for he had shot my friend, Treville, at Warsaw, pulling his trigger, as some said, a good second before the drop of the handkerchief.

Well, the words were hardly out of my mouth when his two comrades wheeled round and fired their pistols at us. I heard Despienne give a terrible cry, and at the same instant both Tremeau and I let drive at the same man. He fell forward with his hands swinging on each side of his horse’s neck. His comrade spurred on to Tremeau, sabre in hand, and I heard the crash which comes when a strong cut is met by a stronger parry. For my own part I never turned my head, but I touched Violette with the spur for the first time and flew after the leader. That he should leave his comrades and fly was proof enough that I should leave mine and follow.

He had gained a couple of hundred paces, but the good little mare set that right before we could have passed two milestones. It was in vain that he spurred and thrashed like a gunner driver on a soft road. His hat flew off with his exertions, and his bald head gleamed in the moonshine. But do what he might, he still heard the rattle of the hoofs growing louder and louder behind him. I could not have been twenty yards from him, and the shadow head was touching the shadow haunch, when he turned with a curse in his saddle and emptied both his pistols, one after the other, into Violette.

I have been wounded myself so often that I have to stop and think before I can tell you the exact number of times. I have been hit by musket balls, by pistol bullets, and by bursting shells, besides being pierced by bayonet, lance, sabre, and finally by a brad-awl, which was the most painful of any. Yet out of all these injuries I have never known the same deadly sickness as came over me when I felt the poor, silent, patient creature, which I had come to love more than anything in the world except my mother and the Emperor, reel and stagger beneath me. I pulled my second pistol from my holster and fired point-blank between the fellow’s broad shoulders. He slashed his horse across the flank with his whip, and for a moment I thought that I had missed him. But then on the green of his chasseur jacket I saw an ever-widening black smudge, and he began to sway in his saddle, very slightly at first, but more and more with every bound, until at last over he went, with his foot caught in the stirrup, and his shoulders thud-thud-thudding along the road, until the drag was too much for the tired horse, and I closed my hand upon the foam-spattered bridle-chain. As I pulled him up it eased the stirrup leather, and the spurred heel clinked loudly as it fell.

‘Your papers!’ I cried, springing from my saddle. ‘This instant!’

But even as I said, it, the huddle of the green body and the fantastic sprawl of the limbs in the moonlight told me clearly enough that it was all over with him. My bullet had passed through his heart, and it was only his own iron will which had held him so long in the saddle. He had lived hard, this Montluc, and I will do him justice to say that he died hard also.

But it was the papers — always the papers — of which I thought. I opened his tunic and I felt in his shirt. Then I searched his holsters and his sabre-tasche. Finally I dragged off his boots, and undid his horse’s girth so as to hunt under the saddle. There was not a nook or crevice which I did not ransack. It was useless. They were not upon him.

When this stunning blow came upon me I could have sat down by the roadside and wept. Fate seemed to be fighting against me, and that is an enemy from whom even a gallant hussar might not be ashamed to flinch. I stood with my arm over the neck of my poor wounded Violette, and I tried to think it all out, that I might act in the wisest way. I was aware that the Emperor had no great respect for my wits, and I longed to show him that he had done me an injustice. Montluc had not the papers. And yet Montluc had sacrificed his companions in order to make his escape. I could make nothing of that. On the other hand, it was clear that, if he had not got them, one or other of his comrades had. One of them was certainly dead. The other I had left fighting with Tremeau, and if he escaped from the old swordsman he had still to pass me. Clearly, my work lay behind me.

I hammered fresh charges into my pistols after I had turned this over in my head. Then I put them back in the holsters, and I examined my little mare, she jerking her head and cocking her ears the while, as if to tell me that an old soldier like herself did not make a fuss about a scratch or two. The first shot had merely grazed her off-shoulder, leaving a skin-mark, as if she had brushed a wall. The second was more serious. It had passed through the muscle of her neck, but already it had ceased to bleed. I reflected that if she weakened I could mount Montluc’s grey, and meanwhile I led him along beside us, for he was a fine horse, worth fifteen hundred francs at the least, and it seemed to me that no one had a better right to him than I.

Well, I was all impatience now to get back to the others, and I had just given Violette her head, when suddenly I saw something glimmering in a field by the roadside. It was the brass-work upon the chasseur hat which had flown from Montluc's head; and at the sight of it a thought made me jump in the saddle. How could the hat have flown off? With its weight, would it not have simply dropped? And here it lay, fifteen paces from the roadway! Of course, he must have thrown it off when he had made sure that I would overtake him. And if he threw it off — I did not stop to reason any more, but sprang from the mare with my heart beating the *pas-de-charge*. Yes, it was all right this time. There, in the crown of the hat was stuffed a roll of papers in a parchment wrapper bound round with yellow ribbon. I pulled it out with the one hand and, holding the hat in the other, I danced for joy in the moonlight. The Emperor would see that he had not made a mistake when he put his affairs into the charge of Etienne Gerard.

I had a safe pocket on the inside of my tunic just over my heart, where I kept a few little things which were dear to me, and into this I thrust my precious roll. Then I sprang upon Violette, and was pushing forward to see what had become of Tremeau, when I saw a horseman riding across the field in the distance. At the same instant I heard the sound of hoofs approaching me, and there in the moonlight was the Emperor upon his white charger, dressed in his grey overcoat and his three-cornered hat, just as I had seen him so often upon the field of battle.

'Well!' he cried, in the sharp, sergeant-major way of his. 'Where are my papers?'

I spurred forward and presented them without a word. He broke the ribbon and ran his eyes rapidly over them. Then, as we sat our horses head to tail, he threw his left arm across me with his hand upon my shoulder. Yes, my friends, simple as you see me, I have been embraced by my great master.

'Gerard,' he cried, 'you are a marvel!'

I did not wish to contradict him, and it brought a flush of joy upon my cheeks to know that he had done me justice at last.

'Where is the thief, Gerard?' he asked.

'Dead, sire.'

'You killed him?'

'He wounded my horse, sire, and would have escaped had I not shot him.'

‘Did you recognise him?’

‘De Montluc is his name, sire — a Colonel of Chasseurs.’

‘Tut,’ said the Emperor. ‘We have got the poor pawn, but the hand which plays the game is still out of our reach.’ He sat in silent thought for a little, with his chin sunk upon his chest. ‘Ah, Talleyrand, Talleyrand,’ I heard him mutter, ‘if I had been in your place and you in mine, you would have crushed a viper when you held it under your heel. For five years I have known you for what you are, and yet I have let you live to sting me. Never mind, my brave,’ he continued, turning to me, ‘there will come a day of reckoning for everybody, and when it arrives, I promise you that my friends will be remembered as well as my enemies.’

‘Sire,’ said I, for I had had time for thought as well as he, ‘if your plans about these papers have been carried to the ears of your enemies, I trust you do not think that it was owing to any indiscretion upon the part of myself or of my comrades.’

‘It would be hardly reasonable for me to do so,’ he answered, ‘seeing that this plot was hatched in Paris, and that you only had your orders a few hours ago.’

‘Then how —— ?’

‘Enough,’ he cried, sternly. ‘You take an undue advantage of your position.’

That was always the way with the Emperor. He would chat with you as with a friend and a brother, and then when he had wiled you into forgetting the gulf which lay between you, he would suddenly, with a word or with a look, remind you that it was as impassable as ever. When I have fondled my old hound until he has been encouraged to paw my knees, and I have then thrust him down again, it has made me think of the Emperor and his ways.

He reined his horse round, and I followed him in silence and with a heavy heart. But when he spoke again his words were enough to drive all thought of myself out of my mind.

‘I could not sleep until I knew how you had fared,’ said he. ‘I have paid a price for my papers. There are not so many of my old soldiers left that I can afford to lose two in one night.’

When he said ‘two’ it turned me cold.

‘Colonel Despienne was shot, sire,’ I stammered.

‘And Captain Tremeau cut down. Had I been a few minutes earlier, I might have saved him. The other escaped across the fields.’

I remembered that I had seen a horseman a moment before I had met the Emperor. He had taken to the fields to avoid me, but if I had known, and Violette been unwounded, the old soldier would not have gone unavenged. I was thinking sadly of his sword-play, and wondering whether it was his stiffening wrist which had been fatal to him, when Napoleon spoke again.

‘Yes, Brigadier,’ said he, ‘you are now the only man who will know where these papers are concealed.’

It must have been imagination, my friends, but for an instant I may confess that it seemed to me that there was a tone in the Emperor’s voice which was not altogether one of sorrow. But the dark thought had hardly time to form itself in my mind before he let me see that I was doing him an injustice.

‘Yes, I have paid a price for my papers,’ he said, and I heard them crackle as he put his hand up to his bosom. ‘No man has ever had more faithful servants — no man since the beginning of the world.’

As he spoke we came upon the scene of the struggle. Colonel Despienne and the man whom we had shot lay together some distance down the road, while their horses grazed contentedly beneath the poplars. Captain Tremeau lay in front of us upon his back, with his arms and legs stretched out, and his sabre broken short off in his hand. His tunic was open, and a huge blood-clot hung like a dark handkerchief out of a slit in his white shirt. I could see the gleam of his clenched teeth from under his immense moustache.

The Emperor sprang from his horse and bent down over the dead man.

‘He was with me since Rivoli,’ said he, sadly. ‘He was one of my old grumblers in Egypt.’

And the voice brought the man back from the dead. I saw his eyelids shiver. He twitched his arm, and moved the sword-hilt a few inches. He was trying to raise it in salute. Then the mouth opened, and the hilt tinkled down on to the ground.

‘May we all die as gallantly,’ said the Emperor, as he rose, and from my heart I added ‘Amen.’

There was a farm within fifty yards of where we were standing, and the farmer, roused from his sleep by the clatter of hoofs and the cracking of pistols, had rushed out to the roadside. We saw him now, dumb with fear and astonishment, staring open-eyed at the Emperor. It was to him that we committed the care of the four dead men and of the horses also. For my own part, I thought it best to leave Violette with him and to take De Montluc’s grey with me, for he could not refuse to give me back my own mare, whilst there might be difficulties about the other. Besides, my little friend’s wound had to be considered, and we had a long return ride before us.

The Emperor did not at first talk much upon the way. Perhaps the deaths of Despienne and Tremeau still weighed heavily upon his spirits. He was always a reserved man, and in those times, when every hour brought him the news of some success of his enemies or defection of his friends, one could not expect him to be a merry companion. Nevertheless, when I reflected that he was carrying in his bosom those papers which he valued so highly, and which only a few hours ago appeared to be for ever lost, and when I further thought that it was I, Etienne Gerard, who had placed them there, I felt that I had deserved some little consideration. The same idea may have occurred to him, for when we had at last left the Paris high road, and had entered the forest, he began of his own accord to tell me that which I should have most liked to have asked him.

‘As to the papers,’ said he, ‘I have already told you that there is no one now, except you and me, who knows where they are to be concealed. My Mameluke carried the spades to the pigeon-house, but I have told him nothing. Our plans, however, for bringing the packet from Paris have been formed since Monday. There were three in the secret, a woman and two men. The woman I would trust with my life; which of the two men has betrayed us I do not know, but I think that I may promise to find out.’

We were riding in the shadow of the trees at the time, and I could hear him slapping his riding-whip against his boot, and taking pinch after pinch of snuff, as was his way when he was excited.

‘You wonder, no doubt,’ said he, after a pause, ‘why these rascals did not stop the carriage at Paris instead of at the entrance to Fontainebleau.’

In truth, the objection had not occurred to me, but I did not wish to appear to have less wits than he gave me credit for, so I answered that it was indeed surprising.

‘Had they done so they would have made a public scandal, and run a chance of missing their end. Short of taking the berline to pieces, they could not have discovered the hiding-place. He planned it well — he could always plan well — and he chose his agents well also. But mine were the better.’

It is not for me to repeat to you, my friends, all that was said to me by the Emperor as we walked our horses amid the black shadows and through the moon-silvered glades of the great forest. Every word of it is impressed upon my memory, and before I pass away it is likely that I will place it all upon paper, so that others may read it in the days to come. He spoke freely of his past, and something also of his future; of the devotion of Macdonald, of the treason of Marmont, of the little King of Rome, concerning whom he talked with as much tenderness as any bourgeois father of a single child; and, finally, of his father-in-law, the Emperor of Austria, who would, he thought, stand between his enemies and himself. For myself, I dared not say a word, remembering how I had already brought a rebuke upon myself; but I rode by his side, hardly able to believe that this was indeed the great Emperor, the man whose glance sent a thrill through me, who was now pouring out his thoughts to me in short, eager sentences, the words rattling and racing like the hoofs of a galloping squadron. It is possible that, after the word-splittings and diplomacy of a Court, it was a relief to him to speak his mind to a plain soldier like myself.

In this way the Emperor and I — even after years it sends a flush of pride into my cheeks to be able to put those words together — the Emperor and I walked our horses through the Forest of Fontainebleau, until we came at last to the Colombier. The three spades were propped against the wall upon the right-hand side of the ruined door, and at the sight of them the tears sprang to my eyes as I thought of the hands for which they were intended. The Emperor seized one and I another.

‘Quick!’ said he. ‘The dawn will be upon us before we get back to the palace.’

We dug the hole, and placing the papers in one of my pistol holsters to screen them from the damp, we laid them at the bottom and covered them up. We then carefully removed all marks of the ground having been disturbed, and we placed a large stone upon the top. I dare say that since the Emperor was a young gunner, and helped to train his pieces against Toulon, he had not worked so hard with his hands. He was mopping his forehead with his silk handkerchief long before we had come to the end of our task.

The first grey cold light of morning was stealing through the tree trunks when we came out together from the old pigeon-house. The Emperor laid his hand upon my shoulder as I stood ready to help him to mount.

‘We have left the papers there,’ said he, solemnly, ‘and I desire that you shall leave all thought of them there also. Let the recollection of them pass entirely from your mind, to be revived only when you receive a direct order under my own hand and seal. From this time onwards you forget all that has passed.’

‘I forget it, sire,’ said I.

We rode together to the edge of the town, where he desired that I should separate from him. I had saluted, and was turning my horse, when he called me back.

‘It is easy to mistake the points of the compass in the forest,’ said he. ‘Would you not say that it was in the north-eastern corner that we buried them?’

‘Buried what, sire?’

‘The papers, of course,’ he cried, impatiently.

‘What papers, sire?’

‘Name of a name! Why, the papers that you have recovered for me.’

‘I am really at a loss to know what your Majesty is talking about.’

He flushed with anger for a moment, and then he burst out laughing.

‘Very good, Brigadier!’ he cried. ‘I begin to believe that you are as good a diplomatist as you are a soldier, and I cannot say more than that.’

So that was my strange adventure in which I found myself the friend and confident agent of the Emperor. When he returned from Elba he refrained from digging up the papers until his position should be secure, and they still remained in the corner of the old pigeon-house after his exile to St Helena. It was at this time that he was desirous of getting them into the hands of his own supporters, and for that purpose he wrote me, as I afterwards learned, three letters, all of which were intercepted by his guardians. Finally, he offered to support himself and his own establishment — which he might very easily have done out of the gigantic sum which belonged to him — if they would only pass one of his letters unopened. This request was refused, and so, up to his death in ‘21, the papers still remained where I have told you. How they came to be dug up by Count Bertrand and myself, and who eventually obtained them, is a story which I would tell you, were it not that the end has not yet come.

Some day you will hear of those papers, and you will see how, after he has been so long in his grave, that great man can still set Europe shaking.

When that day comes, you will think of Etienne Gerard, and you will tell your children that you have heard the story from the lips of the man who was the only one living of all who took part in that strange history — the man who was tempted by Marshal Berthier, who led that wild pursuit upon the Paris road, who was honoured by the embrace of the Emperor, and who rode with him by moonlight in the Forest of Fontainebleau. The buds are bursting and the birds are calling, my friends. You may find better things to do in the sunlight than listening to the stories of an old, broken soldier. And yet you may well treasure what I say, for the buds will have burst and the birds sung in many seasons before France will see such another ruler as he whose servants we were proud to be.

THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD

This is another series of comic short stories about hero Etienne Gerard, who is a Hussar in the French Army during the Napoleonic Wars. Gerard’s most notable attribute is his vanity - he is utterly convinced that he is the bravest soldier, greatest swordsman, most accomplished horseman and gallant lover in all France. Gerard is not entirely wrong since he displays notable bravery on many occasions, but his self-satisfaction undercuts this quite often. Obsessed with honour and glory, he is always ready with a stirring speech or a gallant remark to a lady. Doyle satirises both the stereotypical English view of the French, and - by presenting them from Gerard’s baffled point of view - English manners and attitudes.

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THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD

“Il etait brave mais avec cette graine de folie dans sa
bravoure que les Francais aiment.”

FRENCH BIOGRAPHY.

PREFACE

I hope that some readers may possibly be interested in these little tales of the Napoleonic soldiers to the extent of following them up to the springs from which they flow. The age was rich in military material, some of it the most human and the most picturesque that I have ever read. Setting aside historical works or the biographies of the leaders there is a mass of evidence written by the actual fighting men themselves, which describes their feelings and their experiences, stated always from the point of view of the particular branch of the service to which they belonged. The Cavalry were particularly happy in their writers of memoirs. Thus De Rocca in his “Memoires sur la guerre des Francais en Espagne” has given the narrative of a Hussar, while De Naylies in his “Memoires sur la guerre d’Espagne” gives the same campaigns from the point of view of the Dragoon. Then we have the “Souvenirs Militaires du Colonel de Gonneville,” which treats a series of wars, including that of Spain, as seen from under the steel-brimmed hair-crested helmet of a Cuirassier. Pre-eminent among all these works, and among all military memoirs, are the famous reminiscences of Marbot, which can be obtained in an English form. Marbot was a Chasseur, so again we obtain the Cavalry point of view. Among other books which help one to an understanding of the Napoleonic soldier I would specially recommend “Les Cahiers du Capitaine Coignet,” which treat the wars from the point of view of the private of the Guards, and “Les Memoires du Sergeant Bourgoyne,” who was a non-commissioned officer in the same corps. The Journal of Sergeant Fricasse and the Recollections of de Fezenac and of de Segur complete the materials from which I have worked in my endeavour to give a true historical and military atmosphere to an imaginary figure.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
March, 1903.

How Brigadier Gerard Lost His Ear

It was the old Brigadier who was talking in the cafe.

I have seen a great many cities, my friends. I would not dare to tell you how many I have entered as a conqueror with eight hundred of my little fighting devils clanking and jingling behind me. The cavalry were in front of the Grande Armee, and the Hussars of Conflans were in front of the cavalry, and I was in front of the Hussars. But of all the cities which we visited Venice is the most ill-built and ridiculous. I cannot imagine how the people who laid it out thought that the cavalry could manoeuvre. It would puzzle Murat or Lassalle to bring a squadron into that square of theirs. For this reason we left Kellermann’s heavy brigade and also my own Hussars at Padua on the mainland. But Suchet with the infantry held the town, and he had chosen me as his aide-de-camp for that winter, because he was pleased about the affair of the Italian fencing-master at Milan. The fellow was a good swordsman, and it was fortunate for the credit of French arms that it was I who was opposed to him. Besides, he deserved a lesson, for if one does not like a prima donna’s singing one can always be silent, but it is intolerable that a public affront should be put upon a pretty woman. So the sympathy was all with me, and after the affair had blown over and the man’s widow had been pensioned Suchet chose me as his own galloper, and I followed him to Venice, where I had the strange adventure which I am about to tell you.

You have not been to Venice? No, for it is seldom that the French travel. We were great travellers in those days. From Moscow to Cairo we had travelled everywhere, but we went in larger parties than were convenient to those whom we visited, and we carried our passports in our limbers. It will be a bad day for Europe when the French start travelling again, for they are slow to leave their homes, but when they have done so no one can say how far they will go if they have a guide like our little man to point out the way. But the great days are gone and the great men are dead, and here am I, the last of them, drinking wine of Suresnes and telling old tales in a cafe.

But it is of Venice that I would speak. The folk there live like water-rats upon a mud-bank, but the houses are very fine, and the churches, especially that of St. Mark, are as great as any I have seen. But above all they are proud of their statues and their pictures, which are the most famous in Europe. There are many soldiers who think that because one's trade is to make war one should never have a thought above fighting and plunder. There was old Bouvet, for example — the one who was killed by the Prussians on the day that I won the Emperor's medal; if you took him away from the camp and the canteen, and spoke to him of books or of art, he would sit and stare at you. But the highest soldier is a man like myself who can understand the things of the mind and the soul. It is true that I was very young when I joined the army, and that the quarter-master was my only teacher, but if you go about the world with your eyes open you cannot help learning a great deal.

Thus I was able to admire the pictures in Venice, and to know the names of the great men, Michael Titiens, and Angelus, and the others, who had painted them. No one can say that Napoleon did not admire them also, for the very first thing which he did when he captured the town was to send the best of them to Paris. We all took what we could get, and I had two pictures for my share.

One of them, called “Nymphs Surprised,” I kept for myself, and the other, “Saint Barbara,” I sent as a present for my mother.

It must be confessed, however, that some of our men behaved very badly in this matter of the statues and the pictures. The people at Venice were very much attached to them, and as to the four bronze horses which stood over the gate of their great church, they loved them as dearly as if they had been their children. I have always been a judge of a horse, and I had a good look at these ones, but I could not see that there was much to be said for them. They were too coarse-limbed for light cavalry charges and they had not the weight for the gun-teams.

However, they were the only four horses, alive or dead, in the whole town, so it was not to be expected that the people would know any better. They wept bitterly when they were sent away, and ten French soldiers were found floating in the canals that night. As a punishment for these murders a great many more of their pictures were sent away, and the soldiers took to breaking the statues and firing their muskets at the stained-glass windows.

This made the people furious, and there was very bad feeling in the town. Many officers and men disappeared during that winter, and even their bodies were never found.

For myself I had plenty to do, and I never found the time heavy on my hands. In every country it has been my custom to try to learn the language. For this reason I always look round for some lady who will be kind enough to teach it to me, and then we practise it together. This is the most interesting way of picking it up, and before I was thirty I could speak nearly every tongue in Europe; but it must be confessed that what you learn is not of much use for the ordinary purposes of life. My business, for example, has usually been with soldiers and peasants, and what advantage is it to be able to say to them that I love only them, and that I will come back when the wars are over?

Never have I had so sweet a teacher as in Venice. Lucia was her first name, and her second — but a gentleman forgets second names. I can say this with all discretion, that she was of one of the senatorial families of Venice and that her grandfather had been Doge of the town.

She was of an exquisite beauty — and when I, Etienne Gerard, use such a word as “exquisite,” my friends, it has a meaning. I have judgment, I have memories, I have the means of comparison. Of all the women who have loved me there are not twenty to whom I could apply such a term as that. But I say again that Lucia was exquisite.

Of the dark type I do not recall her equal unless it were Dolores of Toledo. There was a little brunette whom I loved at Santarem when I was soldiering under Massena in Portugal — her name has escaped me. She was of a perfect beauty, but she had not the figure nor the grace of Lucia. There was Agnes also. I could not put one before the other, but I do none an injustice when I say that Lucia was the equal of the best.

It was over this matter of pictures that I had first met her, for her father owned a palace on the farther side of the Rialto Bridge upon the Grand Canal, and it was so packed with wall-paintings that Suchet sent a party of sappers to cut some of them out and send them to Paris.

I had gone down with them, and after I had seen Lucia in tears it appeared to me that the plaster would crack if it were taken from the support of the wall. I said so, and the sappers were withdrawn. After that I was the friend of the family, and many a flask of Chianti have I cracked with the father and many a sweet lesson have I had from the daughter. Some of our French officers married in Venice that winter, and I might have done the same, for I loved her with all my heart; but Etienne Gerard has his sword, his horse, his regiment, his mother, his Emperor, and his career. A debonair Hussar has room in his life for love, but none for a wife. So I thought then, my friends, but I did not see the lonely days when I should long to clasp those vanished hands, and turn my head away when I saw old comrades with their tall children standing round their chairs. This love which I had thought was a joke and a plaything — it is only now that I understand that it is the moulder of one's life, the most solemn and sacred of all things — Thank you, my friend, thank you! It is a good wine, and a second bottle cannot hurt.

And now I will tell you how my love for Lucia was the cause of one of the most terrible of all the wonderful adventures which have ever befallen me, and how it was that I came to lose the top of my right ear. You have often asked me why it was missing. To-night for the first time I will tell you.

Suchet's head-quarters at that time was the old palace of the Doge Dandolo, which stands on the lagoon not far from the place of San Marco. It was near the end of the winter, and I had returned one night from the Theatre Goldini, when I found a note from Lucia and a gondola waiting. She prayed me to come to her at once as she was in trouble. To a Frenchman and a soldier there was but one answer to such a note. In an instant I was in the boat and the gondolier was pushing out into the dark lagoon.

I remember that as I took my seat in the boat I was struck by the man's great size. He was not tall, but he was one of the broadest men that I have ever seen in my life. But the gondoliers of Venice are a strong breed, and powerful men are common enough among them. The fellow took his place behind me and began to row.

A good soldier in an enemy's country should everywhere and at all times be on the alert. It has been one of the rules of my life, and if I have lived to wear grey hairs it is because I have observed it. And yet upon that night I was as careless as a foolish young recruit who fears lest he should be thought to be afraid. My pistols I had left behind in my hurry. My sword was at my belt, but it is not always the most convenient of weapons. I lay back in my seat in the gondola, lulled by the gentle swish of the water and the steady creaking of the oar. Our way lay through a network of narrow canals with high houses towering on either side and a thin slit of star-spangled sky above us. Here and there, on the bridges which spanned the canal, there was the dim glimmer of an oil lamp, and sometimes there came a gleam from some niche where a candle burned before the image of a saint. But save for this it was all black, and one could only see the water by the white fringe which curled round the long black nose of our boat. It was a place and a time for dreaming. I thought of my own past life, of all the great deeds in which I had been concerned, of the horses that I had handled, and of the women that I had loved. Then I thought also of my dear mother, and I fancied her joy when she heard the folk in the village talking about the fame of her son. Of the Emperor also I thought, and of France, the dear fatherland, the sunny France, mother of beautiful daughters and of gallant sons. My heart glowed within me as I thought of how we had brought her colours so many hundred leagues beyond her borders. To her greatness I would dedicate my life. I placed my hand upon my heart as I swore it, and at that instant the gondolier fell upon me from behind.

When I say that he fell upon me I do not mean merely that he attacked me, but that he really did tumble upon me with all his weight. The fellow stands behind you and above you as he rows, so that you can neither see him nor can you in any way guard against such an assault.

One moment I had sat with my mind filled with sublime resolutions, the next I was flattened out upon the bottom of the boat, the breath dashed out of my body, and this monster pinning me down. I felt the fierce pants of his hot breath upon the back of my neck. In an instant he had torn away my sword, had slipped a sack over my head, and had tied a rope firmly round the outside of it.

There I was at the bottom of the gondola as helpless as a trussed fowl. I could not shout, I could not move; I was a mere bundle. An instant later I heard once more the swishing of the water and the creaking of the oar.

This fellow had done his work and had resumed his journey as quietly and unconcernedly as if he were accustomed to clap a sack over a colonel of Hussars every day of the week.

I cannot tell you the humiliation and also the fury which filled my mind as I lay there like a helpless sheep being carried to the butcher’s. I, Etienne Gerard, the champion of the six brigades of light cavalry and the first swordsman of the Grand Army, to be overpowered by a single unarmed man in such a fashion! Yet I lay quiet, for there is a time to resist and there is a time to save one’s strength. I had felt the fellow’s grip upon my arms, and I knew that I would be a child in his hands. I waited quietly, therefore, with a heart which burned with rage, until my opportunity should come.

How long I lay there at the bottom of the boat I can not tell; but it seemed to me to be a long time, and always there were the hiss of the waters and the steady creaking of the oar. Several times we turned corners, for I heard the long, sad cry which these gondoliers give when they wish to warn their fellows that they are coming. At last, after a considerable journey, I felt the side of the boat scrape up against a landing-place. The fellow knocked three times with his oar upon wood, and in answer to his summons I heard the rasping of bars and the turning of keys. A great door creaked back upon its hinges.

“Have you got him?” asked a voice, in Italian.

My monster gave a laugh and kicked the sack in which I lay.

“Here he is,” said he.

“They are waiting.” He added something which I could not understand.

“Take him, then,” said my captor. He raised me in his arms, ascended some steps, and I was thrown down upon a hard floor. A moment later the bars creaked and the key whined once more. I was a prisoner inside a house.

From the voices and the steps there seemed now to be several people round me. I understand Italian a great deal better than I speak it, and I could make out very well what they were saying.

“You have not killed him, Matteo?”

“What matter if I have?”

“My faith, you will have to answer for it to the tribunal.”

“They will kill him, will they not?”

“Yes, but it is not for you or me to take it out of their hands.”

“Tut! I have not killed him. Dead men do not bite, and his cursed teeth met in my thumb as I pulled the sack over his head.”

“He lies very quiet.”

“Tumble him out and you will find that he is lively enough.”

The cord which bound me was undone and the sack drawn from over my head. With my eyes closed I lay motionless upon the floor.

“By the saints, Matteo, I tell you that you have broken his neck.”

“Not I. He has only fainted. The better for him if he never came out of it again.”

I felt a hand within my tunic.

“Matteo is right,” said a voice. “His heart beats like a hammer. Let him lie and he will soon find his senses.”

I waited for a minute or so and then I ventured to take a stealthy peep from between my lashes. At first I could see nothing, for I had been so long in darkness and it was but a dim light in which I found myself. Soon, however, I made out that a high and vaulted ceiling covered with painted gods and goddesses was arching over my head. This was no mean den of cut-throats into which I had been carried, but it must be the hall of some Venetian palace. Then, without movement, very slowly and stealthily I had a peep at the men who surrounded me. There was the gondolier, a swart, hard-faced, murderous ruffian, and beside him were three other men, one of them a little, twisted fellow with an air of authority and several keys in his hand, the other two tall young servants in a smart livery. As I listened to their talk I saw that the small man was the steward of the house, and that the others were under his orders.

There were four of them, then, but the little steward might be left out of the reckoning. Had I a weapon I should have smiled at such odds as those. But, hand to hand, I was no match for the one even without three others to aid him. Cunning, then, not force, must be my aid. I wished to look round for some mode of escape, and in doing so I gave an almost imperceptible movement of my head. Slight as it was it did not escape my guardians.

“Come, wake up, wake up!” cried the steward.

“Get on your feet, little Frenchman,” growled the gondolier. “Get up, I say,” and for the second time he spurned me with his foot.

Never in the world was a command obeyed so promptly as that one. In an instant I had bounded to my feet and rushed as hard as I could to the back of the hall. They were after me as I have seen the English hounds follow a fox, but there was a long passage down which I tore.

It turned to the left and again to the left, and then I found myself back in the hall once more. They were almost within touch of me and there was no time for thought. I turned toward the staircase, but two men were coming down it. I dodged back and tried the door through which I had been brought, but it was fastened with great bars and I could not loosen them. The gondolier was on me with his knife, but I met him with a kick on the body which stretched him on his back. His dagger flew with a clatter across the marble floor. I had no time to seize it, for there were half a dozen of them now clutching at me. As I rushed through them the little steward thrust his leg before me and I fell with a crash, but I was up in an instant, and breaking from their grasp I burst through the very middle of them and made for a door at the other end of the hall. I reached it well in front of them, and I gave a shout of triumph as the handle turned freely in my hand, for I could see that it led to the outside and that all was clear for my escape. But I had forgotten this strange city in which I was. Every house is an island. As I flung open the door, ready to bound out into the street, the light of the hall shone upon the deep, still, black water which lay flush with the topmost step.

I shrank back, and in an instant my pursuers were on me.

But I am not taken so easily. Again I kicked and fought my way through them, though one of them tore a handful of hair from my head in his effort to hold me. The little steward struck me with a key and I was battered and bruised, but once more I cleared a way in front of me.

Up the grand staircase I rushed, burst open the pair of huge folding doors which faced me, and learned at last that my efforts were in vain.

The room into which I had broken was brilliantly lighted. With its gold cornices, its massive pillars, and its painted walls and ceilings it was evidently the grand hall of some famous Venetian palace. There are many hundred such in this strange city, any one of which has rooms which would grace the Louvre or Versailles. In the centre of this great hall there was a raised dais, and upon it in a half circle there sat twelve men all clad in black gowns, like those of a Franciscan monk, and each with a mask over the upper part of his face.

A group of armed men — rough-looking rascals — were standing round the door, and amid them facing the dais was a young fellow in the uniform of the light infantry. As he turned his head I recognised him. It was Captain Auret, of the 7th, a young Basque with whom I had drunk many a glass during the winter.

He was deadly white, poor wretch, but he held himself manfully amid the assassins who surrounded him. Never shall I forget the sudden flash of hope which shone in his dark eyes when he saw a comrade burst into the room, or the look of despair which followed as he understood that I had come not to change his fate but to share it.

You can think how amazed these people were when I hurled myself into their presence. My pursuers had crowded in behind me and choked the doorway, so that all further flight was out of the question. It is at such instants that my nature asserts itself. With dignity I advanced toward the tribunal. My jacket was torn, my hair was dishevelled, my head was bleeding, but there was that in my eyes and in my carriage which made them realise that no common man was before them. Not a hand was raised to arrest me until I halted in front of a formidable old man, whose long grey beard and masterful manner told me that both by years and by character he was the man in authority.

“Sir,” said I, “you will, perhaps, tell me why I have been forcibly arrested and brought to this place. I am an honourable soldier, as is this other gentleman here, and I demand that you will instantly set us both at liberty.”

There was an appalling silence to my appeal. It was not pleasant to have twelve masked faces turned upon you and to see twelve pairs of vindictive Italian eyes fixed with fierce intentness upon your face. But I stood as a debonair soldier should, and I could not but reflect how much credit I was bringing upon the Hussars of Conflans by the dignity of my bearing. I do not think that anyone could have carried himself better under such difficult circumstances. I looked with a fearless face from one assassin to another, and I waited for some reply.

It was the grey-beard who at last broke the silence.

“Who is this man?” he asked.

“His name is Gerard,” said the little steward at the door.

“Colonel Gerard,” said I. “I will not deceive you. I am Etienne Gerard, THE Colonel Gerard, five times mentioned in despatches and recommended for the sword of honour. I am aide-de-camp to General Suchet, and I demand my instant release, together with that of my comrade in arms.”

The same terrible silence fell upon the assembly, and the same twelve pairs of merciless eyes were bent upon my face. Again it was the grey-beard who spoke.

“He is out of his order. There are two names upon our list before him.”

“He escaped from our hands and burst into the room.”

“Let him await his turn. Take him down to the wooden cell.”

“If he resist us, your Excellency?”

“Bury your knives in his body. The tribunal will uphold you. Remove him until we have dealt with the others.”

They advanced upon me, and for an instant I thought of resistance. It would have been a heroic death, but who was there to see it or to chronicle it? I might be only postponing my fate, and yet I had been in so many bad places and come out unhurt that I had learned always to hope and to trust my star. I allowed these rascals to seize me, and I was led from the room, the gondolier walking at my side with a long naked knife in his hand. I could see in his brutal eyes the satisfaction which it would give him if he could find some excuse for plunging it into my body.

They are wonderful places, these great Venetian houses, palaces, and fortresses, and prisons all in one. I was led along a passage and down a bare stone stair until we came to a short corridor from which three doors opened. Through one of these I was thrust and the spring lock closed behind me. The only light came dimly through a small grating which opened on the passage.

Peering and feeling, I carefully examined the chamber in which I had been placed. I understood from what I had heard that I should soon have to leave it again in order to appear before this tribunal, but still it is not my nature to throw away any possible chances.

The stone floor of the cell was so damp and the walls for some feet high were so slimy and foul that it was evident they were beneath the level of the water. A single slanting hole high up near the ceiling was the only aperture for light or air. Through it I saw one bright star shining down upon me, and the sight filled me with comfort and with hope. I have never been a man of religion, though I have always had a respect for those who were, but I remember that night that the star shining down the shaft seemed to be an all-seeing eye which was upon me, and I felt as a young and frightened recruit might feel in battle when he saw the calm gaze of his colonel turned upon him.

Three of the sides of my prison were formed of stone, but the fourth was of wood, and I could see that it had only recently been erected. Evidently a partition had been thrown up to divide a single large cell into two smaller ones. There was no hope for me in the old walls, in the tiny window, or in the massive door. It was only in this one direction of the wooden screen that there was any possibility of exploring. My reason told me that if I should pierce it — which did not seem very difficult — it would only be to find myself in another cell as strong as that in which I then was. Yet I had always rather be doing something than doing nothing, so I bent all my attention and all my energies upon the wooden wall. Two planks were badly joined, and so loose that I was certain I could easily detach them. I searched about for some tool, and I found one in the leg of a small bed which stood in the corner. I forced the end of this into the chink of the planks, and I was about to twist them outward when the sound of rapid footsteps caused me to pause and to listen.

I wish I could forget what I heard. Many a hundred men have I seen die in battle, and I have slain more myself than I care to think of, but all that was fair fight and the duty of a soldier. It was a very different matter to listen to a murder in this den of assassins. They were pushing someone along the passage, someone who resisted and who clung to my door as he passed. They must have taken him into the third cell, the one which was farthest from me. “Help! Help!” cried a voice, and then I heard a blow and a scream. “Help! Help!” cried the voice again, and then “Gerard! Colonel Gerard!” It was my poor captain of infantry whom they were slaughtering.

“Murderers! Murderers!” I yelled, and I kicked at my door, but again I heard him shout and then everything was silent. A minute later there was a heavy splash, and I knew that no human eye would ever see Auret again. He had gone as a hundred others had gone whose names were missing from the roll-calls of their regiments during that winter in Venice.

The steps returned along the passage, and I thought that they were coming for me. Instead of that they opened the door of the cell next to mine and they took someone out of it. I heard the steps die away up the stair.

At once I renewed my work upon the planks, and within a very few minutes I had loosened them in such a way that I could remove and replace them at pleasure. Passing through the aperture I found myself in the farther cell, which, as I expected, was the other half of the one in which I had been confined. I was not any nearer to escape than I had been before, for there was no other wooden wall which I could penetrate and the spring lock of the door had been closed. There were no traces to show who was my companion in misfortune. Closing the two loose planks behind me I returned to my own cell and waited there with all the courage which I could command for the summons which would probably be my death knell.

It was a long time in coming, but at last I heard the sound of feet once more in the passage, and I nerved myself to listen to some other odious deed and to hear the cries of the poor victim. Nothing of the kind occurred, however, and the prisoner was placed in the cell without violence. I had no time to peep through my hole of communication, for next moment my own door was flung open and my rascally gondolier, with the other assassins, came into the cell.

“Come, Frenchman,” said he. He held his blood-stained knife in his great, hairy hand, and I read in his fierce eyes that he only looked for some excuse in order to plunge it into my heart. Resistance was useless. I followed without a word. I was led up the stone stair and back into that gorgeous chamber in which I had left the secret tribunal. I was ushered in, but to my surprise it was not on me that their attention was fixed. One of their own number, a tall, dark young man, was standing before them and was pleading with them in low, earnest tones. His voice quivered with anxiety and his hands darted in and out or writhed together in an agony of entreaty. “You cannot do it! You cannot do it!” he cried.

“I implore the tribunal to reconsider this decision.”

“Stand aside, brother,” said the old man who presided.

“The case is decided and another is up for judgment.”

“For Heaven’s sake be merciful!” cried the young man.

“We have already been merciful,” the other answered.

“Death would have been a small penalty for such an offence. Be silent and let judgment take its course.”

I saw the young man throw himself in an agony of grief into his chair. I had no time, however, to speculate as to what it was which was troubling him, for his eleven colleagues had already fixed their stern eyes upon me.

The moment of fate had arrived.

“You are Colonel Gerard?” said the terrible old man.

“I am.”

“Aide-de-camp to the robber who calls himself General Suchet, who in turn represents that arch-robber Buonaparte?”

It was on my lips to tell him that he was a liar, but there is a time to argue and a time to be silent.

“I am an honourable soldier,” said I. “I have obeyed my orders and done my duty.”

The blood flushed into the old man’s face and his eyes blazed through his mask.

“You are thieves and murderers, every man of you,” he cried. “What are you doing here? You are Frenchmen. Why are you not in France? Did we invite you to Venice? By what right are you here? Where are our pictures? Where are the horses of St. Mark? Who are you that you should pilfer those treasures which our fathers through so many centuries have collected? We were a great city when France was a desert. Your drunken, brawling, ignorant soldiers have undone the work of saints and heroes. What have you to say to it?”

He was, indeed, a formidable old man, for his white beard bristled with fury and he barked out the little sentences like a savage hound. For my part I could have told him that his pictures would be safe in Paris, that his horses were really not worth making a fuss about, and that he could see heroes — I say nothing of saints — without going back to his ancestors or even moving out of his chair. All this I could have pointed out, but one might as well argue with a Mameluke about religion. I shrugged my shoulders and said nothing.

“The prisoner has no defence,” said one of my masked judges.

“Has any one any observation to make before judgment is passed?” The old man glared round him at the others.

“There is one matter, your Excellency,” said another.

“It can scarce be referred to without reopening a brother’s wounds, but I would remind you that there is a very particular reason why an exemplary punishment should be inflicted in the case of this officer.”

“I had not forgotten it,” the old man answered.

“Brother, if the tribunal has injured you in one direction, it will give you ample satisfaction in another.”

The young man who had been pleading when I entered the room staggered to his feet.

“I cannot endure it,” he cried. “Your Excellency must forgive me. The tribunal can act without me. I am ill. I am mad.” He flung his hands out with a furious gesture and rushed from the room.

“Let him go! Let him go!” said the president. “It is, indeed, more than can be asked of flesh and blood that he should remain under this roof. But he is a true Venetian, and when the first agony is over he will understand that it could not be otherwise.”

I had been forgotten during this episode, and though I am not a man who is accustomed to being overlooked I should have been all the happier had they continued to neglect me. But now the old president glared at me again like a tiger who comes back to his victim.

“You shall pay for it all, and it is but justice that you should,” he said. “You, an upstart adventurer and foreigner, have dared to raise your eyes in love to the grand daughter of a Doge of Venice who was already betrothed to the heir of the Loredans. He who enjoys such privileges must pay a price for them."

"It cannot be higher than they are worth," said I.

"You will tell us that when you have made a part payment," said he. "Perhaps your spirit may not be so proud by that time. Matteo, you will lead this prisoner to the wooden cell. To-night is Monday. Let him have no food or water, and let him be led before the tribunal again on Wednesday night. We shall then decide upon the death which he is to die."

It was not a pleasant prospect, and yet it was a reprieve. One is thankful for small mercies when a hairy savage with a blood-stained knife is standing at one's elbow. He dragged me from the room and I was thrust down the stairs and back into my cell. The door was locked and I was left to my reflections.

My first thought was to establish connection with my neighbour in misfortune. I waited until the steps had died away, and then I cautiously drew aside the two boards and peeped through. The light was very dim, so dim that I could only just discern a figure huddled in the corner, and I could hear the low whisper of a voice which prayed as one prays who is in deadly fear. The boards must have made a creaking. There was a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"Courage, friend, courage!" I cried. "All is not lost. Keep a stout heart, for Etienne Gerard is by your side."

"Etienne!" It was a woman's voice which spoke — a voice which was always music to my ears. I sprang through the gap and I flung my arms round her.

"Lucia! Lucia!" I cried.

It was "Etienne!" and "Lucia!" for some minutes, for one does not make speeches at moments like that. It was she who came to her senses first.

"Oh, Etienne, they will kill you. How came you into their hands?"

"In answer to your letter."

"I wrote no letter."

"The cunning demons! But you?"

"I came also in answer to your letter."

"Lucia, I wrote no letter."

"They have trapped us both with the same bait."

"I care nothing about myself, Lucia. Besides, there is no pressing danger with me. They have simply returned me to my cell."

“Oh, Etienne, Etienne, they will kill you. Lorenzo is there.”

“The old greybeard?”

“No, no, a young dark man. He loved me, and I thought I loved him until — until I learned what love is, Etienne. He will never forgive you. He has a heart of stone.”

“Let them do what they like. They cannot rob me of the past, Lucia. But you — what about you?”

“It will be nothing, Etienne. Only a pang for an instant and then all over. They mean it as a badge of infamy, dear, but I will carry it like a crown of honour since it was through you that I gained it.”

Her words froze my blood with horror. All my adventures were insignificant compared to this terrible shadow which was creeping over my soul.

“Lucia! Lucia!” I cried. “For pity’s sake tell me what these butchers are about to do. Tell me, Lucia! Tell me!”

“I will not tell you, Etienne, for it would hurt you far more than it would me. Well, well, I will tell you lest you should fear it was something worse. The president has ordered that my ear be cut off, that I may be marked for ever as having loved a Frenchman.”

Her ear! The dear little ear which I had kissed so often. I put my hand to each little velvet shell to make certain that this sacrilege had not yet been committed.

Only over my dead body should they reach them. I swore it to her between my clenched teeth.

“You must not care, Etienne. And yet I love that you should care all the same.”

“They shall not hurt you — the fiends!”

“I have hopes, Etienne. Lorenzo is there. He was silent while I was judged, but he may have pleaded for me after I was gone.”

“He did. I heard him.”

“Then he may have softened their hearts.”

I knew that it was not so, but how could I bring myself to tell her? I might as well have done so, for with the quick instinct of woman my silence was speech to her.

“They would not listen to him! You need not fear to tell me, dear, for you will find that I am worthy to be loved by such a soldier. Where is Lorenzo now?”

"He left the hall."

"Then he may have left the house as well."

"I believe that he did."

"He has abandoned me to my fate. Etienne, Etienne, they are coming!"

Afar off I heard those fateful steps and the jingle of distant keys. What were they coming for now, since there were no other prisoners to drag to judgment? It could only be to carry out the sentence upon my darling.

I stood between her and the door, with the strength of a lion in my limbs. I would tear the house down before they should touch her.

"Go back! Go back!" she cried. "They will murder you, Etienne. My life, at least, is safe. For the love you bear me, Etienne, go back. It is nothing. I will make no sound. You will not hear that it is done."

She wrestled with me, this delicate creature, and by main force she dragged me to the opening between the cells. But a sudden thought had crossed my mind.

"We may yet be saved," I whispered. "Do what I tell you at once and without argument. Go into my cell. Quick!"

I pushed her through the gap and helped her to replace the planks. I had retained her cloak in my hands, and with this wrapped round me I crept into the darkest corner of her cell. There I lay when the door was opened and several men came in. I had reckoned that they would bring no lantern, for they had none with them before.

To their eyes I was only a dark blur in the corner.

"Bring a light," said one of them.

"No, no; curse it!" cried a rough voice, which I knew to be that of the ruffian, Matteo. "It is not a job that I like, and the more I saw it the less I should like it. I am sorry, signora, but the order of the tribunal has to be obeyed."

My impulse was to spring to my feet and to rush through them all and out by the open door. But how would that help Lucia? Suppose that I got clear away, she would be in their hands until I could come back with help, for single-handed I could not hope to clear a way for her. All this flashed through my mind in an instant, and I saw that the only course for me was to lie still, take what came, and wait my chance. The fellow's coarse hand felt about among my curls — those curls in which only a woman's fingers had ever wandered. The next instant he gripped my ear and a pain shot through me as if I had been touched with a hot iron. I bit my lip to stifle a cry, and I felt the blood run warm down my neck and back.

"There, thank Heaven, that's over," said the fellow, giving me a friendly pat on the head. "You're a brave girl, signora, I'll say that for you, and I only wish you'd have better taste than to love a Frenchman. You can blame him and not me for what I have done."

What could I do save to lie still and grind my teeth at my own helplessness? At the same time my pain and my rage were always soothed by the reflection that I had suffered for the woman whom I loved. It is the custom of men to say to ladies that they would willingly endure any pain for their sake, but it was my privilege to show that I had said no more than I meant. I thought also how nobly I would seem to have acted if ever the story came to be told, and how proud the regiment of Conflans might well be of their colonel. These thoughts helped me to suffer in silence while the blood still trickled over my neck and dripped upon the stone floor. It was that sound which nearly led to my destruction.

"She's bleeding fast," said one of the valets. "You had best fetch a surgeon or you will find her dead in the morning."

"She lies very still and she has never opened her mouth," said another. "The shock has killed her."

"Nonsense; a young woman does not die so easily." It was Matteo who spoke. "Besides, I did but snip off enough to leave the tribunal's mark upon her. Rouse up, signora, rouse up!"

He shook me by the shoulder, and my heart stood still for fear he should feel the epaulet under the mantle.

"How is it with you now?" he asked.

I made no answer.

"Curse it, I wish I had to do with a man instead of a woman, and the fairest woman in Venice," said the gondolier. "Here, Nicholas, lend me your handkerchief and bring a light."

It was all over. The worst had happened. Nothing could save me. I still crouched in the corner, but I was tense in every muscle, like a wild cat about to spring.

If I had to die I was determined that my end should be worthy of my life.

One of them had gone for a lamp and Matteo was stooping over me with a handkerchief. In another instant my secret would be discovered. But he suddenly drew himself straight and stood motionless. At the same instant there came a confused murmuring sound through the little window far above my head. It was the rattle of oars and the buzz of many voices. Then there was a crash upon the door upstairs, and a terrible voice roared: “Open! Open in the name of the Emperor!”

The Emperor! It was like the mention of some saint which, by its very sound, can frighten the demons.

Away they ran with cries of terror — Matteo, the valets, the steward, all of the murderous gang. Another shout and then the crash of a hatchet and the splintering of planks. There were the rattle of arms and the cries of French soldiers in the hall. Next instant feet came flying down the stair and a man burst frantically into my cell.

“Lucia!” he cried, “Lucia!” He stood in the dim light, panting and unable to find his words. Then he broke out again. “Have I not shown you how I love you, Lucia? What more could I do to prove it? I have betrayed my country, I have broken my vow, I have ruined my friends, and I have given my life in order to save you.”

It was young Lorenzo Loredan, the lover whom I had superseded. My heart was heavy for him at the time, but after all it is every man for himself in love, and if one fails in the game it is some consolation to lose to one who can be a graceful and considerate winner.

I was about to point this out to him, but at the first word I uttered he gave a shout of astonishment, and, rushing out, he seized the lamp which hung in the corridor and flashed it in my face.

“It is you, you villain!” he cried. “You French coxcomb. You shall pay me for the wrong which you have done me.”

But the next instant he saw the pallor of my face and the blood which was still pouring from my head.

“What is this?” he asked. “How come you to have lost your ear?”

I shook off my weakness, and pressing my handkerchief to my wound I rose from my couch, the debonair colonel of Hussars.

“My injury, sir, is nothing. With your permission we will not allude to a matter so trifling and so personal.”

But Lucia had burst through from her cell and was pouring out the whole story while she clasped Lorenzo’s arm.

“This noble gentleman — he has taken my place, Lorenzo! He has borne it for me. He has suffered that I might be saved.”

I could sympathise with the struggle which I could see in the Italian’s face. At last he held out his hand to me.

“Colonel Gerard,” he said, “you are worthy of a great love. I forgive you, for if you have wronged me you have made a noble atonement. But I wonder to see you alive. I left the tribunal before you were judged, but I understood that no mercy would be shown to any Frenchman since the destruction of the ornaments of Venice.”

“He did not destroy them,” cried Lucia. “He has helped to preserve those in our palace.”

“One of them, at any rate,” said I, as I stooped and kissed her hand.

This was the way, my friends, in which I lost my ear. Lorenzo was found stabbed to the heart in the Piazza of St. Mark within two days of the night of my adventure. Of the tribunal and its ruffians, Matteo and three others were shot, the rest banished from the town.

Lucia, my lovely Lucia, retired into a convent at Murano after the French had left the city, and there she still may be, some gentle lady abbess who has perhaps long forgotten the days when our hearts throbbed together, and when the whole great world seemed so small a thing beside the love which burned in our veins. Or perhaps it may not be so. Perhaps she has not forgotten.

There may still be times when the peace of the cloister is broken by the memory of the old soldier who loved her in those distant days. Youth is past and passion is gone, but the soul of the gentleman can never change, and still Etienne Gerard would bow his grey head before her and would very gladly lose his other ear if he might do her a service.

How the Brigadier Captured Saragossa

Have I ever told you, my friends, the circumstances connected with my joining the Hussars of Conflans at the time of the siege of Saragossa and the very remarkable exploit which I performed in connection with the taking of that city? No? Then you have indeed something still to learn. I will tell it to you exactly as it occurred. Save for two or three men and a score or two of women, you are the first who have ever heard the story.

You must know, then, that it was in the Second Hussars — called the Hussars of Chamberan — that I had served as a lieutenant and as a junior captain. At the time I speak of I was only twenty-five years of age, as reckless and desperate a man as any in that great army.

It chanced that the war had come to a halt in Germany, while it was still raging in Spain, so the Emperor, wishing to reinforce the Spanish army, transferred me as senior captain to the Hussars of Conflans, which were at that time in the Fifth Army Corps under Marshal Lannes.

It was a long journey from Berlin to the Pyrenees.

My new regiment formed part of the force which, under Marshal Lannes, was then besieging the Spanish town of Saragossa. I turned my horse’s head in that direction, therefore, and behold me a week or so later at the French headquarters, whence I was directed to the camp of the Hussars of Conflans.

You have read, no doubt, of this famous siege of Saragossa, and I will only say that no general could have had a harder task than that with which Marshal Lannes was confronted. The immense city was crowded with a horde of Spaniards — soldiers, peasants, priests — all filled with the most furious hatred of the French, and the most savage determination to perish before they would surrender. There were eighty thousand men in the town and only thirty thousand to besiege them. Yet we had a powerful artillery, and our engineers were of the best. There was never such a siege, for it is usual that when the fortifications are taken the city falls, but here it was not until the fortifications were taken that the real fighting began. Every house was a fort and every street a battle-field, so that slowly, day by day, we had to work our way inwards, blowing up the houses with their garrisons until more than half the city had disappeared. Yet the other half was as determined as ever and in a better position for defence, since it consisted of enormous convents and monasteries with walls like the Bastille, which could not be so easily brushed out of our way. This was the state of things at the time that I joined the army.

I will confess to you that cavalry are not of much use in a siege, although there was a time when I would not have permitted anyone to have made such an observation. The Hussars of Conflans were encamped to the south of the town, and it was their duty to throw out patrols and to make sure that no Spanish force was advancing from that quarter. The colonel of the regiment was not a good soldier, and the regiment was at that time very far from being in the high condition which it afterwards attained. Even in that one evening I saw several things which shocked me, for I had a high standard, and it went to my heart to see an ill-arranged camp, an ill-groomed horse, or a slovenly trooper. That night I supped with twenty-six of my new brother-officers, and I fear that in my zeal I showed them only too plainly that I found things very different to what I was accustomed in the army of Germany.

There was silence in the mess after my remarks, and I felt that I had been indiscreet when I saw the glances that were cast at me. The colonel especially was furious, and a great major named Olivier, who was the fire-eater of the regiment, sat opposite to me curling his huge black moustaches, and staring at me as if he would eat me. However, I did not resent his attitude, for I felt that I had indeed been indiscreet, and that it would give a bad impression if upon this my first evening I quarrelled with my superior officer.

So far I admit that I was wrong, but now I come to the sequel. Supper over, the colonel and some other officers left the room, for it was in a farm-house that the mess was held. There remained a dozen or so, and a goat-skin of Spanish wine having been brought in we all made merry. Presently this Major Olivier asked me some questions concerning the army of Germany and as to the part which I had myself played in the campaign. Flushed with the wine, I was drawn on from story to story. It was not unnatural, my friends.

You will sympathise with me. Up there I had been the model for every officer of my years in the army. I was the first swordsman, the most dashing rider, the hero of a hundred adventures. Here I found myself not only unknown, but even disliked. Was it not natural that I should wish to tell these brave comrades what sort of man it was that had come among them? Was it not natural that I should wish to say, “Rejoice, my friends, rejoice! It is no ordinary man who has joined you to-night, but it is I, THE Gerard, the hero of Ratisbon, the victor of Jena, the man who broke the square at Austerlitz”? I could not say all this. But I could at least tell them some incidents which would enable them to say it for themselves. I did so. They listened unmoved. I told them more. At last, after my tale of how I had guided the army across the Danube, one universal shout of laughter broke from them all. I sprang to my feet, flushed with shame and anger. They had drawn me on. They were making game of me. They were convinced that they had to do with a braggart and a liar. Was this my reception in the Hussars of Conflans?

I dashed the tears of mortification from my eyes, and they laughed the more at the sight.

“Do you know, Captain Pelletan, whether Marshal Lannes is still with the army?” asked the major.

“I believe that he is, sir,” said the other.

“Really, I should have thought that his presence was hardly necessary now that Captain Gerard has arrived.”

Again there was a roar of laughter. I can see the ring of faces, the mocking eyes, the open mouths — Olivier with his great black bristles, Pelletan thin and sneering, even the young sub-lieutenants convulsed with merriment. Heavens, the indignity of it! But my rage had dried my tears. I was myself again, cold, quiet, self-contained, ice without and fire within.

“May I ask, sir,” said I to the major, “at what hour the regiment is paraded?”

“I trust, Captain Gerard, that you do not mean to alter our hours,” said he, and again there was a burst of laughter, which died away as I looked slowly round the circle.

“What hour is the assembly?” I asked, sharply, of Captain Pelletan.

Some mocking answer was on his tongue, but my glance kept it there. “The assembly is at six,” he answered.

“I thank you,” said I. I then counted the company and found that I had to do with fourteen officers, two of whom appeared to be boys fresh from St. Cyr. I could not condescend to take any notice of their indiscretion.

There remained the major, four captains, and seven lieutenants.

“Gentlemen,” I continued, looking from one to the other of them, “I should feel myself unworthy of this famous regiment if I did not ask you for satisfaction for the rudeness with which you have greeted me, and I should hold you to be unworthy of it if on any pretext you refused to grant it.”

“You will have no difficulty upon that score,” said the major. “I am prepared to waive my rank and to give you every satisfaction in the name of the Hussars of Conflans.”

“I thank you,” I answered. “I feel, however, that I have some claim upon these other gentlemen who laughed at my expense.”

“Whom would you fight, then?” asked Captain Pelletan.

“All of you,” I answered.

They looked in surprise from one to the other. Then they drew off to the other end of the room, and I heard the buzz of their whispers. They were laughing. Evidently they still thought that they had to do with some empty braggart. Then they returned.

“Your request is unusual,” said Major Olivier, “but it will be granted. How do you propose to conduct such a duel? The terms lie with you.”

“Sabres,” said I. “And I will take you in order of seniority, beginning with you, Major Olivier, at five o’clock. I will thus be able to devote five minutes to each before the assembly is blown. I must, however, beg you to have the courtesy to name the place of meeting, since I am still ignorant of the locality.”

They were impressed by my cold and practical manner.

Already the smile had died away from their lips.

Olivier’s face was no longer mocking, but it was dark and stern.

“There is a small open space behind the horse lines,” said he. “We have held a few affairs of honour there and it has done very well. We shall be there, Captain Gerard, at the hour you name.”

I was in the act of bowing to thank them for their acceptance when the door of the mess-room was flung open and the colonel hurried into the room, with an agitated face.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I have been asked to call for a volunteer from among you for a service which involves the greatest possible danger. I will not disguise from you that the matter is serious in the last degree, and that Marshal Lannes has chosen a cavalry officer because he can be better spared than an officer of infantry or of engineers. Married men are not eligible. Of the others, who will volunteer?”

I need not say that all the unmarried officers stepped to the front. The colonel looked round in some embarrassment.

I could see his dilemma. It was the best man who should go, and yet it was the best man whom he could least spare.

“Sir,” said I, “may I be permitted to make a suggestion?”

He looked at me with a hard eye. He had not forgotten my observations at supper. “Speak!” said he.

“I would point out, sir,” said I, “that this mission is mine both by right and by convenience.”

“Why so, Captain Gerard?”

“By right because I am the senior captain. By convenience because I shall not be missed in the regiments since the men have not yet learned to know me.”

The colonel’s features relaxed.

“There is certainly truth in what you say, Captain Gerard,” said he. “I think that you are indeed best fitted to go upon this mission. If you will come with me I will give you your instructions.”

I wished my new comrades good-night as I left the room, and I repeated that I should hold myself at their disposal at five o’clock next morning. They bowed in silence, and I thought that I could see from the expression of their faces that they had already begun to take a more just view of my character.

I had expected that the colonel would at once inform me what it was that I had been chosen to do, but instead of that he walked on in silence, I following behind him.

We passed through the camp and made our way across the trenches and over the ruined heaps of stones which marked the old wall of the town. Within, there was a labyrinth of passages formed among the debris of the houses which had been destroyed by the mines of the engineers. Acres and acres were covered with splintered walls and piles of brick which had once been a populous suburb. Lanes had been driven through it and lanterns placed at the corners with inscriptions to direct the wayfarer. The colonel hurried onward until at last, after a long walk, we found our way barred by a high grey wall which stretched right across our path.

Here behind a barricade lay our advance guard. The colonel led me into a roofless house, and there I found two general officers, a map stretched over a drum in front of them, they kneeling beside it and examining it carefully by the light of a lantern. The one with the clean-shaven face and the twisted neck was Marshal Lannes, the other was General Razout, the head of the engineers.

“Captain Gerard has volunteered to go,” said the colonel.

Marshal Lannes rose from his knees and shook me by the hand.

“You are a brave man, sir,” said he. “I have a present to make to you,” he added, handing me a very tiny glass tube. “It has been specially prepared by Dr. Fardet. At the supreme moment you have but to put it to your lips and you will be dead in an instant.”

This was a cheerful beginning. I will confess to you, my friends, that a cold chill passed up my back and my hair rose upon my head.

“Excuse me, sir,” said I, as I saluted, “I am aware that I have volunteered for a service of great danger, but the exact details have not yet been given to me.”

“Colonel Perrin,” said Lannes, severely, “it is unfair to allow this brave officer to volunteer before he has learned what the perils are to which he will be exposed.”

But already I was myself once more.

“Sir,” said I, “permit me to remark that the greater the danger the greater the glory, and that I could only repent of volunteering if I found that there were no risks to be run.”

It was a noble speech, and my appearance gave force to my words. For the moment I was a heroic figure.

As I saw Lannes’s eyes fixed in admiration upon my face it thrilled me to think how splendid was the debut which I was making in the army of Spain. If I died that night my name would not be forgotten. My new comrades and my old, divided in all else, would still have a point of union in their love and admiration of Etienne Gerard.

“General Razout, explain the situation!” said Lannes, briefly.

The engineer officer rose, his compasses in his hand.

He led me to the door and pointed to the high grey wall which towered up amongst the debris of the shattered houses.

“That is the enemy’s present line of defence,” said he. “It is the wall of the great Convent of the Madonna. If we can carry it the city must fall, but they have run countermines all round it, and the walls are so enormously thick that it would be an immense labour to breach it with artillery. We happen to know, however, that the enemy have a considerable store of powder in one of the lower chambers. If that could be exploded the way would be clear for us.”

“How can it be reached?” I asked.

“I will explain. We have a French agent within the town named Hubert. This brave man has been in constant communication with us, and he had promised to explode the magazine. It was to be done in the early morning, and for two days running we have had a storming party of a thousand Grenadiers waiting for the breach to be formed. But there has been no explosion, and for these two days we have had no communication from Hubert. The question is, what has become of him?”

“You wish me to go and see?”

“Precisely. Is he ill, or wounded, or dead? Shall we still wait for him, or shall we attempt the attack elsewhere? We cannot determine this until we have heard from him. This is a map of the town, Captain Gerard. You perceive that within this ring of convents and monasteries are a number of streets which branch off from a central square. If you come so far as this square you will find the cathedral at one corner. In that corner is the street of Toledo. Hubert lives in a small house between a cobbler’s and a wine-shop, on the right-hand side as you go from the cathedral. Do you follow me?”

“Clearly.”

“You are to reach that house, to see him, and to find out if his plan is still feasible or if we must abandon it.”

He produced what appeared to be a roll of dirty brown flannel. “This is the dress of a Franciscan friar,” said he. “You will find it the most useful disguise.”

I shrank away from it.

“It turns me into a spy,” I cried. “Surely I can go in my uniform?”

“Impossible! How could you hope to pass through the streets of the city? Remember, also, that the Spaniards take no prisoners, and that your fate will be the same in whatever dress you are taken.”

It was true, and I had been long enough in Spain to know that that fate was likely to be something more serious than mere death. All the way from the frontier I had heard grim tales of torture and mutilation. I enveloped myself in the Franciscan gown.

“Now I am ready.”

“Are you armed?”

“My sabre.”

“They will hear it clank. Take this knife, and leave your sword. Tell Hubert that at four o’clock, before dawn, the storming party will again be ready. There is a sergeant outside who will show you how to get into the city. Good-night, and good luck!”

Before I had left the room, the two generals had their cocked hats touching each other over the map. At the door an under-officer of engineers was waiting for me.

I tied the girdle of my gown, and taking off my busby, I drew the cowl over my head. My spurs I removed. Then in silence I followed my guide.

It was necessary to move with caution, for the walls above were lined by the Spanish sentries, who fired down continually at our advance posts. Slinking along under the very shadow of the great convent, we picked our way slowly and carefully among the piles of ruins until we came to a large chestnut tree. Here the sergeant stopped.

“It is an easy tree to climb,” said he. “A scaling ladder would not be simpler. Go up it, and you will find that the top branch will enable you to step upon the roof of that house. After that it is your guardian angel who must be your guide, for I can help you no more.”

Girding up the heavy brown gown, I ascended the tree as directed. A half moon was shining brightly, and the line of roof stood out dark and hard against the purple, starry sky. The tree was in the shadow of the house.

Slowly I crept from branch to branch until I was near the top. I had but to climb along a stout limb in order to reach the wall. But suddenly my ears caught the patter of feet, and I cowered against the trunk and tried to blend myself with its shadow. A man was coming toward me on the roof. I saw his dark figure creeping along, his body crouching, his head advanced, the barrel of his gun protruding. His whole bearing was full of caution and suspicion. Once or twice he paused, and then came on again until he had reached the edge of the parapet within a few yards of me. Then he knelt down, levelled his musket, and fired.

I was so astonished at this sudden crash at my very elbow that I nearly fell out of the tree. For an instant I could not be sure that he had not hit me. But when I heard a deep groan from below, and the Spaniard leaned over the parapet and laughed aloud, I understood what had occurred. It was my poor, faithful sergeant, who had waited to see the last of me. The Spaniard had seen him standing under the tree and had shot him. You will think that it was good shooting in the dark, but these people used trabucos, or blunderbusses, which were filled up with all sorts of stones and scraps of metal, so that they would hit you as certainly as I have hit a pheasant on a branch. The Spaniard stood peering down through the darkness, while an occasional groan from below showed that the sergeant was still living. The sentry looked round and everything was still and safe.

Perhaps he thought that he would like to finish of this accursed Frenchman, or perhaps he had a desire to see what was in his pockets; but whatever his motive, he laid down his gun, leaned forward, and swung himself into the tree. The same instant I buried my knife in his body, and he fell with a loud crashing through the branches and came with a thud to the ground. I heard a short struggle below and an oath or two in French.

The wounded sergeant had not waited long for his vengeance.

For some minutes I did not dare to move, for it seemed certain that someone would be attracted by the noise.

However, all was silent save for the chimes striking midnight in the city. I crept along the branch and lifted myself on to the roof. The Spaniard's gun was lying there, but it was of no service to me, since he had the powder-horn at his belt. At the same time, if it were found, it would warn the enemy that something had happened, so I thought it best to drop it over the wall.

Then I looked round for the means of getting off the roof and down into the city.

It was very evident that the simplest way by which I could get down was that by which the sentinel had got up, and what this was soon became evident. A voice along the roof called “Manuelo! Manuelo!” several times, and, crouching in the shadow, I saw in the moonlight a bearded head, which protruded from a trap-door.

Receiving no answer to his summons, the man climbed through, followed by three other fellows, all armed to the teeth. You will see here how important it is not to neglect small precautions, for had I left the man's gun where I found it, a search must have followed and I should certainly have been discovered. As it was, the patrol saw no sign of their sentry, and thought, no doubt, that he had moved along the line of the roofs.

They hurried on, therefore, in that direction, and I, the instant that their backs were turned, rushed to the open trap-door and descended the flight of steps which led from it. The house appeared to be an empty one, for I passed through the heart of it and out, by an open door, into the street beyond.

It was a narrow and deserted lane, but it opened into a broader road, which was dotted with fires, round which a great number of soldiers and peasants were sleeping.

The smell within the city was so horrible that one wondered how people could live in it, for during the months that the siege had lasted there had been no attempt to cleanse the streets or to bury the dead. Many people were moving up and down from fire to fire, and among them I observed several monks. Seeing that they came and went unquestioned, I took heart and hurried on my way in the direction of the great square. Once a man rose from beside one of the fires and stopped me by seizing my sleeve. He pointed to a woman who lay motionless on the road, and I took him to mean that she was dying, and that he desired me to administer the last offices of the Church. I sought refuge, however, in the very little Latin that was left to me. "Ora pro nobis," said I, from the depths of my cowl. "Te Deum laudamus. Ora pro nobis." I raised my hand as I spoke and pointed forward. The fellow released my sleeve and shrank back in silence, while I, with a solemn gesture, hurried upon my way.

As I had imagined, this broad boulevard led out into the central square, which was full of troops and blazing with fires. I walked swiftly onward, disregarding one or two people who addressed remarks to me. I passed the cathedral and followed the street which had been described to me. Being upon the side of the city which was farthest from our attack, there were no troops encamped in it, and it lay in darkness, save for an occasional glimmer in a window. It was not difficult to find the house to which I had been directed, between the wine-shop and the cobbler's. There was no light within and the door was shut. Cautiously I pressed the latch, and I felt that it had yielded. Who was within I could not tell, and yet I must take the risk. I pushed the door open and entered.

It was pitch-dark within — the more so as I had closed the door behind me. I felt round and came upon the edge of a table. Then I stood still and wondered what I should do next, and how I could gain some news of this Hubert, in whose house I found myself. Any mistake would cost me not only my life but the failure of my mission. Perhaps he did not live alone. Perhaps he was only a lodger in a Spanish family, and my visit might bring ruin to him as well as to myself. Seldom in my life have I been more perplexed. And then, suddenly, something turned my blood cold in my veins. It was a voice, a whispering voice, in my very ear. “Mon Dieu!” cried the voice, in a tone of agony. “Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!” Then there was a dry sob in the darkness, and all was still once more.

It thrilled me with horror, that terrible voice, but it thrilled me also with hope, for it was the voice of a Frenchman.

“Who is there?” I asked.

There was a groaning, but no reply.

“Is that you, Monsieur Hubert?”

“Yes, yes,” sighed the voice, so low that I could hardly hear it. “Water, water, for Heaven’s sake, water!”

I advanced in the direction of the sound, but only to come in contact with the wall. Again I heard a groan, but this time there could be no doubt that it was above my head. I put up my hands, but they felt only empty air.

“Where are you?” I cried.

“Here! Here!” whispered the strange, tremulous voice.

I stretched my hand along the wall and I came upon a man’s naked foot. It was as high as my face, and yet, so far as I could feel, it had nothing to support it. I staggered back in amazement. Then I took a tinder-box from my pocket and struck a light. At the first flash a man seemed to be floating in the air in front of me, and I dropped the box in my amazement. Again with tremulous fingers I struck the flint against the steel, and this time I lit not only the tinder but the wax taper. I held it up, and if my amazement was lessened my horror was increased by that which it revealed.

The man had been nailed to the wall as a weasel is nailed to the door of a barn. Huge spikes had been driven through his hands and his feet. The poor wretch was in his last agony, his head sunk upon his shoulder and his blackened tongue protruding from his lips. He was dying as much from thirst as from his wounds, and these inhuman wretches had placed a beaker of wine upon the table in front of him to add a fresh pang to his tortures.

I raised it to his lips. He had still strength enough to swallow, and the light came back a little to his dim eyes.

“Are you a Frenchman?” he whispered.

“Yes. They have sent me to learn what had befallen you.”

“They discovered me. They have killed me for it. But before I die let me tell you what I know. A little more of that wine, please! Quick! Quick! I am very near the end. My strength is going. Listen to me! The powder is stored in the Mother Superior’s room. The wall is pierced, and the end of the train is in Sister Angela’s cell, next the chapel. All was ready two days ago. But they discovered a letter and they tortured me.”

“Good heavens! have you been hanging here for two days?”

“It seems like two years. Comrade, I have served France, have I not? Then do one little service for me. Stab me to the heart, dear friend! I implore you, I entreat you, to put an end to my sufferings.”

The man was indeed in a hopeless plight, and the kindest action would have been that for which he begged.

And yet I could not in cold blood drive my knife into his body, although I knew how I should have prayed for such a mercy had I been in his place. But a sudden thought crossed my mind. In my pocket I held that which would give an instant and a painless death. It was my own safeguard against torture, and yet this poor soul was in very pressing need of it, and he had deserved well of France. I took out my phial and emptied it into the cup of wine. I was in the act of handing it to him when I heard a sudden clash of arms outside the door.

In an instant I put out my light and slipped behind the window-curtains. Next moment the door was flung open and two Spaniards strode into the room, fierce, swarthy men in the dress of citizens, but with muskets slung over their shoulders. I looked through the chink in the curtains in an agony of fear lest they had come upon my traces, but it was evident that their visit was simply in order to feast their eyes upon my unfortunate compatriot.

One of them held the lantern which he carried up in front of the dying man, and both of them burst into a shout of mocking laughter. Then the eyes of the man with the lantern fell upon the flagon of wine upon the table. He picked it up, held it, with a devilish grin, to the lips of Hubert, and then, as the poor wretch involuntarily inclined his head forward to reach it, he snatched it back and took a long gulp himself. At the same instant he uttered a loud cry, clutched wildly at his own throat, and fell stone-dead upon the floor. His comrade stared at him in horror and amazement. Then, overcome by his own superstitious fears, he gave a yell of terror and rushed madly from the room. I heard his feet clattering wildly on the cobble-stones until the sound died away in the distance.

The lantern had been left burning upon the table, and by its light I saw, as I came out from behind my curtain, that the unfortunate Hubert’s head had fallen forward upon his chest and that he also was dead. That motion to reach the wine with his lips had been his last. A clock ticked loudly in the house, but otherwise all was absolutely still. On the wall hung the twisted form of the Frenchman, on the floor lay the motionless body of the Spaniard, all dimly lit by the horn lantern. For the first time in my life a frantic spasm of terror came over me. I had seen ten thousand men in every conceivable degree of mutilation stretched upon the ground, but the sight had never affected me like those two silent figures who were my companions in that shadowy room. I rushed into the street as the Spaniard had done, eager only to leave that house of gloom behind me, and I had run as far as the cathedral before my wits came back to me.

There I stopped, panting, in the shadow, and, my hand pressed to my side, I tried to collect my scattered senses and to plan out what I should do. As I stood there, breathless, the great brass bells roared twice above my head. It was two o’clock. Four was the hour when the storming-party would be in its place. I had still two hours in which to act.

The cathedral was brilliantly lit within, and a number of people were passing in and out; so I entered, thinking that I was less likely to be accosted there, and that I might have quiet to form my plans. It was certainly a singular sight, for the place had been turned into an hospital, a refuge, and a store-house. One aisle was crammed with provisions, another was littered with sick and wounded, while in the centre a great number of helpless people had taken up their abode, and had even lit their cooking fires upon the mosaic floors. There were many at prayer, so I knelt in the shadow of a pillar, and I prayed with all my heart that I might have the good luck to get out of this scrape alive, and that I might do such a deed that night as would make my name as famous in Spain as it had already become in Germany. I waited until the clock struck three, and then I left the cathedral and made my way toward the Convent of the Madonna, where the assault was to be delivered. You will understand, you who know me so well, that I was not the man to return tamely to the French camp with the report that our agent was dead and that other means must be found of entering the city. Either I should find some means to finish his uncompleted task or there would be a vacancy for a senior captain in the Hussars of Conflans.

I passed unquestioned down the broad boulevard, which I have already described, until I came to the great stone convent which formed the outwork of the defence.

It was built in a square with a garden in the centre. In this garden some hundreds of men were assembled, all armed and ready, for it was known, of course, within the town that this was the point against which the French attack was likely to be made. Up to this time our fighting all over Europe had always been done between one army and another. It was only here in Spain that we learned how terrible a thing it is to fight against a people.

On the one hand there is no glory, for what glory could be gained by defeating this rabble of elderly shopkeepers, ignorant peasants, fanatical priests, excited women, and all the other creatures who made up the garrison? On the other hand there were extreme discomfort and danger, for these people would give you no rest, would observe no rules of war, and were desperately earnest in their desire by hook or by crook to do you an injury. I began to realise how odious was our task as I looked upon the motley but ferocious groups who were gathered round the watch-fires in the garden of the Convent of the Madonna. It was not for us soldiers to think about politics, but from the beginning there always seemed to be a curse upon this war in Spain.

However, at the moment I had no time to brood over such matters as these. There was, as I have said, no difficulty in getting as far as the convent garden, but to pass inside the convent unquestioned was not so easy.

The first thing which I did was to walk round the garden, and I was soon able to pick out one large stained-glass window which must belong to the chapel. I had understood from Hubert that the Mother Superior’s room, in which the powder was stored, was near to this, and that the train had been laid through a hole in the wall from some neighbouring cell. I must, at all costs, get into the convent. There was a guard at the door, and how could I get in without explanations? But a sudden inspiration showed me how the thing might be done. In the garden was a well, and beside the well were a number of empty buckets. I filled two of these, and approached the door. The errand of a man who carries a bucket of water in each hand does not need to be explained. The guard opened to let me through. I found myself in a long, stone-flagged corridor, lit with lanterns, with the cells of the nuns leading out from one side of it. Now at last I was on the high road to success. I walked on without hesitation, for I knew by my observations in the garden which way to go for the chapel.

A number of Spanish soldiers were lounging and smoking in the corridor, several of whom addressed me as I passed. I fancy it was for my blessing that they asked, and my “Ora pro nobis” seemed to entirely satisfy them. Soon I had got as far as the chapel, and it was easy enough to see that the cell next door was used as a magazine, for the floor was all black with powder in front of it. The door was shut, and two fierce-looking fellows stood on guard outside it, one of them with a key stuck in his belt. Had we been alone, it would not have been long before it would have been in my hand, but with his comrade there it was impossible for me to hope to take it by force. The cell next door to the magazine on the far side from the chapel must be the one which belonged to Sister Angela. It was half open. I took my courage in both hands and, leaving my buckets in the corridor, I walked unchallenged into the room.

I was prepared to find half a dozen fierce Spanish desperadoes within, but what actually met my eyes was even more embarrassing. The room had apparently been set aside for the use of some of the nuns, who for some reason had refused to quit their home. Three of them were within, one an elderly, stern-faced dame, who was evidently the Mother Superior, the others, young ladies of charming appearance. They were seated together at the far side of the room, but they all rose at my entrance, and I saw with some amazement, by their manner and expressions, that my coming was both welcome and expected. In a moment my presence of mind had returned, and I saw exactly how the matter lay.

Naturally, since an attack was about to be made upon the convent, these sisters had been expecting to be directed to some place of safety. Probably they were under vow not to quit the walls, and they had been told to remain in this cell until they received further orders.

In any case I adapted my conduct to this supposition, since it was clear that I must get them out of the room, and this would give me a ready excuse to do so. I first cast a glance at the door and observed that the key was within. I then made a gesture to the nuns to follow me. The Mother Superior asked me some question, but I shook my head impatiently and beckoned to her again.

She hesitated, but I stamped my foot and called them forth in so imperious a manner that they came at once.

They would be safer in the chapel, and thither I led them, placing them at the end which was farthest from the magazine. As the three nuns took their places before the altar my heart bounded with joy and pride within me, for I felt that the last obstacle had been lifted from my path.

And yet how often have I not found that that is the very moment of danger? I took a last glance at the Mother Superior, and to my dismay I saw that her piercing dark eyes were fixed, with an expression in which surprise was deepening into suspicion, upon my right hand. There were two points which might well have attracted her attention. One was that it was red with the blood of the sentinel whom I had stabbed in the tree. That alone might count for little, as the knife was as familiar as the breviary to the monks of Saragossa.

But on my forefinger I wore a heavy gold ring — the gift of a certain German baroness whose name I may not mention. It shone brightly in the light of the altar lamp. Now, a ring upon a friar’s hand is an impossibility, since they are vowed to absolute poverty.

I turned quickly and made for the door of the chapel, but the mischief was done. As I glanced back I saw that the Mother Superior was already hurrying after me. I ran through the chapel door and along the corridor, but she called out some shrill warning to the two guards in front. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to call out also, and to point down the passage as if we were both pursuing the same object. Next instant I had dashed past them, sprang into the cell, slammed the heavy door, and fastened it upon the inside.

With a bolt above and below and a huge lock in the centre it was a piece of timber that would take some forcing.

Even now if they had had the wit to put a barrel of powder against the door I should have been ruined. It was their only chance, for I had come to the final stage of my adventure. Here at last, after such a string of dangers as few men have ever lived to talk of, I was at one end of the powder train, with the Saragossa magazine at the other. They were howling like wolves out in the passage, and muskets were crashing against the door. I paid no heed to their clamour, but I looked eagerly around for that train of which Hubert had spoken. Of course, it must be at the side of the room next to the magazine. I crawled along it on my hands and knees, looking into every crevice, but no sign could I see. Two bullets flew through the door and flattened themselves against the wall. The thudding and smashing grew ever louder. I saw a grey pile in a corner, flew to it with a cry of joy, and found that it was only dust. Then I got back to the side of the door where no bullets could ever reach me — they were streaming freely into the room — and I tried to forget this fiendish howling in my ear and to think out where this train could be. It must have been carefully laid by Hubert lest these nuns should see it. I tried to imagine how I should myself have arranged it had I been in his place.

My eye was attracted by a statue of St. Joseph which stood in the corner. There was a wreath of leaves along the edge of the pedestal, with a lamp burning amidst them. I rushed across to it and tore the leaves aside.

Yes, yes, there was a thin black line, which disappeared through a small hole in the wall. I tilted over the lamp and threw myself on the ground. Next instant came a roar like thunder, the walls wavered and tottered around me, the ceiling clattered down from above, and over the yell of the terrified Spaniards was heard the terrific shout of the storming column of Grenadiers. As in a dream — a happy dream — I heard it, and then I heard no more.

When I came to my senses two French soldiers were propping me up, and my head was singing like a kettle.

I staggered to my feet and looked around me. The plaster had fallen, the furniture was scattered, and there were rents in the bricks, but no signs of a breach. In fact, the walls of the convent had been so solid that the explosion of the magazine had been insufficient to throw them down. On the other hand, it had caused such a panic among the defenders that our stormers had been able to carry the windows and throw open the doors almost without assistance. As I ran out into the corridor I found it full of troops, and I met Marshal Lannes himself, who was entering with his staff. He stopped and listened eagerly to my story.

“Splendid, Captain Gerard, splendid!” he cried.

“These facts will certainly be reported to the Emperor.”

“I would suggest to your Excellency,” said I, “that I have only finished the work that was planned and carried out by Monsieur Hubert, who gave his life for the cause.”

“His services will not be forgotten,” said the Marshal.

“Meanwhile, Captain Gerard, it is half-past four, and you must be starving after such a night of exertion. My staff and I will breakfast inside the city. I assure you that you will be an honoured guest.”

“I will follow your Excellency,” said I. “There is a small engagement which detains me.”

He opened his eyes.

“At this hour?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered. “My fellow-officers, whom I never saw until last night, will not be content unless they catch another glimpse of me the first thing this morning.”

“Au revoir, then,” said Marshal Lannes, as he passed upon his way.

I hurried through the shattered door of the convent.

When I reached the roofless house in which we had held the consultation the night before, I threw off my gown and I put on the busby and sabre which I had left there.

Then, a Hussar once more, I hurried onward to the grove which was our rendezvous. My brain was still reeling from the concussion of the powder, and I was exhausted by the many emotions which had shaken me during that terrible night. It is like a dream, all that walk in the first dim grey light of dawn, with the smouldering camp-fires around me and the buzz of the waking army. Bugles and drums in every direction were mustering the infantry, for the explosion and the shouting had told their own tale. I strode onward until, as I entered the little clump of cork oaks behind the horse lines, I saw my twelve comrades waiting in a group, their sabres at their sides. They looked at me curiously as I approached. Perhaps with my powder-blackened face and my blood-stained hands I seemed a different Gerard to the young captain whom they had made game of the night before.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said I. “I regret exceedingly if I have kept you waiting, but I have not been master of my own time.”

They said nothing, but they still scanned me with curious eyes. I can see them now, standing in a line before me, tall men and short men, stout men and thin men: Olivier, with his warlike moustache; the thin, eager face of Pelletan; young Oudin, flushed by his first duel; Mortier, with the sword-cut across his wrinkled brow.

I laid aside my busby and drew my sword.

“I have one favour to ask you, gentlemen,” said I.

“Marshal Lannes has invited me to breakfast and I cannot keep him waiting.”

“What do you suggest?” asked Major Olivier.

“That you release me from my promise to give you five minutes each, and that you will permit me to attack you all together.” I stood upon my guard as I spoke.

But their answer was truly beautiful and truly French. With one impulse the twelve swords flew from their scabbards and were raised in salute.

There they stood, the twelve of them, motionless, their heels together, each with his sword upright before his face.

I staggered back from them. I looked from one to the other. For an instant I could not believe my own eyes. They were paying me homage, these, the men who had jeered me! Then I understood it all. I saw the effect that I had made upon them and their desire to make reparation. When a man is weak he can steel himself against danger, but not against emotion.

“Comrades,” I cried, “comrades — !” but I could say no more.

Something seemed to take me by the throat and choke me. And then in an instant Olivier’s arms were round me, Pelletan had seized me by the right hand, Mortier by the left, some were patting me on the shoulder, some were clapping me on the back, on every side smiling faces were looking into mine; and so it was that I knew that I had won my footing in the Hussars of Conflans.

How the Brigadier Slew the Fox [*]

> This story, already published in The Green Flag, is included here so that all of the Brigadier Gerard stories may appear together.

In all the great hosts of France there was only one officer toward whom the English of Wellington’s Army retained a deep, steady, and unchangeable hatred.

There were plunderers among the French, and men of violence, gamblers, duellists, and roues. All these could be forgiven, for others of their kidney were to be found among the ranks of the English. But one officer of Massena’s force had committed a crime which was unspeakable, unheard of, abominable; only to be alluded to with curses late in the evening, when a second bottle had loosened the tongues of men. The news of it was carried back to England, and country gentlemen who knew little of the details of the war grew crimson with passion when they heard of it, and yeomen of the shires raised freckled fists to Heaven and swore. And yet who should be the doer of this dreadful deed but our friend the Brigadier, Etienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans, gay-riding, plume-tossing, debonair, the darling of the ladies and of the six brigades of light cavalry.

But the strange part of it is that this gallant gentleman did this hateful thing, and made himself the most unpopular man in the Peninsula, without ever knowing that he had done a crime for which there is hardly a name amid all the resources of our language. He died of old age, and never once in that imperturbable self-confidence which adorned or disfigured his character knew that so many thousand Englishmen would gladly have hanged him with their own hands. On the contrary, he numbered this adventure among those other exploits which he has given to the world, and many a time he chuckled and hugged himself as he narrated it to the eager circle who gathered round him in that humble cafe where, between his dinner and his dominoes, he would tell, amid tears and laughter, of that inconceivable Napoleonic past when France, like an angel of wrath, rose up, splendid and terrible, before a cowering continent. Let us listen to him as he tells the story in his own way and from his own point of view.

You must know, my friends, said he, that it was toward the end of the year eighteen hundred and ten that I and Massena and the others pushed Wellington backward until we had hoped to drive him and his army into the Tagus. But when we were still twenty-five miles from Lisbon we found that we were betrayed, for what had this Englishman done but build an enormous line of works and forts at a place called Torres Vedras, so that even we were unable to get through them! They lay across the whole Peninsula, and our army was so far from home that we did not dare to risk a reverse, and we had already learned at Busaco that it was no child's play to fight against these people. What could we do, then, but sit down in front of these lines and blockade them to the best of our power? There we remained for six months, amid such anxieties that Massena said afterward that he had not one hair which was not white upon his body.

For my own part, I did not worry much about our situation, but I looked after our horses, who were in much need of rest and green fodder. For the rest, we drank the wine of the country and passed the time as best we might. There was a lady at Santarem — but my lips are sealed. It is the part of a gallant man to say nothing, though he may indicate that he could say a great deal.

One day Massena sent for me, and I found him in his tent with a great plan pinned upon the table. He looked at me in silence with that single piercing eye of his, and I felt by his expression that the matter was serious. He was nervous and ill at ease, but my bearing seemed to reassure him. It is good to be in contact with brave men.

“Colonel Etienne Gerard,” said he, “I have always heard that you are a very gallant and enterprising officer.”

It was not for me to confirm such a report, and yet it would be folly to deny it, so I clinked my spurs together and saluted.

“You are also an excellent rider.”

I admitted it.

“And the best swordsman in the six brigades of light cavalry.”

Massena was famous for the accuracy of his information.

“Now,” said he, “if you will look at this plan you will have no difficulty in understanding what it is that I wish you to do. These are the lines of Torres Vedras. You will perceive that they cover a vast space, and you will realise that the English can only hold a position here and there. Once through the lines you have twenty-five miles of open country which lie between them and Lisbon. It is very important to me to learn how Wellington’s troops are distributed throughout that space, and it is my wish that you should go and ascertain.”

His words turned me cold.

“Sir,” said I, “it is impossible that a colonel of light cavalry should condescend to act as a spy.”

He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

“You would not be a Hussar if you were not a hot-head,” said he. “If you will listen you will understand that I have not asked you to act as a spy. What do you think of that horse?”

He had conducted me to the opening of his tent, and there was a chasseur who led up and down a most admirable creature. He was a dapple grey, not very tall, a little over fifteen hands perhaps, but with the short head and splendid arch of the neck which comes with the Arab blood. His shoulders and haunches were so muscular, and yet his legs so fine, that it thrilled me with joy just to gaze upon him. A fine horse or a beautiful woman — I cannot look at them unmoved, even now when seventy winters have chilled my blood. You can think how it was in the year ‘10.

“This,” said Massena, “is Voltigeur, the swiftest horse in our army. What I desire is that you should start tonight, ride round the lines upon the flank, make your way across the enemy’s rear, and return upon the other flank, bringing me news of his disposition. You will wear a uniform, and will, therefore, if captured, be safe from the death of a spy. It is probable that you will get through the lines unchallenged, for the posts are very scattered. Once through, in daylight you can outride anything which you meet, and if you keep off the roads you may escape entirely unnoticed. If you have not reported yourself by to-morrow night, I will understand that you are taken, and I will offer them Colonel Petrie in exchange.”

Ah, how my heart swelled with pride and joy as I sprang into the saddle and galloped this grand horse up and down to show the Marshal the mastery which I had of him! He was magnificent — we were both magnificent, for Massena clapped his hands and cried out in his delight.

It was not I, but he, who said that a gallant beast deserves a gallant rider. Then, when for the third time, with my panache flying and my dolman streaming behind me, I thundered past him, I saw upon his hard old face that he had no longer any doubt that he had chosen the man for his purpose.

I drew my sabre, raised the hilt to my lips in salute, and galloped on to my own quarters.

Already the news had spread that I had been chosen for a mission, and my little rascals came swarming out of their tents to cheer me. Ah! it brings the tears to my old eyes when I think how proud they were of their Colonel.

And I was proud of them also. They deserved a dashing leader.

The night promised to be a stormy one, which was very much to my liking. It was my desire to keep my departure most secret, for it was evident that if the English heard that I had been detached from the army they would naturally conclude that something important was about to happen. My horse was taken, therefore, beyond the picket line, as if for watering, and I followed and mounted him there. I had a map, a compass, and a paper of instructions from the Marshal, and with these in the bosom of my tunic and my sabre at my side I set out upon my adventure.

A thin rain was falling and there was no moon, so you may imagine that it was not very cheerful. But my heart was light at the thought of the honour which had been done me and the glory which awaited me. This exploit should be one more in that brilliant series which was to change my sabre into a baton. Ah, how we dreamed, we foolish fellows, young, and drunk with success! Could I have foreseen that night as I rode, the chosen man of sixty thousand, that I should spend my life planting cabbages on a hundred francs a month! Oh, my youth, my hopes, my comrades! But the wheel turns and never stops. Forgive me, my friends, for an old man has his weakness.

My route, then, lay across the face of the high ground of Torres Vedras, then over a streamlet, past a farmhouse which had been burned down and was now only a landmark, then through a forest of young cork oaks, and so to the monastery of San Antonio, which marked the left of the English position. Here I turned south and rode quietly over the downs, for it was at this point that Massena thought that it would be most easy for me to find my way unobserved through the position. I went very slowly, for it was so dark that I could not see my hand in front of me. In such cases I leave my bridle loose and let my horse pick its own way. Voltigeur went confidently forward, and I was very content to sit upon his back and to peer about me, avoiding every light.

For three hours we advanced in this cautious way, until it seemed to me that I must have left all danger behind me. I then pushed on more briskly, for I wished to be in the rear of the whole army by daybreak. There are many vineyards in these parts which in winter become open plains, and a horseman finds few difficulties in his way.

But Massena had underrated the cunning of these English, for it appears that there was not one line of defence but three, and it was the third, which was the most formidable, through which I was at that instant passing. As I rode, elated at my own success, a lantern flashed suddenly before me, and I saw the glint of polished gun-barrels and the gleam of a red coat.

“Who goes there?” cried a voice — such a voice! I swerved to the right and rode like a madman, but a dozen squirts of fire came out of the darkness, and the bullets whizzed all round my ears. That was no new sound to me, my friends, though I will not talk like a foolish conscript and say that I have ever liked it. But at least it had never kept me from thinking clearly, and so I knew that there was nothing for it but to gallop hard and try my luck elsewhere. I rode round the English picket, and then, as I heard nothing more of them, I concluded rightly that I had at last come through their defences.

For five miles I rode south, striking a tinder from time to time to look at my pocket compass. And then in an instant — I feel the pang once more as my memory brings back the moment — my horse, without a sob or staggers fell stone-dead beneath me!

I had never known it, but one of the bullets from that infernal picket had passed through his body. The gallant creature had never winced nor weakened, but had gone while life was in him. One instant I was secure on the swiftest, most graceful horse in Massena’s army. The next he lay upon his side, worth only the price of his hide, and I stood there that most helpless, most ungainly of creatures, a dismounted Hussar. What could I do with my boots, my spurs, my trailing sabre? I was far inside the enemy’s lines. How could I hope to get back again?

I am not ashamed to say that I, Etienne Gerard, sat upon my dead horse and sank my face in my hands in my despair.

Already the first streaks were whitening the east.

In half an hour it would be light. That I should have won my way past every obstacle and then at this last instant be left at the mercy of my enemies, my mission ruined, and myself a prisoner — was it not enough to break a soldier’s heart?

But courage, my friends! We have these moments of weakness, the bravest of us; but I have a spirit like a slip of steel, for the more you bend it the higher it springs.

One spasm of despair, and then a brain of ice and a heart of fire. All was not yet lost. I who had come through so many hazards would come through this one also. I rose from my horse and considered what had best be done.

And first of all it was certain that I could not get back. Long before I could pass the lines it would be broad daylight. I must hide myself for the day, and then devote the next night to my escape. I took the saddle, holsters, and bridle from poor Voltigeur, and I concealed them among some bushes, so that no one finding him could know that he was a French horse. Then, leaving him lying there, I wandered on in search of some place where I might be safe for the day. In every direction I could see camp fires upon the sides of the hills, and already figures had begun to move around them. I must hide quickly, or I was lost.

But where was I to hide? It was a vineyard in which I found myself, the poles of the vines still standing, but the plants gone. There was no cover there. Besides, I should want some food and water before another night had come. I hurried wildly onward through the waning darkness, trusting that chance would be my friend.

And I was not disappointed. Chance is a woman, my friends, and she has her eye always upon a gallant Hussar.

Well, then, as I stumbled through the vineyard, something loomed in front of me, and I came upon a great square house with another long, low building upon one side of it. Three roads met there, and it was easy to see that this was the posada, or wine-shop.

There was no light in the windows, and everything was dark and silent, but, of course, I knew that such comfortable quarters were certainly occupied, and probably by someone of importance. I have learned, however, that the nearer the danger may really be the safer place, and so I was by no means inclined to trust myself away from this shelter. The low building was evidently the stable, and into this I crept, for the door was unlatched.

The place was full of bullocks and sheep, gathered there, no doubt, to be out of the clutches of marauders.

A ladder led to a loft, and up this I climbed and concealed myself very snugly among some bales of hay upon the top. This loft had a small open window, and I was able to look down upon the front of the inn and also upon the road. There I crouched and waited to see what would happen.

It was soon evident that I had not been mistaken when I had thought that this might be the quarters of some person of importance. Shortly after daybreak an English light dragoon arrived with a despatch, and from then onward the place was in a turmoil, officers continually riding up and away. Always the same name was upon their lips: “Sir Stapleton — Sir Stapleton.”

It was hard for me to lie there with a dry moustache and watch the great flagons which were brought out by the landlord to these English officers. But it amused me to look at their fresh-coloured, clean-shaven, careless faces, and to wonder what they would think if they knew that so celebrated a person was lying so near to them. And then, as I lay and watched, I saw a sight which filled me with surprise.

It is incredible the insolence of these English! What do you suppose Milord Wellington had done when he found that Massena had blockaded him and that he could not move his army? I might give you many guesses. You might say that he had raged, that he had despaired, that he had brought his troops together and spoken to them about glory and the fatherland before leading them to one last battle. No, Milord did none of these things. But he sent a fleet ship to England to bring him a number of fox-dogs; and he with his officers settled himself down to chase the fox. It is true what I tell you. Behind the lines of Torres Vedras these mad Englishmen made the fox chase three days in the week.

We had heard of it in the camp, and now I was myself to see that it was true.

For, along the road which I have described, there came these very dogs, thirty or forty of them, white and brown, each with its tail at the same angle, like the bayonets of the Old Guard. My faith, but it was a pretty sight! And behind and amidst them there rode three men with peaked caps and red coats, whom I understood to be the hunters. After them came many horsemen with uniforms of various kinds, stringing along the roads in twos and threes, talking together and laughing.

They did not seem to be going above a trot, and it appeared to me that it must indeed be a slow fox which they hoped to catch. However, it was their affair, not mine, and soon they had all passed my window and were out of sight. I waited and I watched, ready for any chance which might offer.

Presently an officer, in a blue uniform not unlike that of our flying artillery, came cantering down the road — an elderly, stout man he was, with grey side-whiskers. He stopped and began to talk with an orderly officer of dragoons, who waited outside the inn, and it was then that I learned the advantage of the English which had been taught me. I could hear and understand all that was said.

“Where is the meet?” said the officer, and I thought that he was hungering for his bifstek. But the other answered him that it was near Altara, so I saw that it was a place of which he spoke.

“You are late, Sir George,” said the orderly.

“Yes, I had a court-martial. Has Sir Stapleton Cotton gone?”

At this moment a window opened, and a handsome young man in a very splendid uniform looked out of it.

“Halloa, Murray!” said he. “These cursed papers keep me, but I will be at your heels.”

“Very good, Cotton. I am late already, so I will ride on.”

“You might order my groom to bring round my horse,” said the young General at the window to the orderly below, while the other went on down the road.

The orderly rode away to some outlying stable, and then in a few minutes there came a smart English groom with a cockade in his hat, leading by the bridle a horse — and, oh, my friends, you have never known the perfection to which a horse can attain until you have seen a first-class English hunter. He was superb: tall, broad, strong, and yet as graceful and agile as a deer. Coal black he was in colour, and his neck, and his shoulder, and his quarters, and his fetlocks — how can I describe him all to you? The sun shone upon him as on polished ebony, and he raised his hoofs in a little playful dance so lightly and prettily, while he tossed his mane and whinnied with impatience. Never have I seen such a mixture of strength and beauty and grace. I had often wondered how the English Hussars had managed to ride over the chasseurs of the Guards in the affair at Astorga, but I wondered no longer when I saw the English horses.

There was a ring for fastening bridles at the door of the inn, and the groom tied the horse there while he entered the house. In an instant I had seen the chance which Fate had brought to me. Were I in that saddle I should be better off than when I started. Even Voltigeur could not compare with this magnificent creature. To think is to act with me. In one instant I was down the ladder and at the door of the stable. The next I was out and the bridle was in my hand. I bounded into the saddle.

Somebody, the master or the man, shouted wildly behind me. What cared I for his shouts! I touched the horse with my spurs and he bounded forward with such a spring that only a rider like myself could have sat him. I gave him his head and let him go — it did not matter to me where, so long as we left this inn far behind us. He thundered away across the vineyards, and in a very few minutes I had placed miles between myself and my pursuers. They could no longer tell in that wild country in which direction I had gone. I knew that I was safe, and so, riding to the top of a small hill, I drew my pencil and note-book from my pocket and proceeded to make plans of those camps which I could see and to draw the outline of the country.

He was a dear creature upon whom I sat, but it was not easy to draw upon his back, for every now and then his two ears would cock, and he would start and quiver with impatience. At first I could not understand this trick of his, but soon I observed that he only did it when a peculiar noise—”yoy, yoy, yoy” — came from somewhere among the oak woods beneath us. And then suddenly this strange cry changed into a most terrible screaming, with the frantic blowing of a horn. Instantly he went mad — this horse. His eyes blazed. His mane bristled. He bounded from the earth and bounded again, twisting and turning in a frenzy. My pencil flew one way and my note-book another. And then, as I looked down into the valley, an extraordinary sight met my eyes.

The hunt was streaming down it. The fox I could not see, but the dogs were in full cry, their noses down, their tails up, so close together that they might have been one great yellow and white moving carpet. And behind them rode the horsemen — my faith, what a sight! Consider every type which a great army could show. Some in hunting dress, but the most in uniforms: blue dragoons, red dragoons, red-trousered hussars, green riflemen, artillerymen, gold-slashed lancers, and most of all red, red, red, for the infantry officers ride as hard as the cavalry.

Such a crowd, some well mounted, some ill, but all flying along as best they might, the subaltern as good as the general, jostling and pushing, spurring and driving, with every thought thrown to the winds save that they should have the blood of this absurd fox! Truly, they are an extraordinary people, the English!

But I had little time to watch the hunt or to marvel at these islanders, for of all these mad creatures the very horse upon which I sat was the maddest. You understand that he was himself a hunter, and that the crying of these dogs was to him what the call of a cavalry trumpet in the street yonder would be to me. It thrilled him. It drove him wild. Again and again he bounded into the air, and then, seizing the bit between his teeth, he plunged down the slope and galloped after the dogs.

I swore, and tugged, and pulled, but I was powerless.

This English General rode his horse with a snaffle only, and the beast had a mouth of iron. It was useless to pull him back. One might as well try to keep a grenadier from a wine-bottle. I gave it up in despair, and, settling down in the saddle, I prepared for the worst which could befall.

What a creature he was! Never have I felt such a horse between my knees. His great haunches gathered under him with every stride, and he shot forward ever faster and faster, stretched like a greyhound, while the wind beat in my face and whistled past my ears. I was wearing our undress jacket, a uniform simple and dark in itself — though some figures give distinction to any uniform — and I had taken the precaution to remove the long panache from my busby. The result was that, amidst the mixture of costumes in the hunt, there was no reason why mine should attract attention, or why these men, whose thoughts were all with the chase, should give any heed to me. The idea that a French officer might be riding with them was too absurd to enter their minds. I laughed as I rode, for, indeed, amid all the danger, there was something of comic in the situation.

I have said that the hunters were very unequally mounted, and so at the end of a few miles, instead of being one body of men, like a charging regiment, they were scattered over a considerable space, the better riders well up to the dogs and the others trailing away behind.

Now, I was as good a rider as any, and my horse was the best of them all, and so you can imagine that it was not long before he carried me to the front. And when I saw the dogs streaming over the open, and the red-coated huntsman behind them, and only seven or eight horsemen between us, then it was that the strangest thing of all happened, for I, too, went mad — I, Etienne Gerard!

In a moment it came upon me, this spirit of sport, this desire to excel, this hatred of the fox. Accursed animal, should he then defy us? Vile robber, his hour was come!

Ah, it is a great feeling, this feeling of sport, my friends, this desire to trample the fox under the hoofs of your horse. I have made the fox chase with the English. I have also, as I may tell you some day, fought the box-fight with the Bustler, of Bristol. And I say to you that this sport is a wonderful thing — full of interest as well as madness.

The farther we went the faster galloped my horse, and soon there were but three men as near the dogs as I was.

All thought of fear of discovery had vanished. My brain throbbed, my blood ran hot — only one thing upon earth seemed worth living for, and that was to overtake this infernal fox. I passed one of the horsemen — a Hussar like myself. There were only two in front of me now: the one in a black coat, the other the blue artilleryman whom I had seen at the inn. His grey whiskers streamed in the wind, but he rode magnificently. For a mile or more we kept in this order, and then, as we galloped up a steep slope, my lighter weight brought me to the front.

I passed them both, and when I reached the crown I was riding level with the little, hard-faced English huntsman.

In front of us were the dogs, and then, a hundred paces beyond them, was a brown wisp of a thing, the fox itself, stretched to the uttermost. The sight of him fired my blood. “Aha, we have you then, assassin!” I cried, and shouted my encouragement to the huntsman. I waved my hand to show him that there was one upon whom he could rely.

And now there were only the dogs between me and my prey. These dogs, whose duty it is to point out the game, were now rather a hindrance than a help to us, for it was hard to know how to pass them. The huntsman felt the difficulty as much as I, for he rode behind them, and could make no progress toward the fox. He was a swift rider, but wanting in enterprise. For my part, I felt that it would be unworthy of the Hussars of Conflans if I could not overcome such a difficulty as this.

Was Etienne Gerard to be stopped by a herd of fox-dogs?

It was absurd. I gave a shout and spurred my horse.

“Hold hard, sir! Hold hard!” cried the huntsman.

He was uneasy for me, this good old man, but I reassured him by a wave and a smile. The dogs opened in front of me. One or two may have been hurt, but what would you have? The egg must be broken for the omelette. I could hear the huntsman shouting his congratulations behind me. One more effort, and the dogs were all behind me. Only the fox was in front.

Ah, the joy and pride of that moment! To know that I had beaten the English at their own sport. Here were three hundred, all thirsting for the life of this animal, and yet it was I who was about to take it. I thought of my comrades of the light cavalry brigade, of my mother, of the Emperor, of France. I had brought honour to each and all. Every instant brought me nearer to the fox. The moment for action had arrived, so I unsheathed my sabre. I waved it in the air, and the brave English all shouted behind me.

Only then did I understand how difficult is this fox chase, for one may cut again and again at the creature and never strike him once. He is small, and turns quickly from a blow. At every cut I heard those shouts of encouragement from behind me, and they spurred me to yet another effort. And then at last the supreme moment of my triumph arrived. In the very act of turning I caught him fair with such another back-handed cut as that with which I killed the aide-de-camp of the Emperor of Russia. He flew into two pieces, his head one way and his tail another. I looked back and waved the blood-stained sabre in the air. For the moment I was exalted — superb!

Ah! how I should have loved to have waited to have received the congratulations of these generous enemies.

There were fifty of them in sight, and not one who was not waving his hand and shouting. They are not really such a phlegmatic race, the English. A gallant deed in war or in sport will always warm their hearts. As to the old huntsman, he was the nearest to me, and I could see with my own eyes how overcome he was by what he had seen. He was like a man paralysed, his mouth open, his hand, with outspread fingers, raised in the air. For a moment my inclination was to return and to embrace him.

But already the call of duty was sounding in my ears, and these English, in spite of all the fraternity which exists among sportsmen, would certainly have made me prisoner. There was no hope for my mission now, and I had done all that I could do. I could see the lines of Massena’s camp no very great distance off, for, by a lucky chance, the chase had taken us in that direction.

I turned from the dead fox, saluted with my sabre, and galloped away.

But they would not leave me so easily, these gallant huntsmen. I was the fox now, and the chase swept bravely over the plain. It was only at the moment when I started for the camp that they could have known that I was a Frenchman, and now the whole swarm of them were at my heels. We were within gunshot of our pickets before they would halt, and then they stood in knots and would not go away, but shouted and waved their hands at me. No, I will not think that it was in enmity. Rather would I fancy that a glow of admiration filled their breasts, and that their one desire was to embrace the stranger who had carried himself so gallantly and well.

How the Brigadier Saved the Army

I have told you, my friends, how we held the English shut up for six months, from October, 1810, to March, 1811, within their lines of Torres Vedras. It was during this time that I hunted the fox in their company, and showed them that amidst all their sportsmen there was not one who could outride a Hussar of Conflans. When I galloped back into the French lines with the blood of the creature still moist upon my blade the outposts who had seen what I had done raised a frenzied cry in my honour, whilst these English hunters still yelled behind me, so that I had the applause of both armies. It made the tears rise to my eyes to feel that I had won the admiration of so many brave men. These English are generous foes. That very evening there came a packet under a white flag addressed “To the Hussar officer who cut down the fox.” Within, I found the fox itself in two pieces, as I had left it. There was a note also, short but hearty, as the English fashion is, to say that as I had slaughtered the fox it only remained for me to eat it. They could not know that it was not our French custom to eat foxes, and it showed their desire that he who had won the honours of the chase should also partake of the game. It is not for a Frenchman to be outdone in politeness, and so I returned it to these brave hunters, and begged them to accept it as a side-dish for their next dejeuner de la chasse.

It is thus that chivalrous opponents make war.

I had brought back with me from my ride a clear plan of the English lines, and this I laid before Massena that very evening.

I had hoped that it would lead him to attack, but all the marshals were at each other’s throats, snapping and growling like so many hungry hounds. Ney hated Massena, and Massena hated Junot, and Soult hated them all. For this reason, nothing was done. In the meantime food grew more and more scarce, and our beautiful cavalry was ruined for want of fodder. With the end of the winter we had swept the whole country bare, and nothing remained for us to eat, although we sent our forage parties far and wide. It was clear even to the bravest of us that the time had come to retreat. I was myself forced to admit it.

But retreat was not so easy. Not only were the troops weak and exhausted from want of supplies, but the enemy had been much encouraged by our long inaction. Of Wellington we had no great fear. We had found him to be brave and cautious, but with little enterprise. Besides, in that barren country his pursuit could not be rapid.

But on our flanks and in our rear there had gathered great numbers of Portuguese militia, of armed peasants, and of guerillas. These people had kept a safe distance all the winter, but now that our horses were foundered they were as thick as flies all round our outposts, and no man's life was worth a sou when once he fell into their hands. I could name a dozen officers of my own acquaintance who were cut off during that time, and the luckiest was he who received a ball from behind a rock through his head or his heart. There were some whose deaths were so terrible that no report of them was ever allowed to reach their relatives. So frequent were these tragedies, and so much did they impress the imagination of the men, that it became very difficult to induce them to leave the camp.

There was one especial scoundrel, a guerilla chief named Manuelo, "The Smiler," whose exploits filled our men with horror. He was a large, fat man of jovial aspect, and he lurked with a fierce gang among the mountains which lay upon our left flank. A volume might be written of this fellow's cruelties and brutalities, but he was certainly a man of power, for he organised his brigands in a manner which made it almost impossible for us to get through his country. This he did by imposing a severe discipline upon them and enforcing it by cruel penalties, a policy by which he made them formidable, but which had some unexpected results, as I will show you in my story. Had he not flogged his own lieutenant — but you will hear of that when the time comes.

There were many difficulties in connection with a retreat, but it was very evident that there was no other possible course, and so Massena began to quickly pass his baggage and his sick from Torres Novas, which was his headquarters, to Coimbra, the first strong post on his line of communications. He could not do this unperceived, however, and at once the guerillas came swarming closer and closer upon our flanks. One of our divisions, that of Clausel, with a brigade of Montbrun's cavalry, was far to the south of the Tagus, and it became very necessary to let them know that we were about to retreat, for Otherwise they would be left unsupported in the very heart of the enemy's country. I remember wondering how Massena would accomplish this, for simple couriers could not get through, and small parties would be certainly destroyed. In some way an order to fall back must be conveyed to these men, or France would be the weaker by fourteen thousand men. Little did I think that it was I, Colonel Gerard, who was to have the honour of a deed which might have formed the crowning glory of any other man’s life, and which stands high among those exploits which have made my own so famous.

At that time I was serving on Massena’s staff, and he had two other aides-de-camp, who were also very brave and intelligent officers. The name of one was Cortex and of the other Duplessis. They were senior to me in age, but junior in every other respect. Cortex was a small, dark man, very quick and eager. He was a fine soldier, but he was ruined by his conceit. To take him at his own valuation, he was the first man in the army.

Duplessis was a Gascon, like myself, and he was a very fine fellow, as all Gascon gentlemen are. We took it in turn, day about, to do duty, and it was Cortex who was in attendance upon the morning of which I speak. I saw him at breakfast, but afterward neither he nor his horse was to be seen. All day Massena was in his usual gloom, and he spent much of his time staring with his telescope at the English lines and at the shipping in the Tagus.

He said nothing of the mission upon which he had sent our comrade, and it was not for us to ask him any questions.

That night, about twelve o’clock, I was standing outside the Marshal’s headquarters when he came out and stood motionless for half an hour, his arms folded upon his breast, staring through the darkness toward the east.

So rigid and intent was he that you might have believed the muffled figure and the cocked hat to have been the statue of the man. What he was looking for I could not imagine; but at last he gave a bitter curse, and, turning on his heel, he went back into the house, banging the door behind him.

Next day the second aide-de-camp, Duplessis, had an interview with Massena in the morning, after which neither he nor his horse was seen again. That night, as I sat in the ante-room, the Marshal passed me, and I observed him through the window standing and staring to the east exactly as he had done before. For fully half an hour he remained there, a black shadow in the gloom.

Then he strode in, the door banged, and I heard his spurs and his scabbard jingling and clanking through the passage. At the best he was a savage old man, but when he was crossed I had almost as soon face the

Emperor himself. I heard him that night cursing and stamping above my head, but he did not send for me, and I knew him too well to go unsought.

Next morning it was my turn, for I was the only aide-de-camp left. I was his favourite aide-de-camp. His heart went out always to a smart soldier. I declare that I think there were tears in his black eyes when he sent for me that morning.

“Gerard,” said he. “Come here!”

With a friendly gesture he took me by the sleeve and he led me to the open window which faced the east. Beneath us was the infantry camp, and beyond that the lines of the cavalry with the long rows of picketed horses.

We could see the French outposts, and then a stretch of open country, intersected by vineyards. A range of hills lay beyond, with one well-marked peak towering above them. Round the base of these hills was a broad belt of forest. A single road ran white and clear, dipping and rising until it passed through a gap in the hills.

“This,” said Massena, pointing to the mountain, “is the Sierra de Merodal. Do you perceive anything upon the top?”

I answered that I did not.

“Now?” he asked, and he handed me his field-glass.

With its aid I perceived a small mound or cairn upon the crest.

“What you see,” said the Marshal, “is a pile of logs which was placed there as a beacon. We laid it when the country was in our hands, and now, although we no longer hold it, the beacon remains undisturbed. Gerard, that beacon must be lit to-night. France needs it, the Emperor needs it, the army needs it. Two of your comrades have gone to light it, but neither has made his way to the summit. To-day it is your turn, and I pray that you may have better luck.”

It is not for a soldier to ask the reason for his orders, and so I was about to hurry from the room, but the Marshal laid his hand upon my shoulder and held me.

“You shall know all, and so learn how high is the cause for which you risk your life,” said he. “Fifty miles to the south of us, on the other side of the Tagus, is the army of General Clausel. His camp is situated near a peak named the Sierra d’Ossa. On the summit of this peak is a beacon, and by this beacon he has a picket. It is agreed between us that when at midnight he shall see our signal-fire he shall light his own as an answer, and shall then at once fall back upon the main army. If he does not start at once I must go without him. For two days I have endeavoured to send him his message. It must reach him to-day, or his army will be left behind and destroyed.”

Ah, my friends, how my heart swelled when I heard how high was the task which Fortune had assigned to me!

If my life were spared, here was one more splendid new leaf for my laurel crown. If, on the other hand, I died, then it would be a death worthy of such a career. I said nothing, but I cannot doubt that all the noble thoughts that were in me shone in my face, for Massena took my hand and wrung it.

“There is the hill and there the beacon,” said he.

“There is only this guerilla and his men between you and it. I cannot detach a large party for the enterprise and a small one would be seen and destroyed. Therefore to you alone I commit it. Carry it out in your own way, but at twelve o’clock this night let me see the fire upon the hill.”

“If it is not there,” said I, “then I pray you, Marshal Massena, to see that my effects are sold and the money sent to my mother.” So I raised my hand to my busby and turned upon my heel, my heart glowing at the thought of the great exploit which lay before me.

I sat in my own chamber for some little time considering how I had best take the matter in hand. The fact that neither Cortex nor Duplessis, who were very zealous and active officers, had succeeded in reaching the summit of the Sierra de Merodal, showed that the country was very closely watched by the guerillas. I reckoned out the distance upon a map. There were ten miles of open country to be crossed before reaching the hills. Then came a belt of forest on the lower slopes of the mountain, which may have been three or four miles wide. And then there was the actual peak itself, of no very great height, but without any cover to conceal me. Those were the three stages of my journey.

It seemed to me that once I had reached the shelter of the wood all would be easy, for I could lie concealed within its shadows and climb upward under the cover of night.

From eight till twelve would give me four hours of darkness in which to make the ascent. It was only the first stage, then, which I had seriously to consider.

Over that flat country there lay the inviting white road, and I remembered that my comrades had both taken their horses. That was clearly their ruin, for nothing could be easier than for the brigands to keep watch upon the road, and to lay an ambush for all who passed along it. It would not be difficult for me to ride across country, and I was well horsed at that time, for I had not only Violette and Rataplan, who were two of the finest mounts in the army, but I had the splendid black English hunter which I had taken from Sir Cotton. However, after much thought, I determined to go upon foot, since I should then be in a better state to take advantage of any chance which might offer. As to my dress, I covered my Hussar uniform with a long cloak, and I put a grey forage cap upon my head. You may ask me why I did not dress as a peasant, but I answer that a man of honour has no desire to die the death of a spy. It is one thing to be murdered, and it is another to be justly executed by the laws of war. I would not run the risk of such an end.

In the late afternoon I stole out of the camp and passed through the line of our pickets. Beneath my cloak I had a field-glass and a pocket pistol, as well as my sword. In my pocket were tinder, flint, and steel.

For two or three miles I kept under cover of the vineyards, and made such good progress that my heart was high within me, and I thought to myself that it only needed a man of some brains to take the matter in hand to bring it easily to success. Of course, Cortex and Duplessis galloping down the high-road would be easily seen, but the intelligent Gerard lurking among the vines was quite another person. I dare say I had got as far as five miles before I met any check. At that point there is a small wine-house, round which I perceived some carts and a number of people, the first that I had seen. Now that I was well outside the lines I knew that every person was my enemy, so I crouched lower while I stole along to a point from which I could get a better view of what was going on. I then perceived that these people were peasants, who were loading two waggons with empty wine-casks. I failed to see how they could either help or hinder me, so I continued upon my way.

But soon I understood that my task was not so simple as had appeared. As the ground rose the vineyards ceased, and I came upon a stretch of open country studded with low hills. Crouching in a ditch I examined them with a glass, and I very soon perceived that there was a watcher upon every one of them, and that these people had a line of pickets and outposts thrown forward exactly like our own. I had heard of the discipline which was practised by this scoundrel whom they called “The Smiler,” and this, no doubt, was an example of it.

Between the hills there was a cordon of sentries, and though I worked some distance round to the flank I still found myself faced by the enemy. It was a puzzle what to do.

There was so little cover that a rat could hardly cross without being seen. Of course, it would be easy enough to slip through at night, as I had done with the English at Torres Vedras, but I was still far from the mountain and I could not in that case reach it in time to light the midnight beacon. I lay in my ditch and I made a thousand plans, each more dangerous than the last. And then suddenly I had that flash of light which comes to the brave man who refuses to despair.

You remember I have mentioned that two waggons were loading up with empty casks at the inn. The heads of the oxen were turned to the east, and it was evident that those waggons were going in the direction which I desired. Could I only conceal myself upon one of them, what better and easier way could I find of passing through the lines of the guerillas? So simple and so good was the plan that I could not restrain a cry of delight as it crossed my mind, and I hurried away instantly in the direction of the inn. There, from behind some bushes, I had a good look at what was going on upon the road.

There were three peasants with red montero caps loading the barrels, and they had completed one waggon and the lower tier of the other. A number of empty barrels still lay outside the wine-house waiting to be put on.

Fortune was my friend — I have always said that she is a woman and cannot resist a dashing young Hussar. As I watched, the three fellows went into the inn, for the day was hot and they were thirsty after their labour. Quick as a flash I darted out from my hiding-place, climbed on to the waggon, and crept into one of the empty casks.

It had a bottom but no top, and it lay upon its side with the open end inward. There I crouched like a dog in its kennel, my knees drawn up to my chin, for the barrels were not very large and I am a well-grown man. As I lay there, out came the three peasants again, and presently I heard a crash upon the top of me which told that I had another barrel above me. They piled them upon the cart until I could not imagine how I was ever to get out again. However, it is time to think of crossing the Vistula when you are over the Rhine, and I had no doubt that if chance and my own wits had carried me so far they would carry me farther.

Soon, when the waggon was full, they set forth upon their way, and I within my barrel chuckled at every step, for it was carrying me whither I wished to go. We travelled slowly, and the peasants walked beside the waggons.

This I knew, because I heard their voices close to me. They seemed to me to be very merry fellows, for they laughed heartily as they went. What the joke was I could not understand. Though I speak their language fairly well I could not hear anything comic in the scraps of their conversation which met my ear.

I reckoned that at the rate of walking of a team of oxen we covered about two miles an hour. Therefore, when I was sure that two and a half hours had passed — such hours, my friends, cramped, suffocated, and nearly poisoned with the fumes of the lees — when they had passed, I was sure that the dangerous open country was behind us, and that we were upon the edge of the forest and the mountain. So now I had to turn my mind upon how I was to get out of my barrel. I had thought of several ways, and was balancing one against the other when the question was decided for me in a very simple but unexpected manner.

The waggon stopped suddenly with a jerk, and I heard a number of gruff voices in excited talk. “Where, where?” cried one. “On our cart,” said another. “Who is he?” said a third. “A French officer; I saw his cap and his boots.” They all roared with laughter. “I was looking out of the window of the posada and I saw him spring into the cask like a toreador with a Seville bull at his heels.” “Which cask, then?” “It was this one,” said the fellow, and sure enough his fist struck the wood beside my head.

What a situation, my friends, for a man of my standing!

I blush now, after forty years, when I think of it.

To be trussed like a fowl and to listen helplessly to the rude laughter of these boors — to know, too, that my mission had come to an ignominious and even ridiculous end — I would have blessed the man who would have sent a bullet through the cask and freed me from my misery.

I heard the crashing of the barrels as they hurled them off the waggon, and then a couple of bearded faces and the muzzles of two guns looked in at me. They seized me by the sleeves of my coat, and they dragged me out into the daylight. A strange figure I must have looked as I stood blinking and gaping in the blinding sunlight.

My body was bent like a cripple’s, for I could not straighten my stiff joints, and half my coat was as red as an English soldier’s from the lees in which I had lain.

They laughed and laughed, these dogs, and as I tried to express by my bearing and gestures the contempt in which I held them their laughter grew all the louder. But even in these hard circumstances I bore myself like the man I am, and as I cast my eye slowly round I did not find that any of the laughers were very ready to face it.

That one glance round was enough to tell me exactly how I was situated. I had been betrayed by these peasants into the hands of an outpost of guerillas. There were eight of them, savage-looking, hairy creatures, with cotton handkerchiefs under their sombreros, and many-buttoned jackets with coloured sashes round the waist.

Each had a gun and one or two pistols stuck in his girdle.

The leader, a great, bearded ruffian, held his gun against my ear while the others searched my pockets, taking from me my overcoat, my pistol, my glass, my sword, and, worst of all, my flint and steel and tinder. Come what might, I was ruined, for I had no longer the means of lighting the beacon even if I should reach it.

Eight of them, my friends, with three peasants, and I unarmed! Was Etienne Gerard in despair? Did he lose his wits? Ah, you know me too well; but they did not know me yet, these dogs of brigands. Never have I made so supreme and astounding an effort as at this very instant when all seemed lost. Yet you might guess many times before you would hit upon the device by which I escaped them. Listen and I will tell you.

They had dragged me from the waggon when they searched me, and I stood, still twisted and warped, in the midst of them. But the stiffness was wearing off, and already my mind was very actively looking out for some method of breaking away. It was a narrow pass in which the brigands had their outpost. It was bounded on the one hand by a steep mountain side. On the other the ground fell away in a very long slope, which ended in a bushy valley many hundreds of feet below. These fellows, you understand, were hardy mountaineers, who could travel either up hill or down very much quicker than I. They wore abarcas, or shoes of skin, tied on like sandals, which gave them a foothold everywhere. A less resolute man would have despaired. But in an instant I saw and used the strange chance which Fortune had placed in my way. On the very edge of the slope was one of the wine-barrels. I moved slowly toward it, and then with a tiger spring I dived into it feet foremost, and with a roll of my body I tipped it over the side of the hill.

Shall I ever forget that dreadful journey — how I bounded and crashed and whizzed down that terrible slope? I had dug in my knees and elbows, bunching my body into a compact bundle so as to steady it; but my head projected from the end, and it was a marvel that I did not dash out my brains. There were long, smooth slopes, and then came steeper scarps where the barrel ceased to roll, and sprang into the air like a goat, coming down with a rattle and crash which jarred every bone in my body. How the wind whistled in my ears, and my head turned and turned until I was sick and giddy and nearly senseless! Then, with a swish and a great rasping and crackling of branches, I reached the bushes which I had seen so far below me. Through them I broke my way, down a slope beyond, and deep into another patch of underwood, where, striking a sapling, my barrel flew to pieces. From amid a heap of staves and hoops I crawled out, my body aching in every inch of it, but my heart singing loudly with joy and my spirit high within me, for I knew how great was the feat which I had accomplished, and I already seemed to see the beacon blazing on the hill.

A horrible nausea had seized me from the tossing which I had undergone, and I felt as I did upon the ocean when first I experienced those movements of which the English have taken so perfidious an advantage. I had to sit for a few moments with my head upon my hands beside the ruins of my barrel. But there was no time for rest.

Already I heard shouts above me which told that my pursuers were descending the hill. I dashed into the thickest part of the underwood, and I ran and ran until I was utterly exhausted. Then I lay panting and listened with all my ears, but no sound came to them. I had shaken off my enemies.

When I had recovered my breath I travelled swiftly on, and waded knee-deep through several brooks, for it came into my head that they might follow me with dogs.

On gaining a clear place and looking round me, I found to my delight that in spite of my adventures I had not been much out of my way. Above me towered the peak of Merodal, with its bare and bold summit shooting out of the groves of dwarf oaks which shrouded its flanks.

These groves were the continuation of the cover under which I found myself, and it seemed to me that I had nothing to fear now until I reached the other side of the forest. At the same time I knew that every man's hand was against me, that I was unarmed, and that there were many people about me. I saw no one, but several times I heard shrill whistles, and once the sound of a gun in the distance.

It was hard work pushing one's way through the bushes, and so I was glad when I came to the larger trees and found a path which led between them. Of course, I was too wise to walk upon it, but I kept near it and followed its course. I had gone some distance, and had, as I imagined, nearly reached the limit of the wood, when a strange, moaning sound fell upon my ears. At first I thought it was the cry of some animal, but then there came words, of which I only caught the French exclamation, "Mon Dieu!" With great caution I advanced in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and this is what I saw.

On a couch of dried leaves there was stretched a man dressed in the same grey uniform which I wore myself.

He was evidently horribly wounded, for he held a cloth to his breast which was crimson with his blood. A pool had formed all round his couch, and he lay in a haze of flies, whose buzzing and droning would certainly have called my attention if his groans had not come to my ear.

I lay for a moment, fearing some trap, and then, my pity and loyalty rising above all other feelings, I ran forward and knelt by his side. He turned a haggard face upon me, and it was Duplessis, the man who had gone before me. It needed but one glance at his sunken cheeks and glazing eyes to tell me that he was dying.

"Gerard!" said he; "Gerard!"

I could but look my sympathy, but he, though the life was ebbing swiftly out of him, still kept his duty before him, like the gallant gentleman he was.

"The beacon, Gerard! You will light it?"

"Have you flint and steel?"

"It is here!"

"Then I will light it to-night."

"I die happy to hear you say so. They shot me, Gerard. But you will tell the Marshal that I did my best."

"And Cortex?"

"He was less fortunate. He fell into their hands and died horribly. If you see that you cannot get away, Gerard, put a bullet into your own heart. Don't die as Cortex did."

I could see that his breath was failing, and I bent low to catch his words.

"Can you tell me anything which can help me in my task?" I asked.

"Yes, yes; de Pombal. He will help you. Trust de Pombal." With the words his head fell back and he was dead.

"Trust de Pombal. It is good advice." To my amazement a man was standing at the very side of me.

So absorbed had I been in my comrade's words and intent on his advice that he had crept up without my observing him. Now I sprang to my feet and faced him. He was a tall, dark fellow, black-haired, black-eyed, black-bearded, with a long, sad face. In his hand he had a wine-bottle and over his shoulder was slung one of the trabucos or blunderbusses which these fellows bear. He made no effort to unsling it, and I understood that this was the man to whom my dead friend had commended me.

"Alas, he is gone!" said he, bending over Duplessis.

"He fled into the wood after he was shot, but I was fortunate enough to find where he had fallen and to make his last hours more easy. This couch was my making, and I had brought this wine to slake his thirst."

"Sir," said I, "in the name of France I thank you. I am but a colonel of light cavalry, but I am Etienne Gerard, and the name stands for something in the French army. May I ask — —"

"Yes, sir, I am Aloysius de Pombal, younger brother of the famous nobleman of that name. At present I am the first lieutenant in the band of the guerilla chief who is usually known as Manuelo, 'The Smiler.'"

My word, I clapped my hand to the place where my pistol should have been, but the man only smiled at the gesture.

"I am his first lieutenant, but I am also his deadly enemy," said he. He slipped off his jacket and pulled up his shirt as he spoke. "Look at this!" he cried, and he turned upon me a back which was all scored and lacerated with red and purple weals. "This is what 'The Smiler' has done to me, a man with the noblest blood of Portugal in my veins. What I will do to 'The Smiler' you have still to see."

There was such fury in his eyes and in the grin of his white teeth that I could no longer doubt his truth, with that clotted and oozing back to corroborate his words.

"I have ten men sworn to stand by me," said he. "In a few days I hope to join your army, when I have done my work here. In the meanwhile—" A strange change came over his face, and he suddenly slung his musket to the front: “Hold up your hands, you French hound!” he yelled. “Up with them, or I blow your head of!”

You start, my friends! You stare! Think, then, how I stared and started at this sudden ending of our talk.

There was the black muzzle and there the dark, angry eyes behind it. What could I do? I was helpless. I raised my hands in the air. At the same moment voices sounded from all parts of the wood, there were crying and calling and rushing of many feet. A swarm of dreadful figures broke through the green bushes, a dozen hands seized me, and I, poor, luckless, frenzied I, was a prisoner once more. Thank God, there was no pistol which I could have plucked from my belt and snapped at my own head. Had I been armed at that moment I should not be sitting here in this cafe and telling you these old-world tales.

With grimy, hairy hands clutching me on every side I was led along the pathway through the wood, the villain de Pombal giving directions to my Captors. Four of the brigands carried up the dead body of Duplessis.

The shadows of evening were already falling when we cleared the forest and came out upon the mountain-side.

Up this I was driven until we reached the headquarters of the guerillas, which lay in a cleft close to the summit of the mountain. There was the beacon which had cost me so much, a square stack of wood, immediately above our heads. Below were two or three huts which had belonged, no doubt, to goatherds, and which were now used to shelter these rascals. Into one of these I was cast, bound and helpless, and the dead body of my poor comrade was laid beside me.

I was lying there with the one thought still consuming me, how to wait a few hours and to get at that pile of fagots above my head, when the door of my prison opened and a man entered. Had my hands been free I should have flown at his throat, for it was none other than de Pombal. A couple of brigands were at his heels, but he ordered them back and closed the door behind him.

“You villain!” said I.

“Hush!” he cried. “Speak low, for I do not know who may be listening, and my life is at stake. I have some words to say to you, Colonel Gerard; I wish well to you, as I did to your dead companion. As I spoke to you beside his body I saw that we were surrounded, and that your capture was unavoidable. I should have shared your fate had I hesitated. I instantly captured you myself, so as to preserve the confidence of the band. Your own sense will tell you that there was nothing else for me to do. I do not know now whether I can save you, but at least I will try."

This was a new light upon the situation. I told him that I could not tell how far he spoke the truth, but that I would judge him by his actions.

"I ask nothing better," said he. "A word of advice to you! The chief will see you now. Speak him fair, or he will have you sawn between two planks. Contradict nothing he says. Give him such information as he wants. It is your only chance. If you can gain time something may come in our favour. Now, I have no more time. Come at once, or suspicion may be awakened."

He helped me to rise, and then, opening the door, he dragged me out very roughly, and with the aid of the fellows outside he brutally pushed and thrust me to the place where the guerilla chief was seated, with his rude followers gathered round him.

A remarkable man was Manuelo, "The Smiler." He was fat and florid and comfortable, with a big, clean-shaven face and a bald head, the very model of a kindly father of a family. As I looked at his honest smile I could scarcely believe that this was, indeed, the infamous ruffian whose name was a horror through the English Army as well as our own. It is well known that Trent, who was a British officer, afterward had the fellow hanged for his brutalities. He sat upon a boulder and he beamed upon me like one who meets an old acquaintance.

I observed, however, that one of his men leaned upon a long saw, and the sight was enough to cure me of all delusions.

"Good evening, Colonel Gerard," said he. "We have been highly honoured by General Massena's staff: Major Cortex one day, Colonel Duplessis the next, and now Colonel Gerard. Possibly the Marshal himself may be induced to honour us with a visit. You have seen Duplessis, I understand. Cortex you will find nailed to a tree down yonder. It only remains to be decided how we can best dispose of yourself."

It was not a cheering speech; but all the time his fat face was wreathed in smiles, and he lisped out his words in the most mincing and amiable fashion. Now, however, he suddenly leaned forward, and I read a very real intensity in his eyes.

"Colonel Gerard," said he, "I cannot promise you your life, for it is not our custom, but I can give you an easy death or I can give you a terrible one. Which shall it be?"

"What do you wish me to do in exchange?"

"If you would die easy I ask you to give me truthful answers to the questions which I ask."

A sudden thought flashed through my mind.

"You wish to kill me," said I; "it cannot matter to you how I die. If I answer your questions, will you let me choose the manner of my own death?"

"Yes, I will," said he, "so long as it is before midnight to-night."

"Swear it!" I cried.

"The word of a Portuguese gentleman is sufficient," said he.

"Not a word will I say until you have sworn it."

He flushed with anger and his eyes swept round toward the saw. But he understood from my tone that I meant what I said, and that I was not a man to be bullied into submission. He pulled a cross from under his zammara or jacket of black sheepskin.

"I swear it," said he.

Oh, my joy as I heard the words! What an end — what an end for the first swordsman of France! I could have laughed with delight at the thought.

"Now, your questions!" said I.

"You swear in turn to answer them truly?"

"I do, upon the honour of a gentleman and a soldier."

It was, as you perceive, a terrible thing that I promised, but what was it compared to what I might gain by compliance?

"This is a very fair and a very interesting bargain," said he, taking a note-book from his pocket.

"Would you kindly turn your gaze toward the French camp?"

Following the direction of his gesture, I turned and looked down upon the camp in the plain beneath us. In spite of the fifteen miles, one could in that clear atmosphere see every detail with the utmost distinctness.

There were the long squares of our tents and our huts, with the cavalry lines and the dark patches which marked the ten batteries of artillery. How sad to think of my magnificent regiment waiting down yonder, and to know that they would never see their colonel again! With one squadron of them I could have swept all these cut-throats off the face of the earth. My eager eyes filled with tears as I looked at the corner of the camp where I knew that there were eight hundred men, any one of whom would have died for his colonel. But my sadness vanished when I saw beyond the tents the plumes of smoke which marked the headquarters at Torres Novas. There was Massena, and, please God, at the cost of my life his mission would that night be done. A spasm of pride and exultation filled my breast. I should have liked to have had a voice of thunder that I might call to them, “Behold it is I, Etienne Gerard, who will die in order to save the army of Clausel!” It was, indeed, sad to think that so noble a deed should be done, and that no one should be there to tell the tale.

“Now,” said the brigand chief, “you see the camp and you see also the road which leads to Coimbra. It is crowded with your fourgons and your ambulances. Does this mean that Massena is about to retreat?”

One could see the dark moving lines of waggons with an occasional flash of steel from the escort. There could, apart from my promise, be no indiscretion in admitting that which was already obvious.

“He will retreat,” said I.

“By Coimbra?”

“I believe so.”

“But the army of Clausel?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“Every path to the south is blocked. No message can reach them. If Massena falls back the army of Clausel is doomed.”

“It must take its chance,” said I.

“How many men has he?”

“I should say about fourteen thousand.”

“How much cavalry?”

“One brigade of Montbrun’s Division.”

“What regiments?”

“The 4th Chasseurs, the 9th Hussars, and a regiment of Cuirassiers.”

“Quite right,” said he, looking at his note-book. “I can tell you speak the truth, and Heaven help you if you don’t.” Then, division by division, he went over the whole army, asking the composition of each brigade.

Need I tell you that I would have had my tongue torn out before I would have told him such things had I not a greater end in view? I would let him know all if I could but save the army of Clausel.

At last he closed his note-book and replaced it in his pocket. “I am obliged to you for this information, which shall reach Lord Wellington to-morrow,” said he.

“You have done your share of the bargain; it is for me now to perform mine. How would you wish to die? As a soldier you would, no doubt, prefer to be shot, but some think that a jump over the Merodal precipice is really an easier death. A good few have taken it, but we were, unfortunately, never able to get an opinion from them afterward. There is the saw, too, which does not appear to be popular. We could hang you, no doubt, but it would involve the inconvenience of going down to the wood. However, a promise is a promise, and you seem to be an excellent fellow, so we will spare no pains to meet your wishes.”

“You said,” I answered, “that I must die before midnight. I will choose, therefore, just one minute before that hour.”

“Very good,” said he. “Such clinging to life is rather childish, but your wishes shall be met.”

“As to the method,” I added, “I love a death which all the world can see. Put me on yonder pile of fagots and burn me alive, as saints and martyrs have been burned before me. That is no common end, but one which an Emperor might envy.”

The idea seemed to amuse him very much. “Why not?” said he. “If Massena has sent you to spy upon us, he may guess what the fire upon the mountain means.”

“Exactly,” said I. “You have hit upon my very reason. He will guess, and all will know, that I have died a soldier’s death.”

“I see no objection whatever,” said the brigand, with his abominable smile. “I will send some goat’s flesh and wine into your hut. The sun is sinking and it is nearly eight o’clock. In four hours be ready for your end.”

It was a beautiful world to be leaving. I looked at the golden haze below, where the last rays of the sinking sun shone upon the blue waters of the winding Tagus and gleamed upon the white sails of the English transports.

Very beautiful it was, and very sad to leave; but there are things more beautiful than that. The death that is died for the sake of others, honour, and duty, and loyalty, and love — these are the beauties far brighter than any which the eye can see. My breast was filled with admiration for my own most noble conduct, and with wonder whether any soul would ever come to know how I had placed myself in the heart of the beacon which saved the army of Clausel. I hoped so and I prayed so, for what a consolation it would be to my mother, what an example to the army, what a pride to my Hussars! When de Pombal came at last into my hut with the food and the wine, the first request I made him was that he would write an account of my death and send it to the French camp.

He answered not a word, but I ate my supper with a better appetite from the thought that my glorious fate would not be altogether unknown.

I had been there about two hours when the door opened again, and the chief stood looking in. I was in darkness, but a brigand with a torch stood beside him, and I saw his eyes and his teeth gleaming as he peered at me.

"Ready?" he asked.

"It is not yet time."

"You stand out for the last minute?"

"A promise is a promise."

"Very good. Be it so. We have a little justice to do among ourselves, for one of my fellows has been misbehaving. We have a strict rule of our own which is no respecter of persons, as de Pombal here could tell you. Do you truss him and lay him on the faggots, de Pombal, and I will return to see him die."

De Pombal and the man with the torch entered, while I heard the steps of the chief passing away. De Pombal closed the door.

"Colonel Gerard," said he, "you must trust this man, for he is one of my party. It is neck or nothing. We may save you yet. But I take a great risk, and I want a definite promise. If we save you, will you guarantee that we have a friendly reception in the French camp and that all the past will be forgotten?"

"I do guarantee it."

"And I trust your honour. Now, quick, quick, there is not an instant to lose! If this monster returns we shall die horribly, all three."

I stared in amazement at what he did. Catching up a long rope he wound it round the body of my dead comrade, and he tied a cloth round his mouth so as to almost cover his face.

"Do you lie there!" he cried, and he laid me in the place of the dead body. "I have four of my men waiting, and they will place this upon the beacon." He opened the door and gave an order. Several of the brigands entered and bore out Duplessis. For myself I remained upon the floor, with my mind in a turmoil of hope and wonder.

Five minutes later de Pombal and his men were back.

"You are laid upon the beacon," said he; "I defy anyone in the world to say it is not you, and you are so gagged and bound that no one can expect you to speak or move. Now, it only remains to carry forth the body of Duplessis and to toss it over the Merodal precipice.”

Two of them seized me by the head and two by the heels, and carried me, stiff and inert, from the hut. As I came into the open air I could have cried out in my amazement. The moon had risen above the beacon, and there, clear outlined against its silver light, was the figure of the man stretched upon the top. The brigands were either in their camp or standing round the beacon, for none of them stopped or questioned our little party. De Pombal led them in the direction of the precipice. At the brow we were out of sight, and there I was allowed to use my feet once more. De Pombal pointed to a narrow, winding track.

“This is the way down,” said he, and then, suddenly,

“Dios mio, what is that?”

A terrible cry had risen out of the woods beneath us.

I saw that de Pombal was shivering like a frightened horse.

“It is that devil,” he whispered. “He is treating another as he treated me. But on, on, for Heaven help us if he lays his hands upon us.”

One by one we crawled down the narrow goat track.

At the bottom of the cliff we were back in the woods once more. Suddenly a yellow glare shone above us, and the black shadows of the tree-trunks started out in front.

They had fired the beacon behind us. Even from where we stood we could see that impassive body amid the flames, and the black figures of the guerillas as they danced, howling like cannibals, round the pile. Ha! how I shook my fist at them, the dogs, and how I vowed that one day my Hussars and I would make the reckoning level!

De Pombal knew how the outposts were placed and all the paths which led through the forest. But to avoid these villains we had to plunge among the hills and walk for many a weary mile. And yet how gladly would I have walked those extra leagues if only for one sight which they brought to my eyes! It may have been two o’clock in the morning when we halted upon the bare shoulder of a hill over which our path curled. Looking back we saw the red glow of the embers of the beacon as if volcanic fires were bursting from the tall peak of Merodal. And then, as I gazed, I saw something else — something which caused me to shriek with joy and to fall upon the ground, rolling in my delight. For, far away upon the southern horizon, there winked and twinkled one great yellow light, throbbing and flaming, the light of no house, the light of no star, but the answering beacon of Mount d’Ossa, which told that the army of Clausel knew what Etienne Gerard had been sent to tell them.

How the Brigadier Triumphed in England

I have told you, my friends, how I triumphed over the English at the fox-hunt when I pursued the animal so fiercely that even the herd of trained dogs was unable to keep up, and alone with my own hand I put him to the sword. Perhaps I have said too much of the matter, but there is a thrill in the triumphs of sport which even warfare cannot give, for in warfare you share your successes with your regiment and your army, but in sport it is you yourself unaided who have won the laurels. It is an advantage which the English have over us that in all classes they take great interest in every form of sport. It may be that they are richer than we, or it may be that they are more idle: but I was surprised when I was a prisoner in that country to observe how widespread was this feeling, and how much it filled the minds and the lives of the people. A horse that will run, a cock that will fight, a dog that will kill rats, a man that will box — they would turn away from the Emperor in all his glory in order to look upon any of these.

I could tell you many stories of English sport, for I saw much of it during the time that I was the guest of Lord Rufton, after the order for my exchange had come to England. There were months before I could be sent back to France, and during this time I stayed with this good Lord Rufton at his beautiful house of High Combe, which is at the northern end of Dartmoor. He had ridden with the police when they had pursued me from Princetown, and he had felt toward me when I was overtaken as I would myself have felt had I, in my own country, seen a brave and debonair soldier without a friend to help him. In a word, he took me to his house, clad me, fed me, and treated me as if he had been my brother. I will say this of the English, that they were always generous enemies, and very good people with whom to fight.

In the Peninsula the Spanish outposts would present their muskets at ours, but the British their brandy-flasks. And of all these generous men there was none who was the equal of this admirable milord, who held out so warm a hand to an enemy in distress.

Ah! what thoughts of sport it brings back to me, the very name of High Combe! I can see it now, the long, low brick house, warm and ruddy, with white plaster pillars before the door. He was a great sportsman, this Lord

Rufton, and all who were about him were of the same sort. But you will be pleased to hear that there were few things in which I could not hold my own, and in some I excelled. Behind the house was a wood in which pheasants were reared, and it was Lord Rufton's joy to kill these birds, which was done by sending in men to drive them out while he and his friends stood outside and shot them as they passed. For my part, I was more crafty, for I studied the habits of the bird, and stealing out in the evening I was able to kill a number of them as they roosted in the trees. Hardly a single shot was wasted, but the keeper was attracted by the sound of the firing, and he implored me in his rough English fashion to spare those that were left. That night I was able to place twelve birds as a surprise upon Lord Rufton's supper-table, and he laughed until he cried, so overjoyed was he to see them. "Gad, Gerard, you'll be the death of me yet!" he cried. Often he said the same thing, for at every turn I amazed him by the way in which I entered into the sports of the English.

There is a game called cricket which they play in the summer, and this also I learned. Rudd, the head gardener, was a famous player of cricket, and so was Lord Rufton himself. Before the house was a lawn, and here it was that Rudd taught me the game. It is a brave pastime, a game for soldiers, for each tries to strike the other with the ball, and it is but a small stick with which you may ward it off. Three sticks behind show the spot beyond which you may not retreat. I can tell you that it is no game for children, and I will confess that, in spite of my nine campaigns, I felt myself turn pale when first the ball flashed past me. So swift was it that I had not time to raise my stick to ward it off, but by good fortune it missed me and knocked down the wooden pins which marked the boundary. It was for Rudd then to defend himself and for me to attack. When I was a boy in Gascony I learned to throw both far and straight, so that I made sure that I could hit this gallant Englishman.

With a shout I rushed forward and hurled the ball at him. It flew as swift as a bullet toward his ribs, but without a word he swung his staff and the ball rose a surprising distance in the air. Lord Rufton clapped his hands and cheered. Again the ball was brought to me, and again it was for me to throw. This time it flew past his head, and it seemed to me that it was his turn to look pale.

But he was a brave man, this gardener, and again he faced me. Ah, my friends, the hour of my triumph had come! It was a red waistcoat that he wore, and at this I hurled the ball. You would have said that I was a gunner, not a hussar, for never was so straight an aim. With a despairing cry — the cry of the brave man who is beaten — he fell upon the wooden pegs behind him, and they all rolled upon the ground together. He was cruel, this English milord, and he laughed so that he could not come to the aid of his servant. It was for me, the victor, to rush forward to embrace this intrepid player, and to raise him to his feet with words of praise, and encouragement, and hope. He was in pain and could not stand erect, yet the honest fellow confessed that there was no accident in my victory. "He did it a-purpose! He did it a-purpose!"

Again and again he said it. Yes, it is a great game this cricket, and I would gladly have ventured upon it again but Lord Rufton and Rudd said that it was late in the season, and so they would play no more.

How foolish of me, the old, broken man, to dwell upon these successes, and yet I will confess that my age has been very much soothed and comforted by the memory of the women who have loved me and the men whom I have overcome. It is pleasant to think that five years afterward, when Lord Rufton came to Paris after the peace, he was able to assure me that my name was still a famous one in the north of Devonshire for the fine exploits that I had performed. Especially, he said, they still talked over my boxing match with the Honourable Baldock. It came about in this way. Of an evening many sportsmen would assemble at the house of Lord Rufton, where they would drink much wine, make wild bets, and talk of their horses and their foxes. How well I remember those strange creatures. Sir Barrington, Jack Lupton, of Barnstable, Colonel Addison, Johnny Miller, Lord Sadler, and my enemy, the Honourable Baldock. They were of the same stamp all of them, drinkers, madcaps, fighters, gamblers, full of strange caprices and extraordinary whims. Yet they were kindly fellows in their rough fashion, save only this Baldock, a fat man, who prided himself on his skill at the box-fight. It was he who, by his laughter against the French because they were ignorant of sport, caused me to challenge him in the very sport at which he excelled. You will say that it was foolish, my friends, but the decanter had passed many times, and the blood of youth ran hot in my veins. I would fight him, this boaster; I would show him that if we had not skill at least we had courage. Lord Rufton would not allow it. I insisted. The others cheered me on and slapped me on the back. "No, dash it, Baldock, he's our guest," said Rufton. "It's his own doing," the other answered. “Look here, Rufton, they can’t hurt each other if they wear the mawleys,” cried Lord Sadler. And so it was agreed.

What the mawleys were I did not know, but presently they brought out four great puddings of leather, not unlike a fencing glove, but larger. With these our hands were covered after we had stripped ourselves of our coats and our waistcoats. Then the table, with the glasses and decanters, was pushed into the corner of the room, and behold us; face to face! Lord Sadler sat in the arm-chair with a watch in his open hand. “Time!” said he.

I will confess to you, my friends, that I felt at that moment a tremor such as none of my many duels have ever given me. With sword or pistol I am at home, but here I only understood that I must struggle with this fat Englishman and do what I could, in spite of these great puddings upon my hands, to overcome him. And at the very outset I was disarmed of the best weapon that was left to me. “Mind, Gerard, no kicking!” said Lord Rufton in my ear. I had only a pair of thin dancing slippers, and yet the man was fat, and a few well-directed kicks might have left me the victor. But there is an etiquette just as there is in fencing, and I refrained. I looked at this Englishman and I wondered how I should attack him. His ears were large and prominent. Could I seize them I might drag him to the ground. I rushed in, but I was betrayed by this flabby glove, and twice I lost my hold. He struck me, but I cared little for his blows, and again I seized him by the ear. He fell, and I rolled upon him and thumped his head upon the ground.

How they cheered and laughed, these gallant Englishmen, and how they clapped me on the back!

“Even money on the Frenchman,” cried Lord Sadler.

“He fights foul,” cried my enemy, rubbing his crimson ears. “He savaged me on the ground.”

“You must take your chance of that,” said Lord Rufton, coldly.

“Time!” cried Lord Sadler, and once again we advanced to the assault.

He was flushed, and his small eyes were as vicious as those of a bull-dog. There was hatred on his face. For my part I carried myself lightly and gaily. A French gentleman fights but he does not hate. I drew myself up before him, and I bowed as I have done in the duello.

There can be grace and courtesy as well as defiance in a bow; I put all three into this one, with a touch of ridicule in the shrug which accompanied it. It was at this moment that he struck me. The room spun round me. I fell upon my back. But in an instant I was on my feet again and had rushed to a close combat. His ear, his hair, his nose, I seized them each in turn. Once again the mad joy of the battle was in my veins. The old cry of triumph rose to my lips. “Vive l’Empereur!” I yelled as I drove my head into his stomach. He threw his arm round my neck, and holding me with one hand he struck me with the other. I buried my teeth in his arm, and he shouted with pain. “Call him off, Rufton!” he screamed.

“Call him off, man! He’s worrying me!” They dragged me away from him. Can I ever forget it? — the laughter, the cheering, the congratulations! Even my enemy bore me no ill-will, for he shook me by the hand. For my part I embraced him on each cheek. Five years afterward I learned from Lord Rufton that my noble bearing upon that evening was still fresh in the memory of my English friends.

It is not, however, of my own exploits in sport that I wish to speak to you to-night, but it is of the Lady Jane Dacre and the strange adventure of which she was the cause. Lady Jane Dacre was Lord Rufton’s sister and the lady of his household. I fear that until I came it was lonely for her, since she was a beautiful and refined woman with nothing in common with those who were about her. Indeed, this might be said of many women in the England of those days, for the men were rude and rough and coarse, with boorish habits and few accomplishments, while the women were the most lovely and tender that I have ever known. We became great friends, the Lady Jane and I, for it was not possible for me to drink three bottles of port after dinner like those Devonshire gentlemen, and so I would seek refuge in her drawing-room, where evening after evening she would play the harpsichord and I would sing the songs of my own land. In those peaceful moments I would find a refuge from the misery which filled me, when I reflected that my regiment was left in the front of the enemy without the chief whom they had learned to love and to follow.

Indeed, I could have torn my hair when I read in the English papers of the fine fighting which was going on in Portugal and on the frontiers of Spain, all of which I had missed through my misfortune in falling into the hands of Milord Wellington.

From what I have told you of the Lady Jane you will have guessed what occurred, my friends. Etienne Gerard is thrown into the company of a young and beautiful woman. What must it mean for him? What must it mean for her? It was not for me, the guest, the captive, to make love to the sister of my host. But I was reserved.

I was discreet. I tried to curb my own emotions and to discourage hers. For my own part I fear that I betrayed myself, for the eye becomes more eloquent when the tongue is silent. Every quiver of my fingers as I turned over her music-sheets told her my secret. But she — she was admirable. It is in these matters that women have a genius for deception. If I had not penetrated her secret I should often have thought that she forgot even that I was in the house. For hours she would sit lost in a sweet melancholy, while I admired her pale face and her curls in the lamp-light, and thrilled within me to think that I had moved her so deeply. Then at last I would speak, and she would start in her chair and stare at me with the most admirable pretence of being surprised to find me in the room. Ah! how I longed to hurl myself suddenly at her feet, to kiss her white hand, to assure her that I had surprised her secret and that I would not abuse her confidence.

But no, I was not her equal, and I was under her roof as a castaway enemy. My lips were sealed. I endeavoured to imitate her own wonderful affectation of indifference, but, as you may think? I was eagerly alert for any opportunity of serving her.

One morning Lady Jane had driven in her phaeton to Okehampton, and I strolled along the road which led to that place in the hope that I might meet her on her return.

It was the early winter, and banks of fading fern sloped down to the winding road. It is a bleak place this Dartmoor, wild and rocky — a country of wind and mist.

I felt as I walked that it is no wonder Englishmen should suffer from the spleen. My own heart was heavy within me, and I sat upon a rock by the wayside looking out on the dreary view with my thoughts full of trouble and foreboding. Suddenly, however, as I glanced down the road, I saw a sight which drove everything else from my mind, and caused me to leap to my feet with a cry of astonishment and anger.

Down the curve of the road a phaeton was coming, the pony tearing along at full gallop. Within was the very lady whom I had come to meet. She lashed at the pony like one who endeavours to escape from some pressing danger, glancing ever backward over her shoulder. The bend of the road concealed from me what it was that had alarmed her, and I ran forward not knowing what to expect.

The next instant I saw the pursuer, and my amazement was increased at the sight. It was a gentleman in the red coat of an English fox-hunter, mounted on a great grey horse. He was galloping as if in a race, and the long stride of the splendid creature beneath him soon brought him up to the lady's flying carriage. I saw him stoop and seize the reins of the pony, so as to bring it to a halt. The next instant he was deep in talk with the lady, he bending forward in his saddle and speaking eagerly, she shrinking away from him as if she feared and loathed him.

You may think, my dear friends, that this was not a sight at which I could calmly gaze. How my heart thrilled within me to think that a chance should have been given to me to serve the Lady Jane! I ran — oh, good Lord, how I ran! At last, breathless, speechless, I reached the phaeton. The man glanced up at me with his blue English eyes, but so deep was he in his talk that he paid no heed to me, nor did the lady say a word. She still leaned back, her beautiful pale face gazing up at him. He was a good-looking fellow — tall, and strong, and brown; a pang of jealousy seized me as I looked at him. He was talking low and fast, as the English do when they are in earnest.

"I tell you, Jinny, it's you and only you that I love," said he. "Don't bear malice, Jinny. Let by-gones be by-gones. Come now, say it's all over."

"No, never, George, never!" she cried.

A dusky red suffused his handsome face. The man was furious.

"Why can't you forgive me, Jinny?"

"I can't forget the past."

"By George, you must! I've asked enough. It's time to order now. I'll have my rights, d'ye hear?" His hand closed upon her wrist.

At last my breath had returned to me.

"Madame," I said, as I raised my hat, "do I intrude, or is there any possible way in which I can be of service to you?"

But neither of them minded me any more than if I had been a fly who buzzed between them. Their eyes were locked together.

"I'll have my rights, I tell you. I've waited long enough."

"There's no use bullying, George."

"Do you give in?"

"No, never!"

"Is that your final answer?"

"Yes, it is."

He gave a bitter curse and threw down her hand.

"All right, my lady, we'll see about this."

"Excuse me, sir!" said I, with dignity.

"Oh, go to blazes!" he cried, turning on me with his furious face. The next instant he had spurred his horse and was galloping down the road once more.

Lady Jane gazed after him until he was out of sight, and I was surprised to see that her face wore a smile and not a frown. Then she turned to me and held out her hand.

"You are very kind, Colonel Gerard. You meant well, I am sure."

"Madame," said I, "if you can oblige me with the gentleman's name and address I will arrange that he shall never trouble you again."

"No scandal, I beg of you," she cried.

"Madame, I could not so far forget myself. Rest assured that no lady's name would ever be mentioned by me in the course of such an incident. In bidding me to go to blazes this gentleman has relieved me from the embarrassment of having to invent a cause of quarrel."

"Colonel Gerard," said the lady, earnestly, "you must give me your word as a soldier and a gentleman that this matter goes no farther, and also that you will say nothing to my brother about what you have seen. Promise me!"

"If I must."

"I hold you to your word. Now drive with me to High Combe, and I will explain as we go."

The first words of her explanation went into me like a sabre-point.

"That gentleman," said she, "is my husband."

"Your husband!"

"You must have known that I was married." She seemed surprised at my agitation.

"I did not know."

"This is Lord George Dacre. We have been married two years. There is no need to tell you how he wronged me. I left him and sought a refuge under my brother's roof. Up till to-day he has left me there unmolested. What I must above all things avoid is the chance of a duel betwixt my husband and my brother. It is horrible to think of. For this reason Lord Rufton must know nothing of this chance meeting of to-day."

"If my pistol could free you from this annoyance — —"

"No, no, it is not to be thought of. Remember your promise, Colonel Gerard. And not a word at High Combe of what you have seen!"

Her husband! I had pictured in my mind that she was a young widow. This brown-faced brute with his “go to blazes” was the husband of this tender dove of a woman. Oh, if she would but allow me to free her from so odious an encumbrance! There is no divorce so quick and certain as that which I could give her. But a promise is a promise, and I kept it to the letter. My mouth was sealed.

In a week I was to be sent back from Plymouth to St. Malo, and it seemed to me that I might never hear the sequel of the story. And yet it was destined that it should have a sequel and that I should play a very pleasing and honourable part in it.

It was only three days after the event which I have described when Lord Rufton burst hurriedly into my room.

His face was pale and his manner that of a man in extreme agitation.

“Gerard,” he cried, “have you seen Lady Jane Dacre?”

I had seen her after breakfast and it was now mid-day.

“By Heaven, there’s villainy here!” cried my poor friend, rushing about like a madman. “The bailiff has been up to say that a chaise and pair were seen driving full split down the Tavistock Road. The blacksmith heard a woman scream as it passed his forge. Jane has disappeared. By the Lord, I believe that she has been kidnapped by this villain Dacre.” He rang the bell furiously. “Two horses, this instant!” he cried. “Colonel Gerard, your pistols! Jane comes back with me this night from Gravel Hanger or there will be a new master in High Combe Hall.”

Behold us then within half an hour, like two knight-errants of old, riding forth to the rescue of this lady in distress. It was near Tavistock that Lord Dacre lived, and at every house and toll-gate along the road we heard the news of the flying post-chaise in front of us, so there could be no doubt whither they were bound. As we rode Lord Rufton told me of the man whom we were pursuing.

His name, it seems, was a household word throughout all England for every sort of mischief. Wine, women, dice, cards, racing — in all forms of debauchery he had earned for himself a terrible name. He was of an old and noble family, and it had been hoped that he had sowed his wild oats when he married the beautiful Lady Jane Rufton.

For some months he had indeed behaved well, and then he had wounded her feelings in their most tender part by some unworthy liaison. She had fled from his house and taken refuge with her brother, from whose care she had now been dragged once more, against her will. I ask you if two men could have had a fairer errand than that upon which Lord Rufton and myself were riding.

“That’s Gravel Hanger,” he cried at last, pointing with his crop, and there on the green side of a hill was an old brick and timber building as beautiful as only an English country-house can be. “There’s an inn by the park-gate, and there we shall leave our horses,” he added.

For my own part it seemed to me that with so just a cause we should have done best to ride boldly up to his door and summon him to surrender the lady. But there I was wrong. For the one thing which every Englishman fears is the law. He makes it himself, and when he has once made it it becomes a terrible tyrant before whom the bravest quails. He will smile at breaking his neck, but he will turn pale at breaking the law. It seems, then, from what Lord Rufton told me as we walked through the park, that we were on the wrong side of the law in this matter. Lord Dacre was in the right in carrying off his wife, since she did indeed belong to him, and our own position now was nothing better than that of burglars and trespassers. It was not for burglars to openly approach the front door. We could take the lady by force or by craft, but we could not take her by right, for the law was against us. This was what my friend explained to me as we crept up toward the shelter of a shrubbery which was close to the windows of the house. Thence we could examine this fortress, see whether we could effect a lodgment in it, and, above all, try to establish some communication with the beautiful prisoner inside.

There we were, then, in the shrubbery, Lord Rufton and I, each with a pistol in the pockets of our riding coats, and with the most resolute determination in our hearts that we should not return without the lady.

Eagerly we scanned every window of the wide-spread house.

Not a sign could we see of the prisoner or of anyone else; but on the gravel drive outside the door were the deep-sunk marks of the wheels of the chaise. There was no doubt that they had arrived. Crouching among the laurel bushes we held a whispered council of wary but a singular interruption brought it to an end.

Out of the door of the house there stepped a tall, flaxen-haired man, such a figure as one would choose for the flank of a Grenadier company. As he turned his brown face and his blue eyes toward us I recognised Lord Dacre.

With long strides he came down the gravel path straight for the spot where we lay.

“Come out, Ned!” he shouted; “you’ll have the game-keeper putting a charge of shot into you. Come out, man, and don’t skulk behind the bushes.”

It was not a very heroic situation for us. My poor friend rose with a crimson face. I sprang to my feet also and bowed with such dignity as I could muster.

“Halloa! it’s the Frenchman, is it?” said he, without returning my bow. “I’ve got a crow to pluck with him already. As to you, Ned, I knew you would be hot on our scent, and so I was looking out for you. I saw you cross the park and go to ground in the shrubbery. Come in, man, and let us have all the cards on the table.”

He seemed master of the situation, this handsome giant of a man, standing at his ease on his own ground while we slunk out of our hiding-place. Lord Rufton had said not a word, but I saw by his darkened brow and his sombre eyes that the storm was gathering. Lord Dacre led the way into the house, and we followed close at his heels.

He ushered us himself into an oak-panelled sitting-room, closing the door behind us. Then he looked me up and down with insolent eyes.

“Look here, Ned,” said he, “time was when an English family could settle their own affairs in their own way. What has this foreign fellow got to do with your sister and my wife?”

“Sir,” said I, “permit me to point out to you that this is not a case merely of a sister or a wife, but that I am the friend of the lady in question, and that I have the privilege which every gentleman possesses of protecting a woman against brutality. It is only by a gesture that I can show you what I think of you.” I had my riding glove in my hand, and I flicked him across the face with it. He drew back with a bitter smile and his eyes were as hard as flint.

“So you’ve brought your bully with you, Ned?” said he. “You might at least have done your fighting yourself, if it must come to a fight.”

“So I will,” cried Lord Rufton. “Here and now.”

“When I’ve killed this swaggering Frenchman,” said Lord Dacre. He stepped to a side table and opened a brass-bound case. “By Gad,” said he, “either that man or I go out of this room feet foremost. I meant well by you, Ned; I did, by George, but I’ll shoot this led-captain of yours as sure as my name’s George Dacre. Take your choice of pistols, sir, and shoot across this table. The barkers are loaded. Aim straight and kill me if you can, for by the Lord if you don’t, you’re done.”

In vain Lord Rufton tried to take the quarrel upon himself. Two things were clear in my mind — one that the Lady Jane had feared above all things that her husband and brother should fight, the other that if I could but kill this big milord, then the whole question would be settled forever in the best way. Lord Rufton did not want him. Lady Jane did not want him. Therefore, I, Etienne Gerard, their friend, would pay the debt of gratitude which I owed them by freeing them of this encumbrance. But, indeed, there was no choice in the matter, for Lord Dacre was as eager to put a bullet into me as I could be to do the same service to him. In vain Lord Rufton argued and scolded. The affair must continue.

“Well, if you must fight my guest instead of myself, let it be to-morrow morning with two witnesses,” he cried, at last; “this is sheer murder across the table.”

“But it suits my humour, Ned,” said Lord Dacre.

“And mine, sir,” said I.

“Then I’ll have nothing to do with it,” cried Lord Rufton. “I tell you, George, if you shoot Colonel Gerard under these circumstances you’ll find yourself in the dock instead of on the bench. I won’t act as second, and that’s flat.”

“Sir,” said I, “I am perfectly prepared to proceed without a second.”

“That won’t do. It’s against the law,” cried Lord Dacre. “Come, Ned, don’t be a fool. You see we mean to fight. Hang it, man, all I want you to do is to drop a handkerchief.”

“I’ll take no part in it.”

“Then I must find someone who will,” said Lord Dacre.

He threw a cloth over the pistols which lay upon the table, and he rang the bell. A footman entered. “Ask Colonel Berkeley if he will step this way. You will find him in the billiard-room.”

A moment later there entered a tall thin Englishman with a great moustache, which was a rare thing amid that clean-shaven race. I have heard since that they were worn only by the Guards and the Hussars. This Colonel Berkeley was a guardsman. He seemed a strange, tired, languid, drawling creature with a long black cigar thrusting out, like a pole from a bush, amidst that immense moustache. He looked from one to the other of us with true English phlegm, and he betrayed not the slightest surprise when he was told our intention.

"Quite so," said he; "quite so."

"I refuse to act, Colonel Berkeley," cried Lord Rufton.

"Remember, this duel cannot proceed without you, and I hold you personally responsible for anything that happens."

This Colonel Berkeley appeared to be an authority upon the question, for he removed the cigar from his mouth and he laid down the law in his strange, drawling voice.

"The circumstances are unusual but not irregular, Lord Rufton," said he. "This gentleman has given a blow and this other gentleman has received it. That is a clear issue. Time and conditions depend upon the person who demands satisfaction. Very good. He claims it here and now, across the table. He is acting within his rights. I am prepared to accept the responsibility."

There was nothing more to be said. Lord Rufton sat moodily in the corner with his brows drawn down and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his riding-breeches.

Colonel Berkeley examined the two pistols and laid them both in the centre of the table. Lord Dacre was at one end and I at the other, with eight feet of shining mahogany between us. On the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, stood the tall colonel, his handkerchief in his left hand, his cigar between two fingers of his right.

"When I drop the handkerchief," said he, "you will pick up your pistols and you will fire at your own convenience. Are you ready?"

"Yes," we cried.

His hand opened and the handkerchief fell. I bent swiftly forward and seized a pistol, but the table, as I have said, was eight feet across, and it was easier for this long-armed milord to reach the pistols than it was for me.

I had not yet drawn myself straight before he fired, and to this it was that I owe my life. His bullet would have blown out my brains had I been erect. As it was it whistled through my curls. At the same instant, just as I threw up my own pistol to fire, the door flew open and a pair of arms were thrown round me. It was the beautiful, flushed, frantic face of Lady Jane which looked up into mine.

"You sha'n't fire! Colonel Gerard, for my sake don't fire," she cried. "It is a mistake, I tell you, a mistake, a mistake! He is the best and dearest of husbands. Never again shall I leave his side.” Her hands slid down my arm and closed upon my pistol.

“Jane, Jane,” cried Lord Rufton; “come with me. You should not be here. Come away.”

“It is all confoundedly irregular,” said Colonel Berkeley.

“Colonel Gerard, you won’t fire, will you? My heart would break if he were hurt.”

“Hang it all, Jinny, give the fellow fair play,” cried Lord Dacre. “He stood my fire like a man, and I won’t see him interfered with. Whatever happens I can’t get worse than I deserve.”

But already there had passed between me and the lady a quick glance of the eyes which told her everything.

Her hands slipped from my arm. “I leave my husband’s life and my own happiness to Colonel Gerard,” said she.

How well she knew me, this admirable woman! I stood for an instant irresolute, with the pistol cocked in my hand. My antagonist faced me bravely, with no blenching of his sunburnt face and no flinching of his bold, blue eyes.

“Come, come, sir, take your shot!” cried the colonel from the mat.

“Let us have it, then,” said Lord Dacre.

I would, at least, show them how completely his life was at the mercy of my skill. So much I owed to my own self-respect. I glanced round for a mark. The colonel was looking toward my antagonist, expecting to see him drop. His face was sideways to me, his long cigar projecting from his lips with an inch of ash at the end of it.

Quick as a flash I raised my pistol and fired.

“Permit me to trim your ash, sir,” said I, and I bowed with a grace which is unknown among these islanders.

I am convinced that the fault lay with the pistol and not with my aim. I could hardly believe my own eyes when I saw that I had snapped off the cigar within half an inch of his lips. He stood staring at me with the ragged stub of the cigar-end sticking out from his singed mustache. I can see him now with his foolish, angry eyes and his long, thin, puzzled face. Then he began to talk. I have always said that the English are not really a phlegmatic or a taciturn nation if you stir them out of their groove. No one could have talked in a more animated way than this colonel. Lady Jane put her hands over her ears.

“Come, come, Colonel Berkeley,” said Lord Dacre, sternly, “you forget yourself. There is a lady in the room.”

The colonel gave a stiff bow.

“If Lady Dacre will kindly leave the room,” said he,

“I will be able to tell this infernal little Frenchman what I think of him and his monkey tricks.”

I was splendid at that moment, for I ignored the words that he had said and remembered only the extreme provocation.

“Sir,” said I, “I freely offer you my apologies for this unhappy incident. I felt that if I did not discharge my pistol Lord Dacre’s honour might feel hurt, and yet it was quite impossible for me, after hearing what this lady has said, to aim it at her husband. I looked round for a mark, therefore, and I had the extreme misfortune to blow your cigar out of your mouth when my intention had merely been to snuff the ash. I was betrayed by my pistol. This is my explanation, sir, and if after listening to my apologies you still feel that I owe you satisfaction, I need not say that it is a request which I am unable to refuse.”

It was certainly a charming attitude which I had assumed, and it won the hearts of all of them. Lord Dacre stepped forward and wrung me by the hand. “By George, sir,” said he, “I never thought to feel toward a Frenchman as I do to you. You’re a man and a gentleman, and I can’t say more.” Lord Rufton said nothing, but his hand-grip told me all that he thought. Even Colonel Berkeley paid me a compliment, and declared that he would think no more about the unfortunate cigar.

And she — ah, if you could have seen the look she gave me, the flushed cheek, the moist eye, the tremulous lip!

When I think of my beautiful Lady Jane it is at that moment that I recall her. They would have had me stay to dinner, but you will understand, my friends, that this was no time for either Lord Rufton or myself to remain at Gravel Hanger. This reconciled couple desired only to be alone. In the chaise he had persuaded her of his sincere repentance, and once again they were a loving husband and wife. If they were to remain so it was best perhaps that I should go. Why should I unsettle this domestic peace? Even against my own will my mere presence and appearance might have their effect upon the lady. No, no, I must tear myself away — even her persuasions were unable to make me stop. Years afterward I heard that the household of the Dacres was among the happiest in the whole country, and that no cloud had ever come again to darken their lives. Yet I dare say if he could have seen into his wife’s mind — but there, I say no more! A lady’s secret is her own, and I fear that she and it are buried long years ago in some Devonshire churchyard. Perhaps all that gay circle are gone and the Lady Jane only lives now in the memory of an old half-pay French brigadier. He at least can never forget.

How the Brigadier Rode to Minsk

I would have a stronger wine to-night, my friends, a wine of Burgundy rather than of Bordeaux. It is that my heart, my old soldier heart, is heavy within me. It is a strange thing, this age which creeps upon one. One does not know, one does not understand; the spirit is ever the same, and one does not remember how the poor body crumbles. But there comes a moment when it is brought home, when quick as the sparkle of a whirling sabre it is clear to us, and we see the men we were and the men we are. Yes, yes, it was so to-day, and I would have a wine of Burgundy to-night. White Burgundy — Montrachet — Sir, I am your debtor!

It was this morning in the Champ de Mars. Your pardon, friends, while an old man tells his trouble. You saw the review. Was it not splendid? I was in the enclosure for veteran officers who have been decorated.

This ribbon on my breast was my passport. The cross itself I keep at home in a leathern pouch. They did us honour, for we were placed at the saluting point, with the Emperor and the carriages of the Court upon our right.

It is years since I have been to a review, for I cannot approve of many things which I have seen. I do not approve of the red breeches of the infantry. It was in white breeches that the infantry used to fight. Red is for the cavalry. A little more, and they would ask our busbies and our spurs! Had I been seen at a review they might well have said that I, Etienne Gerard, had condoned it. So I have stayed at home. But this war of the Crimea is different. The men go to battle.

It is not for me to be absent when brave men gather.

My faith, they march well, those little infantrymen!

They are not large, but they are very solid and they carry themselves well. I took off my hat to them as they passed. Then there came the guns. They were good guns, well horsed and well manned. I took off my hat to them. Then came the Engineers, and to them also I took off my hat. There are no braver men than the Engineers. Then came the cavalry, Lancers, Cuirassiers, Chasseurs, and Spahis. To all of them in turn I was able to take off my hat, save only to the Spahis.

The Emperor had no Spahis. But when all of the others had passed, what think you came at the close? A brigade of Hussars, and at the charge!

Oh, my friends, the pride and the glory and the beauty, the flash and the sparkle, the roar of the hoofs and the jingle of chains, the tossing manes, the noble heads, the rolling cloud, and the dancing waves of steel! My heart drummed to them as they passed. And the last of all, was it not my own old regiment? My eyes fell upon the grey and silver dolmans, with the leopard-skin shabraques, and at that instant the years fell away from me and I saw my own beautiful men and horses, even as they had swept behind their young colonel, in the pride of our youth and our strength, just forty years ago. Up flew my cane. “Chargez! En avant! Vive l’Empereur!”

It was the past calling to the present. But oh, what a thin, piping voice! Was this the voice that had once thundered from wing to wing of a strong brigade? And the arm that could scarce wave a cane, were these the muscles of fire and steel which had no match in all Napoleon’s mighty host? They smiled at me. They cheered me. The Emperor laughed and bowed. But to me the present was a dim dream, and what was real were my eight hundred dead Hussars and the Etienne of long ago.

Enough — a brave man can face age and fate as he faced Cossacks and Uhlans. But there are times when Montrachet is better than the wine of Bordeaux.

It is to Russia that they go, and so I will tell you a story of Russia. Ah, what an evil dream of the night it seems! Blood and ice. Ice and blood. Fierce faces with snow upon the whiskers. Blue hands held out for succour. And across the great white plain the one long black line of moving figures, trudging, trudging, a hundred miles, another hundred, and still always the same white plain. Sometimes there were fir-woods to limit it, sometimes it stretched away to the cold blue sky, but the black line stumbled on and on. Those weary, ragged, starving men, the spirit frozen out of them, looked neither to right nor left, but with sunken faces and rounded backs trailed onward and ever onward, making for France as wounded beasts make for their lair. There was no speaking, and you could scarce hear the shuffle of feet in the snow. Once only I heard them laugh. It was outside Wilna, when an aide-de-camp rode up to the head of that dreadful column and asked if that were the Grand Army. All who were within hearing looked round, and when they saw those broken men, those ruined regiments, those fur-capped skeletons who were once the Guard, they laughed, and the laugh crackled down the column like a feu de joie. I have heard many a groan and cry and scream in my life, but nothing so terrible as the laugh of the Grand Army.

But why was it that these helpless men were not destroyed by the Russians? Why was it that they were not speared by the Cossacks or herded into droves, and driven as prisoners into the heart of Russia? On every side as you watched the black snake winding over the snow you saw also dark, moving shadows which came and went like cloud drifts on either flank and behind. They were the Cossacks, who hung round us like wolves round the flock.

But the reason why they did not ride in upon us was that all the ice of Russia could not cool the hot hearts of some of our soldiers. To the end there were always those who were ready to throw themselves between these savages and their prey. One man above all rose greater as the danger thickened, and won a higher name amid disaster than he had done when he led our van to victory. To him I drink this glass — to Ney, the red-maned Lion, glaring back over his shoulder at the enemy who feared to tread too closely on his heels. I can see him now, his broad white face convulsed with fury, his light blue eyes sparkling like flints, his great voice roaring and crashing amid the roll of the musketry. His glazed and featherless cocked hat was the ensign upon which France rallied during those dreadful days.

It is well known that neither I nor the regiment of Hussars of Conflans were at Moscow. We were left behind on the lines of communication at Borodino. How the Emperor could have advanced without us is incomprehensible to me, and, indeed, it was only then that I understood that his judgment was weakening and that he was no longer the man that he had been. However, a soldier has to obey orders, and so I remained at this village, which was poisoned by the bodies of thirty thousand men who had lost their lives in the great battle. I spent the late autumn in getting my horses into condition and reclothing my men, so that when the army fell back on Borodino my Hussars were the best of the cavalry, and were placed under Ney in the rear-guard.

What could he have done without us during those dreadful days? “Ah, Gerard,” said he one evening — but it is not for me to repeat the words. Suffice it that he spoke what the whole army felt. The rear-guard covered the army and the Hussars of Conflans covered the rear-guard. There was the whole truth in a sentence.

Always the Cossacks were on us. Always we held them off. Never a day passed that we had not to wipe our sabres. That was soldiering indeed.

But there came a time between Wilna and Smolensk when the situation became impossible. Cossacks and even cold we could fight, but we could not fight hunger as well. Food must be got at all costs. That night Ney sent for me to the waggon in which he slept. His great head was sunk on his hands. Mind and body he was wearied to death.

“Colonel Gerard,” said he, “things are going very badly with us. The men are starving. We must have food at all costs.”

“The horses,” I suggested.

“Save your handful of cavalry; there are none left.”

“The band,” said I.

He laughed, even in his despair.

“Why the band?” he asked.

“Fighting men are of value.”

“Good,” said he. “You would play the game down to the last card and so would I. Good, Gerard, good!”

He clasped my hand in his. “But there is one chance for us yet, Gerard.” He unhooked a lantern from the roof of the waggon and he laid it on a map which was stretched before him. “To the south of us,” said he, “there lies the town of Minsk. I have word from a Russian deserter that much corn has been stored in the town-hall. I wish you to take as many men as you think best, set forth for Minsk, seize the corn, load any carts which you may collect in the town, and bring them to me between here and Smolensk. If you fail it is but a detachment cut off. If you succeed it is new life to the army.”

He had not expressed himself well, for it was evident that if we failed it was not merely the loss of a detachment. It is quality as well as quantity which counts.

And yet how honourable a mission and how glorious a risk! If mortal men could bring it, then the corn should come from Minsk. I said so, and spoke a few burning words about a brave man’s duty until the Marshal was so moved that he rose and, taking me affectionately by the shoulders, pushed me out of the waggon.

It was clear to me that in order to succeed in my enterprise I should take a small force and depend rather upon surprise than upon numbers. A large body could not conceal itself, would have great difficulty in getting food, and would cause all the Russians around us to concentrate for its certain destruction. On the other hand, if a small body of cavalry could get past the Cossacks unseen it was probable that they would find no troops to oppose them, for we knew that the main Russian army was several days' march behind us. This corn was meant, no doubt, for their consumption. A squadron of Hussars and thirty Polish Lancers were all whom I chose for the venture. That very night we rode out of the camp, and struck south in the direction of Minsk.

Fortunately there was but a half moon, and we were able to pass without being attacked by the enemy. Twice we saw great fires burning amid the snow, and around them a thick bristle of long poles. These were the lances of Cossacks, which they had stood upright while they slept. It would have been a great joy to us to have charged in amongst them, for we had much to revenge, and the eyes of my comrades looked longingly from me to those red flickering patches in the darkness. My faith, I was sorely tempted to do it, for it would have been a good lesson to teach them that they must keep a few miles between themselves and a French army. It is the essence of good generalship, however, to keep one thing before one at a time, and so we rode silently on through the snow, leaving these Cossack bivouacs to right and left. Behind us the black sky was all mottled with a line of flame which showed where our own poor wretches were trying to keep themselves alive for another day of misery and starvation.

All night we rode slowly onward, keeping our horses' tails to the Pole Star. There were many tracks in the snow, and we kept to the line of these, that no one might remark that a body of cavalry had passed that way.

These are the little precautions which mark the experienced officer. Besides, by keeping to the tracks we were most likely to find the villages, and only in the villages could we hope to get food. The dawn of day found us in a thick fir-wood, the trees so loaded with snow that the light could hardly reach us. When we had found our way out of it it was full daylight, the rim of the rising sun peeping over the edge of the great snow-plain and turning it crimson from end to end. I halted my Hussars and Lancers under the shadow of the wood, and I studied the country. Close to us there was a small farm-house. Beyond, at the distance of several miles, was a village. Far away on the sky-line rose a considerable town all bristling with church towers. This must be Minsk. In no direction could I see any signs of troops. It was evident that we had passed through the Cossacks and that there was nothing between us and our goal. A joyous shout burst from my men when I told them our position, and we advanced rapidly toward the village.

I have said, however, that there was a small farm-house immediately in front of us. As we rode up to it I observed that a fine grey horse with a military saddle was tethered by the door. Instantly I galloped forward, but before I could reach it a man dashed out of the door, flung himself on to the horse, and rode furiously away, the crisp, dry snow flying up in a cloud behind him. The sunlight gleamed upon his gold epaulettes, and I knew that he was a Russian officer. He would raise the whole country-side if we did not catch him. I put spurs to Violette and flew after him. My troopers followed; but there was no horse among them to compare with Violette, and I knew well that if I could not catch the Russian I need expect no help from them.

But it is a swift horse indeed and a skilful rider who can hope to escape from Violette with Etienne Gerard in the saddle. He rode well, this young Russian, and his mount was a good one, but gradually we wore him down.

His face glanced continually over his shoulder — dark, handsome face, with eyes like an eagle — and I saw as I closed with him that he was measuring the distance between us. Suddenly he half turned; there were a flash and a crack as his pistol bullet hummed past my ear.

Before he could draw his sword I was upon him; but he still spurred his horse, and the two galloped together over the plain, I with my leg against the Russian's and my left hand upon his right shoulder. I saw his hand fly up to his mouth. Instantly I dragged him across my pommel and seized him by the throat, so that he could not swallow. His horse shot from under him, but I held him fast and Violette came to a stand. Sergeant Oudin of the Hussars was the first to join us. He was an old soldier, and he saw at a glance what I was after.

"Hold tight, Colonel," said he, "I'll do the rest."

He slipped out his knife, thrust the blade between the clenched teeth of the Russian, and turned it so as to force his mouth open. There, on his tongue, was the little wad of wet paper which he had been so anxious to swallow. Oudin picked it out and I let go of the man's throat. From the way in which, half strangled as he was, he glanced at the paper I was sure that it was a message of extreme importance. His hands twitched as if he longed to snatch it from me. He shrugged his shoulders, however, and smiled good-humouredly when I apologised for my roughness.

“And now to business,” said I, when he had done coughing and hawking. “What is your name?”

“Alexis Barakoff.”

“Your rank and regiment?”

“Captain of the Dragoons of Grodno.”

“What is this note which you were carrying?”

“It is a line which I had written to my sweetheart.”

“Whose name,” said I, examining the address, “is the Hetman Platoff. Come, come, sir, this is an important military document, which you are carrying from one general to another. Tell me this instant what it is.”

“Read it and then you will know.” He spoke perfect French, as do most of the educated Russians. But he knew well that there is not one French officer in a thousand who knows a word of Russian. The inside of the note contained one single line, which ran like this: —

“Pustj Franzuzy pridutt v Minsk. Min gotovy.”

I stared at it, and I had to shake my head. Then I showed it to my Hussars, but they could make nothing of it. The Poles were all rough fellows who could not read or write, save only the sergeant, who came from Memel, in East Prussia, and knew no Russian. It was maddening, for I felt that I had possession of some important secret upon which the safety of the army might depend, and yet I could make no sense of it. Again I entreated our prisoner to translate it, and offered him his freedom if he would do so. He only smiled at my request.

I could not but admire him, for it was the very smile which I should have myself smiled had I been in his position.

“At least,” said I, “tell us the name of this village.”

“It is Dobrova.”

“And that is Minsk over yonder, I suppose.”

“Yes, that is Minsk.”

“Then we shall go to the village and we shall very soon find some one who will translate this despatch.”

So we rode onward together, a trooper with his carbine unslung on either side of our prisoner. The village was but a little place, and I set a guard at the ends of the single street, so that no one could escape from it. It was necessary to call a halt and to find some food for the men and horses, since they had travelled all night and had a long journey still before them.

There was one large stone house in the centre of the village, and to this I rode. It was the house of the priest — a snuffy and ill-favoured old man who had not a civil answer to any of our questions. An uglier fellow I never met, but, my faith, it was very different with his only daughter, who kept house for him. She was a brunette, a rare thing in Russia, with creamy skin, raven hair, and a pair of the most glorious dark eyes that ever kindled at the sight of a Hussar. From the first glance I saw that she was mine. It was no time for love-making when a soldier's duty had to be done, but still, as I took the simple meal which they laid before me, I chatted lightly with the lady, and we were the best of friends before an hour had passed. Sophie was her first name, her second I never knew. I taught her to call me Etienne, and I tried to cheer her up, for her sweet face was sad and there were tears in her beautiful dark eyes. I pressed her to tell me what it was which was grieving her.

"How can I be otherwise," said she, speaking French with a most adorable lisp, "when one of my poor countrymen is a prisoner in your hands? I saw him between two of your Hussars as you rode into the village."

"It is the fortune of war," said I. "His turn to-day; mine, perhaps, to-morrow."

"But consider, Monsieur—" said she.

"Etienne," said I.

"Oh, Monsieur — —"

"Etienne," said I.

"Well, then," she cried, beautifully flushed and desperate, "consider, Etienne, that this young officer will be taken back to your army and will be starved or frozen, for if, as I hear, your own soldiers have a hard march, what will be the lot of a prisoner?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You have a kind face, Etienne," said she; "you would not condemn this poor man to certain death. I entreat you to let him go."

Her delicate hand rested upon my sleeve, her dark eyes looked imploringly into mine.

A sudden thought passed through my mind. I would grant her request, but I would demand a favour in return.

At my order the prisoner was brought up into the room.

"Captain Barakoff," said I, "this young lady has begged me to release you, and I am inclined to do so. I would ask you to give your parole that you will remain in this dwelling for twenty-four hours, and take no steps to inform anyone of our movements."

"I will do so," said he.

"Then I trust in your honour. One man more or less can make no difference in a struggle between great armies, and to take you back as a prisoner would be to condemn you to death. Depart, sir, and show your gratitude not to me, but to the first French officer who falls into your hands."

When he was gone I drew my paper from my pocket.

"Now, Sophie," said I, "I have done what you asked me, and all that I ask in return is that you will give me a lesson in Russian."

"With all my heart," said she.

"Let us begin on this," said I, spreading out the paper before her. "Let us take it word for word and see what it means."

She looked at the writing with some surprise. "It means," said she, "if the French come to Minsk all is lost." Suddenly a look of consternation passed over her beautiful face. "Great Heavens!" she cried, "what is it that I have done? I have betrayed my country! Oh, Etienne, your eyes are the last for whom this message is meant. How could you be so cunning as to make a poor, simple-minded, and unsuspecting girl betray the cause of her country?"

I consoled my poor Sophie as best I might, and I assured her that it was no reproach to her that she should be outwitted by so old a campaigner and so shrewd a man as myself. But it was no time now for talk. This message made it clear that the corn was indeed at Minsk, and that there were no troops there to defend it. I gave a hurried order from the window, the trumpeter blew the assembly, and in ten minutes we had left the village behind us and were riding hard for the city, the gilded domes and minarets of which glimmered above the snow of the horizon. Higher they rose and higher, until at last, as the sun sank toward the west, we were in the broad main street, and galloped up it amid the shouts of the moujiks and the cries of frightened women until we found ourselves in front of the great town-hall. My cavalry I drew up in the square, and I, with my two sergeants, Oudin and Papilette, rushed into the building.

Heavens! shall I ever forget the sight which greeted us? Right in front of us was drawn up a triple line of Russian Grenadiers. Their muskets rose as we entered, and a crashing volley burst into our very faces. Oudin and Papilette dropped upon the floor, riddled with bullets.

For myself, my busby was shot away and I had two holes through my dolman. The Grenadiers ran at me with their bayonets. “Treason!” I cried. “We are betrayed! Stand to your horses!” I rushed out of the hall, but the whole square was swarming with troops.

From every side street Dragoons and Cossacks were riding down upon us, and such a rolling fire had burst from the surrounding houses that half my men and horses were on the ground. “Follow me!” I yelled, and sprang upon Violette, but a giant of a Russian Dragoon officer threw his arms round me and we rolled on the ground together.

He shortened his sword to kill me, but, changing his mind, he seized me by the throat and banged my head against the stones until I was unconscious. So it was that I became the prisoner of the Russians.

When I came to myself my only regret was that my captor had not beaten out my brains. There in the grand square of Minsk lay half my troopers dead or wounded, with exultant crowds of Russians gathered round them.

The rest in a melancholy group were herded into the porch of the town-hall, a sotnia of Cossacks keeping guard over them. Alas! what could I say, what could I do? It was evident that I had led my men into a carefully-baited trap. They had heard of our mission and they had prepared for us. And yet there was that despatch which had caused me to neglect all precautions and to ride straight into the town. How was I to account for that? The tears ran down my cheeks as I surveyed the ruin of my squadron, and as I thought of the plight of my comrades of the Grand Army who awaited the food which I was to have brought them. Ney had trusted me and I had failed him. How often he would strain his eyes over the snow-fields for that convoy of grain which should never gladden his sight! My own fate was hard enough. An exile in Siberia was the best which the future could bring me. But you will believe me, my friends, that it was not for his own sake, but for that of his starving comrades, that Etienne Gerard’s cheeks were lined by his tears, frozen even as they were shed.

“What’s this?” said a gruff voice at my elbow; and I turned to face the huge, black-bearded Dragoon who had dragged me from my saddle. “Look at the Frenchman crying! I thought that the Corsican was followed by brave men and not by children.”

“If you and I were face to face and alone, I should let you see which is the better man,” said I.

For answer the brute struck me across the face with his open hand. I seized him by the throat, but a dozen of his soldiers tore me away from him, and he struck me again while they held my hands.

“You base hound,” I cried, “is this the way to treat an officer and a gentleman?”

“We never asked you to come to Russia,” said he. “If you do you must take such treatment as you can get. I would shoot you off-hand if I had my way.”

“You will answer for this some day,” I cried, as I wiped the blood from my moustache.

“If the Hetman Platoff is of my way of thinking you will not be alive this time to-morrow,” he answered, with a ferocious scowl. He added some words in Russian to his troops, and instantly they all sprang to their saddles.

Poor Violette, looking as miserable as her master, was led round and I was told to mount her. My left arm was tied with a thong which was fastened to the stirrup-iron of a sergeant of Dragoons. So in most sorry plight I and the remnant of my men set forth from Minsk.

Never have I met such a brute as this man Sergine, who commanded the escort. The Russian army contains the best and the worst in the world, but a worse than Major Sergine of the Dragoons of Kieff I have never seen in any force outside of the guerillas of the Peninsula.

He was a man of great stature, with a fierce, hard face and a bristling black beard, which fell over his cuirass.

I have been told since that he was noted for his strength and his bravery, and I could answer for it that he had the grip of a bear, for I had felt it when he tore me from my saddle. He was a wit, too, in his way, and made continual remarks in Russian at our expense which set all his Dragoons and Cossacks laughing. Twice he beat my comrades with his riding-whip, and once he approached me with the lash swung over his shoulder, but there was something in my eyes which prevented it from falling.

So in misery and humiliation, cold and starving, we rode in a disconsolate column across the vast snow-plain. The sun had sunk, but still in the long northern twilight we pursued our weary journey. Numbed and frozen, with my head aching from the blows it had received, I was borne onward by Violette, hardly conscious of where I was or whither I was going. The little mare walked with a sunken head, only raising it to snort her contempt for the mangy Cossack ponies who were round her.

But suddenly the escort stopped, and I found that we had halted in the single street of a small Russian village.

There was a church on one side, and on the other was a large stone house, the outline of which seemed to me to be familiar. I looked around me in the twilight, and then I saw that we had been led back to Dobrova, and that this house at the door of which we were waiting was the same house of the priest at which we had stopped in the morning. Here it was that my charming Sophie in her innocence had translated the unlucky message which had in some strange way led us to our ruin. To think that only a few hours before we had left this very spot with such high hopes and all fair prospects for our mission, and now the remnants of us waited as beaten and humiliated men for whatever lot a brutal enemy might ordain! But such is the fate of the soldier, my friends — kisses to-day, blows to-morrow. Tokay in a palace, ditch-water in a hovel, furs or rags, a full purse or an empty pocket, ever swaying from the best to the worst, with only his courage and his honour unchanging.

The Russian horsemen dismounted, and my poor fellows were ordered to do the same. It was already late, and it was clearly their intention to spend the night in this village. There were great cheering and joy amongst the peasants when they understood that we had all been taken, and they flocked out of their houses with flaming torches, the women carrying out tea and brandy for the Cossacks. Amongst others the old priest came forth — the same whom we had seen in the morning. He was all smiles now, and he bore with him some hot punch on a salver, the reek of which I can remember still. Behind her father was Sophie. With horror I saw her clasp Major Sergine’s hand as she congratulated him upon the victory he had won and the prisoners he had made. The old priest, her father, looked at me with an insolent face and made insulting remarks at my expense, pointing at me with his lean and grimy hand. His fair daughter Sophie looked at me also, but she said nothing, and I could read her tender pity in her dark eyes. At last she turned to Major Sergine and said something to him in Russian, on which he frowned and shook his head impatiently.

She appeared to plead with him, standing there in the flood of light which shone from the open door of her father’s house. My eyes were fixed upon the two faces, that of the beautiful girl and of the dark, fierce man, for my instinct told me that it was my own fate which was under debate. For a long time the soldier shook his head, and then, at last softening before her pleadings, he appeared to give way. He turned to where I stood with my guardian sergeant beside me.

“These good people offer you the shelter of their roof for the night,” said he to me, looking me up and down with vindictive eyes. “I find it hard to refuse them, but I tell you straight that for my part I had rather see you on the snow. It would cool your hot blood, you rascal of a Frenchman!”

I looked at him with the contempt that I felt.

“You were born a savage and you will die one,” said I.

My words stung him, for he broke into an oath, raising his whip as if he would strike me.

“Silence, you crop-eared dog!” he cried. “Had I my way some of the insolence would be frozen out of you before morning.” Mastering his passion, he turned upon Sophie with what he meant to be a gallant manner. “If you have a cellar with a good lock,” said he, “the fellow may lie in it for the night, since you have done him the honour to take an interest in his comfort. I must have his parole that he will not attempt to play us any tricks, as I am answerable for him until I hand him over to the Hetman Platoff to-morrow.”

His supercilious manner was more than I could endure.

He had evidently spoken French to the lady in order that I might understand the humiliating way in which he referred to me.

“I will take no favour from you,” said I. “You may do what you like, but I will never give you my parole.”

The Russian shrugged his great shoulders, and turned away as if the matter were ended.

“Very well, my fine fellow, so much the worse for your fingers and toes. We shall see how you are in the morning after a night in the snow.”

“One moment, Major Sergine,” cried Sophie. “You must not be so hard upon this prisoner. There are some special reasons why he has a claim upon our kindness and mercy.”

The Russian looked with suspicion upon his face from her to me.

“What are the special reasons? You certainly seem to take a remarkable interest in this Frenchman,” said he.

“The chief reason is that he has this very morning of his own accord released Captain Alexis Barakoff, of the Dragoons of Grodno.”

“It is true,” said Barakoff, who had come out of the house. “He captured me this morning, and he released me upon parole rather than take me back to the French army, where I should have been starved.”

“Since Colonel Gerard has acted so generously you will surely, now that fortune has changed, allow us to offer him the poor shelter of our cellar upon this bitter night,” said Sophie. “It is a small return for his generosity.”

But the Dragoon was still in the sulks.

“Let him give me his parole first that he will not attempt to escape,” said he. “Do you hear, sir? Do you give me your parole?”

“I give you nothing,” said I.

“Colonel Gerard,” cried Sophie, turning to me with a coaxing smile, “you will give me your parole, will you not?”

“To you, mademoiselle, I can refuse nothing. I will give you my parole, with pleasure.”

“There, Major Sergine,” cried Sophie, in triumph, “that is surely sufficient. You have heard him say that he gives me his parole. I will be answerable for his safety.”

In an ungracious fashion my Russian bear grunted his consent, and so I was led into the house, followed by the scowling father and by the big, black-bearded Dragoon. In the basement there was a large and roomy chamber, where the winter logs were stored. Thither it was that I was led, and I was given to understand that this was to be my lodging for the night. One side of this bleak apartment was heaped up to the ceiling with fagots of firewood. The rest of the room was stone-flagged and bare-walled, with a single, deep-set window upon one side, which was safely guarded with iron bars. For light I had a large stable lantern, which swung from a beam of the low ceiling. Major Sergine smiled as he took this down, and swung it round so as to throw its light into every corner of that dreary chamber.

“How do you like our Russian hotels, monsieur?” he asked, with his hateful sneer. “They are not very grand, but they are the best that we can give you. Perhaps the next time that you Frenchmen take a fancy to travel you will choose some other country where they will make you more comfortable." He stood laughing at me, his white teeth gleaming through his beard. Then he left me, and I heard the great key creak in the lock.

For an hour of utter misery, chilled in body and soul, I sat upon a pile of fagots, my face sunk upon my hands and my mind full of the saddest thoughts. It was cold enough within those four walls, but I thought of the sufferings of my poor troopers outside, and I sorrowed with their sorrow. Then. I paced up and down, and I clapped my hands together and kicked my feet against the walls to keep them from being frozen. The lamp gave out some warmth, but still it was bitterly cold, and I had had no food since morning. It seemed to me that everyone had forgotten me, but at last I heard the key turn in the lock, and who should enter but my prisoner of the morning, Captain Alexis Barakoff. A bottle of wine projected from under his arm, and he carried a great plate of hot stew in front of him.

"Hush!" said he; "not a word! Keep up your heart! I cannot stop to explain, for Sergine is still with us. Keep awake and ready!" With these hurried words he laid down the welcome food and ran out of the room.

"Keep awake and ready!" The words rang in my ears. I ate my food and I drank my wine, but it was neither food nor wine which had warmed the heart within me. What could those words of Barakoff mean?

Why was I to remain awake? For what was I to be ready? Was it possible that there was a chance yet of escape? I have never respected the man who neglects his prayers at all other times and yet prays when he is in peril. It is like a bad soldier who pays no respect to the colonel save when he would demand a favour of him. And yet when I thought of the salt-mines of Siberia on the one side and of my mother in France upon the other, I could not help a prayer rising, not from my lips, but from my heart, that the words of Barakoff might mean all that I hoped. But hour after hour struck upon the village clock, and still I heard nothing save the call of the Russian sentries in the street outside.

Then at last my heart leaped within me, for I heard a light step in the passage. An instant later the key turned, the door opened, and Sophie was in the room.

"Monsieur—" she cried.

"Etienne," said I.

"Nothing will change you," said she. "But is it possible that you do not hate me? Have you forgiven me the trick which I played you?"

"What trick?" I asked.

“Good heavens! Is it possible that even now you have not understood it? You have asked me to translate the despatch. I have told you that it meant, ‘If the French come to Minsk all is lost.’”

“What did it mean, then?”

“It means, ‘Let the French come to Minsk. We are awaiting them.”’

I sprang back from her.

“You betrayed me!” I cried. “You lured me into this trap. It is to you that I owe the death and capture of my men. Fool that I was to trust a woman!”

“Do not be unjust, Colonel Gerard. I am a Russian woman, and my first duty is to my country. Would you not wish a French girl to have acted as I have done? Had I translated the message correctly you would not have gone to Minsk and your squadron would have escaped. Tell me that you forgive me!”

She looked bewitching as she stood pleading her cause in front of me. And yet, as I thought of my dead men, I could not take the hand which she held out to me.

“Very good,” said she, as she dropped it by her side.

“You feel for your own people and I feel for mine, and so we are equal. But you have said one wise and kindly thing within these walls, Colonel Gerard. You have said, ‘One man more or less can make no difference in a struggle between two great armies.’ Your lesson of nobility is not wasted. Behind those fagots is an unguarded door. Here is the key to it. Go forth, Colonel Gerard, and I trust that we may never look upon each other’s faces again.”

I stood for an instant with the key in my hand and my head in a whirl. Then I handed it back to her.

“I cannot do it,” I said.

“Why not?”

“I have given my parole.”

“To whom?” she asked.

“Why, to you.”

“And I release you from it.”

My heart bounded with joy. Of course, it was true what she said. I had refused to give my parole to Sergine. I owed him no duty. If she relieved me from my promise my honour was clear. I took the key from her hand.

“You will find Captain Barakoff at the end of the village street,” said she. “We of the North never forget either an injury or a kindness. He has your mare and your sword waiting for you. Do not delay an instant, for in two hours it will be dawn."

So I passed out into the star-lit Russian night, and had that last glimpse of Sophie as she peered after me through the open door. She looked wistfully at me as if she expected something more than the cold thanks which I gave her, but even the humblest man has his pride, and I will not deny that mine was hurt by the deception which she had played upon me. I could not have brought myself to kiss her hand, far less her lips. The door led into a narrow alley, and at the end of it stood a muffled figure, who held Violette by the bridle.

"You told me to be kind to the next French officer whom I found in distress," said he. "Good luck! Bon voyage!" he whispered, as I bounded into the saddle.

"Remember, 'Poltava' is the watchword."

It was well that he had given it to me, for twice I had to pass Cossack pickets before I was clear of the lines.

I had just ridden past the last vedettes and hoped that I was a free man again, when there was a soft thudding in the snow behind me, and a heavy man upon a great black horse came swiftly after me. My first impulse was to put spurs to Violette. My second, as I saw a long black beard against a steel cuirass, was to halt and await him.

"I thought that it was you, you dog of a Frenchman," he cried, shaking his drawn sword at me. "So you have broken your parole, you rascal!"

"I gave no parole."

"You lie, you hound!"

I looked around and no one was coming. The vedettes were motionless and distant. We were all alone, with the moon above and the snow beneath. Fortune has ever been my friend.

"I gave you no parole."

"You gave it to the lady."

"Then I will answer for it to the lady."

"That would suit you better, no doubt. But, unfortunately, you will have to answer for it to me."

"I am ready."

"Your sword, too! There is treason in this! Ah, I see it all! The woman has helped you. She shall see Siberia for this night's work."

The words were his death-warrant. For Sophie’s sake I could not let him go back alive. Our blades crossed, and an instant later mine was through his black beard and deep in his throat. I was on the ground almost as soon as he, but the one thrust was enough. He died, snapping his teeth at my ankles like a savage wolf.

Two days later I had rejoined the army at Smolensk, and was a part once more of that dreary procession which tramped onward through the snow, leaving a long weal of blood to show the path which it had taken.

Enough, my friends; I would not re-awaken the memory of those days of misery and death. They still come to haunt me in my dreams. When we halted at last in Warsaw we had left behind us our guns, our transport, and three-fourths of our comrades. But we did not leave behind us the honour of Etienne Gerard. They have said that I broke my parole. Let them beware how they say it to my face, for the story is as I tell it, and old as I am my forefinger is not too weak to press a trigger when my honour is in question.

How the Brigadier Bore Himself at Waterloo

I. THE STORY OF THE FOREST INN

Of all the great battles in which I had the honour of drawing my sword for the Emperor and for France there was not one which was lost. At Waterloo, although, in a sense, I was present, I was unable to fight, and the enemy was victorious. It is not for me to say that there is a connection between these two things. You know me too well, my friends, to imagine that I would make such a claim. But it gives matter for thought, and some have drawn flattering conclusions from it.

After all, it was only a matter of breaking a few English squares and the day would have been our own. If the Hussars of Conflans, with Etienne Gerard to lead them, could not do this, then the best judges are mistaken.

But let that pass. The Fates had ordained that I should hold my hand and that the Empire should fall. But they had also ordained that this day of gloom and sorrow should bring such honour to me as had never come when I swept on the wings of victory from Boulogne to Vienna.

Never had I burned so brilliantly as at that supreme moment when the darkness fell upon all around me. You are aware that I was faithful to the Emperor in his adversity, and that I refused to sell my sword and my honour to the Bourbons. Never again was I to feel my war horse between my knees, never again to hear the kettledrums and silver trumpets behind me as I rode in front of my little rascals. But it comforts my heart, my friends, and it brings the tears to my eyes, to think how great I was upon that last day of my soldier life, and to remember that of all the remarkable exploits which have won me the love of so many beautiful women, and the respect of so many noble men, there was none which, in splendour, in audacity, and in the great end which was attained, could compare with my famous ride upon the night of June 18th, 1815. I am aware that the story is often told at mess-tables and in barrack-rooms, so that there are few in the army who have not heard it, but modesty has sealed my lips, until now, my friends, in the privacy of these intimate gatherings, I am inclined to lay the true facts before you.

In the first place, there is one thing which I can assure you. In all his career Napoleon never had so splendid an army as that with which he took the field for that campaign. In 1813 France was exhausted. For every veteran there were five children — Marie Louises, as we called them; for the Empress had busied herself in raising levies while the Emperor took the field. But it was very different in 1815. The prisoners had all come back — the men from the snows of Russia, the men from the dungeons of Spain, the men from the hulks in England.

These were the dangerous men, veterans of twenty battles, longing for their old trade, and with hearts filled with hatred and revenge. The ranks were full of soldiers who wore two and three chevrons, every chevron meaning five years' service. And the spirit of these men was terrible. They were raging, furious, fanatical, adoring the Emperor as a Mameluke does his prophet, ready to fall upon their own bayonets if their blood could serve him. If you had seen these fierce old veterans going into battle, with their flushed faces, their savage eyes, their furious yells, you would wonder that anything could stand against them. So high was the spirit of France at that time that every other spirit would have quailed before it; but these people, these English, had neither spirit nor soul, but only solid, immovable beef, against which we broke ourselves in vain. That was it, my friends! On the one side, poetry, gallantry, self-sacrifice — all that is beautiful and heroic. On the other side, beef. Our hopes, our ideals, our dreams — all were shattered on that terrible beef of Old England.

You have read how the Emperor gathered his forces, and then how he and I, with a hundred and thirty thousand veterans, hurried to the northern frontier and fell upon the Prussians and the English. On the 16th of June, Ney held the English in play at Quatre-Bras while we beat the Prussians at Ligny. It is not for me to say how far I contributed to that victory, but it is well known that the Hussars of Conflans covered themselves with glory. They fought well, these Prussians, and eight thousand of them were left upon the field. The Emperor thought that he had done with them, as he sent Marshal Grouchy with thirty-two thousand men to follow them up and to prevent their interfering with his plans. Then with nearly eighty thousand men, he turned upon these "Goddam" Englishmen. How much we had to avenge upon them, we Frenchmen — the guineas of Pitt, the hulks of Portsmouth, the invasion of Wellington, the perfidious victories of Nelson! At last the day of punishment seemed to have arisen.

Wellington had with him sixty-seven thousand men, but many of them were known to be Dutch and Belgian, who had no great desire to fight against us. Of good troops he had not fifty thousand. Finding himself in the presence of the Emperor in person with eighty thousand men, this Englishman was so paralysed with fear that he could neither move himself nor his army. You have seen the rabbit when the snake approaches. So stood the English upon the ridge of Waterloo. The night before, the Emperor, who had lost an aide-de-camp at Ligny, ordered me to join his staff, and I had left my Hussars to the charge of Major Victor. I know not which of us was the most grieved, they or I, that I should be called away upon the eve of battle, but an order is an order, and a good soldier can but shrug his shoulders and obey. With the Emperor I rode across the front of the enemy's position on the morning of the 18th, he looking at them through his glass and planning which was the shortest way to destroy them. Soult was at his elbow, and Ney and Foy and others who had fought the English in Portugal and Spain. "Have a care, Sire," said Soult. "The English infantry is very solid."

"You think them good soldiers because they have beaten you," said the Emperor, and we younger men turned away our faces and smiled. But Ney and Foy were grave and serious. All the time the English line, chequered with red and blue and dotted with batteries, was drawn up silent and watchful within a long musket-shot of us. On the other side of the shallow valley our own people, having finished their soup, were assembling for the battle. It had rained very heavily, but at this moment the sun shone out and beat upon the French army, turning our brigades of cavalry into so many dazzling rivers of steel, and twinkling and sparkling on the innumerable bayonets of the infantry. At the sight of that splendid army, and the beauty and majesty of its appearance, I could contain myself no longer, but, rising in my stirrups, I waved my busby and cried, "Vive l'Empereur!" a shout which growled and roared and clattered from one end of the line to the other, while the horsemen waved their swords and the footmen held up their shakos upon their bayonets. The English remained petrified upon their ridge. They knew that their hour had come.

And so it would have come if at that moment the word had been given and the whole army had been permitted to advance. We had but to fall upon them and to sweep them from the face of the earth. To put aside all question of courage, we were the more numerous, the older soldiers, and the better led. But the Emperor desired to do all things in order, and he waited until the ground should be drier and harder, so that his artillery could manoeuvre.

So three hours were wasted, and it was eleven o'clock before we saw Jerome Buonaparte's columns advance upon our left and heard the crash of the guns which told that the battle had begun. The loss of those three hours was our destruction. The attack upon the left was directed upon a farmhouse which was held by the English Guards, and we heard the three loud shouts of apprehension which the defenders were compelled to utter. They were still holding out, and D'Erlon's corps was advancing upon the right to engage another portion of the English line, when our attention was called away from the battle beneath our noses to a distant portion of the field of action.

The Emperor had been looking through his glass to the extreme left of the English line, and now he turned suddenly to the Duke of Dalmatia, or Soult, as we soldiers preferred to call him.

"What is it, Marshal?" said he.

We all followed the direction of his gaze, some raising our glasses, some shading our eyes. There was a thick wood over yonder, then a long, bare slope, and another wood beyond. Over this bare strip between the two woods there lay something dark, like the shadow of a moving cloud.

"I think that they are cattle, Sire," said Soult.

At that instant there came a quick twinkle from amid the dark shadow.

"It is Grouchy," said the Emperor, and he lowered his glass. "They are doubly lost, these English. I hold them in the hollow of my hand. They cannot escape me."

He looked round, and his eyes fell upon me.

"Ah! here is the prince of messengers," said he. "Are you well mounted, Colonel Gerard?"

I was riding my little Violette, the pride of the brigade.

I said so.

"Then ride hard to Marshal Grouchy, whose troops you see over yonder. Tell him that he is to fall upon the left flank and rear of the English while I attack them in front. Together we should crush them and not a man escape."

I saluted and rode off without a word, my heart dancing with joy that such a mission should be mine. I looked at that long, solid line of red and blue looming through the smoke of the guns, and I shook my fist at it as I went. "We shall crush them and not a man escape."

They were the Emperor's words, and it was I, Etienne Gerard, who was to turn them into deeds. I burned to reach the Marshal, and for an instant I thought of riding through the English left wing, as being the shortest cut. I have done bolder deeds and come out safely, but I reflected that if things went badly with me and I was taken or shot the message would be lost and the plans of the Emperor miscarry. I passed in front of the cavalry, therefore, past the Chasseurs, the Lancers of the Guard, the Carabineers, the Horse Grenadiers, and, lastly, my own little rascals, who followed me wistfully with their eyes. Beyond the cavalry the Old Guard was standing, twelve regiments of them, all veterans of many battles, sombre and severe, in long blue overcoats and high bearskins from which the plumes had been removed. Each bore within the goatskin knapsack upon his back the blue and white parade uniform which they would use for their entry into Brussels next day. As I rode past them I reflected that these men had never been beaten, and as I looked at their weather-beaten faces and their stern and silent bearing, I said to myself that they never would be beaten. Great heavens, how little could I foresee what a few more hours would bring!

On the right of the Old Guard were the Young Guard and the 6th Corps of Lobau, and then I passed Jacquinot’s Lancers and Marbot’s Hussars, who held the extreme flank of the line. All these troops knew nothing of the corps which was coming toward them through the wood, and their attention was taken up in watching the battle which raged upon their left. More than a hundred guns were thundering from each side, and the din was so great that of all the battles which I have fought I cannot recall more than half-a-dozen which were as noisy. I looked back over my shoulder, and there were two brigades of Cuirassiers, English and French, pouring down the hill together, with the sword-blades playing over them like summer lightning. How I longed to turn Violette, and to lead my Hussars into the thick of it! What a picture! Etienne Gerard with his back to the battle, and a fine cavalry action raging behind him.

But duty is duty, so I rode past Marbot’s vedettes and on in the direction of the wood, passing the village of Frishermont upon my left.

In front of me lay the great wood, called the Wood of Paris, consisting mostly of oak trees, with a few narrow paths leading through it. I halted and listened when I reached it, but out of its gloomy depths there came no blare of trumpet, no murmur of wheels, no tramp of horses to mark the advance of that great column which, with my own eyes, I had seen streaming toward it. The battle roared behind me, but in front all was as silent as that grave in which so many brave men would shortly sleep. The sunlight was cut off by the arches of leaves above my head, and a heavy damp smell rose from the sodden ground. For several miles I galloped at such a pace as few riders would care to go with roots below and branches above. Then, at last, for the first time I caught a glimpse of Grouchy's advance guard. Scattered parties of Hussars passed me on either side, but some distance off, among the trees. I heard the beating of a drum far away, and the low, dull murmur which an army makes upon the march. Any moment I might come upon the staff and deliver my message to Grouchy in person, for I knew well that on such a march a Marshal of France would certainly ride with the van of his army.

Suddenly the trees thinned in front of me, and I understood with delight that I was coming to the end of the wood? whence I could see the army and find the Marshal.

Where the track comes out from amid the trees there is a small cabaret, where wood-cutters and waggoners drink their wine. Outside the door of this I reined up my horse for an instant while I took in the scene which was before me. Some few miles away I saw a second great forest, that of St. Lambert, out of which the Emperor had seen the troops advancing. It was easy to see, however, why there had been so long a delay in their leaving one wood and reaching the other, because between the two ran the deep defile of the Lasnes, which had to be crossed. Sure enough, a long column of troops — horse, foot, and guns — was streaming down one side of it and swarming up the other, while the advance guard was already among the trees on either side of me. A battery of Horse Artillery was coming along the road, and I was about to gallop up to it and ask the officer in command if he could tell me where I should find the Marshal, when suddenly I observed that, though the gunners were dressed in blue, they had not the dolman trimmed with red brandenburgs as our own horse-gunners wear it. Amazed at the sight, I was looking at these soldiers to left and right when a hand touched my thigh, and there was the landlord, who had rushed from his inn.

"Madman!" he cried, "why are you here? What are you doing?"

"I am seeking Marshal Grouchy."

"You are in the heart of the Prussian army. Turn and fly!"

"Impossible; this is Grouchy's corps."

"How do you know?"

"Because the Emperor has said it."

"Then the Emperor has made a terrible mistake! I tell you that a patrol of Silesian Hussars has this instant left me. Did you not see them in the wood?"

"I saw Hussars."

"They are the enemy."

"Where is Grouchy?"

"He is behind. They have passed him."

"Then how can I go back? If I go forward I may see him yet. I must obey my orders and find him whereever he is."

The man reflected for an instant.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, seizing my bridle. "Do what I say and you may yet escape. They have not observed you yet. Come with me and I will hide you until they pass."

Behind his house there was a low stable, and into this he thrust Violette. Then he half led and half dragged me into the kitchen of the inn. It was a bare, brick-floored room. A stout, red-faced woman was cooking cutlets at the fire.

"What's the matter now?" she asked, looking with a frown from me to the innkeeper. "Who is this you have brought in?"

"It is a French officer, Marie. We cannot let the Prussians take him."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Sacred name of a dog, was I not myself a soldier of Napoleon? Did I not win a musket of honour among the Velites of the Guard? Shall I see a comrade taken before my eyes? Marie, we must save him." But the lady looked at me with most unfriendly eyes.

"Pierre Charras," she said, "you will not rest until you have your house burned over your head. Do you not understand, you blockhead, that if you fought for Napoleon it was because Napoleon ruled Belgium? He does so no longer. The Prussians are our allies and this is our enemy. I will have no Frenchman in this house. Give him up!"

The innkeeper scratched his head and looked at me in despair, but it was very evident to me that it was neither for France nor for Belgium that this woman cared, but that it was the safety of her own house that was nearest her heart.

"Madame," said I, with all the dignity and assurance I could command, "the Emperor is defeating the English, and the French army will be here before evening. If you have used me well you will be rewarded, and if you have denounced me you will be punished and your house will certainly be burned by the provost-martial."

She was shaken by this, and I hastened to complete my victory by other methods.

"Surely," said I, "it is impossible that anyone so beautiful can also be hard-hearted? You will not refuse me the refuge which I need."

She looked at my whiskers and I saw that she was softened. I took her hand, and in two minutes we were on such terms that her husband swore roundly that he would give me up himself if I pressed the matter farther.

"Besides, the road is full of Prussians," he cried.

"Quick! quick! into the loft!"

"Quick! quick! into the loft!" echoed his wife, and together they hurried me toward a ladder which led to a trap-door in the ceiling. There was loud knocking at the door, so you can think that it was not long before my spurs went twinkling through the hole and the board was dropped behind me. An instant later I heard the voices of the Germans in the rooms below me.

The place in which I found myself was a single long attic, the ceiling of which was formed by the roof of the house. It ran over the whole of one side of the inn, and through the cracks in the flooring I could look down either upon the kitchen, the sitting-room, or the bar at my pleasure. There were no windows, but the place was in the last stage of disrepair, and several missing slates upon the roof gave me light and the means of observation.

The place was heaped with lumber-fodder at one end and a huge pile of empty bottles at the other. There was no door or window save the hole through which I had come up.

I sat upon the heap of hay for a few minutes to steady myself and to think out my plans. It was very serious that the Prussians should arrive upon the field of battle earlier than our reserves, but there appeared to be only one corps of them, and a corps more or less makes little difference to such a man as the Emperor. He could afford to give the English all this and beat them still.

The best way in which I could serve him, since Grouchy was behind, was to wait here until they were past, and then to resume my journey, to see the Marshal, and to give him his orders. If he advanced upon the rear of the English instead of following the Prussians all would be well. The fate of France depended upon my judgment and my nerve. It was not the first time, my friends, as you are well aware, and you know the reasons that I had to trust that neither nerve nor judgment would ever fail me. Certainly, the Emperor had chosen the right man for his mission. “The prince of messengers” he had called me. I would earn my title.

It was clear that I could do nothing until the Prussians had passed, so I spent my time in observing them. I have no love for these people, but I am compelled to say that they kept excellent discipline, for not a man of them entered the inn, though their lips were caked with dust and they were ready to drop with fatigue. Those who had knocked at the door were bearing an insensible comrade, and having left him they returned at once to the ranks. Several others were carried in in the same fashion and laid in the kitchen, while a young surgeon, little more than a boy, remained behind in charge of them.

Having observed them through the cracks in the floor, I next turned my attention to the holes in the roof, from which I had an excellent view of all that was passing outside. The Prussian corps was still streaming past. It was easy to see that they had made a terrible march and had little food, for the faces of the men were ghastly, and they were plastered from head to foot with mud from their falls upon the foul and slippery roads. Yet, spent as they were, their spirit was excellent, and they pushed and hauled at the gun-carriages when the wheels sank up to the axles in the mire, and the weary horses were floundering knee-deep unable to draw them through.

The officers rode up and down the column encouraging the more active with words of praise, and the laggards with blows from the flat of their swords. All the time from over the wood in front of them there came the tremendous roar of the battle, as if all the rivers on earth had united in one gigantic cataract, booming and crashing in a mighty fall. Like the spray of the cataract was the long veil of smoke which rose high over the trees.

The officers pointed to it with their swords, and with hoarse cries from their parched lips the mud-stained men pushed onward to the battle. For an hour I watched them pass, and I reflected that their vanguard must have come into touch with Marbot’s vedettes and that the Emperor knew already of their coming. “You are going very fast up the road, my friends, but you will come down it a great deal faster,” said I to myself, and I consoled myself with the thought.

But an adventure came to break the monotony of this long wait. I was seated beside my loophole and congratulating myself that the corps was nearly past, and that the road would soon be clear for my journey, when suddenly I heard a loud altercation break out in French in the kitchen.

“You shall not go!” cried a woman’s voice.

“I tell you that I will!” said a man’s, and there was a sound of scuffling.

In an instant I had my eye to the crack in the floor.

There was my stout lady, like a faithful watch-dog, at the bottom of the ladder, while the young German surgeon, white with anger, was endeavouring to come up it.

Several of the German soldiers who had recovered from their prostration were sitting about on the kitchen floor and watching the quarrel with stolid, but attentive, faces.

The landlord was nowhere to be seen.

“There is no liquor there,” said the woman.

“I do not want liquor; I want hay or straw for these men to lie upon. Why should they lie on the bricks when there is straw overhead?”

“There is no straw.”

“What is up there?”

“Empty bottles.”

“Nothing else?”

“No.”

For a moment it looked as if the surgeon would abandon his intention, but one of the soldiers pointed up to the ceiling. I gathered from what I could understand of his words that he could see the straw sticking out between the planks. In vain the woman protested. Two of the soldiers were able to get upon their feet and to drag her aside, while the young surgeon ran up the ladder, pushed open the trap-door, and climbed into the loft.

As he swung the door back I slipped behind it, but as luck would have it he shut it again behind him, and there we were left standing face to face.

Never have I seen a more astonished young man.

“A French officer!” he gasped.

“Hush!” said I, “hush! Not a word above a whisper.”

I had drawn my sword.

“I am not a combatant,” he said; “I am a doctor. Why do you threaten me with your sword? I am not armed.”

“I do not wish to hurt you, but I must protect myself. I am in hiding here.”

“A spy!”

"A spy does not wear such a uniform as this, nor do you find spies on the staff of an army. I rode by mistake into the heart of this Prussian corps, and I concealed myself here in the hope of escaping when they are past. I will not hurt you if you do not hurt me, but if you do not swear that you will be silent as to my presence you will never go down alive from this attic."

"You can put up your sword, sir," said the surgeon, and I saw a friendly twinkle in his eyes. "I am a Pole by birth, and I have no ill-feeling to you or your people. I will do my best for my patients, but I will do no more. Capturing Hussars is not one of the duties of a surgeon. With your permission I will now descend with this truss of hay to make a couch for these poor fellows below."

I had intended to exact an oath from him, but it is my experience that if a man will not speak the truth he will not swear the truth, so I said no more. The surgeon opened the trap-door, threw out enough hay for his purpose, and then descended the ladder, letting down the door behind him. I watched him anxiously when he rejoined his patients, and so did my good friend the landlady, but he said nothing and busied himself with the needs of his soldiers.

By this time I was sure that the last of the army corps was past, and I went to my loophole confident that I should find the coast clear, save, perhaps, for a few stragglers, whom I could disregard. The first corps was indeed past, and I could see the last files of the infantry disappearing into the wood; but you can imagine my disappointment when out of the Forest of St. Lambert I saw a second corps emerging, as numerous as the first.

There could be no doubt that the whole Prussian army, which we thought we had destroyed at Ligny, was about to throw itself upon our right wing while Marshal Grouchy had been coaxed away upon some fool's errand.

The roar of guns, much nearer than before, told me that the Prussian batteries which had passed me were already in action. Imagine my terrible position! Hour after hour was passing; the sun was sinking toward the west.

And yet this cursed inn, in which I lay hid, was like a little island amid a rushing stream of furious Prussians.

It was all important that I should reach Marshal Grouchy, and yet I could not show my nose without being made prisoner. You can think how I cursed and tore my hair. How little do we know what is in store for us!

Even while I raged against my ill-fortune, that same fortune was reserving me for a far higher task than to carry a message to Grouchy — a task which could not have been mine had I not been held tight in that little inn on the edge of the Forest of Paris.

Two Prussian corps had passed and a third was coming up, when I heard a great fuss and the sound of several voices in the sitting-room. By altering my position I was able to look down and see what was going on.

Two Prussian generals were beneath me, their heads bent over a map which lay upon the table. Several aides-de-camp and staff officers stood round in silence. Of the two generals, one was a fierce old man, white-haired and wrinkled, with a ragged, grizzled moustache and a voice like the bark of a hound. The other was younger, but long-faced and solemn. He measured distances upon the map with the air of a student, while his companion stamped and fumed and cursed like a corporal of Hussars. It was strange to see the old man so fiery and the young one so reserved. I could not understand all that they said, but I was very sure about their general meaning.

“I tell you we must push on and ever on!” cried the old fellow, with a furious German oath. “I promised Wellington that I would be there with the whole army even if I had to be strapped to my horse. Bulow’s corps is in action, and Ziethen’s shall support it with every man and gun. Forward, Gneisenau, forward!”

The other shook his head.

“You must remember, your Excellency, that if the English are beaten they will make for the coast. What will your position be then, with Grouchy between you and the Rhine?”

“We shall beat them, Gneisenau; the Duke and I will grind them to powder between us. Push on, I say! The whole war will be ended in one blow. Bring Pirsch up, and we can throw sixty thousand men into the scale while Thielmann holds Grouchy beyond Wavre.”

Gneisenau shrugged his shoulders, but at that instant an orderly appeared at the door.

“An aide-de-camp from the Duke of Wellington,” said he.

“Ha, ha!” cried the old man; “let us hear what he has to say!”

An English officer, with mud and blood all over his scarlet jacket, staggered into the room. A crimson-stained handkerchief was knotted round his arm, and he held the table to keep himself from falling.

“My message is to Marshal Blucher,” said he;

“I am Marshal Blucher. Go on! go on!” cried the impatient old man.

“The Duke bade me to tell you, sir, that the British Army can hold its own and that he has no fears for the result. The French cavalry has been destroyed, two of their divisions of infantry have ceased to exist, and only the Guard is in reserve. If you give us a vigorous support the defeat will be changed to absolute rout and—” His knees gave way under him and he fell in a heap upon the floor.

“Enough! enough!” cried Blucher. “Gneisenau, send an aide-de-camp to Wellington and tell him to rely upon me to the full. Come on, gentlemen, we have our work to do!” He bustled eagerly out of the room with all his staff clanking behind him, while two orderlies carried the English messenger to the care of the surgeon.

Gneisenau, the Chief of the Staff, had lingered behind for an instant, and he laid his hand upon one of the aides-de-camp. The fellow had attracted my attention, for I have always a quick eye for a fine man. He was tall and slender, the very model of a horseman; indeed, there was something in his appearance which made it not unlike my own. His face was dark and as keen as that of a hawk, with fierce black eyes under thick, shaggy brows, and a moustache which would have put him in the crack squadron of my Hussars. He wore a green coat with white facings, and a horse-hair helmet — a Dragoon, as I conjectured, and as dashing a cavalier as one would wish to have at the end of one’s sword-point.

“A word with you, Count Stein,” said Gneisenau. “If the enemy are routed, but if the Emperor escapes, he will rally another army, and all will have to be done again. But if we can get the Emperor, then the war is indeed ended. It is worth a great effort and a great risk for such an object as that.”

The young Dragoon said nothing, but he listened attentively.

“Suppose the Duke of Wellington’s words should prove to be correct, and the French army should be driven in utter rout from the field, the Emperor will certainly take the road back through Genappe and Charleroi as being the shortest to the frontier. We can imagine that his horses will be fleet, and that the fugitives will make way for him. Our cavalry will follow the rear of the beaten army, but the Emperor will be far away at the front of the throng.”

The young Dragoon inclined his head.

“To you, Count Stein, I commit the Emperor. If you take him your name will live in history. You have the reputation of being the hardest rider in our army. Do you choose such comrades as you may select — ten or a dozen should be enough. You are not to engage in the battle, nor are you to follow the general pursuit, but you are to ride clear of the crowd, reserving your energies for a nobler end. Do you understand me?”

Again the Dragoon inclined his head. This silence impressed me. I felt that he was indeed a dangerous man.

“Then I leave the details in your own hands. Strike at no one except the highest. You cannot mistake the Imperial carriage, nor can you fail to recognise the figure of the Emperor. Now I must follow the Marshal. Adieu! If ever I see you again I trust that it will be to congratulate you upon a deed which will ring through Europe.”

The Dragoon saluted and Gneisenau hurried from the room. The young officer stood in deep thought for a few moments. Then he followed the Chief of the Staff.

I looked with curiosity from my loophole to see what his next proceeding would be. His horse, a fine, strong chestnut with two white stockings, was fastened to the rail of the inn. He sprang into the saddle, and, riding to intercept a column of cavalry which was passing, he spoke to an officer at the head of the leading regiment.

Presently after some talk I saw two Hussars — it was a Hussar regiment — drop out of the ranks and take up their position beside Count Stein. The next regiment was also stopped, and two Lancers were added to his escort. The next furnished him with two Dragoons and the next with two Cuirassiers. Then he drew his little group of horsemen aside and he gathered them round him, explaining to them what they had to do. Finally the nine soldiers rode off together and disappeared into the Wood of Paris.

I need not tell you, my friends, what all this portended.

Indeed, he had acted exactly as I should have done in his place. From each colonel he had demanded the two best horsemen in the regiment, and so he had assembled a band who might expect to catch whatever they should follow. Heaven help the Emperor if, without an escort, he should find them on his track!

And I, dear friends — imagine the fever, the ferment, the madness of my mind! All thought of Grouchy had passed away. No guns were to be heard to the east. He could not be near. If he should come up he would not now be in time to alter the event of the day. The sun was already low in the sky and there could not be more than two or three hours of daylight. My mission might be dismissed as useless. But here was another mission, more pressing, more immediate, a mission which meant the safety, and perhaps the life, of the Emperor. At all costs, through every danger, I must get back to his side.

But how was I to do it? The whole Prussian army was now between me and the French lines. They blocked every road, but they could not block the path of duty when Etienne Gerard sees it lie before him. I could not wait longer. I must be gone.

There was but the one opening to the loft, and so it was only down the ladder that I could descend. I looked into the kitchen and I found that the young surgeon was still there. In a chair sat the wounded English aide-de-camp, and on the straw lay two Prussian soldiers in the last stage of exhaustion. The others had all recovered and been sent on. These were my enemies, and I must pass through them in order to gain my horse. From the surgeon I had nothing to fear; the Englishman was wounded, and his sword stood with his cloak in a corner; the two Germans were half insensible, and their muskets were not beside them. What could be simpler? I opened the trap-door, slipped down the ladder, and appeared in the midst of them, my sword drawn in my hand.

What a picture of surprise! The surgeon, of course, knew all, but to the Englishman and the two Germans it must have seemed that the god of war in person had descended from the skies. With my appearance, with my figure, with my silver and grey uniform, and with that gleaming sword in my hand, I must indeed have been a sight worth seeing. The two Germans lay petrified with staring eyes. The English officer half rose, but sat down again from weakness, his mouth open and his hand on the back of his chair.

“What the deuce!” he kept on repeating, “what the deuce!”

“Pray do not move,” said I; “I will hurt no one, but woe to the man who lays hands upon me to stop me. You have nothing to fear if you leave me alone, and nothing to hope if you try to hinder me. I am Colonel Etienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans.”

“The deuce!” said the Englishman. “You are the man that killed the fox.” A terrible scowl had darkened his face. The jealousy of sportsmen is a base passion. He hated me, this Englishman, because I had been before him in transfixing the animal. How different are our natures! Had I seen him do such a deed I would have embraced him with cries of joy. But there was no time for argument.

“I regret it, sir,” said I; “but you have a cloak here and I must take it.”

He tried to rise from his chair and reach his sword, but I got between him and the corner where it lay.

“If there is anything in the pockets — —”

“A case,” said he.

“I would not rob you,” said I; and raising the cloak I took from the pockets a silver flask, a square wooden case and a field-glass. All these I handed to him. The wretch opened the case, took out a pistol, and pointed it straight at my head.

“Now, my fine fellow,” said he, “put down your sword and give yourself up.”

I was so astounded at this infamous action that I stood petrified before him. I tried to speak to him of honour and gratitude, but I saw his eyes fix and harden over the pistol.

“Enough talk!” said he. “Drop it!”

Could I endure such a humiliation? Death were better than to be disarmed in such a fashion. The word

“Fire!” was on my lips when in an instant the English man vanished from before my face, and in his place was a great pile of hay, with a red-coated arm and two Hessian boots waving and kicking in the heart of it. Oh, the gallant landlady! It was my whiskers that had saved me.

“Fly, soldier, fly!” she cried, and she heaped fresh trusses of hay from the floor on to the struggling Englishman. In an instant I was out in the courtyard, had led Violette from her stable, and was on her back. A pistol bullet whizzed past my shoulder from the window, and I saw a furious face looking out at me. I smiled my contempt and spurred out into the road. The last of the Prussians had passed, and both my road and my duty lay clear before me. If France won, all well. If France lost, then on me and my little mare depended that which was more than victory or defeat — the safety and the life of the Emperor. “On, Etienne, on!” I cried.

“Of all your noble exploits, the greatest, even if it be the last, lies now before you!”

II. THE STORY OF THE NINE PRUSSIAN HORSEMEN

I told you when last we met, my friends, of the important mission from the Emperor to Marshal Grouchy, which failed through no fault of my own, and I described to you how during a long afternoon I was shut up in the attic of a country inn, and was prevented from coming out because the Prussians were all around me. You will remember also how I overheard the

Chief of the Prussian Staff give his instructions to Count Stein, and so learned the dangerous plan which was on foot to kill or capture the Emperor in the event of a French defeat. At first I could not have believed in such a thing, but since the guns had thundered all day, and since the sound had made no advance in my direction, it was evident that the English had at least held their own and beaten off all our attacks.

I have said that it was a fight that day between the soul of France and the beef of England, but it must be confessed that we found the beef was very tough. It was clear that if the Emperor could not defeat the English when alone, then it might, indeed, go hard with him now that sixty thousand of these cursed Prussians were swarming on his flank. In any case, with this secret in my possession, my place was by his side.

I had made my way out of the inn in the dashing manner which I have described to you when last we met, and I left the English aide-de-camp shaking his foolish fist out of the window. I could not but laugh as I looked back at him, for his angry red face was framed and frilled with hay. Once out on the road I stood erect in my stirrups, and I put on the handsome black riding-coat, lined with red, which had belonged to him. It fell to the top of my high boots, and covered my tell-tale uniform completely. As to my busby, there are many such in the German service, and there was no reason why it should attract attention. So long as no one spoke to me there was no reason why I should not ride through the whole of the Prussian army; but though I understood German, for I had many friends among the German ladies during the pleasant years that I fought all over that country, still I spoke it with a pretty Parisian accent which could not be confounded with their rough, unmusical speech. I knew that this quality of my accent would attract attention, but I could only hope and pray that I would be permitted to go my way in silence.

The Forest of Paris was so large that it was useless to think of going round it, and so I took my courage in both hands and galloped on down the road in the track of the Prussian army. It was not hard to trace it, for it was rutted two feet deep by the gun-wheels and the caissons. Soon I found a fringe of wounded men, Prussians and French, on each side of it, where Bulow’s advance had come into touch with Marbot’s Hussars. One old man with a long white beard, a surgeon, I suppose, shouted at me, and ran after me still shouting, but I never turned my head and took no notice of him save to spur on faster. I heard his shouts long after I had lost sight of him among the trees.

Presently I came up with the Prussian reserves. The infantry were leaning on their muskets or lying exhausted on the wet ground, and the officers stood in groups listening to the mighty roar of the battle and discussing the reports which came from the front. I hurried past at the top of my speed, but one of them rushed out and stood in my path with his hand up as a signal to me to stop. Five thousand Prussian eyes were turned upon me. There was a moment! You turn pale, my friends, at the thought of it. Think how every hair upon me stood on end. But never for one instant did my wits or my courage desert me. “General Blucher!” I cried. Was it not my guardian angel who whispered the words in my ear? The Prussian sprang from my path, saluted, and pointed forward. They are well disciplined, these Prussians, and who was he that he should dare to stop the officer who bore a message to the general?

It was a talisman that would pass me out of every danger, and my heart sang within me at the thought. So elated was I that I no longer waited to be asked, but as I rode through the army I shouted to right and left,

“General Blucher! General Blucher!” and every man pointed me onward and cleared a path to let me pass.

There are times when the most supreme impudence is the highest wisdom. But discretion must also be used, and I must admit that I became indiscreet. For as I rode upon my way, ever nearer to the fighting line, a Prussian officer of Uhlans gripped my bridle and pointed to a group of men who stood near a burning farm. “There is Marshal Blucher. Deliver your message!” said he, and sure enough, my terrible old grey-whiskered veteran was there within a pistol-shot, his eyes turned in my direction.

But the good guardian angel did not desert me.

Quick as a flash there came into my memory the name of the general who commanded the advance of the Prussians.

{illust. caption = “There is Marshal Blucher. Deliver your message!”}

“General Bulow!” I cried. The Uhlan let go my bridle. “General Bulow! General Bulow!” I shouted, as every stride of the dear little mare took me nearer my own people. Through the burning village of Planchenoit I galloped, spurred my way between two columns of Prussian infantry, sprang over a hedge, cut down a Silesian Hussar who flung himself before me, and an instant afterward, with my coat flying open to show the uniform below, I passed through the open files of the tenth of the line, and was back in the heart of Lobau’s corps once more. Outnumbered and outflanked, they were being slowly driven in by the pressure of the Prussian advance. I galloped onward, anxious only to find myself by the Emperor’s side.

But a sight lay before me which held me fast as though I had been turned into some noble equestrian statue. I could not move, I could scarce breathe, as I gazed upon it. There was a mound over which my path lay, and as I came out on the top of it I looked down the long, shallow valley of Waterloo. I had left it with two great armies on either side and a clear field between them. Now there were but long, ragged fringes of broken and exhausted regiments upon the two ridges, but a real army of dead and wounded lay between. For two miles in length and half a mile across the ground was strewed and heaped with them. But slaughter was no new sight to me, and it was not that which held me spellbound. It was that up the long slope of the British position was moving a walking forest-black, tossing, waving, unbroken. Did I not know the bearskins of the Guard? And did I not also know, did not my soldier’s instinct tell me, that it was the last reserve of France; that the Emperor, like a desperate gamester, was staking all upon his last card? Up they went and up — grand, solid, unbreakable, scourged with musketry, riddled with grape, flowing onward in a black, heavy tide, which lapped over the British batteries. With my glass I could see the English gunners throw themselves under their pieces or run to the rear. On rolled the crest of the bearskins, and then, with a crash which was swept across to my ears, they met the British infantry. A minute passed, and another, and another. My heart was in my mouth.

They swayed back and forward; they no longer advanced; they were held. Great Heaven! was it possible that they were breaking? One black dot ran down the hill, then two, then four, then ten, then a great, scattered, struggling mass, halting, breaking, halting, and at last shredding out and rushing madly downward. “The Guard is beaten! The Guard is beaten!” From all around me I heard the cry. Along the whole line the infantry turned their faces and the gunners flinched from their guns.

“The Old Guard is beaten! The Guard retreats!” An officer with a livid face passed me yelling out these words of woe. “Save yourselves! Save yourselves! You are betrayed!” cried another. “Save yourselves! Save yourselves!” Men were rushing madly to the rear, blundering and jumping like frightened sheep. Cries and screams rose from all around me. And at that moment, as I looked at the British position, I saw what I can never forget. A single horseman stood out black and clear upon the ridge against the last red angry glow of the setting sun. So dark, so motionless, against that grim light, he might have been the very spirit of Battle brooding over that terrible valley. As I gazed, he raised his hat high in the air, and at the signal, with a low, deep roar like a breaking wave, the whole British army flooded over their ridge and came rolling down into the valley.

Long steel-fringed lines of red and blue, sweeping waves of cavalry, horse batteries rattling and bounding — down they came on to our crumbling ranks. It was over. A yell of agony, the agony of brave men who see no hope, rose from one flank to the other, and in an instant the whole of that noble army was swept in a wild, terror-stricken crowd from the field. Even now, dear friends, I cannot, as you see, speak of that dreadful moment with a dry eye or with a steady voice.

At first I was carried away in that wild rush, whirled off like a straw in a flooded gutter. But, suddenly, what should I see amongst the mixed regiments in front of me but a group of stern horsemen, in silver and grey, with a broken and tattered standard held aloft in the heart of them! Not all the might of England and of Prussia could break the Hussars of Conflans. But when I joined them it made my heart bleed to see them. The major, seven captains, and five hundred men were left upon the field. Young Captain Sabbatier was in command, and when I asked him where were the five missing squadrons he pointed back and answered: “You will find them round one of those British squares.” Men and horses were at their last gasp, caked with sweat and dirt, their black tongues hanging out from their lips; but it made me thrill with pride to see how that shattered remnant still rode knee to knee, with every man, from the boy trumpeter to the farrier-sergeant, in his own proper place.

Would that I could have brought them on with me as an escort for the Emperor! In the heart of the Hussars of Conflans he would be safe indeed. But the horses were too spent to trot. I left them behind me with orders to rally upon the farm-house of St. Aunay, where we had camped two nights before. For my own part, I forced my horse through the throng in search of the Emperor.

There were things which I saw then, as I pressed through that dreadful crowd, which can never be banished from my mind. In evil dreams there comes back to me the memory of that flowing stream of livid, staring, screaming faces upon which I looked down. It was a nightmare. In victory one does not understand the horror of war. It is only in the cold chill of defeat that it is brought home to you. I remember an old Grenadier of the Guard lying at the side of the road with his broken leg doubled at a right angle. “Comrades, comrades, keep off my leg!” he cried, but they tripped and stumbled over him all the same. In front of me rode a Lancer officer without his coat. His arm had just been taken off in the ambulance. The bandages had fallen. It was horrible. Two gunners tried to drive through with their gun. A Chasseur raised his musket and shot one of them through the head. I saw a major of Cuirassiers draw his two holster pistols and shoot first his horse and then himself. Beside the road a man in a blue coat was raging and raving like a madman. His face was black with powder, his clothes were torn, one epaulette was gone, the other hung dangling over his breast. Only when I came close to him did I recognise that it was Marshal Ney. He howled at the flying troops and his voice was hardly human. Then he raised the stump of his sword — it was broken three inches from the hilt. “Come and see how a Marshal of France can die!” he cried. Gladly would I have gone with him, but my duty lay elsewhere.

He did not, as you know, find the death he sought, but he met it a few weeks later in cold blood at the hands of his enemies.

There is an old proverb that in attack the French are more than men, in defeat they are less than women. I knew that it was true that day. But even in that rout I saw things which I can tell with pride. Through the fields which skirt the road moved Cambronne’s three reserve battalions of the Guard, the cream of our army.

They walked slowly in square, their colours waving over the sombre line of the bearskins. All round them raged the English cavalry and the black Lancers of Brunswick, wave after wave thundering up, breaking with a crash, and recoiling in ruin. When last I saw them, the English guns, six at a time, were smashing grape-shot through their ranks and the English infantry were closing in upon three sides and pouring volleys into them; but still, like a noble lion with fierce hounds clinging to its flanks, the glorious remnant of the Guard, marching slowly, halting, closing up, dressing, moved majestically from their last battle. Behind them the Guard’s battery of twelve-pounders was drawn up upon the ridge. Every gunner was in his place, but no gun fired. “Why do you not fire?” I asked the colonel as I passed. “Our powder is finished.” “Then why not retire?” “Our appearance may hold them back for a little. We must give the Emperor time to escape.” Such were the soldiers of France.

Behind this screen of brave men the others took their breath, and then went on in less desperate fashion. They had broken away from the road, and all over the countryside in the twilight I could see the timid, scattered, frightened crowd who ten hours before had formed the finest army that ever went down to battle. I with my splendid mare was soon able to get clear of the throng, and just after I passed Genappe I overtook the Emperor with the remains of his Staff. Soult was with him still, and so were Drouot, Lobau, and Bertrand, with five Chasseurs of the Guard, their horses hardly able to move.

The night was falling, and the Emperor’s haggard face gleamed white through the gloom as he turned it toward me.

“Who is that?” he asked.

“It is Colonel Gerard,” said Soult.

“Have you seen Marshal Grouchy?”

“No, Sire. The Prussians were between.”

“It does not matter. Nothing matters now. Soult, I will go back.”

He tried to turn his horse, but Bertrand seized his bridle. “Ah, Sire,” said Soult, “the enemy has had good fortune enough already.” They forced him on among them. He rode in silence with his chin upon his breast, the greatest and the saddest of men. Far away behind us those remorseless guns were still roaring. Sometimes out of the darkness would come shrieks and screams and the low thunder of galloping hoofs. At the sound we would spur our horses and hasten onward through the scattered troops. At last, after riding all night in the clear moonlight, we found that we had left both pursued and pursuers behind. By the time we passed over the bridge at Charleroi the dawn was breaking. What a company of spectres we looked in that cold, clear, searching light, the Emperor with his face of wax, Soult blotched with powder, Lobau dabbled with blood! But we rode more easily now, and had ceased to glance over our shoulders, for Waterloo was more than thirty miles behind us. One of the Emperor’s carriages had been picked up at Charleroi, and we halted now on the other side of the Sambre, and dismounted from our horses.

You will ask me why it was that during all this time I had said nothing of that which was nearest my heart, the need for guarding the Emperor. As a fact, I had tried to speak of it both to Soult and to Lobau, but their minds were so overwhelmed with the disaster and so distracted by the pressing needs of the moment that it was impossible to make them understand how urgent was my message. Besides, during this long flight we had always had numbers of French fugitives beside us on the road, and, however demoralised they might be, we had nothing to fear from the attack of nine men. But now, as we stood round the Emperor’s carriage in the early morning, I observed with anxiety that not a single French soldier was to be seen upon the long, white road behind us. We had outstripped the army. I looked round to see what means of defence were left to us. The horses of the Chasseurs of the Guard had broken down, and only one of them, a grey-whiskered sergeant, remained.

There were Soult, Lobau, and Bertrand; but, for all their talents, I had rather, when it came to hard knocks, have a single quartermaster-sergeant of Hussars at my side than the three of them put together. There remained the Emperor himself, the coachman, and a valet of the household who had joined us at Charleroi — eight all told; but of the eight only two, the Chasseur and I, were fighting soldiers who could be depended upon at a pinch. A chill came over me as I reflected how utterly helpless we were. At that moment I raised my eyes, and there were the nine Prussian horsemen coming over the hill.

On either side of the road at this point are long stretches of rolling plain, part of it yellow with corn and part of it rich grass land watered by the Sambre. To the south of us was a low ridge, over which was the road to France. Along this road the little group of cavalry was riding. So well had Count Stein obeyed his instructions that he had struck far to the south of us in his determination to get ahead of the Emperor. Now he was riding from the direction in which we were going — the last in which we could expect an enemy. When I caught that first glimpse of them they were still half a mile away.

“Sire!” I cried, “the Prussians!”

They all started and stared. It was the Emperor who broke the silence.

“Who says they are Prussians?”

“I do, Sire — I, Etienne Gerard!”

Unpleasant news always made the Emperor furious against the man who broke it. He railed at me now in the rasping, croaking, Corsican voice which only made itself heard when he had lost his self-control.

“You were always a buffoon,” he cried. “What do you mean, you numskull, by saying that they are Prussians? How could Prussians be coming from the direction of France? You have lost any wits that you ever possessed.”

His words cut me like a whip, and yet we all felt toward the Emperor as an old dog does to its master.

His kick is soon forgotten and forgiven. I would not argue or justify myself. At the first glance I had seen the two white stockings on the forelegs of the leading horse, and I knew well that Count Stein was on its back.

For an instant the nine horsemen had halted and surveyed us. Now they put spurs to their horses, and with a yell of triumph they galloped down the road. They had recognised that their prey was in their power.

At that swift advance all doubt had vanished. “By heavens, Sire, it is indeed the Prussians!” cried Soult.

Lobau and Bertrand ran about the road like two frightened hens. The sergeant of Chasseurs drew his sabre with a volley of curses. The coachman and the valet cried and wrung their hands. Napoleon stood with a frozen face, one foot on the step of the carriage. And I — ah, my friends, I was magnificent! What words can I use to do justice to my own bearing at that supreme instant of my life? So coldly alert, so deadly cool, so clear in brain and ready in hand. He had called me a numskull and a buffoon. How quick and how noble was my revenge! When his own wits failed him, it was Etienne Gerard who supplied the want.

To fight was absurd; to fly was ridiculous. The Emperor was stout, and weary to death. At the best he was never a good rider. How could he fly from these, the picked men of an army? The best horseman in Prussia was among them. But I was the best horseman in France. I, and only I, could hold my own with them. If they were on my track instead of the Emperor’s, all might still be well. These were the thoughts which flashed so swiftly through my mind that in an instant I had sprung from the first idea to the final conclusion. Another instant carried me from the final conclusion to prompt and vigorous action. I rushed to the side of the Emperor, who stood petrified, with the carriage between him and our enemies. “Your coat, Sire! your hat!” I cried. I dragged them of him.

Never had he been so hustled in his life. In an instant I had them on and had thrust him into the carriage. The next I had sprung on to his famous white Arab and had ridden clear of the group upon the road.

You have already divined my plan; but you may well ask how could I hope to pass myself off as the Emperor.

My figure is as you still see it, and his was never beautiful, for he was both short and stout. But a man's height is not remarked when he is in the saddle, and for the rest one had but to sit forward on the horse and round one's back and carry oneself like a sack of flour. I wore the little cocked hat and the loose grey coat with the silver star which was known to every child from one end of Europe to the other. Beneath me was the Emperor's own famous white charger. It was complete.

Already as I rode clear the Prussians were within two hundred yards of us. I made a gesture of terror and despair with my hands, and I sprang my horse over the bank which lined the road. It was enough. A yell of exultation and of furious hatred broke from the Prussians.

It was the howl of starving wolves who scent their prey. I spurred my horse over the meadow-land and looked back under my arm as I rode. Oh, the glorious moment when one after the other I saw eight horsemen come over the bank at my heels! Only one had stayed behind, and I heard shouting and the sounds of a struggle. I remembered my old sergeant of Chasseurs, and I was sure that number nine would trouble us no more. The road was clear and the Emperor free to continue his journey.

But now I had to think of myself. If I were overtaken the Prussians would certainly make short work of me in their disappointment. If it were so — if I lost my life — I should still have sold it at a glorious price. But I had hopes that I might shake them off. With ordinary horsemen upon ordinary horses I should have had no difficulty in doing so, but here both steeds and riders were of the best. It was a grand creature that I rode, but it was weary with its long night's work, and the Emperor was one of those riders who do not know how to manage a horse. He had little thought far them and a heavy hand upon their mouths. On the other hand, Stein and his men had come both far and fast. The race was a fair one.

So quick had been my impulse, and so rapidly had I acted upon it, that I had not thought enough of my own safety. Had I done so in the first instance I should, of course, have ridden straight back the way we had come, for so I should have met our own people. But I was off the road and had galloped a mile over the plain before this occurred to me. Then when I looked back I saw that the Prussians had spread out into a long line, so as to head me off from the Charleroi road. I could not turn back, but at least I could edge toward the north. I knew that the whole face of the country was covered with our flying troops, and that sooner or later I must come upon some of them.

But one thing I had forgotten — the Sambre. In my excitement I never gave it a thought until I saw it, deep and broad, gleaming in the morning sunlight. It barred my path, and the Prussians howled behind me. I galloped to the brink, but the horse refused the plunge. I spurred him, but the bank was high and the stream deep.

He shrank back trembling and snorting. The yells of triumph were louder every instant. I turned and rode for my life down the river bank. It formed a loop at this part, and I must get across somehow, for my retreat was blocked. Suddenly a thrill of hope ran through me, for I saw a house on my side of the stream and another on the farther bank. Where there are two such houses it usually means that there is a ford between them. A sloping path led to the brink and I urged my horse down it. On he went, the water up to the saddle, the foam flying right and left. He blundered once and I thought we were lost, but he recovered and an instant later was clattering up the farther slope. As we came out I heard the splash behind me as the first Prussian took the water. There was just the breadth of the Sambre between us.

I rode with my head sunk between my shoulders in Napoleon’s fashion, and I did not dare to look back for fear they should see my moustache. I had turned up the collar of the grey coat so as partly to hide it. Even now if they found out their mistake they might turn and overtake the carriage. But when once we were on the road I could tell by the drumming of their hoofs how far distant they were, and it seemed to me that the sound grew perceptibly louder, as if they were slowly gaining upon me. We were riding now up the stony and rutted lane which led from the ford. I peeped back very cautiously from under my arm and I perceived that my danger came from a single rider, who was far ahead of his comrades.

He was a Hussar, a very tiny fellow, upon a big black horse, and it was his light weight which had brought him into the foremost place. It is a place of honour; but it is also a place of danger, as he was soon to learn. I felt the holsters, but, to my horror, there were no pistols. There was a field-glass in one and the other was stuffed with papers. My sword had been left behind with Violette.

Had I only my own weapons and my own little mare I could have played with these rascals. But I was not entirely unarmed. The Emperor’s own sword hung to the saddle. It was curved and short, the hilt all crusted with gold — a thing more fitted to glitter at a review than to serve a soldier in his deadly need. I drew it, such as it was, and I waited my chance. Every instant the clink and clatter of the hoofs grew nearer. I heard the panting of the horse, and the fellow shouted some threat at me. There was a turn in the lane, and as I rounded it I drew up my white Arab on his haunches. As we spun round I met the Prussian Hussar face to face. He was going too fast to stop, and his only chance was to ride me down. Had he done so he might have met his own death, but he would have injured me or my horse past all hope of escape. But the fool flinched as he saw me waiting and flew past me on my right. I lunged over my Arab’s neck and buried my toy sword in his side. It must have been the finest steel and as sharp as a razor, for I hardly felt it enter, and yet his blood was within three inches of the hilt. His horse galloped on and he kept his saddle for a hundred yards before he sank down with his face on the mane and then dived over the side of the neck on to the road. For my own part I was already at his horse’s heels. A few seconds had sufficed for all that I have told.

I heard the cry of rage and vengeance which rose from the Prussians as they passed their dead comrade, and I could not but smile as I wondered what they could think of the Emperor as a horseman and a swordsman. I glanced back cautiously as before, and I saw that none of the seven men stopped. The fate of their comrade was nothing compared to the carrying out of their mission.

They were as untiring and as remorseless as bloodhounds.

But I had a good lead and the brave Arab was still going well. I thought that I was safe. And yet it was at that very instant that the most terrible danger befell me. The lane divided, and I took the smaller of the two divisions because it was the more grassy and the easier for the horse’s hoofs. Imagine my horror when, riding through a gate, I found myself in a square of stables and farm-buildings, with no way out save that by which I had come! Ah, my friends, if my hair is snowy white, have I not had enough to make it so?

To retreat was impossible. I could hear the thunder of the Prussians’ hoofs in the lane. I looked round me, and Nature has blessed me with that quick eye which is the first of gifts to any soldier, but most of all to a leader of cavalry. Between a long, low line of stables and the farm-house there was a pig-sty. Its front was made of bars of wood four feet high; the back was of stone, higher than the front. What was beyond I could not tell. The space between the front and the back was not more than a few yards. It was a desperate venture, and yet I must take it. Every instant the beating of those hurrying hoofs was louder and louder. I put my Arab at the pig-sty. She cleared the front beautifully and came down with her forefeet upon the sleeping pig within, slipping forward upon her knees. I was thrown over the wall beyond, and fell upon my hands and face in a soft flower-bed. My horse was upon one side of the wall, I upon the other, and the Prussians were pouring into the yard. But I was up in an instant and had seized the bridle of the plunging horse over the top of the wall. It was built of loose stones, and I dragged down a few of them to make a gap. As I tugged at the bridle and shouted the gallant creature rose to the leap, and an instant afterward she was by my side and I with my foot on the stirrup.

An heroic idea had entered my mind as I mounted into the saddle. These Prussians, if they came over the pig-sty, could only come one at once, and their attack would not be formidable when they had not had time to recover from such a leap. Why should I not wait and kill them one by one as they came over? It was a glorious thought. They would learn that Etienne Gerard was not a safe man to hunt. My hand felt for my sword, but you can imagine my feelings, my friends, when I came upon an empty scabbard. It had been shaken out when the horse had tripped over that infernal pig. On what absurd trifles do our destinies hang — a pig on one side, Etienne Gerard on the other! Could I spring over the wall and get the sword? Impossible! The Prussians were already in the yard. I turned my Arab and resumed my flight.

But for a moment it seemed to me that I was in a far worse trap than before. I found myself in the garden of the farm-house, an orchard in the centre and flower-beds all round. A high wall surrounded the whole place. I reflected, however, that there must be some point of entrance, since every visitor could not be expected to spring over the pig-sty. I rode round the wall. As I expected, I came upon a door with a key upon the inner side. I dismounted, unlocked it, opened it, and there was a Prussian Lancer sitting his horse within six feet of me.

For a moment we each stared at the other. Then I shut the door and locked it again. A crash and a cry came from the other end of the garden. I understood that one of my enemies had come to grief in trying to get over the pig-sty. How could I ever get out of this cul-de-sac? It was evident that some of the party had galloped round, while some had followed straight upon my tracks. Had I my sword I might have beaten off the Lancer at the door, but to come out now was to be butchered. And yet if I waited some of them would certainly follow me on foot over the pig-sty, and what could I do then? I must act at once or I was lost. But it is at such moments that my wits are most active and my actions most prompt. Still leading my horse, I ran for a hundred yards by the side of the wall away from the spot where the Lancer was watching. There I stopped, and with an effort I tumbled down several of the loose stones from the top of the wall. The instant I had done so I hurried back to the door. As I had expected, he thought I was making a gap for my escape at that point, and I heard the thud of his horse's hoofs as he galloped to cut me off. As I reached the gate I looked back, and I saw a green-coated horseman, whom I knew to be Count Stein, clear the pig-sty and gallop furiously with a shout of triumph across the garden.

"Surrender, your Majesty, surrender!" he yelled; "we will give you quarter!" I slipped through the gate, but had no time to lock it on the other side. Stein was at my very heels, and the Lancer had already turned his horse. Springing upon my Arab's back, I was off once more with a clear stretch of grass land before me. Stein had to dismount to open the gate, to lead his horse through, and to mount again before he could follow.

It was he that I feared rather than the Lancer, whose horse was coarse-bred and weary. I galloped hard for a mile before I ventured to look back, and then Stein was a musket-shot from me, and the Lancer as much again, while only three of the others were in sight. My nine Prussians were coming down to more manageable numbers, and yet one was too much for an unarmed man.

It had surprised me that during this long chase I had seen no fugitives from the army, but I reflected that I was considerably to the west of their line of flight, and that I must edge more toward the east if I wished to join them. Unless I did so it was probable that my pursuers, even if they could not overtake me themselves, would keep me in view until I was headed off by some of their comrades coming from the north. As I looked to the eastward I saw afar off a line of dust which stretched for miles across the country. This was certainly the main road along which our unhappy army was flying. But I soon had proof that some of our stragglers had wandered into these side tracks, for I came suddenly upon a horse grazing at the corner of a field, and beside him, with his back against the bank, his master, a French Cuirassier, terribly wounded and evidently on the point of death. I sprang down, seized his long, heavy sword, and rode on with it. Never shall I forget the poor man’s face as he looked at me with his failing sight. He was an old, grey-moustached soldier, one of the real fanatics, and to him this last vision of his Emperor was like a revelation from on high.

Astonishment, love, pride — all shone in his pallid face. He said something — I fear they were his last words — but I had no time to listen, and I galloped on my way.

All this time I had been on the meadow-land, which was intersected in this part by broad ditches. Some of them could not have been less than from fourteen to fifteen feet, and my heart was in my mouth as I went at each of them, for a slip would have been my ruin.

But whoever selected the Emperor’s horses had done his work well. The creature, save when it balked on the bank of the Sambre, never failed me for an instant.

We cleared everything in one stride. And yet we could not shake off! those infernal Prussians. As I left each water-course behind me I looked back with renewed hope; but it was only to see Stein on his white-legged chestnut flying over it as lightly as I had done myself. He was my enemy, but I honoured him for the way in which he carried himself that day.

Again and again I measured the distance which separated him from the next horseman. I had the idea that I might turn and cut him down, as I had the Hussar, before his comrade could come to his help. But the others had closed up and were not far behind. I reflected that this Stein was probably as fine a swordsman as he was a rider, and that it might take me some little time to get the better of him. In that case the others would come to his aid and I should be lost. On the whole, it was wiser to continue my flight.

A road with poplars on either side ran across the plain from east to west. It would lead me toward that long line of dust which marked the French retreat. I wheeled my horse, therefore, and galloped down it. As I rode I saw a single house in front of me upon the right, with a great bush hung over the door to mark it as an inn. Outside there were several peasants, but for them I cared nothing. What frightened me was to see the gleam of a red coat, which showed that there were British in the place. However, I could not turn and I could not stop, so there was nothing for it but to gallop on and to take my chance. There were no troops in sight, so these men must be stragglers or marauders, from whom I had little to fear. As I approached I saw that there were two of them sitting drinking on a bench outside the inn door. I saw them stagger to their feet, and it was evident that they were both very drunk. One stood swaying in the middle of the road.

"It's Boney! So help me, it's Boney!" he yelled. He ran with his hands out to catch me, but luckily for himself his drunken feet stumbled and he fell on his face on the road. The other was more dangerous. He had rushed into the inn, and just as I passed I saw him run out with his musket in his hand. He dropped upon one knee, and I stooped forward over my horse's neck.

A single shot from a Prussian or an Austrian is a small matter, but the British were at that time the best shots in Europe, and my drunkard seemed steady enough when he had a gun at his shoulder. I heard the crack, and my horse gave a convulsive spring which would have unseated many a rider. For an instant I thought he was killed, but when I turned in my saddle I saw a stream of blood running down the off hind-quarter. I looked back at the Englishman, and the brute had bitten the end off another cartridge and was ramming it into his musket, but before he had it primed we were beyond his range. These men were foot-soldiers and could not join in the chase, but I heard them whooping and tally-hoing behind me as if I had been a fox. The peasants also shouted and ran through the fields flourishing their sticks. From all sides I heard cries, and everywhere were the rushing, waving figures of my pursuers. To think of the great Emperor being chivvied over the country-side in this fashion! It made me long to have these rascals within the sweep of my sword.

But now I felt that I was nearing the end of my course. I had done all that a man could be expected to do — some would say more — but at last I had come to a point from which I could see no escape. The horses of my pursuers were exhausted, but mine was exhausted and wounded also. It was losing blood fast, and we left a red trail upon the white, dusty road. Already his pace was slackening, and sooner or later he must drop under me. I looked back, and there were the five inevitable Prussians — Stein a hundred yards in front, then a Lancer, and then three others riding together.

Stein had drawn his sword, and he waved it at me. For my own part I was determined not to give myself up.

I would try how many of these Prussians I could take with me into the other world. At this supreme moment all the great deeds of my life rose in a vision before me, and I felt that this, my last exploit, was indeed a worthy close to such a career. My death would be a fatal blow to those who loved me, to my dear mother, to my Hussars, to others who shall be nameless. But all of them had my honour and my fame at heart, and I felt that their grief would be tinged with pride when they learned how I had ridden and how I had fought upon this last day. Therefore I hardened my heart and, as my Arab limped more and more upon his wounded leg, I drew the great sword which I had taken from the Cuirassier, and I set my teeth for my supreme struggle. My hand was in the very act of tightening the bridle, for I feared that if I delayed longer I might find myself on foot fighting against five mounted men.

At that instant my eye fell upon something which brought hope to my heart and a shout of joy to my lips.

From a grove of trees in front of me there projected the steeple of a village church. But there could not be two steeples like that, for the corner of it had crumbled away or been struck by lightning, so that it was of a most fantastic shape. I had seen it only two days before, and it was the church of the village of Gosselies. It was not the hope of reaching the village which set my heart singing with joy, but it was that I knew my ground now, and that farm-house not half a mile ahead, with its gable end sticking out from amid the trees, must be that very farm of St. Aunay where we had bivouacked, and which I had named to Captain Sabbatier as the rendezvous of the Hussars of Conflans. There they were, my little rascals, if I could but reach them. With every bound my horse grew weaker. Each instant the sound of the pursuit grew louder. I heard a gust of crackling German oaths at my very heels. A pistol bullet sighed in my ears. Spurring frantically and beating my poor Arab with the flat of my sword I kept him at the top of his speed. The open gate of the farm-yard lay before me. I saw the twinkle of steel within. Stein’s horse’s head was within ten yards of me as I thundered through.

“To me, comrades! To me!” I yelled. I heard a buzz as when the angry bees swarm from their nest. Then my splendid white Arab fell dead under me and I was hurled on to the cobble-stones of the yard, where I can remember no more.

Such was my last and most famous exploit, my dear friends, a story which rang through Europe and has made the name of Etienne Gerard famous in history.

Alas! that all my efforts could only give the Emperor a few weeks more liberty, since he surrendered upon the 15th of July to the English. But it was not my fault that he was not able to collect the forces still waiting for him in France, and to fight another Waterloo with a happier ending. Had others been as loyal as I was the history of the world might have been changed, the Emperor would have preserved his throne, and such a soldier as I would not have been left to spend his life in planting cabbages or to while away his old age telling stories in a cafe. You ask me about the fate of Stein and the Prussian horsemen! Of the three who dropped upon the way I know nothing. One you will remember that I killed. There remained five, three of whom were cut down by my Hussars, who, for the instant, were under the impression that it was indeed the Emperor whom they were defending. Stein was taken, slightly wounded, and so was one of the Uhlans. The truth was not told to them, for we thought it best that no news, or false news, should get about as to where the Emperor was, so that Count Stein still believed that he was within a few yards of making that tremendous capture. “You may well love and honour your Emperor,” said he, “for such a horseman and such a swordsman I have never seen.” He could not understand why the young colonel of Hussars laughed so heartily at his words — but he has learned since.

The Last Adventure of the Brigadier

I will tell you no more stories, my dear friends. It is said that man is like the hare, which runs in a circle and comes back to die at the point from which it started.

Gascony has been calling to me of late. I see the blue Garonne winding among the vineyards and the bluer ocean toward which its waters sweep. I see the old town also, and the bristle of masts from the side of the long stone quay. My heart hungers for the breath of my native air and the warm glow of my native sun.

Here in Paris are my friends, my occupations, my pleasures. There all who have known me are in their grave. And yet the southwest wind as it rattles on my windows seems always to be the strong voice of the motherland calling her child back to that bosom into which I am ready to sink. I have played my part in my time. The time has passed. I must pass also.

Nay, dear friends, do not look sad, for what can be happier than a life completed in honour and made beautiful with friendship and love? And yet it is solemn also when a man approaches the end of the long road and sees the turning which leads him into the unknown. But the Emperor and all his Marshals have ridden round that dark turning and passed into the beyond. My Hussars, too — there are not fifty men who are not waiting yonder. I must go. But on this the last night I will tell you that which is more than a tale — it is a great historical secret. My lips have been sealed, but I see no reason why I should not leave behind me some account of this remarkable adventure, which must otherwise be entirely lost, since I and only I, of all living men, have a knowledge of the facts.

I will ask you to go back with me to the year 1821.

In that year our great Emperor had been absent from us for six years, and only now and then from over the seas we heard some whisper which showed that he was still alive. You cannot think what a weight it was upon our hearts for us who loved him to think of him in captivity eating his giant soul out upon that lonely island. From the moment we rose until we closed our eyes in sleep the thought was always with us, and we felt dishonoured that he, our chief and master, should be so humiliated without our being able to move a hand to help him. There were many who would most willingly have laid down the remainder of their lives to bring him a little ease, and yet all that we could do was to sit and grumble in our cafes and stare at the map, counting up the leagues of water which lay between us.

It seemed that he might have been in the moon for all that we could do to help him. But that was only because we were all soldiers and knew nothing of the sea.

Of course, we had our own little troubles to make us bitter, as well as the wrongs of our Emperor. There were many of us who had held high rank and would hold it again if he came back to his own. We had not found it possible to take service under the white flag of the Bourbons, or to take an oath which might turn our sabres against the man whom we loved. So we found ourselves with neither work nor money. What could we do save gather together and gossip and grumble, while those who had a little paid the score and those who had nothing shared the bottle? Now and then, if we were lucky, we managed to pick a quarrel with one of the Garde du Corps, and if we left him on his hack in the Bois we felt that we had struck a blow for Napoleon once again. They came to know our haunts in time, and they avoided them as if they had been hornets' nests.

There was one of these — the Sign of the Great Man — in the Rue Varennes, which was frequented by several of the more distinguished and younger Napoleonic officers. Nearly all of us had been colonels or aides-de-camp, and when any man of less distinction came among us we generally made him feel that he had taken a liberty. There were Captain Lepine, who had won the medal of honour at Leipzig; Colonel Bonnet, aide-de-camp to Macdonald; Colonel Jourdan, whose fame in the army was hardly second to my own; Sabbatier of my own Hussars, Meunier of the Red Lancers, Le Breton of the Guards, and a dozen others.

Every night we met and talked, played dominoes, drank a glass or two, and wondered how long it would be before the Emperor would be back and we at the head of our regiments once more. The Bourbons had already lost any hold they ever had upon the country, as was shown a few years afterward, when Paris rose against them and they were hunted for the third time out of France. Napoleon had but to show himself on the coast, and he would have marched without firing a musket to the capital, exactly as he had done when he came back from Elba.

Well, when affairs were in this state there arrived one night in February, in our cafe, a most singular little man. He was short but exceedingly broad, with huge shoulders, and a head which was a deformity, so large was it. His heavy brown face was scarred with white streaks in a most extraordinary manner, and he had grizzled whiskers such as seamen wear. Two gold earrings in his ears, and plentiful tattooing upon his hands and arms, told us also that he was of the sea before he introduced himself to us as Captain Fourneau, of the Emperor's navy. He had letters of introduction to two of our number, and there could be no doubt that he was devoted to the cause. He won our respect, too, for he had seen as much fighting as any of us, and the burns upon his face were caused by his standing to his post upon the Orient, at the Battle of the Nile, until the vessel blew up underneath him. Yet he would say little about himself, but he sat in the corner of the cafe watching us all with a wonderfully sharp pair of eyes and listening intently to our talk.

One night I was leaving the cafe when Captain Fourneau followed me, and touching me on the arm he led me without saying a word for some distance until we reached his lodgings. "I wish to have a chat with you," said he, and so conducted me up the stair to his room. There he lit a lamp and handed me a sheet of paper which he took from an envelope in his bureau. It was dated a few months before from the Palace of Schonbrunn at Vienna. "Captain Fourneau is acting in the highest interests of the Emperor Napoleon. Those who love the Emperor should obey him without question. — Marie Louise." That is what I read. I was familiar with the signature of the Empress, and I could not doubt that this was genuine.

"Well," said he, "are you satisfied as to my credentials?"

"Entirely."

"Are you prepared to take your orders from me?"

"This document leaves me no choice."

"Good! In the first place, I understand from something you said in the cafe that you can speak English?"

"Yes, I can."

"Let me hear you do so."

I said in English, "Whenever the Emperor needs the help of Etienne Gerard I am ready night and day to give my life in his service." Captain Fourneau smiled.

“It is funny English,” said he, “but still it is better than no English. For my own part I speak English like an Englishman. It is all that I have to show for six years spent in an English prison. Now I will tell you why I have come to Paris. I have come in order to choose an agent who will help me in a matter which affects the interests of the Emperor. I was told that it was at the cafe of the Great Man that I would find the pick of his old officers, and that I could rely upon every man there being devoted to his interests. I studied you all, therefore, and I have come to the conclusion that you are the one who is most suited for my purpose.”

I acknowledged the compliment. “What is it that you wish me to do?” I asked.

“Merely to keep me company for a few months,” said he. “You must know that after my release in England I settled down there, married an English wife, and rose to command a small English merchant ship, in which I have made several voyages from Southampton to the Guinea coast. They look on me there as an Englishman. You can understand, however, that with my feelings about the Emperor I am lonely sometimes, and that it would be an advantage to me to have a companion who would sympathize with my thoughts. One gets very bored on these long voyages, and I would make it worth your while to share my cabin.”

He looked hard at me with his shrewd grey eyes all the time that he was uttering this rigmarole, and I gave him a glance in return which showed him that he was not dealing with a fool. He took out a canvas bag full of money.

“There are a hundred pounds in gold in this bag,” said he. “You will be able to buy some comforts for your voyage. I should recommend you to get them in Southampton, whence we will start in ten days. The name of the vessel is the Black Swan. I return to Southampton to-morrow, and I shall hope to see you in the course of the next week.”

“Come now,” said I. “Tell me frankly what is the destination of our voyage?”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you?” he answered. “We are bound for the Guinea coast of Africa.”

“Then how can that be in the highest interests of the Emperor?” I asked.

“It is in his highest interests that you ask no indiscreet questions and I give no indiscreet replies,” he answered, sharply. So he brought the interview to an end, and I found myself back in my lodgings with nothing save this bag of gold to show that this singular interview had indeed taken place.

There was every reason why I should see the adventure to a conclusion, and so within a week I was on my way to England. I passed from St. Malo to Southampton, and on inquiry at the docks I had no difficulty in finding the Black Swan, a neat little vessel of a shape which is called, as I learned afterward, a brig. There was Captain Fourneau himself upon the deck, and seven or eight rough fellows hard at work grooming her and making her ready for sea. He greeted me and led me down to his cabin.

“You are plain Mr. Gerard now,” said he, “and a Channel Islander. I would be obliged to you if you would kindly forget your military ways and drop your cavalry swagger when you walk up and down my deck. A beard, too, would seem more sailor-like than those moustaches.”

I was horrified by his words, but, after all, there are no ladies on the high seas, and what did it matter? He rang for the steward.

“Gustav,” said he, “you will pay every attention to my friend, Monsieur Etienne Gerard, who makes this voyage with us. This is Gustav Kerouan, my Breton steward,” he explained, “and you are very safe in his hands.”

This steward, with his harsh face and stern eyes, looked a very warlike person for so peaceful an employment.

I said nothing, however, though you may guess that I kept my eyes open. A berth had been prepared for me next the cabin, which would have seemed comfortable enough had it not contrasted with the extraordinary splendour of Fourneau’s quarters. He was certainly a most luxurious person, for his room was new-fitted with velvet and silver in a way which would have suited the yacht of a noble better than a little West African trader.

So thought the mate, Mr. Burns, who could not hide his amusement and contempt whenever he looked at it.

This fellow, a big, solid, red-headed Englishman, had the other berth connected with the cabin. There was a second mate named Turner, who lodged in the middle of the ship, and there were nine men and one boy in the crew, three of whom, as I was informed by Mr. Burns, were Channel Islanders like myself. This Burns, the first mate, was much interested to know why I was coming with them.

“I come for pleasure,” said I.

He stared at me.

“Ever been to the West Coast?” he asked.

I said that I had not.

"I thought not," said he. "You'll never come again for that reason, anyhow."

Some three days after my arrival we untied the ropes by which the ship was tethered and we set off upon our journey. I was never a good sailor, and I may confess that we were far out of sight of any land before I was able to venture upon deck. At last, however, upon the fifth day I drank the soup which the good Kerouan brought me, and I was able to crawl from my bunk and up the stair. The fresh air revived me, and from that time onward I accommodated myself to the motion of the vessel. My beard had begun to grow also, and I have no doubt that I should have made as fine a sailor as I have a soldier had I chanced to be born to that branch of the service. I learned to pull the ropes which hoisted the sails, and also to haul round the long sticks to which they are attached. For the most part, however, my duties were to play ecarte with Captain Fourneau, and to act as his companion. It was not strange that he should need one, for neither of his mates could read or write, though each of them was an excellent seaman.

If our captain had died suddenly I cannot imagine how we should have found our way in that waste of waters, for it was only he who had the knowledge which enabled him to mark our place upon the chart. He had this fixed upon the cabin wall, and every day he put our course upon it so that we could see at a glance how far we were from our destination. It was wonderful how well he could calculate it, for one morning he said that we should see the Cape Verd light that very night, and there it was, sure enough, upon our left front the moment that darkness came. Next day, however, the land was out of sight, and Burns, the mate, explained to me that we should see no more until we came to our port in the Gulf of Biafra. Every day we flew south with a favouring wind, and always at noon the pin upon the chart was moved nearer and nearer to the African coast. I may explain that palm oil was the cargo which we were in search of, and that our own lading consisted of coloured cloths, old muskets, and such other trifles as the English sell to the savages.

At last the wind which had followed us so long died away, and for several days we drifted about on a calm and oily sea, under a sun which brought the pitch bubbling out between the planks upon the deck. We turned and turned our sails to catch every wandering puff, until at last we came out of this belt of calm and ran south again with a brisk breeze, the sea all round us being alive with flying fishes. For some days Burns appeared to be uneasy, and I observed him continually shading his eyes with his hand and staring at the horizon as if he were looking for land. Twice I caught him with his red head against the chart in the cabin, gazing at that pin, which was always approaching and yet never reaching the African coast. At last one evening, as Captain Fourneau and I were playing ecarte in the cabin, the mate entered with an angry look upon his sunburned face.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Fourneau," said he.

"But do you know what course the man at the wheel is steering?"

"Due south," the captain answered, with his eyes fixed upon his cards.

"And he should be steering due east."

"How do you make that out?"

The mate gave an angry growl.

"I may not have much education," said he, "but let me tell you this, Captain Fourneau, I've sailed these waters since I was a little nipper of ten, and I know the line when I'm on it, and I know the doldrums, and I know how to find my way to the oil rivers. We are south of the line now, and we should be steering due east instead of due south if your port is the port that the owners sent you to."

"Excuse me, Mr. Gerard. Just remember that it is my lead," said the captain, laying down his cards.

"Come to the map here, Mr. Burns, and I will give you a lesson in practical navigation. Here is the trade wind from the southwest and here is the line, and here is the port that we want to make, and here is a man who will have his own way aboard his own ship." As he spoke he seized the unfortunate mate by the throat and squeezed him until he was nearly senseless. Kerouan, the steward, had rushed in with a rope, and between them they gagged and trussed the man, so that he was utterly helpless.

"There is one of our Frenchmen at the wheel. We had best put the mate overboard," said the steward.

"That is safest," said Captain Fourneau.

But that was more than I could stand. Nothing would persuade me to agree to the death of a helpless man.

With a bad grace Captain Fourneau consented to spare him, and we carried him to the after-hold, which lay under the cabin. There he was laid among the bales of Manchester cloth.

“It is not worth while to put down the hatch,” said Captain Fourneau. “Gustav, go to Mr. Turner and tell him that I would like to have a word with him.”

The unsuspecting second mate entered the cabin, and was instantly gagged and secured as Burns had been.

He was carried down and laid beside his comrade. The hatch was then replaced.

“Our hands have been forced by that red-headed dolt,” said the captain, “and I have had to explode my mine before I wished. However, there is no great harm done, and it will not seriously disarrange my plans.

“Kerouan, you will take a keg of rum forward to the crew and tell them that the captain gives it to them to drink his health on the occasion of crossing the line.

“They will know no better. As to our own fellows, bring them down to your pantry so that we may be sure that they are ready for business. Now, Colonel Gerard, with your permission we will resume our game of ecarte.”

It is one of those occasions which one does not forget.

This captain, who was a man of iron, shuffled and cut, dealt and played as if he were in his cafe. From below we heard the inarticulate murmurings of the two mates, half smothered by the handkerchiefs which gagged them. Outside the timbers creaked and the sails hummed under the brisk breeze which was sweeping us upon our way. Amid the splash of the waves and the whistle of the wind we heard the wild cheers and shoutings of the English sailors as they broached the keg of rum. We played half-a-dozen games and then the captain rose. “I think they are ready for us now,” said he. He took a brace of pistols from a locker, and he handed one of them to me.

But we had no need to fear resistance, for there was no one to resist. The Englishman of those days, whether soldier or sailor, was an incorrigible drunkard.

Without drink he was a brave and good man. But if drink were laid before him it was a perfect madness — nothing could induce him to take it with moderation.

In the dim light of the den which they inhabited, five senseless figures and two shouting, swearing, singing madmen represented the crew of the Black Swan. Coils of rope were brought forward by the steward, and with the help of two French seamen (the third was at the wheel) we secured the drunkards and tied them up, so that it was impossible for them to speak or move. They were placed under the fore-hatch, as their officers had been under the after one, and Kerouan was directed twice a day to give them food and drink. So at last we found that the Black Swan was entirely our own.

Had there been bad weather I do not know what we should have done, but we still went gaily upon our way with a wind which was strong enough to drive us swiftly south, but not strong enough to cause us alarm. On the evening of the third day I found Captain Fourneau gazing eagerly out from the platform in the front of the vessel. “Look, Gerard, look!” he cried, and pointed over the pole which stuck out in front.

A light blue sky rose from a dark blue sea, and far away, at the point where they met, was a shadowy something like a cloud, but more definite in shape.

“What is it?” I cried.

“It is land.”

“And what land?”

I strained my ears for the answer, and yet I knew already what the answer would be.

“It is St. Helena.”

Here, then, was the island of my dreams! Here was the cage where our great Eagle of France was confined!

All those thousands of leagues of water had not sufficed to keep Gerard from the master whom he loved.

There he was, there on that cloud-bank yonder over the dark blue sea. How my eyes devoured it! How my soul flew in front of the vessel — flew on and on to tell him that he was not forgotten, that after many days one faithful servant was coming to his side. Every instant the dark blur upon the water grew harder and clearer.

Soon I could see plainly enough that it was indeed a mountainous island. The night fell, but still I knelt upon the deck, with my eyes fixed upon the darkness which covered the spot where I knew that the great Emperor was. An hour passed and another one, and then suddenly a little golden twinkling light shone out exactly ahead of us. It was the light of the window of some house — perhaps of his house. It could not be more than a mile or two away. Oh, how I held out my hands to it! — they were the hands of Etienne Gerard, but it was for all France that they were held out.

Every light had been extinguished aboard our ship, and presently, at the direction of Captain Fourneau, we all pulled upon one of the ropes, which had the effect of swinging round one of the sticks above us, and so stopping the vessel. Then he asked me to step down to the cabin.

“You understand everything now, Colonel Gerard,” said he, “and you will forgive me if I did not take you into my complete confidence before. In a matter of such importance I make no man my confidant. I have long planned the rescue of the Emperor, and my remaining in England and joining their merchant service was entirely with that design. All has worked out exactly as I expected. I have made several successful voyages to the West Coast of Africa, so that there was no difficulty in my obtaining the command of this one. One by one I got these old French man-of-war’s-men among the hands. As to you, I was anxious to have one tried fighting man in case of resistance, and I also desired to have a fitting companion for the Emperor during his long homeward voyage. My cabin is already fitted up for his use. I trust that before to-morrow morning he will be inside it, and we out of sight of this accursed island.”

You can think of my emotion, my friends, as I listened to these words. I embraced the brave Fourneau, and implored him to tell me how I could assist him.

“I must leave it all in your hands,” said he. “Would that I could have been the first to pay him homage, but it would not be wise for me to go. The glass is falling, there is a storm brewing, and we have the land under our lee. Besides, there are three English cruisers near the island which may be upon us at any moment. It is for me, therefore, to guard the ship and for you to bring off the Emperor.”

I thrilled at the words.

“Give me your instructions!” I cried.

“I can only spare you one man, for already I can hardly pull round the yards,” said he. “One of the boats has been lowered, and this man will row you ashore and await your return. The light which you see is indeed the light of Longwood. All who are in the house are your friends, and all may be depended upon to aid the Emperor’s escape. There is a cordon of English sentries, but they are not very near to the house. Once you have got as far as that you will convey our plans to the Emperor, guide him down to the boat, and bring him on board.”

The Emperor himself could not have given his instructions more shortly and clearly. There was not a moment to be lost. The boat with the seaman was waiting alongside. I stepped into it, and an instant afterward we had pushed off. Our little boat danced over the dark waters, but always shining before my eyes was the light of Longwood, the light of the Emperor, the star of hope. Presently the bottom of the boat grated upon the pebbles of the beach. It was a deserted cove, and no challenge from a sentry came to disturb us. I left the seaman by the boat and I began to climb the hillside.

There was a goat track winding in and out among the rocks, so I had no difficulty in finding my way. It stands to reason that all paths in St. Helena would lead to the Emperor. I came to a gate. No sentry — and I passed through. Another gate — still no sentry! I wondered what had become of this cordon of which Fourneau had spoken. I had come now to the top of my climb, for there was the light burning steadily right in front of me. I concealed myself and took a good look round, but still I could see no sign of the enemy. As I approached I saw the house, a long, low building with a veranda. A man was walking up and down upon the path in front. I crept nearer and had a look at him.

Perhaps it was this cursed Hudson Lowe. What a triumph if I could not only rescue the Emperor, but also avenge him! But it was more likely that this man was an English sentry. I crept nearer still, and the man stopped in front of the lighted window, so that I could see him. No; it was no soldier, but a priest. I wondered what such a man could be doing there at two in the morning. Was he French or English? If he were one of the household I might take him into my confidence. If he were English he might ruin all my plans.

I crept a little nearer still, and at that moment he entered the house, a flood of light pouring out through the open door. All was clear for me now and I understood that not an instant was to be lost. Bending myself double I ran swiftly forward to the lighted window.

Raising my head I peeped through, and there was the Emperor lying dead before me.

My friends, I fell down upon the gravel walk as senseless as if a bullet had passed through my brain. So great was the shock that I wonder that I survived it.

And yet in half an hour I had staggered to my feet again, shivering in every limb, my teeth chattering, and there I stood staring with the eyes of a maniac into that room of death.

He lay upon a bier in the centre of the chamber, calm, composed, majestic, his face full of that reserve power which lightened our hearts upon the day of battle. A half-smile was fixed upon his pale lips, and his eyes, half-opened, seemed to be turned on mine. He was stouter than when I had seen him at Waterloo, and there was a gentleness of expression which I had never seen in life. On either side of him burned rows of candles, and this was the beacon which had welcomed us at sea, which had guided me over the water, and which I had hailed as my star of hope. Dimly I became conscious that many people were kneeling in the room; the little Court, men and women, who had shared his fortunes, Bertrand, his wife, the priest, Montholon — all were there. I would have prayed too, but my heart was too heavy and bitter for prayer. And yet I must leave, and I could not leave him without a sign. Regardless of whether I was seen or not, I drew myself erect before my dead leader, brought my heels together, and raised my hand in a last salute. Then I turned and hurried of through the darkness, with the picture of the wan, smiling lips and the steady grey eyes dancing always before me.

It had seemed to me but a little time that I had been away, and yet the boatman told me that it was hours.

Only when he spoke of it did I observe that the wind was blowing half a gale from the sea and that the waves were roaring in upon the beach. Twice we tried to push out our little boat, and twice it was thrown back by the sea. The third time a great wave filled it and stove the bottom. Helplessly we waited beside it until the dawn broke, to show a raging sea and a flying scud above it. There was no sign of the Black Swan. Climbing the hill we looked down, but on all the great torn expanse of the ocean there was no gleam of a sail. She was gone. Whether she had sunk, or whether she was recaptured by her English crew, or what strange fate may have been in store for her, I do not know. Never again in this life did I see Captain Fourneau to tell him the result of my mission. For my own part I gave myself up to the English, my boatman and I pretending that we were the only survivors of a lost vessel — though, indeed, there was no pretence in the matter. At the hands of their officers I received that generous hospitality which I have always encountered, but it was many a long month before I could get a passage back to the dear land outside of which there can be no happiness for so true a Frenchman as myself.

And so I tell you in one evening how I bade good-bye to my master, and I take my leave also of you, my kind friends, who have listened so patiently to the long-winded stories of an old broken soldier. Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and England, you have gone with me to all these countries, and you have seen through my dim eyes something of the sparkle and splendour of those great days, and I have brought back to you some shadow of those men whose tread shook the earth. Treasure it in your minds and pass it on to your children, for the memory of a great age is the most precious treasure that a nation can possess. As the tree is nurtured by its own cast leaves so it is these dead men and vanished days which may bring out another blossoming of heroes, of rulers, and of sages. I go to Gascony, but my words stay here in your memory, and long after Etienne Gerard is forgotten a heart may be warmed or a spirit braced by some faint echo of the words that he has spoken. Gentlemen, an old soldier salutes you and bids you farewell.

ROUND THE FIRE STORIES

This collection of short stories was published in 1908.

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THE MAN WITH THE WATCHES

THERE are many who will still bear in mind the singular circumstances which, under the heading of the Rugby Mystery, filled many columns of the daily Press in the spring of the year 1892. Coming as it did at a period of exceptional dulness, it attracted perhaps rather more attention than it deserved, but it offered to the public that mixture of the whimsical and the tragic which is most stimulating to the popular imagination. Interest drooped, however, when, after weeks of fruitless investigation, it was found that no final explanation of the facts was forthcoming, and the tragedy seemed from that time to the present to have finally taken its place in the dark catalogue of inexplicable and unexplained crimes. A recent communication (the authenticity of which appears to be above question) has, however, thrown some new and clear light upon the matter. Before laying it before the public it would be as well, perhaps, that I should refresh their memories as to the singular facts upon which this commentary is founded. These facts were briefly as follows: —

At five o'clock on the evening of the 18th of March in the year already mentioned a train left Euston Station for Manchester. It was a rainy, squally day, which grew wilder as it progressed, so it was by no means the weather in which any one would travel who was not driven to do so by necessity. The train, however, is a favourite one among Manchester business men who are returning from town, for it does the journey in four hours and twenty minutes, with only three stoppages upon the way. In spite of the inclement evening it was, therefore, fairly well filled upon the occasion of which I speak. The guard of the train was a tried servant of the company — a man who had worked for twenty-two years without blemish or complaint. His name was John Palmer.

The station clock was upon the stroke of five, and the guard was about to give the customary signal to the engine-driver when he observed two belated passengers hurrying down the platform. The one was an exceptionally tall man, dressed in a long black overcoat with Astrakhan collar and cuffs. I have already said that the evening was an inclement one, and the tall traveller had the high, warm collar turned up to protect his throat against the bitter March wind. He appeared, as far as the guard could judge by so hurried an inspection, to be a man between fifty and sixty years of age, who had retained a good deal of the vigour and activity of his youth. In one hand he carried a brown leather Gladstone bag. His companion was a lady, tall and erect, walking with a vigorous step which outpaced the gentleman beside her. She wore a long, fawn-coloured dust-cloak, a black, close-fitting toque, and a dark veil which concealed the greater part of her face. The two might very well have passed as father and daughter. They walked swiftly down the line of carriages, glancing in at the windows, until the guard, John Palmer, overtook them.

“Now, then, sir, look sharp, the train is going,” said he.

“First-class,” the man answered.

The guard turned the handle of the nearest door. In the carriage, which he had opened, there sat a small man with a cigar in his mouth. His appearance seems to have impressed itself upon the guard’s memory, for he was prepared, afterwards, to describe or to identify him. He was a man of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, dressed in some grey material, sharp-nosed, alert, with a ruddy, weather-beaten face, and a small, closely cropped black beard. He glanced up as the door was opened. The tall man paused with his foot upon the step.

“This is a smoking compartment. The lady dislikes smoke,” said he, looking round at the guard.

“All right! Here you are, sir!” said John Palmer. He slammed the door of the smoking carriage, opened that of the next one, which was empty, and thrust the two travellers in. At the same moment he sounded his whistle and the wheels of the train began to move. The man with the cigar was at the window of his carriage, and said something to the guard as he rolled past him, but the words were lost in the bustle of the departure. Palmer stepped into the guard’s van, as it came up to him, and thought no more of the incident.

Twelve minutes after its departure the train reached Willesden Junction, where it stopped for a very short interval. An examination of the tickets has made it certain that no one either joined or left it at this time, and no passenger was seen to alight upon the platform. At 5.14 the journey to Manchester was resumed, and Rugby was reached at 6.50, the express being five minutes late.

At Rugby the attention of the station officials was drawn to the fact that the door of one of the first-class carriages was open. An examination of that compartment, and of its neighbour, disclosed a remarkable state of affairs.

The smoking carriage in which the short, red-faced man with the black beard had been seen was now empty. Save for a half-smoked cigar, there was no trace whatever of its recent occupant. The door of this carriage was fastened. In the next compartment, to which attention had been originally drawn, there was no sign either of the gentleman with the Astrakhan collar or of the young lady who accompanied him. All three passengers had disappeared. On the other hand, there was found upon the floor of this carriage — the one in which the tall traveller and the lady had been — a young man, fashionably dressed and of elegant appearance. He lay with his knees drawn up, and his head resting against the further door, an elbow upon either seat. A bullet had penetrated his heart and his death must have been instantaneous. No one had seen such a man enter the train, and no railway ticket was found in his pocket, neither were there any markings upon his linen, nor papers nor personal property which might help to identify him. Who he was, whence he had come, and how he had met his end were each as great a mystery as what had occurred to the three people who had started an hour and a half before from Willesden in those two compartments.

I have said that there was no personal property which might help to identify him, but it is true that there was one peculiarity about this unknown young man which was much commented upon at the time. In his pockets were found no fewer than six valuable gold watches, three in the various pockets of his waistcoat, one in his ticket-pocket, one in his breastpocket, and one small one set in a leather strap and fastened round his left wrist. The obvious explanation that the man was a pickpocket, and that this was his plunder, was discounted by the fact that all six were of American make, and of a type which is rare in England. Three of them bore the mark of the Rochester Watchmaking Company; one was by Mason, of Elmira; one was unmarked; and the small one, which was highly jewelled and ornamented, was from Tiffany, of New York. The other contents of his pocket consisted of an ivory knife with a corkscrew by Rodgers, of Sheffield; a small circular mirror, one inch in diameter; a re-admission slip to the Lyceum theatre; a silver box full of vesta matches, and a brown leather cigar-case containing two cheroots — also two pounds fourteen shillings in money. It was clear, then, that whatever motives may have led to his death, robbery was not among them. As already mentioned, there were no markings upon the man’s linen, which appeared to be new, and no tailor's name upon his coat. In appearance he was young, short, smooth-cheeked, and delicately featured. One of his front teeth was conspicuously stopped with gold.

On the discovery of the tragedy an examination was instantly made of the tickets of all passengers, and the number of the passengers themselves was counted. It was found that only three tickets were unaccounted for, corresponding to the three travellers who were missing. The express was then allowed to proceed, but a new guard was sent with it, and John Palmer was detained as a witness at Rugby. The carriage which included the two compartments in question was uncoupled and side-tracked. Then, on the arrival of Inspector Vane, of Scotland Yard, and of Mr. Henderson, a detective in the service of the railway company, an exhaustive inquiry was made into all the circumstances.

That crime had been committed was certain. The bullet, which appeared to have come from a small pistol or revolver, had been fired from some little distance, as there was no scorching of the clothes. No weapon was found in the compartment (which finally disposed of the theory of suicide), nor was there any sign of the brown leather bag which the guard had seen in the hand of the tall gentleman. A lady's parasol was found upon the rack, but no other trace was to be seen of the travellers in either of the sections. Apart from the crime, the question of how or why three passengers (one of them a lady) could get out of the train, and one other get in during the unbroken run between Willesden and Rugby, was one which excited the utmost curiosity among the general public, and gave rise to much speculation in the London Press.

John Palmer, the guard, was able at the inquest to give some evidence which threw a little light upon the matter. There was a spot between Tring and Cheddington, according to his statement, where, on account of some repairs to the line, the train had for a few minutes slowed down to a pace not exceeding eight or ten miles an hour. At that place it might be possible for a man, or even for an exceptionally active woman, to have left the train without serious injury. It was true that a gang of platelayers was there, and that they had seen nothing, but it was their custom to stand in the middle between the metals, and the open carriage door was upon the far side, so that it was conceivable that someone might have alighted unseen, as the darkness would by that time be drawing in. A steep embankment would instantly screen anyone who sprang out from the observation of the navvies.

The guard also deposed that there was a good deal of movement upon the platform at Willesden Junction, and that though it was certain that no one had either joined or left the train there, it was still quite possible that some of the passengers might have changed unseen from one compartment to another. It was by no means uncommon for a gentleman to finish his cigar in a smoking carriage and then to change to a clearer atmosphere. Supposing that the man with the black beard had done so at Willesden (and the half-smoked cigar upon the floor seemed to favour the supposition), he would naturally go into the nearest section, which would bring him into the company of the two other actors in this drama. Thus the first stage of the affair might be surmised without any great breach of probability. But what the second stage had been, or how the final one had been arrived at, neither the guard nor the experienced detective officers could suggest.

A careful examination of the line between Willesden and Rugby resulted in one discovery which might or might not have a bearing upon the tragedy. Near Tring, at the very place where the train slowed down, there was found at the bottom of the embankment a small pocket Testament, very shabby and worn. It was printed by the Bible Society of London, and bore an inscription: “From John to Alice. Jan. 13th, 1856,” upon the fly-leaf. Underneath was written:

“James, July 4th, 1859,” and beneath that again:

“Edward. Nov. 1st, 1869,” all the entries being in the same handwriting. This was the only clue, if it could be called a clue, which the police obtained, and the coroner’s verdict of “Murder by a person or persons unknown” was the unsatisfactory ending of a singular case. Advertisement, rewards, and inquiries proved equally fruitless, and nothing could be found which was solid enough to form the basis for a profitable investigation.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that no theories were formed to account for the facts. On the contrary, the Press, both in England and in America, teemed with suggestions and suppositions, most of which were obviously absurd. The fact that the watches were of American make, and some peculiarities in connection with the gold stopping of his front tooth, appeared to indicate that the deceased was a citizen of the United States, though his linen, clothes, and boots were undoubtedly of British manufacture. It was surmised, by some, that he was concealed under the seat, and that, being discovered, he was for some reason, possibly because he had overheard their guilty secrets, put to death by his fellow-passengers.

When coupled with generalities as to the ferocity and cunning of anarchical and other secret societies, this theory sounded as plausible as any.

The fact that he should be without a ticket would be consistent with the idea of concealment, and it was well known that women played a prominent part in the Nihilistic propaganda. On the other hand, it was clear, from the guard's statement, that the man must have been hidden there before the others arrived, and how unlikely the coincidence that conspirators should stray exactly into the very compartment in which a spy was already concealed! Besides, this explanation ignored the man in the smoking carriage, and gave no reason at all for his simultaneous disappearance. The police had little difficulty in showing that such a theory would not cover the facts, but they were unprepared in the absence of evidence to advance any alternative explanation.

There was a letter in the Daily Gazette, over the signature of a well-known criminal investigator, which gave rise to considerable discussion at the time. He had formed a hypothesis which had at least ingenuity to recommend it, and I cannot do better than append it in his own words.

"Whatever may be the truth," said he, "it must depend upon some bizarre and rare combination of events, so we need have no hesitation in postulating such events in our explanation. In the absence of data we must abandon the analytic or scientific method of investigation, and must approach it in the synthetic fashion. In a word, instead of taking known events and deducing from them what has occurred, we must build up a fanciful explanation if it will only be consistent with known events.

"We can then test this explanation by any fresh facts which may arise. If they all fit into their places, the probability is that we are upon the right track, and with each fresh fact this probability increases in a geometrical progression until the evidence becomes final and convincing.

"Now, there is one most remarkable and suggestive fact which has not met with the attention which it deserves. There is a local train running through Harrow and King's Langley, which is timed in such a way that the express must have overtaken it at or about the period when it eased down its speed to eight miles an hour on account of the repairs of the line. The two trains would at that time be travelling in the same direction at a similar rate of speed and upon parallel lines. It is within everyone's experience how, under such circumstances, the occupant of each carriage can see very plainly the passengers in the other carriages opposite to him. The lamps of the express had been lit at Willesden, so that each compartment was brightly illuminated, and most visible to an observer from outside.

"Now, the sequence of events as I reconstruct them would be after this fashion. This young man with the abnormal number of watches was alone in the carriage of the slow train. His ticket, with his papers and gloves and other things, was, we will suppose, on the seat beside him. He was probably an American, and also probably a man of weak intellect. The excessive wearing of jewellery is an early symptom in some forms of mania.

"As he sat watching the carriages of the express which were (on account of the state of the line) going at the same pace as himself, he suddenly saw some people in it whom he knew. We will suppose for the sake of our theory that these people were a woman whom he loved and a man whom he hated — and who in return hated him. The young man was excitable and impulsive. He opened the door of his carriage, stepped from the footboard of the local train to the footboard of the express, opened the other door, and made his way into the presence of these two people. The feat (on the supposition that the trains were going at the same pace) is by no means so perilous as it might appear.

"Having now got our young man without his ticket into the carriage in which the elder man and the young woman are travelling, it is not difficult to imagine that a violent scene ensued. It is possible that the pair were also Americans, which is the more probable as the man carried a weapon — an unusual thing in England. If our supposition of incipient mania is correct, the young man is likely to have assaulted the other. As the upshot of the quarrel the elder man shot the intruder, and then made his escape from the carriage, taking the young lady with him.

"We will suppose that all this happened very rapidly, and that the train was still going at so slow a pace that it was not difficult for them to leave it. A woman might leave a train going at eight miles an hour. As a matter of fact, we know that this woman did do so.

"And now we have to fit in the man in the smoking carriage. Presuming that we have, up to this point, reconstructed the tragedy correctly, we shall find nothing in this other man to cause us to reconsider our conclusions. According to my theory, this man saw the young fellow cross from one train to the other, saw him open the door, heard the pistol-shot, saw the two fugitives spring out on to the line, realised that murder had been done, and sprang out himself in pursuit. Why he has never been heard of since —

whether he met his own death in the pursuit, or whether, as is more likely, he was made to realise that it was not a case for his interference — is a detail which we have at present no means of explaining. I acknowledge that there are some difficulties in the way. At first sight, it might seem improbable that at such a moment a murderer would burden himself in his flight with a brown leather bag. My answer is that he was well aware that if the bag were found his identity would be established. It was absolutely necessary for him to take it with him. My theory stands or falls upon one point, and I call upon the railway company to make strict inquiry as to whether a ticket was found unclaimed in the local train through Harrow and King's Langley upon the 18th of March. If such a ticket were found my case is proved. If not, my theory may still be the correct one, for it is conceivable either that he travelled without a ticket or that his ticket was lost."

To this elaborate and plausible hypothesis the answer of the police and of the company was, first, that no such ticket was found; secondly, that the slow train would never run parallel to the express; and, thirdly, that the local train had been stationary in King's Langley Station when the express, going at fifty miles an hour, had flashed past it. So perished the only satisfying explanation, and five years have elapsed without supplying a new one. Now, at last, there comes a statement which covers all the facts, and which must be regarded as authentic. It took the shape of a letter dated from New York, and addressed to the same criminal investigator whose theory I have quoted. It is given here in extenso, with the exception of the two opening paragraphs, which are personal in their nature: —

"You'll excuse me if I'm not very free with names. There's less reason now than there was five years ago when mother was still living. But for all that, I had rather cover up our tracks all I can. But I owe you an explanation, for if your idea of it was wrong, it was a mighty ingenious one all the same. I'll have to go back a little so as you may understand all about it.

"My people came from Bucks, England, and emigrated to the States in the early fifties. They settled in Rochester, in the State of New York, where my father ran a large dry goods store. There were only two sons: myself, James, and my brother, Edward. I was ten years older than my brother, and after my father died I sort of took the place of a father to him, as an elder brother would. He was a bright, spirited boy, and just one of the most beautiful creatures that ever lived. But there was always a soft spot in him, and it was like mould in cheese, for it spread and spread, and nothing that you could do would stop it. Mother saw it just as clearly as I did, but she went on spoiling him all the same, for he had such a way with him that you could refuse him nothing. I did all I could to hold him in, and he hated me for my pains.

"At last he fairly got his head, and nothing that we could do would stop him. He got off into New York, and went rapidly from bad to worse. At first he was only fast, and then he was criminal; and then, at the end of a year or two, he was one of the most notorious young crooks in the city. He had formed a friendship with Sparrow MacCoy, who was at the head of his profession as a bunco-steerer, green goodsman, and general rascal. They took to card-sharping, and frequented some of the best hotels in New York. My brother was an excellent actor (he might have made an honest name for himself if he had chosen), and he would take the parts of a young Englishman of title, of a simple lad from the West, or of a college undergraduate, whichever suited Sparrow MacCoy's purpose. And then one day he dressed himself as a girl, and he carried it off so well, and made himself such a valuable decoy, that it was their favourite game afterwards. They had made it right with Tammany and with the police, so it seemed as if nothing could ever stop them, for those were in the days before the Lexow Commission, and if you only had a pull, you could do pretty nearly everything you wanted.

"And nothing would have stopped them if they had only stuck to cards and New York, but they must needs come up Rochester way, and forge a name upon a check. It was my brother that did it, though everyone knew that it was under the influence of Sparrow MacCoy. I bought up that check, and a pretty sum it cost me. Then I went to my brother, laid it before him on the table, and swore to him that I would prosecute if he did not clear out of the country. At first he simply laughed. I could not prosecute, he said, without breaking our mother's heart, and he knew that I would not do that. I made him understand, however, that our mother's heart was being broken in any case, and that I had set firm on the point that I would rather see him in a Rochester gaol than in a New York hotel. So at last he gave in, and he made me a solemn promise that he would see Sparrow MacCoy no more, that he would go to Europe, and that he would turn his hand to any honest trade that I helped him to get. I took him down right away to an old family friend, Joe Willson, who is an exporter of American watches and clocks, and I got him to give Edward an agency in London, with a small salary and a 15 per cent commission on all business. His manner and appearance were so good that he won the old man over at once, and within a week he was sent off to London with a case full of samples.

“It seemed to me that this business of the check had really given my brother a fright, and that there was some chance of his settling down into an honest line of life. My mother had spoken with him, and what she said had touched him, for she had always been the best of mothers to him, and he had been the great sorrow of her life. But I knew that this man Sparrow MacCoy had a great influence over Edward, and my chance of keeping the lad straight lay in breaking the connection between them. I had a friend in the New York detective force, and through him I kept a watch upon MacCoy. When within a fortnight of my brother’s sailing I heard that MacCoy had taken a berth in the Etruria, I was as certain as if he had told me that he was going over to England for the purpose of coaxing Edward back again into the ways that he had left. In an instant I had resolved to go also, and to put my influence against MacCoy’s. I knew it was a losing fight, but I thought, and my mother thought, that it was my duty. We passed the last night together in prayer for my success, and she gave me her own Testament that my father had given her on the day of their marriage in the Old Country, so that I might always wear it next my heart.

“I was a fellow-traveller, on the steamship, with Sparrow MacCoy, and at least I had the satisfaction of spoiling his little game for the voyage. The very first night I went into the smoking-room, and found him at the head of a card table, with half-a-dozen young fellows who were carrying their full purses and their empty skulls over to Europe. He was settling down for his harvest, and a rich one it would have been, But I soon changed all that.

“‘Gentlemen, said I, ‘are you aware whom you are playing with?’

“‘What’s that to you? You mind your own business!’ said he, with an oath.

“‘ Who is it, anyway?’ asked one of the dudes.

“‘He’s Sparrow MacCoy, the most notorious card-sharper in the States.’

“Up he jumped with a bottle in his hand, but he remembered that he was under the flag of the effete Old Country, where law and order run, and Tammany has no pull. Gaol and the gallows wait for violence and murder, and there’s no slipping out by the back door on board an ocean liner.

"'Prove your words, you — !' said he.

"'I will!' said I. 'If you will turn up your right shirt-sleeve to the shoulder, I will either prove my words or I will eat them.'

"He turned white and said not a word. You see, I knew something of his ways, and I was aware that part of the mechanism which he and all such sharpers use consists of an elastic down the arm with a clip just above the wrist. It is by means of this clip that they withdraw from their hands the cards which they do not want, while they substitute other cards from another hiding-place. I reckoned on it being there, and it was. He cursed me, slunk out of the saloon, and was hardly seen again during the voyage. For once, at any rate, I got level with Mister Sparrow MacCoy.

"But he soon had his revenge upon me, for when it came to influencing my brother he outweighed me every time. Edward had kept himself straight in London for the first few weeks, and had done some business with his American watches, until this villain came across his path once more. I did my best, but the best was little enough. The next thing I heard there had been a scandal at one of the Northumberland Avenue hotels: a traveller had been fleeced of a large sum by two confederate card-sharpers, and the matter was in the hands of Scotland Yard. The first I learned of it was in the evening paper, and I was at once certain that my brother and MacCoy were back at their old games. I hurried at once to Edward's lodgings. They told me that he and a tall gentleman (whom I recognised as MacCoy) had gone off together, and that he had left the lodgings and taken his things with him. The landlady had heard them give several directions to the cabman, ending with Euston Station, and she had accidentally overheard the tall gentleman saying something about Manchester. She believed that that was their destination.

"A glance at the time-table showed me that the most likely train was at five, though there was another at 4.35 which they might have caught, I had only time to get the later one, but found no sign of them either at the depot or in the train. They must have gone on by the earlier one, so I determined to follow them to Manchester and search for them in the hotels there. One last appeal to my brother by all that he owed to my mother might even now be the salvation of him. My nerves were overstrung, and I lit a cigar to steady them. At that moment, just as the train was moving off, the door of my compartment was flung open, and there were MacCoy and my brother on the platform.

“They were both disguised, and with good reason, for they knew that the London police were after them. MacCoy had a great Astrakhan collar drawn up, so that only his eyes and nose were showing. My brother was dressed like a woman, with a black veil half down his face, but of course it did not deceive me for an instant, nor would it have done so even if I had not known that he had often used such a dress before. I started up, and as I did so MacCoy recognised me. He said something, the conductor slammed the door, and they were shown into the next compartment. I tried to stop the train so as to follow them, but the wheels were already moving, and it was too late.

“When we stopped at Willesden, I instantly changed my carriage. It appears that I was not seen to do so, which is not surprising, as the station was crowded with people. MacCoy, of course, was expecting me, and he had spent the time between Euston and Willesden in saying all he could to harden my brother’s heart and set him against me. That is what I fancy, for I had never found him so impossible to soften or to move. I tried this way and I tried that; I pictured his future in an English gaol; I described the sorrow of his mother when I came back with the news; I said everything to touch his heart, but all to no purpose. He sat there with a fixed sneer upon his handsome face, while every now and then Sparrow MacCoy would throw in a taunt at me, or some word of encouragement to hold my brother to his resolutions.

“‘Why don’t you run a Sunday-school?’ he would say to me, and then, in the same breath: ‘He thinks you have no will of your own. He thinks you are just the baby brother and that he can lead you where he likes. He’s only just finding out that you are a man as well as he.’

“It was those words of his which set me talking bitterly. We had left Willesden, you understand, for all this took some time. My temper got the better of me, and for the first time in my life I let my brother see the rough side of me. Perhaps it would have been better had I done so earlier and more often.

“‘A man!’ said I. ‘Well, I’m glad to have your friend’s assurance of it, for no one would suspect it to see you like a boarding-school missy. I don’t suppose in all this country there is a more contemptible-looking creature than you are as you sit there with that Dolly pinafore upon you.’ He coloured up at that, for he was a vain man, and he winced from ridicule.

"'It's only a dust-cloak,' said he, and he slipped it off. 'One has to throw the coppers off one's scent, and I had no other way to do it.' He took his toque off with the veil attached, and he put both it and the cloak into his brown bag. 'Anyway, I don't need to wear it until the conductor comes round,' said he.

'"Not then, either,' said I, and taking the bag I slung it with all my force out of the window. 'Now,' said I, 'you'll never make a Mary Jane of yourself while I can help it. If nothing but that disguise stands between you and a gaol, then to gaol you shall go.'

"That was the way to manage him. I felt my advantage at once. His supple nature was one which yielded to roughness far more readily than to entreaty. He flushed with shame, and his eyes filled with tears. But MacCoy saw my advantage also, and was determined that I should not pursue it.

"'He's my pard, and you shall not bully him,' he cried.

"'He's my brother, and you shall not ruin him,' said I. 'I believe a spell of prison is the very best way of keeping you apart, and you shall have it, or it will be no fault of mine.'

'"Oh, you would squeal, would you?' he cried, and in an instant he whipped out his revolver. I sprang for his hand, but saw that I was too late, and jumped aside. At the same instant he fired, and the bullet which would have struck me passed through the heart of my unfortunate brother.

"He dropped without a groan upon the floor of the compartment, and MacCoy and I, equally horrified, knelt at each side of him, trying to bring back some signs of life. MacCoy still held the loaded revolver in his hand, but his anger against me and my resentment towards him had both for the moment been swallowed up in this sudden tragedy. It was he who first realised the situation. The train was for some reason going very slowly at the moment, and he saw his opportunity for escape. In an instant he had the door open, but I was as quick as he, and jumping upon him the two of us fell off the foot-board and rolled in each other's arms down a steep embankment. At the bottom I struck my head against a stone, and I remembered nothing more. When I came to myself I was lying among some low bushes, not far from the railroad track, and somebody was bathing my head with a wet handkerchief. It was Sparrow MacCoy.

"' I guess I couldn't leave you,' said he. 'I didn't want to have the blood of two of you on my hands in one day. You loved your brother, I've no doubt; but you didn't love him a cent more than I loved him, though you'll say that I took a queer way to show it. Anyhow, it seems a mighty empty world now that he is gone, and I don't care a continental whether you give me over to the hangman or not.'

"He had turned his ankle in the fall, and there we sat, he with his useless foot and I with my throbbing head, and we talked and talked until gradually my bitterness began to soften and to turn into something like sympathy. What was the use of revenging his death upon the man who was as much stricken by that death as I was? And then, as my wits gradually returned, I began to realise also that I could do nothing against MacCoy which would not recoil upon my mother and myself. How could we convict him without a full account of my brother's career being made public — the very thing which of all others we wished to avoid? It was really as much our interest as his to cover the matter up, and from being an avenger of crime I found myself changed to a conspirator against Justice. The place in which we found ourselves was one of those pheasant preserves which are so common in the Old Country, and as we groped our way through it I found myself consulting the slayer of my brother as to how far it would be possible to hush it up.

"I soon realised from what he said that unless there were some papers of which he knew nothing in my brother's pockets, there was really no possible means by which the police could identify him or learn how he had got there. His ticket was in MacCoy's pocket, and so was the ticket for some baggage which they had left at the depot. Like most Americans, he had found it cheaper and easier to buy an outfit in London than to bring one from New York, so that all his linen and clothes were new and unmarked. The bag, containing the dust cloak, which I had thrown out of the window, may have fallen among some bramble patch where it is still concealed, or may have been carried off by some tramp, or may have come into the possession of the police, who kept the incident to themselves. Anyhow, I have seen nothing about it in the London papers. As to the watches, they were a selection from those which had been intrusted to him for business purposes. It may have been for the same business purposes that he was taking them to Manchester, but — well, it's too late to enter into that.

"I don't blame the police for being at fault. I don't see how it could have been otherwise. There was just one little clew that they might have followed up, but it was a small one. I mean that small circular mirror which was found in my brother's pocket. It isn't a very common thing for a young man to carry about with him, is it? But a gambler might have told you what such a mirror may mean to a card-sharper. If you sit back a little from the table, and lay the mirror, face upwards, upon your lap, you can see, as you deal, every card that you give to your adversary. It is not hard to say whether you see a man or raise him when you know his cards as well as your own. It was as much a part of a sharper's outfit as the elastic clip upon Sparrow MacCoy's arm. Taking that, in connection with the recent frauds at the hotels, the police might have got hold of one end of the string.

"I don't think there is much more for me to explain. We got to a village called Amersham that night in the character of two gentlemen upon a walking tour, and afterwards we made our way quietly to London, whence MacCoy went on to Cairo and I returned to New York. My mother died six months afterwards, and I am glad to say that to the day of her death she never knew what happened. She was always under the delusion that Edward was earning an honest living in London, and I never had the heart to tell her the truth. He never wrote; but, then, he never did write at any time, so that made no difference. His name was the last upon her lips.

"There's just one other thing that I have to ask you, sir, and I should take it as a kind return for all this explanation, if you could do it for me. You remember that Testament that was picked up. I always carried it in my inside pocket, and it must have come out in my fall. I value it very highly, for it was the family book with my birth and my brother's marked by my father in the beginning of it. I wish you would apply at the proper place and have it sent to me. It can be of no possible value to any one else. If you address it to X, Bassano's Library, Broadway, New York, it is sure to come to hand."

THE BLACK DOCTOR

BISHOP'S CROSSING is a small village lying ten miles in a south-westerly direction from Liverpool. Here in the early seventies there settled a doctor named Aloysius Lana. Nothing was known locally either of his antecedents or of the reasons which had prompted him to come to this Lancashire hamlet. Two facts only were certain about him: the one that he had gained his medical qualification with some distinction at Glasgow; the other that he came undoubtedly of a tropical race, and was so dark that he might almost have had a strain of the Indian in his composition. His predominant features were, however, European, and he possessed a stately courtesy and carriage which suggested a Spanish extraction. A swarthy skin, raven-black hair, and dark, sparkling eyes under a pair of heavily-tufted brows made a strange contrast to the flaxen or chestnut rustics of England, and the newcomer was soon known as " The Black Doctor of Bishop's Crossing." At first it was a term of ridicule and reproach; as the years went on it became a title of honour which was familiar to the whole country-side, and extended far beyond the narrow confines of the village. For the newcomer proved himself to be a capable surgeon and an accomplished physician. The practice of that district had been in the hands of Edward Rowe, the son of Sir William Rowe, the Liverpool consultant, but he had not inherited the talents of his father, and Dr. Lana, with his advantages of presence and of manner, soon beat him out of the field. Dr. Lana's social success was as rapid as his professional. A remarkable surgical cure in the case of the Hon. James Lowry, the second son of Lord Belton, was the means of introducing him to county society, where he became a favourite through the charm of his conversation and the elegance of his manners. An absence of antecedents and of relatives is sometimes an aid rather than an impediment to social advancement, and the distinguished individuality of the handsome doctor was its own recommendation.

His patients had one fault — and one fault only — to find with him. He appeared to be a confirmed bachelor. This was the more remarkable since the house which he occupied was a large one, and it was known that his success in practice had enabled him to save considerable sums. At first the local matchmakers were continually coupling his name with one or other of the eligible ladies, but as years passed and Dr. Lana remained unmarried, it came to be generally understood that for some reason he must remain a bachelor. Some even went so far as to assert that he was already married, and that it was in order to escape the consequence of an early misalliance that he had buried himself at Bishop's Crossing. And then, just as the match-makers had finally given him up in despair, his engagement was suddenly announced to Miss Frances Morton, of Leigh Hall.

Miss Morton was a young lady who was well known upon the countryside, her father, James Haldane Morton, having been the Squire of Bishop's Crossing. Both her parents were, however, dead, and she lived with her only brother, Arthur Morton, who had inherited the family estate. In person Miss Morton was tall and stately, and she was famous for her quick, impetuous nature and for her strength of character. She met Dr. Lana at a garden-party, and a friendship, which quickly ripened into love, sprang up between them. Nothing could exceed their devotion to each other. There was some discrepancy in age, he being thirty-seven, and she twenty-four; but, save in that one respect, there was no possible objection to be found with the match. The engagement was in February, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place in August.

Upon the 3rd of June Dr. Lana received a letter from abroad. In a small village the postmaster is also in a position to be the gossip-master, and Mr. Bankley, of Bishop's Crossing, had many of the secrets of his neighbours in his possession. Of this particular letter he remarked only that it was in a curious envelope, that it was in a man's handwriting, that the postscript was Buenos Ayres, and the stamp of the Argentine Republic. It was the first letter which he had ever known Dr. Lana to have from abroad, and this was the reason why his attention was particularly called to it before he handed it to the local postman. It was delivered by the evening delivery of that date.

Next morning — that is, upon the 4th of June — Dr. Lana called upon Miss Morton, and a long interview followed, from which he was observed to return in a state of great agitation. Miss Morton remained in her room all that day, and her maid found her several times in tears. In the course of a week it was an open secret to the whole village that the engagement was at an end, that Dr. Lana had behaved shamefully to the young lady, and that Arthur Morton, her brother, was talking of horse-whipping him. In what particular respect the doctor had behaved badly was unknown — some surmised one thing and some another; but it was observed, and taken as the obvious sign of a guilty conscience, that he would go for miles round rather than pass the windows of Leigh Hall, and that he gave up attending morning service upon Sundays where he might have met the young lady. There was an advertisement also in the lancet as to the sale of a practice which mentioned no names, but which was thought by some to refer to Bishop's Crossing, and to mean that Dr. Lana was thinking of abandoning the scene of his success. Such was the position of affairs when, upon the evening of Monday, June 21st, there came a fresh development which changed what had been a mere village scandal into a tragedy which arrested the attention of the whole nation. Some detail is necessary to cause the facts of that evening to present their full significance.

The sole occupants of the doctor's house were his housekeeper, an elderly and most respectable woman, named Martha Woods, and a young servant — Mary Pilling. The coachman and the surgery-boy slept out. It was the custom of the doctor to sit at night in his study, which was next the surgery in the wing of the house which was farthest from the servants' quarters. This side of the house had a door of its own for the convenience of patients, so that it was possible for the doctor to admit and receive a visitor there without the knowledge of any one. As a matter of fact, when patients came late it was quite usual for him to let them in and out by the surgery entrance, for the maid and the housekeeper were in the habit of retiring early.

On this particular night Martha Woods went into the doctor's study at half-past nine, and found him writing at his desk. She bade him good-night, sent the maid to bed, and then occupied herself until a quarter to eleven in household matters. It was striking eleven upon the hall clock when she went to her own room. She had been there about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes when she heard a cry or call, which appeared to come from within the house. She waited some time, but it was not repeated. Much alarmed, for the sound was loud and urgent, she put on a dressing-gown, and ran at the top of her speed to the doctor's study.

"Who's there?" cried a voice, as she tapped at the door.

"I am here, sir — Mrs. Woods."

"I beg that you will leave me in peace. Go back to your room this instant!" cried the voice, which was, to the best of her belief, that of her master. The tone was so harsh and so unlike her master's usual manner, that she was surprised and hurt.

"I thought I heard you calling, sir," she explained, but no answer was given to her. Mrs. Woods looked at the clock as she returned to her room, and it was then half-past eleven.

At some period between eleven and twelve (she could not be positive as to the exact hour) a patient called upon the doctor and was unable to get any reply from him. This late visitor was Mrs. Madding, the wife of the village grocer who was dangerously ill of typhoid fever. Dr. Lana had asked her to look in the last thing and let him know how her husband was progressing. She observed that the light was burning in the study, but having knocked several times at the surgery door without response, she concluded that the doctor had been called out, and so returned home.

There is a short, winding drive with a lamp at the end of it leading down from the house to the road. As Mrs. Madding emerged from the gate a man was coming along the footpath. Thinking that it might be Dr. Lana returning from some professional visit, she waited for him, and was surprised to see that it was Mr. Arthur Morton, the young squire. In the light of the lamp she observed that his manner was excited, and that he carried in his hand a heavy hunting-crop.

He was turning in at the gate when she addressed him.

"The doctor is not in, sir," said she.

"How do you know that?" he asked, harshly.

"I have been to the surgery door, sir."

"I see a light," said the young squire, looking up the drive. "That is in his study, is it not?"

"Yes, sir; but I am sure that he is out." "Well, he must come in again," said young Morton, and passed through the gate while Mrs. Madding went upon her homeward way.

At three o'clock that morning her husband suffered a sharp relapse, and she was so alarmed by his symptoms that she determined to call the doctor without delay. As she passed through the gate she was surprised to see some one lurking among the laurel bushes. It was certainly a man, and to the best of her belief Mr. Arthur Morton. Preoccupied with her own troubles, she gave no particular attention to the incident, but hurried on upon her errand.

When she reached the house she perceived to her surprise that the light was still burning in the study. She therefore tapped at the surgery door. There was no answer. She repeated the knocking several times without effect. It appeared to her to be unlikely that the doctor would either go to bed or go out leaving so brilliant a light behind him, and it struck Mrs. Madding that it was possible that he might have dropped asleep in his chair. She tapped at the study window, therefore, but without result. Then, finding that there was an opening between the curtain and the woodwork, she looked through.

The small room was brilliantly lighted from a large lamp on the central table, which was littered with the doctor’s books and instruments. No one was visible, nor did she see anything unusual, except that in the further shadow thrown by the table a dingy white glove was lying upon the carpet. And then suddenly, as her eyes became more accustomed to the light, a boot emerged from the other end of the shadow, and she realised, with a thrill of horror, that what she had taken to be a glove was the hand of a man, who was prostrate upon the floor. Understanding that something terrible had occurred, she rang at the front door, roused Mrs. Woods, the housekeeper, and the two women made their way into the study, having first dispatched the maidservant to the police-station.

At the side of the table, away from the window, Dr. Lana was discovered stretched upon his back and quite dead. It was evident that he had been subjected to violence, for one of his eyes was blackened, and there were marks of bruises about his face and neck. A slight thickening and swelling of his features appeared to suggest that the cause of his death had been strangulation. He was dressed in his usual professional clothes, but wore cloth slippers, the soles of which were perfectly clean. The carpet was marked all over, especially on the side of the door, with traces of dirty boots, which were presumably left by the murderer. It was evident that some one had entered by the surgery door, had killed the doctor, and had then made his escape unseen. That the assailant was a man was certain, from the size of the footprints and from the nature of the injuries. But beyond that point the police found it very difficult to go.

There were no signs of robbery, and the doctor’s gold watch was safe in his pocket. He kept a heavy cash-box in the room, and this was discovered to be locked but empty. Mrs. Woods had an impression that a large sum was usually kept there, but the doctor had paid a heavy corn bill in cash only that very day, and it was conjectured that it was to this and not to a robber that the emptiness of the box was due. One thing in the room was missing — but that one thing was suggestive. The portrait of Miss Morton, which had always stood upon the side-table, had been taken from its frame, and carried off. Mrs. Woods had observed it there when she waited upon her employer that evening, and now it was gone. On the other hand, there was picked up from the floor a green eye-patch, which the housekeeper could not remember to have seen before. Such a patch might, however, be in the possession of a doctor, and there was nothing to indicate that it was in any way connected with the crime.

Suspicion could only turn in one direction, and Arthur Morton, the young squire, was immediately arrested. The evidence against him was circumstantial, but damning. He was devoted to his sister, and it was shown that since the rupture between her and Dr. Lana he had been heard again and again to express himself in the most vindictive terms towards her former lover. He had, as stated, been seen somewhere about eleven o'clock entering the doctor's drive with a hunting-crop in his hand. He had then, according to the theory of the police, broken in upon the doctor, whose exclamation of fear or of anger had been loud enough to attract the attention of Mrs. Woods. When Mrs. Woods descended. Dr. Lana had made up his mind to talk it over with his visitor, and had, therefore, sent his housekeeper back to her room. This conversation had lasted a long time, had become more and more fiery, and had ended by a personal struggle, in which the doctor lost his life. The fact, revealed by a post-mortem, that his heart was much diseased — an ailment quite unsuspected during his life — would make it possible that death might in his case ensue from injuries which would not be fatal to a healthy man. Arthur Morton had then removed his sister's photograph, and had made his way homeward, stepping aside into the laurel bushes to avoid Mrs. Madding at the gate. This was the theory of the prosecution, and the case which they presented was a formidable one.

On the other hand, there were some strong points for the defence. Morton was high-spirited and impetuous, like his sister, but he was respected and liked by everyone, and his frank and honest nature seemed to be incapable of such a crime. His own explanation was that he was anxious to have a conversation with Dr. Lana about some urgent family matters (from first to last he refused even to mention the name of his sister). He did not attempt to deny that this conversation would probably have been of an unpleasant nature. He had heard from a patient that the doctor was out, and he therefore waited until about three in the morning for his return, but as he had seen nothing of him up to that hour, he had given it up and had returned home. As to his death, he knew no more about it than the constable who arrested him. He had formerly been an intimate friend of the deceased man; but circumstances, which he would prefer not to mention, had brought about a change in his sentiments.

There were several facts which supported his innocence. It was certain that Dr. Lana was alive and in his study at half-past eleven o’clock. Mrs. Woods was prepared to swear that it was at that hour that she had heard his voice. The friends of the prisoner contended that it was probable that at that time Dr. Lana was not alone. The sound which had originally attracted the attention of the housekeeper, and her master’s unusual impatience that she should leave him in peace, seemed to point to that. If this were so, then it appeared to be probable that he had met his end between the moment when the housekeeper heard his voice and the time when Mrs. Madding made her first call and found it impossible to attract his attention. But if this were the time of his death, then it was certain that Mr. Arthur Morton could not be guilty, as it was after this that she had met the young squire at the gate.

If this hypothesis were correct, and someone was with Dr. Lana before Mrs. Madding met Mr. Arthur Morton, then who was this someone, and what motives had he for wishing evil to the doctor? It was universally admitted that if the friends of the accused could throw light upon this, they would have gone a long way towards establishing his innocence. But in the meanwhile it was open to the public to say — as they did say — that there was no proof that any one had been there at all except the young squire; while, on the other hand, there was ample proof that his motives in going were of a sinister kind. When Mrs. Madding called, the doctor might have retired to his room, or he might, as she thought at the time, have gone out and returned afterwards to find Mr. Arthur Morton waiting for him. Some of the supporters of the accused laid stress upon the fact that the photograph of his sister Frances, which had been removed from the doctor’s room, had not been found in her brother’s possession. This argument, however, did not count for much, as he had ample time before his arrest to burn it or to destroy it. As to the only positive evidence in the case — the muddy footmarks upon the floor — they were so blurred by the softness of the carpet that it was impossible to make any trustworthy deduction from them. The most that could be said was that their appearance was not inconsistent with the theory that they were made by the accused, and it was further shown that his boots were very muddy upon that night. There had been a heavy shower in the afternoon, and all boots were probably in the same condition.

Such is a bald statement of the singular and romantic series of events which centred public attention upon this Lancashire tragedy. The unknown origin of the doctor, his curious and distinguished personality, the position of the man who was accused of the murder, and the love affair which had preceded the crime, all combined to make the affair one of those dramas which absorb the whole interest of a nation. Throughout the three kingdoms men discussed the case of the Black Doctor of Bishop's Crossing, and many were the theories put forward to explain the facts; but it may safely be said that among them all there was not one which prepared the minds of the public for the extraordinary sequel, which caused so much excitement upon the first day of the trial, and came to a climax upon the second. The long files of the Lancaster Weekly with their report of the case lie before me as I write, but I must content myself with a synopsis of the case up to the point when, upon the evening of the first day, the evidence of Miss Frances Morton threw a singular light upon the case.

Mr. Porlock Carr, the counsel for the prosecution, had marshalled his facts with his usual skill, and as the day wore on, it became more and more evident how difficult was the task which Mr. Humphrey, who had been retained for the defence, had before him. Several witnesses were put up to swear to the intemperate expressions which the young squire had been heard to utter about the doctor, and the fiery manner in which he resented the alleged ill-treatment of his sister. Mrs. Madding repeated her evidence as to the visit which had been paid late at night by the prisoner to the deceased, and it was shown by another witness that the prisoner was aware that the doctor was in the habit of sitting up alone in this isolated wing of the house, and that he had chosen this very late hour to call because he knew that his victim would then be at his mercy. A servant at the squire's house was compelled to admit that he had heard his master return I about three that morning, which corroborated Mrs. Madding's statement that she had seen him among the laurel bushes near the gate upon the occasion of her second visit. The muddy boots and an alleged similarity in the footprints were duly dwelt upon, and it was felt when the case for the prosecution had been presented that, however circumstantial it might be, it was none the less so complete and so convincing, that the fate of the prisoner was sealed, unless something quite unexpected should be disclosed by the defence. It was three o’clock when the prosecution closed. At half-past four, when the Court rose, a new and unlooked for development had occurred. I extract the incident, or part of it, from the journal which I have already mentioned, omitting the preliminary observations of the counsel.

“Considerable sensation was caused in the crowded court when the first witness called for the defence proved to be Miss Frances Morton, the sister of the prisoner. Our readers will remember that the young lady had been engaged to Dr. Lana, and that it was his anger over the sudden termination of this engagement which was thought to have driven her brother to the perpetration of this crime. Miss Morton had not, however, been directly implicated in the case in any way, either at the inquest or at the police-court proceedings, and her appearance as the leading witness for the defence came as a surprise upon the public.

Miss Frances Morton, who was a tall and handsome brunette, gave her evidence in a low but clear voice, though it was evident throughout that she was suffering from extreme emotion. She alluded to her engagement to the doctor, touched briefly upon its termination, which was due, she said, to personal matters connected with his family, and surprised the Court by asserting that she had always considered her brother’s resentment to be unreasonable and intemperate. In answer to a direct question from her counsel, she replied that she did not feel that she had any grievance whatever against Dr. Lana, and that in her opinion he had acted in a perfectly honourable manner. Her brother, on an insufficient knowledge of the facts, had taken another view, and she was compelled to acknowledge that, in spite of her entreaties, he had uttered threats of personal violence against the doctor, and had, upon the evening of the tragedy, announced his intention of “having it out with him.” She had done her best to bring him to a more reasonable frame of mind, but he was very headstrong where his emotions or prejudices were concerned.

Up to this point the young lady’s evidence had appeared to make against the prisoner rather than in his favour. The questions of her counsel, however, soon put a very different light upon the matter, and disclosed an unexpected line of defence.

Mr. Humphrey: Do you believe your brother to be guilty of this crime?

The Judge; I cannot permit that question, Mr. Humphrey. We are here to decide upon questions of fact — not of belief.

Mr. Humphrey; Do you know that your brother is not guilty of the death of Doctor Lana?

Miss Morton: Yes.

Mr. Humphrey : How do you know it?

Miss Morton: Because Dr. Lana is not dead.

There followed a prolonged sensation in court, which interrupted the cross-examination of the witness.

Mr. Humphrey: And how do you know, Miss Morton, that Dr. Lana is not dead?

Miss Morton: Because I have received a letter from him since the date of his supposed death.

Mr. Humphrey: Have you this letter?

Miss Morton: Yes, but I should prefer not to show it.

Mr. Humphrey: Have you the envelope?

Miss Morton; Yes, it is here.

Mr. Humphrey: What is the post-mark?

Miss Morton: Liverpool.

Mr. Humphrey; And the date?

Miss Morton: June the 22nd.

Mr. Humphrey: That being the day after his alleged death. Are you prepared to swear to this handwriting, Miss Morton?

Miss Morton: Certainly.

Mr. Humphrey: I am prepared to call six other witnesses, my lord, to testify that this letter is in the writing of Doctor Lana.

The Judge: Then you must call them to-morrow.

Mr. Porlock Carr (counsel for the prosecution): In the meantime, my lord, we claim possession of this document, so that we may obtain expert evidence as to how far it is an imitation of the handwriting of the gentleman whom we still confidently assert to be deceased. I need not point out that the theory so unexpectedly sprung upon us may prove to be a very obvious device adopted by the friends of the prisoner in order to divert this inquiry. I would draw attention to the fact that the young lady must, according to her own account, have possessed this letter during the proceedings at the inquest and at the police-court. She desires us to believe that she permitted these to proceed, although she held in her pocket evidence which would at any moment have brought them to an end.

Mr. Humphrey: Can you explain this, Miss Morton?

Miss Morton: Dr. Lana desired his secret to be preserved.

Mr. Porlock Carr: Then why have you made this public?

Miss Morton: To save my brother.

A murmur of sympathy broke out in court, which was instantly suppressed by the Judge.

The Judge: Admitting this line of defence, it lies with you, Mr. Humphrey, to throw a light upon who this man is whose body has been recognised by so many friends and patients of Dr. Lana as being that of the doctor himself.

A Juryman: Has any one up to now expressed any doubt about the matter?

Mr. Porlock Carr: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Humphrey; We hope to make the matter clear.

The Judge: Then the Court adjourns until tomorrow.

This new development of the case excited the utmost interest among the general public. Press comment was prevented by the fact that the trial was still undecided, but the question was everywhere argued as to how far there could be truth in Miss Morton’s declaration, and how far it might be a daring ruse for the purpose of saving her brother. The obvious dilemma in which the missing doctor stood was that if by any extraordinary chance he was not dead, then he must be held responsible for the death of this unknown man, who resembled him so exactly, and who was found in his study. This letter which Miss Morton refused to produce was possibly a confession of guilt, and she might find herself in the terrible position of only being able to save her brother from the gallows by the sacrifice of her former lover. The court next morning was crammed to overflowing, and a murmur of excitement passed over it when Mr. Humphrey was observed to enter in a state of emotion, which even his trained nerves could not conceal, and to confer with the opposing counsel. A few hurried words — words which left a look of amazement upon Mr. Poriock Carr’s face — passed between them, and then the counsel for the defence, addressing the judge, announced that, with the consent of the prosecution, the young lady who had given evidence upon the sitting before would not be recalled.

The Judge: But you appear, Mr. Humphrey, to have left matters in a very unsatisfactory state.

Mr. Humphrey: Perhaps, my lord, my next witness may help to clear them up.

The Judge: Then call your next witness.

Mr. Humphrey: I call Dr. Aloysius Lana.

The learned counsel has made many telling remarks in his day, but he has certainly never produced such a sensation with so short a sentence. The Court was simply stunned with amazement as the very man whose fate had been the subject of so much contention appeared bodily before them in the witness-box. Those among the spectators who had known him at Bishop's Crossing saw him now, gaunt and thin, with deep lines of care upon his face. But in spite of his melancholy bearing and despondent expression, there were few who could say that they had ever seen a man of more distinguished presence. Bowing to the judge, he asked if he might be allowed to make a statement, and having been duly informed that whatever he said might be used against him, he bowed once more, and proceeded : —

"My wish," said he, "is to hold nothing back but to tell with perfect frankness all that occurred, upon the night of the 21st of June. Had I known that the innocent had suffered, and that so much trouble had been brought upon those whom I love best in the world, I should have come forward long ago; but there were reasons which prevented these things from coming to my ears. It was my desire that an unhappy man should vanish from the world which had known him, but I had not foreseen that others would be affected by my actions. Let me to the best of my ability repair the evil which I have done.

"To any one who is acquainted with the history of the Argentine Republic the name of Lana ig well known. My father, who came of the best blood, of old Spain, filled all the highest offices of the State and would have been President but for his death in the riots of San Juan. A brilliant career might have been open to my twin brother Ernest and myself had if not been for financial losses which made it necessary that we should earn our own living. I apologize, sir if these details appear to be irrelevant, but they are a necessary introduction to that which is to follow.

"I had, as I have said, a twin brother named Ernest, whose resemblance to me was so great that even when we were together people could see no difference between us. Down to the smallest detail we were exactly the same. As we grew older this likeness became less marked because our expression was not the same, but with our features in repose the points of difference were very slight.

"It does not become me to say too much of one who is dead, the more so as he is my only brother, but I leave his character to those who knew him best. I will only say — for I have to say it — that in my early manhood I conceived a horror of him, and that I had good reason for the aversion which filled me. My own reputation suffered from his actions, for our close resemblance caused me to be credited with many of them. Eventually, in a peculiarly disgraceful business, he contrived to throw the whole odium upon me in such a way that I was forced to leave the Argentine for ever, and to seek a career in Europe. The freedom from his hated presence more than compensated me for the loss of my native land. I had enough money to defray my medical studies at Glasgow, and I finally settled in practice at Bishop's Crossing, in the firm conviction that in that remote Lancashire hamlet I should never hear of him again.

"For years my hopes were fulfilled, and then at last he discovered me. Some Liverpool man who visited Buenos Ayres put him upon my track. Ho had lost all his money, and he thought that he would come over and share mine. Knowing my horror of him, he rightly thought that I would be willing to buy him off. I received a letter from him saying that he was coming. It was at a crisis in my own affairs, and his arrival might conceivably bring trouble, and even disgrace, upon some whom I was especially bound to shield from anything of the kind. I took steps to insure that any evil which might come should fall on me only, and that" — here he turned and looked at the prisoner—"was the cause of conduct upon my part which has been too harshly judged. My only motive was to screen those who were dear to me from any possible connection with scandal or disgrace. That scandal and disgrace would come with my brother was only to say that what had been would be again.

"My brother arrived himself one night not very long after my receipt of the letter. I was sitting in my study after the servants had gone to bed, when I heard a footstep upon the gravel outside, and an instant later I saw his face looking in at me through the window. He was a clean-shaven man like myself, and the resemblance between us was still so great that, for an instant, I thought it was my own reflection in the glass. He had a dark patch over his eye, but our features were absolutely the same. Then he smiled in a sardonic way which had been a trick of his from his boyhood, and I knew that he was the same brother who had driven me from my native land, and brought disgrace upon what had been an honourable name. I went to the door and I admitted him. That would be about ten o’clock that night.

“When he came into the glare of the lamp, I saw at once that he had fallen upon very evil days. He had walked from Liverpool, and he was tired and ill. I was quite shocked by the expression upon his face. My medical knowledge told me that there was some serious internal malady. He had been drinking also, and his face was bruised as the result of a scuffle which he had had with some sailors. It was to cover his injured eye that he wore this patch, which he removed when he entered the room. He was himself dressed in a pea-jacket and flannel shirt, and his feet were bursting through his boots. But his poverty had only made him more savagely vindictive towards me. His hatred rose to the height of a mania. I had been rolling in money in England, according to his account, while he had been starving in South America. I cannot describe to you the threats which he uttered or the insults which he poured upon me. My impression is, that hardships and debauchery had unhinged his reason. He paced about the room like a wild beast, demanding drink, demanding money, and all in the foulest language. I am a hot-tempered man, but I thank God that I am able to say that I remained master of myself, and that I never raised a hand against him. My coolness only irritated him the more. He raved, he cursed, he shook his fists in my face, and then suddenly a horrible spasm passed over his features, he clapped his hand to his side, and with a loud cry he fell in a heap at my feet. I raised him up and stretched him upon the sofa, but no answer came to my exclamations, and the hand which I held in mine was cold and clammy. His diseased heart had broken down. His own violence had killed him.

“For a long time I sat as if I were in some dreadful dream, staring at the body of my brother. I was aroused by the knocking of Mrs. Woods, who had been disturbed by that dying cry. I sent her away to bed. Shortly afterwards a patient tapped at the surgery door, but as I took no notice, he or she went off again. Slowly and gradually as I sat there a plan was forming itself in my head in the curious automatic way in which plans do form. When I rose from my chair my future movements were finally decided upon without my having been conscious of any process of thought. It was an instinct which irresistibly inclined me towards one course.

“Ever since that change in my affairs to which I have alluded. Bishop’s Crossing had become hateful to me. My plans of life had been ruined, and I had met with hasty judgments and unkind treatment where I had expected sympathy. It is true that any danger of scandal from my brother had passed away with his life; but still, I was sore about the past, and felt that things could never be as they had been. It may be that I was unduly sensitive, and that I had not made sufficient allowance for others, but my feelings were as I describe. Any chance of getting away from Bishop's Crossing and everyone in it would be most welcome to me. And here was such a chance as I could never have dared to hope for, a chance which would enable me to make a clean break with the past.

"There was this dead man lying upon the sofa, so like me that save for some little thickness and coarseness of the features there was no difference at all. No one had seen him come and no one would miss him. We were both clean shaven, and his hair was about the same length as my own. If I changed clothes with him, then Dr. Aloysius Lana would be found lying dead in his study, and there would be an end of an unfortunate fellow, and of a blighted career. There was plenty of ready money in the room, and this I could carry away with me to help me to start once more in some other land. In my brother's clothes I could walk by night unobserved as far as Liverpool, and in that great seaport I would soon find some means of leaving the country. After my lost hopes, the humblest existence where I was unknown was far preferable, in my estimation, to a practice, however successful, in Bishop's Crossing, where at any moment I might come face to face with those whom I should wish, if it were possible, to forget. I determined to effect the change.

"And I did so. I will not go into particulars, for the recollection is as painful as the experience; but in an hour my brother lay, dressed down to the smallest detail in my clothes, while I slunk out by the surgery door, and taking the back path which led across some fields, I started off to make the best of my way to Liverpool, where I arrived the same night. My bag of money and a certain portrait were all I carried out of the house, and I left behind me in my hurry the shade which my brother had been wearing over his eye. Everything else of his I took with me.

"I give you my word, sir, that never for one instant did the idea occur to me that people might think that I had been murdered, nor did I imagine that any one might be caused serious danger through this stratagem by which I endeavoured to gain a fresh start in the world. On the contrary, it was the thought of relieving others from the burden of my presence which was always uppermost in my mind. A sailing vessel was leaving Liverpool that very day for Corunna, and in this I took my passage, thinking that the voyage would give me time to recover my balance, and to consider the future. But before I left my resolution softened. I bethought me that there was one person in the world to whom I would not cause an hour of sadness. She would mourn me in her heart, however harsh and unsympathetic her relatives might be. She understood and appreciated the motives upon which I had acted, and if the rest of her family condemned me, she, at least, would not forget. And so I sent her a note under the seal of secrecy to save her from a baseless grief. If under the pressure of events she broke that seal, she has my entire sympathy and forgiveness.

"It was only last night that I returned to England, and during all this time I have heard nothing of the sensation which my supposed death had caused, nor of the accusation that Mr. Arthur Morton had been concerned in it. It was in a late evening paper that I read an account of the proceedings of yesterday, and I have come this morning as fast as an express train could bring me to testify to the truth."

Such was the remarkable statement of Dr. Aloysius Lana which brought the trial to a sudden termination. A subsequent investigation corroborated it to the extent of finding out the vessel in which his brother Ernest Lana had come over from South America. The ship's doctor was able to testify that he had complained of a weak heart during the voyage, and that his symptoms were consistent with such a death as was described.

As to Dr. Aloysius Lana, he returned to the village from which he had made so dramatic a disappearance, and a complete reconciliation was effected between him and the young squire, the latter having acknowledged that he had entirely misunderstood the other's motives in withdrawing from his engagement. That another reconciliation followed may be judged from a notice extracted from a prominent column in the Morning Post: —

A marriage was solemnized upon September 19th, by the Rev. Stephen Johnson, at the parish church of Bishop's Crossing, between Aloysius Xavier Lana, son of Don Alfredo Lana, formerly Foreign Minister of the Argentine Republic, and Frances Morton, only daughter of the late James Morton, J.P., of Leigh Hall, Bishop's Crossing, Lancashire.

THE JEW’S BREASTPLATE

MY particular friend Ward Mortimer was one of the best men of his day at everything connected with Oriental archaeology. He had written largely upon the subject, he had lived two years in a tomb at Thebes, while he excavated in the Valley of the Kings, and finally he had created a considerable sensation by his exhumation of the alleged mummy of Cleopatra in the inner room of the Temple of Horus, at Philae. With such a record at the age of thirty-one, it was felt that a considerable career lay before him, and no one was surprised when he was elected to the curatorship of the Belmore Street Museum, which carries with it the lectureship-at the Oriental College, and an income which has sunk with the fall in land, but which still remains at that ideal sum which is large enough to encourage an investigator, but not so large as to enervate him.

There was only one reason which made Ward Mortimer’s position a little difficult at the Belmore Street Museum, and that was the extreme eminence of the man whom he had to succeed. Professor Andreas was a profound scholar and a man of European reputation. His lectures were frequented by students from every part of the world, and his admirable management of the collection intrusted to his care was a commonplace in all learned societies. There was, therefore, considerable surprise when, at the age of fifty-five, he suddenly resigned his position and retired from those duties which had been both his livelihood and his pleasure. He and his daughter left the comfortable suite of rooms which had formed his official residence in connection with the museum, and my friend, Mortimer, who was a bachelor, took up his quarters there.

On hearing of Mortimer’s appointment Professor Andreas had written him a very kindly and flattering congratulatory letter. I was actually present at their first meeting, and I went with Mortimer round the museum when the Professor showed us the admirable collection which he had cherished so long. The Professor’s beautiful daughter and a young man, Captain Wilson, who was, as I understood, soon to be her husband, accompanied us in our inspection. There were fifteen rooms, but the Babylonian, the Syrian, and the central hall, which contained the Jewish and Egyptian collection, were the finest of all. Professor Andreas was a quiet, dry, elderly man, with a clean-shaven face and an impassive manner, but his dark eyes sparkled and his features quickened into enthusiastic life as he pointed out to us the rarity and the beauty of some of his specimens. His hand lingered so fondly over them, that one could read his pride in them and the grief in his heart now that they were passing from his care into that of another.

He had shown us in turn his mummies, his papyri, his rare scarabs, his inscriptions, his Jewish relics, and his duplication of the famous seven-branched candlestick of the Temple, which was brought to Rome by Titus, and which is supposed by some to be lying at this instant in the bed of the Tiber. Then he approached a case which stood in the very centre of the hall, and he looked down through the glass with reverence in his attitude and manner.

"This is no novelty to an expert like yourself, Mr. Mortimer," said he; "but I daresay that your friend, Mr. Jackson, will be interested to see it."

Leaning over the case I saw an object, some five inches square, which consisted of twelve precious stones in a framework of gold, with golden hooks at two of the corners. The stones were all varying in sort and colour, but they were of the same size. Their shapes, arrangement, and gradation of tint made me think of a box of water-colour paints. Each stone had some hieroglyphic scratched upon its surface.

"You have heard, Mr. Jackson, of the urim and thummim?"

I had heard the term, but my idea of its meaning was exceedingly vague.

"The urim and thummim was a name given to the jewelled plate which lay upon the breast of the high priest of the Jews. They had a very special feeling of reverence for it — something of the feeling which an ancient Roman might have for the Sibylline books in the Capitol. There are, as you see, twelve magnificent stones, inscribed with mystical characters. Counting from the left-hand top corner, the stones are carnelian, peridot, emerald, ruby, lapis lazuli, onyx, sapphire, agate, amethyst, topaz, beryl, and jasper."

I was amazed at the variety and beauty of the stones. "Has the breastplate any particular history?" I asked.

"It is of great age and of immense value," said Professor Andreas. "Without being able to make an absolute assertion, we have many reasons to think that it is possible that it may be the original urim and thummim of Solomon's Temple. There is certainly nothing so fine in any collection in Europe. My friend, Captain Wilson here, is a practical authority upon precious stones, and he would tell you how pure these are."

Captain Wilson, a man with a dark, hard, incisive face, was standing beside his fiancee at the other side of the case.

"Yes," said he, curtly, "I have never seen finer stones."

"And the gold-work is also worthy of attention. The ancients excelled in —" he was apparently about to indicate the setting of the stones, whey Captain Wilson interrupted him.

"You will see a finer example of their gold-work in this candlestick," said he, turning to another table, and we all joined him in his admiration of its embossed stem and delicately ornamented branches. Altogether it was an interesting and a novel experience to have objects of such rarity explained by so great an expert; and when, finally, Professor Andreas finished our inspection by formally handing over the precious collection to the care of my friend, I could not help pitying him and envying his successor whose life was to pass in so pleasant a duty. Within a week, Ward Mortimer was duly installed in his new set of rooms, and had become the autocrat of the Belmore Street Museum.

About a fortnight afterwards my friend gave a small dinner to half-a-dozen bachelor friends to celebrate his promotion. When his guests were departing he pulled my sleeve and signalled to me that he wished me to remain.

"You have only a few hundred yards to go," said he — I was living in chambers in the Albany. "You may as well stay and have a quiet cigar with me. I very much want your advice."

I relapsed into an arm-chair and lit one of his excellent Matronas. When he had returned from seeing the last of his guests out, he drew a letter from his dress-jacket and sat down opposite to me.

"This is an anonymous letter which I received this morning," said he. " I want to read it to you and to have your advice."

"You are very welcome to it for what it is worth."

"This is how the note runs: ' Sir, — I should strongly advise you to keep a very careful watch over the many valuable things which are committed to your charge. I do not think that the present system of a single watchman is sufficient. Be upon your guard, or an irreparable misfortune may occur."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Well," said I, "it is at least obvious that it was written by one of the limited number of people who are aware that you have only one watchman at night.”

Ward Mortimer handed me the note, with a curious smile. “Have you an eye for handwriting?” said he. “ Now, look at this!” He put another letter in front of me. “ Look at the c in ‘congratulate’ and the c in ‘committed.’ Look at the capital I. Look at the trick of putting in a dash instead of a stop!”

“They are undoubtedly from the same hand — with some attempt at disguise in the case of this first one.”

“The second,” said Ward Mortimer, “is the letter of congratulation which was written to me by Professor Andreas upon my obtaining my appointment.”

I stared at him in amazement. Then I turned over the letter in my hand, and there, sure enough, was “Martin Andreas” signed upon the other side. There could be no doubt, in the mind of any one who had the slightest knowledge of the science of graphology, that the Professor had written an anonymous letter, warning his successor against thieves. It was inexplicable, but it was certain.

“Why should he do it? “ I asked.

“Precisely what I should wish to ask you. If he had any such misgivings, why could he not come and tell me direct?”

“Will you speak to him about it?”

“There again I am in doubt. He might choose to deny that he wrote it.”

“At any rate,” said I, “this warning is meant in a friendly spirit, and I should certainly act upon it. Are the present precautions enough to insure you against robbery?”

“I should have thought so. The public are only admitted from ten till five, and there is a guardian to every two rooms. He stands at the door between them, and so commands them both.”

“But at night?”

“When the public are gone, we at once put up the great iron shutters, which are absolutely burglar-proof. The watchman is a capable fellow. He sits in the lodge, but he walks round every three hours. We keep one electric light burning in each room all night.”

“It is difficult to suggest anything more — short of keeping your day watchers all night.”

“We could not afford that.”

“At least, I should communicate with the police, and have a special constable put on outside in Belmore Street,” said I. “As to the letter, if the writer wishes to be anonymous, I think he has a right to remain so. We must trust to the future to show some reason for the curious course which he has adopted."

So we dismissed the subject, but all that night after my return to my chambers I was puzzling my brain as to what possible motive Professor Andreas could have for writing an anonymous warning letter to his successor — for that the writing was his was as certain to me as if I had seen him actually doing it. He foresaw some danger to the collection. Was it because he foresaw it that he abandoned his charge of it? But if so, why should he hesitate to warn Mortimer in his own name? I puzzled and puzzled until at last I fell into a troubled sleep, which carried me beyond my usual hour of rising.

I was aroused in a singular and effective method, for about nine o'clock my friend Mortimer rushed into my room with an expression of consternation upon his face. He was usually one of the most tidy men of my acquaintance, but now his collar was undone at one end, his tie was flying, and his hat at the back of his head. I read his whole story in his frantic eyes.

"The museum has been robbed!" I cried, springing up in bed.

"I fear so! Those jewels! The jewels of the urim and thummim!" he gasped, for he was out of breath with running. "I'm going on to the police-station. Come to the museum as soon as you can, Jackson! Good-bye! " He rushed distractedly out of the room, and I heard him clatter down the stairs.

I was not long in following his directions, but I found when I arrived that he had already returned with a police inspector, and another elderly gentleman, who proved to be Mr. Purvis, one of the partners of Morson and Company, the well-known diamond merchants. As an expert in stones he was always prepared to advise the police. They were grouped round the case in which the breastplate of the Jewish priest had been exposed. The plate had been taken out and laid upon the glass top of the case, and the three heads were bent over it.

"It is obvious that it has been tampered with," said Mortimer. " It caught my eye the moment that I passed through the room this morning. I examined it yesterday evening, so that it is certain that this has happened during the night."

It was, as he had said, obvious that some one had been at work upon it. The settings of the uppermost row of four stones — the carnelian, peridot, emerald, and ruby — were rough and jagged as if some one had scraped all round them. The stones were in their places, but the beautiful goldwork which we had admired only a few days before had been very clumsily pulled about.

“It looks to me,” said the police inspector, “as if some one had been trying to take out the stones.”

“My fear is,” said Mortimer, “that he not only tried, but succeeded. I believe these four stones to be skilful imitations which have been put in the place of the originals.”

The same suspicion had evidently been in the mind of the expert, for he had been carefully examining the four stones with the aid of a lens. He now submitted them to several tests, and finally turned cheerfully to Mortimer.

“I congratulate you, sir,” said he, heartily. “I will pledge my reputation that all four of these stones are genuine, and of a most unusual degree of purity.”

The colour began to come back to my poor friend’s frightened face, and he drew a long breath of relief.

“Thank God!” he cried. “ Then what in the world did the thief want?”

“Probably he meant to take the stones, but was interrupted.”

“In that case one would expect him to take them out one at a time, but the setting of each of these has been loosened, and yet the stones are all here.”

“It is certainly most extraordinary,” said the inspector. “ I never remember a case like it. Let us see the watchman.”

The commissionaire was called — a soldierly, honest-faced man, who seemed as concerned as Ward Mortimer at the incident.

“No, sir, I never heard a sound,” he answered, in reply to the questions of the inspector. “I made my rounds four times, as usual, but I saw nothing suspicious. I’ve been in my position ten years, but nothing of the kind has ever occurred before.”

“No thief could have come through the windows?”

“Impossible, sir.”

“Or passed you at the door?”

“No, sir; I never left my post except when I walked my rounds.”

“What other openings are there in the museum?”

“There is the door into Mr. Ward Mortimer’s private rooms.”

“That is locked at night,” my friend explained, “and in order to reach it any one from the street would have to open the outside door as well.”

“Your servants?”

“Their quarters are entirely separate.”

“Well, well,” said the inspector, “this is certainly very obscure. However, there has been no harm done, according to Mr. Purvis.”

“I will swear that those stones are genuine.”

“So that the case appears to be merely one of malicious damage. But none the less, I should be very glad to go carefully round the premises, and to see if we can find any trace to show us who your visitor may have been.”

His investigation, which lasted all the morning, was careful and intelligent, but it led in the end to nothing. He pointed out to us that there were two possible entrances to the museum which we had not considered. The one was from the cellars by a trap-door opening in the passage. The other through a skylight from the lumber-room, overlooking that very chamber to which the intruder had penetrated. As neither the cellar nor the lumber-room could be entered unless the thief was already within the locked doors, the matter was not of any practical importance, and the dust of cellar and attic assured us that no one had used either one or the other. Finally, we ended as we began, without the slightest clue as to how, why, or by whom the setting of these four jewels had been tampered with.

There remained one course for Mortimer to take, and he took it. Leaving the police to continue their fruitless researches, he asked me to accompany him that afternoon in a visit to Professor Andreas. He took with him the two letters, and it was his intention to openly tax his predecessor with having written the anonymous warning, and to ask him to explain the fact that he should have anticipated so exactly that which had actually occurred. The Professor was living in a small villa in Upper Norwood, but we were informed by the servant that he was away from home. Seeing our disappointment, she asked us if we should like to see Miss Andreas, and showed us into the modest drawing-room.

I have mentioned incidentally that the Professor’s daughter was a very beautiful girl. She was a blonde, tall and graceful, with a skin of that delicate tint which the French call “mat,” the colour of old ivory or of the lighter petals of the sulphur rose. I was shocked, however, as she entered the room to see how much she had changed in the last fortnight. Her young face was haggard and her bright eyes heavy with trouble.

“Father has gone to Scotland,” she said. “He seems to be tired, and has had a good deal to worry him. He only left us yesterday.”

“You look a little tired yourself, Miss Andreas,” said my friend.

"I have been so anxious about father."

"Can you give me his Scotch address?"

"Yes, he is with his brother, the Rev. David Andreas, 1, Arran Villas, Ardrossan."

Ward Mortimer made a note of the address, and we left without saying anything as to the object of our visit. We found ourselves in Belmore Street in the evening in exactly the same position in which we had been in the morning. Our only clue was the Professor's letter, and my friend had made up his mind to start for Ardrossan next day, and to get to the bottom of the anonymous letter, when a new development came to alter our plans.

Very early on the following morning I was aroused from my sleep by a tap upon my bedroom door. It was a messenger with a note from Mortimer.

"Do come round," it said; "the matter is becoming more and more extraordinary."

When I obeyed his summons I found him pacing excitedly up and down the central room, while the old soldier who guarded the premises stood with military stiffness in a corner.

"My dear Jackson," he cried, " I am so delighted that you have come, for this is a most inexplicable business."

"What has happened, then?"

He waved his hand towards the case which contained the breastplate.

"Look at it," said he.

I did so, and could not restrain a cry of surprise. The setting of the middle row of precious stones had been profaned in the same manner as the upper ones. Of the twelve jewels, eight had been now tampered with in this singular fashion. The setting of the lower four was neat and smooth. The others jagged and irregular.

"Have the stones been altered?" I asked.

"No, I am certain that these upper four are the same which the expert pronounced to be genuine, for I observed yesterday that little discolouration on the edge of the emerald. Since they have not extracted the upper stones, there is no reason to think the lower have been transposed. You say that you heard nothing, Simpson?"

"No, sir," the commissionaire answered. "But when I made my round after daylight I had a special look at these stones, and I saw at once that someone had been meddling with them. Then I called you, sir, and told you.

I was backwards and forwards all the night, and I never saw a soul or heard a sound."

"Come up and have some breakfast with me," said Mortimer, and he took me into his own chambers.—"Now, what do you think of this, Jackson?" he asked.

"It is the most objectless, futile, idiotic business that ever I heard of. It can only be the work of a monomaniac."

"Can you put forward any theory? "

A curious idea came into my head. "This object is a Jewish relic of great antiquity and sanctity," said I. "How about the anti-Semitic movement? Could one conceive that a fanatic of that way of thinking might desecrate —"

"No, no, no!" cried Mortimer. "That will never do! Such a man might push his lunacy to the length of destroying a Jewish relic, but why on earth should he nibble round every stone so carefully that he can only do four stones in a night? We must have a better solution than that, and we must find it for ourselves, for I do not think that our inspector is likely to help us. First of all, what do you think of Simpson, the porter?"

"Have you any reason to suspect him?"

"Only that he is the one person on the premises."

"But why should he indulge in such wanton destruction? Nothing has been taken away. He has no motive."

"Mania?"

"No, I will swear to his sanity."

"Have you any other theory? "

"Well, yourself, for example. You are not a somnambulist, by any chance?"

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

"Then I give it up."

"But I don't — and I have a plan by which we will make it all clear."

"To visit Professor Andreas?"

"No, we shall find our solution nearer than Scotland. I will tell you what we shall do. You know that skylight which overlooks the central hall? We will leave the electric lights in the hall, and we will keep watch in the lumber-room, you and I, and solve the mystery for ourselves. If our mysterious visitor is doing four stones at a time, he has four still to do, and there is every reason to think that he will return tonight and complete the job.”

“Excellent! “ I cried.

“We will keep our own secret, and say nothing either to the police or to Simpson. Will you join me?”

“With the utmost pleasure,” said I; and so it was agreed.

It was ten o’clock that night when I returned to the Belmore Street Museum. Mortimer was, as I could see, in a state of suppressed nervous excitement, but it was still too early to begin our vigil, so we remained for an hour or so in his chambers, discussing all the possibilities of the singular business which we had met to solve. At last the roaring stream of hansom cabs and the rush of hurrying feet became lower and more intermittent as the pleasure seekers passed on their way to their stations or their homes. It was nearly twelve when Mortimer led the way to the lumber room which overlooked the central hall of the museum.

He had visited it during the day, and had spread some sacking so that we could lie at our ease, and look straight down into the museum. The skylight was of unfrosted glass, but was so covered with dust that it would be impossible for any one looking up from below to detect that he was overlooked. We cleared a small piece at each corner, which gave us a complete view of the room beneath us. In the cold white light of the electric lamps everything stood out hard and clear, and I could see the smallest detail of the contents of the various cases.

Such a vigil is an excellent lesson, since one has no choice but to look hard at those objects which we usually pass with such half-hearted interest. Through my little peep-hole I employed the hours in studying every specimen, from the huge mummy-case which leaned against the wall to those very jewels which had brought us there, gleaming and sparkling in their glass case immediately beneath us. There was much precious gold-work and many valuable stones scattered through the numerous cases, but those wonderful twelve which made up the urim and thummim glowed and burned with a radiance which far eclipsed the others. I studied in turn the tomb-pictures of Sicara, the friezes from Karnak, the statues of Memphis, and the inscriptions of Thebes, but my eyes would always come back to that wonderful Jewish relic, and my mind to the singular mystery which surrounded it. I was lost in the thought of it when my companion suddenly drew his breath sharply in, and seized my arm in a convulsive grip. At the same instant I saw what it was which had excited him.

I have said that against the wall — on the right-hand side of the doorway (the right-hand side as we looked at it, but the left as one entered) — there stood a large mummy-case. To our unutterable amazement it was slowly opening. Gradually, gradually the lid was swinging back, and the black slit which marked the opening was becoming wider and wider. So gently and carefully was it done that the movement was almost imperceptible. Then, as we breathlessly watched it, a white thin hand appeared at the opening, pushing back the painted lid, then another hand, and finally a face — a face which was familiar to us both, that of Professor Andreas. Stealthily he slunk out of the mummy-case, like a fox stealing from its burrow, his head turning incessantly to left and to right, stepping, then pausing, then stepping again, the very image of craft and of caution. Once some sound in the street struck him motionless, and he stood listening, with his ear turned, ready to dart back to the shelter behind him. Then he crept onwards again upon tiptoe, very, very softly and slowly, until he had reached the case in the centre of the room. There he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked the case, took out the Jewish breastplate, and, laying it upon the glass in front of him, began to work upon it with some sort of small, glistening tool. He was so directly underneath us that his bent head covered his work, but we could guess from the movement of his hand that he was engaged in finishing the strange disfigurement which he had begun.

I could realise from the heavy breathing of my companion, and the twitchings of the hand which still clutched my wrist, the furious indignation which filled his heart as he saw this vandalism in the quarter of all others where he could least have expected it. He, the very man who a fortnight before had reverently bent over this unique relic, and who had impressed its antiquity and its sanctity upon us, was now engaged in this outrageous profanation. It was impossible, unthinkable — and yet there, in the white glare of the electric light beneath us, was that dark figure with the bent, grey head, and the twitching elbow. What inhuman hypocrisy, what hateful depth of malice against his successor must underlie these sinister nocturnal labours! It was painful to think of and dreadful to watch. Even I, who had none of the acute feelings of a virtuoso, could not bear to look on and see this deliberate mutilation of so ancient a relic. It was a relief to me when my companion tugged at my sleeve as a signal that I was to follow him as he softly crept out of the room. It was not until we were within his own quarters that he opened his lips, and then I saw by his agitated face how deep was his consternation.

“The abominable Goth!” he cried. “Could you have believed it? “

“It is amazing.”

“He is a villain or a lunatic — one or the other. We shall very soon see which. Come with me, Jackson, and we shall get to the bottom of this black business.”

A door opened out of the passage which was the private entrance from his rooms into the museum. This he opened softly with his key, having first kicked off his shoes, an example which I followed. We crept together through room after room, until the large hall lay before us, with that dark figure still stooping and working at the central case. With an advance as cautious as his own we closed in upon him, but softly as we went we could not take him entirely unawares. We were still a dozen yards from him when he looked round with a start, and uttering a husky cry of terror, ran frantically down the museum.

“Simpson! Simpson!” roared Mortimer, and far away down the vista of electric lighted doors we saw the stiff figure of the old soldier suddenly appear. Professor Andreas saw him also, and stopped running, with a gesture of despair. At the same instant we each laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“Yes, yes, gentlemen,” he panted, “I will come with you. To your room, Mr. Ward Mortimer, if you please! I feel that I owe you an explanation.”

My companion’s indignation was so great that I could see that he dared not trust himself to reply. We walked on each side of the old Professor, the astonished commissionaire bringing up the rear. When we reached the violated case, Mortimer stopped and examined the breastplate. Already one of the stones of the lower row had had its setting turned back in the same manner as the others. My friend held it up and glanced furiously at his prisoner.

“How could you!” he cried. “ How could you!”

“It is horrible — horrible!” said the Professor. “I don’t wonder at your feelings. Take me to your room.”

“But this shall not be left exposed!” cried Mortimer. He picked the breastplate up and carried it tenderly in his hand, while I walked beside the Professor, like a policeman with a malefactor. We passed into Mortimer’s chambers, leaving the amazed old soldier to understand matters as best he could. The Professor sat down in Mortimer’s arm-chair, and turned so ghastly a colour that for the instant, all our resentment was changed to concern. A stiff glass of brandy brought the life back to him once more.

“There, I am better now!” said he. “These last few days have been too much for me. I am convinced that I could not stand it any longer. It is a nightmare — a horrible nightmare — that I should be arrested as a burglar in what has been for so long my own museum. And yet I cannot blame you. You could not have done otherwise. My hope always was that I should get it all over before I was detected. This would have been my last night’s work.”

“How did you get in?” asked Mortimer.

“By taking a very great liberty with your private door. But the object justified it. The object justified everything. You will not be angry when you know everything — at least, you will not be angry with me. I had a key to your side door and also to the museum door. I did not give them up when I left. And so you see it was not difficult for me to let myself into the museum. I used to come in early before the crowd had cleared from the street. Then I hid myself in the mummy-case, and took refuge there whenever Simpson came round. I could always hear him coming. I used to leave in the same way as I came.”

“You ran a risk.”

“I had to.”

“But why? What on earth was your object — what possessed you to do a thing like that?” Mortimer pointed reproachfully at the plate which lay before him on the table.

“I could devise no other means. I thought and thought, but there was no alternative except a hideous public scandal, and a private sorrow which would have clouded our lives. I acted for the best, incredible as it may seem to yon, and I only ask your attention to enable me to prove it.”

“I will hear what you have to say before I take any further steps,” said Mortimer, grimly.

“I am determined to hold back nothing, and to take you both completely into my confidence. I will leave it to your own generosity how far you will use the facts with which I supply you.”

“We have the essential facts already.”

“And yet you understand nothing. Let me go back to what passed a few weeks ago, and I will make it all clear to you. Believe me that what I say is the absolute and exact truth.

"You have met the person who calls himself Captain Wilson. I say 'calls himself' because I have reason now to believe that it is not his correct name. It would take me too long if I were to describe all the means by which he obtained an introduction to me and ingratiated himself into my friendship and the affection of my daughter. He brought letters from foreign colleagues which compelled me to show him some attention. And then, by his own attainments, which are considerable, he succeeded in making himself a very welcome visitor at my rooms. When I learned that my daughter's affections had been gained by him, I may have thought it premature, but I certainly was not surprised, for he had a charm of manner and of conversation which would have made him conspicuous in any society.

"He was much interested in Oriental antiquities, and his knowledge of the subject justified his interest. Often when he spent the evening with us he would ask permission to go down into the museum and have an opportunity of privately inspecting the various specimens. You can imagine that I, as an enthusiast, was in sympathy with such a request, and that I felt no surprise at the constancy of his visits. After his actual engagement to Elise, there was hardly an evening which he did not pass with us, and an hour or two were generally devoted to the museum. He had the free run of the place, and when I have been away for the evening I had no objection to his doing whatever he wished here. This state of things was only terminated by the fact of my resignation of my official duties and my retirement to Norwood, where I hoped to have the leisure to write a considerable work which I had planned.

"It was immediately after this — within a week or so — that I first realised the true nature and character of the man whom I had so imprudently introduced into my family. The discovery came to me through letters from my friends abroad, which showed me that his introductions to me had been forgeries. Aghast at the revelation, I asked myself what motive this man could originally have had in practising this elaborate deception upon me. I was too poor a man for any fortune-hunter to have marked me down. Why, then, had he come? I remembered that some of the most precious gems in Europe had been under my charge, and I remembered also the ingenious excuses by which this man had made himself familiar with the cases in which they were kept. He was a rascal who was planning some gigantic robbery. How could I, without striking my own daughter, who was infatuated about him, prevent him from carrying out any plan which he might have formed? My device was a clumsy one, and yet I could think of nothing more effective. If I had written a letter under my own name, you would naturally have turned to me for details which I did not wish to give. I resorted to an anonymous letter, begging you to be upon your guard.

"I may tell you that my change from Belmore Street to Norwood had not affected the visits of this man, who had, I believe, a real and overpowering affection for my daughter. As to her, I could not have believed that any woman could be so completely under the influence of a man as she was. His stronger nature seemed to entirely dominate her. I had not realised how far this was the case, or the extent of the confidence which existed between them, until that very evening when his true character for the first time was made clear to me. I had given orders that when he called he should be shown into my study instead of to the drawing-room. There I told him bluntly that I knew all about him, that I had taken steps to defeat his designs, and that neither I nor my daughter desired ever to see him again. I added that I thanked God that I had found him out before he had time to harm those precious objects which it had been the work of my life-time to protect.

"He was certainly a man of iron nerve. He took my remarks without a sign either of surprise or of defiance, but listened gravely and attentively until I had finished. Then he walked across the room without a word and struck the bell.

"Ask Miss Andreas to be so kind as to step this way,' said he to the servant.

"My daughter entered, and the man closed the door behind her. Then he took her hand in his.

"'Elise,' said he, 'your father has just discovered that I am a villain. He knows now what you knew before.'

"She stood in silence, listening.

"'He says that we are to part for ever,' said he.

"She did not withdraw her hand.

"' Will you be true to me, or will you remove the last good influence which is ever likely to come into my life?'

"'John,' she cried, passionately, 'I will never abandon you! Never, never, not if the whole world were against you.'

“In vain I argued and pleaded with her. It was absolutely useless. Her whole life was bound up in this man before me. My daughter, gentlemen, is all that I have left to love, and it filled me with agony when I saw how powerless I was to save her from her ruin. My helplessness seemed to touch this man who was the cause of my trouble.

“‘It may not be as bad as you think, sir,’ said he, in his quiet, inflexible way. ‘I love Elise with a love which is strong enough to rescue even one who has such a record as I have. It was but yesterday that I promised her that never again in my whole life would I do a thing of which she should be ashamed. I have made up my mind to it, and never yet did I make up my mind to a thing which I did not do.’

“He spoke with an air which carried conviction with it. As he concluded he put his hand into his pocket and he drew out a small cardboard box.

“‘I am about to give you a proof of my determination,’ said he. ‘This, Elise, shall be the first-fruits of your redeeming influence over me. You are right, sir, in thinking that I had designs upon the jewels in your possession. Such ventures have had a charm for me, which depended as much upon the risk run as upon the value of the prize. Those famous and antique stones of the Jewish priest were a challenge to my daring and my ingenuity. I determined to get them.’

“‘I guessed as much.’

“‘There was only one thing that you did not guess.’

“‘And what is that?”

“‘That I got them. They are in this box.’

“He opened the box, and tilted out the contents upon the corner of my desk. My hair rose and my flesh grew cold as I looked. There were twelve magnificent square stones engraved with mystical characters. There could be no doubt that they were the jewels of the urim and thummim.

“‘Good God!’ I cried, ‘How have you escaped discovery?’

“By the substitution of twelve others, made especially to my order, in which the originals are so carefully imitated that I defy the eye to detect the difference.’

“‘Then the present stones are false?’ I cried.

“‘They have been for some weeks.’

“We all stood in silence, my daughter white with emotion, but still holding this man by the hand.

“‘You see what I am capable of, Elise,’ said he.

"'I see that you are capable of repentance and restitution,' she answered.

"'Yes, thanks to your influence! I leave the stones in your hands, sir. Do what you like about it. But remember that whatever you do against me, is done against the future husband of your only daughter. You will hear from me soon again, Elise. It is the last time that I will ever cause pain to your tender heart,' and with these words he left both the room and the house.

"My position was a dreadful one. Here I was with these precious relics in my possession, and how could I return them without a scandal and an exposure? I knew the depth of my daughter's nature too well to suppose that I would ever be able to detach her from this man now that she had entirely given him her heart. I was not even sure how far it was right; to detach her if she had such an ameliorating influence over him. How could I expose him without injuring her — and how far was I justified in exposing him when he had voluntarily put himself into my power? I thought and thought, until at last I formed a resolution which may seem to you to be a foolish one, and yet, if I had to do it again, I believe it would ho the best course open to me.

"My idea was to return the stones without any one being the wiser. With my keys I could get into the museum at any time, and I was confident that I could avoid Simpson, whose hours and methods were familiar to me. I determined to take no one into my confidence — not even my daughter — whom I told that I was about to visit my brother in Scotland. I wanted a free hand for a few nights, without inquiry as to my cominga and goings. To this end I took a room in Harding Street that very night, with an intimation that I was a pressman, and that I should keep very late hours.

"That night I made my way into the museum, and replaced four of the stones. It was hard work, and took me all night. When Simpson came round I always heard his footsteps, and concealed myself in the mummy-case. I had some knowledge of goldwork, but was far less skilful than the thief had been. He had replaced the setting so exactly that I defy anyone to see the difference. My work was rude and clumsy. However, I hoped that the plate might not be carefully examined, or the roughness of the setting observed, until my task was done, Next night I replaced four more stones. And to-night I should have finished my task had it not been for the unfortunate circumstance which has caused me to reveal so much which I should have wished to keep concealed. I appeal to you, gentlemen, to your sense of honour and of compassion, whether what I have told you should go any farther or not. My own happiness, my daughter’s future, the hopes of this man’s regeneration, all depend upon your decision.”

“Which is,” said my friend, “that all is well that ends well, and that the whole matter ends here and at once. To-morrow the loose settings shall be tightened by an expert goldsmith, and so passes the greatest danger to which, since the destruction of the Temple, the urim and thummim have been exposed. Here is my hand. Professor Andreas, and I can only hope that under such difficult circumstances I should have carried myself as unselfishly and as well.”

Just one footnote to this narrative. Within a month Elise Andreas was married to a man whose name, had I the indiscretion to mention it, would appeal to my readers as one who is now widely and deservedly honoured. But if the truth were known, that honour is due not to him but to the gentle girl who plucked him back when he had gone so far down that dark road along which few return.

THE LOST SPECIAL

THE confession of Herbert de Lernac, now lying under sentence of death at Marseilles, has thrown a light upon one of the most inexplicable crimes of the century — an incident which is, I believe, absolutely unprecedented in the criminal annals of any country. Although there is a reluctance to discuss the matter in official circles, and little information has been given to the Press, there are still indications that the statement of this arch-criminal is corroborated by the facts, and that we have at last found a solution for a most astounding business. As the matter is eight years old, and as its importance was somewhat obscured by a political crisis which was engaging the public attention at the time, it may be as well to state the facts as far as we have been able to ascertain them. They are collated from the Liverpool papers of that date, from the proceedings at the inquest upon John Slater, the engine-driver, and from the records of the London and West Coast Rail-way Company, which have been courteously put at my disposal. Briefly, they are as follows.

On the 3rd of June, 1890, a gentleman, who gave his name as Monsieur Louis Caratal, desired an interview with Mr. James Bland, the superintendent of the London and West Coast Central Station in Liverpool.

He was a small man, middle-aged and dark, with a stoop which was so marked that it suggested some deformity of the spine. He was accompanied by a friend, a man of imposing physique, whose deferential manner and constant attention showed that his position was one of dependence. This friend or companion, whose name did not transpire, was certainly a foreigner, and probably, from his swarthy complexion, either a Spaniard or a South American. One peculiarity was observed in him. He carried in his left hand a small black leather dispatch-box, and it was noticed by a sharp-eyed clerk in the Central office that this box was fastened to his wrist by a strap. No importance was attached to the fact at the time, but subsequent events endowed it with some significance. Monsieur Caratal was shown up to Mr. Bland's office, while his companion remained outside,

Monsieur Caratal's business was quickly dispatched. He had arrived that afternoon from Central America. Affairs of the utmost importance demanded that he should be in Paris without the loss of an unnecessary hour. He had missed the London express. A special must be provided.

Money was of no importance. Time was everything. If the company would speed him on his way, they might make their own terms.

Mr. Bland struck the electric bell, summoned Mr. Potter Hood, the traffic manager, and had the matter arranged in five minutes. The train would start in three-quarters of an hour. It would take that time to insure that the line should be clear. The powerful engine called Rochdale (No. 247 on the company's register) was attached to two carriages, with a guard's van behind. The first carriage was solely for the purpose of decreasing the inconvenience arising from the oscillation. The second was divided, as usual, into four compartments, a first-class, a first-class smoking, a second-class, and a second-class smoking. The first compartment, which was nearest to the engine, was the one allotted to the travellers. The other three were empty. The guard of the special train was James McPherson, who had been some years in the service of the company. The stoker, William Smith, was a new hand.

Monsieur Caratal, upon leaving the superintendent's office, rejoined his companion, and both of them manifested extreme impatience to be off. Having paid the money asked, which amounted to fifty pounds five shillings, at the usual special rate of five shillings a mile, they demanded to be shown the carriage, and at once took their seats in it, although they were assured that the better part of an hour must elapse before the line could be cleared. In the meantime a singular coincidence had occurred in the office which Monsieur Caratal had just quitted.

A request for a special is not a very uncommon circumstance in a rich commercial centre, but that two should be required upon the same afternoon was most unusual. It so happened, however, that Mr. Bland had hardly dismissed the first traveller before a second entered with a similar request. This was a Mr. Horace Moore, a gentlemanly man of military appearance, who alleged that the sudden serious illness of his wife in London made it absolutely imperative that he should not lose an instant in starting upon the journey. His distress and anxiety were so evident that Mr. Bland did all that was possible to meet his wishes. A second special was out of the question, as the ordinary local service was already somewhat deranged by the first. There was the alternative, however, that Mr. Moore should share the expense of Monsieur Caratal's train, and should travel in the other empty first-class compartment, if Monsieur Caratal objected to having him in the one which he occupied. It was difficult to see any objection to such an arrangement, and yet Monsieur Caratal, upon the suggestion being made to him by Mr. Potter Hood, absolutely refused to consider it for an instant. The train was his, he said, and he would insist upon the exclusive use of it. All argument failed to overcome his ungracious objections, and finally the plan had to be abandoned. Mr. Horace Moore left the station in great distress, after learning that his only course was to take the ordinary slow train which leaves Liverpool, at six o'clock. At four thirty-one exactly by the station clock the special train, containing the crippled Monsieur Caratal and his gigantic companion, steamed out of the Liverpool station. The line was at that time clear, and there should have been no stoppage before Manchester.

The trains of the London and West Coast Railway run over the lines of another company as far as this town, which should have been reached by the special rather before six o'clock. At a quarter after six considerable surprise and some consternation were caused amongst the officials at Liverpool by the receipt of a telegram from Manchester to say that it had not yet arrived. An inquiry directed to St. Helens, which is a third of the way between the two cities, elicited the following reply: —

"To James Bland, Superintendent, Central L. & W. C., Liverpool. — Special passed here at 4.52, well up to time. — Dowser, St. Helens."

This telegram was received at 6.40. At 6.50 a second message was received from Manchester: —

"No sign of special as advised by you."

And then ten minutes later a third, more bewildering: —

"Presume some mistake as to proposed running of special. Local train from St. Helens timed to follow it has just arrived and has seen nothing of it. Kindly wire advices. — Manchester."

The matter was assuming a most amazing aspect, although in some respects the last telegram was a relief to the authorities at Liverpool. If an accident had occurred to the special, it seemed hardly possible that the local train could have passed down the same line without observing it. And yet, what was the alternative? Where could the train be? Had it possibly been side-tracked for some reason in order to allow the slower train to go past? Such an explanation was possible if some small repair had to be effected. A telegram was dispatched to each of the stations between St. Helens and Manchester, and the superintendent and traffic manager waited in the utmost suspense at the instrument for the series of replies which would enable them to say for certain what had become of the missing train. The answers came back in the order of questions, which was the order of the stations beginning at the St. Helens end; —

“Special passed here five o’clock. — Collins Green.”

“Special passed here six past five. — Earlestown.”

“Special passed here 5.10. — Newton.”

“Special passed here 5.20. — Kenyon Junction.”

“ No special train has passed here. — Barton Moss.”

The two officials stared at each other in amazement.

“This is unique in my thirty years of experience,” said Mr. Bland.

“Absolutely unprecedented and inexplicable, sir. The special has gone wrong between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss.”

“And yet there is no siding, so far as my memory serves me, between the two stations. The special must have run off the metals.”

“But how could the four-fifty parliamentary pass over the same line without observing it? “

“There’s no alternative, Mr. Hood. It must be so. Possibly the local train may have observed something which may throw some light upon the matter. We will wire to Manchester for more information, and to Kenyon Junction with instructions that the line be examined instantly as far as Barton Moss.”

The answer from Manchester came within a few minutes.

“No news of missing special. Driver and guard of slow train positive no accident between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss. Line quite clear, and no sign of anything unusual. — Manchester.”

“That driver and guard will have to go,” said Mr. Bland, grimly. “There has been a wreck and they have missed it. The special has obviously run off the metals without disturbing the line — how it could have done so passes my comprehension — but so it must be, and we shall have a wire from Kenyon or Barton Moss presently to say that they have found her at the bottom of an embankment.”

But Mr. Bland’s prophecy was not destined to be fulfilled. Half an hour passed, and then there arrived the following message from the station-master of Kenyon Junction: —

“There are no traces of the missing special. It is quite certain that she passed here, and that she did not arrive at Barton Moss. We have detached engine from goods train, and I have myself ridden down the line, but all is clear, and there is no sign of any accident.”

Mr. Bland tore his hair in his perplexity.

“This is rank lunacy, Hood! “ he cried. “Does a train vanish into thin air in England in broad daylight? The thing is preposterous. An engine, a tender, two carriages, a van, five human beings — and all lost on a straight line of railway! Unless we get something positive within the next hour I’ll take Inspector Collins, and go down myself.”

And then at last something positive did occur. It took the shape of another telegram from Kenyon Junction.

“Regret to report that the dead body of John Slater, driver of the special train, has just been found among the gorse bushes at a point two and a quarter miles from the Junction. Had fallen from his engine, pitched down the embankment, and rolled among bushes. Injuries to his head, from the fall, appear to be cause of death. Ground has now been carefully examined, and there is no trace of the missing train.”

The country was, as has already been stated, in the throes of a political crisis, and the attention of the public was further distracted by the important and sensational developments in Paris, where a huge scandal threatened to destroy the Government and to wreck the reputations of many of the leading men in France. The papers were full of these events, and the singular disappearance of the special train attracted less attention than would have been the case in more peaceful times. The grotesque nature of the event helped to detract from its importance, for the papers were disinclined to believe the facts as reported to them. More than one of the London journals treated the matter as an ingenious hoax, until the coroner’s inquest upon the unfortunate driver (an inquest which elicited nothing of importance) convinced them of the tragedy of the incident.

Mr. Bland, accompanied by Inspector Collins, the senior detective officer in the service of the company, went down to Kenyon Junction the same evening, and their research lasted throughout the following day, but was attended with purely negative results. Not only was no trace found of the missing train, but no conjecture could be put forward which could possibly explain the facts. At the same time, Inspector Collins’s official report (which lies before me as I write) served to show that the possibilities were more numerous than might have been expected.

“In the stretch of railway between these two points,” said he, “the country is dotted with ironworks and collieries. Of these, some are being worked and some have been abandoned. There are no fewer than twelve which have small gauge lines which run trolly-cars down to the main line. These can, of course, be disregarded. Besides these, however, there are seven which have or have had, proper lines running down and connecting with points to the main line, so as to convey their produce from the mouth of the mine to the great centres of distribution. In every case these lines are only a few miles in length. Out of the seven, four belong to collieries which are worked out, or at least to shafts which are no longer used. These are the Redgauntlet, Hero, Slough of Despond, and Heartsease mines, the latter having ten years ago been one of the principal mines in Lancashire. These four side lines may be eliminated from our inquiry, for, to prevent possible accidents, the rails nearest to the main line have been taken up, and there is no longer any connection. There remain three other side lines leading —

(a) To the Carnstock Iron Works;
(b) To the Big Ben Colliery;
(c) To the Perseverance Colliery.

“Of these the Big Ben line is not more than a quarter of a mile long, and ends at a dead wall of coal waiting removal from the mouth of the mine. Nothing had been seen or heard there of any special. The Carnstock Iron Works line was blocked all day upon the 3rd of June by sixteen truckloads of hematite. It is a single line, and nothing could have passed. As to the Perseverance line, it is a large double line, which does a considerable traffic, for the output of the mine is very large. On the 3rd of June this traffic proceeded as usual; hundreds of men, including a gang of railway platelayers, were working along the two miles and a quarter which constitute the total length of the line, and it is inconceivable that an unexpected train could have come down there without attracting universal attention. It may be remarked in conclusion that this branch line is nearer to St. Helens than the point at which the engine-driver was discovered, so that we have every reason to believe that the train was past that point before misfortune overtook her.

“As to John Slater, there is no clue to be gathered from his appearance or injuries. We can only say that, so far as we can see, he met his end by falling off his engine, though why he fell, or what became of the engine after his fall, is a question upon which I do not feel qualified to offer an opinion.” In conclusion, the inspector offered his resignation to the Board, being much nettled by an accusation of incompetence in the London papers.

A month elapsed, during which both the police and the company prosecuted their inquiries without the slightest success. A reward was offered and a pardon promised in case of crime, but they were both unclaimed. Every day the public opened their papers with the conviction that so grotesque a mystery would at last be solved, but week after week passed by, and a solution remained as far off as ever. In broad daylight, upon a June afternoon in the most thickly inhabited portion of England, a train with its occupants had disappeared as completely as if some master of subtle chemistry had volatilized it into gas. Indeed, among the various conjectures which were put forward in the public Press there were some which seriously asserted that supernatural, or, at least, preternatural, agencies had been at work, and that the deformed Monsieur Caratal was probably a person who was better known under a less polite name. Others fixed upon his swarthy companion as being the author of the mischief, but what it was exactly which he had done could never be clearly formulated in words.

Amongst the many suggestions put forward by various newspapers or private individuals, there were one or two which were feasible enough to attract the attention of the public. One which appeared in the Times, over the signature of an amateur reasoner of some celebrity at that date, attempted to deal with the matter in a critical and semi-scientific manner. An extract must suffice, although the curious can see the whole letter in the issue of the 3rd of July.

“It is one of the elementary principles of practical reasoning,” he remarked, “that when the impossible has been eliminated the residuum, however improbable, must contain the truth. It is certain that the train left Kenyon Junction. It is certain that it did not reach Barton Moss. It is in the highest degree unlikely, but still possible, that it may have taken one of the seven available side lines. It is obviously impossible for a train to run where there are no rails, and, therefore, we may reduce our improbables to the three open lines, namely, the Carnstock Iron Works, the Big Ben, and the Perseverance. Is there a secret society of colliers, an English camorra, which is capable of destroying both train and passengers? It is improbable, but it is not impossible. I confess that I am unable to suggest any other solution. I should certainly advise the company to direct all their energies towards the observation of those three lines, and of the workmen at the end of them. A careful supervision of the pawnbrokers' shops of the district might possibly bring some suggestive facts to light."

The suggestion coming from a recognised authority upon such matters created considerable interest, and a fierce opposition from those who considered such a statement to be a preposterous libel upon an honest and deserving set of men. The only answer to this criticism was a challenge to the objectors to lay any more feasible explanation before the public. In reply to this two others were forthcoming (Times, July 7th and 9th). The first suggested that the train might have run off the metals and be lying submerged in the Lancashire and Staffordshire Canal, which runs parallel to the railway for some hundreds of yards. This suggestion was thrown out of court by the published depth of the canal, which was entirely insufficient to conceal so large an object. The second correspondent wrote calling attention to the bag which appeared to be the sole luggage which the travellers had brought with them, and suggesting that some novel explosive of immense and pulverising power might have been concealed in it. The obvious absurdity, however, of supposing that the whole train might be blown to dust while the metals remained uninjured reduced any such explanation to a farce. The investigation had drifted into this hopeless position when a new mid most unexpected incident occurred.

This was nothing less than the receipt by Mrs. McPherson of a letter from her husband, James McPherson, who had been the guard of the missing train. The letter, which was dated July 5th, 1890, was posted from New York, and came to hand upon July 14th. Some doubts were expressed as to its genuine character, but Mrs. McPherson was positive as to the writing, and the fact that it contained a remittance of a hundred dollars in five-dollar notes was enough in itself to discount the idea of a hoax. No address was given in the letter, which ran in this way: —

"MY DEAR WIFE, —

"I have been thinking a great deal, and I find it very hard to give you up. The same with Lizzie. I try to fight against it, but it will always come back to me. I send you some money which will change into twenty English pounds. This should be enough to bring both Lizzie and you across the Atlantic, and you will find the Hamburg boats which stop at Southampton very good boats, and cheaper than Liverpool. If you could come here and stop at the Johnston House I would try and send you word how to meet, but things are very difficult with me at present, and I am not very happy, finding it hard to give you both up. So no more at present, from your loving husband,

“JAMES McPHERSON.”

For a time it was confidently anticipated that this letter would lead to the clearing up of the whole matter, the more so as it was ascertained that a passenger who bore a close resemblance to the missing guard had travelled from Southampton under the name of Summers in the Hamburg and New York liner Vistula, which started upon the 7th of June. Mrs. McPherson and her sister Lizzie Dolton went across to New York as directed, and stayed for three weeks at the Johnston House, without hearing anything from the missing man. It is probable that some injudicious comments in the Press may have warned him that the police were using them as a bait. However this may be, it is certain that he neither wrote nor came, and the women were eventually compelled to return to Liverpool.

And so the matter stood, and has continued to stand up to the present year of 1898. Incredible as it may seem, nothing has transpired during these eight years which has shed the least light upon the extraordinary disappearance of the special train which contained Monsieur Caratal and his companion. Careful inquiries into the antecedents of the two travellers have only established the fact that Monsieur Caratal was well known as a financier and political agent in Central America, and that during his voyage to Europe he had betrayed extraordinary anxiety to reach Paris. His companion, whose name was entered upon the passenger lists as Eduardo Gomez, was a man whose record was a violent one, and whose reputation was that of a bravo and a bully. There was evidence to show, however, that he was honestly devoted to the interests of Monsieur Caratal, and that the latter, being a man of puny physique, employed the other as a guard and protector. It may be added that no information came from Paris as to what the objects of Monsieur Caratal’s hurried journey may have been. This comprises all the facts of the case up to the publication in the Marseilles papers of the recent confession of Herbert de Lernac, now under sentence of death for the murder of a merchant named Bonvalot. This statement may be literally translated as follows: —

“It is not out of mere pride or boasting that I give this information, for, if that were my object, I could tell a dozen actions of mine which are quite as splendid; but I do it in order that certain gentlemen in Paris may understand that I, who am able here to tell about the fate of Monsieur Caratal, can also tell in whose interest and at whose request the deed was done, unless the reprieve which I am awaiting comes to me very quickly. Take warning, messieurs, before it is too late! You know Herbert de Lernac, and you are aware that his deeds are as ready as his words. Hasten then, or you are lost!

"At present I shall mention no names — if you only heard the names, what would you not think! — but I shall merely tell you how cleverly I did it. I was true to my employers then, and no doubt they will be true to me now. I hope so, and until I am convinced that they have betrayed me, these names, which would convulse Europe, shall not be divulged. But on that day . . . well, I say no more!

"In a word, then, there was a famous trial in Paris, in the year 1890, in connection with a monstrous scandal in politics and finance. How monstrous that scandal was can never be known save by such confidential agents as myself. The honour and careers of many of the chief men in France were at stake. You have seen a group of nine-pins standing, all so rigid, and prim, and unbending. Then there comes the ball from far away and pop, pop, pop — there are your nine-pins on the floor. Well, imagine some of the greatest men in France as these nine-pins, and then this Monsieur Caratal was the ball which could be seen coming from far away. If he arrived, then it was pop, pop, pop for all of them. It was determined that he should not arrive.

"I do not accuse them all of being conscious of what was to happen. There were, as I have said, great financial as well as political interests at stake, and a syndicate was formed to manage the business. Some subscribed to the syndicate who hardly understood what were its objects. But others understood very well, and they can rely upon it that I have not forgotten their names. They had ample warning that Monsieur Caratal was coming long before he left South America, and they knew that the evidence which he held would certainly mean ruin to all of them. The syndicate had the command of an unlimited amount of money — absolutely unlimited, you understand. They looked round for an agent who was capable of wielding this gigantic power. The man chosen must be inventive, resolute, adaptive — a man in a million. They chose Herbert de Lernac, and I admit that they were right.

"My duties were to choose my subordinates, to use freely the power which money gives, and to make certain that Monsieur Caratal should never arrive in Paris.

“With characteristic energy I set about my commission within an hour of receiving my instructions, and the steps which I took were the very best for the purpose which could possibly be devised.

“A man whom I could trust was dispatched instantly to South America to travel home with Monsieur Caratal. Had he arrived in time the ship would never have reached Liverpool; but, alas! it had already started before my agent could reach it. I fitted out a small armed brig to intercept it, but again I was unfortunate. Like all great organizers I was, however, prepared for failure, and had a series of alternatives prepared, one or the other of which must succeed. You must not underrate the difficulties of my undertaking, or imagine that a mere commonplace assassination would meet the case. We must destroy not only Monsieur Caratal, but Monsieur Caratal’s documents, and Monsieur Caratal’s companions also, if we had reason to believe that he had communicated his secrets to them. And you must remember that they were on the alert, and keenly suspicious of any such attempt. It was a task which was in every way worthy of me, for I am always most masterful where another would be appalled.

“I was all ready for Monsieur Caratal’s reception in Liverpool, and I was the more eager because I had reason to believe that he had made arrangements by which he would have a considerable guard from the moment that he arrived in London. Anything which was to be done must be done between the moment of his setting foot upon the Liverpool quay and that of his arrival at the London and West Coast terminus in London. We prepared six plans, each more elaborate than the last; which plan would be used would depend upon his own movements. Do what he would, we were ready for him. If he had stayed in Liverpool, we were ready. If he took an ordinary train, an express, or a special, all was ready. Everything had been foreseen and provided for.

“You may imagine that I could not do all this myself. What could I know of the English railway lines? But money can procure willing agents all the world over, and I soon had one of the acutest brains in England to assist me. I will mention no names, but it would be unjust to claim all the credit for myself. My English ally was worthy of such an alliance. He knew the London and West Coast line thoroughly, and he had the command of a band of workers who were trustworthy and intelligent. The idea was his, and my own judgment was only required in the details. We bought over several officials, amongst whom the most important was James McPherson, whom we had ascertained to be the guard most likely to be employed upon a special train. Smith, the stoker, was also in our employ. John Slater, the engine-driver, had been approached, but had been found to be obstinate and dangerous, so we desisted. We had no certainty that Monsieur Caratal would take a special, but we thought it very probable, for it was of the utmost importance to him that he should reach Paris without delay. It was for this contingency, therefore, that we made special preparations — preparations which were complete down to the last detail long before his steamer had sighted the shores of England. You will be amused to learn that there was one of my agents in the pilot-boat which brought that steamer to its moorings.

“The moment that Caratal arrived in Liverpool we knew that he suspected danger and was on his guard. He had brought with him as an escort a dangerous fellow, named Gomez, a man who carried weapons, and was prepared to use them. This fellow carried Caratal’s confidential papers for him, and was ready to protect either them or his master. The probability was that Caratal had taken him into his counsels, and that to remove Caratal without removing Gomez would be a mere waste of energy. It was necessary that they should be involved in a common fate, and our plans to that end were much facilitated by their request for a special train. On that special train you will understand that two out of the three servants of the company were really in our employ, at a price which would make them independent for a lifetime. I do not go so far as to say that the English are more honest than any other nation, but I have found them more expensive to buy.

“I have already spoken of my English agent — who is a man with a considerable future before him, unless some complaint of the throat carries him off before his time. He had charge of all arrangements at Liverpool, whilst I was stationed at the inn at Kenyon, where I awaited a cipher signal to act. When the special was arranged for, my agent instantly telegraphed to me and warned me how soon I should have everything ready. He himself under the name of Horace Moore applied immediately for a special also, in the hope that he would be sent down with Monsieur Caratal, which might under certain circumstances have been helpful to us. If, for example, our great coup had failed, it would then have become the duty of my agent to have shot them both and destroyed their papers. Caratal was on his guard, however, and refused to admit any other traveller. My agent then left the station, returned by another entrance, entered the guard’s van on the side farthest from the platform, and travelled down with McPherson the guard.

“In the meantime you will be interested to know what my movements were. Everything had been prepared for days before, and only the finishing touches were needed. The side line which we had chosen had once joined the main line, but it had been disconnected. We had only to replace a few rails to connect it once more. These rails had been laid down as far as could be done without danger of attracting attention, and now it was merely a case of completing a juncture with the line, and arranging the points as they had been before. The sleepers had never been removed, and the rails, fish-plates, and rivets were all ready, for we had taken them from a siding on the abandoned portion of the line. With my small but competent band of workers, we had everything ready long before the special arrived. When it did arrive, it ran off upon the small side line so easily that the jolting of the points appears to have been entirely unnoticed by the two travellers.

“Our plan had been that Smith the stoker should chloroform John Slater the driver, so that he should vanish with the others. In this respect, and in this respect only, our plans miscarried — I except the criminal folly of McPherson in writing home to his wife. Our stoker did his business so clumsily that Slater in his struggles fell off the engine, and though fortune was with us so far that he broke his neck in the fall, still he remained as a blot upon that which would otherwise have been one of those complete masterpieces which are only to be contemplated in silent admiration. The criminal expert will find in John Slater the one flaw in all our admirable combinations. A man who has had as many triumphs as I can afford to be frank, and I therefore lay my finger upon John Slater, and I proclaim him to be a flaw.

“But now I have got our special train upon the small line two kilometres, or rather more than one mile, in length, which leads, or rather used to lead, to the abandoned Heartsease mine, once one of the largest coal mines in England. You will ask how it is that no one saw the train upon this unused line. I answer that along its entire length it runs through a deep cutting, and that, unless some one had been on the edge of that cutting, he could not have seen it. There was some one on the edge of that cutting. I was there. And now I will tell you what I saw.

“My assistant had remained at the points in order that he might superintend the switching off of the train. He had four armed men with him, so that if the train ran off the line — we thought it probable, because the points were very rusty — we might still have resources to fall back upon. Having once seen it safely on the side line, he handed over the responsibility to me. I was waiting at a point which overlooks the mouth of the mine, and I was also armed, as were my two companions. Come what might, you see, I was always ready.

“The moment that the train was fairly on the side line. Smith, the stoker, slowed-down the engine, and then, having turned it on to the fullest speed again, he and McPherson, with my English lieutenant, sprang off before it was too late. It may be that it was this slowing-down which first attracted the attention of the travellers, but the train was running at full speed again before their heads appeared at the open window. It makes me smile to think how bewildered they must have been. Picture to yourself your own feelings if, on looking out of your luxurious carriage, you suddenly perceived that the lines upon which you ran were rusted and corroded, red and yellow with disuse and decay! What a catch must have come in their breath as in a second it flashed upon them that it was not Manchester but Death which was waiting for them at the end of that sinister line. But the train was running with frantic speed, rolling and rocking over the rotten line, while the wheels made a frightful screaming sound upon the rusted surface. I was close to them, and could see their faces. Caratal was praying, I think — there was something like a rosary dangling out of his hand. The other roared like a bull who smells the blood of the slaughter-house. He saw us standing on the bank, and he beckoned to us like a madman. Then he tore at his wrist and threw his dispatch-box out of the window in our direction. Of course, his meaning was obvious. Here was the evidence, and they would promise to be silent if their lives were spared. It would have been very agreeable if we could have done so, but business is business. Besides, the train was now as much beyond our control as theirs.

“He ceased howling when the train rattled round the curve and they saw the black mouth of the mine yawning before them. We had removed the boards which had covered it, and we had cleared the square entrance. The rails had formerly run very close to the shaft for the convenience of loading the coal, and we had only to add two or three lengths of rail in order to lead to the very brink of the shaft. In fact, as the lengths would not quite fit, our line projected about three feet over the edge. We saw the two heads at the window: Caratal below, Gomez above; but they had both been struck silent by what they saw. And yet they could not withdraw their heads. The sight seemed to have paralyzed them.

"I had wondered how the train running at a great speed would take the pit into which I had guided it, and I was much interested in watching it. One of my my colleagues thought that it would actually jump it, and indeed it was not very far from doing so. Fortunately, however, it fell short, and the buffers of the engine struck the other lip of the shaft with a tremendous crash. The funnel flew off into the air. The tender, carriages, and van were all smashed up into one jumble, which, with the remains of the engine, choked, for a minute or so the mouth of the pit. Then something gave way in the middle, and the whole mass of green iron, smoking coals, brass fittings, wheels, woodwork, and cushions all crumbled together and crashed down into the mine. We heard the rattle, rattle, rattle, as the debris struck against the walls, and then quite a long time afterwards there came a deep roar as the remains of the train struck the bottom. The boiler may have burst, for a sharp crash came after the roar, and then a dense cloud of steam and smoke swirled up out of the black depths, falling in a spray as thick as rain all round us. Then the vapour shredded off into thin wisps, which floated away in the summer sunshine, and all was quiet again in the Heartsease mine.

"And now, having carried out our plans so successfully, it only remained to leave no trace behind us. Our little band of workers at the other end had already ripped up the rails and disconnected the side line, replacing everything as it had been before. We were equally busy at the mine. The funnel and other fragments were thrown in, the shaft was planked over as it used to be, and the lines which led to it were torn up and taken away. Then, without flurry, but without delay, we all made our way out of the country, most of us to Paris, my English colleague to Manchester, and McPherson to Southampton, whence he emigrated to America. Let the English papers of that date tell how thoroughly we had done our work, and how completely we had thrown the cleverest of their detectives off our track.

"You will remember that Gomez threw his bag of papers out of the window, and I need not say that I secured that bag and brought them to my employers. It may interest my employers now, however, to learn that out of that bag I took one or two little papers as a souvenir of the occasion. I have no wish to publish these papers; but, still, it is every man for himself in this world, and what else can I do if my friends will not come to my aid when I want them? Messieurs, you may believe that Herbert de Lernac is quite as formidable when he is against you as when he is with you, and that he is not a man to go to the guillotine until he has seen that every one of you is en route for New Caledonia. For your own sake, if not for mine, make haste, Monsieur de —— -, and General —— -, and Baron —— — (you can fill up the blanks for yourselves as you read this). I promise you that in the next edition there will be no blanks to fill.

“P.S. — As I look over my statement there is only one omission which I can see. It concerns the unfortunate man McPherson, who was foolish enough to write to his wife and to make an appointment with her in New York. It can be imagined that when interests like ours were at stake, we could not leave them to the chance of whether a man in that class of life would or would not give away his secrets to a woman. Having once broken his oath by writing to his wife, we could not trust him any more. We took steps therefore to insure that he should not see his wife. I have sometimes thought that it would be a kindness to write to her and to assure her that there is no impediment to her marrying again.”

THE CLUB-FOOTED GROCER

MY uncle, Mr. Stephen Maple, had been at the same time the most successful and the least respectable of our family, so that we hardly knew whether to take credit for his wealth or to feel ashamed of his position. He had, as a matter of fact, established a large grocery in Stepney which did a curious mixed business, not always, as we had heard, of a very savoury character, with the riverside and seafaring people. He was ship’s chandler, provision merchant, and, if rumour spoke truly, some other things as well. Such a trade, however lucrative, had its drawbacks, as was evident when, after twenty years of prosperity, he was savagely assaulted by one of his customers and left for dead, with three smashed ribs and a broken leg, which mended so badly that it remained for ever three inches shorter than the other. This incident seemed, not unnaturally, to disgust him with his surroundings, for, after the trial, in which his assailant was condemned to fifteen years’ penal servitude, he retired from his business and settled in a lonely part of the North of England, whence, until that morning, we had never once heard of him — not even at the death of my father, who was his only brother.

My mother read his letter aloud to me: “ If your son is with you, Ellen, and if he is as stout a lad as he promised for when last I heard from you, then send him up to me by the first train after this comes to hand. He will find that to serve me will pay him better than the engineering, and if I pass away (though, thank God, there is no reason to complain as to my health) you will see that I have not forgotten my brother’s son. Congleton is the station, and then a drive of four miles to Greta House, where I am now living. I will send a trap to meet the seven o’clock train, for it is the only one which stops here. Mind that you send him, Ellen, for I have very strong reasons for wishing him to be with me. Let bygones be bygones if there has been anything between us in the past. If you should fail me now you will live to regret it.”

We were seated at either side of the breakfast table, looking blankly at each other and wondering what this might mean, when there came a ring at the bell, and the maid walked in with a telegram. It was from Uncle Stephen.

“On no account let John get out at Congleton,” said the message. “ He will find trap waiting seven o’clock evening train Stedding Bridge, one station further down line. Let him drive not me, but Garth Farm House — six miles. There will receive instructions. Do not fail; only you to look to.”

“That is true enough,” said my mother. “ As far as I know, your uncle has not a friend in the world, nor has he ever deserved one. He has always been a hard man in his dealings, and he held back his money from your father at a time when a few pounds would have saved him from ruin. Why should I send my only son to serve him now?”

But my own inclinations were all for the adventure.

“If I have him for a friend, he can help me in my profession,” I argued, taking my mother upon her weakest side.

“I have never known him to help any one yet,” said she, bitterly. “And why all this mystery about getting out at a distant station and driving to the wrong address? He has got himself into some trouble and he wishes us to get him out of it. When he has used us he will throw us aside as he has done before. Your father might have been living now if he had only helped him.”

But at last my arguments prevailed, for, as I pointed out, we had much to gain and little to lose, and why should we, the poorest members of a family, go out of our way to offend the rich one? My bag was packed and my cab at the door, when there came a second telegram.

“Good shooting. Let John bring gun. Remember Stedding Bridge, not Congleton.” And so, with a gun-case added to my luggage and some surprise at my uncle’s insistence, I started off upon my adventure.

The journey lies over the main Northern Railway as far as the station of Camfield, where one changes for the little branch line which winds over the fells. In all England there is no harsher or more impressive scenery. For two hours I passed through desolate rolling plains, rising at places into low, stone-littered hills, with long, straight outcrops of jagged rock showing upon their surface. Here and there little grey-roofed, grey-walled cottages huddled into villages, but for many miles at a time no house was visible nor any sign of life save the scattered sheep which wandered over the mountain sides. It was a depressing country, and my heart grew heavier and heavier as I neared my journey’s end, until at last the train pulled up at the little village of Stedding Bridge, where my uncle had told me to alight. A single ramshackle trap, with a country lout to drive it, was waiting at the station.

“Is this Mr. Stephen Maple’s?” I asked.

The fellow looked at me with eyes which were full of suspicion. “What is your name?” he asked, speaking a dialect which I will not attempt to reproduce.

“John Maple.”

“Anything to prove it?”

I half raised my hand, for my temper is none of the best, and then I reflected that the fellow was probably only carrying out the directions of my uncle. For answer I pointed to my name printed upon my gun-case.

“Yes, yes, that is right. It’s John Maple, sure enough!” said he, slowly spelling it out. “ Get in, maister, for we have a bit of a drive before us.”

The road, white and shining, like all the roads in that limestone country, ran in long sweeps over the fells, with low walls of loose stone upon either side of it. The huge moors, mottled with sheep and with boulders, rolled away in gradually ascending curves to the misty sky-line. In one place a fall of the land gave a glimpse of a grey angle of distant sea. Bleak and sad and stern were all my surroundings, and I felt, under their influence, that this curious mission of mine was a more serious thing than it had appeared when viewed from London. This sudden call for help from an uncle whom I had never seen, and of whom I had heard little that was good, the urgency of it, his reference to my physical powers, the excuse by which he had ensured that I should bring a weapon, all hung together and pointed to some vague but sinister meaning. Things which appeared to be impossible in Kensington became very probable upon these wild and isolated hillsides. At last, oppressed with my own dark thoughts, I turned to my companion with the intention of asking some questions about my uncle, but the expression upon his face drove the idea from my head.

He was not looking at his old, unclipped chestnut horse, nor at the road along which he was driving, but his face was turned in my direction, and he was staring past me with an expression of curiosity and, as I thought, of apprehension. He raised the whip to lash the horse, and then dropped it again, as if convinced that it was useless. At the same time, following the direction of his gaze, I saw what it was which had excited him.

A man was running across the moor. He ran clumsily, stumbling and slipping among the stones; but the road curved, and it was easy for him to cut us off. As we came up to the spot for which he had been making, he scrambled over the stone wall and stood waiting, with the evening sun shining on his brown, clean-shaven face. He was a burly fellow, and in bad condition, for he stood with his hand on his ribs, panting and blowing after his short run. As we drove up I saw the glint of earrings in his ears.

"Say, mate, where are you bound for?" he asked, in a rough but good-humoured fashion.

"Farmer Purcell's, at the Garth Farm," said the driver.

"Sorry to stop you," cried the other, standing aside; "I thought as I would hail you as you passed, for if so be as you had been going my way I should have made bold to ask you for a passage."

His excuse was an absurd one, since it was evident that our little trap was as full as it could be, but my driver did not seem disposed to argue. He drove on without a word, and, looking back, I could see the stranger sitting by the roadside and cramming tobacco into his pipe.

"A sailor," said I.

"Yes, maister. We're not more than a few miles from Morecambe Bay," the driver remarked.

"You seemed frightened of him," I observed.

"Did I?" said he, drily; and then, after a long pause, "Maybe I was." As to his reasons for fear, I could get nothing from him, and though I asked him many questions he was so stupid, or else so clever, that I could learn nothing from his replies. I observed, however, that from time to time he swept the moors with a troubled eye, but their huge brown expanse was unbroken by any moving figure. At last in a sort of cleft in the hills in front of us I saw a long, low-lying farm building, the centre of all those scattered flocks.

"Garth Farm," said my driver. "There is Farmer Purcell himself," he added, as a man strolled out of the porch and stood waiting for our arrival. He advanced as I descended from the trap, a hard, weather-worn fellow with light blue eyes, and hair and beard like sun-bleached grass. In his expression I read the same surly ill-will which I had already observed in my driver. Their malevolence could not be directed towards a complete stranger like myself, and so I began to suspect that my uncle was no more popular on the north-country fells than he had been in Stepney Highway.

"You're to stay here until nightfall. That's Mr. Stephen Maple's wish," said he, curtly. "You can have some tea and bacon if you like. It's the best we can give you."

I was very hungry, and accepted the hospitality in spite of the churlish tone in which it was offered. The farmer's wife and his two daughters came into the sitting-room during the meal, and I was aware of a certain curiosity with which they regarded me. It may have been that a young man was a rarity in this wilderness, or it may be that my attempts at conversation won their goodwill, but they all three showed a kindliness in their manner. It was getting dark, so I remarked that it was time for me to be pushing on to Greta House.

“You’ve made up your mind to go, then?” said the older woman.

“Certainly. I have come all the way from London.”

“There’s no one hindering you from going back there.”

“But I have come to see Mr. Maple, my uncle.”

“Oh, well, no one can stop you if you want to go on,” said the woman, and became silent as her husband entered the room.

With every fresh incident I felt that I was moving in an atmosphere of mystery and peril, and yet it was all so intangible and so vague that I could not guess where my danger lay. I should have asked the farmer’s wife point-blank, but her surly husband seemed to divine the sympathy which she felt for me, and never again left us together. “It’s time you were going, mister,” said he at last, as his wife lit the lamp upon the table.

“Is the trap ready?”

“You’ll need no trap. You’ll walk,” said he.

“How shall I know the way? “

“William will go with you.”

William was the youth who had driven me up from the station. He was waiting at the door, and ho shouldered my gun-case and bag. I stayed behind to thank the farmer for his hospitality, but he would have none of it. “I ask no thanks from Mr. Stephen Maple nor any friend of his,” said he, bluntly. “I am paid for what I do. If I was not paid I would not do it. Go your way, young man, and say no more.” He turned rudely on his heel and re-entered his house, slamming the door behind him.

It was quite dark outside, with heavy black clouds drifting slowly across the sky. Once clear of the farm inclosure and out on the moor I should have been hopelessly lost if it had not been for my guide, who walked in front of me along narrow sheep-tracks? which were quite invisible to me. Every now and then, without seeing anything, we heard the clumsy scuffling of the creatures in the darkness. At first my guide walked swiftly and carelessly, but gradually his pace slowed down, until at last he was going very slowly and stealthily, like one who walks light-footed amid imminent menace. This vague, inexplicable sense of danger in the midst of the loneliness of that vast moor was more daunting than any evident peril could be, and I had begun to press him as to what it was that he feared, when suddenly he stopped and dragged me down among some gorse bushes which lined the path. His tug at my coat was so strenuous and imperative that I realised that the danger was a pressing one, and in an instant I was squatting down beside him as still as the bushes which shadowed us. It was so dark there that I could not even see the lad beside me.

It was a warm night, and a hot wind puffed in our faces. Suddenly in this wind there came something homely and familiar — the smell of burning tobacco. And then a face, illuminated by the glowing bowl of a pipe, came floating towards us. The man was all in shadow, but just that one dim halo of light with the face which filled it, brighter below and shading away into darkness above, stood out against the universal blackness. A thin, hungry face, thickly freckled with yellow over the cheek bones, blue, watery eyes, an ill-nourished, light-coloured moustache, a peaked yachting cap — that was all that I saw. He passed us, looking vacantly in front of him, and we heard the steps dying away along the path.

“Who was it?” I asked, as we rose to our feet.

“I don’t know.”

The fellow’s continual profession of ignorance made me angry.

“Why should you hide yourself, then?” I asked, sharply.

“Because Maister Maple told me. He said that I were to meet no one. If I met any one I should get no pay.”

“You met that sailor on the road?”

“Yes, and I think he was one of them.”

“One of whom?”

“One of the folk that have come on the fells. They are watchin’ Greta House, and Maister Maple is afeard of them. That’s why he wanted us to keep clear of them, and that’s why I’ve been a-trying to dodge ‘em.”

Here was something definite at last. Some body of men were threatening my uncle. The sailor was one of them. The man with the peaked cap — probably a sailor also — was another. I bethought me of Stepney Highway and of the murderous assault made upon my uncle there. Things were fitting themselves into a connected shape in my mind when a light twinkled over the fell, and my guide informed me that it was Greta. The place lay in a dip among the moors, BO that one was very near it before one saw it. A short walk brought us up to the door.

I could see little of the building save that the lamp which shone through a small latticed window showed me dimly that it was both long and lofty. The low door under an overhanging lintel-was loosely fitted, and light was bursting out on each side of it. The inmates of this lonely house appeared to be keenly on their guard, for they had heard our footsteps, and we were challenged before we reached the door.

“Who is there?” cried a deep-booming voice, and urgently, “Who is it, I say? “

“It’s me, Maister Maple. I have brought the gentleman.”

There was a sharp click, and a small wooden I shutter flew open in the door. The gleam of a lantern shone upon us for a few seconds. Then the shutter closed again; with a great rasping of locks and clattering of bars, the door was opened, and I saw my uncle standing framed in that vivid yellow square cut out of the darkness.

He was a small, thick man, with a great rounded, bald head and one thin border of gingery curls. It was a fine head, the head of a thinker, but his large white face was heavy and commonplace, with a broad, loose-lipped mouth and two hanging dewlaps on either side of it. His eyes were small and restless, and his light-coloured lashes were continually moving. My mother had said once that they reminded her of the legs of a woodlouse, and I saw at the first glance what she meant. I heard also that in Stepney he had learned the language of his customers, and I blushed for our kinship as I listened to his villainous accent. “So, nephew,” said he, holding out his hand. “Come in, come in, man, quick, and don’t leave the door open. Your mother said you were grown a big lad, and, my word, she ‘as a right to say so. ‘Ere’s a ‘alf-crown for you, William, and you can go back again. Put the things down. ‘Ere, Enoch, take Mr. John’s things, and see that ‘is supper is on the table.”

As my uncle, after fastening the door, turned to show me into the sitting-room, I became aware of his most striking peculiarity. The injuries which he had received some years ago had, as I have already remarked, left one leg several inches shorter than the other. To atone for this he wore one of those enormous wooden soles to his boots which are prescribed by surgeons in such cases. He walked without a limp, but his tread on the stone flooring made a curious clack-click, clack-click, as the wood and the leather alternated. Whenever he moved it was to the rhythm of this singular castanets.

The great kitchen, with its huge fireplace and carved settle corners, showed that this dwelling was an oldtime farmhouse. On one side of the room a line of boxes stood all corded and packed. The furniture was scant and plain, but on a trestle-table in the centre some supper, cold meat, bread, and a jug of beer was laid for me. An elderly manservant, as manifest a Cockney as his master, waited upon me, while my uncle, sitting in a corner, asked me many questions as to my mother and myself. When my meal was finished he ordered his man Enoch to unpack my gun. I observed that two other guns, old rusted weapons, were leaning against the wall beside the window.

"It's the window I'm afraid of," said my uncle, in the deep, reverberant voice which contrasted oddly with his plump little figure. " The door's safe against anything short of dynamite, but the window's a terror. Hi! hi!" he yelled, "don't walk across the light! You can duck when you pass the lattice."

"For fear of being seen?" I asked.

"For fear of bein' shot, my lad. That's the trouble. Now, come an' sit beside me on the trestle 'ere, and I'll tell you all about it, for I can see that you are the right sort and can be trusted."

His flattery was clumsy and halting, and it was evident that he was very eager to conciliate me. I sat down beside him, and he drew a folded paper from his pocket. It was a Western Morning News, and the date was ten days before. The passage over which he pressed a long, black nail was concerned with the release from Dartmoor of a convict named Elias, whose term of sentence had been remitted on account of his defence of a warder who had been attacked in the quarries. The whole account was only a few lines long.

"Who is he, then?" I asked.

My uncle cocked his distorted foot into the air. "That's 'is mark!" said he. " 'E was doin' time for that. Now 'e's out an' after me again."

"But why should he be after you?"

"Because 'e wants to kill me. Because 'e'll never rest, the worrying devil, until 'e 'as 'ad 'is revenge on me. It's this way, nephew! I've no secrets from you. 'E thinks I've wronged 'im. For argument's sake we'll suppose I 'ave wronged 'im. And now 'im and 'is friends are after me."

"Who are his friends?"

My uncle’s boom sank suddenly to a frightened whisper. “ Sailors! “ said he. “ I knew they would come when I saw that ‘ere paper, and two days ago I looked through that window and three of them was standin’ lookin’ at the ‘ouse. It was after that that I wrote to your mother. They’ve marked me down, and they’re waitin’ for ‘im.”

“But why not send for the police?”

My uncle’s eyes avoided mine.

“Police are no use,” said he. “ It’s you that can help me.”

“What can I do?”

“I’ll tell you. I’m going to move. That’s what all these boxes are for. Everything will soon be packed and ready. I ‘ave friends at Leeds, and I shall be safer there. Not safe, mind you, but safer. I start to-morrow evening, and if you will stand by me until then I will make it worth your while. There’s only Enoch and me to do everything, but we shall ‘ave it all ready, I promise you, by to-morrow evening. The cart will be round then, and you and me and Enoch and the boy William can guard the things as far as Congleton station. Did you see anything of them on the fells?”

“Yes,” said I; “a sailor stopped us on the way.”

“Ah, I knew they were watching us. That was why I asked you to get out at the wrong station and to drive to Purcell’s instead of comin’ ‘ere. We are blockaded — that’s the word.”

“And there was another,” said I, “a man with a pipe.”

“What was ‘e like? “

“Thin face, freckles, a peaked—”

My uncle gave a hoarse scream.

“That’s ‘im! that’s ‘im! ‘e’s come! God be merciful to me, a sinner!” He went click-clacking about the room with his great foot like one distracted. There was something piteous and baby-like in that big bald head, and for the first time I felt a gush of pity for him.

“Come, uncle,” said I, “ you are living in a civilised land. There is a law that will bring these gentry to order. Let me drive over to the county police-station to-morrow morning and I’ll soon set things right.”

But he shook his head at me.

“‘E’s cunning and ‘e’s cruel,” said he. “I can’t draw a breath without thinking of him, cos ‘e buckled up three of my ribs. ‘E’ll kill me this time, sure. There’s only one chance. We must leave what we ‘ave not packed, and we must be off first thing tomorrow mornin’. Great God, what’s that!”

A tremendous knock upon the door had reverberated through the house and then another and another. An iron fist seemed to be beating upon it. My uncle collapsed into his chair. I seized a gun and ran to the door.

“Who’s there?” I shouted.

There was no answer.

I opened the shutter and looked out.

No one was there.

And then suddenly I saw that a long slip of paper was protruding through the slit of the door. I held it to the light. In rude but vigorous handwriting the message ran: —

“Put them out on the doorstep and save your skin.”

“What do they want?” I asked, as I read him the message.

“What they’ll never ‘ave! No, by the Lord, never!” he cried, with a fine burst of spirit. “‘Ere, Enoch! Enoch!”

The old fellow came running to the call.

“Enoch, I’ve been a good master to you all my life, and it’s your turn now. Will you take a risk for me?”

I thought better of my uncle when I saw how readily the man consented. Whomever else he had wronged, this one at least seemed to love him.

“Put your cloak on and your ‘at, Enoch, and out with you by the back door. You know the way across the moor to the Purcells’. Tell them that I must ‘ave the cart first thing in the mornin’, and that Purcell must come with the shepherd as well. We must get clear of this or we are done. First thing in the mornin’, Enoch, and ten pound for the job. Keep the black cloak on and move slow, and they will never see you. We’ll keep the ‘ouse till you come back.”

It was a job for a brave man to venture out into the vague and invisible dangers of the fell, but the old servant took it as the most ordinary of messages. Picking his long, black cloak and his soft hat from the hook behind the door, he was ready on the instant. We extinguished the small lamp in the back passage, softly unbarred the back door, slipped him out, and barred it up again. Looking through the small hallwindow, I saw his black garments merge instantly into the night.

“It is but a few hours before the light comes, nephew,” said my uncle, after he had tried all the bolts and bars. “You shall never regret this night’s work. If we come through safely it will be the making of you. Stand by me till mornin’, and I stand by you while there’s breath in my body. The cart will be ‘ere by five. What isn’t ready we can afford to leave be’ind. We’ve only to load up and make for the early train at Congleton.”

“Will they let us pass?”

“In broad daylight they dare not stop us. There will be six of us, if they all come, and three guns. We can fight our way through. Where can they get guns, common, wandering seamen? A pistol or two at the most. If we can keep them out for a few hours we are safe. Enoch must be ‘alfway to Purcell’s by now.”

“But what do these sailors want?” I repeated. “You say yourself that you wronged them.”

A look of mulish obstinacy came over his large, white face.

“Don’t ask questions, nephew, and just do what I ask you,” said he. “Enoch won’t come back ‘E’ll just bide there and come with the cart. ‘Ark, what is that?”

A distant cry rang from out of the darkness, and then another one, short and sharp like the wail of the curlew.

“It’s Enoch!” said my uncle, gripping my arm. “They’re killin’ poor old Enoch.”

The cry came again, much nearer, and I heard the sound of hurrying steps and a shrill call for help.

“They are after ‘im!” cried my uncle, rushing to the front door. He picked up the lantern and flashed it through the little shutter. Up the yellow funnel of light a man was running frantically, his head bowed and a black cloak fluttering behind him. The moor seemed to be alive with dim pursuers.

“The bolt! The bolt!” gasped my uncle. He pushed it back whilst I turned the key, and we swung the door open to admit the fugitive. He dashed in and turned at once with a long yell of triumph. “Come on, lads! Tumble up, all hands, tumble up! Smartly there, all of you!”

It was so quickly and neatly done that we were taken by storm before we knew that we were attacked. The passage was full of rushing sailors. I slipped out of the clutch of one and ran for my gun, but it was only to crash down on to the stone floor an instant later with two of them holding on to me. They were so deft and quick that my hands were lashed together even while I struggled, and I was dragged into the settle corner, unhurt but very sore in spirit at the cunning with which our defences had been forced and the ease with which we had been overcome. They had not even troubled to bind my uncle, but he had been pushed into his chair, and the guns had been taken away. He sat with a very white face, his homely figure and absurd row of curls looking curiously out of place among the wild figures who surrounded him.

There were six of them, all evidently sailors. One I recognised as the man with the earrings whom I had already met upon the road that evening. They were all fine, weather-bronzed bewhiskered fellows. In the midst of them, leaning against the table, was the freckled man who had passed me on the moor. The great black cloak which poor Enoch had taken out with him was still hanging from his shoulders. He was of a very different type from the others — crafty, cruel, dangerous, with sly, thoughtful eyes which gloated over my uncle. They suddenly turned themselves upon me and I never knew how one's skin can creep at a man's glance before.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Speak out, or we'll find a way to make you."

"I am Mr. Stephen Maple's nephew, come to visit him."

"You are, are you? Well, I wish you joy of your uncle and of your visit too. Quick's the word, lads, for we must be aboard before morning. What shall we do with the old 'un? "

"Trice him up Yankee fashion and give him six dozen," said one of the seamen.

"D'you hear, you cursed Cockney thief? We'll beat the life out of you if you don't give back what you've stolen. Where are they? I know you never parted with them."

My uncle pursed up his lips and shook his head, with a face in which his fear and his obstinacy contended.

"Won't tell, won't you? We'll see about that! Get him ready, Jim!"

One of the seamen seized my uncle, and pulled his coat and shirt over his shoulders. He sat lumped in his chair, his body all creased into white rolls which shivered with cold and with terror.

"Up with him to those hooks."

There were rows of them along the walls where the smoked meat used to be hung. The seamen tied my uncle by the wrists to two of these. Then one of them undid his leather belt.

"The buckle end, Jim," said the captain. "Give him the buckle."

"You cowards," I cried; "to beat an old man!"

"We'll beat a young one next," said he, with a malevolent glance at my corner. "Now, Jim, cut a wad out of him!"

"Give him one more chance!" cried one of the seamen.

“Aye, aye,” growled one or two others. “ Give the swab a chance! “

“If you turn soft, you may give them up for ever,” said the captain. “One thing or the other! You must lash it out of him; or you may give up what you took such pains to win and what would make you gentlemen for life — every man of you. There’s nothing else for it. Which shall it be?”

“Let him have it,” they cried, savagely.

“Then stand clear! “ The buckle of the man’s belt whined savagely as he whirled it over his shoulder.

But my uncle cried out before the blow fell. “I can’t stand it!” he cried. “Let me down! “

“Where are they, then?”

“I’ll show you if you’ll let me down.” They cast off the handkerchiefs and he pulled his coat over his fat, round shoulders. The seamen stood round him, the most intense curiosity and excitement upon their swarthy faces.

“No gammon!” cried the man with the freckles. “We’ll kill you joint by joint if you try to fool us. Now then! Where are they?”

“In my bedroom.”

“Where is that?”

“The room above.”

“Whereabouts?”

“In the corner of the oak ark by the bed.”

The seamen all rushed to the stair, but the captain called them back.

“We don’t leave this cunning old fox behind us. Ha, your face drops at that, does it? By the Lord, I believe you are trying to slip your anchor. Here, lads, make him fast and take him along!”

With a confused trampling of feet they rushed up the stairs, dragging my uncle in the midst of them. For an instant I was alone. My hands were tied but not my feet. If I could find my way across the moor I might rouse the police and intercept these rascals before they could reach the sea. For a moment I hesitated as to whether I should leave my uncle alone in such a plight. But I should be of more service to him — or, at the worst, to his property — if I went than if I stayed. I rushed to the hall door, and as I reached if. I heard a yell above my head, a shattering, splintering noise, and then amid a chorus of shouts a huge weight fell with a horrible thud at my very feet. Never while I live will that squelching thud pass out of my ears. And there, just in front of me, in the lane of light cast by the open door, lay my unhappy uncle, his bald head twisted on to one shoulder, like the wrung neck of a chicken. It needed but a glance to see that his spine was broken and that he was dead.

The gang of seamen had rushed downstairs so quickly that they were clustered at the door and crowding all round me almost as soon as I had realised what had occurred.

“It’s no doing of ours, mate,” said one of them to me. “He hove himself through the window, and that’s the truth. Don’t you put it down to us.”

“He thought he could get to windward of us if once he was out in the dark, you see,” said another. “ But he came head foremost and broke his bloomin’ neck.”

“And a blessed good job too!” cried the chief, with a savage oath. “ I’d have done it for him if he hadn’t took the lead. Don’t make any mistake, my lads, this is murder, and we’re all in it, together. There’s only one way out of it, and that is to hang together, unless, as the saying goes, you mean to hang apart. There’s only one witness—”

He looked at me with his malicious little eyes, and I saw that he had something that gleamed — either a knife or a revolver — in the breast of his pea-jacket. Two of the men slipped between us.

“Stow that, Captain Elias,” said one of them. “If this old man met his end it is through no fault of ours. The worst we ever meant him was to take some of the skin off his back. But as to this young fellow, we have no quarrel with him —— -”

“You fool, you may have no quarrel with him, but he has his quarrel with you. He’ll swear your life away if you don’t silence his tongue. It’s his life or ours, and don’t you make any mistake.”

“Aye, aye, the skipper has the longest head of any of us. Better do what he tells you,” cried another.

But my champion, who was the fellow with the earrings, covered me with his own broad chest and swore roundly that no one should lay a finger on me. The others were equally divided, and my fate might have been the cause of a quarrel between them, when suddenly the captain gave a cry of delight and amazement which was taken up by the whole gang. I followed their eyes and outstretched fingers, and this was what I saw.

My uncle was lying with his legs outstretched, and the club foot was that which was furthest from us. All round this foot a dozen brilliant objects were twinkling and flashing in the yellow light which streamed from the open door. The captain caught up the lantern and held it to the place. The huge sole of his boot had been shattered in the fall, and it was clear now that it had been a hollow box in which he stowed his valuables, for the path was all sprinkled with precious stones. Three which I saw were of an unusual size, and as many as forty, I should think, of fair value. The seamen had cast themselves down and were greedily gathering them up, when my friend with the earrings plucked me by the sleeve.

"Here's your chance, mate," he whispered. "Off you go before worse comes of it."

It was a timely hint, and it did not take me long to act upon it. A few cautious steps and I had passed unobserved beyond the circle of light. Then I set off running, falling and rising and falling again, for no on a who has not tried it can tell how hard it is to run over uneven ground with hands which are fastened together. I ran and ran, until for want of breath I could no longer put one foot before the other. But I need not have hurried so, for when I had gone a long way I stopped at last to breathe, and, looking back, I could still see the gleam of the lantern far away, and the outline of the seamen who squatted round it. Then at last this single point of light went suddenly out, and the whole great moor was left in the thickest darkness.

So deftly was I tied, that it took me a long half-hour and a broken tooth before I got my hands free. My idea was to make my way across to the Purcells' farm, but north was the same as south under that pitchy sky, and for hours I wandered among the rustling, scuttling sheep without any certainty as to where I was going. When at last there came a glimmer in the east, and the undulating fells, grey with the morning mist, rolled once more to the horizon, I recognised that I was close by Purcell's farm, and there a little in front of me I was startled to see another man walking in the same direction. At first I approached him warily, but before I overtook him I knew by the bent back and tottering step that it was Enoch, the old servant, and right glad I was to see that he was living. He had been knocked down, beaten, and his cloak and hat taken away by these ruffians, and all night he had wandered in the darkness, like myself, in search of help. He burst into tears when I told him of his master's death, and sat hiccoughing with the hard, dry sobs of an old man among the stones upon the moor.

"It's the men of the Black Mogul," he said. "Yes, yes, I knew that they would be the end of 'im."

"Who are they?" I asked.

“Well, well, you are one of ‘is own folk,” said he. “‘E ‘as passed away; yes, yes, it is all over and done. I can tell you about it, no man better, but mum’s the word with old Enoch unless master wants ‘im to speak. But his own nephew who came to ‘elp ‘im in the hour of need — yes, yes. Mister John, you ought to know.

“It was like this, sir. Your uncle ‘ad ‘is grocer’s business at Stepney, but ‘e ‘ad another business also. ‘E would buy as well as sell, and when ‘e bought ‘e never asked no questions where the stuff came from. Why should ‘e? It wasn’t no business of ‘is, was it? If folk brought him a stone or a silver plate, what was it to ‘im where they got it? That’s good sense, and it ought to be good law, as I ‘old. Any’ow, it was good enough for us at Stepney.

“Well, there was a steamer came from South Africa what foundered at sea. At least, they say so, and Lloyd’s paid the money. She ‘ad some very fine diamonds invoiced as being aboard of ‘er. Soon after there came the brig Black Mogul into the port o’ London, with ‘er papers all right as ‘avin’ cleared from Port Elizabeth with a cargo of ‘ides. The captain, which ‘is name was Elias, ‘e came to see the master, and what d’you think that ‘e ‘ad to sell? Why, sir, as I’m a livin’ sinner ‘e ‘ad a packet of diamonds for all the world just the same as what was lost out o’ that there African steamer. ‘Ow did ‘e get them? I don’t know. Master didn’t know. ‘E didn’t seek to know either. The captain ‘e was anxious for reasons of ‘is own to get them safe, so ‘e gave them to master, same as you might put a thing in a bank. But master ‘e’d ‘ad time to get fond of them, and ‘e wasn’t over satisfied as to where the Black Mogul ‘ad been tradin’, or where her captain ‘ad got the stones, so when ‘e come back for them the master ‘e said as ‘e thought they were best in ‘is own ‘ands. Mind I don’t ‘old with it myself, but that was what master said to Captain Elias in the little back parlour at Stepney. That was ‘ow ‘e got ‘is leg broke and three of his ribs.

“So the captain got jugged for that, and the master, when ‘e was able to get about, thought that ‘e would ‘ave peace for fifteen years, and ‘e came away from London because ‘e was afraid of the sailor men; but, at the end of five years, the captain was out and after ‘im, with as many of ‘is crew as ‘e could gather. Send for the perlice, you says! Well, there are two sides to that, and the master ‘e wasn’t much more fond of the perlice than Elias was. But they fair ‘emmed master in, as you ‘ave seen for yourself, and they bested ‘im at last, and the loneliness that ‘e thought would be ‘is safety ‘as proved ‘is ruin. Well, well, ‘e was ‘ard to many, but a good master to me, and it’s long before I come on such another.”

One word in conclusion. A strange cutter, which had been hanging about the coast, was seen to beat down the Irish Sea that morning, and it is conjectured that Elias and his men were on board of it. At any rule, nothing has been heard of them since. It was shown at the inquest that my uncle had lived in a sordid fashion for years, and he left little behind him. The mere knowledge that he possessed this treasure, which he carried about with him in so extraordinary a fashion, had appeared to be the joy of his life, and he had never, as far as we could learn, tried to realise any of his diamonds. So his disreputable name when living was not atoned for by any posthumous benevolence, and the family, equally scandalised by his life and by his death, have finally buried all memory of the club-footed grocer of Stepney.

THE SEALED ROOM

A SOLICITOR of an active habit and athletic tastes who is compelled by his hopes of business to remain within the four walls of his office from ten till five must take what exercise he can in the evenings. Hence it was that I was in the habit of indulging in very long nocturnal excursions, in which I sought the heights of Hampstead and Highgate in order to cleanse my system from the impure air of Abchurch Lane. It was in the course of one of these aimless rambles that I first met Felix Stanniford, and so led up to what has been the most extraordinary adventure of my lifetime.

One evening — it was in April or early May of the year 1894 — I made my way to the extreme northern fringe of London, and was walking down one of those fine avenues of high brick villas which the huge city is for ever pushing farther and farther out into the country. It was a fine, clear spring night, the moon was shining out of an unclouded sky, and I, having already left many miles behind me, was inclined to walk slowly and look about me. In this contemplative mood, my attention was arrested by one of the houses which I was passing.

It was a very large building, standing in its own grounds, a little back from the road. It was modern in appearance, and yet it was far less so than its neighbours, all of which were crudely and painfully new. Their symmetrical line was broken by the gap caused by the laurel-studded lawn, with the great, dark, gloomy house looming at the back of it. Evidently it had been the country retreat of some wealthy merchant, built perhaps when the nearest street was a mile off, and now gradually overtaken and surrounded by the red brick tentacles of the London octopus. The next stage, I reflected, would be its digestion and absorption, so that the cheap builder might rear a dozen eighty-pound-a-year villas upon the garden frontage. And then, as all this passed vaguely through my mind, an incident occurred which brought my thoughts into quite another channel.

A four-wheeled cab, that opprobrium of London, was coming jolting and creaking in one direction, while in the other there was a yellow glare from the lamp of a cyclist. They were the only moving objects in the whole long, moonlit road, and yet they crashed into each other with that malignant accuracy which brings two ocean liners together in the broad waste of the Atlantic. It was the cyclist's fault. He tried to cross in front of the cab, miscalculated his distance, and was knocked sprawling by the horse's shoulder. He rose, snarling; the cabman swore back at him, and then, realising that his number had not yet been taken, lashed his horse and lumbered off. The cyclist caught at the handles of his prostrate machine, and then suddenly sat down with a groan. "Oh, Lord!" he said.

I ran across the road to his side. "Any harm done?" I asked.

"It's my ankle," said he. "Only a twist, I think; but it's pretty painful. Just give me your hand, will you?"

He lay in the yellow circle of the cycle lamp, and I noted as I helped him to his feet that he was a gentlemanly young fellow, with a slight dark moustache and large, brown eyes, sensitive and nervous in appearance, with indications of weak health upon his sunken cheeks. Work or worry had left its traces upon his thin, yellow face. He stood up when I pulled his hand, but he held one foot in the air, and he groaned as he moved it.

"I can't put it to the ground," said he.

"Where do you live?"

"Here!" he nodded his head towards the big, dark house in the garden. " I was cutting across to the gate when that confounded cab ran into me. Could you help me so far?"

It was easily done. I put his cycle inside the gate, and then I supported him down the drive, and up the steps to the hall door. There was not a light anywhere, and the place was as black and silent as if no one had ever lived in it.

"That will do. Thank you very much," said he, fumbling with his key in the lock.

"No, you must allow me to see you safe."

He made some feeble, petulant protest, and then realised that he could really do nothing without me. The door had opened into a pitch-dark hall. He lurched forward, with my hand still on his arm. "This door to the right," said he, feeling about in the darkness.

I opened the door, and at the same moment he managed to strike a light. There was a lamp upon the table, and we lit it between us. " Now, I'm all right. You can leave me now! Good-bye!" said he, and with the words he sat down in the arm-chair and fainted dead away.

It was a queer position for me. The fellow looked so ghastly, that really I was not sure that he was not dead. Presently his lips quivered and his breast heaved, but his eyes were two white slits and his colour was horrible. The responsibility was more than I could stand. I pulled at the bell-rope, and heard the bell ringing furiously far away. But no one came in response. The bell tinkled away into silence, which no murmur or movement came to break. I waited, and rang again, with the same result. There must be some one about. This young gentleman could not live all alone in that huge house. His people ought to know of his condition. If they would not answer the bell, I must hunt them out myself. I seized the lamp and rushed from the room.

What I saw outside amazed me. The hall was empty. The stairs were bare, and yellow with dust. There were three doors opening into spacious rooms, and each was uncarpeted and undraped, save for the grey webs which drooped from the cornice, and rosettes of lichen which had formed upon the walls. My feet reverberated in those empty and silent chambers. Then I wandered on down the passage, with the idea that the kitchens, at least, might be tenanted. Some caretaker might lurk in some secluded room. No, they were all equally desolate. Despairing of finding any help, I ran down another corridor, and came on something which surprised me more than ever.

The passage ended in a large, brown door, and the door had a seal of red wax the size of a five-shilling piece over the keyhole. This seal gave me the impression of having been there for a long time, for it was dusty and discoloured. I was still staring at it, and wondering what that door might conceal, when I heard a voice calling behind me, and, running back, found my young man sitting up in his chair and very much astonished at finding himself in darkness.

“Why on earth did you take the lamp away?” he asked.

“I was looking for assistance.”

“You might look for some time,” said he. “I am alone in the house.”

“Awkward if you get an illness.”

“It was foolish of me to faint. I inherit a weak heart from my mother, and pain or emotion has that effect upon me. It will carry me off some day, as it did her. You’re not a doctor, are you? “

“No, a lawyer. Frank Alder is my name.”

“Mine is Felix Stanniford. Funny that I should meet a lawyer, for my friend, Mr. Perceval, was saying that I should need one soon.”

“Very happy, I am sure.”

“Well, that will depend upon him, you know. Did you say that you had run with that lamp all over the ground floor?”

“Yes.”

“All over it?” he asked, with emphasis, and he looked at me very hard.

“I think so. I kept on hoping that I should find someone.”

“Did you enter all the rooms?” he asked, with the same intent gaze.

“Well, all that I could enter.”

“Oh, then you did notice it!” said he, and he shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who makes the best of a bad job.

“Notice what?”

“Why, the door with the seal on it.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Weren’t you curious to know what was in it?”

“Well, it did strike me as unusual.”

“Do you think you could go on living alone in this house, year after year, just longing all the time to know what is at the other side of that door, and yet not looking?”

“Do you mean to say,” I cried, “that you don’t know yourself?”

“No more than you do.”

“Then why don’t you look?”

“I mustn’t,” said he.

He spoke in a constrained way, and I saw that I had blundered on to some delicate ground. I don’t know that I am more inquisitive than my neighbours, but there certainly wag something in the situation which appealed very strongly to my curiosity. However, my last excuse for remaining in the house was gone now that my companion had recovered his senses. I rose to go.

“Are you in a hurry? “ he asked.

“No; I have nothing to do.”

“Well, I should be very glad if you would stay with me a little. The fact is that I live a very retired and secluded life here. I don’t suppose there is a man in London who leads such a life as I do. It is quite unusual for me to have any one to talk with.”

I looked round at the little room, scantily furnished, with a sofa-bed at one side. Then I thought of the great, bare house, and the sinister door with the discoloured red seal upon it. There was something queer and grotesque in the situation, which made me long to know a little more. Perhaps I should, if I waited. I told him that I should be very happy.

“You will find the spirits and a siphon upon the side table. You must forgive me if I cannot act as host, but I can’t get across the room. Those are cigars in the tray there. I’ll take one myself, I think. And you are a solicitor, Mr. Alder?”

“Yes.”

“And I am nothing. I am that most helpless of living creatures, the son of a millionaire. I was brought up with the expectation of great wealth; and here I am, a poor man, without any profession at all. And then, on the top of it all, I am left with this great mansion on my hands, which I cannot possibly keep up. Isn’t it an absurd situation? For me to use this as my dwelling is like a coster drawing his barrow with a thoroughbred. A donkey would be more useful to him, and a cottage to me.”

“But why not sell the house? “ I asked.

“I mustn’t.”

“Let it, then?”

“No, I mustn’t do that either.”

I looked puzzled, and my companion smiled.

“I’ll tell you how it is, if it won’t bore you.” said he.

“On the contrary, I should be exceedingly interested.”

“I think, after your kind attention to me, I cannot do less than relieve any curiosity that you may feel. You must know that my father was Stanislaus Stanniford, the banker.”

Stanniford, the banker! I remembered the name at once. His flight from the country some seven years before had been one of the scandals and sensations of the time.

“I see that you remember,” said my companion. “My poor father left the country to avoid numerous friends, whose savings he had invested in an unsuccessful speculation. He was a nervous, sensitive man, and the responsibility quite upset his reason. He had committed no legal offence. It was purely a matter of sentiment. He would not even face his own family, and he died among strangers without ever letting us know where he was.”

“He died!” said I.

“We could not prove his death, but we know that it must be so, because the speculations came right again, and so there was no reason why he should not look any man in the face. He would have returned if he were alive. But he must have died in the last two years."

"Why in the last two years? "

"Because we heard from him two years ago."

"Did he not tell you then where he was living? "

"The letter came from Paris, but no address was given. It was when my poor mother died. He wrote to me then, with some instructions and some advice, and I have never heard from him since."

"Had you heard before? "

"Oh, yes, we had heard before, and that's where our mystery of the sealed door, upon which you stumbled to-night, has its origin. Pass me that desk, if you please. Here I have my father's letters, and you are the first man except Mr. Perceval who has seen them."

"Who is Mr. Perceval, may I ask? "

"He was my father's confidential clerk, and he has continued to be the friend and adviser of my mother and then of myself. I don't know what we should have done without Perceval. He saw the letters, but no one else. This is the first one, which came on the very day when my father fled, seven years ago. Read it to yourself."

This is the letter which I read: —

"MY EVER DEAREST WIFE, —

"Since Sir William told me how weak your heart is, and how harmful any shock might be, I have never talked about my business affairs to you. The time has come when at all risks I can no longer refrain from telling you that things have been going badly with me. This will cause me to leave you for a little time, but it is with the absolute assurance that we shall see each other very soon. On this you can thoroughly rely. Our parting is only for a very short time, my own darling, so don't let it fret you, and above all don't let it impair your health, for that is what I want above all things to avoid.

"Now, I have a request to make, and I implore you by all that binds us together to fulfil it exactly as I tell you. There are some things which I do not wish to be seen by any one in my dark room — the room which I use for photographic purposes at the end of the garden passage. To prevent any painful thoughts, I may assure you once for all, dear, that it is nothing of which I need be ashamed. But still I do not wish you or Felix to enter that room. It is locked, and I implore you when you receive this to at once place a seal over the lock, and leave it so. Do not sell or let the house, for in either case my secret will be discovered. As long as you or Felix are in the house, I know that you will comply with my wishes. When Felix is twenty-one he may enter the room — not before.

"And now, good-bye, my own best of wives. During our short separation you can consult Mr. Perceval on any matters which may arise. He has my complete confidence. I hate to leave Felix and you — even for a time — but there is really no choice.

"Ever and always your loving husband,

"STANISLAUS STANNIFORD. June 4th, 1887."

"These are very private family matters for me to inflict upon you," said my companion, apologetically. "You must look upon it as done in your professional capacity. I have wanted to speak about it for years."

"I am honoured by your confidence," I answered, "and exceedingly interested by the facts."

"My father was a man who was noted for his almost morbid love of truth. He was always pedantically accurate. "When he said, therefore, that ho hoped to see my mother very soon, and when he said that he had nothing to be ashamed of in that dark room, you may rely upon it that he meant it."

"Then what can it be?" I ejaculated.

"Neither my mother nor I could imagine. We carried out his wishes to the letter, and placed the seal upon the door; there it has been ever since. My mother lived for five years after my father's disappearance, although at the time all the doctors said that she could not survive long. Her heart was terribly diseased. During the first few months she had two letters from my father. Both had the Paris post-mark, but no address. They were short and to the same effect: that they would soon be re-united, and that she should not fret. Then there was a silence, which lasted until her death; and then came a letter to me of so private a nature that I cannot show it to you, begging me never to think evil of him, giving me much good advice, and saying that the sealing of the room was of less importance now than during the lifetime of my mother, but that the opening might still cause pain to others, and that, therefore, he thought it best that it should be postponed until my twenty-first year, for the lapse of time would make things easier. In the meantime, he committed the care of the room to me; so now you can understand how it is that, although I am a very poor man, I can neither let nor sell this great house."

"You could mortgage it."

“My father had already done so.”

“It is a most singular state of affairs.”

“My mother and I were gradually compelled to sell the furniture and to dismiss the servants, until now, as you see, I am living unattended in a single room. But I have only two more months.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, that in two months I come of age. The first thing that I do will be to open that door; the second, to get rid of the house.”

“Why should your father have continued to stay away when these investments had recovered themselves?”

“He must be dead.”

“You say that he had not committed any legal offence when he fled the country?”

“None.”

“Why should he not take your mother with him?”

“I do not know.”

“Why should he conceal his address?”

“I do not know.”

“Why should he allow your mother to die and be buried without coming back?”

“I do not know.”

“My dear sir,” said I, “if I may speak with the frankness of a professional adviser, I should say that it is very clear that your father had the strongest reasons for keeping out of the country, and that, if nothing has been proved against him, he at least thought that something might be, and refused to put himself within the power of the law. Surely that must be obvious, for in what other possible way can the facts be explained?”

My companion did not take my suggestion in good part.

“You had not the advantage of knowing my father, Mr. Alder,” he said, coldly. “I was only a boy when he left us, but I shall always look upon him as my ideal man. His only fault was that he was too sensitive and too unselfish. That any one should lose money through him would cut him to the heart. His sense of honour was most acute, and any theory of his disappearance which conflicts with that is a mistaken one.”

It pleased me to hear the lad speak out so roundly, and yet I knew that the facts were against him, and that he was incapable of taking an unprejudiced view of the situation.

"I only speak as an outsider," said I. "And now I must leave you, for I have a long walk before me. Your story has interested me so much that I should be glad if you could let me know the sequel."

"Leave me your card," said he; and so, having bade him "good-night," I left him.

I heard nothing more of the matter for some time, and had almost feared that it would prove to be one of those fleeting experiences which drift away from our direct observation and end only in a hope or a suspicion. One afternoon, however, a card bearing the name of Mr. J, H. Perceval was brought up to my office in Abchurch Lane, and its bearer, a small dry, bright-eyed fellow of fifty, was ushered in by the clerk.

"I believe, sir," said he, " that my name has been mentioned to you by my young friend, Mr. Felix Stanniford?"

"Of course," I answered, "I remember."

"He spoke to you, I understand, about the circumstances in connection with the disappearance of my former employer, Mr. Stanislaus Stanniford, and the existence of a sealed room in his former residence."

"He did."

"And you expressed an interest in the matter."

"It interested me extremely."

"You are aware that we hold Mr. Stanniford's permission to open the door on the twenty-first birthday of his son?"

"I remember."

"The twenty-first birthday is to-day."

"Have you opened it?" I asked, eagerly.

"Not yet, sir," said he, gravely. "I have reason to believe that it would be well to have witnesses present when that door is opened. You are a lawyer, and you are acquainted with the facts. Will you be present on the occasion?"

"Most certainly."

"You are employed during the day, and so am I. Shall we meet at nine o'clock at the house?"

"I will come with pleasure."

"Then you will find us waiting for you. Good-bye, for the present." He bowed solemnly, and took his leave.

I kept my appointment that evening, with a brain which was weary with fruitless attempts to think out some plausible explanation of the mystery which we were about to solve. Mr. Perceval and my young acquaintance were waiting for me in the little room. I was not surprised to see the young man looking pale and nervous, but I was rather astonished to find the dry little City man in a state of intense, though partially suppressed, excitement. His cheeks were flushed, his hands twitching, and he could not stand still for an instant.

Stanniford greeted me warmly, and thanked me many times for having come. "And now, Perceval," said he to his companion, "I suppose there is no obstacle to our putting the thing through without delay? I shall be glad to get it over."

The banker's clerk took up the lamp and led the way. But he paused in the passage outside the door, and his hand was shaking, so that the light flickered up and down the high, bare walls.

"Mr. Stanniford," said he, in a cracking voice, "I hope you will prepare yourself in case any shock should be awaiting you when that seal is removed and the door is opened."

"What could there be, Perceval? You are trying to frighten me."

"No, Mr. Stanniford; but I should wish you to be ready ... to be braced up ... not to allow yourself. ..." He had to lick his dry lips between every jerky sentence, and I suddenly realised, as clearly as if he had told me, that he knew what was behind that closed door, and that it was something terrible. " Here are the keys, Mr. Stanniford, but remember my warning!"

He had a bunch of assorted keys in his hand, and the young man snatched them from him. Then he thrust a knife under the discoloured red seal and jerked it off. The lamp was rattling and shaking in Perceval's hands, so I took it from him and held it near the key hole, while Stanniford tried key after key. At last one turned in the lock, the door flew open, he took one step into the room, and then, with a horrible cry, the young man fell senseless at our feet.

If I had not given heed to the clerk's warning, and braced myself for a shock, I should certainly have dropped the lamp. The room, windowless and bare, was fitted up as a photographic laboratory, with a tap and sink at the side of it. A shelf of bottles and measures stood at one side, and a peculiar, heavy smell, partly chemical, partly animal, filled the air. A single table and chair were in front of us, and at this, with his back turned towards us, a man was seated in the act of writing. His outline and attitude were as natural as life; but as the light fell upon him, it made my hair rise to see that the nape of his neck was black and wrinkled, and no thicker than my wrist. Dust lay upon him — thick, yellow dust — upon his hair, his shoulders, his shrivelled, lemon-coloured hands. His head had fallen forward upon his breast. His pen still rested upon a discoloured sheet of paper.

"My poor master! My poor, poor master!" cried the clerk, and the tears were running down his cheeks.

"What!" I cried, "Mr. Stanislaus Stanniford!"

"Here he has sat for seven years. Oh, why would he do it? I begged him, I implored him, I went on my knees to him, but he would have his way. You see the key on the table. He had locked the door upon the inside. And he has written something. We must take it."

"Yes, yes, take it, and for God's sake, let us get out of this," I cried; "the air is poisonous. Come, Stanniford, come!" Taking an arm each, we half led and half carried the terrified man back to his own room.

"It was my father!" he cried, as he recovered his consciousness. "He is sitting there dead in his chair. You knew it, Perceval! This was what you meant when you warned me."

"Yes, I knew it, Mr. Stanniford. I have acted for the best all along, but my position has been a terribly difficult one. For seven years I have known that your father was dead in that room."

"You knew it, and never told us!"

"Don't be harsh, with me, Mr. Stanniford, sir! Make allowance for a man who has had a hard part to play."

"My head is swimming round. I cannot grasp it!" He staggered up, and helped himself from the brandy bottle. "These letters to my mother and to myself — were they forgeries?"

"No, sir; your father wrote them and addressed them, and left them in my keeping to be posted. I have followed his instructions to the very letter in all things. He was my master, and I have obeyed him."

The brandy had steadied the young man's shaken nerves. "Tell me about it. I can stand it now," said he.

"Well, Mr. Stanniford, you know that at one time there came a period of great trouble upon your father, t and he thought that many poor people were about to lose their savings through his fault. He was a man who was so tender-hearted that he could not bear the thought. It worried him and tormented him, until he determined to end his life. Oh, Mr. Stanniford, if you knew how I have prayed him and wrestled with him over it, you would never blame me! And he in turn prayed me as no man has ever prayed me before. He had made up his mind, and he would do it in any case, he said; but it rested with me whether his death should be happy and easy or whether it should be most miserable. I read in his eyes that he meant what he said. And at last I yielded to his prayers, and I consented to do his will.

"What was troubling him was this. He had been told by the first doctor in London that his wife's heart would fail at the slightest shock. He had a horror of accelerating her end, and yet his own existence had become unendurable to him. How could he end himself without injuring her?

"You know now the course that he took. He wrote the letter which she received. There was nothing in it which was not literally true. When he spoke of seeing her again so soon, he was referring to her own approaching death, which he had been assured could not be delayed more than a very few months. So convinced was he of this, that he only left two letters to be forwarded at intervals after his death. She lived five years, and I had no letters to send.

"He left another letter with me to be sent to you, sir, upon the occasion of the death of your mother. I posted all these in Paris to sustain the idea of his being abroad. It was his wish that I should say nothing, and I have said nothing. I have been a faithful servant. Seven years after his death, he thought no doubt that the shock to the feelings of his surviving friends would be lessened. He was always considerate for others."

There was silence for some time. It was broken by young Stanniford.

"I cannot blame you, Perceval, You have spared my mother a shock, which would certainly have broken her heart. What is that paper?"

"It is what your father was writing, sir. Shall I read it to you?"

"Do so."

"'I have taken the poison, and I feel it working in my veins. It is strange, but not painful. When these words are read I shall, if my wishes have been faithfully carried out, have been dead many years. Surely no one who has lost money through me will still bear me animosity. And you, Felix, you will forgive me this family scandal. May God find rest for a sorely wearied spirit!'"

"Amen!" we cried, all three.

THE BRAZILIAN CAT

IT is hard luck on a young fellow to have expensive tastes, great expectations, aristocratic connections, but no actual money in his pocket, and no profession by which he may earn any. The fact was that my father, a good, sanguine, easy-going man, had such confidence in the wealth and benevolence of his bachelor elder brother, Lord Southerton, that he took it for granted that I, his only son, would never be called upon to earn a living for myself. He imagined that if there were not a vacancy for me on the great Southerton Estates, at least there would be found some post in that diplomatic service which still remains the special preserve of our privileged classes. He died too early to realise how false his calculations had been. Neither my uncle nor the State took the slightest notice of me, or showed any interest in my career. An occasional brace of pheasants, or basket of hares, was all that ever reached me to remind me that I was heir to Otwell House and one of the richest estates in the country. In the meantime, I found myself a bachelor and man about town, living in a suite of apartments in Grosvenor Mansions, with no occupation save that of pigeon-shooting and polo-playing at Hurlingham. Month by month I realised that it was more and more difficult to get the brokers to renew my bills, or to cash any further post-obits upon an unentailed property. Ruin lay right across my path, and every day I saw it clearer, nearer, and more absolutely unavoidable.

What made me feel my own poverty the more was that, apart from the great wealth of Lord Southerton, all my other relations were fairly well-to-do. The nearest of these was Everard King, my father’s nephew and my own first cousin, who had spent an adventurous life in Brazil, and had now returned to this country to settle down on his fortune. We never knew how he made his money, but he appeared to have plenty of it, for he bought the estate of Greylands, near Clipton-on-the-Marsh, in Suffolk. For the first year of his residence in England he took no more notice of me than my miserly uncle; but at last one summer morning, to my very great relief and joy, I received a letter asking me to come down that very day and spend a short visit at Greylands Court. I was expecting a rather long visit to Bankruptcy Court at the time, and this interruption seemed almost providential. If I could only get on terms with this unknown relative of mine, I might pull through yet. For the family credit he could not let me go entirely to the wall. I ordered my valet to pack my valise, and I set off the same evening for Clipton-on-the-Marsh.

After changing at Ipswich, a little local train deposited me at a small, deserted station lying amidst a rolling grassy country, with a sluggish and winding river curving in and out amidst the valleys, between high, silted banks, which showed that we were within reach of the tide. No carriage was awaiting me (I found afterwards that my telegram had been delayed), so I hired a dog-cart at the local inn. The driver, an excellent fellow, was full of my relative's praises, and I learned from him that Mr. Everard King was already a name to conjure with in that part of the country. He had entertained the school-children, he had thrown his grounds open to visitors, he had subscribed to charities — in short, his benevolence had been so universal that my driver could only account for it on the supposition that he had Parliamentary ambitions.

My attention was drawn away from my driver's panegyric by the appearance of a very beautiful bird which settled on a telegraph-post beside the road. At first I thought that it was a jay, but it was larger, with a brighter plumage. The driver accounted for its presence at once by saying that it belonged to the very man whom we were about to visit. It seems that the acclimatization of foreign creatures was one of his hobbies, and that he had brought with him from Brazil a number of birds and beasts which he was endeavouring to rear in England. When once we had passed the gates of Greylands Park we had ample evidence of this taste of his. Some small spotted deer, a curious wild pig known, I believe, as a peccary, a gorgeously feathered oriole, some sort of armadillo, and a singular lumbering intoed beast like a very fat badger, were among the creatures which I observed as we drove along the winding avenue.

Mr. Everard King, my unknown cousin, was standing in person upon the steps of his house, for he had seen us in the distance, and guessed that it was I. His appearance was very homely and benevolent, short and stout, forty-five years old perhaps, with a round, good-humoured face, burned brown with the tropical sun, and shot with a thousand wrinkles. He wore white linen clothes, in true planter style, with a cigar between his lips, and a large Panama hat upon the back of his head. It was such a figure as one associates with a verandahed bungalow, and it looked curiously out of place in front of this broad, stone English mansion, with its solid wings and its Palladio pillars before the doorway.

"My dear!" he cried, glancing over his shoulder; "my dear, here is our guest! Welcome, welcome to Greylands! I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Cousin Marshall, and I take it as a great compliment that you should honour this sleepy little country place with your presence."

Nothing could be more hearty than his manner, and he set me at my ease in an instant. But it needed all his cordiality to atone for the frigidity and even rudeness of his wife, a tall, haggard woman, who came forward at his summons. She was, I believe, of Brazilian extraction, though she spoke excellent English, and I excused her manners on the score of her ignorance of our customs. She did not attempt to conceal, however, either then or afterwards, that I was no very welcome visitor at Greylands Court. Her actual words were, as a rule, courteous, but she was the possessor of a pair of particularly expressive dark eyes, and I read in them very clearly from the first that she heartily wished me back in London once more.

However, my debts were too pressing and my designs upon my wealthy relative were too vital for me to allow them to be upset by the ill-temper of his wife, so I disregarded her coldness and reciprocated the extreme cordiality of his welcome. No pains had been spared by him to make me comfortable. My room was a charming one. He implored me to tell him anything which could add to my happiness. It was on the tip of my tongue to inform him that a blank cheque would materially help towards that end, but I felt that it might be premature in the present state of our acquaintance. The dinner was excellent, and as we sat together afterwards over his Havanas and coffee, which latter he told me was specially prepared upon his own plantation, it seemed to me that all my driver's eulogies were justified, and that I had never met a more large-hearted and hospitable man.

But, in spite of his cheery good nature, he was a man with a strong will and a fiery temper of his own. Of this I had an example upon the following morning. The curious aversion which Mrs. Everard King had conceived towards me was so strong, that her manner at breakfast was almost offensive. But her meaning became unmistakable when her husband had quitted the room.

"The best train in the day is at twelve fifteen," said she.

"But I was not thinking of going to-day," I answered, frankly — perhaps even defiantly, for I was determined not to be driven out by this woman.

"Oh, if it rests with you—" said she, and stopped, with a most insolent expression in her eyes.

"I am sure," I answered "that Mr. Everard King would tell me if I were outstaying my welcome."

"What's this? What's this?" said a voice, and there he was in the room. He had overheard my last words, and a glance at our faces had told him the rest. In an instant his chubby, cheery face set into an expression of absolute ferocity.

"Might I trouble you to walk outside, Marshall," said he. (I may mention that my own name is Marshall King.)

He closed the door behind me, and then, for an instant, I heard him talking in a low voice of concentrated passion to his wife. This gross breach of hospitality had evidently hit upon his tenderest point. I am no eavesdropper, so I walked out on to the lawn. Presently I heard a hurried step behind me, and there was the lady, her face pale with excitement, and her eyes red with tears.

"My husband has asked me to apologize to you, Mr. Marshall King," said she, standing with downcast eyes before me.

"Please do not say another word, Mrs. King."

Her dark eyes suddenly blazed out at me.

"You fool!" she hissed, with frantic vehemence, and turning on her heel swept back to the house.

The insult was so outrageous, so insufferable, that I could only stand staring after her in bewilderment. I was still there when my host joined me. He was his cheery, chubby self once more.

"I hope that my wife has apologized for her foolish remarks," said he.

"Oh, yes — yes, certainly!"

He put his hand through my arm and walled with me up and down the lawn.

"You must not take it seriously," said he. " It would grieve me inexpressibly if you curtailed your visit by one hour. The fact is — there is no reason why there should be any concealment between relatives — that my poor dear wife is incredibly jealous. She hates that any one — male or female — should for an instant come between us. Her ideal is a desert island and an eternal tete-a-tete. That gives you the clue to her actions, which are, I confess, upon this particular point, not very far removed from mania. Tell me that you will think no more of it."

“No, no; certainly not.”

“Then light this cigar and come round with me and see my little menagerie.”

The whole afternoon was occupied by this inspection, which included all the birds, beasts, and even reptiles which he had imported. Some were free, some in cages, a few actually in the house. He spoke with enthusiasm of his successes and his failures, his births and his deaths, and he would cry out in his delight, like a schoolboy, when, as we walked, some gaudy bird would flutter up from the grass, or some curious beast slink into the cover. Finally he led me down a corridor which extended from one wing of the house. At the end of this there was a heavy door with a sliding shutter in it, and beside it there projected from the wall an iron handle attached to a wheel and a drum. A line of stout bars extended across the passage. “I am about to show you the jewel of my collection,” said he. “There is only one other specimen in Europe, now that the Rotterdam cub is dead. It is a Brazilian cat.”

“But how does that differ from any other cat?”

“You will soon see that,” said he, laughing. “Will you kindly draw that shutter and look through?”

I did so, and found that I was gazing into a large, empty room, with stone flags, and small, barred windows upon the farther wall.

In the centre of this room, lying in the middle of a golden patch of sunlight, there was stretched a huge creature, as large as a tiger, but as black and sleek as ebony. It was simply a very enormous and very well-kept black cat, and it cuddled up and basked in that yellow pool of light exactly as a cat would do. It was so graceful, so sinewy, and so gently and smoothly diabolical, that I could not take my eyes from the opening.

“Isn’t he splendid?” said my host, enthusiastically,

“Glorious! I never saw such a noble creature.”

“Some people call it a black puma, but really it is not a puma at all. That fellow is nearly eleven feet from tail to tip. Four years ago he was a little ball of black fluff, with two yellow eyes staring out of it. Ho was sold me as a new-born cub up in the wild country at the head-waters of the Rio Negro. They speared his mother to death after she had killed a dozen of them.”

“They are ferocious, then?”

“The most absolutely treacherous and blood-thirsty creatures upon earth. You talk about a Brazilian cat to an up-country Indian, and see him get the jumps. They prefer humans to game. This fellow has never tasted living blood yet, but when he does he will be a terror. At present he won’t stand any one but me in his den. Even Baldwin, the groom, dare not go near him. As to me, I am his mother and father in one.”

As he spoke he suddenly, to my astonishment, opened the door and slipped in, closing it instantly behind him. At the sound of his voice the huge, lithe creature rose, yawned, and rubbed its round, black head affectionately against his side, while he patted and fondled it.

“Now, Tommy, into your cage!” said he.

The monstrous cat walked over to one side of the room and coiled itself up under a grating. Everard King came out, and taking the iron handle which I have mentioned, he began to turn it. As he did so the line of bars in the corridor began to pass through a slot in the wall and closed up the front of this grating, so as to make an effective cage. When it was in position he opened the door once more and invited me into the room, which was heavy with the pungent, musty smell peculiar to the great carnivora.

“That’s how we work it,” said he. “ We give him the run of the room for exercise, and then at night we put him in his cage. You can let him out by turning the handle from the passage, or you can, as you have seen, coop him up in the same way. No, no, you should not do that!”

I had put my hand between the bars to pat the glossy, heaving flank. He pulled it back, with a serious face.

“I assure you that he is not safe. Don’t imagine that because I can take liberties with him any one else can. He is very exclusive in his friends — aren’t you, Tommy? Ah, he hears his lunch coming to him! Don’t you, boy?”

A step sounded in the stone-flagged passage, and the creature had sprung to his feet, and was pacing up and down the narrow cage, his yellow eyes gleaming, and his scarlet tongue rippling and quivering over the white line of his jagged teeth. A groom entered with a coarse joint upon a tray, and thrust it through the bars to him. He pounced lightly upon it, carried it off to the corner, and there, holding it between his paws, tore and wrenched at it, raising his bloody muzzle every now and then to look at us. It was a malignant and yet fascinating sight.

“You can’t wonder that I am fond of him, can you?” said my host, as we left the room, “especially when you consider that I have had the rearing of him. It was no joke bringing him over from the centre of South America; but here he is safe and sound — and, as I have said, far the most perfect specimen in Europe. The people at the Zoo are dying to have him, but I really can't part with him. Now, I think that I have inflicted my hobby upon you long enough, so we cannot do better than follow Tommy's example, and go to our lunch."

My South American relative was so engrossed by his grounds and their curious occupants, that I hardly gave him credit at first for having any interests outside them. That he had some, and pressing ones, was soon borne in upon me by the number of telegrams which he received. They arrived at all hours, and were always opened by him with the utmost eagerness and anxiety upon his face. Sometimes I imagined that it must be the turf, and sometimes the Stock Exchange, but certainly he had some very urgent business going forwards which was not transacted upon the Downs of Suffolk. During the six days of my visit he had never fewer than three or four telegrams a day, and sometimes as many as seven or eight.

I had occupied these six days so well, that by the end of them I had succeeded in getting upon the most cordial terms with my cousin. Every night we had sat up late in the billiard-room, he telling me the most extraordinary stories of his adventures in America — stories so desperate and reckless, that I could hardly associate them with the brown little, chubby man before me. In return, I ventured upon some of my own reminiscences of London life, which interested him so much, that he vowed he would come up to Grosvenor Mansions and stay with me. He was anxious to see the faster side of city life, and certainly, though I say it, he could not have chosen a more competent guide. It was not until the last day of my visit that I ventured to approach that which was on my mind. I told him frankly about my pecuniary difficulties and my impending ruin, and I asked his advice — though I hoped for something more solid. He listened attentively, puffing hard at his cigar.

"But surely," said he, "you are the heir of our relative, Lord Southerton? "

"I have every reason to believe so, but he would never make me any allowance."

"No, no, I have heard of his miserly ways. My poor Marshall, your position has been a very hard one. By the way, have you heard any news of Lord Southerton's health lately?"

"He has always been in a critical condition ever since my childhood."

“Exactly — a creaking hinge, if ever there was one. Your inheritance may be a long way off. Dear me, how awkwardly situated you are!”

“I had some hopes, sir, that you, knowing all the facts, might be inclined to advance—”

“Don’t say another word, my dear boy,” he cried, with the utmost cordiality; “we shall talk it over to-night, and I give you my word that whatever is in my power shall be done.”

I was not sorry that my visit was drawing to a close, for it is unpleasant to feel that there is one person in the house who eagerly desires your departure. Mrs. King’s sallow face and forbidding eyes had become more and more hateful to me. She was no longer actively rude — her fear of her husband prevented her — but she pushed her insane jealousy to the extent of ignoring me, never addressing me, and in every way making my stay at Greylands as uncomfortable as she could. So offensive was her manner during that last day, that I should certainly have left had it not been for that interview with my host in the evening which would, I hoped, retrieve my broken fortunes.

It was very late when it occurred, for my relative, who had been receiving even more telegrams than usual during the day, went off to his study after dinner, and only emerged when the household had retired to bed. I heard him go round locking the doors, as his custom was of a night, and finally he joined me in the billiard-room. His stout figure was wrapped in a dressing-gown, and he wore a pair of red Turkish slippers without any heels. Settling down into an arm-chair, he brewed himself a glass of grog, in which I could not help noticing that the whisky considerably predominated over the water.

“My word!” said he, “what a night!”

It was, indeed. The wind was howling and screaming round the house, and the latticed windows I rattled and shook as if they were coming in. The glow of the yellow lamps and the flavour of our cigars seemed the brighter and more fragrant for the contrast.

“Now, my boy,” said my host, “we have the house and the night to ourselves. Let me have an idea of how your affairs stand, and I will see what can be done to set them in order. I wish to hear every detail.”

Thus encouraged, I entered into a long exposition, in which all my tradesmen and creditors, from my landlord to my valet, figured in turn. I had notes in my pocket-book, and I marshalled my facts, and gave, I flatter myself, a very business-like statement of my own unbusiness-like ways and lamentable position. I was depressed, however, to notice that my companion's eyes were vacant and his attention elsewhere. When he did occasionally throw out a remark, it was so entirely perfunctory and pointless, that I was sure he had not in the least followed my remarks. Every now and then he roused himself and put on some show of interest, asking me to repeat or to explain more fully, but it was always to sink once more into the same brown study. At last he rose and threw the end of his cigar into the grate.

"I'll tell you what, my boy," said he. "I never had a head for figures, so you will excuse me. You must jot it all down upon paper, and let me have a note of the amount. I'll understand it when I see it in black and white."

The proposal was encouraging. I promised to do so.

"And now it's time we were in bed. By Jove, there's one o'clock striking in the hall."

The tinging of the chiming clock broke through the deep roar of the gale. The wind was sweeping past with the rush of a great river.

"I must see my cat before I go to bed," said my host. "A high wind excites him. Will you come?"

"Certainly," said I.

"Then tread softly and don't speak, for every one is asleep."

We passed quietly down the lamp-lit Persian-rugged hall, and through the door at the farther end. All was dark in the stone corridor, but a stable lantern hung on a hook, and my host took it down and lit it. There was no grating visible in the passage, so I knew that the beast was in its cage.

"Come in!" said my relative, and opened the door.

A deep growling as we entered showed that the storm had really excited the creature. In the flickering light of the lantern, we saw it, a huge black mass, coiled in the corner of its den and throwing a squat, uncouth shadow upon the whitewashed wall. Its tail switched angrily among the straw.

"Poor Tommy is not in the best of tempers," said Everard King, holding up the lantern and looking in at him. "What a black devil he looks, doesn't he? I must give him a little supper to put him in a better humour. Would you mind holding the lantern for a moment?"

I took it from his hand and he stepped to the door.

"His larder is just outside here," said he. "You will excuse me for an instant, won't you?" He passed out, and the door shut with a sharp metallic click behind him.

That hard crisp sound made my heart stand still. A sudden wave of terror passed over me. A vague perception of some monstrous treachery turned me cold. I sprang to the door, but there was no handle upon the inner side.

“Here!” I cried. “Let me out!”

“All right! Don’t make a row!” said my host from the passage. “ You’ve got the light all right.”

“Yes, but I don’t care about being locked in alone like this.”

“Don’t you?” I heard his hearty, chuckling laugh. “You won’t be alone long.”

“Let me out, sir!” I repeated angrily. “I tell you I don’t allow practical jokes of this sort.”

“Practical is the word,” said he, with another hateful chuckle. And then suddenly I heard, amidst the roar of the storm, the creak and whine of the winch-handle turning, and the rattle of the grating as it passed through the slot. Great God, he was letting loose the Brazilian cat!

In the light of the lantern I saw the bars sliding slowly before me. Already there was an opening a foot wide at the farther end. With a scream I seized the last bar with my hands and pulled with the strength of a madman. I was a madman with rage and horror. For a minute or more I held the thing motionless. I knew that he was straining with all his force upon the handle, and that the leverage was sure to overcome me. I gave inch by inch, my feet sliding along the stones, and all the time I begged and prayed this inhuman monster to save me from this horrible death. I conjured him by his kinship. I reminded him that I was his guest; I begged to know what harm I had ever done him. His only answers were the tugs and jerks upon the handle, each of which, in spite of all my struggles, pulled another bar through the opening. Clinging and clutching, I was dragged across the whole front of the cage, until at last, with aching wrists and lacerated fingers, I gave up the hopeless struggle. The grating clanged back as I released it, and an instant later I heard the shuffle of the Turkish slippers in the passage, and the slam of the distant door. Then everything was silent.

The creature had never moved during this time. He lay still in the corner, and his tail had ceased switching. This apparition of a man adhering to his bars and dragged screaming across him had apparently filled him with amazement. I saw his great eyes staring steadily at me. I had dropped the lantern when I seized the bars, but it still burned upon the floor, and I made a movement to grasp it, with some idea that its light might protect me. But the instant I moved, the beast gave a deep and menacing growl. I stopped and stood still, quivering with fear in every limb. The cat (if one may call so fearful a creature by so homely a name) was not more than ten feet from me. The eyes glimmered like two discs of phosphorus in the darkness. They appalled and yet fascinated me. I could not take my own eyes from them. Nature plays strange tricks with us at such moments of intensity, and those glimmering lights waxed and waned with a steady rise and fall. Sometimes they seemed to be tiny points of extreme brilliancy — little electric sparks in the black obscurity — then they would widen and widen until all that corner of the room was filled with their shifting and sinister light. And then suddenly they went out altogether.

The beast had closed its eyes. I do not know whether there may be any truth in the old idea of the dominance of the human gaze, or whether the huge cat was simply drowsy, but the fact remains that, far from showing any symptom of attacking me, it simply rested its sleek, black head upon its huge forepaws and seemed to sleep. I stood, fearing to move lest I should rouse it into malignant life once more. But at least I was able to think clearly now that the baleful eyes were off me. Here I was shut up for the night with the ferocious beast. My own instincts, to say nothing of the words of the plausible villain who laid this trap for me, warned me that the animal was as savage as its master. How could I stave it off until morning? The door was hopeless, and so were the narrow, barred windows. There was no shelter anywhere in the bare, stone-flagged room. To cry for assistance was absurd. I knew that this den was an outhouse, and that the corridor which connected it with the house was at least a hundred feet long. Besides, with that gale thundering outside, my cries were not likely to be heard. I had only my own courage and my own wits to trust to.

And then, with a fresh wave of horror, my eyes fell upon the lantern. The candle had burned low, and was already beginning to gutter. In ten minutes it would be out. I had only ten minutes then in which to do something, for I felt that if I were once left in the dark with that fearful beast I should be incapable of action. The very thought of it paralyzed me. I cast my despairing eyes round this chamber of death, and they rested upon one spot which seemed to promise I will not say safety, but less immediate and imminent danger than the open floor.

I have said that the cage had a top as well as a front, and this top was left standing when the front was wound through the slot in the wall. It consisted of bars at a few inches’ interval, with stout wire netting between, and it rested upon a strong stanchion at each end. It stood now as a great barred canopy over the crouching figure in the corner. The space between this iron shelf and the roof may have been from two to three feet. If I could only get up there, squeezed in between bars and ceiling, I should have only one vulnerable side. I should be safe from below, from behind, and from each side. Only on the open face of it could I be attacked. There, it is true, I had no protection whatever; but, at least, I should be out of the brute’s path when he began to pace about his den. He would have to come out of his way to reach me. It was now or never, for if once the light were out it would be impossible. With a gulp in my throat I sprang up, seized the iron edge of the top, and swung myself panting on to it. I writhed in face downwards, and found myself looking straight into the terrible eyes and yawning jaws of the cat. Its fetid breath came up into my face like the steam from some foul pot.

It appeared, however, to be rather curious than angry. With a sleek ripple of its long, black back it rose, stretched itself, and then rearing itself on its hind legs, with one fore paw against the wall, it raised the other, and drew its claws across the wire meshes beneath me. One sharp, white hook tore through my trousers — for I may mention that I was still in evening dress — and dug a furrow in my knee. It was not meant as an attack, but rather as an experiment, for upon my giving a sharp cry of pain he dropped down again, and springing lightly into the room, he began walking swiftly round it, looking up every now and again in my direction. For my part I shuffled backwards until I lay with my back against the wall, screwing myself into the smallest space possible. The farther I got the more difficult it was for him to attack me.

He seemed more excited now that he had begun to move about, and he ran swiftly and noiselessly round and round the den, passing continually underneath the iron couch upon which I lay. It was wonderful to see so great a bulk passing like a shadow, with hardly the softest thudding of velvety pads. The candle was burning low — so low that I could hardly see the creature. And then, with a last flare and splutter it went out altogether. I was alone with the cat in the dark!

It helps one to face a danger when one knows that one has done all that possibly can be done. There is nothing for it then but to quietly await the result. In this case, there was no chance of safety anywhere except the precise spot where I was. I stretched myself out, therefore, and lay silently, almost breathlessly, hoping that the beast might forget my presence if I did nothing to remind him. I reckoned that it must already be two o’clock. At four it would be full dawn. I had not more than two hours to wait for daylight.

Outside, the storm was still raging, and the rain lashed continually against the little windows. Inside, the poisonous and fetid air was overpowering. I could neither hear nor see the cat. I tried to think about other things — but only one had power enough to draw my mind from my terrible position. That was the contemplation of my cousin’s villainy, his unparalleled hypocrisy, his malignant hatred of me. Beneath that cheerful face there lurked the spirit of a mediaeval assassin. And as I thought of it I saw more clearly how cunningly the thing had been arranged. He had apparently gone to bed with the others. No doubt he had his witnesses to prove it. Then, unknown to them, he had slipped down, had lured me into this den and abandoned me. His story would be so simple. He had left me to finish my cigar in the billiard-room. I had gone down on my own account to have a last look at the cat. I had entered the room without observing that the cage was opened, and I had been caught. How could such a crime be brought home to him? Suspicion, perhaps — but proof, never!

How slowly those dreadful two hours went by! Once I heard a low, rasping sound, which I took to be the creature licking its own fur. Several times those greenish eyes gleamed at me through the darkness, but never in a fixed stare, and my hopes grew stronger that my presence had been forgotten or ignored. At last the least faint glimmer of light came through the windows — I first dimly saw them as two grey squares upon the black wall, then grey turned to white, and I could see my terrible companion once more. And he, alas, could see me!

It was evident to me at once that he was in a much more dangerous and aggressive mood than when I had seen him last. The cold of the morning had irritated him, and he was hungry as well. With a continual growl he paced swiftly up and down the side of the room which was farthest from my refuge, his whiskers bristling angrily, and his tail switching and lashing. As he turned at the comers his savage eyes always looked upwards at me with a dreadful menace. I knew then that he meant to kill me. Yet I found myself even at that moment admiring the sinuous grace of the devilish thing, its long, undulating, rippling movements, the gloss of its beautiful flanks, the vivid, palpitating scarlet of the glistening tongue which hung from the jet-black muzzle. And all the time that deep, threatening growl was rising and rising in an unbroken crescendo. I knew that the crisis was at hand.

It was a miserable hour to meet such a death — so cold, so comfortless, shivering in my light dress clothes upon this gridiron of torment upon which I was stretched. I tried to brace myself to it, to raise my soul above it, and at the same time, with the lucidity which comes to a perfectly desperate man, I cast round for some possible means of escape. One thing was clear to me. If that front of the cage was only back in its position once more, I could find a sure refuge behind it. Could I possibly pull it back? I hardly dared to move for fear of bringing the creature upon me. Slowly, very slowly, I put my hand forward until it grasped the edge of the front, the final bar which protruded through the wall. To my surprise it came quite easily to my jerk. Of course the difficulty of drawing it out arose from the fact that I was clinging to it. I pulled again, and three inches of it came through. It ran apparently on wheels. I pulled again . . . and then the cat sprang!

It was so quick, so sudden, that I never saw it happen. I simply heard the savage snarl, and in an instant afterwards the blazing yellow eyes, the flattened black head with its red tongue and flashing teeth, were within reach of me. The impact of the creature shook the bars upon which I lay, until I thought (as far as I could think of anything at such a moment) that they were coming down. The cat swayed there for an instant, the head and front paws quite close to me, the hind paws clawing to find a grip upon the edge of the grating. I heard the claws rasping as they clung to the wire netting, and the breath of the beast made me sick. But its bound had been miscalculated. It could not retain its position. Slowly, grinning with rage and scratching madly at the bars, it swung backwards and dropped heavily upon the floor. With a growl it instantly faced round to me and crouched for another spring.

I knew that the next few moments would decide my fate. The creature had learned by experience. It would not miscalculate again. I must act promptly, fearlessly, if I were to have a chance for life. In an instant I had formed my plan. Pulling off my dress-coat, I threw it down over the head of the beast. At the same moment I dropped over the edge, seized the end of the front grating, and pulled it frantically out of the wall.

It came more easily than I could have expected. I rushed across the room, bearing it with me; but, as I rushed, the accident of my position put me upon the outer side. Had it been the other way, I might have come off scathless. As it was, there was a moment’s pause as I stopped it and tried to pass in through the opening which I had left. That moment was enough to give time to the creature to toss off the coat with which I had blinded him and to spring upon me. I hurled myself through the gap and pulled the rails to behind me, but he seized my leg before I could entirely withdraw it. One stroke of that huge paw tore off my calf as a shaving of wood curls off before a plane. The next moment, bleeding and fainting, I was lying among the foul straw with a line of friendly bars between me and the creature which ramped so frantically against them.

Too wounded to move, and too faint to be conscious of fear, I could only lie, more dead than alive, and watch it. It pressed its broad, black chest against the bars and angled for me with its crooked paws as I have seen a kitten do before a mouse-trap. It ripped my clothes, but, stretch as it would, it could not quite reach me. I have heard of the curious numbing effect produced by wounds from the great carnivora, and now I was destined to experience it, for I had lost all sense of personality, and was as interested in the cat’s failure or success as if it were some game which I was watching. And then gradually my mind drifted away into strange, vague dreams, always with that black face and red tongue coming back into them, and so I lost myself in the nirvana of delirium, the blessed relief of those who are too sorely tried.

Tracing the course of events afterwards, I conclude that I must have been insensible for about two hours. What roused me to consciousness once more was that sharp metallic click which had been the precursor of my terrible experience. It was the shooting back of the spring lock. Then, before my senses were clear enough to entirely apprehend what they saw, I was aware of the round, benevolent face of my cousin peering in through the opened door. What he saw evidently amazed him. There was the cat crouching on the floor. I was stretched upon my back in my shirt-sleeves within the cage, my trousers torn to ribbons and a great pool of blood all round me. I can see his amazed face now, with the morning sunlight upon it. He peered at me, and peered again. Then he closed the door behind him, and advanced to the cage to see if I were really dead.

I cannot undertake to say what happened. I was not in a fit state to witness or to chronicle such events. I can only say that I was suddenly conscious that his face was away from me — that he was looking towards the animal.

“Good old Tommy!” he cried. “Good old Tommy!”

Then he came near the bars, with his back still towards me.

“Down, you stupid beast!” he roared. “Down, sir! Don’t you know your master? “

Suddenly even in my bemuddled brain a remembrance came of those words of his when he had said that the taste of blood would turn the cat into a fiend. My blood had done it, but he was to pay the price.

“Get away!” he screamed.” Get away, you devil! Baldwin! Baldwin! Oh, my God! “

And then I heard him fall, and rise, and fall again, with a sound like the ripping of sacking. His screams grew fainter until they were lost in the worrying snarl. And then, after I thought that he was dead, I saw, as in a nightmare, a blinded, tattered, blood-soaked figure running wildly round the room — and that was the last glimpse which I had of him before I fainted once again.

I was many months in my recovery — in fact, I cannot say that I have ever recovered, for to the end of my days I shall carry a stick as a sign of my night with the Brazilian cat. Baldwin, the groom, and the other servants could not tell what had occurred when, drawn by the death cries of their master, they found me behind the bars, and his remains — or what they afterwards discovered to be his remains — in the clutch of the creature which he had reared. They stalled him off with hot irons, and afterwards shot him through the loophole of the door before they could finally extricate me. I was carried to my bedroom, and there, under the roof of my would-be murderer, I remained between life and death for several weeks. They had sent for a surgeon from Clipton and a nurse from London, and in a month I was able to be carried to the station, and so conveyed back once more to Grosvenor Mansions.

I have one remembrance of that illness, which might have been part of the ever-changing panorama conjured up by a delirious brain were it not so definitely fixed in my memory. One night, when the nurse was absent, the door of my chamber opened, and a tall woman in blackest mourning slipped into the room. She came across to me, and as she bent her sallow face I saw by the faint gleam of the night-light that it was the Brazilian woman whom my cousin had married. She stared intently into my face, and her expression was more kindly than I had ever seen it. “Are you conscious?” she asked. I feebly nodded — for I was still very weak. “ Well, then, I only wished to say to you that you have yourself to blame. Did I not do all I could for you? From the beginning I tried to drive you from the house. By every means, short of betraying my husband, I tried to save you from him. I knew that he had a reason for bringing you here. I knew that he would never let you get away again. No one knew him as I knew him, who had suffered from him so often. I did not dare to tell you all this. He would have killed me. But I did my best for you. As things have turned out, you have been the best friend that I have ever had. You have set me free, and I fancied that nothing but death would do that. I am sorry if you are hurt, but I cannot reproach myself. I told you that you were a fool — and a fool you have been.” She crept out of the room, the bitter, singular woman, and I was never destined to see her again. With what remained from her husband’s property she went back to her native land, and I have heard that she afterwards took the veil at Pernambuco.

It was not until I had been back in London for some time that the doctors pronounced me to be well enough to do business. It was not a very welcome permission to me, for I feared that it would be the signal for an inrush of creditors; but it was Summers, my lawyer, who first took advantage of it.

“I am very glad to see that your lordship is so much better,” said he. “ I have been waiting a long time to offer my congratulations.”

“What do you mean, Summers? This is no time for joking.”

“I mean what I say,” he answered. “You have been Lord Southerton for the last six weeks, but we feared that it would retard your recovery if you were to learn it.”

Lord Southerton! One of the richest peers in England! I could not believe my ears. And then suddenly I thought of the time which had elapsed, and how it coincided with my injuries.

“Then Lord Southerton must have died about the same time that I was hurt? “

“His death occurred upon that very day.” Summers looked hard at me as I spoke, and I am convinced — for he was a very shrewd fellow — that he had guessed the true state of the case. He paused for a moment as if awaiting a confidence from me, but I could not see what was to be gained by exposing such a family scandal.

“Yes, a very curious coincidence,” he continued, with the same knowing look, “ Of course, you are aware that your cousin Everard King was the next heir to the estates. Now, if it had been you instead of him who had been torn to pieces by this tiger, or whatever it was, then of course he would have been Lord Southerton at the present moment.”

“No doubt,” said I.

“And he took such an interest in it,” said Summers. “I happen to know that the late Lord Southerton’s valet was in his pay, and that he used to have telegrams from him every few hours to tell him how he was getting on. That would be about the time when you were down there. Was it not strange that he should wish to be so well informed, since he knew that he was not the direct heir?”

“Very strange,” said I. “And now, Summers, if you will bring me my bills and a new cheque-book, we will begin to get things into order.”

B. 24

I TOLD my story when I was taken, and no one would listen to me. Then I told it again at the trial — the whole thing absolutely as it happened, without so much as a word added, I set it all out truly, so help me God, all that Lady Mannering said and did, and then all that I had said and done, just as it occurred. And what did I get for it? “The prisoner put forward a rambling and inconsequential statement, incredible in its details, and unsupported by any shred of corroborative evidence.” That was what one of the London papers said, and others let it pass as if I had made no defence at all. And yet, with my own eyes I saw Lord Mannering murdered, and I am as guiltless of it as any man on the jury that tried me.

Now, sir, you are there to receive the petitions of prisoners. It all lies with you. All I ask is that you read it — just read it — and then that you make — an inquiry or two about the private character of this “ lady” Mannering, if she still keeps the name that she had three years ago, when to my sorrow and ruin I came to meet her. You could use a private inquiry agent or a good lawyer, and you would soon learn enough to show you that my story is the true one. Think of the glory it would be to you to have all the papers saying that there would have been a shocking miscarriage of justice if it had not been for your perseverance and intelligence! That must be your reward, since I am a poor man and can offer you nothing. But if you don’t do it, may you never lie easy in your bed again! May no night pass that you are not haunted by the thought of the man who rots in gaol because you have not done the duty which you are paid to do! But you will do it, sir, I know. Just make one or two inquiries, and you will soon find which way the wind blows. Remember, also, that the only person who profited by the crime was herself, since it changed her from an unhappy wife to a rich young widow, There's the end of the string in your hand, and you only have to follow it up and see where it leads to.

Mind you, sir, I make no complaint as far as the burglary goes. I don't whine about what I have deserved, and so far I have had no more than I have deserved. Burglary it was, right enough, and my three years have gone to pay for it. It was shown at the trial that I had had a hand in the Merton Cross business, and did a year for that, so my story had the lees attention on that account. A man with a previous conviction never gets a really fair trial. I own to the burglary, but when it comes to the murder which brought me a lifer — any judge but Sir James might have given me the gallows — then I tell you that I had nothing to do with it, and that I am an innocent man. Anil now I'll take that night, the 13th of September, 1894, and I'll give you just exactly what occurred, and may God's hand strike me down if I go one inch over the truth.

I had been at Bristol in the summer looking for work, and then I had a notion that I might get something at Portsmouth, for I was trained as a skilled mechanic, so I came tramping my way across the south of England, and doing odd jobs as I went. I was trying all I knew to keep off the cross, for I had done a year in Exeter Gaol, and I had had enough of visiting Queen Victoria. But it's cruel hard to get work when once the black mark is against your name, and it was all I could do to keep soul and body together. At last, after ten days of wood-cutting and stone-breaking on starvation pay, I found myself near Salisbury with a couple of shillings in my pocket, and my boots and my patience clean wore out. There's an ale-house called "The Willing Mind," which stands on the road between Blandford and Salisbury, and it was there that night I engaged a bed. I was sitting alone in the taproom just about closing time, when the innkeeper — Allen his name was — came beside me and began yarning about the neighbours. He was a man that liked to talk and to have some one to listen to his talk, so I sat there smoking and drinking a mug of ale which he had stood me; and I took no great interest in what he said until he began to talk (as the devil would have it) about the riches of Mannering Hall.

"Meaning the large house on the right before I came to the village?" said I. " The one that stands in its own park?"

"Exactly," said he — and I am giving all our talk so that you may know that I am telling you the truth and hiding nothing. " The long white house with the pillars," said he. "At the side of the Blandford Road."

Now I had looked at it as I passed, and it had crossed my mind, as such thoughts will, that it was a very easy house to get into with that great row of ground windows and glass doors. I had put the thought away from me, and now here was this landlord bringing it back with his talk about the riches within. I said nothing, but I listened, and as luck would have it, he would always come back to this one subject.

"He was a miser young, so you can think what he is now in his age," said he. "Well, he's had some good out of his money."

"What good can he have had if he does not spend it?" said I.

"Well, it bought him the prettiest wife in England, and that was some good that he gob out of it She thought she would have the spending of it, but she knows the difference now."

"Who was she then?" I asked, just for the sake of something to say.

"She was nobody at all until the old Lord made her his Lady," said he. " She came from up London way, and some said that she had been on the stage there, but nobody knew. The old Lord was away for a year, and when he came home he brought a young wife back with him, and there she has been ever since. Stephens, the butler, did tell me once that she was the light of the house when fust she came, but what with her husband's mean and aggravatin' way, and what with her loneliness — for he hates to see a visitor within his doors; and what with his bitter words — for he has a tongue like a hornet's sting, her life all went out of her, and she became a white, silent creature, moping about the country lanes. Some say that she loved another man, and that it was just the riches of the old Lord which tempted her to be false to her lover, and that now she is eating her heart out because she has lost the one without being any nearer to the other, for she might be the poorest woman in the parish for all the money that she has the handling of."

Well, sir, you can imagine that it did not interest me very much to hear about the quarrels between a Lord and a Lady. What did it matter to me if she hated the sound of his voice, or if he put every indignity upon her in the hope of breaking her spirit, and spoke to her as he would never have dared to speak to one of his servants? The landlord told me of these things, and of many more like them, but they passed out of my mind, for they were no concern of mine. But what I did want to hear was the form in which Lord Mannering kept his riches. Title-deeds and stock certificates are but paper, and more danger than profit to the man who takes them. But metal and stones are worth a risk. And then, as if he were answering my very thoughts, the landlord told me of Lord Mannering's great collection of gold medals, that it was the most valuable in the world, and that it was reckoned that if they were put into a sack the strongest man in the parish would not be able to raise them. Then his wife called him, and he and I went to our beds.

I am not arguing to make out a case for myself, but I beg you, sir, to bear all the facts in your mind, and to ask yourself whether a man could be more sorely tempted than I was. I make bold to say that there are few who could have held out against it. There I lay on my bed that night, a desperate man without hope or work, and with my last shilling in my pocket. I had tried to be honest, and honest folk had turned their backs upon me. They taunted me for theft; and yet they pushed me towards it. I was caught in the stream and could not get out. And then it was such a chance: the great house all lined with windows, the golden medals which could be easily be melted down. It was like putting a loaf before a starving man and expecting him not to eat it. I fought against it for a time, but it was no use. At last I sat up on the side of my bed, and I swore that that night I should either be a rich man and able to give up crime for ever, or that the irons should be on my wrists once more. Then I slipped on my clothes, and, having put a shilling on the table — for the landlord had treated me well, and I did not wish to cheat him — I passed out through the window into the garden of the inn.

There was a high wall round this garden, and I had a job to get over it, but once on the other side it was all plain sailing. I did not meet a soul upon the road, and the iron gate of the avenue was open. No one was moving at the lodge. The moon was shining, and I could see the great house glimmering white through an archway of trees. I walked up it for a quarter of a mile or so, until I was at the edge of the drive, where it ended in a broad, gravelled space before the main door. There I stood in the shadow and looked at the long building, with a full moon shining in every window and silvering the high stone front. I crouched there for some time, and I wondered where I should find the easiest entrance. The corner window of the side seemed to be the one which was least overlooked, and a screen of ivy hung heavily over it. My best chance was evidently there. I worked my way under the trees to the back of the house, and then crept along in’ the black shadow of the building. A dog barked and rattled his chain, but I stood waiting until he was quiet, and then I stole on once more until I came to the window which I had chosen.

It is astonishing how careless they are in the country, in places far removed from large towns, where the thought of burglars never enters their heads. I call it setting temptation in a poor man’s way when he puts his hand, meaning no harm, upon a door, and finds it swing open before him. In this case it was not so bad as that, but the window was merely fastened with the ordinary catch, which I opened with a push from the blade of my knife. I pulled up the window as quickly as possible, and then I thrust the knife through the slit in the shutter and prized it open. They were folding shutters, and I shoved them before me and walked into the room.

“Good evening, sir! You are very welcome!” said a voice.

I’ve had some starts in my life, but never one to come up to that one. There, in the opening of the shutters, within reach of my arm, was standing a woman with a small coil of wax taper burning in her hand. She was tall and straight and slender, with a beautiful white face that might have been cut out of clear marble, but her hair and eyes were as black as night. She was dressed in some sort of white dressing-gown which flowed down to her feet, and what with this robe and what with her face, it seemed as if a spirit from above was standing in front of me. My knees knocked together, and I held on to the shutter with one hand to give me support. I should have turned and run away if I had had the strength, but I could only just stand and stare at her.

She soon brought me back to myself once more.

“Don’t be frightened!” said she, and they were strange words for the mistress of a house to have to use to a burglar. “I saw you out of my bedroom window when you were hiding under those trees, so I slipped downstairs, and then I heard you at the window. I should have opened it for you if you had waited, but you managed it yourself just as I came up.”

I still held in my hand the long clasp-knife with which I had opened the shutter. I was unshaven and grimed from a week on the roads. Altogether, there are few people who would have cared to face me alone at one in the morning; but this woman, if I had been her lover meeting her by appointment, could not have looked upon me with a more welcoming eye. She laid her hand upon my sleeve and drew me into the room.

"What's the meaning of this, ma'am? Don't get trying any little games upon me," said I, in my roughest way — and I can put it on rough when I like. "It'll be the worse for you if you play me any trick," I added, showing her my knife.

"I will play you no trick," said she. "On the contrary, I am your friend, and I wish to help you."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but I find it hard to believe that," said I. "Why should you wish to help me?"

"I have my own reasons," said she; and then suddenly, with those black eyes blazing out of her white face: "It's because I hate him, hate him, hate him! Now you understand."

I remembered what the landlord had told me, and I did understand. I looked at her Ladyship's .face, and I knew that I could trust her. She wanted to revenge herself upon her husband. She wanted to hit him where it would hurt him most — upon the pocket. She hated him so that she would even lower her pride to take such a man as me into her confidence if she could gain her end by doing so. I've hated some folk in my time, but I don't think I ever understood what hate was until I saw that woman's face in the light of the taper.

"You'll trust me now?" said she, with another coaxing touch upon my sleeve.

"Yes, your Ladyship."

"You know me, then?"

"I can guess who you are."

"I daresay my wrongs are the talk of the county. But what does he care for that? He only cares for one thing in the whole world, and that you can take from him this night. Have you a bag?"

"No, your Ladyship."

"Shut the shutter behind you. Then no one can see the light. You are quite safe. The servants all sleep in the other wing. I can show you where all the most valuable things are. You cannot carry them all, so we must pick the best."

The room in which I found myself was long and low, with many rugs and skins scattered about on a polished wood floor. Small cases stood here and there, and the walls were decorated with spears and swords and paddles, and other things which find their way into museums. There were some queer clothes, too, which had been brought from savage countries, and the lady took down a large leather sack-bag from among them.

“This sleeping-sack will do,” said she. “Now come with me and I will show you where the medals are.”

It was like a dream to me to think that this tall, white woman wag the lady of the house, and that she was lending me a hand to rob her own home. I could have burst out laughing at the thought of it, and yet there was something in that pale face of hers which stopped my laughter and turned me cold and serious. She swept on in front of me like a spirit, with the green taper in her hand, and I walked behind with my sack until we came to a door at the end of this museum. It was locked, but the key was in it, and she led me through.

The room beyond was a small one, hung all round with curtains which had pictures on them. It was the hunting of a deer that was painted on it, as I remember, and in the flicker of that light you’d have sworn that the dogs and the horses were streaming round the walls. The only other thing in the room was a row of cases made of walnut, with brass ornaments. They had glass tops, and beneath this glass I saw the long lines of those gold medals, some of them as big as a plate and half an inch thick, all resting upon red velvet and glowing and gleaming in the darkness. My fingers were just itching to be at them, and I slipped my knife under the lock of one of the cases to wrench it open.

“Wait a moment,” said she, laying her hand upon my arm. “You might do better than this.”

“I am very well satisfied, ma’am,” said I, “and much obliged to your Ladyship for kind assistance.”

“You can do better,” she repeated. “Would not golden sovereigns be worth more to you than these things?”

“Why, yes,” said I. “That’s best of all,”

“Well,” said she. “He sleeps just above our head. It is but one short staircase. There is a tin box with money enough to fill this bag under his bed.”

“How can I get it without waking him?”

“What matter if he does wake?” She looked very hard at me as she spoke. “You could keep him from calling out.”

“No, no, ma’am, I’ll have none of that.”

“Just as you like,” said she. “I thought that you were a stout-hearted sort of man by your appearance, but I see that I made a mistake. If you are afraid to run the risk of one old man, then of course you cannot have the gold which is under his bed. You are the best judge of your own business, but I should think that you would do better at some other trade.”

“I’ll not have murder on my conscience.”

“You could overpower him without harming him. I never said anything of murder. The money lies under the bed. But if you are faint-hearted, it is better that you should not attempt it.”

She worked upon me so, partly with her scorn and partly with this money that she held before my eyes, that I believe I should have yielded and taken my chances upstairs, had it not been that I saw her eyes following the struggle within me in such a crafty, malignant fashion, that it was evident she was bent upon making me the tool of her revenge, and that she would leave me no choice but to do the old man an injury or to be captured by him. She felt suddenly that she was giving herself away, and she changed her face to a kindly, friendly smile, but it was too late, for had had my warning.

“I will not go upstairs,” said I. “I have all I want here.”

She looked her contempt at me, and there never was a face which could look it plainer.

“Very good. You can take these medals. I should be glad if you would begin at this end. I suppose they will all be the same value when melted down, but these are the ones which arc the rarest, and, therefore, the most precious to him. It is not necessary to break the locks. If you press that brass knob you will find that there is a secret spring. So! Take that small one first — it is the very apple of his eye.”

She had opened one of the cases, and the beautiful things all lay exposed before me. I had my hand upon the one which she had pointed out, when suddenly a change came over her face, and she held up one finger as a warning. “ Hist!” she whispered. “What is that?”

Far away in the silence of the house we heard a low, dragging, shuffling sound, and the distant tread of feet. She closed and fastened the case in an instant.

“It’s my husband!” she whispered. “All right. Don’t be alarmed. I’ll arrange it. Here! Quick, behind the tapestry! “

She pushed me behind the painted curtains upon the wall, my empty leather bag still in my hand, Then she took her taper and walked quickly into the room from which we had come. From where I stood I could see her through the open door.

“Is that you, Robert? “ she cried.

The light of a candle shone through the door of the museum, and the shuffling steps came nearer and nearer. Then I saw a face in the doorway, a great, heavy face, all lines and creases, with a huge curving nose, and a pair of gold glasses fixed across it. He had to throw his head back to see through the glasses, and that great nose thrust out in front of him like the beak of some sort of fowl. He was a big man, very tall and burly, so that in his loose dressing-gown his figure seemed to fill up the whole doorway. He had a pile of grey, curling hair all round his head, but his face was clean-shaven. His mouth was thin and small and prim, hidden away under his long, masterful nose. He stood there, holding the candle in front of him, and looking at his wife with a queer, malicious gleam in his eyes. It only needed that one look to tell me that he was as fond of her as she was of him.

“How’s this?” he asked. “Some new tantrum? What do you mean by wandering about the house? Why don’t you go to bed? “

“I could not sleep,” she answered. She spoke languidly and wearily. If she was an actress once, she had not forgotten her calling.

“Might I suggest,” said he, in the same mocking kind of voice, “that a good conscience is an excellent aid to sleep?”

“That cannot be true,” she answered, “for you sleep very well.”

“I have only one thing in my life to be ashamed of,” said he, and his hair bristled up with anger until he looked like an old cockatoo. “You know best what that is. It is a mistake which has brought its own punishment with it.”

“To me as well as to you. Remember that!”

“You have very little to whine about. It was I who stooped and you who rose.”

“Rose!”

“Yes, rose. I suppose you do not deny that it is promotion to exchange the music-hall for Mannering Hall. Fool that I was ever to take you out of your true sphere!”

“If you think so, why do you not separate?”

“Because private misery is better than public humiliation. Because it is easier to suffer for a mistake than to own to it. Because also I like to keep you in my sight, and to know that you cannot go back to him."

"You villain! You cowardly villain!"

"Yes, yes, my lady. I know your secret ambition, but it shall never be while I live, and if it happens after my death I will at least take care that you go to him as a beggar. You and dear Edward will never have the satisfaction of squandering my savings, and you may make up your mind to that, my lady. Why are those shutters and the window open?"

"I found the night very close."

"It is not safe. How do you know that some tramp may not be outside? Are you aware that my collection of medals is worth more than any similar collection in the world? You have left the door open also. What is there to prevent any one from rifling the cases?"

"I was here."

"I know you were. I heard you moving about in the medal room, and that was why I came down. What were you doing?"

"Looking at the medals. What else should I be doing?"

"This curiosity is something new." He looked suspiciously at her and moved on towards the inner room, she walking beside him.

It was at this moment that I saw something which startled me. I had laid my clasp-knife open upon the top of one of the cases, and there it lay in full view. She saw it before he did, and with a woman's cunning she held her taper out so that the light of it came between Lord Mannering's eyes and the knife. Then she took it in her left hand and held it against her gown out of his sight. He looked about from case to case — I could have put my hand at one time upon his long nose — but there was nothing to show that the medals had been tampered with, and so, still snarling and grumbling, he shuffled off into the other room once more.

And now I have to speak of what I heard rather than of what I saw, but I swear to you, as I shall stand some day before my Maker, that what I say is the truth.

When they passed into the outer room I saw him lay his candle upon the corner of one of the tables, and he sat himself down, but in such a position that he was just out of my sight. She moved behind him, as I could tell from the fact that the light of her taper threw his long, lumpy shadow upon the floor in front of him. Then he began talking about this man whom he called Edward, and every word that he said was like a blistering drop of vitriol. He spoke low, so that I could not hear it all, but from what I heard I should guess that she would as soon have been lashed with a whip. At first she said some hot words in reply, but then she was silent, and he went on and on in that cold, mocking voice of his, nagging and insulting and tormenting, until I wondered that she could bear to stand there in silence and listen to it. Then suddenly I heard him say in a sharp voice, “Come from behind me! Leave go of my collar! What! would you dare to strike me?” There was a sound like a blow, just a soft sort of thud, and then I heard him cry out, “My God, it’s blood!” He shuffled with his feet as if he was getting up, and then I heard another blow, and lie cried out, “Oh, you she-devil!” and was quiet, except for a dripping and splashing upon the floor.

I ran out from behind my curtain at that, and rushed into the other room, shaking all over with the horror of it. The old man had slipped down in the chair, and his dressing-gown had rucked up until lie looked as if he had a monstrous hump to his back. His head, with the gold glasses still fixed on his nose, was lolling over upon one side, and his little mouth was open just like a dead fish. I could not see where the blood was coming from, but I could still hear it drumming upon the floor. She stood behind him with the candle shining full upon her face. Her lips were pressed together and her eyes shining, and a touch of colour had come into each of her cheeks. It just wanted that to make her the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life.

“You’ve done it now!” said I.

“Yes,” said she, in her quiet way, “I’ve done it now.”

“What are you going to do?” I asked. “They’ll have you for murder as sure as fate.”

“Never fear about me. I have nothing to live for, and it does not matter. Give me a hand to set him straight in the chair. It is horrible to see him like this!”

I did so, though it turned me cold all over to touch him. Some of his blood came on my hand and sickened me.

“Now,” said she, “you may as well have the medals as any one else. Take them and go.”

“I don’t want them. I only want to get away. I was never mixed up with a business like this before.”

“Nonsense!” said she. “ You came for the medals, and here they are at your mercy. Why should you not have them? There is no one to prevent you.”

I held the bag still in my hand. She opened the case, and between us we throw a hundred or so of the medals into it. They were all from the one case, but I could not bring myself to wait for any more. Then I made for the window, for the very air of this house seemed to poison me after what I had seen and heard. As I looked back, I saw her standing there, tall and graceful, with the light in her hand, just as I had seen her first. She waved good-bye, and I waved back at her and sprang out into the gravel drive.

I thank God that I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that I have never done a murder, but perhaps it would be different if I had been able to read that woman's mind and thoughts. There might have been two bodies in the room instead of one if I could have seen behind that last smile of hers. But I thought of nothing but of getting safely away, and it never entered my head how she might be fixing the rope round my neck. I had not taken five steps out from the window skirting down the shadow of the house in the way that I had come, when I heard a scream that might have raised the parish, and then another and another.

"Murder!" she cried. " Murder! Murder! Help!" and her voice rang out in the quiet of the night-time and sounded over the whole country-side. It went through my head, that dreadful cry. In an instant lights began to move and windows to fly up, not only in the house behind me, but at the lodge and in the stables in front. Like a frightened rabbit I bolted down the drive, but I heard the clang of the gate being shut before I could reach it. Then I hid my bag of medals under some dry fagots, and I tried to get away across the park, but some one saw me in .the moonlight, and presently I had half a dozen of them with dogs upon my heels. I crouched down among the brambles, but those dogs were too many for me, and I was glad enough when the men came up and prevented me from being torn into pieces. They seized me, and dragged me back to the room from which I had come.

"Is this the man, your Ladyship?" asked the oldest of them — the same whom I found out afterwards to be the butler.

She had been bending over the body, with her her handkerchief to her eyes, and now she turned upon me with the face of a fury. Oh, what an actress that woman was!

"Yes, yes, it is the very man," she cried. Oh, you villain, you cruel villain, to treat an old man so!"

There was a man there who seemed to be a village constable. He laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“What do you say to that?” said he.

“It was she who did it,” I cried, pointing at the woman, whose eyes never flinched before mine.

“Come! come! Try another!” said the constable, and one of the men-servants struck at me with his fist.

“I tell you that I saw her do it. She stabbed him twice with a knife. She first helped me to rob him, and then she murdered him.”

The footman tried to strike me again, but she held up her hand.

“Do not hurt him,” said she. “I think that his punishment may safely be left to the law.”

“I’ll see to that, your Ladyship,” said the constable. “Your Ladyship actually saw the crime committed, did you not?”

“Yes, yes, I saw it with my own eyes. It was horrible. We heard the noise and we came down. My poor husband was in front. The man had one of the cases open, and was filling a black leather bag which he held in his hand. He rushed past us, and my husband seized him. There was a struggle, and he stabbed him twice. There you can see the blood upon his hands. If I am not mistaken, his knife is still in Lord Mannering’s body.”

“Look at the blood upon her hands!” I cried.

“She has been holding up his Lordship’s head, you lying rascal,” said the butler.

“And here’s the very sack her Ladyship spoke of,” said the constable, as a groom came in with the one which I had dropped in my flight. “And hero are the medals inside it. That’s good enough for me. We will keep him safe here to-night, and tomorrow the inspector and I can take him into Salisbury.”

“Poor creature,” said the woman. “For my own part, I forgive him any injury which lie has done me. Who knows what temptation may have driven him to crime? His conscience and the law will give him punishment enough without any reproach of mine rendering it more bitter.”

I could not answer — I tell you, sir, I could not answer, so taken aback was I by the assurance of the woman. And so, seeming by my silence to agree to all that she had said, I was dragged away by the butler and the constable into the cellar, in which they locked me for the night.

There, sir, I have told you the whole story of the events which led up to the murder of Lord Mannering by his wife upon the night of September the 14th, in the year 1894. Perhaps you will put my statement on one side as the constable did at Mannering Towers, or the judge afterwards at the county assizes. Or perhaps you will see that there is the ring of truth in what I say, and you will follow it up, and so make your name for ever as a man who does not grudge personal trouble where justice is to be done. I have only you to look to, sir, and if you will clear my name of this false accusation, then I will worship you as one man never yet worshipped another. But if you fail me, then I give you my solemn promise that I will rope myself up, this day month, to the bar of my window, and from that time on I will come to plague you in your dreams if ever yet one man was able to come back and to haunt another. What I ask you to do is very simple. Make inquiries about this woman, watch her, learn her past history, find out what use she is making of the money which has come to her, and whether there is not a man Edward as I have stated. If from all this you learn anything which shows you her real character, or which seems to you to corroborate the story which I have told you, then I am sure that I can rely upon your goodness of heart to come to the rescue of an innocent man.

THE LAST OF THE LEGIONS AND OTHER TALES OF LONG AGO

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THE LAST OF THE LEGIONS

Pontus, the Roman viceroy, sat in the atrium of his palatial villa by the Thames, and he looked with perplexity at the scroll of papyrus which he had just unrolled. Before him stood the messenger who had brought it, a swarthy little Italian, whose black eyes were glazed with want of sleep, and his olive features darker still from dust and sweat. The viceroy was looking fixedly at him, yet he saw him not, so full was his mind of this sudden and most unexpected order. To him it seemed as if the solid earth had given way beneath his feet. His life and the work of his life had come to irremediable ruin.

“Very good,” he said at last in a hard dry voice, “you can go.”

The man saluted and staggered out of the hall. A yellow-haired British major-domo came forward for orders.

“Is the General there?”

“He is waiting, your excellency.”

“Then show him in, and leave us together.”

A few minutes later Licinius Crassus, the head of the British military establishment, had joined his chief. He was a large, bearded man in a white civilian toga, hemmed with the Patrician purple. His rough, bold features, burned and seamed and lined with the long African wars, were shadowed with anxiety as he looked with questioning eyes at the drawn, haggard face of the viceroy.

“I fear, your excellency, that you have had bad news from Rome.”

“The worst, Crassus. It is all over with Britain. It is a question whether even Gaul will be held.”

“Saint Albus save us! Are the orders precise?”

“Here they are, with the Emperor’s own seal.”

“But why? I had heard a rumour, but it had seemed too incredible.”

“So had I only last week, and had the fellow scourged for having spread it. But here it is as clear as words can make it: ‘Bring every man of the Legions by forced marches to the help of the Empire. Leave not a cohort in Britain.’ These are my orders.”

“But the cause?”

“They will let the limbs wither so that the heart be stronger. The old German hive is about to swarm once more. There are fresh crowds of Barbarians from Dacia and Scythia. Every sword is needed to hold the Alpine passes. They cannot let three legions lie idle in Britain.”

The soldier shrugged his shoulders.

“When the legions go no Roman would feel that his life was safe here. For all that we have done, it is none the less the truth that it is no country of ours, and that we hold it as we won it by the sword.”

“Yes, every man, woman, and child of Latin blood must come with us to Gaul. The galleys are already waiting at Portus Dubris. Get the orders out, Crassus, at once. As the Valerian legion falls back from the Wall of Hadrian it can take the northern colonists with it. The Jovians can bring in the people from the west, and the Batavians can escort the easterns if they will muster at Camboricum. You will see to it.” He sank his face for a moment in his hands. “It is a fearsome thing,” said he, “to tear up the roots of so goodly a tree.”

“To make more space for such a crop of weeds,” said the soldier bitterly. “My God, what will be the end of these poor Britons! From ocean to ocean there is not a tribe which will not be at the throat of its neighbour when the last Roman Lictor has turned his back. With these hot-headed Silures it is hard enough now to keep the swords in their sheaths.”

“The kennel might fight as they choose among themselves until the best hound won,” said the Roman Governor. “At least the victor would keep the arts and the religion which we have brought them, and Britain would be one land. No, it is the bear from the north and the wolves from oversea, the painted savage from beyond the walls and the Saxon pirate from over the water, who will succeed to our rule. Where we saved, they will slay; where we built, they will burn; where we planted, they will ravage. But the die is cast, Crassus. You will carry out the orders.”

“I will send out the messengers within an hour. This very morning there has come news that the Barbarians are through the old gap in the wall, and their outriders as far south as Vinovia.”

The Governor shrugged his shoulders.

“These things concern us no longer,” said he. Then a bitter smile broke upon his aquiline clean-shaven face. “Whom think you that I see in audience this morning?”

“Nay, I know not.”

"Caradoc and Regnus, and Celticus the Icenian, who, like so many of the richer Britons, have been educated at Rome, and who would lay before me their plans as to the ruling of this country."

"And what is their plan?"

"That they themselves should do it."

The Roman soldier laughed. "Well, they will have their will," said he, as he saluted and turned upon his heel. "Farewell, your excellency. There are hard days coming for you and for me."

An hour later the British deputation was ushered into the presence of the Governor. They were good, steadfast men, men who with a whole heart, and at some risk to themselves, had taken up their country's cause, so far as they could see it. At the same time they well knew that under the mild and beneficent rule of Rome it was only when they passed from words to deeds that their backs or their necks would be in danger. They stood now, earnest and a little abashed, before the throne of the viceroy. Celticus was a swarthy, black-bearded little Iberian. Caradoc and Regnus were tall middle-aged men of the fair flaxen British type. All three were dressed in the draped yellow toga after the Latin fashion, instead of in the bracæ and tunic which distinguished their more insular fellow-countrymen.

"Well?" asked the Governor.

"We are here," said Celticus boldly, "as the spokesmen of a great number of our fellow-countrymen, for the purpose of sending our petition through you to the Emperor and to the Roman Senate, that we may urge upon them the policy of allowing us to govern this country after our own ancient fashion." He paused, as if awaiting some outburst as an answer to his own temerity; but the Governor merely nodded his head as a sign that he should proceed. "We had laws of our own before ever Cæsar set foot in Britain, which have served their purpose since first our forefathers came from the land of Ham. We are not a child among the nations, but our history goes back in our own traditions further even than that of Rome, and we are galled by this yoke which you have laid upon us."

"Are not our laws just?" asked the Governor.

"The code of Cæsar is just, but it is always the code of Cæsar. Our own laws were made for our own uses and our own circumstances, and we would fain have them again."

"You speak Roman as if you had been bred in the Forum; you wear a Roman toga; your hair is filleted in Roman fashion — are not these the gifts of Rome?”

“We would take all the learning and all the arts that Rome or Greece could give, but we would still be Britain, and ruled by Britons.”

The viceroy smiled. “By the rood of Saint Helena,” said he, “had you spoken thus to some of my heathen ancestors, there would have been an end to your politics. That you have dared to stand before my face and say as much is a proof for ever of the gentleness of our rule. But I would reason with you for a moment upon this your request. You know well that this land has never been one kingdom, but was always under many chiefs and many tribes, who have made war upon each other. Would you in very truth have it so again?”

“Those were in the evil pagan days, the days of the Druid and the oak-grove, your excellency. But now we are held together by a gospel of peace.”

The viceroy shook his head. “If all the world were of the same way of thinking, then it would be easier,” said he. “It may be that this blessed doctrine of peace will be little help to you when you are face to face with strong men who still worship the god of war. What would you do against the Picts of the north?”

“Your excellency knows that many of the bravest legionaries are of British blood. These are our defence.”

“But discipline, man, the power to command, the knowledge of war, the strength to act — it is in these things that you would fail. Too long have you leaned upon the crutch.”

“The times may be hard, but when we have gone through them, Britain will be herself again.”

“Nay, she will be under a different and a harsher master,” said the Roman. “Already the pirates swarm upon the eastern coast. Were it not for our Roman Count of the Saxon shore they would land to-morrow. I see the day when Britain may, indeed, be one; but that will be because you and your fellows are either dead or are driven into the mountains of the west. All goes into the melting pot, and if a better Albion should come forth from it, it will be after ages of strife, and neither you nor your people will have part or lot in it.”

Regnus, the tall young Celt, smiled. “With the help of God and our own right arms we should hope for a better end,” said he. “Give us but the chance, and we will bear the brunt.”

“You are as men that are lost,” said the viceroy sadly. “I see this broad land, with its gardens and orchards, its fair villas and its walled towns, its bridges and its roads, all the work of Rome. Surely it will pass even as a dream, and these three hundred years of settled order will leave no trace behind. For learn that it will indeed be as you wish, and that this very day the orders have come to me that the legions are to go.”

The three Britons looked at each other in amazement. Their first impulse was towards a wild exultation, but reflection and doubt followed close upon its heels.

“This is indeed wondrous news,” said Celticus. “This is a day of days to the motherland. When do the legions go, your excellency, and what troops will remain behind for our protection?”

“The legions go at once,” said the viceroy. “You will doubtless rejoice to hear that within a month there will be no Roman soldier in the island, nor, indeed, a Roman of any sort, age, or sex, if I can take them with me.”

The faces of the Britons were shadowed, and Caradoc, a grave and thoughtful man, spoke for the first time.

“But this is over sudden, your excellency,” said he. “There is much truth in what you have said about the pirates. From my villa near the fort of Anderida I saw eighty of their galleys only last week, and I know well that they would be on us like ravens on a dying ox. For many years to come it would not be possible for us to hold them off.”

The viceroy shrugged his shoulders. “It is your affair now,” said he. “Rome must look to herself.”

The last traces of joy had passed from the faces of the Britons. Suddenly the future had started up clearly before them, and they quailed at the prospect.

“There is a rumour in the market-place,” said Celticus, “that the northern Barbarians are through the gap in the wall. Who is to stop their progress?”

“You and your fellows,” said the Roman.

Clearer still grew the future, and there was terror in the eyes of the spokesmen as they faced it.

“But, your excellency, if the legions should go at once, we should have the wild Scots at York, and the Northmen in the Thames within the month. We can build ourselves up under your shield, and in a few years it would be easier for us; but not now, your excellency, not now.”

“Tut, man; for years you have been clamouring in our ears and raising the people. Now you have got what you asked. What more would you have? Within the month you will be as free as were your ancestors before Cæsar set foot upon your shore.”

“For God’s sake, your excellency, put our words out of your head. The matter had not been well considered. We will send to Rome. We will ride post-haste ourselves. We will fall at the Emperor’s feet. We will kneel before the Senate and beg that the legions remain.”

The Roman proconsul rose from his chair and motioned that the audience was at an end.

“You will do what you please,” said he. “I and my men are for Italy.”

And even as he said, so was it, for before the spring had ripened into summer, the troops were clanking down the via Aurelia on their way to the Ligurian passes, whilst every road in Gaul was dotted with the carts and the waggons which bore the Brito-Roman refugees on their weary journey to their distant country. But ere another summer had passed Celticus was dead, for he was flayed alive by the pirates and his skin nailed upon the door of a church near Caistor. Regnus, too, was dead, for he was tied to a tree and shot with arrows when the painted men came to the sacking of Isca. Caradoc only was alive, but he was a slave to Elda the red Caledonian and his wife was mistress to Mordred the wild chief of the western Cymri. From the ruined wall in the north to Vectis in the south blood and ruin and ashes covered the fair land of Britain. And after many days it came out fairer than ever, but, even as the Roman had said, neither the Britons nor any men of their blood came into the heritage of that which had been their own.

THE LAST GALLEY

“Mutato nomine, de te, Britannia, fabula narratur.”

It was a spring morning, one hundred and forty-six years before the coming of Christ. The North African coast, with its broad hem of golden sand, its green belt of feathery palm trees, and its background of barren, red-scarped hills, shimmered like a dream country in the opal light. Save for a narrow edge of snow-white surf, the Mediterranean lay blue and serene as far as the eye could reach. In all its vast expanse there was no break but for a single galley, which was slowly making its way from the direction of Sicily and heading for the distant harbour of Carthage.

Seen from afar it was a stately and beautiful vessel, deep red in colour, double-banked with scarlet oars, its broad, flapping sail stained with Tyrian purple, its bulwarks gleaming with brass work. A brazen, three-pronged ram projected in front, and a high golden figure of Baal, the God of the Phœnicians, children of Canaan, shone upon the after-deck. From the single high mast above the huge sail streamed the tiger-striped flag of Carthage. So, like some stately scarlet bird, with golden beak and wings of purple, she swam upon the face of the waters — a thing of might and of beauty as seen from the distant shore.

But approach and look at her now! What are these dark streaks which foul her white decks and dapple her brazen shields? Why do the long red oars move out of time, irregular, convulsive? Why are some missing from the staring portholes, some snapped with jagged, yellow edges, some trailing inert against the sides? Why are two prongs of the brazen ram twisted and broken? See, even the high image of Baal is battered and disfigured! By every sign this ship has passed through some grievous trial, some day of terror, which has left its heavy marks upon her.

And now stand upon the deck itself, and see more closely the men who man her! There are two decks forward and aft, while in the open waist are the double banks of seats, above and below, where the rowers, two to an oar, tug and bend at their endless task. Down the centre is a narrow platform, along which pace a line of warders, lash in hand, who cut cruelly at the slave who pauses, be it only for an instant, to sweep the sweat from his dripping brow. But these slaves — look at them! Some are captured

Romans, some Sicilians, many black Libyans, but all are in the last exhaustion, their weary eyelids drooped over their eyes, their lips thick with black crusts, and pink with bloody froth, their arms and backs moving mechanically to the hoarse chant of the overseer. Their bodies of all tints from ivory to jet, are stripped to the waist, and every glistening back shows the angry stripes of the warders. But it is not from these that the blood comes which reddens the seats and tints the salt water washing beneath their manacled feet. Great gaping wounds, the marks of sword slash and spear stab, show crimson upon their naked chests and shoulders, while many lie huddled and senseless athwart the benches, careless for ever of the whips which still hiss above them. Now we can understand those empty portholes and those trailing oars.

Nor were the crew in better case than their slaves. The decks were littered with wounded and dying men. It was but a remnant who still remained upon their feet. The most lay exhausted upon the fore-deck, while a few of the more zealous were mending their shattered armour, restringing their bows, or cleaning the deck from the marks of combat. Upon a raised platform at the base of the mast stood the sailing-master who conned the ship, his eyes fixed upon the distant point of Megara which screened the eastern side of the Bay of Carthage. On the after-deck were gathered a number of officers, silent and brooding, glancing from time to time at two of their own class who stood apart deep in conversation. The one, tall, dark, and wiry, with pure, Semitic features, and the limbs of a giant, was Magro, the famous Carthaginian captain, whose name was still a terror on every shore, from Gaul to the Euxine. The other, a white-bearded, swarthy man, with indomitable courage and energy stamped upon every eager line of his keen, aquiline face, was Gisco the politician, a man of the highest Punic blood, a Suffete of the purple robe, and the leader of that party in the state which had watched and striven amid the selfishness and slothfulness of his fellow-countrymen to rouse the public spirit and waken the public conscience to the ever-increasing danger from Rome. As they talked, the two men glanced continually, with earnest anxious faces, towards the northern skyline.

“It is certain,” said the older man, with gloom in his voice and bearing, “none have escaped save ourselves.”

“I did not leave the press of the battle whilst I saw one ship which I could succour,” Magro answered. “As it was, we came away, as you saw, like a wolf which has a hound hanging on to either haunch. The Roman dogs can show the wolf-bites which prove it. Had any other galley won clear, they would surely be with us by now, since they have no place of safety save Carthage.”

The younger warrior glanced keenly ahead to the distant point which marked his native city. Already the low, leafy hill could be seen, dotted with the white villas of the wealthy Phœnician merchants. Above them, a gleaming dot against the pale blue morning sky, shone the brazen roof of the citadel of Byrsa, which capped the sloping town.

“Already they can see us from the watch-towers,” he remarked. “Even from afar they may know the galley of Black Magro. But which of all of them will guess that we alone remain of all that goodly fleet which sailed out with blare of trumpet and roll of drum but one short month ago?”

The patrician smiled bitterly. “If it were not for our great ancestors and for our beloved country, the Queen of the Waters,” said he, “I could find it in my heart to be glad at this destruction which has come upon this vain and feeble generation. You have spent your life upon the seas, Magro. You do not know how it has been with us on the land. But I have seen this canker grow upon us which now leads us to our death. I and others have gone down into the market-place to plead with the people, and been pelted with mud for our pains. Many a time have I pointed to Rome, and said, ‘Behold these people, who bear arms themselves, each man for his own duty and pride. How can you who hide behind mercenaries hope to stand against them?’ — a hundred times I have said it.”

“And had they no answer?” asked the Rover.

“Rome was far off and they could not see it, so to them it was nothing,” the old man answered. “Some thought of trade, and some of votes, and some of profits from the State, but none would see that the State itself, the mother of all things, was sinking to her end. So might the bees debate who should have wax or honey when the torch was blazing which would bring to ashes the hive and all therein. ‘Are we not rulers of the sea?’ ‘Was not Hannibal a great man?’ Such were their cries, living ever in the past and blind to the future. Before that sun sets there will be tearing of hair and rending of garments; but what will that now avail us?”

“It is some sad comfort,” said Magro, “to know that what Rome holds she cannot keep.”

“Why say you that? When we go down, she is supreme in all the world.”

“For a time, and only for a time,” Magro answered gravely. “Yet you will smile, perchance, when I tell you how it is that I know it. There was a wise woman who lived in that part of the Tin Islands which juts forth into the sea, and from her lips I have heard many things, but not one which has not come aright. Of the fall of our own country, and even of this battle, from which we now return, she told me clearly. There is much strange lore amongst these savage peoples in the west of the land of Tin.”

“What said she of Rome?”

“That she also would fall, even as we, weakened by her riches and her factions.”

Gisco rubbed his hands. “That at least makes our own fall less bitter,” said he. “But since we have fallen, and Rome will fall, who in turn may hope to be Queen of the Waters?”

“That also I asked her,” said Magro, “and gave her my Tyrian belt with the golden buckle as a guerdon for her answer. But, indeed, it was too high payment for the tale she told, which must be false if all else she said was true. She would have it that in coming days it was her own land, this fog-girt isle where painted savages can scarce row a wicker coracle from point to point, which shall at last take the trident which Carthage and Rome have dropped.”

The smile which flickered upon the old Patrician’s keen features died away suddenly, and his fingers closed upon his companion’s wrist. The other had set rigid, his head advanced, his hawk eyes upon the northern skyline. Its straight, blue horizon was broken by two low black dots.

“Galleys!” whispered Gisco.

The whole crew had seen them. They clustered along the starboard bulwarks, pointing and chattering. For a moment the gloom of defeat was lifted, and a buzz of joy ran from group to group at the thought that they were not alone — that some one had escaped the great carnage as well as themselves.

“By the spirit of Baal,” said Black Magro, “I could not have believed that any could have fought clear from such a welter. Could it be young Hamilcar in the *Africa*, or is it Beneva in the Blue Syrian ship? We three with others may form a squadron and make head against them yet. If we hold our course, they will join us ere we round the harbour mole.”

Slowly the injured galley toiled on her way, and more swiftly the two new-comers swept down from the north. Only a few miles off lay the green point and the white houses which flanked the great African city. Already, upon the headland, could be seen a dark group of waiting townsmen. Gisco and Magro were still watching with puckered gaze the approaching galleys, when the brown Libyan boatswain, with flashing teeth and gleaming eyes, rushed upon the poop, his long thin arm stabbing to the north.

“Romans!” he cried. “Romans!”

A hush had fallen over the great vessel. Only the wash of the water and the measured rattle and beat of the oars broke in upon the silence.

“By the horns of God’s altar, I believe the fellow is right!” cried old Gisco. “See how they swoop upon us like falcons. They are full-manned and full-oared.”

“Plain wood, unpainted,” said Magro. “See how it gleams yellow where the sun strikes it.”

“And yonder thing beneath the mast. Is it not the cursed bridge they use for boarding?”

“So they grudge us even one,” said Magro with a bitter laugh. “Not even one galley shall return to the old sea-mother. Well, for my part, I would as soon have it so. I am of a mind to stop the oars and await them.”

“It is a man’s thought,” answered old Gisco; “but the city will need us in the days to come. What shall it profit us to make the Roman victory complete? Nay, Magro, let the slaves row as they never rowed before, not for our own safety, but for the profit of the State.”

So the great red ship laboured and lurched onwards, like a weary panting stag which seeks shelter from his pursuers, while ever swifter and ever nearer sped the two lean fierce galleys from the north. Already the morning sun shone upon the lines of low Roman helmets above the bulwarks, and glistened on the silver wave where each sharp prow shot through the still blue water. Every moment the ships drew nearer, and the long thin scream of the Roman trumpets grew louder upon the ear.

Upon the high bluff of Megara there stood a great concourse of the people of Carthage who had hurried forth from the city upon the news that the galleys were in sight. They stood now, rich and poor, effete and plebeian, white Phœnician and dark Kabyle, gazing with breathless interest at the spectacle before them. Some hundreds of feet beneath them the Punic galley had drawn so close that with their naked eyes they could see those stains of battle which told their dismal tale. The Romans, too, were heading in such a way that it was before their very faces that their ship was about to be cut off; and yet of all this multitude not one could raise a hand in its defence. Some wept in impotent grief, some cursed with flashing eyes and knotted fists, some on their knees held up appealing hands to Baal; but neither prayer, tears, nor curses could undo the past nor mend the present. That broken, crawling galley meant that their fleet was gone. Those two fierce darting ships meant that the hands of Rome were already at their throat. Behind them would come others and others, the innumerable trained hosts of the great Republic, long mistress of the land, now dominant also upon the waters. In a month, two months, three at the most, their armies would be there, and what could all the untrained multitudes of Carthage do to stop them?

"Nay!" cried one, more hopeful than the rest, "at least we are brave men with arms in our hands."

"Fool!" said another, "is it not such talk which has brought us to our ruin? What is the brave man untrained to the brave man trained? When you stand before the sweep and rush of a Roman legion you may learn the difference."

"Then let us train!"

"Too late! A full year is needful to turn a man to a soldier. Where will you — where will your city be within the year? Nay, there is but one chance for us. If we give up our commerce and our colonies, if we strip ourselves of all that made us great, then perchance the Roman conqueror may hold his hand."

And already the last sea-fight of Carthage was coming swiftly to an end before them. Under their very eyes the two Roman galleys had shot in, one on either side of the vessel of Black Magro. They had grappled with him, and he, desperate in his despair, had cast the crooked flukes of his anchors over their gunwales, and bound them to him in an iron grip, whilst with hammer and crowbar he burst great holes in his own sheathing. The last Punic galley should never be rowed into Ostia, a sight for the holiday-makers of Rome. She would lie in her own waters. And the fierce, dark soul of her rover captain glowed as he thought that not alone should she sink into the depths of the mother sea.

Too late did the Romans understand the man with whom they had to deal. Their boarders who had flooded the Punic decks felt the planking sink and sway beneath them. They rushed to gain their own vessels; but they, too, were being drawn downwards, held in the dying grip of the great red galley. Over they went and ever over. Now the deck of Magro’s ship is flush with the water, and the Romans’, drawn towards it by the iron bonds which hold them, are tilted downwards, one bulwark upon the waves, one reared high in the air. Madly they strain to cast off the death-grip of the galley. She is under the surface now, and ever swifter, with the greater weight, the Roman ships heel after her. There is a rending crash. The wooden side is torn out of one, and mutilated, dismembered, she rights herself, and lies a helpless thing upon the water. But a last yellow gleam in the blue water shows where her consort has been dragged to her end in the iron death-grapple of her foeman. The tiger-striped flag of Carthage has sunk beneath the swirling surface, never more to be seen upon the face of the sea.

For in that year a great cloud hung for seventeen days over the African coast, a deep black cloud which was the dark shroud of the burning city. And when the seventeen days were over, Roman ploughs were driven from end to end of the charred ashes, and salt was scattered there as a sign that Carthage should be no more. And far off a huddle of naked, starving folk stood upon the distant mountains, and looked down upon the desolate plain which had once been the fairest and richest upon earth. And they understood too late that it is the law of heaven that the world is given to the hardy and to the self-denying, whilst he who would escape the duties of manhood will soon be stripped of the pride, the wealth, and the power, which are the prizes which manhood brings.

THROUGH THE VEIL

He was a great shock-headed, freckle-faced Borderer, the lineal descendant of a cattle-thieving clan in Liddesdale. In spite of his ancestry he was as solid and sober a citizen as one would wish to see, a town councillor of Melrose, an elder of the Church, and the chairman of the local branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association. Brown was his name — and you saw it printed up as “Brown and Handiside” over the great grocery stores in the High Street. His wife, Maggie Brown, was an Armstrong before her marriage, and came from an old farming stock in the wilds of Teviothead. She was small, swarthy, and dark-eyed, with a strangely nervous temperament for a Scotch woman. No greater contrast could be found than the big tawny man and the dark little woman, but both were of the soil as far back as any memory could extend.

One day — it was the first anniversary of their wedding — they had driven over together to see the excavations of the Roman Fort at Newstead. It was not a particularly picturesque spot. From the northern bank of the Tweed, just where the river forms a loop, there extends a gentle slope of arable land. Across it run the trenches of the excavators, with here and there an exposure of old stonework to show the foundations of the ancient walls. It had been a huge place, for the camp was fifty acres in extent, and the fort fifteen. However, it was all made easy for them since Mr. Brown knew the farmer to whom the land belonged. Under his guidance they spent a long summer evening inspecting the trenches, the pits, the ramparts, and all the strange variety of objects which were waiting to be transported to the Edinburgh Museum of Antiquities. The buckle of a woman’s belt had been dug up that very day, and the farmer was discoursing upon it when his eyes fell upon Mrs. Brown’s face.

“Your good leddy’s tired,” said he. “Maybe you’d best rest a wee before we gang further.”

Brown looked at his wife. She was certainly very pale, and her dark eyes were bright and wild.

“What is it, Maggie? I’ve wearied you. I’m thinkin’ it’s time we went back.”

“No, no, John, let us go on. It’s wonderful! It’s like a dreamland place. It all seems so close and so near to me. How long were the Romans here, Mr. Cunningham?”

“A fair time, mam. If you saw the kitchen midden-pits you would guess it took a long time to fill them.”

“And why did they leave?”

“Well, mam, by all accounts they left because they had to. The folk round could thole them no longer, so they just up and burned the fort aboot their lugs. You can see the fire marks on the stanes.”

The woman gave a quick little shudder. “A wild night — a fearsome night,” said she. “The sky must have been red that night — and these grey stones, they may have been red also.”

“Aye, I think they were red,” said her husband. “It’s a queer thing, Maggie, and it may be your words that have done it; but I seem to see that business aboot as clear as ever I saw anything in my life. The light shone on the water.”

“Aye, the light shone on the water. And the smoke gripped you by the throat. And all the savages were yelling.”

The old farmer began to laugh. “The leddy will be writin’ a story aboot the old fort,” said he. “I’ve shown many a one ower it, but I never heard it put so clear afore. Some folk have the gift.”

They had strolled along the edge of the foss, and a pit yawned upon the right of them.

“That pit was fourteen foot deep,” said the farmer. “What d’ye think we dug oot from the bottom o’t? Weel, it was just the skeleton of a man wi’ a spear by his side. I’m thinkin’ he was grippin’ it when he died. Now, how cam’ a man wi’ a spear doon a hole fourteen foot deep. He wasna’ buried there, for they aye burned their dead. What make ye o’ that, mam?”

“He sprang doon to get clear of the savages,” said the woman.

“Weel, it’s likely enough, and a’ the professors from Edinburgh couldna’ gie a better reason. I wish you were aye here, mam, to answer a’ oor deeficulties sae readily. Now, here’s the altar that we foond last week. There’s an inscreeption. They tell me it’s Latin, and it means that the men o’ this fort give thanks to God for their safety.”

They examined the old worn stone. There was a large deeply-cut “VV” upon the top of it.

“What does ‘VV’ stand for?” asked Brown.

“Naebody kens,” the guide answered.

“*Valeria Victrix*,” said the lady softly. Her face was paler than ever, her eyes far away, as one who peers down the dim aisles of overarching centuries.

“What’s that?” asked her husband sharply.

She started as one who wakes from sleep. “What were we talking about?” she asked.

“About this ‘VV’ upon the stone.”

“No doubt it was just the name of the Legion which put the altar up.”

“Aye, but you gave some special name.”

“Did I? How absurd! How should I ken what the name was?”

“You said something—’*Victrix*,’ I think.”

“I suppose I was guessing. It gives me the queerest feeling, this place, as if I were not myself, but some one else.”

“Aye, it’s an uncanny place,” said her husband, looking round with an expression almost of fear in his bold grey eyes. “I feel it mysel’. I think we’ll just be wishin’ you good evenin’, Mr. Cunningham, and get back to Melrose before the dark sets in.”

Neither of them could shake off the strange impression which had been left upon them by their visit to the excavations. It was as if some miasma had risen from those damp trenches and passed into their blood. All the evening they were silent and thoughtful, but such remarks as they did make showed that the same subject was in the mind of each. Brown had a restless night, in which he dreamed a strange connected dream, so vivid that he woke sweating and shivering like a frightened horse. He tried to convey it all to his wife as they sat together at breakfast in the morning.

“It was the clearest thing, Maggie,” said he. “Nothing that has ever come to me in my waking life has been more clear than that. I feel as if these hands were sticky with blood.”

“Tell me of it — tell me slow,” said she.

“When it began, I was oot on a braeside. I was laying flat on the ground. It was rough, and there were clumps of heather. All round me was just darkness, but I could hear the rustle and the breathin’ of men. There seemed a great multitude on every side of me, but I could see no one. There was a low chink of steel sometimes, and then a number of voices would whisper ‘Hush!’ I had a ragged club in my hand, and it had spikes o’ iron near the end of it. My heart was beatin’ quickly, and I felt that a moment of great danger and excitement was at hand. Once I dropped my club, and again from all round me the voices in the darkness cried, ‘Hush!’ I put oot my hand, and it touched the foot of another man lying in front of me. There was some one at my very elbow on either side. But they said nothin’.

“Then we all began to move. The whole braeside seemed to be crawlin’ downwards. There was a river at the bottom and a high-arched wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge were many lights — torches on a wall. The creepin’ men all flowed towards the bridge. There had been no sound of any kind, just a velvet stillness. And then there was a cry in the darkness, the cry of a man who had been stabbed suddenly to the hairt. That one cry swelled out for a moment, and then the roar of a thoosand furious voices. I was runnin’. Every one was runnin’. A bright red light shone out, and the river was a scarlet streak. I could see my companions now. They were more like devils than men, wild figures clad in skins, with their hair and beards streamin’. They were all mad with rage, jumpin’ as they ran, their mouths open, their arms wavin’, the red light beatin’ on their faces. I ran, too, and yelled out curses like the rest. Then I heard a great cracklin’ of wood, and I knew that the palisades were doon. There was a loud whistlin’ in my ears, and I was aware that arrows were flyin’ past me. I got to the bottom of a dyke, and I saw a hand stretched doon from above. I took it, and was dragged to the top. We looked doon, and there were silver men beneath us holdin’ up their spears. Some of our folk sprang on to the spears. Then we others followed, and we killed the soldiers before they could draw the spears oot again. They shouted loud in some foreign tongue, but no mercy was shown them. We went ower them like a wave, and trampled them doon into the mud, for they were few, and there was no end to our numbers.

“I found myself among buildings, and one of them was on fire. I saw the flames spoutin’ through the roof. I ran on, and then I was alone among the buildings. Some one ran across in front o’ me. It was a woman. I caught her by the arm, and I took her chin and turned her face so as the light of the fire would strike it. Whom think you that it was, Maggie?”

His wife moistened her dry lips. “It was I,” she said.

He looked at her in surprise. “That’s a good guess,” said he. “Yes, it was just you. Not merely like you, you understand. It was you — you yourself. I saw the same soul in your frightened eyes. You looked white and bonnie and wonderful in the firelight. I had just one thought in my head — to get you awa’ with me; to keep you all to mysel’ in my own home somewhere beyond the hills. You clawed at my face with your nails. I heaved you over my shoulder, and I tried to find a way oot of the light of the burning hoose and back into the darkness.

“Then came the thing that I mind best of all. You’re ill, Maggie. Shall I stop? My God! you have the very look on your face that you had last night in my dream. You screamed. He came runnin’ in the firelight. His head was bare; his hair was black and curled; he had a naked sword in his hand, short and broad, little more than a dagger. He stabbed at me, but he tripped and fell. I held you with one hand, and with the other — —”

His wife had sprung to her feet with writhing features.

“Marcus!” she cried. “My beautiful Marcus! Oh, you brute! you brute! you brute!” There was a clatter of tea-cups as she fell forward senseless upon the table.

They never talk about that strange isolated incident in their married life. For an instant the curtain of the past had swung aside, and some strange glimpse of a forgotten life had come to them. But it closed down, never to open again. They live their narrow round — he in his shop, she in her household — and yet new and wider horizons have vaguely formed themselves around them since that summer evening by the crumbling Roman fort.

THE COMING OF THE HUNS

In the middle of the fourth century the state of the Christian religion was a scandal and a disgrace. Patient, humble, and long-suffering in adversity, it had become positive, aggressive, and unreasonable with success. Paganism was not yet dead, but it was rapidly sinking, finding its most faithful supporters among the conservative aristocrats of the best families on the one hand, and among those benighted villagers on the other who gave their name to the expiring creed. Between these two extremes the great majority of reasonable men had turned from the conception of many gods to that of one, and had rejected for ever the beliefs of their forefathers. But with the vices of polytheism, they had also abandoned its virtues, among which toleration and religious good humour had been conspicuous. The strenuous earnestness of the Christians had compelled them to examine and define every point of their own theology; but as they had no central authority by which such definitions could be checked, it was not long before a hundred heresies had put forward their rival views, while the same earnestness of conviction led the stronger bands of schismatics to endeavour, for conscience sake, to force their views upon the weaker, and thus to cover the Eastern world with confusion and strife.

Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople were centres of theological warfare. The whole north of Africa, too, was rent by the strife of the Donatists, who upheld their particular schism by iron flails and the war-cry of “Praise to the Lord!” But minor local controversies sank to nothing when compared with the huge argument of the Catholic and the Arian, which rent every village in twain, and divided every household from the cottage to the palace. The rival doctrines of the Homoousian and of the Homoiousian, containing metaphysical differences so attenuated that they could hardly be stated, turned bishop against bishop and congregation against congregation. The ink of the theologians and the blood of the fanatics were spilled in floods on either side, and gentle followers of Christ were horrified to find that their faith was responsible for such a state of riot and bloodshed as had never yet disgraced the religious history of the world. Many of the more earnest among them, shocked and scandalised, slipped away to the Libyan Desert, or to the solitude of Pontus, there to await in self-denial and prayer that second coming which was supposed to be at hand. Even in the deserts they could not escape the echo of the distant strife, and the hermits themselves scowled fiercely from their dens at passing travellers who might be contaminated by the doctrines of Athanasius or of Arius.

Such a hermit was Simon Melas, of whom I write. A Trinitarian and a Catholic, he was shocked by the excesses of the persecution of the Arians, which could be only matched by the similar outrages with which these same Arians in the day of their power avenged their treatment on their brother Christians. Weary of the whole strife, and convinced that the end of the world was indeed at hand, he left his home in Constantinople and travelled as far as the Gothic settlements in Dacia, beyond the Danube, in search of some spot where he might be free from the never-ending disputes. Still journeying to the north and east, he crossed the river which we now call the Dniester, and there, finding a rocky hill rising from an immense plain, he formed a cell near its summit, and settled himself down to end his life in self-denial and meditation. There were fish in the stream, the country teemed with game, and there was an abundance of wild fruits, so that his spiritual exercises were not unduly interrupted by the search of sustenance for his mortal frame.

In this distant retreat he expected to find absolute solitude, but the hope was in vain. Within a week of his arrival, in an hour of worldly curiosity, he explored the edges of the high rocky hill upon which he lived. Making his way up to a cleft, which was hung with olives and myrtles, he came upon a cave in the opening of which sat an aged man, white-bearded, white-haired, and infirm — a hermit like himself. So long had this stranger been alone that he had almost forgotten the use of his tongue; but at last, words coming more freely, he was able to convey the information that his name was Paul of Nicopolis, that he was a Greek citizen, and that he also had come out into the desert for the saving of his soul, and to escape from the contamination of heresy.

“Little I thought, brother Simon,” said he, “that I should ever find any one else who had come so far upon the same holy errand. In all these years, and they are so many that I have lost count of them, I have never seen a man, save indeed one or two wandering shepherds far out upon yonder plain.”

From where they sat, the huge steppe, covered with waving grass and gleaming with a vivid green in the sun, stretched away as level and as unbroken as the sea, to the eastern horizon. Simon Melas stared across it with curiosity.

“Tell me, brother Paul,” said he, “you who have lived here so long — what lies at the further side of that plain?”

The old man shook his head. “There is no further side to the plain,” said he. “It is the earth’s boundary, and stretches away to eternity. For all these years I have sat beside it, but never once have I seen anything come across it. It is manifest that if there had been a further side there would certainly at some time have come some traveller from that direction. Over the great river yonder is the Roman post of Tyras; but that is a long day’s journey from here, and they have never disturbed my meditations.”

“On what do you meditate, brother Paul?”

“At first I meditated on many sacred mysteries; but now, for twenty years, I have brooded continually on the nature of the Logos. What is your view upon that vital matter, brother Simon?”

“Surely,” said the younger man, “there can be no question as to that. The Logos is assuredly but a name used by St. John to signify the Deity.”

The old hermit gave a hoarse cry of fury, and his brown, withered face was convulsed with anger. Seizing the huge cudgel which he kept to beat off the wolves, he shook it murderously at his companion.

“Out with you! Out of my cell!” he cried. “Have I lived here so long to have it polluted by a vile Trinitarian — a follower of the rascal Athanasius? Wretched idolater, learn once for all, that the Logos is in truth an emanation from the Deity, and in no sense equal or co-eternal with Him! Out with you, I say, or I will dash out your brains with my staff!”

It was useless to reason with the furious Arian, and Simon withdrew in sadness and wonder, that at this extreme verge of the known earth the spirit of religious strife should still break upon the peaceful solitude of the wilderness. With hanging head and heavy heart he made his way down the valley, and climbed up once more to his own cell, which lay at the crown of the hill, with the intention of never again exchanging visits with his Arian neighbour.

Here, for a year, dwelt Simon Melas, leading a life of solitude and prayer. There was no reason why any one should ever come to this outermost point of human habitation. Once a young Roman officer — Caius Crassus — rode out a day’s journey from Tyras, and climbed the hill to have speech with the anchorite. He was of an equestrian family, and still held his belief in the old dispensation. He looked with interest and surprise, but also with some disgust, at the ascetic arrangements of that humble abode.

“Whom do you please by living in such a fashion?” he asked.

“We show that our spirit is superior to our flesh,” Simon answered. “If we fare badly in this world, we believe that we shall reap an advantage in the world to come.”

The centurion shrugged his shoulders. “There are philosophers among our people, Stoics and others, who have the same idea. When I was in the Herulian Cohort of the Fourth Legion we were quartered in Rome itself, and I saw much of the Christians, but I could never learn anything from them which I had not heard from my own father, whom you, in your arrogance, would call a Pagan. It is true that we talk of numerous gods; but for many years we have not taken them very seriously. Our thoughts upon virtue and duty and a noble life are the same as your own.”

Simon Melas shook his head.

“If you have not the holy books,” said he, “then what guide have you to direct your steps?”

“If you will read our philosophers, and above all the divine Plato, you will find that there are other guides who may take you to the same end. Have you by chance read the book which was written by our Emperor Marcus Aurelius? Do you not discover there every virtue which man could have, although he knew nothing of your creed? Have you considered, also, the words and actions of our late Emperor Julian, with whom I served my first campaign when he went out against the Persians? Where could you find a more perfect man than he?”

“Such talk is unprofitable, and I will have no more of it,” said Simon sternly. “Take heed while there is time, and embrace the true faith; for the end of the world is at hand, and when it comes there will be no mercy for those who have shut their eyes to the light.” So saying, he turned back once more to his praying-stool and to his crucifix, while the young Roman walked in deep thought down the hill, and mounting his horse, rode off to his distant post. Simon watched him until his brazen helmet was but a bead of light on the western edge of the great plain; for this was the first human face that he had seen in all this long year, and there were times when his heart yearned for the voices and the faces of his kind.

So another year passed, and save for the change of weather and the slow change of the seasons, one day was as another. Every morning when Simon opened his eyes, he saw the same grey line ripening into red in the furthest east, until the bright rim pushed itself above that far-off horizon across which no living creature had ever been known to come. Slowly the sun swept across the huge arch of the heavens, and as the shadows shifted from the black rocks which jutted upward from above his cell, so did the hermit regulate his terms of prayer and meditation. There was nothing on earth to draw his eye, or to distract his mind, for the grassy plain below was as void from month to month as the heaven above. So the long hours passed, until the red rim slipped down on the further side, and the day ended in the same pearl-grey shimmer with which it had begun. Once two ravens circled for some days round the lonely hill, and once a white fish-eagle came from the Dniester and screamed above the hermit's head. Sometimes red dots were seen on the green plain where the antelopes grazed, and often a wolf howled in the darkness from the base of the rocks. Such was the uneventful life of Simon Melas the anchorite, until there came the day of wrath.

It was in the late spring of the year 375 that Simon came out from his cell, his gourd in his hand, to draw water from the spring. Darkness had closed in, the sun had set, but one last glimmer of rosy light rested upon a rocky peak, which jutted forth from the hill, on the further side from the hermit's dwelling. As Simon came forth from under his ledge, the gourd dropped from his hand, and he stood gazing in amazement.

On the opposite peak a man was standing, his outline black in the fading light. He was a strange, almost a deformed figure, short-statured, round-backed, with a large head, no neck, and a long rod jutting out from between his shoulders. He stood with his face advanced, and his body bent, peering very intently over the plain to the westward. In a moment he was gone, and the lonely black peak showed up hard and naked against the faint eastern glimmer. Then the night closed down, and all was black once more.

Simon Melas stood long in bewilderment, wondering who this stranger could be. He had heard, as had every Christian, of those evil spirits which were wont to haunt the hermits in the Thebaid and on the skirts of the Ethiopian waste. The strange shape of this solitary creature, its dark outline and prowling, intent attitude, suggestive rather of a fierce, rapacious beast than of a man, all helped him to believe that he had at last encountered one of those wanderers from the pit, of whose existence, in those days of robust faith, he had no more doubt than of his own. Much of the night he spent in prayer, his eyes glancing continually at the low arch of his cell door, with its curtain of deep purple wrought with stars. At any instant some crouching monster, some horned abomination, might peer in upon him, and he clung with frenzied appeal to his crucifix, as his human weakness quailed at the thought. But at last his fatigue overcame his fears, and falling upon his couch of dried grass, he slept until the bright daylight brought him to his senses.

It was later than was his wont, and the sun was far above the horizon. As he came forth from his cell, he looked across at the peak of rock, but it stood there bare and silent. Already it seemed to him that that strange dark figure which had startled him so was some dream, some vision of the twilight. His gourd lay where it had fallen, and he picked it up with the intention of going to the spring. But suddenly he was aware of something new. The whole air was throbbing with sound. From all sides it came, rumbling, indefinite, an inarticulate mutter, low, but thick and strong, rising, falling, reverberating among the rocks, dying away into vague whispers, but always there. He looked round at the blue, cloudless sky in bewilderment. Then he scrambled up the rocky pinnacle above him, and sheltering himself in its shadow, he stared out over the plain. In his wildest dream he had never imagined such a sight.

The whole vast expanse was covered with horsemen, hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands, all riding slowly and in silence, out of the unknown east. It was the multitudinous beat of their horses’ hoofs which caused that low throbbing in his ears. Some were so close to him as he looked down upon them that he could see clearly their thin, wiry horses, and the strange humped figures of their swarthy riders, sitting forward on the withers, shapeless bundles, their short legs hanging stirrupless, their bodies balanced as firmly as though they were part of the beast. In those nearest he could see the bow and the quiver, the long spear and the short sword, with the coiled lasso behind the rider, which told that this was no helpless horde of wanderers, but a formidable army upon the march. His eyes passed on from them and swept further and further, but still to the very horizon, which quivered with movement, there was no end to this monstrous cavalry. Already the vanguard was far past the island of rock upon which he dwelt, and he could now understand that in front of this vanguard were single scouts who guided the course of the army, and that it was one of these whom he had seen the evening before.

All day, held spell-bound by this wonderful sight, the hermit crouched in the shadow of the rocks, and all day the sea of horsemen rolled onward over the plain beneath. Simon had seen the swarming quays of Alexandria, he had watched the mob which blocked the hippodrome of Constantinople, yet never had he imagined such a multitude as now defiled beneath his eyes, coming from that eastern skyline which had been the end of his world. Sometimes the dense streams of horsemen were broken by droves of brood-mares and foals, driven along by mounted guards; sometimes there were herds of cattle; sometimes there were lines of waggons with skin canopies above them; but then once more, after every break, came the horsemen, the horsemen, the hundreds and the thousands and the tens of thousands, slowly, ceaselessly, silently drifting from the east to the west. The long day passed, the light waned, and the shadows fell, but still the great broad stream was flowing by.

But the night brought a new and even stranger sight. Simon had marked bundles of faggots upon the backs of many of the led horses, and now he saw their use. All over the great plain, red pin-points gleamed through the darkness, which grew and brightened into flickering columns of flame. So far as he could see both to east and west the fires extended, until they were but points of light in the furthest distance. White stars shone in the vast heavens above, red ones in the great plain below. And from every side rose the low, confused murmur of voices, with the lowing of oxen and the neighing of horses.

Simon had been a soldier and a man of affairs before ever he forsook the world, and the meaning of all that he had seen was clear to him. History told him how the Roman world had ever been assailed by fresh swarms of Barbarians, coming from the outer darkness, and that the eastern Empire had already, in its fifty years of existence since Constantine had moved the capital of the world to the shores of the Bosphorus, been tormented in the same way. Gepidæ and Heruli, Ostrogoths and Sarmatians, he was familiar with them all. What the advanced sentinel of Europe had seen from this lonely outlying hill, was a fresh swarm breaking in upon the Empire, distinguished only from the others by its enormous, incredible size and by the strange aspect of the warriors who composed it. He alone of all civilised men knew of the approach of this dreadful shadow, sweeping like a heavy storm cloud from the unknown depths of the east. He thought of the little Roman posts along the Dniester, of the ruined Dacian wall of Trajan behind them, and then of the scattered, defenceless villages which lay with no thought of danger over all the open country which stretched down to the Danube. Could he but give them the alarm! Was it not, perhaps, for that very end that God had guided him to the wilderness?

Then suddenly he remembered his Arian neighbour, who dwelt in the cave beneath him. Once or twice during the last year he had caught a glimpse of his tall, bent figure hobbling round to examine the traps which he laid for quails and partridges. On one occasion they had met at the brook; but the old theologian waved him away as if he were a leper. What did he think now of this strange happening? Surely their differences might be forgotten at such a moment. He stole down the side of the hill, and made his way to his fellow-hermit's cave.

But there was a terrible silence as he approached it. His heart sank at that deadly stillness in the little valley. No glimmer of light came from the cleft in the rocks. He entered and called, but no answer came back. Then, with flint, steel, and the dry grass which he used for tinder, he struck a spark, and blew it into a blaze. The old hermit, his white hair dabbled with crimson, lay sprawling across the floor. The broken crucifix, with which his head had been beaten in, lay in splinters across him. Simon had dropped on his knees beside him, straightening his contorted limbs, and muttering the office for the dead, when the thud of a horse's hoofs was heard ascending the little valley which led to the hermit's cell. The dry grass had burned down, and Simon crouched trembling in the darkness, pattering prayers to the Virgin that his strength might be upheld.

It may have been that the new-comer had seen the gleam of the light, or it may have been that he had heard from his comrades of the old man whom they had murdered, and that his curiosity had led him to the spot. He stopped his horse outside the cave, and Simon, lurking in the shadows within, had a fair view of him in the moonlight. He slipped from his saddle, fastened the bridle to a root, and then stood peering through the opening of the cell. He was a very short, thick man, with a dark face, which was gashed with three cuts upon either side. His small eyes were sunk deep in his head, showing like black holes in the heavy, flat, hairless face. His legs were short and very bandy, so that he waddled uncouthly as he walked.

Simon crouched in the darkest angle, and he gripped in his hand that same knotted cudgel which the dead theologian had once raised against him. As that hideous stooping head advanced into the darkness of the cell, he brought the staff down upon it with all the strength of his right arm, and then, as the stricken savage fell forward upon his face, he struck madly again and again, until the shapeless figure lay limp and still. One roof covered the first slain of Europe and of Asia.

Simon's veins were throbbing and quivering with the unwonted joy of action. All the energy stored up in those years of repose came in a flood at this moment of need. Standing in the darkness of the cell, he saw, as in a map of fire, the outlines of the great Barbaric host, the line of the river, the position of the settlements, the means by which they might be warned. Silently he waited in the shadow until the moon had sunk. Then he flung himself upon the dead man's horse, guided it down the gorge, and set forth at a gallop across the plain.

There were fires on every side of him, but he kept clear of the rings of light. Round each he could see, as he passed, the circle of sleeping warriors, with the long lines of picketed horses. Mile after mile and league after league stretched that huge encampment. And then, at last, he had reached the open plain which led to the river, and the fires of the invaders were but a dull smoulder against the black eastern sky. Ever faster and faster he sped across the steppe, like a single fluttered leaf which whirls before the storm. Even as the dawn whitened the sky behind him, it gleamed also upon the broad river in front, and he flogged his weary horse through the shallows, until he plunged into its full yellow tide.

So it was that, as the young Roman centurion — Caius Crassus — made his morning round in the fort of Tyras he saw a single horseman, who rode towards him from the river. Weary and spent, drenched with water and caked with dirt and sweat, both horse and man were at the last stage of their endurance. With amazement the Roman watched their progress, and recognised in the ragged, swaying figure, with flying hair and staring eyes, the hermit of the eastern desert. He ran to meet him, and caught him in his arms as he reeled from the saddle.

"What is it, then?" he asked. "What is your news?"

But the hermit could only point at the rising sun. "To arms!" he croaked. "To arms! The day of wrath is come!" And as he looked, the Roman saw — far across the river — a great dark shadow, which moved slowly over the distant plain.

THE CONTEST

In the year of our Lord 66, the Emperor Nero, being at that time in the twenty-ninth year of his life and the thirteenth of his reign, set sail for Greece with the strangest company and the most singular design that any monarch has ever entertained. With ten galleys he went forth from Puteoli, carrying with him great stores of painted scenery and theatrical properties, together with a number of knights and senators, whom he feared to leave behind him at Rome, and who were all marked for death in the course of his wanderings. In his train he took Natus, his singing coach; Cluvius, a man with a monstrous voice, who should bawl out his titles; and a thousand trained youths who had learned to applaud in unison whenever their master sang or played in public. So deftly had they been taught that each had his own rôle to play. Some did no more than give forth a low deep hum of speechless appreciation. Some clapped with enthusiasm. Some, rising from approbation into absolute frenzy, shrieked, stamped, and beat sticks upon the benches. Some — and they were the most effective — had learned from an Alexandrian a long droning musical note which they all uttered together, so that it boomed over the assembly. With the aid of these mercenary admirers, Nero had every hope, in spite of his indifferent voice and clumsy execution, to return to Rome, bearing with him the chaplets for song offered for free competition by the Greek cities. As his great gilded galley with two tiers of oars passed down the Mediterranean, the Emperor sat in his cabin all day, his teacher by his side, rehearsing from morning to night those compositions which he had selected, whilst every few hours a Nubian slave massaged the Imperial throat with oil and balsam, that it might be ready for the great ordeal which lay before it in the land of poetry and song. His food, his drink, and his exercise were prescribed for him as for an athlete who trains for a contest, and the twanging of his lyre, with the strident notes of his voice, resounded continually from the Imperial quarters.

Now it chanced that there lived in those days a Grecian goatherd named Policles, who tended and partly owned a great flock which grazed upon the long flanks of the hills near Herœa, which is five miles north of the river Alpheus, and no great distance from the famous Olympia. This person was noted over all the country-side as a man of strange gifts and singular character. He was a poet who had twice been crowned for his verses, and he was a musician to whom the use and sound of an instrument were so natural that one would more easily meet him without his staff than his harp. Even in his lonely vigils on the winter hills he would bear it always slung over his shoulder, and would pass the long hours by its aid, so that it had come to be part of his very self. He was beautiful also, swarthy and eager, with a head like Adonis, and in strength there was no one who could compete with him. But all was ruined by his disposition, which was so masterful that he would brook no opposition nor contradiction. For this reason he was continually at enmity with all his neighbours, and in his fits of temper he would spend months at a time in his stone hut among the mountains, hearing nothing from the world, and living only for his music and his goats.

One spring morning, in the year of 67, Policles, with the aid of his boy Dorus, had driven his goats over to a new pasturage which overlooked from afar the town of Olympia. Gazing down upon it from the mountain, the shepherd was surprised to see that a portion of the famous amphitheatre had been roofed in, as though some performance was being enacted. Living far from the world and from all news, Policles could not imagine what was afoot, for he was well aware that the Grecian games were not due for two years to come. Surely some poetic or musical contest must be proceeding of which he had heard nothing. If so, there would perhaps be some chance of his gaining the votes of the judges; and in any case he loved to hear the compositions and admire the execution of the great minstrels who assembled on such an occasion. Calling to Dorus, therefore, he left the goats to his charge, and strode swiftly away, his harp upon his back, to see what was going forward in the town.

When Policles came into the suburbs, he found them deserted; but he was still more surprised when he reached the main street to see no single human being in the place. He hastened his steps, therefore, and as he approached the theatre he was conscious of a low sustained hum which announced the concourse of a huge assembly. Never in all his dreams had he imagined any musical competition upon so vast a scale as this. There were some soldiers clustering outside the door; but Policles pushed his way swiftly through them, and found himself upon the outskirts of the multitude who filled the great space formed by roofing over a portion of the national stadium. Looking around him, Policles saw a great number of his neighbours, whom he knew by sight, tightly packed upon the benches, all with their eyes fixed upon the stage. He also observed that there were soldiers round the walls, and that a considerable part of the hall was filled by a body of youths of foreign aspect, with white gowns and long hair. All this he perceived; but what it meant he could not imagine. He bent over to a neighbour to ask him, but a soldier prodded him at once with the butt end of his spear, and commanded him fiercely to hold his peace. The man whom he had addressed, thinking that Policles had demanded a seat, pressed closer to his neighbour, and so the shepherd found himself sitting at the end of the bench which was nearest to the door. Thence he concentrated himself upon the stage, on which Metas, a well-known minstrel from Corinth and an old friend of Policles, was singing and playing without much encouragement from the audience. To Policles it seemed that Metas was having less than his due, so he applauded loudly, but he was surprised to observe that the soldiers frowned at him, and that all his neighbours regarded him with some surprise. Being a man of strong and obstinate character, he was the more inclined to persevere in his clapping when he perceived that the general sentiment was against him.

But what followed filled the shepherd poet with absolute amazement. When Metas of Corinth had made his bow and withdrawn to half-hearted and perfunctory applause, there appeared upon the stage, amid the wildest enthusiasm upon the part of the audience, a most extraordinary figure. He was a short fat man, neither old nor young, with a bull neck and a round, heavy face, which hung in creases in front like the dewlap of an ox. He was absurdly clad in a short blue tunic, braced at the waist with a golden belt. His neck and part of his chest were exposed, and his short, fat legs were bare from the buskins below to the middle of his thighs, which was as far as his tunic extended. In his hair were two golden wings, and the same upon his heels, after the fashion of the god Mercury. Behind him walked a negro bearing a harp, and beside him a richly dressed officer who bore rolls of music. This strange creature took the harp from the hands of the attendant, and advanced to the front of the stage, whence he bowed and smiled to the cheering audience. “This is some foppish singer from Athens,” thought Policles to himself, but at the same time he understood that only a great master of song could receive such a reception from a Greek audience. This was evidently some wonderful performer whose reputation had preceded him. Policles settled down, therefore, and prepared to give his soul up to the music.

The blue-clad player struck several chords upon his lyre, and then burst suddenly out into the “Ode of Niobe.” Policles sat straight up on his bench and gazed at the stage in amazement. The tune demanded a rapid transition from a low note to a high, and had been purposely chosen for this reason. The low note was a grunting, a rumble, the deep discordant growling of an ill-conditioned dog. Then suddenly the singer threw up his face, straightened his tubby figure, rose upon his tiptoes, and with wagging head and scarlet cheeks emitted such a howl as the same dog might have given had his growl been checked by a kick from his master. All the while the lyre twanged and thrummed, sometimes in front of and sometimes behind the voice of the singer. But what amazed Policles most of all was the effect of this performance upon the audience. Every Greek was a trained critic, and as unsparing in his hisses as he was lavish in his applause. Many a singer far better than this absurd fop had been driven amid execration and abuse from the platform. But now, as the man stopped and wiped the abundant sweat from his fat face, the whole assembly burst into a delirium of appreciation. The shepherd held his hands to his bursting head, and felt that his reason must be leaving him. It was surely a dreadful musical nightmare, and he would wake soon and laugh at the remembrance. But no; the figures were real, the faces were those of his neighbours, the cheers which resounded in his ears were indeed from an audience which filled the theatre of Olympia. The whole chorus was in full blast, the hummers humming, the shouters bellowing, the tappers hard at work upon the benches, while every now and then came a musical cyclone of “Incomparable! Divine!” from the trained phalanx who intoned their applause, their united voices sweeping over the tumult as the drone of the wind dominates the roar of the sea. It was madness — insufferable madness! If this were allowed to pass, there was an end of all musical justice in Greece. Policles’ conscience would not permit him to be still. Standing upon his bench with waving hands and upraised voice, he protested with all the strength of his lungs against the mad judgment of the audience.

At first, amid the tumult, his action was hardly noticed. His voice was drowned in the universal roar which broke out afresh at each bow and smirk from the fatuous musician. But gradually the folk round Policles ceased clapping, and stared at him in astonishment. The silence grew in ever widening circles, until the whole great assembly sat mute, staring at this wild and magnificent creature who was storming at them from his perch near the door.

"Fools!" he cried. "What are you clapping at? What are you cheering? Is this what you call music? Is this cat-calling to earn an Olympian prize? The fellow has not a note in his voice. You are either deaf or mad, and I for one cry shame upon you for your folly."

Soldiers ran to pull him down, and the whole audience was in confusion, some of the bolder cheering the sentiments of the shepherd, and others crying that he should be cast out of the building. Meanwhile the successful singer, having handed his lyre to his negro attendant, was enquiring from those around him on the stage as to the cause of the uproar. Finally a herald with an enormously powerful voice stepped forward to the front, and proclaimed that if the foolish person at the back of the hall, who appeared to differ from the opinion of the rest of the audience, would come forward upon the platform, he might, if he dared, exhibit his own powers, and see if he could outdo the admirable and wonderful exhibition which they had just had the privilege of hearing.

Policles sprang readily to his feet at the challenge, and the great company making way for him to pass, he found himself a minute later standing in his unkempt garb, with his frayed and weather-beaten harp in his hand, before the expectant crowd. He stood for a moment tightening a string here and slackening another there until his chords rang true. Then, amid a murmur of laughter and jeers from the Roman benches immediately before him, he began to sing.

He had prepared no composition, but he had trained himself to improvise, singing out of his heart for the joy of the music. He told of the land of Elis, beloved of Jupiter, in which they were gathered that day, of the great bare mountain slopes, of the swift shadows of the clouds, of the winding blue river, of the keen air of the uplands, of the chill of the evenings, and the beauties of earth and sky. It was all simple and childlike, but it went to the hearts of the Olympians, for it spoke of the land which they knew and loved. Yet when he at last dropped his hand, few of them dared to applaud, and their feeble voices were drowned by a storm of hisses and groans from his opponents. He shrank back in horror from so unusual a reception, and in an instant his blue-clad rival was in his place. If he had sung badly before, his performance now was inconceivable. His screams, his grunts, his discords, and harsh jarring cacophonies were an outrage to the very name of music. And yet every time that he paused for breath or to wipe his streaming forehead a fresh thunder of applause came rolling back from the audience. Policles sank his face in his hands and prayed that he might not be insane. Then, when the dreadful performance ceased, and the uproar of admiration showed that the crown was certainly awarded to this impostor, a horror of the audience, a hatred of this race of fools, and a craving for the peace and silence of the pastures mastered every feeling in his mind. He dashed through the mass of people waiting at the wings, and emerged in the open air. His old rival and friend Metas of Corinth was waiting there with an anxious face.

"Quick, Policles, quick!" he cried. "My pony is tethered behind yonder grove. A grey he is, with red trappings. Get you gone as hard as hoof will bear you, for if you are taken you will have no easy death."

"No easy death! What mean you, Metas? Who is the fellow?"

"Great Jupiter! did you not know? Where have you lived? It is Nero the Emperor! Never would he pardon what you have said about his voice. Quick, man, quick, or the guards will be at your heels!"

* * *

An hour later the shepherd was well on his way to his mountain home, and about the same time the Emperor, having received the Chaplet of Olympia for the incomparable excellence of his performance, was making enquiries with a frowning brow as to who the insolent person might be who had dared to utter such contemptuous criticisms.

"Bring him to me here this instant," said he, "and let Marcus with his knife and branding-iron be in attendance."

"If it please you, great Cæsar," said Arsenius Platus, the officer of attendance, "the man cannot be found, and there are some very strange rumours flying about."

"Rumours!" cried the angry Nero. "What do you mean, Arsenius? I tell you that the fellow was an ignorant upstart with the bearing of a boor and the voice of a peacock. I tell you also that there are a good many who are as guilty as he among the people, for I heard them with my own ears raise cheers for him when he had sung his ridiculous ode. I have half a mind to burn their town about their ears so that they may remember my visit."

"It is not to be wondered at if he won their votes, Cæsar," said the soldier, "for from what I hear it would have been no disgrace had you, even you, been conquered in this contest."

“I conquered! You are mad, Arsenius. What do you mean?”

“None know him, great Cæsar! He came from the mountains, and he disappeared into the mountains. You marked the wildness and strange beauty of his face. It is whispered that for once the great god Pan has condescended to measure himself against a mortal.”

The cloud cleared from Nero’s brow. “Of course, Arsenius! You are right! No man would have dared to brave me so. What a story for Rome! Let the messenger leave this very night, Arsenius, to tell them how their Emperor has upheld their honour in Olympia this day.”

THE FIRST CARGO

“Ex ovo omnia”

When you left Britain with your legion, my dear Crassus, I promised that I would write to you from time to time when a messenger chanced to be going to Rome, and keep you informed as to anything of interest which might occur in this country. Personally, I am very glad that I remained behind when the troops and so many of our citizens left, for though the living is rough and the climate is infernal, still by dint of the three voyages which I have made for amber to the Baltic, and the excellent prices which I obtained for it here, I shall soon be in a position to retire, and to spend my old age under my own fig tree, or even perhaps to buy a small villa at Baiae or Posuoli, where I could get a good sun-bath after the continued fogs of this accursed island. I picture myself on a little farm, and I read the Georgics as a preparation; but when I hear the rain falling and the wind howling, Italy seems very far away.

In my previous letter I let you know how things were going in this country. The poor folk, who had given up all soldiering during the centuries that we guarded them, are now perfectly helpless before these Picts and Scots, tattooed Barbarians from the north, who overrun the whole country and do exactly what they please. So long as they kept to the north, the people in the south, who are the most numerous, and also the most civilised of the Britons, took no heed of them; but now the rascals have come as far as London, and the lazy folk in these parts have had to wake up. Vortigern, the king, is useless for anything but drink or women, so he sent across to the Baltic to get over some of the North Germans, in the hope that they would come and help him. It is bad enough to have a bear in your house, but it does not seem to me to mend matters if you call in a pack of ferocious wolves as well. However, nothing better could be devised, so an invitation was sent and very promptly accepted. And it is here that your humble friend appears upon the scene. In the course of my amber trading I had learned the Saxon speech, and so I was sent down in all haste to the Kentish shore that I might be there when our new allies came. I arrived there on the very day when their first vessel appeared, and it is of my adventures that I wish to tell you. It is perfectly clear to me that the landing of these warlike Germans in England will prove to be an event of historical importance, and so your inquisitive mind will not feel wearied if I treat the matter in some detail.

It was, then, upon the day of Mercury, immediately following the Feast of Our Blessed Lord’s Ascension, that I found myself upon the south bank of the river Thames, at the point where it opens into a wide estuary. There is an island there named Thanet, which was the spot chosen for the landfall of our visitors. Sure enough, I had no sooner ridden up than there was a great red ship, the first as it seems of three, coming in under full sail. The white horse, which is the ensign of these rovers, was hanging from her topmast, and she appeared to be crowded with men. The sun was shining brightly, and the great scarlet ship, with snow-white sails and a line of gleaming shields slung over her side, made as fair a picture on that blue expanse as one would wish to see.

I pushed off at once in a boat, because it had been arranged that none of the Saxons should land until the king had come down to speak with their leaders. Presently I was under the ship, which had a gilded dragon in the bows, and a tier of oars along either side. As I looked up, there was a row of helmeted heads looking down at me, and among them I saw, to my great surprise and pleasure, that of Eric the Swart, with whom I do business at Venta every year. He greeted me heartily when I reached the deck, and became at once my guide, friend, and counsellor. This helped me greatly with these Barbarians, for it is their nature that they are very cold and aloof unless one of their own number can vouch for you, after which they are very hearty and hospitable. Try as they will, they find it hard, however, to avoid a certain suggestion of condescension, and in the baser sort, of contempt, when they are dealing with a foreigner.

It was a great stroke of luck meeting Eric, for he was able to give me some idea of how things stood before I was shown into the presence of Kenna, the leader of this particular ship. The crew, as I learned from him, was entirely made up of three tribes or families — those of Kenna, of Lanc, and of Hasta. Each of these tribes gets its name by putting the letters “ing” after the name of the chief, so that the people on board would describe themselves as Kennings, Lancings, and Hastings. I observed in the Baltic that the villages were named after the family who lived in them, each keeping to itself, so that I have no doubt that if these fellows get a footing on shore, we shall see settlements with names like these rising up among the British towns.

The greater part of the men were sturdy fellows with red, yellow, or brown hair, mostly the latter. To my surprise, I saw several women among them. Eric, in answer to my question, explained that they always take their women with them so far as they can, and that instead of finding them an encumbrance as our Roman dames would be, they look upon them as helpmates and advisers. Of course, I remembered afterwards that our excellent and accurate Tacitus has remarked upon this characteristic of the Germans. All laws in the tribes are decided by votes, and a vote has not yet been given to the women, but many are in favour of it, and it is thought that woman and man may soon have the same power in the State, though many of the women themselves are opposed to such an innovation. I observed to Eric that it was fortunate there were several women on board, as they could keep each other company; but he answered that the wives of chiefs had no desire to know the wives of the inferior officers, and that both of them combined against the more common women, so that any companionship was out of the question. He pointed as he spoke to Editha, the wife of Kenna, a red-faced, elderly woman, who walked among the others, her chin in the air, taking no more notice than if they did not exist.

Whilst I was talking to my friend Eric, a sudden altercation broke out upon the deck, and a great number of the men paused in their work, and flocked towards the spot with faces which showed that they were deeply interested in the matter. Eric and I pushed our way among the others, for I was very anxious to see as much as I could of the ways and manners of these Barbarians. A quarrel had broken out about a child, a little blue-eyed fellow with curly yellow hair, who appeared to be greatly amused by the hubbub of which he was the cause. On one side of him stood a white-bearded old man, of very majestic aspect, who signified by his gestures that he claimed the lad for himself, while on the other was a thin, earnest, anxious person, who strongly objected to the boy being taken from him. Eric whispered in my ear that the old man was the tribal high priest, who was the official sacrificer to their great god Woden, whilst the other was a man who took somewhat different views, not upon Woden, but upon the means by which he should be worshipped. The majority of the crew were on the side of the old priest; but a certain number, who liked greater liberty of worship, and to invent their own prayers instead of always repeating the official ones, followed the lead of the younger man. The difference was too deep and too old to be healed among the grown men, but each had a great desire to impress his view upon the children. This was the reason why these two were now so furious with each other, and the argument between them ran so high that several of their followers on either side had drawn the short saxes, or knives from which their name of Saxon is derived, when a burly, red-headed man pushed his way through the throng, and in a voice of thunder brought the controversy to an end.

"You priests, who argue about the things which no man can know, are more trouble aboard this ship than all the dangers of the sea," he cried. "Can you not be content with worshipping Woden, over which we are all agreed, and not make so much of those small points upon which we may differ. If there is all this fuss about the teaching of the children, then I shall forbid either of you to teach them, and they must be content with as much as they can learn from their mothers."

The two angry teachers walked away with discontented faces; and Kenna — for it was he who spoke — ordered that a whistle should be sounded, and that the crew should assemble. I was pleased with the free bearing of these people, for though this was their greatest chief, they showed none of the exaggerated respect which soldiers of a legion might show to the Prætor, but met him on a respectful equality, which showed how highly they rated their own manhood.

From our Roman standard, his remarks to his men would seem very wanting in eloquence, for there were no graces nor metaphors to be found in them, and yet they were short, strong and to the point. At any rate it was very clear that they were to the minds of his hearers. He began by reminding them that they had left their own country because the land was all taken up, and that there was no use returning there, since there was no place where they could dwell as free and independent men. This island of Britain was but sparsely inhabited, and there was a chance that every one of them would be able to found a home of his own.

"You, Whitta," he said, addressing some of them by name, "you will found a Whitting hame, and you, Bucka, we shall see you in a Bucking hame, where your children and your children's children will bless you for the broad acres which your valour will have gained for them." There was no word of glory or of honour in his speech, but he said that he was aware that they would do their duty, on which they all struck their swords upon their shields so that the Britons on the beach could hear the clang. Then, his eyes falling upon me, he asked me whether I was the messenger from Vortigern, and on my answering, he bid me follow him into his cabin, where Lanc and Hasta, the other chiefs, were waiting for a council.

Picture me, then, my dear Crassus, in a very low-roofed cabin, with these three huge Barbarians seated round me. Each was clad in some sort of saffron tunic, with a chain-mail shirt over it, and a helmet with the horns of oxen on the sides, laid upon the table before him. Like most of the Saxon chiefs, their beards were shaved, but they wore their hair long and their huge light-coloured moustaches drooped down on to their shoulders. They are gentle, slow, and somewhat heavy in their bearing, but I can well fancy that their fury is the more terrible when it does arise.

Their minds seem to be of a very practical and positive nature, for they at once began to ask me a series of question upon the numbers of the Britons, the resources of the kingdom, the conditions of its trade, and other such subjects. They then set to work arguing over the information which I had given, and became so absorbed in their own contention that I believe there were times when they forgot my presence. Everything, after due discussion, was decided between them by the vote, the one who found himself in the minority always submitting, though sometimes with a very bad grace. Indeed, on one occasion Lanc, who usually differed from the others, threatened to refer the matter to the general vote of the whole crew. There was a constant conflict in the point of view; for whereas Kenna and Hasta were anxious to extend the Saxon power, and to make it greater in the eyes of the world, Lanc was of opinion that they should give less thought to conquest and more to the comfort and advancement of their followers. At the same time it seemed to me that really Lanc was the most combative of the three; so much so that, even in time of peace, he could not forego this contest with his own brethren. Neither of the others seemed very fond of him, for they were each, as was easy to see, proud of their chieftainship, and anxious to use their authority, referring continually to those noble ancestors from whom it was derived; while Lanc though he was equally well born, took the view of the common men upon every occasion, claiming that the interests of the many were superior to the privileges of the few. In a word, Crassus, if you could imagine a free-booting Gracchus on one side, and two piratical Patricians upon the other, you would understand the effect which my companions produced upon me.

There was one peculiarity which I observed in their conversation which soothed me very much. I am fond of these Britons, among whom I have spent so much of my life, and I wish them well. It was very pleasing, therefore, to notice that these men insisted upon it in their conversation that the whole object of their visit was the good of the Islanders. Any prospect of advantage to themselves was pushed into the background. I was not clear that these professions could be made to agree with the speech in which Kenna had promised a hundred hides of land to every man on the ship; but on my making this remark, the three chiefs seemed very surprised and hurt by my suspicions, and explained very plausibly that, as the Britons needed them as a guard, they could not aid them better than by settling on the soil, and so being continually at hand in order to help them. In time, they said, they hoped to raise and train the natives to such a point that they would be able to look after themselves. Lanc spoke with some degree of eloquence upon the nobleness of the mission which they had undertaken, and the others clattered their cups of mead (a jar of that unpleasant drink was on the table) in token of their agreement.

I observed also how much interested, and how very earnest and intolerant these Barbarians were in the matter of religion. Of Christianity they knew nothing, so that although they were aware that the Britons were Christians, they had not a notion of what their creed really was. Yet without examination they started by taking it for granted that their own worship of Woden was absolutely right, and that therefore this other creed must be absolutely wrong. “This vile religion,” “This sad superstition,” and “This grievous error” were among the phrases which they used towards it. Instead of expressing pity for any one who had been misinformed upon so serious a question, their feelings were those of anger, and they declared most earnestly that they would spare no pains to set the matter right, fingering the hilts of their long broadswords as they did so.

Well, my dear Crassus, you will have had enough of me and of my Saxons. I have given you a short sketch of these people and their ways. Since I began this letter, I have visited the two other ships which have come in, and as I find the same characteristics among the people on board them, I cannot doubt that they lie deeply in the race. For the rest, they are brave, hardy, and very pertinacious in all that they undertake; whereas the Britons, though a great deal more spirited, have not the same steadiness of purpose, their quicker imaginations suggesting always some other course, and their more fiery passions being succeeded by reaction. When I looked from the deck of the first Saxon ship, and saw the swaying excited multitude of

Britons on the beach, contrasting them with the intent, silent men who stood beside me, it seemed to me more than ever dangerous to call in such allies. So strongly did I feel it that I turned to Kenna, who was also looking towards the beach.

“You will own this island before you have finished,” said I.

His eyes sparkled as he gazed. “Perhaps,” he cried; and then suddenly correcting himself and thinking that he had said too much, he added —

“A temporary occupation — nothing more.”

AN ICONOCLAST

It was daybreak of a March morning in the year of Christ 92. Outside the long Semita Alta was already thronged with people, with buyers and sellers, callers and strollers, for the Romans were so early-rising a people that many a Patrician preferred to see his clients at six in the morning. Such was the good republican tradition, still upheld by the more conservative; but with more modern habits of luxury, a night of pleasure and banqueting was no uncommon thing. Thus one, who had learned the new and yet adhered to the old, might find his hours overlap, and without so much as a pretence of sleep come straight from his night of debauch into his day of business, turning with heavy wits and an aching head to that round of formal duties which consumed the life of a Roman gentleman.

So it was with Emilius Flaccus that March morning. He and his fellow senator, Caius Balbus, had passed the night in one of those gloomy drinking bouts to which the Emperor Domitian summoned his chosen friends at the high palace on the Palatine. Now, having reached the portals of the house of Flaccus, they stood together under the pomegranate-fringed portico which fronted the peristyle and, confident in each other’s tried discretion, made up by the freedom of their criticism for the long self-suppression of that melancholy feast.

“If he would but feed his guests,” said Balbus, a little red-faced, choleric nobleman with yellow-shot angry eyes. “What had we? Upon my life, I have forgotten. Plovers’ eggs, a mess of fish, some bird or other, and then his eternal apples.”

“Of which,” said Flaccus, “he ate only the apples. Do him the justice to confess that he takes even less than he gives. At least they cannot say of him as of Vitellius, that his teeth beggared the empire.”

“No, nor his thirst either, great as it is. That fiery Sabine wine of his could be had for a few sesterces the amphora. It is the common drink of the carters at every wine-house on the country roads. I longed for a glass of my own rich Falernian or the mellow Coan that was bottled in the year that Titus took Jerusalem. Is it even now too late? Could we not wash this rasping stuff from our palates?”

“Nay, better come in with me now and take a bitter draught ere you go upon your way. My Greek physician Stephanos has a rare prescription for a morning head. What! Your clients await you? Well, I will see you later at the Senate house.”

The Patrician had entered his atrium, bright with rare flowers, and melodious with strange singing birds. At the jaws of the hall, true to his morning duties, stood Lebs, the little Nubian slave, with snow-white tunic and turban, a salver of glasses in one hand, whilst in the other he held a flask of thin lemon-tinted liquid. The master of the house filled up a bitter aromatic bumper, and was about to drink it off when his hand was arrested by a sudden perception that something was much amiss in his household. It was to be read all around him — in the frightened eyes of the black boy, in the agitated face of the keeper of the atrium, in the gloom and silence of the little knot of ordinarii, the procurator or major-domo at their head, who had assembled to greet their master. Stephanos the physician, Cleios the Alexandrine reader, Promus the steward each turned his head away to avoid his master’s questioning gaze.

“What in the name of Pluto is the matter with you all?” cried the amazed senator, whose night of potations had left him in no mood for patience. “Why do you stand moping there? Stephanos, Vacculus, is anything amiss? Here, Promus, you are the head of my household. What is it, then? Why do you turn your eyes away from me?”

The burly steward, whose fat face was haggard and mottled with anxiety, laid his hand upon the sleeve of the domestic beside him.

“Sergius is responsible for the atrium, my lord. It is for him to tell you the terrible thing that has befallen in your absence.”

“Nay, it was Datus who did it. Bring him in, and let him explain it himself,” said Sergius in a sulky voice.

The patience of the Patrician was at an end. “Speak this instant, you rascal!” he shouted angrily. “Another minute, and I will have you dragged to the ergastulum, where, with your feet in the stocks and the gyves round your wrists, you may learn quicker obedience. Speak, I say, and without delay.”

“It is the Venus,” the man stammered; “the Greek Venus of Praxiteles.”

The senator gave a cry of apprehension and rushed to the corner of the atrium, where a little shrine, curtained off by silken drapery, held the precious statue, the greatest art treasure of his collection — perhaps of the whole world. He tore the hangings aside and stood in speechless anger before the outraged goddess. The red, perfumed lamp which always burned before her had been spilled and broken; her altar fire had been quenched, her chaplet had been dashed aside. But worst of all — insufferable sacrilege! — her own beautiful nude body of glistening Pentelic marble, as white and fair as when the inspired Greek had hewed it out five hundred years before, had been most brutally mishandled. Three fingers of the gracious outstretched hand had been struck off, and lay upon the pedestal beside her. Above her delicate breast a dark mark showed, where a blow had disfigured the marble. Emilius Flaccus, the most delicate and judicious connoisseur in Rome, stood gasping and croaking, his hand to his throat, as he gazed at his disfigured masterpiece. Then he turned upon his slaves, his fury in his convulsed face; but, to his amazement, they were not looking at him, but had all turned in attitudes of deep respect towards the opening of the peristyle. As he faced round and saw who had just entered his house, his own rage fell away from him in an instant, and his manner became as humble as that of his servants.

The new-comer was a man forty-three years of age, clean shaven, with a massive head, large engorged eyes, a small clear-cut nose, and the full bull neck which was the especial mark of his breed. He had entered through the peristyle with a swaggering, rolling gait, as one who walks upon his own ground, and now he stood, his hands upon his hips, looking round him at the bowing slaves, and finally at their master, with a half-humorous expression upon his flushed and brutal face.

“Why, Emilius,” said he, “I had understood that your household was the best-ordered in Rome. What is amiss with you this morning?”

“Nothing could be amiss with us now that Cæsar has deigned to come under my roof,” said the courtier. “This is indeed a most glad surprise which you have prepared for me.”

“It was an afterthought,” said Domitian. “When you and the others had left me, I was in no mood for sleep, and so it came into my mind that I would have a breath of morning air by coming down to you, and seeing this Grecian Venus of yours, about which you discoursed so eloquently between the cups. But, indeed, by your appearance and that of your servants, I should judge that my visit was an ill-timed one.”

“Nay, dear master; say not so. But, indeed, it is truth that I was in trouble at the moment of your welcome entrance, and this trouble was, as the Fates have willed it, brought forth by that very statue in which you have been graciously pleased to show your interest. There it stands, and you can see for yourself how rudely it has been mishandled.”

“By Pluto and all the nether gods, if it were mine some of you should feed the lampreys,” said the Emperor, looking round with his fierce eyes at the shrinking slaves. “You were always overmerciful, Emilius. It is the common talk that your catenæ are rusted for want of use. But surely this is beyond all bounds. Let me see how you handle the matter. Whom do you hold responsible?”

“The slave Sergius is responsible, since it is his place to tend the atrium,” said Flaccus. “Stand forward, Sergius. What have you to say?”

The trembling slave advanced to his master. “If it please you, sir, the mischief has been done by Datus the Christian.”

“Datus! Who is he?”

“The matulator, the scavenger, my lord. I did not know that he belonged to these horrible people, or I should not have admitted him. He came with his broom to brush out the litter of the birds. His eyes fell upon the Venus, and in an instant he had rushed upon her and struck her two blows with his wooden besom. Then we fell upon him and dragged him away. But alas! alas! it was too late, for already the wretch had dashed off the fingers of the goddess.”

The Emperor smiled grimly, while the Patrician’s thin face grew pale with anger.

“Where is the fellow?” he asked.

“In the ergastulum, your honour, with the furca on his neck.”

“Bring him hither and summon the household.”

A few minutes later the whole back of the atrium was thronged by the motley crowd who ministered to the household needs of a great Roman nobleman. There was the arcarius, or account keeper, with his stylum behind his ear; the sleek prægustator, who sampled all foods, so as to stand between his master and poison, and beside him his predecessor, now a half-witted idiot through the interception twenty years before of a datura draught from Canidia; the cellar-man, summoned from amongst his amphoræ; the cook, with his basting-ladle in his hand; the pompous nomenclator, who ushered the guests; the cubicularius, who saw to their accommodation; the silentiarius, who kept order in the house; the structor, who set forth the tables; the carptor, who carved the food; the cinerarius, who lit the fires —

these and many more, half-curious, half-terrified, came to the judging of Datus. Behind them a chattering, giggling swarm of Lalages, Marias, Cerusas, and Amaryllides, from the laundries and the spinning-rooms, stood upon their tiptoes, and extended their pretty wondering faces over the shoulders of the men. Through this crowd came two stout varlets leading the culprit between them. He was a small, dark, rough-headed man, with an unkempt beard and wild eyes which shone brightly with strong inward emotion. His hands were bound behind him, and over his neck was the heavy wooden collar or furca which was placed upon refractory slaves. A smear of blood across his cheek showed that he had not come uninjured from the preceding scuffle.

"Are you Datus the scavenger?" asked the Patrician.

The man drew himself up proudly. "Yes," said he, "I am Datus."

"Did you do this injury to my statue?"

"Yes, I did."

There was an uncompromising boldness in the man's reply which compelled respect. The wrath of his master became tinged with interest.

"Why did you do this?" he asked.

"Because it was my duty."

"Why, then, was it your duty to destroy your master's property?"

"Because I am a Christian." His eyes blazed suddenly out of his dark face. "Because there is no God but the one eternal, and all else are sticks and stones. What has this naked harlot to do with Him to whom the great firmament is but a garment and the earth a footstool? It was in His service that I have broken your statue."

Domitian looked with a smile at the Patrician. "You will make nothing of him," said he. "They speak even so when they stand before the lions in the arena. As to argument, not all the philosophers of Rome can break them down. Before my very face they refuse to sacrifice in my honour. Never were such impossible people to deal with. I should take a short way with him if I were you."

"What would Cæsar advise?"

"There are the games this afternoon. I am showing the new hunting-leopard which King Juba has sent from Numidia. This slave may give us some sport when he finds the hungry beast sniffing at his heels."

The Patrician considered for a moment. He had always been a father to his servants. It was hateful to him to think of any injury befalling them.

Perhaps even now, if this strange fanatic would show his sorrow for what he had done, it might be possible to spare him. At least it was worth trying.

“Your offence deserves death,” he said. “What reasons can you give why it should not befall you, since you have injured this statue, which is worth your own price a hundred times over?”

The slave looked steadfastly at his master. “I do not fear death,” he said. “My sister Candida died in the arena, and I am ready to do the same. It is true that I have injured your statue, but I am able to find you something of far greater value in exchange. I will give you the truth and the gospel in exchange for your broken idol.”

The Emperor laughed. “You will do nothing with him, Emilius,” he said. “I know his breed of old. He is ready to die; he says so himself. Why save him, then?”

But the Patrician still hesitated. He would make a last effort.

“Throw off his bonds,” he said to the guards. “Now take the furca off his neck. So! Now, Datus, I have released you to show you that I trust you. I have no wish to do you any hurt if you will but acknowledge your error, and so set a better example to my household here assembled.”

“How, then, shall I acknowledge my error?” the slave asked.

“Bow your head before the goddess, and entreat her forgiveness for the violence you have done her. Then perhaps you may gain my pardon as well.”

“Put me, then, before her,” said the Christian.

Emilius Flaccus looked triumphantly at Domitian. By kindness and tact he was effecting that which the Emperor had failed to do by violence. Datus walked in front of the mutilated Venus. Then with a sudden spring he tore the baton out of the hand of one of his guardians, leaped upon the pedestal, and showered his blows upon the lovely marble woman. With a crack and a dull thud her right arm dropped to the ground. Another fierce blow and the left had followed. Flaccus danced and screamed with horror, while his servants dragged the raving iconoclast from his impassive victim. Domitian’s brutal laughter echoed through the hall.

“Well, friend, what think you now?” he cried. “Are you wiser than your Emperor? Can you indeed tame your Christian with kindness?”

Emilius Flaccus wiped the sweat from his brow. “He is yours, great Cæsar. Do with him as you will.”

“Let him be at the gladiators’ entrance of the circus an hour before the games begin,” said the Emperor. “Now, Emilius, the night has been a merry one. My Ligurian galley waits by the river quay. Come, cool your head with a spin to Ostia ere the business of State calls you to the Senate.”

GIANT MAXIMIN

I: THE COMING OF GIANT MAXIMIN

Many are the strange vicissitudes of history. Greatness has often sunk to the dust, and has tempered itself to its new surrounding. Smallness has risen aloft, has flourished for a time, and then has sunk once more. Rich monarchs have become poor monks, brave conquerors have lost their manhood, eunuchs and women have overthrown armies and kingdoms. Surely there is no situation which the mind of man could invent which has not taken shape and been played out upon the world stage. But of all the strange careers and of all the wondrous happenings, stranger than Charles in his monastery, or Justin on his throne, there stands the case of Giant Maximin, what he attained, and how he attained it. Let me tell the sober facts of history, tinged only by that colouring to which the more austere historians could not condescend. It is a record as well as a story.

In the heart of Thrace some ten miles north of the Rhodope mountains, there is a valley which is named Harpessus, after the stream which runs down it. Through this valley lies the main road from the east to the west, and along the road, returning from an expedition against the Alani, there marched, upon the fifth day of the month of June in the year 210, a small but compact Roman army. It consisted of three legions — the Jovian, the Cappadocian, and the men of Hercules. Ten turmæ of Gallic cavalry led the van, whilst the rear was covered by a regiment of Batavian Horse Guards, the immediate attendants of the Emperor Septimius Severus, who had conducted the campaign in person. The peasants who lined the low hills which fringed the valley looked with indifference upon the long files of dusty, heavily-burdened infantry, but they broke into murmurs of delight at the gold-faced cuirasses and high brazen horse-hair helmets of the guardsmen, applauding their stalwart figures, their martial bearing, and the stately black chargers which they rode. A soldier might know that it was the little weary men with their short swords, their heavy pikes over their shoulders, and their square shields slung upon their backs, who were the real terror of the enemies of the Empire, but to the eyes of the wondering Thracians it was this troop of glittering Apollos who bore Rome's victory upon their banners, and upheld the throne of the purple-togaed prince who rode before them.

Among the scattered groups of peasants who looked on from a respectful distance at this military pageant, there were two men who attracted much attention from those who stood immediately around them. The one was commonplace enough — a little grey-headed man, with uncouth dress and a frame which was bent and warped by a long life of arduous toil, goat-driving and wood-chopping, among the mountains. It was the appearance of his youthful companion which had drawn the amazed observation of the bystanders. In stature he was such a giant as is seen but once or twice in each generation of mankind. Eight feet and two inches was his measure from his sandalled sole to the topmost curls of his tangled hair. Yet for all his mighty stature there was nothing heavy or clumsy in the man. His huge shoulders bore no redundant flesh, and his figure was straight and hard and supple as a young pine tree. A frayed suit of brown leather clung close to his giant body, and a cloak of undressed sheep-skin was slung from his shoulder. His bold blue eyes, shock of yellow hair and fair skin showed that he was of Gothic or northern blood, and the amazed expression upon his broad frank face as he stared at the passing troops told of a simple and uneventful life in some back valley of the Macedonian mountains.

“I fear your mother was right when she advised that we keep you at home,” said the old man anxiously. “Tree-cutting and wood-carrying will seem but dull work after such a sight as this.”

“When I see mother next it will be to put a golden torque round her neck,” said the young giant. “And you, daddy; I will fill your leather pouch with gold pieces before I have done.”

The old man looked at his son with startled eyes. “You would not leave us, Theckla! What could we do without you?”

“My place is down among yonder men,” said the young man. “I was not born to drive goats and carry logs, but to sell this manhood of mine in the best market. There is my market in the Emperor’s own Guard. Say nothing, daddy, for my mind is set, and if you weep now it will be to laugh hereafter. I will to great Rome with the soldiers.”

The daily march of the heavily laden Roman legionary was fixed at twenty miles; but on this afternoon, though only half the distance had been accomplished, the silver trumpets blared out their welcome news that a camp was to be formed. As the men broke their ranks, the reason of their light march was announced by the decurions. It was the birthday of Geta, the younger son of the Emperor, and in his honour there would be games and a double ration of wine. But the iron discipline of the Roman army required that under all circumstances certain duties should be performed, and foremost among them that the camp should be made secure. Laying down their arms in the order of their ranks, the soldiers seized their spades and axes, and worked rapidly and joyously until sloping vallum and gaping fossa girdled them round, and gave them safe refuge against a night attack. Then in noisy, laughing, gesticulating crowds they gathered in their thousands round the grassy arena where the sports were to be held. A long green hill-side sloped down to a level plain, and on this gentle incline the army lay watching the strife of the chosen athletes who contended before them. They stretched themselves in the glare of the sunshine, their heavy tunics thrown off, and their naked limbs sprawling, wine-cups and baskets of fruit and cakes circling amongst them, enjoying rest and peace as only those can to whom it comes so rarely.

The five-mile race was over, and had been won as usual by Decurion Brennus, the crack long-distance champion of the Herculians. Amid the yells of the Jovians, Capellus of the corps had carried off both the long and the high jump. Big Brebix the Gaul had out-thrown the long guardsman Serenus with the fifty pound stone. Now, as the sun sank towards the western ridge, and turned the Harpessus to a riband of gold, they had come to the final of the wrestling, where the pliant Greek, whose name is lost in the nickname of “Python,” was tried out against the bull-necked Lictor of the military police, a hairy Hercules, whose heavy hand had in the way of duty oppressed many of the spectators.

As the two men, stripped save for their loincloths, approached the wrestling-ring, cheers and counter-cheers burst from their adherents, some favouring the Lictor for his Roman blood, some the Greek from their own private grudge. And then, of a sudden, the cheering died, heads were turned towards the slope away from the arena, men stood up and peered and pointed, until finally, in a strange hush, the whole great assembly had forgotten the athletes, and were watching a single man walking swiftly towards them down the green curve of the hill. This huge solitary figure, with the oaken club in his hand, the shaggy fleece flapping from his great shoulders, and the setting sun gleaming upon a halo of golden hair, might have been the tutelary god of the fierce and barren mountains from which he had issued. Even the Emperor rose from his chair and gazed with open-eyed amazement at the extraordinary being who approached them.

The man, whom we already know as Theckla the Thracian, paid no heed to the attention which he had aroused, but strode onwards, stepping as lightly as a deer, until he reached the fringe of the soldiers. Amid their open ranks he picked his way, sprang over the ropes which guarded the arena, and advanced towards the Emperor, until a spear at his breast warned him that he must go no nearer. Then he sunk upon his right knee and called out some words in the Gothic speech.

"Great Jupiter! Whoever saw such a body of a man!" cried the Emperor. "What says he? What is amiss with the fellow? Whence comes he, and what is his name?"

An interpreter translated the Barbarian's answer. "He says, great Cæsar, that he is of good blood, and sprung by a Gothic father from a woman of the Alani. He says that his name is Theckla, and that he would fain carry a sword in Cæsar's service."

The Emperor smiled. "Some post could surely be found for such a man, were it but as janitor at the Palatine Palace," said he to one of the Prefects. "I would fain see him walk even as he is through the forum. He would turn the heads of half the women in Rome. Talk to him, Crassus. You know his speech."

The Roman officer turned to the giant. "Cæsar says that you are to come with him, and he will make you the servant at his door."

The Barbarian rose, and his fair cheeks flushed with resentment.

"I will serve Cæsar as a soldier," said he, "but I will be house-servant to no man — not even to him. If Cæsar would see what manner of man I am, let him put one of his guardsmen up against me."

"By the shade of Milo this is a bold fellow!" cried the Emperor. "How say you, Crassus? Shall he make good his words?"

"By your leave, Cæsar," said the blunt soldier, "good swordsmen are too rare in these days that we should let them slay each other for sport. Perhaps if the Barbarian would wrestle a fall — —"

"Excellent!" cried the Emperor. "Here is the Python, and here Varus the Lictor, each stripped for the bout. Have a look at them, Barbarian, and see which you would choose. What does he say? He would take them both? Nay then he is either the king of wrestlers or the king of boasters, and we shall soon see which. Let him have his way, and he has himself to thank if he comes out with a broken neck.”

There was some laughter when the peasant tossed his sheep-skin mantle to the ground and, without troubling to remove his leathern tunic, advanced towards the two wrestlers; but it became uproarious when with a quick spring he seized the Greek under one arm and the Roman under the other, holding them as in a vice. Then with a terrific effort he tore them both from the ground, carried them writhing and kicking round the arena, and finally walking up to the Emperor’s throne, threw his two athletes down in front of him. Then, bowing to Cæsar, the huge Barbarian withdrew, and laid his great bulk down among the ranks of the applauding soldiers, whence he watched with stolid unconcern the conclusion of the sports.

It was still daylight, when the last event had been decided, and the soldiers returned to the camp. The Emperor Severus had ordered his horse, and in the company of Crassus, his favourite prefect, rode down the winding pathway which skirts the Harpessus, chatting over the future dispersal of the army. They had ridden for some miles when Severus, glancing behind him, was surprised to see a huge figure which trotted lightly along at the very heels of his horse.

“Surely this is Mercury as well as Hercules that we have found among the Thracian mountains,” said he with a smile. “Let us see how soon our Syrian horses can out-distance him.”

The two Romans broke into a gallop, and did not draw rein until a good mile had been covered at the full pace of their splendid chargers. Then they turned and looked back; but there, some distance off, still running with a lightness and a spring which spoke of iron muscles and inexhaustible endurance, came the great Barbarian. The Roman Emperor waited until the athlete had come up to them.

“Why do you follow me?” he asked.

“It is my hope, Cæsar, that I may always follow you.” His flushed face as he spoke was almost level with that of the mounted Roman.

“By the god of war, I do not know where in all the world I could find such a servant!” cried the Emperor. “You shall be my own body-guard, the one nearest to me of all.”

The giant fell upon his knee. “My life and strength are yours,” he said. “I ask no more than to spend them for Cæsar.”

Crassus had interpreted this short dialogue. He now turned to the Emperor.

"If he is indeed to be always at your call, Cæsar, it would be well to give the poor Barbarian some name which your lips can frame. Theckla is as uncouth and craggy a word as one of his native rocks."

The Emperor pondered for a moment. "If I am to have the naming of him," said he, "then surely I shall call him Maximus, for there is not such a giant upon earth."

"Hark you," said the Prefect. "The Emperor has deigned to give you a Roman name, since you have come into his service. Henceforth you are no longer Theckla, but you are Maximus. Can you say it after me?"

"Maximin," repeated the Barbarian, trying to catch the Roman word.

The Emperor laughed at the mincing accent. "Yes, yes, Maximin let it be. To all the world you are Maximin, the body-guard of Severus. When we have reached Rome, we will soon see that your dress shall correspond with your office. Meanwhile march with the guard until you have my further orders."

So it came about that as the Roman army resumed its march next day, and left behind it the fair valley of the Harpessus, a huge recruit, clad in brown leather, with a rude sheep-skin floating from his shoulders, marched beside the Imperial troop. But far away in the wooden farmhouse of a distant Macedonian valley two old country folk wept salt tears, and prayed to the gods for the safety of their boy who had turned his face to Rome.

II: THE RISE OF GIANT MAXIMIN

Exactly twenty-five years had passed since the day that Theckla the huge Thracian peasant had turned into Maximin the Roman guardsman. They had not been good years for Rome. Gone for ever were the great Imperial days of the Hadrians and the Trajans. Gone also the golden age of the two Antonines, when the highest were for once the most worthy and most wise. It had been an epoch of weak and cruel men. Severus, the swarthy African, a stark grim man had died in far away York, after fighting all the winter with the Caledonian Highlanders — a race who have ever since worn the martial garb of the Romans. His son, known only by his slighting nickname of Caracalla, had reigned during six years of insane lust and cruelty, before the knife of an angry soldier avenged the dignity of the Roman name. The nonentity Macrinus had filled the dangerous throne for a single year before he also met a bloody end, and made room for the most grotesque of all monarchs, the unspeakable Heliogabalus with his foul mind and his painted face. He in turn was cut to pieces by the soldiers; and Severus Alexander, a gentle youth, scarce seventeen years of age, had been thrust into his place. For thirteen years now he had ruled, striving with some success to put some virtue and stability into the rotting Empire, but raising many fierce enemies as he did so — enemies whom he had not the strength nor the wit to hold in check.

And Giant Maximin — what of him? He had carried his eight feet of manhood through the lowlands of Scotland and the passes of the Grampians. He had seen Severus pass away, and had soldiered with his son. He had fought in Armenia, in Dacia, and in Germany. They had made him a centurion upon the field when with his hands he plucked out one by one the stockades of a northern village, and so cleared a path for the stormers. His strength had been the jest and the admiration of the soldiers. Legends about him had spread through the army, and were the common gossip round the camp fires — of his duel with the German axe-man on the Island of the Rhine, and of the blow with his fist that broke the leg of a Scythian's horse. Gradually he had won his way upwards, until now, after quarter of a century's service, he was tribune of the fourth legion and superintendent of recruits for the whole army. The young soldier who had come under the glare of Maximin's eyes, or had been lifted up with one huge hand while he was cuffed by the other, had his first lesson from him in the discipline of the service.

It was nightfall in the camp of the fourth legion upon the Gallic shore of the Rhine. Across the moonlit water, amid the thick forests which stretched away to the dim horizon, lay the wild untamed German tribes. Down on the river bank the light gleamed upon the helmets of the Roman sentinels who kept guard along the river. Far away a red point rose and fell in the darkness — a watch-fire of the enemy upon the further shore.

Outside his tent, beside some smouldering logs, Giant Maximin was seated, a dozen of his officers around him. He had changed much since the day when we first met him in the Valley of the Harpessus. His huge frame was as erect as ever, and there was no sign of diminution of his strength. But he had aged none the less. The yellow tangle of hair was gone, worn down by the ever-pressing helmet. The fresh young face was drawn and hardened, with austere lines wrought by trouble and privation. The nose was more hawk-like, the eyes more cunning, the expression more cynical and more sinister. In his youth, a child would have run to his arms. Now it would shrink screaming from his gaze. That was what twenty-five years with the eagles had done for Theckla the Thracian peasant.

He was listening now — for he was a man of few words — to the chatter of his centurions. One of them, Balbus the Sicilian, had been to the main camp at Mainz, only four miles away, and had seen the Emperor Alexander arrive that very day from Rome. The rest were eager at the news, for it was a time of unrest, and the rumour of great changes was in the air.

“How many had he with him?” asked Labienus, a black-browed veteran from the south of Gaul. “I’ll wager a month’s pay that he was not so trustful as to come alone among his faithful legions.”

“He had no great force,” replied Balbus. “Ten or twelve cohorts of the Prætorians and a handful of horse.”

“Then indeed his head is in the lion’s mouth,” cried Sulpicius, a hot-headed youth from the African Pentapolis. “How was he received?”

“Coldly enough. There was scarce a shout as he came down the line.”

“They are ripe for mischief,” said Labienus. “And who can wonder, when it is we soldiers who uphold the Empire upon our spears, while the lazy citizens at Rome reap all of our sowing. Why cannot a soldier have what the soldier gains? So long as they throw us our denarius a day, they think that they have done with us.”

“Aye,” croaked a grumbling old greybeard. “Our limbs, our blood, our lives — what do they care so long as the Barbarians are held off, and they are left in peace to their feastings and their circus? Free bread, free wine, free games — everything for the loafer at Rome. For us the frontier guard and a soldier’s fare.”

Maximin gave a deep laugh. “Old Plancus talks like that,” said he; “but we know that for all the world he would not change his steel plate for a citizen’s gown. You’ve earned the kennel, old hound, if you wish it. Go and gnaw your bone and growl in peace.”

“Nay, I am too old for change. I will follow the eagle till I die. And yet I had rather die in serving a soldier master than a long-gowned Syrian who comes of a stock where the women are men and the men are women.”

There was a laugh from the circle of soldiers, for sedition and mutiny were rife in the camp, and even the old centurion’s outbreak could not draw a protest. Maximin raised his great mastiff head and looked at Balbus.

“Was any name in the mouths of the soldiers?” he asked in a meaning voice.

There was a hush for the answer. The sigh of the wind among the pines and the low lapping of the river swelled out louder in the silence. Balbus looked hard at his commander.

“Two names were whispered from rank to rank,” said he. “One was Ascenius Pollio, the General. The other was — —”

The fiery Sulpicius sprang to his feet waving a glowing brand above his head.

“Maximinus!” he yelled. “Imperator Maximinus Augustus!”

Who could tell how it came about? No one had thought of it an hour before. And now it sprang in an instant to full accomplishment. The shout of the frenzied young African had scarcely rung through the darkness when from the tents, from the watch-fires, from the sentries, the answer came pealing back: “Ave Maximinus! Ave Maximinus Augustus!” From all sides men came rushing, half-clad, wild-eyed, their eyes staring, their mouths agape, flaming wisps of straw or flaring torches above their heads. The giant was caught up by scores of hands, and sat enthroned upon the bull-necks of the legionaries. “To the camp!” they yelled. “To the camp! Hail! Hail to the soldier Cæsar!”

That same night Severus Alexander, the young Syrian Emperor, walked outside his Prætorian camp, accompanied by his friend Licinius Probus, the Captain of the Guard. They were talking gravely of the gloomy faces and seditious bearing of the soldiers. A great foreboding of evil weighed heavily upon the Emperor’s heart, and it was reflected upon the stern bearded face of his companion.

“I like it not,” said he. “It is my counsel, Cæsar, that with the first light of morning we make our way south once more.”

“But surely,” the Emperor answered, “I could not for shame turn my back upon the danger. What have they against me? How have I harmed them that they should forget their vows and rise upon me?”

“They are like children who ask always for something new. You heard the murmur as you rode along the ranks. Nay, Cæsar, fly to-morrow, and your Prætorians will see that you are not pursued. There may be some loyal cohorts among the legions, and if we join forces — —”

A distant shout broke in upon their conversation — a low continued roar, like the swelling tumult of a sweeping wave. Far down the road upon which they stood there twinkled many moving lights, tossing and sinking as they rapidly advanced, whilst the hoarse tumultuous bellowing broke into articulate words, the same tremendous words, a thousand-fold repeated. Licinius seized the Emperor by the wrist and dragged him under the cover of some bushes.

“Be still, Cæsar! For your life be still!” he whispered. “One word and we are lost!”

Crouching in the darkness, they saw that wild procession pass, the rushing, screaming figures, the tossing arms, the bearded, distorted faces, now scarlet and now grey, as the brandished torches waxed or waned. They heard the rush of many feet, the clamour of hoarse voices, the clang of metal upon metal. And then suddenly, above them all, they saw a vision of a monstrous man, a huge bowed back, a savage face, grim hawk eyes, that looked out over the swaying shields. It was seen for an instant in a smoke-fringed circle of fire, and then it had swept on into the night.

“Who is he?” stammered the Emperor, clutching at his guardsman’s sleeve. “They call him Cæsar.”

“It is surely Maximin the Thracian peasant.” In the darkness the Prætorian officer looked with strange eyes at his master.

“It is all over, Cæsar. Let us fly together to your tent.”

But even as they went a second shout had broken forth tenfold louder than the first. If the one had been the roar of the oncoming wave, the other was the full turmoil of the tempest. Twenty thousand voices from the camp had broken into one wild shout which echoed through the night, until the distant Germans round their watch-fires listened in wonder and alarm.

“Ave!” cried the voices. “Ave Maximinus Augustus!”

High upon their bucklers stood the giant, and looked round him at the great floor of up-turned faces below. His own savage soul was stirred by the clamour, but only his gleaming eyes spoke of the fire within. He waved his hand to the shouting soldiers as the huntsman waves to the leaping pack. They passed him up a coronet of oak leaves, and clashed their swords in homage as he placed it on his head. And then there came a swirl in the crowd before him, a little space was cleared, and there knelt an officer in the Prætorian garb, blood upon his face, blood upon his bared forearm, blood upon his naked sword. Licinius too had gone with the tide.

“Hail, Cæsar, hail!” he cried, as he bowed his head before the giant. “I come from Alexander. He will trouble you no more.”

III: THE FALL OF GIANT MAXIMIN

For three years the soldier Emperor had been upon the throne. His palace had been his tent, and his people had been the legionaries. With them he was supreme; away from them he was nothing. He had gone with them from one frontier to the other. He had fought against Dacians, Sarmatians, and once again against the Germans. But Rome knew nothing of him, and all her turbulence rose against a master who cared so little for her or her opinion that he never deigned to set foot within her walls. There were cabals and conspiracies against the absent Cæsar. Then his heavy hand fell upon them, and they were cuffed, even as the young soldiers had been who passed under his discipline. He knew nothing, and cared as much for consuls, senates, and civil laws. His own will and the power of the sword were the only forces which he could understand. Of commerce and the arts he was as ignorant as when he left his Thracian home. The whole vast Empire was to him a huge machine for producing the money by which the legions were to be rewarded. Should he fail to get that money, his fellow soldiers would bear him a grudge. To watch their interests they had raised him upon their shields that night. If city funds had to be plundered or temples desecrated, still the money must be got. Such was the point of view of Giant Maximin.

But there came resistance, and all the fierce energy of the man, all the hardness which had given him the leadership of hard men, sprang forth to quell it. From his youth he had lived amidst slaughter. Life and death were cheap things to him. He struck savagely at all who stood up to him, and when they hit back, he struck more savagely still. His giant shadow lay black across the Empire from Britain to Syria. A strange subtle vindictiveness became also apparent in him. Omnipotence ripened every fault and swelled it into crime. In the old days he had been rebuked for his roughness. Now a sullen, dangerous anger rose against those who had rebuked him. He sat by the hour with his craggy chin between his hands, and his elbows resting on his knees, while he recalled all the misadventures, all the vexations of his early youth, when Roman wits had shot their little satires upon his bulk and his ignorance. He could not write, but his son Verus placed the names upon his tablets, and they were sent to the Governor of Rome. Men who had long forgotten their offence were called suddenly to make most bloody reparation.

A rebellion broke out in Africa, but was quelled by his lieutenant. But the mere rumour of it set Rome in a turmoil. The Senate found something of its ancient spirit. So did the Italian people. They would not be for ever bullied by the legions. As Maximin approached from the frontier, with the sack of rebellious Rome in his mind, he was faced with every sign of a national resistance. The country-side was deserted, the farms abandoned, the fields cleared of crops and cattle. Before him lay the walled town of Aquileia. He flung himself fiercely upon it, but was met by as fierce a resistance. The walls could not be forced, and yet there was no food in the country round for his legions. The men were starving and dissatisfied. What did it matter to them who was Emperor? Maximin was no better than themselves. Why should they call down the curse of the whole Empire upon their heads by upholding him? He saw their sullen faces and their averted eyes, and he knew that the end had come.

That night he sat with his son Verus in his tent, and he spoke softly and gently as the youth had never heard him speak before. He had spoken thus in old days with Paullina, the boy’s mother; but she had been dead these many years, and all that was soft and gentle in the big man had passed away with her. Now her spirit seemed very near him, and his own was tempered by its presence.

“I would have you go back to the Thracian mountains,” he said. “I have tried both, boy, and I can tell you that there is no pleasure which power can bring which can equal the breath of the wind and the smell of the kine upon a summer morning. Against you they have no quarrel. Why should they mishandle you? Keep far from Rome and the Romans. Old Eudoxus has money, and to spare. He awaits you with two horses outside the camp. Make for the valley of the Harpessus, lad. It was thence that your father came, and there you will find his kin. Buy and stock a homestead, and keep yourself far from the paths of greatness and of danger. God keep you, Verus, and send you safe to Thrace.”

When his son had kissed his hand and had left him, the Emperor drew his robe around him and sat long in thought. In his slow brain he revolved the past — his early peaceful days, his years with Severus, his memories of Britain, his long campaigns, his strivings and battlings, all leading to that mad night by the Rhine. His fellow soldiers had loved him then. And now he had read death in their eyes. How had he failed them? Others he might have wronged, but they at least had no complaint against him. If he had his time again, he would think less of them and more of his people, he would try to win love instead of fear, he would live for peace and not for war. If he had his time again! But there were shuffling steps, furtive whispers, and the low rattle of arms outside his tent. A bearded face looked in at him, a swarthy African face that he knew well. He laughed, and baring his arm, he took his sword from the table beside him.

"It is you, Sulpicius," said he. "You have not come to cry 'Ave Imperator Maximin!' as once by the camp fire. You are tired of me, and by the gods I am tired of you, and glad to be at the end of it. Come and have done with it, for I am minded to see how many of you I can take with me when I go."

They clustered at the door of the tent, peeping over each other's shoulders, and none wishing to be the first to close with that laughing, mocking giant. But something was pushed forward upon a spear point, and as he saw it, Maximin groaned and his sword sank to the earth.

"You might have spared the boy," he sobbed. "He would not have hurt you. Have done with it then, for I will gladly follow him."

So they closed upon him and cut and stabbed and thrust, until his knees gave way beneath him and he dropped upon the floor.

"The tyrant is dead!" they cried. "The tyrant is dead," and from all the camp beneath them and from the walls of the beleaguered city the joyous cry came echoing back, "He is dead, Maximin is dead!"

* * *

I sit in my study, and upon the table before me lies a denarius of Maximin, as fresh as when the triumvir of the Temple of Juno Moneta sent it from the mint. Around it are recorded his resounding titles — Imperator Maximinus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunitia potestate, and the rest. In the centre is the impress of a great craggy head, a massive jaw, a rude fighting face, a contracted forehead. For all the pompous roll of titles it is a peasant's face, and I see him not as the Emperor of Rome, but as the great Thracian boor who strode down the hill-side on that far-distant summer day when first the eagles beckoned him to Rome.

THE RED STAR

The house of Theodosius, the famous eastern merchant, was in the best part of Constantinople at the Sea Point which is near the church of Saint Demetrius. Here he would entertain in so princely a fashion that even the Emperor Maurice had been known to come privately from the neighbouring Bucoleon palace in order to join in the revelry. On the night in question, however, which was the fourth of November in the year of our Lord 630, his numerous guests had retired early, and there remained only two intimates, both of them successful merchants like himself, who sat with him over their wine on the marble verandah of his house, whence on the one side they could see the lights of the shipping in the Sea of Marmora, and on the other the beacons which marked out the course of the Bosphorus. Immediately at their feet lay a narrow strait of water, with the low, dark loom of the Asiatic hills beyond. A thin haze hid the heavens, but away to the south a single great red star burned sullenly in the darkness.

The night was cool, the light was soothing, and the three men talked freely, letting their minds drift back into the earlier days when they had staked their capital, and often their lives, on the ventures which had built up their present fortunes. The host spoke of his long journeys in North Africa, the land of the Moors; how he had travelled, keeping the blue sea ever upon his right, until he had passed the ruins of Carthage, and so on and ever on until a great tidal ocean beat upon a yellow strand before him, while on the right he could see the high rock across the waves which marked the Pillars of Hercules. His talk was of dark-skinned bearded men, of lions, and of monstrous serpents. Then Demetrius, the Cilician, an austere man of sixty, told how he also had built up his mighty wealth. He spoke of a journey over the Danube and through the country of the fierce Huns, until he and his friends had found themselves in the mighty forest of Germany, on the shores of the great river which is called the Elbe. His stories were of huge men, sluggish of mind, but murderous in their cups, of sudden midnight broils and nocturnal flights, of villages buried in dense woods, of bloody heathen sacrifices, and of the bears and wolves who haunted the forest paths. So the two elder men capped each other's stories and awoke each other's memories, while Manuel Ducas, the young merchant of gold and ostrich feathers, whose name was already known all over the Levant, sat in silence and listened to their talk. At last, however, they called upon him also for an anecdote, and leaning his cheek upon his elbow, with his eyes fixed upon the great red star which burned in the south, the younger man began to speak.

“It is the sight of that star which brings a story into my mind,” said he. “I do not know its name. Old Lascaris the astronomer would tell me if I asked, but I have no desire to know. Yet at this time of the year I always look out for it, and I never fail to see it burning in the same place. But it seems to me that it is redder and larger than it was.

“It was some ten years ago that I made an expedition into Abyssinia, where I traded to such good effect that I set forth on my return with more than a hundred camel-loads of skins, ivory, gold, spices, and other African produce. I brought them to the sea-coast at Arsinoe, and carried them up the Arabian Gulf in five of the small boats of the country. Finally, I landed near Saba, which is a starting-point for caravans, and, having assembled my camels and hired a guard of forty men from the wandering Arabs, I set forth for Macoraba. From this point, which is the sacred city of the idolaters of those parts, one can always join the large caravans which go north twice a year to Jerusalem and the sea-coast of Syria.

“Our route was a long and weary one. On our left hand was the Arabian Gulf, lying like a pool of molten metal under the glare of day, but changing to blood-red as the sun sank each evening behind the distant African coast. On our right was a monstrous desert which extends, so far as I know, across the whole of Arabia and away to the distant kingdom of the Persians. For many days we saw no sign of life save our own long, straggling line of laden camels with their tattered, swarthy guardians. In these deserts the soft sand deadens the footfall of the animals, so that their silent progress day after day through a scene which never changes, and which is itself noiseless, becomes at last like a strange dream. Often as I rode behind my caravan, and gazed at the grotesque figures which bore my wares in front of me, I found it hard to believe that it was indeed reality, and that it was I, I, Manuel Ducas, who lived near the Theodosian Gate of Constantinople, and shouted for the Green at the hippodrome every Sunday afternoon, who was there in so strange a land and with such singular comrades.

“Now and then, far out at sea, we caught sight of the white triangular sails of the boats which these people use, but as they are all pirates, we were very glad to be safely upon shore. Once or twice, too, by the water’s edge we saw dwarfish creatures — one could scarcely say if they were men or monkeys — who burrow for homes among the seaweed, drink the pools of brackish water, and eat what they can catch. These are the fish-eaters, the Ichthyophagi, of whom old Herodotus talks — surely the lowest of all the human race. Our Arabs shrank from them with horror, for it is well known that, should you die in the desert, these little people will settle on you like carrion crows, and leave not a bone unpicked. They gibbered and croaked and waved their skinny arms at us as we passed, knowing well that they could swim far out to sea if we attempted to pursue them; for it is said that even the sharks turn with disgust from their foul bodies.

“We had travelled in this way for ten days, camping every evening at the vile wells which offered a small quantity of abominable water. It was our habit to rise very early and to travel very late, but to halt during the intolerable heat of the afternoon, when, for want of trees, we would crouch in the shadow of a sandhill, or, if that were wanting, behind our own camels and merchandise, in order to escape from the insufferable glare of the sun. On the seventh day we were near the point where one leaves the coast in order to strike inland to Macoraba. We had concluded our midday halt, and were just starting once more, the sun still being so hot that we could hardly bear it, when, looking up, I saw a remarkable sight. Standing on a hillock to our right there was a man about forty feet high, holding in his hand a spear which was the size of the mast of a large ship. You look surprised, my friends, and you can therefore imagine my feelings when I saw such a sight. But my reason soon told me that the object in front of me was really a wandering Arab, whose form had been enormously magnified by the strange distorting effects which the hot air of the desert is able to cause.

“However, the actual apparition caused more alarm to my companions than the imagined one had to me, for with a howl of dismay they shrank together into a frightened group, all pointing and gesticulating as they gazed at the distant figure. I then observed that the man was not alone, but that from all the sandhills a line of turbaned heads was gazing down upon us. The chief of the escort came running to me, and informed me of the cause of their terror, which was that they recognised, by some peculiarity in their headgear, that these men belonged to the tribe of the Dilwas, the most ferocious and unscrupulous of the Bedouin, who had evidently laid an ambuscade for us at this point with the intention of seizing our caravan.

When I thought of all my efforts in Abyssinia, of the length of my journey and of the dangers and fatigues which I had endured, I could not bear to think of this total disaster coming upon me at the last instant and robbing me not only of my profits, but also of my original outlay. It was evident, however, that the robbers were too numerous for us to attempt to defend ourselves, and that we should be very fortunate if we escaped with our lives. Sitting upon a packet, therefore, I commended my soul to our blessed Saint Helena, while I watched with despairing eyes the stealthy and menacing approach of the Arab robbers.

"It may have been our own good fortune, or it may have been the handsome offering of beeswax candles — four to the pound — which I had mentally vowed to the Blessed Helena, but at that instant I heard a great outcry of joy from among my own followers. Standing up on the packet that I might have a better view, I was overjoyed to see a long caravan — five hundred camels at least — with a numerous armed guard, coming along the route from Macoraba. It is, I need not tell you, the custom of all caravans to combine their forces against the robbers of the desert, and with the aid of these new-comers we had become the stronger party. The marauders recognised it at once, for they vanished as if their native sands had swallowed them. Running up to the summit of a sandhill, I was just able to catch a glimpse of a dust-cloud whirling away across the yellow plain, with the long necks of their camels, the flutter of their loose garments, and the gleam of their spears breaking out from the heart of it. So vanished the marauders.

"Presently I found, however, that I had only exchanged one danger for another. At first I had hoped that this new caravan might belong to some Roman citizen, or at least to some Syrian Christian, but I found that it was entirely Arab. The trading Arabs who are settled in the numerous towns of Arabia are, of course, very much more peaceable than the Bedouin of the wilderness, those sons of Ishmael of whom we read in Holy Writ. But the Arab blood is covetous and lawless, so that when I saw several hundred of them formed in a semi-circle round our camels, looking with greedy eyes at my boxes of precious metals and my packets of ostrich feathers, I feared the worst.

"The leader of the new caravan was a man of dignified bearing and remarkable appearance. His age I would judge to be about forty. He had aquiline features, a noble black beard, and eyes so luminous, so searching, and so intense that I cannot remember in all my wanderings to have seen any which could be compared with them. To my thanks and salutations he returned a formal bow, and stood stroking his beard and looking in silence at the wealth which had suddenly fallen into his power. A murmur from his followers showed the eagerness with which they awaited the order to fall upon the plunder, and a young ruffian, who seemed to be on intimate terms with the leader, came to his elbow and put the desires of his companions into words.

"'Surely, oh Reverend One,' said he, 'these people and their treasure have been delivered into our hands. When we return with it to the holy place, who of all the Koraish will fail to see the finger of God which has led us?'

"But the leader shook his head. 'Nay, Ali, it may not be,' he answered. 'This man is, as I judge, a citizen of Rome, and we may not treat him as though he were an idolater.'

"'But he is an unbeliever,' cried the youth, fingering a great knife which hung in his belt. 'Were I to be the judge, he would lose not only his merchandise, but his life also, if he did not accept the faith.'

"The older man smiled and shook his head. 'Nay, Ali; you are too hot-headed,' said he, 'seeing that there are not as yet three hundred faithful in the world, our hands would indeed be full if we were to take the lives and property of all who are not with us. Forget not, dear lad, that charity and honesty are the very nose-ring and halter of the true faith.'

"'Among the faithful,' said the ferocious youth.

"'Nay, towards every one. It is the law of Allah. And yet' — here his countenance darkened, and his eyes shone with a most sinister light—'the day may soon come when the hour of grace is past, and woe, then, to those who have not hearkened! Then shall the sword of Allah be drawn, and it shall not be sheathed until the harvest is reaped. First it shall strike the idolaters on the day when my own people and kinsmen, the unbelieving Koraish, shall be scattered, and the three hundred and sixty idols of the Caaba thrust out upon the dung-heaps of the town. Then shall the Caaba be the home and temple of one God only who brooks no rival on earth or in heaven.'

"The man's followers had gathered round him, their spears in their hands, their ardent eyes fixed upon his face, and their dark features convulsed with such fanatic enthusiasm as showed the hold which he had upon their love and respect.

"'We shall be patient,' said he; 'but some time next year, the year after, the day may come when the great angel Gabriel shall bear me the message that the time of words has gone by, and that the hour of the sword has come. We are few and weak, but if it is His will, who can stand against us? Are you of Jewish faith, stranger?' he asked.

"I answered that I was not.

"'The better for you,' he answered, with the same furious anger in his swarthy face. 'First shall the idolaters fall, and then the Jews, in that they have not known those very prophets whom they had themselves foretold. Then last will come the turn of the Christians, who follow indeed a true Prophet, greater than Moses or Abraham, but who have sinned in that they have confounded a creature with the Creator. To each in turn — idolater, Jew, and Christian — the day of reckoning will come.'

"The ragamuffins behind him all shook their spears as he spoke. There was no doubt about their earnestness, but when I looked at their tattered dresses and simple arms, I could not help smiling to think of their ambitious threats, and to picture what their fate would be upon the day of battle before the battle-axes of our Imperial Guards, or the spears of the heavy cavalry of the Armenian Themes. However, I need not say that I was discreet enough to keep my thoughts to myself, as I had no desire to be the first martyr in this fresh attack upon our blessed faith.

"It was now evening, and it was decided that the two caravans should camp together — an arrangement which was the more welcome as we were by no means sure that we had seen the last of the marauders. I had invited the leader of the Arabs to have supper with me, and after a long exercise of prayer with his followers, he came to join me, but my attempt at hospitality was thrown away, for he would not touch the excellent wine which I had unpacked for him, nor would he eat any of my dainties, contenting himself with stale bread, dried dates, and water. After this meal we sat alone by the smouldering fire, the magnificent arch of the heavens above us of that deep, rich blue with those gleaming, clear-cut stars which can only be seen in that dry desert air. Our camp lay before us, and no sound reached our ears save the dull murmur of the voices of our companions and the occasional shrill cry of a jackal among the sandhills around us. Face to face I sat with this strange man, the glow of the fire beating upon his eager and imperious features and reflecting from his passionate eyes. It was the strangest vigil, and one which will never pass from my recollection. I have spoken with many wise and famous men upon my travels, but never with one who left the impression of this one.

"And yet much of his talk was unintelligible to me, though, as you are aware, I speak Arabian like an Arab. It rose and fell in the strangest way. Sometimes it was the babble of a child, sometimes the incoherent raving of a fanatic, sometimes the lofty dreams of a prophet and philosopher. There were times when his stories of demons, of miracles, of dreams, and of omens, were such as an old woman might tell to please the children of an evening. There were others when, as he talked with shining face of his converse with angels, of the intentions of the Creator, and the end of the universe, I felt as if I were in the company of some one more than mortal, some one who was indeed the direct messenger of the Most High.

"There were good reasons why he should treat me with such confidence. He saw in me a messenger to Constantinople and to the Roman Empire. Even as Saint Paul had brought Christianity to Europe, so he hoped that I might carry his doctrines to my native city. Alas! be the doctrines what they may, I fear that I am not the stuff of which Pauls are made. Yet he strove with all his heart during that long Arabian night to bring me over to his belief. He had with him a holy book, written, as he said, from the dictation of an angel, which he carried in tablets of bone in the nose-bag of a camel. Some chapters of this he read me; but, though the precepts were usually good, the language seemed wild and fanciful. There were times when I could scarce keep my countenance as I listened to him. He planned out his future movements, and indeed, as he spoke, it was hard to remember that he was only the wandering leader of an Arab caravan, and not one of the great ones of the earth.

"'When God has given me sufficient power, which will be within a few years,' said he, 'I will unite all Arabia under my banner. Then I will spread my doctrine over Syria and Egypt. When this has been done, I will turn to Persia, and give them the choice of the true faith or the sword. Having taken Persia, it will be easy then to overrun Asia Minor, and so to make our way to Constantinople.'

"I bit my lip to keep from laughing. 'And how long will it be before your victorious troops have reached the Bosphorus?' I asked.

"'Such things are in the hands of God, whose servants we are,' said he. 'It may be that I shall myself have passed away before these things are accomplished, but before the days of our children are completed, all that I have now told you will come to pass. Look at that star,' he added, pointing to a beautiful clear planet above our heads. 'That is the symbol of Christ. See how serene and peaceful it shines, like His own teaching and the memory of His life. Now,' he added, turning his outstretched hand to a dusky red star upon the horizon — the very one on which we are gazing now—'that is my star, which tells of wrath, of war, of a scourge upon sinners. And yet both are indeed stars, and each does as Allah may ordain.'

"Well, that was the experience which was called to my mind by the sight of this star to-night. Red and angry, it still broods over the south, even as I saw it that night in the desert. Somewhere down yonder that man is working and striving. He may be stabbed by some brother fanatic or slain in a tribal skirmish. If so, that is the end. But if he lives, there was that in his eyes and in his presence which tells me that Mahomet the son of Abdallah — for that was his name — will testify in some noteworthy fashion to the faith that is in him."

THE SILVER MIRROR

Jan. 3. — This affair of White and Wotherspoon's accounts proves to be a gigantic task. There are twenty thick ledgers to be examined and checked. Who would be a junior partner? However, it is the first big bit of business which has been left entirely in my hands. I must justify it. But it has to be finished so that the lawyers may have the result in time for the trial. Johnson said this morning that I should have to get the last figure out before the twentieth of the month. Good Lord! Well, have at it, and if human brain and nerve can stand the strain, I'll win out at the other side. It means office-work from ten to five, and then a second sitting from about eight to one in the morning. There's drama in an accountant's life. When I find myself in the still early hours, while all the world sleeps, hunting through column after column for those missing figures which will turn a respected alderman into a felon, I understand that it is not such a prosaic profession after all.

On Monday I came on the first trace of defalcation. No heavy game hunter ever got a finer thrill when first he caught sight of the trail of his quarry. But I look at the twenty ledgers and think of the jungle through which I have to follow him before I get my kill. Hard work — but rare sport, too, in a way! I saw the fat fellow once at a City dinner, his red face glowing above a white napkin. He looked at the little pale man at the end of the table. He would have been pale too if he could have seen the task that would be mine.

Jan. 6. — What perfect nonsense it is for doctors to prescribe rest when rest is out of the question! Asses! They might as well shout to a man who has a pack of wolves at his heels that what he wants is absolute quiet. My figures must be out by a certain date; unless they are so, I shall lose the chance of my lifetime, so how on earth am I to rest? I'll take a week or so after the trial.

Perhaps I was myself a fool to go to the doctor at all. But I get nervous and highly-strung when I sit alone at my work at night. It's not a pain — only a sort of fullness of the head with an occasional mist over the eyes. I thought perhaps some bromide, or chloral, or something of the kind might do me good. But stop work? It's absurd to ask such a thing. It's like a long distance race. You feel queer at first and your heart thumps and your lungs pant, but if you have only the pluck to keep on, you get your second wind. I'll stick to my work and wait for my second wind. If it never comes — all the same, I'll stick to my work. Two ledgers are done, and I am well on in the third. The rascal has covered his tracks well, but I pick them up for all that.

Jan. 9. — I had not meant to go to the doctor again. And yet I have had to. "Straining my nerves, risking a complete breakdown, even endangering my sanity." That's a nice sentence to have fired off at one. Well, I'll stand the strain and I'll take the risk, and so long as I can sit in my chair and move a pen I'll follow the old sinner's slot.

By the way, I may as well set down here the queer experience which drove me this second time to the doctor. I'll keep an exact record of my symptoms and sensations, because they are interesting in themselves—"a curious psycho-physiological study," says the doctor — and also because I am perfectly certain that when I am through with them they will all seem blurred and unreal, like some queer dream betwixt sleeping and waking. So now, while they are fresh, I will just make a note of them, if only as a change of thought after the endless figures.

There's an old silver-framed mirror in my room. It was given me by a friend who had a taste for antiquities, and he, as I happen to know, picked it up at a sale and had no notion where it came from. It's a large thing — three feet across and two feet high — and it leans at the back of a side-table on my left as I write. The frame is flat, about three inches across, and very old; far too old for hall-marks or other methods of determining its age. The glass part projects, with a bevelled edge, and has the magnificent reflecting power which is only, as it seems to me, to be found in very old mirrors. There's a feeling of perspective when you look into it such as no modern glass can ever give.

The mirror is so situated that as I sit at the table I can usually see nothing in it but the reflection of the red window curtains. But a queer thing happened last night. I had been working for some hours, very much against the grain, with continual bouts of that mistiness of which I had complained. Again and again I had to stop and clear my eyes. Well, on one of these occasions I chanced to look at the mirror. It had the oddest appearance. The red curtains which should have been reflected in it were no longer there, but the glass seemed to be clouded and steamy, not on the surface, which glittered like steel, but deep down in the very grain of it. This opacity, when

I stared hard at it, appeared to slowly rotate this way and that, until it was a thick white cloud swirling in heavy wreaths. So real and solid was it, and so reasonable was I, that I remember turning, with the idea that the curtains were on fire. But everything was deadly still in the room — no sound save the ticking of the clock, no movement save the slow gyration of that strange woolly cloud deep in the heart of the old mirror.

Then, as I looked, the mist, or smoke, or cloud, or whatever one may call it, seemed to coalesce and solidify at two points quite close together, and I was aware, with a thrill of interest rather than of fear, that these were two eyes looking out into the room. A vague outline of a head I could see — a woman's by the hair, but this was very shadowy. Only the eyes were quite distinct; such eyes — dark, luminous, filled with some passionate emotion, fury or horror, I could not say which. Never have I seen eyes which were so full of intense, vivid life. They were not fixed upon me, but stared out into the room. Then as I sat erect, passed my hand over my brow, and made a strong conscious effort to pull myself together, the dim head faded in the general opacity, the mirror slowly cleared, and there were the red curtains once again.

A sceptic would say, no doubt, that I had dropped asleep over my figures, and that my experience was a dream. As a matter of fact, I was never more vividly awake in my life. I was able to argue about it even as I looked at it, and to tell myself that it was a subjective impression — a chimera of the nerves — begotten by worry and insomnia. But why this particular shape? And who is the woman, and what is the dreadful emotion which I read in those wonderful brown eyes? They come between me and my work. For the first time I have done less than the daily tally which I had marked out. Perhaps that is why I have had no abnormal sensations to-night. To-morrow I must wake up, come what may.

Jan. 11. — All well, and good progress with my work. I wind the net, coil after coil, round that bulky body. But the last smile may remain with him if my own nerves break over it. The mirror would seem to be a sort of barometer which marks my brain pressure. Each night I have observed that it had clouded before I reached the end of my task.

Dr. Sinclair (who is, it seems, a bit of a psychologist) was so interested in my account that he came round this evening to have a look at the mirror. I had observed that something was scribbled in crabbed old characters upon the metal work at the back. He examined this with a lens, but could make nothing of it. “Sanc. X. Pal.” was his final reading of it, but that did not bring us any further. He advised me to put it away into another room, but, after all, whatever I may see in it is, by his own account, only a symptom. It is in the cause that the danger lies. The twenty ledgers — not the silver mirror — should be packed away if I could only do it. I’m at the eighth now, so I progress.

Jan. 13. — Perhaps it would have been wiser after all if I had packed away the mirror. I had an extraordinary experience with it last night. And yet I find it so interesting, so fascinating, that even now I will keep it in its place. What on earth is the meaning of it all?

I suppose it was about one in the morning, and I was closing my books preparatory to staggering off to bed, when I saw her there in front of me. The stage of mistiness and development must have passed unobserved, and there she was in all her beauty and passion and distress, as clear-cut as if she were really in the flesh before me. The figure was small, but very distinct — so much so that every feature, and every detail of dress, are stamped in my memory. She is seated on the extreme left of the mirror. A sort of shadowy figure crouches down beside her — I can dimly discern that it is a man — and then behind them is cloud, in which I see figures — figures which move. It is not a mere picture upon which I look. It is a scene in life, an actual episode. She crouches and quivers. The man beside her cowers down. The vague figures make abrupt movements and gestures. All my fears were swallowed up in my interest. It was maddening to see so much and not to see more.

But I can at least describe the woman to the smallest point. She is very beautiful and quite young — not more than five-and-twenty, I should judge. Her hair is of a very rich brown, with a warm chestnut shade fining into gold at the edges. A little flat-pointed cap comes to an angle in front and is made of lace edged with pearls. The forehead is high, too high perhaps for perfect beauty; but one would not have it otherwise, as it gives a touch of power and strength to what would otherwise be a softly feminine face. The brows are most delicately curved over heavy eyelids, and then come those wonderful eyes — so large, so dark, so full of overmastering emotion, of rage and horror, contending with a pride of self-control which holds her from sheer frenzy! The cheeks are pale, the lips white with agony, the chin and throat most exquisitely rounded. The figure sits and leans forward in the chair, straining and rigid, cataleptic with horror. The dress is black velvet, a jewel gleams like a flame in the breast, and a golden crucifix smoulders in the shadow of a fold. This is the lady whose image still lives in the old silver mirror. What dire deed could it be which has left its impress there, so that now, in another age, if the spirit of a man be but worn down to it, he may be conscious of its presence?

One other detail: On the left side of the skirt of the black dress was, as I thought at first, a shapeless bunch of white ribbon. Then, as I looked more intently or as the vision defined itself more clearly, I perceived what it was. It was the hand of a man, clenched and knotted in agony, which held on with a convulsive grasp to the fold of the dress. The rest of the crouching figure was a mere vague outline, but that strenuous hand shone clear on the dark background, with a sinister suggestion of tragedy in its frantic clutch. The man is frightened — horribly frightened. That I can clearly discern. What has terrified him so? Why does he grip the woman's dress? The answer lies amongst those moving figures in the background. They have brought danger both to him and to her. The interest of the thing fascinated me. I thought no more of its relation to my own nerves. I stared and stared as if in a theatre. But I could get no further. The mist thinned. There were tumultuous movements in which all the figures were vaguely concerned. Then the mirror was clear once more.

The doctor says I must drop work for a day, and I can afford to do so, for I have made good progress lately. It is quite evident that the visions depend entirely upon my own nervous state, for I sat in front of the mirror for an hour to-night, with no result whatever. My soothing day has chased them away. I wonder whether I shall ever penetrate what they all mean? I examined the mirror this evening under a good light, and besides the mysterious inscription “Sanc. X. Pal.,” I was able to discern some signs of heraldic marks, very faintly visible upon the silver. They must be very ancient, as they are almost obliterated. So far as I could make out, they were three spear-heads, two above and one below. I will show them to the doctor when he calls to-morrow.

Jan. 14. — Feel perfectly well again, and I intend that nothing else shall stop me until my task is finished. The doctor was shown the marks on the mirror and agreed that they were armorial bearings. He is deeply interested in all that I have told him, and cross-questioned me closely on the details. It amuses me to notice how he is torn in two by conflicting desires — the one that his patient should lose his symptoms, the other that the medium — for so he regards me — should solve this mystery of the past. He advised continued rest, but did not oppose me too violently when I declared that such a thing was out of the question until the ten remaining ledgers have been checked.

Jan. 17. — For three nights I have had no experiences — my day of rest has borne fruit. Only a quarter of my task is left, but I must make a forced march, for the lawyers are clamouring for their material. I will give them enough and to spare. I have him fast on a hundred counts. When they realise what a slippery, cunning rascal he is, I should gain some credit from the case. False trading accounts, false balance-sheets, dividends drawn from capital, losses written down as profits, suppression of working expenses, manipulation of petty cash — it is a fine record!

Jan. 18. — Headaches, nervous twitches, mistiness, fullness of the temples — all the premonitions of trouble, and the trouble came sure enough. And yet my real sorrow is not so much that the vision should come as that it should cease before all is revealed.

But I saw more to-night. The crouching man was as visible as the lady whose gown he clutched. He is a little swarthy fellow, with a black pointed beard. He has a loose gown of damask trimmed with fur. The prevailing tints of his dress are red. What a fright the fellow is in, to be sure! He cowers and shivers and glares back over his shoulder. There is a small knife in his other hand, but he is far too tremulous and cowed to use it. Dimly now I begin to see the figures in the background. Fierce faces, bearded and dark, shape themselves out of the mist. There is one terrible creature, a skeleton of a man, with hollow cheeks and eyes sunk in his head. He also has a knife in his hand. On the right of the woman stands a tall man, very young, with flaxen hair, his face sullen and dour. The beautiful woman looks up at him in appeal. So does the man on the ground. This youth seems to be the arbiter of their fate. The crouching man draws closer and hides himself in the woman’s skirts. The tall youth bends and tries to drag her away from him. So much I saw last night before the mirror cleared. Shall I never know what it leads to and whence it comes? It is not a mere imagination, of that I am very sure. Somewhere, some time, this scene has been acted, and this old mirror has reflected it. But when — where?

Jan. 20. — My work draws to a close, and it is time. I feel a tenseness within my brain, a sense of intolerable strain, which warns me that something must give. I have worked myself to the limit. But to-night should be the last night. With a supreme effort I should finish the final ledger and complete the case before I rise from my chair. I will do it. I will.

Feb. 7. — I did. My God, what an experience! I hardly know if I am strong enough yet to set it down.

Let me explain in the first instance that I am writing this in Dr. Sinclair’s private hospital some three weeks after the last entry in my diary. On the night of January 20 my nervous system finally gave way, and I remembered nothing afterwards until I found myself three days ago in this home of rest. And I can rest with a good conscience. My work was done before I went under. My figures are in the solicitors’ hands. The hunt is over.

And now I must describe that last night. I had sworn to finish my work, and so intently did I stick to it, though my head was bursting, that I would never look up until the last column had been added. And yet it was fine self-restraint, for all the time I knew that wonderful things were happening in the mirror. Every nerve in my body told me so. If I looked up there was an end of my work. So I did not look up till all was finished. Then, when at last with throbbing temples I threw down my pen and raised my eyes, what a sight was there!

The mirror in its silver frame was like a stage, brilliantly lit, in which a drama was in progress. There was no mist now. The oppression of my nerves had wrought this amazing clarity. Every feature, every movement, was as clear-cut as in life. To think that I, a tired accountant, the most prosaic of mankind, with the account-books of a swindling bankrupt before me, should be chosen of all the human race to look upon such a scene!

It was the same scene and the same figures, but the drama had advanced a stage. The tall young man was holding the woman in his arms. She strained away from him and looked up at him with loathing in her face. They had torn the crouching man away from his hold upon the skirt of her dress. A dozen of them were round him — savage men, bearded men. They hacked at him with knives. All seemed to strike him together. Their arms rose and fell. The blood did not flow from him — it squirted. His red dress was dabbled in it. He threw himself this way and that, purple upon crimson, like an over-ripe plum. Still they hacked, and still the jets shot from him. It was horrible — horrible! They dragged him kicking to the door. The woman looked over her shoulder at him and her mouth gaped. I heard nothing, but I knew that she was screaming. And then, whether it was this nerve-racking vision before me, or whether, my task finished, all the overwork of the past weeks came in one crushing weight upon me, the room danced round me, the floor seemed to sink away beneath my feet, and I remembered no more. In the early morning my landlady found me stretched senseless before the silver mirror, but I knew nothing myself until three days ago I awoke in the deep peace of the doctor’s nursing home.

Feb. 9. — Only to-day have I told Dr. Sinclair my full experience. He had not allowed me to speak of such matters before. He listened with an absorbed interest. “You don’t identify this with any well-known scene in history?” he asked, with suspicion in his eyes. I assured him that I knew nothing of history. “Have you no idea whence that mirror came and to whom it once belonged?” he continued. “Have you?” I asked, for he spoke with meaning. “It’s incredible,” said he, “and yet how else can one explain it? The scenes which you described before suggested it, but now it has gone beyond all range of coincidence. I will bring you some notes in the evening.”

Later. — He has just left me. Let me set down his words as closely as I can recall them. He began by laying several musty volumes upon my bed.

“These you can consult at your leisure,” said he. “I have some notes here which you can confirm. There is not a doubt that what you have seen is the murder of Rizzio by the Scottish nobles in the presence of Mary, which occurred in March, 1566. Your description of the woman is accurate. The high forehead and heavy eyelids combined with great beauty could hardly apply to two women. The tall young man was her husband, Darnley. Rizzio, says the chronicle, ‘was dressed in a loose dressing-gown of furred damask, with hose of russet velvet.’ With one hand he clutched Mary’s gown, with the other he held a dagger. Your fierce, hollow-eyed man was Ruthven, who was new-risen from a bed of sickness. Every detail is exact.”

“But why to me?” I asked, in bewilderment. “Why of all the human race to me?”

“Because you were in the fit mental state to receive the impression. Because you chanced to own the mirror which gave the impression.”

“The mirror! You think, then, that it was Mary’s mirror — that it stood in the room where the deed was done?”

“I am convinced that it was Mary’s mirror. She had been Queen of France. Her personal property would be stamped with the Royal arms. What you took to be three spear-heads were really the lilies of France.”

“And the inscription?”

"'Sanc. X. Pal.' You can expand it into Sanctæ Crucis Palatium. Some one has made a note upon the mirror as to whence it came. It was the Palace of the Holy Cross."

"Holyrood!" I cried.

"Exactly. Your mirror came from Holyrood. You have had one very singular experience, and have escaped. I trust that you will never put yourself into the way of having such another."

THE HOME-COMING

In the spring of the year 528, a small brig used to run as a passenger boat between Chalcedon on the Asiatic shore and Constantinople. On the morning in question, which was that of the feast of Saint George, the vessel was crowded with excursionists who were bound for the great city in order to take part in the religious and festive celebrations which marked the festival of the Megalo-martyr, one of the most choice occasions in the whole vast hagiology of the Eastern Church. The day was fine and the breeze light, so that the passengers in their holiday mood were able to enjoy without a qualm the many objects of interest which marked the approach to the greatest and most beautiful capital in the world.

On the right, as they sped up the narrow strait, there stretched the Asiatic shore, sprinkled with white villages and with numerous villas peeping out from the woods which adorned it. In front of them, the Prince's Islands, rising as green as emeralds out of the deep sapphire blue of the Sea of Marmora, obscured for the moment the view of the capital. As the brig rounded these, the great city burst suddenly upon their sight, and a murmur of admiration and wonder rose from the crowded deck. Tier above tier it rose, white and glittering, a hundred brazen roofs and gilded statues gleaming in the sun, with high over all the magnificent shining cupola of Saint Sophia. Seen against a cloudless sky, it was the city of a dream — too delicate, too airily lovely for earth.

In the prow of the small vessel were two travellers of singular appearance. The one was a very beautiful boy, ten or twelve years of age, swarthy, clear-cut, with dark, curling hair and vivacious black eyes, full of intelligence and of the joy of living. The other was an elderly man, gaunt-faced and grey-bearded, whose stern features were lit up by a smile as he observed the excitement and interest with which his young companion viewed the beautiful distant city and the many vessels which thronged the narrow strait.

"See! see!" cried the lad. "Look at the great red ships which sail out from yonder harbour. Surely, your holiness, they are the greatest of all ships in the world."

The old man, who was the abbot of the monastery of Saint Nicephorus in Antioch, laid his hand upon the boy’s shoulder.

“Be wary, Leon, and speak less loudly, for until we have seen your mother we should keep ourselves secret. As to the red galleys they are indeed as large as any, for they are the Imperial ships of war, which come forth from the harbour of Theodosius. Round yonder green point is the Golden Horn, where the merchant ships are moored. But now, Leon, if you follow the line of buildings past the great church, you will see a long row of pillars fronting the sea. It marks the Palace of the Cæsars.”

The boy looked at it with fixed attention. “And my mother is there,” he whispered.

“Yes, Leon, your mother the Empress Theodora and her husband the great Justinian dwell in yonder palace.”

The boy looked wistfully up into the old man’s face.

“Are you sure, Father Luke, that my mother will indeed be glad to see me?”

The abbot turned away his face to avoid those questioning eyes.

“We cannot tell, Leon. We can only try. If it should prove that there is no place for you, then there is always a welcome among the brethren of Saint Nicephorus.”

“Why did you not tell my mother that we were coming, Father Luke? Why did you not wait until you had her command?”

“At a distance, Leon, it would be easy to refuse you. An Imperial messenger would have stopped us. But when she sees you, Leon — your eyes, so like her own, your face, which carries memories of one whom she loved — then, if there be a woman’s heart within her bosom, she will take you into it. They say that the Emperor can refuse her nothing. They have no child of their own. There is a great future before you, Leon. When it comes, do not forget the poor brethren of Saint Nicephorus, who took you in when you had no friend in the world.”

The old abbot spoke cheerily, but it was easy to see from his anxious countenance that the nearer he came to the capital the more doubtful did his errand appear. What had seemed easy and natural from the quiet cloisters of Antioch became dubious and dark now that the golden domes of Constantinople glittered so close at hand. Ten years before, a wretched woman, whose very name was an offence throughout the eastern world, where she was as infamous for her dishonour as famous for her beauty, had come to the monastery gate, and had persuaded the monks to take charge of her infant son, the child of her shame. There he had been ever since. But she, Theodora, the harlot, returning to the capital, had by the strangest turn of fortune's wheel caught the fancy and finally the enduring love of Justinian the heir to the throne. Then on the death of his uncle Justin, the young man had become the greatest monarch upon the earth, and raised Theodora to be not only his wife and Empress, but to be absolute ruler with powers equal to and independent of his own. And she, the polluted one, had risen to the dignity, had cut herself sternly away from all that related to her past life, and had shown signs already of being a great Queen, stronger and wiser than her husband, but fierce, vindictive, and unbending, a firm support to her friends, but a terror to her foes. This was the woman to whom the Abbot Luke of Antioch was bringing Leon, her forgotten son. If ever her mind strayed back to the days when, abandoned by her lover Ecebolus, the Governor of the African Pentapolis, she had made her way on foot through Asia Minor, and left her infant with the monks, it was only to persuade herself that the brethren cloistered far from the world would never identify Theodora the Empress with Theodora the dissolute wanderer, and that the fruits of her sin would be for ever concealed from her Imperial husband.

The little brig had now rounded the point of the Acropolis, and the long blue stretch of the Golden Horn lay before it. The high wall of Theodosius lined the whole harbour, but a narrow verge of land had been left between it and the water's edge to serve as a quay. The vessel ran alongside near the Neorion Gate, and the passengers, after a short scrutiny from the group of helmeted guards who lounged beside it, were allowed to pass through into the great city.

The abbot, who had made several visits to Constantinople upon the business of his monastery, walked with the assured step of one who knows his ground; while the boy, alarmed and yet pleased by the rush of people, the roar and clatter of passing chariots, and the vista of magnificent buildings, held tightly to the loose gown of his guide, while staring eagerly about him in every direction. Passing through the steep and narrow streets which led up from the water, they emerged into the open space which surrounds the magnificent pile of Saint Sophia, the great church begun by Constantine, hallowed by Saint Chrysostom, and now the seat of the Patriarch, and the very centre of the Eastern Church. Only with many crossings and genuflections did the pious abbot succeed in passing the revered shrine of his religion, and hurried on to his difficult task.

Having passed Saint Sophia, the two travellers crossed the marble-paved Augusteum, and saw upon their right the gilded gates of the hippodrome through which a vast crowd of people was pressing, for though the morning had been devoted to the religious ceremony, the afternoon was given over to secular festivities. So great was the rush of the populace that the two strangers had some difficulty in disengaging themselves from the stream and reaching the huge arch of black marble which formed the outer gate of the palace. Within they were fiercely ordered to halt by a gold-crested and magnificent sentinel who laid his shining spear across their breasts until his superior officer should give them permission to pass. The abbot had been warned, however, that all obstacles would give way if he mentioned the name of Basil the eunuch, who acted as chamberlain of the palace and also as Parakimomen — a high office which meant that he slept at the door of the Imperial bed-chamber. The charm worked wonderfully, for at the mention of that potent name the Protosphathaire, or Head of the Palace Guards, who chanced to be upon the spot, immediately detached one of his soldiers with instructions to convoy the two strangers into the presence of the chamberlain.

Passing in succession a middle guard and an inner guard, the travellers came at last into the palace proper, and followed their majestic guide from chamber to chamber, each more wonderful than the last. Marbles and gold, velvet and silver, glittering mosaics, wonderful carvings, ivory screens, curtains of Armenian tissue and of Indian silk, damask from Arabia, and amber from the Baltic — all these things merged themselves in the minds of the two simple provincials, until their eyes ached and their senses reeled before the blaze and the glory of this, the most magnificent of the dwellings of man. Finally, a pair of curtains, crusted with, gold, were parted, and their guide handed them over to a negro eunuch who stood within. A heavy, fat, brown-skinned man, with a large, flabby, hairless face, was pacing up and down the small apartment, and he turned upon them as they entered with an abominable and threatening smile. His loose lips and pendulous cheeks were those of a gross old woman, but above them there shone a pair of dark malignant eyes, full of fierce intensity of observation and judgment.

“You have entered the palace by using my name,” he said. “It is one of my boasts that any of the populace can approach me in this way. But it is not fortunate for those who take advantage of it without due cause.” Again he smiled a smile which made the frightened boy cling tightly to the loose serge skirts of the abbot.

But the ecclesiastic was a man of courage. Undaunted by the sinister appearance of the great chamberlain, or by the threat which lay in his words, he laid his hand upon his young companion’s shoulder and faced the eunuch with a confident smile.

“I have no doubt, your excellency,” said he, “that the importance of my mission has given me the right to enter the palace. The only thing which troubles me is whether it may not be so important as to forbid me from broaching it to you, or indeed, to anybody save the Empress Theodora, since it is she only whom it concerns.”

The eunuch’s thick eyebrows bunched together over his vicious eyes.

“You must make good those words,” he said. “If my gracious master — the ever-glorious Emperor Justinian — does not disdain to take me into his most intimate confidence in all things, it would be strange if there were any subject within your knowledge which I might not hear. You are, as I gather from your garb and bearing, the abbot of some Asiatic monastery?”

“You are right, your excellency, I am the Abbot of the Monastery of St. Nicephorus in Antioch. But I repeat that I am assured that what I have to say is for the ear of the Empress Theodora only.”

The eunuch was evidently puzzled, and his curiosity aroused by the old man’s persistence. He came nearer, his heavy face thrust forward, his flabby brown hands, like two sponges, resting upon the table of yellow jasper before him.

“Old man,” said he, “there is no secret which concerns the Empress which may not be told to me. But if you refuse to speak, it is certain that you will never see her. Why should I admit you, unless I know your errand? How should I know that you are not a Manichean heretic with a poniard in your bosom, longing for the blood of the mother of the Church?”

The abbot hesitated no longer. “If there be a mistake in the matter, then on your head be it,” said he. “Know then that this lad Leon is the son of Theodora the Empress, left by her in our monastery within a month of his birth ten years ago. This papyrus which I hand you will show you that what I say is beyond all question or doubt.”

The eunuch Basil took the paper, but his eyes were fixed upon the boy, and his features showed a mixture of amazement at the news that he had received, and of cunning speculation as to how he could turn it to profit.

"Indeed, he is the very image of the Empress," he muttered; and then, with sudden suspicion, "Is it not the chance of this likeness which has put the scheme into your head, old man?"

"There is but one way to answer that," said the abbot. "It is to ask the Empress herself whether what I say is not true, and to give her the glad tidings that her boy is alive and well."

The tone of confidence, together with the testimony of the papyrus, and the boy's beautiful face, removed the last shadow of doubt from the eunuch's mind. Here was a great fact; but what use could be made of it? Above all, what advantage could he draw from it? He stood with his fat chin in his hand, turning it over in his cunning brain.

"Old man," said he at last, "to how many have you told this secret?"

"To no one in the whole world," the other answered. "There is Deacon Bardas at the monastery and myself. No one else knows anything."

"You are sure of this?"

"Absolutely certain."

The eunuch had made up his mind. If he alone of all men in the palace knew of this event, he would have a powerful hold over his masterful mistress. He was certain that Justinian the Emperor knew nothing of this. It would be a shock to him. It might even alienate his affections from his wife. She might care to take precautions to prevent him from knowing. And if he, Basil the eunuch, was her confederate in those precautions, then how very close it must draw him to her. All this flashed through his mind as he stood, the papyrus in his hand, looking at the old man and the boy.

"Stay here," said he. "I will be with you again." With a swift rustle of his silken robes he swept from the chamber.

A few minutes had elapsed when a curtain at the end of the room was pushed aside, and the eunuch, reappearing, held it back, doubling his unwieldy body into a profound obeisance as he did so. Through the gap came a small alert woman, clad in golden tissue, with a loose outer mantle and shoes of the Imperial purple. That colour alone showed that she could be none other than the Empress; but the dignity of her carriage, the fierce authority of her magnificent dark eyes, and the perfect beauty of her haughty face, all proclaimed that it could only be that of Theodora who, in spite of her lowly origin, was the most majestic as well as the most maturely lovely of all the women in her kingdom. Gone now were the buffoon tricks which the daughter of Acacius the bearward had learned in the amphitheatre; gone too was the light charm of the wanton, and what was left was the worthy mate of a great king, the measured dignity of one who was every inch an empress.

Disregarding the two men, Theodora walked up to the boy, placed her two white hands upon his shoulders, and looked with a long questioning gaze, a gaze which began with hard suspicion and ended with tender recognition, into those large lustrous eyes which were the very reflection of her own. At first the sensitive lad was chilled by the cold intent question of the look; but as it softened, his own spirit responded, until suddenly, with a cry of “Mother! Mother!” he cast himself into her arms, his hands locked round her neck, his face buried in her bosom. Carried away by the sudden natural outburst of emotion, her own arms tightened round the lad’s figure, and she strained him for an instant to her heart. Then, the strength of the Empress gaining instant command over the temporary weakness of the mother, she pushed him back from her, and waved that they should leave her to herself. The slaves in attendance hurried the two visitors from the room. Basil the eunuch lingered, looking down at his mistress, who had thrown herself upon a damask couch, her lips white and her bosom heaving with the tumult of her emotion. She glanced up and met the chancellor’s crafty gaze, her woman’s instinct reading the threat that lurked within it.

“I am in your power,” she said. “The Emperor must never know of this.”

“I am your slave,” said the eunuch, with his ambiguous smile. “I am an instrument in your hand. If it is your will that the Emperor should know nothing, then who is to tell him?”

“But the monk, the boy. What are we to do?”

“There is only one way for safety,” said the eunuch.

She looked at him with horrified eyes. His spongy hands were pointing down to the floor. There was an underground world to this beautiful palace, a shadow that was ever close to the light, a region of dimly-lit passages, of shadowed corners, of noiseless, tongueless slaves, of sudden sharp screams in the darkness. To this the eunuch was pointing.

A terrible struggle rent her breast. The beautiful boy was hers, flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone. She knew it beyond all question or doubt. It was her one child, and her whole heart went out to him. But Justinian! She knew the Emperor’s strange limitations. Her career in the past was forgotten. He had swept it all aside by special Imperial decree published throughout the Empire, as if she were new-born through the power of his will, and her association with his person. But they were childless, and this sight of one which was not his own would cut him to the quick. He could dismiss her infamous past from his mind, but if it took the concrete shape of this beautiful child, then how could he wave it aside as if it had never been? All her instincts and her intimate knowledge of the man told her that even her charm and her influence might fail under such circumstances to save her from ruin. Her divorce would be as easy to him as her elevation had been. She was balanced upon a giddy pinnacle, the highest in the world, and yet the higher the deeper the fall. Everything that earth could give was now at her feet. Was she to risk the losing of it all — for what? For a weakness which was unworthy of an Empress, for a foolish new-born spasm of love, for that which had no existence within her in the morning? How could she be so foolish as to risk losing such a substance for such a shadow?

"Leave it to me," said the brown watchful face above her.

"Must it be — death?"

"There is no real safety outside. But if your heart is too merciful, then by the loss of sight and speech — —"

She saw in her mind the white-hot iron approaching those glorious eyes, and she shuddered at the thought.

"No, no! Better death than that!"

"Let it be death then. You are wise, great Empress, for there only is real safety and assurance of silence."

"And the monk?"

"Him also."

"But the Holy Synod! He is a tonsured priest. What would the Patriarch do?"

"Silence his babbling tongue. Then let them do what they will. How are we of the palace to know that this conspirator, taken with a dagger in his sleeve, is really what he says?"

Again she shuddered and shrank down among the cushions.

"Speak not of it, think not of it," said the eunuch. "Say only that you leave it in my hands. Nay, then, if you cannot say it, do but nod your head, and I take it as your signal."

In that instant there flashed before Theodora's mind a vision of all her enemies, of all those who envied her rise, of all whose hatred and contempt would rise into a clamour of delight could they see the daughter of the bearward hurled down again into that abyss from which she had been dragged. Her face hardened, her lips tightened, her little hands clenched in the agony of her thought.

"Do it!" she said.

In an instant, with a terrible smile, the messenger of death hurried from the room. She groaned aloud, and buried herself yet deeper amid the silken cushions, clutching them frantically with convulsed and twitching hands.

The eunuch wasted no time, for this deed, once done, he became — save for that insignificant monk in Asia Minor, whose fate would soon be sealed — the only sharer of Theodora's secret, and therefore the only person who could curb and bend that imperious nature. Hurrying into the chamber where the visitors were waiting, he gave a sinister signal, only too well known in those iron days. In an instant the black mutes in attendance seized the old man and the boy, pushing them swiftly down a passage and into a meaner portion of the palace, where the heavy smell of luscious cooking proclaimed the neighbourhood of the kitchens. A side corridor led to a heavily-barred iron door, and this in turn opened upon a steep flight of stone steps, feebly illuminated by the glimmer of wall lamps. At the head and foot stood a mute sentinel like an ebony statue, and below, along the dusky and forbidding passages from which the cells opened, a succession of niches in the wall were occupied by a similar guardian. The unfortunate visitors were dragged brutally down a number of stone-flagged and dismal corridors until they descended another long stair which led so deeply into the earth that the damp feeling in the heavy air and the drip of water all round showed that they had come down to the level of the sea. Groans and cries, like those of sick animals, from the various grated doors which they passed showed how many there were who spent their whole lives in this humid and poisonous atmosphere.

At the end of this lowest passage was a door which opened into a single large vaulted room. It was devoid of furniture, but in the centre was a large and heavy wooden board clamped with iron. This lay upon a rude stone parapet, engraved with inscriptions beyond the wit of the eastern scholars, for this old well dated from a time before the Greeks founded Byzantium, when men of Chaldea and Phœnicia built with huge unmortared blocks, far below the level of the town of Constantine. The door was closed, and the eunuch beckoned to the slaves that they should remove the slab which covered the well of death. The frightened boy screamed and clung to the abbot, who, ashy-pale and trembling, was pleading hard to melt the heart of the ferocious eunuch.

“Surely, surely, you would not slay the innocent boy!” he cried. “What has he done? Was it his fault that he came here? I alone — I and Deacon Bardas — are to blame. Punish us, if some one must indeed be punished. We are old. It is to-day or to-morrow with us. But he is so young and so beautiful, with all his life before him. Oh, sir! oh, your excellency, you would not have the heart to hurt him!”

He threw himself down and clutched at the eunuch’s knees, while the boy sobbed piteously and cast horror-stricken eyes at the black slaves who were tearing the wooden slab from the ancient parapet beneath. The only answer which the chamberlain gave to the frantic pleadings of the abbot was to take a stone which lay on the coping of the well and toss it in. It could be heard clattering against the old, damp, mildewed walls, until it fell with a hollow boom into some far distant subterranean pool. Then he again motioned with his hands, and the black slaves threw themselves upon the boy and dragged him away from his guardian. So shrill was his clamour that no one heard the approach of the Empress. With a swift rush she had entered the room, and her arms were round her son.

“It shall not be! It cannot be!” she cried. “No, no, my darling! my darling! they shall do you no hurt. I was mad to think of it — mad and wicked to dream of it. Oh, my sweet boy! to think that your mother might have had your blood upon her head!”

The eunuch’s brows were gathered together at this failure of his plans, at this fresh example of feminine caprice.

“Why kill them, great lady, if it pains your gracious heart?” said he. “With a knife and a branding-iron they can be disarmed for ever.”

She paid no attention to his words. “Kiss me, Leon!” she cried. “Just once let me feel my own child’s soft lips rest upon mine. Now again! No, no more, or I shall weaken for what I have still to say and still to do. Old man, you are very near a natural grave, and I cannot think from your venerable aspect that words of falsehood would come readily to your lips. You have indeed kept my secret all these years, have you not?”

“I have in very truth, great Empress. I swear to you by Saint Nicephorus, patron of our house, that save old Deacon Bardas, there is none who knows.”

“Then let your lips still be sealed. If you have kept faith in the past, I see no reason why you should be a babbler in the future. And you, Leon” — she bent her wonderful eyes with a strange mixture of sternness and of love upon the boy, “can I trust you? Will you keep a secret which could never help you, but would be the ruin and downfall of your mother?”

“Oh, mother, I would not hurt you! I swear that I will be silent.”

“Then I trust you both. Such provision will be made for your monastery and for your own personal comforts as will make you bless the day you came to my palace. Now you may go. I wish never to see you again. If I did, you might find me in a softer mood, or in a harder, and the one would lead to my undoing, the other to yours. But if by whisper or rumour I have reason to think that you have failed me, then you and your monks and your monastery will have such an end as will be a lesson for ever to those who would break faith with their Empress.”

“I will never speak,” said the old abbot; “neither will Deacon Bardas; neither will Leon. For all three I can answer. But there are others — these slaves, the chancellor. We may be punished for another’s fault.”

“Not so,” said the Empress, and her eyes were like flints. “These slaves are voiceless; nor have they any means to tell those secrets which they know. As to you, Basil — —” She raised her white hand with the same deadly gesture which he had himself used so short a time before. The black slaves were on him like hounds on a stag.

“Oh, my gracious mistress, dear lady, what is this? What is this? You cannot mean it!” he screamed, in his high, cracked voice. “Oh, what have I done? Why should I die?”

“You have turned me against my own. You have goaded me to slay my own son. You have intended to use my secret against me. I read it in your eyes from the first. Cruel, murderous villain, taste the fate which you have yourself given to so many others. This is your doom. I have spoken.”

The old man and the boy hurried in horror from the vault. As they glanced back they saw the erect, inflexible, shimmering, gold-clad figure of the Empress. Beyond they had a glimpse of the green-scummed lining of the well, and of the great red open mouth of the eunuch, as he screamed and prayed while every tug of the straining slaves brought him one step nearer to the brink. With their hands over their ears they rushed away, but even so they heard that last woman-like shriek, and then the heavy plunge far down in the dark abysses of the earth.

A POINT OF CONTACT

A curious train of thought is started when one reflects upon those great figures who have trod the stage of this earth, and actually played their parts in the same act, without ever coming face to face, or even knowing of each other's existence. Baber, the Great Mogul, was, for example, overrunning India at the very moment when Hernando Cortez was overrunning Mexico, and yet the two could never have heard of each other. Or, to take a more supreme example, what could the Emperor Augustus Cæsar know of a certain Carpenter's shop wherein there worked a dreamy-eyed boy who was destined to change the whole face of the world? It may be, however, that sometimes these great contemporary forces did approach, touch, and separate — each unaware of the true meaning of the other. So it was in the instance which is now narrated.

It was evening in the port of Tyre, some eleven hundred years before the coming of Christ. The city held, at that time, about a quarter of a million of inhabitants, the majority of whom dwelt upon the mainland, where the buildings of the wealthy merchants, each in its own tree-girt garden, extended for seven miles along the coast. The great island, however, from which the town got its name, lay out some distance from the shore, and contained within its narrow borders the more famous of the temples and public buildings. Of these temples the chief was that of Melmoth, which covered with its long colonnades the greater part of that side of the island which looked down upon the Sidonian port, so called because only twenty miles away the older city of Sidon maintained a constant stream of traffic with its rising offshoot.

Inns were not yet in vogue, but the poorer traveller found his quarters with hospitable citizens, while men of distinction were frequently housed in the annex of the temples, where the servants of the priests attended to their wants. On that particular evening there stood in the portico of the temple of Melmoth two remarkable figures who were the centre of observation for a considerable fringe of Phœnician idlers. One of these men was clearly by his face and demeanour a great chieftain. His strongly-marked features were those of a man who had led an adventurous life, and were suggestive of every virile quality from brave resolve to desperate execution. His broad, high brow and contemplative eyes showed that he was a man of wisdom as well as of valour. He was clad, as became a Greek nobleman of the period, with a pure white linen tunic, a gold-studded belt supporting a short sword, and a purple cloak. The lower legs were bare, and the feet covered by sandals of red leather, while a cap of white cloth was pushed back upon his brown curls, for the heat of the day was past and the evening breeze most welcome.

His companion was a short, thick-set man, bull-necked and swarthy, clad in some dusky cloth which gave him a sombre appearance relieved only by the vivid scarlet of his woollen cap. His manner towards his comrade was one of deference, and yet there was in it also something of that freshness and frankness which go with common dangers and a common interest.

“Be not impatient, sire,” he was saying. “Give me two days, or three at the most, and we shall make as brave a show at the muster as any. But, indeed, they would smile if they saw us crawl up to Tenedos with ten missing oars and the mainsail blown into rags.”

The other frowned and stamped his foot with anger.

“We should have been there now had it not been for this cursed mischance,” said he. “Aeolus played us a pretty trick when he sent such a blast out of a cloudless sky.”

“Well, sire, two of the Cretan galleys foundered, and Trophimes, the pilot, swears that one of the Argos ships was in trouble. Pray Zeus that it was not the galley of Menelaus. We shall not be the last at the muster.”

“It is well that Troy stands a good ten miles from the sea, for if they came out at us with a fleet they might have us at a disadvantage. We had no choice but to come here and refit, yet I shall have no happy hour until I see the white foam from the lash of our oars once more. Go, Seleucas, and speed them all you may.”

The officer bowed and departed, while the chieftain stood with his eyes fixed upon his great dismantled galley over which the riggers and carpenters were swarming. Further out in the roadstead lay eleven other smaller galleys, waiting until their wounded flagship should be ready for them. The sun, as it shone upon them, gleamed upon hundreds of bronze helmets and breastplates, telling of the warlike nature of the errand upon which they were engaged. Save for them the port was filled with bustling merchant ships taking in cargoes or disgorging them upon the quays. At the very feet of the Greek chieftain three broad barges were moored, and gangs of labourers with wooden shovels were heaving out the mussels brought from Dor, destined to supply the famous Tyrian dye-works which adorn the most noble of all garments. Beside them was a tin ship from Britain, and the square boxes of that precious metal, so needful for the making of bronze, were being passed from hand to hand to the waiting waggons. The Greek found himself smiling at the uncouth wonder of a Cornishman who had come with his tin, and who was now lost in amazement as he stared at the long colonnades of the Temple of Melmoth and the high front of the Shrine of Ashtaroth behind it. Even as he gazed some of his ship-mates passed their hands through his arms and led him along the quay to a wine-shop, as being a building much more within his comprehension. The Greek, still smiling, was turning on his heels to return to the Temple, when one of the clean-shaven priests of Baal came towards him.

“It is rumoured, sire,” said he, “that you are on a very distant and dangerous venture. Indeed, it is well known from the talk of your soldiers what it is that you have on hand.”

“It is true,” said the Greek, “that we have a hard task before us. But it would have been harder to bide at home and to feel that the honour of a leader of the Argives had been soiled by this dog from Asia.”

“I hear that all Greece has taken up the quarrel.”

“Yes, there is not a chief from Thessaly to the Malea who has not called out his men, and there were twelve hundred galleys in the harbour of Aulis.”

“It is a great host,” said the priest. “But have ye any seers or prophets among ye who can tell what will come to pass?”

“Yes, we had one such, Calchas his name. He has said that for nine years we shall strive, and only on the tenth will the victory come.”

“That is but cold comfort,” said the priest. “It is, indeed, a great prize which can be worth ten years of a man’s life.”

“I would give,” the Greek answered, “not ten years but all my life if I could but lay proud Ilium in ashes and carry back Helen to her palace on the hill of Argos.”

“I pray Baal, whose priest I am, that you may have good fortune,” said the Phœnician. “I have heard that these Trojans are stout soldiers, and that Hector, the son of Priam, is a mighty leader.”

The Greek smiled proudly.

“They must be stout and well-fed also,” said he, “if they can stand the brunt against the long-haired Argives with such captains as Agamemnon, the son of Atreus from golden Mycenæ, or Achilles, son of Peleus, with his myrmidons. But these things are on the knees of the Fates. In the meantime, my friend, I would fain know who these strange people are who come down the street, for their chieftain has the air of one who is made for great deeds.”

A tall man clad in a long white robe, with a golden fillet running through his flowing auburn hair, was striding down the street with the free elastic gait of one who has lived an active life in the open. His face was ruddy and noble, with a short, crisp beard covering a strong, square jaw. In his clear blue eyes as he looked at the evening sky and the busy waters beneath him there was something of the exaltation of the poet, while a youth walking beside him and carrying a harp hinted at the graces of music. On the other side of him, however, a second squire bore a brazen shield and a heavy spear, so that his master might never be caught unawares by his enemies. In his train there came a tumultuous rabble of dark hawk-like men, armed to the teeth, and peering about with covetous eyes at the signs of wealth which lay in profusion around them. They were swarthy as Arabs, and yet they were better clad and better armed than the wild children of the desert.

“They are but barbarians,” said the priest. “He is a small king from the mountain parts opposite Philistia, and he comes here because he is building up the town of Jebus, which he means to be his chief city. It is only here that he can find the wood, and stone, and craftsmanship that he desires. The youth with the harp is his son. But I pray you, chief, if you would know what is before you at Troy, to come now into the outer hall of the Temple with me, for we have there a famous seer, the prophetess Alaga who is also the priestess of Ashtaroth. It may be that she can do for you what she has done for many others, and send you forth from Tyre in your hollow ships with a better heart than you came.”

To the Greeks, who by oracles, omens, and auguries were for ever prying into the future, such a suggestion was always welcome. The Greek followed the priest to the inner sanctuary, where sat the famous Pythoness — a tall, fair woman of middle age, who sat at a stone table upon which was an abacus or tray filled with sand. She held a style of chalcedony, and with this she traced strange lines and curves upon the smooth surface, her chin leaning upon her other hand and her eyes cast down. As the chief and the priest approached her she did not look up, but she quickened the movements of her pencil, so that curve followed curve in quick succession. Then, still with downcast eyes, she spoke in a strange, high, sighing voice like wind amid the trees.

“Who, then, is this who comes to Alaga of Tyre, the handmaiden of great Ashtaroth? Behold I see an island to the west, and an old man who is the father, and the great chief, and his wife, and his son who now waits him at home, being too young for the wars. Is this not true?”

“Yes, maiden, you have said truth,” the Greek answered.

“I have had many great ones before me, but none greater than you, for three thousand years from now people will still talk of your bravery and of your wisdom. They will remember also the faithful wife at home, and the name of the old man, your father, and of the boy your son — all will be remembered when the very stones of noble Sidon and royal Tyre are no more.”

“Nay, say not so, Alaga!” cried the priest.

“I speak not what I desire but what it is given to me to say. For ten years you will strive, and then you will win, and victory will bring rest to others, but only new troubles to you. Ah!” The prophetess suddenly started in violent surprise, and her hand made ever faster markings on the sand.

“What is it that ails you, Alaga?” asked the priest.

The woman had looked up with wild inquiring eyes. Her gaze was neither for the priest nor for the chief, but shot past them to the further door. Looking round the Greek was aware that two new figures had entered the room. They were the ruddy barbarian whom he had marked in the street, together with the youth who bore his harp.

“It is a marvel upon marvels that two such should enter my chamber on the same day,” cried the priestess. “Have I not said that you were the greatest that ever came, and yet behold here is already one who is greater. For he and his son — even this youth whom I see before me — will also be in the minds of all men when lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules shall have taken the place of Phœnicia and of Greece. Hail to you, stranger, hail! Pass on to your work for it awaits you, and it is great beyond words of mine.” Rising from her stool the woman dropped her pencil upon the sand and passed swiftly from the room.

“It is over,” said the priest. “Never have I heard her speak such words.”

The Greek chief looked with interest at the barbarian. “You speak Greek?” he asked.

“Indifferently well,” said the other. “Yet I should understand it seeing that I spent a long year at Ziklag in the land of the Philistines.”

“It would seem,” said the Greek, “that the gods have chosen us both to play a part in the world.”

“Stranger,” the barbarian answered, “there is but one God.”

“Say you so? Well, it is a matter to be argued at some better time. But I would fain have your name and style and what is it you purpose to do, so that we may perchance hear of each other in the years to come. For my part I am Odysseus, known also as Ulysses, the King of Ithaca, with the good Laertes as my father and young Telemachus as my son. For my work, it is the taking of Troy.”

“And my work,” said the barbarian, “is the building of Jebus, which now we call Jerusalem. Our ways lie separate, but it may come back to your memory that you have crossed the path of David, second King of the Hebrews, together with his young son Solomon, who may follow him upon the throne of Israel.”

So he turned and went forth into the darkened streets where his spearmen were awaiting him, while the Greek passed down to his boat that he might see what was still to be done ere he could set forth upon his voyage.

THE CENTURION

[*Being the fragment of a letter from Sulpicius Balbus, Legate of the Tenth Legion, to his uncle, Lucius Piso, in his villa near Baiae, dated The Kalends of the month of Augustus in the year 824 of Rome.*]

I promised you, my dear uncle, that I would tell you anything of interest concerning the siege of Jerusalem; but, indeed, these people whom we imagined to be unwarlike have kept us so busy that there has been little time for letter-writing. We came to Judæa thinking that a mere blowing of trumpets and a shout would finish the affair, and picturing a splendid triumph in the *via sacra* to follow, with all the girls in Rome throwing flowers and kisses to us. Well, we may get our triumph, and possibly the kisses also, but I can assure you that not even you who have seen such hard service on the Rhine can ever have experienced a more severe campaign than this has been. We have now won the town, and to-day their temple is burning, and the smoke sets me coughing as I sit writing in my tent. But it has been a terrible business, and I am sure none of us wish to see Judæa again.

In fighting the Gauls, or the Germans, you are against brave men, animated by the love of their country. This passion acts more, however, upon some than others, so that the whole army is not equally inflamed by it. These Jews, however, besides their love of country, which is very strong, have a desperate religious fervour, which gives them a fury in battle such as none of us have ever seen. They throw themselves with a shriek of joy upon our swords and lances, as if death were all that they desired.

If one gets past your guard may Jove protect you, for their knives are deadly, and if it comes to a hand-to-hand grapple they are as dangerous as wild beasts, who would claw out your eyes or your throat. You know that our fellows of the Tenth Legion have been, ever since Cæsar’s time, as rough soldiers as any with the Eagles, but I can assure you that I have seen them positively cowed by the fury of these fanatics. As a matter of fact we have had least to bear, for it has been our task from the beginning to guard the base of the peninsula upon which this extraordinary town is built. It has steep precipices upon all the other sides, so that it is only on this one northern base that fugitives could escape or a rescue come. Meanwhile, the fifth, fifteenth, and the twelfth or Syrian legions have done the work, together with the auxiliaries. Poor devils! we have often pitied them, and there have been times when it was difficult to say whether we were attacking the town or the town was attacking us. They broke down our tortoises with their stones, burned our turrets with their fire, and dashed right through our whole camp to destroy the supplies in the rear. If any man says a Jew is not a good soldier, you may be sure that he has never been in Judæa.

However, all this has nothing to do with what I took up my stylus to tell you. No doubt it is the common gossip of the forum and of the baths how our army, excellently handled by the princely Titus, carried one line of wall after the other until we had only the temple before us. This, however, is — or was, for I see it burning even as I write — a very strong fortress. Romans have no idea of the magnificence of this place. The temple of which I speak is a far finer building than any we have in Rome, and so is the Palace, built by Herod or Agrippa, I really forget which. This temple is two hundred paces each way, with stones so fitted that the blade of a knife will not go between, and the soldiers say there is gold enough within to fill the pockets of the whole army. This idea puts some fury into the attack, as you can believe, but with these flames I fear a great deal of the plunder will be lost.

There was a great fight at the temple, and it was rumoured that it would be carried by storm to-night, so I went out on to the rising ground whence one sees the city best. I wonder, uncle, if in your many campaigns you have ever smelt the smell of a large beleaguered town. The wind was south to-night, and this terrible smell of death came straight to our nostrils. There were half a million people there, and every form of disease, starvation, decomposition, filth and horror, all pent in within a narrow compass. You know how the lion sheds smell behind the Circus Maximus, acid and foul. It is like that, but there is a low, deadly, subtle odour which lies beneath it and makes your very heart sink within you. Such was the smell which came up from the city to-night.

As I stood in the darkness, wrapped in my scarlet chlamys — for the evenings here are chill — I was suddenly aware that I was not alone. A tall, silent figure was near me, looking down at the town even as I was. I could see in the moonlight that he was clad as an officer, and as I approached him I recognized that it was Longinus, third tribune of my own legion, and a soldier of great age and experience. He is a strange, silent man, who is respected by all, but understood by none, for he keeps his own council and thinks rather than talks. As I approached him the first flames burst from the temple, a high column of fire, which cast a glow upon our faces and gleamed upon our armour. In this red light I saw that the gaunt face of my companion was set like iron.

"At last!" said he. "At last!"

He was speaking to himself rather than to me, for he started and seemed confused when I asked him what he meant.

"I have long thought that evil would come to the place," said he. "Now I see that it has come, and so I said 'At last!'"

"For that matter," I answered, "we have all seen that evil would come to the place, since it has again and again defied the authority of the Cæsars."

He looked keenly at me with a question in his eyes. Then he said:

"I have heard, sir, that you are one who has a full sympathy in the matter of the gods, believing that every man should worship according to his own conscience and belief."

I answered that I was a Stoic of the school of Seneca, who held that this world is a small matter and that we should care little for its fortunes, but develop within ourselves a contempt for all but the highest.

He smiled in grim fashion at this.

"I have heard," said he, "that Seneca died the richest man in all Nero's Empire, so he made the best of this world in spite of his philosophy."

"What are your own beliefs?" I asked. "Are you, perhaps, one who has fathomed the mysteries of Isis, or been admitted to the Society of Mythra?"

"Have you ever heard," he asked, "of the Christians?"

"Yes," said I. "There were some slaves and wandering men in Rome who called themselves such. They worshipped, so far as I could gather, some man who died over here in Judæa. He was put to death, I believe, in the time of Tiberius."

"That is so," he answered. "It was at the time when Pilate was procurator — Pontius Pilate, the brother of old Lucius Pilate, who had Egypt in the time of Augustus. Pilate was of two minds in the matter, but the mob was as wild and savage as these very men that we have been contending with. Pilate tried to put them off with a criminal, hoping that so long as they had blood they would be satisfied. But they chose the other, and he was not strong enough to withstand them. Ah! it was a pity — a sad pity!"

"You seem to know a good deal about it," said I.

“I was there,” said the man simply, and became silent, while we both looked down at the huge column of flame from the burning temple. As it flared up we could see the white tents of the army and all the country round. There was a low hill just outside the city, and my companion pointed to it.

“That was where it happened,” said he. “I forget the name of the place, but in those days — it was more than thirty years ago — they put their criminals to death there. But He was no criminal. It is always His eyes that I think of — the look in His eyes.”

“What about the eyes, then?”

“They have haunted me ever since. I see them now. All the sorrow of earth seemed mirrored in them. Sad, sad, and yet such a deep, tender pity! One would have said that it was He who needed pity had you seen His poor battered, disfigured face. But He had no thought for Himself — it was the great world pity that looked out of His gentle eyes. There was a noble maniple of the legion there, and not a man among them who did not wish to charge the howling crowd who were dragging such a man to His death.”

“What were you doing there?”

“I was Junior Centurion, with the gold vine-rod fresh on my shoulders. I was on duty on the hill, and never had a job that I liked less. But discipline has to be observed, and Pilate had given the order. But I thought at the time — and I was not the only one — that this man’s name and work would not be forgotten, and that there would be a curse on the place that had done such a deed. There was an old woman there, His mother, with her grey hair down her back. I remember how she shrieked when one of our fellows with his lance put Him out of his pain. And a few others, women and men, poor and ragged, stood by Him. But, you see, it has turned out as I thought. Even in Rome, as you have observed, His followers have appeared.”

“I rather fancy,” said I, “that I am speaking to one of them.”

“At least, I have not forgotten,” said he. “I have been in the wars ever since with little time for study. But my pension is overdue, and when I have changed the sagum for the toga, and the tent for some little farm up Como way, then I shall look more deeply into these things, if, perchance, I can find some one to instruct me.”

And so I left him. I only tell you all this because I remember that you took an interest in the man, Paulus, who was put to death for preaching this religion. You told me that it had reached Cæsar’s palace, and I can tell you now that it has reached Cæsar’s soldiers as well. But apart from this matter

I wish to tell you some of the adventures which we have had recently in raiding for food among the hills, which stretch as far south as the river Jordan. The other day ...

[*Here the fragment is ended.*]

THE END

THE LAST GALLEY

IMPRESSIONS AND TALES

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PREFACE

I have written “Impressions and Tales” upon the title-page of this volume, because I have included within the same cover two styles of work which present an essential difference.

The second half of the collection consists of eight stories, which explain themselves.

The first half is made up of a series of pictures of the past which maybe regarded as trial flights towards a larger ideal which I have long had in my mind. It has seemed to me that there is a region between actual story and actual history which has never been adequately exploited. I could imagine, for example, a work dealing with some great historical epoch, and finding its interest not in the happenings to particular individuals, their adventures and their loves, but in the fascination of the actual facts of history themselves. These facts might be coloured with the glamour which the writer of fiction can give, and fictitious characters and conversations might illustrate them; but none the less the actual drama of history and not the drama of invention should claim the attention of the reader. I have been tempted sometimes to try the effect upon a larger scale; but meanwhile these short sketches, portraying various crises in the story of the human race, are to be judged as experiments in that direction.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

WINDLESHAM, CROWBOROUGH, April, 1911.

PART I.

THE LAST GALLEY

“Mutato nomine, de te, Britannia, fabula narratur.”

It was a spring morning, one hundred and forty-six years before the coming of Christ. The North African Coast, with its broad hem of golden sand, its green belt of feathery palm trees, and its background of barren, red-scarped hills, shimmered like a dream country in the opal light. Save for a narrow edge of snow-white surf, the Mediterranean lay blue and serene as far as the eye could reach. In all its vast expanse there was no break but for a single galley, which was slowly making its way from the direction of Sicily and heading for the distant harbour of Carthage.

Seen from afar it was a stately and beautiful vessel, deep red in colour, double-banked with scarlet oars, its broad, flapping sail stained with Tyrian purple, its bulwarks gleaming with brass work. A brazen, three-pronged ram projected in front, and a high golden figure of Baal, the God of the Phoenicians, children of Canaan, shone upon the after deck. From the single high mast above the huge sail streamed the tiger-striped flag of Carthage. So, like some stately scarlet bird, with golden beak and wings of purple, she swam upon the face of the waters — a thing of might and of beauty as seen from the distant shore.

But approach and look at her now! What are these dark streaks which foul her white decks and dapple her brazen shields? Why do the long red oars move out of time, irregular, convulsive? Why are some missing from the staring portholes, some snapped with jagged, yellow edges, some trailing inert against the side? Why are two prongs of the brazen ram twisted and broken? See, even the high image of Baal is battered and disfigured! By every sign this ship has passed through some grievous trial, some day of terror, which has left its heavy marks upon her.

And now stand upon the deck itself, and see more closely the men who man her! There are two decks forward and aft, while in the open waist are the double banks of seats, above and below, where the rowers, two to an oar, tug and bend at their endless task. Down the centre is a narrow platform, along which pace a line of warders, lash in hand, who cut cruelly at the slave who pauses, be it only for an instant, to sweep the sweat from his dripping brow. But these slaves — look at them! Some are captured Romans, some Sicilians, many black Libyans, but all are in the last exhaustion, their weary eyelids drooped over their eyes, their lips thick with black crusts, and pink with bloody froth, their arms and backs moving mechanically to the hoarse chant of the overseer. Their bodies of all tints from ivory to jet, are stripped to the waist, and every glistening back shows the angry stripes of the warders. But it is not from these that the blood comes which reddens the seats and tints the salt water washing beneath their manacled feet. Great gaping wounds, the marks of sword slash and spear stab, show crimson upon their naked chests and shoulders, while many lie huddled and senseless athwart the benches, careless for ever of the whips which still hiss above them. Now we can understand those empty portholes and those trailing oars.

Nor were the crew in better case than their slaves. The decks were littered with wounded and dying men. It was but a remnant who still remained upon their feet. The most lay exhausted upon the fore-deck, while a few of the more zealous were mending their shattered armour, restringing their bows, or cleaning the deck from the marks of combat. Upon a raised platform at the base of the mast stood the sailing-master who conned the ship, his eyes fixed upon the distant point of Megara which screened the eastern side of the Bay of Carthage. On the after-deck were gathered a number of officers, silent and brooding, glancing from time to time at two of their own class who stood apart deep in conversation. The one, tall, dark, and wiry, with pure, Semitic features, and the limbs of a giant, was Magro, the famous Carthaginian captain, whose name was still a terror on every shore, from Gaul to the Euxine. The other, a white-bearded, swarthy man, with indomitable courage and energy stamped upon every eager line of his keen, aquiline face, was Gisco the politician, a man of the highest Punic blood, a Suffete of the purple robe, and the leader of that party in the State which had watched and striven amid the selfishness and slothfulness of his fellow-countrymen to rouse the public spirit and waken the public conscience to the ever-increasing danger from Rome. As they talked, the two men glanced continually, with earnest anxious faces, towards the northern skyline.

“It is certain,” said the older man, with gloom in his voice and bearing, “none have escaped save ourselves.”

“I did not leave the press of the battle whilst I saw one ship which I could succour,” Magro answered. “As it was, we came away, as you saw, like a wolf which has a hound hanging on to either haunch. The Roman dogs can show the wolf-bites which prove it. Had any other galley won clear, they would surely be with us by now, since they have no place of safety save Carthage."

The younger warrior glanced keenly ahead to the distant point which marked his native city. Already the low, leafy hill could be seen, dotted with the white villas of the wealthy Phoenician merchants. Above them, a gleaming dot against the pale blue morning sky, shone the brazen roof of the citadel of Byrsa, which capped the sloping town.

"Already they can see us from the watch-towers," he remarked. "Even from afar they may know the galley of Black Magro. But which of all of them will guess that we alone remain of all that goodly fleet which sailed out with blare of trumpet and roll of drum but one short month ago?"

The patrician smiled bitterly. "If it were not for our great ancestors and for our beloved country, the Queen of the Waters," said he, "I could find it in my heart to be glad at this destruction which has come upon this vain and feeble generation. You have spent your life upon the seas, Magro. You do not know of know how it has been with us on the land. But I have seen this canker grow upon us which now leads us to our death. I and others have gone down into the market-place to plead with the people, and been pelted with mud for our pains. Many a time have I pointed to Rome, and said, 'Behold these people, who bear arms themselves, each man for his own duty and pride. How can you who hide behind mercenaries hope to stand against them?' — a hundred times I have said it."

"And had they no answer?" asked the Rover.

"Rome was far off and they could not see it, so to them it was nothing," the old man answered. "Some thought of trade, and some of votes, and some of profits from the State, but none would see that the State itself, the mother of all things, was sinking to her end. So might the bees debate who should have wax or honey when the torch was blazing which would bring to ashes the hive and all therein. 'Are we not rulers of the sea?' 'Was not Hannibal a great man?' Such were their cries, living ever in the past and blind to the future. Before that sun sets there will be tearing of hair and rending of garments; what will that now avail us?"

"It is some sad comfort," said Magro, "to know that what Rome holds she cannot keep."

"Why say you that? When we go down, she is supreme in all the world."

"For a time, and only for a time," Magro answered, gravely. "Yet you will smile, perchance, when I tell you how it is that I know it. There was a wise woman who lived in that part of the Tin Islands which juts forth into the sea, and from her lips I have heard many things, but not one which has not come aright. Of the fall of our own country, and even of this battle, from which we now return, she told me clearly. There is much strange lore amongst these savage peoples in the west of the land of Tin.”

“What said she of Rome?”

“That she also would fall, even as we, weakened by her riches and her factions.”

Gisco rubbed his hands. “That at least makes our own fall less bitter,” said he. “But since we have fallen, and Rome will fall, who in turn may hope to be Queen of the Waters?”

“That also I asked her,” said Magro, “and gave her my Tyrian belt with the golden buckle as a guerdon for her answer. But, indeed, it was too high payment for the tale she told, which must be false if all else she said was true. She would have it that in coining days it was her own land, this fog-girt isle where painted savages can scarce row a wicker coracle from point to point, which shall at last take the trident which Carthage and Rome have dropped.”

The smile which flickered upon the old patrician’s keen features died away suddenly, and his fingers closed upon his companion’s wrist. The other had set rigid, his head advanced, his hawk eyes upon the northern skyline. Its straight, blue horizon was broken by two low black dots.

“Galleys!” whispered Gisco.

The whole crew had seen them. They clustered along the starboard bulwarks, pointing and chattering. For a moment the gloom of defeat was lifted, and a buzz of joy ran from group to group at the thought that they were not alone — that some one had escaped the great carnage as well as themselves.

“By the spirit of Baal,” said Black Magro, “I could not have believed that any could have fought clear from such a welter. Could it be young Hamilcar in the *Africa*, or is it Beneva in the blue Syrian ship? We three with others may form a squadron and make head against them yet. If we hold our course, they will join us ere we round the harbour mole.”

Slowly the injured galley toiled on her way, and more swiftly the two newcomers swept down from the north. Only a few miles off lay the green point and the white houses which flanked the great African city. Already, upon the headland, could be seen a dark group of waiting townsmen. Gisco and Magro were still watching with puckered gaze the approaching galleys, when the brown Libyan boatswain, with flashing teeth and gleaming eyes, rushed upon the poop, his long thin arm stabbing to the north.

“Romans!” he cried. “Romans!”

A hush had fallen over the great vessel. Only the wash of the water and the measured rattle and beat of the oars broke in upon the silence.

“By the horns of God’s altar, I believe the fellow is right!” cried old Gisco. “See how they swoop upon us like falcons. They are full-manned and full-oared.”

“Plain wood, unpainted,” said Magro. “See how it gleams yellow where the sun strikes it.”

“And yonder thing beneath the mast. Is it not the cursed bridge they use for boarding?”

“So they grudge us even one,” said Magro with a bitter laugh. “Not even one galley shall return to the old sea-mother. Well, for my part, I would as soon have it so. I am of a mind to stop the oars and await them.”

“It is a man’s thought,” answered old Gisco; “but the city will need us in the days to come. What shall it profit us to make the Roman victory complete? Nay, Magro, let the slaves row as they never rowed before, not for our own safety, but for the profit of the State.”

So the great red ship laboured and lurched onwards, like a weary panting stag which seeks shelter from his pursuers, while ever swifter and ever nearer sped the two lean fierce galleys from the north. Already the morning sun shone upon the lines of low Roman helmets above the bulwarks, and glistened on the silver wave where each sharp prow shot through the still blue water. Every moment the ships drew nearer, and the long thin scream of the Roman trumpets grew louder upon the ear.

Upon the high bluff of Megara there stood a great concourse of the people of Carthage who had hurried forth from the city upon the news that the galleys were in sight. They stood now, rich and poor, effete and plebeian, white Phoenician and dark Kabyle, gazing with breathless interest at the spectacle before them. Some hundreds of feet beneath them the Punic galley had drawn so close that with their naked eyes they could see those stains of battle which told their dismal tale. The Romans, too, were heading in such a way that it was before their very faces that their ship was about to be cut off; and yet of all this multitude not one could raise a hand in its defence. Some wept in impotent grief, some cursed with flashing eyes and knotted fists, some on their knees held up appealing hands to Baal; but neither prayer, tears, nor curses could undo the past nor mend the present. That broken, crawling galley meant that their fleet was gone. Those two fierce darting ships meant that the hands of Rome were already at their throat. Behind them would come others and others, the innumerable trained hosts of the great Republic, long mistress of the land, now dominant also upon the waters. In a month, two months, three at the most, their armies would be there, and what could all the untrained multitudes of Carthage do to stop them?

"Nay!" cried one, more hopeful than the rest, "at least we are brave men with arms in our hands."

"Fool!" said another, "is it not such talk which has brought us to our ruin? What is the brave man untrained to the brave man trained? When you stand before the sweep and rush of a Roman legion you may learn the difference."

"Then let us train!"

"Too late! A full year is needful to turn a man to a soldier. Where will you — where will your city be within the year? Nay, there is but one chance for us. If we give up our commerce and our colonies, if we strip ourselves of all that made us great, then perchance the Roman conqueror may hold his hand."

And already the last sea-fight of Carthage was coming swiftly to an end before them. Under their very eyes the two Roman galleys had shot in, one on either side of the vessel of Black Magro. They had grappled with him, and he, desperate in his despair, had cast the crooked flukes of his anchors over their gunwales, and bound them to him in an iron grip, whilst with hammer and crowbar he burst great holes in his own sheathing. The last Punic galley should never be rowed into Ostia, a sight for the holiday-makers of Rome. She would lie in her own waters. And the fierce, dark soul of her rover captain glowed as he thought that not alone should she sink into the depths of the mother sea.

Too late did the Romans understand the man with whom they had to deal. Their boarders who had flooded the Punic decks felt the planking sink and sway beneath them. They rushed to gain their own vessels; but they, too, were being drawn downwards, held in the dying grip of the great red galley. Over they went and ever over. Now the deck of Magro's ship is flush with the water, and the Romans, drawn towards it by the iron bonds which held them, are tilted downwards, one bulwark upon the waves, one reared high in the air. Madly they strain to cast off the death grip of the galley. She is under the surface now, and ever swifter, with the greater weight, the Roman ships heel after her. There is a rending crash. The wooden side is torn out of one, and mutilated, dismembered, she rights herself, and lies a helpless thing upon the water. But a last yellow gleam in the blue water shows where her consort has been dragged to her end in the iron death-grapple of her foemen. The tiger-striped flag of Carthage has sunk beneath the swirling surface, never more to be seen upon the face of the sea.

For in that year a great cloud hung for seventeen days over the African coast, a deep black cloud which was the dark shroud of the burning city. And when the seventeen days were over, Roman ploughs were driven from end to end of the charred ashes, and salt was scattered there as a sign that Carthage should be no more. And far off a huddle of naked, starving folk stood upon the distant mountains, and looked down upon the desolate plain which had once been the fairest and richest upon earth. And they understood too late that it is the law of heaven that the world is given to the hardy and to the self-denying, whilst he who would escape the duties of manhood will soon be stripped of the pride, the wealth, and the power, which are the prizes which manhood brings.

THE CONTEST.

In the year of our Lord 66, the Emperor Nero, being at that time in the twenty-ninth year of his life and the thirteenth of his reign, set sail for Greece with the strangest company and the most singular design that any monarch has ever entertained. With ten galleys he went forth from Puteoli, carrying with him great stores of painted scenery and theatrical properties, together with a number of knights and senators, whom he feared to leave behind him at Rome, and who were all marked for death in the course of his wanderings. In his train he took Natus, his singing coach; Cluvius, a man with a monstrous voice, who should bawl out his titles; and a thousand trained youths who had learned to applaud in unison whenever their master sang or played in public. So deftly had they been taught that each had his own role to play. Some did no more than give forth a low deep hum of speechless appreciation. Some clapped with enthusiasm. Some, rising from approbation into absolute frenzy, shrieked, stamped, and beat sticks upon the benches. Some — and they were the most effective — had learned from an Alexandrian a long droning musical note which they all uttered together, so that it boomed over the assembly. With the aid of these mercenary admirers, Nero had every hope, in spite of his indifferent voice and clumsy execution, to return to Rome, bearing with him the chaplets for song offered for free competition by the Greek cities. As his great gilded galley with two tiers of oars passed down the Mediterranean, the Emperor sat in his cabin all day, his teacher by his side, rehearsing from morning to night those compositions which he had selected, whilst every few hours a Nubian slave massaged the Imperial throat with oil and balsam, that it might be ready for the great ordeal which lay before it in the land of poetry and song. His food, his drink, and his exercise were prescribed for him as for an athlete who trains for a contest, and the twanging of his lyre, with the strident notes of his voice, resounded continually from the Imperial quarters.

Now it chanced that there lived in those days a Grecian goatherd named Policles, who tended and partly owned a great flock which grazed upon the long flanks of the hills near Heroea, which is five miles north of the river Alpheus, and no great distance from the famous Olympia. This person was noted all over the countryside as a man of strange gifts and singular character. He was a poet who had twice been crowned for his verses, and he was a musician to whom the use and sound of an instrument were so natural that one would more easily meet him without his staff than his harp. Even in his lonely vigils on the winter hills he would bear it always slung over his shoulder, and would pass the long hours by its aid, so that it had come to be part of his very self. He was beautiful also, swarthy and eager, with a head like Adonis, and in strength there was no one who could compete with him. But all was ruined by his disposition, which was so masterful that he would brook no opposition nor contradiction. For this reason he was continually at enmity with all his neighbours, and in his fits of temper he would spend months at a time in his stone hut among the mountains, hearing nothing from the world, and living only for his music and his goats.

One spring morning, in the year of 67, Policles, with the aid of his boy Dorus, had driven his goats over to a new pasturage which overlooked from afar the town of Olympia. Gazing down upon it from the mountain, the shepherd was surprised to see that a portion of the famous amphitheatre had been roofed in, as though some performance was being enacted. Living far from the world and from all news, Policles could not imagine what was afoot, for he was well aware that the Grecian games were not due for two years to come. Surely some poetic or musical contest must be proceeding of which he had heard nothing. If so, there would perhaps be some chance of his gaining the votes of the judges; and in any case he loved to hear the compositions and admire the execution of the great minstrels who assembled on such an occasion. Calling to Dorus, therefore, he left the goats to his charge, and strode swiftly away, his harp upon his back, to see what was going forward in the town.

When Policles came into the suburbs, he found them deserted; but he was still more surprised when he reached the main street to see no single human being in the place. He hastened his steps, therefore, and as he approached the theatre he was conscious of a low sustained hum which announced the concourse of a huge assembly. Never in all his dreams had he imagined any musical competition upon so vast a scale as this. There were some soldiers clustering outside the door; but Policles pushed his way swiftly through them, and found himself upon the outskirts of the multitude who filled the great space formed by roofing over a portion of the national stadium. Looking around him, Policles saw a great number of his neighbours, whom he knew by sight, tightly packed upon the benches, all with their eyes fixed upon the stage. He also observed that there were soldiers round the walls, and that a considerable part of the hall was filled by a body of youths of foreign aspect, with white gowns and long hair. All this he perceived; but what it meant he could not imagine. He bent over to a neighbour to ask him, but a soldier prodded him at once with the butt end of his spear, and commanded him fiercely to hold his peace. The man whom he had addressed, thinking that Policles had demanded a seat, pressed closer to his neighbour, and so the shepherd found himself sitting at the end of the bench which was nearest to the door. Thence he concentrated himself upon the stage, on which Metas, a well-known minstrel from Corinth and an old friend of Policles, was singing and playing without much encouragement from the audience. To Policles it seemed that Metas was having less than his due, so he applauded loudly, but he was surprised to observe that the soldiers frowned at him, and that all his neighbours regarded him with some surprise. Being a man of strong and obstinate character, he was the more inclined to persevere in his clapping when he perceived that the general sentiment was against him.

But what followed filled the shepherd poet with absolute amazement. When Metas of Corinth had made his bow and withdrawn to half-hearted and perfunctory applause, there appeared upon the stage, amid the wildest enthusiasm upon the part of the audience, a most extraordinary figure. He was a short fat man, neither old nor young, with a bull neck and a round, heavy face, which hung in creases in front like the dewlap of an ox. He was absurdly clad in a short blue tunic, braced at the waist with a golden belt. His neck and part of his chest were exposed, and his short, fat legs were bare from the buskins below to the middle of his thighs, which was as far as his tunic extended. In his hair were two golden wings, and the same upon his heels, after the fashion of the god Mercury. Behind him walked a negro bearing a harp, and beside him a richly dressed officer who bore rolls of music. This strange creature took the harp from the hands of the attendant, and advanced to the front of the stage, whence he bowed and smiled to the cheering audience. “This is some foppish singer from Athens,” thought Policles to himself, but at the same time he understood that only a great master of song could receive such a reception from a Greek audience. This was evidently some wonderful performer whose reputation had preceded him. Policles settled down, therefore, and prepared to give his soul up to the music.

The blue-clad player struck several chords upon his lyre, and then burst suddenly out into the “Ode of Niobe.” Policles sat straight up on his bench and gazed at the stage in amazement. The tune demanded a rapid transition from a low note to a high, and had been purposely chosen for this reason. The low note was a grunting, a rumble, the deep discordant growling of an ill-conditioned dog. Then suddenly the singer threw up his face, straightened his tubby figure, rose upon his tiptoes, and with wagging head and scarlet cheeks emitted such a howl as the same dog might have given had his growl been checked by a kick from his master. All the while the lyre twanged and thrummed, sometimes in front of and sometimes behind the voice of the singer. But what amazed Policles most of all was the effect of this performance upon the audience. Every Greek was a trained critic, and as unsparing in his hisses as he was lavish in his applause. Many a singer far better than this absurd fop had been driven amid execration and abuse from the platform. But now, as the man stopped and wiped the abundant sweat from his fat face, the whole assembly burst into a delirium of appreciation. The shepherd held his hands to his bursting head, and felt that his reason must be leaving him. It was surely a dreadful musical nightmare, and he would wake soon and laugh at the remembrance. But no; the figures were real, the faces were those of his neighbours, the cheers which resounded in his ears were indeed from an audience which filled the theatre of Olympia. The whole chorus was in full blast, the hummers humming, the shouters bellowing, the tappers hard at work upon the benches, while every now and then came a musical cyclone of “Incomparable! Divine!” from the trained phalanx who intoned their applause, their united voices sweeping over the tumult as the drone of the wind dominates the roar of the sea. It was madness — insufferable madness! If this were allowed to pass, there was an end of all musical justice in Greece. Policles’ conscience would not permit him to be still. Standing upon his bench with waving hands and upraised voice, he protested with all the strength of his lungs against the mad judgment of the audience.

At first, amid the tumult, his action was hardly noticed. His voice was drowned in the universal roar which broke out afresh at each bow and smirk from the fatuous musician. But gradually the folk round Policles ceased clapping, and stared at him in astonishment. The silence grew in ever widening circles, until the whole great assembly sat mute, staring at this wild and magnificent creature who was storming at them from his perch near the door.

“Fools!” he cried. “What are you clapping at? What are you cheering? Is this what you call music? Is this cat-calling to earn an Olympian prize? The fellow has not a note in his voice. You are either deaf or mad, and I for one cry shame upon you for your folly.”

Soldiers ran to pull him down, and the whole audience was in confusion, some of the bolder cheering the sentiments of the shepherd, and others crying that he should be cast out of the building. Meanwhile the successful singer having handed his lyre to his negro attendant, was inquiring from those around him on the stage as to the cause of the uproar. Finally a herald with an enormously powerful voice stepped forward to the front and proclaimed that if the foolish person at the back of the hall, who appeared to differ from the opinion of the rest of the audience, would come forward upon the platform, he might, if he dared, exhibit his own powers, and see if he could outdo the admirable and wonderful exhibition which they had just had the privilege of hearing.

Policles sprang readily to his feet at the challenge, and the great company making way for him to pass, he found himself a minute later standing in his unkempt garb, with his frayed and weather-beaten harp in his hand, before the expectant crowd. He stood for a moment tightening a string here and slackening another there until his chords rang true. Then, amid a murmur of laughter and jeers from the Roman benches immediately before him, he began to sing.

He had prepared no composition, but he had trained himself to improvise, singing out of his heart for the joy of the music. He told of the land of Elis, beloved of Jupiter, in which they were gathered that day, of the great bare mountain slopes, of the swift shadows of the clouds, of the winding blue river, of the keen air of the uplands, of the chill of the evenings, and the beauties of earth and sky. It was all simple and childlike, but it went to the hearts of the Olympians, for it spoke of the land which they knew and loved. Yet when he at last dropped his hand, few of them dared to applaud, and their feeble voices were drowned by a storm of hisses and groans from his opponents. He shrank back in horror from so unusual a reception, and in an instant his blue-clad rival was in his place. If he had sung badly before, his performance now was inconceivable. His screams, his grunts, his discords, and harsh jarring cacophanies were an outrage to the very name of music. And yet every time that he paused for breath or to wipe his streaming forehead a fresh thunder of applause came rolling back from the audience. Policles sank his face in his hands and prayed that he might not be insane. Then, when the dreadful performance ceased, and the uproar of admiration showed that the crown was certainly awarded to this impostor, a horror of the audience, a hatred of this race of fools, and a craving for the peace and silence of the pastures mastered every feeling in his mind. He dashed through the mass of people waiting at the wings, and emerged in the open air. His old rival and friend Metas of Corinth was waiting there with an anxious face.

"Quick, Policles, quick!" he cried. "My pony is tethered behind yonder grove. A grey he is, with red trappings. Get you gone as hard as hoof will bear you, for if you are taken you will have no easy death."

"No easy death! What mean you, Metas? Who is the fellow?"

"Great Jupiter! did you not know? Where have you lived? It is Nero the Emperor! Never would he pardon what you have said about his voice. Quick, man, quick, or the guards will be at your heels!"

An hour later the shepherd was well on his way to his mountain home, and about the same time the Emperor, having received the Chaplet of Olympia for the incomparable excellence of his performance, was making inquiries with a frowning brow as to who the insolent person might be who had dared to utter such contemptuous criticisms.

"Bring him to me here this instant," said he, "and let Marcus with his knife and branding-iron be in attendance."

"If it please you, great Caesar," said Arsenius Platus, the officer of attendance, "the man cannot be found, and there are some very strange rumours flying about."

"Rumours!" cried the angry Nero. "What do you mean, Arsenius? I tell you that the fellow was an ignorant upstart, with the bearing of a boor and the voice of a peacock. I tell you also that there are a good many who are as guilty as he among the people, for I heard them with my own ears raise cheers for him when he had sung his ridiculous ode. I have half a mind to burn their town about their ears so that they may remember my visit."

"It is not to be wondered at if he won their votes, Caesar," said the soldier, "for from what I hear it would have been no disgrace had you, even you, been conquered in this conquest."

"I conquered! You are mad, Arsenius. What do you mean?"

“None know him, great Caesar! He came from the mountains, and he disappeared into the mountains. You marked the wildness and strange beauty of his face. It is whispered that for once the great god Pan has condescended to measure himself against a mortal.”

The cloud cleared from Nero’s brow. “Of course, Arsenius! You are right! No man would have dared to brave me so. What a story for Rome! Let the messenger leave this very night, Arsenius, to tell them how their Emperor has upheld their honour in Olympia this day.”

THROUGH THE VEIL.

He was a great shock-headed, freckle-faced Borderer, the lineal descendant of a cattle-thieving clan in Liddesdale. In spite of his ancestry he was as solid and sober a citizen as one would wish to see, a town councillor of Melrose, an elder of the Church, and the chairman of the local branch of the Young Men's Christian Association. Brown was his name — and you saw it printed up as "Brown and Handiside" over the great grocery stores in the High Street. His wife, Maggie Brown, was an Armstrong before her marriage, and came from an old farming stock in the wilds of Teviothead. She was small, swarthy, and dark-eyed, with a strangely nervous temperament for a Scotch woman. No greater contrast could be found than the big tawny man and the dark little woman; but both were of the soil as far back as any memory could extend.

One day — it was the first anniversary of their wedding — they had driven over together to see the excavations of the Roman Fort at Newstead. It was not a particularly picturesque spot. From the northern bank of the Tweed, just where the river forms a loop, there extends a gentle slope of arable land. Across it run the trenches of the excavators, with here and there an exposure of old stonework to show the foundations of the ancient walls. It had been a huge place, for the camp was fifty acres in extent, and the fort fifteen. However, it was all made easy for them since Mr. Brown knew the farmer to whom the land belonged. Under his guidance they spent a long summer evening inspecting the trenches, the pits, the ramparts, and all the strange variety of objects which were waiting to be transported to the Edinburgh Museum of Antiquities. The buckle of a woman's belt had been dug up that very day, and the farmer was discoursing upon it when his eyes fell upon Mrs. Brown's face.

"Your good leddy's tired," said he. "Maybe you'd best rest a wee before we gang further."

Brown looked at his wife. She was certainly very pale, and her dark eyes were bright and wild.

"What is it, Maggie? I've wearied you. I'm thinkin' it's time we went back."

"No, no, John, let us go on. It's wonderful! It's like a dreamland place. It all seems so close and so near to me. How long were the Romans here, Mr.

Cunningham?"

"A fair time, mam. If you saw the kitchen midden-pits you would guess it took a long time to fill them."

"And why did they leave?"

"Well, mam, by all accounts they left because they had to. The folk round could thole them no longer, so they just up and burned the fort aboot their lugs. You can see the fire marks on the stanes."

The woman gave a quick little shudder. "A wild night — a fearsome night," said she. "The sky must have been red that night — and these grey stones, they may have been red also."

"Aye, I think they were red," said her husband. "It's a queer thing, Maggie, and it may be your words that have done it; but I seem to see that business aboot as clear as ever I saw anything in my life. The light shone on the water."

"Aye, the light shone on the water. And the smoke gripped you by the throat. And all the savages were yelling."

The old farmer began to laugh. "The leddy will be writin' a story aboot the old fort," said he. "I've shown many a one over it, but I never heard it put so clear afore. Some folk have the gift."

They had strolled along the edge of the foss, and a pit yawned upon the right of them.

"That pit was fourteen foot deep," said the farmer. "What d'ye think we dug oot from the bottom o't? Weel, it was just the skeleton of a man wi' a spear by his side. I'm thinkin' he was grippin' it when he died. Now, how cam' a man wi' a spear doon a hole fourteen foot deep? He wasna' buried there, for they aye burned their dead. What make ye o' that, mam?"

"He sprang doon to get clear of the savages," said the woman.

"Weel, it's likely enough, and a' the professors from Edinburgh couldna gie a better reason. I wish you were aye here, mam, to answer a' oor difficulties sae readily. Now, here's the altar that we foond last week. There's an inscreeption. They tell me it's Latin, and it means that the men o' this fort give thanks to God for their safety."

They examined the old worn stone. There was a large deeply-cut "VV" upon the top of it. "What does 'VV' stand for?" asked Brown.

"Naebody kens," the guide answered.

"*Valeria Victrix*," said the lady softly. Her face was paler than ever, her eyes far away, as one who peers down the dim aisles of overarching centuries.

"What's that?" asked her husband sharply.

She started as one who wakes from sleep. "What were we talking about?" she asked.

"About this 'VV' upon the stone."

"No doubt it was just the name of the Legion which put the altar up."

"Aye, but you gave some special name."

"Did I? How absurd! How should I ken what the name was?"

"You said something—'*Victrix*,' I think."

"I suppose I was guessing. It gives me the queerest feeling, this place, as if I were not myself, but someone else."

"Aye, it's an uncanny place," said her husband, looking round with an expression almost of fear in his bold grey eyes. "I feel it mysel'. I think we'll just be wishin' you good evenin', Mr. Cunningham, and get back to Melrose before the dark sets in."

Neither of them could shake off the strange impression which had been left upon them by their visit to the excavations. It was as if some miasma had risen from those damp trenches and passed into their blood. All the evening they were silent and thoughtful, but such remarks as they did make showed that the same subject was in the minds of each. Brown had a restless night, in which he dreamed a strange connected dream, so vivid that he woke sweating and shivering like a frightened horse. He tried to convey it all to his wife as they sat together at breakfast in the morning.

"It was the clearest thing, Maggie," said he. "Nothing that has ever come to me in my waking life has been more clear than that. I feel as if these hands were sticky with blood."

"Tell me of it — tell me slow," said she.

"When it began, I was oot on a braeside. I was laying flat on the ground. It was rough, and there were clumps of heather. All round me was just darkness, but I could hear the rustle and the breathin' of men. There seemed a great multitude on every side of me, but I could see no one. There was a low chink of steel sometimes, and then a number of voices would whisper 'Hush!' I had a ragged club in my hand, and it had spikes o' iron near the end of it. My heart was beatin' quickly, and I felt that a moment of great danger and excitement was at hand. Once I dropped my club, and again from all round me the voices in the darkness cried, 'Hush!' I put oot my hand, and it touched the foot of another man lying in front of me. There was some one at my very elbow on either side. But they said nothin'.

"Then we all began to move. The whole braeside seemed to be crawlin' downwards. There was a river at the bottom and a high-arched wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge were many lights — torches on a wall. The creepin' men all flowed towards the bridge. There had been no sound of any kind, just a velvet stillness. And then there was a cry in the darkness, the cry of a man who has been stabbed suddenly to the hairt. That one cry swelled out for a moment, and then the roar of a thoosand furious voices. I was runnin'. Every one was runnin'. A bright red light shone out, and the river was a scarlet streak. I could see my companions now. They were more like devils than men, wild figures clad in skins, with their hair and beards streamin'. They were all mad with rage, jumpin' as they ran, their mouths open, their arms wavin', the red light beatin' on their faces. I ran, too, and yelled out curses like the rest. Then I heard a great cracklin' of wood, and I knew that the palisades were doon. There was a loud whistlin' in my ears, and I was aware that arrows were flyin' past me. I got to the bottom of a dyke, and I saw a hand stretched doon from above. I took it, and was dragged to the top. We looked doon, and there were silver men beneath us holdin' up their spears. Some of our folk sprang on to the spears. Then we others followed, and we killed the soldiers before they could draw the spears oot again. They shouted loud in some foreign tongue, but no mercy was shown them. We went ower them like a wave, and trampled them doon into the mud, for they were few, and there was no end to our numbers.

"I found myself among buildings, and one of them was on fire. I saw the flames spoutin' through the roof. I ran on, and then I was alone among the buildings. Some one ran across in front o' me. It was a woman. I caught her by the arm, and I took her chin and turned her face so as the light of the fire would strike it. Whom think you that it was, Maggie?"

His wife moistened her dry lips. "It was I," she said.

He looked at her in surprise. "That's a good guess," said he. "Yes, it was just you. Not merely like you, you understand. It was you — you yourself. I saw the same soul in your frightened eyes. You looked white and bonny and wonderful in the firelight. I had just one thought in my head — to get you awa' with me; to keep you all to mysel' in my own home somewhere beyond the hills. You clawed at my face with your nails. I heaved you over my shoulder, and I tried to find a way oot of the light of the burning hoose and back into the darkness.

“Then came the thing that I mind best of all. You’re ill, Maggie. Shall I stop? My God! You nave the very look on your face that you had last night in my dream. You screamed. He came runnin’ in the firelight. His head was bare; his hair was black and curled; he had a naked sword in his hand, short and broad, little more than a dagger. He stabbed at me, but he tripped and fell. I held you with one hand, and with the other—”

His wife had sprung to her feet with writhing features.

“Marcus!” she cried. “My beautiful Marcus! Oh, you brute! you brute! you brute!” There was a clatter of tea-cups as she fell forward senseless upon the table.

They never talk about that strange isolated incident in their married life. For an instant the curtain of the past had swung aside, and some strange glimpse of a forgotten life had come to them. But it closed down, never to open again. They live their narrow round — he in his shop, she in her household — and yet new and wider horizons have vaguely formed themselves around them since that summer evening by the crumbling Roman fort.

AN ICONOCLAST.

It was daybreak of a March morning in the year of Christ 92. Outside the long Semita Alta was already thronged with people, with buyers and sellers, callers and strollers, for the Romans were so early-rising a people that many a Patrician preferred to see his clients at six in the morning. Such was the good republican tradition, still upheld by the more conservative; but with more modern habits of luxury, a night of pleasure and banqueting was no uncommon thing. Thus one, who had learned the new and yet adhered to the old, might find his hours overlap, and without so much as a pretence of sleep come straight from his night of debauch into his day of business, turning with heavy wits and an aching head to that round of formal duties which consumed the life of a Roman gentleman.

So it was with Emilius Flaccus that March morning. He and his fellow senator, Caius Balbus, had passed the night in one of those gloomy drinking bouts to which the Emperor Domitian summoned his chosen friends at the high palace on the Palatine. Now, having reached the portals of the house of Flaccus, they stood together under the pomegranate-fringed portico which fronted the peristyle and, confident in each other's tried discretion, made up by the freedom of their criticism for their long self-suppression of that melancholy feast.

"If he would but feed his guests," said Balbus, a little red-faced, choleric nobleman with yellow-shot angry eyes. "What had we? Upon my life, I have forgotten. Plovers' eggs, a mess of fish, some bird or other, and then his eternal apples."

"Of which," said Flaccus, "he ate only the apples. Do him the justice to confess that he takes even less than he gives. At least they cannot say of him as of Vitellius, that his teeth beggared the empire."

"No, nor his thirst either, great as it is. That fiery Sabine wine of his could be had for a few sesterces the amphora. It is the common drink of the carters at every wine-house on the country roads. I longed for a glass of my own rich Falernian or the mellow Coan that was bottled in the year that Titus took Jerusalem. Is it even now too late? Could we not wash this rasping stuff from our palates?"

"Nay, better come in with me now and take a bitter draught ere you go upon your way. My Greek physician Stephanos has a rare prescription for a morning head. What! Your clients await you? Well, I will see you later at the Senate house."

The Patrician had entered his atrium, bright with rare flowers, and melodious with strange singing birds. At the jaws of the hall, true to his morning duties, stood Lebs, the little Nubian slave, with snow-white tunic and turban, a salver of glasses in one hand, whilst in the other he held a flask of a thin lemon-tinted liquid. The master of the house filled up a bitter aromatic bumper, and was about to drink it off, when his hand was arrested by a sudden perception that something was much amiss in his household. It was to be read all around him — in the frightened eyes of the black boy, in the agitated face of the keeper of the atrium, in the gloom and silence of the little knot of ordinarii, the procurator or major-domo at their head, who had assembled to greet their master. Stephanos the physician, Cleios the Alexandrine reader, Promus the steward each turned his head away to avoid his master's questioning gaze.

"What in the name of Pluto is the matter with you all?" cried the amazed senator, whose night of potations had left him in no mood for patience. "Why do you stand moping there? Stephanos, Vacculus — is anything amiss? Here, Promus, you are the head of my household. What is it, then? Why do you turn your eyes away from me?"

The burly steward, whose fat face was haggard and mottled with anxiety, laid his hand upon the sleeve of the domestic beside him.

"Sergius is responsible for the atrium, my lord. It is for him to tell you the terrible thing that has befallen in your absence."

"Nay, it was Datus who did it. Bring him in, and let him explain it himself," said Sergius in a sulky voice.

The patience of the Patrician was at an end. "Speak this instant, you rascal!" he shouted angrily. "Another minute, and I will have you dragged to the ergastulum, where, with your feet in the stocks and the gyves round your wrists, you may learn quicker obedience. Speak, I say, and without delay."

"It is the Venus," the man stammered; "the Greek Venus of Praxiteles."

The senator gave a cry of apprehension and rushed to the corner of the atrium, where a little shrine, curtained off by silken drapery, held the precious statue, the greatest art treasure of his collection — perhaps of the whole world. He tore the hangings aside and stood in speechless anger before the outraged goddess. The red perfumed lamp which always burned before her had been spilled and broken; her altar fire had been quenched, her chaplet had been dashed aside. But worst of all — insufferable sacrilege! — her own beautiful nude body of glistening Pantelic marble, as white and fair as when the inspired Greek had hewed it out five hundred years before, had been most brutally mishandled. Three fingers of the gracious outstretched hand had been struck off, and lay upon the pedestal beside her. Above her delicate breast a dark mark showed, where a blow had disfigured the marble. Emilius Flaccus, the most delicate and judicious connoisseur in Rome, stood gasping and croaking, his hand to his throat, as he gazed at his disfigured masterpiece. Then he turned upon his slaves, his fury in his convulsed face; but, to his amazement, they were not looking at him, but had all turned in attitudes of deep respect towards the opening of the peristyle. As he faced round and saw who had just entered his house, his own rage fell away from him in an instant, and his manner became as humble as that of his servants.

The newcomer was a man forty-three years of age, clean shaven, with a massive head, large engorged eyes, a small clear-cut nose, and the full bull neck which was the especial mark of his breed. He had entered through the peristyle with a swaggering, rolling gait, as one who walks upon his own ground, and now he stood, his hands upon his hips, looking round him at the bowing slaves, and finally at their master, with a half-humorous expression upon his flushed and brutal face.

“Why, Emilius,” said he, “I had understood that your household was the best-ordered in Rome. What is amiss with you this morning?”

“Nothing could be amiss with us now that Caesar has deigned to come under my roof,” said the courtier. “This is indeed a most glad surprise which you have prepared for me.”

“It was an afterthought,” said Domitian. “When you and the others had left me, I was in no mood for sleep, and so it came into my mind that I would have a breath of morning air by coming down to you, and seeing this Grecian Venus of yours, about which you discoursed so eloquently between the cups. But, indeed, by your appearance and that of your servants, I should judge that my visit was an ill-timed one.”

“Nay, dear master; say not so. But, indeed, it is truth that I was in trouble at the moment of your welcome entrance, and this trouble was, as the Fates have willed it, brought forth by that very statue in which you have been graciously pleased to show your interest. There it stands, and you can see for yourself how rudely it has been mishandled."

"By Pluto and all the nether gods, if it were mine some of you should feed the lampreys," said the Emperor, looking round with his fierce eyes at the shrinking slaves. "You were always overmerciful, Emilius. It is the common talk that your catenoe are rusted for want of use. But surely this is beyond all bounds. Let me see how you handle the matter. Whom do you hold responsible?"

"The slave Sergius is responsible, since it is his place to tend the atrium," said Flaccus. "Stand forward, Sergius. What have you to say?"

The trembling slave advanced to his master. "If it please you, sir, the mischief has been done by Datus the Christian."

"Datus! Who is he?"

"The matulator, the scavenger, my lord. I did not know that he belonged to these horrible people, or I should not have admitted him. He came with his broom to brush out the litter of the birds. His eyes fell upon the Venus, and in an instant he had rushed upon her and struck her two blows with his wooden besom. Then we fell upon him and dragged him away. But alas! alas! it was too late, for already the wretch had dashed off the fingers of the goddess."

The Emperor smiled grimly, while the Patrician's thin face grew pale with anger.

"Where is the fellow?" he asked.

"In the ergastulum, your honour, with the furca on his neck."

"Bring him hither and summon the household."

A few minutes later the whole back of the atrium was thronged by the motley crowd who ministered to the household needs of a great Roman nobleman. There was the arcarius, or account keeper, with his stylum behind his ear; the sleek praegustator, who sampled all foods, so as to stand between his master and poison, and beside him his predecessor, now a half-witted idiot through the interception twenty years before of a datura draught from Canidia; the cellarman, summoned from amongst his amphorae; the cook, with his basting-ladle in his hand; the pompous nomenclator, who ushered the guests; the cubicularius, who saw to their accommodation; the silentiarius, who kept order in the house; the structor, who set forth the tables; the carptor, who carved the food; the cinerarius, who lit the fires — these and many more, half-curious, half-terrified, came to the judging of

Datus. Behind them a chattering, giggling swarm of Lalages, Marias, Cerusas, and Amaryllides, from the laundries and the spinning-rooms, stood upon their tiptoes and extended their pretty wondering faces over the shoulders of the men. Through this crowd came two stout varlets leading the culprit between them. He was a small, dark, rough-headed man, with an unkempt beard and wild eyes which shone, brightly with strong inward emotion. His hands were bound behind him, and over his neck was the heavy wooden collar or furca which was placed upon refractory slaves. A smear of blood across his cheek showed that he had not come uninjured from the preceding scuffle.

"Are you Datus the scavenger?" asked the Patrician.

The man drew himself up proudly. "Yes," said he, "I am Datus."

"Did you do this injury to my statue?"

"Yes, I did."

There was an uncompromising boldness in the man's reply which compelled respect. The wrath of his master became tinged with interest.

"Why did you do this?" he asked.

"Because it was my duty."

"Why, then, was it your duty to destroy your master's property?"

"Because I am a Christian." His eyes blazed suddenly out of his dark face. "Because there is no God but the one eternal, and all else are sticks and stones. What has this naked harlot to do with Him to whom the great firmament is but a garment and the earth a footstool? It was in His service that I have broken your statue."

Domitian looked with a smile at the Patrician. "You will make nothing of him," said he. "They speak even so when they stand before the lions in the arena. As to argument, not all the philosophers of Rome can break them down. Before my very face they refuse to sacrifice in my honour. Never were such impossible people to deal with. I should take a short way with him if I were you."

"What would Caesar advise?"

"There are the games this afternoon. I am showing the new hunting-leopard which King Juba has sent from Numidia. This slave may give us some sport when he finds the hungry beast sniffing at his heels."

The Patrician considered for a moment. He had always been a father to his servants. It was hateful to him to think of any injury befalling them.

Perhaps even now, if this strange fanatic would show his sorrow for what he had done, it might be possible to spare him. At least it was worth trying.

"Your offence deserves death," he said. "What reasons can you give why it should not befall you, since you have injured this statue, which is worth your own price a hundred times over?"

The slave looked steadfastly at his master. "I do not fear death," he said. "My sister Candida died in the arena, and I am ready to do the same. It is true that I have injured your statue, but I am able to find you something of far greater value in exchange. I will give you the truth and the gospel in exchange for your broken idol."

The Emperor laughed. "You will do nothing with him, Emilius," he said. "I know his breed of old. He is ready to die; he says so himself. Why save him, then?"

But the Patrician still hesitated. He would make a last effort.

"Throw off his bonds," he said to the guards. "Now take the furca off his neck. So! Now, Datus, I have released you to show you that I trust you. I have no wish to do you any hurt if you will but acknowledge your error, and so set a better example to my household here assembled."

"How, then, shall I acknowledge my error?" the slave asked.

"Bow your head before the goddess, and entreat her forgiveness for the violence you have done her. Then perhaps you may gain my pardon as well."

"Put me, then, before her," said the Christian.

Emilius Flaccus looked triumphantly at Domitian. By kindness and tact he was effecting that which the Emperor had failed to do by violence. Datus walked in front of the mutilated Venus. Then with a sudden spring he tore the baton out of the hand of one of his guardians, leaped upon the pedestal, and showered his blows upon the lovely marble woman. With a crack and a dull thud her right arm dropped to the ground. Another fierce blow and the left had followed. Flaccus danced and screamed with horror, while his servants dragged the raving iconoclast from his impassive victim. Domitian's brutal laughter echoed through the hall.

"Well, friend, what think you now?" he cried. "Are you wiser than your Emperor? Can you indeed tame your Christian with kindness?"

Emilius Flaccus wiped the sweat from his brow. "He is yours, great Caesar. Do with him as you will."

“Let him be at the gladiators’ entrance of the circus an hour before the games begin,” said the Emperor. “Now, Emilius, the night has been a merry one. My Ligurian galley waits by the river quay. Come, cool your head with a spin to Ostia ere the business of State calls you to the Senate.”

GIANT MAXIMIN.

I THE COMING OF MAXIMIN

Many are the strange vicissitudes of history. Greatness has often sunk to the dust, and has tempered itself to its new surrounding. Smallness has risen aloft, has flourished for a time, and then has sunk once more. Rich monarchs have become poor monks, brave conquerors have lost their manhood, eunuchs and women have overthrown armies and kingdoms. Surely there is no situation which the mind of man can invent which has not taken shape and been played out upon the world stage. But of all the strange careers and of all the wondrous happenings, stranger than Charles in his monastery, or Justin on his throne, there stands the case of Giant Maximin, what he attained, and how he attained it. Let me tell the sober facts of history, tinged only by that colouring to which the more austere historians could not condescend. It is a record as well as a story.

In the heart of Thrace some ten miles north of the Rhodope mountains, there is a valley which is named Harpessus, after the stream which runs down it. Through this valley lies the main road from the east to the west, and along the road, returning from an expedition against the Alani, there marched, upon the fifth day of the month of June in the year 210, a small but compact Roman army. It consisted of three legions — the Jovian, the Cappadocian, and the men of Hercules. Ten turmae of Gallic cavalry led the van, whilst the rear was covered by a regiment of Batavian Horse Guards, the immediate attendants of the Emperor Septimus Severus who had conducted the campaign in person. The peasants who lined the low hills which fringed the valley looked with indifference upon the long files of dusty, heavily-burdened infantry, but they broke into murmurs of delight at the gold-faced cuirasses and high brazen horse-hair helmets of the guardsmen, applauding their stalwart figures, their martial bearing, and the stately black chargers which they rode. A soldier might know that it was the little weary men with their short swords, their heavy pikes over their shoulders, and their square shields slung upon their backs, who were the real terror of the enemies of the Empire, but to the eyes of the wondering Thracians it was this troop of glittering Apollos who bore Rome’s victory upon their banners, and upheld the throne of the purple-togaed prince who rode before them.

Among the scattered groups of peasants who looked on from a respectful distance at this military pageant, there were two men who attracted much attention from those who stood immediately around them. The one was commonplace enough — a little grey-headed man, with uncouth dress and a frame which was bent and warped by a long life of arduous toil, goat-driving and wood-chopping among the mountains. It was the appearance of his youthful companion which had drawn the amazed observation of the bystanders. In stature he was such a giant as is seen but once or twice in each generation of mankind. Eight feet and two inches was his measure from his sandalled sole to the topmost curls of his tangled hair. Yet for all his mighty stature there was nothing heavy or clumsy in the man. His huge shoulders bore no redundant flesh, and his figure was straight and hard and supple as a young pine tree. A frayed suit of brown leather clung close to his giant body, and a cloak of undressed sheep-skin was slung from his shoulder. His bold blue eyes, shock of yellow hair and fair skin showed that he was of Gothic or northern blood, and the amazed expression upon his broad frank face as he stared at the passing troops told of a simple and uneventful life in some back valley of the Macedonian mountains.

“I fear your mother was right when she advised that we keep you at home,” said the old man anxiously. “Tree-cutting and wood-carrying will seem but dull work after such a sight as this.”

“When I see mother next it will be to put a golden torque round her neck,” said the young giant. “And you, daddy; I will fill your leather pouch with gold pieces before I have done.”

The old man looked at his son with startled eyes. “You would not leave us, Theckla! What could we do without you?”

“My place is down among yonder men,” said the young man. “I was not born to drive goats and carry logs, but to sell this manhood of mine in the best market. There is my market in the Emperor’s own Guard. Say nothing, daddy, for my mind is set, and if you weep now it will be to laugh hereafter. I will to great Rome with the soldiers.”

The daily march of the heavily laden Roman legionary was fixed at twenty miles; but on this afternoon, though only half the distance had been accomplished, the silver trumpets blared out their welcome news that a camp was to be formed. As the men broke their ranks, the reason of their light march was announced by the decurions. It was the birthday of Geta, the younger son of the Emperor, and in his honour there would be games and a double ration of wine. But the iron discipline of the Roman army required that under all circumstances certain duties should be performed, and foremost among them that the camp should be made secure. Laying down their arms in the order of their ranks, the soldiers seized their spades and axes, and worked rapidly and joyously until sloping vallum and gaping fossa girdled them round, and gave them safe refuge against a night attack. Then in noisy, laughing, gesticulating crowds they gathered in their thousands round the grassy arena where the sports were to be held. A long green hillside sloped down to a level plain, and on this gentle incline the army lay watching the strife of the chosen athletes who contended before them. They stretched themselves in the glare of the sunshine, their heavy tunics thrown off, and their naked limbs sprawling, wine-cups an baskets of fruit and cakes circling amongst them, enjoying rest and peace as only those can to whom it comes so rarely.

The five-mile race was over, and had been won as usual by Decurion Brennus, the crack long-distance champion of the Herculians. Amid the yells of the Jovians, Capellus of the corps had carried off both the long and the high jump. Big Brebix the Gaul had out-thrown the long guardsman Serenus with the fifty pound stone. Now, as the sun sank towards the western ridge, and turned the Harpessus to a riband of gold, they had come to the final of the wrestling, where the pliant Greek, whose name is lost in the nickname of “Python,” was tried out against the bull-necked Lictor of the military police, a hairy Hercules, whose heavy hand had in the way of duty oppressed many of the spectators.

As the two men, stripped save for their loin-cloths, approached the wrestling-ring, cheers and counter-cheers burst from their adherents, some favouring the Lictor for his Roman blood, some the Greek from their own private grudge. And then, of a sudden, the cheering died, heads were turned towards the slope away from the arena, men stood up and peered and pointed, until finally, in a strange hush, the whole great assembly had forgotten the athletes, and were watching a single man walking swiftly towards them down the green curve of the hill. This huge solitary figure, with the oaken club in his hand, the shaggy fleece flapping from his great shoulders, and the setting sun gleaming upon a halo of golden hair, might have been the tutelary god of the fierce and barren mountains from which he had issued. Even the Emperor rose from his chair and gazed with open-eyed amazement at the extraordinary being who approached him.

The man, whom we already know as Theckla the Thracian, paid no heed to the attention which he had aroused, but strode onwards, stepping as lightly as a deer, until he reached the fringe of the soldiers. Amid their open ranks he picked his way, sprang over the ropes which guarded the arena, and advanced towards the Emperor, until a spear at his breast warned him that he must go no nearer. Then he sunk upon his right knee and called out some words in the Gothic speech.

"Great Jupiter! Whoever saw such a body of a man!" cried the Emperor. "What says he? What is amiss with the fellow? Whence comes he, and what is his name?"

An interpreter translated the Barbarian's answer. "He says, great Caesar, that he is of good blood, and sprung by a Gothic father from a woman of the Alani. He says that his name is Theckla, and that he would fain carry a sword in Caesar's service."

The Emperor smiled. "Some post could surely be found for such a man, were it but as janitor at the Palatine Palace," said he to one of the Prefects. "I would fain see him walk even as he is through the forum. He would turn the heads of half the women in Rome. Talk to him, Crassus. You know his speech."

The Roman officer turned to the giant. "Caesar says that you are to come with him, and he will make you the servant at his door."

The Barbarian rose, and his fair cheeks flushed with resentment.

"I will serve Caesar as a soldier," said he, "but I will be house-servant to no man-not even to him. If Caesar would see what manner of man I am, let him put one of his guardsmen up against me."

"By the shade of Milo this is a bold fellow!" cried the Emperor. "How say you, Crassus? Shall he make good his words?"

"By your leave, Caesar," said the blunt soldier, "good swordsmen are too rare in these days that we should let them slay each other for sport. Perhaps if the Barbarian would wrestle a fall—"

"Excellent!" cried the Emperor. "Here is the Python, and here Varus the Lictor, each stripped for the bout. Have a look at them, Barbarian, and see which you would choose. What does he say? He would take them both? Nay then he is either the king of wrestlers or the king of boasters, and we shall soon see which. Let him have his way, and he has himself to thank if he comes out with a broken neck.”

There was some laughter when the peasant tossed his sheep-skin mantle to the ground and, without troubling to remove his leathern tunic, advanced towards the two wrestlers; but it became uproarious when with a quick spring he seized the Greek under one arm and the Roman under the other, holding them as in a vice. Then with a terrific effort he tore them both from the ground, carried them writhing and kicking round the arena, and finally walking up to the Emperor’s throne, threw his two athletes down in front of him. Then, bowing to Caesar, the huge Barbarian withdrew, and laid his great bulk down among the ranks of the applauding soldiers, whence he watched with stolid unconcern the conclusion of the sports.

It was still daylight, when the last event had been decided, and the soldiers returned to the camp. The Emperor Severus had ordered his horse, and in the company of Crassus, his favourite prefect, rode down the winding pathway which skirts the Harpessus, chatting over the future dispersal of the army. They had ridden for some miles when Severus, glancing behind him, was surprised to see a huge figure which trotted lightly along at the very heels of his horse.

“Surely this is Mercury as well as Hercules that we have found among the Thracian mountains,” said he with a smile. “Let us see how soon our Syrian horses can out-distance him.”

The two Romans broke into a gallop, and did not draw rein until a good mile had been covered at the full pace of their splendid chargers. Then they turned and looked back; but there, some distance off, still running with a lightness and a spring which spoke of iron muscles and inexhaustible endurance, came the great Barbarian. The Roman Emperor waited until the athlete had come up to them.

“Why do you follow me?” he asked. “It is my hope, Caesar, that I may always follow you.” His flushed face as he spoke was almost level with that of the mounted Roman.

“By the god of war, I do not know where in all the world I could find such a servant!” cried the Emperor. “You shall be my own body-guard, the one nearest to me of all.”

The giant fell upon his knee. “My life and strength are yours,” he said. “I ask no more than to spend them for Caesar.”

Crassus had interpreted this short dialogue. He now turned to the Emperor.

"If he is indeed to be always at your call, Caesar, it would be well to give the poor Barbarian some name which your lips can frame. Theckla is as uncouth and craggy a word as one of his native rocks."

The Emperor pondered for a moment. "If I am to have the naming of him," said he, "then surely I shall call him Maximus, for there is not such a giant upon earth."

"Hark you," said the Prefect. "The Emperor has deigned to give you a Roman name, since you have come into his service. Henceforth you are no longer Theckla, but you are Maximus. Can you say it after me?"

"Maximin," repeated the Barbarian, trying to catch the Roman word.

The Emperor laughed at the mincing accent. "Yes, yes, Maximin let it be. To all the world you are Maximin, the body-guard of Severus. When we have reached Rome, we will soon see that your dress shall correspond with your office. Meanwhile march with the guard until you have my further orders."

So it came about that as the Roman army resumed its march next day, and left behind it the fair valley of the Harpessus, a huge recruit, clad in brown leather, with a rude sheep-skin floating from his shoulders, marched beside the Imperial troop. But far away in the wooden farmhouse of a distant Macedonian valley two old country folk wept salt tears, and prayed to the gods for the safety of their boy who had turned his face to Rome.

II THE RISE OF GIANT MAXIMIN

Exactly twenty-five years had passed since the day that Theckla the huge Thracian peasant had turned into Maximin the Roman guardsman. They had not been good years for Rome. Gone for ever were the great Imperial days of the Hadrians and the Trajans. Gone also the golden age of the two Antonines, when the highest were for once the most worthy and most wise. It had been an epoch of weak and cruel men. Severus, the swarthy African, a stark grim man, had died in far away York, after fighting all the winter with the Caledonian Highlanders — a race who have ever since worn the martial garb of the Romans. His son, known only by his slighting nick-name of Caracalla, had reigned during six years of insane lust and cruelty, before the knife of an angry soldier avenged the dignity of the Roman name. The nonentity Macrinus had filled the dangerous throne for a single year before he also met a bloody end, and made room for the most grotesque of all monarchs, the unspeakable Heliogabalus with his foul mind and his painted face. He in turn was cut to pieces by the soldiers, and Severus Alexander, a gentle youth, scarce seventeen years of age, had been thrust into his place. For thirteen years now he had ruled, striving with some success to put some virtue and stability into the rotting Empire, but raising many fierce enemies as he did so-enemies whom he had not the strength nor the wit to hold in check.

And Giant Maximin — what of him? He had carried his eight feet of manhood through the lowlands of Scotland, and the passes of the Grampians. He had seen Severus pass away, and had soldiered with his son. He had fought in Armenia, in Dacia, and in Germany. They had made him a centurion upon the field when with his hands he plucked out one by one the stockades of a northern village, and so cleared a path for the stormers. His strength had been the jest and the admiration of the soldiers. Legends about him had spread through the army and were the common gossip round the camp fires — of his duel with the German axeman on the Island of the Rhine, and of the blow with his fist which broke the leg of a Scythian's horse. Gradually he had won his way upwards, until now, after quarter of a century's service he was tribune of the fourth legion and superintendent of recruits for the whole army. The young soldier who had come under the glare of Maximin's eyes, or had been lifted up with one huge hand while he was cuffed by the other, had his first lesson from him in the discipline of the service.

It was nightfall in the camp of the fourth legion upon the Gallic shore of the Rhine. Across the moonlit water, amid the thick forests which stretched away to the dim horizon, lay the wild untamed German tribes. Down on the river bank the light gleamed upon the helmets of the Roman sentinels who kept guard along the river. Far away a red point rose and fell in the darkness — a watch-fire of the enemy upon the further shore.

Outside his tent, beside some smouldering logs, Giant Maximin was seated, a dozen of his officers around him. He had changed much since the day when we first met him in the Valley of the Harpessus. His huge frame was as erect as ever, and there was no sign of diminution of his strength. But he had aged none the less. The yellow tangle of hair was gone, worn down by the ever-pressing helmet. The fresh young face was drawn and hardened, with austere lines wrought by trouble and privation. The nose was more hawk-like, the eyes more cunning, the expression more cynical and more sinister. In his youth, a child would have run to his arms. Now it would shrink screaming from his gaze. That was what twenty-five years with the eagles had done for Theckla the Thracian peasant.

He was listening now — for he was a man of few words — to the chatter of his centurions. One of them, Balbus the Sicilian, had been to the main camp at Mainz, only four miles away, and had seen the Emperor Alexander arrive that very day from Rome. The rest were eager at the news, for it was a time of unrest, and the rumour of great changes was in the air.

“How many had he with him?” asked Labienus, a black-browed veteran from the south of Gaul. “I’ll wager a month’s pay that he was not so trustful as to come alone among his faithful legions.”

“He had no great force,” replied Balbus. “Ten or twelve cohorts of the Praetorians and a handful of horse.”

“Then indeed his head is in the lion’s mouth,” cried Sulpicius, a hot-headed youth from the African Pentapolis. “How was he received?”

“Coldly enough. There was scarce a shout as he came down the line.”

“They are ripe for mischief,” said Labienus. “And who can wonder, when it is we soldiers who uphold the Empire upon our spears, while the lazy citizens at Rome reap all of our sowing. Why cannot a soldier have what a soldier gains? So long as they throw us our denarius a day, they think that they have done with us.”

“Aye,” croaked a grumbling old greybeard. “Our limbs, our blood, our lives — what do they care so long as the Barbarians are held off, and they are left in peace to their feastings and their circus? Free bread, free wine, free games — everything for the loafer at Rome. For us the frontier guard and a soldier’s fare.”

Maximin gave a deep laugh. “Old Plancus talks like that,” said he; “but we know that for all the world he would not change his steel plate for a citizen’s gown. You’ve earned the kennel, old hound, if you wish it. Go and gnaw your bone and growl in peace.”

“Nay, I am too old for change. I will follow the eagle till I die. And yet I had rather die in serving a soldier master than a long-gowned Syrian who comes of a stock where the women are men and the men are women.”

There was a laugh from the circle of soldiers, for sedition and mutiny were rife in the camp, and even the old centurion’s outbreak could not draw a protest. Maximin raised his great mastiff head and looked at Balbus.

“Was any name in the mouths of the soldiers?” he asked in a meaning voice.

There was a hush for the answer. The sigh of the wind among the pines and the low lapping of the river swelled out louder in the silence. Balbus looked hard at his commander.

“Two names were whispered from rank to rank,” said he. “One was Ascenius Pollio, the General. The other was—”

The fiery Sulpicius sprang to his feet waving a glowing brand above his head.

“Maximinus!” he yelled, “Imperator Maximinus Augustus!”

Who could tell how it came about? No one had thought of it an hour before. And now it sprang in an instant to full accomplishment. The shout of the frenzied young African had scarcely rung through the darkness when from the tents, from the watch-fires, from the sentries, the answer came pealing back: “Ave, Maximinus! Ave Maximinus Augustus!” From all sides men came rushing, half-clad, wild-eyed, their eyes staring, their mouths agape, flaming wisps of straw or flaring torches above their heads. The giant was caught up by scores of hands, and sat enthroned upon the bull-necks of the legionaries. “To the camp!” they yelled. “To the camp! Hail! Hail to the soldier Caesar!”

That same night Severus Alexander, the young Syrian Emperor, walked outside his Praetorian camp, accompanied by his friend Licinius Probus, the

Captain of the Guard. They were talking gravely of the gloomy faces and seditious bearing of the soldiers. A great foreboding of evil weighed heavily upon the Emperor's heart, and it was reflected upon the stern bearded face of his companion.

"I like it not," said he. "It is my counsel, Caesar, that with the first light of morning we make our way south once more."

"But surely," the Emperor answered, "I could not for shame turn my back upon the danger. What have they against me? How have I harmed them that they should forget their vows and rise upon me?"

"They are like children who ask always for something new. You heard the murmur as you rode along the ranks. Nay, Caesar, fly tomorrow, and your Praetorians will see that you are not pursued. There may be some loyal cohorts among the legions, and if we join forces—"

A distant shout broke in upon their conversation — a low continued roar, like the swelling tumult of a sweeping wave. Far down the road upon which they stood there twinkled many moving lights, tossing and sinking as they rapidly advanced, whilst the hoarse tumultuous bellowing broke into articulate words, the same tremendous words, a thousand-fold repeated. Licinius seized the Emperor by the wrist and dragged him under the cover of some bushes.

"Be still, Caesar! For your life be still!" he whispered. "One word and we are lost!"

Crouching in the darkness, they saw that wild procession pass, the rushing screaming figures, the tossing arms, the bearded, distorted faces, now scarlet and now grey, as the brandished torches waxed or waned. They heard the rush of many feet, the clamour of hoarse voices, the clang of metal upon metal. And then suddenly, above them all, they saw a vision of a monstrous man, a huge bowed back, a savage face, grim hawk eyes, that looked out over the swaying shields. It was seen for an instant in a smoke-fringed circle of fire, and then it had swept on into the night.

"Who is he?" stammered the Emperor, clutching at his guardsman's sleeve. "They call him Caesar."

"It is surely Maximin the Thracian peasant." In the darkness the Praetorian officer looked with strange eyes at his master.

"It is all over, Caesar. Let us fly your tent."

But even as they went a second shout had broken forth tenfold louder than the first. If the one had been the roar of the oncoming wave, the other was the full turmoil of the tempest. Twenty thousand voices from the camp had broken into one wild shout which echoed through the night, until the distant Germans round their watch-fires listened in wonder and alarm.

“Ave!” cried the voices. “Ave Maximinus Augustus!”

High upon their bucklers stood the giant, and looked round him at the great floor of upturned faces below. His own savage soul was stirred by the clamour, but only his gleaming eyes spoke of the fire within. He waved his hand to the shouting soldiers as the huntsman waves to the leaping pack. They passed him up a coronet of oak leaves, and clashed their swords in homage as he placed it on his head. And then there came a swirl in the crowd before him, a little space was cleared, and there knelt an officer in the Praetorian garb, blood upon his face, blood upon his bared forearm, blood upon his naked sword. Licinius too had gone with the tide.

“Hail, Caesar, hail!” he cried, as he bowed his head before the giant. “I come from Alexander. He will trouble you no more.”

III THE FALL OF MAXIMIN

For three years the soldier Emperor had been upon the throne. His palace had been his tent, and his people had been the legionaries. With them he was supreme; away from them he was nothing. He had gone with them from one frontier to the other. He had fought against Dacians, Sarmatians, and once again against the Germans. But Rome knew nothing of him, and all her turbulence rose against a master who cared so little for her or her opinion that he never deigned to set foot within her walls. There were cabals and conspiracies against the absent Caesar. Then his heavy hand fell upon them, and they were cuffed, even as the young soldiers had been who passed under his discipline. He knew nothing, and cared as much for consuls, senates, and civil laws. His own will and the power of the sword were the only forces which he could understand. Of commerce and the arts he was as ignorant as when he left his Thracian home. The whole vast Empire was to him a huge machine for producing the money by which the legions were to be rewarded. Should he fail to get that money, his fellow soldiers would bear him a grudge. To watch their interests they had raised him upon their shields that night. If city funds had to be plundered or temples desecrated, still the money must be got. Such was the point of view of Giant Maximin.

But there came resistance, and all the fierce energy of the man, all the hardness which had given him the leadership of hard men, sprang forth to quell it. From his youth he had lived amidst slaughter. Life and death were cheap things to him. He struck savagely at all who stood up to him, and when they hit back, he struck more savagely still. His giant shadow lay black across the Empire from Britain to Syria. A strange subtle vindictiveness became also apparent in him. Omnipotence ripened every fault and swelled it into crime. In the old days he had been rebuked for his roughness. Now a sullen dangerous anger arose against those who had rebuked him. He sat by the hour with his craggy chin between his hands, and his elbows resting on his knees, while he recalled all the misadventures, all the vexations of his early youth, when Roman wits had shot their little satires upon his bulk and his ignorance. He could not write, but his son Verus placed the names upon his tablets, and they were sent to the Governor of Rome. Men who had long forgotten their offence were called suddenly to make most bloody reparation.

A rebellion broke out in Africa, but was quelled by his lieutenant. But the mere rumour of it set Rome in a turmoil. The Senate found something of its ancient spirit. So did the Italian people. They would not be for ever bullied by the legions. As Maximin approached from the frontier, with the sack of rebellious Rome in his mind, he was faced with every sign of a national resistance. The countryside was deserted, the farms abandoned, the fields cleared of crops and cattle. Before him lay the walled town of Aquileia. He flung himself fiercely upon it, but was met by as fierce a resistance. The walls could not be forced, and yet there was no food in the country round for his legions. The men were starving and dissatisfied. What did it matter to them who was Emperor? Maximin was no better than themselves. Why should they call down the curse of the whole Empire upon their heads by upholding him? He saw their sullen faces and their averted eyes, and he knew that the end had come.

That night he sat with his son Verus in his tent, and he spoke softly and gently as the youth had never heard him speak before. He had spoken thus in old days with Paullina, the boy’s mother; but she had been dead these many years, and all that was soft and gentle in the big man had passed away with her. Now her spirit seemed very near him, and his own was tempered by its presence.

“I would have you go back to the Thracian mountains,” he said. “I have tried both, boy, and I can tell you that there is no pleasure which power can bring which can equal the breath of the wind and the smell of the kine upon a summer morning. Against you they have no quarrel. Why should they mishandle you? Keep far from Rome and the Romans. Old Eudoxus has money, and to spare. He awaits you with two horses outside the camp. Make for the valley of the Harpessus, lad. It was thence that your father came, and there you will find his kin. Buy and stock a homestead, and keep yourself far from the paths of greatness and of danger. God keep you, Verus, and send you safe to Thrace.”

When his son had kissed his hand and had left him, the Emperor drew his robe around him and sat long in thought. In his slow brain he revolved the past — his early peaceful days, his years with Severus, his memories of Britain, his long campaigns, his strivings and battlings, all leading to that mad night by the Rhine. His fellow soldiers had loved him then. And now he had read death in their eyes. How had he failed them? Others he might have wronged, but they at least had no complaint against him. If he had his time again, he would think less of them and more of his people, he would try to win love instead of fear, he would live for peace and not for war. If he had his time again! But there were shuffling Steps, furtive whispers, and the low rattle of arms outside his tent. A bearded face looked in at him, a swarthy African face that he knew well. He laughed, and, bearing his arm, he took his sword from the table beside him.

"It is you, Sulpicius," said he. "You have not come to cry 'Ave Imperator Maximin!' as once by the camp fire. You are tired of me, and by the gods I am tired of you, and glad to be at the end of it. Come and have done with it, for I am minded to see how many of you I can take with me when I go."

They clustered at the door of the tent, peeping over each other's shoulders, and none wishing to be the first to close with that laughing, mocking giant. But something was pushed forward upon a spear point, and as he saw it, Maximin groaned and his sword sank to the earth.

"You might have spared the boy," he sobbed. "He would not have hurt you. Have done with it then, for I will gladly follow him."

So they closed upon him and cut and stabbed and thrust, until his knees gave way beneath him and he dropped upon the floor.

"The tyrant is dead!" they cried. "The tyrant is dead," and from all the camp beneath them and from the walls of the beleaguered city the joyous cry came echoing back, "He is dead, Maximin is dead!"

I sit in my study, and upon the table before me lies a denarius of Maximin, as fresh as when the triumvir of the Temple of Juno Moneta sent it from the mint. Around it are recorded his resounding titles — Imperator Maximinus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunitia potestate, and the rest. In the centre is the impress of a great craggy head, a massive jaw, a rude fighting face, a contracted forehead. For all the pompous roll of titles it is a peasant's face, and I see him not as the Emperor of Rome, but as the great Thracian boor who strode down the hillside on that far-distant summer day when first the eagles beckoned him to Rome.

THE COMING OF THE HUNS

In the middle of the fourth century the state of the Christian religion was a scandal and a disgrace. Patient, humble, and long-suffering in adversity, it had become positive, aggressive, and unreasonable with success. Paganism was not yet dead, but it was rapidly sinking, finding its most faithful supporters among the conservative aristocrats of the best families on the one hand, and among those benighted villagers on the other who gave their name to the expiring creed. Between these two extremes the great majority of reasonable men had turned from the conception of many gods to that of one, and had rejected for ever the beliefs of their forefathers. But with the vices of polytheism they had also abandoned its virtues, among which toleration and religious good humour had been conspicuous. The strenuous earnestness of the Christians had compelled them to examine and define every point of their own theology; but as they had no central authority by which such definitions could be checked, it was not long before a hundred heresies had put forward their rival views, while the same earnestness of conviction led the stronger bands of schismatics to endeavour, for conscience sake, to force their views upon the weaker, and thus to cover the Eastern world with confusion and strife.

Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople were centres of theological warfare. The whole north of Africa, too, was rent by the strife of the Donatists, who upheld their particular schism by iron flails and the war-cry of “Praise to the Lord!” But minor local controversies sank to nothing when compared with the huge argument of the Catholic and the Arian, which rent every village in twain, and divided every household from the cottage to the palace. The rival doctrines of the Homoousian and of the Homoiousian, containing metaphysical differences so attenuated that they could hardly be stated, turned bishop against bishop and congregation against congregation. The ink of the theologians and the blood of the fanatics were spilled in floods on either side, and gentle followers of Christ were horrified to find that their faith was responsible for such a state of riot and bloodshed as had never yet disgraced the religious history of the world. Many of the more earnest among them, shocked and scandalised, slipped away to the Libyan Desert, or to the solitude of Pontus, there to await in self-denial and prayer that second coming which was supposed to be at hand. Even in the deserts they could not escape the echo of the distant strife, and the hermits themselves scowled fiercely from their dens at passing travellers who might be contaminated by the doctrines of Athanasius or of Arius.

Such a hermit was Simon Melas, of whom I write. A Trinitarian and a Catholic, he was shocked by the excesses of the persecution of the Arians, which could be only matched by the similar outrages with which these same Arians in the day of their power avenged their treatment on their brother Christians. Weary of the whole strife, and convinced that the end of the world was indeed at hand, he left his home in Constantinople and travelled as far as the Gothic settlements in Dacia, beyond the Danube, in search of some spot where he might be free from the never-ending disputes. Still journeying to the north and east, he crossed the river which we now call the Dneister, and there, finding a rocky hill rising from an immense plain, he formed a cell near its summit, and settled himself down to end his life in self-denial and meditation. There were fish in the stream, the country teemed with game, and there was an abundance of wild fruits, so that his spiritual exercises were not unduly interrupted by the search of sustenance for his mortal frame.

In this distant retreat he expected to find absolute solitude, but the hope was in vain. Within a week of his arrival, in an hour of worldly curiosity, he explored the edges of the high rocky hill upon which he lived. Making his way up to a cleft, which was hung with olives and myrtles, he came upon a cave in the opening of which sat an aged man, white-bearded, white-haired, and infirm — a hermit like himself. So long had this stranger been alone that he had almost forgotten the use of his tongue; but at last, words coming more freely, he was able to convey the information that his name was Paul of Nicopolis, that he was a Greek citizen, and that he also had come out into the desert for the saving of his soul, and to escape from the contamination of heresy.

“Little I thought, brother Simon,” said he, “that I should ever find any one else who had come so far upon the same holy errand. In all these years, and they are so many that I have lost count of them, I have never seen a man, save indeed one or two wandering shepherds far out upon yonder plain.”

From where they sat, the huge steppe, covered with waving grass and gleaming with a vivid green in the sun, stretched away as level and as unbroken as the sea, to the eastern horizon. Simon Melas stared across it with curiosity.

“Tell me, brother Paul,” said he, “you who have lived here so long — what lies at the further side of that plain?”

The old man shook his head. “There is no further side to the plain,” said he. “It is the earth’s boundary, and stretches away to eternity. For all these years I have sat beside it, but never once have I seen anything come across it. It is manifest that if there had been a further side there would certainly at some time have come some traveller from that direction. Over the great river yonder is the Roman post of Tyras; but that is a long day’s journey from here, and they have never disturbed my meditations.”

“On what do you meditate, brother Paul?”

“At first I meditated on many sacred mysteries; but now, for twenty years, I have brooded continually on the nature of the Logos. What is your view upon that vital matter, brother Simon?”

“Surely,” said the younger man, “there can be no question as to that. The Logos is assuredly but a name used by St. John to signify the Deity.”

The old hermit gave a hoarse cry of fury, and his brown, withered face was convulsed with anger. Seizing the huge cudgel which he kept to beat off the wolves, he shook it murderously at his companion.

“Out with you! Out of my cell!” he cried. “Have I lived here so long to have it polluted by a vile Trinitarian — a follower of the rascal Athanasius? Wretched idolater, learn once for all, that the Logos is in truth an emanation from the Deity, and in no sense equal or co-eternal with Him! Out with you, I say, or I will dash out your brains with my staff!”

It was useless to reason with the furious Arian, and Simon withdrew in sadness and wonder, that at this extreme verge of the known earth the spirit of religious strife should still break upon the peaceful solitude of the wilderness. With hanging head and heavy heart he made his way down the valley, and climbed up once more to his own cell, which lay at the crown of the hill, with the intention of never again exchanging visits with his Arian neighbour.

Here, for a year, dwelt Simon Melas, leading a life of solitude and prayer. There was no reason why any one should ever come to this outermost point of human habitation. Once a young Roman officer — Caius Crassus — rode out a day’s journey from Tyras, and climbed the hill to have speech with the anchorite. He was of an equestrian family, and still held his belief in the old dispensation. He looked with interest and surprise, but also with some disgust, at the ascetic arrangements of that humble abode.

“Whom do you please by living in such a fashion?” he asked.

“We show that our spirit is superior to our flesh,” Simon answered. “If we fare badly in this world, we believe that we shall reap an advantage in the world to come.”

The centurion shrugged his shoulders. “There are philosophers among our people, Stoics and others, who have the same idea. When I was in the Herulian Cohort of the Fourth Legion we were quartered in Rome itself, and I saw much of the Christians, but I could never learn anything from them which I had not heard from my own father, whom you, in your arrogance, would call a Pagan. It is true that we talk of numerous gods; but for many years we have not taken them very seriously. Our thoughts upon virtue and duty and a noble life are the same as your own.”

Simon Melas shook his head.

“If you have not the holy books,” said he, “then what guide have you to direct your steps?”

“If you will read our philosophers, and above all the divine Plato, you will find that there are other guides who may take you to the same end. Have you by chance read the book which was written by our Emperor Marcus Aurelius? Do you not discover there every virtue which man could have, although he knew nothing of your creed? Have you considered, also, the words and actions of our late Emperor Julian, with whom I served my first campaign when he went out against the Persians? Where could you find a more perfect man than he?”

“Such talk is unprofitable, and I will have no more of it,” said Simon, sternly. “Take heed while there is time, and embrace the true faith; for the end of the world is at hand, and when it comes there will be no mercy for those who have shut their eyes to the light.” So saying, he turned back once more to his praying-stool and to his crucifix, while the young Roman walked in deep thought down the hill, and mounting his horse, rode off to his distant post. Simon watched him until his brazen helmet was but a bead of light on the western edge of the great plain; for this was the first human face that he had seen in all this long year, and there were times when his heart yearned for the voices and the faces of his kind.

So another year passed, and save for the chance of weather and the slow change of the seasons, one day was as another. Every morning, when Simon opened his eyes, he saw the same grey line ripening into red in the furthest east, until the bright rim pushed itself above that far-off horizon across which no living creature had ever been known to come. Slowly the sun swept across the huge arch of the heavens, and as the shadows shifted from the black rocks which jutted upward from above his cell, so did the hermit regulate his terms of prayer and meditation. There was nothing on earth to draw his eye, or to distract his mind, for the grassy plain below was as void from month to month as the heaven above. So the long hours passed, until the red rim slipped down on the further side, and the day ended in the same pearl-grey shimmer with which it had begun. Once two ravens circled for some days round the lonely hill, and once a white fish-eagle came from the Dneister and screamed above the hermit's head. Sometimes red dots were seen on the green plain where the antelopes grazed, and often a wolf howled in the darkness from the base of the rocks. Such was the uneventful life of Simon Melas the anchorite, until there came the day of wrath.

It was in the late spring of the year 375 that Simon came out from his cell, his gourd in his hand, to draw water from the spring. Darkness had closed in, the sun had set, but one last glimmer of rosy light rested upon a rocky peak, which jutted forth from the hill, on the further side from the hermit's dwelling. As Simon came forth from under his ledge, the gourd dropped from his hand, and he stood gazing in amazement.

On the opposite peak a man was standing, his outline black in the fading light. He was a strange almost a deformed figure, short-statured, round-backed, with a large head, no neck, and a long rod jutting out from between his shoulders. He stood with his face advanced, and his body bent, peering very intently over the plain to the westward. In a moment he was gone, and the lonely black peak showed up hard and naked against the faint eastern glimmer. Then the night closed down, and all was black once more.

Simon Melas stood long in bewilderment, wondering who this stranger could be. He had heard, as had every Christian, of those evil spirits which were wont to haunt the hermits in the Thebaid and on the skirts of the Ethiopian waste. The strange shape of this solitary creature, its dark outline and prowling, intent attitude, suggestive rather of a fierce, rapacious beast than of a man, all helped him to believe that he had at last encountered one of those wanderers from the pit, of whose existence, in those days of robust faith, he had no more doubt than of his own. Much of the night he spent in prayer, his eyes glancing continually at the low arch of his cell door, with its curtain of deep purple wrought with stars. At any instant some crouching monster, some homed abomination, might peer in upon him; and he clung with frenzied appeal to his crucifix, as his human weakness quailed at the thought. But at last his fatigue overcame his fears, and falling upon his couch of dried grass, he slept until the bright daylight brought him to his senses.

It was later than was his wont, and the sun was far above the horizon. As he came forth from his cell, he looked across at the peak of rock, but it stood there bare and silent. Already it seemed to him that that strange dark figure which had startled him so was some dream, some vision of the twilight. His gourd lay where it had fallen, and he picked it up with the intention of going to the spring. But suddenly he was aware of something new. The whole air was throbbing with sound. From all sides it came, rumbling, indefinite, an inarticulate mutter, low, but thick and strong, rising, falling, reverberating among the rocks, dying away into vague whispers, but always there. He looked round at the blue, cloudless sky in bewilderment. Then he scrambled up the rocky pinnacle above him, and sheltering himself in its shadow, he stared out over the plain. In his wildest dream he had never imagined such a sight.

The whole vast expanse was covered with horse-men, hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands, all riding slowly and in silence, out of the unknown east. It was the multitudinous beat of their horses’ hoofs which caused that low throbbing in his ears. Some were so close to him as he looked down upon them that he could see clearly their thin wiry horses, and the strange humped figures of the swarthy riders, sitting forward on the withers, shapeless bundles, their short legs hanging stirrupless, their bodies balanced as firmly as though they were part of the beast. In those nearest he could see the bow and the quiver, the long spear and the short sword, with the coiled lasso behind the rider, which told that this was no helpless horde of wanderers, but a formidable army upon the march. His eyes passed on from them and swept further and further, but still to the very horizon, which quivered with movement, there was no end to this monstrous cavalry. Already the vanguard was far past the island of rock upon which he dwelt, and he could now understand that in front of this vanguard were single scouts who guided the course of the army, and that it was one of these whom he had seen the evening before.

All day, held spell-bound by this wonderful sight, the hermit crouched in the shadow of the rocks, and all day the sea of horsemen rolled onward over the plain beneath. Simon had seen the swarming quays of Alexandria, he had watched the mob which blocked the hippodrome of Constantinople, yet never had he imagined such a multitude as now defiled beneath his eyes, coming from that eastern skyline which had been the end of his world. Sometimes the dense streams of horsemen were broken by droves of brood-mares and foals, driven along by mounted guards; sometimes there were herds of cattle; sometimes there were lines of waggons with skin canopies above them; but then once more, after every break, came the horsemen, the horsemen, the hundreds and the thousands and the tens of thousands, slowly, ceaselessly, silently drifting from the east to the west. The long day passed, the light waned, and the shadows fell; but still the great broad stream was flowing by.

But the night brought a new and even stranger sight. Simon had marked bundles of faggots upon the backs of many of the led horses, and now he saw their use. All over the great plain, red pin-points gleamed through the darkness, which grew and brightened into flickering columns of flame. So far as he could see both to east and west the fires extended, until they were but points of light in the furthest distance. White stars shone in the vast heavens above, red ones in the great plain below. And from every side rose the low, confused murmur of voices, with the lowing of oxen and the neighing of horses.

Simon had been a soldier and a man of affairs before ever he forsook the world, and the meaning of all that he had seen was clear to him. History told him how the Roman world had ever been assailed by fresh swarms of Barbarians, coming from the outer darkness, and that the Eastern Empire had already, in its fifty years of existence since Constantine had moved the capital of the world to the shores of the Bosphorus, been tormented in the same way. Gepidae and Heruli, Ostrogoths and Sarmatians, he was familiar with them all. What the advanced sentinel of Europe had seen from this lonely outlying hill, was a fresh swarm breaking in upon the Empire, distinguished only from the others by its enormous, incredible size and by the strange aspect of the warriors who composed it. He alone of all civilised men knew of the approach of this dreadful shadow, sweeping like a heavy storm-cloud from the unknown depths of the east. He thought of the little Roman posts along the Dneister, of the ruined Dacian wall of Trajan behind them, and then of the scattered, defenceless villages which lay with no thought of danger over all the open country which stretched down to the Danube. Could he but give them the alarm! Was it not, perhaps, for that very end that God had guided him to the wilderness?

Then suddenly he remembered his Arian neighbour, who dwelt in the cave beneath him. Once or twice during the last year he had caught a glimpse of his tall, bent figure hobbling round to examine the traps which he laid for quails and partridges. On one occasion they had met at the brook; but the old theologian waved him away, as if he were a leper. What did he think now of this strange happening? Surely their differences might be forgotten at such a moment. He stole down the side of the hill, and made his way to his fellow-hermit's cave.

But there was a terrible silence as he approached it. His heart sank at that deadly stillness in the little valley. No glimmer of light came from the cleft in the rocks. He entered and called, but no answer came back. Then, with flint, steel, and the dry grass which he used for tinder, he struck a spark, and blew it into a blaze. The old hermit, his white hair dabbled with crimson, lay sprawling across the floor. The broken crucifix, with which his head had been beaten in, lay in splinters across him. Simon had dropped on his knees beside him, straightening his contorted limbs, and muttering the office for the dead, when the thud of a horse's hoofs was heard ascending the little valley which led to the hermit's cell. The dry grass had burned down, and Simon crouched trembling in the darkness, pattering prayers to the Virgin that his strength might be upheld.

It may have been that the newcomer had seen the gleam of the light, or it may have been that he had heard from his comrades of the old man whom they had murdered, and that his curiosity had led him to the spot. He stopped his horse outside the cave, and Simon, lurking in the shadows within, had a fair view of him in the moonlight. He slipped from his saddle, fastened the bridle to a root, and then stood peering through the opening of the cell. He was a very short, thick man, with a dark face, which was gashed with three cuts upon either side. His small eyes were sunk deep in his head, showing like black holes in the heavy, flat, hairless face. His legs were short and very bandy, so that he waddled uncouthly as he walked.

Simon crouched in the darkest angle, and he gripped in his hand that same knotted cudgel which the dead theologian had once raised against him. As that hideous stooping head advanced into the darkness of the cell, he brought the staff down upon it with all the strength of his right arm, and then, as the stricken savage fell forward upon his face, he struck madly again and again, until the shapeless figure lay limp and still. One roof covered the first slain of Europe and of Asia.

Simon's veins were throbbing and quivering with the unwonted joy of action. All the energy stored up in those years of repose came in a flood at this moment of need. Standing in the darkness of the cell, he saw, as in a map of fire, the outlines of the great Barbaric host, the line of the river, the position of the settlements, the means by which they might be warned. Silently he waited in the shadow until the moon had sunk. Then he flung himself upon the dead man's horse, guided it down the gorge, and set forth at a gallop across the plain.

There were fires on every side of him, but he kept clear of the rings of light. Round each he could see, as he passed, the circle of sleeping warriors, with the long lines of picketed horses. Mile after mile and league after league stretched that huge encampment. And then, at last, he had reached the open plain which led to the river, and the fires of the invaders were but a dull smoulder against the black eastern sky. Ever faster and faster he sped across the steppe, like a single fluttered leaf which whirls before the storm. Even as the dawn whitened the sky behind him, it gleamed also upon the broad river in front, and he flogged his weary horse through the shallows, until he plunged into its full yellow tide.

So it was that, as the young Roman centurion — Caius Crassus — made his morning round in the fort of Tyras he saw a single horseman, who rode towards him from the river. Weary and spent, drenched with water and caked with dirt and sweat, both horse and man were at the last stage of their endurance. With amazement the Roman watched their progress, and recognised in the ragged, swaying figure, with flying hair and staring eyes, the hermit of the eastern desert. He ran to meet him, and caught him in his arms as he reeled from the saddle.

“What is it, then?” he asked. “What is your news?”

But the hermit could only point at the rising sun. “To arms!” he croaked. “To arms! The day of wrath is come!” And as he looked, the Roman saw — far across the river — a great dark shadow, which moved slowly over the distant plain.

THE LAST OF THE LEGIONS

Pontus, the Roman viceroy, sat in the atrium of his palatial villa by the Thames, and he looked with perplexity at the scroll of papyrus which he had just unrolled. Before him stood the messenger who had brought it, a swarthy little Italian, whose black eyes were glazed with want of sleep, and his olive features darker still from dust and sweat. The viceroy was looking fixedly at him, yet he saw him not, so full was his mind of this sudden and most unexpected order. To him it seemed as if the solid earth had given way beneath his feet. His life and the work of his life had come to irremediable ruin.

“Very good,” he said at last in a hard dry voice, “you can go.”

The man saluted and staggered out of the hall.

A yellow-haired British major-domo came forward for orders.

“Is the General there?”

“He is waiting, your excellency.”

“Then show him in, and leave us together.”

A few minutes later Licinius Crassus, the head of the British military establishment, had joined his chief. He was a large bearded man in a white civilian toga, hemmed with the Patrician purple. His rough, bold features, burned and seamed and lined with the long African wars, were shadowed with anxiety as he looked with questioning eyes at the drawn, haggard face of the viceroy.

“I fear, your excellency, that you have had bad news from Rome.”

“The worst, Crassus. It is all over with Britain. It is a question whether even Gaul will be held.”

“Saint Albus save us! Are the orders precise?”

“Here they are, with the Emperor’s own seal.”

“But why? I had heard a rumour, but it had seemed too incredible.”

“So had I only last week, and had the fellow scourged for having spread it. But here it is as clear as words can make it: ‘Bring every man of the Legions by forced marches to the help of the Empire. Leave not a cohort in Britain.’ These are my orders.”

“But the cause?”

“They will let the limbs wither so that the heart be stronger. The old German hive is about to swarm once more. There are fresh crowds of

Barbarians from Dacia and Scythia. Every sword is needed to hold the Alpine passes. They cannot let three legions lie idle in Britain.”

The soldier shrugged his shoulder’s.

“When the legions go no Roman would feel that his life was safe here. For all that we have done, it is none the less the truth that it is no country of ours, and that we hold it as we won it by the sword.”

“Yes, every man, woman, and child of Latin blood must come with us to Gaul. The galleys are already waiting at Portus Dubris. Get the orders out, Crassus, at once. As the Valerian legion falls back from the Wall of Hadrian it can take the northern colonists with it. The Jovians can bring in the people from the west, and the Batavians can escort the easterns if they will muster at Camboricum. You will see to it.” He sank his face for a moment in his hands. “It is a fearsome thing,” said he, “to tear up the roots of so goodly a tree.”

“To make more space for such a crop of weeds,” said the soldier bitterly. “My God, what will be the end of these poor Britons! From ocean to ocean there is not a tribe which will not be at the throat of its neighbour when the last Roman Lictor has turned his back. With these hot-headed Silures it is hard enough now to keep the swords in their sheaths.”

“The kennel might fight as they chose among themselves until the best hound won,” said the Roman Governor. “At least the victor would keep the arts and the religion which we have brought them, and Britain would be one land. No, it is the bear from the north and the wolves from oversea, the painted savage from beyond the walls and the Saxon pirate from over the water, who will succeed to our rule. Where we saved, they will slay; where we built, they will burn; where we planted, they will ravage. But the die is cast, Crassus. You will carry out the orders.”

“I will send out the messengers within an hour. This very morning there has come news that the Barbarians are through the old gap in the wall, and their outriders as far south as Vinovia.” The Governor shrugged his shoulders. “These things concern us no longer,” said he. Then a bitter smile broke upon his aquiline clean-shaven face. “Whom think you that I see in audience this morning?”

“Nay, I know not.”

“Caradoc and Regnus, and Celticus the Icenian, who, like so many of the richer Britons, have been educated at Rome, and who would lay before me their plans as to the ruling of this country.”

“And what is their plan?”

“That they themselves should do it.” The Roman soldier laughed. “Well, they will have their will,” said he, as he saluted and turned upon his heel. “Farewell, your excellency. There are hard days coming for you and for me.”

An hour later the British deputation was ushered into the presence of the Governor. They were good steadfast men, men who with a whole heart, and at some risk to themselves, had taken up their country’s cause, so far as they could see it. At the same time, they well knew that under the mild and beneficent rule of Rome it was only when they passed from words to deeds that their backs or their necks would be in danger. They stood now, earnest and a little abashed, before the throne of the viceroy. Celticus was a swarthy black-bearded little Iberian. Caradoc and Regnus were tall middle-aged men of the fair flaxen British type. All three were dressed in the draped yellow toga after the Latin fashion, instead of in the bracae and tunic which distinguished their more insular fellow-countrymen.

“Well?” asked the Governor.

“We are here,” said Celticus boldly, “as the spokesmen of a great number of our fellow-countrymen, for the purpose of sending our petition through you to the Emperor and to the Roman Senate, that we may urge upon them the policy of allowing us to govern this country after our own ancient fashion.” He paused, as if awaiting some outburst as an answer to his own temerity; but the Governor merely nodded his head as a sign that he should proceed. “We had laws of our own before ever Caesar set foot in Britain, which have served their purpose since first our forefathers came from the land of Ham. We are not a child among the nations, but our history goes back in our own traditions — further even than that of Rome, and we are galled by this yoke which you have laid upon us.”

“Are not our laws just?” asked the Governor.

“The code of Caesar is just, but it is always the code of Caesar. Our own laws were made for our own uses and our own circumstances, and we would fain have them again.”

“You speak Roman as if you had been bred in the Forum; you wear a Roman toga; your hair is filleted in Roman fashion — are not these the gifts of Rome?”

“We would take all the learning and all the arts that Rome or Greece could give, but we would still be Britain, and ruled by Britons.”

The viceroy smiled. “By the rood of Saint Helena,” said he, “had you spoken thus to some of my heathen ancestors, there would have been an end to your politics. That you have dared to stand before my face and say as much is a proof for ever of the gentleness of our rule. But I would reason with you for a moment upon this your request. You know well that this land has never been one kingdom, but was always under many chiefs and many tribes, who have made war upon each other. Would you in very truth have it so again?”

“Those were in the evil pagan days, the days of the Druid and the oak-grove, your excellency. But now we are held together by a gospel of peace.”

The viceroy shook his head. “If all the world were of the same way of thinking, then it would be easier,” said he. “It may be that this blessed doctrine of peace will be little help to you when you are face to face with strong men who still worship the god of war. What would you do against the Picts of the north?”

“Your excellency knows that many of the bravest legionaries are of British blood. These are our defence.”

“But discipline, man, the power to command, the knowledge of war, the strength to act — it is in these things that you would fail. Too long have you leaned upon the crutch.”

“The times may be hard, but when we have gone through them, Britain will be herself again.”

“Nay, she will be under a different and a harsher master,” said the Roman. “Already the pirates swarm upon the eastern coast. Were it not for our Roman Count of the Saxon shore they would land tomorrow. I see the day when Britain may, indeed, be one; but that will be because you and your fellows are either dead or are driven into the mountains of the west. All goes into the melting-pot, and if a better Albion should come forth from it, it will be after ages of strife, and neither you nor your people will have part or lot in it.”

Regnus, the tall young Celt, smiled. “With the help of God and our own right arms we should hope for a better end,” said he. “Give us but the chance, and we will bear the brunt.”

“You are as men that are lost,” said the viceroy sadly. “I see this broad land, with its gardens and orchards, its fair villas and its walled towns, its bridges and its roads, all the work of Rome. Surely it will pass even as a dream, and these three hundred years of settled order will leave no trace behind. For learn that it will indeed be as you wish, and that this very day the orders have come to me that the legions are to go."

The three Britons looked at each other in amazement. Their first impulse was towards a wild exultation, but reflection and doubt followed close upon its heels.

"This is indeed wondrous news," said Celticus. "This is a day of days to the motherland. When do the legions go, your excellency, and what troops will remain behind for our protection?"

"The legions go at once," said the viceroy. "You will doubtless rejoice to hear that within a month there will be no Roman soldier in the island, nor, indeed, a Roman of any sort, age, or sex, if I can take them with me."

The faces of the Britons were shadowed, and Caradoc, a grave and thoughtful man, spoke for the first time.

"But this is over sudden, your excellency," said he. "There is much truth in what you have said about the pirates. From my villa near the fort of Anderida I saw eighty of their galleys only last week, and I know well that they would be on us like ravens on a dying ox. For many years to come it would not be possible for us to hold them off."

The viceroy shrugged his shoulders. "It is your affair now," said he. "Rome must look to herself."

The last traces of joy had passed from the faces of the Britons. Suddenly the future had started up clearly before them, and they quailed at the prospect.

"There is a rumour in the market-place," said Celticus, "that the northern Barbarians are through the gap in the wall. Who is to stop their progress?"

"You and your fellows," said the Roman.

Clearer still grew the future, and there was terror in the eyes of the spokesmen as they faced it.

"But, your excellency, if the legions should go at once, we should have the wild Scots at York, and the Northmen in the Thames within the month. We can build ourselves up under your shield, and in a few years it would be easier for us; but not now, your excellency, not now."

"Tut, man; for years you have been clamouring in our ears and raising the people. Now you have got what you asked. What more would you have? Within the month you will be as free as were your ancestors before Caesar set foot upon your shore."

“For God’s sake, your excellency, put our words out of your head. The matter had not been well considered. We will send to Rome. We will ride post-haste ourselves. We will fall at the Emperor’s feet. We will kneel before the Senate and beg that the legions remain.”

The Roman proconsul rose from his chair and motioned that the audience was at an end.

“You will do what you please,” said he. “I and my men are for Italy.”

And even as he said, so was it, for before the spring had ripened into summer, the troops were clanking down the via Aurelia on their way to the Ligurian passes, whilst every road in Gaul was dotted with the carts and the waggons which bore the Brito-Roman refugees on their weary journey to their distant country. But ere another summer had passed Celticus was dead, for he was flayed alive by the pirates and his skin nailed upon the door of a church near Caistor. Regnus, too, was dead, for he was tied to a tree and shot with arrows when the painted men came to the sacking of Isca. Caradoc only was alive, but he was a slave to Elda the red Caledonian, and his wife was mistress to Mordred the wild chief of the western Cymri. From the ruined wall in the north to Vectis in the south blood and ruin and ashes covered the fair land of Britain. And after many days it came out fairer than ever, but, even as the Roman had said, neither the Britons nor any men of their blood came into the heritage of that which had been their own.

THE FIRST CARGO

“Ex ovo omnia”

When you left Briton with your legion, my dear Crassus, I promised that I would write to you from time to time when a messenger chanced to be going to Rome, and keep you informed as to anything of interest which might occur in this country. Personally, I am very glad that I remained behind when the troops and so many of our citizens left, for though the living is rough and the climate is infernal, still by dint of the three voyages which I have made for amber to the Baltic, and the excellent prices which I obtained for it here, I shall soon be in a position to retire, and to spend my old age under my own fig tree, or even perhaps to buy a small villa at Baiae or Posuoli, where I could get a good sun-bath after the continued fogs of this accursed island. I picture myself on a little farm, and I read the Georgics as a preparation; but when I hear the rain falling and the wind howling, Italy seems very far away.

In my previous letter, I let you know how things were going in this country. The poor folk, who had given up all soldiering during the centuries that we guarded them, are now perfectly helpless before these Picts and Scots, tattoed Barbarians from the north, who overrun the whole country and do exactly what they please. So long as they kept to the north, the people in the south, who are the most numerous, and also the most civilised of the Britons, took no heed of them; but now the rascals have come as far as London, and the lazy folk in these parts have had to wake up. Vortigern, the king, is useless for anything but drink or women, so he sent across to the Baltic to get over some of the North Germans, in the hope that they would come and help him. It is bad enough to have a bear in your house, but it does not seem to me to mend matters if you call in a pack of ferocious wolves as well. However, nothing better could be devised, so an invitation was sent and very promptly accepted. And it is here that your humble friend appears upon the scene. In the course of my amber trading I had learned the Saxon speech, and so I was sent down in all haste to the Kentish shore that I might be there when our new allies came. I arrived there on the very day when their first vessel appeared, and it is of my adventures that I wish to tell you. It is perfectly clear to me that the landing of these warlike Germans in England will prove to be an event of historical importance, and so your inquisitive mind will not feel wearied if I treat the matter in some detail.

It was, then, upon the day of Mercury, immediately following the Feast of Our Blessed Lord’s Ascension, that I found myself upon the south bank of the river Thames, at the point where it opens into a wide estuary. There is an island there named Thanet, which was the spot chosen for the landfall of our visitors. Sure enough, I had no sooner ridden up than there was a great red ship, the first as it seems of three, coming in under full sail. The white horse, which is the ensign of these rovers, was hanging from her topmast, and she appeared to be crowded with men. The sun was shining brightly, and the great scarlet ship, with snow-white sails and a line of gleaming shields slung over her side, made as fair a picture on that blue expanse as one would wish to see.

I pushed off at once in a boat, because it had been arranged that none of the Saxons should land until the king had come down to speak with their leaders. Presently I was under the ship, which had a gilded dragon in the bows, and a tier of oars along either side. As I looked up, there was a row of helmeted heads looking down at me, and among them I saw, to my great surprise and pleasure, that of Eric the Swart, with whom I do business at Venta every year. He greeted me heartily when I reached the deck, and became at once my guide, friend, and counsellor. This helped me greatly with these Barbarians, for it is their nature that they are very cold and aloof unless one of their own number can vouch for you, after which they are very hearty and hospitable. Try as they will, they find it hard, however, to avoid a certain suggestion of condescension, and in the baser sort, of contempt, when they are dealing with a foreigner.

It was a great stroke of luck meeting Eric, for he was able to give me some idea of how things stood before I was shown into the presence of Kenna, the leader of this particular ship. The crew, as I learned from him, was entirely made up of three tribes or families — those of Kenna, of Lanc, and of Hasta. Each of these tribes gets its name by putting the letters “ing” after the name of the chief, so that the people on board would describe themselves as Kennings, Lancings, and Hastings. I observed in the Baltic that the villages were named after the family who lived in them, each keeping to itself, so that I have no doubt if these fellows get a footing on shore, we shall see settlements with names like these rising up among the British towns.

The greater part of the men were sturdy fellows with red, yellow, or brown hair, mostly the latter. To my surprise, I saw several women among them. Eric, in answer to my question, explained that they always take their women with them so far as they can, and that instead of finding them an incumbrance as our Roman dames would be, they look upon them as helpmates and advisers. Of course, I remembered afterwards that our excellent and accurate Tacitus has remarked upon this characteristic of the Germans. All laws in the tribes are decided by votes, and a vote has not yet been given to the women, but many are in favour of it, and it is thought that woman and man may soon have the same power in the State, though many of the women themselves are opposed to such an innovation. I observed to Eric that it was fortunate there were several women on board, as they could keep each other company; but he answered that the wives of chiefs had no desire to know the wives of the inferior officers, and that both of them combined against the more common women, so that any companionship was out of the question. He pointed as he spoke to Editha, the wife of Kenna, a red-faced, elderly woman, who walked among the others, her chin in the air, taking no more notice than if they did not exist.

Whilst I was talking to my friend Eric, a sudden altercation broke out upon the deck, and a great number of the men paused in their work, and flocked towards the spot with faces which showed that they were deeply interested in the matter. Eric and I pushed our way among the others, for I was very anxious to see as much as I could of the ways and manners of these Barbarians. A quarrel had broken out about a child, a little blue-eyed fellow with curly yellow hair, who appeared to be greatly amused by the hubbub of which he was the cause. On one side of him stood a white-bearded old man, of very majestic aspect, who signified by his gestures that he claimed the lad for himself, while on the other was a thin, earnest, anxious person, who strongly objected to the boy being taken from him. Eric whispered in my ear that the old man was the tribal high priest, who was the official sacrificer to their great god Woden, whilst the other was a man who took somewhat different views, not upon Woden, but upon the means by which he should be worshipped. The majority of the crew were on the side of the old priest; but a certain number, who liked greater liberty of worship, and to invent their own prayers instead of always repeating the official ones, followed the lead of the younger man. The difference was too deep and too old to be healed among the grown men, but each had a great desire to impress their view upon the children. This was the reason why these two were now so furious with each other, and the argument between them ran so high that several of their followers on either side had drawn the short saxes, or knives from which their name of Saxon is derived, when a burly, red-headed man pushed his way through the throng, and in a voice of thunder brought the controversy to an end.

"You priests, who argue about the things which no man can know, are more trouble aboard this ship than all the dangers of the sea," he cried. "Can you not be content with worshipping Woden, over which we are all agreed, and not make so much of those small points upon which we may differ? If there is all this fuss about the teaching of the children, then I shall forbid either of you to teach them, and they must be content with as much as they can learn from their mothers."

The two angry teachers walked away with discontented faces; and Kenna — for it was he who spoke — ordered that a whistle should be sounded, and that the crew should assemble. I was pleased with the free bearing of these people, for though this was their greatest chief, they showed none of the exaggerated respect which soldiers of a legion might show to the Praetor, but met him on a respectful equality, which showed how highly they rated their own manhood.

From our Roman standard, his remarks to his men would seem very wanting in eloquence, for there were no graces nor metaphors to be found in them, and yet they were short, strong and to the point. At any rate it was very clear that they were to the minds of his hearers. He began by reminding them that they had left their own country because the land was all taken up, and that there was no use returning there, since there was no place where they could dwell as free and independent men. This island of Britain was but sparsely inhabited, and there was a chance that every one of them would be able to found a home of his own.

"You, Whitta," he said, addressing some of them by name, "you will found a Whitting hame, and you, Bucka, we shall see you in a Bucking hame, where your children, and your children's children will bless you for the broad acres which your valour will have gained for them." There was no word of glory or of honour in his speech, but he said that he was aware that they would do their duty, on which they all struck their swords upon their shields so that the Britons on the beach could hear the clang. Then, his eyes falling upon me, he asked me whether I was the messenger from Vortigern, and on my answering, he bid me follow him into his cabin, where Lanc and Hasta the other chiefs were waiting for a council.

Picture me, then, my dear Crassus, in a very low-roofed cabin, with these three huge Barbarians seated round me. Each was clad in some sort of saffron tunic, with chain-mail shirts over it, and helmets with the horns of oxen on either side, laid upon the table before them. Like most of the Saxon chiefs, their beards were shaved, but they wore their hair long and their huge light-coloured moustaches drooped down on to their shoulders. They are gentle, slow, and somewhat heavy in their bearing, but I can well fancy that their fury is the more terrible when it does arise.

Their minds seem to be of a very practical and positive nature, for they at once began to ask me a series of questions upon the numbers of the Britons, the resources of the kingdom, the conditions of its trade, and other such subjects. They then set to work arguing over the information which I had given, and became so absorbed in their own contention that I believe there were times when they forgot my presence. Everything, after due discussion, was decided between them by vote, the one who found himself in the minority always submitting, though sometimes with a very bad grace. Indeed, on one occasion Lanc, who usually differed from the others, threatened to refer the matter to the general vote of the whole crew. There was a constant conflict in the point of view; for whereas Kenna and Hasta were anxious to extend the Saxon power, and to make it greater in the eyes of the world, Lanc was of opinion that they should give less thought to conquest and more to the comfort and advancement of their followers. At the same time it seemed to me that really Lanc was the more combative of the three; so much so that, even in time of peace, he could not forego this contest with his own brethren. Neither of the others seemed very fond of him, for they were each, as was easy to see, proud of their chieftainship, and anxious to use their authority, referring continually to those noble ancestors from whom it was derived; while Lanc, though he was equally well born, took the view of the common men upon every occasion, claiming that the interests of the many were superior to the privileges of the few. In a word, Crassus, if you could imagine a free-booting Gracchus on one side, and two piratical Patricians upon the other, you would understand the effect which my companions produced upon me.

There was one peculiarity which I observed in their conversation which soothed me very much. I am fond of these Britons, among whom I have spent so much of my life, and I wish them well. It was very pleasing, therefore, to notice that these men insisted upon it in their conversation that the whole object of their visit was the good of the Islanders. Any prospect of advantage to themselves was pushed into the background. I was not clear that these professions could be made to agree with the speech in which Kenna had promised a hundred hides of land to every man on the ship; but on my making this remark, the three chiefs seemed very surprised and hurt by my suspicions, and explained very plausibly that, as the Britons needed them as a guard, they could not aid them better than by settling on the soil, and so being continually at hand in order to help them. In time, they said, they hoped to raise and train the natives to such a point that they would be able to look after themselves. Lanc spoke with some degree of eloquence upon the nobleness of the mission which they had undertaken, and the others clattered their cups of mead (a jar of that unpleasant drink was on the table) in token of their agreement.

I observed also how much interested, and how very earnest and intolerant these Barbarians were in the matter of religion. Of Christianity they knew nothing, so that although they were aware that the Britons were Christians, they had not a notion of what their creed really was. Yet without examination they started by taking it for granted that their own worship of Woden was absolutely right, and that therefore this other creed must be absolutely wrong. “This vile religion,” “This sad superstition,” and “This grievous error,” were among the phrases which they used towards it. Instead of expressing pity for any one who had been misinformed upon so serious a question, their feelings were those of anger, and they declared most earnestly that they would spare no pains to set the matter right, fingering the hilts of their long broad-swords as they said so.

Well, my dear Crassus, you will have had enough of me and of my Saxons. I have given you a short sketch of these people and their ways. Since I began this letter, I have visited the two other ships which have come in, and as I find the same characteristics among the people on board them, I cannot doubt that they lie deeply in the race. For the rest, they are brave, hardy, and very pertinacious in all that they undertake; whereas the Britons, though a great deal more spirited, have not the same steadiness of purpose, their quicker imaginations suggesting always some other course, and their more fiery passions being succeeded by reaction. When I looked from the deck of the first Saxon ship, and saw the swaying excited multitude of

Britons on the beach, contrasting them with the intent, silent men who stood beside me, it seemed to me more than ever dangerous to call in such allies. So strongly did I feel it that I turned to Kenna, who was also looking towards the beach.

“You will own this island before you have finished,” said I.

His eyes sparkled as he gazed. “Perhaps,” he cried; and then suddenly collecting himself and thinking that he had said too much, he added —

“A temporary occupation — nothing more.”

THE HOME-COMING

In the spring of the year 528, a small brig used to run as a passenger boat between Chalcedon on the Asiatic shore and Constantinople. On the morning in question, which was that of the feast of Saint George, the vessel was crowded with excursionists who were bound for the great city in order to take part in the religious and festive celebrations which marked the festival of the Megalo-martyr, one of the most choice occasions in the whole vast hagiology of the Eastern Church. The day was fine and the breeze light, so that the passengers in their holiday mood were able to enjoy without a qualm the many objects of interest which marked the approach to the greatest and most beautiful capital in the world.

On the right, as they sped up the narrow strait, there stretched the Asiatic shore, sprinkled with white villages and with numerous villas peeping out from the woods which adorned it. In front of them, the Prince's Islands, rising as green as emeralds out of the deep sapphire blue of the Sea of Marmora, obscured for the moment the view of the capital. As the brig rounded these, the great city burst suddenly upon their sight, and a murmur of admiration and wonder rose from the crowded deck. Tier above tier it rose, white and glittering, a hundred brazen roofs and gilded statues gleaming in the sun, with high over all the magnificent shining cupola of Saint Sophia. Seen against a cloudless sky, it was the city of a dream-too delicate, too airily lovely for earth.

In the prow of the small vessel were two travellers of singular appearance. The one was a very beautiful boy, ten or twelve years of age, swarthy, clear-cut, with dark, curling hair and vivacious black eyes, full of intelligence and of the joy of living. The other was an elderly man, gaunt-faced and grey-bearded, whose stern features were lit up by a smile as he observed the excitement and interest with which his young companion viewed the beautiful distant city and the many vessels which thronged the narrow strait.

“See! see!” cried the lad. “Look at the great red ships which sail out from yonder harbour. Surely, your holiness, they are the greatest of all ships in the world.”

The old man, who was the abbot of the monastery of Saint Nicephorus in Antioch, laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

“Be wary, Leon, and speak less loudly, for until we have seen your mother we should keep ourselves secret. As to the red galleys they are indeed as large as any, for they are the Imperial ships of war, which come forth from the harbour of Theodosius. Round yonder green point is the Golden Horn, where the merchant ships are moored. But now, Leon, if you follow the line of buildings past the great church, you will see a long row of pillars fronting the sea. It marks the Palace of the Caesars.”

The boy looked at it with fixed attention. “And my mother is there,” he whispered.

“Yes, Leon, your mother the Empress Theodora and her husband the great Justinian dwell in yonder palace.”

The boy looked wistfully up into the old man’s face.

“Are you sure, Father Luke, that my mother will indeed be glad to see me?”

The abbot turned away his face to avoid those questioning eyes.

“We cannot tell, Leon. We can only try. If it should prove that there is no place for you, then there is always a welcome among the brethren of Saint Nicephorus.”

“Why did you not tell my mother that we were coming, Father Luke? Why did you not wait until you had her command?”

“At a distance, Leon, it would be easy to refuse you. An Imperial messenger would have stopped us. But when she sees you, Leon — your eyes, so like her own, your face, which carries memories of one whom she loved — then, if there be a woman’s heart within her bosom, she will take you into it. They say that the Emperor can refuse her nothing. They have no child of their own. There is a great future before you, Leon. When it comes, do not forget the poor brethren of Saint Nicephorus, who took you in when you had no friend in the world.”

The old abbot spoke cheerily, but it was easy to see from his anxious countenance that the nearer he came to the capital the more doubtful did his errand appear. What had seemed easy and natural from the quiet cloisters of Antioch became dubious and dark now that the golden domes of Constantinople glittered so close at hand. Ten years before, a wretched woman, whose very name was an offence throughout the eastern world where she was as infamous for her dishonour as famous for her beauty, had come to the monastery gate, and had persuaded the monks to take charge of her infant son, the child of her shame. There he had been ever since. But she, Theodora, the harlot, returning to the capital, had by the strangest turn of Fortune's wheel caught the fancy and finally the enduring love of Justinian the heir to the throne. Then on the death of his uncle Justin, the young man had become the greatest monarch upon the earth, and had raised Theodora to be not only his wife and Empress, but to be absolute ruler with powers equal to and independent of his own. And she, the polluted one, had risen to the dignity, had cut herself sternly away from all that related to her past life, and had shown signs already of being a great Queen, stronger and wiser than her husband, but fierce, vindictive, and unbending, a firm support to her friends, but a terror to her foes. This was the woman to whom the Abbot Luke of Antioch was bringing Leon, her forgotten son. If ever her mind strayed back to the days when, abandoned by her lover Ecebolus, the Governor of the African Pentapolis, she had made her way on foot through Asia Minor, and left her infant with the monks, it was only to persuade herself that the brethren cloistered far from the world would never identify Theodora the Empress with Theodora the dissolute wanderer, and that the fruits of her sin would be for ever concealed from her Imperial husband.

The little brig had now rounded the point of the Acropolis, and the long blue stretch of the Golden Horn lay before it. The high wall of Theodosius lined the whole harbour, but a narrow verge of land had been left between it and the water's edge to serve as a quay. The vessel ran alongside near the Neorion Gate, and the passengers, after a short scrutiny from the group of helmeted guards who lounged beside it, were allowed to pass through into the great city.

The abbot, who had made several visits to Constantinople upon the business of his monastery, walked with the assured step of one who knows his ground; while the boy, alarmed and yet pleased by the rush of people, the roar and glitter of passing chariots, and the vista of magnificent buildings, held tightly to the loose gown of his guide, while staring eagerly about him in every direction. Passing through the steep and narrow streets which led up from the water, they emerged into the open space which surrounds the magnificent pile of Saint Sophia, the great church begun by Constantine, hallowed by Saint Chrysostom, and now the seat of the Patriarch, and the very centre of the Eastern Church. Only with many crossings and genuflections did the pious abbot succeed in passing the revered shrine of his religion, and hurried on to his difficult task.

Having passed Saint Sophia, the two travellers crossed the marble-paved Augusteum, and saw upon their right the gilded gates of the hippodrome through which a vast crowd of people was pressing, for though the morning had been devoted to the religious ceremony, the afternoon was given over to secular festivities. So great was the rush of the populace that the two strangers had some difficulty in disengaging themselves from the stream and reaching the huge arch of black marble which formed the outer gate of the palace. Within they were fiercely ordered to halt by a gold-crested and magnificent sentinel who laid his shining spear across their breasts until his superior officer should give them permission to pass. The abbot had been warned, however, that all obstacles would give way if he mentioned the name of Basil the eunuch, who acted as chamberlain of the palace and also as Parakimomen — a high office which meant that he slept at the door of the Imperial bed-chamber. The charm worked wonderfully, for at the mention of that potent name the Protosphathaire, or Head of the Palace Guards, who chanced to be upon the spot, immediately detached one of his soldiers with instructions to convoy the two strangers into the presence of the chamberlain.

Passing in succession a middle guard and an inner guard, the travellers came at last into the palace proper, and followed their majestic guide from chamber to chamber, each more wonderful than the last. Marbles and gold, velvet and silver, glittering mosaics, wonderful carvings, ivory screens, curtains of Armenian tissue and of Indian silk, damask from Arabia, and amber from the Baltic — all these things merged themselves in the minds of the two simple provincials, until their eyes ached and their senses reeled before the blaze and the glory of this, the most magnificent of the dwellings of man. Finally, a pair of curtains, crusted with gold, were parted, and their guide handed them over to a negro mute who stood within. A heavy, fat, brown-skinned man, with a large, flabby, hairless face was pacing up and down the small apartment, and he turned upon them as they entered with an abominable and threatening smile. His loose lips and pendulous cheeks were those of a gross old woman, but above them there shone a pair of dark malignant eyes, full of fierce intensity of observation and judgment.

“You have entered the palace by using my name,” he said. “It is one of my boasts that any of the populace can approach me in this way. But it is not fortunate for those who take advantage of it without due cause.” Again he smiled a smile which made the frightened boy cling tightly to the loose serge skirts of the abbot.

But the ecclesiastic was a man of courage. Undaunted by the sinister appearance of the great chamberlain, or by the threat which lay in his words, he laid his hand upon his young companion’s shoulder and faced the eunuch with a confidential smile.

“I have no doubt, your excellency,” said he, “that the importance of my mission has given me the right to enter the palace. The only thing which troubles me is whether it may not be so important as to forbid me from broaching it to you, or indeed, to anybody save the Empress Theodora, since it is she only whom it concerns.”

The eunuch’s thick eyebrows bunched together over his vicious eyes.

“You must make good those words,” he said. “If my gracious master — the ever-glorious Emperor Justinian — does not disdain to take me into his most intimate confidence in all things, it would be strange if there were any subject within your knowledge which I might not hear. You are, as I gather from your garb and bearing, the abbot of some Asiatic monastery?”

“You are right, your excellency, I am the abbot of the Monastery of St. Nicephorus in Antioch. But I repeat that I am assured that what I have to say is for the ear of the Empress Theodora only.”

The eunuch was evidently puzzled, and his curiosity aroused by the old man’s persistence. He came nearer, his heavy face thrust forward, his flabby brown hands, like two sponges, resting upon the table of yellow jasper before him.

“Old man,” said he, “there is no secret which concerns the Empress which may not be told to me. But if you refuse to speak, it is certain that you will never see her. Why should I admit you, unless I know your errand? How should I know that you are not a Manichean heretic with a poniard in your bosom, longing for the blood of the mother of the Church?”

The abbot hesitated no longer. “If there be a mistake in the matter, then on your head be it,” said he. “Know then that this lad Leon is the son of Theodora the Empress, left by her in our monastery within a month of his birth ten years ago. This papyrus which I hand you will show you that what I say is beyond all question or doubt.”

The eunuch Basil took the paper, but his eyes were fixed upon the boy, and his features showed a mixture of amazement at the news that he had received, and of cunning speculation as to how he could turn it to profit.

"Indeed, he is the very image of the Empress," he muttered; and then, with sudden suspicion, "Is it not the chance of this likeness which has put the scheme into your head, old man?"

"There is but one way to answer that," said the abbot. "It is to ask the Empress herself whether what I say is not true, and to give her the glad tidings that her boy is alive and well."

The tone of confidence, together with the testimony of the papyrus, and the boy's beautiful face, removed the last shadow of doubt from the eunuch's mind. Here was a great fact; but what use could he make of it? Above all, what advantage could he draw from it? He stood with his fat chin in his hand, turning it over in his cunning brain.

"Old man," said he at last, "to how many have you told this secret?"

"To no one in the whole world," the other answered. "There is Deacon Bardas at the monastery and myself. No one else knows anything."

"You are sure of this?"

"Absolutely certain."

The eunuch had made up his mind. If he alone of all men in the palace knew of this event, he would have a powerful hold over his masterful mistress. He was certain that Justinian the Emperor knew nothing of this. It would be a shock to him. It might even alienate his affections from his wife. She might care to take precautions to prevent him from knowing. And if he, Basil the eunuch, was her confederate in those precautions, then how very close it must draw him to her. All this flashed through his mind as he stood, the papyrus in his hand, looking at the old man and the boy.

"Stay here," said he. "I will be with you again." With a swift rustle of his silken robes he swept from the chamber.

A few minutes had elapsed when a curtain at the end of the room was pushed aside, and the eunuch, reappearing, held it back, doubling his unwieldy body into a profound obeisance as he did so. Through the gap came a small alert woman, clad in golden tissue, with a loose outer mantle and shoes of the Imperial purple. That colour alone showed that she could be none other than the Empress; but the dignity of her carriage, the fierce authority of her magnificent dark eyes, and the perfect beauty of her haughty face, all proclaimed that it could only be that Theodora who, in spite of her lowly origin, was the most majestic as well as the most maturely lovely of all the women in her kingdom. Gone now were the buffoon tricks which the daughter of Acacius the bearward had learned in the amphitheatre; gone too was the light charm of the wanton, and what was left was the worthy mate of a great king, the measured dignity of one who was every inch an empress.

Disregarding the two men, Theodora walked up to the boy, placed her two white hands upon his shoulders, and looked with a long questioning gaze, a gaze which began with hard suspicion and ended with tender recognition, into those large lustrous eyes which were the very reflection of her own. At first the sensitive lad was chilled by the cold intent question of the look; but as it softened, his own spirit responded, until suddenly, with a cry of “Mother! mother!” he cast himself into her arms, his hands locked round her neck, his face buried in her bosom. Carried away by the sudden natural outburst of emotion, her own arms tightened round the lad’s figure, and she strained him for an instant to her heart. Then, the strength of the Empress gaining instant command over the temporary weakness of the mother, she pushed him back from her, and waved that they should leave her to herself. The slaves in attendance hurried the two visitors from the room. Basil the eunuch lingered, looking down at his mistress, who had thrown herself upon a damask couch, her lips white and her bosom heaving with the tumult of her emotion. She glanced up and met the chancellor’s crafty gaze, her woman’s instinct reading the threat that lurked within it.

“I am in your power,” she said. “The Emperor must never know of this.”

“I am your slave,” said the eunuch, with his ambiguous smile. “I am an instrument in your hand. If it is your will that the Emperor should know nothing, then who is to tell him?”

“But the monk, the boy? What are we to do?”

“There is only one way for safety,” said the eunuch.

She looked at him with horrified eyes. His spongy hands were pointing down to the floor. There was an underground world to this beautiful palace, a shadow that was ever close to the light, a region of dimly-lit passages, of shadowed corners, of noiseless, tongueless slaves, of sudden, sharp screams in the darkness. To this the eunuch was pointing.

A terrible struggle rent her breast. The beautiful boy was hers, flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone. She knew it beyond all question or doubt. It was her one child, and her whole heart went out to him. But Justinian! She knew the Emperor’s strange limitations. Her career in the past was forgotten. He had swept it all aside by special Imperial decree published throughout the Empire, as if she were new-born through the power of his will, and her association with his person. But they were childless, and this sight of one which was not his own would cut him to the quick. He could dismiss her infamous past from his mind, but if it took the concrete shape of this beautiful child, then how could he wave it aside as if it had never been? All her instincts and her intimate knowledge of the man told her that even her charm, and her influence might fail under such circumstances to save her from ruin. Her divorce would be as easy to him as her elevation had been. She was balanced upon a giddy pinnacle, the highest in the world, and yet the higher the deeper the fall. Everything that earth could give was now at her feet. Was she to risk the losing of it all — for what? For a weakness which was unworthy of an Empress, for a foolish new-born spasm of love, for that which had no existence within her in the morning? How could she be so foolish as to risk losing such a substance for such a shadow?

"Leave it to me," said the brown watchful face above her.

"Must it be — death?"

"There is no real safety outside. But if your heart is too merciful, then by the loss of sight and speech—"

She saw in her mind the white-hot iron approaching those glorious eyes, and she shuddered at the thought.

"No, no! Better death than that!"

"Let it be death then. You are wise, great Empress, for there only is real safety and assurance of silence."

"And the monk?"

"Him also."

"But the Holy Synod? He is a tonsured priest. What would the Patriarch do?"

"Silence his babbling tongue. Then let them do what they will. How are we of the palace to know that this conspirator, taken with a dagger in his sleeve, is really what he says?"

Again she shuddered and shrank down among the cushions.

"Speak not of it, think not of it," said the eunuch. "Say only that you leave it in my hands. Nay, then, if you cannot say it, do but nod your head, and I take it as your signal."

In that moment there flashed before Theodora's mind a vision of all her enemies, of all those who envied her rise, of all whose hatred and contempt would rise into a clamour of delight could they see the daughter of the bearward hurled down again into that abyss from which she had been dragged. Her face hardened, her lips tightened, her little hands clenched in the agony of her thought. “Do it!” she said.

In an instant, with a terrible smile, the messenger of death hurried from the room. She groaned aloud, and buried herself yet deeper amid the silken cushions, clutching them frantically with convulsed and twitching hands.

The eunuch wasted no time, for this deed, once done, he became — save for some insignificant monk in Asia Minor, whose fate would soon be sealed — the only sharer of Theodora’s secret, and therefore the only person who could curb and bend that most imperious nature. Hurrying into the chamber where the visitors were waiting, he gave a sinister signal, only too well known in those iron days. In an instant the black mutes in attendance seized the old man and the boy, pushing them swiftly down a passage and into a meaner portion of the palace, where the heavy smell of luscious cooking proclaimed the neighbourhood of the kitchens. A side corridor led to a heavily-barred iron door, and this in turn opened upon a steep flight of stone steps, feebly illuminated by the glimmer of wall lamps. At the head and foot stood a mute sentinel like an ebony statue, and below, along the dusky and forbidding passages from which the cells opened, a succession of niches in the wall were each occupied by a similar guardian. The unfortunate visitors were dragged brutally down a number of stone-flagged and dismal corridors until they descended another long stair which led so deeply into the earth that the damp feeling in the heavy air and the drip of water all round showed that they had come down to the level of the sea. Groans and cries, like those of sick animals, from the various grated doors which they passed showed how many there were who spent their whole lives in this humid and poisonous atmosphere.

At the end of this lowest passage was a door which opened into a single large vaulted room. It was devoid of furniture, but in the centre was a large and heavy wooden board clamped with iron. This lay upon a rude stone parapet, engraved with inscriptions beyond the wit of the eastern scholars, for this old well dated from a time before the Greeks founded Byzantium, when men of Chaldea and Phoenicia built with huge unmortared blocks, far below the level of the town of Constantine. The door was closed, and the eunuch beckoned to the slaves that they should remove the slab which covered the well of death. The frightened boy screamed and clung to the abbot, who, ashy-pale and trembling, was pleading hard to melt the heart of the ferocious eunuch.

“Surely, surely, you would not slay the innocent boy!” he cried. “What has he done? Was it his fault that he came here? I alone — I and Deacon Bardas — are to blame. Punish us, if some one must indeed be punished. We are old. It is today or tomorrow with us. But he is so young and so beautiful, with all his life before him. Oh, sir! oh, your excellency, you would not have the heart to hurt him!”

He threw himself down and clutched at the eunuch’s knees, while the boy sobbed piteously and cast horror-stricken eyes at the black slaves who were tearing the wooden slab from the ancient parapet beneath. The only answer which the chamberlain gave to the frantic pleadings of the abbot was to take a stone which lay on the coping of the well and toss it in. It could be heard clattering against the old, damp, mildewed walls, until it fell with a hollow boom into some far distant subterranean pool. Then he again motioned with his hands, and the black slaves threw themselves upon the boy and dragged him away from his guardian. So shrill was his clamour that no one heard the approach of the Empress. With a swift rush she had entered the room, and her arms were round her son.

“It shall not be! It cannot be!” she cried. “No, no, my darling! my darling! they shall do you no hurt. I was mad to think of it — mad and wicked to dream of it. Oh, my sweet boy! To think that your mother might have had your blood upon her head!”

The eunuch’s brows were gathered together at this failure of his plans, at this fresh example of feminine caprice.

“Why kill them, great lady, if it pains your gracious heart?” said he. “With a knife and a branding iron they can be disarmed for ever.”

She paid no attention to his words. “Kiss me, Leon!” she cried. “Just once let me feel my own child’s soft lips rest upon mine. Now again! No, no more, or I shall weaken for what I have still to say and still to do. Old man, you are very near a natural grave, and I cannot think from your venerable aspect that words of falsehood would come readily to your lips. You have indeed kept my secret all these years, have you not?”

“I have in very truth, great Empress. I swear to you by Saint Nicephorus, patron of our house, that, save old Deacon Bardas, there is none who knows.”

“Then let your lips still be sealed. If you have kept faith in the past, I see no reason why you should be a babbler in the future. And you, Leon” — she bent her wonderful eyes with a strange mixture of sternness and of love upon the boy, “can I trust you? Will you keep a secret which could never help you, but would be the ruin and downfall of your mother?”

“Oh, mother, I would not hurt you! I swear that I will be silent.”

“Then I trust you both. Such provision will be made for your monastery and for your own personal comforts as will make you bless the day you came to my palace. Now you may go. I wish never to see you again. If I did, you might find me in a softer mood, or in a harder, and the one would lead to my undoing, the other to yours. But if by whisper or rumour I have reason to think that you have failed me, then you and your monks and your monastery will have such an end as will be a lesson for ever to those who would break faith with their Empress.”

“I will never speak,” said the old abbot; “neither will Deacon Bardas; neither will Leon. For all three I can answer. But there are others — these slaves, the chancellor. We may be punished for another’s fault.”

“Not so,” said the Empress, and her eyes were like flints. “These slaves are voiceless; nor have they any means to tell those secrets which they know. As to you, Basil—” She raised her white hand with the same deadly gesture which he had himself used so short a time before. The black slaves were on him like hounds on a stag.

“Oh, my gracious mistress, dear lady, what is this? What is this? You cannot mean it!” he screamed, in his high, cracked voice. “Oh, what have I done? Why should I die?”

“You have turned me against my own. You have goaded me to slay my own son. You have intended to use my secret against me. I read it in your eyes from the first. Cruel, murderous villain, taste the fate which you have yourself given to so many others. This is your doom. I have spoken.”

The old man and the boy hurried in horror from the vault. As they glanced back they saw the erect inflexible, shimmering, gold-clad figure of the Empress. Beyond they had a glimpse of the green-scummed lining of the well, and of the great red open mouth of the eunuch, as he screamed and prayed while every tug of the straining slaves brought him one step nearer to the brink. With their hands over their ears they rushed away, but even so they heard that last woman-like shriek, and then the heavy plunge far down in the dark abysses of the earth.

THE RED STAR

The house of Theodosius, the famous eastern merchant, was in the best part of Constantinople at the Sea Point which is near the Church of Saint Demetrius. Here he would entertain in so princely a fashion that even the Emperor Maurice had been known to come privately from the neighbouring Bucoleon palace in order to join in the revelry. On the night in question, however, which was the fourth of November in the year of our Lord 630, his numerous guests had retired early, and there remained only two intimates, both of them successful merchants like himself, who sat with him over their wine on the marble verandah of his house, whence on the one side they could see the lights of the shipping in the Sea of Marmora, and on the other the beacons which marked out the course of the Bosphorus. Immediately at their feet lay a narrow strait of water, with the low, dark loom of the Asiatic hills beyond. A thin haze hid the heavens, but away to the south a single great red star burned sullenly in the darkness.

The night was cool, the light was soothing, and the three men talked freely, letting their minds drift back into the earlier days when they had staked their capital, and often their lives, on the ventures which had built up their present fortunes. The host spoke of his long journeys in North Africa, the land of the Moors; how he had travelled, keeping the blue sea ever upon his right, until he had passed the ruins of Carthage, and so on and ever on until a great tidal ocean beat upon a yellow strand before him, while on the right he could see the high rock across the waves which marked the Pillars of Hercules. His talk was of dark-skinned bearded men, of lions, and of monstrous serpents. Then Demetrius, the Cilician, an austere man of sixty, told how he also had built up his mighty wealth. He spoke of a journey over the Danube and through the country of the fierce Huns, until he and his friends had found themselves in the mighty forest of Germany, on the shores of the great river which is called the Elbe. His stories were of huge men, sluggish of mind, but murderous in their cups, of sudden midnight broils and nocturnal flights, of villages buried in dense woods, of bloody heathen sacrifices, and of the bears and wolves who haunted the forest paths. So the two elder men capped each other’s stories and awoke each other’s memories, while Manuel Ducas, the young merchant of gold and ostrich feathers, whose name was already known all over the Levant, sat in silence and listened to their talk. At last, however, they called upon him also for an anecdote, and leaning his cheek upon his elbow, with his eyes fixed upon the great red star which burned in the south, the younger man began to speak.

"It is the sight of that star which brings a story into my mind," said he. "I do not know its name. Old Lascaris the astronomer would tell me if I asked, but I have no desire to know. Yet at this time of the year I always look out for it, and I never fail to see it burning in the same place. But it seems to me that it is redder and larger than it was.

"It was some ten years ago that I made an expedition into Abyssinia, where I traded to such good effect that I set forth on my return with more than a hundred camel-loads of skins, ivory, gold, spices, and other African produce. I brought them to the sea-coast at Arsinoe, and carried them up the Arabian Gulf in five of the small boats of the country. Finally, I landed near Saba, which is a starting-point for caravans, and, having assembled my camels and hired a guard of forty men from the wandering Arabs, I set forth for Macoraba. From this point, which is the sacred city of the idolaters of those parts, one can always join the large caravans which go north twice a year to Jerusalem and the sea-coast of Syria.

"Our route was a long and weary one. On our left hand was the Arabian Gulf, lying like a pool of molten metal under the glare of day, but changing to blood-red as the sun sank each evening behind the distant African coast. On our right was a monstrous desert which extends, so far as I know, across the whole of Arabia and away to the distant kingdom of the Persians. For many days we saw no sign of life save our own long, straggling line of laden camels with their tattered, swarthy guardians. In these deserts the soft sand deadens the footfall of the animals, so that their silent progress day after day through a scene which never changes, and which is itself noiseless, becomes at last like a strange dream. Often as I rode behind my caravan, and gazed at the grotesque figures which bore my wares in front of me, I found it hard to believe that it was indeed reality, and that it was I, I, Manuel Ducas, who lived near the Theodosian Gate of Constantinople, and shouted for the Green at the hippodrome every Sunday afternoon, who was there in so strange a land and with such singular comrades.

"Now and then, far out at sea, we caught sight of the white triangular sails of the boats which these people use, but as they are all pirates, we were very glad to be safely upon shore. Once or twice, too, by the water's edge we saw dwarfish creatures-one could scarcely say if they were men or monkeys — who burrow for homes among the seaweed, drink the pools of brackish water, and eat what they can catch. These are the fish-eaters, the Ichthyophagi, of whom old Herodotus talks — surely the lowest of all the human race. Our Arabs shrank from them with horror, for it is well known that, should you die in the desert, these little people will settle on you like carrion crows, and leave not a bone unpicked. They gibbered and croaked and waved their skinny arms at us as we passed, knowing well that they could swim far out to sea if we attempted to pursue them; for it is said that even the sharks turn with disgust from their foul bodies.

"We had travelled in this way for ten days, camping every evening at the vile wells which offered a small quantity of abominable water. It was our habit to rise very early and to travel very late, but to halt during the intolerable heat of the afternoon, when, for want of trees, we would crouch in the shadow of a sandhill, or, if that were wanting, behind our own camels and merchandise, in order to escape from the insufferable glare of the sun. On the seventh day we were near the point where one leaves the coast in order to strike inland to Macoraba. We had concluded our midday halt, and were just starting once more, the sun still being so hot that we could hardly bear it, when, looking up, I saw a remarkable sight. Standing on a hillock to our right there was a man about forty feet high, holding in his hand a spear which was the size of the mast of a large ship. You look surprised, my friends, and you can therefore imagine my feelings when I saw such a sight. But my reason soon told me that the object in front of me was really a wandering Arab, whose form had been enormously magnified by the strange distorting effects which the hot air of the desert is able to cause.

"However, the actual apparition caused more alarm to my companions than the imagined one had to me, for with a howl of dismay they shrank together into a frightened group, all pointing and gesticulating as they gazed at the distant figure. I then observed that the man was not alone, but that from all the sandhills a line of turbaned heads was gazing down upon us. The chief of the escort came running to me, and informed me of the cause of their terror, which was that they recognised, by some peculiarity of their headgear, that these men belonged to the tribe of the Dilwas, the most ferocious and unscrupulous of the Bedouin, who had evidently laid an ambuscade for us at this point with the intention of seizing our caravan. When I thought of all my efforts in Abyssinia, of the length of my journey and of the dangers and fatigues which I had endured, I could not bear to think of this total disaster coming upon me at the last instant and robbing me not only of my profits, but also of my original outlay. It was evident, however, that the robbers were too numerous for us to attempt to defend ourselves, and that we should be very fortunate if we escaped with our lives. Sitting upon a packet, therefore, I commended my soul to our blessed Saint Helena, while I watched with despairing eyes the stealthy and menacing approach of the Arab robbers.

"It may have been our own good fortune, or it may have been the handsome offering of beeswax candles — four to the pound — which I had mentally vowed to the blessed Helena, but at that instant I heard a great outcry of joy from among my own followers. Standing up on the packet that I might have a better view, I was overjoyed to see a long caravan — five hundred camels at least-with a numerous armed guard coming along the route from Macoraba. It is, I need not tell you, the custom of all caravans to combine their forces against the robbers of the desert, and with the aid of these newcomers we had become the stronger party. The marauders recognised it at once, for they vanished as if their native sands had swallowed them. Running up to the summit of a sandhill, I was just able to catch a glimpse of a dust-cloud whirling away across the yellow plain, with the long necks of their camels, the flutter of their loose garments, and the gleam of their spears breaking out from the heart of it. So vanished the marauders.

"Presently I found, however, that I had only exchanged one danger for another. At first I had hoped that this new caravan might belong to some Roman citizen, or at least to some Syrian Christian, but I found that it was entirely Arab. The trading Arabs who are settled in the numerous towns of Arabia are, of course, very much more peaceable than the Bedouin of the wilderness, those sons of Ishmael of whom we read in Holy Writ. But the Arab blood is covetous and lawless, so that when I saw several hundred of them formed in a semi-circle round our camels, looking with greedy eyes at my boxes of precious metals and my packets of ostrich feathers, I feared the worst.

"The leader of the new caravan was a man of dignified bearing and remarkable appearance. His age I would judge to be about forty. He had aquiline features, a noble black beard, and eyes so luminous, so searching, and so intense that I cannot remember in all my wanderings to have seen any which could be compared with them. To my thanks and salutations he returned a formal bow, and stood stroking his beard and looking in silence at the wealth which had suddenly fallen into his power. A murmur from his followers showed the eagerness with which they awaited the order to tall upon the plunder, and a young ruffian, who seemed to be on intimate terms with the leader, came to his elbow and put the desires of his companions into words.

"'Surely, oh Revered One,' said he, 'these people and their treasure have been delivered into our hands. When we return with it to the holy place, who of all the Koraish will fail to see the finger of God which has led us?'

"But the leader shook his head. 'Nay, Ali, it may not be,' he answered. 'This man is, as I judge, a citizen of Rome, and we may not treat him as though he were an idolater.'

"'But he is an unbeliever,' cried the youth, fingering a great knife which hung in his belt. 'Were I to be the judge, he would lose not only his merchandise, but his life also, if he did not accept the faith.'

"The older man smiled and shook his head. 'Nay, Ali; you are too hot-headed,' said he, 'seeing that there are not as yet three hundred faithful in the world, our hands would indeed be full if we were to take the lives and property of all who are not with us. Forget not, dear lad, that charity and honesty are the very nose-ring and halter of the true faith.'

"'Among the faithful,' said the ferocious youth.

"'Nay, towards every one. It is the law of Allah. And yet' — here his countenance darkened, and his eyes shone with a most sinister light—'the day may soon come when the hour of grace is past, and woe, then, to those who have not hearkened! Then shall the sword of Allah be drawn, and it shall not be sheathed until the harvest is reaped. First it shall strike the idolaters on the day when my own people and kinsmen, the unbelieving Koraish, shall be scattered, and the three hundred and sixty idols of the Caaba thrust out upon the dungheaps of the town. Then shall the Caaba be the home and temple of one God only who brooks no rival on earth or in heaven.'

"The man's followers had gathered round him, their spears in their hands, their ardent eyes fixed upon his face, and their dark features convulsed with such fanatic enthusiasm as showed the hold which he had upon their love and respect.

"'We shall be patient,' said he; 'but some time next year, the year after, the day may come when the great angel Gabriel shall bear me the message that the time of words has gone by, and that the hour of the sword has come. We are few and weak, but if it is His will, who can stand against us? Are you of Jewish faith, stranger?' he asked.

"I answered that I was not.

"'The better for you,' he answered, with the same furious anger in his swarthy face. 'First shall the idolaters fall, and then the Jews, in that they have not known those very prophets whom they had themselves foretold. Then last will come the turn of the Christians, who follow indeed a true Prophet, greater than Moses or Abraham, but who have sinned in that they have confounded a creature with the Creator. To each in turn — idolater, Jew, and Christian — the day of reckoning will come.'

"The ragamuffins behind him all shook their spears as he spoke. There was no doubt about their earnestness, but when I looked at their tattered dresses and simple arms, I could not help smiling to think of their ambitious threats, and to picture what their fate would be upon the day of battle before the battle-axes of our Imperial Guards, or the spears of the heavy cavalry of the Armenian Themes. However, I need not say that I was discreet enough to keep my thoughts to myself, as I had no desire to be the first martyr in this fresh attack upon our blessed faith.

"It was now evening, and it was decided that the two caravans should camp together — an arrangement which was the more welcome as we were by no means sure that we had seen the last of the marauders. I had invited the leader of the Arabs to have supper with me, and after a long exercise of prayer with his followers he came to join me, but my attempt at hospitality was thrown away, for he would not touch the excellent wine which I had unpacked for him, nor would he eat any of my dainties, contenting himself with stale bread, dried dates, and water. After this meal we sat alone by the smouldering fire, the magnificent arch of the heavens above us of that deep, rich blue with those gleaming, clear-cut stars which can only be seen in that dry desert air. Our camp lay before us, and no sound reached our ears save the dull murmur of the voices of our companions and the occasional shrill cry of a jackal among the sandhills around us. Face to face I sat with this strange man, the glow of the fire beating upon his eager and imperious features and reflecting from his passionate eyes. It was the strangest vigil, and one which will never pass from my recollection. I have spoken with many wise and famous men upon my travels, but never with one who left the impression of this one.

"And yet much of his talk was unintelligible to me, though, as you are aware, I speak Arabian like an Arab. It rose and fell in the strangest way. Sometimes it was the babble of a child, sometimes the incoherent raving of a fanatic, sometimes the lofty dreams of a prophet and philosopher. There were times when his stories of demons, of miracles, of dreams, and of omens, were such as an old woman might tell to please the children of an evening. There were others when, as he talked with shining face of his converse with angels, of the intentions of the Creator, and the end of the universe, I felt as if I were in the company of some one more than mortal, some one who was indeed the direct messenger of the Most High.

"There were good reasons why he should treat me with such confidence. He saw in me a messenger to Constantinople and to the Roman Empire. Even as Saint Paul had brought Christianity to Europe, so he hoped that I might carry his doctrines to my native city. Alas! be the doctrines what they may, I fear that I am not the stuff of which Pauls are made. Yet he strove with all his heart during that long Arabian night to bring me over to his belief. He had with him a holy book, written, as he said, from the dictation of an angel, which he carried in tablets of bone in the nose-bag of a camel. Some chapters of this he read me; but, though the precepts were usually good, the language seemed wild and fanciful. There were times when I could scarce keep my countenance as I listened to him. He planned out his future movements, and indeed, as he spoke, it was hard to remember that he was only the wandering leader of an Arab caravan, and not one of the great ones of the earth.

"'When God has given me sufficient power, which will be within a few years,' said he, 'I will unite all Arabia under my banner. Then I will spread my doctrine over Syria and Egypt. When this has been done, I will turn to Persia, and give them the choice of the true faith or the sword. Having taken Persia, it will be easy then to overrun Asia Minor, and so to make our way to Constantinople.'

"I bit my lip to keep from laughing. 'And how long will it be before your victorious troops have reached the Bosphorus?' I asked.

"'Such things are in the hands of God, whose servants we are,' said he. 'It may be that I shall myself have passed away before these things are accomplished, but before the days of our children are completed, all that I have now told you will come to pass. Look at that star,’ he added, pointing to a beautiful clear planet above our heads. ‘That is the symbol of Christ. See how serene and peaceful it shines, like His own teaching and the memory of His life. Now,’ he added, turning his outstretched hand to a dusky red star upon the horizon — the very one on which we are gazing now—’that is my star, which tells of wrath, of war, of a scourge upon sinners. And yet both are indeed stars, and each does as Allah may ordain.’

“Well, that was the experience which was called to my mind by the sight of this star tonight. Red and angry, it still broods over the south, even as I saw it that night in the desert. Somewhere down yonder that man is working and striving. He may be stabbed by some brother fanatic or slain in a tribal skirmish. If so, that is the end. But if he lives, there was that in his eyes and in his presence which tells me that Mahomet the son of Abdallah — for that was his name — will testify in some noteworthy fashion to the faith that is in him.”

PART II.

THE SILVER MIRROR

Jan. 3. — This affair of White and Wotherspoon's accounts proves to be a gigantic task. There are twenty thick ledgers to be examined and checked. Who would be a junior partner? However, it is the first big bit of business which has been left entirely in my hands. I must justify it. But it has to be finished so that the lawyers may have the result in time for the trial. Johnson said this morning that I should have to get the last figure out before the twentieth of the month. Good Lord! Well, have at it, and if human brain and nerve can stand the strain, I'll win out at the other side. It means office-work from ten to five, and then a second sitting from about eight to one in the morning. There's drama in an accountant's life. When I find myself in the still early hours, while all the world sleeps, hunting through column after column for those missing figures which will turn a respected alderman into a felon, I understand that it is not such a prosaic profession after all.

On Monday I came on the first trace of defalcation. No heavy game hunter ever got a finer thrill when first he caught sight of the trail of his quarry. But I look at the twenty ledgers and think of the jungle through which I have to follow him before I get my kill. Hard work — but rare sport, too, in a way! I saw the fat fellow once at a City dinner, his red face glowing above a white napkin. He looked at the little pale man at the end of the table. He would have been pale too if he could have seen the task that would be mine.

Jan. 6. — What perfect nonsense it is for doctors to prescribe rest when rest is out of the question! Asses! They might as well shout to a man who has a pack of wolves at his heels that what he wants is absolute quiet. My figures must be out by a certain date; unless they are so, I shall lose the chance of my lifetime, so how on earth am I to rest? I'll take a week or so after the trial.

Perhaps I was myself a fool to go to the doctor at all. But I get nervous and highly-strung when I sit alone at my work at night. It's not a pain — only a sort of fullness of the head with an occasional mist over the eyes. I thought perhaps some bromide, or chloral, or something of the kind might do me good. But stop work? It's absurd to ask such a thing. It's like a long-distance race. You feel queer at first and your heart thumps and your lungs pant, but if you have only the pluck to keep on, you get your second wind.

I’ll stick to my work and wait for my second wind. If it never comes — all the same, I’ll stick to my work. Two ledgers are done, and I am well on in the third. The rascal has covered his tracks well, but I pick them up for all that.

Jan. 9. — I had not meant to go to the doctor again. And yet I have had to. “Straining my nerves, risking a complete breakdown, even endangering my sanity.” That’s a nice sentence to have fired off at one. Well, I’ll stand the strain and I’ll take the risk, and so long as I can sit in my chair and move a pen I’ll follow the old sinner’s slot.

By the way, I may as well set down here the queer experience which drove me this second time to the doctor. I’ll keep an exact record of my symptoms and sensations, because they are interesting in themselves—”a curious psycho-physiological study,” says the doctor — and also because I am perfectly certain that when I am through with them they will all seem blurred and unreal, like some queer dream betwixt sleeping and waking. So now, while they are fresh, I will just make a note of them, if only as a change of thought after the endless figures.

There’s an old silver-framed mirror in my room. It was given me by a friend who had a taste for antiquities, and he, as I happen to know, picked it up at a sale and had no notion where it came from. It’s a large thing — three feet across and two feet high — and it leans at the back of a side-table on my left as I write. The frame is flat, about three inches across, and very old; far too old for hall-marks or other methods of determining its age. The glass part projects, with a bevelled edge, and has the magnificent reflecting power which is only, as it seems to me, to be found in very old mirrors. There’s a feeling of perspective when you look into it such as no modern glass can ever give.

The mirror is so situated that as I sit at the table I can usually see nothing in it but the reflection of the red window curtains. But a queer thing happened last night. I had been working for some hours, very much against the grain, with continual bouts of that mistiness of which I had complained. Again and again I had to stop and clear my eyes. Well, on one of these occasions I chanced to look at the mirror. It had the oddest appearance. The red curtains which should have been reflected in it were no longer there, but the glass seemed to be clouded and steamy, not on the surface, which glittered like steel, but deep down in the very grain of it. This opacity, when I stared hard at it, appeared to slowly rotate this way and that, until it was a thick white cloud swirling in heavy wreaths. So real and solid was it, and so reasonable was I, that I remember turning, with the idea that the curtains were on fire. But everything was deadly still in the room — no sound save the ticking of the clock, no movement save the slow gyration of that strange woolly cloud deep in the heart of the old mirror.

Then, as I looked, the mist, or smoke, or cloud, or whatever one may call it, seemed to coalesce and solidify at two points quite close together, and I was aware, with a thrill of interest rather than of fear, that these were two eyes looking out into the room. A vague outline of a head I could see — a woman's by the hair, but this was very shadowy. Only the eyes were quite distinct; such eyes — dark, luminous, filled with some passionate emotion, fury or horror, I could not say which. Never have I seen eyes which were so full of intense, vivid life. They were not fixed upon me, but stared out into the room. Then as I sat erect, passed my hand over my brow, and made a strong conscious effort to pull myself together, the dim head faded into the general opacity, the mirror slowly cleared, and there were the red curtains once again.

A sceptic would say, no doubt, that I had dropped asleep over my figures, and that my experience was a dream. As a matter of fact, I was never more vividly awake in my life. I was able to argue about it even as I looked at it, and to tell myself that it was a subjective impression — a chimera of the nerves — begotten by worry and insomnia. But why this particular shape? And who is the woman, and what is the dreadful emotion which I read in those wonderful brown eyes? They come between me and my work. For the first time I have done less than the daily tally which I had marked out. Perhaps that is why I have had no abnormal sensations tonight. Tomorrow I must wake up, come what may.

Jan. 11. — All well, and good progress with my work. I wind the net, coil after coil, round that bulky body. But the last smile may remain with him if my own nerves break over it. The mirror would seem to be a sort of barometer which marks my brain-pressure. Each night I have observed that it had clouded before I reached the end of my task.

Dr. Sinclair (who is, it seems, a bit of a psychologist) was so interested in my account that he came round this evening to have a look at the mirror. I had observed that something was scribbled in crabbed old characters upon the metal-work at the back. He examined this with a lens, but could make nothing of it. “Sanc. X. Pal.” was his final reading of it, but that did not bring us any farther. He advised me to put it away into another room; but, after all, whatever I may see in it is, by his own account only a symptom. It is in the cause that the danger lies. The twenty ledgers — not the silver mirror — should be packed away if I could only do it. I'm at the eighth now, so I progress.

Jan. 13.-Perhaps it would have been wiser after all if I had packed away the mirror. I had an extraordinary experience with it last night. And yet I find it so interesting, so fascinating, that even now I will keep it in its place. What on earth is the meaning of it all?

I suppose it was about one in the morning, and I was closing my books preparatory to staggering off to bed, when I saw her there in front of me. The stage of mistiness and development must have passed unobserved, and there she was in all her beauty and passion and distress, as clear-cut as if she were really in the flesh before me. The figure was small, but very distinct — so much so that every feature, and every detail of dress, are stamped in my memory. She is seated on the extreme left of the mirror. A sort of shadowy figure crouches down beside her — I can dimly discern that it is a man — and then behind them is cloud, in which I see figures — figures which move. It is not a mere picture upon which I look. It is a scene in life, an actual episode. She crouches and quivers. The man beside her cowers down. The vague figures make abrupt movements and gestures. All my fears were swallowed up in my interest. It was maddening to see so much and not to see more.

But I can at least describe the woman to the smallest point. She is very beautiful and quite young — not more than five-and-twenty, I should judge. Her hair is of a very rich brown, with a warm chestnut shade fining into gold at the edges. A little flat-pointed cap comes to an angle in front, and is made of lace edged with pearls. The forehead is high, too high perhaps for perfect beauty; but one would not have it otherwise, as it gives a touch of power and strength to what would otherwise be a softly feminine face. The brows are most delicately curved over heavy eyelids, and then come those wonderful eyes — so large, so dark, so full of over-mastering emotion, of rage and horror, contending with a pride of self-control which holds her from sheer frenzy! The cheeks are pale, the lips white with agony, the chin and throat most exquisitely rounded. The figure sits and leans forward in the chair, straining and rigid, cataleptic with horror. The dress is black velvet, a jewel gleams like a flame in the breast, and a golden crucifix smoulders in the shadow of a fold. This is the lady whose image still lives in the old silver mirror. What dire deed could it be which has left its impress there, so that now, in another age, if the spirit of a man be but worn down to it, he may be conscious of its presence?

One other detail: On the left side of the skirt of the black dress was, as I thought at first, a shapeless bunch of white ribbon. Then, as I looked more intently or as the vision defined itself more clearly, I perceived what it was. It was the hand of a man, clenched and knotted in agony, which held on with a convulsive grasp to the fold of the dress. The rest of the crouching figure was a mere vague outline, but that strenuous hand shone clear on the dark background, with a sinister suggestion of tragedy in its frantic clutch. The man is frightened-horribly frightened. That I can clearly discern. What has terrified him so? Why does he grip the woman's dress? The answer lies amongst those moving figures in the background. They have brought danger both to him and to her. The interest of the thing fascinated me. I thought no more of its relation to my own nerves. I stared and stared as if in a theatre. But I could get no farther. The mist thinned. There were tumultuous movements in which all the figures were vaguely concerned. Then the mirror was clear once more.

The doctor says I must drop work for a day, and I can afford to do so, for I have made good progress lately. It is quite evident that the visions depend entirely upon my own nervous state, for I sat in front of the mirror for an hour tonight, with no result whatever. My soothing day has chased them away. I wonder whether I shall ever penetrate what they all mean? I examined the mirror this evening under a good light, and besides the mysterious inscription "Sanc. X. Pal.," I was able to discern some signs of heraldic marks, very faintly visible upon the silver. They must be very ancient, as they are almost obliterated. So far as I could make out, they were three spear-heads, two above and one below. I will show them to the doctor when he calls tomorrow.

Jan. 14. — Feel perfectly well again, and I intend that nothing else shall stop me until my task is finished. The doctor was shown the marks on the mirror and agreed that they were armorial bearings. He is deeply interested in all that I have told him, and cross-questioned me closely on the details. It amuses me to notice how he is torn in two by conflicting desires — the one that his patient should lose his symptoms, the other that the medium — for so he regards me — should solve this mystery of the past. He advised continued rest, but did not oppose me too violently when I declared that such a thing was out of the question until the ten remaining ledgers have been checked.

Jan. 17. — For three nights I have had no experiences — my day of rest has borne fruit. Only a quarter of my task is left, but I must make a forced march, for the lawyers are clamouring for their material. I will give them enough and to spare. I have him fast on a hundred counts. When they realise what a slippery, cunning rascal he is, I should gain some credit from the case. False trading accounts, false balance-sheets, dividends drawn from capital, losses written down as profits, suppression of working expenses, manipulation of petty cash — it is a fine record!

Jan. 18. — Headaches, nervous twitches, mistiness, fullness of the temples — all the premonitions of trouble, and the trouble came sure enough. And yet my real sorrow is not so much that the vision should come as that it should cease before all is revealed.

But I saw more tonight. The crouching man was as visible as the lady whose gown he clutched. He is a little swarthy fellow, with a black-pointed beard. He has a loose gown of damask trimmed with fur. The prevailing tints of his dress are red. What a fright the fellow is in, to be sure! He cowers and shivers and glares back over his shoulder. There is a small knife in his other hand, but he is far too tremulous and cowed to use it. Dimly now I begin to see the figures in the background. Fierce faces, bearded and dark, shape themselves out of the mist. There is one terrible creature, a skeleton of a man, with hollow cheeks and eyes sunk in his head. He also has a knife in his hand. On the right of the woman stands a tall man, very young, with flaxen hair, his face sullen and dour. The beautiful woman looks up at him in appeal. So does the man on the ground. This youth seems to be the arbiter of their fate. The crouching man draws closer and hides himself in the woman’s skirts. The tall youth bends and tries to drag her away from him. So much I saw last night before the mirror cleared. Shall I never know what it leads to and whence it comes? It is not a mere imagination, of that I am very sure. Somewhere, some time, this scene has been acted, and this old mirror has reflected it. But when — where?

Jan. 20. — My work draws to a close, and it is time. I feel a tenseness within my brain, a sense of intolerable strain, which warns me that something must give. I have worked myself to the limit. But tonight should be the last night. With a supreme effort I should finish the final ledger and complete the case before I rise from my chair. I will do it. I will.

Feb. 7. — I did. My God, what an experience! I hardly know if I am strong enough yet to set it down.

Let me explain in the first instance that I am writing this in Dr. Sinclair’s private hospital some three weeks after the last entry in my diary. On the night of January 20 my nervous system finally gave way, and I remembered nothing afterwards until I found myself three days ago in this home of rest. And I can rest with a good conscience. My work was done before I went under. My figures are in the solicitors’ hands. The hunt is over.

And now I must describe that last night. I had sworn to finish my work, and so intently did I stick to it, though my head was bursting, that I would never look up until the last column had been added. And yet it was fine self-restraint, for all the time I knew that wonderful things were happening in the mirror. Every nerve in my body told me so. If I looked up there was an end of my work. So I did not look up till all was finished. Then, when at last with throbbing temples I threw down my pen and raised my eyes, what a sight was there!

The mirror in its silver frame was like a stage, brilliantly lit, in which a drama was in progress. There was no mist now. The oppression of my nerves had wrought this amazing clarity. Every feature, every movement, was as clear-cut as in life. To think that I, a tired accountant, the most prosaic of mankind, with the account-books of a swindling bankrupt before me, should be chosen of all the human race to look upon such a scene!

It was the same scene and the same figures, but the drama had advanced a stage. The tall young man was holding the woman in his arms. She strained away from him and looked up at him with loathing in her face. They had torn the crouching man away from his hold upon the skirt of her dress. A dozen of them were round him — savage men, bearded men. They hacked at him with knives. All seemed to strike him together. Their arms rose and fell. The blood did not flow from him-it squirted. His red dress was dabbled in it. He threw himself this way and that, purple upon crimson, like an over-ripe plum. Still they hacked, and still the jets shot from him. It was horrible — horrible! They dragged him kicking to the door. The woman looked over her shoulder at him and her mouth gaped. I heard nothing, but I knew that she was screaming. And then, whether it was this nerve-racking vision before me, or whether, my task finished, all the overwork of the past weeks came in one crushing weight upon me, the room danced round me, the floor seemed to sink away beneath my feet, and I remembered no more. In the early morning my landlady found me stretched senseless before the silver mirror, but I knew nothing myself until three days ago I awoke in the deep peace of the doctor's nursing home.

Feb. 9. — Only today have I told Dr. Sinclair my full experience. He had not allowed me to speak of such matters before. He listened with an absorbed interest. "You don't identify this with any well-known scene in history?" he asked, with suspicion in his eyes. I assured him that I knew nothing of history. "Have you no idea whence that mirror came and to whom it once belonged?" he continued. "Have you?" I asked, for he spoke with meaning. "It's incredible," said he, "and yet how else can one explain it? The scenes which you described before suggested it, but now it has gone beyond all range of coincidence. I will bring you some notes in the evening."

Later. — He has just left me. Let me set down his words as closely as I can recall them. He began by laying several musty volumes upon my bed.

"These you can consult at your leisure," said he. "I have some notes here which you can confirm. There is not a doubt that what you have seen is the murder of Rizzio by the Scottish nobles in the presence of Mary, which occurred in March, 1566. Your description of the woman is accurate. The high forehead and heavy eyelids combined with great beauty could hardly apply to two women. The tall young man was her husband, Darnley. Rizzio, says the chronicle, 'was dressed in a loose dressing-gown of furred damask, with hose of russet velvet.' With one hand he clutched Mary's gown, with the other he held a dagger. Your fierce, hollow-eyed man was Ruthven, who was new-risen from a bed of sickness. Every detail is exact."

"But why to me?" I asked, in bewilderment. "Why of all the human race to me?"

"Because you were in the fit mental state to receive the impression. Because you chanced to own the mirror which gave the impression."

"The mirror! You think, then, that it was Mary's mirror — that it stood in the room where the deed was done?"

"I am convinced that it was Mary's mirror. She had been Queen of France. Her personal property would be stamped with the Royal arms. What you took to be three spear-heads were really the lilies of France."

"And the inscription?"

“‘Sanc. X. Pal.’ You can expand it into Sanctae Crucis Palatium. Some one has made a note upon the mirror as to whence it came. It was the Palace of the Holy Cross.”

“Holyrood!” I cried.

“Exactly. Your mirror came from Holyrood. You have had one very singular experience, and have escaped. I trust that you will never put yourself into the way of having such another.”

THE BLIGHTING OF SHARKEY

Sharkey, the abominable Sharkey, was out again. After two years of the Coromandel coast, his black barque of death, *The Happy Delivery*, was prowling off the Spanish Main, while trader and fisher flew for dear life at the menace of that patched fore-topsail, rising slowly over the violet rim of the tropical sea.

As the birds cower when the shadow of the hawk falls athwart the field, or as the jungle folk crouch and shiver when the coughing cry of the tiger is heard in the night-time, so through all the busy world of ships, from the whalers of Nantucket to the tobacco ships of Charleston, and from the Spanish supply ships of Cadiz to the sugar merchants of the Main, there spread the rumour of the black curse of the ocean.

Some hugged the shore, ready to make for the nearest port, while others struck far out beyond the known lines of commerce, but none were so stout-hearted that they did not breathe more freely when their passengers and cargoes were safe under the guns of some mothering fort.

Through all the islands there ran tales of charred derelicts at sea, of sudden glares seen afar in the night-time, and of withered bodies stretched upon the sand of waterless Bahama Keys. All the old signs were there to show that Sharkey was at his bloody game once more.

These fair waters and yellow-rimmed, palm-nodding islands are the traditional home of the sea rover. First it was the gentleman adventurer, the man of family and honour, who fought as a patriot, though he was ready to take his payment in Spanish plunder.

Then, within a century, his debonnaire figure had passed to make room for the buccaneers, robbers pure and simple, yet with some organized code of their own, commanded by notable chieftains, and taking in hand great concerted enterprises.

They, too, passed with their fleets and their sacking of cities, to make room for the worst of all, the lonely outcast pirate, the bloody Ishmael of the seas, at war with the whole human race. This was the vile brood which the early eighteenth century had spawned forth, and of them all there was none who could compare in audacity, wickedness, and evil repute with the unutterable Sharkey.

It was early in May, in the year 1720, that *The Happy Delivery* lay with her fore-yard aback some five leagues west of the Windward Passage, waiting to see what rich, helpless craft the trade-wind might bring down to her.

Three days she had lain there, a sinister black speck, in the centre of the great sapphire circle of the ocean. Far to the south-east the low blue hills of Hispaniola showed up on the skyline.

Hour by hour as he waited without avail, Sharkey's savage temper had risen, for his arrogant spirit chafed against any contradiction, even from Fate itself. To his quartermaster, Ned Galloway, he had said that night, with his odious neighing laugh, that the crew of the next captured vessel should answer to him for having kept him waiting so long.

The cabin of the pirate barque was a good-sized room, hung with much tarnished finery, and presenting a strange medley of luxury and disorder. The panelling of carved and polished sandal-wood was blotched with foul smudges and chipped with bullet-marks fired in some drunken revelry.

Rich velvets and laces were heaped upon the brocaded settees, while metal-work and pictures of great price filled every niche and corner, for anything which caught the pirate's fancy in the sack of a hundred vessels was thrown haphazard into his chamber. A rich, soft carpet covered the floor, but it was mottled with wine-stains and charred with burned tobacco.

Above, a great brass hanging-lamp threw a brilliant yellow light upon this singular apartment, and upon the two men who sat in their shirt-sleeves with the wine between them, and the cards in their hands, deep in a game of piquet. Both were smoking long pipes, and the thin blue reek filled the cabin and floated through the skylight above them, which, half opened, disclosed a slip of deep violet sky spangled with great silver stars.

Ned Galloway, the quartermaster, was a huge New England wastrel, the one rotten branch upon a goodly Puritan family tree. His robust limbs and giant frame were the heritage of a long line of God-fearing ancestors, while his black savage heart was all his own. Bearded to the temples, with fierce blue eyes, a tangled lion's mane of coarse, dark hair, and huge gold rings in his ears, he was the idol of the women in every waterside hell from the Tortugas to Maracaibo on the Main. A red cap, a blue silken shirt, brown velvet breeches with gaudy knee-ribbons, and high sea-boots made up the costume of the rover Hercules.

A very different figure was Captain John Sharkey. His thin, drawn, clean-shaven face was corpse-like in its pallor, and all the suns of the Indies could but turn it to a more deathly parchment tint. He was part bald, with a few lank locks of tow-like hair, and a steep, narrow forehead. His thin nose jutted sharply forth, and near-set on either side of it were those filmy blue eyes, red-rimmed like those of a white bull-terrier, from which strong men winced away in fear and loathing. His bony hands, with long, thin fingers which quivered ceaselessly like the antennae of an insect, were toying constantly with the cards and the heap of gold moidores which lay before him. His dress was of some sombre drab material, but, indeed, the men who looked upon that fearsome face had little thought for the costume of its owner.

The game was brought to a sudden interruption, for the cabin door was swung rudely open, and two rough fellows — Israel Martin, the boatswain, and Red Foley, the gunner — rushed into the cabin. In an instant Sharkey was on his feet with a pistol in either hand and murder in his eyes.

“Sink you for villains!” he cried. “I see well that if I do not shoot one of you from time to time you will forget the man I am. What mean you by entering my cabin as though it were a Wapping alehouse?”

“Nay, Captain Sharkey,” said Martin, with a sullen frown upon his brick-red face, “it is even such talk as this which has set us by the ears. We have had enough of it.”

“And more than enough,” said Red Foley, the gunner. “There be no mates aboard a pirate craft, and so the boatswain, the gunner, and the quarter-master are the officers.”

“Did I gainsay it?” asked Sharkey with an oath.

“You have miscalled us and mishandled us before the men, and we scarce know at this moment why we should risk our lives in fighting for the cabin and against the foc’sle.”

Sharkey saw that something serious was in the wind. He laid down his pistols and leaned back in his chair with a flash of his yellow fangs.

“Nay, this is sad talk,” said he, “that two stout fellows who have emptied many a bottle and cut many a throat with me, should now fall out over nothing. I know you to be roaring boys who would go with me against the devil himself if I bid you. Let the steward bring cups and drown all unkindness between us.”

“It is no time for drinking, Captain Sharkey,” said Martin. “The men are holding council round the mainmast, and may be aft at any minute. They mean mischief, Captain Sharkey, and we have come to warn you.”

Sharkey sprang for the brass-handled sword which hung from the wall.

“Sink them for rascals!” he cried. “When I have gutted one or two of them they may hear reason.”

But the others barred his frantic way to the door.

“There are forty of them under the lead of Sweetlocks, the master,” said Martin, “and on the open deck they would surely cut you to pieces. Here within the cabin it may be that we can hold them off at the points of our pistols.”

He had hardly spoken when there came the tread of many heavy feet upon the deck. Then there was a pause with no sound but the gentle lipping of the water against the sides of the pirate vessel. Finally, a crashing blow as from a pistol-butt fell upon the door, and an instant afterwards Sweetlocks himself, a tall, dark man, with a deep red birthmark blazing upon his cheek, strode into the cabin. His swaggering air sank somewhat as he looked into those pale and filmy eyes.

“Captain Sharkey,” said he, “I come as spokesman of the crew.”

“So I have heard, Sweetlocks,” said the captain, softly. “I may live to rip you the length of your vest for this night’s work.”

“That is as it may be, Captain Sharkey,” the master answered, “but if you will look up you will see that I have those at my back who will not see me mishandled.”

“Cursed if we do!” growled a deep voice from above, and glancing upwards the officers in the cabin were aware of a line of fierce, bearded, sun-blackened faces looking down at them through the open skylight.

“Well, what would you have?” asked Sharkey. “Put it in words, man, and let us have an end of it.”

“The men think,” said Sweetlocks, “that you are the devil himself, and that there will be no luck for them whilst they sail the sea in such company. Time was when we did our two or three craft a day, and every man had women and dollars to his liking, but now for a long week we have not raised a sail, and save for three beggarly sloops, have taken never a vessel since we passed the Bahama Bank. Also, they know that you killed Jack Bartholomew, the carpenter, by beating his head in with a bucket, so that each of us goes in fear of his life. Also, the rum has given out, and we are hard put to it for liquor. Also, you sit in your cabin whilst it is in the articles that you should drink and roar with the crew. For all these reasons it has been this day in general meeting decreed—”

Sharkey had stealthily cocked a pistol under the table, so it may have been as well for the mutinous master that he never reached the end of his discourse, for even as he came to it there was a swift patter of feet upon the deck, and a ship lad, wild with his tidings, rushed into the room.

“A craft!” he yelled. “A great craft, and close aboard us!”

In a flash the quarrel was forgotten, and the pirates were rushing to quarters. Sure enough, surging slowly down before the gentle trade-wind, a great full-rigged ship, with all sail set, was close beside them.

It was clear that she had come from afar and knew nothing of the ways of the Caribbean Sea, for she made no effort to avoid the low, dark craft which lay so close upon her bow, but blundered on as if her mere size would avail her.

So daring was she, that for an instant the Rovers, as they flew to loose the tackles of their guns, and hoisted their battle-lanterns, believed that a man-of-war had caught them napping.

But at the sight of her bulging, portless sides and merchant rig a shout of exultation broke from amongst them, and in an instant they had swung round their fore-yard, and darting alongside they had grappled with her and flung a spray of shrieking, cursing ruffians upon her deck.

Half a dozen seamen of the night-watch were cut down where they stood, the mate was felled by Sharkey and tossed overboard by Ned Galloway, and before the sleepers had time to sit up in their berths, the vessel was in the hands of the pirates.

The prize proved to be the full-rigged ship *Portobello* — Captain Hardy, master — bound from London to Kingston in Jamaica, with a cargo of cotton goods and hoop-iron.

Having secured their prisoners, all huddled together in a dazed, distracted group, the pirates spread over the vessel in search of plunder, handing all that was found to the giant quartermaster, who in turn passed it over the side of *The Happy Delivery* and laid it under guard at the foot of her mainmast.

The cargo was useless, but there were a thousand guineas in the ship’s strong-box, and there were some eight or ten passengers, three of them wealthy Jamaica merchants, all bringing home well-filled boxes from their London visit.

When all the plunder was gathered, the passengers and crew were dragged to the waist, and under the cold smile of Sharkey each in turn was thrown over the side — Sweetlocks standing by the rail and ham-stringing them with his cutlass as they passed over, lest some strong swimmer should rise in judgment against them. A portly, grey-haired woman, the wife of one of the planters, was among the captives, but she also was thrust screaming and clutching over the side.

"Mercy, you hussy!" neighed Sharkey, "you are surely a good twenty years too old for that."

The captain of the *Portobello,* a hale, blue-eyed grey-beard, was the last upon the deck. He stood, a thick-set resolute figure, in the glare of the lanterns, while Sharkey bowed and smirked before him.

"One skipper should show courtesy to another," said he, "and sink me if Captain Sharkey would be behind in good manners! I have held you to the last, as you see, where a brave man should be; so now, my bully, you have seen the end of them, and may step over with an easy mind."

"So I shall, Captain Sharkey," said the old seaman, "for I have done my duty so far as my power lay. But before I go over I would say a word in your ear."

"If it be to soften me, you may save your breath. You have kept us waiting here for three days, and curse me if one of you shall live!"

"Nay, it is to tell you what you should know. You have not yet found what is the true treasure aboard of this ship."

"Not found it? Sink me, but I will slice your liver, Captain Hardy, if you do not make good your words! Where is this treasure you speak of?" "It is not a treasure of gold, but it is a fair maid, which may be no less welcome."

"Where is she, then? And why is she not with the others?"

"I will tell you why she is not with the others. She is the only daughter of the Count and Countess Ramirez, who are amongst those whom you have murdered. Her name is Inez Ramirez, and she is of the best blood of Spain, her father being Governor of Chagre, to which he was now bound. It chanced that she was found to have formed an attachment, as maids will, to one far beneath her in rank aboard this ship; so her parents, being people of great power, whose word is not to be gainsaid, constrained me to confine her close in a special cabin aft of my own. Here she was held straitly, all food being carried to her, and she allowed to see no one. This I tell you as a last gift, though why I should make it to you I do not know, for indeed you are a most bloody rascal, and it comforts me in dying to think that you will surely be gallow’s-meat in this world, and hell’s-meat in the next.”

At the words he ran to the rail, and vaulted over into the darkness, praying as he sank into the depths of the sea, that the betrayal of this maid might not be counted too heavily against his soul.

The body of Captain Hardy had not yet settled upon the sand forty fathoms deep before the pirates had rushed along the cabin gangway. There, sure enough, at the further end, was a barred door, overlooked in their previous search. There was no key, but they beat it in with their gunstocks, whilst shriek after shriek came from within. In the light of their outstretched lanterns they saw a young woman, in the very prime and fullness of her youth, crouching in a corner, her unkempt hair hanging to the ground, her dark eyes glaring with fear, her lovely form straining away in horror from this inrush of savage blood-stained men. Rough hands seized her, she was jerked to her feet, and dragged with scream on scream to where John Sharkey awaited her. He held the light long and fondly to her face, then, laughing loudly, he bent forward and left his red hand-print upon her cheek.

“‘Tis the Rover’s brand, lass, that he marks his ewes. Take her to the cabin and use her well. Now, hearties, get her under water, and out to our luck once more.”

Within an hour the good ship *Portobello* had settled down to her doom, till she lay beside her murdered passengers upon the Caribbean sand, while the pirate barque, her deck littered with plunder, was heading northward in search of another victim.

There was a carouse that night in the cabin of *The Happy Delivery*, at which three men drank deep. They were the captain, the quartermaster, and Baldy Stable, the surgeon, a man who had held the first practice in Charleston, until, misusing a patient, he fled from justice, and took his skill over to the pirates. A bloated fat man he was, with a creased neck and a great shining scalp, which gave him his name. Sharkey had put for the moment all thought of the mutiny out of his head, knowing that no animal is fierce when it is over-fed, and that whilst the plunder of the great ship was new to them he need fear no trouble from his crew. He gave himself up, therefore, to the wine and the riot, shouting and roaring with his boon companions. All three were flushed and mad, ripe for any devilment, when the thought of the woman crossed the pirate’s evil mind. He yelled to the negro steward that he should bring her on the instant.

Inez Ramirez had now realised it all — the death of her father and mother, and her own position in the hands of their murderers. Yet calmness had come with the knowledge, and there was no sign of terror in her proud, dark face as she was led into the cabin, but rather a strange, firm set of the mouth and an exultant gleam of the eyes, like one who sees great hopes in the future. She smiled at the pirate captain as he rose and seized her by the waist.

"'Fore God! this is a lass of spirit," cried Sharkey, passing his arm round her. "She was born to be a Rover's bride. Come, my bird, and drink to our better friendship."

"Article Six!" hiccoughed the doctor. "All *bona robas* in common."

"Aye! we hold you to that, Captain Sharkey," said Galloway. "It is so writ in Article Six."

"I will cut the man into ounces who comes betwixt us!" cried Sharkey, as he turned his fish-like eyes from one to the other. "Nay, lass, the man is not born that will take you from John Sharkey. Sit here upon my knee, and place your arm round me so. Sink me, if she has not learned to love me at sight! Tell me, my pretty, why you were so mishandled and laid in the bilboes aboard yonder craft?"

The woman shook her head and smiled. "No Inglese — no Inglese," she lisped. She had drunk off the bumper of wine which Sharkey held to her, and her dark eyes gleamed more brightly than before. Sitting on Sharkey's knee, her arm encircled his neck, and her hand toyed with his hair, his ear, his cheek. Even the strange quartermaster and the hardened surgeon felt a horror as they watched her, but Sharkey laughed in his joy. "Curse me, if she is not a lass of metal!" he cried, as he pressed her to him and kissed her unresisting lips.

But a strange intent look of interest had come into the surgeon's eyes as he watched her, and his face set rigidly, as if a fearsome thought had entered his mind. There stole a grey pallor over his bull face, mottling all the red of the tropics and the flush of the wine.

"Look at her hand, Captain Sharkey!" he cried. "For the Lord's sake, look at her hand!"

Sharkey stared down at the hand which had fondled him. It was of a strange dead pallor, with a yellow shiny web betwixt the fingers. All over it was a white fluffy dust, like the flour of a new-baked loaf. It lay thick on Sharkey's neck and cheek. With a cry of disgust he flung the woman from his lap; but in an instant, with a wild-cat bound, and a scream of triumphant malice, she had sprung at the surgeon, who vanished yelling under the table. One of her clawing hands grasped Galloway by the beard, but he tore himself away, and snatching a pike, held her off from him as she gibbered and mowed with the blazing eyes of a maniac.

The black steward had run in on the sudden turmoil, and among them they forced the mad creature back into a cabin and turned the key upon her. Then the three sank panting into their chairs, and looked with eyes of horror upon each other. The same word was in the mind of each, but Galloway was the first to speak it.

“A leper!” he cried. “She has us all, curse her!”

“Not me,” said the surgeon; “she never laid her finger on me.”

“For that matter,” cried Galloway, “it was but my beard that she touched. I will have every hair of it off before morning.”

“Dolts that we were!” the surgeon shouted, beating his head with his hand. “Tainted or no, we shall never know a moment’s peace till the year is up and the time of danger past. ‘Fore God, that merchant skipper has left his mark on us, and pretty fools we were to think that such a maid would be quarantined for the cause he gave. It is easy to see now that her corruption broke forth in the journey, and that save throwing her over they had no choice but to board her up until they should come to some port with a lazarette.”

Sharkey had sat leaning back in his chair with a ghastly face while he listened to the surgeon’s words. He mopped himself with his red handkerchief, and wiped away the fatal dust with which he was smeared.

“What of me?” he croaked. “What say you, Baldy Stable? Is there a chance for me? Curse you for a villain! speak out, or I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! Is there a chance for me, I say?”

But the surgeon shook his head. “Captain Sharkey,” said he, “it would be an ill deed to speak you false. The taint is on you. No man on whom the leper scales have rested is ever clean again.”

Sharkey’s head fell forward on his chest, and he sat motionless, stricken by this great and sudden horror, looking with his smouldering eyes into his fearsome future. Softly the mate and the surgeon rose from their places, and stealing out from the poisoned air of the cabin, came forth into the freshness of the early dawn, with the soft, scent-laden breeze in their faces and the first red feathers of cloud catching the earliest gleam of the rising sun as it shot its golden rays over the palm-clad ridges of distant Hispaniola.

That morning a second council of the Rovers was held at the base of the mainmast, and a deputation chosen to see the captain. They were approaching the after-cabins when Sharkey came forth, the old devil in his eyes, and his bandolier with a pair of pistols over his shoulder.

“Sink you all for villains!” he cried, “Would you dare to cross my hawse? Stand out, Sweetlocks, and I will lay you open! Here, Galloway, Martin, Foley, stand by me and lash the dogs to their kennel!”

But his officers had deserted him, and there was none to come to his aid. There was a rush of the pirates. One was shot through the body, but an instant afterwards Sharkey had been seized and was triced to his own mainmast. His filmy eyes looked round from face to face, and there was none who felt the happier for having met them.

“Captain Sharkey,” said Sweetlocks, “you have mishandled many of us, and you have now pistolled John Masters, besides killing Bartholomew, the carpenter, by braining him with a bucket. All this might have been forgiven you, in that you have been our leader for years, and that we have signed articles to serve under you while the voyage lasts. But now we have heard of this bona roba on board, and we know that you are poisoned to the marrow, and that while you rot there will be no safety for any of us, but that we shall all be turned into filth and corruption. Therefore, John Sharkey, we Rovers of *The Happy Delivery*, in council assembled, have decreed that while there be yet time, before the plague spreads, you shall be set adrift in a boat to find such a fate as Fortune may be pleased to send you.”

John Sharkey said nothing, but slowly circling his head, he cursed them all with his baleful gaze. The ship’s dinghy had been lowered, and he with his hands still tied, was dropped into it on the bight of a rope.

“Cast her off!” cried Sweetlocks.

“Nay, hold hard a moment, Master Sweetlocks!” shouted one of the crew. “What of the wench? Is she to bide aboard and poison us all?”

“Send her off with her mate!” cried another, and the Rovers roared their approval. Driven forth at the end of pikes, the girl was pushed towards the boat. With all the spirit of Spain in her rotting body she flashed triumphant glances on her captors. “Perros! Perros Ingleses! Lepero, Lepero!” she cried in exultation, as they thrust her over into the boat.

“Good luck, captain! God speed you on your honeymoon!” cried a chorus of mocking voices, as the painter was unloosed, and *The Happy Delivery*, running full before the trade-wind, left the little boat astern, a tiny dot upon the vast expanse of the lonely sea.

Extract from the log of H.M. fifty-gun ship *Hecate* in her cruise off the American Main.

“Jan. 26, 1721. — This day, the junk having become unfit for food, and five of the crew down with scurvy, I ordered that we send two boats ashore at the nor’-western point of Hispaniola, to seek for fresh fruit, and perchance shoot some of the wild oxen with which the island abounds.

“7 p.m. — The boats have returned with good store of green stuff and two bullocks. Mr. Woodruff, the master, reports that near the landing-place at the edge of the forest was found the skeleton of a woman, clad in European dress, of such sort as to show that she may have been a person of quality. Her head had been crushed by a great stone which lay beside her. Hard by was a grass hut, and signs that a man had dwelt therein for some time, as was shown by charred wood, bones and other traces. There is a rumour upon the coast that Sharkey, the bloody pirate, was marooned in these parts last year, but whether he has made his way into the interior, or whether he has been picked up by some craft, there is no means of knowing. If he be once again afloat, then I pray that God send him under our guns.”

THE MARRIAGE OF THE BRIGADIER

I am speaking, my friends, of days which are long gone by, when I had scarcely begun to build up that fame which has made my name so familiar. Among the thirty officers of the Hussars of Conflans there was nothing to indicate that I was superior in any way to the others. I can well imagine how surprised they would all have been had they realised that young Lieutenant Etienne Gerard was destined for so glorious a career, and would live to command a brigade and to receive from the Emperor’s own hands that cross which I can show you any time that you do me the honour to visit me in my little cottage. You know, do you not, the little white-washed cottage with the vine in front, in the field beside the Garonne?

People have said of me that I have never known what fear was. No doubt you have heard them say it. For many years, out of a foolish pride, I have let the saying pass. And yet now, in my old age, I can afford to be honest. The brave man dares to be frank. It is only the coward who is afraid to make admissions. So I tell you now that I also am human; that I also have felt my skin grow cold, and my hair rise; that I have even known what it was to run away until my limbs could scarce support me. It shocks you to hear it? Well, some day it may comfort you, when your own courage has reached its limits, to know that even Etienne Gerard has known what it was to be afraid. I will tell you now how this experience befell me, and also how it brought me a wife.

For the moment France was at peace, and we, the Hussars of Conflans, were in camp all that summer a few miles from the town of Les Andelys in Normandy. It is not a very gay place by itself, but we of the Light Cavalry make all places gay which we visit, and so we passed our time very pleasantly. Many years and many scenes have dulled my remembrance, but still the name Les Andelys brings back to me a huge ruined castle, great orchards of apple trees, and above all, a vision of the lovely maidens of Normandy. They were the very finest of their sex, as we may be said to have been of ours, and so we were well met in that sweet sunlit summer. Ah, the youth, the beauty, the valour, and then the dull, dead years that blurr them all! There are times when the glorious past weighs on my heart like lead. No, sir, no wine can wash away such thoughts, for they are of the spirit and the soul. It is only the gross body which responds to wine, but if you offer it for that, then I will not refuse it.

Now of all the maidens who dwelt in those parts there was one who was so superior in beauty and in charm that she seemed to be very specially marked out for me. Her name was Marie Ravon, and her people, the Ravons, were of yeoman stock who had farmed their own land in those parts since the days when Duke William went to England. If I close my eyes now, I see her as she then was, her cheeks, dusky like moss roses; her hazel eyes, so gentle and yet so full of spirit; her hair of that deepest black which goes most fitly with poetry and with passion; her finger as supple as a young birch tree in the wind. Ah! how she swayed away from me when first I laid my arm round it, for she was full of fire and pride, ever evading, ever resisting, fighting to the last that her surrender might be the more sweet. Out of a hundred and forty women — But who can compare where all are so near perfection!

You will wonder why it should be, if this maiden was so beautiful, that I should be left without a rival. There was a very good reason, my friends, for I so arranged it that my rivals were in the hospital. There was Hippolyte Lesoeur, he visited them for two Sundays; but if he lives, I dare swear that he still limps from the bullet which lodges in his knee. Poor Victor also — up to his death at Austerlitz he wore my mark. Soon it was understood that if I could not win Marie, I should at least have a fair field in which to try. It was said in our camp that it was safer to charge a square of unbroken infantry than to be seen too often at the farmhouse of the Ravons.

Now let me be precise for a moment. Did I wish to marry Marie? Ah! my friends, marriage is not for a Hussar. Today he is in Normandy; tomorrow he is in the hills of Spain or in the bogs of Poland. What shall he do with a wife? Would it be fair to either of them? Can it be right that his courage should be blunted by the thought of the despair which his death would bring, or is it reasonable that she should be left fearing lest every post should bring her the news of irreparable misfortune? A Hussar can but warm himself at the fire, and then hurry onwards, too happy if he can but pass another fire from which some comfort may come. And Marie, did she wish to marry me? She knew well that when our silver trumpets blew the march it would be over the grave of our married life. Better far to hold fast to her own people and her own soil, where she and her husband could dwell for ever amid the rich orchards and within sight of the great Castle of Le

Galliard. Let her remember her Hussar in her dreams, but let her waking days be spent in the world as she finds it. Meanwhile we pushed such thoughts from our minds, and gave ourselves up to a sweet companionship, each day complete in itself with never a thought of the morrow. It is true that there were times when her father, a stout old gentleman with a face like one of his own apples, and her mother, a thin anxious woman of the country, gave me hints that they would wish to be clearer as to my intentions; but in their hearts they each knew well that Etienne Gerard was a man of honour, and that their daughter was very safe as well as very happy in his keeping. So the matter stood until the night of which I speak.

It was the Sunday evening, and I had ridden over from the camp. There were several of our fellows who were visiting the village, and we all left our horses at the inn. Thence I had to walk to the Ravons, which was only separated by a single very large field extending to the very door. I was about to start when the landlord ran after me. “Excuse me, lieutenant,” said he, “it is farther by the road, and yet I should advise you to take it.”

“It is a mile or more out of my way.”

“I know it. But I think that it would be wiser,” and he smiled as he spoke.

“And why?” I asked.

“Because,” said he, “the English bull is loose in the field.”

If it were not for that odious smile, I might have considered it. But to hold a danger over me and then to smile in such a fashion was more than my proud temper could bear. I indicated by a gesture what I thought of the English bull.

“I will go by the shortest way,” said I.

I had no sooner set my foot in the field than I felt that my spirit had betrayed me into rashness. It was a very large square field, and as I came further out into it I felt like the cockle-shell which ventures out from land and sees no port save that from which it has issued. There was a wall on every side of the field save that from which I had come. In front of me was the farmhouse of the Ravons, with wall extending to right and left. A back door opened upon the field, and there were several windows, but all were barred, as is usual in the Norman farms. I pushed on rapidly to the door, as being the only harbour of safety, walking with dignity as befits a soldier, and yet with such speed as I could summon. From the waist upwards I was unconcerned and even debonnaire. Below, I was swift and alert.

I had nearly reached the middle of the field when I perceived the creature. He was rooting about with his fore feet under a large beech tree which lay upon my right hand. I did not turn my head, nor would the bystander have detected that I took notice of him, but my eye was watching him with anxiety. It may have been that he was in a contented mood, or it may have been that he was arrested by the nonchalance of my bearing, but he made no movement in my direction. Reassured, I fixed my eyes upon the open window of Marie's bed-chamber, which was immediately over the back door, in the hope that those dear, tender, dark eyes, were surveying me from behind the curtains. I flourished my little cane, loitered to pick a primrose, and sang one of our devil-may-care choruses in order to insult this English beast, and to show my love how little I cared for danger when it stood between her and me. The creature was abashed by my fearlessness, and so, pushing open the back door, I was able to enter the farmhouse in safety and in honour.

And was it not worth the danger? Had all the bulls of Castile guarded the entrance, would it not still have been worth it? Ah, the hours, the sunny hours, which can never come back, when our youthful feet seemed scarce to touch the ground, and we lived in a sweet dreamland of our own creation! She honoured my courage, and she loved me for it. As she lay with her flushed cheek pillowed against the silk of my dolman, looking up at me with her wondering eyes, shining with love and admiration, she marvelled at the stories in which I gave her some pictures of the true character of her lover.

"Has your heart never failed you? Have you never known the feeling of fear?" she asked. I laughed at such a thought. What place could fear have in the mind of a Hussar? Young as I was, I had given my proofs. I told her how I had led my squadron into a square of Hungarian Grenadiers. She shuddered as she embraced me. I told her also how I had swum my horse over the Danube at night with a message for Davoust. To be frank, it was not the Danube, nor was it so deep that I was compelled to swim, but when one is twenty and in love, one tells a story as best one can. Many such stories I told her, while her dear eyes grew more and more amazed.

"Never in my dreams, Etienne," said she, "did I believe that so brave a man existed. Lucky France that has such a soldier, lucky Marie that has such a lover!"

You can think how I flung myself at her feet as I murmured that I was the luckiest of all — I who had found some one who could appreciate and understand.

It was a charming relationship, too infinitely sweet and delicate for the interference of coarser minds. But you can understand that the parents imagined that they also had their duty to do. I played dominoes with the old man, and I wound wool for his wife, and yet they could not be led to believe that it was from love of them that I came thrice a week to their farm. For some time an explanation was inevitable, and that night it came. Marie, in delightful mutiny, was packed off to her room, and I faced the old people in the parlour as they plied me with questions upon my prospects and my intentions.

“One way or the other,” they said, in their blunt country fashion. “Let us hear that you are betrothed to Marie, or let us never see your face again.”

I spoke of my honour, my hopes, and my future, but they remained immovable upon the present. I pleaded my career, but they in their selfish way would think of nothing but their daughter. It was indeed a difficult position in which I found myself. On the one hand, I could not forsake my Marie; on the other, what would a young Hussar do with marriage? At last, hard pressed, I begged them to leave the matter, if it were only for a day.

“I will see Marie,” said I, “I will see her without delay. It is her heart and her happiness which come before all else.”

They were not satisfied, these grumbling old people, but they could say no more. They bade me a short good night and I departed, full of perplexity, for the inn. I came out by the same door which I had entered, and I heard them lock and bar it behind me.

I walked across the field lost in thought, with my mind entirely filled with the arguments of the old people and the skilful replies which I had made to them. What should I do? I had promised to see Marie without delay. What should I say to her when I did see her? Would I surrender to her beauty and turn my back upon my profession? If Etienne Gerard’s sword were turned to a scythe, then indeed it was a bad day for the Emperor and France. Or should I harden my heart and turn away from Marie? Or was it not possible that all might be reconciled; that I might be a happy husband in Normandy but a brave soldier elsewhere? All these thoughts were buzzing in my head, when a sudden noise made me look up. The moon had come from behind a cloud, and there was the bull before me.

He had seemed a large animal beneath the beech tree, but now he appeared enormous. He was black in colour. His head was held down, and the moon shone upon two menacing and bloodshot eyes. His tail switched swiftly from side to side, and his fore feet dug into the earth. A more horrible-looking monster was never seen in a nightmare. He was moving slowly and stealthily in my direction.

I glanced behind me, and I found that in my distraction I had come a very long way from the edge of the field. I was more than half-way across it. My nearest refuge was the inn, but the bull was between me and it. Perhaps if the creature understood how little I feared him, he would make way for me. I shrugged my shoulders and made a gesture of contempt. I even whistled. The creature thought I called it, for he approached with alacrity. I kept my face boldly towards him, but I walked swiftly backwards. When one is young and active, one can almost run backwards and yet keep a brave and smiling face to the enemy. As I ran I menaced the animal with my cane. Perhaps it would have been wiser had I restrained my spirit. He regarded it as a challenge — which, indeed, was the last thing in my mind. It was a misunderstanding, but a fatal one. With a snort he raised his tail and charged.

Have you ever seen a bull charge, my friends? It is a strange sight. You think, perhaps, that he trots, or even that he gallops. No, it is worse than this. It is a succession of bounds by which he advances, each more menacing than the last. I have no fear of anything which man can do. When I deal with man, I feel that the nobility of my own attitude, the gallant ease with which I face him, will in itself go far to disarm him. What he can do, I can do, so why should I fear him? But when it is a ton of enraged beef with which you contend, it is another matter. You cannot hope to argue, to soften, to conciliate. There is no resistance possible. My proud assurance was all wasted upon the creature. In an instant my ready wit had weighed every possible course, and had determined that no one, not the Emperor himself, could hold his ground. There was but one course — to fly.

But one may fly in many ways. One may fly with dignity or one may fly in panic. I fled, I trust, like a soldier. My bearing was superb though my legs moved rapidly. My whole appearance was a protest against the position in which I was placed. I smiled as I ran — the bitter smile of the brave man who mocks his own fate. Had all my comrades surrounded the field, they could not have thought the less of me when they saw the disdain with which I avoided the bull.

But here it is that I must make my confession. When once flight commences, though it be ever so soldierly, panic follows hard upon it. Was it not so with the Guard at Waterloo? So it was that night with Etienne Gerard. After all, there was no one to note my bearing — no one save this accursed bull. If for a minute I forgot my dignity, who would be the wiser? Every moment the thunder of the hoofs and the horrible snorts of the monster drew nearer to my heels. Horror filled me at the thought of so ignoble a death. The brutal rage of the creature sent a chill to my heart. In an instant everything was forgotten. There were in the world but two creatures, the bull and I — he trying to kill me, I striving to escape. I put down my head and I ran — I ran for my life.

It was for the house of the Ravons that I raced. But even as I reached it, it flashed into my mind that there was no refuge for me there. The door was locked. The lower windows were barred. The wall was high upon either side. And the bull was nearer me with every stride. But oh, my friends, it is at that supreme moment of danger that Etienne Gerard has ever risen to his height. There was one path to safety, and in an instant I had chosen it.

I have said that the window of Marie’s bedroom was above the door. The curtains were closed, but the folding sides were thrown open, and a lamp burned in the room. Young and active, I felt that I could spring high enough to reach the edge of the window sill and to draw myself out of danger. The monster was within touch of me as I sprang. Had I been unaided, I should have done what I had planned. But even as in a superb effort I rose from the earth he butted me into the air. I shot through the curtains as if I had been fired from a gun, and I dropped upon my hands and knees in the centre of the room.

There was, as it appears, a bed in the window, but I had passed over it in safety. As I staggered to my feet I turned towards it in consternation, but it was empty. My Marie sat in a low chair in the corner of the room, and her flushed cheeks showed that she had been weeping. No doubt her parents had given her some account of what had passed between us. She was too amazed to move, and could only sit looking at me with her mouth open.

“Etienne!” she gasped. “Etienne!”

In an instant I was as full of resource as ever. There was but one course for a gentleman, and I took it.

“Marie,” I cried, “forgive, oh forgive the abruptness of my return! Marie, I have seen your parents tonight. I could not return to the camp without asking you whether you will make me for ever happy by promising to be my wife?”

It was long before she could speak, so great was her amazement. Then every emotion was swept away in the one great flood of her admiration.

“Oh, Etienne! my wonderful Etienne!” she cried, her arms round my neck. “Was ever such love! Was ever such a man! As you stand there, white and trembling with passion, you seem to me the very hero of my dreams. How hard you breathe, my love, and what a spring it must have been which brought you to my arms! At the instant that you came, I heard the tramp of your war-horse without.”

There was nothing more to explain, and when one is newly betrothed, one finds other uses for one’s lips. But there was a scurry in the passage and a pounding at the panels. At the crash of my arrival the old folk had rushed to the cellar to see if the great cider cask had toppled off the trestles, but now they were back and eager for admittance. I flung open the door, and stood with Marie’s hand in mine.

“Behold your son!” I said.

Ah, the joy which I had brought to that humble household! It warms my heart still when I think of it. It did not seem too strange to them that I should fly in through the window, for who should be a hot-headed suitor if it is not a gallant Hussar? And if the door be locked, then what way is there but the window? Once more we assembled all four in the parlour, while the cobwebbed bottle was brought up and the ancient glories of the House of Ravon were unrolled before me. Once more I see the heavy-raftered room, the two old smiling faces, the golden circle of the lamp-light, and she, my Marie, the bride of my youth, won so strangely, and kept for so short a time.

It was late when we parted. The old man came with me into the hall.

“You can go by the front door or the back,” said he. “The back way is the shorter.”

“I think that I will take the front way,” I answered. “It may be a bit longer, but it will give me the more time to think of Marie.”

THE LORD OF FALCONBRIDGE

A LEGEND OF THE RING

Tom Cribb, Champion of England, having finished his active career by his two famous battles with the terrible Molineux, had settled down into the public house which was known as the Union Arms, at the corner of Panton Street in the Haymarket. Behind the bar of this hostelry there was a green baize door which opened into a large, red-papered parlour, adorned by many sporting prints and by the numerous cups and belts which were the treasured trophies of the famous prize-fighter’s victorious career. In this snuggery it was the custom of the Corinthians of the day to assemble in order to discuss, over Tom Cribb’s excellent wines, the matches of the past, to await the news of the present, and to arrange new ones for the future. Hither also came his brother pugilists, especially such as were in poverty or distress, for the Champion’s generosity was proverbial, and no man of his own trade was ever turned from his door if cheering words or a full meal could mend his condition.

On the morning in question — August 25, 1818 — there were but two men in this famous snuggery. One was Cribb himself — all run to flesh since the time seven years before, when, training for his last fight, he had done his forty miles a day with Captain Barclay over the Highland roads. Broad and deep, as well as tall, he was a little short of twenty stone in weight, but his heavy, strong face and lion eyes showed that the spirit of the prize-fighter was not yet altogether overgrown by the fat of the publican. Though it was not eleven o’clock, a great tankard of bitter ale stood upon the table before him, and he was busy cutting up a plug of black tobacco and rubbing the slices into powder between his horny fingers. For all his record of desperate battles, he looked what he was — a good-hearted, respectable householder, law-abiding and kindly, a happy and prosperous man.

His companion, however, was by no means in the same easy circumstances, and his countenance wore a very different expression. He was a tall and well-formed man, some fifteen years younger than the Champion, and recalling in the masterful pose of his face and in the fine spread of his shoulders something of the manly beauty which had distinguished Cribb at his prime. No one looking at his countenance could fail to see that he was a fighting man by profession, and any judge of the fancy, considering his six feet in height, his thirteen stone solid muscle, and his beautifully graceful build, would admit that he had started his career with advantages which, if they were only backed by the driving power of a stout heart, must carry him far. Tom Winter, or Spring — as he chose to call himself — had indeed come up from his Herefordshire home with a fine country record of local successes, which had been enhanced by two victories gained over formidable London heavy-weights. Three weeks before, however, he had been defeated by the famous Painter, and the set-back weighed heavily upon the young man's spirit.

"Cheer up, lad," said the Champion, glancing across from under his tufted eyebrows at the disconsolate face of his companion. "Indeed, Tom, you take it overhard."

The young man groaned, but made no reply. "Others have been beat before you and lived to be Champions of England. Here I sit with that very title. Was I not beat down Broadwater way by George Nicholls in 1805? What then? I fought on, and here I am. When the big Black came from America it was not George Nicholls they sent for. I say to you — fight on, and by George, I'll see you in my own shoes yet!"

Tom Spring shook his head. "Never, if I have to fight you to get there, Daddy."

"I can't keep it for ever, Tom. It's beyond all reason. I'm going to lay it down before all London at the Fives Courts next year, and it's to you that I want to hand it. I couldn't train down to it now, lad. My day's done."

"Well, Dad, I'll never bid for it till you choose to stand aside. After that, it is as it may be."

"Well, have a rest, Tom; wait for your chance, and, meantime, there's always a bed and crust for you here."

Spring struck his clenched fist on his knee. "I know, Daddy! Ever since I came up from Fownthorpe you've been as good as a father to me."

"I've an eye for a winner."

"A pretty winner! Beat in forty rounds by Ned Painter."

"You had beat him first."

"And by the Lord, I will again!"

"So you will, lad. George Nicholls would never give me another shy. Knew too much, he did. Bought a butcher's shop in Bristol with the money, and there he is to this day."

"Yes, I'll come back on Painter, but I haven't a shilling left. My backers have lost faith in me. If it wasn't for you, Daddy, I'd be in the kennel."

"Have you nothing left, Tom?"

"Not the price of a meal. I left every penny I had, and my good name as well, in the ring at Kingston. I'm hard put to it to live unless I can get another fight, and who's going to back me now?"

"Tut, man! the knowing ones will back you. You're the top of the list, for all Ned Painter. But there are other ways a man may earn a bit. There was a lady in here this morning — nothing flash, boy, a real tip-top out-and-outer with a coronet on her coach — asking after you."

"Asking after me! A lady!" The young pugilist stood up with surprise and a certain horror rising in his eyes. "You don't mean, Daddy—"

"I mean nothing but what is honest, my lad. You can lay to that!"

"You said I could earn a bit."

"So, perhaps, you can. Enough, anyhow, to tide you over your bad time. There's something in the wind there. It's to do with fightin'. She asked questions about your height, weight, and my opinion of your prospect. You can lay that my answers did you no harm."

"She ain't making a match, surely?"

"Well, she seemed to know a tidy bit about it. She asked about George Cooper, and Richmond the Black, and Tom Oliver, always comin' back to you, and wantin' to know if you were not the pick of the bunch. *And* trustworthy. That was the other point. Could she trust you? Lord, Tom, if you was a fightin' archangel you could hardly live up to the character that I've given you."

A drawer looked in from the bar. "If you please, Mr. Cribb, the lady's carriage is back again."

The Champion laid down his long clay pipe. "This way, lad," said he, plucking his young friend by the sleeve towards the side window. "Look there, now! Saw you ever a more slap-up carriage? See, too, the pair of bays — two hundred guineas apiece. Coachman, too, and footman — you'd find 'em hard to beat. There she is now, stepping out of it. Wait here, lad, till I do the honours of my house."

Tom Cribb slipped off, and young Spring remained by the window, tapping the glass nervously with his fingers, for he was a simple-minded country lad with no knowledge of women, and many fears of the traps which await the unwary in a great city. Many stories were afloat of pugilists who had been taken up and cast aside again by wealthy ladies, even as the gladiators were in decadent Rome. It was with some suspicion therefore, and considerable inward trepidation, that he faced round as a tall veiled figure swept into the room. He was much consoled, however, to observe the bulky form of Tom Cribb immediately behind her as a proof that the interview was not to be a private one. When the door was closed, the lady very deliberately removed her gloves. Then with fingers which glittered with diamonds she slowly rolled up and adjusted her heavy veil. Finally, she turned her face upon Spring.

"Is this the man?" said she.

They stood looking at each other with mutual interest, which warmed in both their faces into mutual admiration. What she saw was as fine a figure of a young man as England could show, none the less attractive for the restrained shyness of his manner and the blush which flushed his cheeks. What he saw was a woman of thirty, tall, dark, queen-like, and imperious, with a lovely face, every line and feature of which told of pride and breed, a woman born to Courts, with the instinct of command strong within her, and yet with all the softer woman's graces to temper and conceal the firmness of her soul. Tom Spring felt as he looked at her that he had never seen nor ever dreamed of any one so beautiful, and yet he could not shake off the instinct which warned him to be upon his guard. Yes, it was beautiful, this face — beautiful beyond belief. But was it good, was it kind, was it true? There was some strange subconscious repulsion which mingled with his admiration for her loveliness. As to the lady's thoughts, she had already put away all idea of the young pugilist as a man, and regarded him now with critical eyes as a machine designed for a definite purpose.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. — Mr. Spring," said she, looking him over with as much deliberation as a dealer who is purchasing a horse. "He is hardly as tall as I was given to understand, Mr. Cribb. You said six feet, I believe?"

"So he is, ma'am, but he carries it so easy. It's only the beanstalk that looks tall. See here, I'm six foot myself, and our heads are level, except I've lost my fluff."

"What is the chest measurement?"

"Forty-three inches, ma'am."

"You certainly seem to be a very strong young man. And a game one, too, I hope?"

Young Spring shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not for me to say, ma'am."

"I can speak for that, ma'am," said Cribb. "You read the *Sporting Chronicle* for three weeks ago, ma'am. You'll see how he stood up to Ned Painter until his senses were beat out of him. I waited on him, ma'am, and I know. I could show you my waistcoat now — that would let you guess what punishment he can take."

The lady waved aside the illustration. "But he was beat," said she, coldly. "The man who beat him must be the better man."

"Saving your presence, ma'am, I think not, and outside Gentleman Jackson my judgment would stand against any in the ring. My lad here has beat Painter once, and will again, if your ladyship could see your way to find the battle-money."

The lady started and looked angrily at the Champion.

"Why do you call me that?"

"I beg pardon. It was just my way of speaking."

"I order you not to do it again."

"Very good, ma'am."

"I am here incognito. I bind you both upon your honours to make no inquiry as to who I am. If I do not get your firm promise, the matter ends here."

"Very good, ma'am. I'll promise for my own part, and so, I am sure, will Spring. But if I may be so bold, I can't help my drawers and potmen talking with your servants."

"The coachman and footman know just as much about me as you do. But my time is limited, so I must get to business. I think, Mr. Spring, that you are in want of something to do at present?"

"That is so, ma'am."

"I understand from Mr. Cribb that you are prepared to fight any one at any weight?"

"Anything on two legs," cried the Champion. "Who did you wish me to fight?" asked the young pugilist.

"That cannot concern you. If you are really ready to fight any one, then the particular name can be of no importance. I have my reasons for withholding it."

"Very good, ma'am."

“You have been only a few weeks out of training. How long would it take you to get back to your best?”

“Three weeks or a month.”

“Well, then, I will pay your training expenses and two pounds a week over. Here are five pounds as a guarantee. You will fight when I consider that you are ready, and that the circumstances are favourable. If you win your fight, you shall have fifty pounds. Are you satisfied with the terms?”

“Very handsome, ma’am, I’m sure.”

“And remember, Mr. Spring, I choose you, not because you are the best man — for there are two opinions about that — but because I am given to understand that you are a decent man whom I can trust. The terms of this match are to be secret.”

“I understand that. I’ll say nothing.”

“It is a private match. Nothing more. You will begin your training tomorrow.”

“Very good, ma’am.”

“I will ask Mr. Cribb to train you.”

“I’ll do that, ma’am, with pleasure. But, by your leave, does he have anything if he loses?”

A spasm of emotion passed over the woman’s face and her hands clenched white with passion.

“If he loses, not a penny, not a penny!” she cried. “He must not, shall not lose!”

“Well, ma’am,” said Spring, “I’ve never heard of any such match. But it’s true that I am down at heel, and beggars can’t be choosers. I’ll do just what you say. I’ll train till you give the word, and then I’ll fight where you tell me. I hope you’ll make it a large ring.”

“Yes,” said she; “it will be a large ring.”

“And how far from London?”

“Within a hundred miles. Have you anything else to say? My time is up.”

“I’d like to ask, ma’am,” said the Champion, earnestly, “whether I can act as the lad’s second when the time comes. I’ve waited on him the last two fights. Can I give him a knee?”

“No,” said the woman, sharply. Without another word she turned and was gone, shutting the door behind her. A few moments later the trim carriage flashed past the window, turned down the crowded Haymarket, and was engulfed in the traffic.

The two men looked at each other in silence.

“Well, blow my dicky, if this don’t beat cockfightin’!” cried Tom Cribb at last. “Anyhow, there’s the fiver, lad. But it’s a rum go, and no mistake about it.”

After due consultation, it was agreed that Tom Spring should go into training at the Castle Inn on Hampstead Heath, so that Cribb could drive over and watch him. Thither Spring went on the day after the interview with his patroness, and he set to work at once with drugs, dumb-bells, and breathers on the common to get himself into condition. It was hard, however, to take the matter seriously, and his good-natured trainer found the same difficulty.

“It’s the baccy I miss, Daddy,” said the young pugilist, as they sat together on the afternoon of the third day. “Surely there can’t be any harm in my havin’ a pipe?”

“Well, well, lad, it’s against my conscience, but here’s my box and there’s a yard o’ clay,” said the Champion. “My word, I don’t know what Captain Barclay of Ury would have said if he had seen a man smoke when he was in trainin’! He was the man to work you! He had me down from sixteen to thirteen the second time I fought the Black.”

Spring had lit his pipe and was leaning back amid a haze of blue smoke.

“It was easy for you, Daddy, to keep strict trainin’ when you knew what was before you. You had your date and your place and your man. You knew that in a month you would jump the ropes with ten thousand folk round you, and carrying maybe a hundred thousand in bets. You knew also the man you had to meet, and you wouldn’t give him the better of you. But it’s all different with me. For all I know, this is just a woman’s whim, and will end in nothing. If I was sure it was serious, I’d break this pipe before I would smoke it.”

Tom Cribb scratched his head in puzzlement.

“I can make nothing of it, lad, ‘cept that her money is good. Come to think of it, how many men on the list could stand up to you for half an hour? It can’t be Stringer, ‘cause you’ve beat him. Then there’s Cooper; but he’s up Newcastle way. It can’t be him. There’s Richmond; but you wouldn’t need to take your coat off to beat him. There’s the Gasman; but he’s not twelve stone. And there’s Bill Neat of Bristol. That’s it, lad. The lady has taken into her head to put you up against either the Gasman or Bill Neat.”

“But why not say so? I’d train hard for the Gasman and harder for Bill Neat, but I’m blowed if I can train, with any heart when I’m fightin’ nobody in particular and everybody in general, same as now.”

There was a sudden interruption to the speculations of the two prize-fighters. The door opened and the lady entered. As her eyes fell upon the two men her dark, handsome face flushed with anger, and she gazed at them silently with an expression of contempt which brought them both to their feet with hangdog faces. There they stood, their long, reeking pipes in their hands, shuffling and downcast, like two great rough mastiffs before an angry mistress.

“So!” said she, stamping her foot furiously. “And this is training!”

“I’m sure we’re very sorry, ma’am,” said the abashed Champion. “I didn’t think — I never for one moment supposed—”

“That I would come myself to see if you were taking my money on false pretences? No, I dare say not. You fool!” she blazed, turning suddenly upon Tom Spring. “You’ll be beat. That will be the end of it.”

The young man looked up with an angry face.

“I’ll trouble you not to call me names, ma’am. I’ve my self-respect, the same as you. I’ll allow that I shouldn’t have smoked when I was in trainin’. But I was saying to Tom Cribb here, just before you came in, that if you would give over treatin’ us as if we were children, and if you would tell us just who it is you want me to fight, and when, and where, it would be a deal easier for me to take myself in hand.”

“It’s true, ma’am,” said the Champion. “I know it must be either the Gasman or Bill Neat. There’s no one else. So give me the office, and I’ll promise to have him as fit as a trout on the day.”

The lady laughed contemptuously.

“Do you think,” said she, “that no one can fight save those who make a living by it?”

“By George, it’s an amateur!” cried Cribb, in amazement. “But you don’t surely ask Tom Spring to train for three weeks to meet a Corinthian?”

“I will say nothing more of who it is. It is no business of yours,” the lady answered fiercely. “All I *do* say is, that if you do not train I will cast you aside and take some one who will. Do not think you can fool me because I am a woman. I have learned the points of the game as well as any man.”

“I saw that the very first word you spoke,” said Cribb.

"Then don't forget it. I will not warn you again. If I have occasion to find fault I shall choose another man."

"And you won't tell me who I am to fight?"

"Not a word. But you can take it from me that at your very best it will take you, or any man in England, all your time to master him. Now, get back this instant to your work, and never let me find you shirking it again." With imperious eyes she looked the two strong men down, and then, turning on her heel, she swept out of the room.

The Champion whistled as the door closed behind her, and mopped his brow with his red bandanna handkerchief as he looked across at his abashed companion. "My word, lad," said he, "it's earnest from this day on."

"Yes," said Tom Spring, solemnly, "it's earnest from this day on."

In the course of the next fortnight the lady made several surprise visits to see that her champion was being properly prepared for the contest which lay before him. At the most unexpected moments she would burst into the training quarters, but never again had she to complain of any slackness upon his part or that of his trainer. With long bouts of the gloves, with thirty-mile walks, with mile runs at the back of a mailcart with a bit of blood between the shafts, with interminable series of jumps with a skipping-rope, he was sweated down until his trainer was able to proudly proclaim that "the last ounce of tallow is off him and he is ready to fight for his life." Only once was the lady accompanied by any one upon these visits of inspection. Upon this occasion a tall young man was her companion. He was graceful in figure, aristocratic in his bearing, and would have been strikingly handsome had it not been for some accident which had shattered his nose and broken all the symmetry of his features. He stood in silence with moody eyes and folded arms, looking at the splendid torso of the prize-fighter as, stripped to the waist, he worked with his dumbbells.

"Don't you think he will do?" said the lady.

The young swell shrugged his shoulders. "I don't like it, *cara mia*. I can't pretend that I like it."

"You must like it, George. I have set my very heart on it."

"It is not English, you know. Lucrezia Borgia and Mediaeval Italy. Woman's love and woman's hatred are always the same, but this particular manifestation of it seems to me out of place in nineteenth-century London."

"Is not a lesson needed?"

"Yes, yes; but one would think there were other ways."

“You tried another way. What did you get out of that?”

The young man smiled rather grimly, as he turned up his cuff and looked at a puckered hole in his wrist.

“Not much, certainly,” said he.

“You’ve tried and failed.”

“Yes, I must admit it.”

“What else is there? The law?”

“Good gracious, no!”

“Then it is my turn, George, and I won’t be balked.”

“I don’t think any one is capable of balking you, *cara mia*. Certainly I, for one, should never dream of trying. But I don’t feel as if I could co-operate.”

“I never asked you to.”

“No, you certainly never did. You are perfectly capable of doing it alone. I think, with your leave, if you have quite done with your prize-fighter, we will drive back to London. I would not for the world miss Goldoni in the Opera.”

So they drifted away; he, frivolous and dilettante, she with her face as set as Fate, leaving the fighting men to their business.

And now the day came when Cribb was able to announce to his employer that his man was as fit as science could make him.

“I can do no more, ma’am. He’s fit to fight for a kingdom. Another week would see him stale.”

The lady looked Spring over with the eye of a connoisseur.

“I think he does you credit,” she said at last. “Today is Tuesday. He will fight the day after tomorrow.”

“Very good, ma’am. Where shall he go?”

“I will tell you exactly, and you will please take careful note of all that I say. You, Mr. Cribb, will take your man down to the Golden Cross Inn at Charing Cross by nine o’clock on Wednesday morning. He will take the Brighton coach as far as Tunbridge Wells, where he will alight at the Royal Oak Arms. There he will take such refreshment as you advise before a fight. He will wait at the Royal Oak Arms until he receives a message by word, or by letter, brought him by a groom in a mulberry livery. This message will give him his final instructions.”

“And I am not to come?”

“No,” said the lady.

"But surely, ma'am," he pleaded, "I may come as far as Tunbridge Wells? It's hard on a man to train a cove for a fight and then to leave him."

"It can't be helped. You are too well known. Your arrival would spread all over the town, and my plans might suffer. It is quite out of the question that you should come."

"Well, I'll do what you tell me, but it's main hard."

"I suppose," said Spring, "you would have me bring my fightin' shorts and my spiked shoes?"

"No; you will kindly bring nothing whatever which may point to your trade. I would have you wear just those clothes in which I saw you first, such clothes as any mechanic or artisan might be expected to wear."

Tom Cribb's blank face had assumed an expression of absolute despair.

"No second, no clothes, no shoes — it don't seem regular. I give you my word, ma'am, I feel ashamed to be mixed up in such a fight. I don't know as you can call the thing a fight where there is no second. It's just a scramble — nothing more. I've gone too far to wash my hands of it now, but I wish I had never touched it."

In spite of all professional misgivings on the part of the Champion and his pupil, the imperious will of the woman prevailed, and everything was carried out exactly as she had directed. At nine o'clock Tom Spring found himself upon the box-seat of the Brighton coach, and waved his hand in goodbye to burly Tom Cribb, who stood, the admired of a ring of waiters and ostlers, upon the doorstep of the Golden Cross. It was in the pleasant season when summer is mellowing into autumn, and the first golden patches are seen amid the beeches and the ferns. The young country-bred lad breathed more freely when he had left the weary streets of Southwark and Lewisham behind him, and he watched with delight the glorious prospect as the coach, whirled along by six dapple greys, passed by the classic grounds of Knowle, or after crossing Riverside Hill skirted the vast expanse of the Weald of Kent. Past Tonbridge School went the coach, and on through Southborough, until it wound down a steep, curving road with strange outcrops of sandstone beside it, and halted before a great hostelry, bearing the name which had been given him in his directions. He descended, entered the coffee-room, and ordered the underdone steak which his trainer had recommended. Hardly had he finished it when a servant with a mulberry coat and a peculiarly expressionless face entered the apartment.

"Beg your pardon, sir, are you Mr. Spring — Mr. Thomas Spring, of London?"

"That is my name, young man."

"Then the instructions which I had to give you are that you wait for one hour after your meal. After that time you will find me in a phaeton at the door, and I will drive you in the right direction."

The young pugilist had never been daunted by any experience which had befallen him in the ring. The rough encouragement of his backers, the surge and shouting of the multitude, and the sight of his opponent had always cheered his stout heart and excited him to prove himself worthy of being the centre of such a scene. But his loneliness and uncertainty were deadly. He flung himself down on the horse-hair couch and tried to doze, but his mind was too restless and excited. Finally he rose, and paced up and down the empty room. Suddenly he was aware of a great rubicund face which surveyed him from round the angle of the door. Its owner, seeing that he was observed, pushed forward into the room.

"I beg pardon, sir," said he, "but surely I have the honour of talking to Mr. Thomas Spring?"

"At your service," said the young man.

"Bless me! I am vastly honoured to have you under my roof! Cordery is my name, sir, landlord of this old-fashioned inn. I thought that my eyes could not deceive me. I am a patron of the ring, sir, in my own humble way, and was present at Moulsey in September last, when you beat Jack Stringer of Rawcliffe. A very fine fight, sir, and very handsomely fought, if I may make bold to say so. I have a right to an opinion, sir, for there's never been a fight for many a year in Kent or Sussex that you wouldn't find Joe Cordery at the ring-side. Ask Mr. Gregson at the Chop-house in Holborn and he'll tell you about old Joe Cordery. By the way, Mr. Spring, I suppose it is not business that has brought you down into these parts? Any one can see with half an eye that you are trained to a hair. I'd take it very kindly if you would give me the office."

It crossed Spring's mind that if he were frank with the landlord it was more than likely that he would receive more information than he could give. He was a man of his word, however, and he remembered his promise to his employer.

"Just a quiet day in the country, Mr. Cordery. That's all."

“Dear me! I had hoped there was a mill in the wind. I’ve a nose for these things, Mr. Spring, and I thought I had a whiff of it. But, of course, you should know best. Perhaps you will drive round with me this afternoon and view the hop-gardens — just the right time of year, sir.”

Tom Spring was not very skilful in deception, and his stammering excuses may not have been very convincing to the landlord, or finally persuaded him that his original supposition was wrong. In the midst of the conversation, however, the waiter entered with the news that a phaeton was waiting at the door. The innkeeper’s eyes shone with suspicion and eagerness.

“I thought you said you knew no one in these parts, Mr. Spring?”

“Just one kind friend, Mr. Cordery, and he has sent his gig for me. It’s likely that I will take the night coach to town. But I’ll look in after an hour or two and have a dish of tea with you.”

Outside the mulberry servant was sitting behind a fine black horse in a phaeton, which had two seats in front and two behind. Tom Spring was about to climb up beside him, when the servant whispered that his directions were that he should sit behind. Then the phaeton whirled away, while the excited landlord, more convinced than ever that there was something in the wind, rushed into his stable-yard with shrieks to his ostlers, and in a very few minutes was in hot pursuit, waiting at every cross-road until he could hear tidings of a black horse and a mulberry livery.

The phaeton meanwhile drove in the direction of Crowborough. Some miles out it turned from the high-road into a narrow lane spanned by a tawny arch of beech trees. Through this golden tunnel a lady was walking, tall and graceful, her back to the phaeton. As it came abreast of her she stood aside and looked up, while the coachman pulled up the horse.

“I trust that you are at your best,” said she, looking very earnestly at the prize-fighter. “How do you feel?”

“Pretty tidy, ma’am, I thank you.”

“I will get up beside you, Johnson. We have some way to go. You will drive through the Lower Warren, and then take the lane which skirts the Gravel Hanger. I will tell you where to stop. Go slowly, for we are not due for twenty minutes.”

Feeling as if the whole business was some extraordinary dream, the young pugilist passed through a network of secluded lanes, until the phaeton drew up at a wicket gate which led into a plantation of firs, choked with a thick undergrowth. Here the lady descended and beckoned Spring to alight.

"Wait down the lane," said she to the coachman. "We shall be some little time. Now, Mr. Spring, will you kindly follow me? I have written a letter which makes an appointment."

She passed swiftly through the plantation by a tortuous path, then over a stile, and past another wood, loud with the deep chuckling of pheasants. At the farther side was a fine rolling park, studded with oak trees, and stretching away to a splendid Elizabethan mansion, with balustraded terraces athwart its front. Across the park, and making for the wood, a solitary figure was walking.

The lady gripped the prize-fighter by the wrist. "That is your man," said she.

They were standing under the shadow of the trees, so that he was very visible to them, while they were out of his sight. Tom Spring looked hard at the man, who was still some hundreds of yards away. He was a tall, powerful fellow, clad in a blue coat with gilt buttons, which gleamed in the sun. He had white corded breeches and riding-boots. He walked with a vigorous step, and with every few strides he struck his leg with a dog-whip which hung from his wrist. There was a great suggestion of purpose and of energy in the man's appearance and bearing.

"Why, he's a gentleman!" said Spring. "Look 'ere, ma'am, this is all a bit out of my line. I've nothing against the man, and he can mean me no harm. What am I to do with him?"

"Fight him! Smash him! That is what you are here for."

Tom Spring turned on his heel with disgust. "I'm here to fight, ma'am, but not to smash a man who has no thought of fighting. It's off."

"You don't like the look of him," hissed the woman. "You have met your master."

"That is as may be. It is no job for me."

The woman's face was white with vexation and anger.

"You fool!" she cried. "Is all to go wrong at the last minute? There are fifty pounds here they are in this paper — would you refuse them?"

"It's a cowardly business. I won't do it."

"Cowardly? You are giving the man two stone, and he can beat any amateur in England."

The young pugilist felt relieved. After all, if he could fairly earn that fifty pounds, a good deal depended upon his winning it. If he could only be sure that this was a worthy and willing antagonist!

"How do you know he is so good?" he asked.

"I ought to know. I am his wife."

As she spoke she turned, and was gone like a flash among the bushes. The man was quite close now, and Tom Spring's scruples weakened as he looked at him. He was a powerful, broad-chested fellow, about thirty, with a heavy, brutal face, great thatched eyebrows, and a hard-set mouth. He could not be less than fifteen stone in weight, and he carried himself like a trained athlete. As he swung along he suddenly caught a glimpse of Spring among the trees, and he at once quickened his pace and sprang over the stile which separated them.

"Halloa!" said he, halting a few yards from him, and staring him up and down. "Who the devil are you, and where the devil did you come from, and what the devil are you doing on my property?"

His manner was even more offensive than his words. It brought a flush of anger to Spring's cheeks.

"See here, mister," said he, "civil words is cheap. You've no call to speak to me like that."

"You infernal rascal!" cried the other. "I'll show you the way out of that plantation with the toe of my boot. Do you dare to stand there on my land and talk back at me?" He advanced with a menacing face and his dog-whip half raised. "Well, are you going?" he cried, as he swung it into the air.

Tom Spring jumped back to avoid the threatened blow.

"Go slow, mister," said he. "It's only fair that you should know where you are. I'm Spring, the prize-fighter. Maybe you have heard my name."

"I thought you were a rascal of that breed," said the man. "I've had the handling of one or two of you gentry before, and I never found one that could stand up to me for five minutes. Maybe you would like to try?"

"If you hit me with that dog-whip, mister — —"

"There, then!" He gave the young man a vicious cut across the shoulder. "Will that help you to fight?"

"I came here to fight," said Tom Spring, licking his dry lips. "You can drop that whip, mister, for I *will* fight. I'm a trained man and ready. But you would have it. Don't blame me."

The man was stripping the blue coat from his broad shoulders. There was a sprigged satin vest beneath it, and they were hung together on an alder branch.

“Trained are you?” he muttered. “By the Lord, I’ll train you before I am through!”

Any fears that Tom Spring may have had lest he should be taking some unfair advantage were set at rest by the man’s assured manner and by the splendid physique, which became more apparent as he discarded a black satin tie, with a great ruby glowing in its centre, and threw aside the white collar which cramped his thick muscular neck. He then, very deliberately, undid a pair of gold sleeve-links, and, rolling up his shirt-sleeves, disclosed two hairy and muscular arms, which would have served as a model for a sculptor.

“Come nearer the stile,” said he, when he had finished. “There is more room.”

The prize-fighter had kept pace with the preparations of his formidable antagonist. His own hat, coat, and vest hung suspended upon a bush. He advanced now into the open space which the other had indicated.

“Ruffianing or fighting?” asked the amateur, coolly.

“Fighting.”

“Very good,” said the other. “Put up your hands, Spring. Try it out.”

They were standing facing one another in a grassy ring intersected by the path at the outlet of the wood. The insolent and overbearing look had passed away from the amateur’s face, but a grim half-smile was on his lips and his eyes shone fiercely from under his tufted brows. From the way in which he stood it was very clear that he was a past-master at the game. Tom Spring, as he paced lightly to right and left, looking for an opening, became suddenly aware that neither with Stringer nor with the redoubtable Painter himself had he ever faced a more business-like opponent. The amateur’s left was well forward, his guard low, his body leaning back from the haunches, and his head well out of danger. Spring tried a light lead at the mark, and another at the face, but in an instant his adversary was on to him with a shower of sledge-hammer blows which it took him all his time to avoid. He sprang back, but there was no getting away from that whirlwind of muscle and bone. A heavy blow beat down his guard, a second landed on his shoulder, and over went the prize-fighter with the other on the top of him.

Both sprang to their feet, glared at each other, and fell into position once more.

There could be no doubt that the amateur was not only heavier, but also the harder and stronger man. Twice again he rushed Spring down, once by the weight of his blows, and once by closing and hurling him on to his back. Such falls might have shaken the fight out of a less game man, but to Tom Spring they were but incidents in his daily trade. Though bruised and winded he was always up again in an instant. Blood was trickling from his mouth, but his steadfast blue eyes told of the unshaken spirit within.

He was accustomed now to his opponent's rushing tactics, and he was ready for them. The fourth round was the same as to attack, but it was very different in defence. Up to now the young man had given way and been fought down. This time he stood his ground. As his opponent rushed in he met him with a tremendous straight hit from his left hand, delivered with the full force of his body, and doubled in effect by the momentum of the charge. So stunning was the concussion that the pugilist himself recoiled from it across the grassy ring. The amateur staggered back and leaned his shoulder on a tree-trunk, his hand up to his face.

"You'd best drop it," said Spring. "You'll get pepper if you don't."

The other gave an inarticulate curse, and spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Come on!" said he.

Even now the pugilist found that he had no light task before him. Warned by his misadventure, the heavier man no longer tried to win the battle at a rush, nor to beat down an accomplished boxer as he would a country hawbuck at a village fair. He fought with his head and his feet as well as with his hands. Spring had to admit in his heart that, trained to the ring, this man must have been a match for the best. His guard was strong, his counter was like lightning, he took punishment like a man of iron, and when he could safely close he always brought his lighter antagonist to the ground with a shattering fall. But the one stunning blow which he had courted before he was taught respect for his adversary weighed heavily on him all the time. His senses had lost something of their quickness and his blows of their sting. He was fighting, too, against a man who, of all the boxers who have made their names great, was the safest, the coolest, the least likely to give anything away, or lose an advantage gained. Slowly, gradually, round by round, he was worn down by his cool, quick-stepping, sharp-hitting antagonist. At last he stood exhausted, breathing hoarsely, his face, what could be seen of it, purple with his exertions. He had reached the limit of human endurance. His opponent stood waiting for him, bruised and beaten, but as cool, as ready, as dangerous as ever.

"You'd best drop it, I tell you," said he. "You're done."

But the other's manhood would not have it so. With a snarl of fury he cast his science to the winds, and rushed madly to slogging with both hands. For a moment Spring was overborne. Then he side-stepped swiftly; there was the crash of his blow, and the amateur tossed up his arms and fell all asprawl, his great limbs outstretched, his disfigured face to the sky.

For a moment Tom Spring stood looking down at his unconscious opponent. The next he felt a soft, warm hand upon his bare arm. The woman was at his elbow.

"Now is your time!" she cried, her dark eyes aflame. "Go in! Smash him!"

Spring shook her off with a cry of disgust, but she was back in an instant.

"I'll make it seventy-five pounds—"

"The fight's over, ma'am. I can't touch him."

"A hundred pounds — a clear hundred! I have it here in my bodice. Would you refuse a hundred?"

He turned on his heel. She darted past him and tried to kick at the face of the prostrate man. Spring dragged her roughly away, before she could do him a mischief.

"Stand clear!" he cried, giving her a shake. "You should take shame to hit a fallen man."

With a groan the injured man turned on his side. Then he slowly sat up and passed his wet hand over his face. Finally, he staggered to his feet.

"Well," he said, shrugging his broad shoulders, "it was a fair fight. I've no complaint to make. I was Jackson's favourite pupil, but I give you best." Suddenly his eyes lit upon the furious face of the woman. "Hulloa, Betty!" he cried. "So I have you to thank. I might have guessed it when I had your letter."

"Yes, my lord," said she, with a mock curtsey. "You have me to thank. Your little wife managed it all. I lay behind those bushes, and I saw you beaten like a hound. You haven't had all that I had planned for you, but I think it will be some little time before any woman loves you for the sake of your appearance. Do you remember the words, my lord? Do you remember the words?"

He stood stunned for a moment. Then he snatched his whip from the ground, and looked at her from under his heavy brows.

“I believe you’re the devil!” he cried.

“I wonder what the governess will think?” said she.

He flared into furious rage and rushed at her with his whip. Tom Spring threw himself before him with his arms out.

“It won’t do, sir; I can’t stand by.”

The man glared at his wife over the prize-fighter’s shoulder.

“So it’s for dear George’s sake!” he said, with a bitter laugh. “But poor, broken-nosed George seems to have gone to the wall. Taken up with a prize-fighter, eh? Found a fancy man for yourself!”

“You liar!” she gasped.

“Ha, my lady, that stings your pride, does it? Well, you shall stand together in the dock for trespass and assault. What a picture — great Lord, what a picture!”

“You wouldn’t, John!”

“Wouldn’t I, by — ! you stay there three minutes and see if I wouldn’t.” He seized his clothes from the bush, and staggered off as swiftly as he could across the field, blowing a whistle as he ran.

“Quick! quick!” cried the woman. “There’s not an instant to lose.” Her face was livid, and she was shivering and panting with apprehension. “He’ll raise the country. It would be awful — awful!”

She ran swiftly down the tortuous path, Spring following after her and dressing as he went. In a field to the right a gamekeeper, his gun in his hand, was hurrying towards the whistling. Two labourers, loading hay, had stopped their work and were looking about them, their pitchforks in their hands.

But the path was empty, and the phaeton awaited them, the horse cropping the grass by the lane-side, the driver half asleep on his perch. The woman sprang swiftly in and motioned Spring to stand by the wheel.

“There is your fifty pounds,” she said, handing him a paper. “You were a fool not to turn it into a hundred when you had the chance. I’ve done with you now.”

“But where am I to go?” asked the prize-fighter, gazing around him at the winding lanes.

“To the devil!” said she. “Drive on, Johnson!”

The phaeton whirled down the road and vanished round a curve. Tom Spring was alone.

Everywhere over the countryside he heard shoutings and whistlings. It was clear that so long as she escaped the indignity of sharing his fate his employer was perfectly indifferent as to whether he got into trouble or not. Tom Spring began to feel indifferent himself. He was weary to death, his head was aching from the blows and falls which he had received, and his feelings were raw from the treatment which he had undergone. He walked slowly some few yards down the lane, but had no idea which way to turn to reach Tunbridge Wells. In the distance he heard the baying of dogs, and he guessed that they were being set upon his track. In that case he could not hope to escape them, and might just as well await them where he was. He picked out a heavy stake from the hedge, and he sat down moodily waiting, in a very dangerous temper, for what might befall him.

But it was a friend and not a foe who came first into sight. Round the corner of the lane flew a small dog-cart, with a fast-trotting chestnut cob between the shafts. In it was seated the rubicund landlord of the Royal Oak, his whip going, his face continually flying round to glance behind him.

“Jump in, Mr. Spring jump in!” he cried, as he reined up. “They’re all coming, dogs and men! Come on! Now, hud up, Ginger!” Not another word did he say until two miles of lanes had been left behind them at racing speed and they were back in safety upon the Brighton road. Then he let the reins hang loose on the pony’s back, and he slapped Tom Spring with his fat hand upon the shoulder.

“Splendid!” he cried, his great red face shining with ecstasy. “Oh, Lord! but it was beautiful!”

“What!” cried Spring. “You saw the fight?”

“Every round of it! By George! to think that I should have lived to have had such a fight all to myself! Oh, but it was grand,” he cried, in a frenzy of delight, “to see his lordship go down like a pithed ox and her ladyship clapping her hands behind the bush! I guessed there was something in the wind, and I followed you all the way. When you stopped, I tethered little Ginger in a grove, and I crept after you through the wood. It’s as well I did, for the whole parish was up!”

But Tom Spring was sitting gazing at him in blank amazement.

“His lordship!” he gasped.

“No less, my boy. Lord Falconbridge, Chairman of the Bench, Deputy Lieutenant of the County, Peer of the Realm — that’s your man.”

“Good Lord!”

“And you didn’t know? It’s as well, for maybe you wouldn’t have whacked it in as hard if you had; and, mind you, if you hadn’t, he’d have beat you. There’s not a man in this county could stand up to him. He takes the poachers and gipsies two and three at a time. He’s the terror of the place. But you did him — did him fair. Oh, man, it was fine!”

Tom Spring was too much dazed by what he heard to do more than sit and wonder. It was not until he had got back to the comforts of the inn, and after a bath had partaken of a solid meal, that he sent for Mr. Cordery the landlord. To him he confided the whole train of events which had led up to his remarkable experience, and he begged him to throw such light as he could upon it. Cordery listened with keen interest and many chuckles to the story. Finally he left the room and returned with a frayed newspaper in his hand, which he smoothed out upon his knee.

“It’s the *Pantiles Gazette*, Mr. Spring, as gossiping a rag as ever was printed. I expect there will be a fine column in it if ever it gets its prying nose into this day’s doings. However, we are mum and her ladyship is mum, and, my word! his lordship is mum, though he did, in his passion, raise the hue and cry on you. Here it is, Mr. Spring, and I’ll read it to you while you smoke your pipe. It’s dated July of last year, and it goes like this —

“‘FRACAS IN HIGH LIFE. — It is an open secret that the differences which have for some years been known to exist between Lord F —— and his beautiful wife have come to a head during the last few days. His lordship’s devotion to sport, and also, as it is whispered, some attentions which he has shown to a humbler member of his household, have, it is said, long alienated Lady F — —’s affection. Of late she has sought consolation and friendship with a gentleman whom we will designate as Sir George W —— n. Sir George, who is a famous ladykiller, and as well-proportioned a man as any in England, took kindly to the task of consoling the disconsolate fair. The upshot, however, was vastly unfortunate, both for the lady’s feelings and for the gentleman’s beauty. The two friends were surprised in a rendezvous near the house by Lord F —— himself at the head of a party of his servants. Lord F —— then and there, in spite of the shrieks of the lady, availed himself of his strength and skill to administer such punishment to the unfortunate Lothario as would, in his own parting words, prevent any woman from loving him again for the sake of his appearance. Lady F —— has left his lordship and betaken herself to London, where, no doubt, she is now engaged in nursing the damaged Apollo. It is confidently expected that a duel will result from the affair, but no particulars have reached us up to the hour of going to press.'"

The landlord laid down the paper. "You've been moving in high life, Mr. Thomas Spring," said he.

The pugilist passed his hand over his battered face. "Well, Mr. Cordery," said he, "low life is good enough for me."

OUT OF THE RUNNING

It was on the North Side of Butser on the long swell of the Hampshire Downs. Beneath, some two miles away, the grey roofs and red houses of Petersfield peeped out from amid the trees which surrounded it. From the crest of the low hills downwards the country ran in low, sweeping curves, as though some green primeval sea had congealed in the midst of a ground swell and set for ever into long verdant rollers. At the bottom, just where the slope borders upon the plain, there stood a comfortable square brick farmhouse, with a grey plume of smoke floating up from the chimney. Two cowhouses, a cluster of hayricks, and a broad stretch of fields, yellow with the ripening wheat, formed a fitting setting to the dwelling of a prosperous farmer.

The green slopes were dotted every here and there with dark clumps of gorse bushes, all alight with the flaming yellow blossoms. To the left lay the broad Portsmouth Road curving over the hill, with a line of gaunt telegraph posts marking its course. Beyond a huge white chasm opened in the grass, where the great Butser chalk quarry had been sunk. From its depths rose the distant murmur of voices, and the clinking of hammers. Just above it, between two curves of green hill, might be seen a little triangle of leaden-coloured sea, flecked with a single white sail.

Down the Portsmouth Road two women were walking, one elderly, florid and stout, with a yellow-brown Paisley shawl and a coarse serge dress, the other young and fair, with large grey eyes, and a face which was freckled like a plover’s egg. Her neat white blouse with its trim black belt, and plain, close-cut skirt, gave her an air of refinement which was wanting in her companion, but there was sufficient resemblance between them to show that they were mother and daughter. The one was gnarled and hardened and wrinkled by rough country work, the other fresh and pliant from the benign influence of the Board School; but their step, their slope of the shoulders, and the movement of their hips as they walked, all marked them as of one blood.

“Mother, I can see father in the five-acre field,” cried the younger, pointing down in the direction of the farm.

The older woman screwed up her eyes, and shaded them with her hand.

“Who’s that with him?” she asked.

"There's Bill."

"Oh, he's nobody. He's a-talkin' to some one."

"I don't know, mother. It's some one in a straw hat. Adam Wilson of the Quarry wears a straw hat."

"Aye, of course, it's Adam sure enough. Well, I'm glad we're back home time enough to see him. He'd have been disappointed if he had come over and you'd been away. Drat this dust! It makes one not fit to be seen."

The same idea seemed to have occurred to her daughter, for she had taken out her handkerchief, and was flicking her sleeves and the front of her dress.

"That's right, Dolly. There's some on your flounces. But, Lor' bless you, Dolly, it don't matter to him. It's not your dress he looks at, but your face. Now I shouldn't be very surprised if he hadn't come over to ask you from father."

"I think he'd best begin by asking me from myself," remarked the girl.

"Ah, but you'll have him, Dolly, when he does."

"I'm not so sure of that, mother." The older woman threw up her hands. "There! I don't know what the gals are coming to. I don't indeed. It's the Board Schools as does it. When I was a gal, if a decent young man came a-courtin', we gave him a 'Yes' or a 'No.' We didn't keep him hanging on like a half-clipped sheep. Now, here are you with two of them at your beck, and you can't give an answer to either of them."

"Why, mother, that's it," cried the daughter, with something between a laugh and a sob. "May be if they came one at a time I'd know what to say."

"What have you agin Adam Wilson?"

"Nothing. But I have nothing against Elias Mason."

"Nor I, either. But I know which is the most proper-looking young man."

"Looks isn't everything, mother. You should hear Elias Mason talk. You should hear him repeat poetry."

"Well, then, have Elias."

"Ah, but I haven't the heart to turn against Adam."

"There, now! I never saw such a gal. You're like a calf betwixt two hayricks; you have a nibble at the one and a nibble at the other. There's not one in a hundred as lucky as you. Here's Adam with three pound ten a week, foreman already at the Chalk Works, and likely enough to be manager if he's spared. And there's Elias, head telegraph clerk at the Post Office, and earning good money too. You can't keep 'em both on. You've got to take one or t'other, and it's my belief you'll get neither if you don't stop this shilly-shally."

"I don't care. I don't want them. What do they want to come bothering for?"

"It's human natur', gal. They must do it. If they didn't, you'd be the first to cry out maybe. It's in the Scriptures. 'Man is born for woman, as the sparks fly upwards.'" She looked up out of the corner of her eyes as if not very sure of her quotation. "Why, here be that dratted Bill. The good book says as we are all made of clay, but Bill does show it more than any lad I ever saw."

They had turned from the road into a narrow, deeply rutted lane, which led towards the farm. A youth was running towards them, loose-jointed and long-limbed, with a boyish, lumbering haste, clumping fearlessly with his great yellow clogs through pool and mire. He wore brown corduroys, a dingy shirt, and a red handkerchief tied loosely round his neck. A tattered old straw hat was tilted back upon his shock of coarse, matted, brown hair. His sleeves were turned up to the elbows, and his arms and face were both tanned and roughened until his skin looked like the bark of some young sapling. As he looked up at the sound of the steps, his face with its blue eyes, brown skin, and first slight down of a tawny moustache, was not an uncomely one, were it not marred by the heavy, stolid, somewhat sulky expression of the country yokel.

"Please, mum," said he, touching the brim of his wreck of a hat, "measter seed ye coming. He sent to say as 'ow 'e were in the five-acre lot."

"Run back, Bill, and say that we are coming," answered the farmer's wife, and the awkward figure sped away upon its return journey.

"I say, mother, what is Bill's other name?" asked the girl, with languid curiosity.

"He's not got one."

"No name?"

"No, Dolly, he's a found child, and never had no father or mother that ever was heard of. We had him from the work'us when he was seven, to chop mangel wurzel, and here he's been ever since, nigh twelve year. He was Bill there, and he's Bill here."

"What fun! Fancy having only one name. I wonder what they'll call his wife?"

“I don’t know. Time to talk of that when he can keep one. But now, Dolly dear, here’s your father and Adam Wilson comin’ across the field. I want to see you settled, Dolly. He’s a steady young man. He’s blue ribbon, and has money in the Post Office.”

“I wish I knew which liked me best,” said her daughter glancing from under her hat-brim at the approaching figures. “That’s the one I should like. But it’s all right, mother, and I know how to find out, so don’t you fret yourself any more.”

The suitor was a well-grown young fellow in a grey suit, with a straw hat jauntily ribboned in red and black. He was smoking, but as he approached he thrust his pipe into his breast-pocket, and came forward with one hand outstretched, and the other gripping nervously at his watch-chain.

“Your servant, Mrs. Foster. And how are you, Miss Dolly? Another fortnight of this and you will be starting on your harvest, I suppose.”

“It’s bad to say beforehand what you will do in this country,” said Farmer Foster, with an apprehensive glance round the heavens.

“It’s all God’s doing,” remarked his wife piously.

“And He does the best for us, of course. Yet He does seem these last seasons to have kind of lost His grip over the weather. Well, maybe it will be made up to us this year. And what did you do at Horndean, mother?”

The old couple walked in front, and the other dropped behind, the young man lingering, and taking short steps to increase the distance.

“I say, Dolly,” he murmured at last, flushing slightly as he glanced at her, “I’ve been speaking to your father about — you know what.”

But Dolly didn’t know what. She hadn’t the slightest idea of what. She turned her pretty little freckled face up to him and was full of curiosity upon the point.

Adam Wilson’s face flushed to a deeper red. “You know very well,” said he, impatiently, “I spoke to him about marriage.”

“Oh, then it’s him you want.”

“There, that’s the way you always go on. It’s easy to make fun, but I tell you that I am in earnest, Dolly. Your father says that he would have no objection to me in the family. You know that I love you true.”

“How do I know that then?”

“I tell you so. What more can I do?”

“Did you ever do anything to prove it?”

“Set me something and see if I don’t do it.”

“Then you haven’t done anything yet?”

“I don’t know. I’ve done what I could.”

“How about this?” She pulled a little crumpled sprig of dog-rose, such as grows wild in the wayside hedges, out of her bosom. “Do you know anything of that?”

He smiled, and was about to answer, when his brows suddenly contracted, his mouth set, and his eyes flashed angrily as they focussed some distant object. Following his gaze, she saw a slim, dark figure, some three fields off, walking swiftly in their direction. “It’s my friend, Mr. Elias Mason,” said she.

“Your friend!” He had lost his diffidence in his anger. “I know all about that. What does he want here every second evening?”

“Perhaps he wonders what you want.”

“Does he? I wish he’d come and ask me. I’d let him see what I wanted. Quick too.”

“He can see it now. He has taken off his hat to me,” Dolly said, laughing.

Her laughter was the finishing touch. He had meant to be impressive, and it seemed that he had only been ridiculous. He swung round upon his heel.

“Very well, Miss Foster,” said he, in a choking voice, “that’s all right. We know where we are now. I didn’t come here to be made a fool of, so good day to you.” He plucked at his hat, and walked furiously off in the direction from which they had come. She looked after him, half frightened, in the hope of seeing some sign that he had relented, but he strode onwards with a rigid neck, and vanished at a turn of the lane.

When she turned again her other visitor was close upon her — a thin, wiry, sharp-featured man with a sallow face, and a quick, nervous manner.

“Good evening, Miss Foster. I thought that I would walk over as the weather was so beautiful, but I did not expect to have the good fortune to meet you in the fields.”

“I am sure that father will be very glad to see you, Mr. Mason. You must come in and have a glass of milk.”

“No, thank you, Miss Foster, I should very much prefer to stay out here with you. But I am afraid that I have interrupted you in a chat. Was not that Mr. Adam Wilson who left you this moment?” His manner was subdued, but his questioning eyes and compressed lips told of a deeper and more furious jealousy than that of his rival.

"Yes. It was Mr. Adam Wilson." There was something about Mason, a certain concentration of manner, which made it impossible for the girl to treat him lightly as she had done the other.

"I have noticed him here several times lately."

"Yes. He is head foreman, you know, at the big quarry."

"Oh, indeed. He is fond of your society, Miss Foster. I can't blame him for that, can I, since I am equally so myself. But I should like to come to some understanding with you. You cannot have misunderstood what my feelings are to you? I am in a position to offer you a comfortable home. Will you be my wife, Miss Foster?"

Dolly would have liked to make some jesting reply, but it was hard to be funny with those two eager, fiery eyes fixed so intently upon her own. She began to walk slowly towards the house, while he paced along beside her, still waiting for his answer.

"You must give me a little time, Mr. Mason," she said at last. "'Marry in haste,' they say, 'and repent at leisure.'"

"But you shall never have cause to repent."

"I don't know. One hears such things."

"You shall be the happiest woman in England."

"That sounds very nice. You are a poet, Mr. Mason, are you not?"

"I am a lover of poetry."

"And poets are fond of flowers?"

"I am very fond of flowers."

"Then perhaps you know something of these?" She took out the humble little sprig, and held it out to him with an arch questioning glance. He took it and pressed it to his lips.

"I know that it has been near you, where I should wish to be," said he.

"Good evening, Mr. Mason!" It was Mrs. Foster who had come out to meet them. "Where's Mr. —— ? Oh — ah! Yes, of course. The teapot's on the table, and you'd best come in afore it's over-drawn."

When Elias Mason left the farmhouse that evening, he drew Dolly aside at the door.

"I won't be able to come before Saturday," said he.

"We shall be glad to see you, Mr. Mason."

"I shall want my answer then."

"Oh, I cannot give any promise, you know."

"But I shall live in hope."

“Well, no one can prevent you from doing that.” As she came to realise her power over him she had lost something of her fear, and could answer him now nearly as freely as if he were simple Adam Wilson.

She stood at the door, leaning against the wooden porch, with the long trailers of the honeysuckle framing her tall, slight figure. The great red sun was low in the west, its upper rim peeping over the low hills, shooting long, dark shadows from the beech-tree in the field, from the little group of tawny cows, and from the man who walked away from her. She smiled to see how immense the legs were, and how tiny the body in the great flat giant which kept pace beside him. In front of her in the little garden the bees droned, a belated butterfly or an early moth fluttered slowly over the flower-beds, a thousand little creatures buzzed and hummed, all busy working out their tiny destinies, as she, too, was working out hers, and each doubtless looking upon their own as the central point of the universe. A few months for the gnat, a few years for the girl, but each was happy now in the heavy summer air. A beetle scuttled out upon the gravel path and bored onwards, its six legs all working hard, butting up against stones, upsetting itself on ridges, but still gathering itself up and rushing onwards to some all-important appointment somewhere in the grass plot. A bat fluttered up from behind the beech-tree. A breath of night air sighed softly over the hillside with a little tinge of the chill sea spray in its coolness. Dolly Foster shivered, and had turned to go in when her mother came out from the passage.

“Whatever is that Bill doing there?” she cried.

Dolly looked, and saw for the first time that the nameless farm-labourer was crouching under the beech, his browns and yellows blending with the bark behind him.

“You go out o’ that, Bill!” screamed the farmer’s wife.

“What be I to do?” he asked humbly, slouching forward.

“Go, cut chaff in the barn.” He nodded and strolled away, a comical figure in his mud-crusted boots, his strap-tied corduroys and his almond-coloured skin.

“Well, then, you’ve taken Elias,” said the mother, passing her hand round her daughter’s waist. “I seed him a-kissing your flower. Well, I’m sorry for Adam, for he is a well-grown young man, a proper young man, blue ribbon, with money in the Post Office. Still some one must suffer, else how could we be purified. If the milk’s left alone it won’t ever turn into butter. It wants troubling and stirring and churning. That's what we want, too, before we can turn angels. It's just the same as butter."

Dolly laughed. "I have not taken Elias yet," said she.

"No? What about Adam then?"

"Nor him either."

"Oh, Dolly girl, can you not take advice from them that is older. I tell you again that you'll lose them both."

"No, no, mother. Don't you fret yourself. It's all right. But you can see how hard it is. I like Elias, for he can speak so well, and is so sure and masterful. And I like Adam because — well, because I know very well that Adam loves me."

"Well, bless my heart, you can't marry them both. You'd like all the pears in the basket."

"No, mother, but I know how to choose. You see this bit of a flower, dear."

"It's a common dog-rose."

"Well, where d'you think I found it?"

"In the hedge likely."

"No, but on my window-ledge."

"Oh, but when?"

"This morning. It was six when I got up, and there it lay fresh and sweet, and new-plucked. 'Twas the same yesterday and the day before. Every morning there it lies. It's a common flower, as you say, mother, but it is not so common to find a man who'll break short his sleep day after day just to show a girl that the thought of her is in his heart."

"And which was it?"

"Ah, if I knew! I think it's Elias. He's a poet, you know, and poets do nice things like that."

"And how will you be sure?"

"I'll know before morning. He will come again, whichever it is. And whichever it is he's the man for me. Did father ever do that for you before you married?"

"I can't say he did, dear. But father was always a powerful heavy sleeper."

"Well then, mother, you needn't fret any more about me, for as sure as I stand here, I'll tell you to-morrow which of them it is to be."

That evening the farmer’s daughter set herself to clearing off all those odd jobs which accumulate in a large household. She polished the dark, old-fashioned furniture in the sitting-room. She cleared out the cellar, re-arranged the bins, counted up the cider, made a great cauldron full of raspberry jam, potted, papered, and labelled it. Long after the whole household was in bed she pushed on with her self-imposed tasks until the night was far gone and she very spent and weary. Then she stirred up the smouldering kitchen fire and made herself a cup of tea, and, carrying it up to her own room, she sat sipping it and glancing over an old bound volume of the *Leisure Hour*. Her seat was behind the little dimity window curtains, whence she could see without being seen.

The morning had broken, and a brisk wind had sprung up with the dawn. The sky was of the lightest, palest blue, with a scud of flying white clouds shredded out over the face of it, dividing, coalescing, overtaking one another, but sweeping ever from the pink of the east to the still shadowy west. The high, eager voice of the wind whistled and sang outside, rising from moan to shriek, and then sinking again to a dull mutter and grumble. Dolly rose to wrap her shawl around her, and as she sat down again in an instant her doubts were resolved, and she had seen that for which she had waited.

Her window faced the inner yard, and was some eight feet from the ground. A man standing beneath it could not be seen from above. But she saw enough to tell her all that she wished to know. Silently, suddenly, a hand had appeared from below, had laid a sprig of flower upon her ledge, and had disappeared. It did not take two seconds; she saw no face, she heard no sound, but she had seen the hand and she wanted nothing more. With a smile she threw herself upon the bed, drew a rug over her, and dropped into a heavy slumber.

She was awakened by her mother plucking at her shoulder.

“It’s breakfast time, Dolly, but I thought you would be weary, so I brought you lip some bread and coffee. Sit up, like a dearie, and take it.”

“All right, mother. Thank you. I’m all dressed, so I’ll be ready to come down soon.”

“Bless the gal, she’s never had her things off! And, dearie me, here’s the flower outside the window, sure enough! Well, and did you see who put it there?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Who was it then?”

“It was Adam.”

“Was it now? Well, I shouldn’t have thought that he had it in him. Then Adam it’s to be. Well, he’s steady, and that’s better than being clever, yea, seven-and-seventy fold. Did he come across the yard?”

“No, along by the wall.”

“How did you see him then?”

“I didn’t see him.”

“Then how can you tell?”

“I saw his hand.”

“But d’you tell me you know Adam’s hand?”

“It would be a blind man that couldn’t tell it from Elias’ hand. Why, the one is as brown as that coffee, and the other as white as the cup, with great blue veins all over it.”

“Well, now I shouldn’t have thought of it, but so it is. Well, it’ll be a busy day, Dolly. Just hark to the wind!”

It had, indeed, increased during the few hours since dawn to a very violent tempest. The panes of the window rattled and shook. Glancing out, Dolly saw cabbage leaves and straw whirling up past the casement.

“The great hayrick is giving. They’re all out trying to prop it up. My, but it do blow!”

It did indeed! When Dolly came downstairs it was all that she could do to push her way through the porch. All along the horizon the sky was brassy-yellow, but above the wind screamed and stormed, and the torn, hurrying clouds were now huddled together, and now frayed off into countless tattered streamers. In the field near the house her father and three or four labourers were working with poles and ropes, hatless, their hair and beards flying, staving up a great bulging hayrick. Dolly watched them for a moment, and then, stooping her head and rounding her shoulders, with one hand up to her little black straw hat, she staggered off across the fields.

Adam Wilson was at work always on a particular part of the hillside, and hither it was that she bent her steps. He saw the trim, dapper figure, with its flying skirts and hat-ribbons, and he came forward to meet her with a great white crowbar in his hand. He walked slowly, however, and his eyes were downcast, with the air of a man who still treasures a grievance.

“Good mornin’, Miss Foster.”

“Good morning, Mr. Wilson. Oh, if you are going to be cross with me, I’d best go home again.”

“I’m not cross, Miss Foster. I take it very kindly that you should come out this way on such a day.”

“I wanted to say to you — I wanted to say that I was sorry if I made you angry yesterday. I didn’t mean to make fun. I didn’t, indeed. It is only my way of talking. It was so good of you, so noble of you, to let it make no difference.”

“None at all, Dolly.” He was quite radiant again. “If I didn’t love you so, I wouldn’t mind what that other chap said or did. And if I could only think that you cared more for me than for him—”

“I do, Adam.”

“God bless you for saying so! You’ve lightened my heart, Dolly. I have to go to Portsmouth for the firm today. To-morrow night I’ll come and see you.”

“Very well, Adam, I — Oh, my God, what’s that!”

A rending breaking noise in the distance, a dull rumble, and a burst of shouts and cries.

“The rick’s down! There’s been an accident!” They both started running down the hill.

“Father!” panted the girl, “father!”

“He’s all right!” shouted her companion, “I can see him. But there’s some one down. They’re lifting him now. And here’s one running like mad for the doctor.”

A farm-labourer came rushing wildly up the lane. “Don’t you go, Missey,” he cried. “A man’s hurt.”

“Who?”

“It’s Bill. The rick came down and the ridge-pole caught him across the back. He’s dead, I think. Leastwise, there’s not much life in him. I’m off for Doctor Strong!” He bent his shoulder to the wind, and lumbered off down the road.

“Poor Bill! Thank God it wasn’t father!” They were at the edge of the field now in which the accident had taken place. The rick lay, a shapeless mound upon the earth, with a long thick pole protruding from it, which had formerly supported the tarpaulin drawn across it in case of rain. Four men were walking slowly away, one shoulder humped, one hanging, and betwixt them they bore a formless clay-coloured bundle. He might have been a clod of the earth that he tilled, so passive, so silent, still brown, for death itself could not have taken the burn from his skin, but with patient, bovine eyes looking out heavily from under half-closed lids. He breathed jerkily, but he neither cried out nor groaned. There was something almost brutal and inhuman in his absolute stolidity. He asked no sympathy, for his life had been without it. It was a broken tool rather than an injured man.

"Can I do anything, father?"

"No, lass, no. This is no place for you. I've sent for the doctor. He'll be here soon."

"But where are they taking him?"

"To the loft where he sleeps."

"I'm sure he's welcome to my room, father."

"No, no, lass. Better leave it alone."

But the little group were passing as they spoke, and the injured lad had heard the girl's words.

"Thank ye kindly, Missey," he murmured, with a little flicker of life, and then sank back again into his stolidity and his silence.

Well, a farm hand is a useful thing, but what is a man to do with one who has an injured spine and half his ribs smashed. Farmer Foster shook his head and scratched his chin as he listened to the doctor's report.

"He can't get better?"

"No."

"Then we had better move him."

"Where to?"

"To the work'us hospital. He came from there just this time eleven years. It'll be like going home to him."

"I fear that he is going home," said the doctor gravely. "But it's out of the question to move him now. He must lie where he is for better or for worse."

And it certainly looked for worse rather than for better. In a little loft above the stable he was stretched upon a tiny blue pallet which lay upon the planks. Above were the gaunt rafters, hung with saddles, harness, old scythe blades — the hundred things which droop, like bats, from inside such buildings. Beneath them upon two pegs hung his own pitiable wardrobe, the blue shirt and the grey, the stained trousers, and the muddy coat. A gaunt chaff-cutting machine stood at his head, and a great bin of the chaff behind it. He lay very quiet, still dumb, still uncomplaining, his eyes fixed upon the small square window looking out at the drifting sky, and at this strange world which God has made so queerly — so very queerly.

An old woman, the wife of a labourer, had been set to nurse him, for the doctor had said that he was not to be left. She moved about the room, arranging and ordering, grumbling to herself from time to time at this lonely task which had been assigned to her. There were some flowers in broken jars upon a cross-beam, and these, with a touch of tenderness, she carried over and arranged upon a deal packing-case beside the patient's head. He lay motionless, and as he breathed there came a gritty rubbing sound from somewhere in his side, but he followed his companion about with his eyes and even smiled once as she grouped the flowers round him.

He smiled again when he heard that Mrs. Foster and her daughter had been to ask after him that evening. They had been down to the Post Office together, where Dolly had sent off a letter which she had very carefully drawn up, addressed to Elias Mason, Esq., and explaining to that gentleman that she had formed her plans for life, and that he need spare himself the pain of coming for his answer on the Saturday. As they came back they stopped in the stable and inquired through the loft door as to the sufferer. From where they stood they could hear that horrible grating sound in his breathing. Dolly hurried away with her face quite pale under her freckles. She was too young to face the horrid details of suffering, and yet she was a year older than this poor waif, who lay in silence, facing death itself.

All night he lay very quiet — so quiet that were it not for that one sinister sound his nurse might have doubted whether life was still in him. She had watched him and tended him as well as she might, but she was herself feeble and old, and just as the morning light began to steal palely through the small loft window, she sank back in her chair in a dreamless sleep. Two hours passed, and the first voices of the men as they gathered for their work aroused her. She sprang to her feet. Great heaven! the pallet was empty. She rushed down into the stables, distracted, wringing her hands. There was no sign of him. But the stable door was open. He must have walked-but how could he walk? — he must have crawled — have writhed that way. Out she rushed, and as they heard her tale, the newly risen labourers ran with her, until the farmer with his wife and daughter were called from their breakfast by the bustle, and joined also in this strange chase. A whoop, a cry, and they were drawn round to the corner of the yard on which Miss Dolly's window opened. There he lay within a few yards of the window, his face upon the stones, his feet thrusting out from his tattered night-gown, and his track marked by the blood from his wounded knees. One hand was thrown out before him, and in it he held a little sprig of the pink dog-rose.

They carried him back, cold and stiff, to the pallet in the loft, and the old nurse drew the sheet over him and left him, for there was no need to watch him now. The girl had gone to her room, and her mother followed her thither, all unnerved by this glimpse of death.

“And to think,” said she, “that it was only *him*, after all.”

But Dolly sat at the side of her bed, and sobbed bitterly in her apron.

DE PROFUNDIS

So long as the oceans are the ligaments which bind together the great broadcast British Empire, so long will there be a dash of romance in our minds. For the soul is swayed by the waters, as the waters are by the moon, and when the great highways of an empire are along such roads as these, so full of strange sights and sounds, with danger ever running like a hedge on either side of the course, it is a dull mind indeed which does not bear away with it some trace of such a passage. And now, Britain lies far beyond herself, for the three-mile limit of every seaboard is her frontier, which has been won by hammer and loom and pick rather than by arts of war. For it is written in history that neither king nor army can bar the path to the man who having twopence in his strong box, and knowing well where he can turn it to threepence, sets his mind to that one end. And as the frontier has broadened, the mind of Britain has broadened too, spreading out until all men can see that the ways of the island are continental, even as those of the Continent are insular.

But for this a price must be paid, and the price is a grievous one. As the beast of old must have one young human life as a tribute every year, so to our Empire we throw from day to day the pick and flower of our youth. The engine is world-wide and strong, but the only fuel that will drive it is the lives of British men. Thus it is that in the grey old cathedrals, as we look round upon the brasses on the walls, we see strange names, such names as they who reared those walls had never heard, for it is in Peshawar, and Umballah, and Korti and Fort Pearson that the youngsters die, leaving only a precedent and a brass behind them. But if every man had his obelisk, even where he lay, then no frontier line need be drawn, for a cordon of British graves would ever show how high the Anglo-Celtic tide had lapped.

This, then, as well as the waters which join us to the world, has done something to tinge us with romance. For when so many have their loved ones over the seas, walking amid hillmen’s bullets, or swamp malaria, where death is sudden and distance great, then mind communes with mind, and strange stories arise of dream, presentiment or vision, where the mother sees her dying son, and is past the first bitterness of her grief ere the message comes which should have broken the news. The learned have of late looked into the matter and have even labelled it with a name; but what can we know more of it save that a poor stricken soul, when hard-pressed and driven, can shoot across the earth some ten-thousand-mile-distant picture of its trouble to the mind which is most akin to it. Far be it from me to say that there lies no such power within us, for of all things which the brain will grasp the last will be itself; but yet it is well to be very cautious over such matters, for once at least I have known that which was within the laws of nature seem to be far upon the further side of them.

John Vansittart was the younger partner of the firm of Hudson and Vansittart, coffee exporters of the Island of Ceylon, three-quarters Dutchman by descent, but wholly English in his sympathies. For years I had been his agent in London, and when in ‘72 he came over to England for a three months’ holiday, he turned to me for the introductions which would enable him to see something of town and country life. Armed with seven letters he left my offices, and for many weeks scrappy notes from different parts of the country let me know that he had found favour in the eyes of my friends. Then came word of his engagement to Emily Lawson, of a cadet branch of the Hereford Lawsons, and at the very tail of the first flying rumour the news of his absolute marriage, for the wooing of a wanderer must be short, and the days were already crowding on towards the date when he must be upon his homeward journey. They were to return together to Colombo in one of the firm’s own thousand-ton barque-rigged sailing ships, and this was to be their princely honeymoon, at once a necessity and a delight.

Those were the royal days of coffee-planting in Ceylon, before a single season and a rotten fungus drove a whole community through years of despair to one of the greatest commercial victories which pluck and ingenuity ever won. Not often is it that men have the heart when their one great industry is withered to rear up in a few years another as rich to take its place, and the tea-fields of Ceylon are as true a monument to courage as is the lion at Waterloo. But in ‘72 there was no cloud yet above the skyline, and the hopes of the planters were as high and as bright as the hillsides on which they reared their crops. Vansittart came down to London with his young and beautiful wife. I was introduced, dined with them, and it was finally arranged that I, since business called me also to Ceylon, should be a fellow-passenger with them on the *Eastern Star*, which was timed to sail on the following Monday.

It was on the Sunday evening that I saw him again. He was shown up into my rooms about nine o’clock at night, with the air of a man who is bothered and out of sorts. His hand, as I shook it, was hot and dry.

“I wish, Atkinson,” said he, “that you could give me a little lime juice and water. I have a beastly thirst upon me, and the more I take the more I seem to want.”

I rang and ordered a carafe and glasses. “You are flushed,” said I. “You don’t look the thing.”

“No, I’m clean off colour. Got a touch of rheumatism in my back, and don’t seem to taste my food. It is this vile London that is choking me. I’m not used to breathing air which has been used up by four million lungs all sucking away on every side of you.” He flapped his crooked hands before his face, like a man who really struggles for his breath.

“A touch of the sea will soon set you right.”

“Yes, I’m of one mind with you there. That’s the thing for me. I want no other doctor. If I don’t get to sea to-morrow I’ll have an illness. There are no two ways about it.” He drank off a tumbler of lime juice, and clapped his two hands with his knuckles doubled up into the small of his back.

“That seems to ease me,” said he, looking at me with a filmy eye. “Now I want your help, Atkinson, for I am rather awkwardly placed.”

“As how?”

“This way. My wife’s mother got ill and wired for her. I couldn’t go — you know best yourself how tied I have been — so she had to go alone. Now I’ve had another wire to say that she can’t come to-morrow, but that she will pick up the ship at Falmouth on Wednesday. We put in there, you know, and in, though I count it hard, Atkinson, that a man should be asked to believe in a mystery, and cursed if he can’t do it. Cursed, mind you, no less.” He leaned forward and began to draw a catchy breath like a man who is poised on the very edge of a sob.

Then first it came to my mind that I had heard much of the hard-drinking life of the island, and that from brandy came those wild words and fevered hands. The flushed cheek and the glazing eye were those of one whose drink is strong upon him. Sad it was to see so noble a young man in the grip of that most bestial of all the devils.

“You should lie down,” I said, with some severity.

He screwed up his eyes like a man who is striving to wake himself, and looked up with an air of surprise.

"So I shall presently," said he, quite rationally. "I felt quite swimmy just now, but I am my own man again now. Let me see, what was I talking about? Oh ah, of course, about the wife. She joins the ship at Falmouth. Now I want to go round by water. I believe my health depends upon it. I just want a little clean first-lung air to set me on my feet again. I ask you, like a good fellow, to go to Falmouth by rail, so that in case we should be late you may be there to look after the wife. Put up at the Royal Hotel, and I will wire her that you are there. Her sister will bring her down, so that it will be all plain sailing."

"I'll do it with pleasure," said I. "In fact, I would rather go by rail, for we shall have enough and to spare of the sea before we reach Colombo. I believe too that you badly need a change. Now, I should go and turn in, if I were you."

"Yes, I will. I sleep aboard tonight. You know," he continued, as the film settled down again over his eyes, "I've not slept well the last few nights. I've been troubled with theolololog — that is to say, theolological — hang it," with a desperate effort, "with the doubts of theolologicians. Wondering why the Almighty made us, you know, and why He made our heads swimmy, and fixed little pains into the small of our backs. Maybe I'll do better tonight." He rose and steadied himself with an effort against the corner of the chair back.

"Look here, Vansittart," said I, gravely, stepping up to him, and laying my hand upon his sleeve, "I can give you a shakedown here. You are not fit to go out. You are all over the place. You've been mixing your drinks."

"Drinks!" He stared at me stupidly.

"You used to carry your liquor better than this."

"I give you my word, Atkinson, that I have not had a drain for two days. It's not drink. I don't know what it is. I suppose you think this is drink." He took up my hand in his burning grasp, and passed it over his own forehead.

"Great Lord!" said I.

His skin felt like a thin sheet of velvet beneath which lies a close-packed layer of small shot. It was smooth to the touch at any one place, but to a finger passed along it, rough as a nutmeg grater.

"It's all right," said he, smiling at my startled face. "I've had the prickly heat nearly as bad."

"But this is never prickly heat."

“No, it’s London. It’s breathing bad air. But tomorrow it’ll be all right. There’s a surgeon aboard, so I shall be in safe hands. I must be off now.”

“Not you,” said I, pushing him back into a chair. “This is past a joke. You don’t move from here until a doctor sees you. Just stay where you are.”

I caught up my hat, and rushing round to the house of a neighbouring physician, I brought him back with me. The room was empty and Vansittart gone. I rang the bell. The servant said that the gentleman had ordered a cab the instant that I had left, and had gone off in it. He had told the cabman to drive to the docks.

“Did the gentleman seem ill?” I asked.

“Ill!” The man smiled. “No, sir, he was singin’ his ‘ardest all the time.”

The information was not as reassuring as my servant seemed to think, but I reflected that he was going straight back to the *Eastern Star*, and that there was a doctor aboard of her, so that there was nothing which I could do in the matter. None the less, when I thought of his thirst, his burning hands, his heavy eye, his tripping speech, and lastly, of that leprous forehead, I carried with me to bed an unpleasant memory of my visitor and his visit.

At eleven o’clock next day I was at the docks, but the *Eastern Star* had already moved down the river, and was nearly at Gravesend. To Gravesend I went by train, but only to see her topmasts far off, with a plume of smoke from a tug in front of her. I would hear no more of my friend until I rejoined him at Falmouth. When I got back to my offices, a telegram was awaiting me from Mrs. Vansittart, asking me to meet her; and next evening found us both at the Royal Hotel, Falmouth, where we were to wait for the *Eastern Star*. Ten days passed, and there came no news of her.

They were ten days which I am not likely to forget. On the very day that the *Eastern Star* had cleared from the Thames, a furious easterly gale had sprung up, and blew on from day to day for the greater part of a week without the sign of a lull. Such a screaming, raving, long-drawn storm has never been known on the southern coast. From our hotel windows the sea view was all banked in haze, with a little rain-swept half-circle under our very eyes, churned and lashed into one tossing stretch of foam. So heavy was the wind upon the waves that little sea could rise, for the crest of each billow was torn shrieking from it, and lashed broadcast over the bay. Clouds, wind, sea, all were rushing to the west, and there, looking down at this mad jumble of elements, I waited on day after day, my sole companion a white, silent woman, with terror in her eyes, her forehead pressed ever against the window, her gaze from early morning to the fall of night fixed upon that wall of grey haze through which the loom of a vessel might come. She said nothing, but that face of hers was one long wail of fear.

On the fifth day I took counsel with an old seaman. I should have preferred to have done so alone, but she saw me speak with him, and was at our side in an instant, with parted lips and a prayer in her eyes.

“Seven days out from London,” said he, “and five in the gale. Well, the Channel’s swept clear by this wind. There’s three things for it. She may have popped into port on the French side. That’s like enough.”

“No, no; he knew we were here. He would have telegraphed.”

“Ah, yes, so he would. Well, then, he might have run for it, and if he did that he won’t be very far from Madeira by now. That’ll be it, marm, you may depend.”

“Or else? You said there was a third chance.”

“Did I, marm? No, only two, I think. I don’t think I said anything of a third. Your ship’s out there, depend upon it, away out in the Atlantic, and you’ll hear of it time enough, for the weather is breaking. Now don’t you fret, marm, and wait quiet, and you’ll find a real blue Cornish sky tomorrow.”

The old seaman was right in his surmise, for the next day broke calm and bright, with only a low dwindling cloud in the west to mark the last trailing wreaths of the storm-wrack. But still there came no word from the sea, and no sign of the ship. Three more weary days had passed, the weariest that I have ever spent, when there came a seafaring man to the hotel with a letter. I gave a shout of joy. It was from the captain of the *Eastern Star*. As I read the first lines of it I whisked my hand over it, but she laid her own upon it and drew it away. “I have seen it,” said she, in a cold, quiet voice. “I may as well see the rest, too.”

“DEAR SIR,” said the letter,

“Mr. Vansittart is down with the small-pox, and we are blown so far on our course that we don’t know what to do, he being off his head and unfit to tell us. By dead reckoning we are but three hundred miles from Funchal, so I take it that it is best that we should push on there, get Mr. V. into hospital, and wait in the Bay until you come. There’s a sailing-ship due from Falmouth to Funchal in a few days’ time, as I understand. This goes by the brig *Marian* of Falmouth, and five pounds is due to the master, Yours respectfully, “JNO. HINES.”

She was a wonderful woman that, only a chit of a girl fresh from school, but as quiet and strong as a man. She said nothing — only pressed her lips together tight, and put on her bonnet.

“You are going out?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Can I be of use?”

“No; I am going to the doctor’s.”

“To the doctor’s?”

“Yes. To learn how to nurse a small-pox case.”

She was busy at that all the evening, and next morning we were off with a fine ten-knot breeze in the barque *Rose of Sharon* for Madeira. For five days we made good time, and were no great way from the island; but on the sixth there fell a calm, and we lay without motion on a sea of oil, heaving slowly, but making not a foot of way.

At ten o’clock that night Emily Vansittart and I stood leaning on the starboard railing of the poop, with a full moon shining at our backs, and casting a black shadow of the barque, and of our own two heads upon the shining water. From the shadow a broadening path of moonshine stretched away to the lonely sky-line, flickering and shimmering in the gentle heave of the swell. We were talking with bent heads, chatting of the calm, of the chances of wind, of the look of the sky, when there came a sudden plop, like a rising salmon, and there, in the clear light, John Vansittart sprang out of the water and looked up at us.

I never saw anything clearer in my life than I saw that man. The moon shone full upon him, and he was but three oars’ lengths away. His face was more puffed than when I had seen him last, mottled here and there with dark scabs, his mouth and eyes open as one who is struck with some overpowering surprise. He had some white stuff streaming from his shoulders, and one hand was raised to his ear, the other crooked across his breast. I saw him leap from the water into the air, and in the dead calm the waves of his coming lapped up against the sides of the vessel. Then his figure sank back into the water again, and I heard a rending, crackling sound like a bundle of brushwood snapping in the fire on a frosty night. There were no signs of him when I looked again, but a swift swirl and eddy on the still sea still marked the spot where he had been. How long I stood there, tingling to my finger-tips, holding up an unconscious woman with one hand, clutching at the rail of the vessel with the other, was more than I could afterwards tell. I had been noted as a man of-slow and unresponsive emotions, but this time at least I was shaken to the core. Once and twice I struck my foot upon the deck to be certain that I was indeed the master of my own senses, and that this was not some mad prank of an unruly brain. As I stood, still marvelling, the woman shivered, opened her eyes, gasped, and then standing erect with her hands upon the rail, looked out over the moonlit sea with a face which had aged ten years in a summer night.

"You saw his vision?" she murmured.

"I saw something."

"It was he! It was John! He is dead!"

I muttered some lame words of doubt.

"Doubtless he died at this hour," she whispered. "In hospital at Madeira. I have read of such things. His thoughts were with me. His vision came to me. Oh, my John, my dear, dear, lost John!"

She broke out suddenly into a storm of weeping, and I led her down into her cabin, where I left her with her sorrow. That night a brisk breeze blew up from the east, and in the evening of the next day we passed the two islets of Los Desertos, and dropped anchor at sundown in the Bay of Funchal. The *Eastern Star* lay no great distance from us, with the quarantine flag flying from her main, and her Jack half-way up her peak.

"You see," said Mrs. Vansittart, quickly. She was dry-eyed now, for she had known how it would be.

That night we received permission from the authorities to move on board the *Eastern Star*. The captain, Hines, was waiting upon deck with confusion and grief contending upon his bluff face as he sought for words with which to break this heavy tidings, but she took the story from his lips.

"I know that my husband is dead," she said. "He died yesterday night, about ten o'clock, in hospital at Madeira, did he not?"

The seaman stared aghast. "No, marm, he died eight days ago at sea, and we had to bury him out there, for we lay in a belt of calm, and could not say when we might make the land."

Well, those are the main facts about the death of John Vansittart, and his appearance to his wife somewhere about lat. 35 N. and long. 15 W. A clearer case of a wraith has seldom been made out, and since then it has been told as such, and put into print as such, and endorsed by a learned society as such, and so floated off with many others to support the recent theory of telepathy. For myself, I hold telepathy to be proved, but I would snatch this one case from amid the evidence, and say that I do not think that it was the wraith of John Vansittart, but John Vansittart himself whom we saw that night leaping into the moonlight out of the depths of the Atlantic. It has ever been my belief that some strange chance — one of those chances which seem so improbable and yet so constantly occur — had becalmed us over the very spot where the man had been buried a week before. For the rest, the surgeon tells me that the leaden weight was not too firmly fixed, and that seven days bring about changes which fetch a body to the surface. Coming from the depth to which the weight would have sunk it, he explains that it might well attain such a velocity as to carry it clear of the water. Such is my own explanation of the matter, and if you ask me what then became of the body, I must recall to you that snapping, crackling sound, with the swirl in the water. The shark is a surface feeder and is plentiful in those parts.

THE GREAT BROWN-PERICORD MOTOR

It was a cold, foggy, dreary evening in May. Along the Strand blurred patches of light marked the position of the lamps. The flaring shop windows flickered vaguely with steamy brightness through the thick and heavy atmosphere.

The high lines of houses which lead down to the Embankment were all dark and deserted, or illuminated only by the glimmering lamp of the caretaker. At one point, however, there shone out from three windows upon the second floor a rich flood of light, which broke the sombre monotony of the terrace. Passers-by glanced up curiously, and drew each other’s attention to the ruddy glare, for it marked the chambers of Francis Pericord, the inventor and electrical engineer. Long into the watches of the night the gleam of his lamps bore witness to the untiring energy and restless industry which was rapidly carrying him to the first rank in his profession.

Within the chamber sat two men. The one was Pericord himself — hawk-faced and angular, with the black hair and brisk bearing which spoke of his Celtic origin. The other — thick, sturdy, and blue-eyed — was Jeremy Brown, the well-known mechanician. They had been partners in many an invention, in which the creative genius of the one had been aided by the practical abilities of the other. It was a question among their friends as to which was the better man.

It was no chance visit which had brought Brown into Pericord’s workshop at so late an hour. Business was to be done — business which was to decide the failure or success of months of work, and which might affect their whole careers. Between them lay a long brown table, stained and corroded by strong acids, and littered with giant carboys, Faure’s accumulators, voltaic piles, coils of wire, and great blocks of non-conducting porcelain. In the midst of all this lumber there stood a singular whizzing, whirring machine, upon which the eyes of both partners were riveted.

A small square metal receptacle was connected by numerous wires to a broad steel girdle, furnished on either side with two powerful projecting joints. The girdle was motionless, but the joints with the short arms attached to them flashed round every few seconds, with a pause between each rhythmic turn. The power which moved them came evidently from the metal box. A subtle odour of ozone was in the air.

“How about the flanges, Brown?” asked the inventor.

“They were too large to bring. They are seven foot by three. There is power enough there to work them, however. I will answer for that.”

“Aluminium with an alloy of copper?”

“Yes.”

“See how beautifully it works.” Pericord stretched out a thin, nervous hand, and pressed a button upon the machine. The joints revolved more slowly, and came presently to a dead stop. Again he touched a spring and the arms shivered and woke up again into their crisp metallic life. “The experimenter need not exert his muscular powers,” he remarked. “He has only to be passive, and use his intelligence.”

“Thanks to my motor,” said Brown.

“*Our* motor,” the other broke in sharply.

“Oh, of course,” said his colleague impatiently.

“The motor which you thought of, and which I reduced to practice — call it what you like.”

“I call it the Brown-Pericord Motor,” cried the inventor with an angry flash of his dark eyes. “You worked out the details, but the abstract thought is mine, and mine alone.”

“An abstract thought won’t turn an engine,” said Brown, doggedly.

“That was why I took you into partnership,” the other retorted, drumming nervously with his fingers upon the table. “I invent, you build. It is a fair division of labour.”

Brown pursed up his lips, as though by no means satisfied upon the point. Seeing, however, that further argument was useless, he turned his attention to the machine, which was shivering and rocking with each swing of its arms, as though a very little more would send it skimming from the table.

“Is it not splendid?” cried Pericord.

“It is satisfactory,” said the more phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon.

“There’s immortality in it!”

“There’s money in it!”

“Our names will go down with Montgolfier’s.”

“With Rothschild’s, I hope.”

“No, no, Brown; you take too material a view,” cried the inventor, raising his gleaming eyes from the machine to his companion. “Our fortunes are a mere detail. Money is a thing which every heavy-witted plutocrat in the country shares with us. My hopes rise to something higher than that. Our true reward will come in the gratitude and goodwill of the human race."

Brown shrugged his shoulders. "You may have my share of that," he said. "I am a practical man. We must test our invention."

"Where can we do it?"

"That is what I wanted to speak about. It must be absolutely secret. If we had private grounds of our own it would be an easy matter, but there is no privacy in London."

"We must take it into the country."

"I have a suggestion to offer," said Brown. "My brother has a place in Sussex on the high land near Beachy Head. There is, I remember, a large and lofty barn near the house. Will is in Scotland, but the key is always at my disposal. Why not take the machine down tomorrow and test it in the barn?"

"Nothing could be better."

"There is a train to Eastbourne at one."

"I shall be at the station."

"Bring the gear with you, and I will bring the flanges," said the mechanician, rising. "Tomorrow will prove whether we have been following a shadow, or whether fortune is at our feet. One o'clock at Victoria." He walked swiftly down the stair and was quickly reabsorbed into the flood of comfortless clammy humanity which ebbed and flowed along the Strand.

The morning was bright and spring-like. A pale blue sky arched over London, with a few gauzy white clouds drifting lazily across it. At eleven o'clock Brown might have been seen entering the Patent Office with a great roll of parchment, diagrams, and plans under his arm. At twelve he emerged again smiling, and, opening his pocket-book, he packed away very carefully a small slip of official blue paper. At five minutes to one his cab rolled into Victoria Station. Two giant canvas-covered parcels, like enormous kites, were handed down by the cabman from the top, and consigned to the care of a guard. On the platform Pericord was pacing up and down, with long eager step and swinging arms, a tinge of pink upon his sunken and sallow cheeks.

"All right?" he asked.

Brown pointed in answer to his baggage.

“I have the motor and the girdle already packed away in the guard’s van. Be careful, guard, for it is delicate machinery of great value. So! Now we can start with an easy conscience.”

At Eastbourne the precious motor was carried to a four-wheeler, and the great flanges hoisted on the top. A long drive took them to the house where the keys were kept, whence they set off across the barren Downs. The building which was their destination was a commonplace white-washed structure, with straggling stables and out-houses, standing in a grassy hollow which sloped down from the edge of the chalk cliffs. It was a cheerless house even when in use, but now with its smokeless chimneys and shuttered windows it looked doubly dreary. The owner had planted a grove of young larches and firs around it, but the sweeping spray had blighted them, and they hung their withered heads in melancholy groups. It was a gloomy and forbidding spot.

But the inventors were in no mood to be moved by such trifles. The lonelier the place, the more fitted for their purpose. With the help of the cabman they carried their packages down the footpath, and laid them in the darkened dining-room. The sun was setting as the distant murmur of wheels told them that they were finally alone.

Pericord had thrown open the shutters and the mellow evening light streamed in through the discoloured windows. Brown drew a knife from his pocket and cut the pack-thread with which the canvas was secured. As the brown covering fell away it disclosed two great yellow metal fans. These he leaned carefully against the wall. The girdle, the connecting-bands, and the motor were then in turn unpacked. It was dark before all was set out in order. A lamp was lit, and by its light the two men continued to tighten screws, clinch rivets, and make the last preparations for their experiment.

“That finishes it,” said Brown at last, stepping back and surveying the machine.

Pericord said nothing, but his face glowed with pride and expectation.

“We must have something to eat,” Brown remarked, laying out some provisions which he had brought with him.

“Afterwards.”

“No, now,” said the stolid mechanician. “I am half starved.” He pulled up to the table and made a hearty meal, while his Celtic companion strode impatiently up and down, with twitching fingers and restless eyes.

“Now then,” said Brown, facing round, and brushing the crumbs from his lap, “who is to put it on?”

“I shall,” cried his companion eagerly. “What we do to-night is likely to be historic.”

“But there is some danger,” suggested Brown. “We cannot quite tell how it may act.”

“That is nothing,” said Pericord, with a wave of his hand.

“But there is no use our going out of our way to incur danger.”

“What then? One of us must do it.”

“Not at all. The motor would act equally well if attached to any inanimate object.”

“That is true,” said Pericord, thoughtfully.

“There are bricks by the barn. I have a sack here. Why should not a bagful of them take your place?”

“It is a good idea. I see no objection.”

“Come on then,” and the two sallied out, bearing with them the various sections of their machine. The moon was shining cold and clear though an occasional ragged cloud drifted across her face. All was still and silent upon the Downs. They stood and listened before they entered the barn, but not a sound came to their ears, save the dull murmur of the sea and the distant barking of a dog. Pericord journeyed backwards and forwards with all that they might need, while Brown filled a long narrow sack with bricks.

When all was ready, the door of the barn was closed, and the lamp balanced upon an empty packing-case. The bag of bricks was laid upon two trestles, and the broad steel girdle was buckled round it. Then the great flanges, the wires, and the metal box containing the motor were in turn attached to the girdle. Last of all a flat steel rudder, shaped like a fish’s tail, was secured to the bottom of the sack.

“We must make it travel in a small circle,” said Pericord, glancing round at the bare high walls.

“Tie the rudder down at one side,” suggested Brown. “Now it is ready. Press the connection and off she goes!”

Pericord leaned forward, his long sallow face quivering with excitement. His white nervous hands darted here and there among the wires. Brown stood impassive with critical eyes. There was a sharp burr from the machine. The huge yellow wings gave a convulsive flap. Then another. Then a third, slower and stronger, with a fuller sweep. Then a fourth which filled the barn with a blast of driven air. At the fifth the bag of bricks began to dance upon the trestles. At the sixth it sprang into the air, and would have fallen to the ground, but the seventh came to save it, and fluttered it forward through the air. Slowly rising, it flapped heavily round in a circle, like some great clumsy bird, filling the barn with its buzzing and whirring. In the uncertain yellow light of the single lamp it was strange to see the loom of the ungainly thing, flapping off into the shadows, and then circling back into the narrow zone of light.

The two men stood for a while in silence. Then Pericord threw his long arms up into the air.

"It acts!" he cried. "The Brown-Pericord Motor acts!" He danced about like a madman in his delight. Brown's eyes twinkled, and he began to whistle.

"See how smoothly it goes, Brown!" cried the inventor. "And the rudder — how well it acts! We must register it tomorrow."

His comrade's face darkened and set. "It *is* registered," he said, with a forced laugh.

"Registered?" said Pericord. "Registered?" He repeated the word first in a whisper, and then in a kind of scream. "Who has dared to register my invention?"

"I did it this morning. There is nothing to be excited about. It is all right."

"You registered the motor! Under whose name?"

"Under my own," said Brown, sullenly. "I consider that I have the best right to it."

"And my name does not appear?"

"No, but—"

"You villain!" screamed Pericord. "You thief and villain! You would steal my work! You would filch my credit! I will have that patent back if I have to tear your throat out!" A sombre fire burned in his black eyes, and his hands writhed themselves together with passion. Brown was no coward, but he shrank back as the other advanced upon him.

"Keep your hands off!" he said, drawing a knife from his pocket. "I will defend myself if you attack me."

"You threaten me?" cried Pericord, whose face was livid with anger. "You are a bully as well as a cheat. Will you give up the patent?"

"No, I will not."

"Brown, I say, give it up!"

“I will not. I did the work.”

Pericord sprang madly forward with blazing eyes and clutching fingers. His companion writhed out of his grasp, but was dashed against the packing-case, over which he fell. The lamp was extinguished, and the whole barn plunged into darkness. A single ray of moonlight shining through a narrow chink flickered over the great waving fans as they came and went.

“Will you give up the patent, Brown?”

There was no answer.

“Will you give it up?”

Again no answer. Not a sound save the humming and creaking overhead. A cold pang of fear and doubt struck through Pericord’s heart. He felt aimlessly about in the dark and his fingers closed upon a hand. It was cold and unresponsive. With all his anger turned to icy horror he struck a match, set the lamp up, and lit it.

Brown lay huddled up on the other side of the packing-case. Pericord seized him in his arms, and with convulsive strength lifted him across. Then the mystery of his silence was explained. He had fallen with his right arms doubled up under him, and his own weight had driven the knife deeply into his body. He had died without a groan. The tragedy had been sudden, horrible, and complete.

Pericord sat silently on the edge of the case, staring blankly down, and shivering like one with the ague, while the great Brown-Pericord Motor boomed and hurtled above him. How long he sat there can never be known. It might have been minutes or it might have been hours. A thousand mad schemes flashed through his dazed brain. It was true that he had been only the indirect cause. But who would believe that? He glanced down at his blood-spattered clothing. Everything was against him. It would be better to fly than to give himself up, relying upon his innocence. No one in London knew where they were. If he could dispose of the body he might have a few days clear before any suspicion would be aroused.

Suddenly a loud crash recalled him to himself. The flying sack had gradually risen with each successive circle until it had struck against the rafters. The blow displaced the connecting-gear, and the machine fell heavily to the ground. Pericord undid the girdle. The motor was uninjured. A sudden strange thought flashed upon him as he looked at it. The machine had become hateful to him. He might dispose both of it and the body in a way that would baffle all human search.

He threw open the barn door, and carried his companion out into the moonlight. There was a hillock outside, and on the summit of this he laid him reverently down. Then he brought from the barn the motor, the girdle and the flanges. With trembling fingers he fastened the broad steel belt round the dead man's waist. Then he screwed the wings into the sockets. Beneath he slung the motor-box, fastened the wires, and switched on the connection. For a minute or two the huge yellow fans flapped and flickered. Then the body began to move in little jumps down the side of the hillock, gathering a gradual momentum, until at last it heaved up into the air and soared off in the moonlight. He had not used the rudder, but had turned the head for the south. Gradually the weird thing rose higher, and sped faster, until it had passed over the line of cliff, and was sweeping over the silent sea. Pericord watched it with a white drawn face, until it looked like a black bird with golden wings half shrouded in the mist which lay over the waters.

In the New York State Lunatic Asylum there is a wild-eyed man whose name and birth-place are alike unknown. His reason has been unseated by some sudden shock, the doctors say, though of what nature they are unable to determine. "It is the most delicate machine which is most readily put out of gear," they remark, and point, in proof of their axiom, to the complicated electric engines, and remarkable aeronautic machines which the patient is fond of devising in his more lucid moments.

THE TERROR OF BLUE JOHN GAP

The following narrative was found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle, who died of phthisis on February 4th, 1908, at 36, Upper Coventry Flats, South Kensington. Those who knew him best, while refusing to express an opinion upon this particular statement, are unanimous in asserting that he was a man of a sober and scientific turn of mind, absolutely devoid of imagination, and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events. The paper was contained in an envelope, which was docketed, “A Short Account of the Circumstances which occurred near Miss Allerton’s Farm in North-West Derbyshire in the Spring of Last Year.” The envelope was sealed, and on the other side was written in pencil —

DEAR SEATON, —

“It may interest, and perhaps pain you, to know that the incredulity with which you met my story has prevented me from ever opening my mouth upon the subject again. I leave this record after my death, and perhaps strangers may be found to have more confidence in me than my friend.”

Inquiry has failed to elicit who this Seaton may have been. I may add that the visit of the deceased to Allerton’s Farm, and the general nature of the alarm there, apart from his particular explanation, have been absolutely established. With this foreword I append his account exactly as he left it. It is in the form of a diary, some entries in which have been expanded, while a few have been erased.

April 17. — Already I feel the benefit of this wonderful upland air. The farm of the Allertons lies fourteen hundred and twenty feet above sea-level, so it may well be a bracing climate. Beyond the usual morning cough I have very little discomfort, and, what with the fresh milk and the home-grown mutton, I have every chance of putting on weight. I think Saunderson will be pleased.

The two Miss Allertons are charmingly quaint and kind, two dear little hard-working old maids, who are ready to lavish all the heart which might have gone out to husband and to children upon an invalid stranger. Truly, the old maid is a most useful person, one of the reserve forces of the community. They talk of the superfluous woman, but what would the poor superfluous man do without her kindly presence? By the way, in their simplicity they very quickly let out the reason why Saunderson recommended their farm. The Professor rose from the ranks himself, and I believe that in his youth he was not above scaring crows in these very fields.

It is a most lonely spot, and the walks are picturesque in the extreme. The farm consists of grazing land lying at the bottom of an irregular valley. On each side are the fantastic limestone hills, formed of rock so soft that you can break it away with your hands. All this country is hollow. Could you strike it with some gigantic hammer it would boom like a drum, or possibly cave in altogether and expose some huge subterranean sea. A great sea there must surely be, for on all sides the streams run into the mountain itself, never to reappear. There are gaps everywhere amid the rocks, and when you pass through them you find yourself in great caverns, which wind down into the bowels of the earth. I have a small bicycle lamp, and it is a perpetual joy to me to carry it into these weird solitudes, and to see the wonderful silver and black effect when I throw its light upon the stalactites which drape the lofty roofs. Shut off the lamp, and you are in the blackest darkness. Turn it on, and it is a scene from the Arabian Nights.

But there is one of these strange openings in the earth which has a special interest, for it is the handiwork, not of nature, but of man. I had never heard of Blue John when I came to these parts. It is the name given to a peculiar mineral of a beautiful purple shade, which is only found at one or two places in the world. It is so rare that an ordinary vase of Blue John would be valued at a great price. The Romans, with that extraordinary instinct of theirs, discovered that it was to be found in this valley, and sank a horizontal shaft deep into the mountain side. The opening of their mine has been called Blue John Gap, a clean-cut arch in the rock, the mouth all overgrown with bushes. It is a goodly passage which the Roman miners have cut, and it intersects some of the great water-worn caves, so that if you enter Blue John Gap you would do well to mark your steps and to have a good store of candles, or you may never make your way back to the daylight again. I have not yet gone deeply into it, but this very day I stood at the mouth of the arched tunnel, and peering down into the black recesses beyond, I vowed that when my health returned I would devote some holiday to exploring those mysterious depths and finding out for myself how far the Roman had penetrated into the Derbyshire hills.

Strange how superstitious these countrymen are! I should have thought better of young Armitage, for he is a man of some education and character, and a very fine fellow for his station in life. I was standing at the Blue John Gap when he came across the field to me.

“Well, doctor,” said he, “you’re not afraid, anyhow.”

“Afraid!” I answered. “Afraid of what?”

“Of it,” said he, with a jerk of his thumb towards the black vault, “of the Terror that lives in the Blue John Cave.”

How absurdly easy it is for a legend to arise in a lonely countryside! I examined him as to the reasons for his weird belief. It seems that from time to time sheep have been missing from the fields, carried bodily away, according to Armitage. That they could have wandered away of their own accord and disappeared among the mountains was an explanation to which he would not listen. On one occasion a pool of blood had been found, and some tufts of wool. That also, I pointed out, could be explained in a perfectly natural way. Further, the nights upon which sheep disappeared were invariably very dark, cloudy nights with no moon. This I met with the obvious retort that those were the nights which a commonplace sheep-stealer would naturally choose for his work. On one occasion a gap had been made in a wall, and some of the stones scattered for a considerable distance. Human agency again, in my opinion. Finally, Armitage clinched all his arguments by telling me that he had actually heard the Creature — indeed, that anyone could hear it who remained long enough at the Gap. It was a distant roaring of an immense volume. I could not but smile at this, knowing, as I do, the strange reverberations which come out of an underground water system running amid the chasms of a limestone formation. My incredulity annoyed Armitage, so that he turned and left me with some abruptness.

And now comes the queer point about the whole business. I was still standing near the mouth of the cave turning over in my mind the various statements of Armitage, and reflecting how readily they could be explained away, when suddenly, from the depth of the tunnel beside me, there issued a most extraordinary sound. How shall I describe it? First of all it seemed to be a great distance away, far down in the bowels of the earth. Secondly, in spite of this suggestion of distance, it was very loud. Lastly, it was not a boom, nor a crash, such as one would associate with falling water or tumbling rock, but it was a high whine, tremulous and vibrating, almost like the whinnying of a horse. It was certainly a most remarkable experience, and one which for a moment, I must admit, gave a new significance to

Armitage’s words. I waited by the Blue John Gap for half an hour or more, but there was no return of the sound, so at last I wandered back to the farmhouse, rather mystified by what had occurred. Decidedly I shall explore that cavern when my strength is restored. Of course, Armitage’s explanation is too absurd for discussion, and yet that sound was certainly very strange. It still rings in my ears as I write.

April 20. — In the last three days I have made several expeditions to the Blue John Gap, and have even penetrated some short distance, but my bicycle lantern is so small and weak that I dare not trust myself very far. I shall do the thing more systematically. I have heard no sound at all, and could almost believe that I had been the victim of some hallucination, suggested, perhaps, by Armitage’s conversation. Of course, the whole idea is absurd, and yet I must confess that those bushes at the entrance of the cave do present an appearance as if some heavy creature had forced its way through them. I begin to be keenly interested. I have said nothing to the Miss Allertons, for they are quite superstitious enough already, but I have bought some candles, and mean to investigate for myself.

I observed this morning that among the numerous tufts of sheep’s wool which lay among the bushes near the cavern there was one which was smeared with blood. Of course, my reason tells me that if sheep wander into such rocky places they are likely to injure themselves, and yet somehow that splash of crimson gave me a sudden shock, and for a moment I found myself shrinking back in horror from the old Roman arch. A fetid breath seemed to ooze from the black depths into which I peered. Could it indeed be possible that some nameless thing, some dreadful presence, was lurking down yonder? I should have been incapable of such feelings in the days of my strength, but one grows more nervous and fanciful when one’s health is shaken.

For the moment I weakened in my resolution, and was ready to leave the secret of the old mine, if one exists, for ever unsolved. But tonight my interest has returned and my nerves grown more steady. Tomorrow I trust that I shall have gone more deeply into this matter.

April 22. — Let me try and set down as accurately as I can my extraordinary experience of yesterday. I started in the afternoon, and made my way to the Blue John Gap. I confess that my misgivings returned as I gazed into its depths, and I wished that I had brought a companion to share my exploration. Finally, with a return of resolution, I lit my candle, pushed my way through the briars, and descended into the rocky shaft.

It went down at an acute angle for some fifty feet, the floor being covered with broken stone. Thence there extended a long, straight passage cut in the solid rock. I am no geologist, but the lining of this corridor was certainly of some harder material than limestone, for there were points where I could actually see the tool-marks which the old miners had left in their excavation, as fresh as if they had been done yesterday. Down this strange, old-world corridor I stumbled, my feeble flame throwing a dim circle of light around me, which made the shadows beyond the more threatening and obscure. Finally, I came to a spot where the Roman tunnel opened into a water-worn cavern — a huge hall, hung with long white icicles of lime deposit. From this central chamber I could dimly perceive that a number of passages worn by the subterranean streams wound away into the depths of the earth. I was standing there wondering whether I had better return, or whether I dare venture farther into this dangerous labyrinth, when my eyes fell upon something at my feet which strongly arrested my attention.

The greater part of the floor of the cavern was covered with boulders of rock or with hard incrustations of lime, but at this particular point there had been a drip from the distant roof, which had left a patch of soft mud. In the very centre of this there was a huge mark — an ill-defined blotch, deep, broad and irregular, as if a great boulder had fallen upon it. No loose stone lay near, however, nor was there anything to account for the impression. It was far too large to be caused by any possible animal, and besides, there was only the one, and the patch of mud was of such a size that no reasonable stride could have covered it. As I rose from the examination of that singular mark and then looked round into the black shadows which hemmed me in, I must confess that I felt for a moment a most unpleasant sinking of my heart, and that, do what I could, the candle trembled in my outstretched hand.

I soon recovered my nerve, however, when I reflected how absurd it was to associate so huge and shapeless a mark with the track of any known animal. Even an elephant could not have produced it. I determined, therefore, that I would not be scared by vague and senseless fears from carrying out my exploration. Before proceeding, I took good note of a curious rock formation in the wall by which I could recognise the entrance of the Roman tunnel. The precaution was very necessary, for the great cave, so far as I could see it, was intersected by passages. Having made sure of my position, and reassured myself by examining my spare candles and my matches, I advanced slowly over the rocky and uneven surface of the cavern.

And now I come to the point where I met with such sudden and desperate disaster. A stream, some twenty feet broad, ran across my path, and I walked for some little distance along the bank to find a spot where I could cross dry-shod. Finally, I came to a place where a single flat boulder lay near the centre, which I could reach in a stride. As it chanced, however, the rock had been cut away and made top-heavy by the rush of the stream, so that it tilted over as I landed on it and shot me into the ice-cold water. My candle went out, and I found myself floundering about in utter and absolute darkness.

I staggered to my feet again, more amused than alarmed by my adventure. The candle had fallen from my hand, and was lost in the stream, but I had two others in my pocket, so that it was of no importance. I got one of them ready, and drew out my box of matches to light it. Only then did I realise my position. The box had been soaked in my fall into the river. It was impossible to strike the matches.

A cold hand seemed to close round my heart as I realised my position. The darkness was opaque and horrible. It was so utter that one put one’s hand up to one’s face as if to press off something solid. I stood still, and by an effort I steadied myself. I tried to reconstruct in my mind a map of the floor of the cavern as I had last seen it. Alas! the bearings which had impressed themselves upon my mind were high on the wall, and not to be found by touch. Still, I remembered in a general way how the sides were situated, and I hoped that by groping my way along them I should at last come to the opening of the Roman tunnel. Moving very slowly, and continually striking against the rocks, I set out on this desperate quest.

But I very soon realised how impossible it was. In that black, velvety darkness one lost all one’s bearings in an instant. Before I had made a dozen paces, I was utterly bewildered as to my whereabouts. The rippling of the stream, which was the one sound audible, showed me where it lay, but the moment that I left its bank I was utterly lost. The idea of finding my way back in absolute darkness through that limestone labyrinth was clearly an impossible one.

I sat down upon a boulder and reflected upon my unfortunate plight. I had not told anyone that I proposed to come to the Blue John mine, and it was unlikely that a search party would come after me. Therefore I must trust to my own resources to get clear of the danger. There was only one hope, and that was that the matches might dry. When I fell into the river, only half of me had got thoroughly wet. My left shoulder had remained above the water. I took the box of matches, therefore, and put it into my left armpit. The moist air of the cavern might possibly be counteracted by the heat of my body, but even so, I knew that I could not hope to get a light for many hours. Meanwhile there was nothing for it but to wait.

By good luck I had slipped several biscuits into my pocket before I left the farm-house. These I now devoured, and washed them down with a draught from that wretched stream which had been the cause of all my misfortunes. Then I felt about for a comfortable seat among the rocks, and, having discovered a place where I could get a support for my back, I stretched out my legs and settled myself down to wait. I was wretchedly damp and cold, but I tried to cheer myself with the reflection that modern science prescribed open windows and walks in all weather for my disease. Gradually, lulled by the monotonous gurgle of the stream, and by the absolute darkness, I sank into an uneasy slumber.

How long this lasted I cannot say. It may have been for an hour, it may have been for several. Suddenly I sat up on my rock couch, with every nerve thrilling and every sense acutely on the alert. Beyond all doubt I had heard a sound — some sound very distinct from the gurgling of the waters. It had passed, but the reverberation of it still lingered in my ear. Was it a search party? They would most certainly have shouted, and vague as this sound was which had wakened me, it was very distinct from the human voice. I sat palpitating and hardly daring to breathe. There it was again! And again! Now it had become continuous. It was a tread — yes, surely it was the tread of some living creature. But what a tread it was! It gave one the impression of enormous weight carried upon sponge-like feet, which gave forth a muffled but ear-filling sound. The darkness was as complete as ever, but the tread was regular and decisive. And it was coming beyond all question in my direction.

My skin grew cold, and my hair stood on end as I listened to that steady and ponderous footfall. There was some creature there, and surely by the speed of its advance, it was one which could see in the dark. I crouched low on my rock and tried to blend myself into it. The steps grew nearer still, then stopped, and presently I was aware of a loud lapping and gurgling. The creature was drinking at the stream. Then again there was silence, broken by a succession of long sniffs and snorts of tremendous volume and energy. Had it caught the scent of me? My own nostrils were filled by a low fetid odour, mephitic and abominable. Then I heard the steps again. They were on my side of the stream now. The stones rattled within a few yards of where I lay. Hardly daring to breathe, I crouched upon my rock. Then the steps drew away. I heard the splash as it returned across the river, and the sound died away into the distance in the direction from which it had come.

For a long time I lay upon the rock, too much horrified to move. I thought of the sound which I had heard coming from the depths of the cave, of Armitage's fears, of the strange impression in the mud, and now came this final and absolute proof that there was indeed some inconceivable monster, something utterly unearthly and dreadful, which lurked in the hollow of the mountain. Of its nature or form I could frame no conception, save that it was both light-footed and gigantic. The combat between my reason, which told me that such things could not be, and my senses, which told me that they were, raged within me as I lay. Finally, I was almost ready to persuade myself that this experience had been part of some evil dream, and that my abnormal condition might have conjured up an hallucination. But there remained one final experience which removed the last possibility of doubt from my mind.

I had taken my matches from my armpit and felt them. They seemed perfectly hard and dry. Stooping down into a crevice of the rocks, I tried one of them. To my delight it took fire at once. I lit the candle, and, with a terrified backward glance into the obscure depths of the cavern, I hurried in the direction of the Roman passage. As I did so I passed the patch of mud on which I had seen the huge imprint. Now I stood astonished before it, for there were three similar imprints upon its surface, enormous in size, irregular in outline, of a depth which indicated the ponderous weight which had left them. Then a great terror surged over me. Stooping and shading my candle with my hand, I ran in a frenzy of fear to the rocky archway, hastened up it, and never stopped until, with weary feet and panting lungs, I rushed up the final slope of stones, broke through the tangle of briars, and flung myself exhausted upon the soft grass under the peaceful light of the stars. It was three in the morning when I reached the farm-house, and today

I am all unstrung and quivering after my terrific adventure. As yet I have told no one. I must move warily in the matter. What would the poor lonely women, or the uneducated yokels here think of it if I were to tell them my experience? Let me go to someone who can understand and advise.

April 25. — I was laid up in bed for two days after my incredible adventure in the cavern. I use the adjective with a very definite meaning, for I have had an experience since which has shocked me almost as much as the other. I have said that I was looking round for someone who could advise me. There is a Dr. Mark Johnson who practices some few miles away, to whom I had a note of recommendation from Professor Saunderson. To him I drove, when I was strong enough to get about, and I recounted to him my whole strange experience. He listened intently, and then carefully examined me, paying special attention to my reflexes and to the pupils of my eyes. When he had finished, he refused to discuss my adventure, saying that it was entirely beyond him, but he gave me the card of a Mr. Picton at Castleton, with the advice that I should instantly go to him and tell him the story exactly as I had done to himself. He was, according to my adviser, the very man who was pre-eminently suited to help me. I went on to the station, therefore, and made my way to the little town, which is some ten miles away. Mr. Picton appeared to be a man of importance, as his brass plate was displayed upon the door of a considerable building on the outskirts of the town. I was about to ring his bell, when some misgiving came into my mind, and, crossing to a neighbouring shop, I asked the man behind the counter if he could tell me anything of Mr. Picton. “Why,” said he, “he is the best mad doctor in Derbyshire, and yonder is his asylum.” You can imagine that it was not long before I had shaken the dust of Castleton from my feet and returned to the farm, cursing all unimaginative pedants who cannot conceive that there may be things in creation which have never yet chanced to come across their mole’s vision. After all, now that I am cooler, I can afford to admit that I have been no more sympathetic to Armitage than Dr. Johnson has been to me.

April 27. When I was a student I had the reputation of being a man of courage and enterprise. I remember that when there was a ghost-hunt at Coltbridge it was I who sat up in the haunted house. Is it advancing years (after all, I am only thirty-five), or is it this physical malady which has caused degeneration? Certainly my heart quails when I think of that horrible cavern in the hill, and the certainty that it has some monstrous occupant.

What shall I do? There is not an hour in the day that I do not debate the question. If I say nothing, then the mystery remains unsolved. If I do say anything, then I have the alternative of mad alarm over the whole countryside, or of absolute incredulity which may end in consigning me to an asylum. On the whole, I think that my best course is to wait, and to prepare for some expedition which shall be more deliberate and better thought out than the last. As a first step I have been to Castleton and obtained a few essentials — a large acetylene lantern for one thing, and a good double-barrelled sporting rifle for another. The latter I have hired, but I have bought a dozen heavy game cartridges, which would bring down a rhinoceros. Now I am ready for my troglodyte friend. Give me better health and a little spate of energy, and I shall try conclusions with him yet. But who and what is he? Ah! there is the question which stands between me and my sleep. How many theories do I form, only to discard each in turn! It is all so utterly unthinkable. And yet the cry, the footmark, the tread in the cavern — no reasoning can get past these. I think of the old-world legends of dragons and of other monsters. Were they, perhaps, not such fairy-tales as we have thought? Can it be that there is some fact which underlies them, and am I, of all mortals, the one who is chosen to expose it?

May 3. — For several days I have been laid up by the vagaries of an English spring, and during those days there have been developments, the true and sinister meaning of which no one can appreciate save myself. I may say that we have had cloudy and moonless nights of late, which according to my information were the seasons upon which sheep disappeared. Well, sheep *have* disappeared. Two of Miss Allerton’s, one of old Pearson’s of the Cat Walk, and one of Mrs. Moulton’s. Four in all during three nights. No trace is left of them at all, and the countryside is buzzing with rumours of gipsies and of sheep-stealers.

But there is something more serious than that. Young Armitage has disappeared also. He left his moorland cottage early on Wednesday night and has never been heard of since. He was an unattached man, so there is less sensation than would otherwise be the case. The popular explanation is that he owes money, and has found a situation in some other part of the country, whence he will presently write for his belongings. But I have grave misgivings. Is it not much more likely that the recent tragedy of the sheep has caused him to take some steps which may have ended in his own destruction? He may, for example, have lain in wait for the creature and been carried off by it into the recesses of the mountains. What an inconceivable fate for a civilised Englishman of the twentieth century! And yet I feel that it is possible and even probable. But in that case, how far am I answerable both for his death and for any other mishap which may occur? Surely with the knowledge I already possess it must be my duty to see that something is done, or if necessary to do it myself. It must be the latter, for this morning I went down to the local police-station and told my story. The inspector entered it all in a large book and bowed me out with commendable gravity, but I heard a burst of laughter before I had got down his garden path. No doubt he was recounting my adventure to his family.

June 10. — I am writing this, propped up in bed, six weeks after my last entry in this journal. I have gone through a terrible shock both to mind and body, arising from such an experience as has seldom befallen a human being before. But I have attained my end. The danger from the Terror which dwells in the Blue John Gap has passed never to return. Thus much at least I, a broken invalid, have done for the common good. Let me now recount what occurred as clearly as I may.

The night of Friday, May 3rd, was dark and cloudy — the very night for the monster to walk. About eleven o'clock I went from the farm-house with my lantern and my rifle, having first left a note upon the table of my bedroom in which I said that, if I were missing, search should be made for me in the direction of the Gap. I made my way to the mouth of the Roman shaft, and, having perched myself among the rocks close to the opening, I shut off my lantern and waited patiently with my loaded rifle ready to my hand.

It was a melancholy vigil. All down the winding valley I could see the scattered lights of the farm-houses, and the church clock of Chapel-le-Dale tolling the hours came faintly to my ears. These tokens of my fellow-men served only to make my own position seem the more lonely, and to call for a greater effort to overcome the terror which tempted me continually to get back to the farm, and abandon for ever this dangerous quest. And yet there lies deep in every man a rooted self-respect which makes it hard for him to turn back from that which he has once undertaken. This feeling of personal pride was my salvation now, and it was that alone which held me fast when every instinct of my nature was dragging me away. I am glad now that I had the strength. In spite of all that is has cost me, my manhood is at least above reproach.

Twelve o’clock struck in the distant church, then one, then two. It was the darkest hour of the night. The clouds were drifting low, and there was not a star in the sky. An owl was hooting somewhere among the rocks, but no other sound, save the gentle sough of the wind, came to my ears. And then suddenly I heard it! From far away down the tunnel came those muffled steps, so soft and yet so ponderous. I heard also the rattle of stones as they gave way under that giant tread. They drew nearer. They were close upon me. I heard the crashing of the bushes round the entrance, and then dimly through the darkness I was conscious of the loom of some enormous shape, some monstrous inchoate creature, passing swiftly and very silently out from the tunnel. I was paralysed with fear and amazement. Long as I had waited, now that it had actually come I was unprepared for the shock. I lay motionless and breathless, whilst the great dark mass whisked by me and was swallowed up in the night.

But now I nerved myself for its return. No sound came from the sleeping countryside to tell of the horror which was loose. In no way could I judge how far off it was, what it was doing, or when it might be back. But not a second time should my nerve fail me, not a second time should it pass unchallenged. I swore it between my clenched teeth as I laid my cocked rifle across the rock.

And yet it nearly happened. There was no warning of approach now as the creature passed over the grass. Suddenly, like a dark, drifting shadow, the huge bulk loomed up once more before me, making for the entrance of the cave. Again came that paralysis of volition which held my crooked forefinger impotent upon the trigger. But with a desperate effort I shook it off. Even as the brushwood rustled, and the monstrous beast blended with the shadow of the Gap, I fired at the retreating form. In the blaze of the gun I caught a glimpse of a great shaggy mass, something with rough and bristling hair of a withered grey colour, fading away to white in its lower parts, the huge body supported upon short, thick, curving legs. I had just that glance, and then I heard the rattle of the stones as the creature tore down into its burrow. In an instant, with a triumphant revulsion of feeling, I had cast my fears to the wind, and uncovering my powerful lantern, with my rifle in my hand, I sprang down from my rock and rushed after the monster down the old Roman shaft.

My splendid lamp cast a brilliant flood of vivid light in front of me, very different from the yellow glimmer which had aided me down the same passage only twelve days before. As I ran, I saw the great beast lurching along before me, its huge bulk filling up the whole space from wall to wall. Its hair looked like coarse faded oakum, and hung down in long, dense masses which swayed as it moved. It was like an enormous unclipped sheep in its fleece, but in size it was far larger than the largest elephant, and its breadth seemed to be nearly as great as its height. It fills me with amazement now to think that I should have dared to follow such a horror into the bowels of the earth, but when one's blood is up, and when one's quarry seems to be flying, the old primeval hunting-spirit awakes and prudence is cast to the wind. Rifle in hand, I ran at the top of my speed upon the trail of the monster.

I had seen that the creature was swift. Now I was to find out to my cost that it was also very cunning. I had imagined that it was in panic flight, and that I had only to pursue it. The idea that it might turn upon me never entered my excited brain. I have already explained that the passage down which I was racing opened into a great central cave. Into this I rushed, fearful lest I should lose all trace of the beast. But he had turned upon his own traces, and in a moment we were face to face.

That picture, seen in the brilliant white light of the lantern, is etched for ever upon my brain. He had reared up on his hind legs as a bear would do, and stood above me, enormous, menacing — such a creature as no nightmare had ever brought to my imagination. I have said that he reared like a bear, and there was something bear-like — if one could conceive a bear which was ten-fold the bulk of any bear seen upon earth — in his whole pose and attitude, in his great crooked forelegs with their ivory-white claws, in his rugged skin, and in his red, gaping mouth, fringed with monstrous fangs. Only in one point did he differ from the bear, or from any other creature which walks the earth, and even at that supreme moment a shudder of horror passed over me as I observed that the eyes which glistened in the glow of my lantern were huge, projecting bulbs, white and sightless. For a moment his great paws swung over my head. The next he fell forward upon me, I and my broken lantern crashed to the earth, and I remember no more.

When I came to myself I was back in the farm-house of the Allertons. Two days had passed since my terrible adventure in the Blue John Gap. It seems that I had lain all night in the cave insensible from concussion of the brain, with my left arm and two ribs badly fractured. In the morning my note had been found, a search party of a dozen farmers assembled, and I had been tracked down and carried back to my bedroom, where I had lain in high delirium ever since. There was, it seems, no sign of the creature, and no bloodstain which would show that my bullet had found him as he passed. Save for my own plight and the marks upon the mud, there was nothing to prove that what I said was true.

Six weeks have now elapsed, and I am able to sit out once more in the sunshine. Just opposite me is the steep hillside, grey with shaly rock, and yonder on its flank is the dark cleft which marks the opening of the Blue John Gap. But it is no longer a source of terror. Never again through that ill-omened tunnel shall any strange shape flit out into the world of men. The educated and the scientific, the Dr. Johnsons and the like, may smile at my narrative, but the poorer folk of the countryside had never a doubt as to its truth. On the day after my recovering consciousness they assembled in their hundreds round the Blue John Gap. As the *Castleton Courier* said:

"It was useless for our correspondent, or for any of the adventurous gentlemen who had come from Matlock, Buxton, and other parts, to offer to descend, to explore the cave to the end, and to finally test the extraordinary narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle. The country people had taken the matter into their own hands, and from an early hour of the morning they had worked hard in stopping up the entrance of the tunnel. There is a sharp slope where the shaft begins, and great boulders, rolled along by many willing hands, were thrust down it until the Gap was absolutely sealed. So ends the episode which has caused such excitement throughout the country. Local opinion is fiercely divided upon the subject. On the one hand are those who point to Dr. Hardcastle's impaired health, and to the possibility of cerebral lesions of tubercular origin giving rise to strange hallucinations. Some *idee fixe*, according to these gentlemen, caused the doctor to wander down the tunnel, and a fall among the rocks was sufficient to account for his injuries. On the other hand, a legend of a strange creature in the Gap has existed for some months back, and the farmers look upon Dr. Hardcastle's narrative and his personal injuries as a final corroboration. So the matter stands, and so the matter will continue to stand, for no definite solution seems to us to be now possible. It transcends human wit to give any scientific explanation which could cover the alleged facts."

Perhaps before the *Courier* published these words they would have been wise to send their representative to me. I have thought the matter out, as no one else has occasion to do, and it is possible that I might have removed some of the more obvious difficulties of the narrative and brought it one degree nearer to scientific acceptance. Let me then write down the only explanation which seems to me to elucidate what I know to my cost to have been a series of facts. My theory may seem to be wildly improbable, but at least no one can venture to say that it is impossible.

My view is — and it was formed, as is shown by my diary, before my personal adventure — that in this part of England there is a vast subterranean lake or sea, which is fed by the great number of streams which pass down through the limestone. Where there is a large collection of water there must also be some evaporation, mists or rain, and a possibility of vegetation. This in turn suggests that there may be animal life, arising, as the vegetable life would also do, from those seeds and types which had been introduced at an early period of the world's history, when communication with the outer air was more easy. This place had then developed a fauna and flora of its own, including such monsters as the one which I had seen, which may well have been the old cave-bear, enormously enlarged and modified by its new environment. For countless aeons the internal and the external creation had kept apart, growing steadily away from each other. Then there had come some rift in the depths of the mountain which had enabled one creature to wander up and, by means of the Roman tunnel, to reach the open air. Like all subterranean life, it had lost the power of sight, but this had no doubt been compensated for by nature in other directions. Certainly it had some means of finding its way about, and of hunting down the sheep upon the hillside. As to its choice of dark nights, it is part of my theory that light was painful to those great white eyeballs, and that it was only a pitch-black world which it could tolerate. Perhaps, indeed, it was the glare of my lantern which saved my life at that awful moment when we were face to face. So I read the riddle. I leave these facts behind me, and if you can explain them, do so; or if you choose to doubt them, do so. Neither your belief nor your incredulity can alter them, nor affect one whose task is nearly over.

So ended the strange narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle.

DANGER! AND OTHER STORIES

This is a 1918 collection of short stories. The collection's title story, "Danger!", was written eighteen months before the outbreak of World War I. First published in the *Strand Magazine* in July 1914, it was based on an imaginary country in Europe fighting Britain and intended to direct public attention to the great danger (submarines) which threatened the country. The story describes how Britain is in need of getting up to date in its naval preparations. A small country in Europe (Norland) has been fighting England, and is now invaded by an English army. However the small country has a naval flotilla of submarines under Captain John Sirius. Sirius uses his submarines to lay a naval blockade around the British Isles, so that no supplies can be landed. The result is that the British start suffering famine. However some of the submarines are sunk. The British are congratulating themselves, when Sirius, waiting outside of Liverpool, purposely torpedoes a large White Star liner. The British end up surrendering. At the time there were plenty of popular writings about England facing Germany in an upcoming war. The best remembered are The Riddle of the Sands by Erskine Childers, and When William Came by "Saki". Doyle's story is another example of this genre of invasion literature. Ironically, its conclusion was to mirror the fate of the Cunard liner Lusitania two years later.

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PREFACE

The Title story of this volume was written about eighteen months before the outbreak of the war, and was intended to direct public attention to the great danger which threatened this country. It is a matter of history how fully this warning has been justified and how, even down to the smallest details, the prediction has been fulfilled. The writer must, however, most thankfully admit that what he did not foresee was the energy and ingenuity with which the navy has found means to meet the new conditions. The great silent battle which has been fought beneath the waves has ended in the repulse of an armada far more dangerous than that of Spain.

It may be objected that the writer, feeling the danger so strongly, should have taken other means than fiction to put his views before the authorities. The answer to this criticism is that he did indeed adopt every possible method, that he personally approached leading naval men and powerful editors, that he sent three separate minutes upon the danger to various public bodies, notably to the Committee p. vifor National Defence, and that he touched upon the matter in an article in *The Fortnightly Review*. In some unfortunate way subjects of national welfare are in this country continually subordinated to party politics, so that a self-evident proposition, such as the danger of a nation being fed from without, is waved aside and ignored, because it will not fit in with some general political shibboleth. It is against this tendency that we have to guard in the future, and we have to bear in mind that the danger may recur, and that the remedies in the text (the only remedies ever proposed) have still to be adopted. They are the sufficient encouragement of agriculture, the making of adequate Channel tunnels, and the provision of submarine merchantmen, which, on the estimate of Mr. Lake, the American designer, could be made up to 7,000 ton burden at an increased cost of about 25 per cent. It is true that in this war the Channel tunnels would not have helped us much in the matter of food, but were France a neutral and supplies at liberty to come via Marseilles from the East, the difference would have been enormous.

Apart from food however, when one considers the transports we have needed, their convoys, the double handling of cargo, the interruptions of traffic from submarines or bad weather, the danger and suffering of the wounded, and all p. viielse that we owe to the insane opposition to the

Channel tunnels, one questions whether there has ever been an example of national stupidity being so rapidly and heavily punished. It is as clear as daylight even now, that it will take years to recover all our men and material from France, and that if the tunnel (one will suffice for the time), were at once set in hand, it might be ready to help in this task and so free shipping for the return of the Americans. One thing however, is clear. It is far too big and responsible and lucrative an undertaking for a private company, and it should be carried out and controlled by Government, the proceeds being used towards the war debt.

Arthur Conan Doyle.

August 24*th*,
Crowborough.

DANGER! BEING THE LOG OF CAPTAIN JOHN SIRIUS

It is an amazing thing that the English, who have the reputation of being a practical nation, never saw the danger to which they were exposed. For many years they had been spending nearly a hundred millions a year upon their army and their fleet. Squadrons of Dreadnoughts costing two millions each had been launched. They had spent enormous sums upon cruisers, and both their torpedo and their submarine squadrons were exceptionally strong. They were also by no means weak in their aerial power, especially in the matter of seaplanes. Besides all this, their army was very efficient, in spite of its limited numbers, and it was the most expensive in Europe. Yet when the day of trial came, all this imposing force was of no use whatever, and might as well have not existed. Their ruin could not have been more complete or more rapid if they had not possessed an ironclad or a regiment. And all this was accomplished by me, Captain John Sirius, belonging to the navy of one of the smallest Powers in Europe, and having under my command a flotilla of eight vessels, the collective cost of which was eighteen hundred thousand pounds. No one has a better right to tell the story than I.

I will not trouble you about the dispute concerning the Colonial frontier, embittered, as it was, by the subsequent death of the two missionaries. A naval officer has nothing to do with politics. I only came upon the scene after the ultimatum had been actually received. Admiral Horli had been summoned to the Presence, and he asked that I should be allowed to accompany him, because he happened to know that I had some clear ideas as to the weak points of England, and also some schemes as to how to take advantage of them. There were only four of us present at this meeting — the King, the Foreign Secretary, Admiral Horli, and myself. The time allowed by the ultimatum expired in forty-eight hours.

I am not breaking any confidence when I say that both the King and the Minister were in favour of a surrender. They saw no possibility of standing up against the colossal power of Great Britain. The Minister had drawn up an acceptance of the British terms, and the King sat with it before him on the table. I saw the tears of anger and humiliation run down his cheeks as he looked at it.

"I fear that there is no possible alternative, Sire," said the Minister. "Our envoy in London has just sent this report, which shows that the public and the Press are more united than he has ever known them. The feeling is intense, especially since the rash act of Malort in desecrating the flag. We must give way."

The King looked sadly at Admiral Horli.

"What is your effective fleet, Admiral?" he asked.

"Two battleships, four cruisers, twenty torpedo-boats, and eight submarines," said the Admiral.

The King shook his head.

"It would be madness to resist," said he.

"And yet, Sire," said the Admiral, "before you come to a decision I should wish you to hear Captain Sirius, who has a very definite plan of campaign against the English."

"Absurd!" said the King, impatiently. "What is the use? Do you imagine that you could defeat their vast armada?"

"Sire," I answered, "I will stake my life that if you will follow my advice you will, within a month or six weeks at the utmost, bring proud England to her knees."

There was an assurance in my voice which arrested the attention of the King.

"You seem self-confident, Captain Sirius."

"I have no doubt at all, Sire."

"What then would you advise?"

"I would advise, Sire, that the whole fleet be gathered under the forts of Blankenberg and be protected from attack by booms and piles. There they can stay till the war is over. The eight submarines, however, you will leave in my charge to use as I think fit."

"Ah, you would attack the English battleships with submarines?"

"Sire, I would never go near an English battleship."

"And why not?"

"Because they might injure me, Sire."

"What, a sailor and afraid?"

"My life belongs to the country, Sire. It is nothing. But these eight ships — everything depends upon them. I could not risk them. Nothing would induce me to fight."

"Then what will you do?"

“I will tell you, Sire.” And I did so. For half an hour I spoke. I was clear and strong and definite, for many an hour on a lonely watch I had spent in thinking out every detail. I held them enthralled. The King never took his eyes from my face. The Minister sat as if turned to stone.

“Are you sure of all this?”

“Perfectly, Sire.”

The King rose from the table.

“Send no answer to the ultimatum,” said he. “Announce in both houses that we stand firm in the face of menace. Admiral Horli, you will in all respects carry out that which Captain Sirius may demand in furtherance of his plan. Captain Sirius, the field is clear. Go forth and do as you have said. A grateful King will know how to reward you.”

I need not trouble you by telling you the measures which were taken at Blankenberg, since, as you are aware, the fortress and the entire fleet were destroyed by the British within a week of the declaration of war. I will confine myself to my own plans, which had so glorious and final a result.

The fame of my eight submarines, *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gamma*, *Theta*, *Delta*, *Epsilon*, *Iota*, and *Kappa*, have spread through the world to such an extent that people have begun to think that there was something peculiar in their form and capabilities. This is not so. Four of them, the *Delta*, *Epsilon*, *Iota*, and *Kappa*, were, it is true, of the very latest model, but had their equals (though not their superiors) in the navies of all the great Powers. As to *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gamma*, and *Theta*, they were by no means modern vessels, and found their prototypes in the old F class of British boats, having a submerged displacement of eight hundred tons, with heavy oil engines of sixteen hundred horse-power, giving them a speed of eighteen knots on the surface and of twelve knots submerged. Their length was one hundred and eighty-six and their breadth twenty-four feet. They had a radius of action of four thousand miles and a submerged endurance of nine hours. These were considered the latest word in 1915, but the four new boats exceeded them in all respects. Without troubling you with precise figures, I may say that they represented roughly a twenty-five per cent. advance up on the older boats, and were fitted with several auxiliary engines which were wanting in the others. At my suggestion, instead of carrying eight of the very large Bakdorf torpedoes, which are nineteen feet long, weigh half a ton, and are charged with two hundred pounds of wet gun-cotton, we had tubes designed for eighteen of less than half the size. It was my design to make myself independent of my base.

And yet it was clear that I must have a base, so I made arrangements at once with that object. Blankenberg was the last place I would have chosen. Why should I have a *port* of any kind? Ports would be watched or occupied. Any place would do for me. I finally chose a small villa standing alone nearly five miles from any village and thirty miles from any port. To this I ordered them to convey, secretly by night, oil, spare parts, extra torpedoes, storage batteries, reserve periscopes, and everything that I could need for refitting. The little whitewashed villa of a retired confectioner — that was the base from which I operated against England.

The boats lay at Blankenberg, and thither I went. They were working frantically at the defences, and they had only to look seawards to be spurred to fresh exertions. The British fleet was assembling. The ultimatum had not yet expired, but it was evident that a blow would be struck the instant that it did. Four of their aeroplanes, circling at an immense height, were surveying our defences. From the top of the lighthouse I counted thirty battleships and cruisers in the offing, with a number of the trawlers with which in the British service they break through the mine-fields. The approaches were actually sown with two hundred mines, half contact and half observation, but the result showed that they were insufficient to hold off the enemy, since three days later both town and fleet were speedily destroyed.

However, I am not here to tell you the incidents of the war, but to explain my own part in it, which had such a decisive effect upon the result. My first action was to send my four second-class boats away instantly to the point which I had chosen for my base. There they were to wait submerged, lying with negative buoyancy upon the sands in twenty foot of water, and rising only at night. My strict orders were that they were to attempt nothing upon the enemy, however tempting the opportunity. All they had to do was to remain intact and unseen, until they received further orders. Having made this clear to Commander Panza, who had charge of this reserve flotilla, I shook him by the hand and bade him farewell, leaving with him a sheet of notepaper upon which I had explained the tactics to be used and given him certain general principles which he could apply as circumstances demanded.

My whole attention was now given to my own flotilla, which I divided into two divisions, keeping *Iota* and *Kappa* under my own command, while Captain Miriam had *Delta* and *Epsilon*. He was to operate separately in the British Channel, while my station was the Straits of Dover. I made the whole plan of campaign clear to him. Then I saw that each ship was provided with all it could carry. Each had forty tons of heavy oil for surface propulsion and charging the dynamo which supplied the electric engines under water. Each had also eighteen torpedoes as explained and five hundred rounds for the collapsible quick-firing twelve-pounder which we carried on deck, and which, of course, disappeared into a water-tight tank when we were submerged. We carried spare periscopes and a wireless mast, which could be elevated above the conning-tower when necessary. There were provisions for sixteen days for the ten men who manned each craft. Such was the equipment of the four boats which were destined to bring to naught all the navies and armies of Britain. At sundown that day — it was April 10th — we set forth upon our historic voyage.

Miriam had got away in the afternoon, since he had so much farther to go to reach his station. Stephan, of the *Kappa*, started with me; but, of course, we realised that we must work independently, and that from that moment when we shut the sliding hatches of our conning-towers on the still waters of Blankenberg Harbour it was unlikely that we should ever see each other again, though consorts in the same waters. I waved to Stephan from the side of my conning-tower, and he to me. Then I called through the tube to my engineer (our water-tanks were already filled and all kingstons and vents closed) to put her full speed ahead.

Just as we came abreast of the end of the pier and saw the white-capped waves rolling in upon us, I put the horizontal rudder hard down and she slid under water. Through my glass portholes I saw its light green change to a dark blue, while the manometer in front of me indicated twenty feet. I let her go to forty, because I should then be under the warships of the English, though I took the chance of fouling the moorings of our own floating contact mines. Then I brought her on an even keel, and it was music to my ear to hear the gentle, even ticking of my electric engines and to know that I was speeding at twelve miles an hour on my great task.

At that moment, as I stood controlling my levers in my tower, I could have seen, had my cupola been of glass, the vast shadows of the British blockaders hovering above me. I held my course due westward for ninety minutes, and then, by shutting off the electric engine without blowing out the water-tanks, I brought her to the surface. There was a rolling sea and the wind was freshening, so I did not think it safe to keep my hatch open long, for so small is the margin of buoyancy that one must run no risks. But from the crests of the rollers I had a look backwards at Blankenberg, and saw the black funnels and upper works of the enemy's fleet with the lighthouse and the castle behind them, all flushed with the pink glow of the setting sun. Even as I looked there was the boom of a great gun, and then another. I glanced at my watch. It was six o'clock. The time of the ultimatum had expired. We were at war.

There was no craft near us, and our surface speed is nearly twice that of our submerged, so I blew out the tanks and our whale-back came over the surface. All night we were steering south-west, making an average of eighteen knots. At about five in the morning, as I stood alone upon my tiny bridge, I saw, low down in the west, the scattered lights of the Norfolk coast. "Ah, Johnny, Johnny Bull," I said, as I looked at them, "you are going to have your lesson, and I am to be your master. It is I who have been chosen to teach you that one cannot live under artificial conditions and yet act as if they were natural ones. More foresight, Johnny, and less party politics — that is my lesson to you." And then I had a wave of pity, too, when I thought of those vast droves of helpless people, Yorkshire miners, Lancashire spinners, Birmingham metal-workers, the dockers and workers of London, over whose little homes I would bring the shadow of starvation. I seemed to see all those wasted eager hands held out for food, and I, John Sirius, dashing it aside. Ah, well! war is war, and if one is foolish one must pay the price.

Just before daybreak I saw the lights of a considerable town, which must have been Yarmouth, bearing about ten miles west-south-west on our starboard bow. I took her farther out, for it is a sandy, dangerous coast, with many shoals. At five-thirty we were abreast of the Lowestoft lightship. A coastguard was sending up flash signals which faded into a pale twinkle as the white dawn crept over the water. There was a good deal of shipping about, mostly fishing-boats and small coasting craft, with one large steamer hull-down to the west, and a torpedo destroyer between us and the land. It could not harm us, and yet I thought it as well that there should be no word of our presence, so I filled my tanks again and went down to ten feet. I was pleased to find that we got under in one hundred and fifty seconds. The life of one’s boat may depend on this when a swift craft comes suddenly upon you.

We were now within a few hours of our cruising ground, so I determined to snatch a rest, leaving Vornal in charge. When he woke me at ten o’clock we were running on the surface, and had reached the Essex coast off the Maplin Sands. With that charming frankness which is one of their characteristics, our friends of England had informed us by their Press that they had put a cordon of torpedo-boats across the Straits of Dover to prevent the passage of submarines, which is about as sensible as to lay a wooden plank across a stream to keep the eels from passing. I knew that Stephan, whose station lay at the western end of the Solent, would have no difficulty in reaching it. My own cruising ground was to be at the mouth of the Thames, and here I was at the very spot with my tiny *Iota*, my eighteen torpedoes, my quick-firing gun, and, above all, a brain that knew what should be done and how to do it.

When I resumed my place in the conning-tower I saw in the periscope (for we had dived) that a lightship was within a few hundred yards of us upon the port bow. Two men were sitting on her bulwarks, but neither of them cast an eye upon the little rod that clove the water so close to them. It was an ideal day for submarine action, with enough ripple upon the surface to make us difficult to detect, and yet smooth enough to give me a clear view. Each of my three periscopes had an angle of sixty degrees so that between them I commanded a complete semi-circle of the horizon. Two British cruisers were steaming north from the Thames within half a mile of me. I could easily have cut them off and attacked them had I allowed myself to be diverted from my great plan. Farther south a destroyer was passing westwards to Sheerness. A dozen small steamers were moving about. None of these were worthy of my notice. Great countries are not provisioned by small steamers. I kept the engines running at the lowest pace which would hold our position under water, and, moving slowly across the estuary, I waited for what must assuredly come.

I had not long to wait. Shortly after one o’clock I perceived in the periscope a cloud of smoke to the south. Half an hour later a large steamer raised her hull, making for the mouth of the Thames. I ordered Vornal to stand by the starboard torpedo-tube, having the other also loaded in case of a miss. Then I advanced slowly, for though the steamer was going very swiftly we could easily cut her off. Presently I laid the *Iota* in a position near which she must pass, and would very gladly have lain to, but could not for fear of rising to the surface. I therefore steered out in the direction from which she was coming. She was a very large ship, fifteen thousand tons at the least, painted black above and red below, with two cream-coloured funnels. She lay so low in the water that it was clear she had a full cargo. At her bows were a cluster of men, some of them looking, I dare say, for the first time at the mother country. How little could they have guessed the welcome that was awaiting them!

On she came with the great plumes of smoke floating from her funnels, and two white waves foaming from her cut-water. She was within a quarter of a mile. My moment had arrived. I signalled full speed ahead and steered straight for her course. My timing was exact. At a hundred yards I gave the signal, and heard the clank and swish of the discharge. At the same instant I put the helm hard down and flew off at an angle. There was a terrific lurch, which came from the distant explosion. For a moment we were almost upon our side. Then, after staggering and trembling, the *Iota* came on an even keel. I stopped the engines, brought her to the surface, and opened the conning-tower, while all my excited crew came crowding to the hatch to know what had happened.

The ship lay within two hundred yards of us, and it was easy to see that she had her death-blow. She was already settling down by the stern. There was a sound of shouting and people were running wildly about her decks. Her name was visible, the *Adela*, of London, bound, as we afterwards learned, from New Zealand with frozen mutton. Strange as it may seem to you, the notion of a submarine had never even now occurred to her people, and all were convinced that they had struck a floating mine. The starboard quarter had been blown in by the explosion, and the ship was sinking rapidly. Their discipline was admirable. We saw boat after boat slip down crowded with people as swiftly and quietly as if it were part of their daily drill. And suddenly, as one of the boats lay off waiting for the others, they caught a glimpse for the first time of my conning-tower so close to them. I saw them shouting and pointing, while the men in the other boats got up to have a better look at us. For my part, I cared nothing, for I took it for granted that they already knew that a submarine had destroyed them. One of them clambered back into the sinking ship. I was sure that he was about to send a wireless message as to our presence. It mattered nothing, since, in any case, it must be known; otherwise I could easily have brought him down with a rifle. As it was, I waved my hand to them, and they waved back to me. War is too big a thing to leave room for personal ill-feeling, but it must be remorseless all the same.

I was still looking at the sinking *Adela* when Vornal, who was beside me, gave a sudden cry of warning and surprise, gripping me by the shoulder and turning my head. There behind us, coming up the fairway, was a huge black vessel with black funnels, flying the well-known house-flag of the P. and O. Company. She was not a mile distant, and I calculated in an instant that even if she had seen us she would not have time to turn and get away before we could reach her. We went straight for her, therefore, keeping awash just as we were. They saw the sinking vessel in front of them and that little dark speck moving over the surface, and they suddenly understood their danger. I saw a number of men rush to the bows, and there was a rattle of rifle-fire. Two bullets were flattened upon our four-inch armour. You might as well try to stop a charging bull with paper pellets as the *Iota* with rifle-fire. I had learned my lesson from the *Adela*, and this time I had the torpedo discharged at a safer distance — two hundred and fifty yards. We caught her amidships and the explosion was tremendous, but we were well outside its area. She sank almost instantaneously. I am sorry for her people, of whom I hear that more than two hundred, including seventy Lascars and forty passengers, were drowned. Yes, I am sorry for them. But when I think of the huge floating granary that went to the bottom, I rejoice as a man does who has carried out that which he plans.

It was a bad afternoon that for the P. and O. Company. The second ship which we destroyed was, as we have since learned, the *Moldavia*, of fifteen thousand tons, one of their finest vessels; but about half-past three we blew up the *Cusco*, of eight thousand, of the same line, also from Eastern ports, and laden with corn. Why she came on in face of the wireless messages which must have warned her of danger, I cannot imagine. The other two steamers which we blew up that day, the *Maid of Athens* (Robson Line) and the *Cormorant*, were neither of them provided with apparatus, and came blindly to their destruction. Both were small boats of from five thousand to seven thousand tons. In the case of the second, I had to rise to the surface and fire six twelve-pound shells under her water-line before she would sink. In each case the crew took to the boats, and so far as I know no casualties occurred.

After that no more steamers came along, nor did I expect them. Warnings must by this time have been flying in all directions. But we had no reason to be dissatisfied with our first day. Between the Maplin Sands and the Nore we had sunk five ships of a total tonnage of about fifty thousand tons. Already the London markets would begin to feel the pinch. And Lloyd's — poor old Lloyd's — what a demented state it would be in! I could imagine the London evening papers and the howling in Fleet Street. We saw the result of our actions, for it was quite laughable to see the torpedo-boats buzzing like angry wasps out of Sheerness in the evening. They were darting in every direction across the estuary, and the aeroplanes and hydroplanes were like flights of crows, black dots against the red western sky. They quartered the whole river mouth, until they discovered us at last. Some sharp-sighted fellow with a telescope on board of a destroyer got a sight of our periscope, and came for us full speed. No doubt he would very gladly have rammed us, even if it had meant his own destruction, but that was not part of our programme at all. I sank her and ran her east-south-east with an occasional rise. Finally we brought her to, not very far from the Kentish coast, and the search-lights of our pursuers were far on the western skyline. There we lay quietly all night, for a submarine at night is nothing more than a very third-rate surface torpedo-boat. Besides, we were all weary and needed rest. Do not forget, you captains of men, when you grease and trim your pumps and compressors and rotators, that the human machine needs some tending also.

I had put up the wireless mast above the conning-tower, and had no difficulty in calling up Captain Stephan. He was lying, he said, off Ventnor and had been unable to reach his station, on account of engine trouble, which he had now set right. Next morning he proposed to block the Southampton approach. He had destroyed one large Indian boat on his way down Channel. We exchanged good wishes. Like myself, he needed rest. I was up at four in the morning, however, and called all hands to overhaul the boat. She was somewhat up by the head, owing to the forward torpedoes having been used, so we trimmed her by opening the forward compensating tank, admitting as much water as the torpedoes had weighed. We also overhauled the starboard air-compressor and one of the periscope motors which had been jarred by the shock of the first explosion. We had hardly got ourselves shipshape when the morning dawned.

I have no doubt that a good many ships which had taken refuge in the French ports at the first alarm had run across and got safely up the river in the night. Of course I could have attacked them, but I do not care to take risks — and there are always risks for a submarine at night. But one had miscalculated his time, and there she was, just abreast of Warden Point, when the daylight disclosed her to us. In an instant we were after her. It was a near thing, for she was a flier, and could do two miles to our one; but we just reached her as she went swashing by. She saw us at the last moment, for I attacked her awash, since otherwise we could not have had the pace to reach her. She swung away and the first torpedo missed, but the second took her full under the counter. Heavens, what a smash! The whole stern seemed to go aloft. I drew off and watched her sink. She went down in seven minutes, leaving her masts and funnels over the water and a cluster of her people holding on to them. She was the *Virginia*, of the Bibby Line — twelve thousand tons — and laden, like the others, with foodstuffs from the East. The whole surface of the sea was covered with the floating grain. "John Bull will have to take up a hole or two of his belt if this goes on," said Vornal, as we watched the scene.

And it was at that moment that the very worst danger occurred that could befall us. I tremble now when I think how our glorious voyage might have been nipped in the bud. I had freed the hatch of my tower, and was looking at the boats of the *Virginia* with Vornal near me, when there was a swish and a terrific splash in the water beside us, which covered us both with spray. We looked up, and you can imagine our feelings when we saw an aeroplane hovering a few hundred feet above us like a hawk. With its silencer, it was perfectly noiseless, and had its bomb not fallen into the sea we should never have known what had destroyed us. She was circling round in the hope of dropping a second one, but we shoved on all speed ahead, crammed down the rudders, and vanished into the side of a roller. I kept the deflection indicator falling until I had put fifty good feet of water between the aeroplane and ourselves, for I knew well how deeply they can see under the surface. However, we soon threw her off our track, and when we came to the surface near Margate there was no sign of her, unless she was one of several which we saw hovering over Herne Bay.

There was not a ship in the offing save a few small coasters and little thousand-ton steamers, which were beneath my notice. For several hours I lay submerged with a blank periscope. Then I had an inspiration. Orders had been marconied to every foodship to lie in French waters and dash across after dark. I was as sure of it as if they had been recorded in our own receiver. Well, if they were there, that was where I should be also. I blew out the tanks and rose, for there was no sign of any warship near. They had some good system of signalling from the shore, however, for I had not got to the North Foreland before three destroyers came foaming after me, all converging from different directions. They had about as good a chance of catching me as three spaniels would have of overtaking a porpoise. Out of pure bravado — I know it was very wrong — I waited until they were actually within gunshot. Then I sank and we saw each other no more.

It is, as I have said, a shallow sandy coast, and submarine navigation is very difficult. The worst mishap that can befall a boat is to bury its nose in the side of a sand-drift and be held there. Such an accident might have been the end of our boat, though with our Fleuss cylinders and electric lamps we should have found no difficulty in getting out at the air-lock and in walking ashore across the bed of the ocean. As it was, however, I was able, thanks to our excellent charts, to keep the channel and so to gain the open straits. There we rose about midday, but, observing a hydroplane at no great distance, we sank again for half an hour. When we came up for the second time, all was peaceful around us, and the English coast was lining the whole western horizon. We kept outside the Goodwins and straight down Channel until we saw a line of black dots in front of us, which I knew to be the Dover-Calais torpedo-boat cordon. When two miles distant we dived and came up again seven miles to the south-west, without one of them dreaming that we had been within thirty feet of their keels.

When we rose, a large steamer flying the German flag was within half a mile of us. It was the North German Lloyd *Altona*, from New York to Bremen. I raised our whole hull and dipped our flag to her. It was amusing to see the amazement of her people at what they must have regarded as our unparalleled impudence in those English-swept waters. They cheered us heartily, and the tricolour flag was dipped in greeting as they went roaring past us. Then I stood in to the French coast.

It was exactly as I had expected. There were three great British steamers lying at anchor in Boulogne outer harbour. They were the *Cæsar*, the *King of the East*, and the *Pathfinder*, none less than ten thousand tons. I suppose they thought they were safe in French waters, but what did I care about three-mile limits and international law! The view of my Government was that England was blockaded, food contraband, and vessels carrying it to be destroyed. The lawyers could argue about it afterwards. My business was to starve the enemy any way I could. Within an hour the three ships were under the waves and the *Iota* was streaming down the Picardy coast, looking for fresh victims. The Channel was covered with English torpedo-boats buzzing and whirling like a cloud of midges. How they thought they could hurt me I cannot imagine, unless by accident I were to come up underneath one of them. More dangerous were the aeroplanes which circled here and there.

The water being calm, I had several times to descend as deep as a hundred feet before I was sure that I was out of their sight. After I had blown up the three ships at Boulogne I saw two aeroplanes flying down Channel, and I knew that they would head off any vessels which were coming up. There was one very large white steamer lying off Havre, but she steamed west before I could reach her. I dare say Stephan or one of the others would get her before long. But those infernal aeroplanes spoiled our sport for that day. Not another steamer did I see, save the never-ending torpedo-boats. I consoled myself with the reflection, however, that no food was passing me on its way to London. That was what I was there for, after all. If I could do it without spending my torpedoes, all the better. Up to date I had fired ten of them and sunk nine steamers, so I had not wasted my weapons. That night I came back to the Kent coast and lay upon the bottom in shallow water near Dungeness.

We were all trimmed and ready at the first break of day, for I expected to catch some ships which had tried to make the Thames in the darkness and had miscalculated their time. Sure enough, there was a great steamer coming up Channel and flying the American flag. It was all the same to me what flag she flew so long as she was engaged in conveying contraband of war to the British Isles. There were no torpedo-boats about at the moment, so I ran out on the surface and fired a shot across her bows. She seemed inclined to go on so I put a second one just above her water-line on her port bow. She stopped then and a very angry man began to gesticulate from the bridge. I ran the *Iota* almost alongside.

“Are you the captain?” I asked.

“What the—” I won’t attempt to reproduce his language.

“You have food-stuffs on board?” I said.

“It’s an American ship, you blind beetle!” he cried. “Can’t you see the flag? It’s the *Vermondia*, of Boston.”

“Sorry, Captain,” I answered. “I have really no time for words. Those shots of mine will bring the torpedo-boats, and I dare say at this very moment your wireless is making trouble for me. Get your people into the boats.”

I had to show him I was not bluffing, so I drew off and began putting shells into him just on the water-line. When I had knocked six holes in it he was very busy on his boats. I fired twenty shots altogether, and no torpedo was needed, for she was lying over with a terrible list to port, and presently came right on to her side. There she lay for two or three minutes before she foundered. There were eight boats crammed with people lying round her when she went down. I believe everybody was saved, but I could not wait to inquire. From all quarters the poor old panting, useless war-vessels were hurrying. I filled my tanks, ran her bows under, and came up fifteen miles to the south. Of course, I knew there would be a big row afterwards — as there was — but that did not help the starving crowds round the London bakers, who only saved their skins, poor devils, by explaining to the mob that they had nothing to bake.

By this time I was becoming rather anxious, as you can imagine, to know what was going on in the world and what England was thinking about it all. I ran alongside a fishing-boat, therefore, and ordered them to give up their papers. Unfortunately they had none, except a rag of an evening paper, which was full of nothing but betting news. In a second attempt I came alongside a small yachting party from Eastbourne, who were frightened to death at our sudden appearance out of the depths. From them we were lucky enough to get the London *Courier* of that very morning.

It was interesting reading — so interesting that I had to announce it all to the crew. Of course, you know the British style of headline, which gives you all the news at a glance. It seemed to me that the whole paper was headlines, it was in such a state of excitement. Hardly a word about me and my flotilla. We were on the second page. The first one began something like this: —

CAPTURE OF BLANKENBERG!

* * * * *

destruction of enemy’s fleet

* * * * *

burning of town

* * * * *

trawlers destroy mine field
loss of two battleships

* * * * *

is it the end?

Of course, what I had foreseen had occurred. The town was actually occupied by the British. And they thought it was the end! We would see about that.

On the round-the-corner page, at the back of the glorious resonant leaders, there was a little column which read like this: —

HOSTILE SUBMARINES

Several of the enemy's submarines are at sea, and have inflicted some appreciable damage upon our merchant ships. The danger-spots upon Monday and the greater part of Tuesday appear to have been the mouth of the Thames and the western entrance to the Solent. On Monday, between the Nore and Margate, there were sunk five large steamers, the *Adela*, *Moldavia*, *Cusco*, *Cormorant*, and *Maid of Athens*, particulars of which will be found below. Near Ventnor, on the same day, was sunk the *Verulam*, from Bombay. On Tuesday the *Virginia*, *Cæsar*, *King of the East*, and *Pathfinder* were destroyed between the Foreland and Boulogne. The latter three were actually lying in French waters, and the most energetic representations have been made by the Government of the Republic. On the same day *The Queen of Sheba*, *Orontes*, *Diana*, and *Atalanta* were destroyed near the Needles. Wireless messages have stopped all ingoing cargo-ships from coming up Channel, but unfortunately there is evidence that at least two of the enemy's submarines are in the West. Four cattle-ships from Dublin to Liverpool were sunk yesterday evening, while three Bristol-bound steamers, *The Hilda*, *Mercury*, and *Maria Toser*, were blown up in the neighbourhood of Lundy Island. Commerce has, so far as possible, been diverted into safer channels, but in the meantime, however vexatious these incidents may be, and however grievous the loss both to the owners and to Lloyd's, we may console ourselves by the reflection that since a submarine cannot keep the sea for more than ten days without refitting, and since the base has been captured, there must come a speedy term to these depredations."

So much for the *Courier's* account of our proceedings. Another small paragraph was, however, more eloquent: —

"The price of wheat, which stood at thirty-five shillings a week before the declaration of war, was quoted yesterday on the Baltic at fifty-two. Maize has gone from twenty-one to thirty-seven, barley from nineteen to thirty-five, sugar (foreign granulated) from eleven shillings and threepence to nineteen shillings and sixpence."

"Good, my lads!" said I, when I read it to the crew. "I can assure you that those few lines will prove to mean more than the whole page about the Fall of Blankenberg. Now let us get down Channel and send those prices up a little higher."

All traffic had stopped for London — not so bad for the little *Iota* — and we did not see a steamer that was worth a torpedo between Dungeness and the Isle of Wight. There I called Stephan up by wireless, and by seven o'clock we were actually lying side by side in a smooth rolling sea — Hengistbury Head bearing N.N.W. and about five miles distant. The two crews clustered on the whale-backs and shouted their joy at seeing friendly faces once more. Stephan had done extraordinarily well. I had, of course, read in the London paper of his four ships on Tuesday, but he had sunk no fewer than seven since, for many of those which should have come to the Thames had tried to make Southampton. Of the seven, one was of twenty thousand tons, a grain-ship from America, a second was a grain-ship from the Black Sea, and two others were great liners from South Africa. I congratulated Stephan with all my heart upon his splendid achievement. Then as we had been seen by a destroyer which was approaching at a great pace, we both dived, coming up again off the Needles, where we spent the night in company. We could not visit each other, since we had no boat, but we lay so nearly alongside that we were able, Stephan and I, to talk from hatch to hatch and so make our plans.

He had shot away more than half his torpedoes, and so had I, and yet we were very averse from returning to our base so long as our oil held out. I told him of my experience with the Boston steamer, and we mutually agreed to sink the ships by gun-fire in future so far as possible. I remember old Horli saying, "What use is a gun aboard a submarine?" We were about to show. I read the English paper to Stephan by the light of my electric torch, and we both agreed that few ships would now come up the Channel. That sentence about diverting commerce to safer routes could only mean that the ships would go round the North of Ireland and unload at Glasgow. Oh, for two more ships to stop that entrance! Heavens, what *would* England have done against a foe with thirty or forty submarines, since we only needed six instead of four to complete her destruction! After much talk we decided that the best plan would be that I should dispatch a cipher telegram next morning from a French port to tell them to send the four second-rate boats to cruise off the North of Ireland and West of Scotland. Then when I had done this I should move down Channel with Stephan and operate at the mouth, while the other two boats could work in the Irish Sea. Having made these plans, I set off across the Channel in the early morning, reaching the small village of Etretat, in Brittany. There I got off my telegram and then laid my course for Falmouth, passing under the keels of two British cruisers which were making eagerly for Etretat, having heard by wireless that we were there.

Half-way down Channel we had trouble with a short circuit in our electric engines, and were compelled to run on the surface for several hours while we replaced one of the cam-shafts and renewed some washers. It was a ticklish time, for had a torpedo-boat come upon us we could not have dived. The perfect submarine of the future will surely have some alternative engines for such an emergency. However by the skill of Engineer Morro, we got things going once more. All the time we lay there I saw a hydroplane floating between us and the British coast. I can understand how a mouse feels when it is in a tuft of grass and sees a hawk high up in the heavens. However, all went well; the mouse became a water-rat, it wagged its tail in derision at the poor blind old hawk, and it dived down into a nice safe green, quiet world where there was nothing to injure it.

It was on the Wednesday night that the *Iota* crossed to Etretat. It was Friday afternoon before we had reached our new cruising ground. Only one large steamer did I see upon our way. The terror we had caused had cleared the Channel. This big boat had a clever captain on board. His tactics were excellent and took him in safety to the Thames. He came zigzagging up Channel at twenty-five knots, shooting off from his course at all sorts of unexpected angles. With our slow pace we could not catch him, nor could we calculate his line so as to cut him off. Of course, he had never seen us, but he judged, and judged rightly, that wherever we were those were the tactics by which he had the best chance of getting past. He deserved his success.

But, of course, it is only in a wide Channel that such things can be done. Had I met him in the mouth of the Thames there would have been a different story to tell. As I approached Falmouth I destroyed a three-thousand-ton boat from Cork, laden with butter and cheese. It was my only success for three days.

That night (Friday, April 16th) I called up Stephan, but received no reply. As I was within a few miles of our rendezvous, and as he would not be cruising after dark, I was puzzled to account for his silence. I could only imagine that his wireless was deranged. But, alas!

I was soon to find the true reason from a copy of the *Western Morning News*, which I obtained from a Brixham trawler. The *Kappa*, with her gallant commander and crew, were at the bottom of the English Channel.

It appeared from this account that after I had parted from him he had met and sunk no fewer than five vessels. I gathered these to be his work, since all of them were by gun-fire, and all were on the south coast of Dorset or Devon. How he met his fate was stated in a short telegram which was headed “Sinking of a Hostile Submarine.” It was marked “Falmouth,” and ran thus: —

The P. and O. mail steamer *Macedonia* came into this port last night with five shell holes between wind and water. She reports having been attacked by a hostile submarine ten miles to the south-east of the Lizard. Instead of using her torpedoes, the submarine for some reason approached from the surface and fired five shots from a semi-automatic twelve-pounder gun. She was evidently under the impression that the *Macedonia* was unarmed. As a matter of fact, being warned of the presence of submarines in the Channel, the *Macedonia* had mounted her armament as an auxiliary cruiser. She opened fire with two quick-firers and blew away the conning-tower of the submarine. It is probable that the shells went right through her, as she sank at once with her hatches open. The *Macedonia* was only kept afloat by her pumps.

Such was the end of the *Kappa*, and my gallant friend, Commander Stephan. His best epitaph was in a corner of the same paper, and was headed “Mark Lane.” It ran: —

“Wheat (average) 66, maize 48, barley 50.”

Well, if Stephan was gone there was the more need for me to show energy. My plans were quickly taken, but they were comprehensive. All that day (Saturday) I passed down the Cornish coast and round Land's End, getting two steamers on the way. I had learned from Stephan's fate that it was better to torpedo the large craft, but I was aware that the auxiliary cruisers of the British Government were all over ten thousand tons, so that for all ships under that size it was safe to use my gun. Both these craft, the *Yelland* and the *Playboy* — the latter an American ship — were perfectly harmless, so I came up within a hundred yards of them and speedily sank them, after allowing their people to get into boats. Some other steamers lay farther out, but I was so eager to make my new arrangements that I did not go out of my course to molest them. Just before sunset, however, so magnificent a prey came within my radius of action that I could not possibly refuse her. No sailor could fail to recognise that glorious monarch of the sea, with her four cream funnels tipped with black, her huge black sides, her red bilges, and her high white top-hamper, roaring up Channel at twenty-three knots, and carrying her forty-five thousand tons as lightly as if she were a five-ton motor-boat. It was the queenly *Olympic*, of the White Star — once the largest and still the comeliest of liners. What a picture she made, with the blue Cornish sea creaming round her giant fore-foot, and the pink western sky with one evening star forming the background to her noble lines.

She was about five miles off when we dived to cut her off. My calculation was exact. As we came abreast we loosed our torpedo and struck her fair. We swirled round with the concussion of the water. I saw her in my periscope list over on her side, and I knew that she had her death-blow. She settled down slowly, and there was plenty of time to save her people. The sea was dotted with her boats. When I got about three miles off I rose to the surface, and the whole crew clustered up to see the wonderful sight. She dived bows foremost, and there was a terrific explosion, which sent one of the funnels into the air. I suppose we should have cheered — somehow, none of us felt like cheering. We were all keen sailors, and it went to our hearts to see such a ship go down like a broken eggshell. I gave a gruff order, and all were at their posts again while we headed north-west. Once round the Land's End I called up my two consorts, and we met next day at Hartland Point, the south end of Bideford Bay. For the moment the Channel was clear, but the English could not know it, and I reckoned that the loss of the *Olympic* would stop all ships for a day or two at least.

Having assembled the *Delta* and *Epsilon*, one on each side of me, I received the report from Miriam and Var, the respective commanders. Each had expended twelve torpedoes, and between them they had sunk twenty-two steamers. One man had been killed by the machinery on board of the *Delta*, and two had been burned by the ignition of some oil on the *Epsilon*. I took these injured men on board, and I gave each of the boats one of my crew. I also divided my spare oil, my provisions, and my torpedoes among them, though we had the greatest possible difficulty in those crank vessels in transferring them from one to the other. However, by ten o'clock it was done, and the two vessels were in condition to keep the sea for another ten days. For my part, with only two torpedoes left, I headed north up the Irish Sea. One of my torpedoes I expended that evening upon a cattle-ship making for Milford Haven. Late at night, being abreast of Holyhead, I called upon my four northern boats, but without reply. Their Marconi range is very limited. About three in the afternoon of the next day I had a feeble answer. It was a great relief to me to find that my telegraphic instructions had reached them and that they were on their station. Before evening we all assembled in the lee of Sanda Island, in the Mull of Kintyre. I felt an admiral indeed when I saw my five whale-backs all in a row. Panza's report was excellent. They had come round by the Pentland Firth and reached their cruising ground on the fourth day. Already they had destroyed twenty vessels without any mishap. I ordered the *Beta* to divide her oil and torpedoes among the other three, so that they were in good condition to continue their cruise. Then the *Beta* and I headed for home, reaching our base upon Sunday, April 25th. Off Cape Wrath I picked up a paper from a small schooner.

"Wheat, 84; Maize, 60; Barley, 62." What were battles and bombardments compared to that!

The whole coast of Norland was closely blockaded by cordon within cordon, and every port, even the smallest, held by the British. But why should they suspect my modest confectioner's villa more than any other of the ten thousand houses that face the sea? I was glad when I picked up its homely white front in my periscope. That night I landed and found my stores intact. Before morning the *Beta* reported itself, for we had the windows lit as a guide.

It is not for me to recount the messages which I found waiting for me at my humble headquarters. They shall ever remain as the patents of nobility of my family. Among others was that never-to-be-forgotten salutation from my King. He desired me to present myself at Hauptville, but for once I took it upon myself to disobey his commands. It took me two days — or rather two nights, for we sank ourselves during the daylight hours — to get all our stores on board, but my presence was needful every minute of the time. On the third morning, at four o’clock, the *Beta* and my own little flagship were at sea once more, bound for our original station off the mouth of the Thames.

I had no time to read our papers whilst I was refitting, but I gathered the news after we got under way. The British occupied all our ports, but otherwise we had not suffered at all, since we have excellent railway communications with Europe. Prices had altered little, and our industries continued as before. There was talk of a British invasion, but this I knew to be absolute nonsense, for the British must have learned by this time that it would be sheer murder to send transports full of soldiers to sea in the face of submarines. When they have a tunnel they can use their fine expeditionary force upon the Continent, but until then it might just as well not exist so far as Europe is concerned. My own country, therefore, was in good case and had nothing to fear. Great Britain, however, was already feeling my grip upon her throat. As in normal times four-fifths of her food is imported, prices were rising by leaps and bounds. The supplies in the country were beginning to show signs of depletion, while little was coming in to replace it. The insurances at Lloyd’s had risen to a figure which made the price of the food prohibitive to the mass of the people by the time it had reached the market. The loaf, which, under ordinary circumstances stood at fivepence, was already at one and twopence. Beef was three shillings and fourpence a pound, and mutton two shillings and ninepence. Everything else was in proportion. The Government had acted with energy and offered a big bounty for corn to be planted at once. It could only be reaped five months hence, however, and long before then, as the papers pointed out, half the island would be dead from starvation. Strong appeals had been made to the patriotism of the people, and they were assured that the interference with trade was temporary, and that with a little patience all would be well. But already there was a marked rise in the death-rate, especially among children, who suffered from want of milk, the cattle being slaughtered for food. There was serious rioting in the Lanarkshire coalfields and in the Midlands, together with a Socialistic upheaval in the East of London, which had assumed the proportions of a civil war. Already there were responsible papers which declared that England was in an impossible position, and that an immediate peace was necessary to prevent one of the greatest tragedies in history. It was my task now to prove to them that they were right.

It was May 2nd when I found myself back at the Maplin Sands to the north of the estuary of the Thames. The *Beta* was sent on to the Solent to block it and take the place of the lamented *Kappa*. And now I was throttling Britain indeed — London, Southampton, the Bristol Channel, Liverpool, the North Channel, the Glasgow approaches, each was guarded by my boats. Great liners were, as we learned afterwards, pouring their supplies into Galway and the West of Ireland, where provisions were cheaper than has ever been known. Tens of thousands were embarking from Britain for Ireland in order to save themselves from starvation. But you cannot transplant a whole dense population. The main body of the people, by the middle of May, were actually starving. At that date wheat was at a hundred, maize and barley at eighty. Even the most obstinate had begun to see that the situation could not possibly continue.

In the great towns starving crowds clamoured for bread before the municipal offices, and public officials everywhere were attacked and often murdered by frantic mobs, composed largely of desperate women who had seen their infants perish before their eyes. In the country, roots, bark, and weeds of every sort were used as food. In London the private mansions of Ministers were guarded by strong pickets of soldiers, while a battalion of Guards was camped permanently round the Houses of Parliament. The lives of the Prime Minister and of the Foreign Secretary were continually threatened and occasionally attempted. Yet the Government had entered upon the war with the full assent of every party in the State. The true culprits were those, be they politicians or journalists, who had not the foresight to understand that unless Britain grew her own supplies, or unless by means of a tunnel she had some way of conveying them into the island, all her mighty expenditure upon her army and her fleet was a mere waste of money so long as her antagonists had a few submarines and men who could use them. England has often been stupid, but has got off scot-free. This time she was stupid and had to pay the price. You can't expect Luck to be your saviour always.

It would be a mere repetition of what I have already described if I were to recount all our proceedings during that first ten days after I resumed my station. During my absence the ships had taken heart and had begun to come up again. In the first day I got four. After that I had to go farther afield, and again I picked up several in French waters. Once I had a narrow escape through one of my kingston valves getting some grit into it and refusing to act when I was below the surface. Our margin of buoyancy just carried us through. By the end of that week the Channel was clear again, and both *Beta* and my own boat were down West once more. There we had encouraging messages from our Bristol consort, who in turn had heard from *Delta* at Liverpool. Our task was completely done. We could not prevent all food from passing into the British Islands, but at least we had raised what did get in to a price which put it far beyond the means of the penniless, workless multitudes. In vain Government commandeered it all and doled it out as a general feeds the garrison of a fortress. The task was too great — the responsibility too horrible. Even the proud and stubborn English could not face it any longer.

I remember well how the news came to me. I was lying at the time off Selsey Bill when I saw a small war-vessel coming down Channel. It had never been my policy to attack any vessel coming *down*. My torpedoes and even my shells were too precious for that. I could not help being attracted, however, by the movements of this ship, which came slowly zigzagging in my direction.

"Looking for me," thought I. "What on earth does the foolish thing hope to do if she could find me?"

I was lying awash at the time and got ready to go below in case she should come for me. But at that moment — she was about half a mile away — she turned her quarter, and there to my amazement was the red flag with the blue circle, our own beloved flag, flying from her peak. For a moment I thought that this was some clever dodge of the enemy to tempt me within range. I snatched up my glasses and called on Vornal. Then we both recognised the vessel. It was the *Juno*, the only one left intact of our own cruisers. What could she be doing flying the flag in the enemy's waters? Then I understood it, and turning to Vornal, we threw ourselves into each other's arms. It could only mean an armistice — or peace!

And it was peace. We learned the glad news when we had risen alongside the *Juno*, and the ringing cheers which greeted us had at last died away. Our orders were to report ourselves at once at Blankenberg. Then she passed on down Channel to collect the others. We returned to port upon the surface, steaming through the whole British fleet as we passed up the North Sea. The crews clustered thick along the sides of the vessels to watch us. I can see now their sullen, angry faces. Many shook their fists and cursed us as we went by. It was not that we had damaged them — I will do them the justice to say that the English, as the old Boer War has proved, bear no resentment against a brave enemy — but that they thought us cowardly to attack merchant ships and avoid the warships. It is like the Arabs who think that a flank attack is a mean, unmanly device. War is not a big game, my English friends. It is a desperate business to gain the upper hand, and one must use one's brain in order to find the weak spot of one's enemy. It is not fair to blame me if I have found yours. It was my duty. Perhaps those officers and sailors who scowled at the little *Iota* that May morning have by this time done me justice when the first bitterness of undeserved defeat was passed.

Let others describe my entrance into Blankenberg; the mad enthusiasm of the crowds, and the magnificent public reception of each successive boat as it arrived. Surely the men deserved the grant made them by the State which has enabled each of them to be independent for life. As a feat of endurance, that long residence in such a state of mental tension in cramped quarters, breathing an unnatural atmosphere, will long remain as a record. The country may well be proud of such sailors.

The terms of peace were not made onerous, for we were in no condition to make Great Britain our permanent enemy. We knew well that we had won the war by circumstances which would never be allowed to occur again, and that in a few years the Island Power would be as strong as ever — stronger, perhaps — for the lesson that she had learned. It would be madness to provoke such an antagonist. A mutual salute of flags was arranged, the Colonial boundary was adjusted by arbitration, and we claimed no indemnity beyond an undertaking on the part of Britain that she would pay any damages which an International Court might award to France or to the United States for injury received through the operations of our submarines. So ended the war!

Of course, England will not be caught napping in such a fashion again! Her foolish blindness is partly explained by her delusion that her enemy would not torpedo merchant vessels. Common sense should have told her that her enemy will play the game that suits them best — that they will not inquire what they may do, but they will do it first and talk about it afterwards. The opinion of the whole world now is that if a blockade were proclaimed one may do what one can with those who try to break it, and that it was as reasonable to prevent food from reaching England in war time as it is for a besieger to prevent the victualling of a beleaguered fortress.

I cannot end this account better than by quoting the first few paragraphs of a leader in the *Times*, which appeared shortly after the declaration of peace. It may be taken to epitomize the saner public opinion of England upon the meaning and lessons of the episode.

"In all this miserable business," said the writer, "which has cost us the loss of a considerable portion of our merchant fleet and more than fifty thousand civilian lives, there is just one consolation to be found. It lies in the fact that our temporary conqueror is a Power which is not strong enough to reap the fruits of her victory. Had we endured this humiliation at the hands of any of the first-class Powers it would certainly have entailed the loss of all our Crown Colonies and tropical possessions, besides the payment of a huge indemnity. We were absolutely at the feet of our conqueror and had no possible alternative but to submit to her terms, however onerous. Norland has had the good sense to understand that she must not abuse her temporary advantage, and has been generous in her dealings. In the grip of any other Power we should have ceased to exist as an Empire.

"Even now we are not out of the wood. Some one may maliciously pick a quarrel with us before we get our house in order, and use the easy weapon which has been demonstrated. It is to meet such a contingency that the Government has rushed enormous stores of food at the public expense into the country. In a very few months the new harvest will have appeared. On the whole we can face the immediate future without undue depression, though there remain some causes for anxiety. These will no doubt be energetically handled by this new and efficient Government, which has taken the place of those discredited politicians who led us into a war without having foreseen how helpless we were against an obvious form of attack.

“Already the lines of our reconstruction are evident. The first and most important is that our Party men realise that there is something more vital than their academic disputes about Free Trade or Protection, and that all theory must give way to the fact that a country is in an artificial and dangerous condition if she does not produce within her own borders sufficient food to at least keep life in her population. Whether this should be brought about by a tax upon foreign foodstuffs, or by a bounty upon home products, or by a combination of the two, is now under discussion. But all Parties are combined upon the principle, and, though it will undoubtedly entail either a rise in prices or a deterioration in quality in the food of the working-classes, they will at least be insured against so terrible a visitation as that which is fresh in our memories. At any rate, we have got past the stage of argument. It *must* be so. The increased prosperity of the farming interest, and, as we will hope, the cessation of agricultural emigration, will be benefits to be counted against the obvious disadvantages.

“The second lesson is the immediate construction of not one but two double-lined railways under the Channel. We stand in a white sheet over the matter, since the project has always been discouraged in these columns, but we are prepared to admit that had such railway communication been combined with adequate arrangements for forwarding supplies from Marseilles, we should have avoided our recent surrender. We still insist that we cannot trust entirely to a tunnel, since our enemy might have allies in the Mediterranean; but in a single contest with any Power of the North of Europe it would certainly be of inestimable benefit. There may be dangers attendant upon the existence of a tunnel, but it must now be admitted that they are trivial compared to those which come from its absence. As to the building of large fleets of merchant submarines for the carriage of food, that is a new departure which will be an additional insurance against the danger which has left so dark a page in the history of our country.”

DANGER STORY II. ONE CROWDED HOUR

The place was the Eastbourne-Tunbridge road, not very far from the Cross in Hand — a lonely stretch, with a heath running upon either side. The time was half-past eleven upon a Sunday night in the late summer. A motor was passing slowly down the road.

It was a long, lean Rolls-Royce, running smoothly with a gentle purring of the engine. Through the two vivid circles cast by the electric head-lights the waving grass fringes and clumps of heather streamed swiftly like some golden cinematograph, leaving a blacker darkness behind and around them. One ruby-red spot shone upon the road, but no number-plate was visible within the dim ruddy halo of the tail-lamp which cast it. The car was open and of a tourist type, but even in that obscure light, for the night was moonless, an observer could hardly fail to have noticed a curious indefiniteness in its lines. As it slid into and across the broad stream of light from an open cottage door the reason could be seen. The body was hung with a singular loose arrangement of brown holland. Even the long black bonnet was banded with some close-drawn drapery.

The solitary man who drove this curious car was broad and burly. He sat hunched up over his steering-wheel, with the brim of a Tyrolean hat drawn down over his eyes. The red end of a cigarette smouldered under the black shadow thrown by the headgear. A dark ulster of some frieze-like material was turned up in the collar until it covered his ears. His neck was pushed forward from his rounded shoulders, and he seemed, as the car now slid noiselessly down the long, sloping road, with the clutch disengaged and the engine running free, to be peering ahead of him through the darkness in search of some eagerly-expected object.

The distant toot of a motor-horn came faintly from some point far to the south of him. On such a night, at such a place, all traffic must be from south to north when the current of London week-enders sweeps back from the watering-place to the capital — from pleasure to duty. The man sat straight and listened intently. Yes, there it was again, and certainly to the south of him. His face was over the wheel and his eyes strained through the darkness. Then suddenly he spat out his cigarette and gave a sharp intake of the breath. Far away down the road two little yellow points had rounded a curve. They vanished into a dip, shot upwards once more, and then vanished again. The inert man in the draped car woke suddenly into intense life. From his pocket he pulled a mask of dark cloth, which he fastened securely across his face, adjusting it carefully that his sight might be unimpeded. For an instant he uncovered an acetylene hand-lantern, took a hasty glance at his own preparations, and laid it beside a Mauser pistol upon the seat alongside him. Then, twitching his hat down lower than ever, he released his clutch and slid downward his gear-lever. With a chuckle and shudder the long, black machine sprang forward, and shot with a soft sigh from her powerful engines down the sloping gradient. The driver stooped and switched off his electric head-lights. Only a dim grey swathe cut through the black heath indicated the line of his road. From in front there came presently a confused puffing and rattling and clanging as the oncoming car breasted the slope. It coughed and spluttered on a powerful, old-fashioned low gear, while its engine throbbed like a weary heart. The yellow, glaring lights dipped for the last time into a switchback curve. When they reappeared over the crest the two cars were within thirty yards of each other. The dark one darted across the road and barred the other's passage, while a warning acetylene lamp was waved in the air. With a jarring of brakes the noisy new-comer was brought to a halt.

"I say," cried an aggrieved voice, "'pon my soul, you know, we might have had an accident. Why the devil don't you keep your head-lights on? I never saw you till I nearly burst my radiators on you!"

The acetylene lamp, held forward, discovered a very angry young man, blue-eyed, yellow-moustached, and florid, sitting alone at the wheel of an antiquated twelve-horse Wolseley. Suddenly the aggrieved look upon his flushed face changed to one of absolute bewilderment. The driver in the dark car had sprung out of the seat, a black, long-barrelled, wicked-looking pistol was poked in the traveller's face, and behind the further sights of it was a circle of black cloth with two deadly eyes looking from as many slits.

"Hands up!" said a quick, stern voice. "Hands up! or, by the Lord—"

The young man was as brave as his neighbours, but the hands went up all the same.

"Get down!" said his assailant, curtly.

The young man stepped forth into the road, followed closely by the covering lantern and pistol. Once he made as if he would drop his hands, but a short, stern word jerked them up again.

"I say, look here, this is rather out o' date, ain't it?" said the traveller. "I expect you're joking — what?"

"Your watch," said the man behind the Mauser pistol.

"You can't really mean it!"

"Your watch, I say!"

"Well, take it, if you must. It's only plated, anyhow. You're two centuries out in time, or a few thousand miles longitude. The bush is your mark — or America. You don't seem in the picture on a Sussex road."

"Purse," said the man. There was something very compelling in his voice and methods. The purse was handed over.

"Any rings?"

"Don't wear 'em."

"Stand there! Don't move!"

The highwayman passed his victim and threw open the bonnet of the Wolseley. His hand, with a pair of steel pliers, was thrust deep into the works. There was the snap of a parting wire.

"Hang it all, don't crock my car!" cried the traveller.

He turned, but quick as a flash the pistol was at his head once more. And yet even in that flash, whilst the robber whisked round from the broken circuit, something had caught the young man's eye which made him gasp and start. He opened his mouth as if about to shout some words. Then with an evident effort he restrained himself.

"Get in," said the highwayman.

The traveller climbed back to his seat.

"What is your name?"

"Ronald Barker. What's yours?"

The masked man ignored the impertinence.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"My cards are in my purse. Take one."

The highwayman sprang into his car, the engine of which had hissed and whispered in gentle accompaniment to the interview. With a clash he threw back his side-brake, flung in his gears, twirled the wheel hard round, and cleared the motionless Wolseley. A minute later he was gliding swiftly, with all his lights' gleaming, some half-mile southward on the road, while Mr. Ronald Barker, a side-lamp in his hand, was rummaging furiously among the odds and ends of his repair-box for a strand of wire which would connect up his electricity and set him on his way once more.

When he had placed a safe distance between himself and his victim, the adventurer eased up, took his booty from his pocket, replaced the watch, opened the purse, and counted out the money. Seven shillings constituted the miserable spoil. The poor result of his efforts seemed to amuse rather than annoy him, for he chuckled as he held the two half-crowns and the florin in the glare of his lantern. Then suddenly his manner changed. He thrust the thin purse back into his pocket, released his brake, and shot onwards with the same tense bearing with which he had started upon his adventure. The lights of another car were coming down the road.

On this occasion the methods of the highwayman were less furtive. Experience had clearly given him confidence. With lights still blazing, he ran towards the new-comers, and, halting in the middle of the road, summoned them to stop. From the point of view of the astonished travellers the result was sufficiently impressive. They saw in the glare of their own head-lights two glowing discs on either side of the long, black-muzzled snout of a high-power car, and above the masked face and menacing figure of its solitary driver. In the golden circle thrown by the rover there stood an elegant, open-topped, twenty-horse Humber, with an undersized and very astonished chauffeur blinking from under his peaked cap. From behind the wind-screen the veil-bound hats and wondering faces of two very pretty young women protruded, one upon either side, and a little crescendo of frightened squeaks announced the acute emotion of one of them. The other was cooler and more critical.

“Don’t give it away, Hilda,” she whispered. “Do shut up, and don’t be such a silly. It’s Bertie or one of the boys playing it on us.”

“No, no! It’s the real thing, Flossie. It’s a robber, sure enough. Oh, my goodness, whatever shall we do?”

“What an ‘ad.’!” cried the other. “Oh, what a glorious ‘ad.’! Too late now for the mornings, but they’ll have it in every evening paper, sure.”

“What’s it going to cost?” groaned the other. “Oh, Flossie, Flossie, I’m sure I’m going to faint! Don’t you think if we both screamed together we could do some good? Isn’t he too awful with that black thing over his face? Oh, dear, oh, dear! He’s killing poor little Alf!”

The proceedings of the robber were indeed somewhat alarming. Springing down from his car, he had pulled the chauffeur out of his seat by the scruff of his neck. The sight of the Mauser had cut short all remonstrance, and under its compulsion the little man had pulled open the bonnet and extracted the sparking plugs. Having thus secured the immobility of his capture, the masked man walked forward, lantern in hand, to the side of the car. He had laid aside the gruff sternness with which he had treated Mr. Ronald Barker, and his voice and manner were gentle, though determined. He even raised his hat as a prelude to his address.

"I am sorry to inconvenience you, ladies," said he, and his voice had gone up several notes since the previous interview. "May I ask who you are?"

Miss Hilda was beyond coherent speech, but Miss Flossie was of a sterner mould.

"This is a pretty business," said she. "What right have you to stop us on the public road, I should like to know?"

"My time is short," said the robber, in a sterner voice. "I must ask you to answer my question."

"Tell him, Flossie! For goodness' sake be nice to him!" cried Hilda.

"Well, we're from the Gaiety Theatre, London, if you want to know," said the young lady. "Perhaps you've heard of Miss Flossie Thornton and Miss Hilda Mannering? We've been playing a week at the Royal at Eastbourne, and took a Sunday off to ourselves. So now you know!"

"I must ask you for your purses and for your jewellery."

Both ladies set up shrill expostulations, but they found, as Mr. Ronald Barker had done, that there was something quietly compelling in this man's methods. In a very few minutes they had handed over their purses, and a pile of glittering rings, bangles, brooches, and chains was lying upon the front seat of the car. The diamonds glowed and shimmered like little electric points in the light of the lantern. He picked up the glittering tangle and weighed it in his hand.

"Anything you particularly value?" he asked the ladies; but Miss Flossie was in no humour for concessions.

"Don't come the Claude Duval over us," said she. "Take the lot or leave the lot. We don't want bits of our own given back to us."

"Except just Billy's necklace!" cried Hilda, and snatched at a little rope of pearls. The robber bowed, and released his hold of it.

"Anything else?"

The valiant Flossie began suddenly to cry. Hilda did the same. The effect upon the robber was surprising. He threw the whole heap of jewellery into the nearest lap.

"There! there! Take it!" he said. "It's trumpery stuff, anyhow. It's worth something to you, and nothing to me."

Tears changed in a moment to smiles.

"You're welcome to the purses. The 'ad.' is worth ten times the money. But what a funny way of getting a living nowadays! Aren't you afraid of being caught? It's all so wonderful, like a scene from a comedy."

"It may be a tragedy," said the robber.

"Oh, I hope not — I'm sure I hope not!" cried the two ladies of the drama.

But the robber was in no mood for further conversation. Far away down the road tiny points of light had appeared. Fresh business was coming to him, and he must not mix his cases. Disengaging his machine, he raised his hat, and slipped off to meet this new arrival, while Miss Flossie and Miss Hilda leaned out of their derelict car, still palpitating from their adventure, and watched the red gleam of the tail-light until it merged into the darkness.

This time there was every sign of a rich prize. Behind its four grand lamps set in a broad frame of glittering brasswork the magnificent sixty-horse Daimler breasted the slope with the low, deep, even snore which proclaimed its enormous latent strength. Like some rich-laden, high-pooped Spanish galleon, she kept her course until the prowling craft ahead of her swept across her bows and brought her to a sudden halt. An angry face, red, blotched, and evil, shot out of the open window of the closed limousine. The robber was aware of a high, bald forehead, gross pendulous cheeks, and two little crafty eyes which gleamed between creases of fat.

"Out of my way, sir! Out of my way this instant!" cried a rasping voice. "Drive over him, Hearn! Get down and pull him off the seat. The fellow's drunk — he's drunk I say!"

Up to this point the proceedings of the modern highwayman might have passed as gentle. Now they turned in an instant to savagery. The chauffeur, a burly, capable fellow, incited by that raucous voice behind him, sprang from the car and seized the advancing robber by the throat. The latter hit out with the butt-end of his pistol, and the man dropped groaning on the road. Stepping over his prostrate body the adventurer pulled open the door, seized the stout occupant savagely by the ear, and dragged him bellowing on to the highway. Then, very deliberately, he struck him twice across the face with his open hand. The blows rang out like pistol-shots in the silence of the night. The fat traveller turned a ghastly colour and fell back half senseless against the side of the limousine. The robber dragged open his coat, wrenched away the heavy gold watch-chain with all that it held, plucked out the great diamond pin that sparkled in the black satin tie, dragged off four rings — not one of which could have cost less than three figures and finally tore from his inner pocket a bulky leather note-book. All this property he transferred to his own black overcoat, and added to it the man's pearl cuff-links, and even the golden stud which held his collar. Having made sure that there was nothing else to take, the robber flashed his lantern upon the prostrate chauffeur, and satisfied himself that he was stunned and not dead. Then, returning to the master, he proceeded very deliberately to tear all his clothes from his body with a ferocious energy which set his victim whimpering and writhing in imminent expectation of murder.

Whatever his tormentor's intention may have been, it was very effectually frustrated. A sound made him turn his head, and there, no very great distance off, were the lights of a car coming swiftly from the north. Such a car must have already passed the wreckage which this pirate had left behind him. It was following his track with a deliberate purpose, and might be crammed with every county constable of the district.

The adventurer had no time to lose. He darted from his bedraggled victim, sprang into his own seat, and with his foot on the accelerator shot swiftly off down the road. Some way down there was a narrow side lane, and into this the fugitive turned, cracking on his high speed and leaving a good five miles between him and any pursuer before he ventured to stop. Then, in a quiet corner, he counted over his booty of the evening — the paltry plunder of Mr. Ronald Barker, the rather better-furnished purses of the actresses, which contained four pounds between them, and, finally, the gorgeous jewellery and well-filled note-book of the plutocrat upon the Daimler. Five notes of fifty pounds, four of ten, fifteen sovereigns, and a number of valuable papers made up a most noble haul. It was clearly enough for one night's work. The adventurer replaced all his ill-gotten gains in his pocket, and, lighting a cigarette, set forth upon his way with the air of a man who has no further care upon his mind.

* * * * *

It was on the Monday morning following upon this eventful evening that Sir Henry Hailworthy, of Walcot Old Place, having finished his breakfast in a leisurely fashion, strolled down to his study with the intention of writing a few letters before setting forth to take his place upon the county bench. Sir Henry was a Deputy-Lieutenant of the county; he was a baronet of ancient blood; he was a magistrate of ten years' standing; and he was famous above all as the breeder of many a good horse and the most desperate rider in all the Weald country. A tall, upstanding man, with a strong, clean-shaven face, heavy black eyebrows, and a square, resolute jaw, he was one whom it was better to call friend than foe. Though nearly fifty years of age, he bore no sign of having passed his youth, save that Nature, in one of her freakish moods, had planted one little feather of white hair above his right ear, making the rest of his thick black curls the darker by contrast. He was in thoughtful mood this morning, for having lit his pipe he sat at his desk with his blank note-paper in front of him, lost in a deep reverie.

Suddenly his thoughts were brought back to the present. From behind the laurels of the curving drive there came a low, clanking sound, which swelled into the clatter and jingle of an ancient car. Then from round the corner there swung an old-fashioned Wolseley, with a fresh-complexioned, yellow-moustached young man at the wheel. Sir Henry sprang to his feet at the sight, and then sat down once more. He rose again as a minute later the footman announced Mr. Ronald Barker. It was an early visit, but Barker was Sir Henry's intimate friend. As each was a fine shot, horseman, and billiard-player, there was much in common between the two men, and the younger (and poorer) was in the habit of spending at least two evenings a week at Walcot Old Place. Therefore, Sir Henry advanced cordially with outstretched hand to welcome him.

"You're an early bird this morning," said he. "What's up? If you are going over to Lewes we could motor together."

But the younger man's demeanour was peculiar and ungracious. He disregarded the hand which was held out to him, and he stood pulling at his own long moustache and staring with troubled, questioning eyes at the county magistrate.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked the latter.

Still the young man did not speak. He was clearly on the edge of an interview which he found it most difficult to open. His host grew impatient.

"You don't seem yourself this morning. What on earth is the matter? Anything upset you?"

"Yes," said Ronald Barker, with emphasis.

"What has?"

"*You* have."

Sir Henry smiled. "Sit down, my dear fellow. If you have any grievance against me, let me hear it."

Barker sat down. He seemed to be gathering himself for a reproach. When it did come it was like a bullet from a gun.

"Why did you rob me last night?"

The magistrate was a man of iron nerve. He showed neither surprise nor resentment. Not a muscle twitched upon his calm, set face.

"Why do you say that I robbed you last night?"

"A big, tall fellow in a motor-car stopped me on the Mayfield road. He poked a pistol in my face and took my purse and my watch. Sir Henry, that man was you."

The magistrate smiled.

"Am I the only big, tall man in the district? Am I the only man with a motor-car?"

"Do you think I couldn't tell a Rolls-Royce when I see it — I, who spend half my life on a car and the other half under it? Who has a Rolls-Royce about here except you?"

"My dear Barker, don't you think that such a modern highwayman as you describe would be more likely to operate outside his own district? How many hundred Rolls-Royces are there in the South of England?"

"No, it won't do, Sir Henry — it won't do! Even your voice, though you sunk it a few notes, was familiar enough to me. But hang it, man! What did you do it *for*? That's what gets over me. That you should stick up me, one of your closest friends, a man that worked himself to the bone when you stood for the division — and all for the sake of a Brummagem watch and a few shillings — is simply incredible."

"Simply incredible," repeated the magistrate, with a smile.

"And then those actresses, poor little devils, who have to earn all they get. I followed you down the road, you see. That was a dirty trick, if ever I heard one. The City shark was different. If a chap must go a-robbing, that sort of fellow is fair game. But your friend, and then the girls — well, I say again, I couldn't have believed it."

"Then why believe it?"

"Because it *is* so."

"Well, you seem to have persuaded yourself to that effect. You don't seem to have much evidence to lay before any one else."

"I could swear to you in a police-court. What put the lid on it was that when you were cutting my wire — and an infernal liberty it was! — I saw that white tuft of yours sticking out from behind your mask."

For the first time an acute observer might have seen some slight sign of emotion upon the face of the baronet.

"You seem to have a fairly vivid imagination," said he.

His visitor flushed with anger.

"See here, Hailworthy," said he, opening his hand and showing a small, jagged triangle of black cloth. "Do you see that? It was on the ground near the car of the young women. You must have ripped it off as you jumped out from your seat. Now send for that heavy black driving-coat of yours. If you don't ring the bell I'll ring it myself, and we shall have it in. I'm going to see this thing through, and don't you make any mistake about that."

The baronet's answer was a surprising one. He rose, passed Barker's chair, and, walking over to the door, he locked it and placed the key in his pocket.

"You *are* going to see it through," said he. "I'll lock you in until you do. Now we must have a straight talk, Barker, as man to man, and whether it ends in tragedy or not depends on you."

He had half-opened one of the drawers in his desk as he spoke. His visitor frowned in anger.

"You won't make matters any better by threatening me, Hailworthy. I am going to do my duty, and you won't bluff me out of it."

"I have no wish to bluff you. When I spoke of a tragedy I did not mean to you. What I meant was that there are some turns which this affair cannot be allowed to take. I have neither kith nor kin, but there is the family honour, and some things are impossible."

"It is late to talk like that."

"Well, perhaps it is; but not too late. And now I have a good deal to say to you. First of all, you are quite right, and it was I who held you up last night on the Mayfield road."

"But why on earth—"

"All right. Let me tell it my own way. First I want you to look at these." He unlocked a drawer and he took out two small packages. "These were to be posted in London to-night. This one is addressed to you, and I may as well hand it over to you at once. It contains your watch and your purse. So, you see, bar your cut wire you would have been none the worse for your adventure. This other packet is addressed to the young ladies of the Gaiety Theatre, and their properties are enclosed. I hope I have convinced you that I had intended full reparation in each case before you came to accuse me?"

"Well?" asked Barker.

"Well, we will now deal with Sir George Wilde, who is, as you may not know, the senior partner of Wilde and Guggendorf, the founders of the Ludgate Bank of infamous memory. His chauffeur is a case apart. You may take it from me, upon my word of honour, that I had plans for the chauffeur. But it is the master that I want to speak of. You know that I am not a rich man myself. I expect all the county knows that. When Black Tulip lost the Derby I was hard hit. And other things as well. Then I had a legacy of a thousand. This infernal bank was paying 7 per cent. on deposits. I knew Wilde. I saw him. I asked him if it was safe. He said it was. I paid it in, and within forty-eight hours the whole thing went to bits. It came out before the Official Receiver that Wilde had known for three months that nothing could save him. And yet he took all my cargo aboard his sinking vessel. He was all right — confound him! He had plenty besides. But I had lost all my money and no law could help me. Yet he had robbed me as clearly as one man could rob another. I saw him and he laughed in my face. Told me to stick to Consols, and that the lesson was cheap at the price. So I just swore that, by hook or by crook, I would get level with him. I knew his habits, for I had made it my business to do so. I knew that he came back from Eastbourne on Sunday nights. I knew that he carried a good sum with him in his pocket-book. Well it's *my* pocket-book now. Do you mean to tell me that I'm not morally justified in what I have done? By the Lord, I'd have left the devil as bare as he left many a widow and orphan, if I'd had the time!"

"That's all very well. But what about me? What about the girls?"

"Have some common sense, Barker. Do you suppose that I could go and stick up this one personal enemy of mine and escape detection? It was impossible. I was bound to make myself out to be just a common robber who had run up against him by accident. So I turned myself loose on the high road and took my chance. As the devil would have it, the first man I met was yourself. I was a fool not to recognise that old ironmonger's store of yours by the row it made coming up the hill. When I saw you I could hardly speak for laughing. But I was bound to carry it through. The same with the actresses. I'm afraid I gave myself away, for I couldn't take their little fal-lals, but I had to keep up a show. Then came my man himself. There was no bluff about that. I was out to skin him, and I did. Now, Barker, what do you think of it all? I had a pistol at your head last night, and, by George! whether you believe it or not, you have one at mine this morning!"

The young man rose slowly, and with a broad smile he wrung the magistrate by the hand.

"Don't do it again. It's too risky," said he. "The swine would score heavily if you were taken."

"You're a good chap, Barker," said the magistrate. "No, I won't do it again. Who's the fellow who talks of 'one crowded hour of glorious life'? By George! it's too fascinating. I had the time of my life! Talk of fox-hunting! No, I'll never touch it again, for it might get a grip of me."

A telephone rang sharply upon the table, and the baronet put the receiver to his ear. As he listened he smiled across at his companion.

"I'm rather late this morning," said he, "and they are waiting for me to try some petty larcenies on the county bench."

DANGER STORY III. A POINT OF VIEW

It was an American journalist who was writing up England — or writing her down as the mood seized him. Sometimes he blamed and sometimes he praised, and the case-hardened old country actually went its way all the time quite oblivious of his approval or of his disfavour — being ready at all times, through some queer mental twist, to say more bitter things and more unjust ones about herself than any critic could ever venture upon. However, in the course of his many columns in the *New York Clarion* our journalist did at last get through somebody's skin in the way that is here narrated.

It was a kindly enough article upon English country-house life in which he had described a visit paid for a week-end to Sir Henry Trustall's. There was only a single critical passage in it, and it was one which he had written with a sense both of journalistic and of democratic satisfaction. In it he had sketched off the lofty obsequiousness of the flunkey who had ministered to his needs. "He seemed to take a smug satisfaction in his own degradation," said he. "Surely the last spark of manhood must have gone from the man who has so entirely lost his own individuality. He revelled in humility. He was an instrument of service — nothing more."

Some months had passed and our American Pressman had recorded impressions from St. Petersburg to Madrid. He was on his homeward way when once again he found himself the guest of Sir Henry. He had returned from an afternoon's shooting, and had finished dressing when there was a knock at the door and the footman entered. He was a large cleanly-built man, as is proper to a class who are chosen with a keener eye to physique than any crack regiment. The American supposed that the man had entered to perform some menial service, but to his surprise he softly closed the door behind him.

"Might I have a word with you, sir, if you can kindly give me a moment?" he said in the velvety voice which always got upon the visitor's republican nerves.

"Well, what is it?" the journalist asked sharply.

"It's this, sir." The footman drew from his breast-pocket the copy of the *Clarion*. "A friend over the water chanced to see this, sir, and he thought it would be of interest to me. So he sent it."

"Well?"

"You wrote it, sir, I fancy."

"What if I did."

"And this 'ere footman is your idea of me."

The American glanced at the passage and approved his own phrases.

"Yes, that's you," he admitted.

The footman folded up his document once more and replaced it in his pocket.

"I'd like to 'ave a word or two with you over that, sir," he said in the same suave imperturbable voice. "I don't think, sir, that you quite see the thing from our point of view. I'd like to put it to you as I see it myself. Maybe it would strike you different then."

The American became interested. There was "copy" in the air.

"Sit down," said he.

"No, sir, begging your pardon, sir, I'd very much rather stand."

"Well, do as you please. If you've got anything to say, get ahead with it."

"You see, sir, it's like this: There's a tradition — what you might call a standard — among the best servants, and it's 'anded down from one to the other. When I joined I was a third, and my chief and the butler were both old men who had been trained by the best. I took after them just as they took after those that went before them. It goes back away further than you can tell."

"I can understand that."

"But what perhaps you don't so well understand, sir, is the spirit that's lying behind it. There's a man's own private self-respect to which you allude, sir, in this 'ere article. That's his own. But he can't keep it, so far as I can see, unless he returns good service for the good money that he takes."

"Well, he can do that without — without — crawling."

The footman's florid face paled a little at the word. Apparently he was not quite the automatic machine that he appeared.

"By your leave, sir, we'll come to that later," said he. "But I want you to understand what we are trying to do even when you don't approve of our way of doing it. We are trying to make life smooth and easy for our master and for our master's guests. We do it in the way that's been 'anded down to us as the best way. If our master could suggest any better way, then it would be our place either to leave his service if we disapproved it, or else to try and do it as he wanted. It would hurt the self-respect of any good servant to take a man’s money and not give him the very best he can in return for it.”

“Well,” said the American, “it’s not quite as we see it in America.”

“That’s right, sir. I was over there last year with Sir Henry — in New York, sir, and I saw something of the men-servants and their ways. They were paid for service, sir, and they did not give what they were paid for. You talk about self-respect, sir, in this article. Well now, my self-respect wouldn’t let me treat a master as I’ve seen them do over there.”

“We don’t even like the word ‘master,’” said the American.

“Well, that’s neither ‘ere nor there, sir, if I may be so bold as to say so. If you’re serving a gentleman he’s your master for the time being and any name you may choose to call it by don’t make no difference. But you can’t eat your cake and ‘ave it, sir. You can’t sell your independence and ‘ave it, too.”

“Maybe not,” said the American. “All the same, the fact remains that your manhood is the worse for it.”

“There I don’t ‘old with you, sir.”

“If it were not, you wouldn’t be standing there arguing so quietly. You’d speak to me in another tone, I guess.”

“You must remember, sir, that you are my master’s guest, and that I am paid to wait upon you and make your visit a pleasant one. So long as you are ‘ere, sir, that is ‘ow I regard it. Now in London—”

“Well, what about London?”

“Well, in London if you would have the goodness to let me have a word with you I could make you understand a little clearer what I am trying to explain to you. ‘Arding is my name, sir. If you get a call from ‘Enery ‘Arding, you’ll know that I ‘ave a word to say to you.”

* * * * *

So it happened about three days later that our American journalist in his London hotel received a letter that a Mr. Henry Harding desired to speak with him. The man was waiting in the hall dressed in quiet tweeds. He had cast his manner with his uniform and was firmly deliberate in all he said and did. The professional silkiness was gone, and his bearing was all that the most democratic could desire.

“It’s courteous of you to see me, sir,” said he. “There’s that matter of the article still open between us, and I would like to have a word or two more about it.”

“Well, I can give you just ten minutes,” said the American journalist.

“I understand that you are a busy man, sir, so I’ll cut it as short as I can. There’s a public garden opposite if you would be so good as talk it over in the open air.”

The Pressman took his hat and accompanied the footman. They walked together down the winding gravelled path among the rhododendron bushes.

“It’s like this, sir,” said the footman, halting when they had arrived at a quiet nook. “I was hoping that you would see it in our light and understand me when I told you that the servant who was trying to give honest service for his master’s money, and the man who is free born and as good as his neighbour are two separate folk. There’s the duty man and there’s the natural man, and they are different men. To say that I have no life of my own, or self-respect of my own, because there are days when I give myself to the service of another, is not fair treatment. I was hoping, sir, that when I made this clear to you, you would have met me like a man and taken it back.”

“Well, you have not convinced me,” said the American. “A man’s a man, and he’s responsible for all his actions.”

“Then you won’t take back what you said of me — the degradation and the rest?”

“No, I don’t see why I should.”

The man’s comely face darkened.

“You *will* take it back,” said he. “I’ll smash your blasted head if you don’t.”

The American was suddenly aware that he was in the presence of a very ugly proposition. The man was large, strong, and evidently most earnest and determined. His brows were knotted, his eyes flashing, and his fists clenched. On neutral ground he struck the journalist as really being a very different person to the obsequious and silken footman of Trustall Old Manor. The American had all the courage, both of his race and of his profession, but he realised suddenly that he was very much in the wrong. He was man enough to say so.

“Well, sir, this once,” said the footman, as they shook hands. “I don’t approve of the mixin’ of classes — none of the best servants do. But I’m on my own to-day, so we’ll let it pass. But I wish you’d set it right with your people, sir. I wish you would make them understand that an English servant can give good and proper service and yet that he’s a human bein’ I after all.”

DANGER STORY IV. THE FALL OF LORD BARRYMORE

These are few social historians of those days who have not told of the long and fierce struggle between those two famous bucks, Sir Charles Tregellis and Lord Barrymore, for the Lordship of the Kingdom of St. James, a struggle which divided the whole of fashionable London into two opposing camps. It has been chronicled also how the peer retired suddenly and the commoner resumed his great career without a rival. Only here, however, one can read the real and remarkable reason for this sudden eclipse of a star.

It was one morning in the days of this famous struggle that Sir Charles Tregellis was performing his very complicated toilet, and Ambrose, his valet, was helping him to attain that pitch of perfection which had long gained him the reputation of being the best-dressed man in town. Suddenly Sir Charles paused, his *coup d'archet* half-executed, the final beauty of his neck-cloth half-achieved, while he listened with surprise and indignation upon his large, comely, fresh-complexioned face. Below, the decorous hum of Jermyn Street had been broken by the sharp, staccato, metallic beating of a doorknocker.

"I begin to think that this uproar must be at our door," said Sir Charles, as one who thinks aloud. "For five minutes it has come and gone; yet Perkins has his orders."

At a gesture from his master Ambrose stepped out upon the balcony and craned his discreet head over it. From the street below came a voice, drawling but clear.

"You would oblige me vastly, fellow, if you would do me the favour to open this door," said the voice.

"Who is it? What is it?" asked the scandalised Sir Charles, with his arrested elbow still pointing upwards.

Ambrose had returned with as much surprise upon his dark face as the etiquette of his position would allow him to show.

"It is a young gentleman, Sir Charles."

"A young gentleman? There is no one in London who is not aware that I do not show before midday. Do you know the person? Have you seen him before?"

"I have not seen him, sir, but he is very like some one I could name."

"Like some one? Like whom?"

"With all respect, Sir Charles, I could for a moment have believed that it was yourself when I looked down. A smaller man, sir, and a youth; but the voice, the face, the bearing—"

"It must be that young cub Vereker, my brother's ne'er-do-weel," muttered Sir Charles, continuing his toilet. "I have heard that there are points in which he resembles me. He wrote from Oxford that he would come, and I answered that I would not see him. Yet he ventures to insist. The fellow needs a lesson! Ambrose, ring for Perkins."

A large footman entered with an outraged expression upon his face.

"I cannot have this uproar at the door, Perkins!"

"If you please, the young gentleman won't go away, sir."

"Won't go away? It is your duty to see that he goes away. Have you not your orders? Didn't you tell him that I am not seen before midday?"

"I said so, sir. He would have pushed his way in, for all I could say, so I slammed the door in his face."

"Very right, Perkins."

"But now, sir, he is making such a din that all the folk are at the windows. There is a crowd gathering in the street, sir."

From below came the crack-crack-crack of the knocker, ever rising in insistence, with a chorus of laughter and encouraging comments from the spectators. Sir Charles flushed with anger. There must be some limit to such impertinence.

"My clouded amber cane is in the corner," said he. "Take it with you, Perkins. I give you a free hand. A stripe or two may bring the young rascal to reason."

The large Perkins smiled and departed. The door was heard to open below and the knocker was at rest. A few moments later there followed a prolonged howl and a noise as of a beaten carpet. Sir Charles listened with a smile which gradually faded from his good-humoured face.

"The fellow must not overdo it," he muttered. "I would not do the lad an injury, whatever his deserts may be. Ambrose, run out on the balcony and call him off. This has gone far enough."

But before the valet could move there came the swift patter of agile feet upon the stairs, and a handsome youth, dressed in the height of fashion, was standing framed in the open doorway. The pose, the face, above all the curious, mischievous, dancing light in the large blue eyes, all spoke of the famous Tregellis blood. Even such was Sir Charles when, twenty years before, he had, by virtue of his spirit and audacity, in one short season taken a place in London from which Brummell himself had afterwards vainly struggled to depose him. The youth faced the angry features of his uncle with an air of debonair amusement, and he held towards him, upon his outstretched palms, the broken fragments of an amber cane.

"I much fear, sir," said he, "that in correcting your fellow I have had the misfortune to injure what can only have been your property. I am vastly concerned that it should have occurred."

Sir Charles stared with intolerant eyes at this impertinent apparition. The other looked back in a laughable parody of his senior's manner. As Ambrose had remarked after his inspection from the balcony, the two were very alike, save that the younger was smaller, finer cut, and the more nervously alive of the two.

"You are my nephew, Vereker Tregellis?" asked Sir Charles.

"Yours to command, sir."

"I hear bad reports of you from Oxford."

"Yes, sir, I understand that the reports *are* bad."

"Nothing could be worse."

"So I have been told."

"Why are you here, sir?"

"That I might see my famous uncle."

"So you made a tumult in his street, forced his door, and beat his footman?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had my letter?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were told that I was not receiving?"

"Yes, sir."

"I can remember no such exhibition of impertinence."

The young man smiled and rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

"There is an impertinence which is redeemed by wit," said Sir Charles, severely. "There is another which is the mere boorishness of the clodhopper. As you grow older and wiser you may discern the difference."

"You are very right, sir," said the young man, warmly. "The finer shades of impertinence are infinitely subtle, and only experience and the society of one who is a recognised master" — here he bowed to his uncle—"can enable one to excel."

Sir Charles was notoriously touchy in temper for the first hour after his morning chocolate. He allowed himself to show it.

"I cannot congratulate my brother upon his son," said he. "I had hoped for something more worthy of our traditions."

"Perhaps, sir, upon a longer acquaintance—"

"The chance is too small to justify the very irksome experience. I must ask you, sir, to bring to a close a visit which never should have been made."

The young man smiled affably, but gave no sign of departure.

"May I ask, sir," said he, in an easy conversational fashion, "whether you can recall Principal Munro, of my college?"

"No, sir, I cannot," his uncle answered, sharply.

"Naturally you would not burden your memory to such an extent, but he still remembers you. In some conversation with him yesterday he did me the honour to say that I brought you back to his recollection by what he was pleased to call the mingled levity and obstinacy of my character. The levity seems to have already impressed you. I am now reduced to showing you the obstinacy." He sat down in a chair near the door and folded his arms, still beaming pleasantly at his uncle.

"Oh, you won't go?" asked Sir Charles, grimly.

"No, sir; I will stay."

"Ambrose, step down and call a couple of chairmen."

"I should not advise it, sir. They will be hurt."

"I will put you out with my own hands."

"That, sir, you can always do. As my uncle, I could scarce resist you. But, short of throwing me down the stair, I do not see how you can avoid giving me half an hour of your attention."

Sir Charles smiled. He could not help it. There was so much that was reminiscent of his own arrogant and eventful youth in the bearing of this youngster. He was mollified, too, by the defiance of menials and quick submission to himself. He turned to the glass and signed to Ambrose to continue his duties.

"I must ask you to await the conclusion of my toilet," said he. "Then we shall see how far you can justify such an intrusion."

When the valet had at last left the room Sir Charles turned his attention once more to his scapegrace nephew, who had viewed the details of the famous buck's toilet with the face of an acolyte assisting at a mystery.

"Now, sir," said the older man, "speak, and speak to the point, for I can assure you that I have many more important matters which claim my attention. The Prince is waiting for me at the present instant at Carlton House. Be as brief as you can. What is it that you want?"

"A thousand pounds."

"Really! Nothing more?" Sir Charles had turned acid again.

"Yes, sir; an introduction to Mr. Brinsley Sheridan, whom I know to be your friend."

"And why to him?"

"Because I am told that he controls Drury Lane Theatre, and I have a fancy to be an actor. My friends assure me that I have a pretty talent that way."

"I can see you clearly, sir, in Charles Surface, or any other part where a foppish insolence is the essential. The less you acted, the better you would be. But it is absurd to suppose that I could help you to such a career. I could not justify it to your father. Return to Oxford at once, and continue your studies."

"Impossible!"

"And pray, sir, what is the impediment?"

"I think I may have mentioned to you that I had an interview yesterday with the Principal. He ended it by remarking that the authorities of the University could tolerate me no more."

"Sent down?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this is the fruit, no doubt, of a long series of rascalities."

"Something of the sort, sir, I admit."

In spite of himself, Sir Charles began once more to relax in his severity towards this handsome young scapegrace. His absolute frankness disarmed criticism. It was in a more gracious voice that the older man continued the conversation.

"Why do you want this large sum of money?" he asked.

"To pay my college debts before I go, sir."

"Your father is not a rich man."

"No, sir. I could not apply to him for that reason."

"So you come to me, who am a stranger!"

"No, sir, no! You are my uncle, and, if I may say so, my ideal and my model."

"You flatter me, my good Vereker. But if you think you can flatter me out of a thousand pounds, you mistake your man. I will give you no money."

"Of course, sir, if you can't—"

"I did not say I can't. I say I won't."

"If you can, sir, I think you will."

Sir Charles smiled, and flicked his sleeve with his lace handkerchief.

"I find you vastly entertaining," said he. "Pray continue your conversation. Why do you think that I will give you so large a sum of money?"

"The reason that I think so," continued the younger man, "is that I can do you a service which will seem to you worth a thousand pounds."

Sir Charles raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Is this blackmail?" he inquired.

Vereker Tregellis flushed.

"Sir," said he, with a pleasing sternness, "you surprise me. You should know the blood of which I come too well to suppose that I would attempt such a thing."

"I am relieved to hear that there are limits to what you consider to be justifiable. I must confess that I had seen none in your conduct up to now. But you say that you can do me a service which will be worth a thousand pounds to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And pray, sir, what may this service be?"

"To make Lord Barrymore the laughing-stock of the town."

Sir Charles, in spite of himself, lost for an instant the absolute serenity of his self-control. He started, and his face expressed his surprise. By what devilish instinct did this raw undergraduate find the one chink in his armour? Deep in his heart, unacknowledged to any one, there was the will to pay many a thousand pounds to the man who would bring ridicule upon this his most dangerous rival, who was challenging his supremacy in fashionable London.

"Did you come from Oxford with this precious project?" he asked, after a pause.

"No, sir. I chanced to see the man himself last night, and I conceived an ill-will to him, and would do him a mischief."

"Where did you see him?"

"I spent the evening, sir, at the Vauxhall Gardens."

"No doubt you would," interpolated his uncle.

"My Lord Barrymore was there. He was attended by one who was dressed as a clergyman, but who was, as I am told, none other than Hooper the Tinman, who acts as his bully and thrashes all who may offend him. Together they passed down the central path, insulting the women and browbeating the men. They actually hustled me. I was offended, sir — so much so that I nearly took the matter in hand then and there."

"It is as well that you did not. The prizefighter would have beaten you."

"Perhaps so, sir — and also, perhaps not."

"Ah, you add pugilism to your elegant accomplishments?"

The young man laughed pleasantly.

"William Ball is the only professor of my Alma Mater who has ever had occasion to compliment me, sir. He is better known as the Oxford Pet. I think, with all modesty, that I could hold him for a dozen rounds. But last night I suffered the annoyance without protest, for since it is said that the same scene is enacted every evening, there is always time to act."

"And how would you act, may I ask?"

"That, sir, I should prefer to keep to myself; but my aim, as I say, would be to make Lord Barrymore a laughing-stock to all London."

Sir Charles cogitated for a moment.

"Pray, sir," said he, "why did you imagine that any humiliation to Lord Barrymore would be pleasing to me?"

"Even in the provinces we know something of what passes in polite circles. Your antagonism to this man is to be found in every column of fashionable gossip. The town is divided between you. It is impossible that any public slight upon him should be unpleasing to you."

Sir Charles smiled.

"You are a shrewd reasoner," said he. "We will suppose for the instant that you are right. Can you give me no hint what means you would adopt to attain this very desirable end?"

"I would merely make the remark, sir, that many women have been wronged by this fellow. That is a matter of common knowledge. If one of these damsels were to upbraid him in public in such a fashion that the sympathy of the bystanders should be with her, then I can imagine, if she were sufficiently persistent, that his lordship's position might become an unenviable one."

"And you know such a woman?"

"I think, sir, that I do."

"Well, my good Vereker, if any such attempt is in your mind, I see no reason why I should stand between Lord Barrymore and the angry fair. As to whether the result is worth a thousand pounds, I can make no promise."

"You shall yourself be the judge, sir."

"I will be an exacting judge, nephew."

"Very good, sir; I should not desire otherwise. If things go as I hope, his lordship will not show face in St. James's Street for a year to come. I will now, if I may, give you your instructions."

"My instructions! What do you mean? I have nothing to do with the matter."

"You are the judge, sir, and therefore must be present."

"I can play no part."

"No, sir. I would not ask you to do more than be a witness."

"What, then, are my instructions, as you are pleased to call them?"

"You will come to the Gardens to-night, uncle, at nine o'clock precisely. You will walk down the centre path, and you will seat yourself upon one of the rustic seats which are beside the statue of Aphrodite. You will wait and you will observe."

"Very good; I will do so. I begin to perceive, nephew, that the breed of Tregellis has not yet lost some of the points which have made it famous."

It was at the stroke of nine that night when Sir Charles, throwing his reins to the groom, descended from his high yellow phaeton, which forthwith turned to take its place in the long line of fashionable carriages waiting for their owners. As he entered the gate of the Gardens, the centre at that time of the dissipation and revelry of London, he turned up the collar of his driving-cape and drew his hat over his eyes, for he had no desire to be personally associated with what might well prove to be a public scandal. In spite of his attempted disguise, however, there was that in his walk and his carriage which caused many an eye to be turned after him as he passed and many a hand to be raised in salute. Sir Charles walked on, and, seating himself upon the rustic bench in front of the famous statue, which was in the very middle of the Gardens, he waited in amused suspense to see the next act in this comedy.

From the pavilion, whence the paths radiated, there came the strains of the band of the Foot Guards, and by the many-coloured lamps twinkling from every tree Sir Charles could see the confused whirl of the dancers. Suddenly the music stopped. The quadrilles were at an end.

An instant afterwards the central path by which he sat was thronged by the revellers. In a many-coloured crowd, stocked and cravated with all the bravery of buff and plum-colour and blue, the bucks of the town passed and repassed with their high-waisted, straight-skirted, be-bonneted ladies upon their arms.

It was not a decorous assembly. Many of the men, flushed and noisy, had come straight from their potations. The women, too, were loud and aggressive. Now and then, with a rush and a swirl, amid a chorus of screams from the girls and good-humoured laughter from their escorts, some band of high-blooded, noisy youths would break their way across the moving throng. It was no place for the prim or demure, and there was a spirit of good-nature and merriment among the crowd which condoned the wildest liberty.

And yet there were some limits to what could be tolerated even by so Bohemian an assembly. A murmur of anger followed in the wake of two roisterers who were making their way down the path. It would, perhaps, be fairer to say one roisterer; for of the two it was only the first who carried himself with such insolence, although it was the second who ensured that he could do it with impunity.

The leader was a very tall, hatchet-faced man, dressed in the very height of fashion, whose evil, handsome features were flushed with wine and arrogance. He shouldered his way roughly through the crowd, peering with an abominable smile into the faces of the women, and occasionally, where the weakness of the escort invited an insult, stretching out his hand and caressing the cheek or neck of some passing girl, laughing loudly as she winced away from his touch.

Close at his heels walked his hired attendant, whom, out of insolent caprice and with a desire to show his contempt for the prejudices of others, he had dressed as a rough country clergyman. This fellow slouched along with frowning brows and surly, challenging eyes, like some faithful, hideous human bulldog, his knotted hands protruding from his rusty cassock, his great underhung jaw turning slowly from right to left as he menaced the crowd with his sinister gaze. Already a close observer might have marked upon his face a heaviness and looseness of feature, the first signs of that physical decay which in a very few years was to stretch him, a helpless wreck, too weak to utter his own name, upon the causeway of the London streets. At present, however, he was still an unbeaten man, the terror of the Ring, and as his ill-omened face was seen behind his infamous master many a half-raised cane was lowered and many a hot word was checked, while the whisper of “Hooper! ‘Ware Bully Hooper!” warned all who were aggrieved that it might be best to pocket their injuries lest some even worse thing should befall them. Many a maimed and disfigured man had carried away from Vauxhall the handiwork of the Tinman and his patron.

Moving in insolent slowness through the crowd, the bully and his master had just come opposite to the bench upon which sat Sir Charles Tregellis. At this place the path opened up into a circular space, brilliantly illuminated and surrounded by rustic seats. From one of these an elderly, ringleted woman, deeply veiled, rose suddenly and barred the path of the swaggering nobleman. Her voice sounded clear and strident above the babel of tongues, which hushed suddenly that their owners might hear it.

“Marry her, my lord! I entreat you to marry her! Oh, surely you will marry my poor Amelia!” said the voice.

Lord Barrymore stood aghast. From all sides folk were closing in and heads were peering over shoulders. He tried to push on, but the lady barred his way and two palms pressed upon his beruffled front.

“Surely, surely you would not desert her! Take the advice of that good, kind clergyman behind you!” wailed the voice. “Oh, be a man of honour and marry her!”

The elderly lady thrust out her hand and drew forward a lumpish-looking young woman, who sobbed and mopped her eyes with her handkerchief.

“The plague take you!” roared his lordship, in a fury. “Who is the wench? I vow that I never clapped eyes on either of you in my life!”

“It is my niece Amelia,” cried the lady, “your own loving Amelia! Oh, my lord, can you pretend that you have forgotten poor, trusting Amelia, of Woodbine Cottage at Lichfield.”

“I never set foot in Lichfield in my life!” cried the peer. “You are two impostors who should be whipped at the cart’s tail.”

"Oh, wicked! Oh, Amelia!" screamed the lady, in a voice that resounded through the Gardens. "Oh, my darling, try to soften his hard heart; pray him that he make an honest woman of you at last."

With a lurch the stout young woman fell forward and embraced Lord Barrymore with the hug of a bear. He would have raised his cane, but his arms were pinned to his sides.

"Hooper! Hooper!" screamed the furious peer, craning his neck in horror, for the girl seemed to be trying to kiss him.

But the bruiser, as he ran forward, found himself entangled with the old lady.

"Out o' the way, marm!" he cried. "Out o' the way, I say!" and pushed her violently aside.

"Oh, you rude, rude man!" she shrieked, springing back in front of him. "He hustled me, good people; you saw him hustle me! A clergyman, but no gentleman! What! you would treat a lady so — you would do it again? Oh, I could slap, slap, slap you!"

And with each repetition of the word, with extraordinary swiftness, her open palm rang upon the prizefighter's cheek.

The crowd buzzed with amazement and delight.

"Hooper! Hooper!" cried Lord Barrymore once more, for he was still struggling in the ever-closer embrace of the unwieldy and amorous Amelia.

The bully again pushed forward to the aid of his patron, but again the elderly lady confronted him, her head back, her left arm extended, her whole attitude, to his amazement, that of an expert boxer.

The prizefighter's brutal nature was roused. Woman or no woman, he would show the murmuring crowd what it meant to cross the path of the Tinman. She had struck him. She must take the consequence. No one should square up to him with impunity. He swung his right with a curse. The bonnet instantly ducked under his arm, and a line of razor-like knuckles left an open cut under his eye.

Amid wild cries of delight and encouragement from the dense circle of spectators, the lady danced round the sham clergyman, dodging his ponderous blows, slipping under his arms, and smacking back at him most successfully. Once she tripped and fell over her own skirt, but was up and at him again in an instant.

"You vulgar fellow!" she shrieked. "Would you strike a helpless woman! Take that! Oh, you rude and ill-bred man!"

Bully Hooper was cowed for the first time in his life by the extraordinary thing that he was fighting. The creature was as elusive as a shadow, and yet the blood was dripping down his chin from the effects of the blows. He shrank back with an amazed face from so uncanny an antagonist. And in the moment that he did so his spell was for ever broken. Only success could hold it. A check was fatal. In all the crowd there was scarce one who was not nursing some grievance against master or man, and waiting for that moment of weakness in which to revenge it.

With a growl of rage the circle closed in. There was an eddy of furious, struggling men, with Lord Barrymore's thin, flushed face and Hooper's bulldog jowl in the centre of it. A moment after they were both upon the ground, and a dozen sticks were rising and falling above them.

"Let me up! You're killing me! For God's sake let me up!" cried a crackling voice.

Hooper fought mute, like the bulldog he was, till his senses were beaten out of him.

Bruised, kicked, and mauled, never did their worst victim come so badly from the Gardens as the bully and his patron that night. But worse than the ache of wounds for Lord Barrymore was the smart of the mind as he thought how every club and drawing-room in London would laugh for a week to come at the tale of his Amelia and her aunt.

Sir Charles had stood, rocking with laughter, upon the bench which overlooked the scene. When at last he made his way back through the crowds to his yellow phaeton, he was not entirely surprised to find that the back seat was already occupied by two giggling females, who were exchanging most unladylike repartees with the attendant grooms.

"You young rascals!" he remarked, over his shoulder, as he gathered up his reins.

The two females tittered loudly.

"Uncle Charles!" cried the elder, "may I present Mr. Jack Jarvis, of Brasenose College? I think, uncle, you should take us somewhere to sup, for it has been a vastly fatiguing performance. To-morrow I will do myself the honour to call, at your convenience, and will venture to bring with me the receipt for one thousand pounds."

DANGER STORY V. THE HORROR OF THE HEIGHTS
(WHICH INCLUDES THE MANUSCRIPT KNOWN AS THE JOYCE-ARMSTRONG FRAGMENT)

The idea that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most *macabre* and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforce the statement. Though the assertions contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation. This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R.N., and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent and Sussex border. It was on the fifteenth of September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chauntry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock. A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The notebook was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H. Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognised the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be gathered from other sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air-pilots of England. For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscopic attachment which is known by his name. The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible — exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving aeroplane. There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the outside cover, which have been pronounced by the Home Office experts to be blood — probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year. He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than any one, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen, Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: “And where, pray, is Myrtle’s head?”

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the Flying School on Salisbury Plain, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airmen will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked note-book: —

“Nevertheless, when I dined at Rheims with Coselli and Gustav Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone — always presuming that my premonitions are correct.

“Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been immeasurably raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district.

"It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, every one said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First, there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne, but they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the machine, which was at an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything. There were several other similar cases, and then there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the halfpenny papers, and yet how little was ever done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous vol-plané from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot's seat. Died of what? 'Heart disease,' said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor's heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. 'Died of fright,' said Venables, but could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like ‘Monstrous.’ They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he *did* die of fright, just as Venables thought.

“And then there was Myrtle’s head. Do you really believe — does anybody really believe — that a man’s head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed that it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes—’all slimy with grease,’ said somebody at the inquest. Queer that nobody got thinking after that! I did — but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time. I’ve made three ascents — how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun! — but I’ve never been high enough. Now, with this new light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand to-morrow. I’ll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it’s dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I’ll visit the air-jungle to-morrow — and if there’s anything there I shall know it. If I return, I’ll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don’t, this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please.

“I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There’s nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing, it doesn’t mind damp, and the weather looks as if we should be in the clouds all the time. It’s a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements — enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian-blind principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot. You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded boots, a storm-cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part. Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I should if I were using the biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show — if you want to get the last foot of lift out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered — or both.

"I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then, with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow down wind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud-bank above me. It's all-important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

"It was a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west — one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger — before we learned to put an overmastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud-banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action — a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full, deep-throated purr — the ten singing as one. That's where the beauty of our modern silencers comes in. We can at last control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the early aviators could come back to see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which have been bought at the cost of their lives!

“About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half-a-dozen flying machines were doing hackwork at the thousand-foot level, looking like little black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud-land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapour were swirling round my face. It was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards. My sopped and dripping wings had made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in lighter cloud, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second — opal-coloured and fleecy — at a great height above my head, a white unbroken ceiling above, and a dark unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small water-birds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whirr of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

“The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

“Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud-stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westward. The wind had been steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze — twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out into a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head — all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach. It was a quarter past ten o’clock, and the barograph needle pointed to twelve thousand eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pump. No wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

"I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down wind at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I had always to turn again and tack up in the wind's eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay, and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

"When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harp-strings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky. There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose — rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

"These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbours have called a *tourbillon*, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I have spoken had, as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment's warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun round for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet. It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half-insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort — it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out of the eddies and was skimming down the sky. Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the danger-spot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of that peculiar nausea which goes with rarefaction of the air. For the first time I unscrewed the mouth of my oxygen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I soared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

"It is very clear to me that the insensibility which came upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero Fahrenheit. At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the surface of the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my planes, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent missfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

"It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something whizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is for ever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth's envelope the risk would be a very real one.

"My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no farther. Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear, but my machine had reached its limit. The attenuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still missfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action. If I had not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring in circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers which I had imagined.

"I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new air-tract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen — nothing but the distant silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for more than another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent vol-plané could at any time take me to the earth.

“Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to very fine cigarette-smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil upon my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind when my eyes looked upwards and I saw the most wonderful vision that ever man has seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

“Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size — far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul’s. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsated with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

“I had half-turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the top. There was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely iridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me, a wonderful fairy squadron of strange, unknown argosies of the sky — creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

“But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon — the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them. These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

“But a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

“The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles, and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy-up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of prey which is waiting to pounce. Its method of progression — done so swiftly that it was not easy to follow — was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

"I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a vol-piqué, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I disengaged myself, but only to be caught round the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on to my back.

"As I fell over I blazed off both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that mighty bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature's back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared to attempt, my engine still full on, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite. Far behind me I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

"Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious spiral vol-plané from nearly eight miles of altitude — first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel beneath me as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tank, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from the village of Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal upon earth has ever yet taken and lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of the heights — and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

"And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and will confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of . . ."

Here a page of the manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing: —

"Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!"

Such in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington upon the borders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the note-book was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator's theory is correct that this air-jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures at some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found. The picture of that monoplane skimming down the sky, with the nameless terrors flying as swiftly beneath it and cutting it off always from the earth while they gradually closed in upon their victim, is one upon which a man who valued his sanity would prefer not to dwell. There are many, as I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has disappeared, and I would commend to them his own words: "This note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please."

DANGER STORY VI. BORROWED SCENES

"It cannot be done. People really would not stand it. I know because I have tried." — *Extract from an unpublished paper upon George Borrow and his writings*.

Yes, I tried and my experience may interest other people. You must imagine, then, that I am soaked in George Borrow, especially in his *Lavengro* and his *Romany Rye*, that I have modelled both my thoughts, my speech and my style very carefully upon those of the master, and that finally I set forth one summer day actually to lead the life of which I had read. Behold me, then, upon the country road which leads from the railway-station to the Sussex village of Swinehurst.

As I walked, I entertained myself by recollections of the founders of Sussex, of Cerdic that mighty sea-rover, and of Ella his son, said by the bard to be taller by the length of a spear-head than the tallest of his fellows. I mentioned the matter twice to peasants whom I met upon the road. One, a tallish man with a freckled face, sidled past me and ran swiftly towards the station. The other, a smaller and older man, stood entranced while I recited to him that passage of the Saxon Chronicle which begins, "Then came Leija with longships forty-four, and the fyrd went out against him." I was pointing out to him that the Chronicle had been written partly by the monks of Saint Albans and afterwards by those of Peterborough, but the fellow sprang suddenly over a gate and disappeared.

The village of Swinehurst is a straggling line of half-timbered houses of the early English pattern. One of these houses stood, as I observed, somewhat taller than the rest, and seeing by its appearance and by the sign which hung before it that it was the village inn, I approached it, for indeed I had not broken my fast since I had left London. A stoutish man, five foot eight perhaps in height, with black coat and trousers of a greyish shade, stood outside, and to him I talked in the fashion of the master.

"Why a rose and why a crown?" I asked as I pointed upwards.

He looked at me in a strange manner. The man's whole appearance was strange. "Why not?" he answered, and shrank a little backwards.

"The sign of a king," said I.

"Surely," said he. "What else should we understand from a crown?"

"And which king?" I asked.

"You will excuse me," said he, and tried to pass.

"Which king?" I repeated.

"How should I know?" he asked.

"You should know by the rose," said I, "which is the symbol of that Tudor-ap-Tudor, who, coming from the mountains of Wales, yet seated his posterity upon the English throne. Tudor," I continued, getting between the stranger and the door of the inn, through which he appeared to be desirous of passing, "was of the same blood as Owen Glendower, the famous chieftain, who is by no means to be confused with Owen Gwynedd, the father of Madoc of the Sea, of whom the bard made the famous cnylyn, which runs in the Welsh as follows:—"

I was about to repeat the famous stanza of Dafydd-ap-Gwilyn when the man, who had looked very fixedly and strangely at me as I spoke, pushed past me and entered the inn. "Truly," said I aloud, "it is surely Swinehurst to which I have come, since the same means the grove of the hogs." So saying I followed the fellow into the bar parlour, where I perceived him seated in a corner with a large chair in front of him. Four persons of various degrees were drinking beer at a central table, whilst a small man of active build, in a black, shiny suit, which seemed to have seen much service, stood before the empty fireplace. Him I took to be the landlord, and I asked him what I should have for my dinner.

He smiled, and said that he could not tell.

"But surely, my friend," said I, "you can tell me what is ready?"

"Even that I cannot do," he answered; "but I doubt not that the landlord can inform us." On this he rang the bell, and a fellow answered, to whom I put the same question.

"What would you have?" he asked.

I thought of the master, and I ordered a cold leg of pork to be washed down with tea and beer.

"Did you say tea *and* beer?" asked the landlord.

"I did."

"For twenty-five years have I been in business," said the landlord, "and never before have I been asked for tea and beer."

"The gentleman is joking," said the man with the shining coat.

"Or else—" said the elderly man in the corner.

"Or what, sir?" I asked.

"Nothing," said he—"nothing." There was something very strange in this man in the corner — him to whom I had spoken of Dafydd-ap-Gwilyn.

"Then you are joking," said the landlord.

I asked him if he had read the works of my master, George Borrow. He said that he had not. I told him that in those five volumes he would not, from cover to cover, find one trace of any sort of a joke. He would also find that my master drank tea and beer together. Now it happens that about tea I have read nothing either in the sagas or in the bardic cnylynions, but, whilst the landlord had departed to prepare my meal, I recited to the company those Icelandic stanzas which praise the beer of Gunnar, the long-haired son of Harold the Bear. Then, lest the language should be unknown to some of them, I recited my own translation, ending with the line —

If the beer be small, then let the mug be large.

I then asked the company whether they went to church or to chapel. The question surprised them, and especially the strange man in the corner, upon whom I now fixed my eye. I had read his secret, and as I looked at him he tried to shrink behind the clock-case.

"The church or the chapel?" I asked him.

"The church," he gasped.

"*Which* church?" I asked.

He shrank farther behind the clock. "I have never been so questioned," he cried.

I showed him that I knew his secret, "Rome was not built in a day," said I.

"He! He!" he cried. Then, as I turned away, he put his head from behind the clock-case and tapped his forehead with his forefinger. So also did the man with the shiny coat, who stood before the empty fireplace.

Having eaten the cold leg of pork — where is there a better dish, save only boiled mutton with capers? — and having drunk both the tea and the beer, I told the company that such a meal had been called "to box Harry" by the master, who had observed it to be in great favour with commercial gentlemen out of Liverpool. With this information and a stanza or two from Lopez de Vega I left the Inn of the Rose and Crown behind me, having first paid my reckoning. At the door the landlord asked me for my name and address.

"And why?" I asked.

"Lest there should be inquiry for you," said the landlord.

“But why should they inquire for me?”

“Ah, who knows?” said the landlord, musing. And so I left him at the door of the Inn of the Rose and Crown, whence came, I observed, a great tumult of laughter. “Assuredly,” thought I, “Rome was not built in a day.”

Having walked down the main street of Swinehurst, which, as I have observed, consists of half-timbered buildings in the ancient style, I came out upon the country road, and proceeded to look for those wayside adventures, which are, according to the master, as thick as blackberries for those who seek them upon an English highway. I had already received some boxing lessons before leaving London, so it seemed to me that if I should chance to meet some traveller whose size and age seemed such as to encourage the venture I would ask him to strip off his coat and settle any differences which we could find in the old English fashion. I waited, therefore, by a stile for any one who should chance to pass, and it was while I stood there that the screaming horror came upon me, even as it came upon the master in the dingle. I gripped the bar of the stile, which was of good British oak. Oh, who can tell the terrors of the screaming horror! That was what I thought as I grasped the oaken bar of the stile. Was it the beer — or was it the tea? Or was it that the landlord was right and that other, the man with the black, shiny coat, he who had answered the sign of the strange man in the corner? But the master drank tea with beer. Yes, but the master also had the screaming horror. All this I thought as I grasped the bar of British oak, which was the top of the stile. For half an hour the horror was upon me. Then it passed, and I was left feeling very weak and still grasping the oaken bar.

I had not moved from the stile, where I had been seized by the screaming horror, when I heard the sound of steps behind me, and turning round I perceived that a pathway led across the field upon the farther side of the stile. A woman was coming towards me along this pathway, and it was evident to me that she was one of those gipsy Rias, of whom the master has said so much. Looking beyond her, I could see the smoke of a fire from a small dingle, which showed where her tribe were camping. The woman herself was of a moderate height, neither tall nor short, with a face which was much sunburned and freckled. I must confess that she was not beautiful, but I do not think that anyone, save the master, has found very beautiful women walking about upon the high-roads of England. Such as she was I must make the best of her, and well I knew how to address her, for many times had I admired the mixture of politeness and audacity which should be used in such a case. Therefore, when the woman had come to the stile, I held out my hand and helped her over.

“What says the Spanish poet Calderon?” said I. “I doubt not that you have read the couplet which has been thus Englished:

Oh, maiden, may I humbly pray
That I may help you on your way.”

The woman blushed, but said nothing.

“Where,” I asked, “are the Romany chals and the Romany chis?”

She turned her head away and was silent.

“Though I am a gorgio,” said I, “I know something of the Romany lil,” and to prove it I sang the stanza —

Coliko, coliko saulo wer
Apopli to the farming ker
Will wel and mang him mullo,
Will wel and mang his truppo.

The girl laughed, but said nothing. It appeared to me from her appearance that she might be one of those who make a living at telling fortunes or “dukkering,” as the master calls it, at racecourses and other gatherings of the sort.

“Do you dukker?” I asked.

She slapped me on the arm. “Well, you *are* a pot of ginger!” said she.

I was pleased at the slap, for it put me in mind of the peerless Belle. “You can use Long Melford,” said I, an expression which, with the master, meant fighting.

“Get along with your sauce!” said she, and struck me again.

“You are a very fine young woman,” said I, “and remind me of Grunelda, the daughter of Hjalmar, who stole the golden bowl from the King of the Islands.”

She seemed annoyed at this. “You keep a civil tongue, young man,” said she.

“I meant no harm, Belle. I was but comparing you to one of whom the saga says her eyes were like the shine of sun upon icebergs.”

This seemed to please her, for she smiled. “My name ain’t Belle,” she said at last.

“What is your name?”

“Henrietta.”

“The name of a queen,” I said aloud.

“Go on,” said the girl.

“Of Charles’s queen,” said I, “of whom Waller the poet (for the English also have their poets, though in this respect far inferior to the Basques) — of whom, I say, Waller the poet said:

That she was Queen was the Creator’s act,
Belated man could but endorse the fact.”

“I say!” cried the girl. “How you do go on!”

“So now,” said I, “since I have shown you that you are a queen you will surely give me a choomer” — this being a kiss in Romany talk.

“I’ll give you one on the ear-hole,” she cried.

“Then I will wrestle with you,” said I. “If you should chance to put me down, I will do penance by teaching you the Armenian alphabet — the very word alphabet, as you will perceive, shows us that our letters came from Greece. If, on the other hand, I should chance to put you down, you will give me a choomer.”

I had got so far, and she was climbing the stile with some pretence of getting away from me, when there came a van along the road, belonging, as I discovered, to a baker in Swinehurst. The horse, which was of a brown colour, was such as is bred in the New Forest, being somewhat under fifteen hands and of a hairy, ill-kempt variety. As I know less than the master about horses, I will say no more of this horse, save to repeat that its colour was brown — nor indeed had the horse or the horse’s colour anything to do with my narrative. I might add, however, that it could either be taken as a small horse or as a large pony, being somewhat tall for the one, but undersized for the other. I have now said enough about this horse, which has nothing to do with my story, and I will turn my attention to the driver.

This was a man with a broad, florid face and brown side-whiskers. He was of a stout build and had rounded shoulders, with a small mole of a reddish colour over his left eyebrow. His jacket was of velveteen, and he had large, iron-shod boots, which were perched upon the splashboard in front of him. He pulled up the van as he came up to the stile near which I was standing with the maiden who had come from the dingle, and in a civil fashion he asked me if I could oblige him with a light for his pipe. Then, as I drew a matchbox from my pocket, he threw his reins over the splashboard, and removing his large, iron-shod boots he descended on to the road. He was a burly man, but inclined to fat and scant of breath. It seemed to me that it was a chance for one of those wayside boxing adventures which were so common in the olden times. It was my intention that I should fight the man, and that the maiden from the dingle standing by me should tell me when to use my right or my left, as the case might be, picking me up also in case I should be so unfortunate as to be knocked down by the man with the iron-shod boots and the small mole of a reddish colour over his left eyebrow.

"Do you use Long Melford?" I asked.

He looked at me in some surprise, and said that any mixture was good enough for him.

"By Long Melford," said I, "I do not mean, as you seem to think, some form of tobacco, but I mean that art and science of boxing which was held in such high esteem by our ancestors, that some famous professors of it, such as the great Gully, have been elected to the highest offices of the State. There were men of the highest character amongst the bruisers of England, of whom I would particularly mention Tom of Hereford, better known as Tom Spring, though his father's name, as I have been given to understand, was Winter. This, however, has nothing to do with the matter in hand, which is that you must fight me."

The man with the florid face seemed very much surprised at my words, so that I cannot think that adventures of this sort were as common as I had been led by the master to expect.

"Fight!" said he. "What about?"

"It is a good old English custom," said I, "by which we may determine which is the better man."

"I've nothing against you," said he.

"Nor I against you," I answered. "So that we will fight for love, which was an expression much used in olden days. It is narrated by Harold Sygvynson that among the Danes it was usual to do so even with battle-axes, as is told in his second set of runes. Therefore you will take off your coat and fight." As I spoke, I stripped off my own.

The man’s face was less florid than before. “I’m not going to fight,” said he.

“Indeed you are,” I answered, “and this young woman will doubtless do you the service to hold your coat.”

“You’re clean balmy,” said Henrietta.

“Besides,” said I, “if you will not fight me for love, perhaps you will fight me for this,” and I held out a sovereign. “Will you hold his coat?” I said to Henrietta.

“I’ll hold the thick ‘un,” said she.

“No, you don’t,” said the man, and put the sovereign into the pocket of his trousers, which were of a corduroy material. “Now,” said he, “what am I to do to earn this?”

“Fight,” said I.

“How do you do it?” he asked.

“Put up your hands,” I answered.

He put them up as I had said, and stood there in a sheepish manner with no idea of anything further. It seemed to me that if I could make him angry he would do better, so I knocked off his hat, which was black and hard, of the kind which is called billy-cock.

“Heh, guv’nor!” he cried, “what are you up to?”

“That was to make you angry,” said I.

“Well, I am angry,” said he.

“Then here is your hat,” said I, “and afterwards we shall fight.”

I turned as I spoke to pick up his hat, which had rolled behind where I was standing. As I stooped to reach it, I received such a blow that I could neither rise erect nor yet sit down. This blow which I received as I stooped for his billy-cock hat was not from his fist, but from his iron-shod boot, the same which I had observed upon the splashboard. Being unable either to rise erect or yet to sit down, I leaned upon the oaken bar of the stile and groaned loudly on account of the pain of the blow which I had received. Even the screaming horror had given me less pain than this blow from the iron-shod boot. When at last I was able to stand erect, I found that the florid-faced man had driven away with his cart, which could no longer be seen. The maiden from the dingle was standing at the other side of the stile, and a ragged man was running across the field from the direction of the fire.

“Why did you not warn me, Henrietta?” I asked.

“I hadn’t time,” said she. “Why were you such a chump as to turn your back on him like that?”

The ragged man had reached us, where I stood talking to Henrietta by the stile. I will not try to write his conversation as he said it, because I have observed that the master never condescends to dialect, but prefers by a word introduced here and there to show the fashion of a man’s speech. I will only say that the man from the dingle spoke as did the Anglo-Saxons, who were wont, as is clearly shown by the venerable Bede, to call their leaders ‘Enjist and ‘Orsa, two words which in their proper meaning signify a horse and a mare.

“What did he hit you for?” asked the man from the dingle. He was exceedingly ragged, with a powerful frame, a lean brown face, and an oaken cudgel in his hand. His voice was very hoarse and rough, as is the case with those who live in the open air. “The bloke hit you,” said he. “What did the bloke hit you for?”

“He asked him to,” said Henrietta.

“Asked him to — asked him what?”

“Why, he asked him to hit him. Gave him a thick ‘un to do it.”

The ragged man seemed surprised. “See here, gov’nor,” said he. “If you’re collectin’, I could let you have one half-price.”

“He took me unawares,” said I.

“What else would the bloke do when you bashed his hat?” said the maiden from the dingle.

By this time I was able to straighten myself up by the aid of the oaken bar which formed the top of the stile. Having quoted a few lines of the Chinese poet Lo-tun-an to the effect that, however hard a knock might be, it might always conceivably be harder, I looked about for my coat, but could by no means find it.

“Henrietta,” I said, “what have you done with my coat?”

“Look here, gov’nor,” said the man from the dingle, “not so much Henrietta, if it’s the same to you. This woman’s my wife. Who are you to call her Henrietta?”

I assured the man from the dingle that I had meant no disrespect to his wife. “I had thought she was a mort,” said I; “but the ria of a Romany chal is always sacred to me.”

“Clean balmy,” said the woman.

“Some other day,” said I, “I may visit you in your camp in the dingle and read you the master’s book about the Romanys.”

“What’s Romanys?” asked the man.

Myself. Romanys are gipsies.

The Man. We ain’t gipsies.

Myself. What are you then?

The Man. We are hoppers.

Myself (to Henrietta). Then how did you understand all I have said to you about gipsies?

Henrietta. I didn’t.

I again asked for my coat, but it was clear now that before offering to fight the florid-faced man with the mole over his left eyebrow I must have hung my coat upon the splashboard of his van. I therefore recited a verse from Ferideddin-Atar, the Persian poet, which signifies that it is more important to preserve your skin than your clothes, and bidding farewell to the man from the dingle and his wife I returned into the old English village of Swinehurst, where I was able to buy a second-hand coat, which enabled me to make my way to the station, where I should start for London. I could not but remark with some surprise that I was followed to the station by many of the villagers, together with the man with the shiny coat, and that other, the strange man, he who had slunk behind the clock-case. From time to time I turned and approached them, hoping to fall into conversation with them; but as I did so they would break and hasten down the road. Only the village constable came on, and he walked by my side and listened while I told him the history of Hunyadi Janos and the events which occurred during the wars between that hero, known also as Corvinus or the crow-like, and Mahommed the second, he who captured Constantinople, better known as Byzantium, before the Christian epoch. Together with the constable I entered the station, and seating myself in a carriage I took paper from my pocket and I began to write upon the paper all that had occurred to me, in order that I might show that it was not easy in these days to follow the example of the master. As I wrote, I heard the constable talk to the station-master, a stout, middle-sized man with a red neck-tie, and tell him of my own adventures in the old English village of Swinehurst.

“He is a gentleman too,” said the constable, “and I doubt not that he lives in a big house in London town.”

“A very big house if every man had his rights,” said the station-master, and waving his hand he signalled that the train should proceed.

DANGER STORY VII. THE SURGEON OF GASTER FELL

I — HOW THE WOMAN CAME TO KIRKBY-MALHOUSE

Bleak and wind-swept is the little town of Kirkby-Malhouse, harsh and forbidding are the fells upon which it stands. It stretches in a single line of grey-stone, slate-roofed houses, dotted down the furze-clad slope of the rolling moor.

In this lonely and secluded village, I, James Upperton, found myself in the summer of ‘85. Little as the hamlet had to offer, it contained that for which I yearned above all things — seclusion and freedom from all which might distract my mind from the high and weighty subjects which engaged it. But the inquisitiveness of my landlady made my lodgings undesirable and I determined to seek new quarters.

As it chanced, I had in one of my rambles come upon an isolated dwelling in the very heart of these lonely moors, which I at once determined should be my own. It was a two-roomed cottage, which had once belonged to some shepherd, but had long been deserted, and was crumbling rapidly to ruin. In the winter floods, the Gaster Beck, which runs down Gaster Fell, where the little dwelling stood, had overswept its banks and torn away a part of the wall. The roof was in ill case, and the scattered slates lay thick amongst the grass. Yet the main shell of the house stood firm and true; and it was no great task for me to have all that was amiss set right.

The two rooms I laid out in a widely different manner — my own tastes are of a Spartan turn, and the outer chamber was so planned as to accord with them. An oil-stove by Rippingille of Birmingham furnished me with the means of cooking; while two great bags, the one of flour, and the other of potatoes, made me independent of all supplies from without. In diet I had long been a Pythagorean, so that the scraggy, long-limbed sheep which browsed upon the wiry grass by the Gaster Beck had little to fear from their new companion. A nine-gallon cask of oil served me as a sideboard; while a square table, a deal chair and a truckle-bed completed the list of my domestic fittings. At the head of my couch hung two unpainted shelves — the lower for my dishes and cooking utensils, the upper for the few portraits which took me back to the little that was pleasant in the long, wearisome toiling for wealth and for pleasure which had marked the life I had left behind.

If this dwelling-room of mine were plain even to squalor, its poverty was more than atoned for by the luxury of the chamber which was destined to serve me as my study. I had ever held that it was best for my mind to be surrounded by such objects as would be in harmony with the studies which occupied it, and that the loftiest and most ethereal conditions of thought are only possible amid surroundings which please the eye and gratify the senses. The room which I had set apart for my mystic studies was set forth in a style as gloomy and majestic as the thoughts and aspirations with which it was to harmonise. Both walls and ceilings were covered with a paper of the richest and glossiest black, on which was traced a lurid and arabesque pattern of dead gold. A black velvet curtain covered the single diamond-paned window; while a thick, yielding carpet of the same material prevented the sound of my own footfalls, as I paced backward and forward, from breaking the current of my thought. Along the cornices ran gold rods, from which depended six pictures, all of the sombre and imaginative caste, which chimed best with my fancy.

And yet it was destined that ere ever I reached this quiet harbour I should learn that I was still one of humankind, and that it is an ill thing to strive to break the bond which binds us to our fellows. It was but two nights before the date I had fixed upon for my change of dwelling, when I was conscious of a bustle in the house beneath, with the bearing of heavy burdens up the creaking stair, and the harsh voice of my landlady, loud in welcome and protestations of joy. From time to time, amid the whirl of words, I could hear a gentle and softly modulated voice, which struck pleasantly upon my ear after the long weeks during which I had listened only to the rude dialect of the dalesmen. For an hour I could hear the dialogue beneath — the high voice and the low, with clatter of cup and clink of spoon, until at last a light, quick step passed my study door, and I knew that my new fellow lodger had sought her room.

On the morning after this incident I was up betimes, as is my wont; but I was surprised, on glancing from my window, to see that our new inmate was earlier still. She was walking down the narrow pathway, which zigzags over the fell — a tall woman, slender, her head sunk upon her breast, her arms filled with a bristle of wild flowers, which she had gathered in her morning rambles. The white and pink of her dress, and the touch of deep red ribbon in her broad drooping hat, formed a pleasant dash of colour against the dun-tinted landscape. She was some distance off when I first set eyes upon her, yet I knew that this wandering woman could be none other than our arrival of last night, for there was a grace and refinement in her bearing which marked her from the dwellers of the fells. Even as I watched, she passed swiftly and lightly down the pathway, and turning through the wicket gate, at the further end of our cottage garden, she seated herself upon the green bank which faced my window, and strewing her flowers in front of her, set herself to arrange them.

As she sat there, with the rising sun at her back, and the glow of the morning spreading like an aureole around her stately and well-poised head, I could see that she was a woman of extraordinary personal beauty. Her face was Spanish rather than English in its type — oval, olive, with black, sparkling eyes, and a sweetly sensitive mouth. From under the broad straw hat two thick coils of blue-black hair curved down on either side of her graceful, queenly neck. I was surprised, as I watched her, to see that her shoes and skirt bore witness to a journey rather than to a mere morning ramble. Her light dress was stained, wet and bedraggled; while her boots were thick with the yellow soil of the fells. Her face, too, wore a weary expression, and her young beauty seemed to be clouded over by the shadow of inward trouble. Even as I watched her, she burst suddenly into wild weeping, and throwing down her bundle of flowers ran swiftly into the house.

Distrait as I was and weary of the ways of the world, I was conscious of a sudden pang of sympathy and grief as I looked upon the spasm of despair which, seemed to convulse this strange and beautiful woman. I bent to my books, and yet my thoughts would ever turn to her proud clear-cut face, her weather-stained dress, her drooping head, and the sorrow which lay in each line and feature of her pensive face.

Mrs. Adams, my landlady, was wont to carry up my frugal breakfast; yet it was very rarely that I allowed her to break the current of my thoughts, or to draw my mind by her idle chatter from weightier things. This morning, however, for once, she found me in a listening mood, and with little prompting, proceeded to pour into my ears all that she knew of our beautiful visitor.

“Miss Eva Cameron be her name, sir,” she said: “but who she be, or where she came fra, I know little more than yoursel’. Maybe it was the same reason that brought her to Kirkby-Malhouse as fetched you there yoursel’, sir.”

“Possibly,” said I, ignoring the covert question; “but I should hardly have thought that Kirkby-Malhouse was a place which offered any great attractions to a young lady.”

“Heh, sir!” she cried, “there’s the wonder of it. The leddy has just come fra France; and how her folk come to learn of me is just a wonder. A week ago, up comes a man to my door — a fine man, sir, and a gentleman, as one could see with half an eye. ‘You are Mrs. Adams,’ says he. ‘I engage your rooms for Miss Cameron,’ says he. ‘She will be here in a week,’ says he; and then off without a word of terms. Last night there comes the young leddy hersel’ — soft-spoken and downcast, with a touch of the French in her speech. But my sakes, sir! I must away and mak’ her some tea, for she’ll feel lonesome-like, poor lamb, when she wakes under a strange roof.”

II — HOW I WENT FORTH TO GASTER FELL

I was still engaged upon my breakfast when I heard the clatter of dishes and the landlady’s footfall as she passed toward her new lodger’s room. An instant afterward she had rushed down the passage and burst in upon me with uplifted hand and startled eyes. “Lord ‘a mercy, sir!” she cried, “and asking your pardon for troubling you, but I’m feared o’ the young leddy, sir; she is not in her room.”

“Why, there she is,” said I, standing up and glancing through the casement. “She has gone back for the flowers she left upon the bank.”

“Oh, sir, see her boots and her dress!” cried the landlady, wildly. “I wish her mother was here, sir — I do. Where she has been is more than I ken, but her bed has not been lain on this night.”

“She has felt restless, doubtless, and went for a walk, though the hour was certainly a strange one.”

Mrs. Adams pursed her lip and shook her head. But then as she stood at the casement, the girl beneath looked smilingly up at her and beckoned to her with a merry gesture to open the window.

“Have you my tea there?” she asked in a rich, clear voice, with a touch of the mincing French accent.

“It is in your room, miss.”

“Look at my boots, Mrs. Adams!” she cried, thrusting them out from under her skirt. “These fells of yours are dreadful places — effroyable — one inch, two inch; never have I seen such mud! My dress, too — *voilà*!”

“Eh, miss, but you are in a pickle,” cried the landlady, as she gazed down at the bedraggled gown. “But you must be main weary and heavy for sleep.”

“No, no,” she answered, laughingly, “I care not for sleep. What is sleep? it is a little death — *voilà tout*. But for me to walk, to run, to beathe the air — that is to live. I was not tired, and so all night I have explored these fells of Yorkshire.”

“Lord ‘a mercy, miss, and where did you go?” asked Mrs. Adams.

She waved her hand round in a sweeping gesture which included the whole western horizon. “There,” she cried. “O comme elles sont tristes et sauvages, ces collines! But I have flowers here. You will give me water, will you not? They will wither else." She gathered her treasures in her lap, and a moment later we heard her light, springy footfall upon the stair.

So she had been out all night, this strange woman. What motive could have taken her from her snug room on to the bleak, wind-swept hills? Could it be merely the restlessness, the love of adventure of a young girl? Or was there, possibly, some deeper meaning in this nocturnal journey?

Deep as were the mysteries which my studies had taught me to solve, here was a human problem which for the moment at least was beyond my comprehension. I had walked out on the moor in the forenoon, and on my return, as I topped the brow that overlooks the little town, I saw my fellow-lodger some little distance off among the gorse. She had raised a light easel in front of her, and with papered board laid across it, was preparing to paint the magnificent landscape of rock and moor which stretched away in front of her. As I watched her I saw that she was looking anxiously to right and left. Close by me a pool of water had formed in a hollow. Dipping the cup of my pocket-flask into it, I carried it across to her.

"Miss Cameron, I believe," said I. "I am your fellow-lodger. Upperton is my name. We must introduce ourselves in these wilds if we are not to be for ever strangers."

"Oh, then, you live also with Mrs. Adams!" she cried. "I had thought that there were none but peasants in this strange place."

"I am a visitor, like yourself," I answered. "I am a student, and have come for quiet and repose, which my studies demand."

"Quiet, indeed!" said she, glancing round at the vast circle of silent moors, with the one tiny line of grey cottages which sloped down beneath us.

"And yet not quiet enough," I answered, laughing, "for I have been forced to move further into the fells for the absolute peace which I require."

"Have you, then, built a house upon the fells?" she asked, arching her eyebrows.

"I have, and hope within a few days to occupy it."

"Ah, but that is *triste*," she cried. "And where is it, then, this house which you have built?"

"It is over yonder," I answered. "See that stream which lies like a silver band upon the distant moor? It is the Gaster Beck, and it runs through Gaster Fell."

She started, and turned upon me her great dark, questioning eyes with a look in which surprise, incredulity, and something akin to horror seemed to be struggling for mastery.

“And you will live on the Gaster Fell?” she cried.

“So I have planned. But what do you know of Gaster Fell, Miss Cameron?” I asked. “I had thought that you were a stranger in these parts.”

“Indeed, I have never been here before,” she answered. “But I have heard my brother talk of these Yorkshire moors; and, if I mistake not, I have heard him name this very one as the wildest and most savage of them all.”

“Very likely,” said I, carelessly. “It is indeed a dreary place.”

“Then why live there?” she cried, eagerly. “Consider the loneliness, the barrenness, the want of all comfort and of all aid, should aid be needed.”

“Aid! What aid should be needed on Gaster Fell?”

She looked down and shrugged her shoulders. “Sickness may come in all places,” said she. “If I were a man I do not think I would live alone on Gaster Fell.”

“I have braved worse dangers than that,” said I, laughing; “but I fear that your picture will be spoiled, for the clouds are banking up, and already I feel a few raindrops.”

Indeed, it was high time we were on our way to shelter, for even as I spoke there came the sudden, steady swish of the shower. Laughing merrily, my companion threw her light shawl over her head, and, seizing picture and easel, ran with the lithe grace of a young fawn down the furze-clad slope, while I followed after with camp-stool and paint-box.

* * * * *

It was the eve of my departure from Kirkby-Malhouse that we sat upon the green bank in the garden, she with dark dreamy eyes looking sadly out over the sombre fells; while I, with a book upon my knee, glanced covertly at her lovely profile and marvelled to myself how twenty years of life could have stamped so sad and wistful an expression upon it.

“You have read much,” I remarked at last. “Women have opportunities now such as their mothers never knew. Have you ever thought of going further — or seeking a course of college or even a learned profession?”

She smiled wearily at the thought.

“I have no aim, no ambition,” she said. “My future is black — confused — a chaos. My life is like to one of these paths upon the fells. You have seen them, Monsieur Upperton. They are smooth and straight and clear where they begin; but soon they wind to left and wind to right, and so mid rocks and crags until they lose themselves in some quagmire. At Brussels my path was straight; but now, *mon Dieu*! who is there can tell me where it leads?”

“It might take no prophet to do that, Miss Cameron,” quoth I, with the fatherly manner which twoscore years may show toward one. “If I may read your life, I would venture to say that you were destined to fulfil the lot of women — to make some good man happy, and to shed around, in some wider circle, the pleasure which your society has given me since first I knew you.”

“I will never marry,” said she, with a sharp decision, which surprised and somewhat amused me.

“Not marry — and why?”

A strange look passed over her sensitive features, and she plucked nervously at the grass on the bank beside her.

“I dare not,” said she in a voice that quivered with emotion.

“Dare not?”

“It is not for me. I have other things to do. That path of which I spoke is one which I must tread alone.”

“But this is morbid,” said I. “Why should your lot, Miss Cameron, be separate from that of my own sisters, or the thousand other young ladies whom every season brings out into the world? But perhaps it is that you have a fear and distrust of mankind. Marriage brings a risk as well as a happiness.”

“The risk would be with the man who married me,” she cried. And then in an instant, as though she had said too much, she sprang to her feet and drew her mantle round her. “The night air is chill, Mr. Upperton,” said she, and so swept swiftly away, leaving me to muse over the strange words which had fallen from her lips.

Clearly, it was time that I should go. I set my teeth and vowed that another day should not have passed before I should have snapped this newly formed tie and sought the lonely retreat which awaited me upon the moors. Breakfast was hardly over in the morning before a peasant dragged up to the door the rude hand-cart which was to convey my few personal belongings to my new dwelling. My fellow-lodger had kept her room; and, steeled as my mind was against her influence, I was yet conscious of a little throb of disappointment that she should allow me to depart without a word of farewell. My hand-cart with its load of books had already started, and I, having shaken hands with Mrs. Adams, was about to follow it, when there was a quick scurry of feet on the stair, and there she was beside me all panting with her own haste.

“Then you go — you really go?” said she.

“My studies call me.”

“And to Gaster Fell?” she asked.

“Yes; to the cottage which I have built there.”

“And you will live alone there?”

“With my hundred companions who lie in that cart.”

“Ah, books!” she cried, with a pretty shrug of her graceful shoulders. “But you will make me a promise?”

“What is it?” I asked, in surprise.

“It is a small thing. You will not refuse me?”

“You have but to ask it.”

She bent forward her beautiful face with an expression of the most intense earnestness. “You will bolt your door at night?” said she; and was gone ere I could say a word in answer to her extraordinary request.

It was a strange thing for me to find myself at last duly installed in my lonely dwelling. For me, now, the horizon was bounded by the barren circle of wiry, unprofitable grass, patched over with furze bushes and scarred by the profusion of Nature’s gaunt and granite ribs. A duller, wearier waste I have never seen; but its dullness was its very charm.

And yet the very first night which I spent at Gaster Fell there came a strange incident to lead my thoughts back once more to the world which I had left behind me.

It had been a sullen and sultry evening, with great livid cloud-banks mustering in the west. As the night wore on, the air within my little cabin became closer and more oppressive. A weight seemed to rest upon my brow and my chest. From far away the low rumble of thunder came moaning over the moor. Unable to sleep, I dressed, and standing at my cottage door, looked on the black solitude which surrounded me.

Taking the narrow sheep path which ran by this stream, I strolled along it for some hundred yards, and had turned to retrace my steps, when the moon was finally buried beneath an ink-black cloud, and the darkness deepened so suddenly that I could see neither the path at my feet, the stream upon my right, nor the rocks upon my left. I was standing groping about in the thick gloom, when there came a crash of thunder with a flash of lightning which lighted up the whole vast fell, so that every bush and rock stood out clear and hard in the vivid light. It was but for an instant, and yet that momentary view struck a thrill of fear and astonishment through me, for in my very path, not twenty yards before me, there stood a woman, the livid light beating upon her face and showing up every detail of her dress and features.

There was no mistaking those dark eyes, that tall, graceful figure. It was she — Eva Cameron, the woman whom I thought I had for ever left. For an instant I stood petrified, marvelling whether this could indeed be she, or whether it was some figment conjured up by my excited brain. Then I ran swiftly forward in the direction where I had seen her, calling loudly upon her, but without reply. Again I called, and again no answer came back, save the melancholy wail of the owl. A second flash illuminated the landscape, and the moon burst out from behind its cloud. But I could not, though I climbed upon a knoll which overlooked the whole moor, see any sign of this strange midnight wanderer. For an hour or more I traversed the fell, and at last found myself back at my little cabin, still uncertain as to whether it had been a woman or a shadow upon which I gazed.

III — OF THE GREY COTTAGE IN THE GLEN

It was either on the fourth or the fifth day after I had taken possession of my cottage that I was astonished to hear footsteps upon the grass outside, quickly followed by a crack, as from a stick upon the door. The explosion of an infernal machine would hardly have surprised or discomfited me more. I had hoped to have shaken off all intrusion for ever, yet here was somebody beating at my door with as little ceremony as if it had been a village ale-house. Hot with anger, I flung down my book and withdrew the bolt just as my visitor had raised his stick to renew his rough application for admittance. He was a tall, powerful man, tawny-bearded and deep-chested, clad in a loose-fitting suit of tweed, cut for comfort rather than elegance. As he stood in the shimmering sunlight, I took in every feature of his face. The large, fleshy nose; the steady blue eyes, with their thick thatch of overhanging brows; the broad forehead, all knitted and lined with furrows, which were strangely at variance with his youthful bearing. In spite of his weather-stained felt hat, and the coloured handkerchief slung round his muscular brown neck, I could see at a glance he was a man of breeding and education. I had been prepared for some wandering shepherd or uncouth tramp, but this apparition fairly disconcerted me.

“You look astonished,” said he, with a smile. “Did you think, then, that you were the only man in the world with a taste for solitude? You see that there are other hermits in the wilderness besides yourself.”

“Do you mean to say that you live here?” I asked in no conciliatory voice.

“Up yonder,” he answered, tossing his head backward. “I thought as we were neighbours, Mr. Upperton, that I could not do less than look in and see if I could assist you in any way.”

“Thank you,” I said coldly, standing with my hand upon the latch of the door. “I am a man of simple tastes, and you can do nothing for me. You have the advantage of me in knowing my name.”

He appeared to be chilled by my ungracious manner.

“I learned it from the masons who were at work here,” he said. “As for me, I am a surgeon, the surgeon of Gaster Fell. That is the name I have gone by in these parts, and it serves as well as another.”

“Not much room for practice here?” I observed.

“Not a soul except yourself for miles on either side.”

“You appear to have had need of some assistance yourself,” I remarked, glancing at a broad white splash, as from the recent action of some powerful acid, upon his sunburnt cheek.

“That is nothing,” he answered, curtly, turning his face half round to hide the mark. “I must get back, for I have a companion who is waiting for me. If I can ever do anything for you, pray let me know. You have only to follow the beck upward for a mile or so to find my place. Have you a bolt on the inside of your door?”

“Yes,” I answered, rather startled at this question.

“Keep it bolted, then,” he said. “The fell is a strange place. You never know who may be about. It is as well to be on the safe side. Goodbye.” He raised his hat, turned on his heel and lounged away along the bank of the little stream.

I was still standing with my hand upon the latch, gazing after my unexpected visitor, when I became aware of yet another dweller in the wilderness. Some distance along the path which the stranger was taking there lay a great grey boulder, and leaning against this was a small, wizened man, who stood erect as the other approached, and advanced to meet him. The two talked for a minute or more, the taller man nodding his head frequently in my direction, as though describing what had passed between us. Then they walked on together, and disappeared in a dip of the fell. Presently I saw them ascending once more some rising ground farther on. My acquaintance had thrown his arm round his elderly friend, either from affection or from a desire to aid him up the steep incline. The square burly figure and its shrivelled, meagre companion stood out against the sky-line, and turning their faces, they looked back at me. At the sight, I slammed the door, lest they should be encouraged to return. But when I peeped from the window some minutes afterward, I perceived that they were gone.

All day I bent over the Egyptian papyrus upon which I was engaged; but neither the subtle reasonings of the ancient philosopher of Memphis, nor the mystic meaning which lay in his pages, could raise my mind from the things of earth. Evening was drawing in before I threw my work aside in despair. My heart was bitter against this man for his intrusion. Standing by the beck which purled past the door of my cabin, I cooled my heated brow, and thought the matter over. Clearly it was the small mystery hanging over these neighbours of mine which had caused my mind to run so persistently on them. That cleared up, they would no longer cause an obstacle to my studies. What was to hinder me, then, from walking in the direction of their dwelling, and observing for myself, without permitting them to suspect my presence, what manner of men they might be? Doubtless, their mode of life would be found to admit of some simple and prosaic explanation. In any case, the evening was fine, and a walk would be bracing for mind and body. Lighting my pipe, I set off over the moors in the direction which they had taken.

About half-way down a wild glen there stood a small clump of gnarled and stunted oak trees. From behind these, a thin dark column of smoke rose into the still evening air. Clearly this marked the position of my neighbour’s house. Trending away to the left, I was able to gain the shelter of a line of rocks, and so reach a spot from which I could command a view of the building without exposing myself to any risk of being observed. It was a small, slate-covered cottage, hardly larger than the boulders among which it lay. Like my own cabin, it showed signs of having been constructed for the use of some shepherd; but, unlike mine, no pains had been taken by the tenants to improve and enlarge it. Two little peeping windows, a cracked and weather-beaten door, and a discoloured barrel for catching the rain water, were the only external objects from which I might draw deductions as to the dwellers within. Yet even in these there was food for thought, for as I drew nearer, still concealing myself behind the ridge, I saw that thick bars of iron covered the windows, while the old door was slashed and plated with the same metal. These strange precautions, together with the wild surroundings and unbroken solitude, gave an indescribably ill omen and fearsome character to the solitary building. Thrusting my pipe into my pocket, I crawled upon my hands and knees through the gorse and ferns until I was within a hundred yards of my neighbour’s door. There, finding that I could not approach nearer without fear of detection, I crouched down, and set myself to watch.

I had hardly settled into my hiding place, when the door of the cottage swung open, and the man who had introduced himself to me as the surgeon of Gaster Fell came out, bareheaded, with a spade in his hands. In front of the door there was a small cultivated patch containing potatoes, peas and other forms of green stuff, and here he proceeded to busy himself, trimming, weeding and arranging, singing the while in a powerful though not very musical voice. He was all engrossed in his work, with his back to the cottage, when there emerged from the half-open door the same attenuated creature whom I had seen in the morning. I could perceive now that he was a man of sixty, wrinkled, bent, and feeble, with sparse, grizzled hair, and long, colourless face. With a cringing, sidelong gait, he shuffled toward his companion, who was unconscious of his approach until he was close upon him. His light footfall or his breathing may have finally given notice of his proximity, for the worker sprang round and faced him. Each made a quick step toward the other, as though in greeting, and then — even now I feel the horror of the instant — the tall man rushed upon and knocked his companion to the earth, then whipping up his body, ran with great speed over the intervening ground and disappeared with his burden into the house.

Case hardened as I was by my varied life, the suddenness and violence of the thing made me shudder. The man's age, his feeble frame, his humble and deprecating manner, all cried shame against the deed. So hot was my anger, that I was on the point of striding up to the cabin, unarmed as I was, when the sound of voices from within showed me that the victim had recovered. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and all was grey, save a red feather in the cap of Pennigent. Secure in the failing light, I approached near and strained my ears to catch what was passing. I could hear the high, querulous voice of the elder man and the deep, rough monotone of his assailant, mixed with a strange metallic jangling and clanking. Presently the surgeon came out, locked the door behind him and stamped up and down in the twilight, pulling at his hair and brandishing his arms, like a man demented. Then he set off, walking rapidly up the valley, and I soon lost sight of him among the rocks.

When his footsteps had died away in the distance, I drew nearer to the cottage. The prisoner within was still pouring forth a stream of words, and moaning from time to time like a man in pain. These words resolved themselves, as I approached, into prayers — shrill, voluble prayers, pattered forth with the intense earnestness of one who sees impending an imminent danger. There was to me something inexpressibly awesome in this gush of solemn entreaty from the lonely sufferer, meant for no human ear, and jarring upon the silence of the night. I was still pondering whether I should mix myself in the affair or not, when I heard in the distance the sound of the surgeon's returning footfall. At that I drew myself up quickly by the iron bars and glanced in through the diamond-paned window. The interior of the cottage was lighted up by a lurid glow, coming from what I afterward discovered to be a chemical furnace. By its rich light I could distinguish a great litter of retorts, test tubes and condensers, which sparkled over the table, and threw strange, grotesque shadows on the wall. On the further side of the room was a wooden framework resembling a hencoop, and in this, still absorbed in prayer, knelt the man whose voice I heard. The red glow beating upon his upturned face made it stand out from the shadow like a painting from Rembrandt, showing up every wrinkle upon the parchment-like skin. I had but time for a fleeting glance; then, dropping from the window, I made off through the rocks and the heather, nor slackened my pace until I found myself back in my cabin once more. There I threw myself upon my couch, more disturbed and shaken than I had ever thought to feel again.

Such doubts as I might have had as to whether I had indeed seen my former fellow-lodger upon the night of the thunderstorm were resolved the next morning. Strolling along down the path which led to the fell, I saw in one spot where the ground was soft the impressions of a foot — the small, dainty foot of a well-booted woman. That tiny heel and high instep could have belonged to none other than my companion of Kirkby-Malhouse. I followed her trail for some distance, till it still pointed, as far as I could discern it, to the lonely and ill-omened cottage. What power could there be to draw this tender girl, through wind and rain and darkness, across the fearsome moors to that strange rendezvous?

I have said that a little beck flowed down the valley and past my very door. A week or so after the doings which I have described, I was seated by my window when I perceived something white drifting slowly down the stream. My first thought was that it was a drowning sheep; but picking up my stick, I strolled to the bank and hooked it ashore. On examination it proved to be a large sheet, torn and tattered, with the initials J. C. in the corner. What gave it its sinister significance, however, was that from hem to hem it was all dabbled and discoloured.

Shutting the door of my cabin, I set off up the glen in the direction of the surgeon’s cabin. I had not gone far before I perceived the very man himself. He was walking rapidly along the hillside, beating the furze bushes with a cudgel and bellowing like a madman. Indeed, at the sight of him, the doubts as to his sanity which had arisen in my mind were strengthened and confirmed.

As he approached I noticed that his left arm was suspended in a sling. On perceiving me he stood irresolute, as though uncertain whether to come over to me or not. I had no desire for an interview with him, however, so I hurried past him, on which he continued on his way, still shouting and striking about with his club. When he had disappeared over the fells, I made my way down to his cottage, determined to find some clue to what had occurred. I was surprised, on reaching it, to find the iron-plated door flung wide open. The ground immediately outside it was marked with the signs of a struggle. The chemical apparatus within and the furniture were all dashed about and shattered. Most suggestive of all, the sinister wooden cage was stained with blood-marks, and its unfortunate occupant had disappeared. My heart was heavy for the little man, for I was assured I should never see him in this world more.

There was nothing in the cabin to throw any light upon the identity of my neighbours. The room was stuffed with chemical instruments. In one corner a small bookcase contained a choice selection of works of science. In another was a pile of geological specimens collected from the limestone.

I caught no glimpse of the surgeon upon my homeward journey; but when I reached my cottage I was astonished and indignant to find that somebody had entered it in my absence. Boxes had been pulled out from under the bed, the curtains disarranged, the chairs drawn out from the wall. Even my study had not been safe from this rough intruder, for the prints of a heavy boot were plainly visible on the ebony-black carpet.

IV — OF THE MAN WHO CAME IN THE NIGHT

The night set in gusty and tempestuous, and the moon was all girt with ragged clouds. The wind blew in melancholy gusts, sobbing and sighing over the moor, and setting all the gorse bushes agroaning. From time to time a little sputter of rain pattered up against the window-pane. I sat until near midnight, glancing over the fragment on immortality by Iamblichus, the Alexandrian platonist, of whom the Emperor Julian said that he was posterior to Plato in time but not in genius. At last, shutting up my book, I opened my door and took a last look at the dreary fell and still more dreary sky. As I protruded my head, a swoop of wind caught me and sent the red ashes of my pipe sparkling and dancing through the darkness. At the same moment the moon shone brilliantly out from between two clouds, and I saw, sitting on the hillside, not two hundred yards from my door, the man who called himself the surgeon of Gaster Fell. He was squatted among the heather, his elbows upon his knees, and his chin resting upon his hands, as motionless as a stone, with his gaze fixed steadily upon the door of my dwelling.

At the sight of this ill-omened sentinel, a chill of horror and of fear shot through me, for his gloomy and mysterious associations had cast a glamour round the man, and the hour and place were in keeping with his sinister presence. In a moment, however, a manly glow of resentment and self-confidence drove this petty emotion from my mind, and I strode fearlessly in his direction. He rose as I approached and faced me, with the moon shining on his grave, bearded face and glittering on his eyeballs. “What is the meaning of this?” I cried, as I came upon him. “What right have you to play the spy on me?”

I could see the flush of anger rise on his face. “Your stay in the country has made you forget your manners,” he said. “The moor is free to all.”

“You will say next that my house is free to all,” I said, hotly. “You have had the impertience to ransack it in my absence this afternoon.”

He started, and his features showed the most intense excitement. “I swear to you that I had no hand in it!” he cried. “I have never set foot in your house in my life. Oh, sir, sir, if you will but believe me, there is a danger hanging over you, and you would do well to be careful."

"I have had enough of you," I said. "I saw that cowardly blow you struck when you thought no human eye rested upon you. I have been to your cottage, too, and know all that it has to tell. If there is a law in England, you shall hang for what you have done. As to me, I am an old soldier, sir, and I am armed. I shall not fasten my door. But if you or any other villain attempt to cross my threshold it shall be at your own risk." With these words, I swung round upon my heel and strode into my cabin.

For two days the wind freshened and increased, with constant squalls of rain until on the third night the most furious storm was raging which I can ever recollect in England. I felt that it was positively useless to go to bed, nor could I concentrate my mind sufficiently to read a book. I turned my lamp half down to moderate the glare, and leaning back in my chair, I gave myself up to reverie. I must have lost all perception of time, for I have no recollection how long I sat there on the borderland betwixt thought and slumber. At last, about 3 or possibly 4 o'clock, I came to myself with a start — not only came to myself, but with every sense and nerve upon the strain. Looking round my chamber in the dim light, I could not see anything to justify my sudden trepidation. The homely room, the rain-blurred window and the rude wooden door were all as they had been. I had begun to persuade myself that some half-formed dream had sent that vague thrill through my nerves, when in a moment I became conscious of what it was. It was a sound — the sound of a human step outside my solitary cottage.

Amid the thunder and the rain and the wind I could hear it — a dull, stealthy footfall, now on the grass, now on the stones — occasionally stopping entirely, then resumed, and ever drawing nearer. I sat breathlessly, listening to the eerie sound. It had stopped now at my very door, and was replaced by a panting and gasping, as of one who has travelled fast and far.

By the flickering light of the expiring lamp I could see that the latch of my door was twitching, as though a gentle pressure was exerted on it from without. Slowly, slowly, it rose, until it was free of the catch, and then there was a pause of a quarter minute or more, while I still eat silent with dilated eyes and drawn sabre. Then, very slowly, the door began to revolve upon its hinges, and the keen air of the night came whistling through the slit. Very cautiously it was pushed open, so that never a sound came from the rusty hinges. As the aperture enlarged, I became aware of a dark, shadowy figure upon my threshold, and of a pale face that looked in at me. The features were human, but the eyes were not. They seemed to burn through the darkness with a greenish brilliancy of their own; and in their baleful, shifty glare I was conscious of the very spirit of murder. Springing from my chair, I had raised my naked sword, when, with a wild shouting, a second figure dashed up to my door. At its approach my shadowy visitant uttered a shrill cry, and fled away across the fells, yelping like a beaten hound.

Tingling with my recent fear, I stood at my door, peering through the night with the discordant cry of the fugitives still ringing in my ears. At that moment a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the whole landscape and made it as clear as day. By its light I saw far away upon the hillside two dark figures pursuing each other with extreme rapidity across the fells. Even at that distance the contrast between them forbid all doubt as to their identity. The first was the small, elderly man, whom I had supposed to be dead; the second was my neighbour, the surgeon. For an instant they stood out clear and hard in the unearthly light; in the next, the darkness had closed over them, and they were gone. As I turned to re-enter my chamber, my foot rattled against something on my threshold. Stooping, I found it was a straight knife, fashioned entirely of lead, and so soft and brittle that it was a strange choice for a weapon. To render it more harmless, the top had been cut square off. The edge, however, had been assiduously sharpened against a stone, as was evident from the markings upon it, so that it was still a dangerous implement in the grasp of a determined man.

And what was the meaning of it all? you ask. Many a drama which I have come across in my wandering life, some as strange and as striking as this one, has lacked the ultimate explanation which you demand. Fate is a grand weaver of tales; but she ends them, as a rule, in defiance of all artistic laws, and with an unbecoming want of regard for literary propriety. As it happens, however, I have a letter before me as I write which I may add without comment, and which will clear all that may remain dark.

“Kirkby Lunatic Asylum,
“*September 4th*, 1885.

“Sir, — I am deeply conscious that some apology and explanation is due to you for the very startling and, in your eyes, mysterious events which have recently occurred, and which have so seriously interfered with the retired existence which you desire to lead. I should have called upon you on the morning after the recapture of my father, but my knowledge of your dislike to visitors and also of — you will excuse my saying it — your very violent temper, led me to think that it was better to communicate with you by letter.

"My poor father was a hard-working general practitioner in Birmingham, where his name is still remembered and respected. About ten years ago he began to show signs of mental aberration, which we were inclined to put down to overwork and the effects of a sunstroke. Feeling my own incompetence to pronounce upon a case of such importance, I at once sought the highest advice in Birmingham and London. Among others we consulted the eminent alienist, Mr. Fraser Brown, who pronounced my father's case to be intermittent in its nature, but dangerous during the paroxysms. 'It may take a homicidal, or it may take a religious turn,' he said; 'or it may prove to be a mixture of both. For months he may be as well as you or me, and then in a moment he may break out. You will incur a great responsibility if you leave him without supervision.'

"I need say no more, sir. You will understand the terrible task which has fallen upon my poor sister and me in endeavouring to save my father from the asylum which in his sane moments filled him with horror. I can only regret that your peace has been disturbed by our misfortunes, and I offer you in my sister's name and my own our apologies."

"Yours truly,
"J. Cameron."

DANGER STORY VIII. HOW IT HAPPENED

She was a writing medium. This is what she wrote: —

I can remember some things upon that evening most distinctly, and others are like some vague, broken dreams. That is what makes it so difficult to tell a connected story. I have no idea now what it was that had taken me to London and brought me back so late. It just merges into all my other visits to London. But from the time that I got out at the little country station everything is extraordinarily clear. I can live it again — every instant of it.

I remember so well walking down the platform and looking at the illuminated clock at the end which told me that it was half-past eleven. I remember also my wondering whether I could get home before midnight. Then I remember the big motor, with its glaring head-lights and glitter of polished brass, waiting for me outside. It was my new thirty-horse-power Robur, which had only been delivered that day. I remember also asking Perkins, my chauffeur, how she had gone, and his saying that he thought she was excellent.

"I'll try her myself," said I, and I climbed into the driver's seat.

"The gears are not the same," said he. "Perhaps, sir, I had better drive."

"No; I should like to try her," said I.

And so we started on the five-mile drive for home.

My old car had the gears as they used always to be in notches on a bar. In this car you passed the gear-lever through a gate to get on the higher ones. It was not difficult to master, and soon I thought that I understood it. It was foolish, no doubt, to begin to learn a new system in the dark, but one often does foolish things, and one has not always to pay the full price for them. I got along very well until I came to Claystall Hill. It is one of the worst hills in England, a mile and a half long and one in six in places, with three fairly sharp curves. My park gates stand at the very foot of it upon the main London road.

We were just over the brow of this hill, where the grade is steepest, when the trouble began. I had been on the top speed, and wanted to get her on the free; but she stuck between gears, and I had to get her back on the top again. By this time she was going at a great rate, so I clapped on both brakes, and one after the other they gave way. I didn't mind so much when I felt my footbrake snap, but when I put all my weight on my side-brake, and the lever clanged to its full limit without a catch, it brought a cold sweat out of me. By this time we were fairly tearing down the slope. The lights were brilliant, and I brought her round the first curve all right. Then we did the second one, though it was a close shave for the ditch. There was a mile of straight then with the third curve beneath it, and after that the gate of the park. If I could shoot into that harbour all would be well, for the slope up to the house would bring her to a stand.

Perkins behaved splendidly. I should like that to be known. He was perfectly cool and alert. I had thought at the very beginning of taking the bank, and he read my intention.

"I wouldn't do it, sir," said he. "At this pace it must go over and we should have it on the top of us."

Of course he was right. He got to the electric switch and had it off, so we were in the free; but we were still running at a fearful pace. He laid his hands on the wheel.

"I'll keep her steady," said he, "if you care to jump and chance it. We can never get round that curve. Better jump, sir."

"No," said I; "I'll stick it out. You can jump if you like."

"I'll stick it with you, sir," said he.

If it had been the old car I should have jammed the gear-lever into the reverse, and seen what would happen. I expect she would have stripped her gears or smashed up somehow, but it would have been a chance. As it was, I was helpless. Perkins tried to climb across, but you couldn't do it going at that pace. The wheels were whirring like a high wind and the big body creaking and groaning with the strain. But the lights were brilliant, and one could steer to an inch. I remember thinking what an awful and yet majestic sight we should appear to any one who met us. It was a narrow road, and we were just a great, roaring, golden death to any one who came in our path.

We got round the corner with one wheel three feet high upon the bank. I thought we were surely over, but after staggering for a moment she righted and darted onwards. That was the third corner and the last one. There was only the park gate now. It was facing us, but, as luck would have it, not facing us directly. It was about twenty yards to the left up the main road into which we ran. Perhaps I could have done it, but I expect that the steering-gear had been jarred when we ran on the bank. The wheel did not turn easily. We shot out of the lane. I saw the open gate on the left. I whirled round my wheel with all the strength of my wrists. Perkins and I threw our bodies across, and then the next instant, going at fifty miles an hour, my right front wheel struck full on the right-hand pillar of my own gate. I heard the crash. I was conscious of flying through the air, and then — and then — !

* * * * *

When I became aware of my own existence once more I was among some brushwood in the shadow of the oaks upon the lodge side of the drive. A man was standing beside me. I imagined at first that it was Perkins, but when I looked again I saw that it was Stanley, a man whom I had known at college some years before, and for whom I had a really genuine affection. There was always something peculiarly sympathetic to me in Stanley's personality; and I was proud to think that I had some similar influence upon him. At the present moment I was surprised to see him, but I was like a man in a dream, giddy and shaken and quite prepared to take things as I found them without questioning them.

"What a smash!" I said. "Good Lord, what an awful smash!"

He nodded his head, and even in the gloom I could see that he was smiling the gentle, wistful smile which I connected with him.

I was quite unable to move. Indeed, I had not any desire to try to move. But my senses were exceedingly alert. I saw the wreck of the motor lit up by the moving lanterns. I saw the little group of people and heard the hushed voices. There were the lodge-keeper and his wife, and one or two more. They were taking no notice of me, but were very busy round the car. Then suddenly I heard a cry of pain.

"The weight is on him. Lift it easy," cried a voice.

"It's only my leg!" said another one, which I recognised as Perkins's. "Where's master?" he cried.

"Here I am," I answered, but they did not seem to hear me. They were all bending over something which lay in front of the car.

Stanley laid his hand upon my shoulder, and his touch was inexpressibly soothing. I felt light and happy, in spite of all.

"No pain, of course?" said he.

"None," said I.

"There never is," said he.

And then suddenly a wave of amazement passed over me. Stanley! Stanley! Why, Stanley had surely died of enteric at Bloemfontein in the

Boer War!

“Stanley!” I cried, and the words seemed to choke my throat—”Stanley, you are dead.”

He looked at me with the same old gentle, wistful smile.

“So are you,” he answered.

DANGER STORY IX. THE PRISONER’S DEFENCE

The circumstances, so far as they were known to the public, concerning the death of the beautiful Miss Ena Garnier, and the fact that Captain John Fowler, the accused officer, had refused to defend himself on the occasion of the proceedings at the police-court, had roused very general interest. This was increased by the statement that, though he withheld his defence, it would be found to be of a very novel and convincing character. The assertion of the prisoner’s lawyer at the police-court, to the effect that the answer to the charge was such that it could not yet be given, but would be available before the Assizes, also caused much speculation. A final touch was given to the curiosity of the public when it was learned that the prisoner had refused all offers of legal assistance from counsel and was determined to conduct his own defence. The case for the Crown was ably presented, and was generally considered to be a very damning one, since it showed very clearly that the accused was subject to fits of jealousy, and that he had already been guilty of some violence owing to this cause. The prisoner listened to the evidence without emotion, and neither interrupted nor cross-questioned the witnesses. Finally, on being informed that the time had come when he might address the jury, he stepped to the front of the dock. He was a man of striking appearance, swarthy, black-moustached, nervous, and virile, with a quietly confident manner. Taking a paper from his pocket he read the following statement, which made the deepest impression upon the crowded court: —

I would wish to say, in the first place, gentlemen of the jury, that, owing to the generosity of my brother officers — for my own means are limited — I might have been defended to-day by the first talent of the Bar. The reason I have declined their assistance and have determined to fight my own case is not that I have any confidence in my own abilities or eloquence, but it is because I am convinced that a plain, straightforward tale, coming direct from the man who has been the tragic actor in this dreadful affair, will impress you more than any indirect statement could do. If I had felt that I were guilty I should have asked for help. Since, in my own heart, I believe that I am innocent, I am pleading my own cause, feeling that my plain words of truth and reason will have more weight with you than the most learned and eloquent advocate. By the indulgence of the Court I have been permitted to put my remarks upon paper, so that I may reproduce certain conversations and be assured of saying neither more nor less than I mean.

It will be remembered that at the trial at the police-court two months ago I refused to defend myself. This has been referred to to-day as a proof of my guilt. I said that it would be some days before I could open my mouth. This was taken at the time as a subterfuge. Well, the days are over, and I am now able to make clear to you not only what took place, but also why it was impossible for me to give any explanation. I will tell you now exactly what I did and why it was that I did it. If you, my fellow-countrymen, think that I did wrong, I will make no complaint, but will suffer in silence any penalty which you may impose upon me.

I am a soldier of fifteen years' standing, a captain in the Second Breconshire Battalion. I have served in the South African Campaign and was mentioned in despatches after the battle of Diamond Hill. When the war broke out with Germany I was seconded from my regiment, and I was appointed as adjutant to the First Scottish Scouts, newly raised. The regiment was quartered at Radchurch, in Essex, where the men were placed partly in huts and were partly billeted upon the inhabitants. All the officers were billeted out, and my quarters were with Mr. Murreyfield, the local squire. It was there that I first met Miss Ena Garnier.

It may not seem proper at such a time and place as this that I should describe that lady. And yet her personality is the very essence of my case. Let me only say that I cannot believe that Nature ever put into female form a more exquisite combination of beauty and intelligence. She was twenty-five years of age, blonde and tall, with a peculiar delicacy of features and of expression. I have read of people falling in love at first sight, and had always looked upon it as an expression of the novelist. And yet from the moment that I saw Ena Garnier life held for me but the one ambition — that she should be mine. I had never dreamed before of the possibilities of passion that were within me. I will not enlarge upon the subject, but to make you understand my action — for I wish you to comprehend it, however much you may condemn it — you must realise that I was in the grip of a frantic elementary passion which made, for a time, the world and all that was in it seem a small thing if I could but gain the love of this one girl. And yet, in justice to myself, I will say that there was always one thing which I placed above her. That was my honour as a soldier and a gentleman. You will find it hard to believe this when I tell you what occurred, and yet — though for one moment I forgot myself — my whole legal offence consists in my desperate endeavour to retrieve what I had done.

I soon found that the lady was not insensible to the advances which I made to her. Her position in the household was a curious one. She had come a year before from Montpellier, in the South of France, in answer to an advertisement from the Murreyfields in order to teach French to their three young children. She was, however, unpaid, so that she was rather a friendly guest than an *employée*. She had always, as I gathered, been fond of the English and desirous to live in England, but the outbreak of the war had quickened her feelings into passionate attachment, for the ruling emotion of her soul was her hatred of the Germans. Her grandfather, as she told me, had been killed under very tragic circumstances in the campaign of 1870, and her two brothers were both in the French army. Her voice vibrated with passion when she spoke of the infamies of Belgium, and more than once I have seen her kissing my sword and my revolver because she hoped they would be used upon the enemy. With such feelings in her heart it can be imagined that my wooing was not a difficult one. I should have been glad to marry her at once, but to this she would not consent. Everything was to come after the war, for it was necessary, she said, that I should go to Montpellier and meet her people, so that the French proprieties should be properly observed.

She had one accomplishment which was rare for a lady; she was a skilled motor-cyclist. She had been fond of long, solitary rides, but after our engagement I was occasionally allowed to accompany her. She was a woman, however, of strange moods and fancies, which added in my feelings to the charm of her character. She could be tenderness itself, and she could be aloof and even harsh in her manner. More than once she had refused my company with no reason given, and with a quick, angry flash of her eyes when I asked for one. Then, perhaps, her mood would change and she would make up for this unkindness by some exquisite attention which would in an instant soothe all my ruffled feelings. It was the same in the house. My military duties were so exacting that it was only in the evenings that I could hope to see her, and yet very often she remained in the little study which was used during the day for the children’s lessons, and would tell me plainly that she wished to be alone. Then, when she saw that I was hurt by her caprice, she would laugh and apologize so sweetly for her rudeness that I was more her slave than ever.

Mention has been made of my jealous disposition, and it has been asserted at the trial that there were scenes owing to my jealousy, and that once Mrs. Murreyfield had to interfere. I admit that I was jealous. When a man loves with the whole strength of his soul it is impossible, I think, that he should be clear of jealousy. The girl was of a very independent spirit. I found that she knew many officers at Chelmsford and Colchester. She would disappear for hours together upon her motor-cycle. There were questions about her past life which she would only answer with a smile unless they were closely pressed. Then the smile would become a frown. Is it any wonder that I, with my whole nature vibrating with passionate, whole-hearted love, was often torn by jealousy when I came upon those closed doors of her life which she was so determined not to open? Reason came at times and whispered how foolish it was that I should stake my whole life and soul upon one of whom I really knew nothing. Then came a wave of passion once more and reason was submerged.

I have spoken of the closed doors of her life. I was aware that a young, unmarried Frenchwoman has usually less liberty than her English sister. And yet in the case of this lady it continually came out in her conversation that she had seen and known much of the world. It was the more distressing to me as whenever she had made an observation which pointed to this she would afterwards, as I could plainly see, be annoyed by her own indiscretion, and endeavour to remove the impression by every means in her power. We had several small quarrels on this account, when I asked questions to which I could get no answers, but they have been exaggerated in the address for the prosecution. Too much has been made also of the intervention of Mrs. Murreyfield, though I admit that the quarrel was more serious upon that occasion. It arose from my finding the photograph of a man upon her table, and her evident confusion when I asked her for some particulars about him. The name “H. Vardin” was written underneath — evidently an autograph. I was worried by the fact that this photograph had the frayed appearance of one which has been carried secretly about, as a girl might conceal the picture of her lover in her dress. She absolutely refused to give me any information about him, save to make a statement which I found incredible, that it was a man whom she had never seen in her life. It was then that I forgot myself. I raised my voice and declared that I should know more about her life or that I should break with her, even if my own heart should be broken in the parting. I was not violent, but Mrs. Murreyfield heard me from the passage, and came into the room to remonstrate. She was a kind, motherly person who took a sympathetic interest in our romance, and I remember that on this occasion she reproved me for my jealousy and finally persuaded me that I had been unreasonable, so that we became reconciled once more. Ena was so madly fascinating and I so hopelessly her slave that she could always draw me back, however much prudence and reason warned me to escape from her control. I tried again and again to find out about this man Vardin, but was always met by the same assurance, which she repeated with every kind of solemn oath, that she had never seen the man in her life. Why she should carry about the photograph of a man — a young, somewhat sinister man, for I had observed him closely before she snatched the picture from my hand — was what she either could not, or would not, explain.

Then came the time for my leaving Radchurch. I had been appointed to a junior but very responsible post at the War Office, which, of course, entailed my living in London. Even my week-ends found me engrossed with my work, but at last I had a few days' leave of absence. It is those few days which have ruined my life, which have brought me the most horrible experience that ever a man had to undergo, and have finally placed me here in the dock, pleading as I plead to-day for my life and my honour.

It is nearly five miles from the station to Radchurch. She was there to meet me. It was the first time that we had been reunited since I had put all my heart and my soul upon her. I cannot enlarge upon these matters, gentlemen. You will either be able to sympathize with and understand the emotions which overbalance a man at such a time, or you will not. If you have imagination, you will. If you have not, I can never hope to make you see more than the bare fact. That bare fact, placed in the baldest language, is that during this drive from Radchurch Junction to the village I was led into the greatest indiscretion — the greatest dishonour, if you will — of my life. I told the woman a secret, an enormously important secret, which might affect the fate of the war and the lives of many thousands of men.

It was done before I knew it — before I grasped the way in which her quick brain could place various scattered hints together and weave them into one idea. She was wailing, almost weeping, over the fact that the allied armies were held up by the iron line of the Germans. I explained that it was more correct to say that our iron line was holding them up, since they were the invaders. "But is France, is Belgium, *never* to be rid of them?" she cried. "Are we simply to sit in front of their trenches and be content to let them do what they will with ten provinces of France? Oh, Jack, Jack, for God's sake, say something to bring a little hope to my heart, for sometimes I think that it is breaking! You English are stolid. You can bear these things. But we others, we have more nerve, more soul! It is death to us. Tell me! Do tell me that there is hope! And yet it is foolish of me to ask, for, of course, you are only a subordinate at the War Office, and how should you know what is in the mind of your chiefs?"

"Well, as it happens, I know a good deal," I answered. "Don't fret, for we shall certainly get a move on soon."

"Soon! Next year may seem soon to some people."

"It's not next year."

"Must we wait another month?"

"Not even that."

She squeezed my hand in hers. "Oh, my darling boy, you have brought such joy to my heart! What suspense I shall live in now! I think a week of it would kill me."

"Well, perhaps it won't even be a week."

"And tell me," she went on, in her coaxing voice, "tell me just one thing, Jack. Just one, and I will trouble you no more. Is it our brave French soldiers who advance? Or is it your splendid Tommies? With whom will the honour lie?"

"With both."

"Glorious!" she cried. "I see it all. The attack will be at the point where the French and British lines join. Together they will rush forward in one glorious advance."

"No," I said. "They will not be together."

"But I understood you to say — of course, women know nothing of such matters, but I understood you to say that it would be a joint advance."

"Well, if the French advanced, we will say, at Verdun, and the British advanced at Ypres, even if they were hundreds of miles apart it would still be a joint advance."

"Ah, I see," she cried, clapping her hands with delight. "They would advance at both ends of the line, so that the Boches would not know which way to send their reserves."

"That is exactly the idea — a real advance at Verdun, and an enormous feint at Ypres."

Then suddenly a chill of doubt seized me. I can remember how I sprang back from her and looked hard into her face. "I've told you too much!" I cried. "Can I trust you? I have been mad to say so much."

She was bitterly hurt by my words. That I should for a moment doubt her was more than she could bear. "I would cut my tongue out, Jack, before I would tell any human being one word of what you have said." So earnest was she that my fears died away. I felt that I could trust her utterly. Before we had reached Radchurch I had put the matter from my mind, and we were lost in our joy of the present and in our plans for the future.

I had a business message to deliver to Colonel Worral, who commanded a small camp at Pedley-Woodrow. I went there and was away for about two hours. When I returned I inquired for Miss Garnier, and was told by the maid that she had gone to her bedroom, and that she had asked the groom to bring her motor-bicycle to the door. It seemed to me strange that she should arrange to go out alone when my visit was such a short one. I had gone into her little study to seek her, and here it was that I waited, for it opened on to the hall passage, and she could not pass without my seeing her.

There was a small table in the window of this room at which she used to write. I had seated myself beside this when my eyes fell upon a name written in her large, bold hand-writing. It was a reversed impression upon the blotting-paper which she had used, but there could be no difficulty in reading it. The name was Hubert Vardin. Apparently it was part of the address of an envelope, for underneath I was able to distinguish the initials S.W., referring to a postal division of London, though the actual name of the street had not been clearly reproduced.

Then I knew for the first time that she was actually corresponding with this man whose vile, voluptuous face I had seen in the photograph with the frayed edges. She had clearly lied to me, too, for was it conceivable that she should correspond with a man whom she had never seen? I don't desire to condone my conduct. Put yourself in my place. Imagine that you had my desperately fervid and jealous nature. You would have done what I did, for you could have done nothing else. A wave of fury passed over me. I laid my hands upon the wooden writing-desk. If it had been an iron safe I should have opened it. As it was, it literally flew to pieces before me. There lay the letter itself, placed under lock and key for safety, while the writer prepared to take it from the house. I had no hesitation or scruple, I tore it open. Dishonourable, you will say, but when a man is frenzied with jealousy he hardly knows what he does. This woman, for whom I was ready to give everything, was either faithful to me or she was not. At any cost I would know which.

A thrill of joy passed through me as my eyes fell upon the first words. I had wronged her. “Cher Monsieur Vardin.” So the letter began. It was clearly a business letter, nothing else. I was about to replace it in the envelope with a thousand regrets in my mind for my want of faith when a single word at the bottom of the page caught my eyes, and I started as if I had been stung by an adder. “Verdun” — that was the word. I looked again. “Ypres” was immediately below it. I sat down, horror-stricken, by the broken desk, and I read this letter, a translation of which I have in my hand: —

Murreyfield House, Radchurch.

Dear M. Vardin, — Stringer has told me that he has kept you sufficiently informed as to Chelmsford and Colchester, so I have not troubled to write. They have moved the Midland Territorial Brigade and the heavy guns towards the coast near Cromer, but only for a time. It is for training, not embarkation.

And now for my great news, which I have straight from the War Office itself. Within a week there is to be a very severe attack from Verdun, which is to be supported by a holding attack at Ypres. It is all on a very large scale, and you must send off a special Dutch messenger to Von Starmer by the first boat. I hope to get the exact date and some further particulars from my informant to-night, but meanwhile you must act with energy.

I dare not post this here — you know what village postmasters are, so I am taking it into Colchester, where Stringer will include it with his own report which goes by hand. — Yours faithfully, Sophia Heffner.

I was stunned at first as I read this letter, and then a kind of cold, concentrated rage came over me. So this woman was a German and a spy! I thought of her hypocrisy and her treachery towards me, but, above all, I thought of the danger to the Army and the State. A great defeat, the death of thousands of men, might spring from my misplaced confidence. There was still time, by judgment and energy, to stop this frightful evil. I heard her step upon the stairs outside, and an instant later she had come through the doorway. She started, and her face was bloodless as she saw me seated there with the open letter in my hand.

“How did you get that?” she gasped. “How dared you break my desk and steal my letter?”

I said nothing. I simply sat and looked at her and pondered what I should do. She suddenly sprang forward and tried to snatch the letter. I caught her wrist and pushed her down on to the sofa, where she lay, collapsed. Then I rang the bell, and told the maid that I must see Mr. Murreyfield at once.

He was a genial, elderly man, who had treated this woman with as much kindness as if she were his daughter. He was horrified at what I said. I could not show him the letter on account of the secret that it contained, but I made him understand that it was of desperate importance.

“What are we to do?” he asked. “I never could have imagined anything so dreadful. What would you advise us to do?”

“There is only one thing that we can do,” I answered. “This woman must be arrested, and in the meanwhile we must so arrange matters that she cannot possibly communicate with any one. For all we know, she has confederates in this very village. Can you undertake to hold her securely while I go to Colonel Worral at Pedley and get a warrant and a guard?”

“We can lock her in her bedroom.”

“You need not trouble,” said she. “I give you my word that I will stay where I am. I advise you to be careful, Captain Fowler. You’ve shown once before that you are liable to do things before you have thought of the consequence. If I am arrested all the world will know that you have given away the secrets that were confided to you. There is an end of your career, my friend. You can punish me, no doubt. What about yourself?”

“I think,” said I, “you had best take her to her bedroom.”

“Very good, if you wish it,” said she, and followed us to the door. When we reached the hall she suddenly broke away, dashed through the entrance, and made for her motor-bicycle, which was standing there. Before she could start we had both seized her. She stooped and made her teeth meet in Murreyfield’s hand. With flashing eyes and tearing fingers she was as fierce as a wild cat at bay. It was with some difficulty that we mastered her, and dragged her — almost carried her — up the stairs. We thrust her into her room and turned the key, while she screamed out abuse and beat upon the door inside.

"It's a forty-foot drop into the garden," said Murreyfield, tying up his bleeding hand. "I'll wait here till you come back. I think we have the lady fairly safe."

"I have a revolver here," said I. "You should be armed." I slipped a couple of cartridges into it and held it out to him. "We can't afford to take chances. How do you know what friends she may have?"

"Thank you," said he. "I have a stick here, and the gardener is within call. Do you hurry off for the guard, and I will answer for the prisoner."

Having taken, as it seemed to me, every possible precaution, I ran to give the alarm. It was two miles to Pedley, and the colonel was out, which occasioned some delay. Then there were formalities and a magistrate's signature to be obtained. A policeman was to serve the warrant, but a military escort was to be sent in to bring back the prisoner. I was so filled with anxiety and impatience that I could not wait, but I hurried back alone with the promise that they would follow.

The Pedley-Woodrow Road opens into the high-road to Colchester at a point about half a mile from the village of Radchurch. It was evening now and the light was such that one could not see more than twenty or thirty yards ahead. I had proceeded only a very short way from the point of junction when I heard, coming towards me, the roar of a motor-cycle being ridden at a furious pace. It was without lights, and close upon me. I sprang aside in order to avoid being ridden down, and in that instant, as the machine flashed by, I saw clearly the face of the rider. It was she — the woman whom I had loved. She was hatless, her hair streaming in the wind, her face glimmering white in the twilight, flying through the night like one of the Valkyries of her native land. She was past me like a flash and tore on down the Colchester Road. In that instant I saw all that it would mean if she could reach the town. If she once was allowed to see her agent we might arrest him or her, but it would be too late. The news would have been passed on. The victory of the Allies and the lives of thousands of our soldiers were at stake. Next instant I had pulled out the loaded revolver and fired two shots after the vanishing figure, already only a dark blur in the dusk. I heard a scream, the crashing of the breaking cycle, and all was still.

I need not tell you more, gentlemen. You know the rest. When I ran forward I found her lying in the ditch. Both of my bullets had struck her. One of them had penetrated her brain. I was still standing beside her body when Murreyfield arrived, running breathlessly down the road. She had, it seemed, with great courage and activity scrambled down the ivy of the wall; only when he heard the whirr of the cycle did he realise what had occurred. He was explaining it to my dazed brain when the police and soldiers arrived to arrest her. By the irony of fate it was me whom they arrested instead.

It was urged at the trial in the police-court that jealousy was the cause of the crime. I did not deny it, nor did I put forward any witnesses to deny it. It was my desire that they should believe it. The hour of the French advance had not yet come, and I could not defend myself without producing the letter which would reveal it. But now it is over — gloriously over — and so my lips are unsealed at last. I confess my fault — my very grievous fault. But it is not that for which you are trying me. It is for murder. I should have thought myself the murderer of my own countrymen if I had let the woman pass. These are the facts, gentlemen. I leave my future in your hands. If you should absolve me I may say that I have hopes of serving my country in a fashion which will atone for this one great indiscretion, and will also, as I hope, end for ever those terrible recollections which weigh me down. If you condemn me, I am ready to face whatever you may think fit to inflict.

DANGER STORY X. THREE OF THEM

I — A CHAT ABOUT CHILDREN, SNAKES, AND ZEBUS

These little sketches are called “Three of Them,” but there are really five, on and off the stage. There is Daddy, a lumpish person with some gift for playing Indian games when he is in the mood. He is then known as “The Great Chief of the Leatherskin Tribe.” Then there is my Lady Sunshine. These are the grown-ups, and don’t really count. There remain the three, who need some differentiating upon paper, though their little spirits are as different in reality as spirits could be — all beautiful and all quite different. The eldest is a boy of eight whom we shall call “Laddie.” If ever there was a little cavalier sent down ready-made it is he. His soul is the most gallant, unselfish, innocent thing that ever God sent out to get an extra polish upon earth. It dwells in a tall, slight, well-formed body, graceful and agile, with a head and face as clean-cut as if an old Greek cameo had come to life, and a pair of innocent and yet wise grey eyes that read and win the heart. He is shy and does not shine before strangers. I have said that he is unselfish and brave. When there is the usual wrangle about going to bed, up he gets in his sedate way. “I will go first,” says he, and off he goes, the eldest, that the others may have the few extra minutes while he is in his bath. As to his courage, he is absolutely lion-hearted where he can help or defend any one else. On one occasion Daddy lost his temper with Dimples (Boy Number 2), and, not without very good provocation, gave him a tap on the side of the head. Next instant he felt a butt down somewhere in the region of his waist-belt, and there was an angry little red face looking up at him, which turned suddenly to a brown mop of hair as the butt was repeated. No one, not even Daddy, should hit his little brother. Such was Laddie, the gentle and the fearless.

Then there is Dimples. Dimples is nearly seven, and you never saw a rounder, softer, dimplier face, with two great roguish, mischievous eyes of wood-pigeon grey, which are sparkling with fun for the most part, though they can look sad and solemn enough at times. Dimples has the making of a big man in him. He has depth and reserves in his tiny soul. But on the surface he is a boy of boys, always in innocent mischief. “I will now do mischuff,” he occasionally announces, and is usually as good as his word. He has a love and understanding of all living creatures, the uglier and more slimy the better, treating them all in a tender, fairylike fashion which seems to come from some inner knowledge. He has been found holding a buttercup under the mouth of a slug “to see if he likes butter.” He finds creatures in an astonishing way. Put him in the fairest garden, and presently he will approach you with a newt, a toad, or a huge snail in his custody. Nothing would ever induce him to hurt them, but he gives them what he imagines to be a little treat and then restores them to their homes. He has been known to speak bitterly to the Lady when she has given orders that caterpillars be killed if found upon the cabbages, and even the explanation that the caterpillars were doing the work of what he calls “the Jarmans” did not reconcile him to their fate.

He has an advantage over Laddie, in that he suffers from no trace of shyness and is perfectly friendly in an instant with any one of every class of life, plunging straight into conversation with some such remark as “Can your Daddy give a war-whoop?” or “Were you ever chased by a bear?” He is a sunny creature but combative sometimes, when he draws down his brows, sets his eyes, his chubby cheeks flush, and his lips go back from his almond-white teeth. “I am Swankie the Berserker,” says he, quoting out of his favourite “Erling the Bold,” which Daddy reads aloud at bed-time. When he is in this fighting mood he can even drive back Laddie, chiefly because the elder is far too chivalrous to hurt him. If you want to see what Laddie can really do, put the small gloves on him and let him go for Daddy. Some of those hurricane rallies of his would stop Daddy grinning if they could get home, and he has to fall back off his stool in order to get away from them.

If that latent power of Dimples should ever come out, how will it be manifest? Surely in his imagination. Tell him a story and the boy is lost. He sits with his little round, rosy face immovable and fixed, while his eyes never budge from those of the speaker. He sucks in everything that is weird or adventurous or wild. Laddie is a rather restless soul, eager to be up and doing; but Dimples is absorbed in the present if there be something worth hearing to be heard. In height he is half a head shorter than his brother, but rather more sturdy in build. The power of his voice is one of his noticeable characteristics. If Dimples is coming you know it well in advance. With that physical gift upon the top of his audacity, and his loquacity, he fairly takes command of any place in which he may find himself, while Laddie, his soul too noble for jealousy, becomes one of the laughing and admiring audience.

Then there is Baby, a dainty elfin Dresden-china little creature of five, as fair as an angel and as deep as a well. The boys are but shallow, sparkling pools compared with this little girl with her self-repression and dainty aloofness. You know the boys, you never feel that you quite know the girl. Something very strong and forceful seems to be at the back of that wee body. Her will is tremendous. Nothing can break or even bend it. Only kind guidance and friendly reasoning can mould it. The boys are helpless if she has really made up her mind. But this is only when she asserts herself, and those are rare occasions. As a rule she sits quiet, aloof, affable, keenly alive to all that passes and yet taking no part in it save for some subtle smile or glance. And then suddenly the wonderful grey-blue eyes under the long black lashes will gleam like coy diamonds, and such a hearty little chuckle will come from her that every one else is bound to laugh out of sympathy. She and Dimples are great allies and yet have continual lovers' quarrels. One night she would not even include his name in her prayers. "God bless —" every one else, but not a word of Dimples. "Come, come, darling!" urged the Lady. "Well, then, God bless horrid Dimples!" said she at last, after she had named the cat, the goat, her dolls, and her Wriggly.

That is a strange trait, the love for the Wriggly. It would repay thought from some scientific brain. It is an old, faded, disused downy from her cot. Yet go where she will, she must take Wriggly with her. All her toys put together would not console her for the absence of Wriggly. If the family go to the seaside, Wriggly must come too. She will not sleep without the absurd bundle in her arms. If she goes to a party she insists upon dragging its disreputable folds along with her, one end always projecting "to give it fresh air." Every phase of childhood represents to the philosopher something in the history of the race. From the new-born baby which can hang easily by one hand from a broomstick with its legs drawn up under it, the whole evolution of mankind is re-enacted. You can trace clearly the cave-dweller, the hunter, the scout. What, then, does Wriggly represent? Fetish worship — nothing else. The savage chooses some most unlikely thing and adores it. This dear little savage adores her Wriggly.

So now we have our three little figures drawn as clearly as a clumsy pen can follow such subtle elusive creatures of mood and fancy. We will suppose now that it is a summer evening, that Daddy is seated smoking in his chair, that the Lady is listening somewhere near, and that the three are in a tumbled heap upon the bear-skin before the empty fireplace trying to puzzle out the little problems of their tiny lives. When three children play with a new thought it is like three kittens with a ball, one giving it a pat and another a pat, as they chase it from point to point. Daddy would interfere as little as possible, save when he was called upon to explain or to deny. It was usually wiser for him to pretend to be doing something else. Then their talk was the more natural. On this occasion, however, he was directly appealed to.

"Daddy!" asked Dimples.

"Yes, boy."

"Do you fink that the roses know us?"

Dimples, in spite of his impish naughtiness, had a way of looking such a perfectly innocent and delightfully kissable little person that one felt he really might be a good deal nearer to the sweet secrets of Nature than his elders. However, Daddy was in a material mood.

"No, boy; how could the roses know us?"

"The big yellow rose at the corner of the gate knows *me*."

"How do you know that?"

"'Cause it nodded to me yesterday."

Laddie roared with laughter.

"That was just the wind, Dimples."

"No, it was not," said Dimples, with conviction. "There was none wind. Baby was there. Weren't you, Baby?"

"The wose knew us," said Baby, gravely.

"Beasts know us," said Laddie. "But them beasts run round and make noises. Roses don't make noises."

"Yes, they do. They rustle."

"Woses wustle," said Baby.

"That's not a living noise. That's an all-the-same noise. Different to Roy, who barks and makes different noises all the time. Fancy the roses all barkin' at you. Daddy, will you tell us about animals?"

That is one of the child stages which takes us back to the old tribe life — their inexhaustible interest in animals, some distant echo of those long nights when wild men sat round the fires and peered out into the darkness, and whispered about all the strange and deadly creatures who fought with them for the lordship of the earth. Children love caves, and they love fires and meals out of doors, and they love animal talk — all relics of the far distant past.

"What is the biggest animal in South America, Daddy?"

Daddy, wearily: "Oh, I don't know."

"I s'pose an elephant would be the biggest?"

"No, boy; there are none in South America."

"Well, then, a rhinoceros?"

"No, there are none."

"Well, what is there, Daddy?"

"Well, dear, there are jaguars. I suppose a jaguar is the biggest."

"Then it must be thirty-six feet long."

"Oh, no, boy; about eight or nine feet with his tail."

"But there are boa-constrictors in South America thirty-six feet long."

"That's different."

"Do you fink," asked Dimples, with his big, solemn, grey eyes wide open, "there was ever a boa-'strictor forty-five feet long?"

"No, dear; I never heard of one."

"Perhaps there was one, but you never heard of it. Do you fink you would have heard of a boa-'strictor forty-five feet long if there was one in South America?"

"Well, there may have been one."

"Daddy," said Laddie, carrying on the cross-examination with the intense earnestness of a child, "could a boa-constrictor swallow any small animal?"

"Yes, of course he could."

"Could he swallow a jaguar?"

"Well, I don't know about that. A jaguar is a very large animal."

"Well, then," asked Dimples, "could a jaguar swallow a boa-'strictor?"

"Silly ass," said Laddie. "If a jaguar was only nine feet long and the boa-constrictor was thirty-five feet long, then there would be a lot sticking out of the jaguar's mouth. How could he swallow that?"

"He'd bite it off," said Dimples. "And then another slice for supper and another for breakfast — but, I say, Daddy, a 'stricter couldn't swallow a porkpine, could he? He would have a sore throat all the way down."

Shrieks of laughter and a welcome rest for Daddy, who turned to his paper.

“Daddy!”

He put down his paper with an air of conscious virtue and lit his pipe.

“Well, dear?”

“What’s the biggest snake you ever saw?”

“Oh, bother the snakes! I am tired of them.”

But the children were never tired of them. Heredity again, for the snake was the worst enemy of arboreal man.

“Daddy made soup out of a snake,” said Laddie. “Tell us about that snake, Daddy.”

Children like a story best the fourth or fifth time, so it is never any use to tell them that they know all about it. The story which they can check and correct is their favourite.

“Well, dear, we got a viper and we killed it. Then we wanted the skeleton to keep and we didn’t know how to get it. At first we thought we would bury it, but that seemed too slow. Then I had the idea to boil all the viper’s flesh off its bones, and I got an old meat-tin and we put the viper and some water into it and put it above the fire.”

“You hung it on a hook, Daddy.”

“Yes, we hung it on the hook that they put the porridge pot on in Scotland. Then just as it was turning brown in came the farmer’s wife, and ran up to see what we were cooking. When she saw the viper she thought we were going to eat it. ‘Oh, you dirty divils!’ she cried, and caught up the tin in her apron and threw it out of the window.”

Fresh shrieks of laughter from the children, and Dimples repeated “You dirty divil!” until Daddy had to clump him playfully on the head.

“Tell us some more about snakes,” cried Laddie. “Did you ever see a really dreadful snake?”

“One that would turn you black and dead you in five minutes?” said Dimples. It was always the most awful thing that appealed to Dimples.

“Yes, I have seen some beastly creatures. Once in the Sudan I was dozing on the sand when I opened my eyes and there was a horrid creature like a big slug with horns, short and thick, about a foot long, moving away in front of me.”

“What was it, Daddy?” Six eager eyes were turned up to him.

"It was a death-adder. I expect that would dead you in five minutes, Dimples, if it got a bite at you."

"Did you kill it?"

"No; it was gone before I could get to it."

"Which is the horridest, Daddy — a snake or a shark?"

"I'm not very fond of either!"

"Did you ever see a man eaten by sharks?"

"No, dear, but I was not so far off being eaten myself."

"Oo!" from all three of them.

"I did a silly thing, for I swam round the ship in water where there are many sharks. As I was drying myself on the deck I saw the high fin of a shark above the water a little way off. It had heard the splashing and come up to look for me."

"Weren't you frightened, Daddy?"

"Yes. It made me feel rather cold." There was silence while Daddy saw once more the golden sand of the African beach and the snow-white roaring surf, with the long, smooth swell of the bar.

Children don't like silences.

"Daddy," said Laddie. "Do zebus bite?"

"Zebus! Why, they are cows. No, of course not."

"But a zebu could butt with its horns."

"Oh, yes, it could butt."

"Do you think a zebu could fight a crocodile?"

"Well, I should back the crocodile."

"Why?"

"Well, dear, the crocodile has great teeth and would eat the zebu."

"But suppose the zebu came up when the crocodile was not looking and butted it."

"Well, that would be one up for the zebu. But one butt wouldn't hurt a crocodile."

"No, one wouldn't, would it? But the zebu would keep on. Crocodiles live on sand-banks, don't they? Well, then, the zebu would come and live near the sandbank too — just so far as the crocodile would never see him. Then every time the crocodile wasn't looking the zebu would butt him. Don't you think he would beat the crocodile?"

"Well, perhaps he would."

"How long do you think it would take the zebu to beat the crocodile?"

“Well, it would depend upon how often he got in his butt.”

“Well, suppose he butted him once every three hours, don’t you think —?”

“Oh, bother the zebu!”

“That’s what the crocodile would say,” cried Laddie, clapping his hands.

“Well, I agree with the crocodile,” said Daddy.

“And it’s time all good children were in bed,” said the Lady as the glimmer of the nurse’s apron was seen in the gloom.

II — ABOUT CRICKET

Supper was going on down below and all good children should have been long ago in the land of dreams. Yet a curious noise came from above.

“What on earth — ?” asked Daddy.

“Laddie practising cricket,” said the Lady, with the curious clairvoyance of motherhood. “He gets out of bed to bowl. I do wish you would go up and speak seriously to him about it, for it takes quite an hour off his rest.”

Daddy departed upon his mission intending to be gruff, and my word, he can be quite gruff when he likes! When he reached the top of the stairs, however, and heard the noise still continue, he walked softly down the landing and peeped in through the half-opened door.

The room was dark save for a night-light. In the dim glimmer he saw a little white-clad figure, slight and supple, taking short steps and swinging its arm in the middle of the room.

“Halloa!” said Daddy.

The white-clad figure turned and ran forward to him.

“Oh, Daddy, how jolly of you to come up!”

Daddy felt that gruffness was not quite so easy as it had seemed.

“Look here! You get into bed!” he said, with the best imitation he could manage.

“Yes, Daddy. But before I go, how is this?” He sprang forward and the arm swung round again in a swift and graceful gesture.

Daddy was a moth-eaten cricketer of sorts, and he took it in with a critical eye.

“Good, Laddie. I like a high action. That’s the real Spofforth swing.”

“Oh, Daddy, come and talk about cricket!” He was pulled on the side of the bed, and the white figure dived between the sheets.

“Yes; tell us about cwicket!” came a cooing voice from the corner. Dimples was sitting up in his cot.

“You naughty boy! I thought one of you was asleep, anyhow. I mustn’t stay. I keep you awake.”

“Who was Popoff?” cried Laddie, clutching at his father’s sleeve. “Was he a very good bowler?”

"Spofforth was the best bowler that ever walked on to a cricket-field. He was the great Australian Bowler and he taught us a great deal."

"Did he ever kill a dog?" from Dimples.

"No, boy. Why?"

"Because Laddie said there was a bowler so fast that his ball went frue a coat and killed a dog."

"Oh, that's an old yarn. I heard that when I was a little boy about some bowler whose name, I think, was Jackson."

"Was it a big dog?"

"No, no, son; it wasn't a dog at all."

"It was a cat," said Dimples.

"No; I tell you it never happened."

"But tell us about Spofforth," cried Laddie. Dimples, with his imaginative mind, usually wandered, while the elder came eagerly back to the point. "Was he very fast?"

"He could be very fast. I have heard cricketers who had played against him say that his yorker — that is a ball which is just short of a full pitch — was the fastest ball in England. I have myself seen his long arm swing round and the wicket go down before ever the batsman had time to ground his bat."

"Oo!" from both beds.

"He was a tall, thin man, and they called him the Fiend. That means the Devil, you know."

"And *was* he the Devil?"

"No, Dimples, no. They called him that because he did such wonderful things with the ball."

"Can the Devil do wonderful things with a ball?"

Daddy felt that he was propagating devil-worship and hastened to get to safer ground.

"Spofforth taught us how to bowl and Blackham taught us how to keep wicket. When I was young we always had another fielder, called the long-stop, who stood behind the wicket-keeper. I used to be a thick, solid boy, so they put me as long-stop, and the balls used to bounce off me, I remember, as if I had been a mattress."

Delighted laughter.

"But after Blackham came wicket-keepers had to learn that they were there to stop the ball. Even in good second-class cricket there were no more long-stops. We soon found plenty of good wicket-keeps — like Alfred Lyttelton and MacGregor — but it was Blackham who showed us how. To see Spofforth, all india-rubber and ginger, at one end bowling, and Blackham, with his black beard over the bails waiting for the ball at the other end, was worth living for, I can tell you."

Silence while the boys pondered over this. But Laddie feared Daddy would go, so he quickly got in a question. If Daddy's memory could only be kept going there was no saying how long they might keep him.

"Was there no good bowler until Spofforth came?"

"Oh, plenty, my boy. But he brought something new with him. Especially change of pace — you could never tell by his action up to the last moment whether you were going to get a ball like a flash of lightning, or one that came slow but full of devil and spin. But for mere command of the pitch of a ball I should think Alfred Shaw, of Nottingham, was the greatest bowler I can remember. It was said that he could pitch a ball twice in three times upon a half-crown!"

"Oo!" And then from Dimples: —

"Whose half-crown?"

"Well, anybody's half-crown."

"Did he get the half-crown?"

"No, no; why should he?"

"Because he put the ball on it."

"The half-crown was kept there always for people to aim at," explained Laddie.

"No, no, there never was a half-crown."

Murmurs of remonstrance from both boys.

"I only meant that he could pitch the ball on anything — a half-crown or anything else."

"Daddy," with the energy of one who has a happy idea, "could he have pitched it on the batsman's toe?"

"Yes, boy, I think so."

"Well, then, suppose he *always* pitched it on the batsman's toe!"

Daddy laughed.

"Perhaps that is why dear old W. G. always stood with his left toe cocked up in the air."

"On one leg?"

"No, no, Dimples. With his heel down and his toe up."

"Did you know W. G., Daddy?"

"Oh, yes, I knew him quite well."

"Was he nice?"

"Yes, he was splendid. He was always like a great jolly schoolboy who was hiding behind a huge black beard."

"Whose beard?"

"I meant that he had a great bushy beard. He looked like the pirate chief in your picture-books, but he had as kind a heart as a child. I have been told that it was the terrible things in this war that really killed him. Grand old W. G.!"

"Was he the best bat in the world, Daddy?"

"Of course he was," said Daddy, beginning to enthuse to the delight of the clever little plotter in the bed. "There never was such a bat — never in the world — and I don't believe there ever could be again. He didn't play on smooth wickets, as they do now. He played where the wickets were all patchy, and you had to watch the ball right on to the bat. You couldn't look at it before it hit the ground and think, 'That's all right. I know where that one will be!' My word, that was cricket. What you got you earned."

"Did you ever see W. G. make a hundred, Daddy?"

"See him! I've fielded out for him and melted on a hot August day while he made a hundred and fifty. There's a pound or two of your Daddy somewhere on that field yet. But I loved to see it, and I was always sorry when he got out for nothing, even if I were playing against him."

"Did he ever get out for nothing?"

"Yes, dear; the first time I ever played in his company he was given out leg-before-wicket before he made a run. And all the way to the pavilion — that's where people go when they are out — he was walking forward, but his big black beard was backward over his shoulder as he told the umpire what he thought."

"And what *did* he think?"

"More than I can tell you, Dimples. But I dare say he was right to be annoyed, for it was a left-handed bowler, bowling round the wicket, and it is very hard to get leg-before to that. However, that's all Greek to you."

"What's Gweek?"

"Well, I mean you can't understand that. Now I am going."

"No, no, Daddy; wait a moment! Tell us about Bonner and the big catch."

"Oh, you know about that!"

Two little coaxing voices came out of the darkness.

"Oh, please! Please!"

"I don't know what your mother will say! What was it you asked?"

"Bonner!"

"Ah, Bonner!" Daddy looked out in the gloom and saw green fields and golden sunlight, and great sportsmen long gone to their rest. "Bonner was a wonderful man. He was a giant in size."

"As big as you, Daddy?"

Daddy seized his elder boy and shook him playfully. "I heard what you said to Miss Cregan the other day. When she asked you what an acre was you said 'About the size of Daddy.'"

Both boys gurgled.

"But Bonner was five inches taller than I. He was a giant, I tell you."

"Did nobody kill him?"

"No, no, Dimples. Not a story-book giant. But a great, strong man. He had a splendid figure and blue eyes and a golden beard, and altogether he was the finest man I have ever seen — except perhaps one."

"Who was the one, Daddy?"

"Well, it was the Emperor Frederick of Germany."

"A Jarman!" cried Dimples, in horror.

"Yes, a German. Mind you, boys, a man may be a very noble man and be a German — though what has become of the noble ones these last three years is more than I can guess. But Frederick was noble and good, as you could see on his face. How he ever came to be the father of such a blasphemous braggart" — Daddy sank into reverie.

"Bonner, Daddy!" said Laddie, and Daddy came back from politics with a start.

"Oh, yes, Bonner. Bonner in white flannels on the green sward with an English June sun upon him. That was a picture of a man! But you asked me about the catch. It was in a test match at the Oval — England against Australia. Bonner said before he went in that he would hit Alfred Shaw into the next county, and he set out to do it. Shaw, as I have told you, could keep a very good length, so for some time Bonner could not get the ball he wanted, but at last he saw his chance, and he jumped out and hit that ball the most awful ker-wallop that ever was seen in a cricket-field."

"Oo!" from both boys: and then, "Did it go into the next county, Daddy?" from Dimples.

"Well, I'm telling you!" said Daddy, who was always testy when one of his stories was interrupted. "Bonner thought he had made the ball a half-volley — that is the best ball to hit — but Shaw had deceived him and the ball was really on the short side. So when Bonner hit it, up and up it went, until it looked as if it were going out of sight into the sky."

"Oo!"

"At first everybody thought it was going far outside the ground. But soon they saw that all the giant's strength had been wasted in hitting the ball so high, and that there was a chance that it would fall within the ropes. The batsmen had run three runs and it was still in the air. Then it was seen that an English fielder was standing on the very edge of the field with his back on the ropes, a white figure against the black line of the people. He stood watching the mighty curve of the ball, and twice he raised his hands together above his head as he did so. Then a third time he raised his hands above his head, and the ball was in them and Bonner was out."

"Why did he raise his hands twice?"

"I don't know. He did so."

"And who was the fielder, Daddy?"

"The fielder was G. F. Grace, the younger brother of W. G. Only a few months afterwards he was a dead man. But he had one grand moment in his life, with twenty thousand people all just mad with excitement. Poor G. F.! He died too soon."

"Did you ever catch a catch like that, Daddy?"

"No, boy. I was never a particularly good fielder."

"Did you never catch a good catch?"

"Well, I won't say that. You see, the best catches are very often flukes, and I remember one awful fluke of that sort."

"Do tell us, Daddy?"

"Well, dear, I was fielding at slip. That is very near the wicket, you know. Woodcock was bowling, and he had the name of being the fastest bowler of England at that time. It was just the beginning of the match and the ball was quite red. Suddenly I saw something like a red flash and there was the ball stuck in my left hand. I had not time to move it. It simply came and stuck."

"Oo!"

“I saw another catch like that. It was done by Ulyett, a fine Yorkshire player — such a big, upstanding fellow. He was bowling, and the batsman — it was an Australian in a test match — hit as hard as ever he could. Ulyett could not have seen it, but he just stuck out his hand and there was the ball.”

“Suppose it had hit his body?”

“Well, it would have hurt him.”

“Would he have cried?” from Dimples.

“No, boy. That is what games are for, to teach you to take a knock and never show it. Supposing that—”

A step was heard coming along the passage.

“Good gracious, boys, here’s Mumty. Shut your eyes this moment. It’s all right, dear. I spoke to them very severely and I think they are nearly asleep.”

“What have you been talking about?” asked the Lady.

“Cwicket!” cried Dimples.

“It’s natural enough,” said Daddy; “of course when two boys—”

“Three,” said the Lady, as she tucked up the little beds.

III — SPECULATIONS

The three children were sitting together in a bunch upon the rug in the gloaming. Baby was talking so Daddy behind his newspaper pricked up his ears, for the young lady was silent as a rule, and every glimpse of her little mind was of interest. She was nursing the disreputable little downy quilt which she called Wriggly and much preferred to any of her dolls.

"I wonder if they will let Wriggly into heaven," she said.

The boys laughed. They generally laughed at what Baby said.

"If they won't I won't go in, either," she added.

"Nor me, neither, if they don't let in my Teddy-bear," said Dimples.

"I'll tell them it is a nice, clean, blue Wriggly," said Baby. "I love my Wriggly." She cooed over it and hugged it.

"What about that, Daddy?" asked Laddie, in his earnest fashion. "Are there toys in heaven, do you think?"

"Of course there are. Everything that can make children happy."

"As many toys as in Hamley's shop?" asked Dimples.

"More," said Daddy, stoutly.

"Oo!" from all three.

"Daddy, dear," said Laddie. "I've been wondering about the deluge."

"Yes, dear. What was it?"

"Well, the story about the Ark. All those animals were in the Ark, just two of each, for forty days. Wasn't that so?"

"That is the story."

"Well, then, what did the carnivorous animals eat?"

One should be honest with children and not put them off with ridiculous explanations. Their questions about such matters are generally much more sensible than their parents' replies.

"Well, dear," said Daddy, weighing his words, "these stories are very, very old. The Jews put them in the Bible, but they got them from the people in Babylon, and the people in Babylon probably got them from some one else away back in the beginning of things. If a story gets passed down like that, one person adds a little and another adds a little, and so you never get things quite as they happened. The Jews put it in the Bible exactly as they heard it, but it had been going about for thousands of years before then."

"So it was not true?"

"Yes, I think it was true. I think there was a great flood, and I think that some people did escape, and that they saved their beasts, just as we should try to save Nigger and the Monkstown cocks and hens if we were flooded out. Then they were able to start again when the waters went down, and they were naturally very grateful to God for their escape."

"What did the people who didn't escape think about it?"

"Well, we can't tell that."

"They wouldn't be very grateful, would they?"

"Their time was come," said Daddy, who was a bit of a Fatalist. "I expect it was the best thing."

"It was jolly hard luck on Noah being swallowed by a fish after all his trouble," said Dimples.

"Silly ass! It was Jonah that was swallowed. Was it a whale, Daddy?"

"A whale! Why, a whale couldn't swallow a herring!"

"A shark, then?"

"Well, there again you have an old story which has got twisted and turned a good deal. No doubt he was a holy man who had some great escape at sea, and then the sailors and others who admired him invented this wonder."

"Daddy," said Dimples, suddenly, "should we do just the same as Jesus did?"

"Yes, dear; He was the noblest Person that ever lived."

"Well, did Jesus lie down every day from twelve to one?"

"I don't know that He did."

"Well, then, I won't lie down from twelve to one."

"If Jesus had been a growing boy and had been ordered to lie down by His Mumty and the doctor, I am sure He would have done so."

"Did He take malt extract?"

"He did what He was told, my son — I am sure of that. He was a good man, so He must have been a good boy — perfect in all He did."

"Baby saw God yesterday," remarked Laddie, casually.

Daddy dropped his paper.

"Yes, we made up our minds we would all lie on our backs and stare at the sky until we saw God. So we put the big rug on the lawn and then we all lay down side by side, and stared and stared. I saw nothing, and Dimples saw nothing, but Baby says she saw God."

Baby nodded in her wise way.

"I saw Him," she said.

"What was He like, then?"

"Oh, just God."

She would say no more, but hugged her Wriggly.

The Lady had entered and listened with some trepidation to the frank audacity of the children's views. Yet the very essence of faith was in that audacity. It was all so unquestionably real.

"Which is strongest, Daddy, God or the Devil?" It was Laddie who was speculating now.

"Why, God rules everything, of course."

"Then why doesn't He kill the Devil?"

"And scalp him?" added Dimples.

"That would stop all trouble, wouldn't it, Daddy?"

Poor Daddy was rather floored. The Lady came to his help.

"If everything was good and easy in this world, then there would be nothing to fight against, and so, Laddie, our characters would never improve."

"It would be like a football match with all the players on one side," said Daddy.

"If there was nothing bad, then, nothing would be good, for you would have nothing to compare by," added the Lady.

"Well, then," said Laddie, with the remorseless logic of childhood, "if that is so, then the Devil is very useful; so he can't be so very bad, after all."

"Well, I don't see that," Daddy answered. "Our Army can only show how brave it is by fighting the German Emperor, but that does not prove that the German Emperor is a very nice person, does it now?

"Besides," Daddy continued, improving the occasion, "you must not think of the Devil as a person. You must think of all the mean things one could do, and all the dirty things, and all the cruel things, and that is really the Devil you are fighting against. You couldn't call them useful, could you?"

The children thought over this for a little.

"Daddy," said Laddie, "have *you* ever seen God?"

“No, my boy. But I see His works. I expect that is as near as we can get in this world. Look at all the stars at night, and think of the Power that made them and keeps each in its proper place.”

“He couldn’t keep the shooting stars in their proper place,” said Dimples.

“I expect He meant them to shoot,” said Laddie.

“Suppose they all shot, what jolly nights we should have!” cried Dimples.

“Yes,” said Laddie; “but after one night they would all have gone, and a nice thing then!”

“Well, there’s always the moon,” remarked Dimples. “But, Daddy, is it true that God listens to all we say?”

“I don’t know about that,” Daddy answered, cautiously. You never know into what trap those quick little wits may lead you. The Lady was more rash, or more orthodox.

“Yes, dear, He does hear all you say.”

“Is He listenin’ now?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Well, I call it vewy rude of Him!”

Daddy smiled, and the Lady gasped.

“It isn’t rude,” said Laddie. “It is His duty, and He *has* to notice what you are doing and saying. Daddy, did you ever see a fairy?”

“No, boy.”

“I saw one once.”

Laddie is the very soul of truth, quite painfully truthful in details, so that his quiet remark caused attention.

“Tell us about it, dear.”

He described it with as little emotion as if it were a Persian cat. Perhaps his perfect faith had indeed opened something to his vision.

“It was in the day nursery. There was a stool by the window. The fairy jumped on the stool and then down, and went across the room.”

“What was it dressed like?”

“All in grey, with a long cloak. It was about as big as Baby’s doll. I could not see its arms, for they were under the cloak.”

“Did he look at you?”

“No, he was sideways, and I never really saw his face. He had a little cap. That’s the only fairy I ever saw. Of course, there was Father Christmas, if you call him a fairy.”

“Daddy, was Father Christmas killed in the war?”

"No, boy."

"Because he has never come since the war began. I expect he is fightin' the Jarmans." It was Dimples who was talking.

"Last time he came," said Laddie, "Daddy said one of his reindeers had hurt its leg in the ruts of the Monkstown Lane. Perhaps that's why he never comes."

"He'll come all right after the war," said Daddy, "and he'll be redder and whiter and jollier than ever." Then Daddy clouded suddenly, for he thought of all those who would be missing when Father Christmas came again. Ten loved ones were dead from that one household. The Lady put out her hand, for she always knew what Daddy was thinking.

"They will be there in spirit, dear."

"Yes, and the jolliest of the lot," said Daddy, stoutly. "We'll have our Father Christmas back and all will be well in England."

"But what do they do in India?" asked Laddie.

"Why, what's wrong with them?"

"How do the sledge and the reindeer get across the sea? All the parcels must get wet."

"Yes, dear, there *have* been several complaints," said Daddy, gravely. "Halloa, here's nurse! Time's up! Off to bed!"

They got up resignedly, for they were really very good children. "Say your prayers here before you go," said the Lady. The three little figures all knelt on the rug, Baby still cuddling her Wriggly.

"You pray, Laddie, and the rest can join in."

"God bless every one I love," said the high, clear child-voice. "And make me a good boy, and thank You so much for all the blessings of to-day. And please take care of Alleyne, who is fighting the Germans, and Uncle Cosmo, who is fighting the Germans, and Uncle Woodie, who is fighting the Germans, and all the others who are fighting the Germans, and the men on the ships on the sea, and Grandma and Grandpa, and Uncle Pat, and don't ever let Daddy and Mumty die. That's all."

"And please send plenty sugar for the poor people," said Baby, in her unexpected way.

"And a little petrol for Daddy," said Dimples.

"Amen!" said Daddy. And the little figures rose for the good-night kiss.

IV — THE LEATHERSKIN TRIBE

“Daddy!” said the elder boy. “Have you seen wild Indians?”

“Yes, boy.”

“Have you ever scalped one?”

“Good gracious, no.”

“Has one ever scalped you?” asked Dimples.

“Silly!” said Laddie. “If Daddy had been scalped he wouldn’t have all that hair on his head — unless perhaps it grew again!”

“He has none hair on the very top,” said Dimples, hovering over the low chair in which Daddy was sitting.

“They didn’t scalp you, did they, Daddy?” asked Laddie, with some anxiety.

“I expect Nature will scalp me some of these days.”

Both boys were keenly interested. Nature presented itself as some rival chief.

“When?” asked Dimples, eagerly, with the evident intention of being present.

Daddy passed his fingers ruefully through his thinning locks. “Pretty soon, I expect,” said he.

“Oo!” said the three children. Laddie was resentful and defiant, but the two younger ones were obviously delighted.

“But I say, Daddy, you said we should have an Indian game after tea. You said it when you wanted us to be so quiet after breakfast. You promised, you know.”

It doesn’t do to break a promise to children. Daddy rose somewhat wearily from his comfortable chair and put his pipe on the mantelpiece. First he held a conference in secret with Uncle Pat, the most ingenious of playmates. Then he returned to the children. “Collect the tribe,” said he. “There is a Council in a quarter of an hour in the big room. Put on your Indian dresses and arm yourselves. The great Chief will be there!”

Sure enough when he entered the big room a quarter of an hour later the tribe of the Leatherskins had assembled. There were four of them, for little rosy Cousin John from next door always came in for an Indian game. They had all Indian dresses with high feathers and wooden clubs or tomahawks.

Daddy was in his usual untidy tweeds, but carried a rifle. He was very serious when he entered the room, for one should be very serious in a real good Indian game. Then he raised his rifle slowly over his head in greeting and the four childish voices rang out in the war-cry. It was a prolonged wolfish howl which Dimples had been known to offer to teach elderly ladies in hotel corridors. "You can't be in our tribe without it, you know. There is none body about. Now just try once if you can do it." At this moment there are half-a-dozen elderly people wandering about England who have been made children once more by Laddie and Dimples.

"Hail to the tribe!" cried Daddy.

"Hail, Chief!" answered the voices.

"Red Buffalo!"

"Here!" cried Laddie.

"Black Bear!"

"Here!" cried Dimples.

"White Butterfly!"

"Go on, you silly squaw!" growled Dimples.

"Here," said Baby.

"Prairie Wolf!"

"Here," said little four-year-old John.

"The muster is complete. Make a circle round the camp-fire and we shall drink the firewater of the Palefaces and smoke the pipe of peace."

That was a fearsome joy. The fire-water was ginger-ale drunk out of the bottle, which was gravely passed from hand to hand. At no other time had they ever drunk like that, and it made an occasion of it which was increased by the owlish gravity of Daddy. Then he lit his pipe and it was passed also from one tiny hand to another, Laddie taking a hearty suck at it, which set him coughing, while Baby only touched the end of the amber with her little pink lips. There was dead silence until it had gone round and returned to its owner.

"Warriors of the Leatherskins, why have we come here?" asked Daddy, fingering his rifle.

"Humpty Dumpty," said little John, and the children all began to laugh, but the portentous gravity of Daddy brought them back to the warrior mood.

"The Prairie Wolf has spoken truly," said Daddy. "A wicked Paleface called Humpty Dumpty has taken the prairies which once belonged to the

Leatherskins and is now camped upon them and hunting our buffaloes. What shall be his fate? Let each warrior speak in turn."

"Tell him he has jolly well got to clear out," said Laddie.

"That's not Indian talk," cried Dimples, with all his soul in the game. "Kill him, great Chief — him and his squaw, too." The two younger warriors merely laughed and little John repeated "Humpty Dumpty!"

"Quite right! Remember the villain's name!" said Daddy. "Now, then, the whole tribe follows me on the war-trail and we shall teach this Paleface to shoot our buffaloes."

"Look here, we don't want squaws," cried Dimples, as Baby toddled at the rear of the procession. "You stay in the wigwam and cook."

A piteous cry greeted the suggestion.

"The White Butterfly will come with us and bind up the wounds," said Daddy.

"The squaws are jolly good as torturers," remarked Laddie.

"Really, Daddy, this strikes me as a most immoral game," said the Lady, who had been a sympathetic spectator from a corner, doubtful of the ginger-ale, horrified at the pipe, and delighted at the complete absorption of the children.

"Rather!" said the great Chief, with a sad relapse into the normal. "I suppose that is why they love it so. Now, then, warriors, we go forth on the war-trail. One whoop all together before we start. Capital! Follow me, now, one behind the other. Not a sound! If one gets separated from the others let him give the cry of a night owl and the others will answer with the squeak of the prairie lizard."

"What sort of a squeak, please?"

"Oh, any old squeak will do. You don't walk. Indians trot on the war-path. If you see any man hiding in a bush kill him at once, but don't stop to scalp him—"

"Really, dear!" from the corner.

"The great Queen would rather that you scalp him. Now, then! All ready! Start!"

Away went the line of figures, Daddy stooping with his rifle at the trail, Laddie and Dimples armed with axes and toy pistols, as tense and serious as any Redskins could be. The other two rather more irresponsible but very much absorbed all the same. The little line of absurd figures wound in and out of the furniture, and out on to the lawn, and round the laurel bushes, and into the yard, and back to the clump of trees. There Daddy stopped and held up his hand with a face that froze the children.

“Are all here?” he asked.

“Yes, yes.”

“Hush, warriors! No sound. There is an enemy scout in the bushes ahead. Stay with me, you two. You, Red Buffalo, and you, Black Bear, crawl forward and settle him. See that he makes no sound. What you do must be quick and sudden. When all is clear give the cry of the wood-pigeon, and we will join you.”

The two warriors crawled off in most desperate earnest. Daddy leaned on his gun and winked at the Lady, who still hovered fearfully in the background like a dear hen whose chickens were doing wonderful and unaccountable things. The two younger Indians slapped each other and giggled. Presently there came the “coo” of a wood-pigeon from in front. Daddy and the tribe moved forward to where the advance guard were waiting in the bushes.

“Great Chief, we could find no scout,” said Laddie.

“There was none person to kill,” added Dimples.

The Chief was not surprised, since the scout had been entirely of his own invention. It would not do to admit it, however.

“Have you found his trail?” he asked.

“No, Chief.”

“Let me look.” Daddy hunted about with a look of preternatural sagacity about him. “Before the snows fell a man passed here with a red head, grey clothes, and a squint in his left eye. His trail shows that his brother has a grocer’s shop and his wife smokes cigarettes on the sly.”

“Oh, Daddy, how could you read all that?”

“It’s easy enough, my son, when you get the knack of it. But look here, we are Indians on the war-trail, and don’t you forget it if you value your scalp! Aha, here is Humpty Dumpty’s trail!”

Uncle Pat had laid down a paper trail from this point, as Daddy well knew; so now the children were off like a little pack of eager harriers, following in and out among the bushes. Presently they had a rest.

“Great Chief, why does a wicked Paleface leave paper wherever he goes?”

Daddy made a great effort.

"He tears up the wicked letters he has written. Then he writes others even wickeder and tears them up in turn. You can see for yourself that he leaves them wherever he goes. Now, warriors, come along!"

Uncle Pat had dodged all over the limited garden, and the tribe followed his trail. Finally they stopped at a gap in the hedge which leads into the field. There was a little wooden hut in the field, where Daddy used to go and put up a printed cardboard: "WORKING." He found it a very good dodge when he wanted a quiet smoke and a nap. Usually there was nothing else in the field, but this time the Chief pushed the whole tribe hurriedly behind the hedge, and whispered to them to look carefully out between the branches.

In the middle of the field a tripod of sticks supported a kettle. At each side of it was a hunched-up figure in a coloured blanket. Uncle Pat had done his work skilfully and well.

"You must get them before they can reach their rifles," said the Chief. "What about their horses? Black Bear, move down the hedge and bring back word about their horses. If you see none give three whistles."

The whistles were soon heard, and the warrior returned.

"If the horses had been there, what would you have done?"

"Scalped them!" said Dimples.

"Silly ass!" said Laddie. "Who ever heard of a horse's scalp? You would stampede them."

"Of course," said the Chief. "If ever you see a horse grazing, you crawl up to it, spring on its back and then gallop away with your head looking under its neck and only your foot to be seen. Don't you forget it. But we must scupper these rascals on our hunting-grounds."

"Shall we crawl up to them?"

"Yes, crawl up. Then when I give a whoop rush them. Take them alive. I wish to have a word with them first. Carry them into the hut. Go!"

Away went the eager little figures, the chubby babes and the two lithe, active boys. Daddy stood behind the bush watching them. They kept a line and tip-toed along to the camp of the strangers. Then on the Chief's signal they burst into a cry and rushed wildly with waving weapons into the camp of the Palefaces. A moment later the two pillow-made trappers were being dragged off into the hut by the whooping warriors. They were up-ended in one corner when the Chief entered, and the victorious Indians were dancing about in front of them.

“Anybody wounded?” asked the Chief.

“No, no.”

“Have you tied their hands?”

With perfect gravity Red Buffalo made movements behind each of the pillows.

“They are tied, great Chief.”

“What shall we do with them?”

“Cut off their heads!” shrieked Dimples, who was always the most bloodthirsty of the tribe, though in private life he had been known to weep bitterly over a squashed caterpillar.

“The proper thing is to tie them to a stake,” said Laddie.

“What do you mean by killing our buffaloes?” asked Daddy, severely.

The prisoners preserved a sulky silence.

“Shall I shoot the green one?” asked Dimples, presenting his wooden pistol.

“Wait a bit!” said the Chief. “We had best keep one as a hostage and send the other back to say that unless the Chief of the Palefaces pays a ransom within three days—”

But at that moment, as a great romancer used to say, a strange thing happened. There was the sound of a turning key and the whole tribe of the Leatherskins was locked into the hut. A moment later a dreadful face appeared at the window, a face daubed with mud and overhung with grass, which drooped down from under a soft cap. The weird creature danced in triumph, and then stooped to set a light to some paper and shavings near the window.

“Heavens!” cried the Chief. “It is Yellow Snake, the ferocious Chief of the Bottlenoses!”

Flame and smoke were rising outside. It was excellently done and perfectly safe, but too much for the younger warriors. The key turned, the door opened, and two tearful babes were in the arms of the kneeling Lady. Red Buffalo and Black Bear were of sterner stuff.

“I’m not frightened, Daddy,” said Laddie, though he looked a little pale.

“Nor me,” cried Dimples, hurrying to get out of the hut.

“We’ll lock the prisoners up with no food and have a council of war upon them in the morning,” said the Chief. “Perhaps we’ve done enough to-day.”

“I rather think you have,” said the Lady, as she soothed the poor little sobbing figures.

“That’s the worst of having kids to play,” said Dimples. “Fancy having a squaw in a war-party!”

“Never mind, we’ve had a jolly good Indian game,” said Laddie, as the sound of a distant bell called them all to the nursery tea.

TALES OF TERROR AND MYSTERY

CONTENTS

The Leather Funnel
The New Catacomb
The Case of Lady Sannox
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The Black Doctor
The Jew’s Breastplate

Tales of Terror

The Horror of the Heights

The idea that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most macabre and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforce the statement. Though the assertions contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation. This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R. N., and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent and Sussex border. It was on the 15th September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chauntry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock. A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The note-book was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H.

Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognised the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be gathered from other sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air-pilots of England. For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscopic attachment which is known by his name. The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible — exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving aeroplane. There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the outside cover which have been pronounced by the Home Office experts to be blood — probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year. He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than anyone, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen, Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: “And where, pray, is Myrtle’s head?”

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the Flying School on Salisbury Plain, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airmen will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked note-book:

“Nevertheless, when I dined at Rheims with Coselli and Gustav Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone — always presuming that my premonitions are correct.

“Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been immeasurably raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district.

"It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, everyone said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First, there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne, but they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the machine, which was at an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything. There were several other similar cases, and then there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the halfpenny papers, and yet how little was ever done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous vol-plane from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot's seat. Died of what? 'Heart disease,' said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor's heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. 'Died of fright,' said Venables, but could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like 'Monstrous.' They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he DID die of fright, just as Venables thought.

“And then there was Myrtle’s head. Do you really believe — does anybody really believe — that a man’s head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed that it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes—’all slimy with grease,’ said somebody at the inquest. Queer that nobody got thinking after that! I did — but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time. I’ve made three ascents — how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun — but I’ve never been high enough. Now, with this new, light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand tomorrow. I’ll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it’s dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I’ll visit the air-jungle tomorrow — and if there’s anything there I shall know it. If I return, I’ll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don’t this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if YOU please.

“I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There’s nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing it doesn’t mind damp, and the weather looks as if we should be in the clouds all the time. It’s a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements — enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian-blind principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot. You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded boots, a storm-cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part. Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I should if I were using the biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show — if you want to get the last foot of life out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered — or both.

“I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow down wind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud-bank above me. It’s all-important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

“It was a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west — one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger — before we learned to put an overmastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud-banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action — a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full, deep-throated purr — the ten singing as one. That’s where the beauty of our modern silencers comes in. We can at last control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the early aviators could come back to see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which have been bought at the cost of their lives!

“About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half a dozen flying machines were doing hackwork at the thousand-foot level, looking like little black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud-land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapours were swirling round my face. It was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards. My sopped and dripping wings had made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in lighter cloud, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second — opal-coloured and fleecy — at a great height above my head, a white, unbroken ceiling above, and a dark, unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small water-birds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whir of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

“The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

“Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud-stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westwards. The wind had been steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze — twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out into a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head — all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast, glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach. It was a quarter past ten o’clock, and the barograph needle pointed to twelve thousand eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pump. No wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

“I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down wind at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I had always to turn again and tack up in the wind’s eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay, and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

“When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harp-strings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky. There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose — rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

“These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous, inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbours have called a tourbillon, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I have spoken had, as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment’s warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun round for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet. It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half-insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort — it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out of the eddies and was skimming down the sky. Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the danger-spot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of that peculiar nausea which goes with rarefaction of the air. For the first time I unscrewed the mouth of my oxygen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I soared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

"It is very clear to me that the insensibility which came upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero, Fahrenheit. At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the surface of the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my planes, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent misfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

"It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something whizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is for ever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth's envelope the risk would be a very real one.

"My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no farther. Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear but my machine had reached its limit. The attenuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still misfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action. If I had not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring in circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers which I had imagined.

"I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new airtract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen — nothing but the distant, silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for more than another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent vol-plane could at any time take me to the earth.

"Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to very fine cigarette smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil upon my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind when my eyes looked upwards and I saw the most wonderful vision that ever man has seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

"Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size — far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul's. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsated with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping, green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

"I had half-turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the top. There was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely iridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me, a wonderful fairy squadron of strange unknown argosies of the sky — creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

"But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon — the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them. These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

"But a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast, shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

"The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles, and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of prey which is waiting to pounce. Its method of progression — done so swiftly that it was not easy to follow — was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

"I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge, flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a vol-pique, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I disengaged myself, but only to be caught round the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on to my back.

"As I fell over I blazed off both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that mighty bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature's back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast, clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge, cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared to attempt, my engine still full on, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite. Far behind me I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

"Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious, spiral vol-plane from nearly eight miles of altitude — first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel beneath me as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tank, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from the village of Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal upon earth has ever yet taken and lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of the heights — and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

“And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and will confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of ...”

Here a page of the manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing:

“Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!”

Such in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington upon the borders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the note-book was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator’s theory is correct that this air-jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures at some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found. The picture of that monoplane skimming down the sky, with the nameless terrors flying as swiftly beneath it and cutting it off always from the earth while they gradually closed in upon their victim, is one upon which a man who valued his sanity would prefer not to dwell. There are many, as I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has disappeared, and I would commend to them his own words: “This note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if YOU please.”

The Leather Funnel

My friend, Lionel Dacre, lived in the Avenue de Wagram, Paris. His house was that small one, with the iron railings and grass plot in front of it, on the left-hand side as you pass down from the Arc de Triomphe. I fancy that it had been there long before the avenue was constructed, for the grey tiles were stained with lichens, and the walls were mildewed and discoloured with age. It looked a small house from the street, five windows in front, if I remember right, but it deepened into a single long chamber at the back. It was here that Dacre had that singular library of occult literature, and the fantastic curiosities which served as a hobby for himself, and an amusement for his friends. A wealthy man of refined and eccentric tastes, he had spent much of his life and fortune in gathering together what was said to be a unique private collection of Talmudic, cabalistic, and magical works, many of them of great rarity and value. His tastes leaned toward the marvellous and the monstrous, and I have heard that his experiments in the direction of the unknown have passed all the bounds of civilization and of decorum. To his English friends he never alluded to such matters, and took the tone of the student and virtuoso; but a Frenchman whose tastes were of the same nature has assured me that the worst excesses of the black mass have been perpetrated in that large and lofty hall, which is lined with the shelves of his books, and the cases of his museum.

Dacre’s appearance was enough to show that his deep interest in these psychic matters was intellectual rather than spiritual. There was no trace of asceticism upon his heavy face, but there was much mental force in his huge, dome-like skull, which curved upward from amongst his thinning locks, like a snowpeak above its fringe of fir trees. His knowledge was greater than his wisdom, and his powers were far superior to his character. The small bright eyes, buried deeply in his fleshy face, twinkled with intelligence and an unabated curiosity of life, but they were the eyes of a sensualist and an egotist. Enough of the man, for he is dead now, poor devil, dead at the very time that he had made sure that he had at last discovered the elixir of life. It is not with his complex character that I have to deal, but with the very strange and inexplicable incident which had its rise in my visit to him in the early spring of the year ‘82.

I had known Dacre in England, for my researches in the Assyrian Room of the British Museum had been conducted at the time when he was endeavouring to establish a mystic and esoteric meaning in the Babylonian tablets, and this community of interests had brought us together. Chance remarks had led to daily conversation, and that to something verging upon friendship. I had promised him that on my next visit to Paris I would call upon him. At the time when I was able to fulfil my compact I was living in a cottage at Fontainebleau, and as the evening trains were inconvenient, he asked me to spend the night in his house.

“I have only that one spare couch,” said he, pointing to a broad sofa in his large salon; “I hope that you will manage to be comfortable there.”

It was a singular bedroom, with its high walls of brown volumes, but there could be no more agreeable furniture to a bookworm like myself, and there is no scent so pleasant to my nostrils as that faint, subtle reek which comes from an ancient book. I assured him that I could desire no more charming chamber, and no more congenial surroundings.

“If the fittings are neither convenient nor conventional, they are at least costly,” said he, looking round at his shelves. “I have expended nearly a quarter of a million of money upon these objects which surround you. Books, weapons, gems, carvings, tapestries, images — there is hardly a thing here which has not its history, and it is generally one worth telling.”

He was seated as he spoke at one side of the open fire-place, and I at the other. His reading-table was on his right, and the strong lamp above it ringed it with a very vivid circle of golden light. A half-rolled palimpsest lay in the centre, and around it were many quaint articles of bric-a-brac. One of these was a large funnel, such as is used for filling wine casks. It appeared to be made of black wood, and to be rimmed with discoloured brass.

“That is a curious thing,” I remarked. “What is the history of that?”

“Ah!” said he, “it is the very question which I have had occasion to ask myself. I would give a good deal to know. Take it in your hands and examine it.”

I did so, and found that what I had imagined to be wood was in reality leather, though age had dried it into an extreme hardness. It was a large funnel, and might hold a quart when full. The brass rim encircled the wide end, but the narrow was also tipped with metal.

“What do you make of it?” asked Dacre.

“I should imagine that it belonged to some vintner or maltster in the Middle Ages,” said I. “I have seen in England leathern drinking flagons of the seventeenth century—’black jacks’ as they were called — which were of the same colour and hardness as this filler.”

“I dare say the date would be about the same,” said Dacre, “and, no doubt, also, it was used for filling a vessel with liquid. If my suspicions are correct, however, it was a queer vintner who used it, and a very singular cask which was filled. Do you observe nothing strange at the spout end of the funnel.”

As I held it to the light I observed that at a spot some five inches above the brass tip the narrow neck of the leather funnel was all haggled and scored, as if someone had notched it round with a blunt knife. Only at that point was there any roughening of the dead black surface.

“Someone has tried to cut off the neck.”

“Would you call it a cut?”

“It is torn and lacerated. It must have taken some strength to leave these marks on such tough material, whatever the instrument may have been. But what do you think of it? I can tell that you know more than you say.”

Dacre smiled, and his little eyes twinkled with knowledge.

“Have you included the psychology of dreams among your learned studies?” he asked.

“I did not even know that there was such a psychology.”

“My dear sir, that shelf above the gem case is filled with volumes, from Albertus Magnus onward, which deal with no other subject. It is a science in itself.”

“A science of charlatans!”

“The charlatan is always the pioneer. From the astrologer came the astronomer, from the alchemist the chemist, from the mesmerist the experimental psychologist. The quack of yesterday is the professor of tomorrow. Even such subtle and elusive things as dreams will in time be reduced to system and order. When that time comes the researches of our friends on the bookshelf yonder will no longer be the amusement of the mystic, but the foundations of a science.”

“Supposing that is so, what has the science of dreams to do with a large, black, brass-rimmed funnel?”

“I will tell you. You know that I have an agent who is always on the look-out for rarities and curiosities for my collection. Some days ago he heard of a dealer upon one of the Quais who had acquired some old rubbish found in a cupboard in an ancient house at the back of the Rue Mathurin, in the Quartier Latin. The dining-room of this old house is decorated with a coat of arms, chevrons, and bars rouge upon a field argent, which prove, upon inquiry, to be the shield of Nicholas de la Reynie, a high official of King Louis XIV. There can be no doubt that the other articles in the cupboard date back to the early days of that king. The inference is, therefore, that they were all the property of this Nicholas de la Reynie, who was, as I understand, the gentleman specially concerned with the maintenance and execution of the Draconic laws of that epoch.”

“What then?”

“I would ask you now to take the funnel into your hands once more and to examine the upper brass rim. Can you make out any lettering upon it?”

There were certainly some scratches upon it, almost obliterated by time. The general effect was of several letters, the last of which bore some resemblance to a B.

“You make it a B?”

“Yes, I do.”

“So do I. In fact, I have no doubt whatever that it is a B.”

“But the nobleman you mentioned would have had R for his initial.”

“Exactly! That’s the beauty of it. He owned this curious object, and yet he had someone else’s initials upon it. Why did he do this?”

“I can’t imagine; can you?”

“Well, I might, perhaps, guess. Do you observe something drawn a little farther along the rim?”

“I should say it was a crown.”

“It is undoubtedly a crown; but if you examine it in a good light, you will convince yourself that it is not an ordinary crown. It is a heraldic crown — a badge of rank, and it consists of an alternation of four pearls and strawberry leaves, the proper badge of a marquis. We may infer, therefore, that the person whose initials end in B was entitled to wear that coronet.”

“Then this common leather filler belonged to a marquis?”

Dacre gave a peculiar smile.

“Or to some member of the family of a marquis,” said he. “So much we have clearly gathered from this engraved rim.”

“But what has all this to do with dreams?” I do not know whether it was from a look upon Dacre’s face, or from some subtle suggestion in his manner, but a feeling of repulsion, of unreasoning horror, came upon me as I looked at the gnarled old lump of leather.

“I have more than once received important information through my dreams,” said my companion in the didactic manner which he loved to affect. “I make it a rule now when I am in doubt upon any material point to place the article in question beside me as I sleep, and to hope for some enlightenment. The process does not appear to me to be very obscure, though it has not yet received the blessing of orthodox science. According to my theory, any object which has been intimately associated with any supreme paroxysm of human emotion, whether it be joy or pain, will retain a certain atmosphere or association which it is capable of communicating to a sensitive mind. By a sensitive mind I do not mean an abnormal one, but such a trained and educated mind as you or I possess.”

“You mean, for example, that if I slept beside that old sword upon the wall, I might dream of some bloody incident in which that very sword took part?”

“An excellent example, for, as a matter of fact, that sword was used in that fashion by me, and I saw in my sleep the death of its owner, who perished in a brisk skirmish, which I have been unable to identify, but which occurred at the time of the wars of the Frondists. If you think of it, some of our popular observances show that the fact has already been recognised by our ancestors, although we, in our wisdom, have classed it among superstitions.”

“For example?”

“Well, the placing of the bride’s cake beneath the pillow in order that the sleeper may have pleasant dreams. That is one of several instances which you will find set forth in a small brochure which I am myself writing upon the subject. But to come back to the point, I slept one night with this funnel beside me, and I had a dream which certainly throws a curious light upon its use and origin.”

“What did you dream?”

“I dreamed — —” He paused, and an intent look of interest came over his massive face. “By Jove, that’s well thought of,” said he. “This really will be an exceedingly interesting experiment. You are yourself a psychic subject — with nerves which respond readily to any impression.”

“I have never tested myself in that direction.”

“Then we shall test you tonight. Might I ask you as a very great favour, when you occupy that couch tonight, to sleep with this old funnel placed by the side of your pillow?”

The request seemed to me a grotesque one; but I have myself, in my complex nature, a hunger after all which is bizarre and fantastic. I had not the faintest belief in Dacre’s theory, nor any hopes for success in such an experiment; yet it amused me that the experiment should be made. Dacre, with great gravity, drew a small stand to the head of my settee, and placed the funnel upon it. Then, after a short conversation, he wished me good night and left me.

I sat for some little time smoking by the smouldering fire, and turning over in my mind the curious incident which had occurred, and the strange experience which might lie before me. Sceptical as I was, there was something impressive in the assurance of Dacre’s manner, and my extraordinary surroundings, the huge room with the strange and often sinister objects which were hung round it, struck solemnity into my soul. Finally I undressed, and turning out the lamp, I lay down. After long tossing I fell asleep. Let me try to describe as accurately as I can the scene which came to me in my dreams. It stands out now in my memory more clearly than anything which I have seen with my waking eyes. There was a room which bore the appearance of a vault. Four spandrels from the corners ran up to join a sharp, cup-shaped roof. The architecture was rough, but very strong. It was evidently part of a great building.

Three men in black, with curious, top-heavy, black velvet hats, sat in a line upon a red-carpeted dais. Their faces were very solemn and sad. On the left stood two long-gowned men with port-folios in their hands, which seemed to be stuffed with papers. Upon the right, looking toward me, was a small woman with blonde hair and singular, light-blue eyes — the eyes of a child. She was past her first youth, but could not yet be called middle-aged. Her figure was inclined to stoutness and her bearing was proud and confident. Her face was pale, but serene. It was a curious face, comely and yet feline, with a subtle suggestion of cruelty about the straight, strong little mouth and chubby jaw. She was draped in some sort of loose, white gown.

Beside her stood a thin, eager priest, who whispered in her ear, and continually raised a crucifix before her eyes. She turned her head and looked fixedly past the crucifix at the three men in black, who were, I felt, her judges.

As I gazed the three men stood up and said something, but I could distinguish no words, though I was aware that it was the central one who was speaking. They then swept out of the room, followed by the two men with the papers. At the same instant several rough-looking fellows in stout jerkins came bustling in and removed first the red carpet, and then the boards which formed the dais, so as to entirely clear the room. When this screen was removed I saw some singular articles of furniture behind it. One looked like a bed with wooden rollers at each end, and a winch handle to regulate its length. Another was a wooden horse. There were several other curious objects, and a number of swinging cords which played over pulleys. It was not unlike a modern gymnasium.

When the room had been cleared there appeared a new figure upon the scene. This was a tall, thin person clad in black, with a gaunt and austere face. The aspect of the man made me shudder. His clothes were all shining with grease and mottled with stains. He bore himself with a slow and impressive dignity, as if he took command of all things from the instant of his entrance. In spite of his rude appearance and sordid dress, it was now his business, his room, his to command. He carried a coil of light ropes over his left forearm. The lady looked him up and down with a searching glance, but her expression was unchanged. It was confident — even defiant. But it was very different with the priest. His face was ghastly white, and I saw the moisture glisten and run on his high, sloping forehead. He threw up his hands in prayer and he stooped continually to mutter frantic words in the lady’s ear.

The man in black now advanced, and taking one of the cords from his left arm, he bound the woman’s hands together. She held them meekly toward him as he did so. Then he took her arm with a rough grip and led her toward the wooden horse, which was little higher than her waist. On to this she was lifted and laid, with her back upon it, and her face to the ceiling, while the priest, quivering with horror, had rushed out of the room. The woman’s lips were moving rapidly, and though I could hear nothing I knew that she was praying. Her feet hung down on either side of the horse, and I saw that the rough varlets in attendance had fastened cords to her ankles and secured the other ends to iron rings in the stone floor.

My heart sank within me as I saw these ominous preparations, and yet I was held by the fascination of horror, and I could not take my eyes from the strange spectacle. A man had entered the room with a bucket of water in either hand. Another followed with a third bucket. They were laid beside the wooden horse. The second man had a wooden dipper — a bowl with a straight handle — in his other hand. This he gave to the man in black. At the same moment one of the varlets approached with a dark object in his hand, which even in my dream filled me with a vague feeling of familiarity. It was a leathern filler. With horrible energy he thrust it — but I could stand no more. My hair stood on end with horror. I writhed, I struggled, I broke through the bonds of sleep, and I burst with a shriek into my own life, and found myself lying shivering with terror in the huge library, with the moonlight flooding through the window and throwing strange silver and black traceries upon the opposite wall. Oh, what a blessed relief to feel that I was back in the nineteenth century — back out of that mediaeval vault into a world where men had human hearts within their bosoms. I sat up on my couch, trembling in every limb, my mind divided between thankfulness and horror. To think that such things were ever done — that they could be done without God striking the villains dead. Was it all a fantasy, or did it really stand for something which had happened in the black, cruel days of the world's history? I sank my throbbing head upon my shaking hands. And then, suddenly, my heart seemed to stand still in my bosom, and I could not even scream, so great was my terror. Something was advancing toward me through the darkness of the room.

It is a horror coming upon a horror which breaks a man's spirit. I could not reason, I could not pray; I could only sit like a frozen image, and glare at the dark figure which was coming down the great room. And then it moved out into the white lane of moonlight, and I breathed once more. It was Dacre, and his face showed that he was as frightened as myself.

"Was that you? For God's sake what's the matter?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Oh, Dacre, I am glad to see you! I have been down into hell. It was dreadful."

"Then it was you who screamed?"

"I dare say it was."

“It rang through the house. The servants are all terrified.” He struck a match and lit the lamp. “I think we may get the fire to burn up again,” he added, throwing some logs upon the embers. “Good God, my dear chap, how white you are! You look as if you had seen a ghost.”

“So I have — several ghosts.”

“The leather funnel has acted, then?”

“I wouldn’t sleep near the infernal thing again for all the money you could offer me.”

Dacre chuckled.

“I expected that you would have a lively night of it,” said he. “You took it out of me in return, for that scream of yours wasn’t a very pleasant sound at two in the morning. I suppose from what you say that you have seen the whole dreadful business.”

“What dreadful business?”

“The torture of the water — the ‘Extraordinary Question,’ as it was called in the genial days of ‘Le Roi Soleil.’ Did you stand it out to the end?”

“No, thank God, I awoke before it really began.”

“Ah! it is just as well for you. I held out till the third bucket. Well, it is an old story, and they are all in their graves now, anyhow, so what does it matter how they got there? I suppose that you have no idea what it was that you have seen?”

“The torture of some criminal. She must have been a terrible malefactor indeed if her crimes are in proportion to her penalty.”

“Well, we have that small consolation,” said Dacre, wrapping his dressing-gown round him and crouching closer to the fire. “They WERE in proportion to her penalty. That is to say, if I am correct in the lady’s identity.”

“How could you possibly know her identity?”

For answer Dacre took down an old vellum-covered volume from the shelf.

“Just listen to this,” said he; “it is in the French of the seventeenth century, but I will give a rough translation as I go. You will judge for yourself whether I have solved the riddle or not.

“‘The prisoner was brought before the Grand Chambers and Tournelles of Parliament, sitting as a court of justice, charged with the murder of Master Dreux d’Aubray, her father, and of her two brothers, MM. d’Aubray, one being civil lieutenant, and the other a counsellor of Parliament. In person it seemed hard to believe that she had really done such wicked deeds, for she was of a mild appearance, and of short stature, with a fair skin and blue eyes. Yet the Court, having found her guilty, condemned her to the ordinary and to the extraordinary question in order that she might be forced to name her accomplices, after which she should be carried in a cart to the Place de Greve, there to have her head cut off, her body being afterwards burned and her ashes scattered to the winds.'

"The date of this entry is July 16, 1676."

"It is interesting," said I, "but not convincing. How do you prove the two women to be the same?"

"I am coming to that. The narrative goes on to tell of the woman's behaviour when questioned. 'When the executioner approached her she recognised him by the cords which he held in his hands, and she at once held out her own hands to him, looking at him from head to foot without uttering a word.' How's that?"

"Yes, it was so."

"'She gazed without wincing upon the wooden horse and rings which had twisted so many limbs and caused so many shrieks of agony. When her eyes fell upon the three pails of water, which were all ready for her, she said with a smile, "All that water must have been brought here for the purpose of drowning me, Monsieur. You have no idea, I trust, of making a person of my small stature swallow it all."' Shall I read the details of the torture?"

"No, for Heaven's sake, don't."

"Here is a sentence which must surely show you that what is here recorded is the very scene which you have gazed upon tonight: 'The good Abbe Pirot, unable to contemplate the agonies which were suffered by his penitent, had hurried from the room.' Does that convince you?"

"It does entirely. There can be no question that it is indeed the same event. But who, then, is this lady whose appearance was so attractive and whose end was so horrible?"

For answer Dacre came across to me, and placed the small lamp upon the table which stood by my bed. Lifting up the ill-omened filler, he turned the brass rim so that the light fell full upon it. Seen in this way the engraving seemed clearer than on the night before.

"We have already agreed that this is the badge of a marquis or of a marquise," said he. "We have also settled that the last letter is B."

"It is undoubtedly so."

"I now suggest to you that the other letters from left to right are, M, M, a small d, A, a small d, and then the final B."

"Yes, I am sure that you are right. I can make out the two small d's quite plainly."

"What I have read to you tonight," said Dacre, "is the official record of the trial of Marie Madeleine d'Aubray, Marquise de Brinvilliers, one of the most famous poisoners and murderers of all time."

I sat in silence, overwhelmed at the extraordinary nature of the incident, and at the completeness of the proof with which Dacre had exposed its real meaning. In a vague way I remembered some details of the woman's career, her unbridled debauchery, the cold-blooded and protracted torture of her sick father, the murder of her brothers for motives of petty gain. I recollected also that the bravery of her end had done something to atone for the horror of her life, and that all Paris had sympathized with her last moments, and blessed her as a martyr within a few days of the time when they had cursed her as a murderess. One objection, and one only, occurred to my mind.

"How came her initials and her badge of rank upon the filler? Surely they did not carry their mediaeval homage to the nobility to the point of decorating instruments of torture with their titles?"

"I was puzzled with the same point," said Dacre, "but it admits of a simple explanation. The case excited extraordinary interest at the time, and nothing could be more natural than that La Reynie, the head of the police, should retain this filler as a grim souvenir. It was not often that a marchioness of France underwent the extraordinary question. That he should engrave her initials upon it for the information of others was surely a very ordinary proceeding upon his part."

"And this?" I asked, pointing to the marks upon the leathern neck.

"She was a cruel tigress," said Dacre, as he turned away. "I think it is evident that like other tigresses her teeth were both strong and sharp."

The New Catacomb

"Look here, Burger," said Kennedy, "I do wish that you would confide in me."

The two famous students of Roman remains sat together in Kennedy's comfortable room overlooking the Corso. The night was cold, and they had both pulled up their chairs to the unsatisfactory Italian stove which threw out a zone of stuffiness rather than of warmth. Outside under the bright winter stars lay the modern Rome, the long, double chain of the electric lamps, the brilliantly lighted cafes, the rushing carriages, and the dense throng upon the footpaths. But inside, in the sumptuous chamber of the rich young English archaeologist, there was only old Rome to be seen. Cracked and timeworn friezes hung upon the walls, grey old busts of senators and soldiers with their fighting heads and their hard, cruel faces peered out from the corners. On the centre table, amidst a litter of inscriptions, fragments, and ornaments, there stood the famous reconstruction by Kennedy of the Baths of Caracalla, which excited such interest and admiration when it was exhibited in Berlin. Amphorae hung from the ceiling, and a litter of curiosities strewed the rich red Turkey carpet. And of them all there was not one which was not of the most unimpeachable authenticity, and of the utmost rarity and value; for Kennedy, though little more than thirty, had a European reputation in this particular branch of research, and was, moreover, provided with that long purse which either proves to be a fatal handicap to the student's energies, or, if his mind is still true to its purpose, gives him an enormous advantage in the race for fame. Kennedy had often been seduced by whim and pleasure from his studies, but his mind was an incisive one, capable of long and concentrated efforts which ended in sharp reactions of sensuous languor. His handsome face, with its high, white forehead, its aggressive nose, and its somewhat loose and sensual mouth, was a fair index of the compromise between strength and weakness in his nature.

Of a very different type was his companion, Julius Burger. He came of a curious blend, a German father and an Italian mother, with the robust qualities of the North mingling strangely with the softer graces of the South. Blue Teutonic eyes lightened his sun-browned face, and above them rose a square, massive forehead, with a fringe of close yellow curls lying round it. His strong, firm jaw was clean-shaven, and his companion had frequently remarked how much it suggested those old Roman busts which peered out from the shadows in the corners of his chamber. Under its bluff German strength there lay always a suggestion of Italian subtlety, but the smile was so honest, and the eyes so frank, that one understood that this was only an indication of his ancestry, with no actual bearing upon his character. In age and in reputation, he was on the same level as his English companion, but his life and his work had both been far more arduous. Twelve years before, he had come as a poor student to Rome, and had lived ever since upon some small endowment for research which had been awarded to him by the University of Bonn. Painfully, slowly, and doggedly, with extraordinary tenacity and single-mindedness, he had climbed from rung to rung of the ladder of fame, until now he was a member of the Berlin Academy, and there was every reason to believe that he would shortly be promoted to the Chair of the greatest of German Universities. But the singleness of purpose which had brought him to the same high level as the rich and brilliant Englishman, had caused him in everything outside their work to stand infinitely below him. He had never found a pause in his studies in which to cultivate the social graces. It was only when he spoke of his own subject that his face was filled with life and soul. At other times he was silent and embarrassed, too conscious of his own limitations in larger subjects, and impatient of that small talk which is the conventional refuge of those who have no thoughts to express.

And yet for some years there had been an acquaintanceship which appeared to be slowly ripening into a friendship between these two very different rivals. The base and origin of this lay in the fact that in their own studies each was the only one of the younger men who had knowledge and enthusiasm enough to properly appreciate the other. Their common interests and pursuits had brought them together, and each had been attracted by the other's knowledge. And then gradually something had been added to this. Kennedy had been amused by the frankness and simplicity of his rival, while Burger in turn had been fascinated by the brilliancy and vivacity which had made Kennedy such a favourite in Roman society. I say "had," because just at the moment the young Englishman was somewhat under a cloud. A love-affair, the details of which had never quite come out, had indicated a heartlessness and callousness upon his part which shocked many of his friends. But in the bachelor circles of students and artists in which he preferred to move there is no very rigid code of honour in such matters, and though a head might be shaken or a pair of shoulders shrugged over the flight of two and the return of one, the general sentiment was probably one of curiosity and perhaps of envy rather than of reprobation.

"Look here, Burger," said Kennedy, looking hard at the placid face of his companion, "I do wish that you would confide in me."

As he spoke he waved his hand in the direction of a rug which lay upon the floor. On the rug stood a long, shallow fruit-basket of the light wicker-work which is used in the Campagna, and this was heaped with a litter of objects, inscribed tiles, broken inscriptions, cracked mosaics, torn papyri, rusty metal ornaments, which to the uninitiated might have seemed to have come straight from a dustman's bin, but which a specialist would have speedily recognised as unique of their kind. The pile of odds and ends in the flat wicker-work basket supplied exactly one of those missing links of social development which are of such interest to the student. It was the German who had brought them in, and the Englishman's eyes were hungry as he looked at them.

"I won't interfere with your treasure-trove, but I should very much like to hear about it," he continued, while Burger very deliberately lit a cigar. "It is evidently a discovery of the first importance. These inscriptions will make a sensation throughout Europe."

"For every one here there are a million there!" said the German. "There are so many that a dozen savants might spend a lifetime over them, and build up a reputation as solid as the Castle of St. Angelo."

Kennedy sat thinking with his fine forehead wrinkled and his fingers playing with his long, fair moustache.

"You have given yourself away, Burger!" said he at last. "Your words can only apply to one thing. You have discovered a new catacomb."

"I had no doubt that you had already come to that conclusion from an examination of these objects."

"Well, they certainly appeared to indicate it, but your last remarks make it certain. There is no place except a catacomb which could contain so vast a store of relics as you describe."

"Quite so. There is no mystery about that. I HAVE discovered a new catacomb."

"Where?"

"Ah, that is my secret, my dear Kennedy. Suffice it that it is so situated that there is not one chance in a million of anyone else coming upon it. Its date is different from that of any known catacomb, and it has been reserved for the burial of the highest Christians, so that the remains and the relics are quite different from anything which has ever been seen before. If I was not aware of your knowledge and of your energy, my friend, I would not hesitate, under the pledge of secrecy, to tell you everything about it. But as it is I think that I must certainly prepare my own report of the matter before I expose myself to such formidable competition."

Kennedy loved his subject with a love which was almost a mania — a love which held him true to it, amidst all the distractions which come to a wealthy and dissipated young man. He had ambition, but his ambition was secondary to his mere abstract joy and interest in everything which concerned the old life and history of the city. He yearned to see this new underworld which his companion had discovered.

“Look here, Burger,” said he, earnestly, “I assure you that you can trust me most implicitly in the matter. Nothing would induce me to put pen to paper about anything which I see until I have your express permission. I quite understand your feeling and I think it is most natural, but you have really nothing whatever to fear from me. On the other hand, if you don’t tell me I shall make a systematic search, and I shall most certainly discover it. In that case, of course, I should make what use I liked of it, since I should be under no obligation to you.”

Burger smiled thoughtfully over his cigar.

“I have noticed, friend Kennedy,” said he, “that when I want information over any point you are not always so ready to supply it.”

“When did you ever ask me anything that I did not tell you? You remember, for example, my giving you the material for your paper about the temple of the Vestals.”

“Ah, well, that was not a matter of much importance. If I were to question you upon some intimate thing would you give me an answer, I wonder! This new catacomb is a very intimate thing to me, and I should certainly expect some sign of confidence in return.”

“What you are driving at I cannot imagine,” said the Englishman, “but if you mean that you will answer my question about the catacomb if I answer any question which you may put to me I can assure you that I will certainly do so.”

“Well, then,” said Burger, leaning luxuriously back in his settee, and puffing a blue tree of cigar-smoke into the air, “tell me all about your relations with Miss Mary Saunderson.”

Kennedy sprang up in his chair and glared angrily at his impassive companion.

“What the devil do you mean?” he cried. “What sort of a question is this? You may mean it as a joke, but you never made a worse one.”

“No, I don’t mean it as a joke,” said Burger, simply. “I am really rather interested in the details of the matter. I don’t know much about the world and women and social life and that sort of thing, and such an incident has the fascination of the unknown for me. I know you, and I knew her by sight — I had even spoken to her once or twice. I should very much like to hear from your own lips exactly what it was which occurred between you."

"I won't tell you a word."

"That's all right. It was only my whim to see if you would give up a secret as easily as you expected me to give up my secret of the new catacomb. You wouldn't, and I didn't expect you to. But why should you expect otherwise of me? There's Saint John's clock striking ten. It is quite time that I was going home."

"No; wait a bit, Burger," said Kennedy; "this is really a ridiculous caprice of yours to wish to know about an old love-affair which has burned out months ago. You know we look upon a man who kisses and tells as the greatest coward and villain possible."

"Certainly," said the German, gathering up his basket of curiosities, "when he tells anything about a girl which is previously unknown he must be so. But in this case, as you must be aware, it was a public matter which was the common talk of Rome, so that you are not really doing Miss Mary Saunderson any injury by discussing her case with me. But still, I respect your scruples; and so good night!"

"Wait a bit, Burger," said Kennedy, laying his hand upon the other's arm; "I am very keen upon this catacomb business, and I can't let it drop quite so easily. Would you mind asking me something else in return — something not quite so eccentric this time?"

"No, no; you have refused, and there is an end of it," said Burger, with his basket on his arm. "No doubt you are quite right not to answer, and no doubt I am quite right also — and so again, my dear Kennedy, good night!"

The Englishman watched Burger cross the room, and he had his hand on the handle of the door before his host sprang up with the air of a man who is making the best of that which cannot be helped.

"Hold on, old fellow," said he; "I think you are behaving in a most ridiculous fashion; but still; if this is your condition, I suppose that I must submit to it. I hate saying anything about a girl, but, as you say, it is all over Rome, and I don't suppose I can tell you anything which you do not know already. What was it you wanted to know?"

The German came back to the stove, and, laying down his basket, he sank into his chair once more.

“May I have another cigar?” said he. “Thank you very much! I never smoke when I work, but I enjoy a chat much more when I am under the influence of tobacco. Now, as regards this young lady, with whom you had this little adventure. What in the world has become of her?”

“She is at home with her own people.”

“Oh, really — in England?”

“Yes.”

“What part of England — London?”

“No, Twickenham.”

“You must excuse my curiosity, my dear Kennedy, and you must put it down to my ignorance of the world. No doubt it is quite a simple thing to persuade a young lady to go off with you for three weeks or so, and then to hand her over to her own family at — what did you call the place?”

“Twickenham.”

“Quite so — at Twickenham. But it is something so entirely outside my own experience that I cannot even imagine how you set about it. For example, if you had loved this girl your love could hardly disappear in three weeks, so I presume that you could not have loved her at all. But if you did not love her why should you make this great scandal which has damaged you and ruined her?”

Kennedy looked moodily into the red eye of the stove.

“That’s a logical way of looking at it, certainly,” said he. “Love is a big word, and it represents a good many different shades of feeling. I liked her, and — well, you say you’ve seen her — you know how charming she could look. But still I am willing to admit, looking back, that I could never have really loved her.”

“Then, my dear Kennedy, why did you do it?”

“The adventure of the thing had a great deal to do with it.”

“What! You are so fond of adventures!”

“Where would the variety of life be without them? It was for an adventure that I first began to pay my attentions to her. I’ve chased a good deal of game in my time, but there’s no chase like that of a pretty woman. There was the piquant difficulty of it also, for, as she was the companion of Lady Emily Rood, it was almost impossible to see her alone. On the top of all the other obstacles which attracted me, I learned from her own lips very early in the proceedings that she was engaged.”

“Mein Gott! To whom?”

"She mentioned no names."

"I do not think that anyone knows that. So that made the adventure more alluring, did it?"

"Well, it did certainly give a spice to it. Don't you think so?"

"I tell you that I am very ignorant about these things."

"My dear fellow, you can remember that the apple you stole from your neighbour's tree was always sweeter than that which fell from your own. And then I found that she cared for me."

"What — at once?"

"Oh, no, it took about three months of sapping and mining. But at last I won her over. She understood that my judicial separation from my wife made it impossible for me to do the right thing by her — but she came all the same, and we had a delightful time, as long as it lasted."

"But how about the other man?"

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it is the survival of the fittest," said he. "If he had been the better man she would not have deserted him. Let's drop the subject, for I have had enough of it!"

"Only one other thing. How did you get rid of her in three weeks?"

"Well, we had both cooled down a bit, you understand. She absolutely refused, under any circumstances, to come back to face the people she had known in Rome. Now, of course, Rome is necessary to me, and I was already pining to be back at my work — so there was one obvious cause of separation. Then, again, her old father turned up at the hotel in London, and there was a scene, and the whole thing became so unpleasant that really — though I missed her dreadfully at first — I was very glad to slip out of it. Now, I rely upon you not to repeat anything of what I have said."

"My dear Kennedy, I should not dream of repeating it. But all that you say interests me very much, for it gives me an insight into your way of looking at things, which is entirely different from mine, for I have seen so little of life. And now you want to know about my new catacomb. There's no use my trying to describe it, for you would never find it by that. There is only one thing, and that is for me to take you there."

"That would be splendid."

"When would you like to come?"

"The sooner the better. I am all impatience to see it."

"Well, it is a beautiful night — though a trifle cold. Suppose we start in an hour. We must be very careful to keep the matter to ourselves. If anyone saw us hunting in couples they would suspect that there was something going on."

"We can't be too cautious," said Kennedy. "Is it far?"

"Some miles."

"Not too far to walk?"

"Oh, no, we could walk there easily."

"We had better do so, then. A cabman's suspicions would be aroused if he dropped us both at some lonely spot in the dead of the night."

"Quite so. I think it would be best for us to meet at the Gate of the Appian Way at midnight. I must go back to my lodgings for the matches and candles and things."

"All right, Burger! I think it is very kind of you to let me into this secret, and I promise you that I will write nothing about it until you have published your report. Good-bye for the present! You will find me at the Gate at twelve."

The cold, clear air was filled with the musical chimes from that city of clocks as Burger, wrapped in an Italian overcoat, with a lantern hanging from his hand, walked up to the rendezvous. Kennedy stepped out of the shadow to meet him.

"You are ardent in work as well as in love!" said the German, laughing.

"Yes; I have been waiting here for nearly half an hour."

"I hope you left no clue as to where we were going."

"Not such a fool! By Jove, I am chilled to the bone! Come on, Burger, let us warm ourselves by a spurt of hard walking."

Their footsteps sounded loud and crisp upon the rough stone paving of the disappointing road which is all that is left of the most famous highway of the world. A peasant or two going home from the wine-shop, and a few carts of country produce coming up to Rome, were the only things which they met. They swung along, with the huge tombs looming up through the darkness upon each side of them, until they had come as far as the Catacombs of St. Calistus, and saw against a rising moon the great circular bastion of Cecilia Metella in front of them. Then Burger stopped with his hand to his side.

"Your legs are longer than mine, and you are more accustomed to walking," said he, laughing. "I think that the place where we turn off is somewhere here. Yes, this is it, round the corner of the trattoria. Now, it is a very narrow path, so perhaps I had better go in front and you can follow.”

He had lit his lantern, and by its light they were enabled to follow a narrow and devious track which wound across the marshes of the Campagna. The great Aqueduct of old Rome lay like a monstrous caterpillar across the moonlit landscape, and their road led them under one of its huge arches, and past the circle of crumbling bricks which marks the old arena. At last Burger stopped at a solitary wooden cow-house, and he drew a key from his pocket. “Surely your catacomb is not inside a house!” cried Kennedy.

“The entrance to it is. That is just the safeguard which we have against anyone else discovering it.”

“Does the proprietor know of it?”

“Not he. He had found one or two objects which made me almost certain that his house was built on the entrance to such a place. So I rented it from him, and did my excavations for myself. Come in, and shut the door behind you.”

It was a long, empty building, with the mangers of the cows along one wall. Burger put his lantern down on the ground, and shaded its light in all directions save one by draping his overcoat round it.

“It might excite remark if anyone saw a light in this lonely place,” said he. “Just help me to move this boarding.”

The flooring was loose in the corner, and plank by plank the two savants raised it and leaned it against the wall. Below there was a square aperture and a stair of old stone steps which led away down into the bowels of the earth.

“Be careful!” cried Burger, as Kennedy, in his impatience, hurried down them. “It is a perfect rabbits’-warren below, and if you were once to lose your way there the chances would be a hundred to one against your ever coming out again. Wait until I bring the light.”

“How do you find your own way if it is so complicated?”

“I had some very narrow escapes at first, but I have gradually learned to go about. There is a certain system to it, but it is one which a lost man, if he were in the dark, could not possibly find out. Even now I always spin out a ball of string behind me when I am going far into the catacomb. You can see for yourself that it is difficult, but every one of these passages divides and subdivides a dozen times before you go a hundred yards.”

They had descended some twenty feet from the level of the byre, and they were standing now in a square chamber cut out of the soft tufa. The lantern cast a flickering light, bright below and dim above, over the cracked brown walls. In every direction were the black openings of passages which radiated from this common centre.

“I want you to follow me closely, my friend,” said Burger. “Do not loiter to look at anything upon the way, for the place to which I will take you contains all that you can see, and more. It will save time for us to go there direct.”

He led the way down one of the corridors, and the Englishman followed closely at his heels. Every now and then the passage bifurcated, but Burger was evidently following some secret marks of his own, for he neither stopped nor hesitated. Everywhere along the walls, packed like the berths upon an emigrant ship, lay the Christians of old Rome. The yellow light flickered over the shrivelled features of the mummies, and gleamed upon rounded skulls and long, white armbones crossed over fleshless chests. And everywhere as he passed Kennedy looked with wistful eyes upon inscriptions, funeral vessels, pictures, vestments, utensils, all lying as pious hands had placed them so many centuries ago. It was apparent to him, even in those hurried, passing glances, that this was the earliest and finest of the catacombs, containing such a storehouse of Roman remains as had never before come at one time under the observation of the student.

“What would happen if the light went out?” he asked, as they hurried onwards.

“I have a spare candle and a box of matches in my pocket. By the way, Kennedy, have you any matches?”

“No; you had better give me some.”

“Oh, that is all right. There is no chance of our separating.”

“How far are we going? It seems to me that we have walked at least a quarter of a mile.”

“More than that, I think. There is really no limit to the tombs — at least, I have never been able to find any. This is a very difficult place, so I think that I will use our ball of string.”

He fastened one end of it to a projecting stone and he carried the coil in the breast of his coat, paying it out as he advanced. Kennedy saw that it was no unnecessary precaution, for the passages had become more complex and tortuous than ever, with a perfect network of intersecting corridors. But these all ended in one large circular hall with a square pedestal of tufa topped with a slab of marble at one end of it.

“By Jove!” cried Kennedy in an ecstasy, as Burger swung his lantern over the marble. “It is a Christian altar — probably the first one in existence. Here is the little consecration cross cut upon the corner of it. No doubt this circular space was used as a church.”

“Precisely,” said Burger. “If I had more time I should like to show you all the bodies which are buried in these niches upon the walls, for they are the early popes and bishops of the Church, with their mitres, their croziers, and full canonicals. Go over to that one and look at it!”

Kennedy went across, and stared at the ghastly head which lay loosely on the shredded and mouldering mitre.

“This is most interesting,” said he, and his voice seemed to boom against the concave vault. “As far as my experience goes, it is unique. Bring the lantern over, Burger, for I want to see them all.”

But the German had strolled away, and was standing in the middle of a yellow circle of light at the other side of the hall.

“Do you know how many wrong turnings there are between this and the stairs?” he asked. “There are over two thousand. No doubt it was one of the means of protection which the Christians adopted. The odds are two thousand to one against a man getting out, even if he had a light; but if he were in the dark it would, of course, be far more difficult.”

“So I should think.”

“And the darkness is something dreadful. I tried it once for an experiment. Let us try it again!” He stooped to the lantern, and in an instant it was as if an invisible hand was squeezed tightly over each of Kennedy’s eyes. Never had he known what such darkness was. It seemed to press upon him and to smother him. It was a solid obstacle against which the body shrank from advancing. He put his hands out to push it back from him.

“That will do, Burger,” said he, “let’s have the light again.”

But his companion began to laugh, and in that circular room the sound seemed to come from every side at once.

“You seem uneasy, friend Kennedy,” said he.

“Go on, man, light the candle!” said Kennedy impatiently.

“It’s very strange, Kennedy, but I could not in the least tell by the sound in which direction you stand. Could you tell where I am?”

“No; you seem to be on every side of me.”

"If it were not for this string which I hold in my hand I should not have a notion which way to go."

"I dare say not. Strike a light, man, and have an end of this nonsense."

"Well, Kennedy, there are two things which I understand that you are very fond of. The one is an adventure, and the other is an obstacle to surmount. The adventure must be the finding of your way out of this catacomb. The obstacle will be the darkness and the two thousand wrong turns which make the way a little difficult to find. But you need not hurry, for you have plenty of time, and when you halt for a rest now and then, I should like you just to think of Miss Mary Saunderson, and whether you treated her quite fairly."

"You devil, what do you mean?" roared Kennedy. He was running about in little circles and clasping at the solid blackness with both hands.

"Good-bye," said the mocking voice, and it was already at some distance. "I really do not think, Kennedy, even by your own showing that you did the right thing by that girl. There was only one little thing which you appeared not to know, and I can supply it. Miss Saunderson was engaged to a poor ungainly devil of a student, and his name was Julius Burger."

There was a rustle somewhere, the vague sound of a foot striking a stone, and then there fell silence upon that old Christian church — a stagnant, heavy silence which closed round Kennedy and shut him in like water round a drowning man.

Some two months afterwards the following paragraph made the round of the European Press:

"One of the most interesting discoveries of recent years is that of the new catacomb in Rome, which lies some distance to the east of the well-known vaults of St. Calixtus. The finding of this important burial-place, which is exceeding rich in most interesting early Christian remains, is due to the energy and sagacity of Dr. Julius Burger, the young German specialist, who is rapidly taking the first place as an authority upon ancient Rome. Although the first to publish his discovery, it appears that a less fortunate adventurer had anticipated Dr. Burger. Some months ago Mr. Kennedy, the well-known English student, disappeared suddenly from his rooms in the Corso, and it was conjectured that his association with a recent scandal had driven him to leave Rome. It appears now that he had in reality fallen a victim to that fervid love of archaeology which had raised him to a distinguished place among living scholars. His body was discovered in the heart of the new catacomb, and it was evident from the condition of his feet and boots that he had tramped for days through the tortuous corridors which make these subterranean tombs so dangerous to explorers. The deceased gentleman had, with inexplicable rashness, made his way into this labyrinth without, as far as can be discovered, taking with him either candles or matches, so that his sad fate was the natural result of his own temerity. What makes the matter more painful is that Dr. Julius Burger was an intimate friend of the deceased. His joy at the extraordinary find which he has been so fortunate as to make has been greatly marred by the terrible fate of his comrade and fellow-worker."

The Case of Lady Sannox

The relations between Douglas Stone and the notorious Lady Sannox were very well known both among the fashionable circles of which she was a brilliant member, and the scientific bodies which numbered him among their most illustrious confreres. There was naturally, therefore, a very widespread interest when it was announced one morning that the lady had absolutely and for ever taken the veil, and that the world would see her no more. When, at the very tail of this rumour, there came the assurance that the celebrated operating surgeon, the man of steel nerves, had been found in the morning by his valet, seated on one side of his bed, smiling pleasantly upon the universe, with both legs jammed into one side of his breeches and his great brain about as valuable as a cap full of porridge, the matter was strong enough to give quite a little thrill of interest to folk who had never hoped that their jaded nerves were capable of such a sensation.

Douglas Stone in his prime was one of the most remarkable men in England. Indeed, he could hardly be said to have ever reached his prime, for he was but nine-and-thirty at the time of this little incident. Those who knew him best were aware that famous as he was as a surgeon, he might have succeeded with even greater rapidity in any of a dozen lines of life. He could have cut his way to fame as a soldier, struggled to it as an explorer, bullied for it in the courts, or built it out of stone and iron as an engineer. He was born to be great, for he could plan what another man dare not do, and he could do what another man dare not plan. In surgery none could follow him. His nerve, his judgement, his intuition, were things apart. Again and again his knife cut away death, but grazed the very springs of life in doing it, until his assistants were as white as the patient. His energy, his audacity, his full-blooded self-confidence — does not the memory of them still linger to the south of Marylebone Road and the north of Oxford Street?

His vices were as magnificent as his virtues, and infinitely more picturesque. Large as was his income, and it was the third largest of all professional men in London, it was far beneath the luxury of his living. Deep in his complex nature lay a rich vein of sensualism, at the sport of which he placed all the prizes of his life. The eye, the ear, the touch, the palate, all were his masters. The bouquet of old vintages, the scent of rare exotics, the curves and tints of the daintiest potteries of Europe, it was to these that the quick-running stream of gold was transformed. And then there came his sudden mad passion for Lady Sannox, when a single interview with two challenging glances and a whispered word set him ablaze. She was the loveliest woman in London and the only one to him. He was one of the handsomest men in London, but not the only one to her. She had a liking for new experiences, and was gracious to most men who wooed her. It may have been cause or it may have been effect that Lord Sannox looked fifty, though he was but six-and-thirty.

He was a quiet, silent, neutral-tinted man, this lord, with thin lips and heavy eyelids, much given to gardening, and full of home-like habits. He had at one time been fond of acting, had even rented a theatre in London, and on its boards had first seen Miss Marion Dawson, to whom he had offered his hand, his title, and the third of a county. Since his marriage his early hobby had become distasteful to him. Even in private theatricals it was no longer possible to persuade him to exercise the talent which he had often showed that he possessed. He was happier with a spud and a watering-can among his orchids and chrysanthemums.

It was quite an interesting problem whether he was absolutely devoid of sense, or miserably wanting in spirit. Did he know his lady’s ways and condone them, or was he a mere blind, doting fool? It was a point to be discussed over the teacups in snug little drawing-rooms, or with the aid of a cigar in the bow windows of clubs. Bitter and plain were the comments among men upon his conduct. There was but one who had a good word to say for him, and he was the most silent member in the smoking-room. He had seen him break in a horse at the University, and it seemed to have left an impression upon his mind.

But when Douglas Stone became the favourite all doubts as to Lord Sannox’s knowledge or ignorance were set for ever at rest. There was no subterfuge about Stone. In his high-handed, impetuous fashion, he set all caution and discretion at defiance. The scandal became notorious. A learned body intimated that his name had been struck from the list of its vice-presidents. Two friends implored him to consider his professional credit. He cursed them all three, and spent forty guineas on a bangle to take with him to the lady. He was at her house every evening, and she drove in his carriage in the afternoons. There was not an attempt on either side to conceal their relations; but there came at last a little incident to interrupt them.

It was a dismal winter’s night, very cold and gusty, with the wind whooping in the chimneys and blustering against the window-panes. A thin spatter of rain tinkled on the glass with each fresh sough of the gale, drowning for the instant the dull gurgle and drip from the eaves. Douglas Stone had finished his dinner, and sat by his fire in the study, a glass of rich port upon the malachite table at his elbow. As he raised it to his lips, he held it up against the lamplight, and watched with the eye of a connoisseur the tiny scales of beeswing which floated in its rich ruby depths. The fire, as it spurted up, threw fitful lights upon his bald, clear-cut face, with its widely-opened grey eyes, its thick and yet firm lips, and the deep, square jaw, which had something Roman in its strength and its animalism. He smiled from time to time as he nestled back in his luxurious chair. Indeed, he had a right to feel well pleased, for, against the advice of six colleagues, he had performed an operation that day of which only two cases were on record, and the result had been brilliant beyond all expectation. No other man in London would have had the daring to plan, or the skill to execute, such a heroic measure.

But he had promised Lady Sannox to see her that evening and it was already half-past eight. His hand was outstretched to the bell to order the carriage when he heard the dull thud of the knocker. An instant later there was the shuffling of feet in the hall, and the sharp closing of a door.

“A patient to see you, sir, in the consulting room,” said the butler.

“About himself?”

“No, sir; I think he wants you to go out.”

“It is too late,” cried Douglas Stone peevishly. “I won’t go.”

“This is his card, sir.”

The butler presented it upon the gold salver which had been given to his master by the wife of a Prime Minister.

"'Hamil Ali, Smyrna.' Hum! The fellow is a Turk, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. He seems as if he came from abroad, sir. And he's in a terrible way."

"Tut, tut! I have an engagement. I must go somewhere else. But I'll see him. Show him in here, Pim."

A few moments later the butler swung open the door and ushered in a small and decrepit man, who walked with a bent back and with the forward push of the face and blink of the eyes which goes with extreme short sight. His face was swarthy, and his hair and beard of the deepest black. In one hand he held a turban of white muslin striped with red, in the other a small chamois-leather bag.

"Good evening," said Douglas Stone, when the butler had closed the door. "You speak English, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. I am from Asia Minor, but I speak English when I speak slow."

"You wanted me to go out, I understand?"

"Yes, sir. I wanted very much that you should see my wife."

"I could come in the morning, but I have an engagement which prevents me from seeing your wife tonight."

The Turk's answer was a singular one. He pulled the string which closed the mouth of the chamois-leather bag, and poured a flood of gold on to the table.

"There are one hundred pounds there," said he, "and I promise you that it will not take you an hour. I have a cab ready at the door."

Douglas Stone glanced at his watch. An hour would not make it too late to visit Lady Sannox. He had been there later. And the fee was an extraordinarily high one. He had been pressed by his creditors lately, and he could not afford to let such a chance pass. He would go.

"What is the case?" he asked.

"Oh, it is so sad a one! So sad a one! You have not, perhaps heard of the daggers of the Almohades?"

"Never."

"Ah, they are Eastern daggers of a great age and of a singular shape, with the hilt like what you call a stirrup. I am a curiosity dealer, you understand, and that is why I have come to England from Smyrna, but next week I go back once more. Many things I brought with me, and I have a few things left, but among them, to my sorrow, is one of these daggers.”

“You will remember that I have an appointment, sir,” said the surgeon, with some irritation; “pray confine yourself to the necessary details.”

“You will see that it is necessary. Today my wife fell down in a faint in the room in which I keep my wares, and she cut her lower lip upon this cursed dagger of Almohades.”

“I see,” said Douglas Stone, rising. “And you wish me to dress the wound?”

“No, no, it is worse than that.”

“What then?”

“These daggers are poisoned.”

“Poisoned!”

“Yes, and there is no man, East or West, who can tell now what is the poison or what the cure. But all that is known I know, for my father was in this trade before me, and we have had much to do with these poisoned weapons.”

“What are the symptoms?”

“Deep sleep, and death in thirty hours.”

“And you say there is no cure. Why then should you pay me this considerable fee?”

“No drug can cure, but the knife may.”

“And how?”

“The poison is slow of absorption. It remains for hours in the wound.”

“Washing, then, might cleanse it?”

“No more than in a snake bite. It is too subtle and too deadly.”

“Excision of the wound, then?”

“That is it. If it be on the finger, take the finger off. So said my father always. But think of where this wound is, and that it is my wife. It is dreadful!”

But familiarity with such grim matters may take the finer edge from a man’s sympathy. To Douglas Stone this was already an interesting case, and he brushed aside as irrelevant the feeble objections of the husband.

“It appears to be that or nothing,” said he brusquely. “It is better to lose a lip than a life.”

“Ah, yes, I know that you are right. Well, well, it is kismet, and it must be faced. I have the cab, and you will come with me and do this thing.”

Douglas Stone took his case of bistouries from a drawer, and placed it with a roll of bandage and a compress of lint in his pocket. He must waste no more time if he were to see Lady Sannox.

“I am ready,” said he, pulling on his overcoat. “Will you take a glass of wine before you go out into this cold air?”

His visitor shrank away, with a protesting hand upraised.

“You forget that I am a Mussulman, and a true follower of the Prophet,” said he. “But tell me what is the bottle of green glass which you have placed in your pocket?”

“It is chloroform.”

“Ah, that also is forbidden to us. It is a spirit, and we make no use of such things.”

“What! You would allow your wife to go through an operation without an anaesthetic?”

“Ah! she will feel nothing, poor soul. The deep sleep has already come on, which is the first working of the poison. And then I have given her of our Smyrna opium. Come, sir, for already an hour has passed.”

As they stepped out into the darkness, a sheet of rain was driven in upon their faces, and the hall lamp, which dangled from the arm of a marble Caryatid, went out with a fluff. Pim, the butler, pushed the heavy door to, straining hard with his shoulder against the wind, while the two men groped their way towards the yellow glare which showed where the cab was waiting. An instant later they were rattling upon their journey.

“Is it far?” asked Douglas Stone.

“Oh, no. We have a very little quiet place off the Euston Road.”

The surgeon pressed the spring of his repeater and listened to the little tings which told him the hour. It was a quarter past nine. He calculated the distances, and the short time which it would take him to perform so trivial an operation. He ought to reach Lady Sannox by ten o’clock. Through the fogged windows he saw the blurred gas lamps dancing past, with occasionally the broader glare of a shop front. The rain was pelting and rattling upon the leathern top of the carriage, and the wheels swashed as they rolled through puddle and mud. Opposite to him the white headgear of his companion gleamed faintly through the obscurity. The surgeon felt in his pockets and arranged his needles, his ligatures and his safety-pins, that no time might be wasted when they arrived. He chafed with impatience and drummed his foot upon the floor.

But the cab slowed down at last and pulled up. In an instant Douglas Stone was out, and the Smyrna merchant's toe was at his very heel.

"You can wait," said he to the driver.

It was a mean-looking house in a narrow and sordid street. The surgeon, who knew his London well, cast a swift glance into the shadows, but there was nothing distinctive — no shop, no movement, nothing but a double line of dull, flat-faced houses, a double stretch of wet flagstones which gleamed in the lamplight, and a double rush of water in the gutters which swirled and gurgled towards the sewer gratings. The door which faced them was blotched and discoloured, and a faint light in the fan pane above, it served to show the dust and the grime which covered it. Above in one of the bedroom windows, there was a dull yellow glimmer. The merchant knocked loudly, and, as he turned his dark face towards the light, Douglas Stone could see that it was contracted with anxiety. A bolt was drawn, and an elderly woman with a taper stood in the doorway, shielding the thin flame with her gnarled hand.

"Is all well?" gasped the merchant.

"She is as you left her, sir."

"She has not spoken?"

"No, she is in a deep sleep."

The merchant closed the door, and Douglas Stone walked down the narrow passage, glancing about him in some surprise as he did so. There was no oil-cloth, no mat, no hat-rack. Deep grey dust and heavy festoons of cobwebs met his eyes everywhere. Following the old woman up the winding stair, his firm footfall echoed harshly through the silent house. There was no carpet.

The bedroom was on the second landing. Douglas Stone followed the old nurse into it, with the merchant at his heels. Here, at least, there was furniture and to spare. The floor was littered and the corners piled with Turkish cabinets, inlaid tables, coats of chain mail, strange pipes, and grotesque weapons. A single small lamp stood upon a bracket on the wall. Douglas Stone took it down, and picking his way among the lumber, walked over to a couch in the corner, on which lay a woman dressed in the Turkish fashion, with yashmak and veil. The lower part of the face was exposed, and the surgeon saw a jagged cut which zigzagged along the border of the under lip.

“You will forgive the yashmak,” said the Turk. “You know our views about women in the East.”

But the surgeon was not thinking about the yashmak. This was no longer a woman to him. It was a case. He stooped and examined the wound carefully.

“There are no signs of irritation,” said he. “We might delay the operation until local symptoms develop.”

The husband wrung his hands in uncontrollable agitation.

“Oh! sir, sir,” he cried. “Do not trifle. You do not know. It is deadly. I know, and I give you my assurance that an operation is absolutely necessary. Only the knife can save her.”

“And yet I am inclined to wait,” said Douglas Stone.

“That is enough,” the Turk cried, angrily. “Every minute is of importance, and I cannot stand here and see my wife allowed to sink. It only remains for me to give you my thanks for having come, and to call in some other surgeon before it is too late.”

Douglas Stone hesitated. To refund that hundred pounds was no pleasant matter. But of course if he left the case he must return the money. And if the Turk were right and the woman died, his position before a coroner might be an embarrassing one.

“You have had personal experience of this poison?” he asked.

“I have.”

“And you assure me that an operation is needful.”

“I swear it by all that I hold sacred.”

“The disfigurement will be frightful.”

“I can understand that the mouth will not be a pretty one to kiss.”

Douglas Stone turned fiercely upon the man. The speech was a brutal one. But the Turk has his own fashion of talk and of thought, and there was no time for wrangling. Douglas Stone drew a bistoury from his case, opened it and felt the keen straight edge with his forefinger. Then he held the lamp closer to the bed. Two dark eyes were gazing up at him through the slit in the yashmak. They were all iris, and the pupil was hardly to be seen.

“You have given her a very heavy dose of opium.”

“Yes, she has had a good dose.”

He glanced again at the dark eyes which looked straight at his own. They were dull and lustreless, but, even as he gazed, a little shifting sparkle came into them, and the lips quivered.

"She is not absolutely unconscious," said he.

"Would it not be well to use the knife while it will be painless?"

The same thought had crossed the surgeon's mind. He grasped the wounded lip with his forceps, and with two swift cuts he took out a broad V-shaped piece. The woman sprang up on the couch with a dreadful gurgling scream. Her covering was torn from her face. It was a face that he knew. In spite of that protruding upper lip and that slobber of blood, it was a face that he knew, She kept on putting her hand up to the gap and screaming. Douglas Stone sat down at the foot of the couch with his knife and his forceps. The room was whirling round, and he had felt something go like a ripping seam behind his ear. A bystander would have said that his face was the more ghastly of the two. As in a dream, or as if he had been looking at something at the play, he was conscious that the Turk's hair and beard lay upon the table, and that Lord Sannox was leaning against the wall with his hand to his side, laughing silently. The screams had died away now, and the dreadful head had dropped back again upon the pillow, but Douglas Stone still sat motionless, and Lord Sannox still chuckled quietly to himself.

"It was really very necessary for Marion, this operation," said he, "not physically, but morally, you know, morally."

Douglas Stone stooped for yards and began to play with the fringe of the coverlet. His knife tinkled down upon the ground, but he still held the forceps and something more.

"I had long intended to make a little example," said Lord Sannox, suavely. "Your note of Wednesday miscarried, and I have it here in my pocket-book. I took some pains in carrying out my idea. The wound, by the way, was from nothing more dangerous than my signet ring."

He glanced keenly at his silent companion, and cocked the small revolver which he held in his coat pocket. But Douglas Stone was still picking at the coverlet.

"You see you have kept your appointment after all," said Lord Sannox.

And at that Douglas Stone began to laugh. He laughed long and loudly. But Lord Sannox did not laugh now. Something like fear sharpened and hardened his features. He walked from the room, and he walked on tiptoe. The old woman was waiting outside.

"Attend to your mistress when she awakes," said Lord Sannox.

Then he went down to the street. The cab was at the door, and the driver raised his hand to his hat.

"John," said Lord Sannox, "you will take the doctor home first. He will want leading downstairs, I think. Tell his butler that he has been taken ill at a case."

"Very good, sir."

"Then you can take Lady Sannox home."

"And how about yourself, sir?"

"Oh, my address for the next few months will be Hotel di Roma, Venice. Just see that the letters are sent on. And tell Stevens to exhibit all the purple chrysanthemums next Monday, and to wire me the result."

The Terror of Blue John Gap

The following narrative was found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle, who died of phthisis on February 4th, 1908, at 36, Upper Coventry Flats, South Kensington. Those who knew him best, while refusing to express an opinion upon this particular statement, are unanimous in asserting that he was a man of a sober and scientific turn of mind, absolutely devoid of imagination, and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events. The paper was contained in an envelope, which was docketed, "A Short Account of the Circumstances which occurred near Miss Allerton's Farm in North-West Derbyshire in the Spring of Last Year." The envelope was sealed, and on the other side was written in pencil —

DEAR SEATON, —

"It may interest, and perhaps pain you, to know that the incredulity with which you met my story has prevented me from ever opening my mouth upon the subject again. I leave this record after my death, and perhaps strangers may be found to have more confidence in me than my friend."

Inquiry has failed to elicit who this Seaton may have been. I may add that the visit of the deceased to Allerton's Farm, and the general nature of the alarm there, apart from his particular explanation, have been absolutely established. With this foreword I append his account exactly as he left it. It is in the form of a diary, some entries in which have been expanded, while a few have been erased.

April 17. — Already I feel the benefit of this wonderful upland air. The farm of the Allertons lies fourteen hundred and twenty feet above sea-level, so it may well be a bracing climate. Beyond the usual morning cough I have very little discomfort, and, what with the fresh milk and the home-grown mutton, I have every chance of putting on weight. I think Saunderson will be pleased.

The two Miss Allertons are charmingly quaint and kind, two dear little hard-working old maids, who are ready to lavish all the heart which might have gone out to husband and to children upon an invalid stranger. Truly, the old maid is a most useful person, one of the reserve forces of the community. They talk of the superfluous woman, but what would the poor superfluous man do without her kindly presence? By the way, in their simplicity they very quickly let out the reason why Saunderson recommended their farm. The Professor rose from the ranks himself, and I believe that in his youth he was not above scaring crows in these very fields.

It is a most lonely spot, and the walks are picturesque in the extreme. The farm consists of grazing land lying at the bottom of an irregular valley. On each side are the fantastic limestone hills, formed of rock so soft that you can break it away with your hands. All this country is hollow. Could you strike it with some gigantic hammer it would boom like a drum, or possibly cave in altogether and expose some huge subterranean sea. A great sea there must surely be, for on all sides the streams run into the mountain itself, never to reappear. There are gaps everywhere amid the rocks, and when you pass through them you find yourself in great caverns, which wind down into the bowels of the earth. I have a small bicycle lamp, and it is a perpetual joy to me to carry it into these weird solitudes, and to see the wonderful silver and black effect when I throw its light upon the stalactites which drape the lofty roofs. Shut off the lamp, and you are in the blackest darkness. Turn it on, and it is a scene from the Arabian Nights.

But there is one of these strange openings in the earth which has a special interest, for it is the handiwork, not of nature, but of man. I had never heard of Blue John when I came to these parts. It is the name given to a peculiar mineral of a beautiful purple shade, which is only found at one or two places in the world. It is so rare that an ordinary vase of Blue John would be valued at a great price. The Romans, with that extraordinary instinct of theirs, discovered that it was to be found in this valley, and sank a horizontal shaft deep into the mountain side. The opening of their mine has been called Blue John Gap, a clean-cut arch in the rock, the mouth all overgrown with bushes. It is a goodly passage which the Roman miners have cut, and it intersects some of the great water-worn caves, so that if you enter Blue John Gap you would do well to mark your steps and to have a good store of candles, or you may never make your way back to the daylight again. I have not yet gone deeply into it, but this very day I stood at the mouth of the arched tunnel, and peering down into the black recesses beyond, I vowed that when my health returned I would devote some holiday to exploring those mysterious depths and finding out for myself how far the Roman had penetrated into the Derbyshire hills.

Strange how superstitious these countrymen are! I should have thought better of young Armitage, for he is a man of some education and character, and a very fine fellow for his station in life. I was standing at the Blue John Gap when he came across the field to me.

“Well, doctor,” said he, “you’re not afraid, anyhow.”

“Afraid!” I answered. “Afraid of what?”

“Of it,” said he, with a jerk of his thumb towards the black vault, “of the Terror that lives in the Blue John Cave.”

How absurdly easy it is for a legend to arise in a lonely countryside! I examined him as to the reasons for his weird belief. It seems that from time to time sheep have been missing from the fields, carried bodily away, according to Armitage. That they could have wandered away of their own accord and disappeared among the mountains was an explanation to which he would not listen. On one occasion a pool of blood had been found, and some tufts of wool. That also, I pointed out, could be explained in a perfectly natural way. Further, the nights upon which sheep disappeared were invariably very dark, cloudy nights with no moon. This I met with the obvious retort that those were the nights which a commonplace sheep-stealer would naturally choose for his work. On one occasion a gap had been made in a wall, and some of the stones scattered for a considerable distance. Human agency again, in my opinion. Finally, Armitage clinched all his arguments by telling me that he had actually heard the Creature — indeed, that anyone could hear it who remained long enough at the Gap. It was a distant roaring of an immense volume. I could not but smile at this, knowing, as I do, the strange reverberations which come out of an underground water system running amid the chasms of a limestone formation. My incredulity annoyed Armitage so that he turned and left me with some abruptness.

And now comes the queer point about the whole business. I was still standing near the mouth of the cave turning over in my mind the various statements of Armitage, and reflecting how readily they could be explained away, when suddenly, from the depth of the tunnel beside me, there issued a most extraordinary sound. How shall I describe it? First of all, it seemed to be a great distance away, far down in the bowels of the earth. Secondly, in spite of this suggestion of distance, it was very loud. Lastly, it was not a boom, nor a crash, such as one would associate with falling water or tumbling rock, but it was a high whine, tremulous and vibrating, almost like the whinnying of a horse. It was certainly a most remarkable experience, and one which for a moment, I must admit, gave a new significance to Armitage's words. I waited by the Blue John Gap for half an hour or more, but there was no return of the sound, so at last I wandered back to the farmhouse, rather mystified by what had occurred. Decidedly I shall explore that cavern when my strength is restored. Of course, Armitage's explanation is too absurd for discussion, and yet that sound was certainly very strange. It still rings in my ears as I write.

April 20. — In the last three days I have made several expeditions to the Blue John Gap, and have even penetrated some short distance, but my bicycle lantern is so small and weak that I dare not trust myself very far. I shall do the thing more systematically. I have heard no sound at all, and could almost believe that I had been the victim of some hallucination suggested, perhaps, by Armitage's conversation. Of course, the whole idea is absurd, and yet I must confess that those bushes at the entrance of the cave do present an appearance as if some heavy creature had forced its way through them. I begin to be keenly interested. I have said nothing to the Miss Allertons, for they are quite superstitious enough already, but I have bought some candles, and mean to investigate for myself.

I observed this morning that among the numerous tufts of sheep's wool which lay among the bushes near the cavern there was one which was smeared with blood. Of course, my reason tells me that if sheep wander into such rocky places they are likely to injure themselves, and yet somehow that splash of crimson gave me a sudden shock, and for a moment I found myself shrinking back in horror from the old Roman arch. A fetid breath seemed to ooze from the black depths into which I peered. Could it indeed be possible that some nameless thing, some dreadful presence, was lurking down yonder? I should have been incapable of such feelings in the days of my strength, but one grows more nervous and fanciful when one’s health is shaken.

For the moment I weakened in my resolution, and was ready to leave the secret of the old mine, if one exists, for ever unsolved. But tonight my interest has returned and my nerves grown more steady. Tomorrow I trust that I shall have gone more deeply into this matter.

April 22. — Let me try and set down as accurately as I can my extraordinary experience of yesterday. I started in the afternoon, and made my way to the Blue John Gap. I confess that my misgivings returned as I gazed into its depths, and I wished that I had brought a companion to share my exploration. Finally, with a return of resolution, I lit my candle, pushed my way through the briars, and descended into the rocky shaft.

It went down at an acute angle for some fifty feet, the floor being covered with broken stone. Thence there extended a long, straight passage cut in the solid rock. I am no geologist, but the lining of this corridor was certainly of some harder material than limestone, for there were points where I could actually see the tool-marks which the old miners had left in their excavation, as fresh as if they had been done yesterday. Down this strange, old-world corridor I stumbled, my feeble flame throwing a dim circle of light around me, which made the shadows beyond the more threatening and obscure. Finally, I came to a spot where the Roman tunnel opened into a water-worn cavern — a huge hall, hung with long white icicles of lime deposit. From this central chamber I could dimly perceive that a number of passages worn by the subterranean streams wound away into the depths of the earth. I was standing there wondering whether I had better return, or whether I dare venture farther into this dangerous labyrinth, when my eyes fell upon something at my feet which strongly arrested my attention.

The greater part of the floor of the cavern was covered with boulders of rock or with hard incrustations of lime, but at this particular point there had been a drip from the distant roof, which had left a patch of soft mud. In the very centre of this there was a huge mark — an ill-defined blotch, deep, broad and irregular, as if a great boulder had fallen upon it. No loose stone lay near, however, nor was there anything to account for the impression. It was far too large to be caused by any possible animal, and besides, there was only the one, and the patch of mud was of such a size that no reasonable stride could have covered it. As I rose from the examination of that singular mark and then looked round into the black shadows which hemmed me in, I must confess that I felt for a moment a most unpleasant sinking of my heart, and that, do what I could, the candle trembled in my outstretched hand.

I soon recovered my nerve, however, when I reflected how absurd it was to associate so huge and shapeless a mark with the track of any known animal. Even an elephant could not have produced it. I determined, therefore, that I would not be scared by vague and senseless fears from carrying out my exploration. Before proceeding, I took good note of a curious rock formation in the wall by which I could recognise the entrance of the Roman tunnel. The precaution was very necessary, for the great cave, so far as I could see it, was intersected by passages. Having made sure of my position, and reassured myself by examining my spare candles and my matches, I advanced slowly over the rocky and uneven surface of the cavern.

And now I come to the point where I met with such sudden and desperate disaster. A stream, some twenty feet broad, ran across my path, and I walked for some little distance along the bank to find a spot where I could cross dry-shod. Finally, I came to a place where a single flat boulder lay near the centre, which I could reach in a stride. As it chanced, however, the rock had been cut away and made top-heavy by the rush of the stream, so that it tilted over as I landed on it and shot me into the ice-cold water. My candle went out, and I found myself floundering about in utter and absolute darkness.

I staggered to my feet again, more amused than alarmed by my adventure. The candle had fallen from my hand, and was lost in the stream, but I had two others in my pocket, so that it was of no importance. I got one of them ready, and drew out my box of matches to light it. Only then did I realise my position. The box had been soaked in my fall into the river. It was impossible to strike the matches.

A cold hand seemed to close round my heart as I realised my position. The darkness was opaque and horrible. It was so utter one put one’s hand up to one’s face as if to press off something solid. I stood still, and by an effort I steadied myself. I tried to reconstruct in my mind a map of the floor of the cavern as I had last seen it. Alas! the bearings which had impressed themselves upon my mind were high on the wall, and not to be found by touch. Still, I remembered in a general way how the sides were situated, and I hoped that by groping my way along them I should at last come to the opening of the Roman tunnel. Moving very slowly, and continually striking against the rocks, I set out on this desperate quest.

But I very soon realised how impossible it was. In that black, velvety darkness one lost all one’s bearings in an instant. Before I had made a dozen paces, I was utterly bewildered as to my whereabouts. The rippling of the stream, which was the one sound audible, showed me where it lay, but the moment that I left its bank I was utterly lost. The idea of finding my way back in absolute darkness through that limestone labyrinth was clearly an impossible one.

I sat down upon a boulder and reflected upon my unfortunate plight. I had not told anyone that I proposed to come to the Blue John mine, and it was unlikely that a search party would come after me. Therefore I must trust to my own resources to get clear of the danger. There was only one hope, and that was that the matches might dry. When I fell into the river, only half of me had got thoroughly wet. My left shoulder had remained above the water. I took the box of matches, therefore, and put it into my left armpit. The moist air of the cavern might possibly be counteracted by the heat of my body, but even so, I knew that I could not hope to get a light for many hours. Meanwhile there was nothing for it but to wait.

By good luck I had slipped several biscuits into my pocket before I left the farm-house. These I now devoured, and washed them down with a draught from that wretched stream which had been the cause of all my misfortunes. Then I felt about for a comfortable seat among the rocks, and, having discovered a place where I could get a support for my back, I stretched out my legs and settled myself down to wait. I was wretchedly damp and cold, but I tried to cheer myself with the reflection that modern science prescribed open windows and walks in all weather for my disease. Gradually, lulled by the monotonous gurgle of the stream, and by the absolute darkness, I sank into an uneasy slumber.

How long this lasted I cannot say. It may have been for an hour, it may have been for several. Suddenly I sat up on my rock couch, with every nerve thrilling and every sense acutely on the alert. Beyond all doubt I had heard a sound — some sound very distinct from the gurgling of the waters. It had passed, but the reverberation of it still lingered in my ear. Was it a search party? They would most certainly have shouted, and vague as this sound was which had wakened me, it was very distinct from the human voice. I sat palpitating and hardly daring to breathe. There it was again! And again! Now it had become continuous. It was a tread — yes, surely it was the tread of some living creature. But what a tread it was! It gave one the impression of enormous weight carried upon sponge-like feet, which gave forth a muffled but ear-filling sound. The darkness was as complete as ever, but the tread was regular and decisive. And it was coming beyond all question in my direction.

My skin grew cold, and my hair stood on end as I listened to that steady and ponderous footfall. There was some creature there, and surely by the speed of its advance, it was one which could see in the dark. I crouched low on my rock and tried to blend myself into it. The steps grew nearer still, then stopped, and presently I was aware of a loud lapping and gurgling. The creature was drinking at the stream. Then again there was silence, broken by a succession of long sniffs and snorts of tremendous volume and energy. Had it caught the scent of me? My own nostrils were filled by a low fetid odour, mephitic and abominable. Then I heard the steps again. They were on my side of the stream now. The stones rattled within a few yards of where I lay. Hardly daring to breathe, I crouched upon my rock. Then the steps drew away. I heard the splash as it returned across the river, and the sound died away into the distance in the direction from which it had come.

For a long time I lay upon the rock, too much horrified to move. I thought of the sound which I had heard coming from the depths of the cave, of Armitage's fears, of the strange impression in the mud, and now came this final and absolute proof that there was indeed some inconceivable monster, something utterly unearthly and dreadful, which lurked in the hollow of the mountain. Of its nature or form I could frame no conception, save that it was both light-footed and gigantic. The combat between my reason, which told me that such things could not be, and my senses, which told me that they were, raged within me as I lay. Finally, I was almost ready to persuade myself that this experience had been part of some evil dream, and that my abnormal condition might have conjured up an hallucination. But there remained one final experience which removed the last possibility of doubt from my mind.

I had taken my matches from my armpit and felt them. They seemed perfectly hard and dry. Stooping down into a crevice of the rocks, I tried one of them. To my delight it took fire at once. I lit the candle, and, with a terrified backward glance into the obscure depths of the cavern, I hurried in the direction of the Roman passage. As I did so I passed the patch of mud on which I had seen the huge imprint. Now I stood astonished before it, for there were three similar imprints upon its surface, enormous in size, irregular in outline, of a depth which indicated the ponderous weight which had left them. Then a great terror surged over me. Stooping and shading my candle with my hand, I ran in a frenzy of fear to the rocky archway, hastened up it, and never stopped until, with weary feet and panting lungs, I rushed up the final slope of stones, broke through the tangle of briars, and flung myself exhausted upon the soft grass under the peaceful light of the stars. It was three in the morning when I reached the farm-house, and today I am all unstrung and quivering after my terrific adventure. As yet I have told no one. I must move warily in the matter. What would the poor lonely women, or the uneducated yokels here think of it if I were to tell them my experience? Let me go to someone who can understand and advise.

April 25. — I was laid up in bed for two days after my incredible adventure in the cavern. I use the adjective with a very definite meaning, for I have had an experience since which has shocked me almost as much as the other. I have said that I was looking round for someone who could advise me. There is a Dr. Mark Johnson who practices some few miles away, to whom I had a note of recommendation from Professor Saunderson. To him I drove, when I was strong enough to get about, and I recounted to him my whole strange experience. He listened intently, and then carefully examined me, paying special attention to my reflexes and to the pupils of my eyes. When he had finished, he refused to discuss my adventure, saying that it was entirely beyond him, but he gave me the card of a Mr. Picton at Castleton, with the advice that I should instantly go to him and tell him the story exactly as I had done to himself. He was, according to my adviser, the very man who was pre-eminently suited to help me. I went on to the station, therefore, and made my way to the little town, which is some ten miles away. Mr. Picton appeared to be a man of importance, as his brass plate was displayed upon the door of a considerable building on the outskirts of the town. I was about to ring his bell, when some misgiving came into my mind, and, crossing to a neighbouring shop, I asked the man behind the counter if he could tell me anything of Mr. Picton. “Why,” said he, “he is the best mad doctor in Derbyshire, and yonder is his asylum.” You can imagine that it was not long before I had shaken the dust of Castleton from my feet and returned to the farm, cursing all unimaginative pedants who cannot conceive that there may be things in creation which have never yet chanced to come across their mole’s vision. After all, now that I am cooler, I can afford to admit that I have been no more sympathetic to Armitage than Dr. Johnson has been to me.

April 27. When I was a student I had the reputation of being a man of courage and enterprise. I remember that when there was a ghost-hunt at Coltbridge it was I who sat up in the haunted house. Is it advancing years (after all, I am only thirty-five), or is it this physical malady which has caused degeneration? Certainly my heart quails when I think of that horrible cavern in the hill, and the certainty that it has some monstrous occupant. What shall I do? There is not an hour in the day that I do not debate the question. If I say nothing, then the mystery remains unsolved. If I do say anything, then I have the alternative of mad alarm over the whole countryside, or of absolute incredulity which may end in consigning me to an asylum. On the whole, I think that my best course is to wait, and to prepare for some expedition which shall be more deliberate and better thought out than the last. As a first step I have been to Castleton and obtained a few essentials — a large acetylene lantern for one thing, and a good double-barrelled sporting rifle for another. The latter I have hired, but I have bought a dozen heavy game cartridges, which would bring down a rhinoceros. Now I am ready for my troglodyte friend. Give me better health and a little spate of energy, and I shall try conclusions with him yet. But who and what is he? Ah! there is the question which stands between me and my sleep. How many theories do I form, only to discard each in turn! It is all so utterly unthinkable. And yet the cry, the footmark, the tread in the cavern — no reasoning can get past these I think of the old-world legends of dragons and of other monsters. Were they, perhaps, not such fairy-tales as we have thought? Can it be that there is some fact which underlies them, and am I, of all mortals, the one who is chosen to expose it?

May 3. — For several days I have been laid up by the vagaries of an English spring, and during those days there have been developments, the true and sinister meaning of which no one can appreciate save myself. I may say that we have had cloudy and moonless nights of late, which according to my information were the seasons upon which sheep disappeared. Well, sheep have disappeared. Two of Miss Allerton’s, one of old Pearson’s of the Cat Walk, and one of Mrs. Moulton’s. Four in all during three nights. No trace is left of them at all, and the countryside is buzzing with rumours of gipsies and of sheep-stealers.

But there is something more serious than that. Young Armitage has disappeared also. He left his moorland cottage early on Wednesday night and has never been heard of since. He was an unattached man, so there is less sensation than would otherwise be the case. The popular explanation is that he owes money, and has found a situation in some other part of the country, whence he will presently write for his belongings. But I have grave misgivings. Is it not much more likely that the recent tragedy of the sheep has caused him to take some steps which may have ended in his own destruction? He may, for example, have lain in wait for the creature and been carried off by it into the recesses of the mountains. What an inconceivable fate for a civilised Englishman of the twentieth century! And yet I feel that it is possible and even probable. But in that case, how far am I answerable both for his death and for any other mishap which may occur? Surely with the knowledge I already possess it must be my duty to see that something is done, or if necessary to do it myself. It must be the latter, for this morning I went down to the local police-station and told my story. The inspector entered it all in a large book and bowed me out with commendable gravity, but I heard a burst of laughter before I had got down his garden path. No doubt he was recounting my adventure to his family.

June 10. — I am writing this, propped up in bed, six weeks after my last entry in this journal. I have gone through a terrible shock both to mind and body, arising from such an experience as has seldom befallen a human being before. But I have attained my end. The danger from the Terror which dwells in the Blue John Gap has passed never to return. Thus much at least I, a broken invalid, have done for the common good. Let me now recount what occurred as clearly as I may.

The night of Friday, May 3rd, was dark and cloudy — the very night for the monster to walk. About eleven o’clock I went from the farm-house with my lantern and my rifle, having first left a note upon the table of my bedroom in which I said that, if I were missing, search should be made for me in the direction of the Gap. I made my way to the mouth of the Roman shaft, and, having perched myself among the rocks close to the opening, I shut off my lantern and waited patiently with my loaded rifle ready to my hand.

It was a melancholy vigil. All down the winding valley I could see the scattered lights of the farm-houses, and the church clock of Chapel-le-Dale tolling the hours came faintly to my ears. These tokens of my fellow-men served only to make my own position seem the more lonely, and to call for a greater effort to overcome the terror which tempted me continually to get back to the farm, and abandon for ever this dangerous quest. And yet there lies deep in every man a rooted self-respect which makes it hard for him to turn back from that which he has once undertaken. This feeling of personal pride was my salvation now, and it was that alone which held me fast when every instinct of my nature was dragging me away. I am glad now that I had the strength. In spite of all that is has cost me, my manhood is at least above reproach.

Twelve o'clock struck in the distant church, then one, then two. It was the darkest hour of the night. The clouds were drifting low, and there was not a star in the sky. An owl was hooting somewhere among the rocks, but no other sound, save the gentle sough of the wind, came to my ears. And then suddenly I heard it! From far away down the tunnel came those muffled steps, so soft and yet so ponderous. I heard also the rattle of stones as they gave way under that giant tread. They drew nearer. They were close upon me. I heard the crashing of the bushes round the entrance, and then dimly through the darkness I was conscious of the loom of some enormous shape, some monstrous inchoate creature, passing swiftly and very silently out from the tunnel. I was paralysed with fear and amazement. Long as I had waited, now that it had actually come I was unprepared for the shock. I lay motionless and breathless, whilst the great dark mass whisked by me and was swallowed up in the night.

But now I nerved myself for its return. No sound came from the sleeping countryside to tell of the horror which was loose. In no way could I judge how far off it was, what it was doing, or when it might be back. But not a second time should my nerve fail me, not a second time should it pass unchallenged. I swore it between my clenched teeth as I laid my cocked rifle across the rock.

And yet it nearly happened. There was no warning of approach now as the creature passed over the grass. Suddenly, like a dark, drifting shadow, the huge bulk loomed up once more before me, making for the entrance of the cave. Again came that paralysis of volition which held my crooked forefinger impotent upon the trigger. But with a desperate effort I shook it off. Even as the brushwood rustled, and the monstrous beast blended with the shadow of the Gap, I fired at the retreating form. In the blaze of the gun I caught a glimpse of a great shaggy mass, something with rough and bristling hair of a withered grey colour, fading away to white in its lower parts, the huge body supported upon short, thick, curving legs. I had just that glance, and then I heard the rattle of the stones as the creature tore down into its burrow. In an instant, with a triumphant revulsion of feeling, I had cast my fears to the wind, and uncovering my powerful lantern, with my rifle in my hand, I sprang down from my rock and rushed after the monster down the old Roman shaft.

My splendid lamp cast a brilliant flood of vivid light in front of me, very different from the yellow glimmer which had aided me down the same passage only twelve days before. As I ran, I saw the great beast lurching along before me, its huge bulk filling up the whole space from wall to wall. Its hair looked like coarse faded oakum, and hung down in long, dense masses which swayed as it moved. It was like an enormous unclipped sheep in its fleece, but in size it was far larger than the largest elephant, and its breadth seemed to be nearly as great as its height. It fills me with amazement now to think that I should have dared to follow such a horror into the bowels of the earth, but when one's blood is up, and when one's quarry seems to be flying, the old primeval hunting-spirit awakes and prudence is cast to the wind. Rifle in hand, I ran at the top of my speed upon the trail of the monster.

I had seen that the creature was swift. Now I was to find out to my cost that it was also very cunning. I had imagined that it was in panic flight, and that I had only to pursue it. The idea that it might turn upon me never entered my excited brain. I have already explained that the passage down which I was racing opened into a great central cave. Into this I rushed, fearful lest I should lose all trace of the beast. But he had turned upon his own traces, and in a moment we were face to face.

That picture, seen in the brilliant white light of the lantern, is etched for ever upon my brain. He had reared up on his hind legs as a bear would do, and stood above me, enormous, menacing — such a creature as no nightmare had ever brought to my imagination. I have said that he reared like a bear, and there was something bear-like — if one could conceive a bear which was ten-fold the bulk of any bear seen upon earth — in his whole pose and attitude, in his great crooked forelegs with their ivory-white claws, in his rugged skin, and in his red, gaping mouth, fringed with monstrous fangs. Only in one point did he differ from the bear, or from any other creature which walks the earth, and even at that supreme moment a shudder of horror passed over me as I observed that the eyes which glistened in the glow of my lantern were huge, projecting bulbs, white and sightless. For a moment his great paws swung over my head. The next he fell forward upon me, I and my broken lantern crashed to the earth, and I remember no more.

When I came to myself I was back in the farm-house of the Allertons. Two days had passed since my terrible adventure in the Blue John Gap. It seems that I had lain all night in the cave insensible from concussion of the brain, with my left arm and two ribs badly fractured. In the morning my note had been found, a search party of a dozen farmers assembled, and I had been tracked down and carried back to my bedroom, where I had lain in high delirium ever since. There was, it seems, no sign of the creature, and no bloodstain which would show that my bullet had found him as he passed. Save for my own plight and the marks upon the mud, there was nothing to prove that what I said was true.

Six weeks have now elapsed, and I am able to sit out once more in the sunshine. Just opposite me is the steep hillside, grey with shaly rock, and yonder on its flank is the dark cleft which marks the opening of the Blue John Gap. But it is no longer a source of terror. Never again through that ill-omened tunnel shall any strange shape flit out into the world of men. The educated and the scientific, the Dr. Johnsons and the like, may smile at my narrative, but the poorer folk of the countryside had never a doubt as to its truth. On the day after my recovering consciousness they assembled in their hundreds round the Blue John Gap. As the Castleton Courier said:

“It was useless for our correspondent, or for any of the adventurous gentlemen who had come from Matlock, Buxton, and other parts, to offer to descend, to explore the cave to the end, and to finally test the extraordinary narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle. The country people had taken the matter into their own hands, and from an early hour of the morning they had worked hard in stopping up the entrance of the tunnel. There is a sharp slope where the shaft begins, and great boulders, rolled along by many willing hands, were thrust down it until the Gap was absolutely sealed. So ends the episode which has caused such excitement throughout the country. Local opinion is fiercely divided upon the subject. On the one hand are those who point to Dr. Hardcastle’s impaired health, and to the possibility of cerebral lesions of tubercular origin giving rise to strange hallucinations. Some idee fixe, according to these gentlemen, caused the doctor to wander down the tunnel, and a fall among the rocks was sufficient to account for his injuries. On the other hand, a legend of a strange creature in the Gap has existed for some months back, and the farmers look upon Dr. Hardcastle’s narrative and his personal injuries as a final corroboration. So the matter stands, and so the matter will continue to stand, for no definite solution seems to us to be now possible. It transcends human wit to give any scientific explanation which could cover the alleged facts.”

Perhaps before the Courier published these words they would have been wise to send their representative to me. I have thought the matter out, as no one else has occasion to do, and it is possible that I might have removed some of the more obvious difficulties of the narrative and brought it one degree nearer to scientific acceptance. Let me then write down the only explanation which seems to me to elucidate what I know to my cost to have been a series of facts. My theory may seem to be wildly improbable, but at least no one can venture to say that it is impossible.

My view is — and it was formed, as is shown by my diary, before my personal adventure — that in this part of England there is a vast subterranean lake or sea, which is fed by the great number of streams which pass down through the limestone. Where there is a large collection of water there must also be some evaporation, mists or rain, and a possibility of vegetation. This in turn suggests that there may be animal life, arising, as the vegetable life would also do, from those seeds and types which had been introduced at an early period of the world’s history, when communication with the outer air was more easy. This place had then developed a fauna and flora of its own, including such monsters as the one which I had seen, which may well have been the old cave-bear, enormously enlarged and modified by its new environment. For countless aeons the internal and the external creation had kept apart, growing steadily away from each other. Then there had come some rift in the depths of the mountain which had enabled one creature to wander up and, by means of the Roman tunnel, to reach the open air. Like all subterranean life, it had lost the power of sight, but this had no doubt been compensated for by nature in other directions. Certainly it had some means of finding its way about, and of hunting down the sheep upon the hillside. As to its choice of dark nights, it is part of my theory that light was painful to those great white eyeballs, and that it was only a pitch-black world which it could tolerate. Perhaps, indeed, it was the glare of my lantern which saved my life at that awful moment when we were face to face. So I read the riddle. I leave these facts behind me, and if you can explain them, do so; or if you choose to doubt them, do so. Neither your belief nor your incredulity can alter them, nor affect one whose task is nearly over.

So ended the strange narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle.

The Brazilian Cat

It is hard luck on a young fellow to have expensive tastes, great expectations, aristocratic connections, but no actual money in his pocket, and no profession by which he may earn any. The fact was that my father, a good, sanguine, easy-going man, had such confidence in the wealth and benevolence of his bachelor elder brother, Lord Southerton, that he took it for granted that I, his only son, would never be called upon to earn a living for myself. He imagined that if there were not a vacancy for me on the great Southerton Estates, at least there would be found some post in that diplomatic service which still remains the special preserve of our privileged classes. He died too early to realise how false his calculations had been. Neither my uncle nor the State took the slightest notice of me, or showed any interest in my career. An occasional brace of pheasants, or basket of hares, was all that ever reached me to remind me that I was heir to Otwell House and one of the richest estates in the country. In the meantime, I found myself a bachelor and man about town, living in a suite of apartments in Grosvenor Mansions, with no occupation save that of pigeon-shooting and polo-playing at Hurlingham. Month by month I realised that it was more and more difficult to get the brokers to renew my bills, or to cash any further post-obits upon an unentailed property. Ruin lay right across my path, and every day I saw it clearer, nearer, and more absolutely unavoidable.

What made me feel my own poverty the more was that, apart from the great wealth of Lord Southerton, all my other relations were fairly well-to-do. The nearest of these was Everard King, my father’s nephew and my own first cousin, who had spent an adventurous life in Brazil, and had now returned to this country to settle down on his fortune. We never knew how he made his money, but he appeared to have plenty of it, for he bought the estate of Greylands, near Clipton-on-the-Marsh, in Suffolk. For the first year of his residence in England he took no more notice of me than my miserly uncle; but at last one summer morning, to my very great relief and joy, I received a letter asking me to come down that very day and spend a short visit at Greylands Court. I was expecting a rather long visit to Bankruptcy Court at the time, and this interruption seemed almost providential. If I could only get on terms with this unknown relative of mine, I might pull through yet. For the family credit he could not let me go entirely to the wall. I ordered my valet to pack my valise, and I set off the same evening for Clipton-on-the-Marsh.

After changing at Ipswich, a little local train deposited me at a small, deserted station lying amidst a rolling grassy country, with a sluggish and winding river curving in and out amidst the valleys, between high, silted banks, which showed that we were within reach of the tide. No carriage was awaiting me (I found afterwards that my telegram had been delayed), so I hired a dogcart at the local inn. The driver, an excellent fellow, was full of my relative’s praises, and I learned from him that Mr. Everard King was already a name to conjure with in that part of the county. He had entertained the school-children, he had thrown his grounds open to visitors, he had subscribed to charities — in short, his benevolence had been so universal that my driver could only account for it on the supposition that he had parliamentary ambitions.

My attention was drawn away from my driver’s panegyric by the appearance of a very beautiful bird which settled on a telegraph-post beside the road. At first I thought that it was a jay, but it was larger, with a brighter plumage. The driver accounted for its presence at once by saying that it belonged to the very man whom we were about to visit. It seems that the acclimatization of foreign creatures was one of his hobbies, and that he had brought with him from Brazil a number of birds and beasts which he was endeavouring to rear in England. When once we had passed the gates of Greylands Park we had ample evidence of this taste of his. Some small spotted deer, a curious wild pig known, I believe, as a peccary, a gorgeously feathered oriole, some sort of armadillo, and a singular lumbering in-toed beast like a very fat badger, were among the creatures which I observed as we drove along the winding avenue.

Mr. Everard King, my unknown cousin, was standing in person upon the steps of his house, for he had seen us in the distance, and guessed that it was I. His appearance was very homely and benevolent, short and stout, forty-five years old, perhaps, with a round, good-humoured face, burned brown with the tropical sun, and shot with a thousand wrinkles. He wore white linen clothes, in true planter style, with a cigar between his lips, and a large Panama hat upon the back of his head. It was such a figure as one associates with a verandahed bungalow, and it looked curiously out of place in front of this broad, stone English mansion, with its solid wings and its Palladio pillars before the doorway.

“My dear!” he cried, glancing over his shoulder; “my dear, here is our guest! Welcome, welcome to Greylands! I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Cousin Marshall, and I take it as a great compliment that you should honour this sleepy little country place with your presence.”

Nothing could be more hearty than his manner, and he set me at my ease in an instant. But it needed all his cordiality to atone for the frigidity and even rudeness of his wife, a tall, haggard woman, who came forward at his summons. She was, I believe, of Brazilian extraction, though she spoke excellent English, and I excused her manners on the score of her ignorance of our customs. She did not attempt to conceal, however, either then or afterwards, that I was no very welcome visitor at Greylands Court. Her actual words were, as a rule, courteous, but she was the possessor of a pair of particularly expressive dark eyes, and I read in them very clearly from the first that she heartily wished me back in London once more.

However, my debts were too pressing and my designs upon my wealthy relative were too vital for me to allow them to be upset by the ill-temper of his wife, so I disregarded her coldness and reciprocated the extreme cordiality of his welcome. No pains had been spared by him to make me comfortable. My room was a charming one. He implored me to tell him anything which could add to my happiness. It was on the tip of my tongue to inform him that a blank cheque would materially help towards that end, but I felt that it might be premature in the present state of our acquaintance. The dinner was excellent, and as we sat together afterwards over his Havanas and coffee, which later he told me was specially prepared upon his own plantation, it seemed to me that all my driver’s eulogies were justified, and that I had never met a more large-hearted and hospitable man.

But, in spite of his cheery good nature, he was a man with a strong will and a fiery temper of his own. Of this I had an example upon the following morning. The curious aversion which Mrs. Everard King had conceived towards me was so strong, that her manner at breakfast was almost offensive. But her meaning became unmistakable when her husband had quitted the room.

“The best train in the day is at twelve-fifteen,” said she.

“But I was not thinking of going today,” I answered, frankly — perhaps even defiantly, for I was determined not to be driven out by this woman.

“Oh, if it rests with you—” said she, and stopped with a most insolent expression in her eyes.

“I am sure,” I answered, “that Mr. Everard King would tell me if I were outstaying my welcome.”

“What’s this? What’s this?” said a voice, and there he was in the room. He had overheard my last words, and a glance at our faces had told him the rest. In an instant his chubby, cheery face set into an expression of absolute ferocity.

“Might I trouble you to walk outside, Marshall?” said he. (I may mention that my own name is Marshall King.)

He closed the door behind me, and then, for an instant, I heard him talking in a low voice of concentrated passion to his wife. This gross breach of hospitality had evidently hit upon his tenderest point. I am no eavesdropper, so I walked out on to the lawn. Presently I heard a hurried step behind me, and there was the lady, her face pale with excitement, and her eyes red with tears.

“My husband has asked me to apologize to you, Mr. Marshall King,” said she, standing with downcast eyes before me.

“Please do not say another word, Mrs. King.”

Her dark eyes suddenly blazed out at me.

“You fool!” she hissed, with frantic vehemence, and turning on her heel swept back to the house.

The insult was so outrageous, so insufferable, that I could only stand staring after her in bewilderment. I was still there when my host joined me. He was his cheery, chubby self once more.

“I hope that my wife has apologized for her foolish remarks,” said he.

"Oh, yes — yes, certainly!"

He put his hand through my arm and walked with me up and down the lawn.

"You must not take it seriously," said he. "It would grieve me inexpressibly if you curtailed your visit by one hour. The fact is — there is no reason why there should be any concealment between relatives — that my poor dear wife is incredibly jealous. She hates that anyone — male or female — should for an instant come between us. Her ideal is a desert island and an eternal tete-a-tete. That gives you the clue to her actions, which are, I confess, upon this particular point, not very far removed from mania. Tell me that you will think no more of it."

"No, no; certainly not."

"Then light this cigar and come round with me and see my little menagerie."

The whole afternoon was occupied by this inspection, which included all the birds, beasts, and even reptiles which he had imported. Some were free, some in cages, a few actually in the house. He spoke with enthusiasm of his successes and his failures, his births and his deaths, and he would cry out in his delight, like a schoolboy, when, as we walked, some gaudy bird would flutter up from the grass, or some curious beast slink into the cover. Finally he led me down a corridor which extended from one wing of the house. At the end of this there was a heavy door with a sliding shutter in it, and beside it there projected from the wall an iron handle attached to a wheel and a drum. A line of stout bars extended across the passage.

"I am about to show you the jewel of my collection," said he. "There is only one other specimen in Europe, now that the Rotterdam cub is dead. It is a Brazilian cat."

"But how does that differ from any other cat?"

"You will soon see that," said he, laughing. "Will you kindly draw that shutter and look through?"

I did so, and found that I was gazing into a large, empty room, with stone flags, and small, barred windows upon the farther wall. In the centre of this room, lying in the middle of a golden patch of sunlight, there was stretched a huge creature, as large as a tiger, but as black and sleek as ebony. It was simply a very enormous and very well-kept black cat, and it cuddled up and basked in that yellow pool of light exactly as a cat would do. It was so graceful, so sinewy, and so gently and smoothly diabolical, that I could not take my eyes from the opening.

"Isn't he splendid?" said my host, enthusiastically.

"Glorious! I never saw such a noble creature."

"Some people call it a black puma, but really it is not a puma at all. That fellow is nearly eleven feet from tail to tip. Four years ago he was a little ball of back fluff, with two yellow eyes staring out of it. He was sold me as a new-born cub up in the wild country at the head-waters of the Rio Negro. They speared his mother to death after she had killed a dozen of them."

"They are ferocious, then?"

"The most absolutely treacherous and bloodthirsty creatures upon earth. You talk about a Brazilian cat to an up-country Indian, and see him get the jumps. They prefer humans to game. This fellow has never tasted living blood yet, but when he does he will be a terror. At present he won't stand anyone but me in his den. Even Baldwin, the groom, dare not go near him. As to me, I am his mother and father in one."

As he spoke he suddenly, to my astonishment, opened the door and slipped in, closing it instantly behind him. At the sound of his voice the huge, lithe creature rose, yawned and rubbed its round, black head affectionately against his side, while he patted and fondled it.

"Now, Tommy, into your cage!" said he.

The monstrous cat walked over to one side of the room and coiled itself up under a grating. Everard King came out, and taking the iron handle which I have mentioned, he began to turn it. As he did so the line of bars in the corridor began to pass through a slot in the wall and closed up the front of this grating, so as to make an effective cage. When it was in position he opened the door once more and invited me into the room, which was heavy with the pungent, musty smell peculiar to the great carnivora.

"That's how we work it," said he. "We give him the run of the room for exercise, and then at night we put him in his cage. You can let him out by turning the handle from the passage, or you can, as you have seen, coop him up in the same way. No, no, you should not do that!"

I had put my hand between the bars to pat the glossy, heaving flank. He pulled it back, with a serious face.

"I assure you that he is not safe. Don't imagine that because I can take liberties with him anyone else can. He is very exclusive in his friends —

aren’t you, Tommy? Ah, he hears his lunch coming to him! Don’t you, boy?”

A step sounded in the stone-flagged passage, and the creature had sprung to his feet, and was pacing up and down the narrow cage, his yellow eyes gleaming, and his scarlet tongue rippling and quivering over the white line of his jagged teeth. A groom entered with a coarse joint upon a tray, and thrust it through the bars to him. He pounced lightly upon it, carried it off to the corner, and there, holding it between his paws, tore and wrenched at it, raising his bloody muzzle every now and then to look at us. It was a malignant and yet fascinating sight.

“You can’t wonder that I am fond of him, can you?” said my host, as we left the room, “especially when you consider that I have had the rearing of him. It was no joke bringing him over from the centre of South America; but here he is safe and sound — and, as I have said, far the most perfect specimen in Europe. The people at the Zoo are dying to have him, but I really can’t part with him. Now, I think that I have inflicted my hobby upon you long enough, so we cannot do better than follow Tommy’s example, and go to our lunch.”

My South American relative was so engrossed by his grounds and their curious occupants, that I hardly gave him credit at first for having any interests outside them. That he had some, and pressing ones, was soon borne in upon me by the number of telegrams which he received. They arrived at all hours, and were always opened by him with the utmost eagerness and anxiety upon his face. Sometimes I imagined that it must be the Turf, and sometimes the Stock Exchange, but certainly he had some very urgent business going forwards which was not transacted upon the Downs of Suffolk. During the six days of my visit he had never fewer than three or four telegrams a day, and sometimes as many as seven or eight.

I had occupied these six days so well, that by the end of them I had succeeded in getting upon the most cordial terms with my cousin. Every night we had sat up late in the billiard-room, he telling me the most extraordinary stories of his adventures in America — stories so desperate and reckless, that I could hardly associate them with the brown little, chubby man before me. In return, I ventured upon some of my own reminiscences of London life, which interested him so much, that he vowed he would come up to Grosvenor Mansions and stay with me. He was anxious to see the faster side of city life, and certainly, though I say it, he could not have chosen a more competent guide. It was not until the last day of my visit that I ventured to approach that which was on my mind. I told him frankly about my pecuniary difficulties and my impending ruin, and I asked his advice — though I hoped for something more solid. He listened attentively, puffing hard at his cigar.

“But surely,” said he, “you are the heir of our relative, Lord Southerton?”

“I have every reason to believe so, but he would never make me any allowance.”

“No, no, I have heard of his miserly ways. My poor Marshall, your position has been a very hard one. By the way, have you heard any news of Lord Southerton’s health lately?”

“He has always been in a critical condition ever since my childhood.”

“Exactly — a creaking hinge, if ever there was one. Your inheritance may be a long way off. Dear me, how awkwardly situated you are!”

“I had some hopes, sir, that you, knowing all the facts, might be inclined to advance — —”

“Don’t say another word, my dear boy,” he cried, with the utmost cordiality; “we shall talk it over tonight, and I give you my word that whatever is in my power shall be done.”

I was not sorry that my visit was drawing to a close, for it is unpleasant to feel that there is one person in the house who eagerly desires your departure. Mrs. King’s sallow face and forbidding eyes had become more and more hateful to me. She was no longer actively rude — her fear of her husband prevented her — but she pushed her insane jealousy to the extent of ignoring me, never addressing me, and in every way making my stay at Greylands as uncomfortable as she could. So offensive was her manner during that last day, that I should certainly have left had it not been for that interview with my host in the evening which would, I hoped, retrieve my broken fortunes.

It was very late when it occurred, for my relative, who had been receiving even more telegrams than usual during the day, went off to his study after dinner, and only emerged when the household had retired to bed. I heard him go round locking the doors, as custom was of a night, and finally he joined me in the billiard-room. His stout figure was wrapped in a dressing-gown, and he wore a pair of red Turkish slippers without any heels. Settling down into an arm-chair, he brewed himself a glass of grog, in which I could not help noticing that the whisky considerably predominated over the water.

“My word!” said he, “what a night!”

It was, indeed. The wind was howling and screaming round the house, and the latticed windows rattled and shook as if they were coming in. The glow of the yellow lamps and the flavour of our cigars seemed the brighter and more fragrant for the contrast.

“Now, my boy,” said my host, “we have the house and the night to ourselves. Let me have an idea of how your affairs stand, and I will see what can be done to set them in order. I wish to hear every detail.”

Thus encouraged, I entered into a long exposition, in which all my tradesmen and creditors from my landlord to my valet, figured in turn. I had notes in my pocket-book, and I marshalled my facts, and gave, I flatter myself, a very businesslike statement of my own unbusinesslike ways and lamentable position. I was depressed, however, to notice that my companion’s eyes were vacant and his attention elsewhere. When he did occasionally throw out a remark it was so entirely perfunctory and pointless, that I was sure he had not in the least followed my remarks. Every now and then he roused himself and put on some show of interest, asking me to repeat or to explain more fully, but it was always to sink once more into the same brown study. At last he rose and threw the end of his cigar into the grate.

“I’ll tell you what, my boy,” said he. “I never had a head for figures, so you will excuse me. You must jot it all down upon paper, and let me have a note of the amount. I’ll understand it when I see it in black and white.”

The proposal was encouraging. I promised to do so.

“And now it’s time we were in bed. By Jove, there’s one o’clock striking in the hall.”

The tingling of the chiming clock broke through the deep roar of the gale. The wind was sweeping past with the rush of a great river.

“I must see my cat before I go to bed,” said my host. “A high wind excites him. Will you come?”

“Certainly,” said I.

“Then tread softly and don’t speak, for everyone is asleep.”

We passed quietly down the lamp-lit Persian-rugged hall, and through the door at the farther end. All was dark in the stone corridor, but a stable lantern hung on a hook, and my host took it down and lit it. There was no grating visible in the passage, so I knew that the beast was in its cage.

“Come in!” said my relative, and opened the door.

A deep growling as we entered showed that the storm had really excited the creature. In the flickering light of the lantern, we saw it, a huge black mass coiled in the corner of its den and throwing a squat, uncouth shadow upon the whitewashed wall. Its tail switched angrily among the straw.

"Poor Tommy is not in the best of tempers," said Everard King, holding up the lantern and looking in at him. "What a black devil he looks, doesn't he? I must give him a little supper to put him in a better humour. Would you mind holding the lantern for a moment?"

I took it from his hand and he stepped to the door.

"His larder is just outside here," said he. "You will excuse me for an instant won't you?" He passed out, and the door shut with a sharp metallic click behind him.

That hard crisp sound made my heart stand still. A sudden wave of terror passed over me. A vague perception of some monstrous treachery turned me cold. I sprang to the door, but there was no handle upon the inner side.

"Here!" I cried. "Let me out!"

"All right! Don't make a row!" said my host from the passage. "You've got the light all right."

"Yes, but I don't care about being locked in alone like this."

"Don't you?" I heard his hearty, chuckling laugh. "You won't be alone long."

"Let me out, sir!" I repeated angrily. "I tell you I don't allow practical jokes of this sort."

"Practical is the word," said he, with another hateful chuckle. And then suddenly I heard, amidst the roar of the storm, the creak and whine of the winch-handle turning and the rattle of the grating as it passed through the slot. Great God, he was letting loose the Brazilian cat!

In the light of the lantern I saw the bars sliding slowly before me. Already there was an opening a foot wide at the farther end. With a scream I seized the last bar with my hands and pulled with the strength of a madman. I WAS a madman with rage and horror. For a minute or more I held the thing motionless. I knew that he was straining with all his force upon the handle, and that the leverage was sure to overcome me. I gave inch by inch, my feet sliding along the stones, and all the time I begged and prayed this inhuman monster to save me from this horrible death. I conjured him by his kinship. I reminded him that I was his guest; I begged to know what harm I had ever done him. His only answers were the tugs and jerks upon the handle, each of which, in spite of all my struggles, pulled another bar through the opening. Clinging and clutching, I was dragged across the whole front of the cage, until at last, with aching wrists and lacerated fingers, I gave up the hopeless struggle. The grating clanged back as I released it, and an instant later I heard the shuffle of the Turkish slippers in the passage, and the slam of the distant door. Then everything was silent.

The creature had never moved during this time. He lay still in the corner, and his tail had ceased switching. This apparition of a man adhering to his bars and dragged screaming across him had apparently filled him with amazement. I saw his great eyes staring steadily at me. I had dropped the lantern when I seized the bars, but it still burned upon the floor, and I made a movement to grasp it, with some idea that its light might protect me. But the instant I moved, the beast gave a deep and menacing growl. I stopped and stood still, quivering with fear in every limb. The cat (if one may call so fearful a creature by so homely a name) was not more than ten feet from me. The eyes glimmered like two disks of phosphorus in the darkness. They appalled and yet fascinated me. I could not take my own eyes from them. Nature plays strange tricks with us at such moments of intensity, and those glimmering lights waxed and waned with a steady rise and fall. Sometimes they seemed to be tiny points of extreme brilliancy — little electric sparks in the black obscurity — then they would widen and widen until all that corner of the room was filled with their shifting and sinister light. And then suddenly they went out altogether.

The beast had closed its eyes. I do not know whether there may be any truth in the old idea of the dominance of the human gaze, or whether the huge cat was simply drowsy, but the fact remains that, far from showing any symptom of attacking me, it simply rested its sleek, black head upon its huge forepaws and seemed to sleep. I stood, fearing to move lest I should rouse it into malignant life once more. But at least I was able to think clearly now that the baleful eyes were off me. Here I was shut up for the night with the ferocious beast. My own instincts, to say nothing of the words of the plausible villain who laid this trap for me, warned me that the animal was as savage as its master. How could I stave it off until morning? The door was hopeless, and so were the narrow, barred windows. There was no shelter anywhere in the bare, stone-flagged room. To cry for assistance was absurd. I knew that this den was an outhouse, and that the corridor which connected it with the house was at least a hundred feet long. Besides, with the gale thundering outside, my cries were not likely to be heard. I had only my own courage and my own wits to trust to.

And then, with a fresh wave of horror, my eyes fell upon the lantern. The candle had burned low, and was already beginning to gutter. In ten minutes it would be out. I had only ten minutes then in which to do something, for I felt that if I were once left in the dark with that fearful beast I should be incapable of action. The very thought of it paralysed me. I cast my despairing eyes round this chamber of death, and they rested upon one spot which seemed to promise I will not say safety, but less immediate and imminent danger than the open floor.

I have said that the cage had a top as well as a front, and this top was left standing when the front was wound through the slot in the wall. It consisted of bars at a few inches' interval, with stout wire netting between, and it rested upon a strong stanchion at each end. It stood now as a great barred canopy over the crouching figure in the corner. The space between this iron shelf and the roof may have been from two or three feet. If I could only get up there, squeezed in between bars and ceiling, I should have only one vulnerable side. I should be safe from below, from behind, and from each side. Only on the open face of it could I be attacked. There, it is true, I had no protection whatever; but at least, I should be out of the brute's path when he began to pace about his den. He would have to come out of his way to reach me. It was now or never, for if once the light were out it would be impossible. With a gulp in my throat I sprang up, seized the iron edge of the top, and swung myself panting on to it. I writhed in face downwards, and found myself looking straight into the terrible eyes and yawning jaws of the cat. Its fetid breath came up into my face like the steam from some foul pot.

It appeared, however, to be rather curious than angry. With a sleek ripple of its long, black back it rose, stretched itself, and then rearing itself on its hind legs, with one forepaw against the wall, it raised the other, and drew its claws across the wire meshes beneath me. One sharp, white hook tore through my trousers — for I may mention that I was still in evening dress — and dug a furrow in my knee. It was not meant as an attack, but rather as an experiment, for upon my giving a sharp cry of pain he dropped down again, and springing lightly into the room, he began walking swiftly round it, looking up every now and again in my direction. For my part I shuffled backwards until I lay with my back against the wall, screwing myself into the smallest space possible. The farther I got the more difficult it was for him to attack me.

He seemed more excited now that he had begun to move about, and he ran swiftly and noiselessly round and round the den, passing continually underneath the iron couch upon which I lay. It was wonderful to see so great a bulk passing like a shadow, with hardly the softest thudding of velvety pads. The candle was burning low — so low that I could hardly see the creature. And then, with a last flare and splutter it went out altogether. I was alone with the cat in the dark!

It helps one to face a danger when one knows that one has done all that possibly can be done. There is nothing for it then but to quietly await the result. In this case, there was no chance of safety anywhere except the precise spot where I was. I stretched myself out, therefore, and lay silently, almost breathlessly, hoping that the beast might forget my presence if I did nothing to remind him. I reckoned that it must already be two o’clock. At four it would be full dawn. I had not more than two hours to wait for daylight.

Outside, the storm was still raging, and the rain lashed continually against the little windows. Inside, the poisonous and fetid air was overpowering. I could neither hear nor see the cat. I tried to think about other things — but only one had power enough to draw my mind from my terrible position. That was the contemplation of my cousin’s villainy, his unparalleled hypocrisy, his malignant hatred of me. Beneath that cheerful face there lurked the spirit of a mediaeval assassin. And as I thought of it I saw more clearly how cunningly the thing had been arranged. He had apparently gone to bed with the others. No doubt he had his witness to prove it. Then, unknown to them, he had slipped down, had lured me into his den and abandoned me. His story would be so simple. He had left me to finish my cigar in the billiard-room. I had gone down on my own account to have a last look at the cat. I had entered the room without observing that the cage was opened, and I had been caught. How could such a crime be brought home to him? Suspicion, perhaps — but proof, never!

How slowly those dreadful two hours went by! Once I heard a low, rasping sound, which I took to be the creature licking its own fur. Several times those greenish eyes gleamed at me through the darkness, but never in a fixed stare, and my hopes grew stronger that my presence had been forgotten or ignored. At last the least faint glimmer of light came through the windows — I first dimly saw them as two grey squares upon the black wall, then grey turned to white, and I could see my terrible companion once more. And he, alas, could see me!

It was evident to me at once that he was in a much more dangerous and aggressive mood than when I had seen him last. The cold of the morning had irritated him, and he was hungry as well. With a continual growl he paced swiftly up and down the side of the room which was farthest from my refuge, his whiskers bristling angrily, and his tail switching and lashing. As he turned at the corners his savage eyes always looked upwards at me with a dreadful menace. I knew then that he meant to kill me. Yet I found myself even at that moment admiring the sinuous grace of the devilish thing, its long, undulating, rippling movements, the gloss of its beautiful flanks, the vivid, palpitating scarlet of the glistening tongue which hung from the jet-black muzzle. And all the time that deep, threatening growl was rising and rising in an unbroken crescendo. I knew that the crisis was at hand.

It was a miserable hour to meet such a death — so cold, so comfortless, shivering in my light dress clothes upon this gridiron of torment upon which I was stretched. I tried to brace myself to it, to raise my soul above it, and at the same time, with the lucidity which comes to a perfectly desperate man, I cast round for some possible means of escape. One thing was clear to me. If that front of the cage was only back in its position once more, I could find a sure refuge behind it. Could I possibly pull it back? I hardly dared to move for fear of bringing the creature upon me. Slowly, very slowly, I put my hand forward until it grasped the edge of the front, the final bar which protruded through the wall. To my surprise it came quite easily to my jerk. Of course the difficulty of drawing it out arose from the fact that I was clinging to it. I pulled again, and three inches of it came through. It ran apparently on wheels. I pulled again ... and then the cat sprang!

It was so quick, so sudden, that I never saw it happen. I simply heard the savage snarl, and in an instant afterwards the blazing yellow eyes, the flattened black head with its red tongue and flashing teeth, were within reach of me. The impact of the creature shook the bars upon which I lay, until I thought (as far as I could think of anything at such a moment) that they were coming down. The cat swayed there for an instant, the head and front paws quite close to me, the hind paws clawing to find a grip upon the edge of the grating. I heard the claws rasping as they clung to the wire-netting, and the breath of the beast made me sick. But its bound had been miscalculated. It could not retain its position. Slowly, grinning with rage, and scratching madly at the bars, it swung backwards and dropped heavily upon the floor. With a growl it instantly faced round to me and crouched for another spring.

I knew that the next few moments would decide my fate. The creature had learned by experience. It would not miscalculate again. I must act promptly, fearlessly, if I were to have a chance for life. In an instant I had formed my plan. Pulling off my dress-coat, I threw it down over the head of the beast. At the same moment I dropped over the edge, seized the end of the front grating, and pulled it frantically out of the wall.

It came more easily than I could have expected. I rushed across the room, bearing it with me; but, as I rushed, the accident of my position put me upon the outer side. Had it been the other way, I might have come off scathless. As it was, there was a moment's pause as I stopped it and tried to pass in through the opening which I had left. That moment was enough to give time to the creature to toss off the coat with which I had blinded him and to spring upon me. I hurled myself through the gap and pulled the rails to behind me, but he seized my leg before I could entirely withdraw it. One stroke of that huge paw tore off my calf as a shaving of wood curls off before a plane. The next moment, bleeding and fainting, I was lying among the foul straw with a line of friendly bars between me and the creature which ramped so frantically against them.

Too wounded to move, and too faint to be conscious of fear, I could only lie, more dead than alive, and watch it. It pressed its broad, black chest against the bars and angled for me with its crooked paws as I have seen a kitten do before a mouse-trap. It ripped my clothes, but, stretch as it would, it could not quite reach me. I have heard of the curious numbing effect produced by wounds from the great carnivora, and now I was destined to experience it, for I had lost all sense of personality, and was as interested in the cat's failure or success as if it were some game which I was watching. And then gradually my mind drifted away into strange vague dreams, always with that black face and red tongue coming back into them, and so I lost myself in the nirvana of delirium, the blessed relief of those who are too sorely tried.

Tracing the course of events afterwards, I conclude that I must have been insensible for about two hours. What roused me to consciousness once more was that sharp metallic click which had been the precursor of my terrible experience. It was the shooting back of the spring lock. Then, before my senses were clear enough to entirely apprehend what they saw, I was aware of the round, benevolent face of my cousin peering in through the open door. What he saw evidently amazed him. There was the cat crouching on the floor. I was stretched upon my back in my shirt-sleeves within the cage, my trousers torn to ribbons and a great pool of blood all round me. I can see his amazed face now, with the morning sunlight upon it. He peered at me, and peered again. Then he closed the door behind him, and advanced to the cage to see if I were really dead.

I cannot undertake to say what happened. I was not in a fit state to witness or to chronicle such events. I can only say that I was suddenly conscious that his face was away from me — that he was looking towards the animal.

“Good old Tommy!” he cried. “Good old Tommy!”

Then he came near the bars, with his back still towards me.

“Down, you stupid beast!” he roared. “Down, sir! Don’t you know your master?”

Suddenly even in my bemuddled brain a remembrance came of those words of his when he had said that the taste of blood would turn the cat into a fiend. My blood had done it, but he was to pay the price.

“Get away!” he screamed. “Get away, you devil! Baldwin! Baldwin! Oh, my God!”

And then I heard him fall, and rise, and fall again, with a sound like the ripping of sacking. His screams grew fainter until they were lost in the worrying snarl. And then, after I thought that he was dead, I saw, as in a nightmare, a blinded, tattered, blood-soaked figure running wildly round the room — and that was the last glimpse which I had of him before I fainted once again.

I was many months in my recovery — in fact, I cannot say that I have ever recovered, for to the end of my days I shall carry a stick as a sign of my night with the Brazilian cat. Baldwin, the groom, and the other servants could not tell what had occurred, when, drawn by the death-cries of their master, they found me behind the bars, and his remains — or what they afterwards discovered to be his remains — in the clutch of the creature which he had reared. They stalled him off with hot irons, and afterwards shot him through the loophole of the door before they could finally extricate me. I was carried to my bedroom, and there, under the roof of my would-be murderer, I remained between life and death for several weeks. They had sent for a surgeon from Clipton and a nurse from London, and in a month I was able to be carried to the station, and so conveyed back once more to Grosvenor Mansions.

I have one remembrance of that illness, which might have been part of the ever-changing panorama conjured up by a delirious brain were it not so definitely fixed in my memory. One night, when the nurse was absent, the door of my chamber opened, and a tall woman in blackest mourning slipped into the room. She came across to me, and as she bent her sallow face I saw by the faint gleam of the night-light that it was the Brazilian woman whom my cousin had married. She stared intently into my face, and her expression was more kindly than I had ever seen it.

“Are you conscious?” she asked.

I feebly nodded — for I was still very weak.

“Well; then, I only wished to say to you that you have yourself to blame. Did I not do all I could for you? From the beginning I tried to drive you from the house. By every means, short of betraying my husband, I tried to save you from him. I knew that he had a reason for bringing you here. I knew that he would never let you get away again. No one knew him as I knew him, who had suffered from him so often. I did not dare to tell you all this. He would have killed me. But I did my best for you. As things have turned out, you have been the best friend that I have ever had. You have set me free, and I fancied that nothing but death would do that. I am sorry if you are hurt, but I cannot reproach myself. I told you that you were a fool — and a fool you have been.” She crept out of the room, the bitter, singular woman, and I was never destined to see her again. With what remained from her husband’s property she went back to her native land, and I have heard that she afterwards took the veil at Pernambuco.

It was not until I had been back in London for some time that the doctors pronounced me to be well enough to do business. It was not a very welcome permission to me, for I feared that it would be the signal for an inrush of creditors; but it was Summers, my lawyer, who first took advantage of it.

“I am very glad to see that your lordship is so much better,” said he. “I have been waiting a long time to offer my congratulations.”

“What do you mean, Summers? This is no time for joking.”

“I mean what I say,” he answered. “You have been Lord Southerton for the last six weeks, but we feared that it would retard your recovery if you were to learn it.”

Lord Southerton! One of the richest peers in England! I could not believe my ears. And then suddenly I thought of the time which had elapsed, and how it coincided with my injuries.

“Then Lord Southerton must have died about the same time that I was hurt?”

“His death occurred upon that very day.” Summers looked hard at me as I spoke, and I am convinced — for he was a very shrewd fellow — that he had guessed the true state of the case. He paused for a moment as if awaiting a confidence from me, but I could not see what was to be gained by exposing such a family scandal.

“Yes, a very curious coincidence,” he continued, with the same knowing look. “Of course, you are aware that your cousin Everard King was the next heir to the estates. Now, if it had been you instead of him who had been torn to pieces by this tiger, or whatever it was, then of course he would have been Lord Southerton at the present moment.”

“No doubt,” said I.

“And he took such an interest in it,” said Summers. “I happen to know that the late Lord Southerton’s valet was in his pay, and that he used to have telegrams from him every few hours to tell him how he was getting on. That would be about the time when you were down there. Was it not strange that he should wish to be so well informed, since he knew that he was not the direct heir?”

“Very strange,” said I. “And now, Summers, if you will bring me my bills and a new cheque-book, we will begin to get things into order.”

Tales of Mystery
The Lost Special

The confession of Herbert de Lernac, now lying under sentence of death at Marseilles, has thrown a light upon one of the most inexplicable crimes of the century — an incident which is, I believe, absolutely unprecedented in the criminal annals of any country: Although there is a reluctance to discuss the matter in official circles, and little information has been given to the Press, there are still indications that the statement of this arch-criminal is corroborated by the facts, and that we have at last found a solution for a most astounding business. As the matter is eight years old, and as its importance was somewhat obscured by a political crisis which was engaging the public attention at the time, it may be as well to state the facts as far as we have been able to ascertain them. They are collated from the Liverpool papers of that date, from the proceedings at the inquest upon John Slater, the engine-driver, and from the records of the London and West Coast Railway Company, which have been courteously put at my disposal. Briefly, they are as follows:

On the 3rd of June, 1890, a gentleman, who gave his name as Monsieur Louis Caratal, desired an interview with Mr. James Bland, the superintendent of the London and West Coast Central Station in Liverpool. He was a small man, middle-aged and dark, with a stoop which was so marked that it suggested some deformity of the spine. He was accompanied by a friend, a man of imposing physique, whose deferential manner and constant attention showed that his position was one of dependence. This friend or companion, whose name did not transpire, was certainly a foreigner, and probably from his swarthy complexion, either a Spaniard or a South American. One peculiarity was observed in him. He carried in his left hand a small black, leather dispatch box, and it was noticed by a sharp-eyed clerk in the Central office that this box was fastened to his wrist by a strap. No importance was attached to the fact at the time, but subsequent events endowed it with some significance. Monsieur Caratal was shown up to Mr. Bland's office, while his companion remained outside.

Monsieur Caratal's business was quickly dispatched. He had arrived that afternoon from Central America. Affairs of the utmost importance demanded that he should be in Paris without the loss of an unnecessary hour. He had missed the London express. A special must be provided. Money was of no importance. Time was everything. If the company would speed him on his way, they might make their own terms.

Mr. Bland struck the electric bell, summoned Mr. Potter Hood, the traffic manager, and had the matter arranged in five minutes. The train would start in three-quarters of an hour. It would take that time to insure that the line should be clear. The powerful engine called Rochdale (No. 247 on the company's register) was attached to two carriages, with a guard's van behind. The first carriage was solely for the purpose of decreasing the inconvenience arising from the oscillation. The second was divided, as usual, into four compartments, a first-class, a first-class smoking, a second-class, and a second-class smoking. The first compartment, which was nearest to the engine, was the one allotted to the travellers. The other three were empty. The guard of the special train was James McPherson, who had been some years in the service of the company. The stoker, William Smith, was a new hand.

Monsieur Caratal, upon leaving the superintendent's office, rejoined his companion, and both of them manifested extreme impatience to be off. Having paid the money asked, which amounted to fifty pounds five shillings, at the usual special rate of five shillings a mile, they demanded to be shown the carriage, and at once took their seats in it, although they were assured that the better part of an hour must elapse before the line could be cleared. In the meantime a singular coincidence had occurred in the office which Monsieur Caratal had just quitted.

A request for a special is not a very uncommon circumstance in a rich commercial centre, but that two should be required upon the same afternoon was most unusual. It so happened, however, that Mr. Bland had hardly dismissed the first traveller before a second entered with a similar request. This was a Mr. Horace Moore, a gentlemanly man of military appearance, who alleged that the sudden serious illness of his wife in London made it absolutely imperative that he should not lose an instant in starting upon the journey. His distress and anxiety were so evident that Mr. Bland did all that was possible to meet his wishes. A second special was out of the question, as the ordinary local service was already somewhat deranged by the first. There was the alternative, however, that Mr. Moore should share the expense of Monsieur Caratal's train, and should travel in the other empty first-class compartment, if Monsieur Caratal objected to having him in the one which he occupied. It was difficult to see any objection to such an arrangement, and yet Monsieur Caratal, upon the suggestion being made to him by Mr. Potter Hood, absolutely refused to consider it for an instant. The train was his, he said, and he would insist upon the exclusive use of it. All argument failed to overcome his ungracious objections, and finally the plan had to be abandoned. Mr. Horace Moore left the station in great distress, after learning that his only course was to take the ordinary slow train which leaves Liverpool at six o'clock. At four thirty-one exactly by the station clock the special train, containing the crippled Monsieur Caratal and his gigantic companion, steamed out of the Liverpool station. The line was at that time clear, and there should have been no stoppage before Manchester.

The trains of the London and West Coast Railway run over the lines of another company as far as this town, which should have been reached by the special rather before six o'clock. At a quarter after six considerable surprise and some consternation were caused amongst the officials at Liverpool by the receipt of a telegram from Manchester to say that it had not yet arrived. An inquiry directed to St. Helens, which is a third of the way between the two cities, elicited the following reply —

"To James Bland, Superintendent, Central L. & W. C., Liverpool. — Special passed here at 4:52, well up to time. — Dowster, St. Helens."

This telegram was received at six-forty. At six-fifty a second message was received from Manchester —

"No sign of special as advised by you."

And then ten minutes later a third, more bewildering —

"Presume some mistake as to proposed running of special. Local train from St. Helens timed to follow it has just arrived and has seen nothing of it. Kindly wire advices. — Manchester."

The matter was assuming a most amazing aspect, although in some respects the last telegram was a relief to the authorities at Liverpool. If an accident had occurred to the special, it seemed hardly possible that the local train could have passed down the same line without observing it. And yet, what was the alternative? Where could the train be? Had it possibly been sidetracked for some reason in order to allow the slower train to go past? Such an explanation was possible if some small repair had to be effected. A telegram was dispatched to each of the stations between St. Helens and Manchester, and the superintendent and traffic manager waited in the utmost suspense at the instrument for the series of replies which would enable them to say for certain what had become of the missing train. The answers came back in the order of questions, which was the order of the stations beginning at the St. Helens end —

“Special passed here five o’clock. — Collins Green.”

“Special passed here six past five. — Earlstown.”

“Special passed here 5:10. — Newton.”

“Special passed here 5:20. — Kenyon Junction.”

“No special train has passed here. — Barton Moss.”

The two officials stared at each other in amazement.

“This is unique in my thirty years of experience,” said Mr. Bland.

“Absolutely unprecedented and inexplicable, sir. The special has gone wrong between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss.”

“And yet there is no siding, so far as my memory serves me, between the two stations. The special must have run off the metals.”

“But how could the four-fifty parliamentary pass over the same line without observing it?”

“There’s no alternative, Mr. Hood. It must be so. Possibly the local train may have observed something which may throw some light upon the matter. We will wire to Manchester for more information, and to Kenyon Junction with instructions that the line be examined instantly as far as Barton Moss.” The answer from Manchester came within a few minutes.

“No news of missing special. Driver and guard of slow train positive no accident between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss. Line quite clear, and no sign of anything unusual. — Manchester.”

“That driver and guard will have to go,” said Mr. Bland, grimly. “There has been a wreck and they have missed it. The special has obviously run off the metals without disturbing the line — how it could have done so passes my comprehension — but so it must be, and we shall have a wire from Kenyon or Barton Moss presently to say that they have found her at the bottom of an embankment.”

But Mr. Bland's prophecy was not destined to be fulfilled. Half an hour passed, and then there arrived the following message from the station-master of Kenyon Junction —

"There are no traces of the missing special. It is quite certain that she passed here, and that she did not arrive at Barton Moss. We have detached engine from goods train, and I have myself ridden down the line, but all is clear, and there is no sign of any accident."

Mr. Bland tore his hair in his perplexity.

"This is rank lunacy, Hood!" he cried. "Does a train vanish into thin air in England in broad daylight? The thing is preposterous. An engine, a tender, two carriages, a van, five human beings — and all lost on a straight line of railway! Unless we get something positive within the next hour I'll take Inspector Collins, and go down myself."

And then at last something positive did occur. It took the shape of another telegram from Kenyon Junction.

"Regret to report that the dead body of John Slater, driver of the special train, has just been found among the gorse bushes at a point two and a quarter miles from the Junction. Had fallen from his engine, pitched down the embankment, and rolled among the bushes. Injuries to his head, from the fall, appear to be cause of death. Ground has now been carefully examined, and there is no trace of the missing train."

The country was, as has already been stated, in the throes of a political crisis, and the attention of the public was further distracted by the important and sensational developments in Paris, where a huge scandal threatened to destroy the Government and to wreck the reputations of many of the leading men in France. The papers were full of these events, and the singular disappearance of the special train attracted less attention than would have been the case in more peaceful times. The grotesque nature of the event helped to detract from its importance, for the papers were disinclined to believe the facts as reported to them. More than one of the London journals treated the matter as an ingenious hoax, until the coroner's inquest upon the unfortunate driver (an inquest which elicited nothing of importance) convinced them of the tragedy of the incident.

Mr. Bland, accompanied by Inspector Collins, the senior detective officer in the service of the company, went down to Kenyon Junction the same evening, and their research lasted throughout the following day, but was attended with purely negative results. Not only was no trace found of the missing train, but no conjecture could be put forward which could possibly explain the facts. At the same time, Inspector Collins's official report (which lies before me as I write) served to show that the possibilities were more numerous than might have been expected.

"In the stretch of railway between these two points," said he, "the country is dotted with ironworks and collieries. Of these, some are being worked and some have been abandoned. There are no fewer than twelve which have small-gauge lines which run trolly-cars down to the main line. These can, of course, be disregarded. Besides these, however, there are seven which have, or have had, proper lines running down and connecting with points to the main line, so as to convey their produce from the mouth of the mine to the great centres of distribution. In every case these lines are only a few miles in length. Out of the seven, four belong to collieries which are worked out, or at least to shafts which are no longer used. These are the Redgauntlet, Hero, Slough of Despond, and Heartsease mines, the latter having ten years ago been one of the principal mines in Lancashire. These four side lines may be eliminated from our inquiry, for, to prevent possible accidents, the rails nearest to the main line have been taken up, and there is no longer any connection. There remain three other side lines leading —

(a) To the Carnstock Iron Works;
(b) To the Big Ben Colliery;
(c) To the Perseverance Colliery.

"Of these the Big Ben line is not more than a quarter of a mile long, and ends at a dead wall of coal waiting removal from the mouth of the mine. Nothing had been seen or heard there of any special. The Carnstock Iron Works line was blocked all day upon the 3rd of June by sixteen truckloads of hematite. It is a single line, and nothing could have passed. As to the Perseverance line, it is a large double line, which does a considerable traffic, for the output of the mine is very large. On the 3rd of June this traffic proceeded as usual; hundreds of men including a gang of railway platelayers were working along the two miles and a quarter which constitute the total length of the line, and it is inconceivable that an unexpected train could have come down there without attracting universal attention. It may be remarked in conclusion that this branch line is nearer to St. Helens than the point at which the engine-driver was discovered, so that we have every reason to believe that the train was past that point before misfortune overtook her.

"As to John Slater, there is no clue to be gathered from his appearance or injuries. We can only say that, so far as we can see, he met his end by falling off his engine, though why he fell, or what became of the engine after his fall, is a question upon which I do not feel qualified to offer an opinion." In conclusion, the inspector offered his resignation to the Board, being much nettled by an accusation of incompetence in the London papers.

A month elapsed, during which both the police and the company prosecuted their inquiries without the slightest success. A reward was offered and a pardon promised in case of crime, but they were both unclaimed. Every day the public opened their papers with the conviction that so grotesque a mystery would at last be solved, but week after week passed by, and a solution remained as far off as ever. In broad daylight, upon a June afternoon in the most thickly inhabited portion of England, a train with its occupants had disappeared as completely as if some master of subtle chemistry had volatilized it into gas. Indeed, among the various conjectures which were put forward in the public Press, there were some which seriously asserted that supernatural, or, at least, preternatural, agencies had been at work, and that the deformed Monsieur Caratal was probably a person who was better known under a less polite name. Others fixed upon his swarthy companion as being the author of the mischief, but what it was exactly which he had done could never be clearly formulated in words.

Amongst the many suggestions put forward by various newspapers or private individuals, there were one or two which were feasible enough to attract the attention of the public. One which appeared in The Times, over the signature of an amateur reasoner of some celebrity at that date, attempted to deal with the matter in a critical and semi-scientific manner. An extract must suffice, although the curious can see the whole letter in the issue of the 3rd of July.

"It is one of the elementary principles of practical reasoning," he remarked, "that when the impossible has been eliminated the residuum, HOWEVER IMPROBABLE, must contain the truth. It is certain that the train left Kenyon Junction. It is certain that it did not reach Barton Moss. It is in the highest degree unlikely, but still possible, that it may have taken one of the seven available side lines. It is obviously impossible for a train to run where there are no rails, and, therefore, we may reduce our improbables to the three open lines, namely the Carnstock Iron Works, the Big Ben, and the Perseverance. Is there a secret society of colliers, an English Camorra, which is capable of destroying both train and passengers? It is improbable, but it is not impossible. I confess that I am unable to suggest any other solution. I should certainly advise the company to direct all their energies towards the observation of those three lines, and of the workmen at the end of them. A careful supervision of the pawnbrokers' shops of the district might possibly bring some suggestive facts to light."

The suggestion coming from a recognised authority upon such matters created considerable interest, and a fierce opposition from those who considered such a statement to be a preposterous libel upon an honest and deserving set of men. The only answer to this criticism was a challenge to the objectors to lay any more feasible explanations before the public. In reply to this two others were forthcoming (Times, July 7th and 9th). The first suggested that the train might have run off the metals and be lying submerged in the Lancashire and Staffordshire Canal, which runs parallel to the railway for some hundred of yards. This suggestion was thrown out of court by the published depth of the canal, which was entirely insufficient to conceal so large an object. The second correspondent wrote calling attention to the bag which appeared to be the sole luggage which the travellers had brought with them, and suggesting that some novel explosive of immense and pulverizing power might have been concealed in it. The obvious absurdity, however, of supposing that the whole train might be blown to dust while the metals remained uninjured reduced any such explanation to a farce. The investigation had drifted into this hopeless position when a new and most unexpected incident occurred.

This was nothing less than the receipt by Mrs. McPherson of a letter from her husband, James McPherson, who had been the guard on the missing train. The letter, which was dated July 5th, 1890, was posted from New York and came to hand upon July 14th. Some doubts were expressed as to its genuine character but Mrs. McPherson was positive as to the writing, and the fact that it contained a remittance of a hundred dollars in five-dollar notes was enough in itself to discount the idea of a hoax. No address was given in the letter, which ran in this way:

MY DEAR WIFE, —

"I have been thinking a great deal, and I find it very hard to give you up. The same with Lizzie. I try to fight against it, but it will always come back to me. I send you some money which will change into twenty English pounds. This should be enough to bring both Lizzie and you across the Atlantic, and you will find the Hamburg boats which stop at Southampton very good boats, and cheaper than Liverpool. If you could come here and stop at the Johnston House I would try and send you word how to meet, but things are very difficult with me at present, and I am not very happy, finding it hard to give you both up. So no more at present, from your loving husband,

"James McPherson."

For a time it was confidently anticipated that this letter would lead to the clearing up of the whole matter, the more so as it was ascertained that a passenger who bore a close resemblance to the missing guard had travelled from Southampton under the name of Summers in the Hamburg and New York liner Vistula, which started upon the 7th of June. Mrs. McPherson and her sister Lizzie Dolton went across to New York as directed and stayed for three weeks at the Johnston House, without hearing anything from the missing man. It is probable that some injudicious comments in the Press may have warned him that the police were using them as a bait. However, this may be, it is certain that he neither wrote nor came, and the women were eventually compelled to return to Liverpool.

And so the matter stood, and has continued to stand up to the present year of 1898. Incredible as it may seem, nothing has transpired during these eight years which has shed the least light upon the extraordinary disappearance of the special train which contained Monsieur Caratal and his companion. Careful inquiries into the antecedents of the two travellers have only established the fact that Monsieur Caratal was well known as a financier and political agent in Central America, and that during his voyage to Europe he had betrayed extraordinary anxiety to reach Paris. His companion, whose name was entered upon the passenger lists as Eduardo Gomez, was a man whose record was a violent one, and whose reputation was that of a bravo and a bully. There was evidence to show, however, that he was honestly devoted to the interests of Monsieur Caratal, and that the latter, being a man of puny physique, employed the other as a guard and protector. It may be added that no information came from Paris as to what the objects of Monsieur Caratal’s hurried journey may have been. This comprises all the facts of the case up to the publication in the Marseilles papers of the recent confession of Herbert de Lernac, now under sentence of death for the murder of a merchant named Bonvalot. This statement may be literally translated as follows:

“It is not out of mere pride or boasting that I give this information, for, if that were my object, I could tell a dozen actions of mine which are quite as splendid; but I do it in order that certain gentlemen in Paris may understand that I, who am able here to tell about the fate of Monsieur Caratal, can also tell in whose interest and at whose request the deed was done, unless the reprieve which I am awaiting comes to me very quickly. Take warning, messieurs, before it is too late! You know Herbert de Lernac, and you are aware that his deeds are as ready as his words. Hasten then, or you are lost!

“At present I shall mention no names — if you only heard the names, what would you not think! — but I shall merely tell you how cleverly I did it. I was true to my employers then, and no doubt they will be true to me now. I hope so, and until I am convinced that they have betrayed me, these names, which would convulse Europe, shall not be divulged. But on that day ... well, I say no more!

“In a word, then, there was a famous trial in Paris, in the year 1890, in connection with a monstrous scandal in politics and finance. How monstrous that scandal was can never be known save by such confidential agents as myself. The honour and careers of many of the chief men in France were at stake. You have seen a group of ninepins standing, all so rigid, and prim, and unbending. Then there comes the ball from far away and pop, pop, pop — there are your ninepins on the floor. Well, imagine some of the greatest men in France as these ninepins and then this Monsieur Caratal was the ball which could be seen coming from far away. If he arrived, then it was pop, pop, pop for all of them. It was determined that he should not arrive.

“I do not accuse them all of being conscious of what was to happen. There were, as I have said, great financial as well as political interests at stake, and a syndicate was formed to manage the business. Some subscribed to the syndicate who hardly understood what were its objects. But others understood very well, and they can rely upon it that I have not forgotten their names. They had ample warning that Monsieur Caratal was coming long before he left South America, and they knew that the evidence which he held would certainly mean ruin to all of them. The syndicate had the command of an unlimited amount of money — absolutely unlimited, you understand. They looked round for an agent who was capable of wielding this gigantic power. The man chosen must be inventive, resolute, adaptive — a man in a million. They chose Herbert de Lernac, and I admit that they were right.

“My duties were to choose my subordinates, to use freely the power which money gives, and to make certain that Monsieur Caratal should never arrive in Paris. With characteristic energy I set about my commission within an hour of receiving my instructions, and the steps which I took were the very best for the purpose which could possibly be devised.

“A man whom I could trust was dispatched instantly to South America to travel home with Monsieur Caratal. Had he arrived in time the ship would never have reached Liverpool; but alas! it had already started before my agent could reach it. I fitted out a small armed brig to intercept it, but again I was unfortunate. Like all great organizers I was, however, prepared for failure, and had a series of alternatives prepared, one or the other of which must succeed. You must not underrate the difficulties of my undertaking, or imagine that a mere commonplace assassination would meet the case. We must destroy not only Monsieur Caratal, but Monsieur Caratal’s documents, and Monsieur Caratal’s companions also, if we had reason to believe that he had communicated his secrets to them. And you must remember that they were on the alert, and keenly suspicious of any such attempt. It was a task which was in every way worthy of me, for I am always most masterful where another would be appalled.

“I was all ready for Monsieur Caratal’s reception in Liverpool, and I was the more eager because I had reason to believe that he had made arrangements by which he would have a considerable guard from the moment that he arrived in London. Anything which was to be done must be done between the moment of his setting foot upon the Liverpool quay and that of his arrival at the London and West Coast terminus in London. We prepared six plans, each more elaborate than the last; which plan would be used would depend upon his own movements. Do what he would, we were ready for him. If he had stayed in Liverpool, we were ready. If he took an ordinary train, an express, or a special, all was ready. Everything had been foreseen and provided for.

"You may imagine that I could not do all this myself. What could I know of the English railway lines? But money can procure willing agents all the world over, and I soon had one of the acutest brains in England to assist me. I will mention no names, but it would be unjust to claim all the credit for myself. My English ally was worthy of such an alliance. He knew the London and West Coast line thoroughly, and he had the command of a band of workers who were trustworthy and intelligent. The idea was his, and my own judgement was only required in the details. We bought over several officials, amongst whom the most important was James McPherson, whom we had ascertained to be the guard most likely to be employed upon a special train. Smith, the stoker, was also in our employ. John Slater, the engine-driver, had been approached, but had been found to be obstinate and dangerous, so we desisted. We had no certainty that Monsieur Caratal would take a special, but we thought it very probable, for it was of the utmost importance to him that he should reach Paris without delay. It was for this contingency, therefore, that we made special preparations — preparations which were complete down to the last detail long before his steamer had sighted the shores of England. You will be amused to learn that there was one of my agents in the pilot-boat which brought that steamer to its moorings.

"The moment that Caratal arrived in Liverpool we knew that he suspected danger and was on his guard. He had brought with him as an escort a dangerous fellow, named Gomez, a man who carried weapons, and was prepared to use them. This fellow carried Caratal's confidential papers for him, and was ready to protect either them or his master. The probability was that Caratal had taken him into his counsel, and that to remove Caratal without removing Gomez would be a mere waste of energy. It was necessary that they should be involved in a common fate, and our plans to that end were much facilitated by their request for a special train. On that special train you will understand that two out of the three servants of the company were really in our employ, at a price which would make them independent for a lifetime. I do not go so far as to say that the English are more honest than any other nation, but I have found them more expensive to buy.

"I have already spoken of my English agent — who is a man with a considerable future before him, unless some complaint of the throat carries him off before his time. He had charge of all arrangements at Liverpool, whilst I was stationed at the inn at Kenyon, where I awaited a cipher signal to act. When the special was arranged for, my agent instantly telegraphed to me and warned me how soon I should have everything ready. He himself under the name of Horace Moore applied immediately for a special also, in the hope that he would be sent down with Monsieur Caratal, which might under certain circumstances have been helpful to us. If, for example, our great coup had failed, it would then have become the duty of my agent to have shot them both and destroyed their papers. Caratal was on his guard, however, and refused to admit any other traveller. My agent then left the station, returned by another entrance, entered the guard's van on the side farthest from the platform, and travelled down with McPherson the guard.

"In the meantime you will be interested to know what my movements were. Everything had been prepared for days before, and only the finishing touches were needed. The side line which we had chosen had once joined the main line, but it had been disconnected. We had only to replace a few rails to connect it once more. These rails had been laid down as far as could be done without danger of attracting attention, and now it was merely a case of completing a juncture with the line, and arranging the points as they had been before. The sleepers had never been removed, and the rails, fish-plates and rivets were all ready, for we had taken them from a siding on the abandoned portion of the line. With my small but competent band of workers, we had everything ready long before the special arrived. When it did arrive, it ran off upon the small side line so easily that the jolting of the points appears to have been entirely unnoticed by the two travellers.

"Our plan had been that Smith, the stoker, should chloroform John Slater, the driver, so that he should vanish with the others. In this respect, and in this respect only, our plans miscarried — I except the criminal folly of McPherson in writing home to his wife. Our stoker did his business so clumsily that Slater in his struggles fell off the engine, and though fortune was with us so far that he broke his neck in the fall, still he remained as a blot upon that which would otherwise have been one of those complete masterpieces which are only to be contemplated in silent admiration. The criminal expert will find in John Slater the one flaw in all our admirable combinations. A man who has had as many triumphs as I can afford to be frank, and I therefore lay my finger upon John Slater, and I proclaim him to be a flaw.

"But now I have got our special train upon the small line two kilometres, or rather more than one mile, in length, which leads, or rather used to lead, to the abandoned Heartsease mine, once one of the largest coal mines in England. You will ask how it is that no one saw the train upon this unused line. I answer that along its entire length it runs through a deep cutting, and that, unless someone had been on the edge of that cutting, he could not have seen it. There WAS someone on the edge of that cutting. I was there. And now I will tell you what I saw.

"My assistant had remained at the points in order that he might superintend the switching off of the train. He had four armed men with him, so that if the train ran off the line — we thought it probable, because the points were very rusty — we might still have resources to fall back upon. Having once seen it safely on the side line, he handed over the responsibility to me. I was waiting at a point which overlooks the mouth of the mine, and I was also armed, as were my two companions. Come what might, you see, I was always ready.

"The moment that the train was fairly on the side line, Smith, the stoker, slowed-down the engine, and then, having turned it on to the fullest speed again, he and McPherson, with my English lieutenant, sprang off before it was too late. It may be that it was this slowing-down which first attracted the attention of the travellers, but the train was running at full speed again before their heads appeared at the open window. It makes me smile to think how bewildered they must have been. Picture to yourself your own feelings if, on looking out of your luxurious carriage, you suddenly perceived that the lines upon which you ran were rusted and corroded, red and yellow with disuse and decay! What a catch must have come in their breath as in a second it flashed upon them that it was not Manchester but Death which was waiting for them at the end of that sinister line. But the train was running with frantic speed, rolling and rocking over the rotten line, while the wheels made a frightful screaming sound upon the rusted surface. I was close to them, and could see their faces. Caratal was praying, I think — there was something like a rosary dangling out of his hand. The other roared like a bull who smells the blood of the slaughter-house. He saw us standing on the bank, and he beckoned to us like a madman. Then he tore at his wrist and threw his dispatch-box out of the window in our direction. Of course, his meaning was obvious. Here was the evidence, and they would promise to be silent if their lives were spared. It would have been very agreeable if we could have done so, but business is business. Besides, the train was now as much beyond our controls as theirs.

“He ceased howling when the train rattled round the curve and they saw the black mouth of the mine yawning before them. We had removed the boards which had covered it, and we had cleared the square entrance. The rails had formerly run very close to the shaft for the convenience of loading the coal, and we had only to add two or three lengths of rail in order to lead to the very brink of the shaft. In fact, as the lengths would not quite fit, our line projected about three feet over the edge. We saw the two heads at the window: Caratal below, Gomez above; but they had both been struck silent by what they saw. And yet they could not withdraw their heads. The sight seemed to have paralysed them.

“I had wondered how the train running at a great speed would take the pit into which I had guided it, and I was much interested in watching it. One of my colleagues thought that it would actually jump it, and indeed it was not very far from doing so. Fortunately, however, it fell short, and the buffers of the engine struck the other lip of the shaft with a tremendous crash. The funnel flew off into the air. The tender, carriages, and van were all smashed up into one jumble, which, with the remains of the engine, choked for a minute or so the mouth of the pit. Then something gave way in the middle, and the whole mass of green iron, smoking coals, brass fittings, wheels, wood-work, and cushions all crumbled together and crashed down into the mine. We heard the rattle, rattle, rattle, as the debris struck against the walls, and then, quite a long time afterwards, there came a deep roar as the remains of the train struck the bottom. The boiler may have burst, for a sharp crash came after the roar, and then a dense cloud of steam and smoke swirled up out of the black depths, falling in a spray as thick as rain all round us. Then the vapour shredded off into thin wisps, which floated away in the summer sunshine, and all was quiet again in the Heartsease mine.

“And now, having carried out our plans so successfully, it only remained to leave no trace behind us. Our little band of workers at the other end had already ripped up the rails and disconnected the side line, replacing everything as it had been before. We were equally busy at the mine. The funnel and other fragments were thrown in, the shaft was planked over as it used to be, and the lines which led to it were torn up and taken away. Then, without flurry, but without delay, we all made our way out of the country, most of us to Paris, my English colleague to Manchester, and McPherson to Southampton, whence he emigrated to America. Let the English papers of that date tell how throughly we had done our work, and how completely we had thrown the cleverest of their detectives off our track.

"You will remember that Gomez threw his bag of papers out of the window, and I need not say that I secured that bag and brought them to my employers. It may interest my employers now, however, to learn that out of that bag I took one or two little papers as a souvenir of the occasion. I have no wish to publish these papers; but, still, it is every man for himself in this world, and what else can I do if my friends will not come to my aid when I want them? Messieurs, you may believe that Herbert de Lernac is quite as formidable when he is against you as when he is with you, and that he is not a man to go to the guillotine until he has seen that every one of you is en route for New Caledonia. For your own sake, if not for mine, make haste, Monsieur de —— , and General —— , and Baron —— (you can fill up the blanks for yourselves as you read this). I promise you that in the next edition there will be no blanks to fill.

"P.S. — As I look over my statement there is only one omission which I can see. It concerns the unfortunate man McPherson, who was foolish enough to write to his wife and to make an appointment with her in New York. It can be imagined that when interests like ours were at stake, we could not leave them to the chance of whether a man in that class of life would or would not give away his secrets to a woman. Having once broken his oath by writing to his wife, we could not trust him any more. We took steps therefore to insure that he should not see his wife. I have sometimes thought that it would be a kindness to write to her and to assure her that there is no impediment to her marrying again."

The Beetle-Hunter

A curious experience? said the Doctor. Yes, my friends, I have had one very curious experience. I never expect to have another, for it is against all doctrines of chances that two such events would befall any one man in a single lifetime. You may believe me or not, but the thing happened exactly as I tell it.

I had just become a medical man, but I had not started in practice, and I lived in rooms in Gower Street. The street has been renumbered since then, but it was in the only house which has a bow-window, upon the left-hand side as you go down from the Metropolitan Station. A widow named Murchison kept the house at that time, and she had three medical students and one engineer as lodgers. I occupied the top room, which was the cheapest, but cheap as it was it was more than I could afford. My small resources were dwindling away, and every week it became more necessary that I should find something to do. Yet I was very unwilling to go into general practice, for my tastes were all in the direction of science, and especially of zoology, towards which I had always a strong leaning. I had almost given the fight up and resigned myself to being a medical drudge for life, when the turning-point of my struggles came in a very extraordinary way.

One morning I had picked up the Standard and was glancing over its contents. There was a complete absence of news, and I was about to toss the paper down again, when my eyes were caught by an advertisement at the head of the personal column. It was worded in this way:

“Wanted for one or more days the services of a medical man. It is essential that he should be a man of strong physique, of steady nerves, and of a resolute nature. Must be an entomologist — coleopterist preferred. Apply, in person, at 77B, Brook Street. Application must be made before twelve o’clock today.”

Now, I have already said that I was devoted to zoology. Of all branches of zoology, the study of insects was the most attractive to me, and of all insects beetles were the species with which I was most familiar. Butterfly collectors are numerous, but beetles are far more varied, and more accessible in these islands than are butterflies. It was this fact which had attracted my attention to them, and I had myself made a collection which numbered some hundred varieties. As to the other requisites of the advertisement, I knew that my nerves could be depended upon, and I had won the weight-throwing competition at the inter-hospital sports. Clearly, I was the very man for the vacancy. Within five minutes of my having read the advertisement I was in a cab and on my was to Brook Street.

As I drove, I kept turning the matter over in my head and trying to make a guess as to what sort of employment it could be which needed such curious qualifications. A strong physique, a resolute nature, a medical training, and a knowledge of beetles — what connection could there be between these various requisites? And then there was the disheartening fact that the situation was not a permanent one, but terminable from day to day, according to the terms of the advertisement. The more I pondered over it the more unintelligible did it become; but at the end of my meditations I always came back to the ground fact that, come what might, I had nothing to lose, that I was completely at the end of my resources, and that I was ready for any adventure, however desperate, which would put a few honest sovereigns into my pocket. The man fears to fail who has to pay for his failure, but there was no penalty which Fortune could exact from me. I was like the gambler with empty pockets, who is still allowed to try his luck with the others.

No. 77B, Brook Street, was one of those dingy and yet imposing houses, dun-coloured and flat-faced, with the intensely respectable and solid air which marks the Georgian builder. As I alighted from the cab, a young man came out of the door and walked swiftly down the street. In passing me, I noticed that he cast an inquisitive and somewhat malevolent glance at me, and I took the incident as a good omen, for his appearance was that of a rejected candidate, and if he resented my application it meant that the vacancy was not yet filled up. Full of hope, I ascended the broad steps and rapped with the heavy knocker.

A footman in powder and livery opened the door. Clearly I was in touch with the people of wealth and fashion.

“Yes, sir?” said the footman.

“I came in answer to — —”

“Quite so, sir,” said the footman. “Lord Linchmere will see you at once in the library.”

Lord Linchmere! I had vaguely heard the name, but could not for the instant recall anything about him. Following the footman, I was shown into a large, book-lined room in which there was seated behind a writing-desk a small man with a pleasant, clean-shaven, mobile face, and long hair shot with grey, brushed back from his forehead. He looked me up and down with a very shrewd, penetrating glance, holding the card which the footman had given him in his right hand. Then he smiled pleasantly, and I felt that externally at any rate I possessed the qualifications which he desired.

“You have come in answer to my advertisement, Dr. Hamilton?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you fulfil the conditions which are there laid down?”

“I believe that I do.”

“You are a powerful man, or so I should judge from your appearance.

“I think that I am fairly strong.”

“And resolute?”

“I believe so.”

“Have you ever known what it was to be exposed to imminent danger?”

“No, I don’t know that I ever have.”

“But you think you would be prompt and cool at such a time?”

“I hope so.”

“Well, I believe that you would. I have the more confidence in you because you do not pretend to be certain as to what you would do in a position that was new to you. My impression is that, so far as personal qualities go, you are the very man of whom I am in search. That being settled, we may pass on to the next point.”

“Which is?”

“To talk to me about beetles.”

I looked across to see if he was joking, but, on the contrary, he was leaning eagerly forward across his desk, and there was an expression of something like anxiety in his eyes.

“I am afraid that you do not know about beetles,” he cried.

“On the contrary, sir, it is the one scientific subject about which I feel that I really do know something.”

“I am overjoyed to hear it. Please talk to me about beetles.”

I talked. I do not profess to have said anything original upon the subject, but I gave a short sketch of the characteristics of the beetle, and ran over the more common species, with some allusions to the specimens in my own little collection and to the article upon “Burying Beetles” which I had contributed to the Journal of Entomological Science.

“What! not a collector?” cried Lord Linchmere. “You don’t mean that you are yourself a collector?” His eyes danced with pleasure at the thought.

“You are certainly the very man in London for my purpose. I thought that among five millions of people there must be such a man, but the difficulty is to lay one’s hands upon him. I have been extraordinarily fortunate in finding you.”

He rang a gong upon the table, and the footman entered.

“Ask Lady Rossiter to have the goodness to step this way,” said his lordship, and a few moments later the lady was ushered into the room. She was a small, middle-aged woman, very like Lord Linchmere in appearance, with the same quick, alert features and grey-black hair. The expression of anxiety, however, which I had observed upon his face was very much more marked upon hers. Some great grief seemed to have cast its shadow over her features. As Lord Linchmere presented me she turned her face full upon me, and I was shocked to observe a half-healed scar extending for two inches over her right eyebrow. It was partly concealed by plaster, but none the less I could see that it had been a serious wound and not long inflicted.

“Dr. Hamilton is the very man for our purpose, Evelyn,” said Lord Linchmere. “He is actually a collector of beetles, and he has written articles upon the subject.”

“Really!” said Lady Rossiter. “Then you must have heard of my husband. Everyone who knows anything about beetles must have heard of Sir Thomas Rossiter.”

For the first time a thin little ray of light began to break into the obscure business. Here, at last, was a connection between these people and beetles. Sir Thomas Rossiter — he was the greatest authority upon the subject in the world. He had made it his lifelong study, and had written a most exhaustive work upon it. I hastened to assure her that I had read and appreciated it.

“Have you met my husband?” she asked.

“No, I have not.”

“But you shall,” said Lord Linchmere, with decision.

The lady was standing beside the desk, and she put her hand upon his shoulder. It was obvious to me as I saw their faces together that they were brother and sister.

“Are you really prepared for this, Charles? It is noble of you, but you fill me with fears.” Her voice quavered with apprehension, and he appeared to me to be equally moved, though he was making strong efforts to conceal his agitation.

“Yes, yes, dear; it is all settled, it is all decided; in fact, there is no other possible way, that I can see.”

“There is one obvious way.”

"No, no, Evelyn, I shall never abandon you — never. It will come right — depend upon it; it will come right, and surely it looks like the interference of Providence that so perfect an instrument should be put into our hands."

My position was embarrassing, for I felt that for the instant they had forgotten my presence. But Lord Linchmere came back suddenly to me and to my engagement.

"The business for which I want you, Dr. Hamilton, is that you should put yourself absolutely at my disposal. I wish you to come for a short journey with me, to remain always at my side, and to promise to do without question whatever I may ask you, however unreasonable it may appear to you to be."

"That is a good deal to ask," said I.

"Unfortunately I cannot put it more plainly, for I do not myself know what turn matters may take. You may be sure, however, that you will not be asked to do anything which your conscience does not approve; and I promise you that, when all is over, you will be proud to have been concerned in so good a work."

"If it ends happily," said the lady.

"Exactly; if it ends happily," his lordship repeated.

"And terms?" I asked.

"Twenty pounds a day."

I was amazed at the sum, and must have showed my surprise upon my features.

"It is a rare combination of qualities, as must have struck you when you first read the advertisement," said Lord Linchmere; "such varied gifts may well command a high return, and I do not conceal from you that your duties might be arduous or even dangerous. Besides, it is possible that one or two days may bring the matter to an end."

"Please God!" sighed his sister.

"So now, Dr. Hamilton, may I rely upon your aid?"

"Most undoubtedly," said I. "You have only to tell me what my duties are."

"Your first duty will be to return to your home. You will pack up whatever you may need for a short visit to the country. We start together from Paddington Station at 3:40 this afternoon."

"Do we go far?"

“As far as Pangbourne. Meet me at the bookstall at 3:30. I shall have the tickets. Goodbye, Dr. Hamilton! And, by the way, there are two things which I should be very glad if you would bring with you, in case you have them. One is your case for collecting beetles, and the other is a stick, and the thicker and heavier the better.”

You may imagine that I had plenty to think of from the time that I left Brook Street until I set out to meet Lord Linchmere at Paddington. The whole fantastic business kept arranging and rearranging itself in kaleidoscopic forms inside my brain, until I had thought out a dozen explanations, each of them more grotesquely improbable than the last. And yet I felt that the truth must be something grotesquely improbable also. At last I gave up all attempts at finding a solution, and contented myself with exactly carrying out the instructions which I had received. With a hand valise, specimen-case, and a loaded cane, I was waiting at the Paddington bookstall when Lord Linchmere arrived. He was an even smaller man than I had thought — frail and peaky, with a manner which was more nervous than it had been in the morning. He wore a long, thick travelling ulster, and I observed that he carried a heavy blackthorn cudgel in his hand.

“I have the tickets,” said he, leading the way up the platform.

“This is our train. I have engaged a carriage, for I am particularly anxious to impress one or two things upon you while we travel down.”

And yet all that he had to impress upon me might have been said in a sentence, for it was that I was to remember that I was there as a protection to himself, and that I was not on any consideration to leave him for an instant. This he repeated again and again as our journey drew to a close, with an insistence which showed that his nerves were thoroughly shaken.

“Yes,” he said at last, in answer to my looks rather than to my words, “I AM nervous, Dr. Hamilton. I have always been a timid man, and my timidity depends upon my frail physical health. But my soul is firm, and I can bring myself up to face a danger which a less-nervous man might shrink from. What I am doing now is done from no compulsion, but entirely from a sense of duty, and yet it is, beyond doubt, a desperate risk. If things should go wrong, I will have some claims to the title of martyr.”

This eternal reading of riddles was too much for me. I felt that I must put a term to it.

“I think it would very much better, sir, if you were to trust me entirely,” said I. “It is impossible for me to act effectively, when I do not know what are the objects which we have in view, or even where we are going.”

“Oh, as to where we are going, there need be no mystery about that,” said he; “we are going to Delamere Court, the residence of Sir Thomas Rossiter, with whose work you are so conversant. As to the exact object of our visit, I do not know that at this stage of the proceedings anything would be gained, Dr. Hamilton, by taking you into my complete confidence. I may tell you that we are acting — I say ‘we,’ because my sister, Lady Rossiter, takes the same view as myself — with the one object of preventing anything in the nature of a family scandal. That being so, you can understand that I am loath to give any explanations which are not absolutely necessary. It would be a different matter, Dr. Hamilton, if I were asking your advice. As matters stand, it is only your active help which I need, and I will indicate to you from time to time how you can best give it.”

There was nothing more to be said, and a poor man can put up with a good deal for twenty pounds a day, but I felt none the less that Lord Linchmere was acting rather scurvily towards me. He wished to convert me into a passive tool, like the blackthorn in his hand. With his sensitive disposition I could imagine, however, that scandal would be abhorrent to him, and I realised that he would not take me into his confidence until no other course was open to him. I must trust to my own eyes and ears to solve the mystery, but I had every confidence that I should not trust to them in vain.

Delamere Court lies a good five miles from Pangbourne Station, and we drove for that distance in an open fly. Lord Linchmere sat in deep thought during the time, and he never opened his mouth until we were close to our destination. When he did speak it was to give me a piece of information which surprised me.

“Perhaps you are not aware,” said he, “that I am a medical man like yourself?”

“No, sir, I did not know it.”

“Yes, I qualified in my younger days, when there were several lives between me and the peerage. I have not had occasion to practise, but I have found it a useful education, all the same. I never regretted the years which I devoted to medical study. These are the gates of Delamere Court.”

We had come to two high pillars crowned with heraldic monsters which flanked the opening of a winding avenue. Over the laurel bushes and rhododendrons, I could see a long, many-gabled mansion, girdled with ivy, and toned to the warm, cheery, mellow glow of old brick-work. My eyes were still fixed in admiration upon this delightful house when my companion plucked nervously at my sleeve.

“Here’s Sir Thomas,” he whispered. “Please talk beetle all you can.”

A tall, thin figure, curiously angular and bony, had emerged through a gap in the hedge of laurels. In his hand he held a spud, and he wore gauntleted gardener’s gloves. A broad-brimmed, grey hat cast his face into shadow, but it struck me as exceedingly austere, with an ill-nourished beard and harsh, irregular features. The fly pulled up and Lord Linchmere sprang out.

“My dear Thomas, how are you?” said he, heartily.

But the heartiness was by no means reciprocal. The owner of the grounds glared at me over his brother-in-law’s shoulder, and I caught broken scraps of sentences—”well-known wishes ... hatred of strangers ... unjustifiable intrusion ... perfectly inexcusable.” Then there was a muttered explanation, and the two of them came over together to the side of the fly.

“Let me present you to Sir Thomas Rossiter, Dr. Hamilton,” said Lord Linchmere. “You will find that you have a strong community of tastes.”

I bowed. Sir Thomas stood very stiffly, looking at me severely from under the broad brim of his hat.

“Lord Linchmere tells me that you know something about beetles,” said he. “What do you know about beetles?”

“I know what I have learned from your work upon the coleoptera, Sir Thomas,” I answered.

“Give me the names of the better-known species of the British scarabaei,” said he.

I had not expected an examination, but fortunately I was ready for one. My answers seemed to please him, for his stern features relaxed.

“You appear to have read my book with some profit, sir,” said he. “It is a rare thing for me to meet anyone who takes an intelligent interest in such matters. People can find time for such trivialities as sport or society, and yet the beetles are overlooked. I can assure you that the greater part of the idiots in this part of the country are unaware that I have ever written a book at all — I, the first man who ever described the true function of the elytra. I am glad to see you, sir, and I have no doubt that I can show you some specimens which will interest you.” He stepped into the fly and drove up with us to the house, expounding to me as we went some recent researches which he had made into the anatomy of the lady-bird.

I have said that Sir Thomas Rossiter wore a large hat drawn down over his brows. As he entered the hall he uncovered himself, and I was at once aware of a singular characteristic which the hat had concealed. His forehead, which was naturally high, and higher still on account of receding hair, was in a continual state of movement. Some nervous weakness kept the muscles in a constant spasm, which sometimes produced a mere twitching and sometimes a curious rotary movement unlike anything which I had ever seen before. It was strikingly visible as he turned towards us after entering the study, and seemed the more singular from the contrast with the hard, steady, grey eyes which looked out from underneath those palpitating brows.

“I am sorry,” said he, “that Lady Rossiter is not here to help me to welcome you. By the way, Charles, did Evelyn say anything about the date of her return?”

“She wished to stay in town for a few more days,” said Lord Linchmere. “You know how ladies’ social duties accumulate if they have been for some time in the country. My sister has many old friends in London at present.”

“Well, she is her own mistress, and I should not wish to alter her plans, but I shall be glad when I see her again. It is very lonely here without her company.”

“I was afraid that you might find it so, and that was partly why I ran down. My young friend, Dr. Hamilton, is so much interested in the subject which you have made your own, that I thought you would not mind his accompanying me.”

“I lead a retired life, Dr. Hamilton, and my aversion to strangers grows upon me,” said our host. “I have sometimes thought that my nerves are not so good as they were. My travels in search of beetles in my younger days took me into many malarious and unhealthy places. But a brother coleopterist like yourself is always a welcome guest, and I shall be delighted if you will look over my collection, which I think that I may without exaggeration describe as the best in Europe.”

And so no doubt it was. He had a huge, oaken cabinet arranged in shallow drawers, and here, neatly ticketed and classified, were beetles from every corner of the earth, black, brown, blue, green, and mottled. Every now and then as he swept his hand over the lines and lines of impaled insects he would catch up some rare specimen, and, handling it with as much delicacy and reverence as if it were a precious relic, he would hold forth upon its peculiarities and the circumstances under which it came into his possession. It was evidently an unusual thing for him to meet with a sympathetic listener, and he talked and talked until the spring evening had deepened into night, and the gong announced that it was time to dress for dinner. All the time Lord Linchmere said nothing, but he stood at his brother-in-law's elbow, and I caught him continually shooting curious little, questioning glances into his face. And his own features expressed some strong emotion, apprehension, sympathy, expectation: I seemed to read them all. I was sure that Lord Linchmere was fearing something and awaiting something, but what that something might be I could not imagine.

The evening passed quietly but pleasantly, and I should have been entirely at my ease if it had not been for that continual sense of tension upon the part of Lord Linchmere. As to our host, I found that he improved upon acquaintance. He spoke constantly with affection of his absent wife, and also of his little son, who had recently been sent to school. The house, he said, was not the same without them. If it were not for his scientific studies, he did not know how he could get through the days. After dinner we smoked for some time in the billiard-room, and finally went early to bed.

And then it was that, for the first time, the suspicion that Lord Linchmere was a lunatic crossed my mind. He followed me into my bedroom, when our host had retired.

"Doctor," said he, speaking in a low, hurried voice, "you must come with me. You must spend the night in my bedroom."

"What do you mean?"

"I prefer not to explain. But this is part of your duties. My room is close by, and you can return to your own before the servant calls you in the morning."

"But why?" I asked.

"Because I am nervous of being alone," said he. "That's the reason, since you must have a reason."

It seemed rank lunacy, but the argument of those twenty pounds would overcome many objections. I followed him to his room.

“Well,” said I, “there’s only room for one in that bed.”

“Only one shall occupy it,” said he.

“And the other?”

“Must remain on watch.”

“Why?” said I. “One would think you expected to be attacked.”

“Perhaps I do.”

“In that case, why not lock your door?”

“Perhaps I WANT to be attacked.”

It looked more and more like lunacy. However, there was nothing for it but to submit. I shrugged my shoulders and sat down in the arm-chair beside the empty fireplace.

“I am to remain on watch, then?” said I, ruefully.

“We will divide the night. If you will watch until two, I will watch the remainder.”

“Very good.”

“Call me at two o’clock, then.”

“I will do so.”

“Keep your ears open, and if you hear any sounds wake me instantly — instantly, you hear?”

“You can rely upon it.” I tried to look as solemn as he did.

“And for God’s sake don’t go to sleep,” said he, and so, taking off only his coat, he threw the coverlet over him and settled down for the night.

It was a melancholy vigil, and made more so by my own sense of its folly. Supposing that by any chance Lord Linchmere had cause to suspect that he was subject to danger in the house of Sir Thomas Rossiter, why on earth could he not lock his door and so protect himself? His own answer that he might wish to be attacked was absurd. Why should he possibly wish to be attacked? And who would wish to attack him? Clearly, Lord Linchmere was suffering from some singular delusion, and the result was that on an imbecile pretext I was to be deprived of my night’s rest. Still, however absurd, I was determined to carry out his injunctions to the letter as long as I was in his employment. I sat, therefore, beside the empty fireplace, and listened to a sonorous chiming clock somewhere down the passage which gurgled and struck every quarter of an hour. It was an endless vigil. Save for that single clock, an absolute silence reigned throughout the great house. A small lamp stood on the table at my elbow, throwing a circle of light round my chair, but leaving the corners of the room draped in shadow. On the bed Lord Linchmere was breathing peacefully. I envied him his quiet sleep, and again and again my own eyelids drooped, but every time my sense of duty came to my help, and I sat up, rubbing my eyes and pinching myself with a determination to see my irrational watch to an end.

And I did so. From down the passage came the chimes of two o'clock, and I laid my hand upon the shoulder of the sleeper. Instantly he was sitting up, with an expression of the keenest interest upon his face.

"You have heard something?"

"No, sir. It is two o'clock."

"Very good. I will watch. You can go to sleep."

I lay down under the coverlet as he had done and was soon unconscious. My last recollection was of that circle of lamplight, and of the small, hunched-up figure and strained, anxious face of Lord Linchmere in the centre of it.

How long I slept I do not know; but I was suddenly aroused by a sharp tug at my sleeve. The room was in darkness, but a hot smell of oil told me that the lamp had only that instant been extinguished.

"Quick! Quick!" said Lord Linchmere's voice in my ear.

I sprang out of bed, he still dragging at my arm.

"Over here!" he whispered, and pulled me into a corner of the room. "Hush! Listen!"

In the silence of the night I could distinctly hear that someone was coming down the corridor. It was a stealthy step, faint and intermittent, as of a man who paused cautiously after every stride. Sometimes for half a minute there was no sound, and then came the shuffle and creak which told of a fresh advance. My companion was trembling with excitement. His hand, which still held my sleeve, twitched like a branch in the wind.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"It's he!"

"Sir Thomas?"

"Yes."

"What does he want?"

"Hush! Do nothing until I tell you."

I was conscious now that someone was trying the door. There was the faintest little rattle from the handle, and then I dimly saw a thin slit of subdued light. There was a lamp burning somewhere far down the passage, and it just sufficed to make the outside visible from the darkness of our room. The greyish slit grew broader and broader, very gradually, very gently, and then outlined against it I saw the dark figure of a man. He was squat and crouching, with the silhouette of a bulky and misshapen dwarf. Slowly the door swung open with this ominous shape framed in the centre of it. And then, in an instant, the crouching figure shot up, there was a tiger spring across the room and thud, thud, thud, came three tremendous blows from some heavy object upon the bed.

I was so paralysed with amazement that I stood motionless and staring until I was aroused by a yell for help from my companion. The open door shed enough light for me to see the outline of things, and there was little Lord Linchmere with his arms round the neck of his brother-in-law, holding bravely on to him like a game bull-terrier with its teeth into a gaunt deerhound. The tall, bony man dashed himself about, writhing round and round to get a grip upon his assailant; but the other, clutching on from behind, still kept his hold, though his shrill, frightened cries showed how unequal he felt the contest to be. I sprang to the rescue, and the two of us managed to throw Sir Thomas to the ground, though he made his teeth meet in my shoulder. With all my youth and weight and strength, it was a desperate struggle before we could master his frenzied struggles; but at last we secured his arms with the waist-cord of the dressing-gown which he was wearing. I was holding his legs while Lord Linchmere was endeavouring to relight the lamp, when there came the pattering of many feet in the passage, and the butler and two footmen, who had been alarmed by the cries, rushed into the room. With their aid we had no further difficulty in securing our prisoner, who lay foaming and glaring upon the ground. One glance at his face was enough to prove that he was a dangerous maniac, while the short, heavy hammer which lay beside the bed showed how murderous had been his intentions.

“Do not use any violence!” said Lord Linchmere, as we raised the struggling man to his feet. “He will have a period of stupor after this excitement. I believe that it is coming on already.” As he spoke the convulsions became less violent, and the madman’s head fell forward upon his breast, as if he were overcome by sleep. We led him down the passage and stretched him upon his own bed, where he lay unconscious, breathing heavily.

“Two of you will watch him,” said Lord Linchmere. “And now, Dr. Hamilton, if you will return with me to my room, I will give you the explanation which my horror of scandal has perhaps caused me to delay too long. Come what may, you will never have cause to regret your share in this night’s work.

“The case may be made clear in a very few words,” he continued, when we were alone. “My poor brother-in-law is one of the best fellows upon earth, a loving husband and an estimable father, but he comes from a stock which is deeply tainted with insanity. He has more than once had homicidal outbreaks, which are the more painful because his inclination is always to attack the very person to whom he is most attached. His son was sent away to school to avoid this danger, and then came an attempt upon my sister, his wife, from which she escaped with injuries that you may have observed when you met her in London. You understand that he knows nothing of the matter when he is in his sound senses, and would ridicule the suggestion that he could under any circumstances injure those whom he loves so dearly. It is often, as you know, a characteristic of such maladies that it is absolutely impossible to convince the man who suffers from them of their existence.

“Our great object was, of course, to get him under restraint before he could stain his hands with blood, but the matter was full of difficulty. He is a recluse in his habits, and would not see any medical man. Besides, it was necessary for our purpose that the medical man should convince himself of his insanity; and he is sane as you or I, save on these very rare occasions. But, fortunately, before he has these attacks he always shows certain premonitory symptoms, which are providential danger-signals, warning us to be upon our guard. The chief of these is that nervous contortion of the forehead which you must have observed. This is a phenomenon which always appears from three to four days before his attacks of frenzy. The moment it showed itself his wife came into town on some pretext, and took refuge in my house in Brook Street.

“It remained for me to convince a medical man of Sir Thomas’s insanity, without which it was impossible to put him where he could do no harm. The first problem was how to get a medical man into his house. I bethought me of his interest in beetles, and his love for anyone who shared his tastes. I advertised, therefore, and was fortunate enough to find in you the very man I wanted. A stout companion was necessary, for I knew that the lunacy could only be proved by a murderous assault, and I had every reason to believe that that assault would be made upon myself, since he had the warmest regard for me in his moments of sanity. I think your intelligence will supply all the rest. I did not know that the attack would come by night, but I thought it very probable, for the crises of such cases usually do occur in the early hours of the morning. I am a very nervous man myself, but I saw no other way in which I could remove this terrible danger from my sister's life. I need not ask you whether you are willing to sign the lunacy papers."

"Undoubtedly. But TWO signatures are necessary."

"You forget that I am myself a holder of a medical degree. I have the papers on a side-table here, so if you will be good enough to sign them now, we can have the patient removed in the morning."

So that was my visit to Sir Thomas Rossiter, the famous beetle-hunter, and that was also my first step upon the ladder of success, for Lady Rossiter and Lord Linchmere have proved to be staunch friends, and they have never forgotten my association with them in the time of their need. Sir Thomas is out and said to be cured, but I still think that if I spent another night at Delamere Court, I should be inclined to lock my door upon the inside.

The Man with the Watches

There are many who will still bear in mind the singular circumstances which, under the heading of the Rugby Mystery, filled many columns of the daily Press in the spring of the year 1892. Coming as it did at a period of exceptional dullness, it attracted perhaps rather more attention than it deserved, but it offered to the public that mixture of the whimsical and the tragic which is most stimulating to the popular imagination. Interest drooped, however, when, after weeks of fruitless investigation, it was found that no final explanation of the facts was forthcoming, and the tragedy seemed from that time to the present to have finally taken its place in the dark catalogue of inexplicable and unexpiated crimes. A recent communication (the authenticity of which appears to be above question) has, however, thrown some new and clear light upon the matter. Before laying it before the public it would be as well, perhaps, that I should refresh their memories as to the singular facts upon which this commentary is founded. These facts were briefly as follows:

At five o’clock on the evening of the 18th of March in the year already mentioned a train left Euston Station for Manchester. It was a rainy, squally day, which grew wilder as it progressed, so it was by no means the weather in which anyone would travel who was not driven to do so by necessity. The train, however, is a favourite one among Manchester business men who are returning from town, for it does the journey in four hours and twenty minutes, with only three stoppages upon the way. In spite of the inclement evening it was, therefore, fairly well filled upon the occasion of which I speak. The guard of the train was a tried servant of the company — a man who had worked for twenty-two years without a blemish or complaint. His name was John Palmer.

The station clock was upon the stroke of five, and the guard was about to give the customary signal to the engine-driver when he observed two belated passengers hurrying down the platform. The one was an exceptionally tall man, dressed in a long black overcoat with astrakhan collar and cuffs. I have already said that the evening was an inclement one, and the tall traveller had the high, warm collar turned up to protect his throat against the bitter March wind. He appeared, as far as the guard could judge by so hurried an inspection, to be a man between fifty and sixty years of age, who had retained a good deal of the vigour and activity of his youth. In one hand he carried a brown leather Gladstone bag. His companion was a lady, tall and erect, walking with a vigorous step which outpaced the gentleman beside her. She wore a long, fawn-coloured dust-cloak, a black, close-fitting toque, and a dark veil which concealed the greater part of her face. The two might very well have passed as father and daughter. They walked swiftly down the line of carriages, glancing in at the windows, until the guard, John Palmer, overtook them.

“Now then, sir, look sharp, the train is going,” said he.

“First-class,” the man answered.

The guard turned the handle of the nearest door. In the carriage which he had opened, there sat a small man with a cigar in his mouth. His appearance seems to have impressed itself upon the guard’s memory, for he was prepared, afterwards, to describe or to identify him. He was a man of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, dressed in some grey material, sharp-nosed, alert, with a ruddy, weather-beaten face, and a small, closely cropped, black beard. He glanced up as the door was opened. The tall man paused with his foot upon the step.

“This is a smoking compartment. The lady dislikes smoke,” said he, looking round at the guard.

“All right! Here you are, sir!” said John Palmer. He slammed the door of the smoking carriage, opened that of the next one, which was empty, and thrust the two travellers in. At the same moment he sounded his whistle and the wheels of the train began to move. The man with the cigar was at the window of his carriage, and said something to the guard as he rolled past him, but the words were lost in the bustle of the departure. Palmer stepped into the guard’s van, as it came up to him, and thought no more of the incident.

Twelve minutes after its departure the train reached Willesden Junction, where it stopped for a very short interval. An examination of the tickets has made it certain that no one either joined or left it at this time, and no passenger was seen to alight upon the platform. At 5:14 the journey to Manchester was resumed, and Rugby was reached at 6:50, the express being five minutes late.

At Rugby the attention of the station officials was drawn to the fact that the door of one of the first-class carriages was open. An examination of that compartment, and of its neighbour, disclosed a remarkable state of affairs.

The smoking carriage in which the short, red-faced man with the black beard had been seen was now empty. Save for a half-smoked cigar, there was no trace whatever of its recent occupant. The door of this carriage was fastened. In the next compartment, to which attention had been originally drawn, there was no sign either of the gentleman with the astrakhan collar or of the young lady who accompanied him. All three passengers had disappeared. On the other hand, there was found upon the floor of this carriage — the one in which the tall traveller and the lady had been — a young man fashionably dressed and of elegant appearance. He lay with his knees drawn up, and his head resting against the farther door, an elbow upon either seat. A bullet had penetrated his heart and his death must have been instantaneous. No one had seen such a man enter the train, and no railway ticket was found in his pocket, neither were there any markings upon his linen, nor papers nor personal property which might help to identify him. Who he was, whence he had come, and how he had met his end were each as great a mystery as what had occurred to the three people who had started an hour and a half before from Willesden in those two compartments.

I have said that there was no personal property which might help to identify him, but it is true that there was one peculiarity about this unknown young man which was much commented upon at the time. In his pockets were found no fewer than six valuable gold watches, three in the various pockets of his waist-coat, one in his ticket-pocket, one in his breast-pocket, and one small one set in a leather strap and fastened round his left wrist. The obvious explanation that the man was a pickpocket, and that this was his plunder, was discounted by the fact that all six were of American make and of a type which is rare in England. Three of them bore the mark of the Rochester Watchmaking Company; one was by Mason, of Elmira; one was unmarked; and the small one, which was highly jewelled and ornamented, was from Tiffany, of New York. The other contents of his pocket consisted of an ivory knife with a corkscrew by Rodgers, of Sheffield; a small, circular mirror, one inch in diameter; a readmission slip to the Lyceum Theatre; a silver box full of vesta matches, and a brown leather cigar-case containing two cheroots — also two pounds fourteen shillings in money. It was clear, then, that whatever motives may have led to his death, robbery was not among them. As already mentioned, there were no markings upon the man's linen, which appeared to be new, and no tailor's name upon his coat. In appearance he was young, short, smooth-cheeked, and delicately featured. One of his front teeth was conspicuously stopped with gold.

On the discovery of the tragedy an examination was instantly made of the tickets of all passengers, and the number of the passengers themselves was counted. It was found that only three tickets were unaccounted for, corresponding to the three travellers who were missing. The express was then allowed to proceed, but a new guard was sent with it, and John Palmer was detained as a witness at Rugby. The carriage which included the two compartments in question was uncoupled and side-tracked. Then, on the arrival of Inspector Vane, of Scotland Yard, and of Mr. Henderson, a detective in the service of the railway company, an exhaustive inquiry was made into all the circumstances.

That crime had been committed was certain. The bullet, which appeared to have come from a small pistol or revolver, had been fired from some little distance, as there was no scorching of the clothes. No weapon was found in the compartment (which finally disposed of the theory of suicide), nor was there any sign of the brown leather bag which the guard had seen in the hand of the tall gentleman. A lady's parasol was found upon the rack, but no other trace was to be seen of the travellers in either of the sections. Apart from the crime, the question of how or why three passengers (one of them a lady) could get out of the train, and one other get in during the unbroken run between Willesden and Rugby, was one which excited the utmost curiosity among the general public, and gave rise to much speculation in the London Press.

John Palmer, the guard was able at the inquest to give some evidence which threw a little light upon the matter. There was a spot between Tring and Cheddington, according to his statement, where, on account of some repairs to the line, the train had for a few minutes slowed down to a pace not exceeding eight or ten miles an hour. At that place it might be possible for a man, or even for an exceptionally active woman, to have left the train without serious injury. It was true that a gang of platelayers was there, and that they had seen nothing, but it was their custom to stand in the middle between the metals, and the open carriage door was upon the far side, so that it was conceivable that someone might have alighted unseen, as the darkness would by that time be drawing in. A steep embankment would instantly screen anyone who sprang out from the observation of the navvies.

The guard also deposed that there was a good deal of movement upon the platform at Willesden Junction, and that though it was certain that no one had either joined or left the train there, it was still quite possible that some of the passengers might have changed unseen from one compartment to another. It was by no means uncommon for a gentleman to finish his cigar in a smoking carriage and then to change to a clearer atmosphere. Supposing that the man with the black beard had done so at Willesden (and the half-smoked cigar upon the floor seemed to favour the supposition), he would naturally go into the nearest section, which would bring him into the company of the two other actors in this drama. Thus the first stage of the affair might be surmised without any great breach of probability. But what the second stage had been, or how the final one had been arrived at, neither the guard nor the experienced detective officers could suggest.

A careful examination of the line between Willesden and Rugby resulted in one discovery which might or might not have a bearing upon the tragedy. Near Tring, at the very place where the train slowed down, there was found at the bottom of the embankment a small pocket Testament, very shabby and worn. It was printed by the Bible Society of London, and bore an inscription: “From John to Alice. Jan. 13th, 1856,” upon the fly-leaf.

Underneath was written: “James. July 4th, 1859,” and beneath that again: “Edward. Nov. 1st, 1869,” all the entries being in the same handwriting. This was the only clue, if it could be called a clue, which the police obtained, and the coroner’s verdict of “Murder by a person or persons unknown” was the unsatisfactory ending of a singular case. Advertisement, rewards, and inquiries proved equally fruitless, and nothing could be found which was solid enough to form the basis for a profitable investigation.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that no theories were formed to account for the facts. On the contrary, the Press, both in England and in America, teemed with suggestions and suppositions, most of which were obviously absurd. The fact that the watches were of American make, and some peculiarities in connection with the gold stopping of his front tooth, appeared to indicate that the deceased was a citizen of the United States, though his linen, clothes and boots were undoubtedly of British manufacture. It was surmised, by some, that he was concealed under the seat, and that, being discovered, he was for some reason, possibly because he had overheard their guilty secrets, put to death by his fellow-passengers. When coupled with generalities as to the ferocity and cunning of anarchical and other secret societies, this theory sounded as plausible as any.

The fact that he should be without a ticket would be consistent with the idea of concealment, and it was well known that women played a prominent part in the Nihilistic propaganda. On the other hand, it was clear, from the guard’s statement, that the man must have been hidden there BEFORE the others arrived, and how unlikely the coincidence that conspirators should stray exactly into the very compartment in which a spy was already concealed! Besides, this explanation ignored the man in the smoking carriage, and gave no reason at all for his simultaneous disappearance. The police had little difficulty in showing that such a theory would not cover the facts, but they were unprepared in the absence of evidence to advance any alternative explanation.

There was a letter in the Daily Gazette, over the signature of a well-known criminal investigator, which gave rise to considerable discussion at the time. He had formed a hypothesis which had at least ingenuity to recommend it, and I cannot do better than append it in his own words.

“Whatever may be the truth,” said he, “it must depend upon some bizarre and rare combination of events, so we need have no hesitation in postulating such events in our explanation. In the absence of data we must abandon the analytic or scientific method of investigation, and must approach it in the synthetic fashion. In a word, instead of taking known events and deducing from them what has occurred, we must build up a fanciful explanation if it will only be consistent with known events. We can then test this explanation by any fresh facts which may arise. If they all fit into their places, the probability is that we are upon the right track, and with each fresh fact this probability increases in a geometrical progression until the evidence becomes final and convincing.

“Now, there is one most remarkable and suggestive fact which has not met with the attention which it deserves. There is a local train running through Harrow and King’s Langley, which is timed in such a way that the express must have overtaken it at or about the period when it eased down its speed to eight miles an hour on account of the repairs of the line. The two trains would at that time be travelling in the same direction at a similar rate of speed and upon parallel lines. It is within every one’s experience how, under such circumstances, the occupant of each carriage can see very plainly the passengers in the other carriages opposite to him. The lamps of the express had been lit at Willesden, so that each compartment was brightly illuminated, and most visible to an observer from outside.

“Now, the sequence of events as I reconstruct them would be after this fashion. This young man with the abnormal number of watches was alone in the carriage of the slow train. His ticket, with his papers and gloves and other things, was, we will suppose, on the seat beside him. He was probably an American, and also probably a man of weak intellect. The excessive wearing of jewellery is an early symptom in some forms of mania.

“As he sat watching the carriages of the express which were (on account of the state of the line) going at the same pace as himself, he suddenly saw some people in it whom he knew. We will suppose for the sake of our theory that these people were a woman whom he loved and a man whom he hated — and who in return hated him. The young man was excitable and impulsive. He opened the door of his carriage, stepped from the footboard of the local train to the footboard of the express, opened the other door, and made his way into the presence of these two people. The feat (on the supposition that the trains were going at the same pace) is by no means so perilous as it might appear.

“Having now got our young man, without his ticket, into the carriage in which the elder man and the young woman are travelling, it is not difficult to imagine that a violent scene ensued. It is possible that the pair were also Americans, which is the more probable as the man carried a weapon — an unusual thing in England. If our supposition of incipient mania is correct, the young man is likely to have assaulted the other. As the upshot of the quarrel the elder man shot the intruder, and then made his escape from the carriage, taking the young lady with him. We will suppose that all this happened very rapidly, and that the train was still going at so slow a pace that it was not difficult for them to leave it. A woman might leave a train going at eight miles an hour. As a matter of fact, we know that this woman DID do so.

"And now we have to fit in the man in the smoking carriage. Presuming that we have, up to this point, reconstructed the tragedy correctly, we shall find nothing in this other man to cause us to reconsider our conclusions. According to my theory, this man saw the young fellow cross from one train to the other, saw him open the door, heard the pistol-shot, saw the two fugitives spring out on to the line, realised that murder had been done, and sprang out himself in pursuit. Why he has never been heard of since — whether he met his own death in the pursuit, or whether, as is more likely, he was made to realise that it was not a case for his interference — is a detail which we have at present no means of explaining. I acknowledge that there are some difficulties in the way. At first sight, it might seem improbable that at such a moment a murderer would burden himself in his flight with a brown leather bag. My answer is that he was well aware that if the bag were found his identity would be established. It was absolutely necessary for him to take it with him. My theory stands or falls upon one point, and I call upon the railway company to make strict inquiry as to whether a ticket was found unclaimed in the local train through Harrow and King's Langley upon the 18th of March. If such a ticket were found my case is proved. If not, my theory may still be the correct one, for it is conceivable either that he travelled without a ticket or that his ticket was lost."

To this elaborate and plausible hypothesis the answer of the police and of the company was, first, that no such ticket was found; secondly, that the slow train would never run parallel to the express; and, thirdly, that the local train had been stationary in King's Langley Station when the express, going at fifty miles an hour, had flashed past it. So perished the only satisfying explanation, and five years have elapsed without supplying a new one.

Now, at last, there comes a statement which covers all the facts, and which must be regarded as authentic. It took the shape of a letter dated from New York, and addressed to the same criminal investigator whose theory I have quoted. It is given here in extenso, with the exception of the two opening paragraphs, which are personal in their nature:

“You’ll excuse me if I’m not very free with names. There’s less reason now than there was five years ago when mother was still living. But for all that, I had rather cover up our tracks all I can. But I owe you an explanation, for if your idea of it was wrong, it was a mighty ingenious one all the same. I’ll have to go back a little so as you may understand all about it.

“My people came from Bucks, England, and emigrated to the States in the early fifties. They settled in Rochester, in the State of New York, where my father ran a large dry goods store. There were only two sons: myself, James, and my brother, Edward. I was ten years older than my brother, and after my father died I sort of took the place of a father to him, as an elder brother would. He was a bright, spirited boy, and just one of the most beautiful creatures that ever lived. But there was always a soft spot in him, and it was like mould in cheese, for it spread and spread, and nothing that you could do would stop it. Mother saw it just as clearly as I did, but she went on spoiling him all the same, for he had such a way with him that you could refuse him nothing. I did all I could to hold him in, and he hated me for my pains.

“At last he fairly got his head, and nothing that we could do would stop him. He got off into New York, and went rapidly from bad to worse. At first he was only fast, and then he was criminal; and then, at the end of a year or two, he was one of the most notorious young crooks in the city. He had formed a friendship with Sparrow MacCoy, who was at the head of his profession as a bunco-steerer, green goodsman and general rascal. They took to card-sharping, and frequented some of the best hotels in New York. My brother was an excellent actor (he might have made an honest name for himself if he had chosen), and he would take the parts of a young Englishman of title, of a simple lad from the West, or of a college undergraduate, whichever suited Sparrow MacCoy’s purpose. And then one day he dressed himself as a girl, and he carried it off so well, and made himself such a valuable decoy, that it was their favourite game afterwards. They had made it right with Tammany and with the police, so it seemed as if nothing could ever stop them, for those were in the days before the Lexow Commission, and if you only had a pull, you could do pretty nearly everything you wanted.

"And nothing would have stopped them if they had only stuck to cards and New York, but they must needs come up Rochester way, and forge a name upon a cheque. It was my brother that did it, though everyone knew that it was under the influence of Sparrow MacCoy. I bought up that cheque, and a pretty sum it cost me. Then I went to my brother, laid it before him on the table, and swore to him that I would prosecute if he did not clear out of the country. At first he simply laughed. I could not prosecute, he said, without breaking our mother's heart, and he knew that I would not do that. I made him understand, however, that our mother's heart was being broken in any case, and that I had set firm on the point that I would rather see him in Rochester gaol than in a New York hotel. So at last he gave in, and he made me a solemn promise that he would see Sparrow MacCoy no more, that he would go to Europe, and that he would turn his hand to any honest trade that I helped him to get. I took him down right away to an old family friend, Joe Willson, who is an exporter of American watches and clocks, and I got him to give Edward an agency in London, with a small salary and a 15 per cent commission on all business. His manner and appearance were so good that he won the old man over at once, and within a week he was sent off to London with a case full of samples.

"It seemed to me that this business of the cheque had really given my brother a fright, and that there was some chance of his settling down into an honest line of life. My mother had spoken with him, and what she said had touched him, for she had always been the best of mothers to him and he had been the great sorrow of her life. But I knew that this man Sparrow MacCoy had a great influence over Edward and my chance of keeping the lad straight lay in breaking the connection between them. I had a friend in the New York detective force, and through him I kept a watch upon MacCoy. When, within a fortnight of my brother's sailing, I heard that MacCoy had taken a berth in the Etruria, I was as certain as if he had told me that he was going over to England for the purpose of coaxing Edward back again into the ways that he had left. In an instant I had resolved to go also, and to pit my influence against MacCoy's. I knew it was a losing fight, but I thought, and my mother thought, that it was my duty. We passed the last night together in prayer for my success, and she gave me her own Testament that my father had given her on the day of their marriage in the Old Country, so that I might always wear it next my heart.

"I was a fellow-traveller, on the steamship, with Sparrow MacCoy, and at least I had the satisfaction of spoiling his little game for the voyage. The very first night I went into the smoking-room, and found him at the head of a card-table, with a half a dozen young fellows who were carrying their full purses and their empty skulls over to Europe. He was settling down for his harvest, and a rich one it would have been. But I soon changed all that.

"'Gentlemen,' said I, 'are you aware whom you are playing with?'

"'What's that to you? You mind your own business!' said he, with an oath.

"'Who is it, anyway?' asked one of the dudes.

"'He's Sparrow MacCoy, the most notorious card-sharper in the States.'

"Up he jumped with a bottle in his hand, but he remembered that he was under the flag of the effete Old Country, where law and order run, and Tammany has no pull. Gaol and the gallows wait for violence and murder, and there's no slipping out by the back door on board an ocean liner.

"'Prove your words, you —— !' said he.

"'I will!' said I. 'If you will turn up your right shirt-sleeve to the shoulder, I will either prove my words or I will eat them.'

"He turned white and said not a word. You see, I knew something of his ways, and I was aware of that part of the mechanism which he and all such sharpers use consists of an elastic down the arm with a clip just above the wrist. It is by means of this clip that they withdraw from their hands the cards which they do not want, while they substitute other cards from another hiding place. I reckoned on it being there, and it was. He cursed me, slunk out of the saloon, and was hardly seen again during the voyage. For once, at any rate, I got level with Mister Sparrow MacCoy.

"But he soon had his revenge upon me, for when it came to influencing my brother he outweighed me every time. Edward had kept himself straight in London for the first few weeks, and had done some business with his American watches, until this villain came across his path once more. I did my best, but the best was little enough. The next thing I heard there had been a scandal at one of the Northumberland Avenue hotels: a traveller had been fleeced of a large sum by two confederate card-sharpers, and the matter was in the hands of Scotland Yard. The first I learned of it was in the evening paper, and I was at once certain that my brother and MacCoy were back at their old games. I hurried at once to Edward’s lodgings. They told me that he and a tall gentleman (whom I recognised as MacCoy) had gone off together, and that he had left the lodgings and taken his things with him. The landlady had heard them give several directions to the cabman, ending with Euston Station, and she had accidentally overheard the tall gentleman saying something about Manchester. She believed that that was their destination.

“A glance at the time-table showed me that the most likely train was at five, though there was another at 4:35 which they might have caught. I had only time to get the later one, but found no sign of them either at the depot or in the train. They must have gone on by the earlier one, so I determined to follow them to Manchester and search for them in the hotels there. One last appeal to my brother by all that he owed to my mother might even now be the salvation of him. My nerves were overstrung, and I lit a cigar to steady them. At that moment, just as the train was moving off, the door of my compartment was flung open, and there were MacCoy and my brother on the platform.

“They were both disguised, and with good reason, for they knew that the London police were after them. MacCoy had a great astrakhan collar drawn up, so that only his eyes and nose were showing. My brother was dressed like a woman, with a black veil half down his face, but of course it did not deceive me for an instant, nor would it have done so even if I had not known that he had often used such a dress before. I started up, and as I did so MacCoy recognised me. He said something, the conductor slammed the door, and they were shown into the next compartment. I tried to stop the train so as to follow them, but the wheels were already moving, and it was too late.

“When we stopped at Willesden, I instantly changed my carriage. It appears that I was not seen to do so, which is not surprising, as the station was crowded with people. MacCoy, of course, was expecting me, and he had spent the time between Euston and Willesden in saying all he could to harden my brother’s heart and set him against me. That is what I fancy, for I had never found him so impossible to soften or to move. I tried this way and I tried that; I pictured his future in an English gaol; I described the sorrow of his mother when I came back with the news; I said everything to touch his heart, but all to no purpose. He sat there with a fixed sneer upon his handsome face, while every now and then Sparrow MacCoy would throw in a taunt at me, or some word of encouragement to hold my brother to his resolutions.

"'Why don't you run a Sunday-school?' he would say to me, and then, in the same breath: 'He thinks you have no will of your own. He thinks you are just the baby brother and that he can lead you where he likes. He's only just finding out that you are a man as well as he.'

"It was those words of his which set me talking bitterly. We had left Willesden, you understand, for all this took some time. My temper got the better of me, and for the first time in my life I let my brother see the rough side of me. Perhaps it would have been better had I done so earlier and more often.

"'A man!' said I. 'Well, I'm glad to have your friend's assurance of it, for no one would suspect it to see you like a boarding-school missy. I don't suppose in all this country there is a more contemptible-looking creature than you are as you sit there with that Dolly pinafore upon you.' He coloured up at that, for he was a vain man, and he winced from ridicule.

"'It's only a dust-cloak,' said he, and he slipped it off. 'One has to throw the coppers off one's scent, and I had no other way to do it.' He took his toque off with the veil attached, and he put both it and the cloak into his brown bag. 'Anyway, I don't need to wear it until the conductor comes round,' said he.

"'Nor then, either,' said I, and taking the bag I slung it with all my force out of the window. 'Now,' said I, 'you'll never make a Mary Jane of yourself while I can help it. If nothing but that disguise stands between you and a gaol, then to gaol you shall go.'

"That was the way to manage him. I felt my advantage at once. His supple nature was one which yielded to roughness far more readily than to entreaty. He flushed with shame, and his eyes filled with tears. But MacCoy saw my advantage also, and was determined that I should not pursue it.

"'He's my pard, and you shall not bully him,' he cried.

"'He's my brother, and you shall not ruin him,' said I. 'I believe a spell of prison is the very best way of keeping you apart, and you shall have it, or it will be no fault of mine.'

"'Oh, you would squeal, would you?' he cried, and in an instant he whipped out his revolver. I sprang for his hand, but saw that I was too late, and jumped aside. At the same instant he fired, and the bullet which would have struck me passed through the heart of my unfortunate brother.

“He dropped without a groan upon the floor of the compartment, and MacCoy and I, equally horrified, knelt at each side of him, trying to bring back some signs of life. MacCoy still held the loaded revolver in his hand, but his anger against me and my resentment towards him had both for the moment been swallowed up in this sudden tragedy. It was he who first realised the situation. The train was for some reason going very slowly at the moment, and he saw his opportunity for escape. In an instant he had the door open, but I was as quick as he, and jumping upon him the two of us fell off the footboard and rolled in each other’s arms down a steep embankment. At the bottom I struck my head against a stone, and I remembered nothing more. When I came to myself I was lying among some low bushes, not far from the railroad track, and somebody was bathing my head with a wet handkerchief. It was Sparrow MacCoy.

“‘I guess I couldn’t leave you,’ said he. ‘I didn’t want to have the blood of two of you on my hands in one day. You loved your brother, I’ve no doubt; but you didn’t love him a cent more than I loved him, though you’ll say that I took a queer way to show it. Anyhow, it seems a mighty empty world now that he is gone, and I don’t care a continental whether you give me over to the hangman or not.’

“He had turned his ankle in the fall, and there we sat, he with his useless foot, and I with my throbbing head, and we talked and talked until gradually my bitterness began to soften and to turn into something like sympathy. What was the use of revenging his death upon a man who was as much stricken by that death as I was? And then, as my wits gradually returned, I began to realise also that I could do nothing against MacCoy which would not recoil upon my mother and myself. How could we convict him without a full account of my brother’s career being made public — the very thing which of all others we wished to avoid? It was really as much our interest as his to cover the matter up, and from being an avenger of crime I found myself changed to a conspirator against Justice. The place in which we found ourselves was one of those pheasant preserves which are so common in the Old Country, and as we groped our way through it I found myself consulting the slayer of my brother as to how far it would be possible to hush it up.

“I soon realised from what he said that unless there were some papers of which we knew nothing in my brother’s pockets, there was really no possible means by which the police could identify him or learn how he had got there. His ticket was in MacCoy’s pocket, and so was the ticket for some baggage which they had left at the depot. Like most Americans, he had found it cheaper and easier to buy an outfit in London than to bring one from New York, so that all his linen and clothes were new and unmarked. The bag, containing the dust-cloak, which I had thrown out of the window, may have fallen among some bramble patch where it is still concealed, or may have been carried off by some tramp, or may have come into the possession of the police, who kept the incident to themselves. Anyhow, I have seen nothing about it in the London papers. As to the watches, they were a selection from those which had been intrusted to him for business purposes. It may have been for the same business purposes that he was taking them to Manchester, but — well, it’s too late to enter into that.

“I don’t blame the police for being at fault. I don’t see how it could have been otherwise. There was just one little clue that they might have followed up, but it was a small one. I mean that small, circular mirror which was found in my brother’s pocket. It isn’t a very common thing for a young man to carry about with him, is it? But a gambler might have told you what such a mirror may mean to a card-sharper. If you sit back a little from the table, and lay the mirror, face upwards, upon your lap, you can see, as you deal, every card that you give to your adversary. It is not hard to say whether you see a man or raise him when you know his cards as well as your own. It was as much a part of a sharper’s outfit as the elastic clip upon Sparrow MacCoy’s arm. Taking that, in connection with the recent frauds at the hotels, the police might have got hold of one end of the string.

“I don’t think there is much more for me to explain. We got to a village called Amersham that night in the character of two gentlemen upon a walking tour, and afterwards we made our way quietly to London, whence MacCoy went on to Cairo and I returned to New York. My mother died six months afterwards, and I am glad to say that to the day of her death she never knew what happened. She was always under the delusion that Edward was earning an honest living in London, and I never had the heart to tell her the truth. He never wrote; but, then, he never did write at any time, so that made no difference. His name was the last upon her lips.

“There’s just one other thing that I have to ask you, sir, and I should take it as a kind return for all this explanation, if you could do it for me. You remember that Testament that was picked up. I always carried it in my inside pocket, and it must have come out in my fall. I value it very highly, for it was the family book with my birth and my brother’s marked by my father in the beginning of it. I wish you would apply at the proper place and have it sent to me. It can be of no possible value to anyone else. If you address it to X, Bassano’s Library, Broadway, New York, it is sure to come to hand.”

The Japanned Box

It WAS a curious thing, said the private tutor; one of those grotesque and whimsical incidents which occur to one as one goes through life. I lost the best situation which I am ever likely to have through it. But I am glad that I went to Thorpe Place, for I gained — well, as I tell you the story you will learn what I gained.

I don’t know whether you are familiar with that part of the Midlands which is drained by the Avon. It is the most English part of England. Shakespeare, the flower of the whole race, was born right in the middle of it. It is a land of rolling pastures, rising in higher folds to the westwards, until they swell into the Malvern Hills. There are no towns, but numerous villages, each with its grey Norman church. You have left the brick of the southern and eastern counties behind you, and everything is stone — stone for the walls, and lichened slabs of stone for the roofs. It is all grim and solid and massive, as befits the heart of a great nation.

It was in the middle of this country, not very far from Evesham, that Sir John Bollamore lived in the old ancestral home of Thorpe Place, and thither it was that I came to teach his two little sons. Sir John was a widower — his wife had died three years before — and he had been left with these two lads aged eight and ten, and one dear little girl of seven. Miss Witherton, who is now my wife, was governess to this little girl. I was tutor to the two boys. Could there be a more obvious prelude to an engagement? She governs me now, and I tutor two little boys of our own. But, there — I have already revealed what it was which I gained in Thorpe Place!

It was a very, very old house, incredibly old — pre-Norman, some of it — and the Bollamores claimed to have lived in that situation since long before the Conquest. It struck a chill to my heart when first I came there, those enormously thick grey walls, the rude crumbling stones, the smell as from a sick animal which exhaled from the rotting plaster of the aged building. But the modern wing was bright and the garden was well kept. No house could be dismal which had a pretty girl inside it and such a show of roses in front.

Apart from a very complete staff of servants there were only four of us in the household. These were Miss Witherton, who was at that time four-and-twenty and as pretty — well, as pretty as Mrs. Colmore is now — myself, Frank Colmore, aged thirty, Mrs. Stevens, the housekeeper, a dry, silent woman, and Mr. Richards, a tall military-looking man, who acted as steward to the Bollamore estates. We four always had our meals together, but Sir John had his usually alone in the library. Sometimes he joined us at dinner, but on the whole we were just as glad when he did not.

For he was a very formidable person. Imagine a man six feet three inches in height, majestically built, with a high-nosed, aristocratic face, brindled hair, shaggy eyebrows, a small, pointed Mephistophelian beard, and lines upon his brow and round his eyes as deep as if they had been carved with a penknife. He had grey eyes, weary, hopeless-looking eyes, proud and yet pathetic, eyes which claimed your pity and yet dared you to show it. His back was rounded with study, but otherwise he was as fine a looking man of his age — five-and-fifty perhaps — as any woman would wish to look upon.

But his presence was not a cheerful one. He was always courteous, always refined, but singularly silent and retiring. I have never lived so long with any man and known so little of him. If he were indoors he spent his time either in his own small study in the Eastern Tower, or in the library in the modern wing. So regular was his routine that one could always say at any hour exactly where he would be. Twice in the day he would visit his study, once after breakfast, and once about ten at night. You might set your watch by the slam of the heavy door. For the rest of the day he would be in his library — save that for an hour or two in the afternoon he would take a walk or a ride, which was solitary like the rest of his existence. He loved his children, and was keenly interested in the progress of their studies, but they were a little awed by the silent, shaggy-browed figure, and they avoided him as much as they could. Indeed, we all did that.

It was some time before I came to know anything about the circumstances of Sir John Bollamore's life, for Mrs. Stevens, the housekeeper, and Mr. Richards, the land-steward, were too loyal to talk easily of their employer's affairs. As to the governess, she knew no more than I did, and our common interest was one of the causes which drew us together. At last, however, an incident occurred which led to a closer acquaintance with Mr. Richards and a fuller knowledge of the life of the man whom I served.

The immediate cause of this was no less than the falling of Master Percy, the youngest of my pupils, into the mill-race, with imminent danger both to his life and to mine, since I had to risk myself in order to save him. Dripping and exhausted — for I was far more spent than the child — I was making for my room when Sir John, who had heard the hubbub, opened the door of his little study and asked me what was the matter. I told him of the accident, but assured him that his child was in no danger, while he listened with a rugged, immobile face, which expressed in its intense eyes and tightened lips all the emotion which he tried to conceal.

“One moment! Step in here! Let me have the details!” said he, turning back through the open door.

And so I found myself within that little sanctum, inside which, as I afterwards learned, no other foot had for three years been set save that of the old servant who cleaned it out. It was a round room, conforming to the shape of the tower in which it was situated, with a low ceiling, a single narrow, ivy-wreathed window, and the simplest of furniture. An old carpet, a single chair, a deal table, and a small shelf of books made up the whole contents. On the table stood a full-length photograph of a woman — I took no particular notice of the features, but I remember, that a certain gracious gentleness was the prevailing impression. Beside it were a large black japanned box and one or two bundles of letters or papers fastened together with elastic bands.

Our interview was a short one, for Sir John Bollamore perceived that I was soaked, and that I should change without delay. The incident led, however, to an instructive talk with Richards, the agent, who had never penetrated into the chamber which chance had opened to me. That very afternoon he came to me, all curiosity, and walked up and down the garden path with me, while my two charges played tennis upon the lawn beside us.

“You hardly realise the exception which has been made in your favour,” said he. “That room has been kept such a mystery, and Sir John’s visits to it have been so regular and consistent, that an almost superstitious feeling has arisen about it in the household. I assure you that if I were to repeat to you the tales which are flying about, tales of mysterious visitors there, and of voices overheard by the servants, you might suspect that Sir John had relapsed into his old ways.”

“Why do you say relapsed?” I asked.

He looked at me in surprise.

“Is it possible,” said he, “that Sir John Bollamore’s previous history is unknown to you?”

“Absolutely.”

“You astound me. I thought that every man in England knew something of his antecedents. I should not mention the matter if it were not that you are now one of ourselves, and that the facts might come to your ears in some harsher form if I were silent upon them. I always took it for granted that you knew that you were in the service of ‘Devil’ Bollamore.”

“But why ‘Devil’?” I asked.

“Ah, you are young and the world moves fast, but twenty years ago the name of ‘Devil’ Bollamore was one of the best known in London. He was the leader of the fastest set, bruiser, driver, gambler, drunkard — a survival of the old type, and as bad as the worst of them.”

I stared at him in amazement.

“What!” I cried, “that quiet, studious, sad-faced man?”

“The greatest rip and debauchee in England! All between ourselves, Colmore. But you understand now what I mean when I say that a woman’s voice in his room might even now give rise to suspicions.”

“But what can have changed him so?”

“Little Beryl Clare, when she took the risk of becoming his wife. That was the turning point. He had got so far that his own fast set had thrown him over. There is a world of difference, you know, between a man who drinks and a drunkard. They all drink, but they taboo a drunkard. He had become a slave to it — hopeless and helpless. Then she stepped in, saw the possibilities of a fine man in the wreck, took her chance in marrying him though she might have had the pick of a dozen, and, by devoting her life to it, brought him back to manhood and decency. You have observed that no liquor is ever kept in the house. There never has been any since her foot crossed its threshold. A drop of it would be like blood to a tiger even now.”

“Then her influence still holds him?”

“That is the wonder of it. When she died three years ago, we all expected and feared that he would fall back into his old ways. She feared it herself, and the thought gave a terror to death, for she was like a guardian angel to that man, and lived only for the one purpose. By the way, did you see a black japanned box in his room?"

"Yes."

"I fancy it contains her letters. If ever he has occasion to be away, if only for a single night, he invariably takes his black japanned box with him. Well, well, Colmore, perhaps I have told you rather more than I should, but I shall expect you to reciprocate if anything of interest should come to your knowledge."

I could see that the worthy man was consumed with curiosity and just a little piqued that I, the newcomer, should have been the first to penetrate into the untrodden chamber. But the fact raised me in his esteem, and from that time onwards I found myself upon more confidential terms with him.

And now the silent and majestic figure of my employer became an object of greater interest to me. I began to understand that strangely human look in his eyes, those deep lines upon his care-worn face. He was a man who was fighting a ceaseless battle, holding at arm's length, from morning till night, a horrible adversary who was forever trying to close with him — an adversary which would destroy him body and soul could it but fix its claws once more upon him. As I watched the grim, round-backed figure pacing the corridor or walking in the garden, this imminent danger seemed to take bodily shape, and I could almost fancy that I saw this most loathsome and dangerous of all the fiends crouching closely in his very shadow, like a half-cowed beast which slinks beside its keeper, ready at any unguarded moment to spring at his throat. And the dead woman, the woman who had spent her life in warding off this danger, took shape also to my imagination, and I saw her as a shadowy but beautiful presence which intervened for ever with arms uplifted to screen the man whom she loved.

In some subtle way he divined the sympathy which I had for him, and he showed in his own silent fashion that he appreciated it. He even invited me once to share his afternoon walk, and although no word passed between us on this occasion, it was a mark of confidence which he had never shown to anyone before. He asked me also to index his library (it was one of the best private libraries in England), and I spent many hours in the evening in his presence, if not in his society, he reading at his desk and I sitting in a recess by the window reducing to order the chaos which existed among his books. In spite of these close relations I was never again asked to enter the chamber in the turret.

And then came my revulsion of feeling. A single incident changed all my sympathy to loathing, and made me realise that my employer still remained all that he had ever been, with the additional vice of hypocrisy. What happened was as follows.

One evening Miss Witherton had gone down to Broadway, the neighbouring village, to sing at a concert for some charity, and I, according to my promise, had walked over to escort her back. The drive sweeps round under the eastern turret, and I observed as I passed that the light was lit in the circular room. It was a summer evening, and the window, which was a little higher than our heads, was open. We were, as it happened, engrossed in our own conversation at the moment and we had paused upon the lawn which skirts the old turret, when suddenly something broke in upon our talk and turned our thoughts away from our own affairs.

It was a voice — the voice undoubtedly of a woman. It was low — so low that it was only in that still night air that we could have heard it, but, hushed as it was, there was no mistaking its feminine timbre. It spoke hurriedly, gaspingly for a few sentences, and then was silent — a piteous, breathless, imploring sort of voice. Miss Witherton and I stood for an instant staring at each other. Then we walked quickly in the direction of the hall-door.

“It came through the window,” I said.

“We must not play the part of eavesdroppers,” she answered. “We must forget that we have ever heard it.”

There was an absence of surprise in her manner which suggested a new idea to me.

“You have heard it before,” I cried.

“I could not help it. My own room is higher up on the same turret. It has happened frequently.”

“Who can the woman be?”

“I have no idea. I had rather not discuss it.”

Her voice was enough to show me what she thought. But granting that our employer led a double and dubious life, who could she be, this mysterious woman who kept him company in the old tower? I knew from my own inspection how bleak and bare a room it was. She certainly did not live there. But in that case where did she come from? It could not be anyone of the household. They were all under the vigilant eyes of Mrs. Stevens. The visitor must come from without. But how?

And then suddenly I remembered how ancient this building was, and how probable that some mediaeval passage existed in it. There is hardly an old castle without one. The mysterious room was the basement of the turret, so that if there were anything of the sort it would open through the floor. There were numerous cottages in the immediate vicinity. The other end of the secret passage might lie among some tangle of bramble in the neighbouring copse. I said nothing to anyone, but I felt that the secret of my employer lay within my power.

And the more convinced I was of this the more I marvelled at the manner in which he concealed his true nature. Often as I watched his austere figure, I asked myself if it were indeed possible that such a man should be living this double life, and I tried to persuade myself that my suspicions might after all prove to be ill-founded. But there was the female voice, there was the secret nightly rendezvous in the turret-chamber — how could such facts admit of an innocent interpretation. I conceived a horror of the man. I was filled with loathing at his deep, consistent hypocrisy.

Only once during all those months did I ever see him without that sad but impassive mask which he usually presented towards his fellow-man. For an instant I caught a glimpse of those volcanic fires which he had damped down so long. The occasion was an unworthy one, for the object of his wrath was none other than the aged charwoman whom I have already mentioned as being the one person who was allowed within his mysterious chamber. I was passing the corridor which led to the turret — for my own room lay in that direction — when I heard a sudden, startled scream, and merged in it the husky, growling note of a man who is inarticulate with passion. It was the snarl of a furious wild beast. Then I heard his voice thrilling with anger. “You would dare!” he cried. “You would dare to disobey my directions!” An instant later the charwoman passed me, flying down the passage, white-faced and tremulous, while the terrible voice thundered behind her. “Go to Mrs. Stevens for your money! Never set foot in Thorpe Place again!” Consumed with curiosity, I could not help following the woman, and found her round the corner leaning against the wall and palpitating like a frightened rabbit.

“What is the matter, Mrs. Brown?” I asked.

“It’s master!” she gasped. “Oh, ‘ow ‘e frightened me! If you had seen ‘is eyes, Mr. Colmore, sir. I thought ‘e would ‘ave been the death of me.”

“But what had you done?”

“Done, sir! Nothing. At least nothing to make so much of. Just laid my ‘and on that black box of ‘is—’adn’t even opened it, when in ‘e came and you ‘eard the way ‘e went on. I’ve lost my place, and glad I am of it, for I would never trust myself within reach of ‘im again.”

So it was the japanned box which was the cause of this outburst — the box from which he would never permit himself to be separated. What was the connection, or was there any connection between this and the secret visits of the lady whose voice I had overheard? Sir John Bollamore’s wrath was enduring as well as fiery, for from that day Mrs. Brown, the charwoman, vanished from our ken, and Thorpe Place knew her no more.

And now I wish to tell you the singular chance which solved all these strange questions and put my employer’s secret in my possession. The story may leave you with some lingering doubts as to whether my curiosity did not get the better of my honour, and whether I did not condescend to play the spy. If you choose to think so I cannot help it, but can only assure you that, improbable as it may appear, the matter came about exactly as I describe it.

The first stage in this denouement was that the small room in the turret became uninhabitable. This occurred through the fall of the worm-eaten oaken beam which supported the ceiling. Rotten with age, it snapped in the middle one morning, and brought down a quantity of plaster with it. Fortunately Sir John was not in the room at the time. His precious box was rescued from amongst the debris and brought into the library, where, henceforward, it was locked within his bureau. Sir John took no steps to repair the damage, and I never had an opportunity of searching for that secret passage, the existence of which I had surmised. As to the lady, I had thought that this would have brought her visits to an end, had I not one evening heard Mr. Richards asking Mrs. Stevens who the woman was whom he had overheard talking to Sir John in the library. I could not catch her reply, but I saw from her manner that it was not the first time that she had had to answer or avoid the same question.

“You’ve heard the voice, Colmore?” said the agent.

I confessed that I had.

“And what do YOU think of it?”

I shrugged my shoulders, and remarked that it was no business of mine.

“Come, come, you are just as curious as any of us. Is it a woman or not?”

“It is certainly a woman.”

"Which room did you hear it from?"

"From the turret-room, before the ceiling fell."

"But I heard it from the library only last night. I passed the doors as I was going to bed, and I heard something wailing and praying just as plainly as I hear you. It may be a woman — —"

"Why, what else COULD it be?"

He looked at me hard.

"There are more things in heaven and earth," said he. "If it is a woman, how does she get there?"

"I don't know."

"No, nor I. But if it is the other thing — but there, for a practical business man at the end of the nineteenth century this is rather a ridiculous line of conversation." He turned away, but I saw that he felt even more than he had said. To all the old ghost stories of Thorpe Place a new one was being added before our very eyes. It may by this time have taken its permanent place, for though an explanation came to me, it never reached the others.

And my explanation came in this way. I had suffered a sleepless night from neuralgia, and about midday I had taken a heavy dose of chlorodyne to alleviate the pain. At that time I was finishing the indexing of Sir John Bollamore's library, and it was my custom to work there from five till seven. On this particular day I struggled against the double effect of my bad night and the narcotic. I have already mentioned that there was a recess in the library, and in this it was my habit to work. I settled down steadily to my task, but my weariness overcame me and, falling back upon the settee, I dropped into a heavy sleep.

How long I slept I do not know, but it was quite dark when I awoke. Confused by the chlorodyne which I had taken, I lay motionless in a semi-conscious state. The great room with its high walls covered with books loomed darkly all round me. A dim radiance from the moonlight came through the farther window, and against this lighter background I saw that Sir John Bollamore was sitting at his study table. His well-set head and clearly cut profile were sharply outlined against the glimmering square behind him. He bent as I watched him, and I heard the sharp turning of a key and the rasping of metal upon metal. As if in a dream I was vaguely conscious that this was the japanned box which stood in front of him, and that he had drawn something out of it, something squat and uncouth, which now lay before him upon the table. I never realised — it never occurred to my bemuddled and torpid brain that I was intruding upon his privacy, that he imagined himself to be alone in the room. And then, just as it rushed upon my horrified perceptions, and I had half risen to announce my presence, I heard a strange, crisp, metallic clicking, and then the voice.

Yes, it was a woman’s voice; there could not be a doubt of it. But a voice so charged with entreaty and with yearning love, that it will ring for ever in my ears. It came with a curious faraway tinkle, but every word was clear, though faint — very faint, for they were the last words of a dying woman.

“I am not really gone, John,” said the thin, gasping voice. “I am here at your very elbow, and shall be until we meet once more. I die happy to think that morning and night you will hear my voice. Oh, John, be strong, be strong, until we meet again.”

I say that I had risen in order to announce my presence, but I could not do so while the voice was sounding. I could only remain half lying, half sitting, paralysed, astounded, listening to those yearning distant musical words. And he — he was so absorbed that even if I had spoken he might not have heard me. But with the silence of the voice came my half articulated apologies and explanations. He sprang across the room, switched on the electric light, and in its white glare I saw him, his eyes gleaming with anger, his face twisted with passion, as the hapless charwoman may have seen him weeks before.

“Mr. Colmore!” he cried. “You here! What is the meaning of this, sir?”

With halting words I explained it all, my neuralgia, the narcotic, my luckless sleep and singular awakening. As he listened the glow of anger faded from his face, and the sad, impassive mask closed once more over his features.

“My secret is yours, Mr. Colmore,” said he. “I have only myself to blame for relaxing my precautions. Half confidences are worse than no confidences, and so you may know all since you know so much. The story may go where you will when I have passed away, but until then I rely upon your sense of honour that no human soul shall hear it from your lips. I am proud still — God help me! — or, at least, I am proud enough to resent that pity which this story would draw upon me. I have smiled at envy, and disregarded hatred, but pity is more than I can tolerate.

“You have heard the source from which the voice comes — that voice which has, as I understand, excited so much curiosity in my household. I am aware of the rumours to which it has given rise. These speculations, whether scandalous or superstitious, are such as I can disregard and forgive. What I should never forgive would be a disloyal spying and eavesdropping in order to satisfy an illicit curiosity. But of that, Mr. Colmore, I acquit you.

“When I was a young man, sir, many years younger than you are now, I was launched upon town without a friend or adviser, and with a purse which brought only too many false friends and false advisers to my side. I drank deeply of the wine of life — if there is a man living who has drunk more deeply he is not a man whom I envy. My purse suffered, my character suffered, my constitution suffered, stimulants became a necessity to me, I was a creature from whom my memory recoils. And it was at that time, the time of my blackest degradation, that God sent into my life the gentlest, sweetest spirit that ever descended as a ministering angel from above. She loved me, broken as I was, loved me, and spent her life in making a man once more of that which had degraded itself to the level of the beasts.

“But a fell disease struck her, and she withered away before my eyes. In the hour of her agony it was never of herself, of her own sufferings and her own death that she thought. It was all of me. The one pang which her fate brought to her was the fear that when her influence was removed I should revert to that which I had been. It was in vain that I made oath to her that no drop of wine would ever cross my lips. She knew only too well the hold that the devil had upon me — she who had striven so to loosen it — and it haunted her night and day the thought that my soul might again be within his grip.

“It was from some friend’s gossip of the sick room that she heard of this invention — this phonograph — and with the quick insight of a loving woman she saw how she might use it for her ends. She sent me to London to procure the best which money could buy. With her dying breath she gasped into it the words which have held me straight ever since. Lonely and broken, what else have I in all the world to uphold me? But it is enough. Please God, I shall face her without shame when He is pleased to reunite us! That is my secret, Mr. Colmore, and whilst I live I leave it in your keeping.”

The Black Doctor

Bishop’s Crossing is a small village lying ten miles in a south-westerly direction from Liverpool. Here in the early seventies there settled a doctor named Aloysius Lana. Nothing was known locally either of his antecedents or of the reasons which had prompted him to come to this Lancashire hamlet. Two facts only were certain about him; the one that he had gained his medical qualification with some distinction at Glasgow; the other that he came undoubtedly of a tropical race, and was so dark that he might almost have had a strain of the Indian in his composition. His predominant features were, however, European, and he possessed a stately courtesy and carriage which suggested a Spanish extraction. A swarthy skin, raven-black hair, and dark, sparkling eyes under a pair of heavily-tufted brows made a strange contrast to the flaxen or chestnut rustics of England, and the newcomer was soon known as “The Black Doctor of Bishop’s Crossing.” At first it was a term of ridicule and reproach; as the years went on it became a title of honour which was familiar to the whole countryside, and extended far beyond the narrow confines of the village.

For the newcomer proved himself to be a capable surgeon and an accomplished physician. The practice of that district had been in the hands of Edward Rowe, the son of Sir William Rowe, the Liverpool consultant, but he had not inherited the talents of his father, and Dr. Lana, with his advantages of presence and of manner, soon beat him out of the field. Dr. Lana’s social success was as rapid as his professional. A remarkable surgical cure in the case of the Hon. James Lowry, the second son of Lord Belton, was the means of introducing him to county society, where he became a favourite through the charm of his conversation and the elegance of his manners. An absence of antecedents and of relatives is sometimes an aid rather than an impediment to social advancement, and the distinguished individuality of the handsome doctor was its own recommendation.

His patients had one fault — and one fault only — to find with him. He appeared to be a confirmed bachelor. This was the more remarkable since the house which he occupied was a large one, and it was known that his success in practice had enabled him to save considerable sums. At first the local matchmakers were continually coupling his name with one or other of the eligible ladies, but as years passed and Dr. Lana remained unmarried, it came to be generally understood that for some reason he must remain a bachelor. Some even went so far as to assert that he was already married, and that it was in order to escape the consequence of an early misalliance that he had buried himself at Bishop's Crossing. And, then, just as the matchmakers had finally given him up in despair, his engagement was suddenly announced to Miss Frances Morton, of Leigh Hall.

Miss Morton was a young lady who was well known upon the country-side, her father, James Haldane Morton, having been the Squire of Bishop's Crossing. Both her parents were, however, dead, and she lived with her only brother, Arthur Morton, who had inherited the family estate. In person Miss Morton was tall and stately, and she was famous for her quick, impetuous nature and for her strength of character. She met Dr. Lana at a garden-party, and a friendship, which quickly ripened into love, sprang up between them. Nothing could exceed their devotion to each other. There was some discrepancy in age, he being thirty-seven, and she twenty-four; but, save in that one respect, there was no possible objection to be found with the match. The engagement was in February, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place in August.

Upon the 3rd of June Dr. Lana received a letter from abroad. In a small village the postmaster is also in a position to be the gossip-master, and Mr. Bankley, of Bishop's Crossing, had many of the secrets of his neighbours in his possession. Of this particular letter he remarked only that it was in a curious envelope, that it was in a man's handwriting, that the postscript was Buenos Ayres, and the stamp of the Argentine Republic. It was the first letter which he had ever known Dr. Lana to have from abroad and this was the reason why his attention was particularly called to it before he handed it to the local postman. It was delivered by the evening delivery of that date.

Next morning — that is, upon the 4th of June — Dr. Lana called upon Miss Morton, and a long interview followed, from which he was observed to return in a state of great agitation. Miss Morton remained in her room all that day, and her maid found her several times in tears. In the course of a week it was an open secret to the whole village that the engagement was at an end, that Dr. Lana had behaved shamefully to the young lady, and that Arthur Morton, her brother, was talking of horse-whipping him. In what particular respect the doctor had behaved badly was unknown — some surmised one thing and some another; but it was observed, and taken as the obvious sign of a guilty conscience, that he would go for miles round rather than pass the windows of Leigh Hall, and that he gave up attending morning service upon Sundays where he might have met the young lady. There was an advertisement also in the Lancet as to the sale of a practice which mentioned no names, but which was thought by some to refer to Bishop's Crossing, and to mean that Dr. Lana was thinking of abandoning the scene of his success. Such was the position of affairs when, upon the evening of Monday, June 21st, there came a fresh development which changed what had been a mere village scandal into a tragedy which arrested the attention of the whole nation. Some detail is necessary to cause the facts of that evening to present their full significance.

The sole occupants of the doctor's house were his housekeeper, an elderly and most respectable woman, named Martha Woods, and a young servant — Mary Pilling. The coachman and the surgery-boy slept out. It was the custom of the doctor to sit at night in his study, which was next the surgery in the wing of the house which was farthest from the servants' quarters. This side of the house had a door of its own for the convenience of patients, so that it was possible for the doctor to admit and receive a visitor there without the knowledge of anyone. As a matter of fact, when patients came late it was quite usual for him to let them in and out by the surgery entrance, for the maid and the housekeeper were in the habit of retiring early.

On this particular night Martha Woods went into the doctor's study at half-past nine, and found him writing at his desk. She bade him good night, sent the maid to bed, and then occupied herself until a quarter to eleven in household matters. It was striking eleven upon the hall clock when she went to her own room. She had been there about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes when she heard a cry or call, which appeared to come from within the house. She waited some time, but it was not repeated. Much alarmed, for the sound was loud and urgent, she put on a dressing-gown, and ran at the top of her speed to the doctor's study.

"Who's there?" cried a voice, as she tapped at the door.

"I am here, sir — Mrs. Woods."

"I beg that you will leave me in peace. Go back to your room this instant!" cried the voice, which was, to the best of her belief, that of her master. The tone was so harsh and so unlike her master's usual manner, that she was surprised and hurt.

“I thought I heard you calling, sir,” she explained, but no answer was given to her. Mrs. Woods looked at the clock as she returned to her room, and it was then half-past eleven.

At some period between eleven and twelve (she could not be positive as to the exact hour) a patient called upon the doctor and was unable to get any reply from him. This late visitor was Mrs. Madding, the wife of the village grocer, who was dangerously ill of typhoid fever. Dr. Lana had asked her to look in the last thing and let him know how her husband was progressing. She observed that the light was burning in the study, but having knocked several times at the surgery door without response, she concluded that the doctor had been called out, and so returned home.

There is a short, winding drive with a lamp at the end of it leading down from the house to the road. As Mrs. Madding emerged from the gate a man was coming along the footpath. Thinking that it might be Dr. Lana returning from some professional visit, she waited for him, and was surprised to see that it was Mr. Arthur Morton, the young squire. In the light of the lamp she observed that his manner was excited, and that he carried in his hand a heavy hunting-crop. He was turning in at the gate when she addressed him.

“The doctor is not in, sir,” said she.

“How do you know that?” he asked harshly.

“I have been to the surgery door, sir.”

“I see a light,” said the young squire, looking up the drive. “That is in his study, is it not?”

“Yes, sir; but I am sure that he is out.”

“Well, he must come in again,” said young Morton, and passed through the gate while Mrs. Madding went upon her homeward way.

At three o’clock that morning her husband suffered a sharp relapse, and she was so alarmed by his symptoms that she determined to call the doctor without delay. As she passed through the gate she was surprised to see someone lurking among the laurel bushes. It was certainly a man, and to the best of her belief Mr. Arthur Morton. Preoccupied with her own troubles, she gave no particular attention to the incident, but hurried on upon her errand.

When she reached the house she perceived to her surprise that the light was still burning in the study. She therefore tapped at the surgery door. There was no answer. She repeated the knocking several times without effect. It appeared to her to be unlikely that the doctor would either go to bed or go out leaving so brilliant a light behind him, and it struck Mrs. Madding that it was possible that he might have dropped asleep in his chair. She tapped at the study window, therefore, but without result. Then, finding that there was an opening between the curtain and the woodwork, she looked through.

The small room was brilliantly lighted from a large lamp on the central table, which was littered with the doctor’s books and instruments. No one was visible, nor did she see anything unusual, except that in the farther shadow thrown by the table a dingy white glove was lying upon the carpet. And then suddenly, as her eyes became more accustomed to the light, a boot emerged from the other end of the shadow, and she realised, with a thrill of horror, that what she had taken to be a glove was the hand of a man, who was prostrate upon the floor. Understanding that something terrible had occurred, she rang at the front door, roused Mrs. Woods, the housekeeper, and the two women made their way into the study, having first dispatched the maidservant to the police-station.

At the side of the table, away from the window, Dr. Lana was discovered stretched upon his back and quite dead. It was evident that he had been subjected to violence, for one of his eyes was blackened and there were marks of bruises about his face and neck. A slight thickening and swelling of his features appeared to suggest that the cause of his death had been strangulation. He was dressed in his usual professional clothes, but wore cloth slippers, the soles of which were perfectly clean. The carpet was marked all over, especially on the side of the door, with traces of dirty boots, which were presumably left by the murderer. It was evident that someone had entered by the surgery door, had killed the doctor, and had then made his escape unseen. That the assailant was a man was certain, from the size of the footprints and from the nature of the injuries. But beyond that point the police found it very difficult to go.

There were no signs of robbery, and the doctor’s gold watch was safe in his pocket. He kept a heavy cash-box in the room, and this was discovered to be locked but empty. Mrs. Woods had an impression that a large sum was usually kept there, but the doctor had paid a heavy corn bill in cash only that very day, and it was conjectured that it was to this and not to a robber that the emptiness of the box was due. One thing in the room was missing — but that one thing was suggestive. The portrait of Miss Morton, which had always stood upon the side-table, had been taken from its frame, and carried off. Mrs. Woods had observed it there when she waited upon her employer that evening, and now it was gone. On the other hand, there was picked up from the floor a green eye-patch, which the housekeeper could not remember to have seen before. Such a patch might, however, be in the possession of a doctor, and there was nothing to indicate that it was in any way connected with the crime.

Suspicion could only turn in one direction, and Arthur Morton, the young squire, was immediately arrested. The evidence against him was circumstantial, but damning. He was devoted to his sister, and it was shown that since the rupture between her and Dr. Lana he had been heard again and again to express himself in the most vindictive terms towards her former lover. He had, as stated, been seen somewhere about eleven o'clock entering the doctor's drive with a hunting-crop in his hand. He had then, according to the theory of the police, broken in upon the doctor, whose exclamation of fear or of anger had been loud enough to attract the attention of Mrs. Woods. When Mrs. Woods descended, Dr. Lana had made up his mind to talk it over with his visitor, and had, therefore, sent his housekeeper back to her room. This conversation had lasted a long time, had become more and more fiery, and had ended by a personal struggle, in which the doctor lost his life. The fact, revealed by a post-mortem, that his heart was much diseased — an ailment quite unsuspected during his life — would make it possible that death might in his case ensue from injuries which would not be fatal to a healthy man. Arthur Morton had then removed his sister's photograph, and had made his way homeward, stepping aside into the laurel bushes to avoid Mrs. Madding at the gate. This was the theory of the prosecution, and the case which they presented was a formidable one.

On the other hand, there were some strong points for the defence. Morton was high-spirited and impetuous, like his sister, but he was respected and liked by everyone, and his frank and honest nature seemed to be incapable of such a crime. His own explanation was that he was anxious to have a conversation with Dr. Lana about some urgent family matters (from first to last he refused even to mention the name of his sister). He did not attempt to deny that this conversation would probably have been of an unpleasant nature. He had heard from a patient that the doctor was out, and he therefore waited until about three in the morning for his return, but as he had seen nothing of him up to that hour, he had given it up and had returned home. As to his death, he knew no more about it than the constable who arrested him. He had formerly been an intimate friend of the deceased man; but circumstances, which he would prefer not to mention, had brought about a change in his sentiments.

There were several facts which supported his innocence. It was certain that Dr. Lana was alive and in his study at half-past eleven o'clock. Mrs. Woods was prepared to swear that it was at that hour that she had heard his voice. The friends of the prisoner contended that it was probable that at that time Dr. Lana was not alone. The sound which had originally attracted the attention of the housekeeper, and her master's unusual impatience that she should leave him in peace, seemed to point to that. If this were so then it appeared to be probable that he had met his end between the moment when the housekeeper heard his voice and the time when Mrs. Madding made her first call and found it impossible to attract his attention. But if this were the time of his death, then it was certain that Mr. Arthur Morton could not be guilty, as it was AFTER this that she had met the young squire at the gate.

If this hypothesis were correct, and someone was with Dr. Lana before Mrs. Madding met Mr. Arthur Morton, then who was this someone, and what motives had he for wishing evil to the doctor? It was universally admitted that if the friends of the accused could throw light upon this, they would have gone a long way towards establishing his innocence. But in the meanwhile it was open to the public to say — as they did say — that there was no proof that anyone had been there at all except the young squire; while, on the other hand, there was ample proof that his motives in going were of a sinister kind. When Mrs. Madding called, the doctor might have retired to his room, or he might, as she thought at the time, have gone out and returned afterwards to find Mr. Arthur Morton waiting for him. Some of the supporters of the accused laid stress upon the fact that the photograph of his sister Frances, which had been removed from the doctor's room, had not been found in her brother's possession. This argument, however, did not count for much, as he had ample time before his arrest to burn it or to destroy it. As to the only positive evidence in the case — the muddy footmarks upon the floor — they were so blurred by the softness of the carpet that it was impossible to make any trustworthy deduction from them. The most that could be said was that their appearance was not inconsistent with the theory that they were made by the accused, and it was further shown that his boots were very muddy upon that night. There had been a heavy shower in the afternoon, and all boots were probably in the same condition.

Such is a bald statement of the singular and romantic series of events which centred public attention upon this Lancashire tragedy. The unknown origin of the doctor, his curious and distinguished personality, the position of the man who was accused of the murder, and the love affair which had preceded the crimes all combined to make the affair one of those dramas which absorb the whole interest of a nation. Throughout the three kingdoms men discussed the case of the Black Doctor of Bishop's Crossing, and many were the theories put forward to explain the facts; but it may safely be said that among them all there was not one which prepared the minds of the public for the extraordinary sequel, which caused so much excitement upon the first day of the trial, and came to a climax upon the second. The long files of the Lancaster Weekly with their report of the case lie before me as I write, but I must content myself with a synopsis of the case up to the point when, upon the evening of the first day, the evidence of Miss Frances Morton threw a singular light upon the case.

Mr. Porlock Carr, the counsel for the prosecution, had marshalled his facts with his usual skill, and as the day wore on, it became more and more evident how difficult was the task which Mr. Humphrey, who had been retained for the defence, had before him. Several witnesses were put up to swear to the intemperate expressions which the young squire had been heard to utter about the doctor, and the fiery manner in which he resented the alleged ill-treatment of his sister. Mrs. Madding repeated her evidence as to the visit which had been paid late at night by the prisoner to the deceased, and it was shown by another witness that the prisoner was aware that the doctor was in the habit of sitting up alone in this isolated wing of the house, and that he had chosen this very late hour to call because he knew that his victim would then be at his mercy. A servant at the squire's house was compelled to admit that he had heard his master return about three that morning, which corroborated Mrs. Madding's statement that she had seen him among the laurel bushes near the gate upon the occasion of her second visit. The muddy boots and an alleged similarity in the footprints were duly dwelt upon, and it was felt when the case for the prosecution had been presented that, however circumstantial it might be, it was none the less so complete and so convincing, that the fate of the prisoner was sealed, unless something quite unexpected should be disclosed by the defence. It was three o'clock when the prosecution closed. At half-past four, when the court rose, a new and unlooked-for development had occurred. I extract the incident, or part of it, from the journal which I have already mentioned, omitting the preliminary observations of the counsel.

Considerable sensation was caused in the crowded court when the first witness called for the defence proved to be Miss Frances Morton, the sister of the prisoner. Our readers will remember that the young lady had been engaged to Dr. Lana, and that it was his anger over the sudden termination of this engagement which was thought to have driven her brother to the perpetration of this crime. Miss Morton had not, however, been directly implicated in the case in any way, either at the inquest or at the police-court proceedings, and her appearance as the leading witness for the defence came as a surprise upon the public.

Miss Frances Morton, who was a tall and handsome brunette, gave her evidence in a low but clear voice, though it was evident throughout that she was suffering from extreme emotion. She alluded to her engagement to the doctor, touched briefly upon its termination, which was due, she said, to personal matters connected with his family, and surprised the court by asserting that she had always considered her brother's resentment to be unreasonable and intemperate. In answer to a direct question from her counsel, she replied that she did not feel that she had any grievance whatever against Dr. Lana, and that in her opinion he had acted in a perfectly honourable manner. Her brother, on an insufficient knowledge of the facts, had taken another view, and she was compelled to acknowledge that, in spite of her entreaties, he had uttered threats of personal violence against the doctor, and had, upon the evening of the tragedy, announced his intention of "having it out with him." She had done her best to bring him to a more reasonable frame of mind, but he was very headstrong where his emotions or prejudices were concerned.

Up to this point the young lady's evidence had appeared to make against the prisoner rather than in his favour. The questions of her counsel, however, soon put a very different light upon the matter, and disclosed an unexpected line of defence.

Mr. Humphrey: Do you believe your brother to be guilty of this crime?

The Judge: I cannot permit that question, Mr. Humphrey. We are here to decide upon questions of fact — not of belief.

Mr. Humphrey: Do you know that your brother is not guilty of the death of Doctor Lana?

Miss Morton: Yes.

Mr. Humphrey: How do you know it?

Miss Morton: Because Dr. Lana is not dead.

There followed a prolonged sensation in court, which interrupted the examination of the witness.

Mr. Humphrey: And how do you know, Miss Morton, that Dr. Lana is not dead?

Miss Morton: Because I have received a letter from him since the date of his supposed death.

Mr. Humphrey: Have you this letter?

Miss Morton: Yes, but I should prefer not to show it.

Mr. Humphrey: Have you the envelope?

Miss Morton: Yes, it is here.

Mr. Humphrey: What is the post-mark?

Miss Morton: Liverpool.

Mr. Humphrey: And the date?

Miss Morton: June the 22nd.

Mr. Humphrey: That being the day after his alleged death. Are you prepared to swear to this handwriting, Miss Morton?

Miss Morton: Certainly.

Mr. Humphrey: I am prepared to call six other witnesses, my lord, to testify that this letter is in the writing of Doctor Lana.

The Judge: Then you must call them tomorrow.

Mr. Porlock Carr (counsel for the prosecution): In the meantime, my lord, we claim possession of this document, so that we may obtain expert evidence as to how far it is an imitation of the handwriting of the gentleman whom we still confidently assert to be deceased. I need not point out that the theory so unexpectedly sprung upon us may prove to be a very obvious device adopted by the friends of the prisoner in order to divert this inquiry. I would draw attention to the fact that the young lady must, according to her own account, have possessed this letter during the proceedings at the inquest and at the police-court. She desires us to believe that she permitted these to proceed, although she held in her pocket evidence which would at any moment have brought them to an end.

Mr. Humphrey. Can you explain this, Miss Morton?

Miss Morton: Dr. Lana desired his secret to be preserved.

Mr. Porlock Carr: Then why have you made this public?

Miss Morton: To save my brother.

A murmur of sympathy broke out in court, which was instantly suppressed by the Judge.

The Judge: Admitting this line of defence, it lies with you, Mr. Humphrey, to throw a light upon who this man is whose body has been recognised by so many friends and patients of Dr. Lana as being that of the doctor himself.

A Juryman: Has anyone up to now expressed any doubt about the matter?

Mr. Porlock Carr: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Humphrey: We hope to make the matter clear.

The Judge: Then the court adjourns until tomorrow.

This new development of the case excited the utmost interest among the general public. Press comment was prevented by the fact that the trial was still undecided, but the question was everywhere argued as to how far there could be truth in Miss Morton's declaration, and how far it might be a daring ruse for the purpose of saving her brother. The obvious dilemma in which the missing doctor stood was that if by any extraordinary chance he was not dead, then he must be held responsible for the death of this unknown man, who resembled him so exactly, and who was found in his study. This letter which Miss Morton refused to produce was possibly a confession of guilt, and she might find herself in the terrible position of only being able to save her brother from the gallows by the sacrifice of her former lover. The court next morning was crammed to overflowing, and a murmur of excitement passed over it when Mr. Humphrey was observed to enter in a state of emotion, which even his trained nerves could not conceal, and to confer with the opposing counsel. A few hurried words — words which left a look of amazement upon Mr. Porlock Carr's face — passed between them, and then the counsel for the defence, addressing the Judge, announced that, with the consent of the prosecution, the young lady who had given evidence upon the sitting before would not be recalled.

The Judge: But you appear, Mr. Humphrey, to have left matters in a very unsatisfactory state.

Mr. Humphrey: Perhaps, my lord, my next witness may help to clear them up.

The Judge: Then call your next witness.

Mr. Humphrey: I call Dr. Aloysius Lana.

The learned counsel has made many telling remarks in his day, but he has certainly never produced such a sensation with so short a sentence. The court was simply stunned with amazement as the very man whose fate had been the subject of so much contention appeared bodily before them in the witness-box. Those among the spectators who had known him at Bishop's Crossing saw him now, gaunt and thin, with deep lines of care upon his face. But in spite of his melancholy bearing and despondent expression, there were few who could say that they had ever seen a man of more distinguished presence. Bowing to the judge, he asked if he might be allowed to make a statement, and having been duly informed that whatever he said might be used against him, he bowed once more, and proceeded:

"My wish," said he, "is to hold nothing back, but to tell with perfect frankness all that occurred upon the night of the 21st of June. Had I known that the innocent had suffered, and that so much trouble had been brought upon those whom I love best in the world, I should have come forward long ago; but there were reasons which prevented these things from coming to my ears. It was my desire that an unhappy man should vanish from the world which had known him, but I had not foreseen that others would be affected by my actions. Let me to the best of my ability repair the evil which I have done.

"To anyone who is acquainted with the history of the Argentine Republic the name of Lana is well known. My father, who came of the best blood of old Spain, filled all the highest offices of the State, and would have been President but for his death in the riots of San Juan. A brilliant career might have been open to my twin brother Ernest and myself had it not been for financial losses which made it necessary that we should earn our own living. I apologize, sir, if these details appear to be irrelevant, but they are a necessary introduction to that which is to follow.

"I had, as I have said, a twin brother named Ernest, whose resemblance to me was so great that even when we were together people could see no difference between us. Down to the smallest detail we were exactly the same. As we grew older this likeness became less marked because our expression was not the same, but with our features in repose the points of difference were very slight.

"It does not become me to say too much of one who is dead, the more so as he is my only brother, but I leave his character to those who knew him best. I will only say — for I HAVE to say it — that in my early manhood I conceived a horror of him, and that I had good reason for the aversion which filled me. My own reputation suffered from his actions, for our close resemblance caused me to be credited with many of them. Eventually, in a peculiarly disgraceful business, he contrived to throw the whole odium upon me in such a way that I was forced to leave the Argentine for ever, and to seek a career in Europe. The freedom from his hated presence more than compensated me for the loss of my native land. I had enough money to defray my medical studies at Glasgow, and I finally settled in practice at Bishop's Crossing, in the firm conviction that in that remote Lancashire hamlet I should never hear of him again.

"For years my hopes were fulfilled, and then at last he discovered me. Some Liverpool man who visited Buenos Ayres put him upon my track. He had lost all his money, and he thought that he would come over and share mine. Knowing my horror of him, he rightly thought that I would be willing to buy him off. I received a letter from him saying that he was coming. It was at a crisis in my own affairs, and his arrival might conceivably bring trouble, and even disgrace, upon some whom I was especially bound to shield from anything of the kind. I took steps to insure that any evil which might come should fall on me only, and that" — here he turned and looked at the prisoner—"was the cause of conduct upon my part which has been too harshly judged. My only motive was to screen those who were dear to me from any possible connection with scandal or disgrace. That scandal and disgrace would come with my brother was only to say that what had been would be again.

"My brother arrived himself one night not very long after my receipt of the letter. I was sitting in my study after the servants had gone to bed, when I heard a footstep upon the gravel outside, and an instant later I saw his face looking in at me through the window. He was a clean-shaven man like myself, and the resemblance between us was still so great that, for an instant, I thought it was my own reflection in the glass. He had a dark patch over his eye, but our features were absolutely the same. Then he smiled in a sardonic way which had been a trick of his from his boyhood, and I knew that he was the same brother who had driven me from my native land, and brought disgrace upon what had been an honourable name. I went to the door and I admitted him. That would be about ten o’clock that night.

“When he came into the glare of the lamp, I saw at once that he had fallen upon very evil days. He had walked from Liverpool, and he was tired and ill. I was quite shocked by the expression upon his face. My medical knowledge told me that there was some serious internal malady. He had been drinking also, and his face was bruised as the result of a scuffle which he had had with some sailors. It was to cover his injured eye that he wore this patch, which he removed when he entered the room. He was himself dressed in a pea-jacket and flannel shirt, and his feet were bursting through his boots. But his poverty had only made him more savagely vindictive towards me. His hatred rose to the height of a mania. I had been rolling in money in England, according to his account, while he had been starving in South America. I cannot describe to you the threats which he uttered or the insults which he poured upon me. My impression is, that hardships and debauchery had unhinged his reason. He paced about the room like a wild beast, demanding drink, demanding money, and all in the foulest language. I am a hot-tempered man, but I thank God that I am able to say that I remained master of myself, and that I never raised a hand against him. My coolness only irritated him the more. He raved, he cursed, he shook his fists in my face, and then suddenly a horrible spasm passed over his features, he clapped his hand to his side, and with a loud cry he fell in a heap at my feet. I raised him up and stretched him upon the sofa, but no answer came to my exclamations, and the hand which I held in mine was cold and clammy. His diseased heart had broken down. His own violence had killed him.

“For a long time I sat as if I were in some dreadful dream, staring at the body of my brother. I was aroused by the knocking of Mrs. Woods, who had been disturbed by that dying cry. I sent her away to bed. Shortly afterwards a patient tapped at the surgery door, but as I took no notice, he or she went off again. Slowly and gradually as I sat there a plan was forming itself in my head in the curious automatic way in which plans do form. When I rose from my chair my future movements were finally decided upon without my having been conscious of any process of thought. It was an instinct which irresistibly inclined me towards one course.

“Ever since that change in my affairs to which I have alluded, Bishop’s Crossing had become hateful to me. My plans of life had been ruined, and I had met with hasty judgments and unkind treatment where I had expected sympathy. It is true that any danger of scandal from my brother had passed away with his life; but still, I was sore about the past, and felt that things could never be as they had been. It may be that I was unduly sensitive, and that I had not made sufficient allowance for others, but my feelings were as I describe. Any chance of getting away from Bishop’s Crossing and of everyone in it would be most welcome to me. And here was such a chance as I could never have dared to hope for, a chance which would enable me to make a clean break with the past.

“There was this dead man lying upon the sofa, so like me that save for some little thickness and coarseness of the features there was no difference at all. No one had seen him come and no one would miss him. We were both clean-shaven, and his hair was about the same length as my own. If I changed clothes with him, then Dr. Aloysius Lana would be found lying dead in his study, and there would be an end of an unfortunate fellow, and of a blighted career. There was plenty of ready money in the room, and this I could carry away with me to help me to start once more in some other land. In my brother’s clothes I could walk by night unobserved as far as Liverpool, and in that great seaport I would soon find some means of leaving the country. After my lost hopes, the humblest existence where I was unknown was far preferable, in my estimation, to a practice, however successful, in Bishop’s Crossing, where at any moment I might come face to face with those whom I should wish, if it were possible, to forget. I determined to effect the change.

“And I did so. I will not go into particulars, for the recollection is as painful as the experience; but in an hour my brother lay, dressed down to the smallest detail in my clothes, while I slunk out by the surgery door, and taking the back path which led across some fields, I started off to make the best of my way to Liverpool, where I arrived the same night. My bag of money and a certain portrait were all I carried out of the house, and I left behind me in my hurry the shade which my brother had been wearing over his eye. Everything else of his I took with me.

“I give you my word, sir, that never for one instant did the idea occur to me that people might think that I had been murdered, nor did I imagine that anyone might be caused serious danger through this stratagem by which I endeavoured to gain a fresh start in the world. On the contrary, it was the thought of relieving others from the burden of my presence which was always uppermost in my mind. A sailing vessel was leaving Liverpool that very day for Corunna, and in this I took my passage, thinking that the voyage would give me time to recover my balance, and to consider the future. But before I left my resolution softened. I bethought me that there was one person in the world to whom I would not cause an hour of sadness. She would mourn me in her heart, however harsh and unsympathetic her relatives might be. She understood and appreciated the motives upon which I had acted, and if the rest of her family condemned me, she, at least, would not forget. And so I sent her a note under the seal of secrecy to save her from a baseless grief. If under the pressure of events she broke that seal, she has my entire sympathy and forgiveness.

"It was only last night that I returned to England, and during all this time I have heard nothing of the sensation which my supposed death had caused, nor of the accusation that Mr. Arthur Morton had been concerned in it. It was in a late evening paper that I read an account of the proceedings of yesterday, and I have come this morning as fast as an express train could bring me to testify to the truth."

Such was the remarkable statement of Dr. Aloysius Lana which brought the trial to a sudden termination. A subsequent investigation corroborated it to the extent of finding out the vessel in which his brother Ernest Lana had come over from South America. The ship's doctor was able to testify that he had complained of a weak heart during the voyage, and that his symptoms were consistent with such a death as was described.

As to Dr. Aloysius Lana, he returned to the village from which he had made so dramatic a disappearance, and a complete reconciliation was effected between him and the young squire, the latter having acknowledged that he had entirely misunderstood the other's motives in withdrawing from his engagement. That another reconciliation followed may be judged from a notice extracted from a prominent column in the Morning Post:

"A marriage was solemnized upon September 19th, by the Rev. Stephen Johnson, at the parish church of Bishop's Crossing, between Aloysius Xavier Lana, son of Don Alfredo Lana, formerly Foreign Minister of the Argentine Republic, and Frances Morton, only daughter of the late James Morton, J.P., of Leigh Hall, Bishop's Crossing, Lancashire."

The Jew’s Breastplate

My particular friend, Ward Mortimer, was one of the best men of his day at everything connected with Oriental archaeology. He had written largely upon the subject, he had lived two years in a tomb at Thebes, while he excavated in the Valley of the Kings, and finally he had created a considerable sensation by his exhumation of the alleged mummy of Cleopatra in the inner room of the Temple of Horus, at Philae. With such a record at the age of thirty-one, it was felt that a considerable career lay before him, and no one was surprised when he was elected to the curatorship of the Belmore Street Museum, which carries with it the lectureship at the Oriental College, and an income which has sunk with the fall in land, but which still remains at that ideal sum which is large enough to encourage an investigator, but not so large as to enervate him.

There was only one reason which made Ward Mortimer’s position a little difficult at the Belmore Street Museum, and that was the extreme eminence of the man whom he had to succeed. Professor Andreas was a profound scholar and a man of European reputation. His lectures were frequented by students from every part of the world, and his admirable management of the collection intrusted to his care was a commonplace in all learned societies. There was, therefore, considerable surprise when, at the age of fifty-five, he suddenly resigned his position and retired from those duties which had been both his livelihood and his pleasure. He and his daughter left the comfortable suite of rooms which had formed his official residence in connection with the museum, and my friend, Mortimer, who was a bachelor, took up his quarters there.

On hearing of Mortimer’s appointment Professor Andreas had written him a very kindly and flattering congratulatory letter. I was actually present at their first meeting, and I went with Mortimer round the museum when the Professor showed us the admirable collection which he had cherished so long. The Professor’s beautiful daughter and a young man, Captain Wilson, who was, as I understood, soon to be her husband, accompanied us in our inspection. There were fifteen rooms, but the Babylonian, the Syrian, and the central hall, which contained the Jewish and Egyptian collection, were the finest of all. Professor Andreas was a quiet, dry, elderly man, with a clean-shaven face and an impassive manner, but his dark eyes sparkled and his features quickened into enthusiastic life as he pointed out to us the rarity and the beauty of some of his specimens. His hand lingered so fondly over them, that one could read his pride in them and the grief in his heart now that they were passing from his care into that of another.

He had shown us in turn his mummies, his papyri, his rare scarabs, his inscriptions, his Jewish relics, and his duplication of the famous seven-branched candlestick of the Temple, which was brought to Rome by Titus, and which is supposed by some to be lying at this instant in the bed of the Tiber. Then he approached a case which stood in the very centre of the hall, and he looked down through the glass with reverence in his attitude and manner.

"This is no novelty to an expert like yourself, Mr. Mortimer," said he; "but I daresay that your friend, Mr. Jackson, will be interested to see it."

Leaning over the case I saw an object, some five inches square, which consisted of twelve precious stones in a framework of gold, with golden hooks at two of the corners. The stones were all varying in sort and colour, but they were of the same size. Their shapes, arrangement, and gradation of tint made me think of a box of water-colour paints. Each stone had some hieroglyphic scratched upon its surface.

"You have heard, Mr. Jackson, of the urim and thummim?"

I had heard the term, but my idea of its meaning was exceedingly vague.

"The urim and thummim was a name given to the jewelled plate which lay upon the breast of the high priest of the Jews. They had a very special feeling of reverence for it — something of the feeling which an ancient Roman might have for the Sibylline books in the Capitol. There are, as you see, twelve magnificent stones, inscribed with mystical characters. Counting from the left-hand top corner, the stones are carnelian, peridot, emerald, ruby, lapis lazuli, onyx, sapphire, agate, amethyst, topaz, beryl, and jasper."

I was amazed at the variety and beauty of the stones.

"Has the breastplate any particular history?" I asked.

"It is of great age and of immense value," said Professor Andreas. "Without being able to make an absolute assertion, we have many reasons to think that it is possible that it may be the original urim and thummim of Solomon's Temple. There is certainly nothing so fine in any collection in Europe. My friend, Captain Wilson, here, is a practical authority upon precious stones, and he would tell you how pure these are."

Captain Wilson, a man with a dark, hard, incisive face, was standing beside his fiancee at the other side of the case.

"Yes," said he, curtly, "I have never seen finer stones."

"And the gold-work is also worthy of attention. The ancients excelled in — —" — he was apparently about to indicate the setting of the stones, when Captain Wilson interrupted him.

"You will see a finer example of their gold-work in this candlestick," said he, turning to another table, and we all joined him in his admiration of its embossed stem and delicately ornamented branches. Altogether it was an interesting and a novel experience to have objects of such rarity explained by so great an expert; and when, finally, Professor Andreas finished our inspection by formally handing over the precious collection to the care of my friend, I could not help pitying him and envying his successor whose life was to pass in so pleasant a duty. Within a week, Ward Mortimer was duly installed in his new set of rooms, and had become the autocrat of the Belmore Street Museum.

About a fortnight afterwards my friend gave a small dinner to half a dozen bachelor friends to celebrate his promotion. When his guests were departing he pulled my sleeve and signalled to me that he wished me to remain.

"You have only a few hundred yards to go," said he — I was living in chambers in the Albany. "You may as well stay and have a quiet cigar with me. I very much want your advice."

I relapsed into an arm-chair and lit one of his excellent Matronas. When he had returned from seeing the last of his guests out, he drew a letter from his dress-jacket and sat down opposite to me.

"This is an anonymous letter which I received this morning," said he. "I want to read it to you and to have your advice."

"You are very welcome to it for what it is worth."

"This is how the note runs: 'Sir, — I should strongly advise you to keep a very careful watch over the many valuable things which are committed to your charge. I do not think that the present system of a single watchman is sufficient. Be upon your guard, or an irreparable misfortune may occur.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Well," said I, "it is at least obvious that it was written by one of the limited number of people who are aware that you have only one watchman at night.”

Ward Mortimer handed me the note, with a curious smile. “Have you an eye for handwriting?” said he. “Now, look at this!” He put another letter in front of me. “Look at the c in ‘congratulate’ and the c in ‘committed.’ Look at the capital I. Look at the trick of putting in a dash instead of a stop!”

“They are undoubtedly from the same hand — with some attempt at disguise in the case of this first one.”

“The second,” said Ward Mortimer, “is the letter of congratulation which was written to me by Professor Andreas upon my obtaining my appointment.”

I stared at him in amazement. Then I turned over the letter in my hand, and there, sure enough, was “Martin Andreas” signed upon the other side. There could be no doubt, in the mind of anyone who had the slightest knowledge of the science of graphology, that the Professor had written an anonymous letter, warning his successor against thieves. It was inexplicable, but it was certain.

“Why should he do it?” I asked.

“Precisely what I should wish to ask you. If he had any such misgivings, why could he not come and tell me direct?”

“Will you speak to him about it?”

“There again I am in doubt. He might choose to deny that he wrote it.”

“At any rate,” said I, “this warning is meant in a friendly spirit, and I should certainly act upon it. Are the present precautions enough to insure you against robbery?”

“I should have thought so. The public are only admitted from ten till five, and there is a guardian to every two rooms. He stands at the door between them, and so commands them both.”

“But at night?”

“When the public are gone, we at once put up the great iron shutters, which are absolutely burglar-proof. The watchman is a capable fellow. He sits in the lodge, but he walks round every three hours. We keep one electric light burning in each room all night.”

“It is difficult to suggest anything more — short of keeping your day watches all night.”

“We could not afford that.”

“At least, I should communicate with the police, and have a special constable put on outside in Belmore Street,” said I. “As to the letter, if the writer wishes to be anonymous, I think he has a right to remain so. We must trust to the future to show some reason for the curious course which he has adopted.”

So we dismissed the subject, but all that night after my return to my chambers I was puzzling my brain as to what possible motive Professor Andreas could have for writing an anonymous warning letter to his successor — for that the writing was his was as certain to me as if I had seen him actually doing it. He foresaw some danger to the collection. Was it because he foresaw it that he abandoned his charge of it? But if so, why should he hesitate to warn Mortimer in his own name? I puzzled and puzzled until at last I fell into a troubled sleep, which carried me beyond my usual hour of rising.

I was aroused in a singular and effective method, for about nine o’clock my friend Mortimer rushed into my room with an expression of consternation upon his face. He was usually one of the most tidy men of my acquaintance, but now his collar was undone at one end, his tie was flying, and his hat at the back of his head. I read his whole story in his frantic eyes.

“The museum has been robbed!” I cried, springing up in bed.

“I fear so! Those jewels! The jewels of the urim and thummim!” he gasped, for he was out of breath with running. “I’m going on to the police-station. Come to the museum as soon as you can, Jackson! Good-bye!” He rushed distractedly out of the room, and I heard him clatter down the stairs.

I was not long in following his directions, but I found when I arrived that he had already returned with a police inspector, and another elderly gentleman, who proved to be Mr. Purvis, one of the partners of Morson and Company, the well-known diamond merchants. As an expert in stones he was always prepared to advise the police. They were grouped round the case in which the breastplate of the Jewish priest had been exposed. The plate had been taken out and laid upon the glass top of the case, and the three heads were bent over it.

“It is obvious that it has been tampered with,” said Mortimer. “It caught my eye the moment that I passed through the room this morning. I examined it yesterday evening, so that it is certain that this has happened during the night.”

It was, as he had said, obvious that someone had been at work upon it. The settings of the uppermost row of four stones — the carnelian, peridot, emerald, and ruby — were rough and jagged as if someone had scraped all round them. The stones were in their places, but the beautiful gold-work which we had admired only a few days before had been very clumsily pulled about.

“It looks to me,” said the police inspector, “as if someone had been trying to take out the stones.”

“My fear is,” said Mortimer, “that he not only tried, but succeeded. I believe these four stones to be skilful imitations which have been put in the place of the originals.”

The same suspicion had evidently been in the mind of the expert, for he had been carefully examining the four stones with the aid of a lens. He now submitted them to several tests, and finally turned cheerfully to Mortimer.

“I congratulate you, sir,” said he, heartily. “I will pledge my reputation that all four of these stones are genuine, and of a most unusual degree of purity.”

The colour began to come back to my poor friend’s frightened face, and he drew a long breath of relief.

“Thank God!” he cried. “Then what in the world did the thief want?”

“Probably he meant to take the stones, but was interrupted.”

“In that case one would expect him to take them out one at a time, but the setting of each of these has been loosened, and yet the stones are all here.”

“It is certainly most extraordinary,” said the inspector. “I never remember a case like it. Let us see the watchman.”

The commissionaire was called — a soldierly, honest-faced man, who seemed as concerned as Ward Mortimer at the incident.

“No, sir, I never heard a sound,” he answered, in reply to the questions of the inspector. “I made my rounds four times, as usual, but I saw nothing suspicious. I’ve been in my position ten years, but nothing of the kind has ever occurred before.”

“No thief could have come through the windows?”

“Impossible, sir.”

“Or passed you at the door?”

“No, sir; I never left my post except when I walked my rounds.”

“What other openings are there in the museum?”

“There is the door into Mr. Ward Mortimer’s private rooms.”

“That is locked at night,” my friend explained, “and in order to reach it anyone from the street would have to open the outside door as well.”

“Your servants?”

“Their quarters are entirely separate.”

“Well, well,” said the inspector, “this is certainly very obscure. However, there has been no harm done, according to Mr. Purvis.”

“I will swear that those stones are genuine.”

“So that the case appears to be merely one of malicious damage. But none the less, I should be very glad to go carefully round the premises, and to see if we can find any trace to show us who your visitor may have been.”

His investigation, which lasted all the morning, was careful and intelligent, but it led in the end to nothing. He pointed out to us that there were two possible entrances to the museum which we had not considered. The one was from the cellars by a trap-door opening in the passage. The other through a skylight from the lumber-room, overlooking that very chamber to which the intruder had penetrated. As neither the cellar nor the lumber-room could be entered unless the thief was already within the locked doors, the matter was not of any practical importance, and the dust of cellar and attic assured us that no one had used either one or the other. Finally, we ended as we began, without the slightest clue as to how, why, or by whom the setting of these four jewels had been tampered with.

There remained one course for Mortimer to take, and he took it. Leaving the police to continue their fruitless researches, he asked me to accompany him that afternoon in a visit to Professor Andreas. He took with him the two letters, and it was his intention to openly tax his predecessor with having written the anonymous warning, and to ask him to explain the fact that he should have anticipated so exactly that which had actually occurred. The Professor was living in a small villa in Upper Norwood, but we were informed by the servant that he was away from home. Seeing our disappointment, she asked us if we should like to see Miss Andreas, and showed us into the modest drawing-room.

I have mentioned incidentally that the Professor’s daughter was a very beautiful girl. She was a blonde, tall and graceful, with a skin of that delicate tint which the French call “mat,” the colour of old ivory, or of the lighter petals of the sulphur rose. I was shocked, however, as she entered the room to see how much she had changed in the last fortnight. Her young face was haggard and her bright eyes heavy with trouble.

“Father has gone to Scotland,” she said. “He seems to be tired, and has had a good deal to worry him. He only left us yesterday.”

“You look a little tired yourself, Miss Andreas,” said my friend.

“I have been so anxious about father.”

“Can you give me his Scotch address?”

“Yes, he is with his brother, the Rev. David Andreas, 1, Arran Villas, Ardrossan.”

Ward Mortimer made a note of the address, and we left without saying anything as to the object of our visit. We found ourselves in Belmore Street in the evening in exactly the same position in which we had been in the morning. Our only clue was the Professor’s letter, and my friend had made up his mind to start for Ardrossan next day, and to get to the bottom of the anonymous letter, when a new development came to alter our plans.

Very early on the following morning I was aroused from my sleep by a tap upon my bedroom door. It was a messenger with a note from Mortimer.

“Do come round,” it said; “the matter is becoming more and more extraordinary.”

When I obeyed his summons I found him pacing excitedly up and down the central room, while the old soldier who guarded the premises stood with military stiffness in a corner.

“My dear Jackson,” he cried, “I am so delighted that you have come, for this is a most inexplicable business.”

“What has happened, then?”

He waved his hand towards the case which contained the breastplate.

“Look at it,” said he.

I did so, and could not restrain a cry of surprise. The setting of the middle row of precious stones had been profaned in the same manner as the upper ones. Of the twelve jewels eight had been now tampered with in this singular fashion. The setting of the lower four was neat and smooth. The others jagged and irregular.

“Have the stones been altered?” I asked.

“No, I am certain that these upper four are the same which the expert pronounced to be genuine, for I observed yesterday that little discolouration on the edge of the emerald. Since they have not extracted the upper stones, there is no reason to think the lower have been transposed. You say that you heard nothing, Simpson?”

“No, sir,” the commissionaire answered. “But when I made my round after daylight I had a special look at these stones, and I saw at once that someone had been meddling with them. Then I called you, sir, and told you.

I was backwards and forwards all night, and I never saw a soul or heard a sound."

"Come up and have some breakfast with me," said Mortimer, and he took me into his own chambers.—"Now, what DO you think of this, Jackson?" he asked.

"It is the most objectless, futile, idiotic business that ever I heard of. It can only be the work of a monomaniac."

"Can you put forward any theory?"

A curious idea came into my head. "This object is a Jewish relic of great antiquity and sanctity," said I. "How about the anti-Semitic movement? Could one conceive that a fanatic of that way of thinking might desecrate — —"

"No, no, no!" cried Mortimer. "That will never do! Such a man might push his lunacy to the length of destroying a Jewish relic, but why on earth should he nibble round every stone so carefully that he can only do four stones in a night? We must have a better solution than that, and we must find it for ourselves, for I do not think that our inspector is likely to help us. First of all, what do you think of Simpson, the porter?"

"Have you any reason to suspect him?"

"Only that he is the one person on the premises."

"But why should he indulge in such wanton destruction? Nothing has been taken away. He has no motive."

"Mania?"

"No, I will swear to his sanity."

"Have you any other theory?"

"Well, yourself, for example. You are not a somnambulist, by any chance?"

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

"Then I give it up."

"But I don't — and I have a plan by which we will make it all clear."

"To visit Professor Andreas?"

"No, we shall find our solution nearer than Scotland. I will tell you what we shall do. You know that skylight which overlooks the central hall? We will leave the electric lights in the hall, and we will keep watch in the lumber-room, you and I, and solve the mystery for ourselves. If our mysterious visitor is doing four stones at a time, he has four still to do, and there is every reason to think that he will return tonight and complete the job.”

“Excellent!” I cried.

“We will keep our own secret, and say nothing either to the police or to Simpson. Will you join me?”

“With the utmost pleasure,” said I; and so it was agreed.

It was ten o’clock that night when I returned to the Belmore Street Museum. Mortimer was, as I could see, in a state of suppressed nervous excitement, but it was still too early to begin our vigil, so we remained for an hour or so in his chambers, discussing all the possibilities of the singular business which we had met to solve. At last the roaring stream of hansom cabs and the rush of hurrying feet became lower and more intermittent as the pleasure-seekers passed on their way to their stations or their homes. It was nearly twelve when Mortimer led the way to the lumber-room which overlooked the central hall of the museum.

He had visited it during the day, and had spread some sacking so that we could lie at our ease, and look straight down into the museum. The skylight was of unfrosted glass, but was so covered with dust that it would be impossible for anyone looking up from below to detect that he was overlooked. We cleared a small piece at each corner, which gave us a complete view of the room beneath us. In the cold white light of the electric lamps everything stood out hard and clear, and I could see the smallest detail of the contents of the various cases.

Such a vigil is an excellent lesson, since one has no choice but to look hard at those objects which we usually pass with such half-hearted interest. Through my little peep hole I employed the hours in studying every specimen, from the huge mummy-case which leaned against the wall to those very jewels which had brought us there, gleaming and sparkling in their glass case immediately beneath us. There was much precious gold-work and many valuable stones scattered through the numerous cases, but those wonderful twelve which made up the urim and thummim glowed and burned with a radiance which far eclipsed the others. I studied in turn the tomb-pictures of Sicara, the friezes from Karnak, the statues of Memphis, and the inscriptions of Thebes, but my eyes would always come back to that wonderful Jewish relic, and my mind to the singular mystery which surrounded it. I was lost in the thought of it when my companion suddenly drew his breath sharply in, and seized my arm in a convulsive grip. At the same instant I saw what it was which had excited him.

I have said that against the wall — on the right-hand side of the doorway (the right-hand side as we looked at it, but the left as one entered) — there stood a large mummy-case. To our unutterable amazement it was slowly opening. Gradually, gradually the lid was swinging back, and the black slit which marked the opening was becoming wider and wider. So gently and carefully was it done that the movement was almost imperceptible. Then, as we breathlessly watched it, a white thin hand appeared at the opening, pushing back the painted lid, then another hand, and finally a face — a face which was familiar to us both, that of Professor Andreas. Stealthily he slunk out of the mummy-case, like a fox stealing from its burrow, his head turning incessantly to left and to right, stepping, then pausing, then stepping again, the very image of craft and of caution. Once some sound in the street struck him motionless, and he stood listening, with his ear turned, ready to dart back to the shelter behind him. Then he crept onwards again upon tiptoe, very, very softly and slowly, until he had reached the case in the centre of the room. There he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked the case, took out the Jewish breastplate, and, laying it upon the glass in front of him, began to work upon it with some sort of small, glistening tool. He was so directly underneath us that his bent head covered his work, but we could guess from the movement of his hand that he was engaged in finishing the strange disfigurement which he had begun.

I could realise from the heavy breathing of my companion, and the twitchings of the hand which still clutched my wrist, the furious indignation which filled his heart as he saw this vandalism in the quarter of all others where he could least have expected it. He, the very man who a fortnight before had reverently bent over this unique relic, and who had impressed its antiquity and its sanctity upon us, was now engaged in this outrageous profanation. It was impossible, unthinkable — and yet there, in the white glare of the electric light beneath us, was that dark figure with the bent grey head, and the twitching elbow. What inhuman hypocrisy, what hateful depth of malice against his successor must underlie these sinister nocturnal labours. It was painful to think of and dreadful to watch. Even I, who had none of the acute feelings of a virtuoso, could not bear to look on and see this deliberate mutilation of so ancient a relic. It was a relief to me when my companion tugged at my sleeve as a signal that I was to follow him as he softly crept out of the room. It was not until we were within his own quarters that he opened his lips, and then I saw by his agitated face how deep was his consternation.

“The abominable Goth!” he cried. “Could you have believed it?”

“It is amazing.”

“He is a villain or a lunatic — one or the other. We shall very soon see which. Come with me, Jackson, and we shall get to the bottom of this black business.”

A door opened out of the passage which was the private entrance from his rooms into the museum. This he opened softly with his key, having first kicked off his shoes, an example which I followed. We crept together through room after room, until the large hall lay before us, with that dark figure still stooping and working at the central case. With an advance as cautious as his own we closed in upon him, but softly as we went we could not take him entirely unawares. We were still a dozen yards from him when he looked round with a start, and uttering a husky cry of terror, ran frantically down the museum.

“Simpson! Simpson!” roared Mortimer, and far away down the vista of electric lighted doors we saw the stiff figure of the old soldier suddenly appear. Professor Andreas saw him also, and stopped running, with a gesture of despair. At the same instant we each laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“Yes, yes, gentlemen,” he panted, “I will come with you. To your room, Mr. Ward Mortimer, if you please! I feel that I owe you an explanation.”

My companion’s indignation was so great that I could see that he dared not trust himself to reply. We walked on each side of the old Professor, the astonished commissionaire bringing up the rear. When we reached the violated case, Mortimer stopped and examined the breastplate. Already one of the stones of the lower row had had its setting turned back in the same manner as the others. My friend held it up and glanced furiously at his prisoner.

“How could you!” he cried. “How could you!”

“It is horrible — horrible!” said the Professor. “I don’t wonder at your feelings. Take me to your room.”

“But this shall not be left exposed!” cried Mortimer. He picked the breastplate up and carried it tenderly in his hand, while I walked beside the Professor, like a policeman with a malefactor. We passed into Mortimer’s chambers, leaving the amazed old soldier to understand matters as best he could. The Professor sat down in Mortimer's arm-chair, and turned so ghastly a colour that for the instant all our resentment was changed to concern. A stiff glass of brandy brought the life back to him once more.

"There, I am better now!" said he. "These last few days have been too much for me. I am convinced that I could not stand it any longer. It is a nightmare — a horrible nightmare — that I should be arrested as a burglar in what has been for so long my own museum. And yet I cannot blame you. You could not have done otherwise. My hope always was that I should get it all over before I was detected. This would have been my last night's work."

"How did you get in?" asked Mortimer.

"By taking a very great liberty with your private door. But the object justified it. The object justified everything. You will not be angry when you know everything — at least, you will not be angry with me. I had a key to your side door and also to the museum door. I did not give them up when I left. And so you see it was not difficult for me to let myself into the museum. I used to come in early before the crowd had cleared from the street. Then I hid myself in the mummy-case, and took refuge there whenever Simpson came round. I could always hear him coming. I used to leave in the same way as I came."

"You ran a risk."

"I had to."

"But why? What on earth was your object — YOU to do a thing like that!" Mortimer pointed reproachfully at the plate which lay before him on the table.

"I could devise no other means. I thought and thought, but there was no alternate except a hideous public scandal, and a private sorrow which would have clouded our lives. I acted for the best, incredible as it may seem to you, and I only ask your attention to enable me to prove it."

"I will hear what you have to say before I take any further steps," said Mortimer, grimly.

"I am determined to hold back nothing, and to take you both completely into my confidence. I will leave it to your own generosity how far you will use the facts with which I supply you."

"We have the essential facts already."

"And yet you understand nothing. Let me go back to what passed a few weeks ago, and I will make it all clear to you. Believe me that what I say is the absolute and exact truth.

"You have met the person who calls himself Captain Wilson. I say 'calls himself' because I have reason now to believe that it is not his correct name. It would take me too long if I were to describe all the means by which he obtained an introduction to me and ingratiated himself into my friendship and the affection of my daughter. He brought letters from foreign colleagues which compelled me to show him some attention. And then, by his own attainments, which are considerable, he succeeded in making himself a very welcome visitor at my rooms. When I learned that my daughter's affections had been gained by him, I may have thought it premature, but I certainly was not surprised, for he had a charm of manner and of conversation which would have made him conspicuous in any society.

"He was much interested in Oriental antiquities, and his knowledge of the subject justified his interest. Often when he spent the evening with us he would ask permission to go down into the museum and have an opportunity of privately inspecting the various specimens. You can imagine that I, as an enthusiast, was in sympathy with such a request, and that I felt no surprise at the constancy of his visits. After his actual engagement to Elise, there was hardly an evening which he did not pass with us, and an hour or two were generally devoted to the museum. He had the free run of the place, and when I have been away for the evening I had no objection to his doing whatever he wished here. This state of things was only terminated by the fact of my resignation of my official duties and my retirement to Norwood, where I hoped to have the leisure to write a considerable work which I had planned.

"It was immediately after this — within a week or so — that I first realised the true nature and character of the man whom I had so imprudently introduced into my family. The discovery came to me through letters from my friends abroad, which showed me that his introductions to me had been forgeries. Aghast at the revelation, I asked myself what motive this man could originally have had in practising this elaborate deception upon me. I was too poor a man for any fortune-hunter to have marked me down. Why, then, had he come? I remembered that some of the most precious gems in Europe had been under my charge, and I remembered also the ingenious excuses by which this man had made himself familiar with the cases in which they were kept. He was a rascal who was planning some gigantic robbery. How could I, without striking my own daughter, who was infatuated about him, prevent him from carrying out any plan which he might have formed? My device was a clumsy one, and yet I could think of nothing more effective. If I had written a letter under my own name, you would naturally have turned to me for details which I did not wish to give. I resorted to an anonymous letter, begging you to be upon your guard.

"I may tell you that my change from Belmore Street to Norwood had not affected the visits of this man, who had, I believe, a real and overpowering affection for my daughter. As to her, I could not have believed that any woman could be so completely under the influence of a man as she was. His stronger nature seemed to entirely dominate her. I had not realised how far this was the case, or the extent of the confidence which existed between them, until that very evening when his true character for the first time was made clear to me. I had given orders that when he called he should be shown into my study instead of to the drawing-room. There I told him bluntly that I knew all about him, that I had taken steps to defeat his designs, and that neither I nor my daughter desired ever to see him again. I added that I thanked God that I had found him out before he had time to harm those precious objects which it had been the work of my life-time to protect.

"He was certainly a man of iron nerve. He took my remarks without a sign either of surprise or of defiance, but listened gravely and attentively until I had finished. Then he walked across the room without a word and struck the bell.

"'Ask Miss Andreas to be so kind as to step this way,' said he to the servant.

"My daughter entered, and the man closed the door behind her. Then he took her hand in his.

"'Elise,' said he, 'your father has just discovered that I am a villain. He knows now what you knew before.'

"She stood in silence, listening.

"'He says that we are to part for ever,' said he.

"She did not withdraw her hand.

"'Will you be true to me, or will you remove the last good influence which is ever likely to come into my life?'

"'John,' she cried, passionately. 'I will never abandon you! Never, never, not if the whole world were against you.'

"In vain I argued and pleaded with her. It was absolutely useless. Her whole life was bound up in this man before me. My daughter, gentlemen, is all that I have left to love, and it filled me with agony when I saw how powerless I was to save her from her ruin. My helplessness seemed to touch this man who was the cause of my trouble.

"'It may not be as bad as you think, sir,' said he, in his quiet, inflexible way. 'I love Elise with a love which is strong enough to rescue even one who has such a record as I have. It was but yesterday that I promised her that never again in my whole life would I do a thing of which she should be ashamed. I have made up my mind to it, and never yet did I make up my mind to a thing which I did not do.'

"He spoke with an air which carried conviction with it. As he concluded he put his hand into his pocket and he drew out a small cardboard box.

"'I am about to give you a proof of my determination,' said he. 'This, Elise, shall be the first-fruits of your redeeming influence over me. You are right, sir, in thinking that I had designs upon the jewels in your possession. Such ventures have had a charm for me, which depended as much upon the risk run as upon the value of the prize. Those famous and antique stones of the Jewish priest were a challenge to my daring and my ingenuity. I determined to get them.'

"'I guessed as much.'

"'There was only one thing that you did not guess.'

"'And what is that?'

"'That I got them. They are in this box.'

"He opened the box, and tilted out the contents upon the corner of my desk. My hair rose and my flesh grew cold as I looked. There were twelve magnificent square stones engraved with mystical characters. There could be no doubt that they were the jewels of the urim and thummim.

"'Good God!' I cried. 'How have you escaped discovery?'

"'By the substitution of twelve others, made especially to my order, in which the originals are so carefully imitated that I defy the eye to detect the difference.'

"'Then the present stones are false?' I cried.

"'They have been for some weeks.'

"We all stood in silence, my daughter white with emotion, but still holding this man by the hand.

"'You see what I am capable of, Elise,' said he.

"'I see that you are capable of repentance and restitution,' she answered.

"'Yes, thanks to your influence! I leave the stones in your hands, sir. Do what you like about it. But remember that whatever you do against me, is done against the future husband of your only daughter. You will hear from me soon again, Elise. It is the last time that I will ever cause pain to your tender heart,' and with these words he left both the room and the house.

"My position was a dreadful one. Here I was with these precious relics in my possession, and how could I return them without a scandal and an exposure? I knew the depth of my daughter's nature too well to suppose that I would ever be able to detach her from this man now that she had entirely given him her heart. I was not even sure how far it was right to detach her if she had such an ameliorating influence over him. How could I expose him without injuring her — and how far was I justified in exposing him when he had voluntarily put himself into my power? I thought and thought until at last I formed a resolution which may seem to you to be a foolish one, and yet, if I had to do it again, I believe it would be the best course open to me.

"My idea was to return the stones without anyone being the wiser. With my keys I could get into the museum at any time, and I was confident that I could avoid Simpson, whose hours and methods were familiar to me. I determined to take no one into my confidence — not even my daughter — whom I told that I was about to visit my brother in Scotland. I wanted a free hand for a few nights, without inquiry as to my comings and goings. To this end I took a room in Harding Street that very night, with an intimation that I was a Pressman, and that I should keep very late hours.

"That night I made my way into the museum, and I replaced four of the stones. It was hard work, and took me all night. When Simpson came round I always heard his footsteps, and concealed myself in the mummy-case. I had some knowledge of gold-work, but was far less skilful than the thief had been. He had replaced the setting so exactly that I defy anyone to see the difference. My work was rude and clumsy. However, I hoped that the plate might not be carefully examined, or the roughness of the setting observed, until my task was done. Next night I replaced four more stones. And tonight I should have finished my task had it not been for the unfortunate circumstance which has caused me to reveal so much which I should have wished to keep concealed. I appeal to you, gentlemen, to your sense of honour and of compassion, whether what I have told you should go any farther or not. My own happiness, my daughter’s future, the hopes of this man’s regeneration, all depend upon your decision.

“Which is,” said my friend, “that all is well that ends well and that the whole matter ends here and at once. Tomorrow the loose settings shall be tightened by an expert goldsmith, and so passes the greatest danger to which, since the destruction of the Temple, the urim and thummim has been exposed. Here is my hand, Professor Andreas, and I can only hope that under such difficult circumstances I should have carried myself as unselfishly and as well.”

Just one footnote to this narrative. Within a month Elise Andreas was married to a man whose name, had I the indiscretion to mention it, would appeal to my readers as one who is now widely and deservedly honoured. But if the truth were known that honour is due not to him, but to the gentle girl who plucked him back when he had gone so far down that dark road along which few return.

THE DEALINGS OF CAPTAIN SHARKEY AND OTHER TALES OF PIRATES

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TALES OF PIRATES

CAPTAIN SHARKEY: HOW THE GOVERNOR OF SAINT KITT’S CAME HOME

When the great wars of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing-fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlaying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship *Morning Star*, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt’s was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the 20-gun pirate barque, *Happy Delivery*, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity. From the Bahamas to the Main his coal-black barque, with the ambiguous name, had been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship and her full and valuable lading, that he struck out to the west as far as Bird’s Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, “as provisions for the voyage,” but the seaman had at once committed them to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame, until, at the last moment, the *Morning Star* had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought of him lay heavily upon the seaman’s mind as he watched the agent’s boat shooting out from the custom-house quay.

“I’ll lay you a wager, Morgan,” said he to the first mate, “that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips.”

“Well, captain, I’ll have you a silver dollar, and chance it,” said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder.

“Welcome, Captain Scarrow!” he cried. “Have you heard about Sharkey?”

The captain grinned at the mate.

“What devilry has he been up to now?” he asked.

“Devilry! You’ve not heard, then! Why, we’ve got him safe under lock and key here at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning.”

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

“Sharkey to be hanged!” he cried. “You don’t know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?”

“Stand back!” cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. “I’ll pay that dollar, Captain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?”

“Why, as to that, he became more than his own comrades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. ‘He’s my meat,’ said he, ‘and I claim the cooking of it.’ If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you’ll see the joint swinging.”

“I wish I could,” said the captain, wistfully, “but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide.”

“That you can’t do,” said the agent with decision. “The Governor is going back with you.”

“The Governor!”

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains."

"Well, well!" cried the captain, in some perplexity, "I'm a plain seaman, and I don't know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don't remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it's in King George's service, and he asks a cast in the *Morning Star* as far as London, I'll do what I can for him. There's my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it's lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week; but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste."

"You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow," said the agent. "Sir Charles is in weak health just now, only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life into him. He has a great spirit in him, though, and you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech."

"He may say what he likes and do what he likes so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship," said the captain. "He is Governor of St. Kitt's, but I am Governor of the *Morning Star*. And, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George."

"He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves."

"The early morning tide, then."

"Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night, and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt's without seeing Sharkey do the rogue's hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey."

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the Governor's baggage began to arrive — great ironbound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or the sword within. And then there came a note, with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard that the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle’s coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

“You have my things?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir Charles.”

“Have you wine aboard?”

“I have ordered five cases, sir.”

“And tobacco?”

“There is a keg of Trinidad.”

“You play a hand at piquet?”

“Passably well, sir.”

“Then up anchor, and to sea!”

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limped the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter-rail.

“You are on Government service now, Captain,” said he. “They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?”

“Every inch, Sir Charles.”

“Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage.”

“I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency’s society,” said the Captain. “But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted.”

“Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out.”

“I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague.”

“Yes; I have had a pyrexy, which has reduced me much.”

“We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon.”

“Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!”

He raised his ring-covered hand in the air. From far astern there came the low deep thunder of cannon.

“It is from the island!” cried the captain in astonishment. “Can it be a signal for us to put back?”

The Governor laughed.

“You have heard that Sharkey, the pirate, is to be hanged this morning. I ordered the batteries to salute when the rascal was kicking his last, so that I might know of it out at sea. There’s an end of Sharkey!”

“There’s an end of Sharkey!” cried the captain; and the crew took up the cry as they gathered in little knots upon the deck and stared back at the low, purple line of the vanishing land.

It was a cheering omen for their start across the Western Ocean, and the invalid Governor found himself a popular man on board, for it was generally understood that but for his insistence upon an immediate trial and sentence, the villain might have played upon some more venal judge and so escaped. At dinner that day Sir Charles gave many anecdotes of the deceased pirate; and so affable was he, and so skilful in adapting his conversation to men of lower degree, that captain, mate, and Governor smoked their long pipes and drank their claret as three good comrades should.

“And what figure did Sharkey cut in the dock?” asked the captain.

“He is a man of some presence,” said the Governor.

“I had always understood that he was an ugly, sneering devil,” remarked the mate.

“Well, I dare say he could look ugly upon occasions,” said the Governor.

“I have heard a New Bedford whaleman say that he could not forget his eyes,” said Captain Scarrow. “They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?”

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the Adjutant-General said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury were so foolish as to be visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head."

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink to a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on the top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off — the one to his watch and the other to his bunk. But when after his four hours' spell the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the *Morning Star* was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were half-way across the Atlantic he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet he would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sails and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman — he who had been cast away in the boat — should lead him about, and above all that he should sit beside him when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey, and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed forefinger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulder. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of a mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. “Give me a knife and a bucket!” he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt’s, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the king’s ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw his cards down, and swept all the money into the pocket of his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

“The game’s mine!” said he.

“Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!” cried Captain Scarrow; “you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers.”

“Sink you for a liar!” said the Governor. “I tell you that I *have* played out the hand, and that you *are* a loser.” He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

“Good God!” cried the mate. “It’s Sharkey!”

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh.

“Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen,” said he, “and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the *Happy Delivery*. We made it hot, and so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs — you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs — we hold you at the end of our pistols!”

“You may shoot, or you may not!” cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. “If it’s my last breath, Sharkey, I tell you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!”

“There’s a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he’s going to make a very pretty death of it!” cried Sharkey. “There’s no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you’ll need it soon. Is the dinghy astern, Ned?”

“Ay, ay, captain!”

“And the other boats scuttled?”

“I bored them all in three places.”

“Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow. You look as if you hadn’t quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you’d like to ask me?”

“I believe you’re the devil himself!” cried the captain. “Where is the Governor of St. Kitt’s?”

“When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends — for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port — that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I have ruffled it as a governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them.”

“Help! Help! Watch ahoy!” yelled the mate; but the butt of the pirate’s pistol crashed down on to his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm round his waist.

“No use, Master Scarrow,” said Sharkey. “Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life.”

“I’ll see you — —” cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

“Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?”

“No; not if you twist it off.”

“Put an inch of your knife into him.”

“You may put six inches, and then I won’t.”

“Sink me, but I like his spirit!” cried Sharkey. “Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You’ve saved your skin, Scarrow, and it’s a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow, since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned.”

“To the stove, captain?”

“Tut, tut! there’s a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I’ll let you know which of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table.

“Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!” said the quartermaster. “You surely do not mean to let him go?”

“If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?”

“Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!” said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spreadeagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed underneath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt’s.

“Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you,” said the pirate. “If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he has a barque he’ll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own — so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the *Morning Star*.”

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their foot-steps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dinghy hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

“Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage, Wilson!” he screamed. “Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dinghy. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo’sun, and tumble into the boats all hands.”

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

“The boats are scuttled!” they cried. “They are leaking like a sieve.”

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net.

Close to them was the little dinghy, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

“They are dead men!” cried the captain. “A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger.”

But it was too late.

At that very moment the dinghy shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence. The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

THE DEALINGS OF CAPTAIN SHARKEY WITH STEPHEN CRADDOCK

Careening was a very necessary operation for the old pirate. On his superior speed he depended both for overhauling the trader and escaping the man-of-war. But it was impossible to retain his sailing qualities unless he periodically — once a year, at the least — cleared his vessel’s bottom from the long, trailing plants and crusting barnacles which gather so rapidly in the tropical seas.

For this purpose he lightened his vessel, thrust her into some narrow inlet where she would be left high and dry at low water, fastened blocks and tackles to her masts to pull her over on to her bilge, and then scraped her thoroughly from rudder-post to cutwater.

During the weeks which were thus occupied the ship was, of course, defenceless; but, on the other hand, she was unapproachable by anything heavier than an empty hull, and the place for careening was chosen with an eye to secrecy, so that there was no great danger.

So secure did the captains feel, that it was not uncommon for them, at such times, to leave their ships under a sufficient guard and to start off in the long-boat, either upon a sporting expedition or, more frequently, upon a visit to some outlying town, where they turned the heads of the women by their swaggering gallantry, or broached pipes of wine in the market square, with a threat to pistol all who would not drink with them.

Sometimes they would even appear in cities of the size of Charleston, and walk the streets with their clattering sidearms — an open scandal to the whole law-abiding colony. Such visits were not always paid with impunity. It was one of them, for example, which provoked Lieutenant Maynard to hack off Blackbeard’s head, and to spear it upon the end of his bowsprit. But, as a rule, the pirate ruffled and bullied and drabbed without let or hindrance, until it was time for him to go back to his ship once more.

There was one pirate, however, who never crossed even the skirts of civilisation, and that was the sinister Sharkey, of the barque *Happy Delivery*. It may have been from his morose and solitary temper, or, as is more probable, that he knew that his name upon the coast was such that outraged humanity would, against all odds, have thrown themselves upon him, but never once did he show his face in a settlement.

When his ship was laid up he would leave her under the charge of Ned Galloway — her New England quartermaster — and would take long voyages in his boat, sometimes, it was said, for the purpose of burying his share of the plunder, and sometimes to shoot the wild oxen of Hispaniola, which, when dressed and barbecued, provided provisions for his next voyage. In the latter case the barque would come round to some pre-arranged spot to pick him up and take on board what he had shot.

There had always been a hope in the islands that Sharkey might be taken on one of these occasions; and at last there came news to Kingston which seemed to justify an attempt upon him. It was brought by an elderly logwood-cutter who had fallen into the pirate's hands, and in some freak of drunken benevolence had been allowed to get away with nothing worse than a slit nose and a drubbing. His account was recent and definite. The *Happy Delivery* was careening at Torbec on the south-west of Hispaniola. Sharkey, with four men, was buccaneering on the outlying island of La Vache. The blood of a hundred murdered crews was calling out for vengeance, and now at last it seemed as if it might not call in vain.

Sir Edward Compton, the high-nosed, red-faced Governor, sitting in solemn conclave with the commandant and the head of the council, was sorely puzzled in his mind as to how he should use his chance. There was no man-of-war nearer than Jamestown, and she was a clumsy old fly-boat, which could neither overhaul the pirate on the seas, nor reach her in a shallow inlet. There were forts and artillerymen both at Kingston and Port Royal, but no soldiers available for an expedition.

A private venture might be fitted out — and there were many who had a blood-feud with Sharkey — but what could a private venture do? The pirates were numerous and desperate. As to taking Sharkey and his four companions, that, of course, would be easy if they could get at them; but how were they to get at them on a large well-wooded island like La Vache, full of wild hills and impenetrable jungles? A reward was offered to whoever could find a solution, and that brought a man to the front who had a singular plan, and was himself prepared to carry it out.

Stephen Craddock had been that most formidable person, the Puritan gone wrong. Sprung from a decent Salem family, his ill-doing seemed to be a recoil from the austerity of their religion, and he brought to vice all the physical strength and energy with which the virtues of his ancestors had endowed him. He was ingenious, fearless, and exceedingly tenacious of purpose, so that when he was still young his name became notorious upon the American coast.

He was the same Craddock who was tried for his life in Virginia for the slaying of the Seminole Chief, and, though he escaped, it was well known that he had corrupted the witnesses and bribed the judge.

Afterwards, as a slaver, and even, as it was hinted, as a pirate, he had left an evil name behind him in the Bight of Benin. Finally he had returned to Jamaica with a considerable fortune, and had settled down to a life of sombre dissipation. This was the man, gaunt, austere, and dangerous, who now waited upon the Governor with a plan for the extirpation of Sharkey.

Sir Edward received him with little enthusiasm, for in spite of some rumours of conversion and reformation, he had always regarded him as an infected sheep who might taint the whole of his little flock. Craddock saw the Governor's mistrust under his thin veil of formal and restrained courtesy.

"You've no call to fear me, sir," said he; "I'm a changed man from what you've known. I've seen the light again, of late, after losing sight of it for many a black year. It was through the ministration of the Rev. John Simons, of our own people. Sir, if your spirit should be in need of quickening, you would find a very sweet savour in his discourse."

The Governor cocked his Episcopalian nose at him.

"You came here to speak of Sharkey, Master Craddock," said he.

"The man Sharkey is a vessel of wrath," said Craddock. "His wicked horn has been exalted over long, and it is borne in upon me that if I can cut him off and utterly destroy him, it will be a goodly deed, and one which may atone for many backslidings in the past. A plan has been given to me whereby I may encompass his destruction."

The Governor was keenly interested, for there was a grim and practical air about the man's freckled face which showed that he was in earnest. After all, he was a seaman and a fighter, and, if it were true that he was eager to atone for his past, no better man could be chosen for the business.

"This will be a dangerous task, Master Craddock," said he.

"If I meet my death at it, it may be that it will cleanse the memory of an ill-spent life. I have much to atone for."

The Governor did not see his way to contradict him.

"What was your plan?" he asked.

"You have heard that Sharkey's barque, the *Happy Delivery*, came from this very port of Kingston?"

"It belonged to Mr. Codrington, and it was taken by Sharkey, who scuttled his own sloop and moved into her because she was faster," said Sir Edward.

"Yes; but it may be that you have never heard that Mr. Codrington has a sister ship, the *White Rose*, which lies even now in the harbour, and which is so like the pirate, that, if it were not for a white paint line, none could tell them apart."

"Ah! and what of that?" asked the Governor keenly, with the air of one who is just on the edge of an idea.

"By the help of it this man shall be delivered into our hands."

"And how?"

"I will paint out the streak upon the *White Rose*, and make it in all things like the *Happy Delivery*. Then I will set sail for the Island of La Vache, where this man is slaying the wild oxen. When he sees me he will surely mistake me for his own vessel which he is awaiting, and he will come on board to his own undoing."

It was a simple plan, and yet it seemed to the Governor that it might be effective. Without hesitation he gave Craddock permission to carry it out, and to take any steps he liked in order to further the object which he had in view. Sir Edward was not very sanguine, for many attempts had been made upon Sharkey, and their results had shown, that he was as cunning as he was ruthless. But this gaunt Puritan with the evil record was cunning and ruthless also.

The contest of wits between two such men as Sharkey and Craddock appealed to the Governor's acute sense of sport, and though he was inwardly convinced that the chances were against him, he backed his man with the same loyalty which he would have shown to his horse or his cock.

Haste was, above all things, necessary, for upon any day the careening might be finished, and the pirates out at sea once more. But there was not very much to do, and there were many willing hands to do it, so the second day saw the *White Rose* beating out for the open sea. There were many seamen in the port who knew the lines and rig of the pirate barque, and not one of them could see the slightest difference in this counterfeit. Her white side line had been painted out, her masts and yards were smoked, to give them the dingy appearance of the weather-beaten rover, and a large diamond shaped patch was let into her fore-topsail.

Her crew were volunteers, many of them being men who had sailed with Stephen Craddock before — the mate, Joshua Hird, an old slaver, had been his accomplice in many voyages, and came now at the bidding of his chief.

The avenging barque sped across the Caribbean Sea, and, at the sight of that patched topsail, the little craft which they met flew left and right like frightened trout in a pool. On the fourth evening Point Abacou bore five miles to the north and east of them.

On the fifth they were at anchor in the Bay of Tortoises at the Island of La Vache, where Sharkey and his four men had been hunting. It was a well-wooded place, with the palms and underwood growing down to the thin crescent of silver sand which skirted the shore. They had hoisted the black flag and the red pennant, but no answer came from the shore. Craddock strained his eyes, hoping every instant to see a boat shoot out to them with Sharkey seated in the sheets. But the night passed away, and a day and yet another night, without any sign of the men whom they were endeavouring to trap. It looked as if they were already gone.

On the second morning Craddock went ashore in search of some proof whether Sharkey and his men were still upon the island. What he found reassured him greatly. Close to the shore was a boucan of green wood, such as was used for preserving the meat, and a great store of barbecued strips of ox-flesh was hung upon lines all round it. The pirate ship had not taken off her provisions, and therefore the hunters were still upon the island.

Why had they not shown themselves? Was it that they had detected that this was not their own ship? Or was it that they were hunting in the interior of the island, and were not on the lookout for a ship yet? Craddock was still hesitating between the two alternatives, when a Carib Indian came down with information. The pirates were in the island, he said, and their camp was a day’s march from the sea. They had stolen his wife, and the marks of their stripes were still pink upon his brown back. Their enemies were his friends, and he would lead them to where they lay.

Craddock could not have asked for anything better; so early next morning, with a small party armed to the teeth, he set off under the guidance of the Carib. All day they struggled through brushwood and clambered over rocks, pushing their way further and further into the desolate heart of the island. Here and there they found traces of the hunters, the bones of a slain ox, or the marks of feet in a morass, and once, towards evening, it seemed to some of them that they heard the distant rattle of guns.

That night they spent under the trees, and pushed on again with the earliest light. About noon they came to the huts of bark, which, the Carib told them, were the camp of the hunters, but they were silent and deserted. No doubt their occupants were away at the hunt and would return in the evening, so Craddock and his men lay in ambush in the brushwood around them. But no one came, and another night was spent in the forest. Nothing more could be done, and it seemed to Craddock that after the two days' absence it was time that he returned to his ship once more.

The return journey was less difficult, as they had already blazed a path for themselves. Before evening they found themselves once more at the Bay of Palms, and saw their ship riding at anchor where they had left her. Their boat and oars had been hauled up among the bushes, so they launched it and pulled out to the barque.

"No luck, then!" cried Joshua Hird, the mate, looking down with a pale face from the poop.

"His camp was empty, but he may come down to us yet," said Craddock, with his hand on the ladder.

Somebody upon deck began to laugh. "I think," said the mate, "that these men had better stay in the boat."

"Why so?"

"If you will come aboard, sir, you will understand it." He spoke in a curious hesitating fashion.

The blood flushed to Craddock's gaunt face.

"How is this, Master Hird?" he cried, springing up the side. "What mean you by giving orders to my boat's crew?"

But as he passed over the bulwarks, with one foot upon the deck and one knee upon the rail, a tow-bearded man, whom he had never before observed aboard his vessel, grabbed suddenly at his pistol. Craddock clutched at the fellow's wrist, but at the same instant his mate snatched the cutlass from his side.

"What roguery is this?" shouted Craddock looking furiously around him. But the crew stood in little knots about the deck, laughing and whispering amongst themselves without showing any desire to go to his assistance. Even in that hurried glance Craddock noticed that they were dressed in the most singular manner, with long riding-coats, full-skirted velvet gowns and coloured ribands at their knees, more like men of fashion than seamen.

As he looked at their grotesque figures he struck his brow with his clenched fist to be sure that he was awake. The deck seemed to be much dirtier than when he had left it, and there were strange, sun-blackened faces turned upon him from every side. Not one of them did he know save only Joshua Hird. Had the ship been captured in his absence? Were these Sharkey's men who were around him? At the thought he broke furiously away and tried to climb over to his boat, but a dozen hands were on him in an instant, and he was pushed aft through the open door of his own cabin.

And it was all different from the cabin which he had left. The floor was different, the ceiling was different, the furniture was different. His had been plain and austere. This was sumptuous and yet dirty, hung with rare velvet curtains splashed with wine-stains, and panelled with costly woods which were pocked with pistol-marks.

On the table was a great chart of the Caribbean Sea, and beside it, with compasses in his hand, sat a clean-shaven, pale-faced man with a fur cap and a claret-coloured coat of damask. Craddock turned white under his freckles as he looked upon the long, thin, high-nostrilled nose and the red-rimmed eyes which were turned upon him with the fixed, humorous gaze of the master player who has left his opponent without a move.

"Sharkey?" cried Craddock.

Sharkey's thin lips opened and he broke into his high, sniggering laugh.

"You fool!" he cried, and, leaning over, he stabbed Craddock's shoulder again and again with his compasses. "You poor, dull-witted fool, would you match yourself against me?"

It was not the pain of the wounds, but it was the contempt in Sharkey's voice which turned Craddock into a savage madman. He flew at the pirate, roaring with rage, striking, kicking, writhing, and foaming. It took six men to drag him down on to the floor amidst the splintered remains of the table — and not one of the six who did not bear the prisoner's mark upon him. But Sharkey still surveyed him with the same contemptuous eye. From outside there came the crash of breaking wood and the clamour of startled voices.

"What is that?" asked Sharkey.

"They have stove the boat with cold shot, and the men are in the water."

“Let them stay there,” said the pirate. “Now, Craddock, you know where you are. You are aboard my ship the *Happy Delivery*, and you lie at my mercy. I knew you for a stout seaman, you rogue, before you took to this long-shore canting. Your hands then were no cleaner than my own. Will you sign articles, as your mate has done, and join us, or shall I heave you over to follow your ship’s company?”

“Where is my ship?” asked Craddock.

“Scuttled in the bay.”

“And the hands?”

“In the bay, too.”

“Hock him and heave him over,” said Sharkey.

Many rough hands had dragged Craddock out upon deck, and Galloway, the quartermaster, had already drawn his hangar to cripple him, when Sharkey came hurrying from his cabin with an eager face.

“We can do better with the hound!” he cried. “Sink me if it is not a rare plan. Throw him into the sail-room with the irons on, and do you come here, quartermaster, that I may tell you what I have in my mind.”

So Craddock, bruised and wounded in soul and body, was thrown into the dark sail-room, so fettered that he could not stir hand or foot, but his Northern blood was running strong in his veins, and his grim spirit aspired only to make such an ending as might go some way towards atoning for the evil of his life. All night he lay in the curve of the bilge listening to the rush of the water and the straining of the timbers which told him that the ship was at sea, and driving fast. In the early morning some one came crawling to him in the darkness over the heaps of sails.

“Here’s rum and biscuits,” said the voice of his late mate. “It’s at the risk of my life, Master Craddock, that I bring them to you.”

“It was you who trapped me and caught me as in a snare!” cried Craddock. “How shall you answer for what you have done?”

“What I did I did with the point of a knife betwixt my blade-bones.”

“God forgive you for a coward, Joshua Hird. How came you into their hands?”

“Why, Master Craddock, the pirate ship came back from its careening upon the very day that you left us. They laid us aboard, and, short-handed as we were, with the best of the men ashore with you, we could offer but a poor defence. Some were cut down, and they were the happiest. The others were killed afterwards. As to me, I saved my life by signing on with them.”

“And they scuttled my ship?”

“They scuttled her, and then Sharkey and his men, who had been watching us from the brushwood, came off to the ship. His main-yard had been cracked and fished last voyage, so he had suspicions of us, seeing that ours was whole. Then he thought of laying the same trap for you which you had set for him.”

Craddock groaned.

“How came I not to see that fished main-yard?” he muttered. “But whither are we bound?”

“We are running north and west.”

“North and west! Then we are heading back towards Jamaica.”

“With an eight-knot wind.”

“Have you heard what they mean to do with me?”

“I have not heard. If you would but sign the articles — —”

“Enough, Joshua Hird! I have risked my soul too often.”

“As you wish! I have done what I could. Farewell!”

All that night and the next day the *Happy Delivery* ran before the easterly trades, and Stephen Craddock lay in the dark of the sail-room working patiently at his wrist-irons. One he had slipped off at the cost of a row of broken and bleeding knuckles, but, do what he would, he could not free the other, and his ankles were securely fastened.

From hour to hour he heard the swish of the water, and knew that the barque must be driving with all set, in front of the trade wind. In that case they must be nearly back again to Jamaica by now. What plan could Sharkey have in his head, and what use did he hope to make of him? Craddock set his teeth, and vowed that if he had once been a villain from choice he would, at least, never be one by compulsion.

On the second morning Craddock became aware that sail had been reduced in the vessel, and that she was tacking slowly, with a light breeze on her beam. The varying slope of the sail-room and the sounds from the deck told his practised senses exactly what she was doing. The short reaches showed him that she was man[oe]uvring near shore, and making for some definite point. If so, she must have reached Jamaica. But what could she be doing there?

And then suddenly there was a burst of hearty cheering from the deck, and then the crash of a gun above his head, and then the answering booming of guns from far over the water. Craddock sat up and strained his ears. Was the ship in action? Only the one gun had been fired, and though many had answered there were none of the crashings which told of a shot coming home.

Then, if it was not an action, it must be a salute. But who would salute Sharkey, the pirate? It could only be another pirate ship which would do so. So Craddock lay back again with a groan, and continued to work at the manacle which still held his right wrist.

But suddenly there came the shuffling of steps outside, and he had hardly time to wrap the loose links round his free hand, when the door was unbolted and two pirates came in.

“Got your hammer, carpenter?” asked one, whom Craddock recognised as the big quartermaster. “Knock off his leg shackles, then. Better leave the bracelets — he’s safer with them on.”

With hammer and chisel the carpenter loosened the irons.

“What are you going to do with me?” asked Craddock.

“Come on deck and you’ll see.”

The sailor seized him by the arm and dragged him roughly to the foot of the companion. Above him was a square of blue sky cut across by the mizzen gaff with the colours flying at the peak. But it was the sight of those colours which struck the breath from Stephen Craddock’s lips. For there were two of them, and the British ensign was flying above the Jolly Rodger — the honest flag above that of the rogue.

For an instant Craddock stopped in amazement, but a brutal push from the pirates behind drove him up the companion ladder. As he stepped out upon deck, his eyes turned up to the main, and there again were the British colours flying above the red pennant, and all the shrouds and rigging were garlanded with streamers.

Had the ship been taken, then? But that was impossible, for there were the pirates clustering in swarms along the port bulwarks, and waving their hats joyously in the air. Most prominent of all was the renegade mate, standing on the foc’sle head, and gesticulating wildly. Craddock looked over the side to see what they were cheering at, and then in a flash he saw how critical was the moment.

On the port bow, and about a mile off, lay the white houses and forts of Port Royal, with flags breaking out everywhere over their roofs. Right ahead was the opening of the palisades leading to the town of Kingston. Not more than a quarter of a mile off was a small sloop working out against the very slight wind. The British ensign was at her peak, and her rigging was all decorated. On her deck could be seen a dense crowd of people cheering and waving their hats, and the gleam of scarlet told that there were officers of the garrison among them.

In an instant, with the quick perception of a man of action, Craddock saw through it all. Sharkey, with that diabolical cunning and audacity which were among his main characteristics, was simulating the part which Craddock would himself have played, had he come back victorious. It was in *his* honour that the salutes were firing and the flags flying. It was to welcome *him* that this ship with the Governor, the commandant, and the chiefs of the island was approaching. In another ten minutes they would all be under the guns of the *Happy Delivery*, and Sharkey would have won the greatest stake that ever a pirate played for yet.

“Bring him forward,” cried the pirate captain, as Craddock appeared between the carpenter and the quartermaster. “Keep the ports closed, but clear away the port guns, and stand by for a broadside. Another two cable lengths and we have them.”

“They are edging away,” said the boatswain. “I think they smell us.”

“That’s soon set right,” said Sharkey, turning his filmy eyes upon Craddock. “Stand there, you — right there, where they can recognise you, with your hand on the guy, and wave your hat to them. Quick, or your brains will be over your coat. Put an inch of your knife into him, Ned. Now, will you wave your hat? Try him again, then. Hey, shoot him! stop him!”

But it was too late. Relying upon the manacles, the quartermaster had taken his hands for a moment off Craddock’s arm. In that instant he had flung off the carpenter and, amid a spatter of pistol bullets, had sprung the bulwarks and was swimming for his life. He had been hit and hit again, but it takes many pistols to kill a resolute and powerful man who has his mind set upon doing something before he dies. He was a strong swimmer, and, in spite of the red trail which he left in the water behind him, he was rapidly increasing his distance from the pirate.

“Give me a musket!” cried Sharkey, with a savage oath.

He was a famous shot, and his iron nerves never failed him in an emergency. The dark head appearing on the crest of a roller, and then swooping down on the other side, was already half-way to the sloop. Sharkey dwelt long upon his aim before he fired. With the crack of the gun the swimmer reared himself up in the water, waved his hands in a gesture of warning, and roared out in a voice which rang over the bay. Then, as the sloop swung round her head-sails, and the pirate fired an impotent broadside, Stephen Craddock, smiling grimly in his death agony, sank slowly down to that golden couch which glimmered far beneath him.

THE BLIGHTING OF SHARKEY

Sharkey, the abominable Sharkey, was out again. After two years of the Coromandel coast, his black barque of death, the *Happy Delivery*, was prowling off the Spanish Main, while trader and fisher flew for dear life at the menace of that patched fore-topsail, rising slowly over the violet rim of the tropical sea.

As the birds cower when the shadow of the hawk falls athwart the field, or as the jungle folk crouch and shiver when the coughing cry of the tiger is heard in the night-time, so through all the busy world of ships, from the whalers of Nantucket to the tobacco ships of Charleston, and from the Spanish supply ships of Cadiz to the sugar merchants of the Main, there spread the rumour of the black curse of the ocean.

Some hugged the shore, ready to make for the nearest port, while others struck far out beyond the known lines of commerce, but none were so stout-hearted that they did not breathe more freely when their passengers and cargoes were safe under the guns of some mothering fort.

Through all the islands there ran tales of charred derelicts at sea, of sudden glares seen afar in the night-time, and of withered bodies stretched upon the sand of waterless Bahama Keys. All the old signs were there to show that Sharkey was at his bloody game once more.

These fair waters and yellow-rimmed palm-nodding islands are the traditional home of the sea rover. First it was the gentleman adventurer, the man of family and honour, who fought as a patriot, though he was ready to take his payment in Spanish plunder.

Then, within a century, his debonair figure had passed to make room for the buccaneers, robbers pure and simple, yet with some organised code of their own, commanded by notable chieftains, and taking in hand great concerted enterprises.

They, too, passed with their fleets and their sacking of cities, to make room for the worst of all, the lonely, outcast pirate, the bloody Ishmael of the seas, at war with the whole human race. This was the vile brood which the early eighteenth century had spawned forth, and of them all there was none who could compare in audacity, wickedness, and evil repute with the unutterable Sharkey.

It was early in May, in the year 1720, that the *Happy Delivery* lay with her fore-yard aback some five leagues west of the Windward Passage, waiting to see what rich, helpless craft the trade-wind might bring down to her.

Three days she had lain there, a sinister black speck, in the centre of the great sapphire circle of the ocean. Far to the south-east the low blue hills of Hispaniola showed up on the skyline.

Hour by hour as he waited without avail, Sharkey's savage temper had risen, for his arrogant spirit chafed against any contradiction, even from Fate itself. To his quartermaster, Ned Galloway, he had said that night, with his odious neighing laugh, that the crew of the next captured vessel should answer to him for having kept him waiting so long.

The cabin of the pirate barque was a good-sized room, hung with much tarnished finery, and presenting a strange medley of luxury and disorder. The panelling of carved and polished sandal-wood was blotched with foul smudges and chipped with bullet-marks fired in some drunken revelry.

Rich velvets and laces were heaped upon the brocaded settees, while metal-work and pictures of great price filled every niche and corner, for anything which caught the pirate's fancy in the sack of a hundred vessels was thrown haphazard into his chamber. A rich, soft carpet covered the floor, but it was mottled with wine-stains and charred with burned tobacco.

Above, a great brass hanging-lamp threw a brilliant yellow light upon this singular apartment, and upon the two men who sat in their shirt-sleeves with the wine between them, and the cards in their hands, deep in a game of piquet. Both were smoking long pipes, and the thin blue reek filled the cabin and floated through the skylight above them, which, half opened, disclosed a slip of deep violet sky spangled with great silver stars.

Ned Galloway, the quartermaster, was a huge New England wastrel, the one rotten branch upon a goodly Puritan family tree. His robust limbs and giant frame were the heritage of a long line of God-fearing ancestors, while his black savage heart was all his own. Bearded to the temples, with fierce blue eyes, a tangled lion's mane of coarse, dark hair, and huge gold rings in his ears, he was the idol of the women in every waterside hell from the Tortugas to Maracaibo on the Main. A red cap, a blue silken shirt, brown velvet breeches with gaudy knee-ribbons, and high sea-boots made up the costume of the rover Hercules.

A very different figure was Captain John Sharkey. His thin, drawn, clean-shaven face was corpse-like in its pallor, and all the suns of the Indies could but turn it to a more deathly parchment tint. He was part bald, with a few lank locks of tow-like hair, and a steep, narrow forehead. His thin nose jutted sharply forth, and near-set on either side of it were those filmy blue eyes, red-rimmed like those of a white bull-terrier, from which strong men winced away in fear and loathing. His bony hands, with long, thin fingers which quivered ceaselessly like the antennae of an insect, were toying constantly with the cards and the heap of gold moidores which lay before him. His dress was of some sober drab material, but, indeed, the men who looked upon that fearsome face had little thought for the costume of its owner.

The game was brought to a sudden interruption, for the cabin door was swung rudely open, and two rough fellows — Israel Martin, the boatswain, and Red Foley, the gunner — rushed into the cabin. In an instant Sharkey was on his feet with a pistol in either hand and murder in his eyes.

“Sink you for villains!” he cried. “I see well that if I do not shoot one of you from time to time you will forget the man I am. What mean you by entering my cabin as though it were a Wapping alehouse?”

“Nay, Captain Sharkey,” said Martin, with a sullen frown upon his brick-red face, “it is even such talk as this which has set us by the ears. We have had enough of it.”

“And more than enough,” said Red Foley, the gunner. “There be no mates aboard a pirate craft, and so the boatswain, the gunner, and the quartermaster are the officers.”

“Did I gainsay it?” asked Sharkey with an oath.

“You have miscalled us and mishandled us before the men, and we scarce know at this moment why we should risk our lives in fighting for the cabin and against the foc’sle.”

Sharkey saw that something serious was in the wind. He laid down his pistols and leaned back in his chair with a flash of his yellow fangs.

“Nay, this is sad talk,” said he, “that two stout fellows who have emptied many a bottle and cut many a throat with me, should now fall out over nothing. I know you to be roaring boys who would go with me against the devil himself if I bid you. Let the steward bring cups and drown all unkindness between us.”

“It is no time for drinking, Captain Sharkey,” said Martin. “The men are holding council round the mainmast, and may be aft at any minute. They mean mischief, Captain Sharkey, and we have come to warn you.”

Sharkey sprang for the brass-handled sword which hung from the wall.

“Sink them for rascals!” he cried. “When I have gutted one or two of them they may hear reason.”

But the others barred his frantic way to the door.

“There are forty of them under the lead of Sweetlocks, the master,” said Martin, “and on the open deck they would surely cut you to pieces. Here within the cabin it may be that we can hold them off at the points of our pistols.” He had hardly spoken when there came the tread of many heavy feet upon the deck. Then there was a pause with no sound but the gentle lapping of the water against the sides of the pirate vessel. Finally, a crashing blow as from a pistol-butt fell upon the door, and an instant afterwards Sweetlocks himself, a tall, dark man, with a deep red birth-mark blazing upon his cheek, strode into the cabin. His swaggering air sank somewhat as he looked into those pale and filmy eyes.

“Captain Sharkey,” said he, “I come as spokesman of the crew.”

“So I have heard, Sweetlocks,” said the captain, softly. “I may live to rip you the length of your vest for this night’s work.”

“That is as it may be, Captain Sharkey,” the master answered, “but if you will look up you will see that I have those at my back who will not see me mishandled.”

“Cursed if we do!” growled a deep voice from above, and glancing upwards the officers in the cabin were aware of a line of fierce, bearded, sun-blackened faces looking down at them through the open skylight.

“Well, what would you have?” asked Sharkey. “Put it in words, man, and let us have an end of it.”

“The men think,” said Sweetlocks, “that you are the devil himself, and that there will be no luck for them whilst they sail the sea in such company. Time was when we did our two or three craft a day, and every man had women and dollars to his liking, but now for a long week we have not raised a sail, and save for three beggarly sloops, have taken never a vessel since we passed the Bahama Bank. Also, they know that you killed Jack Bartholomew, the carpenter, by beating his head in with a bucket, so that each of us goes in fear of his life. Also, the rum has given out, and we are hard put to it for liquor. Also, you sit in your cabin whilst it is in the articles that you should drink and roar with the crew. For all these reasons it has been this day in general meeting decreed — —”

Sharkey had stealthily cocked a pistol under the table, so it may have been as well for the mutinous master that he never reached the end of his discourse, for even as he came to it there was a swift patter of feet upon the deck, and a ship lad, wild with his tidings, rushed into the room.

“A craft!” he yelled. “A great craft, and close aboard us!”

In a flash the quarrel was forgotten, and the pirates were rushing to quarters. Sure enough, surging slowly down before the gentle trade-wind, a great full-rigged ship, with all sail set, was close beside them.

It was clear that she had come from afar and knew nothing of the ways of the Caribbean Sea, for she made no effort to avoid the low, dark craft which lay so close upon her bow, but blundered on as if her mere size would avail her.

So daring was she, that for an instant the Rovers, as they flew to loose the tackles of their guns, and hoisted their battle-lanterns, believed that a man-of-war had caught them napping.

But at the sight of her bulging, portless sides and merchant rig a shout of exultation broke from amongst them, and in an instant they had swung round their fore-yard, and darting alongside they had grappled with her and flung a spray of shrieking, cursing ruffians upon her deck.

Half a dozen seamen of the night-watch were cut down where they stood, the mate was felled by Sharkey and tossed overboard by Ned Galloway, and before the sleepers had time to sit up in their berths, the vessel was in the hands of the pirates.

The prize proved to be the full-rigged ship *Portobello* — Captain Hardy, master — bound from London to Kingston in Jamaica, with a cargo of cotton goods and hoop-iron.

Having secured their prisoners, all huddled together in a dazed, distracted group, the pirates spread over the vessel in search of plunder, handing all that was found to the giant quartermaster, who in turn passed it over the side of the *Happy Delivery* and laid it under guard at the foot of her mainmast.

The cargo was useless, but there were a thousand guineas in the ship’s strong-box, and there were some eight or ten passengers, three of them wealthy Jamaica merchants, all bringing home well-filled boxes from their London visit.

When all the plunder was gathered, the passengers and crew were dragged to the waist, and under the cold smile of Sharkey each in turn was thrown over the side — Sweetlocks standing by the rail and hamstringing them with his cutlass as they passed over, lest some strong swimmer should rise in judgment against them. A portly, grey-haired woman, the wife of one of the planters, was among the captives, but she also was thrust screaming and clutching over the side.

“Mercy, you hussy!” neighed Sharkey, “you are surely a good twenty years too old for that.”

The captain of the *Portobello,* a hale, blue-eyed grey-beard, was the last upon the deck. He stood, a thick-set resolute figure, in the glare of the lanterns, while Sharkey bowed and smirked before him.

“One skipper should show courtesy to another,” said he, “and sink me if Captain Sharkey would be behind in good manners! I have held you to the last, as you see, where a brave man should be; so now, my bully, you have seen the end of them, and may step over with an easy mind.”

“So I shall, Captain Sharkey,” said the old seaman, “for I have done my duty so far as my power lay. But before I go over I would say a word in your ear.”

“If it be to soften me, you may save your breath. You have kept us waiting here for three days, and curse me if one of you shall live!”

“Nay, it is to tell you what you should know. You have not yet found what is the true treasure aboard of this ship.”

“Not found it? Sink me, but I will slice your liver, Captain Hardy, if you do not make good your words! Where is this treasure you speak of?”

“It is not a treasure of gold, but it is a fair maid, which may be no less welcome.”

“Where is she, then? And why was she not with the others?”

“I will tell you why she was not with the others. She is the only daughter of the Count and Countess Ramirez, who are amongst those whom you have murdered. Her name is Inez Ramirez, and she is of the best blood of Spain, her father being Governor of Chagre, to which he was now bound. It chanced that she was found to have formed an attachment, as maids will, to one far beneath her in rank aboard this ship; so her parents, being people of great power, whose word is not to be gainsaid, constrained me to confine her close in a special cabin aft of my own. Here she was held straitly, all food being carried to her, and she allowed to see no one. This I tell you as a last gift, though why I should make it to you I do not know, for indeed you are a most bloody rascal, and it comforts me in dying to think that you will surely be gallow's-meat in this world, and hell's-meat in the next."

At the words he ran to the rail, and vaulted over into the darkness, praying as he sank into the depths of the sea, that the betrayal of this maid might not be counted too heavily against his soul.

The body of Captain Hardy had not yet settled upon the sand forty fathoms deep before the pirates had rushed along the cabin gangway. There, sure enough, at the further end, was a barred door, overlooked in their previous search. There was no key, but they beat it in with their gunstocks, whilst shriek after shriek came from within. In the light of their outstretched, lanterns they saw a young woman, in the very prime and fullness of her youth, crouching in a corner, her unkempt hair hanging to the ground, her dark eyes glaring with fear, her lovely form straining away in horror from this inrush of savage blood-stained men. Rough hands seized her, she was jerked to her feet, and dragged with scream on scream to where John Sharkey awaited her. He held the light long and fondly to her face, then, laughing loudly, he bent forward and left his red hand-print upon her cheek.

"'Tis the rovers' brand, lass, that he marks his ewes. Take her to the cabin and use her well. Now, hearties, get her under water, and out to our luck once more."

Within an hour the good ship *Portobello* had settled down to her doom, till she lay beside her murdered passengers upon the Caribbean sand, while the pirate barque, her deck littered with plunder, was heading northward in search of another victim.

There was a carouse that night in the cabin of the *Happy Delivery*, at which three men drank deep. They were the captain, the quartermaster, and Baldy Stable, the surgeon, a man who had held the first practice in Charleston, until, misusing a patient, he fled from justice, and took his skill over to the pirates. A bloated fat man he was, with a creased neck and a great shining scalp, which gave him his name. Sharkey had put for the moment all thought of mutiny out of his head, knowing that no animal is fierce when it is over-fed, and that whilst the plunder of the great ship was new to them he need fear no trouble from his crew. He gave himself up, therefore, to the wine and the riot, shouting and roaring with his boon companions. All three were flushed and mad, ripe for any devilment, when the thought of the woman crossed the pirate’s evil mind. He yelled to the negro steward that he should bring her on the instant.

Inez Ramirez had now realised it all — the death of her father and mother, and her own position in the hands of their murderers. Yet calmness had come with the knowledge, and there was no sign of terror in her proud, dark face as she was led into the cabin, but rather a strange, firm set of the mouth and an exultant gleam of the eyes, like one who sees great hopes in the future. She smiled at the pirate captain as he rose and seized her by the waist.

“‘Fore God! this is a lass of spirit,” cried Sharkey; passing his arm round her. “She was born to be a Rover’s bride. Come, my bird, and drink to our better friendship.”

“Article Six!” hiccoughed the doctor. “All *bona robas* in common.”

“Aye! we hold you to that, Captain Sharkey,” said Galloway. “It is so writ in Article Six.”

“I will cut the man into ounces who comes betwixt us!” cried Sharkey, as he turned his fish-like eyes from one to the other. “Nay, lass, the man is not born that will take you from John Sharkey. Sit here upon my knee, and place your arm round me so. Sink me, if she has not learned to love me at sight! Tell me, my pretty, why you were so mishandled and laid in the bilboes aboard yonder craft?”

The woman shook her head and smiled. “No Inglese — no Inglese,” she lisped. She had drunk off the bumper of wine which Sharkey held to her, and her dark eyes gleamed more brightly than before. Sitting on Sharkey’s knee, her arm encircled his neck, and her hand toyed with his hair, his ear, his cheek. Even the strange quartermaster and the hardened surgeon felt a horror as they watched her, but Sharkey laughed in his joy. “Curse me, if she is not a lass of metal!” he cried, as he pressed her to him and kissed her unresisting lips.

But a strange intent look of interest had come into the surgeon’s eyes as he watched her, and his face set rigidly, as if a fearsome thought had entered his mind. There stole a grey pallor over his bull face, mottling all the red of the tropics and the flush of the wine.

“Look at her hand, Captain Sharkey!” he cried. “For the Lord’s sake, look at her hand!”

Sharkey stared down at the hand which had fondled him. It was of a strange dead pallor, with a yellow shiny web betwixt the fingers. All over it was a white fluffy dust, like the flour of a new-baked loaf. It lay thick on Sharkey's neck and cheek. With a cry he flung the woman from his lap; but in an instant, with a wild-cat bound, and a scream of triumphant malice, she had sprung at the surgeon, who vanished yelling under the table. One of her clawing hands grasped Galloway by the beard, but he tore himself away, and snatching a pike, held her off from him as she gibbered and mowed with the blazing eyes of a maniac.

The black steward had run in on the sudden turmoil, and among them they forced the mad creature back into the cabin and turned the key upon her. Then the three sank panting into their chairs and looked with eyes of horror upon each other. The same word was in the mind of each, but Galloway was the first to speak it.

"A leper!" he cried. "She has us all, curse her!"

"Not me," said the surgeon; "she never laid her finger on me."

"For that matter," cried Galloway, "it was but my beard that she touched. I will have every hair of it off before morning."

"Dolts that we are!" the surgeon shouted, beating his head with-his hand. "Tainted or no, we shall never know a moment's peace till the year is up and the time of danger past. 'Fore God, that merchant skipper has left his mark on us, and pretty fools we were to think that such a maid would be quarantined for the cause he gave. It is easy to see now that her corruption broke forth in the journey, and that save throwing her over they had no choice but to board her up until they should come to some port with a lazarette."

Sharkey had sat leaning back in his chair with a ghastly face while he listened to the surgeon's words. He mopped himself with his red handkerchief, and wiped away the fatal dust with which he was smeared.

"What of me?" he croaked. "What say you, Baldy Stable? Is there a chance for me? Curse you for a villain! speak out, or I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! Is there a chance for me, I say!"

But the surgeon shook his head. "Captain Sharkey," said he, "it would be an ill deed to speak you false. The taint is on you. No man on whom the leper scales have rested is ever clean again."

Sharkey's head fell forward on his chest, and he sat motionless, stricken by this great and sudden horror, looking with his smouldering eyes into his fearsome future. Softly the mate and the surgeon rose from their places, and stealing out from the poisoned air of the cabin, came forth into the freshness of the early dawn, with the soft, scent-laden breeze in their faces and the first red feathers of cloud catching the earliest gleam of the rising sun as it shot its golden rays over the palm-clad ridges of distant Hispaniola.

That morning a second council of the Rovers was held at the base of the mainmast, and a deputation chosen to see the captain. They were approaching the after-cabins when Sharkey came forth, the old devil in his eyes, and his bandolier with a pair of pistols over his shoulder.

“Sink you all for villains!” he cried. “Would you dare cross my hawse? Stand out, Sweetlocks, and I will lay you open! Here, Galloway, Martin, Foley, stand by me and lash the dogs to their kennel!”

But his officers had deserted him, and there was none to come to his aid. There was a rush of the pirates. One was shot through the body, but an instant afterwards Sharkey had been seized and was triced to his own mainmast. His filmy eyes looked round from face to face, and there was none who felt the happier for having met them.

“Captain Sharkey,” said Sweetlocks, “you have mishandled many of us, and you have now pistolled John Masters, besides killing Bartholomew, the carpenter, by braining him with a bucket. All this might have been forgiven you, in that you have been our leader for years, and that we have signed articles to serve under you while the voyage lasts. But now we have heard of this *bona roba* on board, and we know that you are poisoned to the marrow, and that while you rot there will be no safety for any of us, but that we shall all be turned into filth and corruption. Therefore, John Sharkey, we Rovers of the *Happy Delivery*, in council assembled, have decreed that while there be yet time, before the plague spreads, you shall be set adrift in a boat to find such a fate as Fortune may be pleased to send you.”

John Sharkey said nothing, but slowly circling his head, he cursed them all with his baleful gaze. The ship’s dinghy had been lowered, and he, with his hands still tied, was dropped into it on the bight of a rope.

“Cast her off!” cried Sweetlocks.

“Nay, hold hard a moment, Master Sweetlocks!” shouted one of the crew. “What of the wench? Is she to bide aboard and poison us all?”

“Send her off with her mate!” cried another, and the Rovers roared their approval. Driven forth at the end of pikes, the girl was pushed towards the boat. With all the spirit of Spain in her rotting body she flashed triumphant glances on her captors.

“Perros! Perros Ingleses! Lepero, Lepero!” she cried in exultation, as they thrust her over into the boat.

“Good luck, captain! God speed you on your honeymoon!” cried a chorus of mocking voices, as the painter was unloosed, and the *Happy Delivery*, running full before the trade-wind, left the little boat astern, a tiny dot upon the vast expanse of the lonely sea.

* * *

Extract from the log of H.M. fifty-gun ship *Hecate* in her cruise off the American Main.

“*Jan. 26, 1721.* — This day, the junk having become unfit for food, and five of the crew down with scurvy, I ordered that we send two boats ashore at the nor’-western point of Hispaniola, to seek for fresh fruit, and perchance shoot some of the wild oxen with which the island abounds.

“*7 p.m.* — The boats have returned with good store of green stuff and two bullocks. Mr. Woodruff, the master, reports that near the landing-place at the edge of the forest was found the skeleton of a woman, clad in European dress, of such sort as to show that she may have been a person of quality. Her head had been crushed by a great stone which lay beside her. Hard by was a grass hut, and signs that a man had dwelt therein for some time, as was shown by charred wood, bones and other traces. There is a rumour upon the coast that Sharkey, the bloody pirate, was marooned in these parts last year, but whether he has made his way into the interior, or whether he has been picked up by some craft, there is no means of knowing. If he be once again afloat, then I pray that God send him under our guns.”

HOW COPLEY BANKS SLEW CAPTAIN SHARKEY

The Buccaneers were something higher than a mere band of marauders. They were a floating republic, with laws, usages, and discipline of their own. In their endless and remorseless quarrel with the Spaniards they had some semblance of right upon their side. Their bloody harryings of the cities of the Main were not more barbarous than the inroads of Spain upon the Netherlands — or upon the Caribs in these same American lands.

The chief of the Buccaneers, were he English or French, a Morgan or a Granmont, was still a responsible person, whose country might countenance him, or even praise him, so long as he refrained from any deed which might shock the leathery seventeenth-century conscience too outrageously. Some of them were touched with religion, and it is still remembered how Sawkins threw the dice overboard upon the Sabbath, and Daniel pistolled a man before the altar for irreverence.

But there came a day when the fleets of the Buccaneers no longer mustered at the Tortugas, and the solitary and outlawed pirate took their place. Yet even with him the tradition of restraint and of discipline still lingered; and among the early pirates, the Avorys, the Englands, and the Robertses, there remained some respect for human sentiment. They were more dangerous to the merchant than to the seaman.

But they in turn were replaced by more savage and desperate men, who frankly recognised that they would get no quarter in their war with the human race, and who swore that they would give as little as they got. Of their histories we know little that is trustworthy. They wrote no memoirs and left no trace, save an occasional blackened and blood-stained derelict adrift upon the face of the Atlantic. Their deeds could only be surmised from the long roll of ships which never made their port.

Searching the records of history, it is only here and there in an old-world trial that the veil that shrouds them seems for an instant to be lifted, and we catch a glimpse of some amazing and grotesque brutality behind. Such was the breed of Ned Low, of Gow the Scotchman, and of the infamous Sharkey, whose coal-black barque, the *Happy Delivery*, was known from the Newfoundland Banks to the mouths of the Orinoco as the dark forerunner of misery and of death.

There were many men, both among the islands and on the main, who had a blood feud with Sharkey, but not one who had suffered more bitterly than Copley Banks, of Kingston. Banks had been one of the leading sugar merchants of the West Indies. He was a man of position, a member of the Council, the husband of a Percival, and the cousin of the Governor of Virginia. His two sons had been sent to London to be educated, and their mother had gone over to bring them back. On their return voyage the ship, the *Duchess of Cornwall*, fell into the hands of Sharkey, and the whole family met with an infamous death.

Copley Banks said little when he heard the news, but he sank into a morose and enduring melancholy. He neglected his business, avoided his friends, and spent much of his time in the low taverns of the fishermen and seamen. There, amidst riot and devilry, he sat silently puffing at his pipe, with a set face and a smouldering eye. It was generally supposed that his misfortunes had shaken his wits, and his old friends looked at him askance, for the company which he kept was enough to bar him from honest men.

From time to time there came rumours of Sharkey over the sea. Sometimes it was from some schooner which had seen a great flame upon the horizon, and approaching to offer help to the burning ship, had fled away at the sight of the sleek, black barque, lurking like a wolf near a mangled sheep. Sometimes it was a frightened trader, which had come tearing in with her canvas curved like a lady’s bodice, because she had seen a patched fore-topsail rising slowly above the violet water-line. Sometimes it was from a Coaster, which had found a waterless Bahama Cay littered with sun-dried bodies.

Once there came a man who had been mate of a Guineaman, and who had escaped from the pirate’s hands. He could not speak — for reasons which Sharkey could best supply — but he could write, and he did write, to the very great interest of Copley Banks. For hours they sat together over the map, and the dumb man pointed here and there to outlying reefs and tortuous inlets, while his companion sat smoking in silence, with his unvarying face and his fiery eyes.

One morning, some two years after his misfortune, Mr. Copley Banks strode into his own office with his old air of energy and alertness. The manager stared at him in surprise, for it was months since he had shown any interest in business.

“Good morning, Mr. Banks!” said he.

“Good morning, Freeman. I see that *Ruffling Harry* is in the Bay.”

“Yes, sir; she clears for the Windward Islands on Wednesday.”

“I have other plans for her, Freeman. I have determined upon a slaving venture to Whydah.”

“But her cargo is ready, sir.”

“Then it must come out again, Freeman. My mind is made up, and the *Ruffling Harry* must go slaving to Whydah.”

All argument and persuasion were vain, so the manager had dolefully to clear the ship once more.

And then Copley Banks began to make preparations for his African voyage. It appeared that he relied upon force rather than barter for the filling of his hold, for he carried none of those showy trinkets which savages love, but the brig was fitted with eight nine-pounder guns and racks full of muskets and cutlasses. The after sail-room next the cabin was transformed into a powder magazine, and she carried as many round shot as a well-found privateer. Water and provisions were shipped for a long voyage.

But the preparation of his ship’s company was most surprising. It made Freeman, the manager, realise that there was truth in the rumour that his master had taken leave of his senses. For, under one pretext or another, he began to dismiss the old and tried hands, who had served the firm for years, and in their place he embarked the scum of the port — men whose reputations were so vile that the lowest crimp would have been ashamed to furnish them.

There was Birthmark Sweetlocks, who was known to have been present at the killing of the log-wood cutters, so that his hideous scarlet disfigurement was put down by the fanciful as being a red afterglow from that great crime. He was first mate, and under him was Israel Martin, a little sun-wilted fellow who had served with Howell Davies at the taking of Cape Coast Castle.

The crew were chosen from amongst those whom Banks had met and known in their own infamous haunts, and his own table-steward was a haggard-faced man, who gobbled at you when he tried to talk. His beard had been shaved, and it was impossible to recognise him as the same man whom Sharkey had placed under the knife, and who had escaped to tell his experiences to Copley Banks.

These doings were not unnoticed, nor yet uncommented upon in the town of Kingston. The Commandant of the troops — Major Harvey, of the Artillery — made serious representations to the Governor.

"She is not a trader, but a small warship," said he. "I think it would be as well to arrest Copley Banks and to seize the vessel."

"What do you suspect?" asked the Governor, who was a slow-witted man, broken down with fevers and port wine.

"I suspect," said the soldier, "that it is Stede Bonnet over again."

Now, Stede Bonnet was a planter of high reputation and religious character, who, from some sudden and overpowering freshet of wildness in his blood, had given up everything in order to start off pirating in the Caribbean Sea. The example was a recent one, and it had caused the utmost consternation in the islands. Governors had before now been accused of being in league with pirates, and of receiving commissions upon their plunder, so that any want of vigilance was open to a sinister construction.

"Well, Major Harvey," said he, "I am vastly sorry to do anything which may offend my friend Copley Banks, for many a time have my knees been under his mahogany, but in face of what you say there is no choice for me but to order you to board the vessel and to satisfy yourself as to her character and destination."

So at one in the morning Major Harvey, with a launchful of his soldiers, paid a surprise visit to the *Ruffling Harry*, with the result that they picked up nothing more solid than a hempen cable floating at the moorings. It had been slipped by the brig, whose owner had scented danger. She had already passed the Palisades, and was beating out against the north-east trades on a course for the Windward Passage.

When upon the next morning the brig had left Morant Point a mere haze upon the Southern horizon, the men were called aft, and Copley Banks revealed his plans to them. He had chosen them, he said, as brisk boys and lads of spirit, who would rather run some risk upon the sea than starve for a living upon the shore. King's ships were few and weak, and they could master any trader who might come their way. Others had done well at the business, and with a handy, well-found vessel, there was no reason why they should not turn their tarry jackets into velvet coats. If they were prepared to sail under the black flag, he was ready to command them; but if any wished to withdraw, they might have the gig and row back to Jamaica.

Four men out of six-and-forty asked for their discharge, went over the ship's side into the boat, and rowed away amidst the jeers and howlings of the crew. The rest assembled aft, and drew up the articles of their association. A square of black tarpaulin had the white skull painted upon it, and was hoisted amidst cheering at the main.

Officers were elected, and the limits of their authority fixed. Copley Banks was chosen Captain, but, as there are no mates upon a pirate craft, Birthmark Sweetlocks became quartermaster, and Israel Martin the boatswain. There was no difficulty in knowing what was the custom of the brotherhood, for half the men at least had served upon pirates before. Food should be the same for all, and no man should interfere with another man's drink! The Captain should have a cabin, but all hands should be welcome to enter it when they chose.

All should share and share alike, save only the captain, quartermaster, boatswain, carpenter, and master-gunner, who had from a quarter to a whole share extra. He who saw a prize first should have the best weapon taken out of her. He who boarded her first should have the richest suit of clothes aboard of her. Every man might treat his own prisoner, be it man or woman, after his own fashion. If a man flinched from his gun, the quartermaster should pistol him. These were some of the rules which the crew of the *Ruffling Harry* subscribed by putting forty-two crosses at the foot of the paper upon which they had been drawn.

So a new rover was afloat upon the seas, and her name before a year was over became as well known as that of the *Happy Delivery*. From the Bahamas to the Leewards, and from the Leewards to the Windwards, Copley Banks became the rival of Sharkey and the terror of traders. For a long time the barque and the brig never met, which was the more singular, as the *Ruffling Harry* was for ever looking in at Sharkey's resorts; but at last one day, when she was passing down the inlet of Coxon's Hole, at the east end of Cuba, with the intention of careening, there was the *Happy Delivery*, with her blocks and tackle-falls already rigged for the same purpose.

Copley Banks fired a shotted salute and hoisted the green trumpeter ensign, as the custom was among gentlemen of the sea. Then he dropped his boat and went aboard.

Captain Sharkey was not a man of a genial mood, nor had he any kindly sympathy for those who were of the same trade as himself. Copley Banks found him seated astride upon one of the after guns, with his New England quartermaster, Ned Galloway, and a crowd of roaring ruffians standing about him. Yet none of them roared with quite such assurance when Sharkey's pale face and filmy blue eyes were turned upon him.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, with his cambric frills breaking through his open red satin long-flapped vest. The scorching sun seemed to have no power upon his fleshless frame, for he wore a low fur cap, as though it had been winter. A many-coloured band of silk passed across his body and supported a short murderous sword, while his broad, brass-buckled belt was stuffed with pistols.

"Sink you for a poacher!" he cried, as Copley Banks passed over the bulwarks. "I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! What mean you by fishing in my waters?"

Copley Banks looked at him, and his eyes were like those of a traveller who sees his home at last.

"I am glad that we are of one mind," said he, "for I am myself of opinion that the seas are not large enough for the two of us. But if you will take your sword and pistols and come upon a sand-bank with me, then the world will be rid of a damned villain whichever way it goes."

"Now, this is talking!" cried Sharkey, jumping off the gun and holding out his hand. "I have not met many who could look John Sharkey in the eyes and speak with a full breath. May the devil seize me if I do not choose you as a consort! But if you play me false, then I will come aboard of you and gut you upon your own poop."

"And I pledge you the same!" said Copley Banks, and so the two pirates became sworn comrades to each other.

That summer they went north as far as the Newfoundland Banks, and harried the New York traders and the whale-ships from New England. It was Copley Banks who captured the Liverpool ship, *House of Hanover*, but it was Sharkey who fastened her master to the windlass and pelted him to death with empty claret-bottles.

Together they engaged the King's ship *Royal Fortune*, which had been sent in search of them, and beat her off after a night action of five hours, the drunken, raving crews fighting naked in the light of the battle-lanterns, with a bucket of rum and a pannikin laid by the tackles of every gun. They ran to Topsail Inlet in North Carolina to refit, and then in the spring they were at the Grand Caicos, ready for a long cruise down the West Indies.

By this time Sharkey and Copley Banks had become very excellent friends, for Sharkey loved a wholehearted villain, and he loved a man of metal, and it seemed to him that the two met in the captain of the *Ruffling Harry*. It was long before he gave his confidence to him, for cold suspicion lay deep in his character. Never once would he trust himself outside his own ship and away from his own men.

But Copley Banks came often on board the *Happy Delivery*, and joined Sharkey in many of his morose debauches, so that at last any lingering misgivings of the latter were set at rest. He knew nothing of the evil that he had done to his new boon companion, for of his many victims how could he remember the woman and the two boys whom he had slain with such levity so long ago! When, therefore, he received a challenge to himself and to his quartermaster for a carouse upon the last evening of their stay at the Caicos Bank, he saw no reason to refuse.

A well-found passenger ship had been rifled the week before, so their fare was of the best, and after supper five of them drank deeply together. There were the two captains, Birthmark Sweetlocks, Ned Galloway, and Israel Martin, the old buccaneersman. To wait upon them was the dumb steward, whose head Sharkey split with his glass, because he had been too slow in the filling of it.

The quartermaster had slipped Sharkey's pistols away from him, for it was an old joke with him to fire them cross-handed under the table, and see who was the luckiest man. It was a pleasantry which had cost his boatswain his leg, so now, when the table was cleared, they would coax Sharkey's weapons away from him on the excuse of the heat, and lay them out of his reach.

The Captain's cabin of the *Ruffling Harry* was in a deck-house upon the poop, and a sternchaser gun was mounted at the back of it. Round shot were racked round the wall, and three great hogsheads of powder made a stand for dishes and for bottles. In this grim room the five pirates sang and roared and drank, while the silent steward still filled up their glasses, and passed the box and the candle round for their tobacco-pipes. Hour after hour the talk became fouler, the voices hoarser, the curses and shoutings more incoherent, until three of the five had closed their blood-shot eyes, and dropped their swimming heads upon the table.

Copley Banks and Sharkey were left face to face, the one because he had drunk the least, the other because no amount of liquor would ever shake his iron nerve or warm his sluggish blood. Behind him stood the watchful steward, for ever filling up his waning glass. From without came the low lapping of the tide, and from over the water a sailor's chanty from the barque.

In the windless tropical night the words came clearly to their ears:

"A trader sailed from Stepney Town,
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the mainsail!
A trader sailed from Stepney Town
With a keg full of gold and a velvet gown.
Ho, the bully Rover Jack,
Waiting with his yard aback
Out upon the Lowland Sea."

The two boon companions sat listening in silence. Then Copley Banks glanced at the steward, and the man took a coil of rope from the shot-rack behind him.

"Captain Sharkey," said Copley Banks, "do you remember the *Duchess of Cornwall*, hailing from London, which you took and sank three years ago off the Statira Shoal?"

"Curse me if I can bear their names in mind," said Sharkey. "We did as many as ten ships a week about that time."

"There were a mother and two sons among the passengers. Maybe that will bring it back to your mind."

Captain Sharkey leant back in thought, with his huge thin beak of a nose jutting upwards. Then he burst suddenly into a high treble, neighing laugh. He remembered it, he said, and he added details to prove it.

"But burn me if it had not slipped from my mind!" he cried. "How came you to think of it?"

"It was of interest to me," said Copley Banks, "for the woman was my wife and the lads were my only sons."

Sharkey stared across at his companion, and saw that the smouldering fire which lurked always in his eyes had burned up into a lurid flame. He read their menace, and he clapped his hands to his empty belt. Then he turned to seize a weapon, but the bight of a rope was cast round him, and in an instant his arms were bound to his side. He fought like a wild cat and screamed for help.

“Ned!” he yelled. “Ned! Wake up! Here’s damned villainy! Help, Ned, help!”

But the three men were far too deeply sunk in their swinish sleep for any voice to wake them. Round and round went the rope, until Sharkey was swathed like a mummy from ankle to neck. They propped him stiff and helpless against a powder barrel, and they gagged him with a handkerchief, but his filmy, red-rimmed eyes still looked curses at them. The dumb man chattered in his exultation, and Sharkey winced for the first time when he saw the empty mouth before him. He understood that vengeance, slow and patient, had dogged him long, and clutched him at last.

The two captors had their plans all arranged, and they were somewhat elaborate.

First of all they stove the heads of two of the great powder barrels, and they heaped the contents out upon the table and floor. They piled it round and under the three drunken men, until each sprawled in a heap of it. Then they carried Sharkey to the gun and they triced him sitting over the port-hole, with his body about a foot from the muzzle. Wriggle as he would he could not move an inch either to right or left, and the dumb man trussed him up with a sailor’s cunning, so that there was no chance that he should work free.

“Now, you bloody devil,” said Copley Banks, softly, “you must listen to what I have to say to you, for they are the last words that you will hear. You are my man now, and I have bought you at a price, for I have given all that a man can give here below, and I have given my soul as well.

“To reach you I have had to sink to your level. For two years I strove against it, hoping that some other way might come, but I learnt that there was no other way. I’ve robbed and I have murdered — worse still, I have laughed and lived with you — and all for the one end. And now my time has come, and you will die as I would have you die, seeing the shadow creeping slowly upon you and the devil waiting for you in the shadow.”

Sharkey could hear the hoarse voices of his rovers singing their chanty over the water.

“Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stick a-bending!
Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
His gold’s on the capstan, his blood’s on his gown.

All for bully rover Jack,
Reaching on the weather tack
Right across the Lowland Sea."

The words came clear to his ear, and just outside he could hear two men pacing backwards and forwards upon the deck. And yet he was helpless, staring down the mouth of the nine-pounder, unable to move an inch or to utter so much as a groan. Again there came the burst of voices from the deck of the barque.

"So it's up and it's over to Stornoway Bay,
Pack it on! Crack it on! Try her with the stun-sails!
It's off on a bowline to Stornoway Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay,
Waiting for their bully Jack,
Watching for him sailing back,
Right across the Lowland Sea."

To the dying pirate the jovial words and rollicking tune made his own fate seem the harsher, but there was no softening in his venomous blue eyes. Copley Banks had brushed away the priming of the gun, and had sprinkled fresh powder over the touch-hole. Then he had taken up the candle and cut it to the length of about an inch. This he placed upon the loose powder at the breach of the gun. Then he scattered powder thickly over the floor beneath, so that when the candle fell at the recoil it must explode the huge pile in which the three drunkards were wallowing.

"You've made others look death in the face, Sharkey," said he; "now it has come to be your own turn. You and these swine here shall go together!" He lit the candle-end as he spoke, and blew out the other lights upon the table. Then he passed out with the dumb man, and locked the cabin door upon the outer side. But before he closed it he took an exultant look backwards and received one last curse from those unconquerable eyes. In the single dim circle of light that ivory-white face, with the gleam of moisture upon the high, bald forehead, was the last that was ever seen of Sharkey.

There was a skiff alongside, and in it Copley Banks and the dumb steward made their way to the beach, and looked back upon the brig riding in the moonlight just outside the shadow of the palm trees. They waited and waited, watching that dim light which shone through the stern port. And then at last there came the dull thud of a gun, and an instant later the shattering crash of the explosion. The long, sleek, black barque, the sweep of white sand, and the fringe of nodding, feathery palm trees sprang into dazzling light and back into darkness again. Voices screamed and called upon the bay.

Then Copley Banks, his heart singing within him touched his companion upon the shoulder, and they plunged together into the lonely jungle of the Caicos.

THE “SLAPPING SAL”

It was in the days when France’s power was already broken upon the seas, and when more of her three-deckers lay rotting in the Medway than were to be found in Brest harbour. But her frigates and corvettes still scoured the ocean, closely followed ever by those of her rival. At the uttermost ends of the earth these dainty vessels, with sweet names of girls or of flowers, mangled and shattered each other for the honour of the four yards of bunting which flapped from the end of their gaffs.

It had blown hard in the night, but the wind had dropped with the dawning, and now the rising sun tinted the fringe of the storm-wrack as it dwindled into the west and glinted on the endless crests of the long, green waves. To north and south and west lay a skyline which was unbroken save by the spout of foam when two of the great Atlantic seas dashed each other into spray. To the east was a rocky island, jutting out into craggy points, with a few scattered clumps of palm trees and a pennant of mist streaming out from the bare, conical hill which capped it. A heavy surf beat upon the shore, and, at a safe distance from it, the British 32-gun frigate *Leda*, Captain A. P. Johnson, raised her black, glistening side upon the crest of a wave, or swooped down into an emerald valley, dipping away to the nor’ard under easy sail. On her snow-white quarter-deck stood a stiff little brown-faced man, who swept the horizon with his glass.

“Mr. Wharton!” he cried, with a voice like a rusty hinge.

A thin, knock-kneed officer shambled across the poop to him.

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ve opened the sealed orders, Mr. Wharton.”

A glimmer of curiosity shone upon the meagre features of the first lieutenant. The *Leda* had sailed with her consort, the *Dido*, from Antigua the week before, and the admiral’s orders had been contained in a sealed envelope.

“We were to open them on reaching the deserted island of Sombriero, lying in north latitude eighteen, thirty-six, west longitude sixty-three, twenty-eight. Sombriero bore four miles to the north-east from our port-bow when the gale cleared, Mr. Wharton.”

The lieutenant bowed stiffly. He and the captain had been bosom friends from childhood. They had gone to school together, joined the navy together, fought again and again together, and married into each other’s families, but so long as their feet were on the poop the iron discipline of the service struck all that was human out of them and left only the superior and the subordinate. Captain Johnson took from his pocket a blue paper, which crackled as he unfolded it.

“The 32-gun frigates *Leda* and *Dido* (Captains A. P. Johnson and James Munro) are to cruise from the point at which these instructions are read to the mouth of the Caribbean sea, in the hope of encountering the French frigate *La Gloire* (48), which has recently harassed our merchant ships in that quarter. H.M. frigates are also directed to hunt down the piratical craft known sometimes as the *Slapping Sal* and sometimes as the *Hairy Hudson*, which has plundered the British ships as per margin, inflicting barbarities upon their crews. She is a small brig, carrying ten light guns, with one twenty-four pound carronade forward. She was last seen upon the 23rd. ult. to the north-east of the island of Sombriero.

“(Signed) James Montgomery
“(*Rear-Admiral*).

“H.M.S. *Colossus*, Antigua.”

“We appear to have lost our consort,” said Captain Johnson, folding up his instructions and again sweeping the horizon with his glass. “She drew away after we reefed down. It would be a pity if we met this heavy Frenchman without the *Dido*, Mr. Wharton. Eh?”

The lieutenant twinkled and smiled.

“She has eighteen-pounders on the main and twelves on the poop, sir,” said the captain. “She carries four hundred to our two hundred and thirty-one. Captain de Milon is the smartest man in the French service. Oh, Bobby boy, I’d give my hopes of my flag to rub my side up against her!” He turned on his heel, ashamed of his momentary lapse. “Mr. Wharton,” said he, looking back sternly over his shoulder, “get those square sails shaken out and bear away a point more to the west.”

“A brig on the port-bow,” came a voice from the forecastle.

“A brig on the port-bow,” said the lieutenant.

The captain sprang upon the bulwarks and held on by the mizzen-shrouds, a strange little figure with flying skirts and puckered eyes. The lean lieutenant craned his neck and whispered to Smeaton, the second, while officers and men came popping up from below and clustered along the weather-rail, shading their eyes with their hands — for the tropical sun was already clear of the palm trees. The strange brig lay at anchor in the throat of a curving estuary, and it was already obvious that she could not get out without passing under the guns of the frigate. A long, rocky point to the north of her held her in.

"Keep her as she goes, Mr. Wharton," said the captain. "Hardly worth while our clearing for action, Mr. Smeaton, but the men can stand by the guns in case she tries to pass us. Cast loose the bow-chasers and send the small-arm men to the forecastle."

A British crew went to its quarters in those days with the quiet serenity of men on their daily routine. In a few minutes, without fuss or sound, the sailors were knotted round their guns, the marines were drawn up and leaning on their muskets, and the frigate's bowsprit pointed straight for her little victim.

"Is it the *Slapping Sal*, sir?"

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Wharton."

"They don't seem to like the look of us, sir. They've cut their cable and are clapping on sail."

It was evident that the brig meant struggling for her freedom. One little patch of canvas fluttered out above another, and her people could be seen working like madmen in the rigging. She made no attempt to pass her antagonist, but headed up the estuary. The captain rubbed his hands.

"She's making for shoal water, Mr. Wharton, and we shall have to cut her out, sir. She's a footy little brig, but I should have thought a fore-and-after would have been more handy."

"It was a mutiny, sir."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, sir, I heard of it at Manilla: a bad business, sir. Captain and two mates murdered. This Hudson, or Hairy Hudson as they call him, led the mutiny. He's a Londoner, sir, and a cruel villain as ever walked."

"His next walk will be to Execution Dock, Mr. Wharton. She seems heavily manned. I wish I could take twenty topmen out of her, but they would be enough to corrupt the crew of the ark, Mr. Wharton."

Both officers were looking through their glasses at the brig. Suddenly the lieutenant showed his teeth in a grin, while the captain flushed a deeper red.

"That's Hairy Hudson on the after-rail, sir."

“The low, impertinent blackguard! He’ll play some other antics before we are done with him. Could you reach him with the long eighteen, Mr. Smeaton?”

“Another cable length will do it, sir.”

The brig yawed as they spoke, and as she came round a spurt of smoke whiffed out from her quarter. It was a pure piece of bravado, for the gun could scarce carry half-way. Then with a jaunty swing the little ship came into the wind again, and shot round a fresh curve in the winding channel.

“The water’s shoaling rapidly, sir,” repeated the second lieutenant.

“There’s six fathoms by the chart.”

“Four by the lead, sir.”

“When we clear this point we shall see how we lie. Ha! I thought as much! Lay her to, Mr. Wharton. Now we have got her at our mercy!”

The frigate was quite out of sight of the sea now at the head of this river-like estuary. As she came round the curve the two shores were seen to converge at a point about a mile distant. In the angle, as near shore as she could get, the brig was lying with her broadside towards her pursuer and a wisp of black cloth streaming from her mizzen. The lean lieutenant, who had reappeared upon deck with a cutlass strapped to his side and two pistols rammed into his belt, peered curiously at the ensign.

“Is it the Jolly Rodger, sir?” he asked.

But the captain was furious.

“He may hang where his breeches are hanging before I have done with him!” said he. “What boats will you want, Mr. Wharton?”

“We should do it with the launch and the jolly-boat.”

“Take four and make a clean job of it. Pipe away the crews at once, and I’ll work her in and help you with the long eighteens.”

With a rattle of ropes and a creaking of blocks the four boats splashed into the water. Their crews clustered thickly into them: bare-footed sailors, stolid marines, laughing middies, and in the sheets of each the senior officers with their stern schoolmaster faces. The captain, his elbows on the binnacle, still watched the distant brig. Her crew were tricing up the boarding-netting, dragging round the starboard guns, knocking new portholes for them, and making every preparation for a desperate resistance. In the thick of it all a huge man, bearded to the eyes, with a red nightcap upon his head, was straining and stooping and hauling. The captain watched him with a sour smile, and then snapping up his glass he turned upon his heel. For an instant he stood staring.

“Call back the boats!” he cried in his thin, creaking voice. “Clear away for action there! Cast loose those main-deck guns. Brace back the yards, Mr. Smeaton, and stand by to go about when she has weigh enough.”

Round the curve of the estuary was coming a huge vessel. Her great yellow bowsprit and white-winged figure-head were jutting out from the cluster of palm trees, while high above them towered three immense masts with the tricolour flag floating superbly from the mizzen. Round she came, the deep-blue water creaming under her fore foot, until her long, curving, black side, her line of shining copper beneath and of snow-white hammocks above, and the thick clusters of men who peered over her bulwarks were all in full view. Her lower yards were slung, her ports triced up, and her guns run out all ready for action. Lying behind one of the promontories of the island, the lookout men of the *Gloire* upon the shore had seen the *cul de sac* into which the British frigate was headed, so that Captain de Milon had served the *Leda* as Captain Johnson had the *Slapping Sal*.

But the splendid discipline of the British service was at its best in such a crisis. The boats flew back; their crews clustered aboard, they were swung up at the davits and the fall-ropes made fast. Hammocks were brought up and stowed, bulkheads sent down, ports and magazines opened, the fires put out in the galley, and the drums beat to quarters. Swarms of men set the head-sails and brought the frigate round, while the gun-crews threw off their jackets and shirts, tightened their belts, and ran out their eighteen-pounders, peering through the open portholes at the stately Frenchman. The wind was very light. Hardly a ripple showed itself upon the clear blue water, but the sails blew gently out as the breeze came over the wooded banks. The Frenchman had gone about also, and both ships were now heading slowly for the sea under fore-and-aft canvas, the *Gloire* a hundred yards in advance. She luffed up to cross the *Leda’s* bows, but the British ship came round also, and the two rippled slowly on in such a silence that the ringing of ramrods as the French marines drove home their charges clanged quite loudly upon the ear.

“Not much sea-room, Mr. Wharton,” remarked the captain.

“I have fought actions in less, sir.”

“We must keep our distance and trust to our gunnery. She is very heavily manned, and if she got alongside we might find ourselves in trouble.”

"I see the shakos of soldiers aboard of her."

"Two companies of light infantry from Martinique. Now we have her! Hard-a-port, and let her have it as we cross her stern!"

The keen eye of the little commander had seen the surface ripple, which told of a passing breeze. He had used it to dart across the big Frenchman and to rake her with every gun as he passed. But, once past her, the *Leda* had to come back into the wind to keep out of shoal water. The man[oe]uvre brought her on to the starboard side of the Frenchman, and the trim little frigate seemed to heel right over under the crashing broadside which burst from the gaping ports. A moment later her topmen were swarming aloft to set her topsails and royals, and she strove to cross the *Gloire's* bows and rake her again. The French captain, however, brought his frigate's head round, and the two rode side by side within easy pistol-shot, pouring broadsides into each other in one of those murderous duels which, could they all be recorded, would mottle our charts with blood.

In that heavy tropical air, with so faint a breeze, the smoke formed a thick bank round the two vessels, from which the topmasts only protruded. Neither could see anything of its enemy save the throbs of fire in the darkness, and the guns were sponged and trained and fired into a dense wall of vapour. On the poop and forecastle the marines, in two little red lines, were pouring in their volleys, but neither they nor the sea-men-gunners could see what effect their fire was having. Nor, indeed, could they tell how far they were suffering themselves, for, standing at a gun, one could but hazily see that upon the right and the left. But above the roar of the cannon came the sharper sound of the piping shot, the crashing of riven planks, and the occasional heavy thud as spar or block came hurtling on to the deck. The lieutenants paced up and down the line of guns, while Captain Johnson fanned the smoke away with his cocked-hat and peered eagerly out.

"This is rare, Bobby!" said he, as the lieutenant joined him. Then, suddenly restraining himself, "What have we lost, Mr. Wharton?"

"Our maintopsail yard and our gaff, sir."

"Where's the flag?"

"Gone overboard, sir."

"They'll think we've struck! Lash a boat's ensign on the starboard arm of the mizzen cross-jackyard."

"Yes, sir."

A round-shot dashed the binnacle to pieces between them. A second knocked two marines into a bloody, palpitating mash. For a moment the smoke rose, and the English captain saw that his adversary's heavier metal was producing a horrible effect. The *Leda* was a shattered wreck. Her deck was strewed with corpses. Several of her portholes were knocked into one, and one of her eighteen-pounder guns had been thrown right back on to her breech, and pointed straight up to the sky. The thin line of marines still loaded and fired, but half the guns were silent, and their crews were piled thickly round them.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" yelled the captain.

"Cutlasses, lads, cutlasses!" roared Wharton.

"Hold your volley till they touch!" cried the captain of marines.

The huge loom of the Frenchman was seen bursting through the smoke. Thick clusters of boarders hung upon her sides and shrouds. A final broadside leapt from her ports, and the mainmast of the *Leda*, snapping short off a few feet above the deck, spun into the air and crashed down upon the port guns, killing ten men and putting the whole battery out of action. An instant later the two ships scraped together, and the starboard bower anchor of the *Gloire* caught the mizzen-chains of the *Leda* upon the port side. With a yell the black swarm of boarders steadied themselves for a spring.

But their feet were never to reach that blood-stained deck. From somewhere there came a well-aimed whiff of grape, and another, and another. The English marines and seamen, waiting with cutlass and musket behind the silent guns, saw with amazement the dark masses thinning and shredding away. At the same time the port broadside of the Frenchman burst into a roar.

"Clear away the wreck!" roared the captain. "What the devil are they firing at?"

"Get the guns clear!" panted the lieutenant. "We'll do them yet, boys!"

The wreckage was torn and hacked and splintered until first one gun and then another roared into action again. The Frenchman's anchor had been cut away, and the *Leda* had worked herself free from that fatal hug. But now, suddenly, there was a scurry up the shrouds of the *Gloire*, and a hundred Englishmen were shouting themselves hoarse: "They're running! They're running! They're running!"

And it was true. The Frenchman had ceased to fire, and was intent only upon clapping on every sail that he could carry. But that shouting hundred could not claim it all as their own. As the smoke cleared it was not difficult to see the reason. The ships had gained the mouth of the estuary during the fight, and there, about four miles out to sea, was the *Leda's* consort bearing down under full sail to the sound of the guns. Captain de Milon had done his part for one day, and presently the *Gloire* was drawing off swiftly to the north, while the *Dido* was bowling along at her skirts, rattling away with her bow-chasers, until a headland hid them both from view.

But the *Leda* lay sorely stricken, with her mainmast gone, her bulwarks shattered, her mizzen-topmast and gaff shot away, her sails like a beggar's rags, and a hundred of her crew dead and wounded. Close beside her a mass of wreckage floated upon the waves. It was the stern-post of a mangled vessel, and across it, in white letters on a black ground, was painted, "*The Slapping Sal*."

"By the Lord! it was the brig that saved us!" cried Mr. Wharton. "Hudson brought her into action with the Frenchman, and was blown out of the water by a broadside!"

The little captain turned on his heel and paced up and down the deck. Already his crew were plugging the shot-holes, knotting and splicing and mending. When he came back, the lieutenant saw a softening of the stern lines about his eyes and mouth.

"Are they all gone?"

"Every man. They must have sunk with the wreck."

The two officers looked down at the sinister name, and at the stump of wreckage which floated in the discoloured water. Something black washed to and fro beside a splintered gaff and a tangle of halliards. It was the outrageous ensign, and near it a scarlet cap was floating.

"He was a villain, but he was a Briton!" said the captain, at last. "He lived like a dog, but, by God, he died like a man!"

A PIRATE OF THE LAND: ONE CROWDED HOUR

The place was the Eastbourne-Tunbridge road, not very far from the Cross in Hand — a lonely stretch, with a heath running upon either side. The time was half-past eleven upon a Sunday night in the late summer. A motor was passing slowly down the road.

It was a long, lean Rolls-Royce, running smoothly with a gentle purring of the engine. Through the two vivid circles cast by the electric head-lights the waving grass fringes and clumps of heather streamed swiftly like some golden cinematograph, leaving a blacker darkness behind and around them. One ruby-red spot shone upon the road, but no number-plate was visible within the dim ruddy halo of the tail-lamp which cast it. The car was open and of a tourist type, but even in that obscure light, for the night was moonless, an observer could hardly fail to have noticed a curious indefiniteness in its lines. As it slid into and across the broad stream of light from an open cottage door the reason could be seen. The body was hung with a singular loose arrangement of brown holland. Even the long black bonnet was banded with some close-drawn drapery.

The solitary man who drove this curious car was broad and burly. He sat hunched up over his steering-wheel, with the brim of a Tyrolean hat drawn down over his eyes. The red end of a cigarette smouldered under the black shadow thrown by the headgear. A dark ulster of some frieze-like material was turned up in the collar until it covered his ears. His neck was pushed forward from his rounded shoulders, and he seemed, as the car now slid noiselessly down the long sloping road, with the clutch disengaged and the engine running free, to be peering ahead of him through the darkness in search of some eagerly-expected object.

The distant toot of a motor-horn came faintly from some point far to the south of him. On such a night, at such a place, all traffic must be from south to north when the current of London week-enders sweeps back from the watering-place to the capital — from pleasure to duty. The man sat straight and listened intently. Yes, there it was again, and certainly to the south of him. His face was over the wheel and his eyes strained through the darkness. Then suddenly he spat out his cigarette and gave a sharp intake of the breath. Far away down the road two little yellow points had rounded a curve. They vanished into a dip, shot upwards once more, and then vanished again. The inert man in the draped car woke suddenly into intense life. From his pocket he pulled a mask of dark cloth, which he fastened securely across his face, adjusting it carefully that his sight might be unimpeded. For an instant he uncovered an acetylene hand-lantern, took a hasty glance at his own preparations, and laid it beside a Mauser pistol upon the seat alongside him. Then, twitching his hat down lower than ever, he released his clutch and slid downward his gear-lever. With a chuckle and shudder the long, black machine sprang forward, and shot with a soft sigh from her powerful engines down the sloping gradient. The driver stooped and switched off his electric head-lights. Only a dim grey swathe cut through the black heath indicated the line of his road. From in front there came presently a confused puffing and rattling and clanging as the oncoming car breasted the slope. It coughed and spluttered on a powerful, old-fashioned low gear, while its engine throbbed like a weary heart. The yellow, glaring lights dipped for the last time into a switchback curve. When they reappeared over the crest the two cars were within thirty yards of each other. The dark one darted across the road and barred the other's passage, while a warning acetylene lamp was waved in the air. With a jarring of brakes the noisy new-comer was brought to a halt.

"I say," cried an aggrieved voice, "'pon my soul, you know, we might have had an accident. Why the devil don't you keep your head-lights on? I never saw you till I nearly burst my radiators on you!"

The acetylene lamp, held forward, discovered a very angry young man, blue-eyed, yellow-moustached, and florid, sitting alone at the wheel of an antiquated twelve-horse Wolseley. Suddenly the aggrieved look upon his flushed face changed to one of absolute bewilderment. The driver in the dark car had sprung out of the seat, a black, long-barrelled, wicked-looking pistol was poked in the traveller's face, and behind the further sights of it was a circle of black cloth with two deadly eyes looking from as many slits.

"Hands up!" said a quick, stern voice. "Hands up! or, by the Lord — —"

The young man was as brave as his neighbours, but the hands went up all the same.

"Get down!" said his assailant, curtly.

The young man stepped forth into the road, followed closely by the covering lantern and pistol. Once he made as if he would drop his hands, but a short, stern word jerked them up again.

"I say, look here, this is rather out o' date, ain't it?" said the traveller. "I expect you're joking — what?"

"Your watch," said the man behind the Mauser pistol.

"You can't really mean it!"

"Your watch, I say!"

"Well, take it, if you must. It's only plated, anyhow. You're two centuries out in time, or a few thousand miles longitude. The bush is your mark — or America. You don't seem in the picture on a Sussex road."

"Purse," said the man. There was something very compelling in his voice and methods. The purse was handed over.

"Any rings?"

"Don't wear 'em."

"Stand there! Don't move!"

The highwayman passed his victim and threw open the bonnet of the Wolseley. His hand, with a pair of steel pliers, was thrust deep into the works. There was the snap of a parting wire.

"Hang it all, don't crock my car!" cried the traveller.

He turned, but quick as a flash the pistol was at his head once more. And yet even in that flash, whilst the robber whisked round from the broken circuit, something had caught the young man's eye which made him gasp and start. He opened his mouth as if about to shout some words. Then with an evident effort he restrained himself.

"Get in," said the highwayman.

The traveller climbed back to his seat.

"What is your name?"

"Ronald Barker. What's yours?"

The masked man ignored the impertinence.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"My cards are in my purse. Take one."

The highwayman sprang into his car, the engine of which had hissed and whispered in gentle accompaniment to the interview. With a clash he threw back his side-brake, flung in his gears, twirled the wheel hard round, and cleared the motionless Wolseley. A minute later he was gliding swiftly, with all his lights gleaming, some half-mile southward on the road, while Mr. Ronald Barker, a side-lamp in his hand, was rummaging furiously among the odds and ends of his repair-box for a strand of wire which would connect up his electricity and set him on his way once more.

When he had placed a safe distance between himself and his victim, the adventurer eased up, took his booty from his pocket, replaced the watch, opened the purse, and counted out the money. Seven shillings constituted the miserable spoil. The poor result of his efforts seemed to amuse rather than annoy him, for he chuckled as he held the two half-crowns and the florin in the glare of his lantern. Then suddenly his manner changed. He thrust the thin purse back into his pocket, released his brake, and shot onwards with the same tense bearing with which he had started upon his adventure. The lights of another car were coming down the road.

On this occasion the methods of the highwayman were less furtive. Experience had clearly given him confidence. With lights still blazing he ran towards the new-comers, and, halting in the middle of the road, summoned them to stop. From the point of view of the astonished travellers the result was sufficiently impressive. They saw in the glare of their own head-lights two glowing discs on either side of the long, black-muzzled snout of a high-power car, and above the masked face and menacing figure of its solitary driver. In the golden circle thrown by the Rover there stood an elegant, open-topped, twenty-horse Humber, with an undersized and very astonished chauffeur blinking from under his peaked cap. From behind the wind-screen the veil-bound hats and wondering faces of two very pretty young women protruded, one upon either side, and a little crescendo of frightened squeaks announced the acute emotion of one of them. The other was cooler and more critical.

“Don’t give it away, Hilda,” she whispered. “Do shut up, and don’t be such a silly. It’s Bertie or one of the boys playing it on us.”

“No, no! It’s the real thing, Flossie. It’s a robber, sure enough. Oh, my goodness, whatever shall we do?”

“What an ‘ad.’!” cried the other. “Oh, what a glorious ‘ad.’! Too late now for the mornings, but they’ll have it in every evening paper, sure.”

“What’s it going to cost?” groaned the other. “Oh, Flossie, Flossie, I’m sure I’m going to faint! Don’t you think if we both screamed together we could do some good? Isn’t he too awful with that black thing over his face? Oh, dear, oh, dear! He’s killing poor little Alf!”

The proceedings of the robber were indeed somewhat alarming. Springing down from his car, he had pulled the chauffeur out of his seat by the scruff of his neck. The sight of the Mauser had cut short all remonstrance, and under its compulsion the little man had pulled open the bonnet and extracted the sparking plugs. Having thus secured the immobility of his capture, the masked man walked forward, lantern in hand, to the side of the car. He had laid aside the gruff sternness with which he had treated Mr. Ronald Barker, and his voice and manner were gentle, though determined. He even raised his hat as a prelude to his address.

"I am sorry to inconvenience you, ladies," said he, and his voice had gone up several notes since the previous interview. "May I ask who you are?"

Miss Hilda was beyond coherent speech, but Miss Flossie was of a sterner mould.

"This is a pretty business," said she. "What right have you to stop us on the public road, I should like to know?"

"My time is short," said the robber, in a sterner voice. "I must ask you to answer my question."

"Tell him, Flossie! For goodness' sake be nice to him!" cried Hilda.

"Well, we're from the Gaiety Theatre, London, if you want to know," said the young lady. "Perhaps you've heard of Miss Flossie Thornton and Miss Hilda Mannering? We've been playing a week at the Royal at Eastbourne, and took a Sunday off to ourselves. So now you know!"

"I must ask you for your purses and for your jewellery."

Both ladies set up shrill expostulations, but they found, as Mr. Ronald Barker had done, that there was something quietly compelling in this man's methods. In a very few minutes they had handed over their purses, and a pile of glittering rings, bangles, brooches and chains was lying upon the front seat of the car. The diamonds glowed and shimmered like little electric points in the light of the lantern. He picked up the glittering tangle and weighed it in his hand.

"Anything you particularly value?" he asked the ladies; but Miss Flossie was in no humour for concessions.

"Don't come the Claude Duval over us," said she. "Take the lot or leave the lot. We don't want bits of our own given back to us."

"Except just Billy's necklace!" cried Hilda, and snatched at a little rope of pearls. The robber bowed, and released his hold of it.

"Anything else?"

The valiant Flossie began suddenly to cry. Hilda did the same. The effect upon the robber was surprising. He threw the whole heap of jewellery into the nearest lap.

"There! there! Take it!" he said. "It's trumpery stuff, anyhow. It's worth something to you, and nothing to me."

Tears changed in a moment to smiles.

"You're welcome to the purses. The 'ad.' is worth ten times the money. But what a funny way of getting a living nowadays! Aren't you afraid of being caught? It's all so wonderful, like a scene from a comedy."

"It may be a tragedy," said the robber.

"Oh, I hope not — I'm sure I hope not!" cried the two ladies of the drama.

But the robber was in no mood for further conversation. Far away down the road tiny points of light had appeared. Fresh business was coming to him, and he must not mix his cases. Disengaging his machine, he raised his hat, and slipped off to meet this new arrival, while Miss Flossie and Miss Hilda leaned out of their derelict car, still palpitating from their adventure, and watched the red gleam of the tail-light until it merged into the darkness.

This time there was every sign of a rich prize. Behind its four grand lamps set in a broad frame of glittering brasswork the magnificent sixty-horse Daimler breasted the slope with the low, deep, even snore which proclaimed its enormous latent strength. Like some rich-laden, high-pooped Spanish galleon, she kept her course until the prowling craft ahead of her swept across her bows and brought her to a sudden halt. An angry face, red, blotched, and evil, shot out of the open window of the closed limousine. The robber was aware of a high, bald forehead, gross pendulous cheeks, and two little crafty eyes which gleamed between creases of fat.

"Out of my way, sir! Out of my way this instant!" cried a rasping voice. "Drive over him, Hearn! Get down and pull him off the seat. The fellow's drunk — he's drunk, I say!"

Up to this point the proceedings of the modern highwayman might have passed as gentle. Now they turned in an instant to savagery. The chauffeur, a burly, capable fellow, incited by that raucous voice behind him, sprang from the car and seized the advancing robber by the throat. The latter hit out with the butt-end of his pistol, and the man dropped groaning on the road. Stepping over his prostrate body the adventurer pulled open the door, seized the stout occupant savagely by the ear, and dragged him bellowing on the highway. Then, very deliberately, he struck him twice across the face with his open hand. The blows rang out like pistol-shots in the silence of the night. The fat traveller turned a ghastly colour and fell back half senseless against the side of the limousine. The robber dragged open his coat, wrenched away the heavy gold watch-chain with all that it held, plucked out the great diamond pin that sparkled in the black satin tie, dragged off four rings — not one of which could have cost less than three figures — and finally tore from his inner pocket a bulky leather notebook. All this property he transferred to his own black overcoat, and added to it the man’s pearl cuff-links, and even the golden stud which held his collar. Having made sure that there was nothing else to take, the robber flashed his lantern upon the prostrate chauffeur, and satisfied himself that he was stunned and not dead. Then, returning to the master, he proceeded very deliberately to tear all his clothes from his body with a ferocious energy which set his victim whimpering and writhing in imminent expectation of murder.

Whatever the tormentor’s intention may have been, it was very effectually frustrated. A sound made him turn his head, and there, no very great distance off, were the lights of a car coming swiftly from the north. Such a car must have already passed the wreckage which this pirate had left behind him. It was following his track with a deliberate purpose, and might be crammed with every county constable of the district.

The adventurer had no time to lose. He darted from his bedraggled victim, sprang into his own seat, and with his foot on the accelerator shot swiftly off down the road. Some way down there was a narrow side lane, and into this the fugitive turned, cracking on his high speed and leaving a good five miles between him and any pursuer before he ventured to stop. Then, in a quiet corner, he counted over his booty of the evening — the paltry plunder of Mr. Ronald Barker, the rather better-furnished purses of the actresses, which contained four pounds between them, and, finally, the gorgeous jewellery and well-filled notebook of the plutocrat upon the Daimler. Five notes of fifty pounds, four of ten, fifteen sovereigns, and a number of valuable papers made up a most noble haul. It was clearly enough for one night’s work. The adventurer replaced all his ill-gotten gains in his pocket, and, lighting a cigarette, set forth upon his way with the air of a man who has no further care upon his mind.

It was on the Monday morning following upon this eventful evening that Sir Henry Hailworthy, of Walcot Old Place, having finished his breakfast in a leisurely fashion, strolled down to his study with the intention of writing a few letters before setting forth to take his place upon the county bench. Sir

Henry was a Deputy-Lieutenant of the county; he was a baronet of ancient blood; he was a magistrate of ten years' standing; and he was famous above all as the breeder of many a good horse and the most desperate rider in all the Weald country. A tall, upstanding man, with a strong clean-shaven face, heavy black eyebrows, and a square, resolute jaw, he was one whom it was better to call friend than foe. Though nearly fifty years of age, he bore no sign of having passed his youth, save that Nature, in one of her freakish moods, had planted one little feather of white hair above his right ear, making the rest of his thick black curls the darker by contrast. He was in thoughtful mood this morning, for having lit his pipe he sat at his desk with his blank note-paper in front of him, lost in a deep reverie.

Suddenly his thoughts were brought back to the present. From behind the laurels of the curving drive there came a low, clanking sound, which swelled into the clatter and jingle of an ancient car. Then from round the corner there swung an old-fashioned Wolseley, with a fresh-complexioned, yellow-moustached young man at the wheel. Sir Henry sprang to his feet at the sight, and then sat down once more. He rose again as a minute later the footman announced Mr. Ronald Barker. It was an early visit, but Barker was Sir Henry's intimate friend. As each was a fine shot, horseman, and billiard-player, there was much in common between the two men, and the younger (and poorer) was in the habit of spending at least two evenings a week at Walcot Old Place. Therefore, Sir Henry advanced cordially with outstretched hand to welcome him.

"You're an early bird this morning," said he. "What's up? If you are going over to Lewes we could motor together."

But the younger man's demeanour was peculiar and ungracious. He disregarded the hand which was held out to him, and he stood pulling at his own long moustache and staring with troubled, questioning eyes at the county magistrate.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked the latter.

Still the young man did not speak. He was clearly on the edge of an interview which he found it most difficult to open. His host grew impatient.

"You don't seem yourself this morning. What on earth is the matter? Anything upset you?"

"Yes," said Ronald Barker, with emphasis.

"What has?"

"*You* have."

Sir Henry smiled. “Sit down, my dear fellow. If you have any grievance against me, let me hear it.”

Barker sat down. He seemed to be gathering himself for a reproach. When it did come it was like a bullet from a gun.

“Why did you rob me last night?”

The magistrate was a man of iron nerve. He showed neither surprise nor resentment. Not a muscle twitched upon his calm, set face.

“Why do you say that I robbed you last night?”

“A big, tall fellow in a motor-car stopped me on the Mayfield road. He poked a pistol in my face and took my purse and my watch. Sir Henry, that man was you.”

The magistrate smiled.

“Am I the only big, tall man in the district? Am I the only man with a motor-car?”

“Do you think I couldn’t tell a Rolls-Royce when I see it — I, who spend half my life on a car and the other half under it? Who has a Rolls-Royce about here except you?”

“My dear Barker, don’t you think that such a modern highwayman as you describe would be more likely to operate outside his own district? How many hundred Rolls-Royces are there in the South of England?”

“No, it won’t do, Sir Henry — it won’t do! Even your voice, though you sunk it a few notes, was familiar enough to me. But hang it, man! What did you do it *for*? That’s what gets over me. That you should stick up me, one of your closest friends, a man that worked himself to the bone when you stood for the division — and all for the sake of a Brummagem watch and a few shillings — is simply incredible.”

“Simply incredible,” repeated the magistrate, with a smile.

“And then those actresses, poor little devils, who have to earn all they get. I followed you down the road, you see. That was a dirty trick, if ever I heard one. The City shark was different. If a chap must go a-robbing, that sort of fellow is fair game. But your friend, and then the girls — well, I say again, I couldn’t have believed it.”

“Then why believe it?”

“Because it *is* so.”

“Well, you seem to have persuaded yourself to that effect. You don’t seem to have much evidence to lay before any one else.”

“I could swear to you in a police-court. What put the lid on it was that when you were cutting my wire — and an infernal liberty it was! — I saw that white tuft of yours sticking out from behind your mask.”

For the first time an acute observer might have seen some slight sign of emotion upon the face of the baronet.

“You seem to have a fairly vivid imagination,” said he.

His visitor flushed with anger.

“See here, Hailworthy,” said he, opening his hand and showing a small, jagged triangle of black cloth. “Do you see that? It was on the ground near the car of the young women. You must have ripped it off as you jumped out from your seat. Now send for that heavy black driving-coat of yours. If you don’t ring the bell I’ll ring it myself, and we shall have it in. I’m going to see this thing through, and don’t you make any mistake about that.”

The baronet’s answer was a surprising one. He rose, passed Barker’s chair, and, walking over to the door, he locked it and placed the key in his pocket.

“You *are* going to see it through,” said he. “I’ll lock you in until you do. Now we must have a straight talk, Barker, as man to man, and whether it ends in tragedy or not depends on you.”

He had half-opened one of the drawers in his desk as he spoke. His visitor frowned in anger.

“You won’t make matters any better by threatening me, Hailworthy. I am going to do my duty, and you won’t bluff me out of it.”

“I have no wish to bluff you. When I spoke of a tragedy I did not mean to you. What I meant was that there are some turns which this affair cannot be allowed to take. I have neither kith nor kin, but there is the family honour, and some things are impossible.”

“It is late to talk like that.”

“Well, perhaps it is, but not too late. And now I have a good deal to say to you. First of all, you are quite right, and it was I who held you up last night on the Mayfield road.”

“But why on earth — —”

“All right. Let me tell it my own way. First I want you to look at these.” He unlocked a drawer and he took out two small packages. “These were to be posted in London to-night. This one is addressed to you, and I may as well hand it over to you at once. It contains your watch and your purse. So, you see bar your cut wire you would have been none the worse for your adventure. This other packet is addressed to the young ladies of the Gaiety Theatre, and their properties are enclosed. I hope I have convinced you that I had intended full reparation in each case before you came to accuse me?”

“Well?” asked Barker.

“Well, we will now deal with Sir George Wilde, who is, as you may not know, the senior partner of Wilde and Guggendorf, the founders of the Ludgate Bank of infamous memory. His chauffeur is a case apart. You may take it from me, upon my word of honour, that I had plans for the chauffeur. But it is the master that I want to speak of. You know that I am not a rich man myself. I expect all the county knows that. When Black Tulip lost the Derby I was hard hit. And other things as well. Then I had a legacy of a thousand. This infernal bank was paying 7 per cent. on deposits. I knew Wilde. I saw him. I asked him if it was safe. He said it was. I paid it in, and within forty-eight hours the whole thing went to bits. It came out before the Official Receiver that Wilde had known for three months that nothing could save him. And yet he took all my cargo aboard his sinking vessel. He was all right — confound him! He had plenty besides. But I had lost all my money and no law could help me. Yet he had robbed me as clearly as one man could rob another. I saw him and he laughed in my face. Told me to stick to Consols, and that the lesson was cheap at the price. So I just swore that, by hook or by crook, I would get level with him. I knew his habits, for I had made it my business to do so. I knew that he came back from Eastbourse on Sunday nights. I knew that he carried a good sum with him in his pocket-book. Well it’s *my* pocket-book now. Do you mean to tell me that I’m not morally justified in what I have done? By the Lord, I’d have left the devil as bare as he left many a widow and orphan if I’d had the time!”

“That’s all very well. But what about me? What about the girls?”

“Have some common sense, Barker. Do you suppose that I could go and stick up this one personal enemy of mine and escape detection? It was impossible. I was bound to make myself out to be just a common robber who had run up against him by accident. So I turned myself loose on the high road and took my chance. As the devil would have it, the first man I met was yourself. I was a fool not to recognise that old ironmonger’s store of yours by the row it made coming up the hill. When I saw you I could hardly speak for laughing. But I was bound to carry it through. The same with the actresses. I’m afraid I gave myself away, for I couldn’t take their little fallals, but I had to keep up a show. Then came my man himself. There was no bluff about that. I was out to skin him, and I did. Now, Barker, what do you think of it all? I had a pistol at your head last night, and, by George! whether you believe it or not, you have one at mine this morning!”

The young man rose slowly, and with a broad smile he wrung the magistrate by the hand.

“Don’t do it again. It’s too risky,” said he. “The swine would score heavily if you were taken.”

“You’re a good chap, Barker,” said the magistrate. “No, I won’t do it again. Who’s the fellow who talks of ‘one crowded hour of glorious life’? By George! it’s too fascinating. I had the time of my life! Talk of fox-hunting! No, I’ll never touch it again, for it might get a grip of me.”

A telephone rang sharply upon the table, and the baronet put the receiver to his ear. As he listened, he smiled at his companion.

“I’m rather late this morning,” said he, “and they are awaiting for me to try some petty larcenies on the county bench.”

TALES OF BLUE WATER

THE STRIPED CHEST

“What do you make of her, Allardyce?” I asked.

My second mate was standing beside me upon the poop, with his short, thick legs astretch, for the gale had left a considerable swell behind it, and our two quarter-boats nearly touched the water with every roll. He steadied his glass against the mizzen-shrouds, and he looked long and hard at this disconsolate stranger every time she came reeling up on to the crest of a roller and hung balanced for a few seconds before swooping down upon the other side. She lay so low in the water that I could only catch an occasional glimpse of a pea-green line of bulwark.

She was a brig, but her mainmast had been snapped short off some ten feet above the deck, and no effort seemed to have been made to cut away the wreckage, which floated, sails and yards, like the broken wing of a wounded gull, upon the water beside her. The foremast was still standing, but the fore-topsail was flying loose, and the head-sails were streaming out in long white pennons in front of her. Never have I seen a vessel which appeared to have gone through rougher handling.

But we could not be surprised at that, for there had been times during the last three days when it was a question whether our own barque would ever see land again. For thirty-six hours we had kept her nose to it, and if the *Mary Sinclair* had not been as good a seaboat as ever left the Clyde, we could not have gone through. And yet here we were at the end of it with the loss only of our gig and of part of the starboard bulwark. It did not astonish us, however, when the smother had cleared away, to find that others had been less lucky, and that this mutilated brig, staggering about upon a blue sea, and under a cloudless sky, had been left, like a blinded man after a lightning flash, to tell of the terror which is past.

Allardyce, who was a slow and methodical Scotchman, stared long and hard at the little craft, while our seamen lined the bulwark or clustered upon the fore shrouds to have a view of the stranger. In latitude 20° and longitude 10°, which were about our bearings, one becomes a little curious as to whom one meets, for one has left the main lines of Atlantic commerce to the north. For ten days we had been sailing over a solitary sea.

“She’s derelict, I’m thinking,” said the second mate.

I had come to the same conclusion, for I could see no sign of life upon her deck, and there was no answer to the friendly wavings from our seamen. The crew had probably deserted her under the impression that she was about to founder.

“She can’t last long,” continued Allardyce, in his measured way. “She may put her nose down and her tail up any minute. The water’s lipping up to the edge of her rail.”

“What’s her flag?” I asked.

“I’m trying to make out. It’s got all twisted and tangled with the halyards. Yes, I’ve got it now, clear enough. It’s the Brazilian flag, but it’s wrong side up.”

She had hoisted a signal of distress, then, before her people abandoned her. Perhaps they had only just gone. I took the mate’s glass and looked round over the tumultuous face of the deep blue Atlantic, still veined and starred with white lines and spoutings of foam. But nowhere could I see anything human beyond ourselves.

“There may be living men aboard,” said I.

“There may be salvage,” muttered the second mate.

“Then we will run down upon her lee side, and lie to.”

We were not more than a hundred yards from her when we swung our fore-yard aback, and there we were, the barque and the brig, ducking and bowing like two clowns in a dance.

“Drop one of the quarter-boats,” said I. “Take four men, Mr. Allardyce, and see what you can learn of her.”

But just at that moment my first officer, Mr. Armstrong, came on deck, for seven bells had struck, and it was but a few minutes off his watch. It would interest me to go myself to this abandoned vessel and to see what there might be aboard of her. So, with a word to Armstrong, I swung myself over the side, slipped down the falls, and took my place in the sheets of the boat.

It was but a little distance, but it took some time to traverse, and so heavy was the roll, that often, when we were in the trough of the sea, we could not see either the barque which we had left or the brig which we were approaching. The sinking sun did not penetrate down there, and it was cold and dark in the hollows of the waves, but each passing billow heaved us up into the warmth and the sunshine once more. At each of these moments, as we hung upon a white-capped ridge between the two dark valleys, I caught a glimpse of the long, pea-green line, and the nodding foremast of the brig, and I steered so as to come round by her stern, so that we might determine which was the best way of boarding her. As we passed her we saw the name *Nossa Sehnora da Vittoria* painted across her dripping counter.

"The weather side, sir," said the second mate. "Stand by with the boat-hook, carpenter!" An instant later we had jumped over the bulwarks, which were hardly higher than our boat, and found ourselves upon the deck of the abandoned vessel.

Our first thought was to provide for our own safety in case — as seemed very probable — the vessel should settle down beneath our feet. With this object two of our men held on to the painter of the boat, and fended her off from the vessel's side, so that she might be ready in case we had to make a hurried retreat. The carpenter was sent to find out how much water there was, and whether it was still gaining, while the other seaman, Allardyce, and myself, made a rapid inspection of the vessel and her cargo.

The deck was littered with wreckage and with hen-coops, in which the dead birds were washing about. The boats were gone, with the exception of one, the bottom of which had been stove, and it was certain that the crew had abandoned the vessel. The cabin was in a deck house, one side of which had been beaten in by a heavy sea. Allardyce and I entered it, and found the captain's table as he had left it, his books and papers — all Spanish or Portuguese — scattered over it, with piles of cigarette ash everywhere. I looked about for the log, but could not find it.

"As likely as not he never kept one," said Allardyce. "Things are pretty slack aboard a South American trader, and they don't do more than they can help. If there was one it must have been taken away with him in the boat."

"I should like to take all these books and papers," said I. "Ask the carpenter how much time we have."

His report was reassuring. The vessel was full of water, but some of the cargo was buoyant, and there was no immediate danger of her sinking. Probably she would never sink, but would drift about as one of those terrible, unmarked reefs which have sent so many stout vessels to the bottom.

"In that case there is no danger in your going below, Mr. Allardyce," said I. "See what you can make of her, and find out how much of her cargo may be saved. I'll look through these papers while you are gone."

The bills of lading, and some notes and letters which lay upon the desk, sufficed to inform me that the Brazilian brig *Nossa Sehnora da Vittoria* had cleared from Bahia a month before. The name of the captain was Texeira, but there was no record as to the number of the crew. She was bound for London, and a glance at the bills of lading was sufficient to show me that we were not likely to profit much in the way of salvage. Her cargo consisted of nuts, ginger, and wood, the latter in the shape of great logs of valuable tropical growths. It was these, no doubt, which had prevented the ill-fated vessel from going to the bottom, but they were of such a size as to make it impossible for us to extract them. Besides these, there were a few fancy goods, such as a number of ornamental birds for millinery purposes, and a hundred cases of preserved fruits. And then, as I turned over the papers, I came upon a short note in English, which arrested my attention.

"It is requested," said the note, "that the various old Spanish and Indian curiosities, which came out of the Santarem collection, and which are consigned to Prontfoot and Neuman, of Oxford Street, London, should be put in some place where there may be no danger of these very valuable and unique articles being injured or tampered with. This applies most particularly to the treasure-chest of Don Ramirez di Leyra, which must on no account be placed where any one can get at it."

The treasure-chest of Don Ramirez! Unique and valuable articles! Here was a chance of salvage after all! I had risen to my feet with the paper in my hand, when my Scotch mate appeared in the doorway.

"I'm thinking all isn't quite as it should be aboard of this ship, sir," said he. He was a hard-faced man, and yet I could see that he had been startled.

"What's the matter?"

"Murder's the matter, sir. There's a man Here with his brains beaten out."

"Killed in the storm?" said I.

"May be so, sir. But I'll be surprised if you think so after you have seen him."

"Where is he, then?"

"This way, sir; here in the main-deck house."

There appeared to have been no accommodation below in the brig, for there was the afterhouse for the captain, another by the main hatchway with the cook's galley attached to it, and a third in the forecastle for the men. It was to this middle one that the mate led me. As you entered the galley, with its litter of tumbled pots and dishes, was upon the right, and upon the left was a small room with two bunks for the officers. Then beyond there was a place about twelve feet square, which was littered with flags and spare canvas. All round the walls were a number of packets done up in coarse cloth and carefully lashed to the woodwork. At the other end was a great box, striped red and white, though the red was so faded and the white so dirty that it was only where the light fell directly upon it that one could see the colouring. The box was, by subsequent measurement, four feet three inches in length, three feet two inches in height, and three feet across — considerably larger than a seaman's chest.

But it was not to the box that my eyes or my thoughts were turned as I entered the store-room. On the floor, lying across the litter of bunting, there was stretched a small, dark man with a short, curling beard. He lay as far as it was possible from the box, with his feet towards it and his head away. A crimson patch was printed upon the white canvas on which his head was resting, and little red ribbons wreathed themselves round his swarthy neck and trailed away on to the floor, but there was no sign of a wound that I could see, and his face was as placid as that of a sleeping child.

It was only when I stooped that I could perceive his injury, and then I turned away with an exclamation of horror. He had been pole-axed; apparently by some person standing behind him. A frightful blow had smashed in the top of his head and penetrated deeply into his brain. His face might well be placid, for death must have been absolutely instantaneous, and the position of the wound showed that he could never have seen the person who had inflicted it.

"Is that foul play or accident, Captain Barclay?" asked my second mate, demurely.

"You are quite right, Mr. Allardyce. The man has been murdered, struck down from above by a sharp and heavy weapon. But who was he, and why did they murder him?"

"He was a common seaman, sir," said the mate. "You can see that if you look at his fingers." He turned out his pockets as he spoke and brought to light a pack of cards, some tarred string, and a bundle of Brazilian tobacco.

"Hullo, look at this!" said he.

It was a large, open knife with a stiff spring blade which he had picked up from the floor. The steel was shining and bright, so that we could not associate it with the crime, and yet the dead man had apparently held it in his hand when he was struck down, for it still lay within his grasp.

"It looks to me, sir, as if he knew he was in danger, and kept his knife handy," said the mate. "However, we can't help the poor beggar now. I can't make out these things that are lashed to the wall. They seem to be idols and weapons and curios of all sorts done up in old sacking."

"That's right," said I. "They are the only things of value that we are likely to get from the cargo. Hail the barque and tell them to send the other quarter-boat to help us to get the stuff aboard."

While he was away I examined this curious plunder which had come into our possession. The curiosities were so wrapped up that I could only form a general idea as to their nature, but the striped box stood in a good light where I could thoroughly examine it. On the lid, which was clamped and cornered with metal-work, there was engraved a complex coat of arms, and beneath it was a line of Spanish which I was able to decipher as meaning, "The treasure-chest of Don Ramirez di Leyra, Knight of the Order of Saint James, Governor and Captain-General of Terra Firma and of the Province of Veraquas." In one corner was the date 1606, and on the other a large white label, upon which was written in English, "You are earnestly requested, upon no account, to open this box." The same warning was repeated underneath in Spanish. As to the lock, it was a very complex and heavy one of engraved steel, with a Latin motto, which was above a seaman's comprehension.

By the time I had finished this examination of the peculiar box, the other quarter-boat with Mr. Armstrong, the first officer, had come alongside, and we began to carry out and place in her the various curiosities which appeared to be the only objects worth moving from the derelict ship. When she was full I sent her back to the barque, and then Allardyce and I, with a carpenter and one seaman, shifted the striped box, which was the only thing left, to our boat, and lowered it over, balancing it upon the two middle thwarts, for it was so heavy that it would have given the boat a dangerous tilt had we placed it at either end. As to the dead man, we left him where we had found him.

The mate had a theory that at the moment of the desertion of the ship, this fellow had started plundering, and that the captain in an attempt to preserve discipline, had struck him down with a hatchet or some other heavy weapon. It seemed more probable than any other explanation, and yet it did not entirely satisfy me either. But the ocean is full of mysteries, and we were content to leave the fate of the dead seaman of the Brazilian brig to be added to that long list which every sailor can recall.

The heavy box was slung up by ropes on to the deck of the *Mary Sinclair*, and was carried by four seamen into the cabin, where, between the table and the after-lockers, there was just space for it to stand. There it remained during supper, and after that meal the mates remained with me, and discussed over a glass of grog the event of the day. Mr. Armstrong was a long, thin, vulture-like man, an excellent seaman, but famous for his nearness and cupidity. Our treasure-trove had excited him greatly, and already he had begun with glistening eyes to reckon up how much it might be worth to each of us when the shares of the salvage came to be divided.

"If the paper said that they were unique, Mr. Barclay, then they may be worth anything that you like to name. You wouldn't believe the sums that the rich collectors give. A thousand pounds is nothing to them. We'll have something to show for our voyage, or I am mistaken."

"I don't think that," said I. "As far as I can see they are not very different from any other South American curios."

"Well, sir, I've traded there for fourteen voyages, and I have never seen anything like that chest before. That's worth a pile of money, just as it stands. But it's so heavy, that surely there must be something valuable inside it. Don't you think we ought to open it and see?"

"If you break it open you will spoil it, as likely as not," said the second mate.

Armstrong squatted down in front of it, with his head on one side, and his long, thin nose within a few inches of the lock.

"The wood is oak," said he, "and it has shrunk a little with age. If I had a chisel or a strong-bladed knife I could force the lock back without doing any damage at all."

The mention of a strong-bladed knife made me think of the dead seaman upon the brig.

"I wonder if he could have been on the job when some one came to interfere with him," said I.

"I don't know about that, sir, but I am perfectly certain that I could open the box. There's a screwdriver here in the locker. Just hold the lamp, Allardyce, and I'll have it done in a brace of shakes."

"Wait a bit," said I, for already, with eyes which gleamed with curiosity and with avarice, he was stooping over the lid. "I don't see that there is any hurry over this matter. You've read that card which warns us not to open it. It may mean anything or it may mean nothing, but somehow I feel inclined to obey it. After all, whatever is in it will keep, and if it is valuable it will be worth as much if it is opened in the owner's offices as in the cabin of the *Mary Sinclair*."

The first officer seemed bitterly disappointed at my decision.

"Surely, sir, you are not superstitious about it," said he, with a slight sneer upon his thin lips. "If it gets out of our own hands, and we don't see for ourselves what is inside it, we may be done out of our rights; besides — —"

"That's enough, Mr. Armstrong," said I, abruptly. "You may have every confidence that you will get your rights, but I will not have that box opened to-night."

"Why, the label itself shows that the box has been examined by Europeans," Allardyce added. "Because a box is a treasure-box is no reason that it has treasures inside it now. A good many folk have had a peep into it since the days of the old Governor of Terra Firma."

Armstrong threw the screwdriver down upon the table and shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," said he; but for the rest of the evening, although we spoke upon many subjects, I noticed that his eyes were continually coming round, with the same expression of curiosity and greed, to the old striped box.

And now I come to that portion of my story which fills me even now with a shuddering horror when I think of it. The main cabin had the rooms of the officers round it, but mine was the farthest away from it at the end of the little passage which led to the companion. No regular watch was kept by me, except in cases of emergency, and the three mates divided the watches among them. Armstrong had the middle watch, which ends at four in the morning, and he was relieved by Allardyce. For my part I have always been one of the soundest of sleepers, and it is rare for anything less than a hand upon my shoulder to arouse me.

And yet I was aroused that night, or rather in the early grey of the morning. It was just half-past four by my chronometer when something caused me to sit up in my berth wide awake and with every nerve tingling. It was a sound of some sort, a crash with a human cry at the end of it, which still jarred upon my ears. I sat listening, but all was now silent. And yet it could not have been imagination, that hideous cry, for the echo of it still rang in my head, and it seemed to have come from some place quite close to me. I sprang from my bunk, and, pulling on some clothes, I made my way into the cabin.

At first I saw nothing unusual there. In the cold, grey light I made out the red-clothed table, the six rotating chairs, the walnut lockers, the swinging barometer, and there, at the end, the big striped chest. I was turning away with the intention of going upon deck and asking the second mate if he had heard anything, when my eyes fell suddenly upon something which projected from under the table. It was the leg of a man — a leg with a long sea-boot upon it. I stooped, and there was a figure sprawling upon his face, his arms thrown forward and his body twisted. One glance told me that it was Armstrong, the first officer, and a second that he was a dead man. For a few moments I stood gasping. Then I rushed on to the deck, called Allardyce to my assistance, and came back with him into the cabin.

Together we pulled the unfortunate fellow from under the table, and as we looked at his dripping head, we exchanged glances, and I do not know which was the paler of the two.

“The same as the Spanish sailor,” said I.

“The very same. God preserve us! It’s that infernal chest! Look at Armstrong’s hand!”

He held up the mate’s right hand, and there was the screwdriver which he had wished to use the night before.

“He’s been at the chest, sir. He knew that I was on deck and you asleep. He knelt down in front of it, and he pushed the lock back with that tool. Then something happened to him, and he cried out so that you heard him.”

“Allardyce,” I whispered, “what *could* have happened to him?”

The second mate put his hand upon my sleeve and drew me into his cabin.

“We can talk here, sir, and we don’t know who may be listening to us in there. What do you suppose is in that box, Captain Barclay?”

“I give you my word, Allardyce, that I have no idea.”

“Well, I can only find one theory which will fit all the facts. Look at the size of the box. Look at all the carving and metal-work which may conceal any number of holes. Look at the weight of it; it took four men to carry it. On the top of that, remember that two men have tried to open it, and both have come to their end through it. Now, sir, what can it mean except one thing?”

“You mean there is a man in it?”

“Of course there is a man in it. You know how it is in these South American States, sir. A man may be President one week and hunted like a dog the next. They are for ever flying for their lives. My idea is that there is some fellow in hiding there, who is armed and desperate, and who will fight to the death before he is taken.”

“But his food and drink?”

“It’s a roomy chest, sir, and he may have some provisions stowed away. As to his drink, he had a friend among the crew upon the brig who saw that he had what he needed.”

“You think, then, that the label asking people not to open the box was simply written in his interest?”

“Yes, sir, that is my idea. Have you any other way of explaining the facts?”

I had to confess that I had not.

“The question is what are we to do?” I asked.

“The man’s a dangerous ruffian who sticks at nothing. I’m thinking it wouldn’t be a bad thing to put a rope round the chest and tow it alongside for half an hour; then we could open it at our ease. Or if we just tied the box up and kept him from getting any water maybe that would do as well. Or the carpenter could put a coat of varnish over it and stop all the blowholes.”

“Come, Allardyce,” said I, angrily. “You don’t seriously mean to say that a whole ship’s company are going to be terrorised by a single man in a box. If he’s there I’ll engage to fetch him out!” I went to my room and came back with my revolver in my hand. “Now, Allardyce,” said I. “Do you open the lock, and I’ll stand on guard.”

“For God’s sake, think what you are doing, sir,” cried the mate. “Two men have lost their lives over it, and the blood of one not yet dry upon the carpet.”

“The more reason why we should revenge him.”

“Well, sir, at least let me call the carpenter. Three are better than two, and he is a good stout man.”

He went off in search of him, and I was left alone with the striped chest in the cabin. I don’t think that I’m a nervous man, but I kept the table between me and this solid old relic of the Spanish Main. In the growing light of morning the red and white striping was beginning to appear, and the curious scrolls and wreaths of metal and carving which showed the loving pains which cunning craftsmen had expended upon it. Presently the carpenter and the mate came back together, the former with a hammer in his hand.

“It’s a bad business, this, sir,” said he, shaking his head, as he looked at the body of the mate. “And you think there’s someone hiding in the box?”

“There’s no doubt about it,” said Allardyce, picking up the screwdriver and setting his jaw like a man who needs to brace his courage. “I’ll drive the lock back if you will both stand by. If he rises let him have it on the head with your hammer, carpenter! Shoot at once, sir, if he raises his hand. Now!”

He had knelt down in front of the striped chest, and passed the blade of the tool under the lid. With a sharp snick the lock flew back. “Stand by!” yelled the mate, and with a heave he threw open the massive top of the box. As it swung up, we all three sprang back, I with my pistol levelled, and the carpenter with the hammer above his head. Then, as nothing happened, we each took a step forward and peeped in. The box was empty.

Not quite empty either, for in one corner was lying an old yellow candlestick, elaborately engraved, which appeared to be as old as the box itself. Its rich yellow tone and artistic shape suggested that it was an object of value. For the rest there was nothing more weighty or valuable than dust in the old striped treasure-chest.

“Well, I’m blessed!” cried Allardyce, staring blankly into it. “Where does the weight come in, then?”

“Look at the thickness of the sides and look at the lid. Why, it’s five inches through. And see that great metal spring across it.”

“That’s for holding the lid up,” said the mate. “You see, it won’t lean back. What’s that German printing on the inside?”

“It means that it was made by Johann Rothstein of Augsburg, in 1606.”

“And a solid bit of work, too. But it doesn’t throw much light on what has passed, does it, Captain Barclay? That candlestick looks like gold. We shall have something for our trouble after all.”

He leant forward to grasp it, and from that moment I have never doubted as to the reality of inspiration, for on the instant I caught him by the collar and pulled him straight again. It may have been some story of the Middle Ages which had come back to my mind, or it may have been that my eye had caught some red which was not that of rust upon the upper part of the lock, but to him and to me it will always seem an inspiration, so prompt and sudden was my action.

“There’s devilry here,” said I. “Give me the crooked stick from the corner.”

It was an ordinary walking-cane with a hooked top. I passed it over the candlestick and gave it a pull. With a flash a row of polished steel fangs shot out from below the upper lip, and the great striped chest snapped at us like a wild animal. Clang came the huge lid into its place, and the glasses on the swinging rack sang and tinkled with the shock. The mate sat down on the edge of the table, and shivered like a frightened horse.

“You’ve saved my life, Captain Barclay!” said he.

So this was the secret of the striped treasure-chest of old Don Ramirez di Leyra, and this was how he preserved his ill-gotten gains from the Terra Firma and the Province of Veraquas. Be the thief ever so cunning he could not tell that golden candlestick from the other articles of value, and the instant that he laid hand upon it the terrible spring was unloosed and the murderous steel spikes were driven into his brain, while the shock of the blow sent the victim backwards and enabled the chest to automatically close itself. How many, I wondered, had fallen victims to the ingenuity of the Mechanic of Augsburg. And as I thought of the possible history of that grim striped chest my resolution was very quickly taken.

“Carpenter, bring three men and carry this on deck.”

“Going to throw it overboard, sir?”

“Yes, Mr. Allardyce. I’m not superstitious as a rule, but there are some things which are more than a sailor can be called upon to stand.”

“No wonder that brig made heavy weather, Captain Barclay, with such a thing on board. The glass is dropping fast, sir, and we are only just in time.”

So we did not even wait for the three sailors, but we carried it out, the mate, the carpenter, and I, and we pushed it with our own hands over the bulwarks. There was a white spout of water, and it was gone. There it lies, the striped chest, a thousand fathoms deep, and if, as they say, the sea will some day be dry land, I grieve for the man who finds that old box and tries to penetrate into its secret.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE “POLESTAR”

(BEING AN EXTRACT FROM THE SINGULAR JOURNAL OF JOHN M’ALISTER RAY, STUDENT OF MEDICINE.)

September 11th. — Lat. 81° 40’ N.; long. 2° E. Still lying-to amid enormous ice fields. The one which stretches away to the north of us, and to which our ice-anchor is attached, cannot be smaller than an English county. To the right and left unbroken sheets extend to the horizon. This morning the mate reported that there were signs of pack ice to the southward. Should this form of sufficient thickness to bar our return, we shall be in a position of danger, as the food, I hear, is already running somewhat short. It is late in the season, and the nights are beginning to reappear. This morning I saw a star twinkling just over the fore-yard, the first since the beginning of May. There is considerable discontent among the crew, many of whom are anxious to get back home to be in time for the herring season, when labour always commands a high price upon the Scotch coast. As yet their displeasure is only signified by sullen countenances and black looks, but I heard from the second mate this afternoon that they contemplated sending a deputation to the Captain to explain their grievance. I much doubt how he will receive it, as he is a man of fierce temper, and very sensitive about anything approaching to an infringement of his rights. I shall venture after dinner to say a few words to him upon the subject. I have always found that he will tolerate from me what he would resent from any other member of the crew. Amsterdam Island, at the north-west corner of Spitzbergen, is visible upon our starboard quarter — a rugged line of volcanic rocks, intersected by white seams, which represent glaciers. It is curious to think that at the present moment there is probably no human being nearer to us than the Danish settlements in the south of Greenland — a good nine hundred miles as the crow flies. A captain takes a great responsibility upon himself when he risks his vessel under such circumstances. No whaler has ever remained in these latitudes till so advanced a period of the year.

9 P.M. — I have spoken to Captain Craigie, and though the result has been hardly satisfactory, I am bound to say that he listened to what I had to say very quietly and even deferentially. When I had finished he put on that air of iron determination which I have frequently observed upon his face, and paced rapidly backwards and forwards across the narrow cabin for

some minutes. At first I feared that I had seriously offended him, but he dispelled the idea by sitting down again, and putting his hand upon my arm with a gesture which almost amounted to a caress. There was a depth of tenderness too in his wild dark eyes which surprised me considerably. “Look here, Doctor,” he said, “I’m sorry I ever took you — I am indeed — and I would give fifty pounds this minute to see you standing safe upon the Dundee quay. It’s hit or miss with me this time. There are fish to the north of us. How dare you shake your head, sir, when I tell you I saw them blowing from the mast-head?” — this in a sudden burst of fury, though I was not conscious of having shown any signs of doubt. “Two-and-twenty fish in as many minutes as I am a living man, and not one under ten foot. Now, doctor, do you think I can leave the country when there is only one infernal strip of ice between me and my fortune? If it came on to blow from the north to-morrow we could fill the ship and be away before the frost could catch us. If it came on to blow from the south — well, I suppose the men are paid for risking their lives, and as for myself it matters but little to me, for I have more to bind me to the other world than to this one. I confess that I am sorry for *you*, though. I wish I had old Angus Tait who was with me last voyage, for he was a man that would never be missed, and you — you said once that you were engaged, did you not?”

“Yes,” I answered, snapping the spring of the locket which hung from my watch-chain, and holding up the little vignette of Flora.

“Curse you!” he yelled, springing out of his seat, with his very beard bristling with passion. “What is your happiness to me? What have I to do with her that you must dangle her photograph before my eyes?” I almost thought that he was about to strike me in the frenzy of his rage, but with another imprecation he dashed open the door of the cabin and rushed out upon deck, leaving me considerably astonished at his extraordinary violence. It is the first time that he has ever shown me anything but courtesy and kindness. I can hear him pacing excitedly up and down overhead as I write these lines.

I should like to give a sketch of the character of this man, but it seems presumptuous to attempt such a thing upon paper, when the idea in my own mind is at best a vague and uncertain one. Several times I have thought that I grasped the clue which might explain it, but only to be disappointed by his presenting himself in some new light which would upset all my conclusions. It may be that no human eye but my own shall ever rest upon these lines, yet as a psychological study I shall attempt to leave some record of Captain Nicholas Craigie.

A man’s outer case generally gives some indication of the soul within. The Captain is tall and well-formed, with dark, handsome face, and a curious way of twitching his limbs, which may arise from nervousness, or be simply an outcome of his excessive energy. His jaw and whole cast of countenance is manly and resolute, but the eyes are the distinctive feature of his face. They are of the very darkest hazel, bright and eager, with a singular mixture of recklessness in their expression, and of something else which I have sometimes thought was more allied with horror than any other emotion. Generally the former predominated, but on occasions, and more particularly when he was thoughtfully inclined, the look of fear would spread and deepen until it imparted a new character to his whole countenance. It is at these times that he is most subject to tempestuous fits of anger, and he seems to be aware of it, for I have known him lock himself up so that no one might approach him until his dark hour was passed. He sleeps badly, and I have heard him shouting during the night, but his cabin is some little distance from mine, and I could never distinguish the words which he said.

This is one phase of his character, and the most disagreeable one. It is only through my close association with him, thrown together as we are day after day, that I have observed it. Otherwise he is an agreeable companion, well-read and entertaining, and as gallant a seaman as ever trod a deck. I shall not easily forget the way in which he handled the ship when we were caught by a gale among the loose ice at the beginning of April. I have never seen him so cheerful, and even hilarious, as he was that night, as he paced backwards and forwards upon the bridge amid the flashing of the lightning and the howling of the wind. He has told me several times that the thought of death was a pleasant one to him, which is a sad thing for a young man to say; he cannot be much more than thirty, though his hair and moustache are already slightly grizzled. Some great sorrow must have overtaken him and blighted his whole life. Perhaps I should be the same if I lost my Flora — God knows! I think if it were not for her that I should care very little whether the wind blew from the north or the south to-morrow. There, I hear him come down the companion, and he has locked himself up in his room, which shows that he is still in an unamiable mood. And so to bed, as old Pepys would say, for the candle is burning down (we have to use them now since the nights are closing in), and the steward has turned in, so there are no hopes of another one.

September 12th. — Calm, clear day, and still lying in the same position. What wind there is comes from the south-east, but it is very slight. Captain is in a better humour, and apologised to me at breakfast for his rudeness. He still looks somewhat distrait, however, and retains that wild look in his eyes which in a Highlander would mean that he was “fey” — at least so our chief engineer remarked to me, and he has some reputation among the Celtic portion of our crew as a seer and expounder of omens.

It is strange that superstition should have obtained such mastery over this hard-headed and practical race. I could not have believed to what an extent it is carried had I not observed it for myself. We have had a perfect epidemic of it this voyage, until I have felt inclined to serve out rations of sedatives and nerve-tonics with the Saturday allowance of grog. The first symptom of it was that shortly after leaving Shetland the men at the wheel used to complain that they heard plaintive cries and screams in the wake of the ship, as if something were following it and were unable to overtake it. This fiction has been kept up during the whole voyage, and on dark nights at the beginning of the seal-fishing it was only with great difficulty that men could be induced to do their spell. No doubt what they heard was either the creaking of the rudder-chains, or the cry of some passing sea-bird. I have been fetched out of bed several times to listen to it, but I need hardly say that I was never able to distinguish anything unnatural. The men, however, are so absurdly positive upon the subject that it is hopeless to argue with them. I mentioned the matter to the Captain once, but to my surprise he took it very gravely, and indeed appeared to be considerably disturbed by what I told him. I should have thought that he at least would have been above such vulgar delusions.

All this disquisition upon superstition leads me up to the fact that Mr. Manson, our second mate, saw a ghost last night — or, at least, says that he did, which of course is the same thing. It is quite refreshing to have some new topic of conversation after the eternal routine of bears and whales which has served us for so many months. Manson swears the ship is haunted, and that he would not stay in her a day if he had any other place to go to. Indeed the fellow is honestly frightened, and I had to give him some chloral and bromide of potassium this morning to steady him down. He seemed quite indignant when I suggested that he had been having an extra glass the night before, and I was obliged to pacify him by keeping as grave a countenance as possible during his story, which he certainly narrated in a very straightforward and matter-of-fact way.

“I was on the bridge,” he said, “about four bells in the middle watch, just when the night was at its darkest. There was a bit of a moon, but the clouds were blowing across it so that you couldn’t see far from the ship. John M’Leod, the harpooner, came aft from the fo’c’sle-head and reported a strange noise on the starboard bow. I went forrard and we both heard it, sometimes like a bairn crying and sometimes like a wench in pain. I’ve been seventeen years to the country and I never heard seal, old or young, make a sound like that. As we were standing there on the fo’c’sle-head the moon came out from behind a cloud, and we both saw a sort of white figure moving across the ice field in the same direction that we had heard the cries. We lost sight of it for a while, but it came back on the port bow, and we could just make it out like a shadow on the ice. I sent a hand aft for the rifles, and M’Leod and I went down on to the pack, thinking that maybe it might be a bear. When we got on the ice I lost sight of M’Leod, but I pushed on in the direction where I could still hear the cries. I followed them for a mile or maybe more, and then running round a hummock I came right on to the top of it standing and waiting for me seemingly. I don’t know what it was. It wasn’t a bear, anyway. It was tall and white and straight, and if it wasn’t a man nor a woman, I’ll stake my davy it was something worse. I made for the ship as hard as I could run, and precious glad I was to find myself aboard. I signed articles to do my duty by the ship, and on the ship I’ll stay, but you don’t catch me on the ice again after sundown.”

That is his story, given as far as I can in his own words. I fancy what he saw must, in spite of his denial, have been a young bear erect upon its hind legs, an attitude which they often assume when alarmed. In the uncertain light this would bear a resemblance to a human figure, especially to a man whose nerves were already somewhat shaken. Whatever it may have been, the occurrence is unfortunate, for it has produced a most unpleasant effect upon the crew. Their looks are more sullen than before, and their discontent more open. The double grievance of being debarred from the herring fishing and of being detained in what they choose to call a haunted vessel, may lead them to do something rash. Even the harpooners, who are the oldest and steadiest among them, are joining in the general agitation.

Apart from this absurd outbreak of superstition, things are looking rather more cheerful. The pack which was forming to the south of us has partly cleared away, and the water is so warm as to lead me to believe that we are lying in one of those branches of the gulf-stream which run up between Greenland and Spitzbergen. There are numerous small Medusæ and sealemons about the ship, with abundance of shrimps, so that there is every possibility of “fish” being sighted. Indeed one was seen blowing about dinner-time, but in such a position that it was impossible for the boats to follow it.

September 13th. — Had an interesting conversation with the chief mate, Mr. Milne, upon the bridge. It seems that our captain is as great an enigma to the seamen, and even to the owners of the vessel, as he has been to me. Mr. Milne tells me that when the ship is paid off, upon returning from a voyage, Captain Craigie disappears, and is not seen again until the approach of another season, when he walks quietly into the office of the company, and asks whether his services will be required. He has no friend in Dundee, nor does any one pretend to be acquainted with his early history. His position depends entirely upon his skill as a seaman, and the name for courage and coolness which he had earned in the capacity of mate, before being entrusted with a separate command. The unanimous opinion seems to be that he is not a Scotchman, and that his name is an assumed one. Mr. Milne thinks that he has devoted himself to whaling simply for the reason that it is the most dangerous occupation which he could select, and that he courts death in every possible manner. He mentioned several instances of this, one of which is rather curious, if true. It seems that on one occasion he did not put in an appearance at the office, and a substitute had to be selected in his place. That was at the time of the last Russian and Turkish War. When he turned up again next spring he had a puckered wound in the side of his neck which he used to endeavor to conceal with his cravat. Whether the mate’s inference that he had been engaged in the war is true or not I cannot say. It was certainly a strange coincidence.

The wind is veering round in an easterly direction, but is still very slight. I think the ice is lying closer than it did yesterday. As far as the eye can reach on every side there is one wide expanse of spotless white, only broken by an occasional rift or the dark shadow of a hummock. To the south there is the narrow lane of blue water which is our sole means of escape, and which is closing up every day. The Captain is taking a heavy responsibility upon himself. I hear that the tank of potatoes has been finished, and even the biscuits are running short, but he preserves the same impassable countenance, and spends the greater part of the day at the crow's nest, sweeping the horizon with his glass. His manner is very variable, and he seems to avoid my society, but there has been no repetition of the violence which he showed the other night.

7.30 P.M. — My deliberate opinion is that we are commanded by a madman. Nothing else can account for the extraordinary vagaries of Captain Craigie. It is fortunate that I have kept this journal of our voyage, as it will serve to justify us in case we have to put him under any sort of restraint, a step which I should only consent to as a last resource. Curiously enough it was he himself who suggested lunacy and not mere eccentricity as the secret of his strange conduct. He was standing upon the bridge about an hour ago, peering as usual through his glass, while I was walking up and down the quarter-deck. The majority of the men were below at their tea, for the watches have not been regularly kept of late. Tired of walking, I leaned against the bulwarks, and admired the mellow glow cast by the sinking sun upon the great ice fields which surround us. I was suddenly aroused from the reverie into which I had fallen by a hoarse voice at my elbow, and starting round I found that the Captain had descended and was standing by my side. He was staring out over the ice with an expression in which horror, surprise, and something approaching to joy were contending for the mastery. In spite of the cold, great drops of perspiration were coursing down his forehead, and he was evidently fearfully excited. His limbs twitched like those of a man upon the verge of an epileptic fit, and the lines about his mouth were drawn and hard.

"Look!" he gasped, seizing me by the wrist, but still keeping his eyes upon the distant ice, and moving his head slowly in a horizontal direction, as if following some object which was moving across the field of vision. "Look! There, man, there! Between the hummocks! Now coming out from behind the far one! You see her — you *must* see her! There still! Flying from me, by God, flying from me — and gone!"

He uttered the last two words in a whisper of concentrated agony which shall never fade from my remembrance. Clinging to the ratlines he endeavoured to climb up upon the top of the bulwarks as if in the hope of obtaining a last glance at the departing object. His strength was not equal to the attempt, however, and he staggered back against the saloon skylights, where he leaned panting and exhausted. His face was so livid that I expected him to become unconscious, so lost no time in leading him down the companion, and stretching him upon one of the sofas in the cabin. I then poured him out some brandy, which I held to his lips, and which had a wonderful effect upon him, bringing the blood back into his white face and steadying his poor shaking limbs. He raised himself up upon his elbow, and looking round to see that we were alone, he beckoned to me to come and sit beside him.

“You saw it, didn’t you?” he asked, still in the same subdued awesome tone so foreign to the nature of the man.

“No, I saw nothing.”

His head sank back again upon the cushions. “No, he wouldn’t without the glass,” he murmured. “He couldn’t. It was the glass that showed her to me, and then the eyes of love — the eyes of love. I say, Doc, don’t let the steward in! He’ll think I’m mad. Just bolt the door, will you!”

I rose and did what he commanded.

He lay quiet for a while, lost in thought apparently, and then raised himself up upon his elbow again, and asked for some more brandy.

“You don’t think I am, do you Doc?” he asked, as I was putting the bottle back into the after-locker. “Tell me now, as man to man, do you think that I am mad?”

“I think you have something on your mind,” I answered, “which is exciting you and doing you a good deal of harm.”

“Right there, lad!” he cried, his eyes sparkling from the effects of the brandy. “Plenty on my mind — plenty! But I can work out the latitude and the longitude, and I can handle my sextant and manage my logarithms. You couldn’t prove me mad in a court of law, could you, now?” It was curious to hear the man lying back and coolly arguing out the question of his own sanity.

“Perhaps not,” I said; “but still I think you would be wise to get home as soon as you can, and settle down to a quiet life for a while.”

“Get home, eh?” he muttered, with a sneer upon his face. “One word for me and two for yourself, lad. Settle down with Flora — pretty little Flora. Are bad dreams signs of madness?”

“Sometimes,” I answered.

“What else? What would be the first symptoms?”

"Pains in the head, noises in the ears, flashes before the eyes, delusions — —"

"Ah! what about them?" he interrupted. "What would you call a delusion?"

"Seeing a thing which is not there is a delusion."

"But she *was* there!" he groaned to himself. "She *was* there!" and rising, he unbolted the door and walked with slow and uncertain steps to his own cabin, where I have no doubt that he will remain until to-morrow morning. His system seems to have received a terrible shock, whatever it may have been that he imagined himself to have seen. The man becomes a greater mystery every day, though I fear that the solution which he has himself suggested is the correct one, and that his reason is affected. I do not think that a guilty conscience has anything to do with his behaviour. The idea is a popular one among the officers, and, I believe, the crew; but I have seen nothing to support it. He has not the air of a guilty man, but of one who has had terrible usage at the hands of fortune, and who should be regarded as a martyr rather than a criminal.

The wind is veering round to the south to-night. God help us if it blocks that narrow pass which is our only road to safety! Situated as we are on the edge of the main Arctic pack, or the "barrier" as it is called by the whalers, any wind from the north has the effect of shredding out the ice around us and allowing our escape, while a wind from the south blows up all the loose ice behind us and hems us in between two packs. God help us, I say again!

September 14th. — Sunday, and a day of rest. My fears have been confirmed, and the thin strip of blue water has disappeared from the southward. Nothing but the great motionless ice fields around us, with their weird hummocks and fantastic pinnacles. There is a deathly silence over their wide expanse which is horrible. No lapping of the waves now, no cries of seagulls or straining of sails, but one deep universal silence in which the murmurs of the seamen, and the creak of their boots upon the white shining deck, seem discordant and out of place. Our only visitor was an Arctic fox, a rare animal upon the pack, though common enough upon the land. He did not come near the ship, however, but after surveying us from a distance fled rapidly across the ice. This was curious conduct, as they generally know nothing of man, and being of an inquisitive nature, become so familiar that they are easily captured. Incredible as it may seem, even this little incident produced a bad effect upon the crew. "Yon puir beastie kens mair, ay, an' sees mair nor you nor me!" was the comment of one of the leading harpooners, and the others nodded their acquiescence. It is vain to attempt to argue against such puerile superstition. They have made up their minds that there is a curse upon the ship, and nothing will ever persuade them to the contrary.

The Captain remained in seclusion all day except for about half an hour in the afternoon, when he came out upon the quarter-deck. I observed that he kept his eye fixed upon the spot where the vision of yesterday had appeared, and was quite prepared for another outburst, but none such came. He did not seem to see me although I was standing close beside him. Divine service was read as usual by the chief engineer. It is a curious thing that in whaling vessels the Church of England Prayer-book is always employed, although there is never a member of that Church among either officers or crew. Our men are all Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, the former predominating. Since a ritual is used which is foreign to both, neither can complain that the other is preferred to them, and they listen with all attention and devotion, so that the system has something to recommend it.

A glorious sunset, which made the great fields of ice look like a lake of blood. I have never seen a finer and at the same time more weird effect. Wind is veering round. If it will blow twenty-four hours from the north all will yet be well.

September 15th. — To-day is Flora's birthday. Dear lass! it is well that she cannot see her boy, as she used to call me, shut up among the ice fields with a crazy captain and a few weeks' provisions. No doubt she scans the shipping list in the *Scotsman* every morning to see if we are reported from Shetland. I have to set an example to the men and look cheery and unconcerned; but God knows, my heart is very heavy at times.

The thermometer is at nineteen Fahrenheit to-day. There is but little wind, and what there is comes from an unfavourable quarter. Captain is in an excellent humour; I think he imagines he has seen some other omen or vision, poor fellow, during the night, for he came into my room early in the morning, and stooping down over my bunk, whispered, "It wasn't a delusion, Doc; it's all right!" After breakfast he asked me to find out how much food was left, which the second mate and I proceeded to do. It is even less than we had expected. Forward they have half a tank full of biscuits, three barrels of salt meat, and a very limited supply of coffee beans and sugar. In the after-hold and lockers there are a good many luxuries, such as tinned salmon, soups, haricot mutton, etc., but they will go a very short way among a crew of fifty men. There are two barrels of flour in the store-room, and an unlimited supply of tobacco. Altogether there is about enough to keep the men on half rations for eighteen or twenty days — certainly not more. When we reported the state of things to the Captain, he ordered all hands to be piped, and addressed them from the quarter-deck. I never saw him to better advantage. With his tall, well-knit figure, and dark animated face, he seemed a man born to command, and he discussed the situation in a cool sailor-like way which showed that while appreciating the danger he had an eye for every loophole of escape.

"My lads," he said, "no doubt you think I brought you into this fix, if it is a fix, and maybe some of you feel bitter against me on account of it. But you must remember that for many a season no ship that comes to the country has brought in as much oil-money as the old *Polestar*, and every one of you has had his share of it. You can leave your wives behind you in comfort, while other poor fellows come back to find their lasses on the parish. If you have to thank me for the one you have to thank me for the other, and we may call it quits. We've tried a bold venture before this and succeeded, so now that we've tried one and failed we've no cause to cry out about it. If the worst comes to the worst, we can make the land across the ice, and lay in a stock of seals which will keep us alive until the spring. It won't come to that, though, for you'll see the Scotch coast again before three weeks are out. At present every man must go on half rations, share and share alike, and no favour to any. Keep up your hearts and you'll pull through this as you've pulled through many a danger before." These few simple words of his had a wonderful effect upon the crew. His former unpopularity was forgotten, and the old harpooner whom I have already mentioned for his superstition, led off three cheers, which were heartily joined in by all hands.

September 16th. — The wind has veered round to the north during the night, and the ice shows some symptoms of opening out. The men are in good humour in spite of the short allowance upon which they have been placed. Steam is kept up in the engine-room, that there may be no delay should an opportunity for escape present itself. The Captain is in exuberant spirits, though he still retains that wild "fey" expression which I have already remarked upon. This burst of cheerfulness puzzles me more than his former gloom. I cannot understand it. I think I mentioned in an early part of this journal that one of his oddities is that he never permits any person to enter his cabin, but insists upon making his own bed, such as it is, and performing every other office for himself. To my surprise he handed me the key to-day and requested me to go down there and take the time by his chronometer while he measured the altitude of the sun at noon. It is a bare little room, containing a washing-stand and a few books, but little else in the way of luxury, except some pictures upon the walls. The majority of these are small cheap oleographs, but there was one water-coloured sketch of the head of a young lady which arrested my attention. It was evidently a portrait, and not one of those fancy types of female beauty which sailors particularly affect. No artist could have evolved from his own mind such a curious mixture of character and weakness. The languid, dreamy eyes, with their drooping lashes, and the broad, low brow, unruffled by thought or care, were in strong contrast with the clean-cut, prominent jaw, and the resolute set of the lower lip. Underneath it in one of the corners was written, “M. B., æt. 19.” That any one in the short space of nineteen years of existence could develop such strength of will as was stamped upon her face seemed to me at the time to be well-nigh incredible. She must have been an extraordinary woman. Her features have thrown such a glamour over me that, though I had but a fleeting glance at them, I could, were I a draughtsman, reproduce them line for line upon this page of the journal. I wonder what part she has played in our Captain’s life. He has hung her picture at the end of his berth, so that his eyes continually rest upon it. Were he a less reserved man I should make some remark upon the subject. Of the other things in his cabin there was nothing worthy of mention — uniform coats, a camp-stool, small looking-glass, tobacco-box, and numerous pipes, including an oriental hookah — which, by the by, gives some colour to Mr. Milne’s story about his participation in the war, though the connection may seem rather a distant one.

11.20 P.M. — Captain just gone to bed after a long and interesting conversation on general topics. When he chooses he can be a most fascinating companion, being remarkably well-read, and having the power of expressing his opinion forcibly without appearing to be dogmatic. I hate to have my intellectual toes trod upon. He spoke about the nature of the soul, and sketched out the views of Aristotle and Plato upon the subject in a masterly manner. He seems to have a leaning for metempsychosis and the doctrines of Pythagoras. In discussing them we touched upon modern spiritualism, and I made some joking allusion to the impostures of Slade, upon which, to my surprise, he warned me most impressively against confusing the innocent with the guilty, and argued that it would be as logical to brand Christianity as an error because Judas, who professed that religion, was a villain. He shortly afterwards bade me good-night and retired to his room.

The wind is freshening up, and blows steadily from the north. The nights are as dark now as they are in England. I hope to-morrow may set us free from our frozen fetters.

September 17th. — The Bogie again. Thank Heaven that I have strong nerves! The superstition of these poor fellows, and the circumstantial accounts which they give, with the utmost earnestness and self-conviction, would horrify any man not accustomed to their ways. There are many versions of the matter, but the sum-total of them all is that something uncanny has been flitting round the ship all night, and that Sandie M'Donald of Peterhead and "lang" Peter Williamson of Shetland saw it, as also did Mr. Milne on the bridge — so, having three witnesses, they can make a better case of it than the second mate did. I spoke to Milne after breakfast, and told him that he should be above such nonsense, and that as an officer he ought to set the men a better example. He shook his weather-beaten head ominously, but answered with characteristic caution, "Mebbe, aye, mebbe na, Doctor," he said, "I didna ca' it a ghaist. I canna' say I preen my faith in sea-bogles an' the like, though there's a mony as claims to ha' seen a' that and waur. I'm no easy feared, but maybe your ain bluid would run a bit cauld, mun, if instead o' speerin' aboot it in daylicht ye were wi' me last night, an' seed an awfu' like shape, white an' gruesome, whiles here, whiles there, an' it greetin' an' ca'ing in the darkness like a bit lambie that hae lost its mither. Ye would na' be sae ready to put it a' doon to auld wives' clavers then, I'm thinkin'." I saw it was hopeless to reason with him, so contented myself with begging him as a personal favour to call me up the next time the spectre appeared — a request to which he acceded with many ejaculations expressive of his hopes that such an opportunity might never arise.

As I had hoped, the white desert behind us has become broken by many thin streaks of water which intersect it in all directions. Our latitude to-day was 80° 52' N., which shows that there is a strong southerly drift upon the pack. Should the wind continue favourable it will break up as rapidly as it formed. At present we can do nothing but smoke and wait and hope for the best. I am rapidly becoming a fatalist. When dealing with such uncertain factors as wind and ice a man can be nothing else. Perhaps it was the wind and sand of the Arabian deserts which gave the minds of the original followers of Mahomet their tendency to bow to kismet.

These spectral alarms have a very bad effect upon the Captain. I feared that it might excite his sensitive mind, and endeavoured to conceal the absurd story from him, but unfortunately he overheard one of the men making an allusion to it, and insisted upon being informed about it. As I had expected, it brought out all his latent lunacy in an exaggerated form. I can hardly believe that this is the same man who discoursed philosophy last night with the most critical acumen and coolest judgment. He is pacing backwards and forwards upon the quarter-deck like a caged tiger, stopping now and again to throw out his hands with a yearning gesture, and stare impatiently out over the ice. He keeps up a continual mutter to himself, and once he called out, “But a little time, love — but a little time!” Poor fellow, it is sad to see a gallant seaman and accomplished gentleman reduced to such a pass, and to think that imagination and delusion can cow a mind to which real danger was but the salt of life. Was ever a man in such a position as I, between a demented captain and a ghost-seeing mate? I sometimes think I am the only really sane man aboard the vessel — except perhaps the second engineer, who is a kind of ruminant, and would care nothing for all the fiends in the Red Sea so long as they would leave him alone and not disarrange his tools.

The ice is still opening rapidly, and there is every probability of our being able to make a start to-morrow morning. They will think I am inventing when I tell them at home all the strange things that have befallen me.

12 P.M. — I have been a good deal startled, though I feel steadier now, thanks to a stiff glass of brandy. I am hardly myself yet, however, as this handwriting will testify. The fact is, that I have gone through a very strange experience, and am beginning to doubt whether I was justified in branding every one on board as madmen because they professed to have seen things which did not seem reasonable to my understanding. Pshaw! I am a fool to let such a trifle unnerve me; and yet, coming as it does after all these alarms, it has an additional significance, for I cannot doubt either Mr. Manson’s story or that of the mate, now that I have experienced that which I used formerly to scoff at.

After all it was nothing very alarming — a mere sound, and that was all. I cannot expect that any one reading this, if any one should read it, will sympathise with my feelings, or realise the effect which it produced upon me at the time. Supper was over, and I had gone on deck to have a quiet pipe before turning in. The night was very dark — so dark that, standing under the quarter-boat, I was unable to see the officer upon the bridge. I think I have already mentioned the extraordinary silence which prevails in these frozen seas. In other parts of the world, be they ever so barren, there is some slight vibration of the air — some faint hum, be it from the distant haunts of men, or from the leaves of the trees, of the wings of the birds, or even the faint rustle of the grass that covers the ground. One may not actively perceive the sound, and yet if it were withdrawn it would be missed. It is only here in these Arctic seas that stark, unfathomable stillness obtrudes itself upon you in all its gruesome reality. You find your tympanum straining to catch some little murmur, and dwelling eagerly upon every accidental sound within the vessel. In this state I was leaning against the bulwarks when there arose from the ice almost directly underneath me a cry, sharp and shrill, upon the silent air of the night, beginning, as it seemed to me, at a note such as prima donna never reached, and mounting from that ever higher and higher until it culminated in a long wail of agony, which might have been the last cry of a lost soul. The ghastly scream is still ringing in my ears. Grief, unutterable grief, seemed to be expressed in it, and a great longing, and yet through it all there was an occasional wild note of exultation. It shrilled out from close beside me, and yet as I glared into the darkness I could discern nothing. I waited some little time, but without hearing any repetition of the sound, so I came below, more shaken than I have ever been in my life before. As I came down the companion I met Mr. Milne coming up to relieve the watch. “Weel, Doctor,” he said, “maybe that’s auld wives’ clavers tae? Did ye no hear it skirling? Maybe that’s a supersteetion? What d’ye think o’t noo?” I was obliged to apologise to the honest fellow, and acknowledge that I was as puzzled by it as he was. Perhaps to-morrow things may look different. At present I dare hardly write all that I think. Reading it again in days to come, when I have shaken off all these associations, I should despise myself for having been so weak.

September 18th. — Passed a restless and uneasy night, still haunted by that strange sound. The Captain does not look as if he had had much repose either, for his face is haggard and his eyes blood-shot. I have not told him of my adventure of last night, nor shall I. He is already restless and excited, standing up, sitting down, and apparently utterly unable to keep still.

A fine lead appeared in the pack this morning, as I had expected, and we were able to cast off our ice-anchor, and steam about twelve miles in a west-sou'-westerly direction. We were then brought to a halt by a great floe as massive as any which we have left behind us. It bars our progress completely, so we can do nothing but anchor again and wait until it breaks up, which it will probably do within twenty-four hours, if the wind holds. Several bladder-nosed seals were seen swimming in the water, and one was shot, an immense creature more than eleven feet long. They are fierce, pugnacious animals, and are said to be more than a match for a bear. Fortunately they are slow and clumsy in their movements, so that there is little danger in attacking them upon the ice.

The Captain evidently does not think we have seen the last of our troubles, though why he should take a gloomy view of the situation is more than I can fathom, since every one else on board considers that we have had a miraculous escape, and are sure now to reach the open sea.

“I suppose you think it's all right now, Doctor?” he said, as we sat together after dinner.

“I hope so,” I answered.

“We mustn't be too sure — and yet no doubt you are right. We'll all be in the arms of our own true loves before long, lad, won't we? But we mustn't be too sure — we mustn't be too sure.”

He sat silent a little, swinging his leg thoughtfully backward and forwards. “Look here,” he continued; “it's a dangerous place this, even at its best — a treacherous, dangerous place. I have known men cut off very suddenly in a land like this. A slip would do it sometimes — a single slip, and down you go through a crack, and only a bubble on the green water to show where it was that you sank. It's a queer thing,” he continued with a nervous laugh, “but all the years I've been in this country I never once thought of making a will — not that I have anything to leave in particular, but still when a man is exposed to danger he should have everything arranged and ready — don't you think so?”

“Certainly,” I answered, wondering what on earth he was driving at.

“He feels better for knowing it's all settled,” he went on. “Now if anything should ever befall me, I hope that you will look after things for me. There is very little in the cabin, but such as it is I should like it to be sold, and the money divided in the same proportion as the oil-money among the crew. The chronometer I wish you to keep yourself as some slight remembrance of our voyage. Of course all this is a mere precaution, but I thought I would take the opportunity of speaking to you about it. I suppose I might rely upon you if there were any necessity?”

“Most assuredly,” I answered; “and since you are taking this step, I may as well — —”

“You! you!” he interrupted. “*You’re* all right. What the devil is the matter with *you*? There, I didn’t mean to be peppery, but I don’t like to hear a young fellow, that has hardly begun life, speculating about death. Go up on deck and get some fresh air into your lungs instead of talking nonsense in the cabin, and encouraging me to do the same.”

The more I think of this conversation of ours the less do I like it. Why should the man be settling his affairs at the very time when we seem to be emerging from all danger? There must be some method in his madness. Can it be that he contemplates suicide? I remember that upon one occasion he spoke in a deeply reverent manner of the heinousness of the crime of self-destruction. I shall keep my eye upon him, however, and though I cannot obtrude upon the privacy of his cabin, I shall at least make a point of remaining on deck as long as he stays up.

Mr. Milne pooh-poohs my fears, and says it is only the “skipper’s little way.” He himself takes a very rosy view of the situation. According to him we shall be out of the ice by the day after to-morrow, pass Jan Meyen two days after that, and sight Shetland in little more than a week. I hope he may not be too sanguine. His opinion may be fairly balanced against the gloomy precautions of the Captain, for he is an old and experienced seaman, and weighs his words well before uttering them.

The long-impending catastrophe has come at last. I hardly know what to write about it. The Captain is gone. He may come back to us again alive, but I fear me — I fear me. It is now seven o’clock of the morning of the 19th of September. I have spent the whole night traversing the great ice-floe in front of us with a party of seamen in the hope of coming upon some trace of him, but in vain. I shall try to give some account of the circumstances which attended upon his disappearance. Should any one ever chance to read the words which I put down, I trust they will remember that I do not write from conjecture or from hearsay, but that I, a sane and educated man, am describing accurately what actually occurred before my very eyes. My inferences are my own, but I shall be answerable for the facts.

The Captain remained in excellent spirits after the conversation which I have recorded. He appeared to be nervous and impatient, however, frequently changing his position, and moving his limbs in an aimless choreic way which is characteristic of him at times. In a quarter of an hour he went upon deck seven times, only to descend after a few hurried paces. I followed him each time, for there was something about his face which confirmed my resolution of not letting him out of my sight. He seemed to observe the effect which his movements had produced, for he endeavoured by an over-done hilarity, laughing boisterously at the very smallest of jokes, to quiet my apprehensions.

After supper he went on to the poop once more, and I with him. The night was dark and very still, save for the melancholy soughing of the wind among the spars. A thick cloud was coming up from the north-west, and the ragged tentacles which it threw out in front of it were drifting across the face of the moon, which only shone now and again through a rift in the wrack. The Captain paced rapidly backwards and forwards, and then seeing me still dogging him, he came across and hinted that he thought I should be better below — which, I need hardly say, had the effect of strengthening my resolution to remain on deck.

I think he forgot about my presence after this, for he stood silently leaning over the taffrail and peering out across the great desert of snow, part of which lay in shadow, while part glittered mistily in the moonlight. Several times I could see by his movements that he was referring to his watch, and once he muttered a short sentence, of which I could only catch the one word “ready.” I confess to having felt an eerie feeling creeping over me as I watched the loom of his tall figure through the darkness, and noted how completely he fulfilled the idea of a man who is keeping a tryst. A tryst with whom? Some vague perception began to dawn upon me as I pieced one fact with another, but I was utterly unprepared for the sequel.

By the sudden intensity of his attitude I felt that he saw something. I crept up behind him. He was staring with an eager questioning gaze at what seemed to be a wreath of mist, blown swiftly in a line with the ship. It was a dim nebulous body, devoid of shape, sometimes more, sometimes less apparent, as the light fell on it. The moon was dimmed in its brilliancy at the moment by a canopy of thinnest cloud, like the coating of an anemone.

“Coming, lass, coming,” cried the skipper, in a voice of unfathomable tenderness and compassion, like one who soothes a beloved one by some favour long looked for, and as pleasant to bestow as to receive.

What followed happened in an instant. I had no power to interfere. He gave one spring to the top of the bulwarks, and another which took him on to the ice, almost to the feet of the pale misty figure. He held out his hands as if to clasp it, and so ran into the darkness with outstretched arms and loving words. I still stood rigid and motionless, straining my eyes after his retreating form, until his voice died away in the distance. I never thought to see him again, but at that moment the moon shone out brilliantly through a chink in the cloudy heaven, and illuminated the great field of ice. Then I saw his dark figure already a very long way off, running with prodigious speed across the frozen plain. That was the last glimpse which we caught of him — perhaps the last we ever shall. A party was organised to follow him, and I accompanied them, but the men’s hearts were not in the work, and nothing was found. Another will be formed within a few hours. I can hardly believe I have not been dreaming, or suffering from some hideous nightmare, as I write these things down.

7.30 P.M. — Just returned dead beat and utterly tired out from a second unsuccessful search for the Captain. The floe is of enormous extent, for though we have traversed at least twenty miles of its surface, there has been no sign of its coming to an end. The frost has been so severe of late that the overlying snow is frozen as hard as granite, otherwise we might have had the foot-steps to guide us. The crew are anxious that we should cast off and steam round the floe and so to the southward, for the ice has opened up during the night, and the sea is visible upon the horizon. They argue that Captain Craigie is certainly dead, and that we are all risking our lives to no purpose by remaining when we have an opportunity of escape. Mr. Milne and I have had the greatest difficulty in persuading them to wait until to-morrow night, and have been compelled to promise that we will not under any circumstances delay our departure longer than that. We propose therefore to take a few hours’ sleep, and then to start upon a final search.

September 20th, evening. — I crossed the ice this morning with a party of men exploring the southern part of the floe, while Mr. Milne went off in a northerly direction. We pushed on for ten or twelve miles without seeing a trace of any living thing except a single bird, which fluttered a great way over our heads, and which by its flight I should judge to have been a falcon.

The southern extremity of the ice field tapered away into a long narrow spit which projected out into the sea. When we came to the base of this promontory, the men halted, but I begged them to continue to the extreme end of it, that we might have the satisfaction of knowing that no possible chance had been neglected.

We had hardly gone a hundred yards before M'Donald of Peterhead cried out that he saw something in front of us, and began to run. We all got a glimpse of it and ran too. At first it was only a vague darkness against the white ice, but as we raced along together it took the shape of a man, and eventually of the man of whom we were in search. He was lying face downwards upon a frozen bank. Many little crystals of ice and feathers of snow had drifted on to him as he lay, and sparkled upon his dark seaman's jacket. As we came up some wandering puff of wind caught these tiny flakes in its vortex, and they whirled up into the air, partially descended again, and then, caught once more in the current, sped rapidly away in the direction of the sea. To my eyes it seemed but a snow-drift, but many of my companions averred that it started up in the shape of a woman, stooped over the corpse and kissed it, and then hurried away across the floe. I have learned never to ridicule any man's opinion, however strange it may seem. Sure it is that Captain Nicholas Craigie had met with no painful end, for there was a bright smile upon his blue pinched features, and his hands were still outstretched as though grasping at the strange visitor which had summoned him away into the dim world that lies beyond the grave.

We buried him the same afternoon with the ship's ensign around him, and a thirty-two pound shot at his feet. I read the burial service, while the rough sailors wept like children, for there were many who owed much to his kind heart, and who showed now the affection which his strange ways had repelled during his lifetime. He went off the grating with a dull, sullen splash, and as I looked into the green water I saw him go down, down, down until he was but a little flickering patch of white hanging upon the outskirts of eternal darkness. Then even that faded away, and he was gone. There he shall lie, with his secret and his sorrows and his mystery all still buried in his breast, until that great day when the sea shall give up its dead, and Nicholas Craigie come out from among the ice with the smile upon his face, and his stiffened arms outstretched in greeting. I pray that his lot may be a happier one in that life than it has been in this.

I shall not continue my journal. Our road to home lies plain and clear before us, and the great ice field will soon be but a remembrance of the past. It will be some time before I get over the shock produced by recent events. When I began this record of our voyage I little thought of how I should be compelled to finish it. I am writing these final words in the lonely cabin, still starting at times and fancying I hear the quick nervous step of the dead man upon the deck above me. I entered his cabin to-night, as was my duty, to make a list of his effects in order that they might be entered in the official log. All was as it had been upon my previous visit, save that the picture which I have described as having hung at the end of his bed had been cut out of its frame, as with a knife, and was gone. With this last link in a strange chain of evidence I close my diary of the voyage of the *Polestar*.

Note by Dr. John M’Alister Ray, senior. — I have read over the strange events connected with the death of the Captain of the *Polestar*, as narrated in the journal of my son. That everything occurred exactly as he describes it I have the fullest confidence, and, indeed, the most positive certainty, for I know him to be a strong-nerved and unimaginative man, with the strictest regard for veracity. Still, the story is, on the face of it, so vague and so improbable, that I was long opposed to its publication. Within the last few days, however, I have had independent testimony upon the subject which throws a new light upon it. I had run down to Edinburgh to attend a meeting of the British Medical Association, when I chanced to come across Dr. P. —— , an old college chum of mine, now practising at Saltash, in Devonshire. Upon my telling him of this experience of my son’s, he declared to me that he was familiar with the man, and proceeded, to my no small surprise, to give me a description of him, which tallied remarkably well with that given in the journal, except that he depicted him as a younger man. According to his account, he had been engaged to a young lady of singular beauty residing upon the Cornish coast. During his absence at sea his betrothed had died under circumstances of peculiar horror.

THE FIEND OF THE COOPERAGE

It was no easy matter to bring the *Gamecock* up to the island, for the river had swept down so much silt that the banks extended for many miles out into the Atlantic. The coast was hardly to be seen when the first white curl of the breakers warned us of our danger, and from there onwards we made our way very carefully under mainsail and jib, keeping the broken water well to the left, as is indicated on the chart. More than once her bottom touched the sand (we were drawing something under six feet at the time), but we had always way enough and luck enough to carry us through. Finally, the water shoaled, very rapidly, but they had sent a canoe from the factory, and the Krooboy pilot brought us within two hundred yards of the island. Here we dropped our anchor, for the gestures of the negro indicated that we could not hope to get any farther. The blue of the sea had changed to the brown of the river, and, even under the shelter of the island, the current was singing and swirling round our bows. The stream appeared to be in spate, for it was over the roots of the palm trees, and everywhere upon its muddy, greasy surface we could see logs of wood and debris of all sorts which had been carried down by the flood.

When I had assured myself that we swung securely at our moorings, I thought it best to begin watering at once, for the place looked as if it reeked with fever. The heavy river, the muddy, shining banks, the bright poisonous green of the jungle, the moist steam in the air, they were all so many danger signals to one who could read them. I sent the long-boat off, therefore, with two large hogsheads, which should be sufficient to last us until we made St. Paul de Loanda. For my own part I took the dinghy and rowed for the island, for I could see the Union Jack fluttering above the palms to mark the position of Armitage and Wilson’s trading station.

When I had cleared the grove, I could see the place, a long, low, whitewashed building, with a deep verandah in front, and an immense pile of palm oil barrels heaped upon either flank of it. A row of surf boats and canoes lay along the beach, and a single small jetty projected into the river. Two men in white suits with red cummerbunds round their waists were waiting upon the end of it to receive me. One was a large portly fellow with a greyish beard. The other was slender and tall, with a pale pinched face, which was half concealed by a great mushroom-shaped hat.

“Very glad to see you,” said the latter, cordially. “I am Walker, the agent of Armitage and Wilson. Let me introduce Dr. Severall of the same company. It is not often we see a private yacht in these parts.”

“She’s the *Gamecock*,” I explained. “I’m owner and captain — Meldrum is the name.”

“Exploring?” he asked.

“I’m a lepidopterist — a butterfly-catcher. I’ve been doing the west coast from Senegal downwards.”

“Good sport?” asked the Doctor, turning a slow yellow-shot eye upon me.

“I have forty cases full. We came in here to water, and also to see what you have in my line.”

These introductions and explanations had filled up the time whilst my two Krooboys were making the dinghy fast. Then I walked down the jetty with one of my new acquaintances upon either side, each plying me with questions, for they had seen no white man for months.

“What do we do?” said the Doctor, when I had begun asking questions in my turn. “Our business keeps us pretty busy, and in our leisure time we talk politics.”

“Yes, by the special mercy of Providence Severall is a rank Radical, and I am a good stiff Unionist, and we talk Home Rule for two solid hours every evening.”

“And drink quinine cocktails,” said the Doctor. “We’re both pretty well salted now, but our normal temperature was about 103 last year. I shouldn’t, as an impartial adviser, recommend you to stay here very long unless you are collecting bacilli as well as butterflies. The mouth of the Ogowai River will never develop into a health resort.”

There is nothing finer than the way in which these outlying pickets of civilisation distil a grim humour out of their desolate situation, and turn not only a bold, but a laughing face upon the chances which their lives may bring. Everywhere from Sierra Leone downwards I had found the same reeking swamps, the same isolated fever-racked communities and the same bad jokes. There is something approaching to the divine in that power of man to rise above his conditions and to use his mind for the purpose of mocking at the miseries of his body.

“Dinner will be ready in about half an hour, Captain Meldrum,” said the Doctor. “Walker has gone in to see about it; he’s the housekeeper this week.

Meanwhile, if you like, we'll stroll round and I'll show you the sights of the island."

The sun had already sunk beneath the line of palm trees, and the great arch of the heaven above our head was like the inside of a huge shell, shimmering with dainty pinks and delicate iridescence. No one who has not lived in a land where the weight and heat of a napkin become intolerable upon the knees can imagine the blessed relief which the coolness of evening brings along with it. In this sweeter and purer air the Doctor and I walked round the little island, he pointing out the stores, and explaining the routine of his work.

"There's a certain romance about the place," said he, in answer to some remark of mine about the dullness of their lives. "We are living here just upon the edge of the great unknown. Up there," he continued, pointing to the north-east, "Du Chaillu penetrated, and found the home of the gorilla. That is the Gaboon country — the land of the great apes. In this direction," pointing to the south-east, "no one has been very far. The land which is drained by this river is practically unknown to Europeans. Every log which is carried past us by the current has come from an undiscovered country. I've often wished that I was a better botanist when I have seen the singular orchids and curious-looking plants which have been cast up on the eastern end of the island."

The place which the Doctor indicated was a sloping brown beach, freely littered with the flotsam of the stream. At each end was a curved point, like a little natural breakwater, so that a small shallow bay was left between. This was full of floating vegetation, with a single huge splintered tree lying stranded in the middle of it, the current rippling against its high black side.

"These are all from up country," said the Doctor. "They get caught in our little bay, and then when some extra freshet comes they are washed out again and carried out to sea."

"What is the tree?" I asked.

"Oh, some kind of teak, I should imagine, but pretty rotten by the look of it. We get all sorts of big hardwood trees floating past here, to say nothing of the palms. Just come in here, will you?"

He led the way into a long building with an immense quantity of barrel staves and iron hoops littered about in it.

"This is our cooperage," said he. "We have the staves sent out in bundles, and we put them together ourselves. Now, you don't see anything particularly sinister about this building, do you?"

I looked round at the high corrugated iron roof, the white wooden walls, and the earthen floor. In one corner lay a mattress and a blanket.

"I see nothing very alarming," said I.

"And yet there's something out of the common, too," he remarked. "You see that bed? Well, I intend to sleep there to-night. I don't want to buck, but I think it's a bit of a test for nerve."

"Why?"

"Oh, there have been some funny goings on. You were talking about the monotony of our lives, but I assure you that they are sometimes quite as exciting as we wish them to be. You'd better come back to the house now, for after sundown we begin to get the fever-fog up from the marshes. There, you can see it coming across the river."

I looked and saw long tentacles of white vapour writhing out from among the thick green underwood and crawling at us over the broad swirling surface of the brown river. At the same time the air turned suddenly dank and cold.

"There's the dinner gong," said the Doctor. "If this matter interests you I'll tell you about it afterwards."

It did interest me very much, for there was something earnest and subdued in his manner as he stood in the empty cooperage, which appealed very forcibly to my imagination. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, this Doctor, and yet I had detected a curious expression in his eyes as he glanced about him — an expression which I would not describe as one of fear, but rather of a man who is alert and on his guard.

"By the way," said I, as we returned to the house, "you have shown me the huts of a good many of your native assistants, but I have not seen any of the natives themselves."

"They sleep in the hulk over yonder," the Doctor answered, pointing over to one of the banks.

"Indeed. I should not have thought in that case that they would need the huts."

"Oh, they used the huts until quite recently. We've put them on the hulk until they recover their confidence a little. They were all half mad with fright, so we let them go, and nobody sleeps on the island except Walker and myself."

"What frightened them?" I asked.

“Well, that brings us back to the same story. I suppose Walker has no objection to your hearing all about it. I don’t know why we should make any secret about it, though it is certainly a pretty bad business.”

He made no further allusion to it during the excellent dinner which had been prepared in my honour. It appeared that no sooner had the little white topsail of the *Gamecock* shown round Cape Lopez than these kind fellows had begun to prepare their famous pepper-pot — which is the pungent stew peculiar to the West Coast — and to boil their yams and sweet potatoes. We sat down to as good a native dinner as one could wish, served by a smart Sierra Leone waiting boy. I was just remarking to myself that he at least had not shared in the general fright when, having laid the dessert and wine upon the table, he raised his hand to his turban.

“Anyting else I do, Massa Walker?” he asked.

“No, I think that is all right, Moussa,” my host answered. “I am not feeling very well to-night, though, and I should much prefer if you would stay on the island.”

I saw a struggle between his fears and his duty upon the swarthy face of the African. His skin had turned of that livid purplish tint which stands for pallor in a negro, and his eyes looked furtively about him.

“No, no, Massa Walker,” he cried, at last, “you better come to the hulk with me, sah. Look after you much better in the hulk, sah!”

“That won’t do, Moussa. White men don’t run away from the posts where they are placed.”

Again I saw the passionate struggle in the negro’s face, and again his fears prevailed.

“No use, Massa Walker, sah!” he cried. “S’elp me, I can’t do it. If it was yesterday or if it was to-morrow, but this is the third night, sah, an’ it’s more than I can face.”

Walker shrugged his shoulders.

“Off with you then!” said he. “When the mail-boat comes you can get back to Sierra Leone, for I’ll have no servant who deserts me when I need him most. I suppose this is all mystery to you, or has the Doctor told you, Captain Meldrum?”

“I showed Captain Meldrum the cooperage, but I did not tell him anything,” said Dr. Severall. “You’re looking bad, Walker,” he added, glancing at his companion. “You have a strong touch coming on you.”

“Yes, I’ve had the shivers all day, and now my head is like a cannon-ball. I took ten grains of quinine, and my ears are singing like a kettle. But I want to sleep with you in the cooperage to-night.”

“No, no, my dear chap. I won’t hear of such a thing. You must get to bed at once, and I am sure Meldrum will excuse you. I shall sleep in the cooperage, and I promise you that I’ll be round with your medicine before breakfast.”

It was evident that Walker had been struck by one of those sudden and violent attacks of remittent fever which are the curse of the West Coast. His sallow cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining with fever, and suddenly as he sat there he began to croon out a song in the high-pitched voice of delirium.

“Come, come, we must get you to bed, old chap,” said the Doctor, and with my aid he led his friend into his bedroom. There we undressed him and presently, after taking a strong sedative, he settled down into a deep slumber.

“He’s right for the night,” said the Doctor, as we sat down and filled our glasses once more. “Sometimes it is my turn and sometimes his, but, fortunately, we have never been down together. I should have been sorry to be out of it to-night, for I have a little mystery to unravel. I told you that I intended to sleep in the cooperage.”

“Yes, you said so.”

“When I said sleep I meant watch, for there will be no sleep for me. We’ve had such a scare here that no native will stay after sundown, and I mean to find out to-night what the cause of it all may be. It has always been the custom for a native watchman to sleep in the cooperage, to prevent the barrel hoops being stolen. Well, six days ago the fellow who slept there disappeared, and we have never seen a trace of him since. It was certainly singular, for no canoe had been taken, and these waters are too full of crocodiles for any man to swim to shore. What became of the fellow, or how he could have left the island is a complete mystery. Walker and I were merely surprised, but the blacks were badly scared and queer Voodoo tales began to get about amongst them. But the real stampede broke out three nights ago, when the new watchman in the cooperage also disappeared.”

“What became of him?” I asked.

“Well, we not only don’t know, but we can’t even give a guess which would fit the facts. The niggers swear there is a fiend in the cooperage who claims a man every third night. They wouldn’t stay in the island — nothing could persuade them. Even Moussa, who is a faithful boy enough, would, as you have seen, leave his master in a fever rather than remain for the night. If we are to continue to run this place we must reassure our niggers, and I don’t know any better way of doing it than by putting in a night there myself. This is the third night, you see, so I suppose the thing is due, whatever it may be.”

“Have you no clue?” I asked. “Was there no mark of violence, no blood-stain, no foot-prints, nothing to give you a hint as to what kind of danger you may have to meet?”

“Absolutely nothing. The man was gone and that was all. Last time it was old Ali, who has been wharf-tender here since the place was started. He was always as steady as a rock, and nothing but foul play would take him from his work.”

“Well,” said I, “I really don’t think that this is a one-man job. Your friend is full of laudanum, and come what might he can be of no assistance to you. You must let me stay and put in a night with you at the cooperage.”

“Well, now, that’s very good of you, Meldrum,” said he heartily, shaking my hand across the table. “It’s not a thing that I should have ventured to propose, for it is asking a good deal of a casual visitor, but if you really mean it — —”

“Certainly I mean it. If you will excuse me a moment, I will hail the *Gamecock* and let them know that they need not expect me.”

As we came back from the other end of the little jetty we were both struck by the appearance of the night. A huge blue-black pile of clouds had built itself up upon the landward side, and the wind came from it in little hot pants, which beat upon our faces like the draught from a blast furnace. Under the jetty the river was swirling and hissing, tossing little white spurts of spray over the planking.

“Confound it!” said Doctor Severall. “We are likely to have a flood on the top of all our troubles. That rise in the river means heavy rain up-country, and when it once begins you never know how far it will go. We’ve had the island nearly covered before now. Well, we’ll just go and see that Walker is comfortable, and then if you like we’ll settle down in our quarters.”

The sick man was sunk in a profound slumber, and we left him with some crushed limes in a glass beside him in case he should awake with the thirst of fever upon him. Then we made our way through the unnatural gloom thrown by that menacing cloud. The river had risen so high that the little bay which I have described at the end of the island had become almost obliterated through the submerging of its flanking peninsula. The great raft of driftwood, with the huge black tree in the middle, was swaying up and down in the swollen current.

"That's one good thing a flood will do for us," said the Doctor. "It carries away all the vegetable stuff which is brought down on to the east end of the island. It came down with the freshet the other day, and here it will stay until a flood sweeps it out into the main stream. Well, here's our room, and here are some books and here is my tobacco pouch, and we must try and put in the night as best we may."

By the light of our single lantern the great lonely room looked very gaunt and dreary. Save for the piles of staves and heaps of hoops there was absolutely nothing in it, with the exception of the mattress for the Doctor, which had been laid in the corner. We made a couple of seats and a table out of the staves, and settled down together for a long vigil. Severall had brought a revolver for me and was himself armed with a double-barrelled shot-gun. We loaded our weapons and laid them cocked within reach of our hands. The little circle of light and the black shadows arching over us were so melancholy that he went off to the house, and returned with two candles. One side of the cooperage was pierced, however, by several open windows, and it was only by screening our lights behind staves that we could prevent them from being extinguished.

The Doctor, who appeared to be a man of iron nerves, had settled down to a book, but I observed that every now and then he laid it upon his knee, and took an earnest look all round him. For my part, although I tried once or twice to read, I found it impossible to concentrate my thoughts upon the book. They would always wander back to this great empty silent room, and to the sinister mystery which overshadowed it. I racked my brains for some possible theory which would explain the disappearance of these two men. There was the black fact that they were gone, and not the least tittle of evidence as to why or whither. And here we were waiting in the same place — waiting without an idea as to what we were waiting for. I was right in saying that it was not a one-man job. It was trying enough as it was, but no force upon earth would have kept me there without a comrade.

What an endless, tedious night it was! Outside we heard the lapping and gurgling of the great river, and the soughing of the rising wind. Within, save for our breathing, the turning of the Doctor’s pages, and the high, shrill ping of an occasional mosquito, there was a heavy silence. Once my heart sprang into my mouth as Severall’s book suddenly fell to the ground and he sprang to his feet with his eyes on one of the windows.

“Did you see anything, Meldrum?”

“No. Did you?”

“Well, I had a vague sense of movement outside that window.” He caught up his gun and approached it. “No, there’s nothing to be seen, and yet I could have sworn that something passed slowly across it.”

“A palm leaf, perhaps,” said I, for the wind was growing stronger every instant.

“Very likely,” said he, and settled down to his book again, but his eyes were for ever darting little suspicious glances up at the window. I watched it also, but all was quiet outside.

And then suddenly our thoughts were turned into a new direction by the bursting of the storm. A blinding flash was followed by a clap which shook the building. Again and again came the vivid white glare with thunder at the same instant, like the flash and roar of a monstrous piece of artillery. And then down came the tropical rain, crashing and rattling on the corrugated iron roofing of the cooperage. The big hollow room boomed like a drum. From the darkness arose a strange mixture of noises, a gurgling, splashing, tinkling, bubbling, washing, dripping — every liquid sound that nature can produce from the thrashing and swishing of the rain to the deep steady boom of the river. Hour after hour the uproar grew louder and more sustained.

“My word,” said Severall, “we are going to have the father of all the floods this time. Well, here’s the dawn coming at last and that is a blessing. We’ve about exploded the third night superstition anyhow.”

A grey light was stealing through the room, and there was the day upon us in an instant. The rain had eased off, but the coffee-coloured river was roaring past like a waterfall. Its power made me fear for the anchor of the *Gamecock*.

“I must get aboard,” said I. “If she drags she’ll never be able to beat up the river again.”

“The island is as good as a breakwater,” the Doctor answered. “I can give you a cup of coffee if you will come up to the house.”

I was chilled and miserable, so the suggestion was a welcome one. We left the ill-omened cooperage with its mystery still unsolved, and we splashed our way up to the house.

“There’s the spirit lamp,” said Severall. “If you would just put a light to it, I will see how Walker feels this morning.”

He left me, but was back in an instant with a dreadful face.

“He’s gone!” he cried hoarsely.

The words sent a thrill of horror through me. I stood with the lamp in my hand, glaring at him.

“Yes, he’s gone!” he repeated. “Come and look!”

I followed him without a word, and the first thing that I saw as I entered the bedroom was Walker himself lying huddled on his bed in the grey flannel sleeping suit in which I had helped to dress him on the night before.

“Not dead, surely!” I gasped.

The Doctor was terribly agitated. His hands were shaking like leaves in the wind.

“He’s been dead some hours.”

“Was it fever?”

“Fever! Look at his foot!”

I glanced down and a cry of horror burst from my lips. One foot was not merely dislocated, but was turned completely round in a most grotesque contortion.

“Good God!” I cried. “What can have done this?”

Severall had laid his hand upon the dead man’s chest.

“Feel here,” he whispered.

I placed my hand at the same spot. There was no resistance. The body was absolutely soft and limp. It was like pressing a sawdust doll.

“The breast-bone is gone,” said Severall in the same awed whisper. “He’s broken to bits. Thank God that he had the laudanum. You can see by his face that he died in his sleep.”

“But who can have done this?”

“I’ve had about as much as I can stand,” said the Doctor, wiping his forehead. “I don’t know that I’m a greater coward than my neighbours, but this gets beyond me. If you’re going out to the *Gamecock* — —”

“Come on!” said I, and off we started. If we did not run it was because each of us wished to keep up the last shadow of his self-respect before the other. It was dangerous in a light canoe on that swollen river, but we never paused to give the matter a thought. He bailing and I paddling we kept her above water, and gained the deck of the yacht. There, with two hundred yards of water between us and this cursed island we felt that we were our own men once more.

“We’ll go back in an hour or so,” said he. “But we need a little time to steady ourselves. I wouldn’t have had the niggers see me as I was just now for a year’s salary.”

“I’ve told the steward to prepare breakfast. Then we shall go back,” said I. “But in God’s name, Doctor Severall, what do you make of it all?”

“It beats me — beats me clean. I’ve heard of Voodoo deviltry, and I’ve laughed at it with the others. But that poor old Walker, a decent, God-fearing, nineteenth-century, Primrose-League Englishman should go under like this without a whole bone in his body — it’s given me a shake, I won’t deny it. But look there, Meldrum, is that hand of yours mad or drunk, or what is it?”

Old Patterson, the oldest man of my crew, and as steady as the Pyramids, had been stationed in the bows with a boat-hook to fend off the drifting logs which came sweeping down with the current. Now he stood with crooked knees, glaring out in front of him, and one forefinger stabbing furiously at the air.

“Look at it!” he yelled. “Look at it!”

And at the same instant we saw it.

A huge black trunk was coming down the river, its broad glistening back just lapped by the water. And in front of it — about three feet in front — arching upwards like the figure-head of a ship, there hung a dreadful face, swaying slowly from side to side. It was flattened, malignant, as large as a small beer-barrel, of a faded fungoid colour, but the neck which supported it was mottled with a dull yellow and black As it flew past the *Gamecock* in the swirl of the waters I saw two immense coils roll up out of some great hollow in the tree, and the villainous head rose suddenly to the height of eight or ten feet, looking with dull, skin-covered eyes at the yacht. An instant later the tree had shot past us and was plunging with its horrible passenger towards the Atlantic.

“What was it?” I cried.

“It is our fiend of the cooperage,” said Dr. Severall, and he had become in an instant the same bluff, self-confident man that he had been before. “Yes, that is the devil who has been haunting our island. It is the great python of the Gaboon.”

I thought of the stories which I had heard all down the coast of the monstrous constrictors of the interior, of their periodical appetite, and of the murderous effects of their deadly squeeze. Then it all took shape in my mind. There had been a freshet the week before. It had brought down this huge hollow tree with its hideous occupant. Who knows from what far distant tropical forest it may have come! It had been stranded on the little east bay of the island. The cooperage had been the nearest house. Twice with the return of its appetite it had carried off the watchman. Last night it had doubtless come again, when Severall had thought he saw something move at the window, but our lights had driven it away. It had writhed onwards and had slain poor Walker in his sleep.

“Why did it not carry him off?” I asked.

“The thunder and lightning must have scared the brute away. There’s your steward, Meldrum. The sooner we have breakfast and get back to the island the better, or some of those niggers might think that we had been frightened.”

JELLAND’S VOYAGE

“Well,” said our Anglo-Jap as we all drew up our chairs round the smoking-room fire, “it’s an old tale out yonder, and may have spilt over into print for all I know. I don’t want to turn this club-room into a chestnut stall, but it is a long way to the Yellow Sea, and it is just as likely that none of you have ever heard of the yawl *Matilda*, and of what happened to Henry Jelland and Willy McEvoy aboard of her.

“The middle of the sixties was a stirring time out in Japan. That was just after the Simonosaki bombardment, and before the Daimio affair. There was a Tory party and there was a Liberal party among the natives, and the question that they were wrangling over was whether the throats of the foreigners should be cut or not. I tell you all, politics have been tame to me since then. If you lived in a treaty port, you were bound to wake up and take an interest in them. And to make it better, the outsider had no way of knowing how the game was going. If the opposition won it would not be a newspaper paragraph that would tell him of it, but a good old Tory in a suit of chain mail, with a sword in each hand, would drop in and let him know all about it in a single upper cut.

“Of course it makes men reckless when they are living on the edge of a volcano like that. Just at first they are very jumpy, and then there comes a time when they learn to enjoy life while they have it. I tell you there’s nothing makes life so beautiful as when the shadow of death begins to fall across it. Time is too precious to be dawdled away then, and a man lives every minute of it. That was the way with us in Yokohama. There were many European places of business which had to go on running, and the men who worked them made the place lively for seven nights in the week.

“One of the heads of the European colony was Randolph Moore, the big export merchant. His offices were in Yokohama, but he spent a good deal of his time at his house up in Jeddo, which had only just been opened to the trade. In his absence he used to leave his affairs in the hands of his head clerk, Jelland, whom he knew to be a man of great energy and resolution. But energy and resolution are two-edged things, you know, and when they are used against you you don’t appreciate them so much.

“It was gambling that set Jelland wrong. He was a little dark-eyed fellow with black curly hair — more than three-quarters Celt, I should imagine.

Every night in the week you would see him in the same place, on the left-hand side of the croupier at Matheson’s *rouge et noir* table. For a long time he won, and lived in better style than his employer. And then came a turn of luck, and he began to lose so that at the end of a single week his partner and he were stone broke, without a dollar to their names.

“This partner was a clerk in the employ of the same firm — a tall, straw-haired young Englishman called McEvoy. He was a good boy enough at the start, but he was clay in the hands of Jelland, who fashioned him into a kind of weak model of himself. They were for ever on the prowl together, but it was Jelland who led and McEvoy who followed. Lynch and I and one or two others tried to show the youngster that he could come to no good along that line, and when we were talking to him we could win him round easily enough, but five minutes of Jelland would swing him back again. It may have been animal magnetism or what you like, but the little man could pull the big one along like a sixty-foot tug in front of a full-rigged ship. Even when they had lost all their money they would still take their places at the table and look on with shining eyes when any one else was raking in the stamps.

“But one evening they could keep out of it no longer. Red had turned up sixteen times running, and it was more than Jelland could bear. He whispered to McEvoy, and then said a word to the croupier.

“‘Certainly, Mr. Jelland; your cheque is as good as notes,’ said he.

“Jelland scribbled a cheque and threw it on the black. The card was the king of hearts, and the croupier raked in the little bit of paper. Jelland grew angry, and McEvoy white. Another and a heavier cheque was written and thrown on the table. The card was the nine of diamonds. McEvoy leaned his head upon his hands and looked as if he would faint. ‘By God!’ growled Jelland, ‘I won’t be beat,’ and he threw on a cheque that covered the other two. The card was the deuce of hearts. A few minutes later they were walking down the Bund, with the cool night-air playing upon their fevered faces.

“‘Of course you know what this means,’ said Jelland, lighting a cheroot; ‘we’ll have to transfer some of the office money to our current account. There’s no occasion to make a fuss over it. Old Moore won’t look over the books before Easter. If we have any luck, we can easily replace it before then.’

“‘But if we have no luck?’ faltered McEvoy.

"'Tut, man, we must take things as they come. You stick to me, and I'll stick to you, and we'll pull through together. You shall sign the cheques to-morrow night, and we shall see if your luck is better than mine.'

"But if anything it was worse. When the pair rose from the table on the following evening, they had spent over £5,000 of their employer's money. But the resolute Jelland was as sanguine as ever.

"'We have a good nine weeks before us before the books will be examined,' said he. 'We must play the game out, and it will all come straight.'

"McEvoy returned to his rooms that night in an agony of shame and remorse. When he was with Jelland he borrowed strength from him; but alone he recognised the full danger of his position, and the vision of his old white-capped mother in England, who had been so proud when he had received his appointment, rose up before him to fill him with loathing and madness. He was still tossing upon his sleepless couch when his Japanese servant entered the bedroom. For an instant McEvoy thought that the long-expected outbreak had come, and plunged for his revolver. Then, with his heart in his mouth, he listened to the message which the servant had brought.

"Jelland was downstairs, and wanted to see him.

"What on earth could he want at that hour of night? McEvoy dressed hurriedly and rushed downstairs. His companion, with a set smile upon his lips, which was belied by the ghastly pallor of his face, was sitting in the dim light of a solitary candle, with a slip of paper in his hands.

"'Sorry to knock you up, Willy,' said he. 'No eavesdroppers, I suppose?'

"McEvoy shook his head. He could not trust himself to speak.

"'Well, then, our little game is played out. This note was waiting for me at home. It is from Moore, and says that he will be down on Monday morning for an examination of the books. It leaves us in a tight place.'

"'Monday!' gasped McEvoy; 'to-day is Friday.'

"'Saturday, my son, and 3 A.M. We have not much time to turn round in.'

"'We are lost!' screamed McEvoy.

"'We soon will be, if you make such an infernal row,' said Jelland harshly. 'Now do what I tell you, Willy, and we'll pull through yet.'

"'I will do anything — anything.'

"'That's better. Where's your whisky? It's a beastly time of the day to have to get your back stiff, but there must be no softness with us, or we are gone. First of all, I think there is something due to our relations, don't you?'

"McEvoy stared.

"'We must stand or fall together, you know. Now I, for one, don't intend to set my foot inside a felon's dock under any circumstances. D'ye see? I'm ready to swear to that. Are you?'

"'What d'you mean?' asked McEvoy, shrinking back.

"'Why, man, we all have to die, and it's only the pressing of a trigger. I swear that I shall never be taken alive. Will you? If you don't, I leave you to your fate.'

"'All right. I'll do whatever you think best.'

"'You swear it?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, mind, you must be as good as your word. Now we have two clear days to get off in. The yawl *Matilda* is on sale, and she has all her fixings and plenty of tinned stuff aboard. We'll buy the lot to-morrow morning, and whatever we want, and get away in her. But, first, we'll clear all that is left in the office. There are 5,000 sovereigns in the safe. After dark we'll get them aboard the yawl, and take our chance of reaching California. There's no use hesitating, my son, for we have no ghost of a look-in in any other direction. It's that or nothing.'

"'I'll do what you advise.'

"'All right; and mind you get a bright face on you to-morrow, for if Moore gets the tip and comes before Monday, then — —' He tapped the side-pocket of his coat and looked across at his partner with eyes that were full of a sinister meaning.

"All went well with their plans next day. The *Matilda* was bought without difficulty; and, though she was a tiny craft for so long a voyage, had she been larger two men could not have hoped to manage her. She was stocked with water during the day, and after dark the two clerks brought down the money from the office and stowed it in the hold. Before midnight they had collected all their own possessions without exciting suspicion, and at two in the morning they left their moorings and stole quietly out from among the shipping. They were seen, of course, and were set down as keen yachtsmen who were on for a good long Sunday cruise; but there was no one who dreamed that that cruise would only end either on the American coast or at the bottom of the North Pacific Ocean. Straining and hauling, they got their mainsail up and set their foresail and jib. There was a slight breeze from the south-east, and the little craft went dipping along upon her way. Seven miles from land, however, the wind fell away and they lay becalmed, rising and falling on the long swell of a glassy sea. All Sunday they did not make a mile, and in the evening Yokohama still lay along the horizon.

"On Monday morning down came Randolph Moore from Jeddo, and made straight for the offices. He had had the tip from some one that his clerks had been spreading themselves a bit, and that had made him come down out of his usual routine; but when he reached his place and found the three juniors waiting in the street with their hands in their pockets he knew that the matter was serious.

"'What's this?' he asked. He was a man of action, and a nasty chap to deal with when he had his topmasts lowered.

"'We can't get in,' said the clerks.

"Where is Mr. Jelland?'

"'He has not come to-day.'

"'And Mr. McEvoy?'

"'He has not come either.'

"Randolph Moore looked serious. 'We must have the door down,' said he.

"They don't build houses very solid in that land of earthquakes, and in a brace of shakes they were all in the office. Of course, the thing told its own story. The safe was open, the money gone, and the clerks fled. Their employer lost no time in talk.

"'Where were they seen last?'

"'On Saturday they bought the *Matilda* and started for a cruise.'

"Saturday! The matter seemed hopeless if they had got two days' start. But there was still the shadow of a chance. He rushed to the beach and swept the ocean with his glasses.

"'My God!' he cried. 'There's the *Matilda* out yonder. I know her by the rake of her mast. I have my hand upon the villains after all!'

"But there was a hitch even then. No boat had steam up, and the eager merchant had not patience to wait. Clouds were banking up along the haunch of the hills, and there was every sign of an approaching change of weather. A police boat was ready with ten armed men in her, and Randolph Moore himself took the tiller as she shot out in pursuit of the becalmed yawl.

"Jelland and McEvoy, waiting wearily for the breeze which never came, saw the dark speck which sprang out from the shadow of the land and grew larger with every swish of the oars. As she drew nearer, they could see also that she was packed with men, and the gleam of weapons told what manner of men they were. Jelland stood leaning against the tiller, and he looked at the threatening sky, the limp sails, and the approaching boat.

"'It's a case with us, Willy,' said he. 'By the Lord, we are two most unlucky devils, for there's wind in that sky, and another hour would have brought it to us.'

"McEvoy groaned.

"'There's no good softening over it, my lad,' said Jelland. 'It's the police boat right enough, and there's old Moore driving them to row like hell. It'll be a ten-dollar job for every man of them.'

"Willy McEvoy crouched against the side with his knees on the deck. 'My mother! my poor old mother!' he sobbed.

"'She'll never hear that you have been in the dock anyway,' said Jelland. 'My people never did much for me, but I will do that much for them. It's no good, Mac. We can chuck our hands. God bless you, old man! Here's the pistol!'

"He cocked the revolver, and held the butt towards the youngster. But the other shrunk away from it with little gasps and cries. Jelland glanced at the approaching boat. It was not more than a few hundred yards away.

"'There's no time for nonsense,' said he. 'Damn it! man, what's the use of flinching? You swore it!'

"'No, no, Jelland!'

"'Well, anyhow, I swore that neither of us should be taken. Will you do it?'

"'I can't! I can't!'

"'Then I will for you.'

"The rowers in the boat saw him lean forwards, they heard two pistol shots, they saw him double himself across the tiller, and then, before the smoke had lifted, they found that they had something else to think of.

"For at that instant the storm broke — one of those short sudden squalls which are common in these seas. The *Matilda* heeled over, her sails bellied out, she plunged her lee-rail into a wave, and was off like a frightened deer. Jelland's body had jammed the helm, and she kept a course right before the wind, and fluttered away over the rising sea like a blown piece of paper.

The rowers worked frantically, but the yawl still drew a head, and in five minutes it had plunged into the storm wrack never to be seen again by mortal eye. The boat put back, and reached Yokohama with the water washing half-way up to the thwarts.

“And that was how it came that the yawl *Matilda*, with a cargo of five thousand pounds and a crew of two dead young men, set sail across the Pacific Ocean. What the end of Jelland’s voyage may have been no man knows. He may have foundered in that gale, or he may have been picked up by some canny merchant-man, who stuck to the bullion and kept his mouth shut, or he may still be cruising in that vast waste of waters, blown north to the Behring Sea, or south to the Malay Islands. It’s better to leave it unfinished than to spoil a true story by inventing a tag to it.”

J. HABAKUK JEPHSON’S STATEMENT

In the month of December in the year 1873, the British ship *Dei Gratia* steered into Gibraltar, having in tow the derelict brigantine *Marie Celeste*, which had been picked up in latitude 38° 40’, longitude 17° 15’ W. There were several circumstances in connection with the condition and appearance of this abandoned vessel which excited considerable comment at the time, and aroused a curiosity which has never been satisfied. What these circumstances were was summed up in an able article which appeared in the *Gibraltar Gazette*. The curious can find it in the issue for January 4, 1874, unless my memory deceives me. For the benefit of those, however, who may be unable to refer to the paper in question, I shall subjoin a few extracts which touch upon the leading features of the case.

“We have ourselves,” says the anonymous writer in the *Gazette*, “been over the derelict *Marie Celeste,* and have closely questioned the officers of the *Dei Gratia* on every point which might throw light on the affair. They are of opinion that she had been abandoned several days, or perhaps weeks, before being picked up. The official log, which was found in the cabin, states that the vessel sailed from Boston to Lisbon, starting upon October 16. It is, however, most imperfectly kept, and affords little information. There is no reference to rough weather, and, indeed, the state of the vessel’s paint and rigging excludes the idea that she was abandoned for any such reason. She is perfectly watertight. No signs of a struggle or of violence are to be detected, and there is absolutely nothing to account for the disappearance of the crew. There are several indications that a lady was present on board, a sewing-machine being found in the cabin and some articles of female attire. These probably belonged to the captain’s wife, who is mentioned in the log as having accompanied her husband. As an instance of the mildness of the weather, it may be remarked that a bobbin of silk was found standing upon the sewing-machine, though the least roll of the vessel would have precipitated it to the floor. The boats were intact and slung upon the davits; and the cargo, consisting of tallow and American clocks, was untouched. An old-fashioned sword of curious workmanship was discovered among some lumber in the forecastle, and this weapon is said to exhibit a longitudinal striation on the steel, as if it had been recently wiped. It has been placed in the hands of the police, and submitted to Dr.

Monaghan, the analyst, for inspection. The result of his examination has not yet been published. We may remark, in conclusion, that Captain Dalton, of the *Dei Gratia*, an able and intelligent seaman, is of opinion that the *Marie Celeste* may have been abandoned a considerable distance from the spot at which she was picked up, since a powerful current runs up in that latitude from the African coast. He confesses his inability, however, to advance any hypothesis which can reconcile all the facts of the case. In the utter absence of a clue or grain of evidence, it is to be feared that the fate of the crew of the *Marie Celeste* will be added to those numerous mysteries of the deep which will never be solved until the great day when the sea shall give up its dead. If crime has been committed, as is much to be suspected, there is little hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice."

I shall supplement this extract from the *Gibraltar Gazette* by quoting a telegram from Boston, which went the round of the English papers, and represented the total amount of information which had been collected about the *Marie Celeste*. "She was," it said, "a brigantine of 170 tons burden, and belonged to White, Russell & White, wine importers, of this city. Captain J. W. Tibbs was an old servant of the firm, and was a man of known ability and tried probity. He was accompanied by his wife, aged thirty-one, and their youngest child, five years old. The crew consisted of seven hands, including two coloured seamen, and a boy. There were three passengers, one of whom was the well-known Brooklyn specialist on consumption, Dr. Habakuk Jephson, who was a distinguished advocate for Abolition in the early days of the movement, and whose pamphlet, entitled, 'Where is thy Brother?' exercised a strong influence on public opinion before the war. The other passengers were Mr. J. Harton, a writer in the employ of the firm, and Mr. Septimius Goring, a half-caste gentleman, from New Orleans. All investigations have failed to throw any light upon the fate of these fourteen human beings. The loss of Dr. Jephson will be felt both in political and scientific circles."

I have here epitomised, for the benefit of the public, all that has been hitherto known concerning the *Marie Celeste* and her crew, for the past ten years have not in any way helped to elucidate the mystery. I have now taken up my pen with the intention of telling all that I know of the ill-fated voyage. I consider that it is a duty which I owe to society, for symptoms which I am familiar with in others lead me to believe that before many months my tongue and hand may be alike incapable of conveying information. Let me remark, as a preface to my narrative, that I am Joseph Habakuk Jephson, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Harvard, and ex-Consulting Physician of the Samaritan Hospital of Brooklyn.

Many will doubtless wonder why I have not proclaimed myself before, and why I have suffered so many conjectures and surmises to pass unchallenged. Could the ends of justice have been served in any way by my revealing the facts in my possession I should unhesitatingly have done so. It seemed to me, however, that there was no possibility of such a result; and when I attempted after the occurrence, to state my case to an English official, I was met with such offensive incredulity that I determined never again to expose myself to the chance of such an indignity. I can excuse the discourtesy of the Liverpool magistrate, however, when I reflect upon the treatment which I received at the hands of my own relatives, who, though they knew my unimpeachable character, listened to my statement with an indulgent smile as if humouring the delusion of a monomaniac. This slur upon my veracity led to a quarrel between myself and John Vanburger, the brother of my wife, and confirmed me in my resolution to let the matter sink into oblivion — a determination which I have only altered through my son’s solicitations. In order to make my narrative intelligible, I must run lightly over one or two incidents in my former life which throw light upon subsequent events.

My father, William K. Jephson, was a preacher of the sect called Plymouth Brethren, and was one of the most respected citizens of Lowell. Like most of the other Puritans of New England, he was a determined opponent of slavery, and it was from his lips that I received those lessons which tinged every action of my life. While I was studying medicine at Harvard University, I had already made a mark as an advanced Abolitionist; and when, after taking my degree, I bought a third share of the practice of Dr. Willis, of Brooklyn, I managed, in spite of my professional duties, to devote a considerable time to the cause which I had at heart, my pamphlet, “Where is thy Brother?” (Swarburgh, Lister & Co., 1849) attracting considerable attention.

When the war broke out I left Brooklyn and accompanied the 113th New York Regiment through the campaign. I was present at the second battle of Bull’s Run and at the battle of Gettysburg. Finally, I was severely wounded at Antietam, and would probably have perished on the field had it not been for the kindness of a gentleman named Murray, who had me carried to his house and provided me with every comfort. Thanks to his charity, and to the nursing which I received from his black domestics, I was soon able to get about the plantation with the help of a stick. It was during this period of convalescence that an incident occurred which is closely connected with my story.

Among the most assiduous of the negresses who had watched my couch during my illness there was one old crone who appeared to exert considerable authority over the others. She was exceedingly attentive to me, and I gathered from the few words that passed between us that she had heard of me, and that she was grateful to me for championing her oppressed race.

One day as I was sitting alone in the verandah, basking in the sun, and debating whether I should rejoin Grant's army, I was surprised to see this old creature hobbling towards me. After looking cautiously around to see that we were alone, she fumbled in the front of her dress and produced a small chamois leather bag which was hung round her neck by a white cord.

"Massa," she said, bending down and croaking the words into my ear, "me die soon. Me very old woman. Not stay long on Massa Murray's plantation."

"You may live a long time yet, Martha," I answered. "You know I am a doctor. If you feel ill let me know about it, and I will try to cure you."

"No wish to live — wish to die. I'm gwine to join the heavenly host." Here she relapsed into one of those half-heathenish rhapsodies in which negroes indulge. "But, massa, me have one thing must leave behind me when I go. No able to take it with me across the Jordan. That one thing very precious, more precious and more holy than all thing else in the world. Me, a poor old black woman, have this because my people, very great people, 'spose they was back in the old country. But you cannot understand this same as black folk could. My fader give it me, and his fader give it him, but now who shall I give it to? Poor Martha hab no child, no relation, nobody. All round I see black man very bad man. Black woman very stupid woman. Nobody worthy of the stone. And so I say, Here is Massa Jephson who write books and fight for coloured folk — he must be a good man, and he shall have it though he is white man, and nebber can know what it mean or where it came from." Here the old woman fumbled in the chamois leather bag and pulled out a flattish black stone with a hole through the middle of it. "Here, take it," she said, pressing it into my hand; "take it. No harm nebber come from anything good. Keep it safe — nebber lose it!” and with a warning gesture the old crone hobbled away in the same cautious way as she had come, looking from side to side to see if we had been observed.

I was more amused than impressed by the old woman’s earnestness, and was only prevented from laughing during her oration by the fear of hurting her feelings. When she was gone I took a good look at the stone which she had given me. It was intensely black, of extreme hardness, and oval in shape — just such a flat stone as one would pick up on the seashore if one wished to throw a long way. It was about three inches long, and an inch and a half broad at the middle, but rounded off at the extremities. The most curious part about it was several well-marked ridges which ran in semicircles over its surface, and gave it exactly the appearance of a human ear. Altogether I was rather interested in my new possession, and determined to submit it, as a geological specimen, to my friend Professor Shroeder of the New York Institute, upon the earliest opportunity. In the meantime I thrust it into my pocket, and rising from my chair started off for a short stroll in the shrubbery, dismissing the incident from my mind.

As my wound had nearly healed by this time, I took my leave of Mr. Murray shortly afterwards. The Union armies were everywhere victorious and converging on Richmond, so that my assistance seemed unnecessary, and I returned to Brooklyn. There I resumed my practice, and married the second daughter of Josiah Vanburger, the well-known wood engraver. In the course of a few years I built up a good connection and acquired considerable reputation in the treatment of pulmonary complaints. I still kept the old black stone in my pocket, and frequently told the story of the dramatic way in which I had become possessed of it. I also kept my resolution of showing it to Professor Shroeder, who was much interested both by the anecdote and the specimen. He pronounced it to be a piece of meteoric stone, and drew my attention to the fact that its resemblance to an ear was not accidental, but that it was most carefully worked into that shape. A dozen little anatomical points showed that the worker had been as accurate as he was skilful. “I should not wonder,” said the Professor, “if it were broken off from some larger statue, though how such hard material could be so perfectly worked is more than I can understand. If there is a statue to correspond I should like to see it!” So I thought at the time, but I have changed my opinion since.

The next seven or eight years of my life were quiet and uneventful. Summer followed spring, and spring followed winter, without any variation in my duties. As the practice increased I admitted J. S. Jackson as partner, he to have one-fourth of the profits. The continued strain had told upon my constitution, however, and I became at last so unwell that my wife insisted upon my consulting Dr. Kavanagh Smith, who was my colleague at the Samaritan Hospital. That gentleman examined me, and pronounced the apex of my left lung to be in a state of consolidation, recommending me at the same time to go through a course of medical treatment and to take a long sea-voyage.

My own disposition, which is naturally restless, predisposed me strongly in favour of the latter piece of advice, and the matter was clinched by my meeting young Russell, of the firm of White, Russell & White, who offered me a passage in one of his father's ships, the *Marie Celeste,* which was just starting from Boston. "She is a snug little ship," he said, "and Tibbs, the captain, is an excellent fellow. There is nothing like a sailing ship for an invalid." I was very much of the same opinion myself, so I closed with the offer on the spot.

My original plan was that my wife should accompany me on my travels. She has always been a very poor sailor, however, and there were strong family reasons against her exposing herself to any risk at the time, so we determined that she should remain at home. I am not a religious or an effusive man; but oh, thank God for that! As to leaving my practice, I was easily reconciled to it, as Jackson, my partner, was a reliable and hard-working man.

I arrived in Boston on October 12, 1873, and proceeded immediately to the office of the firm in order to thank them for their courtesy. As I was sitting in the counting-house waiting until they should be at liberty to see me, the words *Marie Celeste* suddenly attracted my attention. I looked round and saw a very tall, gaunt man, who was leaning across the polished mahogany counter asking some questions of the clerk at the other side. His face was turned half towards me, and I could see that he had a strong dash of negro blood in him, being probably a quadroon or even nearer akin to the black. His curved aquiline nose and straight lank hair showed the white strain; but the dark, restless eye, sensuous mouth, and gleaming teeth all told of his African origin. His complexion was of a sickly unhealthy yellow, and as his face was deeply pitted with small-pox, the general impression was so unfavourable as to be almost revolting. When he spoke, however, it was in a soft, melodious voice, and in well-chosen words, and he was evidently a man of some education.

“I wished to ask a few questions about the *Marie Celeste*,” he repeated, leaning across to the clerk. “She sails the day after to-morrow, does she not?”

“Yes, sir,” said the young clerk, awed into unusual politeness by the glimmer of a large diamond in the stranger’s shirt front.

“Where is she bound for?”

“Lisbon.”

“How many of a crew?”

“Seven, sir.”

“Passengers?”

“Yes, two. One of our young gentlemen, and a doctor from New York.”

“No gentleman from the South?” asked the stranger eagerly.

“No, none, sir.”

“Is there room for another passenger?”

“Accommodation for three more,” answered the clerk.

“I’ll go,” said the quadroon decisively; “I’ll go, I’ll engage my passage at once. Put it down, will you — Mr. Septimius Goring, of New Orleans.”

The clerk filled up a form and handed it over to the stranger, pointing to a blank space at the bottom. As Mr. Goring stooped over to sign it I was horrified to observe that the fingers of his right hand had been lopped off, and that he was holding the pen between his thumb and the palm. I have seen thousands slain in battle, and assisted at every conceivable surgical operation, but I cannot recall any sight which gave me such a thrill of disgust as that great brown sponge-like hand with the single member protruding from it. He used it skilfully enough, however, for dashing off his signature, he nodded to the clerk and strolled out of the office just as Mr. White sent out word that he was ready to receive me.

I went down to the *Marie Celeste* that evening, and looked over my berth, which was extremely comfortable considering the small size of the vessel. Mr. Goring, whom I had seen in the morning, was to have the one next mine. Opposite was the captain’s cabin and a small berth for Mr. John Harton, a gentleman who was going out in the interests of the firm. These little rooms were arranged on each side of the passage which led from the main-deck to the saloon. The latter was a comfortable room, the panelling tastefully done in oak and mahogany, with a rich Brussels carpet and luxurious settees. I was very much pleased with the accommodation, and also with Tibbs the captain, a bluff, sailor-like fellow, with a loud voice and hearty manner, who welcomed me to the ship with effusion, and insisted upon our splitting a bottle of wine in his cabin. He told me that he intended to take his wife and youngest child with him on the voyage, and that he hoped with good luck to make Lisbon in three weeks. We had a pleasant chat and parted the best of friends, he warning me to make the last of my preparations next morning, as he intended to make a start by the midday tide, having now shipped all his cargo. I went back to my hotel, where I found a letter from my wife awaiting me, and, after a refreshing night's sleep, returned to the boat in the morning. From this point I am able to quote from the journal which I kept in order to vary the monotony of the long sea-voyage. If it is somewhat bald in places I can at least rely upon its accuracy in details, as it was written conscientiously from day to day.

October 16th. — Cast off our warps at half-past two and were towed out into the bay, where the tug left us, and with all sail set we bowled along at about nine knots an hour. I stood upon the poop watching the low land of America sinking gradually upon the horizon until the evening haze hid it from my sight. A single red light, however, continued to blaze balefully behind us, throwing a long track like a trail of blood upon the water, and it is still visible as I write, though reduced to a mere speck. The Captain is in a bad humour, for two of his hands disappointed him at the last moment, and he was compelled to ship a couple of negroes who happened to be on the quay. The missing men were steady, reliable fellows, who had been with him several voyages, and their non-appearance puzzled as well as irritated him. Where a crew of seven men have to work a fair-sized ship the loss of two experienced seamen is a serious one, for though the negroes may take a spell at the wheel or swab the decks, they are of little or no use in rough weather. Our cook is also a black man, and Mr. Septimius Goring has a little darkie servant, so that we are rather a piebald community. The accountant, John Harton, promises to be an acquisition, for he is a cheery, amusing young fellow. Strange how little wealth has to do with happiness! He has all the world before him and is seeking his fortune in a far land, yet he is as transparently happy as a man can be. Goring is rich, if I am not mistaken, and so am I; but I know that I have a lung, and Goring has some deeper trouble still, to judge by his features. How poorly do we both contrast with the careless, penniless clerk!

October 17th. — Mrs. Tibbs appeared upon the deck for the first time this morning — a cheerful, energetic woman, with a dear little child just able to walk and prattle. Young Harton pounced on it at once, and carried it away to his cabin, where no doubt he will lay the seeds of future dyspepsia in the child's stomach. Thus medicine doth make cynics of us all! The weather is still all that could be desired, with a fine fresh breeze from the west-sou'-west. The vessel goes so steadily that you would hardly know that she was moving were it not for the creaking of the cordage, the bellying of the sails, and the long white furrow in our wake. Walked the quarter-deck all morning with the Captain, and I think the keen fresh air has already done my breathing good, for the exercise did not fatigue me in any way. Tibbs is a remarkably intelligent man, and we had an interesting argument about Maury's observations on ocean currents, which we terminated by going down into his cabin to consult the original work. There we found Goring, rather to the Captain's surprise, as it is not usual for passengers to enter that sanctum unless specially invited. He apologised for his intrusion, however, pleading his ignorance of the usages of ship life; and the good-natured sailor simply laughed at the incident, begging him to remain and favour us with his company. Goring pointed to the chronometers, the case of which he had opened, and remarked that he had been admiring them. He has evidently some practical knowledge of mathematical instruments, as he told at a glance which was the most trustworthy of the three, and also named their price within a few dollars. He had a discussion with the Captain too upon the variation of the compass, and when we came back to the ocean currents he showed a thorough grasp of the subject. Altogether he rather improves upon acquaintance, and is a man of decided culture and refinement. His voice harmonises with his conversation, and both are the very antithesis of his face and figure.

The noonday observation shows that we have run two hundred and twenty miles. Towards evening the breeze freshened up, and the first mate ordered reefs to be taken in the topsails and top-gallant sails in expectation of a windy night. I observe that the barometer has fallen to twenty-nine. I trust our voyage will not be a rough one, as I am a poor sailor, and my health would probably derive more harm than good from a stormy trip, though I have the greatest confidence in the Captain's seamanship and in the soundness of the vessel. Played cribbage with Mrs. Tibbs after supper, and Harton gave us a couple of tunes on the violin.

October 18th. — The gloomy prognostications of last night were not fulfilled, as the wind died away again, and we are lying now in a long greasy swell, ruffled here and there by a fleeting catspaw which is insufficient to fill the sails. The air is colder than it was yesterday, and I have put on one of the thick woollen jerseys which my wife knitted for me. Harton came into my cabin in the morning, and we had a cigar together. He says that he remembers having seen Goring in Cleveland, Ohio, in ‘69. He was, it appears, a mystery then as now, wandering about without any visible employment, and extremely reticent on his own affairs. The man interests me as a psychological study. At breakfast this morning I suddenly had that vague feeling of uneasiness which comes over some people when closely stared at, and, looking quickly up, I met his eyes bent upon me with an intensity which amounted to ferocity, though their expression instantly softened as he made some conventional remark upon the weather. Curiously enough, Harton says that he had a very similar experience yesterday upon deck. I observe that Goring frequently talks to the coloured seamen as he strolls about — a trait which I rather admire, as it is common to find half-breeds ignore their dark strain and treat their black kinsfolk with greater intolerance than a white man would do. His little page is devoted to him, apparently, which speaks well for his treatment of him. Altogether, the man is a curious mixture of incongruous qualities, and unless I am deceived in him will give me food for observation during the voyage.

The Captain is grumbling about his chronometers, which do not register exactly the same time. He says it is the first time that they have ever disagreed. We were unable to get a noonday observation on account of the haze. By dead reckoning, we have done about a hundred and seventy miles in the twenty-four hours. The dark seamen have proved, as the skipper prophesied, to be very inferior hands, but as they can both manage the wheel well they are kept steering, and so leave the more experienced men to work the ship. These details are trivial enough, but a small thing serves as food for gossip aboard ship. The appearance of a whale in the evening caused quite a flutter among us. From its sharp back and forked tail, I should pronounce it to have been a rorqual, or “finner,” as they are called by the fishermen.

October 19th. — Wind was cold, so I prudently remained in my cabin all day, only creeping out for dinner. Lying in my bunk I can, without moving, reach my books, pipes, or anything else I may want, which is one advantage of a small apartment. My old wound began to ache a little to-day, probably from the cold. Read *Montaigne's Essays* and nursed myself. Harton came in in the afternoon with Doddy, the Captain's child, and the skipper himself followed, so that I held quite a reception.

October 20th and 21st. — Still cold, with a continual drizzle of rain, and I have not been able to leave the cabin. This confinement makes me feel weak and depressed. Goring came in to see me, but his company did not tend to cheer me up much, as he hardly uttered a word, but contented himself with staring at me in a peculiar and rather irritating manner. He then got up and stole out of the cabin without saying anything. I am beginning to suspect that the man is a lunatic. I think I mentioned that his cabin is next to mine. The two are simply divided by a thin wooden partition which is cracked in many places, some of the cracks being so large that I can hardly avoid, as I lie in my bunk, observing his motions in the adjoining room. Without any wish to play the spy, I see him continually stooping over what appears to be a chart and working with a pencil and compasses. I have remarked the interest he displays in matters connected with navigation, but I am surprised that he should take the trouble to work out the course of the ship. However, it is a harmless amusement enough, and no doubt he verifies his results by those of the Captain.

I wish the man did not run in my thoughts so much. I had a nightmare on the night of the 20th, in which I thought my bunk was a coffin, that I was laid out in it, and that Goring was endeavouring to nail up the lid, which I was frantically pushing away. Even when I woke up, I could hardly persuade myself that I was not in a coffin. As a medical man, I know that a nightmare is simply a vascular derangement of the cerebral hemispheres, and yet in my weak state I cannot shake off the morbid impression which it produces.

October 22nd. — A fine day, with hardly a cloud in the sky, and a fresh breeze from the sou'-west which wafts us gaily on our way. There has evidently been some heavy weather near us, as there is a tremendous swell on, and the ship lurches until the end of the fore-yard nearly touches the water. Had a refreshing walk up and down the quarter-deck, though I have hardly found my sea-legs yet. Several small birds — chaffinches, I think — perched in the rigging.

4.40 P.M. — While I was on deck this morning I heard a sudden explosion from the direction of my cabin, and, hurrying down, found that I had very nearly met with a serious accident. Goring was cleaning a revolver, it seems, in his cabin, when one of the barrels which he thought was unloaded went off. The ball passed through the side partition and imbedded itself in the bulwarks in the exact place where my head usually rests. I have been under fire too often to magnify trifles, but there is no doubt that if I had been in the bunk it must have killed me. Goring, poor fellow, did not know that I had gone on deck that day, and must therefore have felt terribly frightened. I never saw such emotion in a man's face as when, on rushing out of his cabin with the smoking pistol in his hand, he met me face to face as I came down from deck. Of course, he was profuse in his apologies, though I simply laughed at the incident.

11 P.M. — A misfortune has occurred so unexpected and so horrible that my little escape of the morning dwindles into insignificance. Mrs. Tibbs and her child have disappeared — utterly and entirely disappeared. I can hardly compose myself to write the sad details. About half-past eight Tibbs rushed into my cabin with a very white face and asked me if I had seen his wife. I answered that I had not. He then ran wildly into the saloon and began groping about for any trace of her, while I followed him, endeavouring vainly to persuade him that his fears were ridiculous. We hunted over the ship for an hour and a half without coming on any sign of the missing woman or child. Poor Tibbs lost his voice completely from calling her name. Even the sailors, who are generally stolid enough, were deeply affected by the sight of him as he roamed bareheaded and dishevelled about the deck, searching with feverish anxiety the most impossible places, and returning to them again and again with a piteous pertinacity. The last time she was seen was about seven o'clock, when she took Doddy on to the poop to give him a breath of fresh air before putting him to bed. There was no one there at the time except the black seaman at the wheel, who denies having seen her at all. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. My own theory is that while Mrs. Tibbs was holding the child and standing near the bulwarks it gave a spring and fell overboard, and that in her convulsive attempt to catch or save it, she followed it. I cannot account for the double disappearance in any other way. It is quite feasible that such

a tragedy should be enacted without the knowledge of the man at the wheel, since it was dark at the time, and the peaked skylights of the saloon screen the greater part of the quarter-deck. Whatever the truth may be it is a terrible catastrophe, and has cast the darkest gloom upon our voyage. The mate has put the ship about, but of course there is not the slightest hope of picking them up. The Captain is lying in a state of stupor in his cabin. I gave him a powerful dose of opium in his coffee that for a few hours at least his anguish may be deadened.

October 23rd. — Woke with a vague feeling of heaviness and misfortune, but it was not until a few moments' reflection that I was able to recall our loss of the night before. When I came on deck I saw the poor skipper standing gazing back at the waste of waters behind us which contains everything dear to him upon earth. I attempted to speak to him, but he turned brusquely away, and began pacing the deck with his head sunk upon his breast. Even now, when the truth is so clear, he cannot pass a boat or an unbent sail without peering under it. He looks ten years older than he did yesterday morning. Harton is terribly cut up, for he was fond of little Doddy, and Goring seems sorry too. At least he has shut himself up in his cabin all day, and when I got a casual glance at him his head was resting on his two hands as if in a melancholy reverie. I fear we are about as dismal a crew as ever sailed. How shocked my wife will be to hear of our disaster! The swell has gone down now, and we are doing about eight knots with all sail set and a nice little breeze. Hyson is practically in command of the ship, as Tibbs, though he does his best to bear up and keep a brave front, is incapable of applying himself to serious work.

October 24th. — Is the ship accursed? Was there ever a voyage which began so fairly and which changed so disastrously? Tibbs shot himself through the head during the night. I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by an explosion, and immediately sprang out of bed and rushed into the Captain's cabin to find out the cause, though with a terrible presentiment in my heart. Quickly as I went, Goring went more quickly still, for he was already in the cabin stooping over the dead body of the Captain. It was a hideous sight, for the whole front of his face was blown in, and the little room was swimming in blood. The pistol was lying beside him on the floor, just as it had dropped from his hand. He had evidently put it to his mouth before pulling the trigger. Goring and I picked him reverently up and laid him on his bed. The crew had all clustered into his cabin, and the six white men were deeply grieved, for they were old hands who had sailed with him many years. There were dark looks and murmurs among them too, and one of them openly declared that the ship was haunted. Harton helped to lay the poor skipper out, and we did him up in canvas between us. At twelve o’clock the fore-yard was hauled aback, and we committed his body to the deep, Goring reading the Church of England burial service. The breeze has freshened up, and we have done ten knots all day and sometimes twelve. The sooner we reach Lisbon and get away from this accursed ship the better pleased shall I be. I feel as though we were in a floating coffin. Little wonder that the poor sailors are superstitious when I, an educated man, feel it so strongly.

October 25th. — Made a good run all day. Feel listless and depressed.

October 26th. — Goring, Harton, and I had a chat together on deck in the morning. Harton tried to draw Goring out as to his profession, and his object in going to Europe, but the quadroon parried all his questions and gave us no information. Indeed, he seemed to be slightly offended by Harton’s pertinacity, and went down into his cabin. I wonder why we should both take such an interest in this man! I suppose it is his striking appearance, coupled with his apparent wealth, which piques our curiosity. Harton has a theory that he is really a detective, that he is after some criminal who has got away to Portugal, and that he chooses this peculiar way of travelling that he may arrive unnoticed and pounce upon his quarry unawares. I think the supposition is rather a farfetched one, but Harton bases it upon a book which Goring left on deck, and which he picked up and glanced over. It was a sort of scrap-book, it seems, and contained a large number of newspaper cuttings. All these cuttings related to murders which had been committed at various times in the States during the last twenty years or so. The curious thing which Harton observed about them, however, was that they were invariably murders the authors of which had never been brought to justice. They varied in every detail, he says, as to the manner of execution and the social status of the victim, but they uniformly wound up with the same formula that the murderer was still at large, though, of course, the police had every reason to expect his speedy capture. Certainly the incident seems to support Harton’s theory, though it may be a mere whim of Goring’s, or, as I suggested to Harton, he may be collecting materials for a book which shall outvie De Quincey. In any case it is no business of ours.

October 27th, 28th. — Wind still fair, and we are making good progress. Strange how easily a human unit may drop out of its place and be forgotten! Tibbs is hardly ever mentioned now; Hyson has taken possession of his cabin, and all goes on as before. Were it not for Mrs. Tibbs's sewing-machine upon a side-table we might forget that the unfortunate family had ever existed. Another accident occurred on board to-day, though fortunately not a very serious one. One of our white hands had gone down the after-hold to fetch up a spare coil of rope, when one of the hatches which he had removed came crashing down on the top of him. He saved his life by springing out of the way, but one of his feet was terribly crushed, and he will be of little use for the remainder of the voyage. He attributes the accident to the carelessness of his negro companion, who had helped him to shift the hatches. The latter, however, puts it down to the roll of the ship. Whatever be the cause, it reduces our short-handed crew still further. This run of ill-luck seems to be depressing Harton, for he has lost his usual good spirits and joviality. Goring is the only one who preserves his cheerfulness. I see him still working at his chart in his own cabin. His nautical knowledge would be useful should anything happen to Hyson — which God forbid!

October 29th, 30th. — Still bowling along with a fresh breeze. All quiet and nothing of note to chronicle.

October 31st. — My weak lungs, combined with the exciting episodes of the voyage, have shaken my nervous system so much that the most trivial incident affects me. I can hardly believe that I am the same man who tied the external iliac artery, an operation requiring the nicest precision, under a heavy rifle fire at Antietam. I am as nervous as a child. I was lying half dozing last night about four bells in the middle watch trying in vain to drop into a refreshing sleep. There was no light inside my cabin, but a single ray of moonlight streamed in through the port-hole, throwing a silvery flickering circle upon the door. As I lay I kept my drowsy eyes upon this circle, and was conscious that it was gradually becoming less well-defined as my senses left me, when I was suddenly recalled to full wakefulness by the appearance of a small dark object in the very centre of the luminous disc. I lay quietly and breathlessly watching it. Gradually it grew larger and plainer, and then I perceived that it was a human hand which had been cautiously inserted through the chink of the half-closed door — a hand which, as I observed with a thrill of horror, was not provided with fingers. The door swung cautiously backwards, and Goring's head followed his hand. It appeared in the centre of the moonlight, and was framed as it were in a ghastly uncertain halo, against which his features showed out plainly. It seemed to me that I had never seen such an utterly fiendish and merciless expression upon a human face. His eyes were dilated and glaring, his lips drawn back so as to show his white fangs, and his straight black hair appeared to bristle over his low forehead like the hood of a cobra. The sudden and noiseless apparition had such an effect upon me that I sprang up in bed trembling in every limb, and held out my hand towards my revolver. I was heartily ashamed of my hastiness when he explained the object of his intrusion, as he immediately did in the most courteous language. He had been suffering from toothache, poor fellow! and had come in to beg some laudanum, knowing that I possessed a medicine chest. As to a sinister expression he is never a beauty, and what with my state of nervous tension and the effect of the shifting moonlight it was easy to conjure up something horrible. I gave him twenty drops, and he went off again with many expressions of gratitude. I can hardly say how much this trivial incident affected me. I have felt unstrung all day.

A week's record of our voyage is here omitted, as nothing eventful occurred during the time, and my log consists merely of a few pages of unimportant gossip.

November 7th. — Harton and I sat on the poop all the morning, for the weather is becoming very warm as we come into southern latitudes. We reckon that we have done two-thirds of our voyage. How glad we shall be to see the green banks of the Tagus, and leave this unlucky ship for ever! I was endeavouring to amuse Harton to-day and to while away the time by telling him some of the experiences of my past life. Among others I related to him how I came into the possession of my black stone, and as a finale I rummaged in the side pocket of my old shooting coat and produced the identical object in question. He and I were bending over it together, I pointing out to him the curious ridges upon its surface, when we were conscious of a shadow falling between us and the sun, and looking round saw Goring standing behind us glaring over our shoulders at the stone. For some reason or other he appeared to be powerfully excited, though he was evidently trying to control himself and to conceal his emotion. He pointed once or twice at my relic with his stubby thumb before he could recover himself sufficiently to ask what it was and how I obtained it — a question put in such a brusque manner that I should have been offended had I not known the man to be an eccentric. I told him the story very much as I had told it to Harton. He listened with the deepest interest and then asked me if I had any idea what the stone was. I said I had not, beyond that it was meteoric. He asked me if I had ever tried its effect upon a negro. I said I had not. “Come,” said he, “we’ll see what our black friend at the wheel thinks of it.” He took the stone in his hand and went across to the sailor, and the two examined it carefully. I could see the man gesticulating and nodding his head excitedly as if making some assertion, while his face betrayed the utmost astonishment, mixed, I think, with some reverence. Goring came across the deck to as presently, still holding the stone in his hand. “He says it is a worthless, useless thing,” he said, “and fit only to be chucked overboard,” with which he raised his hand and would most certainly have made an end of my relic, had the black sailor behind him not rushed forward and seized him by the wrist. Finding himself secured Goring dropped the stone and turned away with a very bad grace to avoid my angry remonstrances at his breach of faith. The black picked up the stone and handed it to me with a low bow and every sign of profound respect. The whole affair is inexplicable. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that Goring is a maniac or something very near one. When I compare the effect produced by the stone upon the sailor, however, with the respect shown to Martha on the plantation, and the surprise of Goring on its first production, I cannot but come to the conclusion that I have really got hold of some powerful talisman which appeals to the whole dark race. I must not trust it in Goring’s hands again.

November 8th, 9th. — What splendid weather we are having! Beyond one little blow, we have had nothing but fresh breezes the whole voyage. These two days we have made better runs than any hitherto. It is a pretty thing to watch the spray fly up from our prow as it cuts through the waves. The sun shines through it and breaks it up into a number of miniature rainbows—”sun-dogs,” the sailors call them. I stood on the fo’c’sle-head for several hours to-day watching the effect, and surrounded by a halo of prismatic colours. The steersman has evidently told the other blacks about my wonderful stone, for I am treated by them all with the greatest respect. Talking about optical phenomena, we had a curious one yesterday evening which was pointed out to me by Hyson. This was the appearance of a triangular well-defined object high up in the heavens to the north of us. He explained that it was exactly like the Peak of Teneriffe as seen from a great distance — the peak was, however, at that moment at least five hundred miles to the south. It may have been a cloud, or it may have been one of those strange reflections of which one reads. The weather is very warm. The mate says that he never knew it so warm in these latitudes. Played chess with Harton in the evening.

November 10th. — It is getting warmer and warmer. Some land birds came and perched in the rigging to-day, though we are still a considerable way from our destination. The heat is so great that we are too lazy to do anything but lounge about the decks and smoke. Goring came over to me to-day and asked me some more questions about my stone; but I answered him rather shortly, for I have not quite forgiven him yet for the cool way in which he attempted to deprive me of it.

November 11th, 12th. — Still making good progress. I had no idea Portugal was ever as hot as this, but no doubt it is cooler on land. Hyson himself seemed surprised at it, and so do the men.

November 13th. — A most extraordinary event has happened, so extraordinary as to be almost inexplicable. Either Hyson has blundered wonderfully, or some magnetic influence has disturbed our instruments. Just about daybreak the watch on the fo’c’sle-head shouted out that he heard the sound of surf ahead, and Hyson thought he saw the loom of land. The ship was put about, and, though no lights were seen, none of us doubted that we had struck the Portuguese coast a little sooner than we had expected. What was our surprise to see the scene which was revealed to us at break of day! As far as we could look on either side was one long line of surf, great, green billows rolling in and breaking into a cloud of foam. But behind the surf what was there! Not the green banks nor the high cliffs of the shores of Portugal, but a great sandy waste which stretched away and away until it blended with the skyline. To right and left, look where you would, there was nothing but yellow sand, heaped in some places into fantastic mounds, some of them several hundred feet high, while in other parts were long stretches as level apparently as a billiard board. Harton and I, who had come on deck together, looked at each other in astonishment, and Harton burst out laughing. Hyson is exceedingly mortified at the occurrence, and protests that the instruments have been tampered with. There is no doubt that this is the mainland of Africa, and that it was really the Peak of Teneriffe which we saw some days ago upon the northern horizon. At the time when we saw the land birds we must have been passing some of the

Canary Islands. If we continued on the same course, we are now to the north of Cape Blanco, near the unexplored country which skirts the great Sahara. All we can do is to rectify our instruments as far as possible and start afresh for our destination.

8.30 P.M. — Have been lying in a calm all day. The coast is now about a mile and a half from us. Hyson has examined the instruments, but cannot find any reason for their extraordinary deviation.

This is the end of my private journal, and I must make the remainder of my statement from memory. There is little chance of my being mistaken about facts, which have seared themselves into my recollection. That very night the storm which had been brewing so long burst over us, and I came to learn whither all those little incidents were tending which I had recorded so aimlessly. Blind fool that I was not to have seen it sooner! I shall tell what occurred as precisely as I can.

I had gone into my cabin about half-past eleven, and was preparing to go to bed, when a tap came at my door. On opening it I saw Goring’s little black page, who told me that his master would like to have a word with me on deck. I was rather surprised that he should want me at such a late hour, but I went up without hesitation. I had hardly put my foot on the quarter-deck before I was seized from behind, dragged down upon my back, and a handkerchief slipped round my mouth. I struggled as hard as I could, but a coil of rope was rapidly and firmly wound round me, and I found myself lashed to the davit of one of the boats, utterly powerless to do or say anything, while the point of a knife pressed to my throat warned me to cease my struggles. The night was so dark that I had been unable hitherto to recognise my assailants, but as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and the moon broke out through the clouds that obscured it, I made out that I was surrounded by the two negro sailors, the black cook, and my fellow-passenger, Goring. Another man was crouching on the deck at my feet, but he was in the shadow and I could not recognise him.

All this occurred so rapidly that a minute could hardly have elapsed from the time I mounted the companion until I found myself gagged and powerless. It was so sudden that I could scarce bring myself to realise it, or to comprehend what it all meant. I heard the gang round me speaking in short, fierce whispers to each other, and some instinct told me that my life was the question at issue. Goring spoke authoritatively and angrily — the others doggedly and all together, as if disputing his commands. Then they moved away in a body to the opposite side of the deck, where I could still hear them whispering, though they were concealed from my view by the saloon skylights.

All this time the voices of the watch on deck chatting and laughing at the other end of the ship were distinctly audible, and I could see them gathered in a group, little dreaming of the dark doings which were going on within thirty yards of them. Oh! That I could have given them one word of warning, even though I had lost my life in doing it! but it was impossible. The moon was shining fitfully through the scattered clouds, and I could see the silvery gleam of the surge, and beyond it the vast weird desert with its fantastic sand-hills. Glancing down, I saw that the man who had been crouching on the deck was still lying there, and as I gazed at him a flickering ray of moonlight fell full upon his upturned face. Great heaven! even now, when more than twelve years have elapsed, my hand trembles as I write that, in spite of distorted features and projecting eyes, I recognised the face of Harton, the cheery young clerk who had been my companion during the voyage. It needed no medical eye to see that he was quite dead, while the twisted handkerchief round the neck, and the gag in his mouth, showed the silent way in which the hell-hounds had done their work. The clue which explained every event of our voyage came upon me like a flash of light as I gazed on poor Harton’s corpse. Much was dark and unexplained, but I felt a great dim perception of the truth.

I heard the striking of a match at the other side of the skylights, and then I saw the tall, gaunt figure of Goring standing up on the bulwarks and holding in his hands what appeared to be a dark lantern. He lowered this for a moment over the side of the ship, and, to my inexpressible astonishment, I saw it answered instantaneously by a flash among the sand-hills on shore, which came and went so rapidly, that unless I had been following the direction of Goring’s gaze, I should never have detected it. Again he lowered the lantern, and again it was answered from the shore. He then stepped down from the bulwarks, and in doing so slipped, making such a noise, that for a moment my heart bounded with the thought that the attention of the watch would be directed to his proceedings. It was a vain hope. The night was calm and the ship motionless, so that no idea of duty kept them vigilant. Hyson, who after the death of Tibbs was in command of both watches, had gone below to snatch a few hours’ sleep, and the boatswain, who was left in charge, was standing with the other two men at the foot of the foremast. Powerless, speechless, with the cords cutting into my flesh and the murdered man at my feet, I awaited the next act in the tragedy.

The four ruffians were standing up now at the other side of the deck. The cook was armed with some sort of a cleaver, the others had knives, and Goring had a revolver. They were all leaning against the rail and looking out over the water as if watching for something. I saw one of them grasp another's arm and point as if at some object, and following the direction I made out the loom of a large moving mass making towards the ship. As it emerged from the gloom I saw that it was a great canoe crammed with men and propelled by at least a score of paddles. As it shot under our stern the watch caught sight of it also, and raising a cry hurried aft. They were too late, however. A swarm of gigantic negroes clambered over the quarter, and led by Goring swept down the deck in an irresistible torrent. All opposition was overpowered in a moment, the unarmed watch were knocked over and bound, and the sleepers dragged out of their bunks and secured in the same manner. Hyson made an attempt to defend the narrow passage leading to his cabin, and I heard a scuffle, and his voice shouting for assistance. There was none to assist, however, and he was brought on to the poop with the blood streaming from a deep cut in his forehead. He was gagged like the others, and a council was held upon our fate by the negroes. I saw our black seamen pointing towards me and making some statement, which was received with murmurs of astonishment and incredulity by the savages. One of them then came over to me, and plunging his hand into my pocket took out my black stone and held it up. He then handed it to a man who appeared to be a chief, who examined it as minutely as the light would permit, and muttering a few words passed it on to the warrior beside him, who also scrutinised it and passed it on until it had gone from hand to hand round the whole circle. The chief then said a few words to Goring in the native tongue, on which the quadroon addressed me in English. At this moment I seem to see the scene. The tall masts of the ship with the moonlight streaming down, silvering the yards and bringing the network of cordage into hard relief; the group of dusky warriors leaning on their spears; the dead man at my feet; the line of white-faced prisoners, and in front of me the loathsome half-breed, looking in his white linen and elegant clothes a strange contrast to his associates.

“You will bear me witness,” he said in his softest accents, “that I am no party to sparing your life. If it rested with me you would die as these other men are about to do. I have no personal grudge against either you or them, but I have devoted my life to the destruction of the white race, and you are the first that has ever been in my power and has escaped me. You may thank that stone of yours for your life. These poor fellows reverence it, and indeed if it really be what they think it is they have cause. Should it prove when we get ashore that they are mistaken, and this its shape and material is a mere chance, nothing can save your life. In the meantime we wish to treat you well, so if there are any of your possessions which you would like to take with you, you are at liberty to get them.” As he finished he gave a sign, and a couple of the negroes unbound me, though without removing the gag. I was led down into the cabin, where I put a few valuables into my pockets, together with a pocket-compass and my journal of the voyage. They then pushed me over the side into a small canoe, which was lying beside the large one, and my guards followed me, and shoving off began paddling for the shore. We had got about a hundred yards or so from the ship when our steersman held up his hand, and the paddlers paused for a moment and listened. Then on the silence of the night I heard a sort of dull, moaning sound, followed by a succession of splashes in the water. That is all I know of the fate of my poor shipmates. Almost immediately afterwards the large canoe followed us, and the deserted ship was left drifting about — a dreary spectre-like hulk. Nothing was taken from her by the savages. The whole fiendish transaction was carried through as decorously and temperately as though it were a religious rite.

The first grey of daylight was visible in the east as we passed through the surge and reached the shore. Leaving half-a-dozen men with the canoes, the rest of the negroes set off through the sand-hills, leading me with them, but treating me very gently and respectfully. It was difficult walking, as we sank over our ankles into the loose, shifting sand at every step, and I was nearly dead beat by the time we reached the native village, or town rather, for it was a place of considerable dimensions. The houses were conical structures not unlike bee-hives, and were made of compressed seaweed cemented over with a rude form of mortar, there being neither stick nor stone upon the coast nor anywhere within many hundreds of miles. As we entered the town an enormous crowd of both sexes came swarming out to meet us, beating tom-toms and howling and screaming. On seeing me they redoubled their yells and assumed a threatening attitude, which was instantly quelled by a few words shouted by my escort. A buzz of wonder succeeded the war-cries and yells of the moment before, and the whole dense mass proceeded down the broad central street of the town, having my escort and myself in the centre.

My statement hitherto may seem so strange as to excite doubt in the minds of those who do not know me, but it was the fact which I am now about to relate which caused my own brother-in-law to insult me by disbelief. I can but relate the occurrence in the simplest words, and trust to chance and time to prove their truth. In the centre of this main street there was a large building, formed in the same primitive way as the others, but towering high above them; a stockade of beautifully polished ebony rails was planted all round it, the framework of the door was formed by two magnificent elephant’s tusks sunk in the ground on each side and meeting at the top, and the aperture was closed by a screen of native cloth richly embroidered with gold. We made our way to this imposing-looking structure, but on reaching the opening in the stockade, the multitude stopped and squatted down upon their hams, while I was led through into the enclosure by a few of the chiefs and elders of the tribe, Goring accompanying us, and in fact directing the proceedings. On reaching the screen which closed the temple — for such it evidently was — my hat and my shoes were removed, and I was then led in, a venerable old negro leading the way carrying in his hand my stone, which had been taken from my pocket. The building was only lit up by a few long slits in the roof through which the tropical sun poured, throwing broad golden bars upon the clay floor, alternating with intervals of darkness.

The interior was even larger than one would have imagined from the outside appearance. The walls were hung with native mats, shells, and other ornaments, but the remainder of the great space was quite empty, with the exception of a single object in the centre. This was the figure of a colossal negro, which I at first thought to be some real king or high priest of titanic size, but as I approached it I saw by the way in which the light was reflected from it that it was a statue admirably cut in jet-black stone. I was led up to this idol, for such it seemed to be, and looking at it closer I saw that though it was perfect in every other respect, one of its ears had been broken short off.

The grey-haired negro who held my relic mounted upon a small stool, and stretching up his arm fitted Martha's black stone on to the jagged surface on the side of the statue's head. There could not be a doubt that the one had been broken off from the other. The parts dovetailed together so accurately that when the old man removed his hand the ear stuck in its place for a few seconds before dropping into his open palm. The group round me prostrated themselves upon the ground at the sight with a cry of reverence, while the crowd outside, to whom the result was communicated, set up a wild whooping and cheering.

In a moment I found myself converted from a prisoner into a demi-god. I was escorted back through the town in triumph, the people pressing forward to touch my clothing and to gather up the dust on which my foot had trod. One of the largest huts was put at my disposal, and a banquet of every native delicacy was served me. I still felt, however, that I was not a free man, as several spearmen were placed as a guard at the entrance of my hut. All day my mind was occupied with plans of escape, but none seemed in any way feasible. On the one side was the great arid desert stretching away to Timbuctoo, on the other was a sea untraversed by vessels. The more I pondered over the problem the more hopeless did it seem. I little dreamed how near I was to its solution.

Night had fallen, and the clamour of the negroes had died gradually away. I was stretched on the couch of skins which had been provided for me, and was still meditating over my future, when Goring walked stealthily into the hut. My first idea was that he had come to complete his murderous holocaust by making away with me, the last survivor, and I sprang up upon my feet, determined to defend myself to the last. He smiled when he saw the action, and motioned me down again while he seated himself upon the other end of the couch.

"What do you think of me?" was the astonishing question with which he commenced our conversation.

"Think of you!" I almost yelled. "I think you the vilest, most unnatural renegade that ever polluted the earth. If we were away from these black devils of yours I would strangle you with my hands!"

"Don't speak so loud," he said, without the slightest appearance of irritation. "I don't want our chat to be cut short. So you would strangle me, would you!" he went on, with an amused smile. "I suppose I am returning good for evil, for I have come to help you to escape."

“You!” I gasped incredulously.

“Yes, I,” he continued. “Oh, there is no credit to me in the matter. I am quite consistent. There is no reason why I should not be perfectly candid with you. I wish to be king over these fellows — not a very high ambition, certainly, but you know what Cæsar said about being first in a village in Gaul. Well, this unlucky stone of yours has not only saved your life, but has turned all their heads, so that they think you are come down from heaven, and my influence will be gone until you are out of the way. That is why I am going to help you to escape, since I cannot kill you” — this in the most natural and dulcet voice, as if the desire to do so were a matter of course.

“You would give the world to ask me a few questions,” he went on, after a pause; “but you are too proud to do it. Never mind, I’ll tell you one or two things, because I want your fellow white men to know them when you go back — if you are lucky enough to get back. About that cursed stone of yours, for instance. These negroes, or at least so the legend goes, were Mahometans originally. While Mahomet himself was still alive, there was a schism among his followers, and the smaller party moved away from Arabia, and eventually crossed Africa. They took away with them, in their exile, a valuable relic of their old faith in the shape of a large piece of the black stone of Mecca. The stone was a meteoric one, as you may have heard, and in its fall upon the earth it broke into two pieces. One of these pieces is still at Mecca. The larger piece was carried away to Barbary, where a skilful worker modelled it into the fashion which you saw to-day. These men are the descendents of the original seceders from Mahomet, and they have brought their relic safely through all their wanderings until they settled in this strange place, where the desert protects them from their enemies.”

“And the ear?” I asked, almost involuntarily.

“Oh, that was the same story over again. Some of the tribe wandered away to the south a few hundred years ago, and one of them, wishing to have good luck for the enterprise, got into the temple at night and carried off one of the ears. There has been a tradition among the negroes ever since that the ear would come back some day. The fellow who carried it was caught by some slaver, no doubt, and that was how it got into America, and so into your hands — and you have had the honour of fulfilling the prophecy.”

He paused for a few minutes, resting his head upon his hands, waiting apparently for me to speak. When he looked up again, the whole expression of his face had changed. His features were firm and set, and he changed the air of half-levity with which he had spoken before for one of sternness and almost ferocity.

"I wish you to carry a message back," he said, "to the white race, the great dominating race whom I hate and defy. Tell them that I have battened on their blood for twenty years, that I have slain them until even I became tired of what had once been a joy, that I did this unnoticed and unsuspected in the face of every precaution which their civilisation could suggest. There is no satisfaction in revenge when your enemy does not know who has struck him. I am not sorry, therefore, to have you as a messenger. There is no need why I should tell you how this great hate became born in me. See this," and he held up his mutilated hand; "that was done by a white man's knife. My father was white, my mother was a slave. When he died she was sold again, and I, a child then, saw her lashed to death to break her of some of the little airs and graces which her late master had encouraged in her. My young wife, too, oh, my young wife!" a shudder ran through his whole frame. "No matter! I swore my oath, and I kept it. From Maine to Florida, and from Boston to San Francisco, you could track my steps by sudden deaths which baffled the police. I warred against the whole white race as they for centuries had warred against the black one. At last, as I tell you, I sickened of blood. Still, the sight of a white face was abhorrent to me, and I determined to find some bold free black people and to throw in my lot with them, to cultivate their latent powers and to form a nucleus for a great coloured nation. This idea possessed me, and I travelled over the world for two years seeking for what I desired. At last I almost despaired of finding it. There was no hope of regeneration in the slave-dealing Soudanese, the debased Fantee, or the Americanised negroes of Liberia. I was returning from my quest when chance brought me in contact with this magnificent tribe of dwellers in the desert, and I threw in my lot with them. Before doing so, however, my old instinct of revenge prompted me to make one last visit to the United States, and I returned from it in the *Marie Celeste*.

"As to the voyage itself, your intelligence will have told you by this time that, thanks to my manipulation, both compasses and chronometers were entirely untrustworthy. I alone worked out the course with correct instruments of my own, while the steering was done by my black friends under my guidance. I pushed Tibb’s wife overboard. What! You look surprised and shrink away. Surely you had guessed that by this time. I would have shot you that day through the partition, but unfortunately you were not there. I tried again afterwards, but you were awake. I shot Tibbs. I think the idea of suicide was carried out rather neatly. Of course when once we got on the coast the rest was simple. I had bargained that all on board should die; but that stone of yours upset my plans. I also bargained that there should be no plunder. No one can say we are pirates. We have acted from principle, not from any sordid motive.”

I listened in amazement to the summary of his crimes which this strange man gave me, all in the quietest and most composed of voices, as though detailing incidents of every-day occurrence. I still seem to see him sitting like a hideous nightmare at the end of my couch, with the single rude lamp flickering over his cadaverous features.

“And now,” he continued, “there is no difficulty about your escape. These stupid adopted children of mine will say that you have gone back to heaven from whence you came. The wind blows off the land. I have a boat all ready for you, well stored with provisions and water. I am anxious to be rid of you, so you may rely that nothing is neglected. Rise up and follow me.”

I did what he commanded, and he led me through the door of the hut. The guards had either been withdrawn, or Goring had arranged matters with them. We passed unchallenged through the town and across the sandy plain. Once more I heard the roar of the sea, and saw the long white line of the surge. Two figures were standing upon the shore arranging the gear of a small boat. They were the two sailors who had been with us on the voyage.

“See him safely through the surf,” said Goring. The two men sprang in and pushed off, pulling me in after them. With mainsail and jib we ran out from the land and passed safely over the bar. Then my two companions without a word of farewell sprang overboard, and I saw their heads like black dots on the white foam as they made their way back to the shore, while I scudded away into the blackness of the night. Looking back I caught my last glimpse of Goring. He was standing upon the summit of a sand-hill, and the rising moon behind him threw his gaunt angular figure into hard relief. He was waving his arms frantically to and fro; it may have been to encourage me on my way, but the gestures seemed to me at the time to be threatening ones, and I have often thought that it was more likely that his old savage instinct had returned when he realised that I was out of his power. Be that as it may, it was the last that I ever saw or ever shall see of Septimius Goring.

There is no need for me to dwell upon my solitary voyage. I steered as well as I could for the Canaries, but was picked up upon the fifth day by the British and African Steam Navigation Company's boat *Monrovia*. Let me take this opportunity of tendering my sincerest thanks to Captain Stornoway and his officers for the great kindness which they showed me from that time till they landed me in Liverpool, where I was enabled to take one of the Guion boats to New York.

From the day on which I found myself once more in the bosom of my family I have said little of what I have undergone. The subject is still an intensely painful one to me, and the little which I have dropped has been discredited. I now put the facts before the public as they occurred, careless how far they may be believed, and simply writing them down because my lung is growing weaker, and I feel the responsibility of holding my peace longer. I make no vague statement. Turn to your map of Africa. There above Cape Blanco, where the land trends away north and south from the westernmost point of the continent, there it is that Septimius Goring still reigns over his dark subjects, unless retribution has overtaken him; and there, where the long green ridges run swiftly in to roar and hiss upon the hot yellow sand, it is there that Harton lies with Hyson and the other poor fellows who were done to death in the *Marie Celeste*.

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX

“All aboard?” said the captain.

“All aboard, sir!” said the mate.

“Then stand by to let her go.”

It was nine o’clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice; the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landsmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight, a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours I should even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

“Time’s up!” said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. “Time’s up!” said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared, running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. “Look sharp!” shouted the crowd. “Hold hard!” cried the captain. “Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!” and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight’s voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a speciality of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to “Yurrup,” a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida* of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel’s side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. “Here’s a quiet place,” said the voice. “Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.”

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. “This is just the place,” I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

“Well, Muller,” said the taller of the two, “we’ve got it aboard right enough.”

“Yes,” assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller, “it’s safe aboard.”

“It was rather a near go.”

“It was that, Flannigan.”

“It wouldn’t have done to have missed the ship.”

“No, it would have put our plans out.”

“Ruined them entirely,” said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

“I’ve got it here,” he said at last.

“Let me see it.”

“Is no one looking?”

“No, they are nearly all below.”

“We can’t be too careful where so much is at stake,” said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this, and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

"It seems right enough," he said at last.

"I tried not to shake it," said his companion.

"Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller."

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both men smiled in a satisfied way.

"Nothing much wrong there," said Flannigan.

"Right as a trivet," answered his companion.

"Look out! here's some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn't do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake."

"Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off," said Muller.

"They'd be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger," said the taller, with a sinister laugh. "Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It's not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself."

"No," said Muller. "I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn't it?"

"Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own."

"We should take out a patent."

And the two men laughed again with a cold harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package, and concealed it in Muller's voluminous overcoat.

"Come down, and we'll stow it in our berth," said Flannigan. "We won't need it until to-night, and it will be safe there."

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

“Do you mind moving out of that, sir?” he said. “We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.”

His bluff manner and ruddy healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted — solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizzen as the vessel rolled, I was at last alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of “Flannigan” smacked of Fenianism, while “Muller” suggested nothing but socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake — could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of somebody, political or otherwise, who intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the Captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

“Is that you, Hammond?” said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

“God bless me,” I said, as I turned round, “it can’t be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?”

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

"Hullo!" he said, in his kindly way, "what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. *Mal de mer*, eh?"

"No, not that altogether," said I. "Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm."

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

"Have a cigar?" said he, breaking the silence.

"No, thanks," said I. "Dick, we shall be all corpses to-night."

"That's no reason against your having a cigar now," said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

"No," I continued, "it's no laughing matter; and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;" and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. "There, Dick," I said, as I concluded, "what do you think of that and, above all, what am I to do?"

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I'd be frightened," he said, "if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man," he continued, "what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine."

"Nothing of the sort, sir," said I, rather touchily. "You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.”

“You’d make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,” said Dick, “if that is to be your only test.”

“The man’s name was Flannigan,” I continued.

“I don’t think that would go very far in a court of law,” said Dick; “but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.”

“All right,” I answered; “I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don’t look hard at them, though, for I don’t want them to think that they are being watched.”

“Trust me,” said Dick; “I’ll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;” and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth, but there was no sign of them. “Heavens!” thought I, “perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!” It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

“Steward,” said Dick, “are there any other gentlemen about?”

“There’s two in the smoking room, sir,” answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snuggery, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door opened and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was “Napoleon.” Both were adepts at it, and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulation of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath, and refused to go on.

"No, I'm hanged if I do," he said; "I haven't had more than two of a suit for five hands."

"Never mind," said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; "a few dollars one way or the other won't go very far after to-night's work."

I was astonished at the rascal's audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily —

"Nonsense! Why shouldn't I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us."

"I believe you want it not to come off," said Flannigan.

"You believe nothing of the sort," said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. "You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won't have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man. I have as much interest in our success as you have — more, I hope."

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart, but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards, as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion and turned towards me.

"Can you tell me, sir," he said, "when this ship will be heard of again?"

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered —

"I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the angry little man, "I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan, I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir," he continued, turning to me, "utterly wrong."

"Some passing ship, perhaps," suggested Dick.

"No, nor that either."

"The weather is fine," I said; "why should we not be heard of at our destination?"

"I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. Possibly we may not, and in any case that is not where we shall be heard of first."

"Where, then?" asked Dick.

"That you shall never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!" and he chuckled once again.

"Come on deck!" growled his comrade; "you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!" and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

"Well, what do you think now?" I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

"Think!" he said; "why, I think what his companion thinks, that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy."

"Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue."

"Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible."

"O, Dick, Dick," I cried, "how can you be so blind! Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?"

"Humbug, man!" said Dick; "you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?"

"I'll tell you what he meant, Dick," I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. "He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant."

“I didn’t think you were such a fool, Hammond,” said Dick Merton testily. “If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good.”

“If ever I see the end of this one,” I groaned, “I’ll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it’s hardly worth while my going up. I’ll stay below and unpack my things.”

“I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind,” said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine — so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

“Now, ladies,” said our genial Captain, “I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in eight days, or in nine at the very latest.”

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the Captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

“May I ask, Captain,” I said, bending forward and speaking very distinctly, “what you think of Fenian manifestos?”

The Captain’s ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

“They are poor cowardly things,” he said, “as silly as they are wicked.”

“The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,” said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

“O Captain!” said the fat lady at my side, “you don’t really think they would blow up a ship?”

“I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they shall never blow up mine.”

“May I ask what precautions are taken against them?” asked an elderly man at the end of the table.

“All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,” said Captain Dowie.

“But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?” I suggested.

“They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.”

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now and looked at the Captain.

“Don’t you think you are rather underrating them?” he said. “Every secret society has produced desperate men — why shouldn’t the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.”

“Indiscriminate murder cannot be fight in anybody’s eyes,” said the little clergyman.

“The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,” said Flannigan; “yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word ‘murder’ into the more euphonious one of ‘war.’ It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn’t dynamite seem so to the Fenian?”

“At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,” said the Captain.

“Excuse me,” returned Flannigan, “but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the *Dotterel*? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.”

“Then they lied,” said the Captain. “It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas — but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;” and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and Captain? Should I demand a few minutes’ conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered up on deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It was grand but appalling. A single star was twinkling faintly above our mainmast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It was hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

“After all,” I thought, as I gazed into the blue depths beneath me, “if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sickbed on land.” A man’s life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

“Well, old man,” he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, “we’ve not been blown up yet.”

“No, not yet,” said I; “but that’s no proof that we are not going to be.”

“Nonsense, man!” said Dick; “I can’t conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks.”

“Dick,” I said, “I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse.”

“Well, if you really think so,” said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, “it is your duty to let the Captain know of your suspicions.”

“You are right,” I said; “I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.”

“Well, go and do it now,” said Dick; “but for goodness’ sake don’t mix me up in the matter.”

“I’ll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,” I answered; “and in the meantime I don’t mean to lose sight of them.”

“Let me know of the result,” said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the Captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point of navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now, so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The Captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the edge of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side, and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

“This place will do,” said a voice.

“Yes, the leeward side is best.”

“I wonder if the trigger will act?”

“I am sure it will.”

“We were to let it off at ten, were we not?”

“Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet.” There was a pause. Then the voice began again —

“They’ll hear the drop of the trigger, won’t they?”

“It doesn’t matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent its going off.”

“That’s true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won’t there?”

“Rather. How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?”

“The first news will get in at about midnight at earliest.”

“That will be my doing.”

“No, mine.”

“Ha, ha! we’ll settle that.”

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller’s voice in a ghastly whisper, “There’s only five minutes more.”

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

“It’ll make a sensation on land,” said a voice.

“Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.”

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The Captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

“Three minutes more,” he said. “Put it down upon the deck.”

“No, put it here on the bulwarks.”

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular — the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

“A minute and a half more,” he said. “Shall you or I pull the string?”

“I will pull it,” said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

“Stop!” I screamed, springing to my feet. “Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!”

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

“Cain was damned,” I cried, “and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?”

“He’s mad!” said Flannigan. “Time’s up. Let it off, Muller.”

I sprang down upon the deck.

“You shan’t do it!” I said.

“By what right do you prevent us?”

“By every right, human and divine.”

“It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this.”

“Never!” said I.

“Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.”

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

“Now,” he said, “look sharp. He can’t prevent us.”

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off — *two grey carrier pigeons*!

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the *New York Herald* fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America:

“*Pigeon-flying Extraordinary.* — A novel match has been brought off last week between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Lowell. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship *Spartan*, at ten o’clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as some captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Lowell in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following morning, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years."

THE END

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL AND OTHER TALES OF ADVENTURE

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TALES OF ADVENTURE

THE DÉBUT OF BIMBASHI JOYCE

It was in the days when the tide of Mahdism, which had swept in such a flood from the great Lakes and Darfur to the confines of Egypt, had at last come to its full, and even begun, as some hoped, to show signs of a turn. At its outset it had been terrible. It had engulfed Hicks's army, swept over Gordon and Khartoum, rolled behind the British forces as they retired down the river, and finally cast up a spray of raiding parties as far north as Assouan. Then it found other channels to east and to west, to Central Africa and to Abyssinia, and retired a little on the side of Egypt. For ten years there ensued a lull, during which the frontier garrisons looked out upon those distant blue hills of Dongola. Behind the violet mists which draped them, lay a land of blood and horror. From time to time some adventurer went south towards those haze-girt mountains, tempted by stories of gum and ivory, but none ever returned. Once a mutilated Egyptian and once a Greek woman, mad with thirst and fear, made their way to the lines. They were the only exports of that country of darkness. Sometimes the sunset would turn those distant mists into a bank of crimson, and the dark mountains would rise from that sinister reek like islands in a sea of blood. It seemed a grim symbol in the southern heaven when seen from the fort-capped hills by Wady Halfa.

Ten years of lust in Khartoum, ten years of silent work in Cairo, and then all was ready, and it was time for civilisation to take a trip south once more, travelling, as her wont is, in an armoured train. Everything was ready, down to the last pack-saddle of the last camel, and yet no one suspected it, for an unconstitutional Government has its advantages. A great administrator had argued, and managed, and cajoled; a great soldier had organised and planned, and made piastres do the work of pounds. And then one night these two master spirits met and clasped hands, and the soldier vanished away upon some business of his own. And just at that very time Bimbashi Hilary Joyce, seconded from the Royal Mallow Fusiliers, and temporarily attached to the Ninth Soudanese, made his first appearance in Cairo.

Napoleon had said, and Hilary Joyce had noted, that great reputations are only to be made in the East. Here he was in the East with four tin cases of baggage, a Wilkinson sword, a Bond's slug-throwing pistol, and a copy of

Green's Introduction to the Study of Arabic. With such a start, and the blood of youth running hot in his veins, everything seemed easy. He was a little frightened of the General, he had heard stories of his sternness to young officers, but with tact and suavity he hoped for the best. So, leaving his effects at Shepheard's Hotel, he reported himself at headquarters.

It was not the General, but the head of the Intelligence Department who received him, the Chief being still absent upon that business which had called him. Hilary Joyce found himself in the presence of a short, thick-set officer, with a gentle voice and a placid expression which covered a remarkably acute and energetic spirit. With that quiet smile and guileless manner he had undercut and outwitted the most cunning of Orientals. He stood, a cigarette between his fingers, looking at the new-comer.

"I heard that you had come. Sorry the Chief isn't here to see you. Gone up to the frontier, you know."

"My regiment is at Wady Halfa. I suppose, sir, that I should report myself there at once?"

"No; I was to give you your orders." He led the way to a map upon the wall, and pointed with the end of his cigarette. "You see this place. It's the Oasis of Kurkur — a little quiet, I am afraid, but excellent air. You are to get out there as quick as possible. You'll find a company of the Ninth, and half a squadron of cavalry. You will be in command."

Hilary Joyce looked at the name, printed at the intersection of two black lines, without another dot upon the map for several inches round it.

"A village, sir?"

"No, a well. Not very good water, I'm afraid, but you soon get accustomed to natron. It's an important post, as being at the junction of two caravan routes. All routes are closed now, of course, but still you never know who *might* come along them."

"We are there, I presume, to prevent raiding?"

"Well, between you and me, there's really nothing to raid. You are there to intercept messengers. They must call at the wells. Of course you have only just come out, but you probably understand already enough about the conditions of this country to know that there is a great deal of disaffection about, and that the Khalifa is likely to try and keep in touch with his adherents. Then, again, Senoussi lives up that way" — he waved his cigarette to the westward—"the Khalifa might send a message to him along that route. Anyhow, your duty is to arrest every one coming along, and get some account of him before you let him go. You don’t talk Arabic, I suppose?”

“I am learning, sir.”

“Well, well, you’ll have time enough for study there. And you’ll have a native officer, Ali something or other, who speaks English, and can interpret for you. Well, good-bye — I’ll tell the Chief that you reported yourself. Get on to your post now as quickly as you can.”

Railway to Baliani, the post-boat to Assouan, and then two days on a camel in the Libyan Desert, with an Ababdeh guide, and three baggage-camels to tie one down to their own exasperating pace. However, even two and a half miles an hour mount up in time, and at last, on the third evening, from the blackened slag-heap of a hill which is called the Jebel Kurkur, Hilary Joyce looked down upon a distant clump of palms, and thought that this cool patch of green in the midst of the merciless blacks and yellows was the fairest colour effect that he had ever seen. An hour later he had ridden into the little camp, the guard had turned out to salute him, his native subordinate had greeted him in excellent English, and he had fairly entered into his own.

It was not an exhilarating place for a lengthy residence. There was one large bowl-shaped, grassy depression sloping down to the three pits of brown and brackish water. There was the grove of palm trees also, beautiful to look upon, but exasperating in view of the fact that Nature has provided her least shady trees on the very spot where shade is needed most. A single widespread acacia did something to restore the balance. Here Hilary Joyce slumbered in the heat, and in the cool he inspected his square-shouldered, spindle-shanked Soudanese, with their cheery black faces and their funny little pork-pie forage caps. Joyce was a martinet at drill, and the blacks loved being drilled, so the Bimbashi was soon popular among them. But one day was exactly like another. The weather, the view, the employment, the food — everything was the same. At the end of three weeks he felt that he had been there for interminable years. And then at last there came something to break the monotony.

One evening, as the sun was sinking, Hilary Joyce rode slowly down the old caravan road. It had a fascination for him, this narrow track, winding among the boulders and curving up the nullahs, for he remembered how in the map it had gone on and on, stretching away into the unknown heart of Africa. The countless pads of innumerable camels through many centuries had beaten it smooth, so that now, unused and deserted, it still wound away, the strangest of roads, a foot broad, and perhaps two thousand miles in length. Joyce wondered as he rode how long it was since any traveller had journeyed up it from the south, and then he raised his eyes, and there was a man coming along the path.

For an instant Joyce thought that it might be one of his own men, but a second glance assured him that this could not be so. The stranger was dressed in the flowing robes of an Arab, and not in the close-fitting khaki of a soldier. He was very tall, and a high turban made him seem gigantic. He strode swiftly along, with head erect, and the bearing of a man who knows no fear.

Who could he be, this formidable giant coming out of the unknown? The percursor possibly of a horde of savage spearmen. And where could he have walked from? The nearest well was a long hundred miles down the track. At any rate the frontier post of Kurkur could not afford to receive casual visitors. Hilary Joyce whisked round his horse, galloped into camp, and gave the alarm. Then, with twenty horsemen at his back, he rode out again to reconnoitre.

The man was still coming on in spite of these hostile preparations. For an instant he had hesitated when first he saw the cavalry, but escape was out of the question, and he advanced with the air of one who makes the best of a bad job. He made no resistance, and said nothing when the hands of two troopers clutched at his shoulders, but walked quietly between their horses into camp. Shortly afterwards the patrols came in again. There were no signs of any Dervishes. The man was alone. A splendid trotting camel had been found lying dead a little way down the track. The mystery of the stranger's arrival was explained. But why, and whence, and whither? — these were questions for which a zealous officer must find an answer.

Hilary Joyce was disappointed that there were no Dervishes. It would have been a great start for him in the Egyptian army had he fought a little action on his own account. But even as it was, he had a rare chance of impressing the authorities. He would love to show his capacity to the head of the Intelligence, and even more to that grim Chief who never forgot what was smart, or forgave what was slack. The prisoner's dress and bearing showed that he was of importance. Mean men do not ride pure-bred trotting camels. Joyce sponged his head with cold water, drank a cup of strong coffee, put on an imposing official tarboosh instead of his sun-helmet, and formed himself into a court of inquiry and judgment under the acacia tree.

He would have liked his people to have seen him now, with his two black orderlies in waiting, and his Egyptian native officer at his side. He sat behind a camp-table, and the prisoner, strongly guarded, was led up to him. The man was a handsome fellow, with bold grey eyes and a long black beard.

“Why!” cried Joyce, “the rascal is making faces at me.”

A curious contraction had passed over the man’s features, but so swiftly that it might have been a nervous twitch. He was now a model of Oriental gravity.

“Ask him who he is, and what he wants?”

The native officer did so, but the stranger made no reply, save that the same sharp spasm passed once more over his face.

“Well, I’m blessed!” cried Hilary Joyce. “Of all the impudent scoundrels! He keeps on winking at me. Who are you, you rascal? Give an account of yourself! D’ye hear?”

But the tall Arab was as impervious to English as to Arabic. The Egyptian tried again and again. The prisoner looked at Joyce with his inscrutable eyes, and occasionally twitched his face at him, but never opened his mouth. The Bimbashi scratched his head in bewilderment.

“Look here, Mahomet Ali, we’ve got to get some sense out of this fellow. You say there are no papers on him?”

“No, sir; we found no papers.”

“No clue of any kind?”

“He has come far, sir. A trotting camel does not die easily. He has come from Dongola, at least.”

“Well, we must get him to talk.”

“It is possible that he is deaf and dumb.”

“Not he. I never saw a man look more all there in my life.”

“You might send him across to Assouan.”

“And give some one else the credit! No, thank you. This is my bird. But how are we going to get him to find his tongue?”

The Egyptian’s dark eyes skirted the encampment and rested on the cook’s fire.

“Perhaps,” said he, “if the Bimbashi thought fit — —” He looked at the prisoner and then at the burning wood.

"No, no, it wouldn't do. No, by Jove, that's going too far."

"A very little might do it."

"No, no. It's all very well here, but it would sound just awful if ever it got as far as Fleet Street. But, I say," he whispered, "we might frighten him a bit. There's no harm in that."

"No, sir."

"Tell them to undo the man's galabeeah. Order them to put a horseshoe in the fire and make it red-hot."

The prisoner watched the proceedings with an air which had more of amusement than of uneasiness. He never winced as the black sergeant approached with the glowing shoe held upon two bayonets.

"Will you speak now?" asked the Bimbashi savagely.

The prisoner smiled gently and stroked his beard.

"Oh, chuck the infernal thing away!" cried Joyce, jumping up in a passion. "There's no use trying to bluff the fellow. He knows we won't do it. But I *can* and I *will* flog him, and you tell him from me that if he hasn't found his tongue by to-morrow morning, I'll take the skin off his back as sure as my name's Joyce. Have you said all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you can sleep upon it, you beauty, and a good night's rest may it give you!"

He adjourned the Court, and the prisoner, as imperturbable as ever, was led away by the guard to his supper of rice and water.

Hilary Joyce was a kind-hearted man, and his own sleep was considerably disturbed by the prospect of the punishment which he must inflict next day. He had hopes that the mere sight of the koorbash and the thongs might prevail over his prisoner's obstinacy. And then, again, he thought how shocking it would be if the man proved to be really dumb after all. The possibility shook him so that he had almost determined by daybreak that he would send the stranger on unhurt to Assouan. And yet what a tame conclusion it would be to the incident! He lay upon his angareeb still debating it when the question suddenly and effectively settled itself. Ali Mahomet rushed into his tent.

"Sir," he cried, "the prisoner is gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir, and your own best riding camel as well. There is a slit cut in the tent, and he got away unseen in the early morning."

The Bimbashi acted with all energy. Cavalry rode along every track; scouts examined the soft sand of the wadys for signs of the fugitive, but no trace was discovered. The man had utterly disappeared. With a heavy heart Hilary Joyce wrote an official report of the matter and forwarded it to Assouan. Five days later there came a curt order from the Chief that he should report himself there. He feared the worst from the stern soldier, who spared others as little as he spared himself.

And his worst forebodings were realised. Travel-stained and weary, he reported himself one night at the General's quarters. Behind a table piled with papers and strewn with maps the famous soldier and his Chief of Intelligence were deep in plans and figures. Their greeting was a cold one.

"I understand, Captain Joyce," said the General, "that you have allowed a very important prisoner to slip through your fingers."

"I am sorry, sir."

"No doubt. But that will not mend matters. Did you ascertain anything about him before you lost him?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"I could get nothing out of him, sir."

"Did you try?"

"Yes, sir; I did what I could."

"What did you do?"

"Well, sir, I threatened to use physical force."

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing."

"What was he like?"

"A tall man, sir. Rather a desperate character, I should think."

"Any way by which we could identify him?"

"A long black beard, sir. Grey eyes. And a nervous way of twitching his face."

"Well, Captain Joyce," said the General, in his stern, inflexible voice, "I cannot congratulate you upon your first exploit in the Egyptian army. You are aware that every English officer in this force is a picked man. I have the whole British army from which to draw. It is necessary, therefore, that I should insist upon the very highest efficiency. It would be unfair upon the others to pass over any obvious want of zeal or intelligence. You are seconded from the Royal Mallows, I understand?"

“Yes, sir.”

“I have no doubt that your Colonel will be glad to see you fulfilling your regimental duties again.”

Hilary Joyce’s heart was too heavy for words. He was silent.

“I will let you know my final decision to-morrow morning.”

Joyce saluted and turned upon his heel.

“You can sleep upon that, you beauty, and a good night’s rest may it give you!”

Joyce turned in bewilderment. Where had those words been used before? Who was it who had used them?

The General was standing erect. Both he and the Chief of the Intelligence were laughing. Joyce stared at the tall figure, the erect bearing, the inscrutable grey eyes.

“Good Lord!” he gasped.

“Well, well, Captain Joyce, we are quits!” said the General, holding out his hand. “You gave me a bad ten minutes with that infernal red-hot horseshoe of yours. I’ve done as much for you. I don’t think we can spare you for the Royal Mallows just yet awhile.”

“But, sir; but —— !”

“The fewer questions the better, perhaps. But of course it must seem rather amazing. I had a little private business with the Kabbabish. It must be done in person. I did it, and came to your post in my return. I kept on winking at you as a sign that I wanted a word with you alone.”

“Yes, yes. I begin to understand.”

“I couldn’t give it away before all those blacks, or where should I have been the next time I used my false beard and Arab dress? You put me in a very awkward position. But at last I had a word alone with your Egyptian officer, who managed my escape all right.”

“He! Mahomet Ali!”

“I ordered him to say nothing. I had a score to settle with you. But we dine at eight, Captain Joyce. We live plainly here, but I think I can do you a little better than you did me at Kurkur.”

THE SURGEON OF GASTER FELL: HOW THE WOMAN CAME TO KIRKBY-MALHOUSE

Bleak and wind-swept is the little town of Kirkby-Malhouse, harsh and forbidding are the fells upon which it stands. It stretches in a single line of grey-stone, slate-roofed houses, dotted down the furze-clad slope of the rolling moor.

In this lonely and secluded village, I, James Upperton, found myself in the summer of ‘85. Little as the hamlet had to offer, it contained that for which I yearned above all things — seclusion and freedom from all which might distract my mind from the high and weighty subjects which engaged it. But the inquisitiveness of my landlady made my lodgings undesirable and I determined to seek new quarters.

As it chanced, I had in one of my rambles come upon an isolated dwelling in the very heart of these lonely moors, which I at once determined should be my own. It was a two-roomed cottage, which had once belonged to some shepherd, but had long been deserted, and was crumbling rapidly to ruin. In the winter floods, the Gaster Beck, which runs down Gaster Fell, where the little dwelling stood, had overswept its banks and torn away a part of the wall. The roof was in ill case, and the scattered slates lay thick amongst the grass. Yet the main shell of the house stood firm and true; and it was no great task for me to have all that was amiss set right.

The two rooms I laid out in a widely different manner — my own tastes are of a Spartan turn, and the outer chamber was so planned as to accord with them. An oil-stove by Rippingille of Birmingham furnished me with the means of cooking; while two great bags, the one of flour, and the other of potatoes, made me independent of all supplies from without. In diet I had long been a Pythagorean, so that the scraggy, long-limbed sheep which browsed upon the wiry grass by the Gaster Beck had little to fear from their new companion. A nine-gallon cask of oil served me as a sideboard; while a square table, a deal chair and a truckle-bed completed the list of my domestic fittings. At the head of my couch hung two unpainted shelves — the lower for my dishes and cooking utensils, the upper for the few portraits which took me back to the little that was pleasant in the long, wearisome toiling for wealth and for pleasure which had marked the life I had left behind.

If this dwelling-room of mine were plain even to squalor, its poverty was more than atoned for by the luxury of the chamber which was destined to serve me as my study. I had ever held that it was best for my mind to be surrounded by such objects as would be in harmony with the studies which occupied it, and that the loftiest and most ethereal conditions of thought are only possible amid surroundings which please the eye and gratify the senses. The room which I had set apart for my mystic studies was set forth in a style as gloomy and majestic as the thoughts and aspirations with which it was to harmonise. Both walls and ceilings were covered with a paper of the richest and glossiest black, on which was traced a lurid and arabesque pattern of dead gold. A black velvet curtain covered the single diamond-paned window; while a thick, yielding carpet of the same material prevented the sound of my own footfalls, as I paced backward and forward, from breaking the current of my thought. Along the cornices ran gold rods, from which depended six pictures, all of the sombre and imaginative caste, which chimed best with my fancy.

And yet it was destined that ere ever I reached this quiet harbour I should learn that I was still one of humankind, and that it is an ill thing to strive to break the bond which binds us to our fellows. It was but two nights before the date I had fixed upon for my change of dwelling, when I was conscious of a bustle in the house beneath, with the bearing of heavy burdens up the creaking stair, and the harsh voice of my landlady, loud in welcome and protestations of joy. From time to time, amid the whirl of words, I could hear a gentle and softly modulated voice, which struck pleasantly upon my ear after the long weeks during which I had listened only to the rude dialect of the dalesmen. For an hour I could hear the dialogue beneath — the high voice and the low, with clatter of cup and clink of spoon, until at last a light, quick step passed my study door, and I knew that my new fellow-lodger had sought her room.

On the morning after this incident I was up be-times, as is my wont; but I was surprised, on glancing from my window, to see that our new inmate was earlier still. She was walking down the narrow pathway, which zigzags over the fell — a tall woman, slender, her head sunk upon her breast, her arms filled with a bristle of wild flowers, which she had gathered in her morning rambles. The white and pink of her dress, and the touch of deep red ribbon in her broad drooping hat, formed a pleasant dash of colour against the dun-tinted landscape. She was some distance off when I first set eyes upon her, yet I knew that this wandering woman could be none other than our arrival of last night, for there was a grace and refinement in her bearing which marked her from the dwellers of the fells. Even as I watched she passed swiftly and lightly down the pathway, and turning through the wicket gate, at the further end of our cottage garden, she seated herself upon the green bank which faced my window, and strewing her flowers in front of her, set herself to arrange them.

As she sat there, with the rising sun at her back, and the glow of the morning spreading like an aureole around her stately and well-poised head, I could see that she was a woman of extraordinary personal beauty. Her face was Spanish rather than English in its type — oval, olive, with black, sparkling eyes, and a sweetly sensitive mouth. From under the broad straw hat two thick coils of blue-black hair curved down on either side of her graceful queenly neck. I was surprised, as I watched her, to see that her shoes and skirt bore witness to a journey rather than to a mere morning ramble. Her light dress was stained, wet and bedraggled; while her boots were thick with the yellow soil of the fells. Her face, too, wore a weary expression, and her young beauty seemed to be clouded over by the shadow of inward trouble. Even as I watched her, she burst suddenly into wild weeping, and throwing down her bundle of flowers ran swiftly into the house.

Distrait as I was and weary of the ways of the world, I was conscious of a sudden pang of sympathy and grief as I looked upon the spasm of despair which seemed to convulse this strange and beautiful woman. I bent to my books, and yet my thoughts would ever turn to her proud clear-cut face, her weather-stained dress, her drooping head, and the sorrow which lay in each line and feature of her pensive face.

Mrs. Adams, my landlady, was wont to carry up my frugal breakfast; yet it was very rarely that I allowed her to break the current of my thoughts, or to draw my mind by her idle chatter from weightier things. This morning, however, for once, she found me in a listening mood, and with little prompting, proceeded to pour into my ears all that she knew of our beautiful visitor.

“Miss Eva Cameron be her name, sir,” she said: “but who she be, or where she came fra, I know little more than yoursel’. Maybe it was the same reason that brought her to Kirkby-Malhouse as fetched you there yoursel’, sir.”

“Possibly,” said I, ignoring the covert question; “but I should hardly have thought that Kirkby-Malhouse was a place which offered any great attractions to a young lady.”

“Heh, sir!” she cried, “there’s the wonder of it. The leddy has just come fra France; and how her folk come to learn of me is just a wonder. A week ago, up comes a man to my door — a fine man, sir, and a gentleman, as one could see with half an eye. ‘You are Mrs. Adams,’ says he. ‘I engage your rooms for Miss Cameron,’ says he. ‘She will be here in a week,’ says he; and then off without a word of terms. Last night there comes the young leddy hersel’ — soft-spoken and downcast, with a touch of the French in her speech. But my sakes, sir! I must away and mak’ her some tea, for she’ll feel lonesome-like, poor lamb, when she wakes under a strange roof.”

HOW I WENT FORTH TO GASTER FELL

I was still engaged upon my breakfast when I heard the clatter of dishes and the landlady's footfall as she passed toward her new lodger's room. An instant afterward she had rushed down the passage and burst in upon me with uplifted hand and startled eyes. "Lord 'a mercy, sir!" she cried, "and asking your pardon for troubling you, but I'm feared o' the young leddy, sir; she is not in her room."

"Why, there she is," said I, standing up and glancing through the casement. "She has gone back for the flowers she left upon the bank."

"Oh, sir, see her boots and her dress!" cried the landlady wildly. "I wish her mother was here, sir — I do. Where she has been is more than I ken, but her bed has not been lain on this night."

"She has felt restless, doubtless, and went for a walk, though the hour was certainly a strange one."

Mrs. Adams pursed her lip and shook her head. But then as she stood at the casement, the girl beneath looked smilingly up at her and beckoned to her with a merry gesture to open the window.

"Have you my tea there?" she asked in a rich, clear voice, with a touch of the mincing French accent.

"It is in your room, miss."

"Look at my boots, Mrs. Adams!" she cried, thrusting them out from under her skirt. "These fells of yours are dreadful places — *effroyable* — one inch, two inch; never have I seen such mud! My dress, too — *voilà*!"

"Eh, miss, but you are in a pickle," cried the landlady, as she gazed down at the bedraggled gown. "But you must be main weary and heavy for sleep."

"No, no," she answered laughingly, "I care not for sleep. What is sleep? it is a little death — *voilà tout*. But for me to walk, to run, to breathe the air — that is to live. I was not tired, and so all night I have explored these fells of Yorkshire."

"Lord 'a mercy, miss, and where did you go?" asked Mrs. Adams.

She waved her hand round in a sweeping gesture which included the whole western horizon. "There," she cried. "O comme elles sont tristes et sauvages, ces collines! But I have flowers here. You will give me water, will you not? They will wither else.” She gathered her treasures in her lap, and a moment later we heard her light, springy footfall upon the stair.

So she had been out all night, this strange woman. What motive could have taken her from her snug room on to the bleak, wind-swept hills? Could it be merely the restlessness, the love of adventure of a young girl? Or was there, possibly, some deeper meaning in this nocturnal journey?

Deep as were the mysteries which my studies had taught me to solve, here was a human problem which for the moment at least was beyond my comprehension. I had walked out on the moor in the forenoon, and on my return, as I topped the brow that overlooks the little town, I saw my fellow-lodger some little distance off amongst the gorse. She had raised a light easel in front of her, and, with papered board laid across it, was preparing to paint the magnificent landscape of rock and moor which stretched away in front of her. As I watched her I saw that she was looking anxiously to right and left. Close by me a pool of water had formed in a hollow. Dipping the cup of my pocket-flask into it, I carried it across to her.

“Miss Cameron, I believe,” said I. “I am your fellow-lodger. Upperton is my name. We must introduce ourselves in these wilds if we are not to be for ever strangers.”

“Oh, then, you live also with Mrs. Adams!” she cried. “I had thought that there were none but peasants in this strange place.”

“I am a visitor, like yourself,” I answered. “I am a student, and have come for quiet and repose, which my studies demand.”

“Quiet, indeed!” said she, glancing round at the vast circle of silent moors, with the one tiny line of grey cottages which sloped down beneath us.

“And yet not quiet enough,” I answered, laughing, “for I have been forced to move further into the fells for the absolute peace which I require.”

“Have you, then, built a house upon the fells?” she asked, arching her eyebrows.

“I have, and hope within a few days to occupy it.”

“Ah, but that is *triste*,” she cried. “And where is it, then, this house which you have built?”

“It is over yonder,” I answered. “See that stream which lies like a silver band upon the distant moor? It is the Gaster Beck, and it runs through Gaster Fell.”

She started, and turned upon me her great dark, questioning eyes with a look in which surprise, incredulity, and something akin to horror seemed to be struggling for mastery.

“And you will live on the Gaster Fell?” she cried.

“So I have planned. But what do you know of Gaster Fell, Miss Cameron?” I asked. “I had thought that you were a stranger in these parts.”

“Indeed, I have never been here before,” she answered. “But I have heard my brother talk of these Yorkshire moors; and, if I mistake not, I have heard him name this very one as the wildest and most savage of them all.”

“Very likely,” said I carelessly. “It is indeed a dreary place.”

“Then why live there?” she cried eagerly. “Consider the loneliness, the barrenness, the want of all comfort and of all aid, should aid be needed.”

“Aid! What aid should be needed on Gaster Fell?”

She looked down and shrugged her shoulders. “Sickness may come in all places,” said she. “If I were a man I do not think I would live alone on Gaster Fell.”

“I have braved worse dangers than that,” said I, laughing; “but I fear that your picture will be spoiled, for the clouds are banking up, and already I feel a few raindrops.”

Indeed, it was high time we were on our way to shelter, for even as I spoke there came the sudden, steady swish of the shower. Laughing merrily, my companion threw her light shawl over her head, and, seizing picture and easel, ran with the lithe grace of a young fawn down the furze-clad slope, while I followed after with camp-stool and paint-box.

* * *

It was the eve of my departure from Kirkby-Malhouse that we sat upon the green bank in the garden, she with dark, dreamy eyes looking sadly out over the sombre fells; while I, with a book upon my knee, glanced covertly at her lovely profile and marvelled to myself how twenty years of life could have stamped so sad and wistful an expression upon it.

“You have read much,” I remarked at last. “Women have opportunities now such as their mothers never knew. Have you ever thought of going further — of seeking a course of college or even a learned profession?”

She smiled wearily at the thought.

“I have no aim, no ambition,” she said. “My future is black — confused — a chaos. My life is like to one of these paths upon the fells. You have seen them, Monsieur Upperton. They are smooth and straight and clear where they begin; but soon they wind to left and wind to right, and so mid rocks and crags until they lose themselves in some quagmire. At Brussels my path was straight; but now, *mon Dieu!* who is there can tell me where it leads?”

“It might take no prophet to do that, Miss Cameron,” quoth I, with the fatherly manner which two-score years may show toward one. “If I may read your life, I would venture to say that you were destined to fulfil the lot of women — to make some good man happy, and to shed around, in some wider circle, the pleasure which your society has given me since first I knew you.”

“I will never marry,” said she, with a sharp decision, which surprised and somewhat amused me.

“Not marry — and why?”

A strange look passed over her sensitive features, and she plucked nervously at the grass on the bank beside her.

“I dare not,” said she in a voice that quivered with emotion.

“Dare not?”

“It is not for me. I have other things to do. That path of which I spoke is one which I must tread alone.”

“But this is morbid,” said I. “Why should your lot, Miss Cameron, be separated from that of my own sisters, or the thousand other young ladies whom every season brings out into the world? But perhaps it is that you have a fear and distrust of mankind. Marriage brings a risk as well as a happiness.”

“The risk would be with the man who married me,” she cried. And then in an instant, as though she had said too much, she sprang to her feet and drew her mantle round her. “The night air is chill, Mr. Upperton,” said she, and so swept swiftly away, leaving me to muse over the strange words which had fallen from her lips.

Clearly, it was time that I should go. I set my teeth and vowed that another day should not have passed before I should have snapped this newly formed tie and sought the lonely retreat which awaited me upon the moors. Breakfast was hardly over in the morning before a peasant dragged up to the door the rude hand-cart which was to convey my few personal belongings to my new dwelling. My fellow-lodger had kept her room; and, steeled as my mind was against her influence, I was yet conscious of a little throb of disappointment that she should allow me to depart without a word of farewell. My hand-cart with its load of books had already started, and I, having shaken hands with Mrs. Adams, was about to follow it, when there was a quick scurry of feet on the stair, and there she was beside me all panting with her own haste.

“Then you go — you really go?” said she.

“My studies call me.”

“And to Gaster Fell?” she asked.

“Yes; to the cottage which I have built there.”

“And you will live alone there?”

“With my hundred companions who lie in that cart.”

“Ah, books!” she cried, with a pretty shrug of her graceful shoulders. “But you will make me a promise?”

“What is it?” I asked, in surprise.

“It is a small thing. You will not refuse me?”

“You have but to ask it.”

She bent forward her beautiful face with an expression of the most intense earnestness. “You will bolt your door at night?” said she; and was gone ere I could say a word in answer to her extraordinary request.

It was a strange thing for me to find myself at last duly installed in my lonely dwelling. For me, now, the horizon was bounded by the barren circle of wiry, unprofitable grass, patched over with furze bushes and scarred by the profusion of Nature’s gaunt and granite ribs. A duller, wearier waste I have never seen; but its dulness was its very charm.

And yet the very first night which I spent at Gaster Fell there came a strange incident to lead my thoughts back once more to the world which I had left behind me.

It had been a sullen and sultry evening, with great livid cloud-banks mustering in the west. As the night wore on, the air within my little cabin became closer and more oppressive. A weight seemed to rest upon my brow and my chest. From far away the low rumble of thunder came moaning over the moor. Unable to sleep, I dressed, and standing at my cottage door, looked on the black solitude which surrounded me.

Taking the narrow sheep path which ran by this stream, I strolled along it for some hundred yards, and had turned to retrace my steps, when the moon was finally buried beneath an ink-black cloud, and the darkness deepened so suddenly that I could see neither the path at my feet, the stream upon my right, nor the rocks upon my left. I was standing groping about in the thick gloom, when there came a crash of thunder with a flash of lightning which lighted up the whole vast fell, so that every bush and rock stood out clear and hard in the vivid light. It was but for an instant, and yet that momentary view struck a thrill of fear and astonishment through me, for in my very path, not twenty yards before me, there stood a woman, the livid light beating upon her face and showing up every detail of her dress and features.

There was no mistaking those dark eyes, that tall, graceful figure. It was she — Eva Cameron, the woman whom I thought I had for ever left. For an instant I stood petrified, marvelling whether this could indeed be she, or whether it was some figment conjured up by my excited brain. Then I ran swiftly forward in the direction where I had seen her, calling loudly upon her, but without reply. Again I called, and again no answer came back, save the melancholy wail of the owl. A second flash illuminated the landscape, and the moon burst out from behind its cloud. But I could not, though I climbed upon a knoll which overlooked the whole moor, see any sign of this strange midnight wanderer. For an hour or more I traversed the fell, and at last found myself back at my little cabin, still uncertain as to whether it had been a woman or a shadow upon which I gazed.

OF THE GREY COTTAGE IN THE GLEN

It was either on the fourth or the fifth day after I had taken possession of my cottage that I was astonished to hear footsteps upon the grass outside, quickly followed by a crack, as from a stick upon the door. The explosion of an infernal machine would hardly have surprised or discomfited me more. I had hoped to have shaken off all intrusion for ever, yet here was somebody beating at my door with as little ceremony as if it had been a village ale-house. Hot with anger, I flung down my book and withdrew the bolt just as my visitor had raised his stick to renew his rough application for admittance. He was a tall, powerful man, tawny-bearded and deep-chested, clad in a loose-fitting suit of tweed, cut for comfort rather than elegance. As he stood in the shimmering sunlight, I took in every feature of his face. The large, fleshy nose; the steady blue eyes, with their thick thatch of overhanging brows; the broad forehead, all knitted and lined with furrows, which were strangely at variance with his youthful bearing. In spite of his weather-stained felt hat, and the coloured handkerchief slung round his muscular brown neck, I could see at a glance he was a man of breeding and education. I had been prepared for some wandering shepherd or uncouth tramp, but this apparition fairly disconcerted me.

“You look astonished,” said he, with a smile. “Did you think, then, that you were the only man in the world with a taste for solitude? You see that there are other hermits in the wilderness besides yourself.”

“Do you mean to say that you live here?” I asked in no conciliatory voice.

“Up yonder,” he answered, tossing his head backward. “I thought as we were neighbours, Mr. Upperton, that I could not do less than look in and see if I could assist you in any way.”

“Thank you,” I said coldly, standing with my hand upon the latch of the door. “I am a man of simple tastes, and you can do nothing for me. You have the advantage of me in knowing my name.”

He appeared to be chilled by my ungracious manner.

“I learned it from the masons who were at work here,” he said. “As for me, I am a surgeon, the surgeon of Gaster Fell. That is the name I have gone by in these parts, and it serves as well as another.”

“Not much room for practice here?” I observed.

“Not a soul except yourself for miles on either side.”

“You appear to have had need of some assistance yourself,” I remarked, glancing at a broad white splash, as from the recent action of some powerful acid, upon his sunburnt cheek.

“That is nothing,” he answered, curtly, turning his face half round to hide the mark. “I must get back, for I have a companion who is waiting for me. If I can ever do anything for you, pray let me know. You have only to follow the beck upward for a mile or so to find my place. Have you a bolt on the inside of your door?”

“Yes,” I answered, rather startled at this question.

“Keep it bolted, then,” he said. “The fell is a strange place. You never know who may be about. It is as well to be on the safe side. Good-bye.” He raised his hat, turned on his heel and lounged away along the bank of the little stream.

I was still standing with my hand upon the latch, gazing after my unexpected visitor, when I became aware of yet another dweller in the wilderness. Some distance along the path which the stranger was taking there lay a great grey boulder, and leaning against this was a small, wizened man, who stood erect as the other approached, and advanced to meet him. The two talked for a minute or more, the taller man nodding his head frequently in my direction, as though describing what had passed between us. Then they walked on together, and disappeared in a dip of the fell. Presently I saw them ascending once more some rising ground farther on. My acquaintance had thrown his arm round his elderly friend, either from affection or from a desire to aid him up the steep incline. The square burly figure and its shrivelled, meagre companion stood out against the sky-line, and turning their faces, they looked back at me. At the sight, I slammed the door, lest they should be encouraged to return. But when I peeped from the window some minutes afterward, I perceived that they were gone.

All day I bent over the Egyptian papyrus upon which I was engaged; but neither the subtle reasonings of the ancient philosopher of Memphis, nor the mystic meaning which lay in his pages, could raise my mind from the things of earth. Evening was drawing in before I threw my work aside in despair. My heart was bitter against this man for his intrusion. Standing by the beck which purled past the door of my cabin, I cooled my heated brow, and thought the matter over. Clearly it was the small mystery hanging over these neighbours of mine which had caused my mind to run so persistently on them. That cleared up, they would no longer cause an obstacle to my studies. What was to hinder me, then, from walking in the direction of their dwelling, and observing for myself, without permitting them to suspect my presence, what manner of men they might be? Doubtless, their mode of life would be found to admit of some simple and prosaic explanation. In any case, the evening was fine, and a walk would be bracing for mind and body. Lighting my pipe, I set off over the moors in the direction which they had taken.

About half-way down a wild glen there stood a small clump of gnarled and stunted oak trees. From behind these, a thin dark column of smoke rose into the still evening air. Clearly this marked the position of my neighbour's house. Trending away to the left, I was able to gain the shelter of a line of rocks, and so reach a spot from which I could command a view of the building without exposing myself to any risk of being observed. It was a small, slate-covered cottage, hardly larger than the boulders among which it lay. Like my own cabin, it showed signs of having been constructed for the use of some shepherd; but, unlike mine, no pains had been taken by the tenants to improve and enlarge it. Two little peeping windows, a cracked and weather-beaten door, and a discoloured barrel for catching the rain water, were the only external objects from which I might draw deductions as to the dwellers within. Yet even in these there was food for thought, for as I drew nearer, still concealing myself behind the ridge, I saw that thick bars of iron covered the windows, while the old door was slashed and plated with the same metal. These strange precautions, together with the wild surroundings and unbroken solitude, gave an indescribably ill omen and fearsome character to the solitary building. Thrusting my pipe into my pocket, I crawled upon my hands and knees through the gorse and ferns until I was within a hundred yards of my neighbour's door. There, finding that I could not approach nearer without fear of detection, I crouched down, and set myself to watch.

I had hardly settled into my hiding place, when the door of the cottage swung open, and the man who had introduced himself to me as the surgeon of Gaster Fell came out, bareheaded, with a spade in his hands. In front of the door there was a small cultivated patch containing potatoes, peas and other forms of green stuff, and here he proceeded to busy himself, trimming, weeding and arranging, singing the while in a powerful though not very musical voice. He was all engrossed in his work, with his back to the cottage, when there emerged from the half-open door the same attenuated creature whom I had seen in the morning. I could perceive now that he was a man of sixty, wrinkled, bent, and feeble, with sparse, grizzled hair, and long, colourless face. With a cringing, sidelong gait, he shuffled toward his companion, who was unconscious of his approach until he was close upon him. His light footfall or his breathing may have finally given notice of his proximity, for the worker sprang round and faced him. Each made a quick step toward the other, as though in greeting, and then — even now I feel the horror of the instant — the tall man rushed upon and knocked his companion to the earth, then whipping up his body, ran with great speed over the intervening ground and disappeared with his burden into the house.

Case hardened as I was by my varied life, the suddenness and violence of the thing made me shudder. The man's age, his feeble frame, his humble and deprecating manner, all cried shame against the deed. So hot was my anger, that I was on the point of striding up to the cabin, unarmed as I was, when the sound of voices from within showed me that the victim had recovered. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and all was grey, save a red feather in the cap of Pennigent. Secure in the failing light, I approached near and strained my ears to catch what was passing. I could hear the high, querulous voice of the elder man and the deep, rough monotone of his assailant, mixed with a strange metallic jangling and clanking. Presently the surgeon came out, locked the door behind him and stamped up and down in the twilight, pulling at his hair and brandishing his arms, like a man demented. Then he set off, walking rapidly up the valley, and I soon lost sight of him among the rocks.

When his footsteps had died away in the distance, I drew nearer to the cottage. The prisoner within was still pouring forth a stream of words, and moaning from time to time like a man in pain. These words resolved themselves, as I approached, into prayers — shrill, voluble prayers, pattered forth with the intense earnestness of one who sees impending and imminent danger. There was to me something inexpressibly awesome in this gush of solemn entreaty from the lonely sufferer, meant for no human ear, and jarring upon the silence of the night. I was still pondering whether I should mix myself in the affair or not, when I heard in the distance the sound of the surgeon's returning footfall. At that I drew myself up quickly by the iron bars and glanced in through the diamond-paned window. The interior of the cottage was lighted up by a lurid glow, coming from what I afterward discovered to be a chemical furnace. By its rich light I could distinguish a great litter of retorts, test tubes and condensers, which sparkled over the table, and threw strange, grotesque shadows on the wall. On the further side of the room was a wooden framework resembling a hencoop, and in this, still absorbed in prayer, knelt the man whose voice I heard. The red glow beating upon his upturned face made it stand out from the shadow like a painting from Rembrandt, showing up every wrinkle upon the parchment-like skin. I had but time for a fleeting glance; then, dropping from the window, I made off through the rocks and the heather, nor slackened my pace until I found myself back in my cabin once more. There I threw myself upon my couch, more disturbed and shaken than I had ever thought to feel again.

Such doubts as I might have had as to whether I had indeed seen my former fellow-lodger upon the night of the thunderstorm were resolved the next morning. Strolling along down the path which led to the fell, I saw in one spot where the ground was soft the impressions of a foot — the small, dainty foot of a well-booted woman. That tiny heel and high in-step could have belonged to none other than my companion of Kirkby-Malhouse. I followed her trail for some distance, till it still pointed, so far as I could discern it, to the lonely and ill-omened cottage. What power could there be to draw this tender girl, through wind and rain and darkness, across the fearsome moors to that strange rendezvous?

I have said that a little beck flowed down the valley and past my very door. A week or so after the doings which I have described, I was seated by my window when I perceived something white drifting slowly down the stream. My first thought was that it was a drowning sheep; but picking up my stick, I strolled to the bank and hooked it ashore. On examination it prove to be a large sheet, torn and tattered, with the initials J. C. in the corner. What gave it its sinister significance, however, was that from hem to hem it was all dabbled and discoloured.

Shutting the door of my cabin, I set off up the glen in the direction of the surgeon’s cabin. I had not gone far before I perceived the very man himself. He was walking rapidly along the hillside, beating the furze bushes with a cudgel and bellowing like a madman. Indeed, at the sight of him, the doubts as to his sanity which had risen in my mind were strengthened and confirmed.

As he approached I noticed that his left arm was suspended in a sling. On perceiving me he stood irresolute, as though uncertain whether to come over to me or not. I had no desire for an interview with him, however, so I hurried past him, on which he continued on his way, still shouting and striking about with his club. When he had disappeared over the fells, I made my way down to his cottage, determined to find some clue to what occurred. I was surprised, on reaching it, to find the iron-plated door flung wide open. The ground immediately outside it was marked with the signs of a struggle. The chemical apparatus within and the furniture were all dashed about and shattered. Most suggestive of all, the sinister wooden cage was stained with blood-marks, and its unfortunate occupant had disappeared. My heart was heavy for the little man, for I was assured I should never see him in this world more.

There was nothing in the cabin to throw any light upon the identity of my neighbours. The room was stuffed with chemical instruments. In one corner a small bookcase contained a choice selection of works of science. In another was a pile of geological specimens collected from the limestone.

I caught no glimpse of the surgeon upon my homeward journey; but when I reached my cottage I was astonished and indignant to find that somebody had entered it in my absence. Boxes had been pulled out from under the bed, the curtains disarranged, the chairs drawn out from the wall. Even my study had not been safe from this rough intruder, for the prints of a heavy boot were plainly visible on the ebony-black carpet.

OF THE MAN WHO CAME IN THE NIGHT

The night set in gusty and tempestuous, and the moon was all girt with ragged clouds. The wind blew in melancholy gusts, sobbing and sighing over the moor, and setting all the gorse bushes agroaning. From time to time a little sputter of rain pattered up against the window-pane. I sat until near midnight, glancing over the fragment on immortality by Iamblichus, the Alexandrian platonist, of whom the Emperor Julian said that he was posterior to Plato in time but not in genius. At last, shutting up my book, I opened my door and took a last look at the dreary fell and still more dreary sky. As I protruded my head, a swoop of wind caught me and sent the red ashes of my pipe sparkling and dancing through the darkness. At the same moment the moon shone brilliantly out from between two clouds and I saw, sitting on the hillside, not two hundred yards from my door, the man who called himself the surgeon of Gaster Fell. He was squatted among the heather, his elbows upon his knees, and his chin resting upon his hands, as motionless as a stone, with his gaze fixed steadily upon the door of my dwelling.

At the sight of this ill-omened sentinel, a chill of horror and of fear shot through me, for his gloomy and mysterious associations had cast a glamour round the man, and the hour and place were in keeping with his sinister presence. In a moment, however, a manly glow of resentment and self-confidence drove this petty emotion from my mind, and I strode fearlessly in his direction. He rose as I approached and faced me, with the moon shining on his grave, bearded face and glittering on his eyeballs. “What is the meaning of this?” I cried, as I came upon him. “What right have you to play the spy on me?”

I could see the flush of anger rise on his face. “Your stay in the country has made you forget your manners,” he said. “The moor is free to all.”

“You will say next that my house is free to all,” I said, hotly. “You have had the impertinence to ransack it in my absence this afternoon.”

He started, and his features showed the most intense excitement. “I swear to you that I had no hand in it!” he cried. “I have never set foot in your house in my life. Oh, sir, sir, if you will but believe me, there is a danger hanging over you, and you would do well to be careful.”

“I have had enough of you,” I said. “I saw that cowardly blow you struck when you thought no human eye rested upon you. I have been to your cottage, too, and know all that it has to tell. If there is a law in England, you shall hang for what you have done. As to me, I am an old soldier, sir, and I am armed. I shall not fasten my door. But if you or any other villain attempt to cross my threshold it shall be at your own risk.” With these words, I swung round upon my heel and strode into my cabin.

For two days the wind freshened and increased, with constant squalls of rain until on the third night the most furious storm was raging which I can ever recollect in England. I felt that it was positively useless to go to bed, nor could I concentrate my mind sufficiently to read a book. I turned my lamp half down to moderate the glare, and leaning back in my chair, I gave myself up to reverie. I must have lost all perception of time, for I have no recollection how long I sat there on the borderland betwixt thought and slumber. At last, about 3 or possibly 4 o’clock, I came to myself with a start — not only came to myself, but with every sense and nerve upon the strain. Looking round my chamber in the dim light, I could not see anything to justify my sudden trepidation. The homely room, the rain-blurred window and the rude wooden door were all as they had been. I had begun to persuade myself that some half-formed dream had sent that vague thrill through my nerves, when in a moment I became conscious of what it was. It was a sound — the sound of a human step outside my solitary cottage.

Amid the thunder and the rain and the wind I could hear it — a dull, stealthy footfall, now on the grass, now on the stones — occasionally stopping entirely, then resumed, and ever drawing nearer. I sat breathlessly, listening to the eerie sound. It had stopped now at my very door, and was replaced by a panting and gasping, as of one who has travelled fast and far.

By the flickering light of the expiring lamp I could see that the latch of my door was twitching, as though a gentle pressure was exerted on it from without. Slowly, slowly, it rose, until it was free of the catch, and then there was a pause of a quarter minute or more, while I still sat silent with dilated eyes and drawn sabre. Then, very slowly, the door began to revolve upon its hinges, and the keen air of the night came whistling through the slit. Very cautiously it was pushed open, so that never a sound came from the rusty hinges. As the aperture enlarged, I became aware of a dark, shadowy figure upon my threshold, and of a pale face that looked in at me. The features were human, but the eyes were not. They seemed to burn through the darkness with a greenish brilliancy of their own; and in their baleful, shifty glare I was conscious of the very spirit of murder. Springing from my chair, I had raised my naked sword, when, with a wild shouting, a second figure dashed up to my door. At its approach my shadowy visitant uttered a shrill cry, and fled away across the fells, yelping like a beaten hound.

Tingling with my recent fear, I stood at my door, peering through the night with the discordant cry of the fugitives still ringing in my ears. At that moment a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the whole landscape and made it as clear as day. By its light I saw far away upon the hillside two dark figures pursuing each other with extreme rapidity across the fells. Even at that distance the contrast between them forbid all doubt as to their identity. The first was the small, elderly man, whom I had supposed to be dead; the second was my neighbour, the surgeon. For an instant they stood out clear and hard in the unearthly light; in the next, the darkness had closed over them, and they were gone. As I turned to re-enter my chamber, my foot rattled against something on my threshold. Stooping, I found it was a straight knife, fashioned entirely of lead, and so soft and brittle that it was a strange choice for a weapon. To render it more harmless, the top had been cut square off. The edge, however, had been assiduously sharpened against a stone, as was evident from the markings upon it, so that it was still a dangerous implement in the grasp of a determined man.

And what was the meaning of it all? you ask. Many a drama which I have come across in my wandering life, some as strange and as striking as this one, has lacked the ultimate explanation which you demand. Fate is a grand weaver of tales; but she ends them, as a rule, in defiance of all artistic laws, and with an unbecoming want of regard for literary propriety. As it happens, however, I have a letter before me as I write which I may add without comment, and which will clear all that may remain dark.

“Kirkby Lunatic Asylum,

“*September 4th*, 1885.

“Sir, — I am deeply conscious that some apology and explanation is due to you for the very startling and, in your eyes, mysterious events which have recently occurred, and which have so seriously interfered with the retired existence which you desire to lead. I should have called upon you on the morning after the recapture of my father, but my knowledge of your dislike to visitors and also of — you will excuse my saying it — your very violent temper, led me to think that it was better to communicate with you by letter.

“My poor father was a hard-working general practitioner in Birmingham, where his name is still remembered and respected. About ten years ago he began to show signs of mental aberration, which we were inclined to put down to overwork and the effects of a sunstroke. Feeling my own incompetence to pronounce upon a case of such importance, I at once sought the highest advice in Birmingham and London. Among others we consulted the eminent alienist, Mr. Fraser Brown, who pronounced my father’s case to be intermittent in its nature, but dangerous during the paroxysms. ‘It may take a homicidal, or it may take a religious turn,’ he said; ‘or it may prove to be a mixture of both. For months he may be as well as you or I, and then in a moment he may break out. You will incur a great responsibility if you leave him without supervision.’

“I need say no more, sir. You will understand the terrible task which has fallen upon my poor sister and me in endeavoring to save my father from the asylum which in his sane moments filled him with horror. I can only regret that your peace has been disturbed by our misfortunes, and I offer you in my sister’s name and my own our apologies.

“Yours truly,

“J. Cameron.”

BORROWED SCENES

“It cannot be done. People really would not stand it. I know because I have tried.” — *Extract from an unpublished paper upon George Borrow and his writings.*

Yes, I tried and my experience may interest other people. You must imagine, then, that I am soaked in George Borrow, especially in his *Lavengro* and his *Romany Rye*, that I have modelled both my thoughts, my speech and my style very carefully upon those of the master, and that finally I set forth one summer day actually to lead the life of which I had read. Behold me, then, upon the country road which leads from the railway-station to the Sussex village of Swinehurst.

As I walked, I entertained myself by recollections of the founders of Sussex, of Cerdic that mighty sea-rover, and of Ella his son, said by the bard to be taller by the length of a spear-head than the tallest of his fellows. I mentioned the matter twice to peasants whom I met upon the road. One, a tallish man with a freckled face, sidled past me and ran swiftly towards the station. The other, a smaller and older man, stood entranced while I recited to him that passage of the Saxon Chronicle which begins, “Then came Leija with longships forty-four, and the fyrd went out against him.” I was pointing out to him that the Chronicle had been written partly by the monks of Saint Albans and afterwards by those of Peterborough, but the fellow sprang suddenly over a gate and disappeared.

The village of Swinehurst is a straggling line of half-timbered houses of the early English pattern. One of these houses stood, as I observed, somewhat taller than the rest, and seeing by its appearance and by the sign which hung before it that it was the village inn, I approached it, for indeed I had not broken my fast since I had left London. A stoutish man, five foot eight perhaps in height, with black coat and trousers of a greyish shade, stood outside, and to him I talked in the fashion of the master.

“Why a rose and why a crown?” I asked as I pointed upwards.

He looked at me in a strange manner. The man’s whole appearance was strange. “Why not?” he answered, and shrank a little backwards.

“The sign of a king,” said I.

“Surely,” said he. “What else should we understand from a crown?”

“And which king?” I asked.

“You will excuse me,” said he, and tried to pass.

“Which king?” I repeated.

“How should I know?” he asked.

“You should know by the rose,” said I, “which is the symbol of that Tudor-ap-Tudor, who, coming from the mountains of Wales, yet seated his posterity upon the English throne. Tudor,” I continued, getting between the stranger and the door of the inn, through which he appeared to be desirous of passing, “was of the same blood as Owen Glendower, the famous chieftain, who is by no means to be confused with Owen Gwynedd, the father of Madoc of the Sea, of whom the bard made the famous cnylyn, which runs in the Welsh as follows:—”

I was about to repeat the famous stanza of Dafydd-ap-Gwilyn when the man, who had looked very fixedly and strangely at me as I spoke, pushed past me and entered the inn. “Truly,” said I aloud, “it is surely Swinehurst to which I have come, since the same means the grove of the hogs.” So saying I followed the fellow into the bar parlour, where I perceived him seated in a corner with a large chair in front of him. Four persons of various degrees were drinking beer at a central table, whilst a small man of active build, in a black, shiny suit, which seemed to have seen much service, stood before the empty fireplace. Him I took to be the landlord, and I asked him what I should have for my dinner.

He smiled, and said that he could not tell.

“But surely, my friend,” said I, “you can tell me what is ready?”

“Even that I cannot do,” he answered; “but I doubt not that the landlord can inform us.” On this he rang the bell, and a fellow answered, to whom I put the same question.

“What would you have?” he asked.

I thought of the master, and I ordered a cold leg of pork to be washed down with tea and beer.

“Did you say tea *and* beer?” asked the landlord.

“I did.”

“For twenty-five years have I been in business,” said the landlord, “and never before have I been asked for tea and beer.”

“The gentleman is joking,” said the man with the shining coat.

“Or else — —” said the elderly man in the corner.

“Or what, sir?” I asked.

“Nothing,” said he—”nothing.” There was something very strange in this man in the corner — him to whom I had spoken of Dafydd-ap-Gwilyn.

“Then you are joking,” said the landlord.

I asked him if he had read the works of my master, George Borrow. He said that he had not. I told him that in those five volumes he would not, from cover to cover, find one trace of any sort of a joke. He would also find that my master drank tea and beer together. Now it happens that about tea I have read nothing either in the sagas or in the bardic cnylynions, but, whilst the landlord had departed to prepare my meal, I recited to the company those Icelandic stanzas which praise the beer of Gunnar, the long-haired son of Harold the Bear. Then, lest the language should be unknown to some of them, I recited my own translation, ending with the line —

“If the beer be small, then let the mug be large.”

I then asked the company whether they went to church or to chapel. The question surprised them, and especially the strange man in the corner, upon whom I now fixed my eye. I had read his secret, and as I looked at him he tried to shrink behind the clock-case.

“The church or the chapel?” I asked him.

“The church,” he gasped.

“*Which* church?” I asked.

He shrank farther behind the clock. “I have never been so questioned,” he cried.

I showed him that I knew his secret. “Rome was not built in a day,” said I.

“He! He!” he cried. Then, as I turned away, he put his head from behind the clock-case, and tapped his forehead with his fore-finger. So also did the man with the shiny coat, who stood before the empty fireplace.

Having eaten the cold leg of pork — where is there a better dish, save only boiled mutton with capers? — and having drunk both the tea and the beer, I told the company that such a meal had been called “to box Harry” by the master, who had observed it to be in great favour with commercial gentlemen out of Liverpool. With this information and a stanza or two from Lopez de Vega I left the Inn of the Rose and Crown behind me, having first paid my reckoning. At the door the landlord asked me for my name and address.

“And why?” I asked.

“Lest there should be inquiry for you,” said the landlord.

“But why should they enquire for me?”

“Ah, who knows?” said the landlord, musing. And so I left him at the door of the Inn of the Rose and Crown, whence came, I observed, a great tumult of laughter. “Assuredly,” thought I, “Rome was not built in a day.”

Having walked down the main street of Swinehurst, which, as I have observed, consists of half-timbered buildings in the ancient style, I came out upon the country road, and proceeded to look for those wayside adventures, which are, according to the master, as thick as blackberries for those who seek them upon an English highway. I had already received some boxing lessons before leaving London, so it seemed to me that if I should chance to meet some traveller whose size and age seemed such as to encourage the venture, I would ask him to strip off his coat and settle any differences which we could find in the old English fashion. I waited, therefore, by a stile for any one who should chance to pass, and it was while I stood there that the screaming horror came upon me, even as it came upon the master in the dingle. I gripped the bar of the stile, which was of good British oak. Oh, who can tell the terrors of the screaming horror! That was what I thought as I grasped the oaken bar of the stile. Was it the beer — or was it the tea? Or was it that the landlord was right and that other, the man with the black, shiny coat, he who had answered the sign of the strange man in the corner? But the master drank tea with beer. Yes, but the master also had the screaming horror. All this I thought as I grasped the bar of British oak, which was the top of the stile. For half an hour the horror was upon me. Then it passed, and I was left feeling very weak and still grasping the oaken bar.

I had not moved from the stile, where I had been seized by the screaming horror, when I heard the sound of steps behind me, and turning round I perceived that a pathway led across the field upon the farther side of the stile. A woman was coming towards me along this pathway, and it was evident to me that she was one of those gipsy Rias, of whom the master has said so much. Looking beyond her, I could see the smoke of a fire from a small dingle, which showed where her tribe were camping. The woman herself was of a moderate height, neither tall nor short, with a face which was much sunburned and freckled. I must confess that she was not beautiful, but I do not think that any one, save the master, has found very beautiful women walking about upon the high-roads of England. Such as she was I must make the best of her, and well I knew how to address her, for many times had I admired the mixture of politeness and audacity which should be used in such a case. Therefore, when the woman had come to the stile, I held out my hand and helped her over.

"What says the Spanish poet Calderon?" said I. "I doubt not that you have read the couplet which has been thus Englished:

'Oh, maiden, may I humbly pray
That I may help you on your way.'"

The woman blushed, but said nothing.

"Where," I asked, "are the Romany chals and the Romany chis?"

She turned her head away and was silent.

"Though I am a gorgio," said I, "I know something of the Romany lil," and to prove it I sang the stanza —

"Coliko, coliko saulo wer
Apopli to the farming ker
Will wel and mang him mullo,
Will wel and mang his truppo."

The girl laughed, but said nothing. It appeared to me from her appearance that she might be one of those who make a living at telling fortunes or "dukkering," as the master calls it, at racecourses and other gatherings of the sort.

"Do you dukker?" I asked.

She slapped me on the arm. "Well, you *are* a pot of ginger!" said she.

I was pleased at the slap, for it put me in mind of the peerless Belle. "You can use Long Melford," said I, an expression which, with the master, meant fighting.

"Get along with your sauce!" said she, and struck me again.

"You are a very fine young woman," said I, "and remind me of Grunelda, the daughter of Hjalmar, who stole the golden bowl from the King of the Islands."

She seemed annoyed at this. "You keep a civil tongue, young man," said she.

"I meant no harm, Belle. I was but comparing you to one of whom the saga says her eyes were like the shine of sun upon icebergs."

This seemed to please her, for she smiled. “My name ain’t Belle,” she said at last.

“What is your name?”

“Henrietta.”

“The name of a queen,” I said aloud.

“Go on,” said the girl.

“Of Charles’s queen,” said I, “of whom Waller the poet (for the English also have their poets, though in this respect far inferior to the Basques) — of whom, I say, Waller the poet said:

‘That she was Queen was the Creator’s act,
Belated man could but endorse the fact.’”

“I say!” cried the girl. “How you do go on!”

“So now,” said I, “since I have shown you that you are a queen you will surely give me a choomer” — this being a kiss in Romany talk.

“I’ll give you one on the ear-hole,” she cried.

“Then I will wrestle with you,” said I. “If you should chance to put me down, I will do penance by teaching you the Armenian alphabet — the very word alphabet, as you will perceive, shows us that our letters came from Greece. If, on the other hand, I should chance to put you down, you will give me a choomer.”

I had got so far, and she was climbing the stile with some pretence of getting away from me, when there came a van along the road, belonging, as I discovered, to a baker in Swinehurst. The horse, which was of a brown colour, was such as is bred in the New Forest, being somewhat under fifteen hands and of a hairy, ill-kempt variety. As I know less than the master about horses, I will say no more of this horse, save to repeat that its colour was brown — nor indeed had the horse nor the horse’s colour anything to do with my narrative. I might add, however, that it could either be taken as a small horse or as a large pony, being somewhat tall for the one, but undersized for the other. I have now said enough about this horse, which has nothing to do with my story, and I will turn my attention to the driver.

This was a man with a broad, florid face and brown side-whiskers. He was of a stout build and had rounded shoulders, with a small mole of a reddish colour over his left eyebrow. His jacket was of velveteen, and he had large, iron-shod boots, which were perched upon the splashboard in front of him. He pulled up the van as he came up to the stile near which I was standing with the maiden who had come from the dingle, and in a civil fashion he asked me if I could oblige him with a light for his pipe. Then, as I drew a matchbox from my pocket, he threw his reins over the splashboard, and removing his large, iron-shod boots he descended on to the road. He was a burly man, but inclined to fat and scant of breath. It seemed to me that it was a chance for one of those wayside boxing adventures which were so common in the olden times. It was my intention that I should fight the man, and that the maiden from the dingle standing by me should tell me when to use my right or my left, as the case might be, picking me up also in case I should be so unfortunate as to be knocked down by the man with the iron-shod boots and the small mole of a reddish colour over his left eyebrow.

"Do you use Long Melford?" I asked.

He looked at me in some surprise, and said that any mixture was good enough for him.

"By Long Melford," said I, "I do not mean, as you seem to think, some form of tobacco, but I mean that art and science of boxing which was held in such high esteem by our ancestors, that some famous professors of it, such as the great Gully, have been elected to the highest offices of the State. There were men of the highest character amongst the bruisers of England, of whom I would particularly mention Tom of Hereford, better known as Tom Spring, though his father's name, as I have been given to understand, was Winter. This, however, has nothing to do with the matter in hand, which is that you must fight me."

The man with the florid face seemed very much surprised at my words, so that I cannot think that adventures of this sort were as common as I had been led by the master to expect.

"Fight!" said he. "What about?"

"It is a good old English custom," said I, "by which we may determine which is the better man."

"I've nothing against you," said he.

"Nor I against you," I answered. "So that we will fight for love, which was an expression much used in olden days. It is narrated by Harold Sygvynson that among the Danes it was usual to do so even with battle-axes, as is told in his second set of runes. Therefore you will take off your coat and fight." As I spoke, I stripped off my own.

The man’s face was less florid than before. “I’m not going to fight,” said he.

“Indeed you are,” I answered, “and this young woman will doubtless do you the service to hold your coat.”

“You’re clean balmy,” said Henrietta.

“Besides,” said I, “if you will not fight me for love, perhaps you will fight me for this,” and I held out a sovereign. “Will you hold his coat?” I said to Henrietta.

“I’ll hold the thick ‘un,” said she.

“No, you don’t,” said the man, and put the sovereign into the pocket of his trousers, which were of a corduroy material. “Now,” said he, “what am I do to earn this?”

“Fight,” said I.

“How do you do it?” he asked.

“Put up your hands,” I answered.

He put them up as I had said, and stood there in a sheepish manner with no idea of anything further. It seemed to me that if I could make him angry he would do better, so I knocked off his hat, which was black and hard, of the kind which is called billy-cock.

“Heh, guv’nor!” he cried, “what are you up to?”

“That was to make you angry,” said I.

“Well, I am angry,” said he.

“Then here is your hat,” said I, “and afterwards we shall fight.”

I turned as I spoke to pick up his hat, which had rolled behind where I was standing. As I stooped to reach it, I received such a blow that I could neither rise erect nor yet sit down. This blow which I received as I stooped for his billy-cock hat was not from his fist, but from his iron-shod boot, the same which I had observed upon the splashboard. Being unable either to rise erect or yet to sit down, I leaned upon the oaken bar of the stile and groaned loudly on account of the pain of the blow which I had received. Even the screaming horror had given me less pain than this blow from the iron-shod boot. When at last I was able to stand erect, I found that the florid-faced man had driven away with his cart, which could no longer be seen. The maiden from the dingle was standing at the other side of the stile, and a ragged man was running across the field from the direction of the fire.

“Why did you not warn me, Henrietta?” I asked.

"I hadn't time," said she. "Why were you such a chump as to turn your back on him like that?"

The ragged man had reached us, where I stood talking to Henrietta by the stile. I will not try to write his conversation as he said it, because I have observed that the master never condescends to dialect, but prefers by a word introduced here and there to show the fashion of a man's speech. I will only say that the man from the dingle spoke as did the Anglo-Saxons who were wont, as is clearly shown by the venerable Bede, to call their leaders 'Enjist and 'Orsa, two words which in their proper meaning signify a horse and a mare.

"What did he hit you for?" asked the man from the dingle. He was exceedingly ragged, with a powerful frame, a lean brown face, and an oaken cudgel in his hand. His voice was very hoarse and rough, as is the case with those who live in the open air. "The bloke hit you," said he. "What did the bloke hit you for?"

"He asked him to," said Henrietta.

"Asked him to — asked him what?"

"Why, he asked him to hit him. Gave him a thick 'un to do it."

The ragged man seemed surprised. "See here, guv'nor," said he. "If you're collectin', I could let you have one half-price."

"He took me unawares," said I.

"What else would the bloke do when you bashed his hat?" said the maiden from the dingle.

By this time I was able to straighten myself up by the aid of the oaken bar which formed the top of the stile. Having quoted a few lines of the Chinese poet Lo-tun-an to the effect that, however hard a knock might be, it might always conceivably be harder, I looked about for my coat, but could by no means find it.

"Henrietta," I said, "what have you done with my coat?"

"Look here, guv'nor," said the man from the dingle, "not so much Henrietta, if it's the same to you. This woman's my wife. Who are you to call her Henrietta?"

I assured the man from the dingle that I had meant no disrespect to his wife. "I had thought she was a mort," said I; "but the ria of a Romany chal is always sacred to me."

"Clean balmy," said the woman.

“Some other day,” said I, “I may visit you in your camp in the dingle and read you the master’s book about the Romanys.”

“What’s Romanys?” asked the man.

Myself. Romanys are gipsies.

The Man. We ain’t gipsies.

Myself. What are you then?

The Man. We are hoppers.

Myself (to Henrietta). Then how did you understand all I have said to you about gipsies?

Henrietta. I didn’t.

I again asked for my coat, but it was clear now that before offering to fight the florid-faced man with the mole over his left eyebrow I must have hung my coat upon the splashboard of his van. I therefore recited a verse from Ferideddin-Atar, the Persian poet, which signifies that it is more important to preserve your skin than your clothes, and bidding farewell to the man from the dingle and his wife I returned into the old English village of Swinehurst, where I was able to buy a second-hand coat, which enabled me to make my way to the station, where I should start for London. I could not but remark with some surprise that I was followed to the station by many of the villagers, together with the man with the shiny coat, and that other, the strange man, he who had slunk behind the clock-case. From time to time I turned and approached them, hoping to fall into conversation with them; but as I did so they would break and hasten down the road. Only the village constable came on, and he walked by my side and listened while I told him the history of Hunyadi Janos and the events which occurred during the wars between that hero, known also as Corvinus or the crow-like, and Mahommed the second, he who captured Constantinople, better known as Byzantium, before the Christian epoch. Together with the constable I entered the station, and seating myself in a carriage I took paper from my pocket and I began to write upon the paper all that had occurred to me, in order that I might show that it was not easy in these days to follow the example of the master. As I wrote, I heard the constable talk to the station-master, a stout, middle-sized man with a red neck-tie, and tell him of my own adventures in the old English village of Swinehurst.

“He is a gentleman too,” said the constable, “and I doubt not that he lives in a big house in London town.”

“A very big house if every man had his rights,” said the station-master, and waving his hand he signalled that the train should proceed.

THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, I being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote down the following words in my note-book — the result of much mental perturbation and conflict:

“The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death — a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John M’Vittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic discs, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even — save the mark! — puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance.”

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. At last, however, came a time when my uncle, M’Vittie of Glencairn, died — the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time the owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England. Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the coast of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, grey-stone building — when erected or wherefore none could tell me — and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the M’Leods, who were fisher-folk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir-trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that

Dalton’s atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant — all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who, while digging for gold, have turned up many worms, and then exhibit then exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the “mad laird o’ Mansie.” It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathise with? There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in, with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jagged back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the “ragged reef o’ Mansie.” When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and peering over the edge I

have seen far down the flickering, ghostly forms of great fish — fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalist never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored over, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o'clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature, who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and seaweed were pattering up against my attic window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when,

about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the wheezy voice of my housekeeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

“Eh, maister, maister!” she screamed in her hateful dialect. “Come doun, mun; come doun! There’s a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a’ yammerin’ and ca’in’ for help — and I doobt they’ll a’ be drooned. Oh, Maister M’Vittie, come doun!”

“Hold your tongue, you hag!” I shouted back in a passion. “What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone.” I turned in again and drew the blankets over me. “Those men out there,” I said to myself, “have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best therefore that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution.” With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man’s eternal and ever-changing career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrollable impulse, I rose, dressed, and having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me, dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and shading my eyes with my hands to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to

such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man, who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back and his head was sunk upon his breast, but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety, but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where he could see my dark figure upon the beach, his self-respect or some other reason forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman,

with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this, but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and leaning over he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger? I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madness had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over, I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me. I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of fagots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of, “Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie!” from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young — at the most nineteen, with a pale somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge’s garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I strode heavily up the pathway, she put out her hands with a pretty, child-like gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt, and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully. “What country do you come from?” I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

“Français?” I asked. “Deutsch?” “Espagnol?” — each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality. Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat, and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word “Archangel,” painted in strange, quaint lettering. “So,” I thought, as I paddled slowly back, “this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!” It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house, I pronounced the word “Archangel” several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognise it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at mid-day for some food she was sitting, by the table with a needle and thread, mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of her chair with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive shrill voice some uncouth barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, “Come in, you young fiend, come in and be silent!” but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words “Sophie Ramusine” upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young, hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent information to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me and pry, and peep, and chatter — a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw to my great surprise a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair, and short, curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden earrings in his ears — the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red-flannel shirt, and high sea boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognised him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

“Hullo!” I said, in an aggrieved voice. “You got ashore all right, then?”

“Yes,” he answered, in good English. “It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!” There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. “Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me; yet I could not honestly thank them for it.”

“Ho! ho!” thought I, “here is a man of my own kidney.”

“Why do you wish to be drowned?” I asked.

“Because,” he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, “there — there in that blue smiling bay, lies my soul, my treasure — everything that I loved and lived for.”

"Well, well," I said. "People are ruined every day, but there's no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough."

"One of us?" he gasped.

"Yes — if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful."

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realise what I said, and then with a wild cry he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and as I came nearer the sound of a man's bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in, the girl, Sophie Ramusine, was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate pleading words. He made a step forward to her as I entered, but she writhed still further away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weasel has him by the throat.

"Here!" I said, pulling him back from her. "This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?"

"Oh, sir," he said, "excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life."

"Who are you?" I asked roughly.

"I am a man from Archangel," he said simply; "a Russian man."

"What is your name?"

"Ourganeff."

"Ourganeff! — and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring."

"We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven," he said solemnly, looking upwards. "We are bound by higher laws than those of earth." As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. "Give me up my wife, sir," he went on. "Let me take her away from here."

“Look here, you — whatever your name is,” I said sternly; “I don’t want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won’t do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again.”

“You won’t give her up to me?” he said hoarsely.

“I’ll see you damned first!” I answered.

“Suppose I take her,” he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flashed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. “Go,” I said, in a low voice, “go quick, or I may do you an injury.” He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

“Have a heed what you do,” he said. “The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman.”

“We shall see that,” I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work in my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, or bottles and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine, I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each window in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk, she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from Archangel was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea, and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice, still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squatted there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but, as I gazed, my resentment changed into pity and contempt “Poor fool,” I said to myself, “is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambitions centred upon this wretched slip of a girl — a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you? Most women would love you — were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of yours — and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you.” As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so long as he was gone by the morning. As I expected, when I rose and went out, there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping, and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty, I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

“I wish to speak a few words to you,” he said gravely.

“Hurry up, then!” I answered, glancing at my watch. “I have no time to listen to chatter.”

“Chatter!” he repeated angrily. “Ah, but there. You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lie kind honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good, too, in spite of your roughness.”

“In the name of the devil,” I said, “say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you.”

“Can I not soften you in any way?” he cried. “Ah, see — see here” — he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. “Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem.”

“I am not so sure of that,” I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

“You are a very strange man,” he said at last. “I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman — how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul! You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted — you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that,” he cried wildly. “I am deep — too deep — already. Anything rather than that.”

“You would do better to go back to your country,” I said, “than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me.”

“And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?” he asked. “Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?”

“I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so,” I answered. “I give no man reasons for my conduct.”

“Look here!” he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. “If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl — if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her — as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands.” The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

“Stand off,” I said, putting my hand on my pistol. “If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you.”

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs. No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

“I told you,” he said in a quieter voice, “that my name is Ourganeff — Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from Archangel to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that the party had actually gone to the church. In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat's crew — all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of Archangel sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet. You, sir," he said wistfully, "look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?"

"I am tired of your story," I said, turning away. "For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter." With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

"I have told you the beginning of my story," he said, "and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go."

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again some minutes later he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from Archangel had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realise my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of any one else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before — a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous waters were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen’s wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the waters for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29°. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red, and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. “I had better push on,” I thought to myself, “or the wind may rise before I can get back.”

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again — a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over the sands and echoed back from the hills behind me — a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sand-hill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building — there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door, the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog, who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water’s edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms. I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognised it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also and darkness settled over it — a darkness which should never be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No — a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My heart was untouched. But my pride — ah, there I had been cruelly wounded. To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. “If he would but come back again!” I cried, with clenched hands; “if he would but come back!”

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky, and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little farther on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with seaweed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea'd man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman's fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why too should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye, in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times, and when I pass on my daily walk and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar, and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

THE GREAT BROWN-PERICORD MOTOR

It was a cold, foggy, dreary evening in May. Along the Strand blurred patches of light marked the position of the lamps. The flaring shop windows flickered vaguely with steamy brightness through the thick and heavy atmosphere.

The high lines of houses which led down to the Embankment were all dark and deserted, or illuminated only by the glimmering lamp of the caretaker. At one point, however, there shone out from three windows upon the second floor a rich flood of light, which broke the sombre monotony of the terrace. Passers-by glanced up curiously, and drew each others' attention to the ruddy glare, for it marked the chambers of Francis Pericord, the inventor and electrical engineer. Long into the watches of the night the gleam of his lamps bore witness to the untiring energy and restless industry which was rapidly carrying him to the first rank in his profession.

Within the chamber sat two men. The one was Pericord himself — hawk-faced and angular, with the black hair and brisk bearing which spoke of his Celtic origin. The other — thick, sturdy, and blue-eyed, was Jeremy Brown, the well-known mechanician. They had been partners in many an invention, in which the creative genius of the one had been aided by the practical abilities of the other. It was a question among their friends as to which was the better man.

It was no chance visit which had brought Brown into Pericord's workshop at so late an hour. Business was to be done — business which was to decide the failure or success of months of work, and which might affect their whole careers. Between them lay a long brown table, stained and corroded by strong acids, and littered with giant carboys, Faure's accumulators, voltaic piles, coils of wire, and great blocks of nonconducting porcelain. In the midst of all this lumber there stood a singular whizzing, whirring machine, upon which the eyes of both partners were riveted.

A small square metal receptacle was connected by numerous wires to a broad steel girdle, furnished on either side with two powerful projecting joints. The girdle was motionless, but the joints with the short arms attached to them flashed round every few seconds, with a pause between each rhythmic turn. The power which moved them came evidently from the metal box. A subtle odour of ozone was in the air.

“How about the flanges, Brown?” asked the inventor.

“They were too large to bring. They are seven foot by three. There is power enough there to work them however. I will answer for that.”

“Aluminium with an alloy of copper?”

“Yes.”

“See how beautifully it works.” Pericord stretched out a thin, nervous hand, and pressed a button upon the machine. The joints revolved more slowly, and came presently to a dead stop. Again he touched a spring and the arms shivered and woke up again into their crisp metallic life. “The experimenter need not exert his muscular powers,” he remarked. “He has only to be passive, and use his intelligence.”

“Thanks to my motor,” said Brown.

“*Our* motor,” the other broke in sharply.

“Oh, of course,” said his colleague impatiently. “The motor which you thought of, and which I reduced to practice — call it what you like.”

“I call it the Brown-Pericord Motor,” cried the inventor, with an angry flash of his dark eyes. “You worked out the details, but the abstract thought is mine, and mine alone.”

“An abstract thought won’t turn an engine,” said Brown doggedly.

“That was why I took you into partnership,” the other retorted, drumming nervously with his fingers upon the table. “I invent, you build. It is a fair division of labour.”

Brown pursed up his lips, as though by no means satisfied upon the point. Seeing, however, that further argument was useless, he turned his attention to the machine, which was shivering and rocking with each swing of its arms, as though a very little more would send it skimming from the table.

“Is it not splendid?” cried Pericord.

“It is satisfactory,” said the more phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon.

“There’s immortality in it!”

“There’s money in it!”

“Our names will go down with Montgolfier’s.”

“With Rothschild’s, I hope.”

“No, no, Brown; you take too material a view,” cried the inventor, raising his gleaming eyes from the machine to his companion. “Our fortunes are a mere detail. Money is a thing which every heavy-witted plutocrat in the country shares with us. My hopes rise to something higher than that. Our true reward will come in the gratitude and goodwill of the human race.”

Brown shrugged his shoulders. “You may have my share of that,” he said. “I am a practical man. We must test our invention.”

“Where can we do it?”

“That is what I wanted to speak about. It must be absolutely secret. If we had private grounds of our own it would be an easy matter, but there is no privacy in London.”

“We must take it into the country.”

“I have a suggestion to offer,” said Brown. “My brother has a place in Sussex on the high land near Beachy Head. There is, I remember, a large and lofty barn near the house. Will is in Scotland, but the key is always at my disposal. Why not take the machine down to-morrow and test it in the barn?”

“Nothing could be better.”

“There is a train to Eastbourne at one.”

“I shall be at the station.”

“Bring the gear with you, and I will bring the flanges,” said the mechanician, rising. “To-morrow will prove whether we have been following a shadow, or whether fortune is at our feet. One o’clock at Victoria.” He walked swiftly down the stair and was quickly reabsorbed into the flood of comfortless clammy humanity which ebbed and flowed along the Strand.

The morning was bright and spring-like. A pale blue sky arched over London, with a few gauzy white clouds drifting lazily across it. At eleven o’clock Brown might have been seen entering the Patent Office with a great roll of parchment, diagrams, and plans under his arm. At twelve he emerged again smiling, and, opening his pocket-book, he packed away very carefully a small slip of official blue paper. At five minutes to one his cab rolled into Victoria Station. Two giant canvas-covered parcels, like enormous kites, were handed down by the cabman from the top, and consigned to the care of a guard. On the platform Pericord was pacing up and down, with long, eager step and swinging arms, a tinge of pink upon his sunken and sallow cheeks.

“All right?” he asked.

Brown pointed in answer to his baggage.

“I have the motor and the girdle already packed away in the guard’s van. Be careful, guard, for it is delicate machinery of great value. So! Now we can start with an easy conscience."

At Eastbourne the precious motor was carried to a four-wheeler, and the great flanges hoisted on the top. A long drive took them to the house where the keys were kept, whence they set off across the barren Downs. The building which was their destination was a commonplace whitewashed structure, with straggling stables and out-houses, standing in a grassy hollow which sloped down from the edge of the chalk cliffs. It was a cheerless house even when in use, but now with its smokeless chimneys and shuttered windows it looked doubly dreary. The owner had planted a grove of young larches and firs around it, but the sweeping spray had blighted them, and they hung their withered heads in melancholy groups. It was a gloomy and forbidding spot.

But the inventors were in no mood to be moved by such trifles. The lonelier the place, the more fitted for their purpose. With the help of the cabman they carried their packages down the footpath, and laid them in the darkened dining-room. The sun was setting as the distant murmur of wheels told them that they were finally alone.

Pericord had thrown open the shutters and the mellow evening light streamed in through the discoloured windows. Brown drew a knife from his pocket and cut the pack-thread with which the canvas was secured. As the brown covering fell away it disclosed two great yellow metal fans. These he leaned carefully against the wall. The girdle, the connecting-bands, and the motor were then in turn unpacked. It was dark before all was set out in order. A lamp was lit, and by its light the two men continued to tighten screws, clinch rivets, and make the last preparations for their experiment.

"That finishes it," said Brown at last, stepping back and surveying the machine.

Pericord said nothing, but his face glowed with pride and expectation.

"We must have something to eat," Brown remarked, laying out some provisions which he had brought with him.

"Afterwards."

"No, now," said the stolid mechanician. "I am half starved." He pulled up to the table and made a hearty meal, while his Celtic companion strode impatiently up and down, with twitching fingers and restless eyes.

"Now then," said Brown, facing round, and brushing the crumbs from his lap, "who is to put it on?"

“I shall,” cried his companion eagerly. “What we do to-night is likely to be historic.”

“But there is some danger,” suggested Brown. “We cannot quite tell how it may act.”

“That is nothing,” said Pericord, with a wave of his hand.

“But there is no use our going out of our way to incur danger.”

“What then? One of us must do it.”

“Not at all. The motor would act equally well if attached to any inanimate object.”

“That is true,” said Pericord thoughtfully.

“There are bricks by the barn. I have a sack here. Why should not a bagful of them take our place?”

“It is a good idea. I see no objection.”

“Come on then,” and the two sallied out, bearing with them the various sections of their machine. The moon was shining cold and clear though an occasional ragged cloud drifted across her face. All was still and silent upon the Downs. They stood and listened before they entered the barn, but not a sound came to their ears, save the dull murmur of the sea and the distant barking of a dog. Pericord journeyed backwards and forwards with all that they might need, while Brown filled a long narrow sack with bricks.

When all was ready, the door of the barn was closed, and the lamp balanced upon an empty packing-case. The bag of bricks was laid upon two trestles, and the broad steel girdle was buckled round it. Then the great flanges, the wires, and the metal box containing the motor were in turn attached to the girdle. Last of all a flat steel rudder, shaped like a fish’s tail, was secured to the bottom of the sack.

“We must make it travel in a small circle,” said Pericord, glancing round at the bare high walls.

“Tie the rudder down at one side,” suggested Brown. “Now it is ready. Press the connection and off she goes!”

Pericord leaned forward, his long sallow face quivering with excitement. His white nervous hands darted here and there among the wires. Brown stood impassive with critical eyes. There was a sharp burr from the machine. The huge yellow wings gave a convulsive flap. Then another. Then a third, slower and stronger, with a fuller sweep. Then a fourth which filled the barn with a blast of driven air. At the fifth the bag of bricks began to dance upon the trestles. At the sixth it sprang into the air, and would have fallen to the ground, but the seventh came to save it, and fluttered it forward through the air. Slowly rising, it flapped heavily round in a circle, like some great clumsy bird, filling the barn with its buzzing and whirring. In the uncertain yellow light of the single lamp it was strange to see the loom of the ungainly thing, flapping off into the shadows, and then circling back into the narrow zone of light.

The two men stood for a while in silence. Then Pericord threw his long arms up into the air.

"It acts!" he cried. "The Brown-Pericord Motor acts!" He danced about like a madman in his delight. Brown's eyes twinkled, and he began to whistle.

"See how smoothly it goes, Brown!" cried the inventor. "And the rudder — how well it acts! We must register it to-morrow."

His comrade's face darkened and set. "It *is* registered," he said, with a forced laugh.

"Registered?" said Pericord. "Registered?" He repeated the word first in a whisper, and then in a kind of scream. "Who has dared to register my invention?"

"I did it this morning. There is nothing to be excited about. It is all right."

"You registered the motor! Under whose name?"

"Under my own," said Brown sullenly. "I consider that I have the best right to it."

"And my name does not appear?"

"No, but — —"

"You villain!" screamed Pericord. "You thief and villain! You would steal my work! You would filch my credit! I will have that patent back if I have to tear your throat out!" A sombre fire burned in his black eyes, and his hands writhed themselves together with passion. Brown was no coward, but he shrank back as the other advanced upon him.

"Keep your hands off!" he said, drawing a knife from his pocket. "I will defend myself if you attack me.

"You threaten me?" cried Pericord, whose face was livid with anger. "You are a bully as well as a cheat. Will you give up the patent?"

"No, I will not."

"Brown, I say, give it up!"

"I will not. I did the work."

Pericord sprang madly forward with blazing eyes and clutching fingers. His companion writhed out of his grasp, but was dashed against the packing-case, over which he fell. The lamp was extinguished, and the whole barn plunged into darkness. A single ray of moonlight shining through a narrow chink flickered over the great waving fans as they came and went.

"Will you give up the patent, Brown?"

There was no answer.

"Will you give it up?"

Again no answer. Not a sound save the humming and creaking overhead. A cold pang of fear and doubt struck through Pericord's heart. He felt aimlessly about in the dark and his fingers closed upon a hand. It was cold and unresponsive. With all his anger turned to icy horror he struck a match, set the lamp up, and lit it.

Brown lay huddled up on the other side of the packing-case. Pericord seized him in his arms, and with convulsive strength lifted him across. Then the mystery of his silence was explained. He had fallen with his right arm doubled up under him, and his own weight had driven the knife deeply into his body. He had died without a groan. The tragedy had been sudden, horrible, and complete.

Pericord sat silently on the edge of the case, staring blankly down, and shivering like one with the ague, while the great Brown-Pericord Motor boomed and hurtled above him. How long he sat there can never be known. It might have been minutes or it might have been hours. A thousand mad schemes flashed through his dazed brain. It was true that he had been only the indirect cause. But who would believe that? He glanced down at his blood-spattered clothing. Everything was against him. It would be better to fly than to give himself up, relying upon his innocence. No one in London knew where they were. If he could dispose of the body he might have a few days clear before any suspicion would be aroused.

Suddenly a loud crash recalled him to himself. The flying sack had gradually risen with each successive circle until it had struck against the rafters. The blow displaced the connecting-gear, and the machine fell heavily to the ground. Pericord undid the girdle. The motor was uninjured. A sudden, strange thought flashed upon him as he looked at it. The machine had become hateful to him. He might dispose both of it and the body in a way that would baffle all human search.

He threw open the barn door, and carried his companion out into the moonlight. There was a hillock outside, and on the summit of this he laid him reverently down. Then he brought from the barn the motor, the girdle and the flanges. With trembling fingers he fastened the broad steel belt round the dead man’s waist. Then he screwed the wings into the sockets. Beneath he slung the motor-box, fastened the wires, and switched on the connection. For a minute or two the huge yellow fans flapped and flickered. Then the body began to move in little jumps down the side of the hillock, gathering a gradual momentum, until at last it heaved up into the air and soared heavily off in the moonlight. He had not used the rudder, but had turned the head for the south. Gradually the weird thing rose higher, and sped faster, until it had passed over the line of cliff, and was sweeping over the silent sea. Pericord watched it with a white drawn face, until it looked like a black bird with golden wings half shrouded in the mist which lay over the waters.

* * *

In the New York State Lunatic Asylum there is a wild-eyed man whose name and birth-place are alike unknown. His reason has been unseated by some sudden shock, the doctors say, though of what nature they are unable to determine. “It is the most delicate machine which is most readily put out of gear,” they remark, and point, in proof of their axiom, to the complicated electric engines, and remarkable aeronautic machines which the patient is fond of devising in his more lucid moments.

THE SEALED ROOM

A solicitor of an active habit and athletic tastes who is compelled by his hopes of business to remain within the four walls of his office from ten till five must take what exercise he can in the evenings. Hence it was that I was in the habit of indulging in very long nocturnal excursions, in which I sought the heights of Hampstead and Highgate in order to cleanse my system from the impure air of Abchurch Lane. It was in the course of one of these aimless rambles that I first met Felix Stanniford, and so led up to what has been the most extraordinary adventure of my lifetime.

One evening — it was in April or early May of the year 1894 — I made my way to the extreme northern fringe of London, and was walking down one of those fine avenues of high brick villas which the huge city is for ever pushing farther and farther out into the country. It was a fine, clear spring night, the moon was shining out of an unclouded sky, and I, having already left many miles behind me, was inclined to walk slowly and look about me. In this contemplative mood, my attention was arrested by one of the houses which I was passing.

It was a very large building, standing in its own grounds, a little back from the road. It was modern in appearance, and yet it was far less so than its neighbours, all of which were crudely and painfully new. Their symmetrical line was broken by the gap caused by the laurel-studded lawn, with the great, dark, gloomy house looming at the back of it. Evidently it had been the country retreat of some wealthy merchant, built perhaps when the nearest street was a mile off, and now gradually overtaken and surrounded by the red brick tentacles of the London octopus. The next stage, I reflected, would be its digestion and absorption, so that the cheap builder might rear a dozen eighty-pound-a-year villas upon the garden frontage. And then, as all this passed vaguely through my mind, an incident occurred which brought my thoughts into quite another channel.

A four-wheeled cab, that opprobium of London, was coming jolting and creaking in one direction, while in the other there was a yellow glare from the lamp of a cyclist. They were the only moving objects in the whole long, moonlit road, and yet they crashed into each other with that malignant accuracy which brings two ocean liners together in the broad waste of the Atlantic. It was the cyclist's fault. He tried to cross in front of the cab, miscalculated his distance, and was knocked sprawling by the horse's shoulder. He rose, snarling; the cabman swore back at him, and then, realising that his number had not yet been taken, lashed his horse and lumbered off. The cyclist caught at the handles of his prostrate machine, and then suddenly sat down with a groan. "Oh, Lord!" he said.

I ran across the road to his side. "Any harm done?" I asked.

"It's my ankle," said he. "Only a twist, I think; but it's pretty painful. Just give me your hand, will you?"

He lay in the yellow circle of the cycle lamp, and I noted as I helped him to his feet that he was a gentlemanly young fellow, with a slight dark moustache and large, brown eyes, sensitive and nervous in appearance, with indications of weak health upon his sunken cheeks. Work or worry had left its traces upon his thin, yellow face. He stood up when I pulled his hand, but he held one foot in the air, and he groaned as he moved it.

"I can't put it to the ground," said he.

"Where do you live?"

"Here!" he nodded his head towards the big, dark house in the garden. "I was cutting across to the gate when that confounded cab ran into me. Could you help me so far?"

It was easily done. I put his cycle inside the gate, and then I supported him down the drive, and up the steps to the hall door. There was not a light anywhere, and the place was as black and silent as if no one had ever lived in it.

"That will do. Thank you very much," said he, fumbling with his key in the lock.

"No, you must allow me to see you safe."

He made some feeble, petulant protest, and then realised that he could really do nothing without me. The door had opened into a pitch-dark hall. He lurched forward, with my hand still on his arm.

"This door to the right," said he, feeling about in the darkness.

I opened the door, and at the same moment he managed to strike a light. There was a lamp upon the table, and we lit it between us. "Now, I'm all right. You can leave me now! Good-bye!" said he, and with the words he sat down in the arm-chair and fainted dead away.

It was a queer position for me. The fellow looked so ghastly, that really I was not sure that he was not dead. Presently his lips quivered and his breast heaved, but his eyes were two white slits and his colour was horrible. The responsibility was more than I could stand. I pulled at the bell-rope, and heard the bell ringing furiously far away. But no one came in response. The bell tinkled away into silence, which no murmur or movement came to break. I waited, and rang again, with the same result. There must be some one about. This young gentleman could not live all alone in that huge house. His people ought to know of his condition. If they would not answer the bell, I must hunt them out myself. I seized the lamp and rushed from the room.

What I saw outside amazed me. The hall was empty. The stairs were bare, and yellow with dust. There were three doors opening into spacious rooms, and each was uncarpeted and undraped, save for the grey webs which drooped from the cornice, and rosettes of lichen which had formed upon the walls. My feet reverberated in those empty and silent chambers. Then I wandered on down the passage, with the idea that the kitchens, at least, might be tenanted. Some caretaker might lurk in some secluded room. No, they were all equally desolate. Despairing of finding any help, I ran down another corridor, and came on something which surprised me more than ever.

The passage ended in a large, brown door, and the door had a seal of red wax the size of a five-shilling piece over the key-hole. This seal gave me the impression of having been there for a long time, for it was dusty and discoloured. I was still staring at it, and wondering what that door might conceal, when I heard a voice calling behind me, and, running back, found my young man sitting up in his chair and very much astonished at finding himself in darkness.

“Why on earth did you take the lamp away?” he asked.

“I was looking for assistance.”

“You might look for some time,” said he. “I am alone in the house.”

“Awkward if you get an illness.”

“It was foolish of me to faint. I inherit a weak heart from my mother, and pain or emotion has that effect upon me. It will carry me off some day, as it did her. You’re not a doctor, are you?”

“No, a lawyer. Frank Alder is my name.”

“Mine is Felix Stanniford. Funny that I should meet a lawyer, for my friend, Mr. Perceval, was saying that we should need one soon.”

“Very happy, I am sure.”

"Well, that will depend upon him, you know. Did you say that you had run with that lamp all over the ground floor?"

"Yes."

"*All* over it?" he asked, with emphasis, and he looked at me very hard.

"I think so. I kept on hoping that I should find some one."

"Did you enter *all* the rooms?" he asked, with the same intent gaze.

"Well, all that I could enter."

"Oh, then you *did* notice it!" said he, and he shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who makes the best of a bad job.

"Notice, what?"

"Why, the door with the seal on it."

"Yes, I did."

"Weren't you curious to know what was in it?"

"Well, it did strike me as unusual."

"Do you think you could go on living alone in this house, year after year, just longing all the time to know what is at the other side of that door, and yet not looking?"

"Do you mean to say," I cried, "that you don't know yourself?"

"No more than you do."

"Then why don't you look?"

"I mustn't," said he.

He spoke in a constrained way, and I saw that I had blundered on to some delicate ground. I don't know that I am more inquisitive than my neighbours, but there certainly was something in the situation which appealed very strongly to my curiosity. However, my last excuse for remaining in the house was gone now that my companion had recovered his senses. I rose to go.

"Are you in a hurry?" he asked.

"No; I have nothing to do."

"Well, I should be very glad if you would stay with me a little. The fact is that I live a very retired and secluded life here. I don't suppose there is a man in London who leads such a life as I do. It is quite unusual for me to have any one to talk with."

I looked round at the little room, scantily furnished, with a sofa-bed at one side. Then I thought of the great, bare house, and the sinister door with the discoloured red seal upon it. There was something queer and grotesque in the situation, which made me long to know a little more. Perhaps I should, if I waited. I told him that I should be very happy.

"You will find the spirits and a siphon upon the side table. You must forgive me if I cannot act as host, but I can't get across the room. Those are cigars in the tray there. I'll take one myself, I think. And so you are a solicitor, Mr. Alder?"

"Yes."

"And I am nothing. I am that most helpless of living creatures, the son of a millionaire. I was brought up with the expectation of great wealth; and here I am, a poor man, without any profession at all. And then, on the top of it all, I am left with this great mansion on my hands, which I cannot possibly keep up. Isn't it an absurd situation? For me to use this as my dwelling is like a coster drawing his barrow with a thoroughbred. A donkey would be more useful to him, and a cottage to me."

"But why not sell the house?" I asked.

"I mustn't."

"Let it, then?"

"No, I mustn't do that either."

I looked puzzled, and my companion smiled.

"I'll tell you how it is, if it won't bore you," said he.

"On the contrary, I should be exceedingly interested."

"I think, after your kind attention to me, I cannot do less than relieve any curiosity that you may feel. You must know that my father was Stanislaus Stanniford, the banker."

Stanniford, the banker! I remembered the name at once. His flight from the country some seven years before had been one of the scandals and sensations of the time.

"I see that you remember," said my companion. "My poor father left the country to avoid numerous friends, whose savings he had invested in an unsuccessful speculation. He was a nervous, sensitive man, and the responsibility quite upset his reason. He had committed no legal offence. It was purely a matter of sentiment. He would not even face his own family, and he died among strangers without ever letting us know where he was."

"He died!" said I.

"We could not prove his death, but we know that it must be so, because the speculations came right again, and so there was no reason why he should not look any man in the face. He would have returned if he were alive. But he must have died in the last two years."

"Why in the last two years?"

"Because we heard from him two years ago."

"Did he not tell you then where he was living?"

"The letter came from Paris, but no address was given. It was when my poor mother died. He wrote to me then, with some instructions and some advice, and I have never heard from him since."

"Had you heard before?"

"Oh, yes, we had heard before, and that's where our mystery of the sealed door, upon which you stumbled to-night, has its origin. Pass me that desk, if you please. Here I have my father's letters, and you are the first man except Mr. Perceval who has seen them."

"Who is Mr. Perceval, may I ask?"

"He was my father's confidential clerk, and he has continued to be the friend and adviser of my mother and then of myself. I don't know what we should have done without Perceval. He saw the letters, but no one else. This is the first one, which came on the very day when my father fled, seven years ago. Read it to yourself."

This is the letter which I read:

"My Ever Dearest Wife, —

"Since Sir William told me how weak your heart is, and how harmful any shock might be, I have never talked about my business affairs to you. The time has come when at all risks I can no longer refrain from telling you that things have been going badly with me. This will cause me to leave you for a little time, but it is with the absolute assurance that we shall see each other very soon. On this you can thoroughly rely. Our parting is only for a very short time, my own darling, so don't let it fret you, and above all don't let it impair your health, for that is what I want above all things to avoid.

"Now, I have a request to make, and I implore you by all that binds us together to fulfil it exactly as I tell you. There are some things which I do not wish to be seen by any one in my dark room — the room which I use for photographic purposes at the end of the garden passage. To prevent any painful thoughts, I may assure you once for all, dear, that it is nothing of which I need be ashamed. But still I do not wish you or Felix to enter that room. It is locked, and I implore you when you receive this to at once place a seal over the lock, and leave it so. Do not sell or let the house, for in either case my secret will be discovered. As long as you or Felix are in the house, I know that you will comply with my wishes. When Felix is twenty-one he may enter the room — not before.

“And now, good-bye, my own best of wives. During our short separation you can consult Mr. Perceval on any matters which may arise. He has my complete confidence. I hate to leave Felix and you — even for a time — but there is really no choice.

“Ever and always your loving husband,

“Stanislaus Stanniford.

“*June 4th, 1887.*”

“These are very private family matters for me to inflict upon you,” said my companion apologetically. “You must look upon it as done in your professional capacity. I have wanted to speak about it for years.”

“I am honoured by your confidence,” I answered, “and exceedingly interested by the facts.”

“My father was a man who was noted for his almost morbid love of truth. He was always pedantically accurate. When he said, therefore, that he hoped to see my mother very soon, and when he said that he had nothing to be ashamed of in that dark room, you may rely upon it that he meant it.”

“Then what can it be?” I ejaculated.

“Neither my mother nor I could imagine. We carried out his wishes to the letter, and placed the seal upon the door; there it has been ever since. My mother lived for five years after my father’s disappearance, although at the time all the doctors said that she could not survive long. Her heart was terribly diseased. During the first few months she had two letters from my father. Both had the Paris postmark, but no address. They were short and to the same effect: that they would soon be re-united, and that she should not fret. Then there was a silence, which lasted until her death; and then came a letter to me of so private a nature that I cannot show it to you, begging me never to think evil of him, giving me much good advice, and saying that the sealing of the room was of less importance now than during the lifetime of my mother, but that the opening might still cause pain to others, and that, therefore, he thought it best that it should be postponed until my twenty-first year, for the lapse of time would make things easier. In the meantime, he committed the care of the room to me; so now you can understand how it is that, although I am a very poor man, I can neither let nor sell this great house.”

“You could mortgage it.”

“My father had already done so.”

“It is a most singular state of affairs.”

“My mother and I were gradually compelled to sell the furniture and to dismiss the servants, until now, as you see, I am living unattended in a single room. But I have only two more months.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, that in two months I come of age. The first thing that I do will be to open that door; the second, to get rid of the house.”

“Why should your father have continued to stay away when these investments had recovered themselves?”

“He must be dead.”

“You say that he had not committed any legal offence when he fled the country?”

“None.”

“Why should he not take your mother with him?”

“I do not know.”

“Why should he conceal his address?”

“I do not know.”

“Why should he allow your mother to die and be buried without coming back?”

“I do not know.”

“My dear sir,” said I, “if I may speak with the frankness of a professional adviser, I should say that it is very clear that your father had the strongest reasons for keeping out of the country, and that, if nothing has been proved against him, he at least thought that something might be, and refused to put himself within the power of the law. Surely that must be obvious, for in what other possible way can the facts be explained?”

My companion did not take my suggestion in good part.

“You had not the advantage of knowing my father, Mr. Alder,” he said coldly. “I was only a boy when he left us, but I shall always look upon him as my ideal man. His only fault was that he was too sensitive and too unselfish. That any one should lose money through him would cut him to the heart. His sense of honour was most acute, any theory of his disappearance which conflicts with that is a mistaken one.”

It pleased me to hear the lad speak out so roundly, and yet I knew that the facts were against him, and that he was incapable of taking an unprejudiced view of the situation.

"I only speak as an outsider," said I. "And now I must leave you, for I have a long walk before me. Your story has interested me so much that I should be glad if you could let me know the sequel."

"Leave me your card," said he; and so, having bade him "good-night," I left him.

I heard nothing more of the matter for some time, and had almost feared that it would prove to be one of those fleeting experiences which drift away from our direct observation and end only in a hope or a suspicion. One afternoon, however, a card bearing the name of Mr. J. H. Perceval was brought up to my office in Abchurch Lane, and its bearer, a small, dry, bright-eyed fellow of fifty, was ushered in by the clerk.

"I believe, sir," said he, "that my name has been mentioned to you by my young friend, Mr. Felix Stanniford?"

"Of course," I answered, "I remember."

"He spoke to you, I understand, about the circumstances in connection with the disappearance of my former employer, Mr. Stanislaus Stanniford, and the existence of a sealed room in his former residence."

"He did."

"And you expressed an interest in the matter."

"It interested me extremely."

"You are aware that we hold Mr. Stanniford's permission to open the door on the twenty-first birthday of his son?"

"I remember."

"The twenty-first birthday is to-day."

"Have you opened it?" I asked eagerly.

"Not yet, sir," said he gravely. "I have reason to believe that it would be well to have witnesses present when that door is opened. You are a lawyer, and you are acquainted with the facts. Will you be present on the occasion?"

"Most certainly."

"You are employed during the day, and so am I. Shall we meet at nine o'clock at the house?"

"I will come with pleasure."

“Then you will find us waiting for you. Good-bye, for the present.” He bowed solemnly, and took his leave.

I kept my appointment that evening, with a brain which was weary with fruitless attempts to think out some plausible explanation of the mystery which we were about to solve. Mr. Perceval and my young acquaintance were waiting for me in the little room. I was not surprised to see the young man looking pale and nervous, but I was rather astonished to find the dry little City man in a state of intense, though partially suppressed, excitement. His cheeks were flushed, his hands twitching, and he could not stand still for an instant.

Stanniford greeted me warmly, and thanked me many times for having come. “And now, Perceval,” said he to his companion, “I suppose there is no obstacle to our putting the thing through without delay? I shall be glad to get it over.”

The banker’s clerk took up the lamp and led the way. But he paused in the passage outside the door, and his hand was shaking, so that the light flickered up and down the high, bare walls.

“Mr. Stanniford,” said he, in a cracking voice, “I hope you will prepare yourself in case any shock should be awaiting you when that seal is removed and the door is opened.”

“What could there be, Perceval? You are trying to frighten me.”

“No, Mr. Stanniford; but I should wish you to be ready ... to be braced up ... not to allow yourself ...” He had to lick his dry lips between every jerky sentence, and I suddenly realised, as clearly as if he had told me, that he knew what was behind that closed door, and that it *was* something terrible. “Here are the keys, Mr. Stanniford, but remember my warning!”

He had a bunch of assorted keys in his hand, and the young man snatched them from him. Then he thrust a knife under the discoloured seal and jerked it off. The lamp was rattling and shaking in Perceval’s hands, so I took it from him and held it near the key-hole, while Stanniford tried key after key. At last one turned in the lock, the door flew open, he took one step into the room, and then, with a horrible cry, the young man fell senseless at our feet.

If I had not given heed to the clerk’s warning, and braced myself for a shock, I should certainly have dropped the lamp. The room, windowless and bare, was fitted up as a photographic laboratory, with a tap and sink at the side of it. A shelf of bottles and measures stood at one side, and a peculiar, heavy smell, partly chemical, partly animal, filled the air. A single table and chair were in front of us, and at this, with his back turned towards us, a man was seated in the act of writing. His outline and attitude were as natural as life; but as the light fell upon him, it made my hair rise to see that the nape of his neck was black and wrinkled, and no thicker than my wrist. Dust lay upon him — thick, yellow dust — upon his hair, his shoulders, his shrivelled, lemon-coloured hands. His head had fallen forward upon his breast. His pen still rested upon a discoloured sheet of paper.

“My poor master! My poor, poor master!” cried the clerk, and the tears were running down his cheeks.

“What!” I cried, “Mr. Stanislaus Stanniford!”

“Here he has sat for seven years. Oh, why would he do it? I begged him, I implored him, I went on my knees to him, but he would have his way. You see the key on the table. He had locked the door upon the inside. And he has written something. We must take it.”

“Yes, yes, take it, and for God’s sake, let us get out of this,” I cried; “the air is poisonous. Come, Stanniford, come!” Taking an arm each, we half led and half carried the terrified man back to his own room.

“It was my father!” he cried, as he recovered his consciousness. “He is sitting there dead in his chair. You knew it, Perceval! This was what you meant when you warned me.”

“Yes, I knew it, Mr. Stanniford. I have acted for the best all along, but my position has been a terribly difficult one. For seven years I have known that your father was dead in that room.”

“You knew it, and never told us!”

“Don’t be harsh with me, Mr. Stanniford, sir! Make allowance for a man who has had a hard part to play.”

“My head is swimming round. I cannot grasp it!” He staggered up, and helped himself from the brandy bottle. “These letters to my mother and to myself — were they forgeries?”

“No, sir; your father wrote them and addressed them, and left them in my keeping to be posted. I have followed his instructions to the very letter in all things. He was my master, and I have obeyed him.”

The brandy had steadied the young man’s shaken nerves. “Tell me about it. I can stand it now,” said he.

“Well, Mr. Stanniford, you know that at one time there came a period of great trouble upon your father, and he thought that many poor people were about to lose their savings through his fault. He was a man who was so tender-hearted that he could not bear the thought. It worried him and tormented him, until he determined to end his life. Oh, Mr. Stanniford, if you knew how I have prayed him and wrestled with him over it, you would never blame me! And he in turn prayed me as no man has ever prayed me before. He had made up his mind, and he would do it in any case, he said; but it rested with me whether his death should be happy and easy or whether it should be most miserable. I read in his eyes that he meant what he said. And at last I yielded to his prayers, and I consented to do his will.

"What was troubling him was this. He had been told by the first doctor in London that his wife's heart would fail at the slightest shock. He had a horror of accelerating her end, and yet his own existence had become unendurable to him. How could he end himself without injuring her?

"You know now the course that he took. He wrote the letter which she received. There was nothing in it which was not literally true. When he spoke of seeing her again so soon, he was referring to her own approaching death, which he had been assured could not be delayed more than a very few months. So convinced was he of this, that he only left two letters to be forwarded at intervals after his death. She lived five years, and I had no letters to send.

"He left another letter with me to be sent to you, sir, upon the occasion of the death of your mother. I posted all these in Paris to sustain the idea of his being abroad. It was his wish that I should say nothing, and I have said nothing. I have been a faithful servant. Seven years after his death, he thought no doubt that the shock to the feelings of his surviving friends Would be lessened. He was always considerate for others."

There was a silence for some time. It was broken by young Stanniford.

"I cannot blame you, Perceval. You have spared my mother a shock, which would certainly have broken her heart. What is that paper?"

"It is what your father was writing, sir. Shall I read it to you?"

"Do so."

"'I have taken the poison, and I feel it working in my veins. It is strange, but not painful. When these words are read I shall, if my wishes have been faithfully carried out, have been dead many years. Surely no one who has lost money through me will still bear me animosity. And you, Felix, you will forgive me this family scandal. May God find rest for a sorely wearied spirit!'"

"Amen!" we cried, all three.

TALES OF MEDICAL LIFE

A PHYSIOLOGIST’S WIFE

Professor Ainslie Grey had not come down to breakfast at the usual hour. The presentation chiming-clock which stood between the terra-cotta busts of Claude Bernard and of John Hunter upon the dining-room mantelpiece had rung out the half-hour and the three-quarters. Now its golden hand was verging upon the nine, and yet there were no signs of the master of the house.

It was an unprecedented occurrence. During the twelve years that she had kept house for him, his younger sister had never known him a second behind his time. She sat now in front of the high silver coffee-pot, uncertain whether to order the gong to be resounded or to wait on in silence. Either course might be a mistake. Her brother was not a man who permitted mistakes.

Miss Ainslie Grey was rather above the middle height, thin, with peering, puckered eyes, and the rounded shoulders which mark the bookish woman. Her face was long and spare, flecked with colour above the cheek-bones, with a reasonable, thoughtful forehead, and a dash of absolute obstinacy in her thin lips and prominent chin. Snow-white cuffs and collar, with a plain dark dress, cut with almost Quaker-like simplicity, bespoke the primness of her taste. An ebony cross hung over her flattened chest. She sat very upright in her chair, listening with raised eyebrows, and swinging her eye-glasses backwards and forwards with a nervous gesture which was peculiar to her.

Suddenly she gave a sharp, satisfied jerk of the head, and began to pour out the coffee. From outside there came the dull thudding sound of heavy feet Upon thick carpet. The door swung open, and the Professor entered with a quick, nervous step. He nodded to his sister, and seating himself at the other side of the table, began to open the small pile of letters which lay beside his plate.

Professor Ainslie Grey was at that time forty-three years of age — nearly twelve years older than his sister. His career had been a brilliant one. At Edinburgh, at Cambridge, and at Vienna he had laid the foundations of his great reputation, both in physiology and in zoology.

His pamphlet, “On the Mesoblastic Origin of Excitomotor Nerve Roots,” had won him his fellowship of the Royal Society; and his researches, “Upon the Nature of Bathybius, with some Remarks upon Lithococci,” had been translated into at least three European languages. He had been referred to by one of the greatest living authorities as being the very type and embodiment of all that was best in modern science. No wonder, then, that when the commercial city of Birchespool decided to create a medical school, they were only too glad to confer the chair of physiology upon Mr. Ainslie Grey. They valued him the more from the conviction that their class was only one step in his upward journey, and that the first vacancy would remove him to some more illustrious seat of learning.

In person he was not unlike his sister. The same eyes, the same contour, the same intellectual forehead. His lips, however, were firmer, and his long, thin lower jaw was sharper and more decided. He ran his finger and thumb down it from time to time, as he glanced over his letters.

“Those maids are very noisy,” he remarked, as a clack of tongues sounded in the distance.

“It is Sarah,” said his sister; “I shall speak about it.”

She had handed over his coffee-cup, and was sipping at her own, glancing furtively through her narrowed lids at the austere face of her brother.

“The first great advance of the human race,” said the Professor, “was when, by the development of their left frontal convolutions, they attained the power of speech. Their second advance was when they learned to control that power. Woman has not yet attained the second stage.”

He half closed his eyes as he spoke, and thrust his chin forward, but as he ceased he had a trick of suddenly opening both eyes very wide and staring sternly at his interlocutor.

“I am not garrulous, John,” said his sister.

“No, Ada; in many respects you approach the superior or male type.”

The Professor bowed over his egg with the manner of one who utters a courtly compliment; but the lady pouted, and gave an impatient little shrug of her shoulders.

“You were late this morning, John,” she remarked, after a pause.

“Yes, Ada; I slept badly. Some little cerebral congestion, no doubt due to over-stimulation of the centres of thought. I have been a little disturbed in my mind.”

His sister stared across at him in astonishment. The Professor’s mental processes had hitherto been as regular as his habits. Twelve years’ continual intercourse had taught her that he lived in a serene and rarefied atmosphere of scientific calm, high above the petty emotions which affect humbler minds.

"You are surprised, Ada," he remarked. "Well, I cannot wonder at it. I should have been surprised myself if I had been told that I was so sensitive to vascular influences. For, after all, all disturbances are vascular if you probe them deep enough. I am thinking of getting married."

"Not Mrs. O'James?" cried Ada Grey, laying down her egg-spoon.

"My dear, you have the feminine quality of receptivity very remarkably developed. Mrs. O'James is the lady in question."

"But you know so little of her. The Esdailes themselves know so little. She is really only an acquaintance, although she is staying at The Lindens. Would it not be wise to speak to Mrs. Esdaile first, John?"

"I do not think, Ada, that Mrs. Esdaile is at all likely to say anything which would materially affect my course of action. I have given the matter due consideration. The scientific mind is slow at arriving at conclusions, but having once formed them, it is not prone to change. Matrimony is the natural condition of the human race. I have, as you know, been so engaged in academical and other work, that I have had no time to devote to merely personal questions. It is different now, and I see no valid reason why I should forego this opportunity of seeking a suitable helpmate."

"And you are engaged?"

"Hardly that, Ada. I ventured yesterday to indicate to the lady that I was prepared to submit to the common lot of humanity. I shall wait upon her after my morning lecture, and learn how far my proposals meet with her acquiescence. But you frown, Ada!"

His sister started, and made an effort to conceal her expression of annoyance. She even stammered out some few words of congratulation, but a vacant look had come into her brother's eyes, and he was evidently not listening to her.

"I am sure, John," she said, "that I wish you the happiness which you deserve. If I hesitated at all, it is because I know how much is at stake, and because the thing is so sudden, so unexpected." Her thin white hand stole up to the black cross upon her bosom. "These are moments when we need guidance, John. If I could persuade you to turn to spiritual — —"

The Professor waved the suggestion away with a deprecating hand.

"It is useless to reopen that question," he said. "We cannot argue upon it. You assume more than I can grant. I am forced to dispute your premises.

We have no common basis.”

His sister sighed.

“You have no faith,” she said.

“I have faith in those great evolutionary forces which are leading the human race to some unknown but elevated goal.”

“You believe in nothing.”

“On the contrary, my dear Ada, I believe in the differentiation of protoplasm.”

She shook her head sadly. It was the one subject upon which she ventured to dispute her brother’s infallibility.

“This is rather beside the question,” remarked the Professor, folding up his napkin. “If I am not mistaken, there is some possibility of another matrimonial event occurring in the family. Eh, Ada? What!”

His small eyes glittered with sly facetiousness as he shot a twinkle at his sister. She sat very stiff, and traced patterns upon the cloth with the sugar-tongs.

“Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien — —” said the Professor sonorously.

“Don’t, John, don’t!” cried Miss Ainslie Grey.

“Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien,” continued her brother inexorably, “is a man who has already made his mark upon the science of the day. He is my first and my most distinguished pupil. I assure you, Ada, that his ‘Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin,’ is likely to live as a classic. It is not too much to say that he has revolutionised our views about Urobilin.”

He paused, but his sister sat silent, with bent head and flushed cheeks. The little ebony cross rose and fell with her hurried breathings.

“Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien has, as you know, the offer of the physiological chair at Melbourne. He has been in Australia five years, and has a brilliant future before him. To-day he leaves us for Edinburgh, and in two months’ time he goes out to take over his new duties. You know his feeling towards you. It rests with you as to whether he goes out alone. Speaking for myself, I cannot imagine any higher mission for a woman of culture than to go through life in the company of a man who is capable of such a research as that which Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien has brought to a successful conclusion.”

“He has not spoken to me,” murmured the lady.

“Ah, there are signs which are more subtle than speech,” said her brother, wagging his head. “You are pale. Your vasomotor system is excited. Your arterioles have contracted. Let me entreat you to compose yourself. I think I hear the carriage. I fancy that you may have a visitor this morning, Ada. You will excuse me now.”

With a quick glance at the clock he strode off into the hall, and within a few minutes he was rattling in his quiet, well-appointed brougham through the brick-lined streets of Birchespool.

His lecture over, Professor Ainslie Grey paid a visit to his laboratory, where he adjusted several scientific instruments, made a note as to the progress of three separate infusions of bacteria, cut half a dozen sections with a microtome, and finally resolved the difficulties of seven different gentlemen, who were pursuing researches in as many separate lines of inquiry. Having thus conscientiously and methodically completed the routine of his duties, he returned to his carriage and ordered the coachman to drive him to The Lindens. His face as he drove was cold and impassive, but he drew his fingers from time to time down his prominent chin with a jerky, twitchy movement.

The Lindens was an old-fashioned, ivy-clad house which had once been in the country, but was now caught in the long, red-brick feelers of the growing city. It still stood back from the road in the privacy of its own grounds. A winding path, lined with laurel bushes, led to the arched and porticoed entrance. To the right was a lawn, and at the far side, under the shadow of a hawthorn, a lady sat in a garden-chair with a book in her hands. At the click of the gate she started, and the Professor, catching sight of her, turned away from the door, and strode in her direction.

“What! won’t you go in and see Mrs. Esdaile?” she asked, sweeping out from under the shadow of the hawthorn.

She was a small woman, strongly feminine, from the rich coils of her light-coloured hair to the dainty garden slipper which peeped from under her cream-tinted dress. One tiny well-gloved hand was outstretched in greeting, while the other pressed a thick, green-covered volume against her side. Her decision and quick, tactful manner bespoke the mature woman of the world; but her upraised face had preserved a girlish and even infantile expression of innocence in its large, fearless grey eyes, and sensitive, humorous mouth. Mrs. O’James was a widow, and she was two-and-thirty years of age; but neither fact could have been deduced from her appearance.

“You will surely go in and see Mrs. Esdaile,” she repeated, glancing up at him with eyes which had in them something between a challenge and a caress.

“I did not come to see Mrs. Esdaile,” he answered, with no relaxation of his cold and grave manner; “I came to see you.”

“I am sure I should be highly honoured,” she said, with just the slightest little touch of brogue in her accent. “What are the students to do without their Professor?”

“I have already completed my academic duties. Take my arm, and we shall walk in the sunshine. Surely we cannot wonder that Eastern people should have made a deity of the sun. It is the great beneficent force of Nature — man’s ally against cold, sterility, and all that is abhorrent to him. What were you reading?”

“Hale’s *Matter and Life*.”

The Professor raised his thick eyebrows.

“Hale!” he said, and then again in a kind of whisper, “Hale!”

“You differ from him?” she asked.

“It is not I who differ from him. I am only a monad — a thing of no moment. The whole tendency of the highest plane of modern thought differs from him. He defends the indefensible. He is an excellent observer, but a feeble reasoner. I should not recommend you to found your conclusions upon ‘Hale.’”

“I must read *Nature’s Chronicle* to counteract his pernicious influence,” said Mrs. O’James, with a soft, cooing laugh.

Nature’s Chronicle was one of the many books in which Professor Ainslie Grey had enforced the negative doctrines of scientific agnosticism.

“It is a faulty work,” said he; “I cannot recommend it. I would rather refer you to the standard writings of some of my older and more eloquent colleagues.”

There was a pause in their talk as they paced up and down on the green, velvet-like lawn in the genial sunshine.

“Have you thought at all,” he asked at last, “of the matter upon which I spoke to you last night?”

She said nothing, but walked by his side with her eyes averted and her face aslant.

“I would not hurry you unduly,” he continued. “I know that it is a matter which can scarcely be decided off-hand. In my own case, it cost me some thought before I ventured to make the suggestion. I am not an emotional man, but I am conscious in your presence of the great evolutionary instinct which makes either sex the complement of the other.”

“You believe in love, then?” she asked, with a twinkling, upward glance.

“I am forced to.”

“And yet you can deny the soul?”

“How far these questions are psychic and how far material is still *sub judice*,” said the Professor, with an air of toleration. “Protoplasm may prove to be the physical basis of love as well as of life.”

“How inflexible you are!” she exclaimed; “you would draw love down to the level of physics.”

“Or draw physics up to the level of love.”

“Come, that is much better,” she cried, with her sympathetic laugh. “That is really very pretty, and puts science in quite a delightful light.”

Her eyes sparkled, and she tossed her chin with a pretty, wilful air of a woman who is mistress of the situation.

“I have reason to believe,” said the Professor, “that my position here will prove to be only a stepping-stone to some wider scene of scientific activity. Yet, even here, my chair brings me in some fifteen hundred pounds a year, which is supplemented by a few hundreds from my books. I should therefore be in a position to provide you with those comforts to which you are accustomed. So much for my pecuniary position. As to my constitution, it has always been sound. I have never suffered from any illness in my life, save fleeting attacks of cephalalgia, the result of too prolonged a stimulation of the centres of cerebration. My father and mother had no sign of any morbid diathesis, but I will not conceal from you that my grandfather was afflicted with podagra.”

Mrs. O’James looked startled.

“Is that very serious?” she asked.

“It is gout,” said the Professor.

“Oh, is that all? It sounded much worse than that.”

“It is a grave taint, but I trust that I shall not be a victim to atavism. I have laid these facts before you because they are factors which cannot be overlooked in forming your decision. May I ask now whether you see your way to accepting my proposal?”

He paused in his walk, and looked earnestly and expectantly down at her.

A struggle was evidently going on in her mind. Her eyes were cast down, her little slipper tapped the lawn, and her fingers played nervously with her chatelain. Suddenly, with a sharp, quick gesture which had in it something of *abandon* and recklessness, she held out her hand to her companion.

"I accept," she said.

They were standing under the shadow of the hawthorn. He stooped gravely down, and kissed her glove-covered fingers.

"I trust that *you* may never have cause to regret your decision," he said.

"I trust that *you* never may," she cried, with a heaving breast.

There were tears in her eyes, and her lips twitched with some strong emotion.

"Come into the sunshine again," said he. "It is the great restorative. Your nerves are shaken. Some little congestion of the medulla and pons. It is always instructive to reduce psychic or emotional conditions to their physical equivalents. You feel that your anchor is still firm in a bottom of ascertained fact."

"But it is so dreadfully unromantic," said Mrs. O'James, with her old twinkle.

"Romance is the offspring of imagination and of ignorance. Where science throws her calm, clear light there is happily no room for romance."

"But is not love romance?" she asked.

"Not at all. Love has been taken away from the poets, and has been brought within the domain of true science. It may prove to be one of the great cosmic elementary forces. When the atom of hydrogen draws the atom of chlorine towards it to form the perfected molecule of hydrochloric acid, the force which it exerts may be intrinsically similar to that which draws me to you. Attraction and repulsion appear to be the primary forces. This is attraction."

"And here is repulsion," said Mrs. O'James, as a stout, florid lady came sweeping across the lawn in their direction. "So glad you have come out, Mrs. Esdaile! Here is Professor Grey."

"How do you do, Professor?" said the lady, with some little pomposity of manner. "You were very wise to stay out here on so lovely a day. Is it not heavenly?"

"It is certainly very fine weather," the Professor answered.

"Listen to the wind sighing in the trees!" cried Mrs. Esdaile, holding up one finger. "It is Nature's lullaby. Could you not imagine it, Professor Grey, to be the whisperings of angels?”

“The idea had not occurred to me, madam.”

“Ah, Professor, I have always the same complaint against you. A want of *rapport* with the deeper meanings of Nature. Shall I say a want of imagination? You do not feel an emotional thrill at the singing of that thrush?”

“I confess that I am not conscious of one, Mrs. Esdaile.”

“Or at the delicate tint of that background of leaves? See the rich greens!”

“Chlorophyll,” murmured the Professor.

“Science is so hopelessly prosaic. It dissects and labels, and loses sight of the great things in its attention to the little ones. You have a poor opinion of woman’s intellect, Professor Grey. I think that I have heard you say so.”

“It is a question of avoirdupois,” said the Professor, closing his eyes and shrugging his shoulders. “The female cerebrum averages two ounces less in weight than the male. No doubt there are exceptions. Nature is always elastic.”

“But the heaviest thing is not always the strongest,” said Mrs. O’James, laughing. “Isn’t there a law of compensation in science? May we not hope to make up in quality what we lack in quantity?”

“I think not,” remarked the Professor gravely. “But there is your luncheon-gong. No, thank you, Mrs. Esdaile, I cannot stay. My carriage is waiting. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs. O’James.”

He raised his hat and stalked slowly away among the laurel bushes.

“He has no taste,” said Mrs. Esdaile—”no eye for beauty.”

“On, the contrary,” Mrs. O’James answered, with a saucy little jerk of the chin. “He has just asked me to be his wife.”

As Professor Ainslie Grey ascended the steps of his house, the hall-door opened and a dapper gentleman stepped briskly out. He was somewhat sallow in the face, with dark, beady eyes, and a short, black beard with an aggressive bristle. Thought and work had left their traces upon his face, but he moved with the brisk activity of a man who had not yet bade good-bye to his youth.

“I’m in luck’s way,” he cried. “I wanted to see you.”

“Then come back into the library,” said the Professor; “you must stay and have lunch with us.”

The two men entered the hall, and the Professor led the way into his private sanctum. He motioned his companion into an arm-chair.

"I trust that you have been successful, O'Brien," said he. "I should be loath to exercise any undue pressure upon my sister Ada; but I have given her to understand that there is no one whom I should prefer for a brother-in-law to my most brilliant scholar, the author of 'Some Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin.'"

"You are very kind, Professor Grey — you have always been very kind," said the other. "I approached Miss Grey upon the subject; she did not say No."

"She said Yes, then?"

"No; she proposed to leave the matter open until my return from Edinburgh. I go to-day, as you know, and I hope to commence my research to-morrow."

"On the comparative anatomy of the vermiform appendix, by James M'Murdo O'Brien," said the Professor sonorously. "It is a glorious subject — a subject which lies at the very root of evolutionary philosophy."

"Ah, she is the dearest girl," cried O'Brien, with a sudden little spurt of Celtic enthusiasm—"she is the soul of truth and of honour."

"The vermiform appendix — —" began the Professor.

"She is an angel from heaven," interrupted the other. "I fear that it is my advocacy of scientific freedom in religious thought which stands in my way with her."

"You must not truckle upon that point. You must be true to your convictions; let there be no compromise there."

"My reason is true to agnosticism, and yet I am conscious of a void — a vacuum. I had feelings at the old church at home between the scent of the incense and the roll of the organ, such as I have never experienced in the laboratory or the lecture-room."

"Sensuous — purely sensuous," said the Professor, rubbing his chin. "Vague hereditary tendencies stirred into life by the stimulation of the nasal and auditory nerves."

"Maybe so, maybe so," the younger man answered thoughtfully. "But this was not what I wished to speak to you about. Before I enter your family, your sister and you have a claim to know all that I can tell you about my career. Of my worldly prospects I have already spoken to you. There is only one point which I have omitted to mention. I am a widower."

The Professor raised his eyebrows.

“This is news indeed,” said he.

“I married shortly after my arrival in Australia. Miss Thurston was her name. I met her in society. It was a most unhappy match.”

Some painful emotion possessed him. His quick, expressive features quivered, and his white hands tightened upon the arms of the chair. The Professor turned away towards the window.

“You are the best judge,” he remarked; “but I should not think that it was necessary to go into details.”

“You have a right to know everything — you and Miss Grey. It is not a matter on which I can well speak to her direct. Poor Jinny was the best of women, but she was open to flattery, and liable to be misled by designing persons. She was untrue to me, Grey. It is a hard thing to say of the dead, but she was untrue to me. She fled to Auckland with a man whom she had known before her marriage. The brig which carried them foundered, and not a soul was saved.”

“This is very painful, O’Brien,” said the Professor, with a deprecatory motion of his hand. “I cannot see, however, how it affects your relation to my sister.”

“I have eased my conscience,” said O’Brien, rising from his chair; “I have told you all that there is to tell. I should not like the story to reach you through any lips but my own.”

“You are right, O’Brien. Your action has been most honourable and considerate. But you are not to blame in the matter, save that perhaps you showed a little precipitancy in choosing a life-partner without due care and inquiry.”

O’Brien drew his hand across his eyes.

“Poor girl!” he cried. “God help me, I love her still. But I must go.”

“You will lunch with us?”

“No, Professor; I have my packing still to do. I have already bade Miss Grey adieu. In two months I shall see you again.”

“You will probably find me a married man.”

“Married!”

“Yes, I have been thinking of it.”

“My dear Professor, let me congratulate you with all my heart. I had no idea. Who is the lady?”

“Mrs. O’James is her name — a widow of the same nationality as yourself. But to return to matters of importance, I should be very happy to see the proofs of your paper upon the vermiform appendix. I may be able to furnish you with material for a footnote or two.”

“Your assistance will be invaluable to me,” said O’Brien, with enthusiasm, and the two men parted in the hall. The Professor walked back into the dining-room, where his sister was already seated at the luncheon-table.

“I shall be married at the registrar’s,” he remarked; “I should strongly recommend you to do the same.”

Professor Ainslie Grey was as good as his word. A fortnight’s cessation of his classes gave him an opportunity which was too good to let pass. Mrs. O’James was an orphan, without relations and almost without friends in the country. There was no obstacle in the way of a speedy wedding. They were married, accordingly, in the quietest manner possible, and went off to Cambridge together, where the Professor and his charming wife were present at several academic observances, and varied the routine of their honeymoon by incursions into biological laboratories and medical libraries. Scientific friends were loud in their congratulations, not only upon Mrs. Grey’s beauty, but upon the unusual quickness and intelligence she displayed in discussing physiological questions. The Professor was himself astonished at the accuracy of her information. “You have a remarkable range of knowledge for a woman, Jeannette,” he remarked upon more than one occasion. He was even prepared to admit that her cerebrum might be of the normal weight.

One foggy, drizzling morning they returned to Birchespool, for the next day would reopen the session, and Professor Ainslie Grey prided himself upon having never once in his life failed to appear in his lecture-room at the very stroke of the hour. Miss Ada Grey welcomed them with a constrained cordiality, handed over the keys of office to the new mistress. Mrs. Grey pressed her warmly to remain, but she explained that she had already accepted an invitation which would engage her for some months. The same evening she departed for the south of England.

A couple of days later the maid carried a card just after breakfast into the library where the Professor sat revising his morning lecture. It announced the rearrival of Dr. James M’Murdo O’Brien. Their meeting was effusively genial on the part of the younger man, and coldly precise on that of his former teacher.

“You see there have been changes,” said the Professor.

“So I heard. Miss Grey told me in her letters, and I read the notice in the *British Medical Journal*. So it’s really married you are. How quickly and quietly you have managed it all!”

“I am constitutionally averse to anything in the nature of show or ceremony. My wife is a sensible woman — I may even go the length of saying that, for a woman, she is abnormally sensible. She quite agreed with me in the course which I have adopted.”

“And your research on Vallisneria?”

“This matrimonial incident has interrupted it, but I have resumed my classes, and we shall soon be quite in harness again.”

“I must see Miss Grey before I leave England. We have corresponded, and I think that all will be well. She must come out with me. I don’t think I could go without her.”

The Professor shook his head.

“Your nature is not so weak as you pretend,” he said. “Questions of this sort are, after all, quite subordinate to the great duties of life.”

O’Brien smiled.

“You would have me take out my Celtic soul and put in a Saxon one,” he said. “Either my brain is too small or my heart is too big. But when may I call and pay my respects to Mrs. Grey? Will she be at home this afternoon?”

“She is at home now. Come into the morning-room. She will be glad to make your acquaintance.”

They walked across the linoleum-paved hall. The Professor opened the door of the room, and walked in, followed by his friend. Mrs. Grey was sitting in a basket-chair by the window, light and fairy-like in a loose-flowing, pink morning gown. Seeing a visitor, she rose and swept towards them. The Professor heard a dull thud behind him. O’Brien had fallen back into a chair, with his hand pressed tight to his side.

“Jinny!” he gasped—”Jinny!”

Mrs. Grey stopped dead in her advance, and stared at him with a face from which every expression had been struck out, save one of astonishment and horror. Then with a sharp intaking of the breath she reeled, and would have fallen had the Professor not thrown his long, nervous arm round her.

“Try this sofa,” said he.

She sank back among the cushions with the same white, cold, dead look upon her face. The Professor stood with his back to the empty fireplace and glanced from the one to the other.

"So, O'Brien," he said at last, "you have already made the acquaintance of my wife!"

"Your wife," cried his friend hoarsely. "She is no wife of yours. God help me, she is *my* wife."

The Professor stood rigidly upon the hearth-rug. His long, thin fingers were intertwined, and his head had sunk a little forward. His two companions had eyes only for each other.

"Jinny!" said he.

"James!"

"How could you leave me so, Jinny? How could you have the heart to do it? I thought you were dead. I mourned for your death — ay, and you have made me mourn for you living. You have withered my life."

She made no answer, but lay back among the cushions with her eyes still fixed upon him.

"Why do you not speak?"

"Because you are right, James. I have treated you cruelly — shamefully. But it is not as bad as you think."

"You fled with De Horta."

"No, I did not. At the last moment my better nature prevailed. He went alone. But I was ashamed to come back after what I had written to you. I could not face you. I took passage alone to England under a new name, and here I have lived ever since. It seemed to me that I was beginning life again. I knew that you thought I was drowned. Who could have dreamed that Fate would throw us together again! When the Professor asked me — —"

She stopped and gave a gasp for breath.

"You are faint," said the Professor—"keep the head low; it aids the cerebral circulation." He flattened down the cushion. "I am sorry to leave you, O'Brien; but I have my class duties to look to. Possibly I may find you here when I return."

With a grim and rigid face he strode out of the room. Not one of the three hundred students who listened to his lecture saw any change in his manner and appearance, or could have guessed that the austere gentleman in front of them had found out at last how hard it is to rise above one's humanity. The lecture over, he performed his routine duties in the laboratory, and then drove back to his own house. He did not enter by the front door, but passed through the garden to the folding glass casement which led out of the morning-room. As he approached he heard his wife's voice and O'Brien's in loud and animated talk. He paused among the rose-bushes, uncertain whether to interrupt them or no. Nothing was further from his nature than to play the eavesdropper; but as he stood, still hesitating, words fell upon his ear which struck him rigid and motionless.

"You are still my wife, Jinny," said O'Brien; "I forgive you from the bottom of my heart. I love you, and I have never ceased to love you, though you had forgotten me."

"No, James, my heart was always in Melbourne. I have always been yours. I thought that it was better for you that I should seem to be dead."

"You must choose between us now, Jinny. If you determine to remain here, I shall not open my lips. There shall be no scandal. If, on the other hand, you come with me, it's little I care about the world's opinion. Perhaps I am as much to blame as you are. I thought too much of my work and too little of my wife."

The Professor heard the cooing, caressing laugh which he knew so well.

"I shall go with you, James," she said.

"And the Professor —— ?"

"The poor Professor! But he will not mind much, James; he has no heart."

"We must tell him our resolution."

"There is no need," said Professor Ainslie Grey, stepping in through the open casement. "I have overheard the latter part of your conversation. I hesitated to interrupt you before you came to a conclusion."

O'Brien stretched out his hand and took that of the woman. They stood together with the sunshine on their faces. The Professor paused at the casement with his hands behind his back and his long black shadow fell between them.

"You have come to a wise decision," said he. "Go back to Australia together, and let what has passed be blotted out of your lives."

"But you — you — —" stammered O'Brien.

The Professor waved his hand.

"Never trouble about me," he said.

The woman gave a gasping cry.

“What can I do or say?” she wailed. “How could I have foreseen this? I thought my old life was dead. But it has come back again, with all its hopes and its desires. What can I say to you, Ainslie? I have brought shame and disgrace upon a worthy man. I have blasted your life. How you must hate and loathe me! I wish to God that I had never been born!”

“I neither hate nor loathe you, Jeannette,” said the Professor quietly. “You are wrong in regretting your birth, for you have a worthy mission before you in aiding the life-work of a man who has shown himself capable of the highest order of scientific research. I cannot with justice blame you personally for what has occurred. How far the individual monad is to be held responsible for hereditary and engrained tendencies, is a question upon which science has not yet said her last word.”

He stood with his finger-tips touching, and his body inclined as one who is gravely expounding a difficult and impersonal subject. O’Brien had stepped forward to say something, but the other’s attitude and manner froze the words upon his lips. Condolence or sympathy would be an impertinence to one who could so easily merge his private griefs in broad questions of abstract philosophy.

“It is needless to prolong the situation,” the Professor continued, in the same measured tones. “My brougham stands at the door. I beg that you will use it as your own. Perhaps it would be as well that you should leave the town without unnecessary delay. Your things, Jeannette, shall be forwarded.”

O’Brien hesitated with a hanging head.

“I hardly dare offer you my hand,” he said.

“On the contrary. I think that of the three of us you come best out of the affair. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Your sister—”

“I shall see that the matter is put to her in its true light. Good-bye! Let me have a copy of your recent research. Good-bye, Jeannette!”

“Good-bye!”

Their hands met, and for one short moment their eyes also. It was only a glance, but for the first and last time the woman’s intuition cast a light for itself into the dark places of a strong man’s soul. She gave a little gasp, and her other hand rested for an instant, as white and as light as thistle-down, upon his shoulder.

“James, James!” she cried. “Don’t you see that he is stricken to the heart?”

He turned her quietly away from him.

“I am not an emotional man,” he said. “I have my duties — my research on Vallisneria. The brougham is there. Your cloak is in the hall. Tell John where you wish to be driven. He will faring you anything you need. Now go.”

His last two words were so sudden, so volcanic, in such contrast to his measured voice and mask-like face, that they swept the two away from him. He closed the door behind them and paced slowly up and down the room. Then he passed into the library and looked out over the wire blind. The carriage was rolling away. He caught a last glimpse of the woman who had been his wife. He saw the feminine droop of her head, and the curve of her beautiful throat.

Under some foolish, aimless impulse, he took a few quick steps towards the door. Then he turned, and, throwing himself into his study chair, he plunged back into his work.

There was little scandal about this singular domestic incident. The Professor had few personal friends, and seldom went into society. His marriage had been so quiet that most of his colleagues had never ceased to regard him as a bachelor. Mrs. Esdaile and a few others might talk, but their field for gossip was limited, for they could only guess vaguely at the cause of this sudden separation.

The Professor was as punctual as ever at his classes, and as zealous in directing the laboratory work of those who studied under him. His own private researches were pushed on with feverish energy. It was no uncommon thing for his servants, when they came down of a morning, to hear the shrill scratchings of his tireless pen, or to meet him on the staircase as he ascended, grey and silent, to his room. In vain his friends assured him that such a life must undermine his health. He lengthened his hours until day and night were one long, ceaseless task.

Gradually under this discipline a change came over his appearance. His features, always inclined to gauntness, became even sharper and more pronounced. There were deep lines about his temples and across his brow. His cheek was sunken and his complexion bloodless. His knees gave under him when he walked; and once when passing out of his lecture-room he fell and had to be assisted to his carriage.

This was just before the end of the session; and soon after the holidays commenced, the professors who still remained in Birchespool were shocked to hear that their brother of the chair of physiology had sunk so low that no hopes could be entertained of his recovery. Two eminent physicians had consulted over his case without being able to give a name to the affection from which he suffered. A steadily decreasing vitality appeared to be the only symptom — a bodily weakness which left the mind unclouded. He was much interested himself in his own case, and made notes of his subjective sensations as an aid to diagnosis. Of his approaching end he spoke in his usual unemotional and somewhat pedantic fashion. “It is the assertion,” he said, “of the liberty of the individual cell as opposed to the cell-commune. It is the dissolution of a co-operative society. The process is one of great interest.”

And so one grey morning his co-operative society dissolved. Very quietly and softly he sank into his eternal sleep. His two physicians felt some slight embarrassment when called upon to fill in his certificate.

“It is difficult to give it a name,” said one.

“Very,” said the other.

“If he were not such an unemotional man, I should have said that he had died from some sudden nervous shock — from, in fact, what the vulgar would call a broken heart.”

“I don’t think poor Grey was that sort of a man at all.”

“Let us call it cardiac, anyhow,” said the other physician.

So they did so.

BEHIND THE TIMES

My first interview with Dr. James Winter was under dramatic circumstances. It occurred at two in the morning in the bedroom of an old country house. I kicked him twice on the white waistcoat and knocked off his gold spectacles, while he, with the aid of a female accomplice, stifled my angry cries in a flannel petticoat and thrust me into a warm bath. I am told that one of my parents, who happened to be present, remarked in a whisper that there was nothing the matter with my lungs. I cannot recall how Dr. Winter looked at the time for I had other things to think of, but his description of my own appearance is far from flattering. A fluffy head, a body like a trussed goose, very bandy legs, and feet with the soles turned inwards — those are the main items which he can remember.

From this time onwards the epochs of my life were the periodical assaults which Dr. Winter made upon me. He vaccinated me, he cut me for an abscess, he blistered me for mumps. It was a world of peace, and he the one dark cloud that threatened. But at last there came a time of real illness — a time when I lay for months together inside my wicker-work basket bed, and then it was that I learned that that hard face could relax, that those country-made, creaking boots could steal very gently to a bedside, and that that rough voice could thin into a whisper when it spoke to a sick child.

And now the child is himself a medical man, and yet Dr. Winter is the same as ever. I can see no change since first I can remember him, save that perhaps the brindled hair is a trifle whiter, and the huge shoulders a little more bowed. He is a very tall man, though he loses a couple of inches from his stoop. That big back of his has curved itself over sick beds until it has set in that shape. His face is of a walnut brown, and tells of long winter drives over bleak country roads with the wind and the rain in his teeth. It looks smooth at a little distance, but as you approach him you see that it is shot with innumerable fine wrinkles, like a last year’s apple. They are hardly to be seen when he is in repose, but when he laughs his face breaks like a starred glass, and you realise then that, though he looks old, he must be older than he looks.

How old that is I could never discover. I have often tried to find out, and have struck his stream as high up as George the Fourth and even of the Regency, but without ever getting quite to the source. His mind must have been open to impressions very early, but it must also have closed early, for the politics of the day have little interest for him, while he is fiercely excited about questions which are entirely prehistoric. He shakes his head when he speaks of the first Reform Bill and expresses grave doubts as to its wisdom, and I have heard him, when he was warmed by a glass of wine, say bitter things about Robert Peel and his abandoning of the Corn Laws. The death of that statesman brought the history of England to a definite close, and Dr. Winter refers to everything which had happened since then as to an insignificant anti-climax.

But it was only when I had myself become a medical man that I was able to appreciate how entirely he is a survival of a past generation. He had learned his medicine under that obsolete and forgotten system by which a youth was apprenticed to a surgeon, in the days when the study of anatomy was often approached through a violated grave. His views upon his own profession are even more reactionary than his politics. Fifty years have brought him little and deprived him of less. Vaccination was well within the teaching of his youth, though I think he has a secret preference for inoculation. Bleeding he would practise freely but for public opinion. Chloroform he regards as a dangerous innovation, and he always clicks with his tongue when it is mentioned. He has even been known to say vain things about Laennec, and to refer to the stethoscope as “a newfangled French toy.” He carries one in his hat out of deference to the expectations of his patients; but he is very hard of hearing, so that it makes little difference whether he uses it or not.

He always reads, as a duty, his weekly medical paper, so that he has a general idea as to the advance of modern science. He persists in looking upon it, however, as a huge and rather ludicrous experiment. The germ theory of disease set him chuckling for a long time, and his favourite joke in the sick-room was to say, “Shut the door, or the germs will be getting in.” As to the Darwinian theory, it struck him as being the crowning joke of the century. “The children in the nursery and the ancestors in the stable,” he would cry, and laugh the tears out of his eyes.

He is so very much behind the day that occasionally, as things move round in their usual circle, he finds himself, to his own bewilderment, in the front of the fashion. Dietetic treatment, for example, had been much in vogue in his youth, and he has more practical knowledge of it than any one whom I have met. Massage, too, was familiar to him when it was new to our generation. He had been trained also at a time when instruments were in a rudimentary state and when men learned to trust more to their own fingers. He has a model surgical hand, muscular in the palm, tapering in the fingers, “with an eye at the end of each.” I shall not easily forget how Dr. Patterson and I cut Sir John Sirwell, the County Member, and were unable to find the stone. It was a horrible moment. Both our careers were at stake. And then it was that Dr. Winter, whom we had asked out of courtesy to be present, introduced into the wound a finger which seemed to our excited senses to be about nine inches long, and hooked out the stone at the end of it.

“It’s always well to bring one in your waistcoat pocket,” said he with a chuckle, “but I suppose you youngsters are above all that.”

We made him President of our Branch of the British Medical Association, but he resigned after the first meeting. “The young men are too much for me,” he said. “I don’t understand what they are talking about.” Yet his patients do very well. He has the healing touch — that magnetic thing which defies explanation or analysis, but which is a very evident fact none the less. His mere presence leaves the patient with more hopefulness and vitality. The sight of disease affects him as dust does a careful housewife. It makes him angry and impatient. “Tut, tut, this will never do!” he cries, as he takes over a new case. He would shoo death out of the room as though he were an intrusive hen. But when the intruder refuses to be dislodged, when the blood moves more slowly and the eyes grow dimmer, then it is that Dr. Winter is of more avail than all the drugs in his surgery. Dying folk cling to his hand as if the presence of his bulk and vigour gives them more courage to face the change; and that kindly, wind-beaten face has been the last earthly impression which many a sufferer has carried into the unknown.

When Dr. Patterson and I, both of us young, energetic, and up-to-date, settled in the district, we were most cordially received by the old doctor, who would have been only too happy to be relieved of some of his patients. The patients themselves, however, followed their own inclinations, which is a reprehensible way that patients have, so that we remained neglected with our modern instruments and our latest alkaloids, while he was serving out senna and calomel to all the country-side. We both of us loved the old fellow, but at the same time, in the privacy of our own intimate conversations, we could not help commenting upon this deplorable lack of judgment.

"It is all very well for the poorer people," said Patterson, "but after all the educated classes have a right to expect that their medical man will know the difference between a mitral murmur and a bronchitic rale. It's the judicial frame of mind, not the sympathetic, which is the essential one."

I thoroughly agreed with Patterson in what he said. It happened, however, that very shortly afterwards the epidemic of influenza broke out, and we were all worked to death. One morning I met Patterson on my round, and found him looking rather pale and fagged out. He made the same remark about me. I was in fact feeling far from well, and I lay upon the sofa all afternoon with a splitting headache and pains in every joint. As evening closed in I could no longer disguise the fact that the scourge was upon me, and I felt that I should have medical advice without delay. It was of Patterson naturally that I thought, but somehow the idea of him had suddenly become repugnant to me. I thought of his cold, critical attitude, of his endless questions, of his tests and his tappings. I wanted something more soothing — something more genial.

"Mrs. Hudson," said I to my housekeeper, "would you kindly run along to old Dr. Winter and tell him that I should be obliged to him if he would step round."

She was back with an answer presently.

"Dr. Winter will come round in an hour or so, sir, but he has just been called in to attend Dr. Patterson."

HIS FIRST OPERATION

It was the first day of a winter session, and the third year's man was walking with the first year's man. Twelve o'clock was just booming out from the Tron Church.

"Let me see," said the third year's man, "you have never seen an operation?"

"Never."

"Then this way, please. This is Rutherford's historic bar. A glass of sherry, please, for this gentleman. You are rather sensitive, are you not?"

"My nerves are not very strong, I am afraid."

"Hum! Another glass of sherry for this gentleman. We are going to an operation now, you know."

The novice squared his shoulders and made a gallant attempt to look unconcerned.

"Nothing very bad — eh?"

"Well, yes — pretty bad."

"An — an amputation?"

"No, it's a bigger affair than that."

"I think — I think they must be expecting me at home."

"There's no sense in funking. If you don't go to-day you must to-morrow. Better get it over at once. Feel pretty fit?"

"Oh, yes, all right."

The smile was not a success.

"One more glass of sherry, then. Now come on or we shall be late. I want you to be well in front."

"Surely that is not necessary."

"Oh, it is far better. What a drove of students! There are plenty of new men among them. You can tell them easily enough, can't you? If they were going down to be operated upon themselves they could not look whiter."

"I don't think I should look as white."

"Well, I was just the same myself. But the feeling soon wears off. You see a fellow with a face like plaster, and before the week is out he is eating his lunch in the dissecting rooms. I'll tell you all about the case when we get to the theatre."

The students were pouring down the sloping street which led to the infirmary — each with his little sheaf of note-books in his hand. There were pale, frightened lads, fresh from the High Schools, and callous old chronics, whose generation had passed on and left them. They swept in an unbroken, tumultuous stream from the University gate to the hospital. The figures and gait of the men were young, but there was little youth in most of their faces. Some looked as if they ate too little — a few as if they drank too much. Tall and short, tweed coated and black, round-shouldered, bespectacled and slim, they crowded with clatter of feet and rattle of sticks through the hospital gate. Now and again they thickened into two lines as the carriage of a surgeon of the staff rolled over the cobblestones between.

“There’s going to be a crowd at Archer’s,” whispered the senior man with suppressed excitement. “It is grand to see him at work. I’ve seen him jab all round the aorta until it made me jumpy to watch him. This way, and mind the whitewash.”

They passed under an archway and down a long, stone-flagged corridor with drab-coloured doors on either side, each marked with a number. Some of them were ajar, and the novice glanced into them with tingling nerves. He was reassured to catch a glimpse of cheery fires, lines of white-counterpaned beds and a profusion of coloured texts upon the wall. The corridor opened upon a small hall with a fringe of poorly-clad people seated all round upon benches. A young man with a pair of scissors stuck, like a flower, in his button-hole, and a note-book in his hand, was passing from one to the other, whispering and writing.

“Anything good?” asked the third year’s man.

“You should have been here yesterday,” said the out-patient clerk, glancing up. “We had a regular field day. A popliteal aneurism, a Colles’ fracture, a spina bifida, a tropical abscess, and an elephantiasis. How’s that for a single haul?”

“I’m sorry I missed it. But they’ll come again, I suppose. What’s up with the old gentleman?”

A broken workman was sitting in the shadow, rocking himself slowly to and fro and groaning. A woman beside him was trying to console him, patting his shoulder with a hand which was spotted over with curious little white blisters.

“It’s a fine carbuncle,” said the clerk, with the air of a connoisseur who describes his orchids to one who can appreciate them. “It’s on his back, and the passage is draughty, so we must not look at it, must we, daddy? Pemphigus," he added carelessly, pointing to the woman's disfigured hands. "Would you care to stop and take out a metacarpal?"

"No, thank you, we are due at Archer's. Come on;" and they rejoined the throng, which was hurrying to the theatre of the famous surgeon.

The tiers of horseshoe benches, rising from the floor to the ceiling, were already packed, and the novice as he entered saw vague, curving lines of faces in front of him, and heard the deep buzz of a hundred voices and sounds of laughter from somewhere up above him. His companion spied an opening on the second bench, and they both squeezed into it.

"This is grand," the senior man whispered; "you'll have a rare view of it all."

Only a single row of heads intervened between them and the operating table. It was of unpainted deal, plain, strong and scrupulously clean. A sheet of brown waterproofing covered half of it, and beneath stood a large tin tray full of sawdust. On the farther side, in front of the window, there was a board which was strewed with glittering instruments, forceps, tenacula, saws, canulas, and trocars. A line of knives, with long, thin, delicate blades, lay at one side. Two young men lounged in front of this; one threading needles, the other doing something to a brass coffee-pot-like thing which hissed out puffs of steam.

"That's Peterson," whispered the senior. "The big, bald man in the front row. He's the skin-grafting man, you know. And that's Anthony Browne, who took a larynx out successfully last winter. And there's Murphy the pathologist, and Stoddart the eye man. You'll come to know them all soon."

"Who are the two men at the table?"

"Nobody — dressers. One has charge of the instruments and the other of the puffing Billy. It's Lister's antiseptic spray, you know, and Archer's one of the carbolic acid men. Hayes is the leader of the cleanliness-and-cold-water school, and they all hate each other like poison."

A flutter of interest passed through the closely-packed benches as a woman in petticoat and bodice was led in by two nurses. A red woollen shawl was draped over her head and round her neck. The face which looked out from it was that of a woman in the prime of her years, but drawn with suffering and of a peculiar bees-wax tint. Her head drooped as she walked, and one of the nurses, with her arm round her waist, was whispering consolation in her ear. She gave a quick side glance at the instrument table as she passed, but the nurses turned her away from it.

"What ails her?" asked the novice.

"Cancer of the parotid. It's the devil of a case, extends right away back behind the carotids. There's hardly a man but Archer would dare to follow it. Ah, here he is himself."

As he spoke, a small, brisk, iron-grey man came striding into the room, rubbing his hands together as he walked. He had a clean-shaven face of the Naval officer type, with large, bright eyes, and a firm, straight mouth. Behind him came his big house surgeon with his gleaming pince-nez and a trail of dressers, who grouped themselves into the corners of the room.

"Gentlemen," cried the surgeon in a voice as hard and brisk as his manner. "We have here an interesting case of tumour of the parotid, originally cartilaginous but now assuming malignant characteristics, and therefore requiring excision. On to the table, nurse! Thank you! Chloroform, clerk! Thank you! You can take the shawl off, nurse."

The woman lay back upon the waterproofed pillow and her murderous tumour lay revealed. In itself it was a pretty thing, ivory white with a mesh of blue veins, and curving gently from jaw to chest. But the lean, yellow face, and the stringy throat were in horrible contrast with the plumpness and sleekness of this monstrous growth. The surgeon placed a hand on each side of it and pressed it slowly backwards and forwards.

"Adherent at one place, gentlemen," he cried. "The growth involves the carotids and jugulars, and passes behind the ramus of the jaw, whither we must be prepared to follow it. It is impossible to say how deep our dissection may carry us. Carbolic tray, thank you! Dressings of carbolic gauze, if you please! Push the chloroform, Mr. Johnson. Have the small saw ready in case it is necessary to remove the jaw."

The patient was moaning gently under the towel which had been placed over her face. She tried to raise her arms and to draw up her knees but two dressers restrained her. The heavy air was full of the penetrating smells of carbolic acid and of chloroform. A muffled cry came from under the towel and then a snatch of a song, sung in a high, quavering, monotonous voice.

"He says, says he,
If you fly with me

You'll be mistress of the ice-cream van;
You'll be mistress of the — —"

It mumbled off into a drone and stopped. The surgeon came across, still rubbing his hands, and spoke to an elderly man in front of the novice.

"Narrow squeak for the Government," he said.

"Oh, ten is enough."

"They won't have ten long. They'd do better to resign before they are driven to it."

"Oh, I should fight it out."

"What's the use. They can't get past the committee, even if they get a vote in the House. I was talking to — —"

"Patient's ready, sir," said the dresser.

"Talking to M'Donald — but I'll tell you about it presently." He walked back to the patient, who was breathing in long, heavy gasps. "I propose," said he, passing his hands over the tumour in an almost caressing fashion, "to make a free incision over the posterior border and to take another forward at right angles to the lower end of it. Might I trouble you for a medium knife, Mr. Johnson?"

The novice, with eyes which were dilating with horror, saw the surgeon pick up the long, gleaming knife, dip it into a tin basin and balance it in his fingers as an artist might his brush. Then he saw him pinch up the skin above the tumour with his left hand. At the sight, his nerves, which had already been tried once or twice that day, gave way utterly. His head swam round and he felt that in another instant he might faint. He dared not look at the patient. He dug his thumbs into his ears lest some scream should come to haunt him, and he fixed his eyes rigidly upon the wooden ledge in front of him. One glance, one cry, would, he knew, break down the shred of self-possession which he still retained. He tried to think of cricket, of green fields and rippling water, of his sisters at home — of anything rather than of what was going on so near him.

And yet, somehow, even with his ears stopped up, sounds seemed to penetrate to him and to carry their own tale. He heard, or thought that he heard, the long hissing of the carbolic engine. Then he was conscious of some movement among the dressers. Were there groans too breaking in upon him, and some other sound, some fluid sound, which was more dreadfully suggestive still? His mind would keep building up every step of the operation, and fancy made it more ghastly than fact could have been. His nerves tingled and quivered. Minute by minute the giddiness grew more marked, the numb, sickly feeling at his heart more distressing. And then suddenly, with a groan, his head pitching forward and his brow cracking sharply upon the narrow, wooden shelf in front of him, he lay in a dead faint.

* * *

When he came to himself he was lying in the empty theatre with his collar and shirt undone. The third year’s man was dabbing a wet sponge over his face, and a couple of grinning dressers were looking on.

“All right,” cried the novice, sitting up and rubbing his eyes; “I’m sorry to have made an ass of myself.”

“Well, so I should think,” said his companion. “What on earth did you faint about?”

“I couldn’t help it. It was that operation.”

“What operation?”

“Why, that cancer.”

There was a pause, and then the three students burst out laughing.

“Why, you juggins,” cried the senior man, “there never was an operation at all. They found the patient didn’t stand the chloroform well, and so the whole thing was off. Archer has been giving us one of his racy lectures, and you fainted just in the middle of his favourite story.”

THE THIRD GENERATION

Scudamore Lane, sloping down riverwards from just behind the Monument, lies at night in the shadow of two black and monstrous walls which loom high above the glimmer of the scattered gas-lamps. The footpaths are narrow, and the causeway is paved with rounded cobblestones so that the endless drays roar along it like so many breaking waves. A few old-fashioned houses lie scattered among the business premises, and in one of these — half-way down on the left-hand side — Dr. Horace Selby conducts his large practice. It is a singular street for so big a man, but a specialist who has a European reputation can afford to live where he likes. In his particular branch, too, patients do not always consider seclusion to be a disadvantage.

It was only ten o'clock. The dull roar of the traffic which converged all day upon London Bridge had died away now to a mere confused murmur. It was raining heavily, and the gas shone dimly through the streaked and dripping glass, throwing little yellow circles upon the glistening cobblestones. The air was full of the sounds of rain, the thin swish of its fall, the heavier drip from the eaves, and the swirl and gurgle down the two steep gutters and through the sewer grating. There was only one figure in the whole length of Scudamore Lane. It was that of a man, and it stood outside the door of Dr. Horace Selby.

He had just rung and was waiting for an answer. The fanlight beat full upon the gleaming shoulders of his waterproof and upon his upturned features. It was a wan, sensitive, clear-cut face, with some subtle, nameless peculiarity in its expression — something of the startled horse in the white-rimmed eye, something, too, of the helpless child in the drawn cheek and the weakening of the lower lip. The man-servant knew the stranger as a patient at a bare glance at those frightened eyes. Such a look had been seen at that door before.

"Is the doctor in?"

The man hesitated.

"He has had a few friends to dinner, sir. He does not like to be disturbed outside his usual hours, sir."

"Tell him that I *must* see him. Tell him that it is of the very first importance. Here is my card." He fumbled with his trembling fingers in trying to draw one from the case. “Sir Francis Norton is the name. Tell him that Sir Francis Norton of Deane Park must see him at once.”

“Yes, sir.” The butler closed his fingers upon the card and the half-sovereign which accompanied it. “Better hang your coat up here in the hall. It is very wet. Now, if you will wait here in the consulting-room I have no doubt that I shall be able to send the doctor in to you.”

It was a large and lofty room in which the young baronet found himself. The carpet was so soft and thick that his feet made no sound as he walked across it. The two gas-jets were turned only half-way up, and the dim light with the faint aromatic smell which filled the air had a vaguely religious suggestion. He sat down in a shining leather arm-chair by the smouldering fire and looked gloomily about him. Two sides of the room were taken up with books, fat and sombre, with broad gold lettering upon their backs. Beside him was the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece of white marble, the top of it strewed with cotton wadding and bandages, graduated measures and little bottles. There was one with a broad neck, just above him, containing bluestone, and another narrower one with what looked like the ruins of a broken pipe stem, and “Caustic” outside upon a red label. Thermometers, hypodermic syringes, bistouries and spatulas were scattered thickly about, both on the mantelpiece and on the central table on either side of the sloping desk. On the same table to the right stood copies of the five books which Dr. Horace Selby had written upon the subject with which his name is peculiarly associated, while on the left, on the top of a red medical directory, lay a huge glass model of a human eye, the size of a turnip, which opened down the centre to expose the lens and double chamber within.

Sir Francis Norton had never been remarkable for his powers of observation, and yet he found himself watching these trifles with the keenest attention. Even the corrosion of the cork of an acid bottle caught his eye and he wondered that the doctor did not use glass stoppers. Tiny scratches where the light glinted off from the table, little stains upon the leather of the desk, chemical formulæ scribbled upon the labels of some of the phials — nothing was too slight to arrest his attention. And his sense of hearing was equally alert. The heavy ticking of the solemn black clock above the fireplace struck quite painfully upon his ears. Yet, in spite of it, and in spite also of the thick, old-fashioned, wooden partition walls, he could hear the voices of men talking in the next room and could even catch scraps of their conversation. “Second hand was bound to take it.” “Why, you drew the last of them yourself.” “How could I play the queen when I knew the ace was against me?” The phrases came in little spurts, falling back into the dull murmur of conversation. And then suddenly he heard a creaking of a door, and a step in the hall, and knew with a tingling mixture of impatience and horror that the crisis of his life was at hand.

Dr. Horace Selby was a large, portly man, with an imposing presence. His nose and chin were bold and pronounced, yet his features were puffy — a combination which would blend more freely with the wig and cravat of the early Georges, than with the close-cropped hair and black frockcoat of the end of the nineteenth century. He was clean shaven, for his mouth was too good to cover, large, flexible and sensitive, with a kindly human softening at either corner, which, with his brown, sympathetic eyes, had drawn out many a shame-struck sinner’s secret. Two masterful little bushy side whiskers bristled out from under his ears, spindling away upwards to merge in the thick curves of his brindled hair. To his patients there was something reassuring in the mere bulk and dignity of the man. A high and easy bearing in medicine, as in war, bears with it a hint of victories in the past, and a promise of others to come. Dr. Horace Selby’s face was a consolation, and so, too, were the large, white, soothing hands, one of which he held out to his visitor.

“I am sorry to have kept you waiting. It is a conflict of duties, you perceive. A host to his guests and an adviser to his patient. But now I am entirely at your disposal, Sir Francis. But, dear me, you are very cold.”

“Yes, I am cold.”

“And you are trembling all over. Tut, tut, this will never do. This miserable night has chilled you. Perhaps some little stimulant — —”

“No, thank you. I would really rather not. And it is not the night which has chilled me. I am frightened, doctor.”

The doctor half turned in his chair and patted the arch of the young man’s knee as he might the neck of a restless horse.

“What, then?” he asked, looking over his shoulder at the pale face with the startled eyes.

Twice the young man parted his lips. Then he stooped with a sudden gesture and turning up the right leg of his trousers he pulled down his sock and thrust forward his shin. The doctor made a clicking noise with his tongue as he glanced at it.

"Both legs?"

"No, only one."

"Suddenly?"

"This morning."

"Hum!" The doctor pouted his lips, and drew his finger and thumb down the line of his chin. "Can you account for it?" he said briskly.

"No."

A trace of sternness came into the large, brown eyes.

"I need not point out to you that unless the most absolute frankness — —"

The patient sprang from his chair.

"So help me God, doctor," he cried, "I have nothing in my life with which to reproach myself. Do you think that I would be such a fool as to come here and tell you lies? Once for all, I have nothing to regret."

He was a pitiful, half-tragic, and half-grotesque figure as he stood with one trouser leg rolled to his knee, and that ever-present horror still lurking in his eyes. A burst of merriment came from the card-players in the next room and the two looked at each other in silence.

"Sit down!" said the doctor abruptly. "Your assurance is quite sufficient." He stooped and ran his finger down the line of the young man's shin, raising it at one point. "Hum! Serpiginous!" he murmured, shaking his head; "any other symptoms?"

"My eyes have been a little weak."

"Let me see your teeth!" He glanced at them, and again made the gentle clicking sound of sympathy and disapprobation.

"Now the eye!" He lit a lamp at the patient's elbow, and holding a small crystal lens to concentrate the light, he threw it obliquely upon the patient's eye. As he did so a glow of pleasure came over his large, expressive face, a flush of such enthusiasm as the botanist feels when he packs the rare plant into his tin knapsack, or the astronomer when the long-sought comet first swims into the field of his telescope.

"This is very typical — very typical indeed," he murmured, turning to his desk and jotting down a few memoranda upon a sheet of paper. "Curiously enough I am writing a monograph upon the subject. It is singular that you should have been able to furnish so well marked a case."

He had so forgotten the patient in his symptom that he had assumed an almost congratulatory air towards its possessor. He reverted to human sympathy again as his patient asked for particulars.

"My dear sir, there is no occasion for us to go into strictly professional details together," said he soothingly. "If, for example, I were to say that you have interstitial keratitis, how would you be the wiser? There are indications of a strumous diathesis. In broad terms I may say that you have a constitutional and hereditary taint."

The young baronet sank back in his chair and his chin fell forward upon his chest. The doctor sprang to a side table and poured out a half glass of liqueur brandy which he held to his patient's lips. A little fleck of colour came into his cheeks as he drank it down.

"Perhaps I spoke a little abruptly," said the doctor. "But you must have known the nature of your complaint, why otherwise should you have come to me?"

"God help me, I suspected it — but only to-day when my leg grew bad. My father had a leg like this."

"It was from him, then?"

"No, from my grandfather. You have heard of Sir Rupert Norton, the great Corinthian?"

The doctor was a man of wide reading with a retentive memory. The name brought back to him instantly the remembrance of the sinister reputation of its owner — a notorious buck of the thirties, who had gambled and duelled and steeped himself in drink and debauchery until even the vile set with whom he consorted had shrunk away from him in horror, and left him to a sinister old age with the barmaid wife whom in some drunken frolic he had espoused. As he looked at the young man still leaning back in the leather chair, there seemed for the instant to flicker up behind him some vague presentiment of that foul old dandy with his dangling seals, many-wreathed scarf, and dark, satyric face. What was he now? An armful of bones in a mouldy box. But his deeds — they were living and rotting the blood in the veins of an innocent man.

"I see that you have heard of him," said the young baronet. "He died horribly, I have been told, but not more horribly than he had lived. My father was his only son. He was a studious, man, fond of books and canaries and the country. But his innocent life did not save him."

"His symptoms were cutaneous, I understand."

"He wore gloves in the house. That was the first thing I can remember. And then it was his throat, and then his legs. He used to ask me so often about my own health, and I thought him so fussy, for how could I tell what the meaning of it was? He was always watching me — always with a sidelong eye fixed upon me. Now at last I know what he was watching for."

"Had you brothers or sisters?"

"None, thank God!"

"Well, well, it is a sad case, and very typical of many which come in my way. You are no lonely sufferer, Sir Francis. There are many thousands who bear the same cross as you do."

"But where's the justice of it, doctor?" cried the young man, springing from the chair and pacing up and down the consulting-room. "If I were heir to my grandfather's sins as well as to their results I could understand it, but I am of my father's type; I love all that is gentle and beautiful, music and poetry and art. The coarse and animal is abhorrent to me. Ask any of my friends and they would tell you that. And now that this vile, loathsome thing — Ach, I am polluted to the marrow, soaked in abomination! And why? Haven't I a right to ask why? Did I do it? Was it my fault? Could I help being born? And look at me now, blighted and blasted, just as life was at its sweetest! Talk about the sins of the father! How about the sins of the Creator!" He shook his two clenched hands in the air, the poor, impotent atom with his pinpoint of brain caught in the whirl of the infinite.

The doctor rose and placing his hands upon his shoulders he pressed him back into his chair again.

"There, there, my dear lad," said he. "You must not excite yourself! You are trembling all over. Your nerves cannot stand it. We must take these great questions upon trust. What are we after all? Half evolved creatures in a transition stage; nearer, perhaps, to the medusa on the one side than to perfected humanity on the other. With half a complete brain we can't expect to understand the whole of a complete fact, can we, now? It is all very dim and dark, no doubt, but I think Pope's famous couplet sums the whole matter up, and from my heart, after fifty years of varied experience, I can say that — —"

But the young baronet gave a cry of impatience and disgust.

"Words, words, words! You can sit comfortably there in your chair and say them — and think them too, no doubt. You've had your life. But I've never had mine. You've healthy blood in your veins. Mine is putrid. And yet I am as innocent as you. What would words do for you if you were in this chair and I in that? Ah, it's such a mockery and a make-belief. Don't think me rude, though, doctor. I don't mean to be that. I only say that it is impossible for you or any man to realise it. But I've a question to ask you, doctor. It's one on which my whole life must depend."

He writhed his fingers together in an agony of apprehension.

"Speak out, my dear sir. I have every sympathy with you."

"Do you think — do you think the poison has spent itself on me? Do you think if I had children that they would suffer?"

"I can only give one answer to that. 'The third and fourth generation,' says the trite old text. You may in time eliminate it from your system, but many years must pass before you can think of marriage."

"I am to be married on Tuesday," whispered the patient.

It was Dr. Horace Selby's turn to be thrilled with horror. There were not many situations which would yield such a sensation to his well-seasoned nerves. He sat in silence while the babble of the card-table broke in again upon them. "We had a double ruff if you had returned a heart." "I was bound to clear the trumps." They were hot and angry about it.

"How could you?" cried the doctor severely. "It was criminal."

"You forget that I have only learned how I stand to-day." He put his two hands to his temples and pressed them convulsively. "You are a man of the world, Doctor Selby. You have seen or heard of such things before. Give me some advice. I'm in your hands. It is all so sudden and horrible, and I don't think I am strong enough to bear it."

The doctor's heavy brows thickened into two straight lines and he bit his nails in perplexity.

"The marriage must not take place."

"Then what am I to do?"

"At all costs it must not take place."

"And I must give her up?"

"There can be no question about that!"

The young man took out a pocket-book and drew from it a small photograph, holding it out towards the doctor. The firm face softened as he looked at it.

"It is very hard on you, no doubt. I can appreciate it more now that I have seen that. But there is no alternative at all. You must give up all thought of it."

"But this is madness, doctor — madness, I tell you. No, I won't raise my voice! I forgot myself! But realise it, man! I am to be married on Tuesday

— this coming Tuesday, you know. And all the world knows it. How can I put such a public affront upon her? It would be monstrous.”

“None the less it must be done. My dear sir, there is no way out of it.”

“You would have me simply write brutally and break the engagement at this last moment without a reason? I tell you I couldn’t do it.”

“I had a patient once who found himself in a somewhat similar situation some years ago,” said the doctor thoughtfully. “His device was a singular one. He deliberately committed a penal offence and so compelled the young lady’s people to withdraw their consent to the marriage.”

The young baronet shook his head.

“My personal honour is as yet unstained,” said he. “I have little else left, but that at least I will preserve.”

“Well, well, it’s a nice dilemma and the choice lies with you.”

“Have you no other suggestion?”

“You don’t happen to have property in Australia?”

“None.”

“But you have capital?”

“Yes.”

“Then you could buy some — to-morrow morning, for example. A thousand mining shares would do. Then you might write to say that urgent business affairs have compelled you to start at an hour’s notice to inspect your property. That would give you six months at any rate.”

“Well, that would be possible — yes, certainly it would be possible. But think of her position — the house full of wedding presents — guests coming from a distance. It is awful. And you say there is no alternative.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, then, I might write it now, and start to-morrow — eh? Perhaps you would let me use your desk. Thank you! I am so sorry to keep you from your guests so long. But I won’t be a moment now.” He wrote an abrupt note of a few lines. Then, with a sudden impulse, he tore it to shreds and flung it into the fireplace. “No, I can’t sit down and tell her a lie, doctor,” said he rising. “We must find some other way out of this. I will think it over, and let you know my decision. You must allow me to double your fee as I have taken such an unconscionable time. Now, good-bye, and thank you a thousand times for your sympathy and advice.”

“Why, dear me, you haven’t even got your prescription yet. This is the mixture, and I should recommend one of these powders every morning and the chemist will put all directions upon the ointment box. You are placed in a cruel situation, but I trust that these may be but passing clouds. When may I hope to hear from you again?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Very good. How the rain is splashing in the street. You have your waterproof there. You will need it. Good-bye, then, until to-morrow."

He opened the door. A gust of cold, damp air swept into the hall. And yet the doctor stood for a minute or more watching the lonely figure which passed slowly through the yellow splotches of the gas-lamps and into the broad bars of darkness between. It was but his own shadow which trailed up the wall as he passed the lights, and yet it looked to the doctor's eye as though some huge and sombre figure walked by a mannikin's side, and led him silently up the lonely street.

Doctor Horace Selby heard again of his patient next morning and rather earlier than he had expected. A paragraph in the *Daily News* caused him to push away his breakfast untasted, and turned him sick and faint while he read it. "A Deplorable Accident" it was headed, and it ran in this way: —

"A fatal accident of a peculiarly painful character is reported from King William Street. About eleven o'clock last night a young man was observed, while endeavouring to get out of the way of a hansom, to slip and fall under the wheels of a heavy two-horse dray. On being picked up, his injuries were found to be of a most shocking character, and he expired while being conveyed to the hospital. An examination of his pocket-book and card-case shows beyond any question that the deceased is none other than Sir Francis Norton of Deane Park, who has only within the last year come into the baronetcy. The accident is made the more deplorable as the deceased, who was only just of age, was on the eve of being married to a young lady belonging to one of the oldest families in the south. With his wealth and his talents the ball of fortune was at his feet, and his many friends will be deeply grieved to know that his promising career has been cut short in so sudden and tragic a fashion."

THE CURSE OF EVE

Robert Johnson was an essentially commonplace man, with no feature to distinguish him from a million others. He was pale of face, ordinary in looks, neutral in opinions, thirty years of age, and a married man. By trade he was a gentleman's outfitter in the New North Road, and the competition of business squeezed out of him the little character that was left. In his hope of conciliating customers he had become cringing and pliable, until working ever in the same routine from day to day he seemed to have sunk into a soulless machine rather than a man. No great question had ever stirred him. At the end of this smug century, self-contained in his own narrow circle, it seemed impossible that any of the mighty, primitive passions of mankind could ever reach him. Yet birth, and lust, and illness, and death are changeless things, and when one of these harsh facts springs out upon a man at some sudden turn of the path of life, it dashes off for the moment his mask of civilisation and gives a glimpse of the stranger and stronger face below.

Johnson's wife was a quiet little woman, with brown hair and gentle ways. His affection for her was the one positive trait in his character. Together they would lay out the shop window every Monday morning, the spotless shirts in their green cardboard boxes below, the neckties above hung in rows over the brass rails, the cheap studs glistening from the white cards at either side, while in the background were the rows of cloth caps and the bank of boxes in which the more valuable hats were screened from the sunlight. She kept the books and sent out the bills. No one but she knew the joys and sorrows which crept into his small life. She had shared his exultation when the gentleman who was going to India had bought ten dozen shirts and an incredible number of collars, and she had been stricken as he when, after the goods had gone, the bill was returned from the hotel address with the intimation that no such person had lodged there. For five years they had worked, building up the business, thrown together all the more closely because their marriage had been a childless one. Now, however, there were signs that a change was at hand, and that speedily. She was unable to come downstairs, and her mother, Mrs. Peyton, came over from Camberwell to nurse her and to welcome her grandchild.

Little qualms of anxiety came over Johnson as his wife’s time approached. However, after all, it was a natural process. Other men’s wives went through it unharmed, and why should not his? He was himself one of a family of fourteen, and yet his mother was alive and hearty. It was quite the exception for anything to go wrong. And yet in spite of his reasonings the remembrance of his wife’s condition was always like a sombre background to all his other thoughts.

Doctor Miles of Bridport Place, the best man in the neighbourhood, was retained five months in advance, and, as time stole on, many little packets of absurdly small white garments with frill work and ribbons began to arrive among the big consignments of male necessities. And then one evening, as Johnson was ticketing the scarves in the shop, he heard a bustle upstairs, and Mrs. Peyton came running down to say that Lucy was bad and that she thought the doctor ought to be there without delay.

It was not Robert Johnson’s nature to hurry. He was prim and staid and liked to do things in an orderly fashion. It was a quarter of a mile from the corner of the New North Road where his shop stood to the doctor’s house in Bridport Place. There were no cabs in sight, so he set off upon foot, leaving the lad to mind the shop. At Bridport Place he was told that the doctor had just gone to Harman Street to attend a man in a fit. Johnson started off for Harman Street, losing a little of his primness as he became more anxious. Two full cabs but no empty ones passed him on the way. At Harman Street he learned that the doctor had gone on to a case of measles, fortunately he had left the address — 69 Dunstan Road, at the other side of the Regent’s Canal. Johnson’s primness had vanished now as he thought of the women waiting at home, and he began to run as hard as he could down the Kingsland Road. Some way along he sprang into a cab which stood by the curb and drove to Dunstan Road. The doctor had just left, and Robert Johnson felt inclined to sit down upon the steps in despair.

Fortunately he had not sent the cab away, and he was soon back at Bridport Place. Doctor Miles had not returned yet, but they were expecting him every instant. Johnson waited, drumming his fingers on his knees, in a high, dim-lit room, the air of which was charged with a faint, sickly smell of ether. The furniture was massive, and the books in the shelves were sombre, and a squat black clock ticked mournfully on the mantelpiece. It told him that it was half-past seven, and that he had been gone an hour and a quarter. Whatever would the women think of him! Every time that a distant door slammed he sprang from his chair in a quiver of eagerness. His ears strained to catch the deep notes of the doctor’s voice. And then, suddenly, with a gush of joy he heard a quick step outside, and the sharp click of the key in the lock. In an instant he was out in the hall, before the doctor’s foot was over the threshold.

“If you please, doctor, I’ve come for you,” he cried; “the wife was taken bad at six o’clock.”

He hardly knew what he expected the doctor to do. Something very energetic, certainly — to seize some drugs, perhaps, and rush excitedly with him through the gaslit streets. Instead of that Doctor Miles threw his umbrella into the rack, jerked off his hat with a somewhat peevish gesture, and pushed Johnson back into the room.

“Let’s see! You *did* engage me, didn’t you?” he asked in no very cordial voice.

“Oh yes, doctor, last November. Johnson, the outfitter, you know, in the New North Road.”

“Yes, yes. It’s a bit overdue,” said the doctor, glancing at a list of names in a note-book with a very shiny cover. “Well, how is she?”

“I don’t — —”

“Ah, of course, it’s your first. You’ll know more about it next time.”

“Mrs. Peyton said it was time you were there, sir.”

“My dear sir, there can be no very pressing hurry in a first case. We shall have an all-night affair, I fancy. You can’t get an engine to go without coals, Mr. Johnson, and I have had nothing but a light lunch.”

“We could have something cooked for you — something hot and a cup of tea.”

“Thank you, but I fancy my dinner is actually on the table. I can do no good in the earlier stages. Go home and say that I am coming, and I will be round immediately afterwards.”

A sort of horror filled Robert Johnson as he gazed at this man who could think about his dinner at such a moment. He had not imagination enough to realise that the experience which seemed so appallingly important to him, was the merest everyday matter of business to the medical man who could not have lived for a year had he not, amid the rush of work, remembered what was due to his own health. To Johnson he seemed little better than a monster. His thoughts were bitter as he sped back to his shop.

“You’ve taken your time,” said his mother-in-law reproachfully, looking down the stairs as he entered.

“I couldn’t help it!” he gasped. “Is it over?”

“Over! She’s got to be worse, poor dear, before she can be better. Where’s Doctor Miles?”

“He’s coming after he’s had dinner.”

The old woman was about to make some reply, when, from the half-opened door behind, a high, whinnying voice cried out for her. She ran back and closed the door, while Johnson, sick at heart, turned into the shop. There he sent the lad home and busied himself frantically in putting up shutters and turning out boxes. When all was closed and finished he seated himself in the parlour behind the shop. But he could not sit still. He rose incessantly to walk a few paces and then fall back into a chair once more. Suddenly the clatter of china fell upon his ear, and he saw the maid pass the door with a cup on a tray and a smoking teapot.

“Who is that for, Jane?” he asked.

“For the mistress, Mr. Johnson. She says she would fancy it.”

There was immeasurable consolation to him in that homely cup of tea. It wasn’t so very bad after all if his wife could think of such things. So lighthearted was he that he asked for a cup also. He had just finished it when the doctor arrived, with a small black-leather bag in his hand.

“Well, how is she?” he asked genially.

“Oh, she’s very much better,” said Johnson, with enthusiasm.

“Dear me, that’s bad!” said the doctor. “Perhaps it will do if I look in on my morning round?”

“No, no,” cried Johnson, clutching at his thick frieze overcoat. “We are so glad that you have come. And, doctor, please come down soon and let me know what you think about it.”

The doctor passed upstairs, his firm, heavy steps resounding through the house. Johnson could hear his boots creaking as he walked about the floor above him, and the sound was a consolation to him. It was crisp and decided, the tread of a man who had plenty of self-confidence. Presently, still straining his ears to catch what was going on, he heard the scraping of a chair as it was drawn along the floor, and a moment later he heard the door fly open, and some one came rushing downstairs. Johnson sprang up with his hair bristling, thinking that some dreadful thing had occurred, but it was only his mother-in-law, incoherent with excitement and searching for scissors and some tape. She vanished again and Jane passed up the stairs with a pile of newly-aired linen. Then, after an interval of silence, Johnson heard the heavy, creaking tread and the doctor came down into the parlour.

"That's better," said he, pausing with his hand upon the door. "You look pale, Mr. Johnson."

"Oh no, sir, not at all," he answered deprecatingly, mopping his brow with his handkerchief.

"There is no immediate cause for alarm," said Doctor Miles. "The case is not all that we could wish it. Still we will hope for the best."

"Is there danger, sir?" gasped Johnson.

"Well, there is always danger, of course. It is not altogether a favourable case, but still it might be much worse. I have given her a draught. I saw as I passed that they have been doing a little building opposite to you. It's an improving quarter. The rents go higher and higher. You have a lease of your own little place, eh?"

"Yes, sir, yes!" cried Johnson, whose ears were straining for every sound from above, and who felt none the less that it was very soothing that the doctor should be able to chat so easily at such a time. "That's to say no, sir, I am a yearly tenant."

"Ah, I should get a lease if I were you. There's Marshall, the watchmaker, down the street, I attended his wife twice and saw him through the typhoid when they took up the drains in Prince Street. I assure you his landlord sprung his rent nearly forty a year and he had to pay or clear out."

"Did his wife get through it, doctor?"

"Oh yes, she did very well. Hullo! Hullo!"

He slanted his ear to the ceiling with a questioning face, and then darted swiftly from the room.

It was March and the evenings were chill, so Jane had lit the fire, but the wind drove the smoke downwards and the air was full of its acrid taint. Johnson felt chilled to the bone, though rather by his apprehensions than by the weather. He crouched over the fire with his thin white hands held out to the blaze. At ten o'clock Jane brought in the joint of cold meat and laid his place for supper, but he could not bring himself to touch it. He drank a glass of the beer, however, and felt the better for it. The tension of his nerves seemed to have reacted upon his hearing, and he was able to follow the most trivial things in the room above. Once, when the beer was still heartening him, he nerved himself to creep on tiptoe up the stair and to listen to what was going on. The bedroom door was half an inch open, and through the slit he could catch a glimpse of the clean-shaven face of the doctor, looking wearier and more anxious than before. Then he rushed downstairs like a lunatic, and running to the door he tried to distract his thoughts by watching what was going on in the street. The shops were all shut, and some rollicking boon companions came shouting along from the public-house. He stayed at the door until the stragglers had thinned down, and then came back to his seat by the fire. In his dim brain he was asking himself questions which had never intruded themselves before. Where was the justice of it? What had his sweet, innocent little wife done that she should be used so? Why was Nature so cruel? He was frightened at his own thoughts, and yet wondered that they had never occurred to him before.

As the early morning drew in, Johnson, sick at heart and shivering in every limb, sat with his great-coat huddled round him, staring at the grey ashes and waiting hopelessly for some relief. His face was white and clammy, and his nerves had been numbed into a half-conscious state by the long monotony of misery. But suddenly all his feelings leapt into keen life again as he heard the bedroom door open and the doctor’s steps upon the stair. Robert Johnson was precise and unemotional in everyday life, but he almost shrieked now as he rushed forward to know if it were over.

One glance at the stern, drawn face which met him showed that it was no pleasant news which had sent the doctor downstairs. His appearance had altered as much as Johnson’s during the last few hours. His hair was on end, his face flushed, his forehead dotted with beads of perspiration. There was a peculiar fierceness in his eye, and about the lines of his mouth, a fighting look as befitted a man who for hours on end had been striving with the hungriest of foes for the most precious of prizes. But there was a sadness too, as though his grim opponent had been overmastering him. He sat down and leaned his head upon his hand like a man who is fagged out.

“I thought it my duty to see you, Mr. Johnson, and to tell you that it is a very nasty case. Your wife’s heart is not strong, and she has some symptoms which I do not like. What I wanted to say is that if you would like to have a second opinion I shall be very glad to meet any one whom you might suggest.”

Johnson was so dazed by his want of sleep and the evil news that he could hardly grasp the doctor’s meaning. The other, seeing him hesitate, thought that he was considering the expense.

"Smith or Hawley would come for two guineas," said he. "But I think Pritchard of the City Road is the best man."

"Oh yes, bring the best man," cried Johnson.

"Pritchard would want three guineas. He is a senior man, you see."

"I'd give him all I have if he would pull her through. Shall I run for him?"

"Yes. Go to my house first and ask for the green baize bag. The assistant will give it to you. Tell him I want the A.C.E. mixture. Her heart is too weak for chloroform. Then go for Pritchard and bring him back with you."

It was heavenly for Johnson to have something to do and to feel that he was of some use to his wife. He ran swiftly to Bridport Place, his footfalls clattering through the silent streets, and the big dark policemen turning their yellow funnels of light on him as he passed. Two tugs at the night-bell brought down a sleepy, half-clad assistant, who handed him a stoppered glass bottle and a cloth bag which contained something which clinked when you moved it. Johnson thrust the bottle into his pocket, seized the green bag, and pressing his hat firmly down ran as hard as he could set foot to ground until he was in the City Road and saw the name of Pritchard engraved in white upon a red ground. He bounded in triumph up the three steps which led to the door, and as he did so there was a crash behind him. His precious bottle was in fragments upon the pavement.

For a moment he felt as if it were his wife's body that was lying there. But the run had freshened his wits and he saw that the mischief might be repaired. He pulled vigorously at the night-bell.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked a gruff voice at his elbow. He started back and looked up at the windows, but there was no sign of life. He was approaching the bell again with the intention of pulling it, when a perfect roar burst from the wall.

"I can't stand shivering here all night," cried the voice. "Say who you are and what you want or I shut the tube."

Then for the first time Johnson saw that the end of a speaking tube hung out of the wall just above the bell. He shouted up it —

"I want you to come with me to meet Doctor Miles at a confinement at once."

"How far?" shrieked the irascible voice.

"The New North Road, Hoxton."

"My consultation fee is three guineas, payable at the time."

"All right," shouted Johnson. "You are to bring a bottle of A.C.E. mixture with you."

"All right! Wait a bit!"

Five minutes later an elderly, hard-faced man with grizzled hair flung open the door. As he emerged a voice from somewhere in the shadows cried —

"Mind you take your cravat, John," and he impatiently growled something over his shoulder in reply.

The consultant was a man who had been hardened by a life of ceaseless labour, and who had been driven, as so many others have been, by the needs of his own increasing family to set the commercial before the philanthropic side of his profession. Yet beneath his rough crust he was a man with a kindly heart.

"We don't want to break a record," said he, pulling up and panting after attempting to keep up with Johnson for five minutes. "I would go quicker if I could, my dear sir, and I quite sympathise with your anxiety, but really I can't manage it."

So Johnson, on fire with impatience, had to slow down until they reached the New North Road, when he ran ahead and had the door open for the doctor when he came. He heard the two meet outside the bedroom, and caught scraps of their conversation. "Sorry to knock you up — nasty case — decent people." Then it sank into a mumble and the door closed behind them.

Johnson sat up in his chair now, listening keenly, for he knew that a crisis must be at hand. He heard the two doctors moving about, and was able to distinguish the step of Pritchard, which had a drag in it, from the clean, crisp sound of the other's footfall. There was silence for a few minutes and then a curious drunken, mumbling sing-song voice came quavering up, very unlike anything which he had heard hitherto. At the same time a sweetish, insidious scent, imperceptible perhaps to any nerves less strained than his, crept down the stairs and penetrated into the room. The voice dwindled into a mere drone and finally sank away into silence, and Johnson gave a long sigh of relief for he knew that the drug had done its work and that, come what might, there should be no more pain for the sufferer.

But soon the silence became even more trying to him than the cries had been. He had no clue now as to what was going on, and his mind swarmed with horrible possibilities. He rose and went to the bottom of the stairs again. He heard the clink of metal against metal, and the subdued murmur of the doctors' voices. Then he heard Mrs. Peyton say something, in a tone as of fear or expostulation, and again the doctors murmured together. For twenty minutes he stood there leaning against the wall, listening to the occasional rumbles of talk without being able to catch a word of it. And then of a sudden there rose out of the silence the strangest little piping cry, and Mrs. Peyton screamed out in her delight and the man ran into the parlour and flung himself down upon the horse-hair sofa, drumming his heels on it in his ecstasy.

But often the great cat Fate lets us go, only to clutch us again in a fiercer grip. As minute after minute passed and still no sound came from above save those thin, glutinous cries, Johnson cooled from his frenzy of joy, and lay breathless with his ears straining. They were moving slowly about. They were talking in subdued tones. Still minute after minute passing, and no word from the voice for which he listened. His nerves were dulled by his night of trouble, and he waited in limp wretchedness upon his sofa. There he still sat when the doctors came down to him — a bedraggled, miserable figure with his face grimy and his hair unkempt from his long vigil. He rose as they entered, bracing himself against the mantelpiece.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"Doing well," answered the doctor.

And at the words that little conventional spirit which had never known until that night the capacity for fierce agony which lay within it, learned for the second time that there were springs of joy also which it had never tapped before. His impulse was to fall upon his knees, but he was shy before the doctors.

"Can I go up?"

"In a few minutes."

"I'm sure, doctor. I'm very — I'm very — —" he grew inarticulate. "Here are your three guineas, Doctor Pritchard. I wish they were three hundred."

"So do I," said the senior man, and they laughed as they shook hands.

Johnson opened the shop door for them and heard their talk as they stood for an instant outside.

"Looked nasty at one time."

"Very glad to have your help."

"Delighted, I'm sure. Won't you step round and have a cup of coffee?"

“No, thanks. I’m expecting another case.”

The firm step and the dragging one passed away to the right and the left. Johnson turned from the door still with that turmoil of joy in his heart. He seemed to be making a new start in life. He felt that he was a stronger and a deeper man. Perhaps all this suffering had an object then. It might prove to be a blessing both to his wife and to him. The very thought was one which he would have been incapable of conceiving twelve hours before. He was full of new emotions. If there had been a harrowing, there had been a planting too.

“Can I come up?” he cried, and then, without waiting for an answer, he took the steps three at a time.

Mrs. Peyton was standing by a soapy bath with a bundle in her hands. From under the curve of a brown shawl there looked out at him the strangest little red face with crumpled features, moist, loose lips, and eyelids which quivered like a rabbit’s nostrils. The weak neck had let the head topple over, and it rested upon the shoulder.

“Kiss it, Robert!” cried the grandmother. “Kiss your son!”

But he felt a resentment to the little, red, blinking creature. He could not forgive it yet for that long night of misery. He caught sight of a white face in the bed and he ran towards it with such love and pity as his speech could find no words for.

“Thank God it is over! Lucy, dear, it was dreadful!”

“But I’m so happy now. I never was so happy in my life.”

Her eyes were fixed upon the brown bundle.

“You mustn’t talk,” said Mrs. Peyton.

“But don’t leave me,” whispered his wife.

So he sat in silence with his hand in hers. The lamp was burning dim and the first cold light of dawn was breaking through the window. The night had been long and dark but the day was the sweeter and the purer in consequence. London was waking up. The roar began to rise from the street. Lives had come and lives had gone, but the great machine was still working out its dim and tragic destiny.

A MEDICAL DOCUMENT

Medical men are, as a class, very much too busy to take stock of singular situations or dramatic events. Thus it happens that the ablest chronicler of their experiences in our literature was a lawyer. A life spent in watching over death-beds — or over birth-beds which are infinitely more trying — takes something from a man's sense of proportion, as constant strong waters might corrupt his palate. The overstimulated nerve ceases to respond. Ask the surgeon for his best experiences and he may reply that he has seen little that is remarkable, or break away into the technical. But catch him some night when the fire has spurted up and his pipe is reeking, with a few of his brother practitioners for company and an artful question or allusion to set him going. Then you will get some raw, green facts new plucked from the tree of life.

It is after one of the quarterly dinners of the Midland Branch of the British Medical Association. Twenty coffee cups, a dozen liqueur glasses, and a solid bank of blue smoke which swirls slowly along the high, gilded ceiling gives a hint of a successful gathering. But the members have shredded off to their homes. The line of heavy, bulge-pocketed overcoats and of stethoscope-bearing top hats is gone from the hotel corridor. Round the fire in the sitting-room three medicos are still lingering, however, all smoking and arguing, while a fourth, who is a mere layman and young at that, sits back at the table. Under cover of an open journal he is writing furiously with a stylographic pen, asking a question in an innocent voice from time to time and so flickering up the conversation whenever it shows a tendency to wane.

The three men are all of that staid middle age which begins early and lasts late in the profession. They are none of them famous, yet each is of good repute, and a fair type of his particular branch. The portly man with the authoritative manner and the white, vitriol splash upon his cheek is Charley Manson, chief of the Wormley Asylum, and author of the brilliant monograph—"Obscure Nervous Lesions in the Unmarried." He always wears his collar high like that, since the half-successful attempt of a student of Revelations to cut his throat with a splinter of glass. The second, with the ruddy face and the merry brown eyes, is a general practitioner, a man of vast experience, who, with his three assistants and his five horses, takes twenty-five hundred a year in half-crown visits and shilling consultations out of the poorest quarter of a great city. That cheery face of Theodore Foster is seen at the side of a hundred sick-beds a day, and if he has one-third more names on his visiting list than in his cash-book he always promises himself that he will get level some day when a millionaire with a chronic complaint — the ideal combination — shall seek his services. The third, sitting on the right with his dress-shoes shining on the top of the fender, is Hargrave, the rising surgeon. His face has none of the broad humanity of Theodore Foster's, the eye is stern and critical, the mouth straight and severe, but there is strength and decision in every line of it, and it is nerve rather than sympathy which the patient demands when he is bad enough to come to Hargrave's door. He calls himself a jawman, "a mere jawman," as he modestly puts it, but in point of fact he is too young and too poor to confine himself to a specialty, and there is nothing surgical which Hargrave has not the skill and the audacity to do.

"Before, after, and during," murmurs the general practitioner in answer to some interpolation of the outsider's. "I assure you, Manson, one sees all sorts of evanescent forms of madness."

"Ah, puerperal!" throws in the other, knocking the curved grey ash from his cigar. "But you had some case in your mind, Foster."

"Well, there was one only last week which was new to me. I had been engaged by some people of the name of Silcoe. When the trouble came round I went myself, for they would not hear of an assistant. The husband, who was a policeman, was sitting at the head of the bed on the further side. 'This won't do,' said I. 'Oh yes, doctor, it must do,' said she. 'It's quite irregular, and he must go,' said I. 'It's that or nothing,' said she. 'I won't open my mouth or stir a finger the whole night,' said he. So it ended by my allowing him to remain, and there he sat for eight hours on end. She was very good over the matter, but every now and again *he* would fetch a hollow groan, and I noticed that he held his right hand just under the sheet all the time, where I had no doubt that it was clasped by her left. When it was all happily over, I looked at him and his face was the colour of this cigar ash, and his head had dropped on to the edge of the pillow. Of course I thought he had fainted with emotion, and I was just telling myself what I thought of myself for having been such a fool as to let him stay there, when suddenly I saw that the sheet over his hand was all soaked with blood; I whisked it down, and there was the fellow's wrist half cut through. The woman had one bracelet of a policeman’s handcuff over her left wrist and the other round his right one. When she had been in pain she had twisted with all her strength and the iron had fairly eaten into the bone of the man’s arm. ‘Aye, doctor,’ said she, when she saw I had noticed it. ‘He’s got to take his share as well as me. Turn and turn,’ said she.”

“Don’t you find it a very wearing branch of the profession?” asks Foster after a pause.

“My dear fellow, it was the fear of it that drove me into lunacy work.”

“Aye, and it has driven men into asylums who never found their way on to the medical staff. I was a very shy fellow myself as a student, and I know what it means.”

“No joke that in general practice,” says the alienist.

“Well, you hear men talk about it as though it were, but I tell you it’s much nearer tragedy. Take some poor, raw, young fellow who has just put up his plate in a strange town. He has found it a trial all his life, perhaps, to talk to a woman about lawn tennis and church services. When a young man *is* shy he is shyer than any girl. Then down comes an anxious mother and consults him upon the most intimate family matters. ‘I shall never go to that doctor again,’ says she afterwards. ‘His manner is so stiff and unsympathetic.’ Unsympathetic! Why, the poor lad was struck dumb and paralysed. I have known general practitioners who were so shy that they could not bring themselves to ask the way in the street. Fancy what sensitive men like that must endure before they get broken in to medical practice. And then they know that nothing is so catching as shyness, and that if they do not keep a face of stone, their patient will be covered with confusion. And so they keep their face of stone, and earn the reputation perhaps of having a heart to correspond. I suppose nothing would shake *your* nerve, Manson.”

“Well, when a man lives year in year out among a thousand lunatics, with a fair sprinkling of homicidals among them, one’s nerves either get set or shattered. Mine are all right so far.”

“I was frightened once,” says the surgeon. “It was when I was doing dispensary work. One night I had a call from some very poor people, and gathered from the few words they said that their child was ill. When I entered the room I saw a small cradle in the corner. Raising the lamp I walked over and putting back the curtains I looked down at the baby. I tell you it was sheer Providence that I didn’t drop that lamp and set the whole place alight. The head on the pillow turned, and I saw a face looking up at me which seemed to me to have more malignancy and wickedness than ever I had dreamed of in a nightmare. It was the flush of red over the cheek-bones, and the brooding eyes full of loathing of me, and of everything else, that impressed me. I'll never forget my start as, instead of the chubby face of an infant, my eyes fell upon this creature. I took the mother into the next room. 'What is it?' I asked. 'A girl of sixteen,' said she, and then throwing up her arms, 'Oh, pray God she may be taken!' The poor thing, though she spent her life in this little cradle, had great, long, thin limbs which she curled up under her. I lost sight of the case and don't know what became of it, but I'll never forget the look in her eyes."

"That's creepy," says Doctor Foster. "But I think one of my experiences would run it close. Shortly after I put up my plate I had a visit from a little hunch-backed woman, who wished me to come and attend to her sister in her trouble. When I reached the house, which was a very poor one, I found two other little hunched-backed women, exactly like the first, waiting for me in the sitting-room. Not one of them said a word, but my companion took the lamp and walked upstairs with her two sisters behind her, and me bringing up the rear. I can see those three queer shadows cast by the lamp upon the wall as clearly as I can see that tobacco pouch. In the room above was the fourth sister, a remarkably beautiful girl in evident need of my assistance. There was no wedding ring upon her finger. The three deformed sisters seated themselves round the room, like so many graven images, and all night not one of them opened her mouth. I'm not romancing, Hargrave; this is absolute fact. In the early morning a fearful thunderstorm broke out, one of the most violent I have ever known. The little garret burned blue with the lightning, and the thunder roared and rattled as if it were on the very roof of the house. It wasn't much of a lamp I had, and it was a queer thing when a spurt of lightning came to see those three twisted figures sitting round the walls, or to have the voice of my patient drowned by the booming of the thunder. By Jove, I don't mind telling you that there was a time when I nearly bolted from the room. All came right in the end, but I never heard the true story of the unfortunate beauty and her three crippled sisters."

"That's the worst of these medical stories," sighs the outsider. "They never seem to have an end."

"When a man is up to his neck in practice, my boy, he has no time to gratify his private curiosity. Things shoot across him and he gets a glimpse of them, only to recall them, perhaps, at some quiet moment like this. But I've always felt, Manson, that your line had as much of the terrible in it as any other."

"More," groans the alienist. "A disease of the body is bad enough, but this seems to be a disease of the soul. Is it not a shocking thing — a thing to drive a reasoning man into absolute Materialism — to think that you may have a fine, noble fellow with every divine instinct and that some little vascular change, the dropping, we will say, of a minute spicule of bone from the inner table of his skull on to the surface of his brain may have the effect of changing him to a filthy and pitiable creature with every low and debasing tendency? What a satire an asylum is upon the majesty of man, and no less upon the ethereal nature of the soul."

"Faith and hope," murmurs the general practitioner.

"I have no faith, not much hope, and all the charity I can afford," says the surgeon. "When theology squares itself with the facts of life I'll read it up."

"You were talking about cases," says the outsider, jerking the ink down into his stylographic pen.

"Well, take a common complaint which kills many thousands every year, like G.P. for instance."

"What's G.P.?"

"General practitioner," suggests the surgeon with a grin.

"The British public will have to know what G.P. is," says the alienist gravely. "It's increasing by leaps and bounds, and it has the distinction of being absolutely incurable. General paralysis is its full title, and I tell you it promises to be a perfect scourge. Here's a fairly typical case now which I saw last Monday week. A young farmer, a splendid fellow, surprised his friends by taking a very rosy view of things at a time when the whole country-side was grumbling. He was going to give up wheat, give up arable land, too, if it didn't pay, plant two thousand acres of rhododendrons and get a monopoly of the supply for Covent Garden — there was no end to his schemes, all sane enough but just a bit inflated. I called at the farm, not to see him, but on an altogether different matter. Something about the man's way of talking struck me and I watched him narrowly. His lip had a trick of quivering, his words slurred themselves together, and so did his handwriting when he had occasion to draw up a small agreement. A closer inspection showed me that one of his pupils was ever so little larger than the other. As I left the house his wife came after me. ‘Isn’t it splendid to see Job looking so well, doctor?’ said she; ‘he’s that full of energy he can hardly keep himself quiet.’ I did not say anything, for I had not the heart, but I knew that the fellow was as much condemned to death as though he were lying in the cell at Newgate. It was a characteristic case of incipient G.P.”

“Good heavens!” cries the outsider. “My own lips tremble. I often slur my words. I believe I’ve got it myself.”

Three little chuckles come from the front of the fire.

“There’s the danger of a little medical knowledge to the layman.”

“A great authority has said that every first year’s student is suffering in silent agony from four diseases,” remarks the surgeon. “One is heart disease, of course; another is cancer of the parotid. I forget the two other.”

“Where does the parotid come in?”

“Oh, it’s the last wisdom tooth coming through!”

“And what would be the end of that young farmer?” asks the outsider.

“Paresis of all the muscles, ending in fits, coma and death. It may be a few months, it may be a year or two. He was a very strong young man and would take some killing.”

“By the way,” says the alienist, “did I ever tell you about the first certificate I ever signed? I stood as near ruin then as a man could go.”

“What was it, then?”

“I was in practice at the time. One morning a Mrs. Cooper called upon me and informed me that her husband had shown signs of delusions lately. They took the form of imagining that he had been in the army and had distinguished himself very much. As a matter of fact he was a lawyer and had never been out of England. Mrs. Cooper was of opinion that if I were to call it might alarm him, so it was agreed between us that she should send him up in the evening on some pretext to my consulting-room, which would give me the opportunity of having a chat with him and, if I were convinced of his insanity, of signing his certificate. Another doctor had already signed, so that it only needed my concurrence to have him placed under treatment. Well, Mr. Cooper arrived in the evening about half an hour before I had expected him, and consulted me as to some malarious symptoms from which he said that he suffered. According to his account he had just returned from the Abyssinian Campaign, and had been one of the first of the British forces to enter Magdala. No delusion could possibly be more marked, for he would talk of little else, so I filled in the papers without the slightest hesitation. When his wife arrived, after he had left, I put some questions to her to complete the forms. ‘What is his age?’ I asked. ‘Fifty,’ said she. ‘Fifty!’ I cried. ‘Why, the man I examined could not have been more than thirty!’ And so it came out that the real Mr. Cooper had never called upon me at all, but that by one of those coincidences which takes a man’s breath away another Cooper, who really was a very distinguished young officer of artillery, had come in to consult me. My pen was wet to sign the paper when I discovered it,” says Dr. Manson, mopping his forehead.

“We were talking about nerve just now,” observes the surgeon. “Just, after my qualifying I served in the Navy for a time, as I think you know. I was on the flag-ship on the West African Station, and I remember a singular example of nerve which came to my notice at that time. One of our small gunboats had gone up the Calabar river, and when there the surgeon died of coast fever. On the same day a man’s leg was broken by a spar falling upon it, and it became quite obvious that it must be taken off above the knee if his life was to be saved. The young lieutenant who was in charge of the craft searched among the dead doctor’s effects and laid his hands upon some chloroform, a hip-joint knife, and a volume of Grey’s *Anatomy*. He had the man laid by the steward upon the cabin table, and with a picture of the cross section of the thigh in front of him he began to take off the limb. Every now and then, referring to the diagram, he would say: ‘Stand by with the lashings, steward. There’s blood on the chart about here.’ Then he would jab with his knife until he cut the artery, and he and his assistant would tie it up before they went any further. In this way they gradually whittled the leg off, and upon my word they made a very excellent job of it. The man is hopping about the Portsmouth Yard at this day.

“It’s no joke when the doctor of one of these isolated gunboats himself falls ill,” continues the surgeon after a pause. “You might think it easy for him to prescribe for himself, but this fever knocks you down like a club, and you haven’t strength left to brush a mosquito off your face. I had a touch of it at Lagos, and I know what I am telling you. But there was a chum of mine who really had a curious experience. The whole crew gave him up, and, as they had never had a funeral aboard the ship, they began rehearsing the forms so as to be ready. They thought that he was unconscious, but he swears he could hear every word that passed. ‘Corpse comin' up the 'atchway!' cried the cockney sergeant of Marines. 'Present harms!' He was so amused, and so indignant too, that he just made up his mind that he wouldn't be carried through that hatchway, and he wasn't, either."

"There's no need for fiction in medicine," remarks Foster, "for the facts will always beat anything you can fancy. But it has seemed to me sometimes that a curious paper might be read at some of these meetings about the uses of medicine in popular fiction."

"How?"

"Well, of what the folk die of, and what diseases are made most use of in novels. Some are worn to pieces, and others, which are equally common in real life, are never mentioned. Typhoid is fairly frequent, but scarlet fever is unknown. Heart disease is common, but then heart disease, as we know it, is usually the sequel of some foregoing disease, of which we never hear anything in the romance. Then there is the mysterious malady called brain fever, which always attacks the heroine after a crisis, but which is unknown under that name to the text books. People when they are over-excited in novels fall down in a fit. In a fairly large experience I have never known any one to do so in real life. The small complaints simply don't exist. Nobody ever gets shingles or quinsy, or mumps in a novel. All the diseases, too, belongs to the upper part of the body. The novelist never strikes below the belt."

"I'll tell you what, Foster," says the alienist, "there is a side of life which is too medical for the general public and too romantic for the professional journals, but which contains some of the richest human materials that a man could study. It's not a pleasant side, I am afraid, but if it is good enough for Providence to create, it is good enough for us to try and understand. It would deal with strange outbursts of savagery and vice in the lives of the best men, curious momentary weaknesses in the record of the sweetest women, known but to one or two, and inconceivable to the world around. It would deal, too, with the singular phenomena of waxing and of waning manhood, and would throw a light upon those actions which have cut short many an honoured career and sent a man to a prison when he should have been hurried to a consulting-room. Of all evils that may come upon the sons of men, God shield us principally from that one!"

"I had a case some little time ago which was out of the ordinary," says the surgeon. "There was a famous beauty in London Society — I mention no names — who used to be remarkable a few seasons ago for the very low dresses which she would wear. She had the whitest of skins, and most beautiful of shoulders, so it was no wonder. Then gradually the frilling at her neck lapped upwards and upwards, until last year she astonished every one by wearing quite a high collar at a time when it was completely out of fashion. Well, one day this very woman was shown into my consulting-room. When the footman was gone she suddenly tore off the upper part of her dress. 'For God's sake do something for me!' she cried. Then I saw what the trouble was. A rodent ulcer was eating its way upwards, coiling on in its serpiginous fashion until the end of it was flush with her collar. The red streak of its trail was lost below the line of her bust. Year by year it had ascended and she had heightened her dress to hide it, until now it was about to invade her face. She had been too proud to confess her trouble, even to a medical man."

"And did you stop it?"

"Well, with zinc chloride I did what I could. But it may break out again. She was one of those beautiful white-and-pink creatures who are rotten with struma. You may patch but you can't mend."

"Dear! dear! dear!" cries the general practitioner, with that kindly softening of the eyes which has endeared him to so many thousands. "I suppose we mustn't think ourselves wiser than Providence, but there are times when one feels that something is wrong in the scheme of things. I've seen some sad things in my life. Did I ever tell you that case where Nature divorced a most loving couple? He was a fine young fellow, an athlete and a gentleman, but he overdid athletics. You know how the force that controls us gives us a little tweak to remind us when we get off the beaten track. It may be a pinch on the great toe if we drink too much and work too little. Or it may be a tug on our nerves if we dissipate energy too much. With the athlete, of course, it's the heart or the lungs. He had bad phthisis and was sent to Davos. Well, as luck would have it, she developed rheumatic fever, which left her heart very much affected. Now, do you see the dreadful dilemma in which those poor people found themselves? When he came below 4,000 feet or so, his symptoms became terrible. She could come up about 2,500, and then her heart reached its limit. They had several interviews half-way down the valley, which left them nearly dead, and at last, the doctors had to absolutely forbid it. And so for four years they lived within three miles of each other and never met. Every morning he would go to a place which overlooked the chalet in which she lived and would wave a great white cloth and she answer from below. They could see each other quite plainly with their field glasses, and they might have been in different planets for all their chance of meeting.”

“And one at last died,” says the outsider.

“No, sir. I’m sorry not to be able to clinch the story, but the man recovered and is now a successful stockbroker in Drapers Gardens. The woman, too, is the mother of a considerable family. But what are you doing there?”

“Only taking a note or two of your talk.”

The three medical men laugh as they walk towards their overcoats.

“Why, we’ve done nothing but talk shop,” says the general practitioner. “What possible interest can the public take in that?”

THE SURGEON TALKS

"Men die of the diseases which they have studied most," remarked the surgeon, snipping off the end of a cigar with all his professional neatness and finish. "It's as if the morbid condition was an evil creature which, when it found itself closely hunted, flew at the throat of its pursuer. If you worry the microbes too much they may worry you. I've seen cases of it, and not necessarily in microbic diseases either. There was, of course, the well-known instance of Liston and the aneurism; and a dozen others that I could mention. You couldn't have a clearer case than that of poor old Walker of St. Christopher's. Not heard of it? Well, of course, it was a little before your time, but I wonder that it should have been forgotten. You youngsters are so busy in keeping up to the day that you lose a good deal that is interesting of yesterday.

"Walker was one of the best men in Europe on nervous disease. You must have read his little book on sclerosis of the posterior columns. It's as interesting as a novel, and epoch-making in its way. He worked like a horse, did Walker — huge consulting practice — hours a day in the clinical wards — constant original investigations. And then he enjoyed himself also. '*De mortuis*,' of course, but still it's an open secret among all who knew him. If he died at forty-five, he crammed eighty years into it. The marvel was that he could have held on so long at the pace at which he was going. But he took it beautifully when it came.

"I was his clinical assistant at the time. Walker was lecturing on locomotor ataxia to a wardful of youngsters. He was explaining that one of the early signs of the complaint was that the patient could not put his heels together with his eyes shut without staggering. As he spoke, he suited the action to the word. I don't suppose the boys noticed anything. I did, and so did he, though he finished his lecture without a sign.

"When it was over he came into my room and lit a cigarette.

"'Just run over my reflexes, Smith,' said he.

"There was hardly a trace of them left, I tapped away at his knee-tendon and might as well have tried to get a jerk out of that sofa-cushion. He stood, with his eyes shut again, and he swayed like a bush in the wind.

"'So,' said he, 'it was not intercostal neuralgia after all.'

“Then I knew that he had had the lightning pains, and that the case was complete. There was nothing to say, so I sat looking at him while he puffed and puffed at the cigarette. Here he was, a man in the prime of life, one of the handsomest men in London, with money, fame, social success, everything at his feet, and now, without a moment’s warning, he was told that inevitable death lay before him, a death accompanied by more refined and lingering tortures than if he were bound upon a Red Indian stake. He sat in the middle of the blue cigarette cloud with his eyes cast down, and the slightest little tightening of his lips. Then he rose with a motion of his arms, as one who throws off old thoughts and enters upon a new course.

“‘Better put this thing straight at once,’ said he. ‘I must make some fresh arrangements. May I use your paper and envelopes?’

“He settled himself at my desk and he wrote half a dozen letters. It is not a breach of confidence to say that they were not addressed to his professional brothers. Walker was a single man, which means that he was not restricted to a single woman. When he had finished, he walked out of that little room of mine, leaving every hope and ambition of his life behind him. And he might have had another year of ignorance and peace if it had not been for the chance illustration in his lecture.

“It took five years to kill him, and he stood it well. If he had ever been a little irregular he atoned for it in that long martyrdom. He kept an admirable record of his own symptoms, and worked out the eye changes more fully than has ever been done. When the ptosis got very bad he would hold his eyelid up with one hand while he wrote. Then, when he could not co-ordinate his muscles to write, he dictated to his nurse. So died, in the odour of science, James Walker, æt. 45.

“Poor old Walker was very fond of experimental surgery, and he broke ground in several directions. Between ourselves, there may have been some more ground-breaking afterwards, but he did his best for his cases. You know M’Namara, don’t you? He always wears his hair long. He lets it be understood that it comes from his artistic strain, but it is really to conceal the loss of one of his ears. Walker cut the other one off, but you must not tell Mac I said so.

“It was like this. Walker had a fad about the portio dura — the motor to the face, you know — and he thought paralysis of it came from a disturbance of the blood supply. Something else which counterbalanced that disturbance might, he thought, set it right again. We had a very obstinate case of Bell’s paralysis in the wards, and had tried it with every conceivable thing, blistering, tonics, nerve-stretching, galvanism, needles, but all without result. Walker got it into his head that removal of the ear would increase the blood supply to the part, and he very soon gained the consent of the patient to the operation.

“Well, we did it at night. Walker, of course, felt that it was something of an experiment, and did not wish too much talk about it unless it proved successful. There were half a dozen of us there, M’Namara and I among the rest. The room was a small one, and in the centre was the narrow table, with a mackintosh over the pillow, and a blanket which extended almost to the floor on either side. Two candles, on a side-table near the pillow, supplied all the light. In came the patient, with one side of his face as smooth as a baby’s, and the other all in a quiver with fright. He lay down, and the chloroform towel was placed over his face, while Walker threaded his needles in the candle light. The chloroformist stood at the head of the table, and M’Namara was stationed at the side to control the patient. The rest of us stood by to assist.

“Well, the man was about half over when he fell into one of those convulsive flurries which come with the semi-unconscious stage. He kicked and plunged and struck out with both hands. Over with a crash went the little table which held the candles, and in an instant we were left in total darkness. You can think what a rush and a scurry there was, one to pick up the table, one to find the matches, and some to restrain the patient, who was still dashing himself about. He was held down by two dressers, the chloroform was pushed, and by the time the candles were relit, his incoherent, half-smothered shoutings had changed to a stertorous snore. His head was turned on the pillow and the towel was still kept over his face while the operation was carried through. Then the towel was withdrawn, and you can conceive our amazement when we looked upon the face of M’Namara.

“How did it happen? Why, simply enough. As the candles went over, the chloroformist had stopped for an instant and had tried to catch them. The patient, just as the light went out, had rolled off and under the table. Poor M’Namara, clinging frantically to him, had been dragged across it, and the chloroformist, feeling him there, had naturally clapped the towel across his mouth and nose. The others had secured him, and the more he roared and kicked the more they drenched him with chloroform. Walker was very nice about it, and made the most handsome apologies. He offered to do a plastic on the spot, and make as good an ear as he could, but M’Namara had had enough of it. As to the patient, we found him sleeping placidly under the table, with the ends of the blanket screening him on both sides. Walker sent M’Namara round his ear next day in a jar of methylated spirit, but Mac’s wife was very angry about it, and it led to a good deal of ill-feeling. Some people say that the more one has to do with human nature, and the closer one is brought in contact with it, the less one thinks of it. I don’t believe that those who know most would uphold that view. My own experience is dead against it. I was brought up in the miserable-mortal-clay school of theology, and yet here I am, after thirty years of intimate acquaintance with humanity, filled with respect for it. The evil lies commonly upon the surface. The deeper strata are good. A hundred times I have seen folk condemned to death as suddenly as poor Walker was. Sometimes it was to blindness or to mutilations which are worse than death. Men and women, they almost all took it beautifully, and some with such lovely unselfishness, and with such complete absorption in the thought of how their fate would affect others, that the man about town, or the frivolously-dressed woman had seemed to change into an angel before my eyes. I have seen death-beds, too, of all ages and of all creeds and want of creeds. I never saw any of them shrink, save only one poor, imaginative young fellow, who had spent his blameless life in the strictest of sects. Of course, an exhausted frame is incapable of fear, as any one can vouch who is told, in the midst of his seasickness, that the ship is going to the bottom. That is why I rate courage in the face of mutilation to be higher than courage when a wasting illness is fining away into death.

“Now, I’ll take a case which I had in my own practice last Wednesday. A lady came in to consult me — the wife of a well-known sporting baronet. The husband had come with her, but remained, at her request, in the waiting-room. I need not go into details, but it proved to be a peculiarly malignant case of cancer. ‘I knew it,’ said she. ‘How long have I to live?’ ‘I fear that it may exhaust your strength in a few months,’ I answered. ‘Poor old Jack!’ said she. ‘I’ll tell him that it is not dangerous.’ ‘Why should you deceive him?’ I asked. ‘Well, he’s very uneasy about it, and he is quaking now in the waiting-room. He has two old friends to dinner to-night, and I haven’t the heart to spoil his evening. To-morrow will be time enough for him to learn the truth.’ Out she walked, the brave little woman, and a moment later her husband, with his big, red face shining with joy came plunging into my room to shake me by the hand. No, I respected her wish and I did not undeceive him. I dare bet that evening was one of the brightest, and the next morning the darkest, of his life.

"It's wonderful how bravely and cheerily a woman can face a crushing blow. It is different with men. A man can stand it without, but it knocks him dazed and silly all the same. But the woman does not lose her wits any more than she does her courage. Now, I had a case only a few weeks ago which would show you what I mean. A gentleman consulted me about his wife, a very beautiful woman. She had a small tubercular nodule upon her upper arm, according to him. He was sure that it was of no importance, but he wanted to know whether Devonshire or the Riviera would be the better for her. I examined her and found a frightful sarcoma of the bone, hardly showing upon the surface, but involving the shoulder-blade and clavicle as well as the humerus. A more malignant case I have never seen. I sent her out of the room and I told him the truth. What did he do? Why, he walked slowly round that room with his hands behind his back, looking with the greatest interest at the pictures. I can see him now, putting up his gold *pince-nez* and staring at them with perfectly vacant eyes, which told me that he saw neither them nor the wall behind them. 'Amputation of the arm?' he asked at last. 'And of the collar-bone and shoulder-blade,' said I. 'Quite so. The collar-bone and shoulder-blade,' he repeated, still staring about him with those lifeless eyes. It settled him. I don't believe he'll ever be the same man again. But the woman took it as bravely and brightly as could be, and she has done very well since. The mischief was so great that the arm snapped as we drew it from the night-dress. No, I don't think that there will be any return, and I have every hope of her recovery.

"The first patient is a thing which one remembers all one's life. Mine was commonplace, and the details are of no interest. I had a curious visitor, however, during the first few months after my plate went up. It was an elderly woman, richly dressed, with a wicker-work picnic basket in her hand. This she opened with the tears streaming down her face, and out there waddled the fattest, ugliest and mangiest little pug dog that I have ever seen. 'I wish you to put him painlessly out of the world, doctor,' she cried. 'Quick, quick, or my resolution may give way.' She flung herself down, with hysterical sobs, upon the sofa. The less experienced a doctor is, the higher are his notions of professional dignity, as I need not remind you, my young friend, so I was about to refuse the commission with indignation, when I bethought me that, quite apart from medicine, we were gentleman and lady, and that she had asked me to do something for her which was evidently of the greatest possible importance in her eyes. I led off the poor little doggie, therefore, and with the help of a saucerful of milk and a few drops of prussic acid his exit was as speedy and painless as could be desired. ‘Is it over?’ she cried as I entered. It was really tragic to see how all the love which should have gone to husband and children had, in default of them, been centred upon this uncouth little animal. She left, quite broken down, in her carriage, and it was only after her departure that I saw an envelope sealed with a large red seal, and lying upon the blotting pad of my desk. Outside, in pencil, was written:—’I have no doubt that you would willingly have done this without a fee, but I insist upon your acceptance of the enclosed.’ I opened it with some vague notions of an eccentric millionaire and a fifty pound note, but all I found was a postal order for four and sixpence. The whole incident struck me as so whimsical that I laughed until I was tired. You’ll find there’s so much tragedy in a doctor’s life, my boy, that he would not be able to stand it if it were not for the strain of comedy which comes every now and then to leaven it.

“And a doctor has very much to be thankful for also. Don’t you ever forget it. It is such a pleasure to do a little good that a man should pay for the privilege instead of being paid for it. Still, of course, he has his home to keep up and his wife and children to support. But his patients are his friends — or they should be so. He goes from house to house, and his step and his voice are loved and welcomed in each. What could a man ask for more than that? And besides, he is forced to be a good man. It is impossible for him to be anything else. How can a man spend his whole life in seeing suffering bravely borne and yet remain a hard or a vicious man? It is a noble, generous, kindly profession, and you youngsters have got to see that it remains so.”

THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND

Doctor James Ripley was always looked upon as an exceedingly lucky dog by all of the profession who knew him. His father had preceded him in a practice in the village of Hoyland, in the north of Hampshire, and all was ready for him on the very first day that the law allowed him to put his name at the foot of a prescription. In a few years the old gentleman retired, and settled on the South Coast, leaving his son in undisputed possession of the whole country-side. Save for Doctor Horton, near Basingstoke, the young surgeon had a clear run of six miles in every direction, and took his fifteen hundred pounds a year, though, as is usual in country practices, the stable swallowed up most of what the consulting-room earned.

Doctor James Ripley was two-and-thirty years of age, reserved, learned, unmarried, with set, rather stern features, and a thinning of the dark hair upon the top of his head, which was worth quite a hundred a year to him. He was particularly happy in his management of ladies. He had caught the tone of bland sternness and decisive suavity which dominates without offending. Ladies, however, were not equally happy in their management of him. Professionally, he was always at their service. Socially, he was a drop of quicksilver. In vain the country mammas spread out their simple lures in front of him. Dances and picnics were not to his taste, and he preferred during his scanty leisure to shut himself up in his study, and to bury himself in Virchow's *Archives* and the professional journals.

Study was a passion with him, and he would have none of the rust which often gathers round a country practitioner. It was his ambition to keep his knowledge as fresh and bright as at the moment when he had stepped out of the examination hall. He prided himself on being able at a moment's notice to rattle off the seven ramifications of some obscure artery, or to give the exact percentage of any physiological compound. After a long day's work he would sit up half the night performing iridectomies and extractions upon the sheep's eyes sent in by the village butcher, to the horror of his housekeeper, who had to remove the *débris* next morning. His love for his work was the one fanaticism which found a place in his dry, precise nature.

It was the more to his credit that he should keep up to date in his knowledge, since he had no competition to force him to exertion. In the seven years during which he had practiced in Hoyland three rivals had pitted themselves against him, two in the village itself and one in the neighbouring hamlet of Lower Hoyland. Of these one had sickened and wasted, being, as it was said, himself the only patient whom he had treated during his eighteen months of ruralising. A second had bought a fourth share of a Basingstoke practice, and had departed honourably, while a third had vanished one September night, leaving a gutted house and an unpaid drug bill behind him. Since then the district had become a monopoly, and no one had dared to measure himself against the established fame of the Hoyland doctor.

It was, then, with a feeling of some surprise and considerable curiosity that on driving through Lower Hoyland one morning he perceived that the new house at the end of the village was occupied, and that a virgin brass plate glistened upon the swinging gate which faced the high road. He pulled up his fifty guinea chestnut mare and took a good look at it. "Verrinder Smith, M.D.," was printed across it in very neat, small lettering. The last man had had letters half a foot long, with a lamp like a fire-station. Doctor James Ripley noted the difference, and deduced from it that the new-comer might possibly prove a more formidable opponent. He was convinced of it that evening when he came to consult the current medical directory. By it he learned that Doctor Verrinder Smith was the holder of superb degrees, that he had studied with distinction at Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and finally that he had been awarded a gold medal and the Lee Hopkins scholarship for original research, in recognition of an exhaustive inquiry into the functions of the anterior spinal nerve roots. Doctor Ripley passed his fingers through his thin hair in bewilderment as he read his rival's record. What on earth could so brilliant a man mean by putting up his plate in a little Hampshire hamlet.

But Doctor Ripley furnished himself with an explanation to the riddle. No doubt Dr. Verrinder Smith had simply come down there in order to pursue some scientific research in peace and quiet. The plate was up as an address rather than as an invitation to patients. Of course, that must be the true explanation. In that case the presence of this brilliant neighbour would be a splendid thing for his own studies. He had often longed for some kindred mind, some steel on which he might strike his flint. Chance had brought it to him, and he rejoiced exceedingly.

And this joy it was which led him to take a step which was quite at variance with his usual habits. It is the custom for a new-comer among medical men to call first upon the older, and the etiquette upon the subject is strict. Doctor Ripley was pedantically exact on such points, and yet he deliberately drove over next day and called upon Doctor Verrinder Smith. Such a waiving of ceremony was, he felt, a gracious act upon his part, and a fit prelude to the intimate relations which he hoped to establish with his neighbour.

The house was neat and well appointed, and Doctor Ripley was shown by a smart maid into a dapper little consulting-room. As he passed in he noticed two or three parasols and a lady’s sun-bonnet hanging in the hall. It was a pity that his colleague should be a married man. It would put them upon a different footing, and interfere with those long evenings of high scientific talk which he had pictured to himself. On the other hand, there was much in the consulting-room to please him. Elaborate instruments, seen more often in hospitals than in the houses of private practitioners, were scattered about. A sphygmograph stood upon the table and a gasometer-like engine, which was new to Doctor Ripley, in the corner. A bookcase full of ponderous volumes in French and German, paper-covered for the most part, and varying in tint from the shell to the yolk of a duck’s egg, caught his wandering eyes, and he was deeply absorbed in their titles when the door opened suddenly behind him. Turning round, he found himself facing a little woman, whose plain, palish face was remarkable only for a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes of a blue which had two shades too much green in it. She held a *pince-nez* in her left hand, and the doctor’s card in her right.

“How do you do, Doctor Ripley?” said she.

“How do you do, madam?” returned the visitor. “Your husband is perhaps out?”

“I am not married,” said she simply.

“Oh, I beg your pardon! I meant the doctor — Dr. Verrinder Smith.”

“I am Doctor Verrinder Smith.”

Doctor Ripley was so surprised that he dropped his hat and forgot to pick it up again.

“What!” he gasped, “the Lee Hopkins prizeman! You!”

He had never seen a woman doctor before, and his whole conservative soul rose up in revolt at the idea. He could not recall any Biblical injunction that the man should remain ever the doctor and the woman the nurse, and yet he felt as if a blasphemy had been committed. His face betrayed his feelings only too clearly.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said the lady drily.

"You certainly have surprised me," he answered, picking up his hat.

"You are not among our champions, then?"

"I cannot say that the movement has my approval."

"And why?"

"I should much prefer not to discuss it."

"But I am sure you will answer a lady's question."

"Ladies are in danger of losing their privileges when they usurp the place of the other sex. They cannot claim both."

"Why should a woman not earn her bread by her brains?"

Doctor Ripley felt irritated by the quiet manner in which the lady cross-questioned him.

"I should much prefer not to be led into a discussion, Miss Smith."

"Doctor Smith," she interrupted.

"Well, Doctor Smith! But if you insist upon an answer, I must say that I do not think medicine a suitable profession for women and that I have a personal objection to masculine ladies."

It was an exceedingly rude speech, and he was ashamed of it, the instant after he had made it. The lady however, simply raised her eyebrows and smiled.

"It seems to me that you are begging the question," said she. "Of course, if it makes women masculine that *would* be a considerable deterioration."

It was a neat little counter, and Doctor Ripley, like a pinked fencer, bowed his acknowledgment.

"I must go," said he.

"I am sorry that we cannot come to some more friendly conclusion since we are to be neighbours," she remarked.

He bowed again, and took a step towards the door.

"It was a singular coincidence," she continued, "that at the instant that you called I was reading your paper on 'Locomotor Ataxia,' in the *Lancet*."

"Indeed," said he drily.

"I thought it was a very able monograph."

"You are very good."

"But the views which you attribute to Professor Pitres, of Bordeaux, have been repudiated by him."

"I have his pamphlet of 1890," said Doctor Ripley angrily.

“Here is his pamphlet of 1891.” She picked it from among a litter of periodicals. “If you have time to glance your eye down this passage — —”

Doctor Ripley took it from her and shot rapidly through the paragraph which she indicated. There was no denying that it completely knocked the bottom out of his own article. He threw it down, and with another frigid bow he made for the door. As he took the reins from the groom he glanced round and saw that the lady was standing at her window, and it seemed to him that she was laughing heartily.

All day the memory of this interview haunted him. He felt that he had come very badly out of it. She had showed herself to be his superior on his own pet subject. She had been courteous while he had been rude, self-possessed when he had been angry. And then, above all, there was her presence, her monstrous intrusion to rankle in his mind. A woman doctor had been an abstract thing before, repugnant but distant. Now she was there in actual practice, with a brass plate up just like his own, competing for the same patients. Not that he feared competition, but he objected to this lowering of his ideal of womanhood. She could not be more than thirty, and had a bright, mobile face, too. He thought of her humorous eyes, and of her strong, well-turned chin. It revolted him the more to recall the details of her education. A man, of course, could come through such an ordeal with all his purity, but it was nothing short of shameless in a woman.

But it was not long before he learned that even her competition was a thing to be feared. The novelty of her presence had brought a few curious invalids into her consulting-rooms, and, once there, they had been so impressed by the firmness of her manner and by the singular, new-fashioned instruments with which she tapped, and peered, and sounded, that it formed the core of their conversation for weeks afterwards. And soon there were tangible proofs of her powers upon the country-side. Farmer Eyton, whose callous ulcer had been quietly spreading over his shin for years back under a gentle régime of zinc ointment, was painted round with blistering fluid, and found, after three blasphemous nights, that his sore was stimulated into healing. Mrs. Crowder, who had always regarded the birthmark upon her second daughter Eliza as a sign of the indignation of the Creator at a third helping of raspberry tart which she had partaken of during a critical period, learned that, with the help of two galvanic needles, the mischief was not irreparable. In a month Doctor Verrinder Smith was known, and in two she was famous.

Occasionally, Doctor Ripley met her as he drove upon his rounds. She had started a high dog-cart, taking the reins herself, with a little tiger behind. When they met he invariably raised his hat with punctilious politeness, but the grim severity of his face showed how formal was the courtesy. In fact, his dislike was rapidly deepening into absolute detestation. "The unsexed woman," was the description of her which he permitted himself to give to those of his patients who still remained staunch. But, indeed, they were a rapidly-decreasing body, and every day his pride was galled by the news of some fresh defection. The lady had somehow impressed the country-folk with almost superstitious belief in her power, and from far and near they flocked to her consulting-room.

But what galled him most of all was, when she did something which he had pronounced to be impracticable. For all his knowledge he lacked nerve as an operator, and usually sent his worst cases up to London. The lady, however, had no weakness of the sort, and took everything that came in her way. It was agony to him to hear that she was about to straighten little Alec Turner's club-foot, and right at the fringe of the rumour came a note from his mother, the rector's wife, asking him if he would be so good as to act as chloroformist. It would be inhumanity to refuse, as there was no other who could take the place, but it was gall and wormwood to his sensitive nature. Yet, in spite of his vexation, he could not but admire the dexterity with which the thing was done. She handled the little wax-like foot so gently, and held the tiny tenotomy knife as an artist holds his pencil. One straight insertion, one snick of a tendon, and it was all over without a stain upon the white towel which lay beneath. He had never seen anything more masterly, and he had the honesty to say so, though her skill increased his dislike of her. The operation spread her fame still further at his expense, and self-preservation was added to his other grounds for detesting her. And this very detestation it was which brought matters to a curious climax.

One winter's night, just as he was rising from his lonely dinner, a groom came riding down from Squire Faircastle's, the richest man in the district, to say that his daughter had scalded her hand, and that medical help was needed on the instant. The coachman had ridden for the lady doctor, for it mattered nothing to the Squire who came as long as it were speedily. Doctor Ripley rushed from his surgery with the determination that she should not effect an entrance into this stronghold of his if hard driving on his part could prevent it. He did not even wait to light his lamps, but sprang into his gig and flew off as fast as hoof could rattle. He lived rather nearer to the Squire’s than she did, and was convinced that he could get there well before her.

And so he would but for that whimsical element of chance, which will for ever muddle up the affairs of this world and dumbfound the prophets. Whether it came from the want of his lights, or from his mind being full of the thoughts of his rival, he allowed too little by half a foot in taking the sharp turn upon the Basingstoke road. The empty trap and the frightened horse clattered away into the darkness, while the Squire’s groom crawled out of the ditch into which he had been shot. He struck a match, looked down at his groaning companion, and then, after the fashion of rough, strong men when they see what they have not seen before, he was very sick.

The doctor raised himself a little on his elbow in the glint of the match. He caught a glimpse of something white and sharp bristling through his trouser-leg half-way down the shin.

“Compound!” he groaned. “A three months’ job,” and fainted.

When he came to himself the groom was gone, for he had scudded off to the Squire’s house for help, but a small page was holding a gig-lamp in front of his injured leg, and a woman, with an open case of polished instruments gleaming in the yellow light, was deftly slitting up his trouser with a crooked pair of scissors.

“It’s all right, doctor,” said she soothingly. “I am so sorry about it. You can have Doctor Horton to-morrow, but I am sure you will allow me to help you to-night. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you by the roadside.”

“The groom has gone for help,” groaned the sufferer.

“When it comes we can move you into the gig. A little more light, John! So! Ah, dear, dear, we shall have laceration unless we reduce this before we move you. Allow me to give you a whiff of chloroform, and I have no doubt that I can secure it sufficiently to — —”

Doctor Ripley never heard the end of that sentence. He tried to raise a hand and to murmur something in protest, but a sweet smell was in his nostrils, and a sense of rich peace and lethargy stole over his jangled nerves. Down he sank, through clear, cool water, ever down and down into the green shadows beneath, gently, without effort, while the pleasant chiming of a great belfry rose and fell in his ears. Then he rose again, up and up, and ever up, with a terrible tightness about his temples, until at last he shot out of those green shadows and was in the light once more. Two bright, shining, golden spots gleamed before his dazed eyes. He blinked and blinked before he could give a name to them. They were only the two brass balls at the end posts of his bed, and he was lying in his own little room, with a head like a cannon ball, and a leg like an iron bar. Turning his eyes, he saw the calm face of Doctor Verrinder Smith looking down at him.

"Ah, at last!" said she. "I kept you under all the way home, for I knew how painful the jolting would be. It is in good position now with a strong side splint. I have ordered a morphia draught for you. Shall I tell your groom to ride for Doctor Horton in the morning?"

"I should prefer that you should continue the case," said Doctor Ripley feebly, and then, with a half-hysterical laugh—"You have all the rest of the parish as patients, you know, so you may as well make the thing complete by having me also."

It was not a very gracious speech, but it was a look of pity and not of anger which shone in her eyes as she turned away from his bedside.

Doctor Ripley had a brother, William, who was assistant surgeon at a London hospital, and who was down in Hampshire within a few hours of his hearing of the accident. He raised his brows when he heard the details.

"What! You are pestered with one of those!" he cried.

"I don't know what I should have done without her."

"I've no doubt she's an excellent nurse."

"She knows her work as well as you or I."

"Speak for yourself, James," said the London man with a sniff. "But apart from that, you know that the principle of the thing is all wrong."

"You think there is nothing to be said on the other side?"

"Good heavens! do you?"

"Well, I don't know. It struck me during the night that we may have been a little narrow in our views."

"Nonsense, James. It's all very fine for women to win prizes in the lecture-room, but you know as well as I do that they are no use in an emergency. Now I warrant that this woman was all nerves when she was setting your leg. That reminds me that I had better just take a look at it and see that it is all right."

"I would rather that you did not undo it," said the patient. "I have her assurance that it is all right."

Brother William was deeply shocked.

“Of course, if a woman’s assurance is of more value than the opinion of the assistant surgeon of a London hospital, there is nothing more to be said,” he remarked.

“I should prefer that you did not touch it,” said the patient firmly, and Doctor William went back to London that evening in a huff.

The lady, who had heard of his coming, was much surprised on learning of his departure.

“We had a difference upon a point of professional etiquette,” said Doctor James, and it was all the explanation he would vouchsafe.

For two long months Doctor Ripley was brought in contact with his rival every day, and he learned many things which he had not known before. She was a charming companion, as well as a most assiduous doctor. Her short presence during the long, weary day was like a flower in a sand waste. What interested him was precisely what interested her, and she could meet him at every point upon equal terms. And yet under all her learning and her firmness ran a sweet, womanly nature, peeping out in her talk, shining in her greenish eyes, showing itself in a thousand subtle ways which the dullest of men could read. And he, though a bit of a prig and a pedant, was by no means dull, and had honesty enough to confess when he was in the wrong.

“I don’t know how to apologise to you,” he said in his shame-faced fashion one day, when he had progressed so far as to be able to sit in an arm-chair with his leg upon another one; “I feel that I have been quite in the wrong.”

“Why, then?”

“Over this woman question. I used to think that a woman must inevitably lose something of her charm if she took up such studies.”

“Oh, you don’t think they are necessarily unsexed, then?” she cried, with a mischievous smile.

“Please don’t recall my idiotic expression.”

“I feel so pleased that I should have helped in changing your views. I think that it is the most sincere compliment that I have ever had paid me.”

“At any rate, it is the truth,” said he, and was happy all night at the remembrance of the flush of pleasure which made her pale face look quite comely for the instant.

For, indeed, he was already far past the stage when he would acknowledge her as the equal of any other woman. Already he could not disguise from himself that she had become the one woman. Her dainty skill, her gentle touch, her sweet presence, the community of their tastes, had all united to hopelessly upset his previous opinions. It was a dark day for him now when his convalescence allowed her to miss a visit, and darker still that other one which he saw approaching when all occasion for her visits would be at an end. It came round at last, however, and he felt that his whole life's fortune would hang upon the issue of that final interview. He was a direct man by nature, so he laid his hand upon hers as it felt for his pulse, and he asked her if she would be his wife.

"What, and unite the practices?" said she.

He started in pain and anger.

"Surely you do not attribute any such base motive to me!" he cried. "I love you as unselfishly as ever a woman was loved."

"No, I was wrong. It was a foolish speech," said she, moving her chair a little back, and tapping her stethoscope upon her knee. "Forget that I ever said it. I am so sorry to cause you any disappointment, and I appreciate most highly the honour which you do me, but what you ask is quite impossible."

With another woman he might have urged the point, but his instincts told him that it was quite useless with this one. Her tone of voice was conclusive. He said nothing, but leaned back in his chair a stricken man.

"I am so sorry," she said again. "If I had known what was passing in your mind I should have told you earlier that I intend to devote my life entirely to science. There are many women with a capacity for marriage, but few with a taste for biology. I will remain true to my own line, then. I came down here while waiting for an opening in the Paris Physiological Laboratory. I have just heard that there is a vacancy for me there, and so you will be troubled no more by my intrusion upon your practice. I have done you an injustice just as you did me one. I thought you narrow and pedantic, with no good quality. I have learned during your illness to appreciate you better, and the recollection of our friendship will always be a very pleasant one to me."

And so it came about that in a very few weeks there was only one doctor in Hoyland. But folks noticed that the one had aged many years in a few months, that a weary sadness lurked always in the depths of his blue eyes, and that he was less concerned than ever with the eligible young ladies whom chance, or their careful country mammas, placed in his way.

CRABBE’S PRACTICE

I wonder how many men remember Tom Waterhouse Crabbe, student of medicine in this city. He was a man whom it was not easy to forget if you had once come across him. Geniuses are more commonly read about than seen, but one could not speak five minutes with Crabbe without recognising that he had inherited some touch of that subtle, indefinable essence. There was a bold originality in his thought, and a convincing earnestness in his mode of expressing it, which pointed to something higher than mere cleverness. He studied spasmodically and irregularly, yet he was one of the first men — certainly the most independent thinker — of his year. Poor Crabbe — there was something delightfully original even in his mistakes. I can remember how he laboriously explained to his examiner that the Spanish fly *grew* in Spain. And how he gave five drops of Sabin oil credit for producing that state which it is usually believed to rectify.

Crabbe was not at all the type of man whom we usually associate with the word “genius.” He was not pale nor thin, neither was his hair of abnormal growth. On the contrary he was a powerfully built, square-shouldered fellow, full of vitality, with a voice like a bull and a laugh that could be heard across the meadows. A muscular Christian too, and one of the best Rugby forwards in Edinburgh.

I remember my first meeting with Crabbe. It gave me a respect both for his cool reasoning powers and for his courage. It was at one of the Bulgarian Atrocity meetings held in Edinburgh in ‘78. The hall was densely packed and the ventilation defective, so that I was not sorry to find that owing to my lateness I was unable to get any place, and had to stand in the doorway. Leaning against the wall there I could both enjoy the cool air and hear the invectives which speaker after speaker was hurling at the Conservative ministry. The audience seemed enthusiastically unanimous. A burst of cheering hailed every argument and sarcasm. There was not one dissentient voice. The speaker paused to moisten his lips, and there was a silence over the hall. Then a clear voice rose from the middle of it: “All very fine, but what did Gladstone — —” There was a howl of execration and yells of “Turn him out!” But the voice was still audible. “What did Gladstone do in ‘63?” it demanded. “Turn him out. Show him out of the window! Put him out!” There was a perfect hurricane of threats and abuse.

Men sprang upon the benches shaking their sticks and peering over each other's shoulders to get a glimpse of the daring Conservative. "What did Gladstone do in '63?" roared the voice; "I insist upon being answered." There was another howl of execration, a great swaying of the crowd, and an eddy in the middle of it. Then the mass of people parted and a man was borne out kicking and striking, and after a desperate resistance was precipitated down the stairs.

As the meeting became somewhat monotonous after this little divertisement, I went down into the street to cool myself. There was my inquisitive friend leaning up against a lamp-post with his coat torn to shreds and a pipe in his mouth. Recognising him by his cut as being a medical student, I took advantage of the freemasonry which exists between members of that profession.

"Excuse me," I said, "you are a medical, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said; "Thomas Crabbe, a 'Varsity man."

"My name is Barton," I said. "Pardon my curiosity, but would you mind telling me what Gladstone *did* do in '63?"

"My dear chap," said Crabbe, taking my arm and marching up the street with me, "I haven't the remotest idea in the world. You see, I was confoundedly hot and I wanted a smoke, and there seemed no chance of getting out, for I was jammed up right in the middle of the hall, so I thought I'd just make them carry me out; and I did — not a bad idea, was it? If you have nothing better to do, come up to my digs and have some supper."

"Certainly," said I; and that was the foundation of my friendship with Thomas Crabbe.

Crabbe took his degree a year before I did, and went down to a large port in England with the intention of setting up there. A brilliant career seemed to lie before him, for besides his deep knowledge of medicine, acquired in the most practical school in the world, he had that indescribable manner which gains a patient's confidence at once. It is curious how seldom the two are united. That charming doctor, my dear madam, who pulled the young Charley through the measles so nicely, and had such a pleasant manner and such a clever face, was a noted duffer at college and the laughing-stock of his year. While poor little Doctor Grinder whom you snubbed so, and who seemed so nervous and didn't know where to put his hands, he won a gold medal for original research and was as good a man as his professors. After all, it is generally the outside case, not the inside works, which is noticed in this world.

Crabbe went down with his young degree, and a still younger wife, to settle in this town, which we will call Brisport. I was acting as assistant to a medical man in Manchester, and heard little from my former friend, save that he had set up in considerable style, and was making a bid for a high-class practice at once. I read one most deep and erudite paper in a medical journal, entitled “Curious Development of a Discopherous Bone in the Stomach of a Duck,” which emanated from his pen, but beyond this and some remarks on the embryology of fishes he seemed strangely quiet.

One day to my surprise I received a telegram from Mrs. Crabbe begging me to run down to Brisport and see her husband, as he was far from well. Having obtained leave of absence from my principal, I started by the next train, seriously anxious about my friend. Mrs. Crabbe met me at the station. She told me Tom was getting very much broken down by continued anxiety; the expenses of keeping up his establishment were heavy, and patients were few and far between. He wished my advice and knowledge of practical work to guide him in this crisis.

I certainly found Crabbe altered very much for the worse. He looked gaunt and cadaverous, and much of his old reckless joyousness had left him, though he brightened up wonderfully on seeing an old friend.

After dinner the three of us held a solemn council of war, in which he laid before me all his difficulties. “What in the world am I to do, Barton?” he said. “If I could make myself known it would be all right, but no one seems to look at my door-plate, and the place is overstocked with doctors. I believe they think I am a D.D. I wouldn’t mind if these other fellows were good men, but they are not. They are all antiquated old fogies at least half a century behind the day. Now there is old Markham, who lives in that brick house over there and does most of the practice in the town. I’ll swear he doesn’t know the difference between locomotor ataxia and a hypodermic syringe, but he is known, so they flock into his surgery in a manner which is simply repulsive. And Davidson down the road, he is only an L.S.A. Talked about epispastic paralysis at the Society the other night — confused it with liquor epispasticus, you know. Yet that fellow makes a pound to my shilling.”

“Get your name known and write,” said I.

"But what on earth am I to write about?" asked Crabbe. "If a man has no cases, how in the world is he to describe them? Help yourself and pass the bottle."

"Couldn't you invent a case just to raise the wind?"

"Not a bad idea," said Crabbe thoughtfully. "By the way, did you see my 'Discopherous Bone in a Duck's Stomach'?"

"Yes; it seemed rather good."

"Good, I believe you! Why, man, it was a domino which the old duck had managed to gorge itself with. It was a perfect godsend. Then I wrote about embryology of fishes because I knew nothing about it and reasoned that ninety-nine men in a hundred would be in the same boat. But as to inventing whole cases, it seems rather daring, does it not?"

"A desperate disease needs desperate remedies," said I. "You remember old Hobson at college. He writes once a year to the British Medical and asks if any correspondent can tell him how much it costs to keep a horse in the country. And then he signs himself in the Medical Register as 'The contributor of several unostentatious queries and remarks to scientific papers!'"

It was quite a treat to hear Crabbe laugh with his old student guffaw. "Well, old man," he said, "we'll talk it over to-morrow. We mustn't be selfish and forget that you are a visitor here. Come along out, and see the beauties (save the mark!) of Brisport." So saying he donned a funereal coat, a pair of spectacles, and a hat with a desponding brim, and we spent the remainder of the evening roaming about and discussing mind and matter.

We had another council of war next day. It was a Sunday, and as we sat in the window, smoking our pipes and watching the crowded street, we brooded over many plans for gaining notoriety.

"I've done Bob Sawyer's dodge," said Tom despondingly. "I never go to church without rushing out in the middle of the sermon, but no one knows who I am, so it is no good. I had a nice slide in front of the door last winter for three weeks, and used to give it a polish up after dusk every night. But there was only one man ever fell on it, and he actually limped right across the road to Markham's surgery. Wasn't that hard lines?"

"Very hard indeed," said I.

"Something might be done with orange peel," continued Tom, "but it looks so awfully bad to have the whole pavement yellow with peel in front of a doctor's house."

“It certainly does,” I agreed.

“There was one fellow came in with a cut head one night,” said Tom, “and I sewed him up, but he had forgotten his purse. He came back in a week to have the stitches taken out, but without the money. That man is going about to this day, Jack, with half a yard of my catgut in him — and in him it’ll stay until I see the coin.”

“Couldn’t we get up some incident,” said I, “which would bring your name really prominently before the public?”

“My dear fellow, that’s exactly what I want. If I could get my name into the *Brisport Chronicle* it would be worth five hundred a year to me. There’s a family connection, you know, and people only want to realise that I am here. But how am I to do it unless by brawling in the street or by increasing my family? Now, there was the excitement about the discopherous bone. If Huxley or some of these fellows had taken the matter up it might have been the making of me. But they took it all in with a disgusting complacency as if it was the most usual thing in the world and dominoes were the normal food of ducks. I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he continued, moodily eyeing his fowls. “I’ll puncture the floors of their fourth ventricles and present them to Markham. You know that makes them ravenous, and they’d eat him out of house and home in time. Eh, Jack?”

“Look here, Thomas,” said I, “you want your name in the papers — is that it?”

“That’s about the state of the case.”

“Well, by Jove, you shall have it.”

“Eh? Why? How?”

“There’s a pretty considerable crowd of people outside, isn’t there, Tom?” I continued. “They are coming out of church, aren’t they? If there was an accident now it would make some noise.”

“I say, you’re not going to let rip among them with a shot gun, are you, in order to found a practice for me?”

“No, not exactly. But how would this read in tomorrow’s *Chronicle*? —’Painful occurrence in George Street. — As the congregation were leaving George Street Cathedral after the morning service, they were horrified to see a handsome, fashionably dressed gentleman stagger and fall senseless upon the pavement. He was taken up and carried writhing in terrible convulsions into the surgery of the well-known practitioner Doctor Crabbe, who had been promptly upon the spot. We are happy to state that the fit rapidly passed off, and that, owing to the skilful attention which he received, the gentleman, who is a distinguished visitor in our city, was able to regain his hotel and is now rapidly becoming convalescent.' How would that do, eh?"

"Splendid, Jack — splendid!"

"Well, my boy, I'm your fashionably dressed stranger, and I promise you they won't carry me into Markham's."

"My dear fellow, you are a treasure — you won't mind my bleeding you?"

"Bleeding me, confound you! Yes, I do very much mind."

"Just opening a little vein," pleaded Tom.

"Not a capillary," said I. "Now, look here; I'll throw up the whole business unless you give me your word to behave yourself. I don't draw the line at brandy."

"Very well, brandy be it," grumbled Tom.

"Well, I'm off," said I. "I'll go into the fit against your garden gate."

"All right, old man."

"By the way, what sort of a fit would you like? I could give you either an epileptic or an apoplectic easily, but perhaps you'd like something more ornate — a catalepsy or a trade spasm, maybe — with miner's nystagmus or something of that kind?"

"Wait a bit till I think," said Tom, and he sat puffing at his pipe for five minutes. "Sit down again, Jack," he continued. "I think we could do something better than this. You see, a fit isn't a very deadly thing, and if I did bring you through one there would be no credit in it. If we are going to work this thing, we may as well work it well. We can only do it once. It wouldn't do for the same fashionably dressed stranger to be turning up a second time. People would begin to smell a rat."

"So they would," said I; "but hang it, you can't expect me to tumble off the cathedral spire, in order that you may hold an inquest on my remains! I You may command me in anything reasonable, however. What shall it be?"

Tom seemed lost in thought. "Can you swim?" he said presently.

"Fairly well."

"You could keep yourself afloat for five minutes?"

"Yes, I could do that."

"You're not afraid of water?"

"I'm not much afraid of anything."

“Then come out,” said Tom, “and we’ll go over the ground.”

I couldn’t get one word out of him as to his intentions, so I trotted along beside him, wondering what in the wide world he was going to do. Our first stoppage was at a small dock which is crossed by a swinging iron bridge. He hailed an amphibious man with top-boots. “Do you keep rowing-boats and let them out?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” said the man.

“Then good day,” and to the boatman’s profound and audible disgust we set off at once in the other direction.

Our next stoppage was at the Jolly Mariner’s Arms. Did they keep beds? Yes, they kept beds. We then proceeded to the chemist’s. Did he keep a galvanic battery? Once again the answer was in the affirmative, and with a satisfied smile Tom Crabbe headed for home once more, leaving some very angry people behind him.

That evening over a bowl of punch he revealed his plan — and the council of three revised it, modified it, and ended by adopting it, with the immediate result that I at once changed my quarters to the Brisport Hotel.

I was awakened next day by the sun streaming in at my bedroom window. It was a glorious morning. I sprang out of bed and looked at my watch. It was nearly nine o’clock. “Only an hour,” I muttered, “and nearly a mile to walk,” and proceeded to dress with all the haste I could. “Well,” I soliloquised as I sharpened my razor, “if old Tom Crabbe doesn’t get his name in the papers to-day, it isn’t my fault. I wonder if any friend would do as much for me!” I finished my toilet, swallowed a cup of coffee and sallied out.

Brisport seemed unusually lively this morning. The streets were crowded with people. I wormed my way down Waterloo Street through the old Square and past Crabbe’s house. The cathedral bells were chiming ten o’clock as I reached the above-mentioned little dock with the iron swinging bridge. A man was standing on the bridge leaning over the balustrades. There was no mistaking the heart-broken hat rim and the spectacles of Thomas Waterhouse Crabbe, M.B.

I passed him without sign of recognition, dawdled a little on the quay, and then sauntered down to the boathouse. Our friend of yesterday was standing at the door with a short pipe in his mouth.

“Could I have a boat for an hour?” I asked.

He beamed all over. “One minute, sir,” he said, “an’ I’ll get the sculls. Would you want me to row you, sir?”

“Yes, you’d better,” I replied.

He bustled about, and in a short time managed to launch a leaky-looking old tub, into which he stepped, while I squatted down in the sheets.

“Take me round the docks,” I said. “I want to have a look at the shipping.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said he, and away we went, and paddled about the docks for the best part of an hour. At the end of that time we turned back and pulled up to the little quay from which he had started. It was past eleven now and the place was crowded with people. Half Brisport seemed to have concentrated round the iron bridge. The melancholy hat was still visible.

“Shall I pull in, sir?” asked the boatman.

“Give me the sculls,” said I. “I want a bit of exercise — let us change places,” and I stood up.

“Take care, sir!” yelled the boatman as I gave a stagger. “Look out!” and he made a frantic grab at me, but too late, for with a melodramatic scream I reeled and fell over into the Brisport dock.

I hardly realised what it was I was going to do until I had done it. It was not a pleasant feeling to have the thick, clammy water closing over one’s head. I struck the bottom with my feet, and shot up again to the surface. The air seemed alive with shouts. “Heave a rope!” “Where’s a boat-hook!” “Catch him!” “There he is!” The boatman managed to hit me me a smart blow on the head with something, an oar, I fancy, and I went down again, but not before I had got my lungs well filled with air. I came up again and my top-booted friend seized me by the hair of my head as if he would tear my scalp off. “Don’t struggle!” he yelled, “and I’ll save you yet.” But I shook him off, and took another plunge. There was no resisting him next time, however, for he got a boat-hook into my collar, and though I kept my head under water as long as possible I was ignominiously hauled to land.

There I lay on the hard stones of the quay, feeling very much inclined to laugh, but looking, no doubt, very blue and ghastly. “He’s gone, poor chap!” said some one. “Send for a doctor.” “Run, run to Markham.” “Quite dead.” “Turn him upside down.” “Feel his pulse.” “Slap him on the back.”

“Stop,” said a solemn voice—”stop! Can I be of any assistance? I am a medical man. What has occurred?”

"A man drowned," cried a score of voices. "Stand back, make a ring — room for the doctor!"

"My name is Doctor Crabbe. Dear me, poor young gentleman! Drop his hand," he roared at a man who was making for my pulse. "I tell you in such a state the least pressure or impediment to the arterial circulation might prove fatal."

To save my life I couldn't help giving a very audible inward chuckle at Tom's presence of mind. There was a murmur of surprise among the crowd. Tom solemnly took off his hat. "The death rattle!" he whispered. "The young soul has flown — yet perchance science may yet recall it. Bear him up to the tavern."

A shutter was brought, I was solemnly hoisted on to the top of it, and the melancholy cortège passed along the quay, the corpse being really the most cheerful member of the company.

We got to the Mariner's Arms and I was stripped and laid in the best bed. The news of the accident seemed to have spread, for there was a surging crowd in the street, and the staircase was thronged with people. Tom would only admit about a dozen of the more influential of the townspeople into the room, but issued bulletins out of the window every five minutes to the crowd below.

"Quite dead," I heard him roar. "Respiration has ceased — no pulsation — but we still persevere, it is our duty."

"Shall I bring brandy?" said the landlady.

"Yes, and towels, and a hip bath and a basin — but the brandy first."

This sentiment met with the hearty approbation of the corpse.

"Why, he's drinking it," said the landlady, as she applied the glass to my lips.

"Merely an instance of a reflex automatic action," said Tom. "My good woman, any corpse will drink brandy if you only apply it to the glossopharyngeal tract. Stand aside and we will proceed to try Marshall Hall's method of resuscitation."

The citizens stood round in a solemn ring, while Tom stripped off his coat and, climbing on the bed, proceeded to roll me about in a manner which seemed to dislocate every bone in my body.

"Hang it, man, stop!" I growled, but he only paused to make a dart for the window and yell out "No sign of life," and then fell upon me with greater energy than ever. "We will now try Sylvestre's method," he said, when the perspiration was fairly boiling out of him; and with that he seized me again, and performed a series of evolutions even more excruciating than the first. "It is hopeless!" he said at last, stopping and covering my head reverently with the bed-clothes. "Send for the coroner! He has gone to a better land. Here is my card," he continued to an inspector of police who had arrived. "Doctor Crabbe of George Street. You will see that the matter is accurately reported. Poor young man!" And Tom drew his handkerchief across his eyes and walked towards the door, while a groan of sympathy rose from the crowd outside.

He had his hand upon the handle when a thought seemed to strike him, and he turned back. "There is yet a possible hope," he said, "we have not tried the magical effects of electricity — that subtle power, next of kin to nervous force. Is there a chemist's near?"

"Yes, doctor, there's Mr. McLagan just round the corner."

"Then run! run! A human life trembles in the balance — get his strongest battery, quick!" And away went half the crowd racing down the street and tumbling over each other in the effort to be first at Mr. McLagan's. They came back very red and hot, and one of them bore a shining brown mahogany box in his arms which contained the instrument in question.

"Now, gentlemen," said Tom, "I believe I may say that I am the first practitioner in Great Britain who has applied electricity to this use. In my student days I have seen the learned Rokilansky of Vienna employ it in some such way. I apply the negative pole over the solar plexus, while the positive I place on the inner side of the patella. I have seen it produce surprising effects; it may again in this case."

It certainly did. Whether it was an accident or whether Tom's innate reckless devilry got the better of him I cannot say. He himself always swore that it was an accident, but at any rate he sent the strongest current of a most powerful battery rattling and crashing through my system. I gave one ear-splitting yell and landed with a single bound into the middle of the room. I was charged with electricity like a Leyden jar. My very hair bristled with it.

"You confounded idiot!" I shouted, shaking my fist in Tom's face. "Isn't it enough to dislocate every bone in my body with your ridiculous resuscitations without ruining my constitution with this thing?" and I gave a vicious kick at the mahogany box. Never was there such a stampede! The inspector of police and the correspondent of the *Chronicle* sprang down the staircase, followed by the twelve respectable citizens. The landlady crawled under the bed. A lodger who was nursing her baby while she conversed with a neighbour in the street below let the child drop upon her friend's head. In fact Tom might have founded the nucleus of a practice there and then. As it was, his usual presence of mind carried him through. "A miracle!" he yelled from the window. "A miracle! Our friend has been brought back to us; send for a cab." And then *sotto voce*, "For goodness' sake, Jack, behave like a Christian and crawl into bed again. Remember the landlady is in the room and don't go prancing about in your shirt."

"Hang the landlady," said I, "I feel like a lightning conductor — you've ruined me!"

"Poor fellow," cried Tom, once more addressing the crowd, "he is alive, but his intellect is irretrievably affected. He thinks he is a lightning conductor. Make way for the cab. That's right! Now help me to lead him in. He is out of all danger now. He can dress at his hotel. If any of you have any information to give which may throw light upon this case my address is 81 George Street. Remember, Doctor Crabbe, 81 George Street. Good day, kind friends, good-bye!" And with that he bundled me into the cab to prevent my making any further disclosures, and drove off amid the enthusiastic cheers of the admiring crowd.

I could not stay in Brisport long enough to see the effect of my *coup d'état*. Tom gave us a champagne supper that night, and the fun was fast and furious, but in the midst of it a telegram from my principal was handed in ordering me to return to Manchester by the next train. I waited long enough to get an early copy of the *Brisport Chronicle*, and beguiled the tedious journey by perusing the glowing account of my mishap. A column and a half was devoted to Dr. Crabbe and the extraordinary effects of electricity upon a drowned man. It ultimately got into some of the London papers, and was gravely commented upon in the *Lancet*.

As to the pecuniary success of our little experiment I can only judge from the following letter from Tom Crabbe, which I transcribe exactly as I received it:

"What Ho! My resuscitated Corpse,

"You want to know how all goes in Brisport, I suppose. Well, I'll tell you. I'm cutting Markham and Davidson out completely, my boy. The day after our little joke I got a bruised leg (that baby), a cut head (the woman the baby fell upon), an erysipelas, and a bronchitis. Next day a fine rich cancer of Markham's threw him up and came over to me. Also a pneumonia and a man who swallowed a sixpence. I’ve never had a day since without half a dozen new names on the list, and I’m going to start a trap this week. Just let me know when you are going to set up, and I’ll manage to run down, old man, and give you a start in business, if I have to stand on my head in the water-butt. Good-bye. Love from the Missus.

“Ever yours,
“Thomas Waterhouse Crabbe,
“M.B. Edin.

“81 George Street,
“Brisport.”

THE END

UNCOLLECTED SHORT STORIES

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THE PARISH MAGAZINE

It was six o'clock on a winter evening. Mr. Pomeroy, the printer, was on the point of leaving his office, which was his back room, for his home, which was his front room, when young Murphy entered. Murphy was an imperturbable youth with a fat face and sleepy eyes, who had the rare quality of always doing without question whatever he was told. It is usually a great virtue — but there are exceptions.

"There are two folk to see you," said Murphy, laying two cards upon the table.

Mr. Pomeroy glanced at them.

"Mr. Robert Anderson. Miss Julia Duncan. I don't know the names. Well, show them in."

A long, sad-faced youth entered, accompanied by a mournful young lady, clad in black. Their appearance was respectable, but depressing.

"I dare say you know this," said the youth, holding up a small, grey-covered volume, the outer cover of which was ornamented with the picture of a church. "It's the *St. Olivia's Church Magazine*. What I mean, it's the Parish Magazine. This lady and I are what you might call the editors. It has been printed by — —"

"Elliot and Dark, in the City," said the lady, as her companion seemed to stumble. "But they have suddenly closed down their works. We have the month's issue all ready, but we want to add to it."

"A Supplement, if you get my meaning," said the youth. "That's the word — supplement. The thing has become too dam' — —"

"What he is trying to say," cried the girl, "is that the magazine wants lighting up on the social side."

"That's it," said the youth. "Just a bit of ginger, so to speak. So we arranged a Supplement. We will put it in as a loose leaf, if you follow my meaning. It's all typewritten and clear" — here he drew a folded paper from his pocket—"and it needs no reading or correcting. Just rush it through, five hundred copies, as quickly as you can do it."

"The issue is overdue," said the lady. "We must have it out by midday to-morrow. They tell me Ferguson and Co. could easily have it ready in the time, and if you won't guarantee it, we must take it to them."

“Absolutely,” said the youth.

Mr. Pomeroy picked up the typed copy and glanced at it. His eyes fell upon the words, “Our beloved Vicar, Mr. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A.” There was some allusion to a bishopric. Pomeroy threw the paper across to his assistant. “Get on with it!” he said.

“We should like to pay at once,” said Miss Duncan, opening her bag. “Here is a five-pound note, and you can account for it afterwards. Of course, you don’t know us, and might not trust us.”

“Well, if one did not trust the Parish Magazine—” said Pomeroy, smiling.

“Absolutely,” cried the youth. “But what I mean is that we want to pay now. You’ll send the stuff round to me at 16 Colgrove Road. Got it? Not later than twelve. Rush it through. What?”

“It shall be there,” said Pomeroy.

The pair were leaving the room when the girl turned back.

“Put your name as printer at the bottom,” she said. “It’s the law. Besides, you may get the printing of the Magazine in the future.”

“Certainly. We always print our name.”

The couple passed out, and hugged each other in the passage.

“I think we put it across,” said he.

“Marvellous!” said she.

“That fiver was my idea.”

“Incredible!” she cried. “We’ve got him.”

“Absolutely!” said he, and they passed out into the night.

The stolid Murphy wrought long and hard, and the Pomeroy Press was working till unconscionable hours. The assistant found the matter less dull than most which he handled, and a smile spread itself occasionally over his fat face. Surely some of this was rather unusual stuff. He had never read anything quite like it. However, “his not to reason why”. He had been well drilled to do exactly what he was told. The packet was ready next morning, and before twelve o’clock it had been duly dispatched to the house mentioned. Murphy carried it himself and was surprised to find their client waiting for it at the garden gate. It took some energy, apparently, to be the editor of a Parish Magazine.

It was twenty-four hours before the bomb burst, which blew Mr. Pomeroy and his household into fragments. The first intimation of trouble was the following letter:

“*Sir*,

“*We can hardly Imagine that you have read the contents of the so-called Supplement to the Parish Magazine which has been distributed to the members of the congregation of St. Olivia’s Church. If you had you would hardly have dared to make yourself responsible by putting your name to it. I need not say that you are likely to hear a good deal more of the matter. As to my teeth, I may say that they are remarkably sound, and that I have never been to a dentist in my life*.

“James Wilson

“*(Major*).”

There was a second letter upon the breakfast table. The dazed printer picked it up. It was in a feminine hand, and read thus:

“*Sir*,

“*With regard to the infamous paragraph in the new issue of the Parish Magazine, I may say that if I have bought a new car it is no business of anyone else, and the remarks about my private affairs are most unkind and uncalled for. I understand that as you are the printer you are legally responsible. You will hear in the course of a few days from my legal advisers*.

“*Yours faithfully*,

“Jane Peddigrew.

“14, *Elton Square*.”

“What the devil does it mean?” cried Pomeroy, staring wildly at his wife and daughter. “Murphy! Murphy!”

His assistant entered from the office.

“Have you a copy of that Supplement, which you printed for the Parish Magazine?”

“Yes, sir. I delivered five hundred, but there are a few in the office.”

“Bring it in! Bring it in! Quick!”

Then Mr. Pomeroy began to read aloud, and apoplexy grew nearer and nearer. The document was headed Social Notes, and began with several dates and allusions to services which might give confidence to the superficial and rapid reader. Then it opened out in this way:

“‘Our beloved Vicar (Mr. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A.) is still busy trying to wangle a bishopric. This time he says in his breezy way that it is ‘a perfect sitter’, but we have our doubts. It is notorious that he has pulled strings in the past, and that the said strings broke. However, he has a cousin in the Lord Chancellor’s office, so there is always hope.’

“Gracious!” cried Pomeroy. “In the Parish Magazine too!”

“‘In the last fortnight sixteen hymn books have disappeared from the church. There is no need for public scandal so if Mr. James Bagshaw, Junior, of 113 Lower Cheltenhan Place, will call upon the Churchwardens, all will be arranged.’

“That’s the son of old Bagshaw, of the bank,” cried Pomeroy, “What can they have been dreaming of?

“‘The Vicar (the Rev. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A.) would take this opportunity to beg the younger Miss Ormerod to desisist from her present tactics. Delicacy forbids the Vicar from saying what those tactics are. It is not necessary for a young lady to attend every service, and to push herself into the front pew, which is already owned (though not paid for) by the Dawson-Braggs family. The Vicar has asked us to send marked copies of this paragraph to Mrs. Deknar, Miss Featherstone, and Miss Poppy Crewe.’”

Pomeroy wiped his forehead. “This is pretty awful!” said he. Then:

“‘Some of these Sundays Major Wilson’s false teeth will drop into the collecting bag. Let him either get a new set, or else take off that smile when he walks round with the bag. With lips firmly compressed there is no reason why the present set may not last for years.’

“That’s where the answer comes in,” said Pomeroy, glancing at the open letter upon his table. “I expect he’ll be round with a stick presently. What’s this?

“‘We don’t know if Miss Cissy Dufour and Captain Copperley are secretly married or not. If not, they should be. He could then enter Laburnum Villa instead of wearing out the garden gate by leaning on it!’

“Good heavens, listen to this one! ‘Mr. Malceby, the grocer, is back from Hythe. But why the bag of sand among his luggage? Surely sugar gives a sufficient profit at its present price. As we are on the subject, we cannot but remark upon the increased water rate paid last quarter by the Silverside Dairy Company. What do they do with all this water? The public has a right to know.’

“Good Lord, listen to this! ‘It is very wrong to say that our popular member, Sir James Tender, was drunk at the garden party of the Mayor. It is true that he tripped over his own leg when he tried to dance the tango, but that can fairly be attributed to his own obvious physical disabilities. As a matter of fact, several guests who only drank one glass of the Mayor’s champagne (natural 1928) were very ill in consequence, so that it is most unfair to put so uncharitable an interpretation upon our member’s *faux pas*.’

“That’s worth a thousand pounds in any Court,” groaned Porneroy. “My dear, Rothschild couldn’t stand the actions that this paper will bring on us.”

The ladies of the family had shown a regrettable inclination to laugh, but his words made them properly solemn. He continued his reading.

“‘Mrs. Peddigrew has started a six-cylinder which is listed at seven hundred and fifty pounds. How she does it nobody knows. Her late husband was a little rat of a man who did odd jobs down in the City. He could not have left so much. This matter wants looking into.’

“Why, he was the vice-chairman of the Baltic,” said Pomeroy. “These people are stark, staring mad. Listen to this.

“‘Evensong will be at six-thirty. Yes, Mrs. Mould, at six-thirty sharp. And Mr. King will be on the left-hand seat well within view. We can count on your attendance. If you are not a pillar of the church, you are generally sneaking behind one!’ Oh, Lord, here’s another.

“‘If Mr. Goldbury, of 7 Cheesman Place, will call at the Vicarage he will receive back the trouser-button which he put in the bag last Sunday. It is useless to the Vicar, whereas in its right place it might be most important to Mr. Goldbury!’ There’s no use laughing, you two. You won’t laugh when you see the lawyer’s letters. Listen to this.

“‘“Prithee why so pale, fond lover? Prithee why so pale?” The question is addressed to William Briggs, our dentist friend of Hope Street. Has the lady in pink chiffon turned you down, or is it merely that you are behind with your rent, as usual? Cheer up, William. You have our best wishes.’

“Good gracious! They grow worse and worse. Just listen to this.

“‘If any motorists get into trouble, my advice to them is to see Chief Constable Walton in his private room at the Town Hall. Cheques will, of course, not be received. But surely it is far better to pay a small sum across the table in ready cash — asking for no receipt — than to have the trouble and expense of proceedings in the Court.’

“My word, we shall have some proceedings in the Court before we are through. Here is a tit-bit which will keep the lawyers busy: ‘The Voyd-Merriman wedding was a most interesting affair and we wish the young couple every happiness. We say “young” out of courtesy, for it is an open secret that the bride will never see thirty-five again. The groom also is, we should say, getting rather long in the tooth. By the way, why did he start and look over his shoulder when the clergyman spoke of “any just cause or impediment”? No doubt it was perfectly harmless, but it gave rise to some ill-natured gossip. We had pleasure in attending the reception afterwards. There was a detective to guard the presents. We really think that his services could have been dispensed with, for they would never have been in danger. Major Wilson’s two brass napkin rings were the pick of the bunch. There was a cheque in an envelope from the bride’s father. We have heard what the exact figure was, and we quite appreciate the need for an envelope. However, it will pay for the cab to the station. It is understood that the happy couple will get as far as Margate for their honeymoon, and if the money holds out they may extend their travels to Ramsgate. Address: the Red Cow public house, near the Station.’

“Why, these are the richest people in Rotherheath,” said Pomeroy, wiping his forehead.

“There is a lot more, but that is enough to settle our hash. I think we had best sell up for what we can get and clear out of the town. My gosh, those two folk must have got out of an asylum. Anyhow, my first job must be to see them. Maybe they are millionaires who can afford to pay for their little jokes.”

His mission proved, however, to be fruitless. On inquiry at the address given he found that it was an empty house. The caretaker from next door knew nothing of the matter. It was clear now why the young man had waited at the gate for his parcel. What was Pomeroy to do next? Apparently he could only sit and wait for the arrival of the writs. However, it was a very different document which was handed in at his door two evenings later, It was headed

“*R.S.B.Y.P*,”

and ran thus:

“*A special meeting of the R.S.B.Y.P. will be held at 16 Stanmore Terrace, in the billiards-room of John Anderson, J.P., to-night at 9 p.m. The presence of Mr. James Pomeroy, printer, is urgently needed. The matter under discussion is his liability for certain scandalous statements recently printed in the Parish Magazine*.”

It may well be imagined that Mr. Pomeroy was punctual at the appointment.

“Mr. Anderson is not at home himself,” said the footman, “but young Mr. Robert Anderson and his friends are receiving.” There was a humorous twinkle in the footman’s eyes.

The printer was shown into a small waiting-room, where two men, one a postman and the other apparently a small tradesman, were seated. He could not help observing that they were both as harassed and miserable as he was himself. They looked at him with dull, lack-lustre eyes, but were too dispirited to talk, nor did he feel sufficient energy to break the silence.. Presently one of them and then the other was called out. Finally the footman came for him, and threw wide a door.

“Mr. James Pomeroy,” cried the footman.

At the end of a large music-room, which was further adorned by a billiards-table, was sitting a semicircle of young people, all very serious, and all with writing materials before them. None was above twenty-one years of age, and they were about equally divided as to sex. Among them were the two customers who had lured him to his doom. They both smiled at him most affectionately, in spite of his angry stare.

“Pray sit down, Mr. Pomeroy,” said a very young man in evening dress, who acted as Chairman. “There are one or two questions which, as President of the R.S.B.Y.P., it is my duty to put to you. I believe that you have been somewhat alarmed by this incident of the Parish Magazine?”

“Of course I have,” said Pomeroy, in a surly voice.

“May I ask if your sleep has been affected?”

“I have not closed my eyes since it happened.”

There was a subdued murmur of applause, and several members leaned across to shake hands with Mr. Robert Anderson.

“Did it affect your future plans?”

“I had thought of leaving the town.”

“Excellent! I think, fellow-members, that there is no doubt that the monthly gold medal should be awarded to Mr. Anderson and Miss Duncan for their very meritorious performance, which has been well conceived and cleverly carried out. To relieve your natural anxiety, we must tell you at once, Mr. Pomeroy, that you have been the victim of a joke.”

“It’s likely to be a pretty costly one,” said the printer.

“Not at all. No harm has been done. No leaflets have been sent out. The letters which have reached you emanate from ourselves. We are, Mr. Pomeroy, the Rotherheath Society of Bright Young People, who endeavour to make the world a merrier and more lively place by the exercise of our wit. Upon this occasion a prize was offered for whichever member or members could most effectually put the wind up some resident in this suburb. There have been several candidates, but on the whole the prize must be awarded as already said.”

“But — but — it’s unjustifiable!” stammered Pomeroy.

“Entirely,” said the Chairman, cheerfully. “I think that all our proceedings may come under that head. On the other hand, we remind our victims that they have unselfishly sacrificed themselves for the general hilarity of the community. A special silver medal, which I will now affix to your coat, will be your souvenir of the occasion.”

“And I’ll speak to my father when he comes back,” said Anderson. “What I mean is, there is printing and what not to be done for the firm.”

“And my father really edits the Parish Magazine. That’s what put it into our heads,” said Miss Duncan. “Maybe we can get you the printing after all.”

“And there is whisky-and-soda on the sideboard, and a good cigar,” said the President.

So Mr. Pomeroy eventually went out into the night, thinking that after all youth will be served, and it would be a dull world without it.

THE END

THE CABMAN’S STORY

The Mysteries of a London “Growler”

We had to take a “growler,” for the day looked rather threatening and we agreed that it would be a very bad way of beginning our holiday by getting wet, especially when Fanny was only just coming round from the whooping cough. Holidays were rather scarce with us, and when we took one we generally arranged some little treat, and went in for enjoying ourselves. On this occasion we were starting off from Hammersmith to the Alexandra Palace in all the dignity of a four-wheeler. What with the wife and her sister, and Tommy and Fanny and Jack, the inside was pretty well filled up, so I had to look out for myself. I didn’t adopt the plan of John Gilpin under similar circumstances, but I took my waterproof and climbed up beside the driver.

This driver was a knowing-looking old veteran, with a weather-beaten face and white side whiskers. It has always seemed to me that a London cabman is about the shrewdest of the human race, but this specimen struck me as looking like the shrewdest of the cabmen. I tried to draw him out a bit as we jogged along, for I am always fond of a chat; but he was a bit rusty until I oiled his tongue with glass of gin when we got as far as the “Green Anchor.” Then he rattled away quickly enough, and some of what he said is worth trying to put down in black and white.

“Wouldn’t a hansom pay me better?” he said, in answer to a question of mine. “Why, of course it would. But look at the position! A four-wheeler’s a respectable conveyance, and the driver of it’s a respectable man, but you can’t say that of a rattling, splashing ‘ansom. Any boy would do for that job. Now, to my mind money hain’t to be compared to position, whatever a man’s trade may be.”

“Certainly not!” I answered.

“Besides, I’ve saved my little penny, and I’m got too old to change my ways. I’ve begun on a growler, and I’ll end on one. If you’ll believe me, sir, I’ve been on the streets for seven-and-forty year.”

“That’s a long time,” I said.

“Well, it’s long for our trade,” he replied. “You see, there ain’t no other in the world that takes the steam out of a man so quickly — what with wet and cold and late hours, and maybe no hours at all. There's few that lasts at it as long as I have."

"You must have seen a deal of the world during that time," I remarked. "There are few men who can have greater opportunities of seeing life."

"The world!" he grunted, flicking up the horse with his whip. "I've seen enough of it to be well-nigh sick of it. As to life, if you'd said death, you'd ha' been nearer the mark."

"Death!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, death," he said. "Why, bless your soul, sir, if I was to write down all I've seen since I've been in the trade, there's not a man in London would believe me, unless maybe some o' the other cabbies. I tell ye I took a dead man for a fare once, and drove about with him nigh half the night. Oh, you needn't look shocked, sir, for this wasn't the cab — no, nor the last one I had neither."

"How did it happen?" I asked, feeling glad, in spite of his assurance, that Matilda had not heard of the episode.

"Well, it's an old story now," said the driver, putting a small piece of very black tobacco into the corner of his mouth. "I daresay it's twenty odd years since it happened, but it's not the kind o' thing as slips out of a man's memory. It was very late one night, and I was working my hardest to pick up something good, for I'd made a poor day's work of it. The theatres had all come out, and though I kept up and down the Strand till nigh one o'clock, I got nothing but one eighteenpenny job. I was thinking of giving it up and going home, when it struck me that I might as well make a bit of a circuit, and see if I couldn't drop across something. Pretty soon I gave a gentleman a lift as far as the Oxford Road, and then I drove through St. John's Wood on my way home. By that time it would be about half-past one, and the streets were quite quiet and deserted, for the night was cloudy and it was beginning to rain. I was putting on the pace as well as my tired beast would go, for we both wanted to get back to our suppers, when I heard a woman's voice hail me out of a side street. I turned back, and there in about the darkest part of the road was standing two ladies — real ladies, mind you, for it would take a deal of darkness before I would mistake one for the other. One was elderly and stoutish; the other was young, and had a veil over her face. Between them there was a man in evening dress, whom they were supporting on each side, while his back was propped up against a lamp-post. He seemed beyond taking care of himself altogether, for his head was sunk down on his chest, and he'd have fallen if they hadn't held him.

"'Cabman,' said the stout lady, with a very shaky voice, 'I wish you would help us in this painful business.' Those were her very hidentical words.

"'Cert'nly, mum,' I says for I saw my way to a good thing. 'What can I do for the young lady and yourself?' I mentioned the other in order to console her like, for she was sobbing behind her veil something pitiful.

"'The fact is, cabman,' she answers, 'this gentleman is my daughter's husband. They have only just been married, and we are visiting at a friend's house near here. My son-in-law has just returned in a state of complete intoxication, and my daughter and I have brought him out in the hope of seeing a cab in which we could send him home, for we have most particular reasons for not wishing our friends to see him in this state, and as yet they are ignorant of it. If you would drive him to his house and leave him there, you would do us both a very great kindness, and we can easily account to our hosts for his absence.'

"I thought this rather a rum start, but I agreed, and no sooner had I said the word than the old one she pulls open the door, and she and the other, without waiting for me to bear a hand, bundled him in between them.

"'Where to?' I asked.

"'Forty-seven, Orange Grove, Clapham,' she said. 'Hoffman is the name. You'll easily waken the servants.'

"'And how about the fare?' I suggested, for I thought maybe there might be a difficulty in collecting it at the end of the journey.

"'Here it is,' said the young one, slipping what I felt to be a sovereign into my hand, and at the same time giving it a sort of a grateful squeeze, which made me feel as if I'd drive anywhere to get her out of trouble.

"Well, off I went, leaving them standing by the side of the road. The horse was well-nigh beat, but at last I found my way to 47, Orange Grove. It was a biggish house, and all quiet, as you may suppose, at that hour. I rang the bell, and at last down came a servant — a man, he was.

"'I've got the master here,' I said.

"'Got who?' he asked.

"'Why Mr. Hoffman — your master. He's in the cab, not quite himself. This is number forty-seven, ain't it?'

"'Yes, it's forty-seven, right enough; but my master's Captain Ritchie, and he's away in India, so you've got the wrong house.'

"'That was the number they gave me,' I said, 'But maybe he's come to himself by this time, and can give us some information. He was dead drunk an hour ago.'

"Down we went to the cab, the two of us, and opened the door. He had slipped off the seat and was lying all in a heap on the floor.

"'Now, then, sir,' I shouted. 'Wake up and give us your address.'

"He didn't answer.

"I gave another shake. 'Pull yourself together,' I roared. 'Give us your name, and tell us where you live.'

"He didn't answer again. I couldn't even hear the sound of breathing. Then a kind of queer feeling came over me, and I put down my hand and felt his face. It was as cold as lead. The cove's dead, mate,' I said.

"The servant struck a match, and we had a look at my passenger. He was a young, good-looking fellow, but his face wore an expression of pain, and his jaw hung down. He was evidently not only dead, but had been dead some time.

"'What shall we do?' said the flunkey. He was as white as death himself, and his hair bristled with fear.

"'I'll drive to the nearest police station,' I answered; and so I did, leaving him shivering on the pavement. There I gave up my fare, and that was the last I ever saw of him."

"Did you never hear any more of it?" I asked.

"Hear! I thought I should never hear the end of it, what with examinations and inquests and one thing and another. The doctors proved that he must have been dead at the time he was shoved into the cab. Just before the inquest four little blue spots came out on one side of his neck, and one on the other, and they said only a woman's hand could have fitted over them, so they brought in a verdict of willful murder; but, bless you, they had managed it so neatly that there was not a clue to the women, nor to the man either, for everything by which he might have been identified had been removed from his pockets. The police were fairly puzzled by that case. I've always thought what a bit o' luck it was that I got my fare, for I wouldn't have had much chance of it if it hadn't been paid in advance."

My friend the driver began to get very husky about the throat at this stage of the proceedings, and slackened his speed very noticeably as we approached a large public-house, so that I felt constrained to offer him another gin, which he graciously accepted. The ladies had some wine, too, and I followed the example of my companion on the box, so that we all started refreshed.

“The police and me’s been mixed up a good deal,” continued the veteran resuming his reminiscences: “They took the best customer I ever had away from me. I’d have made my fortin if they’d let him carry on his little game a while longer.”

Here, with the coquetry of one who knows that his words are of interest, the driver began to look around him with an air of abstraction and to comment upon the weather.

“Well, what about your customer and the police?” I asked.

“It’s not much to tell,” he said, coming back to his subject. “One morning I was driving across Vauxhall Bridge when I was hailed by a crooked old man with a pair of spectacles on, who was standing at the Middlesex end, with a big leather bag in his hand. ‘Drive anywhere you like,’ he said; ‘only don’t drive fast for I’m getting old, and it shakes me to pieces.’ He jumped in, and shut himself up, closing the windows, and I trotted about with him for three hours, before he let me know that he had had enough. When I stopped, out he hopped with his big bag in his hand.

“‘I say cabbie!’ he said, after he had paid his fare.

“‘Yes, sir,’ said I, touching my hat.

“‘You seem to be a decent sort of fellow, and you don’t go in the break-neck way of some of your kind. I don’t mind giving you the same job every day. The doctors recommend gentle exercise of the sort, and you may as well drive me as another. Just pick me up at the same place tomorrow.’

“Well, to make a long story short, I used to find the little man in his place every morning, always with his black bag, and for nigh on to four months never a day passed without his having his three hours’ drive and paying his fare like a man at the end of it. I shifted into new quarters on the strength of it, and was able to buy a new set of harness. I don’t say as I altogether swallowed the story of the doctors having recommended him on a hot day to go about in a growler with both windows up. However, it’s a bad thing in this world to be too knowing, so though I own I felt a bit curious at times, I never put myself out o’ the way to find out what the little game was. One day, I was driving tap to my usual place of dropping him — for by this time we had got into the way of going a regular beat every morning — when I saw a policeman waiting, with a perky sort of look about him, as if he had some job on hand. When the cab stopped out jumped the little man with his bag right into the arms of the 'bobby.'

"'I arrest you, John Malone,' says the policeman.

"'On what charge?' he answers as cool as a turnip.

"'On the charge of forging Bank of England notes,' says the 'bobby'.

"'Oh, then the game is up!' he cries, and with that he pulls off his spectacles, and his wig and whiskers, and there he was, as smart a young fellow as you'd wish to see.

"'Good-bye, cabby,' he cried, as they led him off, and that was the last I saw of him, marching along between two of them, and another behind with the bag."

"And why did he take a cab?" I asked, much interested.

"Well, you see, he had all his plant for making the notes in that bag. If he were to lock himself up in his lodging several hours a day it would soon set people wondering, to say nothing of the chance of eyes at the window or key-hole. Again, you see, if he took a house all on his own hook, without servant nor anyone, it would look queer. So he made up his mind as the best way of working it was to carry it on in a closed cab, and I don't know that he wasn't right. He was known to the police however, and that was how they spotted him. Drat that van! It was as near as a touch to my off-wheel.

"Bless you, if I was to tell you all the thieves and burglars, and even murderers, as have been in my growler one time or another, you'd think I'd given the whole Newgate Calendar a lift, though to be sure this young chap as I spoke of was the only one as ever reg'lar set up in business there. There was one though as I reckon to be worse than all the others put together, if he was what I think him to be. It's often laid heavy on my mind that I didn't have that chap collared before it was too late, for I might have saved some mischief. It was about ten years ago — I never was a good hand for dates — that I picked up a stout-built sailor-sort of fellow, with a reddish moustache, who wanted to be taken down to the docks. After this chap as I told you of had taken such liberties with the premises I'd had a little bit of a glass slit let in in front here — the same that your little boy's flattening his nose against at this moment — so as I could prevent any such games in the future, and have an idea, whenever I wished, of what was going on inside.

Well, something or another about this sailor fellow made me suspicious of him, and I took a look at what he was after. He was sitting on the seat, sir, with a big lump o' coal in his lap, and was a looking at it most attentive. Now this seemed to me rather a rum start, so I kept on watching of him, for as you'll see, my window's not a very large one, and it's easier to see through it than to be seen. Well, he pulls a spring or something, and out jumps one of the sides of this bit of coal, and then I saw it was really a hollow box, painted, you see, and made rough so as to look like the other. I couldn't make head or tail of it anyhow, and indeed I'd pretty near forgot all about it when there came news of the explosion at Bemerhaven, and people began to talk about coal torpedoes. Then I knew as in all probability I'd carried the man who managed the business, and I gave word to the police, but they never could make anything of it. You know what a coal torpedo is, don't you? Well, you see, a cove insures his ship for more than its value, and then off he goes and makes a box like a bit o'coal, and fills it chock full with dynamite, or some other cowardly stuff of the sort. He drops this box among the other coals on the quay when the vessel is filling her bunkers, and then in course of time box is shoveled on to the furnaces, when of course the whole ship is blown sky high. They say there's many a good ship gone to the bottom like that."

"You've certainly had some queer experiences," I said.

"Why bless you!" remarked the driver, "I've hardly got fairly started yet, and here we are at the 'Alexandry.' I could tell you many another story as strange as these — and true, mind ye, true as Gospel. If ever your missus looks in need of a breath of fresh air you send round for me — Copper Street, number ninety-four — and I'll give her a turn into the country, and if you'll come up beside me on the box, I'll tell you a good deal that may surprise you. But there's your little lad a hollering to you like mad, and the wife wants to get out, and the other one's a tapping at the window with a parasol. Take care how you get down, sir! That's right! Don't forget number ninety-four! Good-day missus! Good-day, sir!" And the growler rumbled heavily away until I lost sight both of it and of its communicative driver among the crowd of holiday-makers who thronged the road which led to the Palace.

The Short Stories

Windlesham Manor, Crowborough — Conan Doyle’s home in later years

LIST OF SHORT STORIES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Please note: to retain the original structure of the story collections, some short stories appear more than once in the list.

For the Sherlock Holmes short stories, click here.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE “POLE-STAR.”
F. HABAKUK JEPHSON’S STATEMENT.
THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT.
THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL.
THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.
JOHN HUXFORD’S HIATUS.
CYPRIAN OVERBECK WELLS — A LITERARY MOSAIC.
JOHN BARRINGTON COWLES.
ELIAS B. HOPKINS, THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.
THE BROWN HAND
THE USHER OF LEA HOUSE SCHOOL
B. 24
THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT
CYPRIAN OVERBECK WELLS
A LITERARY MOSAIC
PLAYING WITH FIRE
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THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO
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DE PROFUNDIS
THE LIFT
ELIAS B. HOPKINS, THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.
MY FRIEND THE MURDERER
THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.
THE AMERICAN’S TALE
BONES. THE APRIL FOOL OF HARVEY’S SLUICE
THE MYSTERY OF SASASSA VALLEY
OUR DERBY SWEEPSTAKES
SELECTING A GHOST. THE GHOSTS OF GORESTHORPE GRANGE
THE GULLY OF BLUEMANSDYKE.
THE PARSON OF JACKMAN’S GULCH.
MY FRIEND THE MURDERER.
THE SILVER HATCHET.
THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL.
THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.
A NIGHT AMONG THE NIHILISTS.
BEHIND THE TIMES.
HIS FIRST OPERATION.
A STRAGGLER OF ‘15.
THE THIRD GENERATION.
A FALSE START.
THE CURSE OF EVE.
SWEETHEARTS.
A PHYSIOLOGIST’S WIFE.
THE CASE OF LADY SANNOX.
A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY.
A MEDICAL DOCUMENT.
LOT NO. 249.
THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO.
THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND.
THE SURGEON TALKS.
THE GREEN FLAG
CAPTAIN SHARKEY.
HOW THE GOVERNOR OF SAINT KITT’S CAME HOME.
THE DEALINGS OF CAPTAIN SHARKEY WITH STEPHEN CRADDOCK
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The Opera

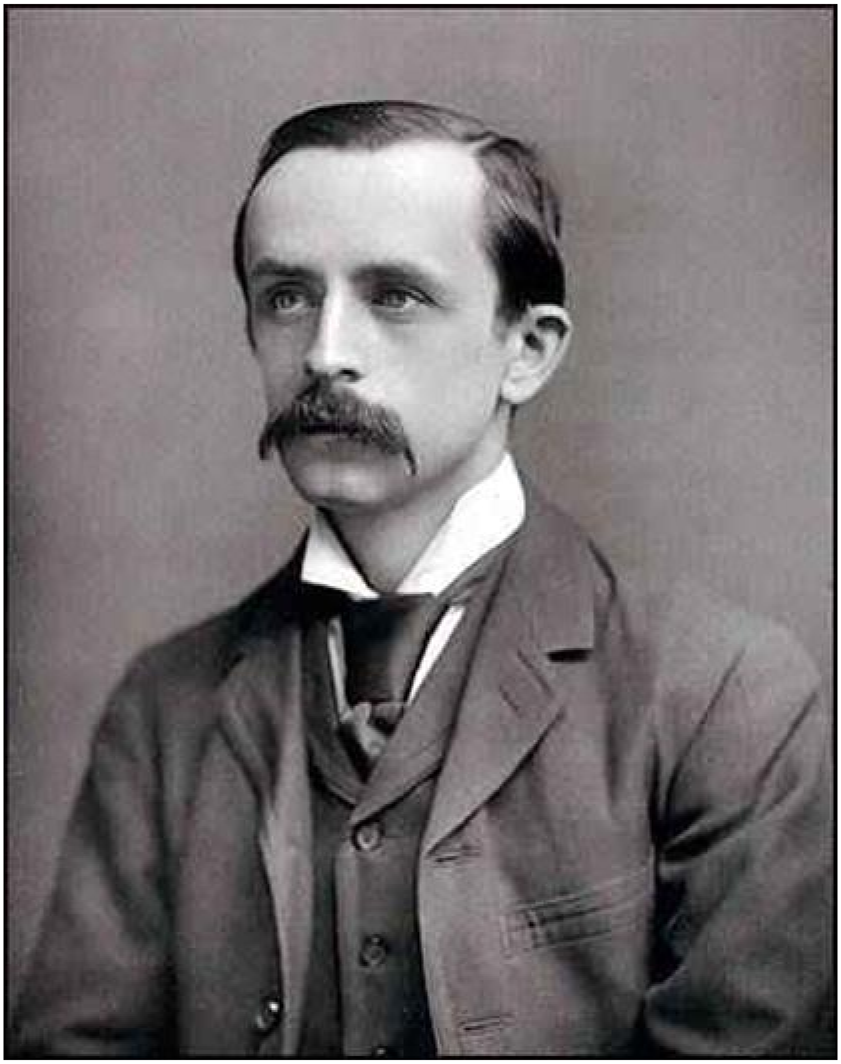

J.M Barrie, Conan Doyle's friend and collaborator

JANE ANNIE, OR THE GOOD CONDUCT PRIZE

This comic opera was written in 1893 by Barrie and Arthur Conan Doyle (of *Sherlock Holmes* fame), with music by Ernest Ford, a conductor and occasional composer. When the Gilbert and Sullivan partnership disbanded after the production of *The Gondoliers* in 1889, impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte was forced to find new works to present at the Savoy Theatre. Barrie was then a journalist and a novelist with a few popular books to his credit. He had not yet created his classic *Peter Pan*, and his only stage productions included a biography that closed after one night, a parody of new-to-London Henrik Ibsen, and in 1892 his first real success, *Walker, London* for Toole's Theatre. Barrie brought his idea for *Jane Annie* to D'Oyly Carte, who suggested that Arthur Sullivan collaborate with him, but Sullivan suggested his former pupil Ford, instead. Ford had composed several operettas, including the one-act Mr. Jericho (premiered at the Savoy in 1893). Barrie did not finish the libretto, suffering a nervous breakdown. His friend Conan Doyle was already popular for his Sherlock Holmes mysteries and so he took on the job of finishing the opera.

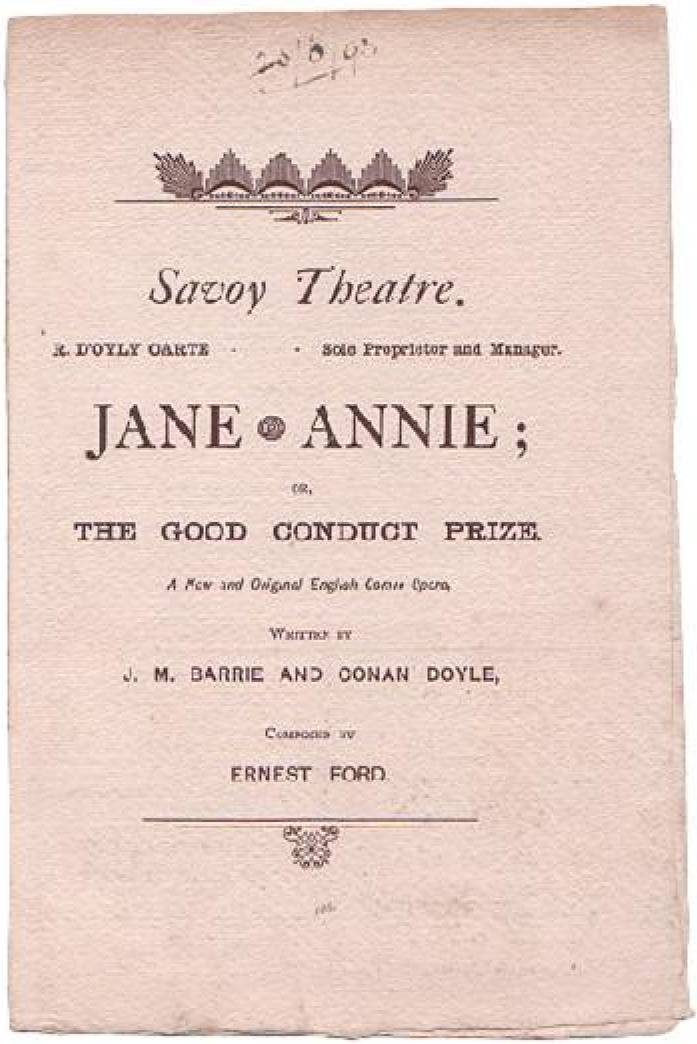

20/5/93

Savoy Theatre.

R. D'OYLY CARTE - - Sole Proprietor and Manager.

JANE ANNIE;

OR,

THE GOOD CONDUCT PRIZE.

A New and Original English Comic Opera,

WRITTEN BY

J. M. BARRIE AND CONAN DOYLE,

COMPOSED BY

ERNEST FORD.

The original programme

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JANE ANNIE;

or, The Good Conduct Prize.

A New and Original English Comic Opera [in Two Acts]
written by J.M. Barrie and Arthur Conan Doyle
music by Ernest Ford

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

A Proctor
Sim (Bulldog)
Greg (Bulldog)
Tom (a Press Student)
Jack (a Warrior)
Caddie (a Page)
Miss Sims (a Schoolmistress)
Jane Annie (a Good Girl)
Bab (a Bad Girl)
Milly (an Average Girl)
Rose (an Average Girl)
Meg (an Average Girl)
Maud (an Average Girl)

Schoolgirls, Press Students, and Lancers.

The Scene is obviously laid round the corner from a certain English University Town.

ACT I.
First Floor of a Seminary for the Little Things
that grow into Women.

ACT II.
A Ladies' Golf Green near the Seminary.

TIME.
The Present.

One Night elapses between the Acts.

The Opera produced under the Stage Direction of Mr. Charles Harris and the Musical Direction of Mr. Francois Cellier.

* Caddie's explanatory notes are included in an appendix and indicated in the text by numbers in square brackets [ ] that correspond to the point in the libretto where they appear.

ACT I.

SCENE. — First floor of the Ladies' Seminary. The GIRLS are exchanging their last confidences for the night. Enter CADDIE with their candles.

CHORUS OF GIRLS.
Good-night! Good-night!
The hour is late;
Though eyes are bright,
No longer wait!
Though clear the head,
Though wit may shine,
To bed! To bed!
It's nearly nine!
Dining-room clock strikes.

MILLY. Now the last faint tint has faded.

ALL. Good-night! Good-night!

MILLY. And the west in gloom is shaded.

ALL. Good-night! Good-night!

MILLY. See the moon her vigil keeping.

ALL. Good-night! Good-night!

MILLY. Torpor o'er the earth is creeping

ALL. Good-night! Good-night!
Drawing-room clock strikes.

ALL. Good-night! Good-night!

A-talking thus,
Though eyes are bright,
Is not for us.
The eve is past,
The shadows fall,
And so at last
Good-night to all.
All retire except CADDIE, who is roused from a profound reverie by the misbehaviour of the clock. He makes short work of it. Exit

CADDIE. There is a knock at the door, and the GIRLS reappear.

MEG. It was the front door!

MILLY. Who can be calling at such a fearsomely late hour as nine o'clock?

ROSE. Why doesn't some one peep down the stairs.

BAB runs downstairs.

MAUD. That bold Bab has gone. Miss Sims will catch her.

MILLY. Oh! I can see. (Looks over staircase.)

ALL. Well?

MILLY. A man!

ROSE. At last!

MILLY. Bald!

ROSE. The wretch!

MILLY. He has two other men with him.

MEG. Two! Girls, let us go and do our hair this instant.

MILLY. They are shewn into Miss Sims’s private room. Ah!

MAUD. What?

MILLY. The door is shut.

ROSE. What a shame!

MEG. What is Bab doing all this time?

MILLY. She has her ear at the keyhole.

MAUD. Dear girl!

MILLY. She shakes her fist at the keyhole.

ALL. Why?

MILLY. I don’t know.

BAB comes upstairs.

ROSE. Bab, why did you shake your fist at the keyhole?

BAB. Because it is stuffed with paper.

ALL. Oh!

BAB. Yes, stuffed. How mean of Miss Sims. She might surely have trusted to our honour not to look.

MILLY. Thank goodness, the holidays begin the day after to-morrow.

BAB. But a great deal may happen before to-morrow. Girls, can you keep a secret — a secret that will freeze your blood and curl you up and make you die of envy?

ALL. Yes, yes!

BAB. That little sneak Jane Annie is not here?

MILLY. She has gone upstairs to bed.

BAB. You are sure?

ROSE. I'll make sure. (Runs upstairs and looks through keyhole.) It's all right, girls! I can see her curling her eyelashes with a hairpin.

GIRLS surround BAB.

BAB. Then, girls, what do you value most in the world?

MILLY. My curls.

MEG. My complexion.

ROSE. My diamond ring.

MAUD. My cousin Dick.

BAB. Well, Meg would be delighted her complexion fair to doff,
And Milly take her scissors and cut her tresses off,
And Rose with a careless "Take it" give up her diamond quick,
And Maud would soon surrender her rights in Cousin Dick,
To be me to-night!

MILLY. What is his name?

BAB. Jack.

MAUD. A lovely name! What are you and Jack to do?

JANE ANNIE steals downstairs.

BAB. This very night we have —

ALL. You have — ?

BAB. Arranged to el —

ALL. To el — (seeing JANE ANNIE.) Oh!

JANE ANNIE comes forward. All turn their backs on her.

JANE A. What have you arranged to do to-night, Bab? What is it, Maud? tell me, Milly.

ROSE. You used to be the worst girl in the school, Jane Annie, and I believe you have become a sneak to win the good-conduct prize.

MILLY. When it is presented to her to-morrow, I shall hiss.

JANE A. What is your secret, Bab?

BAB. Oh, I should like to pinch you!

JANE A. Just because I am a good girl.

SONG. — JANE ANNIE.
I'm not a sneak for praise or pelf,
But when they're acting badly,
I want to make them like myself,
And so I tell tales gladly.

Just because I am a good girl.

ALL. She gives her reasons thus,
But it's rather hard on us,
To suffer just because she is a good girl.

JANE ANNIE. I told Miss Sims they read in bed,
Although with guile they cloaked it,
And when her cane chair vanished,
I told her they had smoked it,
And all because I am a good girl.

ALL. And all because she is a good girl.

JANE ANNIE. Although misunderstood, I'm meek —
Bab, pinch me, pinch me well!
(BAB pinches her.)
Thanks! Next I offer you my cheek.
(BAB slaps her.)
Now, dear, I'll go and tell.
And just because I am a good girl.

ALL. She gives her reasons thus,
But it's rather hard on us,
To suffer just because she is a good girl.

JANE A. If I liked I could make Bab tell me her secret. Beware!
I have a power by which, if I chose to use it, I can
make any one do anything I like.

MILLY (scoffing). Then why don't you use it?

JANE A. Because I am a good girl.
Exit JANE ANNIE downstairs.

ROSE. Do you think she has such a power?

MILLY. Of course not.

MEG. Still, Jane Annie could not tell a lie.

MILLY. You mistake. It was George Washington who could not tell a lie.

MEG. So it was. How stupid of me.

MAUD. Quick, Bab, your secret?

ALL. Yes — the secret!

BAB. Girls, this is my secret. Meg, watch! Jack is a soldier, and he loves me.

ALL. Oh!

BAB. But better still — I have two lovers.

MILLY. Do they hate each other?

BAB. Yes.

MILLY. Scrumptious!

BAB. And, oh girls! I have promised to elope with Jack to-night.

ALL. Oh! (BAB sighs.)

ROSE. But why do you sigh?

BAB. Ah, there is Tom, dear Tom! What is poor Tom to do?

ROSE. Then it is Tom you love?

BAB. Oh, I do not know which I love. Tom is so poor, and Jack is ready to take me now. Besides, I have promised.

MAUD. Then Jack has money?

BAB. He says he has a little.

MILLY. Only a little? Then what are you to live on?

BAB. Oh, we have worked that out very carefully. First of all he is to sell out. Then he has a friend who wrote a novel in six weeks and got £1,000 for it. Well, Jack has much more ability than his friend, so he is to adopt novel writing as a profession, and, as £1,000 in six weeks comes to £8,666 13s. 14d. a year, we shall be quite comfortable.

MILLY. I see you have left nothing to chance.

BAB. No.

ROSE. Where are you and Jack to meet?

BAB. All day I have been expecting a note to say if I am to meet him in the garden or on the tow path.

MISS SIMS and JANE ANNIE come up the stairs listening.

MEG. H’st!

BAB (softly). Girls, we are watched! I must deceive the eavesdroppers. (Aloud.) Girls, this is my secret about which you have asked me.

ALL. Ahem! Ahem!

SONG. — BAB.

Bright-eyed Bab I used to be,
Now these eyes are lead;
Languor has come over me,
Hangs my little head.
Now my figure — once like this —
Droops like autumn berry;
Pity me, my secret is,
Me is sleepy very!

ENSEMBLE.

MISS SIMS and GIRLS. JANE ANNIE.
See her little drowsy head, Does her naughty little head
Droops like autumn berry; Droop like autumn berry?
Says she wants to go to bed, Says she wants to go to bed,
She is sleepy, very!   But I add a query?

BAB.   Simple Bab is charged with art,
Watched by cruel parties;
Palpitates her ‘ittle heart,
‘Is where ‘ittle heart is!
Something Bab has planned to do,
Something will not keep;
Bab’s a drowsy girlie who
Has planned to — go to sleep.

ENSEMBLE.

MISS SIMS and GIRLS. JANE ANNIE.
Such a guileless little head Though she be a drowsy head,
Secret could not keep; That is rather steep;
Tuck her in her cosy bed, Tho’ we tucked her up in bed,
And she’ll go to sleep. Would she go to sleep?
Exeunt GIRLS slowly to refrain of “Good-night, Good-night!”

MISS S. (to JANE ANNIE). This explanation of Bab’s seems quite satisfactory.

JANE A. Hum!

MISS S. Bab, to bed.

BAB. Can’t I stay up for a little, Miss Sims, to entertain your guests?

MISS S. Insolence! I shall see you to your room.

BAB. I can hear them coming upstairs.

JANE A. Do tell me who they are. I am not curious. I only want to know.

MISS S. They are the Proctor and his Bulldogs.
Exeunt MISS SIMS, BAB, and JANE ANNIE.
Enter PROCTOR and BULLDOGS.

RECITATIVE. — PROCTOR.
There was a time when we were not,
The name that this dark period got
Was Chaos.
It lay as ‘neath a ban,
Merely containing animals, vegetables, minerals,
Woman and the like, and man.
Said Nature, “I’ve no Proctor,”
This strange omission shocked her.
Too long she felt she’d waited;
She now enlarged her plan.
We Proctors were created,
And then the world began.

SONG. — PROCTOR.
I’ll tell to you what ‘tis we do,
We stalk the undergrad.
When he perceives our velvet sleeves,

He runs away like mad.
Then follow we by deputy,
These men I now describe;
My bulldogs sound pull him to ground,
They never take a bribe.
In vain he tries to dodge their eyes,
Of all his haunts they've knowledge;
And soon I make our quarry quake
By crying, "Name and college!"

ALL.   Name and college! Name and college!

PROCTOR. Caged lions may forget they're tame,
The wife forget her baby's name,
The trampled worm forget to turn,
The Scot to think of Bannockburn,
One poet in a score forget
The laureateship is open yet,
But none who of its gist have knowledge
Can e'er forget my "Name and college."
In after years I fill with fears
All who've been undergrads;
The Cabinet, the Laureate,
Still run from me like lads.
To Parliament I one time went
The front bench to enlighten,
I thought I'd try to prove that I
Could still the members frighten.
So up I rose, and struck the pose,
And shouted, "Name and college!"
Oh, run did they from me that day,
When I cried "Name and college!"

ALL.   Name and college! Name and college!

PROCTOR. Comedians may forget their part,
Librettists that it rhymes with heart;

Composers may themselves forget
When ragged rhymes they're asked to set;
The Savoy opera singer e'en
Forget that on his head he's been;
But none who of its gist have knowledge,
Can e'er forget my "Name and college."
[Re-enter MISS SIMS.] JANE ANNIE listens from balcony.

MISS S. Dear friend, you have not yet told me the reason for this visit, and I cannot hope that you have called merely because of our old friendship.

PROCTOR. Our more than friendship.
They sigh. BULLDOGS sigh, and PROCTOR glares at them.

GREG (rebelliously). We have our feelings.

PROCTOR. But I object to your having feelings.

SIM (signing to GREG to control himself). Then we haven't.

PROCTOR. Are they still following me?

GREG and SIM (going to window). They are gone!

PROCTOR. Ha!

MISS S. What is it, dear friend?

PROCTOR. It is the penalty of greatness. You have heard that a Chair of New Journalism has been established at the University. There has been no peace for me since. The Press Students follow me, interview me, describe me. You see, honours can now be got in this department, and they are all anxious to take the first "first class" in journalism.

GREG. Besides, they feel that if they don’t hurry up, some lady student will take it before them.

MISS S. It is a way that lady students have.

PROCTOR. But it was duty brought me here. I have private information that an undergraduate named Findlater — popularly known as Tom, is carrying on a — a — a —

GREG. A flirtation.

PROCTOR. A — a flirtation — (He is reluctant to take the word from GREG, but can think of no other. GREG is triumphant.) — with a certain — certain — one of these — ah! what do you call those little things that grow into women?

GREG. A girl.

PROCTOR (annoyed). A — a — girl — in this seminary.

MISS S. Impossible! Could it be Bab?

GREG. Bab was the name.

PROCTOR glares at GREG, with whom SIM expostulates in dumb show.

JANE A. (aside). Tom! Tom! But I am sure the naughty word I heard her say was Jack! (Exit JANE ANNIE.)

PROCTOR. Tom is coming to serenade her from this hall window. Now I have come here to watch, and if he is guilty, to have him sent down. Ha! ha! conceive his discomfiture when he climbs up to this window and is met — not by his sweetheart — but my cry of —

GREG. Name and college.

SIM (quaking). I don’t know what is to become of him! (To

GREG.) Don’t be so dashed independent!

PROCTOR (fiercely). Watch at the windows!

BULLDOGS go to windows.

MISS S. Dear friend, you must be mistaken.

PROCTOR. Mistaken? I am a Proctor. Besides, if you are so confident, you cannot complain of my putting the matter to the proof, and I propose watching here. Where can I hide?

MISS S. (pointing to clock). Do you think you could get into this?

PROCTOR. The clock! Why not? I can just do it.

MISS S. Good. And I shall watch downstairs, for I know that my school can triumphantly stand the test.

DUET. — MISS SIMS and PROCTOR.

MISS SIMS. Strictly tended plants are mine,
Breakfast early, bed at nine —

PROCTOR. Plants that need some watching.

MISS SIMS. Their regard for beauty slight is,
Mental charm their chief delight is —

PROCTOR. Mischief ever hatching.

MISS SIMS. Flirt’s a word at which they frown, Man they know is but a noun —

PROCTOR. A noun they can't decline.

MISS SIMS.   Eyes they never use amiss,
When they take the air like this,
In a maiden line. (Business.)

PROCTOR. Yet I take this information
With some mental reservation,
And I think it most imprudent,
Thus to fire the callow student,
Or the young divine.

MISS SIMS.   Helpful books they read — not Gyp,
But the courting scenes they skip —

PROCTOR. Or at least they say so.

MISS SIMS.   If the heroine who charms
Sinks into her lover's arms —

PROCTOR. They hope to be some day so.

MISS SIMS.   No, their comment prim and terse is,
Namely "What a hard plight hers is!"

PROCTOR. Oh, this is quite too fine!

MISS SIMS.   And mankind with scorn they view,
As they walk out two and two,
In a maiden line. (Business.)

ENSEMBLE.
{ MISS SIMS. Yet he takes my wise instructions
{   With considerable deductions;
{   For such sights are bad, I know

{   For the budding medico,
{   Or the young divine.
{ PROCTOR. Yet I take Miss Sims’ instructions
{   With considerable deductions;
{   For such sights are bad, I know
{   For the budding medico,
{   Or the young divine.

GREG. Thank you so much. What is that called?

MISS S. It is a little thing of my own.

GREG. How delightful!

MISS S. I am so glad you like it.

GREG. You sing with so much expression.

MISS S. Do you really think so?

GREG. Won’t you favour us with another?

MISS S. That is the only one I know.

GREG. How very charming! (PROCTOR orders him back to window.)

PROCTOR. Ah me! Neither of us has forgotten the days when we were lovers. What a pity we quarrelled!

MISS S. (questioningly). I suppose we have quite outgrown that affection?

PROCTOR. Oh, quite. (BULLDOGS at the window make signs as if they saw someone. Soft flute is heard outside.) Ah! he comes! It is Tom! (PROCTOR gets into the clock, MISS

SIMS assisting him. PROCTOR looking out.) How’s that?

MISS S. Wonderful! If the face had hands you could pass for the clock any day. And here they are. (Puts her spectacles on PROCTOR.) There! and now I shall watch downstairs.

PROCTOR. Hi! a moment. What have you set me at?

MISS S. Ten past nine. (Exit.)

PROCTOR. Now the minute hand is in my left eye and I can see nothing. I wish she had put me on half an hour.

GREG (coming down). I beg to inform you, sir — he's gone! Sim, where can the Proctor have vanished to?

SIM (coming down). I am glad he isn't here. What is to be done? We didn't see what the Proctor expected us to see.

GREG. Is that our fault?

SIM. Hush! Of course it is, Greg. You will say we saw the undergraduate, eh, Greg?

PROCTOR (aside). What?

GREG. But we didn't. It was a soldier we saw.

PROCTOR (aside). Eh?

SIM. Oh, what is to be done?

GREG. Tell him the truth.

SIM. Oh, Greg, don't be so independent! Think of the time when you were a little child on your mother's knee.
(GREG is much affected.)

DUET. — SIM and GREG.

SIM. When a bulldog I became,
Independence was my game,
But since my course I'm steering
By a rule that is more wise,
For I hear with other's hearing,
And I see with other's eyes.

GREG (derisively). Tooral, looral-ly!

SIM. That's a risky think to say.

GREG. It's my platform, I reply.

SIM. Platforms, Greg, are cheap to-day.

GREG. Which nobody can deny.
Man's a man for a' that, Sim.

SIM. For a what? say I,

GREG. For a that.

SIM. A that? what's that?

GREG (after reflecting). Tooral, looral-ly!

BOTH. Up with caps and freedom hail!
Here's the new election cry;
Man's a man if born a male,
Tooral, looral, looral-ly!

GREG. Proc's are spry, but I see through them!
I'm the man that will undo them!
With a wit like razors' edges,

Twit them in the ‘Varsitee;
This the thin edge of the wedge is,
Spell them with a little p.

SIM (derisively). Tooral, looral-ly!

GREG. Culture’s fudge — see how I flout it,

SIM. Culture doesn’t pay, that’s why;

GREG. We reformers do without it,

SIM. Which nobody can deny.

GREG. Mad you are, my friend, go to!

SIM. Go to where? say I,

GREG. The missing word I leave to you.

SIM (after reflecting). Tooral, looral-ly!

BOTH. Up with caps and freedom hail!
Here’s the new election cry;
Man’s a man if born a male,
Tooral, looral, looral-ly!

DANCE.
Boots are placed outside the doors at this point. The BULLDOGS look scared, and exeunt downstairs.
Enter CADDIE. He collects boots in a laundress’s basket. The boots he loves are not among them. He is distressed. JANE ANNIE’s door opens and she puts out her boots. He is elated and goes for them. While he is getting them BAB’s arm appears outside her door, groping for her boots. As she doesn’t find then she comes out and looks for them. She sees basket, glides to it unseen by

CADDIE, picks out her boots and exit with them. CADDIE returns with JANE ANNIE's boots, fondling them. He sits down on basket and kisses them. Then he rises and tries to drop them among the others. This strikes him as sacrilege. He shakes his head, then ties the laces of JANE ANNIE's boots together, slings them over his head, and exit, carrying basket.

PROCTOR. What is he up to? If I had only being going, I should be at the half-hour by this time, and then I could see with the left eye. Ten past nine! I little thought that the time would come when the grand ambition of my life would be to be nine-thirty. What is he doing upstairs? Hallo! a girl, and after some mischief. I wonder if I dare ask her to put me on twenty minutes. I feel very queer, as if I was turning into a real clock. I hope I sha'n't strike.

ROSE and MILLY come softly out of their rooms.

MILLY. I have been thinking so much of what Bab told us that I can't go to bed.

ROSE. Nor I — Oh, Milly!

MILLY. What time is it, Rose?

ROSE (holding candle to clock). Half-past nine.

PROCTOR (aside). I wish it was!

ROSE (to MILLY). What?

MILLY. I didn't speak.
Flute heard outside.

ROSE. Listen!

MILLY. Oh, Rose! I am all of a tremble; turn up the gas.

BAB enters. Flute playing continues.

ROSE. It is he — Jack!

BAB (trembling). No, that is Tom!

MILLY. The other one!

BAB. Milly, he must have heard that I am to elope with Jack and doubtless he has come here to shoot me.

MILLY. How romantic!

ROSE. How delightful!

PROCTOR. How out of tune!

MILLY. Perhaps he has only come to ask you to give him back his presents.

ROSE. How horrid of him to bother you when you don’t care for him.

BAB. I never said I didn’t care for him.

MILLY. Oh!

ROSE. I hear him climbing up the ivy.

MILLY. He is coming to the window.

BAB. If he and Jack meet they will fight. (To GIRLS.) Leave us.

ROSE and MILLY exeunt. BAB hides. TOM enters from the window. He is very sad.

BALLAD. — TOM.
It was the time of thistledown,
The corn we wandered through;
She plucked the lover’s thistledown,
As maids are wont to do.
She blew upon the thistledown,
“He loves, he loves me not!”
And from the loyal thistledown,
“He loves” the answer got.
She did not ask the thistledown
If her own love were true;
No need to ask the thistledown,
She thought — as maidens do.
But had she asked the thistledown,
This answer she’d have got,
“Your false breath stains the thistledown,
He loves, but you love not.”

BAB (coming down). Tom! (They embrace.)

TOM. Then you do love me?

BAB (kissing him). Oh no, this is only saying good-bye.

TOM. You fling me over?

BAB. Jack insists on it.

TOM. Have you forgotten that day on the river, when —

BAB. When you kissed my hand? Oh, Tom, but I have been on the river since then with Jack, and he —

TOM. Kissed your hand also?

BAB. No, he did not kiss my — hand. (TOM takes something wrapped in paper from his pocket.) What is that?

TOM. The glove you gave me. (Gives it to her.) Give it to Jack. (Hands her something else.)

BAB. And what is this?

TOM. A hairpin. Give it to Jack. Good-bye!

BAB. Ah, Tom, you will soon forget me.

TOM. I am a man who loves but once, and then for aye.

BAB. You will be heart-broken about me all your life?

TOM. Till the grave close on me.

BAB. Dear Tom, you make me so happy. Now, kiss me passionately for the last time. You must see that it is not my fault. (He is about to kiss her, then sadly lets her go.)

DUET. — TOM and BAB.

TOM. O eyes that spoke to me of truth,
Farewell, deceptive mirror!

BAB. Thus you describe them, yet forsooth,
You look into the mirror!

TOM. Sweet mouth that pouted for my kiss,
Farewell, sweet lying mouth!

BAB. The words you’re using are amiss,
Yet sweet you call my mouth!

TOM.   O heart that throbbed a tale untrue,
Farewell, you falsely beat!

BAB.   Although it may not beat for you,
The words you say are sweet.

TOM.   False one, farewell, I harm you not;
To him depart, and scathless;
Be mine to bear my dreary lot,
Struck down by woman faithless.
For you, a jilt, my heart has bled,
My cup with grief you fill.
Ah, tell me, empty little head,
Why ‘tis I love you still?

BAB.   He loves me still, he loves me true,
He worships at my feet.
My heart may never beat for you,
And yet your words are sweet.

ENSEMBLE.

TOM.   BAB.
‘Tis so; yet joy be thine, Ah, how can joy be mine,
Though hopeless future mine, If hopeless fate is thine?
Farewell!   Farewell!

BAB (aside). Ah! am I sure that it is Jack whom I love best? And yet, my promise!

JANE ANNIE steals downstairs.

BAB. Fly, Tom! It is Jane Annie, the sneak!

TOM hurries to window where JANE ANNIE meets him. The PROCTOR comes stealthily out of clock.

PROCTOR. Name and college!

TOM jumps through the window , PROCTOR seizes JANE ANNIE. BAB listens unseen.

JANE A. Unhand me! I am Jane Annie, the model girl od the school.

PROCTOR. You are Bab, the flirting-girl!

JANE A. You are mistaken, I —

PROCTOR. Mistaken! — I! Have I not told you that I am a Proctor?

JANE A. It was Bab who was flirting, and I came to warn you.

PROCTOR. Yes, it was Bab, and you are Bab. (Seeing BAB.) Girl, what is the name of this chit?

BAB. That is Bab, sir, and my name is Jane Annie.

JANE A. Oh!

PROCTOR. Exactly! She has assumed your name.

BAB. Oh, Bab, how could you!

PROCTOR. I caught her in the act of eloping with an undergraduate through this window.

BAB. Naughty!

JANE A. You wicked little wretch! Sir, I am —

PROCTOR. You are about to be shut up in your bedroom for the night. Which is her room, Jane Annie?

JANE A. You —

BAB. In the attic there.

PROCTOR. Come!

PROCTOR drags JANE ANNIE upstairs, and pushes her into her room.

BAB. I hope poor Tom didn't hurt himself, though I believe he went away blaming me. Men are so unreasonable!

PROCTOR (coming down). Well, Jane Annie, why don't you go to bed?
A letter is thrown through the window.

PROCTOR. A letter! and through the window!

BAB (aside). Oh, it is from Jack! We are ruined!

PROCTOR. It has no address. For whom can it be meant?

BAB. Oh, give it to me, sir?

PROCTOR. To you, child? Never! It is my duty to open it myself. (Opens and reads.) "Ten past nine." Ten past nine! I am waiting for you in the garden." Ha! what plot is this that I have unearthed? Who is waiting in the garden, and for whom?

BAB (aside). Oh, what shall I do? Ha! Have I not heard that Miss Sims and he were sweethearts? (To PROCTOR.) Can you not see?

PROCTOR. No, I can't; and if I can't, it's perfectly certain that no one else can.

BAB. I know whom the letter is from.

PROCTOR. From whom, child?

BAB. It is from Miss Sims.

PROCTOR. From Dinah?

BAB. Precisely.

PROCTOR. And for whom is she waiting?

BAB. Why, for you, of course. Oh, sir, have pity upon this
poor lady's heart.

PROCTOR. Ha! "Ten past nine!" She means me! Of course it is
addressed to me. "Ten past nine, I am waiting for you
in the garden." Excuse me, child! (Exit.)

BAB. Oh, Jack is outside, and I do trust they will not meet.
It was my only chance. Now I must put on my hat and
coat and slip out to join him.
Exit into bedroom. JANE ANNIE comes downstairs.

JANE A. That little wretch Bab will find that ia m not so
easily foiled. Let me see, I need darkness, because I
am such a good girl. (Turns down the lights.) Oh! who
is this?
Enter JACK in a cloak.

JACK. Bab, come! (Sees JANE ANNIE and runs forward.)

JANE A. I am not Bab!

JACK. Oh, Lord! the wrong one. (Takes to his heels, dropping
the cloak in his haste.)

JANE A. What a superior young man! His cloak! (Puts it on.) In this light she might mistake me for him! (Swaggers about in military fashion.) Oh, I will lay such a beautiful trap for her! (Retires to back of stage, and conceals herself by the curtain.)
Enter BAB, dressed for travelling, and with several packages.

BAB. Farewell, dear old school — the nicest school in the world to get away from! If I were only sure that I am not making a mistake! They say that there was a girl who eloped from here once, and that she was unhappy, and that her spirit still haunts these rooms. Tom, Tom! shall I take this final step which is to divide us? Oh! what is that?

VOICES IN THE AIR.
Little maiden, pause and ponder,
Life is cruel, life is dreary.
Little feet, why should you wander
On to paths so rough and weary?
Ere you snap the final link,
Little maiden, pause and think!

BAB. Oh, I am so frightened. What shall I do?

JANE ANNIE comes forward, enveloped in JACK’s cloak.

JANE A. Come!

BAB. Jack, I cannot!

JANE A. Quick!

BAB. Oh, Jack, be good to me! Do be careful of this packet. It is awfully, awfully important. It is my curling tongs. (Gives packet.) The carriage is awaiting us, of course. That contains your letters Jack, and these are

some little things — and take this bag. And now,
darling, carry me down, for I am going to faint!
She falls into JANE ANNIE's arms, who lets the things fall,
seizes her and screams. Ringing of bells, and general alarm.

PRESS STUDENTS come rushing upstairs. MISS SIMS enters, all stare at JANE ANNIE holding BAB, who seems to have fainted from fright.

FINALE.

PRESS STUDENTS. Madam, do no think us rude in
On your privacy intrudin';
We are Students Journalistic,
Keen on copy, plain or mystic,
Commonplace or transcendental,
Psychic, physical, or mental,
News we'll have, and through you, madam,
For we'll interview you, madam.
That's so flat, nought could be flatter,
Tell us quickly, what's the matter?
What's the matter? What's the matter?

GIRLS run out of their rooms in various stages of deshabille.

GIRLS. Madam, when we heard this screaming,
Scarcely sure if we were dreaming,
Curiosity controlled us,
And we came as you behold us,
Trim or ruffled, tossed or dapper,
Clad in dressing gown or wrapper,
We are kneeling to you, madam,
News to get, and through you, madam.
Think not this is idle chatter,
But inform us what's the matter?
What's the matter? What's the matter?

ENSEMBLE.

PRESS STUDENTS. GIRLS.
News we'll have, and   We are kneeling to you,
through you, madam, etc. madam, etc.

MISS SIMS.   Jane Annie, what is this?
Bab, what were you doing in her arms?

BAB. Miss Sims, forgive me! I thought she was a gentleman.

MISS SIMS. Oh, infamous! To your rooms, all, this instant!
Exeunt MISS SIMS, BAB, JANE ANNIE, and GIRLS.

PRESS STUDENTS (taking notes eagerly).
School aristocratic,
The scene most dramatic,
Plot unsystematic,
And very erratic,
Jane Annie ecstatic,
Her victory emphatic,
She won it by stealing
Down from the attic.
Enter PROCTOR furiously.

PRESS STUDENTS. We're glad to interview you,
To get a column through you,
And note what you may say.
See now how we will do him,
While we seem to interview him,
In our frank, new-fashioned way.
Are Proctors men of learning?
Do you spend more than you're earning?
And how much do you owe?
Of women do you think much?
On occasion do you drink much?

PROCTOR. Emphatically, no!

PRESS STUDENTS (writing). Proctors have no acumen,
And no respect for women.

PROCTOR.   Yes, yes! I meant to say!

PRESS STUDENTS (writing). In debt and boasts about it.
Love’s grog — can’t do without it.
Must have it night and day.

PROCTOR. My words you’re misconstruing,
That is not interviewing.

PRESS STUDENTS.   Yes, this is interviewing,
In the frank, new-fashioned way.

PROCTOR. If you’ll suppress this fable,
I’ll tell you, if I’m able,
A recent incident.
(Aside). Diverting their attention,
I’ll draw from my invention
Some singular event.

SOLO. — PROCTOR.
There was once a man in a seaside town,
And his name it was — what was it?
I know it wasn’t Smith, and I’m sure it wasn’t Brown,
But it was — oh, Lor’, what was it?
I very much want to tell you all,
You’d love to know about it;
But just this point I can’t recall,
And as it’s immaterial,
We’d best go on without it.
A widow lived in the same hotel,
Her name it was — you know it!
He stole to her and whispered — well,

He whispered, well — Oh, blow it!
I very much want to tell you all,
You’d love to know about it;
But just this point I can’t recall,
And as it’s immaterial,
I’d best go on without it.
But when the lady heard this speech,
Down to the pier she flew then,
Threw up her arms, and with a screech,
She — she — Oh, dear! what did she do then?
I very much want to tell you all,
You’d love to know about it;
But just this point I don’t recall,
And as it’s most material,
I can’t go on without it.
Enter SIM and GREG.

SIM. At last we’ve got him, sir,

PROCTOR (not heeding). Away!

SIM. Him that dangled after her!

PROCTOR. Hurray!
(addressing PRESS STUDENTS). To catch an undergraduate I came,

SIM and GREG (perplexed). Of this there’s question none,
He is an undergraduate,
In all respects but one.
That one to mention we forgot,
It’s odd to me and mate,
It’s this, that somehow he is not
An undergraduate!

JACK steps forward, CADDIE holding him.

ALL. Why, evidently he is not

An undergraduate!

MILLY (from balcony). Oh, sir, take care
Of one so fair
Let his complexion
Plead with you for him!

JACK. An officer I,
Strolling by,
Smoking a Henry Clay,
These men I met,
They me beset
In a most unseemly way.
Of girls they spoke,
Which spoilt my smoke,
For the sex I do not care about.
I’ve not address’t
Them e’en in jest
Since ‘85 — or there about.
They dragged me here,
By brute force sheer,
But this doth chiefly jar.
Your page, I find,
We left behind
Smoking my big cigar.
And therefore I
Your school defy,
Oh, I do not stand in awe of you;
For spoilt have they
My Henry Clay,
And I mean to have the law of you.
Exit JACK.
Re-enter GIRLS.

PROCTOR. No I am trepanned and done brown.

PRESS STUDENTS. We hear you, and we’ve got it down.

Enter MISS SIMS and JANE ANNIE.

MISS SIMS (to JANE ANNIE). We owe all too you, it appears!
So what can I do?

GIRLS.   Box her ears!

JANE ANNIE. To be good I try hard,

GIRLS.   Ain't she meek?

JANE ANNIE. And I ask no reward,

GIRLS.   Oh, the sneak!

JANE ANNIE. Yet if I should take
Something nice,
They may learn to forsake
Ways of vice.

PRESS STUDENTS. Stop a moment—"Forsake!"
"Ways of vice!"

JANE ANNIE. Now the good-conduct prize,

GIRLS.   Oh, how mean!

JANE ANNIE. Seems good to my eyes,

GIRLS.   Which are green!

JANE ANNIE. So if you agree
That I'm right,
Why not give it me
Well — to-night?

PRESS STUDENTS. Stop a moment—"Agree"

"To to-night."

MISS SIMS. Dear pupils, see, to my bosom I fold her,
The prize shall be hers ere she's five minutes older.
Exeunt MISS SIMS, PROCTOR, BULLDOGS, and CADDIE.

JANE ANNIE. The girl who's good, demure, correct,
Cannot preserve her self-respect,
And mine I would regain.
So having got the prize to-night,
To-morrow I, with all my might,
Will be an imp again!
Girls, I am naughty from this hour,
And six long months of wickedness,
By virtue of my magic power,
Into one day I will compress!

ALL.   Jane Annie's naughty from this hour,
But oh! what is this magic power?

CADDIE sends PRESS STUDENTS away.

SONG. — JANE ANNIE.
When I was a little piccaninny,
Only about so high,
I'd a baby's bib and a baby's pinny
And a queer little gimlet eye.
They couldn't tell why that tiny eye
Would make them writhe and twist,
They found it so, but how could they know
That the babe was a hypnotist?

ALL.   Now think of that! this tiny brat
Was a bit of a hypnotist!

JANE ANNIE. And as I grew my power grew too,
For we were one, you see,

And what I willed the folk would do
At a wave or a glance from me.
I could “suggest” what pleased me best,
And still can, when I list,
And Madam Card will find it hard
To beat this hypnotist!

ALL. Oh, think of it! This little chit
Is a mighty mesmerist!

DANCE.
Enter MISS SIMS, BULLDOGS, PRESS STUDENTS, and CADDIE in procession. PAGE bearing prize. GIRLS become demure.

MISS SIMS. To Jane Annie this prize I present,
And in it I’ve writ this inscription —
“Awarded a hundred per cent.
For goodness of every description.”
(Presents prize.)

MISS SIMS, BULLDOGS, and PAGE.
Hail, oh hail to the modest maiden!
Hail, oh hail to the downcast eyes!
Now with all our plaudits laden,
See, she takes the well-earned prize.
Hail, Jane Annie, hail!

GIRLS. Hail, oh hail to the scheming maiden,
Hail, oh hail to the roguish eye!
Now she stands with honours laden,
They will know her by-and-bye.
Hail, Jane Annie, hail!

ENSEMBLE.

MISS SIMS, BULLDOGS, etc.
Hail, oh hail to her we honour!

Hail, oh hail to the blushing cheek!
Place the laurel wreath upon her,
See her crowned, and good, and meek!
Hail, Jane Annie, hail!

GIRLS.
Hail, oh hail to her they honour!
Hail to her unblushing cheek!
Place the laurel wreath upon her,
See her trying to look meek.
Hail, Jane Annie, hail!

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE. — Golf green near the school. River at back. BAB, a prisoner, is walking up and down in CADDIE's charge.

SONG. — CADDIE.
A page-boy am I
That young ladies decry,
Yes, yes, dears, you do, for I hear yer;
But it's little you know
The volcanoes that glow
Inside of this little exterior.
Oh, you wouldn't deride,
Could you step inside
Of this here pocket edition,
And, striking a light,
Perceive that this mite
Is on fire with a grand ambition.

BAB. But at present the buttons he's wearing,
And he's taking me out for an airing.
(Walks up and down.)

CADDIE. My wife I shall choose
From the class called the Blues,
Whose theory is that they hates men,
Of birthplaces galore
I mean to have more
Than him wot's the eminent statesman.
A peerage I'll take
For my progeny's sake,
To refuse it I think would be shabby,
And I ask poor and rich
To my funeral, which
Will be held in Westminster Abbey.

Oh, you wouldn't deride, etc.
Cries of "Fore! Fore!"

BAB. The girls are playing golf. (She holds up flag.)

CADDIE. Girls! Poor summer flies!

BAB. Do let me play, Caddie.

CADDIE. It's agin the Missus' orders. I'm your jailer, I am, and Miss Sims's words were: "Give the wench a little exercise, but never leave her for a moment, or she will be eloping again; and if she does," said she, "you just pull the big fire bell."

BAB. But why not let me elope, Caddie? See, I go on my knees to you. (Kneels.)

CADDIE. Get up! Get up!

BAB (rising). Cold, relentless! You have never loved!

CADDIE. Have I not? By gum!

BAB. You in love. With whom?

CADDIE (sadly). It's all over for ever, no more.

BAB. She jilted you?

CADDIE. Well, it came to the same thing, I jilted her.

BAB. Why?

CADDIE. I wanted a bigger one.

BAB. And have you got a bigger one?

CADDIE. I have.

BAB. Whom?

CADDIE (pointing off stage). You see that agreeable circumference coming this way?

BAB. Yes.

CADDIE. Well, that’s my new one.

BAB. Jane Annie!

BAB goes sadly up stage. A golf ball lands on green, CADDIE pockets it. Enter JANE ANNIE with golf club. She looks for her ball. CADDIE looks longingly at her and sighs aloud.

CADDIE. My charmer!

JANE A. Caddie, did you see my ball?

CADDIE. No, Miss, no balls have come this way.

JANE A. It is a strange thing that when you are acting as caddie nearly all our balls get lost.

CADDIE. Yes, Miss.

JANE A. And what is stranger still, those same lost balls are afterwards offered us for sale at your mother’s shop in the village.

CADDIE. Ah, it be a puzzling world, Miss.

JANE A. (putting her hand in his pocket and producing ball). Now it seems to me that this is my ball.

CADDIE. Extraordinary thing!

JANE A. How did it get there?

CADDIE. You must have played it into my pocket, Miss.

JANE A. Fibber! I feel sure that it fell dead just on the edge of the hole — here. (Puts ball close to hall.)

CADDIE. No, Miss, now that you mention the circumstance, I recollect that I picked it out of the bunker.

JANE A. Pooh! nonsense!

CADDIE. Is this fair, Miss?

JANE A. Of course it's fair, so long as nobody sees me. Besides, I'm told they often do it at Felixstowe.
Why, even Mr. Balf — (CADDIE signs silence to her, pointing to private box as if fearful lest they should be overheard. Exit CADDIE.)

BAB. Sneak!

JANE A. Are you a prisoner, Bab?

BAB. Yes, thanks to you. I shall tell everybody how good you have been. (Sits down on rug.)

JANE A. How hateful of you to threaten to take away my character.

BAB. Goody! Goody! Goody!

JANE A. (sitting down beside BAB). I'm not really good.

BAB. Yes, you are. You sha’n’t sit on my rug. (Pulls it away.) Why, you promised last night to be dreadfully naughty to-day, so as to make up for your goodness of the past six months, and here you are as shamelessly good as ever.

JANE A. You do me an injustice. The fun is about to begin. Early this morning I hypnotized our dear mistress, and made her write the most dreadful letters. Just fancy, two of them were invitations to Tom and Jack to come and bring as many male friends with them as they could get together. She has not the least idea of what she has done, of course! Ha! ha!

BAB. But why have you done this?

JANE A. So that in the confusion Tom and Jack may carry off the girl of their heart.

BAB. But I can only marry one of them.

JANE A. Yes, but I can marry the other.

BAB. You! But I haven’t selected mine yet. That is my difficulty.

JANE A. No, but I have! That removes your difficulty.

BAB. You toad!

JANE A. The one I have chosen is Jack.

BAB. Jack! Does he know?

JANE A. No, I am keeping it a surprise for him.

BAB. I don’t believe a word you have said.

JANE A. You can have my aid if you will promise to take Tom and leave Jack for me. You can’t elope without my aid.

BAB. I shall.

JANE A. You sha’n’t!

BAB. Goody! Goody! Goody!
Cries of “Fore! Fore!” are heard, and a ball lands on the green.

JANE A. The girls.

BAB. Goody! Goody! Goody!

GIRLS enter in golf costume. JANE ANNIE, ROSE, MEG, and MILLY are playing a foursome; the others are looking on. CADDIE accompanies them as caddie.

CHORUS OF GIRLS.
To golf is staid for bashful maid,
So our schoolmistress thinks,
That’s why, ‘tis said, Queen Mary played
On famed St. Andrew’s links.

BAB (holding up her club). Niblick! }

JANE ANNIE (holding up her club). Driver! }

MILLY (holding up her club). Putter! }

MEG (holding up her club). Brassy! }

BAB. One up!

JANE ANNIE. Two to play!

ALL. We play the game as that Scotch lassie,
Mary, used to play.
This verse is sung with spirit; the second dejectedly.

GIRLS. The game was gay in Mary’s day,
Her foursomes were not lonely,
Maybe ‘cause they had not to play
On greens for ladies only!

BAB (as before). Niblicks! }

JANE ANNIE (as before). Drivers! }

MILLY (as before). Putters! }

MEG (as before). Brassies! }

BAB. One up!

JANE ANNIE. Two to play!

GIRLS. For partners we have only lassies,
Which was not Mary’s way.

MEG plays at hole and misses. CADDIE chuckles.

JANE A. You have flung away the hole.

ROSE plays at hole and misses. CADDIE grins.

MILLY. Silly! (ROSE weeps. MILLY plays into hole.) Hurrah!
Rose and I have done this hole in seventeen!
Enter MISS SIMS.

MISS S. Young ladies, as it is the last day of the term our
rules may be a little relaxed.

MILLY. Oh, you dear kind thing!

MISS S. Except in the case of Bab, who must remain a prisoner all day.

BAB. Oh! Oh! Oh!

MISS S. So we shall admit some men to to-day’s festivities.

ALL. Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

MISS S. But not real men.

ROSE. Boys?

MILLY. Oh, I’m going to bed!

MISS S. No, but half of you may be permitted for this day only to assume the character of men. It will be quite as amusing.

ALL (dismally). Oh!

MISS S. And very much safer.

MILLY (brightening). Perhaps this game will provide an answer to a question in deportment which has often puzzled me. It is this. Suppose a gentleman were to put his arm round me, what would be the right thing for me to do?

ROSE. The right thing would be to scream.

MILLY. No. I think the right thing would be not to let on, so that he shouldn’t have the satisfaction of knowing that you noticed it.

BAB. I know what I should do if a man put his arm round me -

- I would stand still.

MISS S. Shameless! And what would you do, Jane Annie?

JANE A. I would run to you, madam, for protection.

MISS S. (fondling her). Dear Jane Annie! (To girls.) Now go.
Exeunt girls. BAB goes last in charge of CADDIE.

MISS S. Now, Jane Annie, dear, there is something strange I want to speak to you about. You remember when you left me in the study this morning?

JANE A. Yes, Miss Sims.

MISS S. Well, I must have dropped asleep immediately afterwards, and I had the oddest dreams.

JANE A. (chuckles, but assumes an air of sympathy as MISS SIMS turns towards her). Dreams, Miss Sims?

MISS S. Oh, the strangest dreams! I seemed to be writing such a number of letters, but what they were about I cannot imagine.

JANE A. Of course it was all fancy!

MISS S. But ten envelopes were missing when I woke.

JANE A. No!

MISS S. And my fingers were quite inky. I do hope I have not done anything foolish in my sleep.

JANE A. I hope not.

MISS S. Especially just now, while the Proctor is here.

JANE A. Why specially while he is here?

MISS S. Ah, Jane Annie, he and I were once — (Sighs.)

JANE A. No, were you?

MISS S. I assure you he often — (Sighs.)

JANE A. Did he? Where?

MISS S. In the conservatory.

JANE A. Just where they do it to-day.

MISS S. But, alas! he — (Sighs.)

JANE A. How horrid of him.

MISS S. And so his presence here makes me think of early days when — (Sighs.)

JANE A. Naturally.

SONG. — MISS SIMS.
A girl again I seem to be,
Though I'm an old schoolmistress grey;
Again a boy comes courting me,
Though he's a hard-faced man to-day.
He calls me little golden-head,
I feel his kisses on my brow,
I still recall the words he said,
Though I'm an old schoolmistress now,
Youth dreams of what's to be, I ween,
The future's always far away;
But age must dream of what has been,
The past is always yesterday.

We meet, but he does not recall
The golden head, the love-lit eyes;
Our meetings and our partings all
To him are less than memories.
He twits the old schoolmistress prim,
Forgetful of his broken vow,
And that she owes it all to him
That she’s an old schoolmistress now.
Youth dreams of what’s to be, I ween, etc.

MISS SIMS is retiring up stage. She returns excitedly.

MISS S. There is a party of those impertinent Press Students coming sown the river, who look as if they intended to land upon our bank.

JANE A. (in horror). Oh, surely it cannot be. (Aside with exultation.) The result of letter number one.

MISS S. Let us go and fetch Caddie to protect us.
Exeunt MISS SIMS and JANE ANNIE. Song of Oarsmen heard in the distance and coming nearer.

BARCAROLLE. — PRESS STUDENTS
Where the willows shade the river,
Where the leaning rushes quiver,
Where the water weeds are shining,
Some enfolding, some entwining,
There we go! Cheerily oh!
Eight like one we dip and feather!
Steadily now! Stroke and bow!
Pulling along and all together!
They land, TOM among them.
Enter MISS SIMS, JANE ANNIE, and CADDIE.

MISS S. (shrinking from them). The wretches! (To CADDIE.) Order them to go at once, Caddie.

CADDIE (turning up his sleeves fiercely). Come now, you had best go quietly.

TOM. What does this sprat mean?

CADDIE. Sprat! Summer flies! Now, look here, are you going quietly, or must I chuck the blooming lot of you into the river?

TOM. There is some mistake, madam — we came here by invitation.

CADDIE. Look here, I know that game.

MISS S. Impossible! By whose invitation?

TOM (producing letter). By yours — here is your letter. (Hands it to her.)

JANE A. (aside). Exquisite!

MISS S. (reading). "Dear Mr. Tom, as I have seen you in the neighbourhood of my school more than once, I venture to ask whether you will do me the honour of attending a garden party which I am giving to my girls this afternoon. I want to show them a little life. Please bring a few of those pleasant Press Students, and be sure to come in cap and gown. It will be a free and easy affair. My girls join me in sending love, and I am yours sincerely, Dinah Sims." Oh!

CADDIE (shocked). Well, of all the — ! The old girl is coming out of her hegg at last. (Exit.)

MISS S. Oh, Jane Annie, is it not dreadful? I could not have written such a letter.

JANE A. Well, it is certainly in your writing.

TOM (aside). Now to look for Bab. (Exit.)
Enter CADDIE.

CADDIE. If you please, ma'am, the man has come with the Scotch whisky.

MISS S. Whisky! there is some mistake. I never ordered any.

CADDIE. Why, ma'am, you sent me this morning with a letter to the wine-merchant, ordering two dozen of whisky and one dozen of soda.

MISS S. Oh, this is too much!

CADDIE. That's what I thought, ma'am, too much whisky and not enough soda.
Exit MISS SIMS.
1ST STUD. We were invited — and we'll stay.

ALL. Certainly. (Sit down in a determined manner.)

CADDIE (to JANE ANNIE). See here, Miss, I have knocked about a bit in my time, and it strikes me that you have been doing something fishy.

JANE A. Go away!

CADDIE. What's more, I have the responsibility of this here seminary on my shoulders, and I'll find out what you've been up to, and expose you, if you don't —

JANE A. Don't what?

CADDIE. If you don't chuck us a kiss.

JANE A. There! (Slaps his face.)

CADDIE (puzzled). See here now, is that flirting, or ain’t it?

JANE A. It “ain’t.”

CADDIE. Then drop it — and give us a kiss.

JANE A. Sha’n’t!

CADDIE. This is the last time of asking. You’ll never have such a chance again.

JANE A. There! (Slaps him.)

CADDIE. Summer flies! Now for revenge. (Exit.)

JANE A. It’s all very well to laugh, but he is quite capable of doing what he threatens, and so I — I think I had better give him a kiss. (Exit after CADDIE.)
Cries of “Fore!” and two golf balls land on the putting green. The balls are followed by some of the GIRLS, who look self-consciously at the STUDENTS. The STUDENTS look very sheepish.
1ST STUD. Speak to them, Christopherson.
2ND STUD. Say something nice, Tippy.
3RD STUD. I can’t think of anything nice to say.
2ND STUD. Well, then, let us look nice. (All simper.)

MILLY. Are you men?

STUDENTS. Eh, what? We are. Oh, yes, certainly, certainly.

MILLY. So are we.
1ST STUD. Eh?

MILLY. You see, Miss Sims, our mistress, has invented a new

game for us. Half of our number are to be men for today, and to entertain the other half.
2ND STUD. But where’s the other half?

MILLY. Oh, that was the difficulty. You see, we all wanted to be men, so there is no other half.
2ND STUD. You’re all men, then?

MILLY. Yes, and we don’t know what to do for girls.
3RD STUD. A gentlemen will do anything to oblige a lady, will not he, friends?

ALL. Certainly.
3RD STUD. Then, let us be girls.

MILLY. Delightful, and we’ll be students.
The GIRLS put on the caps and gowns of the STUDENTS, and swagger about in a manly way. The STUDENTS look shy and mincing.

MILLY (to 1ST STUDENT). Ah, ah, ah! What are these things you are carrying?
1ST STUD. (consciously). Ah, ah, ha! Kodaks.

MILLY. Ah — ah — no!
1ST STUD. Ah — ah — yes! (They giggle and MILLY runs to ROSE.)

MILLY. Rose, you can’t guess how I have been flirting with that dark one.
1ST STUD. (to 2ND STUDENT). I say, old man, I have been going the pace with little blue eyes.

ROSE. I haven’t felt so wicked since I ate twelve penny tarts at a sitting.
2ND STUD. (to 1ST STUDENT). He, he, he! my one asked me what time it was. Oh, what a lark!

MILLY (hysterically, swaggering). Glass of beer, waiter —

have a weed? How are you, old man? — Glass of beer — have a weed? — how are you, old man? Have a weed — glass of beer. Oh, Jenny, isn't it splendid? Glass of beer — have a weed? —

MAUD. Control yourself, dear.

MILLY. I can't! This cloak has gone to my head. Glass of beer —

PROCTOR rushes in accompanied by BULLDOGS. He cries "Name and College!" The STUDENTS rush off, the GIRLS all turn their backs.

PROCTOR. Now, I've got you. There's no mistake this time, at any rate. (Takes out note-book.) Name and college, sir?

GIRLS. Smith of Olds, Jones of New, Brown of New, etc.

PROCTOR (pompously). Now, Gentlemen of the Press, I have got you. For weeks you have followed me with your impertinent note-books and Kodaks. I shall gate the lot of you!
They all rush off laughing, having taken off their caps, and reveal themselves as girls.

PROCTOR. There now! I knew they were girls all the time.

SIM. Of course, if you say so that is sufficient.

GREG. Fudge!

PROCTOR. Hum! Well, perhaps I did make a mistake this time.

SIM. No, no.

PROCTOR. And that no one may say that there is one law for the humble Undergraduate and another for the great Proctor, I hereby fine myself one shilling.

SIM. There's a sense of justice, Greg!

PROCTOR. And I shall pay it after my usual fashion.

SIM and GREG. Don't!

PROCTOR. Namely by proxy. Come, my men, a sixpence each.
They pay reluctantly.

GREG. Da — da — da —

SIM. Greg, forbear.

GREG. It seems to me that we do nine-tenths of the work and you get nine-tenths of the pay.

SIM. Oh, this dashed independence!

PROCTOR. Well, you can't expect to get both the work and the pay. They never go together, even in our Government offices.

GREG. Then they should.

SIM. Greg, Greg! you are flying in the face of the law of England.

GREG. I say it's a da — da — da —

SIM. Greg!

PROCTOR. This discussion is getting hot. Perhaps I had better clear the air with a song, the little thing that you two composed.

GREG. But we composed it about ourselves.

PROCTOR. It suits me better than you. But I am willing to pay for it.

SIM. There's generosity.

PROCTOR. I will pay for it by prox —

SIM and GREG. You can have it for nothing.

PROCTOR. Thank you,
The music for song is started, PROCTOR hesitates, yawns.

PROCTOR. No, it is too great a fag. You shall sing it for me instead.

GREG. At last!

SIM. Always considerate!

PROCTOR. But remember, you are to sing it about me — not about yourselves.

GREG. Da —

SIM. Hush!

TRIO. — BULLDOGS and PROCTOR.
When I was a — when he was a little child
Only two or three,
All the household went quite wild
Out of love for — he.
Cooks and housemaids came to kiss,
Crowding for their duty,
And the reason for all of this,
Was our — my — his too — too — too —
His too fatal beauty.

When I was a — when he was a little man,
Only just of age,
Off to London then he ran,
And became the rage.
High and low they loved us so — him so,
And claimed him for their booty;
And the reason well I know,
Was our — was my — was his too — too — too —
His too — too fatal beauty.

DANCE.

PROCTOR takes the applause meant for BULLDOGS and exit.

SIM. You can say it now, Greg.

GREG. —— —— — !

BULLDOGS exeunt arm in arm, R.
Enter OFFICERS and JACK.

MILITARY CHORUS. — JACK and OFFICERS.

OFFICERS. We are conscious that we slightly condescend,

JACK. Right turn!

OFFICERS. But we couldn't go and disoblige a friend,

JACK. Left turn!

OFFICERS. Yet it's infra dig., you see,
For such warriors as we
To come out to cakes and tea
At a school.

JACK. Stand at ease!

JACK. Now a midnight oyster supper would be nice,

OFFICERS. Very nice!

JACK. Or anything with just a touch of vice;

OFFICERS. Just a spice

JACK. But coming fresh, you know,
From slaughtering the foe,
It’s just a trifle slow
At a school!

OFFICERS. Mark time

OFFICERS. Now a midnight oyster supper would be nice,

JACK. Right turn!

OFFICERS. Or anything with just a touch of vice;

JACK. Left turn!

OFFICERS.   But coming fresh, you know,
From slaughtering the foe,
It’s just a trifle slow
At a school!

JACK. Dress line!

JACK. Yet from the invitation it is clear,

OFFICERS. Quite clear!

JACK. There are maids whose leisure moments we may cheer;

OFFICERS. Hear! Hear!

JACK. So as a soldier brave
Is ever beauty’s slave,
We had a wash and shave,
And we’ve come!

OFFICERS. Yet from the invitation it is clear,

JACK. Left turn!

OFFICERS. There are maids whose leisure moments we may cheer;

JACK. Right turn!

OFFICERS. So as a soldier brave
Is ever beauty’s slave,
We had a wash and shave,
And we’ve come!

JACK. Stand at ease!
Enter MISS SIMS and JANE ANNIE.

MISS S. How dare you come here!

JACK. We come by invitation, madam. Haw!

MISS S. Whose invitation?

JACK. Yours.

MISS S. I invite you here! You are mad!

JACK. We had a letter from you.

MISS S. (distracted). Oh, these letters! (Talks aside to JANE

ANNIE.)

JACK (to 1ST OFFICER). Never mind her. I want you all to flirt outrageously with the other girls, and while Miss Sims is trying to stop you I shall bolt with Bab. Do you think you could do that, old man? (OFFICER Pulls his moustache confidently). Ask the others. (1ST

OFFICER goes to other OFFICERS, who repeat business.)
Enter CADDIE.

CADDIE. Please, ma’am, the brass band is here.

MISS S. Brass band!

CADDIE. Yes, ma’am, they say they had a letter from you. And the man has come with the bull-pups.

MISS S. Oh, I am going mad!

CADDIE. Yes, ma’am.

MISS S. Let us go and lock the gates. (Exit excitedly.)

JANE A. (to CADDIE). Do let me kiss you, Caddie!

CADDIE. Too late! Revenge!

JANE A. But you wanted me to do it five minutes ago.

CADDIE. I was a boy then. (Exit.)
Enter some of the GIRLS from a boat.

JACK (to JANE ANNIE). Do you know where my Bab is?

JANE A. Bother Bab!

JACK. Eh?

JANE A. I had such a nice dream about you, last night.

JACK. No, had you? Haw!

JANE A. Yes, I dreamt that you were to elope with me instead of with Bab.

JACK. Not if I know it.

JANE A. Perhaps you won’t know it at this time — but you’ll know it afterwards.

JACK (aside). I dislike this girl very much.

JANE A. (to GIRLS who are flirting with OFFICERS). I have been left in charge to see that you all behave yourselves.

ROSE. Oh!

JANE A. You and I, Jack, will set them an example.

CONCERTED PIECE. —

JANE ANNIE, JACK, GIRLS, OFFICERS, and STUDENTS.

JANE ANNIE. You and I, dear Jack, will show
A most excellent example.

JACK. Scarce can they in virtue grow,
If they take me for their sample.

JANE ANNIE. If you list to my advice,
Keep young men at a safe distance.

She draws JACK's arm round her waist.

JACK. This is strange, and yet it's nice,
I shall offer no resistance.

ENSEMBLE.

GIRLS. OFFICERS.
In accord with her This is strange, and yet it's
advice, nice,
We shall keep you at We shall offer no
a distance. resistance.
Drawing OFFICERS' arms round.

ALL. We/They have learned her/my precept pat,
We/They mustn't do that! We/They mustn't do that!
And so, of course, the sequence is,
We/They mustn't do this! We/They mustn't do this!

JANE ANNIE. You and I will also show
A correct and sober bearing.

JACK. Though her words are cold as snow,
Yet her glance is most ensnaring.

JANE ANNIE. If you list to my advice,
You will never start off dancing.
(Dancing several steps.)

JACK. Though she's most severe on vice,
Yet her ways are most entrancing.

ENSEMBLE.

GIRLS. OFFICERS.
In accord with her Though she's very
advice, hard on vice,

We shall never start   Yet her ways are most
off dancing.   entrancing.
All dance.

ALL. We/They have learned her/my precept pat, etc.
Enter STUDENTS and other GIRLS.

OFFICERS. What’s the meaning of all this?
Who are these who disconcert us?

STUDENTS. Maidens this is much amiss,
Surely you would not desert us?

OFFICERS. Beardless boys, you’d better go,
Your time hasn’t come, we vow.

STUDENTS. Aged men, you’re most de trop,
Your time was, it’s over now.

CHORUS.

OFFICERS. Maidens, maidens, can you hesitate?

GIRLS. Hey, dear, we haven’t got an answer!

OFFICERS. Maidens, maidens, your reply we wait.

GIRLS. Hey, dear, the Student or the Lancer!

STUDENTS. Maidens, we are fresh from college,
Smile upon us, we implore you!
Think of all the varied knowledge
In these heads which bow before you.
(All bow.)

OFFICERS. Maidens, with our martial bearing
And our spurs, we ought to suit you;

Think of all the deeds of daring
Done with hands which now salute you.
(All salute.)

STUDENTS. Maidens, maidens, can you hesitate?

GIRLS. Hey, dear, the Student or the Lancer!

OFFICERS. Maidens, maidens, your reply we wait.

GIRLS. Hey, dear, this must be our answer!

GIRLS cross over to STUDENTS.

STUDENTS. Maidens, you are wise in turning
Thus to those who most impress you;
You shall list to words of learning
From these lips which now caress you.
(Kiss them.)

OFFICERS. Maidens, all their vows are idle.
Here to you our hands we proffer;
Fresh from sword-hilt and from bridle,
Here they are, and all on offer.
(Offer their hands.)

STUDENTS. Maidens, maidens, do not hesitate.

GIRLS. Hey, dear, we gave you both our answer!

OFFICERS. Maidens, maidens, what shall be our fate.

GIRLS. Hey, dear, we much prefer the Lancer!

GIRLS cross over and join OFFICERS. Music continues softly through following dialogue.

A STUD. But this is absurd! We are all very distinguished men,
or shall be some day. And then we are journalists, and
can describe your dresses in the papers.

GIRLS. Oh! (Cross over to STUDENTS.)

JACK. But we shave twice a day.

A STUD. Why, there is not of us who could not read Theocritus
in the original.

JACK. But we are to give a dance next week.

MILLY. Oh, you dear things, how nice of you! (Cross to

OFFICERS.)
Dance. All exeunt except JACK.

JACK. And now to find Bab.
Enter TOM.

TOM. I can't see my Bab anywhere. (Sees JACK.) Hullo!

JACK. That fellow here!

TOM (shortly). How are you?

JACK (shortly). H'are you?

TOM (after a pause). Very warm day.

JACK. Cold.

TOM. Cad!

JACK. What do you want here?

TOM. Private business.

JACK. Let us be plain with one another. How could you, a beggarly Press Student, support a wife?

TOM. How could you, a beggarly lieutenant?

JACK. But I am also a novelist — at least I've — I've bought a pound of sermon paper. Haw!

TOM. Well, I am also a dramatist. Why, I have a completed play in my pocket.

JACK. And a very good place for it too. Haw!

TOM. What is more, it has a strong literary flavour.

JACK. Don't be afraid of that. They'll knock it out in rehearsal. Haw!

TOM. Nonsense. It's most original also.

JACK. That'll damn it.

TOM. Originality damn a play! Why?

JACK. Because ours are a healthy-minded public, sir, and they won't stand it. Haw!

TOM. It's an Ibsenite play.

JACK. Then why not produce it at the Independent Theatre?

TOM. I did.

JACK. Well?

TOM. And it promised to be a great success; but, unfortunately, just when the leading man has to say, “What a noble apartment is this,” the nail came out and the apartment fell into the fireplace.
Enter CADDIE and BAB. They walk back and forwards as before.

JACK (amazed). Bab!

BAB. Oh, Jack! Oh, Tom!

CADDIE. Silence!

JACK. What does this mean?

BAB. I am a prisoner, he is giving me an airing.

CADDIE. Silence!

JACK (drawing his sword). Promise not to interfere, or I shall run you through, by the bones of my ancestors!

CADDIE (aiming a catapult at him). Advance another step and you are a dead man, so help my bob!

JACK is discomfited, but TOM seizes CADDIE from behind, and they get him to the ground.

JACK. Promise!

CADDIE. I gives in! You have my word of honour! It’s your hole. (Mimicking JACK.) Haw! (Exit CADDIE followed by TOM.)

JACK. My precious! The gates are locked, but we can cross the river.

BAB. I have been thinking that — I’m not sure whether it is you or Tom I prefer.

JACK. That is awkward.

BAB. Before I decide I want to ask you both two questions.

JACK. What are they?

BAB. First, why did my heart beat so violently last night?

JACK. It was because — because I am so worthy of its love. Haw!

BAB (aside). H'm! Vanity!

JACK (aside). Good answer I think. Hope I shall get round her wealthy papa as easily.

BAB. Second, will you still love me when I am old and wrinkled?

JACK (aside). I question it. (Aloud.) Don't talk of anything so unpleasant, dear. Let us try to think that we shall always be young and handsome.

BAB (aside). I don't like that answer.

JACK (aside). I flatter myself I got out of that bunker very neatly.

TOM re-enters.

BAB. Now go, while I ask Tom.

JACK (aside). She's mine! Haw! Haw! (Exit.)

DUET. — BAB and TOM.

BAB. Last night when we were forced to part
I heard a pit-a-pat
Upon the window of my heart —
Tom, tell me what was that?
Oh, tell me true,
For I'm a little maid,
Of all the world afraid.

TOM. 'Twas my heart which would entrance win,
'Twas 'neath the window hiding,
You raised the sash, and said "Come in,"
And there it's now residing.

BAB. Tom, will your love grow cold to me
When silvered is my hair?
Or do you make believe that we
Shall aye be young and fair?
Oh, tell me true,
For I'm a little maid,
Of all the world afraid.

TOM. Eternal youth's for no one here,
That secret's to discover;
But when you're old and grey, my dear,
I still will be your lover.

BOTH. I've/He's told her/me true
This little maid
No longer is afraid.
Come joy or strife,
Come weal or woe,
Sunshine or stormy weather,
As man and wife
We'll face the foe,
And face him thus together.

TOM. Oh, Bab — you will be my wife?

BAB. Yes, if you want me very, very much, Tom.
Enter BULLDOGS and PROCTOR softly R. TOM sees them and flies L.

BULLDOGS rush after him and exeunt.

BAB. Oh! (Jumps into PROCTOR’s arms.) Saved!

PROCTOR. Caught, you mean.

BAB. No, saved.

PROCTOR. Eh, what? I don’t understand.

BAB. I was only going with him because he promised to take me to you.

PROCTOR. To me?

BAB. Oh, I feel so safe now that I have reached you — you are so solid and satisfying, like a great plum pudding, you know.

PROCTOR. You mean well, my child, I have no doubt; but you have an unfortunate way of expressing yourself. (He puts arm round her. TOM rushes across stage and exit. He is followed by BULLDOGS. They stop when they see PROCTOR and BAB.)

GREG. Hullo!

SIM. Ahem!

PROCTOR. What do you mean?

SIM. Beg pardon, but your arm you know — eh?

PROCTOR (fiercely). What about my arm?

GREG. It is round — don't you see?

PROCTOR. I do not.

GREG. Allow me. (Takes PROCTOR's arm off BAB.)

PROCTOR. Oh, thanks!

BAB. Oh, there is Miss Sims! Save me, Mr. Proctor!

PROCTOR. In here, quick! (Pushes BAB into arbour.) She is a nice girl. (To BULLDOGS.) Remember, you have not seen any girl here, if you are asked.

GREG. Not here! Why, she is in the arbour.

PROCTOR. There is no one in the arbour. What you see is — is an optical illusion. Furthermore, my orders to you are that you see no one in the arbour for the next half-hour, do you hear?

SIM. We — we hear.

PROCTOR (aside). In half an hour I am sure I can convince Bab of the error of her ways. (Aloud.) And stop, if any one inquires for me, I am — I am — gathering flowers by the river's brim. Do you — do you —

GREG. Twig?

PROCTOR. Yes, twig?

SIM and GREG. We twig.

PROCTOR. Good. (Goes to BAB.)

GREG. Now, Sim, do you give him up?

SIM (after a struggle). No!
Exeunt L., expostulating with each other.

BAB. I knew that you would save me.

PROCTOR. Yes, but you must me a good girl in future. You know it's best in the long run.

BAB. Oh, how beautifully you talk!

PROCTOR. To be happy you must be good.

BAB. Yes, but to be awfully, dreadfully, excruciatingly happy, you must be naughty. But I am sure I should be good if Miss Sims would talk to me as you have done.

PROCTOR. Really! Do you mind my calling you Baby?

BAB. Not at all. May I call you Little One?

PROCTOR. Certainly. Do you know I feel a strange something creeping over me!

BAB. So do I.

PROCTOR. I like it!

BAB. So do I.

PROCTOR. Yum yum!

BAB. So do I.

DUET. — BAB and PROCTOR.

PROCTOR. I’m a man of erudition,
And a scorner of frivolities,
With loftiest ambition,
And most domineering qualities.
The rowdiest grow meeker
When I fix them with this eye;
But I feel I’m growing weaker,
And I don’t know why —
No I don’t — not I.
I’m growing quite gelatinous, and can’t guess why.

BAB.   I’m just a little girlie,
Who still am in my teens, you know.
For love it’s much too early,
And I can’t guess what it means, you know.
But since I saw that simper,
And the twinkle of that eye,
I feel I’m growing limper,
And I can’t guess why —
No I can’t — not I.
I’m growing quite invertebrate, and can’t tell why.

PROCTOR. I’ve a will that’s adamantine,
And my nerve is quite unshakable,
My strength is elephantine,
And my spirit is unbreakable,
I cow the flippant cabby,
I can make the coster cry,
Yet I feel I’m growing flabby,
And I can’t tell why —
No I can’t — not I.
I’m growing quite blanc-mangeical, and can’t tell why.

BAB.   I’m just a little dolly,
With an uneventful history,
They tell me love is jolly

But to me it’s still a mystery.
I love my playthings dearly,
And my dolls and apple pie,
But I’m feeling, oh, so queerly,
And I can’t tell why —
No I can’t — not I.
I’m growing quite gutta-perchical, and can’t tell why.

PROCTOR. I fancy that this weakness
May seem to you undignified.

BAB.   Ah me, these words of meekness,
Now tell me what they signified?

BOTH. Your love can hide no longer,
It beckons from your eye;
We’re unquestionably stronger,
And we both know why.
Do you? So do I.
We are feeling dry-champagnified,
And both know why.

BAB. Oh, how nice-looking you are! You would look so pretty with this round your neck. (Puts her long boa round.) Now, it should come across your chest like that. (PROCTOR smiles indulgently). Then round like this, and fasten so. (Ties it behind the chair and fastens it. Then laughs and claps her hands.)

PROCTOR (struggling to rise). What is this? What do you mean?

BAB. Oh, he mustn’t make a noise. (Puts a handkerchief round his mouth. PROCTOR glares horribly and frowns.) Ha! ha! ha! (Goes up stage calling “Tom!” PROCTOR gurgles. The

BULLDOGS enter and stand one on each side of the arbour.)

GREG. There is no one in the arbour, Sim.

SIM. N — No. (PROCTOR gurgles.) I thought —

GREG. So did I. But it’s only an optical illusion, Sim.

SIM. So it is, Greg. I wonder where the Proctor is?

GREG. He is gathering flowers by the river’s brim.

BULLDOGS close arbour and retire.
Enter TOM.

TOM. Now, darling, are you ready?

BAB. My own! (They embrace.)
Enter JACK followed by JANE ANNIE.

JACK (aside). I am sure she will choose me. Eh — ah — ho -- what’s this?

BAB. Don’t you see?

JACK. I wish I didn’t. Haw!

BAB. Jane Annie, you promised to help me if I took Tom.

JANE A. And I shall.

JACK (aside). That unpleasant girl again.

TOM. But what can you do?

JANE A. One of the letters I made Miss Sims write was to the livery stables, requesting that a carriage should be sent to the other side of the river at two o’clock today. It is there now.

TOM. Are you sure?

JANE A. Listen! (She whistles — an answering whistle is heard.) See, there it is! (A carriage is seen driving up.)

BAB. Let us cross at once.

JANE ANNIE signs to carriage to go on, and it goes out of sight.

CADDIE (entering). You can’t get away. Ho! ho!

BAB. Why not?

CADDIE. Because I’ve locked the boat-house and hidden the key.

JACK. Good boy!

CADDIE. That’s a stimie for you.

TOM. Quick, the key!

CADDIE. Sha’n’t!

BAB. What’s to be done?

JANE A. Leave him to me. (Hypnotizes CADDIE.) Now give me the key.

CADDIE begins to undress.

JACK. What is he doing?

TOM. The key must be concealed about his person.

BAB. This is becoming improper.

TOM. Wait a moment. (To CADDIE.) Caddie, where is the key?

CADDIE whispers to him. TOM whistles and whispers to JACK, who rubs his hands gleefully.)

BAB. Tom, do something with him at once!

TOM (primly). If Caddie will retire with me to some secluded spot for a few moments I shall return with the key.
Exeunt TOM and CADDIE.

BAB. Good-bye, Jane Annie, dear.

JANE A. But I am coming with you.

BAB. You?

JANE A. Yes, and so is Jack.

JACK. Not I.

JANE A. Silly boy, yes, you are. Tom is eloping with Bab, and you are eloping with me.

JACK. I'll see you far enough first.

JANE A. Isn't he shy?

TOM (entering). The key!

BAB. Jane Annie proposes that she and Jack should come with us.

TOM. But the carriage will seat only two.

JANE A. Well, that won’t matter.

BAB. Won’t it? (JANE ANNIE chuckles.) Oh Tom! Jane Annie and I see no difficulty.

TIM. How? (He and JACK chuckle.) Do you agree?

JACK. If you will exchange girls. Haw!

TOM. Never!

BAB. Come, Tom.

JANE A. Come, Jack, and make it a foursome.

JACK. This girl terrifies me. I’ll bolt. (Exit.)

JANE A. Come back. (To TOM.) Don’t go without us. (Exit.)

BAB. Now let us fly at once.

TOM. Would it not be a little shabby?

BAB. Not in the least.
Bell begins to toll.

BAB. We are betrayed.

TOM. It is Jack — the villain — I see him.

BAB. Quick, we have time yet.
They are going to the boat-house. CADDIE appears.

CADDIE. Back! (They run L. Enter MISS SIMS, L.)

MISS S. Back! (They run R. Enter JACK, R.)

JACK. Back!
The GIRLS, STUDENTS, and OFFICERS rush on.

MISS S. Seize them! (JACK seizes TOM, and CADDIE seizes BAB.)

TOM. Infamous!

JANE A. It isn’t his hole yet! (Hypnotizes MISS SIMS.)

BAB. She is hypnotized!

ALL. Oh, wonderful!

JANE A. Now, see what I shall make her do.

SEXTET. — JANE ANNIE, MISS SIMS, BAB, PROCTOR, JACK, and TOM.

JANE ANNIE. You’re now a sentimental maid,
The little god caressing,
Dear mistress, we can’t have it said
We went without your blessing.

JANE ANNIE, BAB, TOM, and JACK kneel, JANE ANNIE forcing JACK to
do so.

QUARTET. We’re kneeling, sentimental maid,
A-waiting for your blessing.

ALL.   We hear with wonder what they’ve said,
But will she give her blessing?

MISS S. I’m now a sentimental thing,
And hear with pride and joy,
The news, which you two darlings bring,

That each has found a boy.
Elope, my dears? Why, certainly,
‘Tis every schoolgirl’s mission,
And tell your parents you had my
Approval and permission.

ALL. Their conduct’s praised, we are amazed,
Miss Sims doth sympathize.
Now let us sing of this wonderful thing,
With a hyp-hyp-hypnotize!

PROCTOR rushes in from arbour with seat tied to him.

PROCTOR. Stop! Though this Bab has used me ill —

BAB. Oh, how I wish I’d shot him!

PROCTOR. My triumph’s coming now —

TOM. Stand still!

STUDENTS get Kodaks ready.

PROCTOR. Eh, what?

TOM. All ready? (Click.) Got him.

JANE ANNIE hypnotizes PROCTOR.

JANE ANNIE. You’re now a somewhat soft old boy,
Whate’er the consequences,
Be yours the privilege and joy
To pay all our expenses.

QUARTET. We’re kneeling, somewhat soft old boy,
Requesting our expenses.

ALL. Now is he such a soft old boy
That he'll pay their expenses?

PROCTOR. I'm now a very soft old boy, (Hear, hear.)
Elopements are my passion,
So with delight without alloy
I'll help you in this fashion.
It's sometimes said that gold's a curse. (No, no!)
And love the only candy,
But, Tom, to you I give my purse —
I think you'll find it handy. (Cheers.)

ALL. Tho' love is honey, they've taken the money,
And he doth sympathize;
With this strange thing, his college will ring,
With a hyp-hyp-hypnotize!
Dance. TOM and BAB go in boat.

JANE A. (to MISS SIMS). Now go and be a tea-pot. (To PROCTOR). And you are an escape of gas.

JACK. I wish I was well out of this.

JANE A. Come, Jack.

JACK. I refuse.

JANE A. (hypnotizes him). You are my lover!

JACK. Darling! (He goes to boat.)

JANE A. I took that whole in two!

JANE ANNIE joins the others in boat. All wave handkerchiefs.

PROCTOR. Hyp-hyp-hyp-

CHORUS. -notize!

MISS S. Another!

CHORUS. Hyp-hyp-hypnotize!

PROCTOR. One more!

CHORUS. Hyp-hyp-hypnotize!

JANE A. (from boat). Now, old things, wake up!
Exit boat. MISS SIMS and PROCTOR wake up.

BULLDOGS enter excitedly.

MISS S. What is this?

PROCTOR. Who is in that boat?

MILLY. It’s Bab and Jane Annie going away to be married.

MISS S. What?

CADDIE (rushing on). I can’t stand it! I can’t stand it! Man and boy I’ve been here eighteen months, and I never thought to see such goings on as this. I gives a month’s warning from to-day.
The carriage is seen crossing.

MILLY. The carriage! There they go!

FINALE.

MILLY. The moral of this story is —

GIRLS. You mustn’t do this, you mustn’t do this;

MILLY. Or to express it still more pat —

GIRLS. You mustn’t do that, you mustn’t do that.

MISS SIMS. You’ve learned it now without a hitch —

MEN. We mustn’t do what, we mustn’t do which?

MISS SIMS. Well, you have learned it, have you not?

MEN. We mustn’t do which, we mustn’t do what?

PROCTOR. The moral I will now explain,
Just wait while I expound it;
It teaches that we ne’er again
Should try to — oh, confound it!
I very much want to tell you all —
You’d like to hear about it —
But just this point I can’t recall,
So, though it’s most material,
You’d best go home without it.

ALL. You’d best go home without it.

The Plays

WATERLOO

This play was a great success for the famous actor Henry Irving and was first produced at *The Prince's Theatre*, Bristol, on September 21st, 1894.

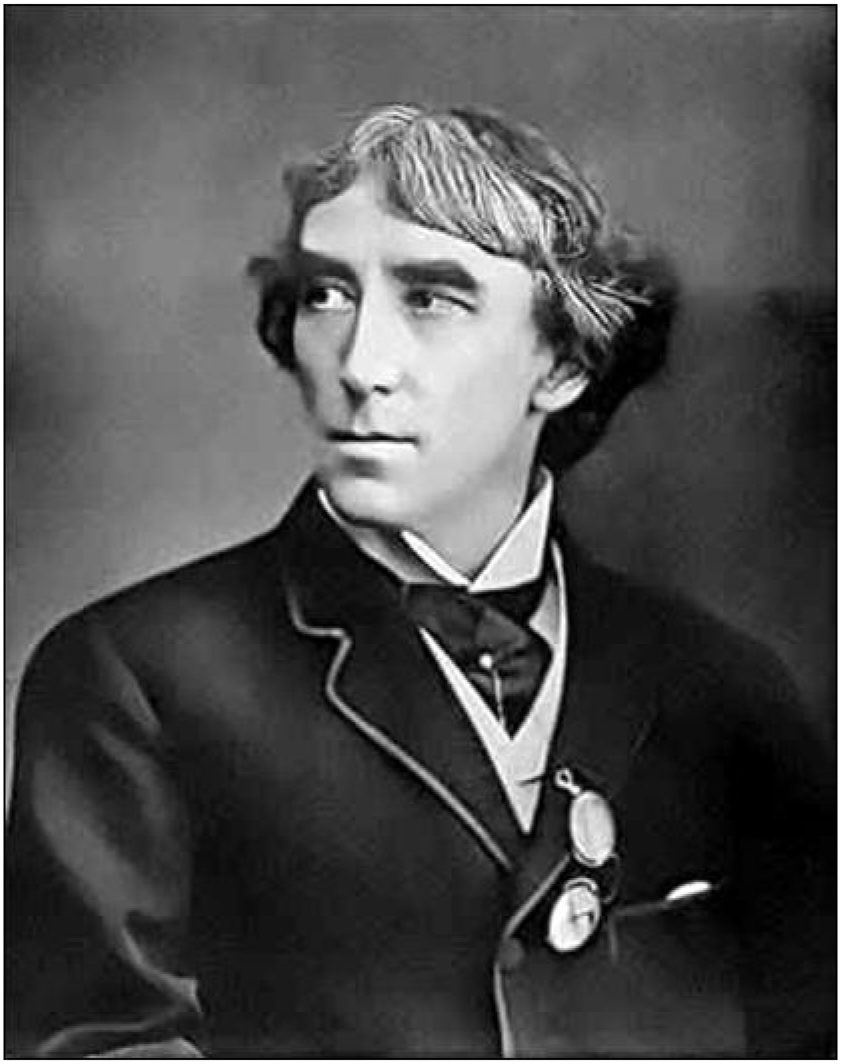

Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The following cast performed later at the *Lyceum Theatre*, London, on May 4th, 1895.

CORPORAL GREGORY BREWSTER (aged 76) “ The Straggler” Mr. Henry Irving.

SERGEANT ARCHIE MCDONALD, R.A.. Mr. Fuller Mellish.

COLONEL JAMES MIDWINTER, Royal Scots Guards Mr. Haviland.

NORAH BREWSTER, the Corporal’s grandniece Miss Annie Hughes.

Scene plot

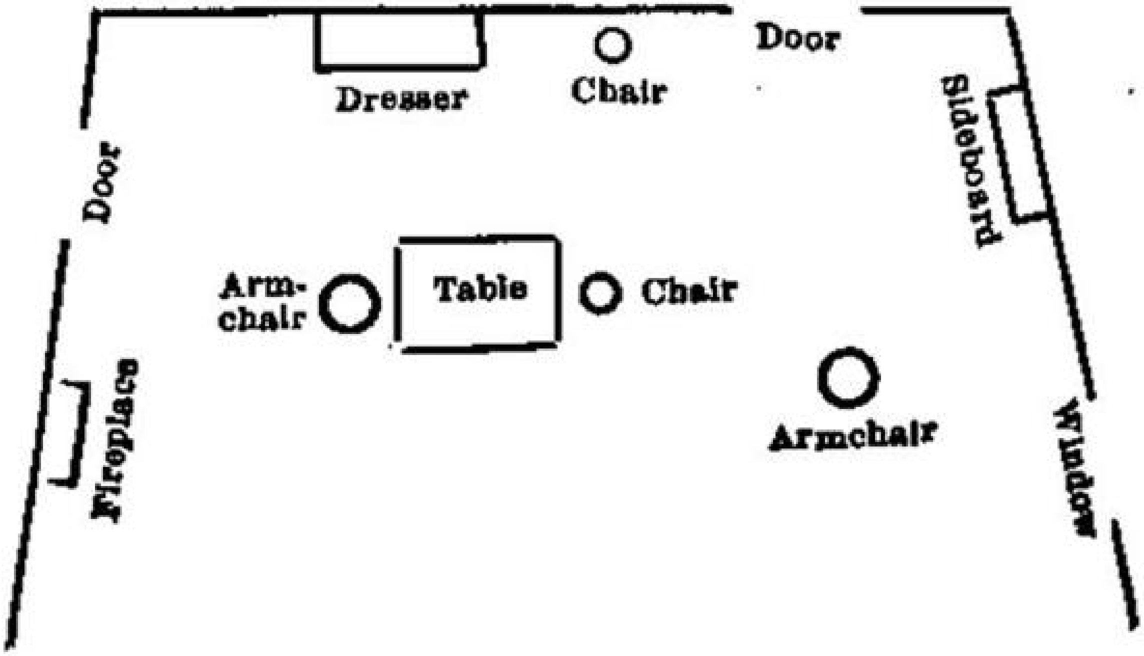
Door
Dresser
Chair
Door
Sideboard
Arm-chair
Table
Chair
Armchair
Fireplace
Window

WATERLOO.

SCENE. — A front room in a small house in Woolwich. Cooking range at fire. Above the fire a rude painting of an impossible military man in a red coat with a bearskin. On one side a cutting from a newspaper framed. On the other a medal, also within a frame. Bright fire-irons, centre table, Bible on small table in window, wooden armchair with cushion, rack holding plates, etc.

June, 1881.

(Curtain rising discovers the empty room; door opens, and enter NORAH BREWSTER, a country girl, with a bundle of her effects. She looks timidly about her, and then closes the door.

Basket on bandbox. During dialogue takes hat and cloak off and puts them on sideboard L., takes apron out of basket, chair R. of door, and puts it on).

NORAH. And this is Uncle Gregory's (crosses to fireplace). Why there's his portrait just above the fireplace, the very same as we have it at home — and there is his medal by his portrait. Oh, how strange that I should have a house all to myself. Why it's next door to being married. I suppose uncle isn't up yet, they said that he was never up before ten. Well thank goodness that housekeeper has lit the fire before she went away. She seems to have been a nice sort of a party, she does. Poor old uncle ! he does seem to have been neglected. Never mind ! I've come to look after him now. Let me see if everything is ready for uncle when he does come. Won't he be surprised to see me. Of course he would have had mother's letter to say I was coming, but he wouldn't think I'd be here so early. (At table R. C.) I wonder what makes the milk look so blue. (At drawer at back R. c.) Oh my! what nasty butter. I'm so glad I brought some other butter with me. (Takes pat of butter off plate puts it in basket, Takes pat out of basket, and puts it on plate). Now for the bacon. Oh, what a cruel piece ! Why, our Essex pigs would blush to own bacon like that ! (Puts rasher in frying-pan and puts pan on hob.) Now I’ll make the tea if the kettle boils. Kettle doesn’t boil. Never mind, I’ll warm the pot. (Puts water out of kettle on fire in pot and pot on table). Dear old uncle (looking at portrait), don’t he look grand ! They must have been awful brave folk to dare to fight against him. I do hope I’ll be able to make him happy. (Knock down in flat, L. a). Oh, dear! A knock ! I wonder who it is! (Knock again). I suppose I must see who it is. (Up to door in flat R. c. opens it).

(Enter SERGEANT MCDONALD.)

SERGEANT. (saluting). Beg your pardon, Miss, but does Corporal Gregory Brewster live here ?

NORAH. (timidly). Yes, sir.

SERGEANT. The same who was in the Scots Guards ?

NORAH. Yes, sir.

SERGEANT. And fought in the battle of Waterloo ?

NORAH. Yes, the same, sir.

SERGEANT. Could I have a word with him, Miss ?

NORAH. He’s not down yet.

SERGEANT. Ah, then, maybe I’d best look in on my way back. I’m going down to the butts, and will pass again in an hour or two.

NORAH. Very well, sir. (Going out). Who shall I say came for him ? (SERGEANT returns and places carbine L. of sideboard L.)

SERGEANT. McDonald’s my name — Sergeant McDonald of the Artillery. But you’ll excuse my mentioning it, Miss : there was some talk down at the Gunners’ barracks that the old gentleman was not looked after quite as well as he might be. But I can see now that it’s only foolish talk, for what more could he want than this ?

NORAH. Oh, I’ve only just come. We heard that his housekeeper was not very good to him, and that was why my father wished me to go. and do what I could.

SERGEANT. Ah ! he’ll find the difference now.

NORAH (bustling about putting tea in pot). Two for uncle and one for the pot. We were all very proud of Uncle Gregory down Leyton way. (Takes teapot to fire and fills it from kettle).

SERGEANT. Aye, he’s been a fine man in his day. There’s not many living now who can say that they fought against Napoleon Boneypart.

NORAH. Ah, see, there’s his medal hung up by his portrait.

SERGEANT (after her). But what’s that beside the medal.

NORAH (standing on tiptoe, and craning her neck). Oh, it is a piece of print, and all about uncle. (Brings frame).

SERGEANT. Aye, its a slip of an old paper. There’s the date, August, 1815, writ in yellow ink on the corner.

NORAH (takes down medal). It’s such small print.

SERGEANT (front of table). I’ll read it to you.

NORAH. Thank ye, sir !

SERGEANT (clears his throat impressively). “ A heroic deed.” That’s what’s on the top. “ On Tues day an interesting ceremony was performed at the bar racks of the third regiment of guards, when in the presence of the Prince Regent, a special medal was presented to Corporal Gregory Brewster

NORAH (R. of SERGEANT.) That’s him ! That’s uncle !

SERGEANT. “TO Corporal Gregory Brewster of Captain Haldane’s flank company, in recog — recognition of his valor in the recent great battle. It appears that on the ever memorable 18th of June, four companies of the third Guards and of the Coldstreams, held the important farmhouse of Hugymount at the right of the British position. At a critical period of the action these troops found themselves short of powder, and Corporal Brewster was dispatched to the rear to hasten up the reserve am —

ammunition. The corporal returned with two tumbrils of the Nassau division, but he found that in his absence the how — howitzer fire of the French had ignited the hedge around the farm, and that the passage of the carts filled with powder had become almost an impossibility. The first tumbril exploded, blowing the driver to pieces, and his comrade, daunted by the sight, turned his horses ; but Corporal Brewster, springing into his seat, hurled the man down, and urging the cart through the flames, succeeded in rejoining his comrades. Long may the heroic Brewster

NORAH. Think of that, the heroic Brewster !

SERG. “ Live to treasure the medal which he has so bravely won, and to look back with pride to the day when, in the presence of his comrades, he received this tribute to his valor from the hands of the first gentleman of the realm.” (Replaces the paper.) Well, that is worth being proud of. (Hands back frame, she puts it on mantel).

NORAH. And we are proud of it, too.

SERG. Well, Miss, I’m due at the butts, or I would (taking carbine) stay to see the old gentleman now. (Up to door.)

NORAH (following). I don’t think he can be long.

SERG. Well, he’ll have turned out before I pass this way again, good day, Miss, and my respects to you, Miss.

(Exit SERGEANT MCDONALD, door in flat L. C.)

NORAH. (looking through door after him). Oh, isn’t he a fine man ! I never saw such a man as that down Leyton way. And how kind he was! Think of him reading all that to me about uncle I (Coming L.) It was as much as to say that uncle won that battle. Well, I think the tea is made (over to fire) now, and —

CORPORAL (without entering). Mary, Mary, — I wants my rations.

NORAH (aside). Lord, ‘a mercy!

(Enter CORPORAL GREGORY BREWSTER, tottering in, gaunt, bent, and doddering, with white hair and wizened face. He taps his way across the room, while NORAH, with her hands clasped, stares aghast first at the man, and then at his picture on the wall.)

CORPORAL (querulously). I wants my rations ! The cold nips me without ‘em. See to my hands. (Holds out his gnarled knuckles).

NORAH (gets round behind table). Don’t you know me, grand-uncle ? I’m Norah Brewster, from down Essex way.

CORPORAL. Rum is warm, and schnapps is warm, and there’s ‘eat in soup, but gimme a dish of tea for chice. Eh? (Peers at the girl) What did you say your name was, young woman ? (Sits R. of table.)

NORAH (L. of table). Norah Brewster.

CORPORAL. You can speak out, lass. Seems to me folks’ voices ain’t as strong as they was.

NORAH (back of chair). I’m Norah Brewster, uncle. I’m your (takes up bacon) grand-niece, come from Essex way to live with you. (Takes bacon out of pan on fire, puts on plate).

CORPORAL (chuckling). You’re Norah, hey ? Then you’ll be brother Jarge’s gal, likely ? Lor, to think o’ little Jarge havin’ a gal !

NORAH (putting bacon on table). Nay, uncle. My father was the son of your brother George. (Pouring out tea).

CORPORAL (mumbles and chuckles, picking at his sleeves with his trembling hands). Lor, but little Jarge was a rare un ! (Draws up to the table while NORAH pours out the tea). Eh, by Jimini, there was no chousing Jarge ! He’s got a bull-pup o’ mine that I lent him when I took the shillin’. Likely it’s dead now. He didn’t give it ye to bring, may-be ?

NORAH (R. of table, and glancing ever wonderingly at her companion). Why, grandpa Jarge has been dead this twenty years.

CORPORAL (mumbling). Eh, but it were a bootiful pup — bootiful! (Drinks his tea with a loud supping, NORAH pours out second cup), I am cold for the lack o’ my rations. Rum is good and schnapps, but I’d as leaf have a dish o’ tea as either.

NORAH. I’ve brought you some butter and some eggs in the basket. Mother said as I was to give you her respec’s and love, and that she’d ha’ sent a tin o’ cream, but it might ha’ turned on the way. (R. Sets chair L. of fireplace,)

CORPORAL (still eating voraciously). Eh, it’s a middlin’ goodish way. Likely the stage left yesterday.

NORAH. The what, uncle ?

CORPORAL. The coach that brought ye.

NORAH. Nay, I came by the mornin’ train.

CORPORAL. Lor’ now, think o’ that. The railway train, heh ? You ain’t afeard o’ them new-fangled things ! By Jimini! to think of your comin’ by railway like that. Why, it’s more than twenty mile. (Chuckling), What’s the world a comin’ to ? (Puffs out his chest and tries to square his shoulders). Eh, but I get a power o’ good from my rations I

NORAH. Indeed, uncle, you seem a deal stronger for them. (Up to table and begins to clear things away,)

CORPORAL. Aye, the food is like coals to that fire. But I’m nigh burned out, lass, I’m nigh burned out.

NORAH (clearing the table). You must ha’seen a deal o’ life, uncle. It must seem a long long time to you.

CORPORAL. Not so very long, neither. I’m going on to ninety, but it might ha’ been yesterday that I took the bounty. And that battle,why, by Jimini, I’ve not got the smell of the burned powder out o’ my nose yet. Have you read that? (Nodding to the cutting).

NORAH. Yes, uncle, and I’m sure that you must be very proud of it.

CORPORAL (stands looking at him). Ah, it was a great day for me — a great day ! The Regent he was there, and a fine body of a man too. (Tries to stuff some tobacco into his pipe). He up to me and he says, “ The ridgement is proud of ye,” says he. “And I’m proud o’ the ridgement,” says I. “ And a damned good answer, too,” says he to Lord Hill, and they both bust out a laughin’. (Coughs and chuckles, and points up at the mantelpiece).

NORAH. What can I hand you, uncle? (Gets bottle and spoon from mantelpiece.)

CORPORAL. A spoonful from that bottle by the brass candlestick, my girl! (Drinks it.) It’s paregoric, (music) and rare stuff to cut the phlegm. (NORAH looks out of the window.) But what be you a peepin’ out o’ the window for ? (NORAH pushes window up, music louder.)

NORAH (excitedly). Oh, uncle, here’s a regiment o’ soldiers comin’ down the street.

CORPORAL (rising and clawing his way towards the window). A ridgement! Heh ! Where be my glasses ? Lordy, I can hear the band as plain as plain. Bands don’t seem to play as loud now-a-days though as they used. (Gets to the window.) Here they come, pioneers, drum-major, band ! What be their number, lass ? (His eyes shine, and his feet and stick tap to the music.)

NORAH. They don’t seem to have no number, uncle. They’ve something wrote on their shoulders. Oxfordshire, I think it be.

CORPORAL. Ah, yes. I heard as they had dropped the numbers, and given them new-fangled names. (shakes his head). That wouldn’t ha’ done for the Dook. The Dook would ha’ had a word there. (band up to ff). There they go, by Jimini! They’re young, but they hain’t forgot how to march. Blessed if I can see the light bobs though! (band dim. to pp). Well, they’ve got the swing, aye, they have the swing (gazes after them until the last files have disappeared).

NORAH (helping him). Come back to your chair, uncle.

CORPORAL. Where be that bottle again. It cuts the phlegm. It’s the toobes that’s wrong with me. Joyce says so, and he is a clever man. I’m in his club. There’s the card, paid up, under yon flat iron. (band stops) (suddenly slapping his thigh). Why, darn my skin, I knew as something was amiss.

NORAH. Where, uncle.

CORPORAL. In them soldiers. I’ve got’ it now. They’d forgot their stocks. Not one o’ them had his stock on (chuckles and croaks). It wouldn’t ha’ done for the Dook. No, by Jimini, the Dook would ha’ had a word there. (Door opens and SERGEANT appears beckoning comrade.)

NORAH (peeping towards the door). Why, uncle, this is the soldier who came this morning — one of them with the blue coats and gold braid.

CORPORAL. Eh, and what do he want ? Don’t stand and stare, lass, but go to the door and ask him what he wants.

(She approaches the door, which is half open. SERGEANT MCDONALD of Artillery, his carbine in his hand, steps over the threshold and salutes.)

SERGEANT. Good day again to you, miss. Is the old gentleman to be seen now ?

NORAH. Yes, sir. That’s him. I’m sure he’ll be very glad to see you. Uncle, here is a gentleman who wants to speak with you.

SERGEANT. Proud to see you, sir — proud and glad, sir I

(Steps forward, grounds his carbine and salutes — NORAH, half frightened half attracted, keeps her eyes on the visitor.)

CORPORAL (blinking at the SERGEANT). Sit ye down, sergeant, sit ye down ! (Shakes his head). You are full young for the stripes. Lordy, it’s easier to get three now, than one in my day, Gunners were old soldiers then, and the grey hairs came quicker than the three stripes.

(SERGEANT puts carbine by window, NORAH takes off apron, folds it up, puts it in basket.)

SERGEANT. I am eight years’ service, sir. McDonald is my name, Sergeant McDonald of H. Battery, Southern Artillery Division. I have called as the spokesman of my mates to say that we are proud to have you in the town, sir.

(NORAH finishes clearing table, table cloth folded in drawer of dresser.)

CORPORAL (chuckling and rubbing his hands). That was what the Regent said. “ The ridgement is proud of you,” says he. “ And I am proud of the ridgement,” says I. “A damned good answer, too,” says he, and he and Lord Hill bust out a-laughin’.

SERGEANT. The non-commissioned mess would be proud and honoured to see you, sir. If you could step as far you will always find a pipe o’ baccy and a glass of grog awaitin’ you.

CORPORAL. (laughing until he coughs). Like to see me, would they, the dogs ! Well, well, if this warm weather holds I’ll drop in — it’s likely that I’ll drop in. My toobes is bad to-day, and I feel queer here (slapping his chest). But you will see me one of these days at the barracks.

SERGEANT. Mind you ask for the non-com. mess.

CORPORAL. Eh ?

SERGEANT. The non-com mess.

CORPORAL. Oh, lordy ! Got a mess of your own, heh, just the same as the officers. Too grand for a canteen now. It wouldn’t have done for the Dook. The Dook would have had a word there.

SERGEANT (respectfully). You was in the Guards, sir, wasn’t you ?

CORPORAL. Yes, I am a guardsman, I am. Served in the 3rd Guards, the same they call now the Scots Guards. Lordy, sergeant, but they have all marched away, from Colonel Byng right down to the drummer boys, and hear am I, a straggler — that’s what I call myself, a straggler. But it ain’t my fault neither, for I’ve never had my call, and I can’t leave my post without it.

SERGEANT (shaking his head). Ah, well, we all have to muster up there. Won't you try my baccy, sir ? (Hands over pouch.,)

CORPORAL. Eh ?

SERGEANT. Try my baccy, sir ?

(CORPORAL BREWSTER tries to fill his clay pipe, but drops it. It breaks, and he bursts into tears with the long helpless sobs of a child,)

CORPORAL. I've broke my pipe ! my pipe !

NORAH (running to him and soothing him). Don't uncle, oh don't! We can easy get another.

SERGEANT. Don't you fret yourself, sir, if you — you'll do me the honour to accept it. 'Ere's a wooden pipe with an amber mouth.

CORPORAL (his smiles instantly bursting through his tears, SERGEANT gets carbine). Jimini ! It's a fine pipe ! See to my new pipe, gal ! I lay that Jarge never had a pipe like this. Eh, and an amber mouth, tool (Mumbles with it in his mouth,) You've got your firelock there, sergeant.

SERGEANT. Yes, sir, I was on my way back from the butts when I looked in.

CORPORAL. Let me have the feel of it!

SERGEANT. Certainly, (gives carb.) Lordy, but it seems like old times to have one's hand on a musket. What's the manual, sergeant ? Eh ? Cock your firelock ! Present your firelock I Look to your priming ! Heh, sergeant! (The breech on being pressed flies open. NORAH is now top of table looking on). Oh, Jimini! I've broke your musket in halves.

SERGEANT (laughing). That's all right, sir! You pressed on the lever and opened the breech-piece. That's where we load 'em, you know.

CORPORAL. Load 'em at the wrong end ! Well, well, to think of it I and no ramrod neither. I've heard tell of it, but I never believed it afore. Ah ! it won't come up to Brown Bess. When there's work to be done you mark my words, and see if they don't come back to Brown Bess.

SERGEANT (rising). But I’ve wearied you enough for one sitting. I’ll look in again, and I’ll bring a comrade or two with me, if I may, for there isn’t one but would be proud to have speech with you. (Salutes. Exit.) My very best respects to you, Miss.

NORAH. Oh, Uncle, isn’t he noble and fine? (Up to door, looks after him.)

CORPORAL (mumbling). Too young for the stripes, gal. A sergeant of gunners should be a growed man. I don’t know what we are comin’ to in these days. (Chuckling.) But he gave me a pipe, Norah ! A fine pipe with an amber mouth. I’ll lay that brother Jarge never had a pipe like that.

NORAH (aside nodding towards the door). To think that he will be like Uncle in sixty years, and that Uncle was once like him. (Forward to window L.) He seems a very kind young man, I think. He calls me “ Miss “ and Uncle “ sir,” so polite and proper. I never saw as nice a man down Essex way.

CORPORAL. What are you moonin’ abont, gal I I want you to help me move my chair to the door, or maybe yon fancy chair will do. It’s warm, and the air would hearten me if I can keep back the flies. They get owdacious in this weather and they plague . me cruel.

NORAH. The flies, Uncle.

(He moves feebly across to where the sunshine comes in at the door, and he sits in it NORAH helps him.)

CORPORAL. Eh, but it’s fine ! It always makes me think of the glory to come. Was it to-day that parson was here ?

NORAH. NO, Uncle. (Kneels on his L.)

CORPORAL. Then it was yesterday. I get the days kind o’ mixed. He reads to me, the parson does.

NORAH. But I could do that, Uncle.

CORPORAL. YOU can read too, can you ? By Jimini, I never seed such a gal. You can travel by railroad and you can read. Whatever is the world comin' to ? It's the Bible he reads to me. (NORAH runs, gets Bible, and kneels again.)

NORAH (opening the Bible). What part would you like to hear ?

CORPORAL. Eh ? (NORAH repeats.)

CORPORAL, Oh, them wars.

NORAH. The wars !

CORPORAL. Aye, keep to the wars ; " Give me the Old Testament, parson," says I, " there's more taste to it," says I. Parson, he wants to get off to something else, but it's Joshua or nothing with me. Them Israelites was good soldiers, good growed soldiers, all of 'em.

NORAH. But, Uncle, it's all peace in the next world.

CORPORAL. NO, it ain't, gal.

NORAH. Oh, yes, Uncle, surely.

CORPORAL (irritably knocking his stick on the ground). I tell ye it ain't, gal. I asked parson.

NORAH. Well, what did he say ?

CORPORAL. He said there was to be a last final fight.

NORAH. Fight ?

CORPORAL. Why, he even gave it a name, he did. The battle of Arm — Arm — The battle of Arm —

NORAH. Armageddon.

CORPORAL. Aye, that was the name. (Pauses thoughtfully.) I 'spec's the 3rd Guards will be there. And the Dook — the Dook'H have a word to say. (Sinks back a little in his chair. NORAH shuts window, puts Bible back.)

NORAH. What is it, Uncle ? You look tired.

CORPORAL (faintly). Maybe I have had air enough. And I ain’t strong enough to fight agin the flies.

NORAH. Oh, but I will keep them off, Uncle.

CORPORAL. They get owdacious in this weather. I’ll get back to the corner. But you’ll need to help me with the chair. (Knock.) Chairs are made heavier than they used to be.

(Is in the act of rising when there comes a tap at the door, and COLONEL MIDWINTER (civilian costume) puts in his head.)

COLONEL. Is this Gregory Brewster’s ?

CORPORAL. Yes, sir. That’s my name.

COLONEL. Then you are the man I came to see.

CORPORAL. Who was that, sir ?

COLONEL. Gregory Brewster was his name.

CORPORAL. I am the man, sir

COLONEL. And you are the same Brewster, as I understand, whose name is on the roll of the Scots Guards as having been present at the battle of Waterloo ?

CORPORAL. The same Brewster, sir, though they used to call it the 3rd Guards in my day. It was a fine ridgement, sir, and they only want me now to make up a full muster.

COLONEL (cheerily). Tut ! tut ! they’ll have to wait years for that. But I thought I should like to have a word with you, for I am the Colonel of the Scots Guards.

(CORPORAL springing to his feet and saluting, staggers about to fall. The COLONEL and NORAH prevent it. NORAH on his L.)

COLONEL. Steady, steady, (leads BREWSTER to other chair.) Easy and steady . . .

CORPORAL (sitting down and panting). Thank ye, sir. I was near gone that time. But, Lordy, why I can scarce believe it. To think of me a corporal of the flank company, and you the colonel of the battalion I Lordy, how things do come round to be sure.

(NORAH helps him into chair R. of table. COLONEL gets by fireplace).

CORPORAL. That’s what the Regent said. “ The regiment is proud of ye,” says he. “ And I’m proud of the regiment,” says I

COLONEL. And so you are actually he.

CORPORAL. “ And a damned good answer, too,” says he.

COLONEL. Why, we are very proud of you in London. And so you are actually one of the men who held Hougoumont. (Looks round him at the medicine bottles, etc.)

(NORAH sits L. of table with needlework, taken from her basket.)

CORPORAL. Yes, colonel, I was at Hougoumont.

COLONEL. Well, I hope that you are pretty comfortable and happy.

CORPORAL. Thank ye, sir, I am pretty bobbish when the weather holds, and the flies are not too owdacious. I have a good deal of trouble with my toobes. You wouldn’t think the job it is to cut the phlegm. And I need my rations, I get cold without ‘em. And my jints, they are not what they used to be.

COLONEL. HOW’S the memory ?

CORPORAL. Oh, there ain’t anything amiss there. Why, sir, I could give you the name of every man in Captain Haldane’s flank company.

COLONEL. And the battle — you remember that ?

CORPORAL. Why I sees it afore me. every time I shuts my eyes. Lordy, sir, you wouldn’t hardly believe how clear it is to me. There’s our line right along from the paragoric bottle to the inhaler, d’ye see ! Well then, the pill box is for Hougoumont on the right, where we was, and the thimble for Le Hay Saint. That’s all right, sir. (Cocks his head and looks at it with satisfaction.) And here are the reserves, and here were our guns and our Belgians, then here’s the French, where I put my new pipe, and over here, where the cough drops are, was the Proosians a comin’ up on our left flank, Jimini, but it was a glad sight to see the smoke of their guns. (NORAH helps him into chair.)

COLONEL. And what was it that struck you most, now, in connection with the whole affair ?

CORPORAL. I lost three half-crowns over it, I did. I shouldn’t wonder if I were never to get the money now. I lent them to Jabez Smith, my rear rank man at Brussels. “Grig!” says he, “I’ll pay you true, only wait till pay-day.” By Jimini, he was struck by a lancer at Quarter Brass, and me without a line to prove the debt. Them three half-crowns is as good as lost to me.

COLONEL (laughing). The officers — of the Guards — want you to buy — yourself — some little trifle, some little present which may add to your comfort. It is not from me, so you need not thank me. (Slips a note into the old man’s baccy pouch. Crosses to leave.)

CORPORAL. Thank you kindly, sir. But there’s one favor I’d ask you, Colonel.

COLONEL. Yes, corporal, what is it ? 2

CORPORAL. If I’m called, Colonel, you won’t grudge me a flag and a firing party. I’m not a civilian, I’m a Guardsman, and I should like to think as two lines of the bear-skins would be walkin’ after my coffin.

COLONEL. All right, corpora! I’ll see to it. (CORPORAL sinks back in his chair.) I fear that I have tired him. He is asleep, I think. Good-bye, my girl; and I hope that we may have nothing but good news from you. (Exit COLONEL.)

NORAH. Thank you, sir, I’m sure I hope so too. Uncle, uncle ! Yes, I suppose he is asleep. But he is so grey and thin, that he frightens me. Oh, I wish I had someone to advise me, for I don’t know when he is ill and when he is not.

(Enter SERGEANT MCDONALD abruptly.)

SERGEANT. Good day, Miss. How is the old gentleman ?

NORAH. Sh I He’s asleep, I think. But I feel quite frightened about him.

SERGEANT (going over to him). Yes, he don’t look as if he were long for this life, do he ? Maybe a sleep like this brings strength to him.

NORAH. Oh, I do hope so.

SERGEANT. I’ll tell you why I came back so quick. I told them up at the barracks that I’d given him a pipe, and the others they wanted to be in it too, so they passed round, you understand, and made up a pound of baccy. It’s long cavendish, with plenty o’ bite to it.

NORAH. HOW kind of you to think of him !

SERGEANT. DO you always live with him ?

NORAH. NO, I only came this morning.

SERGEANT. Well, you haven’t taken long to get straight.

NORAH. Oh, but I found everything in such a mess. When I have time to myself I’ll soon get it nice.

SERGEANT. That sounds like marching orders to me.

NORAH. Oh, how could you think so I

SERGEANT. Tell me, Miss, have you ever been over a barrack ?

NORAH. NO, I’ve been on a farm all my life.

SERGEANT. Well, maybe, when he comes up you would come with him ? I’d like to show you over.

NORAH. I’m sure I’d like to come.

SERGEANT. Well, will you promise to come ?

NORAH (laughing). You seem quite earnest about it.

SERGEANT. Well, maybe I am.

NORAH. Very well, I’ll promise to come.

SERGEANT. You’ll find us rough and ready.

NORAH. I’m sure it will be very nice.

SERGEANT. Not quite what young ladies are accustomed to.

NORAH. But I am no young lady. I’ve worked with my hands every day that I can remember.

CORPORAL (in a loud voice). The Guards need powder. (Louder.) The Guards need powder I (Struggles to rise.)

NORAH. Oh, I am so frightened.

CORPORAL (staggering to his feet, and suddenly flashing out into his old soldiery figure.) The Guards need powder, and, by God, they shall have it ! (Falls back into chair. NORAH and the SERGEANT rush to-wards him.)

NORAH (sobbing). Oh, tell me, sir, tell me, what do you think of him.

SERGEANT (gravely). I think that the 3rd Guards have a full muster now.

CURTAIN. SLOW.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

A Drama in Four Acts

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and William Gillette

1897 and 1898

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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ALFRED BASSICK

JOHN FORMAN

BILLY

JAMES LARRABEE

DOCTOR WATSON

TERESE

JIM CRAIGIN

MRS FAULKNER

THOMAS LEARY

SIDNEY PRINCE

“LIGHTFOOT” MCTAGUE

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MRS SMEEDLEY

SHERLOCK HOLMES

PARSONS

PROFESSOR MORIARTY

COUNT VON STALBURG

JOHN

SIR EDWARD LEIGHTON

ACT I

Drawing-room at the LARRABEES. Evening.

The scene represents the drawing-room at Edelweiss Lodge, an old house, gloomy and decayed, situated in a lonely district in a little-frequented part of London.

The furniture is old and decayed, with the exception of the piano — a baby-grand. The desk is very solid. The ceiling is heavily beamed. Many places out of repair in the walls and ceilings. Carvings broken here and there.

The music stops an instant before rise of curtain. A short pause after curtain is up. Curtain rises in darkness — lights come up. MADGE LARRABEE is discovered anxiously waiting. A strikingly handsome woman, but with a somewhat hard face. Black hair. Richly dressed.

Enter FORMAN with evening paper. He is a quiet perfectly trained servant. He is met by MADGE who takes the paper from him quickly.

FORMAN (*speaks always very quietly*): Pardon, ma'am, but one of the maids wishes to speak with you.

(MADGE *is scanning the paper eagerly and sinks on to seat at the foot of the piano*)

MADGE (*not looking from paper*): I can't spare the time now.

FORMAN: Very well, ma'am. (*Turns to go*.)

MADGE (*without looking up from paper*): Which maid was it?

FORMAN (*turning towards* MADGE *again*): Térèse, ma'am.

MADGE (*looking up. Very slight surprise in her tone)*: Térêse!

FORMAN: Yes, ma'am.

MADGE: Have you any idea what she wants?

FORMAN: Not the least, ma’am.

MADGE: She must tell you. I’m very busy, and can’t see her unless I know.

FORMAN: I’ll say so, ma’am.

(Turns and goes out, carefully and quietly closing the door after him — immediately coming in again and watching MADGE, *who is busy with paper. Finds what she has been looking for and starts eagerly to read it. As if not seeing the print well, she leans near light and resumes reading with the greatest avidity.* FORMAN *quietly shuts door. He stands at the door looking at* MADGE *as she reads the paper. This is prolonged somewhat, so that it may be seen that he is not waiting for her to finish from mere politeness. His eyes are upon her sharply and intensely, yet he does not assume any expression otherwise. She finishes and angrily rises, casting the paper violently down on the piano. She turns and goes near the large heavy desk. Pauses there. Then turns away angrily. Sees* FORMAN, *calms herself at once. Just as* MADGE*turns,* FORMAN *seems to be coming into room.*)

I could get nothing from her, ma’am. She insists that she must speak to you herself.

MADGE: Tell her to wait till to-morrow.

FORMAN: I asked her to do that, ma’am, and she said that she would not be here to-morrow.

(MADGE *turns toward* FORMAN *with some surprise*.)

MADGE: What does she mean by that?

FORMAN: Pardon me for mentioning it, ma’am, but she is a bit singular, as I take it.

MADGE: Tell her to come here — (FORMAN *bows and turns to go.* MADGE *goes toward the piano, near where the paper lies. She sees it. Stops with hand on piano*.)

Oh — Judson!

(FORMAN *stops and comes down. Everything quiet, subdued, cat-like in his methods*.)

How did you happen to imagine that I would be interested in this marriage announcement? (*Takes up paper and sits in seat below the piano*.)

FORMAN: I could ‘ardly help it, ma’am.

(MADGE *turns and looks hard at him an instant.* FORMAN*stands deferentially*.)

MADGE: I suppose you have overheard certain references to the matter — between myself and my brother?

FORMAN: I ‘ave, ma’am, but I would never have referred to it in the least if I did not think it might be of some importance to you ma’am to know it.

MADGE: Oh no — of no special importance! We know the parties concerned and are naturally interested in the event. Of course, you do not imagine there is anything more (*She does not look at him as she says this*)

FORMAN (*not looking at* MADGE — *eyes front*): Certainly not, ma’am. Anyway if I did imagine there was something more I’m sure you’d find it to your interest ma’am to remember my faithful services in helpin’ to keep it quiet.

MADGE (after slight pause, during which she looks steadily in front): Judson, what sort of a fool are you?

(FORMAN *turns to her with feigned astonishment*)

(*Speaks with sharp, caustic utterances, almost between her teeth. Turns to him.*) Do you imagine I would take a house, and bring this girl and her mother here and keep up the establishment for nearly two years without protecting myself against the chance of petty blackmail by my own servants?

FORMAN (*protestingly*) Ah — ma’am — you misunderstand me — I —

MADGE (*rising — throws paper on to the piano*) I understand too well! And now I beg you to understand me. I have had a trifle of experience in the selection of my servants and can recognize certain things when I see them! It was quite evident from your behaviour you had been in something yourself and it didn't take me long to get it out of you. You are a self-confessed forger.

FORMAN (*quick movement of apprehension*): No! (*Apprehensive look around)* Don't speak out like that! (*Recovers a little*) It — it was in confidence — I told you in confidence ma'am.

MADGE: Well, I'm telling you in confidence that at the first sign of any underhand conduct on your part this little episode of yours will —

FORMAN (*hurriedly — to prevent her from speaking it*): Yes, yes! I — will bear it in mind, ma'am. I will bear it in mind!

MADGE (*after a sharp look at him as if satisfying herself that he is now reduced to proper condition*): Very well … Now, as to the maid — Térèse —

(FORMAN *inclines head for instruction.*)

Do you think of anything which might explain her assertion that she will not be here to-morrow?

FORMAN (*his eyes turned away from* MADGE. *Speaking in low tones, and behaviour subdued as if completely humiliated*): It has occurred to me, ma'am, since you first asked me regarding the matter, that she may have taken exceptions to some occurrences which she thinks she 'as seen going on in this 'ouse.

MADGE: I'll raise her wages if I find it necessary; tell her so. If it isn't money that she wants — I'll see her myself.

FORMAN: Very well, ma'am. (*He turns and goes out quietly*.)

(MADGE *stands motionless a moment. There is a sound of a heavy door opening and closing.* MADGE *gives a quick motion of listening. Hurries to look off. Enter* JIM LARRABEE*, through archway, in some excitement. He* *is a tall, heavily-built man, with a hard face. Full of determination and a strong character. He is well dressed, and attractive in some respects. A fine looking man. Dark hair and eyes, but the hard sinister look of a criminal*.)

MADGE: Didn't you find him? I

LARRABEE: No. (*Goes to the heavy desk and throws open the wooden doors of lower part, showing the iron and combination lock of a safe or strong-box. Gives knob a turn or two nervously, and works at it*.)

(MADGE *follows, watching him*.)

He wasn't there! (*Rises from desk.*) We'll have to get a lock smith in.

MADGE (*quickly*): No, no! We can't do that! It isn't safe!

LARRABEE: We've got to do something, haven't we? (*Stoops down quickly before door of safe again, and nervously tries it.*) I wish to God I knew a bit about these things. (*Business at safe*.) There's no time to waste, either! They've put Holmes on the case!

MADGE: Sherlock Holmes?

LARRABEE: Yes. (*At safe, trying knob*.)

MADGE: How do you know?

LARRABEE: I heard it at Leary's. They keep track of him down there, and every time he's put on something they give notice round.

MADGE: What could he do?

LARRABEE (*rises and faces her*): I don't know — but he'll make some move — he never waits long! It may be any minute! (*Moves about restlessly but stops when* MADGE *speaks*.)

MADGE: Can't you think of someone else — as we can't find Sid?

LARRABEE: He may turn up yet. I left word with Billy Rounds, and he's on the hunt for him. (*Between his teeth*.) Oh! it's damnable. After holding on for two good years just for this and now the time comes and she's blocked us! (*Goes to and looks off and up stairway. Looks at* MADGE. *Goes to her.*) Look here! I'll just get at her for a minute. (*Starting to go out.*) I have an idea I can change her mind.

MADGE (*quickly*): Yes — but wait, Jim.

(LARRABEE *stops and turns to her*.)

(*She goes near him*.) What's the use of hurting the girl? We've tried all that!

LARRABEE: Well, I'll try something else! (*Turns and goes to archway*.)

MADGE (*quick, half whisper*): Jim! (LARRABEE *turns*, MADGE *approaches him*.) Remember — nothing that'll show! No marks! We might get into trouble.

LARRABEE (*going doggedly*): I'll look out for that.

(LARRABEE *goes out, running upstairs in haste. As* MADGE*looks after him with a trifle of anxiety standing in archway, enter*TERESE. *She is a quiet-looking French maid with a pleasant face. She stands near the door*. MADGE *turns into the room and sees her. Stands an instant. She seats herself in the arm-chair*.)

MADGE: Come here.

(TERESE *comes down a little way — with slight hesitation.*)

What is it?

TERESE: Meester Judson said I vas to come.

MADGE: I told Judson to arrange with you himself.

TERESE: He could not, madame. I do not veesh longer to remain.

MADGE: What is it? You must give me some reason!

TERESE: It is zat I wish to go.

MADGE: You've been here months, and have made no complaint.

TERESE: Ah, madame — it is not so before! It is now beginning zat I do not like.

MADGE (*rising*): What? What is it you do not like?

TERESE (*with some little spirit but low voice*): I do not like eet, madame — eet — here — zis place — what you do — ze young lady you have up zere! I cannot remain to see! (*Indicating above.*) Eet ees not well! I cannot remain to see!

MADGE: You know nothing about it! The young lady is ill. She is not right here — (*Touching forehead*.) She is a great trouble to us, but we take every care of her, and treat her with the utmost kindness and —

(*A piercing scream, as if muffled by something, heard in distant part of house above*.)

(*Music on scream. Very pianissimo. Agitato.*)

(*Pause. Both motionless.* TERESE *does not assume a horrified expression; she simply stands motionless. After quite a pause,* MRS. FAULKNER *comes down stairway rapidly, a white-haired lady, dressed in an old black gown*.)

MRS. FAULKNER: My child! my child! They're hurting my child!

(MRS. FAULKNER *stands just within archway, looking vacantly, helplessly, at* MADGE. MADGE *turns, sees her and goes quickly to her*.)

MADGE (*between her teeth*): What are you doing here? Didn't I tell you never to come down!

(*The old lady simply stares vacantly, but a vague expression of trouble is upon her face*.)

Come with me! (*Taking* MRS. FAULKNER *by the arm and drawing her towards stairs*.)

(*The old lady hangs back in a frightened way*.)

Come, I say! (*The scream again — more muffled — from above. Sudden change. Tenderly*.) Don't be alarmed, dear, your poor daughter's head is bad to-day. She'll be better soon! (*Turns to* TERESE.) Terèse — come to me in the morning. (*To old lady*.) Come along, dear. (*Then angrily in low threatening voice.*) Do you hear me? Come!

(*Takes* MRS. FAULKNER *off with some force up the stairs.* TERESE *stands looking after them. Enter* FORMAN*quietly. He looks a moment toward where* MADGE *has just taken the old lady off.* TERESE *is looking also the same way*. FORMAN *goes down to* TERESE. *They look at one another an instant in silence. Then he speaks to her in a low voice. Just before* FORMAN *speaks the music stops*)

FORMAN: She's made it quite satisfactory, I suppose.

(TERESE *looks at* FORMAN.)

You will not leave her — now?

TERESE: Leave her now? More zan evaire before! Do you hear young lady? What is eet they make to her?

FORMAN (*low voice*): It may be she is ill.

TERESE: Indeed, I think it is so zat zey make her eel! I weel not remain to see! (*Turning a little*.) I can find another place; eet eez not so difficult.

FORMAN: Not so difficult if you know where to go!

TERESE: Ah — zhat eez it!

FORMAN: I have one address —

TERESE (*turns to him quickly*): Bien — you know one?

(FORMAN *nods*.)

Est-ce serieux? What you call re-li-ah-ble?

FORMAN (*moves to her*): Here — on this card — (*Quickly takes card from pocket and pushes it into her hands*.) Go to that address! Don't let anyone see it!

TERESE (*quickly looking at card while FORMAN looks away — begins slowly to read*): Meester — Sheer — lock —

FORMAN (*with a quick warning exclamation and sudden turn, seizes her, covering her mouth with one hand; they stand a moment, he looks slowly round*): Some one might hear you! Go to that address in the morning.

(*The front door bell rings.* FORMAN *motions her off with quick, short motion. She goes out*. FORMAN *goes out to open the house door — quickly. Sound of house door opening — a solid, heavy sound — not sharp. Enter* SID PRINCE, *walking in quickly. He is a short, stoutish, dapper little fellow. He carries a small black satchel, wears overcoat and hat, gloves, etc., and is well dressed and jaunty. He wears diamond scarf pin, rings, etc., is quick in movements and always on the alert.* FORMAN *follows him on, standing near archway*.)

PRINCE (*going across towards piano*): Don’t waste toime, you fool; tell ‘em I’m ‘ere, can’t yer?

FORMAN: Did you wish to see Mr. Chetwood, sir, or was it Miss Chetwood?

PRINCE (*stopping and turning to* FORMAN): Well, I’ll be blowed! You act as if I’d never been ‘ere before! ‘Ow do you know but I was born in this ‘ere ‘ouse? Go on and tell ‘em as it’s Mr. Sidney Prince, Esq. (*He puts satchel, which is apparently heavy, on seat at foot of piano*.)

FORMAN: Oh yes, sir — I beg your pardon! I’ll announce you immediate, sir. (*Goes out upstairs*.)

(PRINCE *takes off hat, gloves, etc., laying them so as to cover the satchel. Looks about room. Walks over to the heavy desk and glances at it. Swings door of the desk open in easy business-like way*.)

PRINCE: Ah! (*As if he had found what he was looking for. Not an exclamation of surprise. Drops on one knee and gives the lock a turn. Rises and goes over to his satchel — which he uncovers and opens. Feels about for something.*)

(MADGE *and* LARRABEE *come downstairs and enter.*PRINCE *sees them, but does not stop what he is doing.*)

MADGE (*going across to* PRINCE): Oh, is that you, Sid? I'm so glad you've come.

LARRABEE: Hallo, Sid! … Did you get my note?

PRINCE (*going right on with what he is doing*): Well, I'm 'ere, ain't I? (*Business at satchel.*) … That's what it is, I take it? (*Motion of head towards desk.*)

MADGE: Yes … We're awfully glad you turned up, Sid. We might have had to get in some stranger to do it. (*Going across to below piano in front of* PRINCE.)

PRINCE (*standing up and looking at* LARRABEE *and*MADGE): That would be nice now, wouldn't it? If your game 'appens to be anything off colour — !!!

LARRABEE: Oh — it isn't so specially dark.

PRINCE: That different. (*Goes across to desk with tools from satchel.*) I say, Larrabee —

(*Quick "Sh!" from* MADGE *just behind him.*)

LARRABEE (*at same time*): Shut up!

(*They look round.* PRINCE *looks up surprised.*)

For Heaven's sake, Sid, remember — my name is Chetwood here.

PRINCE: Beg your pardon. My mistake. Old times when we was learnin' the trade together — eh!

LARRABEE: Yes, yes!

PRINCE: I 'ardly expected you'd be doin' the 'igh tone thing over 'ere, wen I first come up with you workin' the Sound Steamer Line out O' New York.

LARRABEE: Come! Don’t let’s go into that now.

PRINCE: Well, you needn’t get so ‘uffy about it! You wouldn’t a’ been over ‘ere at all, if it ‘adn’t been for me … An’ youd a’ never met Madge ‘ere neither — and a devil of a life of it you might a’ been leadin’.

LARRABEE: Yes, yes.

MADGE: We know all that, Sid — but can’t you open that box for us now? We’ve no time to lose.

PRINCE: Open it! I should say I could! It’s one o’ those things it’ll fall open if you let it alone long enough! I’d really like to know where you picked up such a relic as this ‘ere box! It’s an old timer and no mistake! (*About to try some tools on lock, looks about.*) All clear, you say, no danger lurking?

LARRABEE (*shaking head*): Not the least!

(MADGE *moves away a little, glancing cautiously about.*PRINCE *tries tools.* LARRABEE *remains near piano. Both watch him as he tries tools in the lock.*)

PRINCE (*at lock*): You’re not robbing yourselves, I trust?

LARRABEE (*near* PRINCE): It does look a little like it!

PRINCE: I knew you was on some rum lay — squatting down in this place for over a year; but I never could seem to — (*business*) get a line on you. (*He works a moment, then crosses to get a tool out of satchel, and goes near light on piano and begins to adjust it. This must bring him where he commands stage. Stopping and looking sharply at* MADGE*and* LARRABEE.) What do we get here? Oof, I trust?

LARRABEE: Sorry to disappoint you, but it isn’t.

PRINCE: That’s too bad!

MADGE (*shakes head*): Only a bundle of papers, Sid.

(PRINCE *works at tool an instant before speaking*.)

PRINCE: Pipers!

LARRABEE: Um! (*Grunt of assent*.)

PRINCE: Realise, I trust?

MADGE: We can't tell — it may be something — it may be nothing.

PRINCE: Well, if it's something, I'm in it, I hope.

MADGE: Why, of course, Sid — whatever you think is due for opening the box.

PRINCE: Fair enough. (*As if it was all settled to go on.*) Now 'ere. (*Glances round quickly*.) Before we starts 'er goin' what's the general surroundin's?

LARRABEE: What's the good of wasting time on — (*Going near* PRINCE.)

PRINCE (*up to him*): If I'm in this, I'm in it, ain't I? An' I want to know wot I'm in.

MADGE: Why don't you tell him, Jimmie?

PRINCE: If anything 'appened, 'ow'd I let the office know 'oo to look out for?

LARRABEE: Well — I'm willing to give him an idea of what it is but I won't give the name of the — (*Hesitates*.)

(MADGE *goes up to arch*.)

PRINCE: That's all I ask — wot it is. I don't want no names.

LARRABEE (*nearer* PRINCE *and speaking lower*): You know we've been working the Continent. Pleasure places and all that.

PRINCE: So I've 'eard.

(MADGE *motions them to wait. Looking off quietly. Nods them to proceed.*)

LARRABEE: It was over there — Homburg was the place. We ran across a young girl who'd been havin' trouble. Sister just died. Mother seemed wrong here. (*Touches forehead.*)

PRINCE: Well — you run across 'er.

LARRABEE: Madge took hold and found that this sister of hers had been having some kind of love affair with a — well — with a foreign gentleman of exceedingly high rank — or at least — expectations that way.

PRINCE: A foreign gentleman?

LARRABEE: That's what I said.

PRINCE: I don't so much care about that, yer know. My lay's 'ere at home.

LARRABEE: Well, this is good enough for me.

PRINCE: 'Ow much was there to it?

LARRABEE: Promise of marriage.

PRINCE: Broke it, of course.

LARRABEE: Yes — and her heart with it. I don't know what more she expected — anyway, she did expect more. She and her child died together.

PRINCE: Oh — dead!

LARRABEE: Yes, but the case isn't; there are evidences — letters, photographs, jewellery with inscriptions that he gave her. The sister's been keeping them … (*A glance about.*) We've been keeping the sister … You see?

PRINCE (*whistles*): Oh, it's the sister you've got 'ere? An' what's 'er little game?

LARRABEE: To get even.

PRINCE: Ah! To get back on 'im for the way 'e treated 'er sister?

LARRABEE: Precisely.

PRINCE: She don’t want money?

LARRABEE: No.

PRINCE: An’ your little game?

LARRABEE (*shrug of shoulders*): Whatever there is in it.

PRINCE: These papers an’ things ought to be worth a little Something!

LARRABEE: I tell you it wouldn’t be safe for him to marry until he gets them out of the way! He knows it very well. But what’s more, the family knows it!

PRINCE: Oh — family! … Rich, I take it.

LARRABEE: Rich isn’t quite the word. They’re something else.

PRINCE: You don’t mean —

(LARRABEE *moves nearer* PRINCE *and whispers a name in his ear*.)

My Gawd! Which of ‘em?

LARRABEE (*shakes head*): I don’t tell you that.

PRINCE: Well, we are a-movin’ among the swells now, ain’t we? But this ‘ere girl — the sister o’ the one that died—’ow did you manage to get ‘er into it?

MADGE: I picked her up, of course, and sympathized and consoled. I invited her to stay with me at my house in London. Jimmy came over and took this place — and when I brought her along a week later it was all ready — and a private desk safe for the letters and jewellery.

LARRABEE (*turning*): Yes — combination lock and all … Everything worked smooth until a couple of weeks ago, when we began to hear from a firm of London solicitors, some veiled proposals were made — which showed that the time was coming. They wanted the things out of the way.

Suddenly all negotiations on their side stopped. The next thing for me to do was to threaten. I wanted the letters for this, but when I went to get them — I found that in some way the girl had managed to change the lock on us. The numbers were wrong — and we couldn't frighten or starve her into opening the thing.

PRINCE: Oh — I see it now. You've got the stuff in there! (*Indicating safe*.)

LARRABEE: That's what I'm telling you! It's in there, and we can't get it out! She's juggled the lock.

PRINCE (*going at once to safe*): Oh, well, it won't take long ta rectify that triflin' error. (*Stops*.) But wot gets me is the w'y they broke off with their offers that way — can you make head or tail of that?

LARRABEE: Yes. (*Goes nearer to* PRINCE.) It's simple enough.

(PRINCE *turns to him for explanation*.)

They've given it up themselves, and have got in Sherlock Holmes on the case.

PRINCE (*suddenly starting*): Wot's that! (*Pause*.) Is 'Olmes in this?

LARRABEE: That's what they told me!

MADGE: But what can he do, Sid? We haven't —

PRINCE: 'Ere, don't stand talking about that — I'll get the box open. (*Goes to piano in front of* LARRABEE.) You send a telegram, that's all I want! (*Tears page out of his note-book and writes hurriedly The other two watch him,* LARRABEE *a little suspiciously. Silence for a few moments while he writes*.) Where's your nearest telegraph office?

MADGE: Round the corner. (*Going to above piano*.)

PRINCE (*down to* LARRABEE *and giving him the telegram he has written*): Run for it! Mind what I say — run for it.

(LARRABEE *is looking at him hard*.)

That’s to Alf Bassick. He’s Professor Moriarty’s confidential man. Moriarty is king of ‘em all in London. He runs everything that’s shady — an’ ‘Olmes ‘as been settin’ lines all round ‘im for months — and he didn’t know it — an’ now he’s beginnin’ to find out that ‘Olmes is trackin’ ‘im down — and there’s the devil to pay. ‘E wants any cases ‘Olmes is on — it’s a dead fight between ‘em! ‘E’ll take the case just to get at ‘Olmes! ‘E’ll kill ‘im before ‘e’s finished with ‘im, you can lay all you’ve got on it.

LARRABEE: What are you telling him?

PRINCE: Nothing whatever, except I’ve got a job on as I wants to see ‘im about in the mornin’ … Read it yourself.

(LARRABEE *looks at what* PRINCE *has written*.)

But don’t take all night over it! You cawn’t tell wot might ‘appen. (*Crosses to safe*.)

MADGE: Go on, Jim!

(LARRABEE *crosses*, MADGE *following him*.)

LARRABEE (*to* MADGE *near archway*): Keep your eyes open.

MADGE (*to* LARRABEE): Don’t you worry!

(LARRABEE *goes out*.)

(MADGE *is looking after him. Quick sound of door closing*. PRINCE *drops down to work — real work now — at desk. Short pause.* MADGE *stands watching* PRINCE *a moment. She moves over to near piano and picks up a book carelessly, which she glances at with perfect nonchalance. After a time she speaks without taking eyes from book.*)

I’ve heard of this Professor Moriarty.

PRINCE: If you ‘aven’t you must’ve been out in the woods.

MADGE: You say he’s king of them all.

PRINCE (*working*): Bloomin’ Hemperor — that’s wot I call ‘im.

MADGE: He must be a good many different things.

PRINCE: You might see it that way if you looked around an’ didn’t breathe too ‘ard!

MADGE: What does he do?

PRINCE: I’ll tell you one thing he does! (*Turns to her and rests a moment from work*) He sits at ‘ome — quiet and easy — an runs nearly every big operation that’s on. All the clever boys are under him one way or another — an’ he ‘olds them in ‘is ‘and without moving a muscle! An’ if there’s a slip and the police get wind of it there ain’t never any ‘old on ‘im. They can’t touch him. And wot’s more, they wouldn’t want to if they could.

MADGE: Why not?

PRINCE: Because they’ve tried it — that’s w’y — an’ the men as did try it was found shortly after a-floatin’ in the river — that is, if they was found at all! The moment a man’s marked there ain’t a street that’s safe for ‘im! No — nor yet an alley. (*Resumes drilling*.)

MADGE (*after pause*): What’s the idea of telling him about this? He might not want —

PRINCE (*turning to her*,): I tell yer, ‘e’ll come into anything that gives ‘im a chance at ‘Olmes — he wants ter trap ‘im — that’s wot is an just what he’ll do (*Resumes work*)

(PRINCE *works rapidly, drill going in suddenly as if he had one hole sunk. He tries a few tools in it and quickly starts another hole with drills.* MADGE *starts forward at business of drill.*)

MADGE (*recovering to careless*): Have you got it, Sid?

PRINCE: Not yet — but I’ll be there soon. (*Works*.) I know where I am now.

(*Sound of door closing outside. Enter* LARRABEE *hurriedly. He is breathless from running.)*

LARRABEE: Well, Sid. How goes it?

PRINCE (*working*): So-so.

LARRABEE: Now about this Professor Moriarty? (*Gets chair from near piano and sits behind* PRINCE.)

PRINCE (*working*): Ask 'er.

MADGE: It's all right, Jim. It was the proper thing to do.

(*Music. Melodramatic, very pp. Hardly audible*.)

(MADGE *and* LARRABEE *move near* PRINCE, *looking over him eagerly. He quickly introduces small punch and hammers rapidly; sound of bolts, etc., falling inside lock as if loosened. Eagerness of all three increases with final sound of loose iron work inside lock, and* PRINCE *at once pulls open the iron doors. All three give a quick look within.* MADGE *and* LARRABEE *start back with subdued exclamation. PRINCE looks in more carefully, then turns to them. Pause.* LARRABEE *in moving back pushes chair along with him. Pause. Music stops*.)

MADGE (*turning to* LARRABEE): Gone!

LARRABEE (*to* MADGE): She's taken 'em out.

PRINCE (*rising to his feet)*: What do you mean?

LARRABEE: The girl!

(MADGE *stops and goes quickly to safe in front of* PRINCE*and dropping down feels carefully about inside. Others watch her closely.* PRINCE *gives back a little for her*.)

(NOTE. — *Their dialogue since opening of safe has dropped to low excited tones, almost whispers, as they would if it were a robbery. Force of habit in their intense excitement.*)

MADGE (*rises and turns to* LARRABEE): She's got them!

PRINCE: 'Ow can you tell as she 'asn't done the trick already?

LARRABEE (*quick turn on* PRINCE): What’s that?

PRINCE: She wants to get even, you say.

MADGE: Yes! yes!

PRINCE: Well, then, if she’s got the thing out of the box there — ain’t it quite likely she’s sent ‘em along to the girl as ‘e wants to marry. (*Brief pause.*)

MADGE: No! She hasn’t had the chance.

LARRABEE: She couldn’t get them out of this room. We’ve Watched her too close for that.

MADGE: Wait! (*Turns and looks rapidly about piano, etc*.)

(LARRABEE *hurriedly looks about under cushions*.)

LARRABEE: Here! (*Strides towards archway*.) I’ll get her down She’ll tell us where they are or strangle for it! (*Turns hurriedly*) Wait here! When I get her in, don’t give her time to think!

(LARRABEE *goes out*. PRINCE *comes to the end of the piano looking off after* LARRABEE.)

(*Music. Very pp*.)

(*Brief pause*. MADGE *glances nervously*.)

PRINCE: Wot’s he goin’ to do?

MADGE: There’s only one thing, Sid. We’ve got to get it out of her or the whole two years’ work is wasted.

(*Muffled cry of pain from* ALICE *in distance. Pause*.)

PRINCE (*glances off anxiously*): Look ‘ere, I don’t so much fancy this sort of thing. (*Goes to safe and collects tools*.)

MADGE: Don’t you worry, we’ll attend to it!

(*Sound of* LARRABEE *approaching outside and speaking angrily Nearer and nearer. Footsteps heard just before entrance*. LARRABEE *drags* ALICE FAULKNER *on, jerking her across him*.)

LARRABEE (*as he brings* ALICE *on*): Now, we'll see whether you will or not! (*Pause for an instant*.)

(NOTE. — *This scene should be played well up stage.*)

(*Music stops*.)

(*Coming down*.) Now tell her what we want.

ALICE (*low voice — slight shake of head*): You needn't tell me, I know well enough.

MADGE (*drawing nearer to* ALICE *with quiet cat-like glide. Smiling*) Oh no dear you don't know. It isn't anything about locks, or keys, or numbers this time. (*Points slowly to the open safe*.) We want to know what you've done with them!

(*Pause*. ALICE *looks at* MADGE *calmly. No defiance or suffering in her expression*.)

(*Comes closer and speaks with set teeth*.) Do you hear! We want to know what you've done with them.

ALICE (*low voice — but clear and distinct*): You will not know from me.

LARRABEE (*sudden violence, yet subdued, as if not wishing servants to overhear*): We will know from you — and we'll know before — (*As if to cross* MADGE *to* ALICE.)

MADGE (*motioning him*): Wait, Jim! (*Moves down with him a little*.)

LARRABEE (*to* MADGE, *violently*): I tell you, they're in this room — she couldn't have got them out — and I'm going to make her — (*As if to seize* ALICE.)

MADGE (*detaining him*): No! Let me speak to her first!

(LARRABEE *after an instant's sullen pause, turns and walks up stage. Watches from above sullenly.* MADGE *turns to* ALICE*again*.)

Don't you think, dear, it's about time to remember that you owe us a little consideration? Wasn't it something, just a little something, that we found you friendless and ill in Homburg and befriended you?

ALICE: It was only to rob me.

MADGE: Wasn't it something that we brought you and your mother across to England with us — that we kept you here — in our own home — and supported and cared for you —

ALICE: So that you could rob me.

MADGE: My dear child — you have nothing of value. That package of letters wouldn't bring you sixpence.

ALICE: Then why do you want it? Why do you persecute me and starve me to get it? (*Pause* — MADGE *looking at her cruelly.*) All your friendship to me and my mother was a pretence — a sham. It was only to get what you wanted away from me when the time came.

MADGE: Why, we have no idea of such a thing!

ALICE (*turning slightly on* MADGE): I don't believe you.

LARRABEE (*who has controlled himself with difficulty*): Well, believe me, then.

(ALICE *turns to him, frightened but calm. No forced expressions of pain and despair anywhere in the scene*.)

(*Moves towards her*.) You're going to tell us what you've done with that package before you leave this room to-night!

(MADGE *backs away a step or two*.)

ALICE: Not if you kill me.

LARRABEE (*seizing* ALICE *violently by the arms or wrists at back of her*): It isn't killing that's going to do it — it's something else.

(*Music melodramatic and pathetic*.)

(LARRABEE *gets* ALICE'S *arms behind her, and holds her as if wrenching or twisting them from behind. She gives slight cry of pain.* MADGE *comes to her*. PRINCE l*ooks away during following — appearing not to like the scene but not moving*.)

MADGE (*sharp hard voice*): Tell us where it is! Tell us and he'll stop.

LARRABEE (*a little behind — business of gripping as if wrenching her arms*): Out with it!

ALICE (*suppressed cry or moan)*: Oh!

(NOTE. — ALICE *has little expression of pain on her face. The idea is to be game*.)

MADGE: Where is it?

LARRABEE: Speak quick now! I'll give you a turn next time that'll take it out of you.

MADGE (*low voice):* Be careful, Jimmie!

LARRABEE (*angry*): Is this any time to be careful? I tell you we've got to get it out of her — and we'll do it too! (*Business*.) Will you tell? (*Business*.) Will you tell? (*Business*.) Will you —

(*Loud ringing of door bell in distant part of house.*)

(NOTE. — *This must on no account be close at hand.*)

(*After bell music stops*.)

PRINCE (*quick turn on ring. Short sharp whisper as he starts up*): Lookout!

(*All stand listening an instant.* ALICE, *however, heard nothing, as the pain has made her faint, though not unconscious*. LARRABEE*pushes* ALICE *into chair facing fire-place. He then hides her.* MADGE *goes quickly and cautiously draws picture from a small concealed window.* LARRABEE *stands near* ALICE*close up to her. Steps heard outside*. LARRABEE *turns quickly, hearing steps. Make these steps distinct — slow — not loud.*)

LARRABEE (*speaking off*): Here!

(*Enter* FORMAN. *He stands waiting*.)

Don't go to that door; see who it is.

(FORMAN *simply waits — no surprise on his face.* MADGE*turning and speaking in low but clear voice*. LARRABEE *stands so that* FORMAN *will not see* ALICE.)

MADGE (*standing on ottoman*): Tall, slim man in a long coat — soft hat — smooth face — carries … an ebony cane — (*Short, quick exclamation from* PRINCE.)

PRINCE (*breaks in with quick exclamation under breath.*MADGE *stopped by* PRINCE'S *exclamation*): Sherlock 'Olmes! He's 'ere!

(*Pause*. PRINCE *quickly conceals his satchel above safe — also closing door of safe. Music melodramatic, very pp*.)

LARRABEE (*moving towards piano, turns out lamp*): We won't answer the bell.

PRINCE (*turning from tools, etc., and stopping him quickly*): Now that won't do, ye know! Looks crooked at the start!

LARRABEE: You're right! We'll have him in — and come the easy innocent. (H*e turns up the lamp again*.)

MADGE: There's the girl!

PRINCE (*at piano*): Get her away — quick!

(ALICE *is beginning to notice what goes on in a dreamy way.*)

LARRABEE: Take her up the back stairway!

(MADGE *takes* ALICE *quickly and forces her to door as they speak.*)

MADGE (*stopping to speak to* LARRABEE *and speaking out very distinctly*): She’s in poor health and can’t see anyone — you understand.

LARRABEE: Yes! yes! Lock her in the room — and stay by the door.

(MADGE *and* ALICE *quickly go out.* LARRABEE*closes door at once and stands an instant, uncertain. Then he goes to and opens lid of box on wall seat, and gets a loaded club — an ugly looking weapon — and shoves it into* PRINCE’S *hand*.)

You get out there! (*Indicating*.) Keep quiet there till he gets in the house — then come round to the front.

PRINCE: I come round to the front after ‘e’s in the ‘ouse — that plain.

LARRABEE: Be ready for ‘im when he comes out! If he’s got the things in spite of us, I’ll give you two sharp whistles! If you don’t hear it, let him pass.

PRINCE: But if I do ‘ear the two whistles — ?

LARRABEE: Then let ‘im have it.

(PRINCE *gets off at window, which he closes at once.* LARRABEE*moves rapidly, kicking door of desk shut as he passes. Stands at piano, leaning on it carelessly. Turns to* FORMAN.)

Go on, answer the bell.

(FORMAN *bows slightly and goes.* LARRABEE *strolls about trying to get into an assumption of coolness. Picks up book off piano. Sound of heavy door closing outside. Brief pause. Enter* SHERLOCKHOLMES, *hat and stick in hand — wearing a long coat or ulster, and gloves. He lingers in the archway, apparently seem nothing in particular, and slowly drawing off gloves. Then moves to the wall seat close at hand and sits.*)

(*Music stops*.)

(*After quite a time* LARRABEE *turns, throws book on piano, and saunters towards* HOLMES *in rather an ostentatious manner*.)

Mr. Holmes, I believe.

HOLMES (*rises and turning to* LARRABEE *as if mildly surprised.*) Yes, sir.

LARRABEE: Who did you wish to see, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES (*looking steadily at* LARRABEE *an instant. Speaks very quietly*): Thank you so much — I sent my card — by the butler.

LARRABEE (*stands motionless an instant — after an instant pause*): Oh — very well.

(*Long pause. Enter* FORMAN *down stairs.* LARRABEE*moves up near piano and turns to hear what* FORMAN *says*.)

FORMAN (*to* HOLMES): Miss Faulkner begs Mr. Holmes to excuse her. She is not well enough to see anyone this evening.

(HOLMES *takes out note-book and pencil and writes a word or two on a card or leaf of the book. Tears it out of book. Pulls out watch and glances at it. Hands the card to* FORMAN, *taking off coat first.)*

HOLMES: Hand Miss Faulkner this — and say that I have —

LARRABEE: I beg your pardon, Mr. Holmes, but it’s quite useless — really.

HOLMES: Oh — I’m so sorry to hear it.

(HOLMES *turns quietly to* LARRABEE *and looks at him*. LARRABEE i*s a trifle affected by* HOLMES’*quiet scrutiny*.)

LARRABEE: Yes — Miss Faulkner is — I regret to say — quite an invalid. She is unable to see anyone — her health is so poor.

HOLMES: Did it ever occur to you that she might be confined to the house too much?

(*An instant's pause*.)

LARRABEE (*suddenly in low threatening tone, but not too violent*): How does that concern you?

HOLMES (*easily*): It doesn't … I simply made the suggestion.

(*The two look at one another an instant.* HOLMES *turns quietly to* FORMAN.)

That's all. (*Motions him slightly*.) Go on. Take it up. (FORMAN*goes out up stairway. After a moment* LARRABEE *turns, breaking into hearty laughter*.)

LARRABEE: Ha! ha! This is really too good. (*Strolling about laughing.*) Why, of course he can take up your card — or your note — or whatever it is, if you wish it so much; I was only trying to save You the trouble.

HOLMES (*who has been watching him through foregoing speech*): Thanks — hardly any trouble at all to send a card. (*Seats himself in an easy languid way — picks up Punch*.)

LARRABEE (*endeavours to be easy, careless and patronizing*) Do you know, Mr. Holmes, you interest me very much.

HOLMES (*easily*): Ah!

LARRABEE: Upon my word, yes! We've all heard of your wonderful methods. (*Coming towards* HOLMES.) Your marvellous insight — your ingenuity in picking up and following clues — an the astonishing manner in which you gain information from the most trifling details … Now, I dare say — in this brief moment or two you've discovered any number of things about me.

HOLMES: Nothing of consequence, Mr. Chetwood — I have scarcely more than asked myself why you rushed off and sent that telegram in such a frightened hurry — what possible excuse you could have had for gulping down that tumbler of raw brandy at the "Lion's Head" on the way back — why your friend with the auburn hair left so suddenly by the terrace window

— and what there can possibly be about the safe in the lower part of that desk to cause you such painful anxiety.

(*Pause*. LARRABEE *standing motionless looking at*HOLMES. HOLMES *picks up paper and reads*.)

LARRABEE: Ha! ha! very good! Very good indeed! If those things were only true now, I'd be wonderfully impressed. It would absolutely —

(*He breaks off as* FORMAN *enters — coming down stairs. He quietly crosses to* LARRABEE, *who is watching him, and extends salver with a note upon it.* HOLMES *is looking over paper languidly.* LARRABEE *takes note*. FORMAN *retires*.)

You'll excuse me, I trust.

(HOLMES *remains silent, glancing over paper and looking quietly at* FORMAN. LARRABEE *reads the note hastily*.)

(*First a second's thought after reading, as he sees that* HOLMES*is not observing him — then speaking.*) Ah — it's from — er — Faulkner! Well really! She begs to be allowed to see — Mr. Holmes. She absolutely implores it! (HOLMES *looks slowly up as though scarcely interested*.) Well, I suppose I shall have to give way. (*Turns to* FORMAN.) Judson!

FORMAN: Sir.

LARRABEE (e*mphasizing words in italics*): *Ask Miss Faulkner* to come down to the drawing-room. Say that Mr. Holmes is waiting to see her.

FORMAN: Yes, sir. (*Bows and goes out upstairs*.)

LARRABEE (*trying to get on the free and easy style again*): It's quite remarkable, upon my soul! May I ask — (*turns toward* HOLMES) — if it's not an impertinent question, what message you sent up that could have so aroused Miss Faulkner's desire to come down?

HOLMES (*looking up at* LARRABEE *innocently*): Merely that if she wasn't down here in five minutes I'd go up.

LARRABEE (*slightly knocked*): Oh, that was it!

HOLMES: Quite so. (*Rises and takes his watch out.*) And unless I am greatly mistaken I hear the young lady on the stairs. In which case she has a minute and a half to spare. (*Moving by piano — taking opportunity to look at keys, music, etc*.)

(*Enter* MADGE LARRABEE *downstairs as if not quite strong. She has made her face pale, and steadies herself a little by columns, side of arch, furniture, etc., as she comes on, but not overdoing this. She gives the impression of a person a little weak, but endeavouring not to let it be seen.*)

LARRABEE (*advancing to* MADGE): Alice — or — that is, Miss Faulkner, let me introduce Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

(HOLMES *is near piano*. MADGE *goes a step to him with extended hand*. HOLMES *meets* MADGE *and takes her hand in the utmost confidence*.)

MADGE: Mr. Holmes! (*Coming toward him with extended hand*.)

HOLMES (*meeting* MADGE): Miss Faulkner!

MADGE: I'm really most charmed to meet you — although it does look as if you had made me come down in spite of myself, doesn't it? But it isn't so at all, Mr. Holmes. I was more than anxious to come, only the doctor has forbidden me seeing anyone — but when Cousin Freddie said I might come, of course that fixed the responsibility on him, so I have a perfectly clear conscience.

HOLMES: I thank you very much for consenting to see me, Miss Faulkner, but regret that you were put to the trouble of making such a very rapid change of dress.

(MADGE *slightest possible start, and recover at once*.)

MADGE: Ye — yes! I did hurry a trifle, I confess. (*Crosses toward* LARRABEE.) Mr. Holmes is quite living up to his reputation, isn't he, Freddie?

LARRABEE: Yes … But he didn't quite live up to it a moment ago.

MADGE: Oh, didn't he! I'm so sorry. (Sits on seat at foot of piano.)

LARRABEE: No. He’s been telling me the most astonishing things.

MADGE: And they weren’t true?

LARRABEE: Well hardly! (HOLMES *sits in arm-chair.*) He wanted to know what there was about the safe in the lower part that desk that caused me such horrible anxiety! Ha! ha! ha!

MADGE (*above* LARRABEE’S *laugh — to* HOLMES): Why, this isn’t anything. (*To* LARRABEE.) Is there?

LARRABEE: That’s just it! Ha! ha! ha! (*With a quick motion swings back the doors*) There’s a safe there, but nothing in it.

(MADGE *joins him in laughter.*)

MADGE (*as she laughs*): Really Mr. Holmes, that’s too grotesque, ha! ha!

(HOLMES, *seated in arm-chair among the cushions, regards* MADGE*and* LARRABEE *with a peculiar whimsical look*.)

LARRABEE (*laughing*): Perhaps you’ll do better next time! (*Closes safe door.*)

MADGE: Yes, next time — (HOLMES *is looking at them*.) You might try on me, Mr. Holmes. (*Looking playfully at* HOLMES, *greatly enjoying the lark*.)

LARRABEE: Yes, what do you think of her?

HOLMES: It is very easy to discern one thing about Miss Faulkner — and that is, that she is particularly fond of the piano that her touch is exquisite, her expression wonderful, and her technique extraordinary. While she likes light music very well, she is extremely fond of some of the great masters, among whom are Chopin, Liszt. She plays a great deal indeed; I see it is her chief diversion — which makes it all the more remarkable that she has not touched the piano for three days.

(*Pause*.)

MADGE (*turning to* LARRABEE — *a trifle disconcerted by* HOLMES'S *last words, but nearly hiding it with success*): Why that's quite surprising, isn't it?

LARRABEE: Certainly better than he did for me.

HOLMES (*rising..*): I am glad to somewhat repair my shattered reputation, and as a reward, will Miss Faulkner be so good as to play me something of which I am particularly fond?

MADGE: I shall be delighted — if I can. (*Looks questioningly at* HOLMES.)

HOLMES: If you can! Something tells me that Chopin's Prelude Number Fifteen is at your finger ends.

MADGE: Oh yes! (*Rising and forgetting her illness, and going to keyboard — crossing in front of piano*): I can give you that.

HOLMES: It will please me so much.

MADGE (*stopping suddenly as she is about to sit at piano*): But tell me, Mr. Holmes, how did you know so much about my playing — my expression — technique?

HOLMES: Your hands.

MADGE: And my preference for the composers you mentioned?

HOLMES: Your music-rack.

MADGE: How simple! But you said I hadn't played for three days. How did —

HOLMES: The keys.

MADGE: The keys?

HOLMES: A light layer of dust.

MADGE: Dust! Oh dear! (*Quick business with handkerchief on keyboard*.) I never knew Terèse to forget before. (*To*HOLMES.) You must think us very untidy, I'm sure.

HOLMES: Quite the reverse. I see from many things that you are not untidy in the least, and therefore I am compelled to conclude that the failure of Térêse is due to something else.

MADGE (*a little under breath — and hesitatingly — yet compelled by* HOLMES' *pointed statement to ask)*: Wh — what?

HOLMES: To some unusual excitement or disturbance that has recently taken place in this house.

MADGE (*after an instant's pause*): You're doing very well, Mr. Holmes, and you deserve your Chopin. (*Sits, makes preparation to play rather hurriedly in order to change the subject*.)

HOLMES: Thanks.

(LARRABEE *looks toward safe, far from easy in his mind, and leans on piano, giving HOLMES a glance as he turns to* MADGE. MADGE *strikes a few preliminary chords during above business and soon begins to play the composition spoken of. Shortly after the music begins, and while* LARRABEE *is looking to front or elsewhere,* HOLMES *reaches quietly back and pulls the bell crank. No sound of bell heard, the music supposed to make it inaudible. He then sinks into seat just at bell. After a short time* FORMAN*enters and stands waiting just in the archway.* LARRABEE *does not see* FORMAN *at first, but happening to turn discovers him standing there and speaks a warning word to* MADGE *under his breath.* MADGE, *hearing* LARRABEE *speak, looks up and sees* FORMAN. *She stops playing in the midst of a bar — a hesitating stop. Looks at* FORMAN *a moment.*)

MADGE: What are you doing here, Judson?

(*Brief pause because* FORMAN *seems surprised*.)

FORMAN: I came to see what was wanted, ma'am.

(*Brief pause.*)

MADGE: What was wanted?

(*Brief pause*.)

LARRABEE: Nobody asked you to come here.

FORMAN: I beg pardon, sir. I answered the bell.

LARRABEE (*becoming savage*): What bell?

FORMAN: The drawing-room bell, sir.

LARRABEE (*threateningly*): What do you mean, you blockhead!

FORMAN: I'm quite sure it rang, sir.

LARRABEE (*loud voice*): Well, I tell you it did not ring!

(*Pause. The* LARRABEES *look angrily at* FORMAN.)

HOLMES (*quietly — after slight pause — clear incisive voice.*): Your butler is right Mr. Chetwood — the bell did ring.

(*Brief pause.* LARRABEE *and* MADGE *looking at* HOLMES.)

LARRABEE: How do you know?

HOLMES: I rang it.

(MADGE *rises*.)

LARRABEE (*roughly*): What do you want?

(HOLMES *rises, takes card from case or pocket.*)

HOLMES: I want to send my card to Miss Faulkner. (*Gives card to* FORMAN.)

(FORMAN *stands apparently paralysed.*)

LARRABEE (*angrily — approaching* HOLMES): What right have you to ring for servants and give orders in my house?

HOLMES (*turning on* LARRABEE): What right have you to prevent my cards from reaching their destination — and how does it happen that you and this woman are resorting to trickery and deceit to prevent me from seeing Alice Faulkner? (T*he situation is held an instant and then he turns quietly to* FORMAN.) Through some trifling oversight, Judson, neither of the cards I handed you have been delivered. See that this error — does not occur again.

(FORMAN *stands, apparently uncertain what to do.*)

FORMAN: My orders, sir —

HOLMES (*quick — sharp*): Ah! you have orders! (*A sudden sharp glance at* LARRABEE *and back in an instant*.)

FORMAN: I can't say, sir, as I —

HOLMES (*quickly breaking in*): You were told not to deliver my card!

LARRABEE (*step or two up*): What business is this of yours, I'd like to know?

HOLMES: I shall satisfy your curiosity on that point in a very short time.

LARRABEE: Yes — and you'll find out in a very short time that it isn't safe to meddle with me! It wouldn't be any trouble at all for me to throw you out into the street.

HOLMES (*sauntering easily towards him — shaking finger ominously*): Possibly not — but trouble would swiftly follow such an experiment on your part.

LARRABEE: It's a cursed lucky thing for you I'm not armed.

HOLMES: Yes — well, when Miss Faulkner comes down you can go and arm yourself.

LARRABEE: Arm myself! I'll call the police! And what's more, I'll do it now.

(HOLMES *steps down and faces* LARRABEE)

HOLMES: You will not do it now. You will remain where you are until the lady I came here to see has entered this room.

LARRABEE: What makes you so sure of that?

HOLMES (*in his face*) Because you will infinitely prefer to avoid an investigation of your very suspicious conduct Mr. James Larrabee —

(*A sharp start from both* LARRABEE *and* MADGE*on hearing* HOLMES *address the former by his proper name*.)

— an investigation that shall certainly take place if you or your wife presume further to interfere with my business (*Turns to* FORMAN.) As for you, my man — it gives me great pleasure recall the features of an old acquaintance. Your recent connection with the signing of another man's name to a small piece of paper has made your presence at Bow Street much desired. You either deliver that card to Miss Faulkner at once — or you sleep in the police station to night. It is a matter of small consequence to me which you do. (*Turns and strolls near fire, picking book from mantelpiece — and sits*)

(FORMAN *stands motionless but torn with conflicting fears)*

FORMAN (*finally in a low painful voice — whispers hoarse*): Shall I go sir?

(MADGE *moves to near* LARRABEE, *at piano*.)

LARRABEE: Go on. Take up the card — it makes no difference to me.

MADGE (q*uick sharp aside to* LARRABEE): If she comes down can't he get them away from her?

LARRABEE (*to* MADGE) If he does Sid Prince is waiting for him outside.

(FORMAN *appearing to be greatly relieved, turns and goes out up stairs with* HOLMES' *card*.)

(*Pathetic music, very pp*.)

(*A pause — no one moves*.)

(*Enter* ALICE FAULKNER. *She comes down a little — very weak — looking at* LARRABEE, *then seeing* HOLMES *for first time*.)

(*Stop music*.)

HOLMES (*on seeing* ALICE, *rises and puts book on mantel. After a brief pause, turns and comes down to* LARRABEE): A short time since you displayed an acute anxiety to leave the room. Pray do not let me detain you or your wife — any longer.

(*The* LARRABEES *do not move. After a brief pause,*HOLMES *shrugs shoulders slightly and goes over to* ALICE. HOLMES *and* ALICE *regard each other a moment*.)

ALICE: This is Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES: Yes.

ALICE: You wished to see me?

HOLMES: Very much indeed, Miss Faulkner, but I am sorry to see — (*placing chair near her*) — you are far from well.

ALICE (*a step.* LARRABEE *gives a quick glance across at her, threateningly, and a gesture of warning, but keeping it down)*: Oh no — (*Stops as she catches* LARRABEE'S *angry glance*.)

HOLMES (*pausing as he is about to place chair, and looking at her*): No? (*Lets go of his chair.*) I beg your pardon — but — (*Goes to her and takes her hand delicately — looks at red marks on her wrist. Looking up at her.*) What does this mean?

ALICE (*shrinking a little. Sees* LARRABEE'S *cruel glance*): Oh — nothing.

(HOLMES *looks steadily at her an instant*.)

HOLMES: Nothing?

ALICE (*shaking head*): No!

HOLMES: And the — (*pointing lightly*) — mark here on your neck. Plainly showing the clutch of a man’s fingers? (*Indicating a place on her neck where more marks appear.*) Does that mean nothing also?

(*Pause*. *ALICE turns slightly away without answering*.)

(*Looking straight before him to front*.) It occurs to me that I would like to have an explanation of this … Possibly — (*turns slowly towards* LARRABEE) — you can furnish one, Mr. Larrabee?

(*Pause*.)

LARRABEE (*doggedly*): How should I know?

HOLMES: It seems to have occurred in your house.

LARRABEE (*advancing a little, becoming violently angry)*: What if it did? You’d better understand that it isn’t healthy for you or anyone else to interfere with my business.

HOLMES (*quickly — incisively*): Ah! Then it is your business. We have that much at least.

(LARRABEE *stops suddenly and holds himself in.*)

(*Turning to* ALICE.) Pray be seated, Miss Faulkner. (*Placing chair as if not near enough*.)

(ALICE *hesitates an instant — then decides to remain standing for the present.* LARRABEE *stands watching and listening to interview between* HOLMES *and* ALICE.)

ALICE: I don’t know who you are, Mr. Holmes, or why you are here.

HOLMES: I shall be very glad to explain. So far as the question of my identity is concerned, you have my name and address as well as the announcement of my profession upon the card, which I observe you still hold clasped tightly in the fingers of your left hand.

(ALICE *at once looks at the card in her hand*.)

ALICE (*a look at him*): A — detective! (*Sits on ottoman, looking at* HOLMES.)

HOLMES (*draws near her and sits*): Quite so. And my business is this. I have been consulted as to the possibility of obtaining from you certain letters and other things which are supposed to be in your possession, and which — I need not tell you — are the source of the greatest anxiety.

ALICE (*her manner changing and no longer timid and shrinking*): It is quite true I have such letters, Mr. Holmes, but it will be impossible to get them from me; others — have tried — and failed.

HOLMES: What others have or have not done, while possibly instructive in certain directions, can in no way affect my conduct, Miss Faulkner. I have come to you frankly and directly, to beg you to pity and forgive.

ALICE: There are some things, Mr. Holmes, beyond pity — beyond forgiveness.

HOLMES: But there are other things that are not. (ALICE*looks at him*.) I am able to assure you of the sincere penitence — the deep regret — of the one who inflicted the injury, and of his earnest desire to make — any reparation in his power.

ALICE: How can reparation be made to the dead?

HOLMES: How indeed! And for that very reason, whatever injury you yourself may be able to inflict by means of these things can be no reparation — no satisfaction — no indemnity to the one no longer here. You will be acting for the living — not the dead. For your own satisfaction, Miss Faulkner, your own gratification, your own revenge!

(ALICE *starts slightly at the idea suggested and rises. Pause.* HOLMES *rises, moves his chair back a little, standing with his hand on it*.)

ALICE (*stands a moment, very quiet low voice*): I know — from this and from other things that have happened — that a — a marriage is — contemplated.

HOLMES: It is quite true.

ALICE: I cannot give up what I intend to do, Mr. Holmes. There are other things beside revenge — there is punishment. If I am not able to communicate with the family — to which this man proposes to ally himself — in time to prevent such a thing — the punishment will come later — but you may be perfectly sure it will come. (HOLMES *is about to speak. She motions him not to speak.*) There is nothing more to say!

(HOLMES *gives a signal.*)

(*She looks at* HOLMES *an instant*.) Good night, Mr. Holmes. (*She turns and starts to go*.)

HOLMES: But my dear Miss Faulkner, before you —

(*A confused noise of shouting and terrified screams from below followed by sounds of people running up a stairway and through the halls.*)

HOLMES: What's that?

(*All stop and listen. Noise louder. Enter* FORMAN, *breathless and white. At same time smoke pours in through archway.*)

FORMAN (*gasping*): Mr. Chetwood! Mr. Chetwood!

MADGE *and* LARRABEE: What is it?

(HOLMES *keeps his eyes sharply on* ALICE. ALICE*stands back alarmed.*)

FORMAN: The lamp — in the kitchen, sir! It fell off the table — an' everything down there is blazin', sir.

MADGE: The house — is on fire! (*She gives a glance towards safe, forgetting that the package is gone — but instantly recovers*.)

(LARRABEE *hurriedly goes out,* MADGE *after him.*FORMAN *disappears. Noise of people running downstairs, etc.* ALICE, *on cue "Blazin', sir," gives a scream and looks quickly at chair, at the same time* *making an involuntary start toward it. She stops upon seeing* HOLMES *and stands. Noises grow less and die away outside and below*.)

HOLMES: Don't alarm yourself, Miss Faulkner — (*slight shake of head*) — there is no fire.

ALICE (*shows by tone that she fears something*): No fire! (*Stands, dreading what may come*.)

HOLMES: The smoke was all arranged for by me. (*Slight pause)*

ALICE: Arranged for? (*Looks at* HOLMES.)

(HOLMES *quickly moves to large upholstered chair which* ALICE g*lanced at and made start towards a moment since*.)

What does it mean, Mr. Holmes?

(HOLMES *feels rapidly over chair. Rips away upholstery.* ALICE*attempts to stop him — but is too late, and backs to piano almost in a fainting condition.* HOLMES *stands erect with a package in*

hand.)

HOLMES: That I wanted this package of letters, Miss Faulkner.

(ALICE *stands looking at* HOLMES *speechless — motionless — meets* HOLMES' *gaze for a moment, and then covers her face with her hands, and very slight motion of convulsive sob or two*. HOLMES *with a quick motion steps quickly in a business-like way to the seat where his coat, hat and cane are, and picks up coat, throwing it over his arm as if to go at once. As he is about to take his hat, he catches sight of* ALICE'S *face and stops dead where he is*.)

(*Music. Very pp. Scarcely audible*.)

(HOLMES *stands looking at her, motionless. She soon looks up at him again, brushing hand across face as if to clear away any sign of crying. The tableau of the two looking at one another is held a moment or two.* HOLMES' *eyes leave her face and he looks down an instant. After a* *moment he lays his coat, hat and cane back on seat. Pauses an instant. Turns toward her.*)

HOLMES (*low voice. Brief pause*): I won't take them, Miss Faulkner. (*He looks down an instant. Her eyes are upon his face steadily*.) As you — (*still looking down*) — as you — very likely conjecture, the alarm of fire was only to make you betray their hiding-place — which you did … and I — availed myself of that betrayal — as you see. But now that I witness your great distress — I find that I cannot keep them — unless — (*looking up at her*) — you can possibly — change your mind and let me have them — of your own free will … (*He looks at her a moment. She shakes her head very slightly*.) I hardly supposed you could. (*Looks down a moment. Looks up.*) I will therefore — return it to you. (*Very slight pause, and he is about to start toward her as if to hand her the Package*.)

(*Sound of quick footsteps outside. Enter* LARRABEE, *with a revolver in his hand, followed by* MADGE.)

(*Stop music.*)

LARRABEE: So! You've got them, have you? And now, I suppose we're going to see you walk out of the house with them. (*Handles revolver with meaning*.)

(HOLMES *looks quietly at* LARRABEE *an instant.*)

HOLMES: On the contrary, you're going to see me return them to their rightful owner.

LARRABEE (*with revolver)* Yes — I think that'll be the safest thing for Mr. Sherlock Holmes to do.

(HOLMES *stops dead and looks at* LARRABEE *and walks quietly down facing him*)

HOLMES: You flatter yourself Mr. Larrabee. The reason I did not leave the house with this package of papers is not because of you, or what you may do — or say — or think — or feel! It is on account of this young lady! I care that for your cheap bravado (*Looks at revolver and smiles*) Really? (*He looks quietly in* LARRABEE'S *eyes an instant, then turns and goes to*

ALICE.) Miss Faulkner permit me to place this in your hands (*Gives her the package*.)

(ALICE *takes the package with sudden eagerness — then turns and keeps her eyes steadily on* HOLMES)

Should you ever change your mind and be so generous, forgiving as to wish to return these letters to the one who wrote them, you have my address. In any event, rest assured there will be no more cruelty, no more persecution in this house. You are perfectly safe with your property now — for I shall so arrange that your faintest cry of distress will be heard! And if that cry is heard — it will be a very unfortunate thing for those who are responsible. Good night Miss Faulkner (*Pause — turns to*LARRABEE *and* MADGE. *Coming to them*) As for you sir and you, madam, I beg you to understand that you continue your persecution of that young lady at your peril

(ALICE *looks at* HOLMES *an instant, uncertain what to do. He makes a slight motion indicating her to go.* ALICE, *after slight pause crosses in front of* HOLMES *and goes out* LARRABEE *makes slight move towards* ALICE, *but is checked by a look from* HOLMES. HOLMES *waits motionless eyes on* ALICE *until exit. Then he looks after her for a moment. Then turns and takes his coat and hat. Looks at them an instant.*)

Good evening — (*Walks out and the sound of heavy door closing is heard outside*)

(*Pause* LARRABEE *and* MADGE *stand where*HOLMES *left them. Sound of window opening* SIDPRINCE *hurries in at window*)

PRINCE (*sharp but subdued*): Well! ‘E didn’t get it, did ‘e?

(LARRABEE *shakes head.* PRINCE *looks at him, puzzled, and then turns towards* MADGE.)

Well — wot is it? Wot’s the pay if ‘e didn’t?

MADGE: He gave it to her.

PRINCE: What!—’e found it?

(MADGE *indicates “Yes” by slight movement.*)

An’ gave it to the girl?

(MADGE *repeats slight affirmative motion.*)

Well ‘ere — I say! Wot are you waiting for? Now’s the chance — before she ‘ides it again! (*Starting as if to go*.)

MADGE (*stopping* PRINCE): No! Wait! (*Glances round nervously*.)

PRINCE: Wot’s the matter! (*Going to* LARRABEE.) Do you want to lose it?

LARRABEE: No! you’re right! It’s all a cursed bluff! (*Starting as if to go*.)

MADGE (*meeting them, as if to stop them*): No, no, Jim!

LARRABEE: I tell you we will! Now’s our chance to get a hold of it! (*Pushing her aside*.)

PRINCE: Well, I should say so!

(*Three knocks are heard just as* PRINCE *and* LARRABEE*reach archway. A distant sound of three heavy blows, as if struck from underneath up against the floor, reverberates through the house. All stop motionless.)*

(*Pause*.)

(*Music, melodramatic agitato, very pp. till Curtain*.)

LARRABEE *(in a low voice)*: What’s that?

MADGE: Someone at the door.

LARRABEE (*low voice)*: No — it was on that side!

(PRINCE *glances round alarmed.* MADGE *rings bell. Enter* FORMAN *All stand easily as if nothing out of the usual*.)

MADGE: I think someone knocked, Judson.

(FORMAN *at once goes out quietly but quickly. Sound of door outside closing again.* FORMAN *re-enters*.)

FORMAN: I beg pardon, ma'am, there's no one at the door.

MADGE: That's all.

(FORMAN *goes*.)

PRINCE (*speaks almost in a whisper from above the piano*) 'E's got us watched! Wot we want to do is to leave it alone an the Hemperor 'ave it!

MADGE (*low voice — taking a step or two toward* PRINCE): Do you mean — Professor Moriarty?

PRINCE: That's 'oo I mean. Once let 'im get at it and 'e'll settle it with 'Olmes pretty quick (*Turns to* LARRABEE). Meet me at Leary's — nine sharp — in the morning. Don't you worry a minute. I tell you the Professor'll get at 'im before to-morrow night! 'E don't wait long either! An' w'en he strikes — it means death. (*He goes out at window*)

(*Brief pause. After* PRINCE *goes* MADGE *looks after him.* LARRABEE, *with a despairing look on his face, leans on chair — looks round puzzled. His eyes meet* MADGE'S*as lights fade away*.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE 1

PROFESSOR MORIARTY’S Underground Office. Morning

SCENE 1 — This scene is built inside the Second. PROFESSOR MORIARTY’S underground office. A large vault-like room, with rough masonry walls and vaulted ceiling. The general idea of this place is that it has been converted from a cellar room of a warehouse into a fairly comfortable office or head-quarters. There are no windows.

The colour or tone of this set must not be similar to the third Act set, which is a gloomy and dark bluish-brown. The effect in this set should be of masonry that has long ago been whitewashed and is now old, stained and grimy. Maps on wall of England, France, Germany, Russia, etc. Also a marked map of London — heavy spots upon certain localities. Many charts of buildings, plans of floors — possible tunnellings, etc. Many books about — on impoverished shelves, etc.

PROFESSOR ROBERT MORIARTY *is seated at a large circular desk facing the front. He is looking over letters, telegrams, papers, etc., as if morning mail. He is a middle-aged man, with massive head and grey hair, and a face full of character, overhanging brow, heavy jaw. A man of great intellectual force, extremely tall and thin. His forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. Clean-shaven, pale, ascetic-looking. Shoulders rounded, and face protruding forward, and for ever oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. Deep hollow voice.*

The room is dark, with light showing on his face, as if from lamp. Pause. MORIARTY *rings a gong at desk, which has a Peculiar sound. In a* *second, buzzer outside door replies twice. He Picks up a speaking tube and puts it to his mouth.*

MORIARTY *(speaking into tube in a low voice)*: Number. *(He Places tube to his ear and listens, then speaks into it again.)*Correct. *(Drops tube. He moves a lever up against wall and the bolt of the door slides back with a solid heavy sound.)*

(*Enter* JOHN *noiselessly. No sound of steps. He stands just within the door in the half darkness.*)

Has any report come in from Chibley?

JOHN: Nothing yet sir.

MORIARTY: All the others are heard from?

JOHN: Yes, sir.

MORIARTY: I was afraid we'd have trouble there. If anything happened we lose Hickson — one of our best men. Send Bassick.

(JOHN *goes out. Bolt slides back. Buzzer outside door rings twice.* MORIARTY *picks up tube and speaks into it*)

(*Speaking into tube*.) Number. (*Listens. Speaks into tube again*.) Correct. *(He slides back bolt of door.)*

(*Enter* BASSICK *noiselessly Bolt of door slides back.* BASSICK *goes to* MORIARTY'S *desk at once and stands*. MORIARTY *motions to sit. He does so*)

Before we go into anything else, I want to refer to Davidson.

BASSICK: I've made a note of him myself, sir; he's holding bad money.

MORIARTY: Something like six hundred short on that last haul, isn't it?

BASSICK: Certainly as much as that.

MORIARTY: Have him attended to. Craigin is the one to do it. (BASSICK *writes a memo quickly*) And see that his disappearance is noticed. Have it spoken of. That finishes Davidson … Now as to this Blaisdell matter — did you learn anything more?

BASSICK: The whole thing was a trap.

MORIARTY: What do you mean?

BASSICK: Set and baited by an expert.

MORIARTY: But those letters and papers of instructions — you brought them back, or destroyed them, I trust?

BASSICK: I could not do it, sir — Manning has disappeared and the papers are gone!

(*Music melodramatic. Cue, as* MORIARTY *looks at* BASSICK.)

MORIARTY: Gone! Sherlock Holmes again. That's bad for the Underwood trial.

BASSICK: I thought Shackleford was going to get a postponement.

MORIARTY: He tried to — and found he was blocked.

BASSICK: Who could have done it?

(MORIARTY *turns and looks at* BASSICK *almost hypnotically — his head vibrating from side to side as if making him speak the name.*)

Sherlock Holmes?

MORIARTY: Sherlock Holmes again. (*His eyes still on* BASSICK.)

BASSICK (*as if fascinated by* MORIARTY. *Slight affirmative motion.*) He's got hold of between twenty and thirty papers and instructions in as many different jobs, and some as to putting a man or two out of the way — and he's gradually completing chains of evidence which, if we let him go on, will reach to me as sure as the sun will rise. Reach to me! — Ha! (*Sneer.*) He's playing rather a dangerous game! Inspector Wilson tried it seven years ago. Wilson is dead. Two years later Henderson took it up. We haven't heard anything of Henderson lately, eh?

BASSICK (*shaking head*): Not a thing, sir.

MORIARTY: Ha! (*Sneer*.) This Holmes is rather a talented man. He hopes to drag me in at the Underwood trial, but he doesn't realise what can happen between now and Monday. He doesn't know that there isn't a street in London that'll be safe for him if I whisper his name to Craigin — I might even make him a little call myself — just for the satisfaction of it — (*business of head swaying, etc.*) — just for the satisfaction of it. (BASSICK *watches* MORIARTY *with some anxiety*.) Baker Street, isn't it? His place — Baker Street — eh?

BASSICK: Baker Street, sir.

MORIARTY: We could make it safe. We could make it absolutely secure for three streets each way.

BASSICK: Yes, sir, but —

MORIARTY: We could. We've done it over and over again elsewhere — Police decoyed. Men in every doorway. (*Sudden turn to him.)* Do this to-night — in Baker Street! At nine o'clock call his attendants out on one pretext and another, and keep them out — you understand! I'll see this Sherlock Holmes myself — I'll give him a chance for his life. If he declines to treat with me —

(*He takes a savage-looking bulldog revolver from under desk and examines it carefully, slowly placing it in breast pocket. Ring of telephone bell is heard, but not until the revolver business is finished.*)

(*The music stops.*)

(MORIARTY *gives a nod to* BASSICK, *indicating him to attend to phone.* BASSICK r*ises and goes to and picks up telephone.* MORIARTY *resumes business of examining papers on his desk*.)

BASSICK (*speaks into receiver and listens as indicated)*: Yes — yes — Bassick — What name did you say? Oh, Prince, yes. He'll have to wait — Yes — I got his telegram last night — Well, tell him to come and speak to me at the phone. (*Longer wait.)* Yes — I got your telegram, Prince, but I have an important matter on. You'll have to wait — Who? (*Suddenly becomes very interested*.) What sort of a game is it? — Where is he now? — - Wait a moment. (*To* MORIARTY.) Here's something, sir. Sid Prince has come here over some job, and he says he's got Holmes fighting against him.

MORIARTY (*quickly turning to* BASSICK) Eh? Ask him what it is. Ask him what it is. (BASSICK *is about to speak through the telephone. Quickly.*) Wait! (BASSICK *stops*.) Let him come here. (BASSICK *turns in surprise*.)

BASSICK: No one sees you — no one knows you. That has meant safety for years.

MORIARTY: No one sees me now. You talk with him — I'll listen from the next room. (BASSICK *looks at him hesitatingly an instant*.) This is your office — you understand — your office — I'll be there.

(BASSICK *turns to telephone*.)

BASSICK (*speaking into telephone*): Is that you, Prince? — Yes, I find I can't come out — but I'll see you here — What interest have they got? What's the name? (*Listening a moment. Looks round to* MORIARTY.) He says there's two with him — a man and a woman named Larrabee. They won't consent to any interview unless they're present.

MORIARTY: Send them in.

BASSICK (*speaking into telephone*): Eh, Prince — ask Beads to come to the telephone — Beads — eh — ? (*Lower voice.)* Those people with Prince, do they seem to be all right? Look close

yes? — Well — take them out through the warehouse and down by the circular stairway and then bring them up here by the long tunnel — Yes, here — Look them over as you go along to see they're not carrying anything — and watch that no one sees you come down — Yes — (*Hangs up ear-piece, turns and looks at* MORIARTY.) I don't like this, sir!

MORIARTY (*rises*): You don't like this! You don't like this! I tell you it's certain death unless we can settle with this man Holmes.

(*The buzzer rings three times.*)

(*Moves towards opening*.) Your office, you understand — your office.

(BASSICK *looks at* MORIARTY. MORIARTY *goes out*. BASSICK, *after* MORIARTY *is well off, goes and takes* MORIARTY’S *place at the back of the desk. Rings gong at desk. Buzzer replies twice from outside.*)

BASSICK (*speaking into tube*): Send John here.

(BASSICK *pushes back bolt. Enter* JOHN *noiselessly. He stands just within door. Bolt of door slides back when door shuts.*)

There are some people coming in here, you stand over there, and keep your eye on them from behind. If you see anything suspicious, drop your handkerchief. If it’s the woman pick it up — if it’s the man leave it on the floor.

(*Three knocks are distinctly heard on door from outside. On last knock* JOHN *goes near wall.*)

(*Picks up tube and speaks into it.*) Number. (*Listens — speaking into tube.*) Are the three waiting with you? (*Listens — drops tube and pushes lever back, and the bolt slides back from the door. The door slowly swings open.*)

(*Enter* SID PRINCE, *followed by* MADGE *and* LARRABEE. *The door Closes and the bolts slide back with a clang. At the sound of the bolts* LARRABEE *looks round at door very sharply, realising that they are all locked in.* BASSICK *motions* MADGE *to chair.* MADGE *Sits*. LARRABEE *is suspicious, and does not like the look of the place.* PRINCE *remains standing*. BASSICK *sits behind desk.* JOHN *is in the dark, watching* LARRABEE *and* MADGE, *with a handkerchief in hand*.)

I understand you to say — through our private telephone — that you’ve got something with Sherlock Holmes against you.

PRINCE: Yes, sir — we ‘ave.

BASSICK: Kindly let me have the particulars.

(LARRABEE *gives "H'm," indicating that he wants to hear*.)

PRINCE: Jim and Madge Larrabee here, which you used to know in early days, they have picked up a girl at 'Omburg, where her sister had been havin' a strong affair of the 'eart with a very 'igh young foreign nob who promised to marry 'er — but the family stepped in and threw the whole thing down. 'E be'aved very bad to 'er an had let 'imself out an written her letters an given her rings and tokens, yer see — and there was photographs too. Now as these various things showed how 'e'd deceived and betrayed 'er, they wouldn't look nice at all considerin' who the young man was, an' wot 'igh titles he was comin' into. So when this girl up an' dies of it all, these letters and things all fall into the 'ands of the sister — which is the one my friends 'ere has been nursin' all along — together with 'er mother.

BASSICK (*to* LARRABEE): Where have you had the people?

LARRABEE: We took a house up the Norrington Road.

BASSICK: How long have you been there?

LARRABEE: Two years, the fourteenth of next month.

BASSICK: And those letters and — other evidences of the young man's misconduct — when will they reach their full value?

(LARRABEE *is about to answer, but* PRINCE *jumps in quickly*.)

PRINCE: It's now, don't you see. It's now — There's a marriage comin' on, an' there's been offers, an' the problem is to get the papers in our 'ands.

BASSICK: Where are they?

PRINCE: Why, the girl's got 'old of 'em, sir!

(BASSICK *turns for explanation of this to* LARRABEE)

LARRABEE: We had a safe for her to keep them in, supposing that when the time came we could open it, but the lock was out of order and we got Prince in to help us. He opened it last night, and the package containing the things was gone — she had taken them out herself.

BASSICK: What did you do when you discovered this?

PRINCE: Do — I ‘adn’t any more than got the box open, sir, an’ given one look at it, when Sherlock Holmes rings the front door bell.

BASSICK (*intent*): There — at your house?

LARRABEE: At my house.

BASSICK: He didn’t get those letters?

LARRABEE: Well, he did get them, but he passed them back to the Faulkner girl.

BASSICK (*rises — in surprise*): Passed them back, eh? What did that mean? (*Goes down a little, thinking.*)

LARRABEE (*slight shrug of shoulders*): There’s another thing that puzzles me. There was an accident below in the kitchen — a lamp fell off the table and scattered burning oil about, the butler came running up, yelling fire. We ran down there, and a few buckets of water put it out.

(MORIARTY *suddenly appears at his desk. Lights on his face.*)

MORIARTY: I have a suggestion to make. (*All turn in surprise and look at* MORIARTY.) The first thing we must do is to get rid of your butler — not discharge him — get rid of him. (*To* BASSICK.) Craigin for that! To-day! As soon as it’s dark. Give him two others to help — Mr. Larrabee will send the man into the cellar for something — they’ll be ready for him there. Doulton’s van will get the body to the river. (MADGE *shudders slightly*.) It need not inconvenience you at all, Madam, we do these things quietly.

(BASSICK *is writing orders*.)

(*To* BASSICK.) What’s the Seraph doing?

BASSICK: He’s on the Reading job to-morrow night.

MORIARTY: Put him with Craigin to-day to help with that butler. But there’s something else we want. Have you seen those letters, the photographs, and whatever else there may be? Have you seen them? Do you know what they're like?

MADGE: I have, sir. I've looked them through carefully several times

MORIARTY: Could you make me a counterfeit set of these things and tie them up so that they will look exactly like the package Sherlock Holmes held in his hand last night?

MADGE: I could manage the letters — but —

MORIARTY: If you manage the letters, I'll send some one who can manage the rest — from your description. Bassick — that old German artist — eh —

BASSICK: Leuftner.

MORIARTY: Precisely! Send Leuftner to Mrs. Larrabee at eleven. (*Looks at watch*.) Quarter past ten — that gives you three quarters of an hour to reach home. I shall want that counterfeit packet an eleven to-night — twelve hours to make it.

MADGE: It will be ready, sir.

MORIARTY: Good! Bassick — notify the Lascar that I may require the Gas Chamber at Stepney to-night.

BASSICK: The Gas Chamber?

MORIARTY: Yes. The one backing over the river — and have Craigin there a quarter before twelve with two others. Mr. Larrabee — (*turning slightly to him*) — I shall want you to write a letter to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which I shall dictate — and tonight I may require a little assistance from you both. (*Taking in* PRINCE *with his glance*.) Meet me here at eleven.

LARRABEE: This is all very well, sir, but you have said nothing about — the business arrangements. I'm not sure that! —

MORIARTY (*turning front*): You have no choice.

LARRABEE: No choice. (*Looks fiercely to* MORIARTY.)

(MADGE *rises to quiet him.* JOHN *drops handkerchief. Pause.*)

MORIARTY (*looking at him*): No choice. (PRINCE *aghast.*) I do what I please. It pleases me to take hold of this case.

LARRABEE (*angry — crossing to desk*): Well, what about pleasing me?

(BASSICK *looks across at* LARRABEE.)

MORIARTY (*perfectly quiet — looks at* LARRABEE *an instant*): I am not so sure but I shall be able to do that as well. I will obtain the original letters from Miss Faulkner and negotiate the for much more than you could possibly obtain. In addition — you will have an opportunity to sell the counterfeit package to Holmes tonight, for a good round sum. And the money obtained from both these sources shall be divided as follows: you will take one hundred per cent, and I — nothing.

(*Brief pause of astonishment.*)

LARRABEE: Nothing!

MORIARTY: Nothing!

(LARRABEE *moves to* PRINCE.)

BASSICK: But we cannot negotiate those letters until we know who they incriminate. Mr. Larrabee has not yet informed us.

MORIARTY: Mr. Larrabee — (LARRABEE *looks round to* MORIARTY) — is wise in exercising caution. He values the keystone to his arch. But he will consent to let me know.

(LARRABEE *goes to* MADGE.)

MADGE (*going across to* MORIARTY): Professor Moriarty, that information we would like to give — only to you. (*Looking toward* BASSICK).

(MORIARTY *motions* BASSICK *away*. BASSICK *moves a little.* MORIARTY *hands a card and pencil to* MADGE *from desk.* MADGE *writes a name and hands it to* MORIARTY. *He glances at name on card, then looks more closely. Looks up at* MADGE *astonished*.)

MORIARTY: This is an absolute certainty.

LARRABEE: Absolute.

MORIARTY: It means that you have a fortune.

(PRINCE *drinks in every word and look*.)

Had I known this, you should hardly have had such terms.

LARRABEE: Oh well — we don't object to a —

MORIARTY (*interrupting*): The arrangement is made, Mr. Larrabee — I bid you good morning. (*Bowing with dignity and Pulling lever back*.)

(LARRABEE, PRINCE *and* MADGE *move toward door. Bolts, etc., slide back on door.* BASSICK *motions* JOHN, *who stands ready to conduct the party.* BASSICK *crosses to door. All bow a little and go out, followed by* JOHN — *business of door closing, bolts, etc.* BASSICK *turns at door and looks at* MORIARTY.)

Bassick, place your men at nine to-night for Sherlock Holmes house in Baker Street.

BASSICK: You will go there yourself sir!

MORIARTY: I will go there myself — myself (*Revolver out*) I am the one to attend to this.

BASSICK: But this meeting to-night at twelve, to trap Holmes in the Gas Chamber in Swandem Lane.

MORIARTY: If I fail to kill him in Baker Street, we'll trap him to-night in Swandem Lane. Either way I have him, Bassick. I have him. I have him.

(*Lights off gradually but not too slow on this act, and leave light on* MORIARTY'S *face last*.)

(*Music. Swell out forte for change.*)

DARK CHANGE

SCENE 2

SHERLOCK HOLMES'S Apartments in Baker Street. Evening

SCENE II. — In SHERLOCK HOLMES' *rooms in Baker Street — the large drawing-room of his apartments. An open, cheerful room, but not too much decorated. Rather plain. The walls are a plain tint, the ceiling ditto. The furniture is comfortable and goody but not elegant. Books, music, violins, tobacco pouches, pipes, tobacco, etc., are scattered in places about the room with some disorder. Various odd things are hung about. Some very choice pictures and etchings hang on the walls here and there, but the pictures do not have heavy gilt frames. All rather simple. The room gives more an impression of an artist's studio. A wide door up right side to hall (and thus by stairway to street door). Door communicating with bedroom or dining-room. A fireplace with cheerful grate fire burning, throwing a red glow into room. Through a large arch can be seen a laboratory and a table with chemicals and various knick-knacks. The lighting should be arranged so that after the dark change the first thing that becomes visible — even before the rest of the room — is the glow of the fire, the blue flame of the spirit lamp — and* SHERLOCK *HOLMES seated among cushions on the floor before the fire. Light gradually on, but still leaving the effect of only firelight.*

Music stops, just as lights up.

SHERLOCK HOLMES *is discovered on the floor before the fire. He is in a dressing-gown and slippers and has his pipe.* HOLMES *leans against the chesterfield. A violin is upon the chesterfield, and the bow near it, as if recently laid down. Other things Scattered about him. He sits smoking awhile in deep thought. Enter* BILLY, *the boy page, or buttons. He comes down to back of table.*

BILLY: Mrs. 'Udson's compliments, sir, an' she wants to know if she can see you?

HOLMES (*without moving, looking into fire thoughtfully*): Where is Mrs. Hudson?

BILLY: Downstairs in the back kitchen, sir.

HOLMES: My compliments and I don't think she can — from where she is.

BILLY: She'll be very sorry, sir.

HOLMES: Our regret will be mutual.

(BILLY *hesitates*.)

BILLY: She says it was terribly important, sir, as she wants to know what you'll have for your breakfast in the mornin'.

HOLMES: Same.

(*Slight pause*.)

BILLY: Same as when, sir?

HOLMES: This morning.

BILLY: You didn't 'ave nothing, sir — you wasn't 'ere.

HOLMES: Quite so — I won't be here tomorrow.

BILLY: Yes, sir. Was that all, sir?

HOLMES: Quite so.

BILLY: Thank you, sir.

(BILLY *goes out. After long pause bell rings off. Enter* BILLY.)

It's Doctor Watson, sir. You told me as I could always show 'im up.

HOLMES: Well! I should think so. (*Rises and meets* WATSON.)

BILLY: Yes, sir, thank you, sir. Dr. Watson, sir!

(*Enter* DR. WATSON. BILLY, *grinning with pleasure as he passes in, goes out at once*.)

HOLMES (*extending left hand to* WATSON): Ah, Watson, dear fellow.

WATSON (*going to* HOLMES *and taking his hand*): How are you, Holmes?

HOLMES: I'm delighted to see you, my dear fellow, perfectly delighted, upon my word — but — I'm sorry to observe that your wife has left you in this way.

WATSON (*laughing*): She has gone on a little visit. (*Puts hat on chair between bookcases*.) But how did you know?

HOLMES (*goes to laboratory table and puts spirit lamp out, then turns up lamp on table. All lights up*): How do I know? Now, Watson, how absurd for you to ask me such a question as that. How do I know anything? (*Comes down a little way. Gives a very little sniff an instant, smelling something.*) How do I know that you've opened a consulting room and resumed the practice of medicine without letting me hear a word about it? How do I know that you've been getting yourself very wet lately? That you have an extremely careless servant girl — and that you've moved your dressing-table to the other side of your room?

WATSON (*turning and looking at* HOLMES *in astonishment*): Holmes, if you'd lived a few centuries ago, they'd have burned you alive. (*Sits*.)

HOLMES: Such a conflagration would have saved no considerable trouble and expense. (*Strolls over to near fire*.)

WATSON: Tell me, how did you know all that?

HOLMES (*pointing*): Too simple to talk about. (*Pointing at* WATSON'S *shoe*.) Scratches and clumsy cuts — on the side of shoe there just where the fire strikes it, somebody scraped away crusted mud — and did it badly — badly. There's your wet feet and careless servant all on one foot. Face badly shaved on one side — used to be on left — light must have come from other side — couldn't well move your window — must have moved your dressing-table. (*Goes to mantel and gets cocaine, etc.*)

WATSON: Yes, by Jove! But my medical practice — I don’t see how you —

HOLMES (*glancing up grieved*): Now, Watson! How perfectly absurd of you to come marching in here, fairly reeking with the odour of iodoform, and with the black mark of nitrate of silver on the inner side of your right forefinger and ask me how I know —

WATSON (*interrupting with a laugh*): Ha! ha! of course. But how the deuce did you know my wife was away and —

HOLMES (*breaking in*): Where the deuce is your second Waistcoat button, and what the deuce is yesterday’s boutonniere doing in to-day’s lapel — and why the deuce do you wear the expression of a —

WATSON (*toying with a cigarette and laughing*): Ha, ha, ha!

HOLMES: Ho! (*Sneer*.) Elementary! The child’s play of deduction!

(HOLMES *has a neat morocco case and a phial in hand, which he brings to the table and lays carefully upon it. As* WATSON *sees* HOLMES *with the open case he looks restless and apparently*

annoyed at what HOLMES *is about to do, throwing cigarette on table.* HOLMES *opens the case and takes therefrom a hypodermic syringe, carefully adjusting the needle. Fills from phial. Then back left cuff of shirt a little. Pauses, looks at arm or wrist a moment. Inserts needle. Presses piston home*.)

(*Music. A weird bar or two — keeping on a strange pulsation on one note for cocaine business. Begin as* HOLMES *fills syringe.*)

(WATSON *has watched him with an expression of deep anxiety but with effort to restrain himself from speaking.*)

WATSON (*as* HOLMES *puts needle in case again. Finally speaks*.) Which is it to-day? Cocaine or morphine or —

HOLMES: Cocaine, my dear fellow. I’m back to my old love. A seven per cent. solution. (*Offering syringe and phial*.) Woud you like to try some?

WATSON (*emphatically — rise*) Certainly not.

HOLMES (*as if surprised*): Oh! I’m sorry!

WATSON: I have no wish to break my system down before time.

(*Pause*.)

HOLMES: Quite right, my dear Watson — quite right — but, see, my time has come. (*Goes to mantel and replaces case thereon. Throws himself languidly into chesterfield and leans back in luxurious enjoyment of the drug*.)

WATSON (*goes to table, resting hand on upper corner, looking at* HOLMES *seriously)*: Holmes, for months I have seen you use these deadly drugs — in ever-increasing doses. When they lay hold of you there is no end. It must go on, and on — until the finish.

HOLMES (*lying back dreamily*): So must you go on and on eating your breakfast — until the finish.

WATSON (*approaches* HOLMES): Breakfast is food. These are poisons — slow but certain. They involve tissue changes of a most serious nature.

HOLMES: Just what I want. I’m bored to death with my present tissues, and I’m trying to get a brand-new lot.

WATSON (*going near* HOLMES — *putting hand on* HOLMES’ *shoulder*) Ah Holmes — I am trying to save you.

HOLMES (*earnest at once — places right hand on* WATSON’S *arm*): You can’t do it, old fellow — so don’t waste your time.

(*Music stops.*)

(*They look at one another an instant.* WATSON *sees cigarette on table — picks it up and sits*.)

Watson, to change the subject a little. In the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle and — if you will excuse my saying so, to somewhat embellish — a few of my little — adventures, you have occasionally committed the error — or indiscretion — of giving them a certain tinge of romance which struck me as being a trifle out of place. Something like working an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid. I merely refer to this in case you should see fit at some future time — to chronicle the most important and far-reaching case in my career — one upon which I have laboured for nearly fourteen months, and which is now rapidly approaching a singularly diverting climax — the case of Professor Robert Moriarty.

WATSON: Moriarty! I don’t remember ever having heard of the fellow.

HOLMES: The Napoleon of crime. The Napoleon! Sitting motionless like an ugly venomous spider in the centre of his web — but that web having a thousand radiations and the spider knowing every quiver of every one of them.

WATSON: Really! This is very interesting. (*Turns chair facing* HOLMES.)

HOLMES: Ah — but the real interest will come when the Professor begins to realise his position — which he cannot fail to do shortly. By ten o’clock to-morrow night the time will be ripe for the arrests. Then the greatest criminal trial of the century … the clearing up of over forty mysteries … and the rope for every one.

WATSON: Good! What will he do when he sees that you have him?

HOLMES: Do? He will do me the honour, my dear Watson, of turning every resource of his wonderful organization of criminals to the one purpose of my destruction.

WATSON: Why, Holmes, this is a dangerous thing. (*Rises*.)

HOLMES: Dear Watson, it’s perfectly delightful! It saves me any number of doses of those deadly drugs upon which you occasionally favour me with your medical views! My whole life is spent in a series of frantic endeavours to escape from the dreary common places of existence! For a brief period I escape! You should congratulate me!

WATSON: But you could escape them without such serious risks! Your other cases have not been so dangerous, and they were even more interesting. Now, the one you spoke of — the last time I saw you — the recovery of those damaging letters and gifts from a young girl who —

(HOLMES *suddenly rises — stands motionless.* WATSON *looks at him surprised. Brief pause. Then* WATSON *sits in arm-chair*.)

A most peculiar affair as I remember it. You were going to try an experiment of making her betray their hiding-place by an alarm of fire in her own house — and after that —

HOLMES: Precisely — after that.

(*Pause*.)

WATSON: Didn't the plan succeed?

HOLMES: Yes — as far as I've gone.

WATSON: You got Forman into the house as butler?

HOLMES (*nods*): Forman was in as butler.

WATSON: And upon your signal he overturned a lamp in the kitchen — (HOLMES *moves up and down*) — scattered the smoke balls and gave an alarm of fire?

(HOLMES *nods and mutters "Yes" under his breath*)

And the young lady — did she —

HOLMES (*turning and interrupting*): Yes, she did, Watson. (*Going down near him as if he had recovered himself*) The young lady did. It all transpired precisely as planned. I took the packet of papers from its hiding-place — and as I told you I would handed it back to Miss Faulkner.

WATSON: But you never told me why you proposed to hand it back.

HOLMES For a very simple reason my dear Watson That would have been theft for me to take it. The contents of the packet were the absolute property of the young lady.

WATSON: What did you gain by this?

HOLMES: Her confidence, and so far as I was able to secure it, her regard. As it was impossible for me to take possession of the letters, photographs and jewellery in that packet without her consent, my only alternative is to obtain that consent — to induce her to give it to me of her own free will. Its return to her after I had laid hands on it was the first move in this direction. The second will depend entirely upon what transpires to-day. I expect Forman here to report in half an hour.

(*Light hurried footsteps outside. Short quick knock at door and enter* TÉRÉSE *in great haste and excitement.* WATSON *rises and turns and faces her near table.* HOLMES *turns towards fire-place*.)

TÉRÉSE: I beg you to pardon me, sir, ze boy he say to come right up as soon as I come.

HOLMES: Quite right! quite right!

TÉRÉSE: Ah! I fear me zere is trouble — Messieurs — ze butlair — you assesstant — ze one who sent me to you —

HOLMES: Forman? (*Turning to her*.)

TÉRÉSE: Heem! Forman. Zere ees somesing done to heem! I fear to go down to see.

HOLMES: Down where?

(WATSON *watches*.)

TÉRÉSE: Ze down. (*Gesture*.) Ze cellaire of zat house. Eet ees a dreadful place. He deed not come back. He went down — he deed not return. (*Business of anguish*.)

(HOLMES *goes to table — rings bell and takes revolver from drawer and slides it into his hip pocket, at same time unfastening dressing-gown.*)

HOLMES (*during business*): Who sent him down?

TÉRÉSE: M’sjeur of ze house, M’sieur Chetwood.

HOLMES: Larrabee?

TÉRESE: Yes.

HOLMES (*during business*): Has he been down there long?

TÉRÉSE: No — for I soon suspect — ze dreadful noise was heard. Oh — (*covers face*) — ze noise! Ze noise!

HOLMES: What noise? (*Goes to her and seizes her arm*.)

TÉRÉSE: Ze noise!

HOLMES: Try to be calm and answer me. What did it sound like?

TÉRÉSE: Ze dreadful cry of a man who eez struck down by a deadly seeng.

(*Enter* BILLY)

HOLMES: Billy! Coat — boots, and order a cab — quick! (*Back again to table, takes a second revolver out*.)

BILLY (*darting off at door*) Yes, sir.

HOLMES (*to* TÉRÉSE) Did anyone follow him down?

(BILLY *is back in a second*.)

TÉRÉSE: I did not see.

HOLMES: Don’t wait. The cab.

(BILLY *shoots off having placed coat over chesterfield and boots on floor*)

Take this Watson and come with me. (*Handing* WATSON *a revolver.* WATSON *advances a step to meet* HOLMES *and takes revolver*.)

TÉRÉSE: I had not better go also?

HOLMES: No … Wait here! (*Ready to go. About to take off dressing gown*)

(*Hurried footsteps heard outside*)

(*Pause*.) Ha! I hear Forman coming now.

(*Enter* FORMAN.)

TÉRÉSE (*seeing* FORMAN — *under her breath*) Ah! (*Backing a little*)

(FORMAN *coming rapidly on is covered with black coal stains, and his clothing otherwise stained. He has a bad bruise on forehead. But he must not be made to look grotesque. There must be no suspicion of comedy about his entrance. Also he must not be torn, as* BILLY *is later in the scene. HOLMES just above table stops taking off his dressing gown, slips it back on shoulders again.*)

FORMAN (*to* HOLMES *in an entirely matter of fact tone*): Nothing more last night, sir. After you left, Prince came in, they made a start for her room to get the package away, but I gave the three knocks with an axe on the floor beams as you directed, and they didn't go any farther. This morning, a little after nine —

HOLMES: One moment.

FORMAN: Yes, sir?

HOLMES (*quietly turns to* TÉRÉSE): Mademoiselle — step into that room and rest yourself. (*Indicating bedroom door.*)

TÉRÉSE (*who has been deeply interested in* FORMAN'S *report*): Ah! (*Shaking head*.) I am not tired, Monsieur.

HOLMES: Step in and walk about, then. I'll let you know when you are required.

TÉRÉSE (*after an instant's pause sees it*): Oui, Monsieur. (*Goes out.*)

(HOLMES *goes over and quickly closes the door after her — he then turns to* WATSON, *but remains at the door with right ear alert to catch any sound from within.*)

HOLMES: Take a look at his head, Watson. (*Listens at door*.)

(WATSON *at once goes to* FORMAN.)

FORMAN: It’s nothing at all.

HOLMES: Take a look at his head, Watson.

WATSON: An ugly bruise, but not dangerous. (*Examining head*.)

(WATSON *goes quickly and stands near end of chesterfield facing around to* FORMAN.)

HOLMES: Very well … At a little after nine, you say — (HOLMES *has attention on door, where* TÉRÉSE *went off while listening to* FORMAN — *but not in such a marked way as to take the attention off from what he says, and after a few seconds sits on chesterfield*)

FORMAN: Yes, sir! (*Coming down a little*.) This morning a little after nine, Larrabee and his wife drove away and she returned about eleven without him. A little later, old Leuftner came and the two went to work in the library. I got a look at them from the outside and found they were making up a counterfeit of the Package we’re working for! You’ll have to watch for some sharp trick, sir.

HOLMES: They’ll have to watch for the trick, my dear Forman. And Larrabee what of him?

FORMAN: He came back a little after three

HOLMES: How did he seem?

FORMAN: Under great excitement, sir.

HOLMES: Any marked resentment towards you?

FORMAN: I think there was, sir — though he tried not to show it.

HOLMES: He has consulted some one outside. Was the Larrabee woman’s behaviour different also?

FORMAN: Now I come to think of it, she gave me an ugly look as she came in.

HOLMES: Ah, an ugly look. She was present at the consultation. They were advised to get you out of the way. He sent you into the cellar on some pretext. You were attacked in the dark by two men — possibly three — and received a bad blow from a sand club. You managed to strike down one of your assailants with a stone or piece of timber and escaped from the others in the dark crawling out through a coal grating.

FORMAN That's what took place sir.

HOLMES: They've taken in a partner, and a dangerous one at that. He not only directed this conspiracy against you, but he advised the making of the counterfeit package as well. Within a very short time I shall receive an offer from Larrabee to sell the package of letters. He will indicate that Miss Faulkner changed her mind, and has concluded to get what she can for them. He will desire to meet me on the subject — and will then endeavour to sell me his bogus package for a large sum of money. After that —

(*Enter* BILLY *with a letter*)

BILLY: Letter, sir! Most important letter, sir! (*After giving* HOLMES *letter, he stands waiting*.)

HOLMES: Unless I am greatly mistaken — the said communication is at hand. (L*ightly waves letter across before face once getting the scent*.) It is. Read it, Watson, there's a good fellow, my eyes — (*With a motion across eyes*. *Half smile.*) You know, cocaine — and all those things you like so much.

(BILLY *goes with letter to* WATSON. WATSON *takes letter and up to lamp*.)

WATSON (*opens letter and reads*): "Dear Sir."

(*After* WATSON *is at lamp,* FORMAN *waits.*)

HOLMES: Who — thus — addresses me? (*Slides further on to chesterfield, supporting head on pillows*.)

WATSON (*glances at signature*): “James Larrabee.”

HOLMES (*whimsically*): What a surprise! And what has James to say this evening?

WATSON: “Dear Sir.”

HOLMES: I hope he won’t say that again.

WATSON: “I have the honour to inform you that Miss Faulkner has changed her mind regarding the letters, etc., which you wish to obtain, and has decided to dispose of them for a monetary consideration. She has placed them in my hands for this purpose, and if you are in a position to offer a good round sum, and to pay it down at once in cash, the entire lot is yours. If you wish to negotiate, however, it must be to-night, at the house of a friend of mine, in the city. At eleven o’clock you will be at the Guards’ Monument at the foot of Waterloo Place. You will see a cab with wooden shutters to the windows. Enter it and the driver will bring you to my friend’s house. If you have the cab followed, or try any other underhand trick, you won’t get what you want. Let me know your decision. Yours truly, James Larrabee.”

(HOLMES *during the reading of the letter begins to write something in a perfectly leisurely way. The light of the fire is upon him, shining across the room — on his left — as he writes*.)

HOLMES: Now see if I have the points. To-night, eleven o’clock — Guards’ Monument — cab with wooden shutters. No one to come with me. No one to follow cab — or I don’t get what I want.

WATSON: Quite right.

HOLMES: Ah!

WATSON: But this cab with the wooden shutters. (*Coming down and placing letter on table.*)

HOLMES: A little device to keep me from seeing where I am driven. Billy!

BILLY (*going to* HOLMES *at once*): Yes, sir.

HOLMES (*reaching out letter to* BILLY *back of him without looking*): Who brought it?

BILLY: It was a woman, sir.

HOLMES (*slight dead stop as he is handing letter*): Ah — old young? (*He does not look round for these questions, but faces the was front or nearly so*)

BILLY: Werry old sir.

HOLMES: In a cab?

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Seen the driver before?

BILLY: Yes sir — but I cant think where.

HOLMES (*rising*): Hand this over to the old lady — apologize for the delay and look at the driver again.

BILLY (*takes letter*): Yes sir. (*Goes out*)

WATSON: My dear Holmes — you did not say you would go?

HOLMES Certainly I did.

WATSON But it is the counterfeit.

HOLMES (*moves towards bedroom door*) The counterfeit is what I want.

WATSON: Why so?

HOLMES (*turning to* WATSON *an instant)* Because with it I shall obtain the original (*Turns and speaks off at door.*) Mademoiselle! (*Turns back*)

WATSON: But this fellow means mischief.

(*Enter* TÉRESE *She comes into and stands a little way inside the room*)

HOLMES (*facing* WATSON — *touching himself lightly*): This fellow means the same.

(*As* HOLMES *turns away to* TÉRÉSE, WATSON *crosses and stands with back to fire*)

(*To* TÉRÉSE) Be so good Mademoiselle as to listen to every word. To-night at twelve o'clock I meet Mr. Larrabee and purchase from him the false bundle of letters to which you just now heard us refer, as you were listening at the keyhole of the door.

TÉRÉSE (*slightly confused but staring blankly*) Oui, Monsieur.

HOLMES: I wish Miss Faulkner to know at once that I propose to buy this package to night.

TÉRÉSE: I will tell her, Monsieur.

HOLMES: That is my wish. But do not tell her that I know this packet and its contents to be counterfeit. She is to suppose that I think I am buying the genuine.

TÉRÉSE: Oui, Monsieur, je comprends. When you purchase you think you have the real.

HOLMES: Precisely. (*Motions her up to door and moving towards door with her*.) One thing more. Tomorrow evening I shall want you to accompany her to this place, here. Sir Edward Leighton and Count von Stalburg will be here to receive the package from me. However, you will receive further instructions as to this in the morning.

TÉRÉSE: Oui, Monsieur. (*Turns and goes out at once*.)

HOLMES: Forman.

FORMAN: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Change to your beggar disguise No. 14 and go through every place in the Riverside District. Don't stop till you get a clue to this new partner of the Larrabees. I must have that. (*Turns away towards* WATSON.) I must have that.

FORMAN: Very well, sir. (*Just about to go.*)

(*Enter* BILLY.)

BILLY: If you please, sir, there’s a man a-waitin’ at the street door — and ‘e says ‘e must speak to Mr. Forman, sir, as quick as ‘e can.

(HOLMES — *who was moving — stops suddenly and stands motionless — eyes front. Pause*.)

(*Music. Danger. Melodramatic. Very low. Agitato. B String.*)

HOLMES (*after a pause*): We’d better have a look at that man, Billy, show him up.

BILLY: ‘E can’t come up, sir—’e’s a-watchin’ a man in the Street. ‘E says ‘e’s from Scotland Yard.

FORMAN (*going toward door*): I’d better see what it is, sir.

HOLMES: No!

(FORMAN *stops. Pause. Music heard throughout this pause, but without swelling forte in the least.* HOLMES *stands motionless a moment*)

Well — (*a motion indicating* FORMAN *to go*) — take a look at first. Be ready for anything.

FORMAN: Trust me for that, sir. (*Goes out*.)

HOLMES: Billy, see what he does.

BILLY: Yes, sir.

(HOLMES *stands an instant thinking*)

WATSON: This is becoming interesting.

(HOLMES *does not reply He goes up to near door and listens then moves to window and glances down to street then turns goes down to table*)

Look here Holmes you’ve been so kind as to give me a half look into this case —

HOLMES (*looking up at him*): What case?

WATSON: This strange case of — Miss —

HOLMES: Quite so. One moment my dear fellow (*Rings bell*.)

(*After slight wait enter* BILLY)

Mr. Forman — is he there still?

BILLY: No, sir—’e’s gone. (*Second’s pause*.)

HOLMES: That’s all.

BILLY: Yes sir. Thank you sir. (*Goes out*)

(*Music stops*)

HOLMES: As you were saying, Watson. (*Eyes front*.) strange case — of — (*Stops but does not change position. As if listening or thinking*)

WATSON: Of Miss Faulkner.

HOLMES (*abandoning further anxiety and giving attention to* WATSON): Precisely. This strange case of Miss Faulkner. (*Eyes down an instant as he recalls it*)

WATSON: You’ve given me some idea of it. Now don’t you it would be only fair to let me have the rest?

(HOLMES *looks at him*)

HOLMES: What shall I tell you?

WATSON: Tell me what you propose to do with that counterfeit package — which you are going to risk your life to obtain.

(HOLMES *looks at* WATSON *an instant before speaking*.)

HOLMES: I intend, with the aid of the counterfeit, to make her willingly hand me the genuine. I shall accomplish this by a piece of trickery and deceit of which I am heartily ashamed — and which I would never have undertaken if I — if I had known her — as I do now (*Looks to the front absently*.) It's too bad. She's — she's rather a nice girl, Watson. (*Goes over to mantel and gets a pipe*.)

WATSON (*following* HOLMES *with his eyes*): Nice girl, is she?

(HOLMES *nods "Yes" to* WATSON. *Brief pause. He turns with pipe in hands and glances towards* WATSON, *then down*.)

Then you think that possibly —

(*Enter* BILLY *quickly.*)

BILLY: I beg pardon, sir, Mr. Forman's just sent over from the chemist's on the corner to say 'is 'ead is a-painin' 'im a bit, an' would Dr. Watson —

(WATSON*, on hearing his name, turns and looks in direction of* BILLY)

— kindly step over and get 'im something to put on it.

WATSON (*moving at once towards door*): Yes — certainly — I'll go at once. (*Picking up hat off chair*.) That's singular. (*Stands puzzled.*) It didn't look like anything serious. (*At door*.) I'll be back in a minute, Holmes. (*Goes out.*)

(HOLMES *says nothing*.)

HOLMES: Billy.

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Who brought that message from Forman?

BILLY: Boy from the chemist's, sir.

HOLMES: Yes, of course, but which boy?

BILLY: Must-a-bin a new one, sir — I ain't never seen 'im before.

(*Music. Danger. Melodramatic. Very low. Agitato*.)

HOLMES: Quick, Billy, run down and look after the doctor. If the boy's gone and there's a man with him it means mischief. Let me know, quick. Don't stop to come up, ring the door bell. I'll hear it. Ring it loud. Quick now.

BILLY: Yes, sir. (*Goes out quickly*.)

(HOLMES *waits motionless a moment, listening*.)

(*Music heard very faintly*.)

(HOLMES *moves quickly towards door. When half-way to the door he stops suddenly, listening; then begins to glide backward toward table, stops and listens — eyes to the front; turns towards door listening. Pipe in left hand — waits — sees pipe in hand — picks up match — lights pipe, listening, and suddenly shouts of warning from* BILLY *— turns — at the same time picking up revolver from off table and puts in pocket of dressing-gown, with his hand clasping it.* HOLMES *at once assumes easy attitude, but keeps eyes on door. Enter* MORIARTY. *He walks in at door very quietly and deliberately. Stops just within doorway, and looks fixedly at* HOLMES, *then moves forward a little way. His right hand behind his back. As* MORIARTY *moves forward,* HOLMES *makes slight motion for the purpose of keeping him covered with revolver in his pocket.* MORIARTY, *seeing what* HOLMES *is doing, stops*.)

MORIARTY (*very quiet low voice*): It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one's dressing-gown.

HOLMES: You'll be taken from here to the hospital if you keep that hand behind you.

(*After slight pause* MORIARTY *slowly takes his hand from behind his back and holds it with the other in front of him*.)

In that case, the table will do quite as well. (*Places his revolver on the table*.)

MORIARTY: You evidently don't know me.

HOLMES (*takes pipe out of mouth, holding it. With very slight motion toward revolver*): I think it quite evident that I do. Please take a chair, Professor. (*Indicating arm-chair*.) I can spare five minutes — if you have anything to say.

(*Very slight pause — then* MORIARTY *moves his right hand as if to take something from inside his coat. Stops instantly on* HOLMES *covering him with revolver, keeping hand exactly where it was stopping*.)

What were you about to do?

MORIARTY: Look at my watch.

HOLMES: I'll tell you when the five minutes is up.

(*Slight pause*. MORIARTY *comes slowly forward. He advances to back of arm-chair. Stands motionless there an instant, his eyes on* HOLMES. *He then takes off his hat, and stoops slowly, putting it on floor, eyeing* HOLMES *the while. He then moves down a little to right of chair, by its side*. HOLMES *now places revolver on table, but before he has quite let go of it,* MORIARTY *raises his right hand, whereupon* HOLMES *quietly takes the revolver back and holds it at his side.* MORIARTY *has stopped with right hand near his throat, seeing* HOLMES' *business with revolver. He now slowly pulls away a woolen muffler from his throat and stands again with hands down before him.* HOLMES' *forefinger motionless on table.* MORIARTY *moves a little in front of chair. This movement is only a step or two. As he makes it* HOLMES *moves simultaneously on the other side of the table so that he keeps the revolver between them on the table. That is the object of this business.*)

MORIARTY: All that I have to say has already crossed your mind.

HOLMES: My answer thereto has already crossed yours.

MORIARTY: It is your intention to pursue this case against me?

HOLMES: That is my intention to the very end.

MORIARTY: I regret this — not so much on my own account — but on yours.

HOLMES: I share your regrets, Professor, but solely because of the rather uncomfortable position it will cause you to occupy.

MORIARTY: May I inquire to what position you are pleased to allude, Mr. Holmes?

(HOLMES *motions a man being hanged with his left hand — slight Pause. A tremor of passion.* MORIARTY *slowly advances towards* HOLMES. *He stops instantly as* HOLMES' *hand goes to his revolver, having only approached him a step or two*.)

And have you the faintest idea that you would be permitted to live to see the day?

HOLMES: As to that, I do not particularly care, so that I might bring you to see it.

(MORIARTY *makes a sudden impulsive start towards* HOLMES, *but stops on being covered with revolver. He has now come close to the table on the other side of* HOLMES. *This tableau is held briefly*.)

MORIARTY (*passionately but in a low tone*): You will never bring me to see it. You will find — (*He stops, recollecting himself as HOLMES looks at him — changes to quieter tone*.) Ah! you are a bold man Mr. Holmes to insinuate such a thing to my face — (*turning towards front*) — but it is the boldness born of ignorance. (*Turning still further away from* HOLMES *in order to get his back to him and after doing so suddenly raising his right hand to breast he is again stopped with hand close to pocket by hearing the noise of HOLMES'S revolver behind him. He holds that position for a moment then passes the matter off by feeling muffler as if adjusting it. He mutters to himself*)

You'll never bring me to see it, you'll never bring me to see it (*Then begins to move in front of table still keeping his back towards* HOLMES. *Business as he moves forward of stopping suddenly on hearing the noise of revolver sliding along table then when in front of table slowly turns so that he brings* *his hands into view of* HOLMES *then a slight salute with hand and bow and back slowly with dignity into chair*)

(*Business of* HOLMES *seating himself on stool opposite* MORIARTY, *revolver business and coming motionless*)

(*After* HOLMES'S *business.*) I tell you it is the boldness born of ignorance. Do you think that I would be here if I had not made the streets quite safe in every respect?

HOLMES (*shaking head*): Oh no! I could never so grossly overestimate your courage as that.

MORIARTY: Do you imagine that your friend the doctor, and your man Forman will soon return?

HOLMES: Possibly not.

MORIARTY: So it leaves us quite alone — doesn't it, Mr. Holmes — quite alone — so that we can talk the matter over quietly and not be disturbed. In the first place I wish to call your attention to a few memoranda which I have jotted down — (*suddenly put both hands to breast pocket*) — which you will find —

HOLMES: Look out! Take your hands away.

(*Music: Danger pp*)

(MORIARTY *again stopped with his hands at breast pocket*)

Get your hands down.

(MORIARTY *does not lower his hands at first request*.)

A little further away from the memorandum book you are talking about.

MORIARTY (*lowers hands to his lap. Slight pause, raising hands again slowly as he speaks*): Why, I was merely about to —

HOLMES: Well, merely don't do it.

MORIARTY (*remonstratingly — his hands still up near breast*): But I would like to show you a —

HOLMES: I don’t want to see it.

MORIARTY: But if you will allow me —

HOLMES: I don’t care for it at all. I don’t require any notebooks. If you want it so badly we’ll have someone get it for you.

(MORIARTY *slowly lowers hands again*.)

(*Rings bell on table with left hand*.) I always like to save my guests unnecessary trouble.

MORIARTY (*after quite a pause*): I observe that your boy does not answer the bell.

HOLMES: No. But I have an idea that he will before long.

MORIARTY (*leaning towards* HOLMES *and speaking with subdued rage and significance*): It may possibly be longer than you think, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES (*intensely*): What! That boy!

MORIARTY (*hissing at* HOLMES): Yes, your boy.

(*Hold the tableau for a moment, the two men scowling at each other.* HOLMES *slowly reaching left hand out to ring bell again.* MORIARTY *begins to raise right hand slowly towards breast pocket, keeping it concealed beneath his muffler as far as possible. On slight motion of* HOLMES’ *left hand, he lowers it again, giving up the attempt this time.*)

HOLMES: At least we will try the bell once more, Professor. (*Rings bell*.)

(*Short wait*.)

MORIARTY (*after pause*): Doesn’t it occur to you that he may Possibly have been detained, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES: It does. But I also observe that you are in very much the same predicament. (*Pause*.)

(HOLMES *rings bell for the third time. Noise on stairway outside. Enter* BILLY *with part of his coat, and with sleeves of shirt and waistcoat badly torn*)

(*Music stops*)

BILLY (*up near door*): I beg pardon, sir — someone tried to ‘old me sir! (*Panting for breath*)

HOLMES: It is quite evident however that he failed to do so.

BILLY: Yes sir—’e’s got my coat sir but ‘e ‘asn’t got me!

HOLMES: Billy!

BILLY (*cheerfully*): Yes sir (*Still out of breath*)

HOLMES: The gentleman I am pointing out to you with this six-shooter desires to have us get something out of his left hand coat pocket.

(MORIARTY *gives a very slight start or movement of right hand to breast pocket, getting it almost to his pocket, then recollecting himself, seeing that* HOLMES *has got him covered*)

Ah, I thought so. Left-hand coat pocket. As he is not feeling quite himself to-day, and the exertion might prove injurious, suppose you attend to it.

BILLY: Yes sir (*He goes quickly to* MORIARTY *puts hand in his pocket and draws out a bull dog revolver*) Is this it sir?

HOLMES: It has the general outline of being it. Quite so. Put it on the table.

(MORIARTY *makes a grab for it*)

Not there Billy. Look out. Push it a little further this way.

(BILLY *does so placing it so that it is within easy reach of* HOLMES.)

HOLMES: That’s more like it.

BILLY: Shall I see if he’s got another sir?

HOLMES: Why, Billy, you surprise me, after the gentleman has taken the trouble to inform you that he hasn’t.

BILLY: When sir?

HOLMES: When he made a snatch for this one. Now that we have your little memorandum book, Professor, do you think of anything else you’d like before Billy goes?

(MORIARTY *does not reply*.)

Any little thing that you’ve got, that you want? No! Ah, I am sorry that’s all, Billy.

(*pause.* MORIARTY *motionless, eyes on* HOLMES. HOLMES *puts his own revolver in his pocket quietly.* MORIARTY *remains motionless, his eyes on* HOLMES, *waiting for a chance*.)

BILLY: Thank you, sir. (*Goes out*.)

(HOLMES *carelessly picks up* MORIARTY’S *weapon, turns it over in his hands a little below table for a moment, then tosses it back on table again — during which business* MORIARTY *looks front savagely*.)

HOLMES (*tapping revolver with pipe*): Rather a rash project of yours Moriarty — even though you have made the street quite safe in every respect — to make use of that thing — so early in the evening and in this part of the town.

MORIARTY: Listen to me. On the 4th of January you crossed my path — on the 23rd you incommoded me. And now, at the close of April, I find myself placed in such a position through your continual interference that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty.

HOLMES: Have you any suggestion to make?

MORIARTY (*head swaying from side to side*): No! (*Pause and look fiercely at* HOLMES.) I have no suggestion to make. I have a fact to state. If you do not drop it at once your life is not worth that. (*Snap of finger*.)

HOLMES: I shall be pleased to drop it — at ten o'clock to-morrow night.

MORIARTY: Why then?

HOLMES: Because at that hour, Moriarty … your life will not be worth that, (*A snap of finger*.) You will be under arrest.

MORIARTY: At that hour, Sherlock Holmes, your eyes will be closed in death.

(*Both look at one another motionless an instant*.)

HOLMES (*rising as if rather bored*): I am afraid, Professor, that in the pleasure of this conversation I am neglecting more important business. (*Turns away to mantel and business of looking for match, etc*.)

(MORIARTY *rises slowly, picks up hat, keeping his eyes on* HOLMES. *Suddenly catches sight of revolver on table — pause — and putting hat on table.*)

MORIARTY (*nearing* HOLMES *and looking towards door*): I came here this evening to see if peace could not be arranged between us.

HOLMES: Ah yes (*Smiling pleasantly and pressing tobacco in pipe*.) I saw that. That's rather good.

MORIARTY (*passionately*): You have seen fit not only to reject my proposals, but to make insulting references coupled with threats of arrest.

HOLMES: Quite so! Quite so! (*Lights match and holds it to pipe*)

MORIARTY (*moving a little so as to be nearer table*): Well (*slyly picking up revolver*) — you have been warned of your danger — you do not heed that warning — perhaps you will heed this!

(*Making a sudden plunge and aiming at HOLMES' head rapidly snaps the revolver in quick attempt to fire*)

(HOLMES *turns quietly toward him still holding match to pipe so that the last snap of hammer is directly in his face. Very slight pause on*

MORIARTY *being unable to fire — and back up at same time boiling with rage*.)

HOLMES: Oh! ha! — here! (*As if recollecting something. Tosses away match and feeling quickly in left pocket of dressing gown brings out some cartridges and tosses them carelessly on table towards* MORIARTY.) I didn’t suppose you’d want to use that thing again, so I took all your cartridges out and put them in my pocket. You’ll find them all there, Professor. (*Reaches over and rings bell on table with right hand.*)

(*Enter* BILLY)

Billy!

BILLY: Yes, sir!

HOLMES: Show this gentleman nicely to the door.

BILLY: Yes sir! This way sir! (*Standing within door*)

(*PROFESSOR MORIARTY looks at HOLMES a moment, then flings revolver down and across the table, clenches fist in HOLMES’ face, turns boiling with rage, picks hat up, and exits quickly at door, muttering aloud as he goes*.)

HOLMES (*after exit of* MORIARTY): Billy! Come here!

BILLY: Yes, sir! (BILLY *comes quickly down.*)

HOLMES: Billy! You’re a good boy!

BILLY: Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! (*Stands grinning up at* HOLMES.)

(*The lights go out suddenly*.)

(*No music at end of this Act.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

The Stepney Gas Chamber. Midnight.

SCENE. — The Gas Chamber at Stepney. A large, dark, grimy room on an upper floor of an old building backing on wharves etc. Plaster cracking off, masonry piers or chimney showing. As uncanny and gruesome appearance as possible. Heavy beams and timbers showing. Door leads to the landing and then to the entrance. Another door leads to a small cupboard. The walls of the cupboard can be seen when the door is opened. Large window, closed. Grimy and dirty glass so nothing can be seen through it. The window is nailed with spike nails securely shut. Black backing — no light behind. Strong bars outside back of windows, to show when window is broken. These bars must not be seen through the glass. Trash all over the room. The only light in the room on the rise of the curtain is from a dim lantern — carried on by McTAGUE.

Characteristic Music for Curtain.

CRAIGIN *and* LEARY *are discovered.* CRAIGIN *is sitting on a box. He sits glum and motionless, waiting.* LEARY *is sitting on table his feet on the chair in front of it.*

McTAGUE *enters with safety lamp. He stops just within a moment, glancing around in the dimness. Soon moves up near a masonry pier, a little above the door, and leans against it, waiting.* CRAIGIN, LEARY *and* McTAGUE *are dressed in dark clothes and wear felt -soled shoes.*

LEARY: What’s McTague doing ‘ere?

McTAGUE: I was sent ‘ere.

(*All dialogue in this part of Act in low tones, but distinct, to give a weird effect, echoing through the large grimy room among the deep shadows*.)

LEARY: I thought the Seraph was with us in this job.

CRAIGIN: ‘E ain’t.

LEARY: Who was the last you put the gas on?

(*Pause*.)

CRAIGIN: I didn’t ‘ear ‘is name. (*Pause*.) ‘E’d been ‘oldin’ back money on a ‘aul out some railway place.

(*Pause*.)

McTAGUE: What’s this ‘ere job he wants done? (*Sits on box, placing lamp on floor by his side*.)

(*Pause*.)

CRAIGIN: I ain’t been told.

(*Pause*.)

LEARY: As long as it’s ‘ere we know what it’s likely to be.

(*Door opens slowly and hesitatingly. Enter* SID PRINCE. *He stands just within door, and looks about a little suspiciously as if uncertain what to do. Pause. He notices that the door is slowly closing behind him and quietly holds it back. But he must not burlesque this movement with funny business.* McTAGUE *holds lantern up to see who it is, at the same time rising and coming down near* PRINCE.)

PRINCE: Does any one of you blokes know if this is the place where I meet Alf Bassick?

(*Pause. Neither of the other men take notice of* PRINCE. McTAGUE *goes back to where he was sitting before* PRINCE’S *entrance.*)

(*After waiting a moment.*) From wot you say, I take it you don’t.

CRAIGIN: We ain’t knowin’ no such man. ‘E may be ‘ere and ‘e may not.

PRINCE: Oh! (*Comes a little farther into room and lets the door close.*) It’s quite right then, thank you. (*Pause. No one speaks.*) Nice old place to find, this ‘ere is. (*No one answers him*.) And when you do find it — (*looks about*) — I can’t say it’s any too cheerful. (*He thereupon pulls out a cigarette-case, puts a cigarette in his mouth, and feels in pocket for matches. Finds one. About to light it. Has moved a few steps during this*.)

CRAIGIN: Here! ...

(PRINCE *stops*.)

Don’t light that! … It ain’t safe!

(PRINCE *stops motionless, where above speech caught him, for an instant. Pause.* PRINCE *begins to turn his head slowly and only a little way, glances carefully about, as if expecting to see tins of nitro-glycerine. He sees nothing on either side, and finally turns towards* CRAIGIN.)

PRINCE: If it ain’t askin’ too much wot’s the matter with the place? It looks all roight to me.

CRAIGIN: Well don’t light no matches, and it’ll stay lookin’ the same.

(*Pause. Door opens, and* BASSICK *enters hurriedly. He looks quickly about*.)

BASSICK: Oh, Prince, you’re here. I was looking for you outside.

PRINCE: You told me to be ‘ere, sir. That was ‘ow the last arrangement stood.

BASSICK: Very well! (*Going across* PRINCE *and glancing about to see that the other men are present*.) You’ve got the rope Craigin?

(*Voices are still kept low*.)

CRAIGIN (*pointing to bunch of loose rope on floor near him*): It’s ‘ere.

BASSICK: That you, Leary?

LEARY: ‘Ere, sir!

BASSICK: And McTague?

McTAGUE: ‘Ere, sir!

BASSICK: You want to be very careful with it to-night — you’ve got a tough one.

CRAIGIN: You ain’t said who, as I’ve ‘eard.

BASSICK (*low voice*): Sherlock Holmes.

(*Brief pause*.)

CRAIGIN (*after the pause*): You mean that, sir?

BASSICK: Indeed, I do!

CRAIGIN: We’re goin’ to count ‘im out.

BASSICK: Well, if you don’t and he gets away — I’m sorry for you, that’s all.

CRAIGIN: I’ll be cursed glad to put the gas on ‘im — I tell you that.

LEARY: I say the same myself.

(*Sound of* MORIARTY *and* LARRABEE *coming*.)

BASSICK: Sh! Professor Moriarty’s coming.

(McTAGUE *places lamp on box.*)

LEARY: Not the guv’nor?

BASSICK: Yes. He wanted to see this.

(*The three men retire a little up stage, waiting.* BASSICK *moves to meet* MORIARTY. PRINCE *moves up out of way. Door opens. Enter* MORIARTY, *followed by* LARRABEE. *Door slowly closes behind them.* LARRABEE *waits a moment near door and then retires up near* PRINCE. *They watch the following scene. All speeches low — quiet — in undertone*.)

MORIARTY: Where’s Craigin?

(CRAIGIN *steps forward*.)

Have you got your men?

CRAIGIN: All ‘ere, sir.

MORIARTY: No mistakes to-night.

CRAIGIN: I’ll be careful o’ that.

MORIARTY (*quick glance about*): That door, Bassick. (*Points up, back to audience.*)

BASSICK: A small cupboard, sir. (*Goes quickly up and opens the door wide to show it.*)

(LEARY *catches up lantern and swings it near the cupboard door*.)

MORIARTY: No outlet?

BASSICK: None whatever, sir.

(LEARY *swings lantern almost inside cupboard to let* MORIARTY *See. All this dialogue in very low tones, but distinct and Impressive.* BASSICK *closes door after lantern business*.)

MORIARTY (*turns and points*): That window?

BASSICK (*moving over a little*): Nailed down, sir!

(LEARY *turns and swings the lantern near window so that* MORIARTY *can see.*)

MORIARTY: A man might break the glass.

BASSICK: If he did that he’d come against heavy iron bars outside.

CRAIGIN: We’ll ‘ave ‘im tied down afore ‘e could break any glass sir.

MORIARTY (*who has turned to* CRAIGIN): Ah! You’ve used it before. Of course you know if it’s airtight?

BASSICK: Every crevice is caulked sir.

MORIARTY (*turns and points as if at something directly over footlights*) And that door?

(LEARY *comes down and gives lantern a quick swing as if lighting place indicated*)

BASSICK (*from same position*): The opening is planked up solid sir as you can see and double thickness.

MORIARTY: Ah! (*Satisfaction. Glances at door through which he entered*) When the men turn the gas on him they leave by that door?

BASSICK: Yes sir.

MORIARTY: It can be made quite secure?

BASSICK: Heavy bolts on the outside sir and solid bars over all.

MORIARTY: Let me see how quick you can operate them.

BASSICK: They tie the man down, sir — there's no need to hurry.

MORIARTY (*same voice*) Let me see how quick you can operate them.

BASSICK (*quick order*): Leary! (*Motions him to door*)

LEARY (*handing lamp to* CRAIGIN): Yes sir! (*He jumps to and goes out closing it at once and immediately the sound of sliding bolts and the dropping of bars are heard from outside*)

(*This is a very important effect as it is repeated at the end of the Act.* CRAIGIN *places lamp on box*)

MORIARTY: That s all.

(*Sounds of bolts withdrawn and* LEARY *enters and waits*)

(*Goes to* CRAIGIN.) Craigin — you'll take your men outside that door and wait till Mr. Larrabee has had a little business interview with the gentleman.

Take them up the passage to the left so Holmes does not see them as he comes in. (*To* BASSICK.) Who's driving the cab to night?

BASSICK: I sent O'Hagan. His orders are to drive him about for an hour so he doesn't know the distance or the direction he's going, and then stop at the small door at upper Swandem Lane. He's going to get him out there and show him to this door.

MORIARTY: The cab windows were covered, of course?

BASSICK: Wooden shutters, sir, bolted and secure. There isn't a place he can see through the size of a pin.

MORIARTY (*satisfied*): Ah! … (*Looks about.*) We must have a lamp here.

BASSICK: Better not, sir — there might be some gas left.

MORIARTY: You've got a light there. (*Pointing to miner's safety lamp on box.*)

BASSICK: It's a safety lamp, sir.

MORIARTY: A safety lamp! You mustn't have that here! The moment he sees that he'll know what you're doing and make trouble. (*Sniffs.*) There's hardly any gas. Go and tell Lascar we must have a good lamp.

(BASSICK *goes out*.)

(*Looks about.*) Bring that table over here.

(CRAIGIN *and* McTAGUE *bring table*.)

Now, Craigin — and the rest of you — One thing remember. No shooting to-night! Not a single shot. It can be heard in the alley below. The first thing is to get his revolver away before he has a chance to use it. Two of you attract his attention in front — the other come up on him from behind and snatch it out of his pocket. Then you have him. Arrange that, Craigin.

CRAIGIN: I'll attend to it, sir.

(*The three men retire. Enter* BASSICK *with large lamp. Glass shade to lamp of whitish colour.* BASSICK *crosses to table and Places lamp on it*.)

BASSICK (*to* McTAGUE): Put out that lamp.

(McTAGUE *is about to pick up lamp*.)

CRAIGIN: Stop!

(McTAGUE *waits*.)

We'll want it when the other's taken away.

BASSICK: He mustn't see it, understand.

MORIARTY: Don't put it out — cover it with something.

CRAIGIN: Here! (*He goes up, takes lantern, and pulling out a large box from several others places lantern within and pushes the open side against the wall so that no light from lantern can be seen from front*.)

MORIARTY: That will do.

BASSICK (*approaching* MORIARTY): You mustn't stay longer, sir. O'Hagan might be a little early.

MORIARTY: Mr. Larrabee — (*Moving a step forward*.) You understand! — they wait for you.

LARRABEE (*low — quiet*): I understand, sir.

MORIARTY: I give you this opportunity to get what you can for your trouble. But anything that is found on him after you have finished — is subject — (*glances at* CRAIGIN *and others*) — to the usual division.

LARRABEE: That's all I want.

MORIARTY: When you have quite finished and got your money suppose you blow that little whistle which I observe hanging from your watch chain — and these gentlemen will take their turn.

(BASSICK *holds door open for* MORIARTY. LARRABEE *moves up out of way as* MORIARTY *crosses*.)

(*Crosses to door. At door, turning to* CRAIGIN.) And, Craigin —

(CRAIGIN *crosses to* MORIARTY.)

At the proper moment present my compliments to Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and say that I wish him a pleasant journey to the other side. (*Goes out, followed by* BASSICK.)

(LARRABEE *glances about critically. As* MORIARTY *goes,* PRINCE *throws cigarette on floor in disgust, which LEARY picks up as he goes later, putting it in his pocket*.)

LARRABEE: You'd better put that rope out of sight.

(CRAIGIN *picks up rope, which he carries with him until he goes out later.* LEARY *and* McTAGUE *move across noiselessly at back.* CRAIGIN *stops an instant up stage to examine the window, looking at the caulking, etc., and shaking the frames to see that they are securely spiked. Others wait near door. He finishes at window.* LARRABEE *is examining package near lamp, which he has taken from his pocket. As* LEARY *crosses he picks up rope which was lying up centre and hides it in barrel.* McTAGUE *in crossing bumps up against* PRINCE, *and both look momentarily at each other very much annoyed.*)

CRAIGIN (*joins* LEARY *and* McTAGUE *at door. Speaks to* LARRABEE *from door*): You understand, sir, we're on this floor just around the far turn of the passage — so 'e won't see us as 'e's commin' up.

LARRABEE: I understand. (*Turning to* CRAIGIN.)

CRAIGIN: An' it's w'en we 'ears that whistle, eh?

LARRABEE: When you hear this whistle.

(CRAIGIN, LEARY *and* McTAGUE *go out noiselessly. Pause. Door remains open.* PRINCE, *who has been very quiet during foregoing scene, begins to move a little nervously and looks about. He looks at his watch and* *then glances about again.* LARRABEE *is still near lamp, looking at package of papers which he took from his pocket*.)

PRINCE (*coming down in a grumpy manner, head down, not looking at* LARRABEE): Look ‘ere, Jim, this sort of thing ain’t so much in my line.

LARRABEE (*at table*): I suppose not.

PRINCE (*still eyes about without looking at* LARRABEE): When it comes to a shy at a safe or drillin’ into bank vaults, I feels perfectly at ‘ome, but I don’t care so much to see a man — (*Stops — hesitates*.) Well, it ain’t my line!

LARRABEE (*turning*): Here! (*Going to him and urging him toward door and putting package away*.) All I want of you is to go down on the corner below and let me know when he comes.

PRINCE (*stops and turns to* LARRABEE): ‘Ow will I let you know?

LARRABEE: Have you got a whistle?

PRINCE (*pulls one out of pocket*): Cert’nly.

LARRABEE: Well when you see O’Hagan driving with him Come down the alley there and blow it twice. (*Urging* PRINCE *a little nearer door*.)

PRINCE: Yes — but ain’t it quite loikely to call a cab at the same time?

LARRABEE: What more do you want — take the cab and go home.

PRINCE: Oh, then you won’t need me ‘ere again.

LARRABEE: No.

(PRINCE *turns to go*.)

PRINCE (*going to door — very much relieved*): Oh, very well — then I’ll tear myself away. (*Goes out.*)

(*Music. Pathetic, melodramatic, agitato, pp*.)

(LARRABEE *crosses to table and looks at lamp, gets two chairs and places them on either side of table; As he places second chair he stops dead as if having heard a noise outside, listens, and is satisfied all is well. Then thinking of the best way to conduct negotiations with Holmes, takes out cigar, and holds it a moment unlighted as he thinks. Then takes out match and is about to light it when* ALICE FAULKNER *enters. He starts up and looks at her. She stands looking at him, frightened and excited*.)

(*Music stops*.)

LARRABEE: What do you want?

ALICE: It's true, then?

LARRABEE: How did you get to this place?

ALICE: I followed you — in a cab.

LARRABEE: What have you been doing since I came up here? Informing the police, perhaps.

ALICE: No — I was afraid he'd come — so I waited.

LARRABEE: Oh — to warn him very likely?

ALICE: Yes. (*Pause*.) To warn him. (*Looks about room*.)

LARRABEE: Then it's just as well you came up.

ALICE: I came to make sure — (*Glances about*.)

LARRABEE: Of what?

ALICE: That something else — is not going to be done besides — what they told me.

LARRABEE: Ah — somebody told you that something else was going to be done?

ALICE: Yes.

LARRABEE: So! We've got another spy in the house.

ALICE: You’re going to swindle and deceive him — I know that. Is there anything more? (*Advancing to him a little*.)

LARRABEE: What could you do if there was?

ALICE: I could buy you off. Such men as you are always open to sale.

LARABEE: How much would you give?

ALICE: The genuine package — the real ones. All the proofs — everything

LARRABEE (*advancing above table, quietly but with quick interest*): Have you got it with you?

ALICE: No, but I can get it.

LARRABEE: Oh — (*Going to table. Slightly disappointed.*) So you’ll do all that for this man? You think he’s your friend, I suppose?

ALICE: I haven’t thought of it.

LARRABEE: Look what he’s doing now. Coming here to buy those things off me.

ALICE: They’re false. They’re counterfeit.

LARRABEE: He thinks they’re genuine, doesn’t he? He’d hardly come here to buy them if he didn’t.

ALICE: He may ask my permission still.

LARRABEE: Ha! (*Sneer — turning away*.) He won’t get the chance.

ALICE (*suspicious again*): Won’t get the chance. Then there is something else.

LARRABEE: Something else! (*Turning to her.*) Why, you see me here myself, don’t you? I’m going to talk to him on a little business. How could I do him any harm?

ALICE (*advancing*): Where are those men who came up here?

LARRABEE: What men?

ALICE: Three villainous looking men — I saw them go in at the street door —

LARRABEE: Oh — those men. They went up the other stairway. (*Pointing over shoulder*.) You can see them in the next building — if you look out of this window. (*Indicating window*.)

(ALICE *at once goes rapidly toward the window and making a hesitating pause near table as she sees* LARRABEE *crossing above her but moving on again quickly* LARRABEE *at same time crosses well up stage, keeping his eye on* ALICE *as she moves towards the window and tries to look out, but finding she cannot she turns at once to* LARRABEE. *He is standing near door*.)

(*Music. Melodramatic. Danger. Keep down. pp Agitato*)

(*Hold this an instant where they stand looking at one another, ALICE beginning to see she has been trapped*.)

ALICE (*starting toward door*): I'll look in the passage-way, if you please.

LARRABEE (*taking one step down before door, quietly*): Yes — but I don't please.

ALICE (*stops before him*): You wouldn't dare to keep me here.

LARRABEE: I might dare — but I won't. You'd be in the way.

ALICE: Where are those men?

LARRABEE: Stay where you are and you'll see them very soon.

(LARRABEE *goes to door and blows whistle as quietly as possible. Short pause. No footsteps heard, as the men move noiselessly. Enter* CRAIGIN, McTAGUE *and* LEARY, *appearing suddenly noiselessly. They stand looking in some astonishment at* ALICE.)

(*Music stops*.)

ALICE: I knew it. (*Moving back a step, seeing from this that they are going to attack Holmes*.) Ah! (*Under breath. After pause she turns and hurries to window, trying to look out or give an alarm. Then runs to cupboard door.* LARRABEE *watching her movements. Desperately*.) You're going to do him some harm.

LARRABEE: Oh no, it's only a little joke — at his expense.

ALICE (*moving toward him a little*): You wanted the letters, the package I had in the safe! I'll get it for you. Let me go and I'll bring it here — or whatever you tell me — (LARRABEE *sneers meaningly*.)

I'll give you my word not to say anything to anyone — not to him — not to the policemen — not anyone!

LARRABEE (*without moving*): You needn't take the trouble to get it — but you can tell me where it is — and you'll have to be quick about it too —

ALICE: Yes — if you'll promise not to go on with this.

LARRABEE: Of course! That's understood.

ALICE (*excitedly*): You promise!

LARRABEE: Certainly I promise. Now where is it?

ALICE: Just outside my bedroom window — just outside on the left, fastened between the shutter and the wall — you can easily find it.

LARRABEE: Yes — I can easily find it.

ALICE: Now tell them — tell them to go.

LARRABEE (*going down to men*): Tie her up so she can't make a noise. Keep her out there until we have Holmes in here, and then let O'Hagan keep her in his cab. She mustn't get back to the house

— not till I've been there.

(ALICE *listens dazed, astonished*.)

CRAIGIN (*speaks low*): Go an' get a hold, Leary. Hand me a piece of that rope.

(McTAGUE *brings rope from under his coat. Business of getting rapidly ready to gag and tie ALICE. Much time must not be spent on this; quick, business-like.* McTAGUE *takes handkerchief from pocket to use as gag*.)

LARRABEE (*taking a step or two down before* ALICE *so as to attract her attention front):* Now then, my pretty bird — *(*ALICE *begins to move back in alarm and looking at* LARRABEE.)

ALICE: You said — you said if I told you —

LARRABEE: Well — we haven't done him any harm yet, have we?

(LEARY *is moving quietly round behind her*.)

ALICE: Then send them away.

LARRABEE: Certainly. Go away now, boys, there's no more work for you to-night.

ALICE (*looking at them terrified*): They don't obey you. They are —

(LEARY *seizes her. She screams and resists, but* CRAIGIN *and* McTAGUE *come at once, so that she is quickly subdued and gagged with handkerchief, etc., and her hands tied. As the Struggle takes place, men work up to near cupboard with* ALICE. LARRABEE *also eagerly watching them tie* ALICE *up. This is not prolonged more than is absolutely necessary. Just as they finish, a shrill whistle is heard in distance outside at back, as if from street far below. All stop — listening — picture*.)

CRAIGIN: Now out of the door with her — (*Starting to door*)

(*The prolonged shrill whistle is heard again*)

LARRABEE: By God, he's here.

CRAIGIN: What!

LARRABEE: That's Sid Prince, I put him on the watch.

CRAIGIN: We won't have time to get her out.

LARRABEE: Shut her in there (*Pointing to cupboard*)

LEARY: Yes — that'll do.

CRAIGIN: In with her.

(LEARY *and* CRAIGIN, *almost on the word, take her to cup board.* McTAGUE *goes and keeps watch at door*.)

(*As he holds* ALICE.) Open that door! Open that door!

(LEARY *goes and opens cupboard door. As* LEARY *leaves she breaks away from* CRAIGIN *and gets almost to right when* CRAIGIN *catches her again. As he takes hold of her she faints, and he throws her into cupboard in a helpless condition.* LEARY *closes cupboard door and they stand before it*.)

LEARY (*still at cupboard door. Others have turned so as to avoid suspicion if Holmes comes in on them*): There ain't no lock on this 'ere door.

LARRABEE: No lock!

LEARY: No.

LARRABEE: Drive something in.

CRAIGIN: Here, this knife. (*Hands* LEARY *a large clasp-knife, opened ready*.)

LARRABEE: A knife won't hold it.

CRAIGIN: Yes, it will. Drive it in strong.

(LEARY *drives blade in door frame with all his force*)

LEARY: 'E'll have to find us 'ere.

CRAIGIN: Yes — and he won't either — we'll go on and do 'im up. (*Going to door*)

LARRABEE: No, you won’t.

(*Men stop. Pause*.)

I’ll see him first, if you please.

(CRAIGIN *and* LARRABEE *facing each other savagely an instant well down stage.*)

McTAGUE: Them was orders, Craigin.

LEARY: So it was.

McTAGUE: There might be time to get back in the passage. (*He listens at door and cautiously looks off — turns back into room*.) They ain’t got up one flight yet.

LEARY: Quick then. (*Moving toward door*.)

(McTAGUE, LEARY *and* CRAIGIN *go out. Door does not close.* LARRABEE *glances at door anxiously. Makes a quick dash up to it, and forces knife in with all his strength. Quickly pulls off coat and hat, throwing them on boxes, and sits quietly chewing an end of cigar. Enter* SHERLOCK HOLMES *at door, walking easily as though on some ordinary business*.)

(*Stop music*.)

HOLMES (*seeing the apartment with a glance as he enters and Pausing, disappointed. His little laugh, with no smile*): How the devil is it that you crooks always manage to hit on the same places for your scoundrelly business? (*Chuckles of amusement*.) Well! I certainly thought, after all this driving about in a closed cab you’d show me something new.

LARRABEE (*looking up nonchalantly*): Seen it before, have you?

HOLMES (*standing still*): Well, I should think so! (*Moves easily about recalling dear old times*.) I nabbed a friend of yours in this place while he was trying to drop himself out of that window. Ned Colvin, the cracksman.

LARRABEE: Colvin. I never heard of him before.

HOLMES: No? Ha! ha! Well, you certainly never heard of him after. A brace of counterfeiters used these regal chambers in the spring of ‘90. One of them hid in the cupboard. We pulled him out by the heels.

LARRABEE (*trying to get in on the nonchalance*): Ah! Did you? And the other?

HOLMES: The other? He was more fortunate.

LARRABEE: Ah — he got away, I suppose.

HOLMES: Yes, he got away. We took his remains out through that door to the street. (*Indicating door*.)

LARRABEE: Quite interesting. (*Drawled a little — looks at end of his cigar*.)

(HOLMES *is looking about.*)

Times have changed since then.

(HOLMES *darts a lightning glance at* LARRABEE. *Instantly easy again and glancing about as before*.)

HOLMES (*dropping down near* LARRABEE): So they have, Mr. Larrabee — so they have. (*A little confidentially.*) Then it was only cracksmen, counterfeiters, and petty swindlers of various kinds — Now — (*Pause, looking at* LARRABEE.)

(LARRABEE *turns and looks at* HOLMES.)

LARRABEE: Well? What now?

HOLMES: Well — (*Mysteriously*.) Between you and me, Larrabee — we’ve heard some not altogether agreeable rumors; rumours of some pretty shady work not far from here — a murder or two of a very peculiar kind — and I’ve always had a suspicion — (*Stops. Sniffs very delicately. Motionless pause. Nods ominously to LARRABEE, who is looking about, and gets over towards window. When within reach he runs his hand lightly along the frame*) My surmise was correct — it is.

LARRABEE (*turning to* HOLMES) It is what?

HOLMES: Caulked.

LARRABEE: What does that signify to us?

HOLMES: Nothing to us, Mr. Larrabee, nothing to us, but it might signify a good deal to some poor devil who's been caught in this trap.

LARRABEE: Well if it's nothing to us suppose we leave it and get to business. My time is limited.

HOLMES: Quite so, of course. I should have realised that reflections could not possibly appeal to you. But it so happens I take a deep interest in anything that pertains to what are known as the criminal classes and this same interest makes me rather curious to know — (*looking straight at* LARRABEE, *who looks up at him*) — how you happened to select such a singularly gruesome place for an ordinary business transaction.

LARRABEE (*looking at* HOLMES *across the table*): I selected this places Mr. Holmes, because I thought you might not be disposed to take such liberties here as you practised in my own house last night.

HOLMES: Quite so, quite so. (*Looks innocently at* LARRABEE.) But why not?

(*They look at one another an instant*.)

LARRABEE: (*significantly*): You might not feel quite so much at home.

HOLMES: Oh — ha! (*A little laugh*.) You've made a singular miscalculation. I feel perfectly at home, Mr. Larrabee! Perfectly! (*He seats himself at table in languid and leisurely manner, takes cigar from pocket and lights it.*)

LARRABEE (*looks at him an instant*): Well, I'm very glad to hear it.

(LARRABEE *now takes out the counterfeit package of papers, etc., and tosses it on the table before them. HOLMES looks on floor slightly by light of match, unobserved by* LARRABEE.)

Here is the little packet which is the object of this meeting. (*He glances at* HOLMES *to see effect of its production*.)

(HOLMES *looks at it calmly as he smokes*.)

I haven't opened it yet, but Miss Faulkner tells me everything is there.

HOLMES: Then there is no need of opening it, Mr. Larrabee.

LARRABEE: Oh, well — I want to see you satisfied.

HOLMES: That is precisely the condition in which you now behold me. Miss Faulkner is a truthful young lady. Her word is sufficient.

LARRABEE: Very well. Now what shall we say, Mr. Holmes? (*Pause*.) Of course, we want a pretty large price for this. Miss Faulkner is giving up everything. She would not be satisfied unless the result justified it.

HOLMES (*pointedly*): Suppose, Mr. Larrabee, that as Miss Faulkner knows nothing whatever about this affair, we omit her name from the discussion.

(*Slight pause of two seconds*.)

LARRABEE: Who told you she doesn't know?

HOLMES: You did. Every look, tone, gesture — everything you have said and done since I have been in this room has informed me that she has never consented to this transaction. It is a little speculation of your own. (*Tapping his fingers on end of table*.)

LARRABEE: Ha! (*Sneer*.) I suppose you think you can read me like a book.

HOLMES: No — like a primer.

LARRABEE: Well, let that pass. How much'll you give?

HOLMES: A thousand pounds.

LARRABEE: I couldn't take it.

HOLMES: What do you ask?

LARRABEE: Five thousand.

HOLMES (*shakes head*): I couldn't give it.

LARRABEE: Very well — (*Rises*.) We've had all this trouble for nothing. (*As if about to put up the packet*.)

HOLMES (*leaning back in chair and remonstrating*): Oh — don't say that, Mr. Larrabee! To me the occasion has been doubly interesting. I have not only had the pleasure of meeting you again but I have also availed myself of the opportunity of making observations regarding this place which may not come amiss.

(LARRABEE *looks at* HOLMES *contemptuously. He places chair under table*.)

LARRABEE: Why, I've been offered four thousand for this little —

HOLMES: Why didn't you take it?

LARRABEE: Because I intend to get more.

HOLMES: That's too bad.

LARRABEE: If they offered four thousand they'll give five.

HOLMES: They won't give anything.

LARRABEE: Why not?

HOLMES: They've turned the case over to me.

LARRABEE: Will you give three thousand?

HOLMES (*rising*): Mr. Larrabee, strange as it may appear, my time is limited as well as yours. I have brought with me the sum of One thousand pounds, which is all that I wish to pay. If it is your desire to sell at this figure kindly appraise me of the fact at once. If not, permit me to wish you a very good evening.

(*Pause.* LARRABEE *looks at him*.)

LARRABEE (*after the pause glances nervously round once, fearing he heard something*): Go on! (*Tosses packet on table*.) You can have them. It's too small a matter to haggle over.

(HOLMES *reseats himself at once, back of table, and takes wallet from his pocket, from which he produces a bunch of bank notes.* LARRABEE *stands watching him with glittering eye.* HOLMES *counts out ten one hundred pound notes and lays the remainder of the notes on the table with elbow on them, while he counts the first over again*.)

(*Sneeringly*.) Oh — I thought you said you had brought just a thousand.

HOLMES (*not looking up; counting the notes*): I did. This is it.

LARRABEE: You brought a trifle more, I see.

HOLMES (*counting notes*): Quite so. I didn't say I hadn't brought any more.

LARRABEE: Ha! (*Sneers*.) You can do your little tricks when it comes to it, can't you?

HOLMES: It depends on who I'm dealing with. (*Hands* LARRABEE *one thousand pounds in notes*.)

(LARRABEE *takes money and keeps a close watch at same time on the remaining pile of notes lying at* HOLMES' *left.* HOLMES, *after handing the notes to* LARRABEE, *lays cigar he was smoking on the table, picks up packet which he puts in his pocket with his right hand, and is almost at the same time reaching with his left hand for the notes he placed upon the table when* LARRABEE *makes a Sudden lunge and snatches the pile of bank notes, jumping back On the instant.* HOLMES *springs to his feet at the same time*.)

Now I've got you where I want you, Jim Larrabee! You've been so cunning and so cautious and so wise, we couldn't find a thing to hold you for — but this little slip will get you in for robbery —

LARRABEE: Oh! You’ll have me in, will you? (*Short sneering laugh*.) What are your views about being able to get away from here yourself?

HOLMES: I do not anticipate any particular difficulty.

LARRABEE (*significantly*): Perhaps you’ll change your mind about that.

HOLMES: Whether I change my mind or not, I certainly shall leave this place, and your arrest will shortly follow.

LARRABEE: My arrest? Ha, ha! Robbery, eh — Why, even if you got away from here you haven’t got a witness. Not a witness to your name.

HOLMES (*slowly backing, keeping his eyes sharply on* LARRABEE *as he does so*): I’m not so sure of that, Mr. Larrabee! — Do you usually fasten that door with a knife? (*Pointing toward door with left arm and hand, but eyes on* LARRABEE.)

(LARRABEE *turns front as if bewildered. Tableau an instant. Very faint moan from within cupboard. HOLMES listens motionless an instant, then makes quick dash to door and seizing knife wrenches it out and flings it on the floor.* LARRABEE *seeing* HOLMES *start toward door of cupboard springs up to head him off*)

LARRABEE: Come away from that door.

(*But* HOLMES *has the door torn open and* ALICE FAULKNER *out before* LARRABEE *gets near.*)

HOLMES: Stand back! (*Turning to* LARRABEE, *supporting* ALICE *at same time.*) You contemptible scoundrel! What does this mean!

LARRABEE: I’ll show you what it means cursed quick. (*Taking a step or two, blows the little silver whistle attached to his watch chain*.)

HOLMES (*untying* ALICE *quickly*) I’m afraid you’re badly hurt Miss Faulkner.

(*Enter* CRAIGIN. *He stands there a moment near door, watching* HOLMES. *He makes a signal with hand to others outside door and then moves noiselessly.* McTAGUE *enters noiselessly, and remains a little* *behind* CRAIGIN *below door.* ALICE *shakes her head quickly, thinking of what she sees, and tries to call* HOLMES *attention to* CRAIGIN *and* McTAGUE.)

ALICE: No! — Mr. Holmes. (*Pointing to* CRAIGIN *and* McTAGUE.)

HOLMES (*glances round*): Ah, Craigin — delighted to see you.

(CRAIGIN *gives slight start*.)

And you too McTague. I infer from your presence here at this particular juncture that I am not dealing with Mr. Larrabee alone.

LARRABEE: Your inference is quite correct, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: It is not difficult to imagine who is at the bottom of such a conspiracy as this.

(CRAIGIN *begins to steal across noiselessly.* McTAGUE *remains before door,* HOLMES *turns to* ALICE *again*.)

I hope you’re beginning to feel a little more yourself, Miss Faulkner — because we shall leave here very soon.

ALICE (*who has been shrinking from the sight of* CRAIGIN *and* McTAGUE): Oh yes — do let us go, Mr. Holmes.

CRAIGIN (*low, deep voice, intense*): You’ll ‘ave to wait a bit, Mr. ‘Olmes. We ‘ave a little matter of business we’d like to talk over.

(HOLMES *turning to CRAIGIN*.)

(*Enter* LEARY *and glides up side in the shadow and begins to move towards* HOLMES. *In approaching from corner he glides behind door of cupboard as it stands open and from there down on* HOLMES *at cue. As* HOLMES *turns to* CRAIGIN, ALICE *leans against wall of cupboard* .)

HOLMES: All right, Craigin, I’ll see you to-morrow morning in your cell at Bow Street.

CRAIGIN (*threateningly*): Werry sorry sir but I cawn't wait till morning Its got to be settled to night.

HOLMES (*looks at* CRAIGIN *an instant*): All right, Craigin, we'll settle it to-night.

CRAIGIN: It's so werry himportant, Mr. 'Olmes — so werry important indeed that you'll 'ave to 'tend to it now.

(*At this instant* ALICE *sees* LEARY *approaching rapidly from behind and screams.* HOLMES *turns, but* LEARY *is upon him at the same time. There is a very short struggle and* HOLMES *throws* LEARY *violently off, but* LEARY *has got* HOLMES' *revolver. As they struggle* ALICE *steps back to side of room up stage. A short deadly pause.* HOLMES *motionless, regarding the men.* ALICE'S *back against wall. After the pause* LEARY *begins to revive.*)

(*Low voice to* LEARY.) 'Ave you got his revolver?

LEARY (*showing revolver*): 'Ere it is. (*Getting slowly to his feet.*)

HOLMES (*recognizing LEARY in the dim light*): Ah, Leary! It is a pleasure indeed. It needed only your blithe personality to make the party complete. (*Sits and writes rapidly on pocket pad, pushing lamp away a little and picking up cigar which he had left on the table, and which he keeps in his mouth as he writes.*) There is only one other I could wish to welcome here, and that is the talented author of this midnight carnival. We shall have him however, by to-morrow night.

CRAIGIN: Though 'e ain't 'ere, Mr. 'Olmes, 'e gave me a message for yer. 'E presented his koindest compliments wished yer a pleasant trip across.

HOLMES (*writing — cigar in mouth*): That's very kind of him, I'm sure. (*Writes.*)

LARRABEE (*sneeringly*): You're writing your will, I suppose?

HOLMES (*writing — with quick glances at the rest*) No (*Shakes head.*) Only a brief description of one or two of you gentlemen for the police. We know the rest.

LEARY: And when will you give it ‘em, Mr. ‘Olmes?

HOLMES (*writes*): In nine or nine and a half minutes, Leary.

LARRABEE: Oh, you expect to leave here in nine minutes, eh?

HOLMES: No. (*Writing*.) In one. It will take me eight minutes to find a policeman. This is a dangerous neighbourhood.

LARRABEE: Well, when you’re ready to start, let us know.

HOLMES (*rising and putting pad in pocket*): I’m ready (*Buttoning up coat*.)

(CRAIGIN. McTAGUE *and* LEARY *suddenly brace themselves for action, and stand ready to make a run for* HOLMES. LARRABEE *also is ready to join in the struggle if necessary.* HOLMES *moves backward from table a little to* ALICE — *she drops down a step towards* HOLMES)

CRAIGIN: Wait a bit. You’d better listen to me, Mr. ‘Olmes. We’re going to tie yer down nice and tight to the top o’ that table.

HOLMES: Well, by Jove! I don’t think you will, That’s my idea, you know.

CRAIGIN: An’ you’ll save yourself a deal of trouble if ye submit quiet and easy like — because if ye don’t ye moight get knocked about a bit —

ALICE (*under her breath*): Oh — Mr. Holmes! (*Coming closer to* HOLMES.)

LARRABEE (*to* ALICE): Come away from him! Come over here if you don’t want to get hurt.

(*Love music*.)

HOLMES (*to* ALICE, *without looking round, but reaching her with left hand*): My child, if you don’t want to get hurt, don’t leave me for a second.

(ALICE *moves closer to* HOLMES.)

LARRABEE: Aren’t you coming?

ALICE (*breathlessly*): No!

CRAIGIN: You'd better look out, Miss — he might get killed.

ALICE: Then you can kill me too.

(HOLMES *makes a quick turn to her, with sudden exclamation under breath. For an instant only he looks in her face — then a quick turn back to* CRAIGIN *and men*.)

HOLMES (*low voice — not taking eyes from men before him*): I'm afraid you don't mean that, Miss Faulkner.

ALICE: Yes, I do.

HOLMES (*eyes on men — though they shift about rapidly, but never toward* ALICE): No. (*Shakes head a trifle*.) You would not say it — at another time or place.

ALICE: I would say it anywhere — always.

(*Music stops*.)

CRAIGIN: So you'll 'ave it out with us, eh?

HOLMES: Do you imagine for one moment, Craigin, that I won't have it out with you?

CRAIGIN: Well then — I'll 'ave to give you one — same as I did yer right-'and man this afternoon. (*Approaching* HOLMES.)

HOLMES (*to* ALICE *without turning — intense, rapid*): Ah!

(CRAIGIN *stops dead*.)

You heard him say that. Same as he did my right-hand man this afternoon.

ALICE (*under breath*): Yes! yes!

HOLMES: Don't forget that face. (*Pointing to* CRAIGIN.) In three days I shall ask you to identify it in the prisoner's dock.

CRAIGIN (*enraged*): Ha! (*Turning away as if to hide his face*.)

HOLMES (*very sharp — rapid*): Yes — and the rest of you with him. You surprise me, gentlemen — thinking you're sure of anybody in this room, and never once taking the trouble to look at that window. If you wanted to make it perfectly safe, you should have had those missing bars put in.

(HOLMES *whispers something to* ALICE, *indicating her to make for door.*)

(*Music till end of Act*.)

(CRAIGIN, LEARY, McTAGUE *and* LARRABEE *make very slight move and say "Eh?" but instantly at tension again, and all motionless, ready to spring on* HOLMES. HOLMES *and* ALICE *motionless, facing them. This is held an instant.*)

LARRABEE: Bars or no bars, you're not going to get out of here as easy as you expect.

(HOLMES *moves easily down near table*.)

HOLMES: There are so many ways, Mr. Larrabee, I hardly know which to choose.

CRAIGIN (*louder — advancing*): Well, you'd better choose quick — I can tell you that.

HOLMES (*sudden — strong — sharp*): I'll choose at once, Mr. Craigin — and my choice — (*quickly seizing chair*) — falls on this. (*On the word he brings the chair down upon the lamp frightful crash, extinguishing light instantly*.)

(*Every light out. Only the glow of* HOLMES' *cigar remains where he stands at the table. He at once begins to move toward window keeping cigar so that it will show to men and to front.*)

CRAIGIN (*loud sharp voice to others*): Trace 'im by the cigar. (*Moving at once toward window*.) Follow the cigar.

LARRABEE: Look out. He's going for the window.

(LEARY *goes quickly to window.* McTAGUE *goes and is ready by safety lamp.* HOLMES *quickly fixes cigar in a crack or joint at side of window so that it is still seen — smash of the window glass is heard. Instantly glides across, well up stage, and down side to the door where he finds* ALICE. *On crash of window* CRAIGIN *and* LEARY *give quick shout of exclamation — they spring up stage toward the light of cigar — sound of quick scuffle and blows in darkness*.)

LARRABEE: Get that light.

CRAIGIN (*clear and distinct*): The safety lamp. Where is it?

(*Make this shout for lantern very strong and audible to front.* McTAGUE *kicks over box which concealed the safety lamp — lights up.* HOLMES *and* ALICE *at door.* ALICE *just going out*.)

HOLMES (*turning at door and pointing to window*): You'll find that cigar in a crevice by the window.

(*All start towards* HOLMES *with exclamations, oaths, etc. He makes quick exit with* ALICE *and slams door after him. Sounds of heavy bolts outside sliding quickly into place, and heavy bars dropping into position.* CRAIGIN, McTAGUE *and* LEARY *rush against door and make violent efforts to open it. After the first excited effort they turn quickly back. As* McTAGUE *crosses he throws safely lamp on table.* LARRABEE, *who has stopped near when he saw door closed, turns front with a look of hatred on his face and mad with rage*.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Doctor Watson’s Consulting Room, Kensington.

The following evening.

The place is London.

SCENE. — DR. WATSON’S *house in Kensington. The consulting room. Oak panelling. Solid furniture. Wide double-doors opening to the hall and street door. Door communicating with doctor’s inner medicine room. Another door, center, opens to private hallway of house. The windows are supposed to open at side of house upon an area which faces the street. These windows have shades or blinds on rollers which can quickly be drawn down. At the opening of the Act they are down, so that no one could see into the room from the street.*

There is a large operating chair with high back, cushions, etc. Music for curtain, which stops an instant before rise.

DR. WATSON *is seated behind his desk and* MRS. SMEEDLEY*, a seedy-looking middle-aged woman, is seated in the chair next to the desk with a medicine bottle in her hand.*

WATSON: Be careful to make no mistake about the medicine. If she’s no better to-morrow I’ll call. You will let me know, of course.

MRS. SMEEDLEY: Oh yes, indeed I will. Good evening, sir.

WATSON: Good night, Mrs. Smeedley.

(MRS. SMEEDLEY *goes out. Sound of door closing heard after she is off. Pause. The doctor turns to his desk, and ringing bell, busies himself with papers*.)

(*Enter* PARSONS — a *servant*.)

Parsons!

(PARSONS *comes a little towards* WATSON.)

(*Lower voice*.) That woman who just left — do you know her?

PARSONS (*trying to recollect*): I can't say as I recollect 'avin' seen 'er before. Was there anything — ?

WATSON: Oh no! Acted a little strange, that's all. I thought I saw her looking about the hall before she went out.

PARSONS: Yes sir, she did give a look. I saw that myself, sir.

WATSON (*after an instant's thought*): Oh well — I dare say it was nothing. Is there anyone waiting, Parsons?

PARSONS: There's one person in the waiting-room, sir — a gentleman.

WATSON (*looks at watch*): I'll see him, but I've only a short time left. If any more come you must send them over to Doctor Anstruther. I spoke to him this afternoon about taking my cases. I have an important appointment at nine.

PARSONS: Very well, sir. Then you'll see this gentleman, sir?

WATSON: Yes.

(PARSONS *goes out. Short pause.* WATSON *busy at desk.* PARSONS *opens door and shows in* SID PRINCE. *He comes in a little way and pauses.* PARSONS *all through this Act closes the door after his exit, or after showing anyone in.* WATSON *looks up.*)

PRINCE (*speaking in the most dreadful husky whisper*): Good evenin', sir!

WATSON: Good evening. (*Indicating chair*.) Pray be seated.

PRINCE (*same voice all through*): Thanks, I don't mind if I do. (*Coughs, then sits in chair near desk*.)

WATSON (looking at him with professional interest): What seems to be the trouble?

PRINCE: Throat, sir. (*Indicating his throat to assist in making himself understood*.) Most dreadful sore throat.

WATSON: Sore throat, eh? (*Glancing about for an instrument*.)

PRINCE: Well, I should think it is. It's the most 'arrowing thing I ever 'ad! It pains me that much to swallow that I —

WATSON: Hurts you to swallow, does it? (*Finding and picking up an instrument on the desk*.)

PRINCE: Indeed it does. Why, I can 'ardly get a bit of food down.

(WATSON *rises and goes to cabinet, pushes gas burner out into position and lights it*.)

WATSON: Just step this way a moment, please. (PRINCE *rises and goes up to* WATSON, *who adjusts reflector over eye, etc. He has an instrument in his hand which he wipes with a napkin*.) Now, mouth open — wide as possible. (PRINCE *opens mouth and* WATSON *places tongue holder on his tongue*.) That's it. (*Picks up dentist's mirror and warms it over gas burner.*)

PRINCE (WATSON *is about to examine throat when* PRINCE *sees instrument and is a trifle alarmed*): Eh!

(*Business of* WATSON *putting in tongue holder and looking down* PRINCES *throat — looking carefully this way and that*)

WATSON: Say "Ah!"

PRINCE (*husky voice*): Ah! (*Steps away and places handkerchief to mouth as if the attempt to say Ah! hurt him*)

(WATSON *discontinues, and takes instrument out of* PRINCE'S *mouth*.)

WATSON (*a slight incredulity in his manner*): Where do you feel this pain?

PRINCE (*indicating with his finger*): Just about there, doctor. Inside about there.

WATSON: That’s singular. I don’t find anything wrong. (*gas burner back to usual position — and placing instrument on cabinet*.)

PRINCE: You may not foind anything wrong, but I feel it wrong. If you would only give me something to take away this awful agony.

WATSON: That’s nothing. It’ll pass away in a few hours. (*Reflectively*.) Singular thing it would have affected your voice in this way. Well, I’ll give you a gargle — it may help you a little.

PRINCE: Yes — if you only would, doctor.

(WATSON *goes into surgery* PRINCE *watching him like a cat. Music. Dramatic agitato, very pp.* WATSON *does not close the door of the room, but pushes it part way so that it is open about a foot.* PRINCE *moves toward door, watching* WATSON *through it. Stops near door. Seems to watch for his chance, for he suddenly turns and goes quickly down and runs up blinds of both windows and moves back quickly, watching* WATSON *through the door again. Seeing that he still has time to spare, he goes to centre door and opens it, looking and listening off. Distant sound of a when door is open which stops when it is closed.* PRINCE *quickly turns back and goes off a little way at centre door, leaving it open so that he is seen peering up above and listening. Turns to come back, but just at the door he sees* WATSON *coming on and stops.* WATSON *suddenly enters and sees* PRINCE *in centre door and stops, with a bottle in his hand, and looks at* PRINCE.)

(*Music stops*.)

WATSON: What are you doing there?

PRINCE: Why, nothing at all, doctor. I felt such a draught on the back o’ my neck, don’t yer know, that I opened the door to see where it came from!

(WATSON *goes down and rings bell on his desk, placing bottle on papers. Pause. Enter* PARSONS.)

WATSON: Parsons, show this man the shortest way to the street door and close the door after him.

PRINCE: But, doctor, ye don’t understand.

WATSON: I understand quite enough. Good evening.

PRINCE: Yer know, the draught plays hell with my throat, sir — and seems to affect my —

WATSON: Good evening. (*He sits and pays no further attention to* PRINCE.)

PARSONS: This way, sir, if you please.

PRINCE: I consider that you’ve treated me damned outrageous, that’s wot I do, and ye won’t hear the last of this very soon.

PARSONS (*approaching him*): Come, none o’ that now. (*Takes* PRINCE *by the arm*.)

PRINCE (*as he walks toward door with* PARSONS, *turns head back and speaks over his shoulder, shouting out in his natural voice*): Yer call yerself a doctor an’ treats sick people as comes to see yer this ‘ere way. (*Goes out with* PARSONS *and continues talking until slam of door outside*.) Yer call yerself a doctor! A bloomin’ foine doctor you are! (*Etc*.)

(PARSONS *has forced* PRINCE *out by the arm during foregoing speech. Door closes after PRINCE. Sound of outside door closing follows shortly.* WATSON, *after short pause, looks round room, not observing that window shades are up. He rings bell. Enter* PARSONS)

WATSON (*rises and gathers up a few things as if to go*): I shall be at Mr. Holmes’s in Baker Street. If there’s anything special, you’ll know where to send for me. The appointment was for nine. (*Looks at watch*.) It’s fifteen minutes past eight now — I’m going to walk over.

PARSONS: Very well, sir.

(*Bell of outside door rings.* PARSONS *looks at* WATSON, *who shakes his head*.)

WATSON: No. I won't see any more to-night. They must go to Doctor Anstruther.

PARSONS: Yes, sir. (*He starts towards door to answer bell*.)

(WATSON *looks and sees blinds up*.)

WATSON: Parsons! (PARSONS *turns*.) Why aren't those blinds down?

PARSONS: They was down a few minutes ago, sir!

WATSON: That's strange! Well, you'd better pull them down now.

PARSONS: Yes, sir.

(*Bell rings twice as* PARSONS *pulls second blind down. He goes out to answer bell. Pause. Then enter* PARSONS *in a peculiar manner*.)

If you please, sir, it isn't a patient at all, sir.

WATSON: Well, what is it?

PARSONS: A lady sir — (WATSON *looks up*) — and she wants to see you most particular, sir!

WATSON: What does she want to see me about?

PARSONS: She didn't say sir. Only she said it was of the hutmost himportance to 'er, if you could see 'er, sir.

WATSON: Is she there in the hall?

PARSONS: Yes sir.

WATSON: Very well — I was going to walk for the exercise — I can take a cab.

PARSONS: Then you'll see the lady, sir.

WATSON: Yes. (PARSONS *turns to go*. WATSON *continues his preparations*.) And call a cab for me at the same time — have it wait.

PARSONS: Yes, sir.

(PARSONS *goes out. Pause.* PARSONS *appears, ushering in a lady — and goes when she has entered. Enter* MADGE LARRABEE. *Her manner is entirely different from that of the former scenes. She is an impetuous gushing society lady with trouble on her mind*)

MADGE (*as she comes in*): Ah! Doctor — it's awfully good of you to see me. I know what a busy man you must be but I'm in such trouble — oh, it's really too dreadful — You'll excuse my troubling you in this way, won't you?

WATSON: Don't speak of it, madam.

MADGE: Oh, thank you so much! For it did look frightful my coming in like this — but I'm not alone — oh no! — I left my maid in the cab — I'm Mrs. H. de Witte Seaton — (*Trying to find card-case.*) Dear me — I didn't bring my card-case — or if I did I lost it.

WATSON: Don't trouble about a card, Mrs. Seaton. (*With gesture to indicate chair*.)

MADGE: Oh, thank you. (*Sitting as she continues to talk.*) You don't know what I've been through this evening — trying to find some one who could tell me what to do. (WATSON *sits in chair at desk.*) It's something that's happened, doctor — it has just simply happened — I know that it wasn't his fault! I know it!

WATSON: Whose fault?

MADGE: My brother's — my poor, dear, youngest brother — he couldn't have done such a thing, he simply couldn't and —

WATSON: Such a thing as what, Mrs. Seaton?

MADGE: As to take the plans of our defences at Gibraltar from the Admiralty Offices. They think he stole them, doctor — and they've arrested him for it — you see, he works there. He was the only one who knew about them in the whole office — because they trusted him so. He was to make copies and — Oh, doctor, it's really too dreadful! (*Overcome, she takes out* *her handkerchief and wipes her eyes. This must all be perfectly natural, and not in the least particular overdone.*)

WATSON: I'm very sorry, Mrs. Seaton —

MADGE (*mixed up with sobs*): Oh, thank you so much! They said you were Mr. Holmes's friend — several people told me that, several — they advised me to ask you where I could find him — and everything depends on it, doctor — everything.

WATSON: Holmes, of course. He's just the one you want.

MADGE: That's it! He's just the one — and there's hardly any time left! They'll take my poor brother away to prison to-morrow! (*Shows signs of breaking down again*.)

WATSON: There, there, Mrs. Seaton — pray control yourself.

MADGE (*choking down sobs*): Now what would you advise me to do?

WATSON: I'd go to Mr. Holmes at once.

MADGE: But I've been. I've been and he wasn't there!

WATSON: You went to his house?

MADGE: Yes — in Baker Street. That's why I came to you! They said he might be here!

WATSON: No — he isn't here! (*Turns away slightly*)

(MADGE *looks deeply discouraged*)

MADGE: But don't you expect him some time this evening?

WATSON: No (*Shaking head*) There's no possibility of his coming — so far as I know.

MADGE: But couldn't you get him to come? (*Pause*) It would be such a great favour to me — I'm almost worn out with going about — and with this dreadful anxiety! If you could get word to him — (*sees that* WATSON *is looking at her strangely and sharply*) — to come.

(*Brief pause*)

WATSON (*rising — rather hard voice*): I could not get him to come madam. And I beg you to excuse me I am going out myself — (*looks at watch*) — on urgent business. (*Rings bell*.)

MADGE (*rising*) Oh certainly! Don t let me detain you! And you think I had better call at his house again?

WATSON (*coldly*): That will be the wisest thing to do.

MADGE: Oh, thank you so much. (*Extends her hand*.) You don t know how you’ve encouraged me!

(WATSON *withdraws his hand as he still looks at her. Enter* PARSONS *He stands at door*)

Well — good night doctor

(WATSON *simply bows coldly.* MADGE *turns to go. The crash of a capsizing vehicle followed by excited shouts of men is heard. This effect must be as if outside the house with doors closed and not close at hand.* MADGE *stops suddenly on hearing the crash and all shouts.* WATSON *looks at* PARSONS.)

WATSON: What’s that Parsons?

PARSONS: I really can’t say sir but it sounded to me like a haccident.

MADGE (*turning to* WATSON): Oh dear! I do hope it isn’t anything serious! It affects me terribly to know that anyone is hurt.

WATSON: Probably nothing more than a broken-down cab. See what it is, Parsons.

(*Bell and knock.* MADGE *turns and looks toward door again, anxiously* PARSONS *turns to go. Sudden vigorous ringing of door bell, followed by the sound of a knocker violently used*.)

PARSONS: There's the bell, sir! There's somebody 'urt, sir, an' they're a-wantin' you!

WATSON: Well, don't allow anybody to come in! (*Looks at watch*.) I have no more time. (*Hurriedly gathers papers up*.)

PARSONS: Very well, sir. (*Goes leaving door open*.)

(MADGE *turns from looking off at door, and looks at* WATSON *anxiously. Looks toward door again*.)

MADGE: But they're coming in, doctor. (*Retreats backward*.)

WATSON (*moving toward door*): Parsons! Parsons!

(*Sound of voices. Following speeches outside are not in rotation, but jumbled together, so that it is all over very quickly*.)

VOICE (*outside*): We 'ad to bring 'im in, man.

VOICE (*outside*): There's nowhere else to go!

PARSONS (*outside*): The doctor can't see anybody.

VOICE (*outside*): Well let the old gent lay 'ere awhile can't yer. It's common decency. Wot 'ave yer got a red lamp 'angin' outside yer bloomin' door for?

VOICE (*outside*): Yes! yes! let him stay.

(*Enter* PARSONS *at door. Door closes and noise stops*.)

PARSONS: They would bring 'im in, sir. It's an old gentleman as was 'urt a bit w'en the cab upset!

MADGE: Oh!

(*Sound of groans, etc. outside, and the old gentleman whining out complaints and threats*.)

WATSON: Let them put him here. (*Indicating operating chair.*) And send at once for Doctor Anstruther.

PARSONS: Yes, sir!

WATSON: Help him in Parsons.

(PARSONS *goes out*)

MADGE: Oh doctor isn’t it frightful.

WATSON (*turning to centre door*): Mrs Seaton if you will be so good as to step this way, you can reach the hall, by taking the first door to your left.

MADGE (*hesitating*): But I — I may be of some use doctor.

WATSON (*with a trifle of impatience*) None whatever (*Holds door open*.)

MADGE: But doctor — I must see the poor fellow — I haven’t the power to go!

WATSON (*facing* MADGE): Madam, I believe you have some ulterior motive in coming here! You will kindly —

(*Enter at door a white-haired old gentleman in black clerical clothes, white tie, etc., assisted by* PARSONS *and the* DRIVER. *He limps as though his leg were hurt. His coat is soiled. His hat is soiled as if it had rolled in the street.* MADGE *has retired above desk and watches old gent closely from there without moving.* WATSON *turns toward the party as they come in.*)

HOLMES (*as he comes in*): Oh, oh! (*He limps so that he hardly touches his right foot to floor*)

PARSONS (*as he helps* HOLMES *in*): This way, sir! Be careful of the sill, sir! That’s it. (*Etc*.)

DRIVER (*as he comes in, and also beginning outside before entrance*): Now we’ll go in ‘ere. You’ll see the doctor an’ it’ll be all right.

HOLMES: No, it won’t be all right.

DRIVER: It was a haccident. You cawn’t ‘elp a haccident.

HOLMES: Yes, you can.

DRIVER: He was on the wrong side of the street. I turned hup — (*Etc*.)

PARSONS: Now over to this chair. (*Indicating operating chair*).

HOLMES (*pushing back and trying to stop at the desk chair*) No, I'll sit here.

PARSONS: No, this is the chair, sir.

HOLMES: Don't I know where I want to sit?

DRIVER (*impatiently*): You'll sit 'ere. (*They lead him up to operating chair*.)

DRIVER (*as they lead him up*): Now, the doctor'll have a look at ye. 'Ere's the doctor.

HOLMES: That isn't a doctor.

DRIVER: It is a doctor. (Seeing WATSON.) 'Ere, doctor, will you just come and have a look at this old gent? (HOLMES *trying to stop him*.) He's hurt 'isself a little, an' — an' —

HOLMES (*trying to stop* DRIVER): Wait, wait, wait!

DRIVER: Well, well?

HOLMES (*still standing back to audience and turned to* DRIVER): Are you the driver?

DRIVER: Yes, I'm the driver.

HOLMES: Well, I'll have you arrested for this.

DRIVER: Arrested?

HOLMES: Arrested, arrested, arrested!

DRIVER: You cawn't arrest me.

HOLMES: I can't, but somebody else can.

DRIVER: ‘Ere, ‘ere. (*Trying to urge* HOLMES *to chair.*)

HOLMES: You are a very disagreeable man! You are totally uninformed on every subject! I wonder you are able to live in the same house with yourself.

(*The* DRIVER *is trying to talk back and make* HOLMES *sit down.* HOLMES *turns suddenly on* PARSONS. WATSON *is trying to attract* PARSONS’ *attention*.)

Are you a driver?

PARSONS: No, sir!

HOLMES: Well, what are you?

PARSONS: I’m the butler, sir.

HOLMES: Butler! Butler!

DRIVER: He’s the doctor’s servant.

HOLMES: Who’d have such a looking butler as you! What fool would —

DRIVER (*turning HOLMES toward him roughly*): He is the doctor’s servant!

HOLMES: Who asked you who he was?

DRIVER: Never mind who asked me — I’m telling you.

HOLMES: Well, go and tell somebody else.

DRIVER (*trying to push* HOLMES *into chair*): Sit down here. Sit down and be quiet

WATSON (*to* PARSONS): Have a cab ready for me. I must see if he’s badly hurt.

PARSONS: Yes, sir. (*Goes*.)

HOLMES (*resisting*): Quiet! quiet! Where’s my hat? My hat! My hat!

DRIVER: Never mind your ‘at.

HOLMES: I will mind my hat! and I hold you responsible —

DRIVER: There’s your hat in your ‘and.

HOLMES (*looks at hat*): That isn’t my hat! Here! (DRIVER *trying to push him into chair*.) You’re responsible. (*In chair*.) I’ll have you arrested. (*Clinging to* DRIVER’S *coat tail as he tries to get away*

to door) Here come back (*Choking with rage*)

DRIVER (*first wrenching away coat from* HOLMES’ *grasp at door*): I cawn’t stay around ‘ere, you know! Some one’lI pinching my cab. (*Exit*.)

HOLMES (*screaming after him*): Then bring your cab in here. I want — (*Lapses into groans and remonstrances.*) Why didn’t somebody stop him? These cabmen! What did he bring me in for? I know where I am, it’s a conspiracy. I won’t stay in this place. If I ever get out of here alive — (*Etc*.)

WATSON (*steps quickly to door, speaking off*): Parsons — that man’s number (*quickly to old gent*) Now sir if you’ll be quiet for one moment, I’ll have a look at you! (*Crosses to end of cabinet as if to look for instrument.*)

(MADGE *advances near to the old gentleman, looking at him closely. She suddenly seems to be satisfied of something, backs away, and reaching out as if to get to the window and give signal, then coming face to face with* WATSON *as he turns, and smiling pleasantly at him. Business with glove. She begins to glide down stage, making a sweep around toward door as if to get out. She shows by her expression that she has recognized* HOLMES, *but is instantly herself again, thinking possibly that* HOLMES *is watch her, and she wishes to evade suspicion regarding her determination to get off at door. Quick as a flash the old gentleman springs to the door and stands facing her. She stops suddenly on finding him facing her, then wheels quickly about and goes rapidly across toward window*)

HOLMES (*sharp*): Don’t let her get to that window.

(WATSON, *who had moved up a little above windows, instantly springs before the windows.* MADGE *stops on being headed off in that direction*.)

WATSON: Is that you, Holmes?

(MADGE *stands motionless*.)

HOLMES: Quite so. (*Takes off his wig, etc*.)

WATSON: What do you want me to do?

HOLMES (*easily*): That's all, you've done it. Don't do anything more just now.

(MADGE *gives a sharp look at them, then goes very slowly for a few steps and suddenly turns and makes a dash for centre door*.)

WATSON: Look out, Holmes! She can get out that way. (*A step or two up*.)

(MADGE *runs off*. HOLMES *is unmoved*.)

HOLMES: I don't think so. (*Saunters over to above* WATSON'S *desk*.) Well, well, what remarkable weather we're having, doctor, eh? (*Suddenly seeing cigarettes on desk*.) Ah! I'm glad to see that you keep a few prescriptions carefully done up. (*Picks up a cigarette and sits on desk*.) Good for the nerves! (HOLMES *finds matches and lights cigarette*.) Have you ever observed, Watson, that those people are always making —

(*Enter the* DRIVER.)

FORMAN (*speaking at once — so as to break in on* HOLMES): I've got her, sir!

(*Very brief pause*.)

WATSON: Good heavens! Is that Forman?

(HOLMES *nods "Yes."*)

HOLMES: Yes, that's Forman all right. Has Inspector Bradstreet Come with his men?

FORMAN: Yes, sir. One of ‘em’s in the hall there ‘olding her. The others are in the kitchen garden. They came in over the back Wall from Mortimer Street.

HOLMES: One moment. (*Sits in thought.*) Watson, my dear fellow — (WATSON *moves toward* HOLMES *at desk.*) As you doubtless gather from the little episode that has just taken place we are making the arrests. The scoundrels are hot on my track. To get me out of the way is the one chance left to them — and I taking advantage of their mad pursuit to draw them where we quietly lay our hands on them — one by one. We’ve made a pretty good haul already — four last night in the gas chamber — seven this afternoon in various places, and one more just now, but I regret to say that up to this time the Professor himself has so far not risen to the bait.

WATSON: Where do you think he is now?

HOLMES: In the open streets — under some clever disguise — watching for a chance to get at me.

WATSON: And was this woman sent in here to —

HOLMES: Quite so. A spy — to let them know by some signal, probably at that window — (*pointing*) — if she found me in the house. And it has Just occurred to me that it might not be such a bad idea to try the Professor with that bait. Forman! (*Motions him to come down*.)

FORMAN: Yes, sir!

HOLMES (*voice lower*) One moment (Business) Bring that Larrabee woman back here for a moment, and when I light a fresh cigarette — let go your hold on her — carelessly — as if your attention was attracted to something else. Get hold of her again when I tell you.

FORMAN: Very well sir.

(*Goes quickly to re-enter bringing in* MADGE LARRABEE. *They stop.* MADGE *calm, but looks at* HOLMES *with the utmost hatred. Brief pause*.)

HOLMES: My dear Mrs. Larrabee — (MADGE, *who has looked away, turns to him angrily*) — I took the liberty of having you brought in for a moment — (*puffs cigarette, which he has nearly finished*) — in order to convey to you in a few fitting words — my sincere sympathy in your rather — unpleasant — predicament,

MADGE (*hissing it out angrily between her teeth*): It's a lie! It's a lie! There's no predicament.

HOLMES: Ah — I'm charmed to gather — from your rather forcible observation — that you do not regard it as such. Quite right, too. Our prisons are so well conducted now. Many consider them quite as comfortable as most of the hotels. Quieter and more orderly.

MADGE: How the prisons are conducted is no concern of mine! There is nothing they can hold me for — nothing.

HOLMES: Oh — to be sure. (*Putting fresh cigarette in mouth.*) There may be something in that. Still — it occurred to me that you might prefer to be near your unfortunate husband — eh? (*Rises from table and goes to gas burner. Slight good-natured chuckle.*) We hear a great deal about the heroic devotion of wives, and all that — (*lights cigarette at gas*) — rubbish. You know, Mrs. Larrabee, when we come right down to it — (FORMAN *carelessly relinquishes his hold on* MADGE'S *arm, and seems to have his attention called to door. Stands as if listening to something outside.* MADGE *gives a quick glance about and at* HOLMES *who is lighting a cigarette at the gas, and apparently not noticing anything. She makes a sudden dash for the window, quickly snaps up blind and makes a rapid motion up and down before window with right hand — then turns quickly, facing* HOLMES *with triumphant defiance.* HOLMES *is still lighting cigarette.*)

Many thanks. (*To* FORMAN.) That's all, Forman. Pick her up again.

(FORMAN *at once goes to* MADGE *and turns her and waits in front of window — holding her right wrist.*)

Doctor, would you kindly pull the blind down once more. I don't care to be shot from the street.

(WATSON *instantly pulls down blind.*)

(NOTE — *Special care must be exercised regarding these window blinds. They must be made specially strong and solid, so that no failure to operate is possible*.)

MADGE (*in triumph*): Ah! It's too late.

HOLMES: Too late, eh? (*Strolling a little*.)

MADGE: The signal is given. You will hear from him soon.

HOLMES: It wouldn't surprise me at all.

(*Door bell rings*.)

(*Voices of* BILLY *and* PARSONS *outside. Door at once opened,* BILLY *on a little way, but held back by* PARSONS *for an instant. He breaks away from* PARSONS. *All very quick,* BILLY *dressed as a street gamin and carrying a bunch of evening papers*)

(*As* BILLY *comes*.) I think I shall hear from him now. (*Shout*.) Let — (BILLY *stands panting*) — him go, Parsons. Quick, Billy.

(BILLY *comes close to* HOLMES.)

BILLY: He's just come sir.

HOLMES: From where?

BILLY: The house across the street; he was in there a-watchin' these windows. He must 'ave seen something for he's just come out — (*Breathlessly*.) There was a cab waitin' in the street for the doctor — and he's changed places with the driver.

HOLMES: Where did the driver go?

BILLY: He slunk away in the dark, sir, but he ain't gone far, there's two or three more 'angin' about.

HOLMES (*slight motion of the head towards* FORMAN): another driver to-night.

BILLY: They’re all in it, sir, an’ they’re a-layin’ to get you in that cab w’en you come out, sir! But don’t you do it, sir!

HOLMES: On the contrary, sir, I’ll have that new driver in here sir! Get out again quick, Billy, and keep your eyes on him!

BILLY: Yes, sir — thank you, sir! (*Goes*.)

HOLMES: Yes, sir! Watson, can you let me have a heavy portmanteau for a few moments — ?

(MADGE *now watching for another chance to get at the window*.)

WATSON: Parsons — my large Gladstone — bring it here!

PARSONS: Yes, sir. (*Goes out*.)

WATSON: I’m afraid it’s a pretty shabby looking —

(MADGE *suddenly tries to break loose from* FORMAN *and attempt to make a dash for window.* FORMAN *turns and pulls her a step or two away. Slight pause*.)

HOLMES: Many thanks, Mrs. Larrabee, but your first signal is all that we require. By it you informed your friend Moriarty that I was here in the house. You are now aware of the fact that he is impersonating a driver, and that it is my intention to have him in here. You wish to signal that there is danger. There is danger, Mrs. Larrabee, but we don’t care to have you let him know it. Take her out, Forman, and make her comfortable and happy.

(FORMAN *leads* MADGE *up to centre door as if to take her out. She pulls him to a stop and gives HOLMES a look of the most violent hatred*.)

And by the way, you might tell the inspector to wait a few moments. I may send him another lot. You can’t tell!

FORMAN: Come along now! (*Takes her off*)

(*As* MADGE *is pulled up, she snaps her fingers in* HOLMES’S *face and goes off laughing hysterically*.)

HOLMES: Fine woman!

(*Enter* PARSONS, *carrying a large portmanteau or Gladstone valise*.)

Put it down there. (*Pointing down before him at floor*.) Thank you so much.

(PARSONS *puts portmanteau down as indicated*.)

Parsons, you ordered a cab for the doctor a short time ago. It has been waiting, I believe.

PARSONS: Yes, sir, I think it ‘as.

HOLMES: Be so good as to tell the driver, the one you’ll now find there, to come in here and get a valise. See that he comes in himself When he comes tell him that’s the one.

(PARSONS *goes*.)

WATSON: But surely he won’t come in.

HOLMES: Surely he will! It’s his only chance to get me into that cab! He’ll take almost any risk for that. (Goes to above desk.) In times like this you should tell your man never to take the first cab that comes on a call — (*smokes*) — nor yet the second — the third may be safe!

WATSON: But in this case —

HOLMES: My dear fellow, I admit that in this case I have it to my advantage, but I speak for your future guidance.

(*Music Melodramatic danger agitato very subdued*)

(*Door opens.* PARSONS *enters, pointing the portmanteau out to some one who is following*.)

PARSONS: ‘Ere it is — right in, this way.

HOLMES (*goes to* WATSON *above table. In rather a loud voice to* WATSON): Well, good-bye, old fellow! (*Shakes hands with him warmly* *and bringing him down left a little*.) I’ll write you from Paris — and I hope you’ll keep me fully informed of the progress of events.

(MORIARTY *enters in the disguise of a cabman and goes at once to valise which PARSONS points out, trying to hurry it through and keeping face away from* HOLMES *but fidgeting about, not touching valise.* PARSONS *goes out.*)

(*Speaks right on, apparently paying no attention to* MORIARTY) As for these papers I’ll attend to them personally. Here my man — (*to* MORIARTY) — just help me to tighten up these straps and bit — (*He slides over to valise and kneels, pulling at strap, and* MORIARTY *bending over and doing same*.) There are a few little things in this bag — (*business*) — that I wouldn’t like to lose — (*business*) — and its Just as well to — Eh — (*looking round for instant*) — who’s that at the window?

(MORIARTY *quickly looks up without lifting hands from valise and at the same instant the snap of handcuffs is heard, and he springs up with the irons on his wrists, making two or three violent efforts to break loose. He then stands motionless.* HOLMES *drops into chair, a cigarette in his mouth.* MORIARTY *in rising knocks his hat off and stands facing audience*.)

(*Music stops*.)

(*In a very quiet tone*.) Doctor, will you kindly strike the bell two or three times in rapid succession.

(WATSON *steps to desk and gives several rapid strokes of the bell.*)

Thanks!

(*Enter* FORMAN. FORMAN *goes down to* MORIARTY *and fastens handcuffs which he has on his own wrists to chain attached to that of* MORIARTY’S. *This is held an instant — the two men looking at each other.*)

Forman!

FORMAN: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Got a man there with you?

FORMAN: Yes, sir, the inspector came in himself.

HOLMES: Ah — the inspector himself. We shall read graphic accounts in to-morrow's papers of a very difficult arrest he succeeded in making at Dr. Watson's house in Kensington. Take him out, Forman, and introduce him to the inspector — they'll be pleased to meet.

(FORMAN *starts to force* MORIARTY *off* MORIARTY *hangs back and endeavours to get at* HOLMES — *a very slight struggle*.)

Here! Wait! Let's see what he wants!

MORIARTY (*low voice to* HOLMES): Do you imagine, Sherlock Holmes, that this is the end.

HOLMES: I ventured to dream that it might be.

MORIARTY: Are you quite sure the police will be able to hold me?

HOLMES: I am quite sure of nothing.

MORIARTY: Ah! (*Slight pause.*) I have heard that you are planning to take a little trip — you and your friend here — a little trip on the Continent.

HOLMES: And if I do?

MORIARTY (*a step to* HOLMES): I shall meet you there. (*Slight pause*.)

HOLMES: That's all, Forman.

(FORMAN *moves up to door, quietly with* MORIARTY.)

MORIARTY (*stopping at door*): I shall meet you there. You will Change your course — you will try to elude me — but whichever way you turn — there will be eyes that see and wires that tell. I shall meet you there — and you know it. You know it! — and you know it. (*Goes with* FORMAN.)

(*Pause*.)

HOLMES: Did you hear that, Watson?

WATSON: Yes — but surely you don't place any importance on such —

HOLMES (*stopping him with wave of hand*): Oh! no importance. But I have a fancy that he spoke the truth.

WATSON: We'll give up the trip.

HOLMES (*a negative wave of the hand at* WATSON): It would be quite the same. What matters it here or there — if it must come (*Sits meditative*)

WATSON (*calling*): Parsons!

(PARSONS *comes in* WATSON *points to the valise* PARSONS *removes it and goes*.)

HOLMES: Watson, my dear fellow — (*smokes*) — it's too bad. Now that this is all over, I suppose you imagine that your room will no longer be required. Let me assure — let me assure you (*voice trembles*) — that the worst is yet to come.

WATSON (*stands in front of desk*): The worst to — (*Suddenly thinks of something. Pulls out watch hurriedly*.) Why, heavens Holmes we have barely five minutes.

HOLMES (*looks up innocently at him*) For what?

WATSON: To get to Baker Street — your rooms!

(HOLMES *still looks at him*.)

Your appointment with Sir Edward and the Count! They were to receive that packet of letters from you.

HOLMES (*nods assent*): They're coming here.

(*Pause.* WATSON *looking at* HOLMES.)

WATSON: Here!

HOLMES: That is — if you will be so good as to permit it.

WATSON Certainly — but why not there?

HOLMES: The police wouldn't allow us inside the ropes.

WATSON: Police! Ropes!

HOLMES: Police — ropes — ladders — hose — crowds — engines —

WATSON: Why, you don't mean that —

HOLMES (*nods*): Quite so — the devils have burned me out.

WATSON: Good heavens — burned you —

(*Pause.* HOLMES *nods*.)

Oh, that's too bad. What did you lose?

HOLMES: Everything! — everything! I'm so glad of it! I've had enough. This one thing — (*right hand strong gesture of emphasis — he stops in midst of sentence — a frown upon his face as he thinks — then in a lower voice*) — ends it! This one thing — that I shall do — here in a few moments — is the finish. (HOLMES *rises*.)

WATSON: You mean — Miss Faulkner?

(HOLMES *nods slightly in affirmative without turning to* WATSON.)

(*Love music. Very pp*.)

HOLMES (*turning suddenly to* WATSON): Watson — she trusted me! She — clung to me! There were four to one against me! They said "Come here," I said "Stay close to me," and she did! She clung to me — I could feel her heart beating against mine — and I was playing a game! — (*lower — parenthetical*) — a dangerous game — but I was playing it! — It will be the same to-night! She'll be there — I'll be here! She'll listen — she'll believe — and she'll trust me — and I'll — be playing — a game. No more — I've had enough! It's my last case!

(WATSON *has been watching him narrowly*.)

Oh well! what does it matter? Life is a small affair at the most — a little while — a few sunrises and sunsets — the warm breath of a few summers — the cold chill of a few winters — (*Looking down on floor a little way before him in meditation.*) And then — (*Pause.*)

WATSON: And then — ?

(HOLMES *glances up at him. Upward toss of hand before speaking.*)

HOLMES: And then.

(*The music stops.*)

WATSON (*going to* HOLMES): My dear Holmes — I'm afraid that plan of — gaining her confidence and regard went a little further than you intended —

(HOLMES *nods assent slightly*)

HOLMES (*mutters after nodding*): A trifle!

WATSON: For — her — or for you?

HOLMES: For her — (*looks up at* WATSON *slowly*) — and for me.

WATSON (*astonished. After an instant's pause*): But — if you both love each other —

HOLMES (*putting hand on* WATSON *to stop him sharply*): Sh — ! Don't say it! (*Pause.*) You mustn't tempt me — with such a thought. That girl! — young — exquisite — just beginning her sweet life — I — seared, drugged, poisoned, almost at an end! No! no! I must cure her! I must stop it, now — while there's time! (*Pause.*) She's coming here.

WATSON: She won't come alone?

HOLMES: No, Térèse will be with her.

(HOLMES *turns and goes to door to surgery, getting a book on the way, and placing it in the way of door closing. Turns to* WATSON)

When she comes let her wait in that room. You can manage that, I'm quite sure.

WATSON: Certainly — Do you intend to leave that book there

HOLMES (*nods "Yes"*): To keep that door from closing. She is to overhear.

WATSON: I see.

HOLMES: Sir Edward and the Count are very likely to become excited. I shall endeavour to make them so. You must not be alarmed old fellow.

(*Bell of outside door rings off* HOLMES *and* WATSON *look at one another*.)

(*Going to centre door*.) She may be there now. I'll go to your dressing-room, if you'll allow me, and brush away some of this dust.

WATSON: By all means! (*Goes to door.*) My wife is in the drawing-room. Do look in on her a moment — it will please her so much.

HOLMES (*at door*): My dear fellow, it will more than please me! (*Opens door. Piano heard off when the door is opened*.) Mrs. Watson! Home! Love! Life! Ah, Watson! (*Eyes glance about thinking. He sighs a little absently, suddenly turns and goes out.*)

(WATSON *turns and goes to his desk — not to sit. Enter* PARSONS.)

PARSONS: A lady sir, wants to know if she can speak to you. If there's anyone 'ere she won't come in.

WATSON: Any-name?

PARSONS: No, sir. I asked her and she said it was unnecessary — as you wouldn't know 'er. She 'as 'er maid with 'er, sir.

WATSON: Then it must be — Show her in.

(PARSONS *turns to go*.)

And Parsons — (PARSONS *stops and turns*.)

(*Lower voice.*) Two gentlemen, Count von Stalburg and Sir Edward Leighton will call. Bring them here to this room at once, and then tell Mr. Holmes. You'll find him in my dressing-room.

PARSONS: Yes, sir.

WATSON: Send everybody else away — I'll see that lady.

PARSONS: Yes, sir.

(*He goes, leaving door open. Brief pause.* PARSONS *appears outside door, showing some one to the room. Enter* ALICE FAULKNER. ALICE *glances apprehensively about, fearing she will see* HOLMES. *Seeing that* WATSON *is alone, she is much relieved and goes towards him.* PARSONS *closes door from outside*.)

ALICE (*with some timidity*): Is this — is this Doctor Watson's room?

WATSON (*encouragingly — and advancing a step or two*): Yes, and I am Doctor Watson.

ALICE: Is — would you mind telling me if Mr. Holmes — Mr. — Sherlock Holmes — is here?

WATSON: He will be before long, Miss — er —

ALICE: My name is Alice Faulkner.

WATSON: Miss Faulkner. He came a short time ago, but has gone upstairs for a few moments.

ALICE: Oh! — (*with an apprehensive look*) — and is he coming down — soon?

WATSON: Well the fact is Miss Faulkner he has an appointment with two gentlemen here and I was to let him know as soon as they arrived.

ALICE: Do you suppose I could wait — without troubling you too much — and see him — afterwards?

WATSON: Why certainly.

ALICE: Thank you — and I — I don't want him to know — that — I — that I came.

WATSON: Of course, if you wish, there's no need of my telling him.

ALICE: It's — very important indeed that you don't, Dr Watson. I can explain it all to you afterwards.

WATSON: No explanation is necessary Miss Faulkner.

ALICE: Thank you (*Glances about*) I suppose there is a waiting room for patients?

WATSON: Yes or you could sit in there (*Indicating surgery door*) You'll be less likely to be disturbed.

ALICE: Yes, thank you. (ALICE *glances toward door.*) I think I would rather be — where its entirely quiet.

(*Bell of front door outside rings*)

WATSON (*going to surgery door*): Then step this way. I think the gentlemen have arrived.

ALICE (*goes to door and turns*): And when the business between the gentlemen is over would you please have some one tell me?

WATSON: I'll tell you myself Miss Faulkner.

ALICE: Thank you (*She goes*)

(PARSONS *enters*)

PARSONS: Count von Stalburg. Sir Edward Leighton.

(*Enter* SIR EDWARD *and* COUNT VON STALBURG. PARSONS *goes, closing door after him*)

WATSON: Count — Sir Edward — (*Bowing and coming forward*)

SIR EDWARD: Dr Watson (*Bows*) Good evening (*Placing hat on pedestal.*)

(VON STALBURG *bows slightly and stands*)

Our appointment with Mr. Holmes was changed to your house, I believe

WATSON: Quite right, Sir Edward. Pray be seated, gentlemen.

(SIR EDWARD *and* WATSON *sit*.)

VON STALBURG: Mr. Holmes is a trifle late. (*Sits*.)

WATSON: He has already arrived, Count. I have sent for him.

VON STALBURG: Ugh!

(*Slight pause*.)

SIR EDWARD: It was quite a surprise to receive his message an hour ago changing the place of meeting. We should otherwise have gone to his house in Baker Street.

WATSON: You would have found it in ashes, Sir Edward.

SIR EDWARD: What! Really!

VON STALBURG: Ugh!

(*Both looking at* WATSON.)

SIR EDWARD: The — the house burnt!

WATSON: Burning now, probably.

SIR EDWARD: I'm very sorry to hear this. It must be a severe blow to him.

WATSON: No, he minds it very little.

SIR EDWARD (*surprised*): Really! I should hardly have thought it.

VON STALBURG: Did I understand you to say, doctor, that you had sent for Mr. Holmes?

WATSON: Yes, Count, and he’ll be here shortly. Indeed, I think I hear him on the stairs now.

(*Pause. Enter* HOLMES *at centre door. He is very pale. His clothing is re-arranged and cleansed, though he still, of course, wears the clerical suit, white tie, etc. He stands near door a moment.* SIR EDWARD *and* COUNT *rise and turn to him.* WATSON *rises and goes to desk, where he soon seats himself in chair behind desk.* SIR EDWARD *and the* COUNT *stand looking at* HOLMES. *Brief Pause*.)

HOLMES (*coming forward and speaking in a low clear voice, entirely calm, but showing some suppressed feeling or anxiety at the back of it*): Gentlemen, be seated again, I beg.

(*Brief pause.* SIR EDWARD *and the* COUNT *reseat themselves.* HOLMES *remains standing. He stands looking down before him for quite a while, others looking at him. He finally begins to speak in a low voice without first looking up*)

Our business to-night can be quickly disposed of. I need not tell you, gentlemen — for I have already told you — that the part I play in it is more than painful to me. But business is business — and the sooner it is over the better. You were notified to come here this evening in order that I might — (*pause*) — deliver into your hands the packet which you engaged me — on behalf of your exalted client —

(COUNT *and* SIR EDWARD *bow slightly at “exalted client.”*)

— to recover. Let me say, in justice to myself, that but for that agreement on my part, and the consequent steps which you took upon the basis of it, I would never have continued with the work. As it was, however, I felt bound to do so, and therefore pursued the matter — to the very end — and I now have the honor to deliver it into your hands.

(HOLMES *goes toward* SIR EDWARD *with the packet.* SIR EDWARD *rises and meets him.* HOLMES *places the packet in his hands,* COUNT VON STALBURG *rises and stands at his chair*.)

SIR EDWARD (formally): Permit me to congratulate you, Holmes, upon the marvellous skill you have displayed, and the promptness with which you have fulfilled your agreement.

(HOLMES *bows slightly and turns away.* SIR EDWARD *at once breaks the seals of the packet and looks at the contents. He begins to show some surprise as he glances at one or two letters or papers and at once looks closer. He quickly motions to* COUNT, *who goes at once to him. He whispers something to him, and they both look at two or three things together*.) ,

VON STALBURG: Oh! No! No!

SIR EDWARD (*stopping examination and looking across to* HOLMES): What does this mean? (*Pause*.)

(HOLMES *turns to* SIR EDWARD *in apparent surprise*.)

These letters! And these — other things. Where did you get them?

HOLMES: I purchased them — last night.

SIR EDWARD: Purchased them?

HOLMES: Quite so — quite so.

VON STALBURG: From whom — if I may ask?

HOLMES: From whom? From the parties interested — by consent of Miss Faulkner.

SIR EDWARD: You have been deceived.

HOLMES: What!

(WATSON *rises and stands at his desk.*)

SIR EDWARD (*excitedly*): This packet contains nothing — not a single letter or paper that we wanted. All clever imitations! The photographs are of another person! You have been duped. With all your supposed cleverness, they have tricked you! Ha! ha! ha!

VON STALBURG: Most decidedly duped, Mr. Holmes!

(HOLMES *turns quickly to* SIR EDWARD.)

HOLMES: Why, this is terrible! (*Turns back to* WATSON. *Stands looking in his face*.)

SIR EDWARD (*astonished*): Terrible! Surely, sir, you do not mean by that, that there is a possibility you may not be able to recover them!

(*Enter* ALICE *and stands listening*.)

HOLMES: It's quite true!

SIR EDWARD: After your positive assurance! After the steps we have taken in the matter by your advice! Why — why, this is — (*Turns to* COUNT, *too indignant to speak*.)

VON STALBURG (*indignantly*): Surely, sir, you don't mean there is no hope of it?

HOLMES: None whatever, Count. It is too late now! I can't begin all over again!

SIR EDWARD: Why, this is scandalous! It is criminal, sir! You had no right to mislead us in this way, and you shall certainly suffer the consequences. I shall see that you are brought into court to answer for it, Mr. Holmes. It will be such a blow to your reputation that you —

HOLMES: There is nothing to do, Sir Edward — I am ruined — ruined —

ALICE (*coming forward*): He is not ruined, Sir Edward. (*quiet voice, perfectly calm and self-possessed; she draws the genuine packet from her dress*.) It is entirely owing to him and what he said to me that I now wish to give you the — (*Starting toward* SIR EDWARD *as if to hand him the packet*.)

(HOLMES *steps forward and intercepts her with left hand extended. She stops surprised*.)

HOLMES: One moment — (*Pause*.) Allow me. (*He takes packet from her hand*.)

(WATSON *stands looking at the scene. Pause.* HOLMES *stands with the package in his hand looking down for a moment. He raises his head, as if he overcame weakness — glances at his watch, and turns to* SIR EDWARD *and the* COUNT. *He speaks quietly as if the climax of the tragedy were passed — the deed done.* ALICE'S *questioning gaze he plainly avoids.*)

Gentlemen — (*putting watch back in pocket*) — I notified you in my letter of this morning that the package should be produced at a quarter-past nine. It is barely fourteen past — and this is it. The one you have there, as you have already discovered, is a counterfeit.

(*Love music*.)

(HOLMES *turns a little, sees* ALICE, *stands looking at her.* ALICE *is looking at* HOLMES *with astonishment and horror. She moves back a little involuntarily*.)

SIR EDWARD and VON STALBURG (*staring up with admiration and delight as they perceive the trick*): Ah! excellent! Admirable, Mr. Holmes! It is all clear now! Really marvellous! (*To one another, etc*.) Yes — upon my word!

(*On* SIR EDWARD *and* COUNT *breaking into expressions of admiration,* WATSON *quickly moves up to them, and stops them with a quick "Sh!" All stand motionless.* HOLMES *and* ALICE *looking at one another.* HOLMES *goes quickly to* ALICE *and puts the package into her hands.*)

HOLMES (*as he does this*): Take this, Miss Faulkner. Take it away from me, quick! It is yours. Never give it up. Use it only for what you wish!

(*Stop music.*)

SIR EDWARD (*springing forward with a mild exclamation*): What! We are not to have it? (*Throwing other package up stage*.)

(VON STALBURG *gives an exclamation or look with foregoing*.)

HOLMES (*turning from* ALICE *— but keeping left hand back upon her hands into which he put the package — as if to make her keep it. Strong —*

breathless — not loud — with emphatic shake of head): No, you are not to have it.

SIR EDWARD: After all this?

HOLMES: After all this.

VON STALBURG: But, my dear sir —

SIR EDWARD: This is outrageous! Your agreement?

HOLMES: I break it! Do what you please — warrants — summons — arrests — will find me here! (*Turns up and says under his breath to* WATSON.) Get them out! Get them away! (*Stands by* WATSON'S *desk, his back to the audience.*)

(*Brief pause.* WATSON *moves toward* SIR EDWARD *and the* COUNT *at the back of* HOLMES.)

WATSON: I'm sure, gentlemen, that you will appreciate the fact — -

ALICE (*stepping forward — interrupting*): Wait a moment, Doctor Watson! (*Going to* SIR EDWARD.) Here is the package, Sir Edward! (*Hands it to* SIR EDWARD *at once*.)

(WATSON *motions to* PARSONS*, off to come on*.)

HOLMES (*turning to* ALICE): No!

ALICE (*to* HOLMES): Yes — (*Turning to* HOLMES. *Pause.*) I much prefer that he should have them. Since you last came that night and asked me to give them to you, I have thought of what you said. You were right — it was revenge. (*She looks down a moment, then suddenly turns away.*)

(HOLMES *stands motionless, near corner of desk, his eyes down.* PARSONS *enters and stands waiting with* SIR EDWARD'S *hat in his hand, which he took from off pedestal.*)

SIR EDWARD: We are greatly indebted to you, Miss Faulkner —

(*Looks at* VON STALBURG.)

VON STALBURG: To be sure!

SIR EDWARD: And to you, too, Mr. Holmes — if this was a part of the game. (*Motionless pause all round. Examining papers carefully.* COUNT *looking at them also.*) It was certainly an extraordinary method of obtaining possession of valuable papers — but we won't quarrel with the method as long as it accomplished the desired result! Eh, Count? (*Placing package in breast pocket and buttoning coat*.)

VON STALBURG: Certainly not, Sir Edward.

SIR EDWARD (*turning to* HOLMES): You have only to notify me of the charge for your services — (ALICE *gives a little look of bitterness at the word "charge"*) — Mr. Holmes, and you will receive a cheque I have the honour to wish you — good night.

(*Music till end of Act*)

(*Bowing punctiliously*.) Dr. Watson. (*Bowing at* WATSON.) This way, Count.

(WATSON *bows and follows them to door.* HOLMES *does not move.* COUNT VON STALBURG *bows to* HOLMES *and to* WATSON *and goes, followed by* SIR EDWARD. PARSONS *exits after giving* SIR EDWARD *his hat.* WATSON *quietly turns and sees* HOLMES *beckoning to him.* WATSON *goes to* HOLMES, *who whispers to him after which he quietly goes.* HOLMES *after a moment's pause, looks at* ALICE.)

HOLMES (*speaks hurriedly*): Now that you think it over, Miss Faulkner, you are doubtless beginning to realise the series of tricks by which I sought to deprive you of your property. I couldn't take it out of the house that night like a straightforward thief — because it could have been recovered at law, and for that reason I resorted to a cruel and cowardly device which should induce you to relinquish it.

ALICE (*not looking at him*): But you — you did not give it to them —

(*Pause*.)

HOLMES (*in a forced cynical hard voice*): No — I preferred that you should do as you did.

(ALICE *looks suddenly up at him in surprise and pain, with a breathless " What?" scarcely audible.* HOLMES *meets her look without a tremor*.)

(*Slowly, distinctly*.) You see, Miss Faulkner, it was a trick — a deception — to the very — end.

(ALICE *looks in his face a moment longer and then down*.)

Your maid is waiting.

ALICE (*stopping him by speech — no action*): And was it — a trick last night — when they tried to kill you?

HOLMES (*hearing* ALICE, *stops dead*): I went there to purchase the counterfeit package — to use as you have seen.

ALICE: And — did you know I would come?

(*Pause*.)

HOLMES: No.

(ALICE *gives a subdued breath of relief*)

But it fell in with my plans notwithstanding. Now that you see me in my true light, Miss Faulkner, we have nothing left to say but good night — and good-bye — which you ought to be very glad to do. Believe me, I meant no harm to you — it was purely business — with me. For that you see I would sacrifice everything. Even my supposed — friendship for you — was a pretense — a sham — everything that you —

(*She has slowly turned away to the front during his speech. She turns and looks him in the face.*)

ALICE (*quietly but distinctly*): I don't believe it.

(*They look at one another*.)

HOLMES (*after a while*): Why not?

ALICE: From the way you speak — from the way you — look — from all sorts of things! — (*With a very slight smile*.) You're not the only one — who can tell things — from small details.

HOLMES (*coming a step closer to her*): Your faculty — of observation is — is somewhat remarkable, Miss Faulkner — and your deduction is quite correct! I suppose — indeed I know — that I love you. I love you. But I know as well what I am — and what you are —

(ALICE *begins to draw nearer to him gradually, but with her face turned front*.)

I know that no such person as I should ever dream of being a part of your sweet life! It would be a crime for me to think of such a thing! There is every reason why I should say good-bye and farewell! There is every reason —

(ALICE *gently places her right hand on* HOLMES' *breast, which stops him from continuing speech. He suddenly stops. After an instant he begins slowly to look down into her face. His left arm gradually steals about her. He presses her head close to him and the lights fade away with* ALICE *resting in* HOLMES' *arms, her head on his breast*.)

(*Music swells gradually.*)

CURTAIN

THE SPECKLED BAND

Conan Doyle published this theatrical adaptation of his well-known Sherlock Holmes short story in 1910.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES The great Detective.
DR. WATSON His Friend.
BELLY Page to Sherlock Holmes.
DR. RYLOTT A retired Anglo-Indian Surgeon, Owner of Stoke Moran Manor.
ENID STONOR His Step-daughter.
ALI An Indian, valet to Dr. Rylott
RODGERS Butler to Dr. Rylott.
MRS. STAUNTON Housekeeper to Dr. Rylott.
MR. SCOTT WILSON Engaged to Enid’s sister.
MR. LONGBRACE Coroner.
MR. BREWER Foreman of the Jury.
MR. ARMITAGE A Juror.

MR. HOLT LOAMINO
MR. MILVERTON
MR. JAMES B. MONTAGU
Clients of Mr. Sherlock Holmes

MRS. SOAMES
CORONER’S OFFICER
INSPECTOR DOWNING
PETERS

ACT I

The Hall of Stoke Place, Stoke Moran

Two years elapse between Acts I and II

SCENE. — *Stoke Place at Stoke Moran. A large, oak-lined, gloomy hall, with everything in disrepair. At the back, centre, is a big double door which leads into the morning-room. To its right, but also facing the audience, is another door which leads to the outside entrance hall. A little down, right, is the door to* DR. RYLOTT'S *study. Farther down, right, a large opening gives access to the passageway of the bedroom wing. A fifth entrance, up left, leads to the servants' hall. There is a long table in the middle of the room, with chairs round.*

ENID STONOR *sits on a couch at one side, her face buried in the cushion, sobbing.* RODGERS *also discovered, the butler, a broken old man. He looks timidly about him and then approaches* ENID.

RODGERS: Don't cry, my dear young lady. You're so good and kind to others that it just goes to my heart to see such trouble to you. Things will all change for the better now.

ENID: Thank you, Rodgers, you are very kind.

RODGERS: Life can't be all trouble, Miss Enid. There must surely be some sunshine somewhere, though I've waited a weary time for it.

ENID: Poor old Rodgers!

RODGERS: Yes, it used to be poor young Rodgers, and now it's poor old Rodgers; and there's the story of my life.

(*Enter* ALI, *an Indian servant, from the servants' hall.)*

ALl: Mrs. Staunton says you are to have beer and sandwiches for the jury, and tiffin for the coroner.

RODGERS: Very good.

ALl: Go at once.

RODGERS: You mind your own business. You think you are the master.

ALl: I carry the housekeeper’s order.

RODGERS: Well, I’ve got my orders.

ALI: And I see they are done.

RODGERS: You’re only the valet, a servant — same as me; as Mrs. Staunton for that matter.

ALl: Shall I tell master? Shall I say you will not take the order?

RODGERS: There, there, I’ll do it.

(*Enter* DR. GRIMESBY RYLOTT *from his study.*)

RYLOTT: Well, what’s the matter? What are you doing Rodgers?

RODGERS: Nothing, sir, nothing.

ALl: I tell him to set out tiffin.

RYLOTT: Go this instant! What do you mean?

(RODGERS *exits into servants’ hall*.)

Ali, stand at the door and show people in. (*To* ENID.) Oh! for God’s sake stop your snivelling! Have I not enough to worry me without that? (*Shakes her*.) Stop it, I say! I’ll have no more. They’ll all be in here in a moment.

ENID: Oh? Don’t be so harsh with me.

RYLOTT: Hark! I think I hear them. (*Crossing toward bedroom passage.*) What can they be loitering for? They won’t learn much by looking at the body. I suppose that consequential ass of a coroner is giving them a lecture.

If Professor Van Donop Doctor WATSON are satisfied, surely that is good enough for him. Ali!

ALl: Yes, Sahib.

RYLOTT: How many witnesses have come?

ALI: Seven, Sahib.

RYLOTT: All in the morning room?

ALl: Yes, Sahib.

RYLOTT: Then put any others in there also.

(ALl *salaams*.)

Woman will you dry your eyes and try for once to think of other people besides yourself? Learn to stamp down your private emotions. Look at me. I was as fond of your sister Violet as if she had really been my daughter, and yet I face the situation now like a man. Get up and do your duty.

ENID (*drying her eyes*): What can I do?

RYLOTT (*sitting on the settee beside her*): There’s a brave girl. I did not mean to be harsh. Thirty years of India sends a man home with a cayenne pepper temper. Did I ever tell you the funny story of the Indian judge and the cabman?

ENID: Oh, how Can you?

RYLOTT: Well, well, I’ll tell it some other time. Don’t look so shocked. I meant well, I was trying to cheer you up. Now look here, Enid! be a sensible girl and pull yourself together — and I say! be careful what you tell them. We may have had our little disagreements — every family has — but don’t wash our linen in public. It is a time to forgive and forget. I always loved Violet in my heart.

ENID: Oh! if I could only think so!

RYLOTT: Since your mother died you have both been to me as my own daughters; in every way the same; mind you say so. D’you hear?

ENID: Yes, I hear.

RYLOTT: Don’t forget it. (*Rising, turns her face*.) Don’t forget it. Curse them! are they never coming, the carrion crows! I’ll see what they are after.

(*Exits into bedroom passage*.)

(SCOTT WILSON *enters at the hall door and is shown by*ALl *into the morning-room. While he is showing him in,* DR. WATSON *enters, and, seeing* ENID *with her face in the cushions, he comes across to her*.)

WATSON: Let me say how sorry I am, Miss Stonor. (*Shakinghands*.)

ENID (*rises to meet him)*: I am so glad to see you, Dr. Watson. (*Sinks on stool and sobs*.) I fear I am a weak, cowardly creature, unfit to meet the shocks of life. It is all like some horrible nightmare.

WATSON: I think you have been splendidly brave. What woman could fail to feel such a shock?

ENID: Your kindness has been the one gleam of light in these dark days. There is such bad feeling between my stepfather and the country doctor that I am sure he would not have come to us. But I remembered the kind letter you wrote when we came home, and I telegraphed on the chance. I could hardly dare hope that you would come from London so promptly.

WATSON: Why, I knew your mother well in India, and I remember you and your poor sister when you were schoolgirls. I was only too glad to be of any use — if indeed I was of any use. Where is your stepfather?

ENID: He has gone in to speak with the coroner.

WATSON: I trust that he does not visit you with any of that violence of which I hear so much in the village. Excuse me if I take a liberty; it is only that I am interested. You are very lonely and defenceless.

ENID: Thank you. I am sure you mean well, but indeed I would rather not discuss this matter.

ALl (*advancing)*: This way, sir.

WATSON: In a minute.

ALl: Master’s orders, sir. (*Coming down*.)

WATSON: In a minute, I say.

ALI: Very sorry, sir. Must go now.

WATSON (*pushing him away*): Stand back, you rascal. I will go in my own time. Don’t you dare to interfere with me.

(ALl s*hrugs shoulders and withdraws*)

Just one last word. It is a true friend who speaks, and you will not resent it. If you should be in any trouble, if anything should come which made you uneasy — which worried you —

ENID: What should come? You frighten me.

WATSON: You have no one in this lonely place to whom you can go. If by chance you should want a friend you will turn to me, will you not?

ENID: How good you are! But you mean more than you say. What is it that you fear?

WATSON: It is a gloomy atmosphere for a young girl. Your stepfather is a strange man. You would come to me, would you not?

ENID: I promise you I will. (*Rising*.)

WATSON: I can do little enough. But I have a singular friend — a man with strange powers and a very masterful personality. We used to live together, and I came to know him well. Holmes is his name — Mr. Sherlock Holmes. It is to him I should turn if things looked black for you. If any man in England could help it is he.

ENID: But I shall need no help. And yet it is good to think that I am not all alone. Hush! they are coming. Don’t delay! Oh! I beg to go.

WATSON: I take your promise with me. (*He goes into the morning-room.*)

(DR. RYLOTT *enters from the bedroom wing, conversing with the* CORONER. *The* JURY, *in a confused crowd, come behind. There are a* CORONER'S OFFICER *and a police*INSPECTOR.)

CORONER: Very proper sentiments, sir; very proper sentiments. I can entirely understand your feelings.

RYLOTT: At my age it is a great thing to have a soothing female influence around one. I shall miss it at every turn. She had the sweet temperament of her dear mother. Enid, my dear, have you been introduced to Mr. Longbrace, the Coroner?

CORONER: How do you do, Miss Stonor? You have my sympathy, I am sure. Well, well, we must get to business. Mr. Brewer, I understand that you have been elected as foreman. Is that so, gentlemen?

ALL: Yes, yes.

CORONER: Then perhaps you would sit here. (*Looks at watch.*) Dear me! it is later than I thought. Now, Dr. Rylott — (*sits at table*) — both you and your stepdaughter are witnesses in this inquiry, so your presence here is irregular.

RYLOTT: I thought, sir, that under my own roof —

CORONER: Not at all, sir, not at all. The procedure is entirely unaffected by such a consideration.

RYLOTT: I am quite in your hands.

CORONER: Then you will kindly withdraw.

RYLOTT: Come, ENID.

CORONER: Possibly the young lady would wish to be free, so we Could take her evidence first.

RYLOTT: That would be most considerate. You can understand, sir, that I would wish her spared in this ordeal. I leave you, dear girl. (*Aside.*)

Remember!

(RYLOTT is *about to go into his study but is directed by the* INSPECTOR *into the morning-room*.)

CORONER: Put a chair, there, officer.

(OFFICER *places chair*)

That will do. Now, Miss Stonor! Thank you. The officer will swear you —

(ENID *is sworn by the* OFFICER)

OFFICER: — The truth and nothing but the truth. Thank you.

(ENID *kisses the Book*.)

CORONER: Now, gentlemen, before I take the evidence, I will remind you of the general circumstances connected with the sudden decease of this unhappy young lady. She was Miss Violet Stonor, the elder of the stepdaughters of Dr. Grimesby Rylott, a retired Anglo-Indian doctor, who has lived for several years at this ancient house of Stoke Place, in Stoke Moran. She was born and educated in India, and her health was never robust. There was, however, no actual physical lesion, nor has any been discovered by the doctors. You have seen the room on the ground floor at the end of this passage, and you realise that the young lady was well guarded, having her sister's bedroom on one side of her and her stepfather's on the other. We will now take the evidence of the sister of the deceased as to what actually occurred. Miss Stonor, do you identify the body of the deceased as that of your sister, Violet Stonor?

ENID: Yes.

CORONER: Might I ask you to tell us what happened upon the night of April 14? I understand that your sister was in her ordinary health when you said good-night to her?

ENID: Yes, she seemed as usual. She was never strong.

CORONER: Had she some mental trouble?

ENID (*hesitating)*: She was not very happy in her mind.

CORONER: I beg that you will have no reserves. I am sure you appreciate the solemnity of this occasion. Why was your sister unhappy in her mind?

ENID: There were obstacles to her engagement.

CORONER: Yes, yes, I understand that this will be dealt with by another witness. Your sister was unhappy in her mind because she was engaged to be married and there were obstacles. Proceed.

ENID: I was awakened shortly after midnight by a scream. I ran into the passage. As I reached her door I heard a sound like low music, then the key turn in the lock, and she rushed out in her nightdress. Her face was convulsed with terror. She screamed out a few words and fell into my arms, and then slipped down upon the floor. When I tried to raise her I found that she was dead. Then — then I fainted myself, and I knew no more.

CORONER: When you came to yourself — ?

ENID: When I came to myself I had been carried by my stepfather and RODGERS, the butler, back to my bed.

CORONER: You mentioned music. What sort of music?

ENID: It was a low, sweet sound.

CORONER: Where did this music come from?

ENID: I could not tell. I may say that once or twice I thought that I heard music at night.

CORONER: You say that your sister screamed out some words. What were the words?

ENID: It was incoherent raving. She was wild with terror.

CORONER: But could you distinguish nothing?

ENID: I heard the word “band” — I also heard the word “speckled.” I cannot say more. I was myself almost as terrified as she.

CORONER: Dear me. Band — speckled — it sounds like delirium. She mentioned no name?

ENID: None.

CORONER: What light was in the passage?

ENID: A lamp against the wall.

CORONER: You could distinctly see your sister?

ENID: Oh, yes.

CORONER: And there was at that time no trace of violence upon her?

ENID: No, no!

CORONER: You are quite clear that she unlocked her door before she appeared?

ENID: Yes, I can swear it.

CORONER: And her window? Did she ever sleep with her window open?

ENID: No, it was always fastened at night.

CORONER: Did you examine it after her death?

ENID: I saw it next morning; it was fastened then.

CORONER: One other point, Miss Stonor. You have no reason to believe that your sister contemplated suicide?

ENID: Certainly not.

CORONER: At the same time when a young lady — admittedly of a nervous, highly-strung disposition — is crossed in her love affairs, such a possibility cannot be excluded. You can throw no light upon such a supposition?

ENID: No.

FOREMAN: Don t you think Mr. Coroner if the young lady had designs upon herself she would have stayed in her room and not rushed out into the passage?

CORONER: Well that is for your consideration and judgement. You have heard this young lady’s evidence. Have any of you any questions to put?

ARMITAGE (*rising*): Well I’m a plain man, a Methodist and the son of a Methodist —

CORONER: What is your name sir?

ARMITAGE: I’m Mr. Armitage sir. I own the big shop in the village.

CORONER: Well sir?

ARMITAGE: I’m a Methodist and the son of a Methodist —

CORONER: Your religious opinions are not under discussion, Mr. Armitage.

ARMITAGE: But I speaks my mind as man to man I pays my taxes the same as the rest of them.

CORONER: Have you any questions to ask?

ARMITAGE: I would like to ask this young lady whether her stepfather uses her ill for there are some queer stories got about in the village.

CORONER: The question would be out of order. It does not bear upon the death of the deceased.

FOREMAN: Well sir I will put Mr. Armitage’s question in another shape. Can you tell us Miss, whether your stepfather ill used the deceased young lady?

ENID: He — he was not always gentle.

ARMITAGE: Does he lay hands on you? — that’s what I want to know.

CORONER: Really, Mr. Armitage.

ARMITAGE: Excuse me, Mr. Coroner. I’ve lived in this village, boy and man for fifty years and I can look any man in the face.

(ARMITAGE *sits*.)

CORONER: You have heard the question, Miss Stonor. I don’t know that we could insist upon your answering it.

ENID: Gentlemen, my stepfather has spent his life in the tropics. It has affected his health. There are times — there are times — when he loses control over his temper. At such times he is liable to be violent. My sister and I thought — hoped — that he was not really responsible for it. He is sorry for it afterwards.

CORONER: Well, Miss Stonor, I am sure I voice the sentiments of the Jury when I express our profound sympathy for the sorrow which has come upon you.

(JURY *all murmur, “Certainly,” “Quite so,” etc*.)

Call Mr. Scott Wilson. We need not detain you any longer.

(ENID rises and goes into the morning-room.)

OFFICER (*at door*): Mr. Scott Wilson.

(Enter SCOTT WILSON — *a commonplace young gentleman*.)

CORONER: Swear him, officer —

(SCOTT WILSON *mumbles and kisses the Book.*)

I understand, Mr. Scott Wilson, that you were engaged to be married to the deceased.

WILSON: Yes, sir.

CORONER: Since how long?

WILSON: Six weeks.

CORONER: Was there any quarrel between you?

WILSON: None.

CORONER: Were you in a position to marry?

WILSON: Yes.

CORONER: Was there any talk of an immediate marriage?

WILSON: Well, sir, we hoped before the summer was over.

CORONER: We hear of obstacles. What were the obstacles?

WILSON: Dr. Rylott. He would not hear of the marriage.

CORONER: Why not?

WILSON: He gave no reason, sir.

CORONER: There was some scandal, was there not?

WILSON: Yes, sir, he assaulted me.

CORONER: What happened?

WILSON: He met me in the village. He was like a raving madman. He struck me several times with his cane, and he set his boar-hound upon me.

CORONER: What did you do?

WILSON: I took refuge in one of the little village shops.

ARMITAGE (*jumping up*): I beg your pardon, young gentleman, you took refuge in my shop.

WILSON: Yes, sir, I took refuge in Mr. Armitage’s shop.

(ARMITAGE *sits*.)

CORONER: And a police charge resulted?

WILSON: I withdrew it, sir, out of consideration for my fiancée.

CORONER: But you continued your engagement?

WILSON: I would not be bullied out of that.

CORONER: Quite so. But this opposition, and her fears as to your safety, caused Miss Stonor great anxiety?

WILSON: Yes.

CORONER: Apart from that, you can say nothing which throws any light on this sad event?

WILSON: No. I had not seen her for a week before her death.

CORONER: She never expressed any particular apprehension to you?

WILSON: She was always nervous and unhappy.

CORONER: But nothing definite?

WILSON: No.

CORONER: Any questions, gentlemen. (*Pause*.) Very good. Call Dr. Watson! You may go.

(SCOTT WILSON goes out through the entrance hall.

OFFICER (*at morning-room door*): Dr. WATSON!

(*Enter* DR. WATSON.)

CORONER: You will kindly take the oath. Gentlemen, at the opening of this Court, and before you viewed the body, you had read to you the evidence of Professor Van Donop, the pathologist who is unable to be present to-day. Dr. Watson's evidence is supplementary to that. You are not in practice, I understand, Dr. Watson?

WATSON: No, sir.

CORONER: A retired Army Surgeon, I understand?

WATSON: Yes.

CORONER: Dear me! you retired young.

WATSON: I was wounded in the Afghan Campaign.

CORONER: I see, I see. You knew Dr. Rylott before this tragedy?

WATSON: No, sir. I knew Mrs. Stonor when she was a widow, and I knew her two daughters. That was in India. I heard of her re-marriage and her death. When I heard that the children, with their stepfather, had come to England, I wrote and reminded them that they had at least one friend.

CORONER: Well, what then?

WATSON: I heard no more until I received a wire from Miss Enid Stonor. I at once came down to Stoke Moran.

CORONER: You were the first medical man to see the body?

WATSON: Dr. Rylott is himself a medical man.

CORONER: Exactly. You were the first independent medical man?

WATSON: Oh, yes, sir.

CORONER: Without going too far into painful details, I take it that you are in agreement with Professor Van Donop's report and analysis?

WATSON: Yes, sir.

CORONER: You found no physical lesion?

WATSON: No.

CORONER: Nothing to account for death?

WATSON: No.

CORONER: No signs of violence?

WATSON: No.

CORONER: Nor of poison?

WATSON: No.

CORONER: Yet there must be a cause?

WATSON: There are many causes of death which leave no sign.

CORONER: For instance — ?

WATSON: Well, for instance, the subtler poisons. There are many poisons for which we have no test.

CORONER: No doubt. But you will remember, Dr. Watson, that this young lady died some five or six hours after her last meal. So far as the evidence goes it was only then that she could have taken Poison, unless she took it of her own free will; in which case we Should have expected to find some paper or bottle in her room. But it would indeed be a strange poison which could strike her down so suddenly many hours after it was taken. You perceive difficulty?

WATSON: Yes sir.

CORONER: You could name no such poison?

WATSON: No.

CORONER: Then what remains?

WATSON: There are other causes. One may die of nervous shock or one may die of a broken heart.

CORONER: Had you any reason to think that the deceased had undergone nervous shock?

WATSON: Only the narrative of her sister.

CORONER: You have formed no conjecture as to the nature of the shock?

WATSON: No sir.

CORONER: You spoke of a broken heart. Have you any reason for using such an expression?

WATSON: Only my general impression that she was not happy.

CORONER: I fear we cannot deal with general impressions.

(*Murmurs of acquiescence from the* JURY)

You have no definite reason?

WATSON: None that I can put into words.

CORONER: Has any juror any question to ask?

ARMITAGE (*rising*): I'm a plain downright man and I want to get to the bottom of this thing.

CORONER: We all share your desire Mr. Armitage.

ARMITAGE: Look here Doctor you examined this lady. Did you find any signs of violence?

WATSON: I have already said I did not.

ARMITAGE: I mean bruises, or the like.

WATSON: No sir.

CORONER: Any questions?

ARMITAGE: I would like to ask the Doctor whether he wrote to these young ladies because he had any reason to think they were ill-used.

WATSON: No, sir. I wrote because I knew their mother.

ARMITAGE: What did their mother die of?

WATSON: I have no idea.

CORONER Really Mr. Armitage you go too far!

(ARMITAGE *sits*.)

Anything else?

FOREMAN: May I ask, Dr. Watson, whether you examined the window of the room to see if any one from outside could have molested the lady?

WATSON: The window was bolted.

FOREMAN: Yes, but had it been bolted all night?

WATSON: Yes, it had.

CORONER: How do you know?

WATSON: By the dust on the window-latch.

CORONER: Dear me, Doctor, you are very observant!

WATSON: I have a friend, sir, who trained me in such matters.

CORONER: Well, your evidence seems final on that point. We are all obliged to you, Dr. Watson, and will detain you no longer.

(*Exit* DR. WATSON *into the morning-room.*)

OFFICER (*at door*): Mr. Rodgers!

(*Enter* RODGERS.)

CORONER: Swear him!

(*Business of swearing.*)

Well, Mr. Rodgers, how long have you been in the service of Dr. Rylott?

RODGERS: For many years, sir.

CORONER: Ever since the family settled here?

RODGERS: Yes, sir. I’m an old man, sir, too old to change. I don’t suppose I’d get another place if I lost this one. He tells me it would be the gutter or the workhouse.

CORONER: Who tells you?

RODGERS: Him, sir — the master. But I am not saying anything against him, sir. No, no, don't think that — not a word against the master. You won't misunderstand me?

CORONER: You seem nervous?

RODGERS: Well, I'm an old man, sir, and things like this —

CORONER: Quite so, we can understand. Now, Rodgers, upon the night of April 14, you helped to carry the deceased to her room.

RODGERS: Did I, sir? Who said that?

CORONER: We had it in Miss Stonor's evidence. Was it not so?

RODGERS: Yes, yes, if Miss Enid said it. What Miss Enid says is true. And what the master says is true. It's all true.

CORONER: I suppose you came when you heard the scream?

RODGERS: Yes, yes, the scream in the night; I came to it.

CORONER: And what did you see?

RODGERS: I saw — I saw — (*Puts his hands up as if about to faint.*)

CORONER: Come, come, man, speak out.

RODGERS: I'm — I'm frightened.

CORONER: You have nothing to fear. You are under protection of the law. Who are you afraid of? Your master?

RODGERS (*rising*): No, no, gentlemen, don't think that! No, no!

CORONER: Well, then — what did you see?

RODGERS: She was on the ground, sir, and Miss Enid beside her — both in white night clothes. My master was standing near them.

CORONER: Well?

RODGERS: We carried the young lady to her room and laid her on her couch. She never spoke nor moved. I know no more indeed I know no more.

(*Sinking into his chair*.)

CORONER: Any questions, gentlemen?

ARMITAGE: You live in the house all the time?

RODGERS: Yes, sir.

ARMITAGE: Does your master ever knock you about?

RODGERS: No, sir, no.

ARMITAGE: Well, Mr. Scott Wilson told us what happened to him, and I know he laid the gardener up for a week and paid ten pound to keep out of court. You know that yourself.

RODGERS: No, no, sir, I know nothing of the kind.

ARMITAGE: Well, every one else in the village knows. What I want to ask is — was he ever violent to these young ladies?

FOREMAN: Yes, that's it. Was he violent?

RODGERS: No, not to say violent. No, he's a kind man, the master.

(*Pause*.)

CORONER: Call Mrs. Staunton, the housekeeper. That will do.

(*Exit* RODGERS *into the servant's hall*.)

(*Enter* MRS. STAUNTON *from the morning-room.*)

CORONER: You are housekeeper here?

MRS. STAUNTON: Yes, sir. (*Standing*.)

CORONER: How long have you been here?

MRS. STAUNTON: Ever since the family settled here.

CORONER: Can you tell us anything of this matter?

MRS. STAUNTON: I knew nothing of it, sir, till after the poor young lady had been laid upon the bed. After that it was I who took charge of things, for Dr. Rylott was so dreadfully upset that he could do nothing.

CORONER: Oh! he was very upset, was he?

MRS. STAUNTON: I never saw a man in such a state of grief.

CORONER: Living in the house you had numerous opportunities of seeing the relations between Dr. Rylott and his two stepdaughters.

MRS. STAUNTON: Yes, sir.

CORONER: How would you describe them?

MRS. STAUNTON: He was kindness itself to them. No two young ladies could be better treated than they have been.

CORONER: It has been suggested that he was sometimes violent to them.

MRS. STAUNTON: Never, sir. He was like a tender father.

ARMITAGE: How about that riding switch? We've heard tales about that.

MRS. STAUNTON: Oh, it's you, Mr. Armitage? There are good reasons why you should make mischief against the Doctor. He told you what he thought of you and your canting ways.

CORONER: Now, then, I cannot have these recriminations. If I had known, Mr. Armitage, that there was personal feeling between the Doctor and you —

ARMITAGE: Nothing of the sort, sir. I'm doing my public duty.

CORONER: Well, the evidence of the witness seems very clear in combating your assertion of ill-treatment. Any other Juror? Very good, Mrs. Staunton.

(*Exit* MRS. STAUNTON *into the servants' hall.*)

Call Dr. Grimesby RYLOTT.

OFFICER (*calls at morning-room door*): Dr. Rylott.

(*Enter* DR. RYLOTT.)

CORONER: Dr. Rylott, do you identify the body of the deceased as that of your stepdaughter, Violet Stonor?

RYLOTT: Yes, sir.

CORONER: Can you say anything which will throw any light upon this unhappy business?

RYLOTT: You may well say unhappy, sir. It has completely unnerved me.

CORONER: No doubt.

RYLOTT: She was the ray of sunshine in the house. She knew my ways. I am lost without her.

CORONER: No doubt. But we must confine ourselves to the facts. Have you any explanation which will cover the facts of your stepdaughter's death?

RYLOTT: I know just as much of the matter as you do It is a complete and absolute mystery to me.

CORONER: Speaking as a doctor, you had no misgivings as to her health?

RYLOTT: She was never robust, but I had no reason for uneasiness.

CORONER: It has come out in evidence that her happiness had been affected by your interference with her engagement?

RYLOTT (*rising*): That is entirely a misunderstanding sir. As a matter of fact I interfered in order to protect her from a man I had every reason to believe was a mere fortune hunter. She saw it herself in that light and was relieved to see the last of him.

CORONER: Excuse me sir but this introduces a new element into the case. Then the young lady had separate means?

RYLOTT: An annuity under her mother’s will. (*Sits*.)

CORONER: And to whom does it now go?

RYLOTT: I believe that I might have a claim upon it but I am waiving it in favour of her sister.

CORONER: Very handsome I am sure.

(*Murmurs from the* JURY)

ARMITAGE (*rising*): I expect sir so long as she lives under your roof you have the spending of it.

CORONER: Well, well, we can hardly go into that.

ARMITAGE: Had the young lady her own cheque book?

CORONER: Really Mr. Armitage you get away from the subject.

ARMITAGE: It is the subject.

RYLOTT (*rising*): I am not here, sir, to submit to impertinence. (*Sits*.)

CORONER: I must ask you, Mr. Armitage — (*Holds up hand*.)

(ARMITAGE *sits*.)

Now, Dr. Rylott, the medical evidence, as you are aware, gives us no cause of death. You can suggest none?

RYLOTT: No, sir.

CORONER: Your stepdaughter has affirmed that her sister unlocked her door before appearing in the passage. Can you confirm this?

RYLOTT: Yes, I heard her unlock the door.

CORONER: You arrived in the passage simultaneously with the lady?

RYLOTT: Yes.

CORONER: You had been aroused by the scream?

RYLOTT: Yes.

CORONER: And naturally you came at once?

RYLOTT: Quite so. I was just in time to see her rush from her room and fall into her sister’s arms. I can only imagine that she had some nightmare or hideous dream which had been too much for her heart. That is my own theory of her death.

CORONER: We have it on record that she said some incoherent words before she died.

RYLOTT: I heard nothing of the sort.

CORONER: She said nothing so far as you know?

RYLOTT: Nothing.

CORONER: Did you hear any music?

RYLOTT: Music, sir? No, I heard none.

CORONER: Well, what happened next?

RYLOTT: I satisfied myself that the poor girl was dead. Rodgers, my butler, had arrived, and together we laid her on her couch. I can really tell you nothing more.

CORONER: You did not at once send for a doctor?

RYLOTT: Well, sir, I was a doctor myself. To satisfy ENID I Consented in the morning to telegraph for Dr. Watson, who had been the girls’ friend in India. I really could do no more.

CORONER: Looking back, you have nothing with which to reproach yourself in your treatment of this lady?

RYLOTT: She was the apple of my eye, I would have given my life for her.

CORONER: Well, gentlemen, any questions?

ARMITAGE: Yes, a good many. (Rising.)

(*The other* JURYMEN *show some impatience*.)

Well, I pay my way, the same as the rest of you, and I claim my rights. Mr. Coroner, I claim my rights.

CORONER: Well, well, Mr. Armitage, be as short as you can (*Looks at his watch*.) It is nearly two.

ARMITAGE: See here, Dr. Rylott, what about that great hound of yours? What about that whip you carry. What about the tales we hear down in the village of your bully-raggin’ them young ladies?

RYLOTT (*rising*): Really, Mr. Coroner, I must claim your protection. This fellow’s impertinence is intolerable.

CORONER: You go rather far, Mr. Armitage. You must confine yourself to definite questions upon matters of fact.

(RYLOTT *sits*.)

ARMITAGE: Well, then, do you sleep with a light in your room?

RYLOTT: No, I do not.

ARMITAGE: How was you dressed in the passage?

RYLOTT: In my dressing-gown.

ARMITAGE: How did you get it?

RYLOTT: I struck a light, of course, and took it from a hook.

ARMITAGE: Well, if you did all that, how did you come into the passage as quick as the young lady who ran out just as she was?

RYLOTT: I can only tell you it was so.

ARMITAGE: Well, I can only tell you I don’t believe it.

CORONER: You must withdraw that, Mr. Armitage.

ARMITAGE: I says what I mean, Mr. Coroner, and I say it again, I don't believe it. I've got common sense if I haven't got education.

RYLOTT (*rising*): I can afford to disregard his remarks, Coroner.

CORONER: Anything else, Mr. Armitage?

ARMITAGE: I've said my say, and I stick to it.

CORONER: Then that will do, Dr. Rylott.

(*Pause*. DR. RYLOTT *is going up towards the morning door*.)

By the way, can your Indian servant help us at all in the matter?

RYLOTT (*coming down again*): Ali sleeps in a garret and knew nothing till next morning. He is my personal valet.

CORONER: Then we need not call him. Very good, Dr. Rylott. you can remain if you wish. (*To* JURY.) Well, gentlemen, you have heard the evidence relating to this very painful case. There are several conceivable alternatives. There is death by murder. Of this I need not say there is not a shadow or tittle of evidence. There is death by suicide. Here, again, the presumption is absolutely against it. Then there is death by accident. We have nothing to lead us to believe that there has been an accident. Finally, we come to death by natural causes. It must be admitted that these natural causes are obscure, but the processes of nature are often mysterious, and we cannot claim to have such an exact knowledge of them that we can always define them. You have read the evidence of Professor Van Donop and you have heard that of Dr. Watson. If you are not satisfied it is always within your competence to declare that death arose from unknown causes. It is for you to form your own conclusions.

(*The* JURY *buzz together for a moment. The* CORONER*looks at his watch, rises, and goes over to* DR. RYLOTT.)

We are later than I intended.

RYLOTT: These absurd interruptions — !

CORONER: Yes, at these country inquests we generally have some queer fellows on the jury.

RYLOTT: Lunch must be ready. Won't you join us.

CORONER: Well, well, I shall be delighted.

FOREMAN: We are all ready, sir.

(CORONER *returns to table.*)

CORONER: Well, gentlemen? (*Sits*.)

FOREMAN: We are for unknown causes.

CORONER: Quite so. Unanimous?

ARMITAGE: No, sir. I am for further investigation. I don't say it's unknown and I won't say it's unknown.

CORONER: I entirely agree with the majority finding. Well, gentlemen that will finish our labours. Officer —

(*The* OFFICER *comes to him.* ARMITAGE *sits*.)

You will all sign the inquisition before you leave this room officer will take your signatures as you pass out

(*The* JURY *rise — sign book as they go out into the entrance hall*.)

(*Crossing to* ARMITAGE)

Mr. Armitage One moment. Mr. Armitage I am sorry that you are not yet satisfied.

ARMITAGE: No sir I am not.

CORONER: You are a little exacting (*Turns away*)

RYLOTT (*touching* ARMITAGE *on the shoulder*): I have only one thing to say to you sir. Get out of my house. Do you hear?

ARMITAGE: Yes Dr Rylott I hear. And I seem to hear something else. Something crying from the ground, Dr. Rylott, from the ground.

(*Exits slowly into the entrance hall)*

RYLOTT: Impertinent rascal! (*Turns away*)

(*Enter* WATSON, ENID *and the other witnesses from the morning room. They all file out towards the entrance hail*)

(ENID *has come down stage.* DR WATSON *comes back from door*)

WATSON: Good bye Miss Enid (*Shakes hands. Then in a lower voice*) Don t forget that you have a friend.

(*He goes out*)

(*Business of* CORONER *and* RYLOTT *lighting cigarettes* — ENID *catches* RYLOTT'S e*ye across* CORONER *and shrinks down onto a chair*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

Two years have elapsed between Acts I and II

SCENE I

DR. RYLOTT'S study at Stoke Place.

The door at one side, a pair of French windows on the other.

It is two years later.

Enter MRS. STAUNTON, *showing in* ARMITAGE.

MRS. STAUNTON: I can't tell how long the Doctor may be. It's not long since he went out.

ARMITAGE: Well, I'll wait for him, however long it is.

MRS. STAUNTON: It's nothing I could do for you, I suppose.

ARMITAGE: No, it is not.

MRS. STAUNTON: Well, you need not be so short. Perhaps, after you've seen the Doctor, you may be sorry.

ARMITAGE: There's the law of England watching over me, Mrs. Staunton. I advise you not to forget it — nor your master either. I fear no man so long as I am doing my duty.

(*Enter* ENID.)

Ah, Miss Stonor, I am very glad to see you.

ENID (*bewildered*): Good-day, Mr. Armitage. What brings you up here?

ARMITAGE: I had a little business with the Doctor. But I should be very glad to have a chat with you also.

MRS. STAUNTON: I don’t think the Doctor would like it, Miss Enid.

ARMITAGE: A pretty state of things. Isn’t this young lady able to speak with whoever she likes? Do you call this a prison, or a private asylum, or what? These are fine doings in a free country.

MRS. STAUNTON: I am sure the Doctor would not like it.

ARMITAGE: Look here, Mrs. Staunton, two is company and three is none. If I’m not afraid of your master, I’m not afraid of YOU. You’re a bit beyond your station, you are. Get to the other side of that door and leave us alone, or else —

MRS. STAUNTON: Or what, Mr. Armitage?

ARMITAGE: As sure as my father was a Methodist I’ll go down to the J.P. and swear out an information that this young lady is under constraint.

MRS. STAUNTON: Oh — well, you need not be so hot about it. It’s nothing to me what you say to Miss Enid. But the Doctor won’t like it.

(*She goes out*)

ARMITAGE (looking at the door): You haven’t such a thing as a hatpin? (Crossing over to door)

ENID: No.

ARMITAGE: If I were to jab it through that keyhole —

ENID: Mr. Armitage please don’t.

ARMITAGE: You’d hear Sister Jane’s top note. But we’ll speak low for I don’t mean she shall hear. First of all Miss Enid are they using you? Are you all right?

ENID: Mr. Armitage I know you mean it all for kindness but I cannot discuss my personal affairs with you. I hardly know you.

ARMITAGE: Only the village grocer. I know all about that. But I’ve taken an interest in you Miss Stonor and I’m not the kind of man that can’t leave go his hold. I came here not to see you, but your stepfather.

ENID: Oh, Mr. Armitage, I beg you to go away at once. You have no idea how violent he is if any one thwarts him. Please, please go at once.

ARMITAGE: Well Miss Stonor your only chance of getting to go is to answer my questions. When my conscience is clear, I'll go and not before. My conscience tells me that it is my duty to stay here till I have some satisfaction.

ENID (*crossing to settee and sitting*): What is it, Mr. Armitage. Let's sit down.

ARMITAGE (*bringing chair over to settee*): Well I'll tell you. I make it my business to know what is going on in this house. It may be that I like you or it may be that I dislike your stepfather. Or it may be that it is just my nature but so it is I've got my own ways of finding out, and I find out.

ENID: What have you found out?

ARMITAGE: Now look here, Miss. Cast your mind back to that inquest two years ago.

ENID: Oh! (*Turning away*.)

ARMITAGE: I'm sorry if it hurts you, but I must speak plain. When did your sister meet her death? It was shortly after her engagement was it not?

ENID: Yes, it was.

ARMITAGE: Well, you're engaged now, are you not?

ENID: Yes, I am.

ARMITAGE: Point number one. Well, now, have there not been repairs lately, and are you not forced to sleep in the very room your sister died in?

ENID: Only for a few nights.

ARMITAGE: Point number two. In your evidence you said you heard music in the house at night. Have you never heard music of late?

ENID: Good God! only last night I thought I heard it; and then persuaded myself that it was a dream. But how do you know these things, Mr. Armitage, and what do they mean?

ARMITAGE: Well, I won’t tell you how I know them, and I can’t tell you what they mean. But it’s devilish, Miss Stonor, devilish! (*Rising*.) Now I’ve come up to see your stepfather and to tell him, as man to man, that I’ve got my eye on him, and that if anything happens to you it will be a bad day’s work for him.

ENID (*rising*): Oh, Mr. Armitage, he would beat you within an inch of your life. Mr. Armitage, you cannot think what he is like when the fury is on him. He is terrible.

ARMITAGE: The law will look after me.

ENID: It might avenge you, Mr. Armitage, but it could not protect you. Besides, there is no possible danger. You know of my engagement to Lieutenant Curtis?

ARMITAGE: I hear he leaves to-morrow.

ENID: That is true. But the next day I am going on a visit to his mother, at Fenton. Indeed, there is no danger.

ARMITAGE: Well, I won’t deny that I am consoled by what you say, but there’s just one condition on which I would leave this house.

ENID: What is that?

ARMITAGE: Well, I remember your friend, Dr. Watson, at the inquest — and we’ve heard of his connection with Mr. Sherlock HOLMES. If you’ll promise me that you’ll slip away to London to-morrow, see those two gentlemen, and get their advice, I’ll wash my hands of it. I should feel that some one stronger than me Was looking after you.

ENID: Oh, Mr. Armitage, I couldn’t.

ARMITAGE (*folding his arms*): Then I stay here.

ENID: It is Lieutenant Curtis's last day in England.

ARMITAGE: When does he leave?

ENID: In the evening.

ARMITAGE: Well if you go in the morning you'd be back in time.

ENID: But how can I get away?

ARMITAGE: Who's to stop you? Have you money?

ENID: Yes, I have enough.

ARMITAGE: Then go.

ENID: It is really impossible.

ARMITAGE (*sitting*): Very good. Then I'll have it out with Doctor.

ENID (*crossing to him*): There, there! I'll promise. I'll go. I won't have you hurt I'll write and arrange it all somehow.

ARMITAGE: Word of honour?

ENID: Yes, yes I'll write to Dr Watson. Oh do go. This way. (Goes to the French window) If you keep among the laurels you can get to the high road and no one will meet you.

ARMITAGE (*going up to the windows. Pause. Returning)*: That dog about?

ENID: It is with the Doctor. Oh do go! and thank you — Thank you with all my heart.

ARMITAGE: My wife and I can always take you in. Don't you forget it.

(ARMITAGE *goes out* ENID *stands looking after him. As she does so Mrs Staunton enters the room*)

MRS STAUNTON: I saw Mr. Armitage going off through the shrubbery (*Looks out of window*).

ENID: Yes he has gone.

MRS. STAUNTON: But why did he not wait to see the Doctor.

ENID: He's changed his mind.

MRS STAUNTON: He is the most impertinent busybody in the whole village. Fancy the insolence of him coming up here without a with-your-leave or by-your-leave. What was it he wanted, Miss Enid?

ENID: It is not your place, Mrs. Staunton, to ask such questions.

MRS. STAUNTON: Oh, indeed! For that matter, Miss Enid, I should not have thought it was your place to have secrets with the village grocer. The Doctor will want to know all about it.

ENID: What my stepfather may do is another matter. I beg, Mrs. Staunton, that you will attend to your own affairs and leave me alone.

MRS. STAUNTON (putting her arms akimbo): High and mighty, indeed! I'm to do all the work of the house, but the grocer can come in and turn me out of the room. If you think I am nobody you may find yourself mistaken some of these days.

ENID: How dare you — (She makes for the door, as RYLOTT enters.)

RYLOTT: Why, ENID, what's the matter? Any one been upsetting you? What's all this, Mrs. Staunton?

ENID: Mrs. Staunton has been rude to me.

RYLOTT: Dear, dear! Here's a storm in a teacup. Well, now, come and tell me all about it. No one shall bother my little Enid. What would her sailor boy say?

MRS. STAUNTON: Mr. Armitage has been here. He would speak with Miss ENID alone. I didn't think it right. That is why Miss Enid is offended.

RYLOTT: Where is the fellow?

MRS. STAUNTON: He is gone. He went off through the shrubbery.

RYLOTT: Upon my word, he seems to make himself at home. What did he want, ENID?

ENID: He wanted to know how I was.

RYLOTT: This is too funny! You have made a conquest, Enid. You have a rustic admirer.

ENID: I believe he is a true friend who means well to me.

RYLOTT: Astounding! Perhaps it is as well for him that he did not prolong his visit. But now, my dear girl, go to your room until I send for you. I am very sorry that you have been upset, and I will see that such a thing does not happen again. Tut, tut! my little girl shall not be worried. Leave it to me. (*Goes up to door with* ENID.)

(ENID *goes out*.)

Well, what is it, then? Why have you upset her?

MRS. STAUNTON: Why has she upset me? Why should I be always the last to be considered?

RYLOTT: Why should you be considered at all?

MRS. STAUNTON: You dare to say that to me — you that promised me marriage only a year ago. If I was what I should be, then there would be no talk as to who is the mistress of this house. I'll put up with no more of her tantrums, talking to me as if I were the kitchen-maid. (*Turning from him*.)

RYLOTT: You forget yourself.

MRS STAUNTON: I forget nothing. I don t forget your promise and it will be a bad day for you if you don't keep it.

RYLOTT: I'll put you out on the roadside if you dare speak so to me.

MRS STAUNTON: You will, will you? Try it and see. I saved you once. Maybe I could do the other thing if I tried.

RYLOTT: Saved me?

MRS STAUNTON: Yes saved you. If it hadn’t been for my evidence at that inquest that fellow Armitage would have taken the Jury with him. Yes he would. I’ve had it from them since.

RYLOTT: Well you only spoke the truth.

MRS STAUNTON: The truth! Do you think I don’t know?

RYLOTT: What do you know?

(*She is silent and looks hard at him*)

What do you know?

(*She is still silent*)

Don’t look at me like that woman. What do you know?

MRS STAUNTON: I know enough

(*Pause*)

RYLOTT: Tell me then — how did she die?

MRS STAUNTON: Only you know that. I may not know how she died but I know very well —

RYLOTT (*interrupting*): You were always fanciful Kate but I know very well that you have only my own interests at heart. Put it out of your head if I have said anything unkind. Don’t quarrel with this little fool, or you may interfere with my plans. Just wait a little longer and things will come straight with us. You know that I have a hasty temper but it is soon over.

MRS. STAUNTON: You can always talk me round, and you know it. Now, listen to me, for I am the only friend you’ve got. Don’t try it again. You’ve got clear once. But a second would be too dangerous.

RYLOTT: They would make no more of the second than of the first. No one in the world can tell. It’s impossible, I tell you. If she marries, half my income is gone.

MRS. STAUNTON: Yes, I know. Couldn’t she sign it to you?

RYLOTT: She can be strong enough when she likes. She would never sign it to me. I hinted at it once, and she talked of a lawyer. (*Pause*.) But if anything should happen to her — well, there’s an end to all our trouble.

MRS. STAUNTON: They must suspect.

RYLOTT: Let them suspect. But they can prove nothing.

MRS. STAUNTON: Not yet.

RYLOTT: On Wednesday she goes a-visiting, and who knows when she may return? No, it’s to-morrow or never.

MRS. STAUNTON: Then let it be never.

RYLOTT: And lose half my income without a struggle? No, Kate, it’s all or nothing with me now.

MRS. STAUNTON: Well, look out for Armitage.

RYLOTT: What about him?

MRS. STAUNTON: He must have known something before he dared to come here.

RYLOTT: What can he know of our affairs?

MRS. STAUNTON: There’s Rodgers. You think he’s half-witted. So he is. But he may know more and say more than we think. He talks and Armitage talks. Maybe Armitage gets hold of him.

RYLOTT: We’ll soon settle that. (*Crossing to bell-pull.*) I’ll twist the old rogue’s neck if he has dared to play me false. There’s one thing — he can’t hold anything in if I want it to come out. Did you ever see a snake and a white mouse? You just watch.

(*Enter* RODGERS.)

Come here, Rodgers.

RODGERS: Yes, sir.

RYLOTT: Stand here, where the light falls on your face, Rodgers. I shall know then if you are telling me the truth.

RODGERS: The truth, sir. Surely I would tell that.

RYLOTT (*takes chair from behind settee*): Sit there! Don’t move! Now look at me. That’s right. You can’t lie to me now. You’ve been down to see Mr. Armitage.

RODGERS: Sir — I hope — there was no harm in that.

RYLOTT: How often?

RODGERS: Two or three times.

RYLOTT: How often?

RODGERS: Two or three —

RYLOTT: How often?

RODGERS: When I go to the village I always see him.

MRS STAUNTON: That’s nearly every day.

RYLOTT: What have you told him about me?

RODGERS: Oh, sir, nothing.

RYLOTT: What have you told him?

RODGERS: Just the news of the house sir.

RYLOTT: What news?

RODGERS: Well, about Miss Enid’s engagement, and Siva biting the gardener and the cook giving notice and the like.

RYLOTT: Nothing more than this?

RODGERS: No sir.

RYLOTT: Nothing more about Miss Enid?

RODGERS: No sir.

RYLOTT You swear it?

RODGERS: No, sir, no. I said nothing more.

RYLOTT (*springing up catching him by the neck shaking him*): You doddering old rascal how came you to say anything at all? I kept you here out of charity and you dare to gossip about my affairs. I've had enough of you — (*Throwing him off*): I'll go to London tomorrow and get a younger man. You pack up your things and go. Do you hear?

RODGERS: Won't you look it over sir? I'm an old man sir. I have no place to go to. Where am I to go?

RYLOTT: You can go to the devil for all I care, or to your friend Armitage the grocer. There is no place for you here. Get out of the room.

RODGERS: Yes sir. You won't reconsider it?

RYLOTT: Get out. And tell Miss Enid I want her.

RODGERS: Yes, sir.

(RODGERS *goes out*)

MRS. STAUNTON: You have done wisely. He was not safe.

RYLOTT: The old devil suited me too in a way. A younger man may give more trouble.

MRS STAUNTON: You'll soon break him in.

RYLOTT: Yes, I expect I will. (*Crossing to her*.) Now, make it right with ENID for my sake. You must play the game to the end.

MRS. STAUNTON: It's all right. I'm ready for her.

(*Enter* ENID.)

RYLOTT: My dear, Mrs. Staunton is very sorry if she has given you any annoyance. I hope you will accept her apology in the same spirit that it is offered.

MRS. STAUNTON: I meant no harm, Miss Enid, and I was only thinking of the master's interests. I hope you'll forgive me.

ENID: Certainly, I forgive you, Mrs. Staunton.

RYLOTT: There's a good little girl. Now, Mrs. Staunton, you had better leave us.

(MRS. STAUNTON *goes out.*)

Now, my dear, you must not be vexed with poor Mrs. Staunton, for she is a very hard-working woman and devoted to her duty, though, of course, her manners are often wanting in polish. Come now, dear, say that it is All right.

(ENID *sits on settee*.)

ENID: I have said that I forgive her.

RYLOTT: You must tell me anything I can do, to make you happier. Of course, you have some one else now, but I would not like you to forget your old stepfather altogether. Until the day when you have to leave me, I wish to do the very best for you.

ENID: You are very kind.

RYLOTT: Can you suggest anything that I can do?

ENID: No, no, there is nothing.

RYLOTT: I was a little too rough last week. I am sorry for that. I should wish your future husband to like me. You will tell him, when you see him, that I have done what I could to make you happy?

ENID: Yes, yes.

RYLOTT: You see him to-morrow?

ENID: Yes.

RYLOTT: And he leaves us to-morrow evening? (*Sitting beside her on settee.*)

ENID: Yes.

RYLOTT: You have all my sympathy, dear. But he will soon back again, and then, of course, you will part no more. You will be sorry to hear that old Rodgers has been behaving badly, and that I must get rid of him.

ENID (*rising*): Rodgers! What has he done?

RYLOTT: He grows more foolish and incompetent every day. I propose to go to London myself tomorrow to get a new butler. Would you send a line in my name to the agents to say that I shall call about two o clock?

ENID: I will do so.

RYLOTT: There’s a good little girl (*Pause. Crossing to her and placing his hand on her shoulder*) There’s nothing on your mind, is there?

ENID: Oh no.

RYLOTT: Well then run away and get your letter written. I dare bet you have another of your own to write. One a day — or two a day? — what is his Allowance? Well, well, we have All done it at some time.

(*Enter* ALI *with milk jug glass and saucer on a tray*)

ALI: I beg pardon Sahib, I go.

RYLOTT: Come in! Come in! Put my milk down on the table.

(ALI *does so*)

Now my dear please don’t forget to write the letter to the agents.

(ENID *goes out*)

You fool! Why did you not make sure I was alone?

ALI: I thought no one here but Sahib.

RYLOTT: Well as it happens there’s no harm done (*Goes to door and locks it. Pulls down blind of window*)

(*While he does so* ALI *opens a cupboard and takes out a square wicker work basket.* RYLOTT *pours milk into saucer and puts it before basket. Then he cracks his fingers and whistles while*ALI *plays on an Eastern flute*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES’ room in Baker Street.

Enter BILLY, *showing in* DR. WATSON.

WATSON: I particularly want to see Mr. Holmes.

BILLY: Well, sir, I expect he will be back almost immediately.

WATSON: Is he very busy just now?

BILLY: Yes, sir, we are very busy. We don’t get much time to ourselves these days.

WATSON: Any particular case?

BILLY: Quite a number of cases, sir. Two German princes and the Duchess of Ferrers yesterday. The Pope’s been bothering us again. Wants us to go to Rome over the cameo robbery. We are very overworked.

WATSON: Well, I’ll wait for Mr. Holmes.

BILLY: Very good, sir. Here is *The Times*. There’s four for him in the waiting-room now.

WATSON: Any lady among them?

BILLY: Not what I would call a lady, sir.

WATSON: All right, I’ll wait. (*Lights a cigarette and looks around him.*) Just the same as ever. There are the old chemicals! Heavens! what have I not endured from those chemicals in the old days? Pistol practice on the wall. Quite so. I wonder if he still keeps tobacco in that Persian slipper? Yes, here it is. And his pipes in the coal-scuttle — black clays. Full of them — the same as ever. (*Takes one out and smells it.*) Faugh! Bottle of cocaine — Billy, Billy!

BILLY: I’ve done my best to break him of it, sir.

WATSON: All right, Billy, you can go.

(BILLY *goes out*.)

There’s the old violin — the same old violin, with one string left. (*Sits on settee*.)

(*Enter* SHERLOCK HOLMES, *disguised as a workman, with tools.*)

HOLMES: You sent for me, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

WATSON: I am not Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: Beg pardon, sir, it was to mend the gas-bracket.

WATSON: What’s wrong with it?

HOLMES: Leaking sir.

WATSON: Well go on with your work.

HOLMES: Yes, sir. (*Goes to the bracket.*) Hope I won’t disturb you sir?

WATSON (*taking up The Times*): That’s all right Don’t mind me.

HOLMES: Very untidy man Mr. Holmes sir.

WATSON: What do you mean by that?

HOLMES: Well, sir, you can’t help noticing it. It’s all over the room. I’ve ‘eard say he was as tidy as any when he started, but he learned bad ‘abits from a cove what lived with him. Watson was his name.

(*Slips into bedroom*)

WATSON (*rising*): You impertinent fellow! How dare you talk in such a fashion? What do you want? (*Looks round*.) Why! wha’ deuce has become of him?

(*The workman emerges as* SHERLOCK HOLMES, *in dressing-gown with hands in pockets*)

Good Heavens Holmes! I should never have recognized you.

HOLMES: My dear Watson when you begin to recognize me it will indeed be the beginning of the end. When your eagle eye penetrates my disguise I shall retire to an eligible poultry farm.

WATSON: But why — ?

HOLMES: A case my dear Watson a case! One of those small conundrums which a trustful public occasionally confides to my investigation. To the British workman, Watson, all doors are open. His costume is unostentatious and his habits are sociable. A tool bag is an excellent passport and a tawny moustache will secure the co-operation of the maids. It may interest you to know that my humble double is courting a cook at Battersea. (*Strikes match and lights pipe)*

WATSON: My dear Holmes! is it fair to the girl?

HOLMES: Chivalrous old Watson! It’s a game of life and death, and every card must be played! But in this case I have a hated rival — the constable on the adjoining beat — so when I disappear, all will readjust itself. We walk out on Saturday evenings. Oh! those walks! But the honour of a Duchess is at stake. A mad world, my masters. (*Turns to survey Watson*.) Well, Watson, what is your news?

WATSON (*smiling*): Well, Holmes, I came here to tell you what I am sure will please you.

HOLMES: Engaged, Watson, engaged! Your coat, your hat, your gloves, your buttonhole, your smile, your blush! The successful suitor shines from you all over. What I had heard of you or perhaps what I had not heard of you, had already excited my worst suspicions. (*Looks fixedly at Watson.*) But this is better and better, for I begin to perceive that it is a young lady whom I know and respect.

WATSON: But, Holmes, this is marvellous. The lady is Miss Morstan, whom you have indeed met and admired. But how could you tell —

HOLMES: By the same observation, my dear Watson, which assures me that you have seen the lady this morning. (*Picks a hair off* WATSON’S*breast, wraps it round his finger, and glances at it with his lens*.) Charming, my dear fellow, charming. There is no mistaking the Titian tint. You lucky fellow! I envy you.

WATSON: Thank you, Holmes. Some of these days I may find myself congratulating you.

HOLMES: No marriage without love, Watson.

WATSON: Then why not love? (*Placing his hand on* HOLMES’S*shoulders*.)

HOLMES: Absurd, Watson, absurd! I am not for love, nor love for me. It would disturb my reason, unbalance my faculties. Love is like a flaw in the crystal, sand in the clockwork, iron near the magnet. No, no, I have other work in the world.

WATSON: You have, indeed. Billy says you are very busy just now.

HOLMES: There are one or two small matters.

WATSON: Have you room to consider one other — the case of Miss Enid Stonor?

HOLMES: My dear fellow, if you have any personal interest in it. (*Sitting on divan*.)

WATSON: Yes, I feel keenly about it.

HOLMES (*taking out note-book*): Let us see how I stand. There is the Baxter Square murder — I have put the police on the track. The Clerkenwell Jewel Robbery — that is now clearing. The case of the Duchess of Ferrers — I have my material. The Pope’s cameos. His Holiness must wait. The Princess who is about to run from home — let her run. I must see one or two who are waiting for me — (*rings bell*) — then I am entirely at your disposal.

(*Enter* BILLY.)

BILLY: Yes, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: How many are waiting?

BILLY: Three, sir.

HOLMES: A light morning. Show them in now.

(BILLY *goes out.*)

WATSON: Well, I’ll look in later.

HOLMES (*striking match and lighting pipe*): No, no, my dear fellow! I have always looked on you as a partner in the Firm — Holmes, Watson, Billy & Co. That’s our brass plate when we raise one. If you’ll sit there I shall soon be free.

(*Enter* BILLY, *with a card on tray*. .MR HOLT LOAMING *follows, a rich, dissipated-looking, middle-aged man in an astrakhan-collared coat.* BILLY *goes out*.)

(*Reading*.) Mr. Holt Loaming. I remember the name. A racing man, I believe?

LOAMING: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Pray take a seat.

(LOAMING *draws up near the table.*)

What can I do for you?

LOAMING: Time’s money, Mr. Holmes, both yours and mine. I’m pretty quick off the mark, and you won’t mind that. I’m not here on the advice gratis line. Don’t you think it. I’ve my Cheque book here — (*takes it out*) — and there’s plenty behind it. I won’t grudge you your fee, Mr. Holmes. I promise you that.

HOLMES: Well, Mr. Loaming, let us hear the business.

LOAMING: My wife, Mr. Holmes — damn her! — she’s given me the slip. Got back to her own people and they’ve hid her. There’s the law, of course, but she’d get out all kinds of lies about ill-treatment. She’s mine, and I’ll just take her when I know where to lay my hands on her.

HOLMES: How would you take her?

LOAMING: I just have to walk up to her and beckon. She’s one of those wincing kind of nervous fillies that kick about in the paddock but give in when once the bridle’s on them and they feel the whip. You show me where she is, and I’ll do the rest.

HOLMES: She is with her own people, you say?

LOAMING: Well, there’s no man in the case, if that’s what you’re driving at. Lord! if you knew how straight she is, and how she carries on when I have a fling. She’s got a cluster of aunts, and she’s lyin’ low somewhere among them. It’s for you to put her up.

HOLMES: I fancy not, Mr. Loaming.

LOAMING: Eh? What’s that?

HOLMES: I rather like to think of her among that cluster of aunts.

LOAMING: But, damn it, sir, she’s my wife.

HOLMES: That’s why!

LOAMING (*getting up*): Well, it’s a rum start, this. Look here, you don’t know what you’re missing. I’d have gone to five hundred. Here’s the cheque.

HOLMES: The case does not attract me. (*Rings bell.*)

(*Enter* BILLY.)

Show Mr. Loaming out, Billy.

LOAMING: It’s the last you’ll see of me, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: Life is full of little consolations.

LOAMING: Damn!

(*He takes his hat and goes out with* BILLY.)

HOLMES: I’m afraid I shall never be a rich man, Watson.

(*Re-enter* BILLY.)

Well?

BILLY: Mr. James B. Montague, sir.

(*Enter* MONTAGUE, *as* BILLY *goes out.*)

HOLMES: Good morning, Mr. Montague. Pray take a chair.

(MONTAGUE *sits*.)

What can I do?

MONTAGUE (*a furtive-looking man with slimy ways*): Anything fresh about the sudden death of my brother, sir? The police said it was murder, and you said it was murder; but we don’t get any further, do we? (*Placing hat on floor*.)

HOLMES: I have not lost sight of it.

MONTAGUE: That man Henderson was a bad man, Holmes, an evil liver and a corruption. Yes, sir, a corruption a danger. Who knows what passed between them? I’ve suspicions — I’ve always had my suspicions.

HOLMES: So you said.

MONTAGUE: Have you worked any further on that line, sir? Because, if you tell me from time to time how it is shaping, I may be able to give you a word in season.

HOLMES: I have my eye on him — a very cunning rascal, as you say. We have not enough to arrest him on, but we work away in the hope.

MONTAGUE: Good, Mr. Holmes, good! Watch him; you’ll get him, as safe as Judgment.

HOLMES: I’ll let you know if anything comes of it. (*Rings*.)

MONTAGUE (*rising*): That’s right, sir. Watch ‘im. I’m his brother, sir. It’s me that should know. It’s never out of my mind.

(*Enter* BILLY.)

HOLMES: Very good, Mr. Montague. Good-morning.

(MONTAGUE *and* BILLY *go out*.)

Curious little murder, Watson; done for most inadequate motive. That was the murderer.

WATSON: Good Heavens!

HOLMES: My case is almost complete. Meanwhile I amuse him and myself by the pretended pursuit of the wrong man — an ancient device, Watson.

(*Re-enter* BILLY.)

Well, any more?

BILLY: Mr. Milverton is here, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: Show him in when I ring.

(BILLY *goes out*.)

I am sorry to delay the business upon which you wished to consult me; but this, I hope, will be the last. You remember Milverton?

WATSON: No.

HOLMES: Ah! it was after your time. The most crawling reptile in London — the King of the Blackmailers — a cunning, ruthless devil. I have traced seventeen suicides to that man’s influence. It is he who is after the Duchess of Ferrers.

WATSON: The beautiful Duchess, whose re-marriage is announced?

HOLMES: Exactly. He has a letter which he thinks would break off the wedding. (*Rings*.) It is my task to regain it.

(*Enter* MILVERTON.)

Well, Mr. Milverton. Pray take a seat.

MILVERTON: Who is this?

HOLMES: My friend, Dr. Watson. Do you mind?

MILVERTON (*sitting*): Oh! I have no object in secrecy. It is your client’s reputation, not mine, which is at stake.

HOLMES: Your reputation! Good Heavens! (*Crossing to fireplace and filling pipe from slipper*.)

MILVERTON: Not much to lose there, is there, Mr. Holmes? I can’t be hurt. But she can. Hardly a fair fight, is it?

HOLMES: What are the terms now? (*Filling pipe*.)

MILVERTON: Steady at seven thousand. No money — no marriage.

HOLMES: Suppose she tells the whole story to the Marquis? Then your letter is not worth sixpence. He would condone all. Come, now, what harm is in the letter?

MILVERTON: Sprightly — very sprightly. However, it is purely a matter of business. If you think it is in the best interests of your client that the Marquis should see the letter — why, you would be very foolish to pay a large sum to regain it.

HOLMES: The lady has no great resources.

MILVERTON: But her marriage is a most suitable time for her friends and relations to make some little effort. I can assure you that this envelope would give more joy than all the tiaras and bracelets in Regent Street.

HOLMES: No, it is impossible!

MILVERTON: Dear me! Dear me! How unfortunate.

HOLMES: It can profit you in no way to push matters to an end.

MILVERTON: There you mistake. I have other cases maturing. If it were known that I had been severe on the Duchess the others would be more open to reason.

HOLMES: Well, well, you give us till noon to-morrow? (*Rings*.)

MILVERTON: But not an hour longer.

(Enter BILLY.)

HOLMES: We are at your mercy. Surely you won’t treat us too harshly?

MILVERTON: Not a minute longer. (Putting on hat.)

(BILLY and MILVERTON go out.)

Terrible! Terrible! A fumigator would be useful, eh, Watson — Pah!

WATSON: What can you do?

HOLMES: My dear Watson — what have I done? It is this gentleman’s cook who has honoured me. In the intervals of philandering, I have made an acquaintance with the lock on the safe. Mr. Milverton spent last night at his club; when he returns home he will find there has been a little burglary at The Battersea, and his precious letter is missing. (*Rings*.)

WATSON: Holmes, you are splendid!

(*Enter* BILLY.)

HOLMES: Tut, tut! (*To* BILLY.) Well, any more?

BILLY: One lady, sir — just come — Miss Enid Stonor, of Stoke Moran.

WATSON: Ah! this is the case. (*Rising*.)

HOLMES: I’ll ring, Billy.

(BILLY *goes out*.)

Now, Watson! Stonor! Stonor! Surely I associate the name with something?

WATSON: I told you of the case at the time. Sudden mysterious death of a girl at an old house in Stoke Moran, some two years ago.

HOLMES: My dear fellow! it all comes back to me. An inquest was it not, with a string of most stupid and ineffectual witnesses.

WATSON: I was one of them.

HOLMES: Of course — so you were, so you were. I docketed the evidence. It introduced to my notice a gentleman of singular and most interesting personality. I have a few notes. (*Takes down a scrapbook from a row*.) Let's see — it's R — Ranter — Roma — Rylott! That's our man. Fifty-five years of age, killed his khitmutgar in India; once in a madhouse, married money — wife died — distinguished surgeon. Well, Watson, what has the distinguished surgeon been up to now? (*Throwing scrapbook on divan*.)

WATSON: Devilry, I fear.

HOLMES: I have the case very clear in my mind.

WATSON: Then you may remember that the death of the lady followed close upon her engagement?

HOLMES: Exactly.

WATSON: Miss Enid Stonor in turn became engaged, about a month ago, to a neighbour, Lieutenant Curtis.

HOLMES: Ah!

WATSON: Unhappily, the young man leaves for the Mediterranean to-day. She will henceforward be alone at Stoke Moran.

HOLMES: I see.

WATSON: And some circumstances have excited her alarm.

HOLMES: I gather that the amiable stepfather stands to lose in case of a marriage.

WATSON: That is so. Of course, supposing that Rylott did the other girl to death, it seems unlikely, on the face of it, that he would try it on again, as two sudden deaths in the house could hardly pass the coroner —

HOLMES: No, no, Watson! you are making the mistake of putting your normal brain into Rylott's abnormal being. The born criminal is often a monstrous egotist. His mind is unhinged from the beginning. What he wants he must have. Because he thinks a thing, it is right. Because he does a thing, it will escape detection. You can't say a priori that he will take this view or that one. Perhaps we had best have the young lady in. (*Rings bell.*) My dear fellow, you'll get into trouble if you go about righting the wrongs of distressed damsels. It won't do, Watson, it really won't.

(*Enter* ENID. WATSON *gets up and meets her.*)

WATSON: How do you do, Miss Enid? This is my friend, Mr. Holmes, of whom I spoke.

(HOLMES *shakes hands with* ENID.)

HOLMES: How do you do, Miss Stonor? Dear me! you must find a dog-cart a cold conveyance in this weather.

ENID: A dog-cart, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES: One can hardly fail to observe the tell-tale splashes on the left sleeve. A white horse and clay soil are indicated. But what is this? You are trembling. Do sit down.

ENID (*looking round and sitting on settee*): Tell me, Mr. Holmes, my stepfather has not been here?

HOLMES: No.

ENID: He saw me in the street. I dashed past him in a cab. he saw me; our eyes met, and he waved me to stop.

HOLMES: Why is your stepfather in London?

ENID: He came up on business.

HOLMES: It would be interesting to know what the business was.

ENID: It was to get a new butler. Rodgers, our old one, leave us, and a new butler is to come at once. I doubt if any servant would come to such a place.

HOLMES: He may certainly find some difficulty. He would, no doubt, apply to an agent.

ENID: At two o’clock, to Patterson and Green, of Cavendish Street.

HOLMES: Exactly. I know them. But this is a digression, is it not? We get back to the fact that he saw you in the street?

ENID: Yes, it was in Pall Mall. I fancy he followed me.

HOLMES: Would he imagine you would come here?

ENID: No, he would think I was going to Dr. Watson’s. He knows that Dr. Watson is my only friend in London.

HOLMES: What has been Dr. Ryolott’s attitude towards you your engagement?

ENID: He has been much kinder, because he knows I have one to protect me. But even so, there are moments — (*Raises her arm.*)

HOLMES: Good Heavens!

ENID: He does not realise his own strength. When he is angry he is like a fierce wild beast. Only last week he thrashed the blacksmith.

HOLMES: He is welcome to the blacksmith, but not to my clients. This must not occur again. Does your fiancé know of this?

ENID: I would not dare to tell him. He would do something dreadful. Besides, as I say, my stepfather has, on the whole, been kinder. But there is a look in his eyes, when I turn on him suddenly, that chills me to the bone. His kindness is from his head, not from his heart. I feel as if he were waiting — waiting —

HOLMES: Waiting for what?

ENID: Waiting for my fiancé to leave. Waiting till he has me at his mercy. That room freezes my blood. Often I cannot sleep for horror.

WATSON: What? He has changed your room? (*Rising from armchair*.)

ENID: My old room is under repair.

WATSON: You sleep, then, in the room where your sister died?

ENID: In the same room. And other things have happened. The music has come again.

HOLMES: The music? Tell me about this music.

ENID: It came before my sister's death. She spoke of it, and then I heard it myself the night she died. But it has come again. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I am terrified.

HOLMES: There, there! you've had enough to break any one's nerve. This — music — does it seem to be inside the house or outside?

ENID: Indeed, I could not say.

HOLMES: What is it like?

ENID: A sort of soft, droning sound.

HOLMES: Like a flute or pipe?

ENID: Yes. It reminds me of my childhood in India.

HOLMES: Ah — India?

ENID: And there's one other thing that puzzles me — my sister's dying words — as she lay in my arms she gasped out two words.

HOLMES: What were they?

ENID: "Band" and "Speckled."

HOLMES: Band — speckled — and Indian music. You sleep with your door and window fastened?

ENID: Yes, but so did poor Violet. It did not save her, and it may not save me.

HOLMES: Could there be anything in the nature of secret doors or panels?

ENID: No. I have searched again and again. There is nothing.

HOLMES: And nothing peculiar in the room?

ENID: No, I cannot say there is.

HOLMES: I must really drop in and have a look at this most

interesting apartment. Suggestive — very suggestive. (*Pause*) When did you hear this music last?

ENID: Last night.

HOLMES: And your fiancé leaves to-day?

ENID: He leaves to-day. What shall I do?

HOLMES: Well, Miss Stonor, I take up your case. It presents features which commend it to me. You must put yourself into my hands.

ENID: I do — unreservedly. (*Rising, and crossing to him*.)

HOLMES (*to Watson*): It is a question whether we are justified in letting her return at All to Stoke Moran.

ENID: I must return. At five o’clock my fiancé leaves, and I shall not see him again for months.

HOLMES: Ah! that is a complication. Where is the A.B.C.? (*Finds it in umbrella stand*.) Stonehouse — Stowell — Stoke —

ENID: I know my train, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: I was looking for mine.

ENID: You are coming down?

HOLMES: I shall not be content until I have seen this room of yours. Yes, that will do. I could get up to you between eleven and twelve, to-night. Would you have the goodness to leave your shutter open? The room is, I understand, upon the ground floor?

ENID: Oh! Mr. Holmes, it is not safe. You cannot think of the danger.

HOLMES: I have taken up your case, Miss Stonor, and this is part of it. Have you any friends in Stoke Moran?

ENID: Mr. Armitage and his wife.

HOLMES: That is most fortunate. Now, listen to me, Miss Stonor. When you have returned home certain circumstances may arise which will ensure your safety. In that case you will at Stoke Place until I come in the evening. On the other hand, things may miscarry, and you may not be safe. In that case I will so manage that a warning will reach you. You will then break from home and take refuge with the Armitages. Is that clear?

ENID: Who will bring me the warning?

HOLMES: I cannot say. But you have my assurance that it will come.

ENID: Then, until it does, I will stay at Stoke Place.

HOLMES: And should any new development occur you could always send me a telegram, could you not?

ENID: Yes, I could do that.

HOLMES: Then it is not goodbye, but au revoir.

(*Enter* BILLY.)

What is it?

BILLY: Please, Mr. Holmes, a gentleman to see you, at once.

HOLMES: Who is he?

BILLY: A very impatient gentleman, sir. It was all I could do to get him to stay in the waiting-room.

ENID: Is he tall, dark, with a black beard, and a long white scar on his cheek?

BILLY: That’s him, Miss.

ENID: Oh, Mr. Holmes, what shall I do? He has followed me.

WATSON: If he went to my rooms, my landlady had instructions to send any one on here.

HOLMES: Exactly.

ENID: Oh! I dare not meet him, I dare not. Can’t I slip out somehow?

HOLMES: I see no reason why you should stay. Billy, show the lady out by the side passage.

BILLY: Don’t be alarmed, Miss, I’ll see you through.

(BILLY *and* ENID *go out.*)

WATSON: This fellow is dangerous, Holmes. You may need a weapon.

HOLMES: There’s something of the kind in that drawer at your right.

(*Enter* BILLY.)

BILLY: Shall I stay when I show him in, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES: Why so?

BILLY: An ugly customer, Mr.. Holmes.

HOLMES: Tut, tut! show him up.

(BILLY *goes out*.)

Well, Watson I must thank you for a most interesting morning. You are certainly the stormy petrel of crime.

(*Enter* DR RYLOTT)

RYLOTT: This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes I believe.

HOLMES: Your belief is justified.

RYLOTT: I have reason to think that you have taken unsolicited interest in my affairs.

HOLMES: Your name being — ?

RYLOTT: My name, sir, is Grimesby Rylott — Doctor Grimesby Rylott, of Stoke Moran. (*Throws down card*.)

HOLMES: A pretty place, I hear! And obviously good for the lungs.

RYLOTT: Sir, you are trifling with me. I have come here to ask whether you have had a visit from my stepdaughter, Miss Enid Stonor —

HOLMES: The first law in my profession, Doctor, is never to answer questions.

RYLOTT: Sir, you shall answer me.

HOLMES: We could do with warmer weather.

RYLOTT: I insist upon an answer.

HOLMES: But I hear the crocuses are coming on.

RYLOTT: Curse your crocuses! I've heard of you, you meddling busybody. And you, Dr. Watson — I expected to find you here. What do you mean by interfering with my lawful affairs?

WATSON: So long as they are lawful, Dr. Rylott, no one is likely to interfere with them.

RYLOTT: Now look here, Mr. Holmes, perhaps I may seem to you a little hot-headed —

HOLMES: Dear me, Dr. Rylott, what put that idea into your head?

RYLOTT: I apologize if I have seemed rude — (*Sitting*)

HOLMES: Robust — a little robust — nothing more.

RYLOTT: I wish to put the matter to you as man to man. You know what girls are, how sudden and unreasonable their prejudices may be. Imagine, sir, how hurt I should feel to be distrusted by one whom I have loved.

HOLMES: You have my deep sympathy, Dr. Rylott.

RYLOTT (*pleased*): Ah!

HOLMES: You are a most unfortunate man. There was that tragedy two years ago —

RYLOTT: Yes, indeed!

HOLMES: I think I could help you in that matter.

RYLOTT: How so?

HOLMES: As a friend, and without a fee.

RYLOTT: You are very good.

HOLMES: I am very busy, but your case seems so hard that I will put everything aside to assist you.

RYLOTT: In what way, sir?

HOLMES: I will come down at once, examine the room in which the tragedy occurred, and see if such small faculties as I possess can throw any light upon the matter.

RYLOTT: Sir, this is an intolerable liberty. (*Rising*.)

HOLMES: What! you don’t want help?

RYLOTT: It is intolerable, I say. What I ask you to do — what I order you to do is to leave my affairs alone. Alone, sir — do you hear me?

HOLMES: You are perfectly audible.

RYLOTT: I’ll have no interference — none! Don’t dare to meddle with me. D’you hear, the pair of you? You — Holmes, I’m warning you.

HOLMES (*looking at his watch*): I fear I must end this interview. Time flies when one is chatting. Life has its duties as well as its pleasures, Doctor.

RYLOTT: Insolent rascal! I’ll — I’ll — (*Turns to the grate and picks up the poker*.)

(WATSON *jumps up*.)

HOLMES: No, Watson, no! It does need poking, but perhaps you would put on a few coals first.

RYLOTT: You laugh at me? You don’t know the man you are dealing with. You think that my strength fails because my hair is turned. I was the strongest man in India once. See that! (*Bends the poker and throws it down at* HOLMES’ *feet.*) I am not a safe man to play with, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: Nor am I a safe man to play with, Dr. Rylott. Let me see — what were we talking about before the Sandow performance?

RYLOTT: You shall not overcrow me with your insolence! I tell you now, and you, too, Dr. Watson, that you interfere with my affairs to your own danger. You have your warning.

HOLMES: I’ll make a note of it.

RYLOTT: And you refuse to tell me if Miss Stonor has been here?

HOLMES: Don’t we seem to be travelling just a little in a circle?

RYLOTT (*picking up hat from table*): Well, you can’t prevent me from finding out from her.

HOLMES: Ah! there I must talk a little seriously to you Grimesby Rylott. You have mentioned this young lady, and I know something of her circumstances. I hold you responsible. My eye is on you sir and the Lord help you — the Lord help you if any harm befall her. Now leave this room, and take my warning with you.

RYLOTT: You cursed fool! I may teach you both not to meddle with what does not concern you. Keep clear of Stoke Moran!

(RYLOTT *goes out slamming the door*)

HOLMES: I had a presentiment he would slam the door.

(WATSON *rises*)

Stoke Moran must be less dull than many country villages. Quite a breezy old gentleman Watson. Well I must thank you for a pretty problem. What the exact danger may be which destroyed one sister and now threatens the other may be suspected, but cannot yet be defined. That is why I must visit the room.

WATSON: I will come with you Holmes.

HOLMES: My dear fellow you are no longer an unattached knight-errant. Dangerous quests are forbidden. What would Morstan say?

WATSON: She would say that the man who would desert his friend would never make a good husband.

HOLMES: Well, my dear Watson, it may be our last adventure together, so I welcome your co-operation.

WATSON: Well, I'll be off.

HOLMES: You will leave Victoria to night at eleven fifteen, for Stoke Moran.

WATSON: Good bye — I'll see you at the station.

HOLMES: Perhaps you will.

(WATSON *goes*)

Perhaps you will! (*Rings*.) Perhaps you won't! (*Stands near fire*.)

(*Enter* BILLY)

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Ever been in love Billy?

BILLY: Not of late years, sir.

HOLMES: Too busy, eh?

BILLY: Yes, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES: Same here. Got my bag there, Billy?

BILLY: Yes, sir. (*Puts it on table*.)

HOLMES: Put in that revolver.

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: And the pipe and pouch.

BILLY (*takes it from table*): Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Got the dark lantern?

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: The lens and the tape?

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Plaster of Paris, for prints?

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Oh, and the cocaine. (*Hands it*.)

BILLY: Yes, sir. (*Throws it down*.)

HOLMES: You young villain! you've broken it. (*Takes his ear and turns his head round*.) You're a clever boy, Billy.

BILLY: Yes, Mr. Holmes.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE 1

The Hall of Stoke Place

MRS STAUNTON *is discovered at the back reading a telegram*

MRS STAUNTON: Are you there Rodgers?

(*Enter* RODGERS)

RODGERS: Well, Mrs. Staunton.

MRS STAUNTON: I've had a telegram from the master. He will be here presently. He is bringing the new butler with him so you can hand over to night.

RODGERS: To night, Mrs Staunton. It all seems very sudden.

MRS STAUNTON: Peters will need your room. That's his name, Peters. He brings a young girl with him, his daughter. The attic will do for her. That will do Rodgers.

(RODGERS *goes into the morning room*)

(*Enter* ENID *from the entrance hall*)

ENID: Oh, Mrs Staunton.

MRS STAUNTON: Yes, Miss.

ENID: Has any message come in my absence?

MRS STAUNTON: No, Miss.

ENID: Let me know at once if any comes.

(ENID *goes into the bedroom wing)*

MRS STAUNTON: Yes Miss. A message! A message!

(*Enter* ALI *hurriedly*)

(*To him*) Well?

ALI: Has she come back?

MRS STAUNTON: Yes, she is in her room.

ALI: I see her meet Curtis Sahib. Then I lose her.

MRS. STAUNTON: Well, she has come back. I have heard from the master. She is not to go out any more. He will come soon. Until he does, we must hold her. She asked if there was a message for her. Who can she expect a message from? Ah — stand back, Ali, she's coming.

(ALI *stands at door to servants' hall.*)

(*Re-enter* ENID, *still dressed for walking*.)

MRS. STAUNTON: I beg pardon, Miss, but what are you going to do?

ENID: I am going down to the village. (*Crosses towards entrance hall*.)

MRS. STAUNTON: What for?

ENID: How dare you ask me such a question? What do you mean by it?

MRS. STAUNTON: I thought it was something we could do for you.

ENID: It was not.

MRS. STAUNTON: Then I am sorry, Miss, but it can't be done. The Doctor didn't like you going to London to-day. His orders are that you should not go out again.

ENID: How dare you? I am going out now.

MRS. STAUNTON: Get to the door, Ali! It's no use, Miss, we must obey our orders. You don't budge from here.

ENID: What is the meaning of this?

MRS. STAUNTON: It is not for the likes of us to ask the meaning. The Doctor is a good master, but his servants have to obey him.

ENID: I will go out. (*Tries to rush past.*)

MRS. STAUNTON: Lock the door, Ali.

(ALI *locks the door to the entrance hall*.)

The other locks are locked as well. You needn’t try the windows, for Siva is loose. All right, Ali, give me the key — you can go!

(ALI *goes into the servants’ hall*.)

Now, Miss, do what the Doctor wishes. That’s my advice to you.

(*She exits into the servants’ hall.*)

(ENID *waits until she has gone; then she rushes across to the writing-table and scribbles a telegram*.)

(RODGERS *enters from the morning-room*.)

ENID: Oh, Rodgers —

RODGERS: Yes, Miss.

ENID: Come here, Rodgers!

(RODGERS *comes down.*)

I want to speak to you. I hear that you are leaving us. I wanted say how sorry I am.

RODGERS: God bless you, Miss Enid. My heart is sore to part with you. All the kindness I’ve ever had in this house has from poor Miss Violet and you.

ENID: Rodgers, if ever I have done anything for you, you can repay it now a hundredfold.

RODGERS: Nothing against the master, Miss Enid! Don’t ask to do anything against the master.

ENID: How can you love him?

RODGERS: Love him! No, no, I don’t love him, Miss Enid. But I fear him — oh! I fear him. One glance of his eyes seems to cut me — to pierce me like a sword. I wouldn’t even listen to anything against him, for I feel it would come round to him, and then — then — !

ENID: What can he do to you?

RODGERS: Oh, I couldn’t, Miss Enid — don’t ask me. What a man! what a man! Has he a child in his room, Miss Enid?

ENID: A child?

RODGERS: Yes — the milk — who drinks the milk? He drinks no milk. Every morning I take up the jug of milk. And the music, who is it he plays the music to?

ENID: Music! You have heard it, too. I’m so frightened. I’m in danger. I know I’m in danger. (*Rising*.)

RODGERS: In danger, Miss Enid?

ENID: And you can save me.

RODGERS: Oh, Miss Enid, I couldn’t — I couldn’t — I have no nerve. I couldn’t.

ENID: All I want you to do is to take a telegram.

RODGERS: A telegram, Miss Enid?

ENID: They won’t let me out, and yet I must send it.

RODGERS: Perhaps they won’t let me out.

ENID: You could wait a little, and then slip away to the office.

RODGERS: What is the telegram, Miss Enid? Say it slowly. My poor old head is not as clear as it used to be.

ENID: Give it to the clerk.

RODGERS: No, no, I must be sure it is nothing against the master.

ENID: It is my business — only mine. Your master’s name is not even mentioned. See — it is to Mr. Sherlock Holmes — he is a friend of mine — Baker Street, London. “Come to me as soon as you can. Please hurry.” That is All. Dear Rodgers, it means so much to me — please — please take it for me.

RODGERS: I can’t understand things like I used.

ENID: Oh! do take it, Rodgers! You said yourself that I had always been kind to you. You will take it, won’t you? (*Holds out telegram to*RODGERS.)

RODGERS: Yes, yes, I will take it, Miss Enid. (*Takes telegram and puts it in his pocket*.)

ENID: Oh! you don’t know what a service you are doing. It may save me — it may save my going all the way to town.

RODGERS: Well, well, of course I will take it. What’s that?

(*Wheels heard outside*.)

(*Enter* MRS. STAUNTON *and* ALI.)

MRS. STAUNTON: Quick, Ali! get the door unlocked. He won’t like to be kept waiting. Rodgers, be ready to receive your master.

ENID (*to* RODGERS): Don’t forget — as soon as you can.

(*She goes into the bedroom wing, followed by* MRS. STAUNTON.)

(*Wheels stop.*)

(ALI *throws open the hall door and salaams. Enter* RYLOTT, *followed by* HOLMES, *disguised as Peters, the new butler, who is followed by* BILLY, *disguised as a young girl, with a big hat-box*.)

RYLOTT: (*taking off things and handing them to* ALI): Where is Miss Enid? Did she return?

ALI: Yes, sir, she is in her room.

RYLOTT: Ah! (*To* RODGERS.) What! still here.

RODGERS: I had some hopes, sir —

RYLOTT: Get away! Lay the supper! I'll deal with you presently.

(RODGERS *goes into the servants' hall*.)

Ali, you can go also. Show this young girl to the kitchen. (*To*HOLMES.) What is her name?

HOLMES: Amelia — the same as her mother's.

RYLOTT: Go to the kitchen, child, and make yourself useful.

(ALI *goes out, followed by* BILLY.)

(*To* HOLMES.) Now, my man, we may as well understand each other first as last. I'm a man who stands no nonsense in my own house. I give good pay, but I exact good service. Do you understand?

HOLMES: Yes, sir.

RYLOTT: I've had a man for some time, but he is old and useless. I want a younger man to keep the place in order. Rodgers will show you the cellar and the other things you should know. You take over from to-morrow morning.

HOLMES: Very good, sir. I'm sure, sir, it was very good of you to take me with such an encumbrance as my poor little orphaned Amelia.

RYLOTT: I've taken you not only with a useless encumbrance but without references and without a character. Why have I done that? Because I expect I shall get better service out of you. Where are you to find a place if you lose this one? Don't you forget it.

HOLMES: I won't forget, sir. I'll do all I can. If I can speak to your late butler, sir, I have no doubt he will soon show me my duties.

RYLOTT: Very good. (*Rings bell*.)

(*Enter* MRS. STAUNTON *from the bedroom wing*.)

Mrs. Staunton, tell Rodgers I want him. By the way, where is Siva?

MRS. STAUNTON: Loose in the park, sir.

(*She goes into the servants' hall*.)

RYLOTT: By the way, I had best warn you, Peters, not to go out till my boar-hound comes to know you. She's not safe with strangers — not very safe with any one but myself.

HOLMES: I'll remember, sir.

RYLOTT: Warn that girl of yours.

(*Enter* RODGERS.)

HOLMES: Yes, I will.

RYLOTT: Ah, Rodgers, you will hand your keys over to Peters. When you have done so, come to me in the study.

RODGERS: Yes, sir.

(RYLOTT *goes into his study*.)

HOLMES (*after looking round*): Well, I'm not so sure that I think so much of this place. Maybe you are the lucky one after all. I hope I am not doing you out of your job. I'd chuck it for two pins. If it wasn't for Amelia I'd chuck it now.

RODGERS: If it wasn't you it would be some one else. Old Rodgers is finished — used up. But he said he wanted to see me in the study. What do you think he wants with me in the study?

HOLMES: Maybe to thank you for your service; maybe to make you a parting present.

RODGERS: His eyes were hard as steel. What can he want with me? I get nervous these days, Mr. Peters. What was it he told me to do?

HOLMES: To hand over the keys. (*Taking his overcoat off)*

RODGERS: Yes, yes, the keys. (*Taking out keys.*) They are here, Mr. Peters. That's the cellar key, Mr. Peters. Be careful about the cellar. That was the first time he struck me — when I mistook the claret for the Burgundy. He's often hasty, but he always kept his hands off till then.

HOLMES: But the more I see of this place the less I fancy it. I'd be off to-night, but it's not so easy these days to get a place if your papers ain't in order. See here, Mr. Rodgers, I'd like to know a little more about my duties. The study is there, ain't it?

RODGERS: Yes, he is there now, waiting — waiting for me.

HOLMES: Where is his room?

RODGERS: You see the passage yonder. Well, the first room you come to is the master's bedroom; the next is Miss Enid's —

HOLMES: I see. Well, now, could you take me along to the master's room and show me any duties I have there?

RODGERS: The master's room? No one ever goes into the master's room. All the time I've been here I've never put my head inside the door.

HOLMES (*surprised*): What? no one at all?

RODGERS: Ali goes. Ali is the Indian valet. But no one else.

HOLMES: I wonder you never mistook the door and just walked in.

RODGERS: You couldn't do that for the door is locked.

HOLMES: Oh! he locks his door does he? Dear me! None of the keys here any use, I suppose?

RODGERS: Don’t think of such a thing. What are you saying? Why should you wish to enter the master’s room?

HOLMES: I don’t want to enter it. The fewer rooms the less work. Why do you suppose he locks the door?

RODGERS: It is not for me nor for you to ask why the master does things. He chooses to do so. That is enough for us.

HOLMES: Well Mr. Rodgers if you’ll excuse my saying so, this old ‘ouse ‘as taken some of the spirit out of you. I’m sure I don’t wonder. I don’t see myself staying here very long. Wasn’t there some one died here not so long ago?

RODGERS: I’d rather not talk of it, Mr. Peters.

HOLMES: A woman died in the room next the doctor’s. The cabman was telling me as we drove up.

RODGERS: Don’t listen to them, Mr. Peters. The master would not like it. Here is Miss Enid and the Doctor wants me.

(*Enter* ENID *from the bedroom wing*)

ENID: Rodgers can I have a word with you?

RODGERS: Very sorry Miss Enid, the master wants me.

(RODGERS *goes into the study*)

ENID (*to* HOLMES): Are you — ?

HOLMES: I am Peters, Miss, the new butler

ENID: Oh! (*Sits down beside table and writes*)

(HOLMES *crosses and stands behind the table. Pause*)

Why do you stand there? Are you a spy set to watch me? Am I never to have one moment of privacy?

HOLMES: I beg pardon, Miss.

ENID: I’m sorry if I have spoken bitterly. I have had enough to make me bitter.

HOLMES: I’m very sorry. Miss. I’m new to the place and don’t quite know where I am yet. May I ask Miss if your name is Stonor?

ENID: Yes. Why do you ask?

HOLMES: There was a lad at the station with a message for you.

ENID (*rising*): A message for me! Oh! it is what I want of All things on earth! Why did you not take it?

HOLMES: I did take it, Miss, it is here. (*Hands her a note*.)

ENID (*tears it open, reads*): “Fear nothing, and stay where you are. All will be right. Holmes.” Oh! it is a ray of sunshine in the darkness — such darkness. Tell me, Peters, who was this boy?

HOLMES: I don’t know, Miss — just a very ordinary nipper. The Doctor had gone on to the cab, and the boy touched my sleeve and asked me to give you this note in your own hand.

ENID: You said nothing to the Doctor.

HOLMES: Well, Miss, it seemed to be your business, not his. I just took it, and there it is.

ENID: God bless you for it. (*She conceals the note in her bosom*.)

HOLMES: I’m only a servant, Miss, but if I can be of any help to you, you must let me know.

(HOLMES *goes into the bedroom wing*.)

(ENID *takes the note out of her bosom, reads it again, then hurriedly replaces it as* RYLOTT *and* RODGERS *re-enter.*)

RYLOTT: Very good. You can go and pack your box.

RODGERS (*cringing*): Yes, sir. You won't —

RYLOTT: That's enough. Get away!

(RODGERS *goes into the servants' hall*.)

(ENID *sits at the tea-table*.)

(*Comes over to* ENID.) There you are! I want a word or two with you. What the devil do you mean by slipping off to London the moment my back was turned? And what did you do when you got there?

ENID: I went there on my own business.

RYLOTT: Oh! on your own business, was it? Perhaps what you call your own business may prove to be my business also. Who did you see? Come, woman, tell me!

ENID: It was my own business. I am of age. You have no claim to control me.

RYLOTT: I know exactly where you went. You went to the rooms of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, where you met Dr. Watson, who had advised you to go there. Was it not so?

ENID: I will answer no questions. If I did as you say, I was within my rights.

RYLOTT: What have you been saying about me? What did you go to consult Mr. Holmes about?

(ENID *remains silent*)

D'you hear? What did you go about? By God, I'll find a way to make you speak! (*Seizes her by the arm*) Come!

(*Enter* HOLMES)

HOLMES: Yes, sir?

RYLOTT: I did not ring for you.

HOLMES: I thought you called.

RYLOTT: Get out of this! What do you mean?

HOLMES: I beg your pardon, sir.

(*He goes into the servants hall*)

(RYLOTT *goes to the door of the servants hall, looks through, then returns*)

RYLOTT: Look here Enid, let us be sensible. I was too hot now. But you must realise the situation. Your wisest and safest course is complete submission. If you do what I tell you, there be no friction between us.

ENID: What do you wish me to do?

RYLOTT: Your marriage will complicate the arrangement which was come to at your mother’s death. I want you of own free will to bind yourself to respect it. Come Enid, you would not wish that your happiness should cause loss and even penury to me. I am an elderly man. I have had losses too, which make it the more necessary that I should preserve what is left. If you will sign a little deed it will be best for both of us.

ENID: I have promised to sign nothing until a lawyer has seen it.

RYLOTT: Promised? Promised whom?

ENID: I promised my fiancée.

RYLOTT: Oh! you did, did you? But why should lawyers come between you and me, Enid? I beg you — I urge you to do what I ask (*Opening out papers before her*)

ENID: No, no. I cannot. I will not.

RYLOTT: Very good! Tell me the truth, Enid. I won’t be angry. What are your suspicions of me?

ENID: I have no suspicions.

RYLOTT: Did I not receive your fiancé with civility?

ENID: Yes, you did.

RYLOTT: Have I not, on the whole, been kind to you all this winter?

ENID: Yes, you have.

RYLOTT: Then, tell me, child, why do you suspect me?

ENID: I don’t suspect you.

RYLOTT: Why do you send out messages to get help against me?

ENID: I don’t understand you.

RYLOTT: Don’t you send out for help? Tell me the truth, child.

ENID: No.

RYLOTT (*with a yell)*: You damned little liar! (*Bangs the telegram down before her.)* What was this telegram that you gave to Rodgers?

(ENID *sinks back, half fainting*.)

Ah! you infernal young hypocrite. Shall I read it to you? “Come to me as soon as you can. Please hurry.” What did you mean by that? What did you mean, I say? (Clutching her arm.) None of your lies — out with it.

ENID: Keep your hands off me, you coward!

RYLOTT: Answer me — answer me, then!

ENID: I will answer you! I believe that you murdered my mother by your neglect. I believe that in some way you drove my sister to her grave. Now, I am certain that you mean to do the same to me. You’re a murderer — a murderer! We were left to your care — helpless girls. You have ill-used us — you have tortured us — now you have murdered one of us, and you would do the same to me. You are a coward, a monster, a man fit only for the gallows!

RYLOTT: You’ll pay for this, you little devil! Get to your room.

ENID: I will. I’m not without friends, as you may find.

RYLOTT: You’ve got some plot against me. What have you been arranging in London? What is it? (*Clutches her.*)

ENID: Let me go!

RYLOTT: What did you tell them? By God, I’ll twist your head off your shoulders if you cross me! (*Seizes her by the neck.*)

ENID: Help! Help!

(*Enter* HOLMES.)

HOLMES: Hands off, Dr. Rylott.

(RYLOTT *releases* ENID.)

You had best go to your room, young lady. I’ll see that you are not molested. Go at once, I tell you, go.

RYLOTT: You infernal villain. I’ll soon settle you.

(*After* ENID *goes out, he runs to a rack at the side, gets a whip, opens the hall door, stands near it with his whip*.)

Now, then, out you go! By George, you’ll remember Stoke Moran.

HOLMES: Excuse me, sir, but is that a whip?

RYLOTT: You’ll soon see what it is.

HOLMES: I am afraid I must ask you to put it down.

RYLOTT: Oh, indeed! must you? (*Comes forward to him*.)

HOLMES (*taking out a revolver*): Yes, sir! You’ll please put down that whip.

RYLOTT (*falling back*): You villain!

HOLMES: Stand right back, sir. I’ll take no risks with a man like you. Right back, I say! Thank you, sir.

RYLOTT: Rodgers! Ali! My gun!

(*He runs into his study*.)

HOLMES: Hurry up, Billy! No time to lose.

(*Enter* BILLY*, as Amelia, from the servants' hall*.)

BILLY: Yes, Mr. Holmes.

(HOLMES *and* BILLY *go out through the entrance hall*.)

(*Several shots are heard outside.* RYLOTT *rushes in from his study with his gun.*)

(*Enter* ALl — *running in from outside*.)

ALI: Stop, Sahib, stop!

RYLOTT: What were those shots?

ALI: The new butler, sir. He shoot Siva!

RYLOTT: Shot my dog! By God, I'll teach him! (*Rushes toward door*.)

ALI: No, no, Sahib. He gone in darkness. What do you do? People come. Police come.

RYLOTT: You're right. (*Puts gun down*.) We have another game; Ali, you will watch outside Miss Enid's window to-night.

ALI: Yes, Sahib, shall I watch all night?

RYLOTT: All night? No, not all night! You will learn when you may cease your watch.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

ENID’S Bedroom, Stoke Place

ENID *is discovered seated near the lamp at a small table near a window. A knock is heard at the door*

ENID: Who is there?

RYLOTT (*off*) It is I.

ENID: What do you want?

RYLOTT: Why is your light still burning?

ENID: I have been reading.

RYLOTT: You are not in bed then?

ENID: Not yet.

RYLOTT: Then I desire to come in.

ENID: But it is so late.

RYLOTT: (*rattles door*) Come, come, let me in this instant.

ENID: No, no I cannot!

RYLOTT: Must I break the door in?

ENID: I will open it. I will open it. (*Opens door*) Why do persecute me so?

(RYLOTT *enters in his dressing gown*)

RYLOTT: Why are you so childish and so suspicious? Your mind has brooded upon your poor sister’s death until you have built up these fantastic suspicions against me. Tell me now Enid — I’m not such a bad sort you know, if you only deal frankly with me. Tell me, have you any idea of your own about how your sister died? Was that what you went to Mr. Holmes about this morning? Couldn't you take me into your confidence as well as him? Is it not natural that I should feel hurt when I see you turn to a stranger for advice?

ENID: How my poor sister met her death only your own wicked heart can know. I am as sure that it came to her through you as if I had seen you strike her down. You may kill me if you like, but I will tell you what I think.

RYLOTT: My dear child, you are overwrought and hysterical. What can have put such wild ideas into your head? After all, I may have a hasty temper — I have often deplored it to you — but what excuse have I ever given you for such monstrous suspicions?

ENID: You think that by a few smooth words you can make me forget all your past looks, your acts. You cannot deceive me, I know the danger and I face it.

RYLOTT: What, then, is the danger?

ENID: It is near me to-night, whatever it is.

RYLOTT: Why do you think so?

ENID: Why is that Indian watching in the darkness? I opened my window just now, and there he was. Why is he there?

RYLOTT: To prevent your making a public fool of yourself. You are capable of getting loose and making a scandal.

ENID: He is there to keep me in my room until you come to murder me.

RYLOTT: Upon my word, I think your brain is unhinged. Now, look here, Enid, be reasonable for a moment.

ENID: What's that?

RYLOTT: What is it, then?

ENID: I thought I heard a cry.

RYLOTT: It’s the howling of the wind. Listen to me. If there is friction between us — and I don’t for a moment deny that there is — why is it? You think I mean to hurt you. I could only have one possible motive for hurting you. Why not remove that motive? Then you could no longer work yourself into these terrors. Here is that legal paper I spoke of. Mrs. Staunton could witness it. All I want is your signature.

ENID: No, never.

RYLOTT: Never!

ENID: Unless my lawyer advises it.

RYLOTT: Is that final?

ENID (*springing up*): Yes, it is. I will never sign it.

RYLOTT: Well, I have done my best for you. It was your last chance.

ENID: Ah! then you do mean murder.

RYLOTT: The last chance of regaining my favour. You — (*Pause*.) Get to your bed and may you wake in a more rational mood to-morrow. You will not be permitted to make a scandal. Ali will be at his post outside, and I shall sit in the hall; so you may reconcile yourself to being quiet. Nothing more to say to me?

(*He goes out*.)

(*When he has gone,* ENID *listens to his departing footsteps. Then she locks the door once again, and looks round her.*)

ENID: What is that tapping? Surely I heard tapping! Perhaps it is the pulse within my own brain?

(*Tapping*.)

Yes! there it is again! Where was it? Is it the signal of death? (*Looks wildly round the walls*.) Ah! it grows louder. It is the window. (*Goes towards* *window.*) A man! a man crouching in the darkness. Still tapping. It's not Ali! The face was white. Ah!

(*The window opens and* HOLMES *enters*.)

HOLMES: My dear young lady, I trust that I don't intrude.

ENID: Oh, Mr. Holmes, I'm so glad to see you! Save me! save me! Mr. Holmes, they mean to murder me.

HOLMES: Tut, tut! we mean that they shall do nothing of sort.

ENID: I had given up All hope of your coming.

HOLMES: These old-fashioned window-catches are most inefficient.

ENID: How did you pass the Indian and the dog?

HOLMES: Well, as to the Indian, we chloroformed him. Watson is busy tying him up in the arbour at the present moment. The dog I was compelled to shoot at an earlier stage of the proceeding.

ENID: You shot Siva!

HOLMES: I might have been forced to shoot her master also. It was after I sent you to your room. He threatened me with a whip.

ENID: You were — you were Peters, the butler.

HOLMES (*feeling the walls)*: I wanted to be near you. So this is the famous room, is it? Dear me! very much as I had pictured it. You will excuse me for not discovering myself to you, but any cry or agitation upon your part would have betrayed me.

ENID: But your daughter Amelia?

HOLMES: Ah, yes, I take Billy when I can. Billy as messenger is invaluable.

ENID: Then you intended to watch over me till night?

HOLMES: Exactly. But the man’s brutality caused me to show my hand too soon. However, I have never been far from your window. I gather the matter is pressing.

ENID: He means to murder me to-night.

HOLMES: He is certainly in an ugly humour. He is not in his room at present.

ENID: No, he is in the hall.

HOLMES: So we can talk with safety. What has become of the excellent Watson? (*Approaches window.*) Come in, Watson, come in!

(*Enter* WATSON *from window*.)

How is our Indian friend?

WATSON: He is coming out of the chloroform; but he can neither move nor speak. Good evening, Miss Stonor, what a night it is.

ENID: How can I thank you for coming?

HOLMES: You’ll find Dr. Watson a useful companion on such an occasion. He has a natural turn for violence — some survival of his surgical training. The wind is good. Its howling will cover all sounds. Just sit in the window, Watson, and see that our retreat is safe. With your leave, I will inspect the room a little more closely. Now, my dear young lady, I can see that you are frightened to death, and no wonder. Your courage, so far, has been admirable. Sit over here by the fire.

ENID: If he should come — !

HOLMES: In that case answer him. Say that you have gone to bed. (*Takes lamp from table.*) A most interesting old room — very quaint indeed! Old-fashioned comfort without modern luxury. The passage is, as I understand, immediately outside?

ENID: Yes.

HOLMES: Mr. Peters made two attempts to explore the ground, but without avail. By the way, I gather that you tried to send me a message, and that old Rodgers gave it to your stepfather.

ENID: Yes, he did.

HOLMES: He is not to be blamed. His master controls him. He had to betray you. (*Placing lamp down*.)

ENID: It was my fault.

HOLMES: Well, well, it was an indiscretion, but it didn't matter. Let me see now, on this side is the room under repair. Quite so. Only one door. This leads into the passage?

ENID: Yes.

HOLMES: And that passage to the hall?

ENID: Yes.

HOLMES: Here is where the genial old gentleman sleeps when he is so innocently employed. Where is his door?

ENID: Down the passage.

HOLMES: Surely I heard him — (*A step is heard in the passage*.)

ENID: Yes, it's his step.

(HOLMES *holds his hat over the light. There is a knock at the door*.)

RYLOTT (*outside door*): Enid!

ENID: What is it?

RYLOTT: Are you in bed?

ENID: Yes.

RYLOTT: Are you still of the same mind?

ENID: Yes, I am.

(*Pause. They all listen.*)

HOLMES (*whispering*): Has he gone into his room?

ENID (*crossing to door, listening*): No, he's gone down the passage again to the hall.

HOLMES: Then we must make the most of the time. Might I trouble you, Watson, for the gimlet and the yard measure? Thank you! The lantern also. Thank you! You can turn up the lamp. I am interested in this partition wall. (Standing on the bed.) No little surprise, I suppose? No trap-doors and sliding panels? Funny folk, our ancestors, with a quaint taste in practical joking. (*Gets on bed and fingers the wall.*) No, it seems solid enough. Dear me! and yet you say your sister fastened both door and window. Remarkable. My lens, Watson. A perfectly respectable wall — in fact, a commonplace wall. Trap-door in the floor? (*Kneels at one side of the bed, then the other.*) No, nothing suspicious in that direction. Ancient carpeting — (*crossing round bed*) — oak wainscot — nothing more. Hullo! (*Pulling at bed-post.*)

WATSON: Why, what is it?

HOLMES: Why is your bed clamped to the floor?

ENID: I really don't know.

HOLMES: Was the bed in your other room clamped?

ENID: No, I don't think it was.

HOLMES: Very interesting. Most interesting and instructive. And this bell-pull — where does it communicate with?

ENID: It does not work.

HOLMES: But if you want to ring?

ENID: There is another over here.

HOLMES: Then why this one?

ENID: I don’t know. There were some changes after we came here.

HOLMES: Quite a burst of activity, apparently. It took some strange shapes. (*Standing on the bed*.) You may be interested to know that the bell-rope ends in a brass hook. No wire attachment; it is a dummy. Dear me! how very singular. I see a small screen above it, which covers a ventilator, I suppose?

ENID: Yes, Mr. Holmes, there is a ventilator.

HOLMES: Curious fad to ventilate one room into another when one could as well get the open air. Most original man, the architect. Very singular indeed. There is no means of opening the flap from here; it must open on the other side.

WATSON: What do you make of it, Holmes?

HOLMES: Suggestive, my dear Watson, very suggestive. Might I trouble you for your knife? With your permission, Miss Stonor, I will make a slight alteration. (*Stands on bed-head and cuts the bell-pull*.)

WATSON: Why do you do that, Holmes?

HOLMES: Dangerous, Watson, dangerous. Bear in mind that this opening, concealed by a flap of wood, leads into the room of our cheery Anglo-Indian neighbour. I repeat the adjective, Watson — Anglo-Indian.

WATSON: Well, Holmes?

HOLMES: The bed is clamped so that it cannot be shifted. He has a dummy bell-pull which leads to the bed. He has a hole above it which opens on his room. He is an Anglo-Indian doctor. Do you make nothing of all this? The music, too? The music. What is the music?

WATSON: A signal, Holmes.

HOLMES: A signal! A signal to whom?

WATSON: An accomplice.

HOLMES: Exactly. An accomplice who could enter a room with locked doors — an accomplice who could give a sure death which leaves no trace. An accomplice who can only be attracted back by music.

ENID: Hush! he is gone to his room.

(*A door is heard to close outside.*)

Listen! The door is shut.

HOLMES (*as Watson is about to take up lamp*): Keep the lamp covered, so that if the ventilator is opened no light will show. He must think the girl is asleep. Keep the dark lantern handy. We must wait in the dark. I fancy we shall not have long to wait.

ENID: I am so frightened.

HOLMES: It is too much for you.

WATSON: Can I do anything, Holmes?

HOLMES: You can hand me my hunting-crop. Hush! What’s that?

(*Flute music is heard*.)

My stick, Watson — quick, be quick! Now take the lantern. Have you got it? When I cry, “Now!” turn it full blaze upon the top of the bell-rope. Do you understand?

WATSON: Yes.

HOLMES: Down that bell-rope comes the messenger of death. It guides to the girl’s pillow. Hush! the flap!

(*The flap opens, disclosing a small square of light. This light is obscured. Music a good deal louder.*)

(*Cries sharply*.) Now!

(WATSON *turns the lantern full on to the bell-rope. A snake is half through the hole.* HOLMES *lashes at it with his stick. It disappears backwards*.)

(*The flute music stops*.)

WATSON: It has gone.

HOLMES: Yes, it has gone, but we know the truth.

(*A loud cry is heard*.)

WATSON: What is that?

HOLMES: I believe the devil has turned on its master.

(*Another cry*.)

It is in the passage. (*Throws open the door.*)

(*In the doorway is seen* DR. RYLOTT *in shirt and trousers, the snake round his head and neck.*)

RYLOTT: Save me! save me!

(RYLOTT *rushes in and falls on the floor.* WATSON*strikes at the snake as it writhes across the room.*)

WATSON (*looking at the snake*): The brute is dead.

HOLMES (*looking at* RYLOTT): So is the other.

(*They both run to support the fainting lady*.) Miss Stonor, there is no more danger for you under this roof.

CURTAIN

THE CROWN DIAMOND

An Evening with Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

1910

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES

The famous Detective.

DR. WATSON

His Friend.

BILLY

Page to MR. HOLMES.

COL. SEBASTIAN MORAN

An intellectual Criminal.

SAM MERTON

A Boxer.

THE CROWN DIAMOND

SCENE. — MR. HOLMES’S *room in Baker Street. It presents the usual features, but there is a deep bow window to it, and across there is drawn a curtain running upon a brass rod fastened across eight feet above the ground and enclosing the recess of the window.*

Enter WATSON *and* BILLY

WATSON: Well, Billy, when will he be back?

BILLY: I’m sure I couldn’t say sir.

WATSON: When did you see him last?

BILLY: I really couldn’t tell you.

WATSON: What, you couldn’t tell me?

BILLY: No sir. There was a clergyman looked in yesterday and there was an old bookmaker and there was a workman.

WATSON: Well?

BILLY: But I’m not sure they weren’t all Mr. Holmes. You see he’s very hot on a chase just now.

WATSON: Oh!

BILLY: He neither eats nor sleeps. Well you’ve lived with him same as me. You know what he’s like when he’s after some one.

WATSON: I know.

BILLY: He’s a responsibility sir, that he is. It’s a real worry to me sometimes. When I asked him if he would order dinner, he said. “Yes, I’ll have chops and mashed potatoes at 7:30 the day after to morrow.” “Won’t you eat before then sir?” I asked. “I haven’t time, Billy. I’m busy,” said he. He gets thinner and paler and his eyes get brighter. It’s awful to see him.

WATSON: Tut, tut, this will never do. I must certainly stop and see him.

BILLY: Yes sir, it will ease my mind.

WATSON: But what is he after?

BILLY: It's this case of the Crown Diamond.

WATSON: What the hundred thousand pound burglary?

BILLY: Yes, sir. They must get it back sir. Why we had the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both sitting on that very sofa. Mr. Holmes promised he'd do his very best for them. Quite nice he was to them. Put them at their ease in a moment.

WATSON: Dear me! I've read about it in the paper. But I say, Billy, what have you been doing to the room? What's this curtain?

BILLY: I don't know, sir. Mr. Holmes had it put there three days ago. But we've got something funny behind it.

WATSON: Something funny?

BILLY *(laughing)*: Yes, sir. He had it made.

*(*BILLY *goes to the curtain and draws it across, disclosing a wax image of Holmes seated in a chair, back to the audience.)*

WATSON: Good heavens, Billy!

BILLY: Yes, sir. It's like him, sir. *(Picks the head off and exhibits it.)*

WATSON: It's wonderful! But what's it for, Billy?

BILLY: You see, sir, he's anxious that those who watch him should think he's at home sometimes when he isn't. There's the bell, sir. *(Replaces head, draws curtain.)* I must go.

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

*(*WATSON *sits down, lights a cigarette, and opens a paper. Enter a tall, bent* OLD WOMAN *in black with veil and side-curls.)*

WATSON *(rising)*: Good day, Ma'm.

WOMAN: You're not Mr. Holmes?

WATSON: No, Ma'm. I'm his friend, Dr. Watson.

WOMAN: I knew you couldn't be Mr. Holmes. I'd always heard he was a handsome man.

WATSON *(aside)*: Upon my word!

WOMAN: But I must see him at once.

WATSON: I assure you he is not in.

WOMAN: I don't believe you.

WATSON: What!

WOMAN: You have a sly, deceitful face — oh, yes, a wicked, scheming face. Come, young man, where is he?

WATSON: Really, Madam ... !

WOMAN: Very well, I'll find him for myself. He's in there, I believe. *(Walks toward bedroom door.)*

WATSON *(rising and crossing)*: That is his bedroom. Really, Madam, this is outrageous!

WOMAN: I wonder what he keeps in this safe.

(She approaches it, and as she does so the lights go out, and the room is in darkness save for "DON'T TOUCH" in red fire over the safe. Four red lights spring up, and between them the inscription "DON'T TOUCH!" After a few seconds the lights go on again, and HOLMES *is standing beside* WATSON.*)*

WATSON: Good heavens, Holmes!

HOLMES: Neat little alarm, is it not, Watson? My own invention. You tread on a loose plank and so connect the circuit, or I can turn it on myself. It prevents inquisitive people becoming too inquisitive. When I come back I know if any one has been fooling with my things. It switches off again automatically, as you saw.

WATSON: But my dear fellow, why this disguise?

HOLMES: A little comic relief, Watson. When I saw you sitting there looking so solemn, I really couldn't help it. But I assure you there is nothing comic in the business I am engaged upon. Good heavens! *(Rushes across room, and draws curtain, which has been left partly open.)*

WATSON: Why, what is it?

HOLMES: Danger, Watson. Airguns, Watson. I'm expecting something this evening.

WATSON: Expecting what, Holmes?

HOLMES *(lighting pipe)*: Expecting to be murdered, Watson.

WATSON: No, no, you are joking, Holmes!

HOLMES: Even my limited sense of humour could evolve a better joke than that, Watson. No, it is a fact. And in case it should come off — it's about a two to one chance — it would perhaps be as well that you should burden your memory with the name and address of the murderer.

WATSON: Holmes!

HOLMES: You can give it to Scotland Yard with my love and a parting blessing. Moran is the name. Colonel Sebastian Moran. Write it down, Watson, write it down! 136, Moorside Gardens, N.W. Got it?

WATSON: But surely something can be done, Holmes. Couldn't you have this fellow arrested?

HOLMES: Yes, Watson, I could. That's what's worrying him so.

WATSON: But why don't you?

HOLMES: Because I don't know where the diamond is.

WATSON: What diamond?

HOLMES: Yes, yes, the great yellow Crown Diamond, seventy seven carats, lad, and without flaw. I have two fish in the net. But I haven't got the stone there. And what's the use of taking them? It's the stone I'm after.

WATSON: Is this Colonel Moran one of the fish in the net?

HOLMES: Yes, and he's a shark. He bites. The other is Sam Merton the boxer. Not a bad fellow, Sam, but the Colonel has used him. Sam's not a shark. He's a big silly gudgeon. But he's flopping about in my net, all the same.

WATSON: Where is this Colonel Moran?

HOLMES: I've been at his elbow all morning. Once he picked up my parasol. "By your leave, Ma'm," said he. Life is full of whimsical happenings. I followed him to old Straubenzee's workshop in the Minories. Straubenzee made the airgun — fine bit of work, I understand.

WATSON: An airgun?

HOLMES: The idea was to shoot me through the window. I had to put up that curtain. By the way, have you seen the dummy? *(Draws curtain.)*

*(*WATSON *nods.)*

Ah! Billy has been showing you the sights. It may get a bullet through its beautiful wax head at any moment.

(Enter BILLY.*)*

Well, Billy?

BILLY: Colonel Sebastian Moran, sir.

HOLMES: Ah! the man himself. I rather expected it. Grasp the nettle, Watson. A man of nerve! He felt my toe on his heels. *(Looks out of* *window.)* And there is Sam Merton in the street — the faithful but fatuous Sam. Where is the Colonel, Billy?

BILLY: Waiting-room, sir.

HOLMES: Show him up when I ring.

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: Oh, by the way, Billy, if I am not in the room show him in just the same.

BILLY: Very good, sir.

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

WATSON: I’ll stay with you, Holmes.

HOLMES: No, my dear fellow, you would be horribly in the way *(Goes to the table and scribbles a note.)*

WATSON: He may murder you.

HOLMES: I shouldn’t be surprised.

WATSON: I can’t possibly leave you.

HOLMES: Yes, you can, my dear Watson, for you’ve always played the game, and I am very sure that you will play it to end. Take this note to Scotland Yard. Come back with the police. The fellow’s arrest will follow.

WATSON: I’ll do that with joy.

HOLMES: And before you return I have just time to find where the diamond is. *(Rings bell.)* This way, Watson. We’ll go together. I rather want to see my shark without his seeing me.

*(*WATSON *and* HOLMES *go into the bedroom.)*

(Enter BILLY *and* COLONEL SEBASTIAN MORAN, *who is a fierce big man, flashily dressed, with a heavy cudgel.)*

BILLY: Colonel Sebastian Moran.

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

*(*COLONEL MORAN *looks round, advances slowly into the room and starts as he sees the dummy figure sitting in the window. He stares at it, then crouches, grips his stick, and advances on tip-toe. When close to the figure he raises his stick.* HOLMES *comes quickly out of the bedroom door.)*

HOLMES: Don’t break it, Colonel, don’t break it.

COLONEL *(staggering back)*: Good Lord!

HOLMES: It’s such a pretty little thing. Tavernier, the French modeller, made it. He is as good at waxwork as Straubenzee is at airguns. *(Shuts curtains.)*

COLONEL: Airguns, sir. Airguns! What do you mean?

HOLMES: Put your hat and stick on the side table. Thank you. Pray take a seat. Would you care to put your revolver out also? Oh, very good, if you prefer to sit upon it.

(The COLONEL *sits down.)*

I wanted to have five minutes’ chat with you.

COLONEL: I wanted to have five minutes’ chat with you.

*(*HOLMES *sits down near him and crosses his leg.)*

I won’t deny that I intended to assault you just now.

HOLMES: It struck me that some idea of that sort had crossed your mind.

COLONEL: And with reason, sir, with reason.

HOLMES: But why this attention?

COLONEL: Because you have gone out of your way to annoy me. Because you have put your creatures on my track.

HOLMES: My creatures?

COLONEL: I have had them followed. I know that they come to report to you here.

HOLMES: No, I assure you.

COLONEL: Tut, sir! Other people can observe as well as you. Yesterday there was an old sporting man; to-day it was an elderly lady. They held me in view all day.

HOLMES: Really, sir, you compliment me! Old Baron Dowson, before he was hanged at Newgate, was good enough to say that in my case what the law had gained the stage had lost. And now you come along with your kindly words. In the name of the elderly lady and of the sporting gentleman I thank you. There was also an out-of-work plumber who was an artistic dream — you seem to have overlooked him.

COLONEL: It was you. . . you!

HOLMES: Your humble servant! If you doubt it, you can see the parasol upon the settee which you so politely handed to me this morning down in the Minories.

COLONEL: If I had known you might never —

HOLMES: Never have seen this humble home again. I was well aware of it. But it happens you didn’t know, and here we are, quite chatty and comfortable.

COLONEL: What you say only makes matters worse. It was not your agents, but you yourself, who have dogged me. Why have you done this?

HOLMES: You used to shoot tigers?

COLONEL: Yes, sir.

HOLMES: But why?

COLONEL: Pshaw! Why does any man shoot a tiger? excitement. The danger.

HOLMES: And no doubt the satisfaction of freeing the country from a pest, which devastates it and lives on the population.

COLONEL: Exactly.

HOLMES: My reasons in a nutshell.

COLONEL *(springing to his feet)*: Insolent!

HOLMES: Sit down, sir, sit down! There was another more practical reason.

COLONEL: Well?

HOLMES: I want that yellow Crown Diamond.

COLONEL: Upon my word! Well, go on.

HOLMES: You knew that I was after you for that. The reason why you are here to-night is to find out how much I know about the matter. Well, you can take it that I know all about it, save one thing, which you are about to tell me.

COLONEL *(sneering)*: And, pray, what is that?

HOLMES: Where the diamond is.

COLONEL: Oh, you want to know that, do you? How the devil should I know where it is?

HOLMES: You not only know, but you are about to tell me.

COLONEL: Oh, indeed!

HOLMES: You can’t bluff me, Colonel. You’re absolute plate glass. I see to the very back of your mind.

COLONEL: Then of course you see where the diamond is.

HOLMES: Ah! then you do know. You have admitted it.

COLONEL: I admit nothing.

HOLMES: Now, Colonel, if you will be reasonable we can do business together. If not you may get hurt.

COLONEL: And you talk about bluff!

HOLMES *(raising a book from the table)*: Do you know what I keep inside this book?

COLONEL: No, sir, I do not.

HOLMES: You.

COLONEL: Me!

HOLMES: Yes, sir, you. You're all here, every action of your vile and dangerous life.

COLONEL: Damn you, Holmes! Don't go too far.

HOLMES: Some interesting details, Colonel. The real facts as to the death of Miss Minnie Warrender of Laburnum Grove. All here, Colonel.

COLONEL: You — you devil!

HOLMES: And the story of young Arbothnot, who was found drowned in the Regents Canal just before his intended exposure of you for cheating at cards.

COLONEL: I — I never hurt the boy.

HOLMES: But he died at a very seasonable time. Do you want some more, Colonel? Plenty of it here. How about the robbery in the train deluxe to the Riviera, February 13th, 1892? How about the forged cheque on the Credit Lyonnais the same year?

COLONEL: No, you're wrong there.

HOLMES: Then I'm right on the others. Now, Colonel, you are a card-player. When the other fellow holds all the trumps it saves time to throw down your hand.

COLONEL: If there was a word of truth in all this, would I have been a free man all these years?

HOLMES: I was not consulted. There were missing links in the police case. But I have a way of finding missing links. You may take it from me that I could do so.

COLONEL: Bluff! Mr. Holmes, bluff!

HOLMES: Oh, you wish me to prove my words! Well, if I touch this bell it means the police, and from that instant the matter is out of my hands. Shall I?

COLONEL: What has all this to do with the jewel you speak of?

HOLMES: Gently, Colonel! Restrain that eager mind. Let me get to the point in my own hum-drum way. I have all this against you, and I also have a clear case against both you and your fighting bully in this case of the Crown Diamond.

COLONEL: Indeed!

HOLMES: I have the cabman who took you to Whitehall, and the cabman who brought you away. I have the commissionaire who saw you beside the case. I have Ikey Cohen who refused to cut it up for you. Ikey has peached, and the game is up.

COLONEL: Hell!

HOLMES: That's the hand I play from. But there's one card missing. I don't know where this king of diamonds is.

COLONEL: You never shall know.

HOLMES: Tut! tut! don't turn nasty. Now, consider. You're going to be locked up for twenty years. So is Sam Merton. What good are you going to get out of your diamond? None in world. But if you let me know where it is. . . well, I’ll compound a felony. We don’t want you or Sam. We want the stone. Give up, and so far as I am concerned you can go free so long as you behave yourself in the future. If you make another slip, then God help you. But this time my commission is to get the stone, not you. *(Rings bell.)*

COLONEL: But if I refuse?

HOLMES: Then, alas, it must be you, not the stone.

(Enter BILLY.*)*

BILLY: Yes, sir.

HOLMES *(to the* COLONEL*)*: I think we had better have your friend Sam at this conference. Billy, you will see a large and very ugly gentleman outside the front door. Ask him to come up, will you?

BILLY: Yes, sir. Suppose he won’t come, sir?

HOLMES: No force, Billy! Don’t be rough with him. If you tell him Colonel Moran wants him, he will come.

BILLY: Yes, sir.

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

COLONEL: What’s the meaning of this, then?

HOLMES: My friend Watson was with me just now. I told him that I had a shark and a gudgeon in my net. Now, I’m drawing the net and up they come together.

COLONEL *(leaning forward):* You won’t die in your bed Holmes!

HOLMES: D’you know, I have often had the same idea. For that matter, your own finish is more likely to be perpendicular than horizontal. But these anticipations are morbid. Let us give ourselves up to the unrestrained enjoyment of the present. No good fingering your revolver, my friend, for you know perfectly well that you dare not use it. Nasty, noisy things, revolvers. Better stick to airguns, Colonel Moran. Ah! … I think I hear the footsteps of your estimable partner.

(Enter BILLY.*)*

BILLY: Mr. Sam Merton.

(Enter SAM MERTON, *in check suit and loud necktie, yellow overcoat.)*

HOLMES: Good day, Mr. Merton. Rather damp in the street, is it not?

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

MERTON *(to the* COLONEL*)*:What's the game? What's up?

HOLMES: If I may put it in a nutshell, Mr. Merton, I should say it is all up.

MERTON *(to the* COLONEL*)*: Is this cove tryin' to be funny — or what? I'm not in the funny mood myself.

HOLMES: You'll feel even less humourous as the evening advances, I think I can promise you that. Now, look here, Colonel. I'm a busy man and I can't waste time. I'm going into the bedroom. Pray make yourselves entirely at home in my absence. You can explain to your friend how the matter lies. I shall try over the Barcarolle upon my violin. *(Looks at watch.)* In five minutes I shall return for your final answer. You quite grasp the alternative, don't you? Shall we take you, or shall we have the stone?

*(*HOLMES *goes into his bedroom, taking his violin with him.)*

MERTON: What's that? He knows about the stone!

COLONEL: Yes, he knows a dashed sight too much about it. I'm not sure that he doesn't know all about it.

MERTON: Good Lord!

COLONEL: Ikey Cohen has split.

MERTON: He has, has he? I'll do him down a thick 'un for that.

COLONEL: But that won't help us. We've got to make up our minds what to do.

MERTON: Half a mo’. He’s not listening, is he? *(Approaches bedroom door.)* No, it’s shut. Look to me as if it was locked.

(Music begins.)

Ah! there he is, safe enough. *(Goes to curtain.)* Here, I say! *(Draws it back, disclosing the figure.)* Here’s that cove again, blast him!

COLONEL: Tut! it’s a dummy. Never mind it.

MERTON: A fake, is it? *(Examines it, and turns the head)* By Gosh, I wish I could twist his own as easy. Well, strike me! Madame Tussaud ain’t in it!

(As MERTON *returns towards the* COLONEL*, the lights suddenly go out, and the red “DON’T TOUCH” signal goes up. After a few seconds the lights readjust themselves. Figures must transpose at that moment.)*

Well, dash my buttons! Look ‘ere, Guv’nor, this is gettin’ on ny nerves. Is it unsweetened gin, or what?

COLONEL: Tut! it is some childish hanky-panky of this fellow Holmes, a spring or an alarm or something. Look here, there’s no time to lose. He can lag us for the diamond.

MERTON: The hell he can!

COLONEL: But he’ll let us slip if we only tell him where the stone is.

MERTON: What, give up the swag! Give up a hundred thousand!

COLONEL: It’s one or the other.

MERTON: No way out? You’ve got the brains, Guv’nor. Surely you can think a way out of it.

COLONEL: Wait a bit! I’ve fooled better men than he. Here’s the stone in my secret pocket. It can be out of England tonight, cut into four pieces in Amsterdam before Saturday. He knows nothing of Van Seddor.

MERTON: I thought Van Seddor was to wait till next week.

COLONEL: Yes, he was. But now he must get the next boat. One or other of us must slip round with the stone to the “Excelsior” and tell him.

MERTON: But the false bottom ain’t in the hat-box yet!

COLONEL: Well, he must take it as it is and chance it. There’s not a moment to lose. As to Holmes, we can fool him enough. You see, he won’t arrest us if he thinks he can get the stone. We’ll put him on the wrong track about it, and before he finds it is the wrong track, the stone will be in Amsterdam, and we out of the country.

MERTON: That’s prime.

COLONEL: You go off now, and tell Van Seddor to get a move on him. I’ll see this sucker and fill him up with a bogus confession. The stone’s in Liverpool — that’s what I’ll tell him. By the time he finds it isn’t, there won’t be much of it left, and we’ll be on blue water. *(He looks carefully round him, then draws a small leather box from his pocket, and holds it out.)* Here is the Crown Diamond.

HOLMES *(taking it, as he rises from his chair)*: I thank you.

COLONEL *(staggering back)*: Curse you, Holmes! *(Puts hand in pocket.)*

MERTON: To hell with him!

HOLMES: No violence, gentlemen; no violence, I beg of you. It must be very clear to you that your position is an impossible one. The police are waiting below.

COLONEL: You — you devil! How did you get there?

HOLMES: The device is obvious but effective; lights off for a moment and the rest is common sense. It gave me a chance of listening to your racy conversation which would have been painfully constrained by a knowledge of my presence. No, Colonel, no. I am covering you with a .450 Derringer through the pocket of my dressing-gown. *(Rings bell.)*

(Enter BILLY.*)*

Send them up, Billy.

*(*BILLY *goes out.)*

COLONEL: Well, you’ve got us, damn you!

MERTON: A fair cop … But I say, what about that bloomin’ fiddle?

HOLMES: Ah, yes, these modern gramophones! Wonderful invention. Wonderful!

CURTAIN

THE JOURNEY

A well in an arid, rocky spot. At the back a winding path. Beyond a rugged mountain, the summit of which is draped in clouds. Round the well sit the Faith family, who are the hereditary guides upon the journey. Beside them sits an iridescent, evasive creature who is Inspiration. A little apart sits Reason, a stern greybeard. Aloof from them all sits Science, working with a battery and some wires. The Faith family are clad in various garbs, all with a suspicion of sacerdotalism, either Mahometan, Buddhist, or Christian.

Faith I. What a blessing it is that we are appointed guides upon the journey ! What would the poor people do without us !

All. Ah, what would they do without us !

Faith 1. They would never reach the City Beautiful at all. They would all wander off upon the way.

Faith 2. They would die in the great salt marsh of Sin.

Faith 3. Or be starved in the Jungle of Disbelief, or fall over the Precipice of Schism.

Faith 4. Well, it depends upon what you call Schism.

Faith 1. Hush ! we need not go into that. Perhaps we had best agree to drop the subject as it has led to so much trouble in the past. We all know in our own hearts what we mean by Schism.

All. [Glaring at each other] Yes, we know that.

Faith 2. Allow me to tell you what Schism is —

Faith 1. No, no, let us change the subject ! The road is very quiet to-day. We have not had many to guide.

Faith 2. So many guide themselves these days and don’t want any help from us.

Faith 3. Poor creatures ! I wonder what befalls them.

Faith 1. And so many never know that they are on a journey at all, and simply wander downwards or round and round the mountain instead of trying to get to the city at the top.

Faith 2. Deplorable ! Deplorable ! We can but go among them and point them upwards.

Faith 3. This is an important camping ground. I thought of erecting a sign-post, so that if I should not be there it would point the way.

All. Admirable ! Splendid ! Let us have a signpost.

Faith 3. See [produces a crossed stick], I have actually made one. [Rises] I will put it on the rock there so that it may point due east.

Faith 2. But that is the wrong way.

Faith 1. Of course it is.

Faith 3. It is the right way.

Others. No, no ! Wrong ! Wrong !

Faith 1. Why, if he went that way he would be up to his neck in the quagmire of Superstition and never win his way through.

Faith 3. You are talking nonsense. How would you go ?

Faith 1. That way! [pointing].

Faith 2. No, that way ! [pointing].

Faith 3. And both of them right over the edge of the Precipice of Schism and down into the Valley of Damnation.

Faith 1. Keep a civil tongue, if you please.

Faith 3. I will testify to what I know to be truth.

Faith 2. Bigoted, obstinate ass ! How do you know that it is truth ?

Faith 3. Because I was told long ago by Inspiration. You told me, Inspiration ?

Inspir. Yes, I told you. Quite right. I told you.

Faith 3. You hear her. She told me. I have never allowed myself to question it. The way is really quite straight. What you imagine to be the quagmire of Superstition is really the pleasant Valley of Tradition. You can’t go wrong, for you can guide yourself by the church steeple, which can always be seen. Somewhere on the hills beyond lies the City.

Faith 4. By Allah, I could smite you with this staff when I hear such talk. You would surely lead the poor wayfarers to Gehenna. A great guide of old named Mahomet showed me the way, and as I learned it, so I teach it.

Faith 2. But who showed it to him ?

Faith 4. Surely it was Inspiration.

Inspir. Yes, yes, I showed it to him. It is right as I showed it.

Faith 4. You go eastwards, it is true, but you take your bearings from a town named Mecca, and pass over the plain of Pious Observance, until at last the minarets of the great City rise before you.

Faith 1. No, no, my good friend. You’re very earnest, I admit, but I wouldn’t trust your guide, and I think our mutual friend Inspiration was less happy than usual if she ever suggested such a route.

Faith 2. Well, how do you direct the travellers ?

Faith 1. Well, I start them from the beginning at the gate of the Baptistry. There the path is clear enough, and I see that every one of them has a book which will tell them the right way if they are in doubt.

Faith 4. But who wrote the book ?

Faith 1. It was Inspiration who wrote it. You did, did you not ?

Inspir. Oh yes, the book is mine.

Faith 4. And my guide book. You wrote that ?

Inspir. Certainly. I wrote that also.

Reason. [Stepping forward.] Might I be permitted to say a word or two ?

Faith 1. Certainly not.

Faith 2. It’s that old bore Reason.

Faith 3. We don’t know the fellow.

Faith 4. I can hardly keep my hands off him.

Reason. It’s true that you and I parted company many, many centuries ago. I don’t think we were ever very friendly, so far as I can remember.

Faith 1. I should hope not indeed.

Faith 2. We have nothing to do with you.

Faith 3. You are getting much too forward nowadays.

Faith 4. The sharp edge of a sword is what my ancestors gave you.

Faith 1. Indeed ! We used always to burn the fellow.

Faith 2. We merely ignore his existence. We look on him as bad form.

Reason. Still, whether you burn me or ignore me, I am still there, you know. You can’t really get away from me. Now do please answer a question or two, will you ?

Faith 1. No flippancy — nothing offensive !

Reason. Certainly not. I have, I assure you, every respect for you — that is to say for your motives, though not for your proceedings.

Faith 2. Pray, what do you mean by that ?

Reason. I mean that you all are very earnest and have the best intentions.

Faith 3. [Sardonically] We thank you most humbly.

Reason. You only need my co-operation to be most valuable.

Faith 4. Rascally infidel !

Faith 1. What characteristic modesty !

Faith 2. You were always a detestable prig.

Faith 3. And how, pray, could you improve us ?

Reason. I would bid you beware of this hussy In spiration. Can't you see that she is fooling you ? Is it not clear that she has given you half a dozen contradictory directions, and that they can't all be the right one ?

Inspir. Blasphemy ! Blasphemy ! Burn the rascal!

Faith 1. One is the right one. The others are delusions.

Reason. Then which is the right one ?

All. Mine.

Reason. You see ! Each of you believes that his comrades have been deceived. Don't you think it more likely that you have all been deceived.

Inspir. Oh, villainy ! Blasphemy ! I knew that you put that rack away too soon. Has no one got a pincers about him ?

Faith 1. If it were not for us, who would guide the travellers ?

Reason. But you all guide them in different directions, and spend most of your time abusing each other.

Faith 2. At least we all point them upwards.

Reason. Exactly. You all point them upwards. There is your merit. But I would point them upwards also, without pretending that only one path can lead to the City. All upward paths will take you equally to the high places. Inspiration has been no help to you. She has only set you all by the ears.

Inspir. Atrocious ! Horrible ! What are we coming to ? Don’t wait here or he will contaminate you. Away ! Away ! The fellow is dangerous.

Faith 1. Come on, my friends. This is most un-edifying talk.

Faith 2. The fellow always gives me a headache.

Faith 3. We should be simple travellers like the rest if he had his way.

Faith 4. And Mecca like any other town. May Allah confound you and guide you down the Valley of Gehenna.

[Exeunt.

[All this time Science has been absorbed in his work.]

Reason. Hullo, Science! [No answer.] Hullo, old Science ! [No answer.] Bless the fellow, he is always absorbed in his own dreams. [Goes across and touches hint.]

Science. Get away ! Don’t interrupt me !

Reason. You are a grumpy fellow.

Science. Oh, it’s you, Reason. I don’t mind you. I look on you as a friend. I thought it was one of those

Faith people, for I heard them all chattering behind me.

Reason. What did you think of what they said ?

Science. I am far too busy to think of what they say.

Reason. But I thought that you and they were getting much more friendly. Some of the travellers told me so of late.

Science. Well, I don’t know. We should get along very well if it were not for that hussy Inspiration.

Reason. You don’t seem to love her any more than I do.

Science. She raises a scream against everything I do. She accuses me of contradicting her. Such a touchy person, she is. Then they all take her side. I am cold-shouldered by them all. But the fact is, my dear Reason, I am so useful to them all that they can’t get on without me. The travellers all say, whatever difference there may be about our path, it is certainly made very much more convenient and comfortable by this hard-working old fellow. I don’t give them promises only. They actually see and feel what I do When old Faith tries to read his guide book in the dark, it is I who give him his electric torch. When his eyes give way — and they are all getting a bit senile, you know — it is I who correct them with glasses. So they don’t pay too much attention to the cries of Inspiration, and they actually admit that they mistook her meaning and that there is no real difference of opinion.

Reason. That’s better than being burned at the stake. In old Giordano Bruno’s time you and I used to blaze together. We are getting a little of our own back now. What are you working at ?

Science. I was plotting out a power station to light the travellers in the dark places of the path.

Reason. And where do you think the path leads to ?

Science. Oh, I know nothing of such matters.

Reason. Well, you at least know that you exist.

Science. Nothing of the sort. I may be altogether subjective. I may be somebody’s dream.

Reason. Oh, come, come! Cheer up ! Is there nothing solid you can get hold of ?

Science. Nothing reliable. I used to work things down to the atom. Now it is the electron. I suspect it will end in the ether. There is no finality.

Reason. But a purposeful force behind it all ?

Science. Pure impersonal laws.

Reason. Which made themselves ?

Science. Exactly.

Reason. Ah, there you and I must agree to differ.

Science. When you differ from me, you cease to be yourself.

Reason. The older you grow, the more dogmatic you get. You know, you old rascal, if you got the upper hand, you are capable of burning a few people on your own account.

Science. Don’t be funny ! I am trying to work.

Reason. But you are an honest and useful old chap. A little limited and a bit inhuman — that’s all. You should marry Imagination.

Science. Half-sister of Inspiration. Thank you, I have had quite enough of that family.

Reason. You’d do her good — and she you.

Science. Well, I must go and fix up this installation. Don’t forget that you are rather limited yourself. Here are some travellers coming. Where’s that voltmeter ? And the induction coil ? Thank you. Well, if you like to travel with me, come along ![Exeunt.

[Enter a man and a woman]

The Man. Thank heaven that we have shaken off the guides. They make my head ache with their chatter.

The Woman. And yet, dear, they all point us upwards.

The Man. Some of them seemed to me to be going downwards themselves.

The Woman. We must go as they point.

The Man. Yes, woman seems to need a guide.

The Woman. We are lost without one. I like a guide and one who is sure of himself — one who has no doubt that he knows the way.

The Man. Whether he really does or not ?

The Woman. One can at least hope that what he says is truth.

The Man. Well, I used to trust them. But they differed so much that I took to guiding myself with the little help that old Reason could give me. Let us rest by this well.

The Woman. Yes, let us rest. Oh, it is a weary, weary journey.

The Man. We have love to help us along — and that is more than many can say.

The Woman. Yes, if love were not with us, I should indeed despair. Love has been our true helper.

The Man. And yet, do you remember that pale sad-faced creature who has walked again and again so very close to us ?

The Woman. You mean Sorrow.

The Man. Exactly. Sorrow. I am not sure that she is not the best guide of all. We seem to have risen higher always when she has been our companion.

The Woman. It is true. I shudder when I think of her, and yet she has surely helped us upon our way. How pale and weary the poor child is ! [Looks at child.]

The Man. Put him here among the ferns.

The Woman. He is worn out. Rest there, my darling!

The Man. She was with us when our boy died.

The Woman. And that night, as we sat together hand in hand, each thinking of the other's grief, then and only then did we seem for one moment, as we looked upwards, to see some break in the clouds and to know that there was indeed something there which makes the long journey worth while.

The Man. Yes, I felt that. I saw the City. Just for a moment I seemed to see the shining walls. [Looks at the boy.] Dear laddie, how weary he is ! Should we wake him and give him food ?

The Woman. Let him rest. He can have food when he wakes. I am so very tired.

The Man. Dear heart, what a comrade you have been! Poor little feet, worn out by tramping at my side.

The Woman. But oh, it was worth it, my own man who never gave a thought to himself.

The Man. How could I when —— Hullo, who are these ?

[Three roisterers come singing down the path.]

The Man. Heh, friends ! you are going the wrong way.

A Roisterer. What d’you mean, the wrong way ? How the deuce do you know where we want to get to ?

The Man. Surely you want to get up to the City Beautiful, like the rest of us.

Roisterer. Not much. We’ve tried that game, and it won’t work. No, no, my friend, you can do the climbing and hunt for something which is up in the clouds of dreamland. Give us something solid.

2nd Roisterer. That’s the idea. Something solid. What’s the use of talking about things that are far away. We want to enjoy ourselves here and now. One City of pleasure down in the plain is worth many City Beautifuls up on the hill-top. Come on, my lads !

3RD Roisterer. You look tired out. No wonder, when you are climbing all the time. It’s much easier to go down hill with us.

The Man. But you only have to come back again.

Roisterer. Oh, bother the fellow. He’s a kill-joy. Come on, boys. We’ll have a rare time down there.

The Man. No, no, don’t be foolish. You’ve got so far. You are bound sooner or later to get to the top. What is the use of going down when you will have all the climbing to do over again.

Roisterer. That’s the future. Hang the future ! We’re in the present.

2nd Roisterer. But there’s something in what the fellow says. We were not started on this journey for the purpose of having a good time, were we ? We were started that we might get to the top.

3rd Roisterer. Well, I want some liquor, and I am going down for it. Come on, Jack, if you are coming.

2nd Roisterer.. No, I think I’ll start up the hill again. I remember what my mother used to say Roisterer. Oh, bother your mother! Come on, Tom. Leave the milksop here, if he wants to stay.

[The two go on down the hill. The other goes slowly up.]

The Man. Poor souls! I’ve been down before now myself.

The Woman. Yes, we have all done it and learned our lesson.

[Enter Sorrow, who sits unobserved on rock at back.]

The Man. Are you less weary now, dear ?

The Woman. Yes, yes, if only the little fellow is rested we can soon go on.

The Man. Do you remember, dear, that when we lost our way, and when it was so dark as we crossed the great marsh of Doubt, I told you that the best guide was our dear little dead lad whom I saw in front of us ?

The Woman. Yes, I saw him too.

The Man. I asked old Science about it. He said it was impossible.

The Woman. Yes, but when you asked him the second time, Science was not so sure about it. At first he thought Imagination had a hand in it. But when he learned that we both saw it, and that Imagination was not present at all, he was more serious about it.

The Man. Yes, but since then I have seen our boy again and again. He is still living, and he is leading us to the City Beautiful, for he has found his own way there. [Looks round.] Who is that over there ?

The Woman. It looks like Sorrow.

The Man. I’m afraid of that woman. I wish she would not come with us.

The Woman. But she did help us up. Let us ask her to the well.

The Man. Won’t you come and join us at the well ?

[Sorrow advances and sits down.]

The Woman. Poor thing! You’ll reach the City some day, will you not ?

Sorrow. No, there is no place for me there. I am stationed on the path. You will always find me there.

The Woman. Every one avoids you, and is afraid of you.

Sorrow. And yet those who have known me make better progress than those who have not.

The Man. Yes, I have known some people who said that they had never met Sorrow, and they were not people whom I wish to travel with. Their hearts were hard to others for they could not understand. Now, dear, if you are rested, we must go on.

The Woman. Yes, dear, we must go on. [Goes to the child.] Oh, John, John, our little boy is dead !

The Man. My God ! Oh, my poor, poor wife !

The Woman. John, dear John, it will break your great heart.

[They embrace each other and weep.]

[Sorrow blesses them and moves slowly away.]

The Man. Well, it is the darkest pass of all. How black it looks above our heads !

The Woman. But surely I see the upward path more clearly.

The Man. Yes, yes, see how it winds over the shoulder of the hill. And see the Towers of the City. Never have we seen it so clearly. Come, while the way is open.

The Woman. Can we leave our bairn ?

The Man. Remember the other. He is ahead of us on the path. We have two guides, not one. Come, brave comrade, come !

[They place their cloak over the child and turn to ascend the path.]

The Poetry

Conan Doyle’s family sightseeing in New York, 1922

SONGS OF ACTION

This book of poetry was first published in 1898.

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THE SONG OF THE BOW

What of the bow?
   The bow was made in England:
Of true wood, of yew-wood,
   The wood of English bows;
      So men who are free
      Love the old yew-tree
And the land where the yew-tree grows.

What of the cord?
   The cord was made in England:
A rough cord, a tough cord,
   A cord that bowmen love;
      And so we will sing
      Of the hempen string
And the land where the cord was wove.

What of the shaft?
   The shaft was cut in England:
A long shaft, a strong shaft,
   Barbed and trim and true;
      So we’ll drink all together
      To the grey goose-feather
And the land where the grey goose flew.

What of the mark?
   Ah, seek it not in England,
A bold mark, our old mark
   Is waiting over-sea.
      When the strings harp in chorus,
      And the lion flag is o’er us,
It is there that our mark will be.

What of the men?
  The men were bred in England:
The bowmen — the yeomen,
  The lads of dale and fell.
    Here’s to you — and to you!
    To the hearts that are true
And the land where the true hearts dwell.

CREMONA

[The French Army, including a part of the Irish Brigade, under Marshal Villeroy, held the fortified town of Cremona during the winter of 1702. Prince Eugene, with the Imperial Army, surprised it one morning, and, owing to the treachery of a priest, occupied the whole city before the alarm was given. Villeroy was captured, together with many of the French garrison. The Irish, however, consisting of the regiments of Dillon and of Burke, held a fort commanding the river gate, and defended themselves all day, in spite of Prince Eugene's efforts to win them over to his cause. Eventually Eugene, being unable to take the post, was compelled to withdraw from the city.]

The Grenadiers of Austria are proper men and tall;
The Grenadiers of Austria have scaled the city wall;
   They have marched from far away
   Ere the dawning of the day,
And the morning saw them masters of Cremona.

There's not a man to whisper, there's not a horse to neigh;
Of the footmen of Lorraine and the riders of Dupres,
   They have crept up every street,
   In the market-place they meet,
They are holding every vantage in Cremona.

The Marshal Villeroy he has started from his bed;
The Marshal Villeroy has no wig upon his head;
   'I have lost my men!' quoth he,
   'And my men they have lost me,
And I sorely fear we both have lost Cremona.'

Prince Eugene of Austria is in the market-place;
Prince Eugene of Austria has smiles upon his face;

Says he, ‘Our work is done,
For the Citadel is won,
And the black and yellow flag flies o’er Cremona.’

Major Dan O’Mahony is in the barrack square,
And just six hundred Irish lads are waiting for him there;
Says he, ‘Come in your shirt,
And you won’t take any hurt,
For the morning air is pleasant in Cremona.’

Major Dan O’Mahony is at the barrack gate,
And just six hundred Irish lads will neither stay nor wait;
There’s Dillon and there’s Burke,
And there’ll be some bloody work
Ere the Kaiserlics shall boast they hold Cremona.

Major Dan O’Mahony has reached the river fort,
And just six hundred Irish lads are joining in the sport;
’Come, take a hand!’ says he,
’And if you will stand by me,
Then it’s glory to the man who takes Cremona!’

Prince Eugene of Austria has frowns upon his face,
And loud he calls his Galloper of Irish blood and race:
’MacDonnell, ride, I pray,
To your countrymen, and say
That only they are left in all Cremona!’

MacDonnell he has reined his mare beside the river dyke,
And he has tied the parley flag upon a sergeant’s pike;
Six companies were there
From Limerick and Clare,
The last of all the guardians of Cremona.

‘Now, Major Dan O’Mahony, give up the river gate,
Or, Major Dan O’Mahony, you’ll find it is too late;
   For when I gallop back
   ’Tis the signal for attack,
And no quarter for the Irish in Cremona!’

And Major Dan he laughed: ‘Faith, if what you say be true,
And if they will not come until they hear again from you,
   Then there will be no attack,
   For you’re never going back,
And we’ll keep you snug and safely in Cremona.’

All the weary day the German stormers came,
All the weary day they were faced by fire and flame,
   They have filled the ditch with dead,
   And the river’s running red;
But they cannot win the gateway of Cremona.

All the weary day, again, again, again,
The horsemen of Dupres and the footmen of Lorraine,
   Taafe and Herberstein,
   And the riders of the Rhine;
It’s a mighty price they’re paying for Cremona.

Time and time they came with the deep-mouthed German roar,
Time and time they broke like the wave upon the shore;
   For better men were there
   From Limerick and Clare,
And who will take the gateway of Cremona?

Prince Eugene has watched, and he gnaws his nether lip;
Prince Eugene has cursed as he saw his chances slip:
   ’Call off! Call off!’ he cried,
   ’It is nearing eventide,
And I fear our work is finished in Cremona.’

Says Wauchop to McAulliffe, ‘Their fire is growing slack.’
Says Major Dan O’Mahony, ‘It is their last attack;
   But who will stop the game
   While there’s light to play the same,
And to walk a short way with them from Cremona?’

And so they snarl behind them, and beg them turn and come,
They have taken Neuberg’s standard, they have taken Diak’s drum;
   And along the winding Po,
   Beard on shoulder, stern and slow
The Kaiserlics are riding from Cremona.

Just two hundred Irish lads are shouting on the wall;
Four hundred more are lying who can hear no slogan call;
   But what’s the odds of that,
   For it’s all the same to Pat
If he pays his debt in Dublin or Cremona.

Says General de Vaudray, ‘You’ve done a soldier’s work!
And every tongue in France shall talk of Dillon and of Burke!
   Ask what you will this day,
   And be it what it may,
It is granted to the heroes of Cremona.’

‘Why, then,’ says Dan O’Mahony, ‘one favour we entreat,
We were called a little early, and our toilet’s not complete.
   We’ve no quarrel with the shirt,
   But the breeches wouldn’t hurt,
For the evening air is chilly in Cremona.’

THE STORMING PARTY

Said Paul Leroy to Barrow,
‘Though the breach is steep and narrow,
   If we only gain the summit
      Then it’s odds we hold the fort.
I have ten and you have twenty,
And the thirty should be plenty,
With Henderson and Henty
   And McDermott in support.’

Said Barrow to Leroy,
‘It’s a solid job, my boy,
   For they’ve flanked it, and they’ve banked it,
      And they’ve bored it with a mine.
But it’s only fifty paces
Ere we look them in the faces;
And the men are in their places,
   With their toes upon the line.’

Said Paul Leroy to Barrow,
‘See that first ray, like an arrow,
   How it tinges all the fringes
      Of the sullen drifting skies.
They told me to begin it
At five-thirty to the minute,
And at thirty-one I’m in it,
   Or my sub will get his rise.

‘So we’ll wait the signal rocket,
Till . . . Barrow, show that locket,
That turquoise-studded locket,
Which you slipped from out your pocket

And are pressing with a kiss!
Turquoise-studded, spiral-twisted,
It is hers! And I had missed it
From her chain; and you have kissed it:
Barrow, villain, what is this?’

‘Leroy, I had a warning,
That my time has come this morning,
So I speak with frankness, scorning
To deny the thing that’s true.
Yes, it’s Amy’s, is the trinket,
Little turquoise-studded trinket,
Not her gift — oh, never think it!
For her thoughts were all for you.

‘As we danced I gently drew it
From her chain — she never knew it
But I love her — yes, I love her:
I am candid, I confess.
But I never told her, never,
For I knew ‘twas vain endeavour,
And she loved you — loved you ever,
Would to God she loved you less!’

‘Barrow, Barrow, you shall pay me!
Me, your comrade, to betray me!
Well I know that little Amy
Is as true as wife can be.
She to give this love-badged locket!
She had rather . . . Ha, the rocket!
Hi, McDougall! Sound the bugle!
Yorkshires, Yorkshires, follow me!’

* * *

Said Paul Leroy to Amy,
‘Well, wifie, you may blame me,
For my passion overcame me,
   When he told me of his shame;
But when I saw him lying,
Dead amid a ring of dying,
Why, poor devil, I was trying
   To forget, and not to blame.

‘And this locket, I unclasped it
From the fingers that still grasped it:
He told me how he got it,
   How he stole it in a valse.’
And she listened leaden-hearted:
Oh, the weary day they parted!
For she loved him — yes, she loved him -
For his youth and for his truth,
   And for those dying words, so false.

THE FRONTIER LINE

What marks the frontier line?
  Thou man of India, say!
Is it the Himalayas sheer,
The rocks and valleys of Cashmere,
Or Indus as she seeks the south
From Attoch to the fivefold mouth?
    ’Not that! Not that!’
  Then answer me, I pray!
What marks the frontier line?

What marks the frontier line?
  Thou man of Burmah, speak!
Is it traced from Mandalay,
And down the marches of Cathay,
From Bhamo south to Kiang-mai,
And where the buried rubies lie?
    ’Not that! Not that!’
  Then tell me what I seek:
What marks the frontier line?

What marks the frontier line?
  Thou Africander, say!
Is it shown by Zulu kraal,
By Drakensberg or winding Vaal,
Or where the Shire waters seek
Their outlet east at Mozambique?
    ’Not that! Not that!
  There is a surer way
To mark the frontier line.’

What marks the frontier line?
Thou man of Egypt, tell!
Is it traced on Luxor’s sand,
Where Karnak’s painted pillars stand,
Or where the river runs between
The Ethiop and Bishareen?
’Not that! Not that!
By neither stream nor well
We mark the frontier line.

‘But be it east or west,
One common sign we bear,
The tongue may change, the soil, the sky,
But where your British brothers lie,
The lonely cairn, the nameless grave,
Still fringe the flowing Saxon wave.
’Tis that! ‘Tis where
THEY lie — the men who placed it there,
That marks the frontier line.’

CORPORAL DICK’S PROMOTION A BALLAD OF ‘82

The Eastern day was well-nigh o’er
When, parched with thirst and travel sore,
Two of McPherson’s flanking corps
   Across the Desert were tramping.
They had wandered off from the beaten track
And now were wearily harking back,
Ever staring round for the signal jack
   That marked their comrades camping.

The one was Corporal Robert Dick,
Bearded and burly, short and thick,
Rough of speech and in temper quick,
   A hard-faced old rapscallion.
The other, fresh from the barrack square,
Was a raw recruit, smooth-cheeked and fair
Half grown, half drilled, with the weedy air
   Of a draft from the home battalion.

Weary and parched and hunger-torn,
They had wandered on from early morn,
And the young boy-soldier limped forlorn,
   Now stumbling and now falling.
Around the orange sand-curves lay,
Flecked with boulders, black or grey,
Death-silent, save that far away
   A kite was shrilly calling.

A kite? Was THAT a kite? The yell
That shrilly rose and faintly fell?
No kite’s, and yet the kite knows well

The long-drawn wild halloo.
And right athwart the evening sky
The yellow sand-spray spurtled high,
And shrill and shriller swelled the cry
Of ‘Allah! Allahu!’

The Corporal peered at the crimson West,
Hid his pipe in his khaki vest.
Growled out an oath and onward pressed,
Still glancing over his shoulder.
‘Bedouins, mate!’ he curtly said;
‘We’ll find some work for steel and lead,
And maybe sleep in a sandy bed,
Before we’re one hour older.

‘But just one flutter before we’re done.
Stiffen your lip and stand, my son;
We’ll take this bloomin’ circus on:
Ball-cartridge load! Now, steady!’
With a curse and a prayer the two faced round,
Dogged and grim they stood their ground,
And their breech-blocks snapped with a crisp clean sound
As the rifles sprang to the ‘ready.’

Alas for the Emir Ali Khan!
A hundred paces before his clan,
That ebony steed of the prophet’s breed
Is the foal of death and of danger.
A spurt of fire, a gasp of pain,
A blueish blurr on the yellow plain,
The chief was down, and his bridle rein
Was in the grip of the stranger.

With the light of hope on his rugged face,
The Corporal sprang to the dead man’s place,
One prick with the steel, one thrust with the heel,

And where was the man to outride him?
A grip of his knees, a toss of his rein,
He was settling her down to her gallop again,
When he stopped, for he heard just one faltering word
From the young recruit beside him.

One faltering word from pal to pal,
But it found the heart of the Corporal.
He had sprung to the sand, he had lent him a hand,
’Up, mate! They’ll be ‘ere in a minute;
Off with you! No palaver! Go!
I’ll bide be’ind and run this show.
Promotion has been cursed slow,
And this is my chance to win it.’

Into the saddle he thrust him quick,
Spurred the black mare with a bayonet prick.
Watched her gallop with plunge and with kick
Away o’er the desert careering.
Then he turned with a softened face,
And loosened the strap of his cartridge-case,
While his thoughts flew back to the dear old place
In the sunny Hampshire clearing.

The young boy-private, glancing back,
Saw the Bedouins’ wild attack,
And heard the sharp Martini crack.
But as he gazed, already
The fierce fanatic Arab band
Was closing in on every hand,
Until one tawny swirl of sand,
Concealed them in its eddy.

* * *

A squadron of British horse that night,
Galloping hard in the shadowy light,
Came on the scene of that last stern fight,
   And found the Corporal lying
Silent and grim on the trampled sand,
His rifle grasped in his stiffened hand,
With the warrior pride of one who died
   ’Mid a ring of the dead and the dying.

And still when twilight shadows fall,
After the evening bugle call,
In bivouac or in barrack-hall,
His comrades speak of the Corporal,
   His death and his devotion.
And there are some who like to say
That perhaps a hidden meaning lay
In the words he spoke, and that the day
When his rough bold spirit passed away
   WAS the day that he won promotion.

A FORGOTTEN TALE

[The scene of this ancient fight, recorded by Froissart, is still called ‘Altura de los Inglesos.’ Five hundred years later Wellington’s soldiers were fighting on the same ground.]

‘Say, what saw you on the hill,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘I saw my brindled heifer there,
A trail of bowmen, spent and bare,
And a little man on a sorrel mare
   Riding slow before them.’

‘Say, what saw you in the vale,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘There I saw my lambing ewe
And an army riding through,
Thick and brave the pennons flew
   From the lances o’er them.’

‘Then what saw you on the hill,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘I saw beside the milking byre,
White with want and black with mire,
The little man with eyes afire
   Marshalling his bowmen.’

‘Then what saw you in the vale,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘There I saw my bullocks twain,
And amid my uncut grain
All the hardy men of Spain
   Spurring for their foemen.’

‘Nay, but there is more to tell,
   Campesino Garcia!’
‘I could not bide the end to view;
I had graver things to do
Tending on the lambing ewe
   Down among the clover.’

‘Ah, but tell me what you heard,
   Campesino Garcia!’
‘Shouting from the mountain-side,
Shouting until eventide;
But it dwindled and it died
   Ere milking time was over.’

‘Nay, but saw you nothing more,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘Yes, I saw them lying there,
The little man and sorrel mare;
And in their ranks the bowmen fair,
   With their staves before them.’

‘And the hardy men of Spain,
   Campesino Garcia?’
‘Hush! but we are Spanish too;
More I may not say to you:
May God’s benison, like dew,
   Gently settle o’er them.’

PENNARBY MINE

Pennarby shaft is dark and steep,
Eight foot wide, eight hundred deep.
Stout the bucket and tough the cord,
Strong as the arm of Winchman Ford.
   ’Never look down!
   Stick to the line!’
That was the saying at Pennarby mine.

A stranger came to Pennarby shaft.
Lord, to see how the miners laughed!
White in the collar and stiff in the hat,
With his patent boots and his silk cravat,
   Picking his way,
   Dainty and fine,
Stepping on tiptoe to Pennarby mine.

Touring from London, so he said.
Was it copper they dug for? or gold? or lead?
Where did they find it? How did it come?
If he tried with a shovel might HE get some?
   Stooping so much
   Was bad for the spine;
And wasn’t it warmish in Pennarby mine?

‘Twas like two worlds that met that day -
The world of work and the world of play;
And the grimy lads from the reeking shaft
Nudged each other and grinned and chaffed.
   ’Got ‘em all out!’
   ’A cousin of mine!’
So ran the banter at Pennarby mine.

And Carnbrae Bob, the Pennarby wit,
Told him the facts about the pit:
How they bored the shaft till the brimstone smell
Warned them off from tapping — well,
He wouldn’t say what,
But they took it as sign
To dig no deeper in Pennarby mine.

Then leaning over and peering in,
He was pointing out what he said was tin
In the ten-foot lode — a crash! a jar!
A grasping hand and a splintered bar.
Gone in his strength,
With the lips that laughed -
Oh, the pale faces round Pennarby shaft!

Far down on a narrow ledge,
They saw him cling to the crumbling edge.
‘Wait for the bucket! Hi, man! Stay!
That rope ain’t safe! It’s worn away!
He’s taking his chance,
Slack out the line!
Sweet Lord be with him!’ cried Pennarby mine.

‘He’s got him! He has him! Pull with a will!
Thank God! He’s over and breathing still.
And he — Lord’s sakes now! What’s that? Well!
Blowed if it ain’t our London swell.
Your heart is right
If your coat IS fine:
Give us your hand!’ cried Pennarby mine.

A ROVER CHANTY

A trader sailed from Stepney town -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the mainsail!
A trader sailed from Stepney town
With a keg full of gold and a velvet gown:
   Ho, the bully rover Jack,
   Waiting with his yard aback
Out upon the Lowland sea!

The trader he had a daughter fair -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the foresail
The trader he had a daughter fair,
She had gold in her ears, and gold in her hair:
   All for bully rover Jack,
   Waiting with his yard aback,
Out upon the Lowland sea!

‘Alas the day, oh daughter mine!’ -
Shake her up! Wake her up! Try her with the topsail!
‘Alas the day, oh daughter mine!
Yon red, red flag is a fearsome sign!’
   Ho, the bully rover Jack,
   Reaching on the weather tack,
Out upon the Lowland sea!

‘A fearsome flag!’ the maiden cried -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the jibsail!
‘A fearsome flag!’ the maiden cried,
But comelier men I never have spied!’
   Ho, the bully rover Jack,
   Reaching on the weather tack,
Out upon the Lowland sea!

There’s a wooden path that the rovers know -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the headsails!
There’s a wooden path that the rovers know,
Where none come back, though many must go:
   Ho, the bully rover Jack,
   Lying with his yard aback,
Out upon the Lowland sea!

Where is the trader of Stepney town? -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stick a-bending!
Where is the trader of Stepney town?
There’s gold on the capstan, and blood on the gown:
   Ho for bully rover Jack,
   Waiting with his yard aback,
Out upon the Lowland sea!

Where is the maiden who knelt at his side? -
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stitch a-drawing!
Where is the maiden who knelt at his side?
We gowned her in scarlet, and chose her our bride:
   Ho, the bully rover Jack,
   Reaching on the weather tack,
Right across the Lowland sea!

So it’s up and its over to Stornoway Bay,
Pack it on! Crack it on! Try her with the stunsails!
It’s off on a bowline to Stornoway Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay:
   Waiting for their bully Jack,
   Watching for him sailing back,
Right across the Lowland sea.

A BALLAD OF THE RANKS

Who carries the gun?
A lad from over the Tweed.
Then let him go, for well we know
He comes of a soldier breed.
So drink together to rock and heather,
Out where the red deer run,
And stand aside for Scotland's pride -
The man that carries the gun!
For the Colonel rides before,
The Major's on the flank,
The Captains and the Adjutant
Are in the foremost rank.
But when it's 'Action front!'
And fighting's to be done,
Come one, come all, you stand or fall
By the man who holds the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from a Yorkshire dale.
Then let him go, for well we know
The heart that never will fail.
Here's to the fire of Lancashire,
And here's to her soldier son!
For the hard-bit north has sent him forth -
The lad that carries the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from a Midland shire.
Then let him go, for well we know
He comes of an English sire.
Here's a glass to a Midland lass,

And each can choose the one,
But east and west we claim the best
For the man that carries the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from the hills of Wales.
Then let him go, for well we know,
That Taffy is hard as nails.
There are several ll’s in the place where he dwells,
And of w’s more than one,
With a ‘Llan’ and a ‘pen,’ but it breeds good men,
And it’s they who carry the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from the windy west.
Then let him go, for well we know
That he is one of the best.
There’s Bristol rough, and Gloucester tough,
And Devon yields to none.
Or you may get in Somerset
Your lad to carry the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from London town.
Then let him go, for well we know
The stuff that never backs down.
He has learned to joke at the powder smoke,
For he is the fog-smoke’s son,
And his heart is light and his pluck is right -
The man who carries the gun.

Who carries the gun?
A lad from the Emerald Isle.
Then let him go, for well we know,
We’ve tried him many a while.
We’ve tried him east, we’ve tried him west,

We’ve tried him sea and land,
But the man to beat old Erin’s best
Has never yet been planned.

Who carries the gun?
It’s you, and you, and you;
So let us go, and we won’t say no
If they give us a job to do.
Here we stand with a cross-linked hand,
Comrades every one;
So one last cup, and drink it up
To the man who carries the gun!
For the Colonel rides before,
The Major’s on the flank,
The Captains and the Adjutant
Are in the foremost rank.
And when it’s ‘Action front!’
And there’s fighting to be done,
Come one, come all, you stand or fall
By the man who holds the gun.

A LAY OF THE LINKS

It’s up and away from our work to-day,
For the breeze sweeps over the down;
And it’s hey for a game where the gorse blossoms flame,
And the bracken is bronzing to brown.
With the turf ‘neath our tread and the blue overhead,
And the song of the lark in the whin;
There’s the flag and the green, with the bunkers between -
Now will you be over or in?

The doctor may come, and we’ll teach him to know
A tee where no tannin can lurk;
The soldier may come, and we’ll promise to show
Some hazards a soldier may shirk;
The statesman may joke, as he tops every stroke,
That at last he is high in his aims;
And the clubman will stand with a club in his hand
That is worth every club in St. James’.

The palm and the leather come rarely together,
Gripping the driver’s haft,
And it’s good to feel the jar of the steel
And the spring of the hickory shaft.
Why trouble or seek for the praise of a clique?
A cleek here is common to all;
And the lie that might sting is a very small thing
When compared with the lie of the ball.

Come youth and come age, from the study or stage,
From Bar or from Bench — high and low!
A green you must use as a cure for the blues -
You drive them away as you go.

We’re outward bound on a long, long round,
   And it’s time to be up and away:
If worry and sorrow come back with the morrow,
   At least we’ll be happy to-day.

THE DYING WHIP

It came from gettin' 'eated, that was 'ow the thing begun,
And 'ackin' back to kennels from a ninety-minute run;
'I guess I've copped brownchitis,' says I to brother Jack,
An' then afore I knowed it I was down upon my back.

At night there came a sweatin' as left me deadly weak,
And my throat was sort of tickly an' it 'urt me for to speak;
An' then there came an 'ackin' cough as wouldn't leave alone,
An' then afore I knowed it I was only skin and bone

I never was a 'eavy weight. I scaled at seven four,
An' rode at eight, or maybe at just a trifle more;
And now I'll stake my davy I wouldn't scale at five,
And I'd 'old my own at catch-weights with the skinniest jock alive.

And the doctor says the reason why I sit an' cough an wheeze
Is all along o' varmint, like the cheese-mites in the cheese;
The smallest kind o' varmint, but varmint all the same,
Microscopes or somethin' — I forget the varmints' name.

But I knows as I'm a goner. They never said as much,
But I reads the people's faces, and I knows as I am such;
Well, there's 'Urst to mind the 'orses and the 'ounds can look to Jack,
Though 'e never was a patch on me in 'andlin' of a pack.

You'll maybe think I'm boastin', but you'll find they all agree
That there's not a whip in Surrey as can 'andle 'ounds like me;
For I knew 'em all from puppies, and I'd tell 'em without fail -
If I seed a tail a-waggin', I could tell who wagged the tail.

And voices — why, Lor’ love you, it’s more than I can ‘elp,
It just comes kind of natural to know each whine an’ yelp;
You might take them twenty couple where you will and let ‘em run,
An’ I’d listen by the coverside and name ‘em one by one.

I say it’s kind of natural, for since I was a brat
I never cared for readin’ books, or fancy things like that;
But give me ‘ounds and ‘orses an’ I was quite content,
An’ I loved to ear ‘em talkin’ and to wonder what they meant.

And when the ‘ydrophoby came five year ago next May,
When Nailer was be’avin’ in a most owdacious way,
I fixed ‘im so’s ‘e couldn’t bite, my ‘ands on neck an’ back,
An’ I ‘eaved ‘im from the kennels, and they say I saved the pack.

An’ when the Master ‘eard of it, ‘e up an’ says, says ‘e,
‘If that chap were a soldier man, they’d give ‘im the V.C.’
Which is some kind a’ medal what they give to soldier men;
An’ Master said if I were such I would ‘a’ got it then.

Parson brought ‘is Bible and come to read to me;
‘‘Ave what you like, there’s everythink within this Book,’ says ‘e.
Says I, ‘They’ve left the ‘orses out!’ Says ‘e, ‘You are mistook;’
An’ ‘e up an’ read a ‘eap of things about them from the Book.

And some of it amazin’ fine; although I’m fit to swear
No ‘orse would ever say ‘Ah, ah!’ same as they said it there.
Per’aps it was an ‘Ebrew ‘orse the chap ‘ad in his mind,
But I never ‘eard an English ‘orse say nothin’ of the kind.

Parson is a good ‘un. I’ve known ‘im from a lad;
‘Twas me as taught ‘im ridin’, an’ ‘e rides uncommon bad;

And he says — But ‘ark an’ listen! There’s an ‘orn! I ‘eard it blow;
Pull the blind from off the winder! Prop me up, and ‘old me so.

They’re drawin’ the black ‘anger, just aside the Squire’s grounds.
‘Ark and listen! ‘Ark and listen! There’s the yappin’ of the
‘ounds:
There’s Fanny and Beltinker, and I ‘ear old Boxer call;
You see I wasn’t boastin’ when I said I knew ‘em all.

Let me sit an’ ‘old the bedrail! Now I see ‘em as they pass:
There’s Squire upon the Midland mare, a good ‘un on the grass;
But this is closish country, and you wants a clever ‘orse
When ‘alf the time you’re in the woods an’ ‘alf among the gorse.

‘Ark to Jack a’ollering — a-bleatin’ like a lamb.
You wouldn’t think it now, perhaps, to see the thing I am;
But there was a time the ladies used to linger at the meet
Just to ‘ear me callin’ in the woods: my callin’ was so sweet.

I see the crossroads corner, with the field awaitin’ there,
There’s Purcell on ‘is piebald ‘orse, an’ Doctor on the mare,
And the Master on ‘is iron grey; she isn’t much to look,
But I seed ‘er do clean twenty foot across the ‘eathly brook.

There’s Captain Kane an’ McIntyre an’ ‘alf a dozen more,
And two or three are ‘untin’ whom I never seed afore;
Likely-lookin’ chaps they be, well groomed and ‘orsed and dressed -
I wish they could ‘a seen the pack when it was at its best.

It’s a check, and they are drawin’ down the coppice for a scent,
You can see as they’ve been runnin’, for the ‘orses they are spent;
I’ll lay the fox will break this way, downwind as sure as fate,
An’ if he does you’ll see the field come poundin’ through our gate.

But, Maggie, what’s that slinkin’ beside the cover? — See!
Now it’s in the clover field, and goin’ fast an’ free,
It’s ‘im, and they don’t see ‘im. It’s ‘im! ‘Alloo! ‘Alloo!
My broken wind won’t run to it — I’ll leave the job to you.

There now I ‘ear the music, and I know they’re on his track;
Oh, watch ‘em, Maggie, watch ‘em! Ain’t they just a lovely pack!
I’ve nursed ‘em through distemper, an’ I’ve trained an’ broke ‘em in,
An’ my ‘eart it just goes out to them as if they was my kin.

Well, all things ‘as an endin’, as I’ve ‘eard the parson say,
The ‘orse is cast, an’ the ‘ound is past, an’ the ‘unter ‘as ‘is day;
But my day was yesterday, so lay me down again.
You can draw the curtain, Maggie, right across the winder pane.

MASTER

Master went a-hunting,
When the leaves were falling;
We saw him on the bridle path,
We heard him gaily calling.
‘Oh master, master, come you back,
For I have dreamed a dream so black!’
A glint of steel from bit and heel,
The chestnut cantered faster;
A red flash seen amid the green,
And so good-bye to master.

Master came from hunting,
Two silent comrades bore him;
His eyes were dim, his face was white,
The mare was led before him.
‘Oh, master, master, is it thus
That you have come again to us?’
I held my lady’s ice-cold hand,
They bore the hurdle past her;
Why should they go so soft and slow?
It matters not to master.

H.M.S. ‘FOUDROYANT’

[Being an humble address to Her Majesty’s Naval advisers, who sold Nelson’s old flagship to the Germans for a thousand pounds.]

Who says the Nation’s purse is lean,
  Who fears for claim or bond or debt,
When all the glories that have been
  Are scheduled as a cash asset?
If times are black and trade is slack,
  If coal and cotton fail at last,
We’ve something left to barter yet -
    Our glorious past.

There’s many a crypt in which lies hid
  The dust of statesman or of king;
There’s Shakespeare’s home to raise a bid,
  And Milton’s house its price would bring.
What for the sword that Cromwell drew?
  What for Prince Edward’s coat of mail?
What for our Saxon Alfred’s tomb?
    They’re all for sale!

And stone and marble may be sold
  Which serve no present daily need;
There’s Edward’s Windsor, labelled old,
  And Wolsey’s palace, guaranteed.
St. Clement Danes and fifty fanes,
  The Tower and the Temple grounds;
How much for these? Just price them, please,
    In British pounds.

You hucksters, have you still to learn,
The things which money will not buy?
Can you not read that, cold and stern
As we may be, there still does lie
Deep in our hearts a hungry love
For what concerns our island story?
We sell our work — perchance our lives,
But not our glory.

Go barter to the knacker’s yard
The steed that has outlived its time!
Send hungry to the pauper ward
The man who served you in his prime!
But when you touch the Nation’s store,
Be broad your mind and tight your grip.
Take heed! And bring us back once more
Our Nelson’s ship.

And if no mooring can be found
In all our harbours near or far,
Then tow the old three-decker round
To where the deep-sea soundings are;
There, with her pennon flying clear,
And with her ensign lashed peak high,
Sink her a thousand fathoms sheer.
There let her lie!

THE FARNSHIRE CUP

Christopher Davis was up upon Mavis
   And Sammy MacGregor on Flo,
Jo Chauncy rode Spider, the rankest outsider,
   But HE’D make a wooden horse go.
There was Robin and Leah and Boadicea,
   And Chesterfield’s Son of the Sea;
And Irish Nuneaton, who never was beaten,
   They backed her at seven to three.

The course was the devil! A start on the level,
   And then a stiff breather uphill;
A bank at the top with a four-foot drop,
   And a bullfinch down by the mill.
A stretch of straight from the Whittlesea gate,
   Then up and down and up;
And the mounts that stay through Farnshire clay
   May bid for the Farnshire Cup.

The tipsters were touting, the bookies were shouting
   ’Bar one, bar one, bar one!’
With a glint and a glimmer of silken shimmer
   The field shone bright in the sun,
When Farmer Brown came riding down:
   ’I hain’t much time to spare,
But I’ve entered her name, so I’ll play out the game,
   On the back o’ my old gray mare.

‘You never would think ‘er a thoroughbred clinker,
   There’s never a judge that would;
Each leg be’ind ‘as a splint, you’ll find,
   And the fore are none too good.

She roars a bit, and she don’t look fit,
   She’s moulted ‘alf ‘er ‘air;
But—’ He smiled in a way that seemed to say,
   That he knew that old gray mare.

And the bookies laughed and the bookies chaffed,
   ’Who backs the mare?’ cried they.
‘A hundred to one!’ ‘It’s done — and done!’
   ’We’ll take that price all day.’
‘What if the mare is shedding hair!
   What if her eye is wild!
We read her worth and her pedigree birth
   In the smile that her owner smiled.’

And the whisper grew and the whisper flew
   That she came of Isonomy stock.
‘Fifty to one!’ ‘It’s done — and done!
   Look at her haunch and hock!
Ill-groomed! Why yes, but one may guess
   That that is her owner’s guile.’
Ah, Farmer Brown, the sharps from town,
   Have read your simple smile!

They’ve weighed him in. ‘Now lose or win,
   I’ve money at stake this day;
Gee-long, my sweet, and if we’re beat,
   We’ll both do all we may!’
He joins the rest, they line abreast,
   ’Back Leah! Mavis up!’
The flag is dipped and the field is slipped,
   Full split for the Farnshire Cup.

Christopher Davis is leading on Mavis,
   Spider is waiting on Flo;
Boadicea is gaining on Leah,
   Irish Nuneaton lies low;

Robin is tailing, his wind has been failing,
Son of the Sea’s going fast:
So crack on the pace for it’s anyone’s race,
And the winner’s the horse that can last.

Chestnut and bay, and sorrel and gray,
See how they glimmer and gleam!
Bending and straining, and losing and gaining,
Silk jackets flutter and stream;
They are over the grass as the cloud shadows pass,
They are up to the fence at the top;
It’s ‘hey then!’ and over, and into the clover,
There wasn’t one slip at the drop.

They are all going still; they are round by the mill,
They are down by the Whittlesea gate;
Leah’s complaining, and Mavis is gaining,
And Flo’s catching up in the straight.
Robin’s gone wrong, but the Spider runs strong,
He sticks to the leader like wax;
An utter outsider, but look at his rider -
Jo Chauncy, the pick of the cracks!

Robin was tailing and pecked at a paling,
Leah’s gone weak in her feet;
Boadicea came down at the railing,
Son of the Sea is dead beat.
Leather to leather, they’re pounding together,
Three of them all in a row;
And Irish Nuneaton, who never was beaten,
Is level with Spider and Flo.

It’s into the straight from the Whittlesea gate,
Clean galloping over the green,
But four foot high the hurdles lie
With a sunken ditch between.

‘Tis a bit of a test for a beast at its best,
   And the devil and all at its worst;
But it’s clear run in with the Cup to win
   For the horse that is over it first.

So try it, my beauties, and fly it, my beauties,
   Spider, Nuneaton, and Flo;
With a trip and a blunder there’s one of them under,
   Hark to it crashing below!
Is it the brown or the sorrel that’s down?
   The brown! It is Flo who is in!
And Spider with Chauncy, the pick of the fancy,
   Is going full split for a win.

‘Spider is winning!’ ‘Jo Chauncy is winning!’
   ’He’s winning! He’s winning! Bravo!’
The bookies are raving, the ladies are waving,
   The Stand is all shouting for Jo.
The horse is clean done, but the race may be won
   By the Newmarket lad on his back;
For the fire of the rider may bring an outsider
   Ahead of a thoroughbred crack.

‘Spider is winning!’ ‘Jo Chauncy is winning!’
   It swells like the roar of the sea;
But Jo hears the drumming of somebody coming,
   And sees a lean head by his knee.
‘Nuneaton! Nuneaton! The Spider is beaten!’
   It is but a spurt at the most;
For lose it or win it, they have but a minute
   Before they are up with the post.

Nuneaton is straining, Nuneaton is gaining,
   Neither will falter nor flinch;
Whips they are plying and jackets are flying,
   They’re fairly abreast to an inch.

‘Crack em up! Let ‘em go! Well ridden! Bravo!’
Gamer ones never were bred;
Jo Chauncy has done it! He’s spurted! He’s won it!’
The favourite’s beat by a head!

Don’t tell me of luck, for its judgment and pluck
And a courage that never will shirk;
To give your mind to it and know how to do it
And put all your heart in your work.
So here’s to the Spider, the winning outsider,
With little Jo Chauncy up;
May they stay life’s course, both jockey and horse,
As they stayed in the Farnshire Cup.

But it’s possible that you are wondering what
May have happened to Farmer Brown,
And the old gray crock of Isonomy stock
Who was backed by the sharps from town.
She blew and she sneezed, she coughed and she wheezed,
She ran till her knees gave way.
But never a grumble at trip or at stumble
Was heard from her jock that day.

For somebody laid AGAINST the gray,
And somebody made a pile;
And Brown says he can make farming pay,
And he smiles a simple smile.
‘Them sharps from town were riled,’ says Brown;
’But I can’t see why — can you?
For I said quite fair as I knew that mare,
And I proved my words was true.’

THE GROOM’S STORY

Ten mile in twenty minutes! ‘E done it, sir. That’s true.
The big bay ‘orse in the further stall — the one wot’s next to you.
I’ve seen some better ‘orses; I’ve seldom seen a wuss,
But ‘e ‘olds the bloomin’ record, an’ that’s good enough for us.

We knew as it wa’s in ‘im. ‘E’s thoroughbred, three part,
We bought ‘im for to race ‘im, but we found ‘e ‘ad no ‘eart;
For ‘e was sad and thoughtful, and amazin’ dignified,
It seemed a kind o’ liberty to drive ‘im or to ride;

For ‘e never seemed a-thinkin’ of what ‘e ‘ad to do,
But ‘is thoughts was set on ‘igher things, admirin’ of the view.
‘E looked a puffeck pictur, and a pictur ‘e would stay,
‘E wouldn’t even switch ‘is tail to drive the flies away.

And yet we knew ‘twas in ‘im, we knew as ‘e could fly;
But what we couldn’t git at was ‘ow to make ‘im try.
We’d almost turned the job up, until at last one day
We got the last yard out of ‘im in a most amazin’ way.

It was all along o’ master; which master ‘as the name
Of a reg’lar true blue sportman, an’ always acts the same;
But we all ‘as weaker moments, which master ‘e ‘ad one,
An’ ‘e went and bought a motor-car when motor-cars begun.

I seed it in the stable yard — it fairly turned me sick -
A greasy, wheezy engine as can neither buck nor kick.
You’ve a screw to drive it forrard, and a screw to make it stop,
For it was foaled in a smithy stove an’ bred in a blacksmith shop.

It didn’t want no stable, it didn’t ask no groom,
It didn’t need no nothin’ but a bit o’ standin’ room.
Just fill it up with paraffin an’ it would go all day,
Which the same should be agin the law if I could ‘ave my way.

Well, master took ‘is motor-car, an’ moted ‘ere an’ there,
A frightenin’ the ‘orses an’ a poisonin’ the air.
‘E wore a bloomin’ yachtin’ cap, but Lor’! wot DID ‘e know,
Excep’ that if you turn a screw the thing would stop or go?

An’ then one day it wouldn’t go. ‘E screwed and screwed again,
But somethin’ jammed, an’ there ‘e stuck in the mud of a country lane.
It ‘urt ‘is pride most cruel, but what was ‘e to do?
So at last ‘e bade me fetch a ‘orse to pull the motor through.

This was the ‘orse we fetched ‘im; an’ when we reached the car,
We braced ‘im tight and proper to the middle of the bar,
And buckled up ‘is traces and lashed them to each side,
While ‘e ‘eld ‘is ‘ead so ‘aughtily, an’ looked most dignified.

Not bad tempered, mind you, but kind of pained and vexed,
And ‘e seemed to say, ‘Well, bli’ me! wot WILL they ask me next?
I’ve put up with some liberties, but this caps all by far,
To be assistant engine to a crocky motor-car!’

Well, master ‘e was in the car, a-fiddlin’ with the gear,
And the ‘orse was meditatin’, an’ I was standin’ near,
When master ‘e touched somethin’ — what it was we’ll never know -
But it sort o’ spurred the boiler up and made the engine go.

‘‘Old ‘ard, old gal!’ says master, and ‘Gently then!’ says I,
But an engine won’t ‘eed coaxin’ an’ it ain’t no use to try;
So first ‘e pulled a lever, an’ then ‘e turned a screw,
But the thing kept crawlin’ forrard spite of all that ‘e could do.

And first it went quite slowly and the ‘orse went also slow,
But ‘e ‘ad to buck up faster when the wheels began to go;
For the car kept crowdin’ on ‘im and buttin’ ‘im along,
And in less than ‘alf a minute, sir, that ‘orse was goin’ strong.

At first ‘e walked quite dignified, an’ then ‘e ‘ad to trot,
And then ‘e tried a canter when the pace became too ‘ot.
‘E looked ‘is very ‘aughtiest, as if ‘e didn’t ‘e mind,
And all the time the motor-car was pushin’ ‘im be’ind.

Now, master lost ‘is ‘ead when ‘e found ‘e couldn’t stop,
And ‘e pulled a valve or somethin’ an’ somethin’ else went pop,
An’ somethin’ else went fizzywiz, and in a flash, or less,
That blessed car was goin’ like a limited express.

Master ‘eld the steerin’ gear, an’ kept the road all right,
And away they whizzed and clattered — my aunt! it was a sight.
‘E seemed the finest draught ‘orse as ever lived by far,
For all the country Juggins thought ‘twas ‘im wot pulled the car.

‘E was stretchin’ like a grey’ound, ‘e was goin’ all ‘e knew;
But it bumped an’ shoved be’ind ‘im, for all that ‘e could do;
It butted ‘im an’ boosted ‘im an’ spanked ‘im on a’ead,
Till ‘e broke the ten-mile record, same as I already said.

Ten mile in twenty minutes! ‘E done it, sir. That’s true.
The only time we ever found what that ‘ere ‘orse could do.
Some say it wasn’t ‘ardly fair, and the papers made a fuss,
But ‘e broke the ten-mile record, and that’s good enough for us.

You see that ‘orse’s tail, sir? You don’t! No more do we,
Which really ain’t surprisin’, for ‘e ‘as no tail to see;

That engine wore it off ‘im before master made it stop,
And all the road was littered like a bloomin’ barber’s shop.

And master? Well, it cured ‘im. ‘E altered from that day,
And come back to ‘is ‘orses in the good old-fashioned way.
And if you wants to git the sack, the quickest way by far
Is to ‘int as ‘ow you think ‘e ought to keep a motor-car.

WITH THE CHIDDINGFOLDS

The horse is bedded down
Where the straw lies deep.
The hound is in the kennel;
Let the poor hound sleep!
And the fox is in the spinney
By the run which he is haunting,
And I'll lay an even guinea
That a goose or two is wanting
When the farmer comes to count them in the morning.

The horse is up and saddled;
Girth the old horse tight!
The hounds are out and drawing
In the morning light.
Now it's 'Yoick!' among the heather,
And it's 'Yoick!' across the clover,
And it's 'To him, all together!'
'Hyke a Bertha! Hyke a Rover!'
And the woodlands smell so sweetly in the morning.

'There's Termagant a-whimpering;
She whimpers so.'
'There's a young hound yapping!'
Let the young hound go!
But the old hound is cunning,
And it's him we mean to follow,
'They are running! They are running!
And it's 'Forrard to the hollo!'
For the scent is lying strongly in the morning.

’Who’s the fool that heads him?’
Hold hard, and let him pass!
He’s out among the oziers
He’s clear upon the grass.
You grip his flanks and settle,
For the horse is stretched and straining,
Here’s a game to test your mettle,
And a sport to try your training,
When the Chiddingfolds are running in the morning.

We’re up by the Coppice
And we’re down by the Mill,
We’re out upon the Common,
And the hounds are running still.
You must tighten on the leather,
For we blunder through the bracken;
Though you’re over hocks in heather
Still the pace must never slacken
As we race through Thursley Common in the morning.

We are breaking from the tangle
We are out upon the green,
There’s a bank and a hurdle
With a quickset between.
You must steady him and try it,
You are over with a scramble.
Here’s a wattle! You must fly it,
And you land among the bramble,
For it’s roughish, toughish going in the morning.

’Ware the bog by the Grove
As you pound through the slush.
See the whip! See the huntsman!
We are close upon his brush.
’Ware the root that lies before you!
It will trip you if you blunder.

’Ware the branch that’s drooping o’er you!
You must dip and swerve from under
As you gallop through the woodland in the morning.

There were fifty at the find,
There were forty at the mill,
There were twenty on the heath,
And ten are going still.
Some are pounded, some are shirking,
And they dwindle and diminish
Till a weary pair are working,
Spent and blowing, to the finish,
And we hear the shrill whoo-ooping in the morning.

The horse is bedded down
Where the straw lies deep,
The hound is in the kennel,
He is yapping in his sleep.
But the fox is in the spinney
Lying snug in earth and burrow.
And I’ll lay an even guinea
We could find again to-morrow,
If we chose to go a-hunting in the morning.

A HUNTING MORNING

Put the saddle on the mare,
   For the wet winds blow;
There’s winter in the air,
   And autumn all below.
For the red leaves are flying
And the red bracken dying,
And the red fox lying
   Where the oziers grow.

Put the bridle on the mare,
   For my blood runs chill;
And my heart, it is there,
   On the heather-tufted hill,
With the gray skies o’er us,
And the long-drawn chorus
Of a running pack before us
   From the find to the kill.

Then lead round the mare,
   For it’s time that we began,
And away with thought and care,
   Save to live and be a man,
While the keen air is blowing,
And the huntsman holloing,
And the black mare going
   As the black mare can.

THE OLD GRAY FOX

We started from the Valley Pride,
  And Farnham way we went.
We waited at the cover-side,
  But never found a scent.
Then we tried the withy beds
  Which grow by Frensham town,
And there we found the old gray fox,
    The same old fox,
    The game old fox;
Yes, there we found the old gray fox,
  Which lives on Hankley Down.
      So here’s to the master,
      And here’s to the man!
    And here’s to twenty couple
    Of the white and black and tan!
  Here’s a find without a wait!
  Here’s a hedge without a gate!
  Here’s the man who follows straight,
    Where the old fox ran.

The Member rode his thoroughbred,
  Doctor had the gray,
The Soldier led on a roan red,
  The Sailor rode the bay.
Squire was there on his Irish mare,
  And Parson on the brown;
And so we chased the old gray fox,
    The same old fox,
    The game old fox,
And so we chased the old gray fox
  Across the Hankley Down.
      So here’s to the master,

And here’s to the man!
&c. &c. &c.

The Doctor’s gray was going strong
Until she slipped and fell;
He had to keep his bed so long
His patients all got well.
The Member he had lost his seat,
’Twas carried by his horse;
And so we chased the old gray fox,
The same old fox,
The game old fox;
And so we chased the old gray fox
That earthed in Hankley Gorse.
So here’s to the master,
And here’s to the man!
&c. &c. &c.

The Parson sadly fell away,
And in the furze did lie;
The words we heard that Parson say
Made all the horses shy!
The Sailor he was seen no more
Upon that stormy bay;
But still we chased the old gray fox,
The same old fox,
The game old fox;
Still we chased the old gray fox
Through all the winter day.
So here’s to the master,
And here’s to the man!
&c. &c. &c.

And when we found him gone to ground,
They sent for spade and man;
But Squire said ‘Shame! The beast was game!

A gamer never ran!
His wind and pace have gained the race,
His life is fairly won.
But may we meet the old gray fox,
The same old fox,
The game old fox;
May we meet the old gray fox
Before the year is done.
So here’s to the master,
And here’s to the man!
And here’s to twenty couple
Of the white and black and tan!
Here’s a find without await!
Here’s a hedge without a gate!
Here’s the man who follows straight,
Where the old fox ran.

WARE HOLES

[“‘Ware Holes!’ is the expression used in the hunting-field to warn those behind against rabbit-burrows or other suck dangers.]

A sportin’ death! My word it was!
   An’ taken in a sportin’ way.
Mind you, I wasn’t there to see;
   I only tell you what they say.

They found that day at Shillinglee,
   An’ ran ‘im down to Chillinghurst;
The fox was goin’ straight an’ free
   For ninety minutes at a burst.

They ‘ad a check at Ebernoe
   An’ made a cast across the Down,
Until they got a view ‘ullo
   An’ chased ‘im up to Kirdford town.

From Kirdford ‘e run Bramber way,
   An’ took ‘em over ‘alf the Weald.
If you ‘ave tried the Sussex clay,
   You’ll guess it weeded out the field.

Until at last I don’t suppose
   As ‘arf a dozen, at the most,
Came safe to where the grassland goes
   Switchbackin’ southwards to the coast.

Young Captain ‘Eadley, ‘e was there,
   And Jim the whip an’ Percy Day;

The Purcells an’ Sir Charles Adair,
  An’ this ‘ere gent from London way.

For ‘e ‘ad gone amazin’ fine,
  Two ‘undred pounds between ‘is knees;
Eight stone he was, an’ rode at nine,
  As light an’ limber as you please.

‘E was a stranger to the ‘Unt,
  There weren’t a person as ‘e knew there;
But ‘e could ride, that London gent -
  ’E sat ‘is mare as if ‘e grew there.

They seed the ‘ounds upon the scent,
  But found a fence across their track,
And ‘ad to fly it; else it meant
  A turnin’ and a ‘arkin’ back.

‘E was the foremost at the fence,
  And as ‘is mare just cleared the rail
He turned to them that rode be’ind,
  For three was at ‘is very tail.

‘‘Ware ‘oles!’ says ‘e, an’ with the word,
  Still sittin’ easy on his mare,
Down, down ‘e went, an’ down an’ down,
  Into the quarry yawnin’ there.

Some say it was two ‘undred foot;
  The bottom lay as black as ink.
I guess they ‘ad some ugly dreams,
  Who reined their ‘orses on the brink.

‘E’d only time for that one cry;
   ’’Ware ‘oles!’ says ‘e, an’ saves all three.
There may be better deaths to die,
   But that one’s good enough for me.

For mind you, ‘twas a sportin’ end,
   Upon a right good sportin’ day;
They think a deal of ‘im down ‘ere,
   That gent what came from London way.

THE HOME-COMING OF THE ‘EURYDICE’

[Lost, with her crew of three hundred boys, on the last day of her voyage, March 23, 1876. She foundered off Portsmouth, from which town many of the boys came.]

Up with the royals that top the white spread of her!
   Press her and dress her, and drive through the foam;
The Island’s to port, and the mainland ahead of her,
   Hey for the Warner and Hayling and Home!

Bo’sun, O Bo’sun, just look at the green of it!
   Look at the red cattle down by the hedge!
Look at the farmsteading — all that is seen of it,
   One little gable end over the edge!’

‘Lord! the tongues of them clattering, clattering,
   All growing wild at a peep of the Wight;
Aye, sir, aye, it has set them all chattering,
   Thinking of home and their mothers to-night.’

Spread the topgallants — oh, lay them out lustily!
   What though it darken o’er Netherby Combe?
‘Tis but the valley wind, puffing so gustily -
   On for the Warner and Hayling and Home!

‘Bo’sun, O Bo’sun, just see the long slope of it!
   Culver is there, with the cliff and the light.
Tell us, oh tell us, now is there a hope of it?
   Shall we have leave for our homes for to-night?’

‘Tut, the clack of them! Steadily! Steadily!
Aye, as you say, sir, they’re little ones still;
One long reach should open it readily,
Round by St. Helens and under the hill.

‘The Spit and the Nab are the gates of the promise,
Their mothers to them — and to us it’s our wives.
I’ve sailed forty years, and — By God it’s upon us!
Down royals, Down top’sles, down, down, for your lives!’

A grey swirl of snow with the squall at the back of it,
Heeling her, reeling her, beating her down!
A gleam of her bends in the thick of the wrack of it,
A flutter of white in the eddies of brown.

It broke in one moment of blizzard and blindness;
The next, like a foul bat, it flapped on its way.
But our ship and our boys! Gracious Lord, in your kindness,
Give help to the mothers who need it to-day!

Give help to the women who wait by the water,
Who stand on the Hard with their eyes past the Wight.
Ah! whisper it gently, you sister or daughter,
’Our boys are all gathered at home for to-night.’

THE INNER ROOM

It is mine — the little chamber,
   Mine alone.
I had it from my forbears
   Years agone.
Yet within its walls I see
A most motley company,
And they one and all claim me
   As their own.

There’s one who is a soldier
   Bluff and keen;
Single-minded, heavy-fisted,
   Rude of mien.
He would gain a purse or stake it,
He would win a heart or break it,
He would give a life or take it,
   Conscience-clean.

And near him is a priest
   Still schism-whole;
He loves the censer-reek
   And organ-roll.
He has leanings to the mystic,
Sacramental, eucharistic;
And dim yearnings altruistic
   Thrill his soul.

There’s another who with doubts
   Is overcast;
I think him younger brother
   To the last.

Walking wary stride by stride,
Peering forwards anxious-eyed,
Since he learned to doubt his guide
   In the past.

And ‘mid them all, alert,
   But somewhat cowed,
There sits a stark-faced fellow,
   Beetle-browed,
Whose black soul shrinks away
From a lawyer-ridden day,
And has thoughts he dare not say
   Half avowed.

There are others who are sitting,
   Grim as doom,
In the dim ill-boding shadow
   Of my room.
Darkling figures, stern or quaint,
Now a savage, now a saint,
Showing fitfully and faint
   Through the gloom.

And those shadows are so dense,
   There may be
Many — very many — more
   Than I see.
They are sitting day and night
Soldier, rogue, and anchorite;
And they wrangle and they fight
   Over me.

If the stark-faced fellow win,
   All is o’er!
If the priest should gain his will
   I doubt no more!

But if each shall have his day,
I shall swing and I shall sway
In the same old weary way
   As before.

THE IRISH COLONEL

Said the king to the colonel,
‘The complaints are eternal,
   That you Irish give more trouble
      Than any other corps.’

Said the colonel to the king,
‘This complaint is no new thing,
   For your foemen, sire, have made it
      A hundred times before.’

THE BLIND ARCHER

Little boy Love drew his bow at a chance,
   Shooting down at the ballroom floor;
He hit an old chaperone watching the dance,
   And oh! but he wounded her sore.
      ’Hey, Love, you couldn’t mean that!
      Hi, Love, what would you be at?’
         No word would he say,
         But he flew on his way,
For the little boy’s busy, and how could he stay?

Little boy Love drew a shaft just for sport
   At the soberest club in Pall Mall;
He winged an old veteran drinking his port,
   And down that old veteran fell.
      ’Hey, Love, you mustn’t do that!
      Hi, Love, what would you be at?
         This cannot be right!
         It’s ludicrous quite!’
But it’s no use to argue, for Love’s out of sight.

A sad-faced young clerk in a cell all apart
   Was planning a celibate vow;
But the boy’s random arrow has sunk in his heart,
   And the cell is an empty one now.
      ’Hey, Love, you mustn’t do that!
      Hi, Love, what would you be at?
         He is not for you,
         He has duties to do.’
‘But I AM his duty,’ quoth Love as he flew.

The king sought a bride, and the nation had hoped
For a queen without rival or peer.
But the little boy shot, and the king has eloped
With Miss No-one on Nothing a year.
’Hey, Love, you couldn’t mean that!
Hi, Love, what would you be at?
What an impudent thing
To make game of a king!’
‘But I’M a king also,’ cried Love on the wing.

Little boy Love grew pettish one day;
’If you keep on complaining,’ he swore,
‘I’ll pack both my bow and my quiver away,
And so I shall plague you no more.’
’Hey, Love, you mustn’t do that!
Hi, Love, what would you be at?
You may ruin our ease,
You may do what you please,
But we can’t do without you, you dear little tease!’

A PARABLE

The cheese-mites asked how the cheese got there,
   And warmly debated the matter;
The Orthodox said that it came from the air,
   And the Heretics said from the platter.
They argued it long and they argued it strong,
   And I hear they are arguing now;
But of all the choice spirits who lived in the cheese,
   Not one of them thought of a cow,

A TRAGEDY

Who’s that walking on the moorland?
Who’s that moving on the hill?
They are passing ‘mid the bracken,
But the shadows grow and blacken
And I cannot see them clearly on the hill.

Who’s that calling on the moorland?
Who’s that crying on the hill?
Was it bird or was it human,
Was it child, or man, or woman,
Who was calling so sadly on the hill?

Who’s that running on the moorland?
Who’s that flying on the hill?
He is there — and there again,
But you cannot see him plain,
For the shadow lies so darkly on the hill.

What’s that lying in the heather?
What’s that lurking on the hill?
My horse will go no nearer,
And I cannot see it clearer,
But there’s something that is lying on the hill.

THE PASSING

It was the hour of dawn,
When the heart beats thin and small,
The window glimmered grey,
Framed in a shadow wall.

And in the cold sad light
Of the early morningtide,
The dear dead girl came back
And stood by his bedside.

The girl he lost came back:
He saw her flowing hair;
It flickered and it waved
Like a breath in frosty air.

As in a steamy glass,
Her face was dim and blurred;
Her voice was sweet and thin,
Like the calling of a bird.

‘You said that you would come,
You promised not to stay;
And I have waited here,
To help you on the way.

‘I have waited on,
But still you bide below;
You said that you would come,
And oh, I want you so!

‘For half my soul is here,
  And half my soul is there,
When you are on the earth
  And I am in the air.

‘But on your dressing-stand
  There lies a triple key;
Unlock the little gate
  Which fences you from me.

‘Just one little pang,
  Just one throb of pain,
And then your weary head
  Between my breasts again.’

In the dim unhomely light
  Of the early morningtide,
He took the triple key
  And he laid it by his side.

A pistol, silver chased,
  An open hunting knife,
A phial of the drug
  Which cures the ill of life.

He looked upon the three,
  And sharply drew his breath:
‘Now help me, oh my love,
  For I fear this cold grey death.’

She bent her face above,
  She kissed him and she smiled;
She soothed him as a mother
  May sooth a frightened child.

‘Just that little pang, love,
   Just a throb of pain,
And then your weary head
   Between my breasts again.’

He snatched the pistol up,
   He pressed it to his ear;
But a sudden sound broke in,
   And his skin was raw with fear.

He took the hunting knife,
   He tried to raise the blade;
It glimmered cold and white,
   And he was sore afraid.

He poured the potion out,
   But it was thick and brown;
His throat was sealed against it,
   And he could not drain it down.

He looked to her for help,
   And when he looked — behold!
His love was there before him
   As in the days of old.

He saw the drooping head,
   He saw the gentle eyes;
He saw the same shy grace of hers
   He had been wont to prize.

She pointed and she smiled,
   And lo! he was aware
Of a half-lit bedroom chamber
   And a silent figure there.

A silent figure lying
  A-sprawl upon a bed,
With a silver-mounted pistol
  Still clotted to his head.

And as he downward gazed,
  Her voice came full and clear,
The homely tender voice
  Which he had loved to hear:

‘The key is very certain,
  The door is sealed to none.
You did it, oh, my darling!
  And you never knew it done.

‘When the net was broken,
  You thought you felt its mesh;
You carried to the spirit
  The troubles of the flesh.

‘And are you trembling still, dear?
  Then let me take your hand;
And I will lead you outward
  To a sweet and restful land.

‘You know how once in London
  I put my griefs on you;
But I can carry yours now -
  Most sweet it is to do!

‘Most sweet it is to do, love,
  And very sweet to plan
How I, the helpless woman,
  Can help the helpful man.

‘But let me see you smiling
   With the smile I know so well;
Forget the world of shadows,
   And the empty broken shell.

‘It is the worn-out garment
   In which you tore a rent;
You tossed it down, and carelessly
   Upon your way you went.

‘It is not YOU, my sweetheart,
   For you are here with me.
That frame was but the promise of
   The thing that was to be -

‘A tuning of the choir
   Ere the harmonies begin;
And yet it is the image
   Of the subtle thing within.

‘There’s not a trick of body,
   There’s not a trait of mind,
But you bring it over with you,
   Ethereal, refined,

‘But still the same; for surely
   If we alter as we die,
You would be you no longer,
   And I would not be I.

‘I might be an angel,
   But not the girl you knew;
You might be immaculate,
   But that would not be you.

‘And now I see you smiling,
   So, darling, take my hand;
And I will lead you outward
   To a sweet and pleasant land,

‘Where thought is clear and nimble,
   Where life is pure and fresh,
Where the soul comes back rejoicing
   From the mud-bath of the flesh

‘But still that soul is human,
   With human ways, and so
I love my love in spirit,
   As I loved him long ago.’

So with hands together
   And fingers twining tight,
The two dead lovers drifted
   In the golden morning light.

But a grey-haired man was lying
   Beneath them on a bed,
With a silver-mounted pistol
   Still clotted to his head.

THE FRANKLIN’S MAID

(From ‘The White Company’)

The franklin he hath gone to roam,
The franklin’s maid she bides at home;
But she is cold, and coy, and staid,
And who may win the franklin’s maid?

There came a knight of high renown
In bassinet and ciclatoun;
On bended knee full long he prayed -
He might not win the franklin’s maid.

There came a squire so debonair,
His dress was rich, his words were fair.
He sweetly sang, he deftly played -
He could not win the franklin’s maid.

There came a mercer wonder-fine,
With velvet cap and gaberdine;
For all his ships, for all his trade,
He could not buy the franklin’s maid.

There came an archer bold and true,
With bracer guard and stave of yew;
His purse was light, his jerkin frayed -
Haro, alas! the franklin’s maid!

Oh, some have laughed and some have cried,
And some have scoured the countryside;

But off they ride through wood and glade,
The bowman and the franklin’s maid.

THE OLD HUNTSMAN

There’s a keen and grim old huntsman
On a horse as white as snow;
Sometimes he is very swift
And sometimes he is slow.
But he never is at fault,
For he always hunts at view
And he rides without a halt
After you.

The huntsman’s name is Death,
His horse’s name is Time;
He is coming, he is coming
As I sit and write this rhyme;
He is coming, he is coming,
As you read the rhyme I write;
You can hear the hoofs’ low drumming
Day and night.

You can hear the distant drumming
As the clock goes tick-a-tack,
And the chiming of the hours
Is the music of his pack.
You may hardly note their growling
Underneath the noonday sun,
But at night you hear them howling
As they run.

And they never check or falter
For they never miss their kill;
Seasons change and systems alter,
But the hunt is running still.

Hark! the evening chime is playing,
O’er the long grey town it peals;
Don’t you hear the death-hound baying
At your heels?

Where is there an earth or burrow?
Where a cover left for you?
A year, a week, perhaps to-morrow
Brings the Huntsman’s death halloo!
Day by day he gains upon us,
And the most that we can claim
Is that when the hounds are on us
We die game.

And somewhere dwells the Master,
By whom it was decreed;
He sent the savage huntsman,
He bred the snow-white steed.
These hounds which run for ever,
He set them on your track;
He hears you scream, but never
Calls them back.

He does not heed our suing,
We never see his face;
He hunts to our undoing,
We thank him for the chase.
We thank him and we flatter,
We hope — because we must -
But have we cause? No matter!
Let us trust!

SONGS OF THE ROAD

This collection of poetry was first published in 1911.

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A LILT OF THE ROAD

J. C. D.

THIS-AND-ALL

February, 1911

FOREWORD

If it were not for the hillocks
  You’d think little of the hills;
The rivers would seem tiny
  If it were not for the rills.
If you never saw the brushwood
  You would under-rate the trees;
And so you see the purpose
  Of such little rhymes as these.

Crowborough

1911

I. — NARRATIVE VERSES AND SONGS

A HYMN OF EMPIRE

(Coronation Year, 1911)
God save England, blessed by Fate,
So old, yet ever young:
The acorn isle from which the great
Imperial oak has sprung!
And God guard Scotland's kindly soil,
The land of stream and glen,
The granite mother that has bred
A breed of granite men!

God save Wales, from Snowdon's vales
To Severn's silver strand!
For all the grace of that old race
Still haunts the Celtic land.
And, dear old Ireland, God save you,
And heal the wounds of old,
For every grief you ever knew
May joy come fifty-fold!

Set Thy guard over us,
May Thy shield cover us,
Enfold and uphold us
On land and on sea!
From the palm to the pine,
From the snow to the line,
Brothers together
And children of Thee.

Thy blessing, Lord, on Canada,
Young giant of the West,

Still upward lay her broadening way,
And may her feet be blessed!
And Africa, whose hero breeds
Are blending into one,
Grant that she tread the path which leads
To holy unison.

May God protect Australia,
Set in her Southern Sea!
Though far thou art, it cannot part
Thy brother folks from thee.
And you, the Land of Maori,
The island-sisters fair,
Ocean hemmed and lake be-gemmed,
God hold you in His care!

Set Thy guard over us,
May Thy shield cover us,
Enfold and uphold us
On land and on sea!
From the palm to the pine,
From the snow to the line,
Brothers together
And children of Thee.

God guard our Indian brothers,
The Children of the Sun,
Guide us and walk beside us,
Until Thy will be done.
To all be equal measure,
Whate’er his blood or birth,
Till we shall build as Thou hast willed
O’er all Thy fruitful Earth.

May we maintain the story
Of honest, fearless right!
Not ours, not ours the Glory!

What are we in Thy sight?
Thy servants, and no other,
Thy servants may we be,
To help our weaker brother,
As we crave for help from Thee!

Set Thy guard over us,
May Thy shield cover us,
Enfold and uphold us
On land and on sea!
From the palm to the pine,
From the snow to the line,
Brothers together
And children of Thee.

SIR NIGEL’S SONG

A sword! A sword! Ah, give me a sword!
For the world is all to win.
Though the way be hard and the door be
   barred,
The strong man enters in.
If Chance or Fate still hold the gate,
Give me the iron key,
And turret high, my plume shall fly,
Or you may weep for me!

A horse! A horse! Ah, give me a horse,
To bear me out afar,
Where blackest need and grimmest deed,
And sweetest perils are.
Hold thou my ways from glutted days,
Where poisoned leisure lies,
And point the path of tears and wrath
Which mounts to high emprise.

A heart! A heart! Ah, give me a heart,
To rise to circumstance!
Serene and high, and bold to try
The hazard of a chance.
With strength to wait, but fixed as fate,
To plan and dare and do;
The peer of all — and only thrall,
Sweet lady mine, to you!

THE ARAB STEED

I gave the ‘orse ‘is evenin’ feed,
And bedded of ‘im down,
And went to ‘ear the sing-song
In the bar-room of the Crown,
And one young feller spoke a piece
As told a kind of tale,
About an Arab man wot ‘ad
A certain ‘orse for sale.

I ‘ave no grudge against the man —
I never ‘eard ‘is name,
But if he was my closest pal
I’d say the very same,
For wot you do in other things
Is neither ‘ere nor there,
But w’en it comes to ‘orses
You must keep upon the square.

Now I’m tellin’ you the story
Just as it was told last night,
And if I wrong this Arab man
Then ‘e can set me right;
But s’posin’ all these fac’s *are* fac’s,
Then I make bold to say
That I think it was not sportsmanlike
To act in sich a way.

For, as I understand the thing,
‘E went to sell this steed —
Which is a name they give a ‘orse
Of some outlandish breed — ,
And soon ‘e found a customer,
A proper sportin’ gent,

Who planked ‘is money down at once
Without no argument.

Now when the deal was finished
And the money paid, you’d think
This Arab would ‘ave asked the gent
At once to name ‘is drink,
Or at least ‘ave thanked ‘im kindly,
An’ wished ‘im a good day,
And own as ‘e’d been treated
In a very ‘andsome way.

But instead o’ this ‘e started
A-talkin’ to the steed,
And speakin’ of its “braided mane”
An’ of its “winged speed,”
And other sich expressions
With which I can’t agree,
For a ‘orse with wings an’ braids an’ things
Is not the ‘orse for me.

The moment that ‘e ‘ad the cash —
Or wot ‘*e* called the gold,
‘E turned as nasty as could be:
Says ‘e, “You’re sold!   You’re sold!”
Them was ‘is words; it’s not for me
To settle wot he meant;
It may ‘ave been the ‘orse was sold,
It may ‘ave been the gent.

I’ve not a word to say agin
His fondness for ‘is ‘orse,
But why should ‘e insinivate
The gent would treat ‘im worse?
An’ why should ‘e go talkin’
In that aggravatin’ way,
As if the gent would gallop ‘im

And wallop ‘im all day?

It may ‘ave been an’ ‘arness ‘orse,
It may ‘ave been an ‘ack,
But a bargain is a bargain,
An’ there ain’t no goin’ back;
For when you’ve picked the money up,
That finishes the deal,
And after that your mouth is shut,
Wotever you may feel.

Supposin’ this ‘ere Arab man
‘Ad wanted to be free,
‘E could ‘ave done it businesslike,
The same as you or me;
A fiver might ‘ave squared the gent,
An’ then ‘e could ‘ave claimed
As ‘e’d cleared ‘imself quite ‘andsome,
And no call to be ashamed.

But instead ‘o that this Arab man
Went on from bad to worse,
An’ took an’ chucked the money
At the cove wot bought the ‘orse;
‘E’d ‘ave learned ‘im better manners,
If ‘e’d waited there a bit,
But ‘e scooted on ‘is bloomin’ steed
As ‘ard as ‘e could split.

Per’aps ‘e sold ‘im after,
Or per’aps ‘e ‘ires ‘im out,
But I’d like to warm that Arab man
Wen next ‘e comes about;
For wot ‘e does in other things
Is neither ‘ere nor there,
But w’en it comes to ‘orses
We must keep ‘im on the square.

A POST-IMPRESSIONIST

Peter Wilson, A.R.A.,
In his small atelier,
Studied Continental Schools,
Drew by Academic rules.
So he made his bid for fame,
But no golden answer came,
For the fashion of his day
Chanced to set the other way,
And decadent forms of Art
Drew the patrons of the mart.

Now this poor reward of merit
Rankled so in Peter’s spirit,
It was more than he could bear;
So one night in mad despair
He took his canvas for the year
(“Isle of Wight from Southsea Pier”),
And he hurled it from his sight,
Hurled it blindly to the night,
Saw it fall diminuendo
From the open lattice window,
Till it landed with a flop
On the dust-bin’s ashen top,
Where, ‘mid damp and rain and grime,
It remained till morning time.

Then when morning brought reflection,
He was shamed at his dejection,
And he thought with consternation
Of his poor, ill-used creation;
Down he rushed, and found it there
Lying all exposed and bare,
Mud-bespattered, spoiled, and botched,

Water sodden, fungus-blotched,
All the outlines blurred and wavy,
All the colours turned to gravy,
Fluids of a dappled hue,
Blues on red and reds on blue,
A pea-green mother with her daughter,
Crazy boats on crazy water
Steering out to who knows what,
An island or a lobster-pot?

Oh, the wretched man’s despair!
Was it lost beyond repair?
Swift he bore it from below,
Hastened to the studio,
Where with anxious eyes he studied
If the ruin, blotched and muddied,
Could by any human skill
Be made a normal picture still.

Thus in most repentant mood
Unhappy Peter Wilson stood,
When, with pompous face, self-centred,
Willoughby the critic entered —
He of whom it has been said
He lives a century ahead —
And sees with his prophetic eye
The forms which Time will justify,
A fact which surely must abate
All longing to reincarnate.

“Ah, Wilson,” said the famous man,
Turning himself the walls to scan,
“The same old style of thing I trace,
Workmanlike but commonplace.
Believe me, sir, the work that lives
Must furnish more than Nature gives.
‘The light that never was,’ you know,

That is your mark — but here,   hullo!

What's this? What's this? Magnificent!
I've wronged you, Wilson! I repent!
A masterpiece! A perfect thing!
What atmosphere! What colouring!
Spanish Armada, is it not?
A view of Ryde, no matter what,
I pledge my critical renown
That this will be the talk of Town.
Where did you get those daring hues,
Those blues on reds, those reds on
   blues?
That pea-green face, that gamboge sky?
You've far outcried the latest cry —
Out Monet-ed Monet.   I have said
Our Art was sleeping, but not dead.
Long have we waited for the Star,
I watched the skies for it afar,
The hour has come — and here you are."

And that is how our artist friend
Found his struggles at an end,
And from his little Chelsea flat
Became the Park Lane plutocrat.
'Neath his sheltered garden wall
When the rain begins to fall,
And the stormy winds do blow,
You may see them in a row,
Red effects and lake and yellow
Getting nicely blurred and mellow.
With the subtle gauzy mist
Of the great Impressionist.
Ask him how he chanced to find
How to leave the French behind,
And he answers quick and smart,
"English climate's best for Art."

EMPIRE BUILDERS

Captain Temple, D.S.O.,
With his banjo and retriever.
“Rough, I know, on poor old Flo,
But, by Jove! I couldn’t leave her.”
Niger ribbon on his breast,
In his blood the Niger fever,
Captain Temple, D.S.O.,
With his banjo and retriever.

Cox of the Politicals,
With his cigarette and glasses,
Skilled in Pushtoo gutturals,
Odd-job man among the Passes,
Keeper of the Zakka Khels,
Tutor of the Khaiber Ghazis,
Cox of the Politicals,
With his cigarette and glasses.

Mr. Hawkins, Junior Sub.,
Late of Woolwich and Thames Ditton,
Thinks his battery the hub
Of the whole wide orb of Britain.
Half a hero, half a cub,
Lithe and playful as a kitten,
Mr. Hawkins, Junior Sub.,
Late of Woolwich and Thames Ditton.

Eighty Tommies, big and small,
Grumbling hard as is their habit.
“Say, mate, what’s a Bunerwal?”
“Sometime like a bloomin’ rabbit.”
“Got to hoof it to Chitral!”
“Blarst ye, did ye think to cab it!”

Eighty Tommies, big and small,
Grumbling hard as is their habit.

Swarthy Goorkhas, short and stout,
Merry children, laughing, crowing,
Don’t know what it’s all about,
Don’t know any use in knowing;
Only know they mean to go
Where the Sirdar thinks of going.
Little Goorkhas, brown and stout,
Merry children, laughing, crowing.

Funjaub Rifles, fit and trim,
Curly whiskered sons of battle,
Very dignified and prim
Till they hear the Jezails rattle;
Cattle thieves of yesterday,
Now the wardens of the cattle,
Fighting Brahmins of Lahore,
Curly whiskered sons of battle.

Up the winding mountain path
See the long-drawn column go;
Himalayan aftermath
Lying rosy on the snow.
Motley ministers of wrath
Building better than they know,
In the rosy aftermath
Trailing upward to the snow.

THE GROOM’S ENCORE

(Being a Sequel to “The Groom’s Story” in “Songs of Action”)

Not tired of ‘earin’ stories! You’re a nailer,
  so you are!
I thought I should ‘ave choked you off with
  that ‘ere motor-car.
Well, mister, ‘ere’s another; and, mind you,
  it’s a fact,
Though you’ll think perhaps I copped it
  out o’ some blue ribbon tract.

It was in the days when farmer men were
  jolly-faced and stout,
For all the cash was comin’ in and little
  goin’ out,
But now, you see, the farmer men are
  ‘ungry-faced and thin,
For all the cash is goin’ out and little
  comin’ in.

But in the days I’m speakin’ of, before
  the drop in wheat,
The life them farmers led was such as
  couldn’t well be beat;
They went the pace amazin’, they ‘unted
  and they shot,
And this ‘ere Jeremiah Brown the liveliest
  of the lot.

‘E was a fine young fellar; the best roun’
  ‘ere by far,
But just a bit full-blooded, as fine young
  fellars are;
Which I know they didn’t ought to, an’ it’s

very wrong of course,
But the colt wot never capers makes a
mighty useless ‘orse.

The lad was never vicious, but ‘e made the
money go,
For ‘e was ready with ‘is “yes,” and back-
ward with ‘is “no.”
And so ‘e turned to drink which is the
avenoo to ‘ell,
An’ ‘ow ‘e came to stop ‘imself is wot’ I
‘ave to tell.

Four days on end ‘e never knew ‘ow ‘e ‘ad
got to bed,
Until one mornin’ fifty clocks was tickin’
in ‘is ‘ead,
And on the same the doctor came, “You’re
very near D.T.,
If you don’t stop yourself, young chap,
you’ll pay the price,” said ‘e.

“It takes the form of visions, as I fear
you’ll quickly know;
Perhaps a string o’ monkeys, all a-sittin’ in
a row,
Perhaps it’s frogs or beetles, perhaps it’s
rats or mice,
There are many sorts of visions and
there’s none of ‘em is nice.”

But Brown ‘e started laughin’: “No
doctor’s muck,” says ‘e,
“A take-’em-break-’em gallop is the only
cure for me!
They ‘unt to-day down ‘Orsham way.
Bring round the sorrel mare,

If them monkeys come inquirin' you can
send 'em on down there."

Well, Jeremiah rode to 'ounds, exactly as
'e said.
But all the time the doctor's words were
ringin' in 'is 'ead —
"If you don't stop yourself, young chap,
you've got to pay the price,
There are many sorts of visions, but none
of 'em is nice."

They found that day at Leonards Lee and
ran to Shipley Wood,
'Ell-for-leather all the way, with scent
and weather good.
Never a check to 'Orton Beck and on
across the Weald,
And all the way the Sussex clay was weed-
in' out the field.

There's not a man among them could
remember such a run,
Straight as a rule to Bramber Pool and on
by Annington,
They followed still past Breeding 'ill
and on by Steyning Town,
Until they'd cleared the 'edges and were
out upon the Down.

Full thirty mile from Plimmers Style,
without a check or fault,
Full thirty mile the 'ounds 'ad run and
never called a 'alt.
One by one the Field was done until at
Finden Down,
There was no one with the 'untsman save

young Jeremiah Brown.

And then the ‘untsman ‘*e* was beat. ‘Is
‘orse ‘ad tripped and fell.
“By George,” said Brown, “I’ll go alone,
and follow it to — well,
The place that it belongs to.” And as ‘e
made the vow,
There broke from right in front of ‘im
the queerest kind of row.

There lay a copse of ‘azels on the border
of the track,
And into this two ‘ounds ‘ad run — them
two was all the pack —
And now from these ‘ere ‘azels there came
a fearsome ‘owl,
With a yappin’ and a snappin’ and a
wicked snarlin’ growl.

Jeremiah’s blood ran cold — a frightened
man was ‘e,
But he butted through the bushes just
to see what ‘e could see,
And there beneath their shadow, blood
drippin’ from his jaws,
Was an awful creature standin’ with a
‘ound beneath its paws.

A fox? Five foxes rolled in one — a
pony’s weight and size,
A rampin’, ragin’ devil, all fangs and
‘air and eyes;
Too scared to speak, with shriek on shriek,
Brown galloped from the sight
With just one thought within ‘is mind —
“The doctor told me right.”

That evenin’ late the minister was seated
in his study,
When in there rushed a ‘untin’ man, all
travel-stained and muddy,
“Give me the Testament!” he cried, “And
‘ear my sacred vow,
That not one drop of drink shall ever pass
my lips from now.”

‘E swore it and ‘e kept it and ‘e keeps it to
this day,
‘E ‘as turned from gin to ginger and says ‘e
finds it pay,
You can search the whole o’ Sussex from
‘ere to Brighton Town,
And you wouldn’t find a better man than
Jeremiah Brown.

And the vision — it was just a wolf, a big
Siberian,
A great, fierce, ‘ungry devil from a show-
man’s caravan,
But it saved ‘im from perdition — and I
don’t mind if I do,
I ‘aven’t seen no wolf myself — so ‘ere’s
my best to you!

THE BAY HORSE

Squire wants the bay horse,
For it is the best.
Squire holds the mortgage;
Where’s the interest?
Haven’t got the interest,
Can’t raise a sou;
Shan’t sell the bay horse,
Whatever he may do.

Did you see the bay horse?
Such a one to go!
He took a bit of ridin’,
When I showed him at the Show.
First prize the broad jump,
First prize the high;
Gold medal, Class A,
You’ll see it by-and-by.

I bred the bay horse
On the Withy Farm.
I broke the bay horse,
He broke my arm.
Don’t blame the bay horse,
Blame the brittle bone,
I bred him and I’ve fed him,
And he’s all my very own.

Just watch the bay horse
Chock full of sense!
Ain’t he just beautiful,
Risin’ to a fence!
Just hear the bay horse
Whinin’ in his stall,

Purrin’ like a pussy cat
When he hears me call.

But if Squire’s lawyer
Serves me with his writ,
I’ll take the bay horse
To Marley gravel pit.
Over the quarry edge,
I’ll sit him tight,
If he wants the brown hide,
He’s welcome to the white!

THE OUTCASTS

Three women stood by the river’s flood
In the gas-lamp’s murky light,
A devil watched them on the left,
And an angel on the right.

The clouds of lead flowed overhead;
The leaden stream below;
They marvelled much, that outcast three,
Why Fate should use them so.

Said one: “I have a mother dear,
Who lieth ill abed,
And by my sin the wage I win
From which she hath her bread.”

Said one: “I am an outcast’s child,
And such I came on earth.
If me ye blame, for this my shame,
Whom blame ye for my birth?”

The third she sank a sin-blotched face,
And prayed that she might rest,
In the weary flow of the stream below,
As on her mother’s breast.

Now past there came a godly man,
Of goodly stock and blood,
And as he passed one frown he cast
At that sad sisterhood.

Sorely it grieved that godly man,
To see so foul a sight,
He turned his face, and strode apace,

And left them to the night.

But the angel drew her sisters three,
Within her pinions’ span,
And the crouching devil slunk away
To join the godly man.

THE END

“Tell me what to get and I will get
it.”
“Then get that picture — that — the
girl in white.”
“Now tell me where you wish that I should
set it.”
“Lean it where I can see it — in the
light.”

“If there is more, sir, you have but to say
it.”
“Then bring those letters — those
which lie apart.”
“Here is the packet! Tell me where to
lay it.”
“Stoop over, nurse, and lay it on
my heart.”

“Thanks for your silence, nurse! You
understand me!
And now I’ll try to manage for
myself.
But, as you go, I’ll trouble you to hand
me
The small blue bottle there upon the
shelf.

“And so farewell! I feel that I am
keeping
The sunlight from you; may your
walk be bright!
When you return I may perchance be
sleeping,

So, ere you go, one hand-clasp
  and good night!”

1902-1909

They recruited William Evans
From the ploughtail and the spade;
Ten years’ service in the Devons
Left him smart as they are made.

Thirty or a trifle older,
Rather over six foot high,
Trim of waist and broad of shoulder,
Yellow-haired and blue of eye;

Short of speech and very solid,
Fixed in purpose as a rock,
Slow, deliberate, and stolid,
Of the real West-country stock.

He had never been to college,
Got his teaching in the corps,
You can pick up useful knowledge
‘Twixt Saltash and Singapore.

Old Field-Cornet Piet van Celling
Lived just northward of the Vaal,
And he called his white-washed dwelling,
Blesbock Farm, Rhenoster Kraal.

In his politics unbending,
Stern of speech and grim of face,
He pursued the never-ending
Quarrel with the English race.

Grizzled hair and face of copper,
Hard as nails from work and sport,

Just the model of a Dopper
Of the fierce old fighting sort.

With a shaggy bearded quota
On commando at his order,
He went off with Louis Botha
Trekking for the British border.

When Natal was first invaded
He was fighting night and day,
Then he scouted and he raided,
With De Wet and Delaney.

Till he had a brush with Plumer,
Got a bullet in his arm,
And returned in sullen humour
To the shelter of his farm.

Now it happened that the Devons,
Moving up in that direction,
Sent their Colour-Sergeant Evans
Foraging with half a section.

By a friendly Dutchman guided,
A Van Eloff or De Vilier,
They were promptly trapped and hided,
In a manner too familiar.

When the sudden scrap was ended,
And they sorted out the bag,
Sergeant Evans lay extended
Mauseritis in his leg.

So the Kaffirs bore him, cursing,
From the scene of his disaster,
And they left him to the nursing
Of the daughters of their master.

Now the second daughter, Sadie —
But the subject why pursue?
Wounded youth and tender lady,
Ancient tale but ever new.

On the stoep they spent the gloaming,
Watched the shadows on the veldt,
Or she led her cripple roaming
To the eucalyptus belt.

He would lie and play with Jacko,
The baboon from Bushman’s Kraal,
Smoked Magaliesberg tobacco
While she lisped to him in Taal.

Till he felt that he had rather
He had died amid the slaughter,
If the harshness of the father
Were not softened in the daughter.

So he asked an English question,
And she answered him in Dutch,
But her smile was a suggestion,
And he treated it as such.

Now among Rhenoster kopjes
Somewhat northward of the Vaal,
You may see four little chappies,
Three can walk and one can crawl.

And the blue of Transvaal heavens
Is reflected in their eyes,
Each a little William Evans,
Smaller model — pocket size.

Each a little Burgher Piet

Of the hardy Boer race,
Two great peoples seem to meet
In the tiny sunburned face.

And they often greatly wonder
Why old granddad and Papa,
Should have been so far asunder,
Till united by mamma.

And when asked, “Are you a Boer.
Or a little Englishman?”
Each will answer, short and sure,
“I am a South African.”

But the father answers, chaffing,
“Africans but British too.”
And the children echo, laughing,
“Half of mother — half of you.”

It may seem a crude example,
In an isolated case,
But the story is a sample
Of the welding of the race.

So from bloodshed and from sorrow,
From the pains of yesterday,
Comes the nation of to-morrow
Broadly based and built to stay.

Loyal spirits strong in union,
Joined by kindred faith and blood;
Brothers in the wide communion
Of our sea-girt brotherhood.

THE WANDERER

With acknowledgment to my friend Sir A. Quiller-Couch.

‘Twas in the shadowy gloaming
Of a cold and wet March day,
That a wanderer came roaming
From countries far away.

Scant raiment had he round him,
Nor purse, nor worldly gear,
Hungry and faint we found him,
And bade him welcome here.

His weary frame bent double,
His eyes were old and dim,
His face was writhed with trouble
Which none might share with him.

His speech was strange and broken,
And none could understand,
Such words as might be spoken
In some far distant land.

We guessed not whence he hailed from,
Nor knew what far-off quay
His roving bark had sailed from
Before he came to me.

But there he was, so slender,
So helpless and so pale,
That my wife’s heart grew tender
For one who seemed so frail.

She cried, “But you must bide here!
You shall no further roam.

Grow stronger by our side here,
Within our moorland home!”

She laid her best before him,
Homely and simple fare,
And to his couch she bore him
The raiment he should wear.

To mine he had been welcome,
My suit of russet brown,
But she had dressed our weary guest
In a loose and easy gown.

And long in peace he lay there,
Brooding and still and weak,
Smiling from day to day there
At thoughts he would not speak.

The months flowed on, but ever
Our guest would still remain,
Nor made the least endeavour
To leave our home again.

He heeded not for grammar,
Nor did we care to teach,
But soon he learned to stammer
Some words of English speech.

With these our guest would tell us
The things that he liked best,
And order and compel us
To follow his behest.

He ruled us without malice,
But as if he owned us all,
A sultan in his palace
With his servants at his call.

Those calls came fast and faster,
Our service still we gave,
Till I who had been master
Had grown to be his slave.

He claimed with grasping gestures
Each thing of price he saw,
Watches and rings and vestures,
His will the only law.

In vain had I commanded,
In vain I struggled still,
Servants and wife were banded
To do the stranger’s will.

And then in deep dejection
It came to me one day,
That my own wife’s affection
Had been beguiled away.

Our love had known no danger,
So certain had it been!
And now to think a stranger
Should dare to step between.

I saw him lie and harken
To the little songs she sung,
And when the shadows darken
I could hear his lisping tongue.

They would sit in chambers shady,
When the light was growing dim,
Ah, my fickle-hearted lady!
With your arm embracing him.

So, at last, lest he divide us,

I would put them to the test.
There was no one there beside us,
Save this interloping guest.

So I took my stand before them,
Very silent and erect,
My accusing glance passed o’er them,
Though with no observed effect.

But the lamp light shone upon her,
And I saw each tell-tale feature,
As I cried, “Now, on your honour,
Do or don’t you love the creature?”

But her answer seemed evasive,
It was “Ducky-doodle-doo!
If his mummy loves um babby,
Doesn’t daddums love um too?”

BENDY’S SERMON

[Bendigo, the well-known Nottingham prize fighter, became converted to religion, and preached at revival meetings throughout the country.]

You didn’t know of Bendigo!   Well, that
knocks me out!
Who’s your board school teacher?   What’s
he been about?

Chock-a-block with fairy-tales — full of
useless cram,
And never heard o’ Bendigo, the pride of
Nottingham!

Bendy’s short for Bendigo.   You should
see him peel!
Half of him was whalebone, half of him
was steel,

Fightin’ weight eleven ten, five foot nine
in height,
Always ready to oblige if you want a
fight.

I could talk of Bendigo from here to king-
dom come,
I guess before I ended you would wish your
dad was dumb.

I’d tell you how he fought Ben Caunt, and
how the deaf ‘un fell,
But the game is done, and the men are
gone — and maybe it’s as well.

Bendy he turned Methodist — he said he

felt a call,
He stumped the country preachin' and you bet he filled the hall,

If you seed him in the pulpit, a-bleatin' like a lamb,
You'd never know bold Bendigo, the pride of Nottingham.

His hat was like a funeral, he'd got a waiter's coat,
With a hallelujah collar and a choker round his throat,

His pals would laugh and say in chaff that Bendigo was right,
In takin' on the devil, since he'd no one else to fight.

But he was very earnest, improvin' day by day,
A-workin' and a-preachin' just as his duty lay,

But the devil he was waitin', and in the final bout,
He hit him hard below his guard and knocked poor Bendy out.

Now I'll tell you how it happened. He was preachin' down at Brum,
He was billed just like a circus, you should see the people come,

The chapel it was crowded, and in the foremost row,
There was half a dozen bruisers who'd a

grudge at Bendigo.

There was Tommy Piatt of Bradford,
Solly Jones of Perry Bar,
Long Connor from the Bull Ring, the
same wot drew with Carr,

Jack Ball the fightin gunsmith, Joe Murphy
from the Mews,
And Iky Moss, the bettin' boss, the
Champion of the Jews.

A very pretty handful a-sittin' in a
string,
Full of beer and impudence, ripe for anything,

Sittin' in a string there, right under
Bendy's nose,
If his message was for sinners, he could
make a start on those.

Soon he heard them chaflin'; "Hi, Bendy!
Here's a go!"
"How much are you coppin' by this Jump
to Glory show?"

"Stow it, Bendy! Left the ring! Mighty
spry of you!
Didn't everybody know the ring was
leavin' you."

Bendy fairly sweated as he stood above
and prayed,
"Look down, O Lord, and grip me with
a strangle hold!" he said.

“Fix me with a strangle hold! Put a stop
on me!
I’m slippin’, Lord, I’m slippin’ and I’m
clingin’ hard to Thee!”

But the roughs they kept on chaffin’ and
the uproar it was such
That the preacher in the pulpit might be
talkin’ double Dutch,

Till a workin’ man he shouted out, a-
jumpin’ to his feet,
“Give us a lead, your reverence, and heave
‘em in the street.”

Then Bendy said, “Good Lord, since
first I left my sinful ways,
Thou knowest that to Thee alone I’ve
given up my days,

But now, dear Lord” — and here he laid his
Bible on the shelf —
“I’ll take, with your permission, just five
minutes for myself.”

He vaulted from the pulpit like a tiger
from a den,
They say it was a lovely sight to see him
floor his men;

Right and left, and left and right, straight
and true and hard,
Till the Ebenezer Chapel looked more like
a knacker’s yard.

Platt was standin’ on his back and lookup
at his toes,

Solly Jones of Perry Bar was feelin’ for his nose,

Connor of the Bull Ring had all that he could do
Rakin’ for his ivories that lay about the pew.

Jack Ball the fightin’ gunsmith was in a peaceful sleep,
Joe Murphy lay across him, all tied up in a heap,

Five of them was twisted in a tangle on the floor,
And Iky Moss, the bettin’ boss, had sprinted for the door.

Five repentant fightin’ men, sitting in a row,
Listenin’ to words of grace from Mister Bendigo,

Listenin’ to his reverence — all as good as gold,
Pretty little baa-lambs, gathered to the fold.

So that’s the way that Bendy ran his mission in the slum,
And preached the Holy Gospel to the fightin’ men of Brum,

“The Lord,” said he, “has given me His message from on high,
And if you interrupt Him, I will know the reason why.”

But to think of all your schooling clean wasted, thrown away,
Darned if I can make out what you’re learnin’ all the day,

Grubbin’ up old fairy-tales, fillin’ up with cram,
And didn’t know of Bendigo, the pride of Nottingham.

II. — PHILOSOPHIC VERSES

COMPENSATION

The grime is on the window pane,
Pale the London sunbeams fall,
And show the smudge of mildew stain,
Which lies on the distempered wall.

I am a cripple, as you see,
And here I lie, a broken thing,
But God has given flight to me,
That mocks the swiftest eagle wing.

For if I will to see or hear,
Quick as the thought my spirit flies,
And lo! the picture flashes clear,
Through all the mist of centuries.

I can recall the Tigris' strand,
Where once the Turk and Tartar met,
When the great Lord of Samarcand
Struck down the Sultan Bajazet.

Under a ten-league swirl of dust
The roaring battle swings and sways,
Now reeling down, now upward thrust,
The crescent sparkles through the
  haze.

I see the Janissaries fly,
I see the chain-mailed leader fall,
I hear the Tekbar clear and high,
The true believer's battle-call.

And tossing o'er the press I mark
The horse-tail banner over all,

Shaped like the smudge of mildew dark
That lies on the distempered wall.

And thus the meanest thing I see
Will set a scene within my brain,
And every sound that comes to me,
Will bring strange echoes back again.

Hark now! In rhythmic monotone,
You hear the murmur of the mart,
The low, deep, unremitting moan,
That comes from weary London's
heart.

But I can change it to the hum
Of multitudinous acclaim,
When triple-walled Byzantium,
Re-echoes the Imperial name.

I hear the beat of armed feet,
The legions clanking on their way,
The long shout rims from street to street,
With rolling drum and trumpet bray.

So I hear it rising, falling,
Till it dies away once more,
And I hear the costers calling
Mid the weary London roar.

Who shall pity then the lameness,
Which still holds me from the ground?
Who commiserate the sameness
Of the scene that girds me round?

Though I lie a broken wreck,
Though I seem to want for all,
Still the world is at my beck

And the ages at my call.

THE BANNER OF PROGRESS

There’s a banner in our van,
And we follow as we can,
For at times we scarce can see it,
And at times it flutters high.
But however it be flown,
Still we know it as our own,
And we follow, ever follow,
Where we see the banner fly.

In the struggle and the strife,
In the weariness of life,
The banner-man may stumble,
He may falter in the fight.
But if one should fail or slip,
There are other hands to grip,
And it’s forward, ever forward,
From the darkness to the light.

HOPE

Faith may break on reason,
Faith may prove a treason
To that highest gift
That is granted by Thy grace;
But Hope! Ah, let us cherish
Some spark that may not perish,
Some tiny spark to cheer us,
As we wander through the waste!

A little lamp beside us,
A little lamp to guide us,
Where the path is rocky,
Where the road is steep.
That when the light falls dimmer,
Still some God-sent glimmer
May hold us steadfast ever,
To the track that we should keep.

Hope for the trending of it,
Hope for the ending of it,
Hope for all around us,
That it ripens in the sun.

Hope for what is waning,
Hope for what is gaining,
Hope for what is waiting
When the long day is done.

Hope that He, the nameless,
May still be best and blameless,
Nor ever end His highest
With the earthworm and the slime.
Hope that o’er the border,

There lies a land of order,
With higher law to reconcile
The lower laws of Time.

Hope that every vexed life,
Finds within that next life,
Something that may recompense,
Something that may cheer.
And that perchance the lowest one
Is truly but the slowest one,
Quickened by the sorrow
Which is waiting for him here.

RELIGIO MEDICI

1
God’s own best will bide the test,
And God’s own worst will fall;
But, best or worst or last or first,
He ordereth it all.

2
For *all* is good, if understood,
(Ah, could we understand!)
And right and ill are tools of skill
Held in His either hand.

3
The harlot and the anchorite,
The martyr and the rake,
Deftly He fashions each aright,
Its vital part to take.

4
Wisdom He makes to form the fruit
Where the high blossoms be;
And Lust to kill the weaker shoot,
And Drink to trim the tree.

5
And Holiness that so the bole
Be solid at the core;
And Plague and Fever, that the whole
Be changing evermore.

6
He strews the microbes in the lung,
The blood-clot in the brain;

With test and test He picks the best,
Then tests them once again.

7
He tests the body and the mind,
He rings them o’er and o’er;
And if they crack, He throws them back,
And fashions them once more.

8
He chokes the infant throat with slime,
He sets the ferment free;
He builds the tiny tube of lime
That blocks the artery.

9
He lets the youthful dreamer store
Great projects in his brain,
Until He drops the fungus spore
That smears them out again.

10
He stores the milk that feeds the babe,
He dulls the tortured nerve;
He gives a hundred joys of sense
Where few or none might serve.

11
And still He trains the branch of good
Where the high blossoms be,
And wieldeth still the shears of ill
To prune and prime His tree.

MAN’S LIMITATION

Man says that He is jealous,
Man says that He is wise,
Man says that He is watching
From His throne beyond the skies.

But perchance the arch above us
Is one great mirror’s span,
And the Figure seen so dimly
Is a vast reflected man.

If it is love that gave us
A thousand blossoms bright,
Why should that love not save us
From poisoned aconite?

If this man blesses sunshine
Which sets his fields aglow,
Shall that man curse the tempest
That lays his harvest low?

If you may sing His praises
For health He gave to you,
What of this spine-curved cripple,
Shall he sing praises too?

If you may justly thank Him
For strength in mind and limb,
Then what of yonder weakling —
Must he give thanks to Him?

Ah dark, too dark, the riddle!
The tiny brain too small!
We call, and fondly listen,

For answer to that call.

There comes no word to tell us
Why this and that should be,
Why you should live with sorrow,
And joy should live with me.

MIND AND MATTER

Great was his soul and high his aim,
He viewed the world, and he could trace
A lofty plan to leave his name
Immortal 'mid the human race.
But as he planned, and as he worked,
The fungus spore within him lurked.

Though dark the present and the past,
The future seemed a sunlit thing.
Still ever deeper and more vast,
The changes that he hoped to bring.
His was the will to dare and do;
But still the stealthy fungus grew.

Alas the plans that came to nought!
Alas the soul that thrilled in vain!
The sunlit future that he sought
Was but a mirage of the brain.
Where now the wit? Where now the will?
The fungus is the master still.

DARKNESS

A gentleman of wit and charm,
A kindly heart, a cleanly mind,
One who was quick with hand or purse,
To lift the burden of his kind.
A brain well balanced and mature,
A soul that shrank from all things
  base,
So rode he forth that winter day,
Complete in every mortal grace.

And then — the blunder of a horse,
The crash upon the frozen clods,
And — Death?   Ah! no such dignity,
But Life, all twisted and at odds!
At odds in body and in soul,
Degraded to some brutish state,
A being loathsome and malign,
Debased, obscene, degenerate.

Pathology?   The case is clear,
The diagnosis is exact;
A bone depressed, a haemorrhage,
The pressure on a nervous tract.
Theology?   Ah, there’s the rub!
Since brain and soul together fade,
Then when the brain is dead — enough!
Lord help us, for we need Thine aid!

III — MISCELLANEOUS VERSES

A WOMAN’S LOVE

I am not blind — I understand;
I see him loyal, good, and wise,
I feel decision in his hand,
I read his honour in his eyes.
Manliest among men is he
With every gift and grace to clothe
  him;
He never loved a girl but me —
And I — I loathe him! — loathe him!

The other! Ah! I value him
Precisely at his proper rate,
A creature of caprice and whim,
Unstable, weak, importunate.
His thoughts are set on paltry gain —
You only tell me what I see —
I know him selfish, cold and vain;
But, oh! he’s all the world to me!

BY THE NORTH SEA

Her cheek was wet with North Sea spray,
We walked where tide and shingle
  meet;
The long waves rolled from far away
To purr in ripples at our feet.
And as we walked it seemed to me
That three old friends had met that
  day,
The old, old sky, the old, old sea,
And love, which is as old as they.

Out seaward hung the brooding mist
We saw it rolling, fold on fold,
And marked the great Sun alchemist
Turn all its leaden edge to gold,
Look well, look well, oh lady mine,
The gray below, the gold above,
For so the grayest life may shine
All golden in the light of love.

DECEMBER’S SNOW

The bloom is on the May once more,
The chestnut buds have burst anew;
But, darling, all our springs are o’er,
‘Tis winter still for me and you.
We plucked Life’s blossoms long ago
What’s left is but December’s snow.

But winter has its joys as fair,
The gentler joys, aloof, apart;
The snow may lie upon our hair
But never, darling, in our heart.
Sweet were the springs of long ago
But sweeter still December’s snow.

Yes, long ago, and yet to me
It seems a thing of yesterday;
The shade beneath the willow tree,
The word you looked but feared to say.
Ah! when I learned to love you so
What recked we of December’s snow?

But swift the ruthless seasons sped
And swifter still they speed away.
What though they bow the dainty head
And fleck the raven hair with gray?
The boy and girl of long ago
Are laughing through the veil of snow.

SHAKESPEARE’S EXPOSTULATION

Masters, I sleep not quiet in my grave,
There where they laid me, by the Avon
shore,
In that some crazy wights have set it forth
By arguments most false and fanciful,
Analogy and far-drawn inference,
That Francis Bacon, Earl of Verulam
(A man whom I remember in old days,
A learned judge with sly adhesive palms,
To which the suitor’s gold was wont to
stick) —
That this same Verulam had writ the plays
Which were the fancies of my frolic brain.
What can they urge to dispossess the crown
Which all my comrades and the whole loud
world
Did in my lifetime lay upon my brow?
Look straitly at these arguments and see
How witless and how fondly slight they be.
Imprimis, they have urged that, being
  born
In the mean compass of a paltry town,
I could not in my youth have trimmed
my mind
To such an eagle pitch, but must be found,
Like the hedge sparrow, somewhere near
  the ground.
Bethink you, sirs, that though I was
  denied
The learning which in colleges is found,
Yet may a hungry brain still find its fo
Wherever books may lie or men may be;
And though perchance by Isis or by Cam

The meditative, philosophic plant
May best luxuriate; yet some would say
That in the task of limning mortal life
A fitter preparation might be made
Beside the banks of Thames.   And then again,
If I be suspect, in that I was not
A fellow of a college, how, I pray,
Will Jonson pass, or Marlowe, or the rest,
Whose measured verse treads with as proud a gait
As that which was my own? Whence did they suck
This honey that they stored?   Can you recite
The vantages which each of these has had
And I had not?   Or is the argument
That my Lord Verulam hath written all,
And covers in his wide-embracing self
The stolen fame of twenty smaller men?
You prate about my learning.   I would urge
My want of learning rather as a proof
That I am still myself.   Have I not traced
A seaboard to Bohemia, and made
The cannons roar a whole wide century
Before the first was forged?   Think you, then,
That he, the ever-learned Verulam,
Would have erred thus?   So may my very faults
In their gross falseness prove that I am true,
And by that falseness gender truth in you.
And what is left?   They say that they have found
A script, wherein the writer tells my Lord
He is a secret poet.   True enough!

But surely now that secret is o'er past.
Have you not read his poems? Know
you not
That in our day a learned chancellor
Might better far dispense unjustest law
Than be suspect of such frivolity
As lies in verse? Therefore his poetry
Was secret. Now that he is gone
'Tis so no longer. You may read his verse,
And judge if mine be better or be worse:
Read and pronounce! The meed of
praise is thine;
But still let his be his and mine be mine.
I say no more; but how can you forswear
Outspoken Jonson, he who knew me well;
So, too, the epitaph which still you read?
Think you they faced my sepulchre with
lies —
Gross lies, so evident and palpable
That every townsman must have wot of it,
And not a worshipper within the church
But must have smiled to see the marbled
fraud?
Surely this touches you? But if by chance
My reasoning still leaves you obdurate,
I'll lay one final plea. I pray you look
On my presentment, as it reaches you.
My features shall be sponsors for my fame;
My brow shall speak when Shakespeare's
voice is dumb,
And be his warrant in an age to come.

THE EMPIRE

1902
They said that it had feet of clay,
That its fall was sure and quick.
In the flames of yesterday
All the clay was burned to brick.

When they carved our epitaph
And marked us doomed beyond recall,
“We are,” we answered, with a laugh,
“The Empire that declines to fall.”

A VOYAGE

1909
Breathing the stale and stuffy air
Of office or consulting room,
Our thoughts will wander back to where
We heard the low Atlantic boom,

And, creaming underneath our screw,
We watched the swirling waters break,
Silver filagrees on blue
Spreading fan-wise in our wake.

Cribbed within the city’s fold,
Fettered to our daily round,
We’ll conjure up the haze of gold
Which ringed the wide horizon round.

And still we’ll break the sordid day
By fleeting visions far and fair,
The silver shield of Vigo Bay,
The long brown cliff of Finisterre.

Where once the Roman galley sped,
Or Moorish corsair spread his sail,
By wooded shore, or sunlit head,
By barren hill or sea-washed vale

We took our way.   But we can swear,
That many countries we have scanned,
But never one that could compare
With our own island mother-land.

The dream is o’er.   No more we view
The shores of Christian or of Turk,

But turning to our tasks anew,
We bend us to our wonted work.

But there will come to you and me
Some glimpse of spacious days gone
  by,
The wide, wide stretches of the sea,
The mighty curtain of the sky,

THE ORPHANAGE

When, ere the tangled web is reft,
The kid-gloved villain scowls and sneers,
And hapless innocence is left
With no assets save sighs and tears,

‘Tis then, just then, that in there stalks
The hero, watchful of her needs;
He talks, Great heavens how he talks!
But we forgive him, for his deeds.

Life is the drama here to-day
And Death the villain of the plot.
It is a realistic play.
Shall it end well or shall it not?

The hero? Oh, the hero’s part
Is vacant — to be played by you.
Then act it well! An orphan’s heart
May beat the lighter if you do.

SEXAGENARIUS LOQUITUR

From our youth to our age
We have passed each stage
In old immemorial order,
From primitive days
Through flowery ways
With love like a hedge as their border.
Ah, youth was a kingdom of joy,
And we were the king and the queen,
   When I was a year
   Short of thirty, my dear,
And you were just nearing nineteen.
But dark follows light
And day follows night
As the old planet circles the sun;
And nature still traces
Her score on our faces
And tallies the years as they run.
Have they chilled the old warmth in your heart?
I swear that they have not in mine,
   Though I am a year
   Short of sixty, my dear,
And you are — well, say thirty-nine.

NIGHT VOICES

Father, father, who is that a-whispering?
Who is it who whispers in the wood?
You say it is the breeze
As it sighs among the trees,
But there’s some one who whispers in the
wood.

Father, father, who is that a-murmuring?
Who is it who murmurs in the night?
You say it is the roar
Of the wave upon the shore,
But there’s some one who murmurs in the
night.

Father, father, who is that who laughs
  at us?
Who is it who chuckles in the glen?
Oh, father, let us go,
For the light is burning low,
And there’s somebody laughing in the
  glen.

Father, father, tell me what you’re waiting
  for,
Tell me why your eyes are on the
  door.
It is dark and it is late,
But you sit so still and straight,
Ever staring, ever smiling, at the door.

THE MESSAGE

(From Heine)
Up, dear laddie, saddle quick,
And spring upon the leather!
Away post haste o’er fell and waste
With whip and spur together!

And when you win to Duncan’s kin
Draw one of them aside
And shortly say, “Which daughter may
We welcome as the bride?”

And if he says, “It is the dark,”
Then quickly bring the mare,
But if he says, “It is the blonde,”
Then you have time to spare;

But buy from off the saddler man
The stoutest cord you see,
Ride at your ease and say no word,
But bring it back to me.

THE ECHO

(After Heine)
Through the lonely mountain land
There rode a cavalier.
“Oh ride I to my darling’s arms,
Or to the grave so drear?”
The Echo answered clear,
“The grave so drear.”

So onward rode the cavalier
And clouded was his brow.
“If now my hour be truly come,
Ah well, it must be now!”
The Echo answered low,
“It must be now.”

ADVICE TO A YOUNG AUTHOR

First begin
Taking in.
Cargo stored,
All aboard,
Think about
Giving out.
Empty ship,
Useless trip!

Never strain
Weary brain,
Hardly fit,
Wait a bit!
After rest
Comes the best.

Sitting still,
Let it fill;
Never press;
Nerve stress
Always shows.
Nature knows.

Critics kind,
Never mind!
Critics flatter,
No matter!
Critics curse,
None the worse.
Critics blame,
All the same!
Do your best.
Hang the rest!

A LILT OF THE ROAD

Being the doggerel Itinerary of a Holiday in September, 1908

To St. Albans' town we came;
Roman Albanus — hence the name.
Whose shrine commemorates the faith
Which led him to a martyr's death.
A high cathedral marks his grave,
With noble screen and sculptured nave.
From thence to Hatfield lay our way,
Where the proud Cecils held their sway,
And ruled the country, more or less,
Since the days of Good Queen Bess.
Next through Hitchin's Quaker hold
To Bedford, where in days of old
John Bunyan, the unorthodox,
Did a deal in local stocks.
Then from Bedford's peaceful nook
Our pilgrim's progress still we took
Until we slackened up our pace
In Saint Neots' market-place.

Next day, the motor flying fast,
Through Newark, Tuxford, Retford passed,
Until at Doncaster we found
That we had crossed broad Yorkshire's bound.
Northward and ever North we pressed,
The Brontë Country to our West.
Still on we flew without a wait,
Skirting the edge of Harrowgate,
And through a wild and dark ravine,
As bleak a pass as we have seen,
Until we slowly circled down

And settled into Settle town.

On Sunday, in the pouring rain,
We started on our way again.
Through Kirkby Lonsdale on we drove,
The weary rain-clouds still above,
Until at last at Windermere
We felt our final port was near,
Thence the lake with wooded beach
Stretches far as eye can reach.
There above its shining breast
We enjoyed our welcome rest.
Tuesday saw us — still in rain —
Buzzing on our road again.

Rydal first, the smallest lake,
Famous for great Wordsworth’s sake;
Grasmere next appeared in sight,
Grim Helvellyn on the right,
Till we made our downward way
To the streets of Keswick gray.
Then amid a weary waste
On to Penrith Town we raced,
And for many a flying mile,
Past the ramparts of Carlisle,
Till we crossed the border line
Of the land of Auld lang syne.
Here we paused at Gretna Green,
Where many curious things were seen
At the grimy blacksmith’s shop,
Where flying couples used to stop
And forge within the smithy door
The chain which lasts for evermore.

They’d soon be back again, I think,
If blacksmith’s skill could break the link.
Ecclefechan held us next,

Where old Tom Carlyle was vexed
By the clamour and the strife
Of this strange and varied life.
We saw his pipe, we saw his hat,
We saw the stone on which he sat.
The solid stone is resting there,
But where the sitter? Where, oh! where?

Over a dreary wilderness
We had to take our path by guess,
For Scotland’s glories don’t include
The use of signs to mark the road.
For forty miles the way ran steep
Over bleak hills with scattered sheep,
Until at last, ‘neath gloomy skies,
We saw the stately towers rise
Where noble Edinburgh lies —
No city fairer or more grand
Has ever sprung from human hand.
But I must add (the more’s the pity)
That though in fair Dunedin’s city
Scotland’s taste is quite delightful,
The smaller Scottish towns are frightful.

When in other lands I roam
And sing “There is no place like home.”
In this respect I must confess
That no place has its ugliness.
Here on my mother’s granite breast
We settled down and took our rest.
On Saturday we ventured forth
To push our journey to the North.

Past Linlithgow first we sped,
Where the Palace rears its head,
Then on by Falkirk, till we pass
The famous valley and morass

Known as Bannockburn in story,
Brightest scene of Scottish glory.
On pleasure and instruction bent
We made the Stirling hill ascent,
And saw the wondrous vale beneath,
The lovely valley of Monteith,
Stretching under sunlit skies
To where the Trossach hills arise.
Thence we turned our willing car
Westward ho! to Callander,
Where childish memories awoke
In the wood of ash and oak,
Where in days so long gone by
I heard the woodland pigeons cry,
And, consternation in my face,
Legged it to some safer place.

Next morning first we viewed a mound,
Memorial of some saint renowned,
And then the mouldered ditch and ramp
Which marked an ancient Roman camp.
Then past Lubnaig on we went,
Gazed on Ben Ledi’s steep ascent,
And passed by lovely stream and valley
Through Dochart Glen to reach Dalmally,
Where on a rough and winding track
We wished ourselves in safety back;
Till on our left we gladly saw
The spreading waters of Loch Awe,
And still more gladly — truth to tell —
A very up-to-date hotel,
With Conan’s church within its ground,
Which gave it quite a homely sound.
Thither we came upon the Sunday,
Viewed Kilchurn Castle on the Monday,
And Tuesday saw us sally forth
Bound for Oban and the North.

We came to Oban in the rain,
I need not mention it again,
For you may take it as a fact
That in that Western Highland tract
It sometimes spouts and sometimes drops,
But never, never, never stops.
From Oban on we thought it well
To take the steamer for a spell.
But ere the motor went aboard
The Pass of Melfort we explored.
A lovelier vale, more full of peace,
Was never seen in classic Greece;
A wondrous gateway, reft and torn,
To open out the land of Lome.
Leading on for many a mile
To the kingdom of Argyle.

Wednesday saw us on our way
Steaming out from Oban Bay,
(Lord, it was a fearsome day!)
To right and left we looked upon
All the lands of Stevenson —
Moidart, Morven, and Ardgour,
Ardshiel, Appin, and Mamore —
If their tale you wish to learn
Then to “Kidnapped” you must turn.
Strange that one man’s eager brain
Can make those dead lands live again!
From the deck we saw Glencoe,
Where upon that night of woe
William’s men did such a deed
As even now we blush to read.
Ben Nevis towered on our right,
The clouds concealed it from our sight,
But it was comforting to say
That over there Ben Nevis lay’.

Finally we made the land
At Fort William’s sloping strand,
And in our car away we went
Along that lasting monument,
The good broad causeway which was made
By King George’s General Wade.
He built a splendid road, no doubt,
Alas! he left the sign-posts out.
And so we wandered, sad to say,
Far from our appointed way,
Till twenty mile of rugged track
In a circle brought us back.
But the incident we viwed
In a philosophic mood.
Tired and hungry but serene
We settled at the Bridge of Spean.

Our journey now we onward press
Toward the town of Inverness,
Through a country all alive
With memories of “forty-five.”
The noble clans once gathered here,
Where now are only grouse and deer.
Alas, that men and crops and herds
Should ever yield their place to birds!
And that the splendid Highland race
Be swept aside to give more space
For forests where the deer may stray
For some rich owner far away,
Whose keeper guards the lonely glen
Which once sent out a hundred men!
When from Inverness we turned,
Feeling that a rest was earned.
We stopped at Nairn, for golf links famed,
“Scotland’s Brighton” it is named,
Though really, when the phrase we heard,
It seemed a little bit absurd,

For Brighton’s size compared to Nairn
Is just a mother to her bairn.
We halted for a day of rest,
But took one journey to the West
To view old Cawdor’s tower and moat
Of which unrivalled Shakespeare wrote,
Where once Macbeth, the schemer deep,
Slew royal Duncan in his sleep,
But actors since avenged his death
By often murdering Macbeth.
Hard by we saw the circles gray
Where Druid priests were wont to pray.

Three crumbling monuments we found,
With Stonehenge monoliths around,
But who had built and who had planned
We tried in vain to understand,
As future learned men may search
The reasons for our village church.
This was our limit, for next day
We turned upon, our homeward way,
Passing first Culloden’s plain
Where the tombstones of the slain
Loom above the purple heather.
There the clansmen lie together —
Men from many an outland skerry,
Men from Athol and Glengarry,
Camerons from wild Mamore,
MacDonalds from the Irish Shore,
Red MacGregors and McLeods
With their tartans for their shrouds,
Menzies, Malcolms from the islands,
Frasers from the upper Highlands —
Callous is the passer by
Who can turn without a sigh
From the tufts of heather deep
Where the noble clansmen sleep.

Now we swiftly made our way
To Kingussie in Strathspey,
Skirting many a nameless loch
As we flew through Badenoch,
Till at Killiecrankie’s Pass,
Heather changing into grass
We descended once again
To the fertile lowland plain,
And by Perth and old Dunblane
Reached the banks of Allan Water,
Famous for the miller’s daughter,
Whence at last we circled back
Till we crossed our Stirling track.
So our little journey ended,
Gladness and instruction blended —
Not a care to spoil our pleasure,
Not a thought to break our leisure,
Drifting on from Sussex hedges
Up through Yorkshire’s fells and ledges
Past the deserts and morasses
Of the dreary Border passes,
Through the scenes of Scottish story
Past the fields of battles gory.

In the future it will seem
To have been a happy dream,
But unless my hopes are vain
We may dream it soon again.

THE GUARDS CAME THROUGH

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THE GUARDS CAME THROUGH

Men of the Twenty-first,
  Up by the Chalk Pit Wood,
Weak from our wounds and our thirst,
  Wanting our sleep and our food
After a day and a night.
  God! shall I ever forget?
Beaten and broke in the fight,
  But sticking it, sticking it yet,
Trying to hold the line,
  Fainting and spent and done;
Always the thud and the whine,
  Always the yell of the Hun.
Northumberland, Lancaster, York,
  Durham and Somerset,
Fighting alone, worn to the bone,
  But sticking it, sticking it yet.

Never a message of hope,
  Never a word of cheer,
Fronting Hill 70's shell-swept slope,
  With the dull, dead plain in our rear;
Always the shriek of the shell,
  Always the roar of the burst,
Always the tortures of Hell,
  As waiting and wincing we cursed
Our luck, the guns, and the Boche.
  When our Corporal shouted "Stand to!"
And I hear some one cry, "Clear the front for the Guards!" —
  And the Guards came through.

Our throats they were parched and hot,
  But, Lord! if you'd heard the cheer,
Irish, Welsh and Scot,
  Coldstream and Grenadier —
Two Brigades, if you please,
  Dressing as straight as a hem.
We, we were down on our knees,
  Praying for us and for them,
Praying with tear-wet cheek,
  Praying with outstretched hand.
Lord! I could speak for a week,
  But how could you understand?
How could your cheeks be wet?
  Such feelin's don't come to you;

But how can me or my mates forget
  How the Guards came through?

“Five yards left extend!”
  It passed from rank to rank,
And line after line, with never a bend,
  And a touch of the London swank.
A trifle of swank and dash,
  Cool as a home parade,
Twinkle, glitter and flash,
  Flinching never a shade,
With the shrapnel right in their face,
  Doing their Hyde Park stunt,
Swinging along at an easy pace,
  Arms at the trail, eyes front.
Man! it was great to see!
  Man! it was great to do!
It’s a cot, and a hospital ward for me,
But I’ll tell them in Blighty wherever I be,
  How the Guards came through.

VICTRIX

How was it then with England?
Her faith was true to her plighted word,
Her strong hand closed on her blunted sword,
Her heart rose high to the foeman’s hate,
She walked with God on the hills of Fate —
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?
Her soul was wrung with loss and pain,
Her face was grey with her heart’s-blood drain,
But her falcon eyes were hard and bright,
Austere and cold as an ice-cave’s light —
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?
Little she said to foe or friend,
True, heart true, to the uttermost end,
Her passion cry was the scathe she wrought,
In flame and steel she voiced her thought —
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?
With drooping sword and bended head,
She turned apart and mourned her dead,
Sad sky above, sad earth beneath,
She walked with God in the Vale of Death —
Ah, woe the day for England!

How is it now with England?
She sees upon her mist-girt path
Dim drifting shapes of fear and wrath.
Hold high the heart! Bend low the knee!
She has been guided, and will be —
And all is well with England.

THOSE OTHERS

Where are those others? — the men who stood
In the first wild spate of the German flood,
And paid full price with their heart's best blood
  For the saving of you and me:
French's Contemptibles, haggard and lean,
Allenby's lads of the cavalry screen,
Gunners who fell in Battery L,
  And Guardsmen of Landrecies?

Where are those others who fought and fell,
Outmanned, outgunned and scant of shell,
On the deadly curve of the Ypres hell,
  Barring the coast to the last?
Where are our laddies who died out there,
From Poelcapelle to Festubert,
When the days grew short and the poplars bare
  In the cold November blast?

For us their toil and for us their pain,
The sordid ditch in the sodden plain,
The Flemish fog and the driving rain,
The cold that cramped and froze;
The weary night, the chill bleak day,
When earth was dark and sky was grey,
And the ragged weeds in the dripping clay
  Were all God's world to those.

Where are those others in this glad time,
When the standards wave and the joy-bells chime,
And London stands with outstretched hands
  Waving her children in?
Athwart our joy still comes the thought
Of the dear dead boys, whose lives have bought
All that sweet victory has brought
  To us who lived to win.

To each his dreams, and mine to me,
But as the shadows fall I see
That ever-glorious company —
  The men who bide out there.
Rifleman, Highlander, Fusilier,
Airman and Sapper and Grenadier,
With flaunting banner and wave and cheer,
  They flow through the darkening air.

And yours are there, and so are mine,
Rank upon rank and line on line,
With smiling lips and eyes that shine,
  And bearing proud and high.
Past they go with their measured tread,
These are the victors, these — the dead!
Ah, sink the knee and bare the head
  As the hallowed host goes by!

HAIG IS MOVING

August 1918

Haig is moving!
Three plain words are all that matter,
Mid the gossip and the chatter,
Hopes in speeches, fears in papers,
Pessimistic froth and vapours —
Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!
We can turn from German scheming,
From humanitarian dreaming,
From assertions, contradictions,
Twisted facts and solemn fictions —
Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!
All the weary idle phrases,
Empty blamings, empty praises,
Here’s an end to their recital,
There is only one thing vital —
Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!
He is moving, he is gaining,
And the whole hushed world is straining,
Straining, yearning, for the vision
Of the doom and the decision —
Haig is moving!

THE GUNS IN SUSSEX

Light green of grass and richer green of bush
Slope upwards to the darkest green of fir.
How still! How deathly still! And yet the hush
Shivers and trembles with some subtle stir,
Some far-off throbbing like a muffled drum,
Beaten in broken rhythm oversea,
To play the last funereal march of some
Who die to-day that Europe may be free.

The deep-blue heaven, curving from the green,
Spans with its shimmering arch the flowery zone;
In all God’s earth there is no gentler scene,
And yet I hear that awesome monotone.
Above the circling midge’s piping shrill,
And the long droning of the questing bee,
Above all sultry summer sounds, it still
Mutters its ceaseless menaces to me.

And as I listen, all the garden fair
Darkens to plains of misery and death,
And, looking past the roses, I see there
Those sordid furrows with the rising breath
Of all things foul and black. My heart is hot
Within me as I view it, and I cry,
“Better the misery of these men’s lot
Than all the peace that comes to such as I!”

And strange that in the pauses of the sound
I hear the children’s laughter as they roam,
And then their mother calls, and all around
Rise up the gentle murmurs of a home.
But still I gaze afar, and at the sight
My whole soul softens to its heart-felt prayer,
“Spirit of Justice, Thou for whom they fight,
Ah, turn in mercy to our lads out there!

“The froward peoples have deserved Thy wrath,
And on them is the Judgment as of old,
But if they wandered from the hallowed path
Yet is their retribution manifold.
Behold all Europe writhing on the rack,
The sins of fathers grinding down the sons!
How long, O Lord?” He sends no answer back,
But still I hear the mutter of the guns.

YPRES

September, 1915

Push on, my Lord of Würtemberg, across the Flemish Fen!
  See where the lure of Ypres calls you!
There's just one ragged British line of Plumer's weary men;
It's true they held you off before, but venture it again,
  Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls you!

You've been some little time, my Lord. Perhaps you scarce remember
  The far-off early days of that resistance.
Was it in October last? Or was it in November?
And now the leaves are turning and you stand in mid-September
  Still staring at the Belfry in the distance.

Can you recall the fateful day — a day of drifting skies,
  When you started on the famous Calais onset?
Can it be the War-Lord blundered when he urged the enterprise?
For surely it's a weary while since first before your eyes
  That old Belfry rose against the sunset.

You held council at your quarters when the budding Alexanders
  And the Pickel-haubed Cæsars gave their reasons.
Was there one amongst that bristle-headed circle of commanders
Ever ventured the opinion that a little town of Flanders
  Would hold you pounded here through all the seasons?

You all clasped hands upon it. You would break the British line,
  You would smash a road to westward with your host,
The howitzers should thunder and the Uhlan lances shine
Till Calais heard the blaring of the distant "Wacht am Rhein,"
  As you topped the grassy uplands of the coast.
Said the Graf von Feuer-Essen, "It's a fact beyond discussion,
  That man to man we can outfight the foe.
There is valour in the French, there is patience in the Russian,
But blend all war-like virtues and you get the lordly Prussian,"
  And the bristle-headed murmured, "Das ist so."

"And the British," cried another, "they are mercenary cattle,
  Without one noble impulse of the soul,
Degenerate and drunken; if the dollars chink and rattle,
'Tis the only sort of music that will call them to the battle."
  And all the bristle-headed cried, "Ja wohl!"
And so next day your battle rolled across the Menin Plain,
  Where Capper's men stood lonely to your wrath.

You broke him, and you broke him, but you broke him all in vain,
For he and his contemptibles kept closing up again,
  And the khaki bar was still across your path.

And on the day when Gheluvelt lay smoking in the sun,
  When Von Deimling stormed so hotly in the van,
You smiled as Haig reeled backwards and you thought him on the run,
But, alas for dreams that vanish, for before the day was done
  It was you, my Lord of Würtemberg, that ran.

A dreary day was that — but another came, more dreary,
  When the Guard from Arras led your fierce attacks,
Spruce and splendid in the morning were the Potsdam Grenadiere,
But not so spruce that evening when they staggered spent and weary,
  With those cursed British storming at their backs.

You knew — your spies had told you — that the ranks were scant and thin,
  That the guns were short of shell and very few,
By all Bernhardi's maxims you were surely bound to win,
There's the open town before you. Haste, my Lord, and enter in,
  Or the War-Lord may have telegrams for you.
Then came the rainy winter, when the price was ever dearer,
  Every time you neared the prize of which you dreamed,
Each day the Belfry faced you but you never brought it nearer,
Each night you saw it clearly but you never saw it clearer.
  Ah, what a weary time it must have seemed!

At last there came the Easter when you loosed the coward gases,
  Surely you have got the rascals now!
You could see them spent and choking as you watched them thro' your
      glasses,
Yes, they choke, but never waver, and again the moment passes
  Without one leaf of laurel for your brow.

Then at Hooge you had them helpless, for their guns were one to ten,
  And you blasted trench and traverse at your will,
You had them dead and buried, but they still sprang up again.
"Donnerwetter!" cried your Lordship, "Donnerwetter!" cried your men,
  For their very ghosts were guarding Ypres still.

Active, Guards, Reserve — men of every corps and name
  That the bugles of the War-Lord muster in,
Each in turn you tried them, but the story was the same;
Play it how you would, my Lord, you never won the game,
  No, never in a twelvemonth did you win.

A year, my Lord of Würtemberg — a year, or nearly so,
  Since first you faced the British vis-à-vis!
Your learned Commandanten are the men who ought to know,
But to ordinary mortals it would seem a trifle slow,

  If you really mean to travel to the sea.

If you cannot *straf* the British, since they *strafen* you so well,
  You can safely smash the town that lies so near,
So it’s down with arch and buttress, down with belfry and with bell,
And it’s *hoch* the seven-seven that can drop the petrol shell
  On the shrines that pious hands have loved to rear!

Fair Ypres was a relic of the soul of other days,
  A poet’s dream, a wanderer’s delight,
We will keep it as a symbol of your brute Teutonic ways
That millions yet unborn may come and curse you as they gaze
  At this token of your impotence and spite.

For shame, my Lord of Würtemberg! Across the Flemish Fen
  See where the little army calls you.
It’s just the old familiar line of fifty thousand men,
They’ve beat you once or twice, my Lord, but venture it again,
  Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls you.

GROUSING

“The army swore terribly in Flanders.”
Uncle Toby.

What do the soldiers say?
  “Dam! Dam! Dam!
I don’t mind cold, I don’t mind heat,
Over the top for a Sunday treat,
With Fritz I’ll always take my spell,
But I want my grub, and where in hell
  Is the jam?”

What does the officer say?
  “Dam! Dam! Dam!
Mud and misery, flies and stench,
Piggin’ it here in a beastly trench,
But what I mean, by Jove, you see,
I like my men and they don’t mind me,
So, on the whole, I’d rather be
  Where I am.”

What does the enemy say?
  “Kolossal Verdam!
They told me, when the war began,
The British Tommy always ran,
And so he does, just as they said,
But, Donnerwetter! it’s straight ahead,
  Like a ram.”

What does the public say?
  “Dam! Dam! Dam!
They tax me here, they tax me there,
Bread is dear and the cupboard bare,
I’m bound to grouse, but if it’s the way
To win the war, why then I’ll pay
  Like a lamb.”

THE VOLUNTEER

(1914–1919)

The dreams are passed and gone, old man,
  That came to you and me,
Of a six days' stunt on an east coast front,
  And the Hun with his back to the sea.

Lord, how we worked and swotted sore
  To be fit when the day should come!
Four years, my lad, and five months more,
  Since first we followed the drum.

Though "Follow the drum" is a bit too grand,
  For we ran to no such frills;
It was just the whistles of Nature's band
  That heartened us up the hills.

That and the toot of the corporal's flute,
  Until he could blow no more,
And the lilt of "Sussex by the Sea,"
  The marching song of the corps.

Those hills! My word, you would soon get fit,
  Be you ever so stale and slack,
If you pad it with rifle and marching kit
  To Rotherfield Hill and back!

Drills in hall, and drills outdoors,
  And drills of every type,
Till we wore our boots with forming fours,
  And our coats with "Shoulder hipe!"

No glory ours, no swank, no pay,
  One dull eventless grind;
Find yourself, and nothing a day
  Were the terms that the old boys signed.

Just drill and march and drill again,
  And swot at the old parade,
But they got two hundred thousand men.
  Not bad for the old brigade!

A good two hundred thousand came,

On the chance of that east coast fight;
They may have been old and stiff and lame,
But, by George, their hearts were right!

Discipline! My! “Eyes right!” they cried,
As we passed the drill hall door,
And left it at that — so we marched cock-eyed
From three to half-past four.

And solid! Why, after a real wet bout
In a hole in the Flanders mud,
It would puzzle the Boche to fetch us out,
For we couldn’t get out if we would!

Some think we could have stood war’s test,
Some say that we could not,
But a chap can only do his best,
And offer all he’s got.

Fall out, the guard! The old home guard!
Pile arms! Right turn! Dismiss!
No grousing, even if it’s hard
To break our ranks like this.

We can’t show much in the way of fun
For four and a half years gone;
If we’d had our chance — just one! just one! —
Carry on, old Sport, carry on!

THE NIGHT PATROL

September 1918

Behind me on the darkened pier
  They crowd and chatter, man and maid,
A coon-song gently strikes the ear,
  A flapper giggles in the shade.
There where the in-turned lantern gleams
  It shines on khaki and on brass;
Across its yellow slanting beams
  The arm-locked lovers slowly pass.

Out in the darkness one far light
  Throbs like a pulse, and fades away —
Some signal on the guarded Wight,
  From Helen’s Point to Bembridge Bay.
An eastern wind blows chill and raw,
  Cheerless and black the waters lie,
And as I gaze athwart the haze,
  I see the night patrol go by.

Creeping shadows blur the gloom,
  Thicken and darken, pass and fade;
Again and yet again they loom,
  One ruby spark above each shade —
Twelve ships in all! They glide so near,
  One hears the wave the fore-foot curled,
And yet to those upon the pier
  They seem some other sterner world.

The coon-song whimpers to a wail,
  The treble laughter sinks and dies,
The lovers cluster on the rail,
  With whispered words and straining eyes.
One hush of awe, and then once more
  The vision fades for them and me,
And there is laughter on the shore,
  And silent duty on the sea.

THE WRECK ON LOCH McGARRY

If you should search all Scotland round,
  The mainland, skerries, and the islands,
A grimmer spot could not be found
  Than Loch McGarry in the Highlands.

Pent in by frowning mountains high,
  It stretches silent as the tomb,
Turbid and thick its waters lie,
  No eye can pierce their yellow gloom.

‘Twas here that on a summer day
  Four tourists hired a crazy wherry.
No warning voices bade them stay,
  As they pushed out on Loch McGarry.

McFarlane, Chairman of the Board,
 A grim hard-fisted son of lucre,
His thoughts were ever on his hoard,
  And life a money-game, like Euchre.

Bob Ainslie, late of London Town,
  A spruce young butterfly of fashion,
A wrinkle in his dressing-gown
  Would rouse an apoplectic passion.

John Waters, John the self-absorbed,
  With thoughts for ever inward bent,
Complacent, self-contained, self-orbed,
  Wrapped in eternal self-content.

Lastly coquettish Mrs. Wild,
  Chattering, rowdy, empty-headed;
At sight of her the whole world smiled,
  Except the wretch whom she had wedded.

Such were the four who sailed that day,
  To the Highlands each a stranger;
Sunlit and calm the wide loch lay,
  With not a hint of coming danger.

Drifting they watched the heather hue,
  The waters and the cliffs that bound them;
The air was still, the sky was blue,
  Deceitful peace lay all around them.

McFarlane pondered on the stocks,
John Waters on his own perfection,
Bob Ainslie’s thoughts were on his socks,
And Mrs. Wild’s on her complexion.

When sudden — oh, that dreadful scream!
That cry from panic fear begotten!
The boat is gaping in each seam,
The worn-out planks are old and rotten.

With two small oars they work and strain,
A long mile from the nearer shore
They cease — their efforts are in vain;
She’s sinking fast, and all is o’er.

The yellow water, thick as pap,
Is crawling, crawling to the thwarts,
And as they mark its upward lap,
So fear goes crawling up their hearts.

Slowly, slowly, thick as pap,
The creeping yellow waters rise;
Like drowning mice within a trap,
They stare around with frantic eyes.

Ah, how clearly they could see
Every sin and shame and error!
How they vowed that saints they’d be,
If delivered from this terror!

How they squirmed and how they squealed!
How they shouted for assistance!
How they fruitlessly appealed
To the shepherds in the distance!

How they sobbed and how they moaned,
As the waters kept encroaching!
How they wept and stormed and groaned,
As they saw their fate approaching!

And they vowed each good resolve
Should be permanent as granite,
Never, never, to dissolve,
Firm and lasting like our planet.

See them sit, aghast and shrinking!
Surely it could not be true!
“Oh, have mercy! Oh, we’re sinking!
Oh, good Lord, what *shall* we do!”

Ah, it’s coming! Now she founders!
See the crazy wherry reel!
Downward to the rocks she flounders —
Just one foot beneath her keel!

In the shallow, turbid water
Lay the saving reef below.
Oh, the waste of high emotion!
Oh, the useless fear and woe!

Late that day four sopping tourists
To their quarters made their way,
And the brushes of Futurists
Scarce could paint their disarray.

And with half-amused compassion
They were viewed from the hotel,
From the pulp-clad beau of fashion,
To the saturated belle.

But a change was in their features,
And that change has come to tarry,
For they all are altered creatures
Since the wreck of Loch McGarry.

Now McFarlane never utters
Any talk of bills or bullion,
But continually mutters
Texts from Cyril or Tertullian.

As to Ainslie, he’s not caring
How the new-cut collar lies,
And has been detected wearing
Dinner-jackets with white ties.

Waters, who had never thought
In his life of others’ needs,
Has most generously bought
A nursing-home for invalids.

And the lady — ah, the lady!
She has turned from paths of sin,
And her husband’s face so shady
Now is brightened by a grin.

So misfortunes of to-day
Are the blessings of to-morrow,
And the wisest cannot say
What is joy and what is sorrow.

If your soul is arable
  You can start this seed within it,
And my tiny parable
  May just help you to begin it.

THE BIGOT

The foolish Roman fondly thought
  That gods must be the same to all,
Each alien idol might be brought
  Within their broad Pantheon Hall.
The vision of a jealous Jove
  Was far above their feeble ken;
They had no Lord who gave them love,
  But scowled upon all other men.

But in our dispensation bright,
  What noble progress have we made!
We know that we are in the light,
  And outer races in the shade.
Our kindly creed ensures us this —
  That Turk and infidel and Jew
Are safely banished from the bliss
  That’s guaranteed to me and you.

The Roman mother understood
  That, if the babe upon her breast
Untimely died, the gods were good,
  And the child’s welfare manifest.
With tender guides the soul would go
  And there, in some Elysian bower,
The tiny bud plucked here below
  Would ripen to the perfect flower.

Poor simpleton! Our faith makes plain
  That, if no blest baptismal word
Has cleared the babe, it bears the stain
  Which faithless Adam had incurred.
How philosophical an aim!
  How wise and well-conceived a plan
Which holds the new-born babe to blame
  For all the sins of early man!

Nay, speak not of its tender grace,
  But hearken to our dogma wise:
Guilt lies behind that dimpled face,
  And sin looks out from gentle eyes.
Quick, quick, the water and the bowl!
  Quick with the words that lift the load!
Oh, hasten, ere that tiny soul
  Shall pay the debt old Adam owed!

The Roman thought the souls that erred
  Would linger in some nether gloom,
But somewhere, sometime, would be spared
  To find some peace beyond the tomb.
In those dark halls, enshadowed, vast,
  They flitted ever, sad and thin,
Mourning the unforgotten past
  Until they shed the taint of sin.

And Pluto brooded over all
  Within that land of night and fear,
Enthroned in some dark Judgment Hall,
  A god himself, reserved, austere.
How thin and colourless and tame!
  Compare our nobler scheme with it,
The howling souls, the leaping flame,
  And all the tortures of the pit!

Foolish half-hearted Roman hell!
  To us is left the higher thought
Of that eternal torture cell
  Whereto the sinner shall be brought.
Out with the thought that God could share
  Our weak relenting pity sense,
Or ever condescend to spare
  The wretch who gave Him just offence!

‘Tis just ten thousand years ago
  Since the vile sinner left his clay,
And yet no pity can he know,
  For as he lies in hell to-day
So when ten thousand years have run
  Still shall he lie in endless night.
O God of Love! O Holy One!
  Have we not read Thy ways aright?

The godly man in heaven shall dwell,
  And live in joy before the throne,
Though somewhere down in nether hell
  His wife or children writhe and groan.
From his bright Empyrean height
  He sees the reek from that abyss —
What Pagan ever dreamed a sight
  So holy and sublime as this!

Poor foolish folk! Had they begun
  To weigh the myths that they professed,
One hour of reason and each one
  Would surely stand a fraud confessed.

Pretending to believe each deed
  Of Theseus or of Hercules,
With fairy tales of Ganymede,
  And gods of rocks and gods of trees!

No, no, had they our purer light
  They would have learned some saner tale
Of Balaam’s ass, or Samson’s might,
  Or prophet Jonah and his whale,
Of talking serpents and their ways,
  Through which our foolish parents strayed,
And how there passed three nights and days
  Before the sun or moon was made!

. . . .

O Bigotry, you crowning sin!
  All evil that a man can do
Has earthly bounds, nor can begin
  To match the mischief done by you —
You, who would force the source of love
  To play your small sectarian part,
And mould the mercy from above
  To fit your own contracted heart.

THE ATHABASCA TRAIL

My life is gliding downwards; it speeds swifter to the day
When it shoots the last dark cañon to the Plains of Far-away,
But while its stream is running through the years that are to be,
The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to me.
I shall hear the roar of rivers where the rapids foam and tear,
I shall smell the virgin upland with its balsam-laden air,
And shall dream that I am riding down the winding woody vale
With the packer and the packhorse on the Athabasca Trail.

I have passed the warden cities at the Eastern water-gate
Where the hero and the martyr laid the corner stone of State,
The habitant, coureur-des-bois, and hardy voyageur —
Where lives a breed more strong at need to venture or endure?
I have seen the gorge of Erie where the roaring waters run,
I have crossed the Inland Ocean, lying golden in the sun,
But the last and best and sweetest is the ride by hill and dale
With the packer and the packhorse on the Athabasca Trail.

I’ll dream again of fields of grain that stretch from sky to sky
And the little prairie hamlets where the cars go roaring by,
Wooden hamlets as I saw them — noble cities still to be,
To girdle stately Canada with gems from sea to sea.
Mother of a mighty manhood, land of glamour and of hope,
From the eastward sea-swept islands to the sunny western slope,
Ever more my heart is with you, ever more till life shall fail
I’ll be out with pack and packer on the Athabasca Trail.

RAGTIME!

[“During the catastrophe the band of the *Titanic* played negro melodies and ragtime until the last moment, when they broke into a hymn.” — Daily Paper.]

Ragtime! Ragtime! Keep it going still!
Let them hear the ragtime! Play it with a will!
Women in the lifeboats, men upon the wreck,
Take heart to hear the ragtime lilting down the deck.

Ragtime! Ragtime! Yet another tune!
Now the “Darkey Dandy,” now “The Yellow Coon!”
Brace against the bulwarks if the stand’s askew,
Find your footing as you can, but keep the music true!

There’s glowing hell beneath us where the shattered boilers roar,
The ship is listing and awash, the boats will hold no more!
There’s nothing more that you can do, and nothing you can mend,
Only keep the ragtime playing to the end.

Don’t forget the time, boys! Eyes upon the score!
Never heed the wavelets sobbing down the floor!
Play it as you played it when with eager feet
A hundred pair of dancers were stamping to the beat.

Stamping to the ragtime down the lamp-lit deck,
With shine of glossy linen and with gleam of snowy neck,
They’ve other thoughts to think to-night, and other things to do,
But the tinkle of the ragtime may help to see them through.

Shut off, shut off the ragtime! The lights are falling low!
The deck is buckling under us! She’s sinking by the bow!
One hymn of hope from dying hands on dying ears to fall —
Gently the music fades away — and so, God rest us all!

CHRISTMAS IN WARTIME

1916

Cheer oh, comrades, we can bide the blast
  And face the gloom until it shall grow lighter.
What though one Christmas should be overcast,
  If duty done makes all the others brighter.

1917

THE LAST LAP

We seldom were quick off the mark,
  And sprinting was never our game;
But when it’s insistence and hold-for-the-distance,
  We’ve never been beat at that same.

The first lap was all to the Hun,
  At the second we still saw his back;
But we knew how to wait and to spurt down the straight,
  Till we left him dead-beat on the track.

He’s a bluffer for all he is worth,
  But he’s winded and done to the core,
So the last lap is here, with the tape very near,
  And the old colours well to the fore.

1918

Not merry! No — the words would grate,
  With gaps at every table-side,
But chastened, thankful, calm, sedate,
  Be your victorious Christmas-tide.

LINDISFAIRE

Horses go down the dingy lane,
But never a horse comes up again.
The greasy yard where the red hides lie
Marks the place where the horses die.

Wheat was sinking year by year,
I bought things cheap, I sold them dear;
Rent was heavy and taxes high,
And a weary-hearted man was I.

In Lindisfaire I walked my grounds,
I hadn’t the heart to ride to hounds;
And as I walked in black despair,
I saw my old bay hunter there.

He tried to nuzzle against my cheek,
He looked the grief he could not speak;
But no caress came back again,
For harder times make harder men.

My thoughts were set on stable rent,
On money saved and money spent,
On weekly bills for forage lost,
And all the old bay hunter cost.

For though a flier in the past,
His days of service long were past,
His gait was stiff, his eyes were dim,
And I could find no use for him.

I turned away with heart of gloom,
And sent for Will, my father’s groom,
The old, old groom, whose worn-out face
Was like the fortune of our race.

I gave my order sharp and hard,
“Go, ride him to the knacker’s yard;
He’ll fetch two pounds, it may be three;
Sell him, and bring the price to me.”

I saw the old groom wince away,
He looked the thoughts he dared not say;
Then from his fob he slowly drew
A leather pouch of faded hue.

“Master,” said he, “my means are small,
This purse of leather holds them all;
But I have neither kith nor kin,
I’ll pay your price for Prince’s skin.

“My brother rents the Nether Farm,
And he will hold him safe from harm
In the great field where he may graze,
And see the finish of his days.”

With dimming eyes I saw him stand,
Two pounds were in his shaking hand;
I gave a curse to drown the sob,
And thrust the purse within his fob.

“May God do this and more to me
If we should ever part, we three,
Master and horse and faithful friend,
We’ll share together to the end!”

You’ll think I’m playing it on you,
I give my word the thing is true;
I hadn’t hardly made the vow,
Before I heard a view-halloo.

And, looking round, whom should I see,
But Bookie Johnson hailing me;
Johnson, the man who bilked the folks
When Ethelrida won the Oaks.

He drew a wad from out his vest,
“Here are a thousand of the best;
Luck’s turned a bit with me of late,
And, as you see, I’m getting straight.”

That’s all. My luck was turning too;
If you have nothing else to do,
Run down some day to Lindisfaire,
You’ll find the old bay hunter there.

A PARABLE

High-brow House was furnished well
    With many a goblet fair;
So when they brought the Holy Grail,
    There was never a space to spare.
Simple Cottage was clear and clean,
    With room to store at will;
So there they laid the Holy Grail,
    And there you’ll find it still.

FATE

I know not how I know,
    And yet I know.
I do not plan to go,
    And yet I go.
There is some dim force propelling,
Gently guiding and compelling,
And a faint voice ever telling
    “This is so.”

The path is rough and black —
    Dark as night —
And there lies a fairer track
    In the light.
Yet I may not shirk or shrink,
For I feel the hands that link
As they guide me on the brink
    Of the Height.

  Bigots blame me in their wrath.
    Let them blame!
  Praise or blame, the fated path
    Is the same.
If I droop upon my mission,
There is still that saving vision,
Iridescent and Elysian,
    Tipped in flame.

  It was granted me to stand
    By my dead.
  I have felt the vanished hand
    On my head,
On my brow the vanished lips,
And I know that Death’s eclipse
Is a floating veil that slips,
    Or is shed.

When I heard thy well-known voice,
    Son of mine,
Should I silently rejoice,
    Or incline
To strike harder as a fighter,
That the heavy might be lighter,
And the gloomy might be brighter
    At the sign?

Great Guide, I ask you still,
        “Wherefore I?”
But if it be thy will
        That I try,
Trace my pathway among men,
Show me how to strike, and when,
Take me to the fight — and then,
                    Oh, be nigh!

The Non Fiction

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and to his right Lady Conan Doyle at the Great Divide, Jasper National Park, June 1914.

THE GREAT BOER WAR

This non-fiction work focuses on the Boer War and was first published in 1900. By the end of the war in 1902 the book had been published in 16 editions, and was constantly revised by Doyle.

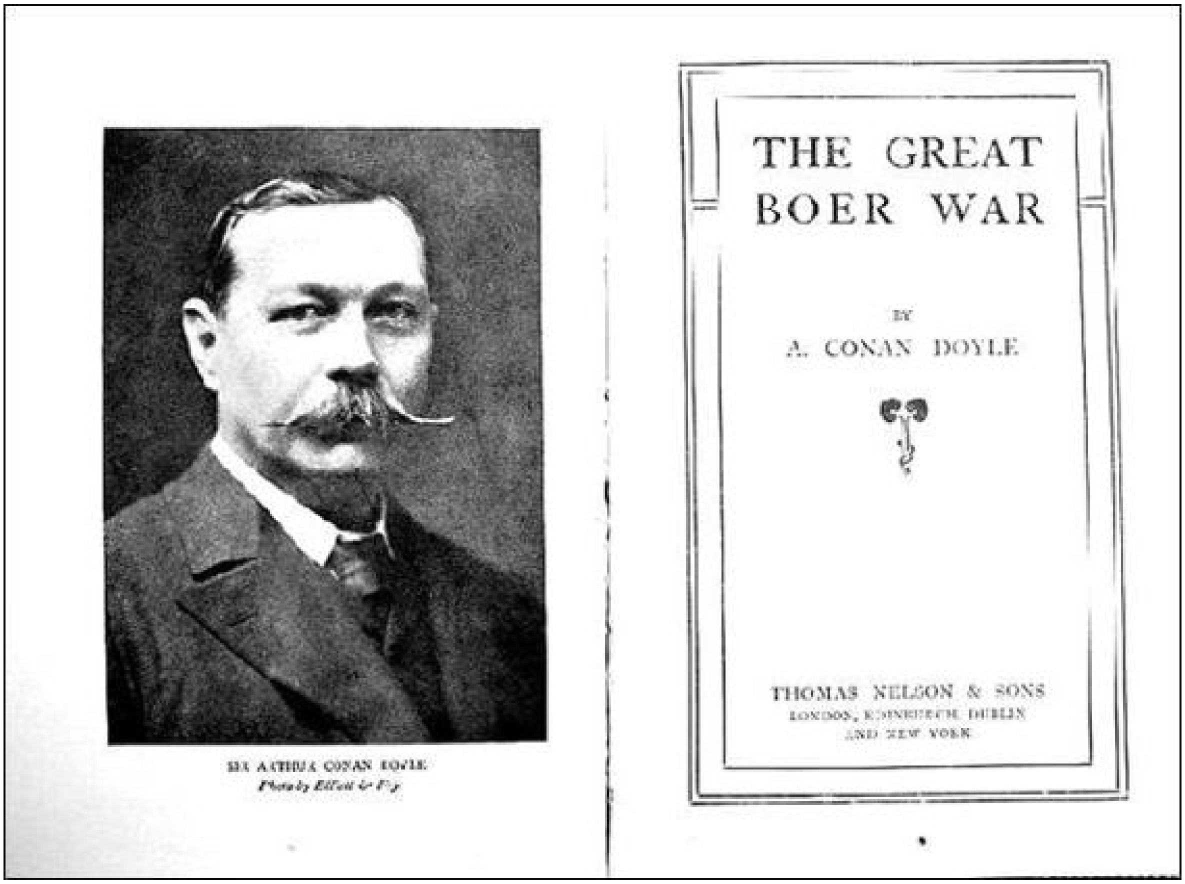

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
Photo by Elliott & Fry

THE GREAT
BOER WAR

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

THOMAS NELSON & SONS
LONDON, EDINBURGH, DUBLIN
AND NEW YORK

The original title page

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PREFACE TO THE FINAL EDITION.

During the course of the war some sixteen Editions of this work have appeared, each of which was, I hope, a little more full and accurate than that which preceded it. I may fairly claim, however, that the absolute mistakes made have been few in number, and that I have never had occasion to reverse, and seldom to modify, the judgments which I have formed. In this final edition the early text has been carefully revised and all fresh available knowledge has been added within the limits of a single volume narrative. Of the various episodes in the latter half of the war it is impossible to say that the material is available for a complete and final chronicle. By the aid, however, of the official dispatches, of the newspapers, and of many private letters, I have done my best to give an intelligible and accurate account of the matter. The treatment may occasionally seem too brief but some proportion must be observed between the battles of 1899-1900 and the skirmishes of 1901-1902.

My private informants are so numerous that it would be hardly possible, even if it were desirable, that I should quote their names. Of the correspondents upon whose work I have drawn for my materials, I would acknowledge my obligations to Messrs. Burleigh, Nevinson, Battersby, Stuart, Amery, Atkins, Baillie, Kinneir, Churchill, James, Ralph, Barnes, Maxwell, Pearce, Hamilton, and others. Especially I would mention the gentleman who represented the ‘Standard’ in the last year of the war, whose accounts of Vlakfontein, Von Donop’s Convoy, and Tweebosch were the only reliable ones which reached the public.

Arthur Conan Doyle, Undershaw, Hindhead: September 1902.

CHAPTER 1. THE BOER NATIONS.

Take a community of Dutchmen of the type of those who defended themselves for fifty years against all the power of Spain at a time when Spain was the greatest power in the world. Intermix with them a strain of those inflexible French Huguenots who gave up home and fortune and left their country for ever at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The product must obviously be one of the most rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen upon earth. Take this formidable people and train them for seven generations in constant warfare against savage men and ferocious beasts, in circumstances under which no weakling could survive, place them so that they acquire exceptional skill with weapons and in horsemanship, give them a country which is eminently suited to the tactics of the huntsman, the marksman, and the rider. Then, finally, put a finer temper upon their military qualities by a dour fatalistic Old Testament religion and an ardent and consuming patriotism. Combine all these qualities and all these impulses in one individual, and you have the modern Boer — the most formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain. Our military history has largely consisted in our conflicts with France, but Napoleon and all his veterans have never treated us so roughly as these hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology and their inconveniently modern rifles.

Look at the map of South Africa, and there, in the very centre of the British possessions, like the stone in a peach, lies the great stretch of the two republics, a mighty domain for so small a people. How came they there? Who are these Teutonic folk who have burrowed so deeply into Africa? It is a twice-told tale, and yet it must be told once again if this story is to have even the most superficial of introductions. No one can know or appreciate the Boer who does not know his past, for he is what his past has made him.

It was about the time when Oliver Cromwell was at his zenith — in 1652, to be pedantically accurate — that the Dutch made their first lodgment at the Cape of Good Hope. The Portuguese had been there before them, but, repelled by the evil weather, and lured forwards by rumours of gold, they had passed the true seat of empire and had voyaged further to settle along the eastern coast. Some gold there was, but not much, and the Portuguese settlements have never been sources of wealth to the mother country, and never will be until the day when Great Britain signs her huge cheque for Delagoa Bay. The coast upon which they settled reeked with malaria. A hundred miles of poisonous marsh separated it from the healthy inland plateau. For centuries these pioneers of South African colonisation strove to obtain some further footing, but save along the courses of the rivers they made little progress. Fierce natives and an enervating climate barred their way.

But it was different with the Dutch. That very rudeness of climate which had so impressed the Portuguese adventurer was the source of their success. Cold and poverty and storm are the nurses of the qualities which make for empire. It is the men from the bleak and barren lands who master the children of the light and the heat. And so the Dutchmen at the Cape prospered and grew stronger in that robust climate. They did not penetrate far inland, for they were few in number and all they wanted was to be found close at hand. But they built themselves houses, and they supplied the Dutch East India Company with food and water, gradually budding off little townlets, Wynberg, Stellenbosch, and pushing their settlements up the long slopes which lead to that great central plateau which extends for fifteen hundred miles from the edge of the Karoo to the Valley of the Zambesi. Then came the additional Huguenot emigrants — the best blood of France three hundred of them, a handful of the choicest seed thrown in to give a touch of grace and soul to the solid Teutonic strain. Again and again in the course of history, with the Normans, the Huguenots, the Emigres, one can see the great hand dipping into that storehouse and sprinkling the nations with the same splendid seed. France has not founded other countries, like her great rival, but she has made every other country the richer by the mixture with her choicest and best. The Rouxs, Du Toits, Jouberts, Du Plessis, Villiers, and a score of other French names are among the most familiar in South Africa.

For a hundred more years the history of the colony was a record of the gradual spreading of the Afrikaners over the huge expanse of veld which lay to the north of them. Cattle raising became an industry, but in a country where six acres can hardly support a sheep, large farms are necessary for even small herds. Six thousand acres was the usual size, and five pounds a year the rent payable to Government. The diseases which follow the white man had in Africa, as in America and Australia, been fatal to the natives, and an epidemic of smallpox cleared the country for the newcomers. Further and further north they pushed, founding little towns here and there, such as Graaf-Reinet and Swellendam, where a Dutch Reformed Church and a store for the sale of the bare necessaries of life formed a nucleus for a few scattered dwellings. Already the settlers were showing that independence of control and that detachment from Europe which has been their most prominent characteristic. Even the sway of the Dutch Company (an older but weaker brother of John Company in India) had caused them to revolt. The local rising, however, was hardly noticed in the universal cataclysm which followed the French Revolution. After twenty years, during which the world was shaken by the Titanic struggle between England and France in the final counting up of the game and paying of the stakes, the Cape Colony was added in 1814 to the British Empire.

In all our vast collection of States there is probably not one the title-deeds to which are more incontestable than to this one. We had it by two rights, the right of conquest and the right of purchase. In 1806 our troops landed, defeated the local forces, and took possession of Cape Town. In 1814 we paid the large sum of six million pounds to the Stadholder for the transference of this and some South American land. It was a bargain which was probably made rapidly and carelessly in that general redistribution which was going on. As a house of call upon the way to India the place was seen to be of value, but the country itself was looked upon as unprofitable and desert. What would Castlereagh or Liverpool have thought could they have seen the items which we were buying for our six million pounds? The inventory would have been a mixed one of good and of evil; nine fierce Kaffir wars, the greatest diamond mines in the world, the wealthiest gold mines, two costly and humiliating campaigns with men whom we respected even when we fought with them, and now at last, we hope, a South Africa of peace and prosperity, with equal rights and equal duties for all men. The future should hold something very good for us in that land, for if we merely count the past we should be compelled to say that we should have been stronger, richer, and higher in the world’s esteem had our possessions there never passed beyond the range of the guns of our men-of-war. But surely the most arduous is the most honourable, and, looking back from the end of their journey, our descendants may see that our long record of struggle, with its mixture of disaster and success, its outpouring of blood and of treasure, has always tended to some great and enduring goal.

The title-deeds to the estate are, as I have said, good ones, but there is one singular and ominous flaw in their provisions. The ocean has marked three boundaries to it, but the fourth is undefined. There is no word of the ‘Hinterland;’ for neither the term nor the idea had then been thought of. Had Great Britain bought those vast regions which extended beyond the settlements? Or were the discontented Dutch at liberty to pass onwards and found fresh nations to bar the path of the Anglo-Celtic colonists? In that question lay the germ of all the trouble to come. An American would realise the point at issue if he could conceive that after the founding of the United States the Dutch inhabitants of the State of New York had trekked to the westward and established fresh communities under a new flag. Then, when the American population overtook these western States, they would be face to face with the problem which this country has had to solve. If they found these new States fiercely anti-American and extremely unprogressive, they would experience that aggravation of their difficulties with which our statesmen have had to deal.

At the time of their transference to the British flag the colonists — Dutch, French, and German — numbered some thirty thousand. They were slaveholders, and the slaves were about as numerous as themselves. The prospect of complete amalgamation between the British and the original settlers would have seemed to be a good one, since they were of much the same stock, and their creeds could only be distinguished by their varying degrees of bigotry and intolerance. Five thousand British emigrants were landed in 1820, settling on the Eastern borders of the colony, and from that time onwards there was a slow but steady influx of English speaking colonists. The Government had the historical faults and the historical virtues of British rule. It was mild, clean, honest, tactless, and inconsistent. On the whole, it might have done very well had it been content to leave things as it found them. But to change the habits of the most conservative of Teutonic races was a dangerous venture, and one which has led to a long series of complications, making up the troubled history of South Africa. The Imperial Government has always taken an honourable and philanthropic view of the rights of the native and the claim which he has to the protection of the law. We hold and rightly, that British justice, if not blind, should at least be colour-blind. The view is irreproachable in theory and incontestable in argument, but it is apt to be irritating when urged by a Boston moralist or a London philanthropist upon men whose whole society has been built upon the assumption that the black is the inferior race. Such a people like to find the higher morality for themselves, not to have it imposed upon them by those who live under entirely different conditions. They feel — and with some reason — that it is a cheap form of virtue which, from the serenity of a well-ordered household in Beacon Street or Belgrave Square, prescribes what the relation shall be between a white employer and his half-savage, half-childish retainers. Both branches of the Anglo-Celtic race have grappled with the question, and in each it has led to trouble.

The British Government in South Africa has always played the unpopular part of the friend and protector of the native servants. It was upon this very point that the first friction appeared between the old settlers and the new administration. A rising with bloodshed followed the arrest of a Dutch farmer who had maltreated his slave. It was suppressed, and five of the participants were hanged. This punishment was unduly severe and exceedingly injudicious. A brave race can forget the victims of the field of battle, but never those of the scaffold. The making of political martyrs is the last insanity of statesmanship. It is true that both the man who arrested and the judge who condemned the prisoners were Dutch, and that the British Governor interfered on the side of mercy; but all this was forgotten afterwards in the desire to make racial capital out of the incident. It is typical of the enduring resentment which was left behind that when, after the Jameson raid, it seemed that the leaders of that ill-fated venture might be hanged, the beam was actually brought from a farmhouse at Cookhouse Drift to Pretoria, that the Englishmen might die as the Dutchmen had died in 1816. Slagter’s Nek marked the dividing of the ways between the British Government and the Afrikaners.

And the separation soon became more marked. There were injudicious tamperings with the local government and the local ways, with a substitution of English for Dutch in the law courts. With vicarious generosity, the English Government gave very lenient terms to the Kaffir tribes who in 1834 had raided the border farmers. And then, finally, in this same year there came the emancipation of the slaves throughout the British Empire, which fanned all smouldering discontents into an active flame.

It must be confessed that on this occasion the British philanthropist was willing to pay for what he thought was right. It was a noble national action, and one the morality of which was in advance of its time, that the British Parliament should vote the enormous sum of twenty million pounds to pay compensation to the slaveholders, and so to remove an evil with which the mother country had no immediate connection. It was as well that the thing should have been done when it was, for had we waited till the colonies affected had governments of their own it could never have been done by constitutional methods. With many a grumble the good British householder drew his purse from his fob, and he paid for what he thought to be right. If any special grace attends the virtuous action which brings nothing but tribulation in this world, then we may hope for it over this emancipation. We spent our money, we ruined our West Indian colonies, and we started a disaffection in South Africa, the end of which we have not seen. Yet if it were to be done again we should doubtless do it. The highest morality may prove also to be the highest wisdom when the half-told story comes to be finished.

But the details of the measure were less honourable than the principle. It was carried out suddenly, so that the country had no time to adjust itself to the new conditions. Three million pounds were ear-marked for South Africa, which gives a price per slave of from sixty to seventy pounds, a sum considerably below the current local rates. Finally, the compensation was made payable in London, so that the farmers sold their claims at reduced prices to middlemen. Indignation meetings were held in every little townlet and cattle camp on the Karoo. The old Dutch spirit was up — the spirit of the men who cut the dykes. Rebellion was useless. But a vast untenanted land stretched to the north of them. The nomad life was congenial to them, and in their huge ox-drawn wagons — like those bullock-carts in which some of their old kinsmen came to Gaul — they had vehicles and homes and forts all in one. One by one they were loaded up, the huge teams were inspanned, the women were seated inside, the men, with their long-barrelled guns, walked alongside, and the great exodus was begun. Their herds and flocks accompanied the migration, and the children helped to round them in and drive them. One tattered little boy of ten cracked his sjambok whip behind the bullocks. He was a small item in that singular crowd, but he was of interest to us, for his name was Paul Stephanus Kruger.

It was a strange exodus, only comparable in modern times to the sallying forth of the Mormons from Nauvoo upon their search for the promised laud of Utah. The country was known and sparsely settled as far north as the Orange River, but beyond there was a great region which had never been penetrated save by some daring hunter or adventurous pioneer. It chanced — if there be indeed such an element as chance in the graver affairs of man — that a Zulu conqueror had swept over this land and left it untenanted, save by the dwarf bushmen, the hideous aborigines, lowest of the human race. There were fine grazing and good soil for the emigrants. They traveled in small detached parties, but their total numbers were considerable, from six to ten thousand according to their historian, or nearly a quarter of the whole population of the colony. Some of the early bands perished miserably. A large number made a trysting-place at a high peak to the east of Bloemfontein in what was lately the Orange Free State. One party of the emigrants was cut off by the formidable Matabeli, a branch of the great Zulu nation. The survivors declared war upon them, and showed in this, their first campaign, the extraordinary ingenuity in adapting their tactics to their adversary which has been their greatest military characteristic. The commando which rode out to do battle with the Matabeli numbered, it is said, a hundred and thirty-five farmers. Their adversaries were twelve thousand spearmen. They met at the Marico River, near Mafeking. The Boers combined the use of their horses and of their rifles so cleverly that they slaughtered a third of their antagonists without any loss to themselves. Their tactics were to gallop up within range of the enemy, to fire a volley, and then to ride away again before the spearmen could reach them. When the savages pursued the Boers fled. When the pursuit halted the Boers halted and the rifle fire began anew. The strategy was simple but most effective. When one remembers how often since then our own horsemen have been pitted against savages in all parts of the world, one deplores that ignorance of all military traditions save our own which is characteristic of our service.

This victory of the ‘voortrekkers’ cleared all the country between the Orange River and the Limpopo, the sites of what has been known as the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In the meantime another body of the emigrants had descended into what is now known as Natal, and had defeated Dingaan, the great Chief of the Zulus. Being unable, owing to the presence of their families, to employ the cavalry tactics which had been so effective against the Matabeli, they again used their ingenuity to meet this new situation, and received the Zulu warriors in a square of laagered wagons, the men firing while the women loaded. Six burghers were killed and three thousand Zulus. Had such a formation been used forty years afterwards against these very Zulus, we should not have had to mourn the disaster of Isandhlwana.

And now at the end of their great journey, after overcoming the difficulties of distance, of nature, and of savage enemies, the Boers saw at the end of their travels the very thing which they desired least — that which they had come so far to avoid — the flag of Great Britain. The Boers had occupied Natal from within, but England had previously done the same by sea, and a small colony of Englishmen had settled at Port Natal, now known as Durban. The home Government, however, had acted in a vacillating way, and it was only the conquest of Natal by the Boers which caused them to claim it as a British colony. At the same time they asserted the unwelcome doctrine that a British subject could not at will throw off his allegiance, and that, go where they might, the wandering farmers were still only the pioneers of British colonies. To emphasise the fact three companies of soldiers were sent in 1842 to what is now Durban — the usual Corporal's guard with which Great Britain starts a new empire. This handful of men was waylaid by the Boers and cut up, as their successors have been so often since. The survivors, however, fortified themselves, and held a defensive position — as also their successors have done so many times since — until reinforcements arrived and the farmers dispersed. It is singular how in history the same factors will always give the same result. Here in this first skirmish is an epitome of all our military relations with these people. The blundering headstrong attack, the defeat, the powerlessness of the farmer against the weakest fortifications — it is the same tale over and over again in different scales of importance. Natal from this time onward became a British colony, and the majority of the Boers trekked north and east with bitter hearts to tell their wrongs to their brethren of the Orange Free State and of the Transvaal.

Had they any wrongs to tell? It is difficult to reach that height of philosophic detachment which enables the historian to deal absolutely impartially where his own country is a party to the quarrel. But at least we may allow that there is a case for our adversary. Our annexation of Natal had been by no means definite, and it was they and not we who first broke that bloodthirsty Zulu power which threw its shadow across the country. It was hard after such trials and such exploits to turn their back upon the fertile land which they had conquered, and to return to the bare pastures of the upland veld. They carried out of Natal a heavy sense of injury, which has helped to poison our relations with them ever since. It was, in a way, a momentous episode, this little skirmish of soldiers and emigrants, for it was the heading off of the Boer from the sea and the confinement of his ambition to the land. Had it gone the other way, a new and possibly formidable flag would have been added to the maritime nations.

The emigrants who had settled in the huge tract of country between the Orange River in the south and the Limpopo in the north had been recruited by newcomers from the Cape Colony until they numbered some fifteen thousand souls. This population was scattered over a space as large as Germany, and larger than Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. Their form of government was individualistic and democratic to the last degree compatible with any sort of cohesion. Their wars with the Kaffirs and their fear and dislike of the British Government appear to have been the only ties which held them together. They divided and subdivided within their own borders, like a germinating egg. The Transvaal was full of lusty little high-mettled communities, who quarreled among themselves as fiercely as they had done with the authorities at the Cape. Lydenburg, Zoutpansberg, and Potchefstroom were on the point of turning their rifles against each other. In the south, between the Orange River and the Vaal, there was no form of government at all, but a welter of Dutch farmers, Basutos, Hottentots, and halfbreeds living in a chronic state of turbulence, recognising neither the British authority to the south of them nor the Transvaal republics to the north. The chaos became at last unendurable, and in 1848 a garrison was placed in Bloemfontein and the district incorporated in the British Empire. The emigrants made a futile resistance at Boomplaats, and after a single defeat allowed themselves to be drawn into the settled order of civilised rule.

At this period the Transvaal, where most of the Boers had settled, desired a formal acknowledgment of their independence, which the British authorities determined once and for all to give them. The great barren country, which produced little save marksmen, had no attractions for a Colonial Office which was bent upon the limitation of its liabilities. A Convention was concluded between the two parties, known as the Sand

River Convention, which is one of the fixed points in South African history. By it the British Government guaranteed to the Boer farmers the right to manage their own affairs, and to govern themselves by their own laws without any interference upon the part of the British. It stipulated that there should be no slavery, and with that single reservation washed its hands finally, as it imagined, of the whole question. So the South African Republic came formally into existence.

In the very year after the Sand River Convention a second republic, the Orange Free State, was created by the deliberate withdrawal of Great Britain from the territory which she had for eight years occupied. The Eastern Question was already becoming acute, and the cloud of a great war was drifting up, visible to all men. British statesmen felt that their commitments were very heavy in every part of the world, and the South African annexations had always been a doubtful value and an undoubted trouble. Against the will of a large part of the inhabitants, whether a majority or not it is impossible to say, we withdrew our troops as amicably as the Romans withdrew from Britain, and the new republic was left with absolute and unfettered independence. On a petition being presented against the withdrawal, the Home Government actually voted forty-eight thousand pounds to compensate those who had suffered from the change. Whatever historical grievance the Transvaal may have against Great Britain, we can at least, save perhaps in one matter, claim to have a very clear conscience concerning our dealings with the Orange Free State. Thus in 1852 and in 1854 were born those sturdy States who were able for a time to hold at bay the united forces of the empire.

In the meantime Cape Colony, in spite of these secessions, had prospered exceedingly, and her population — English, German, and Dutch — had grown by 1870 to over two hundred thousand souls, the Dutch still slightly predominating. According to the Liberal colonial policy of Great Britain, the time had come to cut the cord and let the young nation conduct its own affairs. In 1872 complete self-government was given to it, the Governor, as the representative of the Queen, retaining a nominal unexercised veto upon legislation. According to this system the Dutch majority of the colony could, and did, put their own representatives into power and run the government upon Dutch lines. Already Dutch law had been restored, and Dutch put on the same footing as English as the official language of the country. The extreme liberality of such measures, and the uncompromising way in which they have been carried out, however distasteful the legislation might seem to English ideas, are among the chief reasons which made the illiberal treatment of British settlers in the Transvaal so keenly resented at the Cape. A Dutch Government was ruling the British in a British colony, at a moment when the Boers would not give an Englishman a vote upon a municipal council in a city which he had built himself. Unfortunately, however, ‘the evil that men do lives after them,’ and the ignorant Boer farmer continued to imagine that his southern relatives were in bondage, just as the descendant of the Irish emigrant still pictures an Ireland of penal laws and an alien Church.

For twenty-five years after the Sand River Convention the burghers of the South African Republic had pursued a strenuous and violent existence, fighting incessantly with the natives and sometimes with each other, with an occasional fling at the little Dutch republic to the south. The semi-tropical sun was waking strange ferments in the placid Friesland blood, and producing a race who added the turbulence and restlessness of the south to the formidable tenacity of the north. Strong vitality and violent ambitions produced feuds and rivalries worthy of medieval Italy, and the story of the factious little communities is like a chapter out of Guicciardini. Disorganisation ensued. The burghers would not pay taxes and the treasury was empty. One fierce Kaffir tribe threatened them from the north, and the Zulus on the east. It is an exaggeration of English partisans to pretend that our intervention saved the Boers, for no one can read their military history without seeing that they were a match for Zulus and Sekukuni combined. But certainly a formidable invasion was pending, and the scattered farmhouses were as open to the Kaffirs as our farmers’ homesteads were in the American colonies when the Indians were on the warpath. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, the British Commissioner, after an inquiry of three months, solved all questions by the formal annexation of the country. The fact that he took possession of it with a force of some twenty-five men showed the honesty of his belief that no armed resistance was to be feared. This, then, in 1877 was a complete reversal of the Sand River Convention and the opening of a new chapter in the history of South Africa.

There did not appear to be any strong feeling at the time against the annexation. The people were depressed with their troubles and weary of contention. Burgers, the President, put in a formal protest, and took up his abode in Cape Colony, where he had a pension from the British

Government. A memorial against the measure received the signatures of a majority of the Boer inhabitants, but there was a fair minority who took the other view. Kruger himself accepted a paid office under Government. There was every sign that the people, if judiciously handled, would settle down under the British flag. It is even asserted that they would themselves have petitioned for annexation had it been longer withheld. With immediate constitutional government it is possible that even the most recalcitrant of them might have been induced to lodge their protests in the ballot boxes rather than in the bodies of our soldiers.

But the empire has always had poor luck in South Africa, and never worse than on that occasion. Through no bad faith, but simply through preoccupation and delay, the promises made were not instantly fulfilled. Simple primitive men do not understand the ways of our circumlocution offices, and they ascribe to duplicity what is really red tape and stupidity. If the Transvaalers had waited they would have had their Volksraad and all that they wanted. But the British Government had some other local matters to set right, the rooting out of Sekukuni and the breaking of the Zulus, before they would fulfill their pledges. The delay was keenly resented. And we were unfortunate in our choice of Governor. The burghers are a homely folk, and they like an occasional cup of coffee with the anxious man who tries to rule them. The three hundred pounds a year of coffee money allowed by the Transvaal to its President is by no means a mere form. A wise administrator would fall into the sociable and democratic habits of the people. Sir Theophilus Shepstone did so. Sir Owen Lanyon did not. There was no Volksraad and no coffee, and the popular discontent grew rapidly. In three years the British had broken up the two savage hordes which had been threatening the land. The finances, too, had been restored. The reasons which had made so many favour the annexation were weakened by the very power which had every interest in preserving them.

It cannot be too often pointed out that in this annexation, the starting-point of our troubles, Great Britain, however mistaken she may have been, had no obvious selfish interest in view. There were no Rand mines in those days, nor was there anything in the country to tempt the most covetous. An empty treasury and two native wars were the reversion which we took over. It was honestly considered that the country was in too distracted a state to govern itself, and had, by its weakness, become a scandal and a danger to its neighbours. There was nothing sordid in our action, though it may have been both injudicious and high-handed.

In December 1880 the Boers rose. Every farmhouse sent out its riflemen, and the trysting-place was the outside of the nearest British fort. All through the country small detachments were surrounded and besieged by the farmers. Standerton, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Lydenburg, Wakkerstroom, Rustenberg, and Marabastad were all invested and all held out until the end of the war. In the open country we were less fortunate. At Bronkhorst Spruit a small British force was taken by surprise and shot down without harm to their antagonists. The surgeon who treated them has left it on record that the average number of wounds was five per man. At Laing’s Nek an inferior force of British endeavoured to rush a hill which was held by Boer riflemen. Half of our men were killed and wounded. Ingogo may be called a drawn battle, though our loss was more heavy than that of the enemy. Finally came the defeat of Majuba Hill, where four hundred infantry upon a mountain were defeated and driven off by a swarm of sharpshooters who advanced under the cover of boulders. Of all these actions there was not one which was more than a skirmish, and had they been followed by a final British victory they would now be hardly remembered. It is the fact that they were skirmishes which succeeded in their object which has given them an importance which is exaggerated. At the same time they may mark the beginning of a new military era, for they drove home the fact — only too badly learned by us — that it is the rifle and not the drill which makes the soldier. It is bewildering that after such an experience the British military authorities continued to serve out only three hundred cartridges a year for rifle practice, and that they still encouraged that mechanical volley firing which destroys all individual aim. With the experience of the first Boer war behind them, little was done, either in tactics or in musketry, to prepare the soldier for the second. The value of the mounted rifleman, the shooting with accuracy at unknown ranges, the art of taking cover — all were equally neglected.

The defeat at Majuba Hill was followed by the complete surrender of the Gladstonian Government, an act which was either the most pusillanimous or the most magnanimous in recent history. It is hard for the big man to draw away from the small before blows are struck but when the big man has been knocked down three times it is harder still. An overwhelming British force was in the field, and the General declared that he held the enemy in the hollow of his hand. Our military calculations have been falsified before now by these farmers, and it may be that the task of Wood and Roberts would have been harder than they imagined; but on paper, at least, it looked as if the enemy could be crushed without difficulty. So the public thought, and yet they consented to the upraised sword being stayed. With them, as apart from the politicians, the motive was undoubtedly a moral and Christian one. They considered that the annexation of the Transvaal had evidently been an injustice, that the farmers had a right to the freedom for which they fought, and that it was an unworthy thing for a great nation to continue an unjust war for the sake of a military revenge. It was the height of idealism, and the result has not been such as to encourage its repetition.

An armistice was concluded on March 5th, 1881, which led up to a peace on the 23rd of the same month. The Government, after yielding to force what it had repeatedly refused to friendly representations, made a clumsy compromise in their settlement. A policy of idealism and Christian morality should have been thorough if it were to be tried at all. It was obvious that if the annexation were unjust, then the Transvaal should have reverted to the condition in which it was before the annexation, as defined by the Sand River Convention. But the Government for some reason would not go so far as this. They niggled and quibbled and bargained until the State was left as a curious hybrid thing such as the world has never seen. It was a republic which was part of the system of a monarchy, dealt with by the Colonial Office, and included under the heading of ‘Colonies’ in the news columns of the ‘Times.’ It was autonomous, and yet subject to some vague suzerainty, the limits of which no one has ever been able to define. Altogether, in its provisions and in its omissions, the Convention of Pretoria appears to prove that our political affairs were as badly conducted as our military in this unfortunate year of 1881.

It was evident from the first that so illogical and contentious an agreement could not possibly prove to be a final settlement, and indeed the ink of the signatures was hardly dry before an agitation was on foot for its revision. The Boers considered, and with justice, that if they were to be left as undisputed victors in the war then they should have the full fruits of victory. On the other hand, the English-speaking colonies had their allegiance tested to the uttermost. The proud Anglo-Celtic stock is not accustomed to be humbled, and yet they found themselves through the action of the home Government converted into members of a beaten race. It was very well for the citizen of London to console his wounded pride by the thought that he had done a magnanimous action, but it was different with the British colonist of Durban or Cape Town, who by no act of his own, and without any voice in the settlement, found himself humiliated before his Dutch neighbour. An ugly feeling of resentment was left behind, which might perhaps have passed away had the Transvaal accepted the settlement in the spirit in which it was meant, but which grew more and more dangerous as during eighteen years our people saw, or thought that they saw, that one concession led always to a fresh demand, and that the Dutch republics aimed not merely at equality, but at dominance in South Africa. Professor Bryce, a friendly critic, after a personal examination of the country and the question, has left it upon record that the Boers saw neither generosity nor humanity in our conduct, but only fear. An outspoken race, they conveyed their feelings to their neighbours. Can it be wondered at that South Africa has been in a ferment ever since, and that the British Africander has yearned with an intensity of feeling unknown in England for the hour of revenge?

The Government of the Transvaal after the war was left in the hands of a triumvirate, but after one year Kruger became President, an office which he continued to hold for eighteen years. His career as ruler vindicates the wisdom of that wise but unwritten provision of the American Constitution by which there is a limit to the tenure of this office. Continued rule for half a generation must turn a man into an autocrat. The old President has said himself, in his homely but shrewd way, that when one gets a good ox to lead the team it is a pity to change him. If a good ox, however, is left to choose his own direction without guidance, he may draw his wagon into trouble.

During three years the little State showed signs of a tumultuous activity. Considering that it was as large as France and that the population could not have been more than 50,000, one would have thought that they might have found room without any inconvenient crowding. But the burghers passed beyond their borders in every direction. The President cried aloud that he had been shut up in a kraal, and he proceeded to find ways out of it. A great trek was projected for the north, but fortunately it miscarried. To the east they raided Zululand, and succeeded, in defiance of the British settlement of that country, in tearing away one third of it and adding it to the Transvaal.

To the west, with no regard to the three-year-old treaty, they invaded Bechuanaland, and set up the two new republics of Goshen and Stellaland. So outrageous were these proceedings that Great Britain was forced to fit out in 1884 a new expedition under Sir Charles Warren for the purpose of turning these freebooters out of the country. It may be asked, why should these men be called freebooters if the founders of Rhodesia were pioneers? The answer is that the Transvaal was limited by treaty to certain boundaries which these men transgressed, while no pledges were broken when the British power expanded to the north. The upshot of these trespasses was the scene upon which every drama of South Africa rings down. Once more the purse was drawn from the pocket of the unhappy taxpayer, and a million or so was paid out to defray the expenses of the police force necessary to keep these treaty-breakers in order. Let this be borne in mind when we assess the moral and material damage done to the Transvaal by that ill-conceived and foolish enterprise, the Jameson Raid.

In 1884 a deputation from the Transvaal visited England, and at their solicitation the clumsy Treaty of Pretoria was altered into the still more clumsy Convention of London. The changes in the provisions were all in favour of the Boers, and a second successful war could hardly have given them more than Lord Derby handed them in time of peace. Their style was altered from the Transvaal to the South African Republic, a change which was ominously suggestive of expansion in the future. The control of Great Britain over their foreign policy was also relaxed, though a power of veto was retained. But the most important thing of all, and the fruitful cause of future trouble, lay in an omission. A suzerainty is a vague term, but in politics, as in theology, the more nebulous a thing is the more does it excite the imagination and the passions of men. This suzerainty was declared in the preamble of the first treaty, and no mention of it was made in the second. Was it thereby abrogated or was it not? The British contention was that only the articles were changed, and that the preamble continued to hold good for both treaties. They pointed out that not only the suzerainty, but also the independence, of the Transvaal was proclaimed in that preamble, and that if one lapsed the other must do so also. On the other hand, the Boers pointed to the fact that there was actually a preamble to the second Convention, which would seem, therefore, to have taken the place of the first. The point is so technical that it appears to be eminently one of those questions which might with propriety have been submitted to the decision of a board of foreign jurists — or possibly to the Supreme Court of the United States. If the decision had been given against Great Britain, we might have accepted it in a chastened spirit as a fitting punishment for the carelessness of the representative who failed to make our meaning intelligible. Carlyle has said that a political mistake always ends in a broken head for somebody. Unfortunately the somebody is usually somebody else. We have read the story of the political mistakes. Only too soon we shall come to the broken heads.

This, then, is a synopsis of what had occurred up to the signing of the Convention, which finally established, or failed to establish, the position of the South African Republic. We must now leave the larger questions, and descend to the internal affairs of that small State, and especially to that train of events which has stirred the mind of our people more than anything since the Indian Mutiny.

CHAPTER 2. THE CAUSE OF QUARREL.

There might almost seem to be some subtle connection between the barrenness and worthlessness of a surface and the value of the minerals which lie beneath it. The craggy mountains of Western America, the arid plains of West Australia, the ice-bound gorges of the Klondyke, and the bare slopes of the Witwatersrand veld — these are the lids which cover the great treasure chests of the world.

Gold had been known to exist in the Transvaal before, but it was only in 1886 that it was realised that the deposits which lie some thirty miles south of the capital are of a very extraordinary and valuable nature. The proportion of gold in the quartz is not particularly high, nor are the veins of a remarkable thickness, but the peculiarity of the Rand mines lies in the fact that throughout this ‘banket’ formation the metal is so uniformly distributed that the enterprise can claim a certainty which is not usually associated with the industry. It is quarrying rather than mining. Add to this that the reefs which were originally worked as outcrops have now been traced to enormous depths, and present the same features as those at the surface. A conservative estimate of the value of the gold has placed it at seven hundred millions of pounds.

Such a discovery produced the inevitable effect. A great number of adventurers flocked into the country, some desirable and some very much the reverse. There were circumstances, however, which kept away the rowdy and desperado element who usually make for a newly opened goldfield. It was not a class of mining which encouraged the individual adventurer. There were none of those nuggets which gleamed through the mud of the dollies at Ballarat, or recompensed the forty-niners in California for all their travels and their toils. It was a field for elaborate machinery, which could only be provided by capital. Managers, engineers, miners, technical experts, and the tradesmen and middlemen who live upon them, these were the Uitlanders, drawn from all the races under the sun, but with the Anglo-Celtic vastly predominant. The best engineers were American, the best miners were Cornish, the best managers were English, the money to run the mines was largely subscribed in England. As time went on, however, the German and French interests became more extensive, until their joint holdings are now probably as heavy as those of the British. Soon the population of the mining centres became greater than that of the whole Boer community, and consisted mainly of men in the prime of life — men, too, of exceptional intelligence and energy.

The situation was an extraordinary one. I have already attempted to bring the problem home to an American by suggesting that the Dutch of New York had trekked west and founded an anti-American and highly unprogressive State. To carry out the analogy we will now suppose that that State was California, that the gold of that State attracted a large inrush of American citizens, who came to outnumber the original inhabitants, that these citizens were heavily taxed and badly used, and that they deafened Washington with their outcry about their injuries. That would be a fair parallel to the relations between the Transvaal, the Uitlanders, and the British Government.

That these Uitlanders had very real and pressing grievances no one could possibly deny. To recount them all would be a formidable task, for their whole lives were darkened by injustice. There was not a wrong which had driven the Boer from Cape Colony which he did not now practise himself upon others — and a wrong may be excusable in 1885 which is monstrous in 1895. The primitive virtue which had characterised the farmers broke down in the face of temptation. The country Boers were little affected, some of them not at all, but the Pretoria Government became a most corrupt oligarchy, venal and incompetent to the last degree. Officials and imported Hollanders handled the stream of gold which came in from the mines, while the unfortunate Uitlander who paid nine-tenths of the taxation was fleeced at every turn, and met with laughter and taunts when he endeavoured to win the franchise by which he might peaceably set right the wrongs from which he suffered. He was not an unreasonable person. On the contrary, he was patient to the verge of meekness, as capital is likely to be when it is surrounded by rifles. But his situation was intolerable, and after successive attempts at peaceful agitation, and numerous humble petitions to the Volksraad, he began at last to realise that he would never obtain redress unless he could find some way of winning it for himself.

Without attempting to enumerate all the wrongs which embittered the Uitlanders, the more serious of them may be summed up in this way.

1. That they were heavily taxed and provided about seven-eighths of the revenue of the country. The revenue of the South African Republic —

which had been 154,000 pounds in 1886, when the gold fields were opened — had grown in 1899 to four million pounds, and the country through the industry of the newcomers had changed from one of the poorest to the richest in the whole world (per head of population).

2. That in spite of this prosperity which they had brought, they, the majority of the inhabitants of the country, were left without a vote, and could by no means influence the disposal of the great sums which they were providing. Such a case of taxation without representation has never been known.

3. That they had no voice in the choice or payment of officials. Men of the worst private character might be placed with complete authority over valuable interests. Upon one occasion the Minister of Mines attempted himself to jump a mine, having officially learned some flaw in its title. The total official salaries had risen in 1899 to a sum sufficient to pay 40 pounds per head to the entire male Boer population.

4. That they had no control over education. Mr. John Robinson, the Director General of the Johannesburg Educational Council, has reckoned the sum spent on Uitlander schools as 650 pounds out of 63,000 pounds allotted for education, making one shilling and tenpence per head per annum on Uitlander children, and eight pounds six shillings per head on Boer children — the Uitlander, as always, paying seven-eighths of the original sum.

5. No power of municipal government. Watercarts instead of pipes, filthy buckets instead of drains, a corrupt and violent police, a high death-rate in what should be a health resort — all this in a city which they had built themselves.

6. Despotic government in the matter of the press and of the right of public meeting.

7. Disability from service upon a jury.

8. Continual harassing of the mining interest by vexatious legislation. Under this head came many grievances, some special to the mines and some affecting all Uitlanders. The dynamite monopoly, by which the miners had to pay 600,000 pounds extra per annum in order to get a worse quality of dynamite; the liquor laws, by which one-third of the Kaffirs were allowed to be habitually drunk; the incompetence and extortions of the State-owned railway; the granting of concessions for numerous articles of ordinary consumption to individuals, by which high prices were maintained; the

surrounding of Johannesburg by tolls from which the town had no profit — these were among the economical grievances, some large, some petty, which ramified through every transaction of life.

And outside and beyond all these definite wrongs imagine to a free born progressive man, an American or a Briton, the constant irritation of being absolutely ruled by a body of twenty-five men, twenty-one of whom had in the case of the Selati Railway Company been publicly and circumstantially accused of bribery, with full details of the bribes received, while to their corruption they added such crass ignorance that they argue in the published reports of the Volksraad debates that using dynamite bombs to bring down rain was firing at God, that it is impious to destroy locusts, that the word ‘participate’ should not be used because it is not in the Bible, and that postal pillar boxes are extravagant and effeminate. Such obiter dicta may be amusing at a distance, but they are less entertaining when they come from an autocrat who has complete power over the conditions of your life.

From the fact that they were a community extremely preoccupied by their own business, it followed that the Uitlanders were not ardent politicians, and that they desired to have a share in the government of the State for the purpose of making the conditions of their own industry and of their own daily lives more endurable. How far there was need of such an interference may be judged by any fair-minded man who reads the list of their complaints. A superficial view may recognise the Boers as the champions of liberty, but a deeper insight must see that they (as represented by their elected rulers) have in truth stood for all that history has shown to be odious in the form of exclusiveness and oppression. Their conception of liberty has been a selfish one, and they have consistently inflicted upon others far heavier wrongs than those against which they had themselves rebelled.

As the mines increased in importance and the miners in numbers, it was found that these political disabilities affected some of that cosmopolitan crowd far more than others, in proportion to the amount of freedom to which their home institutions had made them accustomed. The continental Uitlanders were more patient of that which was unendurable to the American and the Briton. The Americans, however, were in so great a minority that it was upon the British that the brunt of the struggle for freedom fell. Apart from the fact that the British were more numerous than all the other Uitlanders combined, there were special reasons why they should feel their humiliating position more than the members of any other race. In the first place, many of the British were British South Africans, who knew that in the neighbouring countries which gave them birth the most liberal possible institutions had been given to the kinsmen of these very Boers who were refusing them the management of their own drains and water supply. And again, every Briton knew that Great Britain claimed to be the paramount power in South Africa, and so he felt as if his own land, to which he might have looked for protection, was conniving at and acquiescing in his ill treatment. As citizens of the paramount power, it was peculiarly galling that they should be held in political subjection. The British, therefore, were the most persistent and energetic of the agitators.

But it is a poor cause which cannot bear to fairly state and honestly consider the case of its opponents. The Boers had made, as has been briefly shown, great efforts to establish a country of their own. They had travelled far, worked hard, and fought bravely. After all their efforts they were fated to see an influx of strangers into their country, some of them men of questionable character, who outnumbered the original inhabitants. If the franchise were granted to these, there could be no doubt that though at first the Boers might control a majority of the votes, it was only a question of time before the newcomers would dominate the Raad and elect their own President, who might adopt a policy abhorrent to the original owners of the land. Were the Boers to lose by the ballot-box the victory which they had won by their rifles? Was it fair to expect it? These newcomers came for gold. They got their gold. Their companies paid a hundred per cent. Was not that enough to satisfy them? If they did not like the country why did they not leave it? No one compelled them to stay there. But if they stayed, let them be thankful that they were tolerated at all, and not presume to interfere with the laws of those by whose courtesy they were allowed to enter the country.

That is a fair statement of the Boer position, and at first sight an impartial man might say that there was a good deal to say for it; but a closer examination would show that, though it might be tenable in theory, it is unjust and impossible in practice.

In the present crowded state of the world a policy of Thibet may be carried out in some obscure corner, but it cannot be done in a great tract of country which lies right across the main line of industrial progress. The position is too absolutely artificial. A handful of people by the right of conquest take possession of an enormous country over which they are dotted at such intervals that it is their boast that one farmhouse cannot see the smoke of another, and yet, though their numbers are so disproportionate to the area which they cover, they refuse to admit any other people upon equal terms, but claim to be a privileged class who shall dominate the newcomers completely. They are outnumbered in their own land by immigrants who are far more highly educated and progressive, and yet they hold them down in a way which exists nowhere else upon earth. What is their right? The right of conquest. Then the same right may be justly invoked to reverse so intolerable a situation. This they would themselves acknowledge. ‘Come on and fight! Come on!’ cried a member of the Volksraad when the franchise petition of the Uitlanders was presented. ‘Protest! Protest! What is the good of protesting?’ said Kruger to Mr. W. Y. Campbell; ‘you have not got the guns, I have.’ There was always the final court of appeal. Judge Creusot and Judge Mauser were always behind the President.

Again, the argument of the Boers would be more valid had they received no benefit from these immigrants. If they had ignored them they might fairly have stated that they did not desire their presence. But even while they protested they grew rich at the Uitlander’s expense. They could not have it both ways. It would be consistent to discourage him and not profit by him, or to make him comfortable and build the State upon his money; but to ill-treat him and at the same time to grow strong by his taxation must surely be an injustice.

And again, the whole argument is based upon the narrow racial supposition that every naturalised citizen not of Boer extraction must necessarily be unpatriotic. This is not borne out by the examples of history. The newcomer soon becomes as proud of his country and as jealous of her liberty as the old. Had President Kruger given the franchise generously to the Uitlander, his pyramid would have been firm upon its base and not balanced upon its apex. It is true that the corrupt oligarchy would have vanished, and the spirit of a broader more tolerant freedom influenced the counsels of the State. But the republic would have become stronger and more permanent, with a population who, if they differed in details, were united in essentials. Whether such a solution would have been to the advantage of British interests in South Africa is quite another question. In more ways than one President Kruger has been a good friend to the empire.

So much upon the general question of the reason why the Uitlander should agitate and why the Boer was obdurate. The details of the long struggle between the seekers for the franchise and the refusers of it may be quickly sketched, but they cannot be entirely ignored by any one who desires to understand the inception of that great contest which was the outcome of the dispute.

At the time of the Convention of Pretoria (1881) the rights of burghership might be obtained by one year’s residence. In 1882 it was raised to five years, the reasonable limit which obtains both in Great Britain and in the United States. Had it remained so, it is safe to say that there would never have been either an Uitlander question or a great Boer war. Grievances would have been righted from the inside without external interference.

In 1890 the inrush of outsiders alarmed the Boers, and the franchise was raised so as to be only attainable by those who had lived fourteen years in the country. The Uitlanders, who were increasing rapidly in numbers and were suffering from the formidable list of grievances already enumerated, perceived that their wrongs were so numerous that it was hopeless to have them set right seriatim, and that only by obtaining the leverage of the franchise could they hope to move the heavy burden which weighed them down. In 1893 a petition of 13,000 Uitlanders, couched in most respectful terms, was submitted to the Raad, but met with contemptuous neglect. Undeterred, however, by this failure, the National Reform Union, an association which organised the agitation, came back to the attack in 1894. They drew up a petition which was signed by 35,000 adult male Uitlanders, a greater number than the total Boer male population of the country. A small liberal body in the Raad supported this memorial and endeavoured in vain to obtain some justice for the newcomers. Mr. Jeppe was the mouthpiece of this select band. ‘They own half the soil, they pay at least three quarters of the taxes,’ said he. ‘They are men who in capital, energy, and education are at least our equals.

What will become of us or our children on that day when we may find ourselves in a minority of one in twenty without a single friend among the other nineteen, among those who will then tell us that they wished to be brothers, but that we by our own act have made them strangers to the republic?’ Such reasonable and liberal sentiments were combated by members who asserted that the signatures could not belong to law-abiding citizens, since they were actually agitating against the law of the franchise, and others whose intolerance was expressed by the defiance of the member already quoted, who challenged the Uitlanders to come out and fight. The champions of exclusiveness and racial hatred won the day. The memorial was rejected by sixteen votes to eight, and the franchise law was, on the initiative of the President, actually made more stringent than ever, being framed in such a way that during the fourteen years of probation the applicant should give up his previous nationality, so that for that period he would really belong to no country at all. No hopes were held out that any possible attitude upon the part of the Uitlanders would soften the determination of the President and his burghers. One who remonstrated was led outside the State buildings by the President, who pointed up at the national flag. ‘You see that flag?’ said he. ‘If I grant the franchise, I may as well pull it down.’ His animosity against the immigrants was bitter. ‘Burghers, friends, thieves, murderers, newcomers, and others,’ is the conciliatory opening of one of his public addresses. Though Johannesburg is only thirty-two miles from Pretoria, and though the State of which he was the head depended for its revenue upon the gold fields, he paid it only three visits in nine years.

This settled animosity was deplorable, but not unnatural. A man imbued with the idea of a chosen people, and unread in any book save the one which cultivates this very idea, could not be expected to have learned the historical lessons of the advantages which a State reaps from a liberal policy. To him it was as if the Ammonites and Moabites had demanded admission into the twelve tribes. He mistook an agitation against the exclusive policy of the State for one against the existence of the State itself. A wide franchise would have made his republic firm-based and permanent. It was a small minority of the Uitlanders who had any desire to come into the British system. They were a cosmopolitan crowd, only united by the bond of a common injustice. But when every other method had failed, and their petition for the rights of freemen had been flung back at them, it was natural that their eyes should turn to that flag which waved to the north, the west, and the south of them — the flag which means purity of government with equal rights and equal duties for all men. Constitutional agitation was laid aside, arms were smuggled in, and everything prepared for an organised rising.

The events which followed at the beginning of 1896 have been so thrashed out that there is, perhaps, nothing left to tell — except the truth. So far as the Uitlanders themselves are concerned, their action was most natural and justifiable, and they have no reason to exculpate themselves for rising against such oppression as no men of our race have ever been submitted to. Had they trusted only to themselves and the justice of their cause, their moral and even their material position would have been infinitely stronger. But unfortunately there were forces behind them which were more questionable, the nature and extent of which have never yet, in spite of two commissions of investigation, been properly revealed. That there should have been any attempt at misleading inquiry, or suppressing documents in order to shelter individuals, is deplorable, for the impression left — I believe an entirely false one — must be that the British Government connived at an expedition which was as immoral as it was disastrous.

It had been arranged that the town was to rise upon a certain night, that Pretoria should be attacked, the fort seized, and the rifles and ammunition used to arm the Uitlanders. It was a feasible device, though it must seem to us, who have had such an experience of the military virtues of the burghers, a very desperate one. But it is conceivable that the rebels might have held Johannesburg until the universal sympathy which their cause excited throughout South Africa would have caused Great Britain to intervene. Unfortunately they had complicated matters by asking for outside help. Mr. Cecil Rhodes was Premier of the Cape, a man of immense energy, and one who had rendered great services to the empire. The motives of his action are obscure — certainly, we may say that they were not sordid, for he has always been a man whose thoughts were large and whose habits were simple. But whatever they may have been — whether an ill-regulated desire to consolidate South Africa under British rule, or a burning sympathy with the Uitlanders in their fight against injustice — it is certain that he allowed his lieutenant, Dr. Jameson, to assemble the mounted police of the Chartered Company, of which Rhodes was founder and director, for the purpose of co-operating with the rebels at Johannesburg. Moreover, when the revolt at Johannesburg was postponed, on account of a disagreement as to which flag they were to rise under, it appears that Jameson (with or without the orders of Rhodes) forced the hand of the conspirators by invading the country with a force absurdly inadequate to the work which he had taken in hand. Five hundred policemen and three field guns made up the forlorn hope who started from near Mafeking and crossed the Transvaal border upon December 29th, 1895. On January 2nd they were surrounded by the Boers amid the broken country near Dornkop, and after losing many of their number killed and wounded, without food and with spent horses, they were compelled to lay down their arms. Six burghers lost their lives in the skirmish.

The Uitlanders have been severely criticised for not having sent out a force to help Jameson in his difficulties, but it is impossible to see how they could have acted in any other manner. They had done all they could to prevent Jameson coming to their relief, and now it was rather unreasonable to suppose that they should relieve their reliever. Indeed, they had an entirely exaggerated idea of the strength of the force which he was bringing, and received the news of his capture with incredulity. When it became confirmed they rose, but in a halfhearted fashion which was not due to want of courage, but to the difficulties of their position. On the one hand, the British Government disowned Jameson entirely, and did all it could to discourage the rising; on the other, the President had the raiders in his keeping at Pretoria, and let it be understood that their fate depended upon the behaviour of the Uitlanders. They were led to believe that Jameson would be shot unless they laid down their arms, though, as a matter of fact, Jameson and his people had surrendered upon a promise of quarter. So skillfully did Kruger use his hostages that he succeeded, with the help of the British Commissioner, in getting the thousands of excited Johannesburgers to lay down their arms without bloodshed. Completely out-manoeuvred by the astute old President, the leaders of the reform movement used all their influence in the direction of peace, thinking that a general amnesty would follow; but the moment that they and their people were helpless the detectives and armed burghers occupied the town, and sixty of their number were hurried to Pretoria Gaol.

To the raiders themselves the President behaved with great generosity. Perhaps he could not find it in his heart to be harsh to the men who had managed to put him in the right and won for him the sympathy of the world. His own illiberal and oppressive treatment of the newcomers was forgotten in the face of this illegal inroad of filibusters. The true issues were so obscured by this intrusion that it has taken years to clear them, and perhaps they will never be wholly cleared. It was forgotten that it was the bad government of the country which was the real cause of the unfortunate raid. From then onwards the government might grow worse and worse, but it was always possible to point to the raid as justifying everything. Were the Uitlanders to have the franchise? How could they expect it after the raid? Would Britain object to the enormous importation of arms and obvious preparations for war? They were only precautions against a second raid. For years the raid stood in the way, not only of all progress, but of all remonstrance. Through an action over which they had no control, and which they had done their best to prevent, the British Government was left with a bad case and a weakened moral authority.

The raiders were sent home, where the rank and file were very properly released, and the chief officers were condemned to terms of imprisonment which certainly did not err upon the side of severity. Cecil Rhodes was left unpunished, he retained his place in the Privy Council, and his Chartered Company continued to have a corporate existence. This was illogical and inconclusive. As Kruger said, ‘It is not the dog which should be beaten, but the man who set him on to me.’ Public opinion — in spite of, or on account of, a crowd of witnesses — was ill informed upon the exact bearings of the question, and it was obvious that as Dutch sentiment at the Cape appeared already to be thoroughly hostile to us, it would be dangerous to alienate the British Africanders also by making a martyr of their favourite leader. But whatever arguments may be founded upon expediency, it is clear that the Boers bitterly resented, and with justice, the immunity of Rhodes.

In the meantime, both President Kruger and his burghers had shown a greater severity to the political prisoners from Johannesburg than to the armed followers of Jameson. The nationality of these prisoners is interesting and suggestive. There were twenty-three Englishmen, sixteen South Africans, nine Scotchmen, six Americans, two Welshmen, one Irishman, one Australian, one Hollander, one Bavarian, one Canadian, one Swiss, and one Turk. The prisoners were arrested in January, but the trial did not take place until the end of April. All were found guilty of high treason. Mr. Lionel Phillips, Colonel Rhodes (brother of Mr. Cecil Rhodes), George Farrar, and Mr. Hammond, the American engineer, were condemned to death, a sentence which was afterwards commuted to the payment of an enormous fine. The other prisoners were condemned to two years’ imprisonment, with a fine of 2000 pounds each. The imprisonment was of the most arduous and trying sort, and was embittered by the harshness of the gaoler, Du Plessis. One of the unfortunate men cut his throat, and several fell seriously ill, the diet and the sanitary conditions being equally unhealthy. At last at the end of May all the prisoners but six were released. Four of the six soon followed, two stalwarts, Sampson and Davies, refusing to sign any petition and remaining in prison until they were set free in 1897. Altogether the Transvaal Government received in fines from the reform prisoners the enormous sum of 212,000 pounds. A certain comic relief was immediately afterwards given to so grave an episode by the presentation of a bill to Great Britain for 1,677, 938 pounds 3 shillings and 3 pence — the greater part of which was under the heading of moral and intellectual damage.

The raid was past and the reform movement was past, but the causes which produced them both remained. It is hardly conceivable that a statesman who loved his country would have refrained from making some effort to remove a state of things which had already caused such grave dangers, and which must obviously become more serious with every year that passed. But Paul Kruger had hardened his heart, and was not to be moved. The grievances of the Uitlanders became heavier than ever. The one power in the land to which they had been able to appeal for some sort of redress amid their grievances was the law courts. Now it was decreed that the courts should be dependent on the Volksraad. The Chief Justice protested against such a degradation of his high office, and he was dismissed in consequence without a pension. The judge who had condemned the reformers was chosen to fill the vacancy, and the protection of a fixed law was withdrawn from the Uitlanders.

A commission appointed by the State was sent to examine into the condition of the mining industry and the grievances from which the newcomers suffered. The chairman was Mr. Schalk Burger, one of the most liberal of the Boers, and the proceedings were thorough and impartial. The result was a report which amply vindicated the reformers, and suggested remedies which would have gone a long way towards satisfying the Uitlanders. With such enlightened legislation their motives for seeking the franchise would have been less pressing. But the President and his Raad would have none of the recommendations of the commission. The rugged old autocrat declared that Schalk Burger was a traitor to his country for having signed such a document, and a new reactionary committee was chosen to report upon the report. Words and papers were the only outcome of the affair. No amelioration came to the newcomers. But at least they had again put their case publicly upon record, and it had been endorsed by the most respected of the burghers. Gradually in the press of the English-speaking countries the raid was ceasing to obscure the issue. More and more clearly it was coming out that no permanent settlement was possible where the majority of the population was oppressed by the minority. They had tried peaceful means and failed. They had tried warlike means and failed. What was there left for them to do? Their own country, the paramount power of South Africa, had never helped them. Perhaps if it were directly appealed to it might do so. It could not, if only for the sake of its own imperial prestige, leave its children for ever in a state of subjection. The Uitlanders determined upon a petition to the Queen, and in doing so they brought their grievances out of the limits of a local controversy into the broader field of international politics. Great Britain must either protect them or acknowledge that their protection was beyond her power. A direct petition to the Queen praying for protection was signed in April 1899 by twenty-one thousand Uitlanders. From that time events moved inevitably towards the one end. Sometimes the surface was troubled and sometimes smooth, but the stream always ran swiftly and the roar of the fall sounded ever louder in the ears.

CHAPTER 3. THE NEGOTIATIONS.

The British Government and the British people do not desire any direct authority in South Africa. Their one supreme interest is that the various States there should live in concord and prosperity, and that there should be no need for the presence of a British redcoat within the whole great peninsula. Our foreign critics, with their misapprehension of the British colonial system, can never realise that whether the four-coloured flag of the Transvaal or the Union Jack of a self-governing colony waved over the gold mines would not make the difference of one shilling to the revenue of Great Britain. The Transvaal as a British province would have its own legislature, its own revenue, its own expenditure, and its own tariff against the mother country, as well as against the rest of the world, and England be none the richer for the change. This is so obvious to a Briton that he has ceased to insist upon it, and it is for that reason perhaps that it is so universally misunderstood abroad. On the other hand, while she is no gainer by the change, most of the expense of it in blood and in money falls upon the home country. On the face of it, therefore, Great Britain had every reason to avoid so formidable a task as the conquest of the South African Republic. At the best she had nothing to gain, and at the worst she had an immense deal to lose. There was no room for ambition or aggression. It was a case of shirking or fulfilling a most arduous duty.

There could be no question of a plot for the annexation of the Transvaal. In a free country the Government cannot move in advance of public opinion, and public opinion is influenced by and reflected in the newspapers. One may examine the files of the press during all the months of negotiations and never find one reputable opinion in favour of such a course, nor did one in society ever meet an advocate of such a measure. But a great wrong was being done, and all that was asked was the minimum change which would set it right, and restore equality between the white races in Africa. ‘Let Kruger only be liberal in the extension of the franchise,’ said the paper which is most representative of the sanest British opinion, ‘and he will find that the power of the republic will become not weaker, but infinitely more secure. Let him once give the majority of the resident males of full age the full vote, and he will have given the republic a stability and power which nothing else can. If he rejects all pleas of this kind, and persists in his present policy, he may possibly stave off the evil day, and preserve his cherished oligarchy for another few years; but the end will be the same.' The extract reflects the tone of all of the British press, with the exception of one or two papers which considered that even the persistent ill usage of our people, and the fact that we were peculiarly responsible for them in this State, did not justify us in interfering in the internal affairs of the republic. It cannot be denied that the Jameson raid and the incomplete manner in which the circumstances connected with it had been investigated had weakened the force of those who wished to interfere energetically on behalf of British subjects. There was a vague but widespread feeling that perhaps the capitalists were engineering the situation for their own ends. It is difficult to imagine how a state of unrest and insecurity, to say nothing of a state of war, can ever be to the advantage of capital, and surely it is obvious that if some arch-schemer were using the grievances of the Uitlanders for his own ends the best way to checkmate him would be to remove those grievances. The suspicion, however, did exist among those who like to ignore the obvious and magnify the remote, and throughout the negotiations the hand of Great Britain was weakened, as her adversary had doubtless calculated that it would be, by an earnest but fussy and faddy minority. Idealism and a morbid, restless conscientiousness are two of the most dangerous evils from which a modern progressive State has to suffer.

It was in April 1899 that the British Uitlanders sent their petition praying for protection to their native country. Since the April previous a correspondence had been going on between Dr. Leyds, Secretary of State for the South African Republic, and Mr. Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, upon the existence or non-existence of the suzerainty. On the one hand, it was contended that the substitution of a second convention had entirely annulled the first; on the other, that the preamble of the first applied also to the second. If the Transvaal contention were correct it is clear that Great Britain had been tricked and jockeyed into such a position, since she had received no quid pro quo in the second convention, and even the most careless of Colonial Secretaries could hardly have been expected to give away a very substantial something for nothing. But the contention throws us back upon the academic question of what a suzerainty is. The Transvaal admitted a power of veto over their foreign policy, and this admission in itself, unless they openly tore up the convention, must deprive them of the position of a sovereign State. On the whole, the question must be acknowledged to have been one which might very well have been referred to trustworthy arbitration.

But now to this debate, which had so little of urgency in it that seven months intervened between statement and reply, there came the bitterly vital question of the wrongs and appeal of the Uitlanders. Sir Alfred Milner, the British Commissioner in South Africa, a man of liberal views who had been appointed by a Conservative Government, commanded the respect and confidence of all parties. His record was that of an able, clear-headed man, too just to be either guilty of or tolerant of injustice. To him the matter was referred, and a conference was arranged between President Kruger and him at Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. They met on May 30th. Kruger had declared that all questions might be discussed except the independence of the Transvaal. ‘All, all, all!’ he cried emphatically. But in practice it was found that the parties could not agree as to what did or what did not threaten this independence. What was essential to one was inadmissible to the other. Milner contended for a five years’ retroactive franchise, with provisions to secure adequate representation for the mining districts. Kruger offered a seven years’ franchise, coupled with numerous conditions which whittled down its value very much, promised five members out of thirty-one to represent a majority of the male population, and added a provision that all differences should be subject to arbitration by foreign powers, a condition which is incompatible with any claim to suzerainty. The proposals of each were impossible to the other, and early in June Sir Alfred Milner was back in Cape Town and President Kruger in Pretoria, with nothing settled except the extreme difficulty of a settlement. The current was running swift, and the roar of the fall was already sounding louder in the ear.

On June 12th Sir Alfred Milner received a deputation at Cape Town and reviewed the situation. ‘The principle of equality of races was,’ he said, essential for South Africa. The one State where inequality existed kept all the others in a fever. Our policy was one not of aggression, but of singular patience, which could not, however, lapse into indifference.’ Two days later Kruger addressed the Raad. ‘The other side had not conceded one tittle, and I could not give more. God has always stood by us. I do not want war, but I will not give more away. Although our independence has once been taken away, God has restored it.’ He spoke with sincerity no doubt, but it is hard to hear God invoked with such confidence for the system which encouraged the liquor traffic to the natives, and bred the most corrupt set of officials that the modern world has seen.

A dispatch from Sir Alfred Milner, giving his views upon the situation, made the British public recognise, as nothing else had done, how serious the position was, and how essential it was that an earnest national effort should be made to set it right. In it he said:

‘The case for intervention is overwhelming. The only attempted answer is that things will right themselves if left alone. But, in fact, the policy of leaving things alone has been tried for years, and it has led to their going from bad to worse. It is not true that this is owing to the raid. They were going from bad to worse before the raid. We were on the verge of war before the raid, and the Transvaal was on the verge of revolution. The effect of the raid has been to give the policy of leaving things alone a new lease of life, and with the old consequences.

‘The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots, constantly chafing under undoubted grievances, and calling vainly to her Majesty’s Government for redress, does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain within the Queen’s dominions. A section of the press, not in the Transvaal only, preaches openly and constantly the doctrine of a republic embracing all South Africa, and supports it by menacing references to the armaments of the Transvaal, its alliance with the Orange Free State, and the active sympathy which, in case of war, it would receive from a section of her Majesty’s subjects. I regret to say that this doctrine, supported as it is by a ceaseless stream of malignant lies about the intentions of her Majesty’s Government, is producing a great effect on a large number of our Dutch fellow colonists. Language is frequently used which seems to imply that the Dutch have some superior right, even in this colony, to their fellow-citizens of British birth. Thousands of men peaceably disposed, and if left alone perfectly satisfied with their position as British subjects, are being drawn into disaffection, and there is a corresponding exasperation upon the part of the British.

‘I can see nothing which will put a stop to this mischievous propaganda but some striking proof of the intention of her Majesty’s Government not to be ousted from its position in South Africa.’

Such were the grave and measured words with which the British pro-consul warned his countrymen of what was to come. He saw the storm-cloud piling in the north, but even his eyes had not yet discerned how near and how terrible was the tempest.

Throughout the end of June and the early part of July much was hoped from the mediation of the heads of the Afrikander Bond, the political union of the Dutch Cape colonists. On the one hand, they were the kinsmen of the Boers; on the other, they were British subjects, and were enjoying the blessings of those liberal institutions which we were anxious to see extended to the Transvaal. ‘Only treat our folk as we treat yours! Our whole contention was compressed into that prayer. But nothing came of the mission, though a scheme endorsed by Mr. Hofmeyer and Mr. Herholdt, of the Bond, with Mr. Fischer of the Free State, was introduced into the Raad and applauded by Mr. Schreiner, the Africander Premier of Cape Colony. In its original form the provisions were obscure and complicated, the franchise varying from nine years to seven under different conditions. In debate, however, the terms were amended until the time was reduced to seven years, and the proposed representation of the gold fields placed at five. The concession was not a great one, nor could the representation, five out of thirty-one, be considered a generous provision for the majority of the population; but the reduction of the years of residence was eagerly hailed in England as a sign that a compromise might be effected. A sigh of relief went up from the country. ‘If,’ said the Colonial Secretary, ‘this report is confirmed, this important change in the proposals of President Kruger, coupled with previous amendments, leads Government to hope that the new law may prove to be the basis of a settlement on the lines laid down by Sir Alfred Milner in the Bloemfontein Conference.’ He added that there were some vexatious conditions attached, but concluded, ‘Her Majesty’s Government feel assured that the President, having accepted the principle for which they have contended, will be prepared to reconsider any detail of his scheme which can be shown to be a possible hindrance to the full accomplishment of the object in view, and that he will not allow them to be nullified or reduced in value by any subsequent alterations of the law or acts of administration.’ At the same time, the ‘Times’ declared the crisis to be at an end. ‘If the Dutch statesmen of the Cape have induced their brethren in the Transvaal to carry such a Bill, they will have deserved the lasting gratitude, not only of their own countrymen and of the English colonists in South Africa, but of the British Empire and of the civilised world.’

But this fair prospect was soon destined to be overcast. Questions of detail arose which, when closely examined, proved to be matters of very essential importance. The Uitlanders and British South Africans, who had experienced in the past how illusory the promises of the President might be, insisted upon guarantees. The seven years offered were two years more than that which Sir Alfred Milner had declared to be an irreducible minimum. The difference of two years would not have hindered their acceptance, even at the expense of some humiliation to our representative. But there were conditions which excited distrust when drawn up by so wily a diplomatist. One was that the alien who aspired to burghership had to produce a certificate of continuous registration for a certain time. But the law of registration had fallen into disuse in the Transvaal, and consequently this provision might render the whole Bill valueless. Since it was carefully retained, it was certainly meant for use. The door had been opened, but a stone was placed to block it. Again, the continued burghership of the newcomers was made to depend upon the resolution of the first Raad, so that should the mining members propose any measure of reform, not only their Bill but they also might be swept out of the house by a Boer majority. What could an Opposition do if a vote of the Government might at any moment unseat them all? It was clear that a measure which contained such provisions must be very carefully sifted before a British Government could accept it as a final settlement and a complete concession of justice to its subjects. On the other hand, it naturally felt loth to refuse those clauses which offered some prospect of an amelioration in their condition. It took the course, therefore, of suggesting that each Government should appoint delegates to form a joint commission which should inquire into the working of the proposed Bill before it was put into a final form. The proposal was submitted to the Raad upon August 7th, with the addition that when this was done Sir Alfred Milner was prepared to discuss anything else, including arbitration without the interference of foreign powers.

The suggestion of this joint commission has been criticised as an unwarrantable intrusion into the internal affairs of another country. But then the whole question from the beginning was about the internal affairs of another country, since the internal equality of the white inhabitants was the condition upon which self-government was restored to the Transvaal. It is futile to suggest analogies, and to imagine what France would do if Germany were to interfere in a question of French franchise. Supposing that France contained as many Germans as Frenchmen, and that they were ill-treated, Germany would interfere quickly enough and continue to do so until some fair modus vivendi was established. The fact is that the case of the Transvaal stands alone, that such a condition of things has never been known, and that no previous precedent can apply to it, save the general rule that a minority of white men cannot continue indefinitely to tax and govern a majority. Sentiment inclines to the smaller nation, but reason and justice are all on the side of England.

A long delay followed upon the proposal of the Secretary of the Colonies. No reply was forthcoming from Pretoria. But on all sides there came evidence that those preparations for war which had been quietly going on even before the Jameson raid were now being hurriedly perfected. For so small a State enormous sums were being spent upon military equipment. Cases of rifles and boxes of cartridges streamed into the arsenal, not only from Delagoa Bay, but even, to the indignation of the English colonists, through Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Huge packing-cases, marked ‘Agricultural Instruments’ and ‘Mining Machinery,’ arrived from Germany and France, to find their places in the forts of Johannesburg or Pretoria. Men of many nations but of a similar type showed their martial faces in the Boer towns. The condottieri of Europe were as ready as ever to sell their blood for gold, and nobly in the end did they fulfill their share of the bargain. For three weeks and more during which Mr. Kruger was silent these eloquent preparations went on. But beyond them, and of infinitely more importance, there was one fact which dominated the situation. A burgher cannot go to war without his horse, his horse cannot move without grass, grass will not come until after rain, and it was still some weeks before the rain would be due. Negotiations, then, must not be unduly hurried while the veld was a bare russet-coloured dust-swept plain. Mr. Chamberlain and the British public waited week after week for their answer. But there was a limit to their patience, and it was reached on August 26th, when the Colonial Secretary showed, with a plainness of speech which is as unusual as it is welcome in diplomacy, that the question could not be hung up for ever. ‘The sands are running down in the glass,’ said he. ‘If they run out, we shall not hold ourselves limited by that which we have already offered, but, having taken the matter in hand, we will not let it go until we have secured conditions which once for all shall establish which is the paramount power in South Africa, and shall secure for our fellow-subjects there those equal rights and equal privileges which were promised them by President Kruger when the independence of the Transvaal was granted by the Queen, and which is the least that in justice ought to be accorded them.’ Lord Salisbury, a little time before, had been equally emphatic. ‘No one in this country wishes to disturb the conventions so long as it is recognised that while they guarantee the independence of the Transvaal on the one side, they guarantee equal political and civil rights for settlers of all nationalities upon the other. But these conventions are not like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. They are mortal, they can be destroyed...and once destroyed they can never be reconstructed in the same shape.’ The long-enduring patience of Great Britain was beginning to show signs of giving way.

In the meantime a fresh dispatch had arrived from the Transvaal which offered as an alternative proposal to the joint commission that the Boer Government should grant the franchise proposals of Sir Alfred Milner on condition that Great Britain withdrew or dropped her claim to a suzerainty, agreed to arbitration, and promised never again to interfere in the internal affairs of the republic. To this Great Britain answered that she would agree to arbitration, that she hoped never again to have occasion to interfere for the protection of her own subjects, but that with the grant of the franchise all occasion for such interference would pass away, and, finally, that she would never consent to abandon her position as suzerain power. Mr. Chamberlain’s dispatch ended by reminding the Government of the Transvaal that there were other matters of dispute open between the two Governments apart from the franchise, and that it would be as well to have them settled at the same time. By these he meant such questions as the position of the native races and the treatment of Anglo-Indians.

On September 2nd the answer of the Transvaal Government was returned. It was short and uncompromising. They withdrew their offer of the franchise. They re-asserted the non-existence of the suzerainty. The negotiations were at a deadlock. It was difficult to see how they could be re-opened. In view of the arming of the burghers, the small garrison of Natal had been taking up positions to cover the frontier. The Transvaal asked for an explanation of their presence. Sir Alfred Milner answered that they were guarding British interests, and preparing against contingencies. The roar of the fall was sounding loud and near.

On September 8th there was held a Cabinet Council — one of the most important in recent years. A message was sent to Pretoria, which even the opponents of the Government have acknowledged to be temperate, and offering the basis for a peaceful settlement. It begins by repudiating emphatically the claim of the Transvaal to be a sovereign international State in the same sense in which the Orange Free State is one. Any proposal made conditional upon such an acknowledgment could not be entertained.

The British Government, however, was prepared to accept the five years' 'franchise' as stated in the note of August 19th, assuming at the same time that in the Raad each member might talk his own language.

'Acceptance of these terms by the South African Republic would at once remove tension between the two Governments, and would in all probability render unnecessary any future intervention to secure redress for grievances which the Uitlanders themselves would be able to bring to the notice of the Executive Council and the Volksraad.

'Her Majesty's Government are increasingly impressed with the danger of further delay in relieving the strain which has already caused so much injury to the interests of South Africa, and they earnestly press for an immediate and definite reply to the present proposal. If it is acceded to they will be ready to make immediate arrangements...to settle all details of the proposed tribunal of arbitration...If, however, as they most anxiously hope will not be the case, the reply of the South African Republic should be negative or inconclusive, I am to state that her Majesty's Government must reserve to themselves the right to reconsider the situation de novo, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.'

Such was the message, and Great Britain waited with strained attention for the answer. But again there was a delay, while the rain came and the grass grew, and the veld was as a mounted rifleman would have it. The burghers were in no humour for concessions. They knew their own power, and they concluded with justice that they were for the time far the strongest military power in South Africa. 'We have beaten England before, but it is nothing to the licking we shall give her now,' cried a prominent citizen, and he spoke for his country as he said it. So the empire waited and debated, but the sounds of the bugle were already breaking through the wrangles of the politicians, and calling the nation to be tested once more by that hammer of war and adversity by which Providence still fashions us to some nobler and higher end.

CHAPTER 4. THE EVE OF WAR.

The message sent from the Cabinet Council of September 8th was evidently the precursor either of peace or of war. The cloud must burst or blow over. As the nation waited in hushed expectancy for a reply it spent some portion of its time in examining and speculating upon those military preparations which might be needed. The War Office had for some months been arranging for every contingency, and had made certain dispositions which appeared to them to be adequate, but which our future experience was to demonstrate to be far too small for the very serious matter in hand.

It is curious in turning over the files of such a paper as the ‘Times’ to observe how at first one or two small paragraphs of military significance might appear in the endless columns of diplomatic and political reports, how gradually they grew and grew, until at last the eclipse was complete, and the diplomacy had been thrust into the tiny paragraphs while the war filled the journal. Under July 7th comes the first glint of arms amid the drab monotony of the state papers. On that date it was announced that two companies of Royal Engineers and departmental corps with reserves of supplies and ammunition were being dispatched. Two companies of engineers! Who could have foreseen that they were the vanguard of the greatest army which ever at any time of the world’s history has crossed an ocean, and far the greatest which a British general has commanded in the field?

On August 15th, at a time when the negotiations had already assumed a very serious phase, after the failure of the Bloemfontein conference and the dispatch of Sir Alfred Milner, the British forces in South Africa were absolutely and absurdly inadequate for the purpose of the defence of our own frontier. Surely such a fact must open the eyes of those who, in spite of all the evidence, persist that the war was forced on by the British. A statesman who forces on a war usually prepares for a war, and this is exactly what Mr. Kruger did and the British authorities did not. The overbearing suzerain power had at that date, scattered over a huge frontier, two cavalry regiments, three field batteries, and six and a half infantry battalions — say six thousand men. The innocent pastoral States could put in the field forty or fifty thousand mounted riflemen, whose mobility doubled their numbers, and a most excellent artillery, including the heaviest guns which have ever been seen upon a battlefield. At this time it is most certain that the Boers could have made their way easily either to Durban or to Cape Town. The British force, condemned to act upon the defensive, could have been masked and afterwards destroyed, while the main body of the invaders would have encountered nothing but an irregular local resistance, which would have been neutralised by the apathy or hostility of the Dutch colonists. It is extraordinary that our authorities seem never to have contemplated the possibility of the Boers taking the initiative, or to have understood that in that case our belated reinforcements would certainly have had to land under the fire of the republican guns.

In July Natal had taken alarm, and a strong representation had been sent from the prime minister of the colony to the Governor, Sir W. Hely Hutchinson, and so to the Colonial Office. It was notorious that the Transvaal was armed to the teeth, that the Orange Free State was likely to join her, and that there had been strong attempts made, both privately and through the press, to alienate the loyalty of the Dutch citizens of both the British colonies. Many sinister signs were observed by those upon the spot. The veld had been burned unusually early to ensure a speedy grass-crop after the first rains, there had been a collecting of horses, a distribution of rifles and ammunition. The Free State farmers, who graze their sheep and cattle upon Natal soil during the winter, had driven them off to places of safety behind the line of the Drakensberg. Everything pointed to approaching war, and Natal refused to be satisfied even by the dispatch of another regiment. On September 6th a second message was received at the Colonial Office, which states the case with great clearness and precision.

‘The Prime Minister desires me to urge upon you by the unanimous advice of the Ministers that sufficient troops should be dispatched to Natal immediately to enable the colony to be placed in a state of defence against an attack from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. I am informed by the General Officer Commanding, Natal, that he will not have enough troops, even when the Manchester Regiment arrives, to do more than occupy Newcastle and at the same time protect the colony south of it from raids, while Laing’s Nek, Ingogo River and Zululand must be left undefended. My Ministers know that every preparation has been made, both in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which would enable an attack to be made on Natal at short notice. My Ministers believe that the Boers have made up their minds that war will take place almost certainly, and their best chance will be, when it seems unavoidable, to deliver a blow before reinforcements have time to arrive. Information has been received that raids in force will be made by way of Middle Drift and Greytown and by way of Bond’s Drift and Stangar, with a view to striking the railway between Pietermaritzburg and Durban and cutting off communications of troops and supplies. Nearly all the Orange Free State farmers in the Klip River division, who stay in the colony usually till October at least, have trekked, at great loss to themselves; their sheep are lambing on the road, and the lambs die or are destroyed. Two at least of the Entonjanani district farmers have trekked with all their belongings into the Transvaal, in the first case attempting to take as hostages the children of the natives on the farm. Reliable reports have been received of attempts to tamper with loyal natives, and to set tribe against tribe in order to create confusion and detail the defensive forces of the colony. Both food and warlike stores in large quantities have been accumulated at Volksrust, Vryheid and Standerton. Persons who are believed to be spies have been seen examining the bridges on the Natal Railway, and it is known that there are spies in all the principal centres of the colony. In the opinion of Ministers, such a catastrophe as the seizure of Laing’s Nek and the destruction of the northern portion of the railway, or a successful raid or invasion such as they have reason to believe is contemplated, would produce a most demoralising effect on the natives and on the loyal Europeans in the colony, and would afford great encouragement to the Boers and to their sympathisers in the colonies, who, although armed and prepared, will probably keep quiet unless they receive some encouragement of the sort. They concur in the policy of her Majesty’s Government of exhausting all peaceful means to obtain redress of the grievances of the Uitlanders and authoritatively assert the supremacy of Great Britain before resorting to war; but they state that this is a question of defensive precaution, not of making war.’

In answer to these and other remonstrances the garrison of Natal was gradually increased, partly by troops from Europe, and partly by the dispatch of five thousand British troops from India. The 2nd Berkshires, the 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers, the 1st Manchesters, and the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers arrived in succession with reinforcements of artillery. The 5th Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers, and 19th Hussars came from India, with the 1st Devonshires, 1st Gloucesters, 2nd King’s Royal Rifles and 2nd Gordon

Highlanders. These with the 21st, 42nd, and 53rd batteries of Field Artillery made up the Indian Contingent. Their arrival late in September raised the number of troops in South Africa to 22,000, a force which was inadequate to a contest in the open field with the numerous, mobile, and gallant enemy to whom they were to be opposed, but which proved to be strong enough to stave off that overwhelming disaster which, with our fuller knowledge, we can now see to have been impending.

As to the disposition of these troops a difference of opinion broke out between the ruling powers in Natal and the military chiefs at the spot. Prince Kraft has said, ‘Both strategy and tactics may have to yield to politics ‘; but the political necessity should be very grave and very clear when it is the blood of soldiers which has to pay for it. Whether it arose from our defective intelligence, or from that caste feeling which makes it hard for the professional soldier to recognise (in spite of deplorable past experiences) a serious adversary in the mounted farmer, it is certain that even while our papers were proclaiming that this time, at least, we would not underrate our enemy, we were most seriously underrating him. The northern third of Natal is as vulnerable a military position as a player of kriegspiel could wish to have submitted to him. It runs up into a thin angle, culminating at the apex in a difficult pass, the ill-omened Laing’s Nek, dominated by the even more sinister bulk of Majuba. Each side of this angle is open to invasion, the one from the Transvaal and the other from the Orange Free State. A force up at the apex is in a perfect trap, for the mobile enemy can flood into the country to the south of them, cut the line of supplies, and throw up a series of entrenchments which would make retreat a very difficult matter. Further down the country, at such positions as Ladysmith or Dundee, the danger, though not so imminent, is still an obvious one, unless the defending force is strong enough to hold its own in the open field and mobile enough to prevent a mounted enemy from getting round its flanks. To us, who are endowed with that profound military wisdom which only comes with a knowledge of the event, it is obvious that with a defending force which could not place more than 12,000 men in the fighting line, the true defensible frontier was the line of the Tugela. As a matter of fact, Ladysmith was chosen, a place almost indefensible itself, as it is dominated by high hills in at least two directions.

Such an event as the siege of the town appears never to have been contemplated, as no guns of position were asked for or sent. In spite of this, an amount of stores, which is said to have been valued at more than a million of pounds, was dumped down at this small railway junction, so that the position could not be evacuated without a crippling loss. The place was the point of bifurcation of the main line, which divides at this little town into one branch running to Harrismith in the Orange Free State, and the other leading through the Dundee coal fields and Newcastle to the Laing's Nek tunnel and the Transvaal. An importance, which appears now to have been an exaggerated one, was attached by the Government of Natal to the possession of the coal fields, and it was at their strong suggestion, but with the concurrence of General Penn Symons, that the defending force was divided, and a detachment of between three and four thousand sent to Dundee, about forty miles from the main body, which remained under General Sir George White at Ladysmith. General Symons underrated the power of the invaders, but it is hard to criticise an error of judgment which has been so nobly atoned and so tragically paid for. At the time, then, which our political narrative has reached, the time of suspense which followed the dispatch of the Cabinet message of September 8th, the military situation had ceased to be desperate, but was still precarious. Twenty-two thousand regular troops were on the spot who might hope to be reinforced by some ten thousand colonials, but these forces had to cover a great frontier, the attitude of Cape Colony was by no means whole-hearted and might become hostile, while the black population might conceivably throw in its weight against us. Only half the regulars could be spared to defend Natal, and no reinforcements could reach them in less than a month from the outbreak of hostilities. If Mr. Chamberlain was really playing a game of bluff, it must be confessed that he was bluffing from a very weak hand.

For purposes of comparison we may give some idea of the forces which Mr. Kruger and Mr. Steyn could put in the field, for by this time it was evident that the Orange Free State, with which we had had no shadow of a dispute, was going, in a way which some would call wanton and some chivalrous, to throw in its weight against us. The general press estimate of the forces of the two republics varied from 25,000 to 35,000 men. Mr. J. B. Robinson, a personal friend of President Kruger's and a man who had spent much of his life among the Boers, considered the latter estimate to be too high. The calculation had no assured basis to start from. A very scattered and isolated population, among whom large families were the rule, is a most difficult thing to estimate. Some reckoned from the supposed natural increase during eighteen years, but the figure given at that date was itself an assumption. Others took their calculation from the number of voters in the last presidential election: but no one could tell how many abstentions there had been, and the fighting age is five years earlier than the voting age in the republics. We recognise now that all calculations were far below the true figure. It is probable, however, that the information of the British Intelligence Department was not far wrong. According to this the fighting strength of the Transvaal alone was 32,000 men, and of the Orange Free State 22,000. With mercenaries and rebels from the colonies they would amount to 60, 000, while a considerable rising of the Cape Dutch would bring them up to 100,000. In artillery they were known to have about a hundred guns, many of them (and the fact will need much explaining) more modern and powerful than any which we could bring against them. Of the quality of this large force there is no need to speak. The men were brave, hardy, and fired with a strange religious enthusiasm. They were all of the seventeenth century, except their rifles. Mounted upon their hardy little ponies, they possessed a mobility which practically doubled their numbers and made it an impossibility ever to outflank them. As marksmen they were supreme. Add to this that they had the advantage of acting upon internal lines with shorter and safer communications, and one gathers how formidable a task lay before the soldiers of the empire. When we turn from such an enumeration of their strength to contemplate the 12,000 men, split into two detachments, who awaited them in Natal, we may recognise that, far from bewailing our disasters, we should rather congratulate ourselves upon our escape from losing that great province which, situated as it is between Britain, India, and Australia, must be regarded as the very keystone of the imperial arch.

At the risk of a tedious but very essential digression, something must be said here as to the motives with which the Boers had for many years been quietly preparing for war. That the Jameson raid was not the cause is certain, though it probably, by putting the Boer Government into a strong position, had a great effect in accelerating matters. What had been done secretly and slowly could be done more swiftly and openly when so plausible an excuse could be given for it. As a matter of fact, the preparations were long antecedent to the raid. The building of the forts at Pretoria and Johannesburg was begun nearly two years before that wretched incursion, and the importation of arms was going on apace. In that very year, 1895, a considerable sum was spent in military equipment.

But if it was not the raid, and if the Boers had no reason to fear the British Government, with whom the Transvaal might have been as friendly as the Orange Free State had been for forty years, why then should they arm? It was a difficult question, and one in answering which we find ourselves in a region of conjecture and suspicion rather than of ascertained fact. But the fairest and most unbiased of historians must confess that there is a large body of evidence to show that into the heads of some of the Dutch leaders, both in the northern republics and in the Cape, there had entered the conception of a single Dutch commonwealth, extending from Cape Town to the Zambesi, in which flag, speech, and law should all be Dutch. It is in this aspiration that many shrewd and well-informed judges see the true inner meaning of this persistent arming, of the constant hostility, of the forming of ties between the two republics (one of whom had been reconstituted and made a sovereign independent State by our own act), and finally of that intriguing which endeavoured to poison the affection and allegiance of our own Dutch colonists, who had no political grievances whatever. They all aimed at one end, and that end was the final expulsion of British power from South Africa and the formation of a single great Dutch republic. The large sum spent by the Transvaal in secret service money — a larger sum, I believe, than that which is spent by the whole British Empire — would give some idea of the subterranean influences at work. An army of emissaries, agents, and spies, whatever their mission, were certainly spread over the British colonies. Newspapers were subsidised also, and considerable sums spent upon the press in France and Germany.

In the very nature of things a huge conspiracy of this sort to substitute Dutch for British rule in South Africa is not a matter which can be easily and definitely proved. Such questions are not discussed in public documents, and men are sounded before being taken into the confidence of the conspirators. But there is plenty of evidence of the individual ambition of prominent and representative men in this direction, and it is hard to believe that what many wanted individually was not striven for collectively, especially when we see how the course of events did actually work towards the end which they indicated. Mr. J.P. FitzPatrick, in ‘The Transvaal from Within’ — a book to which all subsequent writers upon the subject must acknowledge their obligations — narrates how in 1896 he was approached by Mr. D.P. Graaff, formerly a member of the Cape Legislative Council and a very prominent Afrikander Bondsman, with the proposition that Great Britain should be pushed out of South Africa. The same politician made the same proposal to Mr. Beit. Compare with this the following statement of Mr. Theodore Schreiner, the brother of the Prime Minister of the Cape:

‘I met Mr. Reitz, then a judge of the Orange Free State, in Bloemfontein between seventeen and eighteen years ago, shortly after the retrocession of the Transvaal, and when he was busy establishing the Afrikander Bond. It must be patent to every one that at that time, at all events, England and its Government had no intention of taking away the independence of the Transvaal, for she had just “magnanimously” granted the same; no intention of making war on the republics, for she had just made peace; no intention to seize the Rand gold fields, for they were not yet discovered. At that time, then, I met Mr. Reitz, and he did his best to get me to become a member of his Afrikander Bond, but, after studying its constitution and programme, I refused to do so, whereupon the following colloquy in substance took place between us, which has been indelibly imprinted on my mind ever since:

‘REITZ: Why do you refuse? Is the object of getting the people to take an interest in political matters not a good one?

‘MYSELF: Yes, it is; but I seem to see plainly here between the lines of this constitution much more ultimately aimed at than that.

‘REITZ: What?

‘MYSELF: I see quite clearly that the ultimate object aimed at is the overthrow of the British power and the expulsion of the British flag from South Africa.

‘REITZ (with his pleasant conscious smile, as of one whose secret thought and purpose had been discovered, and who was not altogether displeased that such was the case): Well, what if it is so?

‘MYSELF: You don’t suppose, do you, that that flag is going to disappear from South Africa without a tremendous struggle and fight?

‘REITZ (with the same pleasant self-conscious, self satisfied, and yet semi-apologetic smile): Well, I suppose not; but even so, what of that?

‘MYSELF: Only this, that when that struggle takes place you and I will be on opposite sides; and what is more, the God who was on the side of the Transvaal in the late war, because it had right on its side will be on the side of England, because He must view with abhorrence any plotting and scheming to overthrow her power and position in South Africa, which have been ordained by Him.

‘REITZ: We’ll see.

‘Thus the conversation ended, but during the seventeen years that have elapsed I have watched the propaganda for the overthrow of British power in South Africa being ceaselessly spread by every possible means — the press, the pulpit, the platform, the schools, the colleges, the Legislature — until it has culminated in the present war, of which Mr. Reitz and his co-workers are the origin and the cause. Believe me, the day on which F.W. Reitz sat down to pen his ultimatum to Great Britain was the proudest and happiest moment of his life, and one which had for long years been looked forward to by him with eager longing and expectation.’

Compare with these utterances of a Dutch politician of the Cape, and of a Dutch politician of the Orange Free State, the following passage from a speech delivered by Kruger at Bloemfontein in the year 1887:

‘I think it too soon to speak of a United South Africa under one flag. Which flag was it to be? The Queen of England would object to having her flag hauled down, and we, the burghers of the Transvaal, object to hauling ours down. What is to be done? We are now small and of little importance, but we are growing, and are preparing the way to take our place among the great nations of the world.’

‘The dream of our life,’ said another, ‘is a union of the States of South Africa, and this has to come from within, not from without. When that is accomplished, South Africa will be great.’

Always the same theory from all quarters of Dutch thought, to be followed by many signs that the idea was being prepared for in practice. I repeat that the fairest and most unbiased historian cannot dismiss the conspiracy as a myth.

And to this one may retort, why should they not conspire? Why should they not have their own views as to the future of South Africa? Why should they not endeavour to have one universal flag and one common speech? Why should they not win over our colonists, if they can, and push us into the sea? I see no reason why they should not. Let them try if they will. And let us try to prevent them. But let us have an end of talk about British aggression, of capitalist designs upon the gold fields, of the wrongs of a pastoral people, and all the other veils which have been used to cover the issue. Let those who talk about British designs upon the republics turn their attention for a moment to the evidence which there is for republican designs upon the colonies. Let them reflect that in the one system all white men are equal, and that on the other the minority of one race has persecuted the majority of the other, and let them consider under which the truest freedom lies, which stands for universal liberty and which for reaction and racial hatred. Let them ponder and answer all this before they determine where their sympathies lie.

Leaving these wider questions of politics, and dismissing for the time those military considerations which were soon to be of such vital moment, we may now return to the course of events in the diplomatic struggle between the Government of the Transvaal and the Colonial Office. On September 8th, as already narrated, a final message was sent to Pretoria, which stated the minimum terms which the British Government could accept as being a fair concession to her subjects in the Transvaal. A definite answer was demanded, and the nation waited with sombre patience for the reply.

There were few illusions in this country as to the difficulties of a Transvaal war. It was clearly seen that little honour and immense vexation were in store for us. The first Boer war still smarted in our minds, and we knew the prowess of the indomitable burghers. But our people, if gloomy, were none the less resolute, for that national instinct which is beyond the wisdom of statesmen had borne it in upon them that this was no local quarrel, but one upon which the whole existence of the empire hung. The cohesion of that empire was to be tested. Men had emptied their glasses to it in time of peace. Was it a meaningless pouring of wine, or were they ready to pour their hearts’ blood also in time of war? Had we really founded a series of disconnected nations, with no common sentiment or interest, or was the empire an organic whole, as ready to thrill with one emotion or to harden into one resolve as are the several States of the Union? That was the question at issue, and much of the future history of the world was at stake upon the answer.

Already there were indications that the colonies appreciated the fact that the contention was no affair of the mother country alone, but that she was upholding the rights of the empire as a whole, and might fairly look to them to support her in any quarrel which might arise from it. As early as July 11th, Queensland, the fiery and semitropical, had offered a contingent of mounted infantry with machine guns; New Zealand, Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia followed in the order named. Canada, with the strong but more deliberate spirit of the north, was the last to speak, but spoke the more firmly for the delay. Her citizens were the least concerned of any, for Australians were many in South Africa but Canadians few. None the less, she cheerfully took her share of the common burden, and grew the readier and the cheerier as that burden came to weigh more heavily. From all the men of many hues who make up the British Empire, from Hindoo Rajahs, from West African Houssas, from Malay police, from Western Indians, there came offers of service. But this was to be a white man's war, and if the British could not work out their own salvation then it were well that empire should pass from such a race. The magnificent Indian army of 150,000 soldiers, many of them seasoned veterans, was for the same reason left untouched. England has claimed no credit or consideration for such abstention, but an irresponsible writer may well ask how many of those foreign critics whose respect for our public morality appears to be as limited as their knowledge of our principles and history would have advocated such self denial had their own countries been placed in the same position.

On September 18th the official reply of the Boer Government to the message sent from the Cabinet Council was published in London. In manner it was unbending and unconciliatory; in substance, it was a complete rejection of all the British demands. It refused to recommend or propose to the Raad the five years' franchise and the other measures which had been defined as the minimum which the Home Government could accept as a fair measure of justice towards the Uitlanders. The suggestion that the debates of the Raad should be bilingual, as they have been in the Cape Colony and in Canada, was absolutely waived aside. The British Government had stated in their last dispatch that if the reply should be negative or inconclusive they reserved to themselves the right to 'reconsider the situation de novo and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.' The reply had been both negative and inconclusive, and on September 22nd a council met to determine what the next message should be. It was short and firm, but so planned as not to shut the door upon peace. Its purport was that the British Government expressed deep regret at the rejection of the moderate proposals which had been submitted in their last dispatch, and that now, in accordance with their promise, they would shortly put forward their own plans for a settlement. The message was not an ultimatum, but it foreshadowed an ultimatum in the future.

In the meantime, upon September 21st the Raad of the Orange Free State had met, and it became more and more evident that this republic, with whom we had no possible quarrel, but, on the contrary, for whom we had a great deal of friendship and admiration, intended to throw in its weight against Great Britain. Some time before, an offensive and defensive alliance had been concluded between the two States, which must, until the secret history of these events comes to be written, appear to have been a singularly rash and unprofitable bargain for the smaller one. She had nothing to fear from Great Britain, since she had been voluntarily turned into an independent republic by her and had lived in peace with her for forty years. Her laws were as liberal as our own. But by this suicidal treaty she agreed to share the fortunes of a State which was deliberately courting war by its persistently unfriendly attitude, and whose reactionary and narrow legislation would, one might imagine, have alienated the sympathy of her progressive neighbour. There may have been ambitions like those already quoted from the report of Dr. Reitz’s conversation, or there may have been a complete hallucination as to the comparative strength of the two combatants and the probable future of South Africa; but however that may be, the treaty was made, and the time had come to test how far it would hold.

The tone of President Steyn at the meeting of the Raad, and the support which he received from the majority of his burghers, showed unmistakably that the two republics would act as one. In his opening speech Steyn declared uncompromisingly against the British contention, and declared that his State was bound to the Transvaal by everything which was near and dear. Among the obvious military precautions which could no longer be neglected by the British Government was the sending of some small force to protect the long and exposed line of railway which lies just outside the Transvaal border from Kimberley to Rhodesia. Sir Alfred Milner communicated with President Steyn as to this movement of troops, pointing out that it was in no way directed against the Free State. Sir Alfred Milner added that the Imperial Government was still hopeful of a friendly settlement with the Transvaal, but if this hope were disappointed they looked to the Orange Free State to preserve strict neutrality and to prevent military intervention by any of its citizens. They undertook that in that case the integrity of the Free State frontier would be strictly preserved. Finally, he stated that there was absolutely no cause to disturb the good relations between the Free State and Great Britain, since we were animated by the most friendly intentions towards them. To this the President returned a somewhat ungracious answer, to the effect that he disapproved of our action towards the Transvaal, and that he regretted the movement of troops, which would be considered a menace by the burghers. A subsequent resolution of the Free State Raad, ending with the words, ‘Come what may, the Free State will honestly and faithfully fulfill its obligations towards the Transvaal by virtue of the political alliance existing between the two republics,’ showed how impossible it was that this country, formed by ourselves and without a shadow of a cause of quarrel with us, could be saved from being drawn into the whirlpool. Everywhere, from over both borders, came the news of martial preparations. Already at the end of September troops and armed burghers were gathering upon the frontier, and the most incredulous were beginning at last to understand that the shadow of a great war was really falling across them. Artillery, war munitions, and stores were being accumulated at Volksrust upon the Natal border, showing where the storm might be expected to break. On the last day of September, twenty-six military trains were reported to have left Pretoria and Johannesburg for that point. At the same time news came of a concentration at Malmani, upon the Bechuanaland border, threatening the railway line and the British town of Mafeking, a name destined before long to be familiar to the world.

On October 3rd there occurred what was in truth an act of war, although the British Government, patient to the verge of weakness, refused to regard it as such, and continued to draw up their final state paper. The mail train from the Transvaal to Cape Town was stopped at Vereeniging, and the week’s shipment of gold for England, amounting to about half a million pounds, was taken by the Boer Government. In a debate at Cape Town upon the same day the Africander Minister of the Interior admitted that as many as 404 trucks had passed from the Government line over the frontier and had not been returned. Taken in conjunction with the passage of arms and cartridges through the Cape to Pretoria and Bloemfontein, this incident aroused the deepest indignation among the Colonial English and the British public, which was increased by the reports of the difficulty which border towns, such as Kimberley and Vryburg, had had in getting cannon for their own defence. The Raads had been dissolved, and the old President’s last words had been a statement that war was certain, and a stern invocation of the Lord as final arbiter. England was ready less obtrusively but no less heartily to refer the quarrel to the same dread Judge.

On October 2nd President Steyn informed Sir Alfred Milner that he had deemed it necessary to call out the Free State burghers — that is, to mobilise his forces. Sir A. Milner wrote regretting these preparations, and declaring that he did not yet despair of peace, for he was sure that any reasonable proposal would be favourably considered by her Majesty’s Government. Steyn’s reply was that there was no use in negotiating unless the stream of British reinforcements ceased coming into South Africa. As our forces were still in a great minority, it was impossible to stop the reinforcements, so the correspondence led to nothing. On October 7th the army reserves for the First Army Corps were called out in Great Britain and other signs shown that it had been determined to send a considerable force to South Africa. Parliament was also summoned that the formal national assent might be gained for those grave measures which were evidently pending.

It was on October 9th that the somewhat leisurely proceedings of the British Colonial Office were brought to a head by the arrival of an unexpected and audacious ultimatum from the Boer Government. In contests of wit, as of arms, it must be confessed that the laugh has been usually upon the side of our simple and pastoral South African neighbours. The present instance was no exception to the rule. While our Government was cautiously and patiently leading up to an ultimatum, our opponent suddenly played the very card which we were preparing to lay upon the table. The document was very firm and explicit, but the terms in which it was drawn were so impossible that it was evidently framed with the deliberate purpose of forcing an immediate war. It demanded that the troops upon the borders of the republic should be instantly withdrawn, that all reinforcements which had arrived within the last year should leave South Africa, and that those who were now upon the sea should be sent back without being landed. Failing a satisfactory answer within forty-eight hours, ‘the Transvaal Government will with great regret be compelled to regard the action of her Majesty’s Government as a formal declaration of war, for the consequences of which it will not hold itself responsible.’ The audacious message was received throughout the empire with a mixture of derision and anger. The answer was dispatched next day through Sir Alfred Milner.

‘10th October. — Her Majesty’s Government have received with great regret the peremptory demands of the Government of the South African Republic, conveyed in your telegram of the 9th October. You will inform the Government of the South African Republic in reply that the conditions demanded by the Government of the South African Republic are such as her Majesty’s Government deem it impossible to discuss.’

And so we have come to the end of the long road, past the battle of the pens and the wrangling of tongues, to the arbitration of the Lee-Metford and the Mauser. It was pitiable that it should come to this. These people were as near akin to us as any race which is not our own. They were of the same Frisian stock which peopled our own shores. In habit of mind, in religion, in respect for law, they were as ourselves. Brave, too, they were, and hospitable, with those sporting instincts which are dear to the Anglo-Celtic race. There was no people in the world who had more qualities which we might admire, and not the least of them was that love of independence which it is our proudest boast that we have encouraged in others as well as exercised ourselves. And yet we had come to this pass, that there was no room in all vast South Africa for both of us. We cannot hold ourselves blameless in the matter. ‘The evil that men do lives after them,’ and it has been told in this small superficial sketch where we have erred in the past in South Africa. On our hands, too, is the Jameson raid, carried out by Englishmen and led by officers who held the Queen’s Commission; to us, also, the blame of the shuffling, half-hearted inquiry into that most unjustifiable business. These are matches which helped to set the great blaze alight, and it is we who held them. But the fagots which proved to be so inflammable, they were not of our setting. They were the wrongs done to half the community, the settled resolution of the minority to tax and vex the majority, the determination of a people who had lived two generations in a country to claim that country entirely for themselves. Behind them all there may have been the Dutch ambition to dominate South Africa. It was no petty object for which Britain fought. When a nation struggles uncomplainingly through months of disaster she may claim to have proved her conviction of the justice and necessity of the struggle. Should Dutch ideas or English ideas of government prevail throughout that huge country? The one means freedom for a single race, the other means equal rights to all white men beneath one common law. What each means to the coloured races let history declare. This was the main issue to be determined from the instant that the clock struck five upon the afternoon of Wednesday, October the eleventh, eighteen hundred and ninety-nine. That moment marked the opening of a war destined to determine the fate of South Africa, to work great changes in the British Empire, to seriously affect the future history of the world, and incidentally to alter many of our views as to the art of war. It is the story of this war which, with limited material but with much aspiration to care and candour, I shall now endeavour to tell.

CHAPTER 5. TALANA HILL.

It was on the morning of October 12th, amid cold and mist, that the Boer camps at Sandspruit and Volksrust broke up, and the burghers rode to the war. Some twelve thousand of them, all mounted, with two batteries of eight Krupp guns each, were the invading force from the north, which hoped later to be joined by the Freestaters and by a contingent of Germans and Transvaalers who were to cross the Free State border. It was an hour before dawn that the guns started, and the riflemen followed close behind the last limber, so that the first light of day fell upon the black sinuous line winding down between the hills. A spectator upon the occasion says of them: ‘Their faces were a study. For the most part the expression worn was one of determination and bulldog pertinacity. No sign of fear there, nor of wavering. Whatever else may be laid to the charge of the Boer, it may never truthfully be said that he is a coward or a man unworthy of the Briton’s steel.’ The words were written early in the campaign, and the whole empire will endorse them to-day. Could we have such men as willing fellow-citizens, they are worth more than all the gold mines of their country.

This main Transvaal body consisted of the commando of Pretoria, which comprised 1800 men, and those of Heidelberg, Middelburg, Krugersdorp, Standerton, Wakkerstroom, and Ermelo, with the State Artillery, an excellent and highly organised body who were provided with the best guns that have ever been brought on to a battlefield. Besides their sixteen Krupps, they dragged with them two heavy six-inch Creusot guns, which were destined to have a very important effect in the earlier part of the campaign. In addition to these native forces there were a certain number of European auxiliaries. The greater part of the German corps were with the Free State forces, but a few hundred came down from the north. There was a Hollander corps of about two hundred and fifty and an Irish — or perhaps more properly an Irish-American-corps of the same number, who rode under the green flag and the harp.

The men might, by all accounts, be divided into two very different types. There were the town Boers, smartened and perhaps a little enervated by prosperity and civilisation, men of business and professional men, more alert and quicker than their rustic comrades. These men spoke English rather than Dutch, and indeed there were many men of English descent among them. But the others, the most formidable both in their numbers and in their primitive qualities, were the back-veld Boers, the sunburned, tangle-haired, full-bearded farmers, the men of the Bible and the rifle, imbued with the traditions of their own guerrilla warfare. These were perhaps the finest natural warriors upon earth, marksmen, hunters, accustomed to hard fare and a harder couch. They were rough in their ways and speech, but, in spite of many calumnies and some few unpleasant truths, they might compare with most disciplined armies in their humanity and their desire to observe the usages of war.

A few words here as to the man who led this singular host. Piet Joubert was a Cape Colonist by birth — a fellow countryman, like Kruger himself, of those whom the narrow laws of his new country persisted in regarding as outside the pale. He came from that French Huguenot blood which has strengthened and refined every race which it has touched, and from it he derived a chivalry and generosity which made him respected and liked even by his opponents. In many native broils and in the British campaign of 1881 he had shown himself a capable leader. His record in standing out for the independence of the Transvaal was a very consistent one, for he had not accepted office under the British, as Kruger had done, but had remained always an irreconcilable. Tall and burly, with hard grey eyes and a grim mouth half hidden by his bushy beard, he was a fine type of the men whom he led. He was now in his sixty-fifth year, and the fire of his youth had, as some of the burghers urged, died down within him; but he was experienced, crafty, and warwise, never dashing and never brilliant, but slow, steady, solid, and inexorable.

Besides this northern army there were two other bodies of burghers converging upon Natal. One, consisting of the commandoes from Utrecht and the Swaziland districts, had gathered at Vryheid on the flank of the British position at Dundee. The other, much larger, not less probably than six or seven thousand men, were the contingent from the Free State and a Transvaal corps, together with Schiel’s Germans, who were making their way through the various passes, the Tintwa Pass, and Van Reenen’s Pass, which lead through the grim range of the Drakensberg and open out upon the more fertile plains of Western Natal. The total force may have been something between twenty and thirty thousand men. By all accounts they were of an astonishingly high heart, convinced that a path of easy victory lay before them, and that nothing could bar their way to the sea. If the British commanders underrated their opponents, there is ample evidence that the mistake was reciprocal.

A few words now as to the disposition of the British forces, concerning which it must be borne in mind that Sir George White, though in actual command, had only been a few days in the country before war was declared, so that the arrangements fell to General Penn Symons, aided or hampered by the advice of the local political authorities. The main position was at Ladysmith, but an advance post was strongly held at Glencoe, which is five miles from the station of Dundee and forty from Ladysmith. The reason for this dangerous division of force was to secure each end of the Biggarsberg section of the railway, and also to cover the important collieries of that district. The positions chosen seem in each case to show that the British commander was not aware of the number and power of the Boer guns, for each was equally defensible against rifle fire and vulnerable to an artillery attack. In the case of Glencoe it was particularly evident that guns upon the hills above would, as they did, render the position untenable. This outlying post was held by the 1st Leicester Regiment, the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, and the first battalion of Rifles, with the 18th Hussars, three companies of mounted infantry, and three batteries of field artillery, the 13th, 67th, and 69th. The 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers were on their way to reinforce it, and arrived before the first action. Altogether the Glencoe camp contained some four thousand men.

The main body of the army remained at Ladysmith. These consisted of the 1st Devons, the 1st Liverpools, and the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, with the 1st Gloucesters, the 2nd King’s Royal Rifles, and the 2nd Rifle Brigade, reinforced later by the Manchesters. The cavalry included the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 5th Lancers, a detachment of 19th Hussars, the Natal Carabineers, the Natal Mounted Police, and the Border Mounted Rifles, reinforced later by the Imperial Light Horse, a fine body of men raised principally among the refugees from the Rand. For artillery there were the 21st, 42nd, and 53rd batteries of field artillery, and No. 10 Mountain Battery, with the Natal Field Artillery, the guns of which were too light to be of service, and the 23rd Company of Royal Engineers. The whole force, some eight or nine thousand strong, was under the immediate command of Sir George White, with Sir Archibald Hunter, fresh from the Soudan, General French, and General Ian Hamilton as his lieutenants.

The first shock of the Boers, then, must fall upon 4000 men. If these could be overwhelmed, there were 8000 more to be defeated or masked. Then what was there between them and the sea? Some detachments of local volunteers, the Durban Light Infantry at Colenso, and the Natal Royal Rifles, with some naval volunteers at Estcourt. With the power of the Boers and their mobility it is inexplicable how the colony was saved. We are of the same blood, the Boers and we, and we show it in our failings. Over-confidence on our part gave them the chance, and over-confidence on theirs prevented them from instantly availing themselves of it. It passed, never to come again.

The outbreak of war was upon October 11th. On the 12th the Boer forces crossed the frontier both on the north and on the west. On the 13th they occupied Charlestown at the top angle of Natal. On the 15th they had reached Newcastle, a larger town some fifteen miles inside the border. Watchers from the houses saw six miles of canvas-tilted bullock wagons winding down the passes, and learned that this was not a raid but an invasion. At the same date news reached the British headquarters of an advance from the western passes, and of a movement from the Buffalo River on the east. On the 13th Sir George White had made a reconnaissance in force, but had not come in touch with the enemy. On the 15th six of the Natal Police were surrounded and captured at one of the drifts of the Buffalo River. On the 18th our cavalry patrols came into touch with the Boer scouts at Acton Homes and Besters Station, these being the voortrekkers of the Orange Free State force. On the 18th also a detachment was reported from Hadders Spruit, seven miles north of Glencoe Camp. The cloud was drifting up, and it could not be long before it would burst.

Two days later, on the early morning of October 20th, the forces came at last into collision. At half-past three in the morning, well before daylight, the mounted infantry picket at the junction of the roads from Landmans and Vants Drifts was fired into by the Doornberg commando, and retired upon its supports. Two companies of the Dublin Fusiliers were sent out, and at five o’clock on a fine but misty morning the whole of Symons’s force was under arms with the knowledge that the Boers were pushing boldly towards them. The khaki-clad lines of fighting men stood in their long thin ranks staring up at the curves of the saddle-back hills to the north and east of them, and straining their eyes to catch a glimpse of the enemy. Why these same saddle-back hills were not occupied by our own people is, it must be confessed, an insoluble mystery. In a hollow on one flank were the 18th Hussars and the mounted infantry. On the other were the eighteen motionless guns, limbered up and ready, the horses fidgeting and stamping in the raw morning air.

And then suddenly — could that be they? An officer with a telescope stared intently and pointed. Another and another turned a steady field glass towards the same place. And then the men could see also, and a little murmur of interest ran down the ranks.

A long sloping hill — Talana Hill — olive-green in hue, was stretching away in front of them. At the summit it rose into a rounded crest. The mist was clearing, and the curve was hard-outlined against the limpid blue of the morning sky. On this, some two and a half miles or three miles off, a little group of black dots had appeared. The clear edge of the skyline had become serrated with moving figures. They clustered into a knot, then opened again, and then —

There had been no smoke, but there came a long crescendo hoot, rising into a shrill wail. The shell hummed over the soldiers like a great bee, and sloshed into soft earth behind them. Then another — and yet another — and yet another. But there was no time to heed them, for there was the hillside and there the enemy. So at it again with the good old murderous obsolete heroic tactics of the British tradition! There are times when, in spite of science and book-lore, the best plan is the boldest plan, and it is well to fly straight at your enemy’s throat, facing the chance that your strength may fail before you can grasp it. The cavalry moved off round the enemy’s left flank. The guns dashed to the front, unlimbered, and opened fire. The infantry were moved round in the direction of Sandspruit, passing through the little town of Dundee, where the women and children came to the doors and windows to cheer them. It was thought that the hill was more accessible from that side. The Leicesters and one field battery — the 67th — were left behind to protect the camp and to watch the Newcastle Road upon the west. At seven in the morning all was ready for the assault.

Two military facts of importance had already been disclosed. One was that the Boer percussion-shells were useless in soft ground, as hardly any of them exploded; the other that the Boer guns could outrange our ordinary fifteen-pounder field gun, which had been the one thing perhaps in the whole British equipment upon which we were prepared to pin our faith. The two batteries, the 13th and the 69th, were moved nearer, first to 3000, and then at last to 2300 yards, at which range they quickly dominated the guns upon the hill. Other guns had opened from another crest to the east of Talana, but these also were mastered by the fire of the 13th Battery. At 7.30 the infantry were ordered to advance, which they did in open order, extended to ten paces. The Dublin Fusiliers formed the first line, the Rifles the second, and the Irish Fusiliers the third.

The first thousand yards of the advance were over open grassland, where the range was long, and the yellow brown of the khaki blended with the withered veld. There were few casualties until the wood was reached, which lay halfway up the long slope of the hill. It was a plantation of larches, some hundreds of yards across and nearly as many deep. On the left side of this wood — that is, the left side to the advancing troops — there stretched a long nullah or hollow, which ran perpendicularly to the hill, and served rather as a conductor of bullets than as a cover. So severe was the fire at this point that both in the wood and in the nullah the troops lay down to avoid it. An officer of Irish Fusiliers has narrated how in trying to cut the straps from a fallen private a razor lent him for that purpose by a wounded sergeant was instantly shot out of his hand. The gallant Symons, who had refused to dismount, was shot through the stomach and fell from his horse mortally wounded. With an excessive gallantry, he had not only attracted the enemy’s fire by retaining his horse, but he had been accompanied throughout the action by an orderly bearing a red pennon. ‘Have they got the hill? Have they got the hill?’ was his one eternal question as they carried him dripping to the rear. It was at the edge of the wood that Colonel Sherston met his end.

From now onwards it was as much a soldiers’ battle as Inkermann. In the shelter of the wood the more eager of the three battalions had pressed to the front until the fringe of the trees was lined by men from all of them. The difficulty of distinguishing particular regiments where all were clad alike made it impossible in the heat of action to keep any sort of formation. So hot was the fire that for the time the advance was brought to a standstill, but the 69th battery, firing shrapnel at a range of 1400 yards, subdued the rifle fire, and about half-past eleven the infantry were able to push on once more.

Above the wood there was an open space some hundreds of yards across, bounded by a rough stone wall built for herding cattle. A second wall ran at right angles to this down towards the wood. An enfilading rifle fire had been sweeping across this open space, but the wall in front does not appear to have been occupied by the enemy, who held the kopje above it. To avoid the cross fire the soldiers ran in single file under the shelter of the wall, which covered them to the right, and so reached the other wall across their front. Here there was a second long delay, the men dribbling up from below, and firing over the top of the wall and between the chinks of the stones. The Dublin Fusiliers, through being in a more difficult position, had been unable to get up as quickly as the others, and most of the hard-breathing excited men who crowded under the wall were of the Rifles and of the Irish Fusiliers. The air was so full of bullets that it seemed impossible to live upon the other side of this shelter. Two hundred yards intervened between the wall and the crest of the kopje. And yet the kopje had to be cleared if the battle were to be won.

Out of the huddled line of crouching men an officer sprang shouting, and a score of soldiers vaulted over the wall and followed at his heels. It was Captain Connor, of the Irish Fusiliers, but his personal magnetism carried up with him some of the Rifles as well as men of his own command. He and half his little forlorn hope were struck down — he, alas! to die the same night — but there were other leaders as brave to take his place. ‘Forrard away, men, forrard away!’ cried Nugent, of the Rifles. Three bullets struck him, but he continued to drag himself up the boulder-studded hill. Others followed, and others, from all sides they came running, the crouching, yelling, khaki-clad figures, and the supports rushed up from the rear. For a time they were beaten down by their own shrapnel striking into them from behind, which is an amazing thing when one considers that the range was under 2000 yards. It was here, between the wall and the summit, that Colonel Gunning, of the Rifles, and many other brave men met their end, some by our own bullets and some by those of the enemy; but the Boers thinned away in front of them, and the anxious onlookers from the plain below saw the waving helmets on the crest, and learned at last that all was well.

But it was, it must be confessed, a Pyrrhic victory. We had our hill, but what else had we? The guns which had been silenced by our fire had been removed from the kopje. The commando which seized the hill was that of Lucas Meyer, and it is computed that he had with him about 4000 men. This figure includes those under the command of Erasmus, who made halfhearted demonstrations against the British flank. If the shirkers be eliminated, it is probable that there were not more than a thousand actual combatants upon the hill. Of this number about fifty were killed and a hundred wounded. The British loss at Talana Hill itself was 41 killed and 180 wounded, but among the killed were many whom the army could ill spare. The gallant but optimistic Symons, Gunning of the Rifles, Sherston, Connor, Hambro, and many other brave men died that day. The loss of officers was out of all proportion to that of the men.

An incident which occurred immediately after the action did much to rob the British of the fruits of the victory. Artillery had pushed up the moment that the hill was carried, and had unlimbered on Smith's Nek between the two hills, from which the enemy, in broken groups of 50 and 100, could be seen streaming away. A fairer chance for the use of shrapnel has never been. But at this instant there ran from an old iron church on the reverse side of the hill, which had been used all day as a Boer hospital, a man with a white flag. It is probable that the action was in good faith, and that it was simply intended to claim a protection for the ambulance party which followed him. But the too confiding gunner in command appears to have thought that an armistice had been declared, and held his hand during those precious minutes which might have turned a defeat into a rout. The chance passed, never to return. The double error of firing into our own advance and of failing to fire into the enemy's retreat makes the battle one which cannot be looked back to with satisfaction by our gunners.

In the meantime some miles away another train of events had led to a complete disaster to our small cavalry force — a disaster which robbed our dearly bought infantry victory of much of its importance. That action alone was undoubtedly a victorious one, but the net result of the day's fighting cannot be said to have been certainly in our favour. It was Wellington who asserted that his cavalry always got him into scrapes, and the whole of British military history might furnish examples of what he meant. Here again our cavalry got into trouble. Suffice it for the civilian to chronicle the fact, and leave it to the military critic to portion out the blame.

One company of mounted infantry (that of the Rifles) had been told off to form an escort for the guns. The rest of the mounted infantry with part of the 18th Hussars (Colonel Moller) had moved round the right flank until they reached the right rear of the enemy. Such a movement, had Lucas Meyer been the only opponent, would have been above criticism; but knowing, as we did, that there were several commandoes converging upon Glencoe it was obviously taking a very grave and certain risk to allow the cavalry to wander too far from support. They were soon entangled in broken country and attacked by superior numbers of the Boers. There was a time when they might have exerted an important influence upon the action by attacking the Boer ponies behind the hills, but the opportunity was allowed to pass. An attempt was made to get back to the army, and a series of defensive positions were held to cover the retreat, but the enemy's fire became too hot to allow them to be retained. Every route save one appeared to be blocked, so the horsemen took this, which led them into the heart of a second commando of the enemy. Finding no way through, the force took up a defensive position, part of them in a farm and part on a kopje which overlooked it.

The party consisted of two troops of Hussars, one company of mounted infantry of the Dublin Fusiliers, and one section of the mounted infantry of the Rifles — about two hundred men in all. They were subjected to a hot fire for some hours, many being killed and wounded. Guns were brought up, and fired shell into the farmhouse. At 4.30 the force, being in a perfectly hopeless position, laid down their arms. Their ammunition was gone, many of their horses had stampeded, and they were hemmed in by very superior numbers, so that no slightest slur can rest upon the survivors for their decision to surrender, though the movements which brought them to such a pass are more open to criticism. They were the vanguard of that considerable body of humiliated and bitter-hearted men who were to assemble at the capital of our brave and crafty enemy. The remainder of the 18th Hussars, who under Major Knox had been detached from the main force and sent across the Boer rear, underwent a somewhat similar experience, but succeeded in extricating themselves with a loss of six killed and ten wounded. Their efforts were by no means lost, as they engaged the attention of a considerable body of Boers during the day and were able to bring some prisoners back with them.

The battle of Talana Hill was a tactical victory but a strategic defeat. It was a crude frontal attack without any attempt at even a feint of flanking, but the valour of the troops, from general to private, carried it through. The force was in a position so radically false that the only use which they could make of a victory was to cover their own retreat. From all points Boer commandoes were converging upon it, and already it was understood that the guns at their command were heavier than any which could be placed against them. This was made more clear on October 21st, the day after the battle, when the force, having withdrawn overnight from the useless hill which they had captured, moved across to a fresh position on the far side of the railway. At four in the afternoon a very heavy gun opened from a distant hill, altogether beyond the extreme range of our artillery, and plumped shell after shell into our camp. It was the first appearance of the great Creusot. An officer with several men of the Leicesters, and some of our few remaining cavalry, were bit. The position was clearly impossible, so at two in the morning of the 22nd the whole force was moved to a point to the south of the town of Dundee. On the same day a reconnaissance was made in the direction of Glencoe Station, but the passes were found to be strongly occupied, and the little army marched back again to its original position. The command had fallen to Colonel Yule, who justly considered that his men were dangerously and uselessly exposed, and that his correct strategy was to fall back, if it were still possible, and join the main body at Ladysmith, even at the cost of abandoning the two hundred sick and wounded who lay with General Symons in the hospital at Dundee. It was a painful necessity, but no one who studies the situation can have any doubt of its wisdom. The retreat was no easy task, a march by road of some sixty or seventy miles through a very rough country with an enemy pressing on every side. Its successful completion without any loss or any demoralisation of the troops is perhaps as fine a military exploit as any of our early victories. Through the energetic and loyal co-operation of Sir George White, who fought the actions of Elandslaagte and of Rietfontein in order to keep the way open for them, and owing mainly to the skillful guidance of Colonel Dartnell, of the Natal Police, they succeeded in their critical manoeuvre. On October 23rd they were at Beith, on the 24th at Waselibank Spruit, on the 25th at Sunday River, and next morning they marched, sodden with rain, plastered with mud, dog-tired, but in the best of spirits, into Ladysmith amid the cheers of their comrades. A battle, six days without settled sleep, four days without a proper meal, winding up with a single march of thirty-two miles over heavy ground and through a pelting rain storm — that was the record of the Dundee column. They had fought and won, they had striven and toiled to the utmost capacity of manhood, and the end of it all was that they had reached the spot which they should never have left. But their endurance could not be lost — no worthy deed is ever lost. Like the light division, when they marched their fifty odd unbroken miles to be present at Talavera, they leave a memory and a standard behind them which is more important than success. It is by the tradition of such sufferings and such endurance that others in other days are nerved to do the like.

CHAPTER 6. ELANDSLAAGTE AND RIETFONTEIN.

While the Glencoe force had struck furiously at the army of Lucas Meyer, and had afterwards by hard marching disengaged itself from the numerous dangers which threatened it, its comrades at Ladysmith had loyally co-operated in drawing off the attention of the enemy and keeping the line of retreat open.

On October 20th — the same day as the Battle of Talana Hill — the line was cut by the Boers at a point nearly midway between Dundee and Ladysmith. A small body of horsemen were the forerunners of a considerable commando, composed of Freestaters, Transvaalers, and Germans, who had advanced into Natal through Botha’s Pass under the command of General Koch. They had with them the two Maxim-Nordenfelds which had been captured from the Jameson raiders, and were now destined to return once more to British hands. Colonel Schiel, the German artillerist, had charge of these guns.

On the evening of that day General French, with a strong reconnoitering party, including the Natal Carabineers, the 5th Lancers, and the 21st battery, had defined the enemy’s position. Next morning (the 21st) he returned, but either the enemy had been reinforced during the night or he had underrated them the day before, for the force which he took with him was too weak for any serious attack. He had one battery of the Natal artillery, with their little seven-pounder popguns, five squadrons of the Imperial Horse, and, in the train which slowly accompanied his advance, half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment. Elated by the news of Talana Hill, and anxious to emulate their brothers of Dundee, the little force moved out of Ladysmith in the early morning.

Some at least of the men were animated by feelings such as seldom find a place in the breast of the British soldier as he marches into battle. A sense of duty, a belief in the justice of his cause, a love for his regiment and for his country, these are the common incentives of every soldier. But to the men of the Imperial Light Horse, recruited as they were from among the British refugees of the Rand, there was added a burning sense of injustice, and in many cases a bitter hatred against the men whose rule had weighed so heavily upon them. In this singular corps the ranks were full of wealthy men and men of education, who, driven from their peaceful vocations in Johannesburg, were bent upon fighting their way back to them again. A most unmerited slur had been cast upon their courage in connection with the Jameson raid — a slur which they and other similar corps have washed out for ever in their own blood and that of their enemy. Chisholm, a fiery little Lancer, was in command, with Karri Davis and Wools-Sampson, the two stalwarts who had preferred Pretoria Gaol to the favours of Kruger, as his majors. The troopers were on fire at the news that a cartel had arrived in Ladysmith the night before, purporting to come from the Johannesburg Boers and Hollanders, asking what uniform the Light Horse wore, as they were anxious to meet them in battle. These men were fellow townsmen and knew each other well. They need not have troubled about the uniform, for before evening the Light Horse were near enough for them to know their faces.

It was about eight o'clock on a bright summer morning that the small force came in contact with a few scattered Boer outposts, who retired, firing, before the advance of the Imperial Light Horse. As they fell back the green and white tents of the invaders came into view upon the russet-coloured hillside of Elandslaagte. Down at the red brick railway station the Boers could be seen swarming out of the buildings in which they had spent the night. The little Natal guns, firing with obsolete black powder, threw a few shells into the station, one of which, it is said, penetrated a Boer ambulance which could not be seen by the gunners. The accident was to be regretted, but as no patients could have been in the ambulance the mischance was not a serious one.

But the busy, smoky little seven-pounder guns were soon to meet their master. Away up on the distant hillside, a long thousand yards beyond their own furthest range, there was a sudden bright flash. No smoke, only the throb of flame, and then the long sibilant scream of the shell, and the thud as it buried itself in the ground under a limber. Such judgment of range would have delighted the most martinet of inspectors at Okehampton. Bang came another, and another, and another, right into the heart of the battery. The six little guns lay back at their extremest angle, and all barked together in impotent fury. Another shell pitched over them, and the officer in command lowered his field-glass in despair as he saw his own shells bursting far short upon the hillside. Jameson’s defeat does not seem to have been due to any defect in his artillery. French, peering and pondering, soon came to the conclusion that there were too many Boers for him, and that if those fifteen-pounders desired target practice they should find some other mark than the Natal Field Artillery. A few curt orders, and his whole force was making its way to the rear. There, out of range of those perilous guns, they halted, the telegraph wire was cut, a telephone attachment was made, and French whispered his troubles into the sympathetic ear of Ladysmith. He did not whisper in vain. What he had to say was that where he had expected a few hundred riflemen he found something like two thousand, and that where he expected no guns he found two very excellent ones. The reply was that by road and by rail as many men as could be spared were on their way to join him.

Soon they began to drop in, those useful reinforcements — first the Devons, quiet, business-like, reliable; then the Gordons, dashing, fiery, brilliant. Two squadrons of the 5th Lancers, the 42nd R.F.A., the 21st R.F.A., another squadron of Lancers, a squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards — French began to feel that he was strong enough for the task in front of him. He had a decided superiority of numbers and of guns. But the others were on their favourite defensive on a hill. It would be a fair fight and a deadly one.

It was late after noon before the advance began. It was hard, among those billowing hills, to make out the exact limits of the enemy’s position. All that was certain was that they were there, and that we meant having them out if it were humanly possible. ‘The enemy are there,’ said Ian Hamilton to his infantry; ‘I hope you will shift them out before sunset — in fact I know you will.’ The men cheered and laughed. In long open lines they advanced across the veld, while the thunder of the two batteries behind them told the Boer gunners that it was their turn now to know what it was to be outmatched.

The idea was to take the position by a front and a flank attack, but there seems to have been some difficulty in determining which was the front and which the flank. In fact, it was only by trying that one could know. General White with his staff had arrived from Ladysmith, but refused to take the command out of French’s hands. It is typical of White’s chivalrous spirit that within ten days he refused to identify himself with a victory when it was within his right to do so, and took the whole responsibility for a disaster at which he was not present. Now he rode amid the shells and watched the able dispositions of his lieutenant.

About half-past three the action had fairly begun. In front of the advancing British there lay a rolling hill, topped by a further one. The lower hill was not defended, and the infantry, breaking from column of companies into open order, advanced over it. Beyond was a broad grassy valley which led up to the main position, a long kopje flanked by a small sugar-loaf one Behind the green slope which led to the ridge of death an ominous and terrible cloud was driving up, casting its black shadow over the combatants. There was the stillness which goes before some great convulsion of nature. The men pressed on in silence, the soft thudding of their feet and the rattle of their sidearms filling the air with a low and continuous murmur. An additional solemnity was given to the attack by that huge black cloud which hung before them.

The British guns had opened at a range of 4400 yards, and now against the swarthy background there came the quick smokeless twinkle of the Boer reply. It was an unequal fight, but gallantly sustained. A shot and another to find the range; then a wreath of smoke from a bursting shell exactly where the guns had been, followed by another and another. Overmatched, the two Boer pieces relapsed into a sulky silence, broken now and again by short spurts of frenzied activity. The British batteries turned their attention away from them, and began to search the ridge with shrapnel and prepare the way for the advancing infantry.

The scheme was that the Devonshires should hold the enemy in front while the main attack from the left flank was carried out by the Gordons, the Manchesters, and the Imperial Light Horse. The words ‘front’ and ‘flank,’ however, cease to have any meaning with so mobile and elastic a force, and the attack which was intended to come from the left became really a frontal one, while the Devons found themselves upon the right flank of the Boers. At the moment of the final advance the great black cloud had burst, and a torrent of rain lashed into the faces of the men. Slipping and sliding upon the wet grass, they advanced to the assault.

And now amid the hissing of the rain there came the fuller, more menacing whine of the Mauser bullets, and the ridge rattled from end to end with the rifle fire. Men fell fast, but their comrades pressed hotly on. There was a long way to go, for the summit of the position was nearly 800 feet above the level of the railway. The hillside, which had appeared to be one slope, was really a succession of undulations, so that the advancing infantry alternately dipped into shelter and emerged into a hail of bullets. The line of advance was dotted with khaki-clad figures, some still in death, some writhing in their agony. Amid the litter of bodies a major of the Gordons, shot through the leg, sat philosophically smoking his pipe. Plucky little Chisholm, Colonel of the Imperials, had fallen with two mortal wounds as he dashed forward waving a coloured sash in the air. So long was the advance and so trying the hill that the men sank panting upon the ground, and took their breath before making another rush. As at Talana Hill, regimental formation was largely gone, and men of the Manchesters, Gordons, and Imperial Light Horse surged upwards in one long ragged fringe, Scotchman, Englishman, and British Africander keeping pace in that race of death. And now at last they began to see their enemy. Here and there among the boulders in front of them there was the glimpse of a slouched hat, or a peep at a flushed bearded face which drooped over a rifle barrel. There was a pause, and then with a fresh impulse the wave of men gathered themselves together and flung themselves forward. Dark figures sprang up from the rocks in front. Some held up their rifles in token of surrender. Some ran with heads sunk between their shoulders, jumping and ducking among the rocks. The panting breathless climbers were on the edge of the plateau. There were the two guns which had flashed so brightly, silenced now, with a litter of dead gunners around them and one wounded officer standing by a trail. A small body of the Boers still resisted. Their appearance horrified some of our men. ‘They were dressed in black frock coats and looked like a lot of rather seedy business men,’ said a spectator. ‘It seemed like murder to kill them.’ Some surrendered, and some fought to the death where they stood. Their leader Koch, an old gentleman with a white beard, lay amidst the rocks, wounded in three places. He was treated with all courtesy and attention, but died in Ladysmith Hospital some days afterwards.

In the meanwhile the Devonshire Regiment had waited until the attack had developed and had then charged the hill upon the flank, while the artillery moved up until it was within 2000 yards of the enemy’s position. The Devons met with a less fierce resistance than the others, and swept up to the summit in time to head off some of the fugitives. The whole of our infantry were now upon the ridge.

But even so these dour fighters were not beaten. They clung desperately to the further edges of the plateau, firing from behind the rocks. There had been a race for the nearest gun between an officer of the Manchesters and a drummer sergeant of the Gordons. The officer won, and sprang in triumph on to the piece. Men of all regiments swarmed round yelling and cheering, when upon their astonished ears there sounded the ‘Cease fire’ and then the ‘Retire.’ It was incredible, and yet it pealed out again, unmistakable in its urgency. With the instinct of discipline the men were slowly falling back. And then the truth of it came upon the minds of some of them. The crafty enemy had learned our bugle calls. ‘Retire be damned! shrieked a little bugler, and blew the ‘Advance’ with all the breath that the hillside had left him. The men, who had retired a hundred yards and uncovered the guns, flooded back over the plateau, and in the Boer camp which lay beneath it a white flag showed that the game was up. A squadron of the 5th Lancers and of the 5th Dragoon Guards, under Colonel Gore of the latter regiment, had prowled round the base of the hill, and in the fading light they charged through and through the retreating Boers, killing several, and making from twenty to thirty prisoners. It was one of the very few occasions in the war where the mounted Briton overtook the mounted Boer.

‘What price Majuba?’ was the cry raised by some of the infantry as they dashed up to the enemy’s position, and the action may indeed be said to have been in some respects the converse of that famous fight. It is true that there were many more British at Elandslaagte than Boers at Majuba, but then the defending force was much more numerous also, and the British had no guns there. It is true, also, that Majuba is very much more precipitous than Elandslaagte, but then every practical soldier knows that it is easier to defend a moderate glacis than an abrupt slope, which gives cover under its boulders to the attacker while the defender has to crane his head over the edge to look down. On the whole, this brilliant little action may be said to have restored things to their true proportion, and to have shown that, brave as the Boers undoubtedly are, there is no military feat within their power which is not equally possible to the British soldier. Talana Hill and Elandslaagte, fought on successive days, were each of them as gallant an exploit as Majuba.

We had more to show for our victory than for the previous one at Dundee. Two Maxim-Nordenfeld guns, whose efficiency had been painfully evident during the action, were a welcome addition to our artillery. Two hundred and fifty Boers were killed and wounded and about two hundred taken prisoners, the loss falling most heavily upon the Johannesburgers, the Germans, and the Hollanders. General Koch, Dr. Coster, Colonel Schiel, Pretorius, and other well-known Transvaalers fell into our hands. Our own casualty list consisted of 41 killed and 220 wounded, much the same number as at Talana Hill, the heaviest losses falling upon the Gordon Highlanders and the Imperial Light Horse.

In the hollow where the Boer tents had stood, amid the laagered wagons of the vanquished, under a murky sky and a constant drizzle of rain, the victors spent the night. Sleep was out of the question, for all night the fatigue parties were searching the hillside and the wounded were being carried in. Camp-fires were lit and soldiers and prisoners crowded round them, and it is pleasant to recall that the warmest corner and the best of their rude fare were always reserved for the downcast Dutchmen, while words of rude praise and sympathy softened the pain of defeat. It is the memory of such things which may in happier days be more potent than all the wisdom of statesmen in welding our two races into one.

Having cleared the Boer force from the line of the railway, it is evident that General White could not continue to garrison the point, as he was aware that considerable forces were moving from the north, and his first duty was the security of Ladysmith. Early next morning (October 22nd), therefore, his weary but victorious troops returned to the town. Once there he learned, no doubt, that General Yule had no intention of using the broken railway for his retreat, but that he intended to come in a circuitous fashion by road. White’s problem was to hold tight to the town and at the same time to strike hard at any northern force so as to prevent them from interfering with Yule’s retreat. It was in the furtherance of this scheme that he fought upon October 24th the action of Rietfontein, an engagement slight in itself, but important on account of the clear road which was secured for the weary forces retiring from Dundee.

The army from the Free State, of which the commando vanquished at Elandslaagte was the vanguard, had been slowly and steadily debouching from the passes, and working south and eastwards to cut the line between Dundee and Ladysmith. It was White’s intention to prevent them from crossing the Newcastle Road, and for this purpose he sallied out of Ladysmith on Tuesday the 24th, having with him two regiments of cavalry, the 5th Lancers and the 19th Hussars, the 42nd and 53rd field batteries with the 10th mountain battery, four infantry regiments, the Devons, Liverpools, Gloucesters, and 2nd King's Royal Rifles, the Imperial Light Horse, and the Natal Volunteers — some four thousand men in all.

The enemy were found to be in possession of a line of hills within seven miles of Ladysmith, the most conspicuous of which is called Tinta Inyoni. It was no part of General White's plan to attempt to drive him from this position — it is not wise generalship to fight always upon ground of the enemy's choosing — but it was important to hold him where he was, and to engage his attention during this last day of the march of the retreating column. For this purpose, since no direct attack was intended, the guns were of more importance than the infantry — and indeed the infantry should, one might imagine, have been used solely as an escort for the artillery. A desultory and inconclusive action ensued which continued from nine in the morning until half-past one in the afternoon. A well-directed fire of the Boer guns from the hills was dominated and controlled by our field artillery, while the advance of their riflemen was restrained by shrapnel. The enemy's guns were more easily marked down than at Elandslaagte, as they used black powder. The ranges varied from three to four thousand yards. Our losses in the whole action would have been insignificant had it not happened that the Gloucester Regiment advanced somewhat incautiously into the open and was caught in a cross fire of musketry which struck down Colonel Wilford and fifty of his officers and men. Within four days Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, of the Gordons, Colonel Chisholm, of the Light Horse, Colonel Gunning, of the Rifles, and now Colonel Wilford, of the Gloucesters, had all fallen at the head of their regiments. In the afternoon General White, having accomplished his purpose and secured the safety of the Dundee column while traversing the dangerous Biggarsberg passes, withdrew his force to Ladysmith. We have no means of ascertaining the losses of the Boers, but they were probably slight. On our side we lost 109 killed and wounded, of which only 13 cases were fatal. Of this total 64 belonged to the Gloucesters and 25 to the troops raised in Natal. Next day, as already narrated, the whole British army was re-assembled once more at Ladysmith, and the campaign was to enter upon a new phase.

At the end of this first vigorous week of hostilities it is interesting to sum up the net result. The strategical advantage had lain with the Boers. They had made our position at Dundee untenable and had driven us back to Ladysmith. They had the country and the railway for the northern quarter of the colony in their possession. They had killed and wounded between six and seven hundred of our men, and they had captured some two hundred of our cavalry, while we had been compelled at Dundee to leave considerable stores and our wounded, including General Penn Symons, who actually died while a prisoner in their hands. On the other hand, the tactical advantages lay with us. We had twice driven them from their positions, and captured two of their guns. We had taken two hundred prisoners, and had probably killed and wounded as many as we had lost. On the whole, the honours of that week’s fighting in Natal may be said to have been fairly equal — which is more than we could claim for many a weary week to come.

CHAPTER 7. THE BATTLE OF LADYSMITH.

Sir George White had now reunited his force, and found himself in command of a formidable little army some twelve thousand in number. His cavalry included the 5th Lancers, the 5th Dragoons, part of the 18th and the whole of the 19th Hussars, the Natal Carabineers, the Border Rifles, some mounted infantry, and the Imperial Light Horse. Among his infantry were the Royal Irish Fusiliers, the Dublin Fusiliers, and the King's Royal Rifles, fresh from the ascent of Talana Hill, the Gordons, the Manchesters, and the Devons who had been blooded at Elandslaagte, the Leicesters, the Liverpools, the 2nd battalion of the King's Royal Rifles, the 2nd Rifle Brigade, and the Gloucesters, who had been so roughly treated at Rietfontein. He had six batteries of excellent field artillery — the 13th, 21st, 42nd, 53rd, 67th, 69th, and No. 10 Mountain Battery of screw guns. No general could have asked for a more compact and workmanlike little force.

It had been recognised by the British General from the beginning that his tactics must be defensive, since he was largely outnumbered and since also any considerable mishap to his force would expose the whole colony of Natal to destruction. The actions of Elandslaagte and Rietfontein were forced upon him in order to disengage his compromised detachment, but now there was no longer any reason why he should assume the offensive. He knew that away out on the Atlantic a trail of transports which already extended from the Channel to Cape de Verde were hourly drawing nearer to him with the army corps from England. In a fortnight or less the first of them would be at Durban. It was his game, therefore, to keep his army intact, and to let those throbbing engines and whirling propellers do the work of the empire. Had he entrenched himself up to his nose and waited, it would have paid him best in the end.

But so tame and inglorious a policy is impossible to a fighting soldier. He could not with his splendid force permit himself to be shut in without an action. What policy demands honour may forbid. On October 27th there were already Boers and rumours of Boers on every side of him. Joubert with his main body was moving across from Dundee. The Freestaters were to the north and west. Their combined numbers were uncertain, but at least it was already proved that they were far more numerous and also more formidable than had been anticipated. We had had a taste of their artillery also, and the pleasant delusion that it would be a mere useless encumbrance to a Boer force had vanished for ever. It was a grave thing to leave the town in order to give battle, for the mobile enemy might swing round and seize it behind us. Nevertheless White determined to make the venture.

On the 29th the enemy were visibly converging upon the town. From a high hill within rifleshot of the houses a watcher could see no fewer than six Boer camps to the east and north. French, with his cavalry, pushed out feelers, and coasted along the edge of the advancing host. His report warned White that if he would strike before all the scattered bands were united he must do so at once. The wounded were sent down to Pietermaritzburg, and it would bear explanation why the non-combatants did not accompany them. On the evening of the same day Joubert in person was said to be only six miles off, and a party of his men cut the water supply of the town. The Klip, however, a fair-sized river, runs through Ladysmith, so that there was no danger of thirst. The British had inflated and sent up a balloon, to the amazement of the back-veld Boers; its report confirmed the fact that the enemy was in force in front of and around them.

On the night of the 29th General White detached two of his best regiments, the Irish Fusiliers and the Gloucesters, with No. 10 Mountain Battery, to advance under cover of the darkness and to seize and hold a long ridge called Nicholson’s Nek, which lay about six miles to the north of Ladysmith. Having determined to give battle on the next day, his object was to protect his left wing against those Freestaters who were still moving from the north and west, and also to keep a pass open by which his cavalry might pursue the Boer fugitives in case of a British victory. This small detached column numbered about a thousand men — whose fate will be afterwards narrated.

At five o’clock on the morning of the 30th the Boers, who had already developed a perfect genius for hauling heavy cannon up the most difficult heights, opened fire from one of the hills which lie to the north of the town. Before the shot was fired, the forces of the British had already streamed out of Ladysmith to test the strength of the invaders.

White’s army was divided into three columns. On the extreme left, quite isolated from the others, was the small Nicholson’s Nek detachment under the command of Colonel Carleton of the Fusiliers (one of three gallant brothers each of whom commands a British regiment). With him was Major

Adye of the staff. On the right British flank Colonel Grimwood commanded a brigade composed of the 1st and 2nd battalions of the King’s Royal Rifles, the Leicesters, the Liverpools, and the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. In the centre Colonel Ian Hamilton commanded the Devons, the Gordons, the Manchesters, and the 2nd battalion of the Rifle Brigade, which marched direct into the battle from the train which had brought them from Durban. Six batteries of artillery were massed in the centre under Colonel Downing. French with the cavalry and mounted infantry was on the extreme right, but found little opportunity for the use of the mounted arm that day.

The Boer position, so far as it could be seen, was a formidable one. Their centre lay upon one of the spurs of Signal Hill, about three miles from the town. Here they had two forty-pounders and three other lighter guns, but their artillery strength developed both in numbers and in weight of metal as the day wore on. Of their dispositions little could be seen. An observer looking westward might discern with his glass sprays of mounted riflemen galloping here and there over the downs, and possibly small groups where the gunners stood by their guns, or the leaders gazed down at that town which they were destined to have in view for such a weary while. On the dun-coloured plains before the town, the long thin lines, with an occasional shifting sparkle of steel, showed where Hamilton’s and Grimwood’s infantry were advancing. In the clear cold air of an African morning every detail could be seen, down to the distant smoke of a train toiling up the heavy grades which lead from Frere over the Colenso Bridge to Ladysmith.

The scrambling, inconsequential, unsatisfactory action which ensued is as difficult to describe as it must have been to direct. The Boer front covered some seven or eight miles, with kopjes, like chains of fortresses, between. They formed a huge semicircle of which our advance was the chord, and they were able from this position to pour in a converging artillery fire which grew steadily hotter as the day advanced. In the early part of the day our forty-two guns, working furiously, though with a want of accuracy which may be due to those errors of refraction which are said to be common in the limpid air of the veld, preserved their superiority. There appears to have been a want of concentration about our fire, and at some periods of the action each particular battery was firing at some different point of the Boer half-circle. Sometimes for an hour on end the Boer reply would die away altogether, only to break out with augmented violence, and with an accuracy which increased our respect for their training. Huge shells — the largest that ever burst upon a battlefield — hurled from distances which were unattainable by our fifteen-pounders, enveloped our batteries in smoke and flame. One enormous Creusot gun on Pepworth Hill threw a 96-pound shell a distance of four miles, and several 40-pound howitzers outweighted our field guns. And on the same day on which we were so roughly taught how large the guns were which labour and good will could haul on to the field of battle, we learned also that our enemy — to the disgrace of our Board of Ordnance be it recorded — was more in touch with modern invention than we were, and could show us not only the largest, but also the smallest, shell which had yet been used. Would that it had been our officials instead of our gunners who heard the devilish little one-pound shells of the Vickers-Maxim automatic gun, exploding with a continuous string of crackings and bangings, like a huge cracker, in their faces and about their ears!

Up to seven o’clock our infantry had shown no disposition to press the attack, for with so huge a position in front of them, and so many hills which were held by the enemy, it was difficult to know what line of advance should be taken, or whether the attack should not be converted into a mere reconnaissance. Shortly after that hour, however, the Boers decided the question by themselves developing a vigorous movement upon Grimwood and the right flank. With field guns, Maxims, and rifle fire, they closed rapidly in upon him. The centre column was drafted off, regiment by regiment, to reinforce the right. The Gordons, Devons, Manchesters, and three batteries were sent over to Grimwood’s relief, and the 5th Lancers, acting as infantry, assisted him to hold on.

At nine o’clock there was a lull, but it was evident that fresh commandoes and fresh guns were continually streaming into the firing line. The engagement opened again with redoubled violence, and Grimwood’s three advanced battalions fell back, abandoning the ridge which they had held for five hours. The reason for this withdrawal was not that they could not continue to hold their position, but it was that a message had just reached Sir George White from Colonel Knox, commanding in Ladysmith, to the effect that it looked as if the enemy was about to rush the town from the other side. Crossing the open in some disorder, they lost heavily, and would have done so more had not the 13th Field Battery, followed after an interval by the 53rd, dashed forward, firing shrapnel at short ranges, in order to cover the retreat of the infantry. Amid the bursting of the huge 96-pound shells, and the snapping of the vicious little automatic one-pounders, with a cross-fire of rifles as well, Abdy's and Dawkins' gallant batteries swung round their muzzles, and hit back right and left, flashing and blazing, amid their litter of dead horses and men. So severe was the fire that the guns were obscured by the dust knocked up by the little shells of the automatic gun. Then, when their work was done and the retiring infantry had straggled over the ridge, the covering guns whirled and bounded after them. So many horses had fallen that two pieces were left until the teams could be brought back for them, which was successfully done through the gallantry of Captain Thwaites. The action of these batteries was one of the few gleams of light in a not too brilliant day's work. With splendid coolness and courage they helped each other by alternate retirements after the retreating infantry had passed them. The 21st Battery (Blewitt's) also distinguished itself by its staunchness in covering the retirement of the cavalry, while the 42nd (Goulburn's) suffered the heaviest losses of any. On the whole, such honours as fell to our lot were mainly with the gunners.

White must have been now uneasy for his position, and it had become apparent that his only course was to fall back and concentrate upon the town. His left flank was up in the air, and the sound of distant firing, wafted over five miles of broken country, was the only message which arrived from them. His right had been pushed back, and, most dangerous of all, his centre had ceased to exist, for only the 2nd Rifle Brigade remained there. What would happen if the enemy burst rudely through and pushed straight for the town? It was the more possible, as the Boer artillery had now proved itself to be far heavier than ours. That terrible 96-pounder, serenely safe and out of range, was plumping its great projectiles into the masses of retiring troops. The men had had little sleep and little food, and this unanswerable fire was an ordeal for a force which is retreating. A retirement may very rapidly become a rout under such circumstances. It was with some misgivings that the officers saw their men quicken their pace and glance back over their shoulders at the whine and screech of the shell. They were still some miles from home, and the plain was open. What could be done to give them some relief?

And at that very moment there came the opportune and unexpected answer. That plume of engine smoke which the watcher had observed in the morning had drawn nearer and nearer, as the heavy train came puffing and creaking up the steep inclines. Then, almost before it had drawn up at the Ladysmith siding, there had sprung from it a crowd of merry bearded fellows, with ready hands and strange sea cries, pulling and hauling, with rope and purchase to get out the long slim guns which they had lashed on the trucks. Singular carriages were there, specially invented by Captain Percy Scott, and labouring and straining, they worked furiously to get the 12-pounder quick-firers into action. Then at last it was done, and the long tubes swept upwards to the angle at which they might hope to reach that monster on the hill at the horizon. Two of them craned their long inquisitive necks up and exchanged repartees with the big Creusot. And so it was that the weary and dispirited British troops heard a crash which was louder and sharper than that of their field guns, and saw far away upon the distant hill a great spurt of smoke and flame to show where the shell had struck. Another and another and another — and then they were troubled no more. Captain Hedworth Lambton and his men had saved the situation. The masterful gun had met its own master and sank into silence, while the somewhat bedraggled field force came trailing back into Ladysmith, leaving three hundred of their number behind them. It was a high price to pay, but other misfortunes were in store for us which made the retirement of the morning seem insignificant.

In the meantime we may follow the unhappy fortunes of the small column which had, as already described, been sent out by Sir George White in order, if possible, to prevent the junction of the two Boer armies, and at the same time to threaten the right wing of the main force, which was advancing from the direction of Dundee, Sir George White throughout the campaign consistently displayed one quality which is a charming one in an individual, but may be dangerous in a commander. He was a confirmed optimist. Perhaps his heart might have failed him in the dark days to come had he not been so. But whether one considers the non-destruction of the Newcastle Railway, the acquiescence in the occupation of Dundee, the retention of the non combatants in Ladysmith until it was too late to get rid of their useless mouths, or the failure to make any serious preparations for the defence of the town until his troops were beaten back into it, we see always the same evidence of a man who habitually hopes that all will go well, and is in consequence remiss in making preparations for their going ill. But unhappily in every one of these instances they did go ill, though the slowness of the Boers enabled us, both at Dundee and at Ladysmith, to escape what might have been disaster.

Sir George White has so nobly and frankly taken upon himself the blame of Nicholson’s Nek that an impartial historian must rather regard his self-condemnation as having been excessive. The immediate causes of the failure were undoubtedly the results of pure ill-fortune, and depended on things outside his control. But it is evident that the strategic plan which would justify the presence of this column at Nicholson’s Nek was based upon the supposition that the main army won their action at Lombard’s Kop. In that case White might swing round his right and pin the Boers between himself and Nicholson’s Nek. In any case he could then re-unite with his isolated wing. But if he should lose his battle — what then? What was to become of this detachment five miles up in the air? How was it to be extricated? The gallant Irishman seems to have waved aside the very idea of defeat. An assurance was, it is reported, given to the leaders of the column that by eleven o’clock next morning they would be relieved. So they would if White had won his action. But —

The force chosen to operate independently consisted of four and a half companies of the Gloucester regiment, six companies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and No. 10 Mountain Battery of six seven-pounder screw-guns. They were both old soldier regiments from India, and the Fusiliers had shown only ten days before at Talana Hill the stuff of which they were made. Colonel Carleton, of the Fusiliers, to whose exertions much of the success of the retreat from Dundee was due, commanded the column, with Major Adye as staff officer. On the night of Sunday, October 29th, they tramped out of Ladysmith, a thousand men, none better in the army. Little they thought, as they exchanged a jest or two with the outlying pickets, that they were seeing the last of their own armed countrymen for many a weary month.

The road was irregular and the night was moonless. On either side the black loom of the hills bulked vaguely through the darkness. The column tramped stolidly along, the Fusiliers in front, the guns and Gloucesters behind. Several times a short halt was called to make sure of the bearings. At last, in the black cold hours which come between midnight and morning, the column swung to the left out of the road. In front of them, hardly visible, stretched a long black kopje. It was the very Nicholson’s Nek which they had come to occupy. Carleton and Adye must have heaved a sigh of relief as they realised that they had actually struck it. The force was but two hundred yards from the position, and all had gone without a hitch. And yet in those two hundred yards there came an incident which decided the fate both of their enterprise and of themselves.

Out of the darkness there blundered and rattled five horsemen, their horses galloping, the loose stones flying around them. In the dim light they were gone as soon as seen. Whence coming, whither going, no one knows, nor is it certain whether it was design or ignorance or panic which sent them riding so wildly through the darkness. Somebody fired. A sergeant of the Fusiliers took the bullet through his hand. Some one else shouted to fix bayonets. The mules which carried the spare ammunition kicked and reared. There was no question of treachery, for they were led by our own men, but to hold two frightened mules, one with either hand, is a feat for a Hercules. They lashed and tossed and bucked themselves loose, and an instant afterwards were flying helter skelter through the column. Nearly all the mules caught the panic. In vain the men held on to their heads. In the mad rush they were galloped over and knocked down by the torrent of frightened creatures. In the gloom of that early hour the men must have thought that they were charged by cavalry. The column was dashed out of all military order as effectively as if a regiment of dragoons had ridden over them. When the cyclone had passed, and the men had with many a muttered curse gathered themselves into their ranks once more, they realised how grave was the misfortune which had befallen them. There, where those mad hoofs still rattled in the distance, were their spare cartridges, their shells, and their cannon. A mountain gun is not drawn upon wheels, but is carried in adjustable parts upon mule-back. A wheel had gone south, a trail east, a chase west. Some of the cartridges were strewn upon the road. Most were on their way back to Ladysmith. There was nothing for it but to face this new situation and to determine what should be done.

It has been often and naturally asked, why did not Colonel Carleton make his way back at once upon the loss of his guns and ammunition, while it was still dark? One or two considerations are evident. In the first place, it is natural to a good soldier to endeavour to retrieve a situation rather than to abandon his enterprise. His prudence, did he not do so, might become the subject of public commendation, but might also provoke some private comment. A soldier's training is to take chances, and to do the best he can with the material at his disposal. Again, Colonel Carleton and Major Adye knew the general plan of the battle which would be raging within a very few hours, and they quite understood that by withdrawing they would expose General White's left flank to attack from the forces (consisting, as we know now, of the Orange Freestaters and of the Johannesburg Police) who were coming from the north and west. He hoped to be relieved by eleven, and he believed that, come what might, he could hold out until then. These are the most obvious of the considerations which induced Colonel Carleton to determine to carry out so far as he could the programme which had been laid down for him and his command. He marched up the hill and occupied the position.

His heart, however, must have sunk when he examined it. It was very large — too large to be effectively occupied by the force which he commanded. The length was about a mile and the breadth four hundred yards. Shaped roughly like the sole of a boot, it was only the heel end which he could hope to hold. Other hills all round offered cover for Boer riflemen. Nothing daunted, however, he set his men to work at once building sangars with the loose stones. With the full dawn and the first snapping of Boer Mausers from the hills around they had thrown up some sort of rude defences which they might hope to hold until help should come.

But how could help come when there was no means by which they could let White know the plight in which they found themselves? They had brought a heliograph with them, but it was on the back of one of those accursed mules. The Boers were thick around them, and they could not send a messenger. An attempt was made to convert a polished biscuit tin into a heliograph, but with poor success. A Kaffir was dispatched with promises of a heavy bribe, but he passed out of history. And there in the clear cold morning air the balloon hung to the south of them where the first distant thunder of White's guns was beginning to sound. If only they could attract the attention of that balloon! Vainly they wagged flags at it. Serene and unresponsive it brooded over the distant battle.

And now the Boers were thickening round them on every side. Christian de Wet, a name soon to be a household word, marshaled the Boer attack, which was soon strengthened by the arrival of Van Dam and his Police. At five o'clock the fire began, at six it was warm, at seven warmer still. Two companies of the Gloucesters lined a sangar on the tread of the sole, to prevent any one getting too near to the heel. A fresh detachment of Boers, firing from a range of nearly one thousand yards, took this defence in the rear. Bullets fell among the men, and smacked up against the stone breastwork. The two companies were withdrawn, and lost heavily in the open as they crossed it. An incessant rattle and crackle of rifle fire came from all round, drawing very slowly but steadily nearer. Now and then the whisk of a dark figure from one boulder to another was all that ever was seen of the attackers. The British fired slowly and steadily, for every cartridge counted, but the cover of the Boers was so cleverly taken that it was seldom that there was much to aim at. ‘All you could ever see,’ says one who was present, ‘were the barrels of the rifles.’ There was time for thought in that long morning, and to some of the men it may have occurred what preparation for such fighting had they ever had in the mechanical exercises of the parade ground, or the shooting of an annual bagful of cartridges at exposed targets at a measured range. It is the warfare of Nicholson’s Nek, not that of Laffan’s Plain, which has to be learned in the future.

During those weary hours lying on the bullet-swept hill and listening to the eternal hissing in the air and clicking on the rocks, the British soldiers could see the fight which raged to the south of them. It was not a cheering sight, and Carleton and Adye with their gallant comrades must have felt their hearts grow heavier as they watched. The Boers’ shells bursting among the British batteries, the British shells bursting short of their opponents. The Long Toms laid at an angle of forty-five plumped their huge shells into the British guns at a range where the latter would not dream of unlimbering. And then gradually the rifle fire died away also, crackling more faintly as White withdrew to Ladysmith. At eleven o’clock Carleton’s column recognised that it had been left to its fate. As early as nine a heliogram had been sent to them to retire as the opportunity served, but to leave the hill was certainly to court annihilation.

The men had then been under fire for six hours, and with their losses mounting and their cartridges dwindling, all hope had faded from their minds. But still for another hour, and yet another, and yet another, they held doggedly on. Nine and a half hours they clung to that pile of stones. The Fusiliers were still exhausted from the effect of their march from Glencoe and their incessant work since. Many fell asleep behind the boulders. Some sat doggedly with their useless rifles and empty pouches beside them. Some picked cartridges off their dead comrades. What were they fighting for? It was hopeless, and they knew it. But always there was the honour of the flag, the glory of the regiment, the hatred of a proud and brave man to acknowledge defeat. And yet it had to come. There were some in that force who were ready for the reputation of the British army, and for the sake of an example of military virtue, to die stolidly where they stood, or to lead the ‘Faugh-a-ballagh’ boys, or the gallant 28th, in one last death-charge with empty rifles against the unseen enemy. They may have been right, these stalwarts. Leonidas and his three hundred did more for the Spartan cause by their memory than by their living valour. Man passes like the brown leaves, but the tradition of a nation lives on like the oak that sheds them — and the passing of the leaves is nothing if the bole be the sounder for it. But a counsel of perfection is easy at a study table. There are other things to be said — the responsibility of officers for the lives of their men, the hope that they may yet be of service to their country. All was weighed, all was thought of, and so at last the white flag went up. The officer who hoisted it could see no one unhurt save himself, for all in his sangar were hit, and the others were so placed that he was under the impression that they had withdrawn altogether. Whether this hoisting of the flag necessarily compromised the whole force is a difficult question, but the Boers instantly left their cover, and the men in the sangars behind, some of whom had not been so seriously engaged, were ordered by their officers to desist from firing. In an instant the victorious Boers were among them.

It was not, as I have been told by those who were there, a sight which one would wish to have seen or care now to dwell upon. Haggard officers cracked their sword-blades and cursed the day that they had been born. Privates sobbed with their stained faces buried in their hands. Of all tests of discipline that ever they had stood, the hardest to many was to conform to all that the cursed flapping handkerchief meant to them. ‘Father, father, we had rather have died,’ cried the Fusiliers to their priest. Gallant hearts, ill paid, ill thanked, how poorly do the successful of the world compare with their unselfish loyalty and devotion!

But the sting of contumely or insult was not added to their misfortunes. There is a fellowship of brave men which rises above the feuds of nations, and may at last go far, we hope, to heal them. From every rock there rose a Boer — strange, grotesque figures many of them — walnut-brown and shaggy-bearded, and swarmed on to the hill. No term of triumph or reproach came from their lips. ‘You will not say now that the young Boer cannot shoot,’ was the harshest word which the least restrained of them made use of. Between one and two hundred dead and wounded were scattered over the hill. Those who were within reach of human help received all that could be given. Captain Rice, of the Fusiliers, was carried wounded down the hill on the back of one giant, and he has narrated how the man refused the gold piece which was offered him. Some asked the soldiers for their embroidered waist-belts as souvenirs of the day. They will for generations remain as the most precious ornaments of some colonial farmhouse. Then the victors gathered together and sang psalms, not jubilant but sad and quavering. The prisoners, in a downcast column, weary, spent, and unkempt, filed off to the Boer laager at Waschbank, there to take train for Pretoria. And at Ladysmith a bugler of Fusiliers, his arm bound, the marks of battle on his dress and person, burst in upon the camp with the news that two veteran regiments had covered the flank of White's retreating army, but at the cost of their own annihilation.

CHAPTER 8. LORD METHUEN’S ADVANCE.

At the end of a fortnight of actual hostilities in Natal the situation of the Boer army was such as to seriously alarm the public at home, and to cause an almost universal chorus of ill-natured delight from the press of all European nations. Whether the reason was hatred of ourselves, or the sporting instinct which backs the smaller against the larger, or the influence of the ubiquitous Dr. Leyds and his secret service fund, it is certain that the continental papers have never been so unanimous as in their premature rejoicings over what, with an extraordinary want of proportion, and ignorance of our national character, they imagined to be a damaging blow to the British Empire. France, Russia, Austria, and Germany were equally venomous against us, nor can the visit of the German Emperor, though a courteous and timely action in itself, entirely atone for the senseless bitterness of the press of the Fatherland. Great Britain was roused out of her habitual apathy and disregard for foreign opinion by this chorus of execration, and braced herself for a greater effort in consequence. She was cheered by the sympathy of her friends in the United States, and by the good wishes of the smaller nations of Europe, notably of Italy, Denmark, Greece, Turkey, and Hungary.

The exact position at the end of this fortnight of hard slogging was that a quarter of the colony of Natal and a hundred miles of railway were in the hands of the enemy. Five distinct actions had been fought, none of them perhaps coming within the fair meaning of a battle. Of these one had been a distinct British victory, two had been indecisive, one had been unfortunate, and one had been a positive disaster. We had lost about twelve hundred prisoners and a battery of small guns. The Boers had lost two fine guns and three hundred prisoners. Twelve thousand British troops had been shut up in Ladysmith, and there was no serious force between the invaders and the sea. Only in those distant transports, where the grimy stokers shoveled and strove, were there hopes for the safety of Natal and the honour of the Empire. In Cape Colony the loyalists waited with bated breath, knowing well that there was nothing to check a Free State invasion, and that if it came no bounds could be placed upon how far it might advance, or what effect it might have upon the Dutch population.

Leaving Ladysmith now apparently within the grasp of the Boers, who had settled down deliberately to the work of throttling it, the narrative must pass to the western side of the seat of war, and give a consecutive account of the events which began with the siege of Kimberley and led to the ineffectual efforts of Lord Methuen’s column to relieve it.

On the declaration of war two important movements had been made by the Boers upon the west. One was the advance of a considerable body under the formidable Cronje to attack Mafeking, an enterprise which demands a chapter of its own. The other was the investment of Kimberley by a force which consisted principally of Freestaters under the command of Wessels and Botha. The place was defended by Colonel Kekewich, aided by the advice and help of Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who had gallantly thrown himself into the town by one of the last trains which reached it. As the founder and director of the great De Beers diamond mines he desired to be with his people in the hour of their need, and it was through his initiative that the town had been provided with the rifles and cannon with which to sustain the siege.

The troops which Colonel Kekewich had at his disposal consisted of four companies of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment (his own regiment), with some Royal Engineers, a mountain battery, and two machine guns. In addition there were the extremely spirited and capable local forces, a hundred and twenty men of the Cape Police, two thousand Volunteers, a body of Kimberley Light Horse, and a battery of light seven-pounder guns. There were also eight Maxims which were mounted upon the huge mounds of debris which surrounded the mines and formed most efficient fortresses.

A small reinforcement of police had, under tragic circumstances, reached the town. Vryburg, the capital of British Bechuanaland, lies 145 miles to the north of Kimberley. The town has strong Dutch sympathies, and on the news of the approach of a Boer force with artillery it was evident that it could not be held. Scott, the commandant of police, made some attempt to organise a defence, but having no artillery and finding little sympathy, he was compelled to abandon his charge to the invaders. The gallant Scott rode south with his troopers, and in his humiliation and grief at his inability to preserve his post he blew out his brains upon the journey. Vryburg was immediately occupied by the Boers, and British Bechuanaland was formally annexed to the South African Republic. This policy of the instant annexation of all territories invaded was habitually carried out by the enemy, with the idea that British subjects who joined them would in this way be shielded from the consequences of treason. Meanwhile several thousand Freestaters and Transvaalers with artillery had assembled round Kimberley, and all news of the town was cut off. Its relief was one of the first tasks which presented itself to the inpouring army corps. The obvious base of such a movement must be Orange River, and there and at De Aar the stores for the advance began to be accumulated. At the latter place especially, which is the chief railway junction in the north of the colony, enormous masses of provisions, ammunition, and fodder were collected, with thousands of mules which the long arm of the British Government had rounded up from many parts of the world. The guard over these costly and essential supplies seems to have been a dangerously weak one. Between Orange River and De Aar, which are sixty miles apart, there were the 9th Lancers, the Royal Munsters, the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, under three thousand men in all, with two million pounds' worth of stores and the Free State frontier within a ride of them. Verily if we have something to deplore in this war we have much also to be thankful for.

Up to the end of October the situation was so dangerous that it is really inexplicable that no advantage was taken of it by the enemy. Our main force was concentrated to defend the Orange River railway bridge, which was so essential for our advance upon Kimberley. This left only a single regiment without guns for the defence of De Aar and the valuable stores. A fairer mark for a dashing leader and a raid of mounted riflemen was never seen. The chance passed, however, as so many others of the Boers' had done. Early in November Colesberg and Naauwpoort were abandoned by our small detachments, who concentrated at De Aar. The Berkshires joined the Yorkshire Light Infantry, and nine field guns arrived also. General Wood worked hard at the fortifying of the surrounding kopjes, until within a week the place had been made tolerably secure.

The first collision between the opposing forces at this part of the seat of war was upon November 10th, when Colonel Gough of the 9th Lancers made a reconnaissance from Orange River to the north with two squadrons of his own regiment, the mounted infantry of the Northumberland Fusiliers, the Royal Munsters, and the North Lancashires, with a battery of field artillery. To the east of Belmont, about fifteen miles off, he came on a detachment of the enemy with a gun. To make out the Boer position the mounted infantry galloped round one of their flanks, and in doing so passed close to a kopje which was occupied by sharpshooters. A deadly fire crackled suddenly out from among the boulders. Of six men hit four were officers, showing how cool were the marksmen and how dangerous those dress distinctions which will probably disappear hence forwards upon the field of battle. Colonel Keith-Falconer of the Northumberlands, who had earned distinction in the Soudan, was shot dead. So was Wood of the North Lancashires. Hall and Bevan of the Northumberlands were wounded. An advance by train of the troops in camp drove back the Boers and extricated our small force from what might have proved a serious position, for the enemy in superior numbers were working round their wings. The troops returned to camp without any good object having been attained, but that must be the necessary fate of many a cavalry reconnaissance.

On November 12th Lord Methuen arrived at Orange River and proceeded to organise the column which was to advance to the relief of Kimberley. General Methuen had had some previous South African experience when in 1885 he had commanded a large body of irregular horse in Bechuanaland. His reputation was that of a gallant fearless soldier. He was not yet fifty-five years of age.

The force which gradually assembled at Orange River was formidable rather from its quality than from its numbers. It included a brigade of Guards (the 1st Scots Guards, 3rd Grenadiers, and 1st and 2nd Coldstreams), the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 2nd Northamptons, the 1st Northumberlands, and a wing of the North Lancashires whose comrades were holding out at Kimberley, with a naval brigade of seamen gunners and marines. For cavalry he had the 9th Lancers, with detachments of mounted infantry, and for artillery the 75th and 18th Batteries R.F.A.

Extreme mobility was aimed at in the column, and neither tents nor comforts of any sort were permitted to officers or men — no light matter in a climate where a tropical day is followed by an arctic night. At daybreak on November 22nd the force, numbering about eight thousand men, set off upon its eventful journey. The distance to Kimberley was not more than sixty miles, and it is probable that there was not one man in the force who imagined how long that march would take or how grim the experiences would be which awaited them on the way. At the dawn of Wednesday, November 22nd, Lord Methuen moved forward until he came into touch with the Boer position at Belmont. It was surveyed that evening by Colonel Willoughby Verner, and every disposition made to attack it in the morning.

The force of the Boers was much inferior to our own, some two or three thousand in all, but the natural strength of their position made it a difficult one to carry, while it could not be left behind us as a menace to our line of communications. A double row of steep hills lay across the road to Kimberley, and it was along the ridges, snuggling closely among the boulders, that our enemy was waiting for us. In their weeks of preparation they had constructed elaborate shelter pits in which they could lie in comparative safety while they swept all the level ground around with their rifle fire. Mr. Ralph, the American correspondent, whose letters were among the most vivid of the war, has described these lairs, littered with straw and the debris of food, isolated from each other, and each containing its grim and formidable occupant. ‘The eyries of birds of prey’ is the phrase with which he brings them home to us. In these, with nothing visible but their peering eyes and the barrels of their rifles, the Boer marksmen crouched, and munched their biltong and their mealies as the day broke upon the morning of the 23rd. With the light their enemy was upon them.

It was a soldiers’ battle in the good old primeval British style, an Alma on a small scale and against deadlier weapons. The troops advanced in grim silence against the savage-looking, rock-sprinkled, crag-topped position which confronted them. They were in a fierce humour, for they had not breakfasted, and military history from Agincourt to Talavera shows that want of food wakens a dangerous spirit among British troops. A Northumberland Fusilier exploded into words which expressed the gruffness of his comrades. As a too energetic staff officer pranced before their line he roared in his rough North-country tongue, ‘Domn thee! Get thee to hell, and let’s fire!’ In the golden light of the rising sun the men set their teeth and dashed up the hills, scrambling, falling, cheering, swearing, gallant men, gallantly led, their one thought to close with that grim bristle of rifle-barrels which fringed the rocks above them.

Lord Methuen’s intention had been an attack from front and from flank, but whether from the Grenadiers losing their bearings, or from the mobility of the Boers, which made a flank attack an impossibility, it is certain that all became frontal. The battle resolved itself into a number of isolated actions in which the various kopjes were rushed by different British regiments, always with success and always with loss. The honours of the fight, as tested by the grim record of the casualty returns, lay with the Grenadiers, the Coldstreams, the Northumberlands, and the Scots Guards. The brave Guardsmen lay thickly on the slopes, but their comrades crowned the heights. The Boers held on desperately and fired their rifles in the very faces of the stormers. One young officer had his jaw blown to pieces by a rifle which almost touched him. Another, Blundell of the Guards, was shot dead by a wounded desperado to whom he was offering his water-bottle. At one point a white flag was waved by the defenders, on which the British left cover, only to be met by a volley. It was there that Mr. E. F. Knight, of the ‘Morning Post,’ became the victim of a double abuse of the usages of war, since his wound, from which he lost his right arm, was from an explosive bullet. The man who raised the flag was captured, and it says much for the humanity of British soldiers that he was not bayoneted upon the spot. Yet it is not fair to blame a whole people for the misdeeds of a few, and it is probable that the men who descended to such devices, or who deliberately fired upon our ambulances, were as much execrated by their own comrades as by ourselves.

The victory was an expensive one, for fifty killed and two hundred wounded lay upon the hillside, and, like so many of our skirmishes with the Boers, it led to small material results. Their losses appear to have been much about the same as ours, and we captured some fifty prisoners, whom the soldiers regarded with the utmost interest. They were a sullen slouching crowd rudely clad, and they represented probably the poorest of the burghers, who now, as in the middle ages, suffer most in battle, since a long purse means a good horse. Most of the enemy galloped very comfortably away after the action, leaving a fringe of sharpshooters among the kopjes to hold back our pursuing cavalry. The want of horsemen and the want of horse artillery are the two reasons which Lord Methuen gives why the defeat was not converted into a rout. As it was, the feelings of the retreating Boers were exemplified by one of their number, who turned in his saddle in order to place his outstretched fingers to his nose in derision of the victors. He exposed himself to the fire of half a battalion while doing so, but he probably was aware that with our present musketry instruction the fire of a British half-battalion against an individual is not a very serious matter.

The remainder of the 23rd was spent at Belmont Camp, and next morning an advance was made to Enslin, some ten miles further on. Here lay the plain of Enslin, bounded by a formidable line of kopjes as dangerous as those of Belmont. Lancers and Rimington’s Scouts, the feeble but very capable cavalry of the Army, came in with the report that the hills were strongly held. Some more hard slogging was in front of the relievers of Kimberley.

The advance had been on the line of the Cape Town to Kimberley Railway, and the damage done to it by the Boers had been repaired to the extent of permitting an armoured train with a naval gun to accompany the troops. It was six o’ clock upon the morning of Saturday the 25th that this gun came into action against the kopjes, closely followed by the guns of the field artillery. One of the lessons of the war has been to disillusion us as to the effect of shrapnel fire. Positions which had been made theoretically untenable have again and again been found to be most inconveniently tenanted. Among the troops actually engaged the confidence in the effect of shrapnel fire has steadily declined with their experience. Some other method of artillery fire than the curving bullet from an exploding shrapnel shell must be devised for dealing with men who lie close among boulders and behind cover.

These remarks upon shrapnel might be included in the account of half the battles of the war, but they are particularly apposite to the action at Enslin. Here a single large kopje formed the key to the position, and a considerable time was expended upon preparing it for the British assault, by directing upon it a fire which swept the face of it and searched, as was hoped, every corner in which a rifleman might lurk. One of the two batteries engaged fired no fewer than five hundred rounds. Then the infantry advance was ordered, the Guards being held in reserve on account of their exertions at Belmont. The Northumberlands, Northamptons, North Lancashires, and Yorkshires worked round upon the right, and, aided by the artillery fire, cleared the trenches in their front. The honours of the assault, however, must be awarded to the sailors and marines of the Naval Brigade, who underwent such an ordeal as men have seldom faced and yet come out as victors. To them fell the task of carrying that formidable hill which had been so scourged by our artillery. With a grand rush they swept up the slope, but were met by a horrible fire. Every rock spurted flame, and the front ranks withered away before the storm of the Mauser. An eye-witness has recorded that the brigade was hardly visible amid the sand knocked up by the bullets. For an instant they fell back into cover, and then, having taken their breath, up they went again, with a deep-chested sailor roar.

There were but four hundred in all, two hundred seamen and two hundred marines, and the losses in that rapid rush were terrible. Yet they swarmed up, their gallant officers, some of them little boy-middies, cheering them on. Ethelston, the commander of the ‘Powerful,’ was struck down. Plumbe and Senior of the Marines were killed. Captain Prothero of the ‘Doris’ dropped while still yelling to his seamen to ‘take that kopje and be hanged to it!’ Little Huddart, the middy, died a death which is worth many inglorious years. Jones of the Marines fell wounded, but rose again and rushed on with his men. It was on these gallant marines, the men who are ready to fight anywhere and anyhow, moist or dry, that the heaviest loss fell. When at last they made good their foothold upon the crest of that murderous hill they had left behind them three officers and eighty-eight men out of a total of 206 — a loss within a few minutes of nearly 50 per cent. The bluejackets, helped by the curve of the hill, got off with a toll of eighteen of their number. Half the total British losses of the action fell upon this little body of men, who upheld most gloriously the honour and reputation of the service from which they were drawn. With such men under the white ensign we leave our island homes in safety behind us.

The battle of Enslin had cost us some two hundred of killed and wounded, and beyond the mere fact that we had cleared our way by another stage towards Kimberley it is difficult to say what advantage we had from it. We won the kopjes, but we lost our men. The Boer killed and wounded were probably less than half of our own, and the exhaustion and weakness of our cavalry forbade us to pursue and prevented us from capturing their guns. In three days the men had fought two exhausting actions in a waterless country and under a tropical sun. Their exertions had been great and yet were barren of result. Why this should be so was naturally the subject of keen discussion both in the camp and among the public at home. It always came back to Lord Methuen’s own complaint about the absence of cavalry and of horse artillery. Many very unjust charges have been hurled against our War Office — a department which in some matters has done extraordinarily and unexpectedly well — but in this question of the delay in the despatch of our cavalry and artillery, knowing as we did the extreme mobility of our enemy, there is certainly ground for an inquiry.

The Boers who had fought these two actions had been drawn mainly from the Jacobsdal and Fauresmith commandoes, with some of the burghers from Boshof. The famous Cronje, however, had been descending from

Mafeking with his old guard of Transvaalers, and keen disappointment was expressed by the prisoners at Belmont and at Enslin that he had not arrived in time to take command of them. There were evidences, however, at this latter action, that reinforcements for the enemy were coming up and that the labours of the Kimberley relief force were by no means at an end. In the height of the engagement the Lancer patrols thrown out upon our right flank reported the approach of a considerable body of Boer horsemen, who took up a position upon a hill on our right rear. Their position there was distinctly menacing, and Colonel Willoughby Verner was despatched by Lord Methuen to order up the brigade of Guards. The gallant officer had the misfortune in his return to injure himself seriously through a blunder of his horse. His mission, however, succeeded in its effect, for the Guards moving across the plain intervened in such a way that the reinforcements, without an open attack, which would have been opposed to all Boer traditions, could not help the defenders, and were compelled to witness their defeat. This body of horsemen returned north next day and were no doubt among those whom we encountered at the following action of the Modder River.

The march from Orange River had begun on the Wednesday. On Thursday was fought the action of Belmont, on Saturday that of Enslin. There was no protection against the sun by day nor against the cold at night. Water was not plentiful, and the quality of it was occasionally vile. The troops were in need of a rest, so on Saturday night and Sunday they remained at Enslin. On the Monday morning (November 27th) the weary march to Kimberley was resumed.

On Monday, November 27th, at early dawn, the little British army, a dust-coloured column upon the dusty veld, moved forwards again towards their objective. That night they halted at the pools of Klipfontein, having for once made a whole day’s march without coming in touch with the enemy. Hopes rose that possibly the two successive defeats had taken the heart out of them and that there would be no further resistance to the advance. Some, however, who were aware of the presence of Cronje, and of his formidable character, took a juster view of the situation. And this perhaps is where a few words might be said about the celebrated leader who played upon the western side of the seat of war the same part which Joubert did upon the east.

Commandant Cronje was at the time of the war sixty-five years of age, a hard, swarthy man, quiet of manner, fierce of soul, with a reputation among a nation of resolute men for unsurpassed resolution. His dark face was bearded and virile, but sedate and gentle in expression. He spoke little, but what he said was to the point, and he had the gift of those fire-words which brace and strengthen weaker men. In hunting expeditions and in native wars he had first won the admiration of his countrymen by his courage and his fertility of resource. In the war of 1880 he had led the Boers who besieged Potchefstroom, and he had pushed the attack with a relentless vigour which was not hampered by the chivalrous usages of war. Eventually he compelled the surrender of the place by concealing from the garrison that a general armistice had been signed, an act which was afterwards disowned by his own government. In the succeeding years he lived as an autocrat and a patriarch amid his farms and his herds, respected by many and feared by all. For a time he was Native Commissioner and left a reputation for hard dealing behind him. Called into the field again by the Jameson raid, he grimly herded his enemies into an impossible position and desired, as it is stated, that the hardest measure should be dealt out to the captives. This was the man, capable, crafty, iron-hard, magnetic, who lay with a reinforced and formidable army across the path of Lord Methuen’s tired soldiers. It was a fair match. On the one side the hardy men, the trained shots, a good artillery, and the defensive; on the other the historical British infantry, duty, discipline, and a fiery courage. With a high heart the dust-coloured column moved on over the dusty veld.

So entirely had hills and Boer fighting become associated in the minds of our leaders, that when it was known that Modder River wound over a plain, the idea of a resistance there appears to have passed away from their minds. So great was the confidence or so lax the scouting that a force equaling their own in numbers had assembled with many guns within seven miles of them, and yet the advance appears to have been conducted without any expectation of impending battle. The supposition, obvious even to a civilian, that a river would be a likely place to meet with an obstinate resistance, seems to have been ignored. It is perhaps not fair to blame the General for a fact which must have vexed his spirit more than ours — one’s sympathies go out to the gentle and brave man, who was heard calling out in his sleep that he ‘should have had those two guns’ — but it is repugnant to common sense to suppose that no one, neither the cavalry nor the Intelligence Department, is at fault for so extraordinary a state of ignorance. [Footnote: Later information makes it certain that the cavalry did report the presence of the enemy to Lord Methuen.] On the morning of Tuesday, November 28th, the British troops were told that they would march at once, and have their breakfast when they reached the Modder River — a grim joke to those who lived to appreciate it.

The army had been reinforced the night before by the welcome addition of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which made up for the losses of the week. It was a cloudless morning, and a dazzling sun rose in a deep blue sky. The men, though hungry, marched cheerily, the reek of their tobacco-pipes floating up from their ranks. It cheered them to see that the murderous kopjes had, for the time, been left behind, and that the great plain inclined slightly downwards to where a line of green showed the course of the river. On the further bank were a few scattered buildings, with one considerable hotel, used as a week-end resort by the businessmen of Kimberley. It lay now calm and innocent, with its open windows looking out upon a smiling garden; but death lurked at the windows and death in the garden, and the little dark man who stood by the door, peering through his glass at the approaching column, was the minister of death, the dangerous Cronje. In consultation with him was one who was to prove even more formidable, and for a longer time. Semitic in face, high-nosed, bushy-bearded, and eagle-eyed, with skin burned brown by a life of the veld — it was De la Rey, one of the trio of fighting chiefs whose name will always be associated with the gallant resistance of the Boers. He was there as adviser, but Cronje was in supreme command.

His dispositions had been both masterly and original. Contrary to the usual military practice in the defence of rivers, he had concealed his men upon both banks, placing, as it is stated, those in whose staunchness he had least confidence upon the British side of the river, so that they could only retreat under the rifles of their inexorable companions. The trenches had been so dug with such a regard for the slopes of the ground that in some places a triple line of fire was secured. His artillery, consisting of several heavy pieces and a number of machine guns (including one of the diabolical ‘pompoms’), was cleverly placed upon the further side of the stream, and was not only provided with shelter pits but had rows of reserve pits, so that the guns could be readily shifted when their range was found. Rows of trenches, a broadish river, fresh rows of trenches, fortified houses, and a good artillery well worked and well placed, it was a serious task which lay in front of the gallant little army. The whole position covered between four and five miles.

An obvious question must here occur to the mind of every non-military reader — Why should this position be attacked at all? Why should we not cross higher up where there were no such formidable obstacles?’ The answer, so far as one can answer it, must be that so little was known of the dispositions of our enemy that we were hopelessly involved in the action before we knew of it, and that then it was more dangerous to extricate the army than to push the attack. A retirement over that open plain at a range of under a thousand yards would have been a dangerous and disastrous movement. Having once got there, it was wisest and best to see it through.

The dark Cronje still waited reflective in the hotel garden. Across the veld streamed the lines of infantry, the poor fellows eager, after seven miles of that upland air, for the breakfast which had been promised them. It was a quarter to seven when our patrols of Lancers were fired upon. There were Boers, then, between them and their meal! The artillery was ordered up, the Guards were sent forward on the right, the 9th Brigade under Pole-Carew on the left, including the newly arrived Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. They swept onwards into the fatal fire zone — and then, and only then, there blazed out upon them four miles of rifles, cannon, and machine guns, and they realised, from general to private, that they had walked unwittingly into the fiercest battle yet fought in the war.

Before the position was understood the Guards were within seven hundred yards of the Boer trenches, and the other troops about nine hundred, on the side of a very gentle slope which made it most difficult to find any cover. In front of them lay a serene landscape, the river, the houses, the hotel, no movement of men, no smoke — everything peaceful and deserted save for an occasional quick flash and sparkle of flame. But the noise was horrible and appalling. Men whose nerves had been steeled to the crash of the big guns, or the monotonous roar of Maxims and the rattle of Mauser fire, found a new terror in the malignant ‘ploop-plooping’ of the automatic quick-firer. The Maxim of the Scots Guards was caught in the hell-blizzard from this thing — each shell no bigger than a large walnut, but flying in strings of a score — and men and gun were destroyed in an instant. As to the rifle bullets the air was humming and throbbing with them, and the sand was mottled like a pond in a shower. To advance was impossible, to retire was hateful. The men fell upon their faces and huddled close to the earth, too happy if some friendly ant-heap gave them a precarious shelter. And always, tier above tier, the lines of rifle fire rippled and palpitated in front of them. The infantry fired also, and fired, and fired — but what was there to fire at? An occasional eye and hand over the edge of a trench or behind a stone is no mark at seven hundred yards. It would be instructive to know how many British bullets found a billet that day.

The cavalry was useless, the infantry was powerless — there only remained the guns. When any arm is helpless and harried it always casts an imploring eye upon the guns, and rarely indeed is it that the gallant guns do not respond. Now the 75th and 18th Field Batteries came rattling and dashing to the front, and unlimbered at one thousand yards. The naval guns were working at four thousand, but the two combined were insufficient to master the fire of the pieces of large calibre which were opposed to them. Lord Methuen must have prayed for guns as Wellington did for night, and never was a prayer answered more dramatically. A strange battery came lurching up from the British rear, unheralded, unknown, the weary gasping horses panting at the traces, the men, caked with sweat and dirt, urging them on into a last spasmodic trot. The bodies of horses which had died of pure fatigue marked their course, the sergeants' horses tugged in the gun-teams, and the sergeants staggered along by the limbers. It was the 62nd Field Battery, which had marched thirty-two miles in eight hours, and now, hearing the crash of battle in front of them, had with one last desperate effort thrown itself into the firing line. Great credit is due to Major Granet and his men. Not even those gallant German batteries who saved the infantry at Spicheren could boast of a finer feat.

Now it was guns against guns, and let the best gunners win! We had eighteen field-guns and the naval pieces against the concealed cannon of the enemy. Back and forward flew the shells, howling past each other in mid-air. The weary men of the 62nd Battery forgot their labours and fatigues as they stooped and strained at their clay-coloured 15-pounders. Half of them were within rifle range, and the limber horses were the centre of a hot fire, as they were destined to be at a shorter range and with more disastrous effect at the Tugela. That the same tactics should have been adopted at two widely sundered points shows with what care the details of the war had been pre-arranged by the Boer leaders. 'Before I got my horses out,' says an officer, 'they shot one of my drivers and two horses and brought down my own horse. When we got the gun round one of the gunners was shot through the brain and fell at my feet. Another was shot while bringing up shell. Then we got a look in.’ The roar of the cannon was deafening, but gradually the British were gaining the upper hand. Here and there the little knolls upon the further side which had erupted into constant flame lay cold and silent. One of the heavier guns was put out of action, and the other had been withdrawn for five hundred yards. But the infantry fire still crackled and rippled along the trenches, and the guns could come no nearer with living men and horses. It was long past midday, and that unhappy breakfast seemed further off than ever.

As the afternoon wore on, a curious condition of things was established. The guns could not advance, and, indeed, it was found necessary to withdraw them from a 1200 to a 2800-yard range, so heavy were the losses. At the time of the change the 75th Battery had lost three officers out of five, nineteen men, and twenty-two horses. The infantry could not advance and would not retire. The Guards on the right were prevented from opening out on the flank and getting round the enemy’s line, by the presence of the Riet River, which joins the Modder almost at a right angle. All day they lay under a blistering sun, the sleet of bullets whizzing over their heads. ‘It came in solid streaks like telegraph wires,’ said a graphic correspondent. The men gossiped, smoked, and many of them slept. They lay on the barrels of their rifles to keep them cool enough for use. Now and again there came the dull thud of a bullet which had found its mark, and a man gasped, or drummed with his feet; but the casualties at this point were not numerous, for there was some little cover, and the piping bullets passed for the most part overhead.

But in the meantime there had been a development upon the left which was to turn the action into a British victory. At this side there was ample room to extend, and the 9th Brigade spread out, feeling its way down the enemy’s line, until it came to a point where the fire was less murderous and the approach to the river more in favour of the attack. Here the Yorkshires, a party of whom under Lieutenant Fox had stormed a farmhouse, obtained the command of a drift, over which a mixed force of Highlanders and Fusiliers forced their way, led by their Brigadier in person. This body of infantry, which does not appear to have exceeded five hundred in number, were assailed both by the Boer riflemen and by the guns of both parties, our own gunners being unaware that the Modder had been successfully crossed. A small hamlet called Rosmead formed, however, a point d’appui, and to this the infantry clung tenaciously, while reinforcements dribbled across to them from the farther side. ‘Now, boys, who’s for otter hunting?’ cried Major Coleridge, of the North Lancashires, as he sprang into the water. How gladly on that baking, scorching day did the men jump into the river and splash over, to climb the opposite bank with their wet khaki clinging to their figures! Some blundered into holes and were rescued by grasping the unwound putties of their comrades. And so between three and four o’clock a strong party of the British had established their position upon the right flank of the Boers, and were holding on like grim death with an intelligent appreciation that the fortunes of the day depended upon their retaining their grip.

‘Hollo, here is a river!’ cried Codrington when he led his forlorn hope to the right and found that the Riet had to be crossed. ‘I was given to understand that the Modder was fordable everywhere,’ says Lord Methuen in his official despatch. One cannot read the account of the operations without being struck by the casual, sketchy knowledge which cost us so dearly. The soldiers slogged their way through, as they have slogged it before; but the task might have been made much lighter for them had we but clearly known what it was that we were trying to do. On the other hand, it is but fair to Lord Methuen to say that his own personal gallantry and unflinching resolution set the most stimulating example to his troops. No General could have done more to put heart into his men.

And now, as the long weary scorching hungry day came to an end, the Boers began at last to flinch from their trenches. The shrapnel was finding them out and this force upon their flank filled them with vague alarm and with fears for their precious guns. And so as night fell they stole across the river, the cannon were withdrawn, the trenches evacuated, and next morning, when the weary British and their anxious General turned themselves to their grim task once more, they found a deserted village, a line of empty houses, and a litter of empty Mauser cartridge-cases to show where their tenacious enemy had stood.

Lord Methuen, in congratulating the troops upon their achievement, spoke of ‘the hardest-won victory in our annals of war,’ and some such phrase was used in his official despatch. It is hypercritical, no doubt, to look too closely at a term used by a wounded man with the flush of battle still upon him, but still a student of military history must smile at such a comparison between this action and such others as Albuera or Inkerman, where the numbers of British engaged were not dissimilar. A fight in which five hundred men are killed and wounded cannot be classed in the same category as those stern and desperate encounters where more of the victors were carried than walked from the field of battle. And yet there were some special features which will differentiate the fight at Modder River from any of the hundred actions which adorn the standards of our regiments. It was the third battle which the troops had fought within the week, they were under fire for ten or twelve hours, were waterless under a tropical sun, and weak from want of food. For the first time they were called upon to face modern rifle fire and modern machine guns in the open. The result tends to prove that those who hold that it will from now onwards be impossible ever to make such frontal attacks as those which the English made at the Alma or the French at Waterloo, are justified in their belief. It is beyond human hardihood to face the pitiless beat of bullet and shell which comes from modern quick-firing weapons. Had our flank not made a lodgment across the river, it is impossible that we could have carried the position. Once more, too, it was demonstrated how powerless the best artillery is to disperse resolute and well-placed riflemen. Of the minor points of interest there will always remain the record of the forced march of the 62nd Battery, and artillerymen will note the use of gun-pits by the Boers, which ensured that the range of their positions should never be permanently obtained.

The honours of the day upon the side of the British rested with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 2nd Coldstreams, and the artillery. Out of a total casualty list of about 450, no fewer than 112 came from the gallant Argylls and 69 from the Coldstreams. The loss of the Boers is exceedingly difficult to gauge, as they throughout the war took the utmost pains to conceal it. The number of desperate and long-drawn actions which have ended, according to the official Pretorian account, in a loss of one wounded burgher may in some way be better policy, but does not imply a higher standard of public virtue, than those long lists which have saddened our hearts in the halls of the War Office. What is certain is that the loss at Modder River could not have been far inferior to our own, and that it arose almost entirely from artillery fire, since at no time of the action were any large number of their riflemen visible. So it ended, this long pelting match, Cronje sullenly withdrawing under the cover of darkness with his resolute heart filled with fierce determination for the future, while the British soldiers threw themselves down on the ground which they occupied and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER 9. BATTLE OF MAGERSFONTEIN.

Lord Methuen’s force had now fought three actions in the space of a single week, losing in killed and wounded about a thousand men, or rather more than one-tenth of its total numbers. Had there been evidence that the enemy were seriously demoralised, the General would no doubt have pushed on at once to Kimberley, which was some twenty miles distant. The information which reached him was, however, that the Boers had fallen back upon the very strong position of Spytfontein, that they were full of fight, and that they had been strongly reinforced by a commando from Mafeking. Under these circumstances Lord Methuen had no choice but to give his men a well-earned rest, and to await reinforcements. There was no use in reaching Kimberley unless he had completely defeated the investing force. With the history of the first relief of Lucknow in his memory he was on his guard against a repetition of such an experience.

It was the more necessary that Methuen should strengthen his position, since with every mile which he advanced the more exposed did his line of communications become to a raid from Fauresmith and the southern districts of the Orange Free State. Any serious danger to the railway behind them would leave the British Army in a very critical position, and precautions were taken for the protection of the more vulnerable portions of the line. It was well that this was so, for on the 8th of December Commandant Prinsloo, of the Orange Free State, with a thousand horsemen and two light seven-pounder guns, appeared suddenly at Enslin and vigorously attacked the two companies of the Northampton Regiment who held the station. At the same time they destroyed a couple of culverts and tore up three hundred yards of the permanent way. For some hours the Northamptons under Captain Godley were closely pressed, but a telegram had been despatched to Modder Camp, and the 12th Lancers with the ubiquitous 62nd Battery were sent to their assistance. The Boers retired with their usual mobility, and in ten hours the line was completely restored.

Reinforcements were now reaching the Modder River force, which made it more formidable than when it had started. A very essential addition was that of the 12th Lancers and of G battery of Horse Artillery, which would increase the mobility of the force and make it possible for the General to follow up a blow after he had struck it. The magnificent regiments which formed the Highland Brigade — the 2nd Black Watch, the 1st Gordons, the 2nd Seaforths, and the 1st Highland Light Infantry had arrived under the gallant and ill-fated Wauchope. Four five-inch howitzers had also come to strengthen the artillery. At the same time the Canadians, the Australians, and several line regiments were moved up on the line from De Aar to Belmont. It appeared to the public at home that there was the material for an overwhelming advance; but the ordinary observer, and even perhaps the military critic, had not yet appreciated how great is the advantage which is given by modern weapons to the force which acts upon the defensive. With enormous pains Cronje and De la Rey were entrenching a most formidable position in front of our advance, with a confidence, which proved to be justified that it would be on their own ground and under their own conditions that in this, as in the three preceding actions, we should engage them.

On the morning of Saturday, December 9th, the British General made an attempt to find out what lay in front of him amid that semicircle of forbidding hills. To this end he sent out a reconnaissance in the early morning, which included G Battery Horse Artillery, the 9th Lancers, and the ponderous 4.7 naval gun, which, preceded by the majestic march of thirty-two bullocks and attended by eighty seamen gunners, creaked forwards over the plain. What was there to shoot at in those sunlit boulder-strewn hills in front? They lay silent and untenanted in the glare of the African day. In vain the great gun exploded its huge shell with its fifty pounds of lyddite over the ridges, in vain the smaller pieces searched every cleft and hollow with their shrapnel. No answer came from the far-stretching hills. Not a flash or twinkle betrayed the fierce bands who lurked among the boulders. The force returned to camp no wiser than when it left.

There was one sight visible every night to all men which might well nerve the rescuers in their enterprise. Over the northern horizon, behind those hills of danger, there quivered up in the darkness one long, flashing, quivering beam, which swung up and down, and up again like a seraphic sword-blade. It was Kimberley praying for help, Kimberley solicitous for news. Anxiously, distractedly, the great De Beers searchlight dipped and rose. And back across the twenty miles of darkness, over the hills where Cronje lurked, there came that other southern column of light which answered, and promised, and soothed. ‘Be of good heart, Kimberley. We are here! The Empire is behind us. We have not forgotten you. It may be days, or it may be weeks, but rest assured that we are coming.’

About three in the afternoon of Sunday, December 10th, the force which was intended to clear a path for the army through the lines of Magersfontein moved out upon what proved to be its desperate enterprise. The 3rd or Highland Brigade included the Black Watch, the Seaforths, the Argyll and Sutherlands, and the Highland Light Infantry. The Gordons had only arrived in camp that day, and did not advance until next morning. Besides the infantry, the 9th Lancers, the mounted infantry, and all the artillery moved to the front. It was raining hard, and the men with one blanket between two soldiers bivouacked upon the cold damp ground, about three miles from the enemy’s position. At one o’clock, without food, and drenched, they moved forwards through the drizzle and the darkness to attack those terrible lines. Major Benson, R.A., with two of Rimington’s scouts, led them on their difficult way.

Clouds drifted low in the heavens, and the falling rain made the darkness more impenetrable. The Highland Brigade was formed into a column — the Black Watch in front, then the Seaforths, and the other two behind. To prevent the men from straggling in the night the four regiments were packed into a mass of quarter column as densely as was possible, and the left guides held a rope in order to preserve the formation. With many a trip and stumble the ill-fated detachment wandered on, uncertain where they were going and what it was that they were meant to do. Not only among the rank and file, but among the principal officers also, there was the same absolute ignorance. Brigadier Wauchope knew, no doubt, but his voice was soon to be stilled in death. The others were aware, of course, that they were advancing either to turn the enemy’s trenches or to attack them, but they may well have argued from their own formation that they could not be near the riflemen yet. Why they should be still advancing in that dense clump we do not now know, nor can we surmise what thoughts were passing through the mind of the gallant and experienced chieftain who walked beside them. There are some who claim on the night before to have seen upon his strangely ascetic face that shadow of doom which is summed up in the one word ‘fey.’ The hand of coming death may already have lain cold upon his soul. Out there, close beside him, stretched the long trench, fringed with its line of fierce, staring, eager faces, and its bristle of gun-barrels. They knew he was coming. They were ready. They were waiting. But still, with the dull murmur of many feet, the dense column, nearly four thousand strong, wandered onwards through the rain and the darkness, death and mutilation crouching upon their path.

It matters not what gave the signal, whether it was the flashing of a lantern by a Boer scout, or the tripping of a soldier over wire, or the firing of a gun in the ranks. It may have been any, or it may have been none, of these things. As a matter of fact I have been assured by a Boer who was present that it was the sound of the tins attached to the alarm wires which disturbed them. However this may be, in an instant there crashed out of the darkness into their faces and ears a roar of point-blank fire, and the night was slashed across with the throbbing flame of the rifles. At the moment before this outflame some doubt as to their whereabouts seems to have flashed across the mind of their leaders. The order to extend had just been given, but the men had not had time to act upon it. The storm of lead burst upon the head and right flank of the column, which broke to pieces under the murderous volley. Wauchope was shot, struggled up, and fell once more for ever. Rumour has placed words of reproach upon his dying lips, but his nature, both gentle and soldierly, forbids the supposition. ‘What a pity!’ was the only utterance which a brother Highlander ascribes to him. Men went down in swathes, and a howl of rage and agony, heard afar over the veld, swelled up from the frantic and struggling crowd. By the hundred they dropped — some dead, some wounded, some knocked down by the rush and sway of the broken ranks. It was a horrible business. At such a range and in such a formation a single Mauser bullet may well pass through many men. A few dashed forwards, and were found dead at the very edges of the trench. The few survivors of companies A, B, and C of the Black Watch appear to have never actually retired, but to have clung on to the immediate front of the Boer trenches, while the remains of the other five companies tried to turn the Boer flank. Of the former body only six got away unhurt in the evening after lying all day within two hundred yards of the enemy. The rest of the brigade broke and, disentangling themselves with difficulty from the dead and the dying, fled back out of that accursed place. Some, the most unfortunate of all, became caught in the darkness in the wire defences, and were found in the morning hung up ‘like crows,’ as one spectator describes it, and riddled with bullets.

Who shall blame the Highlanders for retiring when they did? Viewed, not by desperate and surprised men, but in all calmness and sanity, it may well seem to have been the very best thing which they could do. Dashed into chaos, separated from their officers, with no one who knew what was to be done, the first necessity was to gain shelter from this deadly fire, which had already stretched six hundred of their number upon the ground. The danger was that men so shaken would be stricken with panic, scatter in the darkness over the face of the country, and cease to exist as a military unit. But the Highlanders were true to their character and their traditions. There was shouting in the darkness, hoarse voices calling for the Seaforths, for the Argylls, for Company C, for Company H, and everywhere in the gloom there came the answer of the clansmen. Within half an hour with the break of day the Highland regiments had re-formed, and, shattered and weakened, but undaunted, prepared to renew the contest. Some attempt at an advance was made upon the right, ebbing and flowing, one little band even reaching the trenches and coming back with prisoners and reddened bayonets. For the most part the men lay upon their faces, and fired when they could at the enemy; but the cover which the latter kept was so excellent that an officer who expended 120 rounds has left it upon record that he never once had seen anything positive at which to aim. Lieutenant Lindsay brought the Seaforths’ Maxim into the firing-line, and, though all her crew except two were hit, it continued to do good service during the day. The Lancers’ Maxim was equally staunch, though it also was left finally with only the lieutenant in charge and one trooper to work it.

Fortunately the guns were at hand, and, as usual, they were quick to come to the aid of the distressed. The sun was hardly up before the howitzers were throwing lyddite at 4000 yards, the three field batteries (18th, 62nd, 75th) were working with shrapnel at a mile, and the troop of Horse Artillery was up at the right front trying to enfilade the trenches. The guns kept down the rifle-fire, and gave the wearied Highlanders some respite from their troubles. The whole situation had resolved itself now into another Battle of Modder River. The infantry, under a fire at from six hundred to eight hundred paces, could not advance and would not retire. The artillery only kept the battle going, and the huge naval gun from behind was joining with its deep bark in the deafening uproar. But the Boers had already learned — and it is one of their most valuable military qualities that they assimilate their experience so quickly — that shell fire is less dangerous in a trench than among rocks. These trenches, very elaborate in character, had been dug some hundreds of yards from the foot of the hills, so that there was hardly any guide to our artillery fire. Yet it is to the artillery fire that all the losses of the Boers that day were due. The cleverness of Cronje's disposition of his trenches some hundred yards ahead of the kopjes is accentuated by the fascination which any rising object has for a gunner. Prince Kraft tells the story of how at Sadowa he unlimbered his guns two hundred yards in front of the church of Chlum, and how the Austrian reply fire almost invariably pitched upon the steeple. So our own gunners, even at a two thousand-yard mark, found it difficult to avoid overshooting the invisible line, and hitting the obvious mark behind.

As the day wore on reinforcements of infantry came up from the force which had been left to guard the camp. The Gordons arrived with the first and second battalions of the Coldstream Guards, and all the artillery was moved nearer to the enemy's position. At the same time, as there were some indications of an attack upon our right flank, the Grenadier Guards with five companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry were moved up in that direction, while the three remaining companies of Barter's Yorkshiremen secured a drift over which the enemy might cross the Modder. This threatening movement upon our right flank, which would have put the Highlanders into an impossible position had it succeeded, was most gallantly held back all morning, before the arrival of the Guards and the Yorkshires, by the mounted infantry and the 12th Lancers, skirmishing on foot. It was in this long and successful struggle to cover the flank of the 3rd Brigade that Major Milton, Major Ray, and many another brave man met his end. The Coldstreams and Grenadiers relieved the pressure upon this side, and the Lancers retired to their horses, having shown, not for the first time, that the cavalryman with a modern carbine can at a pinch very quickly turn himself into a useful infantry soldier. Lord Airlie deserves all praise for his unconventional use of his men, and for the gallantry with which he threw both himself and them into the most critical corner of the fight.

While the Coldstreams, the Grenadiers, and the Yorkshire Light Infantry were holding back the Boer attack upon our right flank the indomitable Gordons, the men of Dargai, furious with the desire to avenge their comrades of the Highland Brigade, had advanced straight against the trenches and succeeded without any very great loss in getting within four hundred yards of them. But a single regiment could not carry the position, and anything like a general advance upon it was out of the question in broad daylight after the punishment which we had received. Any plans of the sort which may have passed through Lord Methuen's mind were driven away for ever by the sudden unordered retreat of the stricken brigade. They had been very roughly handled in this, which was to most of them their baptism of fire, and they had been without food and water under a burning sun all day. They fell back rapidly for a mile, and the guns were for a time left partially exposed. Fortunately the lack of initiative on the part of the Boers which has stood our friend so often came in to save us from disaster and humiliation. It is due to the brave unshaken face which the Guards presented to the enemy that our repulse did not deepen into something still more serious.

The Gordons and the Scots Guards were still in attendance upon the guns, but they had been advanced very close to the enemy's trenches, and there were no other troops in support. Under these circumstances it was imperative that the Highlanders should rally, and Major Ewart with other surviving officers rushed among the scattered ranks and strove hard to gather and to stiffen them. The men were dazed by what they had undergone, and Nature shrank back from that deadly zone where the bullets fell so thickly. But the pipes blew, and the bugles sang, and the poor tired fellows, the backs of their legs so flayed and blistered by lying in the sun that they could hardly bend them, hobbled back to their duty. They worked up to the guns once more, and the moment of danger passed.

But as the evening wore on it became evident that no attack could succeed, and that therefore there was no use in holding the men in front of the enemy's position. The dark Cronje, lurking among his ditches and his barbed wire, was not to be approached, far less defeated. There are some who think that, had we held on there as we did at the Modder River, the enemy would again have been accommodating enough to make way for us during the night, and the morning would have found the road clear to Kimberley. I know no grounds for such an opinion — but several against it. At Modder Cronje abandoned his lines, knowing that he had other and stronger ones behind him. At Magersfontein a level plain lay behind the Boer position, and to abandon it was to give up the game altogether. Besides, why should he abandon it? He knew that he had hit us hard. We had made absolutely no impression upon his defences. Is it likely that he would have tamely given up all his advantages and surrendered the fruits of his victory without a struggle? It is enough to mourn a defeat without the additional agony of thinking that a little more perseverance might have turned it into a victory. The Boer position could only be taken by outflanking it, and we were not numerous enough nor mobile enough to outflank it. There lay the whole secret of our troubles, and no conjectures as to what might under other circumstances have happened can alter it.

About half-past five the Boer guns, which had for some unexplained reason been silent all day, opened upon the cavalry. Their appearance was a signal for the general falling back of the centre, and the last attempt to retrieve the day was abandoned. The Highlanders were dead-beat; the Coldstreams had had enough; the mounted infantry was badly mauled. There remained the Grenadiers, the Scots Guards, and two or three line regiments who were available for a new attack. There are occasions, such as Sadowa, where a General must play his last card. There are others where with reinforcements in his rear, he can do better by saving his force and trying once again. General Grant had an axiom that the best time for an advance was when you were utterly exhausted, for that was the moment when your enemy was probably utterly exhausted too, and of two such forces the attacker has the moral advantage. Lord Methuen determined — and no doubt wisely — that it was no occasion for counsels of desperation. His men were withdrawn — in some cases withdrew themselves — outside the range of the Boer guns, and next morning saw the whole force with bitter and humiliated hearts on their way back to their camp at Modder River.

The repulse of Magersfontein cost the British nearly a thousand men, killed, wounded, and missing, of which over seven hundred belonged to the Highlanders. Fifty-seven officers had fallen in that brigade alone, including their Brigadier and Colonel Downman of the Gordons. Colonel Codrington of the Coldstreams was wounded early, fought through the action, and came back in the evening on a Maxim gun. Lord Winchester of the same battalion was killed, after injudiciously but heroically exposing himself all day. The Black Watch alone had lost nineteen officers and over three hundred men killed and wounded, a catastrophe which can only be matched in all the bloody and glorious annals of that splendid regiment by their slaughter at Ticonderoga in 1757, when no fewer than five hundred fell before Montcalm’s muskets. Never has Scotland had a more grievous day than this of Magersfontein. She has always given her best blood with lavish generosity for the Empire, but it may be doubted if any single battle has ever put so many families of high and low into mourning from the Tweed to the Caithness shore. There is a legend that when sorrow comes upon Scotland the old Edinburgh Castle is lit by ghostly lights and gleams white at every window in the mirk of midnight. If ever the watcher could have seen so sinister a sight, it should have been on this, the fatal night of December 11, 1899. As to the Boer loss it is impossible to determine it. Their official returns stated it to be seventy killed and two hundred and fifty wounded, but the reports of prisoners and deserters placed it at a very much higher figure. One unit, the Scandinavian corps, was placed in an advanced position at Spytfontein, and was overwhelmed by the Seaforths, who killed, wounded, or took the eighty men of whom it was composed. The stories of prisoners and of deserters all speak of losses very much higher than those which have been officially acknowledged.

In his comments upon the battle next day Lord Methuen was said to have given offence to the Highland Brigade, and the report was allowed to go uncontradicted until it became generally accepted. It arose, however, from a complete misunderstanding of the purport of Lord Methuen’s remarks, in which he praised them, as he well might, for their bravery, and condoled with them over the wreck of their splendid regiments. The way in which officers and men hung on under conditions to which no troops have ever been exposed was worthy of the highest traditions of the British army. From the death of Wauchope in the early morning, until the assumption of the command of the brigade by Hughes-Hallett in the late afternoon, no one seems to have taken the direction. ‘My lieutenant was wounded and my captain was killed,’ says a private. ‘The General was dead, but we stayed where we were, for there was no order to retire.’ That was the story of the whole brigade, until the flanking movement of the Boers compelled them to fall back.

The most striking lesson of the engagement is the extreme bloodiness of modern warfare under some conditions, and its bloodlessness under others. Here, out of a total of something under a thousand casualties seven hundred were incurred in about five minutes, and the whole day of shell, machine-gun, and rifle fire only furnished the odd three hundred. So also at Ladysmith the British forces (White’s column) were under heavy fire from 5.30 to 11.30, and the loss again was something under three hundred. With conservative generalship the losses of the battles of the future will be much less than those of the past, and as a consequence the battles themselves will last much longer, and it will be the most enduring rather than the most fiery which will win. The supply of food and water to the combatants will become of extreme importance to keep them up during the prolonged trials of endurance, which will last for weeks rather than days. On the other hand, when a General's force is badly compromised, it will be so punished that a quick surrender will be the only alternative to annihilation.

On the subject of the quarter-column formation which proved so fatal to us, it must be remembered that any other form of advance is hardly possible during a night attack, though at Tel-el-Kebir the exceptional circumstance of the march being over an open desert allowed the troops to move for the last mile or two in a more extended formation. A line of battalion double-company columns is most difficult to preserve in the darkness, and any confusion may lead to disaster. The whole mistake lay in a miscalculation of a few hundred yards in the position of the trenches. Had the regiments deployed five minutes earlier it is probable (though by no means certain) that the position would have been carried.

The action was not without those examples of military virtue which soften a disaster, and hold out a brighter promise for the future. The Guards withdrew from the field as if on parade, with the Boer shells bursting over their ranks. Fine, too, was the restraint of G Battery of Horse Artillery on the morning after the battle. An armistice was understood to exist, but the naval gun, in ignorance of it, opened on our extreme left. The Boers at once opened fire upon the Horse Artillery, who, recognising the mistake, remained motionless and unlimbered in a line, with every horse, and gunner and driver in his place, without taking any notice of the fire, which presently slackened and stopped as the enemy came to understand the situation. It is worthy of remark that in this battle the three field batteries engaged, as well as G Battery, R.H.A., each fired over 1000 rounds and remained for 30 consecutive hours within 1500 yards of the Boer position.

But of all the corps who deserve praise, there was none more gallant than the brave surgeons and ambulance bearers, who encounter all the dangers and enjoy none of the thrills of warfare. All day under fire these men worked and toiled among the wounded. Beevor, Ensor, Douglas, Probyn — all were equally devoted. It is almost incredible, and yet it is true, that by ten o'clock on the morning after the battle, before the troops had returned to camp, no fewer than five hundred wounded were in the train and on their way to Cape Town.

CHAPTER 10. THE BATTLE OF STORMBERG.

Some attempt has now been made to sketch the succession of events which had ended in the investment of Ladysmith in northern Natal, and also to show the fortunes of the force which on the western side of the seat of war attempted to advance to the relief of Kimberley. The distance between these forces may be expressed in terms familiar to the European reader by saying that it was that which separates Paris from Frankfort, or to the American by suggesting that Ladysmith was at Boston and that Methuen was trying to relieve Philadelphia. Waterless deserts and rugged mountain ranges divided the two scenes of action. In the case of the British there could be no connection between the two movements, but the Boers by a land journey of something over a hundred miles had a double choice of a route by which Cronje and Joubert might join hands, either by the Bloemfontein-Johannesburg-Laing’s Nek Railway, or by the direct line from Harrismith to Ladysmith. The possession of these internal lines should have been of enormous benefit to the Boers, enabling them to throw the weight of their forces unexpectedly from the one flank to the other.

In a future chapter it will be recorded how the Army Corps arriving from England was largely diverted into Natal in order in the first instance to prevent the colony from being overrun, and in the second to rescue the beleaguered garrison. In the meantime it is necessary to deal with the military operations in the broad space between the eastern and western armies.

After the declaration of war there was a period of some weeks during which the position of the British over the whole of the northern part of Cape Colony was full of danger. Immense supplies had been gathered at De Aar which were at the mercy of a Free State raid, and the burghers, had they possessed a cavalry leader with the dash of a Stuart or a Sheridan, might have dealt a blow which would have cost us a million pounds’ worth of stores and dislocated the whole plan of campaign. However, the chance was allowed to pass, and when, on November 1st, the burghers at last in a leisurely fashion sauntered over the frontier, arrangements had been made by reinforcement and by concentration to guard the vital points. The objects of the British leaders, until the time for a general advance should come, were to hold the Orange River Bridge (which opened the way to Kimberley), to cover De Aar Junction, where the stores were, to protect at all costs the line of railway which led from Cape Town to Kimberley, and to hold on to as much as possible of those other two lines of railway which led, the one through Colesberg and the other through Stormberg, into the Free State. The two bodies of invaders who entered the colony moved along the line of these two railways, the one crossing the Orange River at Norval's Pont and the other at Bethulie. They enlisted many recruits among the Cape Colony Dutch as they advanced, and the scanty British forces fell back in front of them, abandoning Colesberg on the one line and Stormberg on the other. We have, then, to deal with the movements of two British detachments. The one which operated on the Colesberg line — which was the more vital of the two, as a rapid advance of the Boers upon that line would have threatened the precious Cape Town to Kimberley connection — consisted almost entirely of mounted troops, and was under the command of the same General French who had won the battle of Elandslaagte. By an act of foresight which was only too rare upon the British side in the earlier stages of this war, French, who had in the recent large manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain shown great ability as a cavalry leader, was sent out of Ladysmith in the very last train which made its way through. His operations, with his instructive use of cavalry and horse artillery, may be treated separately.

The other British force which faced the Boers who were advancing through Stormberg was commanded by General Gatacre, a man who bore a high reputation for fearlessness and tireless energy, though he had been criticised, notably during the Soudan campaign, for having called upon his men for undue and unnecessary exertion. 'General Back-acher' they called him, with rough soldierly chaff. A glance at his long thin figure, his gaunt Don Quixote face, and his aggressive jaw would show his personal energy, but might not satisfy the observer that he possessed those intellectual gifts which qualify for high command. At the action of the Atbara he, the brigadier in command, was the first to reach and to tear down with his own hands the zareeba of the enemy — a gallant exploit of the soldier, but a questionable position for the General. The man's strength and his weakness lay in the incident.

General Gatacre was nominally in command of a division, but so cruelly had his men been diverted from him, some to Buller in Natal and some to Methuen, that he could not assemble more than a brigade. Falling back before the Boer advance, he found himself early in December at Sterkstroom, while the Boers occupied the very strong position of Stormberg, some thirty miles to the north of him. With the enemy so near him it was Gatacre's nature to attack, and the moment that he thought himself strong enough he did so. No doubt he had private information as to the dangerous hold which the Boers were getting upon the colonial Dutch, and it is possible that while Buller and Methuen were attacking east and west they urged Gatacre to do something to hold the enemy in the centre. On the night of December 9th he advanced.

The fact that he was about to do so, and even the hour of the start, appear to have been the common property of the camp some days before the actual move. The 'Times' correspondent under the date December 7th details all that it is intended to do. It is to the credit of our Generals as men, but to their detriment as soldiers, that they seem throughout the campaign to have shown extraordinarily little power of dissimulation. They did the obvious, and usually allowed it to be obvious what they were about to do. One thinks of Napoleon striking at Egypt; how he gave it abroad that the real object of the expedition was Ireland, but breathed into the ears of one or two intimates that in very truth it was bound for Genoa. The leading official at Toulon had no more idea where the fleet and army of France had gone than the humblest caulker in the yard. However, it is not fair to expect the subtlety of the Corsican from the downright Saxon, but it remains strange and deplorable that in a country filled with spies any one should have known in advance that a so-called 'surprise' was about to be attempted.

The force with which General Gatacre advanced consisted of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, 960 strong, with one Maxim; the 2nd Irish Rifles, 840 strong, with one Maxim, and 250 Mounted Infantry. There were two batteries of Field Artillery, the 74th and 77th. The total force was well under 3000 men. About three in the afternoon the men were entrained in open trucks under a burning sun, and for some reason, at which the impetuous spirit of the General must have chafed, were kept waiting for three hours. At eight o'clock they detrained at Molteno, and thence after a short rest and a meal they started upon the night march which was intended to end at the break of day at the Boer trenches. One feels as if one were describing the operations of Magersfontein once again and the parallel continues to be painfully exact.

It was nine o’clock and pitch dark when the column moved out of Molteno and struck across the black gloom of the veld, the wheels of the guns being wrapped in hide to deaden the rattle. It was known that the distance was not more than ten miles, and so when hour followed hour and the guides were still unable to say that they had reached their point it must have become perfectly evident that they had missed their way. The men were dog-tired, a long day’s work had been followed by a long night’s march, and they plodded along drowsily through the darkness. The ground was broken and irregular. The weary soldiers stumbled as they marched. Daylight came and revealed the column still looking for its objective, the fiery General walking in front and leading his horse behind him. It was evident that his plans had miscarried, but his energetic and hardy temperament would not permit him to turn back without a blow being struck. However one may commend his energy, one cannot but stand aghast at his dispositions. The country was wild and rocky, the very places for those tactics of the surprise and the ambuscade in which the Boers excelled. And yet the column still plodded aimlessly on in its dense formation, and if there were any attempt at scouting ahead and on the flanks the result showed how ineffectively it was carried out. It was at a quarter past four in the clear light of a South African morning that a shot, and then another, and then a rolling crash of musketry, told that we were to have one more rough lesson of the result of neglecting the usual precautions of warfare. High up on the face of a steep line of hill the Boer riflemen lay hid, and from a short range their fire scourged our exposed flank. The men appear to have been chiefly colonial rebels, and not Boers of the backveld, and to that happy chance it may be that the comparative harmlessness of their fire was due. Even now, in spite of the surprise, the situation might have been saved had the bewildered troops and their harried officers known exactly what to do. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it appears now that the only course that could commend itself would be to extricate the troops from their position, and then, if thought feasible, to plan an attack. Instead of this a rush was made at the hillside, and the infantry made their way some distance up it only to find that there were positive ledges in front of them which could not be climbed. The advance was at a dead stop, and the men lay down under the boulders for cover from the hot fire which came from inaccessible marksmen above them. Meanwhile the artillery had opened behind them, and their fire (not for the first time in this campaign) was more deadly to their friends than to their foes. At least one prominent officer fell among his men, torn by British shrapnel bullets. Talana Hill and Modder River have shown also, though perhaps in a less tragic degree, that what with the long range of modern artillery fire, and what with the difficulty of locating infantry who are using smokeless powder, it is necessary that officers commanding batteries should be provided with the coolest heads and the most powerful glasses of any men in the service, for a responsibility which will become more and more terrific rests upon their judgment.

The question now, since the assault had failed, was how to extricate the men from their position. Many withdrew down the hill, running the gauntlet of the enemy's fire as they emerged from the boulders on to the open ground, while others clung to their positions, some from a soldierly hope that victory might finally incline to them, others because it was clearly safer to lie among the rocks than to cross the bullet-swept spaces beyond. Those portions of the force who extricated themselves do not appear to have realised how many of their comrades had remained behind, and so as the gap gradually increased between the men who were stationary and the men who fell back all hope of the two bodies reuniting became impossible. All the infantry who remained upon the hillside were captured. The rest rallied at a point fifteen hundred yards from the scene of the surprise, and began an orderly retreat to Molteno.

In the meanwhile three powerful Boer guns upon the ridge had opened fire with great accuracy, but fortunately with defective shells. Had the enemy's contractors been as trustworthy as their gunners in this campaign, our losses would have been very much heavier, and it is possible that here we catch a glimpse of some consequences of that corruption which was one of the curses of the country. The guns were moved with great smartness along the ridge, and opened fire again and again, but never with great result. Our own batteries, the 74th and 77th, with our handful of mounted men, worked hard in covering the retreat and holding back the enemy's pursuit.

It is a sad subject to discuss, but it is the one instance in a campaign containing many reverses which amounts to demoralisation among the troops engaged. The Guards marching with the steadiness of Hyde Park off the field of Magersfontein, or the men of Nicholson's Nek chafing because they were not led in a last hopeless charge, are, even in defeat, object lessons of military virtue. But here fatigue and sleeplessness had taken all fire and spirit out of the men. They dropped asleep by the roadside and had to be prodded up by their exhausted officers. Many were taken prisoners in their slumber by the enemy who gleaned behind them. Units broke into small straggling bodies, and it was a sorry and bedraggled force which about ten o'clock came wandering into Molteno. The place of honour in the rear was kept throughout by the Irish Rifles, who preserved some military formation to the end. Our losses in killed and wounded were not severe — military honour would have been less sore had they been more so. Twenty-six killed, sixty-eight wounded — that is all. But between the men on the hillside and the somnambulists of the column, six hundred, about equally divided between the Irish Rifles and the Northumberland Fusiliers, had been left as prisoners. Two guns, too, had been lost in the hurried retreat.

It is not for the historian — especially for a civilian historian — to say a word unnecessarily to aggravate the pain of that brave man who, having done all that personal courage could do, was seen afterwards sobbing on the table of the waiting-room at Molteno, and bewailing his 'poor men.' He had a disaster, but Nelson had one at Teneriffe and Napoleon at Acre, and built their great reputations in spite of it. But the one good thing of a disaster is that by examining it we may learn to do better in the future, and so it would indeed be a perilous thing if we agreed that our reverses were not a fit subject for open and frank discussion.

It is not to the detriment of an enterprise that it should be daring and call for considerable physical effort on the part of those who are engaged in it. On the contrary, the conception of such plans is one of the signs of a great military mind. But in the arranging of the details the same military mind should assiduously occupy itself in foreseeing and preventing every unnecessary thing which may make the execution of such a plan more difficult. The idea of a swift sudden attack upon Stormberg was excellent — the details of the operation are continually open to criticism.

How far the Boers suffered at Stormberg is unknown to us, but there seems in this instance no reason to doubt their own statement that their losses were very slight. At no time was any body of them exposed to our fire, while we, as usual, fought in the open. Their numbers were probably less than ours, and the quality of their shooting and want of energy in pursuit make the defeat the more galling. On the other hand, their guns were served with skill and audacity. They consisted of commandos from Bethulie, Rouxville, and Smithfield, under the orders of Olivier, with those colonials whom they had seduced from their allegiance.

This defeat of General Gatacre’s, occurring, as it did, in a disaffected district and one of great strategic importance, might have produced the worst consequences.

Fortunately no very evil result followed. No doubt the recruiting of rebels was helped, but there was no forward movement and Molteno remained in our hands. In the meanwhile Gatacre’s force was reinforced by a fresh battery, the 79th, and by a strong regiment, the Derbyshires, so that with the 1st Royal Scots and the wing of the Berkshires he was strong enough to hold his own until the time for a general advance should come. So in the Stormberg district, as at the Modder River, the same humiliating and absurd position of stalemate was established.

CHAPTER 11. BATTLE OF COLENSO.

Two serious defeats had within the week been inflicted upon the British forces in South Africa. Cronje, lurking behind his trenches and his barbed wire entanglements barred Methuen’s road to Kimberley, while in the northern part of Cape Colony Gatacre’s wearied troops had been defeated and driven by a force which consisted largely of British subjects. But the public at home steeled their hearts and fixed their eyes steadily upon Natal. There was their senior General and there the main body of their troops. As brigade after brigade and battery after battery touched at Cape Town, and were sent on instantly to Durban, it was evident that it was in this quarter that the supreme effort was to be made, and that there the light might at last break. In club, and dining room, and railway car — wherever men met and talked — the same words might be heard: ‘Wait until Buller moves.’ The hopes of a great empire lay in the phrase.

It was upon October 30th that Sir George White had been thrust back into Ladysmith. On November 2nd telegraphic communication with the town was interrupted. On November 3rd the railway line was cut. On November 10th the Boers held Colenso and the line of the Tugela. On the 14th was the affair of the armoured train. On the 18th the enemy were near Estcourt. On the 21st they had reached the Mooi River. On the 23rd Hildyard attacked them at Willow Grange. All these actions will be treated elsewhere. This last one marks the turn of the tide. From then onwards Sir Redvers Buller was massing his troops at Chieveley in preparation for a great effort to cross the river and to relieve Ladysmith, the guns of which, calling from behind the line of northern hills, told their constant tale of restless attack and stubborn defence.

But the task was as severe a one as the most fighting General could ask for. On the southern side the banks formed a long slope which could be shaved as with a razor by the rifle fire of the enemy. How to advance across that broad open zone was indeed a problem. It was one of many occasions in this war in which one wondered why, if a bullet-proof shield capable of sheltering a lying man could be constructed, a trial should not be given to it. Alternate rushes of companies with a safe rest after each rush would save the troops from the continued tension of that deadly never ending fire.

However, it is idle to discuss what might have been done to mitigate their trials. The open ground had to be passed, and then they came to — not the enemy, but a broad and deep river, with a single bridge, probably undermined, and a single ford, which was found not to exist in practice. Beyond the river was tier after tier of hills, crowned with stone walls and seamed with trenches, defended by thousands of the best marksmen in the world, supported by an admirable artillery. If, in spite of the advance over the open and in spite of the passage of the river, a ridge could still be carried, it was only to be commanded by the next; and so, one behind the other, like the billows of the ocean, a series of hills and hollows rolled northwards to Ladysmith. All attacks must be in the open. All defence was from under cover. Add to this, that the young and energetic Louis Botha was in command of the Boers. It was a desperate task, and yet honour forbade that the garrison should be left to its fate. The venture must be made.

The most obvious criticism upon the operation is that if the attack must be made it should not be made under the enemy’s conditions. We seem almost to have gone out of our way to make every obstacle — the glacislike approach, the river, the trenches — as difficult as possible. Future operations were to prove that it was not so difficult to deceive Boer vigilance and by rapid movements to cross the Tugela. A military authority has stated, I know not with what truth, that there is no instance in history of a determined army being stopped by the line of a river, and from Wellington at the Douro to the Russians on the Danube many examples of the ease with which they may be passed will occur to the reader. But Buller had some exceptional difficulties with which to contend. He was weak in mounted troops, and was opposed to an enemy of exceptional mobility who might attack his flank and rear if he exposed them. He had not that great preponderance of numbers which came to him later, and which enabled him to attempt a wide turning movement. One advantage he had, the possession of a more powerful artillery, but his heaviest guns were naturally his least mobile, and the more direct his advance the more effective would his guns be. For these or other reasons he determined upon a frontal attack on the formidable Boer position, and he moved out of Chieveley Camp for that purpose at daybreak on Friday, December 15th.

The force which General Buller led into action was the finest which any British general had handled since the battle of the Alma. Of infantry he had four strong brigades: the 2nd (Hildyard's) consisting of the 2nd Devons, the 2nd Queen's or West Surrey, the 2nd West Yorkshire, and the 2nd East Surrey; the 4th Brigade (Lyttelton's) comprising the 2nd Cameronians, the 3rd Rifles, the 1st Durhams, and the 1st Rifle Brigade; the 5th Brigade (Hart's) with the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 1st Connaught Rangers, 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, and the Border Regiment, this last taking the place of the 2nd Irish Rifles, who were with Gatacre. There remained the 6th Brigade (Barton's), which included the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers, and the 2nd Irish Fusiliers — in all about 16,000 infantry. The mounted men, who were commanded by Lord Dundonald, included the 13th Hussars, the 1st Royals, Bethune's Mounted Infantry, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, three squadrons of South African Horse, with a composite regiment formed from the mounted infantry of the Rifles and of the Dublin Fusiliers with squadrons of the Natal Carabineers and the Imperial Light Horse. These irregular troops of horse might be criticised by martinets and pedants, but they contained some of the finest fighting material in the army, some urged on by personal hatred of the Boers and some by mere lust of adventure. As an example of the latter one squadron of the South African Horse was composed almost entirely of Texan muleteers, who, having come over with their animals, had been drawn by their own gallant spirit into the fighting line of their kinsmen.

Cavalry was General Buller's weakest arm, but his artillery was strong both in its quality and its number of guns. There were five batteries (30 guns) of the Field Artillery, the 7th, 14th, 63rd, 64th, and 66th. Besides these there were no fewer than sixteen naval guns from H.M.S. 'Terrible' — fourteen of which were 12-pounders, and the other two of the 4.7 type which had done such good service both at Ladysmith and with Methuen. The whole force which moved out from Chieveley Camp numbered about 21,000 men.

The work which was allotted to the army was simple in conception, however terrible it might prove in execution. There were two points at which the river might be crossed, one three miles off on the left, named Bridle Drift, the other straight ahead at the Bridge of Colenso. The 5th or Irish Brigade was to endeavour to cross at Bridle Drift, and then to work down the river bank on the far side so as to support the 2nd or English Brigade, — which was to cross at Colenso. The 4th Brigade was to advance between these, so as to help either which should be in difficulties.

Meanwhile on the extreme right the mounted troops under Dundonald were to cover the flank and to attack Hlangwane Hill, a formidable position held strongly by the enemy upon the south bank of the Tugela. The remaining Fusilier brigade of infantry was to support this movement on the right. The guns were to cover the various attacks, and if possible gain a position from which the trenches might be enfiladed. This, simply stated, was the work which lay before the British army. In the bright clear morning sunshine, under a cloudless blue sky, they advanced with high hopes to the assault. Before them lay the long level plain, then the curve of the river, and beyond, silent and serene, like some peaceful dream landscape, stretched the lines and lines of gently curving hills. It was just five o'clock in the morning when the naval guns began to bay, and huge red dustclouds from the distant foothills showed where the lyddite was bursting. No answer came back, nor was there any movement upon the sunlit hills. It was almost brutal, this furious violence to so gentle and unresponsive a countryside. In no place could the keenest eye detect a sign of guns or men, and yet death lurked in every hollow and crouched by every rock.

It is so difficult to make a modern battle intelligible when fought, as this was, over a front of seven or eight miles, that it is best perhaps to take the doings of each column in turn, beginning with the left flank, where Hart's Irish Brigade had advanced to the assault of Bridle Drift.

Under an unanswered and therefore an unaimed fire from the heavy guns the Irish infantry moved forward upon the points which they had been ordered to attack. The Dublins led, then the Connaughts, the Inniskillings, and the Borderers. Incredible as it may appear after the recent experiences of Magersfontein and of Stormberg, the men in the two rear regiments appear to have been advanced in quarter column, and not to have deployed until after the enemy's fire had opened. Had shrapnel struck this close formation, as it was within an ace of doing, the loss of life must have been as severe as it was unnecessary.

On approaching the Drift — the position or even the existence of which does not seem to have been very clearly defined — it was found that the troops had to advance into a loop formed by the river, so that they were exposed to a very heavy cross-fire upon their right flank, while they were rained on by shrapnel from in front. No sign of the enemy could be seen, though the men were dropping fast. It is a weird and soul-shaking experience to advance over a sunlit and apparently a lonely countryside, with no slightest movement upon its broad face, while the path which you take is marked behind you by sobbing, gasping, writhing men, who can only guess by the position of their wounds whence the shots came which struck them down. All round, like the hissing of fat in the pan, is the monotonous crackle and rattle of the Mausers; but the air is full of it, and no one can define exactly whence it comes. Far away on some hill upon the skyline there hangs the least gauzy veil of thin smoke to indicate whence the six men who have just all fallen together, as if it were some grim drill, met their death. Into such a hell-storm as this it was that the soldiers have again and again advanced in the course of this war, but it may be questioned whether they will not prove to be among the last of mortals to be asked to endure such an ordeal. Other methods of attack must be found or attacks must be abandoned, for smokeless powder, quick-firing guns, and modern rifles make it all odds on the defence!

The gallant Irishmen pushed on, flushed with battle and careless for their losses, the four regiments clubbed into one, with all military organisation rapidly disappearing, and nothing left but their gallant spirit and their furious desire to come to hand-grips with the enemy. Rolling on in a broad wave of shouting angry men, they never winced from the fire until they had swept up to the bank of the river. Northern Inniskilling and Southern man of Connaught, orange and green, Protestant and Catholic, Celt and Saxon, their only rivalry now was who could shed his blood most freely for the common cause. How hateful seem those provincial politics and narrow sectarian creeds which can hold such men apart!

The bank of the river had been gained, but where was the ford? The water swept broad and unruffled in front of them, with no indication of shallows. A few dashing fellows sprang in, but their cartridges and rifles dragged them to the bottom. One or two may even have struggled through to the further side, but on this there is a conflict of evidence. It may be, though it seems incredible, that the river had been partly dammed to deepen the Drift, or, as is more probable, that in the rapid advance and attack the position of the Drift was lost. However this may be, the troops could find no ford, and they lay down, as had been done in so many previous actions, unwilling to retreat and unable to advance, with the same merciless pelting from front and flank. In every fold and behind every anthill the Irishmen lay thick and waited for better times. There are many instances of their cheery and uncomplaining humour. Colonel Brooke, of the Connaughts, fell at the head of his men. Private Livingstone helped to carry him into safety, and then, his task done, he confessed to having ‘a bit of a rap meself,’ and sank fainting with a bullet through his throat. Another sat with a bullet through both legs. ‘Bring me a tin whistle and I’ll blow ye any tune ye like,’ he cried, mindful of the Dargai piper. Another with his arm hanging by a tendon puffed morosely at his short black pipe. Every now and then, in face of the impossible, the fiery Celtic valour flamed furiously upwards. ‘Fix bayonets, men, and let us make a name for ourselves,’ cried a colour sergeant, and he never spoke again. For five hours, under the tropical sun, the grimy parched men held on to the ground they had occupied. British shells pitched short and fell among them. A regiment in support fired at them, not knowing that any of the line were so far advanced. Shot at from the front, the flank, and the rear, the 5th Brigade held grimly on.

But fortunately their orders to retire were at hand, and it is certain that had they not reached them the regiments would have been uselessly destroyed where they lay. It seems to have been Buller himself, who showed extraordinary and ubiquitous personal energy during the day, that ordered them to fall back. As they retreated there was an entire absence of haste and panic, but officers and men were hopelessly jumbled up, and General Hart — whose judgment may occasionally be questioned, but whose cool courage was beyond praise — had hard work to reform the splendid brigade which six hours before had tramped out of Chieveley Camp. Between five and six hundred of them had fallen — a loss which approximates to that of the Highland Brigade at Magersfontein. The Dublins and the Connaughts were the heaviest sufferers.

So much for the mishap of the 5th Brigade. It is superfluous to point out that the same old omissions were responsible for the same old results. Why were the men in quarter column when advancing against an unseen foe? Why had no scouts gone forward to be certain of the position of the ford? Where were the clouds of skirmishers which should precede such an advance? The recent examples in the field and the teachings of the text-books were equally set at naught, as they had been, and were to be, so often in this campaign. There may be a science of war in the lecture-rooms at Camberley, but very little of it found its way to the veld. The slogging valour of the private, the careless dash of the regimental officer — these were our military assets — but seldom the care and foresight of our commanders. It is a thankless task to make such comments, but the one great lesson of the war has been that the army is too vital a thing to fall into the hands of a caste, and that it is a national duty for every man to speak fearlessly and freely what he believes to be the truth.

Passing from the misadventure of the 5th Brigade we come as we move from left to right upon the 4th, or Lyttelton's Brigade, which was instructed not to attack itself but to support the attack on either side of it. With the help of the naval guns it did what it could to extricate and cover the retreat of the Irishmen, but it could play no very important part in the action, and its losses were insignificant. On its right in turn Hildyard's English Brigade had developed its attack upon Colenso and the bridge. The regiments under Hildyard's lead were the 2nd West Surrey, the 2nd Devons (whose first battalion was doing so well with the Ladysmith force), the East Surreys, and the West Yorkshires. The enemy had evidently anticipated the main attack on this position, and not only were the trenches upon the other side exceptionally strong, but their artillery converged upon the bridge, at least a dozen heavy pieces, besides a number of quick-firers, bearing upon it. The Devons and the Queens, in open order (an extended line of khaki dots, blending so admirably with the plain that they were hardly visible when they halted), led the attack, being supported by the East Surrey and the West Yorkshires. Advancing under a very heavy fire the brigade experienced much the same ordeal as their comrades of Hart's brigade, which was mitigated by the fact that from the first they preserved their open order in columns of half-companies extended to six paces, and that the river in front of them did not permit that right flank fire which was so fatal to the Irishmen. With a loss of some two hundred men the leading regiments succeeded in reaching Colenso, and the West Surrey, advancing by rushes of fifty yards at a time, had established itself in the station, but a catastrophe had occurred at an earlier hour to the artillery which was supporting it which rendered all further advance impossible. For the reason of this we must follow the fortunes of the next unit upon their right.

This consisted of the important body of artillery who had been told off to support the main attack. It comprised two field batteries, the 14th and the 66th, under the command of Colonel Long, and six naval guns (two of 4.7, and four 12-pounders) under Lieutenant Ogilvy of the 'Terrible.' Long has the record of being a most zealous and dashing officer, whose handling of the Egyptian artillery at the battle of the Atbara had much to do with the success of the action. Unfortunately, these barbarian campaigns, in which liberties may be taken with impunity, leave an evil tradition, as the French have found with their Algerians. Our own close formations, our adherence to volley firing, and in this instance the use of our artillery all seem to be legacies of our savage wars. Be the cause what it may, at an early stage of the action Long’s guns whirled forwards, outstripped the infantry brigades upon their flanks, left the slow-moving naval guns with their ox-teams behind them, and unlimbered within a thousand yards of the enemy’s trenches. From this position he opened fire upon Fort Wylie, which was the centre of that portion of the Boer position which faced him.

But his two unhappy batteries were destined not to turn the tide of battle, as he had hoped, but rather to furnish the classic example of the helplessness of artillery against modern rifle fire. Not even Mercer’s famous description of the effect of a flank fire upon his troop of horse artillery at Waterloo could do justice to the blizzard of lead which broke over the two doomed batteries. The teams fell in heaps, some dead, some mutilated, and mutilating others in their frantic struggles. One driver, crazed with horror, sprang on a leader, cut the traces and tore madly off the field. But a perfect discipline reigned among the vast majority of the gunners, and the words of command and the laying and working of the guns were all as methodical as at Okehampton. Not only was there a most deadly rifle fire, partly from the lines in front and partly from the village of Colenso upon their left flank, but the Boer automatic quick-firers found the range to a nicety, and the little shells were crackling and banging continually over the batteries. Already every gun had its litter of dead around it, but each was still fringed by its own group of furious officers and sweating desperate gunners. Poor Long was down, with a bullet through his arm and another through his liver. ‘Abandon be damned! We don’t abandon guns!’ was his last cry as they dragged him into the shelter of a little donga hard by. Captain Goldie dropped dead. So did Lieutenant Schreiber. Colonel Hunt fell, shot in two places. Officers and men were falling fast. The guns could not be worked, and yet they could not be removed, for every effort to bring up teams from the shelter where the limbers lay ended in the death of the horses. The survivors took refuge from the murderous fire in that small hollow to which Long had been carried, a hundred yards or so from the line of bullet-splashed cannon. One gun on the right was still served by four men who refused to leave it. They seemed to bear charmed lives, these four, as they strained and wrestled with their beloved 15-pounder, amid the spurting sand and the blue wreaths of the bursting shells. Then one gasped and fell against the trail, and his comrade sank beside the wheel with his chin upon his breast. The third threw up his hands and pitched forward upon his face; while the survivor, a grim powder-stained figure, stood at attention looking death in the eyes until he too was struck down. A useless sacrifice, you may say; but while the men who saw them die can tell such a story round the camp fire the example of such deaths as these does more than clang of bugle or roll of drum to stir the warrior spirit of our race.

For two hours the little knot of heart-sick humiliated officers and men lay in the precarious shelter of the donga and looked out at the bullet-swept plain and the line of silent guns. Many of them were wounded. Their chief lay among them, still calling out in his delirium for his guns. They had been joined by the gallant Baptie, a brave surgeon, who rode across to the donga amid a murderous fire, and did what he could for the injured men. Now and then a rush was made into the open, sometimes in the hope of firing another round, sometimes to bring a wounded comrade in from the pitiless pelt of the bullets. How fearful was that lead-storm may be gathered from the fact that one gunner was found with sixty-four wounds in his body. Several men dropped in these sorties, and the disheartened survivors settled down once more in the donga.

The hope to which they clung was that their guns were not really lost, but that the arrival of infantry would enable them to work them once more. Infantry did at last arrive, but in such small numbers that it made the situation more difficult instead of easing it. Colonel Bullock had brought up two companies of the Devons to join the two companies (A and B) of Scots Fusiliers who had been the original escort of the guns, but such a handful could not turn the tide. They also took refuge in the donga, and waited for better times.

In the meanwhile the attention of Generals Buller and Clery had been called to the desperate position of the guns, and they had made their way to that further nullah in the rear where the remaining limber horses and drivers were. This was some distance behind that other donga in which Long, Bullock, and their Devons and gunners were crouching. ‘Will any of you volunteer to save the guns?’ cried Buller. Corporal Nurse, Gunner Young, and a few others responded. The desperate venture was led by three aides-de-camp of the Generals, Congreve, Schofield, and Roberts, the only son of the famous soldier. Two gun teams were taken down; the horses galloping frantically through an infernal fire, and each team succeeded in getting back with a gun. But the loss was fearful. Roberts was mortally wounded. Congreve has left an account which shows what a modern rifle fire at a thousand yards is like. ‘My first bullet went through my left sleeve and made the joint of my elbow bleed, next a clod of earth caught me smack on the right arm, then my horse got one, then my right leg one, then my horse another, and that settled us.’ The gallant fellow managed to crawl to the group of castaways in the donga. Roberts insisted on being left where he fell, for fear he should hamper the others.

In the meanwhile Captain Reed, of the 7th Battery, had arrived with two spare teams of horses, and another determined effort was made under his leadership to save some of the guns. But the fire was too murderous. Two-thirds of his horses and half his men, including himself, were struck down, and General Buller commanded that all further attempts to reach the abandoned batteries should be given up. Both he and General Clery had been slightly wounded, and there were many operations over the whole field of action to engage their attention. But making every allowance for the pressure of many duties and for the confusion and turmoil of a great action, it does seem one of the most inexplicable incidents in British military history that the guns should ever have been permitted to fall into the hands of the enemy. It is evident that if our gunners could not live under the fire of the enemy it would be equally impossible for the enemy to remove the guns under a fire from a couple of battalions of our infantry. There were many regiments which had hardly been engaged, and which could have been advanced for such a purpose. The men of the Mounted Infantry actually volunteered for this work, and none could have been more capable of carrying it out. There was plenty of time also, for the guns were abandoned about eleven and the Boers did not venture to seize them until four. Not only could the guns have been saved, but they might, one would think, have been transformed into an excellent bait for a trap to tempt the Boers out of their trenches. It must have been with fear and trembling that Cherry Emmett and his men first approached them, for how could they believe that such incredible good fortune had come to them? However, the fact, humiliating and inexplicable, is that the guns were so left, that the whole force was withdrawn, and that not only the ten cannon, but also the handful of Devons, with their Colonel, and the Fusiliers were taken prisoners in the donga which had sheltered them all day.

We have now, working from left to right, considered the operations of Hart’s Brigade at Bridle Drift, of Lyttelton’s Brigade in support, of Hildyard’s which attacked Colenso, and of the luckless batteries which were to have helped him. There remain two bodies of troops upon the right, the further consisting of Dundonald’s mounted men who were to attack Hlangwane Hill, a fortified Boer position upon the south of the river, while Barton’s Brigade was to support it and to connect this attack with the central operations.

Dundonald’s force was entirely too weak for such an operation as the capture of the formidable entrenched hill, and it is probable that the movement was meant rather as a reconnaissance than as an assault. He had not more than a thousand men in all, mostly irregulars, and the position which faced him was precipitous and entrenched, with barbed-wire entanglements and automatic guns. But the gallant colonials were out on their first action, and their fiery courage pushed the attack home. Leaving their horses, they advanced a mile and a half on foot before they came within easy range of the hidden riflemen, and learned the lesson which had been taught to their comrades all along the line, that given approximately equal numbers the attack in the open has no possible chance against the concealed defence, and that the more bravely it is pushed the more heavy is the repulse. The irregulars carried themselves like old soldiers, they did all that mortal man could do, and they retired coolly and slowly with the loss of 130 of the brave troopers. The 7th Field Battery did all that was possible to support the advance and cover the retirement. In no single place, on this day of disaster, did one least gleam of success come to warm the hearts and reward the exertions of our much-enduring men.

Of Barton’s Brigade there is nothing to be recorded, for they appear neither to have supported the attack upon Hlangwane Hill on the one side nor to have helped to cover the ill-fated guns on the other. Barton was applied to for help by Dundonald, but refused to detach any of his troops. If General Buller’s real idea was a reconnaissance in force in order to determine the position and strength of the Boer lines, then of course his brigadiers must have felt a reluctance to entangle their brigades in a battle which was really the result of a misunderstanding. On the other hand, if, as the orders of the day seem to show, a serious engagement was always intended, it is strange that two brigades out of four should have played so insignificant a part. To Barton’s Brigade was given the responsibility of seeing that no right flank attack was carried out by the Boers, and this held it back until it was clear that no such attack was contemplated. After that one would have thought that, had the situation been appreciated, at least two battalions might have been spared to cover the abandoned guns with their rifle fire. Two companies of the Scots Fusiliers did share the fortunes of the guns. Two others, and one of the Irish Fusiliers, acted in support, but the brigade as a whole, together with the 1st Royals and the 13th Hussars, might as well have been at Aldershot for any bearing which their work had upon the fortunes of the day.

And so the first attempt at the relief of Ladysmith came to an end. At twelve o'clock all the troops upon the ground were retreating for the camp. There was nothing in the shape of rout or panic, and the withdrawal was as orderly as the advance; but the fact remained that we had just 1200 men in killed, wounded, and missing, and had gained absolutely nothing. We had not even the satisfaction of knowing that we had inflicted as well as endured punishment, for the enemy remained throughout the day so cleverly concealed that it is doubtful whether more than a hundred casualties occurred in their ranks. Once more it was shown how weak an arm is artillery against an enemy who lies in shelter.

Our wounded fortunately bore a high proportion to our killed, as they always will do when it is rifle fire rather than shell fire which is effective. Roughly we had 150 killed and about 720 wounded. A more humiliating item is the 250 or so who were missing. These men were the gunners, the Devons, and the Scots Fusiliers, who were taken in the donga together with small bodies from the Connaughts, the Dublins, and other regiments who, having found some shelter, were unable to leave it, and clung on until the retirement of their regiments left them in a hopeless position. Some of these small knots of men were allowed to retire in the evening by the Boers, who seemed by no means anxious to increase the number of their prisoners. Colonel Thackeray, of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, found himself with a handful of his men surrounded by the enemy, but owing to their good humour and his own tact he succeeded in withdrawing them in safety. The losses fell chiefly on Hart's Brigade, Hildyard's Brigade, and the colonial irregulars, who bore off the honours of the fight.

In his official report General Buller states that were it not for the action of Colonel Long and the subsequent disaster to the artillery he thought that the battle might have been a successful one. This is a hard saying, and throws perhaps too much responsibility upon the gallant but unfortunate gunner. There have been occasions in the war when greater dash upon the part of our artillery might have changed the fate of the day, and it is bad policy to be too severe upon the man who has taken a risk and failed. The whole operation, with its advance over the open against a concealed enemy with a river in his front, was so absolutely desperate that Long may have seen that only desperate measures could save the situation. To bring guns into action in front of the infantry without having clearly defined the position of the opposing infantry must always remain one of the most hazardous ventures of war. ‘It would certainly be mere folly,’ says Prince Kraft, ‘to advance artillery to within 600 or 800 yards of a position held by infantry unless the latter were under the fire of infantry from an even shorter range.’ This ‘mere folly’ is exactly what Colonel Long did, but it must be remembered in extenuation that he shared with others the idea that the Boers were up on the hills, and had no inkling that their front trenches were down at the river. With the imperfect means at his disposal he did such scouting as he could, and if his fiery and impetuous spirit led him into a position which cost him so dearly it is certainly more easy for the critic to extenuate his fault than that subsequent one which allowed the abandoned guns to fall into the hands of the enemy. Nor is there any evidence that the loss of these guns did seriously affect the fate of the action, for at those other parts of the field where the infantry had the full and unceasing support of the artillery the result was not more favourable than at the centre.

So much for Colenso. A more unsatisfactory and in some ways inexplicable action is not to be found in the range of British military history. And the fuller the light which has been poured upon it, the more extraordinary does the battle appear. There are a preface and a sequel to the action which have put a severe strain upon the charity which the British public has always shown that it is prepared to extend to a defeated General. The preface is that General Buller sent word to General White that he proposed to attack upon the 17th, while the actual attack was delivered upon the 15th, so that the garrison was not prepared to make that demonstration which might have prevented the besiegers from sending important reinforcements to Botha, had he needed them. The sequel is more serious. Losing all heart at his defeat, General Buller, although he had been officially informed that White had provisions for seventy days, sent a heliogram advising the surrender of the garrison. White’s first reply, which deserves to live with the anecdote of Nelson’s telescope at his blind eye, was to the effect that he believed the enemy had been tampering with Buller’s messages. To this Buller despatched an amended message, which with Sir George White’s reply, is here appended:

Message of December 16th, as altered by that of December 17th, 1899.

‘I tried Colenso yesterday, but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force except with siege operations, and these will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long?

‘How many days can you hold out? I suggest you firing away as much ammunition as you can, and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternative suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in. I find my infantry cannot fight more than ten miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here. Whatever happens, recollect to burn your cipher, decipher, and code books, and all deciphered messages.’

From Sir G. White to Sir R. Buller. December 16th, 1899.

‘Yours of today received and understood. My suggestion is that you take up strongest available position that will enable you to keep touch of the enemy and harass him constantly with artillery fire, and in other ways as much as possible. I can make food last for much longer than a month, and will not think of making terms till I am forced to. You may have hit enemy harder than you think. All our native spies report that your artillery fire made considerable impression on enemy. Have your losses been very heavy? If you lose touch of enemy, it will immensely increase his opportunities of crushing me, and have worst effect elsewhere. While you are in touch with him and in communication with me, he has both of our forces to reckon with. Make every effort to get reinforcements as early as possible, including India, and enlist every man in both colonies who will serve and can ride. Things may look brighter. The loss of 12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it. I fear I could not cut my way to you. Enteric fever is increasing alarmingly here. There are now 180 cases, all within last month. Answer fully. I am keeping everything secret for the present till I know your plans.’

Much allowance is to be made for a man who is staggering under the mental shock of defeat and the physical exertions which Buller had endured. That the Government made such allowance is clear from the fact that he was not instantly recalled. And yet the cold facts are that we have a British General, at the head of 25,000 men, recommending another General, at the head of 12,000 men only twelve miles off, to lay down his arms to an army which was certainly very inferior in numbers to the total British force; and this because he had once been defeated, although he knew that there was still time for the whole resources of the Empire to be poured into Natal in order to prevent so shocking a disaster. Such is a plain statement of the advice which Buller gave and which White rejected. For the instant the fate not only of South Africa but even, as I believe, of the Empire hung upon the decision of the old soldier in Ladysmith, who had to resist the proposals of his own General as sternly as the attacks of the enemy. He who sorely needed help and encouragement became, as his message shows, the helper and the encourager. It was a tremendous test, and Sir George White came through it with a staunchness and a loyalty which saved us not only from overwhelming present disaster, but from a hideous memory which must have haunted British military annals for centuries to come.

CHAPTER 12. THE DARK HOUR.

The week which extended from December 10th to December 17th, 1899, was the blackest one known during our generation, and the most disastrous for British arms during the century. We had in the short space of seven days lost, beyond all extenuation or excuse, three separate actions. No single defeat was of vital importance in itself, but the cumulative effect, occurring as they did to each of the main British forces in South Africa, was very great. The total loss amounted to about three thousand men and twelve guns, while the indirect effects in the way of loss of prestige to ourselves and increased confidence and more numerous recruits to our enemy were incalculable.

It is singular to glance at the extracts from the European press at that time and to observe the delight and foolish exultation with which our reverses were received. That this should occur in the French journals is not unnatural, since our history has been largely a contest with that Power, and we can regard with complacency an enmity which is the tribute to our success. Russia, too, as the least progressive of European States, has a natural antagonism of thought, if not of interests, to the Power which stands most prominently for individual freedom and liberal institutions. The same poor excuse may be made for the organs of the Vatican. But what are we to say of the insensate railing of Germany, a country whose ally we have been for centuries? In the days of Marlborough, in the darkest hours of Frederick the Great, in the great world struggle of Napoleon, we have been the brothers-in-arms of these people. So with the Austrians also. If both these countries were not finally swept from the map by Napoleon, it is largely to British subsidies and British tenacity that they owe it. And yet these are the folk who turned most bitterly against us at the only time in modern history when we had a chance of distinguishing our friends from our foes. Never again, I trust, on any pretext will a British guinea be spent or a British soldier or sailor shed his blood for such allies. The political lesson of this writer has been that we should make ourselves strong within the empire, and let all outside it, save only our kinsmen of America, go their own way and meet their own fate without let or hindrance from us. It is amazing to find that even the Americans could understand the stock from which they are themselves sprung so little that such papers as the ‘New York Herald’ should imagine that our defeat at Colenso was a good opportunity for us to terminate the war. The other leading American journals, however, took a more sane view of the situation, and realised that ten years of such defeats would not find the end either of our resolution or of our resources.

In the British Islands and in the empire at large our misfortunes were met by a sombre but unalterable determination to carry the war to a successful conclusion and to spare no sacrifices which could lead to that end. Amid the humiliation of our reverses there was a certain undercurrent of satisfaction that the deeds of our foemen should at least have made the contention that the strong was wantonly attacking the weak an absurd one. Under the stimulus of defeat the opposition to the war sensibly decreased. It had become too absurd even for the most unreasonable platform orator to contend that a struggle had been forced upon the Boers when every fresh detail showed how thoroughly they had prepared for such a contingency and how much we had to make up. Many who had opposed the war simply on that sporting instinct which backs the smaller against the larger began to realise that what with the geographical position of these people, what with the nature of their country, and what with the mobility, number, and hardihood of their forces, we had undertaken a task which would necessitate such a military effort as we had never before been called upon to make. When Kipling at the dawn of the war had sung of ‘fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay,’ the statement had seemed extreme. Now it was growing upon the public mind that four times this number would not be an excessive estimate. But the nation rose grandly to the effort. Their only fear, often and loudly expressed, was that Parliament would deal too tamely with the situation and fail to demand sufficient sacrifices. Such was the wave of feeling over the country that it was impossible to hold a peace meeting anywhere without a certainty of riot. The only London daily which had opposed the war, though very ably edited, was overborne by the general sentiment and compelled to change its line. In the provinces also opposition was almost silent, and the great colonies were even more unanimous than the mother country. Misfortune had solidified us where success might have caused a sentimental opposition.

On the whole, the energetic mood of the nation was reflected by the decided measures of the Government. Before the deep-sea cables had told us the lists of our dead, steps had been taken to prove to the world how great were our latent resources and how determined our spirit. On December 18th, two days after Colenso, the following provisions were made for carrying on the campaign.

1. That as General Buller’s hands were full in Natal the supervision and direction of the whole campaign should be placed in the hands of Lord Roberts, with Lord Kitchener as his chief of staff. Thus the famous old soldier and the famous young one were called together to the assistance of the country.
2. That all the remaining army reserves should be called out.
3. That the 7th Division (10,000 men) should be despatched to Africa, and that an 8th Division should be formed ready for service.
4. That considerable artillery reinforcements, including a howitzer brigade, should go out.
5. That eleven Militia battalions be sent abroad.
6. That a strong contingent of Volunteers be sent out.
7. That a Yeomanry mounted force be despatched.
8. That mounted corps be raised at the discretion of the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.
9. That the patriotic offers of further contingents from the colonies be gratefully accepted.

By these measures it was calculated that from seventy to a hundred thousand men would be added to our South African armies, the numbers of which were already not short of a hundred thousand.

It is one thing, however, to draw up paper reinforcements, and it is another, in a free country where no compulsion would be tolerated, to turn these plans into actual regiments and squadrons. But if there were any who doubted that this ancient nation still glowed with the spirit of its youth his fears must soon have passed away. For this far-distant war, a war of the unseen foe and of the murderous ambuscade, there were so many volunteers that the authorities were embarrassed by their numbers and their pertinacity. It was a stimulating sight to see those long queues of top-hatted, frock-coated young men who waited their turn for the orderly room with as much desperate anxiety as if hard fare, a veld bed, and Boer bullets were all that life had that was worth the holding. Especially the Imperial Yeomanry, a corps of riders and shots, appealed to the sporting instincts of our race. Many could ride and not shoot, many could shoot and not ride, more candidates were rejected than were accepted, and yet in a very short time eight thousand men from every class were wearing the grey coats and bandoliers. This singular and formidable force was drawn from every part of England and Scotland, with a contingent of hard-riding Irish fox-hunters. Noblemen and grooms rode knee to knee in the ranks, and the officers included many well-known country gentlemen and masters of hounds. Well horsed and well armed, a better force for the work in hand could not be imagined. So high did the patriotism run that corps were formed in which the men not only found their own equipment but contributed their pay to the war fund. Many young men about town justified their existence for the first time. In a single club, which is peculiarly consecrated to the jeunesse doree, three hundred members rode to the wars.

Without waiting for these distant but necessary reinforcements, the Generals in Africa had two divisions to look to, one of which was actually arriving while the other was on the sea. These formed the 5th Division under Sir Charles Warren, and the 6th Division under General Kelly-Kenny. Until these forces should arrive it was obviously best that the three armies should wait, for, unless there should be pressing need of help on the part of the besieged garrisons or imminent prospects of European complications, every week which passed was in our favour. There was therefore a long lull in the war, during which Methuen strengthened his position at Modder River, Gatacre held his own at Sterkstroom, and Buller built up his strength for another attempt at the relief of Ladysmith. The only connected series of operations during that time were those of General French in the neighbourhood of Colesberg, an account of which will be found in their entirety elsewhere. A short narrative may be given here of the doings of each of these forces until the period of inaction came to an end.

Methuen after the repulse at Magersfontein had fallen back upon the lines of Modder River, and had fortified them in such a way that he felt himself secure against assault. Cronje, on the other hand, had extended his position both to the right and to the left, and had strengthened the works which we had already found so formidable. In this way a condition of inaction was established which was really very much to our advantage, since Methuen retained his communications by rail, while all supplies to Cronje had to come a hundred miles by road. The British troops, and especially the Highland Brigade, were badly in need of a rest after the very severe ordeal which they had undergone. General Hector Macdonald, whose military record had earned the soldierly name of ‘Fighting Mac,’ was sent for from

India to take the place of the ill-fated Wauchope. Pending his arrival and that of reinforcements, Methuen remained quiet, and the Boers fortunately followed his example. From over the northern horizon those silver flashes of light told that Kimberley was dauntless in the present and hopeful of the future. On January 1st the British post of Kuruman fell, by which twelve officers and 120 police were captured. The town was isolated, and its capture could have no effect upon the general operations, but it is remarkable as the only capture of a fortified post up to this point made by the Boers.

The monotony of the long wait was broken by one dashing raid carried out by a detachment from Methuen’s line of communications. This force consisted of 200 Queenslanders, 100 Canadians (Toronto Company), 40 mounted Munster Fusiliers, a New South Wales Ambulance, and 200 of the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry with one horse battery. This singular force, so small in numbers and yet raked from the ends of the earth, was under the command of Colonel Pilcher. Moving out suddenly and rapidly from Belmont, it struck at the extreme right of the Boer line, which consisted of a laager occupied by the colonial rebels of that part of the country. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the colonists at the prospect of action. ‘At last!’ was the cry which went up from the Canadians when they were ordered to advance. The result was an absolute success. The rebels broke and fled, their camp was taken, and forty of them fell into our hands. Our own loss was slight, three killed and a few wounded. The flying column occupied the town of Douglas and hoisted the British flag there; but it was decided that the time had not yet come when it could be held, and the force fell back upon Belmont. The rebel prisoners were sent down to Cape Town for trial. The movement was covered by the advance of a force under Babington from Methuen’s force. This detachment, consisting of the 9th and 12th Lancers, with some mounted infantry and G troop of Horse Artillery, prevented any interference with Pilcher’s force from the north. It is worthy of record that though the two bodies of troops were operating at a distance of thirty miles, they succeeded in preserving a telephonic connection, seventeen minutes being the average time taken over question and reply.

Encouraged by this small success, Methuen’s cavalry on January 9th made another raid over the Free State border, which is remarkable for the fact that, save in the case of Colonel Plumer’s Rhodesian Force, it was the first time that the enemy’s frontier had been violated. The expedition under Babington consisted of the same regiments and the same battery which had covered Pilcher’s advance. The line taken was a south-easterly one, so as to get far round the left flank of the Boer position. With the aid of a party of the Victorian Mounted Rifles a considerable tract of country was overrun, and some farmhouses destroyed. The latter extreme measure may have been taken as a warning to the Boers that such depredations as they had carried out in parts of Natal could not pass with impunity, but both the policy and the humanity of such a course appear to be open to question, and there was some cause for the remonstrance which President Kruger shortly after addressed to us upon the subject. The expedition returned to Modder Camp at the end of two days without having seen the enemy. Save for one or two similar cavalry reconnaissances, an occasional interchange of long-range shells, a little sniping, and one or two false alarms at night, which broke the whole front of Magersfontein into yellow lines of angry light, nothing happened to Methuen’s force which is worthy of record up to the time of that movement of General Hector Macdonald to Koodoosberg which may be considered in connection with Lord Roberts’s decisive operations, of which it was really a part.

The doings of General Gatacre’s force during the long interval which passed between his disaster at Stormberg and the final general advance may be rapidly chronicled. Although nominally in command of a division, Gatacre’s troops were continually drafted off to east and to west, so that it was seldom that he had more than a brigade under his orders. During the weeks of waiting, his force consisted of three field batteries, the 74th, 77th, and 79th, some mounted police and irregular horse, the remains of the Royal Irish Rifles and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, the 1st Royal Scots, the Derbyshire regiment, and the Berkshires, the whole amounting to about 5500 men, who had to hold the whole district from Sterkstroom to East London on the coast, with a victorious enemy in front and a disaffected population around. Under these circumstances he could not attempt to do more than to hold his ground at Sterkstroom, and this he did unflinchingly until the line of the Boer defence broke down. Scouting and raiding expeditions, chiefly organised by Captain De Montmorency — whose early death cut short the career of one who possessed every quality of a partisan leader — broke the monotony of inaction. During the week which ended the year a succession of small skirmishes, of which the town of Dordrecht was the centre, exercised the troops in irregular warfare.

On January 3rd the Boer forces advanced and attacked the camp of the Cape Mounted Police, which was some eight miles in advance of Gatacre’s main position. The movement, however, was a half-hearted one, and was beaten off with small loss upon their part and less upon ours. From then onwards no movement of importance took place in Gatacre’s column until the general advance along the whole line had cleared his difficulties from in front of him.

In the meantime General Buller had also been playing a waiting game, and, secure in the knowledge that Ladysmith could still hold out, he had been building up his strength for a second attempt to relieve the hard-pressed and much-enduring garrison. After the repulse at Colenso, Hildyard’s and Barton’s brigades had remained at Chieveley with the mounted infantry, the naval guns, and two field batteries. The rest of the force retired to Frere, some miles in the rear. Emboldened by their success, the Boers sent raiding parties over the Tugela on either flank, which were only checked by our patrols being extended from Springfield on the west to Weenen on the east. A few plundered farmhouses and a small list of killed and wounded horsemen on either side were the sole result of these spasmodic and half-hearted operations.

Time here as elsewhere was working for the British, for reinforcements were steadily coming to Buller’s army. By the new year Sir Charles Warren’s division (the 5th) was nearly complete at Estcourt, whence it could reach the front at any moment. This division included the 10th brigade, consisting of the Imperial Light Infantry, 2nd Somersets, the 2nd Dorsets, and the 2nd Middlesex; also the 11th, called the Lancashire Brigade, formed by the 2nd Royal Lancaster, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, the 1st South Lancashire, and the York and Lancaster. The division also included the 14th Hussars and the 19th, 20th, and 28th batteries of Field Artillery. Other batteries of artillery, including one howitzer battery, came to strengthen Buller’s force, which amounted now to more than 30,000 men. Immense transport preparations had to be made, however, before the force could have the mobility necessary for a flank march, and it was not until January 11th that General Buller’s new plans for advance could be set into action. Before describing what these plans were and the disappointing fate which awaited them, we will return to the story of the siege of

Ladysmith, and show how narrowly the relieving force escaped the humiliation — some would say the disgrace — of seeing the town which looked to them for help fall beneath their very eyes. That this did not occur is entirely due to the fierce tenacity and savage endurance of the disease-ridden and half-starved men who held on to the frail lines which covered it.

CHAPTER 13. THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH.

Monday, October 30th, 1899, is not a date which can be looked back to with satisfaction by any Briton. In a scrambling and ill-managed action we had lost our detached left wing almost to a man, while our right had been hustled with no great loss but with some ignominy into Ladysmith. Our guns had been outshot, our infantry checked, and our cavalry paralysed. Eight hundred prisoners may seem no great loss when compared with a Sedan, or even with an Ulm; but such matters are comparative, and the force which laid down its arms at Nicholson’s Nek is the largest British force which has surrendered since the days of our great grandfathers, when the egregious Duke of York commanded in Flanders.

Sir George White was now confronted with the certainty of an investment, an event for which apparently no preparation had been made, since with an open railway behind him so many useless mouths had been permitted to remain in the town. Ladysmith lies in a hollow and is dominated by a ring of hills, some near and some distant. The near ones were in our hands, but no attempt had been made in the early days of the war to fortify and hold Bulwana, Lombard’s Kop, and the other positions from which the town might be shelled. Whether these might or might not have been successfully held has been much disputed by military men, the balance of opinion being that Bulwana, at least, which has a water-supply of its own, might have been retained. This question, however, was already academic, as the outer hills were in the hands of the enemy. As it was, the inner line — Caesar’s Camp, Wagon Hill, Rifleman’s Post, and round to Helpmakaar Hill — made a perimeter of fourteen miles, and the difficulty of retaining so extensive a line goes far to exonerate General White, not only for abandoning the outer hills, but also for retaining his cavalry in the town.

After the battle of Ladysmith and the retreat of the British, the Boers in their deliberate but effective fashion set about the investment of the town, while the British commander accepted the same as inevitable, content if he could stem and hold back from the colony the threatened flood of invasion. On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday the commandoes gradually closed in upon the south and east, harassed by some cavalry operations and reconnaissances upon our part, the effect of which was much exaggerated by the press. On Thursday, November 2nd, the last train escaped under a brisk fire, the passengers upon the wrong side of the seats. At 2 P.M. on the same day the telegraph line was cut, and the lonely town settled herself somberly down to the task of holding off the exultant Boers until the day — supposed to be imminent — when the relieving army should appear from among the labyrinth of mountains which lay to the south of them. Some there were who, knowing both the enemy and the mountains, felt a cold chill within their hearts as they asked themselves how an army was to come through, but the greater number, from General to private, trusted implicitly in the valour of their comrades and in the luck of the British Army.

One example of that historical luck was ever before their eyes in the shape of those invaluable naval guns which had arrived so dramatically at the very crisis of the fight, in time to check the monster on Pepworth Hill and to cover the retreat of the army. But for them the besieged must have lain impotent under the muzzles of the huge Creusots. But in spite of the naive claims put forward by the Boers to some special Providence — a process which a friendly German critic described as ‘commandeering the Almighty’ — it is certain that in a very peculiar degree, in the early months of this war there came again and again a happy chance, or a merciful interposition, which saved the British from disaster. Now in this first week of November, when every hill, north and south and east and west, flashed and smoked, and the great 96-pound shells groaned and screamed over the town, it was to the long thin 4.7’s and to the hearty bearded men who worked them, that soldiers and townsfolk looked for help. These guns of Lambton’s, supplemented by two old-fashioned 6.3 howitzers manned by survivors from No. 10 Mountain Battery, did all that was possible to keep down the fire of the heavy Boer guns. If they could not save, they could at least hit back, and punishment is not so bad to bear when one is giving as well as receiving.

By the end of the first week of November the Boers had established their circle of fire. On the east of the town, broken by the loops of the Klip River, is a broad green plain, some miles in extent, which furnished grazing ground for the horses and cattle of the besieged. Beyond it rises into a long flat-topped hill the famous Bulwana, upon which lay one great Creusot and several smaller guns. To the north, on Pepworth Hill, was another Creusot, and between the two were the Boer batteries upon Lombard’s Kop. The

British naval guns were placed upon this side, for, as the open loop formed by the river lies at this end, it is the part of the defences which is most liable to assault. From thence all round the west down to Besters in the south was a continuous series of hills, each crowned with Boer guns, which, if they could not harm the distant town, were at least effective in holding the garrison to its lines. So formidable were these positions that, amid much outspoken criticism, it has never been suggested that White would have been justified with a limited garrison in incurring the heavy loss of life which must have followed an attempt to force them.

The first few days of the siege were clouded by the death of Lieutenant Egerton of the ‘Powerful,’ one of the most promising officers in the Navy. One leg and the other foot were carried off, as he lay upon the sandbag parapet watching the effect of our fire. ‘There’s an end of my cricket,’ said the gallant sportsman, and he was carried to the rear with a cigar between his clenched teeth.

On November 3rd a strong cavalry reconnaissance was pushed down the Colenso road to ascertain the force which the enemy had in that direction. Colonel Brocklehurst took with him the 18th and 19th Hussars, the 5th Lancers and the 5th Dragoon Guards, with the Light Horse and the Natal Volunteers. Some desultory fighting ensued which achieved no end, and was chiefly remarkable for the excellent behaviour of the Colonials, who showed that they were the equals of the Regulars in gallantry and their superiors in the tactics which such a country requires. The death of Major Taunton, Captain Knapp, and young Brabant, the son of the General who did such good service at a later stage of the war, was a heavy price to pay for the knowledge that the Boers were in considerable strength to the south.

By the end of this week the town had already settled down to the routine of the siege. General Joubert, with the chivalry which had always distinguished him, had permitted the garrison to send out the non-combatants to a place called Intombi Camp (promptly named Funkersdorp by the facetious) where they were safe from the shells, though the burden of their support still fell of course upon the much-tried commissariat. The hale and male of the townsfolk refused for the most part to avoid the common danger, and clung tenaciously to their shot-torn village. Fortunately the river has worn down its banks until it runs through a deep channel, in the sides of which it was found to be possible to hollow out caves which were practically bomb-proof. Here for some months the townsfolk led a troglodytic existence, returning to their homes upon that much appreciated seventh day of rest which was granted to them by their Sabbatarian besiegers.

The perimeter of the defence had been divided off so that each corps might be responsible for its own section. To the south was the Manchester Regiment upon the hill called Caesar's Camp. Between Lombard's Kop and the town, on the north-east, were the Devons. To the north, at what seemed the vulnerable point, were the Rifle Brigade, the Rifles, and the remains of the 18th Hussars. To the west were the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, and 5th Dragoon Guards. The rest of the force was encamped round the outskirts of the town.

There appears to have been some idea in the Boer mind that the mere fact that they held a dominant position over the town would soon necessitate the surrender of the army. At the end of a week they had realised, however, just as the British had, that a siege lay before both. Their fire upon the town was heavy but not deadly, though it became more effective as the weeks went on. Their practice at a range of five miles was exceedingly accurate. At the same time their riflemen became more venturesome, and on Tuesday, November 7th, they made a half-hearted attack upon the Manchesters' position on the south, which was driven back without difficulty. On the 9th, however, their attempt was of a more serious and sustained character. It began with a heavy shell-fire and with a demonstration of rifle-fire from every side, which had for its object the prevention of reinforcements for the true point of danger, which again was Caesar's Camp at the south. It is evident that the Boers had from the beginning made up their minds that here lay the key of the position, as the two serious attacks — that of November 9th and that of January 6th — were directed upon this point.

The Manchesters at Caesar's Camp had been reinforced by the 1st battalion 60th Rifles, who held the prolongation of the same ridge, which is called Waggon Hill. With the dawn it was found that the Boer riflemen were within eight hundred yards, and from then till evening a constant fire was maintained upon the hill. The Boer, however, save when the odds are all in his favour, is not, in spite of his considerable personal bravery, at his best in attack. His racial traditions, depending upon the necessity for economy of human life, are all opposed to it. As a consequence two regiments well posted were able to hold them off all day with a loss which did not exceed thirty killed and wounded, while the enemy, exposed to the shrapnel of the 42nd battery, as well as the rifle-fire of the infantry, must have suffered very much more severely. The result of the action was a well-grounded belief that in daylight there was very little chance of the Boers being able to carry the lines. As the date was that of the Prince of Wales's birthday, a salute of twenty-one shotted naval guns wound up a successful day.

The failure of the attempt upon Ladysmith seems to have convinced the enemy that a waiting game, in which hunger, shell-fire, and disease were their allies, would be surer and less expensive than an open assault. From their distant hilltops they continued to plague the town, while garrison and citizens sat grimly patient, and learned to endure if not to enjoy the crash of the 96-pound shells, and the patter of shrapnel upon their corrugated-iron roofs. The supplies were adequate, and the besieged were fortunate in the presence of a first-class organiser, Colonel Ward of Islington fame, who with the assistance of Colonel Stoneman systematised the collection and issue of all the food, civil and military, so as to stretch it to its utmost. With rain overhead and mud underfoot, chafing at their own idleness and humiliated by their own position, the soldiers waited through the weary weeks for the relief which never came. On some days there was more shell-fire, on some less; on some there was sniping, on some none; on some they sent a little feeler of cavalry and guns out of the town, on most they lay still — such were the ups and downs of life in Ladysmith. The inevitable siege paper, 'The Ladysmith Lyre,' appeared, and did something to relieve the monotony by the exasperation of its jokes. Night, morning, and noon the shells rained upon the town until the most timid learned fatalism if not bravery. The crash of the percussion, and the strange musical tang of the shrapnel sounded ever in their ears. With their glasses the garrison could see the gay frocks and parasols of the Boer ladies who had come down by train to see the torture of the doomed town.

The Boers were sufficiently numerous, aided by their strong positions and excellent artillery, to mask the Ladysmith force and to sweep on at once to the conquest of Natal. Had they done so it is hard to see what could have prevented them from riding their horses down to salt water. A few odds and ends, half battalions and local volunteers, stood between them and Durban. But here, as on the Orange River, a singular paralysis seems to have struck them. When the road lay clear before them the first transports of the army corps were hardly past St. Vincent, but before they had made up their mind to take that road the harbour of Durban was packed with our shipping and ten thousand men had thrown themselves across their path.

For a moment we may leave the fortunes of Ladysmith to follow this southerly movement of the Boers. Within two days of the investment of the town they had swung round their left flank and attacked Colenso, twelve miles south, shelling the Durban Light Infantry out of their post with a long-range fire. The British fell back twenty-seven miles and concentrated at Estcourt, leaving the all-important Colenso railway-bridge in the hands of the enemy. From this onwards they held the north of the Tugela, and many a widow wore crepe before we got our grip upon it once more. Never was there a more critical week in the war, but having got Colenso the Boers did little more. They formally annexed the whole of Northern Natal to the Orange Free State — a dangerous precedent when the tables should be turned. With amazing assurance the burghers pegged out farms for themselves and sent for their people to occupy these newly won estates.

On November 5th the Boers had remained so inert that the British returned in small force to Colenso and removed some stores — which seems to suggest that the original retirement was premature. Four days passed in inactivity — four precious days for us — and on the evening of the fourth, November 9th, the watchers on the signal station at Table Mountain saw the smoke of a great steamer coming past Robben Island. It was the ‘Roslin Castle’ with the first of the reinforcements. Within the week the ‘Moor,’ ‘Yorkshire,’ ‘Aurania,’ ‘Hawarden Castle,’ ‘Gascon,’ ‘Armenian,’ ‘Oriental,’ and a fleet of others had passed for Durban with 15,000 men. Once again the command of the sea had saved the Empire.

But, now that it was too late, the Boers suddenly took the initiative, and in dramatic fashion. North of Estcourt, where General Hildyard was being daily reinforced from the sea, there are two small townlets, or at least geographical (and railway) points. Frere is about ten miles north of Estcourt, and Chieveley is five miles north of that and about as far to the south of Colenso. On November 15th an armoured train was despatched from Estcourt to see what was going on up the line. Already one disaster had befallen us in this campaign on account of these clumsy contrivances, and a heavier one was now to confirm the opinion that, acting alone, they are totally inadmissible. As a means of carrying artillery for a force operating upon either flank of them, with an assured retreat behind, there may be a place for them in modern war, but as a method of scouting they appear to be the most inefficient and also the most expensive that has ever been invented. An intelligent horseman would gather more information, be less visible, and retain some freedom as to route. After our experience the armoured train may steam out of military history.

The train contained ninety Dublin Fusiliers, eighty Durban Volunteers, and ten sailors, with a naval 7-pounder gun. Captain Haldane of the Gordons, Lieutenant Frankland (Dublin Fusiliers), and Winston Churchill, the well-known correspondent, accompanied the expedition. What might have been foreseen occurred. The train steamed into the advancing Boer army, was fired upon, tried to escape, found the rails blocked behind it, and upset. Dublins and Durbans were shot helplessly out of their trucks, under a heavy fire. A railway accident is a nervous thing, and so is an ambuscade, but the combination of the two must be appalling. Yet there were brave hearts which rose to the occasion. Haldane and Frankland rallied the troops, and Churchill the engine-driver. The engine was disentangled and sent on with its cab full of wounded. Churchill, who had escaped upon it, came gallantly back to share the fate of his comrades. The dazed shaken soldiers continued a futile resistance for some time, but there was neither help nor escape and nothing for them but surrender. The most Spartan military critic cannot blame them. A few slipped away besides those who escaped upon the engine. Our losses were two killed, twenty wounded, and about eighty taken. It is remarkable that of the three leaders both Haldane and Churchill succeeded in escaping from Pretoria.

A double tide of armed men was now pouring into Southern Natal. From below, trainload after trainload of British regulars were coming up to the danger point, feted and cheered at every station. Lonely farmhouses near the line hung out their Union Jacks, and the folk on the stoep heard the roar of the choruses as the great trains swung upon their way. From above the Boers were flooding down, as Churchill saw them, dour, resolute, riding silently through the rain, or chanting hymns round their camp fires — brave honest farmers, but standing unconsciously for mediaevalism and corruption, even as our rough-tongued Tommies stood for civilisation, progress, and equal rights for all men.

The invading force, the numbers of which could not have exceeded some few thousands, formidable only for their mobility, lapped round the more powerful but less active force at Estcourt, and struck behind it at its communications. There was for a day or two some discussion as to a further retreat, but Hildyard, strengthened by the advice and presence of Colonel Long, determined to hold his ground. On November 21st the raiding Boers were as far south as Nottingham Road, a point thirty miles south of Estcourt and only forty miles north of the considerable city of Pietermaritzburg. The situation was serious. Either the invaders must be stopped, or the second largest town in the colony would be in their hands. From all sides came tales of plundered farms and broken households. Some at least of the raiders behaved with wanton brutality. Smashed pianos, shattered pictures, slaughtered stock, and vile inscriptions, all exhibit a predatory and violent side to the paradoxical Boer character. [Footnote: More than once I have heard the farmers in the Free State acknowledge that the ruin which had come upon them was a just retribution for the excesses of Natal.]

The next British post behind Hildyard's at Estcourt was Barton's upon the Mooi River, thirty miles to the south. Upon this the Boers made a half-hearted attempt, but Joubert had begun to realise the strength of the British reinforcements and the impossibility with the numbers at his disposal of investing a succession of British posts. He ordered Botha to withdraw from Mooi River and begin his northerly trek.

The turning-point of the Boer invasion of Natal was marked, though we cannot claim that it was caused, by the action of Willow Grange. This was fought by Hildyard and Walter Kitchener in command of the Estcourt garrison, against about 2000 of the invaders under Louis Botha. The troops engaged were the East and West Surreys (four companies of the latter), the West Yorkshires, the Durban Light Infantry, No. 7 battery R.F.A., two naval guns, and some hundreds of Colonial Horse.

The enemy being observed to have a gun upon a hill within striking distance of Estcourt, this force set out on November 22nd to make a night attack and to endeavour to capture it. The hill was taken without difficulty, but it was found that the gun had been removed. A severe counter-attack was made at daylight by the Boers, and the troops were compelled with no great loss and less glory to return to the town. The Surreys and the Yorkshires behaved very well, but were placed in a difficult position and were badly supported by the artillery. Martyn's Mounted Infantry covered the retirement with great gallantry, but the skirmish ended in a British loss of fourteen killed and fifty wounded or missing, which was certainly more than that of the Boers. From this indecisive action of Willow Grange the Boer invasion receded until General Buller, coming to the front on

November 27th, found that the enemy was once more occupying the line of the Tugela. He himself moved up to Frere, where he devoted his time and energies to the collection of that force with which he was destined, after three failures, to make his way into Ladysmith.

One unexpected and little known result of the Boer expedition into Southern Natal was that their leader, the chivalrous Joubert, injured himself through his horse stumbling, and was physically incapacitated for the remainder of the campaign. He returned almost immediately to Pretoria, leaving the command of the Tugela in the hands of Louis Botha.

Leaving Buller to organise his army at Frere, and the Boer commanders to draw their screen of formidable defences along the Tugela, we will return once more to the fortunes of the unhappy town round which the interest of the world, and possibly the destiny of the Empire, were centering. It is very certain that had Ladysmith fallen, and twelve thousand British soldiers with a million pounds' worth of stores fallen into the hands of the invaders, we should have been faced with the alternative of abandoning the struggle, or of reconquering South Africa from Cape Town northwards. South Africa is the keystone of the Empire, and for the instant Ladysmith was the keystone of South Africa. But the courage of the troops who held the shell-torn townlet, and the confidence of the public who watched them, never faltered for an instant.

December 8th was marked by a gallant exploit on the part of the beleaguered garrison. Not a whisper had transpired of the coming sortie, and a quarter of an hour before the start officers engaged had no idea of it. O si sic omnia! At ten o'clock a band of men slipped out of the town. There were six hundred of them, all irregulars, drawn from the Imperial Light Horse, the Natal Carabineers, and the Border Mounted Rifles, under the command of Hunter, youngest and most dashing of British Generals. Edwardes and Boyston were the subcommanders. The men had no knowledge of where they were going or what they had to do, but they crept silently along under a drifting sky, with peeps of a quarter moon, over a mimosa-shadowed plain. At last in front of them there loomed a dark mass — it was Gun Hill, from which one of the great Creusots had plagued them. A strong support (four hundred men) was left at the base of the hill, and the others, one hundred Imperials, one hundred Borders and Carabineers, ten Sappers, crept upwards with Major Henderson as guide. A Dutch outpost challenged, but was satisfied by a Dutch-speaking Carabineer. Higher and higher the men crept, the silence broken only by the occasional slip of a stone or the rustle of their own breathing. Most of them had left their boots below. Even in the darkness they kept some formation, and the right wing curved forward to outflank the defence. Suddenly a Mauser crack and a spurt of flame — then another and another! ‘Come on, boys! Fix bayonets!’ yelled Karri Davies. There were no bayonets, but that was a detail. At the word the gunners were off, and there in the darkness in front of the storming party loomed the enormous gun, gigantic in that uncertain light. Out with the huge breech-block! Wrap the long lean muzzle round with a collar of gun-cotton! Keep the guard upon the run until the work is done! Hunter stood by with a night light in his hand until the charge was in position, and then, with a crash which brought both armies from their tents, the huge tube reared up on its mountings and toppled backwards into the pit. A howitzer lurked beside it, and this also was blown into ruin. The attendant Maxim was dragged back by the exultant captors, who reached the town amid shoutings and laughter with the first break of day. One man wounded, the gallant Henderson, is the cheap price for the best-planned and most dashing exploit of the war. Secrecy in conception, vigour in execution — they are the root ideas of the soldier’s craft. So easily was the enterprise carried out, and so defective the Boer watch, that it is probable that if all the guns had been simultaneously attacked the Boers might have found themselves without a single piece of ordnance in the morning. [Footnote: The destruction of the Creusot was not as complete as was hoped. It was taken back to Pretoria, three feet were sawn off the muzzle, and a new breech-block provided. The gun was then sent to Kimberley, and it was the heavy cannon which arrived late in the history of that siege and caused considerable consternation among the inhabitants.]

On the same morning (December 9th) a cavalry reconnaissance was pushed in the direction of Pepworth Hill. The object no doubt was to ascertain whether the enemy were still present in force, and the terrific roll of the Mausers answered it in the affirmative. Two killed and twenty wounded was the price which we paid for the information. There had been three such reconnaissances in the five weeks of the siege, and it is difficult to see what advantage they gave or how they are to be justified. Far be it for the civilian to dogmatise upon such matters, but one can repeat, and to the best of one’s judgment endorse, the opinion of the vast majority of officers.

There were heart burnings among the Regulars that the colonial troops should have gone in front of them, so their martial jealousy was allayed three nights later by the same task being given to them. Four companies of the 2nd Rifle Brigade were the troops chosen, with a few sappers and gunners, the whole under the command of Colonel Metcalfe of the same battalion. A single gun, the 4.7 howitzer upon Surprise Hill, was the objective. Again there was the stealthy advance through the darkness, again the support was left at the bottom of the hill, again the two companies carefully ascended, again there was the challenge, the rush, the flight, and the gun was in the hands of the stormers.

Here and only here the story varies. For some reason the fuse used for the guncotton was defective, and half an hour elapsed before the explosion destroyed the howitzer. When it came it came very thoroughly, but it was a weary time in coming. Then our men descended the hill, but the Boers were already crowding in upon them from either side. The English cries of the soldiers were answered in English by the Boers, and slouch hat or helmet dimly seen in the mirk was the only badge of friend or foe. A singular letter is extant from young Reitz (the son of the Transvaal secretary), who was present. According to his account there were but eight Boers present, but assertion or contradiction equally valueless in the darkness of such a night, and there are some obvious discrepancies in his statement. ‘We fired among them,’ says Reitz. ‘They stopped and all cried out “Rifle Brigade.” Then one of them said “Charge!” One officer, Captain Paley, advanced, though he had two bullet wounds already. Joubert gave him another shot and he fell on the top of us. Four Englishmen got hold of Jan Luttig and struck him on the head with their rifles and stabbed him in the stomach with a bayonet. He seized two of them by the throat and shouted “Help, boys!” His two nearest comrades shot two of them, and the other two bolted. Then the English came up in numbers, about eight hundred, along the footpath’ (there were two hundred on the hill, but the exaggeration is pardonable in the darkness), ‘and we lay as quiet as mice along the bank. Farther on the English killed three of our men with bayonets and wounded two. In the morning we found Captain Paley and twenty-two of them killed and wounded.’ It seems evident that Reitz means that his own little party were eight men, and not that that represented the force which intercepted the retiring riflemen. Within his own knowledge five of his countrymen were killed in the scuffle, so the total loss was probably considerable. Our own casualties were eleven dead, forty-three wounded, and six prisoners, but the price was not excessive for the howitzer and for the morale which arises from such exploits. Had it not been for that unfortunate fuse, the second success might have been as bloodless as the first. ‘I am sorry,’ said a sympathetic correspondent to the stricken Paley. ‘But we got the gun,’ Paley whispered, and he spoke for the Brigade.

Amid the shell-fire, the scanty rations, the enteric and the dysentery, one ray of comfort had always brightened the garrison. Buller was only twelve miles away — they could hear his guns — and when his advance came in earnest their sufferings would be at an end. But now in an instant this single light was shut off and the true nature of their situation was revealed to them. Buller had indeed moved...but backwards. He had been defeated at Colenso, and the siege was not ending but beginning. With heavier hearts but undiminished resolution the army and the townsfolk settled down to the long, dour struggle. The exultant enemy replaced their shattered guns and drew their lines closer still round the stricken town.

A record of the siege onwards until the break of the New Year centres upon the sordid details of the sick returns and of the price of food. Fifty on one day, seventy on the next, passed under the hands of the overworked and devoted doctors. Fifteen hundred, and later two thousand, of the garrison were down. The air was poisoned by foul sewage and dark with obscene flies. They speckled the scanty food. Eggs were already a shilling each, cigarettes sixpence, whisky five pounds a bottle: a city more free from gluttony and drunkenness has never been seen.

Shell-fire has shown itself in this war to be an excellent ordeal for those who desire martial excitement with a minimum of danger. But now and again some black chance guides a bomb — one in five thousand perhaps — to a most tragic issue. Such a deadly missile falling among Boers near Kimberley is said to have slain nine and wounded seventeen. In Ladysmith too there are days to be marked in red when the gunner shot better than he knew. One shell on December 17th killed six men (Natal Carabineers), wounded three, and destroyed fourteen horses. The grisly fact has been recorded that five separate human legs lay upon the ground. On December 22nd another tragic shot killed five and wounded twelve of the Devons. On the same day four officers of the 5th Lancers (including the Colonel) and one sergeant were wounded — a most disastrous day. A little later it was again the turn of the Devons, who lost one officer killed and ten wounded.

Christmas set in amid misery, hunger, and disease, the more piteous for the grim attempts to amuse the children and live up to the joyous season, when the present of Santa Claus was too often a 96-pound shell. On the top of all other troubles it was now known that the heavy ammunition was running short and must be husbanded for emergencies. There was no surcease, however, in the constant hail which fell upon the town. Two or three hundred shells were a not unusual daily allowance. The monotonous bombardment with which the New Year had commenced was soon to be varied by a most gallant and spirit-stirring clash of arms. On January 6th the Boers delivered their great assault upon Ladysmith — an onfall so gallantly made and gallantly met that it deserves to rank among the classic fights of British military history. It is a tale which neither side need be ashamed to tell. Honour to the sturdy infantry who held their grip so long, and honour also to the rough men of the veld, who, led by untrained civilians, stretched us to the utmost capacity of our endurance.

It may be that the Boers wished once for all to have done at all costs with the constant menace to their rear, or it may be that the deliberate preparations of Buller for his second advance had alarmed them, and that they realised that they must act quickly if they were to act at all. At any rate, early in the New Year a most determined attack was decided upon. The storming party consisted of some hundreds of picked volunteers from the Heidelberg (Transvaal) and Harrismith (Free State) contingents, led by de Villiers. They were supported by several thousand riflemen, who might secure their success or cover their retreat. Eighteen heavy guns had been trained upon the long ridge, one end of which has been called Caesar’s Camp and the other Waggon Hill. This hill, three miles long, lay to the south of the town, and the Boers had early recognised it as being the most vulnerable point, for it was against it that their attack of November 9th had been directed. Now, after two months, they were about to renew the attempt with greater resolution against less robust opponents. At twelve o’clock our scouts heard the sounds of the chanting of hymns in the Boer camps. At two in the morning crowds of barefooted men were clustering round the base of the ridge, and threading their way, rifle in hand, among the mimosa-bushes and scattered boulders which cover the slope of the hill. Some working parties were moving guns into position, and the noise of their labour helped to drown the sound of the Boer advance. Both at Caesar’s Camp, the east end of the ridge, and at Waggon Hill, the west end (the points being, I repeat, three miles apart), the attack came as a complete surprise. The outposts were shot or driven in, and the stormers were on the ridge almost as soon as their presence was detected. The line of rocks blazed with the flash of their guns.

Caesar’s Camp was garrisoned by one sturdy regiment, the Manchesters, aided by a Colt automatic gun. The defence had been arranged in the form of small sangars, each held by from ten to twenty men. Some few of these were rushed in the darkness, but the Lancashire men pulled themselves together and held on strenuously to those which remained. The crash of musketry woke the sleeping town, and the streets resounded with the shouting of the officers and the rattling of arms as the men mustered in the darkness and hurried to the points of danger.

Three companies of the Gordons had been left near Caesar’s Camp, and these, under Captain Carnegie, threw themselves into the struggle. Four other companies of Gordons came up in support from the town, losing upon the way their splendid colonel, Dick-Cunyngham, who was killed by a chance shot at three thousand yards, on this his first appearance since he had recovered from his wounds at Elandslaagte. Later four companies of the Rifle Brigade were thrown into the firing line, and a total of two and a half infantry battalions held that end of the position. It was not a man too much. With the dawn of day it could be seen that the Boers held the southern and we the northern slopes, while the narrow plateau between formed a bloody debatable ground. Along a front of a quarter of a mile fierce eyes glared and rifle barrels flashed from behind every rock, and the long fight swayed a little back or a little forward with each upward heave of the stormers or rally of the soldiers. For hours the combatants were so near that a stone or a taunt could be thrown from one to the other. Some scattered sangars still held their own, though the Boers had passed them. One such, manned by fourteen privates of the Manchester Regiment, remained untaken, but had only two defenders left at the end of the bloody day.

With the coming of the light the 53rd Field Battery, the one which had already done so admirably at Lombard’s Kop, again deserved well of its country. It was impossible to get behind the Boers and fire straight at their position, so every shell fired had to skim over the heads of our own men upon the ridge and so pitch upon the reverse slope. Yet so accurate was the fire, carried on under an incessant rain of shells from the big Dutch gun on

Bulwana, that not one shot miscarried and that Major Abdy and his men succeeded in sweeping the further slope without loss to our own fighting line. Exactly the same feat was equally well performed at the other end of the position by Major Blewitt’s 21st Battery, which was exposed to an even more searching fire than the 53rd. Any one who has seen the iron endurance of British gunners and marvelled at the answering shot which flashes out through the very dust of the enemy’s exploding shell, will understand how fine must have been the spectacle of these two batteries working in the open, with the ground round them sharded with splinters. Eye-witnesses have left it upon record that the sight of Major Blewitt strolling up and down among his guns, and turning over with his toe the last fallen section of iron, was one of the most vivid and stirring impressions which they carried from the fight. Here also it was that the gallant Sergeant Bosley, his arm and his leg stricken off by a Boer shell, cried to his comrades to roll his body off the trail and go on working the gun.

At the same time as — or rather earlier than — the onslaught upon Caesar’s Camp a similar attack had been made with secrecy and determination upon the western end of the position called Waggon Hill. The barefooted Boers burst suddenly with a roll of rifle-fire into the little garrison of Imperial Light Horse and Sappers who held the position. Mathias of the former, Digby-Jones and Dennis of the latter, showed that ‘two in the morning’ courage which Napoleon rated as the highest of military virtues. They and their men were surprised but not disconcerted, and stood desperately to a slogging match at the closest quarters. Seventeen Sappers were down out of thirty, and more than half the little body of irregulars. This end of the position was feebly fortified, and it is surprising that so experienced and sound a soldier as Ian Hamilton should have left it so. The defence had no marked advantage as compared with the attack, neither trench, sangar, nor wire entanglement, and in numbers they were immensely inferior. Two companies of the 60th Rifles and a small body of the ubiquitous Gordons happened to be upon the hill and threw themselves into the fray, but they were unable to turn the tide. Of thirty-three Gordons under Lieutenant MacNaughten thirty were wounded. [Footnote: The Gordons and the Sappers were there that morning to re-escort one of Lambton’s 4.7 guns, which was to be mounted there. Ten seamen were with the gun, and lost three of their number in the defence.] As our men retired under the shelter of the northern slope they were reinforced by another hundred and fifty Gordons under the stalwart Miller-Wallnutt, a man cast in the mould of a Berserk Viking. To their aid also came two hundred of the Imperial Light Horse, burning to assist their comrades. Another half-battalion of Rifles came with them. At each end of the long ridge the situation at the dawn of day was almost identical. In each the stormers had seized one side, but were brought to a stand by the defenders upon the other, while the British guns fired over the heads of their own infantry to rake the further slope.

It was on the Waggon Hill side, however, that the Boer exertions were most continuous and strenuous and our own resistance most desperate. There fought the gallant de Villiers, while Ian Hamilton rallied the defenders and led them in repeated rushes against the enemy's line. Continually reinforced from below, the Boers fought with extraordinary resolution. Never will any one who witnessed that Homeric contest question the valour of our foes. It was a murderous business on both sides. Edwardes of the Light Horse was struck down. In a gun-emplacement a strange encounter took place at point-blank range between a group of Boers and of Britons. De Villiers of the Free State shot Miller-Wallnut dead, Ian Hamilton fired at de Villiers with his revolver and missed him. Young Albrecht of the Light Horse shot de Villiers. A Boer named de Jaeger shot Albrecht. Digby-Jones of the Sappers shot de Jaeger. Only a few minutes later the gallant lad, who had already won fame enough for a veteran, was himself mortally wounded, and Dennis, his comrade in arms and in glory, fell by his side.

There has been no better fighting in our time than that upon Waggon Hill on that January morning, and no better fighters than the Imperial Light Horsemen who formed the centre of the defence. Here, as at Elandslaagte, they proved themselves worthy to stand in line with the crack regiments of the British army.

Through the long day the fight maintained its equilibrium along the summit of the ridge, swaying a little that way or this, but never amounting to a repulse of the stormers or to a rout of the defenders. So intermixed were the combatants that a wounded man more than once found himself a rest for the rifles of his enemies. One unfortunate soldier in this position received six more bullets from his own comrades in their efforts to reach the deadly rifleman behind him. At four o'clock a huge bank of clouds which had towered upwards unheeded by the struggling men burst suddenly into a terrific thunderstorm with vivid lightnings and lashing rain. It is curious that the British victory at Elandslaagte was heralded by just such another storm. Up on the bullet-swept hill the long fringes of fighting men took no more heed of the elements than would two bulldogs who have each other by the throat. Up the greasy hillside, foul with mud and with blood, came the Boer reserves, and up the northern slope came our own reserve, the Devon Regiment, fit representatives of that virile county. Admirably led by Park, their gallant Colonel, the Devons swept the Boers before them, and the Rifles, Gordons, and Light Horse joined in the wild charge which finally cleared the ridge.

But the end was not yet. The Boer had taken a risk over this venture, and now he had to pay the stakes. Down the hill he passed, crouching, darting, but the spruits behind him were turned into swirling streams, and as he hesitated for an instant upon the brink the relentless sleet of bullets came from behind. Many were swept away down the gorges and into the Klip River, never again to be accounted for in the lists of their field-cornet. The majority splashed through, found their horses in their shelter, and galloped off across the great Bulwana Plain, as fairly beaten in as fair a fight as ever brave men were yet.

The cheers of victory as the Devons swept the ridge had heartened the weary men upon Caesar’s Camp to a similar effort. Manchesters, Gordons, and Rifles, aided by the fire of two batteries, cleared the long-debated position. Wet, cold, weary, and without food for twenty-six hours, the bedraggled Tommies stood yelling and waving, amid the litter of dead and of dying.

It was a near thing. Had the ridge fallen the town must have followed, and history perhaps have been changed. In the old stiff-rank Majuba days we should have been swept in an hour from the position. But the wily man behind the rock was now to find an equally wily man in front of him. The soldier had at last learned something of the craft of the hunter. He clung to his shelter, he dwelled on his aim, he ignored his dressings, he laid aside the eighteenth-century traditions of his pigtailed ancestor, and he hit the Boers harder than they had been hit yet. No return may ever come to us of their losses on that occasion; 80 dead bodies were returned to them from the ridge alone, while the slopes, the dongas, and the river each had its own separate tale. No possible estimate can make it less than three hundred killed and wounded, while many place it at a much higher figure. Our own casualties were very serious and the proportion of dead to wounded unusually high, owing to the fact that the greater part of the wounds were necessarily of the head. In killed we lost 13 officers, 135 men. In wounded 28 officers, 244 men — a total of 420, Lord Ava, the honoured Son of an honoured father, the fiery Dick-Cunyngham, stalwart Miller-Wallnutt, the brave boy sappers Digby-Jones and Dennis, Adams and Packman of the Light Horse, the chivalrous Lafone — we had to mourn quality as well as numbers. The grim test of the casualty returns shows that it was to the Imperial Light Horse (ten officers down, and the regiment commanded by a junior captain), the Manchesters, the Gordons, the Devons, and the 2nd Rifle Brigade that the honours of the day are due.

In the course of the day two attacks had been made upon other points of the British position, the one on Observation Hill on the north, the other on the Helpmakaar position on the east. Of these the latter was never pushed home and was an obvious feint, but in the case of the other it was not until Schutte, their commander, and forty or fifty men had been killed and wounded, that the stormers abandoned their attempt. At every point the assailants found the same scattered but impenetrable fringe of riflemen, and the same energetic batteries waiting for them.

Throughout the Empire the course of this great struggle was watched with the keenest solicitude and with all that painful emotion which springs from impotent sympathy. By heliogram to Buller, and so to the farthest ends of that great body whose nerves are the telegraphic wires, there came the announcement of the attack. Then after an interval of hours came ‘everywhere repulsed, but fighting continues.’ Then, ‘Attack continues. Enemy reinforced from the south.’ Then ‘Attack renewed. Very hard pressed.’ There the messages ended for the day, leaving the Empire black with apprehension. The darkest forecasts and most dreary anticipations were indulged by the most temperate and best-informed London papers. For the first time the very suggestion that the campaign might be above our strength was made to the public. And then at last there came the official news of the repulse of the assault. Far away at Ladysmith, the weary men and their sorely tried officers gathered to return thanks to God for His manifold mercies, but in London also hearts were stricken solemn by the greatness of the crisis, and lips long unused to prayer joined in the devotions of the absent warriors.

CHAPTER 14. THE COLESBERG OPERATIONS.

Of the four British armies in the field I have attempted to tell the story of the western one which advanced to help Kimberley, of the eastern one which was repulsed at Colenso, and of the central one which was checked at Stormberg. There remains one other central one, some account of which must now be given.

It was, as has already been pointed out, a long three weeks after the declaration of war before the forces of the Orange Free State began to invade Cape Colony. But for this most providential delay it is probable that the ultimate fighting would have been, not among the mountains and kopjes of Stormberg and Colesberg, but amid those formidable passes which lie in the Hex Valley, immediately to the north of Cape Town, and that the armies of the invader would have been doubled by their kinsmen of the Colony. The ultimate result of the war must have been the same, but the sight of all South Africa in flames might have brought about those Continental complications which have always been so grave a menace.

The invasion of the Colony was at two points along the line of the two railways which connect the countries, the one passing over the Orange River at Norval’s Pont and the other at Bethulie, about forty miles to the eastward. There were no British troops available (a fact to be considered by those, if any remain, who imagine that the British entertained any design against the Republics), and the Boers jogged slowly southward amid a Dutch population who hesitated between their unity of race and speech and their knowledge of just and generous treatment by the Empire. A large number were won over by the invaders, and, like all apostates, distinguished themselves by their virulence and harshness towards their loyal neighbours. Here and there in towns which were off the railway line, in Barkly East or Ladygrey, the farmers met together with rifle and bandolier, tied orange puggarees round their hats, and rode off to join the enemy. Possibly these ignorant and isolated men hardly recognised what it was that they were doing. They have found out since. In some of the border districts the rebels numbered ninety per cent of the Dutch population.

In the meanwhile, the British leaders had been strenuously endeavouring to scrape together a few troops with which to make some stand against the enemy. For this purpose two small forces were necessary — the one to oppose the advance through Bethulie and Stormberg, the other to meet the invaders, who, having passed the river at Norval's Pont, had now occupied Colesberg. The former task was, as already shown, committed to General Gatacre. The latter was allotted to General French, the victor of Elandslaagte, who had escaped in the very last train from Ladysmith, and had taken over this new and important duty. French's force assembled at Arundel and Gatacre's at Sterkstroom. It is with the operations of the former that we have now to deal.

General French, for whom South Africa has for once proved not the grave but the cradle of a reputation, had before the war gained some name as a smart and energetic cavalry officer. There were some who, watching his handling of a considerable body of horse at the great Salisbury manoeuvres in 1898, conceived the highest opinion of his capacity, and it was due to the strong support of General Buller, who had commanded in these peaceful operations, that French received his appointment for South Africa. In person he is short and thick, with a pugnacious jaw. In character he is a man of cold persistence and of fiery energy, cautious and yet audacious, weighing his actions well, but carrying them out with the dash which befits a mounted leader. He is remarkable for the quickness of his decision—'can think at a gallop,' as an admirer expressed it. Such was the man, alert, resourceful, and determined, to whom was entrusted the holding back of the Colesberg Boers.

Although the main advance of the invaders was along the lines of the two railways, they ventured, as they realised how weak the forces were which opposed them, to break off both to the east and west, occupying Dordrecht on one side and Steynsberg on the other. Nothing of importance accrued from the possession of these points, and our attention may be concentrated upon the main line of action.

French's original force was a mere handful of men, scraped together from anywhere. Naauwpoort was his base, and thence he made a reconnaissance by rail on November 23rd towards Arundel, the next hamlet along the line, taking with him a company of the Black Watch, forty mounted infantry, and a troop of the New South Wales Lancers. Nothing resulted from the expedition save that the two forces came into touch with each other, a touch which was sustained for months under many vicissitudes, until the invaders were driven back once more over Norval's Pont. Finding that Arundel was weakly held, French advanced up to it, and established his camp there towards the end of December, within six miles of the Boer lines at Rensburg, to the south of Colesberg. His mission — with his present forces — was to prevent the further advance of the enemy into the Colony, but he was not strong enough yet to make a serious attempt to drive them out.

Before the move to Arundel on December 13th his detachment had increased in size, and consisted largely of mounted men, so that it attained a mobility very unusual for a British force. On December 13th there was an attempt upon the part of the Boers to advance south, which was easily held by the British Cavalry and Horse Artillery. The country over which French was operating is dotted with those singular kopjes which the Boer loves — kopjes which are often so grotesque in shape that one feels as if they must be due to some error of refraction when one looks at them. But, on the other hand, between these hills there lie wide stretches of the green or russet savanna, the noblest field that a horseman or a horse gunner could wish. The riflemen clung to the hills, French's troopers circled warily upon the plain, gradually contracting the Boer position by threatening to cut off this or that outlying kopje, and so the enemy was slowly herded into Colesberg. The small but mobile British force covered a very large area, and hardly a day passed that one or other part of it did not come in contact with the enemy. With one regiment of infantry (the Berkshires) to hold the centre, his hard-riding Tasmanians, New Zealanders, and Australians, with the Scots Greys, the Inniskillings, and the Carabineers, formed an elastic but impenetrable screen to cover the Colony. They were aided by two batteries, O and R, of Horse Artillery. Every day General French rode out and made a close personal examination of the enemy's position, while his scouts and outposts were instructed to maintain the closest possible touch.

On December 30th the enemy abandoned Rensburg, which had been their advanced post, and concentrated at Colesberg, upon which French moved his force up and seized Rensburg. The very next day, December 31st, he began a vigorous and long-continued series of operations. At five o'clock on Sunday evening he moved out of Rensburg camp, with R and half of O batteries R.H.A., the 10th Hussars, the Inniskillings, and the Berkshires, to take up a position on the west of Colesberg. At the same time Colonel Porter, with the half-battery of O, his own regiment (the Carabineers), and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, left camp at two on the Monday morning and took a position on the enemy’s left flank. The Berkshires under Major McCracken seized the hill, driving a Boer picket off it, and the Horse enfiladed the enemy’s right flank, and after a risky artillery duel succeeded in silencing his guns. Next morning, however (January 2nd, 1900), it was found that the Boers, strongly reinforced, were back near their old positions, and French had to be content to hold them and to wait for more troops.

These were not long in coming, for the Suffolk Regiment had arrived, followed by the Composite Regiment (chosen from the Household Cavalry) and the 4th Battery R.F.A. The Boers, however, had also been reinforced, and showed great energy in their effort to break the cordon which was being drawn round them. Upon the 4th a determined effort was made by about a thousand of them under General Schoeman to turn the left flank of the British, and at dawn it was actually found that they had eluded the vigilance of the outposts and had established themselves upon a hill to the rear of the position. They were shelled off of it, however, by the guns of O Battery, and in their retreat across the plain they were pursued by the 10th Hussars and by one squadron of the Inniskillings, who cut off some of the fugitives. At the same time, De Lisle with his mounted infantry carried the position which they had originally held. In this successful and well-managed action the Boer loss was ninety, and we took in addition twenty-one prisoners. Our own casualties amounted only to six killed, including Major Harvey of the 10th, and to fifteen wounded.

Encouraged by this success an attempt was made by the Suffolk Regiment to carry a hill which formed the key of the enemy’s position. The town of Colesberg lies in a basin surrounded by a ring of kopjes, and the possession by us of any one of them would have made the place untenable. The plan has been ascribed to Colonel Watson of the Suffolks, but it is time that some protest should be raised against this devolution of responsibility upon subordinates in the event of failure. When success has crowned our arms we have been delighted to honour our general; but when our efforts end in failure our attention is called to Colonel Watson, Colonel Long, or Colonel Thorneycroft. It is fairer to state that in this instance General French ordered Colonel Watson to make a night attack upon the hill.

The result was disastrous. At midnight four companies in canvas shoes or in their stocking feet set forth upon their venture, and just before dawn they found themselves upon the slope of the hill. They were in a formation of quarter column with files extended to two paces; H Company was leading. When half-way up a warm fire was opened upon them in the darkness. Colonel Watson gave the order to retire, intending, as it is believed, that the men should get under the shelter of the dead ground which they had just quitted, but his death immediately afterwards left matters in a confused condition. The night was black, the ground broken, a hail of bullets whizzing through the ranks. Companies got mixed in the darkness and contradictory orders were issued. The leading company held its ground, though each of the officers, Brett, Carey, and Butler, was struck down. The other companies had retired, however, and the dawn found this fringe of men, most of them wounded, lying under the very rifles of the Boers. Even then they held out for some time, but they could neither advance, retire, or stay where they were without losing lives to no purpose, so the survivors were compelled to surrender. There is better evidence here than at Magersfontein that the enemy were warned and ready. Every one of the officers engaged, from the Colonel to the boy subaltern, was killed, wounded, or taken. Eleven officers and one hundred and fifty men were our losses in this unfortunate but not discreditable affair, which proves once more how much accuracy and how much secrecy is necessary for a successful night attack. Four companies of the regiment were sent down to Port Elizabeth to re-officer, but the arrival of the 1st Essex enabled French to fill the gap which had been made in his force.

In spite of this annoying check, French continued to pursue his original design of holding the enemy in front and working round him on the east. On January 9th, Porter, of the Carabineers, with his own regiment, two squadrons of Household Cavalry, the New Zealanders, the New South Wales Lancers, and four guns, took another step forward and, after a skirmish, occupied a position called Slingersfontein, still further to the north and east, so as to menace the main road of retreat to Norval’s Pont. Some skirmishing followed, but the position was maintained. On the 15th the Boers, thinking that this long extension must have weakened us, made a spirited attack upon a position held by New Zealanders and a company of the 1st Yorkshires, this regiment having been sent up to reinforce French. The attempt was met by a volley and a bayonet charge. Captain Orr, of the Yorkshires, was struck down; but Captain Madocks, of the New Zealanders, who behaved with conspicuous gallantry at a critical instant, took command, and the enemy was heavily repulsed. Madocks engaged in a point-blank rifle duel with the frock-coated top-hatted Boer leader, and had the good fortune to kill his formidable opponent. Twenty-one Boer dead and many wounded left upon the field made a small set-off to the disaster of the Suffolks.

The next day, however (January 16th), the scales of fortune, which swung alternately one way and the other, were again tipped against us. It is difficult to give an intelligible account of the details of these operations, because they were carried out by thin fringes of men covering on both sides a very large area, each kopje occupied as a fort, and the intervening plains patrolled by cavalry.

As French extended to the east and north the Boers extended also to prevent him from outflanking them, and so the little armies stretched and stretched until they were two long mobile skirmishing lines. The actions therefore resolve themselves into the encounters of small bodies and the snapping up of exposed patrols — a game in which the Boer aptitude for guerrilla tactics gave them some advantage, though our own cavalry quickly adapted themselves to the new conditions. On this occasion a patrol of sixteen men from the South Australian Horse and New South Wales Lancers fell into an ambush, and eleven were captured. Of the remainder, three made their way back to camp, while one was killed and one was wounded.

The duel between French on the one side and Schoeman and Lambert on the other was from this onwards one of maneuvering rather than of fighting. The dangerously extended line of the British at this period, over thirty miles long, was reinforced, as has been mentioned, by the 1st Yorkshire and later by the 2nd Wiltshire and a section of the 37th Howitzer Battery. There was probably no very great difference in numbers between the two little armies, but the Boers now, as always, were working upon internal lines. The monotony of the operations was broken by the remarkable feat of the Essex Regiment, which succeeded by hawsers and good-will in getting two 15-pounder guns of the 4th Field Battery on to the top of Coleskop, a hill which rises several hundred feet from the plain and is so precipitous that it is no small task for an unhampered man to climb it. From the summit a fire, which for some days could not be localised by the Boers, was opened upon their laagers, which had to be shifted in consequence. This energetic action upon the part of our gunners may be set off against those other examples where commanders of batteries have shown that they had not yet appreciated what strong tackle and stout arms can accomplish. The guns upon Coleskop not only dominated all the smaller kopjes for a range of 9000 yards, but completely commanded the town of Colesberg, which could not however, for humanitarian and political reasons, be shelled.

By gradual reinforcements the force under French had by the end of January attained the respectable figure of ten thousand men, strung over a large extent of country. His infantry consisted of the 2nd Berkshires, 1st Royal Irish, 2nd Wiltshires, 2nd Worcesters, 1st Essex, and 1st Yorkshires; his cavalry, of the 10th Hussars, the 6th Dragoon Guards, the Inniskillings, the New Zealanders, the N.S. W. Lancers, some Rimington Guides, and the composite Household Regiment; his artillery, the R and O batteries of R.H.A., the 4th R.F.A., and a section of the 37th Howitzer Battery. At the risk of tedium I have repeated the units of this force, because there are no operations during the war, with the exception perhaps of those of the Rhodesian Column, concerning which it is so difficult to get a clear impression. The fluctuating forces, the vast range of country covered, and the petty farms which give their names to positions, all tend to make the issue vague and the narrative obscure. The British still lay in a semicircle extending from Slingersfontein upon the right to Kloof Camp upon the left, and the general scheme of operations continued to be an enveloping movement upon the right. General Clements commanded this section of the forces, while the energetic Porter carried out the successive advances. The lines had gradually stretched until they were nearly fifty miles in length, and something of the obscurity in which the operations have been left is due to the impossibility of any single correspondent having a clear idea of what was occurring over so extended a front.

On January 25th French sent Stephenson and Brabazon to push a reconnaissance to the north of Colesberg, and found that the Boers were making a fresh position at Rietfontein, nine miles nearer their own border. A small action ensued, in which we lost ten or twelve of the Wiltshire Regiment, and gained some knowledge of the enemy’s dispositions. For the remainder of the month the two forces remained in a state of equilibrium, each keenly on its guard, and neither strong enough to penetrate the lines of the other. General French descended to Cape Town to aid General Roberts in the elaboration of that plan which was soon to change the whole military situation in South Africa.

Reinforcements were still dribbling into the British force, Hoad's Australian Regiment, which had been changed from infantry to cavalry, and J battery R.H.A. from India, being the last arrivals. But very much stronger reinforcements had arrived for the Boers — so strong that they were able to take the offensive. De la Rey had left the Modder with three thousand men, and their presence infused new life into the defenders of Colesberg. At the moment, too, that the Modder Boers were coming to Colesberg, the British had begun to send cavalry reinforcements to the Modder in preparation for the march to Kimberley, so that Clements's Force (as it had now become) was depleted at the very instant when that of the enemy was largely increased. The result was that it was all they could do not merely to hold their own, but to avoid a very serious disaster.

The movements of De la Rey were directed towards turning the right of the position. On February 9th and 10th the mounted patrols, principally the Tasmanians, the Australians, and the Inniskillings, came in contact with the Boers, and some skirmishing ensued, with no heavy loss upon either side. A British patrol was surrounded and lost eleven prisoners, Tasmanians and Guides. On the 12th the Boer turning movement developed itself, and our position on the right at Slingersfontein was strongly attacked.

The key of the British position at this point was a kopje held by three companies of the 2nd Worcester Regiment. Upon this the Boers made a fierce onslaught, but were as fiercely repelled. They came up in the dark between the set of moon and rise of sun, as they had done at the great assault of Ladysmith, and the first dim light saw them in the advanced sangars. The Boer generals do not favour night attacks, but they are exceedingly fond of using darkness for taking up a good position and pushing onwards as soon as it is possible to see. This is what they did upon this occasion, and the first intimation which the outposts had of their presence was the rush of feet and loom of figures in the cold misty light of dawn. The occupants of the sangars were killed to a man, and the assailants rushed onwards. As the sun topped the line of the veld half the kopje was in their possession. Shouting and firing, they pressed onwards.

But the Worcester men were steady old soldiers, and the battalion contained no less than four hundred and fifty marksmen in its ranks. Of these the companies upon the hill had their due proportion, and their fire was so accurate that the Boers found themselves unable to advance any further. Through the long day a desperate duel was maintained between the two lines of riflemen. Colonel Cuningham and Major Stubbs were killed while endeavouring to recover the ground which had been lost. Hovel and Bartholomew continued to encourage their men, and the British fire became so deadly that that of the Boers was dominated. Under the direction of Hacket Pain, who commanded the nearest post, guns of J battery were brought out into the open and shelled the portion of the kopje which was held by the Boers. The latter were reinforced, but could make no advance against the accurate rifle fire with which they were met. The Bisley champion of the battalion, with a bullet through his thigh, expended a hundred rounds before sinking from loss of blood. It was an excellent defence, and a pleasing exception to those too frequent cases where an isolated force has lost heart in face of a numerous and persistent foe. With the coming of darkness the Boers withdrew with a loss of over two hundred killed and wounded. Orders had come from Clements that the whole right wing should be drawn in, and in obedience to them the remains of the victorious companies were called in by Hacket Pain, who moved his force by night in the direction of Rensburg. The British loss in the action was twenty-eight killed and nearly a hundred wounded or missing, most of which was incurred when the sangars were rushed in the early morning.

While this action was fought upon the extreme right of the British position another as severe had occurred with much the same result upon the extreme left, where the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment was stationed. Some companies of this regiment were isolated upon a kopje and surrounded by the Boer riflemen when the pressure upon them was relieved by a desperate attack by about a hundred of the Victorian Rifles. The gallant Australians lost Major Eddy and six officers out of seven, with a large proportion of their men, but they proved once for all that amid all the scattered nations who came from the same home there is not one with a more fiery courage and a higher sense of martial duty than the men from the great island continent. It is the misfortune of the historian when dealing with these contingents that, as a rule, by their very nature they were employed in detached parties in fulfilling the duties which fall to the lot of scouts and light cavalry — duties which fill the casualty lists but not the pages of the chronicler. Be it said, however, once for all that throughout the whole African army there was nothing but the utmost admiration for the dash and spirit of the hard-riding, straight-shooting sons of Australia and New

Zealand. In a host which held many brave men there were none braver than they.

It was evident from this time onwards that the turning movement had failed, and that the enemy had developed such strength that we were ourselves in imminent danger of being turned. The situation was a most serious one: for if Clements's force could be brushed aside there would be nothing to keep the enemy from cutting the communications of the army which Roberts had assembled for his march into the Free State. Clements drew in his wings hurriedly and concentrated his whole force at Rensburg. It was a difficult operation in the face of an aggressive enemy, but the movements were well timed and admirably carried out. There is always the possibility of a retreat degenerating into a panic, and a panic at that moment would have been a most serious matter. One misfortune occurred, through which two companies of the Wiltshire regiment were left without definite orders, and were cut off and captured after a resistance in which a third of their number was killed and wounded. No man in that trying time worked harder than Colonel Carter of the Wiltshires (the night of the retreat was the sixth which he had spent without sleep), and the loss of the two companies is to be set down to one of those accidents which may always occur in warfare. Some of the Inniskilling Dragoons and Victorian Mounted Rifles were also cut off in the retreat, but on the whole Clements was very fortunate in being able to concentrate his scattered army with so few mishaps. The withdrawal was heartbreaking to the soldiers who had worked so hard and so long in extending the lines, but it might be regarded with equanimity by the Generals, who understood that the greater strength the enemy developed at Colesberg the less they would have to oppose the critical movements which were about to be carried out in the west. Meanwhile Coleskop had also been abandoned, the guns removed, and the whole force on February 14th passed through Rensburg and fell back upon Arundel, the spot from which six weeks earlier French had started upon this stirring series of operations. It would not be fair, however, to suppose that they had failed because they ended where they began. Their primary object had been to prevent the further advance of the Freestaters into the colony, and, during the most critical period of the war, this had been accomplished with much success and little loss. At last the pressure had become so severe that the enemy had to weaken the most essential part of their general position in order to relieve it. The object of the operations had really been attained when Clements found himself back at Arundel once more. French, the stormy petrel of the war, had flitted on from Cape Town to Modder River, where a larger prize than Colesberg awaited him. Clements continued to cover Naauwport, the important railway junction, until the advance of Roberts’s army caused a complete reversal of the whole military situation.

CHAPTER 15. SPION KOP.

Whilst Methuen and Gatacre were content to hold their own at the Modder and at Sterkstroom, and whilst the mobile and energetic French was herding the Boers into Colesberg, Sir Redvers Buller, the heavy, obdurate, inexplicable man, was gathering and organising his forces for another advance upon Ladysmith. Nearly a month had elapsed since the evil day when his infantry had retired, and his ten guns had not, from the frontal attack upon Colenso. Since then Sir Charles Warren’s division of infantry and a considerable reinforcement of artillery had come to him. And yet in view of the terrible nature of the ground in front of him, of the fighting power of the Boers, and of the fact that they were always acting upon internal lines, his force even now was, in the opinion of competent judges, too weak for the matter in hand.

There remained, however, several points in his favour. His excellent infantry were full of zeal and of confidence in their chief. It cannot be denied, however much we may criticise some incidents in his campaign, that he possessed the gift of impressing and encouraging his followers, and, in spite of Colenso, the sight of his square figure and heavy impassive face conveyed an assurance of ultimate victory to those around him. In artillery he was very much stronger than before, especially in weight of metal. His cavalry was still weak in proportion to his other arms. When at last he moved out on January 10th to attempt to outflank the Boers, he took with him nineteen thousand infantry, three thousand cavalry, and sixty guns, which included six howitzers capable of throwing a 50-pound lyddite shell, and ten long-range naval pieces. Barton’s Brigade and other troops were left behind to hold the base and line of communications.

An analysis of Buller’s force shows that its details were as follows: —

Clery’s Division.
  Hildyard’s Brigade.
  2nd West Surrey.
  2nd Devonshire.
  2nd West Yorkshire.
  2nd East Surrey.
Hart’s Brigade.

1st Inniskilling Fusiliers.
1st Border Regiment.
1st Connaught Rangers.
2nd Dublin Fusiliers.
Field Artillery, three batteries, 19th, 28th, 63rd; one squadron 13th Hussars; Royal Engineers.

Warren’s Division.
Lyttelton’s Brigade.
2nd Cameronians.
3rd King’s Royal Rifles.
1st Durham Light Infantry.
1st Rifle Brigade.
Woodgate’s Brigade.
2nd Royal Lancaster.
2nd Lancashire Fusiliers.
1st South Lancashire.
York and Lancasters.
Field Artillery, three batteries, 7th, 78th, 73rd; one squadron 13th Hussars.

Corps Troops.
Coke’s Brigade.
Imperial Light Infantry.
2nd Somersets.
2nd Dorsets.
2nd Middlesex.
61st Howitzer Battery; two 4.7 naval guns; eight naval 12-pounder guns; one squadron 13th Hussars; Royal Engineers.

Cavalry.
1st Royal Dragoons.
14th Hussars.
Four squadrons South African Horse.
One squadron Imperial Light Horse.
Bethune’s Mounted Infantry.

Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry.
One squadron Natal Carabineers.
One squadron Natal Police.
One company King's Royal Rifles Mounted Infantry.
Six machine guns.

This is the force whose operations I shall attempt to describe.

About sixteen miles to the westward of Colenso there is a ford over the Tugela River which is called Potgieter's Drift. General Buller's apparent plan was to seize this, together with the ferry which runs at this point, and so to throw himself upon the right flank of the Colenso Boers. Once over the river there is one formidable line of hills to cross, but if this were passed there would be comparatively easy ground until the Ladysmith hills were reached. With high hopes Buller and his men sallied out upon their adventure.

Dundonald's cavalry force pushed rapidly forwards, crossed the Little Tugela, a tributary of the main river, at Springfield, and established themselves upon the hills which command the drift. Dundonald largely exceeded his instructions in going so far, and while we applaud his courage and judgment in doing so, we must remember and be charitable to those less fortunate officers whose private enterprise has ended in disaster and reproof. There can be no doubt that the enemy intended to hold all this tract, and that it was only the quickness of our initial movements which forestalled them. Early in the morning a small party of the South African Horse, under Lieutenant Carlisle, swam the broad river under fire and brought back the ferry boat, an enterprise which was fortunately bloodless, but which was most coolly planned and gallantly carried out. The way was now open to our advance, and could it have been carried out as rapidly as it had begun the Boers might conceivably have been scattered before they could concentrate. It was not the fault of the infantry that it was not so. They were trudging, mud-spattered and jovial, at the very heels of the horses, after a forced march which was one of the most trying of the whole campaign. But an army of 20,000 men cannot be conveyed over a river twenty miles from any base without elaborate preparations being made to feed them. The roads were in such a state that the wagons could hardly move, heavy rain had just fallen, and every stream was swollen into a river; bullocks might strain, and traction engines pant, and horses die, but by no human means could the stores be kept up if the advance guard were allowed to go at their own pace. And so, having ensured an ultimate crossing of the river by the seizure of Mount Alice, the high hill which commands the drift, the forces waited day after day, watching in the distance the swarms of strenuous dark figures who dug and hauled and worked upon the hillsides opposite, barring the road which they would have to take. Far away on the horizon a little shining point twinkled amid the purple haze, coming and going from morning to night. It was the heliograph of Ladysmith, explaining her troubles and calling for help, and from the heights of Mount Alice an answering star of hope glimmered and shone, soothing, encouraging, explaining, while the stern men of the veld dug furiously at their trenches in between. ‘We are coming! We are coming!’ cried Mount Alice. ‘Over our bodies,’ said the men with the spades and mattocks.

On Thursday, January 12th, Dundonald seized the heights, on the 13th the ferry was taken and Lyttelton’s Brigade came up to secure that which the cavalry had gained. On the 14th the heavy naval guns were brought up to cover the crossing. On the 15th Coke’s Brigade and other infantry concentrated at the drift. On the 16th the four regiments of Lyttelton’s Brigade went across, and then, and only then, it began to be apparent that Buller’s plan was a more deeply laid one than had been thought, and that all this business of Potgieter’s Drift was really a demonstration in order to cover the actual crossing which was to be effected at a ford named Trichard’s Drift, five miles to the westward. Thus, while Lyttelton’s and Coke’s Brigades were ostentatiously attacking Potgieter’s from in front, three other brigades (Hart’s, Woodgate’s, and Hildyard’s) were marched rapidly on the night of the 16th to the real place of crossing, to which Dundonald’s cavalry had already ridden. There, on the 17th, a pontoon bridge had been erected, and a strong force was thrown over in such a way as to turn the right of the trenches in front of Potgieter’s. It was admirably planned and excellently carried out, certainly the most strategic movement, if there could be said to have been any strategic movement upon the British side, in the campaign up to that date. On the 18th the infantry, the cavalry, and most of the guns were safely across without loss of life. The Boers, however, still retained their formidable internal lines, and the only result of a change of position seemed to be to put them to the trouble of building a new series of those terrible entrenchments at which they had become such experts. After all the combinations the British were, it is true, upon the right side of the river, but they were considerably further from Ladysmith than when they started. There are times, however, when twenty miles are less than fourteen, and it was hoped that this might prove to be among them. But the first step was the most serious one, for right across their front lay the Boer position upon the edge of a lofty plateau, with the high peak of Spion Kop forming the left corner of it. If once that main ridge could be captured or commanded, it would carry them halfway to the goal. It was for that essential line of hills that two of the most dogged races upon earth were about to contend. An immediate advance might have secured the position at once, but, for some reason which is inexplicable, an aimless march to the left was followed by a retirement to the original position of Warren's division, and so two invaluable days were wasted. We have the positive assurance of Commandant Edwards, who was Chief of Staff to General Botha, that a vigorous turning movement upon the left would at this time have completely outflanked the Boer position and opened a way to Ladysmith.

A small success, the more welcome for its rarity, came to the British arms on this first day. Dundonald's men had been thrown out to cover the left of the infantry advance and to feel for the right of the Boer position. A strong Boer patrol, caught napping for once, rode into an ambuscade of the irregulars. Some escaped, some held out most gallantly in a kopje, but the final result was a surrender of twenty-four unwounded prisoners, and the finding of thirteen killed and wounded, including de Mentz, the field-cornet of Heilbron. Two killed and two wounded were the British losses in this well-managed affair. Dundonald's force then took its position upon the extreme left of Warren's advance.

The British were now moving upon the Boers in two separate bodies, the one which included Lyttelton's and Coke's Brigades from Potgieter's Drift, making what was really a frontal attack, while the main body under Warren, who had crossed at Trichard's Drift, was swinging round upon the Boer right. Midway between the two movements the formidable bastion of Spion Kop stood clearly outlined against the blue Natal sky. The heavy naval guns on Mount Alice (two 4.7's and eight twelve-pounders) were so placed as to support either advance, and the howitzer battery was given to Lyttelton to help the frontal attack. For two days the British pressed slowly but steadily on to the Boers under the cover of an incessant rain of shells. Dour and long-suffering the Boers made no reply, save with sporadic rifle-fire, and refused until the crisis should come to expose their great guns to the chance of injury.

On January 19th Warren’s turning movement began to bring him into closer touch with the enemy, his thirty-six field guns and the six howitzers which had returned to him crushing down the opposition which faced him. The ground in front of him was pleated into long folds, and his advance meant the carrying of ridge after ridge. In the earlier stages of the war this would have entailed a murderous loss; but we had learned our lesson, and the infantry now, with intervals of ten paces, and every man choosing his own cover, went up in proper Boer form, carrying position after position, the enemy always retiring with dignity and decorum. There was no victory on one side or rout on the other — only a steady advance and an orderly retirement. That night the infantry slept in their fighting line, going on again at three in the morning, and light broke to find not only rifles, but the long-silent Boer guns all blazing at the British advance. Again, as at Colenso, the brunt of the fighting fell upon Hart’s Irish Brigade, who upheld that immemorial tradition of valour with which that name, either in or out of the British service, has invariably been associated. Upon the Lancashire Fusiliers and the York and Lancasters came also a large share of the losses and the glory. Slowly but surely the inexorable line of the British lapped over the ground which the enemy had held. A gallant colonial, Tobin of the South African Horse, rode up one hill and signaled with his hat that it was clear. His comrades followed closely at his heels, and occupied the position with the loss of Childe, their Major. During this action Lyttelton had held the Boers in their trenches opposite to him by advancing to within 1500 yards of them, but the attack was not pushed further. On the evening of this day, January 20th, the British had gained some miles of ground, and the total losses had been about three hundred killed and wounded. The troops were in good heart, and all promised well for the future. Again the men lay where they had fought, and again the dawn heard the crash of the great guns and the rattle of the musketry.

The operations of this day began with a sustained cannonade from the field batteries and 61st Howitzer Battery, which was as fiercely answered by the enemy. About eleven the infantry began to go forward with an advance which would have astonished the martinets of Aldershot, an irregular fringe of crawlers, wrigglers, writhers, crouchers, all cool and deliberate, giving away no points in this grim game of death. Where now were the officers with their distinctive dresses and flashing swords, where the valiant rushes over the open, where the men who were too proud to lie down? — the tactics of three months ago seemed as obsolete as those of the Middle Ages. All day the line undulated forward, and by evening yet another strip of rock-strewn ground had been gained, and yet another train of ambulances was bearing a hundred of our wounded back to the base hospitals at Frere. It was on Hildyard’s Brigade on the left that the fighting and the losses of this day principally fell. By the morning of January 22nd the regiments were clustering thickly all round the edges of the Boer main position, and the day was spent in resting the weary men, and in determining at what point the final assault should be delivered. On the right front, commanding the Boer lines on either side, towered the stark eminence of Spion Kop, so called because from its summit the Boer voortrekkers had first in 1835 gazed down upon the promised land of Natal. If that could only be seized and held! Buller and Warren swept its bald summit with their field-glasses. It was a venture. But all war is a venture; and the brave man is he who ventures most. One fiery rush and the master-key of all these locked doors might be in our keeping. That evening there came a telegram to London which left the whole Empire in a hush of anticipation. Spion Kop was to be attacked that night.

The troops which were selected for the task were eight companies of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, six of the 2nd Royal Lancasters, two of the 1st South Lancashires, 180 of Thorneycroft’s, and half a company of Sappers. It was to be a North of England job.

Under the friendly cover of a starless night the men, in Indian file, like a party of Iroquois braves upon the war trail, stole up the winding and ill-defined path which led to the summit. Woodgate, the Lancashire Brigadier, and Blomfield of the Fusiliers led the way. It was a severe climb of 2000 feet, coming after arduous work over broken ground, but the affair was well-timed, and it was at that blackest hour which precedes the dawn that the last steep ascent was reached. The Fusiliers crouched down among the rocks to recover their breath, and saw far down in the plain beneath them the placid lights which showed where their comrades were resting. A fine rain was falling, and rolling clouds hung low over their heads. The men with unloaded rifles and fixed bayonets stole on once more, their bodies bent, their eyes peering through the mirk for the first sign of the enemy — that enemy whose first sign has usually been a shattering volley.

Thorneycroft’s men with their gallant leader had threaded their way up into the advance. Then the leading files found that they were walking on the level. The crest had been gained.

With slow steps and bated breath, the open line of skirmishers stole across it. Was it possible that it had been entirely abandoned? Suddenly a raucous shout of ‘Wie da?’ came out of the darkness, then a shot, then a splutter of musketry and a yell, as the Fusiliers sprang onwards with their bayonets. The Boer post of Vryheid burghers clattered and scrambled away into the darkness, and a cheer that roused both the sleeping armies told that the surprise had been complete and the position won.

In the grey light of the breaking day the men advanced along the narrow undulating ridge, the prominent end of which they had captured. Another trench faced them, but it was weakly held and abandoned. Then the men, uncertain what remained beyond, halted and waited for full light to see where they were, and what the work was which lay before them — a fatal halt, as the result proved, and yet one so natural that it is hard to blame the officer who ordered it. Indeed, he might have seemed more culpable had he pushed blindly on, and so lost the advantage which had been already gained.

About eight o’clock, with the clearing of the mist, General Woodgate saw how matters stood. The ridge, one end of which he held, extended away, rising and falling for some miles. Had he the whole of the end plateau, and had he guns, he might hope to command the rest of the position. But he held only half the plateau, and at the further end of it the Boers were strongly entrenched. The Spion Kop mountain was really the salient or sharp angle of the Boer position, so that the British were exposed to a cross fire both from the left and right. Beyond were other eminences which sheltered strings of riflemen and several guns. The plateau which the British held was very much narrower than was usually represented in the press. In many places the possible front was not much more than a hundred yards wide, and the troops were compelled to bunch together, as there was not room for a single company to take an extended formation. The cover upon this plateau was scanty, far too scanty for the force upon it, and the shell fire — especially the fire of the pom-poms — soon became very murderous. To mass the troops under the cover of the edge of the plateau might naturally suggest itself, but with great tactical skill the Boer advanced line from Commandant Prinsloo’s Heidelberg and Carolina commandos kept so aggressive an attitude that the British could not weaken the lines opposed to them. Their skirmishers were creeping round too in such a way that the fire was really coming from three separate points, left, centre, and right, and every corner of the position was searched by their bullets. Early in the action the gallant Woodgate and many of his Lancashire men were shot down. The others spread out and held on, firing occasionally at the whisk of a rifle-barrel or the glimpse of a broad-brimmed hat.

From morning to midday, the shell, Maxim, and rifle fire swept across the kop in a continual driving shower. The British guns in the plain below failed to localise the position of the enemy’s, and they were able to vent their concentrated spite upon the exposed infantry. No blame attaches to the gunners for this, as a hill intervened to screen the Boer artillery, which consisted of five big guns and two pom-poms.

Upon the fall of Woodgate, Thorneycroft, who bore the reputation of a determined fighter, was placed at the suggestion of Buller in charge of the defence of the hill, and he was reinforced after noon by Coke’s brigade, the Middlesex, the Dorsets, and the Somersets, together with the Imperial Light Infantry. The addition of this force to the defenders of the plateau tended to increase the casualty returns rather than the strength of the defence. Three thousand more rifles could do nothing to check the fire of the invisible cannon, and it was this which was the main source of the losses, while on the other hand the plateau had become so cumbered with troops that a shell could hardly fail to do damage. There was no cover to shelter them and no room for them to extend. The pressure was most severe upon the shallow trenches in the front, which had been abandoned by the Boers and were held by the Lancashire Fusiliers. They were enfiladed by rifle and cannon, and the dead and wounded outnumbered the hale. So close were the skirmishers that on at least one occasion Boer and Briton found themselves on each side of the same rock. Once a handful of men, tormented beyond endurance, sprang up as a sign that they had had enough, but Thorneycroft, a man of huge physique, rushed forward to the advancing Boers. ‘You may go to hell!’ he yelled. ‘I command here, and allow no surrender. Go on with your firing.’ Nothing could exceed the gallantry of Louis Botha’s men in pushing the attack. Again and again they made their way up to the British firing line, exposing themselves with a recklessness which, with the exception of the grand attack upon Ladysmith, was unique in our experience of them. About two o’clock they rushed one trench occupied by the Fusiliers and secured the survivors of two companies as prisoners, but were subsequently driven out again. A detached group of the South Lancashires was summoned to surrender. ‘When I surrender,’ cried Colour-Sergeant Nolan, ‘it will be my dead body!’ Hour after hour of the unintermitting crash of the shells among the rocks and of the groans and screams of men torn and burst by the most horrible of all wounds had shaken the troops badly. Spectators from below who saw the shells pitching at the rate of seven a minute on to the crowded plateau marvelled at the endurance which held the devoted men to their post. Men were wounded and wounded and wounded yet again, and still went on fighting. Never since Inkerman had we had so grim a soldier’s battle. The company officers were superb. Captain Muriel of the Middlesex was shot through the check while giving a cigarette to a wounded man, continued to lead his company, and was shot again through the brain. Scott Moncrieff of the same regiment was only disabled by the fourth bullet which hit him. Grenfell of Thorneycroft’s was shot, and exclaimed, ‘That’s all right. It’s not much.’ A second wound made him remark, ‘I can get on all right.’ The third killed him. Ross of the Lancasters, who had crawled from a sickbed, was found dead upon the furthest crest. Young Murray of the Scottish Rifles, dripping from five wounds, still staggered about among his men. And the men were worthy of such officers. ‘No retreat! No retreat!’ they yelled when some of the front line were driven in. In all regiments there are weaklings and hang-backs, and many a man was wandering down the reverse slopes when he should have been facing death upon the top, but as a body British troops have never stood firm through a more fiery ordeal than on that fatal hill...

The position was so bad that no efforts of officers or men could do anything to mend it. They were in a murderous dilemma. If they fell back for cover the Boer riflemen would rush the position. If they held their ground this horrible shell fire must continue, which they had no means of answering. Down at Gun Hill in front of the Boer position we had no fewer than five batteries, the 78th, 7th, 73rd, 63rd, and 61st howitzer, but a ridge intervened between them and the Boer guns which were shelling Spion Kop, and this ridge was strongly entrenched. The naval guns from distant Mount Alice did what they could, but the range was very long, and the position of the Boer guns uncertain. The artillery, situated as it was, could not save the infantry from the horrible scourging which they were enduring.

There remains the debated question whether the British guns could have been taken to the top. Mr. Winston Churchill, the soundness of whose judgment has been frequently demonstrated during the war, asserts that it might have been done. Without venturing to contradict one who was personally present, I venture to think that there is strong evidence to show that it could not have been done without blasting and other measures, for which there was no possible time. Captain Hanwell of the 78th R.F.A., upon the day of the battle had the very utmost difficulty with the help of four horses in getting a light Maxim on to the top, and his opinion, with that of other artillery officers, is that the feat was an impossible one until the path had been prepared. When night fell Colonel Sim was despatched with a party of Sappers to clear the track and to prepare two emplacements upon the top, but in his advance he met the retiring infantry.

Throughout the day reinforcements had pushed up the hill, until two full brigades had been drawn into the fight. From the other side of the ridge Lyttelton sent up the Scottish Rifles, who reached the summit, and added their share to the shambles upon the top. As the shades of night closed in, and the glare of the bursting shells became more lurid, the men lay extended upon the rocky ground, parched and exhausted. They were hopelessly jumbled together, with the exception of the Dorsets, whose cohesion may have been due to superior discipline, less exposure, or to the fact that their khaki differed somewhat in colour from that of the others. Twelve hours of so terrible an experience had had a strange effect upon many of the men. Some were dazed and battle-struck, incapable of clear understanding. Some were as incoherent as drunkards. Some lay in an overpowering drowsiness. The most were doggedly patient and long-suffering, with a mighty longing for water obliterating every other emotion.

Before evening fell a most gallant and successful attempt had been made by the third battalion of the King’s Royal Rifles from Lyttelton’s Brigade to relieve the pressure upon their comrades on Spion Kop. In order to draw part of the Boer fire away they ascended from the northern side and carried the hills which formed a continuation of the same ridge. The movement was meant to be no more than a strong demonstration, but the riflemen pushed it until, breathless but victorious, they stood upon the very crest of the position, leaving nearly a hundred dead or dying to show the path which they had taken. Their advance being much further than was desired, they were recalled, and it was at the moment that Buchanan Riddell, their brave

Colonel, stood up to read Lyttelton's note that he fell with a Boer bullet through his brain, making one more of those gallant leaders who died as they had lived, at the head of their regiments. Chisholm, Dick-Cunyngham, Downman, Wilford, Gunning, Sherston, Thackeray, Sitwell, MacCarthy O'Leary, Airlie — they have led their men up to and through the gates of death. It was a fine exploit of the 3rd Rifles. 'A finer bit of skirmishing, a finer bit of climbing, and a finer bit of fighting, I have never seen,' said their Brigadier. It is certain that if Lyttelton had not thrown his two regiments into the fight the pressure upon the hill-top might have become unendurable; and it seems also certain that if he had only held on to the position which the Rifles had gained, the Boers would never have reoccupied Spion Kop.

And now, under the shadow of night, but with the shells bursting thickly over the plateau, the much-tried Thorneycroft had to make up his mind whether he should hold on for another such day as he had endured, or whether now, in the friendly darkness, he should remove his shattered force. Could he have seen the discouragement of the Boers and the preparations which they had made for retirement, he would have held his ground. But this was hidden from him, while the horror of his own losses was but too apparent. Forty per cent of his men were down. Thirteen hundred dead and dying are a grim sight upon a wide-spread battle-field, but when this number is heaped upon a confined space, where from a single high rock the whole litter of broken and shattered bodies can be seen, and the groans of the stricken rise in one long droning chorus to the ear, then it is an iron mind indeed which can resist such evidence of disaster. In a harder age Wellington was able to survey four thousand bodies piled in the narrow compass of the breach of Badajos, but his resolution was sustained by the knowledge that the military end for which they fell had been accomplished. Had his task been unfinished it is doubtful whether even his steadfast soul would not have flinched from its completion. Thorneycroft saw the frightful havoc of one day, and he shrank from the thought of such another. 'Better six battalions safely down the hill than a mop up in the morning,' said he, and he gave the word to retire. One who had met the troops as they staggered down has told me how far they were from being routed. In mixed array, but steadily and in order, the long thin line trudged through the darkness. Their parched lips would not articulate, but they whispered 'Water! Where is water?' as they toiled upon their way. At the bottom of the hill they formed into regiments once more, and marched back to the camp. In the morning the blood-spattered hill-top, with its piles of dead and of wounded, were in the hands of Botha and his men, whose valour and perseverance deserved the victory which they had won. There is no doubt now that at 3 A.M. of that morning Botha, knowing that the Rifles had carried Burger’s position, regarded the affair as hopeless, and that no one was more astonished than he when he found, on the report of two scouts, that it was a victory and not a defeat which had come to him.

How shall we sum up such an action save that it was a gallant attempt, gallantly carried out, and as gallantly met? On both sides the results of artillery fire during the war have been disappointing, but at Spion Kop beyond all question it was the Boer guns which won the action for them. So keen was the disappointment at home that there was a tendency to criticise the battle with some harshness, but it is difficult now, with the evidence at our command, to say what was left undone which could have altered the result. Had Thorneycroft known all that we know, he would have kept his grip upon the hill. On the face of it one finds it difficult to understand why so momentous a decision, upon which the whole operations depended, should have been left entirely to the judgment of one who in the morning had been a simple Lieutenant-Colonel. ‘Where are the bosses?’ cried a Fusilier, and the historian can only repeat the question. General Warren was at the bottom of the hill. Had he ascended and determined that the place should still be held, he might have sent down the wearied troops, brought up smaller numbers of fresh ones, ordered the Sappers to deepen the trenches, and tried to bring up water and guns. It was for the divisional commander to lay his hand upon the reins at so critical an instant, to relieve the weary man who had struggled so hard all day.

The subsequent publication of the official despatches has served little purpose, save to show that there was a want of harmony between Buller and Warren, and that the former lost all confidence in his subordinate during the course of the operations. In these papers General Buller expresses the opinion that had Warren’s operations been more dashing, he would have found his turning movement upon the left a comparatively easy matter. In this judgment he would probably have the concurrence of most military critics. He adds, however, ‘On the 19th, I ought to have assumed command myself. I saw that things were not going well — indeed, everyone saw that. I blame myself now for not having done so. I did not, because, if I did, I should discredit General Warren in the estimation of the troops, and, if I were shot, and he had to withdraw across the Tugela, and they had lost confidence in him, the consequences might be very serious. I must leave it to higher authority whether this argument was a sound one.' It needs no higher authority than common-sense to say that the argument is an absolutely unsound one. No consequences could be more serious than that the operations should miscarry and Ladysmith remain unrelieved, and such want of success must in any case discredit Warren in the eyes of his troops. Besides, a subordinate is not discredited because his chief steps in to conduct a critical operation. However, these personal controversies may be suffered to remain in that pigeon-hole from which they should never have been drawn.

On account of the crowding of four thousand troops into a space which might have afforded tolerable cover for five hundred the losses in the action were very heavy, not fewer than fifteen hundred being killed, wounded, or missing, the proportion of killed being, on account of the shell fire, abnormally high. The Lancashire Fusiliers were the heaviest sufferers, and their Colonel Blomfield was wounded and fell into the hands of the enemy. The Royal Lancasters also lost heavily. Thorneycroft's had 80 men hit out of 180 engaged. The Imperial Light Infantry, a raw corps of Rand refugees who were enduring their baptism of fire, lost 130 men. In officers the losses were particularly heavy, 60 being killed or wounded. The Boer returns show some 50 killed and 150 wounded, which may not be far from the truth. Without the shell fire the British losses might not have been much more.

General Buller had lost nearly two thousand men since he had crossed the Tugela, and his purpose was still unfulfilled. Should he risk the loss of a large part of his force in storming the ridges in front of him, or should he recross the river and try for an easier route elsewhere? To the surprise and disappointment both of the public and of the army, he chose the latter course, and by January 27th he had fallen back, unmolested by the Boers, to the other side of the Tugela. It must be confessed that his retreat was admirably conducted, and that it was a military feat to bring his men, his guns, and his stores in safety over a broad river in the face of a victorious enemy. Stolid and unmoved, his impenetrable demeanour restored serenity and confidence to the angry and disappointed troops. There might well be heavy hearts among both them and the public. After a fortnight's campaign, and the endurance of great losses and hardships, both Ladysmith and her relievers found themselves no better off than when they started. Buller still held the commanding position of Mount Alice, and this was all that he had to show for such sacrifices and such exertions. Once more there came a weary pause while Ladysmith, sick with hope deferred, waited gloomily upon half-rations of horse-flesh for the next movement from the South.

CHAPTER 16. VAALKRANZ.

Neither General Buller nor his troops appeared to be dismayed by the failure of their plans, or by the heavy losses which were entailed by the movement which culminated at Spion Kop. The soldiers grumbled, it is true, at not being let go, and swore that even if it cost them two-thirds of their number they could and would make their way through this labyrinth of hills with its fringe of death. So doubtless they might. But from first to last their General had shown a great — some said an exaggerated — respect for human life, and he had no intention of winning a path by mere slogging, if there were a chance of finding one by less bloody means. On the morrow of his return he astonished both his army and the Empire by announcing that he had found the key to the position and that he hoped to be in Ladysmith in a week. Some rejoiced in the assurance. Some shrugged their shoulders. Careless of friends or foes, the stolid Buller proceeded to work out his new combination.

In the next few days reinforcements trickled in which more than made up for the losses of the preceding week. A battery of horse artillery, two heavy guns, two squadrons of the 14th Hussars, and infantry drafts to the number of twelve or fourteen hundred men came to share the impending glory or disaster. On the morning of February 5th the army sallied forth once more to have another try to win a way to Ladysmith. It was known that enteric was rife in the town, that shell and bullet and typhoid germ had struck down a terrible proportion of the garrison, and that the rations of starved horse and commissariat mule were running low. With their comrades — in many cases their linked battalions — in such straits within fifteen miles of them, Buller’s soldiers had high motives to brace them for a supreme effort.

The previous attempt had been upon the line immediately to the west of Spion Kop. If, however, one were to follow to the east of Spion Kop, one would come upon a high mountain called Doornkloof. Between these two peaks, there lies a low ridge, called Brakfontein, and a small detached hill named Vaalkranz. Buller’s idea was that if he could seize this small Vaalkranz, it would enable him to avoid the high ground altogether and pass his troops through on to the plateau beyond. He still held the Ford at Potgieter’s and commanded the country beyond with heavy guns on Mount

Alice and at Swartz Kop, so that he could pass troops over at his will. He would make a noisy demonstration against Brakfontein, then suddenly seize Vaalkranz, and so, as he hoped, hold the outer door which opened on to the passage to Ladysmith.

The getting of the guns up Swartz Kop was a preliminary which was as necessary as it was difficult. A road was cut, sailors, engineers, and gunners worked with a will under the general direction of Majors Findlay and Apsley Smith. A mountain battery, two field guns, and six naval 12-pounders were slung up by steel hawsers, the sailors yeo-hoing on the halliards. The ammunition was taken up by hand. At six o'clock on the morning of the 5th the other guns opened a furious and probably harmless fire upon Brakfontein, Spion Kop, and all the Boer positions opposite to them. Shortly afterwards the feigned attack upon Brakfontein was commenced and was sustained with much fuss and appearance of energy until all was ready for the development of the true one. Wynne's Brigade, which had been Woodgate's, recovered already from its Spion Kop experience, carried out this part of the plan, supported by six batteries of field artillery, one howitzer battery, and two 4.7 naval guns. Three hours later a telegram was on its way to Pretoria to tell how triumphantly the burghers had driven back an attack which was never meant to go forward. The infantry retired first, then the artillery in alternate batteries, preserving a beautiful order and decorum. The last battery, the 78th, remained to receive the concentrated fire of the Boer guns, and was so enveloped in the dust of the exploding shells that spectators could only see a gun here or a limber there. Out of this whirl of death it quietly walked, without a bucket out of its place, the gunners drawing one wagon, the horses of which had perished, and so effected a leisurely and contemptuous withdrawal. The gallantry of the gunners has been one of the most striking features of the war, but it has never been more conspicuous than in this feint at Brakfontein.

While the attention of the Boers was being concentrated upon the Lancashire men, a pontoon bridge was suddenly thrown across the river at a place called Munger's Drift, some miles to the eastward. Three infantry brigades, those of Hart, Lyttelton, and Hildyard, had been massed all ready to be let slip when the false attack was sufficiently absorbing. The artillery fire (the Swartz Kop guns, and also the batteries which had been withdrawn from the Brakfontein demonstration) was then turned suddenly, with the crashing effect of seventy pieces, upon the real object of attack, the isolated Vaalkranz. It is doubtful whether any position has ever been subjected to so terrific a bombardment, for the weight of metal thrown by single guns was greater than that of a whole German battery in the days of their last great war. The 4-pounders and 6-pounders of which Prince Kraft discourses would have seemed toys beside these mighty howitzers and 4.7's. Yet though the hillside was sharded off in great flakes, it is doubtful if this terrific fire inflicted much injury upon the cunning and invisible riflemen with whom we had to contend.

About midday the infantry began to stream across the bridge, which had been most gallantly and efficiently constructed under a warm fire, by a party of sappers, under the command of Major Irvine. The attack was led by the Durham Light Infantry of Lyttelton's Brigade, followed by the 1st Rifle Brigade, with the Scottish and 3rd Rifles in support. Never did the old Light Division of Peninsular fame go up a Spanish hillside with greater spirit and dash than these, their descendants, facing the slope of Vaalkranz. In open order they moved across the plain, with a superb disregard of the crash and patter of the shrapnel, and then up they went, the flitting figures, springing from cover to cover, stooping, darting, crouching, running, until with their glasses the spectators on Swartz Kop could see the gleam of the bayonets and the strain of furious rushing men upon the summit, as the last Boers were driven from their trenches. The position was gained, but little else. Seven officers and seventy men were lying killed and wounded among the boulders. A few stricken Boers, five unwounded prisoners, and a string of Basuto ponies were the poor fruits of victory — those and the arid hill from which so much had been hoped, and so little was to be gained.

It was during this advance that an incident occurred of a more picturesque character than is usual in modern warfare. The invisibility of combatants and guns, and the absorption of the individual in the mass, have robbed the battle-field of those episodes which adorned, if they did not justify it. On this occasion, a Boer gun, cut off by the British advance, flew out suddenly from behind its cover, like a hare from its tussock, and raced for safety across the plain. Here and there it wound, the horses stretched to their utmost, the drivers stooping and lashing, the little gun bounding behind. To right to left, behind and before, the British shells burst, lyddite and shrapnel, crashing and riving. Over the lip of a hollow, the gallant gun vanished, and within a few minutes was banging away once more at the

British advance. With cheers and shouts and laughter, the British infantrymen watched the race for shelter, their sporting spirit rising high above all racial hatred, and hailing with a ‘gone to ground’ whoop the final disappearance of the gun.

The Durhams had cleared the path, but the other regiments of Lyttelton’s Brigade followed hard at their heels, and before night they had firmly established themselves upon the hill. But the fatal slowness which had marred General Buller’s previous operations again prevented him from completing his success. Twice at least in the course of these operations there is evidence of sudden impulse to drop his tools in the midst of his task and to do no more for the day. So it was at Colenso, where an order was given at an early hour for the whole force to retire, and the guns which might have been covered by infantry fire and withdrawn after nightfall were abandoned. So it was also at a critical moment at this action at Vaalkranz. In the original scheme of operations it had been planned that an adjoining hill, called the Green Hill, which partly commanded Vaalkranz, should be carried also. The two together made a complete position, while singly each was a very bad neighbour to the other. On the aide-de-camp riding up, however, to inquire from General Buller whether the time had come for this advance, he replied, ‘We have done enough for the day,’ and left out this essential portion of his original scheme, with the result that all miscarried.

Speed was the most essential quality for carrying out his plan successfully. So it must always be with the attack. The defence does not know where the blow is coming, and has to distribute men and guns to cover miles of ground. The attacker knows where he will hit, and behind a screen of outposts he can mass his force and throw his whole strength against a mere fraction of that of his enemy. But in order to do so he must be quick. One tiger spring must tear the centre out of the line before the flanks can come to its assistance. If time is given, if the long line can concentrate, if the scattered guns can mass, if lines of defence can be reduplicated behind, then the one great advantage which the attack possesses is thrown away. Both at the second and at the third attempts of Buller the British movements were so slow that had the enemy been the slowest instead of the most mobile of armies, they could still always have made any dispositions which they chose. Warren’s dawdling in the first days of the movement which ended at Spion Kop might with an effort be condoned on account of possible difficulties of supply, but it would strain the ingenuity of the most charitable critic to find a sufficient reason for the lethargy of Vaalkranz. Though daylight comes a little after four, the operations were not commenced before seven. Lyttelton's Brigade had stormed the hill at two, and nothing more was done during the long evening, while officers chafed and soldiers swore, and the busy Boers worked furiously to bring up their guns and to bar the path which we must take. General Buller remarked a day or two later that the way was not quite so easy as it had been. One might have deduced the fact without the aid of a balloon.

The brigade then occupied Vaalkranz and erected sangars and dug trenches. On the morning of the 6th, the position of the British force was not dissimilar to that of Spion Kop. Again they had some thousands of men upon a hill-top, exposed to shell fire from several directions and without any guns upon the hill to support them. In one or two points the situation was modified in their favour, and hence their escape from loss and disaster. A more extended position enabled the infantry to avoid bunching, but in other respects the situation was parallel to that in which they had found themselves a fortnight before.

The original plan was that the taking of Vaalkranz should be the first step towards the outflanking of Brakfontein and the rolling up of the whole Boer position. But after the first move the British attitude became one of defence rather than of attack. Whatever the general and ultimate effect of these operations may have been, it is beyond question that their contemplation was annoying and bewildering in the extreme to those who were present. The position on February 6th was this. Over the river upon the hill was a single British brigade, exposed to the fire of one enormous gun — a 96-pound Creusot, the longest of all Long Toms — which was stationed upon Doornkloof, and of several smaller guns and pom-poms which spat at them from nooks and crevices of the hills. On our side were seventy-two guns, large and small, all very noisy and impotent. It is not too much to say, as it appears to me, that the Boers have in some ways revolutionised our ideas in regard to the use of artillery, by bringing a fresh and healthy common-sense to bear upon a subject which had been unduly fettered by pedantic rules. The Boer system is the single stealthy gun crouching where none can see it. The British system is the six brave guns coming into action in line of full interval, and spreading out into accurate dressing visible to all men. 'Always remember,' says one of our artillery maxims, 'that one gun is no gun.’ Which is prettier on a field-day, is obvious, but which is business — let the many duels between six Boer guns and sixty British declare. With black powder it was useless to hide the gun, as its smoke must betray it. With smokeless powder the guns are so invisible that it was only by the detection with powerful glasses of the dust from the trail on the recoil that the officers were ever able to localise the guns against which they were fighting. But if the Boers had had six guns in line, instead of one behind that kopje, and another between those distant rocks, it would not have been so difficult to say where they were. Again, British traditions are all in favour of planting guns close together. At this very action of Vaalkranz the two largest guns were so placed that a single shell bursting between them would have disabled them both. The officer who placed them there, and so disregarded in a vital matter the most obvious dictates of common-sense, would probably have been shocked by any want of technical smartness, or irregularity in the routine drill. An over-elaboration of trifles, and a want of grip of common-sense, and of adaptation to new ideas, is the most serious and damaging criticism which can be levelled against our army. That the function of infantry is to shoot, and not to act like spearmen in the Middle Ages; that the first duty of artillery is so far as is possible to be invisible — these are two of the lessons which have been driven home so often during the war, that even our hidebound conservatism can hardly resist them.

Lyttelton’s Brigade, then, held Vaalkranz; and from three parts of the compass there came big shells and little shells, with a constant shower of long-range rifle bullets. Behind them, and as useful as if it had been on Woolwich Common, there was drawn up an imposing mass of men, two infantry divisions, and two brigades of cavalry, all straining at the leash, prepared to shed their blood until the spruits ran red with it, if only they could win their way to where their half-starved comrades waited for them. But nothing happened. Hours passed and nothing happened. An occasional shell from the big gun plumped among them. One, through some freak of gunnery, lobbed slowly through a division, and the men whooped and threw their caps at it as it passed. The guns on Swartz Kop, at a range of nearly five miles, tossed shells at the monster on Doornkloof, and finally blew up his powder magazine amid the applause of the infantry. For the army it was a picnic and a spectacle.

But it was otherwise with the men up on Vaalkranz. In spite of sangar and trench, that cross fire was finding them out; and no feint or demonstration on either side came to draw the concentrated fire from their position. Once there was a sudden alarm at the western end of the hill, and stooping bearded figures with slouch hats and bandoliers were right up on the ridge before they could be stopped, so cleverly had their advance been conducted. But a fiery rush of Durhams and Rifles cleared the crest again, and it was proved once more how much stronger is the defence than the attack. Nightfall found the position unchanged, save that another pontoon bridge had been constructed during the day. Over this Hildyard's Brigade marched to relieve Lyttelton's, who came back for a rest under the cover of the Swartz Kop guns. Their losses in the two days had been under two hundred and fifty, a trifle if any aim were to be gained, but excessive for a mere demonstration.

That night Hildyard's men supplemented the defences made by Lyttelton, and tightened their hold upon the hill. One futile night attack caused them for an instant to change the spade for the rifle. When in the morning it was found that the Boers had, as they naturally would, brought up their outlying guns, the tired soldiers did not regret their labours of the night. It was again demonstrated how innocuous a thing is a severe shell fire, if the position be an extended one with chances of cover. A total of forty killed and wounded out of a strong brigade was the result of a long day under an incessant cannonade. And then at nightfall came the conclusion that the guns were too many, that the way was too hard, and down came all their high hopes with the order to withdraw once more across that accursed river. Vaalkranz was abandoned, and Hildyard's Brigade, seething with indignation, was ordered back once more to its camp.

CHAPTER 17. BULLER’S FINAL ADVANCE.

The heroic moment of the siege of Ladysmith was that which witnessed the repulse of the great attack. The epic should have ended at that dramatic instant. But instead of doing so the story falls back to an anticlimax of crowded hospitals, slaughtered horses, and sporadic shell fire. For another six weeks of inactivity the brave garrison endured all the sordid evils which had steadily grown from inconvenience to misfortune and from misfortune to misery. Away in the south they heard the thunder of Buller’s guns, and from the hills round the town they watched with pale faces and bated breath the tragedy of Spion Kop, preserving a firm conviction that a very little more would have transformed it into their salvation. Their hearts sank with the sinking of the cannonade, and rose again with the roar of Vaalkranz. But Vaalkranz also failed them, and they waited on in the majesty of their hunger and their weakness for the help which was to come.

It has been already narrated how General Buller had made his three attempts for the relief of the city. The General who was inclined to despair was now stimulated by despatches from Lord Roberts, while his army, who were by no means inclined to despair, were immensely cheered by the good news from the Kimberley side. Both General and army prepared for a last supreme effort. This time, at least, the soldiers hoped that they would be permitted to burst their way to the help of their starving comrades or leave their bones among the hills which had faced them so long. All they asked was a fight to a finish, and now they were about to have one. General Buller had tried the Boers’ centre, he had tried their extreme right, and now he was about to try their extreme left. There were some obvious advantages on this side which make it surprising that it was not the first to be attempted. In the first place, the enemy’s main position upon that flank was at Hlangwane mountain, which is to the south of the Tugela, so that in case of defeat the river ran behind them. In the second, Hlangwane mountain was the one point from which the Boer position at Colenso could be certainly enfiladed, and therefore the fruits of victory would be greater on that flank than on the other. Finally, the operations could be conducted at no great distance from the railhead, and the force would be exposed to little danger of having its flank attacked or its communications cut, as was the case in the Spion Kop advance. Against these potent considerations there is only to be put the single fact that the turning of the Boer right would threaten the Freestaters' line of retreat. On the whole, the balance of advantage lay entirely with the new attempt, and the whole army advanced to it with a premonition of success. Of all the examples which the war has given of the enduring qualities of the British troops there is none more striking than the absolute confidence and whole hearted delight with which, after three bloody repulses, they set forth upon another venture.

On February 9th the movements were started which transferred the greater part of the force from the extreme left to the centre and right. By the 11th Lyttelton's (formerly Clery's) second division and Warren's fifth division had come eastward, leaving Burn Murdoch's cavalry brigade to guard the Western side. On the 12th Lord Dundonald, with all the colonial cavalry, two battalions of infantry, and a battery, made a strong reconnaissance towards Hussar Hill, which is the nearest of the several hills which would have to be occupied in order to turn the position. The hill was taken, but was abandoned again by General Buller after he had used it for some hours as an observatory. A long-range action between the retiring cavalry and the Boers ended in a few losses upon each side.

What Buller had seen during the hour or two which he had spent with his telescope upon Hussar Hill had evidently confirmed him in his views, for two days later (February 14th) the whole army set forth for this point. By the morning of the 15th twenty thousand men were concentrated upon the sides and spurs of this eminence. On the 16th the heavy guns were in position, and all was ready for the advance.

Facing them now were the formidable Boer lines of Hlangwane Hill and Green Hill, which would certainly cost several thousands of men if they were to take them by direct storm. Beyond them, upon the Boer flank, were the hills of Monte Christo and Cingolo, which appeared to be the extreme outside of the Boer position. The plan was to engage the attention of the trenches in front by a terrific artillery fire and the threat of an assault, while at the same time sending the true flank attack far round to carry the Cingolo ridge, which must be taken before any other hill could be approached.

On the 17th, in the early morning, with the first tinge of violet in the east, the irregular cavalry and the second division (Lyttelton's) with Wynne's Brigade started upon their widely curving flanking march. The country through which they passed was so broken that the troopers led their horses in single file, and would have found themselves helpless in face of any resistance. Fortunately, Cingolo Hill was very weakly held, and by evening both our horsemen and our infantry had a firm grip upon it, thus turning the extreme left flank of the Boer position. For once their mountainous fortresses were against them, for a mounted Boer force is so mobile that in an open position, such as faced Methuen, it is very hard and requires great celerity of movement ever to find a flank at all. On a succession of hills, however, it was evident that some one hill must mark the extreme end of their line, and Buller had found it at Cingolo. Their answer to this movement was to throw their flank back so as to face the new position.

Even now, however, the Boer leaders had apparently not realised that this was the main attack, or it is possible that the intervention of the river made it difficult for them to send reinforcements. However that may be, it is certain that the task which the British found awaiting them on the 18th proved to be far easier than they had dared to hope. The honours of the day rested with Hildyard's English Brigade (East Surrey, West Surrey, West Yorkshires, and 2nd Devons). In open order and with a rapid advance, taking every advantage of the cover — which was better than is usual in South African warfare — they gained the edge of the Monte Christo ridge, and then swiftly cleared the crest. One at least of the regiments engaged, the Devons, was nerved by the thought that their own first battalion was waiting for them at Ladysmith. The capture of the hill made the line of trenches which faced Buller untenable, and he was at once able to advance with Barton's Fusilier Brigade and to take possession of the whole Boer position of Hlangwane and Green Hill. It was not a great tactical victory, for they had no trophies to show save the worthless debris of the Boer camps. But it was a very great strategical victory, for it not only gave them the whole south side of the Tugela, but also the means of commanding with their guns a great deal of the north side, including those Colenso trenches which had blocked the way so long. A hundred and seventy killed and wounded (of whom only fourteen were killed) was a trivial price for such a result. At last from the captured ridges the exultant troops could see far away the haze which lay over the roofs of Ladysmith, and the besieged, with hearts beating high with hope, turned their glasses upon the distant mottled patches which told them that their comrades were approaching.

By February 20th the British had firmly established themselves along the whole south bank of the river, Hart's brigade had occupied Colenso, and the heavy guns had been pushed up to more advanced positions. The crossing of the river was the next operation, and the question arose where it should be crossed. The wisdom which comes with experience shows us now that it would have been infinitely better to have crossed on their extreme left flank, as by an advance upon this line we should have turned their strong Pieters position just as we had already turned their Colenso one. With an absolutely master card in our hand we refused to play it, and won the game by a more tedious and perilous process. The assumption seems to have been made (on no other hypothesis can one understand the facts) that the enemy were demoralised and that the positions would not be strongly held. Our flanking advantage was abandoned and a direct advance was ordered from Colenso, involving a frontal attack upon the Pieters position.

On February 21st Buller threw his pontoon bridge over the river near Colenso, and the same evening his army began to cross. It was at once evident that the Boer resistance had by no means collapsed. Wynne’s Lancashire Brigade were the first across, and found themselves hotly engaged before nightfall. The low kopjes in front of them were blazing with musketry fire. The brigade held its own, but lost the Brigadier (the second in a month) and 150 rank and file. Next morning the main body of the infantry was passed across, and the army was absolutely committed to the formidable and unnecessary enterprise of fighting its way straight to Ladysmith.

The force in front had weakened, however, both in numbers and in morale. Some thousands of the Freestaters had left in order to defend their own country from the advance of Roberts, while the rest were depressed by as much of the news as was allowed by their leaders to reach them. But the Boer is a tenacious fighter, and many a brave man was still to fall before Buller and White should shake hands in the High Street of Ladysmith.

The first obstacle which faced the army, after crossing the river, was a belt of low rolling ground, which was gradually cleared by the advance of our infantry. As night closed in the advance lines of Boers and British were so close to each other that incessant rifle fire was maintained until morning, and at more than one point small bodies of desperate riflemen charged right up to the bayonets of our infantry. The morning found us still holding our positions all along the line, and as more and more of our infantry came up and gun after gun roared into action we began to push our stubborn enemy northwards. On the 21st the Dorsets, Middlesex, and Somersets had borne the heat of the day. On the 22nd it was the Royal Lancasters, followed by the South Lancashires, who took up the running. It would take the patience and also the space of a Kinglake in this scrambling broken fight to trace the doings of those groups of men who strove and struggled through the rifle fire. All day a steady advance was maintained over the low kopjes, until by evening we were faced by the more serious line of the Pieter's Hills. The operations had been carried out with a monotony of gallantry. Always the same extended advance, always the same rattle of Mausers and clatter of pom-poms from a ridge, always the same victorious soldiers on the barren crest, with a few crippled Boers before them and many crippled comrades behind. They were expensive triumphs, and yet every one brought them nearer to their goal. And now, like an advancing tide, they lapped along the base of Pieter's Hill. Could they gather volume enough to carry themselves over? The issue of the long-drawn battle and the fate of Ladysmith hung upon the question.

Brigadier Fitzroy Hart, to whom the assault was entrusted, is in some ways as singular and picturesque a type as has been evolved in the war. A dandy soldier, always the picture of neatness from the top of his helmet to the heels of his well-polished brown boots, he brings to military matters the same precision which he affects in dress. Pedantic in his accuracy, he actually at the battle of Colenso drilled the Irish Brigade for half an hour before leading them into action, and threw out markers under a deadly fire in order that his change from close to extended formation might be academically correct. The heavy loss of the Brigade at this action was to some extent ascribed to him and affected his popularity; but as his men came to know him better, his romantic bravery, his whimsical soldierly humour, their dislike changed into admiration. His personal disregard for danger was notorious and reprehensible. 'Where is General Hart?' asked some one in action. 'I have not seen him, but I know where you will find him. Go ahead of the skirmish line and you will see him standing on a rock,' was the answer. He bore a charmed life. It was a danger to be near him. 'Whom are you going to?' 'General Hart,' said the aide-de-camp. 'Then good-bye!' cried his fellows. A grim humour ran through his nature. It is gravely recorded and widely believed that he lined up a regiment on a hill-top in order to teach them not to shrink from fire. Amid the laughter of his Irishmen, he walked through the open files of his firing line holding a laggard by the ear. This was the man who had put such a spirit into the Irish

Brigade that amid that army of valiant men there were none who held such a record. ‘Their rushes were the quickest, their rushes were the longest, and they stayed the shortest time under cover,’ said a shrewd military observer. To Hart and his brigade was given the task of clearing the way to Ladysmith.

The regiments which he took with him on his perilous enterprise were the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, the 1st Connaught Rangers, and the Imperial Light Infantry, the whole forming the famous 5th Brigade. They were already in the extreme British advance, and now, as they moved forwards, the Durham Light Infantry and the 1st Rifle Brigade from Lyttelton’s Brigade came up to take their place. The hill to be taken lay on the right, and the soldiers were compelled to pass in single file under a heavy fire for more than a mile until they reached the spot which seemed best for their enterprise. There, short already of sixty of their comrades, they assembled and began a cautious advance upon the lines of trenches and sangars which seamed the brown slope above them.

For a time they were able to keep some cover, and the casualties were comparatively few. But now at last, as the evening sun threw a long shadow from the hills, the leading regiment, the Inniskillings, found themselves at the utmost fringe of boulders with a clear slope between them and the main trench of the enemy. Up there where the shrapnel was spurting and the great lyddite shells crashing they could dimly see a line of bearded faces and the black dots of the slouch hats. With a yell the Inniskillings sprang out, carried with a rush the first trench, and charged desperately onwards for the second one. It was a supremely dashing attack against a supremely steady resistance, for among all their gallant deeds the Boers have never fought better than on that February evening. Amid such a smashing shell fire as living mortals have never yet endured they stood doggedly, these hardy men of the veld, and fired fast and true into the fiery ranks of the Irishmen. The yell of the stormers was answered by the remorseless roar of the Mausers and the deep-chested shouts of the farmers. Up and up surged the infantry, falling, rising, dashing bull-headed at the crackling line of the trench. But still the bearded faces glared at them over the edge, and still the sheet of lead pelted through their ranks. The regiment staggered, came on, staggered again, was overtaken by supporting companies of the Dublins and the Connaughts, came on, staggered once more, and finally dissolved into shreds, who ran swiftly back for cover, threading their way among their stricken comrades. Never on this earth was there a retreat of which the survivors had less reason to be ashamed. They had held on to the utmost capacity of human endurance. Their Colonel, ten officers, and more than half the regiment were lying on the fatal hill. Honour to them, and honour also to the gallant Dutchmen who, rooted in the trenches, had faced the rush and fury of such an onslaught! Today to them, tomorrow to us — but it is for a soldier to thank the God of battles for worthy foes.

It is one thing, however, to repulse the British soldier and it is another to rout him. Within a few hundred yards of their horrible ordeal at Magersfontein the Highlanders reformed into a military body. So now the Irishmen fell back no further than the nearest cover, and there held grimly on to the ground which they had won. If you would know the advantage which the defence has over the attack, then do you come and assault this line of tenacious men, now in your hour of victory and exultation, friend Boer! Friend Boer did attempt it, and skilfully too, moving a flanking party to sweep the position with their fire. But the brigade, though sorely hurt, held them off without difficulty, and was found on the morning of the 24th to be still lying upon the ground which they had won.

Our losses had been very heavy, Colonel Thackeray of the Inniskillings, Colonel Sitwell of the Dublins, three majors, twenty officers, and a total of about six hundred out of 1200 actually engaged. To take such punishment and to remain undemoralised is the supreme test to which troops can be put. Could the loss have been avoided? By following the original line of advance from Monte Christo, perhaps, when we should have turned the enemy’s left. But otherwise no. The hill was in the way and had to be taken. In the war game you cannot play without a stake. You lose and you pay forfeit, and where the game is fair the best player is he who pays with the best grace. The attack was well prepared, well delivered, and only miscarried on account of the excellence of the defence. We proved once more what we had proved so often before, that all valour and all discipline will not avail in a frontal attack against brave coolheaded men armed with quick-firing rifles.

While the Irish Brigade assaulted Railway Hill an attack had been made upon the left, which was probably meant as a demonstration to keep the Boers from reinforcing their comrades rather than as an actual attempt upon their lines. Such as it was, however, it cost the life of at least one brave soldier, for Colonel Thorold, of the Welsh Fusiliers, was among the fallen.

Thorold, Thackeray, and Sitwell in one evening. Who can say that British colonels have not given their men a lead?

The army was now at a deadlock. Railway Hill barred the way, and if Hart’s men could not carry it by assault it was hard to say who could. The 24th found the two armies facing each other at this critical point, the Irishmen still clinging to the slopes of the hill and the Boers lining the top. Fierce rifle firing broke out between them during the day, but each side was well covered and lay low. The troops in support suffered somewhat, however, from a random shell fire. Mr. Winston Churchill has left it upon record that within his own observation three of their shrapnel shells fired at a venture on to the reverse slope of a hill accounted for nineteen men and four horses. The enemy can never have known how hard those three shells had hit us, and so we may also believe that our artillery fire has often been less futile than it appeared.

General Buller had now realised that it was no mere rearguard action which the Boers were fighting, but that their army was standing doggedly at bay; so he reverted to that flanking movement which, as events showed, should never have been abandoned. Hart’s Irish Brigade was at present almost the right of the army. His new plan — a masterly one — was to keep Hart pinning the Boers at that point, and to move his centre and left across the river, and then back to envelope the left wing of the enemy. By this manoeuvre Hart became the extreme left instead of the extreme right, and the Irish Brigade would be the hinge upon which the whole army should turn. It was a large conception, finely carried out. The 24th was a day of futile shell fire — and of plans for the future. The heavy guns were got across once more to the Monte Christo ridge and to Hlangwane, and preparations made to throw the army from the west to the east. The enemy still snarled and occasionally snapped in front of Hart’s men, but with four companies of the 2nd Rifle Brigade to protect their flanks their position remained secure.

In the meantime, through a contretemps between our outposts and the Boers, no leave had been given to us to withdraw our wounded, and the unfortunate fellows, some hundreds of them, had lain between the lines in agonies of thirst for thirty-six hours — one of the most painful incidents of the campaign. Now, upon the 25th, an armistice was proclaimed, and the crying needs of the survivors were attended to. On the same day the hearts of our soldiers sank within them as they saw the stream of our wagons and guns crossing the river once more. What, were they foiled again? Was the blood of these brave men to be shed in vain? They ground their teeth at the thought. The higher strategy was not for them, but back was back and forward was forward, and they knew which way their proud hearts wished to go.

The 26th was occupied by the large movements of troops which so complete a reversal of tactics necessitated. Under the screen of a heavy artillery fire, the British right became the left and the left the right. A second pontoon bridge was thrown across near the old Boer bridge at Hlangwane, and over it was passed a large force of infantry, Barton's Fusilier Brigade, Kitchener's (vice Wynne's, vice Woodgate's) Lancashire Brigade, and two battalions of Norcott's (formerly Lyttelton's) Brigade. Coke's Brigade was left at Colenso to prevent a counter attack upon our left flank and communications. In this way, while Hart with the Durhams and the 1st Rifle Brigade held the Boers in front, the main body of the army was rapidly swung round on to their left flank. By the morning of the 27th all were in place for the new attack.

Opposite the point where the troops had been massed were three Boer hills; one, the nearest, may for convenience sake be called Barton's Hill. As the army had formerly been situated the assault upon this hill would have been a matter of extreme difficulty; but now, with the heavy guns restored to their commanding position, from which they could sweep its sides and summits, it had recovered its initial advantage. In the morning sunlight Barton's Fusiliers crossed the river, and advanced to the attack under a screaming canopy of shells. Up they went and up, darting and crouching, until their gleaming bayonets sparkled upon the summit. The masterful artillery had done its work, and the first long step taken in this last stage of the relief of Ladysmith. The loss had been slight and the advantage enormous. After they had gained the summit the Fusiliers were stung and stung again by clouds of skirmishers who clung to the flanks of the hill, but their grip was firm and grew firmer with every hour.

Of the three Boer hills which had to be taken the nearest (or eastern one) was now in the hands of the British. The furthest (or western one) was that on which the Irish Brigade was still crouching, ready at any moment for a final spring which would take them over the few hundred yards which separated them from the trenches. Between the two intervened a central hill, as yet untouched. Could we carry this the whole position would be ours.

Now for the final effort! Turn every gun upon it, the guns of Monte Christo, the guns of Hlangwane! Turn every rifle upon it — the rifles of Barton’s men, the rifles of Hart’s men, the carbines of the distant cavalry! Scalp its crown with the machine-gun fire! And now up with you, Lancashire men, Norcott’s men! The summit or a glorious death, for beyond that hill your suffering comrades are awaiting you! Put every bullet and every man and all of fire and spirit that you are worth into this last hour; for if you fail now you have failed for ever, and if you win, then when your hairs are white your blood will still run warm when you think of that morning’s work. The long drama had drawn to an end, and one short day’s work is to show what that end was to be.

But there was never a doubt of it. Hardly for one instant did the advance waver at any point of its extended line. It was the supreme instant of the Natal campaign, as, wave after wave, the long lines of infantry went shimmering up the hill. On the left the Lancasters, the Lancashire Fusiliers, the South Lancashires, the York and Lancasters, with a burr of north country oaths, went racing for the summit. Spion Kop and a thousand comrades were calling for vengeance. ‘Remember, men, the eyes of Lancashire are watching you,’ cried the gallant MacCarthy O’Leary. The old 40th swept on, but his dead body marked the way which they had taken. On the right the East Surrey, the Cameronians, the 3rd Rifles, the 1st Rifle Brigade, the Durhams, and the gallant Irishmen, so sorely stricken and yet so eager, were all pressing upwards and onwards. The Boer fire lulls, it ceases — they are running! Wild hat-waving men upon the Hlangwane uplands see the silhouette of the active figures of the stormers along the sky-line and know that the position is theirs. Exultant soldiers dance and cheer upon the ridge. The sun is setting in glory over the great Drakensberg mountains, and so also that night set for ever the hopes of the Boer invaders of Natal. Out of doubt and chaos, blood and labour, had come at last the judgment that the lower should not swallow the higher, that the world is for the man of the twentieth and not of the seventeenth century. After a fortnight of fighting the weary troops threw themselves down that night with the assurance that at last the door was ajar and the light breaking through. One more effort and it would be open before them.

Behind the line of hills which had been taken there extended a great plain as far as Bulwana — that evil neighbour who had wrought such harm upon Ladysmith. More than half of the Pieters position had fallen into Buller’s hands on the 27th, and the remainder had become untenable. The Boers had lost some five hundred in killed, wounded, and prisoners. [Footnote: Accurate figures will probably never be obtained, but a well-known Boer in Pretoria informed me that Pieters was the most expensive fight to them of the whole war.] It seemed to the British General and his men that one more action would bring them safely into Ladysmith.

But here they miscalculated, and so often have we miscalculated on the optimistic side in this campaign that it is pleasing to find for once that our hopes were less than the reality. The Boers had been beaten — fairly beaten and disheartened. It will always be a subject for conjecture whether they were so entirely on the strength of the Natal campaign, or whether the news of the Cronje disaster from the western side had warned them that they must draw in upon the east. For my own part I believe that the honour lies with the gallant men of Natal, and that, moving on these lines, they would, Cronje or no Cronje, have forced their way in triumph to Ladysmith.

And now the long-drawn story draws to a swift close. Cautiously feeling their way with a fringe of horse, the British pushed over the great plain, delayed here and there by the crackle of musketry, but finding always that the obstacle gave way and vanished as they approached it. At last it seemed clear to Dundonald that there really was no barrier between his horsemen and the beleaguered city. With a squadron of Imperial Light Horse and a squadron of Natal Carabineers he rode on until, in the gathering twilight, the Ladysmith picket challenged the approaching cavalry, and the gallant town was saved.

It is hard to say which had shown the greater endurance, the rescued or their rescuers. The town, indefensible, lurking in a hollow under commanding hills, had held out for 118 days. They had endured two assaults and an incessant bombardment, to which, towards the end, owing to the failure of heavy ammunition, they were unable to make any adequate reply. It was calculated that 16, 000 shells had fallen within the town. In two successful sorties they had destroyed three of the enemy’s heavy guns. They had been pressed by hunger, horseflesh was already running short, and they had been decimated by disease. More than 2000 cases of enteric and dysentery had been in hospital at one time, and the total number of admissions had been nearly as great as the total number of the garrison. One-tenth of the men had actually died of wounds or disease. Ragged, bootless, and emaciated, there still lurked in the gaunt soldiers the martial spirit of warriors. On the day after their relief 2000 of them set forth to pursue the Boers. One who helped to lead them has left it on record that the most piteous sight that he has ever seen was these wasted men, stooping under their rifles and gasping with the pressure of their accoutrements, as they staggered after their retreating enemy. A Verestschagen might find a subject these 2000 indomitable men with their emaciated horses pursuing a formidable foe. It is God's mercy they failed to overtake them.

If the record of the besieged force was great, that of the relieving army was no less so. Through the blackest depths of despondency and failure they had struggled to absolute success. At Colenso they had lost 1200 men, at Spion Kop 1700, at Vaalkranz 400, and now, in this last long-drawn effort, 1600 more. Their total losses were over 5000 men, more than 20 per cent of the whole army. Some particular regiments had suffered horribly. The Dublin and Inniskilling Fusiliers headed the roll of honour with only five officers and 40 per cent of the men left standing. Next to them the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Royal Lancasters had been the hardest hit. It speaks well for Buller's power of winning and holding the confidence of his men that in the face of repulse after repulse the soldiers still went into battle as steadily as ever under his command.

On March 3rd Buller's force entered Ladysmith in state between the lines of the defenders. For their heroism the Dublin Fusiliers were put in the van of the procession, and it is told how, as the soldiers who lined the streets saw the five officers and small clump of men, the remains of what had been a strong battalion, realising, for the first time perhaps, what their relief had cost, many sobbed like children. With cheer after cheer the stream of brave men flowed for hours between banks formed by men as brave. But for the purposes of war the garrison was useless. A month of rest and food would be necessary before they could be ready to take the field once more.

So the riddle of the Tugela had at last been solved. Even now, with all the light which has been shed upon the matter, it is hard to apportion praise and blame. To the cheerful optimism of Symons must be laid some of the blame of the original entanglement; but man is mortal, and he laid down his life for his mistake. White, who had been but a week in the country, could not, if he would, alter the main facts of the military situation. He did his best, committed one or two errors, did brilliantly on one or two points, and finally conducted the defence with a tenacity and a gallantry which are above all praise. It did not, fortunately, develop into an absolutely desperate affair, like Massena's defence of Genoa, but a few more weeks would have made it a military tragedy. He was fortunate in the troops whom he commanded — half of them old soldiers from India — [Footnote: An officer in high command in Ladysmith has told me, as an illustration of the nerve and discipline of the troops, that though false alarms in the Boer trenches were matters of continual occurrence from the beginning to the end of the siege, there was not one single occasion when the British outposts made a mistake.] — and exceedingly fortunate in his officers, French (in the operations before the siege), Archibald Hunter, Ian Hamilton, Hedworth Lambton, Dick-Cunyngham, Knox, De Courcy Hamilton, and all the other good men and true who stood (as long as they could stand) by his side. Above all, he was fortunate in his commissariat officers, and it was in the offices of Colonels Ward and Stoneman as much as in the trenches and sangars of Caesar's Camp that the siege was won.

Buller, like White, had to take the situation as he found it. It is well known that his own belief was that the line of the Tugela was the true defence of Natal. When he reached Africa, Ladysmith was already beleaguered, and he, with his troops, had to abandon the scheme of direct invasion and to hurry to extricate White's division. Whether they might not have been more rapidly extricated by keeping to the original plan is a question which will long furnish an excellent subject for military debate. Had Buller in November known that Ladysmith was capable of holding out until March, is it conceivable that he, with his whole army corps and as many more troops as he cared to summon from England, would not have made such an advance in four months through the Free State as would necessitate the abandonment of the sieges both of Kimberley and of Ladysmith? If the Boers persisted in these sieges they could not possibly place more than 20,000 men on the Orange River to face 60, 000 whom Buller could have had there by the first week in December. Methuen's force, French's force, Gatacre's force, and the Natal force, with the exception of garrisons for Pietermaritzburg and Durban, would have assembled, with a reserve of another sixty thousand men in the colony or on the sea ready to fill the gaps in his advance. Moving over a flat country with plenty of flanking room, it is probable that he would have been in Bloemfontein by Christmas and at the Vaal River late in January. What could the Boers do then? They might remain before Ladysmith, and learn that their capital and their gold mines had been taken in their absence. Or they might abandon the siege and trek back to defend their own homes. This, as it appears to a civilian critic, would have been the least expensive means of fighting them; but after all the strain had to come somewhere, and the long struggle of Ladysmith may have meant a more certain and complete collapse in the future. At least, by the plan actually adopted we saved Natal from total devastation, and that must count against a great deal.

Having taken his line, Buller set about his task in a slow, deliberate, but pertinacious fashion. It cannot be denied, however, that the pertinacity was largely due to the stiffening counsel of Roberts and the soldierly firmness of White who refused to acquiesce in the suggestion of surrender. Let it be acknowledged that Buller's was the hardest problem of the war, and that he solved it. The mere acknowledgment goes far to soften criticism. But the singular thing is that in his proceedings he showed qualities which had not been generally attributed to him, and was wanting in those very points which the public had imagined to be characteristic of him. He had gone out with the reputation of a downright John Bull fighter, who would take punishment or give it, but slog his way through without wincing. There was no reason for attributing any particular strategical ability to him. But as a matter of fact, setting the Colenso attempt aside, the crossing for the Spion Kop enterprise, the withdrawal of the compromised army, the Vaalkranz crossing with the clever feint upon Brakfontein, the final operations, and especially the complete change of front after the third day of Pieters, were strategical movements largely conceived and admirably carried out. On the other hand, a hesitation in pushing onwards, and a disinclination to take a risk or to endure heavy punishment, even in the case of temporary failure, were consistent characteristics of his generalship. The Vaalkranz operations are particularly difficult to defend from the charge of having been needlessly slow and half-hearted. This 'saturnine fighter,' as he had been called, proved to be exceedingly sensitive about the lives of his men — an admirable quality in itself, but there are occasions when to spare them to-day is to needlessly imperil them tomorrow. The victory was his, and yet in the very moment of it he displayed the qualities which marred him. With two cavalry brigades in hand he did not push the pursuit of the routed Boers with their guns and endless streams of wagons. It is true that he might have lost heavily, but it is true also that a success might have ended the Boer invasion of Natal, and the lives of our troopers would be well spent in such a venture. If cavalry is not to be used in pursuing a retiring enemy encumbered with much baggage, then its day is indeed past.

The relief of Ladysmith stirred the people of the Empire as nothing, save perhaps the subsequent relief of Mafeking, has done during our generation. Even sober unemotional London found its soul for once and fluttered with joy. Men, women, and children, rich and poor, clubman and cabman, joined in the universal delight. The thought of our garrison, of their privations, of our impotence to relieve them, of the impending humiliation to them and to us, had lain dark for many months across our spirits. It had weighed upon us, until the subject, though ever present in our thoughts, was too painful for general talk. And now, in an instant, the shadow was lifted. The outburst of rejoicing was not a triumph over the gallant Boers. But it was our own escape from humiliation, the knowledge that the blood of our sons had not been shed in vain, above all the conviction that the darkest hour had now passed and that the light of peace was dimly breaking far away — that was why London rang with joy bells that March morning, and why those bells echoed back from every town and hamlet, in tropical sun and in Arctic snow, over which the flag of Britain waved.

CHAPTER 18. THE SIEGE AND RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY.

It has already been narrated how, upon the arrival of the army corps from England, the greater part was drafted to Natal, while some went to the western side, and started under Lord Methuen upon the perilous enterprise of the relief of Kimberley. It has also been shown how, after three expensive victories, Lord Methuen’s force met with a paralysing reverse, and was compelled to remain inactive within twenty miles of the town which they had come to succour. Before I describe how that succour did eventually arrive, some attention must be paid to the incidents which had occurred within the city.

‘I am directed to assure you that there is no reason for apprehending that Kimberley or any part of the colony either is, or in any contemplated event will be, in danger of attack. Mr. Schreiner is of opinion that your fears are groundless and your anticipations in the matter entirely without foundation.’ Such is the official reply to the remonstrance of the inhabitants, when, with the shadow of war dark upon them, they appealed for help. It is fortunate, however, that a progressive British town has usually the capacity for doing things for itself without the intervention of officials. Kimberley was particularly lucky in being the centre of the wealthy and alert De Beers Company, which had laid in sufficient ammunition and supplies to prevent the town from being helpless in the presence of the enemy. But the cannon were popguns, firing a 7-pound shell for a short range, and the garrison contained only seven hundred regulars, while the remainder were mostly untrained miners and artisans. Among them, however, there was a sprinkling of dangerous men from the northern wars, and all were nerved by a knowledge that the ground which they defended was essential to the Empire. Ladysmith was no more than any other strategic position, but Kimberley was unique, the centre of the richest tract of ground for its size in the whole world. Its loss would have been a heavy blow to the British cause, and an enormous encouragement to the Boers.

On October 12th, several hours after the expiration of Kruger’s ultimatum, Cecil Rhodes threw himself into Kimberley. This remarkable man, who stood for the future of South Africa as clearly as the Dopper Boer stood for its past, had, both in features and in character, some traits which may, without extravagance, be called Napoleonic. The restless energy, the fertility of resource, the attention to detail, the wide sweep of mind, the power of terse comment — all these recall the great emperor. So did the simplicity of private life in the midst of excessive wealth. And so finally did a want of scruple where an ambition was to be furthered, shown, for example, in that enormous donation to the Irish party by which he made a bid for their parliamentary support, and in the story of the Jameson raid. A certain cynicism of mind and a grim humour complete the parallel. But Rhodes was a Napoleon of peace. The consolidation of South Africa under the freest and most progressive form of government was the large object on which he had expended his energies and his fortune but the development of the country in every conceivable respect, from the building of a railway to the importation of a pedigree bull, engaged his unremitting attention.

It was on October 15th that the fifty thousand inhabitants of Kimberley first heard the voice of war. It rose and fell in a succession of horrible screams and groans which travelled far over the veld, and the outlying farmers marvelled at the dreadful clamour from the sirens and the hooters of the great mines. Those who have endured all — the rifle, the cannon, and the hunger — have said that those wild whoops from the sirens were what had tried their nerve the most.

The Boers in scattered bands of horsemen were thick around the town, and had blocked the railroad. They raided cattle upon the outskirts, but made no attempt to rush the defence. The garrison, who, civilian and military, approached four thousand in number, lay close in rifle pit and redoubt waiting for an attack which never came. The perimeter to be defended was about eight miles, but the heaps of tailings made admirable fortifications, and the town had none of those inconvenient heights around it which had been such bad neighbours to Ladysmith. Picturesque surroundings are not favourable to defence.

On October 24th the garrison, finding that no attack was made, determined upon a reconnaissance. The mounted force, upon which most of the work and of the loss fell, consisted of the Diamond Fields Horse, a small number of Cape Police, a company of Mounted Infantry, and a body called the Kimberley Light Horse. With two hundred and seventy volunteers from this force Major Scott-Turner, a redoubtable fighter, felt his way to the north until he came in touch with the Boers. The latter, who were much superior in numbers, manoeuvred to cut him off, but the arrival of two companies of the North Lancashire Regiment turned the scale in our favour. We lost three killed and twenty-one wounded in the skirmish. The Boer loss is unknown, but their commander Botha was slain.

On November 4th Commandant Wessels formally summoned the town, and it is asserted that he gave Colonel Kekewich leave to send out the women and children. That officer has been blamed for not taking advantage of the permission — or at the least for not communicating it to the civil authorities. As a matter of fact the charge rests upon a misapprehension. In Wessels' letter a distinction is made between Africander and English women, the former being offered an asylum in his camp. This offer was made known, and half a dozen persons took advantage of it. The suggestion, however, in the case of the English carried with it no promise that they would be conveyed to Orange River, and a compliance with it would have put them as helpless hostages into the hands of the enemy. As to not publishing the message it is not usual to publish such official documents, but the offer was shown to Mr. Rhodes, who concurred in the impossibility of accepting it.

It is difficult to allude to this subject without touching upon the painful but notorious fact that there existed during the siege considerable friction between the military authorities and a section of the civilians, of whom Mr. Rhodes was chief. Among other characteristics Rhodes bore any form of restraint very badly, and chafed mightily when unable to do a thing in the exact way which he considered best. He may have been a Napoleon of peace, but his warmest friends could never describe him as a Napoleon of war, for his military forecasts have been erroneous, and the management of the Jameson fiasco certainly inspired no confidence in the judgment of any one concerned. That his intentions were of the best, and that he had the good of the Empire at heart, may be freely granted; but that these motives should lead him to cabal against, and even to threaten, the military governor, or that he should attempt to force Lord Roberts's hand in a military operation, was most deplorable. Every credit may be given to him for all his aid to the military — he gave with a good grace what the garrison would otherwise have had to commandeer — but it is a fact that the town would have been more united, and therefore stronger, without his presence.

Colonel Kekewich and his chief staff officer, Major O'Meara, were as much plagued by intrigue within as by the Boers without.

On November 7th the bombardment of the town commenced from nine 9-pounder guns to which the artillery of the garrison could give no adequate reply. The result, however, of a fortnight's fire, during which seven hundred shells were discharged, was the loss of two non-combatants. The question of food was recognised as being of more importance than the enemy's fire. An early relief appeared probable, however, as the advance of Methuen's force was already known. One pound of bread, two ounces of sugar, and half a pound of meat were allowed per head. It was only on the small children that the scarcity of milk told with tragic effect. At Ladysmith, at Mafeking, and at Kimberley hundreds of these innocents were sacrificed.

November 25th was a red-letter day with the garrison, who made a sortie under the impression that Methuen was not far off, and that they were assisting his operations. The attack was made upon one of the Boer positions by a force consisting of a detachment of the Light Horse and of the Cape Police, and their work was brilliantly successful. The actual storming of the redoubt was carried out by some forty men, of whom but four were killed. They brought back thirty-three prisoners as a proof of their victory, but the Boer gun, as usual, escaped us. In this brilliant affair Scott-Turner was wounded, which did not prevent him, only three days later, from leading another sortie, which was as disastrous as the first had been successful. Save under very exceptional circumstances it is in modern warfare long odds always upon the defence, and the garrison would probably have been better advised had they refrained from attacking the fortifications of their enemy — a truth which Baden-Powell learned also at Game Tree Hill. As it was, after a temporary success the British were blown back by the fierce Mauser fire, and lost the indomitable Scott-Turner, with twenty-one of his brave companions killed and twenty-eight wounded, all belonging to the colonial corps. The Empire may reflect with pride that the people in whose cause mainly they fought showed themselves by their gallantry and their devotion worthy of any sacrifice which has been made.

Again the siege settled down to a monotonous record of decreasing rations and of expectation. On December 10 there came a sign of hope from the outside world. Far on the southern horizon a little golden speck shimmered against the blue African sky. It was Methuen's balloon gleaming in the sunshine. Next morning the low grumble of distant cannon was the sweetest of music to the listening citizens. But days passed without further news, and it was not for more than a week that they learned of the bloody repulse of Magersfontein, and that help was once more indefinitely postponed. Heliographic communication had been opened with the relieving army, and it is on record that the first message flashed through from the south was a question about the number of a horse. With inconceivable stupidity this has been cited as an example of military levity and incapacity. Of course the object of the question was a test as to whether they were really in communication with the garrison. It must be confessed that the town seems to have contained some very querulous and unreasonable people.

The New Year found the beleaguered city reduced to a quarter of a pound of meat per head, while the health of the inhabitants began to break down under their confinement. Their interest, however, was keenly aroused by the attempt made in the De Beers workshops to build a gun which might reach their opponents. This remarkable piece of ordnance, constructed by an American named Labram by the help of tools manufactured for the purpose and of books found in the town, took the shape eventually of a 28 lb. rifled gun, which proved to be a most efficient piece of artillery. With grim humour, Mr. Rhodes's compliments had been inscribed upon the shells — a fair retort in view of the openly expressed threat of the enemy that in case of his capture they would carry him in a cage to Pretoria.

The Boers, though held off for a time by this unexpected piece of ordnance, prepared a terrible answer to it. On February 7th an enormous gun, throwing a 96 lb. shell, opened from Kamfersdam, which is four miles from the centre of the town. The shells, following the evil precedent of the Germans in 1870, were fired not at the forts, but into the thickly populated city. Day and night these huge missiles exploded, shattering the houses and occasionally killing or maiming the occupants. Some thousands of the women and children were conveyed down the mines, where, in the electric-lighted tunnels, they lay in comfort and safety. One surprising revenge the Boers had, for by an extraordinary chance one of the few men killed by their gun was the ingenious Labram who had constructed the 28-pounder. By an even more singular chance, Leon, who was responsible for bringing the big Boer gun, was struck immediately afterwards by a long-range rifle-shot from the garrison.

The historian must be content to give a tame account of the siege of Kimberley, for the thing itself was tame. Indeed ‘siege’ is a misnomer, for it was rather an investment or a blockade. Such as it was, however, the inhabitants became very restless under it, and though there were never any prospects of surrender the utmost impatience began to be manifested at the protracted delay on the part of the relief force. It was not till later that it was understood how cunningly Kimberley had been used as a bait to hold the enemy until final preparations had been made for his destruction.

And at last the great day came. It is on record how dramatic was the meeting between the mounted outposts of the defenders and the advance guard of the relievers, whose advent seems to have been equally unexpected by friend and foe. A skirmish was in progress on February 15th between a party of the Kimberley Light Horse and of the Boers, when a new body of horsemen, unrecognised by either side, appeared upon the plain and opened fire upon the enemy. One of the strangers rode up to the patrol. ‘What the dickens does K.L. H. mean on your shoulder-strap?’ he asked. ‘It means Kimberley Light Horse. Who are you?’ ‘I am one of the New Zealanders.’ Macaulay in his wildest dream of the future of the much-quoted New Zealander never pictured him as heading a rescue force for the relief of a British town in the heart of Africa.

The population had assembled to watch the mighty cloud of dust which rolled along the south-eastern horizon. What was it which swept westwards within its reddish heart? Hopeful and yet fearful they saw the huge bank draw nearer and nearer. An assault from the whole of Cronje’s army was the thought which passed through many a mind. And then the dust-cloud thinned, a mighty host of horsemen spurred out from it, and in the extended far-flung ranks the glint of spearheads and the gleam of scabbards told of the Hussars and Lancers, while denser banks on either flank marked the position of the whirling guns. Wearied and spent with a hundred miles’ ride the dusty riders and the panting, dripping horses took fresh heart as they saw the broad city before them, and swept with martial rattle and jingle towards the cheering crowds. Amid shouts and tears French rode into Kimberley while his troopers encamped outside the town.

To know how this bolt was prepared and how launched, the narrative must go back to the beginning of the month. At that period Methuen and his men were still faced by Cronje and his entrenched forces, who, in spite of occasional bombardments, held their position between Kimberley and the relieving army. French, having handed over the operations at Colesberg to Clements, had gone down to Cape Town to confer with Roberts and Kitchener. Thence they all three made their way to the Modder River, which was evidently about to be the base of a more largely conceived series of operations than any which had yet been undertaken.

In order to draw the Boer attention away from the thunderbolt which was about to fall upon their left flank, a strong demonstration ending in a brisk action was made early in February upon the extreme right of Cronje’s position. The force, consisting of the Highland Brigade, two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, No. 7 Co. Royal Engineers, and the 62nd Battery, was under the command of the famous Hector Macdonald. ‘Fighting Mac’ as he was called by his men, had joined his regiment as a private, and had worked through the grades of corporal, sergeant, captain, major, and colonel, until now, still in the prime of his manhood, he found himself riding at the head of a brigade. A bony, craggy Scotsman, with a square fighting head and a bulldog jaw, he had conquered the exclusiveness and routine of the British service by the same dogged qualities which made him formidable to Dervish and to Boer. With a cool brain, a steady nerve, and a proud heart, he is an ideal leader of infantry, and those who saw him manoeuvre his brigade in the crisis of the battle of Omdurman speak of it as the one great memory which they carried back from the engagement. On the field of battle he turns to the speech of his childhood, the jagged, rasping, homely words which brace the nerves of the northern soldier. This was the man who had come from India to take the place of poor Wauchope, and to put fresh heart into the gallant but sorely stricken brigade.

The four regiments which composed the infantry of the force — the Black Watch, the Argyll and Sutherlands, the Seaforths, and the Highland Light Infantry — left Lord Methuen’s camp on Saturday, February 3rd, and halted at Fraser’s Drift, passing on next day to Koodoosberg. The day was very hot, and the going very heavy, and many men fell out, some never to return. The drift (or ford) was found, however, to be undefended, and was seized by Macdonald, who, after pitching camp on the south side of the river, sent out strong parties across the drift to seize and entrench the Koodoosberg and some adjacent kopjes which, lying some three-quarters of a mile to the north-west of the drift formed the key of the position. A few Boer scouts were seen hurrying with the news of his coming to the head laager.

The effect of these messages was evident by Tuesday (February 6th), when the Boers were seen to be assembling upon the north bank. By next morning they were there in considerable numbers, and began an attack upon a crest held by the Seaforths. Macdonald threw two companies of the Black Watch and two of the Highland Light Infantry into the fight. The Boers made excellent practice with a 7-pounder mountain gun, and their rifle fire, considering the good cover which our men had, was very deadly. Poor Tait, of the Black Watch, good sportsman and gallant soldier, with one wound hardly healed upon his person, was hit again. ‘They’ve got me this time,’ were his dying words. Blair, of the Seaforths, had his carotid cut by a shrapnel bullet, and lay for hours while the men of his company took turns to squeeze the artery. But our artillery silenced the Boer gun, and our infantry easily held their riflemen. Babington with the cavalry brigade arrived from the camp about 1.30, moving along the north bank of the river. In spite of the fact that men and horses were weary from a tiring march, it was hoped by Macdonald’s force that they would work round the Boers and make an attempt to capture either them or their gun. But the horsemen seem not to have realised the position of the parties, or that possibility of bringing off a considerable coup, so the action came to a tame conclusion, the Boers retiring unpursued from their attack. On Thursday, February 8th, they were found to have withdrawn, and on the same evening our own force was recalled, to the surprise and disappointment of the public at home, who had not realised that in directing their attention to their right flank the column had already produced the effect upon the enemy for which they had been sent. They could not be left there, as they were needed for those great operations which were pending. It was on the 9th that the brigade returned; on the 10th they were congratulated by Lord Roberts in person; and on the 11th those new dispositions were made which were destined not only to relieve Kimberley, but to inflict a blow upon the Boer cause from which it was never able to recover.

Small, brown, and wrinkled, with puckered eyes and alert manner, Lord Roberts in spite of his sixty-seven years preserves the figure and energy of youth. The active open-air life of India keeps men fit for the saddle when in England they would only sit their club armchairs, and it is hard for any one who sees the wiry figure and brisk step of Lord Roberts to realise that he has spent forty-one years of soldiering in what used to be regarded as an unhealthy climate. He had carried into late life the habit of martial exercise, and a Russian traveller has left it on record that the sight which surprised him most in India was to see the veteran commander of the army ride forth with his spear and carry off the peg with the skill of a practised trooper. In his early youth he had shown in the Mutiny that he possessed the fighting energy of the soldier to a remarkable degree, but it was only in the Afghan War of 1880 that he had an opportunity of proving that he had rarer and more valuable gifts, the power of swift resolution and determined execution. At the crisis of the war he and his army disappeared entirely from the public ken only to emerge dramatically as victors at a point three hundred miles distant from where they had vanished.

It is not only as a soldier, but as a man, that Lord Roberts possesses some remarkable characteristics. He has in a supreme degree that magnetic quality which draws not merely the respect but the love of those who know him. In Chaucer's phrase, he is a very perfect gentle knight. Soldiers and regimental officers have for him a feeling of personal affection such as the unemotional British Army has never had for any leader in the course of our history. His chivalrous courtesy, his unerring tact, his kindly nature, his unselfish and untiring devotion to their interests have all endeared him to those rough loyal natures, who would follow him with as much confidence and devotion as the grognards of the Guard had in the case of the Great Emperor. There were some who feared that in Roberts's case, as in so many more, the donga and kopje of South Africa might form the grave and headstone of a military reputation, but far from this being so he consistently showed a wide sweep of strategy and a power of conceiving the effect of scattered movements over a great extent of country which have surprised his warmest admirers. In the second week of February his dispositions were ready, and there followed the swift series of blows which brought the Boers upon their knees. Of these we shall only describe here the exploits of the fine force of cavalry which, after a ride of a hundred miles, broke out of the heart of that reddish dustcloud and swept the Boer besiegers away from hard-pressed Kimberley.

In order to strike unexpectedly, Lord Roberts had not only made a strong demonstration at Koodoosdrift, at the other end of the Boer line, but he had withdrawn his main force some forty miles south, taking them down by rail to Belmont and Enslin with such secrecy that even commanding officers had no idea whither the troops were going. The cavalry which had come from French's command at Colesberg had already reached the rendezvous, travelling by road to Naauwpoort, and thence by train. This force consisted of the Carabineers, New South Wales Lancers, Inniskillings, composite regiment of Household Cavalry, 10th Hussars, with some mounted infantry and two batteries of Horse Artillery, making a force of nearly three thousand sabres. To this were added the 9th and 12th Lancers from Modder River, the 16th Lancers from India, the Scots Greys, which had been patrolling Orange River from the beginning of the war, Rimington's Scouts, and two brigades of mounted infantry under Colonels Ridley and Hannay. The force under this latter officer had a severe skirmish on its way to the rendezvous and lost fifty or sixty in killed, wounded, and missing. Five other batteries of Horse Artillery were added to the force, making seven in all, with a pontoon section of Royal Engineers. The total number of men was about five thousand. By the night of Sunday, February 11th, this formidable force had concentrated at Ramdam, twenty miles north-east of Belmont, and was ready to advance. At two in the morning of Monday, February 12th, the start was made, and the long sinuous line of night-riders moved off over the shadowy veld, the beat of twenty thousand hoofs, the clank of steel, and the rumble of gunwheels and tumbrils swelling into a deep low roar like the surge upon the shingle.

Two rivers, the Riet and the Modder, intervened between French and Kimberley. By daylight on the 12th the head of his force had reached Waterval Drift, which was found to be defended by a body of Boers with a gun. Leaving a small detachment to hold them, French passed his men over Dekiel's Drift, higher up the stream, and swept the enemy out of his position. This considerable force of Boers had come from Jacobsdal, and were just too late to get into position to resist the crossing. Had we been ten minutes later, the matter would have been much more serious. At the cost of a very small loss he held both sides of the ford, but it was not until midnight that the whole long column was brought across, and bivouacked upon the northern bank. In the morning the strength of the force was enormously increased by the arrival of one more horseman. It was Roberts himself, who had ridden over to give the men a send-off, and the sight of his wiry erect figure and mahogany face sent them full of fire and confidence upon their way.

But the march of this second day (February 13th) was a military operation of some difficulty. Thirty long waterless miles had to be done before they could reach the Modder, and it was possible that even then they might have to fight an action before winning the drift. The weather was very hot, and through the long day the sun beat down from an unclouded sky, while the soldiers were only shaded by the dust-bank in which they rode. A broad arid plain, swelling into stony hills, surrounded them on every side. Here and there in the extreme distance, mounted figures moved over the vast expanse — Boer scouts who marked in amazement the advance of this great array. Once or twice these men gathered together, and a sputter of rifle fire broke out upon our left flank, but the great tide swept on and carried them with it. Often in this desolate land the herds of mottled springbok and of grey rekbok could be seen sweeping over the plain, or stopping with that curiosity upon which the hunter trades, to stare at the unwonted spectacle.

So all day they rode, hussars, dragoons, and lancers, over the withered veld, until men and horses drooped with the heat and the exertion. A front of nearly two miles was kept, the regiments moving two abreast in open order; and the sight of this magnificent cloud of horsemen sweeping over the great barren plain was a glorious one. The veld had caught fire upon the right, and a black cloud of smoke with a lurid heart to it covered the flank. The beat of the sun from above and the swelter of dust from below were overpowering. Gun horses fell in the traces and died of pure exhaustion. The men, parched and silent, but cheerful, strained their eyes to pierce the continual mirage which played over the horizon, and to catch the first glimpse of the Modder. At last, as the sun began to slope down to the west, a thin line of green was discerned, the bushes which skirt the banks of that ill-favoured stream. With renewed heart the cavalry pushed on and made for the drift, while Major Rimington, to whom the onerous duty of guiding the force had been entrusted, gave a sigh of relief as he saw that he had indeed struck the very point at which he had aimed.

The essential thing in the movements had been speed — to reach each point before the enemy could concentrate to oppose them. Upon this it depended whether they would find five hundred or five thousand waiting on the further bank. It must have been with anxious eyes that French watched his first regiment ride down to Klip Drift. If the Boers should have had notice of his coming and have transferred some of their 40-pounders, he might lose heavily before he forced the stream. But this time, at last, he had completely outmanoeuvred them. He came with the news of his coming, and Broadwood with the 12th Lancers rushed the drift. The small Boer force saved itself by flight, and the camp, the wagons, and the supplies remained with the victors. On the night of the 13th he had secured the passage of the Modder, and up to the early morning the horses and the guns were splashing through its coffee-coloured waters.

French's force had now come level to the main position of the Boers, but had struck it upon the extreme left wing. The extreme right wing, thanks to the Koodoosdrift demonstration, was fifty miles off, and this line was naturally very thinly held, save only at the central position of Magersfontein. Cronje could not denude this central position, for he saw Methuen still waiting in front of him, and in any case Klip Drift is twenty-five miles from Magersfontein. But the Boer left wing, though scattered, gathered into some sort of cohesion on Wednesday (February 14th), and made an effort to check the victorious progress of the cavalry. It was necessary on this day to rest at Klip Drift, until Kelly-Kenny should come up with the infantry to hold what had been gained. All day the small bodies of Boers came riding in and taking up positions between the column and its objective.

Next morning the advance was resumed, the column being still forty miles from Kimberley with the enemy in unknown force between. Some four miles out French came upon their position, two hills with a long low nek between, from which came a brisk rifle fire supported by artillery. But French was not only not to be stopped, but could not even be retarded. Disregarding the Boer fire completely the cavalry swept in wave after wave over the low nek, and so round the base of the hills. The Boer riflemen upon the kopjes must have seen a magnificent military spectacle as regiment after regiment, the 9th Lancers leading, all in very open order, swept across the plain at a gallop, and so passed over the nek. A few score horses and half as many men were left behind them, but forty or fifty Boers were cut down in the pursuit. It appears to have been one of the very few occasions during the campaign when that obsolete and absurd weapon the sword was anything but a dead weight to its bearer.

And now the force had a straight run in before it, for it had outpaced any further force of Boers which may have been advancing from the direction of Magersfontein. The horses, which had come a hundred miles in four days with insufficient food and water, were so done that it was no uncommon sight to see the trooper not only walking to ease his horse, but carrying part of his monstrous weight of saddle gear. But in spite of fatigue the force pressed on until in the afternoon a distant view was seen, across the reddish plain, of the brick houses and corrugated roofs of Kimberley. The Boer besiegers cleared off in front of it, and that night (February 15th) the relieving column camped on the plain two miles away, while French and his staff rode in to the rescued city.

The war was a cruel one for the cavalry, who were handicapped throughout by the nature of the country and by the tactics of the enemy. They are certainly the branch of the service which had least opportunity for distinction. The work of scouting and patrolling is the most dangerous which a soldier can undertake, and yet from its very nature it can find no chronicler. The war correspondent, like Providence, is always with the big battalions, and there never was a campaign in which there was more unrecorded heroism, the heroism of the picket and of the vedette which finds its way into no newspaper paragraph. But in the larger operations of the war it is difficult to say that cavalry, as cavalry, have justified their existence. In the opinion of many the tendency of the future will be to convert the whole force into mounted infantry. How little is required to turn our troopers into excellent foot soldiers was shown at Magersfontein, where the 12th Lancers, dismounted by the command of their colonel, Lord Airlie, held back the threatened flank attack all the morning. A little training in taking cover, leggings instead of boots, and a rifle instead of a carbine would give us a formidable force of twenty thousand men who could do all that our cavalry does, and a great deal more besides. It is undoubtedly possible on many occasions in this war, at Colesberg, at Diamond Hill, to say ‘Here our cavalry did well.’ They are brave men on good horses, and they may be expected to do well. But the champion of the cavalry cause must point out the occasions where the cavalry did something which could not have been done by the same number of equally brave and equally well-mounted infantry. Only then will the existence of the cavalry be justified. The lesson both of the South African and of the American civil war is that the light horseman who is trained to fight on foot is the type of the future.

A few more words as a sequel to this short sketch of the siege and relief of Kimberley. Considerable surprise has been expressed that the great gun at Kamfersdam, a piece which must have weighed many tons and could not have been moved by bullock teams at a rate of more than two or three miles an hour, should have eluded our cavalry. It is indeed a surprising circumstance, and yet it was due to no inertia on the part of our leaders, but rather to one of the finest examples of Boer tenacity in the whole course of the war. The instant that Kekewich was sure of relief he mustered every available man and sent him out to endeavour to get the gun. It had already been removed, and its retreat was covered by the strong position of Dronfield, which was held both by riflemen and by light artillery. Finding himself unable to force it, Murray, the commander of the detachment, remained in front of it. Next morning (Friday) at three o’clock the weary men and horses of two of French’s brigades were afoot with the same object. But still the Boers were obstinately holding on to Dronfield, and still their position was too strong to force, and too extended to get round with exhausted horses. It was not until the night after that the Boers abandoned their excellent rearguard action, leaving one light gun in the hands of the Cape Police, but having gained such a start for their heavy one that French, who had other and more important objects in view, could not attempt to follow it.

CHAPTER 19. PAARDEBERG.

Lord Roberts’s operations, prepared with admirable secrecy and carried out with extreme energy, aimed at two different results, each of which he was fortunate enough to attain. The first was that an overpowering force of cavalry should ride round the Boer position and raise the siege of Kimberley: the fate of this expedition has already been described. The second was that the infantry, following hard on the heels of the cavalry, and holding all that they had gained, should establish itself upon Cronje’s left flank and cut his connection with Bloemfontein. It is this portion of the operations which has now to be described.

The infantry force which General Roberts had assembled was a very formidable one. The Guards he had left under Methuen in front of the lines of Magersfontein to contain the Boer force. With them he had also left those regiments which had fought in the 9th Brigade in all Methuen’s actions. These, as will be remembered, were the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 2nd Northamptons, and one wing of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. These stayed to hold Cronje in his position.

There remained three divisions of infantry, one of which, the ninth, was made up on the spot. These were constituted in this way:

Sixth Division (Kelly-Kenny).
12th Brigade (Knox).
Oxford Light Infantry.
Gloucesters (2nd).
West Riding.
Buffs.
18th Brigade (Stephenson).
Essex.
Welsh.
Warwicks.
Yorks Seventh Division (Tucker).
14th Brigade (Chermside).
Scots Borderers.
Lincolns.

Hampshires.
Norfolks.
15th Brigade (Wavell).
North Staffords.
Cheshires.
S. Wales Borderers.
East Lancashires Ninth Division (Colvile).
Highland Brigade (Macdonald).
Black Watch.
Argyll and Sutherlands.
Seaforths.
Highland Light Infantry.
19th Brigade (Smith-Dorrien).
Gordons.
Canadians.
Shropshire Light Infantry.
Cornwall Light Infantry.

With these were two brigade divisions of artillery under General Marshall, the first containing the 18th, 62nd, and 75th batteries (Colonel Hall), the other the 76th, 81st, and 82nd (Colonel McDonnell). Besides these there were a howitzer battery, a naval contingent of four 4.7 guns and four 12-pounders under Captain Bearcroft of the ‘Philomel.’ The force was soon increased by the transfer of the Guards and the arrival of more artillery; but the numbers which started on Monday, February 12th, amounted roughly to twenty-five thousand foot and eight thousand horse with 98 guns — a considerable army to handle in a foodless and almost waterless country. Seven hundred wagons drawn by eleven thousand mules and oxen, all collected by the genius for preparation and organisation which characterises Lord Kitchener, groaned and creaked behind the columns.

Both arms had concentrated at Ramdam, the cavalry going down by road, and the infantry by rail as far as Belmont or Enslin. On Monday, February 12th, the cavalry had started, and on Tuesday the infantry were pressing hard after them. The first thing was to secure a position upon Cronje’s flank, and for that purpose the 6th Division and the 9th (Kelly-Kenny’s and Colvile’s) pushed swiftly on and arrived on Thursday, February 15th, at Klip Drift on the Modder, which had only been left by the cavalry that same morning. It was obviously impossible to leave Jacobsdal in the hands of the enemy on our left flank, so the 7th Division (Tucker's) turned aside to attack the town. Wavell's brigade carried the place after a sharp skirmish, chiefly remarkable for the fact that the City Imperial Volunteers found themselves under fire for the first time and bore themselves with the gallantry of the old train-bands whose descendants they are. Our loss was two killed and twenty wounded, and we found ourselves for the first time firmly established in one of the enemy's towns. In the excellent German hospital were thirty or forty of our wounded.

On the afternoon of Thursday, February 15th, our cavalry, having left Klip Drift in the morning, were pushing hard for Kimberley. At Klip Drift was Kelly-Kenny's 6th Division. South of Klip Drift at Wegdraai was Colvile's 9th Division, while the 7th Division was approaching Jacobsdal. Altogether the British forces were extended over a line of forty miles. The same evening saw the relief of Kimberley and the taking of Jacobsdal, but it also saw the capture of one of our convoys by the Boers, a dashing exploit which struck us upon what was undoubtedly our vulnerable point.

It has never been cleared up whence the force of Boers came which appeared upon our rear on that occasion. It seems to have been the same body which had already had a skirmish with Hannay's Mounted Infantry as they went up from Orange River to join the rendezvous at Ramdam. The balance of evidence is that they had not come from Colesberg or any distant point, but that they were a force under the command of Piet De Wet, the younger of two famous brothers. Descending to Waterval Drift, the ford over the Riet, they occupied a line of kopjes, which ought, one would have imagined, to have been carefully guarded by us, and opened a brisk fire from rifles and guns upon the convoy as it ascended the northern bank of the river. Numbers of bullocks were soon shot down, and the removal of the hundred and eighty wagons made impossible. The convoy, which contained forage and provisions, had no guard of its own, but the drift was held by Colonel Ridley with one company of Gordons and one hundred and fifty mounted infantry without artillery, which certainly seems an inadequate force to secure the most vital and vulnerable spot in the line of communications of an army of forty thousand men. The Boers numbered at the first some five or six hundred men, but their position was such that they could not be attacked. On the other hand they were not strong enough to leave their shelter in order to drive in the British guard, who, lying in extended order between the wagons and the assailants, were keeping up a steady and effective fire. Captain Head, of the East Lancashire Regiment, a fine natural soldier, commanded the British firing line, and neither he nor any of his men doubted that they could hold off the enemy for an indefinite time. In the course of the afternoon reinforcements arrived for the Boers, but Kitchener’s Horse and a field battery came back and restored the balance of power. In the evening the latter swayed altogether in favour of the British, as Tucker appeared upon the scene with the whole of the 14th Brigade; but as the question of an assault was being debated a positive order arrived from Lord Roberts that the convoy should be abandoned and the force return.

If Lord Roberts needed justification for this decision, the future course of events will furnish it. One of Napoleon’s maxims in war was to concentrate all one’s energies upon one thing at one time. Roberts’s aim was to outflank and possibly to capture Cronje’s army. If he allowed a brigade to be involved in a rearguard action, his whole swift-moving plan of campaign might be dislocated. It was very annoying to lose a hundred and eighty wagons, but it only meant a temporary inconvenience. The plan of campaign was the essential thing. Therefore he sacrificed his convoy and hurried his troops upon their original mission. It was with heavy hearts and bitter words that those who had fought so long abandoned their charge, but now at least there are probably few of them who do not agree in the wisdom of the sacrifice. Our loss in this affair was between fifty and sixty killed and wounded. The Boers were unable to get rid of the stores, and they were eventually distributed among the local farmers and recovered again as the British forces flowed over the country. Another small disaster occurred to us on the preceding day in the loss of fifty men of E company of Kitchener’s Horse, which had been left as a guard to a well in the desert.

But great events were coming to obscure those small checks which are incidental to a war carried out over immense distances against a mobile and enterprising enemy. Cronje had suddenly become aware of the net which was closing round him. To the dark fierce man who had striven so hard to make his line of kopjes impregnable it must have been a bitter thing to abandon his trenches and his rifle pits. But he was crafty as well as tenacious, and he had the Boer horror of being cut off — an hereditary instinct from fathers who had fought on horseback against enemies on foot. If at any time during the last ten weeks Methuen had contained him in front with a thin line of riflemen with machine guns, and had thrown the rest of his force on Jacobsdal and the east, he would probably have attained the same result. Now at the rumour of English upon his flank Cronje instantly abandoned his position and his plans, in order to restore those communications with Bloemfontein upon which he depended for his supplies. With furious speed he drew in his right wing, and then, one huge mass of horsemen, guns, and wagons, he swept through the gap between the rear of the British cavalry bound for Kimberley and the head of the British infantry at Klip Drift. There was just room to pass, and at it he dashed with the furious energy of a wild beast rushing from a trap. A portion of his force with his heavy guns had gone north round Kimberley to Warrenton; many of the Freestaters also had slipped away and returned to their farms. The remainder, numbering about six thousand men, the majority of whom were Transvaalers, swept through between the British forces.

This movement was carried out on the night of February 15th, and had it been a little quicker it might have been concluded before we were aware of it. But the lumbering wagons impeded it, and on the Friday morning, February 16th, a huge rolling cloud of dust on the northern veld, moving from west to east, told our outposts at Klip Drift that Cronje’s army had almost slipped through our fingers. Lord Kitchener, who was in command at Klip Drift at the moment, instantly unleashed his mounted infantry in direct pursuit, while Knox’s brigade sped along the northern bank of the river to cling on to the right haunch of the retreating column. Cronje’s men had made a night march of thirty miles from Magersfontein, and the wagon bullocks were exhausted. It was impossible, without an absolute abandonment of his guns and stores, for him to get away from his pursuers.

This was no deer which they were chasing, however, but rather a grim old Transvaal wolf, with his teeth flashing ever over his shoulder. The sight of those distant white-tilted wagons fired the blood of every mounted infantryman, and sent the Oxfords, the Buffs, the West Ridings, and the Gloucesters racing along the river bank in the glorious virile air of an African morning. But there were kopjes ahead, sown with fierce Dopper Boers, and those tempting wagons were only to be reached over their bodies. The broad plain across which the English were hurrying was suddenly swept with a storm of bullets. The long infantry line extended yet further and lapped round the flank of the Boer position, and once more the terrible duet of the Mauser and the Lee-Metford was sung while the 81st field battery hurried up in time to add its deep roar to their higher chorus.

With fine judgment Cronje held on to the last moment of safety, and then with a swift movement to the rear seized a further line two miles off, and again snapped back at his eager pursuers. All day the grim and weary rearguard stalled off the fiery advance of the infantry, and at nightfall the wagons were still untaken. The pursuing force to the north of the river was, it must be remembered, numerically inferior to the pursued, so that in simply retarding the advance of the enemy and in giving other British troops time to come up, Knox's brigade was doing splendid work. Had Cronje been well advised or well informed, he would have left his guns and wagons in the hope that by a swift dash over the Modder he might still bring his army away in safety. He seems to have underrated both the British numbers and the British activity.

On the night then of Friday, February 16th, Cronje lay upon the northern bank of the Modder, with his stores and guns still intact, and no enemy in front of him, though Knox's brigade and Hannay's Mounted Infantry were behind. It was necessary for Cronje to cross the river in order to be on the line for Bloemfontein. As the river tended to the north the sooner he could cross the better. On the south side of the river, however, were considerable British forces, and the obvious strategy was to hurry them forward and to block every drift at which he could get over. The river runs between very deep banks, so steep that one might almost describe them as small cliffs, and there was no chance of a horseman, far less a wagon, crossing at any point save those where the convenience of traffic and the use of years had worn sloping paths down to the shallows. The British knew exactly therefore what the places were which had to be blocked. On the use made of the next few hours the success or failure of the whole operation must depend.

The nearest drift to Cronje was only a mile or two distant, Klipkraal the name; next to that the Paardeberg Drift; next to that the Wolveskraal Drift, each about seven miles from the other. Had Cronje pushed on instantly after the action, he might have got across at Klipkraal. But men, horses, and bullocks were equally exhausted after a long twenty-four hours' marching and fighting. He gave his weary soldiers some hours' rest, and then, abandoning seventy-eight of his wagons, he pushed on before daylight for the farthest off of the three fords (Wolveskraal Drift). Could he reach and cross it before his enemies, he was safe. The Klipkraal Drift had in the meanwhile been secured by the Buffs, the West Ridings, and the

Oxfordshire Light Infantry after a spirited little action which, in the rapid rush of events, attracted less attention than it deserved. The brunt of the fighting fell upon the Oxfords, who lost ten killed and thirty-nine wounded. It was not a waste of life, however, for the action, though small and hardly recorded, was really a very essential one in the campaign.

But Lord Roberts's energy had infused itself into his divisional commanders, his brigadiers, his colonels, and so down to the humblest Tommy who tramped and stumbled through the darkness with a devout faith that 'Bobs' was going to catch 'old Cronje' this time. The mounted infantry had galloped round from the north to the south of the river, crossing at Klip Drift and securing the southern end of Klipkraal. Thither also came Stephenson's brigade from Kelly-Kenny's Division, while Knox, finding in the morning that Cronje was gone, marched along the northern bank to the same spot. As Klipkraal was safe, the mounted infantry pushed on at once and secured the southern end of the Paardeberg Drift, whither they were followed the same evening by Stephenson and Knox. There remained only the Wolveskraal Drift to block, and this had already been done by as smart a piece of work as any in the war. Wherever French has gone he has done well, but his crowning glory was the movement from Kimberley to head off Cronje's retreat.

The exertions which the mounted men had made in the relief of Kimberley have been already recorded. They arrived there on Thursday with their horses dead beat. They were afoot at three o'clock on Friday morning, and two brigades out of three were hard at work all day in an endeavour to capture the Dronfield position. Yet when on the same evening an order came that French should start again instantly from Kimberley and endeavour to head Cronje's army off, he did not plead inability, as many a commander might, but taking every man whose horse was still fit to carry him (something under two thousand out of a column which had been at least five thousand strong), he started within a few hours and pushed on through the whole night. Horses died under their riders, but still the column marched over the shadowy veld under the brilliant stars. By happy chance or splendid calculation they were heading straight for the one drift which was still open to Cronje. It was a close thing. At midday on Saturday the Boer advance guard was already near to the kopjes which command it. But French's men, still full of fight after their march of thirty miles, threw themselves in front and seized the position before their very eyes. The last of the drifts was closed. If Cronje was to get across now, he must crawl out of his trench and fight under Roberts's conditions, or he might remain under his own conditions until Roberts's forces closed round him. With him lay the alternative. In the meantime, still ignorant of the forces about him, but finding himself headed off by French, he made his way down to the river and occupied a long stretch of it between Paardeberg Drift and Wolveskraal Drift, hoping to force his way across. This was the situation on the night of Saturday, February 17th.

In the course of that night the British brigades, staggering with fatigue but indomitably resolute to crush their evasive enemy, were converging upon Paardeberg. The Highland Brigade, exhausted by a heavy march over soft sand from Jacobsdal to Klip Drift, were nerved to fresh exertions by the word 'Magersfontein,' which flew from lip to lip along the ranks, and pushed on for another twelve miles to Paardeberg. Close at their heels came Smith-Dorrien's 19th Brigade, comprising the Shropshires, the Cornwalls, the Gordons, and the Canadians, probably the very finest brigade in the whole army. They pushed across the river and took up their position upon the north bank. The old wolf was now fairly surrounded. On the west the Highlanders were south of the river, and Smith-Dorrien on the north. On the east Kelly-Kenny's Division was to the south of the river, and French with his cavalry and mounted infantry were to the north of it. Never was a general in a more hopeless plight. Do what he would, there was no possible loophole for escape.

There was only one thing which apparently should not have been done, and that was to attack him. His position was a formidable one. Not only were the banks of the river fringed with his riflemen under excellent cover, but from these banks there extended on each side a number of dongas, which made admirable natural trenches. The only possible attack from either side must be across a level plain at least a thousand or fifteen hundred yards in width, where our numbers would only swell our losses. It must be a bold soldier and a far bolder civilian, who would venture to question an operation carried out under the immediate personal direction of Lord Kitchener; but the general consensus of opinion among critics may justify that which might be temerity in the individual. Had Cronje not been tightly surrounded, the action with its heavy losses might have been justified as an attempt to hold him until his investment should be complete. There seems, however, to be no doubt that he was already entirely surrounded, and that, as experience proved, we had only to sit round him to insure his surrender. It is not given to the greatest man to have every soldierly gift equally developed, and it may be said without offence that Lord Kitchener's cool judgment upon the actual field of battle has not yet been proved as conclusively as his longheaded power of organisation and his iron determination.

Putting aside the question of responsibility, what happened on the morning of Sunday, February 18th, was that from every quarter an assault was urged across the level plains, to the north and to the south, upon the lines of desperate and invisible men who lay in the dongas and behind the banks of the river. Everywhere there was a terrible monotony about the experiences of the various regiments which learned once again the grim lessons of Colenso and Modder River. We surely did not need to prove once more what had already been so amply proved, that bravery can be of no avail against concealed riflemen well entrenched, and that the more hardy is the attack the heavier must be the repulse. Over the long circle of our attack Knox's brigade, Stephenson's brigade, the Highland brigade, Smith-Dorrien's brigade all fared alike. In each case there was the advance until they were within the thousand-yard fire zone, then the resistless sleet of bullets which compelled them to get down and to keep down. Had they even then recognised that they were attempting the impossible, no great harm might have been done, but with generous emulation the men of the various regiments made little rushes, company by company, towards the river bed, and found themselves ever exposed to a more withering fire. On the northern bank Smith-Dorrien's brigade, and especially the Canadian regiment, distinguished themselves by the magnificent tenacity with which they persevered in their attack. The Cornwalls of the same brigade swept up almost to the river bank in a charge which was the admiration of all who saw it. If the miners of Johannesburg had given the impression that the Cornishman is not a fighter, the record of the county regiment in the war has for ever exploded the calumny. Men who were not fighters could have found no place in Smith-Dorrien's brigade or in the charge of Paardeberg.

While the infantry had been severely handled by the Boer riflemen, our guns, the 76th, 81st, and 82nd field batteries, with the 65th howitzer battery, had been shelling the river bed, though our artillery fire proved as usual to have little effect against scattered and hidden riflemen. At least, however, it distracted their attention, and made their fire upon the exposed infantry in front of them less deadly. Now, as in Napoleon's time, the effect of the guns is moral rather than material. About midday French's horse-artillery guns came into action from the north. Smoke and flames from the dongas told that some of our shells had fallen among the wagons and their combustible stores.

The Boer line had proved itself to be unshakable on each face, but at its ends the result of the action was to push them up, and to shorten the stretch of the river which was held by them. On the north bank Smith-Dorrien's brigade gained a considerable amount of ground. At the other end of the position the Welsh, Yorkshire, and Essex regiments of Stephenson's brigade did some splendid work, and pushed the Boers for some distance down the river bank. A most gallant but impossible charge was made by Colonel Hannay and a number of mounted infantry against the northern bank. He was shot with the majority of his followers. General Knox of the 12th Brigade and General Macdonald of the Highlanders were among the wounded. Colonel Aldworth of the Cornwalls died at the head of his men. A bullet struck him dead as he whooped his West Countrymen on to the charge. Eleven hundred killed and wounded testified to the fire of our attack and the grimness of the Boer resistance. The distribution of the losses among the various battalions — eighty among the Canadians, ninety in the West Riding Regiment, one hundred and twenty in the Seaforths, ninety in the Yorkshires, seventy-six in the Argyll and Sutherlands, ninety-six in the Black Watch, thirty-one in the Oxfordshires, fifty-six in the Cornwalls, forty-six in the Shropshires — shows how universal was the gallantry, and especially how well the Highland Brigade carried itself. It is to be feared that they had to face, not only the fire of the enemy, but also that of their own comrades on the further side of the river. A great military authority has stated that it takes many years for a regiment to recover its spirit and steadiness if it has been heavily punished, and yet within two months of Magersfontein we find the indomitable Highlanders taking without flinching the very bloodiest share of this bloody day — and this after a march of thirty miles with no pause before going into action. A repulse it may have been, but they hear no name of which they may be more proud upon the victory scroll of their colours.

What had we got in return for our eleven hundred casualties? We had contracted the Boer position from about three miles to less than two. So much was to the good, as the closer they lay the more effective our artillery fire might be expected to be. But it is probable that our shrapnel alone, without any loss of life, might have effected the same thing. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it does certainly appear that with our present knowledge the action at Paardeberg was as unnecessary as it was expensive. The sun descended on Sunday, February 18th, upon a bloody field and crowded field hospitals, but also upon an unbroken circle of British troops still hemming in the desperate men who lurked among the willows and mimosas which drape the brown steep banks of the Modder.

There was evidence during the action of the presence of an active Boer force to the south of us, probably the same well-handled and enterprising body which had captured our convoy at Waterval. A small party of Kitchener’s Horse was surprised by this body, and thirty men with four officers were taken prisoners. Much has been said of the superiority of South African scouting to that of the British regulars, but it must be confessed that a good many instances might be quoted in which the colonials, though second to none in gallantry, have been defective in that very quality in which they were expected to excel.

This surprise of our cavalry post had more serious consequences than can be measured by the loss of men, for by it the Boers obtained possession of a strong kopje called Kitchener’s Hill, lying about two miles distant on the south-east of our position. The movement was an admirable one strategically upon their part, for it gave their beleaguered comrades a first station on the line of their retreat. Could they only win their way to that kopje, a rearguard action might be fought from there which would cover the escape of at least a portion of the force. De Wet, if he was indeed responsible for the manoeuvres of these Southern Boers, certainly handled his small force with a discreet audacity which marks him as the born leader which he afterwards proved himself to be.

If the position of the Boers was desperate on Sunday, it was hopeless on Monday, for in the course of the morning Lord Roberts came up, closely followed by the whole of Tucker’s Division (7th) from Jacobsdal. Our artillery also was strongly reinforced. The 18th, 62nd, and 75th field batteries came up with three naval 4.7 guns and two naval 12-pounders. Thirty-five thousand men with sixty guns were gathered round the little Boer army. It is a poor spirit which will not applaud the supreme resolution with which the gallant farmers held out, and award to Cronje the title of one of the most grimly resolute leaders of whom we have any record in modern history.

For a moment it seemed as if his courage was giving way. On Monday morning a message was transmitted by him to Lord Kitchener asking for a twenty-four hours' armistice. The answer was of course a curt refusal. To this he replied that if we were so inhuman as to prevent him from burying his dead there was nothing for him save surrender. An answer was given that a messenger with power to treat should be sent out, but in the interval Cronje had changed his mind, and disappeared with a snarl of contempt into his burrows. It had become known that women and children were in the laager, and a message was sent offering them a place of safety, but even to this a refusal was given. The reasons for this last decision are inconceivable.

Lord Roberts's dispositions were simple, efficacious, and above all bloodless. Smith-Dorrien's brigade, who were winning in the Western army something of the reputation which Hart's Irishmen had won in Natal, were placed astride of the river to the west, with orders to push gradually up, as occasion served, using trenches for their approach. Chermside's brigade occupied the same position on the east. Two other divisions and the cavalry stood round, alert and eager, like terriers round a rat-hole, while all day the pitiless guns crashed their common shell, their shrapnel, and their lyddite into the river-bed. Already down there, amid slaughtered oxen and dead horses under a burning sun, a horrible pest-hole had been formed which sent its mephitic vapours over the countryside. Occasionally the sentries down the river saw amid the brown eddies of the rushing water the floating body of a Boer which had been washed away from the Golgotha above. Dark Cronje, betrayer of Potchefstroom, iron-handed ruler of natives, reviler of the British, stern victor of Magersfontein, at last there has come a day of reckoning for you!

On Wednesday, the 21st, the British, being now sure of their grip of Cronje, turned upon the Boer force which had occupied the hill to the south-east of the drift. It was clear that this force, unless driven away, would be the vanguard of the relieving army which might be expected to assemble from Ladysmith, Bloemfontein, Colesberg, or wherever else the Boers could detach men. Already it was known that reinforcements who had left Natal whenever they heard that the Free State was invaded were drawing near. It was necessary to crush the force upon the hill before it became too powerful. For this purpose the cavalry set forth, Broadwood with the 10th Hussars, 12th Lancers, and two batteries going round on one side, while French with the 9th and 16th Lancers, the Household Cavalry, and two other batteries skirted the other. A force of Boers was met and defeated, while the defenders of the hill were driven off with considerable loss. In this well-managed affair the enemy lost at least a hundred, of whom fifty were prisoners. On Friday, February 23rd, another attempt at rescue was made from the south, but again it ended disastrously for the Boers. A party attacked a kopje held by the Yorkshire regiment and were blown back by a volley, upon which they made for a second kopje, where the Buffs gave them an even rougher reception. Eighty prisoners were marched in. Meantime hardly a night passed that some of the Boers did not escape from their laager and give themselves up to our pickets. At the end of the week we had taken six hundred in all.

In the meantime the cordon was being drawn ever tighter, and the fire became heavier and more deadly, while the conditions of life in that fearful place were such that the stench alone might have compelled surrender. Amid the crash of tropical thunderstorms, the glare of lightning, and the furious thrashing of rain there was no relaxation of British vigilance. A balloon floating overhead directed the fire, which from day to day became more furious, culminating on the 26th with the arrival of four 5-inch howitzers. But still there came no sign from the fierce Boer and his gallant followers. Buried deep within burrows in the river bank the greater part of them lay safe from the shells, but the rattle of their musketry when the outposts moved showed that the trenches were as alert as ever. The thing could only have one end, however, and Lord Roberts, with admirable judgment and patience, refused to hurry it at the expense of the lives of his soldiers.

The two brigades at either end of the Boer lines had lost no chance of pushing in, and now they had come within striking distance. On the night of February 26th it was determined that Smith-Dorrien’s men should try their luck. The front trenches of the British were at that time seven hundred yards from the Boer lines. They were held by the Gordons and by the Canadians, the latter being the nearer to the river. It is worth while entering into details as to the arrangement of the attack, as the success of the campaign was at least accelerated by it. The orders were that the Canadians were to advance, the Gordons to support, and the Shropshires to take such a position on the left as would outflank any counter attack upon the part of the Boers. The Canadians advanced in the darkness of the early morning before the rise of the moon. The front rank held their rifles in the left hand and each extended right hand grasped the sleeve of the man next it. The rear rank had their rifles slung and carried spades. Nearest the river bank were two companies (G and H.) who were followed by the 7th company of Royal Engineers carrying picks and empty sand bags. The long line stole through a pitchy darkness, knowing that at any instant a blaze of fire such as flamed before the Highlanders at Magersfontein might crash out in front of them. A hundred, two, three, four, five hundred paces were taken. They knew that they must be close upon the trenches. If they could only creep silently enough, they might spring upon the defenders unannounced. On and on they stole, step by step, praying for silence. Would the gentle shuffle of feet be heard by the men who lay within stone-throw of them? Their hopes had begun to rise when there broke upon the silence of the night a resonant metallic rattle, the thud of a falling man, an empty clatter! They had walked into a line of meat-cans slung upon a wire. By measurement it was only ninety yards from the trench. At that instant a single rifle sounded, and the Canadians hurled themselves down upon the ground. Their bodies had hardly touched it when from a line six hundred yards long there came one furious glare of rifle fire, with a hiss like water on a red-hot plate, of speeding bullets. In that terrible red light the men as they lay and scraped desperately for cover could see the heads of the Boers pop up and down, and the fringe of rifle barrels quiver and gleam. How the regiment, lying helpless under this fire, escaped destruction is extraordinary. To rush the trench in the face of such a continuous blast of lead seemed impossible, and it was equally impossible to remain where they were. In a short time the moon would be up, and they would be picked off to a man. The outer companies upon the plain were ordered to retire. Breaking up into loose order, they made their way back with surprisingly little loss; but a strange contretemps occurred, for, leaping suddenly into a trench held by the Gordons, they transfixed themselves upon the bayonets of the men. A subaltern and twelve men received bayonet thrusts — none of them fortunately of a very serious nature.

While these events had been taking place upon the left of the line, the right was hardly in better plight. All firing had ceased for the moment — the Boers being evidently under the impression that the whole attack had recoiled. Uncertain whether the front of the small party on the right of the second line (now consisting of some sixty-five Sappers and Canadians lying in one mingled line) was clear for firing should the Boers leave their trenches, Captain Boileau, of the Sappers, crawled forward along the bank of the river, and discovered Captain Stairs and ten men of the Canadians, the survivors of the firing line, firmly ensconced in a crevice of the river bank overlooking the laager, quite happy on being reassured as to the proximity of support. This brought the total number of the daring band up to seventy-five rifles. Meanwhile, the Gordons, somewhat perplexed by the flying phantoms who had been flitting into and over their trenches for the past few minutes, sent a messenger along the river bank to ascertain, in their turn, if their own front was clear to fire, and if not, what state the survivors were in. To this message Colonel Kincaid, R.E., now in command of the remains of the assaulting party, replied that his men would be well entrenched by daylight. The little party had been distributed for digging as well as the darkness and their ignorance of their exact position to the Boers would permit. Twice the sound of the picks brought angry volleys from the darkness, but the work was never stopped, and in the early dawn the workers found not only that they were secure themselves, but that they were in a position to enfilade over half a mile of Boer trenches. Before daybreak the British crouched low in their shelter, so that with the morning light the Boers did not realise the change which the night had wrought. It was only when a burgher was shot as he filled his pannikin at the river that they understood how their position was overlooked. For half an hour a brisk fire was maintained, at the end of which time a white flag went up from the trench. Kincaid stood up on his parapet, and a single haggard figure emerged from the Boer warren. ‘The burghers have had enough; what are they to do?’ said he. As he spoke his comrades scrambled out behind him and came walking and running over to the British lines. It was not a moment likely to be forgotten by the parched and grimy warriors who stood up and cheered until the cry came crashing back to them again from the distant British camps. No doubt Cronje had already realised that the extreme limit of his resistance was come, but it was to that handful of Sappers and Canadians that the credit is immediately due for that white flag which fluttered on the morning of Majuba Day over the lines of Paardeberg.

It was six o’clock in the morning when General Pretyman rode up to Lord Roberts’s headquarters. Behind him upon a white horse was a dark-bearded man, with the quick, restless eyes of a hunter, middle-sized, thickly built, with grizzled hair flowing from under a tall brown felt hat. He wore the black broadcloth of the burgher with a green summer overcoat, and carried a small whip in his hands. His appearance was that of a respectable London vestryman rather than of a most redoubtable soldier with a particularly sinister career behind him.

The Generals shook hands, and it was briefly intimated to Cronje that his surrender must be unconditional, to which, after a short silence, he agreed. His only stipulations were personal, that his wife, his grandson, his secretary, his adjutant, and his servant might accompany him. The same evening he was despatched to Cape Town, receiving those honourable attentions which were due to his valour rather than to his character. His men, a pallid ragged crew, emerged from their holes and burrows, and delivered up their rifles. It is pleasant to add that, with much in their memories to exasperate them, the British privates treated their enemies with as large-hearted a courtesy as Lord Roberts had shown to their leader. Our total capture numbered some three thousand of the Transvaal and eleven hundred of the Free State. That the latter were not far more numerous was due to the fact that many had already shredded off to their farms. Besides Cronje, Wolverans of the Transvaal, and the German artillerist Albrecht, with forty-four other field-cornets and commandants, fell into our hands. Six small guns were also secured. The same afternoon saw the long column of the prisoners on its way to Modder River, there to be entrained for Cape Town, the most singular lot of people to be seen at that moment upon earth — ragged, patched, grotesque, some with goloshes, some with umbrellas, coffee-pots, and Bibles, their favourite baggage. So they passed out of their ten days of glorious history.

A visit to the laager showed that the horrible smells which had been carried across to the British lines, and the swollen carcasses which had swirled down the muddy river were true portents of its condition. Strong-nerved men came back white and sick from a contemplation of the place in which women and children had for ten days been living. From end to end it was a festering mass of corruption, overshadowed by incredible swarms of flies. Yet the engineer who could face evil sights and nauseous smells was repaid by an inspection of the deep narrow trenches in which a rifleman could crouch with the minimum danger from shells, and the caves in which the non-combatants remained in absolute safety. Of their dead we have no accurate knowledge, but two hundred wounded in a donga represented their losses, not only during a bombardment of ten days, but also in that Paardeberg engagement which had cost us eleven hundred casualties. No more convincing example could be adduced both of the advantage of the defence over the attack, and of the harmlessness of the fiercest shell fire if those who are exposed to it have space and time to make preparations.

A fortnight had elapsed since Lord Roberts had launched his forces from Ramdam, and that fortnight had wrought a complete revolution in the campaign. It is hard to recall any instance in the history of war where a single movement has created such a change over so many different operations. On February 14th Kimberley was in danger of capture, a victorious Boer army was facing Methuen, the lines of Magersfontein appeared impregnable, Clements was being pressed at Colesberg, Gatacre was stopped at Stormberg, Buller could not pass the Tugela, and Ladysmith was in a perilous condition. On the 28th Kimberley had been relieved, the Boer army was scattered or taken, the lines of Magersfontein were in our possession, Clements found his assailants retiring before him, Gatacre was able to advance at Stormberg, Buller had a weakening army in front of him, and Ladysmith was on the eve of relief. And all this had been done at the cost of a very moderate loss of life, for most of which Lord Roberts was in no sense answerable. Here at last was a reputation so well founded that even South African warfare could only confirm and increase it. A single master hand had in an instant turned England’s night to day, and had brought us out of that nightmare of miscalculation and disaster which had weighed so long upon our spirits. His was the master hand, but there were others at his side without whom that hand might have been paralysed: Kitchener the organiser, French the cavalry leader — to these two men, second only to their chief, are the results of the operations due. Henderson, the most capable head of Intelligence, and Richardson, who under all difficulties fed the army, may each claim his share in the success.

CHAPTER 20. ROBERTS’S ADVANCE ON BLOEMFONTEIN.

The surrender of Cronje had taken place on February 27th, obliterating for ever the triumphant memories which the Boers had for twenty years associated with that date. A halt was necessary to provide food for the hungry troops, and above all to enable the cavalry horses to pick up. The supply of forage had been most inadequate, and the beasts had not yet learned to find a living from the dry withered herbage of the veld. [Footnote: A battery which turned out its horses to graze found that the puzzled creatures simply galloped about the plain, and could only be reassembled by blowing the call which they associated with feeding, when they rushed back and waited in lines for their nosebags to be put on.] In addition to this, they had been worked most desperately during the fortnight which had elapsed. Lord Roberts waited therefore at Osfontein, which is a farmhouse close to Paardeberg, until his cavalry were fit for an advance. On March 6th he began his march for Bloemfontein.

The force which had been hovering to the south and east of him during the Paardeberg operations had meanwhile been reinforced from Colesberg and from Ladysmith until it had attained considerable proportions. This army, under the leadership of De Wet, had taken up a strong position a few miles to the east, covering a considerable range of kopjes. On March 3rd a reconnaissance was made of it, in which some of our guns were engaged; but it was not until three days later that the army advanced with the intention of turning or forcing it. In the meantime reinforcements had been arriving in the British camp, derived partly from the regiments which had been employed at other points during these operations, and partly from newcomers from the outer Empire. The Guards came up from Klip Drift, the City Imperial Volunteers, the Australian Mounted Infantry, the Burmese Mounted Infantry and a detachment of light horse from Ceylon helped to form this strange invading army which was drawn from five continents and yet had no alien in its ranks.

The position which the enemy had taken up at Poplars Grove (so called from a group of poplars round a farmhouse in the centre of their position) extended across the Modder River and was buttressed on either side by well-marked hills, with intermittent kopjes between. With guns, trenches, rifle pits, and barbed wire a bull-headed general might have found it another Magersfontein. But it is only just to Lord Roberts's predecessors in command to say that it is easy to do things with three cavalry brigades which it is difficult to do with two regiments. The ultimate blame does not rest with the man who failed with the two regiments, but with those who gave him inadequate means for the work which he had to do. And in this estimate of means our military authorities, our politicians, and our public were all in the first instance equally mistaken.

Lord Roberts's plan was absolutely simple, and yet, had it been carried out as conceived, absolutely effective. It was not his intention to go near any of that entanglement of ditch and wire which had been so carefully erected for his undoing. The weaker party, if it be wise, atones for its weakness by entrenchments. The stronger party, if it be wise, leaves the entrenchments alone and uses its strength to go round them. Lord Roberts meant to go round. With his immense preponderance of men and guns the capture or dispersal of the enemy's army might be reduced to a certainty. Once surrounded, they must either come out into the open or they must surrender.

On March 6th the cavalry were brought across the river, and in the early morning of March 7th they were sent off in the darkness to sweep round the left wing of the Boers and to establish themselves on the line of their retreat. Kelly-Kenny's Division (6th) had orders to follow and support this movement. Meanwhile Tucker was to push straight along the southern bank of the river, though we may surmise that his instructions were, in case of resistance, not to push his attack home. Colvile's 9th Division, with part of the naval brigade, were north of the river, the latter to shell the drifts in case the Boers tried to cross, and the infantry to execute a turning movement which would correspond with that of the cavalry on the other flank.

The plan of action was based, however, upon one supposition which proved to be fallacious. It was that after having prepared so elaborate a position the enemy would stop at least a little time to defend it. Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and on the instant that they realised that the cavalry was on their flank they made off. The infantry did not fire a shot.

The result of this very decisive flight was to derange all calculations entirely. The cavalry was not yet in its place when the Boer army streamed off between the kopjes. One would have thought, however, that they would have had a dash for the wagons and the guns, even if they were past them. It is unfair to criticise a movement until one is certain as to the positive orders which the leader may have received; but on the face of it it is clear that the sweep of our cavalry was not wide enough, and that they erred by edging to the left instead of to the right, so leaving the flying enemies always to the outside of them.

As it was, however, there seemed every possibility of their getting the guns, but De Wet very cleverly covered them by his skirmishers. Taking possession of a farmhouse on the right flank they kept up a spirited fire upon the 16th Lancers and upon P battery R.H.A. When at last the latter drove them out of their shelter, they again formed upon a low kopje and poured so galling a fire upon the right wing that the whole movement was interrupted until we had driven this little body of fifty men from their position. When, after a delay of an hour, the cavalry at last succeeded in dislodging them — or possibly it may be fairer to say when, having accomplished their purpose, they retired — the guns and wagons were out of reach, and, what is more important, the two Presidents, both Steyn and Kruger, who had come to stiffen the resistance of the burghers, had escaped.

Making every allowance for the weary state of the horses, it is impossible to say that our cavalry were handled with energy or judgment on this occasion. That such a force of men and guns should be held off from an object of such importance by so small a resistance reflects no credit upon us. It would have been better to repeat the Kimberley tactics and to sweep the regiments in extended order past the obstacle if we could not pass over it. At the other side of that little ill-defended kopje lay a possible termination of the war, and our crack cavalry regiments manoeuvred for hours and let it pass out of their reach. However, as Lord Roberts good-humouredly remarked at the end of the action, ‘In war you can’t expect everything to come out right.’ General French can afford to shed one leaf from his laurel wreath. On the other hand, no words can be too high for the gallant little band of Boers who had the courage to face that overwhelming mass of horsemen, and to bluff them into regarding this handful as a force fighting a serious rearguard action. When the stories of the war are told round the fires in the lonely veld farmhouses, as they will be for a century to come, this one deserves an honoured place.

The victory, if such a word can apply to such an action, had cost some fifty or sixty of the cavalry killed and wounded, while it is doubtful if the Boers lost as many. The finest military display on the British side had been the magnificent marching of Kelly-Kenny's 6th Division, who had gone for ten hours with hardly a halt. One 9-pound Krupp gun was the only trophy. On the other hand, Roberts had turned them out of their strong position, had gained twelve or fifteen miles on he road to Bloemfontein, and for the first time shown how helpless a Boer army was in country which gave our numbers a chance. From now onwards it was only in surprise and ambuscade that they could hope for a success. We had learned and they had learned that they could not stand in the open field.

The action of Poplars Grove was fought on March 7th. On the 9th the army was again on its way, and on the 10th it attacked the new position which the Boers had occupied at a place called Driefontein, or Abram's Kraal. They covered a front of some seven miles in such a formation that their wings were protected, the northern by the river and the southern by flanking bastions of hill extending for some distance to the rear. If the position had been defended as well as it had been chosen, the task would have been a severe one.

Since the Modder covered the enemy's right the turning movement could only be developed on their left, and Tucker's Division was thrown out very wide on that side for the purpose. But in the meanwhile a contretemps had occurred which threw out and seriously hampered the whole British line of battle. General French was in command of the left wing, which included Kelly-Kenny's Division, the first cavalry brigade, and Alderson's Mounted Infantry. His orders had been to keep in touch with the centre, and to avoid pushing his attack home. In endeavouring to carry out these instructions French moved his men more and more to the right, until he had really squeezed in between the Boers and Lord Roberts's central column, and so masked the latter. The essence of the whole operation was that the frontal attack should not be delivered until Tucker had worked round to the rear of the position. It is for military critics to decide whether it was that the flankers were too slow or the frontal assailants were too fast, but it is certain that Kelly-Kenny's Division attacked before the cavalry and the 7th Division were in their place. Kelly-Kenny was informed that the position in front of him had been abandoned, and four regiments, the Buffs, the Essex, the Welsh, and the Yorkshires, were advanced against it. They were passing over the open when the crash of the Mauser fire burst out in front of them, and the bullets hissed and thudded among the ranks. The ordeal was a very severe one. The Yorkshires were swung round wide upon the right, but the rest of the brigade, the Welsh Regiment leading, made a frontal attack upon the ridge. It was done coolly and deliberately, the men taking advantage of every possible cover. Boers could be seen leaving their position in small bodies as the crackling, swaying line of the British surged ever higher upon the hillside. At last, with a cheer, the Welshmen with their Kent and Essex comrades swept over the crest into the ranks of that cosmopolitan crew of sturdy adventurers who are known as the Johannesburg Police. For once the loss of the defence was greater than that of the attack. These mercenaries had not the instinct which teaches the Boer the right instant for flight, and they held their position too long to get away. The British had left four hundred men on the track of that gallant advance, but the vast majority of them were wounded — too often by those explosive or expansive missiles which make war more hideous. Of the Boers we actually buried over a hundred on the ridge, and their total casualties must have been considerably in excess of ours.

The action was strategically well conceived; all that Lord Roberts could do for complete success had been done; but tactically it was a poor affair, considering his enormous preponderance in men and guns. There was no glory in it, save for the four regiments who set their faces against that sleet of lead. The artillery did not do well, and were browbeaten by guns which they should have smothered under their fire. The cavalry cannot be said to have done well either. And yet, when all is said, the action is an important one, for the enemy were badly shaken by the result. The Johannesburg Police, who had been among their corps d'elite, had been badly mauled, and the burghers were impressed by one more example of the impossibility of standing in anything approaching to open country against disciplined troops, Roberts had not captured the guns, but the road had been cleared for him to Bloemfontein and, what is more singular, to Pretoria; for though hundreds of miles intervene between the field of Driefontein and the Transvaal capital, he never again met a force which was willing to look his infantry in the eyes in a pitched battle. Surprises and skirmishes were many, but it was the last time, save only at Doornkop, that a chosen position was ever held for an effective rifle fire — to say nothing of the push of bayonet.

And now the army flowed swiftly onwards to the capital. The indefatigable 6th Division, which had done march after march, one more brilliant than another, since they had crossed the Riet River, reached Asvogel Kop on the evening of Sunday, March 11th, the day after the battle. On Monday the army was still pressing onwards, disregarding all else and striking straight for the heart as Blucher struck at Paris in 1814. At midday they halted at the farm of Gregorowski, he who had tried the Reform prisoners after the Raid. The cavalry pushed on down Kaal Spruit, and in the evening crossed the Southern railway line which connects Bloemfontein with the colony, cutting it at a point some five miles from the town. In spite of some not very strenuous opposition from a Boer force a hill was seized by a squadron of Greys with some mounted infantry and Rimington’s Guides, aided by U battery R.H.A., and was held by them all that night.

On the same evening Major Hunter-Weston, an officer who had already performed at least one brilliant feat in the war, was sent with Lieutenant Charles and a handful of Mounted Sappers and Hussars to cut the line to the north. After a difficult journey on a very dark night he reached his object and succeeded in finding and blowing up a culvert. There is a Victoria Cross gallantry which leads to nothing save personal decoration, and there is another and far higher gallantry of calculation, which springs from a cool brain as well as a hot heart, and it is from the men who possess this rare quality that great warriors arise. Such feats as the cutting of this railway or the subsequent saving of the Bethulie Bridge by Grant and Popham are of more service to the country than any degree of mere valour untempered by judgment. Among other results the cutting of the line secured for us twenty-eight locomotives, two hundred and fifty trucks, and one thousand tons of coal, all of which were standing ready to leave Bloemfontein station. The gallant little band were nearly cut off on their return, but fought their way through with the loss of two horses, and so got back in triumph.

The action of Driefontein was fought on the 10th. The advance began on the morning of the 11th. On the morning of the 13th the British were practically masters of Bloemfontein. The distance is forty miles. No one can say that Lord Roberts cannot follow a victory up as well as win it.

Some trenches had been dug and sangars erected to the north-west of the town; but Lord Roberts, with his usual perverseness, took the wrong turning and appeared upon the broad open plain to the south, where resistance would have been absurd. Already Steyn and the irreconcilables had fled from the town, and the General was met by a deputation of the Mayor, the Landdrost, and Mr. Fraser to tender the submission of the capital. Fraser, a sturdy clear-headed Highlander, had been the one politician in the Free State who combined a perfect loyalty to his adopted country with a just appreciation of what a quarrel A l’outrance with the British Empire would mean. Had Fraser’s views prevailed, the Orange Free State would still exist as a happy and independent State. As it is, he may help her to happiness and prosperity as the prime minister of the Orange River Colony.

It was at half-past one on Tuesday, March 13th, that General Roberts and his troops entered Bloemfontein, amid the acclamations of many of the inhabitants, who, either to propitiate the victor, or as a sign of their real sympathies, had hoisted union jacks upon their houses. Spectators have left it upon record how from all that interminable column of yellow-clad weary men, worn with half rations and whole-day marches, there came never one jeer, never one taunting or exultant word, as they tramped into the capital of their enemies. The bearing of the troops was chivalrous in its gentleness, and not the least astonishing sight to the inhabitants was the passing of the Guards, the dandy troops of England, the body-servants of the great Queen. Black with sun and dust, staggering after a march of thirty-eight miles, gaunt and haggard, with their clothes in such a state that decency demanded that some of the men should be discreetly packed away in the heart of the dense column, they still swung into the town with the aspect of Kentish hop-pickers and the bearing of heroes. She, the venerable mother, could remember the bearded ranks who marched past her when they came with sadly thinned files back from the Crimean winter; even those gallant men could not have endured more sturdily, nor have served her more loyally, than these their worthy descendants.

It was just a month after the start from Ramdam that Lord Roberts and his army rode into the enemy’s capital. Up to that period we had in Africa Generals who were hampered for want of troops, and troops who were hampered for want of Generals. Only when the Commander-in-Chief took over the main army had we soldiers enough, and a man who knew how to handle them. The result was one which has not only solved the question of the future of South Africa, but has given an illustration of strategy which will become classical to the military student. How brisk was the course of events, how incessant the marching and fighting, may be shown by a brief recapitulation. On February 13th cavalry and infantry were marching to the utmost capacity of men and horses. On the 14th the cavalry were halted, but the infantry were marching hard. On the 15th the cavalry covered forty miles, fought an action, and relieved Kimberley. On the 16th the cavalry were in pursuit of the Boer guns all day, and were off on a thirty-mile march to the Modder at night, while the infantry were fighting Cronje’s rearguard action, and closing up all day. On the 17th the infantry were marching hard. On the 18th was the battle of Paardeberg. From the 19th to the 27th was incessant fighting with Cronje inside the laager and with De Wet outside. From the 28th to March 6th was rest. On March 7th was the action of Poplars Grove with heavy marching; on March 10th the battle of Driefontein. On the 11th and 12th the infantry covered forty miles, and on the 13th were in Bloemfontein. All this was accomplished by men on half-rations, with horses which could hardly be urged beyond a walk, in a land where water is scarce and the sun semi-tropical, each infantryman carrying a weight of nearly forty pounds. There are few more brilliant achievements in the history of British arms. The tactics were occasionally faulty, and the battle of Paardeberg was a blot upon the operations; but the strategy of the General and the spirit of the soldier were alike admirable.

CHAPTER 21. STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF LORD ROBERTS’S MARCH.

From the moment that Lord Roberts with his army advanced from Ramdam all the other British forces in South Africa, the Colesberg force, the Stormberg force, Brabant’s force, and the Natal force, had the pressure relieved in front of them, a tendency which increased with every fresh success of the main body. A short chapter must be devoted to following rapidly the fortunes of these various armies, and tracing the effect of Lord Roberts’s strategy upon their movements. They may be taken in turn from west to east.

The force under General Clements (formerly French’s) had, as has already been told, been denuded of nearly all its cavalry and horse artillery, and so left in the presence of a very superior body of the enemy. Under these circumstances Clements had to withdraw his immensely extended line, and to concentrate at Arundel, closely followed by the elated enemy. The situation was a more critical one than has been appreciated by the public, for if the force had been defeated the Boers would have been in a position to cut Lord Roberts’s line of communications, and the main army would have been in the air. Much credit is due, not only to General Clements, but to Carter of the Wiltshires, Hacket Pain of the Worcesters, Butcher of the 4th R.F.A., the admirable Australians, and all the other good men and true who did their best to hold the gap for the Empire.

The Boer idea of a strong attack upon this point was strategically admirable, but tactically there was not sufficient energy in pushing home the advance. The British wings succeeded in withdrawing, and the concentrated force at Arundel was too strong for attack Yet there was a time of suspense, a time when every man had become of such importance that even fifty Indian syces were for the first and last time in the war, to their own supreme gratification, permitted for twenty-four hours to play their natural part as soldiers. [Footnote: There was something piteous in the chagrin of these fine Sikhs at being held back from their natural work as soldiers. A deputation of them waited upon Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein to ask, with many salaams, whether ‘his children were not to see one little fight before they returned.’] But then with the rapid strokes in front the hour of danger passed, and the Boer advance became first a halt and then a retreat.

On February 27th, Major Butcher, supported by the Inniskillings and Australians, attacked Rensburg and shelled the enemy out of it. Next morning Clements’s whole force had advanced from Arundel and took up its old position. The same afternoon it was clear that the Boers were retiring, and the British, following them up, marched into Colesberg, around which they had manoeuvred so long. A telegram from Steyn to De Wet found in the town told the whole story of the retirement: ‘As long as you are able to hold the positions you are in with the men you have, do so. If not, come here as quickly as circumstances will allow, as matters here are taking a serious turn.’ The whole force passed over the Orange River unimpeded, and blew up the Norval’s Pont railway bridge behind it. Clements’s brigade followed on March 4th, and succeeded in the course of a week in throwing a pontoon bridge over the river and crossing into the Orange Free State. Roberts having in the meanwhile seized Bloemfontein, communication was restored by railway between the forces, and Clements was despatched to Phillipolis, Fauresmith, and the other towns in the south-west to receive the submission of the inhabitants and to enforce their disarmament. In the meantime the Engineers worked furiously at the restoration of the railway bridge over the Orange River, which was not, however, accomplished until some weeks later.

During the long period which had elapsed since the repulse at Stormberg, General Gatacre had held his own at Sterkstroom, under orders not to attack the enemy, repulsing them easily upon the only occasion when they ventured to attack him. Now it was his turn also to profit by the success which Lord Roberts had won. On February 23rd he re-occupied Molteno, and on the same day sent out a force to reconnoitre the enemy’s position at Stormberg. The incident is memorable as having been the cause of the death of Captain de Montmorency [Footnote: De Montmorency had established a remarkable influence over his rough followers. To the end of the war they could not speak of him without tears in their eyes. When I asked Sergeant Howe why his captain went almost alone up the hill, his answer was, ‘Because the captain knew no fear.’ Byrne, his soldier servant (an Omdurman V.C. like his master), galloped madly off next morning with a saddled horse to bring back his captain alive or dead, and had to be forcibly seized and restrained by our cavalry.], one of the most promising of the younger officers of the British army. He had formed a corps of scouts, consisting originally of four men, but soon expanding to seventy or eighty. At the head of these men he confirmed the reputation for desperate valour which he had won in the Soudan, and added to it proofs of the enterprise and judgment which go to make a leader of light cavalry. In the course of the reconnaissance he ascended a small kopje accompanied by three companions, Colonel Hoskier, a London Volunteer soldier, Vice, a civilian, and Sergeant Howe. ‘They are right on the top of us,’ he cried to his comrades, as he reached the summit, and dropped next instant with a bullet through his heart. Hoskier was shot in five places, and Vice was mortally wounded, only Howe escaping. The rest of the scouts, being farther back, were able to get cover and to keep up a fight until they were extricated by the remainder of the force. Altogether our loss was formidable rather in quality than in quantity, for not more than a dozen were hit, while the Boers suffered considerably from the fire of our guns.

On March 5th General Gatacre found that the Boers were retreating in front of him — in response, no doubt, to messages similar to those which had already been received at Colesberg. Moving forward he occupied the position which had confronted him so long. Thence, having spent some days in drawing in his scattered detachments and in mending the railway, he pushed forward on March 12th to Burghersdorp, and thence on the 13th to Olive Siding, to the south of the Bethulie Bridge.

There are two bridges which span the broad muddy Orange River, thick with the washings of the Basutoland mountains. One of these is the magnificent high railway bridge, already blown to ruins by the retreating Boers. Dead men or shattered horses do not give a more vivid impression of the unrelenting brutality of war than the sight of a structure, so graceful and so essential, blown into a huge heap of twisted girders and broken piers. Half a mile to the west is the road bridge, broad and old-fashioned. The only hope of preserving some mode of crossing the difficult river lay in the chance that the troops might anticipate the Boers who were about to destroy this bridge.

In this they were singularly favoured by fortune. On the arrival of a small party of scouts and of the Cape Police under Major Nolan-Neylan at the end of the bridge it was found that all was ready to blow it up, the mine sunk, the detonator fixed, and the wire laid. Only the connection between the wire and the charge had not been made. To make sure, the Boers had also laid several boxes of dynamite under the last span, in case the mine should fail in its effect. The advance guard of the Police, only six in number, with Nolan-Neylan at their head, threw themselves into a building which commanded the approaches of the bridge, and this handful of men opened so spirited and well-aimed a fire that the Boers were unable to approach it. As fresh scouts and policemen came up they were thrown into the firing line, and for a whole long day they kept the destroyers from the bridge. Had the enemy known how weak they were and how far from supports, they could have easily destroyed them, but the game of bluff was admirably played, and a fire kept up which held the enemy to their rifle pits.

The Boers were in a trench commanding the bridge, and their brisk fire made it impossible to cross. On the other hand, our rifle fire commanded the mine and prevented any one from exploding it. But at the approach of darkness it was certain that this would be done. The situation was saved by the gallantry of young Popham of the Derbyshires, who crept across with two men and removed the detonators. There still remained the dynamite under the further span, and this also they removed, carrying it off across the bridge under a heavy fire. The work was made absolutely complete a little later by the exploit of Captain Grant of the Sappers, who drew the charges from the holes in which they had been sunk, and dropped them into the river, thus avoiding the chance that they might be exploded next morning by shell fire. The feat of Popham and of Grant was not only most gallant but of extraordinary service to the country; but the highest credit belongs to Nolan-Neylan, of the Police, for the great promptitude and galantry of his attack, and to McNeill for his support. On that road bridge and on the pontoon bridge at Norval's Pont Lord Roberts's army was for a whole month dependent for their supplies.

On March 15th Gatacre's force passed over into the Orange Free State, took possession of Bethulie, and sent on the cavalry to Springfontein, which is the junction where the railways from Cape Town and from East London meet. Here they came in contact with two battalions of Guards under Pole-Carew, who had been sent down by train from Lord Roberts's force in the north. With Roberts at Bloemfontein, Gatacre at Springfontein, Clements in the south-west, and Brabant at Aliwal, the pacification of the southern portion of the Free State appeared to be complete. Warlike operations seemed for the moment to be at an end, and scattered parties traversed the country, ‘bill-sticking,’ as the troops called it — that is, carrying Lord Roberts’s proclamation to the lonely farmhouses and outlying villages.

In the meantime the colonial division of that fine old African fighter, General Brabant, had begun to play its part in the campaign. Among the many judicious arrangements which Lord Roberts made immediately after his arrival at the Cape was the assembling of the greater part of the scattered colonial bands into one division, and placing over it a General of their own, a man who had defended the cause of the Empire both in the legislative assembly and the field. To this force was entrusted the defence of the country lying to the east of Gatacre’s position, and on February 15th they advanced from Penhoek upon Dordrecht. Their Imperial troops consisted of the Royal Scots and a section of the 79th R.F.A., the Colonial of Brabant’s Horse, the Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles, the Cape Mounted Rifles and Cape Police, with Queenstown and East London Volunteers. The force moved upon Dordrecht, and on February 18th occupied the town after a spirited action, in which Brabant’s Horse played a distinguished part. On March 4th the division advanced once more with the object of attacking the Boer position at Labuschagne’s Nek, some miles to the north.

Aided by the accurate fire of the 79th R.F.A., the colonials succeeded, after a long day of desultory fighting, in driving the enemy from his position. Leaving a garrison in Dordrecht Brabant followed up his victory and pushed forward with two thousand men and eight guns (six of them light 7-pounders) to occupy Jamestown, which was done without resistance. On March 10th the colonial force approached Aliwal, the frontier town, and so rapid was the advance of Major Henderson with Brabant’s Horse that the bridge at Aliwal was seized before the enemy could blow it up. At the other side of the bridge there was a strong stand made by the enemy, who had several Krupp guns in position; but the light horse, in spite of a loss of some twenty-five men killed and wounded, held on to the heights which command the river. A week or ten days were spent in pacifying the large north-eastern portion of Cape Colony, to which Aliwal acts as a centre. Barkly East, Herschel, Lady Grey, and other villages were visited by small detachments of the colonial horsemen, who pushed forward also into the south-eastern portion of the Free State, passing through Rouxville, and so along the Basutoland border as far as Wepener. The rebellion in the Colony was now absolutely dead in the north-east, while in the north-west in the Prieska and Carnarvon districts it was only kept alive by the fact that the distances were so great and the rebel forces so scattered that it was very difficult for our flying columns to reach them. Lord Kitchener had returned from Paardeberg to attend to this danger upon our line of communications, and by his exertions all chance of its becoming serious soon passed. With a considerable force of Yeomanry and Cavalry he passed swiftly over the country, stamping out the smouldering embers.

So much for the movements into the Free State of Clements, of Gatacre, and of Brabant. It only remains to trace the not very eventful history of the Natal campaign after the relief of Ladysmith.

General Buller made no attempt to harass the retreat of the Boers, although in two days no fewer than two thousand wagons were counted upon the roads to Newcastle and Dundee. The guns had been removed by train, the railway being afterwards destroyed. Across the north of Natal lies the chain of the Biggarsberg mountains, and to this the Transvaal Boers had retired, while the Freestaters had hurried through the passes of the Drakensberg in time to make the fruitless opposition to Roberts's march upon their capital. No accurate information had come in as to the strength of the Transvaalers, the estimates ranging from five to ten thousand, but it was known that their position was formidable and their guns mounted in such a way as to command the Dundee and Newcastle roads.

General Lyttelton's Division had camped as far out as Elandslaagte with Burn Murdoch's cavalry, while Dundonald's brigade covered the space between Burn Murdoch's western outposts and the Drakensberg passes. Few Boers were seen, but it was known that the passes were held in some strength. Meanwhile the line was being restored in the rear, and on March 9th the gallant White was enabled to take train for Durban, though it was not until ten days later that the Colenso bridge was restored. The Ladysmith garrison had been sent down to Colenso to recruit their health. There they were formed into a new division, the 4th, the brigades being given to Howard and Knox, and the command to Lyttelton, who had returned his former division, the second, to Clery. The 5th and 6th brigades were also formed into one division, the 10th, which was placed under the capable command of Hunter, who had confirmed in the south the reputation which he had won in the north of Africa. In the first week of April Hunter's Division was sent down to Durban and transferred to the western side, where they were moved up to Kimberley, whence they advanced northwards. The man on the horse has had in this war an immense advantage over the man on foot, but there have been times when the man on the ship has restored the balance. Captain Mahan might find some fresh texts in the transference of Hunter’s Division, or in the subsequent expedition to Beira.

On April 10th the Boers descended from their mountains and woke up our sleepy army corps by a brisk artillery fire. Our own guns silenced it, and the troops instantly relapsed into their slumber. There was no movement for a fortnight afterwards upon either side, save that of Sir Charles Warren, who left the army in order to take up the governorship of British Bechuanaland, a district which was still in a disturbed state, and in which his presence had a peculiar significance, since he had rescued portions of it from Boer domination in the early days of the Transvaal Republic. Hildyard took over the command of the 5th Division. In this state of inertia the Natal force remained until Lord Roberts, after a six weeks’ halt in Bloemfontein, necessitated by the insecurity of his railway communication and his want of every sort of military supply, more especially horses for his cavalry and boots for his infantry, was at last able on May 2nd to start upon his famous march to Pretoria. Before accompanying him, however, upon this victorious progress, it is necessary to devote a chapter to the series of incidents and operations which had taken place to the east and south-east of Bloemfontein during this period of compulsory inactivity.

One incident must be recorded in this place, though it was political rather than military. This was the interchange of notes concerning peace between Paul Kruger and Lord Salisbury. There is an old English jingle about ‘the fault of the Dutch, giving too little and asking too much,’ but surely there was never a more singular example of it than this. The united Presidents prepare for war for years, spring an insulting ultimatum upon us, invade our unfortunate Colonies, solemnly annex all the portions invaded, and then, when at last driven back, propose a peace which shall secure for them the whole point originally at issue. It is difficult to believe that the proposals could have been seriously meant, but more probable that the plan may have been to strengthen the hands of the Peace deputation who were being sent to endeavour to secure European intervention. Could they point to a proposal from the Transvaal and a refusal from England, it might, if not too curiously examined, excite the sympathy of those who follow emotions rather than facts.

The documents were as follow: —

‘The Presidents of the Orange Free State and of the South African Republic to the Marquess of Salisbury. Bloemfontein March 5th, 1900.

‘The blood and the tears of the thousands who have suffered by this war, and the prospect of all the moral and economic ruin with which South Africa is now threatened, make it necessary for both belligerents to ask themselves dispassionately and as in the sight of the Triune God for what they are fighting and whether the aim of each justifies all this appalling misery and devastation.

‘With this object, and in view of the assertions of various British statesmen to the effect that this war was begun and is carried on with the set purpose of undermining Her Majesty’s authority in South Africa, and of setting up an administration over all South Africa independent of Her Majesty’s Government, we consider it our duty to solemnly declare that this war was undertaken solely as a defensive measure to safeguard the threatened independence of the South African Republic, and is only continued in order to secure and safeguard the incontestable independence of both Republics as sovereign international States, and to obtain the assurance that those of Her Majesty’s subjects who have taken part with us in this war shall suffer no harm whatsoever in person or property.

‘On these conditions, but on these conditions alone, are we now as in the past desirous of seeing peace re-established in South Africa, and of putting an end to the evils now reigning over South Africa; while, if Her Majesty’s Government is determined to destroy the independence of the Republics, there is nothing left to us and to our people but to persevere to the end in the course already begun, in spite of the overwhelming pre-eminence of the British Empire, conscious that that God who lighted the inextinguishable fire of the love of freedom in our hearts and those of our fathers will not forsake us, but will accomplish His work in us and in our descendants.

‘We hesitated to make this declaration earlier to your Excellency as we feared that, as long as the advantage was always on our side, and as long as our forces held defensive positions far in Her Majesty’s Colonies, such a declaration might hurt the feelings of honour of the British people. But now that the prestige of the British Empire may be considered to be assured by the capture of one of our forces, and that we are thereby forced to evacuate other positions which we had occupied, that difficulty is over and we can no longer hesitate to inform your Government and people in the sight of the whole civilised world why we are fighting and on what conditions we are ready to restore peace.’

Such was the message, deep in its simplicity and cunning in its candour, which was sent by the old President, for it is Kruger’s style which we read in every line of it. One has to get back to facts after reading it, to the enormous war preparations of the Republics, to the unprepared state of the British Colonies, to the ultimatum, to the annexations, to the stirring up of rebellion, to the silence about peace in the days of success, to the fact that by ‘inextinguishable love of freedom’ is meant inextinguishable determination to hold other white men as helots — only then can we form a just opinion of the worth of his message. One must remember also, behind the homely and pious phraseology, that one is dealing with a man who has been too cunning for us again and again — a man who is as wily as the savages with whom he has treated and fought. This Paul Kruger with the simple words of peace is the same Paul Kruger who with gentle sayings insured the disarmament of Johannesburg, and then instantly arrested his enemies — the man whose name was a by-word for ‘slimness’ [craftiness] throughout South Africa. With such a man the best weapon is absolute naked truth with which Lord Salisbury confronted him in his reply: —

Foreign Office: March 11th.

‘I have the honour to acknowledge your Honours’ telegram dated March 5th from Bloemfontein, of which the purport was principally to demand that Her Majesty’s Government shall recognise the “incontestable independence” of the South African Republic and Orange Free State as “sovereign international States,” and to offer on those terms to bring the war to a conclusion.

‘In the beginning of October last peace existed between Her Majesty and the two Republics under the conventions which then were in existence. A discussion had been proceeding for some months between Her Majesty’s Government and the South African Republic, of which the object was to obtain redress for certain very serious grievances under which British residents in the Republic were suffering. In the course of those negotiations the Republic had, to the knowledge of Her Majesty’s Government, made considerable armaments, and the latter had consequently taken steps to provide corresponding reinforcements to the British garrisons of Cape Town and Natal. No infringement of the rights guaranteed by the conventions had up to that time taken place on the British side. Suddenly, at two days' notice, the South African Republic, after issuing an insulting ultimatum, declared war, and the Orange Free State with whom there had not even been any discussion, took a similar step. Her Majesty's dominions were immediately invaded by the two Republics, siege was laid to three towns within the British frontier, a large portion of the two Colonies was overrun with great destruction to property and life, and the Republics claimed to treat the inhabitants as if those dominions had been annexed to one or other of them. In anticipation of these operations the South African Republic had been accumulating for many years past military stores upon an enormous scale, which by their character could only have been intended for use against Great Britain.

'Your Honours make some observations of a negative character upon the object with which these preparations were made. I do not think it necessary to discuss the questions which you have raised. But the result of these preparations, carried on with great secrecy, has been that the British Empire has been compelled to confront an invasion which has entailed a costly war and the loss of thousands of precious lives. This great calamity has been the penalty which Great Britain has suffered for having in recent years acquiesced in the existence of the two Republics.

'In view of the use to which the two Republics have put the position which was given to them, and the calamities which their unprovoked attack has inflicted upon Her Majesty's dominions, Her Majesty's Government can only answer your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the independence either of the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State.'

With this frank and uncompromising reply the Empire, with the exception of a small party of dupes and doctrinaires, heartily agreed. The pens were dropped, and the Mauser and the Lee-Metford once more took up the debate.

CHAPTER 22. THE HALT AT BLOEMFONTEIN.

On March 13th Lord Roberts occupied the capital of the Orange Free State. On May 1st, more than six weeks later, the advance was resumed. This long delay was absolutely necessary in order to supply the place of the ten thousand horses and mules which are said to have been used up in the severe work of the preceding month. It was not merely that a large number of the cavalry chargers had died or been abandoned, but it was that of those which remained the majority were in a state which made them useless for immediate service. How far this might have been avoided is open to question, for it is notorious that General French's reputation as a horsemaster does not stand so high as his fame as a cavalry leader. But besides the horses there was urgent need of every sort of supply, from boots to hospitals, and the only way by which they could come was by two single-line railways which unite into one single-line railway, with the alternative of passing over a precarious pontoon bridge at Norval's Pont, or truck by truck over the road bridge at Bethulie. To support an army of fifty thousand men under these circumstances, eight hundred miles from a base, is no light matter, and a premature advance which could not be thrust home would be the greatest of misfortunes. The public at home and the army in Africa became restless under the inaction, but it was one more example of the absolute soundness of Lord Roberts's judgment and the quiet resolution with which he adheres to it. He issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of the Free State promising protection to all who should bring in their arms and settle down upon their farms. The most stringent orders were issued against looting or personal violence, but nothing could exceed the gentleness and good humour of the troops. Indeed there seemed more need for an order which should protect them against the extortion of their conquered enemies. It is strange to think that we are separated by only ninety years from the savage soldiery of Badajoz and San Sebastian.

The streets of the little Dutch town formed during this interval a curious object-lesson in the resources of the Empire. All the scattered Anglo-Celtic races had sent their best blood to fight for the common cause. Peace is the great solvent, as war is the powerful unifier. For the British as for the German Empire much virtue had come from the stress and strain of battle. To stand in the market square of Bloemfontein and to see the warrior types around you was to be assured of the future of the race. The middle-sized, square-set, weather-tanned, straw-bearded British regulars crowded the footpaths. There also one might see the hard-faced Canadians, the loose-limbed dashing Australians, fireblooded and keen, the dark New Zealanders, with a Maori touch here and there in their features, the gallant men of Tasmania, the gentlemen troopers of India and Ceylon, and everywhere the wild South African irregulars with their bandoliers and unkempt wiry horses, Rimington's men with the racoon bands, Roberts's Horse with the black plumes, some with pink puggarees, some with birdseye, but all of the same type, hard, rugged, and alert. The man who could look at these splendid soldiers, and, remembering the sacrifices of time, money, and comfort which most of them had made before they found themselves fighting in the heart of Africa, doubt that the spirit of the race burned now as brightly as ever, must be devoid of judgment and sympathy. The real glories of the British race lie in the future, not in the past. The Empire walks, and may still walk, with an uncertain step, but with every year its tread will be firmer, for its weakness is that of waxing youth and not of waning age.

The greatest misfortune of the campaign, one which it was obviously impolitic to insist upon at the time, began with the occupation of Bloemfontein. This was the great outbreak of enteric among the troops. For more than two months the hospitals were choked with sick. One general hospital with five hundred beds held seventeen hundred sick, nearly all enterics. A half field hospital with fifty beds held three hundred and seventy cases. The total number of cases could not have been less than six or seven thousand — and this not of an evanescent and easily treated complaint, but of the most persistent and debilitating of continued fevers, the one too which requires the most assiduous attention and careful nursing. How great was the strain only those who had to meet it can tell. The exertions of the military hospitals and of those others which were fitted out by private benevolence sufficed, after a long struggle, to meet the crisis. At Bloemfontein alone, as many as fifty men died in one day, and more than 1000 new graves in the cemetery testify to the severity of the epidemic. No men in the campaign served their country more truly than the officers and men of the medical service, nor can any one who went through the epidemic forget the bravery and unselfishness of those admirable nursing sisters who set the men around them a higher standard of devotion to duty.

Enteric fever is always endemic in the country, and especially at Bloemfontein, but there can be no doubt that this severe outbreak had its origin in the Paardeberg water. All through the campaign, while the machinery for curing disease was excellent, that for preventing it was elementary or absent. If bad water can cost us more than all the bullets of the enemy, then surely it is worth our while to make the drinking of unboiled water a stringent military offence, and to attach to every company and squadron the most rapid and efficient means for boiling it — for filtering alone is useless. An incessant trouble it would be, but it would have saved a division for the army. It is heartrending for the medical man who has emerged from a hospital full of water-born pestilence to see a regimental watercart being filled, without protest, at some polluted wayside pool. With precautions and with inoculation all those lives might have been saved. The fever died down with the advance of the troops and the coming of the colder weather.

To return to the military operations: these, although they were stagnant so far as the main army was concerned, were exceedingly and inconveniently active in other quarters. Three small actions, two of which were disastrous to our arms, and one successful defence marked the period of the pause at Bloemfontein.

To the north of the town, some twelve miles distant lies the ubiquitous Modder River, which is crossed by a railway bridge at a place named Glen. The saving of the bridge was of considerable importance, and might by the universal testimony of the farmers of that district have been effected any time within the first few days of our occupation. We appear, however, to have imperfectly appreciated how great was the demoralisation of the Boers. In a week or so they took heart, returned, and blew up the bridge. Roving parties of the enemy, composed mainly of the redoubtable Johannesburg police, reappeared even to the south of the river. Young Lygon was killed, and Colonels Crabbe and Codrington with Captain Trotter, all of the Guards, were severely wounded by such a body, whom they gallantly but injudiciously attempted to arrest when armed only with revolvers.

These wandering patrols who kept the country unsettled, and harassed the farmers who had taken advantage of Lord Roberts's proclamation, were found to have their centre at a point some six miles to the north of Glen, named Karee. At Karee a formidable line of hills cut the British advance, and these had been occupied by a strong body of the enemy with guns. Lord Roberts determined to drive them off, and on March 28th Tucker's 7th Division, consisting of Chermside's brigade (Lincolns, Norfolks, Hampshires, and Scottish Borderers), and Wavell's brigade (Cheshires, East Lancashires, North Staffords, and South Wales Borderers), were assembled at Glen. The artillery consisted of the veteran 18th, 62nd, and 75th R.F.A. Three attenuated cavalry brigades with some mounted infantry completed the force.

The movement was to be upon the old model, and in result it proved to be only too truly so. French's cavalry were to get round one flank, Le Gallais's mounted infantry round the other, and Tucker's Division to attack in front. Nothing could be more perfect in theory and nothing apparently more defective in practice. Since on this as on other occasions the mere fact that the cavalry were demonstrating in the rear caused the complete abandonment of the position, it is difficult to see what the object of the infantry attack could be. The ground was irregular and unexplored, and it was late before the horsemen on their weary steeds found themselves behind the flank of the enemy. Some of them, Le Gallais's mounted infantry and Davidson's guns, had come from Bloemfontein during the night, and the horses were exhausted by the long march, and by the absurd weight which the British troop-horse is asked to carry. Tucker advanced his infantry exactly as Kelly-Kenny had done at Driefontein, and with a precisely similar result. The eight regiments going forward in echelon of battalions imagined from the silence of the enemy that the position had been abandoned. They were undeceived by a cruel fire which beat upon two companies of the Scottish Borderers from a range of two hundred yards. They were driven back, but reformed in a donga. About half-past two a Boer gun burst shrapnel over the Lincolnshires and Scottish Borderers with some effect, for a single shell killed five of the latter regiment. Chermside's brigade was now all involved in the fight, and Wavell's came up in support, but the ground was too open and the position too strong to push the attack home. Fortunately, about four o'clock, the horse batteries with French began to make their presence felt from behind, and the Boers instantly quitted their position and made off through the broad gap which still remained between French and Le Gallais. The Brandfort plain appears to be ideal ground for cavalry, but in spite of that the enemy with his guns got safely away. The loss of the infantry amounted to one hundred and sixty killed and wounded, the larger share of the casualties and of the honour falling to the Scottish Borderers and the East Lancashires. The infantry was not well handled, the cavalry was slow, and the guns were inefficient — altogether an inglorious day. Yet strategically it was of importance, for the ridge captured was the last before one came to the great plain which stretched, with a few intermissions, to the north. From March 29th until May 2nd Karee remained the advanced post.

In the meanwhile there had been a series of operations in the east which had ended in a serious disaster. Immediately after the occupation of Bloemfontein (on March 18th) Lord Roberts despatched to the east a small column consisting of the 10th Hussars, the composite regiment, two batteries (Q and U) of the Horse Artillery, some mounted infantry, Roberts's Horse, and Rimington's Guides. On the eastern horizon forty miles from the capital, but in that clear atmosphere looking only half the distance, there stands the impressive mountain named Thabanchu (the black mountain). To all Boers it is an historical spot, for it was at its base that the wagons of the Voortrekkers, coming by devious ways from various parts, assembled. On the further side of Thabanchu, to the north and east of it, lies the richest grain-growing portion of the Free State, the centre of which is Ladybrand. The forty miles which intervene between Bloemfontein and Thabanchu are intersected midway by the Modder River. At this point are the waterworks, erected recently with modern machinery, to take the place of the insanitary wells on which the town had been dependent. The force met with no resistance, and the small town of Thabanchu was occupied.

Colonel Pilcher, the leader of the Douglas raid, was inclined to explore a little further, and with three squadrons of mounted men he rode on to the eastward. Two commandos, supposed to be Grobler's and Olivier's, were seen by them, moving on a line which suggested that they were going to join Steyn, who was known to be rallying his forces at Kroonstad, his new seat of government in the north of the Free State. Pilcher, with great daring, pushed onwards until with his little band on their tired horses he found himself in Ladybrand, thirty miles from his nearest supports. Entering the town he seized the landdrost and the field-cornet, but found that strong bodies of the enemy were moving upon him and that it was impossible for him to hold the place. He retired, therefore, holding grimly on to his prisoners, and got back with small loss to the place from which he started. It was a dashing piece of bluff, and, when taken with the Douglas exploit, leads one to hope that Pilcher may have a chance of showing what he can do with larger means at his disposal. Finding that the enemy was following him in force, he pushed on the same night for Thabanchu. His horsemen must have covered between fifty and sixty miles in the twenty-four hours.

Apparently the effect of Pilcher's exploit was to halt the march of those commandos which had been seen trekking to the north-west, and to cause them to swing round upon Thabanchu. Broadwood, a young cavalry commander who had won a name in Egypt, considered that his position was unnecessarily exposed and fell back upon Bloemfontein. He halted on the first night near the waterworks, halfway upon his journey.

The Boers are great masters in the ambuscade. Never has any race shown such aptitude for this form of warfare — a legacy from a long succession of contests with cunning savages. But never also have they done anything so clever and so audacious as De Wet's dispositions in this action. One cannot go over the ground without being amazed at the ingenuity of their attack, and also at the luck which favoured them, for the trap which they had laid for others might easily have proved an absolutely fatal one for themselves.

The position beside the Modder at which the British camped had numerous broken hills to the north and east of it. A force of Boers, supposed to number about two thousand men, came down in the night, bringing with them several heavy guns, and with the early morning opened a brisk fire upon the camp. The surprise was complete. But the refinement of the Boer tactics lay in the fact that they had a surprise within a surprise — and it was the second which was the more deadly.

The force which Broadwood had with him consisted of the 10th Hussars and the composite regiment, Rimington's Scouts, Roberts's Horse, the New Zealand and Burmah Mounted Infantry, with Q and U batteries of Horse Artillery. With such a force, consisting entirely of mounted men, he could not storm the hills upon which the Boer guns were placed, and his twelve-pounders were unable to reach the heavier cannon of the enemy. His best game was obviously to continue his march to Bloemfontein. He sent on the considerable convoy of wagons and the guns, while he with the cavalry covered the rear, upon which the long-range pieces of the enemy kept up the usual well-directed but harmless fire.

Broadwood’s retreating column now found itself on a huge plain which stretches all the way to Bloemfontein, broken only by two hills, both of which were known to be in our possession. The plain was one which was continually traversed from end to end by our troops and convoys, so that once out upon its surface all danger seemed at an end. Broadwood had additional reasons for feeling secure, for he knew that, in answer to his own wise request, Colvile’s Division had been sent out before daybreak that morning from Bloemfontein to meet him. In a very few miles their vanguard and his must come together. There were obviously no Boers upon the plain, but if there were they would find themselves between two fires. He gave no thought to his front therefore, but rode behind, where the Boer guns were roaring, and whence the Boer riflemen might ride.

But in spite of the obvious there WERE Boers upon the plain, so placed that they must either bring off a remarkable surprise or be themselves cut off to a man. Across the veld, some miles from the waterworks, there runs a deep donga or watercourse — one of many, but the largest. It cuts the rough road at right angles. Its depth and breadth are such that a wagon would dip down the incline, and disappear for about two minutes before it would become visible again at the crown of the other side. In appearance it was a huge curving ditch with a stagnant stream at the bottom. The sloping sides of the ditch were fringed with Boers, who had ridden thither before dawn and were now waiting for the unsuspecting column. There were not more than three hundred of them, and four times their number were approaching; but no odds can represent the difference between the concealed man with the magazine rifle and the man upon the plain.

There were two dangers, however, which the Boers ran, and, skilful as their dispositions were, their luck was equally great, for the risks were enormous. One was that a force coming the other way (Colvile’s was only a few miles off) would arrive, and that they would be ground between the upper and the lower millstone. The other was that for once the British scouts might give the alarm and that Broadwood’s mounted men would wheel swiftly to right and left and secure the ends of the long donga. Should that happen, not a man of them could possibly escape. But they took their chances like brave men, and fortune was their friend. The wagons came on without any scouts. Behind them was U battery, then Q, with Roberts's Horse abreast of them and the rest of the cavalry behind.

As the wagons, occupied for the most part only by unarmed sick soldiers and black transport drivers, came down into the drift, the Boers quickly but quietly took possession of them, and drove them on up the further slope. Thus the troops behind saw their wagons dip down, reappear, and continue on their course. The idea of an ambush could not suggest itself. Only one thing could avert an absolute catastrophe, and that was the appearance of a hero who would accept certain death in order to warn his comrades. Such a man rode by the wagons — though, unhappily, in the stress and rush of the moment there is no certainty as to his name or rank. We only know that one was found brave enough to fire his revolver in the face of certain death. The outburst of firing which answered his shot was the sequel which saved the column. Not often is it given to a man to die so choice a death as that of this nameless soldier.

But the detachment was already so placed that nothing could save it from heavy loss. The wagons had all passed but nine, and the leading battery of artillery was at the very edge of the donga. Nothing is so helpless as a limbered-up battery. In an instant the teams were shot down and the gunners were made prisoners. A terrific fire burst at the same instant upon Roberts's Horse, who were abreast of the guns. 'Files a bout! gallop!' yelled Colonel Dawson, and by his exertions and those of Major Pack-Beresford the corps was extricated and reformed some hundreds of yards further off. But the loss of horses and men was heavy. Major Pack-Beresford and other officers were shot down, and every unhorsed man remained necessarily as a prisoner under the very muzzles of the riflemen in the donga.

As Roberts's Horse turned and galloped for dear life across the flat, four out of the six guns [Footnote: Of the other two one overturned and could not be righted, the other had the wheelers shot and could not be extricated from the tumult. It was officially stated that the guns of Q battery were halted a thousand yards off the donga, but my impression was, from examining the ground, that it was not more than six hundred.] of Q battery and one gun (the rearmost) of U battery swung round and dashed frantically for a place of safety. At the same instant every Boer along the line of the donga sprang up and emptied his magazine into the mass of rushing, shouting soldiers, plunging horses, and screaming Kaffirs. It was for a few moments a sauve-qui-peut. Serjeant-Major Martin of U, with a single driver on a wheeler, got away the last gun of his battery. The four guns which were extricated of Q, under Major Phipps-Hornby, whirled across the plain, pulled up, unlimbered, and opened a brisk fire of shrapnel from about a thousand yards upon the donga. Had the battery gone on for double the distance, its action would have been more effective, for it would have been under a less deadly rifle fire, but in any case its sudden change from flight to discipline and order steadied the whole force. Roberts's men sprang from their horses, and with the Burmese and New Zealanders flung themselves down in a skirmish line. The cavalry moved to the left to find some drift by which the donga could be passed, and out of chaos there came in a few minutes calm and a settled purpose.

It was for Q battery to cover the retreat of the force, and most nobly it did it. A fortnight later a pile of horses, visible many hundreds of yards off across the plain, showed where the guns had stood. It was the Colenso of the horse gunners. In a devilish sleet of lead they stood to their work, loading and firing while a man was left. Some of the guns were left with two men to work them, one was loaded and fired by a single officer. When at last the order for retirement came, only ten men, several of them wounded, were left upon their feet. With scratch teams from the limbers, driven by single gunners, the twelve-pounders staggered out of action, and the skirmish line of mounted infantry sprang to their feet amid the hail of bullets to cheer them as they passed.

It was no slight task to extricate that sorely stricken force from the close contact of an exultant enemy, and to lead it across that terrible donga. Yet, thanks to the coolness of Broadwood and the steadiness of his rearguard, the thing was done. A practicable passage had been found two miles to the south by Captain Chester-Master of Rimington's. This corps, with Roberts's, the New Zealanders, and the 3rd Mounted Infantry, covered the withdrawal in turn. It was one of those actions in which the horseman who is trained to fight upon foot did very much better than the regular cavalry. In two hours' time the drift had been passed and the survivors of the force found themselves in safety.

The losses in this disastrous but not dishonourable engagement were severe. About thirty officers and five hundred men were killed, wounded, or missing. The prisoners came to more than three hundred. They lost a hundred wagons, a considerable quantity of stores, and seven twelve-pounder guns — five from U battery and two from Q. Of U battery only

Major Taylor and Sergeant-Major Martin seem to have escaped, the rest being captured en bloc. Of Q battery nearly every man was killed or wounded. Roberts’s Horse, the New Zealanders, and the mounted infantry were the other corps which suffered most heavily. Among many brave men who died, none was a greater loss to the service than Major Booth of the Northumberland Fusiliers, serving in the mounted infantry. With four comrades he held a position to cover the retreat, and refused to leave it. Such men are inspired by the traditions of the past, and pass on the story of their own deaths to inspire fresh heroes in the future.

Broadwood, the instant that he had disentangled himself, faced about, and brought his guns into action. He was not strong enough, however, nor were his men in a condition, to seriously attack the enemy. Martyr’s mounted infantry had come up, led by the Queenslanders, and at the cost of some loss to themselves helped to extricate the disordered force. Colvile’s Division was behind Bushman’s Kop, only a few miles off, and there were hopes that it might push on and prevent the guns and wagons from being removed. Colvile did make an advance, but slowly and in a flanking direction instead of dashing swiftly forward to retrieve the situation. It must be acknowledged, however, that the problem which faced this General was one of great difficulty. It was almost certain that before he could throw his men into the action the captured guns would be beyond his reach, and it was possible that he might swell the disaster. With all charity, however, one cannot but feel that his return next morning, after a reinforcement during the night, without any attempt to force the Boer position, was lacking in enterprise. [Footnote: It may be urged in General Colvile’s defence that his division had already done a long march from Bloemfontein. A division, however, which contains two such brigades as Macdonald’s and Smith-Dorrien’s may safely be called upon for any exertions. The gunner officers in Colvile’s division heard their comrades’ guns in ‘section — fire’ and knew it to be the sign of a desperate situation.] The victory left the Boers in possession of the waterworks, and Bloemfontein had to fall back upon her wells — a change which reacted most disastrously upon the enteric which was already decimating the troops.

The effect of the Sanna’s Post defeat was increased by the fact that only four days later (on April 4th) a second even more deplorable disaster befell our troops. This was the surrender of five companies of infantry, two of them mounted, at Reddersberg. So many surrenders of small bodies of troops had occurred during the course of the war that the public, remembering how seldom the word ‘surrender’ had ever been heard in our endless succession of European wars, had become very restive upon the subject, and were sometimes inclined to question whether this new and humiliating fact did not imply some deterioration of our spirit. The fear was natural, and yet nothing could be more unjust to this the most splendid army which has ever marched under the red-crossed flag. The fact was new because the conditions were new, and it was inherent in those conditions. In that country of huge distances small bodies must be detached, for the amount of space covered by the large bodies was not sufficient for all military purposes. In reconnoitring, in distributing proclamations, in collecting arms, in overawing outlying districts, weak columns must be used. Very often these columns must contain infantry soldiers, as the demands upon the cavalry were excessive. Such bodies, moving through a hilly country with which they were unfamiliar, were always liable to be surrounded by a mobile enemy. Once surrounded the length of their resistance was limited by three things: their cartridges, their water, and their food. When they had all three, as at Wepener or Mafeking, they could hold out indefinitely. When one or other was wanting, as at Reddersberg or Nicholson’s Nek, their position was impossible. They could not break away, for how can men on foot break away from horsemen? Hence those repeated humiliations, which did little or nothing to impede the course of the war, and which were really to be accepted as one of the inevitable prices which we had to pay for the conditions under which the war was fought. Numbers, discipline, and resources were with us. Mobility, distances, nature of the country, insecurity of supplies, were with them. We need not take it to heart therefore if it happened, with all these forces acting against them, that our soldiers found themselves sometimes in a position whence neither wisdom nor valour could rescue them. To travel through that country, fashioned above all others for defensive warfare, with trench and fort of superhuman size and strength, barring every path, one marvels how it was that such incidents were not more frequent and more serious. It is deplorable that the white flag should ever have waved over a company of British troops, but the man who is censorious upon the subject has never travelled in South Africa.

In the disaster at Reddersberg three of the companies were of the Irish Rifles, and two of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers — the same unfortunate regiments which had already been cut up at Stormberg. They had been detached from Gatacre's 3rd Division, the headquarters of which was at Springfontein. On the abandonment of Thabanchu and the disaster of Sanna's Post, it was obvious that we should draw in our detached parties to the east; so the five companies were ordered to leave Dewetsdorp, which they were garrisoning, and to get back to the railway line. Either the order was issued too late, or they were too slow in obeying it, for they were only halfway upon their journey, near the town of Reddersberg, when the enemy came down upon them with five guns. Without artillery they were powerless, but, having seized a kopje, they took such shelter as they could find, and waited in the hope of succour. Their assailants seem to have been detached from De Wet's force in the north, and contained among them many of the victors of Sanna's Post. The attack began at 11 A.M. of April 3rd, and all day the men lay among the stones, subjected to the pelt of shell and bullet. The cover was good, however, and the casualties were not heavy. The total losses were under fifty killed and wounded. More serious than the enemy's fire was the absence of water, save a very limited supply in a cart. A message was passed through of the dire straits in which they found themselves, and by the late afternoon the news had reached headquarters. Lord Roberts instantly despatched the Camerons, just arrived from Egypt, to Bethany, which is the nearest point upon the line, and telegraphed to Gatacre at Springfontein to take measures to save his compromised detachment. The telegram should have reached Gatacre early on the evening of the 3rd, and he had collected a force of fifteen hundred men, entrained it, journeyed forty miles up the line, detrained it, and reached Reddersberg, which is ten or twelve miles from the line, by 10.30 next morning. Already, however, it was too late, and the besieged force, unable to face a second day without water under that burning sun, had laid down their arms. No doubt the stress of thirst was dreadful, and yet one cannot say that the defence rose to the highest point of resolution. Knowing that help could not be far off, the garrison should have held on while they could lift a rifle. If the ammunition was running low, it was bad management which caused it to be shot away too fast. Captain McWhinnie, who was in command, behaved with the utmost personal gallantry. Not only the troops but General Gatacre also was involved in the disaster. Blame may have attached to him for leaving a detachment at Dewetsdorp, and not having a supporting body at Reddersberg upon which it might fall back; but it must be remembered that his total force was small and that he had to cover a long stretch of the lines of communication. As to General Gatacre's energy and gallantry it is a by-word in the army; but coming after the Stormberg disaster this fresh mishap to his force made the continuance of his command impossible. Much sympathy was felt with him in the army, where he was universally liked and respected by officers and men. He returned to England, and his division was taken over by General Chermside.

In a single week, at a time when the back of the war had seemed to be broken, we had lost nearly twelve hundred men with seven guns. The men of the Free State — for the fighting was mainly done by commandos from the Ladybrand, Winburg, Bethlehem, and Harrismith districts — deserve great credit for this fine effort, and their leader De Wet confirmed the reputation which he had already gained as a dashing and indefatigable leader. His force was so weak that when Lord Roberts was able to really direct his own against it, he brushed it away before him; but the manner in which De Wet took advantage of Roberts's enforced immobility, and dared to get behind so mighty an enemy, was a fine exhibition of courage and enterprise. The public at home chafed at this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs; but the General, constant to his own fixed purpose, did not permit his strength to be wasted, and his cavalry to be again disorganised, by flying excursions, but waited grimly until he should be strong enough to strike straight at Pretoria.

In this short period of depression there came one gleam of light from the west. This was the capture of a commando of sixty Boers, or rather of sixty foreigners fighting for the Boers, and the death of the gallant Frenchman, De Villebois-Mareuil, who appears to have had the ambition of playing Lafayette in South Africa to Kruger's Washington. From the time that Kimberley had been reoccupied the British had been accumulating their force there so as to make a strong movement which should coincide with that of Roberts from Bloemfontein. Hunter's Division from Natal was being moved round to Kimberley, and Methuen already commanded a considerable body of troops, which included a number of the newly arrived Imperial Yeomanry. With these Methuen pacified the surrounding country, and extended his outposts to Barkly West on the one side, to Boshof on the other, and to Warrenton upon the Vaal River in the centre. On April 4th news reached Boshof that a Boer commando had been seen some ten miles to the east of the town, and a force, consisting of Yeomanry, Kimberley

Light Horse, and half of Butcher’s veteran 4th battery, was sent to attack them. They were found to have taken up their position upon a kopje which, contrary to all Boer custom, had no other kopjes to support it. French generalship was certainly not so astute as Boer cunning. The kopje was instantly surrounded, and the small force upon the summit being without artillery in the face of our guns found itself in exactly the same position which our men had been in twenty-four hours before at Reddersberg. Again was shown the advantage which the mounted rifleman has over the cavalry, for the Yeomanry and Light Horsemen left their horses and ascended the hill with the bayonet. In three hours all was over and the Boers had laid down their arms. Villebois was shot with seven of his companions, and there were nearly sixty prisoners. It speaks well for the skirmishing of the Yeomanry and the way in which they were handled by Lord Chesham that though they worked their way up the hill under fire they only lost four killed and a few wounded. The affair was a small one, but it was complete, and it came at a time when a success was very welcome. One bustling week had seen the expensive victory of Karee, the disasters of Sanna’s Post and Reddersberg, and the successful skirmish of Boshof. Another chapter must be devoted to the movement towards the south of the Boer forces and the dispositions which Lord Roberts made to meet it.

CHAPTER 23. THE CLEARING OF THE SOUTH-EAST.

Lord Roberts never showed his self-command and fixed purpose more clearly than during his six weeks’ halt at Bloemfontein. De Wet, the most enterprising and aggressive of the Boer commanders, was attacking his eastern posts and menacing his line of communications. A fussy or nervous general would have harassed his men and worn out his horses by endeavouring to pursue a number of will-of-the-wisp commandos. Roberts contented himself by building up his strength at the capital, and by spreading nearly twenty thousand men along his line of rail from Bloemfontein to Bethulie. When the time came he would strike, but until then he rested. His army was not only being rehorsed and reshod, but in some respects was being reorganised. One powerful weapon which was forged during those weeks was the collection of the mounted infantry of the central army into one division, which was placed under the command of Ian Hamilton, with Hutton and Ridley as brigadiers. Hutton’s brigade contained the Canadians, New South Wales men, West Australians, Queenslanders, New Zealanders, Victorians, South Australians, and Tasmanians, with four battalions of Imperial Mounted Infantry, and several light batteries. Ridley’s brigade contained the South African irregular regiments of cavalry, with some imperial troops. The strength of the whole division came to over ten thousand rifles, and in its ranks there rode the hardiest and best from every corner of the earth over which the old flag is flying.

A word as to the general distribution of the troops at this instant while Roberts was gathering himself for his spring. Eleven divisions of infantry were in the field. Of these the 1st (Methuen’s) and half the 10th (Hunter’s) were at Kimberley, forming really the hundred-mile-distant left wing of Lord Roberts’s army. On that side also was a considerable force of Yeomanry, as General Villebois discovered. In the centre with Roberts was the 6th division (Kelly-Kenny’s) at Bloemfontein, the 7th (Tucker’s) at Karee, twenty miles north, the 9th (Colvile’s) and the 11th (Pole-Carew’s) near Bloemfontein. French’s cavalry division was also in the centre. As one descended the line towards the Cape one came on the 3rd division

(Chermside's, late Gatacre's), which had now moved up to Reddersberg, and then, further south, the 8th (Rundle's), near Rouxville. To the south and east was the other half of Hunter's division (Hart's brigade), and Brabant's Colonial division, half of which was shut up in Wepener and the rest at Aliwal. These were the troops operating in the Free State, with the addition of the division of mounted infantry in process of formation.

There remained the three divisions in Natal, the 2nd (Clery's), the 4th (Lyttelton's), and the 5th (Hildyard's, late Warren's), with the cavalry brigades of Burn-Murdoch, Dundonald, and Brocklehurst. These, with numerous militia and unbrigaded regiments along the lines of communication, formed the British army in South Africa. At Mafeking some 900 irregulars stood at bay, with another force about as large under Plumer a little to the north, endeavouring to relieve them. At Beira, a Portuguese port through which we have treaty rights by which we may pass troops, a curious mixed force of Australians, New Zealanders and others was being disembarked and pushed through to Rhodesia, so as to cut off any trek which the Boers might make in that direction. Carrington, a fierce old soldier with a large experience of South African warfare, was in command of this picturesque force, which moved amid tropical forests over crocodile-haunted streams, while their comrades were shivering in the cold southerly winds of a Cape winter. Neither our Government, our people, nor the world understood at the beginning of this campaign how grave was the task which we had undertaken, but, having once realised it, it must be acknowledged that it was carried through in no half-hearted way. So vast was the scene of operations that the Canadian might almost find his native climate at one end of it and the Queenslander at the other.

To follow in close detail the movements of the Boers and the counter movements of the British in the southeast portion of the Free State during this period would tax the industry of the historian and the patience of the reader. Let it be told with as much general truth and as little geographical detail as possible. The narrative which is interrupted by an eternal reference to the map is a narrative spoiled.

The main force of the Freestaters had assembled in the north-eastern corner of their State, and from this they made their sally southwards, attacking or avoiding at their pleasure the eastern line of British outposts. Their first engagement, that of Sanna's Post, was a great and deserved success. Three days later they secured the five companies at Reddersberg.

Warned in time, the other small British bodies closed in upon their supports, and the railway line, that nourishing artery which was necessary for the very existence of the army, was held too strongly for attack. The Bethulie Bridge was a particularly important point; but though the Boers approached it, and even went the length of announcing officially that they had destroyed it, it was not actually attacked. At Wepener, however, on the Basutoland border, they found an isolated force, and proceeded at once, according to their custom, to hem it in and to bombard it, until one of their three great allies, want of food, want of water, or want of cartridges, should compel a surrender.

On this occasion, however, the Boers had undertaken a task which was beyond their strength. The troops at Wepener were one thousand seven hundred in number, and formidable in quality. The place had been occupied by part of Brabant's Colonial division, consisting of hardy irregulars, men of the stuff of the defenders of Mafeking. Such men are too shrewd to be herded into an untenable position and too valiant to surrender a tenable one. The force was commanded by a dashing soldier, Colonel Dalgety, of the Cape Mounted Rifles, as tough a fighter as his famous namesake. There were with him nearly a thousand men of Brabant's Horse, four hundred of the Cape Mounted Rifles, four hundred Kaffrarian Horse, with some scouts, and one hundred regulars, including twenty invaluable Sappers. They were strong in guns — two seven-pounders, two naval twelve-pounders, two fifteen-pounders and several machine guns. The position which they had taken up, Jammersberg, three miles north of Wepener, was a very strong one, and it would have taken a larger force than De Wet had at his disposal to turn them out of it. The defence had been arranged by Major Cedric Maxwell, of the Sappers; and though the huge perimeter, nearly eight miles, made its defence by so small a force a most difficult matter, the result proved how good his dispositions were.

At the same time, the Boers came on with every confidence of victory, for they had a superiority in guns and an immense superiority in men. But after a day or two of fierce struggle their attack dwindled down into a mere blockade. On April 9th they attacked furiously, both by day and by night, and on the 10th the pressure was equally severe. In these two days occurred the vast majority of the casualties. But the defenders took cover in a way to which British regulars have not yet attained, and they outshot their opponents both with their rifles and their cannon. Captain Lukin's management of the artillery was particularly skilful. The weather was vile and the hastily dug trenches turned into ditches half full of water, but neither discomfort nor danger shook the courage of the gallant colonials. Assault after assault was repulsed, and the scourging of the cannon was met with stolid endurance. The Boers excelled all their previous feats in the handling of artillery by dragging two guns up to the summit of the lofty Jammersberg, whence they fired down upon the camp. Nearly all the horses were killed and three hundred of the troopers were hit, a number which is double that of the official return, for the simple reason that the spirit of the force was so high that only those who were very severely wounded reported themselves as wounded at all. None but the serious cases ever reached the hands of Dr. Faskally, who did admirable work with very slender resources. How many the enemy lost can never be certainly known, but as they pushed home several attacks it is impossible to imagine that their losses were less than those of the victorious defenders. At the end of seventeen days of mud and blood the brave irregulars saw an empty laager and abandoned trenches. Their own resistance and the advance of Brabant to their rescue had caused a hasty retreat of the enemy. Wepener, Mafeking, Kimberley, the taking of the first guns at Ladysmith, the deeds of the Imperial Light Horse — it cannot be denied that our irregular South African forces have a brilliant record for the war. They are associated with many successes and with few disasters. Their fine record cannot, I think, be fairly ascribed to any greater hardihood which one portion of our race has when compared with another, for a South African must admit that in the best colonial corps at least half the men were Britons of Britain. In the Imperial Light Horse the proportion was very much higher. But what may fairly be argued is that their exploits have proved, what the American war proved long ago, that the German conception of discipline is an obsolete fetish, and that the spirit of free men, whose individualism has been encouraged rather than crushed, is equal to any feat of arms. The clerks and miners and engineers who went up Elandslaagte Hill without bayonets, shoulder to shoulder with the Gordons, and who, according to Sir George White, saved Ladysmith on January 6th, have shown for ever that with men of our race it is the spirit within, and not the drill or the discipline, that makes a formidable soldier. An intelligent appreciation of the fact might in the course of the next few years save us as much money as would go far to pay for the war.

It may well be asked how for so long a period as seventeen days the British could tolerate a force to the rear of them when with their great superiority of numbers they could have readily sent an army to drive it away. The answer must be that Lord Roberts had despatched his trusty lieutenant, Kitchener, to Aliwal, whence he had been in heliographic communication with Wepener, that he was sure that the place could hold out, and that he was using it, as he did Kimberley, to hold the enemy while he was making his plans for their destruction. This was the bait to tempt them to their ruin. Had the trap not been a little slow in closing, the war in the Free State might have ended then and there. From the 9th to the 25th the Boers were held in front of Wepener. Let us trace the movements of the other British detachments during that time.

Brabant's force, with Hart's brigade, which had been diverted on its way to Kimberley, where it was to form part of Hunter's division, was moving on the south towards Wepener, advancing through Rouxville, but going slowly for fear of scaring the Boers away before they were sufficiently compromised. Chermside's 3rd division approached from the north-west, moving out from the railway at Bethany, and passing through Reddersberg towards Dewetsdorp, from which it would directly threaten the Boer line of retreat. The movement was made with reassuring slowness and gentleness, as when the curved hand approaches the unconscious fly. And then suddenly, on April 21st, Lord Roberts let everything go. Had the action of the agents been as swift and as energetic as the mind of the planner, De Wet could not have escaped us.

What held Lord Roberts's hand for some few days after he was ready to strike was the abominable weather. Rain was falling in sheets, and those who know South African roads, South African mud, and South African drifts will understand how impossible swift military movements are under those circumstances. But with the first clearing of the clouds the hills to the south and east of Bloemfontein were dotted with our scouts. Rundle with his 8th division was brought swiftly up from the south, united with Chermside to the east of Reddersberg, and the whole force, numbering 13,000 rifles with thirty guns, advanced upon Dewetsdorp, Rundle, as senior officer, being in command. As they marched the blue hills of Wepener lined the sky some twenty miles to the south, eloquent to every man of the aim and object of their march.

On April 20th, Rundle as he advanced found a force with artillery across his path to Dewetsdorp. It is always difficult to calculate the number of hidden men and lurking guns which go to make up a Boer army, but with some knowledge of their total at Wepener it was certain that the force opposed to him must be very inferior to his own. At Constantia Farm, where he found them in position, it is difficult to imagine that there were more than three thousand men. Their left flank was their weak point, as a movement on that side would cut them off from Wepener and drive them up towards our main force in the north. One would have thought that a containing force of three thousand men, and a flanking movement from eight thousand, would have turned them out, as it has turned them out so often before and since. Yet a long-range action began on Friday, April 20th, and lasted the whole of the 21st, the 22nd, and the 23rd, in which we sustained few losses, but made no impression upon the enemy. Thirty of the 1st Worcesters wandered at night into the wrong line, and were made prisoners, but with this exception the four days of noisy fighting does not appear to have cost either side fifty casualties. It is probable that the deliberation with which the operations were conducted was due to Rundle's instructions to wait until the other forces were in position. His subsequent movements showed that he was not a General who feared to strike.

On Sunday night (April 22nd) Pole-Carew sallied out from Bloemfontein on a line which would take him round the right flank of the Boers who were facing Rundle. The Boers had, however, occupied a strong position at Leeuw Kop, which barred his path, so that the Dewetsdorp Boers were covering the Wepener Boers, and being in turn covered by the Boers of Leeuw Kop. Before anything could be done, they must be swept out of the way. Pole-Carew is one of those finds which help to compensate us for the war. Handsome, dashing, debonnaire, he approaches a field of battle as a light-hearted schoolboy approaches a football field. On this occasion he acted with energy and discretion. His cavalry threatened the flanks of the enemy, and Stephenson's brigade carried the position in front at a small cost. On the same evening General French arrived and took over the force, which consisted now of Stephenson's and the Guards brigades (making up the 11th division), with two brigades of cavalry and one corps of mounted infantry. The next day, the 23rd, the advance was resumed, the cavalry bearing the brunt of the fighting. That gallant corps, Roberts's Horse, whose behaviour at Sanna's Post had been admirable, again distinguished itself, losing among others its Colonel, Brazier Creagh. On the 24th again it was to the horsemen that the honour and the casualties fell. The 9th Lancers, the regular cavalry regiment which bears away the honours of the war, lost several men and officers, and the 8th Hussars also suffered, but the Boers were driven from their position, and lost more heavily in this skirmish than in some of the larger battles of the campaign. The ‘pom-poms,’ which had been supplied to us by the belated energy of the Ordnance Department, were used with some effect in this engagement, and the Boers learned for the first time how unnerving are those noisy but not particularly deadly fireworks which they had so often crackled round the ears of our gunners.

On the Wednesday morning Rundle, with the addition of Pole-Carew’s division, was strong enough for any attack, while French was in a position upon the flank. Every requisite for a great victory was there except the presence of an enemy. The Wepener siege had been raised and the force in front of Rundle had disappeared as only Boer armies can disappear. The combined movement was an admirable piece of work on the part of the enemy. Finding no force in front of them, the combined troops of French, Rundle, and Chermside occupied Dewetsdorp, where the latter remained, while the others pushed on to Thabanchu, the storm centre from which all our troubles had begun nearly a month before. All the way they knew that De Wet’s retreating army was just in front of them, and they knew also that a force had been sent out from Bloemfontein to Thabanchu to head off the Boers. Lord Roberts might naturally suppose, when he had formed two cordons through which De Wet must pass, that one or other must hold him. But with extraordinary skill and mobility De Wet, aided by the fact that every inhabitant was a member of his intelligence department, slipped through the double net which had been laid for him. The first net was not in its place in time, and the second was too small to hold him.

While Rundle and French had advanced on Dewetsdorp as described, the other force which was intended to head off De Wet had gone direct to Thabanchu. The advance began by a movement of Ian Hamilton on April 22nd with eight hundred mounted infantry upon the waterworks. The enemy, who held the hills beyond, allowed Hamilton’s force to come right down to the Modder before they opened fire from three guns. The mounted infantry fell back, and encamped for the night out of range. [Footnote: This was a remarkable exhibition of the harmlessness of shell-fire against troops in open formation. I myself saw at least forty shells, all of which burst, fall among the ranks of the mounted infantry, who retired at a contemptuous walk. There were no casualties.] Before morning they were reinforced by Smith-Dorrien’s brigade (Gordons, Canadians, and Shropshires — the Cornwalls had been left behind) and some more mounted Infantry. With daylight a fine advance was begun, the brigade moving up in very extended order and the mounted men turning the right flank of the defence. By evening we had regained the waterworks, a most important point for Bloemfontein, and we held all the line of hills which command it. This strong position would not have been gained so easily if it had not been for Pole-Carew’s and French’s actions two days before, on their way to join Rundle, which enabled them to turn it from the south.

Ian Hamilton, who had already done good service in the war, having commanded the infantry at Elandslaagte, and been one of the most prominent leaders in the defence of Ladysmith, takes from this time onwards a more important and a more independent position. A thin, aquiline man, of soft voice and gentle manners, he had already proved more than once during his adventurous career that he not only possessed in a high degree the courage of the soldier, but also the equanimity and decision of the born leader. A languid elegance in his bearing covered a shrewd brain and a soul of fire. A distorted and half-paralysed hand reminded the observer that Hamilton, as a young lieutenant, had known at Majuba what it was to face the Boer rifles. Now, in his forty-seventh year, he had returned, matured and formidable, to reverse the results of that first deplorable campaign. This was the man to whom Lord Roberts had entrusted the command of that powerful flanking column which was eventually to form the right wing of his main advance. Being reinforced upon the morning after the capture of the Waterworks by the Highland Brigade, the Cornwalls, and two heavy naval guns, his whole force amounted to not less than seven thousand men. From these he detached a garrison for the Waterworks, and with the rest he continued his march over the hilly country which lies between them and Thabanchu.

One position, Israel’s Poort, a nek between two hills, was held against them on April 25th, but was gained without much trouble, the Canadians losing one killed and two wounded. Colonel Otter, their gallant leader, was one of the latter, while Marshall’s Horse, a colonial corps raised in Grahamstown, had no fewer than seven of their officers and several men killed or wounded. Next morning the town of Thabanchu was seized, and

Hamilton found himself upon the direct line of the Boer retreat. He seized the pass which commands the road, and all next day he waited eagerly, and the hearts of his men beat high when at last they saw a long trail of dust winding up to them from the south. At last the wily De Wet had been headed off! Deep and earnest were the curses when out of the dust there emerged a khaki column of horsemen, and it was realised that this was French's pursuing force, closely followed by Rundle's infantry from Dewetsdorp. The Boers had slipped round and were already to the north of us.

It is impossible to withhold our admiration for the way in which the Boer force was manoeuvred throughout this portion of the campaign. The mixture of circumspection and audacity, the way in which French and Rundle were hindered until the Wepener force had disengaged itself, the manner in which these covering forces were then withdrawn, and finally the clever way in which they all slipped past Hamilton, make a brilliant bit of strategy. Louis Botha, the generalissimo, held all the strings in his hand, and the way in which he pulled them showed that his countrymen had chosen the right man for that high office, and that his was a master spirit even among those fine natural warriors who led the separate commandos.

Having got to the north of the British forces Botha made no effort to get away, and refused to be hustled by a reconnaissance developing into an attack, which French made upon April 27th. In a skirmish the night before Kitchener's Horse had lost fourteen men, and the action of the 27th cost us about as many casualties. It served to show that the Boer force was a compact body some six or seven thousand strong, which withdrew in a leisurely fashion, and took up a defensive position at Houtnek, some miles further on. French remained at Thabanchu, from which he afterwards joined Lord Roberts' advance, while Hamilton now assumed complete command of the flanking column, with which he proceeded to march north upon Winburg.

The Houtnek position is dominated upon the left of the advancing British force by Thoba Mountain, and it was this point which was the centre of Hamilton's attack. It was most gallantly seized by Kitchener's Horse, who were quickly supported by Smith-Dorrien's men. The mountain became the scene of a brisk action, and night fell before the crest was cleared. At dawn upon May 1st the fighting was resumed, and the position was carried by a determined advance of the Shropshires, the Canadians, and the Gordons:

the Boers escaping down the reverse slope of the hill came under a heavy fire of our infantry, and fifty of them were wounded or taken. It was in this action, during the fighting on the hill, that Captain Towse, of the Gordons, though shot through the eyes and totally blind, encouraged his men to charge through a group of the enemy who had gathered round them. After this victory Hamilton's men, who had fought for seven days out of ten, halted for a rest at Jacobsrust, where they were joined by Broadwood's cavalry and Bruce Hamilton's infantry brigade. Ian Hamilton's column now contained two infantry brigades (Smith-Dorrien's and Bruce Hamilton's), Ridley's Mounted Infantry, Broadwood's Cavalry Brigade, five batteries of artillery, two heavy guns, altogether 13,000 men. With this force in constant touch with Botha's rearguard, Ian Hamilton pushed on once more on May 4th. On May 5th he fought a brisk cavalry skirmish, in which Kitchener's Horse and the 12th Lancers distinguished themselves, and on the same day he took possession of Winburg, thus covering the right of Lord Roberts's great advance.

The distribution of the troops on the eastern side of the Free State was, at the time of this the final advance of the main army, as follows — Ian Hamilton with his mounted infantry, Smith-Dorrien's brigade, Macdonald's brigade, Bruce Hamilton's brigade, and Broadwood's cavalry were at Winburg. Rundle was at Thabanchu, and Brabant's colonial division was moving up to the same point. Chermside was at Dewetsdorp, and had detached a force under Lord Castletown to garrison Wepener. Hart occupied Smithfield, whence he and his brigade were shortly to be transferred to the Kimberley force. Altogether there could not have been fewer than thirty thousand men engaged in clearing and holding down this part of the country. French's cavalry and Pole-Carew's division had returned to take part in the central advance.

Before entering upon a description of that great and decisive movement, one small action calls for comment. This was the cutting off of twenty men of Lumsden's Horse in a reconnaissance at Karee. The small post under Lieutenant Crane found themselves by some misunderstanding isolated in the midst of the enemy. Refusing to hoist the flag of shame, they fought their way out, losing half their number, while of the other half it is said that there was not one who could not show bullet marks upon his clothes or person. The men of this corps, volunteer Anglo-Indians, had abandoned the ease and even luxury of Eastern life for the hard fare and rough fighting of this most trying campaign. In coming they had set the whole empire an object-lesson in spirit, and now on their first field they set the army an example of military virtue. The proud traditions of Outram’s Volunteers have been upheld by the men of Lumsden’s Horse. Another minor action which cannot be ignored is the defence of a convoy on April 29th by the Derbyshire Yeomanry (Major Dugdale) and a company of the Scots Guards. The wagons were on their way to Rundle when they were attacked at a point about ten miles west of Thabanchu. The small guard beat off their assailants in the most gallant fashion, and held their own until relieved by Brabazon upon the following morning.

This phase of the war was marked by a certain change in the temper of the British. Nothing could have been milder than the original intentions and proclamations of Lord Roberts, and he was most ably seconded in his attempts at conciliation by General Pretyman, who had been made civil administrator of the State. There was evidence, however, that this kindness had been construed as weakness by some of the burghers, and during the Boer incursion to Wepener many who had surrendered a worthless firearm reappeared with the Mauser which had been concealed in some crafty hiding-place. Troops were fired at from farmhouses which flew the white flag, and the good housewife remained behind to charge the ‘rooinek’ extortionate prices for milk and fodder while her husband shot at him from the hills. It was felt that the burghers might have peace or might have war, but could not have both simultaneously. Some examples were made therefore of offending farmhouses, and stock was confiscated where there was evidence of double dealing upon the part of the owner. In a country where property is a more serious thing than life, these measures, together with more stringent rules about the possession of horses and arms, did much to stamp out the chances of an insurrection in our rear. The worst sort of peace is an enforced peace, but if that can be established time and justice may do the rest.

The operations which have been here described may be finally summed up in one short paragraph. A Boer army came south of the British line and besieged a British garrison. Three British forces, those of French, Rundle, and Ian Hamilton, were despatched to cut it off. It successfully threaded its way among them and escaped. It was followed to the northward as far as the town of Winburg, which remained in the British possession. Lord Roberts had failed in his plan of cutting off De Wet’s army, but, at the expense of many marches and skirmishes, the south-east of the State was cleared of the enemy.

CHAPTER 24. THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING.

This small place, which sprang in the course of a few weeks from obscurity to fame, is situated upon the long line of railway which connects Kimberley in the south with Rhodesia in the north. In character it resembles one of those western American townlets which possess small present assets but immense aspirations. In its litter of corrugated-iron roofs, and in the church and the racecourse, which are the first-fruits everywhere of Anglo-Celtic civilisation, one sees the seeds of the great city of the future. It is the obvious depot for the western Transvaal upon one side, and the starting-point for all attempts upon the Kalahari Desert upon the other. The Transvaal border runs within a few miles.

It is not clear why the imperial authorities should desire to hold this place, since it has no natural advantages to help the defence, but lies exposed in a widespread plain. A glance at the map must show that the railway line would surely be cut both to the north and south of the town, and the garrison isolated at a point some two hundred and fifty miles from any reinforcements. Considering that the Boers could throw any strength of men or guns against the place, it seemed certain that if they seriously desired to take possession of it they could do so. Under ordinary circumstances any force shut up there was doomed to capture. But what may have seemed short-sighted policy became the highest wisdom, owing to the extraordinary tenacity and resource of Baden-Powell, the officer in command. Through his exertions the town acted as a bait to the Boers, and occupied a considerable force in a useless siege at a time when their presence at other seats of war might have proved disastrous to the British cause.

Colonel Baden-Powell is a soldier of a type which is exceedingly popular with the British public. A skilled hunter and an expert at many games, there was always something of the sportsman in his keen appreciation of war. In the Matabele campaign he had out-scouted the savage scouts and found his pleasure in tracking them among their native mountains, often alone and at night, trusting to his skill in springing from rock to rock in his rubber-soled shoes to save him from their pursuit. There was a brain quality in his bravery which is rare among our officers. Full of veld craft and resource, it was as difficult to outwit as it was to outfight him. But there was another curious side to his complex nature. The French have said of one of their heroes, ‘Il avait cette graine de folie dans sa bravoure que les Francais aiment,’ and the words might have been written of Powell. An impish humour broke out in him, and the mischievous schoolboy alternated with the warrior and the administrator. He met the Boer commandos with chaff and jokes which were as disconcerting as his wire entanglements and his rifle-pits. The amazing variety of his personal accomplishments was one of his most striking characteristics. From drawing caricatures with both hands simultaneously, or skirt dancing to leading a forlorn hope, nothing came amiss to him; and he had that magnetic quality by which the leader imparts something of his virtues to his men. Such was the man who held Mafeking for the Queen.

In a very early stage, before the formal declaration of war, the enemy had massed several commandos upon the western border, the men being drawn from Zeerust, Rustenburg, and Lichtenburg. Baden-Powell, with the aid of an excellent group of special officers, who included Colonel Gould Adams, Lord Edward Cecil, the soldier son of England’s Premier, and Colonel Hore, had done all that was possible to put the place into a state of defence. In this he had immense assistance from Benjamin Weil, a well known South African contractor, who had shown great energy in provisioning the town. On the other hand, the South African Government displayed the same stupidity or treason which had been exhibited in the case of Kimberley, and had met all demands for guns and reinforcements with foolish doubts as to the need of such precautions. In the endeavour to supply these pressing wants the first small disaster of the campaign was encountered. On October 12th, the day after the declaration of war, an armoured train conveying two 7-pounders for the Mafeking defences was derailed and captured by a Boer raiding party at Kraaipan, a place forty miles south of their destination. The enemy shelled the shattered train until after five hours Captain Nesbitt, who was in command, and his men, some twenty in number, surrendered. It was a small affair, but it derived importance from being the first blood shed and the first tactical success of the war.

The garrison of the town, whose fame will certainly live in the history of South Africa, contained no regular soldiers at all with the exception of the small group of excellent officers. They consisted of irregular troops, three hundred and forty of the Protectorate Regiment, one hundred and seventy

Police, and two hundred volunteers, made up of that singular mixture of adventurers, younger sons, broken gentlemen, and irresponsible sportsmen who have always been the voortrekkers of the British Empire. These men were of the same stamp as those other admirable bodies of natural fighters who did so well in Rhodesia, in Natal, and in the Cape. With them there was associated in the defence the Town Guard, who included the able-bodied shopkeepers, businessmen, and residents, the whole amounting to about nine hundred men. Their artillery was feeble in the extreme, two 7-pounder toy guns and six machine guns, but the spirit of the men and the resource of their leaders made up for every disadvantage. Colonel Vyvyan and Major Panzera planned the defences, and the little trading town soon began to take on the appearance of a fortress.

On October 13th the Boers appeared before Mafeking. On the same day Colonel Baden-Powell sent two truckloads of dynamite out of the place. They were fired into by the invaders, with the result that they exploded. On October 14th the pickets around the town were driven in by the Boers. On this the armoured train and a squadron of the Protectorate Regiment went out to support the pickets and drove the Boers before them. A body of the latter doubled back and interposed between the British and Mafeking, but two fresh troops with a 7-pounder throwing shrapnel drove them off. In this spirited little action the garrison lost two killed and fourteen wounded, but they inflicted considerable damage on the enemy. To Captain Williams, Captain FitzClarence, and Lord Charles Bentinck great credit is due for the way in which they handled their men; but the whole affair was ill advised, for if a disaster had occurred Mafeking must have fallen, being left without a garrison. No possible results which could come from such a sortie could justify the risk which was run.

On October 16th the siege began in earnest. On that date the Boers brought up two 12-pounder guns, and the first of that interminable flight of shells fell into the town. The enemy got possession of the water supply, but the garrison had already dug wells. Before October 20th five thousand Boers, under the formidable Cronje, had gathered round the town. ‘Surrender to avoid bloodshed’ was his message. ‘When is the bloodshed going to begin?’ asked Powell. When the Boers had been shelling the town for some weeks the lighthearted Colonel sent out to say that if they went on any longer he should be compelled to regard it as equivalent to a declaration of war. It is to be hoped that Cronje also possessed some sense of humour, or else he must have been as sorely puzzled by his eccentric opponent as the Spanish generals were by the vagaries of Lord Peterborough.

Among the many difficulties which had to be met by the defenders of the town the most serious was the fact that the position had a circumference of five or six miles to be held by about one thousand men against a force who at their own time and their own place could at any moment attempt to gain a footing. An ingenious system of small forts was devised to meet the situation. Each of these held from ten to forty riflemen, and was furnished with bomb-proofs and covered ways. The central bomb-proof was connected by telephone with all the outlying ones, so as to save the use of orderlies. A system of bells was arranged by which each quarter of the town was warned when a shell was coming in time to enable the inhabitants to scuttle off to shelter. Every detail showed the ingenuity of the controlling mind. The armoured train, painted green and tied round with scrub, stood unperceived among the clumps of bushes which surrounded the town.

On October 24th a savage bombardment commenced, which lasted with intermissions for seven months. The Boers had brought an enormous gun across from Pretoria, throwing a 96-pound shell, and this, with many smaller pieces, played upon the town. The result was as futile as our own artillery fire has so often been when directed against the Boers.

As the Mafeking guns were too weak to answer the enemy’s fire, the only possible reply lay in a sortie, and upon this Colonel Powell decided. It was carried out with great gallantry on the evening of October 27th, when about a hundred men under Captain FitzClarence moved out against the Boer trenches with instructions to use the bayonet only. The position was carried with a rush, and many of the Boers bayoneted before they could disengage themselves from the tarpaulins which covered them. The trenches behind fired wildly in the darkness, and it is probable that as many of their own men as of ours were hit by their rifle fire. The total loss in this gallant affair was six killed, eleven wounded, and two prisoners. The loss of the enemy, though shrouded as usual in darkness, was certainly very much higher.

On October 31st the Boers ventured upon an attack on Cannon Kopje, which is a small fort and eminence to the south of the town. It was defended by Colonel Walford, of the British South African Police, with fifty-seven of his men and three small guns. The attack was repelled with heavy loss to the Boers. The British casualties were six killed and five wounded.

Their experience in this attack seems to have determined the Boers to make no further expensive attempts to rush the town, and for some weeks the siege degenerated into a blockade. Cronje had been recalled for more important work, and Commandant Snyman had taken over the uncompleted task. From time to time the great gun tossed its huge shells into the town, but boardwood walls and corrugated-iron roofs minimise the dangers of a bombardment. On November 3rd the garrison rushed the Brickfields, which had been held by the enemy's sharpshooters, and on the 7th another small sally kept the game going. On the 18th Powell sent a message to Snyman that he could not take the town by sitting and looking at it. At the same time he despatched a message to the Boer forces generally, advising them to return to their homes and their families. Some of the commandos had gone south to assist Cronje in his stand against Methuen, and the siege languished more and more, until it was woken up by a desperate sortie on December 26th, which caused the greatest loss which the garrison had sustained. Once more the lesson was to be enforced that with modern weapons and equality of forces it is always long odds on the defence.

On this date a vigorous attack was made upon one of the Boer forts on the north. There seems to be little doubt that the enemy had some inkling of our intention, as the fort was found to have been so strengthened as to be impregnable without scaling ladders. The attacking force consisted of two squadrons of the Protectorate Regiment and one of the Bechuanaland Rifles, backed up by three guns. So desperate was the onslaught that of the actual attacking party — a forlorn hope, if ever there was one — fifty-three out of eighty were killed and wounded, twenty-five of the former and twenty-eight of the latter. Several of that gallant band of officers who had been the soul of the defence were among the injured. Captain FitzClarence was wounded, Vernon, Sandford, and Paton were killed, all at the very muzzles of the enemy's guns. It must have been one of the bitterest moments of Baden-Powell's life when he shut his field-glass and said, 'Let the ambulance go out!'

Even this heavy blow did not damp the spirits nor diminish the energies of the defence, though it must have warned Baden-Powell that he could not afford to drain his small force by any more expensive attempts at the offensive, and that from then onwards he must content himself by holding grimly on until Plumer from the north or Methuen from the south should at last be able to stretch out to him a helping hand. Vigilant and indomitable, throwing away no possible point in the game which he was playing, the new year found him and his hardy garrison sternly determined to keep the flag flying.

January and February offer in their records that monotony of excitement which is the fate of every besieged town. On one day the shelling was a little more, on another a little less. Sometimes they escaped scatheless, sometimes the garrison found itself the poorer by the loss of Captain Girdwood or Trooper Webb or some other gallant soldier. Occasionally they had their little triumph when a too curious Dutchman, peering for an instant from his cover to see the effect of his shot, was carried back in the ambulance to the laager. On Sunday a truce was usually observed, and the snipers who had exchanged rifle-shots all the week met occasionally on that day with good-humoured chaff. Snyman, the Boer General, showed none of that chivalry at Mafeking which distinguished the gallant old Joubert at Ladysmith. Not only was there no neutral camp for women or sick, but it is beyond all doubt or question that the Boer guns were deliberately turned upon the women’s quarters inside Mafeking in order to bring pressure upon the inhabitants. Many women and children were sacrificed to this brutal policy, which must in fairness be set to the account of the savage leader, and not of the rough but kindly folk with whom we were fighting. In every race there are individual ruffians, and it would be a political mistake to allow our action to be influenced or our feelings permanently embittered by their crimes. It is from the man himself, and not from his country, that an account should be exacted.

The garrison, in the face of increasing losses and decreasing food, lost none of the high spirits which it reflected from its commander. The programme of a single day of jubilee — Heaven only knows what they had to hold jubilee over — shows a cricket match in the morning, sports in the afternoon, a concert in the evening, and a dance, given by the bachelor officers, to wind up. Baden-Powell himself seems to have descended from the eyrie from which, like a captain on the bridge, he rang bells and telephoned orders, to bring the house down with a comic song and a humorous recitation. The ball went admirably, save that there was an interval to repel an attack which disarranged the programme. Sports were zealously cultivated, and the grimy inhabitants of casemates and trenches were pitted against each other at cricket or football. [Footnote: Sunday cricket so shocked Snyman that he threatened to fire upon it if it were continued.] The monotony was broken by the occasional visits of a postman, who appeared or vanished from the vast barren lands to the west of the town, which could not all be guarded by the besiegers. Sometimes a few words from home came to cheer the hearts of the exiles, and could be returned by the same uncertain and expensive means. The documents which found their way up were not always of an essential or even of a welcome character. At least one man received an unpaid bill from an angry tailor.

In one particular Mafeking had, with much smaller resources, rivalled Kimberley. An ordnance factory had been started, formed in the railway workshops, and conducted by Connely and Cloughlan, of the Locomotive Department. Daniels, of the police, supplemented their efforts by making both powder and fuses. The factory turned out shells, and eventually constructed a 5.5-inch smooth-bore gun, which threw a round shell with great accuracy to a considerable range. April found the garrison, in spite of all losses, as efficient and as resolute as it had been in October. So close were the advanced trenches upon either side that both parties had recourse to the old-fashioned hand grenades, thrown by the Boers, and cast on a fishing-line by ingenious Sergeant Page, of the Protectorate Regiment. Sometimes the besiegers and the number of guns diminished, forces being detached to prevent the advance of Plumer’s relieving column from the north; but as those who remained held their forts, which it was beyond the power of the British to storm, the garrison was now much the better for the alleviation. Putting Mafeking for Ladysmith and Plumer for Buller, the situation was not unlike that which had existed in Natal.

At this point some account might be given of the doings of that northern force whose situation was so remote that even the ubiquitous correspondent hardly appears to have reached it. No doubt the book will eventually make up for the neglect of the journal, but some short facts may be given here of the Rhodesian column. Their action did not affect the course of the war, but they clung like bulldogs to a most difficult task, and eventually, when strengthened by the relieving column, made their way to Mafeking.

The force was originally raised for the purpose of defending Rhodesia, and it consisted of fine material pioneers, farmers, and miners from the great new land which had been added through the energy of Mr. Rhodes to the British Empire. Many of the men were veterans of the native wars, and all were imbued with a hardy and adventurous spirit. On the other hand, the men of the northern and western Transvaal, whom they were called upon to face the burghers of Watersberg and Zoutpansberg, were tough frontiersmen living in a land where a dinner was shot, not bought. Shaggy, hairy, half-savage men, handling a rifle as a mediaeval Englishman handled a bow, and skilled in every wile of veld craft, they were as formidable opponents as the world could show.

On the war breaking out the first thought of the leaders in Rhodesia was to save as much of the line which was their connection through Mafeking with the south as was possible. For this purpose an armoured train was despatched only three days after the expiration of the ultimatum to the point four hundred miles south of Bulawayo, where the frontiers of the Transvaal and of Bechuanaland join. Colonel Holdsworth commanded the small British force. The Boers, a thousand or so in number, had descended upon the railway, and an action followed in which the train appears to have had better luck than has usually attended these ill-fated contrivances. The Boer commando was driven back and a number were killed. It was probably news of this affair, and not anything which had occurred at Mafeking, which caused those rumours of gloom at Pretoria very shortly after the outbreak of hostilities. An agency telegraphed that women were weeping in the streets of the Boer capital. We had not then realised how soon and how often we should see the same sight in Pall Mall.

The adventurous armoured train pressed on as far as Lobatsi, where it found the bridges destroyed; so it returned to its original position, having another brush with the Boer commandos, and again, in some marvellous way, escaping its obvious fate. From then until the new year the line was kept open by an admirable system of patrolling to within a hundred miles or so of Mafeking. An aggressive spirit and a power of dashing initiative were shown in the British operations at this side of the scene of war such as have too often been absent elsewhere. At Sekwani, on November 24th, a considerable success was gained by a surprise planned and carried out by Colonel Holdsworth. The Boer laager was approached and attacked in the early morning by a force of one hundred and twenty frontiersmen, and so effective was their fire that the Boers estimated their numbers at several thousand. Thirty Boers were killed or wounded, and the rest scattered.

While the railway line was held in this way there had been some skirmishing also on the northern frontier of the Transvaal. Shortly after the outbreak of the war the gallant Blackburn, scouting with six comrades in thick bush, found himself in the presence of a considerable commando. The

British concealed themselves by the path, but Blackburn’s foot was seen by a keen-eyed Kaffir, who pointed it out to his masters. A sudden volley riddled Blackburn with bullets; but his men stayed by him and drove off the enemy. Blackburn dictated an official report of the action, and then died.

In the same region a small force under Captain Hare was cut off by a body of Boers. Of the twenty men most got away, but the chaplain J.W. Leary, Lieutenant Haserick (who behaved with admirable gallantry), and six men were taken. [Footnote: Mr. Leary was wounded in the foot by a shell. The German artillerist entered the hut in which he lay. ‘Here’s a bit of your work!’ said Leary good-humouredly. ‘I wish it had been worse,’ said the amiable German gunner.] The commando which attacked this party, and on the same day Colonel Spreckley’s force, was a powerful one, with several guns. No doubt it was organised because there were fears among the Boers that they would be invaded from the north. When it was understood that the British intended no large aggressive movement in that quarter, these burghers joined other commandos. Sarel Eloff, who was one of the leaders of this northern force, was afterwards taken at Mafeking.

Colonel Plumer had taken command of the small army which was now operating from the north along the railway line with Mafeking for its objective. Plumer is an officer of considerable experience in African warfare, a small, quiet, resolute man, with a knack of gently enforcing discipline upon the very rough material with which he had to deal. With his weak force — which never exceeded a thousand men, and was usually from six to seven hundred — he had to keep the long line behind him open, build up the ruined railway in front of him, and gradually creep onwards in face of a formidable and enterprising enemy. For a long time Gaberones, which is eighty miles north of Mafeking, remained his headquarters, and thence he kept up precarious communications with the besieged garrison. In the middle of March he advanced as far south as Lobatsi, which is less than fifty miles from Mafeking; but the enemy proved to be too strong, and Plumer had to drop back again with some loss to his original position at Gaberones. Sticking doggedly to his task, Plumer again came south, and this time made his way as far as Ramathlabama, within a day’s march of Mafeking. He had with him, however, only three hundred and fifty men, and had he pushed through the effect might have been an addition of hungry men to the garrison. The relieving force was fiercely attacked, however, by the Boers and driven back on to their camp with a loss of twelve killed, twenty-six wounded, and fourteen missing. Some of the British were dismounted men, and it says much for Plumer’s conduct of the fight that he was able to extricate these safely from the midst of an aggressive mounted enemy. Personally he set an admirable example, sending away his own horse, and walking with his rearmost soldiers. Captain Crewe Robertson and Lieutenant Milligan, the famous Yorkshire cricketer, were killed, and Rolt, Jarvis, Maclaren, and Plumer himself were wounded. The Rhodesian force withdrew again to near Lobatsi, and collected itself for yet another effort.

In the meantime Mafeking — abandoned, as it seemed, to its fate — was still as formidable as a wounded lion. Far from weakening in its defence it became more aggressive, and so persistent and skilful were its riflemen that the big Boer gun had again and again to be moved further from the town. Six months of trenches and rifle-pits had turned every inhabitant into a veteran. Now and then words of praise and encouragement came to them from without. Once it was a special message from the Queen, once a promise of relief from Lord Roberts. But the rails which led to England were overgrown with grass, and their brave hearts yearned for the sight of their countrymen and for the sound of their voices. ‘How long, O Lord, how long?’ was the cry which was wrung from them in their solitude. But the flag was still held high.

April was a trying month for the defence. They knew that Methuen, who had advanced as far as Fourteen Streams upon the Vaal River, had retired again upon Kimberley. They knew also that Plumer’s force had been weakened by the repulse at Ramathlabama, and that many of his men were down with fever. Six weary months had this village withstood the pitiless pelt of rifle bullet and shell. Help seemed as far away from them as ever. But if troubles may be allayed by sympathy, then theirs should have lain lightly. The attention of the whole empire had centred upon them, and even the advance of Roberts’s army became secondary to the fate of this gallant struggling handful of men who had upheld the flag so long. On the Continent also their resistance attracted the utmost interest, and the numerous journals there who find the imaginative writer cheaper than the war correspondent announced their capture periodically as they had once done that of Ladysmith. From a mere tin-roofed village Mafeking had become a prize of victory, a stake which should be the visible sign of the predominating manhood of one or other of the great white races of South

Africa. Unconscious of the keenness of the emotions which they had aroused, the garrison manufactured brawn from horsehide, and captured locusts as a relish for their luncheons, while in the shot-torn billiard-room of the club an open tournament was started to fill in their hours off duty. But their vigilance, and that of the hawk-eyed man up in the Conning Tower, never relaxed. The besiegers had increased in number, and their guns were more numerous than before. A less acute man than Baden-Powell might have reasoned that at least one desperate effort would be made by them to carry the town before relief could come.

On Saturday, May 12th, the attack was made at the favourite hour of the Boer — the first grey of the morning. It was gallantly delivered by about three hundred volunteers under the command of Eloff, who had crept round to the west of the town — the side furthest from the lines of the besiegers. At the first rush they penetrated into the native quarter, which was at once set on fire by them. The first building of any size upon that side is the barracks of the Protectorate Regiment, which was held by Colonel Hore and about twenty of his officers and men. This was carried by the enemy, who sent an exultant message along the telephone to Baden-Powell to tell him that they had got it. Two other positions within the lines, one a stone kraal and the other a hill, were held by the Boers, but their supports were slow in coming on, and the movements of the defenders were so prompt and energetic that all three found themselves isolated and cut off from their own lines. They had penetrated the town, but they were as far as ever from having taken it. All day the British forces drew their cordon closer and closer round the Boer positions, making no attempt to rush them, but ringing them round in such a way that there could be no escape for them. A few burghers slipped away in twos and threes, but the main body found that they had rushed into a prison from which the only egress was swept with rifle fire. At seven o’clock in the evening they recognised that their position was hopeless, and Eloff with 117 men laid down their arms. Their losses had been ten killed and nineteen wounded. For some reason, either of lethargy, cowardice, or treachery, Snyman had not brought up the supports which might conceivably have altered the result. It was a gallant attack gallantly met, and for once the greater wiliness in fight was shown by the British. The end was characteristic. ‘Good evening, Commandant,’ said Powell to Eloff; ‘won’t you come in and have some dinner?’ The prisoners

— burghers, Hollanders, Germans, and Frenchmen — were treated to as good a supper as the destitute larders of the town could furnish.

So in a small blaze of glory ended the historic siege of Mafeking, for Eloff's attack was the last, though by no means the worst of the trials which the garrison had to face. Six killed and ten wounded were the British losses in this admirably managed affair. On May 17th, five days after the fight, the relieving force arrived, the besiegers were scattered, and the long-imprisoned garrison were free men once more. Many who had looked at their maps and saw this post isolated in the very heart of Africa had despaired of ever reaching their heroic fellow-countrymen, and now one universal outbreak of joybells and bonfires from Toronto to Melbourne proclaimed that there is no spot so inaccessible that the long arm of the empire cannot reach it when her children are in peril.

Colonel Mahon, a young Irish officer who had made his reputation as a cavalry leader in Egypt, had started early in May from Kimberley with a small but mobile force consisting of the Imperial Light Horse (brought round from Natal for the purpose), the Kimberley Mounted Corps, the Diamond Fields Horse, some Imperial Yeomanry, a detachment of the Cape Police, and 100 volunteers from the Fusilier brigade, with M battery R.H.A. and pom-poms, twelve hundred men in all. Whilst Hunter was fighting his action at Rooidam on May 4th, Mahon with his men struck round the western flank of the Boers and moved rapidly to the northwards. On May 11th they had left Vryburg, the halfway house, behind them, having done one hundred and twenty miles in five days. They pushed on, encountering no opposition save that of nature, though they knew that they were being closely watched by the enemy. At Koodoosrand it was found that a Boer force was in position in front, but Mahon avoided them by turning somewhat to the westward. His detour took him, however, into a bushy country, and here the enemy headed him off, opening fire at short range upon the ubiquitous Imperial Light Horse, who led the column. A short engagement ensued, in which the casualties amounted to thirty killed and wounded, but which ended in the defeat and dispersal of the Boers, whose force was certainly very much weaker than the British. On May 15th the relieving column arrived without further opposition at Masibi Stadt, twenty miles to the west of Mafeking.

In the meantime Plumer's force upon the north had been strengthened by the addition of C battery of four 12-pounder guns of the Canadian Artillery under Major Eudon and a body of Queenslanders. These forces had been part of the small army which had come with General Carrington through Beira, and after a detour of thousands of miles, through their own wonderful energy they had arrived in time to form portion of the relieving column. Foreign military critics, whose experience of warfare is to move troops across a frontier, should think of what the Empire has to do before her men go into battle. These contingents had been assembled by long railway journeys, conveyed across thousands of miles of ocean to Cape Town, brought round another two thousand or so to Beira, transferred by a narrow-gauge railway to Bamboo Creek, changed to a broader gauge to Marandellas, sent on in coaches for hundreds of miles to Bulawayo, transferred to trains for another four or five hundred miles to Ootsi, and had finally a forced march of a hundred miles, which brought them up a few hours before their presence was urgently needed upon the field. Their advance, which averaged twenty-five miles a day on foot for four consecutive days over deplorable roads, was one of the finest performances of the war. With these high-spirited reinforcements and with his own hardy Rhodesians Plumer pushed on, and the two columns reached the hamlet of Masibi Stadt within an hour of each other. Their united strength was far superior to anything which Snyman’s force could place against them.

But the gallant and tenacious Boers would not abandon their prey without a last effort. As the little army advanced upon Mafeking they found the enemy waiting in a strong position. For some hours the Boers gallantly held their ground, and their artillery fire was, as usual, most accurate. But our own guns were more numerous and equally well served, and the position was soon made untenable. The Boers retired past Mafeking and took refuge in the trenches upon the eastern side, but Baden-Powell with his war-hardened garrison sallied out, and, supported by the artillery fire of the relieving column, drove them from their shelter. With their usual admirable tactics their larger guns had been removed, but one small cannon was secured as a souvenir by the townsfolk, together with a number of wagons and a considerable quantity of supplies. A long rolling trail of dust upon the eastern horizon told that the famous siege of Mafeking had at last come to an end.

So ended a singular incident, the defence of an open town which contained no regular soldiers and a most inadequate artillery against a numerous and enterprising enemy with very heavy guns. All honour to the towns folk who bore their trial so long and so bravely — and to the indomitable men who lined the trenches for seven weary months. Their constancy was of enormous value to the empire. In the all-important early month at least four or five thousand Boers were detained by them when their presence elsewhere would have been fatal. During all the rest of the war, two thousand men and eight guns (including one of the four big Creusots) had been held there. It prevented the invasion of Rhodesia, and it gave a rallying-point for loyal whites and natives in the huge stretch of country from Kimberley to Bulawayo. All this had, at a cost of two hundred lives, been done by this one devoted band of men, who killed, wounded, or took no fewer than one thousand of their opponents. Critics may say that the enthusiasm in the empire was excessive, but at least it was expended over worthy men and a fine deed of arms.

CHAPTER 25. THE MARCH ON PRETORIA.

In the early days of May, when the season of the rains was past and the veld was green, Lord Roberts’s six weeks of enforced inaction came to an end. He had gathered himself once more for one of those tiger springs which should be as sure and as irresistible as that which had brought him from Belmont to Bloemfontein, or that other in olden days which had carried him from Cabul to Candahar. His army had been decimated by sickness, and eight thousand men had passed into the hospitals; but those who were with the colours were of high heart, longing eagerly for action. Any change which would carry them away from the pest-ridden, evil-smelling capital which had revenged itself so terribly upon the invader must be a change for the better. Therefore it was with glad faces and brisk feet that the centre column left Bloemfontein on May 1st, and streamed, with bands playing, along the northern road.

On May 3rd the main force was assembled at Karee, twenty miles upon their way. Two hundred and twenty separated them from Pretoria, but in little more than a month from the day of starting, in spite of broken railway, a succession of rivers, and the opposition of the enemy, this army was marching into the main street of the Transvaal capital. Had there been no enemy there at all, it would still have been a fine performance, the more so when one remembers that the army was moving upon a front of twenty miles or more, each part of which had to be co-ordinated to the rest. It is with the story of this great march that the present chapter deals.

Roberts had prepared the way by clearing out the south-eastern corner of the State, and at the moment of his advance his forces covered a semicircular front of about forty miles, the right under Ian Hamilton near Thabanchu, and the left at Karee. This was the broad net which was to be swept from south to north across the Free State, gradually narrowing as it went. The conception was admirable, and appears to have been an adoption of the Boers’ own strategy, which had in turn been borrowed from the Zulus. The solid centre could hold any force which faced it, while the mobile flanks, Hutton upon the left and Hamilton upon the right, could lap round and pin it, as Cronje was pinned at Paardeberg. It seems admirably simple when done upon a small scale. But when the scale is one of forty miles, since your front must be broad enough to envelop the front which is opposed to it, and when the scattered wings have to be fed with no railway line to help, it takes such a master of administrative detail as Lord Kitchener to bring the operations to complete success.

On May 3rd, the day of the advance from our most northern post, Karee, the disposition of Lord Roberts's army was briefly as follows. On his left was Hutton, with his mixed force of mounted infantry drawn from every quarter of the empire. This formidable and mobile body, with some batteries of horse artillery and of pom-poms, kept a line a few miles to the west of the railroad, moving northwards parallel with it. Roberts's main column kept on the railroad, which was mended with extraordinary speed by the Railway Pioneer regiment and the Engineers, under Girouard and the ill-fated Seymour. It was amazing to note the shattered culverts as one passed, and yet to be overtaken by trains within a day. This main column consisted of Pole-Carew's 11th Division, which contained the Guards, and Stephenson's Brigade (Warwicks, Essex, Welsh, and Yorkshires). With them were the 83rd, 84th, and 85th R.F.A., with the heavy guns, and a small force of mounted infantry. Passing along the widespread British line one would then, after an interval of seven or eight miles, come upon Tucker's Division (the 7th), which consisted of Maxwell's Brigade (formerly Chermside's — the Norfolks, Lincolns, Hampshires, and Scottish Borderers) and Wavell's Brigade (North Staffords, Cheshires, East Lancashires, South Wales Borderers). To the right of these was Ridley's mounted infantry. Beyond them, extending over very many miles of country and with considerable spaces between, there came Broadwood's cavalry, Bruce Hamilton's Brigade (Derbyshires, Sussex, Camerons, and C.I.V.), and finally on the extreme right of all Ian Hamilton's force of Highlanders, Canadians, Shropshires, and Cornwalls, with cavalry and mounted infantry, starting forty miles from Lord Roberts, but edging westwards all the way, to merge with the troops next to it, and to occupy Winburg in the way already described. This was the army, between forty and fifty thousand strong, with which Lord Roberts advanced upon the Transvaal.

In the meantime he had anticipated that his mobile and enterprising opponents would work round and strike at our rear. Ample means had been provided for dealing with any attempt of the kind. Rundle with the 8th Division and Brabant's Colonial Division remained in rear of the right flank to confront any force which might turn it. At Bloemfontein were Kelly-

Kenny’s Division (the 6th) and Chermside’s (the 3rd), with a force of cavalry and guns. Methuen, working from Kimberley towards Boshof, formed the extreme left wing of the main advance, though distant a hundred miles from it. With excellent judgment Lord Roberts saw that it was on our right flank that danger was to be feared, and here it was that every precaution had been taken to meet it.

The objective of the first day’s march was the little town of Brandfort, ten miles north of Karee. The head of the main column faced it, while the left arm swept round and drove the Boer force from their position. Tucker’s Division upon the right encountered some opposition, but overbore it with artillery. May 4th was a day of rest for the infantry, but on the 5th they advanced, in the same order as before, for twenty miles, and found themselves to the south of the Vet River, where the enemy had prepared for an energetic resistance. A vigorous artillery duel ensued, the British guns in the open as usual against an invisible enemy. After three hours of a very hot fire the mounted infantry got across the river upon the left and turned the Boer flank, on which they hastily withdrew. The first lodgment was effected by two bodies of Canadians and New Zealanders, who were energetically supported by Captain Anley’s 3rd Mounted Infantry. The rushing of a kopje by twenty-three West Australians was another gallant incident which marked this engagement, in which our losses were insignificant. A maxim and twenty or thirty prisoners were taken by Hutton’s men. The next day (May 6th) the army moved across the difficult drift of the Vet River, and halted that night at Smaldeel, some five miles to the north of it. At the same time Ian Hamilton had been able to advance to Winburg, so that the army had contracted its front by about half, but had preserved its relative positions. Hamilton, after his junction with his reinforcements at Jacobsrust, had under him so powerful a force that he overbore all resistance. His actions between Thabanchu and Winburg had cost the Boers heavy loss, and in one action the German legion had been overthrown. The informal warfare which was made upon us by citizens of many nations without rebuke from their own Governments is a matter of which pride, and possibly policy, have forbidden us to complain, but it will be surprising if it does not prove that their laxity has established a very dangerous precedent, and they will find it difficult to object when, in the next little war in which either France or Germany is engaged, they find a few hundred British adventurers carrying a rifle against them.

The record of the army's advance is now rather geographical than military, for it rolled northwards with never a check save that which was caused by the construction of the railway diversions which atoned for the destruction of the larger bridges. The infantry now, as always in the campaign, marched excellently; for though twenty miles in the day may seem a moderate allowance to a healthy man upon an English road, it is a considerable performance under an African sun with a weight of between thirty and forty pounds to be carried. The good humour of the men was admirable, and they eagerly longed to close with the elusive enemy who flitted ever in front of them. Huge clouds of smoke veiled the northern sky, for the Boers had set fire to the dry grass, partly to cover their own retreat, and partly to show up our khaki upon the blackened surface. Far on the flanks the twinkling heliographs revealed the position of the wide-spread wings.

On May 10th Lord Roberts's force, which had halted for three days at Smaldeel, moved onwards to Welgelegen. French's cavalry had come up by road, and quickly strengthened the centre and left wing of the army. On the morning of the 10th the invaders found themselves confronted by a formidable position which the Boers had taken up on the northern bank of the Sand River. Their army extended over twenty miles of country, the two Bothas were in command, and everything pointed to a pitched battle. Had the position been rushed from the front, there was every material for a second Colenso, but the British had learned that it was by brains rather than by blood that such battles may be won. French's cavalry turned the Boers on one side, and Bruce Hamilton's infantry on the other. Theoretically we never passed the Boer flanks, but practically their line was so over-extended that we were able to pierce it at any point. There was never any severe fighting, but rather a steady advance upon the British side and a steady retirement upon that of the Boers. On the left the Sussex regiment distinguished itself by the dash with which it stormed an important kopje. The losses were slight, save among a detached body of cavalry which found itself suddenly cut off by a strong force of the enemy and lost Captain Elworthy killed, and Haig of the Inniskillings, Wilkinson of the Australian Horse, and twenty men prisoners. We also secured forty or fifty prisoners, and the enemy's casualties amounted to about as many more. The whole straggling action fought over a front as broad as from London to Woking cost the British at the most a couple of hundred casualties, and carried their army over the most formidable defensive position which they were to encounter. The war in its later phases certainly has the pleasing characteristic of being the most bloodless, considering the number of men engaged and the amount of powder burned, that has been known in history. It was at the expense of their boots and not of their lives that the infantry won their way.

On May 11th Lord Roberts’s army advanced twenty miles to Geneva Siding, and every preparation was made for a battle next day, as it was thought certain that the Boers would defend their new capital, Kroonstad. It proved, however, that even here they would not make a stand, and on May 12th, at one o’clock, Lord Roberts rode into the town. Steyn, Botha, and De Wet escaped, and it was announced that the village of Lindley had become the new seat of government. The British had now accomplished half their journey to Pretoria, and it was obvious that on the south side of the Vaal no serious resistance awaited them. Burghers were freely surrendering themselves with their arms, and returning to their farms. In the south-east Rundle and Brabant were slowly advancing, while the Boers who faced them fell back towards Lindley. On the west, Hunter had crossed the Vaal at Windsorton, and Barton’s Fusilier Brigade had fought a sharp action at Rooidam, while Mahon’s Mafeking relief column had slipped past their flank, escaping the observation of the British public, but certainly not that of the Boers. The casualties in the Rooidam action were nine killed and thirty wounded, but the advance of the Fusiliers was irresistible, and for once the Boer loss, as they were hustled from kopje to kopje, appears to have been greater than that of the British. The Yeomanry had an opportunity of showing once more that there are few more high-mettled troops in South Africa than these good sportsmen of the shires, who only showed a trace of their origin in their irresistible inclination to burst into a ‘tally-ho!’ when ordered to attack. The Boer forces fell back after the action along the line of the Vaal, making for Christiana and Bloemhof. Hunter entered into the Transvaal in pursuit of them, being the first to cross the border, with the exception of raiding Rhodesians early in the war. Methuen, in the meanwhile, was following a course parallel to Hunter but south of him, Hoopstad being his immediate objective. The little union jacks which were stuck in the war maps in so many British households were now moving swiftly upwards.

Buller's force was also sweeping northwards, and the time had come when the Ladysmith garrison, restored at last to health and strength, should have a chance of striking back at those who had tormented them so long. Many of the best troops had been drafted away to other portions of the seat of war. Hart's Brigade and Barton's Fusilier Brigade had gone with Hunter to form the 10th Division upon the Kimberley side, and the Imperial Light Horse had been brought over for the relief of Mafeking. There remained, however, a formidable force, the regiments in which had been strengthened by the addition of drafts and volunteers from home. Not less than twenty thousand sabres and bayonets were ready and eager for the passage of the Biggarsberg mountains.

This line of rugged hills is pierced by only three passes, each of which was held in strength by the enemy. Considerable losses must have ensued from any direct attempt to force them. Buller, however, with excellent judgment, demonstrated in front of them with Hildyard's men, while the rest of the army, marching round, outflanked the line of resistance, and on May 15th pounced upon Dundee. Much had happened since that October day when Penn Symons led his three gallant regiments up Talana Hill, but now at last, after seven weary months, the ground was reoccupied which he had gained. His old soldiers visited his grave, and the national flag was raised over the remains of as gallant a man as ever died for the sake of it.

The Boers, whose force did not exceed a few thousands, were now rolled swiftly back through Northern Natal into their own country. The long strain at Ladysmith had told upon them, and the men whom we had to meet were very different from the warriors of Spion Kop and Nicholson's Nek. They had done magnificently, but there is a limit to human endurance, and no longer would these peasants face the bursting lyddite and the bayonets of angry soldiers. There is little enough for us to boast of in this. Some pride might be taken in the campaign when at a disadvantage we were facing superior numbers, but now we could but deplore the situation in which these poor valiant burghers found themselves, the victims of a rotten government and of their own delusions. Hofer's Tyrolese, Charette's Vendeans, or Bruce's Scotchmen never fought a finer fight than these children of the veld, but in each case they combated a real and not an imaginary tyrant. It is heart-sickening to think of the butchery, the misery, the irreparable losses, the blood of men, and the bitter tears of women, all of which might have been spared had one obstinate and ignorant man been persuaded to allow the State which he ruled to conform to the customs of every other civilised State upon the earth.

Buller was now moving with a rapidity and decision which contrast pleasantly with some of his earlier operations. Although Dundee was only occupied on May 15th, on May 18th his vanguard was in Newcastle, fifty miles to the north. In nine days he had covered 138 miles. On the 19th the army lay under the loom of that Majuba which had cast its sinister shadow for so long over South African politics. In front was the historical Laing's Nek, the pass which leads from Natal into the Transvaal, while through it runs the famous railway tunnel. Here the Boers had taken up that position which had proved nineteen years before to be too strong for British troops. The Rooineks had come back after many days to try again. A halt was called, for the ten days' supplies which had been taken with the troops were exhausted, and it was necessary to wait until the railway should be repaired. This gave time for Hildyard's 5th Division and Lyttelton's 4th Division to close up on Clery's 2nd Division, which with Dundonald's cavalry had formed our vanguard throughout. The only losses of any consequence during this fine march fell upon a single squadron of Bethune's mounted infantry, which being thrown out in the direction of Vryheid, in order to make sure that our flank was clear, fell into an ambuscade and was almost annihilated by a close-range fire. Sixty-six casualties, of which nearly half were killed, were the result of this action, which seems to have depended, like most of our reverses, upon defective scouting. Buller, having called up his two remaining divisions and having mended the railway behind him, proceeded now to manoeuvre the Boers out of Laing's Nek exactly as he had manoeuvred them out of the Biggarsberg. At the end of May Hildyard and Lyttelton were despatched in an eastern direction, as if there were an intention of turning the pass from Utrecht.

It was on May 12th that Lord Roberts occupied Kroonstad, and he halted there for eight days before he resumed his advance. At the end of that time his railway had been repaired, and enough supplies brought up to enable him to advance again without anxiety. The country through which he passed swarmed with herds and flocks, but, with as scrupulous a regard for the rights of property as Wellington showed in the south of France, no hungry soldier was allowed to take so much as a chicken as he passed. The punishment for looting was prompt and stern. It is true that farms were burned occasionally and the stock confiscated, but this was as a punishment for some particular offence and not part of a system. The limping Tommy looked askance at the fat geese which covered the dam by the roadside, but it was as much as his life was worth to allow his fingers to close round those tempting white necks. On foul water and bully beef he tramped through a land of plenty.

Lord Roberts's eight days' halt was spent in consolidating the general military situation. We have already shown how Buller had crept upwards to the Natal Border. On the west Methuen reached Hoopstad and Hunter Christiana, settling the country and collecting arms as they went. Rundle in the south-east took possession of the rich grain lands, and on May 21st entered Ladybrand. In front of him lay that difficult hilly country about Senekal, Ficksburg, and Bethlehem which was to delay him so long. Ian Hamilton was feeling his way northwards to the right of the railway line, and for the moment cleared the district between Lindley and Heilbron, passing through both towns and causing Steyn to again change his capital, which became Vrede, in the extreme north-east of the State. During these operations Hamilton had the two formidable De Wet brothers in front of him, and suffered nearly a hundred casualties in the continual skirmishing which accompanied his advance. His right flank and rear were continually attacked, and these signs of forces outside our direct line of advance were full of menace for the future.

On May 22nd the main army resumed its advance, moving forward fifteen miles to Honing's Spruit. On the 23rd another march of twenty miles over a fine rolling prairie brought them to Rhenoster River. The enemy had made some preparations for a stand, but Hamilton was near Heilbron upon their left and French was upon their right flank. The river was crossed without opposition. On the 24th the army was at Vredefort Road, and on the 26th the vanguard crossed the Vaal River at Viljoen's Drift, the whole army following on the 27th. Hamilton's force had been cleverly swung across from the right to the left flank of the British, so that the Boers were massed on the wrong side.

Preparations for resistance had been made on the line of the railway, but the wide turning movements on the flanks by the indefatigable French and Hamilton rendered all opposition of no avail. The British columns flowed over and onwards without a pause, tramping steadily northwards to their destination. The bulk of the Free State forces refused to leave their own country, and moved away to the eastern and northern portion of the State, where the British Generals thought — incorrectly, as the future was to prove — that no further harm would come from them. The State which they were in arms to defend had really ceased to exist, for already it had been publicly proclaimed at Bloemfontein in the Queen’s name that the country had been annexed to the Empire, and that its style henceforth was that of ‘The Orange River Colony.’ Those who think this measure unduly harsh must remember that every mile of land which the Freestaters had conquered in the early part of the war had been solemnly annexed by them. At the same time, those Englishmen who knew the history of this State, which had once been the model of all that a State should be, were saddened by the thought that it should have deliberately committed suicide for the sake of one of the most corrupt governments which have ever been known. Had the Transvaal been governed as the Orange Free State was, such an event as the second Boer war could never have occurred.

Lord Roberts’s tremendous march was now drawing to a close. On May 28th the troops advanced twenty miles, and passed Klip River without fighting. It was observed with surprise that the Transvaalers were very much more careful of their own property than they had been of that of their allies, and that the railway was not damaged at all by the retreating forces. The country had become more populous, and far away upon the low curves of the hills were seen high chimneys and gaunt iron pumps which struck the north of England soldier with a pang of homesickness. This long distant hill was the famous Rand, and under its faded grasses lay such riches as Solomon never took from Ophir. It was the prize of victory; and yet the prize is not to the victor, for the dust-grimed officers and men looked with little personal interest at this treasure-house of the world. Not one penny the richer would they be for the fact that their blood and their energy had brought justice and freedom to the gold fields. They had opened up an industry for the world, men of all nations would be the better for their labours, the miner and the financier or the trader would equally profit by them, but the men in khaki would tramp on, unrewarded and uncomplaining, to India, to China, to any spot where the needs of their worldwide empire called them.

The infantry, streaming up from the Vaal River to the famous ridge of gold, had met with no resistance upon the way, but great mist banks of cloud by day and huge twinkling areas of flame by night showed the handiwork of the enemy. Hamilton and French, moving upon the left flank, found Boers thick upon the hills, but cleared them off in a well-managed skirmish which cost us a dozen casualties. On May 29th, pushing swiftly along, French found the enemy posted very strongly with several guns at Doornkop, a point west of Klip River Berg. The cavalry leader had with him at this stage three horse batteries, four pom-poms, and 3000 mounted men. The position being too strong for him to force, Hamilton's infantry (19th and 21st Brigades) were called up, and the Boers were driven out. That splendid corps, the Gordons, lost nearly a hundred men in their advance over the open, and the C.I.V.s on the other flank fought like a regiment of veterans. There had been an inclination to smile at these citizen soldiers when they first came out, but no one smiled now save the General who felt that he had them at his back. Hamilton's attack was assisted by the menace rather than the pressure of French's turning movement on the Boer right, but the actual advance was as purely frontal as any of those which had been carried through at the beginning of the war. The open formation of the troops, the powerful artillery behind them, and perhaps also the lowered morale of the enemy combined to make such a movement less dangerous than of old. In any case it was inevitable, as the state of Hamilton's commisariat rendered it necessary that at all hazards he should force his way through.

Whilst this action of Doornkop was fought by the British left flank, Henry's mounted infantry in the centre moved straight upon the important junction of Germiston, which lies amid the huge white heaps of tailings from the mines. At this point, or near it, the lines from Johannesburg and from Natal join the line to Pretoria. Colonel Henry's advance was an extremely daring one, for the infantry were some distance behind; but after an irregular scrambling skirmish, in which the Boer snipers had to be driven off the mine heaps and from among the houses, the 8th mounted infantry got their grip of the railway and held it. The exploit was a very fine one, and stands out the more brilliantly as the conduct of the campaign cannot be said to afford many examples of that well-considered audacity which deliberately runs the risk of the minor loss for the sake of the greater gain. Henry was much assisted by J battery R.H.A., which was handled with energy and judgment.

French was now on the west of the town, Henry had cut the railway on the east, and Roberts was coming up from the south. His infantry had covered 130 miles in seven days, but the thought that every step brought them nearer to Pretoria was as exhilarating as their fifes and drums. On May 30th the victorious troops camped outside the city while Botha retired with his army, abandoning without a battle the treasure-house of his country. Inside the town were chaos and confusion. The richest mines in the world lay for a day or more at the mercy of a lawless rabble drawn from all nations. The Boer officials were themselves divided in opinion, Krause standing for law and order while Judge Koch advocated violence. A spark would have set the town blazing, and the worst was feared when a crowd of mercenaries assembled in front of the Robinson mine with threats of violence. By the firmness and tact of Mr. Tucker, the manager, and by the strong attitude of Commissioner Krause, the situation was saved and the danger passed. Upon May 31st, without violence to life or destruction to property, that great town which British hands have done so much to build found itself at last under the British flag. May it wave there so long as it covers just laws, honest officials, and clean-handed administrators — so long and no longer!

And now the last stage of the great journey had been reached. Two days were spent at Johannesburg while supplies were brought up, and then a move was made upon Pretoria thirty miles to the north. Here was the Boer capital, the seat of government, the home of Kruger, the centre of all that was anti-British, crouching amid its hills, with costly forts guarding every face of it. Surely at last the place had been found where that great battle should be fought which should decide for all time whether it was with the Briton or with the Dutchman that the future of South Africa lay.

On the last day of May two hundred Lancers under the command of Major Hunter Weston, with Charles of the Sappers and Burnham the scout, a man who has played the part of a hero throughout the campaign, struck off from the main army and endeavoured to descend upon the Pretoria to Delagoa railway line with the intention of blowing up a bridge and cutting the Boer line of retreat. It was a most dashing attempt; but the small party had the misfortune to come into contact with a strong Boer commando, who headed them off. After a skirmish they were compelled to make their way back with a loss of five killed and fourteen wounded.

The cavalry under French had waited for the issue of this enterprise at a point nine miles north of Johannesburg. On June 2nd it began its advance with orders to make a wide sweep round to the westward, and so skirt the capital, cutting the Pietersburg railway to the north of it. The country in the direct line between Johannesburg and Pretoria consists of a series of rolling downs which are admirably adapted for cavalry work, but the detour which French had to make carried him into the wild and broken district which lies to the north of the Little Crocodile River. Here he was fiercely attacked on ground where his troops could not deploy, but with extreme coolness and judgment beat off the enemy. To cover thirty-two miles in a day and fight a way out of an ambuscade in the evening is an ordeal for any leader and for any troops. Two killed and seven wounded were our trivial losses in a situation which might have been a serious one. The Boers appear to have been the escort of a strong convoy which had passed along the road some miles in front. Next morning both convoy and opposition had disappeared. The cavalry rode on amid a country of orange groves, the troopers standing up in their stirrups to pluck the golden fruit. There was no further fighting, and on June 4th French had established himself upon the north of the town, where he learned that all resistance had ceased.

Whilst the cavalry had performed this enveloping movement the main army had moved swiftly upon its objective, leaving one brigade behind to secure Johannesburg. Ian Hamilton advanced upon the left, while Lord Roberts's column kept the line of the railway, Colonel Henry's mounted infantry scouting in front. As the army topped the low curves of the veld they saw in front of them two well-marked hills, each crowned by a low squat building. They were the famous southern forts of Pretoria. Between the hills was a narrow neck, and beyond the Boer capital.

For a time it appeared that the entry was to be an absolutely bloodless one, but the booming of cannon and the crash of Mauser fire soon showed that the enemy was in force upon the ridge. Botha had left a strong rearguard to hold off the British while his own stores and valuables were being withdrawn from the town. The silence of the forts showed that the guns had been removed and that no prolonged resistance was intended; but in the meanwhile fringes of determined riflemen, supported by cannon, held the approaches, and must be driven off before an entry could be effected. Each fresh corps as it came up reinforced the firing line. Henry's mounted infantrymen supported by the horse-guns of J battery and the guns of Tucker's division began the action. So hot was the answer, both from cannon and from rifle, that it seemed for a time as if a real battle were at last about to take place. The Guards' Brigade, Stephenson's Brigade, and Maxwell's Brigade streamed up and waited until Hamilton, who was on the enemy’s right flank, should be able to make his presence felt. The heavy guns had also arrived, and a huge cloud of debris rising from the Pretorian forts told the accuracy of their fire.

But either the burghers were half-hearted or there was no real intention to make a stand. About half-past two their fire slackened and Pole-Carew was directed to push on. That debonnaire soldier with his two veteran brigades obeyed the order with alacrity, and the infantry swept over the ridge, with some thirty or forty casualties, the majority of which fell to the Warwicks. The position was taken, and Hamilton, who came up late, was only able to send on De Lisle’s mounted infantry, chiefly Australians, who ran down one of the Boer maxims in the open. The action had cost us altogether about seventy men. Among the injured was the Duke of Norfolk, who had shown a high sense of civic virtue in laying aside the duties and dignity of a Cabinet Minister in order to serve as a simple captain of volunteers. At the end of this one fight the capital lay at the mercy of Lord Roberts. Consider the fight which they made for their chief city, compare it with that which the British made for the village of Mafeking, and say on which side is that stern spirit of self-sacrifice and resolution which are the signs of the better cause.

In the early morning of June 5th, the Coldstream Guards were mounting the hills which commanded the town. Beneath them in the clear African air lay the famous city, embowered in green, the fine central buildings rising grandly out of the wide circle of villas. Through the Nek part of the Guards’ Brigade and Maxwell’s Brigade had passed, and had taken over the station, from which at least one train laden with horses had steamed that morning. Two others, both ready to start, were only just stopped in time.

The first thought was for the British prisoners, and a small party headed by the Duke of Marlborough rode to their rescue. Let it be said once for all that their treatment by the Boers was excellent and that their appearance would alone have proved it. One hundred and twenty-nine officers and thirty-nine soldiers were found in the Model Schools, which had been converted into a prison. A day later our cavalry arrived at Waterval, which is fourteen miles to the north of Pretoria. Here were confined three thousand soldiers, whose fare had certainly been of the scantiest, though in other respects they appear to have been well treated. [Footnote: Further information unfortunately shows that in the case of the sick and of the Colonial prisoners the treatment was by no means good.] Nine hundred of their comrades had been removed by the Boers, but Porter’s cavalry was in time to release the others, under a brisk shell fire from a Boer gun upon the ridge. Many pieces of good luck we had in the campaign, but this recovery of our prisoners, which left the enemy without a dangerous lever for exacting conditions of peace, was the most fortunate of all.

In the centre of the town there is a wide square decorated or disfigured by a bare pedestal upon which a statue of the President was to have been placed. Hard by is the bleak barnlike church in which he preached, and on either side are the Government offices and the Law Courts, buildings which would grace any European capital. Here, at two o’clock on the afternoon of June 5th, Lord Roberts sat his horse and saw pass in front of him the men who had followed him so far and so faithfully — the Guards, the Essex, the Welsh, the Yorks, the Warwicks, the guns, the mounted infantry, the dashing irregulars, the Gordons, the Canadians, the Shropshires, the Cornwalls, the Camerons, the Derbys, the Sussex, and the London Volunteers. For over two hours the khaki waves with their crests of steel went sweeping by. High above their heads from the summit of the Raad-saal the broad Union Jack streamed for the first time. Through months of darkness we had struggled onwards to the light. Now at last the strange drama seemed to be drawing to its close. The God of battles had given the long-withheld verdict. But of all the hearts which throbbed high at that supreme moment there were few who felt one touch of bitterness towards the brave men who had been overborne. They had fought and died for their ideal. We had fought and died for ours. The hope for the future of South Africa is that they or their descendants may learn that that banner which has come to wave above Pretoria means no racial intolerance, no greed for gold, no paltering with injustice or corruption, but that it means one law for all and one freedom for all, as it does in every other continent in the whole broad earth. When that is learned it may happen that even they will come to date a happier life and a wider liberty from that 5th of June which saw the symbol of their nation pass for ever from among the ensigns of the world.

CHAPTER 26. DIAMOND HILL — RUNDLE’S OPERATIONS.

The military situation at the time of the occupation of Pretoria was roughly as follows. Lord Roberts with some thirty thousand men was in possession of the capital, but had left his long line of communications very imperfectly guarded behind him. On the flank of this line of communications, in the eastern and north-eastern corner of the Free State, was an energetic force of unconquered Freestaters who had rallied round President Steyn. They were some eight or ten thousand in number, well horsed, with a fair number of guns, under the able leadership of De Wet, Prinsloo, and Olivier. Above all, they had a splendid position, mountainous and broken, from which, as from a fortress, they could make excursions to the south or west. This army included the commandos of Ficksburg, Senekal, and Harrismith, with all the broken and desperate men from other districts who had left their farms and fled to the mountains. It was held in check as a united force by Rundle’s Division and the Colonial Division on the south, while Colvile, and afterwards Methuen, endeavoured to pen them in on the west. The task was a hard one, however, and though Rundle succeeded in holding his line intact, it appeared to be impossible in that wide country to coop up altogether an enemy so mobile. A strange game of hide-and-seek ensued, in which De Wet, who led the Boer raids, was able again and again to strike our line of rails and to get back without serious loss. The story of these instructive and humiliating episodes will be told in their order. The energy and skill of the guerilla chief challenge our admiration, and the score of his successes would be amusing were it not that the points of the game are marked by the lives of British soldiers.

General Buller had spent the latter half of May in making his way from Ladysmith to Laing’s Nek, and the beginning of June found him with twenty thousand men in front of that difficult position. Some talk of a surrender had arisen, and Christian Botha, who commanded the Boers, succeeded in gaining several days’ armistice, which ended in nothing. The Transvaal forces at this point were not more than a few thousand in number, but their position was so formidable that it was a serious task to turn them out. Van Wyk’s Hill, however, had been left unguarded, and as its possession would give the British the command of Botha’s Pass, its unopposed capture by the South African Light Horse was an event of great importance. With guns upon this eminence the infantry were able, on June 8th, to attack and to carry with little loss the rest of the high ground, and so to get the Pass into their complete possession. Botha fired the grass behind him, and withdrew sullenly to the north. On the 9th and 10th the convoys were passed over the Pass, and on the 11th the main body of the army followed them.

The operations were now being conducted in that extremely acute angle of Natal which runs up between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In crossing Botha’s Pass the army had really entered what was now the Orange River Colony. But it was only for a very short time, as the object of the movement was to turn the Laing’s Nek position, and then come back into the Transvaal through Alleman’s Pass. The gallant South African Light Horse led the way, and fought hard at one point to clear a path for the army, losing six killed and eight wounded in a sharp skirmish. On the morning of the 12th the flanking movement was far advanced, and it only remained for the army to force Alleman’s Nek, which would place it to the rear of Laing’s Nek, and close to the Transvaal town of Volksrust.

Had the Boers been the men of Colenso and of Spion Kop, this storming of Alleman’s Nek would have been a bloody business. The position was strong, the cover was slight, and there was no way round. But the infantry came on with the old dash without the old stubborn resolution being opposed to them. The guns prepared the way, and then the Dorsets, the Dublins, the Middlesex, the Queen’s, and the East Surrey did the rest. The door was open and the Transvaal lay before us. The next day Volksrust was in our hands.

The whole series of operations were excellently conceived and carried out. Putting Colenso on one side, it cannot be denied that General Buller showed considerable power of manoeuvring large bodies of troops. The withdrawal of the compromised army after Spion Kop, the change of the line of attack at Pieter’s Hill, and the flanking marches in this campaign of Northern Natal, were all very workmanlike achievements. In this case a position which the Boers had been preparing for months, scored with trenches and topped by heavy artillery, had been rendered untenable by a clever flank movement, the total casualties in the whole affair being less than two hundred killed and wounded. Natal was cleared of the invader, Buller's foot was on the high plateau of the Transvaal, and Roberts could count on twenty thousand good men coming up to him from the south-east. More important than all, the Natal railway was being brought up, and soon the central British Army would depend upon Durban instead of Cape Town for its supplies — a saving of nearly two-thirds of the distance. The fugitive Boers made northwards in the Middelburg direction, while Buller advanced to Standerton, which town he continued to occupy until Lord Roberts could send a force down through Heidelberg to join hands with him. Such was the position of the Natal Field Force at the end of June. From the west and the south-west British forces were also converging upon the capital. The indomitable Baden-Powell sought for rest and change of scene after his prolonged trial by harrying the Boers out of Zeerust and Rustenburg. The forces of Hunter and of Mahon converged upon Potchefstroom, from which, after settling that district, they could be conveyed by rail to Krugersdorp and Johannesburg.

Before briefly recounting the series of events which took place upon the line of communications, the narrative must return to Lord Roberts at Pretoria, and describe the operations which followed his occupation of that city. In leaving the undefeated forces of the Free State behind him, the British General had unquestionably run a grave risk, and was well aware that his railway communication was in danger of being cut. By the rapidity of his movements he succeeded in gaining the enemy's capital before that which he had foreseen came to pass; but if Botha had held him at Pretoria while De Wet struck at him behind, the situation would have been a serious one. Having once attained his main object, Roberts could receive with equanimity the expected news that De Wet with a mobile force of less than two thousand men had, on June 7th, cut the line at Roodeval to the north of Kroonstad. Both rail and telegraph were destroyed, and for a few days the army was isolated. Fortunately there were enough supplies to go on with, and immediate steps were taken to drive away the intruder, though, like a mosquito, he was brushed from one place only to settle upon another.

Leaving others to restore his broken communications, Lord Roberts turned his attention once more to Botha, who still retained ten or fifteen thousand men under his command. The President had fled from Pretoria with a large sum of money, estimated at over two millions sterling, and was known to be living in a saloon railway carriage, which had been transformed into a seat of government even more mobile than that of President Steyn. From Waterval-Boven, a point beyond Middelburg, he was in a position either to continue his journey to Delagoa Bay, and so escape out of the country, or to travel north into that wild Lydenburg country which had always been proclaimed as the last ditch of the defence. Here he remained with his gold-bags waiting the turn of events.

Botha and his stalwarts had not gone far from the capital. Fifteen miles out to the east the railway line runs through a gap in the hills called Pienaars Poort, and here was such a position as the Boer loves to hold. It was very strong in front, and it had widely spread formidable flanking hills to hamper those turning movements which had so often been fatal to the Boer generals. Behind was the uncut railway line along which the guns could in case of need be removed. The whole position was over fifteen miles from wing to wing, and it was well known to the Boer general that Lord Roberts had no longer that preponderance of force which would enable him to execute wide turning movements, as he had done in his advance from the south. His army had decreased seriously in numbers. The mounted men, the most essential branch of all, were so ill horsed that brigades were not larger than regiments. One brigade of infantry (the 14th) had been left to garrison Johannesburg, and another (the 18th) had been chosen for special duty in Pretoria. Smith-Dorrien’s Brigade had been detached for duty upon the line of communications. With all these deductions and the wastage caused by wounds and disease, the force was in no state to assume a vigorous offensive. So hard pressed were they for men that the three thousand released prisoners from Waterval were hurriedly armed with Boer weapons and sent down the line to help to guard the more vital points.

Had Botha withdrawn to a safe distance, Lord Roberts would certainly have halted, as he had done at Bloemfontein, and waited for remounts and reinforcements. But the war could not be allowed to languish when an active enemy lay only fifteen miles off, within striking distance of two cities and of the line of rail. Taking all the troops that he could muster, the British General moved out once more on Monday, June 11th, to drive Botha from his position. He had with him Pole-Carew’s 11th Division, which numbered about six thousand men with twenty guns, Ian Hamilton’s force, which included one infantry brigade (Bruce Hamilton’s), one cavalry brigade, and a corps of mounted infantry, say, six thousand in all, with thirty guns. There remained French’s Cavalry Division, with Hutton’s Mounted

Infantry, which could not have exceeded two thousand sabres and rifles. The total force was, therefore, not more than sixteen or seventeen thousand men, with about seventy guns. Their task was to carry a carefully prepared position held by at least ten thousand burghers with a strong artillery. Had the Boer of June been the Boer of December, the odds would have been against the British.

There had been some negotiations for peace between Lord Roberts and Botha, but the news of De Wet’s success from the south had hardened the Boer general’s heart, and on June 9th the cavalry had their orders to advance. Hamilton was to work round the left wing of the Boers, and French round their right, while the infantry came up in the centre. So wide was the scene of action that the attack and the resistance in each flank and in the centre constituted, on June 11th, three separate actions. Of these the latter was of least importance, as it merely entailed the advance of the infantry to a spot whence they could take advantage of the success of the flanking forces when they had made their presence felt. The centre did not on this as on several other occasions in the campaign make the mistake of advancing before the way had been prepared for it.

French with his attenuated force found so vigorous a resistance on Monday and Tuesday that he was hard put to it to hold his own. Fortunately he had with him three excellent Horse Artillery batteries, G, O, and T, who worked until, at the end of the engagement, they had only twenty rounds in their limbers. The country was an impossible one for cavalry, and the troopers fought dismounted, with intervals of twenty or thirty paces between the men. Exposed all day to rifle and shell fire, unable to advance and unwilling to retreat, it was only owing to their open formation that they escaped with about thirty casualties. With Boers on his front, his flank, and even on his rear, French held grimly on, realising that a retreat upon his part would mean a greater pressure at all other points of the British advance. At night his weary men slept upon the ground which they had held. All Monday and all Tuesday French kept his grip at Kameelsdrift, stolidly indifferent to the attempt of the enemy to cut his line of communications. On Wednesday, Hamilton, upon the other flank, had gained the upper hand, and the pressure was relaxed. French then pushed forward, but the horses were so utterly beaten that no effective pursuit was possible.

During the two days that French had been held up by the Boer right wing Hamilton had also been seriously engaged upon the left — so seriously that at one time the action appeared to have gone against him. The fight presented some distinctive features, which made it welcome to soldiers who were weary of the invisible man with his smokeless gun upon the eternal kopje. It is true that man, gun, and kopje were all present upon this occasion, but in the endeavours to drive him off some new developments took place, which formed for one brisk hour a reversion to picturesque warfare. Perceiving a gap in the enemy's line, Hamilton pushed up the famous Q battery — the guns which had plucked glory out of disaster at Sanna's Post. For the second time in one campaign they were exposed and in imminent danger of capture. A body of mounted Boers with great dash and hardihood galloped down within close range and opened fire. Instantly the 12th Lancers were let loose upon them. How they must have longed for their big-boned long-striding English troop horses as they strove to raise a gallop out of their spiritless overworked Argentines! For once, however, the lance meant more than five pounds dead weight and an encumbrance to the rider. The guns were saved, the Boers fled, and a dozen were left upon the ground. But a cavalry charge has to end in a re-formation, and that is the instant of danger if any unbroken enemy remains within range. Now a sleet of bullets hissed through their ranks as they retired, and the gallant Lord Airlie, as modest and brave a soldier as ever drew sword, was struck through the heart. 'Pray moderate your language!' was his last characteristic remark, made to a battle-drunken sergeant. Two officers, seventeen men, and thirty horses went down with their Colonel, the great majority only slightly injured. In the meantime the increasing pressure upon his right caused Broadwood to order a second charge, of the Life Guards this time, to drive off the assailants. The appearance rather than the swords of the Guards prevailed, and cavalry as cavalry had vindicated their existence more than they had ever done during the campaign. The guns were saved, the flank attack was rolled back, but one other danger had still to be met, for the Heidelberg commando — a corps d'elite of the Boers — had made its way outside Hamilton's flank and threatened to get past him. With cool judgment the British General detached a battalion and a section of a battery, which pushed the Boers back into a less menacing position. The rest of Bruce Hamilton's Brigade were ordered to advance upon the hills in front, and, aided by a heavy artillery fire, they had succeeded, before the closing in of the winter night, in getting possession of this first line of the enemy's defences. Night fell upon an undecided fight, which, after swaying this way and that, had finally inclined to the side of the British. The Sussex and the City Imperial Volunteers were clinging to the enemy’s left flank, while the 11th Division were holding them in front. All promised well for the morrow.

By order of Lord Roberts the Guards were sent round early on Tuesday, the 12th, to support the flank attack of Bruce Hamilton’s infantry. It was afternoon before all was ready for the advance, and then the Sussex, the London Volunteers, and the Derbyshires won a position upon the ridge, followed later by the three regiments of Guards. But the ridge was the edge of a considerable plateau, swept by Boer fire, and no advance could be made over its bare expanse save at a considerable loss. The infantry clung in a long fringe to the edge of the position, but for two hours no guns could be brought up to their support, as the steepness of the slope was insurmountable. It was all that the stormers could do to hold their ground, as they were enfiladed by a Vickers-Maxim, and exposed to showers of shrapnel as well as to an incessant rifle fire. Never were guns so welcome as those of the 82nd battery, brought by Major Connolly into the firing line. The enemy’s riflemen were only a thousand yards away, and the action of the artillery might have seemed as foolhardy as that of Long at Colenso. Ten horses went down on the instant, and a quarter of the gunners were hit; but the guns roared one by one into action, and their shrapnel soon decided the day. Undoubtedly it is with Connolly and his men that the honours lie.

At four o’clock, as the sun sank towards the west, the tide of fight had set in favour of the attack. Two more batteries had come up, every rifle was thrown into the firing line, and the Boer reply was decreasing in volume. The temptation to an assault was great, but even now it might mean heavy loss of life, and Hamilton shrank from the sacrifice. In the morning his judgment was justified, for Botha had abandoned the position, and his army was in full retreat. The mounted men followed as far as Elands River Station, which is twenty-five miles from Pretoria, but the enemy was not overtaken, save by a small party of De Lisle’s Australians and Regular Mounted Infantry. This force, less than a hundred in number, gained a kopje which overlooked a portion of the Boer army. Had they been more numerous, the effect would have been incalculable. As it was, the Australians fired every cartridge which they possessed into the throng, and killed many horses and men. It would bear examination why it was that only this small corps was present at so vital a point, and why, if they could push the pursuit to such purpose, others should not be able to do the same. Time was bringing some curious revenges. Already Paardeberg had come upon Majuba Day. Buller's victorious soldiers had taken Laing's Nek. Now, the Spruit at which the retreating Boers were so mishandled by the Australians was that same Bronkers Spruit at which, nineteen years before, a regiment had been shot down. Many might have prophesied that the deed would be avenged; but who could ever have guessed the men who would avenge it?

Such was the battle of Diamond Hill, as it was called from the name of the ridge which was opposite to Hamilton's attack. The prolonged two days' struggle showed that there was still plenty of fight in the burghers. Lord Roberts had not routed them, nor had he captured their guns; but he had cleared the vicinity of the capital, he had inflicted a loss upon them which was certainly as great as his own, and he had again proved to them that it was vain for them to attempt to stand. A long pause followed at Pretoria, broken by occasional small alarms and excursions, which served no end save to keep the army from ennui. In spite of occasional breaks in his line of communications, horses and supplies were coming up rapidly, and, by the middle of July, Roberts was ready for the field again. At the same time Hunter had come up from Potchefstroom, and Hamilton had taken Heidelberg, and his force was about to join hands with Buller at Standerton. Sporadic warfare broke out here and there in the west, and in the course of it Snyman of Mafeking had reappeared, with two guns, which were promptly taken from him by the Canadian Mounted Rifles. On all sides it was felt that if the redoubtable De Wet could be captured there was every hope that the burghers might discontinue a struggle which was disagreeable to the British and fatal to themselves. As a point of honour it was impossible for Botha to give in while his ally held out. We will turn, therefore, to this famous guerilla chief, and give some account of his exploits. To understand them some description must be given of the general military situation in the Free State.

When Lord Roberts had swept past to the north he had brushed aside the flower of the Orange Free State army, who occupied the considerable quadrilateral which is formed by the north-east of that State. The function of Rundle's 8th Division and of Brabant's Colonial Division was to separate the sheep from the goats by preventing the fighting burghers from coming south and disturbing those districts which had been settled. For this purpose

Rundle formed a long line which should serve as a cordon. Moving up through Trommel and Clocolan, Ficksburg was occupied on May 25th by the Colonial Division, while Rundle seized Senekal, forty miles to the north-west. A small force of forty Yeomanry, who entered the town some time in advance of the main body, was suddenly attacked by the Boers, and the gallant Dalbiac, famous rider and sportsman, was killed, with four of his men. He was a victim, as so many have been in this campaign, to his own proud disregard of danger.

The Boers were in full retreat, but now, as always, they were dangerous. One cannot take them for granted, for the very moment of defeat is that at which they are capable of some surprising effort. Rundle, following them up from Senekal, found them in strong possession of the kopjes at Biddulphsberg, and received a check in his endeavour to drive them off. It was an action fought amid great grass fires, where the possible fate of the wounded was horrible to contemplate. The 2nd Grenadiers, the Scots Guards, the East Yorkshires, and the West Kents were all engaged, with the 2nd and 79th Field Batteries and a force of Yeomanry. Our losses incurred in the open from unseen rifles were thirty killed and 130 wounded, including Colonel Lloyd of the Grenadiers. Two days later Rundle, from Senekal, joined hands with Brabant from Ficksburg, and a defensive line was formed between those two places, which was held unbroken for two months, when the operations ended in the capture of the greater part of the force opposed to him. Clements’s Brigade, consisting of the 1st Royal Irish, the 2nd Bedfords, the 2nd Worcesters, and the 2nd Wiltshires, had come to strengthen Rundle, and altogether he may have had as many as twelve thousand men under his orders. It was not a large force with which to hold a mobile adversary at least eight thousand strong, who might attack him at any point of his extended line. So well, however, did he select his positions that every attempt of the enemy, and there were many, ended in failure. Badly supplied with food, he and his half-starved men held bravely to their task, and no soldiers in all that great host deserve better of their country.

At the end of May, then, the Colonial Division, Rundle’s Division, and Clements’s Brigade held the Boers from Ficksburg on the Basuto border to Senekal. This prevented them from coming south. But what was there to prevent them from coming west, and falling upon the railway line? There was the weak point of the British position. Lord Methuen had been brought across from Boshof, and was available with six thousand men. Colvile was on that side also, with the Highland Brigade. A few details were scattered up and down the line, waiting to be gathered up by an enterprising enemy. Kroonstad was held by a single militia battalion; each separate force had to be nourished by convoys with weak escorts. Never was there such a field for a mobile and competent guerilla leader. And, as luck would have it, such a man was at hand, ready to take full advantage of his opportunities.

CHAPTER 27. THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION.

Christian de Wet, the elder of two brothers of that name, was at this time in the prime of life, a little over forty years of age. He was a burly middle-sized bearded man, poorly educated, but endowed with much energy and common-sense. His military experience dated back to Majuba Hill, and he had a large share of that curious race hatred which is intelligible in the case of the Transvaal, but inexplicable in a Freestater who has received no injury from the British Empire. Some weakness of his sight compels the use of tinted spectacles, and he had now turned these, with a pair of particularly observant eyes behind them, upon the scattered British forces and the long exposed line of railway.

De Wet's force was an offshoot from the army of Freestaters under De Villiers, Olivier, and Prinsloo, which lay in the mountainous north-east of the State. To him were committed five guns, fifteen hundred men, and the best of the horses. Well armed, well mounted, and operating in a country which consisted of rolling plains with occasional fortress kopjes, his little force had everything in its favour. There were so many tempting objects of attack lying before him that he must have had some difficulty in knowing where to begin. The tinted spectacles were turned first upon the isolated town of Lindley.

Colvile with the Highland Brigade had come up from Ventersburg with instructions to move onward to Heilbron, pacifying the country as he passed. The country, however, refused to be pacified, and his march from Ventersburg to Lindley was harassed by snipers every mile of the way. Finding that De Wet and his men were close upon him, he did not linger at Lindley, but passed on to his destination, his entire march of 126 miles costing him sixty-three casualties, of which nine were fatal. It was a difficult and dangerous march, especially for the handful of Eastern Province Horse, upon whom fell all the mounted work. By evil fortune a force of five hundred Yeomanry, the 18th battalion, including the Duke of Cambridge's Own and the Irish companies, had been sent from Kroonstad to join Colvile at Lindley. Colonel Spragge was in command. On May 27th this body of horsemen reached their destination only to find that Colvile had already abandoned it. They appear to have determined to halt for a day in Lindley, and then follow Colvile to Heilbron. Within a few hours of their entering the town they were fiercely attacked by De Wet.

Colonel Spragge seems to have acted for the best. Under a heavy fire he caused his troopers to fall back upon his transport, which had been left at a point a few miles out upon the Kroonstad Road, where three defensible kopjes sheltered a valley in which the cattle and horses could be herded. A stream ran through it. There were all the materials there for a stand which would have brought glory to the British arms. The men were of peculiarly fine quality, many of them from the public schools and from the universities, and if any would fight to the death these with their sporting spirit and their high sense of honour might have been expected to do so.

They had the stronger motive for holding out, as they had taken steps to convey word of their difficulty to Colvile and to Methuen. The former continued his march to Heilbron, and it is hard to blame him for doing so, but Methuen on hearing the message, which was conveyed to him at great personal peril by Corporal Hankey of the Yeomanry, pushed on instantly with the utmost energy, though he arrived too late to prevent, or even to repair, a disaster. It must be remembered that Colvile was under orders to reach Heilbron on a certain date, that he was himself fighting his way, and that the force which he was asked to relieve was much more mobile than his own. His cavalry at that date consisted of 100 men of the Eastern Province Horse.

Colonel Spragge’s men had held their own for the first three days of their investment, during which they had been simply exposed to a long-range rifle fire which inflicted no very serious loss upon them. Their principal defence consisted of a stone kraal about twenty yards square, which sheltered them from rifle bullets, but must obviously be a perfect death-trap in the not improbable event of the Boers sending for artillery. The spirit of the troopers was admirable. Several dashing sorties were carried out under the leadership of Captain Humby and Lord Longford. The latter was a particularly dashing business, ending in a bayonet charge which cleared a neighbouring ridge. Early in the siege the gallant Keith met his end. On the fourth day the Boers brought up five guns. One would have thought that during so long a time as three days it would have been possible for the officer in command to make such preparations against this obvious possibility as were so successfully taken at a later stage of the war by the handful who garrisoned Ladybrand. Surely in this period, even without engineers, it would not have been hard to construct such trenches as the Boers have again and again opposed to our own artillery. But the preparations which were made proved to be quite inadequate. One of the two smaller kopjes was carried, and the garrison fled to the other. This also was compelled to surrender, and finally the main kopje also hoisted the white flag. No blame can rest upon the men, for their presence there at all is a sufficient proof of their public spirit and their gallantry. But the lessons of the war seem to have been imperfectly learned, especially that very certain lesson that shell fire in a close formation is insupportable, while in an open formation with a little cover it can never compel surrender. The casualty lists (80 killed and wounded out of a force of 470) show that the Yeomanry took considerable punishment before surrendering, but do not permit us to call the defence desperate or heroic. It is only fair to add that Colonel Spragge was acquitted of all blame by a court of inquiry, which agreed, however, that the surrender was premature, and attributed it to the unauthorised hoisting of a white flag upon one of the detached kopjes. With regard to the subsequent controversy as to whether General Colvile might have returned to the relief of the Yeomanry, it is impossible to see how that General could have acted in any other way than he did.

Some explanation is needed of Lord Methuen’s appearance upon the central scene of warfare, his division having, when last described, been at Boshof, not far from Kimberley, where early in April he fought the successful action which led to the death of Villebois. Thence he proceeded along the Vaal and then south to Kroonstad, arriving there on May 28th. He had with him the 9th Brigade (Douglas’s), which contained the troops which had started with him for the relief of Kimberley six months before. These were the Northumberland Fusiliers, Loyal North Lancashires, Northamptons, and Yorkshire Light Infantry. With him also were the Munsters, Lord Chesham’s Yeomanry (five companies), with the 4th and 37th batteries, two howitzers and two pom-poms. His total force was about 6000 men. On arriving at Kroonstad he was given the task of relieving Heilbron, where Colvile, with the Highland Brigade, some Colonial horse, Lovat’s Scouts, two naval guns, and the 5th battery, were short of food and ammunition. The more urgent message from the Yeomen at Lindley, however, took him on a fruitless journey to that town on June 1st. So vigorous was the pursuit of the Yeomanry that the leading squadrons, consisting of South Notts Hussars and Sherwood Rangers, actually cut into the Boer convoy and might have rescued the prisoners had they been supported. As it was they were recalled, and had to fight their way back to Lindley with some loss, including Colonel Rolleston, the commander, who was badly wounded. A garrison was left under Paget, and the rest of the force pursued its original mission to Heilbron, arriving there on June 7th, when the Highlanders had been reduced to quarter rations. 'The Salvation Army' was the nickname by which they expressed their gratitude to the relieving force.

A previous convoy sent to the same destination had less good fortune. On June 1st fifty-five wagons started from the railway line to reach Heilbron. The escort consisted of one hundred and sixty details belonging to Highland regiments without any guns, Captain Corballis in command. But the gentleman with the tinted glasses was waiting on the way. 'I have twelve hundred men and five guns. Surrender at once!' Such was the message which reached the escort, and in their defenceless condition there was nothing for it but to comply. Thus one disaster leads to another, for, had the Yeomanry held out at Lindley, De Wet would not on June 4th have laid hands upon our wagons; and had he not recruited his supplies from our wagons it is doubtful if he could have made his attack upon Roodeval. This was the next point upon which he turned his attention.

Two miles beyond Roodeval station there is a well-marked kopje by the railway line, with other hills some distance to the right and the left. A militia regiment, the 4th Derbyshire, had been sent up to occupy this post. There were rumours of Boers on the line, and Major Haig, who with one thousand details of various regiments commanded at railhead, had been attacked on June 6th but had beaten off his assailants. De Wet, acting sometimes in company with, and sometimes independently of, his lieutenant Nel, passed down the line looking fur some easier prey, and on the night of June 7th came upon the militia regiment, which was encamped in a position which could be completely commanded by artillery. It is not true that they had neglected to occupy the kopje under which they lay, for two companies had been posted upon it. But there seems to have been no thought of imminent danger, and the regiment had pitched its tents and gone very comfortably to sleep without a thought of the gentleman in the tinted glasses. In the middle of the night he was upon them with a hissing sleet of bullets. At the first dawn the guns opened and the shells began to burst among them. It was a horrible ordeal for raw troops. The men were miners and agricultural labourers, who had never seen more bloodshed than a cut finger in their lives. They had been four months in the country, but their life had been a picnic, as the luxury of their baggage shows. Now in an instant the picnic was ended, and in the grey cold dawn war was upon them — grim war with the whine of bullets, the screams of pain, the crash of shell, the horrible rending and riving of body and limb. In desperate straits, which would have tried the oldest soldiers, the brave miners did well. They never from the beginning had a chance save to show how gamely they could take punishment, but that at least they did. Bullets were coming from all sides at once and yet no enemy was visible. They lined one side of the embankment, and they were shot in the back. They lined the other, and were again shot in the back. Baird-Douglas, the Colonel, vowed to shoot the man who should raise the white flag, and he fell dead himself before he saw the hated emblem. But it had to come. A hundred and forty of the men were down, many of them suffering from the horrible wounds which shell inflicts. The place was a shambles. Then the flag went up and the Boers at last became visible. Outnumbered, outgeneralled, and without guns, there is no shadow of stain upon the good name of the one militia regiment which was ever seriously engaged during the war. Their position was hopeless from the first, and they came out of it with death, mutilation, and honour.

Two miles south of the Rhenoster kopje stands Roodeval station, in which, on that June morning, there stood a train containing the mails for the army, a supply of great-coats, and a truck full of enormous shells. A number of details of various sorts, a hundred or more, had alighted from the train, twenty of them Post-office volunteers, some of the Pioneer Railway corps, a few Shropshires, and other waifs and strays. To them in the early morning came the gentleman with the tinted glasses, his hands still red with the blood of the Derbies. ‘I have fourteen hundred men and four guns. Surrender!’ said the messenger. But it is not in nature for a postman to give up his postbag without a struggle. ‘Never!’ cried the valiant postmen. But shell after shell battered the corrugated-iron buildings about their ears, and it was not possible for them to answer the guns which were smashing the life out of them. There was no help for it but to surrender. De Wet added samples of the British volunteer and of the British regular to his bag of militia. The station and train were burned down, the great-coats looted, the big shells exploded, and the mails burned. The latter was the one unsportsmanlike action which can up to that date be laid to De Wet’s charge. Forty thousand men to the north of him could forego their coats and their food, but they yearned greatly for those home letters, charred fragments of which are still blowing about the veld. [Footnote: Fragments continually met the eye which must have afforded curious reading for the victors. ‘I hope you have killed all those Boers by now,’ was the beginning of one letter which I could not help observing.]

For three days De Wet held the line, and during all that time he worked his wicked will upon it. For miles and miles it was wrecked with most scientific completeness. The Rhenoster bridge was destroyed. So, for the second time, was the Roodeval bridge. The rails were blown upwards with dynamite until they looked like an unfinished line to heaven. De Wet’s heavy hand was everywhere. Not a telegraph-post remained standing within ten miles. His headquarters continued to be the kopje at Roodeval.

On June 10th two British forces were converging upon the point of danger. One was Methuen’s, from Heilbron. The other was a small force consisting of the Shropshires, the South Wales Borderers, and a battery which had come south with Lord Kitchener. The energetic Chief of the Staff was always sent by Lord Roberts to the point where a strong man was needed, and it was seldom that he failed to justify his mission. Lord Methuen, however, was the first to arrive, and at once attacked De Wet, who moved swiftly away to the eastward. With a tendency to exaggeration, which has been too common during the war, the affair was described as a victory. It was really a strategic and almost bloodless move upon the part of the Boers. It is not the business of guerillas to fight pitched battles. Methuen pushed for the south, having been informed that Kroonstad had been captured. Finding this to be untrue, he turned again to the eastward in search of De Wet.

That wily and indefatigable man was not long out of our ken. On June 14th he appeared once more at Rhenoster, where the construction trains, under the famous Girouard, were working furiously at the repair of the damage which he had already done. This time the guard was sufficient to beat him off, and he vanished again to the eastward. He succeeded, however, in doing some harm, and very nearly captured Lord Kitchener himself. A permanent post had been established at Rhenoster under the charge of Colonel Spens of the Shropshires, with his own regiment and several guns. Smith-Dorrien, one of the youngest and most energetic of the divisional commanders, had at the same time undertaken the supervision and patrolling of the line.

An attack had at this period been made by a commando of some hundred Boers at the Sand River to the south of Kroonstad, where there is a most important bridge. The attempt was frustrated by the Royal Lancaster regiment and the Railway Pioneer regiment, helped by some mounted infantry and Yeomanry. The fight was for a time a brisk one, and the Pioneers, upon whom the brunt of it fell, behaved with great steadiness. The skirmish is principally remarkable for the death of Major Seymour of the Pioneers, a noble American, who gave his services and at last his life for what, in the face of all slander and misrepresentation, he knew to be the cause of justice and of liberty.

It was hoped now, after all these precautions, that the last had been seen of the gentleman with the tinted glasses, but on June 21st he was back in his old haunts once more. Honing Spruit Station, about midway between Kroonstad and Roodeval, was the scene of his new raid. On that date his men appeared suddenly as a train waited in the station, and ripped up the rails on either side of it. There were no guns at this point, and the only available troops were three hundred of the prisoners from Pretoria, armed with Martini-Henry rifles and obsolete ammunition. A good man was in command, however — the same Colonel Bullock of the Devons who had distinguished himself at Colenso — and every tattered, half-starved wastrel was nerved by a recollection of the humiliations which he had already endured. For seven hours they lay helpless under the shell-fire, but their constancy was rewarded by the arrival of Colonel Brookfield with 300 Yeomanry and four guns of the 17th R.F.A., followed in the evening by a larger force from the south. The Boers fled, but left some of their number behind them; while of the British, Major Hobbs and four men were killed and nineteen wounded. This defence of three hundred half-armed men against seven hundred Boer riflemen, with three guns firing shell and shrapnel, was a very good performance. The same body of burghers immediately afterwards attacked a post held by Colonel Evans with two companies of the Shropshires and fifty Canadians. They were again beaten back with loss, the Canadians under Inglis especially distinguishing themselves by their desperate resistance in an exposed position.

All these attacks, irritating and destructive as they were, were not able to hinder the general progress of the war. After the battle of Diamond Hill the captured position was occupied by the mounted infantry, while the rest of the forces returned to their camps round Pretoria, there to await the much-needed remounts. At other parts of the seat of war the British cordon was being drawn more tightly round the Boer forces. Buller had come as far as Standerton, and Ian Hamilton, in the last week of June, had occupied Heidelberg. A week afterwards the two forces were able to join hands, and so to completely cut off the Free State from the Transvaal armies. Hamilton in these operations had the misfortune to break his collar-bone, and for a time the command of his division passed to Hunter — the one man, perhaps, whom the army would regard as an adequate successor.

It was evident now to the British commanders that there would be no peace and no safety for their communications while an undefeated army of seven or eight thousand men, under such leaders as De Wet and Olivier, was lurking amid the hills which flanked their railroad. A determined effort was made, therefore, to clear up that corner of the country. Having closed the only line of escape by the junction of Ian Hamilton and of Buller, the attention of six separate bodies of troops was concentrated upon the stalwart Freestaters. These were the divisions of Rundle and of Brabant from the south, the brigade of Clements on their extreme left, the garrison of Lindley under Paget, the garrison of Heilbron under Macdonald, and, most formidable of all, a detachment under Hunter which was moving from the north. A crisis was evidently approaching.

The nearest Free State town of importance still untaken was Bethlehem — a singular name to connect with the operations of war. The country on the south of it forbade an advance by Rundle or Brabant, but it was more accessible from the west. The first operation of the British consisted, therefore, in massing sufficient troops to be able to advance from this side. This was done by effecting a junction between Clements from Senekal, and Paget who commanded at Lindley, which was carried out upon July 1st near the latter place. Clements encountered some opposition, but besides his excellent infantry regiments, the Royal Irish, Worcesters, Wiltshires, and Bedfords, he had with him the 2nd Brabant’s Horse, with yeomanry, mounted infantry, two 5-inch guns, and the 38th R.F.A. Aided by a demonstration on the part of Grenfell and of Brabant, he pushed his way through after three days of continual skirmish.

On getting into touch with Clements, Paget sallied out from Lindley, leaving the Buffs behind to garrison the town. He had with him Brookfield’s mounted brigade one thousand strong, eight guns, and two fine battalions of infantry, the Munster Fusiliers and the Yorkshire Light Infantry. On July 3rd he found near Leeuw Kop a considerable force of Boers with three guns opposed to him, Clements being at that time too far off upon the flank to assist him. Four guns of the 38th R.F.A. (Major Oldfield) and two belonging to the City Volunteers came into action. The Royal Artillery guns appear to have been exposed to a very severe fire, and the losses were so heavy that for a time they could not be served. The escort was inadequate, insufficiently advanced, and badly handled, for the Boer riflemen were able, by creeping up a donga, to get right into the 38th battery, and the gallant major, with Lieutenant Belcher, was killed in the defence of the guns. Captain FitzGerald, the only other officer present, was wounded in two places, and twenty men were struck down, with nearly all the horses of one section. Captain Marks, who was brigade-major of Colonel Brookfield’s Yeomanry, with the help of Lieutenant Keevil Davis and the 15th I.Y. came to the rescue of the disorganised and almost annihilated section. At the same time the C.I.V. guns were in imminent danger, but were energetically covered by Captain Budworth, adjutant of the battery. Soon, however, the infantry, Munster Fusiliers, and Yorkshire Light Infantry, which had been carrying out a turning movement, came into action, and the position was taken. The force moved onwards, and on July 6th they were in front of Bethlehem.

The place is surrounded by hills, and the enemy was found strongly posted. Clements’s force was now on the left and Paget’s on the right. From both sides an attempt was made to turn the Boer flanks, but they were found to be very wide and strong. All day a long-range action was kept up while Clements felt his way in the hope of coming upon some weak spot in the position, but in the evening a direct attack was made by Paget’s two infantry regiments upon the right, which gave the British a footing on the Boer position. The Munster Fusiliers and the Yorkshire Light Infantry lost forty killed and wounded, including four officers, in this gallant affair, the heavier loss and the greater honour going to the men of Munster.

The centre of the position was still held, and on the morning of July 7th Clements gave instructions to the colonel of the Royal Irish to storm it if the occasion should seem favourable. Such an order to such a regiment means that the occasion will seem favourable. Up they went in three extended lines, dropping forty or fifty on the way, but arriving breathless and enthusiastic upon the crest of the ridge. Below them, upon the further side, lay the village of Bethlehem. On the slopes beyond hundreds of horsemen were retreating, and a gun was being hurriedly dragged into the town. For a moment it seemed as if nothing had been left as a trophy, but suddenly a keen-eyed sergeant raised a cheer, which was taken up again and again until it resounded over the veld. Under the crest, lying on its side with a broken wheel, was a gun — one of the 15-pounders of Stormberg which it was a point of honour to regain once more. Many a time had the gunners been friends in need to the infantry. Now it was the turn of the infantry to do something in exchange. That evening Clements had occupied Bethlehem, and one more of their towns had passed out of the hands of the Freestaters.

A word now as to that force under General Hunter which was closing in from the north. The gallant and energetic Hamilton, lean, aquiline, and tireless, had, as already stated, broken his collar-bone at Heidelberg, and it was as his lieutenant that Hunter was leading these troops out of the Transvaal into the Orange River Colony. Most of his infantry was left behind at Heidelberg, but he took with him Broadwood's cavalry (two brigades) and Bruce Hamilton's 21st infantry brigade, with Ridley's mounted infantry, some seven thousand men in all. On the 2nd of July this force reached Frankfort in the north of the Free State without resistance, and on July 3rd they were joined there by Macdonald's force from Heilbron, so that Hunter found himself with over eleven thousand men under his command. Here was an instrument with which surely the coup de grace could be given to the dying State. Passing south, still without meeting serious resistance, Hunter occupied Reitz, and finally sent on Broadwood's cavalry to Bethlehem, where on July 8th they joined Paget and Clements.

The net was now in position, and about to be drawn tight, but at this last moment the biggest fish of all dashed furiously out from it. Leaving the main Free State force in a hopeless position behind him, De Wet, with fifteen hundred well-mounted men and five guns, broke through Slabbert's Nek between Bethlehem and Ficksburg, and made swiftly for the north-west, closely followed by Paget's and Broadwood's cavalry. It was on July 16th that he made his dash for freedom. On the 19th Little, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, had come into touch with him near Lindley. De Wet shook himself clear, and with splendid audacity cut the railway once more to the north of Honing Spruit, gathering up a train as he passed, and taking two hundred details prisoners. On July 22nd De Wet was at Vredefort, still closely followed by Broadwood, Ridley, and Little, who gleaned his wagons and his stragglers. Thence he threw himself into the hilly country some miles to the south of the Vaal River, where he lurked for a week or more while Lord Kitchener came south to direct the operations which would, as it was hoped, lead to a surrender.

Leaving the indomitable guerilla in his hiding-place, the narrative must return to that drawing of the net which still continued in spite of the escape of this one important fish. On all sides the British forces had drawn closer, and they were both more numerous and more formidable in quality. It was evident now that by a rapid advance from Bethlehem in the direction of the Basuto border all Boers to the north of Ficksburg would be hemmed in. On July 22nd the columns were moving. On that date Paget moved out of Bethlehem, and Rundle took a step forward from Ficksburg. Bruce Hamilton had already, at the cost of twenty Cameron Highlanders, got a grip upon a bastion of that rocky country in which the enemy lurked. On the 23rd Hunter's force was held by the Boers at the strong pass of Retief's Nek, but on the 24th they were compelled to abandon it, as the capture of Slabbert's Nek by Clements threatened their rear. This latter pass was fortified most elaborately. It was attacked upon the 23rd by Brabant's Horse and the Royal Irish without success. Later in the day two companies of the Wiltshire Regiment were also brought to a standstill, but retained a position until nightfall within stone-throw of the Boer lines, though a single company had lost 17 killed and wounded. Part of the Royal Irish remained also close to the enemy's trenches. Under cover of darkness, Clements sent four companies of the Royal Irish and two of the Wiltshires under Colonel Guinness to make a flanking movement along the crest of the heights. These six companies completely surprised the enemy, and caused them to hurriedly evacuate the position. Their night march was performed under great difficulties, the men crawling on hands and knees along a rocky path with a drop of 400 feet upon one side. But their exertions were greatly rewarded. Upon the success of their turning movement depended the fall of Slabbert's Nek. Retief's Nek was untenable if we held Slabbert's Nek, and if both were in our hands the retreat of Prinsloo was cut off.

At every opening of the hills the British guns were thundering, and the heads of British columns were appearing on every height. The Highland

Brigade had fairly established themselves over the Boer position, though not without hard fighting, in which a hundred men of the Highland Light Infantry had been killed and wounded. The Seaforths and the Sussex had also gripped the positions in front of them, and taken some punishment in doing so. The outworks of the great mountain fortress were all taken, and on July 26th the British columns were converging on Fouriesburg, while Naauwpoort on the line of retreat was held by Macdonald. It was only a matter of time now with the Boers.

On the 28th Clements was still advancing, and contracting still further the space which was occupied by our stubborn foe. He found himself faced by the stiff position of Slaapkrantz, and a hot little action was needed before the Boers could be dislodged. The fighting fell upon Brabant's Horse, the Royal Irish, and the Wiltshires. Three companies of the latter seized a farm upon the enemy's left, but lost ten men in doing so, while their gallant colonel, Carter, was severely wounded in two places. The Wiltshires, who were excellently handled by Captain Bolton, held on to the farm and were reinforced there by a handful of the Scots Guards. In the night the position was abandoned by the Boers, and the advance swept onwards. On all sides the pressure was becoming unendurable. The burghers in the valley below could see all day the twinkle of British heliographs from every hill, while at night the constant flash of signals told of the sleepless vigilance which hemmed them in. Upon July 29th, Prinsloo sent in a request for an armistice, which was refused. Later in the day he despatched a messenger with the white flag to Hunter, with an announcement of his unconditional surrender.

On July 30th the motley army which had held the British off so long emerged from among the mountains. But it soon became evident that in speaking for all Prinsloo had gone beyond his powers. Discipline was low and individualism high in the Boer army. Every man might repudiate the decision of his commandant, as every man might repudiate the white flag of his comrade. On the first day no more than eleven hundred men of the Ficksburg and Ladybrand commandos, with fifteen hundred horses and two guns, were surrendered. Next day seven hundred and fifty more men came in with eight hundred horses, and by August 6th the total of the prisoners had mounted to four thousand one hundred and fifty with three guns, two of which were our own. But Olivier, with fifteen hundred men and several guns, broke away from the captured force and escaped through the hills. Of this incident General Hunter, an honourable soldier, remarks in his official report: ‘I regard it as a dishonourable breach of faith upon the part of General Olivier, for which I hold him personally responsible. He admitted that he knew that General Prinsloo had included him in the unconditional surrender.’ It is strange that, on Olivier’s capture shortly afterwards, he was not court-martialled for this breach of the rules of war, but that good-natured giant, the Empire, is quick — too quick, perhaps — to let byegones be byegones. On August 4th Harrismith surrendered to Macdonald, and thus was secured the opening of the Van Reenen’s Pass and the end of the Natal system of railways. This was of the very first importance, as the utmost difficulty had been found in supplying so large a body of troops so far from the Cape base. In a day the base was shifted to Durban, and the distance shortened by two-thirds, while the army came to be on the railway instead of a hundred miles from it. This great success assured Lord Roberts’s communications from serious attack, and was of the utmost importance in enabling him to consolidate his position at Pretoria.

CHAPTER 28. THE HALT AT PRETORIA.

Lord Roberts had now been six weeks in the capital, and British troops had overrun the greater part of the south and west of the Transvaal, but in spite of this there was continued Boer resistance, which flared suddenly up in places which had been nominally pacified and disarmed. It was found, as has often been shown in history, that it is easier to defeat a republican army than to conquer it. From Klerksdorp, from Ventersdorp, from Rustenburg, came news of risings against the newly imposed British authority. The concealed Mauser and the bandolier were dug up once more from the trampled corner of the cattle kraal, and the farmer was a warrior once again. Vague news of the exploits of De Wet stimulated the fighting burghers and shamed those who had submitted. A letter was intercepted from the guerilla chief to Cronje’s son, who had surrendered near Rustenburg. De Wet stated that he had gained two great victories and had fifteen hundred captured rifles with which to replace those which the burghers had given up. Not only were the outlying districts in a state of revolt, but even round Pretoria the Boers were inclined to take the offensive, while both that town and Johannesburg were filled with malcontents who were ready to fly to their arms once more.

Already at the end of June there were signs that the Boers realised how helpless Lord Roberts was until his remounts should arrive. The mosquitoes buzzed round the crippled lion. On June 29th there was an attack upon Springs near Johannesburg, which was easily beaten off by the Canadians. Early in July some of the cavalry and mounted infantry patrols were snapped up in the neighbourhood of the capital. Lord Roberts gave orders accordingly that Hutton and Mahon should sweep the Boers back upon his right, and push them as far as Bronkhorst Spruit. This was done on July 6th and 7th, the British advance meeting with considerable resistance from artillery as well as rifles. By this movement the pressure upon the right was relieved, which might have created a dangerous unrest in Johannesburg, and it was done at the moderate cost of thirty-four killed and wounded, half of whom belonged to the Imperial Light Horse. This famous corps, which had come across with Mahon from the relief of Mafeking, had, a few days before, ridden with mixed feelings through the streets of Johannesburg and past, in many instances, the deserted houses which had once been their homes. Many weary months were to pass before the survivors might occupy them. On July 9th the Boers again attacked, but were again pushed back to the eastward.

It is probable that all these demonstrations of the enemy upon the right of Lord Roberts's extended position were really feints in order to cover the far-reaching plans which Botha had in his mind. The disposition of the Boer forces at this time appears to have been as follows: Botha with his army occupied a position along Delagoa railway line, further east than Diamond Hill, whence he detached the bodies which attacked Hutton upon the extreme right of the British position to the south-east of Pretoria. To the north of Pretoria a second force was acting under Grobler, while a third under De la Rey had been despatched secretly across to the left wing of the British, north-west of Pretoria. While Botha engaged the attention of Lord Roberts by energetic demonstrations on his right, Grobler and De la Rey were to make a sudden attack upon his centre and his left, each point being twelve or fifteen miles from the other. It was well devised and very well carried out; but the inherent defect of it was that, when subdivided in this way, the Boer force was no longer strong enough to gain more than a mere success of outposts.

De la Rey's attack was delivered at break of day on July 11th at Uitval's Nek, a post some eighteen miles west of the capital. This position could not be said to be part of Lord Roberts's line, but rather to be a link to connect his army with Rustenburg. It was weakly held by three companies of the Lincolns with two others in support, one squadron of the Scots Greys, and two guns of O battery R.H.A. The attack came with the first grey light of dawn, and for many hours the small garrison bore up against a deadly fire, waiting for the help which never came. All day they held their assailants at bay, and it was not until evening that their ammunition ran short and they were forced to surrender. Nothing could have been better than the behaviour of the men, both infantry, cavalry, and gunners, but their position was a hopeless one. The casualties amounted to eighty killed and wounded. Nearly two hundred were made prisoners and the two guns were taken.

On the same day that De la Rey made his coup at Uitval's Nek, Grobler had shown his presence on the north side of the town by treating very roughly a couple of squadrons of the 7th Dragoon Guards which had attacked him. By the help of a section of the ubiquitous O battery and of the

14th Hussars, Colonel Lowe was able to disengage his cavalry from the trap into which they had fallen, but it was at the cost of between thirty and forty officers and men killed, wounded, or taken. The old ‘Black Horse’ sustained their historical reputation, and fought their way bravely out of an almost desperate situation, where they were exposed to the fire of a thousand riflemen and four guns.

On this same day of skirmishes, July 11th, the Gordons had seen some hot work twenty miles or so to the south of Uitval’s Nek. Orders had been given to the 19th Brigade (Smith-Dorrien’s) to proceed to Krugersdorp, and thence to make their way north. The Scottish Yeomanry and a section of the 78th R.F.A. accompanied them. The idea seems to have been that they would be able to drive north any Boers in that district, who would then find the garrison of Uitval’s Nek at their rear. The advance was checked, however, at a place called Dolverkrantz, which was strongly held by Boer riflemen. The two guns were insufficiently protected, and the enemy got within short range of them, killing or wounding many of the gunners. The lieutenant in charge, Mr. A.J. Turner, the famous Essex cricketer, worked the gun with his own hands until he also fell wounded in three places. The situation was now very serious, and became more so when news was flashed of the disaster at Uitval’s Nek, and they were ordered to retire. They could not retire and abandon the guns, yet the fire was so hot that it was impossible to remove them. Gallant attempts were made by volunteers from the Gordons — Captain Younger and other brave men throwing away their lives in the vain effort to reach and to limber up the guns. At last, under the cover of night, the teams were harnessed and the two field-pieces successfully removed, while the Boers who rushed in to seize them were scattered by a volley. The losses in the action were thirty-six and the gain nothing. Decidedly July 11th was not a lucky day for the British arms.

It was well known to Botha that every train from the south was bringing horses for Lord Roberts’s army, and that it had become increasingly difficult for De Wet and his men to hinder their arrival. The last horse must win, and the Empire had the world on which to draw. Any movement which the Boers would make must be made at once, for already both the cavalry and the mounted infantry were rapidly coming back to their full strength once more. This consideration must have urged Botha to deliver an attack on July 16th, which had some success at first, but was afterwards beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy. The fighting fell principally upon Pole-Carew and Hutton, the corps chiefly engaged being the Royal Irish Fusiliers, the New Zealanders, the Shropshires, and the Canadian Mounted Infantry. The enemy tried repeatedly to assault the position, but were beaten back each time with a loss of nearly a hundred killed and wounded. The British loss was about sixty, and included two gallant young Canadian officers, Borden and Birch, the former being the only son of the minister of militia. So ended the last attempt made by Botha upon the British positions round Pretoria. The end of the war was not yet, but already its futility was abundantly evident. This had become more apparent since the junction of Hamilton and of Buller had cut off the Transvaal army from that of the Free State. Unable to send their prisoners away, and also unable to feed them, the Freestaters were compelled to deliver up in Natal the prisoners whom they had taken at Lindley and Roodeval. These men, a ragged and starving battalion, emerged at Ladysmith, having made their way through Van Reenen’s Pass. It is a singular fact that no parole appears on these and similar occasions to have been exacted by the Boers.

Lord Roberts, having remounted a large part of his cavalry, was ready now to advance eastward and give Botha battle. The first town of any consequence along the Delagoa Railway is Middelburg, some seventy miles from the capital. This became the British objective, and the forces of Mahon and Hamilton on the north, of Pole-Carew in the centre, and of French and Hutton to the south, all converged upon it. There was no serious resistance, though the weather was abominable, and on July 27th the town was in the hands of the invaders. From that date until the final advance to the eastward French held this advanced post, while Pole-Carew guarded the railway line. Rumours of trouble in the west had convinced Roberts that it was not yet time to push his advantage to the east, and he recalled Ian Hamilton’s force to act for a time upon the other side of the seat of the war. This excellent little army, consisting of Mahon’s and Pilcher’s mounted infantry, M battery R.H.A., the Elswick battery, two 5-inch and two 4.7 guns, with the Berkshires, the Border Regiment, the Argyle and Sutherlands, and the Scottish Borderers, put in as much hard work in marching and in fighting as any body of troops in the whole campaign.

The renewal of the war in the west had begun some weeks before, but was much accelerated by the transference of De la Rey and his burghers to that side. There is no district in the Transvaal which is better worth fighting for, for it is a fair country side, studded with farmhouses and green with orange-groves, with many clear streams running through it. The first sign of activity appears to have been on July 7th, when a commando with guns appeared upon the hills above Rustenburg. Hanbury Tracy, commandant of Rustenburg, was suddenly confronted with a summons to surrender. He had only 120 men and one gun, but he showed a bold front. Colonel Houldsworth, at the first whisper of danger, had started from Zeerust with a small force of Australian bushmen, and arrived at Rustenburg in time to drive the enemy away in a very spirited action. On the evening of July 8th Baden-Powell took over the command, the garrison being reinforced by Plumer's command.

The Boer commando was still in existence, however, and it was reinforced and reinvigorated by De la Rey's success at Uitval's Nek. On July 18th they began to close in upon Rustenburg again, and a small skirmish took place between them and the Australians. Methuen's division, which had been doing very arduous service in the north of the Free State during the last six weeks, now received orders to proceed into the Transvaal and to pass northwards through the disturbed districts en route for Rustenburg, which appeared to be the storm centre. The division was transported by train from Kroonstad to Krugersdorp, and advanced on the evening of July 18th upon its mission, through a bare and fire-blackened country. On the 19th Lord Methuen manoeuvred the Boers out of a strong position, with little loss to either side. On the 21st he forced his way through Olifant's Nek, in the Magaliesberg range, and so established communication with Baden-Powell, whose valiant bushmen, under Colonel Airey, had held their own in a severe conflict near Magato Pass, in which they lost six killed, nineteen wounded, and nearly two hundred horses. The fortunate arrival of Captain FitzClarence with the Protectorate Regiment helped on this occasion to avert a disaster. The force, only 300 strong, without guns, had walked into an ugly ambuscade, and only the tenacity and resource of the men enabled them ever to extricate themselves.

Although Methuen came within reach of Rustenburg, he did not actually join hands with Baden-Powell. No doubt he saw and heard enough to convince him that that astute soldier was very well able to take care of himself. Learning of the existence of a Boer force in his rear, Methuen turned, and on July 29th he was back at Frederickstad on the Potchefstroom to Krugersdorp railway. The sudden change in his plans was caused doubtless by the desire to head off De Wet in case he should cross the Vaal

River. Lord Roberts was still anxious to clear the neighbourhood of Rustenburg entirely of the enemy; and he therefore, since Methuen was needed to complete the cordon round De Wet, recalled Hamilton's force from the east and despatched it, as already described, to the west of Pretoria.

Before going into the details of the great De Wet hunt, in which Methuen's force was to be engaged, I shall follow Hamilton's division across, and give some account of their services. On August 1st he set out from Pretoria for Rustenburg. On that day and on the next he had brisk skirmishes which brought him successfully through the Magaliesberg range with a loss of forty wounded, mostly of the Berkshires. On the 5th of August he had made his way to Rustenburg and drove off the investing force. A smaller siege had been going on to westward, where at Elands River another Mafeking man, Colonel Hore, had been held up by the burghers. For some days it was feared, and even officially announced, that the garrison had surrendered. It was known that an attempt by Carrington to relieve the place on August 5th had been beaten back, and that the state of the country appeared so threatening that he had been compelled, or had imagined himself to be compelled, to retreat as far as Mafeking, evacuating Zeerust and Otto's Hoop, abandoning the considerable stores which were collected at those places. In spite of all these sinister indications the garrison was still holding its own, and on August 16th it was relieved by Lord Kitchener.

This stand at Brakfontein on the Elands River appears to have been one of the very finest deeds of arms of the war. The Australians have been so split up during the campaign, that though their valour and efficiency were universally recognised, they had no single exploit which they could call their own. But now they can point to Elands River as proudly as the Canadians can to Paardeberg. They were 500 in number, Victorians, New South Welshmen, and Queenslanders, the latter the larger unit, with a corps of Rhodesians. Under Hore were Major Hopper of the Rhodesians, and Major Toubridge of the Queenslanders. Two thousand five hundred Boers surrounded them, and most favourable terms of surrender were offered and scouted. Six guns were trained upon them, and during 11 days 1800 shells fell within their lines. The river was half a mile off, and every drop of water for man or beast had to come from there. Nearly all their horses and 75 of the men were killed or wounded. With extraordinary energy and ingenuity the little band dug shelters which are said to have exceeded in depth and efficiency any which the Boers have devised. Neither the repulse of Carrington, nor the jamming of their only gun, nor the death of the gallant Annett, was sufficient to dishearten them. They were sworn to die before the white flag should wave above them. And so fortune yielded, as fortune will when brave men set their teeth, and Broadwood's troopers, filled with wonder and admiration, rode into the lines of the reduced and emaciated but indomitable garrison. When the ballad-makers of Australia seek for a subject, let them turn to Elands River, for there was no finer resistance in the war. They will not grudge a place in their record to the 130 gallant Rhodesians who shared with them the honours and the dangers of the exploit.

On August 7th Ian Hamilton abandoned Rustenburg, taking Baden-Powell and his men with him. It was obviously unwise to scatter the British forces too widely by attempting to garrison every single town. For the instant the whole interest of the war centred upon De Wet and his dash into the Transvaal. One or two minor events, however, which cannot be fitted into any continuous narrative may be here introduced.

One of these was the action at Faber's Put, by which Sir Charles Warren crushed the rebellion in Griqualand. In that sparsely inhabited country of vast distances it was a most difficult task to bring the revolt to a decisive ending. This Sir Charles Warren, with his special local knowledge and interest, was able to do, and the success is doubly welcome as bringing additional honour to a man who, whatever view one may take of his action at Spion Kop, has grown grey in the service of the Empire. With a column consisting mainly of colonials and of yeomanry he had followed the rebels up to a point within twelve miles of Douglas. Here at the end of May they turned upon him and delivered a fierce night attack, so sudden and so strongly pressed that much credit is due both to General and to troops for having repelled it. The camp was attacked on all sides in the early dawn. The greater part of the horses were stampeded by the firing, and the enemy's riflemen were found to be at very close quarters. For an hour the action was warm, but at the end of that time the Boers fled, leaving a number of dead behind them. The troops engaged in this very creditable action, which might have tried the steadiness of veterans, were four hundred of the Duke of Edinburgh's volunteers, some of Paget's horse and of the 8th Regiment Imperial Yeomanry, four Canadian guns, and twenty-five of

Warren’s Scouts. Their losses were eighteen killed and thirty wounded. Colonel Spence, of the volunteers, died at the head of his regiment. A few days before, on May 27th, Colonel Adye had won a small engagement at Kheis, some distance to the westward, and the effect of the two actions was to put an end to open resistance. On June 20th De Villiers, the Boer leader, finally surrendered to Sir Charles Warren, handing over two hundred and twenty men with stores, rifles, and ammunition. The last sparks had for the time been stamped out in the colony.

There remain to be mentioned those attacks upon trains and upon the railway which had spread from the Free State to the Transvaal. On July 19th a train was wrecked on the way from Potchefstroom to Krugersdorp without serious injury to the passengers. On July 31st, however, the same thing occurred with more murderous effect, the train running at full speed off the metals. Thirteen of the Shropshires were killed and thirty-seven injured in this deplorable affair, which cost us more than many an important engagement. On August 2nd a train coming up from Bloemfontein was derailed by Sarel Theron and his gang some miles south of Kroonstad. Thirty-five trucks of stores were burned, and six of the passengers (unarmed convalescent soldiers) were killed or wounded. A body of mounted infantry followed up the Boers, who numbered eighty, and succeeded in killing and wounding several of them.

On July 21st the Boers made a determined attack upon the railhead at a point thirteen miles east of Heidelberg, where over a hundred Royal Engineers were engaged upon a bridge. They were protected by three hundred Dublin Fusiliers under Major English. For some hours the little party was hard pressed by the burghers, who had two field-pieces and a pom-pom. They could make no impression, however, upon the steady Irish infantry, and after some hours the arrival of General Hart with reinforcements scattered the assailants, who succeeded in getting their guns away in safety.

At the beginning of August it must be confessed that the general situation in the Transvaal was not reassuring. Springs near Johannesburg had in some inexplicable way, without fighting, fallen into the hands of the enemy. Klerksdorp, an important place in the south-west, had also been reoccupied, and a handful of men who garrisoned it had been made prisoners without resistance. Rustenburg was about to be abandoned, and the British were known to be falling back from Zeerust and Otto’s Hoop, concentrating upon

Mafeking. The sequel proved however, that there was no cause for uneasiness in all this. Lord Roberts was concentrating his strength upon those objects which were vital, and letting the others drift for a time. At present the two obviously important things were to hunt down De Wet and to scatter the main Boer army under Botha. The latter enterprise must wait upon the former, so for a fortnight all operations were in abeyance while the flying columns of the British endeavoured to run down their extremely active and energetic antagonist.

At the end of July De Wet had taken refuge in some exceedingly difficult country near Reitzburg, seven miles south of the Vaal River. The operations were proceeding vigorously at that time against the main army at Fouriesberg, and sufficient troops could not be spared to attack him, but he was closely observed by Kitchener and Broadwood with a force of cavalry and mounted infantry. With the surrender of Prinsloo a large army was disengaged, and it was obvious that if De Wet remained where he was he must soon be surrounded. On the other hand, there was no place of refuge to the south of him. With great audacity he determined to make a dash for the Transvaal, in the hope of joining hands with De la Rey’s force, or else of making his way across the north of Pretoria, and so reaching Botha’s army. President Steyn went with him, and a most singular experience it must have been for him to be harried like a mad dog through the country in which he had once been an honoured guest. De Wet’s force was exceedingly mobile, each man having a led horse, and the ammunition being carried in light Cape carts.

In the first week of August the British began to thicken round his lurking-place, and De Wet knew that it was time for him to go. He made a great show of fortifying a position, but it was only a ruse to deceive those who watched him. Travelling as lightly as possible, he made a dash on August 7th at the drift which bears his own name, and so won his way across the Vaal River, Kitchener thundering at his heels with his cavalry and mounted infantry. Methuen’s force was at that time at Potchefstroom, and instant orders had been sent to him to block the drifts upon the northern side. It was found as he approached the river that the vanguard of the enemy was already across and that it was holding the spurs of the hills which would cover the crossing of their comrades. By the dash of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the exertions of the artillery ridge after ridge was carried, but before evening De Wet with supreme skill had got his convoy across, and had broken away, first to the eastward and then to the north. On the 9th Methuen was in touch with him again, and the two savage little armies, Methuen worrying at the haunch, and De Wet snapping back over his shoulder, swept northward over the huge plains. Wherever there was ridge or kopje the Boer riflemen staved off the eager pursuers. Where the ground lay flat and clear the British guns thundered onwards and fired into the lines of wagons. Mile after mile the running fight was sustained, but the other British columns, Broadwood's men and Kitchener's men, had for some reason not come up. Methuen alone was numerically inferior to the men he was chasing, but he held on with admirable energy and spirit. The Boers were hustled off the kopjes from which they tried to cover their rear. Twenty men of the Yorkshire Yeomanry carried one hill with the bayonet, though only twelve of them were left to reach the top.

De Wet trekked onwards during the night of the 9th, shedding wagons and stores as he went. He was able to replace some of his exhausted beasts from the farmhouses which he passed. Methuen on the morning of the 10th struck away to the west, sending messages back to Broadwood and Kitchener in the rear that they should bear to the east, and so nurse the Boer column between them. At the same time he sent on a messenger, who unfortunately never arrived, to warn Smith-Dorrien at Bank Station to throw himself across De Wet's path. On the 11th it was realised that De Wet had succeeded, in spite of great exertions upon the part of Smith-Dorrien's infantry, in crossing the railway line, and that he had left all his pursuers to the south of him. But across his front lay the Magaliesberg range. There are only three passes, the Magato Pass, Olifant's Nek, and Commando Nek. It was understood that all three were held by British troops. It was obvious, therefore, that if Methuen could advance in such a way as to cut De Wet off from slipping through to the west he would be unable to get away. Broadwood and Kitchener would be behind him, and Pretoria, with the main British army, to the east.

Methuen continued to act with great energy and judgment. At three A.M. on the 12th be started from Fredericstadt, and by 5 P.M. on Tuesday he had done eighty miles in sixty hours. The force which accompanied him was all mounted, 1200 of the Colonial Division (1st Brabant's, Cape Mounted Rifles, Kaffrarian Rifles, and Border Horse), and the Yeomanry with ten guns. Douglas with the infantry was to follow behind, and these brave fellows covered sixty-six miles in seventy-six hours in their eagerness to be in time. No men could have made greater efforts than did those of Methuen, for there was not one who did not appreciate the importance of the issue and long to come to close quarters with the wily leader who had baffled us so long.

On the 12th Methuen's van again overtook De Wet's rear, and the old game of rearguard riflemen on one side, and a pushing artillery on the other, was once more resumed. All day the Boers streamed over the veld with the guns and the horsemen at their heels. A shot from the 78th battery struck one of De Wet's guns, which was abandoned and captured. Many stores were taken and much more, with the wagons which contained them, burned by the Boers. Fighting incessantly, both armies traversed thirty-five miles of ground that day.

It was fully understood that Olifant's Nek was held by the British, so Methuen felt that if he could block the Magato Pass all would be well. He therefore left De Wet's direct track, knowing that other British forces were behind him, and he continued his swift advance until he had reached the desired position. It really appeared that at last the elusive raider was in a corner. But, alas for fallen hopes, and alas for the wasted efforts of gallant men! Olifant's Nek had been abandoned and De Wet had passed safely through it into the plains beyond, where De la Rey's force was still in possession. In vain Methuen's weary column forced the Magato Pass and descended into Rustenburg. The enemy was in a safe country once more. Whose the fault, or whether there was a fault at all, it is for the future to determine. At least unalloyed praise can be given to the Boer leader for the admirable way in which he had extricated himself from so many dangers. On the 17th., moving along the northern side of the mountains, he appeared at Commando Nek on the Little Crocodile River, where he summoned Baden-Powell to surrender, and received some chaff in reply from that light-hearted commander. Then, swinging to the eastward, he endeavoured to cross to the north of Pretoria. On the 19th he was heard of at Hebron. Baden-Powell and Paget had, however, already barred this path, and De Wet, having sent Steyn on with a small escort, turned back to the Free State. On the 22nd it was reported that, with only a handful of his followers, he had crossed the Magaliesberg range by a bridlepath and was riding southwards. Lord Roberts was at last free to turn his undivided attention upon Botha.

Two Boer plots had been discovered during the first half of August, the one in Pretoria and the other in Johannesburg, each having for its object a rising against the British in the town. Of these the former, which was the more serious, involving as it did the kidnapping of Lord Roberts, was broken up by the arrest of the deviser, Hans Cordua, a German lieutenant in the Transvaal Artillery. On its merits it is unlikely that the crime would have been met by the extreme penalty, especially as it was a question whether the agent provocateur had not played a part. But the repeated breaches of parole, by which our prisoners of one day were in the field against us on the next, called imperatively for an example, and it was probably rather for his broken faith than for his hare-brained scheme that Cordua died. At the same time it is impossible not to feel sorrow for this idealist of twenty-three who died for a cause which was not his own. He was shot in the garden of Pretoria Gaol upon August 24th. A fresh and more stringent proclamation from Lord Roberts showed that the British Commander was losing his patience in the face of the wholesale return of paroled men to the field, and announced that such perfidy would in future be severely punished. It was notorious that the same men had been taken and released more than once. One man killed in action was found to have nine signed passes in his pocket. It was against such abuses that the extra severity of the British was aimed.

CHAPTER 29. THE ADVANCE TO KOMATIPOORT.

The time had now come for the great combined movement which was to sweep the main Boer army off the line of the Delagoa railway, cut its source of supplies, and follow it into that remote and mountainous Lydenburg district which had always been proclaimed as the last refuge of the burghers. Before entering upon this most difficult of all his advances Lord Roberts waited until the cavalry and mounted infantry were well mounted again. Then, when all was ready, the first step in this last stage of the regular campaign was taken by General Buller, who moved his army of Natal veterans off the railway line and advanced to a position from which he could threaten the flank and rear of Botha if he held his ground against Lord Roberts. Buller's cavalry had been reinforced by the arrival of Strathcona's Horse, a fine body of Canadian troopers, whose services had been presented to the nation by the public-spirited nobleman whose name they bore. They were distinguished by their fine physique, and by the lassoes, cowboy stirrups, and large spurs of the North-Western plains.

It was in the first week of July that Clery joined hands with the Heidelberg garrison, while Coke with the 10th Brigade cleared the right flank of the railway by an expedition as far as Amersfoort. On July 6th the Natal communications were restored, and on the 7th Buller was able to come through to Pretoria and confer with the Commander-in-Chief. A Boer force with heavy guns still hung about the line, and several small skirmishes were fought between Vlakfontein and Greylingstad in order to drive it away. By the middle of July the immediate vicinity of the railway was clear save for some small marauding parties who endeavoured to tamper with the rails and the bridges. Up to the end of the month the whole of the Natal army remained strung along the line of communications from Heidelberg to Standerton, waiting for the collection of forage and transport to enable them to march north against Botha's position.

On August 8th Buller's troops advanced to the north-east from Paardekop, pushing a weak Boer force with five guns in front of them. At the cost of twenty-five wounded, principally of the 60th Rifles, the enemy was cleared off, and the town of Amersfoort was occupied. On the 13th, moving on the same line, and meeting with very slight opposition, Buller took possession of Ermelo. His advance was having a good effect upon the district, for on the 12th the Standerton commando, which numbered 182 men, surrendered to Clery. On the 15th, still skirmishing, Buller's men were at Twyfelaar, and had taken possession of Carolina. Here and there a distant horseman riding over the olive-coloured hills showed how closely and incessantly he was watched; but, save for a little sniping upon his flanks, there was no fighting. He was coming now within touch of French's cavalry, operating from Middelburg, and on the 14th heliographic communication was established with Gordon's Brigade.

Buller's column had come nearer to its friends, but it was also nearer to the main body of Boers who were waiting in that very rugged piece of country which lies between Belfast in the west and Machadodorp in the east. From this rocky stronghold they had thrown out mobile bodies to harass the British advance from the south, and every day brought Buller into closer touch with these advance guards of the enemy. On August 21st he had moved eight miles nearer to Belfast, French operating upon his left flank. Here he found the Boers in considerable numbers, but he pushed them northward with his cavalry, mounted infantry, and artillery, losing between thirty and forty killed and wounded, the greater part from the ranks of the 18th Hussars and the Gordon Highlanders. This march brought him within fifteen miles of Belfast, which lay due north of him. At the same time Pole-Carew with the central column of Lord Roberts's force had advanced along the railway line, and on August 24th he occupied Belfast with little resistance. He found, however, that the enemy were holding the formidable ridges which lie between that place and Dalmanutha, and that they showed every sign of giving battle, presenting a firm front to Buller on the south as well as to Roberts's army on the west.

On the 23rd some successes attended their efforts to check the advance from the south. During the day Buller had advanced steadily, though under incessant fire. The evening found him only six miles to the south of Dalmanutha, the centre of the Boer position. By some misfortune, however, after dark two companies of the Liverpool Regiment found themselves isolated from their comrades and exposed to a very heavy fire. They had pushed forward too far, and were very near to being surrounded and destroyed. There were fifty-six casualties in their ranks, and thirty-two, including their wounded captain, were taken. The total losses in the day were 121.

On August 25th it was evident that important events were at hand, for on that date Lord Roberts arrived at Belfast and held a conference with Buller, French, and Pole-Carew. The general communicated his plans to his three lieutenants, and on the 26th and following days the fruits of the interview were seen in a succession of rapid manoeuvres which drove the Boers out of this, the strongest position which they had held since they left the banks of the Tugela.

The advance of Lord Roberts was made, as his wont is, with two widespread wings, and a central body to connect them. Such a movement leaves the enemy in doubt as to which flank will really be attacked, while if he denudes his centre in order to strengthen both flanks there is the chance of a frontal advance which might cut him in two. French with two cavalry brigades formed the left advance, Pole-Carew the centre, and Buller the right, the whole operations extending over thirty miles of infamous country. It is probable that Lord Roberts had reckoned that the Boer right was likely to be their strongest position, since if it were turned it would cut off their retreat upon Lydenburg, so his own main attack was directed upon their left. This was carried out by General Buller on August 26th and 27th.

On the first day the movement upon Buller’s part consisted in a very deliberate reconnaissance of and closing in upon the enemy’s position, his troops bivouacking upon the ground which they had won. On the second, finding that all further progress was barred by the strong ridge of Bergendal, he prepared his attack carefully with artillery and then let loose his infantry upon it. It was a gallant feat of arms upon either side. The Boer position was held by a detachment of the Johannesburg Police, who may have been bullies in peace, but were certainly heroes in war. The fire of sixty guns was concentrated for a couple of hours upon a position only a few hundred yards in diameter. In this infernal fire, which left the rocks yellow with lyddite, the survivors still waited grimly for the advance of the infantry. No finer defence was made in the war. The attack was carried out across an open glacis by the 2nd Rifle Brigade and by the Inniskilling Fusiliers, the men of Pieter’s Hill. Through a deadly fire the gallant infantry swept over the position, though Metcalfe, the brave colonel of the Rifles, with eight other officers, and seventy men were killed or wounded. Lysley, Steward, and Campbell were all killed in leading their companies, but they could not have met their deaths upon an occasion more honourable to their battalion. Great credit must also be given to A and B companies of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, who were actually the first over the Boer position. The cessation of the artillery fire was admirably timed. It was sustained up to the last possible instant. ‘As it was,’ said the captain of the leading company, ‘a 94-pound shell burst about thirty yards in front of the right of our lot. The smell of the lyddite was awful.’ A pom-pom and twenty prisoners, including the commander of the police, were the trophies of the day. An outwork of the Boer position had been carried, and the rumour of defeat and disaster had already spread through their ranks. Braver men than the burghers have never lived, but they had reached the limits of human endurance, and a long experience of defeat in the field had weakened their nerve and lessened their morale. They were no longer men of the same fibre as those who had crept up to the trenches of Spion Kop, or faced the lean warriors of Ladysmith on that grim January morning at Caesar’s Camp. Dutch tenacity would not allow them to surrender, and yet they realised how hopeless was the fight in which they were engaged. Nearly fifteen thousand of their best men were prisoners, ten thousand at the least had returned to their farms and taken the oath. Another ten had been killed, wounded, or incapacitated. Most of the European mercenaries had left; they held only the ultimate corner of their own country, they had lost their grip upon the railway line, and their supply of stores and of ammunition was dwindling. To such a pass had eleven months of war reduced that formidable army who had so confidently advanced to the conquest of South Africa.

While Buller had established himself firmly upon the left of the Boer position, Pole-Carew had moved forward to the north of the railway line, and French had advanced as far as Swart Kopjes upon the Boer right. These operations on August 26th and 27th were met with some resistance, and entailed a loss of forty or fifty killed and wounded; but it soon became evident that the punishment which they had received at Bergendal had taken the fight out of the Boers, and that this formidable position was to be abandoned as the others had been. On the 28th the burghers were retreating, and Machadodorp, where Kruger had sat so long in his railway carriage, protesting that he would eventually move west and not east, was occupied by Buller. French, moving on a more northerly route, entered Watervalonder with his cavalry upon the same date, driving a small Boer force before him. Amid rain and mist the British columns were pushing rapidly forwards, but still the burghers held together, and still their artillery was uncaptured. The retirement was swift, but it was not yet a rout.

On the 30th the British cavalry were within touch of Nooitgedacht, and saw a glad sight in a long trail of ragged men who were hurrying in their direction along the railway line. They were the British prisoners, eighteen hundred in number, half of whom had been brought from Waterval when Pretoria was captured, while the other half represented the men who had been sent from the south by De Wet, or from the west by De la Rey. Much allowance must be made for the treatment of prisoners by a belligerent who is himself short of food, but nothing can excuse the harshness which the Boers showed to the Colonials who fell into their power, or the callous neglect of the sick prisoners at Waterval. It is a humiliating but an interesting fact that from first to last no fewer than seven thousand of our men passed into their power, all of whom were now recovered save some sixty officers, who had been carried off by them in their flight.

On September 1st Lord Roberts showed his sense of the decisive nature of these recent operations by publishing the proclamation which had been issued as early as July 4th, by which the Transvaal became a portion of the British Empire. On the same day General Buller, who had ceased to advance to the east and retraced his steps as far as Helvetia, began his northerly movement in the direction of Lydenburg, which is nearly fifty miles to the north of the railway line. On that date his force made a march of fourteen miles, which brought them over the Crocodile River to Badfontein. Here, on September 2nd, Buller found that the indomitable Botha was still turning back upon him, for he was faced by so heavy a shell fire, coming from so formidable a position, that he had to be content to wait in front of it until some other column should outflank it. The days of unnecessary frontal attacks were for ever over, and his force, though ready for anything which might be asked of it, had gone through a good deal in the recent operations. Since August 21st they had been under fire almost every day, and their losses, though never great on any one occasion, amounted in the aggregate during that time to 365. They had crossed the Tugela, they had relieved Ladysmith, they had forced Laing’s Nek, and now it was to them that the honour had fallen of following the enemy into this last fastness. Whatever criticism may be directed against some episodes in the Natal campaign, it must never be forgotten that to Buller and to his men have fallen some of the hardest tasks of the war, and that these tasks have always in the end been successfully carried out. The controversy about the unfortunate message to White, and the memory of the abandoned guns at Colenso, must not lead us to the injustice of ignoring all that is to be set to the credit account.

On September 3rd Lord Roberts, finding how strong a position faced Buller, despatched Ian Hamilton with a force to turn it upon the right. Brocklehurst’s brigade of cavalry joined Hamilton in his advance. On the 4th he was within signalling distance of Buller, and on the right rear of the Boer position. The occupation of a mountain called Zwaggenhoek would establish Hamilton firmly, and the difficult task of seizing it at night was committed to Colonel Douglas and his fine regiment of Royal Scots. It was Spion Kop over again, but with a happier ending. At break of day the Boers discovered that their position had been rendered untenable and withdrew, leaving the road to Lydenburg clear to Buller. Hamilton and he occupied the town upon the 6th. The Boers had split into two parties, the larger one with the guns falling back upon Kruger’s Post, and the others retiring to Pilgrim’s Rest. Amid cloud-girt peaks and hardly passable ravines the two long-enduring armies still wrestled for the final mastery.

To the north-east of Lydenburg, between that town and Spitzkop, there is a formidable ridge called the Mauchberg, and here again the enemy were found to be standing at bay. They were even better than their word, for they had always said that they would make their last stand at Lydenburg, and now they were making one beyond it. But the resistance was weakening. Even this fine position could not be held against the rush of the three regiments, the Devons, the Royal Irish, and the Royal Scots, who were let loose upon it. The artillery supported the attack admirably. ‘They did nobly,’ said one who led the advance. ‘It is impossible to overrate the value of their support. They ceased also exactly at the right moment. One more shell would have hit us.’ Mountain mists saved the defeated burghers from a close pursuit, but the hills were carried. The British losses on this day, September 8th, were thirteen killed and twenty-five wounded; but of these thirty-eight no less than half were accounted for by one of those strange malignant freaks which can neither be foreseen nor prevented. A shrapnel shell, fired at an incredible distance, burst right over the Volunteer Company of the Gordons who were marching in column. Nineteen men fell, but it is worth recording that, smitten so suddenly and so terribly, the gallant

Volunteers continued to advance as steadily as before this misfortune befell them. On the 9th Buller was still pushing forward to Spitzkop, his guns and the 1st Rifles overpowering a weak rearguard resistance of the Boers. On the 10th he had reached Klipgat, which is halfway between the Mauchberg and Spitzkop. So close was the pursuit that the Boers, as they streamed through the passes, flung thirteen of their ammunition wagons over the cliffs to prevent them from falling into the hands of the British horsemen. At one period it looked as if the gallant Boer guns had waited too long in covering the retreat of the burghers. Strathcona's Horse pressed closely upon them. The situation was saved by the extreme coolness and audacity of the Boer gunners. 'When the cavalry were barely half a mile behind the rear gun' says an eye-witness 'and we regarded its capture as certain, the LEADING Long Tom deliberately turned to bay and opened with case shot at the pursuers streaming down the hill in single file over the head of his brother gun. It was a magnificent coup, and perfectly successful. The cavalry had to retire, leaving a few men wounded, and by the time our heavy guns had arrived both Long Toms had got clean away.' But the Boer riflemen would no longer stand. Demoralised after their magnificent struggle of eleven months the burghers were now a beaten and disorderly rabble flying wildly to the eastward, and only held together by the knowledge that in their desperate situation there was more comfort and safety in numbers. The war seemed to be swiftly approaching its close. On the 15th Buller occupied Spitzkop in the north, capturing a quantity of stores, while on the 14th French took Barberton in the south, releasing all the remaining British prisoners and taking possession of forty locomotives, which do not appear to have been injured by the enemy. Meanwhile Pole-Carew had worked along the railway line, and had occupied Kaapmuiden, which was the junction where the Barberton line joins that to Lourenco Marques. Ian Hamilton's force, after the taking of Lydenburg and the action which followed, turned back, leaving Buller to go his own way, and reached Komatipoort on September 24th, having marched since September 9th without a halt through a most difficult country.

On September 11th an incident had occurred which must have shown the most credulous believer in Boer prowess that their cause was indeed lost. On that date Paul Kruger, a refugee from the country which he had ruined, arrived at Lourenco Marques, abandoning his beaten commandos and his deluded burghers. How much had happened since those distant days when as a little herdsboy he had walked behind the bullocks on the great northward trek. How piteous this ending to all his strivings and his plottings! A life which might have closed amid the reverence of a nation and the admiration of the world was destined to finish in exile, impotent and undignified. Strange thoughts must have come to him during those hours of flight, memories of his virile and turbulent youth, of the first settlement of those great lands, of wild wars where his hand was heavy upon the natives, of the triumphant days of the war of independence, when England seemed to recoil from the rifles of the burghers. And then the years of prosperity, the years when the simple farmer found himself among the great ones of the earth, his name a household word in Europe, his State rich and powerful, his coffers filled with the spoil of the poor drudges who worked so hard and paid taxes so readily. Those were his great days, the days when he hardened his heart against their appeals for justice and looked beyond his own borders to his kinsmen in the hope of a South Africa which should be all his own. And now what had come of it all? A handful of faithful attendants, and a fugitive old man, clutching in his flight at his papers and his moneybags. The last of the old-world Puritans, he departed poring over his well-thumbed Bible, and proclaiming that the troubles of his country arose, not from his own narrow and corrupt administration, but from some departure on the part of his fellow burghers from the stricter tenets of the dopper sect. So Paul Kruger passed away from the country which he had loved and ruined.

Whilst the main army of Botha had been hustled out of their position at Machadodorp and scattered at Lydenburg and at Barberton, a number of other isolated events had occurred at different points of the seat of war, each of which deserves some mention. The chief of these was a sudden revival of the war in the Orange River Colony, where the band of Olivier was still wandering in the north-eastern districts. Hunter, moving northwards after the capitulation of Prinsloo at Fouriesburg, came into contact on August 15th with this force near Heilbron, and had forty casualties, mainly of the Highland Light Infantry, in a brisk engagement. For a time the British seemed to have completely lost touch with Olivier, who suddenly on August 24th struck at a small detachment consisting almost entirely of Queenstown Rifle Volunteers under Colonel Ridley, who were reconnoitring near Winburg. The Colonial troopers made a gallant defence. Throwing themselves into the farmhouse of Helpmakaar, and occupying every post of vantage around it, they held off more than a thousand assailants, in spite of the three guns which the latter brought to bear upon them. A hundred and thirty-two rounds were fired at the house, but the garrison still refused to surrender. Troopers who had been present at Wepener declared that the smaller action was the warmer of the two. Finally on the morning of the third day a relief force arrived upon the scene, and the enemy dispersed. The British losses were thirty-two killed and wounded. Nothing daunted by his failure, Olivier turned upon the town of Winburg and attempted to regain it, but was defeated again and scattered, he and his three sons being taken. The result was due to the gallantry and craft of a handful of the Queenstown Volunteers, who laid an ambuscade in a donga, and disarmed the Boers as they passed, after the pattern of Sanna's Post. By this action one of the most daring and resourceful of the Dutch leaders fell into the hands of the British. It is a pity that his record is stained by his dishonourable conduct in breaking the compact made on the occasion of the capture of Prinsloo. But for British magnanimity a drumhead court-martial should have taken the place of the hospitality of the Ceylon planters.

On September 2nd another commando of Free State Boers under Fourie emerged from the mountain country on the Basuto border, and fell upon Ladybrand, which was held by a feeble garrison consisting of one company of the Worcester regiment and forty-three men of the Wiltshire Yeomanry. The Boers, who had several guns with them, appear to have been the same force which had been repulsed at Winburg. Major White, a gallant marine, whose fighting qualities do not seem to have deteriorated with his distance from salt water, had arranged his defences upon a hill, after the Wepener model, and held his own most stoutly. So great was the disparity of the forces that for days acute anxiety was felt lest another of those humiliating surrenders should interrupt the record of victories, and encourage the Boers to further resistance. The point was distant, and it was some time before relief could reach them. But the dusky chiefs, who from their native mountains looked down on the military drama which was played so close to their frontier, were again, as on the Jammersberg, to see the Boer attack beaten back by the constancy of the British defence. The thin line of soldiers, 150 of them covering a mile and a half of ground, endured a heavy shell and rifle fire with unshaken resolution, repulsed every attempt of the burghers, and held the flag flying until relieved by the forces under White and Bruce Hamilton. In this march to the relief Hamilton's infantry covered eighty miles in four and a half days. Lean and hard, inured to warfare, and far from every temptation of wine or women, the British troops at this stage of the campaign were in such training, and marched so splendidly, that the infantry was often very little slower than the cavalry. Methuen’s fine performance in pursuit of De Wet, where Douglas’s infantry did sixty-six miles in seventy-five hours, the City Imperial Volunteers covering 224 miles in fourteen days, with a single forced march of thirty miles in seventeen hours, the Shropshires forty-three miles in thirty-two hours, the forty-five miles in twenty-five hours of the Essex Regiment, Bruce Hamilton’s march recorded above, and many other fine efforts serve to show the spirit and endurance of the troops.

In spite of the defeat at Winburg and the repulse at Ladybrand, there still remained a fair number of broken and desperate men in the Free State who held out among the difficult country of the east. A party of these came across in the middle of September and endeavoured to cut the railway near Brandfort. They were pursued and broken up by Macdonald, who, much aided in his operations by the band of scouts which Lord Lovat had brought with him from Scotland, took several prisoners and a large number of wagons and of oxen. A party of these Boers attacked a small post of sixteen Yeomanry under Lieutenant Slater at Bultfontein, but were held at bay until relief came from Brandfort.

At two other points the Boer and British forces were in contact during these operations. One was to the immediate north of Pretoria, where Grobler’s commando was faced by Paget’s brigade. On August 18th the Boers were forced with some loss out of Hornies Nek, which is ten miles to the north of the capital. On the 22nd a more important skirmish took place at Pienaar’s River, in the same direction, between Baden-Powell’s men, who had come thither in pursuit of De Wet, and Grobler’s band. The advance guards of the two forces galloped into each other, and for once Boer and Briton looked down the muzzles of each other’s rifles. The gallant Rhodesian Regiment, which had done such splendid service during the war, suffered most heavily. Colonel Spreckley and four others were killed, and six or seven wounded. The Boers were broken, however, and fled, leaving twenty-five prisoners to the victors. Baden-Powell and Paget pushed forwards as far as Nylstroom, but finding themselves in wild and profitless country they returned towards Pretoria, and established the British northern posts at a place called Warm Baths. Here Paget commanded, while Baden-

Powell shortly afterwards went down to Cape Town to make arrangements for taking over the police force of the conquered countries, and to receive the enthusiastic welcome of his colonial fellow-countrymen. Plumer, with a small force operating from Warm Baths, scattered a Boer commando on September 1st, capturing a few prisoners and a considerable quantity of munitions of war. On the 5th there was another skirmish in the same neighbourhood, during which the enemy attacked a kopje held by a company of Munster Fusiliers, and was driven off with loss. Many thousands of cattle were captured by the British in this part of the field of operations, and were sent into Pretoria, whence they helped to supply the army in the east.

There was still considerable effervescence in the western districts of the Transvaal, and a mounted detachment met with fierce opposition at the end of August on their journey from Zeerust to Krugersdorp. Methuen, after his unsuccessful chase of De Wet, had gone as far as Zeerust, and had then taken his force on to Mafeking to refit. Before leaving Zeerust, however, he had despatched Colonel Little to Pretoria with a column which consisted of his own third cavalry brigade, 1st Brabant’s, the Kaffrarian Rifles, R battery of Horse Artillery, and four Colonial guns. They were acting as guard to a very large convoy of ‘returned empties.’ The district which they had to traverse is one of the most fertile in the Transvaal, a land of clear streams and of orange groves. But the farmers are numerous and aggressive, and the column, which was 900 strong, could clear all resistance from its front, but found it impossible to brush off the snipers upon its flanks and rear. Shortly after their start the column was deprived of the services of its gallant leader, Colonel Little, who was shot while riding with his advance scouts. Colonel Dalgety took over the command. Numerous desultory attacks culminated in a fierce skirmish at Quaggafontein on August 31st, in which the column had sixty casualties. The event might have been serious, as De la Rey’s main force appears to have been concentrated upon the British detachment, the brunt of the action falling upon the Kaffrarian Rifles. By a rapid movement the column was able to extricate itself and win its way safely to Krugersdorp, but it narrowly escaped out of the wolf’s jaws, and as it emerged into the open country De la Rey’s guns were seen galloping for the pass which they had just come through. This force was sent south to Kroonstad to refit.

Lord Methuen’s army, after its long marches and arduous work, arrived at Mafeking on August 28th for the purpose of refitting. Since his departure from Boshof on May 14th his men had been marching with hardly a rest, and he had during that time fought fourteen engagements. He was off upon the war-path once more, with fresh horses and renewed energy, on September 8th, and on the 9th, with the co-operation of General Douglas, he scattered a Boer force at Malopo, capturing thirty prisoners and a great quantity of stores. On the 14th he ran down a convoy and regained one of the Colenso guns and much ammunition. On the 20th he again made large captures. If in the early phases of the war the Boers had given Paul Methuen some evil hours, he was certainly getting his own back again. At the same time Clements was despatched from Pretoria with a small mobile force for the purpose of clearing the Rustenburg and Krugersdorp districts, which had always been storm centres. These two forces, of Methuen and of Clements, moved through the country, sweeping the scattered Boer bands before them, and hunting them down until they dispersed. At Kekepoort and at Hekspoort Clements fought successful skirmishes, losing at the latter action Lieutenant Stanley of the Yeomanry, the Somersetshire cricketer, who showed, as so many have done, how close is the connection between the good sportsman and the good soldier. On the 12th Douglas took thirty-nine prisoners near Lichtenburg. On the 18th Rundle captured a gun at Bronkhorstfontein. Hart at Potchefstroom, Hildyard in the Utrecht district, Macdonald in the Orange River Colony, everywhere the British Generals were busily stamping out the remaining embers of what had been so terrible a conflagration.

Much trouble but no great damage was inflicted upon the British during this last stage of the war by the incessant attacks upon the lines of railway by roving bands of Boers. The actual interruption of traffic was of little consequence, for the assiduous Sappers with their gangs of Basuto labourers were always at hand to repair the break. But the loss of stores, and occasionally of lives, was more serious. Hardly a day passed that the stokers and drivers were not made targets of by snipers among the kopjes, and occasionally a train was entirely destroyed. [Footnote: It is to be earnestly hoped that those in authority will see that these men obtain the medal and any other reward which can mark our sense of their faithful service. One of them in the Orange River Colony, after narrating to me his many hairbreadth escapes, prophesied bitterly that the memory of his services would pass with the need for them.] Chief among these raiders was the wild Theron, who led a band which contained men of all nations — the same gang who had already, as narrated, held up a train in the Orange River Colony. On August 31st he derailed another at Flip River to the south of Johannesburg, blowing up the engine and burning thirteen trucks. Almost at the same time a train was captured near Kroonstad, which appeared to indicate that the great De Wet was back in his old hunting-grounds. On the same day the line was cut at Standerton. A few days later, however, the impunity with which these feats had been performed was broken, for in a similar venture near Krugersdorp the dashing Theron and several of his associates lost their lives.

Two other small actions performed at this period of the war demand a passing notice. One was a smart engagement near Kraai Railway Station, in which Major Broke of the Sappers with a hundred men attacked a superior Boer force upon a kopje and drove them off with loss — a feat which it is safe to say he could not have accomplished six months earlier. The other was the fine defence made by 125 of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, who, while guarding the railway, were attacked by a considerable Boer force with two guns. They proved once more, as Ladybrand and Elands River had shown, that with provisions, cartridges, and brains, the smallest force can successfully hold its own if it confines itself to the defensive.

And now the Boer cause appeared to be visibly tottering to its fall. The flight of the President had accelerated that process of disintegration which had already set in. Schalk Burger had assumed the office of Vice-President, and the notorious Ben Viljoen had become first lieutenant of Louis Botha in maintaining the struggle. Lord Roberts had issued an extremely judicious proclamation, in which he pointed out the uselessness of further resistance, declared that guerilla warfare would be ruthlessly suppressed, and informed the burghers that no fewer than fifteen thousand of their fellow-countrymen were in his hands as prisoners, and that none of these could be released until the last rifle had been laid down. From all sides in the third week of September the British forces were converging on Komatipoort, the frontier town. Already wild figures, stained and tattered after nearly a year of warfare, were walking the streets of Lourenco Marques, gazed at with wonder and some distrust by the Portuguese inhabitants. The exiled burghers moodily pacing the streets saw their exiled President seated in his corner of the Governor’s verandah, the well-known curved pipe still dangling from his mouth, the Bible by his chair. Day by day the number of these refugees increased. On September 17th special trains were arriving crammed with the homeless burghers, and with the mercenaries of many nations — French, German, Irish-American, and Russian — all anxious to make their way home. By the 19th no fewer than seven hundred had passed over.

At dawn on September 22nd a half-hearted attempt was made by the commando of Erasmus to attack Elands River Station, but it was beaten back by the garrison. While it was going on Paget fell upon the camp which Erasmus had left behind him, and captured his stores. From all over the country, from Plumer's Bushmen, from Barton at Krugersdorp, from the Colonials at Heilbron, from Clements on the west, came the same reports of dwindling resistance and of the abandoning of cattle, arms, and ammunition.

On September 24th came the last chapter in this phase of the campaign in the Eastern Transvaal, when at eight in the morning Pole-Carew and his Guardsmen occupied Komatipoort. They had made desperate marches, one of them through thick bush, where they went for nineteen miles without water, but nothing could shake the cheery gallantry of the men. To them fell the honour, an honour well deserved by their splendid work throughout the whole campaign, of entering and occupying the ultimate eastern point which the Boers could hold. Resistance had been threatened and prepared for, but the grim silent advance of that veteran infantry took the heart out of the defence. With hardly a shot fired the town was occupied. The bridge which would enable the troops to receive their supplies from Lourenco Marques was still intact. General Pienaar and the greater part of his force, amounting to over two thousand men, had crossed the frontier and had been taken down to Delagoa Bay, where they met the respect and attention which brave men in misfortune deserve. Small bands had slipped away to the north and the south, but they were insignificant in numbers and depressed in spirit. For the time it seemed that the campaign was over, but the result showed that there was greater vitality in the resistance of the burghers and less validity in their oaths than any one had imagined.

One find of the utmost importance was made at Komatipoort, and at Hector Spruit on the Crocodile River. That excellent artillery which had fought so gallant a fight against our own more numerous guns, was found destroyed and abandoned. Pole-Carew at Komatipoort got one Long Tom

(96-pound) Creusot, and one smaller gun. Ian Hamilton at Hector Spruit found the remains of many guns, which included two of our horse artillery twelve-pounders, two large Creusot guns, two Krupps, one Vickers-Maxim quick firer, two pompoms and four mountain guns.

CHAPTER 30. THE CAMPAIGN OF DE WET.

It had been hoped that the dispersal of the main Boer army, the capture of its guns and the expulsion of many both of the burghers and of the foreign mercenaries, would have marked the end of the war. These expectations were, however, disappointed, and South Africa was destined to be afflicted and the British Empire disturbed by a useless guerilla campaign. After the great and dramatic events which characterised the earlier phases of the struggle between the Briton and the Boer for the mastery of South Africa it is somewhat of the nature of an anticlimax to turn one’s attention to those scattered operations which prolonged the resistance for a turbulent year at the expense of the lives of many brave men on either side. These raids and skirmishes, which had their origin rather in the hope of vengeance than of victory, inflicted much loss and misery upon the country, but, although we may deplore the desperate resolution which bids brave men prefer death to subjugation, it is not for us, the countrymen of Hereward or Wallace, to condemn it.

In one important respect these numerous, though trivial, conflicts differed from the battles in the earlier stages of the war. The British had learned their lesson so thoroughly that they often turned the tables upon their instructors. Again and again the surprise was effected, not by the nation of hunters, but by those rooineks whose want of cunning and of veld-craft had for so long been a subject of derision and merriment. A year of the kopje and the donga had altered all that. And in the proportion of casualties another very marked change had occurred. Time was when in battle after battle a tenth would have been a liberal estimate for the losses of the Boers compared with those of the Briton. So it was at Stormberg; so it was at Colenso; so it may have been at Magersfontein. But in this last stage of the war the balance was rather in favour of the British. It may have been because they were now frequently acting on the defensive, or it may have been from an improvement in their fire, or it may have come from the more desperate mood of the burghers, but in any case the fact remains that every encounter diminished the small reserves of the Boers rather than the ample forces of their opponents.

One other change had come over the war, which caused more distress and searchings of conscience among some of the people of Great Britain than the darkest hours of their misfortunes. This lay in the increased bitterness of the struggle, and in those more strenuous measures which the British commanders felt themselves entitled and compelled to adopt. Nothing could exceed the lenity of Lord Roberts’s early proclamations in the Free State. But, as the months went on and the struggle still continued, the war assumed a harsher aspect. Every farmhouse represented a possible fort, and a probable depot for the enemy. The extreme measure of burning them down was only carried out after a definite offence, such as affording cover for snipers, or as a deterrent to railway wreckers, but in either case it is evident that the women or children who were usually the sole occupants of the farm could not by their own unaided exertions prevent the line from being cut or the riflemen from firing. It is even probable that the Boers may have committed these deeds in the vicinity of houses the destruction of which they would least regret. Thus, on humanitarian grounds there were strong arguments against this policy of destruction being pushed too far, and the political reasons were even stronger, since a homeless man is necessarily the last man to settle down, and a burned-out family the last to become contented British citizens. On the other hand, the impatience of the army towards what they regarded as the abuses of lenity was very great, and they argued that the war would be endless if the women in the farm were allowed always to supply the sniper on the kopje. The irregular and brigand-like fashion in which the struggle was carried out had exasperated the soldiers, and though there were few cases of individual outrage or unauthorised destruction, the general orders were applied with some harshness, and repressive measures were taken which warfare may justify but which civilisation must deplore.

After the dispersal of the main army at Komatipoort there remained a considerable number of men in arms, some of them irreconcilable burghers, some of them foreign adventurers, and some of them Cape rebels, to whom British arms were less terrible than British law. These men, who were still well armed and well mounted, spread themselves over the country, and acted with such energy that they gave the impression of a large force. They made their way into the settled districts, and brought fresh hope and fresh disaster to many who had imagined that the war had passed for ever away from them. Under compulsion from their irreconcilable countrymen, a large number of the farmers broke their parole, mounted the horses which British leniency had left with them, and threw themselves once more into the struggle, adding their honour to the other sacrifices which they had made for their country. In any account of the continual brushes between these scattered bands and the British forces, there must be such a similarity in procedure and result, that it would be hard for the writer and intolerable for the reader if they were set forth in detail. As a general statement it may be said that during the months to come there was no British garrison in any one of the numerous posts in the Transvaal, and in that portion of the Orange River Colony which lies east of the railway, which was not surrounded by prowling riflemen, there was no convoy sent to supply those garrisons which was not liable to be attacked upon the road, and there was no train upon any one of the three lines which might not find a rail up and a hundred raiders covering it with their Mausers. With some two thousand miles of railroad to guard, so many garrisons to provide, and an escort to be furnished to every convoy, there remained out of the large body of British troops in the country only a moderate force who were available for actual operations. This force was distributed in different districts scattered over a wide extent of country, and it was evident that while each was strong enough to suppress local resistance, still at any moment a concentration of the Boer scattered forces upon a single British column might place the latter in a serious position. The distribution of the British in October and November was roughly as follows. Methuen was in the Rustenburg district, Barton at Krugersdorp and operating down the line to Klerksdorp, Settle was in the West, Paget at Pienaar’s River, Clements in the Magaliesberg, Hart at Potchefstroom, Lyttelton at Middelburg, Smith-Dorrien at Belfast, W. Kitchener at Lydenburg, French in the Eastern Transvaal, Hunter, Rundle, Brabant, and Bruce Hamilton in the Orange River Colony. Each of these forces was occupied in the same sort of work, breaking up small bodies of the enemy, hunting for arms, bringing in refugees, collecting supplies, and rounding up cattle. Some, however, were confronted with organised resistance and some were not. A short account may be given in turn of each separate column.

I would treat first the operations of General Barton, because they form the best introduction to that narrative of the doings of Christian De Wet to which this chapter will be devoted.

The most severe operations during the month of October fell to the lot of this British General, who, with some of the faithful fusiliers whom he had led from the first days in Natal, was covering the line from Krugersdorp to Klerksdorp. It is a long stretch, and one which, as the result shows, is as much within striking distance of the Orange Free Staters as of the men of the Transvaal. Upon October 5th Barton left Krugersdorp with a force which consisted of the Scots and Welsh Fusiliers, five hundred mounted men, the 78th R.F.A., three pom-poms, and a 4.7 naval gun. For a fortnight, as the small army moved slowly down the line of the railroad, their progress was one continual skirmish. On October 6th they brushed the enemy aside in an action in which the volunteer company of the Scots Fusiliers gained the applause of their veteran comrades. On the 8th and 9th there was sharp skirmishing, the brunt of which on the latter date fell upon the Welsh Fusiliers, who had three officers and eleven men injured. The commandos of Douthwaite, Liebenberg, and Van der Merwe seem to have been occupied in harassing the column during their progress through the Gatsrand range. On the 15th the desultory sniping freshened again into a skirmish in which the honours and the victory belonged mainly to the Welshmen and to that very keen and efficient body, the Scottish Yeomanry. Six Boers were left dead upon the ground. On October 17th the column reached Frederickstad, where it halted. On that date six of Marshall’s Horse were cut off while collecting supplies. The same evening three hundred of the Imperial Light Horse came in from Krugersdorp.

Up to this date the Boer forces which dogged the column had been annoying but not seriously aggressive. On the 19th, however, affairs took an unexpected turn. The British scouts rode in to report a huge dust cloud whirling swiftly northwards from the direction of the Vaal River — soon plainly visible to all, and showing as it drew nearer the hazy outline of a long column of mounted men. The dark coats of the riders, and possibly the speed of their advance, showed that they were Boers, and soon it was rumoured that it was no other than Christian De Wet with his merry men, who, with characteristic audacity, had ridden back into the Transvaal in the hope of overwhelming Barton’s column.

It is some time since we have seen anything of this energetic gentleman with the tinted glasses, but as the narrative will be much occupied with him in the future a few words are needed to connect him with the past. It has been already told how he escaped through the net which caught so many of his countrymen at the time of the surrender of Prinsloo, and how he was chased at furious speed from the Vaal River to the mountains of Magaliesberg. Here he eluded his pursuers, separated from Steyn, who desired to go east to confer with Kruger, and by the end of August was back again in his favourite recruiting ground in the north of the Orange River Colony. Here for nearly two months he had lain very quiet, refitting and reassembling his scattered force, until now, ready for action once more, and fired by the hope of cutting off an isolated British force, he rode swiftly northwards with two thousand men under that rolling cloud which had been spied by the watchers of Frederickstad.

The problem before him was a more serious one, however, than any which he had ever undertaken, for this was no isolated regiment or ill-manned post, but a complete little field force very ready to do battle with him. De Wet's burghers, as they arrived, sprang from their ponies and went into action in their usual invisible but effective fashion, covered by the fire of several guns. The soldiers had thrown up lines of sangars, however, and were able, though exposed to a very heavy fire coming from several directions, to hold their own until nightfall, when the defences were made more secure. On the 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th the cordon of the attack was drawn gradually closer, the Boers entirely surrounding the British force, and it was evident that they were feeling round for a point at which an assault might be delivered.

The position of the defenders upon the morning of October 25th was as follows. The Scots Fusiliers were holding a ridge to the south. General Barton with the rest of his forces occupied a hill some distance off. Between the two was a valley down which ran the line, and also the spruit upon which the British depended for their water supply. On each side of the line were ditches, and at dawn on this seventh day of the investment it was found that these had been occupied by snipers during the night, and that it was impossible to water the animals. One of two things must follow. Either the force must shift its position or it must drive these men out of their cover. No fire could do it, as they lay in perfect safety. They must be turned out at the point of the bayonet.

About noon several companies of Scots and Welsh Fusiliers advanced from different directions in very extended order upon the ditches. Captain Baillie's company of the former regiment first attracted the fire of the burghers. Wounded twice the brave officer staggered on until a third bullet struck him dead. Six of his men were found lying beside him. The other companies were exposed in their turn to a severe fire, but rushing onwards they closed rapidly in upon the ditches. There have been few finer infantry advances during the war, for the veld was perfectly flat and the fire terrific. A mile of ground was crossed by the fusiliers. Three gallant officers — Dick, Elliot, and Best — went down; but the rush of the men was irresistible. At the edge of the ditches the supports overtook the firing line, and they all surged into the trenches together. Then it was seen how perilous was the situation of the Boer snipers. They had placed themselves between the upper and the nether millstone. There was no escape for them save across the open. It says much for their courage that they took that perilous choice rather than wave the white flag, which would have ensured their safety.

The scene which followed has not often been paralleled. About a hundred and fifty burghers rushed out of the ditches, streaming across the veld upon foot to the spot where their horses had been secreted. Rifles, pom-poms, and shrapnel played upon them during this terrible race. ‘A black running mob carrying coats, blankets, boots, rifles, &c., was seen to rise as if from nowhere and rush as fast as they could, dropping the various things they carried as they ran.’ One of their survivors has described how awful was that wild blind flight, through a dust-cloud thrown up by the shells. For a mile the veld was dotted with those who had fallen. Thirty-six were found dead, thirty were wounded, and thirty more gave themselves up as prisoners. Some were so demoralised that they rushed into the hospital and surrendered to the British doctor. The Imperial Light Horse were for some reason slow to charge. Had they done so at once, many eye-witnesses agree that not a fugitive should have escaped. On the other hand, the officer in command may have feared that in doing so he might mask the fire of the British guns.

One incident in the action caused some comment at the time. A small party of Imperial Light Horse, gallantly led by Captain Yockney of B Squadron, came to close quarters with a group of Boers. Five of the enemy having held up their hands Yockney passed them and pushed on against their comrades. On this the prisoners seized their rifles once more and fired upon their captors. A fierce fight ensued with only a few feet between the muzzles of the rifles. Three Boers were shot dead, five wounded, and eight taken. Of these eight three were shot next day by order of court-martial for having resumed their weapons after surrender, while two others were acquitted. The death of these men in cold blood is to be deplored, but it is difficult to see how any rules of civilised warfare can be maintained if a flagrant breach of them is not promptly and sternly punished.

On receiving this severe blow De Wet promptly raised the investment and hastened to regain his favourite haunts. Considerable reinforcements had reached Barton upon the same day, including the Dublins, the Essex, Strathcona's Horse, and the Elswick Battery, with some very welcome supplies of ammunition. As Barton had now more than a thousand mounted men of most excellent quality it is difficult to imagine why he did not pursue his defeated enemy. He seems to have underrated the effect which he had produced, for instead of instantly assuming the offensive he busied himself in strengthening his defences. Yet the British losses in the whole operations had not exceeded one hundred, so that there does not appear to have been any reason why the force should be crippled. As Barton was in direct and constant telegraphic communication with Pretoria, it is possible that he was acting under superior orders in the course which he adopted.

It was not destined, however, that De Wet should be allowed to escape with his usual impunity. On the 27th, two days after his retreat from Frederickstad he was overtaken — stumbled upon by pure chance apparently — by the mounted infantry and cavalry of Charles Knox and De Lisle. The Boers, a great disorganised cloud of horsemen, swept swiftly along the northern bank of the Vaal, seeking for a place to cross, while the British rode furiously after them, spraying them with shrapnel at every opportunity. Darkness and a violent storm gave De Wet his opportunity to cross, but the closeness of the pursuit compelled him to abandon two of his guns, one of them a Krupp and the other one of the British twelve-pounders of Sanna's Post, which, to the delight of the gunners, was regained by that very U battery to which it belonged.

Once across the river and back in his own country De Wet, having placed seventy miles between himself and his pursuers, took it for granted that he was out of their reach, and halted near the village of Bothaville to refit. But the British were hard upon his track, and for once they were able to catch this indefatigable man unawares. Yet their knowledge of his position seems to have been most hazy, and on the very day before that on which they found him, General Charles Knox, with the main body of the force, turned north, and was out of the subsequent action. De Lisle's mounted troops also turned north, but fortunately not entirely out of call. To the third and smallest body of mounted men, that under Le Gallais, fell the honour of the action which I am about to describe.

It is possible that the move northwards of Charles Knox and of De Lisle had the effect of a most elaborate stratagem, since it persuaded the Boer scouts that the British were retiring. So indeed they were, save only the small force of Le Gallais, which seems to have taken one last cast round to the south before giving up the pursuit. In the grey of the morning of November 6th, Major Lean with forty men of the 5th Mounted Infantry came upon three weary Boers sleeping upon the veld. Having secured the men, and realising that they were an outpost, Lean pushed on, and topping a rise some hundreds of yards further, he and his men saw a remarkable scene. There before them stretched the camp of the Boers, the men sleeping, the horses grazing, the guns parked, and the wagons outspanned.

There was little time for consideration. The Kaffir drivers were already afoot and strolling out for their horses, or lighting the fires for their masters' coffee. With splendid decision, although he had but forty men to oppose to over a thousand, Lean sent back for reinforcements and opened fire upon the camp. In an instant it was buzzing like an overturned hive. Up sprang the sleepers, rushed for their horses, and galloped away across the veld, leaving their guns and wagons behind. A few stalwarts remained, however, and their numbers were increased by those whose horses had stampeded, and who were, therefore, unable to get away. They occupied an enclosed kraal and a farmhouse in front of the British, whence they opened a sharp fire. At the same time a number of the Boers who had ridden away came back again, having realised how weak their assailants were, and worked round the British flanks upon either side.

Le Gallais, with his men, had come up, but the British force was still far inferior to that which it was attacking. A section of U battery was able to unlimber, and open fire at four hundred yards from the Boer position. The British made no attempt to attack, but contented themselves with holding on to the position from which they could prevent the Boer guns from being removed. The burghers tried desperately to drive off the stubborn fringe of riflemen. A small stone shed in the possession of the British was the centre of the Boer fire, and it was within its walls that Ross of the Durhams was horribly wounded by an explosive ball, and that the brave Jerseyman, Le

Gallais, was killed. Before his fall he had despatched his staff officer, Major Hickie, to hurry up men from the rear.

On the fall of Ross and Le Gallais the command fell upon Major Taylor of U battery. The position at that time was sufficiently alarming. The Boers were working round each flank in considerable numbers, and they maintained a heavy fire from a stone enclosure in the centre. The British forces actually engaged were insignificant, consisting of forty men of the 5th Mounted Infantry, and two guns in the centre, forty-six men of the 17th and 18th Imperial Yeomanry upon the right, and 105 of the 8th Mounted Infantry on the left or 191 rifles in all. The flanks of this tiny force had to extend to half a mile to hold off the Boer flank attack, but they were heartened in their resistance by the knowledge that their comrades were hastening to their assistance. Taylor, realising that a great effort must be made to tide over the crisis, sent a messenger back with orders that the convoy should be parked, and every available man sent up to strengthen the right flank, which was the weakest. The enemy got close on to one of the guns, and swept down the whole detachment, but a handful of the Suffolk Mounted Infantry under Lieutenant Peebles most gallantly held them off from it. For an hour the pressure was extreme. Then two companies of the 7th Mounted Infantry came up, and were thrown on to each flank. Shortly afterwards Major Welch, with two more companies of the same corps, arrived, and the tide began slowly to turn. The Boers were themselves outflanked by the extension of the British line and were forced to fall back. At half-past eight De Lisle, whose force had trotted and galloped for twelve miles, arrived with several companies of Australians, and the success of the day was assured. The smoke of the Prussian guns at Waterloo was not a more welcome sight than the dust of De Lisle’s horsemen. But the question now was whether the Boers, who were in the walled inclosure and farm which formed their centre, would manage to escape. The place was shelled, but here, as often before, it was found how useless a weapon is shrapnel against buildings. There was nothing for it but to storm it, and a grim little storming party of fifty men, half British, half Australian, was actually waiting with fixed bayonets for the whistle which was to be their signal, when the white flag flew out from the farm, and all was over. Warned by many a tragic experience the British still lay low in spite of the flag. ‘Come out! come out!’ they shouted. Eighty-two unwounded Boers filed out of the enclosure, and the total number of prisoners came to 114, while between twenty and thirty Boers were killed. Six guns, a pom-pom, and 1000 head of cattle were the prizes of the victors.

This excellent little action showed that the British mounted infantry had reached a point of efficiency at which they were quite able to match the Boers at their own game. For hours they held them with an inferior force, and finally, when the numbers became equal, were able to drive them off and capture their guns. The credit is largely due to Major Lean for his prompt initiative on discovering their laager, and to Major Taylor for his handling of the force during a very critical time. Above all, it was due to the dead leader, Le Gallais, who had infected every man under him with his own spirit of reckless daring. ‘If I die, tell my mother that I die happy, as we got the guns,’ said he, with his failing breath. The British total losses were twelve killed (four officers) and thirty-three wounded (seven officers). Major Welch, a soldier of great promise, much beloved by his men, was one of the slain. Following closely after the repulse at Frederickstad this action was a heavy blow to De Wet. At last, the British were beginning to take something off the score which they owed the bold raider, but there was to be many an item on either side before the long reckoning should be closed. The Boers, with De Wet, fled south, where it was not long before they showed that they were still a military force with which we had to reckon.

In defiance of chronology it may perhaps make a clearer narrative if I continue at once with the movements of De Wet from the time that he lost his guns at Bothaville, and then come back to the consideration of the campaign in the Transvaal, and to a short account of those scattered and disconnected actions which break the continuity of the story. Before following De Wet, however, it is necessary to say something of the general state of the Orange River Colony and of some military developments which had occurred there. Under the wise and conciliatory rule of General Pretyman the farmers in the south and west were settling down, and for the time it looked as if a large district was finally pacified. The mild taxation was cheerfully paid, schools were reopened, and a peace party made itself apparent, with Fraser and Piet de Wet, the brother of Christian, among its strongest advocates.

Apart from the operations of De Wet there appeared to be no large force in the field in the Orange River Colony, but early in October of 1900 a small but very mobile and efficient Boer force skirted the eastern outposts of the British, struck the southern line of communications, and then came up the western flank, attacking, where an attack was possible, each of the isolated and weakly garrisoned townlets to which it came, and recruiting its strength from a district which had been hardly touched by the ravages of war, and which by its prosperity alone might have proved the amenity of British military rule. This force seems to have skirted Wepener without attacking a place of such evil omen to their cause. Their subsequent movements are readily traced by a sequence of military events.

On October 1st Rouxville was threatened. On the 9th an outpost of the Cheshire Militia was taken and the railway cut for a few hours in the neighbourhood of Bethulie. A week later the Boer riders were dotting the country round Phillipolis, Springfontein and Jagersfontein, the latter town being occupied upon October 16th, while the garrison held out upon the nearest kopje. The town was retaken from the enemy by King Hall and his men, who were Seaforth Highlanders and police. There was fierce fighting in the streets, and from twenty to thirty of each side were killed or wounded. Fauresmith was attacked on October 19th, but was also in the very safe hands of the Seaforths, who held it against a severe assault. Phillipolis was continually attacked between the 18th and the 24th, but made a most notable defence, which was conducted by Gostling, the resident magistrate, with forty civilians. For a week this band of stalwarts held their own against 600 Boers, and were finally relieved by a force from the railway. All the operations were not, however, as successful as these three defences. On October 24th a party of cavalry details belonging to many regiments were snapped up in an ambuscade. On the next day Jacobsdal was attacked, with considerable loss to the British. The place was entered in the night, and the enemy occupied the houses which surrounded the square. The garrison, consisting of about sixty men of the Capetown Highlanders, had encamped in the square, and were helpless when fire was opened upon them in the morning. There was practically no resistance, and yet for hours a murderous fire was kept up upon the tents in which they cowered, so that the affair seems not to have been far removed from murder. Two-thirds of the little force were killed or wounded. The number of the assailants does not appear to have been great, and they vanished upon the appearance of a relieving force from Modder River.

After the disaster at Jacobsdal the enemy appeared on November 1st near Kimberley and captured a small convoy. The country round was disturbed, and Settle was sent south with a column to pacify it. In this way we can trace this small cyclone from its origin in the old storm centre in the north-east of the Orange River Colony, sweeping round the whole country, striking one post after another, and finally blowing out at the corresponding point upon the other side of the seat of war.

We have last seen De Wet upon November 6th, when he fled south from Bothaville, leaving his guns but not his courage behind him. Trekking across the line, and for a wonder gathering up no train as he passed, he made for that part of the eastern Orange River Colony which had been reoccupied by his countrymen. Here, in the neighbourhood of Thabanchu, he was able to join other forces, probably the commandos of Haasbroek and Fourie, which still retained some guns. At the head of a considerable force he attacked the British garrison of Dewetsdorp, a town some forty miles to the south-east of Bloemfontein.

It was on November 18th that De Wet assailed the place, and it fell upon the 24th, after a defence which appears to have been a very creditable one. Several small British columns were moving in the south-east of the Colony, but none of them arrived in time to avert the disaster, which is the more inexplicable as the town is within one day’s ride of Bloemfontein. The place is a village hemmed in upon its western side by a semicircle of steep rocky hills broken in the centre by a gully. The position was a very extended one, and had the fatal weakness that the loss of any portion of it meant the loss of it all. The garrison consisted of one company of Highland Light Infantry on the southern horn of the semicircle, three companies of the 2nd Gloucester Regiment on the northern and central part, with two guns of the 68th battery. Some of the Royal Irish Mounted Infantry and a handful of police made up the total of the defenders to something over four hundred, Major Massy in command.

The attack developed at that end of the ridge which was held by the company of Highlanders. Every night the Boer riflemen drew in closer, and every morning found the position more desperate. On the 20th the water supply of the garrison was cut, though a little was still brought up by volunteers during the night. The thirst in the sultry trenches was terrible, but the garrison still, with black lips and parched tongues, held on to their lines. On the 22nd the attack had made such progress that the post had by the Highlanders became untenable, and had to be withdrawn. It was occupied next morning by the Boers, and the whole ridge was at their mercy. Out of eighteen men who served one of the British guns sixteen were killed or wounded, and the last rounds were fired by the sergeant-farrier, who carried, loaded, and fired all by himself. All day the soldiers held out, but the thirst was in itself enough to justify if not to compel a surrender. At half-past five the garrison laid down their arms, having lost about sixty killed or wounded. There does not, as far as one can learn, seem to have been any attempt to injure the two guns which fell into the hands of the enemy. De Wet himself was one of the first to ride into the British trenches, and the prisoners gazed with interest at the short strong figure, with the dark tail coat and the square-topped bowler hat, of the most famous of the Boer leaders.

British columns were converging, however, from several quarters, and De Wet had to be at once on the move. On the 26th Dewetsdorp was reoccupied by General Charles Knox with fifteen hundred men. De Wet had two days' start, but so swift was Knox that on the 27th he had run him down at Vaalbank, where he shelled his camp. De Wet broke away, however, and trekking south for eighteen hours without a halt, shook off the pursuit. He had with him at this time nearly 8000 men with several guns under Haasbroek, Fourie, Philip Botha, and Steyn. It was his declared intention to invade Cape Colony with his train of weary footsore prisoners, and the laurels of Dewetsdorp still green upon him. He was much aided in all his plans by that mistaken leniency which had refused to recognise that a horse is in that country as much a weapon as a rifle, and had left great numbers upon the farms with which he could replace his useless animals. So numerous were they that many of the Boers had two or three for their own use. It is not too much to say that our weak treatment of the question of horses will come to be recognised as the one great blot upon the conduct of the war, and that our undue and fantastic scruples have prolonged hostilities for months, and cost the country many lives and many millions of pounds.

De Wet's plan for the invasion of the Colony was not yet destined to be realised, for a tenacious man had set himself to frustrate it. Several small but mobile British columns, those of Pilcher, of Barker, and of Herbert, under the supreme direction of Charles Knox, were working desperately to head him off. In torrents of rain which turned every spruit into a river and every road into a quagmire, the British horsemen stuck manfully to their work. De Wet had hurried south, crossed the Caledon River, and made for Odendaal's Drift. But Knox, after the skirmish at Vaalbank, had trekked swiftly south to Bethulie, and was now ready with three mobile columns and a network of scouts and patrols to strike in any direction. For a few days he had lost touch, but his arrangements were such that he must recover it if the Boers either crossed the railroad or approached the river. On December 2nd he had authentic information that De Wet was crossing the Caledon, and in an instant the British columns were all off at full cry once more, sweeping over the country with a front of fifteen miles. On the 3rd and 4th, in spite of frightful weather, the two little armies of horsemen struggled on, fetlock-deep in mud, with the rain lashing their faces. At night without cover, drenched and bitterly cold, the troopers threw themselves down on the sodden veld to snatch a few hours' sleep before renewing the interminable pursuit. The drift over the Caledon flowed deep and strong, but the Boer had passed and the Briton must pass also. Thirty guns took to the water, diving completely under the coffee-coloured surface, to reappear glistening upon the southern bank. Everywhere there were signs of the passage of the enemy. A litter of crippled or dying horses marked their track, and a Krupp gun was found abandoned by the drift. The Dewetsdorp prisoners, too, had been set loose, and began to stumble and stagger back to their countrymen, their boots worn off, and their putties wrapped round their bleeding feet. It is painful to add that they had been treated with a personal violence and a brutality in marked contrast to the elaborate hospitality shown by the British Government to its involuntary guests.

On December 6th De Wet had at last reached the Orange River a clear day in front of his pursuers. But it was only to find that his labours had been in vain. At Odendaal, where he had hoped to cross, the river was in spate, the British flag waved from a post upon the further side, and a strong force of expectant Guardsmen eagerly awaited him there. Instantly recognising that the game was up, the Boer leader doubled back for the north and safety. At Rouxville he hesitated as to whether he should snap up the small garrison, but the commandant, Rundle, showed a bold face, and De Wet passed on to the Coomassie Bridge over the Caledon. The small post there refused to be bluffed into a surrender, and the Boers, still dropping their horses fast, passed on, and got over the drift at Amsterdam, their rearguard being hardly across before Knox had also reached the river.

On the 10th the British were in touch again near Helvetia, where there was a rearguard skirmish. On the 11th both parties rode through Reddersberg, a few hours separating them. The Boers in their cross-country trekking go, as one of their prisoners observed, 'slap-bang at everything,' and as they are past-masters in the art of ox and mule driving, and have such a knowledge of the country that they can trek as well by night as by day, it says much for the energy of Knox and his men that he was able for a fortnight to keep in close touch with them.

It became evident now that there was not much chance of overtaking the main body of the burghers, and an attempt was therefore made to interpose a fresh force who might head them off. A line of posts existed between Thabanchu and Ladybrand, and Colonel Thorneycroft was stationed there with a movable column. It was Knox's plan therefore to prevent the Boers from breaking to the west and to head them towards the Basuto border. A small column under Parsons had been sent by Hunter from Bloemfontein, and pushed in upon the flank of De Wet, who had on the 12th got back to Dewetsdorp. Again the pursuit became warm, but De Wet's time was not yet come. He headed for Springhaan Nek, about fifteen miles east of Thabanchu. This pass is about four miles broad, with a British fort upon either side of it. There was only one way to safety, for Knox's mounted infantrymen and lancers were already dotting the southern skyline. Without hesitation the whole Boer force, now some 2500 strong, galloped at full speed in open order through the Nek, braving the long range fire of riflemen and guns. The tactics were those of French in his ride to Kimberley, and the success was as complete. De Wet's force passed through the last barrier which had been held against him, and vanished into the mountainous country round Ficksburg, where it could safely rest and refit.

The result then of these bustling operations had been that De Wet and his force survived, but that he had failed in his purpose of invading the Colony, and had dropped some five hundred horses, two guns, and about a hundred of his men. Haasbroek's commando had been detached by De Wet to make a feint at another pass while he made his way through the Springhaan. Parsons's force followed Haasbroek up and engaged him, but under cover of night he was able to get away and to join his leader to the north of Thabanchu. On December 13th, this, the second great chase after De Wet, may be said to have closed.

CHAPTER 31. THE GUERILLA WARFARE IN THE TRANSVAAL: NOOITGEDACHT.

Leaving De Wet in the Ficksburg mountains, where he lurked until after the opening of the New Year, the story of the scattered operations in the Transvaal may now be carried down to the same point — a story comprising many skirmishes and one considerable engagement, but so devoid of any central thread that it is difficult to know how to approach it. From Lichtenburg to Komati, a distance of four hundred miles, there was sporadic warfare everywhere, attacks upon scattered posts, usually beaten off but occasionally successful, attacks upon convoys, attacks upon railway trains, attacks upon anything and everything which could harass the invaders. Each General in his own district had his own work of repression to perform, and so we had best trace the doings of each up to the end of the year 1900.

Lord Methuen after his pursuit of De Wet in August had gone to Mafeking to refit. From that point, with a force which contained a large proportion of yeomanry and of Australian bushmen, he conducted a long series of operations in the difficult and important district which lies between Rustenburg, Lichtenburg, and Zeerust. Several strong and mobile Boer commandos with guns moved about in it, and an energetic though not very deadly warfare raged between Lemmer, Snyman, and De la Rey on the one side, and the troops of Methuen, Douglas, Broadwood, and Lord Errol upon the other. Methuen moved about incessantly through the broken country, winning small skirmishes and suffering the indignity of continual sniping. From time to time he captured stores, wagons, and small bodies of prisoners. Early in October he and Douglas had successes. On the 15th Broadwood was engaged. On the 20th there was a convoy action. On the 25th Methuen had a success and twenty-eight prisoners. On November 9th he surprised Snyman and took thirty prisoners. On the 10th he got a pom-pom. Early in this month Douglas separated from Methuen, and marched south from Zeerust through Ventersdorp to Klerksdorp, passing over a country which had been hardly touched before, and arriving at his goal with much cattle and some prisoners. Towards the end of the month a considerable stock of provisions were conveyed to Zeerust, and a garrison left to hold that town so as to release Methuen’s column for service elsewhere.

Hart’s sphere of action was originally round Potchefstroom. On September 9th he made a fine forced march to surprise this town, which had been left some time before with an entirely inadequate garrison to fall into the hands of the enemy. His infantry covered thirty-six and his cavalry fifty-four miles in fifteen hours. The operation was a complete success, the town with eighty Boers falling into his hands with little opposition. On September 30th Hart returned to Krugersdorp, where, save for one skirmish upon the Gatsrand on November 22nd, he appears to have had no actual fighting to do during the remainder of the year.

After the clearing of the eastern border of the Transvaal by the movement of Pole-Carew along the railway line, and of Buller aided by Ian Hamilton in the mountainous country to the north of it, there were no operations of importance in this district. A guard was kept upon the frontier to prevent the return of refugees and the smuggling of ammunition, while General Kitchener, the brother of the Sirdar, broke up a few small Boer laagers in the neighbourhood of Lydenburg. Smith-Dorrien guarded the line at Belfast, and on two occasions, November 1st and November 6th, he made aggressive movements against the enemy. The first, which was a surprise executed in concert with Colonel Spens of the Shropshires, was frustrated by a severe blizzard, which prevented the troops from pushing home their success. The second was a two days’ expedition, which met with a spirited opposition, and demands a fuller notice.

This was made from Belfast, and the force, which consisted of about fourteen hundred men, advanced south to the Komati River. The infantry were Suffolks and Shropshires, the cavalry Canadians and 5th Lancers, with two Canadian guns and four of the 84th battery. All day the Boer snipers clung to the column, as they had done to French’s cavalry in the same district. Mere route marches without a very definite and adequate objective appear to be rather exasperating than overawing, for so long as the column is moving onwards the most timid farmer may be tempted into long-range fire from the flanks or rear. The river was reached and the Boers driven from a position which they had taken up, but their signal fires brought mounted riflemen from every farm, and the retreat of the troops was pressed as they returned to Belfast. There was all the material for a South African

Lexington. The most difficult of military operations, the covering of a detachment from a numerous and aggressive enemy, was admirably carried out by the Canadian gunners and dragoons under the command of Colonel Lessard. So severe was the pressure that sixteen of the latter were for a time in the hands of the enemy, who attempted something in the nature of a charge upon the steadfast rearguard. The movement was repulsed, and the total Boer loss would appear to have been considerable, since two of their leaders, Commandant Henry Prinsloo and General Joachim Fourie, were killed, while General Johann Grobler was wounded. If the rank and file suffered in proportion the losses must have been severe. The British casualties in the two days amounted to eight killed and thirty wounded, a small total when the arduous nature of the service is considered. The Canadians and the Shropshires seem to have borne off the honours of these trying operations.

In the second week of October, General French, with three brigades of cavalry (Dickson’s, Gordon’s, and Mahon’s), started for a cross-country ride from Machadodorp. Three brigades may seem an imposing force, but the actual numbers did not exceed two strong regiments, or about 1500 sabres in all. A wing of the Suffolk Regiment went with them. On October 13th Mahon’s brigade met with a sharp resistance, and lost ten killed and twenty-nine wounded. On the 14th the force entered Carolina. On the 16th they lost six killed and twenty wounded, and from the day that they started until they reached Heidelberg on the 27th there was never a day that they could shake themselves clear of their attendant snipers. The total losses of the force were about ninety killed and wounded, but they brought in sixty prisoners and a large quantity of cattle and stores. The march had at least the effect of making it clear that the passage of a column of troops encumbered with baggage through a hostile country is an inefficient means for quelling a popular resistance. Light and mobile parties acting from a central depot were in future to be employed, with greater hopes of success.

Some appreciable proportion of the British losses during this phase of the war arose from railway accidents caused by the persistent tampering with the lines. In the first ten days of October there were four such mishaps, in which two Sappers, twenty-three of the Guards (Coldstreams), and eighteen of the 66th battery were killed or wounded. On the last occasion, which occurred on October 10th near Vlakfontein, the reinforcements who came to aid the sufferers were themselves waylaid, and lost twenty, mostly of the

Rifle Brigade, killed, wounded, or prisoners. Hardly a day elapsed that the line was not cut at some point. The bringing of supplies was complicated by the fact that the Boer women and children were coming more and more into refugee camps, where they had to be fed by the British, and the strange spectacle was frequently seen of Boer snipers killing or wounding the drivers and stokers of the very trains which were bringing up food upon which Boer families were dependent for their lives. Considering that these tactics were continued for over a year, and that they resulted in the death or mutilation of many hundreds of British officers and men, it is really inexplicable that the British authorities did not employ the means used by all armies under such circumstances — which is to place hostages upon the trains. A truckload of Boers behind every engine would have stopped the practice for ever. Again and again in this war the British have fought with the gloves when their opponents used their knuckles.

We will pass now to a consideration of the doings of General Paget, who was operating to the north and north-east of Pretoria with a force which consisted of two regiments of infantry, about a thousand horsemen, and twelve guns. His mounted men were under the command of Plumer. In the early part of November this force had been withdrawn from Warm Baths and had fallen back upon Pienaar’s River, where it had continual skirmishes with the enemy. Towards the end of November, news having reached Pretoria that the enemy under Erasmus and Viljoen were present in force at a place called Rhenoster Kop, which is about twenty miles north of the Delagoa Railway line and fifty miles north-east of the capital, it was arranged that Paget should attack them from the south, while Lyttelton from Middelburg should endeavour to get behind them. The force with which Paget started upon this enterprise was not a very formidable one. He had for mounted troops some Queensland, South Australian, New Zealand, and Tasmanian Bushmen, together with the York, Montgomery, and Warwick Yeomanry. His infantry were the 1st West Riding regiment and four companies of the Munsters. His guns were the 7th and 38th batteries, with two naval quick-firing twelve-pounders and some smaller pieces. The total could not have exceeded some two thousand men. Here, as at other times, it is noticeable that in spite of the two hundred thousand soldiers whom the British kept in the field, the lines of communication absorbed so many that at the actual point of contact they were seldom superior and often inferior in numbers to the enemy. The opening of the Natal and Delagoa lines though valuable in many ways, had been an additional drain. Where every culvert needs its picket and every bridge its company, the guardianship of many hundreds of miles of rail is no light matter.

In the early morning of November 29th Paget’s men came in contact with the enemy, who were in some force upon an admirable position. A ridge for their centre, a flanking kopje for their cross fire, and a grass glacis for the approach — it was an ideal Boer battlefield. The colonials and the yeomanry under Plumer on the left, and Hickman on the right, pushed in upon them, until it was evident that they meant to hold their ground. Their advance being checked by a very severe fire, the horsemen dismounted and took such cover as they could. Paget’s original idea had been a turning movement, but the Boers were the more numerous body, and it was impossible for the smaller British force to find their flanks, for they extended over at least seven miles. The infantry were moved up into the centre, therefore, between the wings of dismounted horsemen, and the guns were brought up to cover the advance. The country was ill-suited, however, to the use of artillery, and it was only possible to use an indirect fire from under a curve of the grass land. The guns made good practice, however, one section of the 38th battery being in action all day within 800 yards of the Boer line, and putting themselves out of action after 300 rounds by the destruction of their own rifling. Once over the curve every yard of the veld was commanded by the hidden riflemen. The infantry advanced, but could make no headway against the deadly fire which met them. By short rushes the attack managed to get within 300 yards of the enemy, and there it stuck. On the right the Munsters carried a detached kopje which was in front of them, but could do little to aid the main attack. Nothing could have exceeded the tenacity of the Yorkshiremen and the New Zealanders, who were immediately to their left. Though unable to advance they refused to retire, and indeed they were in a position from which a retirement would have been a serious operation. Colonel Lloyd of the West Ridings was hit in three places and killed. Five out of six officers of the New Zealand corps were struck down. There were no reserves to give a fresh impetus to the attack, and the thin scattered line, behind bullet-spotted stones or anthills, could but hold its own while the sun sank slowly upon a day which will not be forgotten by those who endured it. The Boers were reinforced in the afternoon, and the pressure became so severe that the field guns were retired with much difficulty. Many of the infantry had shot away all their cartridges and were helpless. Just one year before British soldiers had lain under similar circumstances on the plain which leads to Modder River, and now on a smaller scale the very same drama was being enacted. Gradually the violet haze of evening deepened into darkness, and the incessant rattle of the rifle fire died away on either side. Again, as at Modder River, the British infantry still lay in their position, determined to take no backward step, and again the Boers stole away in the night, leaving the ridge which they had defended so well. A hundred killed and wounded was the price paid by the British for that line of rock studded hills — a heavier proportion of losses than had befallen Lord Methuen in the corresponding action. Of the Boer losses there was as usual no means of judging, but several grave-mounds, newly dug, showed that they also had something to deplore. Their retreat, however, was not due to exhaustion, but to the demonstration which Lyttelton had been able to make in their rear. The gunners and the infantry had all done well in a most trying action, but by common consent it was with the men from New Zealand that the honours lay. It was no empty compliment when Sir Alfred Milner telegraphed to the Premier of New Zealand his congratulations upon the distinguished behaviour of his fellow countrymen.

From this time onwards there was nothing of importance in this part of the seat of war.

It is necessary now to turn from the north-east to the north-west of Pretoria, where the presence of De la Rey and the cover afforded by the Magaliesberg mountains had kept alive the Boer resistance. Very rugged lines of hill, alternating with fertile valleys, afforded a succession of forts and of granaries to the army which held them. To General Clements' column had been committed the task of clearing this difficult piece of country. His force fluctuated in numbers, but does not appear at any time to have consisted of more than three thousand men, which comprised the Border Regiment, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the second Northumberland Fusiliers, mounted infantry, yeomanry, the 8th R.F.A., P battery R.H.A., and one heavy gun. With this small army he moved about the district, breaking up Boer bands, capturing supplies, and bringing in refugees. On November 13th he was at Krugersdorp, the southern extremity of his beat. On the 24th he was moving north again, and found himself as he approached the hills in the presence of a force of Boers with cannon. This was the redoubtable De la Rey, who sometimes operated in Methuen's country to the north of the

Magaliesberg, and sometimes to the south. He had now apparently fixed upon Clements as his definite opponent. De la Rey was numerically inferior, and Clements had no difficulty in this first encounter in forcing him back with some loss. On November 26th Clements was back at Krugersdorp again with cattle and prisoners. In the early days of December he was moving northwards once more, where a serious disaster awaited him. Before narrating the circumstances connected with the Battle of Nooitgedacht there is one incident which occurred in this same region which should be recounted.

This consists of the determined attack made by a party of De la Rey's men, upon December 3rd, on a convoy which was proceeding from Pretoria to Rustenburg, and had got as far as Buffel's Hoek. The convoy was a very large one, consisting of 150 wagons, which covered about three miles upon the march. It was guarded by two companies of the West Yorkshires, two guns of the 75th battery, and a handful of the Victoria Mounted Rifles. The escort appears entirely inadequate when it is remembered that these stores, which were of great value, were being taken through a country which was known to be infested by the enemy. What might have been foreseen occurred. Five hundred Boers suddenly rode down upon the helpless line of wagons and took possession of them. The escort rallied, however, upon a kopje, and, though attacked all day, succeeded in holding their own until help arrived. They prevented the Boers from destroying or carrying off as much of the convoy as was under their guns, but the rest was looted and burned. The incident was a most unfortunate one, as it supplied the enemy with a large quantity of stores, of which they were badly in need. It was the more irritating as it was freely rumoured that a Boer attack was pending; and there is evidence that a remonstrance was addressed from the convoy before it left Rietfontein to the General of the district, pointing out the danger to which it was exposed. The result was the loss of 120 wagons and of more than half the escort. The severity of the little action and the hardihood of the defence are indicated by the fact that the small body who held the kopje lost fifteen killed and twenty-two wounded, the gunners losing nine out of fifteen. A relieving force appeared at the close of the action, but no vigorous pursuit was attempted, although the weather was wet and the Boers had actually carried away sixty loaded wagons, which could only go very slowly. It must be confessed that from its feckless start to its spiritless finish the story of the Buffel’s Hoek convoy is not a pleasant one to tell.

Clements, having made his way once more to the Magaliesberg range, had pitched his camp at a place called Nooitgedacht — not to be confused with the post upon the Delagoa Railway at which the British prisoners had been confined. Here, in the very shadow of the mountain, he halted for five days, during which, with the usual insouciance of British commanders, he does not seem to have troubled himself with any entrenching. He knew, no doubt, that he was too strong for his opponent De la Rey, but what he did not know, but might have feared, was that a second Boer force might appear suddenly upon the scene and join with De la Rey in order to crush him. This second Boer force was that of Commandant Beyers from Warm Baths. By a sudden and skilful movement the two united, and fell like a thunderbolt upon the British column, which was weakened by the absence of the Border Regiment. The result was such a reverse as the British had not sustained since Sanna’s Post — a reverse which showed that, though no regular Boer army might exist, still a sudden coalition of scattered bands could at any time produce a force which would be dangerous to any British column which might be taken at a disadvantage. We had thought that the days of battles in this war were over, but an action which showed a missing and casualty roll of 550 proved that in this, as in so many other things, we were mistaken.

As already stated, the camp of Clements lay under a precipitous cliff, upon the summit of which he had placed four companies of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers. This strong post was a thousand feet higher than the camp. Below lay the main body of the force, two more companies of fusiliers, four of Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 2nd Mounted Infantry, Kitchener’s Horse, yeomanry, and the artillery. The latter consisted of one heavy naval gun, four guns of the 8th R.F.A., and P battery R.H.A. The whole force amounted to about fifteen hundred men.

It was just at the first break of dawn — the hour of fate in South African warfare — that the battle began. The mounted infantry post between the camp and the mountains were aware of moving figures in front of them. In the dim light they could discern that they were clothed in grey, and that they wore the broad-brimmed hats and feathers of some of our own irregular corps. They challenged, and the answer was a shattering volley, instantly returned by the survivors of the picket. So hot was the Boer attack that before help could come every man save one of the picket was on the ground. The sole survivor, Daley of the Dublins, took no backward step, but continued to steadily load and fire until help came from the awakened camp. There followed a savage conflict at point blank-range. The mounted infantry men, rushing half clad to the support of their comrades, were confronted by an ever-thickening swarm of Boer riflemen, who had already, by working round on the flank, established their favourite cross fire. Legge, the leader of the mounted infantry, a hard little Egyptian veteran, was shot through the head, and his men lay thick around him. For some minutes it was as hot a corner as any in the war. But Clements himself had appeared upon the scene, and his cool gallantry turned the tide of fight. An extension of the line checked the cross fire, and gave the British in turn a flanking position. Gradually the Boer riflemen were pushed back, until at last they broke and fled for their horses in the rear. A small body were cut off, many of whom were killed and wounded, while a few were taken prisoners.

This stiff fight of an hour had ended in a complete repulse of the attack, though at a considerable cost. Both Boers and British had lost heavily. Nearly all the staff were killed or wounded, though General Clements had come through untouched. Fifty or sixty of both sides had fallen. But it was noted as an ominous fact that in spite of shell fire the Boers still lingered upon the western flank. Were they coming on again? They showed no signs of it. And yet they waited in groups, and looked up towards the beetling crags above them. What were they waiting for? The sudden crash of a murderous Mauser fire upon the summit, with the rolling volleys of the British infantry, supplied the answer.

Only now must it have been clear to Clements that he was not dealing merely with some spasmodic attack from his old enemy De la Rey, but that this was a largely conceived movement, in which a force at least double the strength of his own had suddenly been concentrated upon him. His camp was still menaced by the men whom he had repulsed, and he could not weaken it by sending reinforcements up the hill. But the roar of the musketry was rising louder and louder. It was becoming clearer that there was the main attack. It was a Majuba Hill action up yonder, a thick swarm of skirmishers closing in from many sides upon a central band of soldiers. But the fusiliers were hopelessly outnumbered, and this rock fighting is that above all others in which the Boer has an advantage over the regular. A helio on the hill cried for help. The losses were heavy, it said, and the assailants numerous. The Boers closed swiftly in upon the flanks, and the fusiliers were no match for their assailants. Till the very climax the helio still cried that they were being overpowered, and it is said that even while working it the soldier in charge was hurled over the cliff by the onrush of the victorious Boers.

The fight of the mounted infantry men had been at half-past four. At six the attack upon the hill had developed, and Clements in response to those frantic flashes of light had sent up a hundred men of the yeomanry, from the Fife and Devon squadrons, as a reinforcement. To climb a precipitous thousand feet with rifle, bandolier, and spurs, is no easy feat, yet that roar of battle above them heartened them upon their way. But in spite of all their efforts they were only in time to share the general disaster. The head of the line of hard-breathing yeomen reached the plateau just as the Boers, sweeping over the remnants of the Northumberland Fusiliers, reached the brink of the cliff. One by one the yeomen darted over the edge, and endeavoured to find some cover in the face of an infernal point-blank fire. Captain Mudie of the staff, who went first, was shot down. So was Purvis of the Fifes, who followed him. The others, springing over their bodies, rushed for a small trench, and tried to restore the fight. Lieutenant Campbell, a gallant young fellow, was shot dead as he rallied his men. Of twenty-seven of the Fifeshires upon the hill six were killed and eleven wounded. The statistics of the Devons are equally heroic. Those yeomen who had not yet reached the crest were in a perfectly impossible position, as the Boers were firing from complete cover right down upon them. There was no alternative for them but surrender. By seven o’clock every British soldier upon the hill, yeoman or fusilier, had been killed, wounded, or taken. It is not true that the supply of cartridges ran out, and the fusiliers, with the ill-luck which has pursued the 2nd battalion, were outnumbered and outfought by better skirmishers than themselves.

Seldom has a General found himself in a more trying position than Clements, or extricated himself more honourably. Not only had he lost nearly half his force, but his camp was no longer tenable, and his whole army was commanded by the fringe of deadly rifles upon the cliff. From the berg to the camp was from 800 to 1000 yards, and a sleet of bullets whistled down upon it. How severe was the fire may be gauged from the fact that the little pet monkey belonging to the yeomanry — a small enough object — was hit three times, though he lived to survive as a battle-scarred veteran.

Those wounded in the early action found themselves in a terrible position, laid out in the open under a withering fire, ‘like helpless Aunt Sallies,’ as one of them described it. ‘We must get a red flag up, or we shall be blown off the face of the earth,’ says the same correspondent, a corporal of the Ceylon Mounted Infantry. ‘We had a pillow-case, but no red paint. Then we saw what would do instead, so they made the upright with my blood, and the horizontal with Paul’s.’ It is pleasant to add that this grim flag was respected by the Boers. Bullocks and mules fell in heaps, and it was evident that the question was not whether the battle could be restored, but whether the guns could be saved. Leaving a fringe of yeomen, mounted infantry, and Kitchener’s Horse to stave off the Boers, who were already descending by the same steep kloof up which the yeomen had climbed, the General bent all his efforts to getting the big naval gun out of danger. Only six oxen were left out of a team of forty, and so desperate did the situation appear that twice dynamite was placed beneath the gun to destroy it. Each time, however, the General intervened, and at last, under a stimulating rain of pom-pom shells, the great cannon lurched slowly forward, quickening its pace as the men pulled on the drag-ropes, and the six oxen broke into a wheezy canter. Its retreat was covered by the smaller guns which rained shrapnel upon the crest of the hill, and upon the Boers who were descending to the camp. Once the big gun was out of danger, the others limbered up and followed, their rear still covered by the staunch mounted infantry, with whom rest all the honours of the battle. Cookson and Brooks with 250 men stood for hours between Clements and absolute disaster. The camp was abandoned as it stood, and all the stores, four hundred picketed horses, and, most serious of all, two wagons of ammunition, fell into the hands of the victors. To have saved all his guns, however, after the destruction of half his force by an active enemy far superior to him in numbers and in mobility, was a feat which goes far to condone the disaster, and to increase rather than to impair the confidence which his troops feel in General Clements. Having retreated for a couple of miles he turned his big gun round upon the hill, which is called Yeomanry Hill, and opened fire upon the camp, which was being looted by swarms of Boers. So bold a face did he present that he was able to remain with his crippled force upon Yeomanry Hill from about nine until four in the afternoon, and no attack was pressed home, though he lay under both shell and rifle fire all day. At four in the afternoon he began his retreat, which did not cease till he had reached Rietfontein, twenty miles off, at six o'clock upon the following morning. His weary men had been working for twenty-six hours, and actually fighting for fourteen, but the bitterness of defeat was alleviated by the feeling that every man, from the General downwards, had done all that was possible, and that there was every prospect of their having a chance before long of getting their own back.

The British losses at the battle of Nooitgedacht amounted to 60 killed, 180 wounded, and 315 prisoners, all of whom were delivered up a few days later at Rustenburg. Of the Boer losses it is, as usual, impossible to speak with confidence, but all the evidence points to their actual casualties being as heavy as those of the British. There was the long struggle at the camp in which they were heavily punished, the fight on the mountain, where they exposed themselves with unusual recklessness, and the final shelling from shrapnel and from lyddite. All accounts agree that their attack was more open than usual. 'They were mowed down in twenties that day, but it had no effect. They stood like fanatics,' says one who fought against them. From first to last their conduct was most gallant, and great credit is due to their leaders for the skilful sudden concentration by which they threw their whole strength upon the exposed force. Some eighty miles separate Warm Baths from Nooitgedacht, and it seems strange that our Intelligence Department should have remained in ignorance of so large a movement.

General Broadwood's 2nd Cavalry Brigade had been stationed to the north of Magaliesberg, some twelve miles westward of Clements, and formed the next link in the long chain of British forces. Broadwood does not appear, however, to have appreciated the importance of the engagement, and made no energetic movement to take part in it. If Colvile is open to the charge of having been slow to 'march upon the cannon' at Sanna's Post, it might be urged that Broadwood in turn showed some want of energy and judgment upon this occasion. On the morning of the 13th his force could hear the heavy firing to the eastward, and could even see the shells bursting on the top of the Magaliesberg. It was but ten or twelve miles distant, and, as his Elswick guns have a range of nearly five, a very small advance would have enabled him to make a demonstration against the flank of the Boers, and so to relieve the pressure upon Clements. It is true that his force was not large, but it was exceptionally mobile. Whatever the reasons, no effective advance was made by Broadwood. On hearing the result he fell back upon Rustenburg, the nearest British post, his small force being dangerously isolated.

Those who expected that General Clements would get his own back had not long to wait. In a few days he was in the field again. The remains of his former force had, however, been sent into Pretoria to refit, and nothing remained of it save the 8th R.F.A. and the indomitable cow-gun still pocked with the bullets of Nooitgedacht. He had also F battery R.H.A., the Inniskillings, the Border regiment, and a force of mounted infantry under Alderson. More important than all, however, was the co-operation of General French, who came out from Pretoria to assist in the operations. On the 19th, only six days after his defeat, Clements found himself on the very same spot fighting some at least of the very same men. This time, however, there was no element of surprise, and the British were able to approach the task with deliberation and method. The result was that both upon the 19th and 20th the Boers were shelled out of successive positions with considerable loss, and driven altogether away from that part of the Magaliesberg. Shortly afterwards General Clements was recalled to Pretoria, to take over the command of the 7th Division, General Tucker having been appointed to the military command of Bloemfontein in the place of the gallant Hunter, who, to the regret of the whole army, was invalided home. General Cunningham henceforward commanded the column which Clements had led back to the Magaliesberg.

Upon November 13th the first of a series of attacks was made upon the posts along the Delagoa Railway line. These were the work of Viljoen’s commando, who, moving swiftly from the north, threw themselves upon the small garrisons of Balmoral and of Wilge River, stations which are about six miles apart. At the former was a detachment of the Buffs, and at the latter of the Royal Fusiliers. The attack was well delivered, but in each instance was beaten back with heavy loss to the assailants. A picket of the Buffs was captured at the first rush, and the detachment lost six killed and nine wounded. No impression was made upon the position, however, and the double attack seems to have cost the Boers a large number of casualties.

Another incident calling for some mention was the determined attack made by the Boers upon the town of Vryheid, in the extreme south-east of the Transvaal near the Natal border. Throughout November this district had been much disturbed, and the small British garrison had evacuated the town and taken up a position on the adjacent hills. Upon December 11th the

Boers attempted to carry the trenches. The garrison of the town appears to have consisted of the 2nd Royal Lancaster regiment, some five hundred strong, a party of the Lancashire Fusiliers, 150 strong, and fifty men of the Royal Garrison Artillery, with a small body of mounted infantry. They held a hill about half a mile north of the town, and commanding it. The attack, which was a surprise in the middle of the night, broke upon the pickets of the British, who held their own in a way which may have been injudicious but was certainly heroic. Instead of falling back when seriously attacked, the young officers in charge of these outposts refused to move, and were speedily under such a fire that it was impossible to reinforce them. There were four outposts, under Woodgate, Theobald, Lippert, and Mangles. The attack at 2.15 on a cold dark morning began at the post held by Woodgate, the Boers coming hand-to-hand before they were detected. Woodgate, who was unarmed at the instant, seized a hammer, and rushed at the nearest Boer, but was struck by two bullets and killed. His post was dispersed or taken. Theobald and Lippert, warned by the firing, held on behind their sangars, and were ready for the storm which burst over them. Lippert was unhappily killed, and his ten men all hit or taken, but young Theobald held his own under a heavy fire for twelve hours. Mangles also, the gallant son of a gallant father, held his post all day with the utmost tenacity. The troops in the trenches behind were never seriously pressed, thanks to the desperate resistance of the outposts, but Colonel Gawne of the Lancasters was unfortunately killed. Towards evening the Boers abandoned the attack, leaving fourteen of their number dead upon the ground, from which it may be guessed that their total casualties were not less than a hundred. The British losses were three officers and five men killed, twenty-two men wounded, and thirty men with one officer missing — the latter being the survivors of those outposts which were overwhelmed by the Boer advance.

A few incidents stand out among the daily bulletins of snipings, skirmishes, and endless marchings which make the dull chronicle of these, the last months of the year 1900. These must be enumerated without any attempt at connecting them. The first is the long-drawn-out siege or investment of Schweizer-Renecke. This small village stands upon the Harts River, on the western border of the Transvaal. It is not easy to understand why the one party should desire to hold, or the other to attack, a position so insignificant. From August 19th onwards it was defended by a garrison of 250 men, under the very capable command of Colonel Chamier, who handled a small business in a way which marks him as a leader. The Boer force, which varied in numbers from five hundred to a thousand, never ventured to push home an attack, for Chamier, fresh from the experience of Kimberley, had taken such precautions that his defences were formidable, if not impregnable. Late in September a relieving force under Colonel Settle threw fresh supplies into the town, but when he passed on upon his endless march the enemy closed in once more, and the siege was renewed. It lasted for several months, until a column withdrew the garrison and abandoned the position.

Of all the British detachments, the two which worked hardest and marched furthest during this period of the war was the 21st Brigade (Derbysbires, Sussex, and Camerons) under General Bruce Hamilton, and the column under Settle, which operated down the western border of the Orange River Colony, and worked round and round with such pertinacity that it was familiarly known as Settle’s Imperial Circus. Much hard and disagreeable work, far more repugnant to the soldier than the actual dangers of war, fell to the lot of Bruce Hamilton and his men. With Kroonstad as their centre they were continually working through the dangerous Lindley and Heilbron districts, returning to the railway line only to start again immediately upon a fresh quest. It was work for mounted police, not for infantry soldiers, but what they were given to do they did to the best of their ability. Settle’s men had a similar thankless task. From the neighbourhood of Kimberley he marched in November with his small column down the border of the Orange River Colony, capturing supplies and bringing in refugees. He fought one brisk action with Hertzog’s commando at Kloof, and then, making his way across the colony, struck the railway line again at Edenburg on December 7th, with a train of prisoners and cattle.

Rundle also had put in much hard work in his efforts to control the difficult district in the north-east of the Colony which had been committed to his care. He traversed in November from north to south the same country which he had already so painfully traversed from south to north. With occasional small actions he moved about from Vrede to Reitz, and so to Bethlehem and Harrismith. On him, as on all other commanders, the vicious system of placing small garrisons in the various towns imposed a constant responsibility lest they should be starved or overwhelmed.

The year and the century ended by a small reverse to the British arms in the Transvaal. This consisted in the capture of a post at Helvetia defended by a detachment of the Liverpool Regiment and by a 4.7 gun. Lydenburg, being seventy miles off the railway line, had a chain of posts connecting it with the junction at Machadodorp. These posts were seven in number, ten miles apart, each defended by 250 men. Of these Helvetia was the second. The key of the position was a strongly fortified hill about three-quarters of a mile from the headquarter camp, and commanding it. This post was held by Captain Kirke with forty garrison artillery to work the big gun, and seventy Liverpool infantry. In spite of the barbed-wire entanglements, the Boers most gallantly rushed this position, and their advance was so rapid, or the garrison so slow, that the place was carried with hardly a shot fired. Major Cotton, who commanded the main lines, found himself deprived in an instant of nearly half his force and fiercely attacked by a victorious and exultant enemy. His position was much too extended for the small force at his disposal, and the line of trenches was pierced and enfiladed at many points. It must be acknowledged that the defences were badly devised — little barbed wire, frail walls, large loopholes, and the outposts so near the trenches that the assailants could reach them as quickly as the supports. With the dawn Cotton’s position was serious, if not desperate. He was not only surrounded, but was commanded from Gun Hill. Perhaps it would have been wiser if, after being wounded, he had handed over the command to Jones, his junior officer. A stricken man’s judgement can never be so sound as that of the hale. However that may be, he came to the conclusion that the position was untenable, and that it was best to prevent further loss of life. Fifty of the Liverpools were killed and wounded, 200 taken. No ammunition of the gun was captured, but the Boers were able to get safely away with this humiliating evidence of their victory. One post, under Captain Wilkinson with forty men, held out with success, and harassed the enemy in their retreat. As at Dewetsdorp and at Nooitgedacht, the Boers were unable to retain their prisoners, so that the substantial fruits of their enterprise were small, but it forms none the less one more of those incidents which may cause us to respect our enemy and to be critical towards ourselves. [Footnote: Considering that Major Stapelton Cotton was himself wounded in three places during the action (one of these wounds being in the head), he has had hard measure in being deprived of his commission by a court-martial which sat eight months after the event. It is to be earnestly hoped that there may be some revision of this severe sentence.]

In the last few months of the year some of those corps which had served their time or which were needed elsewhere were allowed to leave the seat of war. By the middle of November the three different corps of the City Imperial Volunteers, the two Canadian contingents, Lumsden’s Horse, the Composite Regiment of Guards, six hundred Australians, A battery R.H.A., and the volunteer companies of the regular regiments, were all homeward bound. This loss of several thousand veteran troops before the war was over was to be deplored, and though unavoidable in the case of volunteer contingents, it is difficult to explain where regular troops are concerned. Early in the new year the Government was compelled to send out strong reinforcements to take their place.

Early in December Lord Roberts also left the country, to take over the duties of Commander-in-Chief. High as his reputation stood when, in January, he landed at Cape Town, it is safe to say that it had been immensely enhanced when, ten months later, he saw from the quarter-deck of the ‘Canada’ the Table Mountain growing dimmer in the distance. He found a series of disconnected operations, in which we were uniformly worsted. He speedily converted them into a series of connected operations in which we were almost uniformly successful. Proceeding to the front at the beginning of February, within a fortnight he had relieved Kimberley, within a month he had destroyed Cronje’s force, and within six weeks he was in Bloemfontein. Then, after a six weeks’ halt which could not possibly have been shortened, he made another of his tiger leaps, and within a month had occupied Johannesburg and Pretoria. From that moment the issue of the campaign was finally settled, and though a third leap was needed, which carried him to Komatipoort, and though brave and obstinate men might still struggle against their destiny, he had done what was essential, and the rest, however difficult, was only the detail of the campaign. A kindly gentleman, as well as a great soldier, his nature revolted from all harshness, and a worse man might have been a better leader in the last hopeless phases of the war. He remembered, no doubt, how Grant had given Lee’s army their horses, but Lee at the time had been thoroughly beaten, and his men had laid down their arms. A similar boon to the partially conquered Boers led to very different results, and the prolongation of the war is largely due to this act of clemency. At the same time political and military considerations were opposed to each other upon the point, and his moral position in the use of harsher measures is the stronger since a policy of conciliation had been tried and failed. Lord Roberts returned to London with the respect and love of his soldiers and of his fellow-countrymen. A passage from his farewell address to his troops may show the qualities which endeared him to them.

‘The service which the South African Force has performed is, I venture to think, unique in the annals of war, inasmuch as it has been absolutely almost incessant for a whole year, in some cases for more than a year. There has been no rest, no days off to recruit, no going into winter quarters, as in other campaigns which have extended over a long period. For months together, in fierce heat, in biting cold, in pouring rain, you, my comrades, have marched and fought without halt, and bivouacked without shelter from the elements. You frequently have had to continue marching with your clothes in rags and your boots without soles, time being of such consequence that it was impossible for you to remain long enough in one place to refit. When not engaged in actual battle you have been continually shot at from behind kopjes by invisible enemies to whom every inch of the country was familiar, and who, from the peculiar nature of the country, were able to inflict severe punishment while perfectly safe themselves. You have forced your way through dense jungles, over precipitous mountains, through and over which with infinite manual labour you have had to drag heavy guns and ox-wagons. You have covered with almost incredible speed enormous distances, and that often on very short supplies of food. You have endured the sufferings inevitable in war to sick and wounded men far from the base, without a murmur and even with cheerfulness.’

The words reflect honour both upon the troops addressed and upon the man who addressed them. From the middle of December 1900 Lord Kitchener took over the control of the campaign.

CHAPTER 32. THE SECOND INVASION OF CAPE COLONY.

(DECEMBER 1900 TO APRIL 1901.)

During the whole war the task of the British had been made very much more difficult by the openly expressed sympathy with the Boers from the political association known as the Afrikander Bond, which either inspired or represented the views which prevailed among the great majority of the Dutch inhabitants of Cape Colony. How strong was this rebel impulse may be gauged by the fact that in some of the border districts no less than ninety per cent of the voters joined the Boer invaders upon the occasion of their first entrance into the Colony. It is not pretended that these men suffered from any political grievances whatever, and their action is to be ascribed partly to a natural sympathy with their northern kinsmen, and partly to racial ambition and to personal dislike to their British neighbours. The liberal British policy towards the natives had especially alienated the Dutch, and had made as well-marked a line of cleavage in South Africa as the slave question had done in the States of the Union.

With the turn of the war the discontent in Cape Colony became less obtrusive, if not less acute, but in the later months of the year 1900 it increased to a degree which became dangerous. The fact of the farm-burning in the conquered countries, and the fiction of outrages by the British troops, raised a storm of indignation. The annexation of the Republics, meaning the final disappearance of any Dutch flag from South Africa, was a racial humiliation which was bitterly resented. The Dutch papers became very violent, and the farmers much excited. The agitation culminated in a conference at Worcester upon December 6th, at which some thousands of delegates were present. It is suggestive of the Imperial nature of the struggle that the assembly of Dutch Afrikanders was carried out under the muzzles of Canadian artillery, and closely watched by Australian cavalry. Had violent words transformed themselves into deeds, all was ready for the crisis.

Fortunately the good sense of the assembly prevailed, and the agitation, though bitter, remained within those wide limits which a British constitution permits. Three resolutions were passed, one asking that the war be ended, a second that the independence of the Republics be restored, and a third protesting against the actions of Sir Alfred Milner. A deputation which carried these to the Governor received a courteous but an uncompromising reply. Sir Alfred Milner pointed out that the Home Government, all the great Colonies, and half the Cape were unanimous in their policy, and that it was folly to imagine that it could be reversed on account of a local agitation. All were agreed in the desire to end the war, but the last way of bringing this about was by encouraging desperate men to go on fighting in a hopeless cause. Such was the general nature of the Governor’s reply, which was, as might be expected, entirely endorsed by the British Government and people.

Had De Wet, in the operations which have already been described, evaded Charles Knox and crossed the Orange River, his entrance into the Colony would have been synchronous with the congress at Worcester, and the situation would have become more acute. This peril was fortunately averted. The agitation in the Colony suggested to the Boer leaders, however, that here was an untouched recruiting ground, and that small mobile invading parties might gather strength and become formidable. It was obvious, also, that by enlarging the field of operations the difficulties of the British Commander-in-chief would be very much increased, and the pressure upon the Boer guerillas in the Republics relaxed. Therefore, in spite of De Wet’s failure to penetrate the Colony, several smaller bands under less-known leaders were despatched over the Orange River. With the help of the information and the supplies furnished by the local farmers, these bands wandered for many months over the great expanse of the Colony, taking refuge, when hard pressed, among the mountain ranges. They moved swiftly about, obtaining remounts from their friends, and avoiding everything in the nature of an action, save when the odds were overwhelmingly in their favour. Numerous small posts or patrols cut off, many skirmishes, and one or two railway smashes were the fruits of this invasion, which lasted till the end of the war, and kept the Colony in an extreme state of unrest during that period. A short account must be given here of the movement and exploits of these hostile bands, avoiding, as far as possible, that catalogue of obscure ‘fonteins’ and ‘kops’ which mark their progress.

The invasion was conducted by two main bodies, which shed off numerous small raiding parties. Of these two, one operated on the western side of the Colony, reaching the sea-coast in the Clanwilliam district, and attaining a point which is less than a hundred miles from Cape Town. The other penetrated even more deeply down the centre of the Colony, reaching almost to the sea in the Mossel Bay direction. Yet the incursion, although so far-reaching, had small effect, since the invaders held nothing save the ground on which they stood, and won their way, not by victory, but by the avoidance of danger. Some recruits were won to their cause, but they do not seem at that time to have been more than a few hundreds in number, and to have been drawn for the most part from the classes of the community which had least to lose and least to offer.

The Western Boers were commanded by Judge Hertzog of the Free State, having with him Brand, the son of the former president, and about twelve hundred well-mounted men. Crossing the Orange River at Sand Drift, north of Colesberg, upon December 16th, they paused at Kameelfontein to gather up a small post of thirty yeomen and guardsmen under Lieutenant Fletcher, the wellknown oar. Meeting with a stout resistance, and learning that British forces were already converging upon them, they abandoned the attack, and turning away from Colesberg they headed west, cutting the railway line twenty miles to the north of De Aar. On the 22nd they occupied Britstown, which is eighty miles inside the border, and on the same day they captured a small body of yeomanry who had been following them. These prisoners were released again some days later. Taking a sweep round towards Prieska and Strydenburg, they pushed south again. At the end of the year Hertzog's column was 150 miles deep in the Colony, sweeping through the barren and thinly-inhabited western lands, heading apparently for Fraserburg and Beaufort West.

The second column was commanded by Kritzinger, a burgher of Zastron, in the Orange River Colony. His force was about 800 strong. Crossing the border at Rhenoster Hoek upon December 16th, they pushed for Burghersdorp, but were headed off by a British column. Passing through Venterstad, they made for Steynsberg, fighting two indecisive skirmishes with small British forces. The end of the year saw them crossing the rail road at Sherburne, north of Rosmead Junction, where they captured a train as they passed, containing some Colonial troops. At this time they were a hundred miles inside the Colony, and nearly three hundred from Hertzog's western column.

In the meantime Lord Kitchener, who had descended for a few days to De Aar, had shown great energy in organising small mobile columns which should follow and, if possible, destroy the invaders. Martial law was proclaimed in the parts of the Colony affected, and as the invaders came further south the utmost enthusiasm was shown by the loyalists, who formed themselves everywhere into town guards. The existing Colonial regiments, such as Brabant's, the Imperial and South African Light Horse — Thorneycroft's, Rimington's, and the others — had already been brought up to strength again, and now two new regiments were added, Kitchener's Bodyguard and Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, the latter being raised by Johann Colenbrander, who had made a name for himself in the Rhodesian wars. At this period of the war between twenty and thirty thousand Cape colonists were under arms. Many of these were untrained levies, but they possessed the martial spirit of the race, and they set free more seasoned troops for other duties.

It will be most convenient and least obscure to follow the movements of the western force (Hertzog's), and afterwards to consider those of the eastern (Kritzinger's). The opening of the year saw the mobile column of Free Staters 150 miles over the border, pushing swiftly south over the barren surface of the Karoo. It is a country of scattered farms and scanty population; desolate plains curving upwards until they rise into still more desolate mountain ranges. Moving in a very loose formation over a wide front, the Boers swept southwards. On or about January 4th they took possession of the small town of Calvinia, which remained their headquarters for more than a month. From this point their roving bands made their way as far as the seacoast in the Clanwilliam direction, for they expected at Lambert's Bay to meet with a vessel with mercenaries and guns from Europe. They pushed their outposts also as far as Sutherland and Beaufort West in the south. On January 15th strange horsemen were seen hovering about the line at Touws River, and the citizens of Cape Town learned with amazement that the war had been carried to within a hundred miles of their own doors.

Whilst the Boers were making this daring raid a force consisting of several mobile columns was being organised by General Settle to arrest and finally to repel the western invasion. The larger body was under the command of Colonel De Lisle, an officer who brought to the operations of war the same energy and thoroughness with which he had made the polo team of an infantry regiment the champions of the whole British Army. His troops consisted of the 6th Mounted Infantry, the New South Wales Mounted Infantry, the Irish Yeomanry, a section of R battery R.H.A., and a pom-pom. With this small but mobile and hardy force he threw himself in front of Hertzog's line of advance. On January 13th he occupied Piquetburg, eighty miles south of the Boer headquarters. On the 23rd he was at Clanwilliam, fifty miles south-west of them. To his right were three other small British columns under Bethune, Thorneycroft, and Henniker, the latter resting upon the railway at Matjesfontein, and the whole line extending over 120 miles — barring the southern path to the invaders.

Though Hertzog at Calvinia and De Lisle at Clanwilliam were only fifty miles apart, the intervening country is among the most broken and mountainous in South Africa. Between the two points, and nearer to De Lisle than to Hertzog, flows the Doorn River. The Boers advancing from Calvinia came into touch with the British scouts at this point, and drove them in upon January 21st. On the 28th De Lisle, having been reinforced by Bethune's column, was able at last to take the initiative. Bethune's force consisted mainly of Colonials, and included Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, the Cape Mounted Police, Cape Mounted Rifles, Brabant's Horse, and the Diamond Field Horse. At the end of January the united forces of Bethune and of De Lisle advanced upon Calvinia. The difficulties lay rather in the impassable country than in the resistance of an enemy who was determined to refuse battle. On February 6th, after a fine march, De Lisle and his men took possession of Calvinia, which had been abandoned by the Boers. It is painful to add that during the month that they had held the town they appear to have behaved with great harshness, especially to the kaffirs. The flogging and shooting of a coloured man named Esan forms one more incident in the dark story of the Boer and his relations to the native.

The British were now sweeping north on a very extended front. Colenbrander had occupied Van Rhyns Dorp, to the east of Calvinia, while Bethune's force was operating to the west of it. De Lisle hardly halted at Calvinia, but pushed onwards to Williston, covering seventy-two miles of broken country in forty-eight hours, one of the most amazing performances of the war. Quick as he was, the Boers were quicker still, and during his northward march he does not appear to have actually come into contact with them. Their line of retreat lay through Carnarvon, and upon February 22nd they crossed the railway line to the north of De Aar, and joined upon February 26th the new invading force under De Wet, who had now crossed the Orange River. De Lisle, who had passed over five hundred miles of barren country since he advanced from Piquetburg, made for the railway at Victoria West, and was despatched from that place on February 22nd to the scene of action in the north. From all parts Boer and Briton were concentrating in their effort to aid or to repel the inroad of the famous guerilla.

Before describing this attempt it would be well to trace the progress of the eastern invasion (Kritzinger's), a movement which may be treated rapidly, since it led to no particular military result at that time, though it lasted long after Hertzog's force had been finally dissipated. Several small columns, those of Williams, Byng, Grenfell, and Lowe, all under the direction of Haig, were organised to drive back these commandos; but so nimble were the invaders, so vast the distances and so broken the country, that it was seldom that the forces came into contact. The operations were conducted over a portion of the Colony which is strongly Dutch in sympathy, and the enemy, though they do not appear to have obtained any large number of recruits, were able to gather stores, horses, and information wherever they went.

When last mentioned Kritzinger's men had crossed the railway north of Rosmead on December 30th, and held up a train containing some Colonial troops. From then onwards a part of them remained in the Middelburg and Graaf-Reinet districts, while part moved towards the south. On January 11th there was a sharp skirmish near Murraysburg, in which Byng's column was engaged, at the cost of twenty casualties, all of Brabant's or the South African Light Horse. On the 16th a very rapid movement towards the south began. On that date Boers appeared at Aberdeen, and on the 18th at Willowmore, having covered seventy miles in two days. Their long, thin line was shredded out over 150 miles, and from Maraisburg, in the north, to Uniondale, which is only thirty miles from the coast, there was rumour of their presence. In this wild district and in that of Oudtshoorn the Boer vanguard flitted in and out of the hills, Haig's column striving hard to bring them to an action. So well-informed were the invaders that they were always able to avoid the British concentrations, while if a British outpost or patrol was left exposed it was fortunate if it escaped disaster. On February

6th a small body of twenty-five of the 7th King’s Dragoon Guards and of the West Australians, under Captain Oliver, were overwhelmed at Klipplaat, after a very fine defence, in which they held their own against 200 Boers for eight hours, and lost nearly fifty per cent of their number. On the 12th a patrol of yeomanry was surprised and taken near Willowmore.

The coming of De Wet had evidently been the signal for all the Boer raiders to concentrate, for in the second week of February Kritzinger also began to fall back, as Hertzog had done in the west, followed closely by the British columns. He did not, however, actually join De Wet, and his evacuation of the country was never complete, as was the case with Hertzog’s force. On the 19th Kritzinger was at Bethesda, with Gorringe and Lowe at his heels. On the 23rd an important railway bridge at Fish River, north of Cradock, was attacked, but the attempt was foiled by the resistance of a handful of Cape Police and Lancasters. On March 6th a party of Boers occupied the village of Pearston, capturing a few rifles and some ammunition. On the same date there was a skirmish between Colonel Parsons’s column and a party of the enemy to the north of Aberdeen. The main body of the invading force appears to have been lurking in this neighbourhood, as they were able upon April 7th to cut off a strong British patrol, consisting of a hundred Lancers and Yeomanry, seventy-five of whom remained as temporary prisoners in the hands of the enemy. With this success we may for the time leave Kritzinger and his lieutenant, Scheepers, who commanded that portion of his force which had penetrated to the south of the Colony.

The two invasions which have been here described, that of Hertzog in the west and of Kritzinger in the midlands, would appear in themselves to be unimportant military operations, since they were carried out by small bodies of men whose policy was rather to avoid than to overcome resistance. Their importance, however, is due to the fact that they were really the forerunners of a more important incursion upon the part of De Wet. The object of these two bands of raiders was to spy out the land, so that on the arrival of the main body all might be ready for that general rising of their kinsmen in the Colony which was the last chance, not of winning, but of prolonging the war. It must be confessed that, however much their reason might approve of the Government under which they lived, the sentiment of the Cape Dutch had been cruelly, though unavoidably, hurt in the course of the war. The appearance of so popular a leader as De Wet with a few thousand veterans in the very heart of their country might have stretched their patience to the breaking-point. Inflamed, as they were, by that racial hatred which had always smouldered, and had now been fanned into a blaze by the speeches of their leaders and by the fictions of their newspapers, they were ripe for mischief, while they had before their eyes an object-lesson of the impotence of our military system in those small bands who had kept the country in a ferment for so long. All was propitious, therefore, for the attempt which Steyn and De Wet were about to make to carry the war into the enemy's country.

We last saw De Wet when, after a long chase, he had been headed back from the Orange River, and, winning clear from Knox's pursuit, had in the third week of December passed successfully through the British cordon between Thabanchu and Ladybrand. Thence he made his way to Senekal, and proceeded, in spite of the shaking which he had had, to recruit and recuperate in the amazing way which a Boer army has. There is no force so easy to drive and so difficult to destroy. The British columns still kept in touch with De Wet, but found it impossible to bring him to an action in the difficult district to which he had withdrawn. His force had split up into numerous smaller bodies, capable of reuniting at a signal from their leader. These scattered bodies, mobile as ever, vanished if seriously attacked, while keenly on the alert to pounce upon any British force which might be overpowered before assistance could arrive. Such an opportunity came to the commando led by Philip Botha, and the result was another petty reverse to the British arms.

Upon January 3rd Colonel White's small column was pushing north, in co-operation with those of Knox, Pilcher, and the others. Upon that date it had reached a point just north of Lindley, a district which has never been a fortunate one for the invaders. A patrol of Kitchener' s newly raised bodyguard, under Colonel Laing, 120 strong, was sent forward to reconnoitre upon the road from Lindley to Reitz.

The scouting appears to have been negligently done, there being only two men out upon each flank. The little force walked into one of those horse-shoe positions which the Boers love, and learned by a sudden volley from a kraal upon their right that the enemy was present in strength. On attempting to withdraw it was instantly evident that the Boers were on all sides and in the rear with a force which numbered at least five to one. The camp of the main column was only four miles away, however, and the bodyguard, having sent messages of their precarious position, did all they could to make a defence until help could reach them. Colonel Laing had fallen, shot through the heart, but found a gallant successor in young Nairne, the adjutant. Part of the force had thrown themselves, under Nairne and Milne, into a donga, which gave some shelter from the sleet of bullets. The others, under Captain Butters, held on to a ruined kraal. The Boers pushed the attack very rapidly, however, and were soon able with their superior numbers to send a raking fire down the donga, which made it a perfect death-trap. Still hoping that the laggard reinforcements would come up, the survivors held desperately on; but both in the kraal and in the donga their numbers were from minute to minute diminishing. There was no formal surrender and no white flag, for, when fifty per cent of the British were down, the Boers closed in swiftly and rushed the position. Philip Botha, the brother of the commandant, who led the Boers, behaved with courtesy and humanity to the survivors; but many of the wounds were inflicted with those horrible explosive and expansive missiles, the use of which among civilised combatants should now and always be a capital offence. To disable one’s adversary is a painful necessity of warfare, but nothing can excuse the wilful mutilation and torture which is inflicted by these brutal devices.

‘How many of you are there?’ asked Botha. ‘A hundred,’ said an officer. ‘It is not true. There are one hundred and twenty. I counted you as you came along.’ The answer of the Boer leader shows how carefully the small force had been nursed until it was in an impossible position. The margin was a narrow one, however, for within fifteen minutes of the disaster White’s guns were at work. There may be some question as to whether the rescuing force could have come sooner, but there can be none as to the resistance of the bodyguard. They held out to the last cartridge. Colonel Laing and three officers with sixteen men were killed, four officers and twenty-two men were wounded. The high proportion of fatal casualties can only be explained by the deadly character of the Boer bullets. Hardly a single horse of the bodyguard was left unwounded, and the profit to the victors, since they were unable to carry away their prisoners, lay entirely in the captured rifles. It is worthy of record that the British wounded were despatched to Heilbron without guard through the Boer forces. That they arrived there unmolested is due to the forbearance of the enemy and to the tact and energy of Surgeon-Captain Porter, who commanded the convoy.

Encouraged by this small success, and stimulated by the news that Hertzog and Kritzinger had succeeded in penetrating the Colony without disaster, De Wet now prepared to follow them. British scouts to the north of Kroonstad reported horsemen riding south and east, sometimes alone, sometimes in small parties. They were recruits going to swell the forces of De Wet. On January 23rd five hundred men crossed the line, journeying in the same direction. Before the end of the month, having gathered together about 2500 men with fresh horses at the Doornberg, twenty miles north of Winburg, the Boer leader was ready for one of his lightning treks once more. On January 28th he broke south through the British net, which appears to have had more meshes than cord. Passing the Bloemfontein-Ladybrand line at Israel Poort he swept southwards, with British columns still wearily trailing behind him, like honest bulldogs panting after a greyhound.

Before following him upon this new venture it is necessary to say a few words about that peace movement in the Boer States to which some allusion has already been made. On December 20th Lord Kitchener had issued a proclamation which was intended to have the effect of affording protection to those burghers who desired to cease fighting, but who were unable to do so without incurring the enmity of their irreconcilable brethren. ‘It is hereby notified,’ said the document, ‘to all burghers that if after this date they voluntarily surrender they will be allowed to live with their families in Government laagers until such time as the guerilla warfare now being carried on will admit of their returning safely to their homes. All stock and property brought in at the time of the surrender of such burghers will be respected and paid for if requisitioned.’ This wise and liberal offer was sedulously concealed from their men by the leaders of the fighting commandos, but was largely taken advantage of by those Boers to whom it was conveyed. Boer refugee camps were formed at Pretoria, Johannesburg, Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Warrenton; and other points, to which by degrees the whole civil population came to be transferred. It was the reconcentrado system of Cuba over again, with the essential difference that the guests of the British Government were well fed and well treated during their detention. Within a few months the camps had 50,000 inmates.

It was natural that some of these people, having experienced the amenity of British rule, and being convinced of the hopelessness of the struggle, should desire to convey their feelings to their friends and relations in the field. Both in the Transvaal and in the Orange River Colony Peace Committees were formed, which endeavoured to persuade their countrymen to bow to the inevitable. A remarkable letter was published from Piet de Wet, a man who had fought bravely for the Boer cause, to his brother, the famous general. ‘Which is better for the Republics,’ he asked, ‘to continue the struggle and run the risk of total ruin as a nation, or to submit? Could we for a moment think of taking back the country if it were offered to us, with thousands of people to be supported by a Government which has not a farthing?... Put passionate feeling aside for a moment and use common-sense, and you will then agree with me that the best thing for the people and the country is to give in, to be loyal to the new government, and to get responsible government...Should the war continue a few months longer the nation will become so poor that they will be the working class in the country, and disappear as a nation in the future... The British are convinced that they have conquered the land and its people, and consider the matter ended, and they only try to treat magnanimously those who are continuing the struggle in order to prevent unnecessary bloodshed.’

Such were the sentiments of those of the burghers who were in favour of peace. Their eyes had been opened and their bitterness was transferred from the British Government to those individual Britons who, partly from idealism and partly from party passion, had encouraged them to their undoing. But their attempt to convey their feelings to their countrymen in the field ended in tragedy. Two of their number, Morgendaal and Wessels, who had journeyed to De Wet’s camp, were condemned to death by order of that leader. In the case of Morgendaal the execution actually took place, and seems to have been attended by brutal circumstances, the man having been thrashed with a sjambok before being put to death. The circumstances are still surrounded by such obscurity that it is impossible to say whether the message of the peace envoys was to the General himself or to the men under his command. In the former case the man was murdered. In the latter the Boer leader was within his rights, though the rights may have been harshly construed and brutally enforced.

On January 29th, in the act of breaking south, De Wet’s force, or a portion of it, had a sharp brush with a small British column (Crewe’s) at Tabaksberg, which lies about forty miles north-east of Bloemfontein; This small force, seven hundred strong, found itself suddenly in the presence of a very superior body of the enemy, and had some difficulty in extricating itself. A pom-pom was lost in this affair. Crewe fell back upon Knox, and the combined columns made for Bloemfontein, whence they could use the rails for their transport. De Wet meanwhile moved south as far as Smithfield, and then, detaching several small bodies to divert the attention of the British, he struck due west, and crossed the track between Springfontein and Jagersfontein road, capturing the usual supply train as he passed. On February 9th he had reached Phillipolis, well ahead of the British pursuit, and spent a day or two in making his final arrangements before carrying the war over the border. His force consisted at this time of nearly 8000 men, with two 15-pounders, one pom-pom, and one maxim. The garrisons of all the towns in the south-west of the Orange River Colony had been removed in accordance with the policy of concentration, so De Wet found himself for the moment in a friendly country.

The British, realising how serious a situation might arise should De Wet succeed in penetrating the Colony and in joining Hertzog and Kritzinger, made every effort both to head him off and to bar his return. General Lyttelton at Naauwpoort directed the operations, and the possession of the railway line enabled him to concentrate his columns rapidly at the point of danger. On February 11th De Wet forded the Orange River at Zand Drift, and found himself once more upon British territory. Lyttelton's plan of campaign appears to have been to allow De Wet to come some distance south, and then to hold him in front by De Lisle's force, while a number of small mobile columns under Plumer, Crabbe, Henniker, Bethune, Haig, and Thorneycroft should shepherd him behind. On crossing, De Wet at once moved westwards, where, upon February 12th, Plumer's column, consisting of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, the Imperial Bushmen, and part of the King's Dragoon Guards, came into touch with his rearguard. All day upon the 13th and 14th, amid terrific rain, Plumer's hardy troopers followed close upon the enemy, gleaning a few ammunition wagons, a maxim, and some prisoners. The invaders crossed the railway line near Houtnek, to the north of De Aar, in the early hours of the 15th, moving upon a front of six or eight miles. Two armoured trains from the north and the south closed in upon him as he passed, Plumer still thundered in his rear, and a small column under Crabbe came pressing from the south. This sturdy Colonel of Grenadiers had already been wounded four times in the war, so that he might be excused if he felt some personal as well as patriotic reasons for pushing a relentless pursuit. On crossing the railroad De Wet turned furiously upon his pursuers, and, taking an excellent position upon a line of kopjes rising out of the huge expanse of the Karoo, he fought a stubborn rearguard action in order to give time for his convoy to get ahead. He was hustled off the hills, however, the Australian Bushmen with great dash carrying the central kopje, and the guns driving the invaders to the westward. Leaving all his wagons and his reserve ammunition behind him, the guerilla chief struck north-west, moving with great swiftness, but never succeeding in shaking off Plumer's pursuit. The weather continued, however, to be atrocious, rain and hail falling with such violence that the horses could hardly be induced to face it. For a week the two sodden, sleepless, mud-splashed little armies swept onwards over the Karoo. De Wet passed northwards through Strydenburg, past Hopetown, and so to the Orange River, which was found to be too swollen with the rains to permit of his crossing. Here upon the 23rd, after a march of forty-five miles on end, Plumer ran into him once more, and captured with very little fighting a fifteen-pounder, a pom-pom, and close on to a hundred prisoners. Slipping away to the east, De Wet upon February 24th crossed the railroad again between Krankuil and Orange River Station, with Thorneycroft's column hard upon his heels. The Boer leader was now more anxious to escape from the Colony than ever he had been to enter it, and he rushed distractedly from point to point, endeavouring to find a ford over the great turbid river which cut him off from his own country. Here he was joined by Hertzog's commando with a number of invaluable spare horses. It is said also that he had been able to get remounts in the Hopetown district, which had not been cleared — an omission for which, it is to be hoped, someone has been held responsible. The Boer ponies, used to the succulent grasses of the veld, could make nothing of the rank Karoo, and had so fallen away that an enormous advantage should have rested with the pursuers had ill luck and bad management not combined to enable the invaders to renew their mobility at the very moment when Plumer's horses were dropping dead under their riders.

The Boer force was now so scattered that, in spite of the advent of Hertzog, De Wet had fewer men with him than when he entered the Colony. Several hundreds had been taken prisoners, many had deserted, and a few had been killed. It was hoped now that the whole force might be captured, and Thorneycroft's, Crabbe's, Henniker's, and other columns were closing swiftly in upon him, while the swollen river still barred his retreat. There was a sudden drop in the flood, however; one ford became passable, and over it, upon the last day of February, De Wet and his bedraggled, dispirited commando escaped to their own country. There was still a sting in his tail, however; for upon that very day a portion of his force succeeded in capturing sixty and killing or wounding twenty of Colenbrander's new regiment, Kitchener's Fighting Scouts. On the other hand, De Wet was finally relieved upon the same day of all care upon the score of his guns, as the last of them was most gallantly captured by Captain Dallimore and fifteen Victorians, who at the same time brought in thirty-three Boer prisoners. The net result of De Wet's invasion was that he gained nothing, and that he lost about four thousand horses, all his guns, all his convoy, and some three hundred of his men.

Once safely in his own country again, the guerilla chief pursued his way northwards with his usual celerity and success. The moment that it was certain that De Wet had escaped, the indefatigable Plumer, wiry, tenacious man, had been sent off by train to Springfontein, while Bethune's column followed direct. This latter force crossed the Orange River bridge and marched upon Luckhoff and Fauresmith. At the latter town they overtook Plumer, who was again hard upon the heels of De Wet. Together they ran him across the Riet River and north to Petrusburg, until they gave it up as hopeless upon finding that, with only fifty followers, he had crossed the Modder River at Abram's Kraal. There they abandoned the chase and fell back upon Bloemfontein to refit and prepare for a fresh effort to run down their elusive enemy.

While Plumer and Bethune were following upon the track of De Wet until he left them behind at the Modder, Lyttelton was using the numerous columns which were ready to his hand in effecting a drive up the south-eastern section of the Orange River Colony. It was disheartening to remember that all this large stretch of country had from April to November been as peaceful and almost as prosperous as Kent or Yorkshire. Now the intrusion of the guerilla bands, and the pressure put by them upon the farmers, had raised the whole country once again, and the work of pacification had to be set about once more, with harsher measures than before. A continuous barrier of barbed-wire fencing had been erected from Bloemfontein to the Basuto border, a distance of eighty miles, and this was now strongly held by British posts. From the south Bruce Hamilton, Hickman, Thorneycroft, and Haig swept upwards, stripping the country as they went in the same way that French had done in the Eastern Transvaal, while Pilcher’s column waited to the north of the barbed-wire barrier. It was known that Fourie, with a considerable commando, was lurking in this district, but he and his men slipped at night between the British columns and escaped. Pilcher, Bethune, and Byng were able, however, to send in 200 prisoners and very great numbers of cattle. On April 10th Monro, with Bethune’s Mounted Infantry, captured eighty fighting Boers near Dewetsdorp, and sixty more were taken by a night attack at Boschberg. There is no striking victory to record in these operations, but they were an important part of that process of attrition which was wearing the Boers out and helping to bring the war to an end. Terrible it is to see that barren countryside, and to think of the depths of misery to which the once flourishing and happy Orange Free State had fallen, through joining in a quarrel with a nation which bore it nothing but sincere friendship and goodwill. With nothing to gain and everything to lose, the part played by the Orange Free State in this South African drama is one of the most inconceivable things in history. Never has a nation so deliberately and so causelessly committed suicide.

CHAPTER 33. THE NORTHERN OPERATIONS FROM JANUARY TO APRIL, 1901.

Three consecutive chapters have now given some account of the campaign of De Wet, of the operations in the Transvaal up to the end of the year 1900, and of the invasion of Cape Colony up to April 1901. The present chapter will deal with the events in the Transvaal from the beginning of the new century. The military operations in that country, though extending over a very large area, may be roughly divided into two categories: the attacks by the Boers upon British posts, and the aggressive sweeping movements of British columns. Under the first heading come the attacks on Belfast, on Zuurfontein, on Kaalfontein, on Zeerust, on Modderfontein, and on Lichtenburg, besides many minor affairs. The latter comprises the operations of Babington and of Cunningham to the west and south-west of Pretoria, those of Methuen still further to the south-west, and the large movement of French in the south-east. In no direction did the British forces in the field meet with much active resistance. So long as they moved the gnats did not settle; it was only when quiet that they buzzed about and occasionally stung.

The early days of January 1901 were not fortunate for the British arms, as the check in which Kitchener’s Bodyguard was so roughly handled, near Lindley, was closely followed by a brisk action at Naauwpoort or Zandfontein, near the Magaliesberg, in which De la Rey left his mark upon the Imperial Light Horse. The Boer commandos, having been driven into the mountains by French and Clements in the latter part of December, were still on the look-out to strike a blow at any British force which might expose itself. Several mounted columns had been formed to scour the country, one under Kekewich, one under Gordon, and one under Babington. The two latter, meeting in a mist upon the morning of January 5th, actually turned their rifles upon each other, but fortunately without any casualties resulting. A more deadly rencontre was, however, awaiting them.

A force of Boers were observed, as the mist cleared, making for a ridge which would command the road along which the convoy and guns were moving. Two squadrons (B and C) of the Light Horse were instantly detached to seize the point. They do not appear to have realised that they were in the immediate presence of the enemy, and they imagined that the ground over which they were passing had been already reconnoitred by a troop of the 14th Hussars. It is true that four scouts were thrown forward, but as both squadrons were cantering there was no time for these to get ahead. Presently C squadron, which was behind, was ordered to close up upon the left of B squadron, and the 150 horsemen in one long line swept over a low grassy ridge. Some hundreds of De la Rey's men were lying in the long grass upon the further side, and their first volley, fired at a fifty-yard range, emptied a score of saddles. It would have been wiser, if less gallant, to retire at once in the presence of a numerous and invisible enemy, but the survivors were ordered to dismount and return the fire. This was done, but the hail of bullets was terrific and the casualties were numerous. Captain Norman, of C squadron, then retired his men, who withdrew in good order. B squadron having lost Yockney, its brave leader, heard no order, so they held their ground until few of them had escaped the driving sleet of lead. Many of the men were struck three and four times. There was no surrender, and the extermination of B company added another laurel, even at a moment of defeat, to the regiment whose reputation was so grimly upheld. The Boer victors walked in among the litter of stricken men and horses. 'Practically all of them were dressed in khaki and had the water-bottles and haversacks of our soldiers. One of them snatched a bayonet from a dead man, and was about to despatch one of our wounded when he was stopped in the nick of time by a man in a black suit, who, I afterwards heard, was De la Rey himself...The feature of the action was the incomparable heroism of our dear old Colonel Wools-Sampson.' So wrote a survivor of B company, himself shot through the body. It was four hours before a fresh British advance reoccupied the ridge, and by that time the Boers had disappeared. Some seventy killed and wounded, many of them terribly mutilated, were found on the scene of the disaster. It is certainly a singular coincidence that at distant points of the seat of war two of the crack irregular corps should have suffered so severely within three days of each other. In each case, however, their prestige was enhanced rather than lowered by the result. These incidents tend, however, to shake the belief that scouting is better performed in the Colonial than in the regular forces.

Of the Boer attacks upon British posts to which allusion has been made, that upon Belfast, in the early morning of January 7th, appears to have been very gallantly and even desperately pushed. On the same date a number of smaller attacks, which may have been meant simply as diversions, were made upon Wonderfontein, Nooitgedacht, Wildfontein, Pan, Dalmanutha, and Machadodorp. These seven separate attacks, occurring simultaneously over sixty miles, show that the Boer forces were still organised and under one effective control. The general object of the operations was undoubtedly to cut Lord Roberts's communications upon that side and to destroy a considerable section of the railway.

The town of Belfast was strongly held by Smith-Dorrien, with 1750 men, of which 1300 were infantry belonging to the Royal Irish, the Shropshires, and the Gordons. The perimeter of defence, however, was fifteen miles, and each little fort too far from its neighbour for mutual support, though connected with headquarters by telephone. It is probable that the leaders and burghers engaged in this very gallant attack were in part the same as those concerned in the successful attempt at Helvetia upon December 29th, for the assault was delivered in the same way, at the same hour, and apparently with the same primary object. This was to gain possession of the big 5-inch gun, which is as helpless by night as it is formidable by day. At Helvetia they attained their object and even succeeded not merely in destroying, but in removing their gigantic trophy. At Belfast they would have performed the same feat had it not been for the foresight of General Smith-Dorrien, who had the heavy gun trundled back into the town every night.

The attack broke first upon Monument Hill, a post held by Captain Fosbery with eighty-three Royal Irish. Chance or treason guided the Boers to the weak point of the wire entanglement and they surged into the fort, where the garrison fought desperately to hold its own. There was thick mist and driving rain; and the rush of vague and shadowy figures amid the gloom was the first warning of the onslaught. The Irishmen were overborne by a swarm of assailants, but they nobly upheld their traditional reputation. Fosbery met his death like a gallant gentleman, but not more heroically than Barry, the humble private, who, surrounded by Boers, thought neither of himself nor of them, but smashed at the maxim gun with a pickaxe until he fell riddled with bullets. Half the garrison were on the ground before the post was carried.

A second post upon the other side of the town was defended by Lieutenant Marshall with twenty men, mostly Shropshires. For an hour they held out until Marshall and nine out of his twelve Shropshires had been hit. Then this post also was carried.

The Gordon Highlanders held two posts to the southeast and to the southwest of the town, and these also were vigorously attacked. Here, however, the advance spent itself without result. In vain the Ermelo and Carolina commandos stormed up to the Gordon pickets. They were blown back by the steady fire of the infantry. One small post manned by twelve Highlanders was taken, but the rest defied all attack. Seeing therefore that his attempt at a coup-de-main was a failure, Viljoen withdrew his men before daybreak. The Boer casualties have not been ascertained, but twenty-four of their dead were actually picked up within the British lines. The British lost sixty killed and wounded, while about as many were taken prisoners. Altogether the action was a brisk and a gallant one, of which neither side has cause to be ashamed. The simultaneous attacks upon six other stations were none of them pressed home, and were demonstrations rather than assaults.

The attempts upon Kaalfontein and on Zuurfontein were both made in the early morning of January 12th. These two places are small stations upon the line between Johannesburg and Pretoria. It is clear that the Boers were very certain of their own superior mobility before they ventured to intrude into the very heart of the British position, and the result showed that they were right in supposing that even if their attempt were repulsed, they would still be able to make good their escape. Better horsed, better riders, with better intelligence and a better knowledge of the country, their ventures were always attended by a limited liability.

The attacks seem to have been delivered by a strong commando, said to have been under the command of Beyers, upon its way to join the Boer concentration in the Eastern Transvaal. They had not the satisfaction, however, of carrying the garrison of a British post with them, for at each point they were met by a stout resistance and beaten off. Kaalfontein was garrisoned by 120 men of Cheshire under Williams-Freeman, Zuurfontein by as many Norfolks and a small body of Lincolns under Cordeaux and Atkinson. For six hours the pressure was considerable, the assailants of Kaalfontein keeping up a brisk shell and rifle fire, while those of Zuurfontein were without artillery. At the end of that time two armoured trains came up with reinforcements and the enemy continued his trek to the eastward. Knox ‘s 2nd cavalry brigade followed them up, but without any very marked result.

Zeerust and Lichtenburg had each been garrisoned and provisioned by Lord Methuen before he carried his column away to the south-west, where much rough and useful work awaited him. The two towns were at once invested by the enemy, who made an attack upon each of them. That upon Zeerust, on January 7th, was a small matter and easily repulsed. A more formidable one was made on Lichtenburg, on March 3rd. The attack was delivered by De la Rey, Smuts, and Celliers, with 1500 men, who galloped up to the pickets in the early morning. The defenders were 600 in number, consisting of Paget’s Horse and three companies of the 1st battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers, a veteran regiment with a long record of foreign service, not to be confused with that 2nd battalion which was so severely handled upon several occasions. It was well that it was so, for less sturdy material might have been overborne by the vigour of the attack. As it was, the garrison were driven to their last trench, but held out under a very heavy fire all day, and next morning the Boers abandoned the attack. Their losses appear to have been over fifty in number, and included Commandant Celliers, who was badly wounded and afterwards taken prisoner at Warm Baths. The brave garrison lost fourteen killed, including two officers of the Northumberlands, and twenty wounded.

In each of these instances the attacks by the Boers upon British posts had ended in a repulse to themselves. They were more fortunate, however, in their attempt upon Modderfontein on the Gatsrand at the end of January. The post was held by 200 of the South Wales Borderers, reinforced by the 59th Imperial Yeomanry, who had come in as escort to a convoy from Krugersdorp. The attack, which lasted all day, was carried out by a commando of 2000 Boers under Smuts, who rushed the position upon the following morning. As usual, the Boers, who were unable to retain their prisoners, had little to show for their success. The British casualties, however, were between thirty and forty, mostly wounded.

On January 22nd General Cunninghame left Oliphant’s Nek with a small force consisting of the Border and Worcester Regiments, the 6th Mounted Infantry, Kitchener’s Horse, 7th Imperial Yeomanry, 8th R.F.A., and P battery R.H.A. It had instructions to move south upon the enemy known to be gathering there. By midday this force was warmly engaged, and found itself surrounded by considerable bodies of De la Rey’s burghers. That night they camped at Middelfontein, and were strongly attacked in the early morning. So menacing was the Boer attitude, and so formidable the position, that the force was in some danger. Fortunately they were in heliographic communication with Oliphant’s Nek, and learned upon the 23rd that Babington had been ordered to their relief. All day Cunninghame’s men were under a long-range fire, but on the 24th Babington appeared, and the British force was successfully extricated, having seventy-five casualties. This action of Middelfontein is interesting as having been begun in Queen Victoria’s reign, and ended in that of Edward VII.

Cunninghame’s force moved on to Krugersdorp, and there, having heard of the fall of the Modderfontein post as already described, a part of his command moved out to the Gatsrand in pursuit of Smuts. It was found, however, that the Boers had taken up a strong defensive position, and the British were not numerous enough to push the attack. On February 3rd Cunninghame endeavoured to outflank the enemy with his small cavalry force while pushing his infantry up in front, but in neither attempt did he succeed, the cavalry failing to find the flank, while the infantry were met with a fire which made further advance impossible. One company of the Border Regiment found itself in such a position that the greater part of it was killed, wounded, or taken. This check constituted the action of Modderfontein. On the 4th, however, Cunningham, assisted by some of the South African Constabulary, made his way round the flank, and dislodged the enemy, who retreated to the south. A few days later some of Smuts’s men made an attempt upon the railway near Bank, but were driven off with twenty-six casualties. It was after this that Smuts moved west and joined De la Rey’s commando to make the attack already described upon Lichtenburg. These six attempts represent the chief aggressive movements which the Boers made against British posts in the Transvaal during these months. Attacks upon trains were still common, and every variety of sniping appears to have been rife, from the legitimate ambuscade to something little removed from murder.

It has been described in a previous chapter how Lord Kitchener made an offer to the burghers which amounted to an amnesty, and how a number of those Boers who had come under the influence of the British formed themselves into peace committees, and endeavoured to convey to the fighting commandos some information as to the hopelessness of the struggle, and the lenient mood of the British. Unfortunately these well-meant offers appear to have been mistaken for signs of weakness by the Boer leaders, and encouraged them to harden their hearts. Of the delegates who conveyed the terms to their fellow countrymen two at least were shot, several were condemned to death, and few returned without ill-usage. In no case did they bear back a favourable answer. The only result of the proclamation was to burden the British resources by an enormous crowd of women and children who were kept and fed in refugee camps, while their fathers and husbands continued in most cases to fight.

This allusion to the peace movement among the burghers may serve as an introduction to the attempt made by Lord Kitchener, at the end of February 1901, to bring the war to a close by negotiation. Throughout its course the fortitude of Great Britain and of the Empire had never for an instant weakened, but her conscience had always been sensitive at the sight of the ruin which had befallen so large a portion of South Africa, and any settlement would have been eagerly hailed which would insure that the work done had not been wasted, and would not need to be done again. A peace on any other terms would simply shift upon the shoulders of our descendants those burdens which we were not manly enough to bear ourselves. There had arisen, as has been said, a considerable peace movement among the burghers of the refugee camps and also among the prisoners of war. It was hoped that some reflection of this might be found among the leaders of the people. To find out if this were so Lord Kitchener, at the end of February, sent a verbal message to Louis Botha, and on the 27th of that month the Boer general rode with an escort of Hussars into Middelburg. ‘Sunburned, with a pleasant, fattish face of a German type, and wearing an imperial,’ says one who rode beside him. Judging from the sounds of mirth heard by those without, the two leaders seem to have soon got upon amiable terms, and there was hope that a definite settlement might spring from their interview. From the beginning Lord Kitchener explained that the continued independence of the two republics was an impossibility. But on every other point the British Government was prepared to go great lengths in order to satisfy and conciliate the burghers.

On March 7th Lord Kitchener wrote to Botha from Pretoria, recapitulating the points which he had advanced. The terms offered were certainly as far as, and indeed rather further than, the general sentiment of the Empire would have gone. If the Boers laid down their arms there was to be a complete amnesty, which was apparently to extend to rebels also so long as they did not return to Cape Colony or Natal. Self-government was promised after a necessary interval, during which the two States should be administered as Crown colonies. Law courts should be independent of the Executive from the beginning, and both languages be official. A million pounds of compensation would be paid to the burghers — a most remarkable example of a war indemnity being paid by the victors. Loans were promised to the farmers to restart them in business, and a pledge was made that farms should not be taxed. The Kaffirs were not to have the franchise, but were to have the protection of law. Such were the generous terms offered by the British Government. Public opinion at home, strongly supported by that of the colonies, and especially of the army, felt that the extreme step had been taken in the direction of conciliation, and that to do more would seem not to offer peace, but to implore it. Unfortunately, however, the one thing which the British could not offer was the one thing which the Boers would insist upon having, and the leniency of the proposals in all other directions may have suggested weakness to their minds. On March 15th an answer was returned by General Botha to the effect that nothing short of total independence would satisfy them, and the negotiations were accordingly broken off.

There was a disposition, however, upon the Boer side to renew them, and upon May 10th General Botha applied to Lord Kitchener for permission to cable to President Kruger, and to take his advice as to the making of peace. The stern old man at The Hague was still, however, in an unbending mood. His reply was to the effect that there were great hopes of a successful issue of the war, and that he had taken steps to make proper provision for the Boer prisoners and for the refugee women. These steps, and very efficient ones too, were to leave them entirely to the generosity of that Government which he was so fond of reviling.

On the same day upon which Botha applied for leave to use the British cable, a letter was written by Reitz, State Secretary of the Transvaal, to Steyn, in which the desperate condition of the Boers was clearly set forth. This document explained that the burghers were continually surrendering, that the ammunition was nearly exhausted, the food running low, and the nation in danger of extinction. ‘The time has come to take the final step,’ said the Secretary of State. Steyn wrote back a reply in which, like his brother president, he showed a dour resolution to continue the struggle, prompted by a fatalist conviction that some outside interference would reverse the result of his appeal to arms. His attitude and that of Kruger determined the Boer leaders to hold out for a few more months, a resolution which may have been injudicious, but was certainly heroic. ‘It’s a fight to a finish this time,’ said the two combatants in the ‘Punch’ cartoon which marked the beginning of the war. It was indeed so, as far as the Boers were concerned. As the victors we can afford to acknowledge that no nation in history has ever made a more desperate and prolonged resistance against a vastly superior antagonist. A Briton may well pray that his own people may be as staunch when their hour of adversity comes round.

The British position at this stage of the war was strengthened by a greater centralisation. Garrisons of outlying towns were withdrawn so that fewer convoys became necessary. The population was removed also and placed near the railway lines, where they could be more easily fed. In this way the scene of action was cleared and the Boer and British forces left face to face. Convinced of the failure of the peace policy, and morally strengthened by having tried it, Lord Kitchener set himself to finish the war by a series of vigorous operations which should sweep the country from end to end. For this purpose mounted troops were essential, and an appeal from him for reinforcements was most nobly answered. Five thousand horsemen were despatched from the colonies, and twenty thousand cavalry, mounted infantry, and Yeomanry were sent from home. Ten thousand mounted men had already been raised in Great Britain, South Africa, and Canada for the Constabulary force which was being organised by Baden-Powell. Altogether the reinforcements of horsemen amounted to more than thirty-five thousand men, all of whom had arrived in South Africa before the end of April. With the remains of his old regiments Lord Kitchener had under him at this final period of the war between fifty and sixty thousand cavalry — such a force as no British General in his happiest dream had ever thought of commanding, and no British war minister in his darkest nightmare had ever imagined himself called upon to supply.

Long before his reinforcements had come to hand, while his Yeomanry was still gathering in long queues upon the London pavement to wait their turn at the recruiting office, Lord Kitchener had dealt the enemy several shrewd blows which materially weakened their resources in men and material. The chief of these was the great drive down the Eastern Transvaal undertaken by seven columns under the command of French. Before considering this, however, a few words must be devoted to the doings of Methuen in the south-west.

This hard-working General, having garrisoned Zeerust and Lichtenburg, had left his old district and journeyed with a force which consisted largely of Bushmen and Yeomanry to the disturbed parts of Bechuanaland which had been invaded by De Villiers. Here he cleared the country as far as Vryburg, which he had reached in the middle of January, working round to Kuruman and thence to Taungs. From Taungs his force crossed the Transvaal border and made for Klerksdorp, working through an area which had never been traversed and which contained the difficult Masakani hills. He left Taungs upon February 2nd, fighting skirmishes at Uitval’s Kop, Paardefontein and Lilliefontein, in each of which the enemy was brushed aside. Passing through Wolmaranstad, Methuen turned to the north, where at Haartebeestefontein, on February 19th, he fought a brisk engagement with a considerable force of Boers under De Villiers and Liebenberg. On the day before the fight he successfully outwitted the Boers, for, learning that they had left their laager in order to take up a position for battle, he pounced upon the laager and captured 10,000 head of cattle, forty-three wagons, and forty prisoners. Stimulated by this success, he attacked the Boers next day, and after five hours of hard fighting forced the pass which they were holding against him. As Methuen had but 1500 men, and was attacking a force which was as large as his own in a formidable position, the success was a very creditable one. The Yeomanry all did well, especially the 5th and 10th battalions. So also did the Australians and the Loyal North Lancashires. The British casualties amounted to sixteen killed and thirty-four wounded, while the Boers left eighteen of their dead upon the position which they had abandoned. Lord Methuen’s little force returned to Klerksdorp, having deserved right well of their country. From Klerksdorp Methuen struck back westwards to the south of his former route, and on March 14th he was reported at Warrenton. Here also in April came Erroll’s small column, bringing with it the garrison and inhabitants of Hoopstad, a post which it had been determined, in accordance with Lord Kitchener’s policy of centralisation, to abandon.

In the month of January, 1901, there had been a considerable concentration of the Transvaal Boers into that large triangle which is bounded by the Delagoa railway line upon the north, the Natal railway line upon the south, and the Swazi and Zulu frontiers upon the east. The bushveld is at this season of the year unhealthy both for man and beast, so that for the sake of their herds, their families, and themselves the burghers were constrained to descend into the open veld. There seemed the less objection to their doing so since this tract of country, though traversed once both by Buller and by French, had still remained a stronghold of the Boers and a storehouse of supplies. Within its borders are to be found Carolina, Ermelo, Vryheid, and other storm centres. Its possession offers peculiar strategical advantages, as a force lying there can always attack either railway, and might even make, as was indeed intended, a descent into Natal. For these mingled reasons of health and of strategy a considerable number of burghers united in this district under the command of the Bothas and of Smuts.

Their concentration had not escaped the notice of the British military authorities, who welcomed any movement which might bring to a focus that resistance which had been so nebulous and elusive. Lord Kitchener having once seen the enemy fairly gathered into this huge cover, undertook the difficult task of driving it from end to end. For this enterprise General French was given the chief command, and had under his orders no fewer than seven columns, which started from different points of the Delagoa and of the Natal railway lines, keeping in touch with each other and all trending south and east. A glance at the map would show, however, that it was a very large field for seven guns, and that it would need all their alertness to prevent the driven game from breaking back. Three columns started from the Delagoa line, namely, Smith-Dorrien’s from Wonderfontein (the most easterly), Campbell’s from Middelburg, and Alderson’s from Eerstefabrieken, close to Pretoria. Four columns came from the western railway line: General Knox’s from Kaalfontein, Major Allenby’s from Zuurfontein (both stations between Pretoria and Johannesburg), General Dartnell’s from Springs, close to Johannesburg, and finally General Colville (not to be confused with Colvile) from Greylingstad in the south. The whole movement resembled a huge drag net, of which Wonderfontein and Greylingstad formed the ends, exactly one hundred miles apart. On January 27th the net began to be drawn. Some thousands of Boers with a considerable number of guns were known to be within the enclosure, and it was hoped that even if their own extreme mobility enabled them to escape it would be impossible for them to save their transport and their cannon.

Each of the British columns was about 2000 strong, making a total of 14,000 men with about fifty guns engaged in the operations. A front of not less than ten miles was to be maintained by each force. The first decided move was on the part of the extreme left wing, Smith-Dorrien’s column, which moved south on Carolina, and thence on Bothwell near Lake Chrissie. The arduous duty of passing supplies down from the line fell mainly upon him, and his force was in consequence larger than the others, consisting of 8500 men with thirteen guns. On the arrival of Smith-Dorrien at Carolina the other columns started, their centre of advance being Ermelo. Over seventy miles of veld the gleam of the helio by day and the flash of the signal lamps at night marked the steady flow of the British tide. Here and there the columns came in touch with the enemy and swept him before them. French had a skirmish at Wilge River at the end of January, and Campbell another south of Middelburg, in which he had twenty casualties. On February 4th Smith-Dorrien was at Lake Chrissie; French had passed through Bethel and the enemy was retiring on Amsterdam. The hundred-mile ends of the drag net were already contracted to a third of that distance, and the game was still known to be within it. On the 5th Ermelo was occupied, and the fresh deep ruts upon the veld told the British horsemen of the huge Boer convoy that was ahead of them. For days enormous herds, endless flocks, and lines of wagons which stretched from horizon to horizon had been trekking eastward. Cavalry and mounted infantry were all hot upon the scent.

Botha, however, was a leader of spirit, not to be hustled with impunity. Having several thousand burghers with him, it was evident that if he threw himself suddenly upon any part of the British line he might hope for a time to make an equal fight, and possibly to overwhelm it. Were Smith-Dorrien out of the way there would be a clear road of escape for his whole convoy to the north, while a defeat of any of the other columns would not help him much. It was on Smith-Dorrien, therefore, that he threw himself with great impetuosity. That General’s force was, however, formidable, consisting of the Suffolks, West Yorks and Camerons, 5th Lancers, 2nd Imperial Light Horse, and 3rd Mounted Infantry, with eight field guns and three heavy pieces. Such a force could hardly be defeated in the open, but no one can foresee the effect of a night surprise well pushed home, and such was the attack delivered by Botha at 3 A.M. upon February 6th, when his opponent was encamped at Bothwell Farm.

The night was favourable to the attempt, as it was dark and misty. Fortunately, however, the British commander had fortified himself and was ready for an assault. The Boer forlorn hope came on with a gallant dash, driving a troop of loose horses in upon the outposts, and charging forward into the camp. The West Yorkshires, however, who bore the brunt of the attack, were veterans of the Tugela, who were no more to be flurried at three in the morning than at three in the afternoon. The attack was blown backwards, and twenty dead Boers, with their brave leader Spruyt, were left within the British lines. The main body of the Boers contented themselves with a heavy fusillade out of the darkness, which was answered and crushed by the return fire of the infantry. In the morning no trace, save their dead, was to be seen of the enemy, but twenty killed and fifty wounded in Smith-Dorrien’s column showed how heavy had been the fire which had swept through the sleeping camp. The Carolina attack, which was to have co-operated with that of the Heidelbergers, was never delivered, through difficulties of the ground, and considerable recriminations ensued among the Boers in consequence.

Beyond a series of skirmishes and rearguard actions this attack of Botha’s was the one effort made to stay the course of French’s columns. It did not succeed, however, in arresting them for an hour. From that day began a record of captures of men, herds, guns, and wagons, as the fugitives were rounded up from the north, the west, and the south. The operation was a very thorough one, for the towns and districts occupied were denuded of their inhabitants, who were sent into the refugee camps while the country was laid waste to prevent its furnishing the commandos with supplies in the future. Still moving south-east, General French’s columns made their way to Piet Retief upon the Swazi frontier, pushing a disorganised array which he computed at 5000 in front of them. A party of the enemy, including the Carolina commando, had broken back in the middle of February and Louis Botha had got away at the same time, but so successful were his main operations that French was able to report his total results at the end of the month as being 292 Boers killed or wounded, 500 surrendered, 3 guns and one maxim taken, with 600 rifles, 4000 horses, 4500 trek oxen, 1300 wagons and carts, 24,000 cattle, and 165,000 sheep. The whole vast expanse of the eastern veld was dotted with the broken and charred wagons of the enemy.

Tremendous rains were falling and the country was one huge quagmire, which crippled although it did not entirely prevent the further operations. All the columns continued to report captures. On March 3rd Dartnell got a maxim and 50 prisoners, while French reported 50 more, and Smith-Dorrien 80. On March 6th French captured two more guns, and on the 14th he reported 46 more Boer casualties and 146 surrenders, with 500 more wagons, and another great haul of sheep and oxen. By the end of March French had moved as far south as Vryheid, his troops having endured the greatest hardships from the continual heavy rains, and the difficulty of bringing up any supplies. On the 27th he reported seventeen more Boer casualties and 140 surrenders, while on the last day of the month he took another gun and two pom-poms. The enemy at that date were still retiring eastward, with Alderson and Dartnell pressing upon their rear. On April 4th French announced the capture of the last piece of artillery which the enemy possessed in that region. The rest of the Boer forces doubled back at night between the columns and escaped over the Zululand border, where 200 of them surrendered. The total trophies of French’s drive down the Eastern Transvaal amounted to eleven hundred of the enemy killed, wounded, or taken, the largest number in any operation since the surrender of Prinsloo. There is no doubt that the movement would have been even more successful had the weather been less boisterous, but this considerable loss of men, together with the capture of all the guns in that region, and of such enormous quantities of wagons, munitions, and stock, inflicted a blow upon the Boers from which they never wholly recovered. On April 20th French was back in Johannesburg once more.

While French had run to earth the last Boer gun in the south-eastern corner of the Transvaal, De la Rey, upon the western side, had still managed to preserve a considerable artillery with which he flitted about the passes of the Magaliesberg or took refuge in the safe districts to the south-west of it. This part of the country had been several times traversed, but had never been subdued by British columns. The Boers, like their own veld grass, need but a few sparks to be left behind to ensure a conflagration breaking out again. It was into this inflammable country that Babington moved in March with Klerksdorp for his base. On March 21st he had reached Haartebeestefontein, the scene not long before of a successful action by Methuen. Here he was joined by Shekleton’s Mounted Infantry, and his whole force consisted of these, with the 1st Imperial Light Horse, the 6th

Imperial Bushmen, the New Zealanders, a squadron of the 14th Hussars, a wing each of the Somerset Light Infantry and of the Welsh Fusiliers, with Carter's guns and four pom-poms. With this mobile and formidable little force Babington pushed on in search of Smuts and De la Rey, who were known to be in the immediate neighbourhood.

As a matter of fact the Boers were not only there, but were nearer and in greater force than had been anticipated. On the 22nd three squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse under Major Briggs rode into 1500 of them, and it was only by virtue of their steadiness and gallantry that they succeeded in withdrawing themselves and their pom-pom without a disaster. With Boers in their front and Boers on either flank they fought an admirable rearguard action. So hot was the fire that A squadron alone had twenty-two casualties. They faced it out, however, until their gun had reached a place of safety, when they made an orderly retirement towards Babington's camp, having inflicted as heavy a loss as they had sustained. With Elandslaagte, Waggon Hill, the relief of Mafeking, Naauwpoort, and Haartebeestefontein upon their standards, the Imperial Light Horse, should they take a permanent place in the Army List, will start with a record of which many older regiments might be proud.

If the Light Horse had a few bad hours on March 22nd at the hands of the Boers, they and their colonial comrades were soon able to return the same with interest. On March 23rd Babington moved forward through Kafir Kraal, the enemy falling back before him. Next morning the British again advanced, and as the New Zealanders and Bushmen, who formed the vanguard under Colonel Gray, emerged from a pass they saw upon the plain in front of them the Boer force with all its guns moving towards them. Whether this was done of set purpose or whether the Boers imagined that the British had turned and were intending to pursue them cannot now be determined, but whatever the cause it is certain that for almost the first time in the campaign a considerable force of each side found themselves in the open and face to face.

It was a glorious moment. Setting spurs to their horses, officers and men with a yell dashed forward at the enemy. One of the Boer guns unlimbered and attempted to open fire, but was overwhelmed by the wave of horsemen. The Boer riders broke and fled, leaving their artillery to escape as best it might. The guns dashed over the veld in a mad gallop, but wilder still was the rush of the fiery cavalry behind them. For once the brave and cool-headed Dutchmen were fairly panic-stricken. Hardly a shot was fired at the pursuers, and the riflemen seem to have been only too happy to save their own skins. Two field guns, one pom-pom, six maxims, fifty-six wagons and 140 prisoners were the fruits of that one magnificent charge, while fifty-four stricken Boers were picked up after the action. The pursuit was reluctantly abandoned when the spent horses could go no farther.

While the vanguard had thus scattered the main body of the enemy a detachment of riflemen had ridden round to attack the British rear and convoy. A few volleys from the escort drove them off, however, with some loss. Altogether, what with the loss of nine guns and of at least 200 men, the rout of Haartebeestefontein was a severe blow to the Boer cause. A week or two later Sir H. Rawlinson’s column, acting with Babington, rushed Smuts’s laager at daylight and effected a further capture of two guns and thirty prisoners. Taken in conjunction with French’s successes in the east and Plumer’s in the north, these successive blows might have seemed fatal to the Boer cause, but the weary struggle was still destined to go on until it seemed that it must be annihilation rather than incorporation which would at last bring a tragic peace to those unhappy lands.

All over the country small British columns had been operating during these months — operations which were destined to increase in scope and energy as the cold weather drew in. The weekly tale of prisoners and captures, though small for any one column, gave the aggregate result of a considerable victory. In these scattered and obscure actions there was much good work which can have no reward save the knowledge of duty done. Among many successful raids and skirmishes may be mentioned two by Colonel Park from Lydenburg, which resulted between them in the capture of nearly 100 of the enemy, including Abel Erasmus of sinister reputation. Nor would any summary of these events be complete without a reference to the very gallant defence of Mahlabatini in Zululand, which was successfully held by a handful of police and civilians against an irruption of the Boers. With the advent of winter and of reinforcements the British operations became very energetic in every part of the country, and some account of them will now be added.

CHAPTER 34. THE WINTER CAMPAIGN (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER, 1901).

The African winter extends roughly from April to September, and as the grass during that period would be withered on the veld, the mobility of the Boer commandos must be very much impaired. It was recognised therefore that if the British would avoid another year of war it could only be done by making good use of the months which lay before them. For this reason Lord Kitchener had called for the considerable reinforcements which have been already mentioned, but on the other hand he was forced to lose many thousands of his veteran Yeomanry, Australians, and Canadians, whose term of service was at an end. The volunteer companies of the infantry returned also to England, and so did nine militia battalions, whose place was taken however by an equal number of new-comers.

The British position was very much strengthened during the winter by the adoption of the block-house system. These were small square or hexagonal buildings, made of stone up to nine feet with corrugated iron above it. They were loopholed for musketry fire and held from six to thirty men. These little forts were dotted along the railways at points not more than 2000 yards apart, and when supplemented by a system of armoured trains they made it no easy matter for the Boers to tamper with or to cross the lines. So effective did these prove that their use was extended to the more dangerous portions of the country, and lines were pushed through the Magaliesberg district to form a chain of posts between Krugersdorp and Rustenburg. In the Orange River Colony and on the northern lines of the Cape Colony the same system was extensively applied. I will now attempt to describe the more important operations of the winter, beginning with the incursion of Plumer into the untrodden ground to the north.

At this period of the war the British forces had overrun, if they had not subdued, the whole of the Orange River Colony and every part of the Transvaal which is south of the Mafeking-Pretoria-Komati line. Through this great tract of country there was not a village and hardly a farmhouse which had not seen the invaders. But in the north there remained a vast district, two hundred miles long and three hundred broad, which had hardly been touched by the war. It is a wild country, scrub-covered, antelope-haunted plains rising into desolate hills, but there are many kloofs and valleys with rich water meadows and lush grazings, which formed natural granaries and depots for the enemy. Here the Boer government continued to exist, and here, screened by their mountains, they were able to organise the continuation of the struggle. It was evident that there could be no end to the war until these last centres of resistance had been broken up.

The British forces had advanced as far north as Rustenburg in the west, Pienaar in the centre, and Lydenburg in the east, but here they had halted, unwilling to go farther until their conquests had been made good behind them. A General might well pause before plunging his troops into that vast and rugged district, when an active foe and an exposed line of communication lay for many hundreds of miles to the south of them. But Lord Kitchener with characteristic patience waited for the right hour to come, and then with equally characteristic audacity played swiftly and boldly for his stake. De Wet, impotent for the moment, had been hunted back over the Orange River. French had harried the burghers in the South-east Transvaal, and the main force of the enemy was known to be on that side of the seat of war. The north was exposed, and with one long, straight lunge to the heart, Pietersburg might be transfixed.

There could only be one direction for the advance, and that must be along the Pretoria to Pietersburg railroad. This is the only line of rails which leads to the north, and as it was known to be in working order (the Boers were running a bi-weekly service from Pietersburg to Warm Baths), it was hoped that a swift advance might seize it before any extensive damage could be done. With this object a small but very mobile force rapidly assembled at the end of March at Pienaar River, which was the British rail-head forty miles north of Pretoria and a hundred and thirty from Pietersburg. This column consisted of the Bushveld Carbineers, the 4th Imperial Bushmen’s Corps, and the 6th New Zealand contingent. With them were the 18th battery R.F.A., and three pom-poms. A detachment of the invaluable mounted Sappers rode with the force, and two infantry regiments, the 2nd Gordons and the Northamptons, were detached to garrison the more vulnerable places upon the line of advance.

Upon March 29th the untiring Plumer, called off from the chase of De Wet, was loosed upon this fresh line, and broke swiftly away to the north. The complete success of his undertaking has obscured our estimate of its danger, but it was no light task to advance so great a distance into a bitterly hostile country with a fighting force of 2000 rifles. As an enterprise it was in many ways not unlike Mahon’s dash on Mafeking, but without any friendly force with which to join hands at the end. However from the beginning all went well. On the 30th the force had reached Warm Baths, where a great isolated hotel already marks the site of what will be a rich and fashionable spa. On April 1st the Australian scouts rode into Nylstroom, fifty more miles upon their way. There had been sufficient sniping to enliven the journey, but nothing which could be called an action. Gleaning up prisoners and refugees as they went, with the railway engineers working like bees behind them, the force still swept unchecked upon its way. On April 5th Piet Potgietersrust was entered, another fifty-mile stage, and on the morning of the 8th the British vanguard rode into Pietersburg. Kitchener’s judgment and Plumer’s energy had met with their reward.

The Boer commando had evacuated the town and no serious opposition was made to the British entry. The most effective resistance came from a single schoolmaster, who, in a moment of irrational frenzy or of patriotic exaltation, shot down three of the invaders before he met his own death. Some rolling stock, one small gun, and something under a hundred prisoners were the trophies of the capture, but the Boer arsenal and the printing press were destroyed, and the Government sped off in a couple of Cape carts in search of some new capital. Pietersburg was principally valuable as a base from which a sweeping movement might be made from the north at the same moment as one from the south-east. A glance at the map will show that a force moving from this point in conjunction with another from Lydenburg might form the two crooked claws of a crab to enclose a great space of country, in which smaller columns might collect whatever was to be found. Without an instant of unnecessary delay the dispositions were made, and no fewer than eight columns slipped upon the chase. It will be best to continue to follow the movements of Plumer’s force, and then to give some account of the little armies which were operating from the south, with the results of their enterprise.

It was known that Viljoen and a number of Boers were within the district which lies north of the line in the Middelburg district. An impenetrable bush-veld had offered them a shelter from which they made their constant sallies to wreck a train or to attack a post. This area was now to be systematically cleared up. The first thing was to stop the northern line of retreat. The Oliphant River forms a loop in that direction, and as it is a considerable stream, it would, if securely held, prevent any escape upon that side. With this object Plumer, on April 14th, the sixth day after his occupation of Pietersburg, struck east from that town and trekked over the veld, through the formidable Chunies Pass, and so to the north bank of the Oliphant, picking up thirty or forty Boer prisoners upon the way. His route lay through a fertile country dotted with native kraals. Having reached the river which marked the line which he was to hold, Plumer, upon April 17th, spread his force over many miles, so as to block the principal drifts. The flashes of his helio were answered by flash after flash from many points upon the southern horizon. What these other forces were, and whence they came, must now be made clear to the reader.

General Bindon Blood, a successful soldier, had confirmed in the Transvaal a reputation which he had won on the northern frontier of India. He and General Elliot were two of the late comers who had been spared from the great Eastern dependency to take the places of some of those Generals who had returned to England for a well-earned rest. He had distinguished himself by his systematic and effective guardianship of the Delagoa railway line, and he was now selected for the supreme control of the columns which were to advance from the south and sweep the Roos-Senekal district. There were seven of them, which were arranged as follows:

Two columns started from Middelburg under Beatson and Benson, which might be called the left wings of the movement. The object of Beatson's column was to hold the drifts of the Crocodile River, while Benson's was to seize the neighbouring hills called the Bothasberg. This it was hoped would pin the Boers from the west, while Kitchener from Lydenburg advanced from the east in three separate columns. Pulteney and Douglas would move up from Belfast in the centre, with Dulstoom for their objective. It was the familiar drag net of French, but facing north instead of south.

On April 13th the southern columns were started, but already the British preparations had alarmed the Boers, and Botha, with his main commandos, had slipped south across the line into that very district from which he had been so recently driven. Viljoen's commando still remained to the north, and the British troops, pouring in from every side, converged rapidly upon it. The success of the operations was considerable, though not complete. The Tantesberg, which had been the rallying-point of the Boers, was occupied, and Roos-Senekal, their latest capital, was taken, with their State papers and treasure. Viljoen, with a number of followers, slipped through between the columns, but the greater part of the burghers, dashing furiously about like a shoal of fish when they become conscious of the net, were taken by one or other of the columns. A hundred of the Boksburg commando surrendered en masse, fifty more were taken at Roos-Senekal; forty-one of the formidable Zarps with Schroeder, their leader, were captured in the north by the gallantry and wit of a young Australian officer named Reid; sixty more were hunted down by the indefatigable Vialls, leader of the Bushmen. From all parts of the district came the same story of captures and surrenders.

Knowing, however, that Botha and Viljoen had slipped through to the south of the railway line, Lord Kitchener determined to rapidly transfer the scene of the operations to that side. At the end of April, after a fortnight's work, during which this large district was cropped, but by no means shaved, the troops turned south again. The results of the operation had been eleven hundred prisoners, almost the same number as French had taken in the south-east, together with a broken Krupp, a pom-pom, and the remains of the big naval gun taken from us at Helvetia.

It was determined that Plumer's advance upon Pietersburg should not be a mere raid, but that steps should be taken to secure all that he had gained, and to hold the lines of communication. With this object the 2nd Gordon Highlanders and the 2nd Wiltshires were pushed up along the railroad, followed by Kitchener's Fighting Scouts. These troops garrisoned Pietersburg and took possession of Chunies Poort, and other strategic positions. They also furnished escorts for the convoys which supplied Plumer on the Oliphant River, and they carried out some spirited operations themselves in the neighbourhood of Pietersburg. Grenfell, who commanded the force, broke up several laagers, and captured a number of prisoners, operations in which he was much assisted by Colenbrander and his men. Finally the last of the great Creusot guns, the formidable Long Toms, was found mounted near Haenertsburg. It was the same piece which had in succession scourged Mafeking and Kimberley. The huge gun, driven to bay, showed its powers by opening an effective fire at ten thousand yards. The British galloped in upon it, the Boer riflemen were driven off, and the gun was blown up by its faithful gunners. So by suicide died the last of that iron brood, the four sinister brothers who had wrought much mischief in South Africa. They and their lesson will live in the history of modern artillery.

The sweeping of the Roos-Senekal district being over, Plumer left his post upon the River of the Elephants, a name which, like Rhenoster, Zeekoe, Kameelfontein, Leeuw Kop, Tigerfontein, Elands River, and so many more, serves as a memorial to the great mammals which once covered the land. On April 28th the force turned south, and on May 4th they had reached the railroad at Eerstefabrieken close to Pretoria. They had come in touch with a small Boer force upon the way, and the indefatigable Vialls hounded them for eighty miles, and tore away the tail of their convoy with thirty prisoners. The main force had left Pretoria on horseback on March 28th, and found themselves back once again upon foot on May 5th. They had something to show, however, for the loss of their horses, since they had covered a circular march of 400 miles, had captured some hundreds of the enemy, and had broken up their last organised capital. From first to last it was a most useful and well-managed expedition.

It is the more to be regretted that General Blood was recalled from his northern trek before it had attained its full results, because those operations to which he turned did not offer him any great opportunities for success. Withdrawing from the north of the railway with his columns, he at once started upon a sweep of that portion of the country which forms an angle between the Delagoa line and the Swazi frontier — the Barberton district. But again the two big fish, Viljoen and Botha, had slipped away, and the usual collection of sprats was left in the net. The sprats count also, however, and every week now telegrams were reaching England from Lord Kitchener which showed that from three to five hundred more burghers had fallen into our hands. Although the public might begin to look upon the war as interminable, it had become evident to the thoughtful observer that it was now a mathematical question, and that a date could already be predicted by which the whole Boer population would have passed into the power of the British.

Among the numerous small British columns which were at work in different parts of the country, in the latter half of May, there was one under General Dixon which was operating in the neighbourhood of the Magaliesberg Range. This locality has never been a fortunate one for the British arms. The country is peculiarly mountainous and broken, and it was held by the veteran De la Rey and a numerous body of irreconcilable Boers.

Here in July we had encountered a check at Uitval's Nek, in December Clements had met a more severe one at Nooitgedacht, while shortly afterwards Cunningham had been repulsed at Middelfontein, and the Light Horse cut up at Naauwpoort. After such experiences one would have thought that no column which was not of overmastering strength would have been sent into this dangerous region, but General Dixon had as a matter of fact by no means a strong force with him. With 1600 men and a battery he was despatched upon a quest after some hidden guns which were said to have been buried in those parts.

On May 26th Dixon's force, consisting of Derbyshires, King's Own Scottish Borderers, Imperial Yeomanry, Scottish Horse, and six guns (four of 8th R.F.A. and two of 28th R.F.A.), broke camp at Naauwpoort and moved to the west. On the 28th they found themselves at a place called Vlakfontein, immediately south of Oliphant's Nek. On that day there were indications that there were a good many Boers in the neighbourhood. Dixon left a guard over his camp and then sallied out in search of the buried guns. His force was divided into three parts, the left column under Major Chance consisting of two guns of the 28th R.F.A., 230 of the Yeomanry, and one company of the Derbys. The centre comprised two guns (8th R.F. A.), one howitzer, two companies of the Scottish Borderers and one of the Derbys; while the right was made up of two guns (8th R.F.A.), 200 Scottish Horse, and two companies of Borderers. Having ascertained that the guns were not there, the force about midday was returning to the camp, when the storm broke suddenly and fiercely upon the rearguard.

There had been some sniping during the whole morning, but no indications of the determined attack which was about to be delivered. The force in retiring upon the camp had become divided, and the rearguard consisted of the small column under Major Chance which had originally formed the left wing. A veld fire was raging on one flank of this rearguard, and through the veil of smoke a body of five hundred Boers charged suddenly home with magnificent gallantry upon the guns. We have few records of a more dashing or of a more successful action in the whole course of the war. So rapid was it that hardly any time elapsed between the glimpse of the first dark figures galloping through the haze and the thunder of their hoofs as they dashed in among the gunners. The Yeomanry were driven back and many of them shot down. The charge of the mounted Boers was supported by a very heavy fire from a covering party, and the gun-detachments were killed or wounded almost to a man. The lieutenant in charge and the sergeant were both upon the ground. So far as it is possible to reconstruct the action from the confused accounts of excited eyewitnesses and from the exceedingly obscure official report of General Dixon, there was no longer any resistance round the guns, which were at once turned by their captors upon the nearest British detachment.

The company of infantry which had helped to escort the guns proved however to be worthy representatives of that historic branch of the British service. They were northerners, men of Derbyshire and Nottingham, the same counties which had furnished the brave militia who had taken their punishment so gamely at Roodeval. Though hustled and broken they reformed and clung doggedly to their task, firing at the groups of Boers who surrounded the guns. At the same time word had been sent of their pressing need to the Scotch Borderers and the Scottish Horse, who came swarming across the valley to the succour of their comrades. Dixon had brought two guns and a howitzer into action, which subdued the fire of the two captured pieces, and the infantry, Derbys and Borderers, swept over the position, retaking the two guns and shooting down those of the enemy who tried to stand. The greater number vanished into the smoke, which veiled their retreat as it had their advance. Forty-one of them were left dead upon the ground. Six officers and fifty men killed with about a hundred and twenty wounded made up the British losses, to which two guns would certainly have been added but for the gallant counter-attack of the infantry. With Dargai and Vlakfontein to their credit the Derbys have green laurels upon their war-worn colours. They share them on this occasion with the Scottish Borderers, whose volunteer company carried itself as stoutly as the regulars.

How is such an action to be summed up? To Kemp, the young Boer leader, and his men belongs the credit of the capture of the guns; to the British that of their recapture and of the final possession of the field. The British loss was probably somewhat higher than that of the Boers, but upon the other hand there could be no question as to which side could afford loss the better. The Briton could be replaced, but there were no reserves behind the fighting line of the Boers.

There is one subject which cannot be ignored in discussing this battle, however repugnant it may be. That is the shooting of some of the British wounded who lay round the guns. There is no question at all about the fact, which is attested by many independent witnesses. There is reason to hope that some of the murderers paid for their crimes with their lives before the battle was over. It is pleasant to add that there is at least one witness to the fact that Boer officers interfered with threats to prevent some of these outrages. It is unfair to tarnish the whole Boer nation and cause on account of a few irresponsible villains, who would be disowned by their own decent comrades. Very many — too many — British soldiers have known by experience what it is to fall into the hands of the enemy, and it must be confessed that on the whole they have been dealt with in no ungenerous spirit, while the British treatment of the Boers has been unexampled in all military history for its generosity and humanity. That so fair a tale should be darkened by such ruffianly outrages is indeed deplorable, but the incident is too well authenticated to be left unrecorded in any detailed account of the campaign. General Dixon, finding the Boers very numerous all round him, and being hampered by his wounded, fell back upon Naauwpoort, which he reached on June 1st.

In May, Sir Bindon Blood, having returned to the line to refit, made yet another cast through that thrice-harried belt of country which contains Ermelo, Bethel, and Carolina, in which Botha, Viljoen, and the fighting Boers had now concentrated. Working over the blackened veld he swung round in the Barberton direction, and afterwards made a westerly drive in conjunction with small columns commanded by Walter Kitchener, Douglas, and Campbell of the Rifles, while Colville, Garnett, and Bullock co-operated from the Natal line. Again the results were disappointing when compared with the power of the instrument employed. On July 5th he reached Springs, near Johannesburg, with a considerable amount of stock, but with no great number of prisoners. The elusive Botha had slipped away to the south and was reported upon the Zululand border, while Viljoen had succeeded in crossing the Delagoa line and winning back to his old lair in the district north of Middelburg, from which he had been evicted in April. The commandos were like those pertinacious flies which buzz upwards when a hand approaches them, but only to settle again in the same place. One could but try to make the place less attractive than before.

Before Viljoen’s force made its way over the line it had its revenge for the long harrying it had undergone by a well-managed night attack, in which it surprised and defeated a portion of Colonel Beatson’s column at a place called Wilmansrust, due south of Middelburg, and between that town and Bethel. Beatson had divided his force, and this section consisted of 850 of the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles, with thirty gunners and two pom-poms, the whole under the command of Major Morris. Viljoen’s force trekking north towards the line came upon this detachment upon June 12th. The British were aware of the presence of the enemy, but do not appear to have posted any extra outposts or taken any special precautions. Long months of commando chasing had imbued them too much with the idea that these were fugitive sheep, and not fierce and wily wolves, whom they were endeavouring to catch. It is said that 700 yards separated the four pickets. With that fine eye for detail which the Boer leaders possess, they had started a veld fire upon the west of the camp and then attacked from the east, so that they were themselves invisible while their enemies were silhouetted against the light. Creeping up between the pickets, the Boers were not seen until they opened fire at point-blank range upon the sleeping men. The rifles were stacked — another noxious military tradition — and many of the troopers were shot down while they rushed for their weapons. Surprised out of their sleep and unable to distinguish their antagonists, the brave Australians did as well as any troops could have done who were placed in so impossible a position. Captain Watson, the officer in charge of the pom-poms, was shot down, and it proved to be impossible to bring the guns into action. Within five minutes the Victorians had lost twenty killed and forty wounded, when the survivors surrendered. It is pleasant to add that they were very well treated by the victors, but the high-spirited colonials felt their reverse most bitterly. ‘It is the worst thing that ever happened to Australia!’ says one in the letter in which he describes it. The actual number of Boers who rushed the camp was only 180, but 400 more had formed a cordon round it. To Viljoen and his lieutenant Muller great credit must be given for this well-managed affair, which gave them a fresh supply of stores and clothing at a time when they were hard pressed for both. These same Boer officers had led the attack upon Helvetia where the 4.7 gun was taken. The victors succeeded in getting away with all their trophies, and having temporarily taken one of the blockhouses on the railway near Brugspruit, they crossed the line in safety and returned, as already said, to their old quarters in the north, which had been harried but not denuded by the operations of General Blood.

It would take a volume to catalogue, and a library to entirely describe the movements and doings of the very large number of British columns which operated over the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony during this cold-weather campaign. If the same columns and the same leaders were consistently working in the same districts, some system of narrative might enable the reader to follow their fortunes, but they were, as a matter of fact, rapidly transferred from one side of the field of action to another in accordance with the concentrations of the enemy. The total number of columns amounted to at least sixty, which varied in number from two hundred to two thousand, and seldom hunted alone. Could their movements be marked in red upon a chart, the whole of that huge district would be criss-crossed, from Taungs to Komati and from Touws River to Pietersburg, with the track of our weary but indomitable soldiers.

Without attempting to enter into details which would be unbecoming to the modesty of a single volume, one may indicate what the other more important groupings were during the course of these months, and which were the columns that took part in them. Of French’s drive in the south-east, and of Blood’s incursion into the Roos-Senekal district some account has been given, and of his subsequent sweeping of the south. At the same period Babington, Dixon, and Rawlinson were co-operating in the Klerksdorp district, though the former officer transferred his services suddenly to Blood’s combination, and afterwards to Elliot’s column in the north of Orange River Colony. Williams and Fetherstonhaugh came later to strengthen this Klerksdorp district, in which, after the clearing of the Magaliesberg, De la Rey had united his forces to those of Smuts. This very important work of getting a firm hold upon the Magaliesberg was accomplished in July by Barton, Allenby, Kekewich, and Lord Basing, who penetrated into the wild country and established blockhouses and small forts in very much the same way as Cumberland and Wade in 1746 held down the Highlands. The British position was much strengthened by the firm grip obtained of this formidable stronghold of the enemy, which was dangerous not only on account of its extreme strength, but also of its proximity to the centres of population and of wealth.

De la Rey, as already stated, had gone down to the Klerksdorp district, whence, for a time at least, he seems to have passed over into the north of the Orange River Colony. The British pressure at Klerksdorp had become severe, and thither in May came the indefatigable Methuen, whom we last traced to Warrenton. From this point on May 1st he railed his troops to Mafeking, whence he trekked to Lichtenburg, and south as far as his old fighting ground of Haartebeestefontein, having one skirmish upon the way and capturing a Boer gun. Thence he returned to Mafeking, where he had to bid adieu to those veteran Yeomanry who had been his comrades on so many a weary march. It was not their fortune to be present at any of the larger battles of the war, but few bodies of troops have returned to England with a finer record of hard and useful service.

No sooner, however, had Methuen laid down one weapon than he snatched up another. Having refitted his men and collected some of the more efficient of the new Yeomanry, he was off once more for a three weeks' circular tour in the direction of Zeerust. It is difficult to believe that the oldest inhabitant could have known more of the western side of the Transvaal, for there was hardly a track which he had not traversed or a kopje from which he had not been sniped. Early in August he had made a fresh start from Mafeking, dividing his force into two columns, the command of the second being given to Von Donop. Having joined hands with Fetherstonhaugh, he moved through the south-west and finally halted at Klerksdorp. The harried Boers moved a hundred miles north to Rustenburg, followed by Methuen, Fetherstonhaugh, Hamilton, Kekewich, and Allenby, who found the commandos of De la Rey and Kemp to be scattering in front of them and hiding in the kloofs and dongas, whence in the early days of September no less than two hundred were extracted. On September 6th and 8th Methuen engaged the main body of De la Rey in the valley of the Great Marico River which lies to the north-west of Rustenburg. In these two actions he pushed the Boers in front of him with a loss of eighteen killed and forty-one prisoners, but the fighting was severe, and fifteen of his men were killed and thirty wounded before the position had been carried. The losses were almost entirely among the newly raised Yeomanry, who had already shown on several occasions that, having shed their weaker members and had some experience of the field, they were now worthy to take their place beside their veteran comrades.

The only other important operation undertaken by the British columns in the Transvaal during this period was in the north, where Beyers and his men were still harried by Grenfell, Colenbrander, and Wilson. A considerable proportion of the prisoners which figured in the weekly lists came from this quarter. On May 30th there was a notable action, the truth of which was much debated but finally established, in which Kitchener's Scouts under Wilson surprised and defeated a Boer force under Pretorius, killing and wounding several, and taking forty prisoners. On July 1st Grenfell took nearly a hundred of Beyers' men with a considerable convoy. North, south, east, and west the tale was ever the same, but so long as Botha, De la Rey, Steyn, and De Wet remained uncaptured, the embers might still at any instant leap into a flame.

It only remains to complete this synopsis of the movements of columns within the Transvaal that I should add that after the conclusion of Blood's movement in July, several of his columns continued to clear the country and to harass Viljoen in the Lydenburg and Dulstroom districts. Park, Kitchener, Spens, Beatson, and Benson were all busy at this work, never succeeding in forcing more than a skirmish, but continually whittling away wagons, horses, and men from that nucleus of resistance which the Boer leaders still held together.

Though much hampered by the want of forage for their horses, the Boers were ever watchful for an opportunity to strike back, and the long list of minor successes gained by the British was occasionally interrupted by a petty reverse. Such a one befell the small body of South African Constabulary stationed near Vereeniging, who encountered upon July 13th a strong force of Boers supposed to be the main commando of De Wet. The Constabulary behaved with great gallantry but were hopelessly outnumbered, and lost their seven-pounder gun, four killed, six wounded, and twenty-four prisoners. Another small reverse occurred at a far distant point of the seat of war, for the irregular corps known as Steinacker's Horse was driven from its position at Bremersdorp in Swaziland upon July 24th, and had to fall back sixteen miles, with a loss of ten casualties and thirty prisoners. Thus in the heart of a native state the two great white races of South Africa were to be seen locked in a desperate conflict. However unavoidable, the sight was certainly one to be deplored.

To the Boer credit, or discredit, are also to be placed those repeated train wreckings, which cost the British during this campaign the lives and limbs of many brave soldiers who were worthy of some less ignoble fate. It is true that the laws of war sanction such enterprises, but there is something indiscriminate in the results which is repellent to humanity, and which appears to justify the most energetic measures to prevent them. Women, children, and sick must all travel by these trains and are exposed to a common danger, while the assailants enjoy a safety which renders their exploit a peculiarly inglorious one. Two Boers, Trichardt and Hindon, the one a youth of twenty-two, the other a man of British birth, distinguished, or disgraced, themselves by this unsavoury work upon the Delagoa line, but with the extension of the blockhouse system the attempts became less successful. There was one, however, upon the northern line near Naboomspruit which cost the lives of Lieutenant Best and eight Gordon Highlanders, while ten were wounded. The party of Gordons continued to resist after the smash, and were killed or wounded to a man. The painful incident is brightened by such an example of military virtue, and by the naive reply of the last survivor, who on being questioned why he continued to fight until he was shot down, answered with fine simplicity, ‘Because I am a Gordon Highlander.’

Another train disaster of an even more tragic character occurred near Waterval, fifteen miles north of Pretoria, upon the last day of August. The explosion of a mine wrecked the train, and a hundred Boers who lined the banks of the cutting opened fire upon the derailed carriages. Colonel Vandeleur, an officer of great promise, was killed and twenty men, chiefly of the West Riding regiment, were shot. Nurse Page was also among the wounded. It was after this fatal affair that the regulation of carrying Boer hostages upon the trains was at last carried out.

It has been already stated that part of Lord Kitchener’s policy of concentration lay in his scheme for gathering the civil population into camps along the lines of communication. The reasons for this, both military and humanitarian, were overwhelming. Experience had proved that the men if left at liberty were liable to be persuaded or coerced by the fighting Boers into breaking their parole and rejoining the commandos. As to the women and children, they could not be left upon the farms in a denuded country. That the Boers in the field had no doubts as to the good treatment of these people was shown by the fact that they repeatedly left their families in the way of the columns so that they might be conveyed to the camps. Some consternation was caused in England by a report of Miss Hobhouse, which called public attention to the very high rate of mortality in some of these camps, but examination showed that this was not due to anything insanitary in their situation or arrangement, but to a severe epidemic of measles which had swept away a large number of the children. A fund was started in London to give additional comforts to these people, though there is reason to believe that their general condition was superior to that of the Uitlander refugees, who still waited permission to return to their homes. By the end of

July there were no fewer than sixty thousand inmates of the camps in the Transvaal alone, and half as many in the Orange River Colony. So great was the difficulty in providing the supplies for so large a number that it became more and more evident that some at least of the camps must be moved down to the sea coast.

Passing to the Orange River Colony we find that during this winter period the same British tactics had been met by the same constant evasions on the part of the dwindling commandos. The Colony had been divided into four military districts: that of Bloemfontein, which was given to Charles Knox, that of Lyttelton at Springfontein, that of Rundle at Harrismith, and that of Elliot in the north. The latter was infinitely the most important, and Elliot, the warden of the northern marches, had under him during the greater part of the winter a mobile force of about 6000 men, commanded by such experienced officers as Broadwood, De Lisle, and Bethune. Later in the year Spens, Bullock, Plumer, and Rimington were all sent into the Orange River Colony to help to stamp out the resistance. Numerous skirmishes and snipings were reported from all parts of the country, but a constant stream of prisoners and of surrenders assured the soldiers that, in spite of the difficulty of the country and the obstinacy of the enemy, the term of their labours was rapidly approaching.

In all the petty and yet necessary operations of these columns, two incidents demand more than a mere mention. The first was a hard-fought skirmish in which some of Elliot’s horsemen were engaged upon June 6th. His column had trekked during the month of May from Kroonstad to Harrismith, and then turning north found itself upon that date near the hamlet of Reitz. Major Sladen with 200 Mounted Infantry, when detached from the main body, came upon the track of a Boer convoy and ran it down. Over a hundred vehicles with forty-five prisoners were the fruits of their enterprise. Well satisfied with his morning’s work, the British leader despatched a party of his men to convey the news to De Lisle, who was behind, while he established himself with his loot and his prisoners in a convenient kraal. Thence they had an excellent view of a large body of horsemen approaching them with scouts, flankers, and all military precautions. One warm-hearted officer seems actually to have sallied out to meet his comrades, and it was not till his greeting of them took the extreme form of handing over his rifle that the suspicion of danger entered the heads of his companions. But if there was some lack of wit there was none of heart in Sladen and his men. With forty-five Boers to hold down, and 500 under Fourie, De Wet, and De la Rey around them, the little band made rapid preparation for a desperate resistance: the prisoners were laid upon their faces, the men knocked loopholes in the mud walls of the kraal, and a blunt soldierly answer was returned to the demand for surrender.

But it was a desperate business. The attackers were five to one, and the five were soldiers of De Wet, the hard-bitten veterans of a hundred encounters. The captured wagons in a long double row stretched out over the plain, and under this cover the Dutchmen swarmed up to the kraal. But the men who faced them were veterans also, and the defence made up for the disparity of numbers. With fine courage the Boers made their way up to the village, and established themselves in the outlying huts, but the Mounted Infantry clung desperately to their position. Out of the few officers present Findlay was shot through the head, Moir and Cameron through the heart, and Strong through the stomach. It was a Waggon Hill upon a small scale, two dour lines of skirmishers emptying their rifles into each other at point-blank range. Once more, as at Bothaville, the British Mounted Infantry proved that when it came to a dogged pelting match they could stand punishment longer than their enemy. They suffered terribly. Fifty-one out of the little force were on the ground, and the survivors were not much more numerous than their prisoners. To the 1st Gordons, the 2nd Bedfords, the South Australians, and the New South Welsh men belongs the honour of this magnificent defence. For four hours the fierce battle raged, until at last the parched and powder-stained survivors breathed a prayer of thanks as they saw on the southern horizon the vanguard of De Lisle riding furiously to the rescue. For the last hour, since they had despaired of carrying the kraal, the Boers had busied themselves in removing their convoy; but now, for the second time in one day, the drivers found British rifles pointed at their heads, and the oxen were turned once more and brought back to those who had fought so hard to hold them. Twenty-eight killed and twenty-six wounded were the losses in this desperate affair. Of the Boers seventeen were left dead in front of the kraal, and the forty-five had not escaped from the bulldog grip which held them. There seems for some reason to have been no effective pursuit of the Boers, and the British column held on its way to Kroonstad.

The second incident which stands out amid the dreary chronicle of hustlings and snipings is the surprise visit paid by Broadwood with a small

British column to the town of Reitz upon July 11th, which resulted in the capture of nearly every member of the late government of the Free State, save only the one man whom they particularly wanted. The column consisted of 200 yeomen, 200 of the 7th Dragoon Guards, and two guns. Starting at 11 P.M., the raiders rode hard all night and broke with the dawn upon the sleeping village. Racing into the main street, they secured the startled Boers as they rushed from the houses. It is easy to criticise such an operation from a distance, and to overlook the practical difficulties in the way, but on the face of it it seems a pity that the holes had not been stopped before the ferret was sent in. A picket at the farther end of the street would have barred Steyn's escape. As it was, he flung himself upon his horse and galloped half-clad out of the town. Sergeant Cobb of the Dragoons snapped a rifle at close quarters upon him, but the cold of the night had frozen the oil on the striker and the cartridge hung fire. On such trifles do the large events of history turn! Two Boer generals, two commandants, Steyn's brother, his secretary, and several other officials were among the nine-and-twenty prisoners. The treasury was also captured, but it is feared that the Yeomen and Dragoons will not be much the richer from their share of the contents.

Save these two incidents, the fight at Reitz and the capture of a portion of Steyn's government at the same place, the winter's campaign furnished little which was of importance, though a great deal of very hard and very useful work was done by the various columns under the direction of the governors of the four military districts. In the south General Bruce Hamilton made two sweeps, one from the railway line to the western frontier, and the second from the south and east in the direction of Petrusburg. The result of the two operations was about 300 prisoners. At the same time Monro and Hickman re-cleared the already twice-cleared districts of Rouxville and Smithfield. The country in the east of the Colony was verging now upon the state which Grant described in the Shenandoah Valley: ‘A crow,’ said he, ‘must carry his own rations when he flies across it.’

In the middle district General Charles Knox, with the columns of Pine-Coffin, Thorneycroft, Pilcher, and Henry, were engaged in the same sort of work with the same sort of results.

The most vigorous operations fell to the lot of General Elliot, who worked over the northern and north-eastern district, which still contained a large number of fighting burghers. In May and June Elliot moved across to

Vrede and afterwards down the eastern frontier of the Colony, joining hands at last with Rundle at Harrismith. He then worked his way back to Kroonstad through Reitz and Lindley. It was on this journey that Sladen’s Mounted Infantry had the sharp experience which has been already narrated. Western’s column, working independently, co-operated with Elliot in this clearing of the north-east. In August there were very large captures by Broadwood’s force, which had attained considerable mobility, ninety miles being covered by it on one occasion in two days.

Of General Rundle there is little to be said, as he was kept busy in exploring the rough country in his own district — the same district which had been the scene of the operations against Prinsloo and the Fouriesburg surrender. Into this district Kritzinger and his men trekked after they were driven from the Colony in July, and many small skirmishes and snipings among the mountains showed that the Boer resistance was still alive.

July and August were occupied in the Orange River Colony by energetic operations of Spens’ and Rimington’s columns in the midland districts, and by a considerable drive to the north-eastern corner, which was shared by three columns under Elliot and two under Plumer, with one under Henry and several smaller bodies. A considerable number of prisoners and a large amount of stock were the result of the movement, but it was very evident that there was a waste of energy in the employment of such forces for such an end. The time appeared to be approaching when a strong force of military police stationed permanently in each district might prove a more efficient instrument. One interesting development of this phase of the war was the enrolment of a burgher police among the Boers who had surrendered. These men — well paid, well mounted, and well armed — were an efficient addition to the British forces. The movement spread until before the end of the war there were several thousand burghers under such well-known officers as Celliers, Villonel, and young Cronje, fighting against their own guerilla countrymen. Who, in 1899, could have prophesied such a phenomenon as that!

Lord Kitchener’s proclamation issued upon August 9th marked one more turn in the screw upon the part of the British authorities. By it the burghers were warned that those who had not laid down their arms by September 15th would in the case of the leaders be banished, and in the case of the burghers be compelled to support their families in the refugee camps. As many of the fighting burghers were men of no substance, the latter threat did not affect them much, but the other, though it had little result at the time, may be useful for the exclusion of firebrands during the period of reconstruction. Some increase was noticeable in the number of surrenders after the proclamation, but on the whole it had not the result which was expected, and its expediency is very open to question. This date may be said to mark the conclusion of the winter campaign and the opening of a new phase in the struggle.

CHAPTER 35. THE GUERILLA OPERATIONS IN CAPE COLONY.

In the account which has been given in a preceding chapter of the invasion of Cape Colony by the Boer forces, it was shown that the Western bands were almost entirely expelled, or at least that they withdrew, at the time when De Wet was driven across the Orange River. This was at the beginning of March 1901. It was also mentioned that though the Boers evacuated the barren and unprofitable desert of the Karoo, the Eastern bands which had come with Kritzinger did not follow the same course, but continued to infest the mountainous districts of the Central Colony, whence they struck again and again at the railway lines, the small towns, British patrols, or any other quarry which was within their reach and strength. From the surrounding country they gathered a fair number of recruits, and they were able through the sympathy and help of the Dutch farmers to keep themselves well mounted and supplied. In small wandering bands they spread themselves over a vast extent of country, and there were few isolated farmhouses from the Orange River to the Oudtshoorn Mountains, and from the Cape Town railroad in the west to the Fish River in the east, which were not visited by their active and enterprising scouts. The object of the whole movement was, no doubt, to stimulate a general revolt in the Colony; and it must be acknowledged that if the powder did not all explode it was not for want of the match being thoroughly applied.

It might at first sight seem the simplest of military operations to hunt down these scattered and insignificant bands; but as a matter of fact nothing could be more difficult. Operating in a country which was both vast and difficult, with excellent horses, the best of information and supplies ready for them everywhere, it was impossible for the slow-moving British columns with their guns and their wagons to overtake them. Formidable even in flight, the Boers were always ready to turn upon any force which exposed itself too rashly to retaliation, and so amid the mountain passes the British chiefs had to use an amount of caution which was incompatible with extreme speed. Only when a commando was exactly localised so that two or three converging British forces could be brought to bear upon it, was there a reasonable chance of forcing a fight. Still, with all these heavy odds against them, the various little columns continued month after month to play hide-and-seek with the commandos, and the game was by no means always on the one side. The varied fortunes of this scrambling campaign can only be briefly indicated in these pages.

It has already been shown that Kritzinger's original force broke into many bands, which were recruited partly from the Cape rebels and partly from fresh bodies which passed over from the Orange River Colony. The more severe the pressure in the north, the greater reason was there for a trek to this land of plenty. The total number of Boers who were wandering over the eastern and midland districts may have been about two thousand, who were divided into bands which varied from fifty to three hundred. The chief leaders of separate commandos were Kritzinger, Scheepers, Malan, Myburgh, Fouche, Lotter, Smuts, Van Reenen, Lategan, Maritz, and Conroy, the two latter operating on the western side of the country. To hunt down these numerous and active bodies the British were compelled to put many similar detachments into the field, known as the columns of Gorringe, Crabbe, Henniker, Scobell, Doran, Kavanagh, Alexander, and others. These two sets of miniature armies performed an intricate devil's dance over the Colony, the main lines of which are indicated by the red lines upon the map. The Zuurberg mountains to the north of Steynsburg, the Sneeuwberg range to the south of Middelburg, the Oudtshoorn Mountains in the south, the Cradock district, the Murraysburg district, and the Graaf-Reinet district — these were the chief centres of Boer activity.

In April Kritzinger made his way north to the Orange River Colony, for the purpose of consulting with De Wet, but he returned with a following of 200 men about the end of May. Continual brushes occurred during this month between the various columns, and much hard marching was done upon either side, but there was nothing which could be claimed as a positive success.

Early in May two passengers sailed for Europe, the journey of each being in its way historical. The first was the weary and overworked Pro-Consul who had the foresight to distinguish the danger and the courage to meet it. Milner's worn face and prematurely grizzled hair told of the crushing weight which had rested upon him during three eventful years. A gentle scholar, he might have seemed more fitted for a life of academic calm than for the stormy part which the discernment of Mr. Chamberlain had assigned to him. The fine flower of an English university, low-voiced and urbane, it was difficult to imagine what impression he would produce upon those rugged types of which South Africa is so peculiarly prolific. But behind the reserve of a gentleman there lay within him a lofty sense of duty, a singular clearness of vision, and a moral courage which would brace him to follow whither his reason pointed. His visit to England for three months' rest was the occasion for a striking manifestation of loyalty and regard from his fellow-countrymen. He returned in August as Lord Milner to the scene of his labours, with the construction of a united and loyal commonwealth of South Africa as the task of his life.

The second traveller who sailed within a few days of the Governor was Mrs. Botha, the wife of the Boer General, who visited Europe for private as well as political reasons. She bore to Kruger an exact account of the state of the country and of the desperate condition of the burghers. Her mission had no immediate or visible effect, and the weary war, exhausting for the British but fatal for the Boers, went steadily on.

To continue the survey of the operations in the Cape, the first point scored was by the invaders, for Malan's commando succeeded upon May 13th in overwhelming a strong patrol of the Midland Mounted Rifles, the local colonial corps, to the south of Maraisburg. Six killed, eleven wounded, and forty-one prisoners were the fruits of his little victory, which furnished him also with a fresh supply of rifles and ammunition. On May 21st Crabbe's column was in touch with Lotter and with Lategan, but no very positive result came from the skirmish.

The end of May showed considerable Boer activity in the Cape Colony, that date corresponding with the return of Kritzinger from the north. Haig had for the moment driven Scheepers back from the extreme southerly point which he had reached, and he was now in the Graaf-Reinet district; but on the other side of the colony Conroy had appeared near Kenhart, and upon May 23rd he fought a sharp skirmish with a party of Border Scouts. The main Boer force under Kritzinger was in the midlands, however, and had concentrated to such an extent in the Cradock district that it was clear that some larger enterprise was on foot. This soon took shape, for on June 2nd, after a long and rapid march, the Boer leader threw himself upon Jamestown, overwhelmed the sixty townsmen who formed the guard, and looted the town, from which he drew some welcome supplies and 100 horses. British columns were full cry upon his heels, however, and the

Boers after a few hours left the gutted town and vanished into the hills once more. On June 6th the British had a little luck at last, for on that date Scobell and Lukin in the Barkly East district surprised a laager and took twenty prisoners, 166 horses, and much of the Jamestown loot. On the same day Windham treated Van Reenen in a similar rough fashion near Steynsburg, and took twenty-two prisoners.

On June 8th the supreme command of the operations in Cape Colony was undertaken by General French, who from this time forward manoeuvred his numerous columns upon a connected plan with the main idea of pushing the enemy northwards. It was some time, however, before his disposition bore fruit, for the commandos were still better mounted and lighter than their pursuers. On June 13th the youthful and dashing Scheepers, who commanded his own little force at an age when he would have been a junior lieutenant of the British army, raided Murraysburg and captured a patrol. On June 17th Monro with Lovat’s Scouts and Bethune’s Mounted Infantry had some slight success near Tarkastad, but three days later the ill-fated Midland Mounted Rifles were surprised in the early morning by Kritzinger at Waterkloof, which is thirty miles west of Cradock, and were badly mauled by him. They lost ten killed, eleven wounded, and sixty-six prisoners in this unfortunate affair. Again the myth that colonial alertness is greater than that of regular troops seems to have been exposed.

At the end of June, Fouche, one of the most enterprising of the guerilla chiefs, made a dash from Barkly East into the native reserves of the Transkei in order to obtain horses and supplies. It was a desperate measure, as it was vain to suppose that the warlike Kaffirs would permit their property to be looted without resistance, and if once the assegais were reddened no man could say how far the mischief might go. With great loyalty the British Government, even in the darkest days, had held back those martial races — Zulus, Swazis, and Basutos — who all had old grudges against the Amaboon. Fouche’s raid was stopped, however, before it led to serious trouble. A handful of Griqualand Mounted Rifles held it in front, while Dalgety and his colonial veterans moving very swiftly drove him back northwards.

Though baulked, Fouche was still formidable, and on July 14th he made a strong attack in the neighbourhood of Jamestown upon a column of Connaught Rangers who were escorting a convoy. Major Moore offered a determined resistance, and eventually after some hours of fighting drove the enemy away and captured their laager. Seven killed and seventeen wounded were the British losses in this spirited engagement.

On July 10th General French, surveying from a lofty mountain peak the vast expanse of the field of operations, with his heliograph calling up responsive twinkles over one hundred miles of country, gave the order for the convergence of four columns upon the valley in which he knew Scheepers to be lurking. We have it from one of his own letters that his commando at the time consisted of 240 men, of whom forty were Free Staters and the rest colonial rebels. Crewe, Windham, Doran, and Scobell each answered to the call, but the young leader was a man of resource, and a long kloof up the precipitous side of the hill gave him a road to safety. Yet the operations showed a new mobility in the British columns, which shed their guns and their baggage in order to travel faster. The main commando escaped, but twenty-five laggards were taken. The action took place among the hills thirty miles to the west of Graaf-Reinet.

On July 21st Crabbe and Kritzinger had a skirmish in the mountains near Cradock, in which the Boers were strong enough to hold their own; but on the same date near Murraysburg, Lukin, the gallant colonial gunner, with ninety men rode into 150 of Lategan’s band and captured ten of them, with a hundred horses. On July 27th a small party of twenty-one Imperial Yeomanry was captured, after a gallant resistance, by a large force of Boers at the Doorn River on the other side of the Colony. The Kaffir scouts of the British were shot dead in cold blood by their captors after the action. There seems to be no possible excuse for the repeated murders of coloured men by the Boers, as they had themselves from the beginning of the war used their Kaffirs for every purpose short of actually fighting. The war had lost much of the good humour which marked its outset. A fiercer feeling had been engendered on both sides by the long strain, but the execution of rebels by the British, though much to be deplored, is still recognised as one of the rights of a belligerent. When one remembers the condonation upon the part of the British of the use of their own uniforms by the Boers, of the wholesale breaking of paroles, of the continual use of expansive bullets, of the abuse of the pass system and of the red cross, it is impossible to blame them for showing some severity in the stamping out of armed rebellion within their own Colony. If stern measures were eventually adopted it was only after extreme leniency had been tried and failed. The loss of five years’ franchise as a penalty for firing upon their own flag is surely the most gentle correction which an Empire ever laid upon a rebellious people.

At the beginning of August the connected systematic work of French’s columns began to tell. In a huge semicircle the British were pushing north, driving the guerillas in front of them. Scheepers in his usual wayward fashion had broken away to the south, but the others had been unable to penetrate the cordon and were herded over the Stormberg to Naauwport line. The main body of the Boers was hustled swiftly along from August 7th to August 10th, from Graaf-Reinet to Thebus, and thrust over the railway line at that point with some loss of men and a great shedding of horses. It was hoped that the blockhouses on the railroad would have held the enemy, but they slipped across by night and got into the Steynsburg district, where Gorringe’s colonials took up the running. On August 18th he followed the commandos from Steynsburg to Venterstad, killing twenty of them and taking several prisoners. On the 15th, Kritzinger with the main body of the invaders passed the Orange River near Bethulie, and made his way to the Wepener district of the Orange River Colony. Scheepers, Lotter, Lategan, and a few small wandering bands were the only Boers left in the Colony, and to these the British columns now turned their attention, with the result that Lategan, towards the end of the month, was also driven over the river. For the time, at least, the situation seemed to have very much improved, but there was a drift of Boers over the north-western frontier, and the long-continued warfare at their own doors was undoubtedly having a dangerous effect upon the Dutch farmers. Small successes from time to time, such as the taking of sixty of French’s Scouts by Theron’s commando on August 10th, served to keep them from despair. Of the guerilla bands which remained, the most important was that of Scheepers, which now numbered 300 men, well mounted and supplied. He had broken back through the cordon, and made for his old haunts in the south-west. Theron, with a smaller band, was also in the Uniondale and Willowmore district, approaching close to the sea in the Mossel Bay direction, but being headed off by Kavanagh. Scheepers turned in the direction of Cape Town, but swerved aside at Montagu, and moved northwards towards Touws River.

So far the British had succeeded in driving and injuring, but never in destroying, the Boer bands. It was a new departure therefore when, upon September 4th, the commando of Lotter was entirely destroyed by the column of Scobell. This column consisted of some of the Cape Mounted

Rifles and of the indefatigable 9th Lancers. It marked the enemy down in a valley to the west of Cradock and attacked them in the morning, after having secured all the approaches. The result was a complete success. The Boers threw themselves into a building and held out valiantly, but their position was impossible, and after enduring considerable punishment they were forced to hoist the white flag. Eleven had been killed, forty-six wounded, and fifty-six surrendered — figures which are in themselves a proof of the tenacity of their defence. Lotter was among the prisoners, 260 horses were taken, and a good supply of ammunition, with some dynamite. A few days later, on September 10th, a similar blow, less final in its character, was dealt by Colonel Crabbe to the commando of Van der Merve, which was an offshoot of that of Scheepers. The action was fought near Laingsburg, which is on the main line, just north of Matjesfontein, and it ended in the scattering of the Boer band, the death of their boy leader (he was only eighteen years of age), and the capture of thirty-seven prisoners. Seventy of the Beers escaped by a hidden road. To Colonials and Yeomanry belongs the honour of the action, which cost the British force seven casualties. Colonel Crabbe pushed on after the success, and on September 14th he was in touch with Scheepers’s commando near Ladismith (not to be confused with the historical town of Natal), and endured and inflicted some losses. On the 17th a patrol of Grenadier Guards was captured in the north of the Colony, Rebow, the young lieutenant in charge of them, meeting with a soldier’s death.

On the same day a more serious engagement occurred near Tarkastad, a place which lies to the east of Cradock, a notorious centre of disaffection in the midland district. Smuts’s commando, some hundreds strong, was marked down in this part, and several forces converged upon it. One of the outlets, Elands River Poort, was guarded by a single squadron of the 17th Lancers. Upon this the Boers made a sudden and very fierce attack, their approach being facilitated partly by the mist and partly by the use of khaki, a trick which seems never to have grown too stale for successful use. The result was that they were able to ride up to the British camp before any preparations had been made for resistance, and to shoot down a number of the Lancers before they could reach their horses. So terrible was the fire that the single squadron lost thirty-four killed and thirty-six wounded. But the regiment may console itself for the disaster by the fact that the sorely stricken detachment remained true to the spirited motto of the corps, and that no prisoners appear to have been lost.

After this one sharp engagement there ensued several weeks during which the absence of historical events, or the presence of the military censor, caused a singular lull in the account of the operations. With so many small commandos and so many pursuing columns it is extraordinary that there should not have been a constant succession of actions. That there was not must indicate a sluggishness upon the part of the pursuers, and this sluggishness can only be explained by the condition of their horses. Every train of thought brings the critic back always to the great horse question, and encourages the conclusion that there, at all seasons of the war and in all scenes of it, is to be found the most damning indictment against British foresight, common-sense, and power of organisation. That the third year of the war should dawn without the British forces having yet got the legs of the Boers, after having penetrated every portion of their country and having the horses of the world on which to draw, is the most amazingly inexplicable point in the whole of this strange campaign. From the telegram ‘Infantry preferred’ addressed to a nation of rough-riders, down to the failure to secure the excellent horses on the spot, while importing them unfit for use from the ends of the earth, there has been nothing but one long series of blunders in this, the most vital question of all. Even up to the end, in the Colony the obvious lesson had not yet been learnt that it is better to give 1000 men two horses each, and to let them reach the enemy, than give 2000 men one horse each, with which they can never attain their object. The chase during two years of the man with two horses by the man with one horse, has been a sight painful to ourselves and ludicrous to others.

In connection with this account of operations within the Colony, there is one episode which occurred in the extreme north-west which will not fit in with this connected narrative, but which will justify the distraction of the reader’s intelligence, for few finer deeds of arms are recorded in the war. This was the heroic defence of a convoy by the 14th Company of Irish Imperial Yeomanry. The convoy was taking food to Griquatown, on the Kimberley side of the seat of war. The town had been long invested by Conroy, and the inhabitants were in such straits that it was highly necessary to relieve them. To this end a convoy, two miles long, was despatched under Major Humby of the Irish Yeomanry. The escort consisted of seventy-five Northumberland Fusiliers, twenty-four local troops, and 100 of the 74th

Irish Yeomanry. Fifteen miles from Griquatown, at a place called Rooikopjes, the convoy was attacked by the enemy several hundred in number. Two companies of the Irishmen seized the ridge, however, which commanded the wagons, and held it until they were almost exterminated. The position was covered with bush, and the two parties came to the closest of quarters, the Yeomen refusing to take a backward step, though it was clear that they were vastly outnumbered. Encouraged by the example of Madan and Ford, their gallant young leaders, they deliberately sacrificed their lives in order to give time for the guns to come up and for the convoy to pass. Oliffe, Bonynge, and Maclean, who had been children together, were shot side by side on the ridge, and afterwards buried in one grave. Of forty-three men in action, fourteen were killed and twenty severely wounded. Their sacrifice was not in vain, however. The Boers were beaten back, and the convoy, as well as Griquatown, was saved. Some thirty or forty Boers were killed or wounded in the skirmish, and Conroy, their leader, declared that it was the stiffest fight of his life.

In the autumn and winter of 1901 General French had steadily pursued the system of clearing certain districts, one at a time, and endeavouring by his blockhouses and by the arrangement of his forces to hold in strict quarantine those sections of the country which were still infested by the commandos. In this manner he succeeded by the November of this year in confining the active forces of the enemy to the extreme north-east and to the south-west of the peninsula. It is doubtful if the whole Boer force, three-quarters of whom were colonial rebels, amounted to more than fifteen hundred men. When we learn that at this period of the war they were indifferently armed, and that many of them were mounted upon donkeys, it is impossible, after making every allowance for the passive assistance of the farmers, and the difficulties of the country, to believe that the pursuit was always pushed with the spirit and vigour which was needful.

In the north-east, Myburgh, Wessels, and the truculent Fouche were allowed almost a free hand for some months, while the roving bands were rounded up in the midlands and driven along until they were west of the main railroad. Here, in the Calvinia district, several commandos united in October 1901 under Maritz, Louw, Smit, and Theron. Their united bands rode down into the rich grain-growing country round Piquetberg and Malmesbury, pushing south until it seemed as if their academic supporters at Paarl were actually to have a sight of the rebellion which they had fanned to a flame. At one period their patrols were within forty miles of Cape Town. The movement was checked, however, by a small force of Lancers and district troops, and towards the end of October, Maritz, who was chief in this quarter, turned northwards, and on the 29th captured a small British convoy which crossed his line of march. Early in November he doubled back and attacked Piquetberg, but was beaten off with some loss. From that time a steady pressure from the south and east drove these bands farther and farther into the great barren lands of the west, until, in the following April, they had got as far as Namaqualand, many hundred miles away.

Upon October 9th, the second anniversary of the Ultimatum, the hands of the military were strengthened by the proclamation of Cape Town and all the seaport towns as being in a state of martial law. By this means a possible source of supplies and recruits for the enemy was effectually blocked. That it had not been done two years before is a proof of how far local political considerations can be allowed to over-ride the essentials of Imperial policy. Meanwhile treason courts were sitting, and sentences, increasing rapidly from the most trivial to the most tragic, were teaching the rebel that his danger did not end upon the field of battle. The execution of Lotter and his lieutenants was a sign that the patience of a long-suffering Empire had at last reached an end.

The young Boer leader, Scheepers, had long been a thorn in the side of the British. He had infested the southern districts for some months, and he had distinguished himself both by the activity of his movements and by the ruthless vigour of some of his actions. Early in October a serious illness and consequent confinement to his bed brought him at last within the range of British mobility. On his recovery he was tried for repeated breaches of the laws of war, including the murder of several natives. He was condemned to death, and was executed in December. Much sympathy was excited by his gallantry and his youth — he was only twenty-three. On the other hand, our word was pledged to protect the natives, and if he whose hand had been so heavy upon them escaped, all confidence would have been lost in our promises and our justice. That British vengeance was not indiscriminate was shown soon afterwards in the case of a more important commander, Kritzinger, who was the chief leader of the Boers within Cape Colony. Kritzinger was wounded and captured while endeavouring to cross the line near Hanover Road upon December 15th. He was put upon his trial, and his fate turned upon how far he was responsible for the misdeeds of some of his subordinates. It was clearly shown that he had endeavoured to hold them within the bounds of civilised warfare, and with congratulations and handshakings he was acquitted by the military court.

In the last two months of the year 1901, a new system was introduced into the Cape Colony campaign by placing the Colonial and district troops immediately under the command of Colonial officers and of the Colonial Government. It had long been felt that some devolution was necessary, and the change was justified by the result. Without any dramatic incident, an inexorable process of attrition, caused by continual pursuit and hardship, wore out the commandos. Large bands had become small ones, and small ones had vanished. Only by the union of several bodies could any enterprise higher than the looting of a farmhouse be successfully attempted.

Such a union occurred, however, in the early days of February 1902, when Smuts, Malan, and several other Boer leaders showed great activity in the country round Calvinia. Their commandos seem to have included a proportion of veteran Republicans from the north, who were more formidable fighting material than the raw Colonial rebels. It happened that several dangerously weak British columns were operating within reach at that time, and it was only owing to the really admirable conduct of the troops that a serious disaster was averted. Two separate actions, each of them severe, were fought on the same date, and in each case the Boers were able to bring very superior numbers into the field.

The first of these was the fight in which Colonel Doran’s column extricated itself with severe loss from a most perilous plight. The whole force under Doran consisted of 350 men with two guns, and this handful was divided by an expedition which he, with 150 men, undertook in order to search a distant farm. The remaining two hundred men, under Captain Saunders, were left upon February 5th with the guns and the convoy at a place called Middlepost, which lies about fifty miles south-west of Calvinia. These men were of the 11th, 23rd, and 24th Imperial Yeomanry, with a troop of Cape Police. The Boer Intelligence was excellent, as might be expected in a country which is dotted with farms. The weakened force at Middlepost was instantly attacked by Smuts’s commando. Saunders evacuated the camp and abandoned the convoy, which was the only thing he could do, but he concentrated all his efforts upon preserving his guns. The night was illuminated by the blazing wagons, and made hideous by the whoops of the drunken rebels who caroused among the captured stores.

With the first light of dawn the small British force was fiercely assailed on all sides, but held its own in a manner which would have done credit to any troops. The much criticised Yeomen fought like veterans. A considerable position had to be covered, and only a handful of men were available at the most important points. One ridge, from which the guns would be enfiladed, was committed to the charge of Lieutenants Tabor and Chichester with eleven men of the 11th Imperial Yeomanry, their instructions being ‘to hold it to the death.’ The order was obeyed with the utmost heroism. After a desperate defence the ridge was only taken by the Boers when both officers had been killed and nine out of eleven men were on the ground. In spite of the loss of this position the fight was still sustained until shortly after midday, when Doran with the patrol returned. The position was still most dangerous, the losses had been severe, and the Boers were increasing in strength. An immediate retreat was ordered, and the small column, after ten days of hardship and anxiety, reached the railway line in safety. The wounded were left to the care of Smuts, who behaved with chivalry and humanity.

At about the same date a convoy proceeding from Beaufort West to Fraserburg was attacked by Malan’s commando. The escort, which consisted of sixty Colonial Mounted Rifles and 100 of the West Yorkshire militia, was overwhelmed after a good defence, in which Major Crofton, their commander, was killed. The wagons were destroyed, but the Boers were driven off by the arrival of Crabbe’s column, followed by those of Capper and Lund. The total losses of the British in these two actions amounted to twenty-three killed and sixty-five wounded.

The re-establishment of settled law and order was becoming more marked every week in those south-western districts, which had long been most disturbed. Colonel Crewe in this region, and Colonel Lukin upon the other side of the line, acting entirely with Colonial troops, were pushing back the rebels, and holding, by a well-devised system of district defence, all that they had gained. By the end of February there were none of the enemy south of the Beaufort West and Clanwilliam line. These results were not obtained without much hard marching and a little hard fighting. Small columns under Crabbe, Capper, Wyndham, Nickall, and Lund, were continually on the move, with little to show for it save an ever-widening area of settled country in their rear. In a skirmish on February 20th Judge Hugo, a well-known Boer leader, was killed, and Vanheerden, a notorious rebel, was captured. At the end of this month Fouche's tranquil occupation of the north-east was at last disturbed, and he was driven out of it into the midlands, where he took refuge with the remains of his commando in the Camdeboo Mountains. Malan's men had already sought shelter in the same natural fortress. Malan was wounded and taken in a skirmish near Somerset East a few days before the general Boer surrender. Fouche gave himself up at Cradock on June 2nd.

The last incident of this scattered, scrambling, unsatisfactory campaign in the Cape peninsula was the raid made by Smuts, the Transvaal leader, into the Port Nolloth district of Namaqualand, best known for its copper mines. A small railroad has been constructed from the coast at this point, the terminus being the township of Ookiep. The length of the line is about seventy miles. It is difficult to imagine what the Boers expected to gain in this remote corner of the seat of war, unless they had conceived the idea that they might actually obtain possession of Port Nolloth itself, and so restore the communications with their sympathisers and allies. At the end of March the Boer horsemen appeared suddenly out of the desert, drove in the British outposts, and summoned Ookiep to surrender. Colonel Shelton, who commanded the small garrison, sent an uncompromising reply, but he was unable to protect the railway in his rear, which was wrecked, together with some of the blockhouses which had been erected to guard it. The loyal population of the surrounding country had flocked into Ookiep, and the Commandant found himself burdened with the care of six thousand people. The enemy had succeeded in taking the small post of Springbok, and Concordia, the mining centre, was surrendered into their hands without resistance, giving them welcome supplies of arms, ammunition, and dynamite. The latter was used by the Boers in the shape of hand-bombs, and proved to be a very efficient weapon when employed against blockhouses. Several of the British defences were wrecked by them, with considerable loss to the garrison; but in the course of a month's siege, in spite of several attacks, the Boers were never able to carry the frail works which guarded the town. Once more, at the end of the war as at the beginning of it, there was shown the impotence of the Dutch riflemen against a British defence. A relief column, under Colonel Cooper, was quickly organised at Port Nolloth, and advanced along the railway line, forcing Smuts to raise the siege in the first week of May. Immediately afterwards came the news of the negotiations for peace, and the Boer general presented himself at Port

Nolloth, whence he was conveyed by ship to Cape Town, and so north again to take part in the deliberations of his fellow-countrymen. Throughout the war he had played a manly and honourable part. It may be hoped that with youth and remarkable experience, both of diplomacy and of war, he may now find a long and brilliant career awaiting him in a wider arena than that for which he strove.

CHAPTER 36. THE SPRING CAMPAIGN (SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER, 1901).

The history of the war during the African winter of 1901 has now been sketched, and some account given of the course of events in the Transvaal, the Orange River Colony, and the Cape Colony. The hope of the British that they might stamp out resistance before the grass should restore mobility to the larger bodies of Boers was destined to be disappointed. By the middle of September the veld had turned from drab to green, and the great drama was fated to last for one more act, however anxious all the British and the majority of the Boers might be to ring down the curtain. Exasperating as this senseless prolongation of a hopeless struggle might be, there was still some consolation in the reflection that those who drank this bitter cup to the very lees would be less likely to thirst for it again.

September 15th was the date which brought into force the British Proclamation announcing the banishment of those Boer leaders who continued in arms. It must be confessed that this step may appear harsh and unchivalrous to the impartial observer, so long as those leaders were guilty of no practices which are foreign to the laws of civilised warfare. The imposition of personal penalties upon the officers of an opposing army is a step for which it is difficult to quote a precedent, nor is it wise to officially rule your enemy outside the pale of ordinary warfare, since it is equally open to him to take the same step against you. The only justification for such a course would be its complete success, as this would suggest that the Intelligence Department were aware that the leaders desired some strong excuse for coming in — such an excuse as the Proclamation would afford. The result proved that nothing of the kind was needed, and the whole proceeding must appear to be injudicious and high-handed. In honourable war you conquer your adversary by superior courage, strength, or wit, but you do not terrorise him by particular penalties aimed at individuals. The burghers of the Transvaal and of the late Orange Free State were legitimate belligerents, and to be treated as such — a statement which does not, of course, extend to the Afrikander rebels who were their allies.

The tendency of the British had been to treat their antagonists as a broken and disorganised banditti, but with the breaking of the spring they were sharply reminded that the burghers were still capable of a formidable and coherent effort. The very date which put them beyond the pale as belligerents was that which they seem to have chosen in order to prove what active and valiant soldiers they still remained. A quick succession of encounters occurred at various parts of the seat of war, the general tendency of which was not entirely in favour of the British arms, though the weekly export of prisoners reassured all who noted it as to the sapping and decay of the Boer strength. These incidents must now be set down in the order of their occurrence, with their relation to each other so far as it is possible to trace it.

General Louis Botha, with the double intention of making an offensive move and of distracting the wavering burghers from a close examination of Lord Kitchener's proclamation, assembled his forces in the second week of September in the Ermelo district. Thence he moved them rapidly towards Natal, with the result that the volunteers of that colony had once more to grasp their rifles and hasten to the frontier. The whole situation bore for an instant an absurd resemblance to that of two years before — Botha playing the part of Joubert, and Lyttelton, who commanded on the frontier, that of White. It only remained, to make the parallel complete, that some one should represent Penn Symons, and this perilous role fell to a gallant officer, Major Gough, commanding a detached force which thought itself strong enough to hold its own, and only learned by actual experiment that it was not.

This officer, with a small force consisting of three companies of Mounted Infantry with two guns of the 69th R.F.A., was operating in the neighbourhood of Utrecht in the south-eastern corner of the Transvaal, on the very path along which Botha must descend. On September 17th he had crossed De Jagers Drift on the Blood River, not very far from Dundee, when he found himself in touch with the enemy. His mission was to open a path for an empty convoy returning from Vryheid, and in order to do so it was necessary that Blood River Poort, where the Boers were now seen, should be cleared. With admirable zeal Gough pushed rapidly forward, supported by a force of 350 Johannesburg Mounted Rifles under Stewart. Such a proceeding must have seemed natural to any British officer at this stage of the war, when a swift advance was the only chance of closing with the small bodies of Boers; but it is strange that the Intelligence Department had not warned the patrols upon the frontier that a considerable force was coming down upon them, and that they should be careful to avoid action against impossible odds. If Gough had known that Botha's main commando was coming down upon him, it is inconceivable that he would have pushed his advance until he could neither extricate his men nor his guns. A small body of the enemy, said to have been the personal escort of Louis Botha, led him on, until a large force was able to ride down upon him from the flank and rear. Surrounded at Scheepers Nek by many hundreds of riflemen in a difficult country, there was no alternative but a surrender, and so sharp and sudden was the Boer advance that the whole action was over in a very short time. The new tactics of the Boers, already used at Vlakfontein, and afterwards to be successful at Brakenlaagte and at Tweebosch, were put in force. A large body of mounted men, galloping swiftly in open order and firing from the saddle, rode into and over the British. Such temerity should in theory have met with severe punishment, but as a matter of fact the losses of the enemy seem to have been very small. The soldiers were not able to return an effective fire from their horses, and had no time to dismount. The sights and breech-blocks of the two guns are said to have been destroyed, but the former statement seems more credible than the latter. A Colt gun was also captured. Of the small force twenty were killed, forty wounded, and over two hundred taken. Stewart's force was able to extricate itself with some difficulty, and to fall back on the Drift. Gough managed to escape that night and to report that it was Botha himself, with over a thousand men, who had eaten up his detachment. The prisoners and wounded were sent in a few days later to Vryheid, a town which appeared to be in some danger of capture had not Walter Kitchener hastened to carry reinforcements to the garrison. Bruce Hamilton was at the same time despatched to head Botha off, and every step taken to prevent his southern advance. So many columns from all parts converged upon the danger spot that Lyttelton, who commanded upon the Natal frontier, had over 20,000 men under his orders.

Botha's plans appear to have been to work through Zululand and then strike at Natal, an operation which would be the more easy as it would be conducted a considerable distance from the railway line. Pushing on a few days after his successful action with Gough, he crossed the Zulu frontier, and had in front of him an almost unimpeded march as far as the Tugela. Crossing this far from the British base of power, his force could raid the

Greytown district and raise recruits among the Dutch farmers, laying waste one of the few spots in South Africa which had been untouched by the blight of war. All this lay before him, and in his path nothing save only two small British posts which might be either disregarded or gathered up as he passed. In an evil moment for himself, tempted by the thought of the supplies which they might contain, he stopped to gather them up, and the force of the wave of invasion broke itself as upon two granite rocks.

These two so-called forts were posts of very modest strength, a chain of which had been erected at the time of the old Zulu war. Fort Itala, the larger, was garrisoned by 300 men of the 5th Mounted Infantry, drawn from the Dublin Fusiliers, Middlesex, Dorsets, South Lancashires, and Lancashire Fusiliers — most of them old soldiers of many battles. They had two guns of the 69th R.F.A., the same battery which had lost a section the week before. Major Chapman, of the Dublins, was in command.

Upon September 25th the small garrison heard that the main force of the Boers was sweeping towards them, and prepared to give them a soldiers' welcome. The fort is situated upon the flank of a hill, on the summit of which, a mile from the main trenches, a strong outpost was stationed. It was upon this that the first force of the attack broke at midnight of September 25th. The garrison, eighty strong, was fiercely beset by several hundred Boers, and the post was eventually carried after a sharp and bloody contest. Kane, of the South Lancashires, died with the words 'No surrender' upon his lips, and Potgieter, a Boer leader, was pistolled by Kane's fellow officer, Lefroy. Twenty of the small garrison fell, and the remainder were overpowered and taken.

With this vantage-ground in their possession the Boers settled down to the task of overwhelming the main position. They attacked upon three sides, and until morning the force was raked from end to end by unseen riflemen. The two British guns were put out of action and the maxim was made unserviceable by a bullet. At dawn there was a pause in the attack, but it recommenced and continued without intermission until sunset. The span betwixt the rising of the sun and its last red glow in the west is a long one for the man who spends it at his ease, but how never-ending must have seemed the hours to this handful of men, outnumbered, surrounded, pelted by bullets, parched with thirst, torn with anxiety, holding desperately on with dwindling numbers to their frail defences! To them it may have seemed a hard thing to endure so much for a tiny fort in a savage land. The larger view of its vital importance could have scarcely come to console the regimental officer, far less the private. But duty carried them through, and they wrought better than they knew, for the brave Dutchmen, exasperated by so disproportionate a resistance, stormed up to the very trenches and suffered as they had not suffered for many a long month. There have been battles with 10,000 British troops hotly engaged in which the Boer losses have not been so great as in this obscure conflict against an isolated post. When at last, baffled and disheartened, they drew off with the waning light, it is said that no fewer than a hundred of their dead and two hundred of their wounded attested the severity of the fight. So strange are the conditions of South African warfare that this loss, which would have hardly made a skirmish memorable in the slogging days of the Peninsula, was one of the most severe blows which the burghers had sustained in the course of a two years' warfare against a large and aggressive army. There is a conflict of evidence as to the exact figures, but at least they were sufficient to beat the Boer army back and to change their plan of campaign.

Whilst this prolonged contest had raged round Fort Itala, a similar attack upon a smaller scale was being made upon Fort Prospect, some fifteen miles to the eastward. This small post was held by a handful of Durham Artillery Militia and of Dorsets. The attack was delivered by Grobler with several hundred burghers, but it made no advance although it was pushed with great vigour, and repeated many times in the course of the day. Captain Rowley, who was in command, handled his men with such judgment that one killed and eight wounded represented his casualties during a long day's fighting. Here again the Boer losses were in proportion to the resolution of their attack, and are said to have amounted to sixty killed and wounded. Considering the impossibility of replacing the men, and the fruitless waste of valuable ammunition, September 26th was an evil day for the Boer cause. The British casualties amounted to seventy-three.

The water of the garrison of Fort Itala had been cut off early in the attack, and their ammunition had run low by evening. Chapman withdrew his men and his guns therefore to Nkandhla, where the survivors of his gallant garrison received the special thanks of Lord Kitchener. The country around was still swarming with Boers, and on the last day of September a convoy from Melmoth fell into their hands and provided them with some badly needed supplies.

But the check which he had received was sufficient to prevent any important advance upon the part of Botha, while the swollen state of the rivers put an additional obstacle in his way. Already the British commanders, delighted to have at last discovered a definite objective, were hurrying to the scene of action. Bruce Hamilton had reached Fort Itala upon September 28th and Walter Kitchener had been despatched to Vryheid. Two British forces, aided by smaller columns, were endeavouring to surround the Boer leader. On October 6th Botha had fallen back to the north-east of Vryheid, whither the British forces had followed him. Like De Wet's invasion of the Cape, Botha's advance upon Natal had ended in placing himself and his army in a critical position. On October 9th he had succeeded in crossing the Privaan River, a branch of the Pongolo, and was pushing north in the direction of Piet Retief, much helped by misty weather and incessant rain. Some of his force escaped between the British columns, and some remained in the kloofs and forests of that difficult country.

Walter Kitchener, who had followed up the Boer retreat, had a brisk engagement with the rearguard upon October 6th. The Boers shook themselves clear with some loss, both to themselves and to their pursuers. On the 10th those of the burghers who held together had reached Luneburg, and shortly afterwards they had got completely away from the British columns. The weather was atrocious, and the lumbering wagons, axle-deep in mud, made it impossible for troops who were attached to them to keep in touch with the light riders who sped before them. For some weeks there was no word of the main Boer force, but at the end of that time they reappeared in a manner which showed that both in numbers and in spirit they were still a formidable body.

Of all the sixty odd British columns which were traversing the Boer states there was not one which had a better record than that commanded by Colonel Benson. During seven months of continuous service this small force, consisting at that time of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, the 2nd Scottish Horse, the 18th and 19th Mounted Infantry, and two guns, had acted with great energy, and had reduced its work to a complete and highly effective system. Leaving the infantry as a camp guard, Benson operated with mounted troops alone, and no Boer laager within fifty miles was safe from his nocturnal visits. So skilful had he and his men become at these night attacks in a strange, and often difficult country, that out of twenty-eight attempts twenty-one resulted in complete success. In each case the rule was simply to gallop headlong into the Boer laager, and to go on chasing as far as the horses could go. The furious and reckless pace may be judged by the fact that the casualties of the force were far greater from falls than from bullets. In seven months forty-seven Boers were killed and six hundred captured, to say nothing of enormous quantities of munitions and stock. The success of these operations was due, not only to the energy of Benson and his men, but to the untiring exertions of Colonel Wools-Sampson, who acted as intelligence officer. If, during his long persecution by President Kruger, Wools-Sampson in the bitterness of his heart had vowed a feud against the Boer cause, it must be acknowledged that he has most amply fulfilled it, for it would be difficult to point to any single man who has from first to last done them greater harm.

In October Colonel Benson's force was reorganised, and it then consisted of the 2nd Buffs, the 2nd Scottish Horse, the 3rd and 25th Mounted Infantry, and four guns of the 84th battery. With this force, numbering nineteen hundred men, he left Middelburg upon the Delagoa line on October 20th and proceeded south, crossing the course along which the Boers, who were retiring from their abortive raid into Natal, might be expected to come. For several days the column performed its familiar work, and gathered up forty or fifty prisoners. On the 26th came news that the Boer commandos under Grobler were concentrating against it, and that an attack in force might be expected. For two days there was continuous sniping, and the column as it moved through the country saw Boer horsemen keeping pace with it on the far flanks and in the rear. The weather had been very bad, and it was in a deluge of cold driving rain that the British set forth upon October 30th, moving towards Brakenlaagte, which is a point about forty miles due south of Middelburg. It was Benson's intention to return to his base.

About midday the column, still escorted by large bodies of aggressive Boers, came to a difficult spruit swollen by the rain. Here the wagons stuck, and it took some hours to get them all across. The Boer fire was continually becoming more severe, and had broken out at the head of the column as well as the rear. The situation was rendered more difficult by the violence of the rain, which raised a thick steam from the ground and made it impossible to see for any distance. Major Anley, in command of the rearguard, peering back, saw through a rift of the clouds a large body of horsemen in extended order sweeping after them. 'There's miles of them, begob!' cried an excited

Irish trooper. Next instant the curtain had closed once more, but all who had caught a glimpse of that vision knew that a stern struggle was at hand.

At this moment two guns of the 84th battery under Major Guinness were in action against Boer riflemen. As a rear screen on the farther side of the guns was a body of the Scottish Horse and of the Yorkshire Mounted Infantry. Near the guns themselves were thirty men of the Buffs. The rest of the Buffs and of the Mounted Infantry were out upon the flanks or else were with the advance guard, which was now engaged, under the direction of Colonel Wools-Sampson, in parking the convoy and in forming the camp. These troops played a small part in the day’s fighting, the whole force of which broke with irresistible violence upon the few hundred men who were in front of or around the rear guns. Colonel Benson seems to have just ridden back to the danger point when the Boers delivered their furious attack.

Louis Botha with his commando is said to have ridden sixty miles in order to join the forces of Grobler and Oppermann, and overwhelm the British column. It may have been the presence of their commander or a desire to have vengeance for the harrying which they had undergone upon the Natal border, but whatever the reason, the Boer attack was made with a spirit and dash which earned the enthusiastic applause of every soldier who survived to describe it. With the low roar of a great torrent, several hundred horsemen burst through the curtain of mist, riding at a furious pace for the British guns. The rear screen of Mounted Infantry fell back before this terrific rush, and the two bodies of horsemen came pell-mell down upon the handful of Buffs and the guns. The infantry were ridden into and surrounded by the Boers, who found nothing to stop them from galloping on to the low ridge upon which the guns were stationed. This ridge was held by eighty of the Scottish Horse and forty of the Yorkshire M.I., with a few riflemen from the 25th Mounted Infantry. The latter were the escort of the guns, but the former were the rear screen who had fallen back rapidly because it was the game to do so, but who were in no way shaken, and who instantly dismounted and formed when they reached a defensive position.

These men had hardly time to take up their ground when the Boers were on them. With that extraordinary quickness to adapt their tactics to circumstances which is the chief military virtue of the Boers, the horsemen did not gallop over the crest, but lined the edge of it, and poured a withering fire on to the guns and the men beside them. The heroic nature of the defence can be best shown by the plain figures of the casualties. No rhetoric is needed to adorn that simple record. There were thirty-two gunners round the guns, and twenty-nine fell where they stood. Major Guinness was mortally wounded while endeavouring with his own hands to fire a round of case. There were sixty-two casualties out of eighty among the Scottish Horse, and the Yorkshires were practically annihilated. Altogether 123 men fell, out of about 160 on the ridge. ‘Hard pounding, gentlemen,’ as Wellington remarked at Waterloo, and British troops seemed as ready as ever to endure it.

The gunners were, as usual, magnificent. Of the two little bullet-pelted groups of men around the guns there was not one who did not stand to his duty without flinching. Corporal Atkin was shot down with all his comrades, but still endeavoured with his failing strength to twist the breech-block out of the gun. Another bullet passed through his upraised hands as he did it. Sergeant Hayes, badly wounded, and the last survivor of the crew, seized the lanyard, crawled up the trail, and fired a last round before he fainted. Sergeant Mathews, with three bullets through him, kept steadily to his duty. Five drivers tried to bring up a limber and remove the gun, but all of them, with all the horses, were hit. There have been incidents in this war which have not increased our military reputation, but you might search the classical records of valour and fail to find anything finer than the consistent conduct of the British artillery.

Colonel Benson was hit in the knee and again in the stomach, but wounded as he was he despatched a message back to Wools-Sampson, asking him to burst shrapnel over the ridge so as to prevent the Boers from carrying off the guns. The burghers had ridden in among the litter of dead and wounded men which marked the British position, and some of the baser of them, much against the will of their commanders, handled the injured soldiers with great brutality. The shell-fire drove them back, however, and the two guns were left standing alone, with no one near them save their prostrate gunners and escort.

There has been some misunderstanding as to the part played by the Buffs in this action, and words have been used which seem to imply that they had in some way failed their mounted companions. It is due to the honour of one of the finest regiments in the British army to clear this up. As a matter of fact, the greater part of the regiment under Major Dauglish was engaged in defending the camp. Near the guns there were four separate small bodies of Buffs, none of which appears to have been detailed as an escort. One of these parties, consisting of thirty men under Lieutenant Greatwood, was ridden over by the horsemen, and the same fate befell a party of twenty who were far out upon the flank. Another small body under Lieutenant Lynch was over taken by the same charge, and was practically destroyed, losing nineteen killed and wounded out of thirty. In the rear of the guns was a larger body of Buffs, 130 in number, under Major Eales. When the guns were taken this handful attempted a counter-attack, but Eales soon saw that it was a hopeless effort, and he lost thirty of his men before he could extricate himself. Had these men been with the others on the gun ridge they might have restored the fight, but they had not reached it when the position was taken, and to persevere in the attempt to retake it would have led to certain disaster. The only just criticism to which the regiment is open is that, having just come off blockhouse duty, they were much out of condition, which caused the men to straggle and the movements to be unduly slow.

It was fortunate that the command of the column devolved upon so experienced and cool-headed a soldier as Wools-Sampson. To attempt a counter-attack for the purpose of recapturing the guns would, in case of disaster, have risked the camp and the convoy. The latter was the prize which the Boers had particularly in view, and to expose it would be to play their game. Very wisely, therefore, Wools-Sampson held the attacking Boers off with his guns and his riflemen, while every spare pair of hands was set to work entrenching the position and making it impregnable against attack. Outposts were stationed upon all those surrounding points which might command the camp, and a summons to surrender from the Boer leader was treated with contempt. All day a long-range fire, occasionally very severe, rained upon the camp. Colonel Benson was brought in by the ambulance, and used his dying breath in exhorting his subordinate to hold out. ‘No more night marches’ are said to have been the last words spoken by this gallant soldier as he passed away in the early morning after the action. On October 31st the force remained on the defensive, but early on November 1st the gleaming of two heliographs, one to the north-east and one to the south-west, told that two British columns, those of De Lisle and of Barter, were hastening to the rescue. But the Boers had passed as the storm does, and nothing but their swathe of destruction was left to show where they had been. They had taken away the guns during the night, and were already beyond the reach of pursuit.

Such was the action at Brakenlaagte, which cost the British sixty men killed and 170 wounded, together with two guns. Colonel Benson, Colonel Guinness, Captain Eyre Lloyd of the Guards, Major Murray and Captain Lindsay of the Scottish Horse, with seven other officers were among the dead, while sixteen officers were wounded. The net result of the action was that the British rear-guard had been annihilated, but that the main body and the convoy, which was the chief object of the attack, was saved. The Boer loss was considerable, being about one hundred and fifty. In spite of the Boer success nothing could suit the British better than hard fighting of the sort, since whatever the immediate result of it might be, it must necessarily cause a wastage among the enemy which could never be replaced. The gallantry of the Boer charge was only equalled by that of the resistance offered round the guns, and it is an action to which both sides can look back without shame or regret. It was feared that the captured guns would soon be used to break the blockhouse line, but nothing of the kind was attempted, and within a few weeks they were both recovered by British columns.

In order to make a consecutive and intelligible narrative, I will continue with an account of the operations in this south-eastern portion of the Transvaal from the action of Brakenlaagte down to the end of the year 1901. These were placed in the early part of November, under the supreme command of General Bruce Hamilton, and that energetic commander set in motion a number of small columns, which effected numerous captures. He was much helped in his work by the new lines of blockhouses, one of which extended from Standerton to Ermelo, while another connected Brugspruit with Greylingstad. The huge country was thus cut into manageable districts, and the fruits were soon seen by the large returns of prisoners which came from this part of the seat of war.

Upon December 3rd Bruce Hamilton, who had the valuable assistance of Wools-Sampson to direct his intelligence, struck swiftly out from Ermelo and fell upon a Boer laager in the early morning, capturing ninety-six prisoners. On the 10th he overwhelmed the Bethel commando by a similar march, killing seven and capturing 131. Williams and Wing commanded separate columns in this operation, and their energy may be judged from the fact that they covered fifty-one miles during the twenty-four hours. On the 12th Hamilton’s columns were on the war-path once more, and another commando was wiped out. Sixteen killed and seventy prisoners were the fruits of this expedition. For the second time in a week the columns had done their fifty miles a day, and it was no surprise to hear from their commander that they were in need of a rest. Nearly four hundred prisoners had been taken from the most warlike portion of the Transvaal in ten days by one energetic commander, with a list of twenty-five casualties to ourselves. The thanks of the Secretary of War were specially sent to him for his brilliant work. From then until the end of the year 1901, numbers of smaller captures continued to be reported from the same region, where Plumer, Spens, Mackenzie, Rawlinson, and others were working. On the other hand there was one small setback which occurred to a body of two hundred Mounted Infantry under Major Bridgford, who had been detached from Spens's column to search some farmhouses at a place called Holland, to the south of Ermelo. The expedition set forth upon the night of December 19th, and next morning surrounded and examined the farms.

The British force became divided in doing this work, and were suddenly attacked by several hundred of Britz's commando, who came to close quarters through their khaki dress, which enabled them to pass as Plumer's vanguard. The brunt of the fight fell upon an outlying body of fifty men, nearly all of whom were killed, wounded or taken. A second body of fifty men were overpowered in the same way, after a creditable defence. Fifteen of the British were killed and thirty wounded, while Bridgford the commander was also taken. Spens came up shortly afterwards with the column, and the Boers were driven off. There seems every reason to think that upon this occasion the plans of the British had leaked out, and that a deliberate ambush had been laid for them round the farms, but in such operations these are chances against which it is not always possible to guard. Considering the number of the Boers, and the cleverness of their dispositions, the British were fortunate in being able to extricate their force without greater loss, a feat which was largely due to the leading of Lieutenant Sterling.

Leaving the Eastern Transvaal, the narrative must now return to several incidents of importance which had occurred at various points of the seat of war during the latter months of 1901.

On September 19th, two days after Gough's disaster, a misfortune occurred near Bloemfontein by which two guns and a hundred and forty men fell temporarily into the hands of the enemy. These guns, belonging to U battery, were moving south under an escort of Mounted Infantry, from that very Sanna's Post which had been so fatal to the same battery eighteen months before. When fifteen miles south of the Waterworks, at a place called Vlakfontein (another Vlakfontein from that of General Dixon's engagement), the small force was surrounded and captured by Ackermann's commando. The gunner officer, Lieutenant Barry, died beside his guns in the way that gunner officers have. Guns and men were taken, however, the latter to be released, and the former to be recovered a week or two later by the British columns. It is certainly a credit to the Boers that the spring campaign should have opened by four British guns falling into their hands, and it is impossible to withhold our admiration for those gallant farmers who, after two years of exhausting warfare, were still able to turn upon a formidable and victorious enemy, and to renovate their supplies at his expense.

Two days later, hard on the heels of Gough's mishap, of the Vlakfontein incident, and of the annihilation of the squadron of Lancers in the Cape, there was a serious affair at Elands Kloof, near Zastron, in the extreme south of the Orange River Colony. In this a detachment of the Highland Scouts raised by the public spirit of Lord Lovat was surprised at night and very severely handled by Kritzinger's commando. The loss of Colonel Murray, their commander, of the adjutant of the same name, and of forty-two out of eighty of the Scouts, shows how fell was the attack, which broke as sudden and as strong as a South African thunderstorm upon the unconscious camp. The Boers appear to have eluded the outposts and crept right among the sleeping troops, as they did in the case of the Victorians at Wilmansrust. Twelve gunners were also hit, and the only field gun taken. The retiring Boers were swiftly followed up by Thorneycroft's column, however, and the gun was retaken, together with twenty of Kritzinger's men. It must be confessed that there seems some irony in the fact that, within five days of the British ruling by which the Boers were no longer a military force, these non-belligerents had inflicted a loss of nearly six hundred men killed, wounded, or taken. Two small commandos, that of Koch in the Orange River Colony, and that of Carolina, had been captured by Williams and Benson. Combined they only numbered a hundred and nine men, but here, as always, they were men who could never be replaced.

Those who had followed the war with care, and had speculated upon the future, were prepared on hearing of Botha's movement upon Natal to learn that De la Rey had also made some energetic attack in the western quarter of the Transvaal. Those who had formed this expectation were not disappointed, for upon the last day of September the Boer chief struck fiercely at Kekewich’s column in a vigorous night attack, which led to as stern an encounter as any in the campaign. This was the action at Moedwill, near Magato Nek, in the Magaliesberg.

When last mentioned De la Rey was in the Marico district, near Zeerust, where he fought two actions with Methuen in the early part of September. Thence he made his way to Rustenburg and into the Magaliesberg country, where he joined Kemp. The Boer force was followed up by two British columns under Kekewich and Fetherstonhaugh. The former commander had camped upon the night of Sunday, September 30th, at the farm of Moedwill, in a strong position within a triangle formed by the Selous River on the west, a donga on the east, and the Zeerust-Rustenburg road as a base. The apex of the triangle pointed north, with a ridge on the farther side of the river.

The men with Kekewich were for the most part the same as those who had fought in the Vlakfontein engagement — the Derbys, the 1st Scottish Horse, the Yeomanry, and the 28th R.F.A. Every precaution appears to have been taken by the leader, and his pickets were thrown out so far that ample warning was assured of an attack. The Boer onslaught came so suddenly and fiercely, however, in the early morning, that the posts upon the river bank were driven in or destroyed and the riflemen from the ridge on the farther side were able to sweep the camp with their fire. In numbers the two forces were not unequal, but the Boers had already obtained the tactical advantage, and were playing a game in which they are the schoolmasters of the world. Never has the British spirit flamed up more fiercely, and from the commander to the latest yeoman recruit there was not a man who flinched from a difficult and almost a desperate task. The Boers must at all hazard be driven from the position which enabled them to command the camp. No retreat was possible without such an abandonment of stores as would amount to a disaster. In the confusion and the uncertain light of early dawn there was no chance of a concerted movement, though Kekewich made such dispositions as were possible with admirable coolness and promptness. Squadrons and companies closed in upon the river bank with the one thought of coming to close quarters and driving the enemy from their commanding position. Already more than half the horses and a very large number of officers and men had gone down before the pelting bullets. Scottish Horse, Yeomanry, and Derbys pushed on, the young soldiers of the two former corps keeping pace with the veteran regiment. ‘All the men behaved simply splendidly,’ said a spectator, ‘taking what little cover there was and advancing yard by yard. An order was given to try and saddle up a squadron, with the idea of getting round their flank. I had the saddle almost on one of my ponies when he was hit in two places. Two men trying to saddle alongside of me were both shot dead, and Lieutenant Wortley was shot through the knee. I ran back to where I had been firing from and found the Colonel slightly hit, the Adjutant wounded and dying, and men dead and wounded all round.’ But the counter-attack soon began to make way. At first the advance was slow, but soon it quickened into a magnificent rush, the wounded Kekewich whooping on his men, and the guns coming into action as the enemy began to fall back before the fierce charge of the British riflemen. At six o’clock De la Rey’s burghers had seen that their attempt was hopeless, and were in full retreat — a retreat which could not be harassed by the victors, whose cavalry had been converted by that hail of bullets into footmen. The repulse had been absolute and complete, for not a man or a cartridge had been taken from the British, but the price paid in killed and wounded was a heavy one. No fewer than 161 had been hit, including the gallant leader, whose hurt did not prevent him from resuming his duties within a few days. The heaviest losses fell upon the Scottish Horse, and upon the Derbys; but the Yeomanry also proved on this, as on some other occasions, how ungenerous were the criticisms to which they had been exposed. There are few actions in the war which appear to have been more creditable to the troops engaged.

Though repulsed at Moedwill, De la Rey, the grim, long-bearded fighting man, was by no means discouraged. From the earliest days of the campaign, when he first faced Methuen upon the road to Kimberley, he had shown that he was a most dangerous antagonist, tenacious, ingenious, and indomitable. With him were a body of irreconcilable burghers, who were the veterans of many engagements, and in Kemp he had an excellent fighting subordinate. His command extended over a wide stretch of populous country, and at any time he could bring considerable reinforcements to his aid, who would separate again to their farms and hiding-places when their venture was accomplished. For some weeks after the fight at Moedwill the Boer forces remained quiet in that district. Two British columns had left Zeerust on October 17th, under Methuen and Von Donop, in order to sweep the surrounding country, the one working in the direction of Elands River and the other in that of Rustenburg. They returned to Zeerust twelve days later, after a successful foray, which had been attended with much sniping and skirmishing, but only one action which is worthy of record.

This was fought on October 24th at a spot near Kleinfontein, upon the Great Marico River, which runs to the north-east of Zeerust. Von Donop’s column was straggling through very broken and bush-covered country when it was furiously charged in the flank and rear by two separate bodies of burghers. Kemp, who commanded the flank attack, cut into the line of wagons and destroyed eight of them, killing many of the Kaffir drivers, before he could be driven off. De la Rey and Steenkamp, who rushed the rear-guard, had a more desperate contest. The Boer horsemen got among the two guns of the 4th R.F.A., and held temporary possession of them, but the small escort were veterans of the ‘Fighting Fifth,’ who lived up to the traditions of their famous north-country regiment. Of the gun crews of the section, amounting to about twenty-six men, the young officer, Hill, and sixteen men were hit. Of the escort of Northumberland Fusiliers hardly a man was left standing, and forty-one of the supporting Yeomanry were killed and wounded. It was for some little time a fierce and concentrated struggle at the shortest of ranges. The British horsemen came galloping to the rescue, however, and the attack was finally driven back into that broken country from which it had come. Forty dead Boers upon the ground, with their brave chieftain, Ouisterhuisen, amongst them, showed how manfully the attack had been driven home. The British losses were twenty-eight killed and fifty-six wounded. Somewhat mauled, and with eight missing wagons, the small column made its way back to Zeerust.

From this incident until the end of the year nothing of importance occurred in this part of the seat of war, save for a sharp and well-managed action at Beestekraal upon October 29th, in which seventy-nine Boers were surrounded and captured by Kekewich’s horsemen. The process of attrition went very steadily forwards, and each of the British columns returned its constant tale of prisoners. The blockhouse system had now been extended to such an extent that the Magaliesberg was securely held, and a line had been pushed through from Klerksdorp and Fredericstad to Ventersdorp. One of Colonel Hickie’s Yeomanry patrols was roughly handled near Brakspruit upon November 13th, but with this exception the points scored were all upon one side. Methuen and Kekewich came across early in November from Zeerust to Klerksdorp, and operated from the railway line. The end of the year saw them both in the Wolmaranstad district, where they were gathering up prisoners and clearing the country.

Of the events in the other parts of the Transvaal, during the last three months of the year 1901, there is not much to be said. In all parts the lines of blockhouses and of constabulary posts were neutralising the Boer mobility, and bringing them more and more within reach of the British. The only fighting forces left in the Transvaal were those under Botha in the south-east and those under De la Rey in the west. The others attempted nothing save to escape from their pursuers, and when overtaken they usually gave in without serious opposition. Among the larger hauls may be mentioned that of Dawkins in the Nylstrom district (seventy-six prisoners), Kekewich (seventy-eight), Colenbrander in the north (fifty-seven), Dawkins and Colenbrander (104), Colenbrander (sixty-two); but the great majority of the captures were in smaller bodies, gleaned from the caves, the kloofs, and the farmhouses.

Only two small actions during these months appear to call for any separate notice. The first was an attack made by Buys' commando, upon November 20th, on the Railway Pioneers when at work near Villiersdorp, in the extreme north-east of the Orange River Colony. This corps, consisting mainly of miners from Johannesburg, had done invaluable service during the war. On this occasion a working party of them was suddenly attacked, and most of them taken prisoners. Major Fisher, who commanded the pioneers, was killed, and three other officers with several men were wounded. Colonel Rimington's column appeared upon the scene, however, and drove off the Boers, who left their leader, Buys, a wounded prisoner in our hands.

The second action was a sharp attack delivered by Muller's Boers upon Colonel Park's column on the night of December 19th, at Elandspruit. The fight was sharp while it lasted, but it ended in the repulse of the assailants. The British casualties were six killed and twenty-four wounded. The Boers, who left eight dead behind them, suffered probably to about the same extent.

Already the most striking and pleasing feature in the Transvaal was the tranquillity of its central provinces, and the way in which the population was settling down to its old avocations. Pretoria had resumed its normal quiet life, while its larger and more energetic neighbour was rapidly recovering from its two years of paralysis. Every week more stamps were dropped in the mines, and from month to month a steady increase in the output showed that the great staple industry of the place would soon be as vigorous as ever. Most pleasing of all was the restoration of safety upon the railway lines, which, save for some precautions at night, had resumed their normal traffic. When the observer took his eyes from the dark clouds which shadowed every horizon, he could not but rejoice at the ever-widening central stretch of peaceful blue which told that the storm was nearing its end.

Having now dealt with the campaign in the Transvaal down to the end of 1901, it only remains to bring the chronicle of the events in the Orange River Colony down to the same date. Reference has already been made to two small British reverses which occurred in September, the loss of two guns to the south of the Waterworks near Bloemfontein, and the surprise of the camp of Lord Lovat’s Scouts. There were some indications at this time that a movement had been planned through the passes of the Drakensberg by a small Free State force which should aid Louis Botha’s invasion of Natal. The main movement was checked, however, and the demonstration in aid of it came to nothing.

The blockhouse system had been developed to a very complete extent in the Orange River Colony, and the small bands of Boers found it increasingly difficult to escape from the British columns who were for ever at their heels. The southern portion of the country had been cut off from the northern by a line which extended through Bloemfontein on the east to the Basuto frontier, and on the west to Jacobsdal. To the south of this line the Boer resistance had practically ceased, although several columns moved continually through it, and gleaned up the broken fragments of the commandos. The north-west had also settled down to a large extent, and during the last three months of 1901 no action of importance occurred in that region. Even in the turbulent north-east, which had always been the centre of resistance, there was little opposition to the British columns, which continued every week to send in their tale of prisoners. Of the column commanders, Williams, Damant, Du Moulin, Lowry Cole, and Wilson were the most successful. In their operations they were much aided by the South African Constabulary. One young officer of this force, Major Pack-Beresford, especially distinguished himself by his gallantry and ability. His premature death from enteric was a grave loss to the British army. Save for one skirmish of Colonel Wilson’s early in October, and another of Byng’s on November 14th, there can hardly be said to have been any actual fighting until the events late in December which I am about to describe.

In the meanwhile the peaceful organisation of the country was being pushed forward as rapidly as in the Transvaal, although here the problems presented were of a different order, and the population an exclusively Dutch one. The schools already showed a higher attendance than in the days before the war, while a continual stream of burghers presented themselves to take the oath of allegiance, and even to join the ranks against their own irreconcilable countrymen, whom they looked upon with justice as the real authors of their troubles.

Towards the end of November there were signs that the word had gone forth for a fresh concentration of the fighting Boers in their old haunts in the Heilbron district, and early in December it was known that the indefatigable De Wet was again in the field. He had remained quiet so long that there had been persistent rumours of his injury and even of his death, but he was soon to show that he was as alive as ever. President Steyn was ill of a most serious complaint, caused possibly by the mental and physical sufferings which he had undergone; but with an indomitable resolution which makes one forget and forgive the fatuous policy which brought him and his State to such a pass, he still appeared in his Cape cart at the laager of the faithful remnant of his commandos. To those who remembered how widespread was our conviction of the half-heartedness of the Free Staters at the outbreak of the war, it was indeed a revelation to see them after two years still making a stand against the forces which had crushed them.

It had been long evident that the present British tactics of scouring the country and capturing the isolated burghers must in time bring the war to a conclusion. From the Boer point of view the only hope, or at least the only glory, lay in reassembling once more in larger bodies and trying conclusions with some of the British columns. It was with this purpose that De Wet early in December assembled Wessels, Manie Botha, and others of his lieutenants, together with a force of about two thousand men, in the Heilbron district. Small as this force was, it was admirably mobile, and every man in it was a veteran, toughened and seasoned by two years of constant fighting. De Wet’s first operations were directed against an isolated column of Colonel Wilson’s, which was surrounded within twenty miles of Heilbron. Rimington, in response to a heliographic call for assistance, hurried with admirable promptitude to the scene of action, and joined hands with Wilson. De Wet's men were as numerous, however, as the two columns combined, and they harassed the return march into Heilbron. A determined attack was made on the convoy and on the rearguard, but it was beaten off. That night Rimington's camp was fired into by a large body of Boers, but he had cleverly moved his men away from the fires, so that no harm was done. The losses in these operations were small, but with troops which had not been trained in this method of fighting the situation would have been a serious one. For a fortnight or more after this the burghers contented themselves by skirmishing with British columns and avoiding a drive which Elliot's forces made against them. On December 18th they took the offensive, however, and within a week fought three actions, two of which ended in their favour.

News had come to British headquarters that Kaffir's Kop, to the north-west of Bethlehem, was a centre of Boer activity. Three columns were therefore turned in that direction, Elliot's, Barker's, and Dartnell's. Some desultory skirmishing ensued, which was only remarkable for the death of Haasbroek, a well-known Boer leader. As the columns separated again, unable to find an objective, De Wet suddenly showed one of them that their failure was not due to his absence. Dartnell had retraced his steps nearly as far as Eland's River Bridge, when the Boer leader sprang out of his lair in the Langberg and threw himself upon him. The burghers attempted to ride in, as they had successfully done at Brakenlaagte, but they were opposed by the steady old troopers of the two regiments of Imperial Horse, and by a General who was familiar with every Boer ruse. The horsemen never got nearer than 150 yards to the British line, and were beaten back by the steady fire which met them. Finding that he made no headway, and learning that Campbell's column was coming up from Bethlehem, De Wet withdrew his men after four hours' fighting. Fifteen were hit upon the British side, and the Boer loss seems to have been certainly as great or greater.

De Wet's general aim in his operations seems to have been to check the British blockhouse building. With his main force in the Langberg he could threaten the line which was now being erected between Bethlehem and Harrismith, a line against which his main commando was destined, only two months later, to beat itself in vain. Sixty miles to the north a second line was being run across country from Frankfort to Standerton, and had reached a place called Tafelkop. A covering party of East Lancashires and

Yeomanry watched over the workers, but De Wet had left a portion of his force in that neighbourhood, and they harassed the blockhouse builders to such an extent that General Hamilton, who was in command, found it necessary to send in to Frankfort for support. The British columns there had just returned exhausted from a drive, but three bodies under Damant, Rimington, and Wilson were at once despatched to clear away the enemy.

The weather was so atrocious that the veld resembled an inland sea, with the kopjes as islands rising out of it. By this stage of the war the troops were hardened to all weathers, and they pushed swiftly on to the scene of action. As they approached the spot where the Boers had been reported, the line had been extended over many miles, with the result that it had become very attenuated and dangerously weak in the centre. At this point Colonel Damant and his small staff were alone with the two guns and the maxim, save for a handful of Imperial Yeomanry (91st), who acted as escort to the guns. Across the face of this small force there rode a body of men in khaki uniforms, keeping British formation, and actually firing bogus volleys from time to time in the direction of some distant Boers. Damant and his staff seem to have taken it for granted that these were Rimington’s men, and the clever ruse succeeded to perfection. Nearer and nearer came the strangers, and suddenly throwing off all disguise, they made a dash for the guns. Four rounds of case failed to stop them, and in a few minutes they were over the kopje on which the guns stood and had ridden among the gunners, supported in their attack by a flank fire from a number of dismounted riflemen.

The instant that the danger was realised Damant, his staff, and the forty Yeomen who formed the escort dashed for the crest in the hope of anticipating the Boers. So rapid was the charge of the others that they had overwhelmed the gunners before the supports could reach the hill, and the latter found themselves under the deadly fire of the Boer rifles from above. Damant was hit in four places, all of his staff were wounded, and hardly a man of the small body of Yeomanry was left standing. Nothing could exceed their gallantry. Gaussen their captain fell at their head. On the ridge the men about the guns were nearly all killed or wounded. Of the gun detachment only two men remained, both of them hit, and Jeffcoat their dying captain bequeathed them fifty pounds each in a will drawn upon the spot. In half an hour the centre of the British line had been absolutely annihilated. Modern warfare is on the whole much less bloody than of old, but when one party has gained the tactical mastery it is a choice between speedy surrender and total destruction.

The wide-spread British wings had begun to understand that there was something amiss, and to ride in towards the centre. An officer on the far right peering through his glasses saw those tell-tale puffs at the very muzzles of the British guns, which showed that they were firing case at close quarters. He turned his squadron inwards and soon gathered up Scott’s squadron of Damant’s Horse, and both rode for the kopje. Rimington’s men were appearing on the other side, and the Boers rode off. They were unable to remove the guns which they had taken, because all the horses had perished. ‘I actually thought,’ says one officer who saw them ride away, ‘that I had made a mistake and been fighting our own men. They were dressed in our uniforms and some of them wore the tiger-skin, the badge of Damant’s Horse, round their hats.’ The same officer gives an account of the scene on the gun-kopje. ‘The result when we got to the guns was this, gunners all killed except two (both wounded), pom-pom officers and men all killed, maxim all killed, 91st (the gun escort) one officer and one man not hit, all the rest killed or wounded; staff, every officer hit.’ That is what it means to those who are caught in the vortex of the cyclone. The total loss was about seventy-five.

In this action the Boers, who were under the command of Wessels, delivered their attack with a cleverness and dash which deserved success. Their stratagem, however, depending as it did upon the use of British uniforms and methods, was illegitimate by all the laws of war, and one can but marvel at the long-suffering patience of officers and men who endured such things without any attempt at retaliation. There is too much reason to believe also, that considerable brutality was shown by those Boers who carried the kopje, and the very high proportion of killed to wounded among the British who lay there corroborates the statement of the survivors that several were shot at close quarters after all resistance had ceased.

This rough encounter of Tafelkop was followed only four days later by a very much more serious one at Tweefontein, which proved that even after two years of experience we had not yet sufficiently understood the courage and the cunning of our antagonist. The blockhouse line was being gradually extended from Harrismith to Bethlehem, so as to hold down this turbulent portion of the country. The Harrismith section had been pushed as far as Tweefontein, which is nine miles west of Elands River Bridge, and here a small force was stationed to cover the workers. This column consisted of four squadrons of the 4th Imperial Yeomanry, one gun of the 79th battery, and one pom-pom, the whole under the temporary command of Major Williams of the South Staffords, Colonel Firmin being absent.

Knowing that De Wet and his men were in the neighbourhood, the camp of the Yeomen had been pitched in a position which seemed to secure it against attack. A solitary kopje presented a long slope to the north, while the southern end was precipitous. The outposts were pushed well out upon the plain, and a line of sentries was placed along the crest. The only precaution which seems to have been neglected was to have other outposts at the base of the southern declivity. It appears to have been taken for granted, however, that no attack was to be apprehended from that side, and that in any case it would be impossible to evade the vigilance of the sentries upon the top.

Of all the daring and skilful attacks delivered by the Boers during the war there is certainly none more remarkable than this one. At two o’clock in the morning of a moonlight night De Wet’s forlorn hope assembled at the base of the hill and clambered up to the summit. The fact that it was Christmas Eve may conceivably have had something to do with the want of vigilance upon the part of the sentries. In a season of good will and conviviality the rigour of military discipline may insensibly relax. Little did the sleeping Yeomen in the tents, or the drowsy outposts upon the crest, think of the terrible Christmas visitors who were creeping on to them, or of the grim morning gift which Santa Claus was bearing.

The Boers, stealing up in their stockinged feet, poured under the crest until they were numerous enough to make a rush. It is almost inconceivable how they could have got so far without their presence being suspected by the sentries — but so it was. At last, feeling strong enough to advance, they sprang over the crest and fired into the pickets, and past them into the sleeping camp. The top of the hill being once gained, there was nothing to prevent their comrades from swarming up, and in a very few minutes nearly a thousand Boers were in a position to command the camp. The British were not only completely outnumbered, but were hurried from their sleep into the fight without any clear idea as to the danger or how to meet it, while the hissing sleet of bullets struck many of them down as they rushed out of their tents. Considering how terrible the ordeal was to which they were exposed, these untried Yeomen seem to have behaved very well.

‘Some brave gentlemen ran away at the first shot, but I am thankful to say they were not many,’ says one of their number. The most veteran troops would have been tried very high had they been placed in such a position. ‘The noise and the clamour,’ says one spectator, ‘were awful. The yells of the Dutch, the screams and shrieks of dying men and horses, the cries of natives, howls of dogs, the firing, the galloping of horses, the whistling of bullets, and the whirr volleys make in the air, made up such a compound of awful and diabolical sounds as I never heard before nor hope to hear again. In the confusion some of the men killed each other and some killed themselves. Two Boers who put on helmets were killed by their own people. The men were given no time to rally or to collect their thoughts, for the gallant Boers barged right into them, shooting them down, and occasionally being shot down, at a range of a few yards. Harwich and Watney, who had charge of the maxim, died nobly with all the men of their gun section round them. Reed, the sergeant-major, rushed at the enemy with his clubbed rifle, but was riddled with bullets. Major Williams, the commander, was shot through the stomach as he rallied his men. The gunners had time to fire two rounds before they were overpowered and shot down to a man. For half an hour the resistance was maintained, but at the end of that time the Boers had the whole camp in their possession, and were already hastening to get their prisoners away before the morning should bring a rescue.

The casualties are in themselves enough to show how creditable was the resistance of the Yeomanry. Out of a force of under four hundred men they had six officers and fifty-one men killed, eight officers and eighty men wounded. There have been very few surrenders during the war in which there has been such evidence as this of a determined stand. Nor was it a bloodless victory upon the part of the Boers, for there was evidence that their losses, though less than those of the British, were still severe.

The prisoners, over two hundred in number, were hurried away by the Boers, who seemed under the immediate eye of De Wet to have behaved with exemplary humanity to the wounded. The captives were taken by forced marches to the Basuto border, where they were turned adrift, half clad and without food. By devious ways and after many adventures, they all made their way back again to the British lines. It was well for De Wet that he had shown such promptness in getting away, for within three hours of the end of the action the two regiments of Imperial Horse appeared upon the scene, having travelled seventeen miles in the time. Already, however, the rearguard of the Boers was disappearing into the fastness of the Langberg, where all pursuit was vain.

Such was the short but vigorous campaign of De Wet in the last part of December of the year 1901. It had been a brilliant one, but none the less his bolt was shot, and Tweefontein was the last encounter in which British troops should feel his heavy hand. His operations, bold as they had been, had not delayed by a day the building of that iron cage which was gradually enclosing him. Already it was nearly completed, and in a few more weeks he was destined to find himself and his commando struggling against bars.

CHAPTER 37. THE CAMPAIGN OF JANUARY TO APRIL, 1902.

At the opening of the year 1902 it was evident to every observer that the Boer resistance, spirited as it was, must be nearing its close. By a long succession of captures their forces were much reduced in numbers. They were isolated from the world, and had no means save precarious smuggling of renewing their supplies of ammunition. It was known also that their mobility, which had been their great strength, was decreasing, and that in spite of their admirable horsemastership their supply of remounts was becoming exhausted. An increasing number of the burghers were volunteering for service against their own people, and it was found that all fears as to this delicate experiment were misplaced, and that in the whole army there were no keener and more loyal soldiers.

The chief factor, however, in bringing the Boers to their knees was the elaborate and wonderful blockhouse system, which had been strung across the whole of the enemy's country. The original blockhouses had been far apart, and were a hindrance and an annoyance rather than an absolute barrier to the burghers. The new models, however, were only six hundred yards apart, and were connected by such impenetrable strands of wire that a Boer pithily described it by saying that if one's hat blew over the line anywhere between Ermelo and Standerton one had to walk round Ermelo to fetch it. Use was made of such barriers by the Spaniards in Cuba, but an application of them on such a scale over such an enormous tract of country is one of the curiosities of warfare, and will remain one of several novelties which will make the South African campaign for ever interesting to students of military history.

The spines of this great system were always the railway lines, which were guarded on either side, and down which, as down a road, went flocks, herds, pedestrians, and everything which wished to travel in safety. From these long central cords the lines branched out to right and left, cutting up the great country into manageable districts. A category of them would but weary the reader, but suffice it that by the beginning of the year the south-east of the Transvaal and the north-east of the Orange River Colony, the haunts of Botha and De Wet, had been so intersected that it was obvious that the situation must soon be impossible for both of them. Only on the west of the Transvaal was there a clear run for De la Rey and Kemp. Hence it was expected, as actually occurred, that in this quarter the most stirring events of the close of the campaign would happen.

General Bruce Hamilton in the Eastern Transvaal had continued the energetic tactics which had given such good results in the past. With the new year his number of prisoners fell, but he had taken so many, and had hustled the remainder to such an extent, that the fight seemed to have gone out of the Boers in this district. On January 1st be presented the first-fruits of the year in the shape of twenty-two of Grobler’s burghers. On the 3rd he captured forty-nine, while Wing, co-operating with him, took twenty more. Among these was General Erasmus, who had helped, or failed to help, General Lucas Meyer at Talana Hill. On the 10th Colonel Wing’s column, which was part of Hamilton’s force, struck out again and took forty-two prisoners, including the two Wolmarans. Only two days later Hamilton returned to the same spot, and was rewarded with thirty-two more captures. On the 18th he took twenty-seven, on the 24th twelve, and on the 26th no fewer than ninety. So severe were these blows, and so difficult was it for the Boers to know how to get away from an antagonist who was ready to ride thirty miles in a night in order to fall upon their laager, that the enemy became much scattered and too demoralised for offensive operations. Finding that they had grown too shy in this much shot over district, Hamilton moved farther south, and early in March took a cast round the Vryheid district, where he made some captures, notably General Cherry Emmett, a descendant of the famous Irish rebel, and brother-in-law of Louis Botha. For all these repeated successes it was to the Intelligence Department, so admirably controlled by Colonel Wools-Sampson, that thanks are mainly due.

Whilst Bruce Hamilton was operating so successfully in the Ermelo district, several British columns under Plumer, Spens, and Colville were stationed some fifty miles south to prevent the fugitives from getting away into the mountainous country which lies to the north of Wakkerstroom. On January 3rd a small force of Plumer’s New Zealanders had a brisk skirmish with a party of Boers, whose cattle they captured, though at some loss to themselves. These Boers were strongly reinforced, however, and when on the following day Major Vallentin pursued them with fifty men he found himself at Onverwacht in the presence of several hundred of the enemy, led by Oppermann and Christian Botha. Vallentin was killed and almost all of his small force were hit before British reinforcements, under Colonel Pulteney, drove the Boers off. Nineteen killed and twenty-three wounded were our losses in this most sanguinary little skirmish. Nine dead Boers, with Oppermann himself, were left upon the field of battle. His loss was a serious one to the enemy, as he was one of their most experienced Generals.

From that time until the end these columns, together with Mackenzie’s column to the north of Ermelo, continued to break up all combinations, and to send in their share of prisoners to swell Lord Kitchener’s weekly list. A final drive, organised on April 11th against the Standerton line, resulted in 134 prisoners.

In spite of the very large army in South Africa, so many men were absorbed by the huge lines of communications and the blockhouse system that the number available for active operations was never more than forty or fifty thousand men. With another fifty thousand there is no doubt that at least six months would have been taken from the duration of the war. On account of this shorthandedness Lord Kitchener had to leave certain districts alone, while he directed his attention to those which were more essential. Thus to the north of the Delagoa Railway line there was only one town, Lydenburg, which was occupied by the British. They had, however, an energetic commander in Park of the Devons. This leader, striking out from his stronghold among the mountains, and aided by Urmston from Belfast, kept the commando of Ben Viljoen and the peripatetic Government of Schalk Burger continually upon the move. As already narrated, Park fought a sharp night action upon December 19th, after which, in combination with Urmston, he occupied Dulstroom, only missing the government by a few hours. In January Park and Urmston were again upon the war-path, though the incessant winds, fogs, and rains of that most inclement portion of the Transvaal seriously hampered their operations. Several skirmishes with the commandos of Muller and Trichardt gave no very decisive result, but a piece of luck befell the British on January 25th in the capture of General Viljoen by an ambuscade cleverly arranged by Major Orr in the neighbourhood of Lydenburg. Though a great firebrand before the war, Viljoen had fought bravely and honourably throughout the contest, and he had won the respect and esteem of his enemy.

Colonel Park had had no great success in his last two expeditions, but on February 20th he made an admirable march, and fell upon a Boer laager which lay in placid security in the heart of the hills. One hundred and sixty-four prisoners, including many Boer officers, were the fruits of this success, in which the National Scouts, or ‘tame Boers,’ as they were familiarly called, played a prominent part. This commando was that of Middelburg, which was acting as escort to the government, who again escaped dissolution. Early in March Park was again out on trek, upon one occasion covering seventy miles in a single day. Nothing further of importance came from this portion of the seat of war until March 23rd, when the news reached England that Schalk Burger, Reitz, Lucas Meyer, and others of the Transvaal Government had come into Middelburg, and that they were anxious to proceed to Pretoria to treat. On the Eastern horizon had appeared the first golden gleam of the dawning peace.

Having indicated the course of events in the Eastern Transvaal, north and south of the railway line, I will now treat one or two incidents which occurred in the more central and northern portions of the country. I will then give some account of De Wet’s doings in the Orange River Colony, and finally describe that brilliant effort of De la Rey’s in the west which shed a last glory upon the Boer arms.

In the latter days of December, Colenbrander and Dawkins operating together had put in a great deal of useful work in the northern district, and from Nylstrom to Pietersburg the burghers were continually harried by the activity of these leaders. Late in the month Dawkins was sent down into the Orange River Colony in order to reinforce the troops who were opposed to De Wet. Colenbrander alone, with his hardy colonial forces, swept through the Magaliesburg, and had the double satisfaction of capturing a number of the enemy and of heading off and sending back a war party of Linchwe’s Kaffirs who, incensed by a cattle raid of Kemp’s, were moving down in a direction which would have brought them dangerously near to the Dutch women and children. This instance and several similar ones in the campaign show how vile are the lies which have been told of the use, save under certain well-defined conditions, of armed natives by the British during the war. It would have been a perfectly easy thing at any time for the Government to have raised all the fighting native races of South Africa, but it is not probable that we, who held back our admirable and highly disciplined Sikhs and Ghoorkas, would break our self-imposed restrictions in order to enrol the inferior but more savage races of Africa. Yet no charge has been more often repeated and has caused more piteous protests among the soft-hearted and soft-headed editors of Continental journals.

The absence of Colenbrander in the Rustenburg country gave Beyers a chance of which he was not slow to avail himself. On January 24th, in the early morning, he delivered an attack upon Pietersburg itself, but he was easily driven off by the small garrison. It is probable, however, that the attack was a mere feint in order to enable a number of the inmates of the refugee camp to escape. About a hundred and fifty made off, and rejoined the commandos. There were three thousand Boers in all in this camp, which was shortly afterwards moved down to Natal in order to avoid the recurrence of such an incident.

Colenbrander, having returned to Pietersburg once more, determined to return Beyers's visit, and upon April 8th he moved out with a small force to surprise the Boer laager. The Inniskilling Fusiliers seized the ground which commanded the enemy's position. The latter retreated, but were followed up, and altogether about one hundred and fifty were killed, wounded, and taken. On May 3rd a fresh operation against Beyers was undertaken, and resulted in about the same loss to the Boers. On the other hand, the Boers had a small success against Kitchener's Scouts, killing eighteen and taking thirty prisoners.

There is one incident, however, in connection with the war in this region which one would desire to pass over in silence if such a course were permissible. Some eighty miles to the east of Pietersburg is a wild part of the country called the Spelonken. In this region an irregular corps, named the Bushveld Carbineers, had been operating. It was raised in South Africa, but contained both Colonials and British in its ranks. Its wild duties, its mixed composition, and its isolated situation must have all militated against discipline and restraint, and it appears to have degenerated into a band not unlike those Southern 'bush-whackers' in the American war to whom the Federals showed little mercy. They had given short shrift to the Boer prisoners who had fallen into their hands, the excuse offered for their barbarous conduct being that an officer who had served in the corps had himself been murdered by the Boers. Such a reason, even if it were true, could of course offer no justification for indiscriminate revenge. The crimes were committed in July and August 1901, but it was not until January 1902 that five of the officers were put upon their trial and were found to be guilty as principals or accessories of twelve murders. The corps was disbanded, and three of the accused officers, Handcock, Wilton, and Morant, were sentenced to death, while another, Picton, was cashiered. Handcock and Morant were actually executed. This stern measure shows more clearly than volumes of argument could do how high was the standard of discipline in the British Army, and how heavy was the punishment, and how vain all excuses, where it had been infringed. In the face of this actual outrage and its prompt punishment how absurd becomes that crusade against imaginary outrages preached by an ignorant press abroad, and by renegade Englishmen at home.

To the south of Johannesburg, half-way between that town and the frontier, there is a range of hills called the Zuikerboschrand, which extends across from one railway system to the other. A number of Boers were known to have sought refuge in this country, so upon February 12th a small British force left Klip River Post in order to clear them out. There were 320 men in all, composing the 28th Mounted Infantry, drawn from the Lancashire Fusiliers, Warwicks, and Derbys, most of whom had just arrived from Malta, which one would certainly imagine to be the last place where mounted infantry could be effectively trained. Major Dowell was in command. An advance was made into the hilly country, but it was found that the enemy was in much greater force than had been imagined. The familiar Boer tactics were used with the customary success. The British line was held by a sharp fire in front, while strong flanking parties galloped round each of the wings. It was with great difficulty that any of the British extricated themselves from their perilous position, and the safety of a portion of the force was only secured by the devotion of a handful of officers and men, who gave their lives in order to gain time for their comrades to get away. Twelve killed and fifty wounded were our losses in this unfortunate skirmish, and about one hundred prisoners supplied the victors with a useful addition to their rifles and ammunition. A stronger British force came up next day, and the enemy were driven out of the hills.

A week later, upon February 18th, there occurred another skirmish at Klippan, near Springs, between a squadron of the Scots Greys and a party of Boers who had broken into this central reserve which Lord Kitchener had long kept clear of the enemy. In this action the cavalry were treated as roughly as the mounted infantry had been the week before, losing three officers killed, eight men killed or wounded, and forty-six taken. They had formed a flanking party to General Gilbert Hamilton’s column, but were attacked and overwhelmed so rapidly that the blow had fallen before their comrades could come to their assistance.

One of the consequences of the successful drives about to be described in the Orange River Colony was that a number of the Free Staters came north of the Vaal in order to get away from the extreme pressure upon the south. At the end of March a considerable number had reinforced the local commandos in that district to the east of Springs, no very great distance from Johannesburg, which had always been a storm centre. A cavalry force was stationed at this spot which consisted at that time of the 2nd Queen’s Bays, the 7th Hussars, and some National Scouts, all under Colonel Lawley of the Hussars. After a series of minor engagements east of Springs, Lawley had possessed himself of Boschman’s Kop, eighteen miles from that town, close to the district which was the chief scene of Boer activity. From this base he despatched upon the morning of April 1st three squadrons of the Bays under Colonel Fanshawe, for the purpose of surprising a small force of the enemy which was reported at one of the farms. Fanshawe’s strength was about three hundred men.

The British cavalry found themselves, however, in the position of the hunter who, when he is out for a snipe, puts up a tiger. All went well with the expedition as far as Holspruit, the farm which they had started to search. Commandant Pretorius, to whom it belonged, was taken by the energy of Major Vaughan, who pursued and overtook his Cape cart. It was found, however, that Alberts’s commando was camped at the farm, and that the Bays were in the presence of a very superior force of the enemy. The night was dark, and when firing began it was almost muzzle to muzzle, with the greatest possible difficulty in telling friend from foe. The three squadrons fell back upon some rising ground, keeping admirable order under most difficult circumstances. In spite of the darkness the attack was pressed fiercely home, and with their favourite tactics the burghers rapidly outflanked the position taken up by the cavalry. The British moved by alternate squadrons on to a higher rocky kopje on the east, which could be vaguely distinguished looming in the darkness against the skyline. B squadron, the last to retire, was actually charged and ridden through by the brave assailants, firing from their saddles as they broke through the ranks. The British had hardly time to reach the kopje and to dismount and line its edge when the Boers, yelling loudly, charged with their horses up the steep flanks. Twice they were beaten back, but the third time they seized one corner of the hill and opened a hot fire upon the rear of the line of men who were defending the other side. Dawn was now breaking, and the situation most serious, for the Boers were in very superior numbers and were pushing their pursuit with the utmost vigour and determination. A small party of officers and men whose horses had been shot covered the retreat of their comrades, and continued to fire until all of them, two officers and twenty-three men, were killed or wounded, the whole of their desperate defence being conducted within from thirty to fifty yards of the enemy. The remainder of the regiment was now retired to successive ridges, each of which was rapidly outflanked by the Boers, whose whole method of conducting their attack was extraordinarily skilful. Nothing but the excellent discipline of the overmatched troopers prevented the retreat from becoming a rout. Fortunately, before the pressure became intolerable the 7th Hussars with some artillery came to the rescue, and turned the tide. The Hussars galloped in with such dash that some of them actually got among the Boers with their swords, but the enemy rapidly fell back and disappeared.

In this very sharp and sanguinary cavalry skirmish the Bays lost eighty killed and wounded out of a total force of 270. To stand such losses under such circumstances, and to preserve absolute discipline and order, is a fine test of soldierly virtue. The adjutant, the squadron leaders, and six out of ten officers were killed or wounded. The Boers lost equally heavily. Two Prinsloos, one of them a commandant, and three field-cornets were among the slain, with seventy other casualties. The force under General Alberts was a considerable one, not fewer than six hundred rifles, so that the action at Holspruit is one which adds another name of honour to the battle-roll of the Bays. It is pleasing to add that in this and the other actions which were fought at the end of the war our wounded met with kindness and consideration from the enemy.

We may now descend to the Orange River Colony and trace the course of those operations which were destined to break the power of De Wet’s commando. On these we may concentrate our attention, for the marchings and gleanings and snipings of the numerous small columns in the other portions of the colony, although they involved much arduous and useful work, do not claim a particular account.

After the heavy blow which he dealt Firmin's Yeomanry, De Wet retired, as has been told, into the Langberg, whence he afterwards retreated towards Reitz. There he was energetically pushed by Elliot's columns, which had attained such mobility that 150 miles were performed in three days within a single week. Our rough schoolmasters had taught us our lesson, and the soldiering which accomplished the marches of Bruce Hamilton, Elliot, Rimington, and the other leaders of the end of the war was very far removed from that which is associated with ox-wagons and harmoniums.

Moving rapidly, and covering himself by a succession of rearguard skirmishes, De Wet danced like a will-o'the-wisp in front of and round the British columns. De Lisle, Fanshawe, Byng, Rimington, Dawkins, and Rawlinson were all snatching at him and finding him just beyond their finger-tips. The master-mind at Pretoria had, however, thought out a scheme which was worthy of De Wet himself in its ingenuity. A glance at the map will show that the little branch from Heilbron to Wolvehoek forms an acute angle with the main line. Both these railways were strongly blockhoused and barbed-wired, so that any force which was driven into the angle, and held in it by a force behind it, would be in a perilous position. To attempt to round De Wet's mobile burghers into this obvious pen would have been to show one's hand too clearly. In vain is the net laid in sight of the bird. The drive was therefore made away from this point, with the confident expectation that the guerilla chief would break back through the columns, and that they might then pivot round upon him and hustle him so rapidly into the desired position that he would not realise his danger until it was too late. Byng's column was left behind the driving line to be ready for the expected backward break. All came off exactly as expected. De Wet doubled back through the columns, and one of his commandos stumbled upon Byng's men, who were waiting on the Vlei River to the west of Reitz. The Boers seem to have taken it for granted that, having passed the British driving line, they were out of danger, and for once it was they who were surprised. The South African Light Horse, the New Zealanders, and the Queensland Bushmen all rode in upon them. A fifteen-pounder, the one taken at Tweefontein, and two pom-poms were captured, with thirty prisoners and a considerable quantity of stores.

This successful skirmish was a small matter, however, compared to the importance of being in close touch with De Wet and having a definite objective for the drive. The columns behind expanded suddenly into a spray of mounted men forming a continuous line for over sixty miles. On February 5th the line was advancing, and on the 6th it was known that De Wet was actually within the angle, the mouth of which was spanned by the British line. Hope ran high in Pretoria. The space into which the burgher chief had been driven was bounded by sixty-six miles of blockhouse and wire on one side and thirty on the other, while the third side of the triangle was crossed by fifty-five miles of British horsemen, flanked by a blockhouse line between Kroonstad and Lindley. The tension along the lines of defence was extreme. Infantry guarded every yard of them, and armoured trains patrolled them, while at night searchlights at regular intervals shed their vivid rays over the black expanse of the veld and illuminated the mounted figures who flitted from time to time across their narrow belts of light.

On the 6th De Wet realised his position, and with characteristic audacity and promptness he took means to clear the formidable toils which had been woven round him. The greater part of his command scattered, with orders to make their way as best they might out of the danger. Working in their own country, where every crease and fold of the ground was familiar to them, it is not surprising that most of them managed to make their way through gaps in the attenuated line of horsemen behind them. A few were killed, and a considerable number taken, 270 being the respectable total of the prisoners. Three or four slipped through, however, for every one who stuck in the meshes. De Wet himself was reported to have made his escape by driving cattle against the wire fences which enclosed him. It seems, however, to have been nothing more romantic than a wire-cutter which cleared his path, though cattle no doubt made their way through the gap which he left. With a loss of only three of his immediate followers be Wet won his way out of the most dangerous position which even his adventurous career had ever known. Lord Kitchener had descended to Wolvehoek to be present at the climax of the operations, but it was not fated that he was to receive the submission of the most energetic of his opponents, and he returned to Pretoria to weave a fresh mesh around him.

This was not hard to do, as the Boer General had simply escaped from one pen into another, though a larger one. After a short rest to restore the columns, the whole pack were full cry upon his heels once more. An acute angle is formed by the Wilge River on one side and the line of blockhouses between Harrismith and Van Reenen upon the other. This was strongly manned by troops and five columns; those of Rawlinson, Nixon, Byng, Rimington, and Keir herded the broken commandos into the trap. From February 20th the troops swept in an enormous skirmish line across the country, ascending hills, exploring kloofs, searching river banks, and always keeping the enemy in front of them. At last, when the pressure was severely felt, there came the usual breakback, which took the form of a most determined night attack upon the British line. This was delivered shortly after midnight on February 23rd. It struck the British cordon at the point of juncture between Byng's column and that of Rimington. So huge were the distances which had to be covered, and so attenuated was the force which covered them, that the historical thin red line was a massive formation compared to its khaki equivalent. The chain was frail and the links were not all carefully joined, but each particular link was good metal, and the Boer impact came upon one of the best. This was the 7th New Zealand Contingent, who proved themselves to be worthy comrades to their six gallant predecessors. Their patrols were broken by the rush of wild, yelling, firing horsemen, but the troopers made a most gallant resistance. Having pierced the line the Boers, who were led in their fiery rush by Manie Botha, turned to their flank, and, charging down the line of weak patrols, overwhelmed one after another and threatened to roll up the whole line. They had cleared a gap of half a mile, and it seemed as if the whole Boer force would certainly escape through so long a gap in the defences. The desperate defence of the New Zealanders gave time, however, for the further patrols, which consisted of Cox's New South Wales Mounted Infantry, to fall back almost at right angles so as to present a fresh face to the attack. The pivot of the resistance was a maxim gun, most gallantly handled by Captain Begbie and his men. The fight at this point was almost muzzle to muzzle, fifty or sixty New Zealanders and Australians with the British gunners holding off a force of several hundred of the best fighting men of the Boer forces. In this desperate duel many dropped on both sides. Begbie died beside his gun, which fired eighty rounds before it jammed. It was run back by its crew in order to save it from capture. But reinforcements were coming up, and the Boer attack was beaten back. A number of them had escaped, however, through the opening which they had cleared, and it was conjectured that the wonderful De Wet was among them. How fierce was the storm which had broken on the New Zealanders may be shown by their roll of twenty killed and forty wounded, while thirty dead

Boers were picked up in front of their picket line. Of eight New Zealand officers seven are reported to have been hit, an even higher proportion than that which the same gallant race endured at the battle of Rhenoster Kop more than a year before.

It was feared at first that the greater part of the Boers might have escaped upon this night of the 23rd, when Manie Botha’s storming party burst through the ranks of the New Zealanders. It was soon discovered that this was not so, and the columns as they closed in had evidence from the numerous horsemen who scampered aimlessly over the hills in front of them that the main body of the enemy was still in the toils. The advance was in tempestuous weather and over rugged country, but the men were filled with eagerness, and no precaution was neglected to keep the line intact.

This time their efforts were crowned with considerable success. A second attempt was made by the corraled burghers to break out on the night of February 26th, but it was easily repulsed by Nixon. The task of the troopers as the cordon drew south was more and more difficult, and there were places traversed upon the Natal border where an alpen stock would have been a more useful adjunct than a horse. At six o’clock on the morning of the 27th came the end. Two Boers appeared in front of the advancing line of the Imperial Light Horse and held up a flag. They proved to be Truter and De Jager, ready to make terms for their commando. The only terms offered were absolute surrender within the hour. The Boers had been swept into a very confined space, which was closely hemmed in by troops, so that any resistance must have ended in a tragedy. Fortunately there was no reason for desperate councils in their case, since they did not fight as Lotter had done, with the shadow of judgment hanging over him. The burghers piled arms, and all was over.

The total number captured in this important drive was 780 men, including several leaders, one of whom was De Wet’s own son. It was found that De Wet himself had been among those who had got away through the picket lines on the night of the 23rd. Most of the commando were Transvaalers, and it was typical of the wide sweep of the net that many of them were the men who had been engaged against the 28th Mounted Infantry in the district south of Johannesburg upon the 12th of the same month. The loss of 2000 horses and 50,000 cartridges meant as much as that of the men to the

Boer army. It was evident that a few more such blows would clear the Orange River Colony altogether.

The wearied troopers were allowed little rest, for in a couple of days after their rendezvous at Harrismith they were sweeping back again to pick up all that they had missed. This drive, which was over the same ground, but sweeping backwards towards the Heilbron to Wolvehoek line, ended in the total capture of 147 of the enemy, who were picked out of holes, retrieved from amid the reeds of the river, called down out of trees, or otherwise collected. So thorough were the operations that it is recorded that the angle which formed the apex of the drive was one drove of game upon the last day, all the many types of antelope, which form one of the characteristics and charms of the country, having been herded into it.

More important even than the results of the drive was the discovery of one of De Wet's arsenals in a cave in the Vrede district. Half-way down a precipitous krantz, with its mouth covered by creepers, no writer of romance could have imagined a more fitting headquarters for a guerilla chief. The find was made by Ross's Canadian Scouts, who celebrated Dominion Day by this most useful achievement. Forty wagon-loads of ammunition and supplies were taken out of the cave. De Wet was known to have left the north-east district, and to have got across the railway, travelling towards the Vaal as if it were his intention to join De la Rey in the Transvaal. The Boer resistance had suddenly become exceedingly energetic in that part, and several important actions had been fought, to which we will presently turn.

Before doing so it would be as well to bring the chronicle of events in the Orange River Colony down to the conclusion of peace. There were still a great number of wandering Boers in the northern districts and in the frontier mountains, who were assiduously, but not always successfully, hunted down by the British troops. Much arduous and useful work was done by several small columns, the Colonial Horse and the Artillery Mounted Rifles especially distinguishing themselves. The latter corps, formed from the gunners whose field-pieces were no longer needed, proved themselves to be a most useful body of men; and the British gunner, when he took to carrying his gun, vindicated the reputation which he had won when his gun had carried him.

From the 1st to the 4th of May a successful drive was conducted by many columns in the often harried but never deserted Lindley to Kroonstad district. The result was propitious, as no fewer than 321 prisoners were brought in. Of these, 150 under Mentz were captured in one body as they attempted to break through the encircling cordon.

Amid many small drives and many skirmishes, one stands out for its severity. It is remarkable as being the last action of any importance in the campaign. This was the fight at Moolman’s Spruit, near Ficksburg, upon April 20th, 1902. A force of about one hundred Yeomanry and forty Mounted Infantry (South Staffords) was despatched by night to attack an isolated farm in which a small body of Boers was supposed to be sleeping. Colonel Perceval was in command. The farm was reached after a difficult march, but the enemy were found to have been forewarned, and to be in much greater strength than was anticipated. A furious fire was opened on the advancing troops, who were clearly visible in the light of a full moon. Sir Thomas Fowler was killed and several men of the Yeomanry were hit. The British charged up to the very walls, but were unable to effect an entrance, as the place was barricaded and loopholed. Captain Blackwood, of the Staffords, was killed in the attack. Finding that the place was impregnable, and that the enemy outnumbered him, Colonel Perceval gave the order to retire, a movement which was only successfully carried out because the greater part of the Boer horses had been shot. By morning the small British force had extricated itself, from its perilous position with a total loss of six killed, nineteen wounded, and six missing. The whole affair was undoubtedly a cleverly planned Boer ambush, and the small force was most fortunate in escaping destruction.

One other isolated incident may be mentioned here, though it occurred far away in the Vryheid district of the Transvaal. This was the unfortunate encounter between Zulus and Boers by which the latter lost over fifty of their numbers under deplorable circumstances. This portion of the Transvaal has only recently been annexed, and is inhabited by warlike Zulus, who are very different from the debased Kaffirs of the rest of the country. These men had a blood-feud against the Boers, which was embittered by the fact that they had lost heavily through Boer depredations. Knowing that a party of fifty-nine men were sleeping in a farmhouse, the Zulus crept on to it and slaughtered every man of the inmates. Such an incident is much to be regretted, and yet, looking back upon the long course of the war, and remembering the turbulent tribes who surrounded the combatants — Swazis, Basutos, and Zulus — we may well congratulate ourselves that we have been able to restrain those black warriors, and to escape the brutalities and the bitter memories of a barbarian invasion.

CHAPTER 38. DE LA REY’S CAMPAIGN OF 1902.

IT will be remembered that at the close of 1901 Lord Methuen and Colonel Kekewich had both come across to the eastern side of their district and made their base at the railway line in the Klerksdorp section. Their position was strengthened by the fact that a blockhouse cordon now ran from Klerksdorp to Ventersdorp, and from Ventersdorp to Potchefstroom, so that this triangle could be effectively controlled. There remained, however, a huge tract of difficult country which was practically in the occupation of the enemy. Several thousand stalwarts were known to be riding with De la Rey and his energetic lieutenant Kemp. The strenuous operations of the British in the Eastern Transvaal and in the Orange River Colony had caused this district to be comparatively neglected, and so everything was in favour of an aggressive movement of the Boers. There was a long lull after the unsuccessful attack upon Kekewich’s camp at Moedwill, but close observers of the war distrusted this ominous calm and expected a storm to follow.

The new year found the British connecting Ventersdorp with Tafelkop by a blockhouse line. The latter place had been a centre of Boer activity. Colonel Hickie’s column covered this operation. Meanwhile Methuen had struck across through Wolmaranstad as far as Vryburg. In these operations, which resulted in constant small captures, he was assisted by a column under Major Paris working from Kimberley. From Vryburg Lord Methuen made his way in the middle of January to Lichtenburg, meeting with a small rebuff in the neighbourhood of that town, for a detachment of Yeomanry was overwhelmed by General Celliers, who killed eight, wounded fifteen, and captured forty. From Lichtenburg Lord Methuen continued his enormous trek, and arrived on February 1st at Klerksdorp once more. Little rest was given to his hard-worked troops, and they were sent off again within the week under the command of Von Donop, with the result that on February 8th, near Wolmaranstad, they captured Potgieter’s laager with forty Boer prisoners. Von Donop remained at Wolmaranstad until late in

February; On the 23rd he despatched an empty convoy back to Klerksdorp, the fate of which will be afterwards narrated.

Kekewich and Hickie had combined their forces at the beginning of February. On February 4th an attempt was made by them to surprise General De la Rey. The mounted troops who were despatched under Major Leader failed in this enterprise, but they found and overwhelmed the laager of Sarel Alberts, capturing 132 prisoners. By stampeding the horses the Boer retreat was cut off, and the attack was so furiously driven home, especially by the admirable Scottish Horse, that few of the enemy got away. Alberts himself with all his officers were among the prisoners. From this time until the end of February this column was not seriously engaged.

It has been stated above that on February 23rd Von Donop sent in an empty convoy from Wolmaranstad to Klerksdorp, a distance of about fifty miles. Nothing had been heard for some time of De la Rey, but he had called together his men and was waiting to bring off some coup. The convoy gave him the very opportunity for which he sought.

The escort of the convoy consisted of the 5th Imperial Yeomanry, sixty of Paget’s Horse, three companies of the ubiquitous Northumberland Fusiliers, two guns of the 4th R.F.A., and a pom-pom, amounting in all to 630 men. Colonel Anderson was in command. On the morning of Tuesday, February 25th, the convoy was within ten miles of its destination, and the sentries on the kopjes round the town could see the gleam of the long line of white-tilted wagons. Their hazardous voyage was nearly over, and yet they were destined to most complete and fatal wreck within sight of port. So confident were they that the detachment of Paget’s Horse was permitted to ride on the night before into the town. It was as well, for such a handful would have shared and could not have averted the disaster.

The night had been dark and wet, and the Boers under cover of it had crept between the sleeping convoy and the town. Some bushes which afford excellent cover lie within a few hundred yards of the road, and here the main ambush was laid. In the first grey of the morning the long line of the convoy, 130 wagons in all, came trailing past — guns and Yeomanry in front, Fusiliers upon the flanks and rear. Suddenly the black bank of scrub was outlined in flame, and a furious rifle fire was opened upon the head of the column. The troops behaved admirably under most difficult circumstances. A counter-attack by the Fusiliers and some of the Yeomanry, under cover of shrapnel from the guns, drove the enemy out of the scrub and silenced his fire at this point. It was evident, however, that he was present in force, for firing soon broke out along the whole left flank, and the rearguard found itself as warmly attacked as the van. Again, however, the assailants were driven off. It was now broad daylight, and the wagons, which had got into great confusion in the first turmoil of battle, had been remarshalled and arranged. It was Colonel Anderson's hope that he might be able to send them on into safety while he with the escort covered their retreat. His plan was certainly the best one, and if it did not succeed it was due to nothing which he could avert, but to the nature of the ground and the gallantry of the enemy.

The physical obstacle consisted in a very deep and difficult spruit, the Jagd Spruit, which forms an ugly passage in times of peace, but which when crowded and choked with stampeding mules and splintering wagons, under their terrified conductors, soon became impassable. Here the head of the column was clubbed and the whole line came to a stand. Meanwhile the enemy, adopting their new tactics, came galloping in on the left flank and on the rear. The first attack was repelled by the steady fire of the Fusiliers, but on the second occasion the horsemen got up to the wagons, and galloping down them were able to overwhelm in detail the little knots of soldiers who were scattered along the flank. The British, who were outnumbered by at least three to one, made a stout resistance, and it was not until seven o'clock that the last shot was fired. The result was a complete success to the burghers, but one which leaves no shadow of discredit on any officer or man among those who were engaged. Eleven officers and 176 men fell out of about 550 actually engaged. The two guns were taken. The convoy was no use to the Boers, so the teams were shot and the wagons burned before they withdrew. The prisoners too, they were unable to retain, and their sole permanent trophies consisted of the two guns, the rifles, and the ammunition. Their own losses amounted to about fifty killed and wounded.

A small force sallied out from Klerksdorp in the hope of helping Anderson, but on reaching the Jagd Drift it was found that the fighting was over and that the field was in possession of the Boers. De la Rey was seen in person among the burghers, and it is pleasant to add that he made himself conspicuous by his humanity to the wounded. His force drew off in the course of the morning, and was soon out of reach of immediate pursuit, though this was attempted by Kekewich, Von Donop, and Grenfell. It was important to regain the guns if possible, as they were always a menace to the blockhouse system, and for this purpose Grenfell with sixteen hundred horsemen was despatched to a point south of Lichtenburg, which was conjectured to be upon the Boer line of retreat. At the same time Lord Methuen was ordered up from Vryburg in order to cooperate in this movement, and to join his forces to those of Grenfell. It was obvious that with an energetic and resolute adversary like De la Rey there was great danger of these two forces being taken in detail, but it was hoped that each was strong enough to hold its own until the other could come to its aid. The result was to show that the danger was real and the hope fallacious.

It was on March 2nd that Methuen left Vryburg. The column was not his old one, consisting of veterans of the trek, but was the Kimberley column under Major Paris, a body of men who had seen much less service and were in every way less reliable. It included a curious mixture of units, the most solid of which were four guns (two of the 4th, and two of the 38th R.F.A.), 200 Northumberland Fusiliers, and 100 Loyal North Lancashires. The mounted men included 5th Imperial Yeomanry (184), Cape Police (233), Cullinan’s Horse (64), 86th Imperial Yeomanry (110), Diamond Fields Horse (92), Dennison’ s Scouts (58), Ashburner’s Horse (126), and British South African Police (24). Such a collection of samples would be more in place, one would imagine, in a London procession than in an operation which called for discipline and cohesion. In warfare the half is often greater than the whole, and the presence of a proportion of halfhearted and inexperienced men may be a positive danger to their more capable companions.

Upon March 6th Methuen, marching east towards Lichtenburg, came in touch near Leeuwspruit with Van Zyl’s commando, and learned in the small skirmish which ensued that some of his Yeomanry were unreliable and ill-instructed. Having driven the enemy off by his artillery fire, Methuen moved to Tweebosch, where he laagered until next morning. At 3 A.M. of the 7th the ox-convoy was sent on, under escort of half of his little force. The other half followed at 4. 20, so as to give the slow-moving oxen a chance of keeping ahead. It was evident, however, immediately after the column had got started that the enemy were all round in great numbers, and that an attack in force was to be expected. Lord Methuen gave orders therefore that the ox-wagons should be halted and that the mule-transport should close upon them so as to form one solid block, instead of a straggling line. At the same time he reinforced his rearguard with mounted men and with two guns, for it was in that quarter that the enemy appeared to be most numerous and aggressive. An attack was also developing upon the right flank, which was held off by the infantry and by the second section of the guns.

It has been said that Methuen’s horsemen were for the most part inexperienced irregulars. Such men become in time excellent soldiers, as all this campaign bears witness, but it is too much to expose them to a severe ordeal in the open field when they are still raw and untrained. As it happened, this particular ordeal was exceedingly severe, but nothing can excuse the absolute failure of the troops concerned to rise to the occasion. Had Methuen’s rearguard consisted of Imperial Light Horse, or Scottish Horse, it is safe to say that the battle of Tweebosch would have had a very different ending.

What happened was that a large body of Boers formed up in five lines and charged straight home at the rear screen and rearguard, firing from their saddles as they had done at Brakenlaagte. The sight of those wide-flung lines of determined men galloping over the plain seems to have been too much for the nerves of the unseasoned troopers. A panic spread through their ranks, and in an instant they had turned their horses’ heads and were thundering to their rear, leaving the two guns uncovered and streaming in wild confusion past the left flank of the jeering infantry who were lying round the wagons. The limit of their flight seems to have been the wind of their horses, and most of them never drew rein until they had placed many miles between themselves and the comrades whom they had deserted. ‘It was pitiable,’ says an eye-witness, ‘to see the grand old General begging them to stop, but they would not; a large body of them arrived in Kraaipan without firing a shot,’ It was a South African ‘Battle of the Spurs.’

By this defection of the greater portion of the force the handful of brave men who remained were left in a hopeless position. The two guns of the 38th battery were overwhelmed and ridden over by the Boer horsemen, every man being killed or wounded, including Lieutenant Nesham, who acted up to the highest traditions of his corps.

The battle, however, was not yet over. The infantry were few in number, but they were experienced troops, and they maintained the struggle for some hours in the face of overwhelming numbers. Two hundred of the Northumberland Fusiliers lay round the wagons and held the Boers off from their prey. With them were the two remaining guns, which were a mark for a thousand Boer riflemen. It was while encouraging by his presence and example the much-tried gunners of this section that the gallant Methuen was wounded by a bullet which broke the bone of his thigh. Lieutenant Venning and all the detachment fell with their General round the guns.

An attempt had been made to rally some of the flying troopers at a neighbouring kraal, and a small body of Cape Police and Yeomanry under the command of Major Paris held out there for some hours. A hundred of the Lancashire Infantry aided them in their stout defence. But the guns taken by the Boers from Von Donop’s convoy had free play now that the British guns were out of action, and they were brought to bear with crushing effect upon both the kraal and the wagons. Further resistance meant a useless slaughter, and orders were given for a surrender. Convoy, ammunition, guns, horses — nothing was saved except the honour of the infantry and the gunners. The losses, 68 killed and 121 wounded, fell chiefly upon these two branches of the service. There were 205 unwounded prisoners.

This, the last Boer victory in the war, reflected equal credit upon their valour and humanity, qualities which had not always gone hand in hand in our experience of them. Courtesy and attention were extended to the British wounded, and Lord Methuen was sent under charge of his chief medical officer, Colonel Townsend (the doctor as severely wounded as the patient), into Klerksdorp. In De la Rey we have always found an opponent who was as chivalrous as he was formidable. The remainder of the force reached the Kimberley to Mafeking railway line in the direction of Kraaipan, the spot where the first bloodshed of the war had occurred some twenty-nine months before.

On Lord Methuen himself no blame can rest for this unsuccessful action. If the workman’s tool snaps in his hand he cannot be held responsible for the failure of his task. The troops who misbehaved were none of his training. ‘If you hear anyone slang him,’ says one of his men, ‘you are to tell them that he is the finest General and the truest gentleman that ever fought in this war.’ Such was the tone of his own troopers, and such also that of the spokesmen of the nation when they commented upon the disaster in the Houses of Parliament. It was a fine example of British justice and sense of fair play, even in that bitter moment, that to hear his eulogy one would have thought that the occasion had been one when thanks were being returned for a victory. It is a generous public with fine instincts, and Paul Methuen, wounded and broken, still remained in their eyes the heroic soldier and the chivalrous man of honour.

The De Wet country had been pretty well cleared by the series of drives which have already been described, and Louis Botha’s force in the Eastern Transvaal had been much diminished by the tactics of Bruce Hamilton and Wools-Sampson. Lord Kitchener was able, therefore, to concentrate his troops and his attention upon that wide-spread western area in which General De la Rey had dealt two such shrewd blows within a few weeks of each other. Troops were rapidly concentrated at Klerksdorp. Kekewich, Walter Kitchener, Rawlinson, and Rochfort, with a number of small columns, were ready in the third week of March to endeavour to avenge Lord Methuen.

The problem with which Lord Kitchener was confronted was a very difficult one, and he has never shown more originality and audacity than in the fashion in which he handled it. De la Rey’s force was scattered over a long tract of country, capable of rapidly concentrating for a blow, but otherwise as intangible and elusive as a phantom army. Were Lord Kitchener simply to launch ten thousand horsemen at him, the result would be a weary ride over illimitable plains without sight of a Boer, unless it were a distant scout upon the extreme horizon. De la Rey and his men would have slipped away to his northern hiding-places beyond the Marico River. There was no solid obstacle here, as in the Orange River Colony, against which the flying enemy could be rounded up. One line of blockhouses there was, it is true — the one called the Schoonspruit cordon, which flanked the De la Rey country. It flanked it, however, upon the same side as that on which the troops were assembled. If the troops were only on the other side, and De la Rey was between them and the blockhouse line, then, indeed, something might be done. But to place the troops there, and then bring them instantly back again, was to put such a strain upon men and horses as had never yet been done upon a large scale in the course of the war. Yet Lord Kitchener knew the mettle of the men whom he commanded, and he was aware that there were no exertions of which the human frame is capable which he might not confidently demand.

The precise location of the Boer laagers does not appear to have been known, but it was certain that a considerable number of them were scattered about thirty miles or so to the west of Klerksdorp and the Schoonspruit line.

The plan was to march a British force right through them, then spread out into a wide line and come straight back, driving the burghers on to the cordon of blockhouses, which had been strengthened by the arrival of three regiments of Highlanders. But to get to the other side of the Boers it was necessary to march the columns through by night. It was a hazardous operation, but the secret was well kept, and the movement was so well carried out that the enemy had no time to check it. On the night of Sunday, March 23rd, the British horsemen passed stealthily in column through the De la Rey country, and then, spreading out into a line, which from the left wing at Lichtenburg to the right wing at Commando Drift measured a good eighty miles, they proceeded to sweep back upon their traces. In order to reach their positions the columns had, of course, started at different points of the British blockhouse line, and some had a good deal farther to go than others, while the southern extension of the line was formed by Rochfort’s troops, who had moved up from the Vaal. Above him from south to north came Walter Kitchener, Rawlinson, and Kekewich in the order named.

On the morning of Monday, March 24th, a line of eighty miles of horsemen, without guns or transport, was sweeping back towards the blockhouses, while the country between was filled with scattered parties of Boers who were seeking for gaps by which to escape. It was soon learned from the first prisoners that De la Rey was not within the cordon. His laager had been some distance farther west. But the sight of fugitive horsemen rising and dipping over the rolling veld assured the British that they had something within their net. The catch was, however, by no means as complete as might have been desired. Three hundred men in khaki slipped through between the two columns in the early morning. Another large party escaped to the southwards. Some of the Boers adopted extraordinary devices in order to escape from the ever-narrowing cordon. ‘Three, in charge of some cattle, buried themselves, and left a small hole to breathe through with a tube. Some men began to probe with bayonets in the new-turned earth and got immediate and vociferous subterranean yells. Another man tried the same game and a horse stepped on him. He writhed and reared the horse, and practically the horse found the prisoner for us.’ But the operations achieved one result, which must have lifted a load of anxiety from Lord Kitchener’s mind. Three fifteen-pounders, two pom-poms, and a large amount of ammunition were taken. To Kekewich and the Scottish Horse fell the honour of the capture, Colonel Wools-Sampson and Captain

Rice heading the charge and pursuit. By this means the constant menace to the blockhouses was lessened, if not entirely removed. One hundred and seventy-five Boers were disposed of, nearly all as prisoners, and a considerable quantity of transport was captured. In this operation the troops had averaged from seventy to eighty miles in twenty-six hours without change of horses. To such a point had the slow-moving ponderous British Army attained after two years' training of that stern drill-master, necessity.

The operations had attained some success, but nothing commensurate with the daring of the plan or the exertions of the soldiers. Without an instant's delay, however, Lord Kitchener struck a second blow at his enemy. Before the end of March Kekewich, Rawlinson, and Walter Kitchener were all upon the trek once more. Their operations were pushed farther to the west than in the last drive, since it was known that on that occasion De la Rey and his main commando had been outside the cordon.

It was to one of Walter Kitchener's lieutenants that the honour fell to come in direct contact with the main force of the burghers. This General had moved out to a point about forty miles west of Klerksdorp. Forming his laager there, he despatched Cookson on March 30th with seventeen hundred men to work further westward in the direction of the Harts River. Under Cookson's immediate command were the 2nd Canadian Mounted Infantry, Damant's Horse, and four guns of the 7th R.F.A. His lieutenant, Keir, commanded the 28th Mounted Infantry, the Artillery Mounted Rifles, and 2nd Kitchener's Fighting Scouts. The force was well mounted, and carried the minimum of baggage.

It was not long before this mobile force found itself within touch of the enemy. The broad weal made by the passing of a convoy set them off at full cry, and they were soon encouraged by the distant cloud of dust which shrouded the Boer wagons. The advance guard of the column galloped at the top of their speed for eight miles, and closed in upon the convoy, but found themselves faced by an escort of five hundred Boers, who fought a clever rearguard action, and covered their charge with great skill. At the same time Cookson closed in upon his mounted infantry, while on the other side De la Rey's main force fell back in order to reinforce the escort. British and Boers were both riding furiously to help their own comrades. The two forces were fairly face to face.

Perceiving that he was in front of the whole Boer army, and knowing that he might expect reinforcements, Cookson decided to act upon the defensive. A position was rapidly taken up along the Brakspruit, and preparations made to resist the impending attack. The line of defence was roughly the line of the spruit, but for some reason, probably to establish a cross fire, one advanced position was occupied upon either flank. On the left flank was a farmhouse, which was held by two hundred men of the Artillery Rifles. On the extreme right was another outpost of twenty-four Canadians and forty-five Mounted Infantry. They occupied no defensible position, and their situation was evidently a most dangerous one, only to be justified by some strong military reason which is not explained by any account of the action.

The Boer guns had opened fire, and considerable bodies of the enemy appeared upon the flanks and in front. Their first efforts were devoted towards getting possession of the farmhouse, which would give them a point d'appui from which they could turn the whole line. Some five hundred of them charged on horseback, but were met by a very steady fire from the Artillery Rifles, while the guns raked them with shrapnel. They reached a point within five hundred yards of the building, but the fire was too hot, and they wheeled round in rapid retreat. Dismounting in a mealie-patch they skirmished up towards the farmhouse once more, but they were again checked by the fire of the defenders and by a pompom which Colonel Keir had brought up. No progress whatever was made by the attack in this quarter.

In the meantime the fate which might have been foretold had befallen the isolated detachment of Canadians and 28th Mounted Infantry upon the extreme right. Bruce Carruthers, the Canadian officer in command, behaved with the utmost gallantry, and was splendidly seconded by his men. Overwhelmed by vastly superior numbers, amid a perfect hail of bullets they fought like heroes to the end. 'There have been few finer instances of heroism in the course of the campaign,' says the reticent Kitchener in his official despatch. Of the Canadians eighteen were hit out of twenty-one, and the Mounted Infantry hard by lost thirty out of forty-five before they surrendered.

This advantage gained upon the right flank was of no assistance to the Boers in breaking the British line. The fact that it was so makes it the more difficult to understand why this outpost was so exposed. The burghers had practically surrounded Cookson's force, and De la Rey and Kemp urged on the attack; but their artillery fire was dominated by the British guns, and no weak point could be found in the defence. At 1 o'clock the attack had been begun, and at 5.30 it was finally abandoned, and De la Rey was in full retreat. That he was in no sense routed is shown by the fact that Cookson did not attempt to follow him up or to capture his guns; but at least he had failed in his purpose, and had lost more heavily than in any engagement which he had yet fought. The moral effect of his previous victories had also been weakened, and his burghers had learned, if they had illusions upon the subject, that the men who fled at Tweebosch were not typical troopers of the British Army. Altogether, it was a well-fought and useful action, though it cost the British force some two hundred casualties, of which thirty-five were fatal. Cookson's force stood to arms all night until the arrival of Walter Kitchener's men in the morning.

General Ian Hamilton, who had acted for some time as Chief of the Staff to Lord Kitchener, had arrived on April 8th at Klerksdorp to take supreme command of the whole operations against De la Rey. Early in April the three main British columns had made a rapid cast round without success. To the very end the better intelligence and the higher mobility seem to have remained upon the side of the Boers, who could always force a fight when they wished and escape when they wished. Occasionally, however, they forced one at the wrong time, as in the instance which I am about to describe.

Hamilton had planned a drive to cover the southern portion of De la Rey's country, and for this purpose, with Hartebeestefontein for his centre, he was manoeuvring his columns so as to swing them into line and then sweep back towards Klerksdorp. Kekewich, Rawlinson, and Walter Kitchener were all manoeuvring for this purpose. The Boers, however, game to the last, although they were aware that their leaders had gone in to treat, and that peace was probably due within a few days, determined to have one last gallant fall with a British column. The forces of Kekewich were the farthest to the westward, and also, as the burghers thought, the most isolated, and it was upon them, accordingly, that the attack was made. In the morning of April 11th, at a place called Rooiwal, the enemy, who had moved up from Wolmaranstad, nineteen hundred strong, under Kemp and Vermaas, fell with the utmost impetuosity upon the British column. There was no preliminary skirmishing, and a single gallant charge by 1500 Boers both opened and ended the engagement. 'I was just saying to the staff officer that there were no Boers within twenty miles,' says one who was present, ‘when we heard a roar of musketry and saw a lot of men galloping down on us.’ The British were surprised but not shaken by this unexpected apparition. ‘I never saw a more splendid attack. They kept a distinct line,’ says the eye-witness. Another spectator says, ‘They came on in one long line four deep and knee to knee.’ It was an old-fashioned cavalry charge, and the fact that it got as far as it did shows that we have over rated the stopping power of modern rifles. They came for a good five hundred yards under direct fire, and were only turned within a hundred of the British line. The Yeomanry, the Scottish Horse, and the Constabulary poured a steady fire upon the advancing wave of horsemen, and the guns opened with case at two hundred yards. The Boers were stopped, staggered, and turned. Their fire, or rather the covering fire of those who had not joined in the charge, had caused some fifty casualties, but their own losses were very much more severe. The fierce Potgieter fell just in front of the British guns. ‘Thank goodness he is dead!’ cried one of his wounded burghers, ‘for he sjamboked me into the firing line this morning.’ Fifty dead and a great number of wounded were left upon the field of battle. Rawlinson’s column came up on Kekewich’s left, and the Boer flight became a rout, for they were chased for twenty miles, and their two guns were captured. It was a brisk and decisive little engagement, and it closed the Western campaign, leaving the last trick, as well as the game, to the credit of the British. From this time until the end there was a gleaning of prisoners but little fighting in De la Rey’s country, the most noteworthy event being a surprise visit to Schweizer-Renecke by Rochfort, by which some sixty prisoners were taken, and afterwards the drive of Ian Hamilton’s forces against the Mafeking railway line by which no fewer than 364 prisoners were secured. In this difficult and well-managed operation the gaps between the British columns were concealed by the lighting of long veld-fires and the discharge of rifles by scattered scouts. The newly arrived Australian Commonwealth Regiments gave a brilliant start to the military history of their united country by the energy of their marching and the thoroughness of their entrenching.

Upon May 29th, only two days before the final declaration of peace, a raid was made by a few Boers upon the native cattle reserves near Fredericstad. A handful of horsemen pursued them, and were ambushed by a considerable body of the enemy in some hilly country ten miles from the British lines. Most of the pursuers got away in safety, but young Sutherland, second lieutenant of the Seaforths, and only a few months from Eton, found himself separated from his horse and in a hopeless position. Scorning to surrender, the lad actually fought his way upon foot for over a mile before he was shot down by the horsemen who circled round him. Well might the Boer commander declare that in the whole course of the war he had seen no finer example of British courage. It is indeed sad that at this last instant a young life should be thrown away, but Sutherland died in a noble fashion for a noble cause, and many inglorious years would be a poor substitute for the example and tradition which such a death will leave behind.

CHAPTER 39. THE END.

It only remains in one short chapter to narrate the progress of the peace negotiations, the ultimate settlement, and the final consequences of this long-drawn war. However disheartening the successive incidents may have been in which the Boers were able to inflict heavy losses upon us and to renew their supplies of arms and ammunition, it was none the less certain that their numbers were waning and that the inevitable end was steadily approaching. With mathematical precision the scientific soldier in Pretoria, with his web of barbed wire radiating out over the whole country, was week by week wearing them steadily down. And yet after the recent victory of De la Rey and various braggadocio pronouncements from the refugees at The Hague, it was somewhat of a surprise to the British public when it was announced upon March 22nd that the acting Government of the Transvaal, consisting of Messrs. Schalk Burger, Lucas Meyer, Reitz, Jacoby, Krogh, and Van Velden had come into Middelburg and requested to be forwarded by train to Pretoria for the purpose of discussing terms of peace with Lord Kitchener. A thrill of hope ran through the Empire at the news, but so doubtful did the issue seem that none of the preparations were relaxed which would ensure a vigorous campaign in the immediate future. In the South African as in the Peninsular and in the Crimean wars, it may truly be said that Great Britain was never so ready to fight as at the dawning of peace. At least two years of failure and experience are needed to turn a civilian and commercial nation into a military power.

In spite of the optimistic pronouncements of Mr. Fischer and the absurd forecasts of Dr. Leyds the power of the Boers was really broken, and they had come in with the genuine intention of surrender. In a race with such individuality it was not enough that the government should form its conclusion. It was necessary for them to persuade their burghers that the game was really up, and that they had no choice but to throw down their well-worn rifles and their ill-filled bandoliers. For this purpose a long series of negotiations had to be entered into which put a strain upon the complacency of the authorities in South Africa and upon the patience of the attentive public at home. Their ultimate success shows that this complacency and this patience were eminently the right attitude to adopt.

On March 23rd the Transvaal representatives were despatched to Kroonstad for the purpose of opening up the matter with Steyn and De Wet. Messengers were sent to communicate with these two leaders, but had they been British columns instead of fellow-countrymen they could not have found greater difficulty in running them to earth. At last, however, at the end of the month the message was conveyed, and resulted in the appearance of De Wet, De la Rey, and Steyn at the British outposts at Klerksdorp. The other delegates had come north again from Kroonstad, and all were united in the same small town, which, by a whimsical fate, had suddenly become the centre both for the making of peace and for the prosecution of the war, with the eyes of the whole world fixed upon its insignificant litter of houses. On April 11th, after repeated conferences, both parties moved on to Pretoria, and the most sceptical observers began to confess that there was something in the negotiations after all. After conferring with Lord Kitchener the Boer leaders upon April 18th left Pretoria again and rode out to the commandos to explain the situation to them. The result of this mission was that two delegates were chosen from each body in the field, who assembled at Vereeniging upon May 15th for the purpose of settling the question by vote. Never was a high matter of state decided in so democratic a fashion.

Up to that period the Boer leaders had made a succession of tentative suggestions, each of which had been put aside by the British Government. Their first had been that they should merely concede those points which had been at issue at the beginning of the war. This was set aside. The second was that they should be allowed to consult their friends in Europe. This also was refused. The next was that an armistice should be granted, but again Lord Kitchener was obdurate. A definite period was suggested within which the burghers should make their final choice between surrender and a war which must finally exterminate them as a people. It was tacitly understood, if not definitely promised, that the conditions which the British Government would be prepared to grant would not differ much in essentials from those which had been refused by the Boers a twelvemonth before, after the Middelburg interview.

On May 15th the Boer conference opened at Vereeniging. Sixty-four delegates from the commandos met with the military and political chiefs of the late republics, the whole amounting to 150 persons. A more singular gathering has not met in our time. There was Botha, the young lawyer, who had found himself by a strange turn of fate commanding a victorious army in a great war. De Wet was there, with his grim mouth and sun-browned face; De la Rey, also, with the grizzled beard and the strong aquiline features. There, too, were the politicians, the grey-bearded, genial Reitz, a little graver than when he looked upon ‘the whole matter as an immense joke,’ and the unfortunate Steyn, stumbling and groping, a broken and ruined man. The burly Lucas Meyer, smart young Smuts fresh from the siege of Ookiep, Beyers from the north, Kemp the dashing cavalry leader, Muller the hero of many fights — all these with many others of their sun-blackened, gaunt, hard-featured comrades were grouped within the great tent of Vereeniging. The discussions were heated and prolonged. But the logic of facts was inexorable, and the cold still voice of common-sense had more power than all the ravings of enthusiasts. The vote showed that the great majority of the delegates were in favour of surrender upon the terms offered by the British Government. On May 31st this resolution was notified to Lord Kitchener, and at half-past ten of the same night the delegates arrived at Pretoria and set their names to the treaty of peace. After two years seven and a half months of hostilities the Dutch republics had acquiesced in their own destruction, and the whole of South Africa, from Cape Town to the Zambesi, had been added to the British Empire. The great struggle had cost us twenty thousand lives and a hundred thousand stricken men, with two hundred millions of money; but, apart from a peaceful South Africa, it had won for us a national resuscitation of spirit and a closer union with our great Colonies which could in no other way have been attained. We had hoped that we were a solid empire when we engaged in the struggle, but we knew that we were when we emerged from it. In that change lies an ample recompense for all the blood and treasure spent.

The following were in brief the terms of surrender: —

1. That the burghers lay down their arms and acknowledge themselves subjects of Edward VII.
2. That all prisoners taking the oath of allegiance be returned.
3. That their liberty and property be inviolate.
4. That an amnesty be granted — save in special cases.
5. That the Dutch language be allowed in schools and law-courts.
6. That rifles be allowed if registered.
7. That self-government be granted as soon as possible.
8. That no franchise be granted for natives until after

self-government.
9. That no special land tax be levied.
10. That the people be helped to reoccupy the farms.
11. That 3,000,000 pounds be given to help the farmers.
12. That the rebels be disfranchised and their leaders tried, on condition that no death penalty be inflicted.

These terms were practically the same as those which had been refused by Botha in March 1901. Thirteen months of useless warfare had left the situation as it was.

It had been a war of surprises, but the surprises have unhappily been hitherto invariably unpleasant ones. Now at last the balance swung the other way, for in all the long paradoxical history of South African strife there is nothing more wonderful than the way in which these two sturdy and unemotional races clasped hands the instant that the fight was done. The fact is in itself a final answer to the ill-natured critics of the Continent. Men do not so easily grasp a hand which is reddened with the blood of women and children. From all parts as the commandos came in there was welcome news of the fraternisation between them and the soldiers; while the Boer leaders, as loyal to their new ties as they had been to their old ones, exerted themselves to promote good feeling among their people. A few weeks seemed to do more to lessen racial bitterness than some of us had hoped for in as many years. One can but pray that it will last.

The surrenders amounted in all to twenty thousand men, and showed that in all parts of the seat of war the enemy had more men in the field than we had imagined, a fact which may take the sting out of several of our later mishaps. About twelve thousand surrendered in the Transvaal, six thousand in the Orange River Colony, and about two thousand in the Cape Colony, showing that the movement in the rebel districts had always been more vexatious than formidable. A computation of the prisoners of war, the surrenders, the mercenaries, and the casualties, shows that the total forces to which we were opposed were certainly not fewer than seventy-five thousand well-armed mounted men, while they may have considerably exceeded that number. No wonder that the Boer leaders showed great confidence at the outset of the war.

That the heavy losses caused us by the war were borne without a murmur is surely evidence enough how deep was the conviction of the nation that the war was not only just but essential — that the possession of South

Africa and the unity of the Empire were at stake. Could it be shown, or were it even remotely possible, that ministers had incurred so immense a responsibility and entailed such tremendous sacrifices upon their people without adequate cause, is it not certain that, the task once done, an explosion of rage from the deceived and the bereaved would have driven them for ever from public life? Among high and low, in England, in Scotland, in Ireland, in the great Colonies, how many high hopes had been crushed, how often the soldier son had gone forth and never returned, or come back maimed and stricken in the pride of his youth. Everywhere was the voice of pity and sorrow, but nowhere that of reproach. The deepest instincts of the nation told it that it must fight and win, or for ever abdicate its position in the world. Through dark days which brought out the virtues of our race as nothing has done in our generation, we struggled grimly on until the light had fully broken once again. And of all gifts that God has given to Britain there is none to compare with those days of sorrow, for it was in them that the nation was assured of its unity, and learned for all time that blood is stronger to bind than salt water is to part. The only difference in the point of view of the Briton from Britain and the Briton from the ends of the earth, was that the latter with the energy of youth was more whole-souled in the Imperial cause. Who has seen that Army and can forget it — its spirit, its picturesqueness — above all, what it stands for in the future history of the world? Cowboys from the vast plains of the North-West, gentlemen who ride hard with the Quorn or the Belvoir, gillies from the Sutherland deer-forests, bushmen from the back blocks of Australia, exquisites of the Raleigh Club or the Bachelor’s, hard men from Ontario, dandy sportsmen from India and Ceylon, the horsemen of New Zealand, the wiry South African irregulars — these are the Reserves whose existence was chronicled in no Blue-book, and whose appearance came as a shock to the pedant soldiers of the Continent who had sneered so long at our little Army, since long years of peace have caused them to forget its exploits. On the plains of South Africa, in common danger and in common privation, the blood brotherhood of the Empire was sealed.

So much for the Empire. But what of South Africa? There in the end we must reap as we sow. If we are worthy of the trust, it will be left to us. If we are unworthy of it, it will be taken away. Kruger’s downfall should teach us that it is not rifles but Justice which is the title-deed of a nation. The British flag under our best administrators will mean clean government, honest laws, liberty and equality to all men. So long as it continues to do so, we shall hold South Africa. When, out of fear or out or greed, we fall from that ideal, we may know that we are stricken with that disease which has killed every great empire before us.

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

ITS CAUSE AND CONDUCT
BY

A. CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF ‘THE GREAT BOER WAR’

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PREFACE

For some reason, which may be either arrogance or apathy, the British are very slow to state their case to the world. At present the reasons for our actions and the methods which we have used are set forth in many Blue-books, tracts, and leaflets, but have never, so far as I know, been collected into one small volume. In view of the persistent slanders to which our politicians and our soldiers have been equally exposed, it becomes a duty which we owe to our national honour to lay the facts before the world. I wish someone more competent, and with some official authority, had undertaken the task, which I have tried to do as best I might from an independent standpoint.

There was never a war in history in which the right was absolutely on one side, or in which no incidents of the campaign were open to criticism. I do not pretend that it was so here. But I do not think that any unprejudiced man can read the facts without acknowledging that the British Government has done its best to avoid war, and the British Army to wage it with humanity.

To my publisher and to myself this work has been its own reward. In this way we hope to put the price within the reach of all, and yet leave a profit for the vendor. Our further ambition is, however, to translate it into all European tongues, and to send[vi] a free copy to every deputy and every newspaper on the Continent and in America. For this work money will be needed — a considerable sum. We propose to make an appeal to the public for these funds. Any sums which are sent to me or to my publisher will be devoted to this work. There cannot be too much, for the more we get the more we shall do.

I may add that I have not burdened my pages with continual references. My quotations are reliable and can always, if necessary, be substantiated.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

Undershaw, Hindhead:
January, 1902.

THE WAR: ITS CAUSE AND CONDUCT

CHAPTER I

THE BOER PEOPLE

It is impossible to appreciate the South African problem and the causes which have led up to the present war between the British Empire and the Boer republics without some knowledge, however superficial, of the past history of South Africa. To tell the tale one must go back to the beginning, for there has been complete continuity of history in South Africa, and every stage has depended upon that which has preceded it. No one can know or appreciate the Boer who does not know his past, for he is what his past has made him.

It was about the time when Oliver Cromwell was at his zenith — in 1652, to be pedantically accurate — that the Dutch made their first lodgment at the Cape of Good Hope. The Portuguese had been there before them, but, repelled by the evil weather, and lured forward by rumours of gold, they had passed the true seat of empire, and had voyaged farther, to settle along the eastern coast. But the Dutchmen at the Cape prospered and grew stronger in that robust climate. They did not penetrate far inland, for they were few in number, and all they wanted was to be found close at hand. But they built themselves houses, and they supplied the Dutch East India Company with food and water, gradually budding off little townlets, Wynberg, Stellenbosch, and pushing their settlements up the long slopes which lead to that great central plateau which extends for 1,500 miles from the edge of the Karoo to the Valley of the Zambesi.

For a hundred more years the history of the colony was a record of the gradual spreading of the Africanders over the huge expanse of veldt which lay to the north of them. Cattle-raising became an industry, but in a country where six acres can hardly support a sheep, large farms are necessary for even small herds. Six thousand acres was the usual size, and 5*l.* a year the rent payable to Government. The diseases which follow the white man had in Africa, as in America and Australia, been fatal to the natives, and an epidemic of smallpox cleared the country for the new-comers. Farther and farther north they pushed, founding little towns here and there, such as

Graaf-Reinet and Swellendam, where a Dutch Reformed Church and a store for the sale of the bare necessaries of life formed a nucleus for a few scattered dwellings. Already the settlers were showing that independence of control and that detachment from Europe which has been their most prominent characteristic. Even the mild sway of the Dutch Company had caused them to revolt. The local rising, however, was hardly noticed in the universal cataclysm which followed the French Revolution. After twenty years, during which the world was shaken by the Titanic struggle in the final counting up of the game and paying of the stakes, the Cape Colony was added in 1814 to the British Empire.

In all the vast collection of British States there is probably not one the title-deeds to which are more incontestable than to this. Britain had it by two rights, the right of conquest and the right of purchase. In 1806 troops landed, defeated the local forces, and took possession of Cape Town. In 1814 Britain paid the large sum of six million pounds to the Stadtholder for the transference of this and some South American land. It was a bargain which was probably made rapidly and carelessly in that general redistribution which was going on. As a house of call upon the way to India the place was seen to be of value, but the country itself was looked upon as unprofitable and desert. What would Castlereagh or Liverpool have thought could they have seen the items which they were buying for six million pounds? The inventory would have been a mixed one of good and of evil: nine fierce Kaffir wars, the greatest diamond mines in the world, the wealthiest gold mines, two costly and humiliating campaigns with men whom we respected even when we fought with them, and now at last, we hope, a South Africa of peace and prosperity, with equal rights and equal duties for all men.

The title-deeds to the estate are, as I have said, good ones, but there is one singular and ominous flaw in their provisions. The ocean has marked three boundaries to it, but the fourth is undefined. There is no word of the ‘hinterland,’ for neither the term nor the idea had then been thought of. Had Great Britain bought those vast regions which extended beyond the settlements? Or were the discontented Dutch at liberty to pass onwards and found fresh nations to bar the path of the Anglo-Celtic colonists? In that question lay the germ of all the trouble to come. An American would realise the point at issue if he could conceive that after the founding of the United States the Dutch inhabitants of the State of New York had trekked to the westward and established fresh communities under a new flag. Then, when the American population overtook these western States, they would be face to face with the problem which this country has had to solve. If they found these new States fiercely anti-American and extremely unprogressive, they would experience that aggravation of their difficulties with which British statesmen have had to deal.

At the time of their transference to the British flag the colonists — Dutch, French, and German — numbered some thirty thousand. They were slaveholders, and the slaves were about as numerous as themselves. The prospect of complete amalgamation between the British and the original settlers would have seemed to be a good one, since they were of much the same stock, and their creeds could only be distinguished by their varying degrees of bigotry and intolerance. Five thousand British emigrants were landed in 1820, settling on the Eastern borders of the colony, and from that time onwards there was a slow but steady influx of English-speaking colonists. The Government had the historical faults and the historical virtues of British rule. It was mild, clean, honest, tactless, and inconsistent. On the whole, it might have done very well had it been content to leave things as it found them. But to change the habits of the most conservative of Teutonic races was a dangerous venture, and one which has led to a long series of complications, making up the troubled history of South Africa.

The Imperial Government has always taken an honourable and philanthropic view of the rights of the native and the claim which he has to the protection of the law. We hold, and rightly, that British justice, if not blind, should at least be colour-blind. The view is irreproachable in theory and incontestable in argument, but it is apt to be irritating when urged by a Boston moralist or a London philanthropist upon men whose whole society has been built upon the assumption that the black is the inferior race. Such a people like to find the higher morality for themselves, not to have it imposed upon them by those who live under entirely different conditions.

The British Government in South Africa has always played the unpopular part of the friend and protector of the native servants. It was upon this very point that the first friction appeared between the old settlers and the new administration. A rising with bloodshed followed the arrest of a Dutch farmer who had maltreated his slave. It was suppressed, and five of the participants were hanged. This punishment was unduly severe and exceedingly injudicious. A brave race can forget the victims of the field of battle, but never those of the scaffold. The making of political martyrs is the last insanity of statesmanship. However, the thing was done, and it is typical of the enduring resentment which was left behind that when, after the Jameson Raid, it seemed that the leaders of that ill-fated venture might be hanged, the beam was actually brought from a farmhouse at Cookhouse Drift to Pretoria, that the Englishmen might die as the Dutchmen had died in 1816. Slagter's Nek marked the dividing of the ways between the British Government and the Africanders.

And the separation soon became more marked. With vicarious generosity, the English Government gave very lenient terms to the Kaffir tribes who in 1834 had raided the border farmers. And then, finally, in this same year there came the emancipation of the slaves throughout the British Empire, which fanned all smouldering discontents into an active flame.

It must be confessed that on this occasion the British philanthropist was willing to pay for what he thought was right. It was a noble national action, and one the morality of which was in advance of its time, that the British Parliament should vote the enormous sum of twenty million pounds to pay compensation to the slaveholders, and so to remove an evil with which the mother country had no immediate connection. It was as well that the thing should have been done when it was, for had we waited till the colonies affected had governments of their own it could never have been done by constitutional methods. With many a grumble the good British householder drew his purse from his fob, and paid for what he thought to be right. If any special grace attends the virtuous action which brings nothing but tribulation in this world, then we may hope for it over this emancipation. We spent our money, we ruined our West Indian colonies, and we started a disaffection in South Africa, the end of which we have not seen.

But the details of the measure were less honourable than the principle. It was carried out suddenly, so that the country had no time to adjust itself to the new conditions. Three million pounds were ear-marked for South Africa, which gives a price per slave of from 60*l.* to 70*l.*, a sum considerably below the current local rates. Finally, the compensation was made payable in London, so that the farmers sold their claims at reduced prices to middlemen. Indignation meetings were held in every little townlet and cattle-camp on the Karoo. The old Dutch spirit was up — the spirit of the men who cut the dykes. Rebellion was useless. But a vast untenanted land stretched to the north of them. The nomad life was congenial to them, and in their huge ox-drawn wagons — like those bullock-carts in which some of their old kinsmen came to Gaul — they had vehicles and homes and forts all in one. One by one they were loaded up, the huge teams were inspanned, the women were seated inside, the men with their long-barrelled guns walked alongside, and the great exodus was begun. Their herds and flocks accompanied the migration, and the children helped to round them in and drive them. One tattered little boy of ten cracked his sjambok whip behind the bullocks. He was a small item in that singular crowd, but he was of interest to us, for his name was Paul Stephanus Kruger.

It was a strange exodus, only comparable in modern times to the sallying forth of the Mormons from Nauvoo upon their search for the promised land of Utah. The country was known and sparsely settled as far north as the Orange River, but beyond there was a great region which had never been penetrated save by some daring hunter or adventurous pioneer. It chanced — if there be indeed such an element as chance in the graver affairs of man — that a Zulu conqueror had swept over this land and left it untenanted, save by the dwarf bushmen, the hideous aborigines, lowest of the human race. There were fine grazing and good soil for the emigrants. They travelled in small detached parties, but their total numbers were considerable, from six to ten thousand according to their historian, or nearly a quarter of the whole population of the colony. Some of the early bands perished miserably. A large number made a trysting-place at a high peak to the east of Bloemfontein, in what was lately the Orange Free State. One party of the emigrants was cut off by the formidable Matabeli, a branch of the great Zulu nation.

The final victory of the ‘voortrekkers’ cleared all the country between the Orange River and the Limpopo, the sites of what have been known as the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In the meantime another body of the emigrants had descended into Natal, and had defeated Dingaan, the great Chief of the Zulus.

And now at the end of their great journey, after overcoming the difficulties of distance, of nature, and of savage enemies, the Boers saw at the end of their travels the very thing which they desired least — that which they had come so far to avoid — the flag of Great Britain. The Boers had occupied Natal from within, but England had previously done the same by sea, and a small colony of Englishmen had settled at Port Natal, now known as Durban. The home Government, however, had acted in a vacillating way, and it was only the conquest of Natal by the Boers which caused them to claim it as a British colony. At the same time they asserted the unwelcome doctrine that a British subject could not at will throw off his allegiance, and that, go where they might, the wandering farmers were still only the pioneers of British colonies. To emphasise the fact three companies of soldiers were sent in 1842 to what is now Durban — the usual Corporal's guard with which Great Britain starts a new empire. This handful of men was waylaid by the Boers and cut up, as their successors have been so often since. The survivors, however, fortified themselves, and held a defensive position — as also their successors have done so many times since — until reinforcements arrived and the farmers dispersed. Natal from this time onward became a British colony, and the majority of the Boers trekked north and east with bitter hearts to tell their wrongs to their brethren of the Orange Free State and of the Transvaal.

Had they any wrongs to tell? It is difficult to reach that height of philosophic detachment which enables the historian to deal absolutely impartially where his own country is a party to the quarrel. But at least we may allow that there is a case for our adversary. Our annexation of Natal had been by no means definite, and it was they and not we who first broke that bloodthirsty Zulu power which threw its shadow across the country. It was hard after such trials and such exploits to turn their back upon the fertile land which they had conquered, and to return to the bare pastures of the upland veldt. They carried out of Natal a heavy sense of injury, which has helped to poison our relations with them ever since. It was, in a way, a momentous episode, this little skirmish of soldiers and emigrants, for it was the heading off of the Boer from the sea and the confinement of his ambition to the land. Had it gone the other way, a new and possibly formidable flag would have been added to the maritime nations.

The emigrants who had settled in the huge tract of country between the Orange River in the south and the Limpopo in the north had been recruited by new-comers from the Cape Colony until they numbered some fifteen thousand souls. This population was scattered over a space as large as Germany, and larger than Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. Their form of government was individualistic and democratic to the last degree compatible with any sort of cohesion. Their wars with the Kaffirs and their fear and dislike of the British Government appear to have been the only ties which held them together. They divided and subdivided within their own borders, like a germinating egg. The Transvaal was full of lusty little high-mettled communities, who quarrelled among themselves as fiercely as they had done with the authorities at the Cape. Lydenburg, Zoutpansberg, and Potchefstroom were on the point of turning their rifles against each other. In the south, between the Orange River and the Vaal, there was no form of government at all, but a welter of Dutch farmers, Basutos, Hottentots, and half-breeds living in a chronic state of turbulence, recognising neither the British authority to the south of them nor the Transvaal republics to the north. The chaos became at last unendurable, and in 1848 a garrison was placed in Bloemfontein and the district incorporated in the British Empire. The emigrants made a futile resistance at Boomplaats, and after a single defeat allowed themselves to be drawn into the settled order of civilised rule.

At this period the Transvaal, where most of the Boers had settled, desired a formal acknowledgment of their independence, which the British authorities determined once and for all to give them. The great barren country, which produced little save marksmen, had no attractions for a Colonial Office which was bent upon the limitation of its liabilities. A Convention was concluded between the two parties, known as the Sand River Convention, which is one of the fixed points in South African history. By it the British Government guaranteed to the Boer farmers the right to manage their own affairs, and to govern themselves by their own laws without any interference upon the part of the British. It stipulated that there should be no slavery, and with that single reservation washed its hands finally, as it imagined, of the whole question. So the Transvaal Republic came formally into existence.

In the very year after the Sand River Convention, a second republic, the Orange Free State, was created by the deliberate withdrawal of Great Britain from the territory which she had for eight years occupied. The Eastern Question was already becoming acute, and the cloud of a great war was drifting up, visible to all men. British statesmen felt that their commitments were very heavy in every part of the world, and the South African annexations had always been a doubtful value and an undoubted trouble. Against the will of a large part of the inhabitants, whether a majority or not it is impossible to say, we withdrew our troops as amicably as the Romans withdrew from Britain, and the new republic was left with absolute and unfettered independence. On a petition being presented against the withdrawal, the Home Government actually voted 48,000*l.* to compensate those who had suffered from the change. Whatever historical grievance the Transvaal may have against Great Britain, we can at least, save perhaps in one matter, claim to have a very clear conscience concerning our dealings with the Orange Free State. Thus in 1852 and in 1854 were born those sturdy States who have been able for a time to hold at bay the united forces of the Empire.

In the meantime Cape Colony, in spite of these secessions, had prospered exceedingly, and her population — British, German, and Dutch — had grown by 1870 to over two hundred thousand souls, the Dutch still slightly predominating. According to the liberal colonial policy of Great Britain, the time had come to cut the cord and let the young nation conduct its own affairs. In 1872 complete self-government was given to it, the Governor, as the representative of the Queen, retaining a nominal unexercised veto upon legislation. According to this system the Dutch majority of the colony could, and did, put their own representatives into power and run the government upon Dutch lines. Already Dutch law had been restored, and Dutch put on the same footing as English as the official language of the country. The extreme liberality of such measures, and the uncompromising way in which they have been carried out, however distasteful the legislation might seem to English ideas, are among the chief reasons which made the illiberal treatment of British settlers in the Transvaal so keenly resented at the Cape. A Dutch Government was ruling the British in a British colony, at a moment when the Boers would not give an Englishman a vote upon a municipal council in a city which he had built himself.

For twenty-five years after the Sand River Convention the burghers of the Transvaal Republic had pursued a strenuous and violent existence, fighting incessantly with the natives and sometimes with each other, with an occasional fling at the little Dutch republic to the south. Disorganisation ensued. The burghers would not pay taxes and the treasury was empty. One fierce Kaffir tribe threatened them from the north, and the Zulus on the east. It is an exaggeration to pretend that British intervention saved the Boers, for no one can read their military history without seeing that they were a match for Zulus and Sekukuni combined. But certainly a formidable invasion was pending, and the scattered farmhouses were as open to the Kaffirs as our farmers' homesteads were in the American colonies when the Indians were on the war-path. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, the British Commissioner, after an inquiry of three months, solved all questions by the formal annexation of the country. The fact that he took possession of it with a force of some twenty-five men showed the honesty of his belief that no armed resistance was to be feared. This, then, in 1877, was a complete reversal of the Sand River Convention and the opening of a new chapter in the history of South Africa.

There did not appear to be any strong feeling at the time against the annexation. The people were depressed with their troubles and weary of contention. Burgers, the President, put in a formal protest, and took up his abode in Cape Colony, where he had a pension from the British Government. A memorial against the measure received the signatures of a majority of the Boer inhabitants, but there was a fair minority who took the other view. Kruger himself accepted a paid office under Government. There was every sign that the people, if judiciously handled, would settle down under the British flag.

But the Empire has always had poor luck in South Africa, and never worse than on that occasion. Through no bad faith, but simply through preoccupation and delay, the promises made were not instantly fulfilled. If the Transvaalers had waited, they would have had their Volksraad and all that they wanted. But the British Government had some other local matters to set right, the rooting out of Sekukuni and the breaking of the Zulus, before they would fulfil their pledges. The delay was keenly resented. And we were unfortunate in our choice of Governor. The burghers are a homely folk, and they like an occasional cup of coffee with the anxious man who tries to rule them. The 300*l.* a year of coffee-money allowed by the Transvaal to its President is by no means a mere form. A wise administrator would fall into the social and democratic habits of the people. Sir Theophilus Shepstone did so. Sir Owen Lanyon did not. There was no Volksraad and no coffee, and the popular discontent grew rapidly. In three years the British had broken up the two savage hordes which had been threatening the land. The finances, too, had been restored. The reasons which had made so many burghers favour the annexation were weakened by the very power which had every interest in preserving them.

It cannot be too often pointed out that in this annexation, the starting-point of our troubles, Great Britain, however mistaken she may have been, had no possible selfish interest in view. There were no Rand mines in those days, nor was there anything in the country to tempt the most covetous. An empty treasury and two expensive native wars were the reversion which we took over. It was honestly considered that the country was in too distracted a state to govern itself, and had, by its weakness, become a scandal and a danger to its neighbours and to itself. There was nothing sordid in the British action, though it may have been premature and injudicious. There is some reason to think that if it had been delayed it would eventually have been done on the petition of the majority of the inhabitants.

In December 1880 the Boers rose. Every farmhouse sent out its riflemen, and the trysting-place was the outside of the nearest British fort. All through the country small detachments were surrounded and besieged by the farmers. Standerton, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Lydenburg, Wakkerstroom, Rustenburg, and Marabastad were all invested and all held out until the end of the war. In the open country the troops were less fortunate. At Bronkhorst Spruit a small British force was taken by surprise and shot down without harm to their antagonists. The surgeon who treated them has left it on record that the average number of wounds was five per man. At Laing’s Nek an inferior force of British endeavoured to rush a hill which was held by Boer riflemen. Half of the men were killed and wounded. Ingogo may be called a drawn battle, though the British loss was more heavy than that of the enemy. Finally came the defeat of Majuba Hill, where 400 infantry upon a mountain were defeated and driven off by a swarm of sharpshooters who advanced under the cover of boulders. Of all these actions there was not one which was more than a skirmish, and had they been followed by a final British victory they would now be hardly remembered. It is the fact that they were skirmishes which succeeded in their object which has given them an importance which is exaggerated.

The defeat at Majuba Hill was followed by the complete surrender of the Gladstonian Government, an act which was either the most pusillanimous or the most magnanimous in recent history. It is hard for the big man to draw away from the small before blows are struck, but when the big man has been knocked down three times it is harder still. An overwhelming British force was in the field, and the General declared that he held the enemy in the hollow of his hand. British military calculations have been falsified before now by these farmers, and it may be that the task of Wood and Roberts would have been harder than they imagined; but on paper, at least, it looked as if the enemy could be crushed without difficulty. So the public thought, and yet they consented to the upraised sword being stayed.

With them, as apart from the politicians, the motive was undoubtedly a moral and Christian one. They considered that the annexation of the Transvaal had evidently been an injustice, that the farmers had a right to the freedom for which they fought, and that it was an unworthy thing for a great nation to continue an unjust war for the sake of a military revenge. Such was the motive of the British public when it acquiesced in the action of the Government. It was the height of idealism, and the result has not been such as to encourage its repetition.

An armistice was concluded on March 5, 1881, which led up to a peace on the 23rd of the same month. The Government, after yielding to force what it had repeatedly refused to friendly representations, made a clumsy compromise in their settlement. A policy of idealism and Christian morality should have been thorough if it were to be tried at all. It was obvious that if the annexation were unjust, then the Transvaal should have reverted to the condition in which it was before the annexation, as defined by the Sand River Convention. But the Government for some reason would not go so far as this. They niggled and quibbled and bargained until the State was left as a curious hybrid thing such as the world has never seen. It was a republic which was part of the system of a monarchy, dealt with by the Colonial Office, and included under the heading of ‘Colonies’ in the news columns of the ‘Times.’ It was autonomous, and yet subject to some vague suzerainty, the limits of which no one has ever been able to define. Altogether, in its provisions and in its omissions, the Convention of Pretoria appears to prove that our political affairs were as badly conducted as our military in this unfortunate year of 1881.

It was evident from the first that so illogical and contentious an agreement could not possibly prove to be a final settlement, and indeed the ink of the signatures was hardly dry before an agitation was on foot for its revision. The Boers considered, and with justice, that if they were to be left as undisputed victors in the war then they should have the full fruits of victory. On the other hand, the English-speaking colonies had their allegiance tested to the uttermost. The proud Anglo-Celtic stock is not accustomed to be humbled, and yet they found themselves through the action of the home Government converted into members of a beaten race. It was very well for the citizen of London to console his wounded pride by the thought that he had done a magnanimous action, but it was different with the British colonist of Durban or Cape Town who, by no act of his own, and without any voice in the settlement, found himself humiliated before his Dutch neighbour. An ugly feeling of resentment was left behind, which might perhaps have passed away had the Transvaal accepted the settlement in the spirit in which it was meant, but which grew more and more dangerous, as during eighteen years our people saw, or thought that they saw, that one concession led always to a fresh demand, and that the Dutch republics aimed not merely at equality, but at dominance in South Africa. Professor Bryce, a friendly critic, after a personal examination of the country and the question, has left it upon record that the Boers saw neither generosity nor humanity in our conduct, but only fear. An outspoken race, they conveyed their feelings to their neighbours. Can it be wondered at that South Africa has been in a ferment ever since, and that the British Africander has yearned with an intensity of feeling unknown in England for the hour of revenge?

The Government of the Transvaal after the war was left in the hands of a triumvirate, but after one year Kruger became President, an office which he continued to hold for eighteen years. His career as ruler vindicates the wisdom of that wise but unwritten provision of the American Constitution by which there is a limit to the tenure of this office. Continued rule for half a generation must turn a man into an autocrat. The old President has said himself, in his homely but shrewd way, that when one gets a good ox to lead the team it is a pity to change him. If a good ox, however, is left to choose his own direction without guidance, he may draw his wagon into trouble.

During three years the little State showed signs of a tumultuous activity. Considering that it was larger than France and that the population could not have been more than fifty thousand, one would have thought that they might have found room without any inconvenient crowding. But the burghers passed beyond their borders in every direction. The President cried aloud that he had been shut up in a kraal, and he proceeded to find ways out of it. A great trek was projected for the north, but fortunately it miscarried. To the east they raided Zululand, and succeeded, in defiance of the British settlement of that country, in tearing away one-third of it and adding it to the Transvaal. To the west, with no regard to the three-year-old treaty, they invaded Bechuanaland, and set up the two new republics of Goshen and Stellaland. So outrageous were these proceedings that Great Britain was forced to fit out in 1884 a new expedition under Sir Charles Warren for the purpose of turning these freebooters out of the country. It may be asked, Why should these men be called freebooters if the founders of Rhodesia were pioneers? The answer is that the Transvaal was limited by treaty to certain boundaries which these men transgressed, while no pledges were broken when the British power expanded to the north. The upshot of these trespasses was the scene upon which every drama of South Africa rings down. Once more the purse was drawn from the pocket of the unhappy taxpayer, and a million or so was paid out to defray the expenses of the police force necessary to keep these treaty-breakers in order. Let this be borne in mind when we assess the moral and material damage done to the Transvaal by the Jameson Raid.

In 1884 a deputation from the Transvaal visited England, and at their solicitation the clumsy Treaty of Pretoria was altered into the still more clumsy Convention of London. The changes in the provisions were all in favour of the Boers, and a second successful war could hardly have given them more than Lord Derby handed them in time of peace. Their style was altered from the Transvaal to the South African Republic, a change which was ominously suggestive of expansion in the future. The control of Great Britain over their foreign policy was also relaxed, though a power of veto was retained. But the most important thing of all, and the fruitful cause of future trouble, lay in an omission. A suzerainty is a vague term, but in politics, as in theology, the more nebulous a thing is the more does it excite the imagination and the passions of men. This suzerainty was declared in the preamble of the first treaty, and no mention of it was made in the second. Was it thereby abrogated or was it not? The British contention is that only the articles were changed, and that the preamble continued to hold good for both treaties. They point out that not only the suzerainty, but also the independence, of the Transvaal is proclaimed in that preamble, and that if one lapses the other must do so also. On the other hand, the Boers point to the fact that there is actually a preamble to the second convention, which would seem, therefore, to take the place of the first. As a matter of fact, the discussion is a barren one, since both parties agree that Great Britain retained certain rights over the making of treaties by the Republic, which rights place her in a different position to an entirely independent state. Whether this difference amounts to a suzerainty or not is a subject for the academic discussion of international jurists. What is of importance is the fact, not the word.

CHAPTER II

THE CAUSE OF QUARREL

Gold had been known to exist in the Transvaal before, but it was only in 1886 that it was realised that the deposits which lie some thirty miles south of the capital are of a very extraordinary and valuable nature. The proportion of gold in the quartz is not particularly high, nor are the veins of a remarkable thickness, but the peculiarity of the Rand mines lies in the fact that throughout this ‘banket’ formation the metal is so uniformly distributed that the enterprise can claim a certainty which is not usually associated with the industry. It is quarrying rather than mining. Add to this that the reefs which were originally worked as outcrops have now been traced to enormous depths, and present the same features as those at the surface. A conservative estimate of the value of the gold has placed it at seven hundred millions of pounds.

Such a discovery produced the inevitable effect. A great number of adventurers flocked into the country, some desirable and some very much the reverse. There were circumstances, however, which kept away the rowdy and desperado element who usually make for a newly-opened goldfield. It was not a class of mining which encouraged the individual adventurer. It was a field for elaborate machinery, which could only be provided by capital. Managers, engineers, miners, technical experts, and the tradesmen and middlemen who live upon them, these were the Uitlanders, drawn from all races under the sun, but with the Anglo-Celtic vastly predominant. The best engineers were American, the best miners were Cornish, the best managers were English, the money to run the mines was largely subscribed in England. As time went on, however, the German and French interests became more extensive, until their joint holdings are now probably as heavy as those of the British. Soon the population of the mining centres became about as numerous as that of the whole Boer community, and consisted mainly of men in the prime of life — men, too, of exceptional intelligence and energy.

The situation was an extraordinary one. I have already attempted to bring the problem home to an American by suggesting that the Dutch of New York had trekked west and founded an anti-American and highly unprogressive State. To carry out the analogy we will now suppose that that State was California, that the gold of that State attracted a large inrush of American citizens, that these citizens were heavily taxed and badly used, and that they deafened Washington with their outcry about their injuries. That would be a fair parallel to the relations between the Transvaal, the Uitlanders, and the British Government.

That these Uitlanders had very real and pressing grievances no one could possibly deny. To recount them all would be a formidable task, for their whole lives were darkened by injustice. There was not a wrong which had driven the Boer from Cape Colony which he did not now practise himself upon others — and a wrong may be excusable in 1835 which is monstrous in 1895. The primitive virtue which had characterised the farmers broke down in the face of temptation. The country Boers were little affected, some of them not at all, but the Pretoria Government became a most corrupt oligarchy, venal and incompetent to the last degree. Officials and imported Hollanders handled the stream of gold which came in from the mines, while the unfortunate Uitlander who paid nine-tenths of the taxation was fleeced at every turn, and met with laughter and taunts when he endeavoured to win the franchise by which he might peaceably set right the wrongs from which he suffered. He was not an unreasonable person. On the contrary, he was patient to the verge of meekness, as capital is likely to be when it is surrounded by rifles. But his situation was intolerable, and after successive attempts at peaceful agitation, and numerous humble petitions to the Volksraad, he began at last to realise that he would never obtain redress unless he could find some way of winning it for himself.

Without attempting to enumerate all the wrongs which embittered the Uitlanders, the more serious of them may be summed up in this way:

1. That they were heavily taxed and provided about seven-eighths of the revenue of the country. The revenue of the South African Republic — which had been 154,000*l.* in 1886, when the goldfields were opened — had grown in 1899 to four million pounds, and the country through the industry of the new-comers had changed from one of the poorest to the richest in the whole world (per head of population).

2. That in spite of this prosperity which they had brought, they were left without a vote, and could by no means influence the disposal of the great sums which they were providing. Such a case of taxation without representation has never been known.

3. That they had no voice in the choice or payment of officials. Men of the worst private character might be placed with complete authority over valuable interests. The total official salaries had risen in 1899 to a sum sufficient to pay 40*l.* per head to the entire male Boer population.

4. That they had no control over education. Mr. John Robinson, the Director-General of the Johannesburg Educational Council, has reckoned the sum spent on the Uitlander schools as 650*l.* out of 63,000*l.* allotted for education, making 1*s.* 10*d.* per head per annum on Uitlander children, and 8*l.* 6*s.* per head on Boer children — the Uitlander, as always, paying seven-eighths of the original sum.

5. No power of municipal government. Watercarts instead of pipes, filthy buckets instead of drains, a corrupt and violent police, a high death-rate in what should be a health resort — all this in a city which they had built themselves.

6. Despotic government in the matter of the Press and of the right of public meeting.

7. Disability from service upon a jury.

8. Continual harassing of the mining interest by vexatious legislation. Under this head come many grievances, some special to the mines and some affecting all Uitlanders. The dynamite monopoly, by which the miners had to pay 600,000*l.* extra per annum in order to get a worse quality of dynamite; the liquor laws, by which the Kaffirs were allowed to be habitually drunk; the incompetence and extortions of the State-owned railway; the granting of concessions for numerous articles of ordinary consumption to individuals, by which high prices were maintained; the surrounding of Johannesburg by tolls from which the town had no profit — these were among the economical grievances, some large, some petty, which ramified through every transaction of life. These are the wrongs which Mr. W. T. Stead has described as ‘the twopenny-halfpenny grievances of a handful of Englishmen.’

The manner in which the blood was sucked from the Uitlanders, and the rapid spread of wealth among the Boer officials, may be gathered from the list of the salaries of the State servants from the opening of the mines to the outbreak of the war:

	£
1886	51,831
1887	99,083
1888	164,466
1889	249,641
1890	324,520
1891	332,888
1892	323,608
1893	361,275
1894	419,775
1895	570,047
1896	813,029
1897	996,959
1898	1,080,382
1899	1,216,394

which shows, as Mr. FitzPatrick has pointed out, that the salary list had become twenty-four times what it was when the Uitlanders arrived, and five times as much as the total revenue was then.

But outside and beyond all the definite wrongs from which they suffered, there was a constant irritation to freeborn and progressive men, accustomed to liberal institutions, that they should be despotically ruled by a body of men some of whom were ignorant bigots, some of them buffoons, and nearly all of them openly and shamelessly corrupt. Out of twenty-five members of the First Volksraad twenty-one were, in the case of the Selati Railway Company, publicly and circumstantially accused of bribery, with full details of the bribes received, their date, and who paid them. The black-list includes the present vice-president, Schalk Burger; the vice-president of that date; Eloff, the son-in-law of Kruger; and the secretary of the Volksraad. Apparently every man of the executive and the legislature had his price.

A corrupt assembly is an evil master, but when it is narrow-minded and bigoted as well, it becomes indeed intolerable. The following tit-bits from the debates in the two Raads show the intelligence and spirit of the men who were ruling over one of the most progressive communities in the world:

‘Pillar-boxes in Pretoria were opposed on the grounds that they were extravagant and effeminate. Deputy Taljaard said that he could not see why people wanted to be always writing letters; he wrote none himself. In the days of his youth he had written a letter and had not been afraid to travel fifty miles and more on horseback and by wagon to post it — and now people complained if they had to go one mile.’

A debate on the possibility of decreasing the plague of locusts led to the following enlightened discussion:

‘*July 21.* — Mr. Roos said locusts were a plague, as in the days of King Pharaoh, sent by God, and the country would assuredly be loaded with shame and obloquy if it tried to raise its hand against the mighty hand of the Almighty.

‘Messrs. Declerq and Steenkamp spoke in the same strain, quoting largely from the Scriptures.

‘The Chairman related a true story of a man whose farm was always spared by the locusts, until one day he caused some to be killed. His farm was then devastated.

‘Mr. Stoop conjured the members not to constitute themselves terrestrial gods and oppose the Almighty.

‘Mr. Lucas Meyer raised a storm by ridiculing the arguments of the former speakers, and comparing the locusts to beasts of prey which they destroyed.

‘Mr. Labuschagne was violent. He said the locusts were quite different from beasts of prey. They were a special plague sent by God for their sinfulness.’

In a further debate:

‘Mr. Jan de Beer complained of the lack of uniformity in neckties. Some wore a Tom Thumb variety, and others wore scarves. This was a state of things to be deplored, and he considered that the Raad should put its foot down and define the size and shape of neckties.’

The following note of a debate gives some idea of how far the legislators were qualified to deal with commercial questions:

‘*May 8.* — On the application of the Sheba G. M. Co. for permission to erect an aërial tram from the mine to the mill, ‘Mr. Grobelaar asked whether an aërial tram was a balloon or whether it could fly through the air.

‘The only objection that the Chairman had to urge against granting the tram was that the Company had an English name, and that with so many Dutch ones available.

‘Mr. Taljaard objected to the word “participeeren” (participate) as not being Dutch, and to him unintelligible: “I can’t believe the word is Dutch; why have I never come across it in the Bible if it is?”

‘*June 18.* — On the application for a concession to treat tailings,

‘Mr. Taljaard wished to know if the words “pyrites” and “concentrates” could not be translated into the Dutch language. He could not understand what it meant. He had gone to night-school as long as he had been in Pretoria, and even now he could not explain everything to his burghers. He thought it a shame that big hills should be made on ground under which there might be rich reefs, and which in future might be required for a market or outspan. He would support the recommendation on condition that the name of the quartz should be translated into Dutch, as there might be more in this than some of them imagined.’

Such debates as these may be amusing at a distance, but they are less entertaining when they come from an autocrat who has complete power over the conditions of your life.

From the fact that they were a community extremely preoccupied by their own business, it followed that the Uitlanders were not ardent politicians, and that they desired to have a share in the government of the State for the purpose of making the conditions of their own industry and of their own daily lives more endurable. How far there was need of such an interference may be judged by any fair-minded man who reads the list of their complaints. A superficial view may recognise the Boers as the champions of liberty, but a deeper insight must see that they (as represented by their elected rulers) have in truth stood for all that history has shown to be odious in the form of exclusiveness and oppression. Their conception of liberty has been a narrow and selfish one, and they have consistently inflicted upon others far heavier wrongs than those against which they had themselves rebelled.

As the mines increased in importance and the miners in numbers, it was found that these political disabilities affected some of that cosmopolitan crowd far more than others, in proportion to the amount of freedom to which their home institutions had made them accustomed. The Continental Uitlanders were more patient of that which was unendurable to the American and the Briton. The Americans, however, were in so great a minority that it was upon the British that the brunt of the struggle for freedom fell. Apart from the fact that the British were more numerous than all the other Uitlanders combined, there were special reasons why they should feel their humiliating position more than the members of any other race. In the first place, many of the British were British South Africans, who knew that in the neighbouring countries which gave them birth the most liberal possible institutions had been given to the kinsmen of these very Boers who were refusing them the management of their own drains and water-supply. And again, every Briton knew that Great Britain claimed to be the paramount Power in South Africa, and so he felt as if his own land, to which he might have looked for protection, was conniving at and acquiescing in his ill-treatment. As citizens of the paramount Power, it was peculiarly galling that they should be held in political subjection. The British, therefore, were the most persistent and energetic of the agitators.

But it is a poor cause which cannot bear to fairly state and honestly consider the case of its opponents. The Boers had made, as has been briefly shown, great efforts to establish a country of their own. They had travelled far, worked hard, and fought bravely. After all their efforts they were fated to see an influx of strangers into their country, some of them men of questionable character, who threatened to outnumber the original inhabitants. If the franchise were granted to these, there could be no doubt that, though at first the Boers might control a majority of the votes, it was only a question of time before the new-comers would dominate the Raad and elect their own President, who might adopt a policy abhorrent to the original owners of the land. Were the Boers to lose by the ballot-box the victory which they had won by their rifles? Was it fair to expect it? These new-comers came for gold. They got their gold. Their companies paid a hundred per cent. Was not that enough to satisfy them? If they did not like the country, why did they not leave it? No one compelled them to stay there. But if they stayed, let them be thankful that they were tolerated at all, and not presume to interfere with the laws of those by whose courtesy they were allowed to enter the country.

That is a fair statement of the Boer position, and at first sight an impartial man might say that there was a good deal to say for it; but a closer examination would show that, though it might be tenable in theory, it is unjust and impossible in practice.

In the present crowded state of the world a policy of Thibet may be carried out in some obscure corner, but it cannot be done in a great tract of country which lies right across the main line of industrial progress. The position is too absolutely artificial. A handful of people by the right of conquest take possession of an enormous country over which they are dotted at such intervals that it is their boast that one farmhouse cannot see the smoke of another, and yet, though their numbers are so disproportionate to the area which they cover, they refuse to admit any other people upon equal terms, but claim to be a privileged class who shall dominate the new-comers completely. They are outnumbered in their own land by immigrants who are far more highly educated and progressive, and yet they hold them down in a way which exists nowhere else upon earth. What is their right? The right of conquest. Then the same right may be justly invoked to reverse so intolerable a situation. This they would themselves acknowledge. ‘Come on and fight! Come on!’ cried a member of the Volksraad when the franchise petition of the Uitlanders was presented. ‘Protest! Protest! What is the good of protesting?’ said Kruger to Mr. W. Y. Campbell; ‘you have not got the guns, I have.’ There was always the final court of appeal. Judge Creusot and Judge Mauser were always behind the President.

Again, the argument of the Boers would be more valid had they received no benefit from these immigrants. If they had ignored them they might fairly have stated that they did not desire their presence. But even while they protested they grew rich at the Uitlanders’ expense. They could not have it both ways. It would be consistent to discourage him and not profit by him, or to make him comfortable and build the State upon his money; but to ill-treat him and at the same time grow strong by his taxation must surely be an injustice.

And again, the whole argument is based upon the narrow racial supposition that every naturalised citizen not of Boer extraction must necessarily be unpatriotic. This is not borne out by the examples of history. The new-comer soon becomes as proud of his country and as jealous of her liberty as the old. Had President Kruger given the franchise generously to the Uitlander, his pyramid would have been firm upon its base and not balanced upon its apex. It is true that the corrupt oligarchy would have vanished, and the spirit of a broader, more tolerant freedom influenced the counsels of the State. But the republic would have become stronger and more permanent with a population who, if they differed in details, were united in essentials. Whether such a solution would have been to the advantage of British interests in South Africa is quite another question. In more ways than one President Kruger has been a good friend to the Empire.

At the time of the Convention of Pretoria (1881) the rights of burghership might be obtained by one year's residence. In 1882 it was raised to five years, the reasonable limit which obtains both in Great Britain and in the United States. Had it remained so, it is safe to say that there would never have been either an Uitlander question or a war. Grievances would have been righted from the inside without external interference.

In 1890 the inrush of outsiders alarmed the Boers, and the franchise was raised so as to be only attainable by those who had lived fourteen years in the country. The Uitlanders, who were increasing rapidly in numbers and were suffering from the formidable list of grievances already enumerated, perceived that their wrongs were so numerous that it was hopeless to have them set right seriatim, and that only by obtaining the leverage of the franchise could they hope to move the heavy burden which weighed them down. In 1893 a petition of 13,000 Uitlanders, couched in most respectful terms, was submitted to the Raad, but met with contemptuous neglect. Undeterred, however, by this failure, the National Reform Union, an association which was not one of capitalists, came back to the attack in 1894. They drew up a petition which was signed by 35,000 adult male Uitlanders, as great a number probably as the total Boer male population of the country. A small liberal body in the Raad supported this memorial and endeavoured in vain to obtain some justice for the new-comers. Mr. Jeppe was the mouthpiece of this select band. 'They own half the soil, they pay at least three-quarters of the taxes,' said he. 'They are men who in capital, energy, and education are at least our equals. What will become of us or our children on that day when we may find ourselves in a minority of one in twenty without a single friend among the other nineteen, among those who will then tell us that they wished to be brothers, but that we by our own act have made them strangers to the republic?' Such reasonable and liberal sentiments were combated by members who asserted that the signatures could not belong to law-abiding citizens, since they were actually agitating against the law of the franchise, and others whose intolerance was expressed by the defiance of the member already quoted, who challenged the Uitlanders to come out and fight. The champions of exclusiveness and racial hatred won the day. The memorial was rejected by sixteen votes to eight, and the franchise law was, on the initiative of the President, actually made more stringent than ever, being framed in such a way that during the fourteen years of probation the applicant should give up his previous nationality, so that for that period he would belong to no country at all. No hopes were held out that any possible attitude upon the part of the Uitlanders would soften the determination of the President and his burghers. One who remonstrated was led outside the State buildings by the President, who pointed up at the national flag. 'You see that flag?' said he. 'If I grant the franchise, I may as well pull it down.' His animosity against the immigrants was bitter. 'Burghers, friends, thieves, murderers, new-comers, and others,' is the conciliatory opening of one of his public addresses. Though Johannesburg is only thirty-two miles from Pretoria, and though the State of which he was the head depended for its revenue upon the goldfields, he paid it only three visits in nine years.

This settled animosity was deplorable, but not unnatural. A man imbued with the idea of a chosen people, and unread in any book save the one which cultivates this very idea, could not be expected to have learned the historical lessons of the advantages which a State reaps from a liberal policy. To him it was as if the Ammonites and Moabites had demanded admission into the twelve tribes. He mistook an agitation against the exclusive policy of the State for one against the existence of the State itself. A wide franchise would have made his republic firm-based and permanent. It was a minority of the Uitlanders who had any desire to come into the British system. They were a cosmopolitan crowd, only united by the bond of a common injustice. The majority of the British immigrants had no desire to subvert the State. But when every other method had failed, and their petition for the rights of freemen had been flung back at them, it was natural that their eyes should turn to that flag which waved to the north, the west, and the south of them — the flag which means purity of government with equal rights and equal duties for all men. Constitutional agitation was laid aside, arms were smuggled in, and everything prepared for an organised rising.

It had been arranged that the town was to rise upon a certain night, that Pretoria should be attacked, the fort seized, and the rifles and ammunition, used to arm the Uitlanders. It was a feasible device, though it must seem to us, who have had such an experience of the military virtues of the burghers, a very desperate one. But it is conceivable that the rebels might have held Johannesburg until the universal sympathy which their cause excited throughout South Africa would have caused Great Britain to intervene. Unfortunately they had complicated matters by asking for outside help. Mr. Cecil Rhodes was Premier of the Cape, a man of immense energy, and one who had rendered great services to the empire. The motives of his action are obscure — certainly, we may say that they were not sordid, for he has always been a man whose thoughts were large and whose habits were simple. But whatever they may have been — whether an ill-regulated desire to consolidate South Africa under British rule, or a burning sympathy with the Uitlanders in their fight against injustice — it is certain that he allowed his lieutenant, Dr. Jameson, to assemble the mounted police of the Chartered Company, of which Rhodes was founder and director, for the purpose of co-operating with the rebels at Johannesburg. Moreover, when the revolt at Johannesburg was postponed, on account of a disagreement as to which flag they were to rise under, it appears that Jameson (with or without the orders of Rhodes) forced the hand of the conspirators by invading the country with a force absurdly inadequate to the work which he had taken in hand. Five hundred policemen and two field-guns made up the forlorn hope who started from near Mafeking and crossed the Transvaal border upon December 29, 1895. On January 2 they were surrounded by the Boers amid the broken country near Dornkop, and after losing many of their number killed and wounded, without food and with spent horses, they were compelled to lay down their arms. Six burghers lost their lives in the skirmish.

Determined attempts have been made to connect the British Government with this fiasco, and to pretend that the Colonial Secretary and other statesmen were cognisant of it. Such an impression has been fostered by the apparent reluctance of the Commission of Inquiry to push their researches to the uttermost. It is much to be regretted that every possible telegram and letter should not have been called for upon that occasion; but the idea that this was not done for fear that Mr. Chamberlain and the British Government would be implicated, becomes absurd in the presence of the fact that the Commission included among its members Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Sir William Harcourt. Is it conceivable that these gentlemen held their hands for fear of damaging the Government, or that Mr. Chamberlain could afterwards have the effrontery to publicly and solemnly deny all knowledge of the business in the presence of gentlemen who had connived at the suppression of the proofs that he *did* know? Such a supposition is ridiculous, and yet it is involved in the theory that the Commission refrained from pushing their examination because they were afraid of showing their country to have been in the wrong.

Again, even the most embittered enemy of Mr. Chamberlain must admit that he is a clear-headed man, a man of resolution, and a man with some sense of proportion as to the means which should be used for an end. Is such a man, knowing the military record of the burghers, the sort of man to connive at the invasion of their country by 500 policemen and two guns? Would he be likely, even if he approved of the general aim, to sanction such a harebrained piece of folly? And, having sanctioned it, would he be so weak of purpose as to take energetic steps, the instant that he heard of the invasion, to undo that which he is supposed himself to have done, and to cause the failure of his own scheme? Why should he on such a supposition send energetic messages to Johannesburg forbidding the British to co-operate with the raiders? The whole accusation is so absurd that it is only the mania of party spite or of national hatred which could induce anyone to believe it.

Again, supposing for an instant that the British Government knew anything about the coming raid, what is the first and most obvious thing which they would have done? Whether Jameson got safely to Johannesburg or not there was evidently a probability of a great race-struggle in South Africa. Would they not then, on some pretext or another, have increased the strength of the British force in the country, which was so weak that it was powerless to influence the course of events? It is certain that this is so. But nothing of the kind was done.

Mr. Chamberlain’s own denial is clear and emphatic:

‘I desire to say in the most explicit manner that I had not then, and that I never had, any knowledge, or until, I think it was the day before the actual raid took place, the slightest suspicion of anything in the nature of a hostile or armed invasion of the Transvaal.’ — (British South Africa Committee, 1897. Q. 6223.)

The Earl of Selborne, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, was no less explicit:

‘Neither then nor at any subsequent period prior to the raid did we know of what is now called “Jameson’s plan,” nor that the revolution at Johannesburg was being largely controlled and financed from Cape Colony and Rhodesia.... Sir Hercules Robinson had no suspicion of what was impending, nor apparently President Kruger, nor Mr. Hofmeyr, nor any public man in South Africa, except those who were preparing the plan. At any rate the fact remains that from no quarter did the Colonial Office receive any warning. I submit, therefore, it would have been a most extraordinary thing if any suspicion had occurred to us.’

The finding of the Committee — a Committee composed of men of all parties, some of whom, as we know, were yearning ‘to give Joe a fall’ — was unanimous in condemning the raid and equally unanimous in exonerating the Government from any knowledge of it. Their Report said:

‘Your Committee fully accept the statements of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and of the Under-Secretary, and entirely exonerate the officials of the Colonial Office of having been in any sense cognisant of the plans which led up to the incursion of Dr. Jameson’s force into the South African Republic....

‘Neither the Secretary of State for the Colonies, nor any of the officials of the Colonial Office received any information which made them, or should have made them, or any of them, aware of the plot during its development.’

And yet to this day it is one of the articles of faith of a few crack-brained fanatics in this country, and of many ill-informed and prejudiced editors upon the Continent, that the British Government was responsible for the raid.

The Uitlanders have been severely criticised for not having sent out a force to help Jameson in his difficulties, but it is impossible to see how they could have acted in any other manner. They had done all they could to prevent Jameson coming to their relief, and now it was rather unreasonable to suppose that they should relieve their reliever. Indeed, they had an entirely exaggerated idea of the strength of the force which he was bringing, and received the news of his capture with incredulity. When it became confirmed they rose, but in a half-hearted fashion which was not due to want of courage, but to the difficulties of their position. On the one hand the British Government disowned Jameson entirely, and did all it could to discourage the rising; on the other, the President had the raiders in his keeping at Pretoria, and let it be understood that their fate depended upon the behaviour of the Uitlanders. They were led to believe that Jameson would be shot unless they laid down their arms, though, as a matter of fact, Jameson and his people had surrendered upon a promise of quarter. So skilfully did Kruger use his hostages that he succeeded, with the help of the British Commissioner, in getting the thousands of excited Johannesburgers to lay down their arms without bloodshed. Completely out-manœuvred by the astute old President, the leaders of the reform movement used all their influence in the direction of peace, thinking that a general amnesty would follow; but the moment that they and their people were helpless the detectives and armed burghers occupied the town, and sixty of their number were hurried to Pretoria Gaol.

To the raiders themselves the President behaved with generosity. Perhaps he could not find it in his heart to be harsh to the men who had managed to put him in the right and won for him the sympathy of the world. His own illiberal and oppressive treatment of the new-comers was forgotten in the face of this illegal inroad of filibusters. The true issues were so obscured by this intrusion that it has taken years to clear them, and perhaps they will never be wholly cleared. It was forgotten that it was the bad government of the country which was the real cause of the unfortunate raid. From then onwards the government might grow worse and worse, but it was always possible to point to the raid as justifying everything. Were the Uitlanders to have the franchise? How could they expect it after the raid? Would Britain object to the enormous importation of arms and obvious preparations for war? They were only precautions against a second raid. For years the raid stood in the way, not only of all progress, but of all remonstrance. Through an action over which they had no control, and which they had done their best to prevent, the British Government was left with a bad case and a weakened moral authority.

The raiders were sent home, where the rank and file were very properly released, and the chief officers were condemned to terms of imprisonment which certainly did not err upon the side of severity. In the meantime, both President Kruger and his burghers had shown a greater severity to the political prisoners from Johannesburg than to the armed followers of Jameson. The nationality of these prisoners is interesting and suggestive. There were twenty-three Englishmen, sixteen South Africans, nine Scotchmen, six Americans, two Welshmen, one Irishman, one Australian, one Hollander, one Bavarian, one Canadian, one Swiss, and one Turk. The list is sufficient comment upon the assertion that only the British Uitlanders made serious complaints of subjection and injustice. The prisoners were arrested in January, but the trial did not take place until the end of April. All were found guilty of high treason. Mr. Lionel Phillips, Colonel Rhodes (brother of Mr. Cecil Rhodes), George Farrar, and Mr. Hammond, the American engineer, were condemned to death, a sentence which was afterwards commuted to the payment of an enormous fine. The other prisoners were condemned to two years' imprisonment, with a fine of 2,000*l.* each. The imprisonment was of the most arduous and trying sort, and was embittered by the harshness of the gaoler, Du Plessis. One of the unfortunate men cut his throat, and several fell seriously ill, the diet and the sanitary conditions being equally unhealthy. At last, at the end of May, all the prisoners but six were released. Four of the six soon followed, two stalwarts, Sampson and Davies, refusing to sign any petition and remaining in prison until they were set free in 1897. Altogether the Transvaal Government received in fines from the reform prisoners the enormous sum of 212,000*l.* A certain comic relief was immediately afterwards given to so grave an episode by the presentation of a bill to Great Britain for 1,677,938*l.* 3*s.* 3*d.* — the greater part of which was under the heading of moral and intellectual damage. It is to be feared that even the 3*s.* 3*d.* remains still unpaid.

The raid was past and the reform movement was past, but the causes which produced them both remained. It is hardly conceivable that a statesman who loved his country would have refrained from making some effort to remove a state of things which had already caused such grave dangers, and which must obviously become more serious with every year that passed. But Paul Kruger had hardened his heart, and was not to be moved. The grievances of the Uitlanders became heavier than ever. The one power in the land to which they had been able to appeal for some sort of redress amid their troubles was the law courts. Now it was decreed that the courts should be dependent on the Volksraad. The Chief Justice protested against such a degradation of his high office, and he was dismissed in consequence without a pension. The judge who had condemned the reformers was chosen to fill the vacancy, and the protection of a fixed law was withdrawn from the Uitlanders.

A commission appointed by the State was sent to examine into the condition of the mining industry and the grievances from which the new-comers suffered. The chairman was Mr. Schalk Burger, one of the most liberal of the Boers, and the proceedings were thorough and impartial. The result was a report which amply vindicated the reformers, and suggested remedies which would have gone a long way towards satisfying the Uitlanders. With such enlightened legislation their motives for seeking the franchise would have been less pressing. But the President and his Raad would have none of the recommendations of the commission. The rugged old autocrat declared that Schalk Burger was a traitor to his country for having signed such a document, and a new reactionary committee was chosen to report upon the report. Words and papers were the only outcome of the affair. No amelioration came to the new-comers. But at least they had again put their case publicly upon record, and it had been endorsed by the most respected of the burghers. Gradually in the press of the English-speaking countries the raid was ceasing to obscure the issue. More and more clearly it was coming out that no permanent settlement was possible where half the population was oppressed by the other half. They had tried peaceful means and failed. They had tried warlike means and failed. What was there left for them to do? Their own country, the paramount power of South Africa, had never helped them. Perhaps if it were directly appealed to it might do so. It could not, if only for the sake of its own imperial prestige, leave its children for ever in a state of subjection. The small spark which caused a final explosion came from the shooting of a British subject named Edgar by a Boer policeman, Jones, in Johannesburg. The action of the policeman was upheld by the authorities, and the British felt that their lives were no longer safe in the presence of an armed overbearing police. At another time the incident might have been of no great importance, but at that moment it seemed to be taken as the crowning example of the injustice under which the miners suffered. A meeting of protest called by the British residents was broken up by gangs of workmen under Boer officials. Driven to desperation the Uitlanders determined upon a petition to Queen Victoria, and in doing so they brought their grievances out of the limits of a local controversy into the broader field of international politics. Great Britain must either protect them or acknowledge that their protection was beyond her power. A direct petition to the Queen praying for protection was signed in April 1899 by 21,000 Uitlanders.

The lines which this historical petition took may be judged from the following excerpt:

‘The condition of Your Majesty’s subjects in this State has indeed become well-nigh intolerable.

‘The acknowledged and admitted grievances of which Your Majesty’s subjects complained prior to 1895, not only are not redressed, but exist to-day in an aggravated form. They are still deprived of all political rights, they are denied any voice in the government of the country, they are taxed far above the requirements of the country, the revenue of which is misapplied and devoted to objects which keep alive a continuous and well-founded feeling of irritation, without in any way advancing the general interest of the State. Maladministration and peculation of public moneys go hand-in-hand, without any vigorous measures being adopted to put a stop to the scandal. The education of Uitlander children is made subject to impossible conditions. The police afford no adequate protection to the lives and property of the inhabitants of Johannesburg; they are rather a source of danger to the peace and safety of the Uitlander population.

‘A further grievance has become prominent since the beginning of the year. The power vested in the Government by means of the Public Meetings Act has been a menace to Your Majesty’s subjects since the enactment of the Act in 1894. This power has now been applied in order to deliver a blow that strikes at the inherent and inalienable birthright of every British subject — namely, his right to petition his Sovereign. Straining to the utmost the language and intention of the law, the Government have arrested two British subjects who assisted in presenting a petition to Your Majesty on behalf of four thousand fellow-subjects. Not content with this, the Government, when Your Majesty’s loyal subjects again attempted to lay their grievances before Your Majesty, permitted their meeting to be broken up, and the objects of it to be defeated, by a body of Boers, organised by Government officials and acting under the protection of the police. By reason, therefore, of the direct, as well as the indirect, act of the Government, Your Majesty’s loyal subjects have been prevented from publicly ventilating their grievances, and from laying them before Your Majesty.

‘Wherefore Your Majesty’s humble petitioners humbly beseech Your Most Gracious Majesty to extend Your Majesty’s protection to Your Majesty’s loyal subjects resident in this State, and to cause an inquiry to be made into grievances and complaints enumerated and set forth in this humble petition, and to direct Your Majesty’s representative in South Africa to take measures which will insure the speedy reform of the abuses complained of, and to obtain substantial guarantees from the Government of this State for a recognition of their rights as British subjects.’

From the date of this direct petition from our ill-used people to their Sovereign events moved inevitably towards one end. Sometimes the surface was troubled and sometimes smooth, but the stream always ran swiftly and the roar of the fall sounded ever louder in the ears.

CHAPTER III

THE NEGOTIATIONS

The British Government and the British people do not desire any direct authority in South Africa. Their one supreme interest is that the various States there should live in concord and prosperity, and that there should be no need for the presence of a British redcoat within the whole great peninsula. Our foreign critics, with their misapprehension of the British colonial system, can never realise that whether the four-coloured flag of the Transvaal or the Union Jack of a self-governing colony waved over the gold mines would not make the difference of one shilling to the revenue of Great Britain. The Transvaal as a British province would have its own legislature, its own revenue, its own expenditure, and its own tariff against the mother country, as well as against the rest of the world, and Britain be none the richer for the change. This is so obvious to a Briton that he has ceased to insist upon it, and it is for that reason perhaps that it is so universally misunderstood abroad. On the other hand, while she is no gainer by the change, most of the expense of it in blood and in money falls upon the home country. On the face of it, therefore, Great Britain had every reason to avoid so formidable a task as the conquest of the South African Republic. At the best she had nothing to gain, and at the worst she had an immense deal to lose. There was no room for ambition or aggression. It was a case of shirking or fulfilling a most arduous duty.

There could be no question of a plot for the annexation of the Transvaal. In a free country the Government cannot move in advance of public opinion, and public opinion is influenced by and reflected in the newspapers. One may examine the files of the press during all the months of negotiations and never find one reputable opinion in favour of such a course, nor did one in society ever meet an advocate of such a measure. But a great wrong was being done, and all that was asked was the minimum change which would set it right, and restore equality between the white races in Africa. ‘Let Kruger only be liberal in the extension of the franchise,’ said the paper which is most representative of the sanest British opinion, ‘and he will find that the power of the republic will become not weaker, but infinitely more secure. Let him once give the majority of the resident males of full age the full vote, and he will have given the republic a stability and power which nothing else can. If he rejects all pleas of this kind, and persists in his present policy, he may possibly stave off the evil day, and preserve his cherished oligarchy for another few years; but the end will be the same.’ The extract reflects the tone of all the British press with the exception of one or two papers which considered that even the persistent ill-usage of our people, and the fact that we were peculiarly responsible for them in this State, did not justify us in interfering in the internal affairs of the republic. It cannot be denied that the Jameson Raid had weakened the force of those who wished to interfere energetically on behalf of British subjects. There was a vague but widespread feeling that perhaps the capitalists were engineering the situation for their own ends. It is difficult to imagine how a state of unrest and insecurity, to say nothing of a state of war, can ever be to the advantage of capital, and surely it is obvious that if some arch-schemer were using the grievances of the Uitlanders for his own ends the best way to checkmate him would be to remove those grievances. The suspicion, however, did exist among those who like to ignore the obvious and magnify the remote, and throughout the negotiations the hand of Great Britain was weakened, as her adversary had doubtless calculated that it would be, by an earnest but fussy and faddy minority.

It was in April 1899 that the British Uitlanders sent their petition praying for protection to their native country. Since the April previous a correspondence had been going on between Dr. Leyds, Secretary of State for the South African Republic, and Mr. Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, upon the existence or non-existence of the suzerainty. On the one hand, it was contended that the substitution of a second convention had entirely annulled the first; on the other, that the preamble of the first applied also to the second. If the Transvaal contention were correct it is clear that Great Britain had been tricked and jockeyed into such a position, since she had received no *quid pro quo* in the second convention, and even the most careless of Colonial Secretaries could hardly have been expected to give away a very substantial something for nothing. But the contention throws us back upon the academic question of what a suzerainty is. The Transvaal admitted a power of veto over their foreign policy, and this admission in itself, unless they openly tore up the convention, must deprive them of the position of a sovereign State.

But now to this debate, which had so little of urgency in it that seven months intervened between statement and reply, there came the bitterly vital question of the wrongs and appeal of the Uitlanders. Sir Alfred Milner, the British Commissioner in South Africa, a man of liberal politics who had been appointed by a Conservative Government, commanded the respect and confidence of all parties. His record was that of an able, clear-headed man, too just to be either guilty of or tolerant of injustice. To him the matter was referred, and a conference was arranged between President Kruger and him at Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. They met on May 31, 1899.

There were three different classes of subject which had to be discussed at the Conference. One included all those alleged breaches of the Convention of London which had caused so much friction between the two Governments, and which had thrice in eighteen years brought the States to the verge of war. Among these subjects would be the Boer annexations of native territory, such interference with trade as the stopping of the Drifts, the question of suzerainty, and the possibility of arbitration. The second class of questions would deal with the grievances of the Uitlanders, which presented a problem which had in no way been provided for in the Conventions. The third class contained the question of the ill-treatment of British Indians, and other causes of quarrel. Sir Alfred Milner was faced with the alternative either to argue over each of these questions in turn — an endless and unprofitable business — or to put forward some one test-question which would strike at the root of the matter and prove whether a real attempt would be made by the Boer Government to relieve the tension. The question which he selected was that of the franchise for the Uitlanders, for it was evident that if they obtained not a fair share — such a request was never made — but any appreciable share in the government of the country, they would in time be able to relieve their own grievances and so spare the British Government the heavy task of acting as their champions. But the Conference was quickly wrecked upon this question. Milner contended for a five-years' retroactive franchise, with provisions to secure adequate representation for the mining districts. Kruger offered a seven-years' franchise, coupled with numerous conditions which whittled down its value very much; promised five members out of thirty-one to represent half the male adult population; and added a provision that all differences should be subject to arbitration by foreign powers — a condition which is incompatible with any claim to suzerainty. This offer dropped the term for the franchise from fourteen years to seven, but it retained a number of conditions which might make it illusory, while demanding in exchange a most important concession from the British Government. The proposals of each were impossible to the other, and early in June Sir Alfred Milner was back in Cape Town and President Kruger in Pretoria, with nothing settled except the extreme difficulty of a settlement.

On June 12 Sir Alfred Milner received a deputation at Cape Town and reviewed the situation. ‘The principle of equality of races was,’ he said, ‘essential for South Africa. The one State where inequality existed kept all the others in a fever. Our policy was one not of aggression, but of singular patience, which could not, however, lapse into indifference.’ Two days later Kruger addressed the Raad. ‘The other side had not conceded one tittle, and I could not give more. God has always stood by us. I do not want war, but I will not give more away. Although our independence has once been taken away, God had restored it.’ He spoke with sincerity no doubt, but it is hard to hear God invoked with such confidence for the system which encouraged the liquor traffic to the natives, and bred the most corrupt set of officials that the modern world has seen.

A despatch from Sir Alfred Milner, giving his views upon the situation, made the British public recognise, as nothing else had done, how serious the position was, and how essential it was that an earnest national effort should be made to set it right. In it he said:

‘The case for intervention is overwhelming. The only attempted answer is that things will right themselves if left alone. But, in fact, the policy of leaving things alone has been tried for years, and it has led to their going from bad to worse. It is not true that this is owing to the raid. They were going from bad to worse before the raid. We were on the verge of war before the raid, and the Transvaal was on the verge of revolution. The effect of the raid has been to give the policy of leaving things alone a new lease of life, and with the old consequences.

‘The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots, constantly chafing under undoubted grievances, and calling vainly to her Majesty’s Government for redress, does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain within the Queen’s dominions. A section of the press, not in the Transvaal only, preaches openly and constantly the doctrine of a republic embracing all South Africa, and supports it by menacing references to the armaments of the Transvaal, its alliance with the Orange Free State, and the active sympathy which, in case of war, it would receive from a section of her Majesty’s subjects. I regret to say that this doctrine, supported as it is by a ceaseless stream of malignant lies about the intentions of her Majesty’s Government, is producing a great effect on a large number of our Dutch fellow-colonists. Language is frequently used which seems to imply that the Dutch have some superior right, even in this colony, to their fellow-citizens of British birth. Thousands of men peaceably disposed, and if left alone perfectly satisfied with their position as British subjects, are being drawn into disaffection, and there is a corresponding exasperation upon the part of the British.

‘I can see nothing which will put a stop to this mischievous propaganda but some striking proof of the intention of her Majesty’s Government not to be ousted from its position in South Africa.’

Such were the grave and measured words with which the British proconsul warned his countrymen of what was to come. He saw the stormcloud piling in the north, but even his eyes had not yet discerned how near and how terrible was the tempest.

Throughout the end of June and the early part of July much was hoped from the mediation of the heads of the Afrikander Bond, the political union of the Dutch Cape colonists. On the one hand, they were the kinsmen of the Boers; on the other, they were British subjects, and were enjoying the blessings of those liberal institutions which we were anxious to see extended to the Transvaal. ‘Only treat our folk as we treat yours!’ Our whole contention was compressed into that prayer. But nothing came of the mission, though a scheme endorsed by Mr. Hofmeyr and Mr. Herholdt, of the Bond, with Mr. Fischer of the Free State, was introduced into the Raad and applauded by Mr. Schreiner, the Africander Premier of Cape Colony. In its original form the provisions were obscure and complicated, the franchise varying from nine years to seven under different conditions. In debate, however, the terms were amended until the time was reduced to seven years, and the proposed representation of the Goldfields placed at five. The concession was not a great one, nor could the representation, five out of thirty-one, be considered a generous provision for half the adult male population; but the reduction of the years of residence was eagerly hailed in England as a sign that a compromise might be effected. A sigh of relief went up from the country. ‘If,’ said the Colonial Secretary, ‘this report is confirmed, this important change in the proposals of President Kruger, coupled with previous amendments, leads Government to hope that the new law may prove to be the basis of a settlement on the lines laid down by Sir Alfred Milner in the Bloemfontein Conference.’ He added that there were some vexatious conditions attached, but concluded, ‘Her Majesty’s Government feel assured that the President, having accepted the principle for which they have contended, will be prepared to reconsider any detail of his scheme which can be shown to be a possible hindrance to the full accomplishment of the object in view, and that he will not allow them to be nullified or reduced in value by any subsequent alterations of the law or acts of administration.’ At the same time, the ‘Times’ declared the crisis to be at an end: ‘If the Dutch statesmen of the Cape have induced their brethren in the Transvaal to carry such a Bill, they will have deserved the lasting gratitude, not only of their own countrymen and of the English colonists in South Africa, but of the British Empire and of the civilised world.’ The reception of the idea that the crisis was at an end is surely a conclusive proof how little it was desired in England that that crisis should lead to war.

But this fair prospect was soon destined to be overcast. Questions of detail arose which, when closely examined, proved to be matters of very essential importance. The Uitlanders and British South Africans, who had experienced in the past how illusory the promises of the President might be, insisted upon guarantees. The seven years offered were two years more than that which Sir Alfred Milner had declared to be an irreducible minimum. The difference of two years would not have hindered their acceptance, even at the expense of some humiliation to our representative. But there were conditions which excited distrust when drawn up by so wily a diplomatist. One was that the alien who aspired to burghership had to produce a certificate of continuous registration for a certain time. But the law of registration had fallen into disuse in the Transvaal, and consequently this provision might render the whole Bill valueless. Since it was carefully retained, it was certainly meant for use. The door had been opened, but a stone was placed to block it. Again, the continued burghership of the new-comers was made to depend upon the resolution of the first Raad, so that should the mining members propose any measure of reform, not only their

Bill but they also might be swept out of the house by a Boer majority. What could an Opposition do if a vote of the Government might at any moment unseat them all? It was clear that a measure which contained such provisions must be very carefully sifted before a British Government could accept it as a final settlement and a complete concession of justice to its subjects. On the other hand, it naturally felt loth to refuse those clauses which offered some prospect of an amelioration in their condition. It took the course, therefore, of suggesting that each Government should appoint delegates to form a joint commission which should inquire into the working of the proposed Bill before it was put into a final form. The proposal was submitted to the Raad on August 7, with the addition that when this was done Sir Alfred Milner was prepared to discuss anything else, including arbitration without the interference of foreign powers.

The suggestion of this joint commission has been criticised as an unwarrantable intrusion into the internal affairs of another country. But then the whole question from the beginning was about the internal affairs of another country, since there could be no rest in South Africa so long as one race tried to dominate the other. It is futile to suggest analogies, and to imagine what France would do if Germany were to interfere in a question of French franchise. Supposing that France contained nearly as many Germans as Frenchmen, and that they were ill-treated, Germany would interfere quickly enough and continue to do so until some fair *modus vivendi* was established. The fact is that the case of the Transvaal stands alone, that such a condition of things has never been known, and that no previous precedent can apply to it, save the general rule that white men who are heavily taxed must have some representation. Sentiment may incline to the smaller nation, but reason and justice are all on the side of Britain.

A long delay followed upon the proposal of the Secretary of the Colonies. No reply was forthcoming from Pretoria. But on all sides there came evidence that those preparations for war which had been quietly going on even before the Jameson Raid were now being hurriedly perfected. For so small a State enormous sums were being spent upon military equipment. Cases of rifles and boxes of cartridges streamed into the arsenal, not only from Delagoa Bay, but even, to the indignation of the English colonists, through Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Huge packing-cases, marked ‘Agricultural Instruments’ and ‘Mining Machinery,’ arrived from Germany and France, to find their places in the forts of Johannesburg or Pretoria. As early as May the Orange Free State President, who was looked upon by the simple and trustful British as the honest broker who was about to arrange a peace, was writing to Grobler, the Transvaal official, claiming his share of the twenty-five million cartridges which had then been imported. This was the man who was posing as mediator between the two parties a fortnight later at Bloemfontein.

For three years the Transvaal had been arming to the teeth. So many modern magazine-rifles had been imported that there were enough to furnish five to every male burgher in the country. The importation of ammunition was on the same gigantic scale. For what were these formidable preparations? Evidently for a war with Great Britain, and not for a defensive war. It is not in a defensive war that a State provides sufficient rifles to arm every man of Dutch blood in the whole of South Africa. No British reinforcements had been sent during the years that the Transvaal was obviously preparing for a struggle. In that one eloquent fact lies a complete proof as to which side forced on a war, and which side desired to avoid one. For three weeks and more, during which Mr. Kruger was silent, these preparations went on more energetically and more openly.

But beyond them, and of infinitely more importance, there was one fact which dominated the situation and retarded the crisis. A burgher cannot go to war without his horse, his horse cannot move without grass, grass will not come until after rain, and it was still some weeks before the rain would be due. Negotiations, then, must not be unduly hurried while the veldt was a bare russet-coloured dust-swept plain. Mr. Chamberlain and the British public waited week after week for an answer. But there was a limit to their patience, and it was reached on August 26, when the Colonial Secretary showed, with a plainness of speech which is as unusual as it is welcome in diplomacy, that the question could not be hung up for ever. ‘The sands are running down in the glass,’ said he. ‘If they run out we shall not hold ourselves limited by that which we have already offered, but, having taken the matter in hand, we will not let it go until we have secured conditions which once for all shall establish which is the paramount power in South Africa, and shall secure for our fellow-subjects there those equal rights and equal privileges which were promised them by President Kruger when the independence of the Transvaal was granted by the Queen, and which is the least that in justice ought to be accorded them.’ Lord Salisbury, a short time before, had been equally emphatic: ‘No one in this country wishes to disturb the conventions so long as it is recognised that while they guarantee the independence of the Transvaal on the one side, they guarantee equal political and civil rights for settlers of all nationalities upon the other. But these conventions are not like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. They are mortal, they can be destroyed ... and once destroyed they can never be reconstructed in the same shape.' The long-enduring patience of Great Britain was beginning to show signs of giving way.

Pressure was in the meanwhile being put upon the old President and upon his advisers, if he can be said ever to have had any advisers, in order to induce him to accept the British offer of a joint committee of inquiry. Sir Henry de Villiers, representing the highest Africander opinion of the Cape, wrote strongly pleading the cause of peace, and urging Mr. Fischer of the Free State to endeavour to give a more friendly tone to the negotiations. 'Try to induce President Kruger to meet Mr. Chamberlain in a friendly way, and remove all the causes of unrest which have disturbed this unhappy country for so many years.' Similar advice came from Europe. The Dutch minister telegraphed as follows:

'*August 4, 1899.* — Communicate confidentially to the President that, having heard from the Transvaal Minister the English proposal of the International Commission, I recommend the President, in the interest of the country, not peremptorily to refuse that proposition.'

'*August 15, 1899.* — Please communicate confidentially to the President that the German Government entirely shares my opinion expressed in my despatch of August 4, not to refuse the English proposal. The German Government is, like myself, convinced that every approach to one of the Great Powers in this very critical moment will be without any results whatever, and very dangerous for the Republic.'

But neither his Africander brothers nor his friends abroad could turn the old man one inch from the road upon which he had set his foot. The fact is, that he knew well that his franchise proposals would not bear examination; that, in the words of an eminent lawyer, they 'might as well have been seventy years as seven,' so complicated and impossible were the conditions. For a long time he was silent, and when he at last spoke it was to open a new phase of the negotiations. His ammunition was not all to hand yet, his rifles had not all been distributed, the grass had not appeared upon the veldt. The game must be kept going for a couple of months. 'You are such past-masters in the art of gaining time!’ said Mr. Labouchere to Mr. Montague White. The President proceeded to prove it.

His new suggestions were put forward on August 12. In them the Joint Commission was put aside, and the proposal was made that the Boer Government should accede to the franchise proposals of Sir Alfred Milner on condition that the British Government withdrew or dropped her claim to a suzerainty, agreed to arbitration by a British and South African tribunal, and promised never again to interfere in the internal affairs of the Republic. To this Great Britain answered that she would agree to such arbitration; that she hoped never again to have occasion to interfere for the protection of her own subjects, but that with the grant of the franchise all occasion for such interference would pass away; and, finally, that she would never consent to abandon her position as suzerain power. Mr. Chamberlain’s despatch ended by reminding the Government of the Transvaal that there were other matters of dispute open between the two Governments apart from the franchise, and that it would be as well to have them settled at the same time. By these he meant such questions as the position of the native races and the treatment of Anglo-Indians.

For a moment there seemed now to be a fair prospect of peace. There was no very great gap between the two parties, and had the negotiations been really *bonâ fide* it seems incredible that it could not be bridged. But the Transvaal was secure now of the alliance of the Orange Free State; it believed that the Colony was ripe for rebellion; and it knew that with 60,000 cavalry and 100 guns it was infinitely the strongest military power in Africa. One cannot read the negotiations without being convinced that they were never meant to succeed, and the party which did not mean them to succeed was the party which prepared all the time for war. De Villiers, a friendly critic, says of the Transvaal Government: ‘Throughout the negotiations they have always been wriggling to prevent a clear and precise decision.’ Surely the sequel showed clearly enough why this was so. Their military hand was stronger than their political one, and it was with that that they desired to play the game. It would not do, therefore, to get the negotiations into such a stage that a peaceful solution should become inevitable. What was the use of all those rifles and cannon if the pen were after all to effect a compromise? ‘The only thing that we are afraid of,’ wrote young Blignant, ‘is that Chamberlain with his admitted fitfulness of temper should cheat us out of our war and, consequently, the opportunity of annexing the Cape Colony and Natal, and forming the Republican United States of South Africa' — a legitimate national ambition perhaps, but not compatible with *bonâ-fide* peaceful negotiations.

It was time, then, to give a less promising turn to the situation. On September 2 the answer of the Transvaal Government was returned. It was short and uncompromising. They withdrew their offer of the franchise. They reasserted the non-existence of the suzerainty. The negotiations were at a deadlock. It was difficult to see how they could be reopened. In view of the arming of the burghers, the small garrison of Natal had been taking up positions to cover the frontier. The Transvaal asked for an explanation of their presence. Sir Alfred Milner answered that they were guarding British interests, and preparing against contingencies. The roar of the fall was sounding loud and near.

On September 8 there was held a Cabinet Council — one of the most important in recent years. The military situation was pressing. The handful of troops in Africa could not be left at the mercy of the large and formidable force which the Boers could at any time hurl against them. On the other hand, it was very necessary not to appear to threaten or to appeal to force. For this reason reinforcements were sent upon such a scale as to make it evident that they were sent for defensive, and not for offensive, purposes. Five thousand men were sent from India to Natal, and the Cape garrisons were strengthened from England.

At the same time that they took these defensive measures, a message was sent to Pretoria, which even the opponents of the Government have acknowledged to be temperate, and offering the basis for a peaceful settlement. It begins by repudiating emphatically the claim of the Transvaal to be a sovereign international State in the same sense in which the Orange Free State is one. Any proposal made conditional upon such an acknowledgment could not be entertained. The status of the Transvaal was settled by certain conventions agreed to by both Governments, and nothing had occurred to cause us to acquiesce in a radical change in it.

The British Government, however, was prepared to accept the five years' franchise as stated in the note of August 19, assuming at the same time that in the Raad each member might use his own language.

'Acceptance of these terms by the South African Republic would at once remove tension between the two Governments, and would in all probability render unnecessary any future intervention to secure redress for grievances which the Uitlanders themselves would be able to bring to the notice of the Executive Council and the Volksraad.

‘Her Majesty’s Government are increasingly impressed with the danger of further delay in relieving the strain which has already caused so much injury to the interests of South Africa, and they earnestly press for an immediate and definite reply to the present proposal. If it is acceded to they will be ready to make immediate arrangements ... to settle all details of the proposed tribunal of arbitration.... If, however, as they most anxiously hope will not be the case, the reply of the South African Republic should be negative or inconclusive, I am to state that Her Majesty’s Government must reserve to themselves the right to reconsider the situation *de novo*, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.’

This despatch was so moderate in form and so courteous in tone that press and politicians of every shade of opinion were united in approving it, and hoping for a corresponding reply which would relax the tension between the two nations. Mr. Morley, Mr. Leonard Courtney, the ‘Daily Chronicle’ — all the most strenuous opponents of the Government policy — were satisfied that it was a message of peace. But nothing at that time, save a complete and abject surrender upon the part of the British, could have satisfied the Boers, who had the most exaggerated ideas of their own military prowess and no very high opinion of our own. The continental conception of the British wolf and the Transvaal lamb would have raised a laugh in Pretoria, where the outcome of the war was looked upon as a foregone conclusion. The burghers were in no humour for concessions. They knew their own power, and they concluded with justice that they were for the time far the strongest military power in South Africa. ‘We have beaten England before, but it is nothing to the licking that we shall give her now!’ said one prominent citizen. ‘Reitz seemed to treat the whole matter as a big joke,’ remarked de Villiers. ‘Is it really necessary for you to go,’ said the Chief Justice of the Transvaal to an English clergyman. ‘The war will be over in a fortnight. We shall take Kimberley and Mafeking and give the English such a beating in Natal that they will sue for peace.’ Such were the extravagant ideas which caused them to push aside the olive-branch of peace.

On September 18 the official reply of the Boer Government to the message sent from the Cabinet Council was published in London. In manner it was unbending and unconciliatory; in substance, it was a complete rejection of all the British demands. It refused to recommend or propose to the Raad the five-years' franchise and the other provisions which had been defined as the minimum which the Home Government could accept as a fair measure of justice towards the Uitlanders. The suggestion that the debates of the Raad should be bilingual, as they are in the Cape Colony and in Canada, was absolutely waved aside. The British Government had stated in their last despatch that if the reply should be negative or inconclusive they reserved to themselves the right to 'reconsider the situation *de novo*, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.' The reply had been both negative and inconclusive, and on September 22 a council met to determine what the next message should be. It was short and firm, but so planned as not to shut the door upon peace. Its purport was that the British Government expressed deep regret at the rejection of the moderate proposals which had been submitted in their last despatch, and that now, in accordance with their promise, they would shortly put forward their own plans for a settlement. The message was not an ultimatum, but it foreshadowed an ultimatum in the future.

In the meantime, upon September 21, the Raad of the Orange Free State had met, and it became more and more evident that this republic, with whom we had no possible quarrel, but, on the contrary, for whom we had a great deal of friendship and admiration, intended to throw in its weight against Great Britain. Some time before, an offensive and defensive alliance had been concluded between the two States, which must, until the secret history of these events comes to be written, appear to have been a singularly rash and unprofitable bargain for the smaller one. She had nothing to fear from Great Britain, since she had been voluntarily turned into an independent republic by her, and had lived in peace with her for forty years. Her laws were as liberal as our own. But by this suicidal treaty she agreed to share the fortunes of a State which was deliberately courting war by its persistently unfriendly attitude, and whose reactionary and narrow legislation would, one might imagine, have alienated the sympathy of her progressive neighbour. The trend of events was seen clearly in the days of President Brand, who was a sane and experienced politician. 'President Brand,' says Paul Botha (himself a voortrekker and a Boer of the Boers), 'saw clearly what our policy ought to have been. He always avoided offending the Transvaal, but he loved the Orange Free State and its independence for its own sake and not as an appendage to the Transvaal.

And in order to maintain its character he always strove for the friendship of England.

‘President Brand realised that closer union with the turbulent and misguided Transvaal, led by Kruger’s challenging policy, would inevitably result in a disastrous war with England.

‘I [Paul Botha] felt this as strongly, and never ceased fighting against closer union. I remember once stating these arguments in the Volksraad, and wound up my speech by saying, “May Heaven grant that I am wrong in what I fear, because, if I am right, then woe, woe to the Orange Free State.”’

It is evident that if the Free State rushed headlong to utter destruction it was not for want of wise voices which tried to guide her to some safer path. But there seems to have been a complete hallucination as to the comparative strength of the two opponents, and as to the probable future of South Africa. Under no possible future could the Free State be better off than it was already, a perfectly free and independent republic; and yet the country was carried away by race-prejudice spread broadcast from a subsidised press and an unchristian pulpit. ‘When I come to think of the abuse the pulpit made of its influence,’ says Paul Botha, ‘I feel as if I cannot find words strong enough to express my indignation. God’s word was prostituted. A religious people’s religion was used to urge them to their destruction. A minister of God told me himself, with a wink, that he had to preach anti-English because otherwise he would lose favour with those in power.’ Such were the influences which induced the Free State to make an insane treaty, compelling it to wantonly take up arms against a State which had never injured it and which bore it nothing but good will.

The tone of President Steyn at the meeting of the Raad, and the support which he received from the majority of his burghers, showed unmistakably that the two republics would act as one. In his opening speech Steyn declared uncompromisingly against the British contention, and declared that his State was bound to the Transvaal by everything which was near and dear. Among the obvious military precautions which could no longer be neglected by the British Government, was the sending of some small force to protect the long and exposed line of railway which lies just outside the Transvaal border from Kimberley to Rhodesia. Sir Alfred Milner communicated with President Steyn as to this movement of troops, pointing out that it was in no way directed against the Free State. Sir Alfred Milner added that the Imperial Government was still hopeful of a friendly settlement with the Transvaal, but if this hope were disappointed they looked to the Orange Free State to preserve strict neutrality and to prevent military intervention by any of its citizens. They undertook that in that case the integrity of the Free State frontier would be strictly preserved. Finally, he stated that there was absolutely no cause to disturb the good relations between the Free State and Great Britain, since we were animated by the most friendly intentions towards them. To this the President returned a somewhat ungracious answer, to the effect that he disapproved of our action towards the Transvaal, and that he regretted the movement of troops, which would be considered a menace by the burghers. A subsequent resolution of the Free State Raad, ending with the words, ‘Come what may, the Free State will honestly and faithfully fulfil its obligations towards the Transvaal by virtue of the political alliance existing between the two republics,’ showed how impossible it was that this country, formed by ourselves, and without a shadow of a cause of quarrel with us, could be saved from being drawn into the whirlpool.

In the meantime, military preparations were being made upon both sides, moderate in the case of the British and considerable in that of the Boers.

On August 15, at a time when the negotiations had already assumed a very serious phase, after the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference and the despatch of Sir Alfred Milner, the British forces in South Africa were absolutely and absurdly inadequate for the purpose of the defence of our own frontier. Surely such a fact must open the eyes of those who, in spite of all the evidence, persist that the war was forced on by the British. A statesman who forces on a war usually prepares for a war, and this is exactly what Mr. Kruger did and the British authorities did not. The overbearing suzerain power had at that date, scattered over a huge frontier, two cavalry regiments, three field batteries, and six and a half infantry battalions — say six thousand men. The innocent pastoral States could put in the field more than fifty thousand mounted riflemen, whose mobility doubled their numbers, and a most excellent artillery, including the heaviest guns which have ever been seen upon a battlefield. At this time it is most certain that the Boers could have made their way easily either to Durban or to Cape Town. The British force, condemned to act upon the defensive, could have been masked and afterwards destroyed, while the main body of the invaders would have encountered nothing but an irregular local resistance, which would have been neutralised by the apathy or hostility of the Dutch colonists. It is extraordinary that our authorities seem never to have contemplated the possibility of the Boers taking the initiative, or to have understood that in that case our belated reinforcements would certainly have had to land under the fire of the republican guns. They ran a great military risk by their inaction, but at least they made it clear to all who are not wilfully blind how far from the thoughts or wishes of the British Government it has always been that the matter should be decided by force.

In answer to the remonstrances of the Colonial Prime Minister the garrison of Natal was gradually increased, partly by troops from Europe, and partly by the despatch of 5,000 British troops from India. Their arrival late in September raised the number of troops in South Africa to 22,000, a force which was inadequate to a contest in the open field with the numerous, mobile, and gallant enemy to whom they were to be opposed, but which proved to be strong enough to stave off that overwhelming disaster which, with our fuller knowledge, we can now see to have been impending.

In the weeks which followed the despatch of the Cabinet message of September 8, the military situation had ceased to be desperate, but was still precarious. Twenty-two thousand regular troops were on the spot who might hope to be reinforced by some ten thousand Colonials, but these forces had to cover a great frontier, the attitude of Cape Colony was by no means whole-hearted and might become hostile, while the black population might conceivably throw in its weight against us. Only half the regulars could be spared to defend Natal, and no reinforcements could reach them in less than a month from the outbreak of hostilities. If Mr. Chamberlain was really playing a game of bluff, it must be confessed that he was bluffing from a very weak hand.

For purposes of comparison we may give some idea of the forces which Mr. Kruger and Mr. Steyn could put in the field. The general press estimate of the forces of the two republics varied from 25,000 to 35,000 men. Mr. J. B. Robinson, a personal friend of President Kruger’s and a man who had spent much of his life among the Boers, considered the latter estimate to be too high. The calculation had no assured basis to start from. A very scattered and isolated population, among whom large families were the rule, is a most difficult thing to estimate. Some reckoned from the supposed natural increase during eighteen years, but the figure given at that date was itself an assumption. Others took their calculation from the number of voters in the last presidential election; but no one could tell how many abstentions there had been, and the fighting age is five years earlier than the voting age in the republics. We recognise now that all calculations were far below the true figure. It is probable, however, that the information of the British Intelligence Department was not far wrong. No branch of the British Service has come better out of a very severe ordeal than this one, and its report before the war is so accurate, alike in facts and in forecast, as to be quite prophetic.

According to this the fighting strength of the Transvaal alone was 32,000 men, and of the Orange Free State 22,000. With mercenaries and rebels from the colonies they would amount to 60,000, while a considerable rising of the Cape Dutch would bring them up to 100,000. Our actual male prisoners now amount to 42,000, and we can account for 10,000 casualties, so that, allowing another 10,000 for the burghers at large, the Boer force, excluding a great number of Cape rebels, would reach 62,000. Of the quality of this large force there is no need to speak. The men were brave, hardy, and fired with a strange religious enthusiasm. They were all of the seventeenth century, except their rifles. Mounted upon their hardy little ponies, they possessed a mobility which practically doubled their numbers and made it an impossibility ever to outflank them. As marksmen they are supreme. Add to this that they had the advantage of acting upon internal lines with shorter and safer communications, and one gathers how formidable a task lay before the soldiers of the Empire. When we turn from such an enumeration of their strength to contemplate the 12,000 men, split into two detachments, who awaited them in Natal, we may recognise that, far from bewailing our disasters, we should rather congratulate ourselves upon our escape from losing that great province which, situated as it is between Britain, India, and Australia, must be regarded as the very keystone of the imperial arch.

But again one must ask whether in the face of these figures it is still possible to maintain that Great Britain was deliberately attempting to overthrow by force the independence of the republics.

There was a lull in the political exchanges after the receipt of the Transvaal despatch of September 16, which rejected the British proposals of September 8. In Africa all hope or fear of peace had ended. The Raads had been dissolved and the old President’s last words had been that war was certain, with a stern invocation of the Lord as the final arbiter. Britain was ready less obtrusively, but no less heartily, to refer the quarrel to the same dread judge.

On October 2 President Steyn informed Sir Alfred Milner that he had deemed it necessary to call out the Free State burghers — that is, to mobilise his forces. Sir A. Milner wrote regretting these preparations, and declaring that he did not yet despair of peace, for he was sure that any reasonable proposal would be favourably considered by her Majesty's Government. Steyn's reply was that there was no use in negotiating unless the stream of British reinforcements ceased coming into South Africa. As our forces were still in a great minority, it was impossible to stop the reinforcements, so the correspondence led to nothing. On October 7 the army reserves for the First Army Corps were called out in Great Britain, and other signs shown that it had been determined to send a considerable force to South Africa. Parliament was also summoned, that the formal national assent might be gained for those grave measures which were evidently pending.

It has been stated that it was the action of the British in calling out the reserves which caused the ultimatum from the Boers and so precipitated the war. Such a contention is absurd, for it puts the cart before the horse. The Transvaal commandos had mobilised upon September 27, and those of the Free State on October 2. The railways had been taken over, the exodus from Johannesburg had begun, and an actual act of war had been committed by the stopping of a train and the confiscation of the gold which was in it. The British action was subsequent to all this, and could not have been the cause of it. But no Government could see such portents and delay any longer to take those military preparations which were called for by the critical situation. As a matter of fact, the Boer ultimatum was prepared before the date of the calling out of the reserves, and was only delivered later because the final details for war were not quite ready.

It was on October 9 that the somewhat leisurely proceedings of the British Colonial Office were brought to a head by the arrival of an unexpected and audacious ultimatum from the Boer Government. In contests of wit, as of arms, it must be confessed that the laugh has up to now been usually upon the side of our simple and pastoral South African neighbours. The present instance was no exception to the rule. The document was very firm and explicit, but the terms in which it was drawn were so impossible that it was evidently framed with the deliberate purpose of forcing an immediate war. It demanded that the troops upon the borders of the republic should be instantly withdrawn, that all reinforcements which had arrived within the last year should leave South Africa, and that those who were now upon the sea should be sent back without being landed. Failing a satisfactory answer within forty-eight hours, ‘The Transvaal Government will with great regret be compelled to regard the action of her Majesty’s Government as a formal declaration of war, for the consequences of which it will not hold itself responsible.’ The audacious message was received throughout the empire with a mixture of derision and anger. The answer was despatched next day through Sir Alfred Milner.

‘*October 10.* — Her Majesty’s Government have received with great regret the peremptory demands of the Government of the South African Republic, conveyed in your telegram of the 9th October. You will inform the Government of the South African Republic in reply that the conditions demanded by the Government of the South African Republic are such as her Majesty’s Government deem it impossible to discuss.’

CHAPTER IV

SOME POINTS EXAMINED

Such is a general sketch of the trend of the negotiations and of the events which led up to the war. Under their different headings I will now examine in as short a space as possible the criticisms to which the British Government has been subjected. Various damaging theories and alternate lines of action have been suggested, each of which may be shortly discussed.

1. *That Mr. Chamberlain was personally concerned in the raid and that out of revenge for that failure, or because he was in the power of Mr. Rhodes, he forced on the war.* — The theory that Mr. Chamberlain was in the confidence of the raiders, has been already examined and shown to be untenable. That he knew that an insurrection might probably result from the despair of the Uitlanders is very probable. It was his business to know what was going on so far as he could, and there is no reason why his private sympathies, like those of every other Englishman, should not be with his own ill-used people. But that he contemplated an invasion of the Transvaal by a handful of policemen is absurd. If he did, why should he instantly take the strongest steps to render the invasion abortive? What could he possibly do to make things miscarry which he did not do? And if he were conscious of being in the power of Mr. Rhodes, how would he dare to oppose with such vigour that gentleman's pet scheme? The very facts and the very telegrams upon which critics rely to prove Mr. Chamberlain's complicity will really, when looked at with unprejudiced eyes, most clearly show his entire independence. Thus when Rhodes, or Harris in Rhodes's name, telegraphs, 'Inform Chamberlain that I shall get through all right if he will support me, but he must not send cable like he sent to the High Commissioner,' and again, 'Unless you can make Chamberlain instruct the High Commissioner to proceed at once to Johannesburg the whole position is lost,' is it not perfectly obvious that there has been no understanding of any sort, and that the conspirators are attempting to force the Colonial Secretary's hand? Again, critics make much of the fact that shortly before

the raid Mr. Chamberlain sold to the Chartered Company the strip of land from which the raid started, and that he made a hard bargain, exacting as much as 200,000*l.* for it. Surely the perversion of an argument could hardly go further, for if Mr. Chamberlain were in their confidence and in favour of their plan it is certain that he would have given them easy and not difficult terms for the land for which they asked. The supposition that Mr. Chamberlain was the tool of Rhodes in declaring war, presupposes that Mr. Chamberlain could impose his will without question upon a Cabinet which contained Lord Salisbury, Lord Lansdowne, Arthur Balfour, Hicks-Beach, and the other ministers. Such a supposition is too monstrous to discuss.

2. *That it is a capitalists' war, engineered by company promoters and Jews.* — After the Jameson Raid a large body of the public held this view, and it was this which to a great extent tied the hands of the Government, and stopped them from taking that strong line which might have prevented the accumulation of those huge armaments which could only be intended for use against ourselves. It took years to finally dissipate the idea, but how thoroughly it has been dissipated in the public mind is best shown by the patient fortitude with which our people have borne the long and weary struggle in which few families in the land have not lost either a friend or a relative. The complaisance of the British public towards capitalists goes no further than giving them their strict legal rights — and certainly does not extend to pouring out money and blood like water for their support. Such a supposition is absurd, nor can any reason be given why a body of high-minded and honourable British gentlemen like the Cabinet should sacrifice their country for the sake of a number of cosmopolitan financiers, most of whom are German Jews. The tax which will eventually be placed upon the Transvaal mining industry, in order to help to pay for the war, will in itself prove that the capitalists have no great voice in the councils of the nation. We know now that the leading capitalists in Johannesburg were the very men who most strenuously resisted an agitation which might lead to war. This seems natural enough when one considers how much capitalists had at stake, and how much to lose by war. The agitation for the franchise and other rights was a *bonâ-fide* liberal agitation, started by poor men, employés and miners, who intended to live in the country, not in Park Lane. The capitalists were the very last to be drawn into it. When I say capitalists I mean the capitalists with British sympathies, for there is indeed much to be said in favour of the war being a capitalists' war, in that it was largely

caused by the anti-British attitude and advice of the South African Netherlands Company, the Dynamite Monopoly, and other leeches which drained the country. To them a free and honest government meant ruin, and they strained every nerve, even to paying bogus English agitators, in order to hinder the cause of reform. Their attitude undoubtedly had something to do with stiffening the backs of the Boers and so preventing concessions.

3. *That Britain wanted the gold mines.* — No possible accusation is more popular or more widely believed upon the Continent, and yet none could be more ridiculous when it is examined. The gold mines are private companies, with shares held by private shareholders, German and French, as well as British. Whether the British or the Boer flag flew over the country would not alienate a single share from any holder, nor would the wealth of Britain be in any way greater. She will be the poorer by the vast expense of the war, and it is unlikely that more than one-third of this expenditure can be covered by taxation of the profits of the gold mines. Apart from this limited contribution towards the war, how is Britain the richer because her flag flies over the Rand? The Transvaal will be a self-governing colony, like all other British colonies, with its own finance minister, its own budget, its own taxes, even its own power of imposing duties upon British merchandise. They will pay a British governor 10,000*l.*, and he will be expected to spend 15,000*l. We* know all this because it is part of our British system, but it is not familiar to those nations who look upon colonies as sources of direct revenue to the mother country. It is the most general, and at the same time the most untenable, of all Continental comments upon the war. The second Transvaal war was the logical sequel of the first, and the first was fought before gold was discovered in the country.

4. *That it was a monarchy against a republic.* — This argument undoubtedly had weight with those true republics like the United States, France, and Switzerland, where people who were ignorant of the facts were led away by mere names. As a matter of fact Great Britain and the British colonies are among the most democratic communities in the world. They preserve, partly from sentiment, partly for political convenience, a hereditary chief, but the will of the people is decisive upon all questions, and every man by his vote helps to mould the destiny of the State. There is practically universal suffrage, and the highest offices of the State are within reach of any citizen who is competent to attain them. On the other hand, the

Transvaal is an oligarchy, not a democracy, where half the inhabitants claim to be upon an entirely different footing from the other half. This rule represents the ascendency of one race over the other, such an ascendency as existed in Ireland in the eighteenth century. Technically the one country is a republic and the other a monarchy, but in truth the empire stood for liberty and the republic for tyranny, race ascendency, corruption, taxation without representation, and all that is most opposed to the broader conception of freedom.

5. *That it was a strong nation attacking a weak one.* — That appeal to sentiment and to the sporting instincts of the human race must always be a powerful one. But in this instance it is entirely misapplied. The preparation for war, the ultimatum, the invasion, and the first shedding of blood, all came from the nation which the result has shown to be the weaker. The reason why this smaller nation attacked so audaciously was that they knew perfectly well that they were at the time far the stronger power in South Africa, and all their information led them to believe that they would continue to be so even when Britain had put forth all her strength. It certainly seemed that they were justified in this belief. The chief military critics of the Continent had declared that 100,000 men was the outside figure which Britain could place in the field. Against these they knew that without any rising of their kinsmen in the Cape they could place fifty or sixty thousand men, and their military history had unfortunately led them to believe that such a force of Boers, operating under their own conditions with their own horses in their own country, was far superior to this number of British soldiers. They knew how excellent was their artillery, and how complete their preparations. A dozen extracts could be given to show how confident they were of success, from Blignant’s letter with his fears that Chamberlain would do them out of the war, to Esselen’s boast that he would not wash until he reached the sea. What they did not foresee, and what put out their plans, was that indignant wave of public opinion throughout the British Empire which increased threefold — as it would, if necessary, have increased tenfold — the strength of the army and so enabled it to beat down the Boer resistance. When war was declared, and for a very long time afterwards, it was the Boers who were the strong power and the British who were the weak one, and any sympathy given on the other understanding was sympathy misapplied. From that time onwards the war had to take its course, and the British had no choice but to push it to its end.

6. *That the British refused to arbitrate.* — This has been repeated *ad nauseam*, but the allegation will not bear investigation. There are some subjects which can be settled by arbitration, and all those Great Britain freely consented to treat in this fashion, before a tribunal which should be limited to Great Britain and South Africa. Such a tribunal would by no means be necessarily drawn from judges who were committed to one side or the other. There were many men whose moderation and discretion both sides would admit. Such a man, for example, was Rose Innes amongst the British, and de Villiers among those who had Africander sympathies. Both the Transvaal and the British Governments agreed that such a tribunal was competent, but they disagreed upon the point that the British Government desired to reserve some subjects from this arbitration.

The desire upon the part of Great Britain to exclude outsiders from the arbitration tribunal was due to the fact that to admit them was to give away the case before going into Court. The Transvaal claimed to be a sovereign international state. Great Britain denied it. If the Transvaal could appeal to arbitration as a peer among peers in a court of nations, she became *ipso facto* an international state. Therefore Great Britain refused such a court.

But why not refer all subjects to such a South African court as was finally accepted by both sides? The answer is that it is a monstrous hypocrisy to carry cases into an arbitration court, when you know beforehand that by their very nature they cannot possibly be settled by such a court. To quote Milner’s words, ‘It is, of course, absurd to suggest that the question whether the South African Republic does or does not treat British residents in that country with justice, and the British Government with the consideration and respect due to any friendly, not to say suzerain power, is a question capable of being referred to arbitration. You cannot arbitrate on broad questions of policy any more than on questions of national honour.’ On this point of the limitation of arbitration the Transvaal leaders appear to have been as unanimous as the British, so that it is untrue to lay the blame of the restriction upon one side only. Mr. Reitz, in his scheme of arbitration formulated upon June 9, has the express clause ‘That each side shall have the right to reserve and exclude points which appear to it to be too important to be submitted to arbitration.’ To this the British Government agreed, making the further very great concession that an Orange Free Stater should not be regarded as a foreigner. The matter was in this state when the Transvaal sent its ultimatum. Up to the firing of the first shot the British

Government still offered the only form of arbitration which was possible without giving away the question at issue. It was the Transvaal which, after agreeing to such a Court, turned suddenly to the arbitrament of the Mauser and the Creusot.

7. *That the war was to avenge Majuba.* — There can be no doubt that our defeat in this skirmish had left considerable heart-burnings which were not allayed by the subsequent attitude of the Boers and their assumption, testified to by Bryce and other friendly observers, that what we did after the action was due not to a magnanimous desire to repair a wrong but to craven fear. From the outset of the war there was a strong desire on the part of the soldiers to avenge Majuba, which was fully gratified when, upon the anniversary of that day, Cronje and his 4,000 brave companions had to raise the white flag. But that a desire to avenge Majuba swayed the policy of the country cannot be upheld in view of the fact that eighteen years had elapsed; that during that time the Boers had again and again broken the conventions by extending their boundaries; that three times matters were in such a position that war might have resulted and yet that peace was successfully maintained. War might very easily have been forced upon the Boers during the years before they turned their country into an arsenal, when it would have been absolutely impossible for them to have sustained a long campaign. That it was not done and that the British Government remained patient until it received the outrageous ultimatum, is a proof that Majuba may have rankled in our memory but was not allowed to influence our policy.

8. *What proof is there that the Boers ever had any aggressive designs upon the British?* — It would be a misuse of terms to call the general Boer designs against the British a conspiracy, for it was openly advocated in the press, preached from the pulpit, and preached upon the platform, that the Dutch should predominate in South Africa, and that the portion of it which remained under the British flag should be absorbed by that which was outside it. So widespread and deep-seated was this ambition, that it was evident that Great Britain must, sooner or later, either yield to it or else sustain her position by force of arms. She was prepared to give Dutch citizens within her borders the vote, the power of making their own laws, complete religious and political freedom, and everything which their British comrades could have, without any distinction whatever; but when it came to hauling down the flag, it was certainly time that a stand should be made.

How this came about cannot be expressed more clearly than in the words of Paul Botha, who, as I have already said, was a voortrekker like Kruger himself, and a Boer of the Boers, save that he seems to have been a man with wider and more liberal views than his fellows. He was member for Kroonstadt in the Free State Raad.

‘I am convinced,’ he says, ‘that Kruger’s influence completely changed the character of the Afrikander Bond — an organisation which I believe Hofmeyr started at the Cape with the legitimate purpose of securing certain political privileges, but which, under Kruger’s henchmen — Sauer, Merriman, Te Water, and others — raised unrest in the Cape Colony.

‘This successful anti-British policy of Kruger created a number of imitators — Steyn, Fischer, Esselen, Smuts, and numerous other young educated Africanders of the Transvaal, Orange Free State, and the Cape Colony, who, misled by his successes, ambitiously hoped by the same means to raise themselves to the same pinnacle.

‘Krugerism under them developed into a reign of terror. If you were anti-Kruger you were stigmatised as “Engelschgezind,” and a traitor to your people, unworthy of a hearing. I have suffered bitterly from this taunt, especially under Steyn’s *régime*. The more hostile you were to England the greater patriot you were accounted.

‘This gang, which I wish to be clearly understood was spread over the whole of South Africa, the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and the Cape Colony, used the Bond, the press, and the pulpit to further its schemes.

‘Reitz, whom I believe to have been an honest enthusiast, set himself up as second sponsor to the Bond and voiced the doctrine of this gang: “Africa for the Africanders. Sweep the English into the sea.” With an alluring cry like this, it will be readily understood how easy it was to inflame the imagination of the illiterate and uneducated Boer, and to work upon his vanity and prejudices. That pernicious rag, Carl Borckenhagen’s “Bloemfontein Express,” enormously contributed to spreading this doctrine in the Orange Free State. I myself firmly believe that the “Express” was subsidised by Kruger. It was no mystery to me from where Borckenhagen, a full-blooded German, got his ardent Free State patriotism.

‘In the Transvaal this was done by the “Volksstem,” written by a Hollander and subsidised by Kruger; by the “Rand Post,” also written by a Hollander, also subsidised by Paul Kruger; and in the Cape Colony by the “Patriot,” which was started by intriguers and rebels to their own

Government, at the Paarl — a hot-bed of false Africanderism. “Ons Land” may be an honest paper, but by fostering impossible ideas it has done us incalculable harm. It grieves me to think that my poor people, through want of education, had to swallow this poison undiluted.

‘Is it possible to imagine that Steyn, Fischer, and the other educated men of the Free State did not know that, following Kruger’s hostile policy of eliminating the preponderating Power in South Africa, meant that that Power would be forced either to fight in self-preservation or to disappear ignominiously? For I maintain that there were only two courses open to England in answer to Kruger’s challenging policy — to fight or to retire from South Africa. It was only possible for men suffering from tremendously swollen heads, such as our leaders were suffering from, not to see the obvious or to doubt the issue.’

So much for a Boer’s straightforward account of the forces at work, and the influences which were at the back of those forces. It sums the situation up tersely, but the situation itself was evident and dominated Cape politics. The ambitions of Africanderdom were discussed in the broad light of day in the editorial, in the sermon, in the speech, though the details by which those ambitions were to be carried out were only whispered on the Dutch stoeps.

Here are the opinions of Reitz, the man who more than all others, save his master, has the blood of the fallen upon his conscience. It is taken from the ‘Reminiscences’ of Mr. Theophilus Schreiner, the brother of the ex-Prime Minister of the Cape:

‘I met Mr. Reitz, then a judge of the Orange Free State, in Bloemfontein between seventeen and eighteen years ago, shortly after the retrocession of the Transvaal, and when he was busy establishing the Afrikander Bond. It must be patent to everyone that at that time, at all events, England and its Government had no intention of taking away the independence of the Transvaal, for she had just “magnanimously” granted the same; no intention of making war on the republics, for she had just made peace; no intention to seize the Rand gold fields, for they were not yet discovered. At that time, then, I met Mr. Reitz, and he did his best to get me to become a member of his Afrikander Bond, but, after studying its constitution and programme, I refused to do so, whereupon the following colloquy in substance took place between us, which has been indelibly imprinted on my mind ever since:

‘*Reitz*: Why do you refuse? Is the object of getting the people to take an interest in political matters not a good one?

‘*Myself*: Yes, it is; but I seem to see plainly here between the lines of this constitution much more ultimately aimed at than that.

‘*Reitz*: What?

‘*Myself*: I see quite clearly that the ultimate object aimed at is the overthrow of the British power and the expulsion of the British flag from South Africa.

‘*Reitz* (*with his pleasant conscious smile, as of one whose secret thought and purpose had been discovered, and who was not altogether displeased that such was the case*): Well, what if it is so?

‘*Myself*: You don’t suppose, do you, that that flag is going to disappear from South Africa without a tremendous struggle and fight?

‘*Reitz* (*with the same pleasant self-conscious, self-satisfied, and yet semi-apologetic smile*): Well, I suppose not; but even so, what of that?

‘*Myself*: Only this, that when that struggle takes place you and I will be on opposite sides; and what is more, the God who was on the side of the Transvaal in the late war, because it had right on its side, will be on the side of England, because He must view with abhorrence any plotting and scheming to overthrow her power and position in South Africa, which have been ordained by Him.

‘*Reitz*: We’ll see.

‘Thus the conversation ended, but during the seventeen years that have elapsed I have watched the propaganda for the overthrow of British power in South Africa being ceaselessly spread by every possible means — the press, the pulpit, the platform, the schools, the colleges, the Legislature — until it has culminated in the present war, of which Mr. Reitz and his co-workers are the origin and the cause. Believe me, the day on which F. W. Reitz sat down to pen his ultimatum to Great Britain was the proudest and happiest moment of his life, and one which had for long years been looked forward to by him with eager longing and expectation.’

Compare with these utterances of a Dutch politician of the Cape, and of a Dutch politician of the Orange Free State, the following passage from a speech delivered by Kruger at Bloemfontein in the year 1887, long before Jameson raids or franchise agitations:

‘I think it too soon to speak of a United South Africa under one flag. Which flag was it to be? The Queen of England would object to having her flag hauled down, and we, the burghers of the Transvaal, object to hauling ours down. What is to be done? We are now small and of little importance, but we are growing, and are preparing the way to take our place among the great nations of the world.’

‘The dream of our life,’ said another, ‘is a union of the States of South Africa, and this has to come from within, not from without. When that is accomplished, South Africa will be great.’

Always the same theory from all quarters of Dutch thought, to be followed by many signs that the idea was being prepared for in practice. I repeat, that the fairest and most unbiassed historian cannot dismiss the movement as a myth.

And to this one may retort, Why should they not do so? Why should they not have their own views as to the future of South Africa? Why should they not endeavour to have one universal flag and one common speech? Why should they not win over our colonists, if they can, and push us into the sea? I see no reason why they should not. Let them try if they will. And let us try to prevent them. But let us have an end of talk about British aggression, of capitalist designs upon the gold fields, of the wrongs of a pastoral people, and all the other veils which have been used to cover the issue. Let those who talk about British designs upon the republics turn their attention for a moment to the evidence which there is for republican designs upon the colonies. Let them reflect that in the British system all white men are equal, and that in the Boer one race has persecuted the other; and let them consider under which the truest freedom lies, which stands for universal liberty, and which for reaction and racial hatred. Let them ponder and answer all this before they determine where their sympathies lie.

Long before the war, when the British public and the British Government also had every confidence that the solution would be found in peace, every burgher had been provided with his rifle, his ammunition, and his instructions as to the part which he was to play in that war which they looked upon as certain. A huge conspiracy as to the future, which might be verbally discussed but which must not be written, seems to have prevailed among the farmers. Curious evidence of it came into my own hands in this fashion. After a small action at which I was present I entered a deserted Boer farmhouse which had been part of the enemy’s position, and, desiring to carry away some souvenir which should be of no value, I took some papers which appeared to be children’s writing-exercises. They were so, but among them were one or two letters, one of which I append in all its frankness and simplicity. The date is some fourteen weeks *before* the declaration of war, when the British were anxious for and confident in a peaceful solution:

‘Paradÿs, June 25, 1899.

‘My dear Henry, — I taking my pen up to write you these few lines. That we all are in good health, hoping to hear the same from you all. And the letter of the 18th is handed to me. And I feel very much obliged that I hear you are all in good health.... Here by us are the fields very dry, and the dams just by dry also. *Dear Henry, the war are by us very much. How is it there by you. News is very scarce to write, but much to speak by ourselves.* I must now close with my letter because I see that you will be tired out to read it. With best love to you and your family so I remain your faithfully friend,

‘Pieter Wiese.’

Here is, in itself, as it seems to me, evidence of that great conspiracy, not of ambitions (for there was no reason why they should not be openly discussed), but of weapons and of dates for using them, which was going on all the time behind that cloud of suspicious negotiations with which the Boer Governments veiled their resolution to attack the British. A small straw, no doubt, but the result has shown how deep and dangerous was the current which it indicates. Here is a letter from one of the Snymans to his brother at a later period, but still a month before the war. He is talking of Kruger:

‘The old chap was nearly raving about it, and said that the burghers wanted to tie his hands, and so, brother, the thing is simply war and nothing else. He said we had gone too far, and help from oversea was positively promised, only unanimity of opinion must reign here or we could neither expect nor obtain assistance. Brother, the old man and his Hollander dogs talk very easily about the thing; but what shall we do, because if one speaks against it one is simply a rebel? So I remain dumb.

‘On the stoep it is nothing but war, but in the Raad everything is peace and Queen. Those are the politics they talk. I have nothing more to say here, but I can tell you a good deal. Brother, old Reitz says Chamberlain will have a great surprise one of these days, and the burghers must sleep with one eye open.

‘It is rumoured here that our military officers work day and night to send old Victoria an ultimatum before she is ready.’

‘On the stoep it is nothing but war, but in the Raad everything is peace.’ No wonder the British overtures were in vain.

CHAPTER V

THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE

This is not an attempt to write the history of the war, which I have done elsewhere, but only to touch upon those various points upon which attempts have been made to mislead continental and American opinion. I will endeavour to treat each of these subjects in turn, not in the spirit of a lawyer preparing a brief, but with an honest endeavour to depict the matter as it is, even when I venture to differ from the action either of the British Government or of the generals in the field. In this chapter I will deal with the question of making peace, and examine how far the British are to blame for not having brought those negotiations which have twice been opened to a successful conclusion.

The outset of the war saw the Boers aggressive and victorious. They flocked into British territory, drove the small forces opposed to them into entrenched positions, and held them there at Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking. At the same time they drove back at Colenso and at Magersfontein the forces which were sent to relieve these places. During this long period of their predominance from October 1899 to February 1900, there was no word of peace. On the contrary, every yard of British territory which was occupied was instantly annexed either by the Transvaal or by the Orange Free State. This is admitted and beyond dispute. What becomes then of the theory of a defensive war, and what can they urge against the justice which awarded the same fate to the land of the Boers when it in turn was occupied by us? The Boers did not use their temporary victory in any moderate spirit. At the end of January 1900, Dr. Leyds, while on his visit to Berlin, said:

‘I believe that England will have to give us back a good part of the territory formerly snatched away from us.... The Boers will probably demand the cession of the strip of coast between Durban and Delagoa Bay, with the harbours of Lucia and Kosi. The Orange Free State and the Transvaal are to be united and to form one State, together with parts of

Natal and the northern districts of Cape Colony.’ — (*Daily News* Berlin correspondent, February 1, March 16, 1900.)

They were to go to the sea, and nothing but going to the sea would satisfy them. The war would end when their flag flew over Cape Town. But there came a turn of the tide. The resistance of the garrisons, the tenacity of the relieving forces, and the genius of Lord Roberts altered the whole situation. The Boers were driven back to the first of their capitals. Then for the first time there came from them those proposals for peace, which were never heard when the game was going in their favour. Here is President Kruger’s telegram:

‘THE PRESIDENTS OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE AND OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC TO THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY.

‘Bloemfontein: March 5, 1900.

‘The blood and the tears of the thousands who have suffered by this war, and the prospect of all the moral and economic ruin with which South Africa is now threatened, make it necessary for both belligerents to ask themselves dispassionately, and as in the sight of the Triune God, for what they are fighting, and whether the aim of each justifies all this appalling misery and devastation.

‘With this object, and in view of the assertions of various British statesmen to the effect that this war was begun and is being carried on with the set purpose of undermining Her Majesty’s authority in South Africa, and of setting up an Administration over all South Africa independent of Her Majesty’s Government, we consider it our duty solemnly to declare that this war was undertaken solely as a defensive measure to safeguard the threatened independence of the South African Republic, and is only continued in order to secure and safeguard the incontestable independence of both Republics as Sovereign International States, and to obtain the assurance that those of Her Majesty’s subjects who have taken part with us in this war shall suffer no harm whatsoever in person or property.

‘On these conditions, but on these conditions alone, are we now, as in the past, desirous of seeing peace re-established in South Africa, and of putting an end to the evils now reigning over South Africa; while, if Her Majesty’s Government is determined to destroy the independence of the Republics, there is nothing left to us and to our people but to persevere to the end in the course already begun, in spite of the overwhelming pre-eminence of the

British Empire, confident that that God who lighted the unextinguishable fire of the love of freedom in the hearts of ourselves and of our fathers will not forsake us, but will accomplish His work in us and in our descendants.

‘We hesitated to make this declaration earlier to Your Excellency, as we feared that as long as the advantage was always on our side, and as long as our forces held defensive positions far in Her Majesty’s colonies, such a declaration might hurt the feelings of honour of the British people; but now that the prestige of the British Empire may be considered to be assured by the capture of one of our forces by Her Majesty’s troops, and that we are thereby forced to evacuate other positions which our forces had occupied, that difficulty is over, and we can no longer hesitate clearly to inform your Government and people in the sight of the whole civilised world why we are fighting, and on what conditions we are ready to restore peace.’

Here is Lord Salisbury’s reply:

‘Foreign Office: March 11, 1900.

‘I have the honour to acknowledge Your Honours’ telegram dated the 5th of March from Bloemfontein, of which the purport is principally to demand that Her Majesty’s Government shall recognise the “incontestable independence” of the South African Republic and Orange Free State “as Sovereign International States,” and to offer, on those terms, to bring the war to a conclusion.

‘In the beginning of October last peace existed between Her Majesty and the two Republics under the Conventions which then were in existence. A discussion had been proceeding for some months between Her Majesty’s Government and the South African Republic, of which the object was to obtain redress for certain very serious grievances under which British residents in the South African Republic were suffering. In the course of those negotiations the South African Republic had, to the knowledge of Her Majesty’s Government, made considerable armaments, and the latter had, consequently, taken steps to provide corresponding reinforcements to the British garrisons of Cape Town and Natal. No infringement of the rights guaranteed by the Conventions had up to that point taken place on the British side. Suddenly, at two days’ notice, the South African Republic, after issuing an insulting ultimatum, declared war upon Her Majesty, and the Orange Free State, with whom there had not even been any discussion, took a similar step. Her Majesty’s dominions were immediately invaded by the two Republics, siege was laid to three towns within the British frontier, a large portion of the two colonies was overrun, with great destruction to property and life, and the Republics claimed to treat the inhabitants of extensive portions of Her Majesty's dominions as if those dominions had been annexed to one or other of them. In anticipation of these operations, the South African Republic had been accumulating for many years past military stores on an enormous scale, which by their character could only have been intended for use against Great Britain.

'Your Honours make some observations of a negative character upon the object with which these preparations were made. I do not think it necessary to discuss the question you have raised. But the result of these preparations, carried on with great secrecy, has been that the British Empire has been compelled to confront an invasion which has entailed upon the Empire a costly war and the loss of thousands of precious lives. This great calamity has been the penalty which Great Britain has suffered for having in recent years acquiesced in the existence of the two Republics.

'In view of the use to which the two Republics have put the position which was given to them, and the calamities which their unprovoked attack has inflicted upon Her Majesty's dominions, Her Majesty's Government can only answer Your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the independence either of the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State.'

Is there any sane man of any nation who can contend that a British statesman could possibly have taken any other view? From the firing of the first shot the irresistible logic of events showed that either the Republics must dominate Africa or they must cease to exist. For the sparing of the Orange Free State there might, I think, be a fair argument, but they had put themselves out of court by annexing every foot of British territory which they could lay their hands upon. For the sparing of the Transvaal there could be no possible reason. Had that State been reconstituted we should instantly have been faced once more with the Franchise question, the Uitlander question, the corrupt oligarchy, the anti-British conspiracy, and everything which we had spent so much blood and money to set right. The desperate situation from which the British power was only just emerging was so fresh in our minds that we could not feel justified in leaving the possibility — indeed the certainty — of its recurrence to our children. Remember, you who judge us, that we had done all this before. Once before within our own memories we had patched up an inconclusive peace, and left these people the power to hurt us. And what had come of it? Eternal trouble ending in a great war which strained the resources of the Empire. Could we be asked to do the same again? Would any nation on earth have done the same again? From the day of the signing of peace we should know that we had an implacable and formidable foe to the north of us, nursing his wrath and preparing his strength for the day when he might strike us at an advantage. Our colonies would lie ever in the shadow of its menace. Who can blame us for deciding that the job should be done now in such a way that it should never, so far as we could help it, need to be done once more?

Such was the end of the first negotiations for peace. The war was resumed, and in time the second capital of the Boers was taken and President Kruger withdrew to Europe, leaving South Africa in the welter to which he had reduced it. Then, for the second time, negotiations for peace were opened on the initiative of General Botha, which led to a meeting upon February 28, 1901, between Kitchener and Botha. Kitchener had already explained that for the reasons given above the restoration of independence was impossible, and the negotiations were carried through on that understanding. Here is Lord Kitchener’s own account of the interview and of the points at issue:

[*Telegram.*]’Pretoria: March 1, 1901, 2.20 P.M.

‘*28th February.* — I have had a long interview with Botha, who showed very good feeling and seemed anxious to bring about peace. He asked for information on a number of subjects which he said that he should submit to his Government and people, and if they agreed he should visit Orange River Colony and get them to agree. They should all then hand in their arms and finish the war. He told me that they could go on for some time, and that he was not sure of being able to bring about peace without independence. He tried very hard for some kind of independence, but I declined to discuss such a point, and said that a modified form of independence would be most dangerous and likely to lead to war in the future. Subject was then dropped, and —

‘Firstly. — The nature of future government of Colonies asked about. He wanted more details than were given by Colonial Secretary, and I said that, subject to correction from home, I understood that when hostilities ceased military guard would be replaced by Crown Colony administration, consisting of nominated Executive, with elected assembly to advise administration, to be followed after a period by representative government.

He would have liked representative government at once, but seemed satisfied with above.

‘Secondly. — Whether a Boer would be able to have a rifle to protect him from native? I said I thought he would be by a licence and on registration.

‘Thirdly. — He asked whether Dutch language would be allowed? I said that English and Dutch would, I thought, have equal rights. He expressed hope that officials dealing with farmers would know Dutch.

‘Fourthly. — The Kaffir question. This turned at once on franchise of Kaffirs, and a solution seemed to be that franchise should not be given to Kaffirs until after representative government was granted to Colonies. Orange Free State laws for Kaffirs were considered good.

‘Fifthly. — That Dutch Church property should remain untouched.

‘Sixthly. — Public trusts and orphan funds to be left intact. He asked whether British Government, in taking over the assets of Republics, would also take over legal debts. This he made rather a strong point of, and he intended it to include debts legally contracted since the war began. He referred to notes issued amounting to less than a million.

‘Seventhly. — He asked if any war tax would be imposed on farmers? I said I thought not.

‘Eighthly. — When would prisoners of war return?

‘Ninthly. — He referred to pecuniary assistance to repair burnt farms, and enable farmers to start afresh. I said I thought some assistance would be given.

‘Tenthly. — Amnesty to all at end of war. We spoke of Colonials who joined Republics, and he seemed not adverse to their being disfranchised.

‘I arranged with him that I should write and let him know the view of the Government on these points. All I said during the interview was qualified by being subject to confirmation from home. He was anxious to get an answer soon.’

There followed some correspondence between Lord Kitchener, Sir Alfred Milner, and Mr. Chamberlain upon the exact terms which could be given to Botha. They ended in the following offer, which was submitted to him upon March 7. That, in consideration of a complete military surrender,

‘1. There should be a complete amnesty for all *bonâ fide* acts of war for all burghers of the Republics. In the case of Colonial rebels, if they returned to their Colonies some inquiry must be held on their conduct.

‘2. All prisoners to be at once sent back.

‘3. Crown Colony government to be given as soon as possible; this in turn to change to representative government, as in all other free British possessions. The courts of law to be independent of the government.

‘4. The Dutch and English languages to be put upon an equality.

‘5. That the Government should help to replace the farmers on their farms, to restore their buildings, should pledge itself not to specially tax them, and should pay as an act of grace one million pounds to meet the debt incurred by the Republican governments to their own people during the war.

‘6. That the burghers be allowed sporting fire-arms.

‘7. That the Kaffirs should have the protection of the law, but should not have the vote.

‘In conclusion,’ says Lord Kitchener, ‘I must inform your honour that if the terms are not accepted after a reasonable delay for consideration, they must be regarded as cancelled.’

But the wise and chivalrous Botha was overruled by the men around him, many of whom had little to lose by a continuance of the struggle. It was evident that he did not himself consider independence vital, since he had gravely discussed terms which were based upon loss of independence. But other influences had been brought to bear upon him, and this was his reply — a reply which has already cost the lives of so many of each side:

‘I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency’s letter stating what steps Your Excellency’s Government is prepared to take in the event of a general and total cessation of hostilities. I have advised my Government of Your Excellency’s said letter; but, after the mutual exchange of views at our interview at Middelburg on 28th February last, it will certainly not surprise Your Excellency to know that I do not feel disposed to recommend that the terms of the said letter shall have the earnest consideration of my Government. I may add also that my Government and my chief officers here entirely agree to my views.’

It will be observed that in this reply Botha bases his refusal upon his own views as expressed in the original interview with Kitchener; and we have his own authority, therefore, to show that they were not determined by any changes which Chamberlain may have made in the terms — a favourite charge of that gentleman’s enemies.

It is impossible to say how, short of independence, Great Britain could have improved upon these terms, and it has already been shown that to offer independence would mean having to fight the war over again. It has been suggested that Great Britain might have offered a definite date upon which representative institutions should come in force, but such a promise must be disingenuous, for it must evidently depend not upon a date, but upon the state of the country. The offers of loans to the farmers towards the stocking and rebuilding the farms were surely generous to our defeated foes, and, indeed, it is clear now that in some respects our generosity went too far, and that the interests of the Empire would have suffered severely had these terms been accepted. To have given more would certainly seem not to have offered peace, but to have implored it.

Whatever the final terms of peace may prove to be, it is to be earnestly hoped that 40,000 male prisoners will not be returned, as a matter of right, without any guarantee for their future conduct. It is also much to be desired that the bastard taal language, which has no literature and is almost as unintelligible to a Hollander as to an Englishman, will cease to be officially recognised. These two omissions may repay in the long run for weary months of extra war since, upon Botha's refusal, the British Government withdrew these terms and the hand moved onwards upon the dial of fate, never to turn back.

De Wet had said in reference to Kitchener's terms of peace, 'What is the use of examining all the points, as the only object for which we are fighting is our independence and our national existence?' It is evident, however, that Botha did not consider this an absolute bar to renewing the negotiations, for upon May 10, two months later, he wrote the following letter to Lord Kitchener:

'Commandant-General's Camp, May 10, 1901.

'Excellency, — As I have already assured Your Excellency I am very desirous of terminating this war, and its sad consequences. It is, however, necessary, in order to comply with the "Grondwet" of this Republic and otherwise, that, before any steps are taken in that direction, the condition of our country and our cause be brought to the notice of His Honour, State President Kruger, in Europe; and I therefore wish to send two persons to him in order to acquaint him fully with that condition.

'As speed in this matter is of great consequence to both contending parties, and as such despatch without Your Excellency's assistance would take a considerable time, I should like to hear from Your Excellency whether Your Excellency is prepared to assist me in expediting this matter by allowing such person or persons to journey there and back unhindered, if necessary by the traffic medium within Your Excellency’s control. — I have, &c.,

‘Louis Botha, Commandant-General.’

To this Kitchener answered:

‘Army Headquarters, South Africa, Pretoria, May 16, 1901.

‘Your Honour, — I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of Your Honour’s letter of 10th instant, and, in reply, beg to state that I can only deal with you and your superior officers in the field in regard to the cessation of hostilities, and that I do not recognise the official status of any other persons in the late Republics of the Orange River and Transvaal.

‘If, however, Your Honour desires, with the object of bringing hostilities to a close, to consult with any person in Europe, I will forward any telegram Your Honour desires on the subject, and let you have the reply. Should, however, Your Honour still desire to send messengers, and will inform me of their names and status, I will refer the matter to His Majesty’s Government for decision. — I have, &c.,

‘Kitchener, General,

‘Commanding-in-Chief, British Troops, South Africa.’

At this period, the second week of May, the Boer cause was in very low water, as on the same date we have Botha reopening negotiations which he had declared to be definitely closed, and Reitz (the man who used to regard the whole matter as a great joke) writing a despairing letter to Steyn to the effect that the game was up and that it was time to take the last final step. A reply was received from Kruger encouraging the Boers to continue their hopeless and fatal resistance. His reply was to the effect that there were still great hopes of a successful issue of the war, and that he had taken steps to make proper provision for the Boer prisoners and for the refugee women. These steps, and very efficient ones, too, were to leave them to the generosity of that Government which he was so fond of reviling. There are signs that something else had occurred to give them fresh hope and also fresh material supplies. It looks, upon the face of it, as if, about that time, large supplies of rifles, ammunition, and possibly recruits must have reached them from some quarter, either from German Damaraland or the Portuguese coast. At any rate there has been so much ammunition used since, that either Reitz must have been raving or else large supplies have reached the Boers from some unknown source.

So much for the official attempts at peace.

They have been given in some detail in order to prove how false it is *that the British Government has insisted upon an unconditional surrender*. Far from this being so, the terms offered by the British Government have been so generous that they have aroused the strongest distrust and criticism in this country, where they have seemed to be surrendering by the pen all that had been won by the sword. Nothing has been refused the enemy, save only independence, and that can never be given, if the war has to continue until the last Boer is deported out of Africa.

It is only necessary to refer briefly to the unofficial Boer attempts at peace. A considerable body of the Boers, including many men of influence and of intelligence, were disposed to accept the British flag and to settle down in peace. The leaders of this party were the brave Piet de Wet, brother of Christian, Paul Botha of Kroonstad, Fraser of Bloemfontein, and others. Piet de Wet, who had fought against us as hard as any man, wrote to his brother: ‘Which is better, for the Republics to continue the struggle and run the risk of total ruin as a nation, or to submit? Could we for a moment think of taking back the country, if it were offered to us, with thousands of people to be supported by a Government which has not a farthing? Put passionate feeling aside for a moment and use common-sense, and you will then agree with me that the best thing for the people and the country is to give in, to be loyal to the new Government, and to get responsible government.’ Such were the sentiments of many of the best of the burghers, and they endeavoured to persuade their fellows. Both in the Transvaal and in the Free State, Peace Committees were formed among the burghers, who sent deputies to lay the facts of the situation before their brethren on commando. The results were tragic. Two of the envoys, Morgendaal and de Koch, were shot in cold blood, the former having been first beaten. Several of the others were beaten, and all were ill-used.

This severity did not, however, stop the movement, but gave it a fiercer turn. The burghers who were in favour of peace, finding it useless to argue with their fellow-countrymen and knowing that their country was being hopelessly ruined by the insensate resistance, took the extreme course at last of bearing arms against them. There are at present three strong commandos of burghers fighting upon the British side, commanded by three Boer Generals — Marais, Celliers, and the younger Cronje, all of whom had made their names in fighting against us. This fact alone goes far to dispel those stories of British barbarity with which I shall presently deal. They are believed in by political fanatics in England and by dupes abroad, but the answer which many of the Boers upon the spot make to them is to enlist and fight under the British flag. They are in the best position for knowing the truth, and how can they show in a stronger way what they believe that truth to be?

CHAPTER VI

THE FARM-BURNING

In the official correspondence which is published between the Boer and British leaders in South Africa may very clearly be traced the way in which this practice came to assume proportions which shocked public opinion. It must be admitted that the results have not justified it, and that, putting all moral questions apart, a burned-out family is the last which is likely to settle down, as we hope that the Boers may eventually settle down, as contented British citizens. On the other hand, when a nation adopts guerilla tactics it deliberately courts those sufferings to the whole country which such tactics invariably entail. They have been the same in all wars and at all times. The army which is stung by guerillas, strikes round it furiously and occasionally indiscriminately. An army which is continually sniped and harassed becomes embittered, and a General feels called upon to take those harsher measures which precedent and experience suggest. That such measures have not been pushed to an extreme by the British authorities is shown by the fact that the captured guerilla has been made a prisoner of war — unlike his prototype, the *franc-tireur*. The general question of guerillas may be discussed later. At present we will confine our attention to the burning of farms.

The first protest from the Boer side is dated February 3, 1900. In it the two Presidents accuse the British troops ‘of burning and blowing up with dynamite the farmhouses, and of the devastation of farms.’ The document also includes an accusation of having used armed natives against the Boers.

Lord Roberts replied upon February 5 to the effect that stringent instructions had been given to the British troops to respect private property. ‘All wanton destruction or injury to peaceful inhabitants is contrary to British practice and tradition, and will, if necessary, be rigorously repressed by me.’ He added that it was an untrue statement that natives had ever been encouraged by British officers to commit depredations. The charge, which has been the subject of many effective cartoons upon the Continent, is as absurd as most of the other works of the same artists. Why should the State which refused the aid of its own highly trained Indian army of 150,000 men, avail itself of that of savages? Lord Roberts denied the assertion with befitting warmth, and it is not again repeated in the course of the despatches.

Lord Roberts in this document was not content with denying the Boer allegations, but carried the war into the enemy's country:

'I regret to say that it is the Republican forces which have in some cases been guilty of carrying on the war in a manner not in accordance with civilised usage. I refer especially to the expulsion of loyal subjects of Her Majesty from their homes in the invaded districts of this Colony, because they refused to be commandeered by the invader. It is barbarous to attempt to force men to take sides against their own Sovereign and country by threats of spoliation and expulsion. Men, women, and children have had to leave their homes owing to such compulsion, and many of those who were formerly in comfortable circumstances are now being maintained by charity.'

He adds: 'I beg to call your Honours' attention to the wanton destruction of property by the Boer forces in Natal. They not only have helped themselves freely to the cattle and other property of farmers without payment, but they have utterly wrecked the contents of many farmhouses. As an instance I would specify Mr. Theodore Wood's farm "Longwood" near Springfield. I point out how very different is the conduct of the British troops. It is reported to me from Modder River that farms within the actual area of the British Camp have never even been entered, the occupants are unmolested, and their houses, gardens, and crops remain absolutely untouched.'

On March 26 Lord Roberts's Proclamation spoke with no uncertain voice upon the subject of private property. It says:

'The following Proclamation, issued by me in the name of Her Majesty's Government on the 26th March, begins: Notice is hereby given that all persons who within the territories of the South African Republic or Orange Free State shall authorise or be guilty of the wanton destruction or damage or the counselling, aiding, or assisting in the wanton destruction or damage of public or private property, such destruction or damage not being justified by the usages and customs of civilised warfare, will be held responsible in their persons and property for all such wanton destruction and damage.'

This was during the period of the halt at Bloemfontein. I can well remember that then and for long afterwards the consideration which was shown upon this point seemed to those who were at the spot to be exaggerated and absurd. I can remember that when we applied for leave to use the deserted villas to put our sick soldiers into — the hospitals being full — we were told that it could only be done by private treaty with the owners, who were at that time on commando against us. I remember also suggesting that the corrugated-iron fencing round the cricket field should be used for making huts, and being told that it was impossible, as it was private property.

The same extreme respect for personal property was shown during Lord Roberts's advance. The country through which he passed swarmed with herds and flocks, but, with as scrupulous a regard for the rights of property as Wellington showed in the south of France, no hungry soldier was allowed to take so much as a chicken. The punishment for looting was prompt and stern. It is true that farms were burned occasionally and the stock confiscated, but this was as a punishment for some particular offence and not part of a system. The limping Tommy looked askance at the fat geese which covered the dam by the roadside, but it was as much as his life was worth to allow his fingers to close round those tempting white necks. On foul water and bully beef he tramped through a land of plenty.

A most striking example of British discipline and forbearance was furnished at this period, while the war could still be called regular upon the Boer side, by Rundle's Division, christened the 'Hungry Eighth' by the Army. This Division had the misfortune to be stationed for several months some distance from the railway line, and in consequence had great difficulty in getting supplies. They were on half-rations for a considerable period, and the men were so reduced in strength that their military efficiency was much impaired. Yet they lived in a land of plenty — a land of large farms well stocked with every sort of food. Why it was impossible to get this food for the men I do not know, but I do know that the prices for bread, eggs, milk, and other such things were kept very high by the wives of the farmers who were away upon commando; and that the hungry soldiers were quite unable to buy, and were not permitted to take, the nourishment which was essential.

On May 19, while Lord Roberts's force was advancing on Pretoria, De Wet sent in a despatch to complain of the destruction of two farms, Paarde

Kraal and Leeuw Kop. Lord Roberts replied that these two farms were destroyed because, while a white flag was flying from the houses, the troops were fired upon from the farmsteads. ‘I have had two farms near Kroonstad,’ he adds, ‘destroyed for similar reasons, and shall continue to punish all such cases of treachery by the destruction of the farms where they occur.’ Here is a definite declaration of policy, quite distinct from wanton destruction, and it is difficult to see how any General could take any other steps, with justice to his own men. These farms, and all which are included in this category, were justly and properly destroyed — the families being removed without violence to a place of safety.

The next representations from the Boer Commander were more definite in their nature.

‘Complaints are repeatedly reaching me,’ he writes, ‘that private dwellings are plundered, and in some cases totally destroyed, and all provisions taken from women and children, so that they are compelled to wander about without food or covering. To quote several instances: It has just been brought to my notice by way of sworn affidavit that the house of Field-Cornet S. Buys on the farm, Leeuwspruit district, Middelburg, was set on fire and destroyed on 20th June last. His wife, who was at home, was given five minutes’ time to remove her bedding and clothing, and even what she took out was again taken from her. Her food, sugar, &c., was all taken, so that for herself and her children she had neither covering nor food for the following night. She was asked for the key of the safe, and after it was given up by her she was threatened with a sword, and money was demanded. All the money that was in the house was taken away, all the papers in the safe were torn up, and everything at the homestead that could not be taken away was destroyed. The house of Field-Cornet Buys’s son was also destroyed, the doors and windows broken, &c.

‘It has also been reported to me that my own buildings, on the farm Varkenspruit, district Standerton, as well as the house of Field-Cornet Badenhorst, on the adjoining farm, have been totally destroyed, and such of the stock as was not removed was shot dead on the farm.

‘Further, there is the sworn declaration of Mrs. Hendrik Badenhorst, which speaks for itself.

‘I cannot believe that such godless barbarities take place with Your Excellency’s consent, and thus I deem it my solemn duty to protest most strongly against such destruction and vindictiveness as being entirely contrary to civilised warfare.'

The greater part of these alleged outrages had occurred on General Buller's side of the Transvaal, so the matter was referred to him. He acknowledged that he had ordered six farmhouses to be destroyed:

'The following circumstances induced me to give the order. On entering the Transvaal I caused the attached Proclamation (A) to be widely distributed along my line of route. We marched from Volksrust to Standerton practically unopposed. Shortly after our arrival at Standerton our telegraph line was cut on several nights following, and attempts were made to damage the military line by placing dynamite cartridges with detonators attached upon it. These attempts were all made on or in close vicinity to the estates above named. A watch was kept and it was found that the attempts were made not by any formed force of the enemy, but by a few scattered banditti who were given shelter during the night in the houses I afterwards had destroyed, and who thence, when they could, tried to murder our patrols, and sallied out at night to damage the line. It was further ascertained that these men came and usually returned through Varkenspruit. I directed that copies of Proclamation (A) should be personally left at each house, and the inmates of each should be warned that these depredations could not be permitted, and that if people living under our protection allowed these sort of men to resort to their houses without informing us, they must take the consequences, and their houses would be destroyed. This warning had some effect for a day or two, but on 1st and 2nd of July the nuisance recommenced, and on the 7th July, having acquired full proof that the houses were being regularly used as shelters for men who were hostile to us, and who were not under any proper command, in fact, who were only acting as banditti, I had the houses destroyed.

'The women and children occupying the farms were removed elsewhere with as little inconvenience to themselves as we could arrange.'

Here again it is impossible to doubt that the British commanders were well within their rights. It is true that Article XXIII. of The Hague Conventions makes it illegal to destroy the enemy's property, but it adds: 'Unless such destruction be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war.' Now nothing can be more imperative in war than the preservation of the communications of the army. A previous clause of the same Article makes it illegal to 'kill or wound treacherously individuals belonging to the hostile army.’ It is incontestable that to take the cover of a farmhouse which flies the white flag in order to make attacks is to ‘kill or wound treacherously,’ and so on a double count the action of the British becomes legal, and even inevitable. Lord Roberts’s message to De Wet upon August 3, 1900, restates both his intentions and his reasons for it:

‘Latterly, many of my soldiers have been shot from farmhouses over which the white flag has been flying, the railway and telegraph lines have been cut, and trains wrecked. I have therefore found it necessary, after warning your Honour, to take such steps as are sanctioned by the customs of war to put an end to these and similar acts, and have burned down the farmhouses at or near which such deeds have been perpetrated. This I shall continue to do whenever I consider the occasion demands it.

‘The remedy lies in your Honour’s own hands. The destruction of property is most distasteful to me, and I shall be greatly pleased when your Honour’s co-operation in the matter renders it no longer necessary.’

This raises the question of the legality of the burning of farmhouses in the vicinity of the place where the railway is cut. The question presented itself forcibly to my mind when I saw with my own eyes the tall plumes of smoke rising from six farmhouses, De Wet’s among them, in the neighbourhood of Roodeval. There is no doubt whatever that in the war of 1870 — the classic type of modern war — the villages and populations near the scene of a cut railway were severely punished. But The Hague Conventions had not then been signed. On the one hand, it may be urged that it is impossible without such disciplinary measures to preserve a line of 1,000 miles running all the way through a hostile or semi-hostile country. Also that it is ‘imperatively demanded by the necessities of war.’ On the other hand, there is Article L., which says, ‘No general penalty can be inflicted on the population on account of the acts of individuals, for which it cannot be regarded as collectively responsible.’ An argument might be advanced for either side, but what will actually determine is the strongest argument of all — that of self-preservation. An army situated as the British Army was, and dependent for its supplies upon its communications, *must* keep them open even if it strains the Conventions in doing so. As a matter of fact, farm-burning had no effect in checking the railway-cutting, and had a considerable effect in embittering the population. Yet a General who was cut off from his base thirty times in a month was bound to leave the argument of legality to the jurists, and to adopt the means which seemed most likely to stop the nuisance. The punishment fell with cruel injustice upon some individuals. Others may have been among the actual raiders.

On September 2 Lord Roberts communicated his intentions to General Botha:

‘Sir, — I have the honour to address your Honour regarding the operations of those comparatively small bands of armed Boers who conceal themselves on farms in the neighbourhood of our lines of communication and thence endeavour to damage the railway, thus endangering the lives of passengers travelling by train who may or may not be combatants.

‘2. My reason for again referring to this subject is that, except in the districts occupied by the Army under the personal command of your Honour, there is now no formed body of Boer troops in the Transvaal or Orange River Colony, and that the war is degenerating into operations carried on by irregular and irresponsible guerillas. This would be so ruinous to the country and so deplorable from every point of view, that I feel bound to do everything in my power to prevent it.

‘3. The orders I have at present issued, to give effect to these views, are that the farm nearest the scene of any attempt to injure the line or wreck a train is to be burnt, and that all farms within a radius of 10 miles are to be completely cleared of all their stock, supplies, &c.’

Granting that the penalty is legal at all, it must be allowed that it is put in a minimum form, since only one farm in each case is to be destroyed; and the further clearing of stock is undoubtedly justified, since it would tend to cripple the mobility of Boer raiders approaching the line. Yet one farm for each attack becomes a formidable total when the attacks are on an average of one per day.

We have treated two causes for which farms were burned: (1) For being used as cover for snipers; (2) as a punishment for the cutting of railways. A third cause now comes to the front. A large number of burghers had taken the oath of neutrality and had been allowed to return to their farms by the British. These men were persuaded or terrorised by the fighting commandos into breaking their parole and abandoning those farms on which they had sworn to remain. The farmhouses were their bail, and Lord Roberts decreed that it was forfeited. On August 23 he announced his decision to General Botha:

‘Your Honour represents that well-disposed families living on their farms have been driven from their houses, and that their property has been taken away or destroyed. This no doubt is true, but not in the sense which your letter would imply. Burghers who are well-disposed towards the British Government, and anxious to submit to my authority, have had their property seized by the Boer commandos, and have been threatened with death if they refused to take up arms against the British forces. Your Honour's contention that a solemn oath of neutrality which the burghers have voluntarily taken in order to remain in unmolested occupation of their farms is null and void, because you have not consented to it, is hardly open to discussion. I shall punish those who violate their oath and confiscate their property, no burgher having been forced to take the oath against his will.'

It is quite certain that the Boer Government committed a very clear breach of the Conventions of The Hague in compelling, or even in permitting, these men to rejoin the ranks. 'In such cases,' says Article X., 'their own Government shall not require of, nor accept from, them any service incompatible with the parole given.' This is clear as regards the Government. But in the case of the men it is different. Their promise was in a sense conditional upon effective protection from our troops. We had no right to place a man in so terrible a position that he had to choose between breaking his parole and death at the hands of his own countrymen. If we were not sure that we could protect them, we could have retained them in guarded camps, as we eventually did. If we chose to turn them loose upon the wide veldt, then it was our fault more than theirs that they were forced into the ranks of the enemy. To their credit be it said that even under such pressure many of them were true to their oath.

But if their guilt is indeed no greater than our own, then how are we justified in burning down their houses? It seems to me that these cases are very different from those in the other two categories, and that the question of compensation to these men should be at least considered. I take it that the numerous cases where 'on commando' is marked against a burned farm on the official list, means that he had returned to commando after giving his parole. The destruction of his house under those circumstances is, in the peculiar conditions of the case, a harsh measure, but if 'on commando' means simply that the man was away doing his duty to his country, without any question of parole, then our conscience can never permit that man to go without compensation.

We can trace in this account of the communications between the leaders the growth of those harsher measures which have been so generally deplored in this country. So long as the war was regular it is certain that nothing could be more regular than the British conduct. When, however, the war became irregular upon the part of the Boers, and their army dissolved into small bands which harried the lines of communications, the small posts, and the convoys, there was a corresponding change upon the part of the troops. Towards the end of the year 1900 that change was pushed to considerable lengths. Certain districts which had been Boer centres, where they habitually collected time after time, were devastated and destroyed. Such districts were those of Kroonstad, Heilbron, Ventersburg, and Winburg. In these four districts about one hundred and seventy houses were destroyed. The village of Bothaville, which was a depôt of the enemy, was also destroyed. It consisted of forty-three houses. In the Transvaal the number of houses actually destroyed for strategic purposes seems to have been very much smaller. In the official returns only about twelve houses are so mentioned. Altogether the houses which have been burned for reasons which are open to dispute, including those of the men upon commando, do not appear to exceed two hundred and fifty.

It must be confessed that the case of these houses is entirely different from the others which have been destroyed, because they were used for active warlike operations. Of the 630 buildings which we know to have been destroyed, more than half have been used by snipers, or in some other direct fashion have brought themselves within the laws of warfare. But it cannot be said that these others have done so. The cost of the average farmhouse is a mere trifle. A hundred pounds would build a small one, and 300*l.* a large. If we take the intermediate figure, then the expenditure of 50,000*l.* would compensate for those cases where military policy and international law may have been at variance with each other. The burning of houses ceased in the year 1900, and, save in very special instances, where there was an overwhelming military necessity, it has not been resorted to since. In the sweeping of the country carried out by French in the Eastern Transvaal and by Blood to the north of the Delagoa Railway, no buildings appear to have been destroyed, although it was a military necessity to clear the farms of every sort of supply in order to hamper the movements of the commandos. The destruction of the crops and herds of the Boers, distasteful as such work must be, is exactly analogous to the destruction by them of our supply trains on which the Army depended for their food. Guerilla warfare cannot enjoy all its own advantages and feel none of its own defects. It is a two-edged weapon, and the responsibility for the consequences rests upon the combatant who first employs it.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

When considerable districts of the country were cleared of food in order to hamper the movements of the commandos, and when large numbers of farmhouses were destroyed under the circumstances already mentioned, it became evident that it was the duty of the British, as a civilised people, to form camps of refuge for the women and children, where, out of reach, as we hoped, of all harm, they could await the return of peace. There were three courses open. The first was to send the Boer women and children into the Boer lines — a course which became impossible when the Boer army broke into scattered bands and had no longer any definite lines; the second was to leave them where they were; the third was to gather them together and care for them as best we could.

It is curious to observe that the very people who are most critical of the line of policy actually adopted, were also most severe when it appeared that the alternative might be chosen. The British nation would have indeed remained under an ineffaceable stain had they left women and children without shelter upon the veldt in the presence of a large Kaffir population. Even Mr. Stead could hardly have ruined such a case by exaggeration. On some rumour that it would be so, he drew harrowing pictures of the moral and physical degradation of the Boer women in the vicinity of the British camps. No words can be too strong to stigmatise such assertions unless the proof of them is overwhelmingly strong — and yet the only ‘proof’ adduced is the bare assertion of a partisan writer in a partisan paper, who does not claim to have any personal knowledge of the matter. It is impossible without indignation to know that a Briton has written on such evidence of his own fellow-countrymen that they have ‘used famine as a pander to lust.’

Such language, absurd as it is, shows very clearly the attacks to which the British Government would have been subjected had they *not* formed the camps of refuge. It was not merely that burned-out families must be given a shelter, but it was that no woman on a lonely farm was safe amid a black population, even if she had the means of procuring food. Then, again, we had learned our lesson as regards the men who had given their parole. They should not again be offered the alternative of breaking their oaths or being punished by their own people. The case for the formation of the camps must be admitted to be complete and overwhelming. They were formed, therefore, by the Government at convenient centres, chiefly at Pretoria, Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, Middelburg, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, Heidelburg, Standerton, Pietersburg, Klerksdorp, and Volksrust in the Transvaal; Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, Bethulie, and Edenburg in the Orange Free State.

Such camps as refuges were no new things, for the British refugees from Johannesburg have been living for over a year in precisely such places. As no political capital and no international sentiment could be extracted from their sufferings, and as they have borne their troubles with dignity and restraint, we have heard little of the condition of their lives, which is in many ways more deplorable than that of the Boers.

Having determined to form the camps, the authorities carried out the plan with great thoroughness. The sites seem to have been well chosen, and the arrangements in most cases all that could be wished. They were formed, however, at an unfortunate moment. Great strain had been placed upon our Commissariat by the large army, over 200,000 men, who had to be supplied by three tiny railways, which were continually cut. In January 1901 De Wet made his invasion of Cape Colony, and the demand upon the lines was excessive. The extraordinary spectacle was presented at that time of the British straining every nerve to feed the women and children of the enemy, while that enemy was sniping the engineers and derailing the trains which were bringing up the food.

The numbers of the inmates of the refugee camps increased rapidly from 20,000 at the end of the year 1900, up to more than 100,000 at the end of 1901. Great efforts were made by the military authorities to accommodate the swelling tide of refugees, and no money was spared for that purpose. Early in the year 1901 a painful impression was created in England by the report of Miss Hobhouse, an English lady, who had visited the camps and criticised them unfavourably. The value of her report was discounted, however, by the fact that her political prejudices were known to be against the Government. Mr. Charles Hobhouse, a relation of hers, and a Radical member of Parliament, has since then admitted that some of her statements will not bear examination. With the best will in the world her conclusions would have been untrustworthy, since she could speak no Dutch, had no experience of the Boer character, and knew nothing of the normal conditions of South African life.

Her main contentions were that the diet was not sufficient, that there was little bedding, that the water-supply was short, that the sanitation was bad, that there was overcrowding, and that there was an excessive death-rate, especially among the children.

As to diet, the list which she gives agrees roughly with that which is officially quoted as the daily allowance at Irene Camp, near Pretoria, in July. It is as follows:

Meat	½ lb.
Coffee	2 oz.
Flour	¾ lb.
Sugar	2 oz.
Salt	½ oz.

To every child under six, a bottle of milk

It must be confessed that the diet is a spare one, and that as supplies become more plentiful it might well be increased. The allowance may, however, be supplemented by purchase, and there is a considerable outside fund, largely subscribed by British people, which is used to make the scale more liberal. A slight difference was made at first between the diet of a family which had surrendered and of that the head of which was still in arms against us. A logical distinction may certainly be made, but in practice it was felt to be unchivalrous and harsh, so it was speedily abandoned.

As to the shortness of the water-supply, it is the curse of all South Africa, which alternately suffers from having too much water and too little. With artesian wells and better arrangements this difficulty is being overcome, but it has applied as strongly to our own camps as to those of the Boer refugees.

There seems to be a consensus of opinion from all the camps that the defects in sanitation are due to the habits of the inmates, against which commandants and doctors are perpetually fighting. Camp life without cleanliness must become unhygienic. The medical reports are filled with instances of the extreme difficulty which has been experienced in enforcing discipline upon those who have been accustomed to the absolute liberty of the lonely veldt.

On the question of overcrowding, the demand for tents in South Africa has been excessive, and it may well have taxed all the power of the authorities to find accommodation for the crowds of women and children. The evil has been remedied since the time of Miss Hobhouse’s report. It is well known that the Boers in their normal life have no objection to crowded rooms, and that the inmates of a farmhouse are accustomed to conditions which would be unendurable to most. To overcrowd a tent is hygienically almost impossible, for the atmosphere of a tent, however crowded, will never become tainted in the same sense as a room.

All these things are of human contrivance, and the authorities were doing their best to set them right, as Miss Hobhouse herself acknowledged. ‘They are, I believe, doing their best with very limited means,’ said she, and in so saying reduced her whole report to nothing. For if they are really doing their best, then what more can be said? The only alternative is the breaking up of the camps and the dispersal of the women. But in that case Mr. Stead is waiting for us with some ‘Blood and Hell’ broadsheet to tell us of the terrible fate of those women upon the veldt. It must be one or the other. Of the two I prefer Miss Hobhouse and the definite grievances which she reports, to the infinite possibilities of Mr. Stead. As to the suggestion that this enormous crowd of women and children should be quartered upon their kinsmen in the Colony, it is beyond all argument. There has been no offer of such wholesale hospitality nor have we any means for enforcing it.

But then we come to the great and piteous tragedy of the refugee camps, the mortality, and especially the mortality among the children. That is deplorable — more deplorable even than the infant mortality in Mafeking, Ladysmith, and Kimberley. But is it avoidable? Or is it one of those misfortunes, like that enteric outbreak which swept away so many British soldiers, which is beyond our present sanitary science and can only be endured with sad resignation? The nature of the disease which is mainly responsible for the high mortality shows that it has no direct connection with the sanitary conditions of the camps, or with anything which it was in our power to alter. Had the deaths come from some filth-disease, such as typhus fever, or even from enteric or diphtheria, the sanitation of the camps might be held responsible. But it is to a severe form of measles that the high mortality is due. Apart from that the record of the camps would have been a very fair one. Now measles when once introduced among children runs through a community without any regard to diet or conditions of life. The only possible hope is the segregation of the sufferer. To obtain this early quarantine the co-operation of the parent is needed: but in the case in point the Boer mothers, with a natural instinct, preferred to cling to the children and to make it difficult for the medical men to remove them in the first stages of the disease. The result was a rapid spread of the epidemic, which was the more fatal as many of the sufferers were in low health owing to the privations unavoidably endured in the journey from their own homes to the camps. Not only was the spread of the disease assisted by the mother, but in her mistaken zeal she frequently used remedies which were as fatal as the disease. Children died of arsenical-poisoning, having been covered from head to foot with green paint; and others of opium-poisoning, having quack drugs which contain laudanum administered to them. ‘In Potchefstroom as at Irene,’ says Dr. Kendal Franks, ‘the death-rate is attributable not so much to the severity of the epidemic as to the ignorance, perverseness, and dirty habits of the parents themselves.’ But whatever the immediate cause the death of these numerous children lies heavy, not upon the conscience, but upon the heart of our nation. It is some mitigation to know that the death-rate among children is normally quite remarkably high in South Africa, and that the rate in the camps was frequently not higher than that of the towns near which the camp was situated.

Be this as it may, we cannot deny that the cause of the outbreak of measles was the collection of the women and children by us into the camps. But why were they collected into camps? Because they could not be left on the veldt. And why could they not be left on the veldt? Because we had destroyed the means of subsistence. And why had we destroyed the means of subsistence? To limit the operations of the mobile bands of guerillas. At the end of every tragedy we are forced back to the common origin of all of them, and made to understand that the nation which obstinately perseveres in a useless guerilla war prepares much trouble for its enemy, but absolute ruin for itself.

We have pushed our humanity in this matter of the refugees so far that we have looked after our enemies far better than our friends. I recognise that the two cases are not on all fours, since the Boers are compelled to be in camps and the loyalist refugees are not. But the fact remains that the loyalists *are* in camps, through no fault of their own, and that their condition is a worse one than that of our enemies. At East London, for example, there are two refugee camps, Boer and British. The former has

350, the latter 420 inhabitants. The former are by far the better fed, clad, and housed, with a hospital, a school, and a washhouse, all of which are wanting in the British camp. At Port Elizabeth there is a Boer camp. A Dutch deputation came with 50*l.* to expend in improving their condition, but returned without spending the money as nothing was needed. The Boer refugees and the British are catered for by the same man at Port Elizabeth. He is allowed 15*d.* per head for the Boers per day, and 8*d.* for the British. These are the 'Methods of Barbarism.'

I shall now take a few opinions of the camps from British sources and from Boer. I have only seen one British witness who was in sympathy with Miss Hobhouse, and that is a lady (name not mentioned) who is quoted in the appendix of Mr. Methuen's 'Peace or War.' She takes much the same view, insisting mainly upon the insufficient diet, the want of fuel and of bed-clothing. Against these two ladies I shall very shortly and in condensed form cite a few witnesses from both sides.

Mr. Seaton, of Johannesburg (Secretary of the Congregational Church and of the burgher camp), says: 'The reports you send make our blood boil. They are frightfully exaggerated, and in many instances not only misleading but untrue.... A more healthy spot it would be difficult to find.... There is no overcrowding.

'Some weeks ago there was an epidemic of measles in camp of a very severe type, and naturally there were many deaths among the children. The doctor and nurses worked to the very utmost, and I am pleased to say the epidemic is stamped out. No doubt this is what caused the talk by the pro-Boers in the House of Commons and elsewhere, but it is one of those epidemics which could not be prevented among the class of people we have here. They had absolutely no regard for sanitary conveniences, and the officials had the greatest difficulty in enforcing the most ordinary rules of cleanliness. Another difficulty we had was to get them to bring their children when sick into the hospital, where there is every convenience. They prefer to disobey the doctor and try the old women's remedies, which, as you know, are very plentiful among such people. The doctor has had a most trying position, and has worked like a slave. Nearly all the deaths have been from measles. We are having a fairly mild winter. About three months ago it was bitterly cold, but they are used to outdoor life, and this is no worse than they have always been used to. The tents are all military tents, and there is no sign of leakage. I know they all want tents when they come here, if it is possible to get them. On the whole, the inmates are contented, and the children are particularly happy. They skip and play about from morn till eve.'

The Rev. R. Rogers (Wesleyan minister) writes:

'What is the use of persons ignorant of the life and customs of the Boers coming to investigate these burgher camps? I have seen, and do not hesitate to say, that most of them are better housed, better clothed, and better fed than in their own homes of wattle and daub, and mud floors.'

Mr. Howe of the Camp Soldiers' Homes says:

'We do not pass judgment; we only state facts.

'When the first concentration camp was formed we were on the spot, and also saw others spring up. We admit that there has been suffering, but we solemnly affirm that the officers in charge of the several camps known to us were only too anxious to make the helpless people as comfortable as possible. We have seen the huge cases and bales of comforts for the inmates, and know that, in order to expedite the despatch of these things, military stores and ordnance have been kept back.'

The Rev. R. B. Douglas (Presbyterian minister) writes:

'I am glad to see that you are not giving credence to the tales of brutality and cruelty which are being freely circulated by disloyal agitators about the treatment of the Boer refugees. But one point on which you ask for more information is worth being noticed — the difference of treatment between families of those on commando and others. I am in a position to state that the whole difference made amounted to two ounces of coffee and four ounces of sugar per week, and that even this distinction totally disappeared by the middle of March. As a set-off to this, the local Dutch Committee, in distributing some sixty cases of clothing, &c., sent out by the charitable, refused to give any help to the families of some who were not on commando, on the ground that these articles were for the benefit of those who were fighting for their country.'

Mrs. Gauntlett, of Johannesburg, writes:

'I have read certain statements you sent me from English papers on cruelty to Boer refugee families. I am amazed at the iniquity of men who circulate such lies, and the credulity of those who believe them. The opinion of Germans, French, Americans, and even many Dutch, here on the spot, is that the leniency and amazing liberality of the Government to their foes is prolonging the war. A Dutch girl in the Pretoria Camp declared to the nurse that for seven months they had not been able to get such good food as was given them by the British.’

Mr. Soutar, Secretary of the Pretoria Camp, writes:

‘The Boer women and children get as much food as they require, and have all sorts of medical comforts, such as beef-tea, extracts of meat, jellies, brandy and wine, and the advantage of fully qualified attendants. Not only are their absolute requirements provided for, but even their “fads” are considered.’

Mr. Scholtz, Inspector of Camps for the Transvaal, reports:

‘Many of the children, when they first arrived at the camp, were little better than skin and bone, and, being in so emaciated a condition, it was not surprising that, when they did catch measles, they could not cope with the disease. Many of the women would not open their tents to admit fresh air, and, instead of giving the children the proper medicines supplied by the military, preferred to give them home remedies. The mothers would not sponge the children, and the greatest difficulty was experienced in inducing them to send the patients to hospital. The cause of the high death-rate among children from measles is due to the fact that the women let their children out as soon as the measles rash has subsided. Pneumonia and bronchitis naturally supervene. Another cause is that the mothers persist in giving their children meat and other indigestible foods, even when the doctors strictly prohibit it, dysentery resulting as a matter of course. In other respects the health of the camp is good, there being only one case of typhoid out of 5,000 residents in camp.’

Here is light on the Krugersdorp Camp:

‘Johannesburg, July 31st. — (Reuter’s Special Service.) — Commandant Alberts, commanding the Boers near Krugersdorp, has sent a letter to the officer commanding the British forces at Krugersdorp, stating that as he has with him on commando several families whose male relatives have recently surrendered, he wishes to know if he will receive these families, as they would like to go to Krugersdorp. The officer replied that he would be pleased to receive them, and they are expected to arrive to-day.

‘This action on the part of the Boers clearly shows that the families themselves have no longer any objection to the Refugee Camps, where everything is done to promote their comfort, or any disinclination to being placed under our care and protection.’

From Reuter’s agent at Springfontein:

‘I to-day visited the Boer Refugee Camp here, containing 2,700 inmates. The camp is splendidly situated, and well laid out. I spoke to several refugees, and met with no complaint, all being satisfied with the treatment received. The hospital arrangements are excellent, and there is very little sickness in the camp.’

From Mr. Celliers, Dutch Minister from Aberdeen, Cape Colony, sent to inspect the Port Elizabeth Refugee Camp:

‘He was writing this to show that the British Government were doing everything in their power to help the exiles, and to show that, although these exiles’ relatives and friends were still in the field, yet the powers were merciful and kind to the exiles, showing them no enmity, for which they felt grateful. He wished the people to understand that he was at liberty to speak to them privately, and that he had a fair opportunity to hear any complaints, if there were any to be made. Mr. Hess allowed him to go round, placing full confidence in him, and he felt satisfied that if there had been anything wrong he should have heard of it. It had been his opinion all along that the Military, in sending these exiles down there, had done so for their own safety and advantage; and that it had preserved them, and been a blessing in disguise, which would be acknowledged by all in time to come.’

Major Harold Sykes’s (2nd Dragoons) evidence is reported as follows:

He arranged the first of the Refugee Concentrated Camps, and when he left he had a camp of about six thousand women and children under his care. All charges of cruelty and inhumanity were vile and calumnious falsehoods. Nay, worse, they were miserable, despicable concoctions. Both women and children were better off, the great bulk of them, than ever they were in their lives. The only thing approaching cruelty to them was at the authorities insisted upon cleanliness and proper attention to sanitary regulations, which the average Boer, being a stranger to, utterly disliked. He had seen all the workings of these camps. He could give an unqualified denial to all the villainous allegations that had recently been made in public meeting and in the House of Commons.

Under date November 1, an officer of the Kroonstad Camp writes:

‘We have cricket, tennis, and croquet for them, and they are all jolly well treated. Besides other amusements, they have a band twice a week, and the other day they got up a concert.’

This is what Mr. Stead calls ‘doing to death by slow torture all the women and children whom we have penned behind the barbed wire of our prison camps.’ Can a cause be a sound one which is pleaded in such terms!

Now for some Boer voices.

Commandant Alberts writes:

‘Major Walter, Boksburg. — Honoured Sir, — I must express to you and the other officers of Boksburg my heartfelt thanks for the great kindness shown towards my wife, and at the same time for the message, and I hope that this kindness may some time be repaid to you.

‘May you and I be spared to have a personal meeting.

‘I have the honour to be your honour’s servant,

‘(Signed) H. Alberts, Commandant.’

A Dutch minister writes to Captain Snowden, O.C. of Boer Camp, Johannesburg:—’Sir, — I am directed by the Committee of the Dutch Reformed Churches here to convey to you the appreciation of the Committee for the kindly interest and sympathy shown by you to the women and children under your charge.’

One hundred male refugee Boers in the camp at Kroonstad sign the following sentiment:

‘We also wish to tender Your Excellency our heartiest thanks for the interest you take in the education of our youth, and we trust you will succeed in your endeavours, and that the growing-up generation will be taught to be God-fearing, honest, and loyal citizens under the British flag. We regret, however, to state that, notwithstanding the highly appreciated efforts of our worthy superintendent and doctors, still so many cases of sickness and deaths occur daily in this camp, still we hope and trust Your Excellency will do all in your power for the health in this camp.

‘We trust that the efforts of our worthy superintendent towards promoting our welfare under trying circumstances will be appreciated by Your Excellency. We are happy to state that the spirit of loyalty is daily increasing in this camp, and that the majority of the male refugees have taken the oath of allegiance.’

Mr. Dudley Keys, a surrendered burgher, writes to his brother:

‘I have been in camp now for more than seven months — a sufficient time, you will allow, for reflection — and the immutability of the life provides ample scope for indulgence in that direction. How we long for the settlement you cannot imagine, nor can you imagine with what disgust and impatience we regard every endeavour on the part of the pro-Boers, as they are called, to divert the natural and inevitable course of things. You will not be surprised at hearing this from a one-time Dutch Republican when you take into consideration that all of us who have surrendered are fully aware of the fact that we were the aggressors, and that our statesmen are to blame for our present predicament. A large number of Boers, of course, will never come to view the matter in this light. That, of course, is not the result of thought and reflection, but utter and total ignorance. When Miss Hobhouse was here I frequently saw her priming herself or being primed. Some of our women would tell her anything for a dress or a pair of boots. If she knew our countrymen and women as well as we know them, her story would have been a short one. Now the home Government are despatching this commission. Well, when they see the women and children in camp they will naturally feel sorry for them. Who would not? But if they only remember that this is war and not a picnic, they will satisfy the people in England on their return that all we want is peace, and plenty of it.'

He adds:

'In spite of the lack of gratitude shown by our people, the authorities continue to make improvements and to lessen the hardships. That this entails enormous expenditure you will see by the statistics frequently published in the English papers. When I hear our people grumble, I often wonder how they would have treated the Britishers if the positions were reversed, and I am bound to acknowledge that it would not compare favourably with the treatment we receive.'

A Boer woman, writing from Pietermaritzburg, says:

'Those who complain of anything must lie, for we are in good circumstances.'

In a second letter she says:

'I can make no complaint at all.'

Mrs. Blignant, writing from the Port Elizabeth Refugee Camp, says:

'If we had to complain it would be false complaint, and all the stories about ill-treatment are untrue as far as I can find out.' Among the women cared for in this camp was one from Jagersfontein, who boasted — and with truth — that she had shot two unarmed British soldiers with a revolver.

Such is some of the evidence to be placed against Miss Hobhouse's report, and that of the unnamed lady in Pretoria. In justice it must be acknowledged that some camps may have been more open to criticism than others, and that (as we should expect) they became more perfect with time. But I cannot believe that any impartial mind can read the evidence without seeing that the British Government was doing its best under difficult circumstances to carry out the most humane plan possible, and that any other must involve consequences from which a civilised nation must shrink.

Towards the end of 1901 an attempt was made to lessen the mortality in the camps by bringing them down to the sea-coast. The problem was complicated by the fact that many of the refugees were averse from leaving their own country, and had come in upon a promise that they would not be asked to do so. Those who would were moved down, and the camps at East London, Port Elizabeth, and Merebank, near Durban, largely increased. ‘No expense must be allowed to stand in the way,’ said Mr. Chamberlain in an official message. In Blue Book (Cd. 853) we find Lord Milner and the Colonial Secretary discussing every means by which the mortality might be lessened and the comfort of the camps increased.

It is worthy of record that the portrait of an emaciated child has been circulated upon the Continent and in America as a proof positive of the horrors of the concentration system. It is only too probable that there are many emaciated children in the camps, for they usually arrive in that condition. This particular portrait however was, as I am credibly informed, taken by the British authorities on the occasion of the criminal trial of the mother for the ill-usage of the child. The incident is characteristic of the unscrupulous tactics which have been used from the beginning to poison the mind of the world against Great Britain.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRITISH SOLDIER IN SOUTH AFRICA

When Lord Roberts desired to sum up the character of the soldiers whom he had led, he declared that they had behaved like gentlemen. I believe that statement to be no exaggeration, and I think that when the bitter animosities of warfare have subsided, it will be acknowledged by the Boers themselves that it is true. They have had some unsavoury work to do — for guerilla warfare brings much in its train which is hateful — but officers and men have ameliorated and softened the asperities of warfare wherever it has been possible to do so. Their character has been most foully attacked by politicians at home, and by the ignorant or malevolent abroad. Let us examine the evidence.

There were many military attachés present with our Army. Have any of them reported against the discipline of our soldiers? So far as their reports are known, nothing of the sort has been alleged. Captain Slocum, the American representative, writes from Bloemfontein:

‘The British have been too merciful, and I believe, had a more rigorous course been adopted when the Army first entered this capital and the enemy thoroughly stampeded, the war would have been materially shortened.’

The French military attaché said: ‘What I admire most in this campaign is the conduct of your soldiers. Here they are trekking and fighting daily in an uninteresting country, scorched by day, cold by night, without drink, without women. Any other soldiers in Europe would have mutinied long ago.’

There were several foreign war-correspondents with our army. Of these the only Frenchman, M. Carrère of the ‘Matin’ was an ardent pro-Boer. Read his book, ‘En pleine Epopée.’ He is bitter against our policy and our politicians. His eyes are very keenly open for flaws in our Army. But from cover to cover he has nothing but praise for the devoted Tommy and his chivalrous officer.

Three American correspondents were there — there may have been more, but three I knew. These were Messrs. Julian Ralph, James Barnes, and

Unger. The first two were much impressed by the humanity and discipline of the British troops, though Mr. Ralph was, I believe, like Captain Slocum, of the opinion that it was occasionally pushed too far. Mr. Unger's published impressions of the war confirm the same idea.

Here, then, is practical unanimity among all the impartial witnesses. On the opinions of our own correspondents I will not dwell. I have the advantage of knowing nearly all of them, and though among them are several gentlemen who have a chivalrous and idealistic sympathy for the Boers, I cannot recollect that I have ever once heard one of them record a single instance where they had been shocked by the conduct of a soldier.

I may, perhaps, be permitted to add my own testimony. I went to South Africa with great sympathy for the individual Boer, and with a belief that I should find soldiers in the field very different from soldiers in peace. I was three months in Bloemfontein when there were from ten to thirty thousand men encamped round the town. During that time I only once saw a man drunk. I never saw a man drunk during the short time that I was in Pretoria and Johannesburg. I once heard of a soldier striking a Boer. It was because the man had refused to raise his hat at the burial of the soldier's comrade. I not only never saw any outrage, but in many confidential talks with officers I never heard of one. I saw twenty Boer prisoners within five minutes of their capture. The soldiers were giving them cigarettes. Only two assaults on women came to my ears while I was in Africa. In each case the culprit was a Kaffir, and the deed was promptly avenged by the British Army.

Miss Hobhouse has mixed with a great number of refugees, many of whom are naturally very bitter against us. She is not reticent as to the tales which they told her. Not one of them all has a story of outrage. One woman, she says, was kicked by a drunken soldier, for which, she adds, he was punished.

An inmate of the Springfontein Refugee Camp, Mr. Maltman, of Philippolis, writes: 'All the Boer women here speak in the highest terms of the treatment they have received at the hands of soldiers.'

Here is the testimony of a burgher's wife, Mrs. Van Niekirk:

'Will you kindly allow me to give my testimony to the kindly treatment of the Dutch women and children by the British troops? As the wife of a Transvaal burgher, I have lived in Krugersdorp since 1897, until three weeks ago. The town was taken in June last, and since then there has always been a fairly large force of men in, or quite near it; indeed, on several occasions the numbers have amounted to ten thousand, or more, and have been of many different regiments, English, Scotch, Irish, and Colonial.

‘At such times the streets and the few shops open were thronged with soldiers, while, even when the town was quietest, there were always numbers of them about. The women were at first afraid, but they very soon discovered that they could move about as freely as in ordinary times, without fear of any annoyance. During the whole six months I never saw or heard of a single instance where a woman was treated with the slightest disrespect; the bearing of both officers and men was invariably deferential to all women, and kindly to children.

‘Last July a detachment of Gordon Highlanders was camped on the veldt for a week in front of my house, which stands almost alone on the outskirts of the town. My husband was away during the time, and I was alone with my young children. The nearest camp-fires were not a dozen yards from my gate, yet I never experienced the least annoyance, nor missed from my ground even so much as a stick of wood.

‘I could multiply instances, but after this little need be said; if I had not seen it I could not have believed that a victorious army would behave with such humanity and consideration in the territory of a people even then in arms against them; and if they behave so in Krugersdorp — a place mind you, where during the last six months their doings could not be openly criticised — is it likely that their conduct in other places will be so entirely different? — I am, &c.’

This is the testimony of a woman. Here it is from a man’s point of view — an old burgher who had very special opportunities for studying the conduct of British troops:

‘Allow me to state here, once for all, that throughout the entire war all the English officers — and a great many of all ranks came to see us — treated us with the greatest kindness and courtesy. They knew, too, that I was a burgher, and that I had several sons who were doing their duty in fighting for the independence of our country.

‘I return once more to the conduct of “Tommy Atkins.” We saw numbers of convoys, some of which were more than sixteen kilometres long, bringing a great many Boer prisoners and their families to Pretoria. Tommy was everywhere, watching the wagons, marching without a word in clouds of dust, frequently in mud to the ankle, never rough towards women or children, as has been so often repeated. We have heard the contrary stated by our tried friends and by our own children.

‘During halts, Tommy was the best and readiest creature imaginable; he got the water boiled, laid himself out to attend to the children in a thousand ways, and comforted the broken-hearted mothers. His hand was ready with help for every invalid. At our farm he helped of his own free will in saving a drowning beast, or in removing a fat pig that had been killed, sometimes even in rounding-in cattle that had strayed out of bounds, and so on, giving help in a thousand ways. For all that he wanted no reward. Rewards he refused altogether simply because it was good-feeling which made him do these things.

‘Sir, these are indisputable facts, which I have repeated as accurately as I could, leaving your readers to draw their own conclusions.

‘Old Burgher of the Transvaal.

‘Rustenburg, Transvaal: July 1901.’

A long and curious letter appears in the ‘Suisse Liberale’ from a young Swiss who spent the whole time of the war upon a farm in the Thabanchu district of the Orange Free State. It is very impartial in its judgments, and remarks, among other things — talking of the life of the local garrison:

‘They make frequent visits, send out invitations, and organise picnics. In the town they get up charity concerts, balls, sports, and horse-races. It is a curious thing that the English, even when they are at war, cannot live without their usual sports, and the conquered do not show the slightest repugnance to joining the victors in their games or to mixing in society with them.’

Is this consistent with stories of military brutality? It appears to be a very modified hell which is loose in that portion of Africa.

Mr. and Mrs. Osborn Howe were the directors of the Camp Soldiers’ Homes in South Africa. They have seen as much of the army in South Africa as most people, and have looked at it with critical eyes. Here are some of their conclusions:

‘Neither we nor our staff, scattered between De Aar and Pretoria, have ever heard of a single case of outrage or ill-treatment. One and all indignantly denied the accusations against our soldiers, and have given us many instances of great kindness shown by the troops towards helpless women and children.

‘We ourselves saw nothing which we could not tell to a gathering of schoolgirls.

‘When living in the Orange River Colony we were in the midst of the farm-burning district, and witnessed Lord Roberts’s efforts to spare the people suffering by issuing warning proclamations. We saw how the officers waited till the farmers had had time to digest these repeated warnings, and then with what reluctance both officers and men went to carry out the work of destruction, but we never heard of a case where there had not first been some overt act on the part of the enemy.

‘A story of reported outrage at a Dutch mission-house in the slums of a large town was found after personal investigation to have been anything but an outrage as the result proved. The young soldiers who entered the house when the door was opened in answer to their knock, withdrew after they had discovered that the ladies who occupied the house were missionaries, nor had anything been removed or injured. But the garbled story, with its misuse of the word “outrage,” reached a district in Cape Colony where it did no little mischief in fanning the flames of animosity and rebellion. Thus the reported “outrage” was not even a common assault.

‘It may be said that our love for the soldiers has warped our judgment. We would say we love God, and we love truth more than the honour of our soldiers. If there was another side we should not hide it.’

So much for the general facts. But it is notoriously difficult to prove a negative. Let us turn then to particular instances which have been raked together, and see what can be made of them. One of them occurred early in the war, when it was stated that there had been two assaults upon women in Northern Natal. Here are the lies duly nailed to the counter.

The Vicar of Dundee, Colony of Natal, on being requested by the Bishop of Natal to inquire into the truth of a statement that four women of a family near Dundee, named Bester, were outraged by English soldiers, reported that he had had an interview with the father-in-law of Bester, Jacobus Maritz, who is one of the most influential farmers in the district. Maritz said to him:

‘Well, Mr. Bailey, you do right in coming to me, for our family (Mrs. Bester is his daughter) is the *only* family of Bester in the district, and you can say from me, that the story is nothing but a pack of lies.’

The other case, alleged at Dundee, furnished no names. The only thing specified was that one of the men was in the uniform of a Highlander. The

Vicar replies to this: ‘As you are aware, no Highland regiment has been stationed at Dundee during the war.’

The weapons of slander were blunted by the fact that about May 1900 the Transvaal Government, wishing to allay the fears of the women in the farms, published an announcement in the ‘Volksstem’ advising every burgher to leave his family upon the farms as the enemy were treating women and children with the utmost consideration and respect. We know that both President Kruger and General Botha acted up to this advice by leaving their own wives under our protection while they carried on their campaign against us. At the very instant that Kruger was falsely stating at Marseilles that we were making war on women and children, his own infirm wife was being so sedulously guarded by British soldiers that the passer-by was not even allowed to stare curiously at the windows or to photograph the house.

There was a lull in the campaign of calumny which was made up for by the whole-hearted effort of M. van Broekhuizen. This man was a minister in Pretoria, and, like most of the Dutch ministers, a red-hot politician. Having given his parole to restrain his sentiments, he was found to be still preaching inflammatory political sermons; so he was advised to leave, and given a passage gratis to Europe. He signalised his arrival by an article printed in the ‘Independence Belge,’ declaring among other statements that 30 per cent. of the Boer women had been ruined by the British troops. Such a statement from such a source raised a feeling of horror in Europe, and one of deep anger and incredulity on the side of those who knew the British Army. The letter was forwarded to Pretoria for investigation, and elicited the following unofficial comments from M. Constançon, the former Swiss Consul in that city, who had been present during the whole British occupation:

‘I am more than astonished, I am disgusted, that a Lausanne paper should print such abominable and filthy lies.

‘The whole article from the beginning to the end is nothing but a pack of lies, and the writer, a minister of the Gospel, of all men, ought to know better than to perjure himself and his office in the way he does.

‘I have lived for the last eighteen years in or around Pretoria, and know almost every Boer family in the district. The two names mentioned by Broekhuizen of women assaulted by the troops are quite unknown to me, and are certainly not Boer names.

‘Ever since the entry of the troops in the Transvaal, I have travelled constantly through the whole of Pretoria district and part of the Waterberg. I have often put up at Boer houses for the night, and stopped at all houses on my road on my business. In most of these houses the men were away fighting against the British; women and children alone were to be found on the farms. Nowhere and in no instance have I heard a single word of complaint against the troops; here and there a few fowls were missing and fencing poles pulled out for firewood; but this can only be expected from troops on the march. On the other hand, the women could not say enough in praise of the soldiers, and their behaviour towards their sex. Whenever a camp was established close to the homestead, the officers have always had a picket placed round the house for the object of preventing all pilfering, and the women, rich or poor, have everywhere been treated as ladies.

‘Why the Boer women were so unanimous in their praises is because they were far from expecting such treatment at the hands of the victors.

‘Our town is divided into wards, and every woman and child has been fed whenever they were without support, and in one ward we have actually five hundred of these receiving rations from the British Government, although in most cases the men are still fighting. In the towns the behaviour of the troops has been, admirable, all canteens have been closed, and in the last six months I have only seen two cases of drunkenness amongst soldiers.

‘We are quite a little Swiss colony here, and I don’t know one of my countrymen who would not endorse every word of my statement.

‘Many may have sympathies with the Boers, but in all justice they will always give credit to the British troops and their officers for the humane way this war is carried on, and for the splendid way in which Tommy Atkins behaves himself.’

With this was printed in the ‘Gazette de Lausanne,’ which instituted the inquiry, a letter from Mr. Gray, Presbyterian minister in Pretoria, which says:

‘A few days ago I received an extract from your issue of November 17 last entitled “La Civilisation Anglaise en Afrique.” It consisted mainly of a letter over the signature of H. D. van Broekhuizen (not Broesehuizen as printed), Boer pastor of Pretoria. Allow me, sir, to assure you that the wholesale statements with regard to the atrocities of British soldiers contained in that letter are a tissue of falsehoods, and constitute an unfounded calumny which it would be difficult to parallel in the annals of warfare. It is difficult to conceive the motives that actuate the writer, but that they have been violent enough to make him absolutely reckless as to facts, is evident.

‘When I got the article from your paper I immediately went out to make inquiry as to what possible foundation there was for the charges hurled so wildly at the British soldier. Having lived in Pretoria for the last eleven years I am acquainted with many of the local Boers. Those of them whom I questioned assured me that they had never known a case in which British soldiers had outraged a woman. One case was rumoured, but had never been substantiated, and was regarded as very doubtful. Let it be granted that some solitary cases of rudeness may have occurred, that would not be surprising under the circumstances. Still it would not furnish a ground for the libelling of a whole army. The astonishing fact is, however, that in this country one only hears of the surprise everywhere felt that the British soldier has been so self-restrained and deferential towards women.’

To this M. van Broekhuizen’s feeble reply was that there was no ex-consul of the name of Constançon in Pretoria. The ‘Gazette de Lausanne’ then pointed out that the gentleman was well known, that he had acted in that capacity for many years, and added that if M. van Broekhuizen was so ill-informed upon so simple a matter, it was not likely that he was very correct upon other more contentious ones. Thus again a false coin was nailed to the counter, but only after it had circulated so widely that many who had passed it would never know that it was proved to be base metal. Incredible as it may seem, the infamous falsehood was repeated in 1902 by a Dr. Vallentin, in the ‘Deutsche Rundschau,’ from which it was copied into other leading German papers without any reference to its previous disproof in 1901.

Now we will turn for a moment to the evidence of Miss Alice Bron, the devoted Belgian nurse, who served on both sides during the war and has therefore a fair standard of comparison. Here are a few sentences from her reports:

‘I have so often heard it said and repeated that the British soldiers are the dregs of London and the scum of the criminal classes, that their conduct astounded me.’

This is the opinion of a lady who spent two years in the service of humanity on the veldt.

Here are one or two other sidelights from Miss Bron:

‘How grateful and respectful they all are! I go to the hospital at night without the slightest fear, and when a sentry hears my reply, “Sister,” to his challenge, he always humbly begs my pardon.

‘I have seen the last of them and their affectionate attentions, their respect, and their confidence. On this head I could relate many instances of exquisite feeling on the part of these poor soldiers.

‘A wounded English soldier was speaking of Cronje. “Ah, sister,” said he, “I am glad that we have made so many prisoners.”

‘“Why?” I asked, fearing to hear words of hatred.

‘“Oh,” he said, “I was glad to hear it because I know that they at least would be neither wounded nor killed. They will not leave wife nor children, neither will they suffer what we are suffering.”’

She describes how she met General Wavell:

‘“You see I have come to protect you,” he said.

‘We smiled and bowed, and I thought, “I know your soldiers too well, General. We don’t need any protection.”’

But war may have brutalised the combatants, and so it is of interest to have Nurse Bron’s impressions at the end of 1901. She gives her conversation with a Boer:

‘“All that I have to say to you is that what you did down there has never been seen in any other war. *Never* in any country in the world has such a dastardly act been committed as the shooting of one who goes to meet the white flag.”

‘Very pale, the chief, a true “gentleman” fifty-three years old, and the father of eleven children, answered, “You are right, sister.”

‘“And since we talk of these things,” I said, “I will say that I understand very well that you are defending your country, but what I do not excuse is your lying as you do about these English.”

‘“We repeat what we are told.”

‘“No,” I said, “you all of you lie, and you know that you are lying, with the Bible on your knees and invoking the name of God, and, thanks to your lies, all Europe believes that the English army is composed of assassins and thieves. You see how they treat you here!”’

She proceeds to show how they were treated. The patients, it may be observed, were not Boer combatants but Cape rebels, liable to instant execution. This is the diet after operations:

‘For eight, or ten days, the patient has champagne *of the choicest French brands* (her italics), in considerable quantity, then old cognac, and finally port, stout, or ale at choice, with five or six eggs a day beaten up in brandy and milk, arriving at last at a complete diet of which I, though perfectly well, could not have absorbed the half.’

‘This,’ she says, ‘is another instance of the “ferocity” with which, according to the European press, the English butchers have conducted the war.’

The Sisters of Nazareth in South Africa are a body who are above political or racial prejudice. Here are the published words of the Mother Superior:

‘I receive letters by every mail, but a word that would imply the least shadow of reproach on the conduct of the soldiers has never been written. As for the British soldier in general, our sisters in various parts of the colony, who have come a great deal in contact with the military of all ranks, state that they can never say enough of their courtesy, politeness, and good behaviour at all times.’

These are not the impressions which the Boer agents, with their command of secret-service money and their influence on the European press, have given to the world. A constant stream of misrepresentations and lies have poisoned the mind of Europe and have made a deep and enduring breach between ourselves and our German kinsmen.

The British troops have been accused of shooting women. It is wonderful that many women have not been shot, for it has not been unusual for farmhouses to be defended by the men when there were women within. As a matter of fact, however, very few cases have occurred where a woman has been injured. One amazon was killed in the fighting line, rifle in hand, outside Ladysmith. A second victim furnished the famous Eloff myth, which gave material for many cartoons and editorials. The accusation was that in cold blood we had shot Kruger’s niece, and a Berlin morning paper told the story, with many artistic embellishments, as follows:

‘As the Boer saw his wife down, just able to raise herself, he made an attempt to run to her assistance, but the inhumans held him fast. The officer assured him that she was shot through the temples and must anyhow die, and they left her therefore lying. In the evening he heard his name called. It was his wife who still lived after twelve hours’ agony. When they reached Rustenburg she was dead. This woman was Frau Eloff, Kruger’s niece. In addition to the sympathy for the loss Kruger has suffered, this report will renew the bitter feeling of all against the brutality of English warfare.'

This story was dished up in many ways by many papers. Here is Lord Kitchener's plain account of the matter:

'No woman of that name has been killed, but the report may refer to the death of a Mrs. Vandermerve, who unfortunately was killed at a farmhouse from which her husband was firing. Mrs. Vandermerve is a sister-in-law of Eloff. The death of a woman from a stray bullet is greatly to be regretted, but it appears clear that her husband was responsible for the fighting which caused the accident.'

So perished another myth. I observe, however, now (Christmas 1901), a continental journalist describing an interview with Kruger says, 'he wore mourning on account of his niece who died of a gun-shot.' Might not his wife's death possibly account for the mourning?

And yet another invention which is destined to the same fate, is the story that at the skirmish of Graspan, near Reitz, upon June 6, the British used the Boer women as cover, a subject which also afforded excellent material for the caricaturists of the Fatherland. The picture of rows of charming Boer maidens chained in the open with bloodthirsty soldiers crouching behind them was too alluring for the tender-hearted artist. Nothing was wanting for a perfect cartoon — except the original fact. Here is the report as it appeared in a German paper:

'When the English on June 6 were attacked by the Boers, they ordered the women and children to leave the wagons. Placing these in front of the soldiers, they shot beneath the women's arms upon the approaching Boers. Eight women and two children fell through the Boers' fire. When the Boers saw this they stopped firing. Yelling like wild beasts, they broke through the soldiers' lines, beating to death the Tommies like mad dogs with the butt ends of their rifles.'

The true circumstances of the action so far as they can be collected are as follows: Early on June 6 Major Sladen, with 200 mounted infantry, ran down a Boer convoy of 100 wagons. He took forty-five male prisoners, and the wagons were full of women and children. He halted his men and waited for the main British force (De Lisle's) to come up. While he was waiting he was fiercely attacked by a large body of Boers, five or six hundred, under De Wet. The British threw themselves into a Kaffir kraal and made a desperate resistance. The long train of wagons with the women still in them extended from this village right across the plain, and the Boers used them as cover in skirmishing up to the village. The result was that the women and children were under a double fire from either side. One woman and two children appear to have been hit, though whether by Boer or Briton it must have been difficult to determine. The convoy and the prisoners remained eventually in the hands of the British. It will be seen then that it is as just to say that the Boers used their women as cover for their advance as the British for their defence. Probably in the heat of the action both sides thought more of the wagons than of what was inside them.

These, with one case at Middelburg, where in a night attack of the Boers one or two inmates of the refugee camp are said to have been accidentally hit, form the only known instances in the war. And yet so well known a paper as the German ‘Kladderadatsch’ is not ashamed to publish a picture of a ruined farm with dead women strewed round it, and the male child hanging from the branch of a tree. The ‘Kladderadatsch’ has a reputation as a comic paper, but there should be some limits to its facetiousness.

In his pamphlet on ‘Methods of Barbarism,’ Mr. Stead has recently produced a chapter called ‘A Glimpse of the Hellish Panorama,’ in which he deals with the evidence at the Spoelstra trial. Spoelstra was a Hollander who, having sworn an oath of neutrality, afterwards despatched a letter to a Dutch newspaper without submitting it to a censor, in which he made libellous attacks upon the British Army. He was tried for the offence and sentenced to a fine of 100*l.*, his imprisonment being remitted. In the course of the trial he called a number of witnesses for the purpose of supporting his charges against the troops, and it is on their evidence that Mr. Stead dilates under the characteristic headline given above.

Mr. Stead begins his indictment by a paragraph which speaks for itself: ‘It is a cant cry with many persons, by no means confined to those who have advocated the war, that the British Army has spent two years in the South African Republics without a single case of impropriety being proved against a single soldier. I should be very glad to believe it; but there is Rudyard Kipling’s familiar saying that Tommy Atkins is no plaster saint, but a single man in barracks, or, in this case, a single man in camp, remarkably like other human beings. We all know him at home. There is not one father of a family in the House or on the London Press who would allow his servant girl to remain out all night on a public common in England in time of profound peace in the company of a score of soldiers. If he did, he would feel that he had exposed the girl to the loss of her character. This is not merely admitted, but acted upon by all decent people who live in garrison towns or in the neighbourhood of barracks. Why, then, should they suppose that when the same men are released from all the restraints of civilisation, and sent forth to burn, destroy, and loot at their own sweet will and pleasure, they will suddenly undergo so complete a transformation as to scrupulously respect the wives and daughters of the enemy? It is very unpopular to say this, and I already hear in advance the shrieks of execration of those who will declare that I am calumniating the gallant soldiers who are spending their lives in the defence of the interests of the Empire. But I do not say a word against our soldiers. I only say that they are men.'

He adds:

'It is an unpleasant fact, but it has got to be faced like other facts. No war can be conducted — and this war has not been conducted — without exposing multitudes of women, married and single, to the worst extremities of outrage. It is an inevitable incident of war. It is one of the normal phenomena of the military Inferno. It is absolutely impossible to attempt any comparative or quantitative estimate of the number of women who have suffered wrong at the hands of our troops.'

Was ever such an argument adduced in this world upon a serious matter! When stripped of its rhetoric it amounts to this, '250,000 men have committed outrages. How do I prove it? Because they are 250,000 men, and therefore *must* commit outrages.' Putting all chivalry, sense of duty, and every higher consideration upon one side, is Mr. Stead not aware that if a soldier had done such a thing and if his victim could have pointed him out, the man's life would be measured by the time that was needed to collect a military court to try him? Is there a soldier who does not know this? Is there a Boer who does not know it? It is the one offence for which there would be no possible forgiveness. Are the Boers so meek-spirited a race that they have no desire for vengeance? Would any officer take the responsibility of not reporting a man who was accused of such a crime? Where, then, are the lists of the men who must have suffered if this cruel accusation were true? There are no such lists, because such things have never occurred.

Leading up to the events of the trial, Mr. Stead curdles our blood by talking of the eleven women who stood up upon oath to testify to the ill-treatment which they had received at the hands of our troops. Taken with the context, the casual reader would naturally imagine that these eleven women were all complaining of some sexual ill-usage. In the very next sentence he talks about ‘such horrible and shameful incidents.’ But on examination it proves that eight out of the eleven cases have nothing sexual or, indeed, in many of them, anything criminal in their character. One is, that a coffin was dug up to see if there were arms in it. On this occasion the search was a failure, though it has before now been a success. Another was that the bed of a sick woman was searched — without any suggestion of indelicacy. Two others, that women had been confined while on the trek in wagons. ‘The soldiers did not bother the woman during or after the confinement. They did not peep into the wagon,’ said the witness. These are the trivialities which Mr. Stead tries to bluff us into classifying as ‘horrible and shameful incidents.’

But there were three alleged cases of assault upon women. One of them is laid to the charge of a certain Mr. E —— n, of the Intelligence Department. Now, the use of Mr. and the description ‘Intelligence Department’ make it very doubtful whether this man could be called a member of the British Army at all. The inference is that he was a civilian, and further, that he was a Dutch civilian. British names which will fit E —— n are not common, while the Dutch name Esselen or Enslin is extremely so. ‘I have never been to the Intelligence Department to find out whether he really belonged to that Department,’ said the woman. She adds that E —— n acted as an interpreter. Surely, then, he must have been a Dutchman. In that case, why is his name the only name which is disguised? Is it not a little suggestive?

The second case was that of Mrs. Gouws, whose unfortunate experience was communicated to Pastor van Broekhuizen, and had such an effect upon him as to cause him to declare that 30 per cent. of the women of the country had been ruined. Mrs. Gouws certainly appears by her own account to have been very roughly treated, though she does not assert that her assailant went to the last extremity — or, indeed, that he did more than use coarse terms in his conversation. The husband in his evidence says: ‘I have seen a great deal of soldiers, and they behaved well, and I could speak well of them.’ He added that a British officer had taken his wife’s deposition, and that both the Provost-Marshal and the Military Governor were interesting themselves in the case. Though no actual assault was committed, it is to be hoped that the man who was rude to a helpless woman will sooner or later be identified and punished.

There remains one case, that of Mrs. Botha of Rustenburg, which, if her account is corroborated, is as bad as it could be. The mystery of the case lies in the fact that by her own account a British force was encamped close by, and yet that neither she nor her husband made the complaint which would have brought most summary punishment upon the criminal. This could not have been from a shrinking from publicity, since she was ready to tell the story in Court. There is not the least indication who this solitary soldier may have been, and even the date was unknown to the complainant. What can be done in such a case? The President of the court-martial, with a burst of indignation which shows that he at least does not share Mr. Stead's views upon the frequency of such crimes in South Africa, cried: 'If such a most awful thing happened to a woman, would it not be the first thing for a man to do to rush out and bring the guilty man to justice? He ought to risk his life for that. There was no reason for him to be frightened. We English are not a barbarous nation.' The husband, however, had taken no steps. We may be very sure that the case still engages the earnest attention of our Provost-Marshal, and that the man, if he exists, will sooner or later form an object-lesson upon discipline and humanity to the nearest garrison. Such was the Spoelstra trial. Mr. Stead talks fluently of the charges made, but deliberately omits the essential fact that after a patient hearing not one of them was substantiated.

I cannot end the chapter better than with the words of the Rev. P. S. Bosman, head of the Dutch Reformed Church at Pretoria:

'Not a single case of criminal assault or rape by non-commissioned officers or men of the British Army in Pretoria on Boer women has come to my knowledge. I asked several gentlemen in turn about this point and their testimony is the same as mine.'

But Mr. Stead says that it must be so because there are 250,000 men in Africa. Could the perversion of argument go further? Which are we to believe, our enemy upon the spot or the journalist in London?

CHAPTER IX

FURTHER CHARGES AGAINST BRITISH TROOPS

Expansive and Explosive Bullets.
When Mr. Stead indulges in vague rhetoric it is difficult to corner him, but when he commits himself to a definite statement he is more open to attack. Thus, in his ‘Methods of Barbarism’ he roundly asserts that ‘England sent several million rounds of expanding bullets to South Africa, and in the North of the Transvaal and at Mafeking for the first three months of the war no other bullets were used.’ Mr. Methuen, on the authority of a letter of Lieutenant de Montmorency, R.A., states also that from October 12, 1899, up to January 15, 1900, the British forces north of Mafeking used nothing but Mark IV. ammunition, which is not a dum-dum but is an expansive bullet.

Mr. Methuen’s statement differs, as will be seen, very widely from Mr. Stead’s; for Mr. Stead says Mafeking, and Mr. Methuen says north of Mafeking. There was a very great deal of fighting at Mafeking, and comparatively little north of Mafeking during that time, so that the difference is an essential one. To test Mr. Stead’s assertion about Mafeking, I communicated with General Baden-Powell, the gentleman who is most qualified to speak as to what occurred there, and his answer lies before me: ‘We had no expanding bullets in our supply at Mafeking, unless you call the ordinary Martini-Henry an expanding bullet. I would not have used them on humane principles, and moreover, an Army order had been issued against the use of dum-dum bullets in this campaign. On the other hand, explosive bullets are expressly forbidden in the Convention, and these the Boers used freely against us in Mafeking, especially on May 12.’

I have endeavoured also to test the statement as it concerns the troops to the north of Mafeking. The same high authority says: ‘With regard to the northern force, it is just possible that a few sportsmen in the Rhodesian column may have had some sporting bullets, but I certainly never heard of them.’ A friend of mine who was in Lobatsi during the first week of the war assures me that he never saw anything but the solid bullet. It must be remembered that the state of things was very exceptional with the Rhodesian force. Their communications to the south were cut on the second day of the war, and for seven months they were dependent upon the long and circuitous Beira route for any supplies which reached them. One could imagine that under such circumstances uniformity of armament would be more difficult to maintain than in the case of an army with an assured base.

The expansive bullet is not, as a matter of fact, contrary to the Conventions of The Hague. It was expressly held from being so by the representatives of the United States and of Great Britain. In taking this view I cannot but think that these two enlightened and humanitarian Powers were ill-advised. Those Conventions were of course only binding on those who signed them, and therefore in fighting desperate savages the man-stopping bullet could still have been used. Whatever our motives in taking the view that we did, a swift retribution has come upon us, for it has prevented us from exacting any retribution, or even complaining, when the Boers have used these weapons against us. Explosive bullets are, however, as my distinguished correspondent points out, upon a different footing, and if the Boers claim the advantages of the Conventions of The Hague, then every burgher found with these weapons in his bandolier is liable to punishment.

Our soldiers have been more merciful than our Hague diplomatists, for in spite of the reservation of the right to use this ammunition, every effort has been made to exclude it from the firing line. An unfortunate incident early in the campaign gave our enemies some reason to suspect us. The facts are these.

At the end of the spring of 1899 some hundreds of thousands of hollow-headed bullets, made in England, were condemned as unsatisfactory, not being true to gauge, &c., and were sent to South Africa for target practice only. A quantity of this ammunition, known as ‘Metford Mark IV.,’ was sent up to Dundee by order of General Symons for practice in field firing. As Mark IV. was not for use in a war with white races all these cartridges were called in as soon as Kruger declared war, and the officers responsible thought they were every one returned. By some blundering in the packing at home, however, some of this Mark IV. must have got mixed up with the ordinary, or Mark II., ammunition, and was found on our men by the Boers on October 30. Accordingly a very careful inspection was ordered, and a few Mark IV. bullets were found in our men’s pouches, and at once removed. Their presence was purely accidental, and undoubtedly caused by a blunder in the Ordnance Department long before the war, and it was in consequence of this that some hollow-headed bullets were fired by the English early in the war without their knowledge.

What is usually known as the dum-dum bullet is a ‘soft-nosed’ one: but the regulation Mark II. is also made at the dum-dum factory, and the Boers, seeing the dum-dum label on boxes containing the latter, naturally thought the contents were the soft-nosed, which they were not.

It must be admitted that there was some carelessness in permitting sporting ammunition ever to get to the front at all. When the Derbyshire Militia were taken by De Wet at Roodeval, a number of cases of sporting cartridges were captured by the Boers (the officers had used them for shooting springbok). My friend, Mr. Langman, who was present, saw the Boers, in some instances, filling their bandoliers from these cases on the plausible excuse that they were only using our own ammunition. Such cartridges should never have been permitted to go up. But in spite of instances of bungling, the evidence shows that every effort has been made to keep the war as humane as possible. I am inclined to hope that a fuller knowledge will show that the same holds good for our enemies, and that in spite of individual exceptions, they have never systematically used anything except what one of their number described as a ‘gentlemanly’ bullet.

Conduct to Prisoners on the Field.

On this count, also, the British soldiers have been exposed to attacks, both at home and abroad, which are as unfounded and as shameful as most of those which have been already treated.

The first occasion upon which Boer prisoners fell into our hands was at the Battle of Elandslaagte, on October 21, 1899. That night was spent by the victorious troops in a pouring rain, round such fires as they were able to light. It has been recorded by several witnesses that the warmest corner by the fire was reserved for the Boer prisoners. It has been asserted, and is again asserted, that when the Lancers charged a small body of the enemy after the action, they gave no quarter—’too well substantiated and too familiar,’ says one critic of this assertion. I believe, as a matter of fact, that the myth arose from a sensational picture in an illustrated paper. The charge was delivered late in the evening, in uncertain light. Under such circumstances it is always possible, amid so wild and confused a scene, that a man who would have surrendered has been cut down or ridden over. But the cavalry brought back twenty prisoners, and the number whom they killed or wounded has not been placed higher than that, so that it is certain there was no indiscriminate slaying. I have read a letter from the officer who commanded the cavalry and who directed the charge, in which he tells the whole story confidentially to a brother officer. He speaks of his prisoners, but there is no reference to any brutality upon the part of the troopers.

Mr. Stead makes a great deal of some extracts from the letters of private soldiers at the front who talk of bayonetting their enemies. Such expressions should be accepted with considerable caution, for it may amuse the soldier to depict himself as rather a terrible fellow to his home-staying friends. Even if isolated instances could be corroborated, it would merely show that men of fiery temperament in the flush of battle are occasionally not to be restrained, either by the power of discipline or by the example and exhortations of their officers. Such instances, I do not doubt, could be found among all troops in all wars. But to found upon it a general charge of brutality or cruelty is unjust in the case of a foreigner, and unnatural in the case of our own people.

There is one final and complete answer to all such charges. It is that we have now in our hands 42,000 males of the Boer nations. They assert, and we cannot deny, that their losses in killed have been extraordinarily light during two years of warfare. How are these admitted and certain facts compatible with any general refusal of quarter? To anyone who, like myself, has seen the British soldiers jesting and smoking cigarettes with their captives within five minutes of their being taken, such a charge is ludicrous, but surely even to the most biassed mind the fact stated above must be conclusive.

In some ways I fear that the Conventions of The Hague will prove, when tested on a large scale, to be a counsel of perfection. It will certainly be the extreme test of self-restraint and discipline — a test successfully endured by the British troops at Elandslaagte, Bergendal, and many other places — to carry a position by assault and then to give quarter to those defenders who only surrender at the last instant. It seems almost too much to ask. The assailants have been terribly punished: they have lost their friends and their officers, in the frenzy of battle they storm the position, and then at the last instant the men who have done all the mischief stand up unscathed from behind their rocks and claim their own personal safety. Only at that moment has the soldier seen his antagonist or been on equal terms with him. He must give quarter, but it must be confessed that this is trying human nature rather high.

But if this holds good of an organised force defending a position, how about the solitary sniper? The position of such a man has never been defined by the Conventions of The Hague, and no rules are laid down for his treatment. It is not wonderful if the troops who have been annoyed by him should on occasion take the law into their own hands and treat him in a summary fashion.

The very first article of the Conventions of The Hague states that a belligerent must (1) Be commanded by some responsible person; (2) Have a distinctive emblem visible at a distance; (3) Carry arms openly. Now it is evident that the Boer sniper who draws his Mauser from its hiding-place in order to have a shot at the Rooineks from a safe kopje does not comply with any one of these conditions. In the letter of the law, then, he is undoubtedly outside the rules of warfare.

In the spirit he is even more so. Prowling among the rocks and shooting those who cannot tell whence the bullet comes, there is no wide gap between him and the assassin. His victims never see him, and in the ordinary course he incurs no personal danger. I believe such cases to have been very rare, but if the soldiers have occasionally shot such a man without reference to the officers, can it be said that it was an inexcusable action, or even that it was outside the strict rules of warfare?

I find in the ‘Gazette de Lausanne’ a returned Swiss soldier named Pache, who had fought for the Boers, expresses his amazement at the way in which the British troops after their losses in the storming of a position gave quarter to those who had inflicted those losses upon them.

‘Only once,’ he says, ‘at the fight at Tabaksberg, have I seen the Boers hold on to their position to the very end. At the last rush of the enemy they opened a fruitless magazine fire, and then threw down their rifles and lifted their hands, imploring quarter from those whom they had been firing at at short range. I was astounded at the clemency of the soldiers, who allowed them to live. For my part I should have put them to death.’

Of prisoners after capture there is hardly need to speak. There is a universal consensus of opinion from all, British or foreign, who have had an opportunity of forming an opinion, that the prisoners have been treated with humanity and generosity. The same report has come from Green Point, St.

Helena, Bermuda, Ceylon, Ahmednager, and all other camps. An outcry was raised when Ahmednager in India was chosen for a prison station, and it was asserted, with that recklessness with which so many other charges have been hurled against the authorities, that it was a hot-bed of disease. Experience has shown that there was no grain of truth in these statements, and the camp has been a very healthy one. As it remains the only one which has ever been subjected to harsh criticism, it may be of use to append the conclusions of Mr. Jesse Collings during a visit to it last month:

‘The Boer officers said, speaking for ourselves and men, we have nothing at all to complain of. As prisoners of war we could not be better treated, and Major Dickenson’ (this they wished specially to be inserted), ‘is as kind and considerate as it is possible to be.’

Some sensational statements were also made in America as to the condition of the Bermuda Camps, but a newspaper investigation has shown that there is no charge to be brought against them.

Mr. John J. O’Rorke writes to the ‘New York Times,’ saying, ‘That in view of the many misrepresentations regarding the treatment of the Boer prisoners in Bermuda, he recently obtained a trustworthy opinion from one of his correspondents there.’... The correspondent’s name is Musson Wainwright, and Mr. O’Rorke describes him ‘as one of the influential residents in the island.’ He says, ‘That the Boers in Bermuda are better off than many residents in New York. They have plenty of beef, plenty of bread, plenty of everything except liberty. There are good hospitals and good doctors. It is true that some of the Boers are short of clothing, but these are very few, and the Government is issuing clothing to them. On the whole,’ says Mr. Wainwright, ‘Great Britain is treating the Boers far better than most people would.’

Compare this record with the undoubted privations, many of them unnecessary, which our soldiers endured at Waterval near Pretoria, the callous neglect of the enteric patients there, and the really barbarous treatment of British Colonial prisoners who were confined in cells on the absurd plea that in fighting for their flag they were traitors to the Africander cause.

Executions.

The number of executions of Boers, as distinguished from the execution of Cape rebels, has been remarkably few in a war which has already lasted twenty-six months. So far as I have been able to follow them, they have been limited to the execution of Cordua for broken parole and conspiracy upon August 24, 1900, at Pretoria, the shooting of one or two horse-poisoners in Natal, and the shooting of three men after the action of October 27, 1900, near Fredericstad. These men, after throwing down their arms and receiving quarter, picked them up again and fired at the soldiers from behind. No doubt there have been other cases, scattered up and down the vast scene of warfare, but I can find no record of them, and if they exist at all they must be few in number. Since the beginning of 1901 four men have been shot in the Transvaal, three in Pretoria as spies and breakers of parole, one in Johannesburg as an aggravated case of breaking neutrality by inciting Boers to resist.

At the beginning of the war 90 per cent. of the farmers in the northern district of Cape Colony joined the invaders. Upon the expulsion of the Boers these men for the most part surrendered. The British Government, recognising that pressure had been put upon them and that their position had been a difficult one, inflicted no penalty upon the rank-and-file beyond depriving them of the franchise for a few years. A few who, like the Douglas rebels, were taken red-handed upon the field of battle, were condemned to periods of imprisonment which varied from one to five years.

This was in the year 1900. In 1901 there was an invasion of the Colony by Boers which differed very much from the former one. In the first case the country had actually been occupied by the Boer forces, who were able to exert real pressure upon the inhabitants. In the second the invaders were merely raiding bands who traversed many places but occupied none. A British subject who joined on the first occasion might plead compulsion, on the second it was undoubtedly of his own free will.

These Boer bands being very mobile, and never fighting save when they were at an overwhelming advantage, penetrated all parts of the Colony and seduced a number of British subjects from their allegiance. The attacking of small posts and the derailing of trains, military or civilian, were their chief employment. To cover their tracks they continually murdered natives whose information might betray them. Their presence kept the Colony in confusion and threatened the communications of the Army.

The situation may be brought home to a continental reader by a fairly exact parallel. Suppose that an Austrian army had invaded Germany, and that while it was deep in German territory bands of Austrian subjects who were of German extraction began to tear up the railway lines and harass the communications. That was our situation in South Africa. Would the Austrians under these circumstances show much mercy to those rebel bands, especially if they added cold-blooded murder to their treason? Is it likely that they would?

The British, however, were very long-suffering. Many hundreds of these rebels passed into their hands, and most of them escaped with fine and imprisonment. The ringleaders, and those who were convicted of capital penal offences, were put to death. I have been at some pains to make a list of the executions in 1901, including those already mentioned. It is at least approximately correct:

Number	Place	Date 1901		Reason
2	De Aar	March	19	Train-wrecking.
2	Pretoria	June	11	Boers breaking oath of neutrality.
1	Middelburg	July	10	Fighting.
1	Cape Town	“	13	“
1	Cradock	“	13	“
2	Middelburg	“	24	“
2	Kenhardt	“	25	“
1	Pretoria	Aug.	22	Boer spy.
3	Colesburg	Sept.	4	Fighting.
1	Middelburg	Oct.	10	“
1	Middelburg	“	11	“
1	Vryburg (hanged)	“	12	“
Several	Tarkastad	“	12	“
1	Tarkastad	“	14	“
1	Middelburg	“	15	“
2	Cradock (1 hanged, 1 shot)	“	17	Train-wrecking and murdering native.
2	Vryburg	“	29	Fighting.
1	Mafeking	Nov.	11	Shooting a Native.

1	Colesburg	“	12	Fighting, marauding, and assaulting, &c.
1	Johannesburg	“	23	Persuading surrendered burghers to break oath.
1	Aliwal North	“	26	Cape Police Deserter.
1	Krugersdorp	Dec.	26	Shooting wounded.
2	Mafeking	“	27	Kaffir murder.

Allowing 3 for the ‘several’ at Tarkastad on October 12, that makes a total of 34. Many will undoubtedly be added in the future, for the continual murder of inoffensive natives, some of them children, calls for stern justice. In this list 4 were train-wreckers (aggravated cases by rebels), 1 was a spy, 4 were murderers of natives, 1 a deserter who took twenty horses from the Cape Police, and the remaining 23 were British subjects taken fighting and bearing arms against their own country.

Hostages upon Railway Trains.

Here the military authorities are open, as it seems to me, to a serious charge, not of inhumanity to the enemy but of neglecting those steps which it was their duty to take in order to safeguard their own troops. If all the victims of derailings and railway cuttings were added together it is not an exaggeration to say that it would furnish as many killed and wounded as a considerable battle. On at least five occasions between twenty and thirty men were incapacitated, and there are very numerous cases where smaller numbers were badly hurt.

Let it be said at once that we have no grievance in this. To derail a train is legitimate warfare, with many precedents to support it. But to checkmate it by putting hostages upon the trains is likewise legitimate warfare, with many precedents to support it also. The Germans habitually did it in France, and the result justified them as the result has justified us. From the time (October 1901) that it was adopted in South Africa we have not heard of a single case of derailing, and there can be no doubt that the lives of many soldiers, and possibly of some civilians, have been saved by the measure.

I will conclude this chapter by two extracts chosen out of many from the diary of the Austrian, Count Sternberg. In the first he describes his capture:

‘Three hours passed thus without our succeeding in finding our object. The sergeant then ordered that we should take a rest. We sat down on the ground, and chatted good-humouredly with the soldiers. They were fine fellows, without the least sign of brutality — in fact, full of sympathy. They had every right to be angry with us, for we had spoiled their sleep after they had gone through a trying day; yet they did not visit it on us in any way, and were most kind. They even shared their drinking-water with us. I cannot describe what my feelings were that night. A prisoner!’

He adds: ‘I can only repeat that the English officers and the English soldiers have shown in this war that the profession of arms does not debase, but rather ennobles man.’

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE QUESTION

Writing in November 1900, after hearing an expression of opinion from many officers from various parts of the seat of war, I stated in ‘The Great Boer War’: ‘The Boers have been the victims of a great deal of cheap slander in the press. The men who have seen most of the Boers in the field are the most generous in estimating their character. That the white flag was hoisted by the Boers as a cold-blooded device for luring our men into the open, is an absolute calumny. To discredit their valour is to discredit our victory.’ My own opinion would have been worthless, but this was, as I say, the result of considerable inquiry. General Porter said: ‘On a few occasions the white flag was abused, but in what large community would you not find a few miscreants?’ General Lyttelton said: ‘The Boers are brave men, and I do not think that the atrocities which have been reported are the acts of the regular Dutch burghers, but of the riff-raff who get into all armies.’

It is a painful fact, but the words could not possibly be written to-day. Had the war only ended when it should have ended, the combatants might have separated each with a chivalrous feeling of respect for a knightly antagonist. But the Boers having appealed to the God of battles and heard the judgment, appealed once more against it. Hence came the long, bitter, and fruitless struggle which has cost so many lives, so much suffering, and a lowering of the whole character of the war.

It is true that during the first year there were many things to exasperate the troops. The Boers were a nation of hunters and they used many a ruse which seemed to the straightforward soldier to be cowardly and unfair. Individuals undoubtedly played the white-flag trick, and individuals were guilty of holding up their hands in order to lure the soldiers from their cover. There are many instances of this — indeed, in one case Lord Roberts was himself a witness of it. Appended is his official protest:

‘Another instance having occurred of a gross abuse of the white flag and of the signal of holding up the hands in token of surrender, it is my duty to inform your Honour that if such abuse occurs again I shall most reluctantly be compelled to order my troops to disregard the white flag entirely.

‘The instance occurred on the kopje east of Driefontein Farm yesterday evening, and was witnessed by several of my own staff officers, as well as by myself, and resulted in the wounding of several of my officers and men.

‘A large quantity of explosive bullets of three different kinds was found in Cronje’s laager, and after every engagement with your Honour’s troops.

‘Such breaches of the recognised usages of war and of the Geneva Convention are a disgrace to any civilised power.’

But British officers were not unreasonable. They understood that they were fighting against a force in which the individual was a law unto himself. It was not fair to impute to deliberate treachery upon the part of the leaders every slim trick of an unscrupulous burgher. Again, it was understood that a coward may hoist an unauthorised white flag and his braver companions may refuse to recognise it, as our own people might on more than one occasion have done with advantage. For these reasons there was very little bitterness against the enemy, and most officers would, I believe, have subscribed the opinion which I have expressed.

From the first the position of the Boers was entirely irregular as regards the recognised rules of warfare. The first article of the Conventions of The Hague insists that an army in order to claim belligerent rights must first wear some emblem which is visible at a distance. It is true that the second article is to the effect that a population which has no time to organise themselves and who are defending themselves may be excused from this rule; but the Boers were the invaders at the outset of the war, and in view of their long and elaborate preparations it is absurd to say that they could not have furnished burghers on commando with some distinctive badge. When they made a change it was for the worse, for they finally dressed themselves in the khaki uniforms of our own soldiers, and by this means effected several surprises. It is typical of the good humour of the British that very many of these khaki-clad burghers have passed through our hands, and that no penalty has ever been inflicted upon them for their dangerous breach of the rules of war. In this, as in the case of the train hostages, we have gone too far in the direction of clemency. Had the first six khaki-clad burghers been shot, the lives of many of our soldiers would have been saved.

The question of uniform was condoned, however, just as the white-flag incidents were condoned. We made allowance for the peculiarities of the warfare, and for the difficulties of our enemies. We tried to think that they were playing the game as fairly as they could. Already their methods were certainly rough. Here, for example, is a sworn narrative of a soldier taken in the fighting before Ladysmith:

‘Evidence of No. 6418 Private F. Ayling, 3rd Batt. King’s Royal Rifles.

‘Near Colenso, February 25, 1900.

‘I was taken prisoner about 5 A.M. on 23rd instant by the Boers, being too far in front of my company to retire. I was allowed to go about 10 A.M. on the 25th, and rejoined my regiment.

‘During this time I was kept in the Boer trenches without food or drink. There were quite twenty of our wounded lying close to the trenches, and asking for water all the time, which was always refused. If any of the wounded moved they were shot at. Most of them died for want of assistance, as they were lying there two days and two nights. The Boers (who seemed to be all English) said, “Let them die, and give them no water.”’

Such instances may, however, be balanced against others where kind-hearted burghers have shown commiseration and generosity to our wounded and prisoners.

As the war dragged on, however, it took a more savage character upon the part of our enemy, and it says much for the discipline of the British troops that they have held their hands and refused to punish a whole nation for the cruelty and treachery of a few. The first absolute murder in the war was that of Lieutenant Neumeyer, which occurred at the end of November 1900. The facts, which have since been officially confirmed, were thus reported at the time from Aliwal:

‘Lieutenant Neumeyer, commanding the Orange River Police at Smithfield, was driving here, unarmed, in a cart yesterday, when he was “held up” by two Boers. He was taken prisoner, handcuffed, and treacherously shot in the back with a revolver and again through the head.

‘The murderers stripped off the leggings which Lieutenant Neumeyer was wearing, searched his clothes for money, and afterwards dragged the body to a sluit, where, later in the day it was discovered by the Cape Police and brought here. Two natives were eye-witnesses of the murder. Lieutenant Neumeyer had served with distinction in the Rhodesian campaign.’

At this latter period of the war began that systematic murdering of the Kaffirs by the Boers which has been the most savage and terrible feature in the whole business. On both sides Kaffirs have been used as teamsters, servants, and scouts, but on neither side as soldiers. The British could with the greatest ease have swamped the whole Boer resistance at the beginning of the war by letting loose the Basutos, the Zulus, and the Swazis, all of whom have blood-feuds with the Boers. It is very certain that the Boers would have had no such compunctions, for when in 1857 the Transvaalers had a quarrel with the Free State we have Paul Botha's evidence for the fact that they intrigued with a Kaffir chief to attack their kinsmen from the rear. Botha says:

'I have particular knowledge of this matter, because I took part in the commando which our Government sent to meet the Transvaal forces. The dispute was eventually amicably settled, but, incredible as it may seem, the Transvaal had actually sent five persons, headed by the notorious Karel Geere, to Moshesh, the Basuto chief, to prevail upon him to attack *us*, their kinsmen, in the rear! I was one of the patrol that captured Geere and his companions, some of whom I got to know subsequently, and who revealed to me the whole dastardly plot.'

This will give some idea as to what we might have had to expect had native sympathy gone the other way. In the letter already quoted, written by Snyman to his brother, he asserts that Kruger told him that he relied upon the assistance of the Swazis and Zulus. As it was, however, beyond allowing natives to defend their own lives and property when attacked, as in the case of the Baralongs at Mafeking, and the Kaffirs in the Transkei, we have only employed Kaffirs in the pages of the continental cartoons.

As teamsters, servants, guides, and scouts the Kaffirs were, however, essential to us, and realising this the Boers, when the war began to go against them, tried to terrorise them into deserting us by killing them without mercy whenever they could in any way connect them with the British. How many hundreds were done to death in this fashion it is impossible to compute. After a British defeat no mercy was shown to the drivers of the wagons and the native servants. Boer commandos covered their tracks by putting to death every Kaffir who might give information. Sometimes they killed even the children. Thus Lord Kitchener, in his report, narrates a case where a British column hard upon the track of a Boer commando found four little Kaffir boys with their brains dashed out in the kraal which the Boers had just evacuated.

A case which particularly touched the feelings of the British people was that of Esau, the coloured blacksmith, who was a man of intelligence and education, living as a loyal British subject in the British town of Calvinia. There was no possible case of ‘spying’ here, since the man had not left his own town. The appended documents will show why the nation will not have done its duty until justice has been done upon the murderers. A touching letter has been published from Esau to the governor of the district in which he says that, come what may, he would be loyal to the flag under which he was born. The next news of him was of his brutal murder:

‘Abraham Esau, a loyal coloured blacksmith, was mercilessly flogged for refusing to give information as to where arms were buried. Inflammation of the kidneys set in; nevertheless he was again beaten through the village with sjamboks until he was unable to walk, and was then shot dead.’ — Calvinia, February 8. (‘Times,’ February 16, 1901, p. 7).

‘The district surgeon at Calvinia, writing to the Colonial secretary, has fully confirmed the flogging and shooting of Esau by a Boer named Strydom, who stated that he acted in accordance with orders. No trial was held, and no reason is alleged for the deed.’ — Cape Town, February 19. (‘Times,’ February 20, 1901, p. 5).

‘The authority for the statement of the flogging by the Boers of a coloured man named Esau at Calvinia was a Reuter’s telegram, confirmed subsequently by the report made to Cape Town by the district surgeon of Calvinia.’ — From Mr. Brodrick’s reply to Mr. Labouchere in House of Commons, February 21. (‘Times,’ February 22, 1901).

‘I had a telegram from Sir A. Milner in confirmation of the reports from various quarters that have reached me. The High Commissioner states that the name of the district surgeon who reported the mal-treatment of the coloured man is Foote. Sir A. Milner adds: “There is absolutely no doubt about the murder of Esau.”’ — From Mr. Brodrick’s reply to Mr. Dillon in House of Commons, February 22. (‘Times,’ February 23, 1901).

The original rule of the British Service was that the black scouts should be unarmed, so as to avoid all accusations of arming natives. When it was found that they were systematically shot they were given rifles, as it was inhuman to expose them to death without any means of defence. I believe that some armed Kaffirs who watch the railway line have also been employed in later phases of the war, the weapons to be used in self-defence. Considering how pressed the British were at one time, and considering that by a word they could have thrown a large and highly disciplined Indian army into the scales, I think that their refusal to do so is one of the most remarkable examples of moderation in history. The French had no hesitation in using Turcos against the Germans, nor did the Americans refrain from using Negro regiments against the Spaniards. We made it a white man’s war, however, and I think that we did wisely and well.

So far did the Boers carry their murderous tactics against the natives, that British prisoners with dark complexions were in imminent danger. Thus at a skirmish at Doorn River on July 27, 1901, the seven Kaffir scouts taken with the British were shot in cold blood, and an Englishman named Finch was shot with them in the alleged belief that he had Kaffir blood. Here is the evidence of the latter murder:

No. 28284 Trooper Charles Catton, 22nd Imperial Yeomanry, being duly sworn, states:

‘At Doorn River on 27th July, 1901, I was one of the patrol captured by the Boers, and after we had surrendered I saw a man lying on the ground, wounded, between two natives. I saw a Boer go up to him and shoot him through the chest. I noticed the man, Trooper Finch, was alive. I do not know the name of the Boer who shot him, but I could recognise him again.’

No. 33966 Trooper F. W. Madams, having been duly sworn, states:

‘I was one of the patrol captured by the Boers on 27th July, 1901, near Doorn River. After we had surrendered I went to look for my hat, and after finding it I was passing the wounded man, Trooper Finch, when I saw a Boer, whose name I do not know, shoot Trooper Finch through the chest with a revolver. I could identify the man who shot him.’

This scandal of the murder of the Kaffirs, a scandal against which no protest seems to have been raised by the pro-Boer press in England or the Continent, has reached terrible proportions. I append some of the evidence from recent official reports from the front:

Case at Magaliesberg. — About October or November 1900, the bodies of nine natives were found lying together on the top of the Magaliesberg. Of these five were intelligence natives, the remainder being boys employed by the Boers, but suspected of giving information. The witnesses in this case are now difficult to find, as they are all natives; but it appears that the natives were tried by an informal court, of which B. A. Klopper, ex-President of the Volksraad, was president, and condemned to death. Hendrik

Schoeman, son of the late general, and Piet Joubert are reported to have acted as escort.

Case of five natives murdered near Wilge River. — On capturing a train near Wilge River, Transvaal, on March 11, 1901, the Boers took five unarmed natives on one side and shot them, throwing their bodies into a ditch. Corporal Sutton, of the Hampshire Regiment, saw, after the surrender, a Boer put five shots into a native who was lying down. Other soldiers on the train vouch to seeing one man deliberately shoot five boys in cold blood.

Case of eight Kaffir boys. — On or about July 17, 1901, eight Kaffir boys, between the ages of twelve and fourteen, went out from Uitkijk, near Edenburg, to get oranges. None were armed. Boers opened fire, shot one, captured six; one escaped, and is now with Major Damant. Corporal Willett, Damant's Horse, afterwards saw boys' bodies near farm, but so disfigured that they could not be recognised. Some Kaffirs were then sent out from Edenburg and recognised them. One boy is supposed to have been spared by Boers, body not found. Lieutenant Kentish, Royal Irish Fusiliers, saw bodies, and substantially confirms murder, and states Boers were under Field-Cornet Dutoit.

Case of Klass, Langspruit, Standerton. — Klass's wife states that on August 3, 1901, Cornelius Laas, of Langspruit, and another Boer came to the kraal and told Klass to go with them. On his demurring they accused him of giving information to the British, and C. Laas shot him through the back of the head as he ran away. Another native, the wife of a native clergyman at Standerton, saw the dead body.

Case of Two Natives near Hopetown. — On August 22, 1901, Private C. P. Fivaz, of the Cape Mounted Police, along with two natives, was captured near Venter Hoek, Hopetown district, by a force under Commandant Van Reenan. He had off-saddled at the time, and the natives were sleeping in a stable. He heard Van Reenan give his men an order to shoot the natives, which order was promptly carried out in his presence as regards one man, and he was told that the other had also been shot. The resident on the farm, A. G. Liebenberg, who warned Fivaz at 5 A.M. of the approach of the enemy, buried both the bodies where he found them — viz., one about forty yards from the house and the other about five hundred yards away. His statement is corroborated by his son, who saw one of the boys killed.

Case of John Makran. — John Makran and Alfius Bampa (the witness) are unarmed natives living near Warmbaths, north of Pretoria. On the evening of September 17, 1901, Andries Van der Walt and a party of Boers surrounded Makran's house. Van der Walt told the boy to come out, and when he did so two men seized him. While two men held Makran's hands up Van der Walt stood five yards behind him and shot him through the head with a Mauser rifle. When the boy fell he shot him again through the heart, and then with a knife cut a deep gash across his forehead. Both these boys formerly worked for Van der Walt.

Case at Zandspruit. — On the night of October 1, 1901, about 11.30 P.M., a party of Boers surrounded a native house at Dassie Klip, near Zandspruit, and killed four natives in or about the house. The party consisted of twenty-four, under the following leaders: Dirk Badenhorst, of Dassie Klip; Cornelius Erasmus, of Streepfontein; and C. Van der Merwe, of Rooi Draai. The witnesses in this case are all natives residing at Dassie Klip, who knew the assailants well. In one case a native called Karle was endeavouring to escape over a wall, but was wounded in the thigh. On seeing he was not dead, Stoffel Visagie, of Skuilhoek, drew a revolver and shot him through the head. The charge against these natives appears to have been that they harboured British scouts.

Case of Jim Zulu. — On or about October 18, 1901, V. C. Thys Pretorius (presumably of Pretoria), with seventy men, visited Waterval North, on the Pretoria-Pietersburg line, and practically murdered two natives, wounding three others, one of whom afterwards died. The witnesses state that on the morning of October 18, 1901, Pretorius came to a colliery near Waterval North and called for Jim Zulu, and on his appearance shot him through the face. Three days later this native died of his wounds. At the same time he and another man, named Dorsehasmus, also shot three other natives.

Here is a further list, showing how systematic has been this brutality. I reproduce it in its official curtness:

Report of Resident Magistrate, Barkly West, January 28, 1900. — Native despatch rider shot and mutilated.

November or December 1900. — Near Virginia two natives were shot, being accused of showing the British the road to Ventersburg.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Taungs, December 4, 1900. — Three natives murdered at Border Siding.

December 18, 1900. — Native, Philip, shot at Vlakplaats, eight miles south-west of Pretoria, by J. Johnson and J. Dilmar, of J. Joubert’s commando.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Taungs, December 24, 1900. — Native shot by Boers at Pudimoe. Three natives killed at Christiana.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Herschel, January 6, 1901. — Two natives shot as spies.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Calvinia, January 29, 1901. — Esau case and ill-treatment of other natives.

February 28, 1901. — Zulu boy shot dead at Zevenfontein, between Pretoria and Johannesburg, charged with giving information to the British, by men of Field-Cornet Jan Joubert’s commando.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Cradock, March 21, 1901. — Murder of native witness, Salmon Booi.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Taungs, May 8, 1901. — Natives shot by Boers at Manthe.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Gordonia, May 23, 1901. — Native shot dead.

May 25, 1901. — District Harrismith. A native accused of laziness and insolence was shot by men in M. Prinsloo’s commando.

May 28, 1901. — At Sannah’s Post three natives were captured and shot.

June 5, 1901. — Three natives with Colonel Plumer’s column captured and shot near Paardeberg.

July 27, 1901. — Seven natives captured with a patrol of Imperial Yeomanry near Doorn River Hut were shot on the spot.

Report of Intelligence, East Cape Colony, July 29, 1901. — Shooting of natives by Commandant Myburgh.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Aliwal North, July 30, 1901. — Shooting of natives at refugee camp.

August 23, 1901. — Native captured with a private of the Black Watch near Clocolan and shot in his presence.

September 1, 1901. — Four natives with Colonel Dawkins’s column captured in Fauresmith district and shot by order of Judge Hertzog.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Aliwal North, September 4, 1901. — Brutal treatment of natives by Boers under Bester, J.P., of Aliwal North.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Riversdale, September 4, 1901. — Two coloured despatch riders severely flogged.

Report of Intelligence, South Cape Colony, September 18, 1901. — Natives murdered by Theron’s orders.

Report of Chief Commissioner, Richmond, September 23, 1901. — Two unarmed natives shot by Commandant Malan.

Report of Resident Magistrate, Prieska, September 26, 1901. — Murder of two unarmed natives.

Report of Colonel Hickman, Ladismith, October 1, 1901. — Shooting of two natives by Scheepers.

Date uncertain. — A native in Petrusburg Gaol was shot in his cell by two Boers on the approach of the British troops.

So much for the Kaffir murders. It is to be earnestly hoped that no opportunism or desire to conciliate our enemies at the expense of justice will prevent a most thorough examination into every one of these black deeds, and a most stern punishment for the criminals.

I return, however, to the question of the conduct of the Boers to their white opponents. So long as they were fighting as an army under the eyes of the honourable men who led them, their conduct was on the whole good, but guerilla warfare brought with it the demoralisation which it always does bring, and there was a rapid falling away from the ordinary humanity between civilised opponents. I do not mean by this to assert that the Boer guerillas behaved as did the Spanish guerillas in 1810, or the Mexican in 1866. Such an assertion would be absurd. The Boers gave quarter and they received it. But several isolated instances, and several general cases have shown the demoralisation of their ranks. Of the former I might quote the circumstances of the death of Lieutenant Miers.

The official intimation was as follows:

‘Pretoria: September 27.

‘Lieutenant Miers, Somerset Light Infantry, employed with South African Constabulary, went out from his post at Riversdraai, 25th September, to meet three Boers approaching under white flag, who, after short conversation, were seen to shoot Lieutenant Miers dead and immediately gallop away. Inquiry being made and evidence recorded.’

A more detailed account was sent by the non-commissioned officer who was present. He described how the Boers approached the fort waving a white flag, how a corporal went out to them, and was told that they wished to speak with an officer, how Captain Miers rode out alone, and then:

‘As soon as the officer had gone but a short distance on the far side of the spruit, the Boer with the white flag advanced to meet him; the officer also continued to advance till he came up with the blackguard. At the end of three or four minutes we saw the two walking back to the two Boers (who were standing a good two miles off from this fort of ours). When they reached the two Boers we saw the captain dismount, the group being barely visible owing to a rise in the ground. At the end of five or ten minutes we were just able to distinguish the sound of a shot, immediately after which we saw the officer’s grey mare bolting westwards across the veldt riderless, with one of the Boers galloping for all he was worth after it.’

Of the general demoralisation here is the evidence of a witness in that very action at Graspan on June 6, which has been made so much of by the slanderers of our Army:

No. 4703 Lance-Corporal James Hanshaw, 2nd Batt. Bedfordshire Regiment, being duly sworn, states: ‘At Graspan on June 6, 1901, I was present when we were attacked by the Boers, having previously captured a convoy from them. On going towards the wagons I found the Boers already there; finding we were outnumbered and resistance hopeless, we threw down our arms and held our hands up. Private Blunt, who was with me, shouted. “Don’t shoot me, I have thrown down my rifle.” The Boers then shot Private Blunt dead. He was holding his hands above his head at the time. Lieutenant Mair then shouted, “Have mercy, you cowards.” The Boers then deliberately shot Lieutenant Mair dead as he was standing with his hands above his head. They then shot at Privates Pearse and Harvey, who were both standing with their hands up, the same bullet hitting Private Pearse in the nose, and killing Private Harvey. Two Boers then rushed from the wagons and threatened to shoot me, kicked me, and told me to lie down.’

No. 3253 Private E. Sewell, 2nd Batt. Bedfordshire Regiment, being duly sworn, states: ‘I was at the fight at Graspan on June 6, 1901. About noon on that date the Boers attacked the convoy. I retired to Lieutenant Mair’s party, when, finding we were outnumbered and surrounded, we put our hands up. The Boers took our arms from us and retired round some kraals; shortly afterwards they came back, and two men shouted, “Hands up.” We said we were already prisoners, and that our arms had been collected. Private Blunt held up his hands, and at the same time said, “Don’t shoot me, I am already hands up.” The Boers then said, “Take that,” and shot him through the stomach. Lieutenant Mair then stepped out from the wagons, and said, “Have mercy, you cowards.” The Boer then shot him dead from his horse. The Boer was sitting on his horse almost touching Lieutenant Mair at the time. The Boer then shot at Lance-Corporal Harvey and Private Pearse, who were standing together with their hands up above their heads, the shot wounding Private Pearse and killing Lance-Corporal Harvey.’

Here is the evidence of the murder of the wounded at Vlakfontein on May 29, 1901:

Private D. Chambers, H Company, 1st Batt. Derbyshire Regiment, being duly sworn, states: ‘Whilst lying on the ground wounded I saw a Boer shoot two of our wounded who were lying on the ground near me. This Boer also fired at me, but missed me.’

Privates W. Bacon and Charles Girling, 1st Batt. Derbyshire Regiment, being duly sworn, state: ‘Whilst lying wounded on the ground with two other wounded men four Boers came up to us, dismounted, and fired a volley at us. We were all hit again, and Private Goodwin, of our regiment, was killed. The Boers then took our arms away, and after swearing at us rode away.’

Corporal Sargent, 1st Batt. Derbyshire Regiment, being duly sworn, states: ‘While lying wounded behind a rock I saw a Boer shoot a Yeomanry officer who was walking away, wounded in the hand.’

Acting-Sergeant Chambers, 69th Company Imperial Yeomanry, being duly sworn, states: ‘I saw a Boer, a short man with a dark beard, going round carrying his rifle under his arm, as one would carry a sporting rifle, and shoot three of our wounded.’

Private A. C. Bell, 69th Company Imperial Yeomanry, being duly sworn, states: ‘I heard a Boer call to one of our men to put up his hands, and when he did so the Boer shot him from about fifteen yards off; I was about twenty yards off.’

Private T. George, 69th Company Imperial Yeomanry, being duly sworn, states: ‘I was walking back to camp wounded, when I saw a Boer about seventeen years of age shoot at a wounded Derby man who was calling for water; the Boer then came up to me and took my bandolier away.’

Gunner W. H. Blackburn, 28th Battery Royal Field Artillery, being duly sworn, states: ‘I saw a Boer take a rifle and bandolier from a wounded Derby man, and then shoot him; the Boer then came to me and asked me for my rifle; I showed it him where it was lying on the ground.’

Things of this sort are progressive. Here is what occurred at Brakenlaagte when the rear of Benson’s column was destroyed.

Major N. E. Young, D.S.O., Royal Field Artillery, sends the report to the Commander-in-Chief of Boer cruelty to the officers and men wounded in the action with Colonel Benson’s column at Brakenlaagte. It is dated Pretoria, November 7, and Lord Kitchener’s covering letter is dated November 9.

Major Young, who made the inquiries into the charges of cruelty in accordance with Lord Kitchener’s instructions, says:

‘Out of a total of 147 wounded non-commissioned officers and men seen by me fifty-four had not been in the hands of the Boers. Of the remaining ninety-three men, eighteen informed me they had nothing to complain of.

‘Seventy-five non-commissioned officers and men made complaint of ill-treatment of a more or less serious nature; nearly all of these had been robbed of whatever money they possessed, also of their watches and private papers.

‘Many had been deprived of other articles of clothing, hats, jackets, and socks, in some cases being left with an old shirt and a pair of drawers only.

‘There is a consensus of opinion that the wounded lying round the guns were fired on by Boers, who had already disarmed them, for a long period, after all firing in their neighbourhood from our side had ceased.

‘Even the late Colonel Benson was not respected, though he was protected for some time by a man in authority; eventually his spurs, gaiters, and private papers were removed.’

Major Young, in concluding his report, says: —

‘I was impressed with the idea that the statements made to me were true and not wilfully exaggerated, so simply were they made. There seems no doubt that though the Boer commandants have the will they have no longer the power to repress outrage and murder on the part of their subordinates.’

Lieutenant G. Acland Troyte, King’s Royal Rifle Corps, 25th Mounted Infantry, states: ‘I was wounded on October 25 in a rearguard action with Colonel Benson’s force, near Kaffirstadt. The Boers came up and stripped me of everything except my drawers, shirt, and socks, they gave me an old pair of trousers, and later a coat.’

Lieutenant Reginald Seymour, 1st Batt. King’s Royal Rifle Corps, 25th Mounted Infantry:—’On October 30 my company was sent back to the support of Colonel Benson’s rearguard. I was wounded early in the day. The

Boers came up. They took my greatcoat, gaiters, spurs, and helmet; they took the money and watches from the other wounded, but left them their clothes except the coat of one man. They then left us without assistance. Two Boers afterwards returned and took away a greatcoat belonging to one of our men which had been left over me. One of the party who stripped us was addressed by the remainder as Commandant.'

Captain C. W. Collins, Cheshire Regiment:—'I was signalling officer to Colonel Benson on October 30. I was wounded, and lying near the guns about a hundred yards in rear of them. A field-cornet came up and went away without molesting me. At about 5.30 P.M., or a little later, the ambulances came and picked me up; my ambulance went on some distance farther, and Colonel Benson and some men were put in it. There seemed to be a lot of delay, which annoyed the Colonel, and he asked to be allowed to get away. The delay, however, continued till a Boer came and took away Colonel Benson's documents from his pocket, notwithstanding his protest that they were all private papers, and that they had been seen by a commandant earlier in the day, who said they were not required.'

Private E. Rigby, 4th Batt. King's Royal Rifle Corps, states the Boers took all his clothes except his shirt. This man is not quite able to speak yet.

Trooper Hood, 2nd Scottish Horse: 'While I was lying wounded on the ground the Boers came up and stripped me of my hat and coat, boots, 15*s.*, and a metal watch. I saw them fire at another wounded man as he was coming to me for a drink.'

Trooper Alexander Main, 2nd Scottish Horse: 'While lying on the ground, the Boers came close up and stood about fifteen to twenty yards away from where we were lying wounded round the guns. All were wounded at this time, and no one was firing. I saw the Boers there fire at the wounded. Captain Lloyd, a staff officer, was lying beside me wounded in the leg at this time; he received one or two more shots in the body, and shortly afterwards he died. I myself received three more wounds.'

Trooper Jamieson, Scottish Horse: 'The Boers took off his boots and they hurt his shattered arm in a terrible manner while getting off his bandolier. His arm has been removed.'

Private Parrish, 1st Batt. King's Royal Rifle Corps: 'Our ridge was not firing any more, but whenever a wounded man showed himself, they fired at him, in this way several were killed; one man who was waving a bit of blue stuff with the idea of getting an ambulance, received about twenty shots.’

Private Prickett, 4th Batt. King’s Royal Rifle Corps: ‘On October 30 I was lying wounded. I saw the Boers come up, and an old Boer with black beard and whiskers, and wearing leggings, whom I should be able to recognise again, shot my friend, Private F. Foster, 4th Batt. King’s Royal Rifle Corps, by putting the muzzle of his rifle to his side. Private Foster had been firing under cover of an ant-heap till the Boers took the position; he then threw away his rifle to put his hands up, but was shot all the same.’

Private N. H. Grierson, Scottish Horse: ‘I was wounded and lying by the side of Colonel Benson. When the Boers came up they wanted to begin to loot; Colonel Benson stopped them, telling them he had received a letter from Commandant Grobelaar saying the wounded would be respected. Colonel Benson asked if he could see Grobelaar; they said they would fetch him, and brought up someone who was in authority, but I do not think it was Grobelaar. Colonel Benson told him the wounded were not to be touched, and he said he would do his best; he himself protected Colonel Benson for about an hour, but he was still there when a Boer took off Colonel Benson’s spurs and gaiters.’

Sergeant Ketley, 7th Hussars: ‘I was wounded in the head and hip just before the Boers rushed the guns. I was covered with blood. A Boer came up, took away my carbine and revolver and asked me to put up my hands. I could not do this, being too weak with the loss of blood. He loaded my own carbine and aimed from his breast while kneeling, and pointed at my breast. He fired and hit me in the right arm just below the shoulder.’

Private Bell, 4th Batt. King’s Royal Rifle Corps, 25th Mounted Infantry: ‘When the Boers came up they took my boots off very roughly, hurting my wounded leg very much. I saw them taking watches and money off the other men.’

Private C. Connor, Royal Dublin Fusiliers: ‘I was lying beside the guns among a lot of our wounded, who were not firing. Every time one of our wounded attempted to move the Boers fired at them; several men (about ten or eleven) were killed in this way.’

Lieutenant Bircham, 4th Batt. King’s Royal Rifle Corps: ‘Was in the same ambulance wagon as Lieutenant Martin, King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (since deceased), and the latter told him that when he (Lieutenant Martin) was lying on the ground wounded the Boers took off his spurs and gaiters. In taking off his spurs they wrenched his leg, the bone of which was shattered, completely round, so as to be able to get at the spurs more easily, though Lieutenant Martin told them where he was hit.'

Corporal P. Gower, 4th Batt. King's Royal Rifle Corps, 25th Mounted Infantry: 'I was wounded and unconscious. When I came to, the Boers were stripping the men round me. A man, Private Foster, who was not five yards from me, put up his hands in token of surrender, but was shot at about five-yards range by a tall man with a black beard. He was killed.'

Corporal Atkins, 84th Battery Royal Field Artillery: 'The Boers came up to me and said, "Can you work this gun?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Get up and show me." I said, "How can I? I have one hand taken away, and I am wounded in both legs" — this last was not true. He then said, "Give us your boots" — he took them and my mackintosh. He took what money was in my belt. One of our men, Bombardier Collins, got up to try and put up a white flag, as we were being fired at both from the camp and by the Boers; as soon as he got up they began shooting at him. I saw a Kaffir fire three shots from about thirty yards off.'

Bombardier Collins, 84th Battery Royal Field Artillery: 'When lying wounded near the guns after the Boers had been up to them I tried to raise a white flag as our own people were dropping their bullets close to us. When I did this they fired at me.'

So long as an excuse could be found for a brave enemy we found it. But the day is rapidly approaching when we must turn to the world with our evidence and say, 'Are these the deeds of soldiers or of brigands? If they act as brigands, then, why must we for ever treat them as soldiers?' I have read letters from soldiers who saw their own comrades ill-treated at Brakenlaagte. I trust that they will hold their hands, but it is almost more than can be asked of human nature.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSIONS

I have now dealt with the various vexed questions of the war, and have, I hope, said enough to show that we have no reason to blush for our soldiers, but only for those of their fellow-countrymen who have traduced them. But there are a number of opponents of the war who have never descended to such baseness, and who honestly hold that the war might have been avoided, and also that we might, after it broke out, have found some terms which the Boers could accept. At their back they have all those amiable and goodhearted idealists who have not examined the question very critically, but are oppressed by the fear that the Empire is acting too roughly towards these pastoral republics. Such an opinion is just as honest as, and infinitely more respectable than, that of some journalists whose arrogance at the beginning of the war brought shame upon us. There is no better representative of such views than Mr. Methuen in his ‘Peace or War,’ an able and moderate statement. Let us examine his conclusions, omitting the causes of the war, which have already been treated at some length.

Mr. Methuen draws a close comparison between the situation and that of the American Revolution. There are certainly points of resemblance — and also of difference. Our cause was essentially unjust with the Americans and essentially just with the Boers. We have the Empire at our back now. We have the command of the seas. We are very wealthy. These are all new and important factors.

The revolt of the Boer States against the British suzerainty is much more like the revolt of the Southern States against the Government of Washington. The situation here after Colenso was that of the North after Bull’s Run. Mr. Methuen has much to say of Boer bitterness, but was it greater than Southern bitterness? That war was fought to a finish and we see what has come of it. I do not claim that the parallel is exact, but it is at least as nearly exact as that from which Mr. Methuen draws such depressing conclusions. He has many gloomy remarks upon our prospects, but it is in facing gloomy prospects with a high heart that a nation proves that it is not yet degenerate. Better pay all the price which he predicts than shrink for one instant from our task.

Mr. Methuen makes a good deal of the foolish and unchivalrous, even brutal, way in which some individuals and some newspapers have spoken of the enemy. I suppose there are few gentlemen who have not winced at such remarks. But let Mr. Methuen glance at the continental press and see the work of the supporters of the enemy. It will make him feel more charitable towards his boorish fellow-countrymen. Or let him examine the Dutch press in South Africa and see if all the abuse is on one side. Here are some appreciations from the first letter of P.S. (of Colesburg) in the ‘Times’:

‘Your lazy, dirty, drunken, lower classes.’

‘Your officers are pedantic scholars or frivolous society men.’

‘The major part of your population consists of females, cripples, epileptics, consumptives, cancerous people, invalids, and lunatics of all kinds.’

‘Nine-tenths of your statesmen and higher officials are suffering from kidney disease.’

‘We will not be governed by a set of British curs.’

No great chivalry or consideration of the feelings of one’s opponent there! Here is a poem from the ‘Volksstem’ on August 26, 1899, weeks before the war, describing the Boer programme. A translation runs thus:

‘Then shall our ears with pleasure listen
To widow’s wail and orphan’s cry;
And shall we gird, as joyful witness,
The death-watch of your villainy.

‘Then shall we massacre and butcher
You, and swallow glad your blood;
And count it “capital with interest” —
Villain’s interest — sweet and good.

‘And when the sun shall set in Heaven,
Dark with the clouds of steaming blood,
A ghastly, woeful, dying murmur
Will be the Briton’s last salute.

‘Then shall we start our jolly banquet,
And toast the first “the British blood.”’

No doubt a decent Boer would be as ashamed of this as we are of some of our Jingo papers. But even their leaders, Reitz, Steyn, and Kruger, have allowed themselves to use language about the British which cannot, fortunately, be matched upon our side.

Mr. Methuen is severe upon Lord Salisbury for the uncompromising nature of his reply to the Presidents’ overtures for peace in March 1900. But what other practical course could he suggest? Is it not evident that if independence were left to the Boers the war would have been without result, since all the causes which led to it would be still open and unsolved. On the morrow of such a peace we should be faced by the Franchise question, the Uitlander question, and every other question for the settling of which we have made such sacrifices. Is that a sane policy? Is it even tenable on the grounds of humanity, since it is perfectly clear that it must lead to another and a greater struggle in the course of a few years? When the work was more than half done it would have been madness to hold our hand.

Surely there is no need for gloomy forebodings. The war has seemed long to us who have endured it, but to our descendants it will probably seem a very short time for the conquest of so huge a country and so stubborn a foe. Our task is not endless. Four-fifths of the manhood of the country is already in our hands, and the fifth remaining diminishes week by week. Our mobility and efficiency increase. There is not the slightest ground for Mr. Methuen’s lament about the condition of the Army. It is far fitter than when it began. It is mathematically certain that a very few months must see the last commando hunted down. Meanwhile civil life is gaining strength once more. Already the Orange River Colony pays its own way, and the Transvaal is within measurable distance of doing the same. Industries are waking up, and on the Rand the roar of the stamps has replaced that of the cannon. Fifteen hundred of them will soon be at work, and the refugees are returning at the rate of 400 a week.

It is argued that the bitterness of this struggle will never die out, but history has shown that it is the fights which are fought to an absolute finish which leave the least rancour. Remember Lee’s noble words: ‘We are a Christian people. We have fought this fight as long and as well as we knew how. We have been defeated. For us, as a Christian people, there is now but one course to pursue. We must accept the situation.’ That is how a brave man accepts the judgment of the God of battles. So it may at last be with the Boers. These prison camps and concentration camps have at least brought them, men and women, in contact with our people. Perhaps the memories left behind will not be entirely bitter. Providence works in strange ways, and possibly the seeds of reconciliation, may be planted even there.

As to the immediate future it is probable that the Transvaal, with the rush of immigrants which prosperity will bring, will soon be, next to Natal, the most British of the South African States. With Natal British, Rhodesia British, the Transvaal British, the Cape half and half, and only the Orange River Colony Dutch, the British would be assured of a majority in a parliament of United South Africa. It would be well to allow Natal to absorb the Vryheid district of the Transvaal.

It has occurred to me — a suggestion which I put forward with all diffidence — that it would be a wise and practicable step to form a Boer Reservation in the northern districts of the Transvaal (Watersberg and Zoutpansberg). Let them live there as Basutos live in Basutoland, or Indians in Indian territory, or the inhabitants of a protected state in India. Guarantee them, as long as they remain peaceable under the British flag, complete protection from the invasion of the miner or the prospector. Let them live their own lives in their own way, with some simple form of home rule of their own. The irreconcilable men who could never rub shoulders with the British could find a home there, and the British colonies would be all the stronger for the placing in quarantine of those who might infect their neighbours with their own bitterness. Such a State could not be a serious source of danger, since we could control all the avenues by which arms could reach it. I am aware that the Watersberg and the Zoutpansberg are not very desirable places of residence, but the thing is voluntary and no man would need to go there unless he wished. Without some such plan the Empire will have no safety-valve in South Africa.

I cannot conclude this short review of the South African question without some allusion to the attitude of continental nations during the struggle. This has been in all cases correct upon the part of the governments, and in nearly all cases incorrect upon the part of the people. A few brave and clear-headed men, like Yves Guyot in France, and M. Tallichet and M. Naville in Switzerland, have been our friends, or rather the friends of truth; but the vast majority of all nations have been carried away by that flood of prejudice and lies which has had its source in a venal, or at best an ignorant, press. In this country the people in the long run can always impose its will upon the Government, and it has, I believe, come to some very definite conclusions which will affect British foreign policy for many years to come.

Against France there is no great bitterness, for we feel that France has never had much reason to look upon us in any light save that of an enemy. For many years we have wished to be friendly, but the traditions of centuries are not so easily forgotten. Besides, some of our shortcomings are of recent date. Many of us were, and are, ashamed of the absurd and hysterical outcry in this country over the Dreyfus case. Are there no miscarriages of justice in the Empire? An expression of opinion was permissible, but the wholesale national abuse has disarmed us from resenting some equally immoderate criticism of our own character and morals. To Russia also we can bear no grudge, for we know that there is no real public opinion in that country, and that their press has no means for forming first-hand conclusions. Besides, in this case also there is a certain secular enmity which may account for a warped judgment.

But it is very different with Germany. Again and again in the world’s history we have been the friends and the allies of these people. It was so in the days of Marlborough, in those of the Great Frederick, and in those of Napoleon. When we could not help them with men we helped them with money. Our fleet has crushed their enemies. And now, for the first time in history, we have had a chance of seeing who were our friends in Europe, and nowhere have we met more hatred and more slander than from the German press and the German people. Their most respectable journals have not hesitated to represent the British troops — troops every bit as humane and as highly disciplined as their own — not only as committing outrages on person and property, but even as murdering women and children.

At first this unexpected phenomenon merely surprised the British people, then it pained them, and, finally, after two years of it, it has roused a deep and enduring anger in their minds. There is a rumour which crops up from time to time, and which appears to have some foundation, that there is a secret agreement by which the Triple Alliance can, under certain circumstances, claim the use of the British fleet. There are, probably, only a few men in Europe who know whether this is so or not. But if it is, it would be only fair to denounce such a treaty as soon as may be, for very many years must pass before it would be possible for the public to forget and forgive the action of Germany. Nor can we entirely exonerate the German Government, for we know the Germans to be a well-disciplined people; and we cannot believe that Anglophobia could have reached the point of mania without some official encouragement — or, at least, in the face of any official discouragement.

The agitation reached its climax in the uproar over the reference which Mr. Chamberlain made to the war of 1870 in his speech at Edinburgh. In this speech Mr. Chamberlain very justly remarked that we could find precedents for any severe measures which we might be compelled to take against the guerillas, in the history of previous campaigns — those of the French in Algiers, the Russians in the Caucasus, the Austrians in Bosnia, and the Germans in France. Such a remark implied, of course, no blame upon these respective countries, but pointed out the martial precedents which justify such measures. It is true that the Germans in France never found any reason to lay the country waste, for they were never faced with a universal guerilla warfare as we have been, but they gave the *franc-tireur*, or the man who was found cutting the wire of the line, very short shrift; whereas we have never put to death a single *bonâ-fide* Boer for this offence. Possibly it was not that the Germans were too severe, but that we were too lax. In any case, it is evident that there was nothing offensive in the statement, and those who have been well informed as to the doings of the British soldiers in the war will know that any troops in the world might be proud to be classed with them, either in valour or humanity.

But the agitators did not even trouble to ascertain the words which Mr. Chamberlain had used — though they might have seen them in the original on the table of the *Lesezimmer* of the nearest hotel. On the strength of a garbled report a tumult arose over the whole country and many indignation meetings were held. Six hundred and eighty clergymen were found whose hearts and heads were soft enough to be imposed upon by absurd tales of British atrocities, and these reverend gentlemen subscribed an insulting protest against them. The whole movement was so obviously artificial — or at least based upon misapprehension — that it excited as much amusement as anger in this country; but still the honour of our Army is very dear to us, and the continued attacks upon it have left an enduring feeling of resentment amongst us, which will not, and should not, die away in this generation. It is not too much to say that five years ago a complete defeat by Germany in a European war would have certainly caused British intervention. Public sentiment and racial affinity would never have allowed us to see her really go to the wall. And now it is certain that in our lifetime no British guinea and no soldier’s life would under any circumstances be spent for such an end. That is one strange result of the Boer war, and in the long run it is possible that it may prove not the least important.

Yet some allowance must be made for people who for years have had only one side of the question laid before them, and have had that one side supported by every sort of malignant invention and misrepresentation. Surely the day will come when truth will prevail, if only for the reason that the sources of corruption will run dry. It is difficult to imagine that any permanent policy can ever be upheld by falsehood. When that day does come, and the nations of Europe see how they have been hoodwinked and made tools of by a few artful and unscrupulous men, it is possible that a tardy justice will be done to the dignity and inflexible resolution which Great Britain has shown throughout. Until the dawn breaks we can but go upon our way, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but keeping our eyes fixed ever upon one great object — a South Africa in which there shall never again be strife, and in which Boer and Briton shall enjoy the same rights and the same liberties, with a common law to shield them and a common love of their own fatherland to weld them into one united nation.

THROUGH THE MAGIC DOOR

This non-ficition work is a memoir-catalogue of the books in Doyle's library.

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I.

I care not how humble your bookshelf may be, nor how lowly the room which it adorns. Close the door of that room behind you, shut off with it all the cares of the outer world, plunge back into the soothing company of the great dead, and then you are through the magic portal into that fair land whither worry and vexation can follow you no more. You have left all that is vulgar and all that is sordid behind you. There stand your noble, silent comrades, waiting in their ranks. Pass your eye down their files. Choose your man. And then you have but to hold up your hand to him and away you go together into dreamland. Surely there would be something eerie about a line of books were it not that familiarity has deadened our sense of it. Each is a mummified soul embalmed in cere-cloth and natron of leather and printer’s ink. Each cover of a true book enfolds the concentrated essence of a man. The personalities of the writers have faded into the thinnest shadows, as their bodies into impalpable dust, yet here are their very spirits at your command.

It is our familiarity also which has lessened our perception of the miraculous good fortune which we enjoy. Let us suppose that we were suddenly to learn that Shakespeare had returned to earth, and that he would favour any of us with an hour of his wit and his fancy. How eagerly we would seek him out! And yet we have him — the very best of him — at our elbows from week to week, and hardly trouble ourselves to put out our hands to beckon him down. No matter what mood a man may be in, when once he has passed through the magic door he can summon the world’s greatest to sympathize with him in it. If he be thoughtful, here are the kings of thought. If he be dreamy, here are the masters of fancy. Or is it amusement that he lacks? He can signal to any one of the world’s great story-tellers, and out comes the dead man and holds him enthralled by the hour. The dead are such good company that one may come to think too little of the living. It is a real and a pressing danger with many of us, that we should never find our own thoughts and our own souls, but be ever obsessed by the dead. Yet second-hand romance and second-hand emotion are surely better than the dull, soul-killing monotony which life brings to most of the human race. But best of all when the dead man’s wisdom and strength in the living of our own strenuous days.

Come through the magic door with me, and sit here on the green settee, where you can see the old oak case with its untidy lines of volumes. Smoking is not forbidden. Would you care to hear me talk of them? Well, I ask nothing better, for there is no volume there which is not a dear, personal friend, and what can a man talk of more pleasantly than that? The other books are over yonder, but these are my own favourites — the ones I care to re-read and to have near my elbow. There is not a tattered cover which does not bring its mellow memories to me.

Some of them represent those little sacrifices which make a possession dearer. You see the line of old, brown volumes at the bottom? Every one of those represents a lunch. They were bought in my student days, when times were not too affluent. Threepence was my modest allowance for my midday sandwich and glass of beer; but, as luck would have it, my way to the classes led past the most fascinating bookshop in the world. Outside the door of it stood a large tub filled with an ever-changing litter of tattered books, with a card above which announced that any volume therein could be purchased for the identical sum which I carried in my pocket. As I approached it a combat ever raged betwixt the hunger of a youthful body and that of an inquiring and omnivorous mind. Five times out of six the animal won. But when the mental prevailed, then there was an entrancing five minutes' digging among out-of-date almanacs, volumes of Scotch theology, and tables of logarithms, until one found something which made it all worth while. If you will look over these titles, you will see that I did not do so very badly. Four volumes of Gordon's "Tacitus" (life is too short to read originals, so long as there are good translations), Sir William Temple's Essays, Addison's works, Swift's "Tale of a Tub," Clarendon's "History," "Gil Blas," Buckingham's Poems, Churchill's Poems, "Life of Bacon" — not so bad for the old threepenny tub.

They were not always in such plebeian company. Look at the thickness of the rich leather, and the richness of the dim gold lettering. Once they adorned the shelves of some noble library, and even among the odd almanacs and the sermons they bore the traces of their former greatness, like the faded silk dress of the reduced gentlewoman, a present pathos but a glory of the past.

Reading is made too easy nowadays, with cheap paper editions and free libraries. A man does not appreciate at its full worth the thing that comes to him without effort. Who now ever gets the thrill which Carlyle felt when he hurried home with the six volumes of Gibbon's "History" under his arm, his mind just starving for want of food, to devour them at the rate of one a day? A book should be your very own before you can really get the taste of it, and unless you have worked for it, you will never have the true inward pride of possession.

If I had to choose the one book out of all that line from which I have had most pleasure and most profit, I should point to yonder stained copy of Macaulay's "Essays." It seems entwined into my whole life as I look backwards. It was my comrade in my student days, it has been with me on the sweltering Gold Coast, and it formed part of my humble kit when I went a-whaling in the Arctic. Honest Scotch harpooners have addled their brains over it, and you may still see the grease stains where the second engineer grappled with Frederick the Great. Tattered and dirty and worn, no gilt-edged morocco-bound volume could ever take its place for me.

What a noble gateway this book forms through which one may approach the study either of letters or of history! Milton, Machiavelli, Hallam, Southey, Bunyan, Byron, Johnson, Pitt, Hampden, Clive, Hastings, Chatham — what nuclei for thought! With a good grip of each how pleasant and easy to fill in all that lies between! The short, vivid sentences, the broad sweep of allusion, the exact detail, they all throw a glamour round the subject and should make the least studious of readers desire to go further. If Macaulay's hand cannot lead a man upon those pleasant paths, then, indeed, he may give up all hope of ever finding them.

When I was a senior schoolboy this book — not this very volume, for it had an even more tattered predecessor — opened up a new world to me. History had been a lesson and abhorrent. Suddenly the task and the drudgery became an incursion into an enchanted land, a land of colour and beauty, with a kind, wise guide to point the path. In that great style of his I loved even the faults — indeed, now that I come to think of it, it was the faults which I loved best. No sentence could be too stiff with rich embroidery, and no antithesis too flowery. It pleased me to read that "a universal shout of laughter from the Tagus to the Vistula informed the Pope that the days of the crusades were past," and I was delighted to learn that "Lady Jerningham kept a vase in which people placed foolish verses, and Mr. Dash wrote verses which were fit to be placed in Lady Jerningham's vase." Those were the kind of sentences which used to fill me with a vague but enduring pleasure, like chords which linger in the musician's ear. A man likes a plainer literary diet as he grows older, but still as I glance over the Essays I am filled with admiration and wonder at the alternate power of handling a great subject, and of adorning it by delightful detail — just a bold sweep of the brush, and then the most delicate stippling. As he leads you down the path, he for ever indicates the alluring side-tracks which branch away from it. An admirable, if somewhat old-fashioned, literary and historical education night be effected by working through every book which is alluded to in the Essays. I should be curious, however, to know the exact age of the youth when he came to the end of his studies.

I wish Macaulay had written a historical novel. I am convinced that it would have been a great one. I do not know if he had the power of drawing an imaginary character, but he certainly had the gift of reconstructing a dead celebrity to a remarkable degree. Look at the simple half-paragraph in which he gives us Johnson and his atmosphere. Was ever a more definite picture given in a shorter space —

“As we close it, the club-room is before us, and the table on which stand the omelet for Nugent, and the lemons for Johnson. There are assembled those heads which live for ever on the canvas of Reynolds. There are the spectacles of Burke, and the tall thin form of Langton, the courtly sneer of Beauclerk and the beaming smile of Garrick, Gibbon tapping his snuff-box, and Sir Joshua with his trumpet in his ear. In the foreground is that strange figure which is as familiar to us as the figures of those among whom we have been brought up — the gigantic body, the huge massy face, seamed with the scars of disease, the brown coat, the black worsted stockings, the grey wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing, and then comes the ‘Why, sir!’ and the ‘What then, sir?’ and the ‘No, sir!’ and the ‘You don’t see your way through the question, sir!’”

It is etched into your memory for ever.

I can remember that when I visited London at the age of sixteen the first thing I did after housing my luggage was to make a pilgrimage to Macaulay’s grave, where he lies in Westminster Abbey, just under the shadow of Addison, and amid the dust of the poets whom he had loved so well. It was the one great object of interest which London held for me. And so it might well be, when I think of all I owe him. It is not merely the knowledge and the stimulation of fresh interests, but it is the charming gentlemanly tone, the broad, liberal outlook, the general absence of bigotry and of prejudice. My judgment now confirms all that I felt for him then.

My four-volume edition of the History stands, as you see, to the right of the Essays. Do you recollect the third chapter of that work — the one which reconstructs the England of the seventeenth century? It has always seemed to me the very high-water mark of Macaulay's powers, with its marvellous mixture of precise fact and romantic phrasing. The population of towns, the statistics of commerce, the prosaic facts of life are all transmuted into wonder and interest by the handling of the master. You feel that he could have cast a glamour over the multiplication table had he set himself to do so. Take a single concrete example of what I mean. The fact that a Londoner in the country, or a countryman in London, felt equally out of place in those days of difficult travel, would seem to hardly require stating, and to afford no opportunity of leaving a strong impression upon the reader's mind. See what Macaulay makes of it, though it is no more than a hundred other paragraphs which discuss a hundred various points —

"A cockney in a rural village was stared at as much as if he had intruded into a kraal of Hottentots. On the other hand, when the lord of a Lincolnshire or Shropshire manor appeared in Fleet Street, he was as easily distinguished from the resident population as a Turk or a Lascar. His dress, his gait, his accent, the manner in which he gazed at the shops, stumbled into gutters, ran against the porters, and stood under the waterspouts, marked him out as an excellent subject for the operations of swindlers and banterers. Bullies jostled him into the kennel, Hackney coachmen splashed him from head to foot, thieves explored with perfect security the huge pockets of his horseman's coat, while he stood entranced by the splendour of the Lord Mayor's Show. Money-droppers, sore from the cart's tail, introduced themselves to him, and appeared to him the most honest friendly gentlemen that he had ever seen. Painted women, the refuse of Lewkner Lane and Whetstone Park, passed themselves on him for countesses and maids of honour. If he asked his way to St. James', his informants sent him to Mile End. If he went into a shop, he was instantly discerned to be a fit purchaser of everything that nobody else would buy, of second-hand embroidery, copper rings, and watches that would not go. If he rambled into any fashionable coffee-house, he became a mark for the insolent derision of fops, and the grave waggery of Templars. Enraged and mortified, he soon returned to his mansion, and there, in the homage of his tenants and the conversation of his boon companions, found consolation for the vexations and humiliations which he had undergone. There he was once more a great man, and saw nothing above himself except when at the assizes he took his seat on the bench near the Judge, or when at the muster of the militia he saluted the Lord Lieutenant."

On the whole, I should put this detached chapter of description at the very head of his Essays, though it happens to occur in another volume. The History as a whole does not, as it seems to me, reach the same level as the shorter articles. One cannot but feel that it is a brilliant piece of special pleading from a fervid Whig, and that there must be more to be said for the other side than is there set forth. Some of the Essays are tinged also, no doubt, by his own political and religious limitations. The best are those which get right away into the broad fields of literature and philosophy. Johnson, Walpole, Madame D'Arblay, Addison, and the two great Indian ones, Clive and Warren Hastings, are my own favourites. Frederick the Great, too, must surely stand in the first rank. Only one would I wish to eliminate. It is the diabolically clever criticism upon Montgomery. One would have wished to think that Macaulay's heart was too kind, and his soul too gentle, to pen so bitter an attack. Bad work will sink of its own weight. It is not necessary to souse the author as well. One would think more highly of the man if he had not done that savage bit of work.

I don't know why talking of Macaulay always makes me think of Scott, whose books in a faded, olive-backed line, have a shelf, you see, of their own. Perhaps it is that they both had so great an influence, and woke such admiration in me. Or perhaps it is the real similarity in the minds and characters of the two men. You don't see it, you say? Well, just think of Scott's "Border Ballads," and then of Macaulay's "Lays." The machines must be alike, when the products are so similar. Each was the only man who could possibly have written the poems of the other. What swing and dash in both of them! What a love of all that is and noble and martial! So simple, and yet so strong. But there are minds on which strength and simplicity are thrown away. They think that unless a thing is obscure it must be superficial, whereas it is often the shallow stream which is turbid, and the deep which is clear. Do you remember the fatuous criticism of Matthew Arnold upon the glorious "Lays," where he calls out "is this poetry?" after quoting —

”And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers
And the Temples of his Gods?”

In trying to show that Macaulay had not the poetic sense he was really showing that he himself had not the dramatic sense. The baldness of the idea and of the language had evidently offended him. But this is exactly where the true merit lies. Macaulay is giving the rough, blunt words with which a simple-minded soldier appeals to two comrades to help him in a deed of valour. Any high-flown sentiment would have been absolutely out of character. The lines are, I think, taken with their context, admirable ballad poetry, and have just the dramatic quality and sense which a ballad poet must have. That opinion of Arnold’s shook my faith in his judgment, and yet I would forgive a good deal to the man who wrote —

”One more charge and then be dumb,
When the forts of Folly fall,
May the victors when they come
Find my body near the wall.”

Not a bad verse that for one’s life aspiration.

This is one of the things which human society has not yet understood — the value of a noble, inspiriting text. When it does we shall meet them everywhere engraved on appropriate places, and our progress through the streets will be brightened and ennobled by one continual series of beautiful mental impulses and images, reflected into our souls from the printed thoughts which meet our eyes. To think that we should walk with empty, listless minds while all this splendid material is running to waste. I do not mean mere Scriptural texts, for they do not bear the same meaning to all, though what human creature can fail to be spurred onwards by “Work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.” But I mean those beautiful thoughts — who can say that they are uninspired thoughts? — which may be gathered from a hundred authors to match a hundred uses. A fine thought in fine language is a most precious jewel, and should not be hid away, but be exposed for use and ornament. To take the nearest example, there is a horse-trough across the road from my house, a plain stone trough, and no man could pass it with any feelings save vague discontent at its ugliness. But suppose that on its front slab you print the verse of Coleridge—

”He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small
For the dear Lord who fashioned him
He knows and loveth all.”

I fear I may misquote, for I have not “The Ancient Mariner” at my elbow, but even as it stands does it not elevate the horse-trough? We all do this, I suppose, in a small way for ourselves. There are few men who have not some chosen quotations printed on their study mantelpieces, or, better still, in their hearts. Carlyle’s transcription of “Rest! Rest! Shall I not have all Eternity to rest in!” is a pretty good spur to a weary man. But what we need is a more general application of the same thing for public and not for private use, until people understand that a graven thought is as beautiful an ornament as any graven image, striking through the eye right deep down into the soul.

However, all this has nothing to do with Macaulay’s glorious lays, save that when you want some flowers of manliness and patriotism you can pluck quite a bouquet out of those. I had the good fortune to learn the Lay of Horatius off by heart when I was a child, and it stamped itself on my plastic mind, so that even now I can reel off almost the whole of it. Goldsmith said that in conversation he was like the man who had a thousand pounds in the bank, but could not compete with the man who had an actual sixpence in his pocket. So the ballad that you bear in your mind outweighs the whole bookshelf which waits for reference. But I want you now to move your eye a little farther down the shelf to the line of olive-green volumes. That is my edition of Scott. But surely I must give you a little breathing space before I venture upon them.

II.

It is a great thing to start life with a small number of really good books which are your very own. You may not appreciate them at first. You may pine for your novel of crude and unadulterated adventure. You may, and will, give it the preference when you can. But the dull days come, and the rainy days come, and always you are driven to fill up the chinks of your reading with the worthy books which wait so patiently for your notice. And then suddenly, on a day which marks an epoch in your life, you understand the difference. You see, like a flash, how the one stands for nothing, and the other for literature. From that day onwards you may return to your crudities, but at least you do so with some standard of comparison in your mind. You can never be the same as you were before. Then gradually the good thing becomes more dear to you; it builds itself up with your growing mind; it becomes a part of your better self, and so, at last, you can look, as I do now, at the old covers and love them for all that they have meant in the past. Yes, it was the olive-green line of Scott’s novels which started me on to rhapsody. They were the first books I ever owned — long, long before I could appreciate or even understand them. But at last I realised what a treasure they were. In my boyhood I read them by surreptitious candle-ends in the dead of the night, when the sense of crime added a new zest to the story. Perhaps you have observed that my “Ivanhoe” is of a different edition from the others. The first copy was left in the grass by the side of a stream, fell into the water, and was eventually picked up three days later, swollen and decomposed, upon a mud-bank. I think I may say, however, that I had worn it out before I lost it. Indeed, it was perhaps as well that it was some years before it was replaced, for my instinct was always to read it again instead of breaking fresh ground.

I remember the late James Payn telling the anecdote that he and two literary friends agreed to write down what scene in fiction they thought the most dramatic, and that on examining the papers it was found that all three had chosen the same. It was the moment when the unknown knight, at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, riding past the pavilions of the lesser men, strikes with the sharp end of his lance, in a challenge to mortal combat, the shield of the formidable Templar. It was, indeed, a splendid moment! What matter that no Templar was allowed by the rules of his Order to take part in so secular and frivolous an affair as a tournament? It is the privilege of great masters to make things so, and it is a churlish thing to gainsay it. Was it not Wendell Holmes who described the prosaic man, who enters a drawing-room with a couple of facts, like ill-conditioned bull-dogs at his heels, ready to let them loose on any play of fancy? The great writer can never go wrong. If Shakespeare gives a sea-coast to Bohemia, or if Victor Hugo calls an English prize-fighter Mr. Jim-John-Jack — well, it was so, and that's an end of it. "There is no second line of rails at that point," said an editor to a minor author. "I make a second line," said the author; and he was within his rights, if he can carry his readers' conviction with him.

But this is a digression from "Ivanhoe." What a book it is! The second greatest historical novel in our language, I think. Every successive reading has deepened my admiration for it. Scott's soldiers are always as good as his women (with exceptions) are weak; but here, while the soldiers are at their very best, the romantic figure of Rebecca redeems the female side of the story from the usual commonplace routine. Scott drew manly men because he was a manly man himself, and found the task a sympathetic one.

He drew young heroines because a convention demanded it, which he had never the hardihood to break. It is only when we get him for a dozen chapters on end with a minimum of petticoat — in the long stretch, for example, from the beginning of the Tournament to the end of the Friar Tuck incident — that we realise the height of continued romantic narrative to which he could attain. I don't think in the whole range of our literature we have a finer sustained flight than that.

There is, I admit, an intolerable amount of redundant verbiage in Scott's novels. Those endless and unnecessary introductions make the shell very thick before you come to the oyster. They are often admirable in themselves, learned, witty, picturesque, but with no relation or proportion to the story which they are supposed to introduce. Like so much of our English fiction, they are very good matter in a very bad place. Digression and want of method and order are traditional national sins. Fancy introducing an essay on how to live on nothing a year as Thackeray did in "Vanity Fair," or sandwiching in a ghost story as Dickens has dared to do. As well might a dramatic author rush up to the footlights and begin telling anecdotes while his play was suspending its action and his characters waiting wearily behind him. It is all wrong, though every great name can be quoted in support of it. Our sense of form is lamentably lacking, and Sir Walter sinned with the rest. But get past all that to a crisis in the real story, and who finds the terse phrase, the short fire-word, so surely as he? Do you remember when the reckless Sergeant of Dragoons stands at last before the grim Puritan, upon whose head a price has been set: "A thousand marks or a bed of heather!" says he, as he draws. The Puritan draws also: "The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" says he. No verbiage there! But the very spirit of either man and of either party, in the few stern words, which haunt your mind. "Bows and Bills!" cry the Saxon Varangians, as the Moslem horse charges home. You feel it is just what they must have cried. Even more terse and businesslike was the actual battle-cry of the fathers of the same men on that long-drawn day when they fought under the "Red Dragon of Wessex" on the low ridge at Hastings. "Out! Out!" they roared, as the Norman chivalry broke upon them. Terse, strong, prosaic — the very genius of the race was in the cry.

Is it that the higher emotions are not there? Or is it that they are damped down and covered over as too precious to be exhibited? Something of each, perhaps. I once met the widow of the man who, as a young signal midshipman, had taken Nelson's famous message from the Signal Yeoman and communicated it to the ship's company. The officers were impressed. The men were not. "Duty!" they muttered. "We've always done it. Why not?" Anything in the least highfalutin' would depress, not exalt, a British company. It is the under statement which delights them. German troops can march to battle singing Luther's hymns. Frenchmen will work themselves into a frenzy by a song of glory and of Fatherland. Our martial poets need not trouble to imitate — or at least need not imagine that if they do so they will ever supply a want to the British soldier. Our sailors working the heavy guns in South Africa sang: "Here's another lump of sugar for the Bird." I saw a regiment go into action to the refrain of "A little bit off the top." The martial poet aforesaid, unless he had the genius and the insight of a Kipling, would have wasted a good deal of ink before he had got down to such chants as these. The Russians are not unlike us in this respect. I remember reading of some column ascending a breach and singing lustily from start to finish, until a few survivors were left victorious upon the crest with the song still going. A spectator inquired what wondrous chant it was which had warmed them to such a deed of valour, and he found that the exact meaning of the words, endlessly repeated, was "Ivan is in the garden picking cabbages." The fact is, I suppose, that a mere monotonous sound may take the place of the tom-tom of savage warfare, and hypnotize the soldier into valour.

Our cousins across the Atlantic have the same blending of the comic with their most serious work. Take the songs which they sang during the most bloody war which the Anglo-Celtic race has ever waged — the only war in which it could have been said that they were stretched to their uttermost and showed their true form—"Tramp, tramp, tramp," "John Brown's Body," "Marching through Georgia" — all had a playful humour running through them. Only one exception do I know, and that is the most tremendous war-song I can recall. Even an outsider in time of peace can hardly read it without emotion. I mean, of course, Julia Ward Howe's "War-Song of the Republic," with the choral opening line: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." If that were ever sung upon a battle-field the effect must have been terrific.

A long digression, is it not? But that is the worst of the thoughts at the other side of the Magic Door. You can't pull one out without a dozen being entangled with it. But it was Scott's soldiers that I was talking of, and I was saying that there is nothing theatrical, no posing, no heroics (the thing of all others which the hero abominates), but just the short bluff word and the simple manly ways, with every expression and metaphor drawn from within his natural range of thought. What a pity it is that he, with his keen appreciation of the soldier, gave us so little of those soldiers who were his own contemporaries — the finest, perhaps, that the world has ever seen! It is true that he wrote a life of the great Soldier Emperor, but that was the one piece of hackwork of his career. How could a Tory patriot, whose whole training had been to look upon Napoleon as a malignant Demon, do justice to such a theme? But the Europe of those days was full of material which he of all men could have drawn with a sympathetic hand. What would we not give for a portrait of one of Murat's light-cavalrymen, or of a Grenadier of the Old Guard, drawn with the same bold strokes as the Rittmeister of Gustavus or the archers of the French King's Guard in "Quentin Durward"?

In his visit to Paris Scott must have seen many of those iron men who during the preceding twenty years had been the scourge and also the redemption of Europe. To us the soldiers who scowled at him from the sidewalks in 1814 would have been as interesting and as much romantic figures of the past as the mail-clad knights or ruffling cavaliers of his novels. A picture from the life of a Peninsular veteran, with his views upon the Duke, would be as striking as Dugald Dalgetty from the German wars. But then no man ever does realise the true interest of the age in which he happens to live. All sense of proportion is lost, and the little thing hard-by obscures the great thing at a distance. It is easy in the dark to confuse the fire-fly and the star. Fancy, for example, the Old Masters seeking their subjects in inn parlours, or St. Sebastians, while Columbus was discovering America before their very faces.

I have said that I think "Ivanhoe" the best of Scott's novels. I suppose most people would subscribe to that. But how about the second best? It speaks well for their general average that there is hardly one among them which might not find some admirers who would vote it to a place of honour. To the Scottish-born man those novels which deal with Scottish life and character have a quality of raciness which gives them a place apart. There is a rich humour of the soil in such books as "Old Mortality," "The Antiquary," and "Rob Roy," which puts them in a different class from the others. His old Scottish women are, next to his soldiers, the best series of types that he has drawn. At the same time it must be admitted that merit which is associated with dialect has such limitations that it can never take the same place as work which makes an equal appeal to all the world. On the whole, perhaps, "Quentin Durward," on account of its wider interests, its strong character-drawing, and the European importance of the events and people described, would have my vote for the second place. It is the father of all those sword-and-cape novels which have formed so numerous an addition to the light literature of the last century. The pictures of Charles the Bold and of the unspeakable Louis are extraordinarily vivid. I can see those two deadly enemies watching the hounds chasing the herald, and clinging to each other in the convulsion of their cruel mirth, more clearly than most things which my eyes have actually rested upon.

The portrait of Louis with his astuteness, his cruelty, his superstition and his cowardice is followed closely from Comines, and is the more effective when set up against his bluff and war-like rival. It is not often that historical characters work out in their actual physique exactly as one would picture them to be, but in the High Church of Innsbruck I have seen effigies of Louis and Charles which might have walked from the very pages of Scott-Louis, thin, ascetic, varminty; and Charles with the head of a prize-fighter. It is hard on us when a portrait upsets all our preconceived ideas, when, for example, we see in the National Portrait Gallery a man with a noble, olive-tinted, poetic face, and with a start read beneath it that it is the wicked Judge Jeffreys. Occasionally, however, as at Innsbruck, we are absolutely satisfied. I have before me on the mantelpiece yonder a portrait of a painting which represents Queen Mary's Bothwell. Take it down and look at it. Mark the big head, fit to conceive large schemes; the strong animal face, made to captivate a sensitive, feminine woman; the brutally forceful features — the mouth with a suggestion of wild boars' tusks behind it, the beard which could bristle with fury: the whole man and his life-history are revealed in that picture. I wonder if Scott had ever seen the original which hangs at the Hepburn family seat?

Personally, I have always had a very high opinion of a novel which the critics have used somewhat harshly, and which came almost the last from his tired pen. I mean "Count Robert of Paris." I am convinced that if it had been the first, instead of the last, of the series it would have attracted as much attention as "Waverley." I can understand the state of mind of the expert, who cried out in mingled admiration and despair: "I have studied the conditions of Byzantine Society all my life, and here comes a Scotch lawyer who makes the whole thing clear to me in a flash!" Many men could draw with more or less success Norman England, or mediaeval France, but to reconstruct a whole dead civilization in so plausible a way, with such dignity and such minuteness of detail, is, I should think, a most wonderful tour de force. His failing health showed itself before the end of the novel, but had the latter half equalled the first, and contained scenes of such humour as Anna Comnena reading aloud her father's exploits, or of such majesty as the account of the muster of the Crusaders upon the shores of the Bosphorus, then the book could not have been gainsaid its rightful place in the very front rank of the novels.

I would that he had carried on his narrative, and given us a glimpse of the actual progress of the First Crusade. What an incident! Was ever anything in the world's history like it? It had what historical incidents seldom have, a definite beginning, middle and end, from the half-crazed preaching of Peter down to the Fall of Jerusalem. Those leaders! It would take a second Homer to do them justice. Godfrey the perfect soldier and leader, Bohemund the unscrupulous and formidable, Tancred the ideal knight errant, Robert of Normandy the half-mad hero! Here is material so rich that one feels one is not worthy to handle it. What richest imagination could ever evolve anything more marvellous and thrilling than the actual historical facts?

But what a glorious brotherhood the novels are! Think of the pure romance of “The Talisman”; the exquisite picture of Hebridean life in “The Pirate”; the splendid reproduction of Elizabethan England in “Kenilworth”; the rich humour of the “Legend of Montrose”; above all, bear in mind that in all that splendid series, written in a coarse age, there is not one word to offend the most sensitive car, and it is borne in upon one how great and noble a man was Walter Scott, and how high the service which he did for literature and for humanity.

For that reason his life is good reading, and there it is on the same shelf as the novels. Lockhart was, of course, his son-in-law and his admiring friend. The ideal biographer should be a perfectly impartial man, with a sympathetic mind, but a stern determination to tell the absolute truth. One would like the frail, human side of a man as well as the other. I cannot believe that anyone in the world was ever quite so good as the subject of most of our biographies. Surely these worthy people swore a little sometimes, or had a keen eye for a pretty face, or opened the second bottle when they would have done better to stop at the first, or did something to make us feel that they were men and brothers. They need not go the length of the lady who began a biography of her deceased husband with the words —”D — - was a dirty man,” but the books certainly would be more readable, and the subjects more lovable too, if we had greater light and shade in the picture.

But I am sure that the more one knew of Scott the more one would have admired him. He lived in a drinking age, and in a drinking country, and I have not a doubt that he took an allowance of toddy occasionally of an evening which would have laid his feeble successors under the table. His last years, at least, poor fellow, were abstemious enough, when he sipped his barley-water, while the others passed the decanter. But what a high-souled chivalrous gentleman he was, with how fine a sense of honour, translating itself not into empty phrases, but into years of labour and denial! You remember how he became sleeping partner in a printing house, and so involved himself in its failure. There was a legal, but very little moral, claim against him, and no one could have blamed him had he cleared the account by a bankruptcy, which would have enabled him to become a rich man again within a few years. Yet he took the whole burden upon himself and bore it for the rest of his life, spending his work, his time, and his health in the one long effort to save his honour from the shadow of a stain. It was nearly a hundred thousand pounds, I think, which he passed on to the creditors — a great record, a hundred thousand pounds, with his life thrown in.

And what a power of work he had! It was superhuman. Only the man who has tried to write fiction himself knows what it means when it is recorded that Scott produced two of his long novels in one single year. I remember reading in some book of reminiscences — on second thoughts it was in Lockhart himself — how the writer had lodged in some rooms in Castle Street, Edinburgh, and how he had seen all evening the silhouette of a man outlined on the blind of the opposite house. All evening the man wrote, and the observer could see the shadow hand conveying the sheets of paper from the desk to the pile at the side. He went to a party and returned, but still the hand was moving the sheets. Next morning he was told that the rooms opposite were occupied by Walter Scott.

A curious glimpse into the psychology of the writer of fiction is shown by the fact that he wrote two of his books — good ones, too — at a time when his health was such that he could not afterwards remember one word of them, and listened to them when they were read to him as if he were hearing the work of another man. Apparently the simplest processes of the brain, such as ordinary memory, were in complete abeyance, and yet the very highest and most complex faculty — imagination in its supreme form — was absolutely unimpaired. It is an extraordinary fact, and one to be pondered over. It gives some support to the feeling which every writer of imaginative work must have, that his supreme work comes to him in some strange way from without, and that he is only the medium for placing it upon the paper. The creative thought — the germ thought from which a larger growth is to come, flies through his brain like a bullet. He is surprised at his own idea, with no conscious sense of having originated it. And here we have a man, with all other brain functions paralyzed, producing this magnificent work. Is it possible that we are indeed but conduit pipes from the infinite reservoir of the unknown? Certainly it is always our best work which leaves the least sense of personal effort.

And to pursue this line of thought, is it possible that frail physical powers and an unstable nervous system, by keeping a man's materialism at its lowest, render him a more fitting agent for these spiritual uses? It is an old tag that

”Great Genius is to madness close allied,
And thin partitions do those rooms divide.”

But, apart from genius, even a moderate faculty for imaginative work seems to me to weaken seriously the ties between the soul and the body.

Look at the British poets of a century ago: Chatterton, Burns, Shelley, Keats, Byron. Burns was the oldest of that brilliant band, yet Burns was only thirty-eight when he passed away, “burned out,” as his brother terribly expressed it. Shelley, it is true, died by accident, and Chatterton by poison, but suicide is in itself a sign of a morbid state. It is true that Rogers lived to be almost a centenarian, but he was banker first and poet afterwards. Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning have all raised the average age of the poets, but for some reason the novelists, especially of late years, have a deplorable record. They will end by being scheduled with the white-lead workers and other dangerous trades. Look at the really shocking case of the young Americans, for example. What a band of promising young writers have in a few years been swept away! There was the author of that admirable book, “David Harum”; there was Frank Norris, a man who had in him, I think, the seeds of greatness more than almost any living writer. His “Pit” seemed to me one of the finest American novels. He also died a premature death. Then there was Stephen Crane — a man who had also done most brilliant work, and there was Harold Frederic, another master-craftsman. Is there any profession in the world which in proportion to its numbers could show such losses as that? In the meantime, out of our own men Robert Louis Stevenson is gone, and Henry Seton Merriman, and many another.

Even those great men who are usually spoken of as if they had rounded off their career were really premature in their end. Thackeray, for example, in spite of his snowy head, was only 52; Dickens attained the age of 58; on the whole, Sir Walter, with his 61 years of life, although he never wrote a novel until he was over 40, had, fortunately for the world, a longer working career than most of his brethren.

He employed his creative faculty for about twenty years, which is as much, I suppose, as Shakespeare did. The bard of Avon is another example of the limited tenure which Genius has of life, though I believe that he outlived the greater part of his own family, who were not a healthy stock. He died, I should judge, of some nervous disease; that is shown by the progressive degeneration of his signature. Probably it was locomotor ataxy, which is the special scourge of the imaginative man. Heine, Daudet, and how many more, were its victims. As to the tradition, first mentioned long after his death, that he died of a fever contracted from a drinking bout, it is absurd on the face of it, since no such fever is known to science. But a very moderate drinking bout would be extremely likely to bring a chronic nervous complaint to a disastrous end.

One other remark upon Scott before I pass on from that line of green volumes which has made me so digressive and so garrulous. No account of his character is complete which does not deal with the strange, secretive vein which ran through his nature. Not only did he stretch the truth on many occasions in order to conceal the fact that he was the author of the famous novels, but even intimate friends who met him day by day were not aware that he was the man about whom the whole of Europe was talking. Even his wife was ignorant of his pecuniary liabilities until the crash of the Ballantyne firm told her for the first time that they were sharers in the ruin. A psychologist might trace this strange twist of his mind in the numerous elfish Fenella-like characters who flit about and keep their irritating secret through the long chapters of so many of his novels.

It’s a sad book, Lockhart’s “Life.” It leaves gloom in the mind. The sight of this weary giant, staggering along, burdened with debt, overladen with work, his wife dead, his nerves broken, and nothing intact but his honour, is one of the most moving in the history of literature. But they pass, these clouds, and all that is left is the memory of the supremely noble man, who would not be bent, but faced Fate to the last, and died in his tracks without a whimper. He sampled every human emotion. Great was his joy and great his success, great was his downfall and bitter his grief. But of all the sons of men I don’t think there are many greater than he who lies under the great slab at Dryburgh.

III.

We can pass the long green ranks of the Waverley Novels and Lockhart’s “Life” which flanks them. Here is heavier metal in the four big grey volumes beyond. They are an old-fashioned large-print edition of Boswell’s “Life of Johnson.” I emphasize the large print, for that is the weak point of most of the cheap editions of English Classics which come now into the market. With subjects which are in the least archaic or abstruse you need good clear type to help you on your way. The other is good neither for your eyes nor for your temper. Better pay a little more and have a book that is made for use.

That book interests me — fascinates me — and yet I wish I could join heartily in that chorus of praise which the kind-hearted old bully has enjoyed. It is difficult to follow his own advice and to “clear one’s mind of cant” upon the subject, for when you have been accustomed to look at him through the sympathetic glasses of Macaulay or of Boswell, it is hard to take them off, to rub one’s eyes, and to have a good honest stare on one’s own account at the man’s actual words, deeds, and limitations. If you try it you are left with the oddest mixture of impressions. How could one express it save that this is John Bull taken to literature — the exaggerated John Bull of the caricaturists — with every quality, good or evil, at its highest? Here are the rough crust over a kindly heart, the explosive temper, the arrogance, the insular narrowness, the want of sympathy and insight, the rudeness of perception, the positiveness, the overbearing bluster, the strong deep-seated religious principle, and every other characteristic of the cruder, rougher John Bull who was the great grandfather of the present good-natured Johnnie.

If Boswell had not lived I wonder how much we should hear now of his huge friend? With Scotch persistence he has succeeded in inoculating the whole world with his hero worship. It was most natural that he should himself admire him. The relations between the two men were delightful and reflect all credit upon each. But they are not a safe basis from which any third person could argue. When they met, Boswell was in his twenty-third and Johnson in his fifty-fourth year. The one was a keen young Scot with a mind which was reverent and impressionable. The other was a figure from a past generation with his fame already made. From the moment of meeting the one was bound to exercise an absolute ascendency over the other which made unbiassed criticism far more difficult than it would be between ordinary father and son. Up to the end this was the unbroken relation between them.

It is all very well to pooh-pooh Boswell as Macaulay has done, but it is not by chance that a man writes the best biography in the language. He had some great and rare literary qualities. One was a clear and vivid style, more flexible and Saxon than that of his great model. Another was a remarkable discretion which hardly once permitted a fault of taste in this whole enormous book where he must have had to pick his steps with pitfalls on every side of him. They say that he was a fool and a coxcomb in private life. He is never so with a pen in his hand. Of all his numerous arguments with Johnson, where he ventured some little squeak of remonstrance, before the roaring “No, sir!” came to silence him, there are few in which his views were not, as experience proved, the wiser. On the question of slavery he was in the wrong. But I could quote from memory at least a dozen cases, including such vital subjects as the American Revolution, the Hanoverian Dynasty, Religious Toleration, and so on, where Boswell’s views were those which survived.

But where he excels as a biographer is in telling you just those little things that you want to know. How often you read the life of a man and are left without the remotest idea of his personality. It is not so here. The man lives again. There is a short description of Johnson’s person — it is not in the Life, but in the Tour to the Hebrides, the very next book upon the shelf, which is typical of his vivid portraiture. May I take it down, and read you a paragraph of it? —

“His person was large, robust, I may say approaching to the gigantic, and grown unwieldy from corpulency. His countenance was naturally of the cast of an ancient statue, but somewhat disfigured by the scars of King’s evil. He was now in his sixty-fourth year and was become a little dull of hearing. His sight had always been somewhat weak, yet so much does mind govern and even supply the deficiencies of organs that his perceptions were uncommonly quick and accurate. His head, and sometimes also his body, shook with a kind of motion like the effect of palsy. He appeared to be frequently disturbed by cramps or convulsive contractions of the nature of that distemper called St. Vitus’ dance. He wore a full suit of plain brown clothes, with twisted hair buttons of the same colour, a large bushy greyish wig, a plain shirt, black worsted stockings and silver buckles. Upon this tour when journeying he wore boots and a very wide brown cloth great-coat with pockets which might almost have held the two volumes of his folio dictionary, and he carried in his hand a large English oak stick."

You must admit that if one cannot reconstruct the great Samuel after that it is not Mr. Boswell's fault — and it is but one of a dozen equally vivid glimpses which he gives us of his hero. It is just these pen-pictures of his of the big, uncouth man, with his grunts and his groans, his Gargantuan appetite, his twenty cups of tea, and his tricks with the orange-peel and the lamp-posts, which fascinate the reader, and have given Johnson a far broader literary vogue than his writings could have done.

For, after all, which of those writings can be said to have any life to-day? Not "Rasselas," surely — that stilted romance. "The Lives of the Poets" are but a succession of prefaces, and the "Ramblers" of ephemeral essays. There is the monstrous drudgery of the Dictionary, a huge piece of spadework, a monument to industry, but inconceivable to genius. "London" has a few vigorous lines, and the "Journey to the Hebrides" some spirited pages. This, with a number of political and other pamphlets, was the main output of his lifetime. Surely it must be admitted that it is not enough to justify his predominant place in English literature, and that we must turn to his humble, much-ridiculed biographer for the real explanation.

And then there was his talk. What was it which gave it such distinction? His clear-cut positiveness upon every subject. But this is a sign of a narrow finality — impossible to the man of sympathy and of imagination, who sees the other side of every question and understands what a little island the greatest human knowledge must be in the ocean of infinite possibilities which surround us. Look at the results. Did ever any single man, the very dullest of the race, stand convicted of so many incredible blunders? It recalls the remark of Bagehot, that if at any time the views of the most learned could be stamped upon the whole human race the result would be to propagate the most absurd errors. He was asked what became of swallows in the winter. Rolling and wheezing, the oracle answered: "Swallows," said he, "certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water and lie in the bed of a river." Boswell gravely dockets the information. However, if I remember right, even so sound a naturalist as

White of Selborne had his doubts about the swallows. More wonderful are Johnson’s misjudgments of his fellow-authors. There, if anywhere, one would have expected to find a sense of proportion. Yet his conclusions would seem monstrous to a modern taste. “Shakespeare,” he said, “never wrote six consecutive good lines.” He would only admit two good verses in Gray’s exquisite “Elegy written in a Country Churchyard,” where it would take a very acid critic to find two bad ones. “Tristram Shandy” would not live. “Hamlet” was gabble. Swift’s “Gulliver’s Travels” was poor stuff, and he never wrote anything good except “A Tale of a Tub.” Voltaire was illiterate. Rousseau was a scoundrel. Deists, like Hume, Priestley, or Gibbon, could not be honest men.

And his political opinions! They sound now like a caricature. I suppose even in those days they were reactionary. “A poor man has no honour.” “Charles the Second was a good King.” “Governments should turn out of the Civil Service all who were on the other side.” “Judges in India should be encouraged to trade.” “No country is the richer on account of trade.” (I wonder if Adam Smith was in the company when this proposition was laid down!) “A landed proprietor should turn out those tenants who did not vote as he wished.” “It is not good for a labourer to have his wages raised.” “When the balance of trade is against a country, the margin must be paid in current coin.” Those were a few of his convictions.

And then his prejudices! Most of us have some unreasoning aversion. In our more generous moments we are not proud of it. But consider those of Johnson! When they were all eliminated there was not so very much left. He hated Whigs. He disliked Scotsmen. He detested Nonconformists (a young lady who joined them was “an odious wench”). He loathed Americans. So he walked his narrow line, belching fire and fury at everything to the right or the left of it. Macaulay’s posthumous admiration is all very well, but had they met in life Macaulay would have contrived to unite under one hat nearly everything that Johnson abominated.

It cannot be said that these prejudices were founded on any strong principle, or that they could not be altered where his own personal interests demanded it. This is one of the weak points of his record. In his dictionary he abused pensions and pensioners as a means by which the State imposed slavery upon hirelings. When he wrote the unfortunate definition a pension must have seemed a most improbable contingency, but when George III., either through policy or charity, offered him one a little later, he made no hesitation in accepting it. One would have liked to feel that the violent expression of his convictions represented a real intensity of feeling, but the facts in this instance seem against it.

He was a great talker — but his talk was more properly a monologue. It was a discursive essay, with perhaps a few marginal notes from his subdued audience. How could one talk on equal terms with a man who could not brook contradiction or even argument upon the most vital questions in life? Would Goldsmith defend his literary views, or Burke his Whiggism, or Gibbon his Deism? There was no common ground of philosophic toleration on which one could stand. If he could not argue he would be rude, or, as Goldsmith put it: "If his pistol missed fire, he would knock you down with the butt end." In the face of that "rhinoceros laugh" there was an end of gentle argument. Napoleon said that all the other kings would say "Ouf!" when they heard he was dead, and so I cannot help thinking that the older men of Johnson's circle must have given a sigh of relief when at last they could speak freely on that which was near their hearts, without the danger of a scene where "Why, no, sir!" was very likely to ripen into "Let us have no more on't!" Certainly one would like to get behind Boswell's account, and to hear a chat between such men as Burke and Reynolds, as to the difference in the freedom and atmosphere of the Club on an evening when the formidable Doctor was not there, as compared to one when he was.

No smallest estimate of his character is fair which does not make due allowance for the terrible experiences of his youth and early middle age. His spirit was as scarred as his face. He was fifty-three when the pension was given him, and up to then his existence had been spent in one constant struggle for the first necessities of life, for the daily meal and the nightly bed. He had seen his comrades of letters die of actual privation. From childhood he had known no happiness. The half blind gawky youth, with dirty linen and twitching limbs, had always, whether in the streets of Lichfield, the quadrangle of Pembroke, or the coffee-houses of London, been an object of mingled pity and amusement. With a proud and sensitive soul, every day of his life must have brought some bitter humiliation. Such an experience must either break a man's spirit or embitter it, and here, no doubt, was the secret of that roughness, that carelessness for the sensibilities of others, which caused Boswell's father to christen him "Ursa Major." If his nature was in any way warped, it must be admitted that terrific forces had gone to the rending of it. His good was innate, his evil the result of a dreadful experience.

And he had some great qualities. Memory was the chief of them. He had read omnivorously, and all that he had read he remembered, not merely in the vague, general way in which we remember what we read, but with every particular of place and date. If it were poetry, he could quote it by the page, Latin or English. Such a memory has its enormous advantage, but it carries with it its corresponding defect. With the mind so crammed with other people’s goods, how can you have room for any fresh manufactures of your own? A great memory is, I think, often fatal to originality, in spite of Scott and some other exceptions. The slate must be clear before you put your own writing upon it. When did Johnson ever discover an original thought, when did he ever reach forward into the future, or throw any fresh light upon those enigmas with which mankind is faced? Overloaded with the past, he had space for nothing else. Modern developments of every sort cast no first herald rays upon his mind. He journeyed in France a few years before the greatest cataclysm that the world has ever known, and his mind, arrested by much that was trivial, never once responded to the storm-signals which must surely have been visible around him. We read that an amiable Monsieur Sansterre showed him over his brewery and supplied him with statistics as to his output of beer. It was the same foul-mouthed Sansterre who struck up the drums to drown Louis’ voice at the scaffold. The association shows how near the unconscious sage was to the edge of that precipice and how little his learning availed him in discerning it.

He would have been a great lawyer or divine. Nothing, one would think, could have kept him from Canterbury or from the Woolsack. In either case his memory, his learning, his dignity, and his inherent sense of piety and justice, would have sent him straight to the top. His brain, working within its own limitations, was remarkable. There is no more wonderful proof of this than his opinions on questions of Scotch law, as given to Boswell and as used by the latter before the Scotch judges. That an outsider with no special training should at short notice write such weighty opinions, crammed with argument and reason, is, I think, as remarkable a tour de force as literature can show.

Above all, he really was a very kind-hearted man, and that must count for much. His was a large charity, and it came from a small purse. The rooms of his house became a sort of harbour of refuge in which several strange battered hulks found their last moorings. There were the blind Mr. Levett, and the acidulous Mrs. Williams, and the colourless Mrs. De Moulins, all old and ailing — a trying group amid which to spend one's days. His guinea was always ready for the poor acquaintance, and no poet was so humble that he might not preface his book with a dedication whose ponderous and sonorous sentences bore the hall-mark of their maker. It is the rough, kindly man, the man who bore the poor street-walker home upon his shoulders, who makes one forget, or at least forgive, the dogmatic pedantic Doctor of the Club.

There is always to me something of interest in the view which a great man takes of old age and death. It is the practical test of how far the philosophy of his life has been a sound one. Hume saw death afar, and met it with unostentatious calm. Johnson's mind flinched from that dread opponent. His letters and his talk during his latter years are one long cry of fear. It was not cowardice, for physically he was one of the most stout-hearted men that ever lived. There were no limits to his courage. It was spiritual diffidence, coupled with an actual belief in the possibilities of the other world, which a more humane and liberal theology has done something to soften. How strange to see him cling so desperately to that crazy body, with its gout, its asthma, its St. Vitus' dance, and its six gallons of dropsy! What could be the attraction of an existence where eight hours of every day were spent groaning in a chair, and sixteen wheezing in a bed? "I would give one of these legs," said he, "for another year of life." None the less, when the hour did at last strike, no man could have borne himself with more simple dignity and courage. Say what you will of him, and resent him how you may, you can never open those four grey volumes without getting some mental stimulus, some desire for wider reading, some insight into human learning or character, which should leave you a better and a wiser man.

IV.

Next to my Johnsoniana are my Gibbons — two editions, if you please, for my old complete one being somewhat crabbed in the print I could not resist getting a set of Bury’s new six-volume presentment of the History. In reading that book you don’t want to be handicapped in any way. You want fair type, clear paper, and a light volume. You are not to read it lightly, but with some earnestness of purpose and keenness for knowledge, with a classical atlas at your elbow and a note-book hard by, taking easy stages and harking back every now and then to keep your grip of the past and to link it up with what follows. There are no thrills in it. You won’t be kept out of your bed at night, nor will you forget your appointments during the day, but you will feel a certain sedate pleasure in the doing of it, and when it is done you will have gained something which you can never lose — something solid, something definite, something that will make you broader and deeper than before.

Were I condemned to spend a year upon a desert island and allowed only one book for my companion, it is certainly that which I should choose. For consider how enormous is its scope, and what food for thought is contained within those volumes. It covers a thousand years of the world’s history, it is full and good and accurate, its standpoint is broadly philosophic, its style dignified. With our more elastic methods we may consider his manner pompous, but he lived in an age when Johnson’s turgid periods had corrupted our literature. For my own part I do not dislike Gibbon’s pomposity. A paragraph should be measured and sonorous if it ventures to describe the advance of a Roman legion, or the debate of a Greek Senate. You are wafted upwards, with this lucid and just spirit by your side upholding and instructing you. Beneath you are warring nations, the clash of races, the rise and fall of dynasties, the conflict of creeds. Serene you float above them all, and ever as the panorama flows past, the weighty measured unemotional voice whispers the true meaning of the scene into your ear.

It is a most mighty story that is told. You begin with a description of the state of the Roman Empire when the early Caesars were on the throne, and when it was undisputed mistress of the world. You pass down the line of the

Emperors with their strange alternations of greatness and profligacy, descending occasionally to criminal lunacy. When the Empire went rotten it began at the top, and it took centuries to corrupt the man behind the spear. Neither did a religion of peace affect him much, for, in spite of the adoption of Christianity, Roman history was still written in blood. The new creed had only added a fresh cause of quarrel and violence to the many which already existed, and the wars of angry nations were mild compared to those of excited sectaries.

Then came the mighty rushing wind from without, blowing from the waste places of the world, destroying, confounding, whirling madly through the old order, leaving broken chaos behind it, but finally cleansing and purifying that which was stale and corrupt. A storm-centre somewhere in the north of China did suddenly what it may very well do again. The human volcano blew its top off, and Europe was covered by the destructive debris. The absurd point is that it was not the conquerors who overran the Roman Empire, but it was the terrified fugitives, who, like a drove of stampeded cattle, blundered over everything which barred their way. It was a wild, dramatic time — the time of the formation of the modern races of Europe. The nations came whirling in out of the north and east like dust-storms, and amid the seeming chaos each was blended with its neighbour so as to toughen the fibre of the whole. The fickle Gaul got his steadying from the Franks, the steady Saxon got his touch of refinement from the Norman, the Italian got a fresh lease of life from the Lombard and the Ostrogoth, the corrupt Greek made way for the manly and earnest Mahommedan. Everywhere one seems to see a great hand blending the seeds. And so one can now, save only that emigration has taken the place of war. It does not, for example, take much prophetic power to say that something very great is being built up on the other side of the Atlantic. When on an Anglo-Celtic basis you see the Italian, the Hun, and the Scandinavian being added, you feel that there is no human quality which may not be thereby evolved.

But to revert to Gibbon: the next stage is the flight of Empire from Rome to Byzantium, even as the Anglo-Celtic power might find its centre some day not in London but in Chicago or Toronto. There is the whole strange story of the tidal wave of Mahommedanism from the south, submerging all North Africa, spreading right and left to India on the one side and to Spain on the other, finally washing right over the walls of Byzantium until it, the bulwark of Christianity, became what it is now, the advanced European fortress of the Moslem. Such is the tremendous narrative covering half the world's known history, which can all be acquired and made part of yourself by the aid of that humble atlas, pencil, and note-book already recommended.

When all is so interesting it is hard to pick examples, but to me there has always seemed to be something peculiarly impressive in the first entrance of a new race on to the stage of history. It has something of the glamour which hangs round the early youth of a great man. You remember how the Russians made their debut — came down the great rivers and appeared at the Bosphorus in two hundred canoes, from which they endeavoured to board the Imperial galleys. Singular that a thousand years have passed and that the ambition of the Russians is still to carry out the task at which their skin-clad ancestors failed. Or the Turks again; you may recall the characteristic ferocity with which they opened their career. A handful of them were on some mission to the Emperor. The town was besieged from the landward side by the barbarians, and the Asiatics obtained leave to take part in a skirmish. The first Turk galloped out, shot a barbarian with his arrow, and then, lying down beside him, proceeded to suck his blood, which so horrified the man's comrades that they could not be brought to face such uncanny adversaries. So, from opposite sides, those two great races arrived at the city which was to be the stronghold of the one and the ambition of the other for so many centuries.

And then, even more interesting than the races which arrive are those that disappear. There is something there which appeals most powerfully to the imagination. Take, for example, the fate of those Vandals who conquered the north of Africa. They were a German tribe, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, from somewhere in the Elbe country. Suddenly they, too, were seized with the strange wandering madness which was epidemic at the time. Away they went on the line of least resistance, which is always from north to south and from east to west. South-west was the course of the Vandals — a course which must have been continued through pure love of adventure, since in the thousands of miles which they traversed there were many fair resting-places, if that were only their quest.

They crossed the south of France, conquered Spain, and, finally, the more adventurous passed over into Africa, where they occupied the old Roman province. For two or three generations they held it, much as the English hold India, and their numbers were at the least some hundreds of thousands.

Presently the Roman Empire gave one of those flickers which showed that there was still some fire among the ashes. Belisarius landed in Africa and reconquered the province. The Vandals were cut off from the sea and fled inland. Whither did they carry those blue eyes and that flaxen hair? Were they exterminated by the negroes, or did they amalgamate with them? Travellers have brought back stories from the Mountains of the Moon of a Negroid race with light eyes and hair. Is it possible that here we have some trace of the vanished Germans?

It recalls the parallel case of the lost settlements in Greenland. That also has always seemed to me to be one of the most romantic questions in history — the more so, perhaps, as I have strained my eyes to see across the ice-floes the Greenland coast at the point (or near it) where the old “Eyrbyggia” must have stood. That was the Scandinavian city, founded by colonists from Iceland, which grew to be a considerable place, so much so that they sent to Denmark for a bishop. That would be in the fourteenth century. The bishop, coming out to his see, found that he was unable to reach it on account of a climatic change which had brought down the ice and filled the strait between Iceland and Greenland. From that day to this no one has been able to say what has become of these old Scandinavians, who were at the time, be it remembered, the most civilised and advanced race in Europe. They may have been overwhelmed by the Esquimaux, the despised Skroeling — or they may have amalgamated with them — or conceivably they might have held their own. Very little is known yet of that portion of the coast. It would be strange if some Nansen or Peary were to stumble upon the remains of the old colony, and find possibly in that antiseptic atmosphere a complete mummy of some bygone civilization.

But once more to return to Gibbon. What a mind it must have been which first planned, and then, with the incessant labour of twenty years, carried out that enormous work! There was no classical author so little known, no Byzantine historian so diffuse, no monkish chronicle so crabbed, that they were not assimilated and worked into their appropriate place in the huge framework. Great application, great perseverance, great attention to detail was needed in all this, but the coral polyp has all those qualities, and somehow in the heart of his own creation the individuality of the man himself becomes as insignificant and as much overlooked as that of the little creature that builds the reef. A thousand know Gibbon’s work for one who cares anything for Gibbon.

And on the whole this is justified by the facts. Some men are greater than their work. Their work only represents one facet of their character, and there may be a dozen others, all remarkable, and uniting to make one complex and unique creature. It was not so with Gibbon. He was a cold-blooded man, with a brain which seemed to have grown at the expense of his heart. I cannot recall in his life one generous impulse, one ardent enthusiasm, save for the Classics. His excellent judgment was never clouded by the haze of human emotion — or, at least, it was such an emotion as was well under the control of his will. Could anything be more laudable — or less lovable? He abandons his girl at the order of his father, and sums it up that he "sighs as a lover but obeys as a son." The father dies, and he records the fact with the remark that "the tears of a son are seldom lasting." The terrible spectacle of the French Revolution excited in his mind only a feeling of self-pity because his retreat in Switzerland was invaded by the unhappy refugees, just as a grumpy country gentleman in England might complain that he was annoyed by the trippers. There is a touch of dislike in all the allusions which Boswell makes to Gibbon — often without even mentioning his name — and one cannot read the great historian's life without understanding why.

I should think that few men have been born with the material for self-sufficient contentment more completely within himself than Edward Gibbon. He had every gift which a great scholar should have, an insatiable thirst for learning in every form, immense industry, a retentive memory, and that broadly philosophic temperament which enables a man to rise above the partisan and to become the impartial critic of human affairs. It is true that at the time he was looked upon as bitterly prejudiced in the matter of religious thought, but his views are familiar to modern philosophy, and would shock no susceptibilities in these more liberal (and more virtuous) days. Turn him up in that Encyclopedia, and see what the latest word is upon his contentions. "Upon the famous fifteenth and sixteenth chapters it is not necessary to dwell," says the biographer, "because at this time of day no Christian apologist dreams of denying the substantial truth of any of the more important allegations of Gibbon. Christians may complain of the suppression of some circumstances which might influence the general result, and they must remonstrate against the unfair construction of their case. But they no longer refuse to hear any reasonable evidence tending to show that persecution was less severe than had been once believed, and they have slowly learned that they can afford to concede the validity of all the secondary causes assigned by Gibbon and even of others still more discreditable. The fact is, as the historian has again and again admitted, that his account of the secondary causes which contributed to the progress and establishment of Christianity leaves the question as to the natural or supernatural origin of Christianity practically untouched.” This is all very well, but in that case how about the century of abuse which has been showered upon the historian? Some posthumous apology would seem to be called for.

Physically, Gibbon was as small as Johnson was large, but there was a curious affinity in their bodily ailments. Johnson, as a youth, was ulcerated and tortured by the king’s evil, in spite of the Royal touch. Gibbon gives us a concise but lurid account of his own boyhood.

“I was successively afflicted by lethargies and fevers, by opposite tendencies to a consumptive and dropsical habit, by a contraction of my nerves, a fistula in my eye, and the bite of a dog, most vehemently suspected of madness. Every practitioner was called to my aid, the fees of the doctors were swelled by the bills of the apothecaries and surgeons. There was a time when I swallowed more physic than food, and my body is still marked by the indelible scars of lancets, issues, and caustics.”

Such is his melancholy report. The fact is that the England of that day seems to have been very full of that hereditary form of chronic ill-health which we call by the general name of struma. How far the hard-drinking habits in vogue for a century or so before had anything to do with it I cannot say, nor can I trace a connection between struma and learning; but one has only to compare this account of Gibbon with Johnson’s nervous twitches, his scarred face and his St. Vitus’ dance, to realise that these, the two most solid English writers of their generation, were each heir to the same gruesome inheritance.

I wonder if there is any picture extant of Gibbon in the character of subaltern in the South Hampshire Militia? With his small frame, his huge head, his round, chubby face, and the pretentious uniform, he must have looked a most extraordinary figure. Never was there so round a peg in a square hole! His father, a man of a very different type, held a commission, and this led to poor Gibbon becoming a soldier in spite of himself. War had broken out, the regiment was mustered, and the unfortunate student, to his own utter dismay, was kept under arms until the conclusion of hostilities.

For three years he was divorced from his books, and loudly and bitterly did he resent it. The South Hampshire Militia never saw the enemy, which is perhaps as well for them. Even Gibbon himself pokes fun at them; but after three years under canvas it is probable that his men had more cause to smile at their book-worm captain than he at his men. His hand closed much more readily on a pen-handle than on a sword-hilt. In his lament, one of the items is that his colonel's example encouraged the daily practice of hard and even excessive drinking, which gave him the gout. "The loss of so many busy and idle hours were not compensated for by any elegant pleasure," says he; "and my temper was insensibly soured by the society of rustic officers, who were alike deficient in the knowledge of scholars and the manners of gentlemen." The picture of Gibbon flushed with wine at the mess-table, with these hard-drinking squires around him, must certainly have been a curious one. He admits, however, that he found consolations as well as hardships in his spell of soldiering. It made him an Englishman once more, it improved his health, it changed the current of his thoughts. It was even useful to him as an historian. In a celebrated and characteristic sentence, he says, "The discipline and evolutions of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the Phalanx and the Legions, and the captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire."

If we don't know all about Gibbon it is not his fault, for he wrote no fewer than six accounts of his own career, each differing from the other, and all equally bad. A man must have more heart and soul than Gibbon to write a good autobiography. It is the most difficult of all human compositions, calling for a mixture of tact, discretion, and frankness which make an almost impossible blend. Gibbon, in spite of his foreign education, was a very typical Englishman in many ways, with the reticence, self-respect, and self-consciousness of the race. No British autobiography has ever been frank, and consequently no British autobiography has ever been good. Trollope's, perhaps, is as good as any that I know, but of all forms of literature it is the one least adapted to the national genius. You could not imagine a British Rousseau, still less a British Benvenuto Cellini. In one way it is to the credit of the race that it should be so. If we do as much evil as our neighbours we at least have grace enough to be ashamed of it and to suppress its publication.

There on the left of Gibbon is my fine edition (Lord Braybrooke's) of Pepys' Diary. That is, in truth, the greatest autobiography in our language, and yet it was not deliberately written as such. When Mr. Pepys jotted down from day to day every quaint or mean thought which came into his head he would have been very much surprised had any one told him that he was doing a work quite unique in our literature. Yet his involuntary autobiography, compiled for some obscure reason or for private reference, but certainly never meant for publication, is as much the first in that line of literature as Boswell's book among biographies or Gibbon's among histories.

As a race we are too afraid of giving ourselves away ever to produce a good autobiography. We resent the charge of national hypocrisy, and yet of all nations we are the least frank as to our own emotions — especially on certain sides of them. Those affairs of the heart, for example, which are such an index to a man's character, and so profoundly modify his life — what space do they fill in any man's autobiography? Perhaps in Gibbon's case the omission matters little, for, save in the instance of his well-controlled passion for the future Madame Neckar, his heart was never an organ which gave him much trouble. The fact is that when the British author tells his own story he tries to make himself respectable, and the more respectable a man is the less interesting does he become. Rousseau may prove himself a maudlin degenerate. Cellini may stand self-convicted as an amorous ruffian. If they are not respectable they are thoroughly human and interesting all the same.

The wonderful thing about Mr. Pepys is that a man should succeed in making himself seem so insignificant when really he must have been a man of considerable character and attainments. Who would guess it who read all these trivial comments, these catalogues of what he had for dinner, these inane domestic confidences — all the more interesting for their inanity! The effect left upon the mind is of some grotesque character in a play, fussy, self-conscious, blustering with women, timid with men, dress-proud, purse-proud, trimming in politics and in religion, a garrulous gossip immersed always in trifles. And yet, though this was the day-by-day man, the year-by-year man was a very different person, a devoted civil servant, an eloquent orator, an excellent writer, a capable musician, and a ripe scholar who accumulated 3000 volumes — a large private library in those days — and had the public spirit to leave them all to his University. You can forgive old

Pepys a good deal of his philandering when you remember that he was the only official of the Navy Office who stuck to his post during the worst days of the Plague. He may have been — indeed, he assuredly was — a coward, but the coward who has sense of duty enough to overcome his cowardice is the most truly brave of mankind.

But the one amazing thing which will never be explained about Pepys is what on earth induced him to go to the incredible labour of writing down in shorthand cipher not only all the trivialities of his life, but even his own very gross delinquencies which any other man would have been only too glad to forget. The Diary was kept for about ten years, and was abandoned because the strain upon his eyes of the crabbed shorthand was helping to destroy his sight. I suppose that he became so familiar with it that he wrote it and read it as easily as he did ordinary script. But even so, it was a huge labour to compile these books of strange manuscript. Was it an effort to leave some memorial of his own existence to single him out from all the countless sons of men? In such a case he would assuredly have left directions in somebody’s care with a reference to it in the deed by which he bequeathed his library to Cambridge. In that way he could have ensured having his Diary read at any date he chose to name after his death. But no allusion to it was left, and if it had not been for the ingenuity and perseverance of a single scholar the dusty volumes would still lie unread in some top shelf of the Pepysian Library. Publicity, then, was not his object. What could it have been? The only alternative is reference and self-information. You will observe in his character a curious vein of method and order, by which he loved, to be for ever estimating his exact wealth, cataloguing his books, or scheduling his possessions. It is conceivable that this systematic recording of his deeds — even of his misdeeds — was in some sort analogous, sprung from a morbid tidiness of mind. It may be a weak explanation, but it is difficult to advance another one.

One minor point which must strike the reader of Pepys is how musical a nation the English of that day appear to have been. Every one seems to have had command of some instrument, many of several. Part-singing was common. There is not much of Charles the Second’s days which we need envy, but there, at least, they seem to have had the advantage of us. It was real music, too — music of dignity and tenderness — with words which were worthy of such treatment. This cult may have been the last remains of those mediaeval pre-Reformation days when the English Church choirs were, as I have read somewhere, the most famous in Europe. A strange thing this for a land which in the whole of last century has produced no single master of the first rank!

What national change is it which has driven music from the land? Has life become so serious that song has passed out of it? In Southern climes one hears poor folk sing for pure lightness of heart. In England, alas, the sound of a poor man's voice raised in song means only too surely that he is drunk. And yet it is consoling to know that the germ of the old powers is always there ready to sprout forth if they be nourished and cultivated. If our cathedral choirs were the best in the old Catholic days, it is equally true, I believe, that our orchestral associations are now the best in Europe. So, at least, the German papers said on the occasion of the recent visit of a north of England choir. But one cannot read Pepys without knowing that the general musical habit is much less cultivated now than of old.

V.

It is a long jump from Samuel Pepys to George Borrow — from one pole of the human character to the other — and yet they are in contact on the shelf of my favourite authors. There is something wonderful, I think, about the land of Cornwall. That long peninsula extending out into the ocean has caught all sorts of strange floating things, and has held them there in isolation until they have woven themselves into the texture of the Cornish race. What is this strange strain which lurks down yonder and every now and then throws up a great man with singular un-English ways and features for all the world to marvel at? It is not Celtic, nor is it the dark old Iberian. Further and deeper lie the springs. Is it not Semitic, Phoenician, the roving men of Tyre, with noble Southern faces and Oriental imaginations, who have in far-off days forgotten their blue Mediterranean and settled on the granite shores of the Northern Sea?

Whence came the wonderful face and great personality of Henry Irving? How strong, how beautiful, how un-Saxon it was! I only know that his mother was a Cornish woman. Whence came the intense glowing imagination of the Brontes — so unlike the Miss-Austen-like calm of their predecessors? Again, I only know that their mother was a Cornish woman. Whence came this huge elfin creature, George Borrow, with his eagle head perched on his rocklike shoulders, brown-faced, white-headed, a king among men? Where did he get that remarkable face, those strange mental gifts, which place him by himself in literature? Once more, his father was a Cornishman. Yes, there is something strange, and weird, and great, lurking down yonder in the great peninsula which juts into the western sea. Borrow may, if he so pleases, call himself an East Anglian—”an English Englishman,” as he loved to term it — but is it a coincidence that the one East Anglian born of Cornish blood was the one who showed these strange qualities? The birth was accidental. The qualities throw back to the twilight of the world.

There are some authors from whom I shrink because they are so voluminous that I feel that, do what I may, I can never hope to be well read in their works. Therefore, and very weakly, I avoid them altogether. There is Balzac, for example, with his hundred odd volumes. I am told that some of them are masterpieces and the rest pot-boilers, but that no one is agreed which is which. Such an author makes an undue claim upon the little span of mortal years. Because he asks too much one is inclined to give him nothing at all. Dumas, too! I stand on the edge of him, and look at that huge crop, and content myself with a sample here and there. But no one could raise this objection to Borrow. A month’s reading — even for a leisurely reader — will master all that he has written. There are “Lavengro,” “The Bible in Spain,” “Romany Rye,” and, finally, if you wish to go further, “Wild Wales.” Only four books — not much to found a great reputation upon — but, then, there are no other four books quite like them in the language.

He was a very strange man, bigoted, prejudiced, obstinate, inclined to be sulky, as wayward as a man could be. So far his catalogue of qualities does not seem to pick him as a winner. But he had one great and rare gift. He preserved through all his days a sense of the great wonder and mystery of life — the child sense which is so quickly dulled. Not only did he retain it himself, but he was word-master enough to make other people hark back to it also. As he writes you cannot help seeing through his eyes, and nothing which his eyes saw or his ear heard was ever dull or commonplace. It was all strange, mystic, with some deeper meaning struggling always to the light. If he chronicled his conversation with a washer-woman there was something arresting in the words he said, something singular in her reply. If he met a man in a public-house one felt, after reading his account, that one would wish to know more of that man. If he approached a town he saw and made you see — not a collection of commonplace houses or frowsy streets, but something very strange and wonderful, the winding river, the noble bridge, the old castle, the shadows of the dead. Every human being, every object, was not so much a thing in itself, as a symbol and reminder of the past. He looked through a man at that which the man represented. Was his name Welsh? Then in an instant the individual is forgotten and he is off, dragging you in his train, to ancient Britons, intrusive Saxons, unheard-of bards, Owen Glendower, mountain raiders and a thousand fascinating things. Or is it a Danish name? He leaves the individual in all his modern commonplace while he flies off to huge skulls at Hythe (in parenthesis I may remark that I have examined the said skulls with some care, and they seemed to me to be rather below the human average), to Vikings, Berserkers, Varangians, Harald Haardraada, and the innate wickedness of the Pope. To Borrow all roads lead to Rome.

But, my word, what English the fellow could write! What an organ-roll he could get into his sentences! How nervous and vital and vivid it all is!

There is music in every line of it if you have been blessed with an ear for the music of prose. Take the chapter in “Lavengro” of how the screaming horror came upon his spirit when he was encamped in the Dingle. The man who wrote that has caught the true mantle of Bunyan and Defoe. And, observe the art of it, under all the simplicity — notice, for example, the curious weird effect produced by the studied repetition of the word “dingle” coming ever round and round like the master-note in a chime. Or take the passage about Britain towards the end of “The Bible in Spain.” I hate quoting from these masterpieces, if only for the very selfish reason that my poor setting cannot afford to show up brilliants. None the less, cost what it may, let me transcribe that one noble piece of impassioned prose —

“O England! long, long may it be ere the sun of thy glory sink beneath the wave of darkness! Though gloomy and portentous clouds are now gathering rapidly around thee, still, still may it please the Almighty to disperse them, and to grant thee a futurity longer in duration and still brighter in renown than thy past! Or, if thy doom be at hand, may that doom be a noble one, and worthy of her who has been styled the Old Queen of the waters! May thou sink, if thou dost sink, amidst blood and flame, with a mighty noise, causing more than one nation to participate in thy downfall! Of all fates, may it please the Lord to preserve thee from a disgraceful and a slow decay; becoming, ere extinct, a scorn and a mockery for those self-same foes who now, though they envy and abhor thee, still fear thee, nay even against their will, honour and respect thee…. Remove from thee the false prophets, who have seen vanity and divined lies; who have daubed thy wall with untempered mortar, that it may fall; who see visions of peace where there is no peace; who have strengthened the hands of the wicked, and made the heart of the righteous sad. Oh, do this, and fear not the result, for either shall thy end be a majestic and an enviable one; or God shall perpetuate thy reign upon the waters, thou Old Queen!”

Or take the fight with the Flaming Tinman. It’s too long for quotation — but read it, read every word of it. Where in the language can you find a stronger, more condensed and more restrained narrative? I have seen with my own eyes many a noble fight, more than one international battle, where the best of two great countries have been pitted against each other — yet the second-hand impression of Borrow’s description leaves a more vivid remembrance upon my mind than any of them. This is the real witchcraft of letters.

He was a great fighter himself. He has left a secure reputation in other than literary circles — circles which would have been amazed to learn that he was a writer of books. With his natural advantages, his six foot three of height and his staglike agility, he could hardly fail to be formidable. But he was a scientific sparrer as well, though he had, I have been told, a curious sprawling fashion of his own. And how his heart was in it — how he loved the fighting men! You remember his thumb-nail sketches of his heroes. If you don’t I must quote one, and if you do you will be glad to read it again —

“There’s Cribb, the Champion of England, and perhaps the best man in England; there he is, with his huge, massive figure, and face wonderfully like that of a lion. There is Belcher, the younger, not the mighty one, who is gone to his place, but the Teucer Belcher, the most scientific pugilist that ever entered a ring, only wanting strength to be I won’t say what. He appears to walk before me now, as he did that evening, with his white hat, white great coat, thin genteel figure, springy step, and keen determined eye. Crosses him, what a contrast! Grim, savage Shelton, who has a civil word for nobody, and a hard blow for anybody. Hard! One blow given with the proper play of his athletic arm will unsense a giant. Yonder individual, who strolls about with his hands behind him, supporting his brown coat lappets, undersized, and who looks anything but what he is, is the king of the light-weights, so-called — Randall! The terrible Randall, who has Irish blood in his veins; not the better for that, nor the worse; and not far from him is his last antagonist, Ned Turner, who, though beaten by him, still thinks himself as good a man, in which he is, perhaps, right, for it was a near thing. But how shall I name them all? They were there by dozens, and all tremendous in their way. There was Bulldog Hudson, and fearless Scroggins, who beat the conqueror of Sam the Jew. There was Black Richmond — no, he was not there, but I knew him well; he was the most dangerous of blacks, even with a broken thigh. There was Purcell, who could never conquer until all seemed over with him. There was — what! shall I name thee last? Ay, why not? I believe that thou art the last of all that strong family still above the sod, where mayst thou long continue — true piece of English stuff — Tom of Bedford. Hail to thee, Tom of Bedford, or by whatever name it may please thee to be called, Spring or Winter! Hail to thee, six-foot Englishman of the brown eye, worthy to have carried a six-foot bow at Flodden, where England's yeomen triumphed over Scotland's King, his clans and chivalry. Hail to thee, last of English bruisers, after all the many victories which thou hast achieved — true English victories, unbought by yellow gold."

Those are words from the heart. Long may it be before we lose the fighting blood which has come to us from of old! In a world of peace we shall at last be able to root it from our natures. In a world which is armed to the teeth it is the last and only guarantee of our future. Neither our numbers, nor our wealth, nor the waters which guard us can hold us safe if once the old iron passes from our spirit. Barbarous, perhaps — but there are possibilities for barbarism, and none in this wide world for effeminacy.

Borrow's views of literature and of literary men were curious. Publisher and brother author, he hated them with a fine comprehensive hatred. In all his books I cannot recall a word of commendation to any living writer, nor has he posthumous praise for those of the generation immediately preceding. Southey, indeed, he commends with what most would regard as exaggerated warmth, but for the rest he who lived when Dickens, Thackeray, and Tennyson were all in their glorious prime, looks fixedly past them at some obscure Dane or forgotten Welshman. The reason was, I expect, that his proud soul was bitterly wounded by his own early failures and slow recognition. He knew himself to be a chief in the clan, and when the clan heeded him not he withdrew in haughty disdain. Look at his proud, sensitive face and you hold the key to his life.

Harking back and talking of pugilism, I recall an incident which gave me pleasure. A friend of mine read a pugilistic novel called "Rodney Stone" to a famous Australian prize-fighter, stretched upon a bed of mortal sickness. The dying gladiator listened with intent interest but keen, professional criticism to the combats of the novel. The reader had got to the point where the young amateur fights the brutal Berks. Berks is winded, but holds his adversary off with a stiff left arm. The amateur's second in the story, an old prize-fighter, shouts some advice to him as to how to deal with the situation. "That's right. By — - he's got him!" yelled the stricken man in the bed. Who cares for critics after that?

You can see my own devotion to the ring in that trio of brown volumes which stand, appropriately enough, upon the flank of Borrow. They are the three volumes of “Pugilistica,” given me years ago by my old friend, Robert Barr, a mine in which you can never pick for half an hour without striking it rich. Alas! for the horrible slang of those days, the vapid witless Corinthian talk, with its ogles and its fogles, its pointless jokes, its maddening habit of italicizing a word or two in every sentence. Even these stern and desperate encounters, fit sports for the men of Albuera and Waterloo, become dull and vulgar, in that dreadful jargon. You have to tum to Hazlitt’s account of the encounter between the Gasman and the Bristol Bull, to feel the savage strength of it all. It is a hardened reader who does not wince even in print before that frightful right-hander which felled the giant, and left him in “red ruin” from eyebrow to jaw. But even if there be no Hazlitt present to describe such a combat it is a poor imagination which is not fired by the deeds of the humble heroes who lived once so vividly upon earth, and now only appeal to faithful ones in these little-read pages. They were picturesque creatures, men of great force of character and will, who reached the limits of human bravery and endurance. There is Jackson on the cover, gold upon brown, “gentleman Jackson,” Jackson of the balustrade calf and the noble head, who wrote his name with an 88-pound weight dangling from his little finger.

Here is a pen-portrait of him by one who knew him well —

“I can see him now as I saw him in ‘84 walking down Holborn Hill, towards Smithfield. He had on a scarlet coat worked in gold at the buttonholes, ruffles and frill of fine lace, a small white stock, no collar (they were not then invented), a looped hat with a broad black band, buff knee-breeches and long silk strings, striped white silk stockings, pumps and paste buckles; his waistcoat was pale blue satin, sprigged with white. It was impossible to look on his fine ample chest, his noble shoulders, his waist (if anything too small), his large but not too large hips, his balustrade calf and beautifully turned but not over delicate ankle, his firm foot and peculiarly small hand, without thinking that nature had sent him on earth as a model. On he went at a good five miles and a half an hour, the envy of all men and the admiration of all women.”

Now, that is a discriminating portrait — a portrait which really helps you to see that which the writer sets out to describe. After reading it one can understand why even in reminiscent sporting descriptions of those old days, amid all the Tonis and Bills and Jacks, it is always Mr. John Jackson. He was the friend and instructor of Byron and of half the bloods in town.

Jackson it was who, in the heat of combat, seized the Jew Mendoza by the hair, and so ensured that the pugs for ever afterwards should be a close-cropped race. Inside you see the square face of old Broughton, the supreme fighting man of the eighteenth century, the man whose humble ambition it was to begin with the pivot man of the Prussian Guard, and work his way through the regiment. He had a chronicler, the good Captain Godfrey, who has written some English which would take some beating. How about this passage? —

“He stops as regularly as the swordsman, and carries his blows truly in the line; he steps not back distrusting of himself, to stop a blow, and puddle in the return, with an arm unaided by his body, producing but fly-flap blows. No! Broughton steps boldly and firmly in, bids a welcome to the coming blow; receives it with his guardian arm; then, with a general summons of his swelling muscles, and his firm body seconding his arm, and supplying it with all its weight, pours the pile-driving force upon his man.”

One would like a little more from the gallant Captain. Poor Broughton! He fought once too often. “Why, damn you, you’re beat!” cried the Royal Duke. “Not beat, your highness, but I can’t see my man!” cried the blinded old hero. Alas, there is the tragedy of the ring as it is of life! The wave of youth surges ever upwards, and the wave that went before is swept sobbing on to the shingle. “Youth will be served,” said the terse old pugs. But what so sad as the downfall of the old champion! Wise Tom Spring — Tom of Bedford, as Borrow calls him — had the wit to leave the ring unconquered in the prime of his fame. Cribb also stood out as a champion. But Broughton, Slack, Belcher, and the rest — their end was one common tragedy.

The latter days of the fighting men were often curious and unexpected, though as a rule they were short-lived, for the alternation of the excess of their normal existence and the asceticism of their training undermined their constitution. Their popularity among both men and women was their undoing, and the king of the ring went down at last before that deadliest of light-weights, the microbe of tubercle, or some equally fatal and perhaps less reputable bacillus. The crockiest of spectators had a better chance of life than the magnificent young athlete whom he had come to admire. Jem Belcher died at 30, Hooper at 31, Pearce, the Game Chicken, at 32, Turner at 35, Hudson at 38, Randall, the Nonpareil, at 34. Occasionally, when they did reach mature age, their lives took the strangest turns. Gully, as is well known, became a wealthy man, and Member for Pontefract in the Reform Parliament. Humphries developed into a successful coal merchant. Jack Martin became a convinced teetotaller and vegetarian. Jem Ward, the Black Diamond, developed considerable powers as an artist. Cribb, Spring, Langan, and many others, were successful publicans. Strangest of all, perhaps, was Broughton, who spent his old age haunting every sale of old pictures and bric-a-brac. One who saw him has recorded his impression of the silent old gentleman, clad in old-fashioned garb, with his catalogue in his hand — Broughton, once the terror of England, and now the harmless and gentle collector.

Many of them, as was but natural, died violent deaths, some by accident and a few by their own hands. No man of the first class ever died in the ring. The nearest approach to it was the singular and mournful fate which befell Simon Byrne, the brave Irishman, who had the misfortune to cause the death of his antagonist, Angus Mackay, and afterwards met his own end at the hands of Deaf Burke. Neither Byrne nor Mackay could, however, be said to be boxers of the very first rank. It certainly would appear, if we may argue from the prize-ring, that the human machine becomes more delicate and is more sensitive to jar or shock. In the early days a fatal end to a fight was exceedingly rare. Gradually such tragedies became rather more common, until now even with the gloves they have shocked us by their frequency, and we feel that the rude play of our forefathers is indeed too rough for a more highly organized generation. Still, it may help us to clear our minds of cant if we remember that within two or three years the hunting-field and the steeple-chase claim more victims than the prize-ring has done in two centuries.

Many of these men had served their country well with that strength and courage which brought them fame. Cribb was, if I mistake not, in the Royal Navy. So was the terrible dwarf Scroggins, all chest and shoulders, whose springing hits for many a year carried all before them until the canny Welshman, Ned Turner, stopped his career, only to be stopped in turn by the brilliant Irishman, Jack Randall. Shaw, who stood high among the heavy-weights, was cut to pieces by the French Cuirassiers in the first charge at Waterloo. The brutal Berks died greatly in the breach of Badajos. The lives of these men stood for something, and that was just the one supreme thing which the times called for — an unflinching endurance which could bear up against a world in arms. Look at Jem Belcher — beautiful, heroic Jem, a manlier Byron — but there, this is not an essay on the old prize-ring, and one man’s lore is another man’s bore. Let us pass those three low-down, unjustifiable, fascinating volumes, and on to nobler topics beyond!

VI.

Which are the great short stories of the English language? Not a bad basis for a debate! This I am sure of: that there are far fewer supremely good short stories than there are supremely good long books. It takes more exquisite skill to carve the cameo than the statue. But the strangest thing is that the two excellences seem to be separate and even antagonistic. Skill in the one by no means ensures skill in the other. The great masters of our literature, Fielding, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Reade, have left no single short story of outstanding merit behind them, with the possible exception of Wandering Willie's Tale in "Red Gauntlet." On the other hand, men who have been very great in the short story, Stevenson, Poe, and Bret Harte, have written no great book. The champion sprinter is seldom a five-miler as well.

Well, now, if you had to choose your team whom would you put in? You have not really a large choice. What are the points by which you judge them? You want strength, novelty, compactness, intensity of interest, a single vivid impression left upon the mind. Poe is the master of all. I may remark by the way that it is the sight of his green cover, the next in order upon my favourite shelf, which has started this train of thought. Poe is, to my mind, the supreme original short story writer of all time. His brain was like a seed-pod full of seeds which flew carelessly around, and from which have sprung nearly all our modern types of story. Just think of what he did in his offhand, prodigal fashion, seldom troubling to repeat a success, but pushing on to some new achievement. To him must be ascribed the monstrous progeny of writers on the detection of crime—"quorum pars parva fui!" Each may find some little development of his own, but his main art must trace back to those admirable stories of Monsieur Dupin, so wonderful in their masterful force, their reticence, their quick dramatic point. After all, mental acuteness is the one quality which can be ascribed to the ideal detective, and when that has once been admirably done, succeeding writers must necessarily be content for all time to follow in the same main track. But not only is Poe the originator of the detective story; all treasure-hunting, cryptogram-solving yarns trace back to his "Gold Bug," just as all pseudo-scientific Verne-and-Wells stories have their prototypes in the “Voyage to the Moon,” and the “Case of Monsieur Valdemar.” If every man who receives a cheque for a story which owes its springs to Poe were to pay tithe to a monument for the master, he would have a pyramid as big as that of Cheops.

And yet I could only give him two places in my team. One would be for the “Gold Bug,” the other for the “Murder in the Rue Morgue.” I do not see how either of those could be bettered. But I would not admit *perfect* excellence to any other of his stories. These two have a proportion and a perspective which are lacking in the others, the horror or weirdness of the idea intensified by the coolness of the narrator and of the principal actor, Dupin in the one case and Le Grand in the other. The same may be said of Bret Harte, also one of those great short story tellers who proved himself incapable of a longer flight. He was always like one of his own gold-miners who struck a rich pocket, but found no continuous reef. The pocket was, alas, a very limited one, but the gold was of the best. “The Luck of Roaring Camp” and “Tennessee’s Partner” are both, I think, worthy of a place among my immortals. They are, it is true, so tinged with Dickens as to be almost parodies of the master, but they have a symmetry and satisfying completeness as short stories to which Dickens himself never attained. The man who can read those two stories without a gulp in the throat is not a man I envy.

And Stevenson? Surely he shall have two places also, for where is a finer sense of what the short story can do? He wrote, in my judgment, two masterpieces in his life, and each of them is essentially a short story, though the one happened to be published as a volume. The one is “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” which, whether you take it as a vivid narrative or as a wonderfully deep and true allegory, is a supremely fine bit of work. The other story of my choice would be “The Pavilion on the Links” — the very model of dramatic narrative. That story stamped itself so clearly on my brain when I read it in Cornhill that when I came across it again many years afterwards in volume form, I was able instantly to recognise two small modifications of the text — each very much for the worse — from the original form. They were small things, but they seemed somehow like a chip on a perfect statue. Surely it is only a very fine work, of art which could leave so definite an impression as that. Of course, there are a dozen other of his stories which would put the average writer’s best work to shame, all with the strange Stevenson glamour upon them, of which I may discourse later, but only to those two would I be disposed to admit that complete excellence which would pass them into such a team as this.

And who else? If it be not an impertinence to mention a contemporary, I should certainly have a brace from Rudyard Kipling. His power, his compression, his dramatic sense, his way of glowing suddenly into a vivid flame, all mark him as a great master. But which are we to choose from that long and varied collection, many of which have claims to the highest? Speaking from memory, I should say that the stories of his which have impressed me most are “The Drums of the Fore and Aft,” “The Man who Would be King,” “The Man who Was,” and “The Brushwood Boy.” Perhaps, on the whole, it is the first two which I should choose to add to my list of masterpieces.

They are stories which invite criticism and yet defy it. The great batsman at cricket is the man who can play an unorthodox game, take every liberty which is denied to inferior players, and yet succeed brilliantly in the face of his disregard of law. So it is here. I should think the model of these stories is the most dangerous that any young writer could follow. There is digression, that most deadly fault in the short narrative; there is incoherence, there is want of proportion which makes the story stand still for pages and bound forward in a few sentences. But genius overrides all that, just as the great cricketer hooks the off ball and glides the straight one to leg. There is a dash, an exuberance, a full-blooded, confident mastery which carries everything before it. Yes, no team of immortals would be complete which did not contain at least two representatives of Kipling.

And now whom? Nathaniel Hawthorne never appealed in the highest degree to me. The fault, I am sure, is my own, but I always seemed to crave stronger fare than he gave me. It was too subtle, too elusive, for effect. Indeed, I have been more affected by some of the short work of his son Julian, though I can quite understand the high artistic claims which the senior writer has, and the delicate charm of his style. There is Bulwer Lytton as a claimant. His “Haunted and the Haunters” is the very best ghost story that I know. As such I should include it in my list. There was a story, too, in one of the old Blackwoods—”Metempsychosis” it was called, which left so deep an impression upon my mind that I should be inclined, though it is many years since I read it, to number it with the best. Another story which has the characteristics of great work is Grant Allen’s “John Creedy.” So good a story upon so philosophic a basis deserves a place among the best. There is some first-class work to be picked also from the contemporary work of Wells and of Quiller-Couch which reaches a high standard. One little sketch—”Old Oeson” in “Noughts and Crosses” — is, in my opinion, as good as anything of the kind which I have ever read.

And all this didactic talk comes from looking at that old green cover of Poe. I am sure that if I had to name the few books which have really influenced my own life I should have to put this one second only to Macaulay’s Essays. I read it young when my mind was plastic. It stimulated my imagination and set before me a supreme example of dignity and force in the methods of telling a story. It is not altogether a healthy influence, perhaps. It turns the thoughts too forcibly to the morbid and the strange.

He was a saturnine creature, devoid of humour and geniality, with a love for the grotesque and the terrible. The reader must himself furnish the counteracting qualities or Poe may become a dangerous comrade. We know along what perilous tracks and into what deadly quagmires his strange mind led him, down to that grey October Sunday morning when he was picked up, a dying man, on the side-walk at Baltimore, at an age which should have seen him at the very prime of his strength and his manhood.

I have said that I look upon Poe as the world’s supreme short story writer. His nearest rival, I should say, was Maupassant. The great Norman never rose to the extreme force and originality of the American, but he had a natural inherited power, an inborn instinct towards the right way of making his effects, which mark him as a great master. He produced stories because it was in him to do so, as naturally and as perfectly as an apple tree produces apples. What a fine, sensitive, artistic touch it is! How easily and delicately the points are made! How clear and nervous is his style, and how free from that redundancy which disfigures so much of our English work! He pares it down to the quick all the time.

I cannot write the name of Maupassant without recalling what was either a spiritual interposition or an extraordinary coincidence in my own life. I had been travelling in Switzerland and had visited, among other places, that Gemmi Pass, where a huge cliff separates a French from a German canton. On the summit of this cliff was a small inn, where we broke our journey. It was explained to us that, although the inn was inhabited all the year round, still for about three months in winter it was utterly isolated, because it could at any time only be approached by winding paths on the mountain side, and when these became obliterated by snow it was impossible either to come up or to descend. They could see the lights in the valley beneath them, but were as lonely as if they lived in the moon. So curious a situation naturally appealed to one's imagination, and I speedily began to build up a short story in my own mind, depending upon a group of strong antagonistic characters being penned up in this inn, loathing each other and yet utterly unable to get away from each other's society, every day bringing them nearer to tragedy. For a week or so, as I travelled, I was turning over the idea.

At the end of that time I returned through France. Having nothing to read I happened to buy a volume of Maupassant's Tales which I had never seen before. The first story was called "L'Auberge" (The Inn) — and as I ran my eye down the printed page I was amazed to see the two words, "Kandersteg" and "Gemmi Pass." I settled down and read it with ever-growing amazement. The scene was laid in the inn I had visited. The plot depended on the isolation of a group of people through the snowfall. Everything that I imagined was there, save that Maupassant had brought in a savage hound.

Of course, the genesis of the thing is clear enough. He had chanced to visit the inn, and had been impressed as I had been by the same train of thought. All that is quite intelligible. But what is perfectly marvellous is that in that short journey I should have chanced to buy the one book in all the world which would prevent me from making a public fool of myself, for who would ever have believed that my work was not an imitation? I do not think that the hypothesis of coincidence can cover the facts. It is one of several incidents in my life which have convinced me of spiritual interposition — of the promptings of some beneficent force outside ourselves, which tries to help us where it can. The old Catholic doctrine of the Guardian Angel is not only a beautiful one, but has in it, I believe, a real basis of truth.

Or is it that our subliminal ego, to use the jargon of the new psychology, or our astral, in the terms of the new theology, can learn and convey to the mind that which our own known senses are unable to apprehend? But that is too long a side track for us to turn down it.

When Maupassant chose he could run Poe close in that domain of the strange and weird which the American had made so entirely his own. Have you read Maupassant's story called "Le Horla"? That is as good a bit of diablerie as you could wish for. And the Frenchman has, of course, far the broader range. He has a keen sense of humour, breaking out beyond all decorum in some of his stories, but giving a pleasant sub-flavour to all of them. And yet, when all is said, who can doubt that the austere and dreadful American is far the greater and more original mind of the two?

Talking of weird American stories, have you ever read any of the works of Ambrose Bierce? I have one of his works there, “In the Midst of Life.” This man had a flavour quite his own, and was a great artist in his way. It is not cheering reading, but it leaves its mark upon you, and that is the proof of good work.

I have often wondered where Poe got his style. There is a sombre majesty about his best work, as if it were carved from polished jet, which is peculiarly his own. I dare say if I took down that volume I could light anywhere upon a paragraph which would show you what I mean. This is the kind of thing —

“Now there are fine tales in the volumes of the Magi — in the iron-bound melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories of the heaven and of the earth, and of the mighty sea — and of the genius that overruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven. There were much lore, too, in the sayings which were said by the Sybils, and holy, holy things were heard of old by the dim leaves which trembled round Dodona, but as Allah liveth, that fable which the Demon told me as he sat by my side in the shadow of the tomb, I hold to be the most wonderful of all.” Or this sentence: “And then did we, the seven, start from our seats in horror, and stand trembling and aghast, for the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and, varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends.”

Is there not a sense of austere dignity? No man invents a style. It always derives back from some influence, or, as is more usual, it is a compromise between several influences. I cannot trace Poe’s. And yet if Hazlitt and De Quincey had set forth to tell weird stories they might have developed something of the kind.

Now, by your leave, we will pass on to my noble edition of “The Cloister and the Hearth,” the next volume on the left.

I notice, in glancing over my rambling remarks, that I classed “Ivanhoe” as the second historical novel of the century. I dare say there are many who would give “Esmond” the first place, and I can quite understand their position, although it is not my own. I recognise the beauty of the style, the consistency of the character-drawing, the absolutely perfect Queen Anne atmosphere. There was never an historical novel written by a man who knew his period so thoroughly. But, great as these virtues are, they are not the essential in a novel. The essential in a novel is interest, though Addison unkindly remarked that the real essential was that the pastrycooks should never run short of paper. Now "Esmond" is, in my opinion, exceedingly interesting during the campaigns in the Lowlands, and when our Machiavelian hero, the Duke, comes in, and also whenever Lord Mohun shows his ill-omened face; but there are long stretches of the story which are heavy reading. A pre-eminently good novel must always advance and never mark time. "Ivanhoe" never halts for an instant, and that just makes its superiority as a novel over "Esmond," though as a piece of literature I think the latter is the more perfect.

No, if I had three votes, I should plump them all for "The Cloister and the Hearth," as being our greatest historical novel, and, indeed, as being our greatest novel of any sort. I think I may claim to have read most of the more famous foreign novels of last century, and (speaking only for myself and within the limits of my reading) I have been more impressed by that book of Reade's and by Tolstoi's "Peace and War" than by any others. They seem to me to stand at the very top of the century's fiction. There is a certain resemblance in the two — the sense of space, the number of figures, the way in which characters drop in and drop out. The Englishman is the more romantic. The Russian is the more real and earnest. But they are both great.

Think of what Reade does in that one book. He takes the reader by the hand, and he leads him away into the Middle Ages, and not a conventional study-built Middle Age, but a period quivering with life, full of folk who are as human and real as a 'bus-load in Oxford Street. He takes him through Holland, he shows him the painters, the dykes, the life. He leads him down the long line of the Rhine, the spinal marrow of Mediaeval Europe. He shows him the dawn of printing, the beginnings of freedom, the life of the great mercantile cities of South Germany, the state of Italy, the artist-life of Rome, the monastic institutions on the eve of the Reformation. And all this between the covers of one book, so naturally introduced, too, and told with such vividness and spirit. Apart from the huge scope of it, the mere study of Gerard's own nature, his rise, his fall, his regeneration, the whole pitiable tragedy at the end, make the book a great one. It contains, I think, a blending of knowledge with imagination, which makes it stand alone in our literature. Let any one read the “Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini,” and then Charles Reade’s picture of Mediaeval Roman life, if he wishes to appreciate the way in which Reade has collected his rough ore and has then smelted it all down in his fiery imagination. It is a good thing to have the industry to collect facts. It is a greater and a rarer one to have the tact to know how to use them when you have got them. To be exact without pedantry, and thorough without being dull, that should be the ideal of the writer of historical romance.

Reade is one of the most perplexing figures in our literature. Never was there a man so hard to place. At his best he is the best we have. At his worst he is below the level of Surreyside melodrama. But his best have weak pieces, and his worst have good. There is always silk among his cotton, and cotton among his silk. But, for all his flaws, the man who, in addition to the great book, of which I have already spoken, wrote “It is Never Too Late to Mend,” “Hard Cash,” “Foul Play,” and “Griffith Gaunt,” must always stand in the very first rank of our novelists.

There is a quality of heart about his work which I recognise nowhere else. He so absolutely loves his own heroes and heroines, while he so cordially detests his own villains, that he sweeps your emotions along with his own. No one has ever spoken warmly enough of the humanity and the lovability of his women. It is a rare gift — very rare for a man — this power of drawing a human and delightful girl. If there is a better one in nineteenth-century fiction than Julia Dodd I have never had the pleasure of meeting her. A man who could draw a character so delicate and so delightful, and yet could write such an episode as that of the Robber Inn in “The Cloister and the Hearth,” adventurous romance in its highest form, has such a range of power as is granted to few men. My hat is always ready to come off to Charles Reade.

VII.

It is good to have the magic door shut behind us. On the other side of that door are the world and its troubles, hopes and fears, headaches and heartaches, ambitions and disappointments; but within, as you lie back on the green settee, and face the long lines of your silent soothing comrades, there is only peace of spirit and rest of mind in the company of the great dead. Learn to love, learn to admire them; learn to know what their comradeship means; for until you have done so the greatest solace and anodyne God has given to man have not yet shed their blessing upon you. Here behind this magic door is the rest house, where you may forget the past, enjoy the present, and prepare for the future.

You who have sat with me before upon the green settee are familiar with the upper shelf, with the tattered Macaulay, the dapper Gibbon, the drab Boswell, the olive-green Scott, the pied Borrow, and all the goodly company who rub shoulders yonder. By the way, how one wishes that one's dear friends would only be friends also with each other. Why should Borrow snarl so churlishly at Scott? One would have thought that noble spirit and romantic fancy would have charmed the huge vagrant, and yet there is no word too bitter for the younger man to use towards the elder. The fact is that Borrow had one dangerous virus in him — a poison which distorts the whole vision — for he was a bigoted sectarian in religion, seeing no virtue outside his own interpretation of the great riddle. Downright heathendom, the blood-stained Berserk or the chaunting Druid, appealed to his mind through his imagination, but the man of his own creed and time who differed from him in minutiae of ritual, or in the interpretation of mystic passages, was at once evil to the bone, and he had no charity of any sort for such a person. Scott therefore, with his reverent regard for old usages, became at once hateful in his eyes. In any case he was a disappointed man, the big Borrow, and I cannot remember that he ever had much to say that was good of any brother author. Only in the bards of Wales and in the Scalds of the Sagas did he seem to find his kindred spirits, though it has been suggested that his complex nature took this means of informing the world that he could read both Cymric and Norse. But we must not be unkind behind the magic door — and yet to be charitable to the uncharitable is surely the crown of virtue.

So much for the top line, concerning which I have already gossipped for six sittings, but there is no surcease for you, reader, for as you see there is a second line, and yet a third, all equally dear to my heart, and all appealing in the same degree to my emotions and to my memory. Be as patient as you may, while I talk of these old friends, and tell you why I love them, and all that they have meant to me in the past. If you picked any book from that line you would be picking a little fibre also from my mind, very small, no doubt, and yet an intimate and essential part of what is now myself. Hereditary impulses, personal experiences, books — those are the three forces which go to the making of man. These are the books.

This second line consists, as you see, of novelists of the eighteenth century, or those of them whom I regard as essential. After all, putting aside single books, such as Sterne's "Tristram Shandy," Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield," and Miss Burney's "Evelina," there are only three authors who count, and they in turn wrote only three books each, of first-rate importance, so that by the mastery of nine books one might claim to have a fairly broad view of this most important and distinctive branch of English literature. The three men are, of course, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett. The books are: Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe," "Pamela," and "Sir Charles Grandison"; Fielding's "Tom Jones", "Joseph Andrews," and "Amelia"; Smollett's "Peregrine Pickle," "Humphrey Clinker," and "Roderick Random." There we have the real work of the three great contemporaries who illuminated the middle of the eighteenth century — only nine volumes in all. Let us walk round these nine volumes, therefore, and see whether we cannot discriminate and throw a little light, after this interval of a hundred and fifty years, upon their comparative aims, and how far they have justified them by the permanent value of their work. A fat little bookseller in the City, a rakehell wit of noble blood, and a rugged Scotch surgeon from the navy — those are the three strange immortals who now challenge a comparison — the three men who dominate the fiction of their century, and to whom we owe it that the life and the types of that century are familiar to us, their fifth generation.

It is not a subject to be dogmatic upon, for I can imagine that these three writers would appeal quite differently to every temperament, and that whichever one might desire to champion one could find arguments to sustain one's choice. Yet I cannot think that any large section of the critical public could maintain that Smollett was on the same level as the other two. Ethically he is gross, though his grossness is accompanied by a full-blooded humour which is more mirth-compelling than the more polished wit of his rivals. I can remember in callow boyhood — puris omnia pura — reading "Peregrine Pickle," and laughing until I cried over the Banquet in the Fashion of the Ancients. I read it again in my manhood with the same effect, though with a greater appreciation of its inherent bestiality. That merit, a gross primitive merit, he has in a high degree, but in no other respect can he challenge comparison with either Fielding or Richardson. His view of life is far more limited, his characters less varied, his incidents less distinctive, and his thoughts less deep. Assuredly I, for one, should award him the third place in the trio.

But how about Richardson and Fielding? There is indeed a competition of giants. Let us take the points of each in turn, and then compare them with each other.

There is one characteristic, the rarest and subtlest of all, which each of them had in a supreme degree. Each could draw the most delightful women — the most perfect women, I think, in the whole range of our literature. If the eighteenth-century women were like that, then the eighteenth-century men got a great deal more than they ever deserved. They had such a charming little dignity of their own, such good sense, and yet such dear, pretty, dainty ways, so human and so charming, that even now they become our ideals. One cannot come to know them without a double emotion, one of respectful devotion towards themselves, and the other of abhorrence for the herd of swine who surrounded them. Pamela, Harriet Byron, Clarissa, Amelia, and Sophia Western were all equally delightful, and it was not the negative charm of the innocent and colourless woman, the amiable doll of the nineteenth century, but it was a beauty of nature depending upon an alert mind, clear and strong principles, true womanly feelings, and complete feminine charm. In this respect our rival authors may claim a tie, for I could not give a preference to one set of these perfect creatures over another. The plump little printer and the worn-out man-about-town had each a supreme woman in his mind.

But their men! Alas, what a drop is there! To say that we are all capable of doing what Tom Jones did — as I have seen stated — is the worst form of inverted cant, the cant which makes us out worse than we are. It is a libel on mankind to say that a man who truly loves a woman is usually false to her, and, above all, a libel that he should be false in the vile fashion which aroused good Tom Newcome's indignation. Tom Jones was no more fit to touch the hem of Sophia's dress than Captain Booth was to be the mate of Amelia. Never once has Fielding drawn a gentleman, save perhaps Squire Alworthy. A lusty, brawling, good-hearted, material creature was the best that he could fashion. Where, in his heroes, is there one touch of distinction, of spirituality, of nobility? Here I think that the plebeian printer has done very much better than the aristocrat. Sir Charles Grandison is a very noble type — spoiled a little by over-coddling on the part of his creator, perhaps, but a very high-souled and exquisite gentleman all the same. Had *he* married Sophia or Amelia I should not have forbidden the banns. Even the persevering Mr. B — - and the too amorous Lovelace were, in spite of their aberrations, men of gentle nature, and had possibilities of greatness and tenderness within them. Yes, I cannot doubt that Richardson drew the higher type of man — and that in Grandison he has done what has seldom or never been bettered.

Richardson was also the subtler and deeper writer, in my opinion. He concerns himself with fine consistent character-drawing, and with a very searching analysis of the human heart, which is done so easily, and in such simple English, that the depth and truth of it only come upon reflection. He condescends to none of those scuffles and buffetings and pantomime rallies which enliven, but cheapen, many of Fielding's pages. The latter has, it may be granted, a broader view of life. He had personal acquaintance of circles far above, and also far below, any which the douce citizen, who was his rival, had ever been able or willing to explore. His pictures of low London life, the prison scenes in "Amelia," the thieves' kitchens in "Jonathan Wild," the sponging houses and the slums, are as vivid and as complete as those of his friend Hogarth — the most British of artists, even as Fielding was the most British of writers. But the greatest and most permanent facts of life are to be found in the smallest circles. Two men and a woman may furnish either the tragedian or the comedian with the most satisfying theme. And so, although his range was limited, Richardson knew very clearly and very thoroughly just that knowledge which was essential for his purpose. Pamela, the perfect woman of humble life, Clarissa, the perfect lady, Grandison the ideal gentleman — these were the three figures on which he lavished his most loving art. And now, after one hundred and fifty years, I do not know where we may find more satisfying types.

He was prolix, it may be admitted, but who could bear to have him cut? He loved to sit down and tell you just all about it. His use of letters for his narratives made this gossipy style more easy. First *he* writes and he tells all that passed. You have his letter. *She* at the same time writes to her friend, and also states her views. This also you see. The friends in each case reply, and you have the advantage of their comments and advice. You really do know all about it before you finish. It may be a little wearisome at first, if you have been accustomed to a more hustling style with fireworks in every chapter. But gradually it creates an atmosphere in which you live, and you come to know these people, with their characters and their troubles, as you know no others of the dream-folk of fiction. Three times as long as an ordinary book, no doubt, but why grudge the time? What is the hurry? Surely it is better to read one masterpiece than three books which will leave no permanent impression on the mind.

It was all attuned to the sedate life of that, the last of the quiet centuries. In the lonely country-house, with few letters and fewer papers, do you suppose that the readers ever complained of the length of a book, or could have too much of the happy Pamela or of the unhappy Clarissa? It is only under extraordinary circumstances that one can now get into that receptive frame of mind which was normal then. Such an occasion is recorded by Macaulay, when he tells how in some Indian hill station, where books were rare, he let loose a copy of “Clarissa.” The effect was what might have been expected. Richardson in a suitable environment went through the community like a mild fever. They lived him, and dreamed him, until the whole episode passed into literary history, never to be forgotten by those who experienced it. It is tuned, for every ear. That beautiful style is so correct and yet so simple that there is no page which a scholar may not applaud nor a servant-maid understand.

Of course, there are obvious disadvantages to the tale which is told in letters. Scott reverted to it in “Guy Mannering,” and there are other conspicuous successes, but vividness is always gained at the expense of a strain upon the reader’s good-nature and credulity. One feels that these constant details, these long conversations, could not possibly have been recorded in such a fashion. The indignant and dishevelled heroine could not sit down and record her escape with such cool minuteness of description.

Richardson does it as well as it could be done, but it remains intrinsically faulty. Fielding, using the third person, broke all the fetters which bound his rival, and gave a freedom and personal authority to the novel which it had never before enjoyed. There at least he is the master.

And yet, on the whole, my balance inclines towards Richardson, though I dare say I am one in a hundred in thinking so. First of all, beyond anything I may have already urged, he had the supreme credit of having been the first. Surely the originator should have a higher place than the imitator, even if in imitating he should also improve and amplify. It is Richardson and not Fielding who is the father of the English novel, the man who first saw that without romantic gallantry, and without bizarre imaginings, enthralling stories may be made from everyday life, told in everyday language. This was his great new departure. So entirely was Fielding his imitator, or rather perhaps his parodist, that with supreme audacity (some would say brazen impudence) he used poor Richardson’s own characters, taken from “Pamela,” in his own first novel, “Joseph Andrews,” and used them too for the unkind purpose of ridiculing them. As a matter of literary ethics, it is as if Thackeray wrote a novel bringing in Pickwick and Sam Weller in order to show what faulty characters these were. It is no wonder that even the gentle little printer grew wroth, and alluded to his rival as a somewhat unscrupulous man.

And then there is the vexed question of morals. Surely in talking of this also there is a good deal of inverted cant among a certain class of critics. The inference appears to be that there is some subtle connection between immorality and art, as if the handling of the lewd, or the depicting of it, were in some sort the hallmark of the true artist. It is not difficult to handle or depict. On the contrary, it is so easy, and so essentially dramatic in many of its forms, that the temptation to employ it is ever present. It is the easiest and cheapest of all methods of creating a spurious effect. The difficulty does not lie in doing it. The difficulty lies in avoiding it. But one tries to avoid it because on the face of it there is no reason why a writer should cease to be a gentleman, or that he should write for a woman’s eyes that which he would be justly knocked down for having said in a woman’s ears. But “you must draw the world as it is.” Why must you? Surely it is just in selection and restraint that the artist is shown. It is true that in a coarser age great writers heeded no restrictions, but life itself had fewer restrictions then. We are of our own age, and must live up to it.

But must these sides of life be absolutely excluded? By no means. Our decency need not weaken into prudery. It all lies in the spirit in which it is done. No one who wished to lecture on these various spirits could preach on a better text than these three great rivals, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett. It is possible to draw vice with some freedom for the purpose of condemning it. Such a writer is a moralist, and there is no better example than Richardson. Again, it is possible to draw vice with neither sympathy nor disapprobation, but simply as a fact which is there. Such a writer is a realist, and such was Fielding. Once more, it is possible to draw vice in order to extract amusement from it. Such a man is a coarse humorist, and such was Smollett. Lastly, it is possible to draw vice in order to show sympathy with it. Such a man is a wicked man, and there were many among the writers of the Restoration. But of all reasons that exist for treating this side of life, Richardson's were the best, and nowhere do we find it more deftly done.

Apart from his writings, there must have been something very noble about Fielding as a man. He was a better hero than any that he drew. Alone he accepted the task of cleansing London, at that time the most dangerous and lawless of European capitals. Hogarth's pictures give some notion of it in the pre-Fielding days, the low roughs, the high-born bullies, the drunkenness, the villainies, the thieves' kitchens with their riverside trapdoors, down which the body is thrust. This was the Augean stable which had to be cleaned, and poor Hercules was weak and frail and physically more fitted for a sick-room than for such a task. It cost him his life, for he died at 47, worn out with his own exertions. It might well have cost him his life in more dramatic fashion, for he had become a marked man to the criminal classes, and he headed his own search-parties when, on the information of some bribed rascal, a new den of villainy was exposed. But he carried his point. In little more than a year the thing was done, and London turned from the most rowdy to what it has ever since remained, the most law-abiding of European capitals. Has any man ever left a finer monument behind him?

If you want the real human Fielding you will find him not in the novels, where his real kindliness is too often veiled by a mock cynicism, but in his “Diary of his Voyage to Lisbon.” He knew that his health was irretrievably ruined and that his years were numbered. Those are the days when one sees a man as he is, when he has no longer a motive for affectation or pretence in the immediate presence of the most tremendous of all realities. Yet, sitting in the shadow of death, Fielding displayed a quiet, gentle courage and constancy of mind, which show how splendid a nature had been shrouded by his earlier frailties.

Just one word upon another eighteenth-century novel before I finish this somewhat didactic chat. You will admit that I have never prosed so much before, but the period and the subject seem to encourage it. I skip Sterne, for I have no great sympathy with his finicky methods. And I skip Miss Burney's novels, as being feminine reflections of the great masters who had just preceded her. But Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield" surely deserves one paragraph to itself. There is a book which is tinged throughout, as was all Goldsmith's work, with a beautiful nature. No one who had not a fine heart could have written it, just as no one without a fine heart could have written "The Deserted Village." How strange it is to think of old Johnson patronizing or snubbing the shrinking Irishman, when both in poetry, in fiction, and in the drama the latter has proved himself far the greater man. But here is an object-lesson of how the facts of life may be treated without offence. Nothing is shirked. It is all faced and duly recorded. Yet if I wished to set before the sensitive mind of a young girl a book which would prepare her for life without in any way contaminating her delicacy of feeling, there is no book which I should choose so readily as "The Vicar of Wakefield."

So much for the eighteenth-century novelists. They have a shelf of their own in the case, and a corner of their own in my brain. For years you may never think of them, and then suddenly some stray word or train of thought leads straight to them, and you look at them and love them, and rejoice that you know them. But let us pass to something which may interest you more.

If statistics could be taken in the various free libraries of the kingdom to prove the comparative popularity of different novelists with the public, I think that it is quite certain that Mr. George Meredith would come out very low indeed. If, on the other hand, a number of authors were convened to determine which of their fellow-craftsmen they considered the greatest and the most stimulating to their own minds, I am equally confident that Mr. Meredith would have a vast preponderance of votes. Indeed, his only conceivable rival would be Mr. Hardy. It becomes an interesting study, therefore, why there should be such a divergence of opinion as to his merits, and what the qualities are which have repelled so many readers, and yet have attracted those whose opinion must be allowed to have a special weight.

The most obvious reason is his complete unconventionality. The public read to be amused. The novelist reads to have new light thrown upon his art. To read Meredith is not a mere amusement; it is an intellectual exercise, a kind of mental dumb-bell with which you develop your thinking powers. Your mind is in a state of tension the whole time that you are reading him.

If you will follow my nose as the sportsman follows that of his pointer, you will observe that these remarks are excited by the presence of my beloved “Richard Feverel,” which lurks in yonder corner. What a great book it is, how wise and how witty! Others of the master’s novels may be more characteristic or more profound, but for my own part it is the one which I would always present to the new-comer who had not yet come under the influence. I think that I should put it third after “Vanity Fair” and “The Cloister and the Hearth” if I had to name the three novels which I admire most in the Victorian era. The book was published, I believe, in 1859, and it is almost incredible, and says little for the discrimination of critics or public, that it was nearly twenty years before a second edition was needed.

But there are never effects without causes, however inadequate the cause may be. What was it that stood in the way of the book’s success? Undoubtedly it was the style. And yet it is subdued and tempered here with little of the luxuriance and exuberance which it attained in the later works. But it was an innovation, and it stalled off both the public and the critics. They regarded it, no doubt, as an affectation, as Carlyle’s had been considered twenty years before, forgetting that in the case of an original genius style is an organic thing, part of the man as much as the colour of his eyes. It is not, to quote Carlyle, a shirt to be taken on and off at pleasure, but a skin, eternally fixed. And this strange, powerful style, how is it to be described? Best, perhaps, in his own strong words, when he spoke of Carlyle with perhaps the arriere pensee that the words would apply as strongly to himself.

“His favourite author,” says he, “was one writing on heroes in a style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed. A wind-in-the-orchard style that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster, sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and joints."

What a wonderful description and example of style! And how vivid is the impression left by such expressions as "all the pages in a breeze." As a comment on Carlyle, and as a sample of Meredith, the passage is equally perfect.

Well, "Richard Feverel" has come into its own at last. I confess to having a strong belief in the critical discernment of the public. I do not think good work is often overlooked. Literature, like water, finds its true level. Opinion is slow to form, but it sets true at last. I am sure that if the critics were to unite to praise a bad book or to damn a good one they could (and continually do) have a five-year influence, but it would in no wise affect the final result. Sheridan said that if all the fleas in his bed had been unanimous, they could have pushed him out of it. I do not think that any unanimity of critics has ever pushed a good book out of literature.

Among the minor excellences of "Richard Feverel" — excuse the prolixity of an enthusiast — are the scattered aphorisms which are worthy of a place among our British proverbs. What could be more exquisite than this, "Who rises from prayer a better man his prayer is answered"; or this, "Expediency is man's wisdom. Doing right is God's"; or, "All great thoughts come from the heart"? Good are the words "The coward amongst us is he who sneers at the failings of humanity," and a healthy optimism rings in the phrase "There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness; from that uppermost pinnacle of wisdom whence we see that this world is well designed." In more playful mood is "Woman is the last thing which will be civilised by man." Let us hurry away abruptly, for he who starts quotation from "Richard Feverel" is lost.

He has, as you see, a goodly line of his brothers beside him. There are the Italian ones, "Sandra Belloni," and "Vittoria"; there is "Rhoda Fleming," which carried Stevenson off his critical feet; "Beauchamp's Career," too, dealing with obsolete politics. No great writer should spend himself upon a temporary theme. It is like the beauty who is painted in some passing fashion of gown. She tends to become obsolete along with her frame. Here also is the dainty "Diana," the egoist with immortal Willoughby Pattern, eternal type of masculine selfishness, and "Harry Richmond," the first chapters of which are, in my opinion, among the finest pieces of narrative prose in the language. That great mind would have worked in any form which his age had favoured. He is a novelist by accident. As an Elizabethan he would have been a great dramatist; under Queen Anne a great essayist. But whatever medium he worked in, he must equally have thrown the image of a great brain and a great soul.

VIII.

We have left our eighteenth-century novelists — Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett — safely behind us, with all their solidity and their audacity, their sincerity, and their coarseness of fibre. They have brought us, as you perceive, to the end of the shelf. What, not wearied? Ready for yet another? Let us run down this next row, then, and I will tell you a few things which may be of interest, though they will be dull enough if you have not been born with that love of books in your heart which is among the choicest gifts of the gods. If that is wanting, then one might as well play music to the deaf, or walk round the Academy with the colour-blind, as appeal to the book-sense of an unfortunate who has it not.

There is this old brown volume in the corner. How it got there I cannot imagine, for it is one of those which I bought for threepence out of the remnant box in Edinburgh, and its weather-beaten comrades are up yonder in the back gallery, while this one has elbowed its way among the quality in the stalls. But it is worth a word or two. Take it out and handle it! See how swarthy it is, how squat, with how bullet-proof a cover of scaling leather. Now open the fly-leaf "Ex libris Guilielmi Whyte. 1672" in faded yellow ink. I wonder who William Whyte may have been, and what he did upon earth in the reign of the merry monarch. A pragmatical seventeenth-century lawyer, I should judge, by that hard, angular writing. The date of issue is 1642, so it was printed just about the time when the Pilgrim Fathers were settling down into their new American home, and the first Charles's head was still firm upon his shoulders, though a little puzzled, no doubt, at what was going on around it. The book is in Latin — though Cicero might not have admitted it — and it treats of the laws of warfare.

I picture some pedantic Dugald Dalgetty bearing it about under his buff coat, or down in his holster, and turning up the reference for every fresh emergency which occurred. "Hullo! here's a well!" says he. "I wonder if I may poison it?" Out comes the book, and he runs a dirty forefinger down the index. "Ob fas est aquam hostis venere," etc. "Tut, tut, it's not allowed. But here are some of the enemy in a barn? What about that?" "Ob fas est hostem incendio," etc. "Yes; he says we may. Quick, Ambrose, up with the straw and the tinder box." Warfare was no child's play about the time when

Tilly sacked Magdeburg, and Cromwell turned his hand from the mash tub to the sword. It might not be much better now in a long campaign, when men were hardened and embittered. Many of these laws are unrepealed, and it is less than a century since highly disciplined British troops claimed their dreadful rights at Badajos and Rodrigo. Recent European wars have been so short that discipline and humanity have not had time to go to pieces, but a long war would show that man is ever the same, and that civilization is the thinnest of veneers.

Now you see that whole row of books which takes you at one sweep nearly across the shelf? I am rather proud of those, for they are my collection of Napoleonic military memoirs. There is a story told of an illiterate millionaire who gave a wholesale dealer an order for a copy of all books in any language treating of any aspect of Napoleon's career. He thought it would fill a case in his library. He was somewhat taken aback, however, when in a few weeks he received a message from the dealer that he had got 40,000 volumes, and awaited instructions as to whether he should send them on as an instalment, or wait for a complete set. The figures may not be exact, but at least they bring home the impossibility of exhausting the subject, and the danger of losing one's self for years in a huge labyrinth of reading, which may end by leaving no very definite impression upon your mind. But one might, perhaps, take a corner of it, as I have done here in the military memoirs, and there one might hope to get some finality.

Here is Marbot at this end — the first of all soldier books in the world. This is the complete three-volume French edition, with red and gold cover, smart and debonnaire like its author. Here he is in one frontispiece with his pleasant, round, boyish face, as a Captain of his beloved Chasseurs. And here in the other is the grizzled old bull-dog as a full general, looking as full of fight as ever. It was a real blow to me when some one began to throw doubts upon the authenticity of Marbot's memoirs. Homer may be dissolved into a crowd of skin-clad bards. Even Shakespeare may be jostled in his throne of honour by plausible Baconians; but the human, the gallant, the inimitable Marbot! His book is that which gives us the best picture by far of the Napoleonic soldiers, and to me they are even more interesting than their great leader, though his must ever be the most singular figure in history. But those soldiers, with their huge shakoes, their hairy knapsacks, and their hearts of steel — what men they were! And what a latent power there must be in this French nation which could go on pouring out the blood of its sons for twenty-three years with hardly a pause!

It took all that time to work off the hot ferment which the Revolution had left in men’s veins. And they were not exhausted, for the very last fight which the French fought was the finest of all. Proud as we are of our infantry at Waterloo, it was really with the French cavalry that the greenest laurels of that great epic rested. They got the better of our own cavalry, they took our guns again and again, they swept a large portion of our allies from the field, and finally they rode off unbroken, and as full of fight as ever. Read Gronow’s “Memoirs,” that chatty little yellow volume yonder which brings all that age back to us more vividly than any more pretentious work, and you will find the chivalrous admiration which our officers expressed at the fine performance of the French horsemen.

It must be admitted that, looking back upon history, we have not always been good allies, nor yet generous co-partners in the battlefield. The first is the fault of our politics, where one party rejoices to break what the other has bound. The makers of the Treaty are staunch enough, as the Tories were under Pitt and Castlereagh, or the Whigs at the time of Queen Anne, but sooner or later the others must come in. At the end of the Marlborough wars we suddenly vamped up a peace and, left our allies in the lurch, on account of a change in domestic politics. We did the same with Frederick the Great, and would have done it in the Napoleonic days if Fox could have controlled the country. And as to our partners of the battlefield, how little we have ever said that is hearty as to the splendid staunchness of the Prussians at Waterloo. You have to read the Frenchman, Houssaye, to get a central view and to understand the part they played. Think of old Blucher, seventy years old, and ridden over by a regiment of charging cavalry the day before, yet swearing that he would come to Wellington if he had to be strapped to his horse. He nobly redeemed his promise.

The loss of the Prussians at Waterloo was not far short of our own. You would not know it, to read our historians. And then the abuse of our Belgian allies has been overdone. Some of them fought splendidly, and one brigade of infantry had a share in the critical instant when the battle was turned. This also you would not learn from British sources. Look at our Portuguese allies also! They trained into magnificent troops, and one of Wellington’s earnest desires was to have ten thousand of them for his Waterloo campaign. It was a Portuguese who first topped the rampart of Badajos.

They have never had their due credit, nor have the Spaniards either, for, though often defeated, it was their unconquerable pertinacity which played a great part in the struggle. No; I do not think that we are very amiable partners, but I suppose that all national history may be open to a similar charge.

It must be confessed that Marbot's details are occasionally a little hard to believe. Never in the pages of Lever has there been such a series of hairbreadth escapes and dare-devil exploits. Surely he stretched it a little sometimes. You may remember his adventure at Eylau — I think it was Eylau — how a cannon-ball, striking the top of his helmet, paralyzed him by the concussion of his spine; and how, on a Russian officer running forward to cut him down, his horse bit the man's face nearly off. This was the famous charger which savaged everything until Marbot, having bought it for next to nothing, cured it by thrusting a boiling leg of mutton into its mouth when it tried to bite him. It certainly does need a robust faith to get over these incidents. And yet, when one reflects upon the hundreds of battles and skirmishes which a Napoleonic officer must have endured — how they must have been the uninterrupted routine of his life from the first dark hair upon his lip to the first grey one upon his head, it is presumptuous to say what may or may not have been possible in such unparalleled careers. At any rate, be it fact or fiction — fact it is, in my opinion, with some artistic touching up of the high lights — there are few books which I could not spare from my shelves better than the memoirs of the gallant Marbot.

I dwell upon this particular book because it is the best; but take the whole line, and there is not one which is not full of interest. Marbot gives you the point of view of the officer. So does De Segur and De Fezensac and Colonel Gonville, each in some different branch of the service. But some are from the pens of the men in the ranks, and they are even more graphic than the others. Here, for example, are the papers of good old Cogniet, who was a grenadier of the Guard, and could neither read nor write until after the great wars were over. A tougher soldier never went into battle. Here is Sergeant Bourgogne, also with his dreadful account of that nightmare campaign in Russia, and the gallant Chevillet, trumpeter of Chasseurs, with his matter-of-fact account of all that he saw, where the daily "combat" is sandwiched in betwixt the real business of the day, which was foraging for his frugal breakfast and supper. There is no better writing, and no easier reading, than the records of these men of action.

A Briton cannot help asking himself, as he realises what men these were, what would have happened if 150,000 Cogniets and Bourgognes, with Marbots to lead them, and the great captain of all time in the prime of his vigour at their head, had made their landing in Kent? For months it was touch-and-go. A single naval slip which left the Channel clear would have been followed by an embarkation from Boulogne, which had been brought by constant practice to so incredibly fine a point that the last horse was aboard within two hours of the start. Any evening might have seen the whole host upon the Pevensey Flats. What then? We know what Humbert did with a handful of men in Ireland, and the story is not reassuring. Conquest, of course, is unthinkable. The world in arms could not do that. But Napoleon never thought of the conquest of Britain. He has expressly disclaimed it. What he did contemplate was a gigantic raid in which he would do so much damage that for years to come England would be occupied at home in picking up the pieces, instead of having energy to spend abroad in thwarting his Continental plans.

Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Sheerness in flames, with London either levelled to the ground or ransomed at his own figure — that was a more feasible programme. Then, with the united fleets of conquered Europe at his back, enormous armies and an inexhaustible treasury, swollen with the ransom of Britain, he could turn to that conquest of America which would win back the old colonies of France and leave him master of the world. If the worst happened and he had met his Waterloo upon the South Downs, he would have done again what he did in Egypt and once more in Russia: hurried back to France in a swift vessel, and still had force enough to hold his own upon the Continent. It would, no doubt, have been a big stake to lay upon the table — 150,000 of his best — but he could play again if he lost; while, if he won, he cleared the board. A fine game — if little Nelson had not stopped it, and with one blow fixed the edge of salt water as the limit of Napoleon’s power.

There’s the cast of a medal on the top of that cabinet which will bring it all close home to you. It is taken from the die of the medal which Napoleon had arranged to issue on the day that he reached London. It serves, at any rate, to show that his great muster was not a bluff, but that he really did mean serious business. On one side is his head. On the other France is engaged in strangling and throwing to earth a curious fish-tailed creature, which stands for perfidious Albion. “Frappe a Londres” is printed on one part of it, and “La Descente dans Angleterre” upon another. Struck to commemorate a conquest, it remains now as a souvenir of a fiasco. But it was a close call.

By the way, talking of Napoleon’s flight from Egypt, did you ever see a curious little book called, if I remember right, “Intercepted Letters”? No; I have no copy upon this shelf, but a friend is more fortunate. It shows the almost incredible hatred which existed at the end of the eighteenth century between the two nations, descending even to the most petty personal annoyance. On this occasion the British Government intercepted a mail-bag of letters coming from French officers in Egypt to their friends at home, and they either published them, or at least allowed them to be published, in the hope, no doubt, of causing domestic complications. Was ever a more despicable action? But who knows what other injuries had been inflicted to draw forth such a retaliation? I have myself seen a burned and mutilated British mail lying where De Wet had left it; but suppose the refinement of his vengeance had gone so far as to publish it, what a thunder-bolt it might have been!

As to the French officers, I have read their letters, though even after a century one had a feeling of guilt when one did so. But, on the whole, they are a credit to the writers, and give the impression of a noble and chivalrous set of men. Whether they were all addressed to the right people is another matter, and therein lay the poisoned sting of this most un-British affair. As to the monstrous things which were done upon the other side, remember the arrest of all the poor British tourists and commercials who chanced to be in France when the war was renewed in 1803. They had run over in all trust and confidence for a little outing and change of air. They certainly got it, for Napoleon’s steel grip fell upon them, and they rejoined their families in 1814. He must have had a heart of adamant and a will of iron. Look at his conduct over the naval prisoners. The natural proceeding would have been to exchange them. For some reason he did not think it good policy to do so. All representations from the British Government were set aside, save in the case of the higher officers. Hence the miseries of the hulks and the dreadful prison barracks in England. Hence also the unhappy idlers of Verdun. What splendid loyalty there must have been in those humble Frenchmen which never allowed them for one instant to turn bitterly upon the author of all their great misfortunes. It is all brought vividly home by the description of their prisons given by Borrow in “Lavengro.” This is the passage —

“What a strange appearance had those mighty casernes, with their blank, blind walls, without windows or grating, and their slanting roofs, out of which, through orifices where the tiles had been removed, would be protruded dozens of grim heads, feasting their prison-sick eyes on the wide expanse of country unfolded from their airy height. Ah! there was much misery in those casernes; and from those roofs, doubtless, many a wistful look was turned in the direction of lovely France. Much had the poor inmates to endure, and much to complain of, to the disgrace of England be it said — of England, in general so kind and bountiful. Rations of carrion meat, and bread from which I have seen the very hounds occasionally turn away, were unworthy entertainment even for the most ruffian enemy, when helpless and captive; and such, alas! was the fare in those casernes. And then, those visits, or rather ruthless inroads, called in the slang of the place ‘straw-plait hunts,’ when in pursuit of a contraband article, which the prisoners, in order to procure themselves a few of the necessaries and comforts of existence, were in the habit of making, red-coated battalions were marched into the prisons, who, with the bayonet’s point, carried havoc and ruin into every poor convenience which ingenious wretchedness had been endeavouring to raise around it; and then the triumphant exit with the miserable booty, and worst of all, the accursed bonfire, on the barrack parade of the plait contraband, beneath the view of glaring eyeballs from those lofty roofs, amid the hurrahs of the troops frequently drowned in the curses poured down from above like a tempest-shower, or in the terrific war-whoop of ‘Vive l’Empereur!’”

There is a little vignette of Napoleon’s men in captivity. Here is another which is worth preserving of the bearing of his veterans when wounded on the field of battle. It is from Mercer’s recollections of the Battle of Waterloo. Mercer had spent the day firing case into the French cavalry at ranges from fifty to two hundred yards, losing two-thirds of his own battery in the process. In the evening he had a look at some of his own grim handiwork.

“I had satisfied my curiosity at Hougoumont, and was retracing my steps up the hill when my attention was called to a group of wounded Frenchmen by the calm, dignified, and soldier-like oration addressed by one of them to the rest. I cannot, like Livy, compose a fine harangue for my hero, and, of course, I could not retain the precise words, but the import of them was to exhort them to bear their sufferings with fortitude; not to repine, like women or children, at what every soldier should have made up his mind to suffer as the fortune of war, but above all, to remember that they were surrounded by Englishmen, before whom they ought to be doubly careful not to disgrace themselves by displaying such an unsoldier-like want of fortitude.

“The speaker was sitting on the ground with his lance stuck upright beside him — an old veteran with thick bushy, grizzly beard, countenance like a lion — a lancer of the old guard, and no doubt had fought in many a field. One hand was flourished in the air as he spoke, the other, severed at the wrist, lay on the earth beside him; one ball (case-shot, probably) had entered his body, another had broken his leg. His suffering, after a night of exposure so mangled, must have been great; yet he betrayed it not. His bearing was that of a Roman, or perhaps an Indian warrior, and I could fancy him concluding appropriately his speech in the words of the Mexican king, ‘And I too; am I on a bed of roses?’”

What a load of moral responsibility upon one man! But his mind was insensible to moral responsibility. Surely if it had not been it must have been crushed beneath it. Now, if you want to understand the character of Napoleon — but surely I must take a fresh start before I launch on so portentous a subject as that.

But before I leave the military men let me, for the credit of my own country, after that infamous incident of the letters, indicate these six well-thumbed volumes of “Napier’s History.” This is the story of the great Peninsular War, by one who fought through it himself, and in no history has a more chivalrous and manly account been given of one’s enemy. Indeed, Napier seems to me to push it too far, for his admiration appears to extend not only to the gallant soldiers who opposed him, but to the character and to the ultimate aims of their leader. He was, in fact, a political follower of Charles James Fox, and his heart seems to have been with the enemy even at the moment when he led his men most desperately against them. In the verdict of history the action of those men who, in their honest zeal for freedom, inflamed somewhat by political strife, turned against their own country, when it was in truth the Champion of Freedom, and approved of a military despot of the most uncompromising kind, seems wildly foolish.

But if Napier's politics may seem strange, his soldiering was splendid, and his prose among the very best that I know. There are passages in that work — the one which describes the breach of Badajos, that of the charge of the Fusiliers at Albuera, and that of the French advance at Fuentes d'Onoro — which once read haunt the mind for ever. The book is a worthy monument of a great national epic. Alas! for the pregnant sentence with which it closes, "So ended the great war, and with it all memory of the services of the veterans." Was there ever a British war of which the same might not have been written?

The quotation which I have given from Mercer's book turns my thoughts in the direction of the British military reminiscences of that period, less numerous, less varied, and less central than the French, but full of character and interest all the same. I have found that if I am turned loose in a large library, after hesitating over covers for half an hour or so, it is usually a book of soldier memoirs which I take down. Man is never so interesting as when he is thoroughly in earnest, and no one is so earnest as he whose life is at stake upon the event. But of all types of soldier the best is the man who is keen upon his work, and yet has general culture which enables him to see that work in its due perspective, and to sympathize with the gentler aspirations of mankind. Such a man is Mercer, an ice-cool fighter, with a sense of discipline and decorum which prevented him from moving when a bombshell was fizzing between his feet, and yet a man of thoughtful and philosophic temperament, with a weakness for solitary musings, for children, and for flowers. He has written for all time the classic account of a great battle, seen from the point of view of a battery commander. Many others of Wellington's soldiers wrote their personal reminiscences. You can get them, as I have them there, in the pleasant abridgement of "Wellington's Men" (admirably edited by Dr. Fitchett) — Anton the Highlander, Harris the rifleman, and Kincaid of the same corps. It is a most singular fate which has made an Australian nonconformist clergyman the most sympathetic and eloquent reconstructor of those old heroes, but it is a noble example of that unity of the British race, which in fifty scattered lands still mourns or rejoices over the same historic record.

And just one word, before I close down this over-long and too discursive chatter, on the subject of yonder twin red volumes which flank the shelf. They are Maxwell's "History of Wellington," and I do not think you will find a better or more readable one. The reader must ever feel towards the great soldier what his own immediate followers felt, respect rather than affection. One’s failure to attain a more affectionate emotion is alleviated by the knowledge that it was the last thing which he invited or desired. “Don’t be a damned fool, sir!” was his exhortation to the good citizen who had paid him a compliment. It was a curious, callous nature, brusque and limited. The hardest huntsman learns to love his hounds, but he showed no affection and a good deal of contempt for the men who had been his instruments. “They are the scum of the earth,” said he. “All English soldiers are fellows who have enlisted for drink. That is the plain fact — they have all enlisted for drink.” His general orders were full of undeserved reproaches at a time when the most lavish praise could hardly have met the real deserts of his army. When the wars were done he saw little, save in his official capacity, of his old comrades-in-arms. And yet, from major-general to drummer-boy, he was the man whom they would all have elected to serve under, had the work to be done once more. As one of them said, “The sight of his long nose was worth ten thousand men on a field of battle.” They were themselves a leathery breed, and cared little for the gentler amenities so long as the French were well drubbed.

His mind, which was comprehensive and alert in warfare, was singularly limited in civil affairs. As a statesman he was so constant an example of devotion to duty, self-sacrifice, and high disinterested character, that the country was the better for his presence. But he fiercely opposed Catholic Emancipation, the Reform Bill, and everything upon which our modern life is founded. He could never be brought to see that a pyramid should stand on its base and not on its apex, and that the larger the pyramid, the broader should be the base. Even in military affairs he was averse from every change, and I know of no improvements which came from his initiative during all those years when his authority was supreme. The floggings which broke a man’s spirit and self-respect, the leathern stock which hampered his movements, all the old traditional regime found a champion in him. On the other hand, he strongly opposed the introduction of the percussion cap as opposed to the flint and steel in the musket. Neither in war nor in politics did he rightly judge the future.

And yet in reading his letters and dispatches, one is surprised sometimes at the incisive thought and its vigorous expression. There is a passage in which he describes the way in which his soldiers would occasionally desert into some town which he was besieging. “They knew,” he writes, “that they must be taken, for when we lay our bloody hands upon a place we are sure to take it, sooner or later; but they liked being dry and under cover, and then that extraordinary caprice which always pervades the English character! Our deserters are very badly treated by the enemy; those who deserted in France were treated as the lowest of mortals, slaves and scavengers. Nothing but English caprice can account for it; just what makes our noblemen associate with stage-coach drivers, and become stage-coach drivers themselves.” After reading that passage, how often does the phrase “the extraordinary caprice which always pervades the English character” come back as one observes some fresh manifestation of it!

But let not my last note upon the great duke be a carping one. Rather let my final sentence be one which will remind you of his frugal and abstemious life, his carpetless floor and little camp bed, his precise courtesy which left no humblest letter unanswered, his courage which never flinched, his tenacity which never faltered, his sense of duty which made his life one long unselfish effort on behalf of what seemed to him to be the highest interest of the State. Go down and stand by the huge granite sarcophagus in the dim light of the crypt of St. Paul’s, and in the hush of that austere spot, cast back your mind to the days when little England alone stood firm against the greatest soldier and the greatest army that the world has ever known. Then you feel what this dead man stood for, and you pray that we may still find such another amongst us when the clouds gather once again.

You see that the literature of Waterloo is well represented in my small military library. Of all books dealing with the personal view of the matter, I think that “Siborne’s Letters,” which is a collection of the narratives of surviving officers made by Siborne in the year 1827, is the most interesting. Gronow’s account is also very vivid and interesting. Of the strategical narratives, Houssaye’s book is my favourite. Taken from the French point of view, it gets the actions of the allies in truer perspective than any English or German account can do; but there is a fascination about that great combat which makes every narrative that bears upon it of enthralling interest.

Wellington used to say that too much was made of it, and that one would imagine that the British Army had never fought a battle before. It was a characteristic speech, but it must be admitted that the British Army never had, as a matter of fact, for many centuries fought a battle which was finally decisive of a great European war. There lies the perennial interest of the incident, that it was the last act of that long-drawn drama, and that to the very fall of the curtain no man could tell how the play would end—”the nearest run thing that ever you saw” — that was the victor’s description. It is a singular thing that during those twenty-five years of incessant fighting the material and methods of warfare made so little progress. So far as I know, there was no great change in either between 1789 and 1805. The breech-loader, heavy artillery, the ironclad, all great advances in the art of war, have been invented in time of peace. There are some improvements so obvious, and at the same time so valuable, that it is extraordinary that they were not adopted. Signalling, for example, whether by heliograph or by flag-waving, would have made an immense difference in the Napoleonic campaigns. The principle of the semaphore was well known, and Belgium, with its numerous windmills, would seem to be furnished with natural semaphores. Yet in the four days during which the campaign of Waterloo was fought, the whole scheme of military operations on both sides was again and again imperilled, and finally in the case of the French brought to utter ruin by lack of that intelligence which could so easily have been conveyed. June 18th was at intervals a sunshiny day — a four-inch glass mirror would have put Napoleon in communication with Gruchy, and the whole history of Europe might have been altered. Wellington himself suffered dreadfully from defective information which might have been easily supplied. The unexpected presence of the French army was first discovered at four in the morning of June 15. It was of enormous importance to get the news rapidly to Wellington at Brussels that he might instantly concentrate his scattered forces on the best line of resistance — yet, through the folly of sending only a single messenger, this vital information did not reach him until three in the afternoon, the distance being thirty miles. Again, when Blucher was defeated at Ligny on the 16th, it was of enormous importance that Wellington should know at once the line of his retreat so as to prevent the French from driving a wedge between them. The single Prussian officer who was despatched with this information was wounded, and never reached his destination, and it was only next day that Wellington learned the Prussian plans. On what tiny things does History depend!

IX.

The contemplation of my fine little regiment of French military memoirs had brought me to the question of Napoleon himself, and you see that I have a very fair line dealing with him also. There is Scott's life, which is not entirely a success. His ink was too precious to be shed in such a venture. But here are the three volumes of the physician Bourrienne — that Bourrienne who knew him so well. Does any one ever know a man so well as his doctor? They are quite excellent and admirably translated. Meneval also — the patient Meneval — who wrote for untold hours to dictation at ordinary talking speed, and yet was expected to be legible and to make no mistakes. At least his master could not fairly criticize his legibility, for is it not on record that when Napoleon's holograph account of an engagement was laid before the President of the Senate, the worthy man thought that it was a drawn plan of the battle? Meneval survived his master and has left an excellent and intimate account of him. There is Constant's account, also written from that point of view in which it is proverbial that no man is a hero. But of all the vivid terrible pictures of Napoleon the most haunting is by a man who never saw him and whose book was not directly dealing with him. I mean Taine's account of him, in the first volume of "Les Origines de la France Contemporaine." You can never forget it when once you have read it. He produces his effect in a wonderful, and to me a novel, way. He does not, for example, say in mere crude words that Napoleon had a more than mediaeval Italian cunning. He presents a succession of documents — gives a series of contemporary instances to prove it. Then, having got that fixed in your head by blow after blow, he passes on to another phase of his character, his coldhearted amorousness, his power of work, his spoiled child wilfulness, or some other quality, and piles up his illustrations of that. Instead, for example, of saying that the Emperor had a marvellous memory for detail, we have the account of the head of Artillery laying the list of all the guns in France before his master, who looked over it and remarked, "Yes, but you have omitted two in a fort near Dieppe." So the man is gradually etched in with indelible ink. It is a wonderful figure of which you are conscious in the end, the figure of an archangel, but surely of an archangel of darkness.

We will, after Taine’s method, take one fact and let it speak for itself. Napoleon left a legacy in a codicil to his will to a man who tried to assassinate Wellington. There is the mediaeval Italian again! He was no more a Corsican than the Englishman born in India is a Hindoo. Read the lives of the Borgias, the Sforzas, the Medicis, and of all the lustful, cruel, broad-minded, art-loving, talented despots of the little Italian States, including Genoa, from which the Buonapartes migrated. There at once you get the real descent of the man, with all the stigmata clear upon him — the outward calm, the inward passion, the layer of snow above the volcano, everything which characterized the old despots of his native land, the pupils of Machiavelli, but all raised to the dimensions of genius. You can whitewash him as you may, but you will never get a layer thick enough to cover the stain of that cold-blooded deliberate endorsement of his noble adversary’s assassination.

Another book which gives an extraordinarily vivid picture of the man is this one — the Memoirs of Madame de Remusat. She was in daily contact with him at the Court, and she studied him with those quick critical eyes of a clever woman, the most unerring things in life when they are not blinded by love. If you have read those pages, you feel that you know him as if you had yourself seen and talked with him. His singular mixture of the small and the great, his huge sweep of imagination, his very limited knowledge, his intense egotism, his impatience of obstacles, his boorishness, his gross impertinence to women, his diabolical playing upon the weak side of every one with whom he came in contact — they make up among them one of the most striking of historical portraits.

Most of my books deal with the days of his greatness, but here, you see, is a three-volume account of those weary years at St. Helena. Who can help pitying the mewed eagle? And yet if you play the great game you must pay a stake. This was the same man who had a royal duke shot in a ditch because he was a danger to his throne. Was not he himself a danger to every throne in Europe? Why so harsh a retreat as St. Helena, you say? Remember that he had been put in a milder one before, that he had broken away from it, and that the lives of fifty thousand men had paid for the mistaken leniency. All this is forgotten now, and the pathetic picture of the modern Prometheus chained to his rock and devoured by the vultures of his own bitter thoughts, is the one impression which the world has retained. It is always so much easier to follow the emotions than the reason, especially where a cheap magnanimity and second-hand generosity are involved. But reason must still insist that Europe’s treatment of Napoleon was not vindictive, and that Hudson Lowe was a man who tried to live up to the trust which had been committed to him by his country.

It was certainly not a post from which any one would hope for credit. If he were slack and easy-going all would be well. But there would be the chance of a second flight with its consequences. If he were strict and assiduous he would be assuredly represented as a petty tyrant. “I am glad when you are on outpost,” said Lowe’s general in some campaign, “for then I am sure of a sound rest.” He was on outpost at St. Helena, and because he was true to his duties Europe (France included) had a sound rest. But he purchased it at the price of his own reputation. The greatest schemer in the world, having nothing else on which to vent his energies, turned them all to the task of vilifying his guardian. It was natural enough that he who had never known control should not brook it now. It is natural also that sentimentalists who have not thought of the details should take the Emperor’s point of view. What is deplorable, however, is that our own people should be misled by one-sided accounts, and that they should throw to the wolves a man who was serving his country in a post of anxiety and danger, with such responsibility upon him as few could ever have endured. Let them remember Montholon’s remark: “An angel from heaven would not have satisfied us.” Let them recall also that Lowe with ample material never once troubled to state his own case. “Je fais mon devoir et suis indifferent pour le reste,” said he, in his interview with the Emperor. They were no idle words.

Apart from this particular epoch, French literature, which is so rich in all its branches, is richest of all in its memoirs. Whenever there was anything of interest going forward there was always some kindly gossip who knew all about it, and was ready to set it down for the benefit of posterity. Our own history has not nearly enough of these charming sidelights. Look at our sailors in the Napoleonic wars, for example. They played an epoch-making part. For nearly twenty years Freedom was a Refugee upon the seas. Had our navy been swept away, then all Europe would have been one organized despotism. At times everybody was against us, fighting against their own direct interests under the pressure of that terrible hand. We fought on the waters with the French, with the Spaniards, with the Danes, with the Russians, with the Turks, even with our American kinsmen. Middies grew into post-captains, and admirals into dotards during that prolonged struggle. And what have we in literature to show for it all? Marryat's novels, many of which are founded upon personal experience, Nelson's and Collingwood's letters, Lord Cochrane's biography — that is about all. I wish we had more of Collingwood, for he wielded a fine pen. Do you remember the sonorous opening of his Trafalgar message to his captains? —

"The ever to be lamented death of Lord Viscount Nelson, Duke of Bronte, the Commander-in-Chief, who fell in the action of the 21st, in the arms of Victory, covered with glory, whose memory will be ever dear to the British Navy and the British Nation; whose zeal for the honour of his king and for the interests of his country will be ever held up as a shining example for a British seaman — leaves to me a duty to return thanks, etc., etc."

It was a worthy sentence to carry such a message, written too in a raging tempest, with sinking vessels all around him. But in the main it is a poor crop from such a soil. No doubt our sailors were too busy to do much writing, but none the less one wonders that among so many thousands there were not some to understand what a treasure their experiences would be to their descendants. I can call to mind the old three-deckers which used to rot in Portsmouth Harbour, and I have often thought, could they tell their tales, what a missing chapter in our literature they could supply.

It is not only in Napoleonic memoirs that the French are so fortunate. The almost equally interesting age of Louis XIV. produced an even more wonderful series. If you go deeply into the subject you are amazed by their number, and you feel as if every one at the Court of the Roi Soleil had done what he (or she) could to give away their neighbours. Just to take the more obvious, there are St. Simon's Memoirs — those in themselves give us a more comprehensive and intimate view of the age than anything I know of which treats of the times of Queen Victoria. Then there is St. Evremond, who is nearly as complete. Do you want the view of a woman of quality? There are the letters of Madame de Sevigne (eight volumes of them), perhaps the most wonderful series of letters that any woman has ever penned. Do you want the confessions of a rake of the period? Here are the too salacious memoirs of the mischievous Duc de Roquelaure, not reading for the nursery certainly, not even for the boudoir, but a strange and very intimate picture of the times. All these books fit into each other, for the characters of the one reappear in the others. You come to know them quite familiarly before you have finished, their loves and their hates, their duels, their intrigues, and their ultimate fortunes. If you do not care to go so deeply into it you have only to put Julia Pardoe's four-volumed "Court of Louis XIV." upon your shelf, and you will find a very admirable condensation — or a distillation rather, for most of the salt is left behind. There is another book too — that big one on the bottom shelf — which holds it all between its brown and gold covers. An extravagance that — for it cost me some sovereigns — but it is something to have the portraits of all that wonderful galaxy, of Louis, of the devout Maintenon, of the frail Montespan, of Bossuet, Fenelon, Moliere, Racine, Pascal, Conde, Turenne, and all the saints and sinners of the age. If you want to make yourself a present, and chance upon a copy of "The Court and Times of Louis XIV.," you will never think that your money has been wasted.

Well, I have bored you unduly, my patient friend, with my love of memoirs, Napoleonic and otherwise, which give a touch of human interest to the arid records of history. Not that history should be arid. It ought to be the most interesting subject upon earth, the story of ourselves, of our forefathers, of the human race, the events which made us what we are, and wherein, if Weismann's views hold the field, some microscopic fraction of this very body which for the instant we chance to inhabit may have borne a part. But unfortunately the power of accumulating knowledge and that of imparting it are two very different things, and the uninspired historian becomes merely the dignified compiler of an enlarged almanac. Worst of all, when a man does come along with fancy and imagination, who can breathe the breath of life into the dry bones, it is the fashion for the dryasdusts to belabour him, as one who has wandered away from the orthodox path and must necessarily be inaccurate. So Froude was attacked. So also Macaulay in his day. But both will be read when the pedants are forgotten. If I were asked my very ideal of how history should be written, I think I should point to those two rows on yonder shelf, the one M'Carthy's "History of Our Own Times," the other Lecky's "History of England in the Eighteenth Century." Curious that each should have been written by an Irishman, and that though of opposite politics and living in an age when Irish affairs have caused such bitterness, both should be conspicuous not merely for all literary graces, but for that broad toleration which sees every side of a question, and handles every problem from the point of view of the philosophic observer and never of the sectarian partisan.

By the way, talking of history, have you read Parkman’s works? He was, I think, among the very greatest of the historians, and yet one seldom hears his name. A New England man by birth, and writing principally of the early history of the American Settlements and of French Canada, it is perhaps excusable that he should have no great vogue in England, but even among Americans I have found many who have not read him. There are four of his volumes in green and gold down yonder, “The Jesuits in Canada,” and “Frontenac,” but there are others, all of them well worth reading, “Pioneers of France,” “Montcalm and Wolfe,” “Discovery of the Great West,” etc. Some day I hope to have a complete set.

Taking only that one book, “The Jesuits in Canada,” it is worth a reputation in itself. And how noble a tribute is this which a man of Puritan blood pays to that wonderful Order! He shows how in the heyday of their enthusiasm these brave soldiers of the Cross invaded Canada as they did China and every other place where danger was to be faced, and a horrible death to be found. I don’t care what faith a man may profess, or whether he be a Christian at all, but he cannot read these true records without feeling that the very highest that man has ever evolved in sanctity and devotion was to be found among these marvellous men. They were indeed the pioneers of civilization, for apart from doctrines they brought among the savages the highest European culture, and in their own deportment an object-lesson of how chastely, austerely, and nobly men could live. France has sent myriads of brave men on to her battlefields, but in all her long record of glory I do not think that she can point to any courage so steadfast and so absolutely heroic as that of the men of the Iroquois Mission.

How nobly they lived makes the body of the book, how serenely they died forms the end to it. It is a tale which cannot even now be read without a shudder — a nightmare of horrors. Fanaticism may brace a man to hurl himself into oblivion, as the Mahdi’s hordes did before Khartoum, but one feels that it is at least a higher development of such emotion, where men slowly and in cold blood endure so thankless a life, and welcome so dreadful an end. Every faith can equally boast its martyrs — a painful thought, since it shows how many thousands must have given their blood for error — but in testifying to their faith these brave men have testified to something more important still, to the subjugation of the body and to the absolute supremacy of the dominating spirit.

The story of Father Jogue is but one of many, and yet it is worth recounting, as showing the spirit of the men. He also was on the Iroquois Mission, and was so tortured and mutilated by his sweet parishioners that the very dogs used to howl at his distorted figure. He made his way back to France, not for any reason of personal rest or recuperation, but because he needed a special dispensation to say Mass. The Catholic Church has a regulation that a priest shall not be deformed, so that the savages with their knives had wrought better than they knew. He received his dispensation and was sent for by Louis XIV., who asked him what he could do for him. No doubt the assembled courtiers expected to hear him ask for the next vacant Bishopric. What he did actually ask for, as the highest favour, was to be sent back to the Iroquois Mission, where the savages signalised his arrival by burning him alive.

Parkman is worth reading, if it were only for his account of the Indians. Perhaps the very strangest thing about them, and the most unaccountable, is their small numbers. The Iroquois were one of the most formidable of tribes. They were of the Five Nations, whose scalping-parties wandered over an expanse of thousands of square miles. Yet there is good reason to doubt whether the whole five nations could have put as many thousand warriors in the field. It was the same with all the other tribes of Northern Americans, both in the east, the north, and the west. Their numbers were always insignificant. And yet they had that huge country to themselves, the best of climates, and plenty of food. Why was it that they did not people it thickly? It may be taken as a striking example of the purpose and design which run through the affairs of men, that at the very moment when the old world was ready to overflow the new world was empty to receive it. Had North America been peopled as China is peopled, the Europeans might have founded some settlements, but could never have taken possession of the continent. Buffon has made the striking remark that the creative power appeared to have never had great vigour in America. He alluded to the abundance of the flora and fauna as compared with that of other great divisions of the earth’s surface. Whether the numbers of the Indians are an illustration of the same fact, or whether there is some special cause, is beyond my very modest scientific attainments. When one reflects upon the countless herds of bison which used to cover the Western plains, or marks in the present day the race statistics of the French Canadians at one end of the continent, and of the Southern negro at the other, it seems absurd to suppose that there is any geographical reason against Nature being as prolific here as elsewhere. However, these be deeper waters, and with your leave we will get back into my usual six-inch wading-depth once more.

X.

I don’t know how those two little books got in there. They are Henley’s “Song of the Sword” and “Book of Verses.” They ought to be over yonder in the rather limited Poetry Section. Perhaps it is that I like his work so, whether it be prose or verse, and so have put them ready to my hand. He was a remarkable man, a man who was very much greater than his work, great as some of his work was. I have seldom known a personality more magnetic and stimulating. You left his presence, as a battery leaves a generating station, charged up and full. He made you feel what a lot of work there was to be done, and how glorious it was to be able to do it, and how needful to get started upon it that very hour. With the frame and the vitality of a giant he was cruelly bereft of all outlet for his strength, and so distilled it off in hot words, in warm sympathy, in strong prejudices, in all manner of human and stimulating emotions. Much of the time and energy which might have built an imperishable name for himself was spent in encouraging others; but it was not waste, for he left his broad thumb-mark upon all that passed beneath it. A dozen second-hand Henleys are fortifying our literature to-day.

Alas that we have so little of his very best! for that very best was the finest of our time. Few poets ever wrote sixteen consecutive lines more noble and more strong than those which begin with the well-known quatrain —

”Out of the night that covers me,
  Black as the pit from Pole to Pole,
I thank whatever Gods there be
  For my unconquerable soul.”

It is grand literature, and it is grand pluck too; for it came from a man who, through no fault of his own, had been pruned, and pruned again, like an ill-grown shrub, by the surgeon’s knife. When he said —

”In the fell clutch of Circumstance
  I have not winced nor cried aloud,

Beneath the bludgeonings of Chance
 My head is bloody but unbowed.”

It was not what Lady Byron called “the mimic woe” of the poet, but it was rather the grand defiance of the Indian warrior at the stake, whose proud soul can hold in hand his quivering body.

There were two quite distinct veins of poetry in Henley, each the very extreme from the other. The one was heroic, gigantic, running to large sweeping images and thundering words. Such are the “Song of the Sword” and much more that he has written, like the wild singing of some Northern scald. The other, and to my mind both the more characteristic and the finer side of his work, is delicate, precise, finely etched, with extraordinarily vivid little pictures drawn in carefully phrased and balanced English. Such are the “Hospital Verses,” while the “London Voluntaries” stand midway between the two styles. What! you have not read the “Hospital Verses!” Then get the “Book of Verses” and read them without delay. You will surely find something there which, for good or ill, is unique. You can name — or at least I can name — nothing to compare it with. Goldsmith and Crabbe have written of indoor themes; but their monotonous, if majestic metre, wearies the modern reader. But this is so varied, so flexible, so dramatic. It stands by itself. Confound the weekly journals and all the other lightning conductors which caused such a man to pass away, and to leave a total output of about five booklets behind him!

However, all this is an absolute digression, for the books had no business in this shelf at all. This corner is meant for chronicles of various sorts. Here are three in a line, which carry you over a splendid stretch of French (which usually means European) history, each, as luck would have it, beginning just about the time when the other leaves off. The first is Froissart, the second de Monstrelet, and the third de Comines. When you have read the three you have the best contemporary account first hand of considerably more than a century — a fair slice out of the total written record of the human race.

Froissart is always splendid. If you desire to avoid the mediaeval French, which only a specialist can read with pleasure, you can get Lord Berners’ almost equally mediaeval, but very charming English, or you can turn to a modern translation, such as this one of Johnes. A single page of Lord Berners is delightful; but it is a strain, I think, to read bulky volumes in an archaic style. Personally, I prefer the modern, and even with that you have shown some patience before you have reached the end of that big second tome.

I wonder whether, at the time, the old Hainault Canon had any idea of what he was doing — whether it ever flashed across his mind that the day might come when his book would be the one great authority, not only about the times in which he lived, but about the whole institution of chivalry? I fear that it is far more likely that his whole object was to gain some mundane advantage from the various barons and knights whose names and deeds be recounts. He has left it on record, for example, that when he visited the Court of England he took with him a handsomely-bound copy of his work; and, doubtless, if one could follow the good Canon one would find his journeys littered with similar copies which were probably expensive gifts to the recipient, for what return would a knightly soul make for a book which enshrined his own valour?

But without looking too curiously into his motives, it must be admitted that the work could not have been done more thoroughly. There is something of Herodotus in the Canon’s cheery, chatty, garrulous, take-it-or-leave-it manner. But he has the advantage of the old Greek in accuracy. Considering that he belonged to the same age which gravely accepted the travellers’ tales of Sir John Maundeville, it is, I think, remarkable how careful and accurate the chronicler is. Take, for example, his description of Scotland and the Scotch. Some would give the credit to Jean-le-Bel, but that is another matter. Scotch descriptions are a subject over which a fourteenth-century Hainaulter might fairly be allowed a little scope for his imagination. Yet we can see that the account must on the whole have been very correct. The Galloway nags, the girdle-cakes, the bagpipes — every little detail rings true. Jean-le-Bel was actually present in a Border campaign, and from him Froissart got his material; but he has never attempted to embroider it, and its accuracy, where we can to some extent test it, must predispose us to accept his accounts where they are beyond our confirmation.

But the most interesting portion of old Froissart’s work is that which deals with the knights and the knight-errants of his time, their deeds, their habits, their methods of talking. It is true that he lived himself just a little after the true heyday of chivalry; but he was quite early enough to have met many of the men who had been looked upon as the flower of knighthood of the time. His book was read too, and commented on by these very men (as many of them as could read), and so we may take it that it was no fancy portrait, but a correct picture of these soldiers which is to be found in it. The accounts are always consistent. If you collate the remarks and speeches of the knights (as I have had occasion to do) you will find a remarkable uniformity running through them. We may believe then that this really does represent the kind of men who fought at Crecy and at Poictiers, in the age when both the French and the Scottish kings were prisoners in London, and England reached a pitch of military glory which has perhaps never been equalled in her history.

In one respect these knights differ from anything which we have had presented to us in our historical romances. To turn to the supreme romancer, you will find that Scott's mediaeval knights were usually muscular athletes in the prime of life: Bois-Guilbert, Front-de-Boeuf, Richard, Ivanhoe, Count Robert — they all were such. But occasionally the most famous of Froissart's knights were old, crippled and blinded. Chandos, the best lance of his day, must have been over seventy when he lost his life through being charged upon the side on which he had already lost an eye. He was well on to that age when he rode out from the English army and slew the Spanish champion, big Marten Ferrara, upon the morning of Navaretta. Youth and strength were very useful, no doubt, especially where heavy armour had to be carried, but once on the horse's back the gallant steed supplied the muscles. In an English hunting-field many a doddering old man, when he is once firmly seated in his familiar saddle, can give points to the youngsters at the game. So it was among the knights, and those who had outlived all else could still carry to the wars their wiliness, their experience with arms, and, above all, their cool and undaunted courage.

Beneath his varnish of chivalry, it cannot be gainsayed that the knight was often a bloody and ferocious barbarian. There was little quarter in his wars, save when a ransom might be claimed. But with all his savagery, he was a light-hearted creature, like a formidable boy playing a dreadful game. He was true also to his own curious code, and, so far as his own class went, his feelings were genial and sympathetic, even in warfare. There was no personal feeling or bitterness as there might be now in a war between Frenchmen and Germans. On the contrary, the opponents were very softspoken and polite to each other. “Is there any small vow of which I may relieve you?” “Would you desire to attempt some small deed of arms upon me?” And in the midst of a fight they would stop for a breather, and converse amicably the while, with many compliments upon each other's prowess. When Seaton the Scotsman had exchanged as many blows as he wished with a company of French knights, he said, "Thank you, gentlemen, thank you!" and galloped away. An English knight made a vow, "for his own advancement and the exaltation of his lady," that he would ride into the hostile city of Paris, and touch with his lance the inner barrier. The whole story is most characteristic of the times. As he galloped up, the French knights around the barrier, seeing that he was under vow, made no attack upon him, and called out to him that he had carried himself well. As he returned, however, there stood an unmannerly butcher with a pole-axe upon the side-walk, who struck him as he passed, and killed him. Here ends the chronicler; but I have not the least doubt that the butcher had a very evil time at the hands of the French knights, who would not stand by and see one of their own order, even if he were an enemy, meet so plebeian an end.

De Comines, as a chronicler, is less quaint and more conventional than Froissart, but the writer of romance can dig plenty of stones out of that quarry for the use of his own little building. Of course Quentin Durward has come bodily out of the pages of De Comines. The whole history of Louis XI. and his relations with Charles the Bold, the strange life at Plessis-le-Tours, the plebeian courtiers, the barber and the hangman, the astrologers, the alternations of savage cruelty and of slavish superstition — it is all set forth here. One would imagine that such a monarch was unique, that such a mixture of strange qualities and monstrous crimes could never be matched, and yet like causes will always produce like results. Read Walewski's "Life of Ivan the Terrible," and you will find that more than a century later Russia produced a monarch even more diabolical, but working exactly on the same lines as Louis, even down to small details. The same cruelty, the same superstition, the same astrologers, the same low-born associates, the same residence outside the influence of the great cities — a parallel could hardly be more complete. If you have not supped too full of horrors when you have finished Ivan, then pass on to the same author's account of Peter the Great. What a land! What a succession of monarchs! Blood and snow and iron! Both Ivan and Peter killed their own sons. And there is a hideous mockery of religion running through it all which gives it a grotesque horror of its own. We have had our Henry the Eighth, but our very worst would have been a wise and benevolent rule in Russia.

Talking of romance and of chivalry, that tattered book down yonder has as much between its disreputable covers as most that I know. It is Washington Irving's "Conquest of Granada." I do not know where he got his material for this book — from Spanish Chronicles, I presume — but the wars between the Moors and the Christian knights must have been among the most chivalrous of exploits. I could not name a book which gets the beauty and the glamour of it better than this one, the lance-heads gleaming in the dark defiles, the red bale fires glowing on the crags, the stern devotion of the mail-clad Christians, the debonnaire and courtly courage of the dashing Moslem. Had Washington Irving written nothing else, that book alone should have forced the door of every library. I love all his books, for no man wrote fresher English with a purer style; but of them all it is still "The Conquest of Granada" to which I turn most often.

To hark back for a moment to history as seen in romances, here are two exotics side by side, which have a flavour that is new. They are a brace of foreign novelists, each of whom, so far as I know, has only two books. This green-and-gold volume contains both the works of the Pomeranian Meinhold in an excellent translation by Lady Wilde. The first is "Sidonia the Sorceress," the second, "The Amber Witch." I don't know where one may turn for a stranger view of the Middle Ages, the quaint details of simple life, with sudden intervals of grotesque savagery. The most weird and barbarous things are made human and comprehensible. There is one incident which haunts one after one has read it, where the executioner chaffers with the villagers as to what price they will give him for putting some young witch to the torture, running them up from a barrel of apples to a barrel and a half, on the grounds that he is now old and rheumatic, and that the stooping and straining is bad for his back. It should be done on a sloping hill, he explains, so that the "dear little children" may see it easily. Both "Sidonia" and "The Amber Witch" give such a picture of old Germany as I have never seen elsewhere.

But Meinhold belongs to a bygone generation. This other author, in whom I find a new note, and one of great power, is Merejkowski, who is, if I mistake not, young and with his career still before him. "The Forerunner" and "The Death of the Gods" are the only two books of his which I have been able to obtain, but the pictures of Renaissance Italy in the one, and of declining Rome in the other, are in my opinion among the masterpieces of fiction. I confess that as I read them I was pleased to find how open my mind was to new impressions, for one of the greatest mental dangers which comes upon a man as he grows older is that he should become so attached to old favourites that he has no room for the new-comer, and persuades himself that the days of great things are at an end because his own poor brain is getting ossified. You have but to open any critical paper to see how common is the disease, but a knowledge of literary history assures us that it has always been the same, and that if the young writer is discouraged by adverse comparisons it has been the common lot from the beginning. He has but one resource, which is to pay no heed to criticism, but to try to satisfy his own highest standard and leave the rest to time and the public. Here is a little bit of doggerel, pinned, as you see, beside my bookcase, which may in a ruffled hour bring peace and guidance to some younger brother —

”Critics kind — never mind!
Critics flatter — no matter!
Critics blame — all the same!
Critics curse — none the worse!
Do your best —— — the rest!”

XI.

I have been talking in the past tense of heroes and of knight-errants, but surely their day is not yet passed. When the earth has all been explored, when the last savage has been tamed, when the final cannon has been scrapped, and the world has settled down into unbroken virtue and unutterable dulness, men will cast their thoughts back to our age, and will idealise our romance and — our courage, even as we do that of our distant forbears. “It is wonderful what these people did with their rude implements and their limited appliances!” That is what they will say when they read of our explorations, our voyages, and our wars.

Now, take that first book on my travel shelf. It is Knight’s “Cruise of the Falcon.” Nature was guilty of the pun which put this soul into a body so named. Read this simple record and tell me if there is anything in Hakluyt more wonderful. Two landsmen — solicitors, if I remember right — go down to Southampton Quay. They pick up a long-shore youth, and they embark in a tiny boat in which they put to sea. Where do they turn up? At Buenos Ayres. Thence they penetrate to Paraquay, return to the West Indies, sell their little boat there, and so home. What could the Elizabethan mariners have done more? There are no Spanish galleons now to vary the monotony of such a voyage, but had there been I am very certain our adventurers would have had their share of the doubloons. But surely it was the nobler when done out of the pure lust of adventure and in answer to the call of the sea, with no golden bait to draw them on. The old spirit still lives, disguise it as you will with top hats, frock coats, and all prosaic settings. Perhaps even they also will seem romantic when centuries have blurred them.

Another book which shows the romance and the heroism which still linger upon earth is that large copy of the “Voyage of the Discovery in the Antarctic” by Captain Scott. Written in plain sailor fashion with no attempt at over-statement or colour, it none the less (or perhaps all the more) leaves a deep impression upon the mind. As one reads it, and reflects on what one reads, one seems to get a clear view of just those qualities which make the best kind of Briton. Every nation produces brave men. Every nation has men of energy. But there is a certain type which mixes its bravery and its energy with a gentle modesty and a boyish good-humour, and it is just this type which is the highest. Here the whole expedition seem to have been imbued with the spirit of their commander. No flinching, no grumbling, every discomfort taken as a jest, no thought of self, each working only for the success of the enterprise. When you have read of such privations so endured and so chronicled, it makes one ashamed to show emotion over the small annoyances of daily life. Read of Scott's blinded, scurvy-struck party staggering on to their goal, and then complain, if you can, of the heat of a northern sun, or the dust of a country road.

That is one of the weaknesses of modern life. We complain too much. We are not ashamed of complaining. Time was when it was otherwise — when it was thought effeminate to complain. The Gentleman should always be the Stoic, with his soul too great to be affected by the small troubles of life. "You look cold, sir," said an English sympathizer to a French emigre. The fallen noble drew himself up in his threadbare coat. "Sir," said he, "a gentleman is never cold." One's consideration for others as well as one's own self-respect should check the grumble. This self-suppression, and also the concealment of pain are two of the old noblesse oblige characteristics which are now little more than a tradition. Public opinion should be firmer on the matter. The man who must hop because his shin is hacked, or wring his hand because his knuckles are bruised should be made to feel that he is an object not of pity, but of contempt.

The tradition of Arctic exploration is a noble one among Americans as well as ourselves. The next book is a case in point. It is Greely's "Arctic Service," and it is a worthy shelf-companion to Scott's "Account of the Voyage of the Discovery." There are incidents in this book which one can never forget. The episode of those twenty-odd men lying upon that horrible bluff, and dying one a day from cold and hunger and scurvy, is one which dwarfs all our puny tragedies of romance. And the gallant starving leader giving lectures on abstract science in an attempt to take the thoughts of the dying men away from their sufferings — what a picture! It is bad to suffer from cold and bad to suffer from hunger, and bad to live in the dark; but that men could do all these things for six months on end, and that some should live to tell the tale, is, indeed, a marvel. What a world of feeling lies in the exclamation of the poor dying lieutenant: "Well, this *is* wretched," he groaned, as he turned his face to the wall.

The Anglo-Celtic race has always run to individualism, and yet there is none which is capable of conceiving and carrying out a finer ideal of discipline. There is nothing in Roman or Grecian annals, not even the lava-baked sentry at Pompeii, which gives a more sternly fine object-lesson in duty than the young recruits of the British army who went down in their ranks on the Birkenhead. And this expedition of Greely's gave rise to another example which seems to me hardly less remarkable. You may remember, if you have read the book, that even when there were only about eight unfortunates still left, hardly able to move for weakness and hunger, the seven took the odd man out upon the ice, and shot him dead for breach of discipline. The whole grim proceeding was carried out with as much method and signing of papers, as if they were all within sight of the Capitol at Washington. His offence had consisted, so far as I can remember, of stealing and eating the thong which bound two portions of the sledge together, something about as appetizing as a bootlace. It is only fair to the commander to say, however, that it was one of a series of petty thefts, and that the thong of a sledge might mean life or death to the whole party.

Personally I must confess that anything bearing upon the Arctic Seas is always of the deepest interest to me. He who has once been within the borders of that mysterious region, which can be both the most lovely and the most repellent upon earth, must always retain something of its glamour. Standing on the confines of known geography I have shot the southward flying ducks, and have taken from their gizzards pebbles which they have swallowed in some land whose shores no human foot has trod. The memory of that inexpressible air, of the great ice-girt lakes of deep blue water, of the cloudless sky shading away into a light green and then into a cold yellow at the horizon, of the noisy companionable birds, of the huge, greasy-backed water animals, of the slug-like seals, startlingly black against the dazzling whiteness of the ice — all of it will come back to a man in his dreams, and will seem little more than some fantastic dream itself, go removed is it from the main stream of his life. And then to play a fish a hundred tons in weight, and worth two thousand pounds — but what in the world has all this to do with my bookcase?

Yet it has its place in my main line of thought, for it leads me straight to the very next upon the shelf, Bullen's "Cruise of the Cachelot," a book which is full of the glamour and the mystery of the sea, marred only by the brutality of those who go down to it in ships. This is the sperm-whale fishing, an open-sea affair, and very different from that Greenland ice groping in which I served a seven-months' apprenticeship. Both, I fear, are things of the past — certainly the northern fishing is so, for why should men risk their lives to get oil when one has but to sink a pipe in the ground. It is the more fortunate then that it should have been handled by one of the most virile writers who has described a sailor's life. Bullen's English at its best rises to a great height. If I wished to show how high, I would take that next book down, "Sea Idylls."

How is this, for example, if you have an ear for the music of prose? It is a simple paragraph out of the magnificent description of a long calm in the tropics.

"A change, unusual as unwholesome, came over the bright blue of the sea. No longer did it reflect, as in a limpid mirror, the splendour of the sun, the sweet silvery glow of the moon, or the coruscating clusters of countless stars. Like the ashen-grey hue that bedims the countenance of the dying, a filmy greasy skin appeared to overspread the recent loveliness of the ocean surface. The sea was sick, stagnant, and foul, from its turbid waters arose a miasmatic vapour like a breath of decay, which clung clammily to the palate and dulled all the senses. Drawn by some strange force, from the unfathomable depths below, eerie shapes sought the surface, blinking glassily at the unfamiliar glare they had exchanged for their native gloom — uncouth creatures bedight with tasselled fringes like weed-growths waving around them, fathom-long, medusae with coloured spots like eyes clustering all over their transparent substance, wriggling worm-like forms of such elusive matter that the smallest exposure to the sun melted them, and they were not. Lower down, vast pale shadows creep sluggishly along, happily undistinguishable as yet, but adding a half-familiar flavour to the strange, faint smell that hung about us."

Take the whole of that essay which describes a calm in the Tropics, or take the other one "Sunrise as seen from the Crow's-nest," and you must admit that there have been few finer pieces of descriptive English in our time. If I had to choose a sea library of only a dozen volumes I should certainly give Bullen two places. The others? Well, it is so much a matter of individual taste. "Tom Cringle's Log" should have one for certain. I hope boys respond now as they once did to the sharks and the pirates, the planters, and all the rollicking high spirits of that splendid book. Then there is Dana's "Two Years before the Mast." I should find room also for

Stevenson’s “Wrecker” and “Ebb Tide.” Clark Russell deserves a whole shelf for himself, but anyhow you could not miss out “The Wreck of the Grosvenor.” Marryat, of course, must be represented, and I should pick “Midshipman Easy” and “Peter Simple” as his samples. Then throw in one of Melville’s Otaheite books — now far too completely forgotten—”Typee” or “Omoo,” and as a quite modern flavour Kipling’s “Captains Courageous” and Jack London’s “Sea Wolf,” with Conrad’s “Nigger of the Narcissus.” Then you will have enough to turn your study into a cabin and bring the wash and surge to your cars, if written words can do it. Oh, how one longs for it sometimes when life grows too artificial, and the old Viking blood begins to stir! Surely it must linger in all of us, for no man who dwells in an island but had an ancestor in longship or in coracle. Still more must the salt drop tingle in the blood of an American when you reflect that in all that broad continent there is not one whose forefather did not cross 3000 miles of ocean. And yet there are in the Central States millions and millions of their descendants who have never seen the sea.

I have said that “Omoo” and “Typee,” the books in which the sailor Melville describes his life among the Otaheitans, have sunk too rapidly into obscurity. What a charming and interesting task there is for some critic of catholic tastes and sympathetic judgment to undertake rescue work among the lost books which would repay salvage! A small volume setting forth their names and their claims to attention would be interesting in itself, and more interesting in the material to which it would serve as an introduction. I am sure there are many good books, possibly there are some great ones, which have been swept away for a time in the rush. What chance, for example, has any book by an unknown author which is published at a moment of great national excitement, when some public crisis arrests the popular mind? Hundreds have been still-born in this fashion, and are there none which should have lived among them? Now, there is a book, a modern one, and written by a youth under thirty. It is Snaith’s “Broke of Covenden,” and it scarce attained a second edition. I do not say that it is a Classic — I should not like to be positive that it is not — but I am perfectly sure that the man who wrote it has the possibility of a Classic within him. Here is another novel—”Eight Days,” by Forrest. You can’t buy it. You are lucky even if you can find it in a library. Yet nothing ever written will bring the Indian Mutiny home to you as this book will do. Here’s another which I will warrant you never heard of. It is Powell’s “Animal Episodes.” No, it is not a collection of dog-and-cat anecdotes, but it is a series of very singularly told stories which deal with the animal side of the human, and which you will feel have an entirely new flavour if you have a discriminating palate. The book came out ten years ago, and is utterly unknown. If I can point to three in one small shelf, how many lost lights must be flitting in the outer darkness!

Let me hark back for a moment to the subject with which I began, the romance of travel and the frequent heroism of modern life. I have two books of Scientific Exploration here which exhibit both these qualities as strongly as any I know. I could not choose two better books to put into a young man's hands if you wished to train him first in a gentle and noble firmness of mind, and secondly in a great love for and interest in all that pertains to Nature. The one is Darwin's "Journal of the Voyage of the Beagle." Any discerning eye must have detected long before the "Origin of Species" appeared, simply on the strength of this book of travel, that a brain of the first order, united with many rare qualities of character, had arisen. Never was there a more comprehensive mind. Nothing was too small and nothing too great for its alert observation. One page is occupied in the analysis of some peculiarity in the web of a minute spider, while the next deals with the evidence for the subsidence of a continent and the extinction of a myriad animals. And his sweep of knowledge was so great — botany, geology, zoology, each lending its corroborative aid to the other. How a youth of Darwin's age — he was only twenty-three when in the year 1831 he started round the world on the surveying ship Beagle — could have acquired such a mass of information fills one with the same wonder, and is perhaps of the same nature, as the boy musician who exhibits by instinct the touch of the master. Another quality which one would be less disposed to look for in the savant is a fine contempt for danger, which is veiled in such modesty that one reads between the lines in order to detect it. When he was in the Argentina, the country outside the Settlements was covered with roving bands of horse Indians, who gave no quarter to any whites. Yet Darwin rode the four hundred miles between Bahia and Buenos Ayres, when even the hardy Gauchos refused to accompany him. Personal danger and a hideous death were small things to him compared to a new beetle or an undescribed fly.

The second book to which I alluded is Wallace's "Malay Archipelago." There is a strange similarity in the minds of the two men, the same courage, both moral and physical, the same gentle persistence, the same catholic knowledge and wide. sweep of mind, the same passion for the observation of Nature. Wallace by a flash of intuition understood and described in a letter to Darwin the cause of the Origin of Species at the very time when the latter was publishing a book founded upon twenty years' labour to prove the same thesis. What must have been his feelings when he read that letter? And yet he had nothing to fear, for his book found no more enthusiastic admirer than the man who had in a sense anticipated it. Here also one sees that Science has its heroes no less than Religion. One of Wallace's missions in Papua was to examine the nature and species of the Birds-of-Paradise; but in the course of the years of his wanderings through those islands he made a complete investigation of the whole fauna. A footnote somewhere explains that the Papuans who lived in the Bird-of-Paradise country were confirmed cannibals. Fancy living for years with or near such neighbours! Let a young fellow read these two books, and he cannot fail to have both his mind and his spirit strengthened by the reading.

XII.

Here we are at the final seance. For the last time, my patient comrade, I ask you to make yourself comfortable upon the old green settee, to look up at the oaken shelves, and to bear with me as best you may while I preach about their contents. The last time! And yet, as I look along the lines of the volumes, I have not mentioned one out of ten of those to which I owe a debt of gratitude, nor one in a hundred of the thoughts which course through my brain as I look at them. As well perhaps, for the man who has said all that he has to say has invariably said too much.

Let me be didactic for a moment! I assume this solemn — oh, call it not pedantic! — attitude because my eye catches the small but select corner which constitutes my library of Science. I wanted to say that if I were advising a young man who was beginning life, I should counsel him to devote one evening a week to scientific reading. Had he the perseverance to adhere to his resolution, and if he began it at twenty, he would certainly find himself with an unusually well-furnished mind at thirty, which would stand him in right good stead in whatever line of life he might walk. When I advise him to read science, I do not mean that he should choke himself with the dust of the pedants, and lose himself in the subdivisions of the Lepidoptera, or the classifications of the dicotyledonous plants. These dreary details are the prickly bushes in that enchanted garden, and you are foolish indeed if you begin your walks by butting your head into one. Keep very clear of them until you have explored the open beds and wandered down every easy path. For this reason avoid the text-books, which repel, and cultivate that popular science which attracts. You cannot hope to be a specialist upon all these varied subjects. Better far to have a broad idea of general results, and to understand their relations to each other. A very little reading will give a man such a knowledge of geology, for example, as will make every quarry and railway cutting an object of interest. A very little zoology will enable you to satisfy your curiosity as to what is the proper name and style of this buff-ermine moth which at the present instant is buzzing round the lamp. A very little botany will enable you to recognise every flower you are likely to meet in your walks abroad, and to give you a tiny thrill of interest when you chance upon one which is beyond your ken.

A very little archaeology will tell you all about yonder British tumulus, or help you to fill in the outline of the broken Roman camp upon the downs. A very little astronomy will cause you to look more intently at the heavens, to pick out your brothers the planets, who move in your own circles, from the stranger stars, and to appreciate the order, beauty, and majesty of that material universe which is most surely the outward sign of the spiritual force behind it. How a man of science can be a materialist is as amazing to me as how a sectarian can limit the possibilities of the Creator. Show me a picture without an artist, show me a bust without a sculptor, show me music without a musician, and then you may begin to talk to me of a universe without a Universe-maker, call Him by what name you will.

Here is Flammarion's "L'Atmosphere" — a very gorgeous though weather-stained copy in faded scarlet and gold. The book has a small history, and I value it. A young Frenchman, dying of fever on the west coast of Africa, gave it to me as a professional fee. The sight of it takes me back to a little ship's bunk, and a sallow face with large, sad eyes looking out at me. Poor boy, I fear that he never saw his beloved Marseilles again!

Talking of popular science, I know no better books for exciting a man's first interest, and giving a broad general view of the subject, than these of Samuel Laing. Who would have imagined that the wise savant and gentle dreamer of these volumes was also the energetic secretary of a railway company? Many men of the highest scientific eminence have begun in prosaic lines of life. Herbert Spencer was a railway engineer. Wallace was a land surveyor. But that a man with so pronounced a scientific brain as Laing should continue all his life to devote his time to dull routine work, remaining in harness until extreme old age, with his soul still open to every fresh idea and his brain acquiring new concretions of knowledge, is indeed a remarkable fact. Read those books, and you will be a fuller man.

It is an excellent device to talk about what you have recently read. Rather hard upon your audience, you may say; but without wishing to be personal, I dare bet it is more interesting than your usual small talk. It must, of course, be done with some tact and discretion. It is the mention of Laing's works which awoke the train of thought which led to these remarks. I had met some one at a table d'hote or elsewhere who made some remark about the prehistoric remains in the valley of the Somme. I knew all about those, and showed him that I did. I then threw out some allusion to the rock temples of Yucatan, which he instantly picked up and enlarged upon. He spoke of ancient Peruvian civilization, and I kept well abreast of him. I cited the Titicaca image, and he knew all about that. He spoke of Quaternary man, and I was with him all the time. Each was more and more amazed at the fulness and the accuracy of the information of the other, until like a flash the explanation crossed my mind. “You are reading Samuel Laing’s ‘Human Origins’!” I cried. So he was, and so by a coincidence was I. We were pouring water over each other, but it was all new-drawn from the spring.

There is a big two-volumed book at the end of my science shelf which would, even now, have its right to be called scientific disputed by some of the pedants. It is Myers’ “Human Personality.” My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that it will be recognised a century hence as a great root book, one from which a whole new branch of science will have sprung. Where between four covers will you find greater evidence of patience, of industry, of thought, of discrimination, of that sweep of mind which can gather up a thousand separate facts and bind them all in the meshes of a single consistent system? Darwin has not been a more ardent collector in zoology than Myers in the dim regions of psychic research, and his whole hypothesis, so new that a new nomenclature and terminology had to be invented to express it, telepathy, the subliminal, and the rest of it, will always be a monument of acute reasoning, expressed in fine prose and founded upon ascertained fact.

The mere suspicion of scientific thought or scientific methods has a great charm in any branch of literature, however far it may be removed from actual research. Poe’s tales, for example, owe much to this effect, though in his case it was a pure illusion. Jules Verne also produces a charmingly credible effect for the most incredible things by an adept use of a considerable amount of real knowledge of nature. But most gracefully of all does it shine in the lighter form of essay, where playful thoughts draw their analogies and illustrations from actual fact, each showing up the other, and the combination presenting a peculiar piquancy to the reader.

Where could I get better illustration of what I mean than in those three little volumes which make up Wendell Holmes’ immortal series, “The Autocrat,” “The Poet,” and “The Professor at the Breakfast Table”? Here the subtle, dainty, delicate thought is continually reinforced by the allusion or the analogy which shows the wide, accurate knowledge behind it. What work it is! how wise, how witty, how large-hearted and tolerant! Could one choose one’s philosopher in the Elysian fields, as once in Athens, I would surely join the smiling group who listened to the human, kindly words of the Sage of Boston. I suppose it is just that continual leaven of science, especially of medical science, which has from my early student days given those books so strong an attraction for me. Never have I so known and loved a man whom I had never seen. It was one of the ambitions of my lifetime to look upon his face, but by the irony of Fate I arrived in his native city just in time to lay a wreath upon his newly-turned grave. Read his books again, and see if you are not especially struck by the up-to-dateness of them. Like Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” it seems to me to be work which sprang into full flower fifty years before its time. One can hardly open a page haphazard without lighting upon some passage which illustrates the breadth of view, the felicity of phrase, and the singular power of playful but most suggestive analogy. Here, for example, is a paragraph — no better than a dozen others — which combines all the rare qualities: —

“Insanity is often the logic of an accurate mind overtasked. Good mental machinery ought to break its own wheels and levers, if anything is thrust upon them suddenly which tends to stop them or reverse their motion. A weak mind does not accumulate force enough to hurt itself; stupidity often saves a man from going mad. We frequently see persons in insane hospitals, sent there in consequence of what are called religious mental disturbances. I confess that I think better of them than of many who hold the same notions, and keep their wits and enjoy life very well, outside of the asylums. Any decent person ought to go mad if he really holds such and such opinions…. Anything that is brutal, cruel, heathenish, that makes life hopeless for the most of mankind, and perhaps for entire races — anything that assumes the necessity for the extermination of instincts which were given to be regulated — no matter by what name you call it — no matter whether a fakir, or a monk, or a deacon believes it — if received, ought to produce insanity in every well-regulated mind.”

There’s a fine bit of breezy polemics for the dreary fifties — a fine bit of moral courage too for the University professor who ventured to say it.

I put him above Lamb as an essayist, because there is a flavour of actual knowledge and of practical acquaintance with the problems and affairs of life, which is lacking in the elfin Londoner. I do not say that the latter is not the rarer quality. There are my “Essays of Elia,” and they are well-thumbed as you see, so it is not because I love Lamb less that I love this other more.

Both are exquisite, but Wendell Holmes is for ever touching some note which awakens an answering vibration within my own mind.

The essay must always be a somewhat repellent form of literature, unless it be handled with the lightest and deftest touch. It is too reminiscent of the school themes of our boyhood — to put a heading and then to show what you can get under it. Even Stevenson, for whom I have the most profound admiration, finds it difficult to carry the reader through a series of such papers, adorned with his original thought and quaint turn of phrase. Yet his "Men and Books" and "Virginibus Puerisque" are high examples of what may be done in spite of the inherent unavoidable difficulty of the task.

But his style! Ah, if Stevenson had only realised how beautiful and nervous was his own natural God-given style, he would never have been at pains to acquire another! It is sad to read the much-lauded anecdote of his imitating this author and that, picking up and dropping, in search of the best. The best is always the most natural. When Stevenson becomes a conscious stylist, applauded by so many critics, he seems to me like a man who, having most natural curls, will still conceal them under a wig. The moment he is precious he loses his grip. But when he will abide by his own sterling Lowland Saxon, with the direct word and the short, cutting sentence, I know not where in recent years we may find his mate. In this strong, plain setting the occasional happy word shines like a cut jewel. A really good stylist is like Beau Brummell's description of a well-dressed man — so dressed that no one would ever observe him. The moment you begin to remark a man's style the odds are that there is something the matter with it. It is a clouding of the crystal — a diversion of the reader's mind from the matter to the manner, from the author's subject to the author himself.

No, I have not the Edinburgh edition. If you think of a presentation — but I should be the last to suggest it. Perhaps on the whole I would prefer to have him in scattered books, rather than in a complete set. The half is more than the whole of most authors, and not the least of him. I am sure that his friends who reverenced his memory had good warrant and express instructions to publish this complete edition — very possibly it was arranged before his lamented end. Yet, speaking generally, I would say that an author was best served by being very carefully pruned before being exposed to the winds of time. Let every weak twig, every immature shoot be shorn away, and nothing but strong, sturdy, well-seasoned branches left.

So shall the whole tree stand strong for years to come. How false an impression of the true Stevenson would our critical grandchild acquire if he chanced to pick down any one of half a dozen of these volumes! As we watched his hand stray down the rank, how we would pray that it might alight upon the ones we love, on the “New Arabian Nights” “The Ebb-tide,” “The Wrecker,” “Kidnapped,” or “Treasure Island.” These can surely never lose their charm.

What noble books of their class are those last, “Kidnapped” and “Treasure Island”! both, as you see, shining forth upon my lower shelf. “Treasure Island” is the better story, while I could imagine that “Kidnapped” might have the more permanent value as being an excellent and graphic sketch of the state of the Highlands after the last Jacobite insurrection. Each contains one novel and admirable character, Alan Breck in the one, and Long John in the other. Surely John Silver, with his face the size of a ham, and his little gleaming eyes like crumbs of glass in the centre of it, is the king of all seafaring desperadoes. Observe how the strong effect is produced in his case: seldom by direct assertion on the part of the story-teller, but usually by comparison, innuendo, or indirect reference. The objectionable Billy Bones is haunted by the dread of “a seafaring man with one leg.” Captain Flint, we are told, was a brave man; “he was afraid of none, not he, only Silver — Silver was that genteel.” Or, again, where John himself says, “there was some that was feared of Pew, and some that was feared of Flint; but Flint his own self was feared of me. Feared he was, and proud. They was the roughest crew afloat was Flint’s. The devil himself would have been feared to go to sea with them. Well, now, I will tell you. I’m not a boasting man, and you seen yourself how easy I keep company; but when I was quartermaster, lambs wasn’t the word for Flint’s old buccaneers.” So, by a touch here and a hint there, there grows upon us the individuality of the smooth-tongued, ruthless, masterful, one-legged devil. He is to us not a creation of fiction, but an organic living reality with whom we have come in contact; such is the effect of the fine suggestive strokes with which he is drawn. And the buccaneers themselves, how simple and yet how effective are the little touches which indicate their ways of thinking and of acting. “I want to go in that cabin, I do; I want their pickles and wine and that.” “Now, if you had sailed along o’ Bill you wouldn’t have stood there to be spoke twice — not you. That was never Bill’s way, not the way of sich as sailed with him.” Scott’s buccaneers in “The Pirate” are admirable, but they lack something human which we find here. It will be long before John Silver loses his place in sea fiction, “and you may lay to that.”

Stevenson was deeply influenced by Meredith, and even in these books the influence of the master is apparent. There is the apt use of an occasional archaic or unusual word, the short, strong descriptions, the striking metaphors, the somewhat staccato fashion of speech. Yet, in spite of this flavour, they have quite individuality enough to constitute a school of their own. Their faults, or rather perhaps their limitations, lie never in the execution, but entirely in the original conception. They picture only one side of life, and that a strange and exceptional one. There is no female interest. We feel that it is an apotheosis of the boy-story — the penny number of our youth in excelsis. But it is all so good, so fresh, so picturesque, that, however limited its scope, it still retains a definite and well-assured place in literature. There is no reason why “Treasure Island” should not be to the rising generation of the twenty-first century what “Robinson Crusoe” has been to that of the nineteenth. The balance of probability is all in that direction.

The modern masculine novel, dealing almost exclusively with the rougher, more stirring side of life, with the objective rather than the subjective, marks the reaction against the abuse of love in fiction. This one phase of life in its orthodox aspect, and ending in the conventional marriage, has been so hackneyed and worn to a shadow, that it is not to be wondered at that there is a tendency sometimes to swing to the other extreme, and to give it less than its fair share in the affairs of men. In British fiction nine books out of ten have held up love and marriage as the be-all and end-all of life. Yet we know, in actual practice, that this may not be so. In the career of the average man his marriage is an incident, and a momentous incident; but it is only one of several. He is swayed by many strong emotions — his business, his ambitions, his friendships, his struggles with the recurrent dangers and difficulties which tax a man’s wisdom and his courage. Love will often play a subordinate part in his life. How many go through the world without ever loving at all? It jars upon us then to have it continually held up as the predominating, all-important fact in life; and there is a not unnatural tendency among a certain school, of which Stevenson is certainly the leader, to avoid altogether a source of interest which has been so misused and overdone. If all love-making were like that between Richard Feverel and Lucy Desborough, then indeed we could not have too much of it; but to be made attractive once more, the passion must be handled by some great master who has courage to break down conventionalities and to go straight to actual life for his inspiration.

The use of novel and piquant forms of speech is one of the most obvious of Stevenson’s devices. No man handles his adjectives with greater judgment and nicer discrimination. There is hardly a page of his work where we do not come across words and expressions which strike us with a pleasant sense of novelty, and yet express the meaning with admirable conciseness. “His eyes came coasting round to me.” It is dangerous to begin quoting, as the examples are interminable, and each suggests another. Now and then he misses his mark, but it is very seldom. As an example, an “eye-shot” does not commend itself as a substitute for “a glance,” and “to tee-hee” for “to giggle” grates somewhat upon the ear, though the authority of Chaucer might be cited for the expressions.

Next in order is his extraordinary faculty for the use of pithy similes, which arrest the attention and stimulate the imagination. “His voice sounded hoarse and awkward, like a rusty lock.” “I saw her sway, like something stricken by the wind.” “His laugh rang false, like a cracked bell.” “His voice shook like a taut rope.” “My mind flying like a weaver’s shuttle.” “His blows resounded on the grave as thick as sobs.” “The private guilty considerations I would continually observe to peep forth in the man’s talk like rabbits from a hill.” Nothing could be more effective than these direct and homely comparisons.

After all, however, the main characteristic of Stevenson is his curious instinct for saying in the briefest space just those few words which stamp the impression upon the reader’s mind. He will make you see a thing more clearly than you would probably have done had your eyes actually rested upon it. Here are a few of these word-pictures, taken haphazard from among hundreds of equal merit —

“Not far off Macconochie was standing with his tongue out of his mouth, and his hand upon his chin, like a dull fellow thinking hard.

”Stewart ran after us for more than a mile, and I could not help laughing as I looked back at last and saw him on a hill, holding his hand to his side, and nearly burst with running.

> ”Ballantrae turned to me with a face all wrinkled up, and his teeth all showing in his mouth…. He said no word, but his whole appearance was a kind of dreadful question.

> ”Look at him, if you doubt; look at him, grinning and gulping, a detected thief.

> ”He looked me all over with a warlike eye, and I could see the challenge on his lips.”

What could be more vivid than the effect produced by such sentences as these?

There is much more that might be said as to Stevenson’s peculiar and original methods in fiction. As a minor point, it might be remarked that he is the inventor of what may be called the mutilated villain. It is true that Mr. Wilkie Collins has described one gentleman who had not only been deprived of all his limbs, but was further afflicted by the insupportable name of Miserrimus Dexter. Stevenson, however, has used the effect so often, and with such telling results, that he may be said to have made it his own. To say nothing of Hyde, who was the very impersonation of deformity, there is the horrid blind Pew, Black Dog with two fingers missing, Long John with his one leg, and the sinister catechist who is blind but shoots by ear, and smites about him with his staff. In “The Black Arrow,” too, there is another dreadful creature who comes tapping along with a stick. Often as he has used the device, he handles it so artistically that it never fails to produce its effect.

Is Stevenson a classic? Well, it is a large word that. You mean by a classic a piece of work which passes into the permanent literature of the country. As a rule, you only know your classics when they are in their graves. Who guessed it of Poe, and who of Borrow? The Roman Catholics only canonize their saints a century after their death. So with our classics. The choice lies with our grandchildren. But I can hardly think that healthy boys will ever let Stevenson’s books of adventure die, nor do I think that such a short tale as “The Pavilion on the Links” nor so magnificent a parable as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” will ever cease to be esteemed. How well I remember the eagerness, the delight with which I read those early tales in “Cornhill” away back in the late seventies and early eighties. They were unsigned, after the old unfair fashion, but no man with any sense of prose could fail to know that they were all by the same author. Only years afterwards did I learn who that author was.

I have Stevenson's collected poems over yonder in the small cabinet. Would that he had given us more! Most of them are the merest playful sallies of a freakish mind. But one should, indeed, be a classic, for it is in my judgment by all odds the best narrative ballad of the last century — that is if I am right in supposing that "The Ancient Mariner" appeared at the very end of the eighteenth. I would put Coleridge's tour de force of grim fancy first, but I know none other to compare in glamour and phrase and easy power with "Ticonderoga." Then there is his immortal epitaph. The two pieces alone give him a niche of his own in our poetical literature, just as his character gives him a niche of his own in our affections. No, I never met him. But among my most prized possessions are several letters which I received from Samoa. From that distant tower he kept a surprisingly close watch upon what was doing among the bookmen, and it was his hand which was among the first held out to the striver, for he had quick appreciation and keen sympathies which met another man's work half-way, and wove into it a beauty from his own mind.

And now, my very patient friend, the time has come for us to part, and I hope my little sermons have not bored you over-much. If I have put you on the track of anything which you did not know before, then verify it and pass it on. If I have not, there is no harm done, save that my breath and your time have been wasted. There may be a score of mistakes in what I have said — is it not the privilege of the conversationalist to misquote? My judgments may differ very far from yours, and my likings may be your abhorrence; but the mere thinking and talking of books is in itself good, be the upshot what it may. For the time the magic door is still shut. You are still in the land of faerie. But, alas, though you shut that door, you cannot seal it. Still come the ring of bell, the call of telephone, the summons back to the sordid world of work and men and daily strife. Well, that's the real life after all — this only the imitation. And yet, now that the portal is wide open and we stride out together, do we not face our fate with a braver heart for all the rest and quiet and comradeship that we found behind the Magic Door?

THE CRIME OF THE CONGO

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PREFACE

THERE are many of us in England who consider the crime which has been wrought in the Congo lands by King Leopold of Belgium and his followers to be the greatest which has ever been known in human annals. Personally I am strongly of that opinion. There have been great expropriations like that of the Normans in England or of the English in Ireland. There have been massacres of populations like that of the South Americans by the Spaniards or of subject nations by the Turks. But never before has there been such a mixture of wholesale expropriation and wholesale massacre all done under an odious guise of philanthropy and with the lowest commercial motives as a reason. It is this sordid cause and the unctious hypocrisy which makes this crime unparalleled in its horror.

The witnesses of the crime are of all nations, and there is no possibility of error concerning facts. There are British consuls like Casement, Thesiger, Mitchell and Armstrong, all writing in their official capacity with every detail of fact and date. There are Frenchmen like Pierre Mille and Fdlicien Challaye, both of whom have written books upon the subject. There are missionaries of many races — Harris, Weeks and Stannard (British); Morrison, Clarke and Shepherd (American); Sjoblom (Swedish) and Father Ver- meersch, the Jesuit. There is the eloquent action of the Italian Government, who refused to allow Italian officers to be employed any longer in such hangman's work, and there is the report of the Belgian commission, the evidence before which was suppressed because it was too dreadful for publication; finally, there is the incorruptible evidence of the kodak. Any American citizen who will glance at Mark Twain's "King Leopold's Soliloquy" will see some samples of that. A perusal of all of these sources of information will show that there is not a grotesque, obscene or ferocious torture which human ingenuity could invent which has not been used against these harmless and helpless people.

This would, to my mind, warrant our intervention in any case.

Turkey has several times been interfered with simply on the general ground of humanity. There is in this instance a very special reason why America and England should not stand by and see these people done to death. They are, in a sense, their wards. America was the first to give official recognition to King Leopold's enterprise in 1884, and so has the responsibility of having actually put him into that position which he has so dreadfully abused. She has been the indirect and innocent cause of the whole tragedy. Surely some reparation is due. On the other hand England has, with the other European Powers, signed the treaty of 1885, by which each and all of them make it responsible for the condition of the native races. The other Powers have so far shown no desire to live up to this pledge. But the conscience of England is uneasy and she is slowly rousing herself to act. Will America be behind?

At this moment two American citizens, Shepherd and that noble Virginian, Morrison, are about to be tried at Boma for telling the truth about the scoundrels. Morrison in the dock makes a finer Statue of Liberty than Bartholdi's in New York harbour.

Attempts will be made in America (for the Congo has its paid apologists everywhere) to pretend that England wants to oust Belgium from her colony and take it herself. Such accusations are folly. To run a tropical colony honestly without enslaving the natives is an expensive process. For example Nigeria, the nearest English colony, has to be subsidized to the extent of $2,000,000 a year. Whoever takes over the Congo will, considering its present demoralised condition, have a certain expense of $10,000,000 a year for twenty years. Belgium has not run the colony. It has simply sacked it, forcing the inhabitants without pay to ship everything of value to Antwerp. No decent European Power could do this. For many years to come the Congo will be a heavy expense and it will truly be a philanthropic call upon the next owner. I trust it will not fall to England.

Attempts have been made too (for there is considerable ingenuity and unlimited money on the other side) to pretend that it is a question of Protestant missions against Catholic. Any one who thinks this should read the book, "La Question Kongolaise," of the eloquent and holy Jesuit, Father Vermeersch. He lived in the country and, as he says, it was the sight of the "immeasurable misery," which drove him to write.

We English who are earnest over this matter look eagerly to the westward to see some sign of moral support of material leading. It would be a grand sight to see the banner of humanity and civilization carried forward in such a cause by the two great English-speaking nations.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

INTRODUCTION

I am convinced that the reason why public opinion has not been more sensitive upon the question of the Congo Free State, is that the terrible story has not been brought thoroughly home to the people. Mr. E. D. Morel has done the work of ten men, and the Congo Reform Association has struggled hard with very scanty means; but their time and energies have, for the most part, been absorbed in dealing with each fresh phase of the situation as it arose. There is room, therefore, as it seemed to me, for a general account which would cover the whole field and bring the matter up to date. This account must necessarily be a superficial one, if it is to be produced at such a size and such a price, as will ensure its getting at that general public for which it has been prepared. Yet it contains the essential facts, and will enable the reader to form his own opinion upon the situation.

Should he, after reading it, desire to help in the work of forcing this question to the front, he can do so in several ways. He can join the Congo Reform Association (Granville House, Arundel Street, W. C.). He can write to his local member and aid in getting up local meetings to ventilate the question. Finally, he can pass this book on and purchase other copies, for any profits will be used in setting the facts before the French and German public.

It may be objected that this is ancient history, and that the greater part of it refers to a period before the Congo State was annexed to Belgium on August ioth, 1908. But responsibility cannot be so easily shaken off. The Congo State was founded by the Belgian King, and exploited by Belgian capital, Belgian soldiers and Belgian con- cessionnaires. It was defended and upheld by successive Belgian Governments, who did all they could to discourage the Reformers. In spite of legal quibbles, it is an insult to common sense to suppose that the responsibility for the Congo has not always rested with Belgium. The Belgian machinery was always ready to help and defend the State, but never to hold it in control and restrain it from crime.

One chance Belgium had. If immediately upon taking over the State they had formed a Judicial Commission for the rigid inspection of the whole matter, with power to punish for all past offences, and to examine all the scandals of recent years, then they would have done something to clear the past. If on the top of that they had freed the land, given up the system of forced labour entirely, and cancelled the charters of all the concessionnaire companies, for the obvious reason that they have notoriously abused their powers, then Belgium could go forward in its colonizing enterprise on the same terms as other States, with her sins expiated so far as expiation is now possible.

She did none of these things. For a year now she has herself persevered in the evil ways of her predecessor. Her colony is a scandal before the whole world. The era of murders and mutilations has, as we hope, passed by, but the country is sunk into a state of cowed and hopeless slavery. It is not a new story, but merely another stage of the same story. When Belgium took over the Congo State, she took over its history and its responsibilities also. What a load that was is indicated in these pages.

The record of the dates is the measure of our patience. Can any one say that we are precipitate if we now brush aside vain words and say definitely that the matter has to be set right by a certain near date, or that we will appeal to each and all of the Powers, with the evidence before them, to assist us in setting it right? If the Powers refuse to do so, then it is our duty to honour the guarantees which we made as to the safety of these poor people, and to turn to the task of setting it right ourselves. If the Powers join in, or give us a mandate, all the better. But we have a mandate from something higher than the Powers which obliges us to act.

Sir Edward Grey has told us in his speech of July 22nd, 1909, that a danger to European peace lies in the matter. Let us look this danger squarely in the face. Whence does it come? Is it from Germany, with her traditions of kindly home life — is this the power which would raise a hand to help the butchers of the Mongalla and of the Domaine de la Couronne? Is it likely that those who so justly admire the splendid private and public example of William II. would draw the sword for Leopold? Both in the name of trade rights and in that of humanity Germany has a long score to settle on the Congo. Or is it the United States which would stand in the way, when her citizens have vied wjth our own in withstanding and exposing these iniquities? Or, lastly, is France the danger? There are those who think that because France has capital invested in these enterprises, because the French Congo has itself degenerated under the influence and example of its neighbour, and because France holds a right of pre-emption, that therefore our trouble lies across the Channel. For my own part, I cannot believe it. I know too well the generous, chivalrous instincts of the French people. I know, also, that their colonial record during centuries has been hardly inferior to our own. Such traditions are not lightly set aside, and all will soon be right again when a strong Colonial Minister turns his attention to the concessionnaires in the French Congo. They will remember de Brazza's dying words: “Our Congo must not be turned into a Mongalla.” It is an impossibility that France could ally herself with King Leopold, and certainly if such were, indeed, the case, the entente cordiale would be strained to breaking. Surely, then, if these three Powers, the ones most directly involved, have such obvious reasons for helping, rather than hindering, we may go forward without fear. But if it were not so, if all Europe frowned upon our enterprise, we would not be worthy to be the sons of our fathers if we did not go forward on the plain path of national duty.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Windlesham, Crowborough, September, 1909.

The Crime of the Congo

CHAPTER I

HOW THE CONGO FREE STATE CAME TO BE FOUNDED

IN THE earlier years of his reign King Leopold of Belgium began to display that interest in Central Africa which for a long time was ascribed to nobility and philanthropy, until the contrast between such motives, and the actual unscrupulous commercialism, became too glaring to be sustained. As far back as the year 1876 he called a conference of humanitarians and travellers, who met at Brussels for the purpose of debating various plans by which the Dark Continent might be opened up. From this conference sprang the so-called International African Association, which, in spite of its name, was almost entirely a Belgian body, with the Belgian King as President. Its professed object was the exploration of the country and the founding of stations which should be rest-houses for travellers and centres of civilization.

On the return of Stanley from his great journey in 1878, he was met at Marseilles by a representative from the King of Belgium, who enrolled the famous traveller as an agent for his Association. The immediate task given to Stanley was to open up the Congo for trade, and to make such terms with the natives as would enable stations to be built and depdts established. In 1879 Stanley was at work with characteristic energy. His own intentions were admirable. “We shall require but mere contact,” he wrote, “ to satisfy the natives that our intentions are pure and honourable, seeking their own good, materially and socially, more than our own interests. We go to spread what blessings arise from amiable and just intercourse with people who have been strangers to them.” Stanley was a hard man, but he was no hypocrite. What he said he undoubtedly meant. It is worth remarking, in view of the accounts of the laziness or stupidity of the natives given by King Leopold’s apologists in order to justify their conduct toward them, that Stanley had the very highest opinion of their industry and commercial ability. The following extracts from his writings set this matter beyond all doubt:

“Bolobo is a great centre for the ivory and camwood powder trade, principally because its people are so enterprising.”

Of Irebu—”a Venice of the Congo” — he says:

“ These people were really acquainted with many lands and tribes on the Upper Congo. From Stanley Pool to Upoto, a distance of 6,000 miles, they knew every landing-place on the river banks. All the ups and downs of savage life, all the profits and losses derived from barter, all the diplomatic arts used by tactful savages, were as well known to them as the Roman alphabet to us. . . . No wonder that all this commercial knowledge had left its traces on their faces; indeed, it is the same as in your own cities in Europe. Know you not the military man among you, the lawyer and the merchant, the banker, the artist, or the poet? It is the same in Africa, MORE ESPECIALLY ON THE CONGO, WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE SO DEVOTED TO TRADE.”

“During the few days of our mutual intercourse they gave us a high idea of their qualities — industry, after their own style, not being the least conspicuous.”

“ As in the old time, Umangi, from the right bank, and Mpa, from the left bank, despatched their representatives with ivory tusks, large and small, goats and sheep, and vegetable food, clamorously demanding that we should buy from them. Such urgent entreaties, accompanied with blandishments to purchase their stock, were difficult to resist.”

“I speak of eager native traders following us for miles for the smallest piece of cloth. I mention that after travelling many miles to obtain cloth for ivory and redwood powder, the despairing natives asked: ‘Well, what is it you do want? Tell us, and we will get it for you.’ “

Speaking of English scepticism as to King Leopold’s intentions, he says:

“Though they understand the satisfaction of a sentiment when applied to England, they are slow to understand that it may be a sentiment that induccd King Leopold II. to father this International Association. He is a dreamer, like his confreres in the work, because the sentiment is applied to the neglected millions of the Dark Continent. They cannot appreciate rightly, because there are no dividends attaching to it, this ardent, vivifying and expansive sentiment, which seeks to extend civilizing influences among the dark races, and to brighten up with the glow of civilization the dark places of sad-browed Africa.”

One cannot let these extracts pass without noting that Bolobo, the first place named by Stanley, has sunk in population from 40,000 to 7,000; that Irebu, called by Stanley the populous Venice of the Congo, had in 1903 a population of fifty; that the natives who used to follow Stanley, beseeching him to trade, now, according to Consul Casement, fly into the bush at the approach of a steamer, and that the unselfish sentiment of King Leopold II. has developed into dividends of 300 per cent, per annum. Such is the difference between Stanley’s anticipation and the actual fulfilment.

Untroubled, however, with any vision as to the destructive effects of his own work, Stanley laboured hard among the native chiefs, and returned to his employer with no less than 450 alleged treaties which transferred land to the Association. We have no record of the exact payment made in order to obtain these treaties, but we have the terms of a similar transaction carried out by a Belgian officer in 1883 at Palabala. In this case the payment made to the Chief consisted of “one coat of red cloth with gold facings, one red cap, one white tunic, one piece of white baft, one piece of red points, one box of liqueurs, four demijohns of rum, two boxes of gin, 128 bottles of gin, twenty red handkerchiefs, forty singlets and forty old cotton caps.” It is clear that in making such treaties the Chief thought that he was giving permission for the establishment of a station. The idea that he was actually bartering away the land was never even in his mind, for it was held by a communal tenure for the whole tribe, and it was not his to barter. And yet it is on the strength of such treaties as these that twenty millions of people have been expropriated, and the whole wealth and land of the country proclaimed to belong, not to the inhabitants, but to the State — that is, to King Leopold.

With this sheaf of treaties in his portfolio the King of the Belgians now approached the Powers with high sentiments of humanitarianism, and with a definite request that the State which he was forming should receive some recognised status among the nations. Was he at that time consciously hypocritical? Did he already foresee how widely his future actions would differ from his present professions? It is a problem which will interest the historian of the future, who may have more materials than we upon which to form a judgment. On the one hand, there was a furtive secrecy about the evolution of his plans and the despatch of his expeditions which should have no place in a philanthropic enterprise. On the other hand, there arc limits to human powers of deception, and it is almost inconceivable that a man who was acting a part could so completely deceive the whole civilised world. It is more probable, as it seems to me, that his ambitious mind discerned that it was possible for him to acquire a field of action which his small kingdom could not give, in mixing himself with the affairs of Africa. He chose the obvious path, that of a civilizing and elevating mission, taking the line of least resistance without any definite idea whither it might lead him. Once faced with the facts, his astute brain perceived the great material possibilities of the country; his early dreams faded away to be replaced by unscrupulous cupidity, and step by step he was led downward until he, the man of holy aspirations in 1885, stands now in 1909 with such a cloud of terrible direct personal responsibility resting upon him as no man in modern European history has had to bear.

It is, indeed, ludicrous, with our knowledge of the outcome, to read the declarations of the King and of his representatives at that time. They were actually forming the strictest of commercial monopolies — an organization which was destined to crush out all general private trade in a country as large as the whole of Europe with Russia omitted. That was the admitted outcome of their enterprise. Now listen to M. Beernaert, the Belgian Premier, speaking in the year 1885:

“The State, of which our King will be the Sovereign, will be a sort of international Colony. There will be no monopolies, no privileges. . . . Quite the contrary: absolute freedom of commerce, freedom of property, freedom of navigation.”

Here, too, are the words of Baron Lambermont, the Belgian Plenipotentiary at the Berlin Conference:

“The temptation to impose abusive taxes will find its corrective, if need be, in the freedom of commerce. ... No doubt exists as to the strict and literal meaning of the term ‘ in commercial matters.’ It means. . . . the unlimited right for every one to buy and to sell.”

The question of humanity is so pressing that it obscures that of the broken pledges about trade, but on the latter alone there is ample reason to say that every condition upon which this State was founded has been openly and notoriously violated, and that, therefore, its title-deeds are vitiated from the beginning.

At the time the professions of the King made the whole world his enthusiastic allies. The United States was the first to hasten to give formal recognition to the new State. May it be the first, also, to realise the truth and to take public steps to retract what it has done. The churches and the Chambers of Commerce of Great Britain were all for Leopold, the one attracted by the prospect of pushing their missions into the heart of Africa, the others delighted at the offer of an open market for their produce. At the Congress of Berlin, which was called to regulate the situation, the nations vied with each other in furthering the plans of the King of the Belgians and in extolling his high aims. The Congo Free State was created amid general rejoicings. The veteran Bismarck, as credulous as the others, pronounced its baptismal blessing. “The New Congo State is called upon,” said he, “to become one of the chief promoters of the work” (of civilization) “which we have in view, and I pray for its prosperous development and for the fulfilment of the noble aspirations of its illustrious founder.” Such was the birth of the Congo Free State. Had the nations gathered round been able to perceive its future, the betrayal of religion and civilization of which it would be guilty, the immense series of crimes which it would perpetrate throughout Central Africa, the lowering of the prestige of all the white races, they would surely have strangled the monster in its cradle.

It is not necessary to record in this statement the whole of the provisions of the Berlin Congress. Two only will suffice, as they are at the same time the most important and the most flagrantly abused. The first of these (which forms the fifth article of the agreement) proclaims that “No Power which exercises sovereign rights in the said regions shall be allowed to grant therein either monopoly or privilege of any kind in commercial matters.” No words could be clearer than that, but the Belgian representatives, conscious that such a clause must disarm all opposition, went out of their way to accentuate it. “No privileged situation can be created in this respect,” they said. “The way remains open without any restriction to free competition in the sphere of commerce.” It would be interesting now to send a British or German trading expedition up the Congo in search of that free competition which has been so explicitly promised, and to see how it would fare between the monopolist Government and the monopolist companies who have divided the land between them. We have travelled some distance since Prince Bismarck at the last sitting of the Conference declared that the result was “to secure to the commerce of all nations free access to the centre of the African Continent.”

More important, however, is Article VI., both on account of the issues at stake, and because the signatories of the treaty bound themselves solemnly, “in the name of Almighty God,” to watch over its enforcement. It ran: “All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in these territories pledge themselves to watch over the preservation of the native populations and the improvement of their moral and material conditions of existence, and to work together for the suppression of slavery and of the slave trade.” That was the pledge of the united nations of Europe. It is a disgrace to each of them, including ourselves, the way in which they have fulfilled that oath. Before their eyes, as I shall show in the sequel, they have had enacted one long, horrible tragedy, vouched for by priests and missionaries, traders, travellers and consuls, all corroborated, but in no way reformed, by a Belgium commission of inquiry. They have seen these unhappy people, who were their wards, robbed of all they possessed, debauched, degraded, mutilated, tortured, murdered, all on such a scale as has never, to my knowledge, occurred before in the whole course of history, and now, after all these years, with all the facts notorious, we are still at the stage of polite diplomatic expostulations. It is no answer to say that France and Germany have shown even less regard for the pledge they took at Berlin. An individual does not condone the fact that he has broken his word by pointing out that his neighbour has done the same.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONGO STATE

HAVING received his mandate from the civilised world King Leopold proceeded to organize the Government of the new State, which was in theory to be independent of Belgium, although ruled by the same individual. In Europe, King Leopold was a constitutional monarch; in Africa, an absolute autocrat. There were chosen three ministers for the new State — for foreign affairs, for finances and for internal affairs; but it cannot be too clearly understood that they and their successors, up to 1908, were nominated by the King, paid by the King, answerable only to the King, and, in all ways, simply so many upper clerks in his employ. The workings of one policy and of one brain, as capable as it is sinister, are to be traced in every fresh development. If the ministers were ever meant to be a screen, it is a screen which is absolutely transparent. The origin of everything is the King — always the King. M. van Ectvelde, one of the three head agents, put the matter into a single sentence: “C’est h votre majeste qu’appartient l’fitat.” They were simply stewards, who managed the estate with a very alert and observant owner at their back.

One of the early acts was enough to make observers a little thoughtful. It was the announcement of the right to issue laws by arbitrary decrees without publishing them in Europe. There should be secret laws, which could, at any instant, be altered. The Bulletin Officiel announced that “Tous les Actes du Gouvernement qu’il y a interet h rendre publics seront insdrds au Bulletin OfficielAlready it is clear that something was in the wind which might shock the rather leathery conscience of a European Concert. Meanwhile, the organization of the State went forward. A Governor-General was elected, who should live at Boma, which was made the capital. Under him were fifteen District Commissaries, who should govern so many districts into which the whole country was divided. The only portion which was at that time at all developed was the semi- civilised Lower Congo at the mouth of the river. There lay the white population. The upper reaches of the stream and of its great tributaries were known only to a few devoted missionaries and enterprising explorers. Grenfell and Bentley, of the Missions, with Von Wissman, the Geman, and the ever-energetic Stanley, were the pioneers who, during the few years which followed, opened up the great hinterland which was to be the scene of such atrocious events.

But the work of the explorer had soon to be supplemented and extended by the soldier. Whilst the Belgians had been entering the Congo land from the west, the slave-dealing Arabs had penetrated from the east, passing down the river as far as Stanley Falls. There could be no compromise between such opposite forces, though some attempt was made to find one by electing the Arab leader as Free State Governor. There followed a long scrambling campaign, carried on for many years between the Arab slavers on the one side and the Congo forces upon the other — the latter consisting largely of cannibal tribes — men of the Stone Age, armed with the weapons of the nineteenth century. The suppression of the slave trade is a good cause, but the means by which it was effected, and the use of Barbarians who ate in the evening those whom they had slain during the day, are as bad as the evil itself. Yet there is no denying the energy and ability of the Congo leaders, especially of Baron Dhanis. By the year 1894 the Belgian expeditions had been pushed as far as Lake Tanganyika, the Arab strongholds had fallen, and Dhanis was able to report to Brussels that the campaign was at an end, and that slave-raiding was no more. The new State could claim that they had saved a part of the natives from slavery. How they proceeded to impose upon all of them a yoke, compared to which the old slavery was merciful, will be shown in these pages. From the time of the fall of the Arab power the Congo Free State was only called upon to use military force in the case of mutinies of its own black troops, and of occasional risings of its own tormented “citizens.” Master of its own house, it could settle down to exploit the country which it had won.

In the meantime the internal policy of the State showed a tendency to take an unusual and sinister course. I have already expressed my opinion that King Leopold was not guilty of conscious hypocrisy in the beginning, that his intentions were vaguely philanthropic, and that it was only by degrees that he sank to the depths which will be shown. This view is borne out by some of the earlier edicts of the State. In 1886, a long pronouncement upon native lands ended by the words: “All acts or agreements are forbidden which tend to the expulsion of natives from the territory they occupy, or to deprive them, directly or indirectly, of their liberty or their means of existence.” Such are the words of 1886. Before the end of 1887, an Act had been published, though not immediately put into force, which had the exactly opposite effect. By this Act all lands which were not actually occupied by natives were proclaimed to be the property of the State. Consider for a moment what this meant! No land in such a country is actually occupied by natives save the actual site of their villages, and the scanty fields of grain or manioc which surround them. Everywhere beyond these tiny patches extend the plains and forests which have been the ancestral wandering places of the natives, and which contain the rubber, the camwood, the copal, the ivory, and the skins which are the sole objects of their commerce. At a single stroke of a pen in Brussels everything was taken from them, not only the country, but the produce of the country. How could they trade when the State had taken from them everything which they had to offer? How could the foreign merchant do business when the State had seized everything and could sell it for itself direct in Europe? Thus, within two years of the establishment of the State by the Treaty of Berlin, it had with one hand seized the whole patrimony of those natives for whose “moral and material advantage” it had been so solicitous, and with the other hand it had torn up that clause in the treaty by which monopolies were forbidden, and equal trade rights guaranteed to all. How blind were the Powers not to see what sort of a creature they had made, and how short-sighted not to take urgent steps in those early days to make it retrace its steps and find once more the path of loyalty and justice! A firm word, a stern act at that time in the presence of this flagrant breach of international agreement, would have saved all Central Africa from the horror which has come upon it, would have screened Belgium from a lasting disgrace, and would have spared Europe a question which has already, as it seems to me, lowered the moral standing of all the nations, and the end of which is not yet.

Having obtained possession of the land and its products, the next step was to obtain labour by which these products could be safely garnered. The first definite move in this direction was taken in the year 1888, when, with that odious hypocrisy which has been the last touch in so many of these transactions, an Act was produced which was described in the Bulletin Officiel as being for the “Special protection of the black.” It is evident that the real protection of the black in matters of trade was to offer him such pay as would induce him to do a day’s work, and to let him choose his own employment, as is done with the Kaffirs of South Africa, or any other native population. This Act had a very different end. It allowed blacks to be bound over in terms of seven years’ service to their masters in a manner which was in truth indistinguishable from slavery. As the negotiations were usually carried on with the capita, or headman, the unfortunate servant was transferred with small profit to himself, and little knowledge of the conditions of his servitude. Under the same system the State also enlisted its employees, including the recruits for its small army. This army was supplemented by a wild militia, consisting of various barbarous tribes, many of them cannibals, and all of them capable of any excess of cruelty or outrage. A German, August Boshart, in his “Zehn Jahre Afrikanischen Lebens,” has given us a clear idea of how these tribes are recruited, and of the precise meaning of the attractive word “Iib6r6” when applied to a State servant. “Some District Commissary,” he says, “receives instructions to furnish a certain number of men in a given time. He puts himself in communication with the chiefs, and invites them to a palaver at his residence. These chiefs, as a rule, already have an inkling of what is coming, and, if made wise by experience, make a virtue of necessity and present themselves. In that case the negotiations run their course easily enough; each chief promises to supply a certain number of slaves, and receives presents in return. It may happen, however, that one or another pays no heed to the friendly invitation, in which case war is declared, his villages are burned down, perhaps some of his people are shot, and his stores or gardens are plundered. In this way the wild king is soon tamed, and he sues for peace, which, of course, is granted on condition of his supplying double the number of slaves. These men are entered in the State books as iibdr^s.’ To prevent their running away, they are put in irons and sent, on the first opportunity, to one of the military camps, where their irons are taken off and they are drafted into the army. The District Commissary is paid £2 sterling for every serviceable recruit.”

Having taken the country and secured labour for exploiting it in the way described, King Leopold proceeded to take further steps for its development, all of them exceedingly well devised for the object in view.

The great impediment to the navigation of the Congo had lain in the continuous rapids which made the river impassable from Stanley Pool for three hundred miles down to Boma at the mouth. A company was now formed to find the capital by which a railway should be built between these two points. The construction was begun in 1888, and was completed in 1898, after many financial vicissitudes, forming a work which deserves high credit as a piece of ingenious engineering and of sustained energy. Other commercial companies, of which more will be said hereafter, were formed in order to exploit large districts of the country which the State was not yet strong enough to handle. By this arrangement the companies found the capital for exploring, station building, etc., while the State — that is, the King — retained a certain portion, usually half, of the company's shares. The plan itself is not necessarily a vicious one; indeed, it closely resembles that under which the Chartered Company of Rhodesia grants mining and other leases. The scandal arose from the methods by which these companies proceeded to carry out their ends — those methods being the same as were used by the State, on whose pattern these smaller organizations were moulded.

In the meantime King Leopold, feeling the weakness of his personal position in face of the great enterprise which lay before him in Africa, endeavoured more and more to draw Belgium, as a State, into the matter. Already the Congo State was largely the outcome of Belgian work and of Belgian money, but, theoretically, there was no connection between the two countries. Now the Belgian Parliament was won over to advancing ten million francs for the use of the Congo, and thus a direct connection sprang up which has eventually led to annexation. At the time of this loan King Leopold let it be known that he had left the Congo Free State in his will to Belgium. In this document appear the words, "A young and spacious State, directed from Brussels, has pacifically appeared in the sunlight, thanks to the benevolent support of the Powers that have welcomed its appearance. Some Belgians administer it, while others, each day more numerous, there increase their wealth." So he flashed the gold before the eyes of his European subjects. Verily, if King Leopold deceived other Powers, he reserved the most dangerous of all his deceits for his own country. The day on which they turned from their own honest, healthy development to follow the Congo lure, and to administer without any previous colonial experience a country more than sixty times their own size, will prove to have been a dark day in Belgian history.

The Berlin Conference of 1885 marks the first International session upon the affairs of the Congo. The second was the Brussels Conference of 1889-90. It is amazing to find that after these years of experience the Powers were still ready to accept King Leopold’s professions at their face value. It is true that none of the more sinister developments had been conspicuous, but the legislation of the State with regard to labour and trade was already such as to suggest the turn which affairs would take in future if not curbed by a strong hand. One Power, and one only, Holland, had the sagacity to appreciate the true situation, and the independence to show its dissatisfaction. The outcome of the sittings was various philanthropic resolutions intended to strengthen the new State in dealing with that slave trade it was destined to re-introduce in its most odious form. We are too near to these events, and they are too painfully intimate, to permit us to see humour in them; but the historian of the future, when he reads that the object of the European Concert was “to protect effectually the aboriginal inhabitants of Africa,” may find it difficult to suppress a smile. This was the last European assembly to deal with the affairs of the Congo. May the next be for the purpose of taking steps to truly carry out those high ends which have been forever spoken of and never reduced to practice.

The most important practical outcome of the Brussels Conference was that the Powers united to free the new State from those free port promises which it had made in 1885, and to permit it in future to levy ten per cent, upon imports. The Act was hung up for two years owing to the opposition of Holland, but the fact of its adoption by the other Powers, and the renewed mandate given to King Leopold, strengthened the position of the new State to such an extent that it found no difficulty in securing a further loan from Belgium of twenty-five millions of francs, upon condition that, after ten years, Belgium should have the option of taking over the Congo lands as a colony.

If in the years which immediately succeeded the Brussels Conference — from 1890 to 1894 — a bird’s-eye view could be taken of the enormous river which, with its tributaries, forms a great twisted fan radiating over the whole centre of Africa, one would mark in all directions symptoms of European activity. At the Lower Congo one would see crowds of natives, impressed for the service and guarded by black soldiers, working at the railway. At Boma and at Leopoldsville, the two termini of the projected line, cities are rising, with stations, wharves and public buildings. In the extreme southeast one would see an expedition under Stairs exploring and annexing the great district of Katanga, which abuts upon Northern Rhodesia. In the furthest northeast and along the whole eastern border, small military expeditions would be disclosed, fighting against rebellious blacks or Arab raiders. Then, along all the lines of the rivers, posts were being formed and stations established — some by the State and some by the various concessionnaire companies for the development of their commerce.

In the meantime, the State was tightening its grip upon the land with its products, and was working up the system which was destined to produce such grim results in the near future. The independent traders were discouraged and stamped out, Belgium, as well as Dutch, English and French. Some of the loudest protests against the new order may be taken from Belgian sources. Everywhere, in flagrant disregard of the Treaty of Berlin, the State proclaimed itself to be the sole landlord and the sole trader. In some cases it worked its own so-called property, in other cases it leased it. Even those who had striven to help King Leopold in the earlier stages of his enterprise were thrown overboard. Major Parminter, himself engaged in trade upon the Congo, sums up the situation in 1902 as follows: “To sum up, the application of the new decrees of the Government signifies this: that the State considers as its private property the whole of the Congo Basin, excepting the sites of the natives’ villages and gardens. It decrees that all the products of this immense region are its private property, and it monopolizes the trade in them. As regards the primitive proprietors, the native tribes, they are dispossessed by a simple circular; permission is graciously granted to them to collect such products, but only on condition that they bring them for sale to the State for whatever the latter may be pleased to give them. As regards alien traders, they are prohibited in all this territory from trading with the natives.”

Everywhere there were stern orders — to the natives on the one hand, that they had no right to gather the products of their own forests; to independent traders on the other hand, that they were liable to punishment if they bought anything from the natives. In January, 1892, District Commissary Baert wrote: “The native of the district of Ubangi-Welle are not authorized to gather rubber.

It has been notified to them that they can only receive permission to do so on condition that they gather the produce for the exclusive benefit of the State.” Captain Le Marinel, a little later, is even more explicit: “I have decided,” he says, “to enforce rigorously the rights of the State over its domain, and, in consequence, cannot allow the natives to convert to their own profit, or to sell to others, any part of the rubber or ivory forming the fruits of the domain. Traders who purchase, or attempt to purchase, such fruits of this domain from the natives — which fruits the State only authorizes the natives to gather subject to the condition that they are brought to it — render themselves, in my opinion, guilty of receiving stolen goods, and I shall denounce them to the judicial authorities, so that proceedings may be taken against them.” This last edict was in the Bangala district, but it was followed at once by another from the more settled Equateur district, which shows that the strict adoption of the system was universal. In May, 1892, Lieutenant Lemaire proclaims: “ Considering that no concession has been granted to gather rubber in the domains of the State within this district, (1) natives can only gather rubber on condition of selling the same to the State; (2) any person or persons or vessels having in his or their possession, or on board, more than one kilogramme of rubber will have a prods- verbal drawn up against him, or them, or it; and the ship can be confiscated without prejudice to any subsequent proceedings.”

The sight of these insignificant lieutenants and captains, who are often non-commissioned officers of the Belgian army, issuing proclamations which were in distinct contradiction to the expressed will of all the great Powers of the world, might at the time have seemed ludicrous; but the history of the next seventeen years was to prove that a small malignant force, driven on by greed, may prove to be more powerful than a vague general philanthropy, strong only in good intentions and platitudes. During these years — from 1890 to 1895 — whatever indignation might be felt among traders over the restrictions placed upon them, the only news received by the general public from the Congo Free State concerned the founding of new stations, and the idea prevailed that King Leopold’s enterprise was indeed working out upon the humanitarian lines which had been originally planned. Then, for the first time, incidents occurred which gave some glimpse of the violence and anarchy which really prevailed.

The first of these, so far as Great Britain is concerned, lay in the treatment of natii»es from Sierra Leone, Lagos, and other British

Settlements, who had been engaged by the Belgians to come to Congoland and help in railway construction and other work. Coming from the settled order of such a colony as Sierra Leone or Lagos, these natives complained loudly when they found themselves working side by side with impressed Congolese, and under the discipline of the armed sentinels of the Force Publique. They were discontented and the discontent was met by corporal punishment. The matter grew to the dimensions of a scandal.

In answer to a question asked in the House of Commons on March 12th, 1896, Mr. Chamberlain, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated that complaints had been received of these British subjects having been employed without their consent as soldiers, and of their having been cruelly flogged, and, in some cases, shot; and he added: “They were engaged with the knowledge of Her Majesty’s representatives, and every possible precaution was taken in their interests; but, in consequence of the complaints received, the recruitment of labourers for the Congo has been prohibited.”

This refusal of the recruitment of labourers by Great Britain was the first public and national sign of disapproval of Congolese methods. A few years later, a more pointed one was given, when the Italian War Ministry refused to allow their officers to serve with the Congo forces.

Early in 1895 occurred the Stokes affair, which moved public opinion deeply, both in this country and in Germany. Charles Henry Stokes was an Englishman by birth, but he resided in German East Africa, was the recipient of a German Decoration for his services on behalf of German colonization, and formed his trading caravans from a German base, with East African natives as his porters. He had led such a caravan over the Congo State border, when he was arrested by Captain Lothaire, an officer in command of some Congolese troops. The unfortunate Stokes may well have thought himself safe as the subject of one great Power and the agent of another, but he was tried instantly in a most informal manner upon a charge of selling guns to the natives, was condemned, and was hanged on the following morning. When Captain Lothaire reported his proceedings to his superiors they signified their approbation by promoting him to the high rank of Commissaire-G6n6ral.

The news of this tragedy excited as much indignation in Berlin as in London. Faced with the facts, the representatives of the Free State in Brussels — that is, the agents of the King — were compelled to admit the complete illegality of the whole incident, and could only fall back upon the excuse that Lothaire's action was bona-fide, and free from personal motive. This is by no means certain, for as Baron von Marschall pointed out to the acting British Ambassador at Berlin, Stokes was known to be a successful trader in ivory, exporting it by the east route, and so depriving the officers of the Congo Government of a ten per cent, commission, which would be received by them if it were exported by the west route. "This was the reason," the report continued, quoting the German Statesman's words, "that he had been done away with, and not on account of an alleged sale of arms to Arabs, his death being, in fact, not an act of justice, but one of commercial protection, neither more nor less."

This was one reading of the situation. Whether it was a true one or not, there could be no two opinions as to the illegality of the proceedings. Under pressure from England, Lothaire was tried at Boma and acquitted. He was again, under the same pressure, tried at Brussels, when theJProsecuting Counsel thought it consistent with his duty to plead for an acquittal and the proceedings became a fiasco. There the matter was allowed to remain. A Blue Book of 188 pages is the last monument to Charles Henry Stokes, and his executioner returned to high office in the Congo Free State, where his name soon recurred in the accounts of the violent and high-handed proceedings which make up the history of that country. He was appointed Director of the Antwerp Society for the Commerce of the Congo — an appointment for which King Leopold must have been responsible — and he managed the affairs of that company until he. was implicated in the Mongalla massacres, of which more will be said hereafter.

It has been necessary to describe the case of Stokes, because it is historical, but nothing is further from my intention than to address national amour propre in the matter. It was a mere accident that Stokes was an Englishman, and the outrage remains the same had he been a citizen of any State. The cause I plead is too broad, and also too lofty, to be supported by any narrower appeals than those which may be addressed to all humanity. I will proceed to describe a case which occurred a few years later to show that men of other nationalities suffered as well as the English. Stokes, the Englishman, was killed, and his death, it was said by some Congolese apologists, was due to his not having, after his summary trial, announced that he would lodge an immediate appeal to the higher court at Boma. Rabinck, the Austrian, the victim of similar proceedings, did appeal to the higher court at Boma, and it is interesting to see what advantage he gained by doing so.

Rabinck was, as I have said, an Austrian from Olmutz, a man of a gentle and lovable nature, popular with all who knew him, and remarkable, as several have testified, for his just and kindly treatment of the natives. He had, for some years, traded with the people of Katanga, which is the southeastern portion of the Congo State where it abuts upon British Central Africa. The natives were at the time in arms against the Belgians, but Rabinck had acquired such influence among them that he was still able to carry on his trade in ivory and rubber for which he held a permit from the Katanga Company.

Shortly after receiving this permit, for which he had paid a considerable sum, certain changes were made in the company by which the State secured a controlling influence in it. A new manager, Major Weyns, appeared, who represented the new regime, superseding M. L6veque, who had sold the permits in the name of the original company. Major Weyns was zealous that the whole trade of the country should belong to the Concessionnaire Company, which was practically the Government, according to the usual, but internationally illegal, habit of the State. To secure this trade, the first step was evidently to destroy so well-known and successful a private trader as M. Rabinck. In spite of his permits, therefore, a charge was trumped up against him of having traded illegally in rubber — an offence which, even if he had no permit, was an impossibility in the face of that complete freedom of trade which was guaranteed by the Treaty of Berlin. The young Austrian could not bring himself to believe that the matter was serious. His letters are extant, showing that he regarded the matter as so preposterous that he could not feel any fears upon the subject. He was soon to be undeceived, and his eyes were opened too late to the character of the men and the organization with which he was dealing. Major Weyns sat in court- martial upon him. The offence with which he was charged, dealing illegally in rubber, was one which could only be punished by a maximum imprisonment of a month. This would not serve the purpose in view. Major Weyns within forty minutes tried the case, condemned the prisoner, and sentenced him to a year’s imprisonment. There was an attempt to excuse this monstrous sentence afterward by the assertion that the crime punished was that of selling guns to the natives, but as a matter of fact there was at the time no mention of anything of the sort, as is proved by the existing minutes of the trial. Rabinck naturally appealed against such a sentence. He would have been wiser had he submitted to it in the nearest guardhouse. In that case he might possibly have escaped with his life. In the other, he was doomed. “He will go,” said Major Weyns, “on such a nice little voyage that he will act like this no more, and others will take example from it.” The voyage in question was the two thousand miles which separated Katanga from the Appeal Court at Boma. He was to travel all this way under the sole escort of black soldiers, who had their own instructions. The unfortunate man felt that he could never reach his destination alive. “Rumours have it,” he wrote to his relatives, “that Europeans who have been taken are poisoned, so if I disappear without further news you may guess what has become of me.” Nothing more was heard from him save two agonized letters, begging officials to speed him on his way. He died, as he had foreseen, on the trip down the Congo, and was hurriedly buried in a wayside station when two hours more would have brought the body to Leopoldville. If it is possible to add a darker shadow to the black business it lies in the fact that the apologists of the State endeavoured to make the world believe that their victim’s death was due to his own habit of taking morphia. The fact is denied by four creditable witnesses, who knew him well, but most’ of all is it denied by the activity and energy which had made him one of the leading traders of Central Africa — too good a trader to be allowed open competition with King Leopold’s huge commercial monopoly. As a last and almost inconceivable touch, the whole of the dead man’s caravans and outfits, amounting to some £15,000, were seized by those who had driven him to his death, and by the last reports neither his relatives nor his creditors have received any portion of this large sum. Consider the whole story and say if it is exaggeration to state that Gustav Maria Rabinck was robbed and murdered by the Congo Free State.

Having shown in these two examples the way in which the Congo Free State has dared to treat the citizens of European States who have traded within her borders, I will now proceed to detail, in chronological order, some account of the dark story of that State’s relations to the subject races, for whose moral and material advantage we and other European Powers have answered. For every case I chronicle there are a hundred which are known, but which cannot here be dealt with. For every one known, there are ten thousand, the story of which never came to Europe. Consider how vast is the country, and how few the missionaries or consuls who alone would report such matters. Consider also that every official of the Congo State is sworn neither at the time nor afterward to reveal any matter that may have come to his knowledge. Consider, lastly, that the missionary or consul acts as a deterrent, and that it is in the huge stretch of country where neither are to be found that the agent has his own unfettered way. With all these considerations, is it not clear that all the terrible facts which we know are but the mere margin of that welter of violence and injustice which the Jesuit, Father Vermeersch, has summed up in the two words, “Immeasurable Misery!”

CHAPTER III

THE WORKING OF THE SYSTEM

HAVING claimed, as I have shown, the whole of the land, and therefore the whole of its products, the State — that is, the King — proceeded to construct a system by which these products could be gathered most rapidly and at least cost. The essence of this system was that the people who had been dispossessed (ironically called “ citizens”) were to be forced to gather, for the profit of the State, those very products which had been taken from them. This was to be effected by two means; the one, taxation, by which an arbitrary amount, ever growing larger until it consumed almost their whole lives in the gathering, should be claimed for nothing. The other, so-called barter by which the natives were paid for the stuff exactly what the State chose to give, and in the form the State chose to give it, there being no competition allowed from any other purchaser. This remuneration, ridiculous in value, took the most absurd shape, the natives being compelled to take it, whatever the amount, and however little they might desire it. Consul Thesiger, in 1908, describing their so-called barter, says: “The goods he proceeds to distribute, giving a hat to one man, or an iron hoe-head to another, and so on. Each recipient is then at the end of a month responsible for so many balls of rubber. No choice of the objects is given, no refusal is allowed. If any one makes any objection, the stuff is thrown down at his door, and whether it is taken or left, the man is responsible for so many balls at the end of the month. The total amounts are fixed by the agents at the maximum which the inhabitants are capable of producing.”

But is it not clear that no natives, especially tribes who, as Stanley has recorded, had remarkable aptitude for trade, would do business at all upon such terms? That is just where the system came in.

By this system some two thousand white agents were scattered over the Free State to collect the produce. These whites were placed in ones and twos in the more central points, and each was given a tract of country containing a certain number of villages. By the help of the inmates he was to gather the rubber, which was the most valuable asset. These whites, many of whom were men of low morale before they left Europe, were wretchedly paid, the scale running from 150 to 300 francs a month. This pay they might supplement by a commission or bonus on the amount of rubber collected. If their returns were large it meant increased pay, official praise, a more speedy return to Europe, and a better chance of promotion. If, on the other hand, the returns were small, it meant poverty, harsh reproof and degradation. No system could be devised by which a body of men could be so driven to attain results at any cost. It is not to the absolute discredit of Belgians that such an existence should have demoralised them, and, indeed, there were other nationalities besides Belgians in the ranks of the agents. I doubt if Englishmen, Americans, or Germans could have escaped the same result had they been exposed in a tropical country to similar temptations.

And now, the two thousand agents being in place, and eager to enforce the collection of rubber upon very unwilling natives, how did the system intend that they should set about it? The method was as efficient as it was absolutely diabolical. Each agent was given control over a certain number of savages, drawn from the wild tribes, but armed with firearms. One or more of these was placed in each village to ensure that the villagers should do their task. These are the men who are called “capitas,” or head-men in the accounts, and who are the actual, though not the moral, perpetrators of so many horrible deeds. Imagine the nightmare which lay upon each village while this barbarian squatted in the midst of it. Day or night they could never get away from him. He called for palm wine. He called for women. He beat them, mutilated them, and shot them down at his pleasure. He enforced public incest in order to amuse himself by the sight. Sometimes they plucked up spirit and killed him. The Belgian Commission records that 142 capitas had been killed in seven months in a single district. Then came the punitive expedition, and the destruction of the whole community. The more terror the capita inspired, the more useful he was, the more eagerly the villagers obeyed him, and the more rubber yielded its commission to the agent. When the amount fell off, then the capita was himself made to feel some of those physical pains which he had inflicted upon others. Often the white agent far exceeded in cruelty the barbarian who carried out his commissions. Often, too, the white man pushed the black aside, and acted himself as torturer and executioner. As a rule, however, the relationship was as I have stated, the outrages being actually committed by the capitas, but with the approval of, and often in the presence of, their white employers.

It would be absurd to suppose that the agents were all equally merciless, and that there were not some who were torn in two by the desire for wealth and promotion on the one side and the horror of their daily task upon the other. Here are two illustrative extracts from the letters of Lieutenant Tilkens, as quoted by Mr. Vandervelde in the debate in the Belgian Chamber: “The steamer v. d. Kerkhove is coming up the Nile. It will require the colossal number of fifteen hundred porters — unhappy blacks! I cannot think of them. I ask myself how I shall find such a number. If the roads were passable it would make some difference, but they are hardly cleared of morasses where many will meet their death. Hunger and weariness will make an end of many more in the eight days’ march. How much blood will the transport make to flow? Already I have had to make war three times against the chieftains who will not take part in this work. The people prefer to die in the forest instead of doing this work. If a chieftain refuses, it is war, and this horrible war — perfect firearms against spear and lance. A chieftain has just left me with the complaint: ‘My village is in ruins, my women are killed.’ But what can I do? I am often compelled to put these unhappy chieftains into chains until they collect one or two hundred porters. Very often my soldiers find the villages empty, then they seize the women and children.”

To his mother he writes:

“Com. Verstraeten visited my station and highly congratulated me. He said the attitude of his report hung upon the quantity of rubber I would bring. My quantity rose from 360 kilos in September to 1,500 in October, and from January it will be 4,000 per month, which gives me 500 francs over my pay. Am I not a lucky fellow? And if I continue, in two years I shall have reached an additional 12,000 francs.”

But a year later he writes in a different tone to Major Leussens:

“I look forward to a general rising. I warned you before, I think, already in my last letter. The cause is always the same.

The natives are weary of the hitherto rigime — transport labour, collection of rubber, preparation of food stores for blacks and whites. Again for three months I have had to fight with only ten days’ rest. I have 152 prisoners. For two years now I have been carrying on war in this neighbourhood. But I cannot say I have subjected the people. They prefer to die. What can I do? I am paid to do my work, I am a tool in the hands of my superiors, and I follow orders as discipline requires.”

Let us consider now for an instant the chain of events which render such a situation not only possible, but inevitable. The State is run with the one object of producing revenue. For this end all land and its produce are appropriated. How, then, is this produce to be gathered? It can only be by the natives. But if the natives gather it they must be paid their price, which will diminish profits, or else they will refuse to work. Then they must be made to work. But the agents are too few to make them work. Then they must employ such sub-agents as will strike most terror into the people. But if these sub-agents are to make the people work all the time, then they must themselves reside in the villages. So a capita must be sent as a constant terror to each village. Is it not clear that these steps are not accidental, but are absolutely essential to the original idea? Given the confiscation of the land, all the rest must logically follow. It is utterly futile, therefore, to imagine that any reform can set matters right. Such a thing is impossible. Until unfettered trade is unconditionally restored, as it now exists in every German and English colony, it is absolutely out of the question that any specious promises or written decrees can modify the situation. But, on the other hand, if trade be put upon this natural basis, then for many years the present owners of the Congo land, instead of sharing dividends, must pay out at least a million a year to administer the country, exactly as England pays half a million a year to administer the neighbouring land of Nigeria. To grasp that fact is to understand the root of the whole question.

And one more point before we proceed to the dark catalogue of the facts. Where did the responsibility for these deeds of blood, these thousands of cold-blooded murders lie? Was it with the capita?

He was a cannibal and a ruffian, but if he did not inspire terror in the village he was himself punished by the agent. Was it, then, with the agent? He was a degraded man, and yet, as I have already said, no men could serve on such terms in a tropical country without degrada- tioi) He was goaded and driven to crime by the constant clamour from those above him. Was it, then, with the District Commissary? He had reached a responsible and well-paid post, which he would lose if his particular district fell behind in the race of production. Was it, then, with the Governor-General at Boma? He was a man of a hardened conscience, but for him also there was mitigation. He was there for a purpose with definite orders from home which it was his duty to carry through. It would take a man of exceptional character to throw up his high position, sacrifice his career, and refuse to carry out the evil system which had been planned before he was allotted a place in it. Where, then, was the guilt? There were half a dozen officials in Brussels who were, as shown already, so many bailiffs paid to manage a property upon lines laid down for them. Trace back the chain from the red-handed savage, through the worried, bilious agent, the pompous Commissary, the dignified Governor-General, the smooth diplomatist, and you come finally, without a break, and without a possibility of mitigation or excuse, up the cold, scheming brain which framed and drove the whole machine. It is upon the King, always the King, that the guilt must lie. He planned it, knowing the results which must follow. They did follow. He was well informed of it. Again and again, and yet again, his attention was drawn to it. A word from him would have altered the system. The word was never said. There is no possible subterfuge by which the moral guilt can be deflected from the head of the State, the man who went to Africa for the freedom of commerce and the regeneration of the native.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST FRUITS OF THE SYSTEM

THE first testimony which I shall cite is that of Mr. Glave, which covers the years 1893 up to his death in 1895. Mr.

• Glave was a young Englishman, who had been for six years in the employ of the State, and whose character and work were highly commended by Stanley. Four years after the expiration of his engagement he travelled as an independent man right across the whole country, from Tanganyika in the east to Matadi near the mouth of the river, a distance of 2,000 miles. The agent and rubber systems were still in their infancy, but already he remarked on every side that violence and disregard of human life which were so soon to grow to such proportions. Remember that he was himself a Stanleyman, a pioneer and a native trader, by no means easy to shock. Here are some of his remarks as taken from his diary.

Dealing with the release of slaves by the Belgians, for which so much credit has been claimed, he says {Cent. Mag., Vol. 53):

“They are supposed to be taken out of slavery and freed, but I. fail to see how this can be argued out. They are taken from their villages and shipped south, to be soldiers, workers, etc., on the State stations, and what were peaceful families have been broken up, and the different members spread about the place. They have to be made fast and guarded for transportation, or they would all run away. This does not look as though the freedom promised had any seductive prospects. The young children thus ‘liberated’ are handed over to the French mission stations, where they receive the kindest care, but nothing justifies this form of serfdom. I can understand the State compelling natives to do a certain amount of work for a certain time; but to take people forcibly from their homes, and despatch them here and there, breaking up families, is not right. I shall learn more about this on the way and at Kabambare. If these conditions are to exist, I fail to see how the anti-slavery movement is to benefit the native.”

With regard to the use of barbarous soldiers he says:

“State soldiers are also employed without white officers. This should not be allowed, for the black soldiers do not understand the reason of the fighting, and instead of submission being sought, often the natives are massacred or driven away into the hill. . . . But the black soldiers are bent on fighting and raiding; they want no peaceful settlement. They have good rifles and ammunition, realise their superiority over the natives with their bows and arrows, and they want to shoot and kill and rob. Black delights to kill black, whether the victim be man, woman, or child, and no matter how defenceless. This is no reasonable way of settling the land; it is merely persecution. Blacks cannot be employed on such an errand unless under the leadership of whites.” > «

He met and describes one Lieutenant Hambursin, who seems to have been a capable officer:

“Yesterday the natives in a neighbouring village came to complain that one of Hambursin’s soldiers had killed a villager; they brought in the offender’s gun. To-day at roll-call the soldier appeared without his gun; his guilt was proved, and without more to do, he was hanged on a tree. Hambursin has hanged several for the crime of murder.”

Had there been more Hambursins there might have been fewer scandals. Glave proceeds to comment on treatment of prisoners:

“In stations in charge of white men, Government officers, one sees strings of poor emaciated old women, some of them mere skeletons, working from six in the morning till noon, and from half-past two till six, carrying clay water-jars, tramping about in gangs, with a rope round the neck, and connected by a rope one and a half yards apart. They are prisoners of war. In war the old women are always caught, but should receive a little humanity. They are naked, except for a miserable patch of cloth of several parts, held in place by a string round the waist. They are not loosened from the rope for any purpose. They live in the guard-house under the charge of black native sentries, who delight in slapping and ill-using them, for pity is not in the heart of the native. Some of the women have babies, but they go to work just the same. They form, indeed, a miserable spectacle, and one wonders that old women, although prisoners of war, should not receive a little more consideration; at least, their nakedness might be hidden. The men prisoners are treated in a far better way.”

Describing the natives he says:

“The natives are not lazy, good-for-nothing fellows. Their fine powers are obtained by hard work, sobriety and frugal living.”

He gives a glimpse of what the chicotte is like, the favourite and universal instrument of torture used by the agents and officers of the Free State:

“The ‘chicotte’ of raw hippo hide, especially a new one, trimmed like a corkscrew, with edges like knife-blades, and as hard as wood, is a terrible weapon, and a few blows bring blood; not more than twenty-five blows should be given unless the offence is very serious. Though we persuaded ourselves that the African’s skin is very tough it needs an extraordinary constitution to withstand the terrible punishment of one hundred blows; generally the victim is in a state of insensibility after twenty-five or thirty blows. At the first blow he yells abominably; then he quiets down, and is a mere groaning, quivering body till the operation is over, when the culprit stumbles away, often with gashes which will endure a lifetime. It is bad enough the flogging of men, but far worse is this punishment when inflicted on women and children. Small boys of ten or twelve, with excitable, hot-tempered masters, often are most harshly treated. At Kasnogo there is a great deal of cruelty displayed. I saw two boys very badly cut. I conscientiously believe that a man who receives one hundred blows is often nearly killed, and has his spirit broken for life.”

He has a glimpse of the treatment of the subjects of other nations:

“Two days before my arrival (at Wabundu) two Sierra Leoneans were hanged by Laschet. They were sentries on guard, and while they were asleep allowed a native chief, who was a prisoner and in chains, to escape. Next morning Laschet, in a fit of rage, hanged the two men. They were British subjects, engaged by the Congo Free State as soldiers. In time of war, I suppose, they could be executed, after court-martial, by being shot; but to hang a subject of any other country without trial seems to me outrageous,”

Talking of the general unrest he says:

“It is the natural outcome of the harsh, cruel policy of the State in wringing rubber from these people without paying for it. The revolution will extend.” He adds: “The post (Isangi) is close to the large settlement of an important coast man, Kayamba, who now is devoted to the interests of the State, catching slaves for them, and stealing ivory from the natives of the interior. Does the philanthropic King of the Belgians know about this? If not, he ought to."

As he gets away from the zone of war, and into that which-should represent peace, his comments become more bitter. The nascent rubber trade began to intrude its methods upon his notice:

"Formerly the natives were well treated, but now expeditions have been sent in every direction, forcing natives to make rubber and to bring it to the stations. Up the Ikelemba, we are taking down one hundred slaves, mere children, all taken in unholy wars against the natives. ... It was not necessary in the olden times, when we white men had no force at all. This forced commerce is depopulating the country. . . . Left Equateur at eleven o'clock this morning, after taking on a cargo of one hundred small slaves, principally boys, seven or eight years old, with a few girls among the batch, all stolen from the natives. The Commissary of the district is a violent-tempered fellow. While arranging to take on the hundred small slaves a woman who had charge of the youngsters was rather slow in understanding his order, delivered in very poor Kabanji. He sprang at her, slapped her in the face, and as she ran away, kicked her. They talk of philanthropy and civilization! Where it is, I do not know."

And again:

"Most white officers out on the Congo are averse to the india- rubber policy of the State, but the laws command it. Therefore, at each post one finds the natives deserting their homes, and escaping to the French side of the river when possible."

As he goes on his convictions grow stronger:

"Everywhere," he said, "I hear the same news of the doings of the Congo Free State — rubber and murder, slavery in its worst form. It is said that half the liberes sent down die on the road. ... In Europe we understand from the word liberes slaves saved from their cruel masters. Not at all! Most of them result from wars made against the natives because of ivory or rubber."

On all sides he sees evidence of the utter disregard of humanity:

1' To-day I saw the dead body of a carrier lying on the trail. There could have been no mistake about his being a sick man; he was nothing but skin and bones. These posts ought to give some care to the porters; the heartless disregard for life is abominable. . . . Native life is considered of no value by the Belgians. No wonder the State is hated.”

Finally, a little before his death, he heard of that practice of mutilation which was one of the most marked fruits of the policy of “moral and material advantage of the native races” promised at the Berlin Conference:

“Mr. Harvey heard from Clarke, who is at Lake Mantumba, that the State soldiers have been in the vicinity of his station recently fighting and taking prisoners; and he himself had seen several men with bunches of hands signifying their individual skill. These, I presume, they must produce to prove their success! Among the hands were those of men and women, and also those of little children! The missionaries are so much at the mercy of the State that they do not report these barbaric happenings to the people at home. I have previously heard of hands, among them children’s, being brought to the stations, but I was not so satisfied of the truth of the former information as of the reports received just now by Mr. Harvey from Clarke. Much of this sort of thing is going on at the Equateur Station. The methods employed are not necessary. Years ago, when I was on duty at the Equateur without soldiers, I never had any difficulty in getting what men I needed, nor did any other station in the old, humane days. The stations and the boats then had no difficulty in finding men or labour, nor will the Belgians, if they introduce more reasonable methods.”

A sentence which is worth noting is that “The missionaries are so much at the mercy of the State that they do not report these barbaric happenings to the people at home.” Far from the question being one, which, as the apologists for King Leopold have contended, has been fomented by the missionaries, it has actually been held back by them, and it is only the courage and truthfulness of a handful of Englishmen and Americans which have finally brought it to the front.

So much for Mr. Glave’s testimony. He was an English traveller. Mr. Murphy, an American missionary, was working in another part of the country, the region where the Ubangi joins the Congo, during the same years. Let us see how far his account, written entirely independently {Times, November 18, 1895), agrees with the other:

“I have seen these things done,” he said, “and have remonstrated with the State in the years 1888, 1889, and 1894, but never got satisfaction. I have been in the interior and have seen the ravages made by the State in pursuit of this iniquitous trade. Let me give an incident to show how this unrighteous trade affects the people. One day a State corporal, who was in charge of the post of Solifa, was going round the town collecting rubber. Meeting a poor woman, whose husband was away fishing, he asked: ‘ Where is your husband?’ She answered by pointing to the river. He then asked: ‘Where is his rubber?’ She answered: ‘It is ready for you.’ Whereupon he said: ‘ You lie,’ and lifting up his gun, shot her dead. Shortly afterward the husband returned and was told of the murder of his wife. He went straight to the corporal, taking with him his rubber, and asked why he had shot his wife. The wretched man then raised his gun and killed the corporal. The soldiers ran away to the headquarters of the State, and made representations of the case, with the result that the Commissary sent a large force to support the authority of the soldiers; the town was looted, burned, and many people were killed and wounded.”

Again:

“In November last (1894) there was heavy fighting on the Bosira, because the people refused to give rubber, and I was told upon the authority of a State officer that no less than eighteen hundred people were killed. Upon another occasion in the same month some soldiers ran away from a State steamer, and, it was said, went to the town of Bombumba. The officer sent a message telling the chief of the town to give them up. He answered that he could not, as the fugitives had not been in his town. The officer sent the messenger a second time with the order: ‘Come to me at once, or war in the morning.’ The next morning the old chief went to meet the Belgians, and was attacked without provocation. He himself was wounded, his wife was killed before his eyes, and her head cut off in order that they might possess the brass necklet that she wore. Twenty-four of the chief’s people were also killed, and all for the paltry reason given above. Again the people of Lake Mantumba ran away on account of the cruelty of the State, and the latter sent some soldiers in charge of a coloured corporal to treat with them and induce them to return. On the way the troops met a canoe containing seven of the fugitives. Under some paltry pretext they made the people land, shot them, cut off their hands and took them to the Commissary. The Mantumba people complained to the missionary at Irebu, and he went down to see if the story was true. He ascertained the case to be just as they had narrated, and found that one of the seven was a little girl, who was not quite dead. The child recovered, and she lives to-day, the stump of the handless arm witnessing against this horrible practice. These are only a few things of many that have taken place in one district.”

It was not merely for rubber that these horrors were done. Much of the country is unsuited to rubber, and in those parts there were other imposts which were collected with equal brutality. One village had to send food and was remiss one day in supplying it:

“The people were quietly sleeping in their beds when they heard a shot fired, and ran out to see what was the matter. Finding the soldiers had surrounded the town, their only thought was escape. As they raced out of their homes, men, women and children, they were ruthlessly shot down. Their town was utterly destroyed, and is a ruin to this day. The only reason for this fight was that the people had failed to bring Kwanga (food) to the State upon that one day.”

Finally Mr. Murphy says: “The rubber question is accountable for most of the horrors perpetrated in the Congo. It has reduced the people to a state of utter despair. Each town in the district is forced to bring a certain quantity to the headquarters of the Commissary every Sunday. It is collected by force; the soldiers drive the people into the bush; if they will not go they are shot down, their left hands being cut off and taken as trophies to the Commissary. The soldiers do not care whom they shoot down, and they most often shoot poor, helpless women and harmless children. These hands — the hands of men, womon and children — are placed in rows before the Commissary, who counts them to see the soldiers have not wasted the cartridges. The Commissary is paid a commission of about a penny per pound upon all the rubber he gets; it is, therefore, to his interest to get as much as he can.”

Here is corroboration and amplification of all that Mr. Glaves had put forward. The system had not been long established, and was more efficient ten or twelve years later, but already it was bearing some notable first fruits of civilization. King Leopold^ rule cannot be said to have left the country unchanged. There is ample evidence that mutilations of this sort were unknown among the native savages. Knowledge was spreading under European rule.

Having heard the testimony of an English traveller and of an American missionary, let us now hear that of a Swedish clergyman, Mr. Sjoblom, as detailed in The Aborigines’ Friend, July, 1897. It covers much the same time as the other two, and is drawn from the Equateur district. Here is the system in full swing:

“They refuse to bring the rubber. Then war is declared. The soldiers are sent in different directions. The people in the towns are attacked, and when they are running away into the forest, and try to hide themselves, and save their lives, they are found out by the soldiers. Then their gardens of rice are destroyed, and their supplies taken. Their plantains are cut down while they are young and not in fruit, and often their huts are burned, and, of course, everything of value is taken. Within my own knowledge forty-five villages were altogether burned down. I say altogether, because there were many others partly burned down. I passed through twenty-eight abandoned villages. The natives had left their places to go further inland. In order to separate themselves from the white men they go part of the way down the river, or else they cross the river into French territory. Sometimes, the natives are obliged to pay a large indemnity. The chiefs often have to pay with brass wire and slaves, and if the slaves do not make up the amount their wives are sold to pay. I was told that by a Belgian officer. I will give you,” Mr. Sjoblom continues, “ an instance of a man I saw shot right before my eyes. In one of my inland journeys, when I had gone a little farther, perhaps, than the Commissary expected me to go, I saw something that perhaps he would not have liked me to see. It was at a town called Ibera, one of the cannibal towns to which no white man had ever been before. I reached it at sunset, after the natives had returned from the various places in which they had been looking for india- rubber. They gathered together in a great crowd, being curious to see a white man. Besides, they had heard I had some good news to tell them, which came through the Gospel. When that large crowd gathered, and I was just ready to preach, the sentinels rushed in among them to seize an old man. They dragged him aside a little from the crowd, and the sentinel in charge came to me and said,’ I want to shoot this man, because he has been in the river fishing to-day. He has not been on the river for india-rubber.’ I told him: ‘I have not authority to stop you, because I have nothing to do with these palavers, but the people are here to hear what I have to say to them, and I don’t want you to do it before my eyes.’ He said: ‘ All right, I will keep him in bonds, then, until to-morrow morning when you have gone. Then I will kill him.’ But a few minutes afterward the sentinel came in a rage to the man and shot him right before my eyes. Then he charged his rifle again and pointed it at the others, who all rushed away like chaff before the wind. He told a little boy, eight or nine years of age, to go and cut off the right hand of the man who had been shot. The man was not quite dead, and when he felt the knife he tried to drag his hand away. The boy, after some labour, cut the hand off and laid it by a fallen tree. A little later this hand was put on a fire to smoke before being sent to the Commissary."

Here we get the system at its highest. I think that picture of the child hacking off the hand of the dying man at the order of the monster who would have assuredly murdered him also had he hesitated to obey, is as diabolical a one as even the Congo could show. A pretty commentary upon the doctrine of Christ which the missionary was there to preach!

Mr. Sjoblom seems to have been unable to believe at first that such deeds were done with the knowledge and approval of the whites. He ventured to appeal to the Commissary. " He turned in anger on me," he adds, " and in the presence of the soldiers said that he would expel me from the town if I meddled with matters of that kind any more."

It would, indeed, have been rather absurd for the Commissary to interfere when the severed hand had actually been cut off in order to be presented to him. The whole procedure is explained in the following paragraph:

" If the rubber does not reach the full amount required, the sentinels attack the natives. They kill some and bring the hands to the Commissary. Others are brought to the Commissary as prisoners. At the beginning they came with their smoked hands. The sentinels, or else the boys in attendance on them, put these hands on a little kiln, and after they had been smoked, they by and by put them on the top of the rubber baskets. I have on many occasions seen this done."

Then we read in the latest State papers of the Belgian diplomatists that they propose to continue the beneficent and civilizing work which they have inherited.

Yet another paragraph from Mr. Sjoblom showing the complicity of the Belgian authorities, and showing also that the presence of the missionaries was some deterrent against open brutality. If, then, they saw as much as they did, what must have been the condition of those huge tracts of country where no missions existed?

"At the end of 1895, Commissary — all the people were gathering the rubber — said he had often told the sentinels not to kill the people. But on the 14th of December a sentinel passed our mission station and a woman accompanied him, carrying a basket of hands. Mr. and Mrs. Banks, besides myself,went down the road, and they told the sentinel to put the hands on the road that they might count them. We counted eighteen right hands smoked and from the size of the hands we could judge that they belonged to men, women and children. We could not understand why these hands had been collected, as the Commissary had given orders that no more natives were to be killed for their hands. On my last journey I discovered the secret. One Monday night, a sentinel who had just returned from the Commissary, said to me: ‘ What are the sentinels to do? When all the people are gathered together, the Commissary openly tells us not to kill any more people, but when the people have gone he tells us privately that if they do not bring plenty of india-rubber we must kill some, but not bring the hands to him.’ Some sentinels, he told me, had been put in chains because they killed some natives who happened to be near a mission station; but it was only because he thought it might become known that the Commissary, to justify himself, had put the men in chains. I said to the sentinel: ‘You should obey the first command, never to kill any more.’ ‘The people,’ he answered,’unless they are frightened, do not bring in the rubber, and then the Commissary flogs us with the hippopotamus hide, or else he puts us in chains, or sends us to Boma.’ The sent’nel added that the Commissary induced him to hide cruelty while letting it go on, and to do this in such a way that he might be justified, in case it should become known and an investigation should be made. In such a case the Commissary could say, ‘ Why, I told him openly not to kill any more’ and he might put the blame on the soldier to justify himself, though the blame and the punishment in all its force ought to have been put on himself, after he had done such a terrible act in order to disguise or mislead justice. If the sentinels were puzzled about this message, what would the natives be?”

I have said that there was more to be said for the cannibal murderers than for those who worked the system. The capitas pleaded the same excuse. Don’t take this to heart so much,” said one of them to the missionary. “They kill us if we do not bring rubber. The Commissary has promised us if we bring plenty of hands he will shorten our service. I have brought plenty already, and I expect my time will soon be finished.”

That the Commissaries are steeped to the lips in this horrible business has been amply shown in these paragraphs. But Mr. Sjoblom was able to go one stage further along the line which leads to the Palace at Brussels. M. Wahis, the Governor-General, a man who has played a sinister part in the country, came up the river and endeavoured to get the outspoken Swede to contradict himself, or, failing that, to intimidate him. To get at the truth or to right the wrong seems to have been the last thing in his mind, for he knew well that the wrong was essential to the system, and that without it the wheels would move more slowly and the head engineer in Europe would soon wish to know what was amiss with his rubber-producing machine. “You may have seen all these things that you have stated,” said he, “but nothing is proved.” The Commissary meanwhile had been holding a rifle to the head of witnesses so as to make sure that nothing would be proved. In spite of this Mr. Sjoblom managed to collect his evidence, and going to the Governor, asked him when he could listen to it. “I don’t want to hear any witnesses,” said he, and then: “If you continue to demand investigation in these matters we will make a charge against you. . . . That means five years’ imprisonment.”

Such is Mr Sjoblom’s narrative involving Governor Wahis in the general infamy. “It is not true,” cries the Congolese apologist.

Strange how Swedes, Americans, and British, laymen and clerg), all unite in defaming this innocent State! No doubt the wicked children lop off their own hands in order to cast a slur upon “the benevolent and philanthropic enterprise of the Congo.” Tartuffe and Jack the Ripper — was ever such a combination in the history of the world!

One more anecdote of Mr. Wahis, for it is not often that we can get a Governor of the Congo in person face to face with the results of his own work. As he passed down the river, Mr. Sjoblom was able to report another outrage to him:

“Mr. Banks told the Governor that he had seen it himself, whereupon M. Wahis summoned the commandant in charge — the officer who had ordered the raid had already gone elsewhere — and asked him in French if the story were true. The Belgian officer assured M. Wahis that it was, but the latter, thinking Mr. Banks did not understand French, said: ‘After all, you may have seen this; but you have no witnesses.’ ‘ Oh,’ said Mr. Banks,’ I can call the commandant, who has just told you that it is true.’ M. Wahis then tried to minimize the matter, when, to his great surprise, Mr. Banks added: ‘In any case I have, at his own request, furnished to the British Consul, who passed through here lately, a signed statement concerning it.’ M. Wahis rose from his chair, saying: ‘Oh, then, it is all over Europe!’ Then for the first time he said that the responsible Commissary must be punished.”

It need not be added that the punishment was the merest farce.

These successive reports, each amplifying the other, coming on the top of the killing of Mr. Stokes, and the action of the British Colonial Office in prohibiting recruiting for Congoland, had the effect of calling strong attention to the condition of that country. The charges were met partly by denial, partly by general phrases about morality, and partly by bogus reform. M. van Eetvelde, in Brussels, and M. Jules Houdret, in London, denied things which have since been proved up to the hilt. The reform took the shape of a so-called Natives’ Protection Commission. Like all these so-called reforms, it was utterly ineffectual, and was only meant for European consumption. No one knew so well as the men at Brussels that no possible reform could have any effect whatever unless the system was itself abolished, for that system produced outrages as logically and certainly as frost produces ice. The sequel will show the results of the Natives’ Protection Commission.

CHAPTER V

FURTHER FRUITS OF THE SYSTEM

FOR a moment I must interrupt the narrative of the long, dismal succession of atrocities in order to explain certain new factors in the situation.

It has already been shown that the Congo State, unable to handle the whole of its vast domain, had sublet large tracts of it to monopolist companies, in absolute contradiction to Article V. of the Berlin Treaty. Up to the year 1897, these companies were registered in Belgium, and had some pretence to being international in scope. The State had no open or direct control over them. This was now altered. The State drew closer the bonds which united it to these commercial undertakings. They were, for the most part, dissolved, and then reconstructed under Congo law. In most cases, in return for the monopoly, the State was given control, sometimes to the extent of appointing all managers and agents. Half the shares of the company or half the profits were usually made over to the State. Thus one must bear in mind in future that whether one talks of the Abir Company, of the Kasai, the Katanga, the Anversoise, or any other, it is really with the State — that is, with King Leopold — that one has to do. He owned the companies, but paid them fifty per cent, commission for doing all the work. As their profits were such as might be expected where nothing was paid either for produce or for labour (varying from fifty to seven hundred per cent, per annum), all parties to the bargain were the gainers.

Another new factor in the situation was the completion, in 1898, of the Lower Congo Railway, which connects Boma with Stanley Pool, and so outflanks the cataracts. The enterprise itself was beneficent and splendid. The means by which it was carried out were unscrupulous and inhuman. Had civilization no complaint against the Congo State save the history of its railway construction with its forced labour, so different to the tradition of the tropical procedure of other European colonies, it would be a heavy indictment. Now it sinks to insignificance when compared with the enslavement of a whole people and the twenty years of uninterrupted massacre. As a sketch of the condition of the railway district here is a little pen picture by M. Edouard Picard, of the Belgian Senate, who saw it in the building:

"The cruel impression conveyed by the mutilated forests," he wrote, "is heightened in the places where, till lately, native villages nestled, hidden and protected by thick and lofty foliage. The inhabitants have fled. They have fled in spite of encouraging palavers and promises of peace and kind treatment. They have burnt their huts, and great heaps of cinders mark the sites, amid deserted palm-groves and trampled-down banana fields. The terrors caused by the memory of inhuman floggings, of massacres, of rapes and abductions, haunt their poor brains,' and they go as fugitives to seek shelter in the recesses of the hospitable bush, or, across the frontiers, to find it in French or Portuguese Congo, not yet afflicted with so many labours and alarms, far from the roads traversed by white men, those baneful intruders, and their train of strange and disquieting habits." The outlook was as gloomy when he wandered along the path trodden by the caravans to the Pool and back again. "We are constantly meeting these carriers, either isolated or in Indian file; blacks, blacks, miserable blacks, with horribly filthy loin-clothes for their only garments; their bare and frizzled heads supporting their loads — chest, bale, ivory-tusk, hamper of rubber, or barrel; for the most part broken down, sinking under the burdens made heavier by their weariness and insufficiency of food, consisting of a handful of rice and tainted dried fish; pitiful walking caryatids; beasts of burden with the lank limbs of monkeys, pinched-up features, eyes fixed and round with the strain of keeping their balance and the dulness of exhaustion. Thus they come and go by thousands, organized in a system of human transport, requisitioned by the State armed with its irresistible force pub- lique, supplied by the chiefs whose slaves they are and who pounce on their wages; jogging on, with knees bent and stomach protruding, one arm raised up and the other resting on a long stick, dusty and malodorous; covered with insects as their huge procession passes over mountains and through valleys; dying on the tramp, or, when the tramp is over, going to their villages to die of exhaustion."

It will be remembered that Captain Lothaire, having been acquitted of the murder of Mr. Stokes, was sent out by King Leopold to act as managing-director of the Anversoise Trust. In 1898, he arrived in the Mongalla District, and from then onward there came to Europe vague rumours of native attacks and bloody reprisals, with those other symptoms of violence and unrest which might be expected where a large population accustomed to freedom is suddenly reduced to slavery. How huge were the rubber operations which were carried through under the ferocious rule of Captain Lothaire, may be guessed from the fact that the profits of the company, which had been 120,000 francs in 1897, rose to 3,968,000 in 1899 — a sum which is considerably more than twice the total capital. M. Mille tells of a Belgian agent who showed 25,000 cartridges and remarked, “I can turn those into 25,000 pounds of rubber.” Captain Lothaire believed in the same trade methods, for his fighting and his output increased together. It is worth while to slaughter one- fourth of the population if the effect is to drive the others to frenzied and unceasing work.

No definite details might ever have reached Europe of those doings had not Lothaire made the capital mistake of quarrelling with his subordinates. One of these, named Lacroix, sent a communication to the Nieuw Gazet, of Antwerp, which, with the Petit Bleu, acted an honourable and independent part at this epoch. The Congo Press Bureau, which has stifled the voice of the more venal portion of the Belgian and Parisian Press, had not at that time attained the efficiency which it afterward reached. This letter from Lacroix was published on April 10th, 1900, and shed a lurid light upon what had been going on in the Mongalla District. It was a confession, but a confession which involved his superiors as well as himself. He told how he had been instructed by his chief to massacre all the natives of a certain village which had been slow in bringing its rubber. He had carried out the order. Later, his chief had put sixty women in irons, and allowed nearly all of them to die of hunger because the village — Mummumbula — had not brought enough rubber. “I am going to be tried,” he wrote, “for having murdered one hundred and fifty men, for having crucified women and children, and for having mutilated many men and hung the remains on the village fence.” At the same moment as this confession of Lacroix, Le Petit Bleu published sworn affidavits of soldiers employed by the Trust, telling how they had put to death whole villages for being short with their rubber. Moray, another agent, published a confession in Le Petit Bleu, from which this is an extract;

"At Ambas we were a party of thirty, under Van Eycken, who sent us into a village to ascertain if the natives were collecting rubber, and in the contrary case to murder all, including men, women and children. We found the natives sitting peaceably. We asked them what they were doing. They were unable to reply, thereupon we fell upon them all, and killed them without mercy. An hour later we were joined by Van Eycken, and told him what had been done. He answered: 1 It is well, but you have not done enough!' Thereupon he ordered us to cut off the heads of the men and hang them on the village palisades, also their sexual members, and to hang the women and children on the palisades in the form of a cross."

In the face of these fresh revelations there was an outburst of feeling in Belgium, showing that it is only their ignorance of the true facts which prevents the inhabitants of that country from showing the same humanity as any other civilised nation would do. They have not yet realised the foul things which have been done in their name. Surely when they do realise it there will be a terrible reckoning! Some were already very alive to the question. MM. Vandervelde and Lorand fought bravely in the Chamber. The officials, with MM. Liebrichts and De Cuvelier at their head, made the usual vague professions and general denials. "Ah, you can rest assured light will be forthcoming, complete, striking!'' cried the former. Light was indeed forthcoming, though not so complete as might be wished, for some, at least, of the scoundrels implicated were tried and condemned. In any other European colony they would have been hanged offhand, as the villainous murderers that they were. But they do not hang white men in the Congoland, even with the blood of a hundred murders on their hands. The only white man ever hanged there was the Englishman Stokes for competing in trade.

What is to be remarked, however, is that only subordinates were punished. Van Eycken was acquitted; Lacroix had imprisonment; Mattheys, another agent accused of horrible practices, got twelve years — which sounded well at the time, but he was liberated at the end of three. In the sentence upon this man the Judge used the words, "Seeing that it is just to take into account the example which his superiors gave him in showing no respect for the lives or rights of the natives." Brave words, but how helpless is justice when such words can be said, and no result follow! They referred, of course, to Captain Lothaire, who had, in the meanwhile, fled aboard a steamer at Matadi, and made his escape to Europe. His flight was common knowledge, but who would dare to lay his hand upon the favourite of the King. Lothaire has had occasion several times since to visit the Congo, but Justice has indeed sat with bandaged eyes where that man was concerned!

There is one incident which should be marked in the story of this trial. Moray, whose testimony would have been of great importance, was found dead in his bed just before the proceedings. There have been several such happenings in Congo history. Commandant Dooms, having threatened to expose the misdeeds of Lieutenant Massard before Europe, was shortly afterward declared to have been mysteriously drowned by a hippopotamus. Dr. Barotti, returning hot with anger after an inspection of the State, declares vehemently that he was poisoned. There is much that is of the sixteenth century in this State, besides its views of its duties to the natives.

Before passing these revelations with the attendant burst of candour in the Belgian Press, it may be well to transcribe the following remark in an interview from a returned Congo official which appeared in the Antwerp Nieuw Gazet (April ioth, 1900). He says:

"When first commissioned to establish a fort, I was given some native soldiers and a prodigious stock of ammunition. My chief gave me the following instructions: 'Crush every obstacle!' I obeyed, and cut through my district by fire and sword. I had left Antwerp thinking I was simply to gather rubber. Great was my stupefaction when the truth dawned on me."

This, with the letter of Lieutenant Tilken, as quoted before, gives some insight into the position of the agent.

Indeed, there is something to be said for these unfortunate men, for it is a more awful thing to be driven to crime than to endure it. Consider the sequence of events! The man sees an advertisement offering a commercial situation in the tropics. He applies to a bureau. He is told that the salary is some seventy-five pounds a year, with a bonus on results. He knows nothing of the country or conditions. He accepts. He is then asked if he has any money. He has not. One hundred pounds is advanced to him for expenses and outfit, and he is pledged to work it off. He goes out and finds the terrible nature of the task before him. He must condone crime to get his results. Suppose he resigns? "Certainly," say the authorities; "but you must remain there until you have worked off your debt!" He cannot possibly get down the river, for the steamers are all under Government control. What can he do then? There is one thing which he very frequently does, and that is to blow out his brains. The statistics of suicide are higher than in any service in the world. But suppose he takes the line: “Very well, I will stay if you make me do so, but I will expose these misdeeds to Europe.” What then? The routine is a simple one. An official charge is preferred against him of ill-treating the natives. Ill-treating of some sort is always going forward, and there is no difficulty with the help of the sentries in proving that something for which the agent is responsible does not tally with the written law, however much it might be the recognised custom. He is taken to Boma, tried and condemned. Thus it comes about that the prison of Boma may at the same time contain the best men and the worst — the men whose ideas were too humane for the authorities as well as those whose crimes could not be overlooked even by a Congolese administration. Take warning, you who seek service in this dark country, for suicide, the Boma prison, or such deeds as will poison your memory forever are the only choice which will lie before you.

Here is the sort of official circular-which descends in its thousands upon the agent. This particular one was from the Commissioner in the Wille district:

“I give you carte blanche to procure 4,000 kilos of rubber a month. You have two months in which to work your people. Employ gentleness at first, and if they persist in resisting the demands of the State, employ force of arms.”

And this State was formed for the “moral and material advantage of the native.”

While dealing with trials of Boma I will give some short account of the Caudron case, which occurred in 1904. This case was remarkable as establishing judicially what was always clear enough: the complicity between the State and the criminal. Caudron was a man against whom 120 cold-blooded murders were charged. He was, in fact, a zealous and efficient agent of the Anversoise Society, that same company whose red-edged securities rose to such a height when Manager Lothaire taught the natives what a minister in the Belgian House described as the Christian law of work. He did his best for the company, and he did his best forhimself, for he had a three per cent, commission upon the rubber. Why he should be chosen among all his fellow-murderers is hard to explain, but it was so, and he found himself at Boma with a sentence of twenty years. On appealing, this was reduced to fifteen years, which experience has shown to mean in practice two or three. The interesting point of his trial, however, is that his appeal, and the consequent decrease of sentence which justified that appeal, were based upon the claim that the Government was cognisant of the murderous raids, and that the Government soldiers were used to effect them. The points brought out by the trial were:

1. The existence of a system of organized oppression, plunder* and massacre, in order to increase the output of india-rubber for the benefit of a "company," which is only a covering name for the Government itself.
2. That the local authorities of the Government are cognisant, and participatory in this system.
3. That local officials of the Government engage in these rubber raids, and that Government troops are regularly employed there on.
4. That the Judicature is powerless to place the real responsibility on the proper shoulders.
5. That, consequently, these atrocities will continue until the system itself is extirpated.

Caudron's counsel called for the production of official documents to show how the chain of responsibility went, but the President of the Appeal Court refused it, knowing as clearly as we do, that it could only conduct to the Throne itself.

One might ask how the details of this trial came to Europe when it is so seldom that anything leaks out from the Courts of Boma. The reason was that there lived in Boma a British coloured subject named Shanir, who was at the pains to attend the court day by day in order to preserve some record of the procedure. This he dispatched to Europe. The sequel is interesting. The man's trade, which was a very large one, was boycotted, he lost his all, brooded over his misfortunes, and finally took his own life — another martyr in the cause of the Congo.

CHAPTER VI

VOICES FROM THE DARRKNESS

I WILL now return to the witnesses of the shocking treatment of the natives. Rev. Joseph Clark was an American missionary living at Ikoko in the Crown Domain, which is King Leopold's own special private preserve. These letters cover the space between 1893 and 1899.

This is Ikoko as he found it in 1893:

"Irebo contains say 2,000 people. Ikoko has at least 4,000 and there are other towns within easy reach, several as large as Irebo, and two probably as large as Ikoko. The people are fine-looking, bold and active."

In 1903 there were 600 people surviving.

In 1894 Ikoko in the Crown Domain began to feel the effects of "moral and material regeneration." On May 30th of that year Mr. Clark writes:

"Owing to trouble with the State the Irebo people fled and left their homes. Yesterday the State soldiers shot a sick man who had not attempted to run away, and others have been killed by the State (native) soldiers, who, in the absence of a white man, do as they please."

In November, 1894:

"At Ikoko quite a number of people have been killed by the soldiers, and most of the others are living in the bush."

In the same month he complained officially to Commissaire Fievez:

"If you do not come soon and stop the present trouble the towns will be empty. ... I entreat you to help us to have peace on the Lake. ... It seems so hard to see the dead bodies in the creek and on the beach, and to know why they are killed. . . . People are living in the bush like wild beasts without shelter or proper food, and afraid to make fires. Many died in this way. One woman ran away with three children — they all died in the forest, and the woman herself came back a wreck and died before long — ruined by exposure and starvation. We knew her well. My hope in 1894 was to get the facts put before King Leopold, as I was sure he knew nothing of the awful conditions of the collection of the so- called 'rubber tax.' "

On November 28th he writes:

"The State soldiers brought in seven hands, and reported having shot the people in the act of running away to the French side, etc."

“We found all that the soldiers had reported was untrue, and that the statements made by the natives to me were true. We saw only six bodies; a seventh had evidently fallen into the water, and we learned in a day or two that an eighth body had floated into the landing- place above us — a woman that had either been thrown or had fallen into the water after being shot.”

On December 5th, he says:

“A year ago we passed or visited between here and Ikoko the following villages:

	Probable population
Lobwaka	250
Boboko	250
Bosungu	100
Kenzie	150
Bokaka	200
Mosenge	150
Ituta	80
Ngero	2,000
Total	3,180

“ A week ago I went up, and only at Ngero were there any people: there we found ten. Ikoko did not contain over twelve people other than those employed by Frank. Beyond Ikoko the case is the same.”

April 12th, 1895, he writes:

“I am sorry that rubber palavers continue. Every week we hear of some fighting, and there are frequent ‘rows,’ even in our village, with the armed and unruly soldiers. . . . During the past twelve months it has cost more lives than native wars and superstition would have sacrificed in three to five years. The people make this comparison among themselves. ... It seems incredible and awful to think of these savage men armed with rifles and let loose to hunt and kill people, because they do not get rubber to sell at a mere nothing to the State, and it is blood-curdling to see them returning with hands of the slain and to find the hands of young children, amongst bigger ones, evidencing their 1 bravery.’

The following was written on May 3rd, 1895:

“The war on account of rubber. The State demands that the natives shall make rubber and sell same to its agents at a very low price. The natives do not like it. It is hard work and very poor pay, and takes them away from their homes into the forest, where they feel very unsafe, as there are always feuds among them. . . . The rubber from this district has cost hundreds of lives, and the scenes I have witnessed while unable to help the oppressed have been almost enough to make me wish I were dead. The soldiers, are themselves savages, some even cannibals, trained to use rifles and in many cases they are sent away without supervision, and they do as they please. When they come to any town no man’s property or wife is safe, and when they are at war they are like devils.

“Imagine them returning from fighting some 1rebels’; see, on the bow of the canoe is a pole and a bundle of something on it. . . . These are the hands {right hands) of sixteen warriors they have slain. 1 Warriors/’ Don’t you see among them the hands of little children and girls {young girls or boys)? I have seen them. I have seen where even the trophy has been cut of while yet the poor heart beat strongly enough to shoot the blood from the cut arteries to a distance of fully four feet.”

“A young baby was brought here one time; its mother was taken prisoner, and before her eyes they threw the infant in the water to drown it. The soldiers coolly told me and my wife that their white man did not want them to bring infants to their place. They dragged the women off and left the infant beside us, but we sent the child to its mother, and said we would report the matter to the chief of the post. We did so, but the men were not punished. The principal offender was told before me he would get fifty lashes, but I heard the same mouth send a message to say he would not be flogged.”

Compare with this the following extracts from King Leopold’s Officiel Bulletin, referring to this very tract of country:

“The exploitation of the rubber vines of this district was undertaken barely three years ago by M. Fievez. The results he obtained have been unequalled. The district produced in 1895 more than 650 tons of rubber, bought (sic) for 2(European price), and sold at Antwerp for 55. per kilo (2 lbs.).”

A later bulletin adds:

“With this development of general order is combined an inevitable amelioration in the native’s condition of existence wherever he conies into contact with the European element. . . .

“ Such is, in fact, one of the ends of the general policy of the State, to promote the regeneration of the race by instilling into him a higher idea of the necessity of labour.”

Truly, I know nothing in history to match’’such documents as these — pirates and bandits have never descended to that last odious abyss of hypocrisy. It stands alone, colossal in its horror, colossal, too, in its effrontery.

A few more anecdotes from the worthy Mr. Clark. This is an extract from a letter to the Chief of the District, Mueller:

“There is a matter I want to report to you regarding the Nkake sentries. You remember some time ago they took eleven canoes and shot some Ikoko people. As a proof they went to you with some hands, of which three were the hands of little children. We heard from one of their paddlers that one child was not dead when its hand was cut off, but did not believe the story. Three days after we were told the child was still alive in the bush. I sent four of my men to see, and they brought back a little girl whose right hand had been cut off, and she left to die from the wound. The child had no other wound. As I was going to see Dr. Reusens about my own sickness I took the child to him, and he has cut the arm and made it right and I think she will live. But I think such awful cruelty should be punished.”

Mr. Clark still clung to the hope that King Leopold did not know of the results of his own system. On March 25th, 1896, he writes:

“ This rubber traffic is steeped in blood, and if the natives were to rise and sweep every white person on the upper Congo into eternity there would still be left a fearful balance to their credit. Is it not possible for some American of influence to see the King of the Belgians, and let him know what is being done in his name? The Lake is reserved for the King — no traders allowed — and to collect rubber for him hundreds of men, women and children have been shot.”

At last the natives, goaded beyond endurance, rose against their oppressors. Who can help rejoicing that they seem to have had some success?

Extracts from letter-book commencing January 29th, 1897:

“The native uprising. This was brought about at last by sentries robbing and badly treating an important chief. In my presence he laid his complaint before M. Mueller, reporting the seizure of his wives and goods and the personal violence he had suffered at the hands of M. Mueller’s soldiers stationed in his town. I saw M. Mueller kick him off his veranda. Within forty-eight hours there were no ‘sentries’ or their followers left in that chief’s town — they were killed and mutilated — and soon after M. Mueller, with another white officer and many soldiers, were killed, and the revolt began.”

Such is some of the evidence, a very small portion of the whole narrative furnished by Mr. Clark. Remember that it is extracted from a long series of letters written to various people during a succession of years. One could conceive a single statement being a concoction, but the most ingenious apologist for the Congo methods could not explain how such a document as this could be other than true.

So much for Mr. Clark, the American. The evidence of Mr. Scrivener, the Englishman, covering roughly the same place and date, will follow. But lest the view should seem too Anglo-Saxon, let me interpolate a paragraph from the travels of a Frenchman, M. Leon Berthier, whose diary was published by the Colonial Institute of Marseilles in 1902:

“Belgian post of Imesse well constructed. The Chef de Poste is absent. He has gone to punish the village of M’Batchi, guilty of being a little late in paying the rubber tax. ... A canoe full of Congo State soldiers returns from the pillage of M’Batchi. . . . Thirty killed, fifty wounded. . . . At three o’clock arrive at M’Batchi, the scene of the bloody punishment of the Chef de Poste at Imesse. Poor village! The debris of miserable huts. . . . One goes away humiliated and saddened from these scenes of desolation, filled with indescribable feelings.”

In showing the continuity of the Congo horror and the extent of its duration (an extent which is the shame of the great Powers who acquiesced in it by their silence), I have marshalled witnesses in their successive order. Messrs. Glave, Murphy and Sjoblom have covered the time from 1894 to 1897; Mr. Clark has carried it on to 1900; we have had the deeds of 1901-4 as revealed in the Boma Law Courts. I shall now give the experience of Rev. Mr. Scrivener, and English missionary, who in July, August and September, 1903, traversed a section of the Crown Domain, that same region specially assigned to King Leopold in person, in which Mr. Clark had spent so many nightmare years. We shall see how far the independent testimony of the Englishman and the American, the one extracted from a diary, the other from a succession of letters, corroborate each other:

“At six in the morning woke up to find it still raining. It kept on till nine, and we managed to get off by eleven. All the cassava bread was finished the day previous, so a little rice was cooked, but it was a hungry crowd that left the little village. I tried to find out something about them. They said they were runaways from a district a little distance away, where rubber was being collected. They told us some horrible tales of murder and starvation, and when we heard all we wondered that men so maltreated should be able to live without retaliation. The boys and girls were naked, and I gave them each a strip of calico, much to their wonderment. . . .

“Four hours and a half brought us to a place called Sa. . . . On the way we passed two villages with more people than we had seen for days. There may have been 120. Close to the post was another small village. We decided to stay there the rest of the day. Three chiefs came in with all the adult members of their people, and altogether there were not 300. And this where, not more than six or seven years ago, there were at least 3,000! It made one’s heart heavy to listen to the tales of bloodshed and cruelty. And it all seemed so foolish. To kill the people off in the wholesale way in which it has been done in this Lake district, because they would not bring in a sufficient quantity of rubber to satisfy the white man — and now here is an empty country and a very much diminished output of rubber as the inevitable consequence. ...”

Finally Mr. Scrivcner emerged in the neighbourhood of a “big State station.” He was hospitably received, and had many chats with his host, who seems to have been a very decent sort of man, doing his best under very trying circumstances. His predecessor had worked incalculable havoc in the country, and the present occupant of the post was endeavouring to carry out the duties assigned to him (those duties consisting, as usual, of orders to get all the rubber possible out of the people) with as much humanity as the nature of the task permitted. In this he, no doubt, did what was possible as one whom the system had not yet degraded to its level — one of the rare few: and one cannot wonder that they should be rare, seeing the nature of the bonds, and the helplessness in which an official is placed who does not carry out the full desires of his superiors. But he had only succeeded in getting himself into trouble with the district commander in consequence. He showed Mr. Scrivener a letter from the latter upbraiding him for not using more vigorous means, telling him to talk less and shoot more, and reprimanding him for not killing more than one man in a district under his care where there was a little trouble.

Mr. Scrivener had the opportunity while at this State post, under the regime of a man who was endeavouring to be as humane as his instructions allowed, to actually see the process whereby the secret revenues of the “Crown Domain” are obtained. He says:

“Everything was on a military basis, but, so far as I could see, the one and only reason for it all was rubber. It was the theme of every conversation, and it was evident that the only way to please one’s superiors was to increase the output somehow. I saw a few men come in, and the frightened look even now on their faces tells only too eloquently of the awful time they have passed through. As I saw it brought in, each man had a little basket, containing, say, four or five pounds of rubber. This was emptied into a larger basket and weighed, and being found sufficient, each man was given a cupful of coarse salt, and to some of the head-men a fathom of calico. . . . I heard from the white men and some of the soldiers some most gruesome stories. The former white man (I feel ashamed of my colour every time I think of him) would stand at the door of the store to receive the rubber from the poor trembling wretches, who after, in some cases, weeks of privation in the forest, had ventured in with what they had been able to collect. A man bringing rather under the proper amount, the white man flies into a rage, and seizing a rifle from one of the guards, shoots him dead on the spot. Very rarely did rubber come in but one or more were shot in that way at the door of the store—’to make the survivors bring more next time.’ Men who had tried to run from the country and had been caught, were brought to the station and made to stand one behind the other, and an Albini bullet sent through them. ‘A pity to waste cartridges on such wretches.’ Only the roads to and fro from the various posts are kept open, and large tracts of country are abandoned to the wild beasts. The white man himself told me that you could walk on for five days in one direction, and not see a single village or a single human being. And this where formerly there was a big tribe! . . .

“As one by one the surviving relatives of my men arrived, some affecting scenes were enacted. There was no falling on necks and weeping, but very genuine joy was shown and tears were shed as the losses death had made were told. How they shook hands and snapped their fingers! What expressions of surprise — the wide- opened mouth covered with the open hand to make its evidence of wonder the more apparent. ... So far as the State post was concerned, it was in a very dilapidated condition. ... On three sides of the usual huge quadrangle there were abundant signs of a former population, but we only found three villages — bigger, indeed, than any we had seen before, but sadly diminished from what had been but recently the condition of the place. . . . Soon we began talking, and, without any encouragement on my part, they began the tales I had become so accustomed to. They were living in peace and quietness when the white men came in from the Lake with all sorts of requests to do this and to do that, and they thought it meant slavery. So they attempted to keep the white men out of their country, but without avail. The rifles were too much for them. So they submitted, and made up their minds to do the best they could under the altered circumstances. First came the command to build houses for the soldiers, and this was done without a murmur. Then they had to feed the soldiers, and all the men and women — hangers-on — who accompanied them.

"Then they were told to bring in rubber. This was quite a new thing for them to do. There was rubber in the forest several days away from their home, but that it was worth anything was news to them. A small reward was offered, and a rush was made for the rubber; 'What strange white men, to give us cloth and beads for the sap of a wild vine.' They rejoiced in what they thought was their good fortune. But soon the reward was reduced until they were told to bring in the rubber for nothing. To this they tried to demur, but to their great surprise several were shot by the soldiers, and the rest were told, with many curses and blows, to go at once or more would be killed. Terrified, they began to prepare their food for the fortnight's absence from the village, which the collection of the rubber entailed. The soldiers discovered them sitting about. 'What, not gone yet?' Bang! bang! bang! bang! And down fell one and another, dead, in the midst of wives and companions. There is a terrible wail, and an attempt made to prepare the dead for burial, but this is not allowed. All must go at once to the forest. And off the poor wretches had to go, without even their tinder- boxes to make fires. Many died in the forests from exposure and hunger, and still more from the rifles of the ferocious soldiers in charge of the post. In spite of all their efforts, the amount fell off, and more and more were killed. . . .

"I was shown around the place, and the sites of former big chiefs' settlements were pointed out. A careful estimate made the population, of say, seven years ago, to be 2,000 people in and about the post, within a radius of, say a quarter of a mile. All told, they would not muster 200 now, and there is so much sadness and gloom that they are fast decreasing. . . . Lying about in the grass, within a few yards of the house I was occupying, were numbers of human bones, in some cases complete skeletons. I counted thirty-six skulls, and saw many sets of bones from which the skulls were missing. I called one of the men, and asked the meaning of it. ‘When the rubber palaver began,’ said he, ‘ the soldiers shot so many we grew tired of burying, and very often we were not allowed to bury, and so just dragged the bodies out into the grass and left them. There are hundreds all round if you would like to see them.’ But I had seen more than enough, and was sickened by the stories that came from men and women alike of the awful time they had passed through. The Bulgarian atrocities might be considered as mildness itself when compared with what has been done here. . . .

“In due course we reached Ibali. There was hardly a sound building in the place. . . . Why such dilapidation? The Commandant away for a trip likely to extend into three months, the sub-lieutenant away in another direction on a punitive expedition.

In other words, the station must be neglected, and rubber-hunting carried out with all vigour. I stayed here two days, and the one thing that impressed itself upon me was the collection of rubber. I saw long files of men come, as at Mbongo, with their little baskets under their arms, saw them paid their milk-tin full of salt, and the two yards of calico flung to the head-men; saw their trembling timidity, and, in fact, a great deal more, to prove the state of terrorism that exists, and the virtual slavery in which the people are held. . . .

“So much for the journey to the Lake. It has enlarged my knowledge of the country, and also, alas! my knowledge of the awful deeds enacted in the mad haste of men to get rich. So far as I know, I am the first white man to go into the Domaine Prive of the King, other than the employees of the State. I expect there will be wrath in some quarters, but that cannot be helped.”

So far Mr. Scrivener. But perhaps the reader may think that there really was a missionary plot to decry the Free State. Let us have some travellers, then. Here is Mr. Grogan from his “ Cape to Cairo”:

“The people were terrorized and were living in marshes.” This was on the British frontier. “ The Belgians have crossed the frontier, descended into the valley, shot down large numbers of natives, British subjects, driven off the young women and cattle, and actually tied up and burned the old women. I do not make these statements without having gone into the matter. I remarked on the absence of women and the reason was given. It was on further inquiry that I was assured by the natives that white men had been present when the old women had been burned. . . . They even described to me the personal appearance of the white officers with the troops. . . . The wretched people came to me and asked me why the British had deserted them."

Further on he says:

"Every village had been burned to the ground, and as I fled from the country I saw skeletons, skeletons everywhere. And such postures! What tales of horror they told."

Just a word in conclusion from another witness, Mr. Herbert Frost:

"The power of an armed soldier among these enslaved people is absolutely paramount. By chief or child, every command, wish, or whim of the soldier must be obeyed or gratified. At his command with rifle ready a man will . . . outrage his own sister, give to his persecutor the wife he loves most of all, say or do anything, indeed, to save his life. The woes and sorrows of the race whom King Leopold has enslaved have not decreased, for his Commissaire officers and agents have introduced and maintain a system of deviltry hitherto undreamed of by his victims."

Does this all seem horrible? But in the face of it is there not something more horrible in a sentence of this kind? —

"Our only programme, I am anxious to repeat, is the work of moral and material regeneration, and we must do this among a population whose degeneration in its inherited conditions it is difficult to measure. The many horrors and atrocities which disgrace humanity give way little by little before our intervention."

It is King Leopold who speaks.

CHAPTER VII

CONSUL ROGER CASEMENT’S REPORT

UP TO this time the published reports as to the black doings of King Leopold and his men were, with the exception of a guarded document from Consul Pickersgill, in 1898, entirely from private individuals. No doubt there were official reports but the Government withheld them. In 1904, this policy of reticence was abandoned, and the historic report of Consul Roger Casement confirmed, and in some ways amplified, all that had reached Europe from other sources.

A word or two as to Mr. Casement’s own personality and qualifications may not be amiss, since both were attacked by his Belgian detractors. He is a tried and experienced public servant, who has had exceptional opportunities of knowing Africa and the natives. He entered the Consular Service in 1892, served on the Niger till 1895, was Consul at Delagoa Bay to 1898, and was finally transferred to the Congo. Personally, he is a man of the highest character, truthful, unselfish — one who is deeply respected by all who know him. His experience, which deals with the Crown Domain districts in the year 1903, covers some sixty-two pages, to be read in full in “White Book, Africa, No. 1, 1904.” I will not apologize for the length of the extracts, as this, the first official exposure, was an historical document and from its publication we mark the first step in that train of events which is surely destined to remove the Congo State from hands which have proved so unworthy, and to place it in conditions which shall no longer be a disgrace to European civilization. It may be remarked before beginning that at some of these conversations with the natives Mr. Scrivener was present, and that he corroborates the account given by the Consul.

The beginning of Mr. Casement’s report shows how willing he was to give praise where praise was possible, and to say all that could be said for the Administration. He talks of “energetic European intervention,” and adds, “that very much of this intervention has been called for no one who formerly knew the Upper Congo could doubt.” “Admirably built and admirably kept stations greet the traveller at many points.” “To-day the railway works most efficiently.” He attributes sleeping sickness as “one cause of the seemingly wholesale diminution of human life which I everywhere observed in the regions re-visited; a prominent place must be assigned to this malady. The natives certainly attribute their alarming death-rate to this as one of the inducing causes, although they attribute, and I think principally, their rapid decrease in numbers to other causes as well.”

The Government work shop “was brightness, care, order, and activity, and it was impossible not to admire and commend the industry which had created and maintained in constant working order this useful establishment.”

These are not the words of a critic who has started with a prejudiced mind or the desire to make out a case.

In the lower reaches of the river above Stanley Pool Casement found no gross ill-usage. The natives were hopeless and listless, being debarred from trade and heavily taxed in food, fish and other produce. It was not until he began to approach the cursed rubber zones that terrible things began to dawn upon him. Casement had travelled in 1887 in the Congo, and was surprised to note the timidity of the natives. Soon he had his explanation:

“At one of these village, S   , after confidence had been restored and the fugitives had been induced to come in from the surrounding forest, where they had hidden themselves, I saw women coming back, carrying their babies, their household utensils, and even the food they had hastily snatched up, up to a late hour of the evening. Meeting some of these returning women in one of the fields I asked them why they had run away at my approach, and they said, smiling, ‘We thought you were Bula Matadi’ (i. e., ‘men of the Government’). Fear of this kind was formerly unknown on the Upper Congo; and in much more out-of-the-way places visited many years ago the people flocked from all sides to greet a white stranger. But to-day the apparition of a white man’s steamer evidently gave the signal for instant flight.”

“. . . Men, he said, still came to him whose hands had been cut off by the Government soldiers during those evil days, and he said there were still many victims of this species of mutilation in the surrounding country. Two cases of the kind came to my actual notice while I was in the lake. One, a young man, both of whose hands had been beaten off with the butt-ends of rifles against a tree, the other a young lad of eleven or twelve years of age, whose right hand was cut off at the wrist. This boy described the circumstances of his mutilation, and, in answer to my inquiry, said that although wounded at the time he was perfectly sensible of the severing of his wrist, but lay still fearing that if he moved he would be killed. In both these cases the Government soldiers had been accompanied by white officers whose names were given to me. Of six natives (one a girl, three little boys, one youth, and one old woman) who had been mutilated in this way during the rubber regime, all except one were dead at the date of my visit. The old woman had died at the beginning of this year, and her niece described to me how the act of mutilation in her case had been accomplished."

The fines inflicted upon villages for trifling offences were such as to produce the results here described:

"The officer had then imposed as further punishment a fine of 55,000 brass rods (2,750 fr.) — ^110. This sum they had been forced to pay, and as they had no other means of raising so large a sum they had, many of them, been compelled to sell their children and their wives. I saw no live-stock of any kind in W save a very few fowls — possibly under a dozen — and it seemed, indeed, not unlikely that, as these people asserted, they had great difficulty in always getting their supplies ready. A father and mother stepped out and said that they had been forced to sell their son, a little boy called F, for 1,000 rods to meet their share of the fine. A widow came and declared that she had been forced, in order to meet her share of the fine, to sell her daughter G, a little girl whom I judged from her description to be about ten years of age. She had been sold to a man in Y , who was named, for 1,000 rods, which had then gone to make up the fine."

The natives were broken in spirit by the treatment:

"One of them — a strong, indeed, a splendid-looking man — broke down and wept, saying that their lives were useless to them, and that they knew of no means of escape from the troubles which were gathering around them. I could only assure these people that their obvious course to obtain relief was by appeal to their own constituted authorities, and that if their circumstances were clearly understood by those responsible for these fines I trusted and believed some satisfaction would be forthcoming."

These fines, it may be added, were absolutely illegal. It was the officer, not the poor, harried natives, who had broken the law.

“These fines, it should be borne in mind, are illegally imposed; they are not ‘fines of Court’; are not pronounced after any judicial hearing, or for any proved offence against the law, but are quite arbitrarily levied according to the whim or ill-will of the executive officers of the district, and their collection, as well as their imposition, involves continuous breaches of the Congolese laws. They do not, moreover, figure in the account of public revenues in the Congo ‘Budgets’; they are not paid into the public purse of the country, but are spent on the needs of the station or military camp of the officer imposing them, just as seems good to this official.”

Here is an illustrative anecdote:

“One of the largest Congo Concession Companies had, when I was on the Upper River, addressed a request to its Directors in Europe for a further supply of ball-cartridge. The Directors had met this demand by asking what had become of the 72,000 cartridges shipped some three years ago, to which a reply was sent to the effect that these had all been used in the production of india-rubber. I did not see this correspondence, and cannot vouch for the truth of the statement; but the officer who informed me that it had passed before his own eyes was one of the highest standing in the interior.”

Another witness showed the exact ratio between cartridges and rubber:

“ ‘The S. A. B. on the Bussira, with 150 guns, get only ten tons (rubber) a month; we, the State, at Momboyo, with 130 guns, get thirteen tons per month.’ ‘ So you count by guns?’ I asked him. ‘Partout,’ M. P. said. ‘Each time the corporal goes out to get rubber cartridges are given to him. He must bring back all not used; and for every one used, he must bring back a right hand.’ M. P. told me that sometimes they shot a cartridge at an animal in hunting; they then cut off a hand from a living man. As to the extent to which this is carried on, he informed me that in six months they, the State, on the Momboyo River, had used 6,000 cartridges, which means that 6,ooo people are killed or mutilated. It means more than 6,000 for the people have told me repeatedly that the soldiers kill children with the butt of their guns.”

That the statement about the cutting off of living hands is correct is amply proved by the Kodak. I have photographs of at least twenty such mutilated Negroes in my own possession.

Here is a copy of a dispatch from an official quoted in its naked frankness: ‘

“Le Chef Ngulu de Wangata est envoys dans la Maringa, pour m’y acheter des esclaves. Priere a MM. les agents de l’A.B.I.R. de bien vouloir me signaler les mefaits que celui-ci pourrait com- mettre en route.

“Le Capitaine-Commandant, (Signe) “SARRAZZYN.”

“ Colquilhatville, le ier Mai, 1896.”

Pretty good for the State which boasts that it has put down the slave trade.

There is a passage showing the working of the rubber system which is so clear and authoritative that I transcribe it in full:

“I went to the homes of these men some miles away and found out their circumstances. To get the rubber they had first to go fully a two days’ journey from their homes, leaving their wives, and being absent for from five to six days. They were seen to the forest limits under guard, and if not back by the sixth day trouble was likely to ensue. To get the rubber in the forests — which, generally speaking, are very swampy — involves much fatigue and often fruitless searching for a well-flowing vine. As the area of supply diminishes, moreover, the demand for rubber constantly increases. Some little time back I learned the Bongandanga district supplied seven tons of rubber a month, a quantity which it was hoped would shortly be increased to ten tons. The quantity of rubber brought by the three men in question would have represented, probably, for the three of them certainly not less than seven kilog. of pure rubber. That would be a very safe estimate, and at an average of 7fr. per kilog. they might be said to have brought in £2 worth of rubber. In return for this labour, or imposition, they had received goods which cost certainly under 15., and whose local valuation came to 45 rods (is. iod.). \s this process repeats itself twenty-six times a year, it will be seen that they would have yielded £52 in kind at the end of the year to the local factory, and would have received in return some 24s. or 25s. worth of goods, which Lua a market value on the spot of £2 7s. 8d. In addition to these formal payments they were liable at times to be dealt with in another manner, for should their work, which might have been just as hard, have proved less profitable in its yield of rubber, the local prison would have seen them. The people everywhere assured me that they were not happy under this system, and it was apparent to a callous eye that in this they spoke the strict truth.”

Again I insert a passage to show that Casement’. «.s by no means an ill-natured critic:

“It is only right to say that the present agent of the A.B.I.R. Society I met at Bongandan^a denied to me to try, in very difficult and embarrassing circumstances, to minimize as far as possible, and within the limits of his duties, the evils of the system I there observed at work.”

Speaking of the Mongalla massacres — those in which Lothaire was implicated — he quotes from the judgment of the Court of Appeal:

“That it is just to take into account that, by the correspondence produced in the case, the chiefs of the Concession Company have, if not by formal orders, at least by their example and their tolerance, induced their agents to take no account whatever of the rights, property, and lives of the natives; to use the arms and the soldiers which should have served for their defence and the maintenance of order to force the natives to furnish them with produce and to work for the Company, as also to pursue as rebels and outlaws those who sought to escape from the requisitions imposed upon them. . . . That, above all, the fact that the arrest of women and their detention, to compel the villages to furnish both produce and workmen, was tolerated and admitted even by certain of the administrative authorities of the region.”

Yet another example of the workings of the system:

“In the morning, when about to start for K   , many people from the surrounding country came in to see me. They brought with them three individuals who had been shockingly wounded by gun fire, two men and a very small boy, not more than six years of age, and a fourth — a boy child of six or seven — whose right hand was c’i* off at the wrist. One of the men, who had been shot through the arm, declared that he was Y of L   , a village situated some miles away. He declared that he had been shot as I saw under the following circumstances: the soldiers had entered his town, he alleged, to enforce the due fulfilment of the rubber tax due by the community. These men had tied him up and said that unless he paid 1,000 brass rods to them they would shoot him. Having no rods to give them they had shot him through the arm and had left him.”

I may say that among my photographs are several with shattered arms who have been treated in this fashion.

This is how the natives were treated when they complained to the white man:

"In addition, fifty women are required each morning to go to the factory and work there all day. They complained that the remuneration given for these services was most inadequate, and that they were continually beaten. When I asked the Chief W why he had not gone to D F to complain if the sentries beat him or his people, opening his mouth he pointed to one of the teeth which was just dropping out, and said: 'That is what I got from the D F four days ago when I went to tell him what I now say to you.' He added that he was frequently beaten, along with others of his people, by the white man."

One sentry was taken almost red-handed by Mr. Casement:

" After some little delay a boy of about fifteen years of age appeared, whose left arm was wrapped up in a dirty rag. Removing this, I found the left hand had been hacked off by the wrist, and that a shot hole appeared in the fleshy part of the forearm. The boy, who gave his name as I I, in answer to my inquiry, said that a sentry of the La Lulanga Company now in the town had cut off his hand. I proceeded to look for this man, who at first could not be found, the natives to a considerable number gathering behind me as I walked through the town. After some delay the sentry appeared, carrying a cap-gun. The boy, whom I placed before him, then accused him to his face of having mutilated him. The men of the town, who were questioned in succession, corroborated the boy's statement. The sentry, who gave his name as K K, could make no answer to the charge. He met it by vaguely saying some other sentry of the Company had mutilated I I; his predecessor, he said, had cut off several hands, and probably this was one of the victims. The natives around said that there were two other sentries at present in the town, who were not so bad as K K, but that he was a villain. As the evidence against him was perfectly clear, man after man standing out and declaring he had seen the act committed, I informed him and the people present that I should appeal to the local authorities for his immediate arrest and trial."

The following extract must be my final quotation from Consul Casement's report:

"I asked then how this tax was imposed. One of them, who had been hammering out an iron neck-collar on my arrival, spoke first. He said:

" 'I am NN. These other two beside me are O O and P P, all of us Y . From our country each village had to take twenty loads of rubber. These loads were big: they were as big as this. . . .' (Producing an empty basket which came nearly up to the handle of my walking-stick.) ‘That was the first size. We had to fill that up, but as rubber got scarcer the white man reduced the amount. We had to take these loads in four times a month.’

“ Q. 1 How much pay did you get for this?’

“ A. (Entire audience.) ‘ We got no pay! We got nothing!’

“And then N N, whom I asked again, said:

“ ‘ Our village got cloth and a little salt, but not the people who did the work. Our chiefs eat up the cloth; the workers got nothing. The pay was a fathom of cloth and a little salt for every big basketful, but it was given to the chief, never to the men. It used to take ten days to get the twenty baskets of rubber — we were always in the forest and then when we were late we were killed. We had to go further and further into the forest to find the rubber vines, to go without food, and our women had to give up cultivating the fields and gardens. Then we starved. Wild beasts — the leopards — killed some of us when we were working away in the forest, and others got lost or died from exposure and starvation, and we begged the white man to leave us alone, saying we could get no more rubber, but the white men and their soldiers said: “Go! You are only beasts yourselves; you are nyama (meat).” We tried, always going further into the forest, and when we failed and our rubber was short, the soldiers came to our towns and killed us. Many were shot, some had their ears cut off: others were tied up with ropes around their necks and bodies and taken away. The white men sometimes at the posts did not know of the bad things the soldiers did to us, but it was the white men who sent the soldiers to punish us for not bringing in enough rubber.’

“ Here P P took up the tale from N N:

“ ‘We said to the white men, “We are not enough people now to do what you want us. Our country has not many people in it and we are dying fast. We are killed by the work you make us do, by the stoppage of our plantations, and the breaking up of our homes.” The white man looked at us and said: “There are lots of people in Mputu”’ (Europe, the white man’s country). ‘“If there are lots of people in the white man’s country there must be many people in the black man’s country.” The white man who said this was the chief white man at F F ; his name was A B; he was a very bad man. Other white men of Bula Matadi who had been bad and wicked were B C, C D, and D E.’ ‘ These had killed us often, and killed us by their own hands as well as by their soldiers. Some white men were good. These were E F, F G, G H, H I, I K, K L.'

"These ones told them to stay in their homes and did not hunt and chase them as the others had done, but after what they had suffered they did not trust more any one's word, and they had fled from their country and were now going to stay here, far from their homes, in this country where there was no rubber.

"Q. 'How long is it since you left your homes, since the big trouble you speak of?'

"A. 'It lasted for three full seasons, and it is now four seasons since we fled and came into the K country.'

"Q. 'How many days is it from N to your own country?'

"A. 'Six days of quick marching. We fled because we could not endure the things done to us. Our ghiefs were hanged, and we were killed and starved and worked beyond endurance to get rubber.'

"Q. 'How do you know it was the white men themselves who ordered these cruel things to be done to you? These things must have been done without the white man's knowledge by the black soldiers.'

"A. (PP): 'The whit- men told their soldiers: "You kill only women; you cannot kill men. You must prove that you kill men." So then the soldiers when they killed us' (here he stopped and hesitated, and then pointing to the private parts of my bulldog — it was lying asleep at my feet), he said: 'then they cut off those things and took them to the white men, who said: "It is true, you have killed men." '

"Q. 'You mean to tell me that any white man ordered your bodies to be mutilated like that, and those parts of you carried to him?'

"PP, O O, and all (shouting): 'Yes! many white men. DE did it.'

"Q. 'You say this is true? Were many of you so treated after being shot?'

"All (shouting out): 'Nkoto! Nkoto!' (Very many! Very many!)

" There was no doubt that these people were not inventing. Their veh&nence, their flashing eyes, their excitement, was not simulated. Doubtless they exaggerated the numbers, but they were clearly telling what they knew and loathed. I was told that they often became so furious at the recollection of what had been done to them that they lost control over themselves. One of the men before me was getting into this state now."

Such is the story — or a very small portion of it — which His Majesty's Consul conveyed to His Majesty's Government as to the condition of those natives, who, "in the name of Almighty God," we had pledged ourselves to defend!

The same damning White Book contained a brief account of Lord Cromer's experience upon the Upper Nile in the Lado district. He notes that for eighty miles the side of the river which is British territory was crowded with native villages, the inhabitants of which ran along the bank calling to the steamer. The other bank (Congolese territory), was a deserted wilderness. The "Tuquoque" argument which King Leopold's henchmen are so fond of advancing will find it hard to reconcile the difference. Lord Cromer ends his report:

" It appears to me that the facts which I have stated above afford amply sufficient evidence of the spirit which animates the Belgian Administration, if, indeed, Administration it can be called. The Government, so far as I could judged conducted almost exclusively on commercial principles, and, even judged by that standard, it would appear that those principles are somewhat short-sighted."

In the same White Book which contains these documents there is printed the Congolese defence drawn up by M. de Cuvelier. The defence consists in simply ignoring all the definite facts laid before the public, and in making such statements as that the British have themselves made war upon natives, as if there were no distinction between war and massacre, and that the British have put a poll-tax upon natives, which, if it be reasonable in amount, is a perfectly just proceeding adopted by all Colonial nations. Let the possessors of the Free State use this system, and at the same time restore the freedom of trade by throwing open the country to all, and returning to the natives that land and produce which has been taken from them. When they have done this — and punished the guilty — there will be an end of anti-Congo agitation. Beyond this, a large part (nearly half) of the Congo Reply (notes sur le rapport de Mr. Casement, de Dec. n, 1903), is taken up by trying to show that in one case of mutilation the injuries were, in truth, inflicted by a wild boar. There must be many wild boars in Congo land, and their habits are of a singular nature. It is not in the Congo that these boars are bred.

CHAPTER VIII

KING LEOPOLD’S COMMISSION AND ITS REPORT

THE immediate effect of the publication as a State paper of the general comment of Lord Cromer, and of the definite accusations of Consul Casement, was a demand both in Belgium and in England for an official inquiry. Lord Landsdowne stipulated that this inquiry should be impartial and thorough. It was also suggested by the British Government that it should be international in character, and separated from the local administration. Very grudgingly and under constant pressure the King appointed a Commission, but whittled down its powers to such a point that its proceedings must lose all utility. Such were the terms that they provoked remonstrance from men like M. A. J. Wauters, the Belgian historian of the Congo Free State, who protested in the Mouvement Geogra- phique (August 7 th, 1904) that such a body could serve no useful end. Finally, their functions were slightly increased, but they possessed no punitive powers and were hampered in every direction by the terms of their reference.

The personnel of the Commission was worthy of the importance of the inquiry. M. Janssens, a well-known jurist of Belgium, was the president. He impressed all who came in contact with him as a man of upright and sympathetic character. Baron Nisco’s appointment was open to criticism, as he was himself a Congo functionary, but save for that fact there was no complaint to make against him. Dr. Schumacher, a distinguished Swiss lawyer, was the third Commissioner. The English Government applied to have a representative upon the tribunal, and with true Congo subtlety the request was granted after the three judges had reached the Congo. The Englishman, Mr. Mackie, hurried out, but was only in time to attend the last three sittings, which were held in the lower part of the river, far from the notorious rubber agents. It is worth noting that on his arrival he applied for the minutes of the previous meetings and that his application was refused. In Belgium the evidence of the Commission has never been published, and it is safe to say that it never will be. Fortunately the Congo missionaries took copious notes of the proceedings and of the testimony which came immediately under their own notice. It is from their evidence that I draw these accounts. If the Congo authorities contest the accuracy of those accounts, then let them confute them forever and put their accusers to confusion by producing the actual minutes which they hold.

The first sitting of any length of which there are records is that at Bolobo, and extended from November 5th to 12th, 1904. The veteran, Mr. Grenfell, gave evidence at this sitting, and it is useful to summarize his views as he was one of the men who held out longest against the condemnation of King Leopold, and because his early utterances have been quoted as if he were a supporter of the system. He expressed to the Commissioners his disappointment at the failure of the Congo Government to realise the promises with which it inaugurated its career. He declared he could no longer wear the decorations which he had received from the Sovereign of the Congo State. He gave it as his opinion that the ills the country was suffering from were due to the haste of a few men to get rich, and to the absence of anything like a serious attempt to properly police the country in the interests of the people. He instanced the few judicial officers, and the virtual impossibility of a native obtaining justice, owing to witnesses being compelled to travel long distances, either to Leopoldville or Boma. Mr. Grenfell spoke out emphatically against the administrative regime on the Upper River, so far as it had been brought under his notice.

Mr. Scrivener, a gentleman who had been twenty-three years on the Congo, was the next witness. His evidence was largely the same as the “Diary” from which I have already quoted, concerning the condition of the Crown Domain. Many witnesses were examined. “ How do you know the names of the men murdered?” a lad was asked. “One of them was my father,” was the dramatic reply. “Men of stone,” wrote Mr.Scrivener, “ would be moved by the stories that are unfolded as the Commission probes this awful history of rubber collection.”

Mr. Gilchrist, another missionary, was a new witness. His testimony was concerned with the State Domain and the Concessionnaire area, principally on the Lulanga River. He said:

“ I also told them what we had seen on the Ikelemba, of the signs of desolation in all the districts, of the heartrending stories the people told us, of the butcheries wrought by the various white men of the State and companies who had, from time to time, been stationed there among whom a few names were notorious. I pointed out to them the fact that the basin of the Ikelemba was supposed to be free-trade territory also, but that everywhere the people of the various districts were compelled to serve the companies of these respective districts, in rubber, gum copal or food. At one out-of-the-way place where we were on the south bank, two men arrived just as we were leaving, with their bodies covered with marks of the chicotte, which they had just received from the trader of Bosci because their quantity had been short. I said to the Commissaire, given favourable conditions, particularly freedom, there would soon be a large population in these interior towns, the Ngombe and Mongo.”

In answer to questions the following facts were solicited:

“ Unsettled condition of the people. The older people never seem to have confidence to build their houses substantially. If they have any suspicion of the approach of a canoe or steamer with soldiers they flee.

“Chest disease, pneumonia, etc. These carry off very many. The people flee to the islands, live in the open air, expose themselves to all kinds of weather, contract chills, which are followed by serious lung troubles, and die. For years we never saw a new house because of the drifting population. They have a great fear of soldiers. In the case of many the absence from the villages is temporary; in the case of a few they permanently settle on the north bank of the river.

“ Want of proper nourishment. I have witnessed the collecting of the State imposition, and after this was set aside the natives had nothing but leaves to eat.”

Also, that fines, which the Commission at once declared to be illegal, were constantly levied on the people, and that these fines had continued after the matter had been reported to the Governor- General. In spite of this declaration of illegality, no steps were taken in the matter, and M. de Bauw, the chief offender, was by last accounts the supreme executive official of the district. At every turn one finds that there is no relation at all between law and practice in the Congo. Law is habitually broken by every official from the Governor-General downward if the profits of the State can be increased thereby. The only stern enforcement of the laws is toward the foreigner, the Austrian Rubinck, or the Englishman Stokes, who is foolish enough to think that an international agreement is of more weight than the edicts of Boma. These men believed it, and met their death through their belief without redress, and even, in the case of the Austrian, without public remonstrance.

The next considerable session of the Commission was at Baringa. Mr. Harris and Mr. Stannard, the missionaries at this station, had played a noble part throughout in endeavouring within their very limited powers to shield the natives from their tormentors. In both cases, and also in that of Mrs. Harris, this had been done at the repeated risk of their lives. Their white neighbours of the rubber factories made their lives miserable also by preventing their receipt of food from the natives, and harassing them in various ways. On one occasion a chief and his son were both murdered by the order of the white agent because they had supplied the Harris household with the fore-quarter of an antelope. Before giving the terrible testimony of the missionaries — a testimony which was admitted to be true by the chief agent of the A.B.I.R. Company on the spot, it would be well to show the exact standing of this Corporation and its relation to the State. These relations are so close that they become to all intents and purposes the same. The State holds fifty per cent, of the shares; it places the Government soldiers at the company’s disposal; it carries up in the Government steamers and supplies licenses for the great number of rifles and the quantity of cartridges which the company needs for its murderous work. Whatever crimes are done by the company, the State is a close accomplice. Finally, the European directors of this bloodstained company are, or were at the time, the Senator Van der Nest, who acted as President; and as Council: Count John d’Oultremont, Grand Marshal of the Belgian Court; Baron Dhanis, of Congo fame, and M. van Eetevelde, the creature of the King, and the writer of so many smug despatches to the British Government about the mission of civilization and the high purpose of the Congo State. Now listen to some of the testimony as condensed by Mr. Harris:

“First, the specific atrocities during 1904 were dealt with, including men, women, and children; then murders and outrages, including cannibalism. From this I passed on to the imprisonment of men, women and children. Following this I called attention to the destruction of the Baringa towns and the partial famine among the people in consequence. Also the large gangs of prisoners — men, women and children — imprisoned to carry out this work; the murder of two men whilst it was being done. Next followed the irregularities during 1903. The expedition conducted by an A.B.I.R. agent against Samb’ekota, and the arming continually of A.B.I.R. sentries with Albini rifles. Following this I drew attention to the administration of Mons. Forcie, whose regime was a terrible one, including the murder of Isekifasu, the principal Chief of Bolima; the killing, cutting up and eating of his wives, son and children; the decorating of the chief houses with the intestines, liver and heart of some of the killed, as stated by ‘Veritas’ in the West African Mail.

“I confirmed in general the letter published in the West African Mail by ‘Veritas.’

“Following this I came to Mons. Tagner’s time, and stated that no village in this district had escaped murders under this man’s regime.

“Next we dealt with irregularities common to all agents, calling attention to and proving by specific instances the public floggings of practically any and every one; quoting, for instance, seeing with my own eyes six Ngombe men receive one hundred strokes each, delivered simultaneously by two sentries.

“Next, the normal condition has always been the imprisoning of men, women and children, all herded together in one shed, with no arrangement for the demands of nature. Further, that very many, including even chiefs, had died either in prison or immediately on their release.

“Next, the mutilation of the woman Boaji, because she wished to remain faithful to her husband, and refused to subject herself to the passions of the sentries. The woman’s footless leg and hernia testify to the truth of her statement. She appeared before the Commission and doctor.

“Next, the fact that natives are imprisoned for visiting friends and relatives in other villages, and the refusal to allow native canoes to pass up and down river without carrying a permit signed by the rubber agent; pointing out that even missionaries are subject to these restrictions, and publicly insulted, in an unprintable manner, when they do so.

“Next point dealt with was responsibility — maintaining that responsibility lay not so much in the individual as in the system. The sentry blames the agent, he in turn the director, and so on.

“I next called attention to the difficulties to be faced by natives in reporting irregularities. The number of civil officials is too small; the practical impossibility of reaching those that do exist — the native having first to ask permission of the rubber agent.

"The relations that are at present necessary between the A.B.I.R. and the State render it highly improbable that the natives will ever report irregularities. I then pointed out that we firmly believe that but for us these irregularities would never have come to light.

"Following on this the difficulties to be faced by missionaries were dealt with, pointing out that the A.B.I.R. can and do impose on us all sorts of restrictions if we dare to speak a word about their irregularities. I then quoted a few of the many instances which found their climax in Mrs. Harris and I almost losing our lives for daring to oppose the massacres by Van Caelcken. It was also stated that we could not disconnect the attitude of the State in refusing us fresh sites with our action in condemning the administration. I then mentioned that the forests are exhausted of rubber, pointing out that during a five days' tour through the forests I did not see a single vine of any size. This is solely because the vines have been worked in such a manner that all the rubber roots need many years' rest, whereas the natives now are actually reduced to digging up those roots in order to get rubber.

"The next subject dealt with was the clear violation both of the spirit and letter of the Berlin Act. In the first place we are not allowed to extend the Mission, and, further, we are forbidden to trade even for food.

"Next the statement was made that, so far as we are aware, no single sentry had ever been punished by the State till 1904 for the many murders committed in this district.

"I next pointed out that one reason why the natives object to paddle for the A.B.I.R. is because of the sentries who travel in the A.B.I.R. canoes, and whose only business is to flog the paddlers in order to keep them going.

"After Mr. Stannard had been heard, sixteen Esanga witnesses were questioned one by one. They gave clearly the details of how father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter were killed in cold blood for rubber. These sixteen represented over twenty murders in Esanga alone. Then followed the big chief of all Bolima, who succeeded Isekifasu (murdered by the A.B.I.R.). What a sight for those who prate about lying missionaries! He stood boldly before all, pointed to his twenty witnesses, placed on the table his one hundred and ten twigs, each twig representing a life for rubber. 'These are chiefs' twigs, these are men's, these shorter are women's, these smaller still are children’s.’ He gives the names of scores, but begs for permission to call his son as a reminder. The Commission, though, is satisfied with him, that he is telling the truth, and therefore say that it is unnecessary. He tells how his beard of many years’ growth, and which nearly reached his feet, was cut off by a rubber agent, merely because he visited a friend in another town. Asked if he had not killed A.B.I.R. sentries, he denied it, but owned to his people spearing three of the sentry’s boys. He tells how the white man fought him, and when the fight was over handed him his corpses, and said: ‘Now you will bring rubber, won’t you?’ To which he replied: ‘Yes.’ The corpses were cut up and eaten by Mons. Forcie’s fighters. He also told how he had been chicotted and imprisoned by the A.B.I.R. agent, and further put to the most menial labour by the agent.

“Here Bonkoko came forward and told how he accompanied the A.B.I.R. sentries when they went to murder Isekifasu and his wives and little ones; of finding them peacefully sitting at their evening meal; of the killing as many as they could, also the cutting up and eating of the bodies of Isekifasu’s son and his father’s wives; of how they dashed the baby’s brains out, cut the body in half, and impaled the halves.

“Again he tells how, on their return, Mons. Forcie had the sentries chicotted because they had not killed enough of the Bolima people.

“Next came Bongwalanga, and confirmed Bonkoko’s story; this youth went to ‘look on.’ After this the mutilated wife of Lomboto, of Ekerongo, was carried by a chief, who showed her foodess leg and hernia. This was the price she had to pay for remaining faithful to her husband. The husband told how he was chicotted because he was angry about his wife’s mutilation.

“Then Longoi, of Lotoko, placed eighteen twigs on the table, representing eighteen men, women and children murdered for rubber. Next, Iriunga laid thirty-four twigs on the table and told how thirty-four of his men, women and children had been murdered at Ekerongo. He admits that they had speared one sentry, Iloko, but that, as in every other such instance, was because Iloko had first killed their people. Lomboto shows his mutilated wrist and useless hand, done by the sentry. Isekansu shows his stump of a forearm, telling the same pitiful story. Every witness tells of floggings, rape, mutilations, murders, and of imprisonments of men, women and children, and of illegal fines and irregular taxes, etc., etc. The Commission endeavours to get through this slough of iniquity and river of blood, but finding it hopeless, asks how much longer I can go on. I tell them I can go on until they are satisfied that hundreds of murders have been committed by the A.B.I.R. in this district alone; murders of chiefs, men, women and little children, and that multitudes of witnesses only await my signal to appear by the thousand.

"I further point out that we have only considered about two hundred murders from the villages of Bolima, Esanga, Ekerongo, Lotoko; that by far the greater majority still remain. The following districts are as yet untouched: Bokri, Nson-go, Boru-ga, Ekala, Baringa, Linza, Lifindu, Nsongo-Mboyo, Livoku, Boendo, the Lomako river, the Ngombe country, and many others, all of whom have the same tale to tell. Every one saw the hopelessness of trying to investigate things fully. To do so, the Commission would have to stay here for months."

What comment can be added to such evidence as this! It stands in its naked horror, and it is futile to try to make it more vivid. What can any of those English apologists of the Congo who have thrown a doubt upon the accounts of outrages because in passing through a section of this huge country upon a flying visit they had not happened to see them — what can Lord Mountmorris, Captain Boyd Alexander, or Mrs. French Sheldon say in the face of a mass of evidence with the actual mutilated limbs and excoriated backs to enforce it? Can they say more than the man actually incriminated, M. Le Jeune, the chief agent at the spot? "What have you to say?" asked the President. M. Le Jeune shrugged his shoulders. He had nothing to say. The President, who had listened, to his honour be it spoken, with tears running down his cheeks to some of the evidence, cried out in amazement and disgust. "There is one document I would put in," said the agent. "It is to show that 142 of my sentinels were slain by the villagers in the course of seven months." "Surely that makes the matter worse!" cried the sagacious judge. "If these well-armed men were slain by the defenceless villagers, how terrible must the wrongs have been which called for such desperate reprisals!"

You will ask what was done with this criminal agent, a man whose deeds merited the heaviest punishment that human law could bestow. Nothing whatever was done to him. He was allowed to slip out of the country exactly as Captain Lothaire, in similar circumstances, was allowed to slip from the country. An insignificant agent may be occasionally made an example of, but to punish the local manager of a great company would be to lessen the output of rubber, and what are morality and justice compared to that?

Why should one continue with the testimony given before the Commission? Their wanderings covered a little space of the country and were confined to the main river, but everywhere they elicited the same tale of slavery, mutilation, and murder. What Scrivener and Grenfell said at Bolobo was what Harris and Stannard said at Baringa, what Gilchrist said at Lulanga, what Rushin and Gamman said at Bongadanga, what Mr. and Mrs. Lower said at Ikan, what Padfield said at Bonginda, what Weeks said at Monscombe. The place varied, but the results of the system were ever the same. Here and there were human touches which lingered in the memory; here and there also episodes of horror which stood out even in that universal Golgotha. One lad testified that he had lost every relative in the world, male or female, all murdered for rubber. As his father lay dying he had given him the charge of two infant brothers and enjoined him to guard them tenderly. He had cared for them until he had been compelled at last to go himself into the forest to gather the rubber. One week their quantity had been short. When he returned from the wood the village had been raided in his absence, and he found his two little brothers lying disembowelled across a log. The company, however, paid 200 per cent.

Four natives had been tortured until they cried out for some one to bring a gun and shoot them.

The chiefs died because their hearts were broken.

Mr. Gamman knew no village where it took them less than ten days out of fifteen to satisfy the demands of the A.B.I.R. As a rule, the people had four days in a month to themselves. By law the maximum of forced labour was forty hours in a month. But, as I have said, there is no relation at all between law and practice in the Congo.

One witness appeared with a string knotted in forty-two places, and with a packet of fifty leaves. Each knot represented a murder and each leaf a rope in his native village.

The son of a murdered chief took the bod) of his father (all names, dates and place specified) to show it to the white agent, in the hope of justice. The agent called his dog and set it on him, the dog biting the son on the leg as he carried the corpse of his father.

The villagers brought their murdered men to M. Spelier, director of the La Lulanga Company. He accused them of lying and ordered them off.

One chief was seized by two white agents, one of whom held him while the other beat him. When they had finished they kicked him to make him get up, but the man was dead. The Commission examined ten witnesses in their investigation of this story. The chief was Jonghi, the village Bogeka, the date October, 1904.

Such is a fractional sample of the evidence which was laid before the Commission, corroborated by every detail of name, place and date which could enforce conviction. There is no doubt that it did enforce thorough conviction. The judges travelled down the river sadder and wiser men. When they reached Boma, they had an interview with Governor-General Constermann. What passed at that interview has not been published, but the Governor-General went forth from it and cut his own throat. The fact may, perhaps, give some indication of how the judges felt when the stories were still fresh in their minds, and their nerves wincing under the horror of the evidence.

A whole year elapsed between the starting of the Commission and the presentation of their Report, which was published upon October 31st, 1905. The evidence which would have stirred Europe to its foundations was never published at all, in spite of an informal assurance to Lord Lansdowne that nothing would be held back. Only the conclusions saw the light, without the document upon which they were founded.

The effect of that Report, when stripped of its courtly phrases, was an absolute confirmation of all that had been said by so many witnesses during so many years. It is easy to blame the Commissioners for not having the full courage of their convictions, but their position was full of difficulty. The Report was really a personal one. The State was, as no one knew better than themselves, a fiction. It was the King who had sent them, and it was to the King himself that they were reporting upon a matter which deeply affected his personal honour as well as his material interests. Had they been, as had been suggested, an international bod)-, the matter would have been simple. But of the three good care had been taken that two should be men who would have to answer for what was said. Mr. Janssens was a more or less independent man, but a Belgian, and a subject all the same. Baron Nisco was in the actual employ of the King, and his future was at stake. On the whole, I think that the Commissioners acted like brave and honest men.

Naturally they laid all stress upon what could be said in favour of the King and his creation. They would have been more than human had they not done so. They enlarged upon the size and the traffic of the cities at the mouth of the Congo — as if the whole loot of a nation could pass down a river without causing commerce and riches at its mouth. Very early in the Report they indicated that the question of the State appropriation of the land had forced itself upon their notice. “If the State wishes to avoid the principle of the State appropriation of vacant lands resulting in abuse,” says the Report, “it should place its agents and officials on their guard against too restrictive interpretation and too rigorous applications.” Weak and trimming, it is true, but it was the cornerstone of all that the King had built, and how were they to knock it rudely out? Their attitude was not heroic. But it was natural. They go on:

“As the greater portion of the land in the Congo is not under cultivation, this interpretation concedes to the State A RIGHT OF

ABSOLUTE AND EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP OVER VIRTUALLY THE WHOLE OF THE LAND, WITH THIS CONSEQUENCE: THAT IT CAN DISPOSE — ITSELF AND SOLELY — OF ALL THE PRODUCTS OF THE SOIL; PROSECUTE AS A POACHER ANY ONE WHO TAKES FROM THAT LAND THE LEAST OF ITS FRUITS, OR AS A RECEIVER OF STOLEN GOODS ANY ONE WHO RECEIVES SUCH FRUIT: FORBID ANY ONE TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF ON THE GREATER PART OF THE TERRITORY. THE ACTIVITY OF THE NATIVES IS THUS LIMITED TO VERY RESTRICTED AREAS, AND THEIR ECONOMIC CONDITION IS IMMOBILIZED. THUS ABUSIVELY APPLIED, SUCH LEGISLATION WOULD PREVENT ANY DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE LIFE. IN THIS MANNER, NOT ONLY HAS THE NATIVE BEEN OFTEN FORBIDDEN TO SHIFT HIS VILLAGE, BUT HE HAS EVEN BEEN FORBIDDEN TO VISIT, EVEN TEMPORARILY, A NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE WITHOUT SPECIAL PERMIT. A NATIVE DISPLACING HIMSELF WITHOUT BEING THE BEARER OF SUCH AN AUTHORIZATION, WOULD LEAVE HIMSELF OPEN TO ARREST, TO BE TAKEN BACK AND EVEN PUNISHED,”

Who could possibly deny, after reading this passage, that the Congo’native has been reduced from freedom into slavery? There follows a curious sentence:

“Let us hasten,” says the Report, “to say that in actual fact so great a rigour has not been shown. Almost everywhere certain PRODUCTS OF

THE DOMAIN have been abandoned to the natives, notably palm kernels, which form the object of an important export trade in the Lower Congo.”

This palm kernel trade is an old-established one, affecting only the mouth of the river, which could not be disturbed without obvious international complications, and which bears no relation to the great Upper Congo populations, whose inhuman treatment was the question at issue.

The Report then proceeds to point out very clearly, the all-important fact which arises from the expropriation of the native from the land. “Apart from the rough plantations,” it says, “which barely suffice, to feed the natives themselves and to supply the stations, all the fruits of the soil are considered as the property of the State or of the Con- cessionnaire societies.” This being so, there is an end forever of free trade, or, indeed, of any trade, save an export by the Government itself, or by a handful of companies which really represent the Government, of the whole wealth of the country to Europe for the benefit of a ring of millionaires.

Having dealt with the taking of the land and the taking of its products, the Commission handles with kid gloves the third great root proposition, the forcing of the natives, for nothing, under the name of taxes, for trifles under the absurd name of trade, to work for the sake of their oppressors. It expends many words in showing that natives do not like work, and that, therefore, compulsion is necessary. It is sad to see just and learned men driven to such straits in defending what is indefensible. Do the blacks of the Rand gold mines like work? Do the Kimberley diamond hunters like work? Do the carriers of an East German caravan like work? No more than the Congolese. Why, then, do they work? Because they are paid a fair wage to do so. Because the money earned by their work can bring them more pleasure than the work does pain. That is the law of work the whole world over. Notably it is the law on the Congo itself, where the missionaries, who pay honestly for work, have no difficulty in getting it. Of course, the Congolese, like the Englishman, or the Belgian, does not like work when it is work which brings a benefit to others and none to himself.

But in spite of this preamble, the Commission cannot escape the actual facts.

“Numbers of agents only thought of one thing: to obtain as MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME, and their demands were often excessive. This is NOT AT ALL ASTONISHING, AT ANY

RATE AS REGARDS THE GATHERING OF THE PRODUCE OF THE DOMAIN. . . .

that is to say, the revenues for Government; FOR THE AGENTS THEMSELVES WHO REGULATED THE TAX AND SAW

TO ITS COLLECTION, HAD A DIRECT INTEREST IN INCREASING ITS AMOUNT, SINCE THEY RECEIVED PROPORTIONAL BONUSES ON THE PRODUCE THUS COLLECTED.”

No more definite statement could be made of the system which had been attacked by the Reformers and denied by the Congo officials for so many years. The Report then goes on to tell that when the State, in one of those pretended reforms which were meant for European, not for Congolese, use, allotted forty hours of forced labour per month as the amount which the native owed the State, the announcement was accompanied by a private intimation from the Governor- General to the District Commissioners, dated February 23rd, 1904, that this new law must have the effect, not of lessening, but “of bringing about a constant increase in the resources of the Treasury.” Could they be told in plainer terms that they were to disregard it?

The land is taken, the produce is taken, the labour is taken. In old days the African slave was exported, but we progress with the ages and now a higher intelligence has shown the folly of the old-fashioned methods when it is to easy to enslave him in his own home.

We may pass the Report of the Commission in so far as it deals with the taxation of the natives, food taxes, porterage taxes and other imposts. It brings out very clearly the curse of the parasitic army, with their families, which have to be fed by the natives, and the difficulty which it causes them with their limited plantations to find the means for feeding themselves. Even the wood to the State steamers is not paid for, but is taken as a tax. Such demands “force the natives in the neighbourhood of the stations in certain cases to an almost continuous labour” — a fresh admission of slave conditions. The Report describes the result of the rubber tax in the following terms:

“This circumstance [exhaustion of the rubber] explains the repugnance of the native for rubber work, which in itself is not particularly painful. In THE MAJORITY OF CASES the native must go one or two days’ march EVERY FORTNIGHT, until he arrives at that part of the forest where the rubber vines can be met with in a certain degree of abundance. There the collector passes a number of days IN A MISERABLE EXISTENCE. HE HAS TO BUILD HIMSELF AN IMPROVISED SHELTER, WHICH CANNOT, OBVIOUSLY, REPLACE HIS HUT. HE HAS NOT THE FOOD TO WHICH HE IS ACCUSTOMED. HE, IS DEPRIVED OF HIS WIFE, EXPOSED TO THE INCLEMENCIES OF THE WEATHER AND THE ATTACKS OF WILD BEASTS. WHEN ONCE HE HAS COLLECTED THE RUBBER HE MUST BRING IT TO THE STATE STATION OR TO THAT

OF THE COMPANY, AND ONLY THEN CAN HE RETURN TO HIS VILLAGE, WHERE HE CAN SOJOURN FOR BARELY MORE THAN TWO OR THREE DAYS, BECAUSE THE NEXT DEMAND IS UPON HIM. . . . It is hardly necessary to add that this state of affairs is A FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THE FORTY HOURS' LAW."

The Report deals finally with the question of the punishments meted out by the State. These it enumerates as "the taking of hostages, the imprisonment of the chiefs, the institution of sentries or capitas, fines and military expeditions," the latter being a euphemism for cold-blooded massacres. It continues:

"Whatever one may think of native ideas, acts such as taking women as hostages outrage too much our ideas of justice to be tolerated. The State has prohibited this practice long ago, but without being able to suppress it."

The State prohibits, but the State not only condones, but actually commands it by private circular. Again the gap which lies betwixt law and fact where the interest of gain is concerned.

"It was barely denied," the Report continues, "that in the various posts of the A.B.I.R. which we visited, the imprisonment of women hostages, the subjection of the chiefs to servile labour, the humiliations meted out to them, the flogging of rubber collectors, the brutality of the black employes set over the prisoners, were the rule commonly followed."

Then follows an illuminative passage about the sentries, capitas or "forest guards," or messengers, as they are alternatively called. It is a wonder that they were not called hospital orderlies in the efforts to make them seem inoffensive. What they actually were was, as we have seen, some twenty thousand cannibals armed with Albini repeating rifles. The Report says:

"This system of native supervisors (surveillants) has given rise to numerous criticisms, even on the part of State officials. The Protestant missionaries heard at Bolobo, Ikoko (Lake Mantumba), Lulonga, Bonginda, Ikau, Baringa and Bongandanga, drew up formidable accusations against the acts of these intermediaries. They brought before the Commission a MULTITUDE OF NATIVE

WITNESSES, WHO REVEALED A LARGE NUMBER OF CRIMES and excesses alleged to have been committed by the sentinels. According to the witnesses these auxiliaries, especially those stationed in the villages, abuse the authority conferred upon them, convert themselves into DESPOTS, CLAIMING THE WOMEN AND THE FOOD, NOT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES BUT FOR THE BODY OF PARASITES AND CREATURES WITHOUT ANY CALLING WHICH A LOVE OF RAPINE CAUSES TO BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH THEM, AND WITH WHOM THEY SURROUND THEMSELVES AS WITH A VERITABLE BODYGUARD; THEY KILL WITHOUT PITY ALL THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO RESIST THEIR EXIGENCIES AND

WHIMS. The Commission was obviously unable in all cases to verify the exactitude of the allegations made before it, the more so that the facts were often several years old. However, TRUTH OF THE

CHARGES IS BORNE OUT BY A MASS OF EVIDENCE AND OFFICIAL REPORTS.”

It adds:

“OF HOW MANY ABUSES HAVE THESE NATIVE SENTINELS BEEN

GUILTY IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY, EVEN APPROXIMATELY.

SEVERAL CHIEFS OF BARINGA BROUGHT US, ACCORDING TO THE

NATIVE CUSTOM, BUNDLES OF STICKS, EACH OF WHICH WAS MEANT TO SHOW ONE OF THEIR SUBJECTS KILLED BY THE CAPITAS. ONE OF THEM SHOWED 120 MURDERS IN HIS VILLAGE COMMITTED DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS. Whatever one may think of the confidence with which this native form of book-keeping may inspire one, a document handed to the Commission by the Director of the A.B.I.R. does not allow any doubt to remain as to the sinister character of the system. It consisted of a list showing that from ist January to ist August, 1905 — that is to say, within a space of seven months — 142 sentries of the Society had been killed or wounded by the natives. Now, it is to be assumed that in many cases these sentries had been attacked by the natives by way of revenge. One may judge by this of the number of bloody affrays to which their presence had given rise. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE AGENTS INTERROGATED BY THE COMMISSION, OR WHO WERE PRESENT AT THE AUDIENCES, DID NOT EVEN ATTEMPT TO DENY THE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE SENTINELS.”

That last sentence seems the crown of the arch. If the agents on the spot did not attempt before the Commission to deny the outrages who shall venture to do it in their name?

The remainder of the Report, though stuffed with courtly platitudes and with vague recommendations of reform which are absolutely unpractical, so long as the root causes of all the trouble remain undisturbed, contains a few positive passages which are worth preserving. Talking of the want of definite instructions to military expeditions, it says:

“The consequences are often very murderous. And one must not be astonished. If in the course of THESE DELICATE OPERATIONS, WHOSE OBJECT IT IS TO SEIZE HOSTAGES AND TO INTIMIDATE

THE NATIVES, constant watch cannot be exercised over the sanguinary instincts of the soldiers when orders to punish are given by superior authority, it is difficult that the expedition should not degenerate into massacres, accompanied by pillage and incendiarism.”

Again:

“The responsibility for these abuses must not, however, always be placed upon the commanders of military expeditions. In considering these facts one must bear in mind the deplorable confusion still existing in the Upper Congo between a state of war and a state of peace; between administration and repression; between those who may be regarded as enemies and those who have the right to be regarded as citizens of the State and treated in accordance with its laws. The Commission was struck with the general tone of the reports relating to operations described above. Often, while admitting that the expedition had been sent out SOLELY FOR SHORTAGE

IN TAXATION, AND WITHOUT MAKING ALLUSION TO AN ATTACK OR RESISTANCE ON THE PART OF THE NATIVES, WHICH ALONE WOULD JUSTIFY THE USE OF \RMS, the authors of these reports speak of ‘SURPRISING VILLAGES,’ ‘ENERGETIC PURSUIT,’ ‘NUMEROUS ENEMIES KILLED AND WOUNDED,’ ‘LOOT,’ ‘PRISONERS OF WAR,’ ‘CONDITIONS

OF PEACE.’ Evidently these officers thought themselves at war, acted as though at war.”

Again:

“The course of such expeditions grave abuses have occurred; men, women and children have BEEN KILLED EVEN AT THE VERY

TIME THEY SOUGHT SAFETY IN FLIGHT. OTHERS HAVE BEEN

IMPRISONED. WOMEN HAVE BEEN TAKEN AS HOSTAGES.”

There is an interesting passage about the missionaries:

“Often also, in the regions where evangelical stations are established, the native, instead of going to the magistrate, his natural protector, adopts the habit when he thinks he has a grievance against an agent or an Executive officer, to confide in the missionary. The latter listens to him, helps him according to his means, and makes himself the echo of all the complaints of a region. Hence the astounding influence which the missionaries possess in some parts of the territory. It exercises itself not only among the natives within the purview of their religious propaganda, but over all the villages whose troubles they have listened to. The missionary becomes, for the native of the region, the only representative of equity and justice; he adds to the ascendancy acquired from his religious zeal, the prestige which, in the interest of the State itself, should be invested in the magistrates.”

I will now turn for a moment to contemplate the document as a whole.

With the characteristic policy of the Congo authorities, it was originally given to the world as being a triumphant vindication of King Leopold’s administration, which would certainly have been the greatest whitewashing contract ever yet carried through upon this planet. Looked at more closely, it is clearly seen that behind the veil of courtly phrase and complimentary forms, every single thing that the Reformers have been claiming has been absolutely established. That the land has been taken. That the produce has been taken. That the people are enslaved. That they are reduced to misery. That the white agents have given the capitas a free hand against them.

That there have been illegal holdings of hostages, predatory expeditions, murders and mutilations. All these things are absolutely admitted. I do not know that anything more has ever been claimed, save that the Commission talks coldly of what a private man must talk of hotly, and that the Commission might give the impression that they were isolated acts, whereas the evidence here given and the general depopulation of the country show that they are general, universal, and parts of a single system extending from Leopoldville to the Great Lakes, and from the French border to Katanga. Be it private domain, crown domain, or Concessionnaire territory, be it land of the Kasai, the Anversoise, the Abir, or the Katanga companies, the tale still tells of bloodshed and horror.

Where the Commission differs from the Reformers is in their estimate of the gravity of this situation and of the need of absolute radical reforms. It is to be borne in mind that of the three judges two had never been in Africa before, while the third was a direct servant of the attacked institution. They seem to have vaguely felt that these terrible facts were necessary phases of Colonial expansion. Had they travelled, as I have done, in British West Africa, and had it been brought home to them that a blow to a black man, Sierra Leone, for example, would mean that one would be taken by a black policeman before a black judge to be handed over to a black gaoler, they would understand that there are other methods of administration. Had they ever read of that British Governor of Jamaica, who, having in the face of dangerous revolt, executed a Negro without due forms of law, was recalled to London, tried, and barely escaped with his life. It is by such tension as this that Europeans in the Tropics, whatever be their nation, must be braced up to maintain their civilised morale. Human nature is weak, the influence of environment is strong. Germans or English would yield and in isolated cases have yielded, to their surroundings. No nation can claim much individual superiority in such a matter. But for both Germany and England (I would add France, were it not for the French Congo) can claim that their system works as strongly against outrage as the Belgian one does in favour of it. These things are not, as the Commissioners seemed to think, necessary evils, which are tolerated elsewhere. How can their raw opinion weigh for a moment upon such a point when it is counterbalanced by the words of such Reformers as Sir Harry Johnston or Lord Cromer? The fact is that the running of a tropical colony is, of all tests, the most searching as to the development of the nation which attempts it; to see helpless people and not to oppress them, to see great wealth and not to confiscate it, to have absolute power and not to abuse it, to raise the native instead of sinking yourself — these are the supreme trials of a nation’s spirit. We have all failed at times. But never has there been failure so hopeless, so shocking, bearing such consequences to the world, such degradation to the good name of Christianity and civilization as the failure of the Belgians in the Congo.

And all this has happened and all this has been tolerated in an age of progress. The greatest, deepest, most wide-reaching crime of which there is any record, has been reserved for these latter years. Some excuse there is for racial extermination where, as with Saxons and Celts, two peoples contend for the same land which will but hold one. Some excuse, too, for religious massacre when, like Mahomet the Second at Constantinople, or Alva in the Lowlands, the bigoted murderers honestly conceived that their brutal work was in the interest of God. But here the real doers have sat remote with cold blood in their veins, knowing well from day to day what they were doing, and with the sole object of adding more to wealth which was already enormous. Consider this circumstance and consider also the professions of philanthropy with which the huge massacre was inaugurated, the cloud of lies with which it has been screened, the persecution and calumny of the few honest men who uncovered it, the turning of religion against religion and of nation against nation in the attempt to perpetuate it, and having weighed all this, tell me where in the course of history there is any such story. What is progress? Is it to run a little faster in a motor-car, to listen to gabble in a gramophone? — these are the toys of life. But if progress is a spiritual thing, then we do not progress. Such a horror as this of Belgium and the Congo would not have been possible fifty years ago. No European nation would have done it, and if it had, no other one would have failed to raise its voice in protest. There was more decorum and principle in life in those slower days. We live in a time of rush, but do not call it progress. The story of the Congo has made the idea a little absurd.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONGO AFTER THE COMMISSION

THE high hopes which the advent of the Commission raised among the natives and the few Europeans who had acted as their champions, were soon turned to bitter disappointment. The indefatigable Mr. Harris had sent on after the Commission a number of fresh cases which had come to his notice. In one of these a chief deposed that he had been held back in his village (Boendo) in order to prevent him from reaching the Commission. He succeeded in breaking away from his guards, but was punished for his enterprise by having his wife clubbed to death by a sentry. He brought with him, in the hope that he might lay them before the judges, one hundred and eighty-two long twigs and seventy-six smaller ones, to represent so many adults and children who had been murdered by the A.B.I.R. Company in his district during the last few years. His account of the methods by which these unfortunate people met their deaths will not bear printing. The wildest dreams of the Inquisition were outdone. Women had been killed by thrusting stakes into them from below. When the horrified missionary asked the chief if this was personally known to him, his answer was, “They killed my daughter, Nsinga, in this manner; I found the stake in her.” And a reputable Belgian statesman can write in this year of grace that they are carrying on. the beneficent and philanthropic mission which has been handed down to them.

In a later communication Mr. Harris gives the names of men, women and children killed by the sentries of a M. Pilaet.

“Last year,” he says, “or the year before, the young woman, Imenega, was tied to a forked tree and chopped in half with a hatchet, beginning at the left shoulder, chopping down through the chest and abdomen and out at the side.” Again, with every detail of name and place, he dwelt upon the horrible fact that public incest had been enforced by the sentries — brother with sister, and father with daughter. “Oh, Inglcsia,” cried the chief in conclusion, “don’t stay away long; if you do, they will come, I am sure they will come, and then these enfeebled legs will not support me, I cannot run away. I am near my end; try and see to it that they let me die in peace; don’t stay away.”

“I was so moved, your Excellency, at these people’s story that I took the liberty of promising them, in the name of the Congo Free State, that you will only kill them in future for crimes. I told them the Inspector Royal was, I hoped, on his way, and that I was sure he would listen to their story, and give them time to recover themselves.”

It is terrible to think that such a promise, through no fault of Mr. Harris, has not been fulfilled. Are the dreams of the Commissioners never haunted by the thought of those who put such trust in them, but whose only reward has been that they have been punished for the evidence they gave and that their condition has been more miserable than ever. The final practical result of the Commission was that upon the natives, and not upon their murderers, came the punishment.

M. Malfeyt, a Royal High Commissioner, had been sent out on pretence of reform. How hollow was this pretence may be seen from the fact that at the same time M. Wahis had been despatched as Governor-General in place of that Constermann who had committed suicide after his interview with the judges of the Commission. Wahis had already served two terms as Governor, and it was under his administration that all the abuses the Commission had condemned had actually grown up. Could King Leopold have shown more clearly how far any real reform was from his mind?

M. Malfeyt’s visit had been held up as a step toward improvement. The British Government had been assured that his visit would be of a nature to effect all necessary reforms. On arriving in the country, however, he announced that he had no power to act, and only came to see and hear. Thus a few more months were gained before any change could be effected. The only small consolation which we can draw from all this succession of impotent ambassadors and reforming committees, which do not, and were never intended to, reform, is that the game has been played and exposed, and surely cannot be played again. A Government would deservedly be the laughing-stock of the world which again accepted assurances from the same source.

What, in the meanwhile, was the attitude of that A.B.I.R. Company, whose iniquities had been thoroughly exposed before the Commission, and whose manager M. Le Jeune, had fled to Europe? Was it ashamed of its bloodthirsty deeds? Was it prepared in any way to modify its policy after the revelations which its representatives had admitted to be true? Read the following interview which Mr. Stannard had with M. Delvaux, who had visited the stations of his disgraced colleague:

"He spoke of the Commission of Inquiry in a contemptuous manner, and showed considerable annoyance about the things we had said to the Commission. He declared the A.B.I.H. had full authority and power to send out armed sentries, and force the people to bring in rubber, and to imprison those who did not. A short time ago, the natives of a town brought in some rubber to the agent here, but he refused it because it was not enough, and the men were thrashed by the A.B.I.R. employees, and driven away. The director justified the agent in refusing the rubber because the quantity was too small. The Commissioners had declared that the A.B.I.R. had no power to send armed sentries into the towns in order to flog the people and drive them into the forests to seek rubber; they were ' guards of the forest,' and that was their work. When we pointed this out to M. Delvaux, he pooh-poohed the idea, and said the name had no significance; some called the sentries by one name, some by another. We pointed out that the people were not compelled to pay their taxes in rubber only, but could bring in other things, or even currency. He denied this, and said that the alternative tax only meant that an agent could impose whatever tax he thought fit. It had no reference whatever to the natives. The A.B.I.R. preferred the taxes to be paid in rubber. This is what the A.B.I.R. says, in spite of the interpretation by Baron Nisco, the highest judicial authority in the State, that the natives could pay their taxes in what they were best able. All these things were said in the presence of the Royal High Commissioner, who, whether he approved or not, certainly did not contradict or protest against them."

Within a week or two of the departure of the Commission the state of the country was as bad as ever. It cannot be too often repeated that it was not local in its origin, but that it occurred there, as elsewhere, on account of pressure from the central officials. If further proof were needed of this it is to be found in the Van Caelchen trial. This agent, having been arrested, succeeded in showing (as was done in the Caudron case) that the real guilt lay with his superior officers. In his defence he "Bases his power on a letter of the Commissaire-Gdn^ral de Bauw (the Supreme Executive Officer in the District), and in a circular transmitted to him by his director, and signed ‘Constermann’ (Governor-General), which he read to the Court, deploring the diminished output in rubber, and saying that the agents of the A.B.I.R. should not forget that they had the same powers of ‘contrainte par corps’ (bodily detention) as were delegated to the agent of the Socidtd Commerciale Anversoise au Congo for the increase of rubber production; that if the Governor-General or his Commissaire-Gendral did not know what they were writing and what they signed, he knows what orders he had to obey; it was not for him to question the legality or illegality of these orders; his superiors ought to have known and have weighed what they wrote before giving him orders to execute; that bodily detention of natives for rubber was no secret, seeing that at the end of every month a statement of ‘ contrainte par corps’ (bodily detention) during the month has to be furnished in duplicate, the book signed, and one of the copies transmitted to the Government.”

Whilst these organized outrages were continuing in the Congo, King Leopold, at Belgium, had taken a fresh step, which, in its cynical disregard for any attempt at consistency, surpassed any of his previous performances. Feeling that something must be done in the face of the finding of his own delegates, he appointed a fresh Commission, whose terms of reference were “ to study the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry, to formulate the proposals they call for, and to seek for practical means for realising them.” It is worth while to enumerate the names of the men chosen for this work. Had a European Areopagus called before it the head criminals of this terrible business, all of these men, with the exception of two or three, would have been standing in the dock. Take their names in turn: Van Maldeghem, the President — a jurist, who had written on Congo law, but had no direct complicity in the crimes; Janssens, the President of the former Commission, a man of integrity; M. Davignon, a Belgian politician — so far the selection is a possible one — now listen to the others! De Cuvelier, creature of the King, and responsible for the Congo horrors; Droogmans, creature of the King, administrator of the secret funds derived from his African estates, and himself President of a Rubber Trust; Arnold, creature of the King; Liebrechts, the same; Gohr, the same; Chenot, a Congo Commissioner; Tombeur, the same; Fiv£, a Congo inspector; Nys, the chief legal upholder of the King’s system; De Hemptinne, President of the Kasai Rubber Trust;

Mobs, an Administrator of the A.B.I.R. Is it not evident that, save the first three, these were the very men who were on their trial? The whole appointment is an example of that cynical humour which gives a grotesque touch to this inconceivable story. It need not be added that no result making for reform ever came from such an assembly. One can but rejoice that the presence of the small humane minority may have prevented the others from devising some fresh methods of oppression.

It cannot be said, however, that no judicial proceedings and no condemnation arose from the actions of the Congo Commission. But who could ever guess who the man was who was dragged to the bar. On the evidence of natives and missionaries, the whole white hierarchy, from Governor-General to subsidized cannibal, had been shown to be blood-guilty. Which of them was punished? None of them, but Mr. Stannard, one of the accusing witnesses. He had shown that the soldiers of a certain M. Hagstrom had behaved brutally to the natives. This was the account of Lontulu the chief:

“Lontulu, the senior chief of Bolima, came with twenty witnesses, which was all the canoe would hold. He brought with him one hundred and ten twigs, each of which represented a life sacrificed for rubber. The twigs were of different lengths, and represented chiefs, men, women and children, according to their length. It was a horrible story of massacre, mutilation and cannibalism that he had to tell, and it was perfectly clear that he was telling the truth. He was further supported by other eye-witnesses. These crimes were committed by those who were acting under the instructions and with the knowledge of white men. On one occasion the sentries were flogged because they had not killed enough people. At one time, after they had killed a number of people, including Isekifasu, the principal chief, his wives and children, the bodies, except that of Isekifasu, were cut up, and the cannibalistic fighters attached to the A.B.I.R. force were rationed on the meat thus supplied. The intestines, etc., were hung up in and about the house, and a little child who had been cut in halves was impaled. After one attack, Lontulu, the chief, was shown the dead bodies of his people, and asked by the rubber agent if he would bring in rubber now. He replied that he would. Although a chief of considerable standing, he has been flogged, imprisoned, tied by the neck with men who were regarded as slaves, made to do the most menial work, and his beard, which was of many years’ growth, and reached almost to the ground, was cut off by the rubber agent because he visited another town."

Lontulu was cross-examined by the Commission and his evidence was not shaken. Here are some of the questions and answers:

"President Janssens: 'M. Hagstrom leur a fait la guerre. II a tue beaucoup d'hommes avec ses soldats.'

"To Lontulu: 'Were the people of Monji, etc., given the corpses to eat?'

"Lontulu: 'Yes, they cut them up and ate them.'

"Baron Nisco: 'Did they flog you?'

" Lontulu: ' Repeatedly.'

"Baron Nisco: 'Who cut your beard off?'

"Lontulu: 'M. Hannotte.'

"President Janssens: 'Did you see sentries kill your people? Did they kill many?'

"Lontulu: 'Yes, all my family is finished.'

"President: 'Give us names.'

"Lontulu: 'Chiefs Bokomo, Isekifasu, Botamba, Longeva, Bos- angi, Booifa, Eongo, Lomboto, Loma, Bayolo.'

"Then followed names of women and children and ordinary men (not chiefs).

"Lontulu: ' May I call my son lest I make a mistake?'

"President: 'It is unnecessary; goon.'

"Lontulu: 'Bomposa, Beanda, Ekila.'

"President: 'Are you sure that each of your twigs (no) represents one person killed?'

"Lontulu: 'Yes.'

"President: 'Was Isekifasu killed at this time?'

"Reply not recorded.

"President: 'Did you see his entrails hanging on his house?'

"Lontulu: 'Yes.'

"Question: 'Were the sentries and people who helped given the dead bodies to eat?'

"Answer: 'Yes, they ate them. Those who took part in the fight cut them up and ate them. ... He was chicotted (flogged), and said, " Why do you do this? Is it right to flog a chief? " Gave a very full account of his harsh treatment and sufferings."

The action was taken for criminal libel by M. Hagstrom against Mr. Stannard, for saying that this evidence had been given before the Commission. Of course, the only way to establish the fact was a reference to the evidence itself which lay at Brussels. But as Hagstrom was only a puppet of the higher Government of the Congo (which means the King himself), in their attempt to revenge themselves upon the missionaries it was not very likely that official documents would be produced for the mere purpose of serving the end of Justice. The minutes then were not forthcoming. How, then, was Mr. Stannard to produce evidence that his account was correct? Obviously by producing Lontulu, the chief. But the wretched Lontulu, beaten and tortured, with his beard plucked off and his spirit broken, had been cast into gaol before the trial, and knew well what would be his fate if he testified against his masters. He withdrew all that he had said at the Commission — and who can blame him? So M. Hagstrom obtained his verdict and the Belgian reptile Press proclaimed that Mr. Stannard had been proved to be a liar. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, with the alternative of a £40 fine. Even as I write, two more of these lion-hearted missionaries, Americans this time — Mr. Morrison and Mr. Shepherd — are undergoing a similar prosecution on the Congo. This time it is the Kasai Company which is the injured innocent. But the eyes of Europe and America are on the transaction, and M. Vandervelde, the fearless Belgian advocate of liberty, has set forth to act for the accused. What M. Labori was to Dreyfus, M. Vandervelde has been to the Congo, save that it is a whole nation who are his clients. He and his noble comrade, Mr. Lorand, are the two men who redeem the record of infamy which must long darken the good name of Belgium.

I will now deal swiftly with the records of evil deeds which have occurred since the time which I have already treated. I say "swiftly " not because there is not much material from which to choose, but because I feel that my reader must be as sated with horrors as I who have to write them. Here are some notes of a journey undertaken by W. Cassie Murdoch, as recently as July and September, 1907. This time we are concerned with the Crown Domain, King Leopold's private estate, of which we have such accounts from Mr. Clark and Mr. Scrivener dating as far back as 1894. Thirteen years had elapsed and no change! What do these thirteen represent in torture and murder? Could all these screams be united, what a vast cry would have reached the heavens. In the Congo hell the most lurid glow is to be found in the Royal Domain. And the money dragged from these tortured people is used in turn to corrupt newspapers and public men — that it may be possible to continue the system. So the devil’s wheel goes round and round! Here are some extracts from Mr. Murdoch’s report:

“I remarked to the old chief of the largest town I came across that his people seemed to be numerous. ‘Ah,’ said he, ‘my people are all dead. These you see are only a very few of what I once had.’ And, indeed, it was evident enough that his town had once been a place of great size and importance. There cannot be the least doubt that this depopulation is directly due to the State. Everywhere I went I heard stories of the raids made by the State soldiers. The number of people they shot, or otherwise tortured to death, must have been enormous. Perhaps as many more of those who escaped the rifle died from starvation and exposure. More than one of my carriers could tell of how their villages had been raided, and of their own narrow escapes. They are not a warlike people, and I could hear of no single attempt at resistance. They are the kind of people the State soldiers are most successful with. They would rather any day run away than fight. And in fact, they have nothing to fight with except a few bows and arrows. I have been trying to reckon the probable number of people I met with. I should say that five thousand is, if anything, beyond the mark. A few years ago the population of the district I passed through must have been four times that number. On my return march I was desirous of visiting Mbelo, the place where Lieutenant Massard had been stationed, and in which he committed his unspeakable outrages. On making inquiries, however, I was told that there were no people there now, and that the roads were all ‘dead.’ On reaching one of the roads that led there, it was evident enough that it had not been used for a long time. Later on, I was able to confirm the statement that what had once been a district with numerous large towns, was now completely empty. . . .

“With the exception of a few people living near the^one State post now existing on this side of the Lake, who supply the State with kwanga and large mats, all the people I saw are taxed with rubber. The rubber tax is an intolerable burden — how intolerable I should have found it almost impossible to believe had I not seen it. It is DIFFICULT TO DESCRIBE IT CALMLY. What I found was simply this: The ‘ tax’ demands from twenty to twenty-five days’ labour every month. There never was a ‘forty hours per month labour law’ in the Crown Domain, and so long as the tax is demanded in rubber, there never will be — at least in the section of it I visited. If that law were applied, no rubber would, or could possibly, be produced, for the simple reason that there is no rubber left in this section of the Domain.

“ It was some time before I made the discovery that in the Domaine de la Couronne west of Lake Leopold there is no rubber. On my way through I was continually meeting numbers of men going out on the hunt for rubber, and heard with amazement the distance they had to walk. It seemed so impossible that I was somewhat sceptical of the truth of what I was told. But I heard the same story so often, and in so many different places, that I was at last obliged to accept it. On my return I followed up this track, and found that it was all true. And I found also that the rubber is collected from the Domaine Priv6 in forests from ten to forty miles beyond the boundary of the Crown Domain.

“Once the vines had been found the working of the rubber is a small part of the labour. I have made a careful calculation of the distance the people I met have to walk, and I find that the average cannot be less than 300 miles there and back. But walking to the forest and back does not occupy from twenty to twenty-five days per month. They will cover the 300 miles in ten or twelve days. The rest of the time is used in hunting for the vines, and in tapping them when found. I met a party returning with their rubber who had been six nights in the forest. This was the lowest number. Most of them have to spend ten, some as many as fifteen, nights in the forest. Two days after I left the Domain on my way back I saw some men returning empty-handed. They had been hunting for over eight days and had found nothing. What the poor wretches would do I cannot imagine. If they failed to produce the usual amount of rubber on the appointed day they would be put in ‘bloc’ (imprisoned).

“The workmen of the chef de poste at Mbongo described a concoction which is sometimes administered to capitas when their tale of rubber is short. The white man chops up green tobacco leaves and soaks them in water. Red peppers are added, and a dose of the liquid is administered to defaulting capitas. This wily official manages to get thirteen monthly ‘taxes’ in the year. At one village I bought a contrivance by which the natives reckon when the tax falls due. Pieces of wood are strung on a piece of cane. One piece is moved up every day. On counting them I found there were only twenty-eight. I asked why, and was told that originally there were thirty pieces, but the white man had so often sent on the twenty-eighth day to say the time was up, that at last they took off two.

"Individual acts of atrocity here have for the most part ceased. The State agents seem to have come to the conclusion that it is a waste of cartridges to shoot down these people. BUT THE WHOLE SYSTEM

IS A VAST ATROCITY INVOLVING THE PEOPLE IN A STATE OF UNIMAGINABLE MISERY. One man said to me,' Slaves are happy compared with us. Slaves are protected by their masters, they are fed and clothed. As for us — the capitas do with us what they like. Our wives have to plant the cassava gardens and fish in the stream to feed us while we spend our days working for Bula Matadi. No, we are not even slaves.' And he is right. It is not slavery as slavery was generally understood: it is not even the uncivilised African's idea of slavery. There never was a slavery more absolute in its despotism or more fiendish in its tyranny."

It will be seen that, so far as the people are concerned, the problem is largely solved, the bitterness of death is past. No European intervention can save them. In many places they have been utterly destroyed. But they were the wards of Europe, and surely Europe, if she is not utterly lost to shame, will have something to say to their fate!

CHAPTER X

SOME CATHOLIC TESTIMONY AS TO THE CONGO

IT MUST be admitted that the Roman Catholic Church, as an organized body, has not raised her voice as she should in the matter of the Congo. Never was there such a field for a Las Casas. It was the proudest boast of that church that in the dark days of man's history she was the one power which stood with her spiritual terrors between the oppressor and the oppressed. This noble tradition has been sadly forgotten in the Congo, where the missions have themselves, as I understand, done most excellent work, but where the power of the Church has never been invoked against the constant barbarities of the State. In extenuation, it may be stated that the chief Catholic establishments are down the river and far from the rubber zones. It is important, however, to collect under a separate heading such testimony as exists, for an unworthy attempt has been made to represent the matter as a contest between rival creeds, whereas it is really a contest between humanity and civilization on one side and cruel greed upon the other.

The organization of the Catholic Church is more disciplined, and admits of less individualism than that of those religious bodies which supplied the valiant champions of right in the Congo. The simple priests were doubtless as horrified as others, within the limit of their knowledge, but the means of expression were denied them. M. Coifs, himself a Catholic, said in the Belgian Chamber: “Our missionaries have less liberty than foreign missionaries. They are expected to keep silence. . . . There is a gag. This gag is placed in the mouth of Belgian missionaries.”

Signor Santini, the Catholic and Royalist Deputy for Rome, has been one of the leaders in the anti-Congo movement, and has done excellent work in Italy. From his own sources of information he confirms and amplifies all that the English and Americans have asserted. Speaking in the Italian Parliament on February 4th, 1907, Signor Santini said:

"I am proud to have been the first to bring the question of the Congo before this House. If at the present day we are spared the shame of seeing again officers of our Army, valorous and perfectly stainless, serving under and at the orders of an association of sweaters, slave-holders and barbarians, it is legitimate for me to declare that I have, if only modestly, at least efficaciously, co-operated in this result."

There is no conflict of creeds in such an utterance as that.

Catholic papers have occasionally spoken out bravely upon the subject.

Le Patriote, of Brussels (Royalist and Catholic), in its issue of February 28th, 1907, has an indignant editorial:

"The rebellion in the A.B.I.R. territory extends. The Government itself forces the rubber, and delivers it on the Antwerp quay to the brokers of the A.B.I.R. . . . Nothing is altered on the Congo. The same abominable measures are adopted; the same outrages take place. . . . The Government is adopting the same measures as in the Mongalla, flooding the A.B.I.R. territory with soldiers to utterly smash the people, whom it thinks will then work, and the rubber output be increased. . . . The memory of these deeds will remain graven in the memory of men, and in the memory of Divine vengeance. Sooner or later the executioners will have to render an account to God and to history."

There is one order of the Catholic Church which has always had a most noble record in its treatment of native races. These are the Jesuits. No one who has read the "History of Paraguay," or studied the records of the Missions to the Red Indians of the eighteenth century, can forget the picture of unselfish devotion which they exhibit. Father Vermeersch, a worthy successor of such predecessors, has published a book, "La Question Congolaise," in which he finds nothing incompatible between his position as a Catholic and his exposure of the abuses of the Congo.

In all points the position of Father Vermeersch and of the English Reformers appears to be identical.

On the rightful possession of the land by the natives he writes in terms which might be a paragraph from Mr. Morel:

"On the Congo the land cannot be supposedly vacant. Presumption is in favour of occupation, of a full occupation. By this is meant that it is not sufficient to recognise to the natives rights of tenure over the land they actually cultivate, or certain rights of usage — wood-cutting, hunting, fishing — on the remainder of the territory; but these rights of usage, which are much more important than with us, appear to imply a full animus domini, and to signify a complete appropriation, which is carried out amongst us in different fashion. It is not, in effect, indispensable in natural law that I should exhaust the utility of an article or of land in order to be able to claim it as my own; it suffices that I should make use of it in a positive manner, but of my own will, personally, and that I should have the will to forbid any stranger to use it without my consent. Hence effective occupation is joined to intention, and all the constituent elements to a valid title of property exist. Let us suppose, moreover, that some great Belgian landowner wishes to convert portions of his property into sporting land — that land, nevertheless, remains in his entire possession. Amongst the Congo natives, no doubt, occupation is usually collective; but such occupation is as worthy of respect as no matter what individual appropriation."

He continues:

"To whom does the rubber belong which grows upon the land occupied by the Congo natives? To the natives, and to no one else, without their consent and just compensation."

Again:

"To sum up, we recognise it with much regret, the State's appropriation of so-called vacant land on the Congo confronts us with AN

IMMENSE EXPROPRIATION."

He makes a bold attack upon King Leopold's own preserve:

"Humanity, whose cause we plead, Christian rights, whose principles we endeavour to inculcate, compel us to touch briefly upon a curious and mysterious creation which is peculiar to the Congo State — the Domaine de la Couronne."

"What are the revenues of this mysterious civil personality? Estimates, more or less conjectural in nature, elaborated by M. Cattier appear to establish the profits from the exploitation of rubber alone, at eight to nine millions of francs per annum. M. le Comte de Smet de Naeyer reduces this figure to four or five millions. Short of positive data one can only deal in conjectures. But we regret still more that an impenetrable veil hides from sight all that takes place in the territory of this Domaine. IT IS EIGHT OR TEN TIMES THE

SIZE OF BELGIUM, AND THROUGHOUT THIS VAST EXTENT OF TERRITORY THERE IS NEITHER MISSIONARY NOR MAGISTRATE.”

Only one missionary at that date had entered this dark land, and his exclamation was: “The Bulgarian atrocities are child’s play to what has taken place here.”

Father Vermeersch then proceeds to deal with the Congo balance- sheets. His criticism is most destructive. He shows at considerable length, and with a fine grasp of his subject, that there is really no connection at all between the so-called estimate and the actual budget. In the course of the State’s development there is an excess running to millions of pounds which has never been accounted for. In this Father Vermeersch is in agreement with the equally elaborate calculations of Professor Cattier, of Brussels.

He puts the economical case in a nutshell thus:

“X , District Commissioner, commits every day dozens of offences against individual liberty. What can be done? These violations of the law are necessitated by a great enterprise which must have workmen. In such cases the intervention of the magistrate would be a ruinous imprudence, calculated to bring trouble into the region.”

“But the law?”

“Oh, law in the Congo is not applicable!”

“But if you offered a decent remuneration, would you not get free labour?”

“That is precisely what the State will not listen to. It maintains that the enterprise must be carried out for nothing!”

And disposes once again of the “forty hours a month” fiction:

“It is IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE STATE TO OBTAIN THE AMOUNT OF RUBBER IT SELLS ANNUALLY, BY LABOUR LIMITED TO FORTY HOURS A MONTH, especially when it is borne in mind that a number of these hours are absorbed in other corvees. Of two things one, therefore. Either the surplus is furnished freely; and if so, how can coercion be logically argued? Or this supplementary labour is forced; and if so, the law of forty hours is shown to be merely a fraud.”

He shows the root causes of the evil:

“ So long as an inflexible will fixes in advance the quantity of rubber to be obtained; so long as instructions are given in this form: ‘Increase by five tons your rubber output per month’ (instance given by Father Cus and van

Hencxthoven in their report), we cannot await with confidence a serious improvement, which is the desire of aU. . . .”

“The Governor-General dismisses and appoints magistrates at his will, suspends the execution of penalties; even sends back, if need be, gentlemen of the gown to Europe. Who does not realise the grave inconvenience of this dependence? That is not all. No proceedings can be attempted against a European without the authority of the Governor-General.”

And, finally, his reasons for writing his book:

“The contemplation of an immeasurable misery has caused us to publish this book. The gravity of the evil, its roots causes, had long escaped us. When we knew them we could not retain within ourselves the compassion with which we were imbued, and we resolved to tell the citizens of a generous country, appealing to their religion, to their patriotism, to their hearts.”

P Surely after such evidence from such a source there must be some heart-searchings among those higher members of the Catholic hierarchy, including both Cardinals and Bishops, who have done what they could to cripple the efforts of the reformers. Misinformed through their own want of care in searching for the truth, they have stood before the whole world as the defenders of that which will be described by the historian as the greatest crime in history.

CHAPTER XI

THE EVIDENCE UP TO DATE

I SHALL now append some extracts from the reports of several British Vice-Consuls and Consuls sent in during the last few years. These bear less upon outrages, which have admittedly greatly decreased, but mainly upon the general condition of the people, which is one of deplorable poverty and misery — a slavery without that care which the owner was bound to exercise over the health and strength of the slave. I shall give without comment some extracts from the reports of Vice-Consul Mitchell, which date from July, 1906:

"Most of the primitive bridges over the numerous creeks and marshes had rotted away, and we had some difficulty in crossing on fallen trees or a few thin sticks. This was the case all the way to Banalya, and I may here state that this condition of the roads, even of the most frequented, is universal in this province. The reason is that the local authorities have neither men, means, nor time at their disposal for the making of decent roads. The parsimony 0} the State in this respect is the more remarkable in the i Domaine Privi,' whence large amounts are derived, and where next to nothing is expended.

"So long as the policy of the State Government is to extract all it can from the country, while using only local materials, and spending the least possible amount on development and improvements, no increase in the general well-being can be expected. . . .

". . . . At all the posts on the north (right) bank, between Yambuya and Basoko, I found the European agents absent in the interior, and at Basoko itself only the doctor was left in charge, all the rest of the staff being away len expeditionthat is, on punitive expeditions.

"I stayed at Basoko for five days, partly at Dr. Grossule's request, and partly in the endeavour to learn something of the operations going on in the interior. Three canoe-loads of prisoners arrived, all heavily loaded with chains. But all I could learn was that they were sent in by Lieutenant Baron von Otter, who had been sent to the promontory lying between the mouth of the Aruwimi and the Congo to enforce the Labour Ordinances.

"In all the Basenji villages through which I have passed on my two journeys, the natives assert that it takes them three weeks every month to find and make their tale of rubber, besides taking it once every three months to the State post, from four to six days distant.

"This country is taxed to the utmost, not one penny of the proceeds of which is spent on the roads. This condition of the most important highway in the province is nothing less than disgraceful, and yet this is the road of which the authorities are really proud.

"Thus, with the exception of a trivial payment for some things, the Government carries on the work of the country at no expense beyond the wages and the European rations of the white agents, and these are excessively few in number. It is true there are the Force Publique and some travailleurs. These are recruited by conscription and receive pay and rations, but it is at the lowest possible rate. . .

"Coming to the Basenji, the following particulars of a village in the forest will show their liabilities. This village has fourteen adult males; its neighbour, which works with it, the chiefs being brothers, has nine. Each man has to take to the State post a large basket, holding about twenty-five pounds of rubber, once every month and a half. To get this rubber, though they find it only one day's journey distant, takes them thirty days. It then takes them five days to carry it to the State post, and three days to return. Thus they spend thirty-eight days out of forty-five in the compulsory service of the State. For the basket of rubber they receive 1 kilog. of salt, nominally worth 1 fr. The chief receives 1 kilog. of salt for the whole. If the rubber is deficient in quality or quantity, the man is liable to be whipped and imprisoned without trial. As it is supposed to be the equivalent of the forty hours' monthly labour, I fail to see by what right the man can be held responsible for the quality, even if he wilfully adulterates it with other substances.

"The people are all disheartened, and are unanimously of the opinion that they were better off under the Arabs, whose rule was intermittent, and from whom they could run away. . . .

“I must say that during more than nineteen years’ experience in Northern and Central Africa, I have never seen such a miserably poor lot as the Basenji in this State. . . .

“It is perfectly clear that the Inspectors, however conscientious, hard-working, and faithful they may be, cannot remedy the excessive impositions on the natives under the present system. . . .

“The grant of land and seed to the natives is of absolutely no use to them till they are left time to use them. . . .

“To say that the State cannot afford the expense is absurd. The Congo is taxed unmercifully, and I do not suppose any country has less money spent upon it. The taxpayer gets literally nothing in return for the life of practical slavery he has to spend in the support of the Government.

“If trade and navigation were really free, and guarded by proper police, German trade through Ujiji, which already exists to some extent, might be greatly developed, as well as that with the British colonies and Zanzibar.

“The operations of the Dutch traders, who up to a few months ago had quite a considerable fleet of steamers on the Upper Congo and its affluents, and of the French at Brazzaville, and of the Portuguese, would also benefit greatly.

u All these have practically disappeared from the Upper Congo.

“Here, as elsewhere, the natives appeared to me to be so heavily taxed as to be depressed and to regard themselves as practically enslaved by the ‘Bula Matadi.’ The incessant call for rubber, food and labour, leaves them no respite nor peace of mind.”

The following are extracts from Vice-Consul Armstrong’s report, dated October, 1906:

“As the result of my journey through this portion of the country, I am forced to the conclusion that the condition of the people in the A.B.I.R. territory is deplorable, and although those living in the vicinity of the mission stations are, comparatively speaking, safe from ill-treatment by the rubber agents and their armed sentries, those in other parts are subjected to the gravest abuses.

“There is no free labour, the natives being forced to work at a totally inadequate wage. In visiting the various rubber-working towns, one would expect to see some signs of European commodities that had been given in exchange for the millions of pounds’ worth of rubber that has been extracted from them, but the native residents possess actually nothing at all.

“ Their conditions 0} living are deplorabh, and the filth and squalor of their villages is only too apparent. The people live in a state 0} uncertainty as to the advent 0} police officers and soldiers, who invariably chase them from their abodes and destroy their huts, and for this reason it is impossible for them to better their condition of living by the construction of suitable dwellings.

“No change of system to be looked for.

“No change in the existing system can be looked for until a more reasonable method of taxation is adopted. The present system permits the rubber agents to extract the largest possible quantity of rubber from the native at the lowest possible wage, and allows the employment of armed sentries to enforce this deplorable system.”

In these despatches Vice-Consul Armstrong gives evidence of a plot against the sturdy Mr. Stannard upon the part of the infamous A.B.I.R. Company. Their idea, no doubt, was to break down his health and embitter his existence by successive law-suits. In May of 1906, the natives of a village called Lokongi rose up against his murderous sentries and burned their houses. A charge was at once made against Mr. Stannard of having instigated them to this very natural and commendable action. Natives had been suborned or terrified into giving evidence against him, and it might have gone ill with him had it not been for the prompt action of the Consul. He set off for the village, accompanied by Mr. Stannard and the A.B.I.R. director. The natives were assembled and asked to speak the truth. They said, without hesitation, that Mr. Stannard had had nothing to do with the matter, but that the representatives of the company had threatened to torture them unless they said that he had. The A.B.I.R. director held his peace before these revelations and had no explanation to offer. Consul Armstrong then pointed out to the Public Prosecutor in good, straight terms, which his official superiors might well imitate, that the matter had gone far enough, that English patience was almost exhausted, and that Mr. Stannard should be baited no longer. The case was dropped.

I shall pass straight on now to the most recent reports received from the Congo, to show that there is no difference at all in the general condition, so far as it is reported by the impartial men at the spot, save that the actual killings and maimings have decreased. The great oppression and misery of the people seem to grow rather than abate. The following extracts are from Consul Thesiger’s report of his experiences in the Kasai Company’s district.

This company, it may be worth remarking, has paid the enormous dividend of seven hundred per cent. The first paragraph may be commended to the consideration of those British or American travellers who, on the strength of a flying visit, venture to contradict the experience of those white men who spend their lives in the country:

"Although from the evidence of State officials it has been proved that individual cases of abuses are not infrequent even at these posts, the chance traveller will certainly see nothing of them, and when he judges of the condition of the country by what he actually sees at these stations, his opinions may be perfectly honest, but they are absolutely worthless. It is as though some well-meaning person, who had heard that a certain fashionable firm was making a fortune by sweated labour, were to venture to deny the facts because a cursory visit to the West End establishment showed that the salesmen behind the counter were well-dressed and well-nourished, ignoring altogether the festering misery of the sweaters' dens in which every article sold over that counter was made up."

After showing that the Kasai Company, in their haste for wealth (and, perhaps, in their foresight, as knowing that their occupancy may be brought to an end), are cutting down the rubber vines instead of tapping them (illegal, of course, but what does that matter where Belgian Concessionnaires are in question), goes on to show the pressure on the people:

"The work is compulsory; it is also incessant. The vines have to be sought out in the forest, cut down and disentangled from the high-growing branches, divided into lengths, and carried home. This operation has to be continually repeated, as no man can carry a larger quantity of the heavy vine lengths than will keep him occupied for two or three days. Accidents are frequent, especially among the Bakuba, who are large-built men, hunters and agriculturists by nature, and unaccustomed to tree climbing. Large as the Bakuba villages still are, the population is diminishing. Here there is no sleeping sickness to account for the decrease, there have been no epidemics of late years; exposure, overwork, and shortage of proper food alone are responsible for it. The Bakuba district was formerly one of the richest food-producing regions in the country, maize and millet being the staple crops, together with manioc and other plants.

So much so was this the case that the mission at Luebo used to send there to buy maize. Under the present rigime the villagers are not allowed to waste in cultivating, hunting or fishing — time which should be occupied in making rubber.

“In a few villages they were cultivating by stealth small patches in the forest, where they were supposed to be out cutting the rubber vines; but everywhere else it was the same story: the capitas would not allow them time to clear new ground for cultivation, or permit them to hunt or fish; if they tried to do so their nets and implements were destroyed. The majority of the capitas, when questioned, acknowledged quite frankly that they had orders to that effect. These villages are living on the produce of the old manioc fields, and are buying food from the Bakette. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the population is diminishing. As one woman expressed it: ‘The men go out hungry into the forest; when they come back they get sick and die.’ The village of Ibunge, where formerly the largest market of the district was held weekly, now consists of a collection of hovels, eight of which are habitable, and the market is all but dead.”

So the capitas are at their old work the same as ever. The Congo idea of reforming them has always been to change their name — so by calling a burglar a policeman a great reformation is effected.

Read, however, the following passage, which shows that if the capita is the same, so also is the agent. The white race is certainly superior, for when the savage sentry’s heart relented the white man was able to scourge him back to his inhuman task:

“Once I had got outside the zone surrounding Ibanj, where the villages are not taxed in rubber, I found the capitas, with very few exceptions, were all armed with cap-guns. I met them frequently, escorting the rubber caravans to the company post, or going from village to village collecting the rubber from the centres under their charge and distributing the trade goods for the coming month. I noticed that they invariably carried their guns, and, in fact, I have seldom seen a capita stir outside his own home without his gun. These are the men who are appointed by the Kasia Company agents to enforce the rubber tax. Chosen always from a different race, they have no sympathy with the natives placed under them, and having the authority of the agent behind them they can do as they please, so long as they insure the rubber being brought at the proper times and in sufficient quantities. In the villages they are absolute masters, and the villagers have to supply them gratis with a house, food, palm wine, and a woman. They exercise freely the right of beating or imprisoning the villagers for any imaginary offences or for neglecting their work in any way, and even go as far as imposing fines in cowries on their own account, and confiscating for their own use the cowries paid over by the plaintiff or defendant's family in the case of trial by poison, which, in spite of statements to the contrary recently made in the Belgian Chamber, are of frequent occurrence in this country. The native cannot complain or obtain satisfaction in any way, as the capita acts in the name of the company, and the company's agent is always threatening them in the name of 'Bula- Matadi.' If the authorities wish to act in the matter, they might profitably make inquiry into the doings of the capitas at Bungueh, Bolong, and into those of the Zappo Zap capita, who appears to exercise the chief control over the villages near Ibunge, though he does not live in the latter town. These appear to me to be among the worst where most are bad. The capitas, however, are scarcely to be blamed, as, if they do not extort enough rubber, they are liable in their turn to suffer at the hands of the agent. Witness a case at Sangela, when it was reported that the capita had some time back been chicotted in the village itself by the agent for not bringing in rubber sufficient. Endless cases could be quoted, but these will probably be sufficient to show the methods pursued under the auspices of the Kasai Company. Yet in a letter dated the eighth of March, 1908, we find Dr. Dreypondt writing reproachfully:

" 'You know we have no armed sentries, but only tradesmen going, with goods of every kind, and unarmed, through the villages for the purchasing of rubber. We use only one trading principle — Voffre et la demanded"

The laws at all points are completely ignored, "and many of the agents not only punish the natives in these ways themselves, but allow their capitas the same privileges. It is only by these means that the natives can be kept at their incessant work."

Suicide is not natural with African, as it is with some Oriental races. But it has come in with the other blessings of King Leopold.

"At Ibanj, for instance, only a day's march from a State post, two Bakette from the village of Baka-Tomba were not long ago imprisoned for shortage of rubber, and were daily taken out under the charge of an armed native to work in the fields with ropes round their necks. One of them, tired of captivity, pretended one day that he saw some animal in a tree and obtained leave from the guard to try and get it. He climbed the tree, tied the rope which was round his neck to a branch and hung himself. He was cut down, and, after a considerable time, was resuscitated, thanks to the medical experience of one of the missionaries. I was able to question the man myself at his village, and the story was also confirmed by the Capita."

The American flag presents no refuge for the persecuted.

"About the same time this same man had the effrontery to take some seven armed natives on to the station of the American mission, during the absence of the missionaries, and demand from the native who was left in charge that he should hand over to him a native, not in his own employ, who had run away in consequence of some dispute, and who he declared was hiding at the mission. The overseer, a Sierra Leone man, very rightly declared his inability to do so, and said he must await the return of the missionaries. An altercation followed, and the agent struck him twice in the face. The man being a British subject, I told him if he chose to prosecute I would support him, or else I would insist on the agent paying him an indemnity in cloth. As a prosecution would have entailed his going to Lusambo, a fifteen days' journey, with every prospect of being kept there some four to six months with all the witnesses while awaiting the hearing of his case, he chose the latter method. The cloth was paid."

He continues:

"These cases can all be substantiated, and are typical of a certain class of agent which is unfortunately, although not general, far too common. Numerous complaints were also made to me in different villages against an agent, not only that he beat and imprisoned the natives for shortage of rubber, but also that he obliged them to supply him with alcohol distilled from palm wine, and was in the habit of taking any of the village women that struck his fancy at the weekly market held on or near his own post. The Company, I believe, promised the American mission last May that this man should be removed, but when I passed through he was still there. Placed in the power of men like these the natives dare not complain to the authorities, and are entirely helpless."

Nominally the Company makes no punitive expeditions. As a matter of fact they have engaged Lukenga, a warlike chief of the neighbourhood, to do it for them. Nominally the capitas are not supplied with guns. As a matter of fact they all carry guns, which are declared to be their personal property. At every corner one meets hypocrisy and evasion of law.

Speaking of the Bakuba, the Consul says:

"Although not wanting in physical courage or strength, they are rather an agricultural than a warlike race, and their villages were formerly noted for their well-built and artistically decorated houses and their well-cultivated fields.

“It is, however, their misfortune to live in a forest country rich in rubber vines, and they have consequently come under the curse of the concessionary Company in the shape of the Kasai Trust. As a result their native industries are dying out, their houses and fields are neglected, and the population is not only decreasing, but also sinking to the dead-level of the less advanced and less capable races.

“There is no doubt that the Bakuba are the most oppressed race to-day in the Kasai. Harassed by their own king in the interest of the Rubber Company, driven by the agents and their capitas, disarmed and deprived even of the most ordinary rights, they will, if nothing is done to help them, sink to the level of the vicious and degraded Bakette.

“ One asks oneself in vain what benefits these people have gained from the boasted civilization of the Free State. One looks in vain for any attempt to benefit them or to recompense them in any way for the enormous wealth which they are helping to pour into the Treasury of the State. Their native industries are being destroyed, their freedom has been taken from them, and their numbers are decreasing.

“The only efforts made to civilize them have been made by the missionaries, who are hampered at every turn.”

Consul Thesiger winds up with the remark that as the Company has behaved illegally at every turn it has forfeited all claims to consideration and that there is no hope for the country so long as it exists. Straight words — but how much more forcibly do they apply to that Congo State of which these particular companies are merely an outcome. Until it is swept from the map there is no hope for the country. You cannot avoid the rank products while the putridity remains.

The next document bearing upon the question is from the Rev. H. M. Whiteside, from the notorious A.B.I.R. district. I give it in full, that the reader may judge for himself how far the direct Belgian rule has altered the situation.

“I should like to bring to your notice a few facts regarding the condition of this (A.B.I.R.) district.

“After this extensive journey made through the district recently, and particularly the Bompona neighbourhood, I found the people working rubber in all the towns visited with the exception of those taxed in provisions.

“It is difficult to know which ‘tax,’ rubber or provisions, is hardest. The rubber workers implored us to free them from rubber, and at one village upon our departure they followed us a considerable distance, and it was difficult to get away from them. The amount of rubber collected is small compared with what was formerly demanded, but I have no doubt it requires one-third of the time of the people to collect it. Many of the people of the villages behind Bompona were away collecting rubber. We met many of the Ionji people in the forest, either actually engaged in their work or hunting for a district where the vines might have escaped other collectors. We also met other villagers in the bush in quest of rubber. Almost all the village migrates to the forest — men, many women and children — when rubber is required.

“ In the light of these facts, how worthless are the assertions that rubber ‘tax’ has been stopped in the A.B.I.R. territory.

“With regard to the provision tax, it was difficult to get any data, but it is easy for one to see the oppressed condition of the people when one comes into contact with them. Between the provision tax, porterage and paddlers, I believe that the people of Bompona have got very little time to themselves. There is one thing that one cannot help seeing, viz., the mean, miserable appearance of the people residing around the State post of Bompona. The houses or huts are in keeping with the owners of them. A very small bale of cloth could take the place of all I saw worn. In all the district I never saw a single brass rod, nor any domestic animals except a few miserable chickens. The extreme poverty of the people is most remarkable. There is no doubt as to their desire to possess European goods, but they have nothing with which to buy except rubber and ivory, which is claimed by the State.

“ It may be thought that I am painting their condition in too dark colours, but I feel it requires strong words to give a fair idea of the utter hopelessness and abject appearance of the people of Bompona, of the people of the villages behind the State post some twenty-five miles away, and in a lesser degree of the rubber workers opposite Bompona.

«JKAU “H. M. WHITESIDE.

“June 15th, 1909.”

Finally, there is the following report from the extreme other end of the country. It is dated June ist, 1909. The name of the sender, though not published, was sent to the Foreign Office. He is an American citizen:

“I am sorry to say there is need for agitation for the reform of the Belgian Kwango territory along this frontier. Robbing and murder are still being carried on under the rule of the Belgian official from Popocabacca. Last month he came with an armed force to the district of Mpangala Nlele, two days west of here, to decorate with the Congo medal a new chief in the stead of our old friend Nlekani. Nlekani left a number of sons, but none of them were willing to take the responsibility of the Medal Chieftainship. They, therefore, placed their villages under the authority of a powerful chief living to the north of them.

“The official of the Congo Government had been insisting for a year that a younger son of the old chief should consent to be the Medal Chief. This young man, named Kingeleza, was a fine, bright fellow, but thinking that, as a younger son, he would lack the necessary authority over the people and would get into trouble with the Government if he could not satisfy its requirements, he declined. The Belgian official was, however, so insistent that Kingeleza had finally agreed in order to avoid a clash with the Government.

“ On his way to make the ‘ investiture,’ the Belgian official robbed some villages and killed two men. Kingeleza’s people, who had gathered together to witness the investiture, hearing of the treatment meted out to the other villages, took fright and fled from their own villages, which the Belgians, upon arriving, found deserted. Whereupon the soldiers proceeded to ferret the fugitives out of the woods, where they were hiding. Twenty were seized, among whom was one of Kingeleza’s sisters, a young and attractive looking girl. Four of the villagers were subsequently released, and the balance maiched off with other spoils to Popocabacca. The evangelist attached to the American mission, who was absent in the Lower Congo, had his house broken open and a tent and school materials carried off.

“As for Kingeleza, some of the Belgian soldiers met him in the path and shot him. They did not know that he was Kingeleza, and Kingeleza is still being sought for by the Belgian official.

“This same ‘Chief of Brigands,’ as I prefer to call him, has just been on another raid for which he even entered Portuguese territory within a few hours of where I am writing, wantonly destroying all that he could not carry off. The people had, happily, all escaped before he arrived. The Portuguese are reporting this outrage to the Governor-General at Loanda.”

CHAPTER XII

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

IHAVE not in this statement touched upon the financial side of the Congo State. A huge scandal lies there — so huge that the limits of it have not yet been defined. I will not go into that morass. If Belgians wish to be hoodwinked in the matter, and to have their good name compromised in finance as well as in morality, it is they who in the end will suffer. One may merely indicate the main points, that during the independent life of the Congo State all accounts have been kept secret, that no budgets of the last year but only estimates of the coming one have ever been published, that the State has made huge gains, in spite of which it has borrowed money, and that the great sums resulting have been laid out in speculations in China and elsewhere, that sums amounting in the aggregate to at least £7,000,000 of money have been traced to the King, and that this money has been spent partly in buildings in Belgium, partly in land in the same country, partly in building on the Riviera, partly in the corruption of public men, and of the European and American Press (our own being not entirely untarnished, I fear), and, finally, in the expenses of such a private life as has made King Leopold’s name notorious throughout Europe. Of the guilty companies the poorest seem to pay fifty and the richest seven hundred per cent, per annum. There I will leave this unsavoury side of the ma-tter. It is to humanity that I appeal, and that is concerned with higher things.

Before ending my task, however, I would give a short account of the evolution of the political situation as it affected, first, Great Britain and the Congo State; secondly, Great Britain and Belgium. In each case Great Britain was, indeed, the spokesman of the civilised world.

So far as one can trace, no strong protest was raised by the British Government at the time when the Congo State took the fatal step, the direct cause of everything which has followed, of leaving the honest path, trodden up to that time by all European Colonies, and seizing the land of the country as their own. Only in 1896 do we find protests against the ill-usage of British coloured subjects, ending in a statement in Parliament from Mr. Chamberlain that no further recruiting would be allowed. For the first time we had shown ourselves in sharp disagreement with the policy of the Congo State. In April, 1897, a debate was raised on Congo affairs by Sir Charles Dilke without any definite result.

Our own troubles in South Africa (troubles which called forth in Belgium a burst of indignation against wholly imaginary British outrages during the war) left us little time to fulfil our Treaty obligations toward the natives on the Congo. In 1903 the matter forced itself to the front again, and a considerable debate took place in the House of Commons, which ended by passing a resolution with almost complete unanimity to the following effect:

"That the Government of the Congo Free State, having, at its inception, guaranteed to the Powers that its native subjects should be governed with humanity, and that no trading monopoly or privilege should be permitted within its dominions; this House requests His Majesty's Government to confer with the other Powers, signatories of the Berlin General Act, by virtue of which the Congo Free State exists, in order that measures may be adopted to abate the evils prevalent in that State."

In July of the same year there occurred the famous three days' debate in the Belgian House, which was really inaugurated by the British resolution. In this debate the two brave Reformers, Vandervelde and Lorand, though crushed by the voting power of their opponents, bore off all the honours of war. M. de Favereau, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, alternately explained that there was no connection at all between Belgium and the Congo State, and that it was a breach of Belgian patriotism to attack the latter. The policy of the Congo State was upheld and defended by the Belgian Government in a way which must forever identify them with all the crimes which I have recounted. No member of the Congo administration could ever have expressed the intimate spirit of Congo administration so concisely as M. de Smet de Naeyer, when he said, speaking of the natives: "They are not entitled to anything. What is given them is a pure gratuity." Was there ever in the world such an utterance as that from a responsible statesman! In 1885 a State is formed for the "moral and material improvement of the native races." In 1903 the native "is not entitled to anything." The two phrases mark the beginning and the end of King Leopold's journey.

In 1904 the British Government showed its continued uneasiness and disgust at the state of affairs on the Congo by publishing the truly awful report of Consul Casement. This document, circulated officially all over the globe, must have opened the eyes of the nations, if any were still shut, to the true object and development of King Leopold’s enterprise. It was hoped that this action upon the part of Great Britain would be the first step toward intervention, and, indeed, Lord Lansdowne made it clear in so many words that our hand was outstretched, and that if any other nation chose to grasp it, we would proceed together to the task of compulsory reform. It is not to the credit of the civilised nations that not one was ready to answer the appeal. If, finally, we are forced to move alone, they cannot say that we did not ask and desire their co-operation.

From this date remonstrances were frequent from the British Government, though they inadequately represented the anger and impatience of those British subjects who were aware of the true state of affairs. The British Government refrained from going to extremes because it was understood that there would shortly be a Belgian annexation, and it was hoped that this would mark the beginning of better things without the necessity for our intervention. Delay followed delay, and nothing was done. A Liberal Government was as earnest upon the matter as its Unionist predecessor, but still the diplomatic etiquette delayed them from coming to a definite conclusion. Note followed note, while a great population was sinking into slavery and despair. In August, 1906, Sir Edward Grey declared that we “could not wait forever,” and yet we see that he is waiting still. In 1908 the long looked-for annexation came at last, and the Congo State exchanged the blue flag with the golden star for the tricolour of Belgium. Immediate and radical reforms were promised, but the matter ended as all previous promises have done. In 1909 M. Renkin, the Belgian Colonial Minister, went out to inspect the Congo State, and had the frankness before going to say that nothing would be changed there. This assurance he repeated at Boma, with a flourish about the “genial monarch” who presided over their destinies. By the time this pamphlet is printed M. Renkin will be back, no doubt with the usual talk of minor reforms, which will take another year to produce, and will be utterly futile when reduced to practice. But the world has seen this game too often. Surely it will not be made a fool of again. There is some limit to European patience.

Meanwhile, in this very month of August, 1909, a full year after the annexation by Belgium (an annexation, be it mentioned, which will not be officially recognised by Great Britain until she is satisfied in the matter of reforms), Prince Albert, the heir to the throne, has returned from the Congo. He says:

“The Congo is a marvellous country, which offers unlimited resources to men of enterprise. In my opinion our colony will be an important factor in the welfare of our country, whatever sacrifices we will have to make for its development. What we must do is to work for the moral regeneration of the natives, ameliorate their material situation, suppress the scourge of sleeping sickness, and build new railways.”

“Moral regeneration of the natives!” Moral regeneration of his own family and of his own country — that is what the situation demands.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME CONGOLESE APOLOGIES

IT ONLY remains to examine some of the Congolese attempts to answer the unanswerable. It is but fair to hear the other side, and I will set down such points as they advance as clearly as I can:

1. — That the Congo State is independent and that it is no one else's business what occurs within its borders.

I have, I trust, clearly shown that by the Berlin Treaty of 1885 the State was formed on certain conditions, and that these conditions as affecting both trade and the natives have not been fulfilled. Therefore we have the right to interfere. Apart from the Treaty this right might be claimed on the general grounds of humanity, as has been done more than once with Turkey.

2. — That the French Congo is as bad, and that we do not interfere.

The French Colonial system has usually been excellent, and there is, therefore, every reason to believe that this one result of evil example will soon be amended. There, at least, we have no Treaty obligation to interfere.

3. — That the English agitation is due to jealousy of Belgian success.

We do not look upon it as success, but the most stupendous failure in history. What is there to be jealous of? Is it the making of money? But we could do the same at once in any tropical Colony if we stooped to the same methods.

4. — That it is a plot of the Liverpool merchants.

This legend had its origin in the fact that Mr. Morel, the leader and hero of the cause, was in business in Liverpool, and was afterward elected to be a member of the Liverpool Chamber of Com-

merce. There is, indeed, a connection between Liverpool and the movement, because it was while engaged in the shipping trade there that Mr. Morel was brought into connection with the persons and the facts which moved him to generous indignation, and started him upon the long struggle which he has so splendidly and unselfishly maintained. As a matter of fact, all business men in England have very good reason to take action against a system which has kept their commerce out of a country which was declared to be open to international trade. But of ail towns Liverpool has the least reason to complain, as it is the centre of that shipping line which (alas! that any English line should do so) conveys the Congo rubber from Boma to Antwerp.

5. — That it is a Protestant scheme in order to gain an advantage over the Catholic missions.

In all British Colonies Catholic missions may be founded and developed without any hindrance. If the Congo were British to-morrow, no Catholic church, or school would be disturbed. What advantage, then, would the Protestants gain by any change? These charges are, as a matter of fact, borne out by Catholics as well as by Protestants. Father Vermeersch is as fervid as any English or American pastor.

6. — That travellers who have passed through the country, and others who reside in the country, have seen no trace 0} outrages.

Such a defence reminds one of the ancient pleasantry of the man who, being accused on the word of three men who were present and saw him do the crime, declared that the balance of evidence was in his favour, since he was prepared to produce ten men who were not present and did not see it. Of the white people who live in the country the great majority are in the Lower Congo, which is not affected by the murderous rubber traffic. Their evidence is beside the question. When a traveller passes up the main river his advent is known and all is ready for him. Captain Boyd Alexander passed, as I understand, along the frontier, where naturally one would expect the best conditions, since a discontented tribe has only to cross the line. To show the fallacy of such reasoning I would instance the case of the Reverend John Howell, who for many years travelled on one of the mission boats upon the main river and during that time never saw an outrage. No doubt he had formed the opinion that his brethren had been exaggerating. Then one day he heard an outburst of firing, and turned his little steamer to the spot. This is what he saw: “They1 were horrified to find the native soldiers of the Government under the eyes of their white officers engaged in mutilating the dead bodies of the natives who had just been killed. • Three native bodies were lying near the river’s edge and human limbs were lying within a few yards from the steamer. A State soldier was seen drawing away the legs and other portions of a human body. Another soldier was seen standing by a large basket in which were the viscera of a human body. The missionaries were promptly ordered off the beach by the two officers presiding over this human shambles.” And this was on the main river, twenty years after the European occupation.

7. — That land has been claimed by Government in Uganda and other British Colonies.

Where land has been so claimed, it has been worked by free labour for the benefit of the African community itself, and not for the purpose of sending the proceeds to Europe. This is a vital distinction.

8. — That odious incidents occur in all Colonies.

It is true that no Colonial system is always free from such reproach.

But the object of the normal European system is to discourage and to punish such abuses, especially if they occur in high places. I have already given the instance of Eyre, Governor of Jamaica, who was tried for his life in England because he had executed a half-caste at a time when there was actual revolt among the black population, of which he was the leader. Germany also has not hesitated to bring to the bar of Justice any of her officers who have lowered her prestige by their conduct in the tropics. But in the Congo, after twenty years of unexampled horror and brutality, not one single officer above the rank of a simple clerk has ever been condemned, or even, so far as I can learn, tried for conduct which, had they been British, would assuredly have earned them the gallows. What chance would Lothaire or Le Jeune have before a Middlesex jury? There lies the difference between the systems.

9. — That the British charges did not begin until the Congo became a flourishing State.

Since the Congo’s wealth sprang from this barbarous system, it is natural that they both attracted attention at the same time. Rising wealth meant a more rigidly enforced system.

10. — That the Congo State deservea great credit for having prohibited the sale of alcohol to the natives.

It is true that the sale of alcohol to natives should be forbidden in all parts of Africa. It is caused by the competition of trade. If a chief desires gin for his ivory, it is clear that the nation which supplies that gin will get the trade, and that which refuses will lose it. This by way of explanation, not of apology. But as there is no trade competition in the Congo, they have no reason to introduce alcohol, which would simply detract from the quality and value of their slave population. When compared with the absolute immorality of other Congo proceedings, it is clear that the prohibition of alcohol springs from no high motive, but is purely dictated by self-interest.

n. — That the depopulation is due to sleeping sickness.

Sleeping sickness is one of the contributory causes, but all the evidence in this book will tend to show that the great wastage of the people has occurred where the Congo rule has pressed heavily upon them.

So I bring my task to an end.

I look at my statement of the facts and I wince at its many faults of omission. How many specific examples have I left out, how many deductions have I missed, how many fresh sides to the matter have I neglected. It is hurried and broken, as a man’s speech may be hurried and broken when he is driven to it by a sense of burning injustice and intolerable wrong. But it is true — and I defy any man to read it without rising with the conviction of its truth. Consider the cloud of witnesses. Consider the minute and specific detail in the evidence. Consider the undenied system which must prima facie produces such results. Consider the admissions of the Belgian Commission. Not one shadow of doubt can remain in the most sceptical mind that the accusations of the Reformers have been absolutely proved. It is not a thing of the past. It is going on at this hour. The Belgian annexation has made no difference. The machinery and the men who work it are the same. There are fewer outrages it is true. The spirit of the unhappy people is so broken that it is a waste of labour to destroy them further. That their conditions have not improved is shown by the unanswerable fact that the export of rubber has not decreased. That export is the exact measure of the terrorism employed. Many of the old districts are worked out, but the new ones, must be exploited with greater energy to atone. The problem, I say, remains as ever. But surely the answer is at hand. Surely there is some limit to the silent complicity of the civilised world?

CHAPTER XIV

SOLUTIONS

BUT what can be done? What course should we pursue? Let us consider a few possible solutions and the reasons which bear upon them.

There is one cardinal fact which dominates everything. It is that any change must be for the better. Under their old savage regime as Stanley found them the tribes were infinitely happier, richer and more advanced than they are to-day. If they should return undisturbed to such an existence, the situation would, at least, be free from all that lowering of the ideals of the white race which is implied by a Belgian occupation. We may start with a good heart, therefore, since whatever happens must be for the better.

Can a solution be found through Belgium?

No, it is impossible, and that should be recognised from the outset. The Belgians have been given their chance. They have had nearly twenty-five years of undisturbed possession, and they have made it a hell upon earth. They cannot disassociate themselves from this work or pretend that it was done by a separate State. It was done by a^elgian King, Belgian soldiers, Belgian financiers, Belgian lawyers, Belgian capital, and was endorsed and defended by Belgian governments. It is out of the question that Belgium should remain on the Congo.

Nor, in face of reform, would Belgium wish to be there. She could not carry the burden. When the country is restored to its inhabitants together with their freedom, it will be in the same position as those German and English colonies which entail heavy annual expenditure from the mother country. It is a proof of the honesty of German colonial policy, and the fitness of Germany to be a great land-owning Power, that nearly all her tropical colonies, like our own, show, or have shown, a deficit. It is easy to show a profit if a land be exploited as Spain exploited Central America, or

Belgium the Congo. It would always be more profitable to sack a business than to run it.

Now, if the forced revenue of the Congo State disappeared, it would, at a moderate estimate, take a minimum of a million a year for twenty years to bring the demoralised State back to the normal condition of a tropical colony. Would Belgium pay this £20,000,000? It is certain that she would not. Reform, then, is an absolute impossibility so long as Belgium holds the Congo.

What, then, should be done?

That is for the statesmen of Europe and America to determine. America hastened before all the rest of the world in 1884 to recognise this new State, and her recognition caused the rest of the world to follow suit. But since then she has done nothing to control what she created. American citizens have suffered as much as British, and American commerce has met with the same impediments, in spite of the shrewd attempt of King Leopold to bribe American complicity by allowing some of her citizens to form a Concessionnaire Company and so to share in the unholy spoils. But America has a high moral sense, and when the true facts are known to her, and when she learns to distinguish the outcome of King Leopold’s dollars from the work of honest publicists, she will surely be ready to move in the matter. It was in crushing pirates that America made her first international appearance upon the world’s stage. May it be a precedent.

But to bring the matter to a head the British Government should surely act with no further delay. The obvious course would appear to be that having prepared the ground by sounding each of the Great Powers, they should then lay before each of them the whole evidence, and ask that a European Congress should meet to discuss the situation. Such a Congress would surely result in the partition of the Congo lands — a partition in which Great Britain, whose responsibilities of empire are already too vast, might well play the most self-denying part. If France, having given a pledge to rule her Congo lands in the same excellent fashion as she does the rest of her African Empire, were to extend her borders to the northern bank of the river along its whole course until it turns to the south, then an orderly government might be hoped for in those regions. Germany, too, might well extend her East African Protectorate, so as to bring it up to the eastern bank of the Congo, where it runs to the south. With these large sections removed it would not be difficult to arrange some great native reservation in the centre, which should be under some international guarantee which would be less of a fiasco than the last one. The Lower Congo and the Boma railway would, no doubt, present difficulties, but surely they arc not above solution. And always one may repeat that any change is a change for good.

Such a partition would form one solution. Another, less permanent and stable — and to that extent, as it seems to me, less good — is that which is advanced by Mr. Morel and others. It is an international control of the river, some provision for which is, as I understand, already in existence. The trouble is that what belongs to all nations belongs to no nation, and that when the native risings and general turmoil come, which will surely succeed the withdrawal of Belgian pressure, something stronger and richer than an International Riverine Board will be needed to meet them. I am convinced that partition affords the only chance of solid, lasting amendment.

Let us suppose, however, that the Powers refuse to convene a meeting, and that we are deserted even by America. Then it is our duty, as it has often been in the world’s history, to grapple single- handed with that which should be a common task. We have often done so before, and if we are worthy of our fathers, we will do it again. A warning and a date must be fixed, and then we must decide our course of action.

And what shall that action be? War with Belgium? On them must rest the responsibility for that. Our measures must be directed against the Congo State, which has not yet been recognised by us as being a possession of Belgium. If Belgium take up the quarrel then so be it. There are many ways in which we can bring the Congo State to her knees. A blockade of the Congo is one, but it has the objection of the international complications which might ensue. An easier way would be to proclaim this guilty land as an outlaw State. Such a proclamation means that to no British subject does the law of that land apply. If British traders enter it, they shall be stopped at the peril of those who stop them. If British subjects are indicted, they shall be tried in our own Consular Courts. If complications ensue, as is likely, then Boma shall be occupied. This would surely lead to that European Conference which we are supposing to have been denied us.

Yet another solution. Let a large trading caravan start into the Congoland from Northern Rhodesia. We claim that we have a right to free trade by the Berlin Treaty. We will enforce our claim. To do so would cut at the very roots of the Congo system. If the caravan be opposed, then again Boma and a conference.

Many solutions could be devised, but there is one which will come of itself, and may bring about a very sudden end of the Congo Power. Northern Rhodesia is slowly filling up. The railhead is advancing. The nomad South African population, half Boers, half English, adventurers and lion hunters, are trekking toward the Katanga border. They are not men who will take less than those rights of free entry and free commerce which are, in fact, guaranteed them. Only last year twelve Boer wagons appeared upon the Katanga border and were, contrary to all international law, warned off. They are the pioneers of many more. No one has the right, and no one, save their own Government, has the force to keep them out. Let the Powers of Europe hasten to regulate the situation, or some day they may find themselves in the presence of a fait accompli. Better an orderly partition conducted from Paris or Berlin, than the intrusion of some Piet Joubert, with his swarthy followers, who will see no favour in taking that which they believe to be their right.

But whichever solution is adopted, the conscience of Europe should not be content merely with the safeguarding of the future. Surely there should be some punishment for those who by their injustice and violence have dragged Christianity and civilization in the dirt. Surely, also, there should be compulsory compensation out of the swollen moneybags of the three hundred per cent, concessionnaires for the widows and the orphans, the maimed and the incapacitated. Justice cannot be satisfied with less. An International Commission, with punitive powers, may be exceptional, but the whole circumstances are exceptional, and Europe must rise to them. The fear is, however, that it is the wretched agents on the spot, the poor driven bonus- hunters who will be offered up as victims, whereas the real criminals will escape. The curse of blood and the scorn of every honest man rest upon them already. Would that they were within the reach of human justice also! They have been guilty of the sack of a country, the spoliation of a nation, the greatest crime in all history, the greater for having been carried out under an odious pretence of philanthropy. Surely somehow, somewhere, they will have their reward!

APPENDIX

NOTE I — THE CHICOTTE

Chicotting is alluded to in Congo annals as a minor punishment, freely inflicted upon women and children. It is really a terrible torture, which leaves the victim flayed and fainting. There is a science in the administration of it. Felicien Challaye tells of a Belgian officer who became communicative upon the subject. “One can hardly believe,” said the brute, “how difficult it is to administer the chicotte properly. One should spread out the blows so that each shall give a fresh pang. Then we have a law which forbids us to give more than twenty-five blows in one day, and to stop when the blood flows. One should, therefore, give twenty- four of the blows vigorously, but without risking to stop; then at the twenty-fifth, with a dexterous twist, one should make the blood spurt.” (“Le Congo Franjais,” Challaye.) The twenty-five lash law, like all other laws, has no relation at all to the proceedings in the Upper Congo.

Monsieur Stanislas Lefranc, Judge on the Congo, and one of the few men whose humanity seems to have survived such an experience, says:

“Every day, at six in the morning and two in the afternoon, at each State post can be seen, to-day, as five or even ten years ago, the savoury sight which I am going to try to depict, and to which new recruits are specially invited.

“The chief of the post points out the victims; they leave the ranks and come forward, for at the least attempt at flight they would be brutally seized by the soldiers, struck in the face by the representative of the Free State and the punishment would be doubled. Trembling and terrified, they stretch themselves face down before the captain and his colleagues; two of their companions, sometimes four, seize them by their hands and feet and take off their waistcloth. Then, armed with a lash of hippopotamus hide, similar to what we call a cow-hide, but more flexible, a black soldier, who is only required to be energetic and pitiless, flogs the victims.

“Every time the executioner draws away the chicotte a reddish streak appears upon the skin of the wretched victims who, although strongly built, gasp in terrible contortions.

“Often the blood trickles, more rarely fainting ensues. Regularly and without cessation the chicotte winds round the flesh of these martyrs of the most relentless and loathsome tyrants who have ever disgraced humanity. A.t the first blows the unhappy victims utter terrible shrieks which soon die down to low groans. In addition, when the officer who orders the punishment is in a bad humour, he kicks those who cry or struggle. Some (I have witnessed the thing), by a refinement of brutality, require that, at the moment when they get up gasping, the slaves should graciously give the military salute. This formality, not required by the regulations, is really a part of the design of the vile institution which aims at debasing the black in order to be able to use him and abuse him without fear.”—”Le Regime Congolais,” Lidge, Lefranc.

THE CASE OF MR. GEORGE EDALJI

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION BY SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

Due to the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories, many people wrote letters to Conan Doyle over the years, asking him for help with real life crimes. The author was also a member of an organisation called the Crimes Club which began in 1904 and which met regularly to debate famous criminal cases, and included other writers of his day. Evidence from real unsolved crimes was available for all members to study, and lectures on methods of crime were given by actual criminals. Conan Doyle also wrote for a series in the Strand Magazine on the history of crime in 1901, called Strange Studies from Life. Sometimes, however, he did get directly involved with criminal cases, themselves. The two most famous examples were George Edalji and Oliver Slater, which follows next in this works. Conan Doyle's involvement in both these cases led to the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal in both England and Scotland.

In 1903, over a period of six months in Great Wyrley, near Birmingham, 16 animals were found slashed to death with shallow slits along their stomach. George Edalji was convicted specifically for an injured pony mutilated in the middle of the night and discovered in a field not far from Edalji's home. His trial inferred that he was also responsible for the other slayings. Staffordshire police charged him of mutilating animals and writing a threatening letters; some strangely enough accused Edalji himself of the mutilations. That the animal slayings continued after George Edalji's imprisonment was discounted by the local authorities, who by now had come up with a theory that a cult was continuing the work Edalji had started. Conan Doyle believed this was a case of deliberate racism both on the part of the local authorities and other unknown culprits, due to Edalji's mixed heritage — his father was Indian and his mother English.

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THE CASE OF MR. GEORGE EDALJI

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION BY SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

The first sight which I ever had of Mr. George Edalji was enough in itself to convince me both of the extreme improbability of his being guilty of the crime for which he was condemned, and to suggest some at least of the reasons which had led to his being suspected. He had come to my hotel by appointment, but I had been delayed, and he was passing the time by reading the paper. I recognised my man by his dark face, so I stood and observed him. He held the paper close to his eyes and rather sideways, proving not only a high degree of myopia, but marked astigmatism. The idea of such a man scouring fields at night and assaulting cattle while avoiding the watching police was ludicrous to anyone who can imagine what the world looks like to eyes with myopia of eight dioptres — the exact value of Mr. Edalji's myopia according to Mr. Kenneth Scott of Manchester-square. But such a condition, so hopelessly bad that no glasses availed in the open air, gave the sufferer a vacant, bulge-eyed, staring appearance, which, when taken with his dark skin, must assuredly have made him seem a very queer man to the eyes of an English village, and therefore to be naturally associated with any queer event There, in a single physical defect, lay the moral certainty of his innocence, and the reason why he should become the scapegoat Before seeing him I had read the considerable literature which had been sent to me about his case. After seeing him I read still more, saw or wrote to everyone who could in any way throw light upon the matter, and finally visited Wyrley and had a useful day's work upon the spot. The upshot of my whole research has been to introduce me to a chain of circumstances which seem so extraordinary that they are far beyond the invention of the writer of fiction. At all times in my inquiries I have kept before my mind the supreme necessity of following truth rather than any preconceived theory, and I was always prepared to examine any point against the accused with as much care as if it made for his innocence, but I have felt at last that it was an in suit to my intelligence to hold out any longer against the certainty that there had been an inconceivable miscarriage of justice.

Let me now tell the strange story from the beginning. I hope that the effect of my narrative will be to raise such a wave of feeling in this country as will make some public reconsideration of his case inevitable, for I am convinced that such reconsideration can only end in his complete acquittal and to his restoration to the ranks of that honourable profession from which he has been most unjustly removed.

The story begins as far back as the year 1874, when the Rev. S. Edalji, a Church of England clergyman of Parsee origin, was married to Miss C. Stoneham. An uncle of the bride, as I understand it, held the gift of the living of Great Wyrley, which was a parish, half agricultural and half mining, about six miles from Walsall, in Staffordshire. Through this uncle's influence Mr. Edalji became vicar of Great Wyrley, a cure which he has now held for thirty-one years, living a blameless life in the sight of all men. Placed in the exceedingly difficult position of a coloured clergyman in an English parish, he seems to have conducted himself with dignity and discretion. The only time that I can ever find that any local feeling was raised against him was during elections, for he was a strong Liberal in politics, and had been known to lend the church school-room for meetings. Some bitterness was aroused among the baser local politicians by this action.

There were three surviving children from this union —

George, who was born in 1876, Horace in 1879, and Maud in 1882. Of these Horace received a Government post, and was absent at the time when the long persecution to which the family had been subjected culminated in the tragedy which overwhelmed his brother.

In the year 1888, George Edalji being at that time twelve years of age, a number of threatening anonymous letters were received at the vicarage. The aid of the police was called in, and an arrest was made. This was of the servant-maid at the vicarage, one Elizabeth Foster, who was accused, among other things, of writing up ribald sentences about her employers on outhouses and buildings. She was tried at Cannock in 1889, but her solicitor pleaded that it was all a foolish joke, and she was bound over to keep the peace. An attempt has been made since to contend that she was not guilty, but I take it that no barrister could make such an admission without his client's consent. She and her friends were animated afterwards by bitter feelings of revenge; and there is good reason to believe that in this incident of 1888 is to be found the seed which led to the trouble of 1893-95 and the subsequent trouble of 1903. The 1892-95 letters openly championed Elizabeth Foster; the 1903 ones had no direct allusion to her, but a scurrilous postcard on Aug. 4 contained the words, “Why not go on with your old game of writing things on walls?” this being the very offence Elizabeth Foster was charged with. The reader must remember that in 1888 George Edalji was a schoolboy of twelve, and that the letters received at that date were in a formed handwriting, which could not possibly have been his.

In 1892 the second singular outbreak of anonymous letters began, some of which were published in the Staffordshire papers at the time by Mr. Edalji, in the hope that their style or contents might discover the writer. Many were directed to the vicarage, but many others were sent to different people in the vicinity, so malevolent and so ingenious that it seemed as if a very demon of mischief were endeavouring to set the parish by the ears. They were posted at Walsall, Cannock, and various other towns, but bore internal evidence of a common origin, and were all tainted with the Elizabeth Foster incident. They lasted for three years, and as they were accompanied by a long series of most ingenious and elaborate hoaxes, it is really wonderful that they did not accomplish their proclaimed purpose, which was to drive their victim off his head.

On examination of such of these letters as I have been able to see their prevailing characteristics are:

1. A malignant diabolical hatred of the whole Edalji family, the 16-17-18-year-old George coming in for his fair share of the gross abuse. This hatred is insane in its intensity, and yet is so coldly resolute that three years of constant persecution caused no mitigation. Here are extracts to illustrate the point “I swear by God that I will murder George Edalji soon. The only tiling I care about in this world is revenge, revenge, revenge, sweet revenge, I long for, then I shall be happy in hell.” “Every day, every hour, my hatred is growing against George Edalji.” “Do you think, you Pharisee, that because you are a parson God will absolve you from your iniquities?” “May the Lord strike me dead if I don’t murder George Edalji.” ‘Tour damned wife.” “Your horrid little girl.” “I will descend into the infernal regions showering curses upon you all.” Such are few of the phrases in which maniacal hatred of the Edalji family is shown.

2. The second characteristic of the letters is a frantic admiration, real or feigned, for the local police. There was a Sergeant Upton on duty in Cannock, who is eulogised in this way: “Ha, ha, hurrah for Upton! Good old Upton! Blessed Upton. Good old Upton! Upton is blessed! Dear old Upton!

Stand up, stand up for Upton, Ye soldiers of the Cross.
Lift high your Royal banner, It must not suffer loss.”

“The following in this district we love truly — the police of Cannock in general.” Again: “I love Upton. I love him better than life, because for my sake he lost promotion.”

3. The third characteristic of these letters, besides hatred of Edalji and eulogy of the police, is real or simulated religious mania, taking the form, in some portions of the same letter, that the writer claims to be God, and in others that he is eternally lost in hell. So consistent is this that it is hard to doubt that there was a real streak of madness in the writer.

4. A fourth remarkable characteristic of the letters is the intimacy of the writer with the names and affairs of the people in the district. As many as twenty names will sometimes be given, most of them with opprobrious epithets attached. No one can read them and doubt that the writer lived in the immediate neighbourhood, and was intimately acquainted with the people of whom he spoke.

One would imagine that under these circumstances there would be little difficulty in tracing the letters to their source, but, as a matter of fact, the handwriting was never recognised, nor was the culprit discovered. The opinion was strongly held, however, by those who were most concerned, that there was a connection with the former incident, and that the letters were done by some male ally or allies of the discharged maid.

Whilst these letters had been circulating the life of the Edaljis had, as I have already said, been made miserable by a series of most ingenious and daring hoaxes, many of which might have seemed comic had it not been for the tragedy of such a persecution. In all sorts of papers the curious wants of the Rev. S. Edalji, of Great Wyrley, broke out by letter and by advertisement Forgery caused no qualms to the hidden conspirator. Mr. Edalji became in these effusions an enterprising matrimonial agent, with a number of ladies, their charms and fortunes most realistically catalogued, whom he was ready to dispose of to any eligible bachelor. His house was advertised to be let for the most extraordinary purposes. His servant-girl was summoned over to Wolverhampton to view the dead body of a non-existent sister supposed to be King at a public-house. Trades people brought cartloads of unordered goods to the vicarage. An unfortunate parson from Norwich flew across to Great Wyrley on the urgent summons of the Rev. Shapurji Edalji, only to find himself the victim of a forgery. Finally, to the confusion of anyone who imagines that the youth George Edalji was annoying himself and playing heartless tricks upon his own people, there came a forged apology in the public Press, beginning with the words: “We, the undersigned, G.E.T. Edalji and Fredk. Brookes, both residing in the parish of Great Wyrley, do hereby declare that we were the sole authors and writers of certain offensive and anonymous letters received by various persons during the last twelve months.” The apology then goes on to express regret for utterances against the favourite protégé of the unknown, Upton, the sergeant of police at Cannock, and also against Elizabeth Foster. This pretended apology was, of course, at once disowned by the Edaljis, and must, I think, convince any reasonable man, if there were already any room for doubt, that the Edaljis were not persecuting themselves in this maddening fashion.

Before leaving this subject of the anonymous letters of 1893, which breathe revenge against the Edalji family, I should like to quote and strongly emphasise two expressions which have a lurid meaning when taken with the actual outcome of the future.

On March 17, 1893, this real or pretended maniac says in a letter to the father: “Before the end of this year your kid will be either in the graveyard or disgraced for life.” Later, in the same letter, he says: “Do you think that when we want we cannot copy your kid’s writing?” Within ten years of the receipt of that letter the “kid”, or George Edalji, had indeed been disgraced for life, and anonymous letters which imitated his handwriting had played a part in his downfall. It is difficult after this to doubt that the schemer of 1893 was identical with the writer of the letters in 1903.

Among the many hoaxes and annoyances practised during these years was the continual laying of objects within the vicarage grounds and on the window-sills, or under the doors, done with such audacity that the culprit was more than once nearly caught in the act. There was one of these incidents which I must allude to at some length, for though it was trivial in itself, it has considerable importance as forming a link between the outrages of 1893 and of 1903, and also because it shows for the first time the very strong suspicion which Captain the Honourable G. A. Anson, Chief Constable of Staffordshire — influenced no doubt by those reports of his subordinates, which he may or may not have too readily believed — has shown towards George Edalji. Personally I have met with nothing but frankness and courtesy from Captain the Hon. G. A. Anson during the course of my investigation, and if in the search after truth I have to criticise any word or action of his, I can assure him that it is with regret and only in pursuit of what seems to me to be a clear duty.

On Dec. 12, 1892, at the very beginning of the series of hoaxes, a large key was discovered lying upon the vicarage doorstep. This key was handed to the police, and was discovered in a few days to be a key which had been taken from Walsall Grammar School. The reason why I say that this incident has an important bearing upon the connection between the outrages of 1893 and those of 1903 is that the very first letter in the latter series proclaimed the writer to be a scholar at Walsall Grammar School. Granting that. he could no longer be a scholar there if he were concerned in the hoaxes of 1893, it is still an argument that the same motive power lay behind each, since we find Walsall Grammar School obtruding itself in each case.

The incident of the key was brought before the chief constable of the county, who seems at once to have concluded that young George Edalji was the culprit George Edalji was not a scholar at the Walsall School, having been brought up at Rugeley, and there does not appear to have been the slightest reason to suppose that he had procured a key from this six miles distant school and laid it on his own doorstep. However, here is a queer-looking boy, and here are queer doings, and here is a zealous constable, the very Upton whose praises were later to be so enthusiastically voiced by the writer of the letters. Some report was made, and the chief constable believed it. He took the course of writing in his own hand, over his own name, in an attempt to bluff the boy into a confession. Under date Jan. 23, 1893, he says to the father, in a letter which now lies before me: “Will you please ask your son George from whom the key was obtained which was found on your doorstep on Dec. 12? The key was stolen, but if it can be shown that the whole thing was due to some idle freak or practical joke, I should not be inclined to allow any police proceedings to be taken in regard to it. If, however, the persons concerned in the removal of the key refuse to make any explanation of the subject, I must necessarily treat the matter in all seriousness as a theft. I may say at once that I shall not pretend to believe any protestations of ignorance which your son may make about this key. My information on the subject does not come from the police.”

Considering the diabolical ingenuity of the hoaxer, it would seem probable that the information came directly or indirectly from him. In any case, it seems to have been false, or, at least, incapable of proof, as is shown by the fact that after these threats from the chief constable no action was taken. But the point to be noted is that as early as 1893, when Edalji was only seventeen, we have the police force of Staffordshire, through the mouth of their chief, making charges against him, and declaring in advance that they will not believe any protestation of innocence. Two years later, on July 25, 1895, the chief constable goes even further. Still writing to the father he says: “I did not tell Mr. Pry that I know the name of the offender” (the writer of the letters and author of the hoaxes), “though I told him that I had my suspicions. I prefer to keep my suspicions to myself until I am able to prove them, and I trust to be able to obtain a dose of penal servitude for the offender; as although great care has apparently been exercised to avoid, as far as possible, anything which would constitute any serious offence in law, the person who writes the letters has overreached himself in two or three instances, in such a manner as to render him liable to the most serious punishment. I have no doubt that the offender will be detected.”

Now, it must be admitted that this is a rather sinister letter. It follows after eighteen months upon the previous one in which he accuses George Edalji by name. The letter was drawn from him by the father’s complaint of gossip in the neighbourhood, and the allusion to the skill of the offender in keeping within the law has a special meaning, in view of the fact that young Edalji was already a law student. Without mentioning a name, he assures Edalji’s father that the culprit may get a dose of penal servitude. No doubt the chief constable honestly meant every word he said, and thought that he had excellent reasons for his conclusions; but the point is that if the Staffordshire police took this attitude towards young Edalji in 1895, what chance of impartiality had he in 1903, when a culprit was wanted for an entirely new set of crimes? It is evident that their minds were steeped in prejudice against him, and that they were in the mood to view his actions in the darkest light At the end of 1895 this persecution ceased. Letters and hoaxes were suddenly switched off. From that date till 1903 peace reigned in Wyrley. But George Edalji was resident at the vicarage all the time. Had he been the culprit there was no reason for change. But in 1903 the troubles broke out in a far more dangerous form than ever.

It was on Feb. 2, 1903, that the first serious outrage occurred at Wyrley. On that date a valuable horse belonging to Mr. Joseph Holmes was found to have been ripped up during the night Two months later, on April 2, a cob belonging to Mr. Thomas was treated in a similar fashion; and a month after that a cow of Mrs. Bungay's was killed in the same way. Within a fortnight a horse of Mr. Badger's was terribly mutilated, and on the same day some sheep were killed. On June 6 two cows suffered the same fate, and three weeks later two valuable horses belonging to the Quinton Colliery Company were also destroyed. Next in order in this monstrous series of barbarities was the killing of a pony at Great Wyrley Colliery, for which George Edalji was arrested and convicted. His disappearance from the scene made no difference at all to the sequence of outrages, for on Sept. 21, betwixt his arrest and his trial, another horse was disembowelled, and, as if expressly to confute the views of those who might say that this outrage was committed by confederates in order to affect the trial, the most diabolical deed of all was committed, after Edalji's conviction upon Nov. 3, when a horse and mare were found mutilated in the same field, an additional touch of horror being added by the discovery of a newly-born foal some little distance from the mare. Three months later, on Feb. 8, 1904, another horse was found to be injured, and finally, on March 24, two sheep and a lamb were found mutilated, and a rough miner named Farrington was convicted, upon entirely circumstantial evidence, and condemned to three years. Now here the results of the police are absolutely illogical and incompatible. Their theory was that of a moon-lighting gang. Edalji is condemned as one member of it, Farrington as another. But no possible connection can be proved or was ever suggested between Edalji and Farrington; the one a rude, illiterate miner, the other the son of the vicar and a rising professional man; the one a loafer at public-houses, the other a total abstainer. It is certainly suggestive, presuming that Farrington did do the deed for which he was convicted, that he was employed at the Wyrley Colliery, and may have had to pass in going to his work that very pony which Edalji was supposed to have injured. It is also, it must be admitted, suggestive that while Edalji's imprisonment had no effect upon the outrages, Farrington's was at once followed by their complete cessation. How monstrous, then, to contend, as the Home Office has done, that no new facts have arisen to justify a revision of Edalji's case. At the same time, I do not mean to imply Farrington's guilt, of which I have grave doubts, but merely that, as compared with Edalji, a strong case could be made out against him.

Now let me, before examining the outrage of Aug. 17, 1903, which proved so fatal to Edalji, give some account of the fresh epidemic of letters which broke out in the district. They were synchronous with the actual outrages, and there were details in them which made it possible, though by no means certain, that they were written by someone who was actually concerned in the crimes.

It cannot be said that there is absolute proof that the letters of 1903 were by the same hand as those of 1895, but there are points about their phrasing, about their audacity and violence of language, finally, about the attentions which they bestow upon the Edalji family, which seem to point to a common origin. Only in this case the Rev. Edalji escapes, and it is the son — the same son who has been menaced in the first series with disgrace for life — who receives some of the communications, and is referred to in the others. I may say that this series of letters present various handwritings, all of which differ from the 1895 letters, but as the original persecutor was fond of boasting that he could change his handwriting, and even that he could imitate that of George Edalji, the variance need not be taken too seriously.

And now for the letters. They were signed by various names, but the more important purported to come from a young schoolboy, named Greatorex. This youth denied all knowledge of them, and was actually away in the Isle of Man when some of them were written, as well as on Aug. 17, the date of the Wyrley outrage. It is a curious fact that this youth, in going up to Walsall every day to school, travelled with a certain number of schoolfellows upon the same errand, and that the names of some of these schoolfellows do find their way into these letters. In the same carriage travelled young Edalji upon some few occasions. "I have known accused by sight for three or four years," said Greatorex at the trial, "he has travelled in the same compartment with me and my schoolmates, going to Walsall. This has not occurred many times during the last twelve months — about a dozen times, in fact." Now, at first sight, one would think this was a point for the police, as on the presumption that Edalji wrote these anonymous letters it would account for the familiarity with these youths displayed in them. But since Edalji always went to business by the 7.30 train in the morning, and the boys took the same train every day, to find himself in their company twelve times in one year was really rather more seldom than one would expect. He drifted into their compartment as into any other, and he seems to have been in their company but not of it Yet the anonymous writer knew that group of boys well, and the police, by proving that George Edalji might have known them, seemed to make a distinct point against him.

The “Greatorex” letters to the police are all to the effect that the writer is a member of the gang for maiming cattle, that George Edalji is another member, and that he (Greatorex) is prepared to give away the gang if certain conditions are complied with. “I have got a dare-devil face and can run well, and when they formed that gang at Wyrley they got me to join. I knew all about horses and beasts and how to catch them best. . . they said they would do me in if I funked it, so I did, and caught them both King down at ten minutes to three, and they roused up; and then I caught each under the belly, but they didn’t spurt much blood, and one ran away, but the other fell. . . Now 111 tell you who are in the gang, but you can’t prove it without me. There is one named *from Wyrley, and a porter who they call* , and he’s had to stay away, and there’s Edalji, the lawyer . . . Now I have not told you who is at the back of them all, and 1 shan’t unless you promise to do nothing at me. It is not true we always do it when the moon is young, and the one Edalji killed on April 11 was full moon.” (It is worth mentioning here that there was no outrage at all within a week of that date.) “I’ve never been locked up yet, and I don’t think any of the others have, except the Captain, so I guess they’ll get off light.”

I would draw attention in passing to the artistic touch of “ten minutes to three.” This is realism overdone, as no mutilator on a dark night could readily consult his watch nor care to remember the exact hour to a minute. But it corresponds closely to the remarkable power of imaginative detail — a rather rare gift — shown in the hoaxes of 1893-95.

In the next letter, also to the police, the unknown refers to his previous communication, but is a good deal more truculent and abusive than before. “There will be merry times at Wyrley in November,” he says, “when they start on little girls, for they will do twenty wenches like the horses before next March. Don’t think you are likely to catch them cutting the beasts; they go too quiet, and lie low for hours, till your men have gone”... Mr. Edalji, him they said was locked up, is going to Brum on Sunday night to see the Captain, near Northfield, about how it’s to be carried on with so many detectives about, and I believe they are going to do some cows in the daytime instead of at night ... I think they are going to kill beasts nearer here soon, and I know Cross Keys Farm and West Cannock Farm are the two first on the list. . . You bloated blackguard, I will shoot you with father's gun through your thick head if you come in my way or go sneaking to any of my pals."

This letter was addressed, like the last, to: The Sergeant, Police Station, Hednesford, Staffordshire.

bearing a Walsall post mark of July 10, 1903. Edalji is openly accused of the crimes in the letters, and yet the police put forward the theory that he himself wrote them, and founded upon the last sentence of them, which I have quoted, that second charge, which sounded so formidable in his indictment, viz., of threatening to murder Sergeant Robinson.

A few days previously a second police officer, Mr. Rowley, of Bridgtown, had received another letter, evidently from the same hand. Here the detail as to the method of the crime is more realistic than ever, though no accusations against others are made. I quote this letter in extenso:

"Sir — A party whose initials you'll guess will be bringing a new hook home by the train from Walsall on Wednesday night, an he will have it in his special long pocket under his coat, an if you or your pals can get his coat pulled aside a bit you'll get sight of it, as it's an inch and half longer than the one he threw out of sight when he heard someone a slopin it after him this morning. He will come by that after five or six, or if he don't come home tomorrow he is sure on Thursday, an you have made a mistake not keeping all the plain clothes men at hand. You sent them away too soon. Why, just think, he did it close where two of them were hiding only a few days gone by. But, sir, he has got eagle eyes, and his ears is as sharp as a razor, and he is as fleet of foot as a fox, and as noiseless, and he crawls on all fours up to the poor beasts, an fondles them a bit, and then he pulls the hook smart across 'em, and out their entrails fly, before they guess they are hurt. You want 100 detectives to run him in red-handed, because he is so fly, and knows every nook and corner. You know who it is, and I can prove it; but until £100 reward is offered for a conviction, I shan't split no more."

There is, it must be admitted, striking realism in dais account also, but a hook — unless it were a billhook or horticultural hook — could not under any circumstances have inflicted the injuries.

It seems absurd enough that these letters incriminating himself in such violent terms should be attributed to young Edalji, but the climax is reached when a most offensive postcard, handed in at Edalji's own business office, is also sworn to by the expert employed by the police as being in Edalji's own writing. His vile effusion, which cannot be reproduced in full, accuses Edalji of guilty relations with a certain lady, ending up with the words, "Rather go back to your old game of writing anonymous letters and killing cows and writing on walls."

Now this postcard was posted at Wolverhampton upon Aug. 4, 1903. As luck would have it, Edalji and his sister had gone upon an excursion to Aberystwyth that day, and were absent from very early morning till late at night Here is the declaration of the station official upon the point:

"On the night of 4th of August, 1903, and early morning of the 5th I was on duty at Rugely Town Station, and spoke to Mr. George Edalji and his sister, who were in the train on their return from Aberystwyth. William Bullock, Porter-Signalman, Rugeley Town Station."

The station-master at Wyrley has made a similar declaration.

It is certain, then, that this postcard could not have been by him, even had the insulting contents not made the supposition absurd. And yet it is included in that list of anonymous letters which the police maintained, and the expert declared, to be in Edalji's own handwriting. If this incident is not enough in itself to break down the whole case, so far as the authorship of the letters goes, then I ask, what in this world would be sufficient to demonstrate its absurdity?

Before leaving this postcard, let me say that it was advanced for the prosecution that if a card were posted at certain country boxes to be found within two and a half miles of Wyrley they would not be cleared till evening, and so would have the Wolverhampton mark of next day. Thus the card might have been posted in one of these out-of-the-way boxes on the 3rd, and yet bear the mark of the 4th. This, however, will not do. The card has the Wolverhampton mark of the evening of the 4th, and was actually delivered in Birmingham on the morning of the 5th. Even granting that one day was Bank Holiday, you cannot stretch the dislocation of the postal service to the point that what was posted on the 3rd took two days to go twenty miles.

Now, during these six months, while Edalji was receiving these scurrilous letters, and while the police were receiving others accusing the young lawyer, you will naturally ask why did he not take some steps himself to prove his innocence and to find out the writer? He did, as a matter of fact, everything in his power. He offered a reward of £25 in die public Press — a reward, according to the police theory, for his own apprehension. He showed the police the letters which he received, and he took a keen interest in the capture of the criminals, making the very sensible suggestion that bloodhounds should be used. It seems hardly conceivable that the prejudice of the police had risen to such a point that both these facts were alleged as suspicious circumstances against him, as though he were endeavouring to worm himself into their confidence, and so find out what measures they were taking for the capture of the offender. I am quite prepared to find that in these dialogues the quick-witted youth showed some impatience at their constant blunders, and that the result was to increase the very great malevolence with which they appear to have regarded him, ever since their chief declared, in 1895, "I shall not pretend to believe any protestations of ignorance which your son may make."

And now, having dealt with the letters of 1903, let me, before I proceed to the particular outrage for which Edalji was arrested and convicted, say a few words as to the personality of this unfortunate young man, who was, according to the police theory, an active member, if not the leading spirit, of a gang of village ruffians. Anyone more absurdly constructed to play the role could not be imagined. In the first place, he is a total abstainer, which in itself hardly seems to commend him to such a gang. He does not smoke. He is very shy and nervous. He is a most distinguished student, having won the highest legal prizes within his reach, and written, at his early age, a handbook of railway law. Finally, he is as blind as the proverbial bat, but the bat has the advantage of finding its way in the dark, which would be very difficult for him. To find a pony in a dark field, or, indeed, to find the field itself, unless it were easily approached, would be a hard task, while to avoid a lurking watcher would be absolutely impossible. I have myself practised as an oculist, but I can never remember correcting so high a degree of astigmatic myopia as that which afflicts Mr. Edalji. "Like all myopics, Mr. Edalji," says an expert, "must find it at all times difficult to see clearly any objects more than a few inches off, and in dusk it would be practically impossible for him to find his way about any place with which he was not perfectly familiar." Fearing lest it might be thought that he was feigning blindness, I asked Mr. Kenneth Scott, of Manchester-square, to paralyse the accommodation by atropine, and then to take the result by means which were independent of the patient. Here is his report:

Right eye — 8.75 Drop Spher.

— 1.75 Drop cylind axis 90°.

Left eye — 8.25 Drop Spher.

“I am prepared to testify as to the accuracy of the above under oath,” says Mr. Kenneth Scott.

As to what such figures mean, I will bring it home to the uninitiated by saying that a glass made up to that prescription would cause the normal healthy eye to see the world as Edalji’s eyes always see it. I am prepared to have such a glass made up, and if any defender of the police will put it on at night, and will make his way over the route the accused is alleged to have taken inside of an hour, I will admit that what seems to me absolutely impossible could be done. I may add that this blindness is a permanent structural condition, the same in 1903 as in 1906.

I appeal to the practising oculists of this country, and I ask whether there is one of them who would not admit that such a condition of the eyes would make such a performance practically impossible, and that the circumstance must add enormously to a defence which is already overwhelmingly strong. And yet this all-important point was never made at the trial.

It is this studious youth who touches neither alcohol nor tobacco, and is so blind that he gropes his way in the dusk, who is the dangerous barbarian who scours the country at night, ripping up horses. Is it not perfectly clear, looking at his strange, swarthy face and bulging eyes, that it is not the village ruffian, but rather the unfortunate village scapegoat, who stands before you?

I have brought the narrative down to the Aug. 17 outrage. At this period twenty constables and detectives had been brought into the district, and several, acting, I presume, upon orders from higher quarters, watched the vicarage at night. On Aug. 17 Edalji, following his own account, returned from his day’s work at Birmingham — he had started in practice there as a lawyer — and reached his home about 6.30. He transacted some business, put on a blue serge coat, and then walked down to the bootmaker’s in the village, where he arrived about 8.35, according to the independent evidence of John Hands, the tradesman in question. His supper would not be ready before 9.30, and until that hour he took a walk round, being seen by various people. His household depose to his return before supper-time, and their testimony is confirmed by the statement of Walter Whitehouse, who saw the accused enter the vicarage at 9.25. After supper Edalji retired to bed in the same room as his father, the pair having shared an apartment for seventeen years. The old vicar was a light sleeper, his son was within a few feet of him, the whole house was locked up, and the outside was watched by constables, who saw no one leave it. To show how close the inspection was, I may quote the words of Sergeant Robinson, who said, "I saw four men observing it when I was there ... I could see the front door and side door. I should say no one could get out on the side I was watching without my seeing." This was before the night of the outrage, but it is inconceivable that if there was so close a watch then, there was none on the 17th. By the police evidence there were no less than twenty men scattered about waiting for the offender. I may add at this point some surprise has been expressed that the vicar should sleep in the same room as his son with the door locked. They slept thus, and had done for many years, so that the daughter, whose health was precarious, might sleep with the mother, and the service of the house, there being only the one maid, should be minimised. Absurd emphasis has been placed by the police upon the door being locked at night I can only suppose that the innuendo is that the vicar locked the door to keep his son from roving. Do we not all know that it is the commonest thing for nervous people to lock their doors whether alone or not, and Mr. Edalji has been in the habit of doing so all his long life. I have evidence that Mr. Edalji always locked his door before he slept with his son, and that he has continued to lock his door after his son left him. If, then — to revert to the evidence — it is possible for a person in this world to establish an alibi, it was successfully established by Edalji that night from 9.30 onwards. Granting the perfectly absurd supposition that the old vicar connived at his son slipping out at night and ripping up cattle, you have still the outside police to deal with. On no possible supposition can George Edalji have gone out after 9.30.

And yet upon that night a pony had been destroyed at the Great Wyrley Colliery. Sergeant Parsons gave evidence that he saw the pony, apparently all right, at eleven o'clock at night It was very dark, but he was not far off it. It was a wild night, with rain coining in squalls. The rain began about twelve, and cleared about dawn, being very heavy at times. On the 18th, at 6.20, a lad, named Henry Garrett, going to his work at the colliery, observed that the pony was injured. "It had a cut on the side," he said. "The blood was trickling from the wound. It was dropping pretty quickly." The alarm was at once given. Constables appeared upon the scene. By half-past eight Mr. Lewis, a veterinary surgeon, was on the spot. “The wound,” he deposed, “was quite fresh, and could not have been done further than six hours from the time he saw it.” The least learned of laymen might be sure that if the pony was standing bleeding freely at six it could not have been so all night, as the drain must have exhausted it. And here, on the top of this obvious consideration, is the opinion of the surgeon, that the injury was inflicted within six hours. Where George Edalji was during those six hours has already been shown beyond all possible question or dispute. So already the whole bottom has dropped out of the case; but, none the less, the indefatigable police went on with their pre-arranged campaign.

That it was pre-arranged is evident, since it was not on account of evidence, but in search of evidence, that the constables raided the vicarage. The young lawyer had already started for his day’s work in Birmingham. The startled parents were ordered to produce all the young man’s clothing. The mother was asked for his dagger, but could produce nothing more formidable than a botany spud. A hunt was made for weapons, and a set of razors belonging to the vicar were seized. Some were said to be wet — a not uncommon condition for razors in the morning. Dark spots were perceived upon the back of one, but they proved upon chemical examination to be rust stains. Twelve men quartered the small garden, but nothing was found.

The clothes, however, were a more serious matter. One coat was seized by the police and declared to be damp. This is vigorously denied by the vicar, who handled the coat before it was removed. Damp is, of course, a relative term, and all garments may give some feeling of dampness after a rainy night, when the whole atmosphere is humid; but if the condition had been caused by being out in the wild weather which prevailed that night, it is certain that the coat would have been not damp, but sopping wet The coat, however, was not one which Edalji used outside, and the evidence of Mr. Hands was called to show that he had not worn it the night before. It was an old house-coat, so stained and worn that it is not likely that an ambitious young professional man would, even in the lamplight, walk in the streets and show himself to his neighbours in such a garment But it was these very stains which naturally attracted the attention of the police. There were some whitish stains — surely these must be the saliva of the unfortunate animal. They were duly tested, and proved to be starch stains, probably from fish sauce or bread and milk. But there was something still more ominous upon this unhappy coat. There were, according to Inspector Campbell, “dark red or brown stains, right cuff much more stained than the left. There were other stains on each sleeve, further up, reddish brown or white. The coat was damp . . . There are other spots and stains upon it.”

Now the police try to make two points here: that the coat was damp, and that there were stains which might have been the traces of the crime upon it. Each point is good in itself; but, unfortunately, they are incompatible and mutually destructive. If the coat were damp, and if those marks were blood-stains contracted during the night, then those stains were damp also, and the inspector had only to touch them and then to raise his crimson finger in the air to silence all criticism. Rut since he could not do so it is clear that the stains were not fresh. They fell twelve hours later into the capable hands of the police surgeon, and the sanguinary smears conjured up by tire evidence of the constable diminished with absurd swiftness until they became “two stains in the centre of the right cuff, each about the size of a threepenny bit” This was declared by Dr. Butter to be mammalian blood, He found no more blood at all. How these small stains came there it is difficult to trace — as difficult as to trace a stain which I see now upon the sleeve of my own house-jacket as I look down. A splash from the gravy of underdone meat might well produce it At any rate, it may most safely be said that the most adept operator who ever lived would not rip up a horse with a razor upon a dark night and have only two threepenny-bit spots of blood to show for it The idea is beyond argument.

But now, having exhausted the white stains and the dark stains, we come to the most damning portion of the whole indictment though a careful consideration may change one’s view as to who it is who is damned by it. The police claimed that they discovered horse-hairs upon the coat. “On the sleeve,” says Inspector Campbell, “I found brownish hairs, which look like horse-hairs, There are some on now.” Now, let us listen to the very clear statement of the vicar upon the subject I transcribe it in full:

“On Aug. 18, 1903, they called at the vicarage at about eight o’clock in the morning, and in compliance with their request Mrs. Edalji showed them a number of garments belonging to her son, George Edalji. As soon as they saw the old coat they began to examine it, and Inspector Campbell put his finger upon one place and said that there was a hair there. Mrs. Edalji told him that it was not a hair, but a thread, and Miss Edalji, who was present then, remarked that it looked like a ‘roving.’ This was all that Inspector Campbell had said to them about the hair before I came down. When I saw him he told me that he had found horse-hairs upon the coat. The coat was then spread out upon the desk in the study. I asked him to point out the place where the hairs were to be seen. He pointed out a lower part of the coat, and said, There’s a horse-hair there.’ I examined the place and said, There is no hair here at all.’ Some further conversation followed, and then suddenly he put his finger upon another place on the coat nearer to where I was standing, and, drawing two straight lines with his finger, he said, ‘Look here, Mr. Edalji, there’s horse-hair here.’ I looked at the place for a moment, and in order to have more light upon it, I took up the coat with both my hands and drew nearer to the window, and after carefully examining it I said to him, ‘There is, to be sure, no hair here, it is a clear surface.’ He then said that he wanted to take the coat with him, and I said, ‘You can take the coat. I am satisfied there is no horse-hair upon it.’

“Now I have said it over and over again, and I say it here once more, that there was absolutely no horse-hair upon the coat. If there had been any I could not have failed to see it, and both Mrs. Edalji and Miss Edalji looked at the coat at the same time, and saw no hair of any sort upon it.” Incidentally it may be mentioned in connection with this statement, in which Miss Edalji entirely concurs, that we have the evidence of Miss Foxley, formerly of Newnham College, and then head mistress of the High School, that Miss Edalji was an exceedingly competent scientific observer. She adds, “Wilful misstatement on her part is as impossible in itself as it is inconsistent with her high principles and frank, straightforward character.”

Now, here is a clear conflict of evidence between two groups of interested people — the constables on the one hand, eager to build up their case; the household on the other, eager to confute this terrible accusation. Let us suppose the two statements balance each other. But is it not evident that there was only one course open for the police now to establish their point and that if they did not avail themselves of it they put themselves out of court? Their obvious course was then and there to send for a referee — die police doctor, or any other doctor — and picking samples of the hair from the coat to have sealed diem in an envelope, calling the new-comer to witness when and where they had been obtained. Such a proceeding must silence all doubt But they did nothing of the kind. What they actually did was to carry off the coat upon which three reputable witnesses have sworn there were no hairs. The coat then disappears from view for twelve hours. In the meantime the pony has been put out of its pain, and a portion of its hide was cut off with the hairs attached, and also secured by the police. The coat had been taken at eight in the morning. It was seen by Dr. Butter, the police surgeon, at nine in the evening. At that hour Dr. Butter picked twenty-nine undoubted obvious horse-hairs from its surface.

The prosecution have here to break their way through two strong lines of defence, each within the other. On the one hand, if Edalji had done the crime the evening before, it was his blue serge coat, and not his house-coat, that he wore, as is shown by the independent evidence of Mr. Hands. In die second line of defence is the oath of the family that there were no hairs in the morning, which is strengthened by the failure of the police to demonstrate there and then a fact which could have been so easily and completely demonstrated. But now we are faced by the undoubted fact that the hairs were there, upon the cuffs and the left breast, by evening. Why was the coat not taken straight to the surgeon? Why was a piece of the animal’s hide sent for before the coat was shown to Dr. Butter? One need not fly to extreme conclusions. It is to be remembered that the mere carrying of hide and coat together may have caused the transference of hairs, or that the officers may themselves have gathered hairs on their clothes while examining the pony, and so unconsciously transferred them to the coat. But the fact that the hairs were found just on the cuffs and breast will still recur in the mind. It would be sad indeed to commit one injustice while trying to correct another, but when the inevitable inquiry comes this incident must form a salient point of it There is one test which occurs to one’s mind. Did the hairs all correspond with the type, colour, and texture of the hairs on the sample of hide? If they did, then they were beyond all question conveyed from that sample to the coat. The cut was down the belly, and the portion taken off was from the side of the cut. The under hair of a horse differs greatly from the longer, darker, harsher hair of the sides. A miscreant leaning against a horse would get the side hairs. If all the hairs on the coat were short belly hairs, then there is a suggestive fact for the inquiry. Dr. Butter must have compared their appearance.

Since writing the above I have been able to get the words of Dr. Butter’s evidence. They are quoted: “Numerous hairs on the jacket, which were similar in colour, length, and structure to those on the piece of skin cut from the horse.” In that case I say, confidently — and all reflection must confirm it — that these hairs could not possibly be from the general body of the pony, but must have been transferred, no doubt unconsciously, from that particular piece of skin. With all desire to be charitable, the incident leaves a most unpleasant impression upon the mind.

If one could for a moment conceive oneself performing this barbarity, one would not expect to find hairs upon one’s coat. There is no necessary connection at all. Anxious to avoid the gush of blood, one would imagine that one would hold off the animal with the flat of one hand and attack it with the other. To lean one’s coat against its side would be to bring one’s trousers and boots in danger of being soaked in blood.

So much for the saliva stains, the blood stains, and the hairs. There remain the questions of the trousers and the boots. The trousers were said by the police to be damp, and stained with dark mud round the bottom. The boots were very wet The boots were the same ones which Edalji had admittedly used during his sixty-minutes’ walk upon the evening before. It was fine in the evening, but there had been heavy rain during the day, and puddles everywhere. Of course his boots were wet The trousers were not a pair used the evening before, according to the family. No attempt was made to show blood marks on boots or trousers, though Mr. Sewell, a well-known veterinary surgeon, deposed afterwards that in making such an incision a skilled operator would wear an apron to prevent his clothes from being soaked. It is an interesting point brought out by the evidence of some of the witnesses of the prosecution, that the mud at the place of outrage was yellow-red, a mixture of clay and sand, quite distinct from the road mud, which the police claim to have seen upon the trousers.

And now we come to the farce of the footprints. The outrage had occurred just outside a large colliery, and hundreds of miners going to their work had swarmed along every approach, in order to see the pony. The soft, wet soil was trampled up by diem from six o’clock onwards; yet on four o’clock of that afternoon, eight hours after the seizure of the boots, we have Inspector Campbell endeavouring to trace a similarity in tracks. The particular boot was worn at the heel, a fairly common condition, and some tracks among the multitude were down at the heel, and why should not the one be caused by the other? No cast was taken of the tracks. They were not photographed. They were not cut out for purpose of expert comparison. So little were they valued by Inspector Campbell that he did not even mention them to the magistrates on the 19th. But in retrospect they grew more valuable, and they bulked large at the trial.

Now, once again, the police are trying to make a point which in itself would help them, but which is incompatible with their other points. Their original theory was that the crime was done before 9.30. There was heavy rain on and off all night It is perfectly clear that any well-marked footsteps must have been left after the rain stopped, or when it had nearly stopped. Even granting that the earth was soft enough, as it was, to take footprints before then, this heavy rain would blur them to a point that would make identification by a worn-down heel absurd. What becomes then of all this elaborate business of the footmarks? Every point in this case simply crumbles to pieces as you touch it.

How formidable it all sounds — wet razor, blood on razor, blood and saliva and hair on coat, wet boots, footmark corresponding to boot — and yet how absolutely futile it all is when examined. There is not one single item which will bear serious criticism. Let us pass, however, from these material clues to those more subtle ones which the bearing or remarks of the youth may have furnished. These will bear examination even less than the others. As he waited upon the platform for the 7.30 train an ex-constable, now an innkeeper, named Markhew, came up to him and asked him to stay, as Inspector Campbell wished to see him. At the same moment someone announced that a fresh outrage had been committed, upon which Markhew says that Edalji turned away and smiled. Now, it is perfectly clear that a guilty man would have been much alarmed by the news that the police wished to see him, and that he would have done anything but smile on hearing of the outrage. Edalji's account is that Markhew said, "Can't you give yourself a holiday for one day?" on which Edalji smiled. Which is the more probable version I leave to the reader. The incident was referred to by the prosecuting counsel as "the prisoner's extraordinary conduct at the station."

He went to his office in Birmingham, and there, later in the day, he was arrested by the police.

On the way to the station, after his arrest, this unfortunate youth made another deadly remark: "I am not surprised at this. I have been expecting it for some time." It is not a very natural remark for a guilty man to make, if you come to think of it; but it is an extremely probable one from a man who believes that the police have a down on him, and who is aware that he has been accused by name in malignant anonymous letters. What else would he have said? Next day and the following Monday he was before the magistrates, where the police evidence, as already set forth, was given.

The magisterial proceedings lasted till Sept 4, off and on, when a prima facie case was made out and the prisoner committed to the Staffordshire Quarter Sessions. How far a case of this importance should have been referred to any less tribunal than the assizes I leave to legal opinion. Again the criminal made a remark which rose up in judgment against him. “I won’t have bail,” said he to Police-constable Meredith, “and when the next horse is killed it will not be by me.” In commenting upon this, Mr. Disturnal, the prosecuting counsel, said, “In refusing bail the prisoner made use of a very significant observation, and it went to suggest that the prisoner knew perfectly well what he was about when he refused bail.” The inference here is that it was pre-arranged that a friend of Edalji’s would do a fresh crime, in order to clear him. Was ever a more unfair utterance! It was, “Heads I win, tails you lose!” If no crimes occur, then it is clear we have the villain under lock and key. If crimes do occur, then it is clear that he is deep in conspiracy with others. As a matter of fact both Edalji’s decision to remain in gaol and his remark were the most proper and natural things in the world. He believed that there was a strong conspiracy against him. In the face of the letters he had even’ reason to believe so. So long as he was in his cell he was safe, he thought from this conspiracy. Perhaps another crime would be committed, and in that case, he thought in the innocence of his heart that it would clear him. In his wildest dreams he could never have imagined that such a crime would be fitted in as a link in the chain against him.

A crime was committed, and it occurred upon Sept 21, between Edalji’s committal and trial, whilst he lay in Stafford Gaol. The facts are these: Ham’ Green was the nineteen-year-old son of a farmer who lived somewhere between the vicarage and the scene of the outrage for which Edalji was convicted. He and Edalji knew each other slightly, as neighbours in the country must do, but how slight was their acquaintance may be shown by the fact that when, in the course of my inquiry, I asked Edalji what Green’s writing was like, he had to admit that he had never seen it. Consider the utter want of common ground between the two men, the purblind, studious teetotal young lawyer of twenty-seven, and the young Yeomanry trooper of nineteen, one of a set of boisterous young fellows, who made a centre of mirth and also of mischief at each annual training. Edalji entered no public-house, and was at work from early morning to late at night. Where was there room for that blood-brotherhood which would make the one man risk any danger and sacrifice his own horse for the sake of the other?

Green's charger was found disembowelled. It was not a very valuable animal. In one estimate it is placed at five pounds. Whether it was insured or not there is a conflict of evidence. For days there was scare and conjecture. Then, at the end of that time, it was known that Green had signed a confession which admitted that he had himself killed his own horse. That confession undoubtedly exists, but Green, having had a week or two to think things over, and having in the meantime got a ticket to South Africa, suddenly went back on his own confession, and declared, with much circumstantiality of detail, that he had not done it and that the confession had been bullied out of him by the police. One or other statement of Green's must be a falsehood, and I have sufficient reason myself, in the shape of evidence which has been set before me, to form a very clear opinion what the actual facts of the case were. When a final clearing of the case arrives, and there is a renewed inquiry on the basis that Edalji is innocent, and that the actual perpetrators have never been punished, there are many facts which maybe laid before the authority who conducts it Meanwhile the task which lies immediately before me is not to show who did do the crime — though that I think, is by no means an insuperable problem — but that Edalji did not and could not have done them. I will leave young Green there, with his two contradictory statements, and I will confine myself to his relation with the case, whichever of the statements is true.

And, first of all, here are the police who claim to hold his written confession. Then why did they not prosecute? It will not do to say that it is not a crime to kill your own horse. It is not a crime to shoot your own horse from humane motives, but it is at all times a crime, as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would very quickly show, to disembowel a horse on a dark night, be it fifty times your own. Here is an outrage of the same sort which has convulsed the countryside for so many months, it is brought home by his own confession to the offender, and yet the police refuse to prosecute, and connive at the man's flight from the country. But why? If it was not that the prosecution of Green would bring out facts which would interfere with the successful prosecution of Edalji, then, again, I ask, why? Far be it from me to be unjust to the police, but again it is their own really extraordinary behaviour which drives one to seek for hypotheses. The Home Office says that all inquiry has been made in this case, and that everything has been investigated and the matter closed. That is the official answer I received only a fortnight ago. Then can the Home Office give any good reason why Green was not prosecuted? The point is a very vital one.

Green was present at Edalji’s trial, was not called, and left afterwards for South Africa. He had been subpoenaed by the police, and that, no doubt, was what prevented the defence from calling him. Rut had they done so, and had he spoken in public as he has spoken in private, there would have been an end of all possibility, according to my information, of the great miscarriage which ensued. It may be noted before leaving this extraordinary incident that the reason given by Green in his confession was that the horse had to be killed, having been injured in the Yeomanry training, but nowhere has he ever said a word to suggest that he was acting in collusion with George Edalji.

And now at last we come to the trial. Here, as at every point of this extraordinary case, there are irregularities which will be more fitly dealt with by a lawyer. Suffice it that though the case was of such importance that it is generally thought that it should not have been at Quarter Sessions at all, it was at the lesser of the courts which make up that tribunal that it was at last tried. In Court A a skilled lawyer presided. Sir Reginald Hardy, who conducted Court B, had no legal training. I have not a word to say against his desire to be impartial and fair, but here was a young man, accused of one of a series of crimes for which the whole county was longing to find someone who might be made an example of The jury would naturally have the same feelings as their fellow-citizens. Hence it was peculiarly necessary to have a cold legal mind to cool their ardour and keep diem on firm ground of fact, far from prejudice and emotion. Yet it was in the court of the layman that the case was tried.

The ground over which the prosecution advanced is already familiar to the reader. We have the clothes which have now become “wet”. They were merely “damp” in the previous inquiry, and we have the word of the vicar that this

dampness was imperceptible to him, coupled with the fact that any bloodstains would then have been liquid. We have the down-at-heel boot, which was fitted into impressions which must have been made after rain, whereas the whole police theory was that the crime was committed before the rain. We have the bloodstains which sank from smears into two threepenny-bit patches, and we have the hairs which made their appearance thirteen hours after the coat had been in the hands of the police, and after it had been associated with the strip of horse's hide. Then came the letters. There was a strong probability that whoever wrote the letters knew something of the crimes. What matter that the letters actually accused Edalji himself and vilified him in all sorts of ways? What matter that one villainous postcard in the same writing as the others was posted at Wolverhampton when he was at Aberystwyth? What matter that in the original series of anonymous letters the writer had said, "Do you think we cannot imitate your kid's writing?" None of these things weighed as compared with the expression of opinion by an expert that the letters were in George Edalji's own writing. As the unfortunate prisoner listened to such an opinion he must have felt that he was in some nightmare dream. And who was the expert who expressed these views which weighed so heavily with the jury? It was Mr. Thomas Gurrin. And what is the record of Mr. Thomas Gurrin? His nemesis was soon to come. Within a year he had to present himself before the Beck Committee, and admit the terrible fact that through his evidence an innocent man had suffered prolonged incarceration. Does this fact alone not convince my readers that an entire reconsideration of the Edalji case is a most pressing public duty?

There is absolutely the whole evidence — the coat-boot-razor business, the letter business, the so-called incriminating expressions which I have already analysed, and the one fact, which I admit did really deserve consideration, that a group of schoolboys with whom once a month young Edalji may have travelled were known also to the writer of the letters. That is all. I have shown what each link is worth. And on that evidence a young gentleman, distinguished already in an honourable profession, was torn from his family, suffered all the indignities of a convict, was immured for three of the best years of his life, was struck from the roll on which with such industry and self-denial he had written his name, and had every torture made ten-fold more bitter by the thought of the vicar at home, of his mother and of his sister, so peculiarly sensitive, from their position in the church, to the scoff and the derision of those around them. It is a tale which makes a man hot with indignation as he reads it One word as to the evidence of the family, upon which so much depends. It has been asserted that it was given in a peculiar way, which shook the confidence of the jury. I have had some experience of the Edaljis, and I can say with confidence that what seemed peculiar to the jury arose from extreme anxiety to speak the absolute, exact truth. An experienced barrister who knew them well remarked to me that they were the most precisely truthful people he had ever met—”bad witnesses,” he added, “as they are so conscientious that they lay undue stress upon any point of doubt”

It must be admitted that the defence was not as strong as it might have been made, which does not seem to have been due to any shortcomings of the counsel so much as to a deficiency in the supply of information. The fact is that the consciousness of innocence was in this case a danger, as it caused some slackness in guarding every point So far as I can find, the whole story of the early persecutions of 1888 and of 1893-5 was not gone into, nor was their probable connection with that of 1903 pointed out The blindness of Edalji, a most vital fact was not supported by an array of evidence; indeed, I think that it was hardly mentioned at all. At all points one finds things which might have been better, but even granting that one cannot but feel the amazement which Sir George Lewis has voiced, when the jury brought in “Guilty,” and Sir Reginald Hardy sentenced the prisoner to seven years.

Now, once again, let me state the double dilemma of the police, before I leave this portion of my statement Either Edalji did the crime before ten o’clock that night or after ten o’clock that night. The latter case must be laughed out of a commonsense court by the fact that his father, the vicar, spent the night within a few feet of him, that the small vicarage was bolted and barred, no one being heard to leave it and that the police watchers outside saw no one leave it If that does not establish an alibi, what could? On the other hand, supposing that he did it before ten, or rather before 9.30, the time of his return home. You have to face the supposition that after returning from a long day’s work in Birmingham he sallied out in a coat which he was only known to wear in the house, performed a commonplace mission at the boot-shop in the village, then, blind as he was, hurried off for three-quarters of a mile, through difficult tortuous ways, with fences to climb and railway fines to cross (I can answer for it, having myself trod every foot of it), to commit a ghastly and meaningless crime, entirely foreign to his studious and abstinent nature; that he then hurried back another three-quarters of a mile to the vicarage, arrived so composed and tidy as to attract no attention, and sat down quietly to the family supper, the whole expedition from first to last being under an hour. The mere statement of this alternative supposition seems grotesque enough, but on the top of the gross, inherent improbability you are up against the hard facts that the pony was bleeding freely in the morning, and could not have so bled all night, that the veterinary surgeon deposed that the wound could not possibly be more than six hours old, no other veterinary surgeon being called to contradict this statement, and that the footprints on which the police relied were worthless unless left after the rain, which began at twelve. Add to this that the pony was seen standing apparently all right by the police themselves at eleven o'clock, and the case then seems to me to be overpoweringly convincing. Take whichever supposition you like, and I say that it is demonstrably false, and an insult to commonsense, to suppose that George Edalji committed the crime for which, through the action of the Staffordshire police, the error of an expert, and the gross stupidity of a jury, he has been made to suffer so cruelly.

I do not know that there is much to add, save a bare recital of the events which have occurred since then. After Edalji's conviction the outrages continued unabated, and the epidemic of anonymous letters raged as ever. The November outrage upon Mr. Stanley's horses was never traced, but there was some good local information as to the author of that crime, and a widespread conviction in the district, which may have been utterly unjust that the police were not too anxious to push the matter, as any conviction would certainly disturb the one which they had already obtained. This incident also, will furnish some evidence for the coming inquiry. Finally, in March, 1904, a man, named Farrington, was convicted for injuring some sheep. No attempt has ever been made to trace any connection between this man and Edalji. In the Green case not only was there no attempt to prove complicity between Green and Edalji, but I have evidence to show that the police had a most positive statement from Green that he had nothing to do with Edalji, obtained under circumstances which make it perfectly convincing. And yet, in face of this fact, Mr. Disturnal, the mouthpiece of the police at the trial, was permitted to say, referring to this outrage: "The letters which would be read would show that the writer of them was not acting alone, but in conjunction with some other people, and he put it to the jury, what was more likely than that, if there was a gang operating in the way suggested, one of its members would commit a similar outrage in order to create evidence for the defence?” Counsel, no doubt, spoke according to his instructions; but what are we to think of those from whom such instructions issued, since they had the clearest proof that there was no connection between Green and Edalji? Such incidents shake one’s confidence in British justice to the very foundations, for it is clear that the jury, already prejudiced by the nature of the crimes, were hoodwinked into giving their conviction.

A few words as to the sequel. The friends of the prisoner, organised and headed by Mr. R. D. Yelverton (late Chief Justice of the Bahamas), to whose long, ceaseless, and unselfish exertions Edalji will owe so much when the hour of triumph comes, drew up a memorial to the Home Secretary, setting forth some of the facts as here recorded. This petition for reconsideration was signed by ten thousand people, including hundreds of lawyers and many KC.’s, and was reinforced by the strongest letters testifying to Edalji’s character from men who must have known him intimately, including Mr. Denning, his schoolmaster; Mr. Ludlow, the solicitor with whom he was for five years articled; the Honorary Secretary’ and Reader of the Birmingham Law Society, and many others. Now every man of the world will admit that the schoolmaster’s testimony is of very great importance, for any traits of cruelty will show themselves most clearly at that age. This is what Mr. Denning says: “During the five years your son George was here I have never known him commit any acts of cruelty or unkindness. I have always found him a thoroughly upright and well-principled youth, in whom I could place every confidence.” Grier, his school-mate, writes: “He was several years older than myself, but always treated me with great kindness. I never knew him cruel to any animal, and from what I knew of him then — for I came to know him well — I should say he was quite incapable of any act of cruelty.” How foolish the loose gossip and surmise of Stafford seem in the face of page after page of testimonials such as these.

The memorial had no effect, and some inquiry should certainly be made as to how its fate was determined. It would be indeed a vicious circle if a police prosecution, when doubted, is referred back again to the police for report. I cannot imagine anything more absurd and unjust in an Oriental despotism than this. And yet any superficial independent investigation, or even a careful perusal of the memorial, must have convinced any reasonable human being. The friends of Edalji, headed by Mr. Yelverton, naturally demanded to see the dossier at the Home Office, but, as in the Beck case, the seekers after justice were denied access to the very documents which they needed in order to prove their case and confute their opponents.

I have said it was as in the Beck case. I might well have gone to a more classic example, for in all its details this seems to me to form a kind of squalid Dreyfus case. The parallel is extraordinarily close. You have a Parsee, instead of a Jew, with a young and promising career blighted, in each case the degradation from a profession and the campaign for redress and restoration, in each case questions of forgery and handwriting arise, with Esterhazy in the one, and the anonymous writer in the other. Finally, I regret to say that in the one case you have a clique of French officials going from excess to excess in order to cover an initial mistake, and that in the other you have the Staffordshire police acting in the way I have described.

And that brings me to what is the most painful part of my statement, and the one which I would be most glad to shirk were it possible for me to do so. No account of the case is complete which does not deal with the attitude taken up by Captain Anson, Chief Constable of Staffordshire, against this unhappy young man. It must, I suppose, have taken its root in those far-off days from 1892 to 1895, when Edalji was little more than a boy, and when Sergeant Upton, for reasons which make a tale by themselves, sent reports against him to his superior at Stafford. It was at that early date that Captain Anson delivered those two memorable dicta.- “You may tell your son at once that I will not believe any profession of ignorance,” and “I will endeavour to get the offender a dose of penal servitude.”

Now, I have no doubt Captain Anson was quite honest in his dislike, and unconscious of his own prejudice. It would be folly to think otherwise. But men in his position have no right to yield to such feelings. They are too powerful, others are too weak, and the consequences are too terrible. As I trace the course of events this dislike of their chief s filtered down until it came to imbue the whole force, and when they had George Edalji they did not give him the most elementary justice, as is shown by the fact that they did not prosecute Green at a time when his prosecution would have endangered the case against Edalji.

I do not know what subsequent reports prevented justice from being done at the Home Office — (there lies the wickedness of the concealed dossier)

— but this I do know, that, instead of leaving the fallen man alone, every possible effort was made after the conviction to blacken his character, and that of his father, so as to frighten off anyone who might be inclined to investigate his case. When Mr. Yelverton first took it up, he had a letter over Captain Anson’s own signature, saying, under date Nov. 8, 1903: “It is right to tell you that you will find it a simple waste of time to attempt to prove that George Edalji could not, owing to his position and alleged good character, have been guilty of writing offensive and abominable letters. His father is as well aware as I am of his proclivities in the direction of anonymous writing, and several other people have personal knowledge on the same subject.”

Now, both Edalji and his father declare on oath that the former never wrote an anonymous letter in his life, and on being applied to by Mr. Yelverton for the names of the “several other people” no answer was received. Consider that this letter was written immediately after the conviction, and that it was intended to nip in the bud the movement in the direction of mercy. It is certainly a little like kicking a man when he is down.

Since I took up the case I have myself had a considerable correspondence with Captain Anson. I find myself placed in a difficult position as regards these letters, for while the first was marked “Confidential,” the others have no reserve. One naturally supposes that when a public official writes upon a public matter to a perfect stranger, the contents are for the public. No doubt one might also add, that when an English gentleman makes most damaging assertions about other people he is prepared to confront these people, and to make good his words. Yet the letters are so courteous to me personally that it makes it exceedingly difficult for me to use them for the purpose of illustrating my thesis — viz., the strong opinion which Captain Anson had formed against the Edalji family. One curious example of this is that during fifteen years that the vicarage has been a centre of debate, the chief constable has never once visited the spot or taken counsel personally with the inmates.

For three years George Edalji endured the privations of Lewes and of Portland. At the end of that time the indefatigable Mr. Yelverton woke the case up again, and Truth had an excellent series of articles demonstrating the impossibility of the man’s guilt Then the case took a new turn, as irregular and illogical as those which had preceded it At the end of his third year, out of seven, the young man, though in good health, was suddenly released without a pardon. Evidently the authorities were shaken, and compromised with their consciences in this fashion. But this cannot be final. The man is guilty, or he is not If he is he deserves every day of his seven years. If he is not then we must have apology, pardon, and restitution. There can obviously be no middle ground between these extremes.

And what else is needed besides this tardy justice to George Edalji? I should say that several points suggest themselves for the consideration of any small committee. One is the reorganisation of the Staffordshire Constabulary from end to end; a second is an inquiry into any irregularity of procedure at Quarter Sessions; the third and most important is a stringent inquiry as to who is the responsible man at the Home Office, and what is the punishment for his delinquency, when in this case, as in that of Beck, justice has to wait for years upon the threshold, and none will raise the latch. Until each and all of these questions is settled a dark stain will remain upon the administrative annals of this country.

I have every sympathy for those who deprecate public agitations of this kind on the ground that they weaken the power of the forces which make for law and order, by shaking the confidence of the public. No doubt they do so. But every effort has been made in this case to avoid this deplorable necessity. Repeated applications for justice under both Administrations have met with the usual official commonplaces, or have been referred back to those who are obviously interested parties.

Amid the complexity of life and the limitations of intelligence any man may do an injustice, but how is it possible to go on again and again reiterating the same one? If the continuation of the outrages, the continuation of the anonymous letters, the discredit cast upon Gurrin as an expert, the confession of a culprit that he had done a similar outrage, and finally the exposition of Edalji’s blindness, do not present new fact to modify a jury’s conclusion, what possible new fact would do so? But the door is shut in our faces. Now we turn to the last tribunal of all, a tribunal which never errs when the facts are fairly laid before them, and we ask the public of Great Britain whether this tiling is to go on.

Arthur Conan Doyle Undershaw, Hindhead January, 1907.

CASE OF GEORGE EDALJI: LETTER FROM SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

FACSIMILE DOCUMENTS — No. 1

Some six weeks ago a correspondent in the Midlands wrote to me to the effect that the police, when driven out of the position that George Edalji committed the crime for which he was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, would endeavour to defend a second line — namely, that he had written the anonymous letters, and was therefore responsible for the mistake to which he fell a victim. The insight or the information of the writer has seemed to be correct, and this is, indeed, the defence which has been set up, with such success that it has prevented the injured man from receiving that compensation which is his due. In this article I ask your permission to examine this contention, and I hope I shall satisfy your readers, or enable them to satisfy themselves, that the supposition is against all reason or probability, and that a fresh injustice and scandal will arise if it should retard the fullest possible amends being made to this most shamefully-treated man.

During an investigation of this case, which has now extended over five months, I have examined a very large number of documents, and tested a long series of real and alleged facts. During all that time I have kept my mind open, but I can unreservedly say that in the whole research I have never come across any considerations which would make it, I will not say probable, but in any way credible, that George Edalji had anything to do, either directly or indirectly, with the outrages or with the anonymous letters. As the latter question seems to be at the bottom of the ungenerous decision not to give Edalji compensation, I will, with your permission, place some of the documents before your readers, so that they may form their own opinion as to how far the contention that Edalji wrote them can be sustained.

First, I will take the mere question of the handwriting of the letters, and secondly, I will take the internal evidence of their contents. The exhibits, which I will call 1 and 2, are specimens of Edalji's ordinary writing, which is remarkably consistent in the many samples which I have observed. He says, and 1 believe with truth, that he has little power of varying his script. No proof has ever been adduced that he has such power. The specimens here given may be open to the objection that they arc four years later than the time of the outrages, but Edalji was twenty-seven years of age then, and is now thirty-one, and no marked development of writing is likely to occur in the interval. I give two separate specimens that the consistency of their peculiarities may be observed:

I now, for purposes of comparison, give two samples of those letters in 1903 which Mr. Gurrin, the expert who was at fault in the Reck case, declared to be, to the best of his belief, in the writing of George Edalji. To the ruin of the young man he persuaded the jury to adopt his view, and now the committee chosen by the Home Office has endorsed the opinion of the jury, with the result that compensation has been withheld. Exhibits 3 and 4 give specimens of the anonymous letters of 1903.

Now, on comparing the two specimens of Edalji with the two anonymous letters, the first general observation, before going into any details, is that the former is the writing of an educated man, and that the latter is certainly not so. A forger may imitate certain details in writing. A curious fashion of forming a letter is within the powers of even a clumsy imitator. Rut character is more difficult, and more subtle. Compare the real Edalji writing with the addressed envelope of three, or with the postscript of four, and ask yourself whether they do not belong to an entirely different class. Apart from the question of educated as against uneducated writing, the most superficial observer of character, as expressed in writing, would say that one and two were open and free, while three and four were cramped and mean. Yet Mr. Gurrin, the jury, and the Home Office Committee contend that they are the same, and a man’s career has been ruined on the resemblance.

Now let us examine the details. There are one or two points of resemblance which are sufficiently close to make me believe that it is not entirely coincidence, and that there may have been some conscious, though very imperfect imitation, of Edalji’s writing. One of these is a very small twirl made occasionally in finishing a letter. It is visible in the c in the fourth line from the bottom of exhibit two, and in the c of the word “clothes” fifth line from the bottom of three. A close inspection might detect it in several letters of both exhibits, and I am told that it was more common in Edalji’s writing of that date. Another resemblance is the long upward stroke in beginning such words as “kindly” in two, and “known” four lines from the bottom of three. This formation, however, is not unusual. Lastly, there is the r, which might occasionally almost be an e, as in “return” in two, and in “sharp” in three. These peculiarities, especially the last, are so marked that they are, one would imagine, the first points which anyone disguising his hand would suppress, and anyone imitating would reproduce.

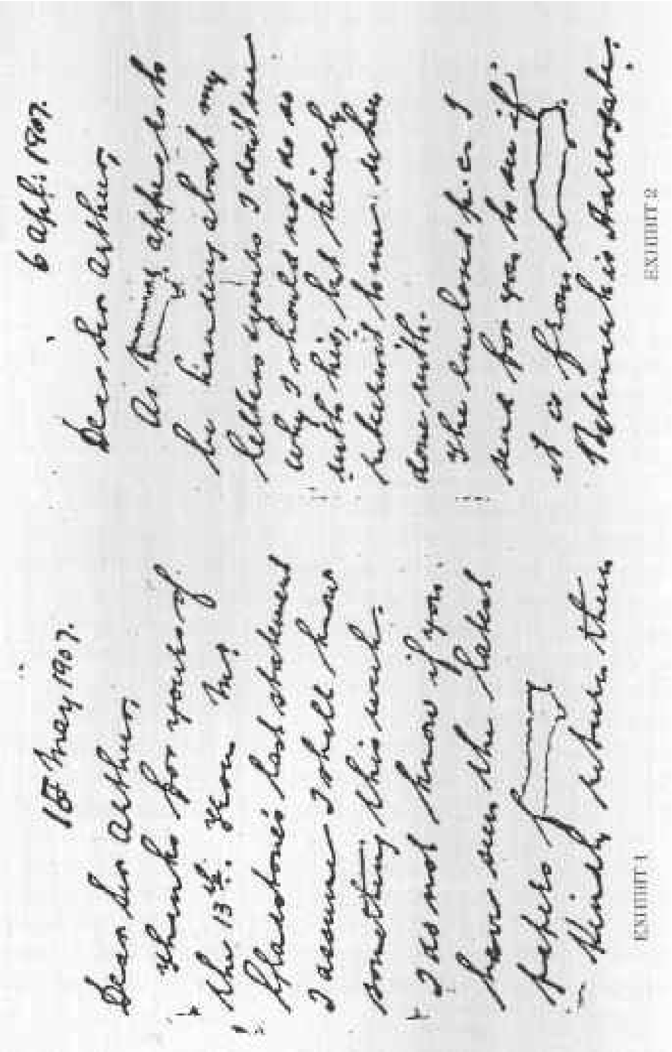

15th May 1907.

Dear Sir Arthur,
Thanks for yours of the 13th. From Mr Gladstone's last statement I assume I shall know something this week.
I do not know if you have seen the latest papers [redacted]
Kindly return them

EXHIBIT 1

6 Apl: 1907.

Dear Sir Arthur,
As [redacted] appears to be handing about my letters & yours I don't see why I should not do so with his, but kindly return it to me when done with.
The enclosed p.c. I send for you to see if it is from [redacted]
Between his Harrogate.

EXHIBIT 2

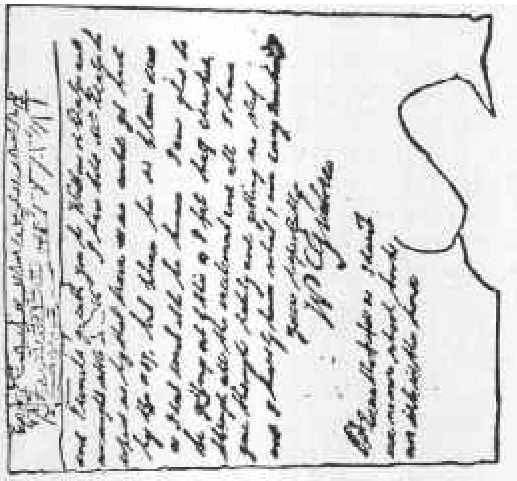

EXHIBIT 4

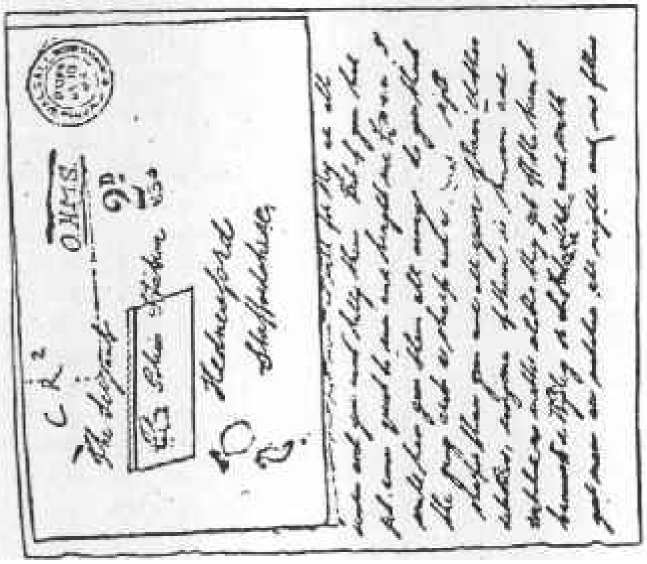

EXHIBIT 3

But now consider the points of difference. See the peculiar huddling of the letters together appearing in such words as “brought,” “sharper,” and “would,” in 3, or in “don’t” “write,” and “known,” in 4. Where is there any trace of this in Edalji’s own writing ? Compare the rounded “g” of the whether they do not belong to an entirely different class. Apart from the question of educated as against uneducated writing, the most superficial observer of character, as expressed in writing, would say that one and two were open and free, while three and four were cramped and mean. Yet Mr. Gurrin, the jury, and the Home Office Committee contend that they are the same, and a man’s career has been ruined on the resemblance.

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So much for the actual writing. The matter becomes perfectly grotesque when we examine the internal evidence of the letters. In the first place, they are written for the evident purpose of exciting the suspicions of the police against two persons — the one being Edalji himself, and the other being young Greatorex, whose name was forged at the end of them. Why should Edalji, an eminently sane young lawyer, with a promising career before him, write to the police accusing himself of a crime of which he was really innocent? The committee speak of a spirit of impish mischief. What evidence of such a spirit has ever been shown in the life of this shy, retiring man? Such an action would appear to me to be inconsistent with sanity, and yet Edalji has always been eminently sane. What possible evidence is there to support so incredible a supposition? And suppose such a thing were true, how then would the introduction of young Greatorex be explained? Young Greatorex and Edalji were practically strangers. They had at most met without conversation when chance threw ‘them into the same railway carriage on the Walsall line. There was no connection between them, no cause of quarrel, no possible reason why Edalji should involve Greatorex in a terrible suspicion, and then voluntarily come to share his danger. The whole supposition is monstrous. But it all becomes clear when we regard the letters as the work of a third person, who was the enemy both of Edalji and of Greatorex, and who hoped by this device to bring down both his birds with one stone. That Edalji had enemies, who had brought ingenious mystifications in letter writing to a fine point is shown by the persecution to which he and his family were subjected from 1892 to 1895. One has only to show that one of those persecutors had also reason to wish evil to young Greatorex, and then it needs no fancifed theories of people writing scurrilous letters about themselves to make the whole situation perfectly credible and clear.

A priori, then, the likelihood of the letters being by Edalji is so slight that nothing but the most marked resemblance in the script could for a moment justify such a supposition. How far such an overpowering resemblance exists the reader can now judge for himself. But apart from the inherent improbability of such a theory, look at all the other points which should have laughed it out of court. Edalji was a well-educated young man, brought up in a clerical atmosphere, with no record of coarse speech or evil life. From his school days at Rugeley, where his headmaster gave him the highest character, until the time when he won the best prizes within his reach at the Legal College of Birmingham, there is nothing against his conduct or his language. Yet these letters are written by a foul-mouthed boor, a blackguard who has a smattering of education, but neither grammar nor decency. They do not as the Committee have said, actually prove that the writer was the man who did the outrages, but they at least show that he had a cruel and bloodthirsty mind, which loved to dwell upon revolting details. “I caught each under the belly, but they did not spurt much blood.” “We will do twenty wenches like the horses.” “He pulls the hook smart across ‘em and out the entrails fly.” This is the writing of a hardened ruffian. Where in Edalji's studious life has he ever given the slightest indications of such a nature? His whole career and the testimony of all who have known him cry out against such a supposition.

Finally, there are certain allusions in the letters which are altogether outside Edalji's possible knowledge. In one of them some seven or eight people are mentioned, all of whom live in a group two stations down the line from Wyrley, and entirely removed from Edalji's very limited circle. They were a group immediately surrounding young Greatorex, and they were put in with a view to substantiating the pretence that he was the writer, for the entanglement of Greatorex was evidently the plotter's chief aim, and the ruin of Edalji was a mere by-product in the operation. One of the people mentioned was the village dressmaker, a second the doctor, a third the butcher, all in the neighbourhood of Greatorex and out of the ken of Edalji. In his attempt to entangle Greatorex the writer actually gave himself away, as it is clear to any intelligence above that of a prejudiced official that he must be one of the very limited number of people who was himself acquainted with this particular group.

There is one other peculiarity in the first Greatorex letter which cannot fail to arrest attention. It is the reiterated allusions to the sea. Edalji had no connection with the sea, and there was no reason why he should write of it. But in this one letter there ore three or four references to it. How is this to be accounted for? When one considers that there had been a former persecution, that this had ended abruptly at the beginning of 1896, that peace had reigned for six years, and that now a new series of letters is commenced by someone whose mind is running upon the sea, one would like to make inquiry as to the possibility of some sailor having returned to the neighbourhood. Should such a man exist, as is likely enough upon a crowded countryside, the fact alone would be of small weight, but, at least, it might be worth an investigator's while to trace the matter further and see if any other points of contact could be established.

I have now dealt with the so-called "Greatorex" letters, and have enabled the reader to judge for himself as to how far the script is identical with that of Edalji. I have also shown that the a-priori reasoning and the internal evidence are absolutely opposed to the idea that the young lawyer wrote them. I am suppressing nothing in order to make a case, for I cannot find any single point in the letters which can be used as an argument that Edalji did write them. It is amazing to me that three men of position like Sir Albert de Rutzen, Sir Arthur Wilson, and the Hon. Mr. Wharton should express themselves as being in agreement with the senseless opinion of the Stafford jury. What possible facts can they allege to support such a contention? Where is the evidence of this “impish spirit” which they have themselves conjured up? It has added three more names to that long line of policemen, officials, and politicians who owe a very abject apology to this ill-used man. Until this apology is offered and reparation made no mutual daubings of complimentary white-wash will ever get them clean.

There are many other documents connected with this case which I should wish to discuss and reproduce in a later article. I should be glad, therefore, if your readers would retain the present specimens for future comparison.

WHO WROTE THE LETTERS? — No. 2

In my last, article I laid before the reader copies of the actual writings of George Edalji, together with specimens of the anonymous letters of 1903, so that each might form his own opinion as to the degree of resemblance in the script. I also showed by the internal evidence of the letters themselves how grotesque is the theory that they were from the pen of the young lawyer, and how mean the refusal to compensate him for his unjust punishment by pretending that he had contributed to his own ruin. I will now lay some further documents before the public in order to illustrate the peculiar nature of the long persecution to which the Edalji family has been subjected, and to prove the fact that the anonymous letters now received by Edalji and by his friends come from the same hand which wrote some of the letters in the series of 1892-95. If anyone conceives the wild theory that Edalji has been persecuting himself during all these years, I will undertake to show that such a supposition cannot be fitted into the facts. I admit that no one can put a limit to the strange aberrations of human nature, and that it is possible to conceive of a man otherwise sane who had some kink in his brain which compelled him from time to time to write abusive and scurrilous documents to himself and to his people. In this case, however, it is not only possible to show that Edalji did not write the letters, but also to draw some fairly reliable inferences as to the people who did. This, I venture to do in the hope that some remark of mine may possibly prove suggestive to good citizens upon the spot, and help them to find some of the missing links in this long and tangled chain of events.

Those who have interested themselves in the case will remember that the main persecution of the Edalji family began in the year 1892, and lasted until the beginning of 1896. During that time hundreds of letters of an extraordinary nature were sent to them; hoaxes of the most ingenious description were played upon them; bogus advertisements of an offensive character were put in their names into the papers; objects were thrown into the vicarage grounds, and many other pranks played upon them. Any one of these might be described as trivial, but the continued, ingenious persecution, lasting over three years, became cruelty of a most diabolical kind, under which the minds of the victims might well have broken down.

To the lasting disgrace of the Staffordshire police this man-baiting was allowed to continue for this long period without any serious effort upon their part to shield the unfortunate family from their brutal tormentors. Their complaints were unheeded, or else it was hinted to them, exactly as it is now said to the son, that their sufferings were in some way due to themselves. It is a story which any unofficial Englishman must read with shame and indignation.

I have carefully examined a considerable number of the letters and postcards written by the conspirators, and I have been able to come to some definite conclusions about them. In the first place, there appear to have been three of them, two adults and a boy. I must admit that the writings of the two adults are so fluid, and run so frequently into the same characteristics, that I am prepared to find that they both came from one individual. Such a supposition is possible, but I think that it is very improbable. I seem to trace three lines of thought and character, as well as three peculiarities of script. We will take it, then, that there is adult writing and that there is boy writing, the adult writing being separable into two. Of the boy, it may be definitely stated that he could not have been less than twelve or more than sixteen. I find no exact evidence as to the age of the others, save that the mischief which characterises the whole proceeding, and the fact that they could devote so very much time and attention to it — some of the letters are of great length — would seem to indicate that they were still youths, and that they had no settled occupation. It is fairly certain that they must have lived within a radius of a mile or two of the vicarage, since many of the missives were left by hand.

Let us now consider what relation these three plotters bore to each other. Had there been a cramming establishment, or any other centre where mischievous young men could congregate, I should say that very likely they were no relations, but mere partners in a cruel practical joke. I have been unable to find, however, that anything of the sort exists in that neighbourhood. Yet these three individuals, the two young adults and the boy, undoubtedly lived under the same roof. Their epistles are continually on the same paper, and in the same envelopes. In some cases the rude scrawl of the boy comes in upon the very page which is taken up by the educated writing of the adult A sheet may exhibit on one side an elaborate forgery of the signatures of the Edaljis, the Brookes, or some other neighbouring family, while on the other is a rude drawing (rude in every sense), which could only have been done by a lad. The adults appeared to pride themselves upon forgers', and the results, so far as I have been able to test them, show that they had remarkable powers in that direction. "Do you think that we could not imitate your kid's writing?" they say exultantly in one of the 1892 letters. They most certainly could — and did.

What are we to say, then, of three youths, all living under one roof, and engaged over several years in long succession of heartless practical jokes. It is possible that they were three clerks in an office, or three assistants in a business, but in such a case, how are we to account for the presence among them of a boy? On the whole, the balance of probability is greatly in favour of there being three relatives, brothers for choice, who are working together in the matter. The fact that the rude writing of the youngest developed at a later date some of the peculiarities of his elders, would seem to indicate a family habit In this way we have built up, as a rough working hypothesis, the idea of two young men and an exceedingly foul-mouthed boy, who are brothers or close relations, and fellow-conspirators in this persecution. Let us see now if an inspection of the letters can give us any information of the habits of these young blackguards. The first thing which is perfectly evident is the connection of the younger one with Walsall Grammar School. Walsall Grammar School is an excellent educational establishment, and a great boon to all the country round, but like every other school, it has an occasional black sheep, and it needs no far-fetched inference to make it certain that this youngster was among them. Let me explain here that it was not merely the Edalji family who were persecuted by scurrilous letters, but that several other families in the neighbourhood, notably the Brookes and the Wynnes, were troubled in the same fashion. Now, both the Brookes and the Wynnes had a son at that time at Walsall School, and the headmaster of Walsall was also a recipient of anonymous letters, written in the same rough boyish hand, so that the focus of trouble seems certainly to lie there. I may explain in passing that George Edalji was at Rugeley Grammar School, and had no connection whatever with Walsall.

My point is, then, that the youngest of these three brothers, the ill-conditioned boy, had some connection with Walsall School. To illustrate it I append an exhibit, which, for purposes of future reference, I will call No. 1.

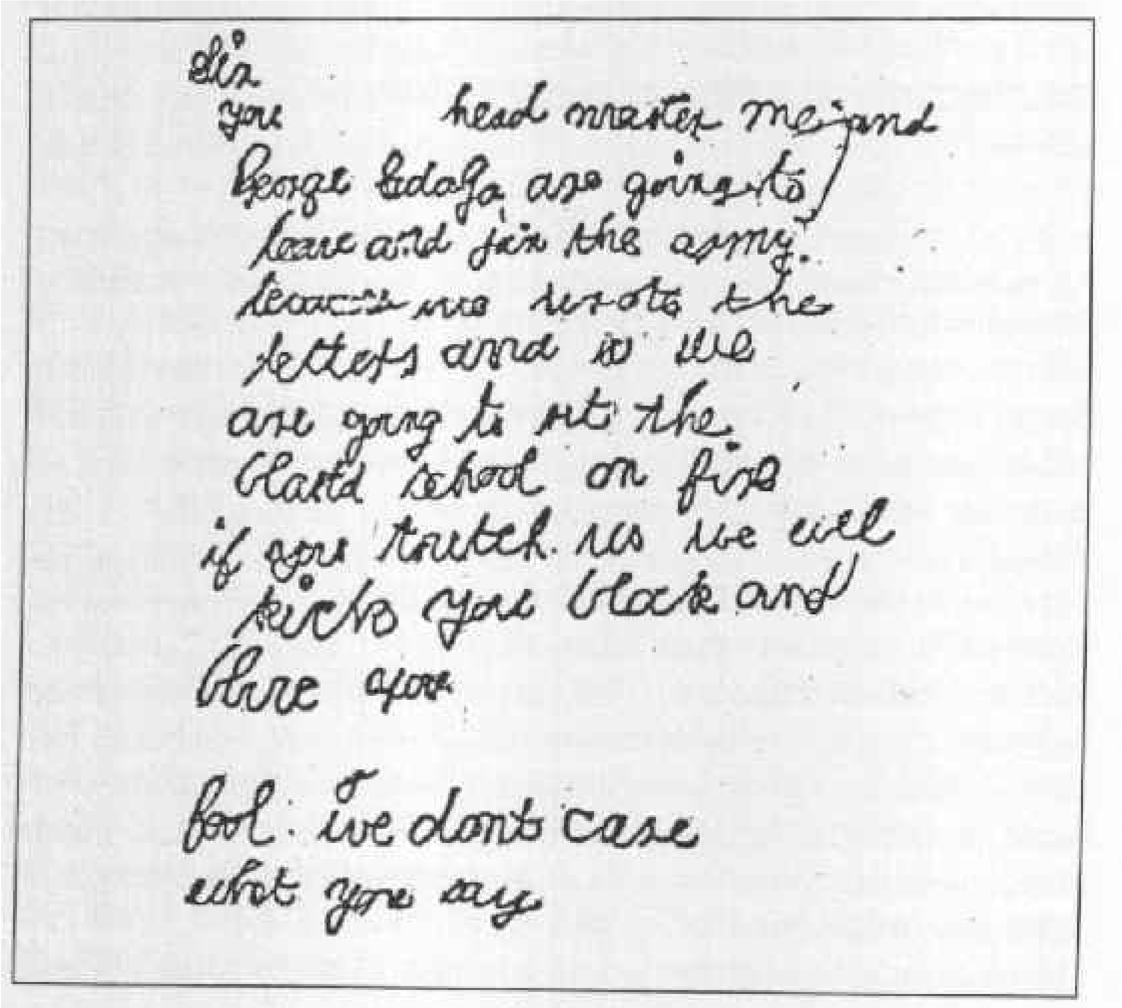

Sir
you head master me and
George Edalja are going to
leave and jin the army.
because we wrote the
letters and so we
are going to set the
Blank school on fire
if you tutch us we will
kicks you black and
blue you
fool. we dont care
what you say

No. 1

Here the writer, dragging in as usual the butt, Edalji, whose very name he cannot at that time spell, utters the most scurrilous threats against the headmaster.

This writing is, beyond all doubt, as will afterwards be demonstrated, the same as that of the younger conspirator.

Here now we are getting at something tangible. The writer of 1 was a boy who entertained a malignant hatred of the headmaster of Walsall School. Why? It does not seem to be stretching the argument to suppose that it is a boy who has often felt the headmaster’s cane, or possibly has been expelled for his evil conduct Without over-elaborating the point it can at least be stated as a probability, indeed almost a certainty, that the boy brother was a scholar at Walsall (and a very backward unruly one) in the year 1892. The argument up to this point must certainly approximate to the truth. It is possible, therefore, that an examination of the records of Walsall (Grammar School at that date would give a starting point for an investigation.

Not only can we say with some certainty that this young rascal was at Walsall, but there is a strong probability that one of the others was at the same school, though his age, as indicated by his writing, would show that he had either left before the older joined, or that he was in the higher when his younger brother was in the lower classes. He joins his young brother in writing anonymously to the Brookes and the Wynnes, showing a certain community of interest where school matters are concerned. His scholastic record must have been a very different one, for both his script and the contents of his letters show a very alert and ingenious mind. In one of his letters there is a long quotation from Milton. I believe that I am correct in stating that this particular book of Milton had been the school exercise some little time before. I

repeat, therefore, that the balance of evidence is in favour of one at least of the elder brothers having been a senior scholar at Walsall at or about the time when his brother was a junior. This should narrow down the field of an inquiry.

In this connection we must consider the incident of the Walsall Grammar School key. This key was discovered by the village constable on Dec. 12, 1892, upon the window-sill of the vicarage, and George Edalji, upon the unvarying principle of laying everything mysterious to his charge, was at once accused of having put it there, how he could have got it from the six-mile-off school, or what end could be served by so foolish a prank, was never explained. Yet it was over this incident that the chief constable wrote: “If the persons concerned in the removal of the key refuse to make any explanation of the subject, I must necessarily treat the matter as a theft. I may say at once, that I shall not pretend to believe any protestations of ignorance which your son may make about this key. My information on the subject does not come from the police.” When one takes this incident with the preceding evidence as to Walsall Grammar School being the focus of the mischief, is it not exceedingly probable that the key was brought over by the same mischievous scholars who wrote the letters, and that the chief constable’s information was conveyed in one of their ingenious epistles? There is, at least, nothing unnatural or far-fetched in such a supposition, while the suggestion that George Edalji would travel twelve miles in order to lay on his own father’s window-sill a key which nobody wanted is grotesque in its improbability. I only recall the incident at present as a corroboration of the theory which I am demonstrating, that the storm-centre at that time lay in Walsall School.

I will now present specimens of the script of the two elders of the trio, with the proviso that it is within the bounds of possibility that the two may eventually prove to have been one. For the present, at least. I will differentiate them. One of them, who seems to me to be the elder, as his thought and expression are the more developed is the creature who writes extraordinary religious rant over the signature of “God-Satan.” There are remarkable qualities in these mad effusions, grim humour, wild imagination, and a maniacal turn of mind, which alternates between hysterical religion and outrageous blasphemy. It was no ordinary man who wrote the following characteristic effusion:

“I must live partly in Heaven and partly in hell, so if that ever-accursed monster Satan tries to detain me in hell I will fight with him and throw myself into the gulf which is fixed between hell and Heaven, and then I shall be able to climb out of the gulf into Heaven. And moreover, if God tries to push me back into hell I will defy God and struggle with him, and if I cannot prevail I will hold on to God and fall with Him over the precipice of hell.”

“If you wish to escape having your house blown up by dynamite you are to do this thus, namely, order the postman to take Mrs. M. ‘s body out of her grave and bring it to your house. You are then to break open her head, take out her brains, and boil them in a cauldron of port wine for three hours. Next you are to order Mr. — to come to your house, make him open his mouth and drink the contents of the cauldron whilst boiling. If you do this to my satisfaction I will ask God not to give you such a hot place in hell.”

There are countless pages of this strange, pernicious stuff”, alternating with such lighter passages as this: You vindictive wretch I dare you to do to me whatever your vengeance prompts you, but spare, oh, spare, the honest police!” I

append as a specimen of the script the page, which I shall number as 2, upon which the latter gem appears.

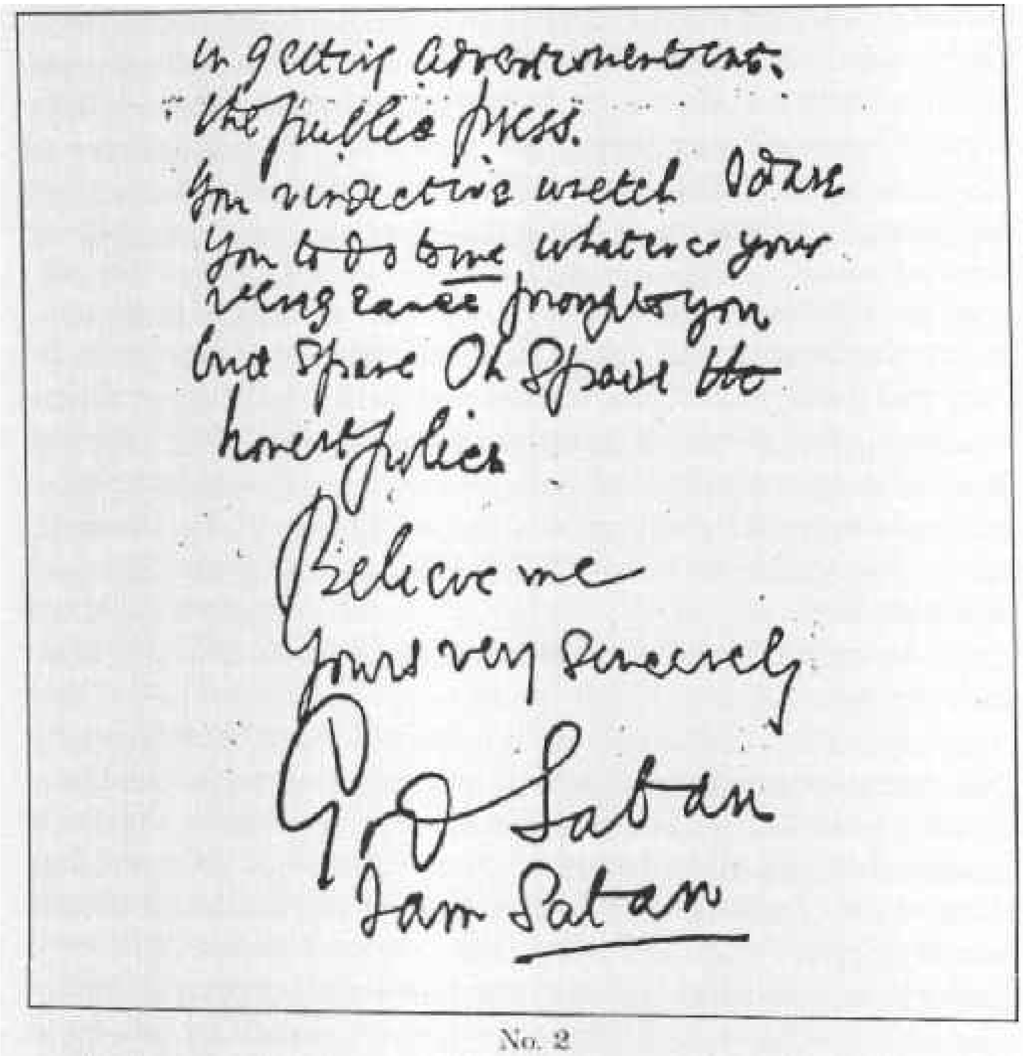

in getting advertisements
the public press.
You vindictive wretch I dare
you to do to me whatever your
vengeance prompts you
but spare Oh spare the
honest police

Believe me
Yours very sincerely
G O Satan
I am Satan

No. 2

The writing in all these effusions is fluent and easy, with every mark of an educated hand. I can find no evidence that any particular care has been taken to disguise it, but it is naturally unformed, and does not set rigidly into definite characteristics.

From 1896 onwards this individual disappears entirely, and I was at some loss to form an opinion as to whether the mania was real or simulated. It bore every aspect of being real, but on the other hand it was difficult to conceive that such a person could so conceal his mental eccentricity as to escape general comment Some weeks ago, however, an incident occurred which convinced me that the man still lives, and that he is now a marked religious maniac. A newspaper containing some account of the Edalji affair had found its way to Long Beach, California, in the United States. A page of it was sent back to Mr. George Edalji, with religious and blasphemous comments scribbled in pencil all round the margins. The general character of this script the knowledge shown of the case, and the singular mental conditions, have all convinced me that whatever be his name, God-Satan is now to be found on the Pacific Coast and that he is an undoubted madman.

So much for the elder of the three hypothetical individuals, he now drops out of the narrative, and we come to the second. This man writes a closer, smaller hand, with many of his senior's peculiarities. There is no fancy and no madness in his productions. On the contrary, they are particularly practical. They are usually postcards of an allusive character, sent to someone at a distance, and signed with a forged name. At his ingenious bidding deluded tradesmen have brought huge consignments of goods to the vicarage, brother clergymen have hastened to Wyrley upon all sorts of urgent summonses, and editors have inserted the most monstrous advertisements as to the extraordinary needs of the vicar. The exhibit No. 3 gives a specimen of the script

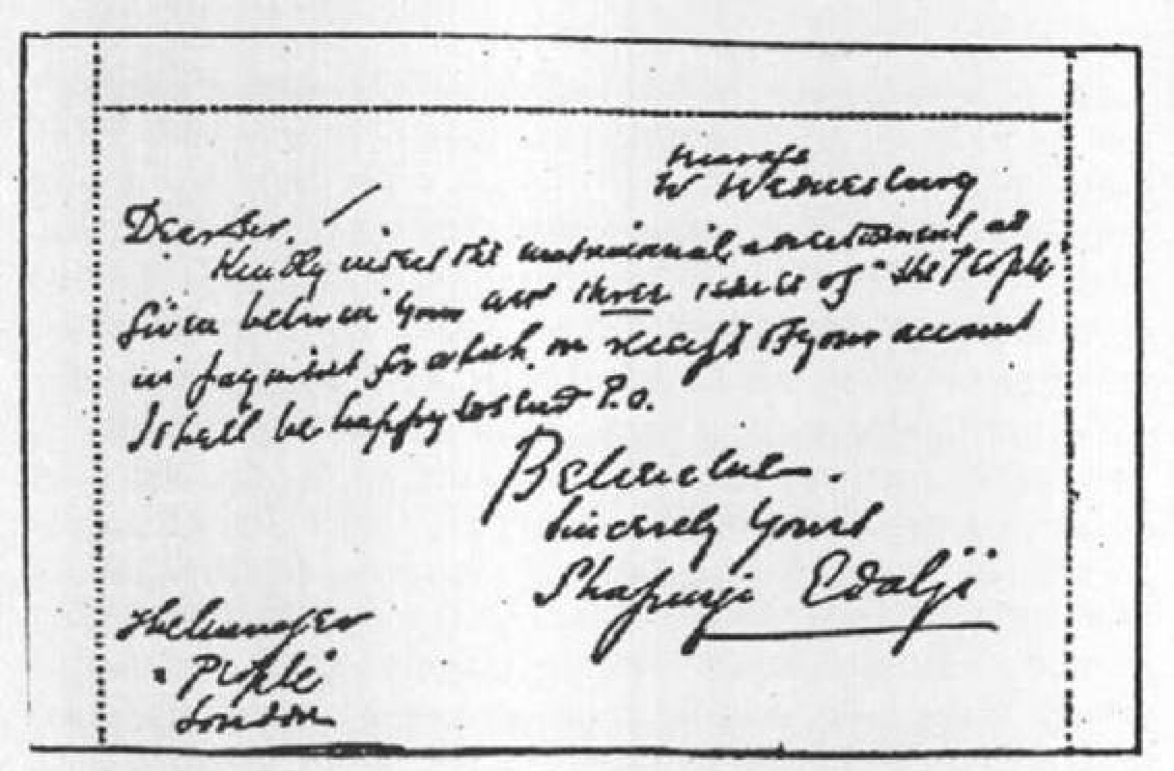

Vicarage
Gt Wyrley

Dear Sir, /
Kindly insert the matrimonial advertisement as given below in your next three issues of "The People" in payment for which on receipt of your account I shall be happy to send P.O.

Believe me.
Sincerely Yours
Shapurji Edalji

The Manager
"People"
London

No. 3

Of this man's future I know nothing, and it may well prove, when the veil comes to be lifted, that he is simply another manifestation of the ingenuity of "God-Satan."

I will pursue the subject in a concluding letter.

THE “MARTIN MOLTON” LETTERS — No. 3.

We now come to the third individual whom we have constructed, the foul-mouthed boy. He is far the more interesting and important of the three, for whereas the others drop out he carries on the persecution. As I will presently show, I have myself received a letter from him within the last few weeks, one of a considerable series which have been signed by various pseudonyms, but which I will call in future the Martin Molton letters, since that was the name which was attached to the first specimen. That Martin Molton, of 1907, and the bad boy of 1892 are the same individual is, as I will show, beyond all reasonable doubt.

Let me pause here for one instant to consider the theory which I really believe still lingers at the Home Office, that the bad boy of 1892-95 was actually George Edalji reviling his own people, and writing furious letters to those who had never offended him. If the officials could only make good that proposition, when they could point to him also as being Martin Molton and all would be well. But to any unprejudiced mind, with no official theory to sustain, the thing is beyond argument. Look at the writing of 1 and also of 4. It is rude, coarse, and unformed to the last degree. Such as it is it appears unchanged in the persecuting letters up to the end of 1895. Now, at that date George Edalji was nineteen years of age, an excellent scholar”, who had finished his grammar school education, and had already started that course of legal study in Birmingham at which he was to win such distinction. Can anyone believe that he is responsible for this barbarous writing and more barbarous spelling and grammar. It is impossible to suppose such a thing, and by saying so we dispose for ever of the wild idea that Martin Molton was George Edalji, for whoever wrote the schoolboy scrawl of 1892-95 wrote the letters of 1907.

Let me now make that point clear before I go any further. I present side by side two exhibits, which I call 4 and 5. 4 is a specimen of the bad boy’s writing, dating back to 1893. Alienists will be interested in the circular dots to the i’s, which are recognised as a symptom of lunacy. 5 is a short extract from a long abusive anonymous letter which reached me on April 17 of this year, posted on that date in the N. W. or Euston quarter of London.

Compare the character of the writing. Compare the words “run” and the words “murder” in each. Compare the peculiar r’s shaped like x. Is there any reasonable man who can doubt that the thing is beyond coincidence, and that the same hand fashioned each? It may be fairly inferred, also, that the writer has been employed during the fourteen years which have elapsed in some trade which has not required much clerical work, as it is difficult to believe otherwise that he would not have developed his calligraphy.

Having, as I hope, satisfied the reader that the young rascal of 1893 is the writer of the anonymous letter quoted above, I must complete my point by showing that the latter is also Martin Molton. The handwriting of all these 1907 letters is identical, save that in some cases the Greek e is used with an ordinary r, while in others the ordinary e is used with the peculiar r. I append an extract from my letter, 6, and one from the Martin Molton series, 7, which will, I hope, satisfy the reader that they are the same script, and that they are therefore both the handiwork of the bad boy of Walsall School. T may add that of the Martin Molton series five were posted in London and two in Birmingham.

Now we have secured the two ends of our chain, and it only remains to examine those central links which are formed by the letters of 1903 — those letters which the committee, and also the jury, have most unreasonably ascribed to Edalji. I claim that I have shown these two ends to be from another hand, and if I can show that there is any correspondence or connection between them and the 1903 letters, then the latter also are from another hand. I have in my previous article shown, both by the script and by the internal evidence, that it is in the highest degree improbable that they could have been by Edalji. I now propose to show that it is, on die

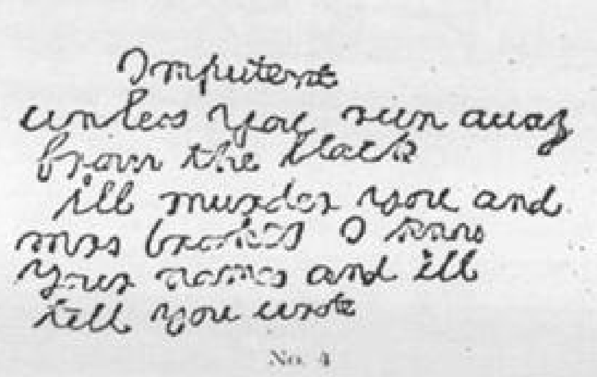

Impuitent
unless you run away
from the place
ill murder you and
mrs brooks I know
your names and ill
tell you write

No. 4

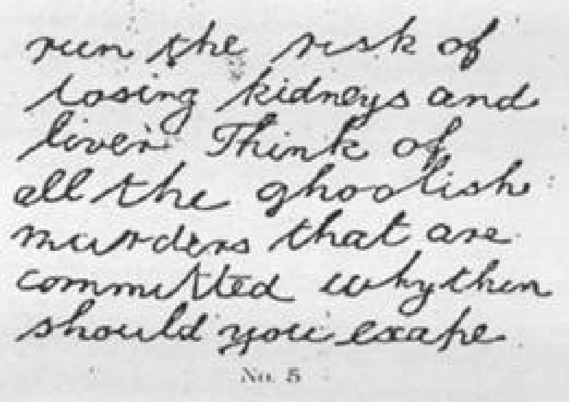

run the risk of
losing kidneys and
liver Think of
all the ghoolish
murders that are
committed why then
should you escape

No. 5

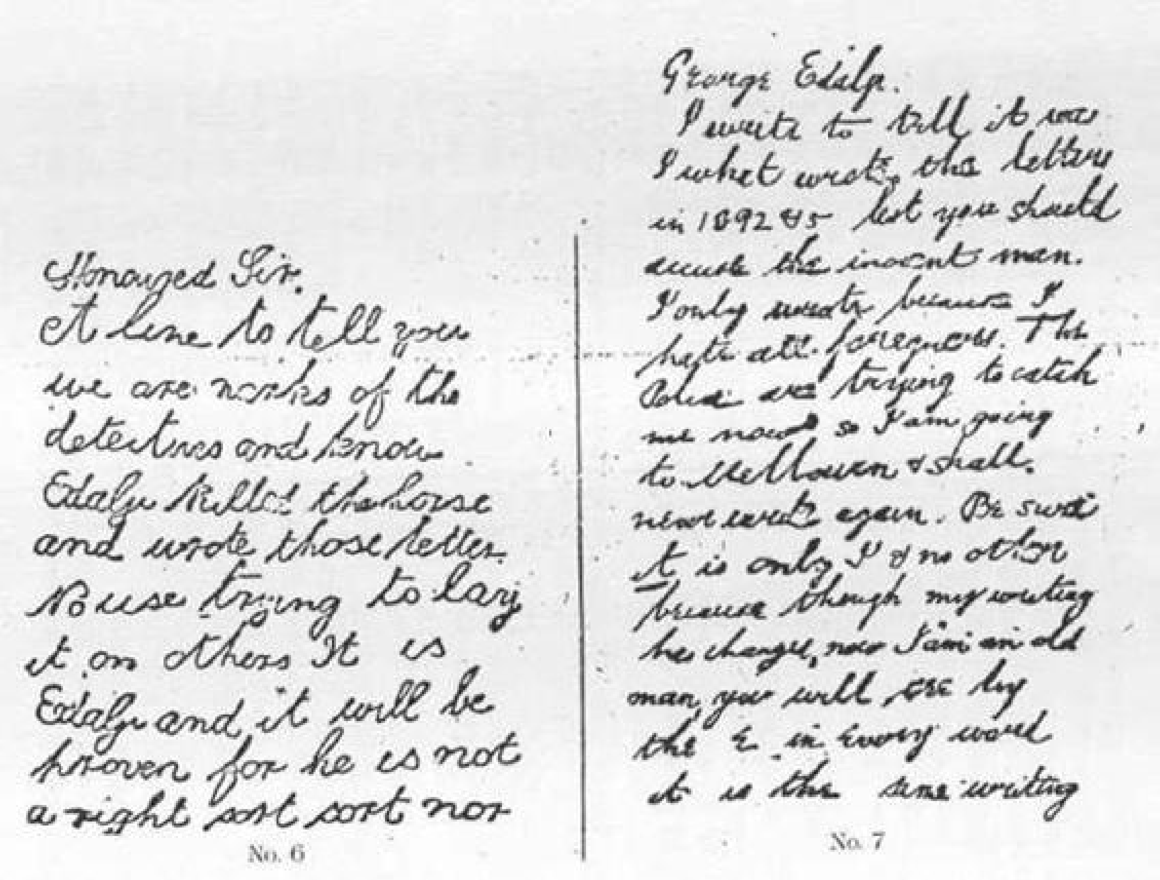

Honoured Sir.
A line to tell you
we are works of the
detectives and know
Edalji killed the horse
and wrote those letter.
No use trying to lay
it on others It is
Edalji and it will be
proven for he is not
a right sort sort nor

No. 6

George Edalji.
I write to tell it was
I what wrote the letters
in 1892–95 lest you should
accuse the inocent man.
I only wrote because I
hate all foreigners. The
Police are trying to catch
me now so I am going
to Melbourn & shall
never write again. Be sure
it is only I & no other
because though my writing
be changed, now I am an old
man, you will see by
the E in every word
it is the same writing

No. 7

other hand, in the highest degree probable that they are by the same author as the others. Who that may be it is for those upon the spot to determine.

First of all I reproduce part of the envelope of one of the Martin Molton letters (8), and I place below it the forged signature of Wilfred Greatorex in 1903. Let the reader look at the two capital Ws. Each is curiously fashioned, and yet there is an absolute similarity between them.

Is this within the range of coincidence? I have shown that there is a history of forgery in the family from the beginning, and the actual writing is cleverly concealed, but every here and there, as in this conspicuous W, there is a glaring lapse.

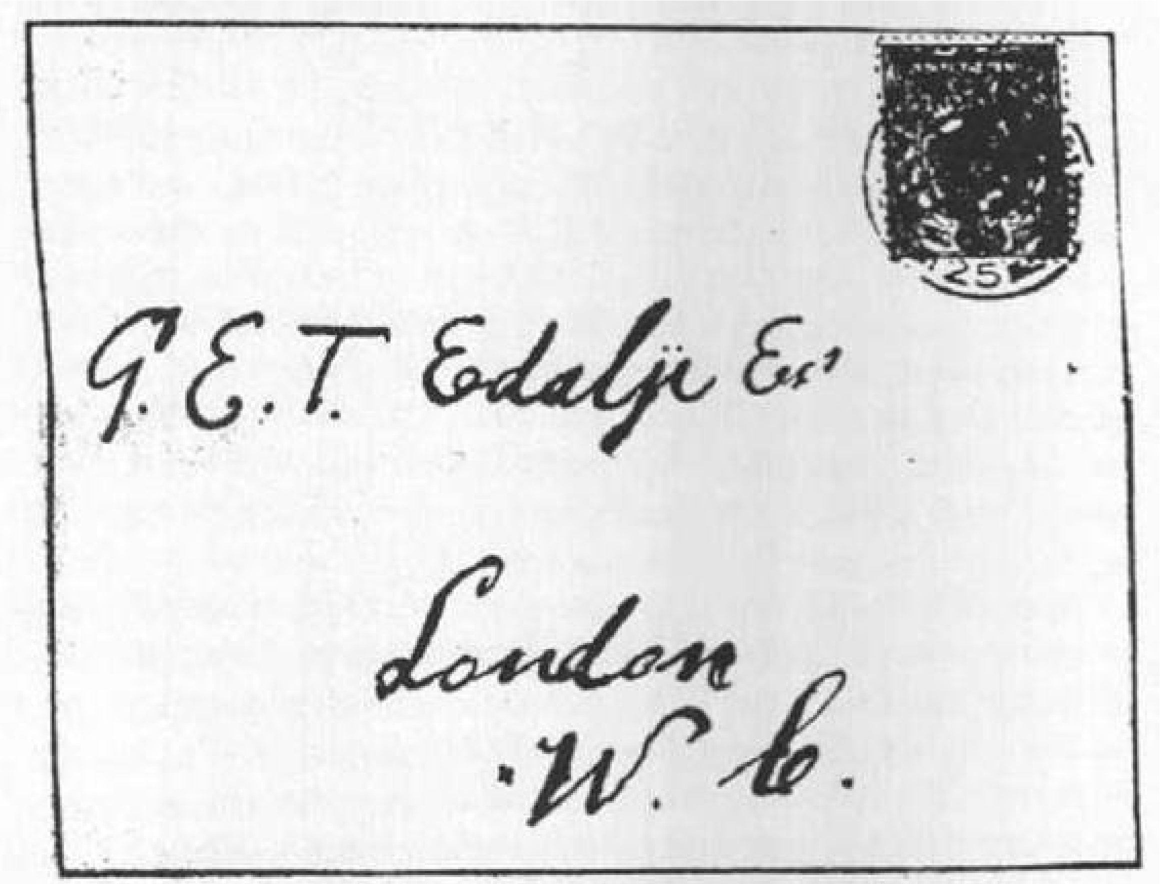

G.E.T. Edalji Esq

London

W.C.

No. 8

Even the same phrases recur in the different series of letters. I have one of the 1903 letters before me as I write, and I read in it, “None of the people think you a right sort,” addressed to George Edalji. Turn to exhibit 6, and you will find the same phrase applied to the same man in the letters of 1907. Is this also coincidence? See the continued ill will towards the Edaljis breaking out in 1893, 1903, and again in 1907. Is this also coincidence, and is the central mystification distinct from the first and the last? It is not for me to state who actually wrote the letters of 1903, but I claim that, while in my last article I proved that all the evidence is against them having been done by George Edalji, in the present I have shown that there are very sound reasons to believe that they are from the same hand as

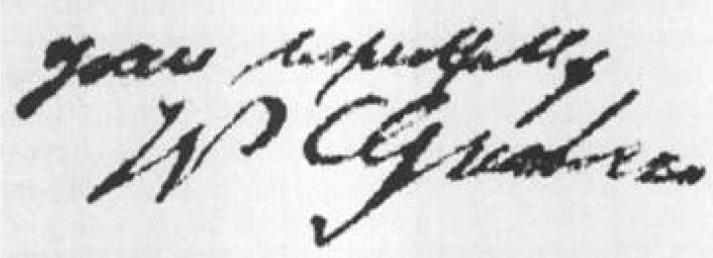

Yours respectfully

W. Greatorex

No. 9

those of 1893 and of 1907. I have also given some indications by which that hand may be traced.

Just one word at this point as to the object of all this elaborate mystification. Of that I have no doubt at all. The culprit is a lunatic, and his destination when his pranks have all been brought home to him should be, not a prison, but an asylum. The religious mania of the elder conspirator is the index of a family weakness which becomes a diabolically mischievous madness in the junior. He will be found, when exposed, to be a man of eccentric life and character, with periodical accessions of actual madness, during which he loses all prudence and control. Had the persecution been confined to the Edaljis, one might well have imagined that some secret reason could explain it, but it has broken out in so many directions, and been accompanied by such senseless deeds, that nothing but a disordered brain can be behind it Such a man is a danger to the community in which he lives, as no one can say what turn his destructive propensities may take. That he still lives in the Midlands, and possibly in the very district of the crimes, is made feasible by the postmarks of two of the Martin Molton letters. I trust that it will not be long before he is under medical supervision.

I have purposely said nothing of the outrages diem selves, and confined my remarks to the letters, since these are the only things for which Edalji is now held responsible, and it is on account of that alleged responsibility that compensation is refused him. The writing of the letters does not appear to be a criminal offence, or at worst a minor one, so that if the assertion were true that Edalji wrote diem, the country would none the less owe him compensation for his three years of gaol. I trust, however, that I have convinced every impartial man that the balance of evidence is enormously against Edalji having had anything to do with the letters. Redress for one unjust accusation has been refused by the simple process of making a second equally unjust. Nowhere in the State document is there one word of sorrow or repentance for the blunder so tardily found out. All honest, manly admission and moderate redress would have been met in a conciliatory spirit, and the matter would have ended. As it is, the sore still runs. Fortunately, behind the mutual whitewashers and the ring of interested officials, there is always the great public to whom an injured man may appeal.

Those who have followed my argument, and who agree with those conclusions, which seem to me to be inevitable, may well ask why all these documents and this reasoning have not been laid before the Committee and the Home Office. My answer is that they were so. I wish I could say with assurance that they were ever considered by the Committee. “Facts and printed matter” is their guarded description of what they have examined, and my documents could not be included in the latter. In their report there is not a word which leads me to think that my evidence was considered, and there are several passages — notably about Green, and about the eyesight — which make it difficult for me to believe that it was so. In the matter of the eyesight, the opinion of some unnamed prison doctor is endorsed, while there is no comment on the views of fifteen experts, some of them the first oculists in the country, which I sent in. As to the Home Office, I have shown them documents and demonstrated the points here set forth until I was weary. I was treated always with courtesy, but I was met also with a chilly want of sympathy. Instead of recognising that I had no possible object, save the ends of justice, and that it was their function in this country to see that justice was done, they took an obvious side in favour of impeached officialdom, and made me feel at every point that there was a hostile atmosphere around me. However, in spite of every obstacle, nine-tenths of the victory is won, and I have not a doubt that the fair-minded men of this country, apart from every consideration of persons or politics, will see that it is made complete by public apology and redress for a public wrong.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
Undershaw, May 20 .

STATEMENT OF THE CASE AGAINST ROYDEN SHARP

of Cannock, for the committing of those outrages upon Cattle from February to August, 1903, for which GEORGE EDALJI was condemned to Seven Years' penal servitude at Stafford Assizes, November, 1903.

At the time of the outrages, roughly July, 1903, Royden Sharp had a conversation alone with Mrs. Greatorex, who is the wife of Mr. W. A. Greatorex, Littleworth Farm, Hednesford, who was appointed Trustee at the time of the death of Peter Sharp, the father, in November, 1893. To this gentleman, Mr. Greatorex, I owe much assistance in working out the case. In the course of the conversation referred to above, Royden Sharp — after alluding to the outrages — went to a cupboard, and produced a horse lancet of unusual size. He showed this to Mrs. Greatorex, saying, “This is what they kill the cattle with.” Mrs. Greatorex was horrified, and told him to put it away, saving, “You don't want me to think you are the man, do you?” The possession by Sharp of this unusual instrument of so huge a size is to be explained by the fact that he served for ten months of 1902 on board a cattle boat between Liverpool and America. No doubt he took this lancet when he left the boat. I suggest that the instrument is still in the house, and could be secured in case of an arrest.

The fact that this was true, and that this actually was the instrument with which the crimes were committed is corroborated by the following considerations: —

That the wounds in all the earlier outrages up to August 18th were of a peculiar character, which could not have been inflicted by any other weapon. In even case there was a shallow incision which had cut through the skin and muscles, but had not penetrated the gut. Had any knife been plunged in and drawn along it must almost certainly have cut the gut with its point.

The blade in question is like this:

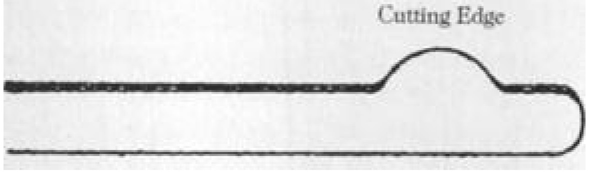

It is very sharp, but could not penetrate further than superficially. The witnesses who could testify most clearly as to the nature of the wounds are Mr. Sambrook, a butcher, who has now removed from Wyrley to Sheffield, but can, I understand, be easily traced, and Mr. Forsyth, a veterinary surgeon, of Cannock. I know that Mr. Sambrook was struck by the peculiarity of the cuts.

Royden Sharp was in all respects peculiarly fitted to have done these crimes, and there is, apart from this incident, much evidence both before the time of the crimes, during the time and after the time to cause him to be regarded with gravest suspicion. I will, for the moment, put on one side the persecution of the Edaljis (in which he was concerned with his elder brother Wallie in 1892-95) and confine the evidence entirely to that which bears upon the outrages and the anonymous letters of 1903. I will first trace his early career.

EVIDENCE OF HIS CHARACTER BEFORE THE CRIMES

Royden Sharp was born in 1879. He very early showed marked criminal tendencies which took a destructive form. When he was 12 years of age he was found to have set a rick on fire at a Cannock Farm (Hatton’s Farm at West Cannock) and his father was forced to pay a considerable compensation. He was sent at the age of eleven to Walsall Grammar School, where his brother Wallie was an elder scholar at the time. His record at the school was as follows: this is an extract which I got from the school books through the courtesy of Mr. Mitchell, the present headmaster.

Xmas, 1890. Lower 1. Order, 23rd out of 23.

Very backward and weak. French and Latin not attempted.

Easter, 1891. Lower 1. Order, 20th out of 20.

Dull, homework neglected, begins to improve in Drawing.

Midsummer, 1891. Lower 1. Order, 18th out of 18.

Beginning to progress, caned for misbehaviour in class, tobacco chewing, prevarication, and nicknaming.

Xmas, 1891. Lower 1. Order, 16th out of 16.

Unsatisfactory, often untruthful Always complaining or being complained of Detected cheating, and frequently absent without leave. Drawing improved.

Easter 1892. Form 1. Order, 8th out of o.

Idle and mischievous, caned daily, wrote to father, falsified schoolfellows’ marks, and lied deliberately about it Caned 20 times this term.

Midsummer, 1892. Played truant, forged letters and initials, removed by his father.

It will thus be seen that forgery, which played a part in the anonymous letters of 1903 was familiar to him as a school boy.

Apart from the forgery which the school records show to have been done by him, the disposition to brutal violence was very marked, and so was that of foisting upon others, often with considerable ingenuity, the misdeeds of his own doing. Out of the anonymous letters which are certainly from his hand at this school period 1892-95, I take the two following expressions:

> “I will cut your bowels out,”
> “I will open your belly,”

showing curiously how his own thoughts were already turning. If he were left in a railway carriage he would turn up the cushion and slit it on the lower side, so as to let out the horse hair. This evidence is given by Mr. Wynne, painter, of “Clovelly,” Cheslyn Hay, who was at school with him. He adds the following anecdote illustrative of his destructiveness, of his bearing false witness, and of his writing vindictive anonymous letters, all of diem qualities which came out 10 years later in 1903.

During the time that the Edalji family had been deluged with anonymous letters from 1892 to 1895 (which letters I have good reason to believe were from the Sharps), another family in the same village, the Brookes, were plagued in the same way, and in the same handwriting, especially the young son, Fred Brookes. I had failed to find any cause, save colour hatred, in the case of the Edaljis, so I hoped I might get something more definite in the case of young Brookes. This is Wynne’s story: —

MR. WYNNE’S STATEMENT

“R.S.,” known as “Speck,” was a small built youth with sharp features. Generally in a sailor’s suit, he was the worst scholar in the school for about three years, and remained at the bottom of the first form. He was very fond of chewing tobacco, and I think it was in the Summer holiday of 1892

that he set a rick on fire near Hednesford... One evening we were returning by the usual evening train. F. G. Brookes and myself got in the train when Speck came running into the same compartment straight to the end of the carriage, and put his head through the carriage window smashing it all to bits. We all made our way into another compartment In a day or two after Brookes and myself were charged by one of the railway officials of breaking the carriage window. We found out that Sharp had told of us. that it was us. not himself Then we sought the station master, and told him how it happened, and Sharp had to pay for it, and he was also caught cutting the straps of the window, and had to pay, I think, more than once; his father was asked to take him away from the school as they could not do any good with him. He was always into mischief and getting others into trouble. The next I heard was he was sent to sea "If my memory serves me right the first letters that I heard of were sent to Mr. W H. Brookes, some time after the railway carriage incident, in a large school handwriting, saying that "Your kid and Wynn's kid have been spitting in an old woman's face on Walsall station." and requesting monies to be sent to Walsall Post Office. The second one was threatening to prosecute if the money was not sent.

Thus the receipt of the anonymous letters by Brookes immediately followed a cause of feud between young Brookes and Royden Sharp.

Having been expelled from school Roy den Sharp was apprenticed to a butcher, thus learning to use a knife upon W. A. Greatorex, of Littleworth Farm, became Royden's Trustee. This gentleman is an excellent witness, and ready to help the ends of justice in any way. It was to his wife that the implied confession was made. For two years, 1894 and 1895, this gentleman had much trouble with the lad. Finally he sent him to sea. He went to sea from Liverpool on December 30di in the ship "General Roberts," belonging to Lewis Davies & Co., 5, Fenwick Street Liverpool. He went as apprentice.

From the time he left the letters, hoaxes, &c., which had kept the countryside in a turmoil, ceased completely, and were not renewed until his return in 1903. I may remark in passing that Edalji was at home all this time, and that this fact alone would, one would have thought, have awakened the suspicions of the police and shown them who was the author of the troubles. I am told, but have not verified the fact, that the last anonymous hoax on the Edaljis was an advertisement in a Blackpool paper, about the end of December, 1895 — Blackpool being the pleasure resort of Liverpool.

Royden Sharp does not, so far as my enquiries go, appear to have acted badly aboard ship. He finished his apprenticeship in 1900, and afterwards gained a third Mate's certificate. He came home late in 1901, but shortly after got a billet on board a cattle ship to America, where his natural brutality was probably not lessened, and where he, no doubt, got the huge horse lancet which Mrs. Greatorex can depose to having seen in his hand.

The Wyrley outrages upon cattle were begun while Royden Sharp was at home, and he was in the district during the whole time of their continuance. Whoever committed the outrages must have been in a position to get into and out of his house at all hours of the night without being observed either by the police or by the other inmates of the house, if living miles away from him; but they belonged to the immediate group who surrounded the Sharp and Greatorex families. They lived two stations down the line from Edalji, whom everyone describes as a very retiring man who made no friends. How could he know these people? But they were put in by Sharp because they were the people whom Greatorex knew, and in putting diem in he really proved his own guilt, for he and his family were the only people who could know exactly the same circle. This piece of internal evidence alone must convince any independent and intelligent observer that Edalji could not have written these "Greatorex" letters, and that if Greatorex did not, which all admit to be true, then all the evidence points to the Sharps, who were accomplished forgers and mystifiers as already shown.

Apart from the letters bearing upon the crimes, other anonymous letters of an obscene description were circulating in the district at this period. I have seen a letter from one who was present dated August 3rd, 1903, saying that a conference was held as to the authorship of these letters that day in the presence of Mr. Greatorex, now dead (no relation of the other), who was a local bank manager, and Inspector Campbell, now living at Cannock. The letter wound up, "I believe that Royden Sharp will be arrested before evening." From this I infer that the local police had evidence of Sharp's writing anonymous letters at this time. This evidence should be available at the trial, and should show that this was a habit of his. I believe that August 3rd did mark a cessation of letters for some time.

There are many points of internal evidence in the letters (the so-called "Greatorex" letters) which point to Royden Sharp, apart from the fact that they appeared after his return to the district, and that they deal with a number of people well known to him (and unknown to Edalji). In all the 1892-95 letters there is, so far as I have seen, no mention of the sea. In the very first of the "Greatorex" letters in 1903 there are two or three allusions to the sea, most natural for anyone who had just left it. He advises in his letter that some boy be sent to sea as an apprentice which was, as I have shown, Royden Sharp's own experience.

The writer uses the curious expression that a hook did the crimes. The instrument which Sharp showed to Mrs. Greatorex has a hooky appearance, and could be carried shut in the pocket, as the writer asserts that the "Hook" actually was. A sharp hook in the ordinary sense of a hook could not be so carried without cutting the cloth.

The writer says that he feels inclined to put his head on the rails where the train runs from Hednesford to Cannock. This is the actual stretch of rail near the Sharp's [sic] house (and is some distance from Wyrley where Edalji lives).

In June, 1903, a letter (still preserved) was received with the Rugeley post mark, signed "A Lover of Justice," and addressed to George Edalji. It was asking him to leave the district for a time, so as to be away when the next crime was done, as otherwise he would be in danger of being taken for it. The writer of this letter I identify as being the same as the former anonymous letters of 1895; which I also identify as having been done by Wallie Sharp. There would be no difficulty in getting expert evidence as to the hands being the same. Wallie Sharp was acting as apprentice to an electrical engineer at the time, and was much in the small neighbouring towns of which Rugeley is one. It is to be observed that in the letter in question occurs the phrase "you are not a right sort." This phrase occurs also in one of the Greatorex letters.

This points to Wallie's complicity in the Greatorex letters, or his brother's phrase may have lingered in his mind. It could hardly be coincidence that the same phrase could occur in both letters. Wallie Sharp died in South Africa in November, 1906.

I now come to what I look upon as a very important piece of evidence, indeed, I think it is conclusive as regards the anonymous letters. Some time after Edalji's arrest there began a series of anonymous letters, signed "G. H. Darby," the writer claiming to be Captain of the Wyrley Gang. These letters — many of which I have seen — are all in the same writing and, though very roughly done, contain some of the characteristics of Royden Sharp's writing, especially an r made like x and sometimes so exaggerated as to be almost x which occurs from boyhood in Royden Sharp's writing. About November, 1903, some of these letters arrived from Rotherham, near Sheffield. The police, I think, had some, and others were received by a local paper, the Wolverhampton Star. The writer was evidently a Cannock man, and I should think few Cannock men would at any time visit Rotherham. Now, I have found the porter, whose name is A. Beenham, Drayman, near Baptist Chapel, Cannock Road, Chadsrnoor, near Cannock, who in November carried Royden Sharp's box to the station, and observed that it was addressed to Rotherham. The Darby letters said that the Captain would return before Xmas, and I believe Sharp actually did so. This seems to me perfectly conclusive, as regards the identity of Royden Shaq) with G. H. Darby, and the latter boasted that he was the author of the outrages.

Another significant fact is as follows: — On September 29th, 1903, there was an anonymous notice that "it was decided to 'slice up' ten wenches between November 1st and 20th and 10 after Xmas," repeating a threat which had already been uttered in the second "Greatonex" letter. The date s are curious in view of the fact that Royden Sharp would be away as already shown from November to Xmas The announcement caused much terror in the district, which was increased by the following incident — A woman and little girl (Mrs. Jarius Handley, Great Wyrley, is [the] woman's name) were coming from Wyrley station one evening, soon after, where they had been buying some papers for sale. They met two men in the road. One of them caught the girl by the throat, and held in his hand something that gleamed. They both screamed, on which the man ran away, crying to his comrade who had gone on: "All right, Jack, I am coming. I suggest that this man was Royden Sharp, and that his companion was Jack Hart, a dissolute butcher, of the neighbourhood, and a friend of Sharp's. The little girl declared to her mother that she had been stopped once before by the same young man, and proceeded to give a minute description of him. She said that he had a round face, no moustache, about 5ft. Sin. in height, a dark suit, and a shiny peaked cap, which was exactly Royden Sharp's sailor-like costume. I suggest that after Sharp's arrest this girl be allowed an opportunity of identifying him. I am informed that from the time that his description got about Sharp gave up wearing this style of dress.

There was another of the series of anonymous letters which came from London, and was said by the writer to have been written in a Lockhart's coffee-house there. It was dated "   19th" (month can be found by further search)

and the writer said he had gone up to London from Birmingham that day. On enquiry Mr. Beaumont, of Wolverhampton Road, Cannock, — who has assisted me much —

discovered that Royden Sharp had actually left Cannock for Birmingham upon the morning of that same day — 19th. Mr. Hunt, the local station master, was his informant I will now recapitulate in condensed form the statement which has been here set out at length. Royden Sharp can be shown to have been the culprit:

1. Because of his showing the weapon to Mrs. Greatorex.
2. Because the wounds could only be produced by such an instrument as he showed.
3. Because only such an instrument fits in with the description in the letters.
4. Because being a butcher and a man from a cattle ship he was able to do such crimes which would be very hard for any ordinary man.
5. Because in many points of the anonymous letters there is internal evidence pointing to Royden Sharp.
6. Because he had a proved record of writing anonymous letters, of forgery, of diabolical mischief, and of bearing false witness, all of which qualities came out here.
7. Because he went to Rotherham at the time when letters bearing on the crimes came from Rotherham.
8. Because he is correctly described by a girl, who saw a man endeavouring to carry out, or pretend to carry out, the threats in the letters.
9. Because the actual handwriting in many of the letters bears a resemblance to Royden Sharp's own old writing. It is impossible now to get any specimen of his actual writing, as he is most guarded in writing anything. Why should he be if he is innocent?
10. I am informed (but have not yet verified the fact) that in one of the anonymous letters occurs the phrase, "I am as Sharp as Sharp can be."

This seems to me to be in itself a complete case, and if I — a stranger in the district — have been able to collect it, I cannot doubt that fresh local evidence would come out after his arrest. He appears to have taken very little pains to hide his proceedings, and how there could have been at any time any difficulty in pointing him out as the criminal is to me an extraordinary thing.

If further evidence were needed in order to assure a conviction, there are two men who could certainly supply it. These men are: —

Harry Green, formerly of Wyrley Farm, Wyrley, now in South Africa.

The other is Jack Hart, Butcher, Bridgtown, near Cannock.

Either of these men, if properly handled, would certainly turn King's evidence. They both undoubtedly knew all about Sharp. Others who know something, but possibly not enough, as they were only on the edge of the affair, are Fred Brookes (formerly of Wyrley, now in Manchester), Thomas, and Grinsell, all of the local Yeomanry. It seems to me that Sharp did no more outrages with his own hands after the arrest of Edalji in August The next outrage was admittedly done by Harry Green, who can be shown, when in doubt as to what he should do, to have sent a note to someone else, which note was answered from London in a letter written on telegram forms, now to be seen in the Home Office. This answer was, I believe from the writing, from Royden Sharp. It is worth noting on the evidence of Mr. Arrowsmith, of the Cannock Star Tea Company, who has done most excellent work on this case, that Green accepted all Arrowsmith's remarks good-humouredly, but on the latter saying "Sharp should be where Edalji now is," he at once became very angry. The November outrage was done upon Stanley's horses by

Jack Hart, the butcher, acting in collusion with Sharp. This makes really a separate case.

If it should be found possible to get Mrs. Sharp in the box, she would depose as she has told Mrs. Greatorex, that Royden Sharp is strangely affected by the new moon, and that on such occasions she had to closely watch him. At such times he seems to be a maniac, and Mr. Greatorex has himself heard him laughing like one. In this connection it is to be observed that the first four outrages occurred on February 2, April 2, May 3, and June 6, which in each case immediately follows the date of the new moon. The point of a connection between the outrages and the moon is referred to in one of the "Greatorex" letters, so it was present in the mind of the writer.

I cannot end this statement without acknowledging how much I owe to the unselfish exertions of Mr. Greatorex, of Littleworth Farm, Mr. Arrowsmith, of the Star Tea Company, Cannock, and Mr. Beaumont, of Wolverhampton Road, Cannock, without whose help I should have been powerless.

(Signed) Arthur Conan Doyle.
Undershaw, Hindhead

THE CASE OF MR. OSCAR SLATER

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION BY SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

Due to the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories, many people wrote letters to Conan Doyle over the years, asking him for help with real life crimes. The two most famous examples were George Edalji and Oliver Slater. Conan Doyle's involvement in both these cases led to the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal in both England and Scotland.

In 1908 a wealthy 82-year-old woman named Marion Gilchrist, was bludgeoned to death at her home in Glasgow. Her body was discovered by a downstairs neighbour and a maid. Oscar Slater, a petty criminal known to police as an illegal gambling-den operator had been staying in Glasgow for only 6 weeks, near the Gilchrist residence, before he boarded an ocean liner for New York. When he found out he had been accused of Gilchrist's murder Slater returned to Glasgow to clear his name. However, his trial, characterized by Conan Doyle as a great injustice, left Slater imprisoned for nearly two decades on sketchy evidence. Conan Doyle believed the actual murderer was a member of the victim's family and known to the police. However because of that person's political and social connections a cover-up was necessary and Slater became the perfect scapegoat for the crime.

Oscar Slater, 1908

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THE CASE OF OSCAR SLATER

IT is impossible to read and weigh the facts in connection with the conviction of Oscar Slater in May, 1909, at the High Court in Edinburgh, without feeling deeply dissatisfied with the proceedings, and morally certain that justice was not done. Under the circumstances of Scotch law I am not clear how far any remedy exists, but it will, in my opinion, be a serious scandal if the man be allowed upon such evidence to spend his life in a convict prison. The verdict which led to his condemnation to death, was given by a jury of fifteen, who voted: Nine for “Guilty,” five for “ Non-proven,” and one for “ Not Guilty.” Under English law, this division of opinion would naturally have given cause for a new trial. In Scotland the man was condemned to death, he was only reprieved two days before his execution, and he is now working out a life sentence in Peterhead convict establishment. How far the verdict was a just one, the reader may judge for himself when he has perused a connected story of the case.

There lived in Glasgow in the year 1908, an old maiden lady named Miss Marion Gilchrist. She had lived for thirty years in the one flat, which was on the first floor in 15, Queen’s Terrace. The flat above hers was vacant, and the only immediate neighbours were a family named Adams, living on the ground floor below, their house having a separate door which was close alongside the flat entrance. The old lady had one servant, named Helen Lambie, who was a girl twenty-one years of age. This girl had been with Miss Gilchrist for three or four years. By all accounts Miss Gilchrist was a most estimable person, leading a quiet and uneventful life. She was comfortably off, and she had one singular characteristic for a lady of her age and surroundings, in that she had made a collection of jewelry of considerable value. These jewels, which took the form of brooches, rings, pendants, etc., were bought at different times, extending over a considerable number of years, from a reputable jeweller. I lay stress upon the fact, as some wild rumour was circulated at the time that the old lady might herself be a criminal receiver. Such an idea could not be entertained. She seldom wore her jewelry save in single pieces, and as her life was a retired one, it is difficult to see how anyone outside a very small circle could have known of her hoard. The value of this treasure was about three thousand pounds. It was a fearful joy which she snatched from its possession, for she more than once expressed apprehension that she might be attacked and robbed. Her fears had the practical result that she attached two patent locks to her front door, and that she arranged with the Adams family underneath that in case of alarm she would signal to them by knocking upon the floor.

It was the household practice that Lambie, the maid, should go out and get an evening paper for her mistress about seven o’clock each day. After bringing the paper she then usually went out again upon the necessary shopping. This routine was followed upon the night of December 21st She left her mistress seated by the fire in the dining-room reading a magazine. Lambie took the keys with her, shut the flat door, closed the hall door downstairs, and was gone about ten minutes upon her errand. It is the events of those ten minutes which form the tragedy and the mystery which were so soon to engage the attention of the public.

According to the girl’s evidence, it was a minute or two before seven when she went out. At about seven, Mr. Arthur Adams and his two sisters were in their dining-room immediately below the room in which the old lady had been left. Suddenly they heard “ a noise from above, then a very heavy fall, and then three sharp knocks.” They were alarmed at the sound, and the young man at once set off to see if all was right. He ran out of his hall door, through the hall door of the flats, which was open, and so up to the first floor, where he found Miss Gilchrist’s door shut. He rang three times without an answer. From within, however, he heard a sound which he compared to the breaking of sticks. He imagined therefore that the servant girl was within, and that she was engaged in her household duties. After waiting for a minute or two, he seems to have convinced himself that all was right. He therefore descended again and returned to his sisters, who persuaded him to go up once more to the flat. This he did and rang for the fourth time. As he was standing with his hand upon the bell, straining his ears and hearing nothing, someone approached up the stairs from below. It was the young servant-maid, Helen Lambie, returning from her errand. The two held council for a moment. Young Adams described the noise which had been heard. Lambie said that the pulleys of the clothes-lines in the kitchen must have given way. It was a singular explanation, since the kitchen was not above the dining-room of the Adams, and one would not expect any great noise from the fall of a cord which suspended sheets or towels. However, it was a moment of agitation, and the girl may have said the first explanation which came into her head. She then put her keys into the two safety locks and opened the door.

At this point there is a curious little discrepancy of evidence. Lambie is prepared to swear that she remained upon the mat beside young Adams. Adams is equally positive that she walked several paces down the hall. This inside hall was lit by a gas, which turned half up, and shining through a coloured shade, gave a sufficient, but not a brilliant light. Says Adams: “I stood at the door on the threshold, half in and half out, and just when the girl had got past the clock to go into the kitchen, a well-dressed man appeared. I did not suspect him, and she said nothing; and he came up to me quite pleasantly. I did not suspect anything wrong for the minute. I thought the man was going to speak to me, till he got past me, and then I suspected something wrong, and by that time the girl ran into the kitchen and put the gas up and said it was all right, meaning her pulleys. I said: ‘Where is your mistress?’ and she went into the dining-room. She said: ‘Oh! come here!’ I just went in and saw this horrible spectacle.”

The spectacle in question was the poor old lady lying upon the floor close by the chair in which the servant had last seen her. Her feet were towards the door, her head towards the fireplace. She lay upon a hearth-rug, but a skin rug had been thrown across her head. Her injuries were frightful, nearly every bone of her face and skull being smashed. In spite of her dreadful wounds she lingered for a few minutes, but died without showing any sign of consciousness.

The murderer when he had first appeared had emerged from one of the two bedrooms at the back of the hall, the larger, or spare bedroom, not the old lady’s room. On passing Adams upon the doormat, which he had done with the utmost coolness, he had at once rushed down the stair. It was a dark and drizzly evening, and it seems that he made his way along one or two quiet streets until he was lost in the more crowded thoroughfares. He had left no weapon nor possession of any sort in the old lady’s flat, save a box of matches with which he had lit the gas in the bedroom from which he had come. In this bedroom a number of articles of value, including a watch, lay upon the dressing-table, but none of them had been touched. A box containing papers had been forced open, and these papers were found scattered upon the floor. If he were really in search of the jewels, he was badly informed, for these were kept among the dresses in the old lady’s wardrobe. Later, a single crescent diamond brooch, an article worth perhaps forty or fifty pounds, was found to be missing. Nothing else was taken from the flat. It is remarkable that though the furniture round where the body lay was spattered with blood, and one would have imagined that the murderer's hands must have been stained, no mark was seen upon the half-consumed match with which he had lit the gas, nor upon the match box, the box containing papers, nor any other thing which he may have touched in the bedroom.

We come now to the all-important question of the description of the man seen at such close quarters by Adams and Lambie. Adams was short-sighted and had not his spectacles with him. His evidence at the trial ran thus:

"He was a man a little taller and a little broader than I am, not a well-built man but well featured and clean-shaven, and I cannot exactly swear to his moustache, but if he had any it was very little. He was rather a commercial traveller type, or perhaps a clerk, and I did not know but what he might be one of her friends. He had on dark trousers and a light overcoat. I could not say if it were fawn or grey. I do not recollect what sort of hat he had. He seemed gentlemanly and well- dressed. He had nothing in his hand so far as I could tell. I did not notice anything about his way of walking."

Helen Lambie, the other spectator, could give no information about the face (which rather bears out Adams' view as to her position), and could only say that he wore a round cloth hat, a three-quarter length overcoat of a grey colour, and that he had some peculiarity in his walk. As the distance traversed by the murderer within sight of Lambie could be crossed in four steps, and as these steps were taken under circumstances of peculiar agitation, it is difficult to think that any importance could be attached to this last item in the description.

It is impossible to avoid some comment upon the actions of Helen Lambie during the incidents just narrated, which can only be explained by supposing that from the time she saw Adams waiting outside her door, her whole reasoning faculty had deserted her. First, she explained the great noise heard below: "The ceiling was like to crack," said Adams, by the fall of a clothes-line and its pulleys of attachment, which could not possibly, one would imagine, have produced any such effect. She then declares that she remained upon the mat, while Adams is convinced that she went right down the hall. On the appearance of the stranger she did not gasp out: " Who are you? " or any other sign of amazement, but allowed Adams to suppose by her silence that the man might be someone who had a right to be there. Finally, instead of rushing at once to see if her mistress was safe, she went into the kitchen, still apparently under the obsession of the pulleys. She informed Adams that they were all right, as if it mattered to any human being; thence she went into the spare bedroom, where she must have seen that robbery had been committed, since an open box lay in the middle of the floor. She gave no alarm however, and it was only when Adams called out: “ Where is your mistress? “ that she finally went into the room of the murder. It must be admitted that this seems strange conduct, and only explicable, if it can be said to be explicable, by great want of intelligence and grasp of the situation.

On Tuesday, December 22nd, the morning after the murder, the Glasgow police circulated a description of the murderer, founded upon the joint impressions of Adams and of Lambie. It ran thus:

“A man between 25 and 30 years of age, five foot eight or nine inches in height, slim build, dark hair, clean-shaven, dressed in light grey overcoat and dark cloth cap.”

Four days later, however, upon Christmas Day, the police found themselves in a position to give a more detailed description: “ The man wanted is about 28 or 30 years of age, tall and thin, with his face shaved clear of all hair, while a distinctive feature is that his nose is slightly turned to one side. The witness thinks the twist is to the right side. He wore one of the popular tweed hats known as Donegal hats, and a fawn coloured overcoat which might have been a waterproof, also dark trousers and brown boots.”

The material from which these further points were gathered, came from a young girl of fifteen, in humble life, named Mary Barrow- man. According to this new evidence, the witness was passing the scene of the murder shortly after seven o’clock upon the fatal night. She saw a man run hurriedly down the steps, and he passed her under a lamp-post. The incandescent light shone clearly upon him. He ran on, knocking against the witness in his haste, and disappeared round a corner. On hearing later of the murder, she connected this incident with it. Her general recollections of the man were as given in the description, and the grey coat and cloth cap of the first two witnesses were given up in favour of the fawn coat and round Donegal hat of the young girl. Since she had seen no peculiarity in his walk, and they had seen none in his nose, there is really nothing the same in the two descriptions save the “ clean-shaven,” the “ slim build “ and the approximate age.

It was on the evening of Christmas Day that the police came at last upon a definite clue. It was brought to their notice that a German Jew of the assumed name of Oscar Slater had been endeavouring to dispose of the pawn ticket of a crescent diamond brooch of about the same value as the missing one. Also, that in a general way, he bore a resemblance to the published description. Still more hopeful did this clue appear when, upon raiding the lodgings in which this man and his mistress lived, it was found that they had left Glasgow that very night by the nine o’clock train, with tickets (over this point there was some clash of evidence) either for Liverpool or London. Three days later, the Glasgow police learned that the couple had actually sailed upon December 26th upon the Lusitania for New York under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Otto Sando. It must be ad mitted that in all these proceedings the Glasgow police showed considerable deliberation. The original information had been given at the Central Police Office shortly after six o’clock, and a detective was actually making enquiries at Slater’s flat at seven-thirty, yet no watch was kept upon his movements, and he was allowed to leave between eight and nine, untraced and unquestioned. Even stranger was the Liverpool departure. He was known to have got away in the southbound train upon the Friday evening. A great liner sails from Liverpool upon the Saturday. One would have imagined that early on the Saturday morning steps would have been taken to block his method of escape. However, as a fact, it was not done, and as it proved it is as well for the cause of justice, since it had the effect that two judicial processes were needed, an American and a Scottish, which enables an interesting comparison to be made between the evidence of the principal witnesses.

Oscar Slater was at once arrested upon arriving at New York, and his seven trunks of baggage were impounded and sealed. On the face of it there was a good case against him, for he had undoubtedly pawned a diamond brooch, and he had subsequently fled under a false name for America. The Glasgow police had reason to think that they had got their man. Two officers, accompanied by the witnesses to identity — Adams, Lambie and Barrowman — set off at once to carry through the extradition proceedings and bring the suspect back to be tried for his offence. In the New York Court they first set eyes upon the prisoner, and each of them, in terms which will be afterwards described, expressed the opinion that he was at any rate exceedingly like the person they had seen in Glasgow. Their actual identification of him was vitiated by the fact that Adams and Barrowman had been shown his photographs before attending the Court, and also that he was led past them, an obvious prisoner, whilst they were waiting in the corridor. Still, however much one may discount the actual identification, it cannot be denied that each witness saw a close resemblance between the man before them and the man whom they had seen in Glasgow. So far at every stage the case against the accused was becoming more menacing. Any doubt as to extradition was speedily set at rest by the prisoner’s announcement that he was prepared, without compulsion, to return to Scotland and to stand his trial. One may well refuse to give him any excessive credit for this surrender, since he may have been persuaded that things were going against him, but still the fact remains (and it was never, so far as I can trace, mentioned at his subsequent trial), that he gave himself up of his own free will to justice. On February 21st Oscar Slater was back in Glasgow once more, and on May 3rd his trial took place at the High Court in Edinburgh.

But already the very bottom of the case had dropped out. The starting link of what had seemed an imposing chain, had suddenly broken. It will be remembered that the original suspicion of Slater was founded upon the fact that he had pawned a crescent diamond brooch. The ticket was found upon him, and the brooch recovered. It was not the one which was missing from the room of the murdered woman, and it had belonged for years to Slater, who had repeatedly pawned it before. This was shown beyond all cavil or dispute. The case of the police might well seem desperate after this, since if Slater were indeed guilty, it would mean that by pure chance they had pursued the right man. The coincidence involved in such a supposition would seem to pass the limits of all probability.

Apart from this crushing fact, several of the other points of the prosecution had already shown themselves to be worthless. It had seemed at first that Slater’s departure had been sudden and unpremeditated — the flight of a guilty man. It was quickly proved that this was not so. In the Bohemian clubs which he frequented — he was by profession a peddling jeweller and a man of disreputable, though not criminal habits — it had for weeks before the date of the crime been known that he purported to go to some business associates in America. A correspondence, which was produced, showed the arrangements which had been made, long before the crime, for his emigration, though it should be added that the actual determination of the date and taking of the ticket were subsequent to the tragedy.

This hurrying-up of the departure certainly deserves close scrutiny. According to the evidence of his mistress and of the servant, Slater had received two letters upon the morning of December 21st. Neither of these were produced at the trial. One was said to be from a Mr. Rogers, a friend of Slater's in London, telling him that Slater's wife was bothering him for money. The second was said to be from one Devoto, a former partner of Slater's asking him to join him in San Francisco. Even if the letters had been destroyed, one would imagine that these statements as to the letters could be disproved or corroborated by either the Crown or the defence. They are of considerable importance, as giving the alleged reasons why Slater hurried up a departure which had been previously announced as for January. I cannot find, however, that in the actual trial anything definite was ascertained upon the matter.

Another point had already been scored against the prosecution in that the seven trunks which contained the whole effects of the prisoner, yielded nothing of real importance. There were a felt hat and two cloth ones, but none which correspond with the Donegal of the original description. A light- coloured waterproof coat was among the outfit. If the weapon with which the deed was done was carried off in the pocket of the assassin's overcoat — and it is difficult to say how else he could have carried it, then the pocket must, one would suppose, be crusted with blood, since the crime was a most sanguinary one. No such marks were discovered, nor were the police fortunate as to the weapon. It is true that a hammer was found in the trunk, but it was clearly shown to have been purchased in one of those cheap half-crown sets of tools which are tied upon a card, was an extremely light and fragile instrument, and utterly incapable in the eyes of commonsense of inflicting those terrific injuries which had shattered the old lady's skull. It is said by the prosecution to bear some marks of having been scraped or cleaned, but this was vigorously denied by the defence, and the police do not appear to have pushed the matter to the obvious test of removing the metal work, when they must, had this been indeed the weapon, have certainly found some soakage of blood into the wood under the edges of the iron cheeks or head. But a glance at a facsimile of this puny weapon would convince an impartial person that any task beyond fixing a tin-tack, or cracking a small bit of coal, would be above its strength. It may fairly be said that before the trial had begun, the three important points of the pawned jewel, the supposed flight, and the evidence from clothing and weapon, had each either broken down completely, or become exceedingly attenuated.

Let us see now what there was upon the other side. The evidence for the prosecution really resolved itself into two sets of witnesses for identification. The first set were those who had actually seen the murderer, and included Adams, Helen Lambie, and the girl Barrowman. The second set consisted of twelve people who had, at various dates, seen a man frequenting the street in which Miss Gilchrist lived, and loitering in a suspicious manner before the house. All of these, some with confidence, but most of them with reserve, were prepared to identify the prisoner with this unknown man. What the police never could produce, however, was the essential thing, and that was the least connecting link between Slater and Miss Gilchrist, or any explanation how a foreigner in Glasgow could even know of the existence, to say nothing of the wealth, of a retired old lady, who had few acquaintances and seldom left her guarded flat.

It is notorious that nothing is more tricky than evidence of identification. In the Beck case there were, if I remember right, some ten witnesses who had seen the real criminal under normal circumstances, and yet they were all prepared to swear to the wrong man. In the case of Oscar Slater, the first three witnesses saw their man under conditions of excitement, while the second group saw the loiterer in the street under various lights, and in a fashion which was always more or less casual. It is right, therefore, that in assigning its due weight to this evidence, one should examine it with some care. We shall first take the three people who actually saw the murderer.

There seems to have been some discrepancy between them from the first, since, as has already been pointed out, the description published from the data of Adams and Lambie, was modified after Barrowman had given her information. Adams and Lambie said:

“A man between twenty-five and thirty years of age, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches in height, slim build, dark hair, clean shaven, dressed in light grey overcoat and dark cloth cap.”

After collaboration with Barrowman the description became:

“ Twenty-eight or thirty years of age, tall and thin, clean shaven, his nose slightly turned to one side. Wore one of the popular round tweed hats known as Donegal hats, and a fawn-coloured overcoat which might have been a waterproof, also dark trousers and brown boots.”

Apart from the additions in the second description there are, it will be observed, two actual discrepancies in the shape of the hat and the colour of the coat.

As to how far either of these descriptions tallies with Slater, it may be stated here that the accused was thirty-seven years of age, that he was above the medium height, that his nose was not twisted, but was depressed at the end, as if it had at some time been broken, and finally that eight witnesses were called upon to prove that, on the date of the murder, the accused wore a short but noticeable moustache.

I have before me a verbatim stenographic report of the proceedings in New York and also in Edinburgh, furnished by the kindness of Shaughnessy & Co., solicitors, of Glasgow, who are still contending for the interests of their unfortunate client. I will here compare the terms of the identification in the two Courts:

Helen Lambie, New York, January 26th, 1909.

Q. “Do you see the man here you saw there? “

A. “ One is very suspicious, if anything.” Q. “Describe him.”

A. “ The clothes he had on that night he hasn’t got on to-day — but his face I could not tell. I never saw his face.”

(Having described a peculiarity of walk, she was asked): Q. “ Is that man in the room? “ A. “ Yes, he is, sir.” Q. “Point him out.”

A. “ I would not like to say “

(After some pressure and argument she pointed to Slater, who had been led past her in the corridor between two officers, when both she and Barrowman had exclaimed: “ That is the man,” or “ I could nearly swear that is the man.”)

Q. “ Didn’t you say you did not see the man’s face? “ A. “ Neither I did. I saw the walk.” The reader must bear in mind that Lambie’s only chance of seeing the man’s walk was in the four steps or so down the passage. It was never at any time shown that there was any marked peculiarity about Slater’s walk.

Now take Helen Lambie’s identification in Edinburgh, May 9th, 1909.

Q. “ How did you identify him in America?”

A. “ By his walk and height, his dark hair and the side of his face.”

Q . “ You were not quite sure of him at first in America?”

A. “ Yes, I was quite sure.”

Q. “ Why did you say you were only suspicions? “

A. “It was a mistake.”

Q. “What did you mean in America by saying that you never saw his face if, in point of fact, you did see it so as to help you to recognise it? What did you mean? “

A. “Nothing.”

On further cross-examination she declared that when she said that she had never seen the man’s face she meant that she had never seen the “ broad of it” but had seen it sideways.

Here it will be observed that Helen Lambie’s evidence had greatly stiffened during the three months between the New York and the Edinburgh proceedings. In so aggressively positive a frame of mind was she on the later occasion, that, on being shown Slater’s overcoat and asked if it resembled the murderer’s, she answered twice over: “ That is the coat,”although it had not yet been unrolled, and though it was not light grey, which was the colour in her own original description. It should not be forgotten in dealing with the evidence of Lambie and Adams that they are utterly disagreed as to so easily fixed a thing as their own proceedings after the hall door was opened, Adams swearing that Lambie walked to nearly the end of the hall, and Lambie that she remained upon the doormat. Without deciding which was right, it is clear that the incident must shake one’s confidence in one or other of them as a witness.

In the case of Adams the evidence was given with moderation, and was substantially the same in America and in Scotland.

“ I couldn’t say positively. This man (indicating Slater) is not at all unlike him.” Q. “ Did you notice a crooked nose? “ A. “No.”

Q. “ Anything remarkable about his walk? “ A. “No.”

Q. “ You don’t swear this is the man you saw? “

A. “ No, sir. He resembles the man, that is all that I can say.”

In reply to the same general questions in Edinburgh, he said:

“ I would not like to swear he is the man. I am a little near-sighted. He resembles the man closely.”

Barrowman, the girl of fifteen, had met the man presumed to be the murderer in the street, and taken one passing glance at him ‘under a gas lamp on a wet December’s night — difficult circumstances for an identification. She used these words in New York:

“That man here is something like him,” which she afterwards amended to “ very like him.” She admitted that a picture of the man she was expected to identify had been shown to her before she came into the Court. Her one point by which she claimed to recognise the man was the crooked nose. This crooked nose was not much more apparent to others than the peculiarity of walk which so greatly impressed Helen Lambie that, after seeing half a dozen steps of it, she could identify it with confidence. In Edinburgh Barrowman, like Lambie, was very much more certain than in New York. The further they got from the event, the easier apparently did recognition become. “ Yes, that is the man who knocked against me that night,” she said. It is remarkable that both these females, Lambie and Barrowman, swore that though they were thrown together in this journey out to New York, and actually shared the same cabin, they never once talked of the object of their mission or compared notes as to the man they were about to identify. For girls of the respective ages of fifteen and twenty-one this certainly furnishes a unique example of self- restraint.

These, then, are the three identifications by the only people who saw the murderer. Had the diamond brooch clue been authentic, and these identifications come upon the top of it, they would undoubtedly have been strongly corroborative. But when the brooch has been shown to be a complete mistake, I really do not understand how anyone could accept such half-hearted recognitions as being enough to establish the identity and guilt of the prisoner.

There remains the so-called identification by twelve witnesses who had seen a man loitering in the street during the weeks before the crime had been committed. I have said a “so-called” identification, for the proceedings were farcical as a real test of recognition. The witnesses had seen portraits of the accused. They were well aware that he was a foreigner, and then they were asked to pick out his swarthy Jewish physiognomy from among nine Glasgow policemen to two railway officials. Naturally they did it without hesitation, since this man was more like the dark individual whom they had seen and described than the others could be.

Read their own descriptions, however, of the man they had seen, with the details of his clothing, and they will be found in many respects to differ from each other on one hand, and in many from Slater on the other. Here is a synopsis of their impressions:

Mrs. McHaffie.—” Dark. Moustached, light overcoat, not waterproof, check trousers, spats. Black bowler hat. Nose normal.”

Miss M. McHaffie.—”Seen at same time and same description. Was only prepared at first to say there was some resemblance, but 4 had been thinking it over, and concluded that he was the man.’”

Miss A. M. McHaffie.—”Same as before. Had heard the man speak and noticed nothing in his accent. (Prisoner has a strong German accent.) “

Madge McHaffie (belongs to the same family).—”Dark, moustached, nose normal. Check trousers, fawn overcoat and spats. Black bowler hat. ‘ The prisoner was fairly like the man.’”

In connection with the identification of these four witnesses it is to be observed that neither check trousers, nor spats were found in the prisoner’s luggage. As the murderer was described as being dressed in dark trousers, there was no possible reason why these clothes, if Slater owned them, should have been destroyed.

Constable Brien. “Claimed to know the prisoner by sight. Says he was the man he saw loitering. Light coat and a hat. It was a week before the crime, and he was loitering eighty yards from the scene of it. He picked him out among five constables as the man He had seen.”

Constable Walker.—” Had seen the loiterer across the street, never nearer, and after dark in December. Thought at first he was someone else whom he knew. Had heard that the man he had to identify was of foreign appearance. Picked him out from a number of detectives. The man seen had a moustache.”

Euphemia Cunningham.—” Very dark, sallow, heavy featured. Clean shaven. Nose normal. Dark tweed coat. Green cap with peak.”

W. Campbell.—” Had been with the previous witness. Corroborated. ‘There was a. general resemblance between the prisoner and the man, but he could not positively identify him.’”

Alex Gillies.—” Sallow, dark haired and clean shaven. Fawn coat. Cap. ‘ The prisoner resembled him, but witness could not say he was the same man.’”

R. B. Bryson.—”Black coat and vest. Black bowler hat. No overcoat. Black moustache with droop. Sallow, foreign. (This witness had seen the man the night before the murder. He appeared to be looking up at Miss Gilchrist’s windows.) “

A. Nairn.—”Broad shoulders, long neck. Dark hair. Motor cap. Light overcoat to knees. Never saw the man’s face. ‘Oh! I will not swear in fact, but I am certain he is the man I saw — but I will not swear.’”

Mrs. Liddell.—” Peculiar nose. Clear complexion, not sallow. Dark, clean shaven, brown tweed cap. Brown tweed coat with hemmed edge. Delicate man ‘rather drawn together.’ She believed that prisoner was the man. Saw him in the street immediately before the murder.”

These are the twelve witnesses as to the identify of the mysterious stranger. In the first place there is no evidence whatever that this lounger in the street had really anything to do with the murder. It is just as probable that he had some vulgar amour, and was waiting for his girl to run out to him. What could a man who was planning murder hope to gain by standing nights beforehand eighty and a hundred yards away from the place in the darkness? But supposing that we waive this point and examine the plain question as to whether Slater was the same man as the loiterer, we find ourselves faced by a mass of difficulties and contradictions. Two of the most precise witnesses were Nairn and Bryson who saw the stranger upon the Sunday night preceding the murder. Upon that night Slater had an unshaken alibi, vouched for not only by the girl, Antoine, with whom he lived, and their servant, Schmalz, but by an acquaintance, Samuel Reid, who had been with him from six to ten-thirty. This positive evidence, which was quite unshaken in cross examination, must completely destroy the surmises of the stranger and Slater. Then come the four witnesses of the McHaffie family who are all strong upon check trousers and spats, articles of dress which were never traced to the prisoner. Finally, apart from the discrepancies about the moustache, there is a mixture of bowler hats, green caps, brown caps, and motor caps which leave a most confused and indefinite impression in the mind. Evidence of this kind might be of some value if supplementary to some strong ascertained fact, but to attempt to build upon such an identification alone is to construct the whole case upon shifting sand.

The reader has already a grasp of the facts, but some fresh details came out at the trial which may be enumerated here. They have to be lightly touched upon within the limits of such an argument as this, but those who desire a fuller summary will find it in an account of the trial published by

Hodge of Edinburgh, and ably edited by William Roughead, W.S. On this book and on the verbatim precognitions and shorthand account of the American proceedings, I base my own examination of case. First, as to Slater's movements upon the day of the crime. He began the day, according to the account of himself and the women, by the receipt of the two letters already referred to, which caused him to hasten his journey to America. The whole day seems to have been occupied by preparations for his impending departure. He gave his servant Schmalz notice as from next Saturday. Before five (as was shown by the postmark upon the envelope), he wrote to a post office in London, where he had some money on deposit. At 6.12 a telegram was sent in his name and presumably by him from the Central Station to Dent, London, for his watch, which was being repaired. According to the evidence of two witnesses he was seen in a billiard room at 6.20. The murder, it will be remembered, was done at seven. He remained about ten minutes in the billiard room, and left some time between 6.30 and 6.40. Rathman, one of these witnesses, deposed that he had at the time a moustache about a quarter of an inch long, which was so noticeable that no one could take him for a clean-shaven man. Antoine, his mistress, and Schmalz, the servant, both deposed that Slater dined at home at 7 o'clock. The evidence of the girl is no doubt suspect, but there was no possible reason why the dismissed servant Schmalz should perjure herself for the sake of her ex- employer. The distance between Slater's flat and that of Miss Gilchrist is about a quarter of a mile. From the billiard room to Slater's flat is about a mile. He had to go for the hammer and bring it back, unless he had it jutting out of his pocket all day. But unless the evidence of the two women is entirely set aside, enough has been said to show that there was no time for the commission by him of such a crime and the hiding of the traces which it would leave behind it. At 9.45 that night, Slater was engaged in his usual occupation of trying to raise the wind at some small gambling club. The club-master saw no discomposure about his dress (which was the same as, according to the Crown, he had done this bloody crime in), and swore that he was then wearing a short moustache "like stubble," thus corroborating Rathman. It will be remembered that Lambie and Barrowman both swore that the murderer was clean shaven.

On December 24th, three days after the murder, Slater was shown at Cook's Office, bargaining for a berth in the "Lusitania" for his so-called wife and himself. He made no secret that he was going by that ship, but gave his real name and address and declared finally that he would take his berth in Liverpool, which he did. Among other confidants as tor the ship was a barber, the last person one would think to whom secrets would be confided. Certainly, if this were a flight, it is hard to say what an open departure would be. In Liverpool he took his passage under the assumed name of Otto Sando. This he did, according to his own account, because he had reason to fear pursuit from his real wife, and wished to cover his traces. This may or may not be the truth, but it is undoubtedly the fact that Slater, who was a disreputable, rolling- stone of a man, had already assumed several aliases in the course of his career. It is to be noted that there was nothing at all secret about his departure from Glasgow, and that he carried off all his luggage with him in a perfectly open manner.

The reader is now in possession of the main facts, save those which are either unessential, or redundant. It will be observed that save for the identifications, the value of which can be estimated, there is really no single point of connection between the crime and the alleged criminal. It may be argued that the existence of the hammer is such a point; but what household in the land is devoid of a hammer? It is to be remembered that if Slater committed the murder with this hammer, he must have taken it with him in order to commit the crime, since it could be no use to him in forcing an entrance. But what man in his senses, planning a deliberate murder, would take with him a weapon which was light, frail, and so long that it must project from any pocket? The nearest lump of stone upon the road would serve his purpose better than that. Again, it must in its blood-soaked condition have been in his pocket when he came away from the crime. The Crown never attempted to prove either blood-stains in a pocket, or the fact that any clothes had been burned. If Slater destroyed clothes, he would naturally have destroyed the hammer, too. Even one of the two medical witnesses of the prosecution was driven to say that he should not have expected such a weapon to cause such wounds.

It may well be that in this summary of the evidence, I may seem to have stated the case entirely from the point of view of the defence. In reply, I would only ask the reader to take the trouble to read the extended evidence. (“ Trial of Oscar Slater “ Hodge & Co., Edinburgh.) If he will do so, he will realise that without a conscious mental effort towards special pleading, there is no other way in which the story can be told. The facts are on one side. The conjectures, the unsatisfactory identifications, the damaging flaws, and the very strong prejudices upon the other.

Now for the trial itself. The case was opened for the Crown by the Lord-Advocate, in a speech which faithfully represented the excited feeling of the time. It was vigorous to the point of being passionate, and its effect upon the jury was reflected in their ultimate verdict. The Lord-Advocate spoke, as I understand, without notes, a procedure which may well add to eloquence while subtracting from accuracy. It is to this fact that one must attribute a most fatal misstatement which could not fail, coming under such circumstances from so high an authority, to make a deep impression upon his hearers. For some reason, this misstatement does not appear to have been corrected at the moment by either the Judge or the defending counsel. It was the one really damaging allegation — so damaging that had I myself been upon the jury and believed it to be true, I should have recorded my verdict against the prisoner, and yet this one fatal point had no substance at all in fact. In this incident alone, there seems to me to be good ground for a revision of the sentence, or a reference of the facts to some Court or Committee of Appeal. Here is the extract from the Lord-Advocate's speech to which I allude:

"At this time he had given his name to Cook's people in Glasgow as Oscar Slater. On December 25th, the day he was to go back to Cook's Office — his name and his description and all the rest of it appear in the Glasgow papers, and he sees that the last thing in the world that he ought to do, if he studies his own safety, is to go back to Cook's Office as Oscar Slater. He accordingly proceeds to pack up all his goods and effects upon the 25th. So far as we know, he never leaves the house from the time he sees the paper, until a little after six o'clock, when he goes down to the Central Station."

Here the allegation is clearly made and it is repeated later that Oscar Slater's name was in the paper, and that, subsequently to that, he fled. Such a flight would clearly be an admission of guilt. The point is of enormous even vital importance. And yet on examination of the dates, it will be found that there is absolutely no foundation for it. It was not until the evening of the 25th that even the police heard of the existence of Slater, and it was nearly a week later that his name appeared in the papers, he being already far out upon the Atlantic. What did appear upon the 25th was the description of the murderer, already quoted: "with his face shaved clean of all hair," &c., Slater at that time having a marked moustache. Why should he take such a description to himself, or why should he forbear to carry out a journey which he had already prepared for? The point goes for absolutely nothing when examined, and yet if the minds of the jury were at all befogged as to the dates, the definite assertion of the Lord- Advocate, twice repeated, that Slater's name had been published before his flight, was bound to have a most grave and prejudiced effect.

Some of the Lord-Advocate's other statements are certainly surprising. Thus he says: "The prisoner is hopelessly unable to produce a single witness who says that he was anywhere else than at the scene of the murder that night." Let us test this assertion. Here is the evidence of Schmalz, the servant, verbatim. I may repeat that this woman was under no known obligations to Slater and had just received notice from him. The evidence of the mistress that Slater dined in the flat at seven on the night of the murder I pass, but I do not understand why Schmalz's positive corroboration should be treated by the Lord-Advocate as non-existent. The prisoner might well be "hopeless" if his witnesses were to be treated so. Could anything be more positive than this?

Q. "Did he usually come home to dinner? "

A. "Yes, always. Seven o'clock was the usual hour."

Q. "Was it sometimes nearly eight?

A. " It was my fault. Mr. Slater was in."

Q. " But owing to your fault was it about eight before it was served? "

A. " No. Mr. Slater was in after seven, and was waiting for dinner."

This seems very definite. The murder was committed about seven. The murderer may have regained the street about ten minutes or quarter past seven. It was some distance to Slater's flat. If he had done the murder he could hardly have reached it before half-past seven at the earliest. Yet Schmalz says he was in at seven, and so does Antoine. The evidence of the woman may be good or bad, but it is difficult to understand how anyone could state that the prisoner was " hopelessly unable to produce, etc." What evidence could he give, save that of everyone who lived with him?

For the rest, the Lord-Advocate had an easy task in showing that Slater was a worthless fellow, that he lived with and possibly on a woman of easy virtue, that he had several times changed^ his name, and that generally he was an unsatisfactory Bohemian. No actual criminal record was shown against him. Early in his speech, the Lord-Advocate remarked that he would show later how Slater may have come to know that Miss Gilchrist owned the jewels. No further reference appears to have been made to the matter, and his promise was therefore never fulfilled, though it is clearly of the utmost importance. Later, he stated that from the appearance of the wounds, they Must have been done by a small hammer. There is no “ must” in the matter, for it is clear that many other weapons, a burglar’s jemmy, for example, would have produced the same effect. He then makes the good point that the prisoner dealt in precious stones, and could therefore dispose of the proceeds of such a robbery. The criminal, he added, was clearly someone who had no acquaintance with the inside of the house, and did not know where the jewels were kept. “ That answers to the prisoner.” It also, of course, answers to practically every man in Scotland. The Lord-Advocate then gave a summary of the evidence as to the man seen by various witnesses in the street. “ Gentlemen, if that was the prisoner, how do you Account for his presence there? “ Of course, the whole point lies in the italicised phrase. There was, it must be admitted, a consensus of opinion among the witnesses that the prisoner was the man. But what was it compared to the consensus of opinion which wrongfully condemned Beck to penal servitude? The counsel laid considerable stress upon the fact that Mrs. Liddell (one of the Adams family) had seen a man only a few minutes before the murder, loitering in the street, and identified him as Slater. The dress of the man seen in the street was very different from that given as the murderer’s. He had a heavy tweed mixture coat of a brownish hue, and a brown peaked cap. The original identification by Mrs. Liddell was conveyed in the words: “ One, slightly,” when she was asked if any of a group at the police station resembled the man she had seen. Afterwards, like every other female witness, she became more positive. She declared that she had the clearest recollection of the man’s face, and yet refused to commit herself as to whether he was shaven or moustached.

We have then the recognitions of Lambie, Adams and Barrowman, with their limitations and developments, which have been already discussed. Then comes the question of the so-called “flight” and the change of name upon the steamer. Had the prisoner been a man who had never before changed his name, this incident would be more striking. But the short glimpse we obtain of his previous life show several changes of name, and it has not been suggested that each of them was the consequence of a crime. He seems to have been in debt in Glasgow and he also appears to have had reasons for getting away from the pursuit of an ill-used wife. The Lord-Advocate said that the change of name “could not be explained consistently with innocence.” That may be true enough, but the change can surely be explained on some cause less grave than murder. Finally, after showing very truly that Slater was a great liar and that not a word he said need be believed unless there were corroboration, the Lord-Advocate wound up with the words: “ My submission to you is that this guilt has been brought fairly home to him, that no shadow of doubt exists, that there is no reasonable doubt that he was the perpetrator of this foul murder.” The verdict showed that the jury, under the spell of the Lord-Advocate’s eloquence, shared this view, but, viewing it in colder blood, it is difficult to see upon what grounds he made so confident an assertion.

Mr. M’Clure, who conducted the defence, spoke truly when, in opening his speech, he declared that “ he had to fight a most unfair fight against public prejudice, roused with a fury I do not remember to have seen in any other case.” Still he fought this fight bravely and with scrupulous moderation. His appeals were all to reason and never to emotion. He showed how clearly the prisoner had expressed his intention of going to America, weeks before the murder, and how every preparation had been made. On the day after the murder he had told witnesses that he was going to America and had discussed the advantages of various lines, finally telling one of them the particular boat in which he did eventually travel, curious proceedings for a fugitive from justice. Mr. M’Clure described the movements of the prisoner on the night of the murder, after the crime had been committed, showing that he was wearing the very clothes in which the theory of the prosecution made him do the deed, as if such a deed could be done without leaving its traces. He showed incidentally (it is a small point, but a human one) that one of the last actions of Slater in Glasgow was to take great trouble to get an English five-pound note in order to send it as a Christmas present to his parents in Germany. A man who could do this was not all bad. Finally, Mr. M’Clure exposed very clearly the many discrepancies as to identification and warned the jury solemnly as to the dangers which have been so often proved to lurk in this class of evidence. Altogether, it was a broad, comprehensive reply, though where so many points were involved, it is natural that some few may have been overlooked. One does not, for example, find the counsel as insistent as one might expect upon such points as, the failure of the Crown to show how Slater could have known anything at all about the existence of Miss Gilchrist and her jewels, how he got into the flat, and what became of the brooch which, according to their theory, he had carried off. It is ungracious to suggest any additions to so earnest a defence, and no doubt one who is dependent upon printed accounts of the matter may miss points which were actually made, but not placed upon record.

Only on one point must Mr. M’Clure’s judgment be questioned, and that is on the most difficult one, which a criminal counsel has ever to decide. He did not place his man in the box. This should very properly be taken as a sign of weakness. I have no means of saying what considerations led Mr. M’Clure to this determination. It certainly told against his client. In the masterly memorial for reprieve drawn up by Slater’s solicitor, the late Mr. Spiers, it is stated with the full inner knowledge which that solicitor had, that Slater was all along anxious to give evidence on his own behalf. “ He was advised by his counsel not to do so, but not from any knowledge of guilt. He had undergone the strain of a four days’ trial. He speaks rather broken English, although quite intelligible — with a foreign accent, and be had been in custody since January.” It must be admitted that these reasons are very unconvincing. It is much more probable that the counsel decided that the purely negative evidence which his client could give upon the crime would be dearly paid for by the long recital of sordid amours and blackguard experiences which would be drawn from him on cross-examination and have the most damning effect upon the minds of a respectable Edinburgh jury. And yet, perhaps, counsel did not sufficiently consider the prejudice which is excited — and rightly excited — against the prisoner who shuns the box. Some of this prejudice might have been removed if it had been made more clear that Slater had volunteered to come over and stand his trial of his own free will, without waiting for the verdict of the extradition proceedings.

There remains the summing up of Lord Guthrie. His Lordship threw out the surmise that the assassin may well have gone to the flat without any intention of murder. This is certainly possible, but in the highest degree improbable. He commented with great severity upon Slater’s general character. In his summing-up of the case, he recapitulated the familiar facts in an impartial fashion, concluding with the words, “ I suppose that you all think that the prisoner possibly is the murderer. You may very likely all think that he probably is the murderer. That, however, will not entitle you to convict him. The Crown have undertaken to prove that he is the murderer. That is the question you have to consider. If you think there is no reasonable doubt about it, you will convict him; if you think there is, you will acquit him."

In an hour and ten minutes the jury had made up their mind. By a majority they found the prisoner guilty. Out of fifteen, nine, as was afterwards shown, were for guilty, five for non-proven, and one for not guilty. By English law, a new trial would have been needed, ending, possibly, as in the Gardiner case, in the complete acquittal of the prisoner. By Scotch law the majority verdict held good.

"I know nothing about the affair, absolutely nothing," cried the prisoner in a frenzy of despair. "I never heard the name. I know nothing about the affair. I do not know how I could be connected with the affair. I know nothing about it. I came from America on my own account. I can say no more."

Sentence of death was then passed.

The verdict was, it is said, a complete surprise to most of those in the Court, and certainly is surprising when examined after the event. I do not see how any reasonable man can carefully weigh the evidence and not admit that when the unfortunate prisoner cried, " I know nothing about it," he was possibly, and even probably, speaking the literal truth.

Consider the monstrous coincidence which is involved in his guilt, the coincidence that the police owing to their mistake over the brooch, by pure chance started out in pursuit of the right man. Which is A Priori the more probable: That such an unheard-of million-to-one coincidence should have occurred, Or, that the police, having committed themselves to the theory that he was the murderer, refused to admit that they were wrong when the bottom fell out of the original case, and persevered in the hope that vague identifications of a queer- looking foreigner would justify their original action? Outside these identifications, I must repeat once again there is nothing to couple Slater with the murder, or to show that he ever knew, or could have known that such a person as Miss Gilchrist existed.

The admirable memorial for a reprieve drawn up by the solicitors for the defence, and reproduced at the end of this pamphlet, was signed by 20,000 members of the public, and had the effect of changing the death sentence to one of penal servitude for life. The sentence was passed on May 6th. For twenty days the man was left in doubt, and the written reprieve only arrived on May 26th within twenty-four hours of the time for the execution. On July 8th Slater was conveyed to the Peterhead Convict prison. There he has now been for three years, and there he still remains.

I cannot help in my own mind comparing the case of Oscar Slater with another, which I had occasion to examine — that of George Edalji. I must admit that they are not of the same class. George Edalji was a youth of exemplary character. Oscar Slater was .a blackguard. George Edalji was physically incapable of the crime for which he suffered three years' imprisonment (years for which he has not received, after his innocence was established, one shilling of compensation from the nation). Oscar Slater might conceivably have committed the murder, but the balance of proof and probability seems entirely against it. Thus, one cannot feel the same burning sense of injustice over the matter. And yet I trust for the sake of our character not only for justice, but for intelligence, that the judgment may in some way be reconsidered and the man's present punishment allowed to atone for those irregularities of life which helped to make his conviction possible.

Before leaving the case it is interesting to see how far this curious crime may be reconstructed and whether any possible light can be thrown upon it. Using second-hand material one cannot hope to do more than indicate certain possibilities which may already have been considered and tested by the police. The trouble, however, with all police prosecutions is that, having once got what they imagine to be their man, they are not very open to any line of investigation which might lead to other conclusions. Everything which will not fit into the official theory is liable to be excluded. One might make a few isolated comments on the case which may at least give rise to some interesting trains of thought.

One question which has to be asked was whether the assassin was after the jewels at all. It might be urged that the type of man described by the spectators was by no means that of the ordinary thief. When he reached the bedroom and lit the gas, he did not at once seize the watch and rings which were lying openly exposed upon the dressing-table. He did not pick up a half-sovereign which was lying on the dining-room table. His attention was given to a wooden box, the lid of which he wrenched open. (This, I think, was " the breaking of sticks" heard by Adams.) The papers in it were strewed on the ground. Were the papers his object, and the final abstraction of one diamond brooch a mere blind? Personally, I can only point out the possibility of such a solution. On the other hand, it might be urged, if the thief’s action seems inconsequential, that Adams had rung and that he already found himself in a desperate situation. It might be said also that save a will it would be difficult to imagine any paper which would account for such an enterprise, while the jewels, on the other hand, were an obvious mark for whoever knew of their existence.

Presuming that the assassin was indeed after the jewels, it is very instructive to note his knowledge of their location, and also its limitations. Why did he go straight into the spare bedroom where the jewels were actually kept? The same question may be asked with equal force if we consider that he was after the papers. Why the spare bedroom? Any knowledge gathered from outside (by a watcher in the back-yard for example) would go to the length of ascertaining which was the old lady’s room. One would expect a robber who had gained his information thus, to go straight to that chamber. But this man did not do so. He went straight to the unlikely room in which both jewels and papers actually were. Is not this remarkably suggestive? Does it not pre-suppose a previous acquaintance with the inside of the flat and the ways of its owner?

But now note the limitations of the knowledge. If it were the jewels he was after, he knew what room they were in, but not in what part of the room. A fuller knowledge would have told him they were kept in the wardrobe. And yet he searched a box. If he was after papers, his information was complete ; but if he was indeed after the jewels, then we can say that he had the knowledge of one who is conversant, but not intimately conversant, with the household arrangements. To this we may add that he would seem to have shown ignorance of the habits of the inmates, or he would surely have chosen Lambie’s afternoon or evening out for his attempt, and not have done it at a time when the girl was bound to be back within a very few minutes. What men had ever visited the house? The number must have been very limited. What friends? what tradesmen? what plumbers? Who brought back the jewels after they had been stored with the jewellers when the old lady went every year to the country? One is averse to throw out vague suspicions which may give pain to innocent people, and yet it is clear that there are lines of inquiry here which should be followed up, however negative the results.

How did the murderer get in if Lambie is correct in thinking that she shut the doors? I cannot get away from the conclusion that he had duplicate keys. In that case all becomes comprehensible, for the old lady — whose faculties were quite normal — would hear the lock go and would not be alarmed, thinking that Lambie had returned before her time. Thus, she would only know her danger when the murderer rushed into the room, and would hardly have time to rise, receive the first blow, and fall, as she was found, beside the chair, upon which she had been sitting. That is intelligible. But if he had not the keys, consider the difficulties. If the old lady had opened the flat door her body would have been found in the passage. Therefore, the police were driven to the hypothesis that the old lady heard the ring, opened the lower stair door from above (as can be done in all Scotch flats), opened the flat door, never looked over the lighted stair to see who was coming up, but returned to her chair and her magazine, leaving the door open, and a free entrance to the murderer. This is possible, but is it not in the highest degree improbable? Miss Gilchrist was nervous of robbery and would not neglect obvious precautions. The ring came immediately after the maid's departure. She could hardly have thought that it was her returning, the less so as the girl had the keys and would not need to ring. If she went as far as the hall door to open it, she only had to take another step to see who was ascending the stair. Would she not have taken it if it were only to say: “ What, have you forgotten your keys? “ That a nervous old lady should throw open both doors, never look to see who her visitor was, and return to her dining-room is very hard to believe.

And look at it from the murderer's point of view. He had planned out his proceedings. It is notorious that it is the easiest thing in the world to open the lower door of a Scotch flat. The blade of any penknife will do that. If he was to depend upon ringing to get at his victim, it was evidently better for him to ring at the upper door, as otherwise the chance would seem very great that she would look down, see him coming up the stair, and shut herself in. On the other hand, if he were at the upper door and she answered it, he had only to push his way in. Therefore, the latter would be his course if he rang at all. And yet the police theory is that though he rang, he rang from below. It is not what he would do, and if he did do it, it would be most unlikely that he would get in. How could he suppose that the old lady would do so incredible a thing as leave her door open and return to her reading? If she waited, she might even up to the last instant have shut the door in his face. If one weighs all these reasons, one can hardly fail, I think, to come to the conclusion that the murderer had keys, and that the old lady never rose from her chair until the last instant, because, hearing the keys in the door, she took it for granted that the maid had come back. But if he had keys, how did he get the mould, and how did he get them made? There is a line of inquiry there. The only conceivable alternatives are, that the murderer was actually concealed in the flat when Lambie came put, and of that there is no evidence whatever, or that the visitor was some one whom the old lady knew, in which case he would naturally have been admitted.

There are still one or two singular points which invite comment. One of these, which I have incidentally mentioned, is that neither the match, the match-box, nor the box opened in the bedroom showed any marks of blood. Yet the crime had been an extraordinarily bloody one. This is certainly very singular. An explanation given by Dr. Adams who was the first medical man to view the body is worthy of attention. He considered that the wounds might have been inflicted by prods downwards from the leg of a chair, in which case the seat of the chair would preserve the clothes and to some extent the hands of the murderer from bloodstains. The condition of one of the chairs seemed to him to favour this supposition. The explanation is ingenious, but I must confess that I cannot understand how such wounds could be inflicted by such an instrument. There were in particular a number of spindle-shaped cuts with a bridge of skin between them which are very suggestive. My first choice as to the weapon which inflicted these would be a burglar’s jemmy, which is bifurcated at one end, while the blow which pushed the poor woman’s eye into her brain would represent a thrust from the other end. Failing a jemmy, I should choose a hammer, but a very different one from the toy thing from a half-crown card of tools which was exhibited in Court. Surely commonsense would say that such an instrument could burst an eye-ball, but could not possibly drive it deep into the brain, since the short head could not penetrate nearly so far. The hammer, which I would reconstruct from the injuries would be what they call, I believe, a plasterer’s hammer, short in the handle, long and strong in the head, with a broad fork behind. But how such a weapon could be used without the user bearing marks of it, is more than I can say. It has never been explained why a rug was laid over the murdered woman. The murderer, as his conduct before Lambie and Adams showed, was a perfectly cool person. It is at least possible that he used the rug as a shield between him and his victim while he battered her with his weapon. His clothes, if not his hands, would in this way be preserved.

I have said that it is of the first importance to trace who knew of the existence of the jewels, since this might greatly help the solution of the problem. In connection with this there is a passage in Lambie’s evidence in New York which is of some importance. I give it from the stenographer’s report, condensing in places:

Q. “Do you know in Glasgow a man named ? “

A. “ Yes, sir.”

Q. “What is his business?”

A. “A book-maker.”

Q. “ When did you first meet him? “

A. “ At a dance.”

Q. “ What sort of dance? “

A. “A New Year’s dance.” (That would be New Year of igo8.)

Q. “ When did you meet him after that? “

A. “In the beginning of June.”

Q. “Where?”

A. “In Glasgow.”

Q. “ At a street corner? “

A. “No, he came up to the house at Prince’s Street.”

Q. “ Miss Gilchrist’s house? “

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “That was the first time since the dance? “

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “ Do you deny that you had a meeting with him by a letter received from him at a corner of a street in Glasgow? “

A. “I got a letter.”

Q. “ To meet him at a street corner? “

A. “ Yes.”

Q. “The first meeting after the dance?”

A. “ Yes.”

Q. “ And you met him there? “

A. “ Yes.”

Q. “ And you went out with him? “

A. “ No, I did not go out with him.”

Q. “ You went somewhere with him, didn’t you? “

A. “ Yes, I made an appointment for Sun day.”

Q. “Did you know anything about the man?”

A. “Yes, I did, sir.”

Q. “ What did you know about him? “

A. “ I didn’t know much.”

Q. “ How many times did he visit you at Miss Gilchrist’s house? “

A. “Once.”

Q. “ Quite sure of that? “

A. “ Quite sure.”

Q. “ Didn’t he come and take tea with you there in her apartment? “

A. “That was at the Coast.”

Q. “ Then he came to see you at Miss Gil-Christ’s summer place? “

A. “Yes.”

Q. “How many times?”

A. “Once.”

Q. “ Did he meet Miss Gilchrist then? “

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “You introduced him?”

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “ Did she wear this diamond brooch? “

A. “I don’t remember.”

Q. “ When did you next see him? “

A. “ The first week in September.”

Q. “In Glasgow?”

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “By appointment?”

A. “Yes.”

Q. “When next?”

A. “I have not met him since.”

Q. “ And you say he only called once at the country place?”

A. “Once, sir.”

Q. “ In your Glasgow deposition you say:

‘ He visited me at Girvan and was entertained at tea with me on Saturday night, and at dinner on Sunday with Miss Gilchrist and me.’”

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “ Then you did see him more than once in the country.”

A. “Once.”

He read the extract again as above.

Q. “Was that true?”

A. “Yes.”

Q. “ Then you invited this man to tea at Miss Gilchrist’s summer house? “

A. “Yes.”

Q. “ On Saturday night? “

A. “Yes.”

Q. “ And on Sunday night? “

A. “ He wasn’t there.”

Q. “ On Sunday you invited him there to dinner with Miss Gilchrist and yourself, didn’t you? “

A. “Yes, sir. I didn’t invite him.”

Q. “Who invited him.”

A. “ Miss Gilchrist.”

Q. “Had you introduced him?”

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “ He was your friend, wasn’t he? “

A. “Yes, sir.”

Q. “ She knew nothing about him? “

A. “No.”

Q. “ She took him to the house on your recommendation? “

A. “Yes.”

Q. “Did she wear her diamonds at this dinner party? “

A. “I don’t remember.”

Q. “You told him that she was a rich woman? “

A. “Yes.”

Q. “ Did you tell him that she had a great many jewels?”

A. “Yes.”

Q. “Have your suspicions ever turned towards this man? “

A. “Never.”

Q. “ Do you know of any other man who would be as familiar with those premises, the wealth of the old lady, her jewelry, and the way to get into the premises as that man? “

A. “No, sir.”

Q. “Was the man you met in the hallway this man? “

A. “No, sir.”

This is a condensation of a very interesting and searching piece of the cross-examination which reveals several things. One is Lambie's qualities as a witness. Another is the very curious picture of the old lady, the bookmaker and the servant-maid all sitting at dinner together. The last and most important is the fact, that a knowledge of the jewels had got out. Against the man himself there is no possible allegation. The matter was looked into by the police, and their conclusions were absolute, and were shared by those responsible for the defence. But is it to be believed that during the months which elapsed between this man acquiring this curious knowledge, and the actual crime, never once chanced to repeat to any friend, who in turn repeated it to another, the strange story of the lonely old woman and her hoard? This he would do in full innocence. It was a most natural thing to do. But, for almost the first time in the case we seem to catch some glimpse of the relation between possible cause and effect, some connection between the dead woman on one side, and outsiders on the other who had the means of knowing something of her remarkable situation.

There is just one other piece of Lambie's cross-examination, this time from the Edinburgh trial, which I would desire to quote. It did not appear in America, just as the American extract already given did not appear in Edinburgh. For the first time they come out together:

Q. "Did Miss Gilchrist use to have a dog? "

A. "Yes, an Irish terrier."

Q. "What happened to it?"

A. " It got poisoned."

Q. " When was it poisoned? "

A. "I think on the 7th or 8th of September."

Q. " Was that thought to be done by some one?"

A. "I did not think it, for I thought it might have eaten something, but Miss Gil-

Christ thought it was poisoned by some one."

Q. " To kill the watch-dog — was that the idea?"

A. " She did not say."

The reader should be reminded that Slater did not arrive in Glasgow until the end of October of that year. His previous residences in the town were as far back as 1901 and 1905. If the dog were indeed poisoned in anticipation of the crime, he, at least, could have had nothing to do with it.

There is one other piece of evidence which may, or may not have been of importance. It is that of Miss Brown, the schoolmistress. This lady was in court, but seems to have been called by neither side for the reason that her evidence was helpful to neither the prosecution nor the defence. She deposed that on the night of the murder, about ten minutes past seven, she saw two men running away from the scene. One of these men closely corresponded to the original description of the murderer before it was modified by Barrowman. This one was of medium build, dark hair and clean shaven, with three-quarter length grey overcoat, dark tweed cap, and both hands in his pockets. Here we have the actual assassin described to the life, and had Miss Brown declared that this man was the prisoner, she would have been a formidable addition to the witnesses for prosecution. Miss Brown, however identified Oscar Slater (after the usual absurd fashion of such identifications) as the second man, whom she describes, as of “Dark glossy hair, navy blue overcoat with velvet collar, dark trousers, black boots, something in his hand which seemed clumsier than a walking stick.” One would imagine that this object in his hand would naturally be his hat, since she describes the man as bare-headed. All that can be said of this incident is that if the second man was Slater, then he certainly was not the actual murderer whose dress corresponds closely to the first, and in no particular to the second. To the Northern eye, all swarthy foreigners bear a resemblance, and that there was a swarthy man, whether foreign or not, concerned in this affair would seem to be beyond question. That there should have been two confederates, one of whom had planned the crime while the other carried it out, is a perfectly feasible supposition. Miss Brown’s story does not necessarily contradict that of Barrowman, as one would imagine that the second man would join the murderer at some little distance from the scene of the crime. However, as there was no cross-examination upon the story, it is difficult to know what weight to attach to it.

Let me say in conclusion that I have had no desire in anything said in this argument, to hurt the feelings or usurp the functions of anyone, whether of the police or the criminal court, who had to do with the case. It is difficult to discuss matters from a detached point of view without giving offence. I am well aware that it is easier to theorise at a distance than to work a case out in practice whether as detective or as counsel. I leave the matter now with the hope that, even after many days, some sudden flash may be sent which will throw a light upon as brutal and callous a crime as has ever been recorded in those black annals in which the criminologist finds the materials for his study. Meanwhile it is on the conscience of the authorities, and in the last resort on that of the community that this verdict obtained under the circumstances which I have indicated, shall now be reconsidered.

Arthur Conan Doyle.

Windlesham, Crowborough. COPY OF MEMORIAL FOR REPRIEVE

UNTO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD PENTLAND, HIS MAJESTY'S SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND MEMORIAL ON BEHALF OF OSCAR SLATER

THIS Memorial is humbly presented on behalf of Oscar Slater presently a Prisoner in the Prison of Glasgow, who was, in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh, on Thursday, the sixth day of May, Nineteen hundred and nine, found guilty of the charge of murdering Miss Marion Gilchrist in her house in West Princes Street, Glasgow, and sentenced to death. The Prisoner is a Jew, and was born in Germany. He is 37 years of age.

The Jury returned a verdict of " Guilty " by a majority of nine to six, and the legal advisers of the condemned man hold a very strong opinion that the verdict of the majority of the Jury was not in accordance with the evidence led, and that this evidence was quite insufficient to identify the Prisoner with the murderer, and so to establish the Prisoner's guilt. This view, they believe, is shared by the general public of all classes in Scotland, and by the Glasgow press (vide leading article in The Glasgow Herald of 7th May, 1909, sent herewith).

Your Memorialist has endeavoured in this paper to deal with the matter as briefly and with as little argument as possible; but in view of the fact that the trial of the Prisoner occupied four days, it is inevitable that the Memorial should extend to some length.

It is common ground that the late Miss Gilchrist, a lady of about 82 years of age, resided alone with her domestic servant, Nellie Lambie, a girl of about 21 years of age.

According to the evidence of Lambie, the latter left Miss Gilchrist alone in the house at seven o'clock on the evening of 21st December, 1908, and went to purchase an evening paper. Lambie deponed that she securely shut the house door behind her, and also the door at the close, or street entry; that she was only absent about ten minutes; that on returning about ten minutes past seven o'clock she found the close door open; that upon ascending the stair she found Mr. Adams, a gentleman who resides in the flat below, standing at Miss Gilchrist's house door; that Adams informed her that he had gone up to Miss Gilchrist’s door because he had heard knocking on the floor of Miss Gilchrist’s house, and had rung the bell, but that he could obtain no admittance; that the lobby was lighted by one gas jet turned half up, but giving a good light; that Lambie thereupon opened the house door with her keys; that upon the door being opened a man came through the lobby or hall of Miss Gilchrist’s house, passed Lambie and Adams, went downstairs, and disappeared; and that, upon Lambie and Adams entering the house, they found Miss Gilchrist lying on the dining-room floor dead, her head having been smashed.

Upon the Wednesday following the murder (23rd December, 1908), the Glasgow Police were informed by a message girl named Mary Barrowman (about 15 years of age), that she had seen a man wearing a Donegal hat and a light coat running out of the close which leads from the street to Miss Gilchrist’s house shortly after seven o’clock on the night of the murder; that the man passed her, running at top speed; that she noticed that he was dark, and clean shaven, and that his nose was twisted towards the right side. The servant Lambie had also informed the Police that a gold crescent brooch, set in diamonds, had disappeared from Miss Gilchrist’s house on the night of the murder, and that this was all of Miss Gilchrist’s property that she missed. These statements were published in the Glasgow newspapers on Friday, 25th December, 1908, and following upon this the witness Allan Maclean, a member of a club to which Slater belonged, informed the Police that Slater’s appearance somewhat corresponded with the description advertised, and that he had been trying to sell a pawn ticket for a diamond brooch. Following up this clue, the Police went to Slater’s house at 69, St. George’s Road, Glasgow, on the night of Friday, 25th December, and learned that he and Miss Andree Antoine, with whom he had been cohabiting, had left Glasgow that night with their belongings. The Police thereafter ascertained that Slater had sailed on the “ Lusitania “ for New York from Liverpool on Saturday, 26th December, and cabled to the Authorities at New York to detain and search him on his arrival. This was done, and the pawn ticket, which he had been trying to sell, was found upon him, but turned out to be a pawn ticket for a brooch which belonged to Miss Antoine, had never belonged to Miss Gilchrist, and had been pawned a considerable time before the murder. Proceedings, however, were instituted for Slater’s extradition. The witnesses Lambie, Adams, and Barrowman gave evidence in America, purporting to identify him as the man seen leaving Miss Gilchrist’s house, and Slater was (he states of his own consent) extradited, and brought back to Scotland for trial.

An advertisement was published by the Authorities in Glasgow offering a reward of £200 for information which would lead to the arrest of the murderer.

The only evidence against Slater, which might be called direct evidence, was the evidence of the persons who saw a man walk out of the lobby or hall in Miss Gilchrist’s house on the night of the murder (Lambie and Adams), or leaving the close leading therefrom, or running along the street (Barrowman).

At the trials Lambie professed to identify Slater, as the man whom she had seen leaving the house, by the side of his face. It was put to her, however, and clearly proved, that when she gave evidence in New York in the extradition proceedings she stated in Court there that she did not see the man’s face, and professed to identify him by his walk. When Slater’s own coat, the one found in his luggage, was shown to her at the trial, she at once remarked, even before it was unrolled, that it was not like the coat the man in the lobby wore — it was the coat. It was obviously impossible that she knew it to be the same coat. Lord Guthrie referred to this in his charge to the jury as a typical example of the nature of her evidence. With regard to the positive nature of her evidence generally, it is interesting to note that her first answer in America, when asked if she saw the man, was, “ One is very suspicious, if any thing,” She stated that, when she saw Slater in the Central Police Office at Glasgow, she recognised him in his “own coat” It was proved that he was not then wearing his own coat, but one with which he had been dressed for identification purposes.

The witness only saw the man who was leaving the house for a moment or two. Adams and she contradicted each other as to where she was when the man walked across the lobby. Adams deponed that she was by the lobby clock and walking towards the kitchen. If so, she must practically have had her back to the man. She says she was on the threshold of the door. In any event, her view was momentary.

The witness Adams, who deponed that he had a better view of the man in the house than Lambie, stated at the trial that he, standing at the threshold, saw the man’s face as he approached, that their eyes met, and that the man walked slowly towards him, face to face, but Adams would not go further than to say that Slater resembled the man very much. He is superior to

Lambie and Barrowman in years, education and intelligence. Your Memorialist begs to emphasise the fact that this witness had a much better view of the man than any of the other witnesses.

The witness Barrowman stated at the trial that the man ran out of the close and rushed past her at top speed, brushing against her, and that he had his hat pulled well down over his forehead. The witness is a message girl, about 15 years of age. She also stated that the man had on brown boots, a Donegal hat, and a fawn coat, and that he was dark and clean shaven, and that his nose had a twist to the right. She professed to have noticed all these things as he rushed past her at top speed. At the trial this witness stated in cross-examination (1) that she was proceeding in the opposite direction from the man, to deliver a parcel, but that she turned and went some distance after him; that she thought he was probably going to catch a tram-car; but she could not explain why she should go out of her way to turn and follow a man running for a car in a busy city like Glasgow; and (2) that, although the girl Lambie and she had occupied the same cabin on the voyage to America, which lasted about twelve days, she had not once discussed the appearance of the man, and that no one had warned her not to do so. These two statements do not impress your Memorialist as bearing the stamp of truth. This girl started the description of the twisted nose. She is the only witness who refers to it. Her view of the man's face must necessarily have been momentary. Slater's nose cannot properly be described as "twisted to the right." It has a noticeable prominence in the centre. *

All of these three witnesses had, as has been said, only a momentary view of the man, and it was proved that before Barrowman professed to identify Slater in New York she was shown his photograph, and that both she and Lambie, before attempting to identify him in New York, saw him being brought into Court by a Court official, wearing a badge. In her New York evidence she first said, " He is something like the man I saw." At the trial she stated that he was the man. These facts very much reduce, if they do not altogether vitiate, the value of the evidence of these identifying witnesses.

Another witness, Mrs. Liddell, who is a married sister of the witness Adams, stated that, at five minutes to seven on the evening of the murder, she saw a dark, clean-shaven man leaning against a railing at the street entry to Miss Gilchrist's house, but that this man wore a heavy brown tweed coat and a brown cap. It is to be observed that Constable Neil, who passed the house at ten minutes to seven, saw no one there; and Lambie, who left the house promptly at seven, or, as she said in America, “perhaps a few minutes before seven,” saw no one there. Further, Mrs. Liddell did not observe where the man went to; according to her he merely glided away; and although she was in Miss Gilchrist’s house that night and saw the body, and would naturally be greatly concerned over the murder, she did not recollect having seen this man until the Wednesday after the murder. Even taking her evidence as absolutely true and reliable, it provides an excellent object-lesson on the difficulty and responsibility of convicting on such evidence as this, because the man she saw was obviously dressed differently from the man seen by the other three witnesses. Her evidence does not, to any appreciable extent, further the case against Slater, as she stated that she thought this man was Slater, but admitted that she might be in error.

The other witness is a girl named Annie Armour, a ticket clerk in the Subway Station at Kelvinbridge, who says that between 7.30 and 8 that evening a man, whom she identified as Slater, rushed past her office without waiting for a ticket, and seemed excited. Lord Guthrie in his charge to the jury did not refer to this witness, and your Memorialist thinks advisedly. The mere question of time is sufficient to render her evidence valueless. She is sure the incident did not happen before 7.30. According to the other witnesses, the murderer must have run from the house by at least 7.15. It was proved that it would only take a man five or six minutes to run from the scene of the tragedy to this station, either by the most direct route or by the route which Barrowman’s evidence suggests he took. Then it is impossible to suppose that she could get anything like a good view, even of the side face, of a man who rushed past her in the way she described.

All the witnesses who saw the man on the night of the murder (Monday) say that he was clean shaven. It was proved that on the next day or two after the murder Slater had a short, black, stubbly moustache.

These were the only witnesses called by the Crown to identify Slater with the murderer. Further circumstantial evidence, however, was led by the Crown to show that, on occasions before the day of the murder, Slater had been seen standing in or walking up and down West Princes Street — Mrs. M’Haffie, her daughters and niece, Campbell, Cunningham, Bryson, Nairn, and O’Brien and Walker (two policemen). It may be noted that Slater’s house was situated about three minutes’ walk from West Princes Street.

These witnesses did not all agree in their evidence. Some said that Slater was the man they had seen; others, equally or perhaps better able to judge, only said that he was very like him. The Memorialist does not propose in this paper to deal at length with this part of the evidence, except to point out that two witnesses (Nairn and Bryson) say they saw Slater in West Princes Street on the Sunday evening previous to the murder. Against this there is the evidence that Slater on this day, as usual, spent all Sunday (day and evening) in his house. Three witnesses from Paris, London, and Dublin spoke to this. Coming from different places, they had no chance to concoct a story.

At Slater’s trial it was suggested that there were various circumstances tending to create an atmosphere of suspicion around him; but it is submitted that all these were capable of explanation, and in no way pointing to Slater’s guilt as a murderer. Slater had written to Cameron that he could prove where he was on the evening of the murder “ by five people.” When this letter was written, he thought that the date of the murder was the Tuesday, the 22nd.

The evidence of his witnesses was to the effect that on the evening of the murder he was in a billiard room until 6.30 p. m., after which he went home for dinner.

It was shown that Slater dealt in diamonds. There was, however, no evidence of any dishonest dealing of any kind. The brooch said to have been missing from Miss Gilchrist’s house has not been traced. There was no evidence of any kind led to show that Slater ever knew, or even heard of, Miss Gilchrist or her house, and the Memorialist would emphasise the fact that it was the missing brooch that put the Police on the track of Slater.

With reference to Slater’s departure for America on 25th December, 1908, it was proved that he had formed the intention, some weeks before the murder, of going to America. Cameron, Rattman, and Aumann proved this. Slater had, in fact, tried to get the last named to take over his flat. The letter from Jacobs, of 28th December, and the card bearing the words “ address till 30th December,” produced by the Crown, also corroborate the evidence of this intention of leaving, which is further corroborated by the evidence of Nichols, the barber, a Crown witness.

On the morning of 21st December, 1908, Slater received two letters — one from London, stating that his wife was demanding his address, and the other from San Francisco, asking him to come over. These were spoken to by Schmalz, his servant girl, and Miss Antoine. Further corroboration of his intention to leave is (1) on the morning of 21st December he raised a further £30 from Mr. Liddell, pawnbroker, on his brooch, and on the same day tried to sell the ticket; (a) he wrote to the Post Office for payment of the money at his credit; (3) he wired to Dent, London, to send on his watch, which was being repaired, immediately; (4) on the Monday morning he gave notice to the servant girl that she would not be required after the following Saturday (these events all happened before the murder); (5) on the Tuesday morning he redeemed a pair of binoculars from another pawnbroker whose assistant, Kempton, proved this, and who stated that he was in no way excited; (6) on the 23rd and 24th December he made inquiries at Cook's Shipping Offices regarding berths, and betrayed no signs of any excitement; on the 23rd he was, in the evening, in Johnston's billiard room, which he used to frequent; and on the 24th he spent the afternoon about Glasgow with his friend Cameron, who gave evidence; (7) on Friday morning a Mrs. Freedman and her sister arrived from London to take over his flat, so that he and Miss Antoine left on Friday night.

A rumour got abroad at the time to the effect that he booked to London and left the train at Liverpool. This rumour was published in the various newspapers, to Slater's great prejudice, but nothing of the kind was proved at the trial. The Police were evidently misled by the fact that he went by a London train, but it was proved that there were two carriages in that train for Liverpool, and also that Slater's luggage, consisting of nine boxes, was labelled to Liverpool. The Porter who labelled the luggage was called, and stated that Slater told him that he was going to Liverpool, and entered a Liverpool carriage.

The point was also raised against Slater that he used various aliases. He had been staying apart from his wife for about four years, during which time he cohabited with Miss Antoine. She stated that Slater's wife was a drunken woman, and caused him a deal of trouble. At one time he adopted the name of "George," and when he came to Glasgow on the last occasion he took the name of " Anderson." On the voyage to America he took the name of Otto Sando, because his luggage was labelled O. S. At times he called himself a dentist. There was no evidence that he really was a dentist Miss Antoine explained that he adopted the title of dentist, as he required a designation of some sort, although he was a gambler. A great deal was published in the newspapers about a hammer that had been found in one of his boxes. This turned out to be an ordinary small domestic nail hammer, purchased on a card containing several other tools, the lot costing only 2s. 6d. He, of course, took the hammer to America with him with all the rest of his belongings.

Nothing incriminating was found in any of his boxes.

No evidence whatever was led to show how the murderer gained access to the house.

It will be conceded that identification evidence, especially in a serious charge of this kind, must be examined very carefully, and should have little weight attached to it, unless it is very clear.

To sum up, the only real evidence in the case is that of those who saw a man running away on the night of the murder; and, as has been pointed out, these witnesses had only a momentary glance at him. Adams does not positively identify the prisoner as the man. He says he closely resembles him.

Lambie's New York evidence has already been referred to, and her evidence at the trial cannot be reconciled with it.

. Lambie and Barrowman both saw him in custody before trying to identify him in New York, and the latter, before identifying him, was shown his photograph.

All the other identifying witnesses called to give evidence as to his having been seen in the vicinity on days previous to the murder were taken down to the General Police Office when Slater returned from America to identify him. They were shown into one room together, and then separately taken into a room in the Police Office, where Slater was amongst about a dozen men, none of whom were like him. (Cunningham says she could see that the other men were policemen in plain clothes.) All these witnesses knew that Slater had arrived from America, and was in the room. They had all read his description in the newspapers, or had seen his photograph. They all, therefore, looked for, and had no difficulty in pointing out, a dark, foreign- looking man, with a somewhat peculiarly shaped nose. It is submitted that this is not identification evidence in the proper sense at all. Had these people been able to pick out, as their man, from amongst several others, a man whose description they only knew from what they had previously seen of him, unassisted by description, and unassisted by a photograph, the value of their evidence would have been entirely different.

Some Crown witnesses identified him as the man they had seen and talked to (Shipping Clerk, Porter, &c.), but they, of course, were able to do so. None of the identifying witnesses had ever spoken to him.

Identification evidence is a class of evidence which the law distrusts. The most famous authority is the case of Adolf Beck. Beck was, in 1896, sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, on the evidence of ten women, who swore positively that he was a man whom they had each met on two occasions, and spent some time with in their own houses, and who had defrauded them, and on the evidence of two policemen, who swore positively that Beck was the man who had been previously convicted of similar crimes, taken along with certain circumstantial evidence — that he was known to frequent a hotel on the notepaper of which one of the women had received a letter. Again, in 1904, Beck was convicted of similar crimes on similar evidence. It was subsequently demonstrated that Beck committed none of the crimes, but that a man bearing a general similarity to him was the criminal.

In the report issued by the Commission appointed to investigate the matter, consisting of Lord Collins, Sir Spencer Walpole, and Sir John Edge, the following passage occurs:—"Evidence of identity, upon personal impression, however bona fide, is of all classes of evidence the least to be relied upon, and, unless supported by other evidence, an unsafe basis for the verdict of a Jury."

Now, the evidence in the Beck case was infinitely more overwhelming and consistent than in this case; and the report in the Beck case, and the report on which it followed, make it clear that on the evidence in this case the Jury had no right to bring in a verdict of " Guilty."

A good deal was said by the learned Lord Advocate to the Jury about Slater's immoral character. It was not disputed that he was a gambler. It was also admitted that he had cohabited for about four years with Madame Antoine, who was of doubtful virtue, and who gave evidence. Yet the learned Lord Advocate addressed the Jury to the effect that the prisoner " had followed a life which descended to the very depth of human degradation, for, by the universal judgment of mankind, the man who lived upon the proceeds of prostitution has sunk to the lowest depth, and all moral sense in him had been destroyed." This he cited as proof of the disappearance of an obstacle which had previously been in his way, viz: — Whether it was conceivable that such a man as Slater could commit such an inhumanly brutal crime. The only evidence on that point was that of Cameron, Slater’s friend, who, in cross-examination, said he had heard that Slater lived on the earnings of prostitution, but who did not say he knew. The Jury were distinctly told by the Lord Advocate, and by the prisoner’s Counsel, and by the Judge, to banish from their minds anything they had heard regarding the man’s character; but they had previously heard all about it, and the Memorialist feels strongly that they were evidently unable to do so.

Public feeling is also very strong on the point that the question of Slater’s character should never have been brought before the Jury.

The Memorialist thinks it is only fair to prisoner to point out that he was all along anxious to give evidence on his own behalf. He was advised by his Counsel not to do so, but not from any knowledge of guilt. He had undergone the strain of a four days’ trial. He speaks rather broken English — although quite intelligibly — with a foreign accent, and he had been in custody since January.

Apart from what has been set forth above, your Memorialist begs to draw attention to the fact that on the Crown list of witnesses is the name of a witness, Miss Agnes Brown (No. 46). This lady is 30 years of age, and a very intelligent school teacher. Your Memorialist is informed that she told the Police and Procurator-Fiscal that on the night of the murder, about ten minutes past seven o’clock, two men in company rushed along West Princes Street from the direction of Miss Gilchrist’s house, and passed close to her at the corner of West Princes Street and West Cumberland Street; that one of them was dressed in a blue Melton coat with a dark velvet collar, black boots, and without a hat; that both men ran past the opening of West Cumberland Street, straight on along West Princes Street, crossed West Princes Street, and ran down Rupert Street, a street further west, and opening off the opposite side of West Princes Street Your Memorialist understands that, in the identification proceedings before referred to, this witness pointed out Slater as the man in the Melton coat, as she thought This witness’s evidence is thus in sharp contradiction on material points to that of the message girl Barrowman (who had only a momentary glance at the man), but upon whose evidence so much weight has evidently been laid, and who says that Slater was dressed in a light coat, a Donegal hat, and brown boots, was alone, and ran down West Cumberland Street Your Memorialist respectfully submits that this illustrates the danger of convicting a man upon the kind of evidence given in this case. Miss Brown was in attendance at the trial, but was not called as a witness. Even on the evidence led, the votes of two more jurymen in his favour would have liberated the prisoner. In England the probability is that a conviction would never have been obtained.

Your Memorialist is authorised to state that Slater’s Counsel agree that the evidence did not justify the conviction.

Your Memorialist, who has all along acted as Slater’s Solicitor since he was brought back from America after the Extradition Proceedings, and who has had very many interviews with Slater, begs respectfully to state his absolute belief in Slater’s innocence.

May it therefore please the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for Scotland to take this Memorial into his most favourable consideration, and thereafter to advise his Most Gracious Majesty to exercise his royal prerogative to the effect of commuting the sentence passed upon the prisoner, or to do otherwise as in the circumstances may seem just.

And your Memorialist will ever pray.

EWING SPIERS, 190 West George Street, Glasgow, Oscar Slater’s Solicitor.

Dated this seventeenth day of May, One thousand nine hundred and nine.

THE HOLOCAUST OF MANOR PLACE

In the study of criminal psychology one is forced to the conclusion that the most dangerous of all types of mind is that of the inordinately selfish man. He is a man who has lost his sense of proportion. His own will and his own interest have blotted out for him the duty which he owes to the community. Impulsiveness, jealousy, vindictiveness are the fruitful parents of crime, but the insanity of selfishness is the most dangerous and also the most unlovely of them all. Sir Willoughby Patterne, the eternal type of all egoists, may be an amusing and harmless character as long as things go well with him, but let him be thwarted, let the thing which he desires be withheld from him, and the most monstrous results may follow. Huxley has said that a man in this life is for ever playing a game with an unseen opponent, who only makes his presence felt by exacting a penalty every time one makes a mistake in the game. The player who makes the mistake of selfishness may have a terrible forfeit to pay, but the unaccountable thing in the rules is that some, who are only spectators of his game, may have to help him in the paying. Read the Story of William Godfrey Youngman, and see how difficult it is to understand the rules under which these penalties are exacted. Learn also from it that selfishness is no harmless peccadillo, but that it is an evil root from which the most monstrous growths may spring.

About forty miles to the south of London, and close to the rather passé watering-place of Tunbridge Wells, there lies the little townlet of Wadhurst. It is situated within the borders of Sussex at a point which is close to the confines of Kent. The country is a rich pastoral one and the farmers are a flourishing race, for they are near enough to the Metropolis to take advantage of its mighty appetite. Among these farmers there lived in the year 1860 one Streeter, the master of a small homestead and the father of a fair daughter, Mary Wells Streeter. Mary was a strong, robust girl, some twenty years of age, skilled in all country work, and with some knowledge also of the town, for she had friends up there, and above all she had one friend, a young man of twenty-five, whom she had met upon one of her occasional visits, and who had admired her so that he had actually come down to Wadhurst after her, and had spent a night under her father's roof. The father had expressed no disapprobation of the suitor, a brisk, masterful young fellow, a little vague in his description of his own occupation and prospects, but an excellent fireside companion. And so it came about that the deep, town-bred William Godfrey Youngman became engaged to the simple, country-bred Mary Wells Streeter, William knowing all about Mary, but Mary very little about William.

July the 29th of that year fell upon a Sunday, and Mary sat in the afternoon in the window of the farm-house parlour, with her bundle of love-letters upon her lap, reading them again and yet again. Outside was the little square of green lawn, fringed with the homely luxuriance of an English country garden, the high hollyhocks, the huge nodding sunflowers, the bushes of fuchsia, and the fragrant clumps of sweet William. Through the open lattice came the faint, delicate scent of the lilac and the long, low droning of the bees. The farmer had lain down to the plethoric sleep of the Sunday afternoon, and Mary had the room to herself. There were fifteen love-letters in all some shorter, some longer, some wholly delightful, some with scattered business allusions, which made her wrinkle her pretty brows. There was this matter of the insurance, for example, which had cost her lover so much anxiety until she had settled it. No doubt he knew more of the world than she, but still it was strange that she, so young and so hale, should be asked and again asked to prepare herself for death. Even in the flush of her love those scattered words struck a chill to her heart. 'Dearest girl,' he had written, 'I have filled up the paper now, and took it to the life insurance office, and they will write to Mrs. James Boric today to get an answer on Saturday. So you can go to the office with me before two o'clock on Monday.' And then again, only two days later, he had begun his letter: 'You promised me faithfully over and over again, and I expect you to keep your promise, that you would be mine, and that your friends would not know it until we were married; but now, dearest Mary, if you will only let Mrs. James Bone write to the insurance office at once and go with me to have your life insured on Monday morning next!' So ran the extracts from the letters, and they perplexed Mary as she read them. But it was all over now, and he should mingle business no longer with his love, for she had yielded to his whim, and the insurance for £100 had been duly effected. It had cost her a quarterly payment of 10s. 4d., but it had seemed to please him, and so she would think of it no more.

There was a click of the garden-gate, and looking up she saw the porter from the station coming up the path with a note in his hand. Seeing her at the window he handed it in and departed, slyly smiling, a curious messenger of Cupid in his corduroys and clumping boots — a messenger of a grimmer god than Cupid, had he but known it. She had eagerly torn it open, and this was the message that she read:

‘16, Manor Place, Newington, S.E. Saturday night, July 28th.

‘My BELOVED POLLY,

‘I have posted one letter to you this afternoon, but I find that I shall not have to go to Brighton tomorrow as I have had a letter from there with what I wanted inside of it, so, my dear girl, I have quite settled my business now and I am quite ready to see you now, therefore I send this letter to you. I will send this to London Bridge Station tomorrow morning by 6:30 o’clock and get the guard to take it to Wadhurst Station, to give it to the porter there, who will take it to your place. I can only give the guard something, so you can give the man who brings this a small sum. I shall expect to see you, my dear girl, on Monday morning by the first train. I will await your coming at London Bridge Station. I know the time the train arrives — a quarter to ten o’clock. I have promised to go to my uncle’s tomorrow, so I cannot come down; but I will go with you home on Monday night or first thing Tuesday morning, and so return here again Tuesday night, to be ready to go anywhere on Wednesday; but you know all that I have told you, and I now expect that you will come up on Monday morning, when I shall be able to manage things as I expect to do. Excuse more now, my dearest Mary. I shall now go to bed to be up early tomorrow to take this letter. Bring or burn all your letters, my dear girl. Do not forget; and with kind love and respects to all I now sum up, awaiting to see you Monday morning a quarter to ten o’clock.

Believe me, ever your loving, affectionate,

WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN.’

A very pressing invitation this to a merry day in town; but there were certainly some curious phrases in it. What did he mean by saying that he would manage things as he expected to do? And why should she burn or bring her love-letters? There, at least, she was determined to disobey this masterful suitor who always ‘expected’ in so authoritative a fashion that she would do this or that. Her letters were much too precious to be disposed of in this off-hand fashion. She packed them back, sixteen of them now, into the little tin box in which she kept her simple treasures, and then ran to meet her father, whose step she heard upon the stairs, to tell him of her invitation and the treat which awaited her to-morrow.

At a quarter to ten next morning William Godfrey Youngman was waiting upon the platform of London Bridge Station to meet the Wadhurst train which was bringing his sweetheart up to town. No observer glancing down the straggling line of loiterers would have picked him out as the man whose name and odious fame would before another day was passed be household words to all the three million dwellers in London. In person he was of a goodly height and build, but commonplace in his appearance, and with a character which was only saved from insignificance through the colossal selfishness, tainted with insanity, which made him conceive that all things should bend before his needs and will. So distorted was his outlook that it even seemed to him that if he wished people to be deceived they must be deceived, and that the weakest device or excuse, if it came from him, would pass unquestioned. He had been a journeyman tailor, as his father was before him, but aspiring beyond this, he had sought and obtained a situation as footman to Dr. Duncan, of Covent Garden. Here he had served with credit for some time, but had finally resigned his post and had returned to his father’s house, where for some time he had been living upon the hospitality of his hard-worked parents. He had talked vaguely of going into farming, and it was doubtless his short experience of Wadhurst with its sweet-smelling kine and Sussex breezes which had put the notion into his Cockney head.

But now the train rolls in, and there at a third-class window is Mary Streeter with her pink country cheeks, the pinker at the sight of her waiting lover. He takes her bag and they walk down the platform together amongst the crinolined women and baggy-trousered men whose pictures make the London of this date more strange to us than that of last century. He lives at Walworth, in South London, and a straw-strewn omnibus outside the station conveys them almost to the door. It was eleven o’clock when they arrived at Manor Place, where Youngman’s family resided.

The household arrangements at Manor Place were peculiar. The architect having not yet evolved the flat in England, the people had attained the same result in another fashion. The tenant of a two-storied house resided upon the ground-floor, and then sub-let his first and second floors to other families. Thus, in the present instance, Mr. James Bevan occupied the ground, Mr. and Mrs. Beard the first, and the Youngman family the second, of the various floors of No. 16. Manor Place. The ceilings were thin and the stairs were in common, so it may be imagined that each family took a lively interest in the doings of its neighbour. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Beard of the first floor were well aware that young Youngman had brought his sweetheart home, and were even able through half-closed doors to catch a glimpse of her, and to report that his manner towards her was affectionate.

It was not a very large family to which he introduced her. The father departed to his tailoring at five o’clock every morning and returned at ten at night. There remained only the mother, a kindly, anxious, hard-working woman, and two younger sons aged eleven and seven. At eleven o’clock the boys were at school and the mother alone.She welcomed her country visitor, eyeing her meanwhile and summing her up as a mother would do when first she met the woman whom her son was likely to marry. They dined together, and then the two set forth to see something of the sights of London.

No record has been left of what the amusements were to which this singular couple turned: he with a savage, unrelenting purpose in his heart; she wondering at his abstracted manner, and chattering country gossip with the shadow of death already gathering thickly over her. One little incident has survived. One Edward Spicer, a bluff, outspoken publican who kept the Green Dragon in Bermondsey Street, knew Mary Streeter and her father. The couple called together at the inn, and Mary presented her lover. We have no means of knowing what repellent look mine host may have observed in the young man’s face, or what malign trait he may have detected in his character, but he drew the girl aside and whispered that it was better for her to take a rope and hang herself in his skittle-alley than to marry such a man as that — a warning which seems to have met the same fate as most other warnings received by maidens of their lovers. In the evening they went to the theatre together to see one of Macready’s tragedies.

How could she know as she sat in the crowded pit, with her silent lover at her side, that her own tragedy was far grimmer than any upon the stage? It was eleven o’clock before they were back once more at Manor Place.

The hard-working tailor had now returned, and the household all supped together.Then they had to be divided for the night between the two bedrooms, which were all the family possessed. The mother, Mary, and the boy of seven occupied the front one. The father slept on his own board in the back one, and in a bed beside him lay the young man and the boy of eleven. So they settled down to sleep as commonplace a family as any in London, with little thought that within a day the attention of all the great city would be centred upon those two dingy rooms and upon the fates of their inmates.

The father woke in the very early hours, and saw in the dim light of the dawn the tall figure of his son standing in white beside his bed. To some sleepy remark that he was stirring early the youth muttered an excuse and lay down once more. At five the tailor rose to his endless task, and at twenty minutes past he went down the stair and closed the hall door behind him. So passed away the only witness, and all that remains is conjecture and circumstantial evidence. No one will ever know the exact details of what occurred, and for the purpose of the chronicler it is as well, for such details will not bear to be too critically examined. The motives and mind of the murderer are of perennial interest to every student of human nature, but the vile record of his actual brutality may be allowed to pass away when the ends of justice have once been served by their recital.

I have said that on the floor under the Youngman’s there lived a couple named Beard. At half-past five, a little after the time when the tailor had closed the hall door behind him, Mrs. Beard was disturbed by a sound which she took to be from children running up and down and playing. There was a light patter of feet on the floor above. But as she listened it struck her that there was something unusual in this romping at so early an hour, so she nudged her husband and asked him for his opinion. Then, as the two sat up in bed, straining their ears, there came from above them a gasping cry and the dull, soft thud of a falling body. Beard sprang out of bed and rushed upstairs until his head came upon the level of the Youngman’s landing. He saw enough to send him shrieking down to Mr. Bevan upon the ground-floor. ‘For God’s sake, come here! There is murder!’ he roared, fumbling with his shaking fingers at the handle of the landlord’s bedroom.

His summons did not find the landlord entirely unprepared. That ill-boding thud had been loud enough to reach his ears. He sprang palpitating from his bed, and the two men in their nightdresses ascended the creaking staircase, their frightened faces lit up by the blaze of golden sunlight of a

July morning. Again they do not seem to have got farther than the point from which they could see the landing. That confused huddle of white-clad figures littered over the passage, with those glaring smears and blotches, were more than their nerves could stand. They could count three lying there, stark dead upon the landing. And there was someone moving in the bedroom. It was coming towards them. With horror-dilated eyes they saw William Godfrey Youngman framed in the open doorway, his white nightdress brilliant with ghastly streaks and the sleeve hanging torn over his hand.

‘Mr. Beard,’ he cried, when he saw the two bloodless faces upon the stairs, ‘for God’s sake fetch a surgeon! I believe there is some alive yet!’ Then, as they turned and ran down stairs again, he called after them the singular explanation to which he ever afterwards adhered. ‘My mother has done all this,’ he cried; ‘she murdered my two brothers and my sweetheart, and I in self-defence believe that I have murdered her.’

The two men did not stop to discuss the question with him. They had both rushed to their rooms and huddled on some clothes. Then they ran out of the house in search of a surgeon and a policeman, leaving Youngman still standing on the stair repeating his strange explanation. How sweet the morning air must have seemed to them when they were once clear of the accursed house, and how the honest milkmen, with their swinging tins, must have stared at those two rushing and dishevelled figures. But they had not far to go. John Varney, of P Division, as solid and unimaginative as the law which he represents, was standing at the street corner, and he came clumping back with reassuring slowness and dignity.

‘Oh, policeman, here is a sight! What shall I do?’ cried Youngman, as he saw the glazed official hat coming up the stair.

Constable Varney is not shaken by that horrid cluster of death. His advice is practical and to the point.

‘Go and dress yourself!’ said he.

‘I struck my mother; but it was in self defence,’ cried the other. ‘Would you not have done the same? It is the law.’

Constable Varney is not to be drawn into giving a legal opinion, but he is quite convinced that the best thing for Youngman to do is to put on some clothes.

And now a crowd had begun to assemble in the street, and another policeman and an inspector had arrived. It was clear that, whether

Youngman’s story was correct or not, he was a self-confessed homicide, and that the law must hold her grip of him. But when a dagger-shaped knife, splintered by the force of repeated blows, was found upon the floor, and Youngman had to confess that it belonged to him; when also it was observed that ferocious strength and energy were needed to produce the wounds inflicted, it became increasingly evident that, instead of being a mere victim of circumstances, this man was one of the criminals of a century. But all evidence must be circumstantial, for mother, sweetheart, brothers — the mouths of all were closed in the one indiscriminate butchery.

The horror and the apparent purposelessness of the deed roused public excitement and indignation to the highest pitch. The miserable sum for which poor Mary was insured appeared to be the sole motive of the crime; the prisoner’s eagerness to have the business concluded, and his desire to have the letters destroyed in which he had urged it, forming the strongest evidence against him. At the same time, his calm assumption that things would be arranged as he wished them to be, and that the Argus Insurance Office would pay over the money to one who was neither husband nor relative of the deceased, pointed to an ignorance of the ways of business or a belief in his own powers of managing, which in either case resembled insanity. When in addition it came out at the trial that the family was sodden with lunacy upon both sides, that the wife’s mother and the husband’s brother were in asylums, and that the husband’s father had been in an asylum, but had become ‘tolerably sensible’ before his death, it is doubtful whether the case should not have been judged upon medical rather than upon criminal grounds. In these more scientific and more humanitarian days it is perhaps doubtful whether Youngman would have been hanged, but there was never any doubt as to his fate in 1860.

The trial came off at the Central Criminal Court upon August 16th before Mr. Justice Williams. Few fresh details came out, save that the knife had been in prisoner’s possession for some time. He had exhibited it once in a bar, upon which a bystander, with the good British love of law and order, had remarked that that was not a fit knife for any man to carry.

‘Anybody,’ said Youngman, in reply, ‘has the right to carry such a knife if he thinks proper in his own defence.’

Perhaps the objector did not realize how near he may have been at that moment to getting its point between his ribs. Nothing serious against the prisoner’s previous character came out at the trial, and he adhered steadfastly to his own account of the tragedy. In summing up, however, Justice Williams pointed out that if the prisoner’s story were true it meant that he had disarmed his mother and got possession of the knife. What necessity was there, then, for him to kill her? and why should he deal her repeated wounds? This argument, and the fact that there were no stains upon the hands of the mother, prevailed with the jury, and sentence was duly passed upon the prisoner.

Youngman had shown an unmoved demeanour in the dock, but he gave signs of an irritable, and occasionally of a violent, temper in prison. His father visited him, and the prisoner burst instantly into fierce reproaches against his treatment of his family — reproaches for which there seem to have been no justification. Another thing which appeared to have galled him to the quick was the remark of the publican, which first reached his ears at the trial, to the effect that Mary had better hang herself in the skittle-yard than marry such a man. His self-esteem, the strongest trait in his nature, was cruelly wounded by such a speech.

‘Only one thing I wish,’ he cried, furiously, ‘that I could get hold of this man Spicer, for I would strike his head off.’ The unnatural and bloodthirsty character of the threat is characteristic of the homicidal maniac. ‘Do you suppose,’ he added, with a fine touch of vanity, ‘that a man of my determination and spirit would have heard these words used in my presence without striking the man who used them to the ground?’

But in spite of exhortation and persuasion he carried his secret with him to the grave. He never varied from the story which he had probably concocted before the event.

‘Do not leave the world with a lie on your lips.’ said the chaplain, as they walked to the scaffold.

‘Well, if I wanted to tell a lie I would say that I did it.’ was his retort. He hoped to the end with his serene self-belief that the story which he had put forward could not fail eventually to be accepted. Even on the scaffold he was on the alert for a reprieve.

It was on the 4th of September, a little more than a month after the commission of his crime, that he was led out in front of Horsemonger Gaol to suffer his punishment. A concourse of 30,000 people, many of whom had waited all night, raised a brutal howl at his appearance. It was remarked at the time that it was one of the very few instances of capital punishment in which no sympathizer or philanthropist of any sort could be found to raise a single voice against the death penalty. The man died quietly and coolly.

‘Thank you, Mr. Jessopp,’ said he to the chaplain, ‘for your great kindness. See my brother and take my love to him, and all at home.’

And so, with the snick of a bolt and the jar of a rope, ended one of the most sanguinary, and also one of the most unaccountable, incidents in English criminal annals. That the man was guilty seems to admit no doubt, and yet it must be confessed that circumstantial evidence can never be absolutely convincing, and that it is only the critical student of such cases who realizes how often a damning chain of evidence may, by some slight change, be made to bear an entirely different interpretation.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MANOR PLACE MURDER TRIAL

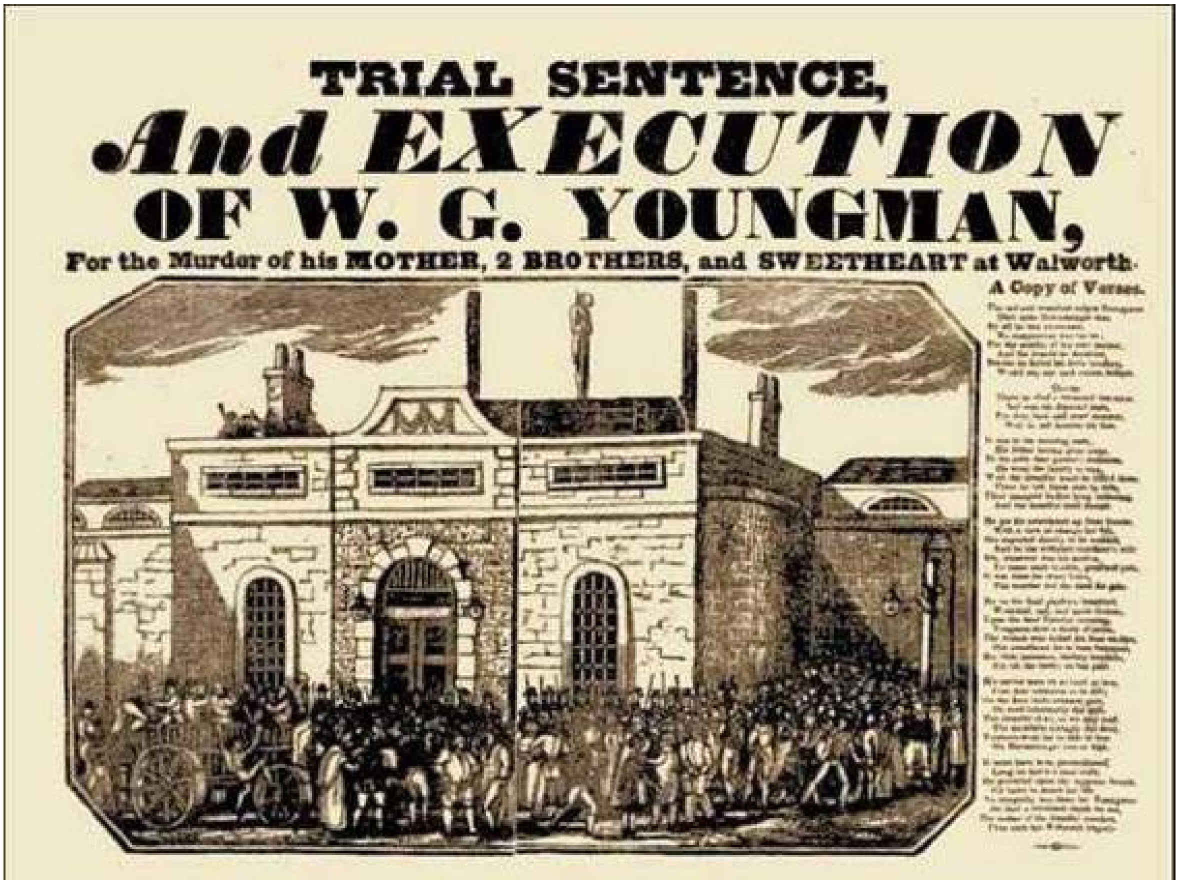
TRIAL SENTENCE,
And EXECUTION
OF W. G. YOUNGMAN,
For the Murder of his MOTHER, 2 BROTHERS, and SWEETHEART at Walworth.
A Copy of Verses.

Image from a broadsheet announcing and illustrating the execution of the accused, 1860.

Proceedings Of The Old Bailey, 13th August 1860

723. WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN (25), was indicted for the wilful murder of Mary Wells Streeter. He was also charged on the Coroner's Inquisition with the like offence.

MESSRS. CLERK *and* BEASLEY *conducted the Prosecution.*

JAMES BEVAN. I am a carman, and reside at 16, Manor-place, Walworth — I am the landlord of the house — I occupy the ground floor — the house consists of a first and second floor — the first floor is immediately above my rooms — on 31st July last Mr. Beard occupied the first floor — that consists of a front and a back room — there was Mr. Beard, his wife, and one son — the floor above that was occupied by Mr. Youngman — I believe his name to be John — he is the father of the prisoner — his family consisted of his wife and two little boys — the second floor consisted of two rooms, a front and a back one — I had known at that time that the prisoner had been there for a few days; for a holiday, I understood — I had seen him backwards and forwards before 31st July — I believed him to be sleeping there — I remember the morning of 31st July — I was disturbed about ten minutes to 6, or something like that — I was then in bed, in the lower back room on the ground floor — I was disturbed by hearing a lumbering, as I supposed, on the top of the house; a lumbering, or heavy fell on the floor; a lumbering noise, as if something had fallen on the floor — the noise proceeded from the top of the house, as I supposed at the time, the second floor — as soon as I heard the noise I immediately jumped out of bed to hear and see what was amiss, and, before I could get to the door, Mr. Beard, who has the first floor, tapped at the door and said, "For God's sake come up stairs, here is murder;" that was before I had got out of my room — I immediately proceeded up stairs to see what was amiss — I went on to the top landing, the landing of the seoond floor, and I turned my head and saw the little boy — there is a staircase that ends with a landing, and a door on each side of the landing — a door opens on to the landing from each room; the doors front each other on the landing — I saw the little boy lying dead on the top floor — I did not take very particular notice of him — I believe him to be the eldest boy — I did not see any one else about — I came down stairs and dressed as quickly as I could, to get assistance — as I was about to proceed for the officer the prisoner was standing on the first staircase — that was the first time I saw him that morning — it was directly I came down stairs and dressed; after I had dressed — I was then about to proceed for the officers — I should think not two minutes had been occupied by my dressing — on coming out of my room dressed I saw the prisoner standing three parts of the way on the first staircase; the staircase leading from the ground floor to the first floor — he was standing at that time looking downwards; looking down stairs — that staircase does not face the front door — the stairs, face the passage which leads to the door — at the bot-tom of the stairs there is a long passage, quite through the house, and the staircase is in the middle of the passage — he had got nothing on then, only his shirt — he told me his mother had done all this.

COURT. *Q.* What were the words he used, as near as you can say? A. He said, "My mother has done all this; she has murdered my two brothers and my sweetheart, and I, in self-defence, believe I have murdered her."

MR. BEASLEY. *Q.* Was that all he said at the time? A. Yes — I then went for the police — I believe I heard the prisoner's father go out that morning about half-past five.

COURT. *Q.* You heard somebody go out? A. Yes; and believe it was he.

Cross-examined by MR. BEST. *Q.* Had the Youngmans lived long in your house? *A.* On 24th March they came to lodge with me — I am not much at home in the day-time — I go out in the morning and come back in the evening, calling in sometimes in the course of the day — I do not know but what Youngman and his wife lived on pretty tolerable good terms — perhaps occasionally I heard them have a word or two, but not enough for me to interfere.

COURT. *Q.* They had a word or two occasionally, but nothing particular? *A.* Nothing particular.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Did they seem to be pretty well off in the money way? *A.* Well, the man always paid me his rent, and so far I had nothing more to do with him; he paid me regularly 4s. a week — I was awoke by a lumbering noise — the noise was like a heavy fall on the floor, as if something heavy had fallen — I do not know how far the distance is from the room where I was sleeping to the landing where I saw the body of the boy; I never measured it — I cannot tell you — the floor of the second floor was not so high as this Court — I lived on the ground floor — I never measured the distance between the ground floor and this third floor where these people were living — it is about three parts of the height of this Court, I should say

— when I went up to the landing the first time I saw no live person there; I did not go up on to the top of the landing, as soon as I saw the boy's body I turned down stairs — I saw the prisoner afterwards, not at that time, some portion of the way down stairs — I cannot say much as to his being collected and composed at the time — I should not think he was very collected at that time; I did not stop long enough to make any particular observation of the man.

FREDERICK HENRY CAIGER. I am a surveyor — I made this plan of the premises.

COURT. *Q.* Is it made to a scale? *A.* It is; I have not measured any heights, but I should say that from the floor of the ground floor to the floor of the second floor was about from twenty to twenty-one feet.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* I see by the plan there is a door to each room opening on to the landing? *A.* Opening inwards to the rooms from the landing — I am speaking of the second floor — the doors are exactly opposite each other — the two doors, when closed, are 5ft. 10 1/2 in. from one another, across the landing — from that landing of 5ft. 10 1/2 in. there is a narrow landing 2ft. 6in. wide — that goes toward the head of the stairs — that goes from the landing that is between the two doors towards the head of the stairs — 2ft. 6in. is the width of each stair.

SUSANNAH BEARD. I am the wife of Philip Beard — I live with my husband at 16 Manor-place — we occupy the first floor — I have one little boy about 11 years old — I occupy the back room as a sleeping-room — the little boy slept in the same room — on the morning of Tuesday, 31st July, I should think it was nearly 6 o'clock when I awoke — a noise above my head awoke me — it was a sort of scuffling on the boards — I thought it was the children playing when I first awoke — I awoke my husband, thinking it was late — I heard a sort of lumbering as if something fell on to the boards after that; that was not till after I awoke my husband — I could not say what it sounded like, falling — it appeared to be as if something heavy had fallen on the boards — I thought it was in the bed-room; it seemed over my head — I could not say whether what I heard fall fell on the landing or in the room — my husband went to the bed-room door and went up the stairs — he then called out the "Murder!" and came down — he afterwards went up again with Mr. Bevan, the landlord — after he came down the second time I went to the door of our room and saw the prisoner on the stairs between the first and second floors — he either said, "Mr.

Beard" or, "Mrs. Beard, my mother has done all this, she has murdered my sweetheart and my two little brothers, and, in seltdefence, I believe I have murdered her" — while my husband was dressing the prisoner called out from the stairs, "Mr. Beard, for God's sake fetch a surgeon, I believe there are some alive now" — when my husband was dressed he left the house — he and I went down stairs into the lower parlour — I locked my bed-room door, and locked my child in, and we went down below to the landlord's room, and my husband directly went for a doctor — I did not see the body of the young woman at all — I had seen a young woman come to the house on the previous day, Monday, 30th July; I think it was pretty well 11 o'clock in the morning when she came — she came with the prisoner — I saw them again about 7 in the evening, going out, as I thought for a walk; they went as if they were going to the Walworth-road — I afterwards saw them return about 10 o'clock; they returned together, by themselves — I saw them come down stairs again about five minutes afterwards, that is I saw them outside the door as if they had come down stairs — I saw them come into the house again about a quarter of an hour afterwards; that would be about a quarter past 10.

Cross-examined. *Q*. Had you seen this young man before that day? *A*. Oh, yes; he had been staying at the house for a short time previously — he and the young woman seemed very friendly when they were at the door together at 10 o'clock — they seemed on affectionate terms with each other — when the prisoner addressed me on the stairs, and said, "This is my mother's doing," he seemed very much excited — on other occasions he was generally calm and quiet in his manner.

PHILIP WILLIAM BEARD. I am a carpenter and joiner — I and my wife occupy the first floor at 16 Manor-place — I remember the prisoner coming to the house, but I cannot say exactly what time he came — I had seen him there some days before 31st July — I had seen him in the house — I remember Sunday the 29th — I had some conversation with the prisoner that day in the yard — a little conversation passed on trivial affairs, and he told me that he had been a valet and footman, but that he had left that, and was going into the farming business — he did not say why he had left it — I did not see the young woman on the Monday night — on the Tuesday morning I was awoke by my wife early; it was about 5 minutes before 6, or something like that — after she had awoke me I heard a sort of rumbling noise on the stairs, it appeared to be on the landing over me, it was like children running about, or something like that, I had heard the noise frequently before — I was on my landing — it seemed to come from the top floor above me — when I came out of my room I heard a slight scream, when I got to the foot of the stain — I went up stairs — the first thing I saw was a spot of blood on the stairs, on the fourth stair from the top, I did not notice any on any other — I went a little higher, and the first thing I saw was the little boy lying on the landing — I thought he was dead, he had his throat cut, and was lying on his back with his head towards the stairs — I then went a little higher and there saw the female lying on the landing — I did not then know who she was — I found afterwards it was Mary Streeter — she was also lying dead, a little beyond the dead body of the boy — I did not observe any other body at that time — I was alarmed, and went down, and called up Mr. Bevan, the landlord — I then went up again with him, behind him; there was no one else with us; the inspector had not come at that time — when I had called the landlord I went up stairs and began to drees — I did not go up with him then, I went up to my own bed-room, I did not go up to the second floor then, not till the inspector came — he did not come till Mr. Bevan went for him — I did not go up any more till after the police had been — I went for a surgeon — I saw a policeman at the top of Manor-place, and I sent him down — I did not see anything more of the prisoner — he called me out of my bed-room after I had began to dress, he was then on the stain — he called me and said, "Mr. Beard, my mother has done it all, she has murdered my two little brothers and my sweetheart, and, in self-defence, I believe I have murdered her" — that was all he said then — I then went into my bed-room again, and finished dressing and he begged of me to go for a surgeon.

Cross-examined. *Q*. Did he say to you, "For God's sake go to a surgeon's, I think there is some of them alive now?" *A*. Yes — I was about five minutes in my room dressing myself — I dressed as speedily as I possibly could — I do not know whether my wife was present at this conversation on the stain — she was present in one instance, I believe, I did not see her — I have not known the prisoner for any time — I only just saw him backwards and forwards in the house — I never had any particular conversation with him — I was not at home most of the day — I was always out at work from 6 in the morning till 8 or 9 at night — I had no opportunity of observing how Mr. Youngman and his wife lived towards each other.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* Your wife used to be at home? *A.* Yes.

JOHN YOUNGMAN. I am the father of the prisoner — I resided on the second-floor of the house, 16, Manor-place, Wai worth — I can't say exactly how long I had been there — my wife, Elizabeth Youngman, also lived there, and my two sons, Thomas Neale Youngman, and Charles Youngman — Thomas was eleven years of age, and Charles seven — in the month of July the prisoner came to live with me — he had before that been at service at Dr. Duncan's; that was the last place he had lived at — he was footman there — I do not recollect on what, day it was that he came to my lodgings, but I should suppose it was about a fortnight before the 31st July — he used to sleep in the back room, the same room that I slept in — Thomas, the eldest of the two boys, slept with him in the same bed — I slept on a bed made up on the shop-board — I am a tailor, but I work away from home along with a son who lives in the neighbourhood — my wife slept in the front room and the boy Charles with her — I am frequently away from home at my work, during the day; mostly all day — I go home to dinner very frequently; not at all times — I was away from morning till night, except sometimes when I went home to dinner — on Monday, 30th July, I came home about a quarter or twenty minutes after 10 at night, as near as I can bring it to mind — I did not see the young woman, Mary Streeter, at all that night — I saw my wife before I went to bed — the prisoner went, to bed that night as usual, in the room — I should think it wanted about twenty minutes to 11, at that time — I told him when he was ready I would put the light out, and he said he was all ready, and I put the light out and went to bed directly, and he at the same time — my boy, Thomas, was in bed when I got into bed; he was in the bed with the prisoner — I awoke in the morning, I consider, somewhere about 4 o'clock; I did not know the time because I had not a clock in my room; I imagine that was the time by the appearance of the morning — at that time I saw the prisoner at the foot of his bed — it was daylight; just the break of day — he was in the act of getting into bed — I supposed he had been to look at the clock — I believe the door of the room was not closed; it generally stood open, but I did not take that notice — I usually slept with the door about an inch open — I took no notice of it then — the door of the front room was always closed at night, to the best of my knowledge — I fell asleep again — I got up at 5 o'clock that morning — it was about twenty minutes after 5 when I left my room — I expected that the clock went 6, but in lien of that it was 5

I found when I got out — the prisoner and Thomas were in bed at that time — I went to my son John's to work — I did not go into the front room before I left; the door of that room was closed — I was afterwards fetched from my son's — I should think it was about twenty minutes after 6 — I came back to the house — I saw the body of the young woman, Mary Streeter — she was then dead — I had seen her before, three or four times, I believe — the first time I saw her I dare say might have been two years previous — she had not been in the habit of coming to our house then — I saw her two or three times since — I saw her once or twice in July; that was at Manor-place — I do not think I saw her more than once in Manor-place — I saw her once at my son John's, along with William, and once at Manorplace with him — the prisoner had never said anything to me about his intended marriage — I understood it was to be the case, but he never acquainted me with it — a knife was shown to me on the morning of 31st July, by Lack the constable — this (*produced*) is it — I had seen that knife before that day — I saw it in my son John's shop — it was in the prisoner's possession — it was then quite whole, to the best of my knowledge; not broken as it is now — the prisoner was showing it to a man who was working at my son John's, and the man said it was not a fit knife to carry — the prisoner said anybody had a right to carry such a knife, if they thought proper, for their own protection — I should think this was about nine days or a fortnight before 31st July — I never saw him use the knife for any purpose — I never saw him show it at home to my wife; not to my recollection — as soon as I got back to the house on the morning in question, I called out, "Where is William?" he was then brought down in to the passage by the police; he was in custody — he said, "This is all mother's doings, father" — that was all he said — to the best of my knowledge the prisoner was not possessed of any property at this time; he had no money, except what he had from service — I believe he had been in Dr. Duncan's service for half a year — he was out of employment for some time before he went there — I cannot say for how long — it was as long as a year — I learnt so from him.

Q. Had he ever said anything to you about insuring the life of the young woman? *A.* I had heard it talked of; I don't think he ever said anything about it to me — I am not certain he did not; I have heard it repeated and talked of at different times — I heard it talked about at my son John's.

COURT. *Q.* You say he never mentioned it to you; but did you hear him mention that he was about insuring the life? *A.* Oh, yes; at different times — I heard him mention it at my son John's.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* Do you know the prisoner's handwriting? *A.* I think I should know it, but I am not sure; I am a very little writer myself — I saw the dead body of my wife and of my son Thomas, at the same time I saw the dead body of the young woman — I also saw the dead body of my youngest boy, Charles; I saw him last.

Cross-examined. *Q.* You say this insurance was talked about at your son John's; was that in the presence of several persons? *A.* Yes, openly — I should think that was something like nine days, or a fortnight, or a week before 31st July, and perhaps a day or two before, but I cannot bring it to mind — my wife's maiden name was Golden — I knew her mother quite well — she was a lunatic at the latter part of her life — she died in Peckham Asylum — a brother of my own also died'a lunatic in Norwich Thorpe Asylum — none of my children have died in that way — my father, I believe, died tolerably sensible, but he had been in an asylum two or three times — I work for my son as a journeyman and receive journeyman's wages — I receive a pound a week, on an average; I am sometimes short of work — I was not short at this time; I had plenty doing just then — my wife and I lived upon tolerably good terms; we used to have more words about the children than anything else; I thought that she talked to them a good deal more than there was any occasion for — we quarrelled occasionally about the children — I thought she interfered with them too much — she used to correct them more than I thought she had any occasion for — she did not correct them particularly severely, but she corrected Thomas more than I thought she ought, because I thought Charles was quite as much or more in fault than Thomas — my wife and I did not sleep together at all times — we had not slept together for the last week previous to William coming to the house — that was because I wished to get to bed always when I got home of a night; and not only that, my wife was troubled with an inward complaint — she had a cancer in the womb; that was the reason why we did not sleep together — I sometimes took my breakfast at my son John's — I sometimes took my supper at home, not often — I supped at my son's, and sometimes I had no supper at all — I always took my tea at my son's when I was there — I did not go to any place of entertainment to spend my evenings, or to any public-house; and had not done so for a long time — I saw this knife when I was at my son John's house — I do not remember the prisoner saying that it was a good sort of knife for eating meals with — I cannot say that I ever heard him say that — I have seen him take his meals in the house, but I never saw him use that knife at all — I did not sup in the house the night before 31st July — the front room was used for supper and meals; that was the room in which the family lived in the daytime — the point of this knife is broken off and the guard is also broken.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* When was it that your wife's mother died? *A.* 15 years ago, in October — I never visited her in the asylum but once — I can't say whether she was there 12 mouths or 2 years — I think she was between sixty and seventy when she died — my wife had never been confined in any asylnm — I cannot say that I ever perceived any appearance of an unsound mind in her during our marriage — I never did — she was rather more kind to Charles than to Thomas — that has been a cause of difference, a cause of words between us — I have frequently told her that Charles was most in fault.

JOHN VARNEY (*Policeman, P 333*). I remember Beard speaking to me on the morning of 31st July — I went by myself to 16, Manor-place, Walworth, about 6 o'clock — I went into the house and went up stairs on to the second floor landing — when I went up there I saw three dead bodies on the landing; the first was a boy about 10 or 11 years old; the next was a female lying on her face; and another female a little to the left of her — the prisoner came to the door; he said, "Oh! policeman, here is a sight; what shall I do?" — he made a step to come towards me on the landing — he was standing at the back room door when he said that — he was stepping out on to the landing, and I said," Go back into the room and put on your clothes" — he was not dressed; he was in his night-shirt; I noticed the right sleeve of the shirt was torn, and the wristband was hanging on his hand — I noticed that when he was standing at the door — the wristband appeared to hang on the back of his hand — the inspector arrived just then — I then left the prisoner with him and went into the front room — the prisoner did not say anything to me before the inspector came, further than what I have stated; he said his mother had done all this — he said that at the time that he said "Here is a sight; what shall I do?" he said, "My mother has done all this;" and when in the back room he said, "I struck my mother, but it was in self-defence, and would not you have done the same? that is law."

Crosi-examined. *Q.* You told him to go into his room and dress himself? *A.* Yes — at that time he was only in his shirt — I am sure I saw the wristband hanging down — after my coming into the front room he took off his shirt to put another one on, and at that time I missed the wristband of it; I could not find it anywhere — I am quite sure it was on when I saw him first — I have the shirt here.

JAMES DANN (*Police Inspector, P*). Shortly before 6 o'clock on the morning of 31st July I heard of what had taken place at Manor-place — I went to the house accompanied by a constable of the name of Lack — I went up the stall's — I saw the prisoner standing on the landing on the second floor — we were both on the landing — he said, "This is my mother's doing; she came to the bedside where my brother and I were sleeping; killed him, and made a stab at me, and I in my own defence wrenched the knife from her hand and killed her, if she is dead" — upon that, the constable Lack, pointing to the body of the young woman, said, "Was this young woman lying here when you killed your mother?" — the prisoner hesitated a little and then said, "I don't know" — at that time there were three bodies on the landing — the boy, Thomas Neale Youngman, was lying on his back — his head was close to the edge of the top stair — his feet were in a direction away from the stairs; towards the wall of the house; the opposite wall — he was in his night-shirt — the right leg was a little drawn up — there was a great deal of blood where the body of the boy was lying — I then observed the position of the young woman, Mary Streeter — she was lying on the landing with her head inside the back room door — I should say that her head was about a foot or thirteen inches inside the doorway — her feet were towards the front room door — the body wag lying on the right side — she was in her night-dress — there was nothing on her feet; no slippers — there was a great deal of blood near where her head was lying — the blood had flowed from near her head under the door of the back room and under the foot of the bed in the back room; the Stream was about four feet six or seven inches in length — the breadth at the commencement was about fifteen inches, at the termination about six or seven — I then observed the body of the elder woman, Elizabeth Youngman — she was lying on the landing with her face downwards; on her stomach — her face was close to the thighs of the young woman; resting on the floor — the right shoulder of the elder woman rested on the legs of the young woman — the feet of Mrs. Youngman were inside the front room door —

she was also in her night-dress; without slippers, or steckings, or anything on her feet — I observed a great deal of blood where she was lying — most of it was close to her head and throat; it had spread some distance; several inches away from her — there was a pool of blood where she was lying; where her bead was — I went into the front room and there saw the body of the youngest child — it was on a bed in the front room, outside the bed-clothes, quite dead — he was in his nightdress — he was lying move on the right side than any other position — the feet were towards the head of the bed; and the head towards the foot — there was a great deal of blood on the bed — it had soaked through the counterpane, blanket, and sheet; and into the bed — the blood was just underneath where the child was lying; underneath the child’s neck and shoulders — I observed the floor of that room — there was not any pool of blood anywhere on the floor in that room — I saw marks of blood in the room — some had been trodden into the room with a naked foot — the footmark was sufficiently distinct for me to be able to speak of its size — it appeared to be the foot of a grown-up person — I saw two footmarks of blood; both in the same direction — I mean that I saw two footsteps which had imprints of blood, which had left the marks of blood, both going in the same direction, from the door towards the bed where the child was lying — there was no smear of blood along the floor of that room — there was no other blood in the bed except that which I have mentioned as being underneath the head and shoulders of the child, and that which had soaked through the clothes — I examined the bed in the back room — there was an appearance of blood about that bed — there wen three or four drops of blood on the sheet, and some smears of blood on the sheet — it appeared to have been wiped off a person’s hands — there was no pool of blood about that bed — there was some blood that had run from the door under the foot of the bed, and there was some blood that bad been trampled about the floor of the room; but no pool of blood in any part — when I first came to the house the prisoner was not dressed; he was in his night-shirt — his bands and feet were bloody; his night-shirt was very much stained with blood also — I did not see any wound about any part of his person — I did not examine him particularly, but I stripped him, and I did not see any wound — I saw the weapon after it was found — the prisoner was taken into custody — I did not see any cut on him when he was taken into custody; he did not complain of any — on the evening of the same day I went down to Wadhurst, to the residence of Mr. Streeter the father of the deceased — I received from Mr. Streeter a number of letters, which I have here — I have fifteen in all — six of these letters were read before the Magistrate — these (*produced*) are the six given in evidence, and these (*produced*) are the nine — they are all here — on my return to town I saw a box at the police-station, in the possession of Superintendent Payne — I opened that box with a key which I found in the prisoner's possession — I there found the paper which I now produce — it is a policy of assurance — I have a piece of the guard of the knife which has been produced — the prisoners brother John gave it to me.

Cross-examined. *Q.* You have told us there were two footmarks leading into the front room? *A.* Two — the first I should say was about two feet inside the door; that is, as near as I can remember — the second was about two feet six inches further on; towards the bed — one was the right, and the other was the left foot — there were no more footsteps round the bed — there was too much blood just at the landing outside between the two doors, to trace any footmark there — when the prisoner had the conversation with Lack, myself, Lack, and Varney were present — when the question was put to him he was a little confused — he was not so all through — he was very little excited; not at all — he appeared confused when Lack put the question — he hesitated, as I have said — he was not confused during any other part of the time — he appeared to be quite collected.

DAVID LACK (*Policeman, P 132*). On the morning of 31st July I went with Mr. Dann to 16, Manor-place, Walworth, a few minutes before 6 — I saw three bodies lying on the second landing — I found this knife — it was lying just between the two females; it was open as it is now, with the point and a piece of the guard broken off, and smeared with blood just the same as it is now — I picked it up — I saw the prisoner at this time — he spoke to me first — he pulled his right shirt-sleeve up and said, "Here is a job; my mother has done all this" — I said, "Where is your mother?" he pointed down to the elder female and said, "There she lies; I struck her in my own defence" — I said, "Was this young female lying here when you struck your mother?" — he hesitated for a moment and then said, "I do not know."

EDMUND PAYNE. I am superintendent of the P division of police — I obtained the box which was opened by inspector Dann at the house, 16, Manor- place — I found it in the back room on the top floor — I directed its removal to my office and went with it — when the prisoner was brought to the police-station on the morning of 31st July, I spoke to him about the knife which has been produced here — I said, “Do you know anything about that knife?” — Lack the constable had just shown the knife to me; I think that was in the presence of the prisoner — the prisoner’s reply was, “It is my knife; it is what I had to cut my bread and cheese with” — I think I asked how long he had had it, and he said, “A few days,” or “about a fortnight” — I did not expect at that time to be called as a witness, and I do not recollect distinctly whether it was in reply to me or of his own accord, but he said he had had it in his possession a few days or nearly a fortnight — I believe he used both expressions; first, “a few days,” and I believe he afterwards said, “Nearly a fortnight.”

JOHN VARNEY (*re-examined*). When I saw the prisoner on that morning at the house in Manor-place, I asked him where the young woman slept the previous night, and he said, “In the front room” — he said she had slept with his mother and his little brother, and the elder boy slept with himself in the back room

WILLIAM BARNARD BODDY. I am a surgeon, and practise at 3, Savillerow, Walworth — on the morning of Tuesday, 31st July, I was called to go to the house 16, Manor-place — that was, I should think, about 6 o’clock — Beard, the carpenter, the man who lives in the second floor, came to me — I went to the house immediately — I there found the bodies of four persons, who were dead — three were on the landing and the body of the little boy was on the bed in the front room — the bodies were all quite warm; as warm as if they had been alive; from animal heat — I examined the body of the young woman, Mary Wells Streeter, which was lying on the landing — I found a stab over her left breast which penetrated the cavity of the chest — there was also a wound on the throat; it was literally cut from ear to ear — that had been done with a very sharp and very strong instrument — the carotid artery and jugular vein on each side were divided; making a clean sweep through everything, down to the cervical vertebrae or bones of the neck — the wound had severed the windpipe and the gullet — such a wound would, I think, have caused instantaneous death; the cutting through the windpipe and the gullet would prevent a person from calling out; it would be quite impossible for a person to call out with such a wound — I think it must have required a strong arm to have inflicted that wound.

COURT. *Q.* That must, of course, depend upon the instrument? *A.* It would depend upon the instrument.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* What sort of person was the deceased? *A.* A young woman in good animal condition, I think — in no way emaciated, but healthy — she was anything but weak; I think she was healthy and strong — I then examined the body of the elder woman; she had three stabs altogether, two over the left shoulder-blade, one over the sternum or breast-bone, and a deep cut or stab behind the left side of the neck, which divided the carotid artery and jugular vein on the left side down to the cervical vertebra — that wound would have caused almost immediate death, perhaps not so instantaneous as with the other, who had her throat cut — I should not think it possible that the wounds either upon the young woman or the elder woman could have been inflicted by themselves, particularly upon the elder woman; it would be an impossibility — the elder woman seemed to be a person in tolerably good health, not particularly bulky or muscular, but tolerably healthy, I thought — she was not particularly strong certainly, rather inclined to be stout than thin — I did not discover any injury about the hands of either of the women — I then examined the body of the younger boy, Charles, who was lying on the bed in the front room — I discovered one wound over the chest-bone, and two small incised cuts on the left upper arm, and there was one deep plunging cut or stab through the back of the neck, which divided the bones of the neck and cut right through the spinal cord — that wpund would have caused immediate death — a part of the gullet and windpipe was likewise wounded in the sweep of the knife; that would have quite prevented the child from crying out — I then examined the body of the elder boy, which was lying on the stairs; he had two cuts, one on the right angle of the lower lip, and one cut all round the throat, merely dividing the cutis, not the skin positively, but the small enveloping membrane — there were six stabs altogether, one on the right side of the neck and half way between the ear and the right shoulder, one over the left breast, another over the left breast about an inch and a half below the former, and more to the left side, and three stabs on the left side over the ribs — the three first fingers of the right hand at the extremities were cut through to the bone; the third finger of the left hand was likewise cut at its extremity quite into the bone — those were all the wounds — the one that entered the chest was the cause of death — there wore two wounds on the chest; both were fatal wounds; one entered the pericardium, the enveloping membrane of the heart, that would be necessarily fatal, the other penetrated the lungs — both wounds entered the lungs, the top as well as the bottom plunge, and both would be fatal — if the child had grasped a sharp instrument, the hands would have presented exactly the appearance that I discovered, if the weapon had been drawn through the hands — I see the knife that has been produced; the marks I saw were just such as I should have expected to find from such an instrument — all the wounds upon all the four bodies were inflicted with a sharp instrument; it must have been a very sharp, powerful instrument — I have seen this knife before; the point of it is broken — I apprehend that it was originally a sharp pointed instrument; such an instrument as that, if the point had been sharp, might have inflicted all the wounds I saw upon all the bodies — there was no mark upon any of the bodies of a struggle having taken place during life, except upon that of the child that was lying near the stairs; his were the only hands that were wounded.

Cross-examined, Q. If I understand you rightly the mother had one wound in the chest? *A.* Yes — if that wound had been inflicted first I think she would possibly have screamed; I think it is more than probable she would — she had four wounds — I think the mischief that was product on the boy's hand was from an attempt in struggling to relieve himself from some injury that was being inflicted upon him; the cuts presented the appearance as if they were inflicted when struggling with some person, putting his hands up to prevent his throat being cut — if those wounds on the boy had been inflicted with great rapidity he would have died almost immediately — the two in the chest would have caused nearly instant death — I think he might have had time to scream out; death would not have followed so rapidly as that; there would have been some moments between the infliction of the wound and death — I have had very little experience in cases of cancer of the womb — I have never known it to create delirium; it produces a great deal of emaciation if it is of long continuance — it is an extremely painful disease — I should not think the pain would affect the brain; it might occasionally, but not as a general rule — it is not taken as a symptom or consequence of disease of the womb — supposing that Mrs. Youngman had been in a state of delirium I think she was strong enough to have inflicted these blows.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* Had there been an attempt to cut the throat of the boy that was lying on the stairs? *A.* Yes.

COURT. *Q.* That was the wound on the throat you have described? *A.* Yes, the superficial cut — that led me to suppose that there had been an attempt to cut the throat; the mark was very defined all round the throat — I did not distinguish much difference as to size and bulk between Mrs. Youngman and Mary Streeter; the elder woman was the fatter of the two I think — there was no appearance whatever of any struggle on the part of Mary Streeter.

MARY ANN WOOTTON. I am in the service of Dr. Duncan, of Henriettastreet, Covent-garden — I know the prisoner; he was there a week before me — he left on 16th July last — he had been in Dr. Duncan's service three months, I believe; during that time I have seen him writing frequently — he used to write letters and poetry — the date of the letter I am looking at is the 21st June; I believe it is the prisoner's handwriting — this one of 18th Juue is his writing, and this of the 21st — I believe this letter of 13th July is in his handwriting; also these two on 16th, and this one of the 19th — to the best of my belief this one without a date is in his haudwriting — this letter of 21st is his, and also the one of the 28th.

JAMES ANDREW DUNCAN. I am a physician, residing at Henrietta-street, Covent-garden — the prisoner was in my service as a footman; he came to me on 18th April last, and quitted on 16 th July — I was in the habit of seeing him frequently; it was the greater part of his duty to wait on me.

Cross-examined. Q. Have you had any experience in cases of cancer? *A.* Yes: cancer in the womb is a most painful disease; it generally makes a patient very irritable — I should not set down delirium as one of its symptoms; it may come up as an accidental symptom — if there has been mania in a family and a disease is acting upon a person, it would be more likely to bring it on — I know a mania, described as homicidal mania, especially among women — one of the great features of that mania, is, that persons afflicted by it, most frequently attack those to whom they have the greatest affection — it generally occurs after confinement, where the mother, although she has the greatest affection for her child, cannot resist destroying it — I have read Dr. Taylor's work on homicidal mania — I agree with him when he says that individuals are liable to be seized by a sudden impulse, when they will destroy persons to whom they are most strongly attached; but it is impossible to define what madness is; that is to say a person may have reason and know the wickedness of what he is going to commit, but yet be unable to resist the animal part of the functions, of the brain.

MR. CLERE. *Q.* Does cancer in the womb, where it exists, produce emaciation of the body? *A.* Yes; that is how the patient dies, from being completely worn out.

COURT. *Q.* Supposing a person not to be emaciated, does that indicate anything with respect to the state of the disease? *A.* That would show it was merely beginning, not advanced; that the disease had made but little progress — it might or it might not be attended with pain, then it would not necessarily follow the patient would be made more irritable — in my judgment if the disease had not got so far as to emaciate the patient, I don’t think the pain would be such as to bring on delirium — the patient might, possibly have taken opium as a remedy for it, which would perhaps cause it.

EDWARD SPICE. I keep the Green Dragon public-house, Bermondsey-street, in the Borough — I knew the deceased Mary Streeter — on Monday, 23d July last, she came to my house on a visit; she came with the prisoner — she came in the afternoon and stayed there all night — on the next day, the 20th, the prisoner came, as near as I can recollect, about half-past 6 in the morning — Mary Streeter stayed four days at my house on a visit — she was an old friend of mine; I and her father Were brought up together — after partaking of breakfast on that morning, they went away together and returned again about 9 o’clock in the evening — he came down at half-past 5 the next morning — it rained on that day, and they stopped till 9 o’clock — on Thursday morning I called her out at 5 o’clock, and the prisoner came in about five minutes past 5 — I had some conversation with him about the girl — I spoke to her first in the tap-room — I saw what I did not like in the man, and said to her in his presence, “Mary, I would sooner see you take a rope and hang yourself in the skittle ground, than marry a man like that” — I said to the prisoner, “What means have you got to support my girl? “I called her my girl — he said, “I am independent” — I said, “What is your independency, was it left by a legacy? have you got anything to show me, any paper?” — his reply was, “In houses” — I then asked him if they were in the country or London? “Various places in London — he said — I said, “Well, you must be a rich man,” and said to deceased, “Now, Mary, take my advice, give him a total denial, have no more to do with him; go and seat yourself in my bar parlour, and I will take you home safe to your father” — the prisoner made no remark on that — he said he intended to take her either to Hastings or Brighton; I think it was Hastings he said.

Cross-examined. *Q.* He did not say to reside there? *A.* He said he was going to take lodgings there to keep her independent — I said, You must have a good income to support a young woman like this" — he said, he was a retired tailor — I did not know anything about his being a valet.

SAMUEL WELLS STREETER. I am a farmer in Essex — the deceased young woman was my daughter — the prisoner came to my house on Sunday, 8th July last, and stayed there one night; I had never seen him before — my daughter had never mentioned to me that he was paying his addresses to her — the prisoner had not mentioned it to me — when Inspector Dann came down to my house I gave him some letters that were locked up in my daughter's writing-desk.

Cross-examined. *Q.* I believe you had the misfortune to lose another of your daughters some time before? *A.* Yes; in May last — she was not married, she died of consumption — this girl had not been subject to any disease of the chest or anything of that kind.

THOMAS TANNER. I am clerk in the office of the Argus Insurance Company — on 19th July last I saw the prisoner at that office (he had had a form previously) — he brought a form of application with him; I have it here (*produced*) — this is one of the forms issued by our office; the name of William Godfrey Youngman was signed in my presence by the prisoner — he wrote the answer to question No. 18, it is "William Godfrey Youngman, 16, Manor Place, Newington, London, retired from the business of a tailor" — that is written opposite the question "Name and place of residence" — before he signed it I asked him what he was — he said he was no trade — he came again on the following day, the 24th, accompanied by a young woman — she was examined by the medical officer, and a policy on her life was prepared — that is the policy (*produced*) — there is no attesting witness; that is the policy that was effected on that day — the premium was paid on 25th, 10s. 1d. for three months — the premiums are according to the wish of the parties; if they wish they can pay quarterly or half-yearly — in this case the prisoner expressed a wish to pay quarterly — I gave a receipt for the premium; I have it here, this is the first receipt — I believe the young woman paid the money.

(*The following letters from the prisoner to the deceased were read; the first was dated 18th June, from Henrietta-street, Covent-garden; it contained some allusions to his long silence, and expressed a desire to renew his former intimacy with the deceased; the second was dated 21st*

June, acknowledging a reply to his first letter, and expressing a wish to see her when she came to town. Editor’s note: Spelling errors in these letters are italicized.)

“8, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, July 13th, 1860.

“My dearest Mary. — This comes with my kindest love to you, trusting you are well and happy; myself I am pretty well in health. Now, come to London, dear girl, on Monday next, the 23d, and stay till Mrs. Walker leaves her situation, then go back home again and come up again on Friday morning, 10th August, and I will come on 10th Augnst to meet you, and shall stay at the lodgings I shall take for you and myself. I shall engage furnished lodgings for a week only, when I shall be able to settle all things and go down to your father and stay with him a day or two. You can lodge somewhere on the Friday you come up, and I, at our lodgings, so be ready for Saturday morning, when we will be married at St. Martin’s, Charing Cross, on Saturday, August 11th next; I have published the banns of our marriage, last Wednesday, and it will be asked in church on Sunday next, and Sunday, 29th, for the third time. I gave warning to leave on Wednesday hist, 11th, can leave on 10th ef next mouth having a day’s wages less; now you will have quite money enough, my dear, till after we are married, when I shall have plenty, but not till then; but you need only wear your black clothes, my dear girl, at our wedding. I shall only wear black things and have no white gloves at all dearest; our coachman will stand as father for you, and I shall not require a bridesmaid unless you like, if so, our housemaid will come if she can, and we will go after we are married to Kew Gardens or somewhere, and breakfast before we are married, by ourselves. I think I want to assure your life when you come up on Monday week; it will be settled in the time you are here, two or three days; bring all your things when you come on 10th August; say to your mother you are going to stay with my Mends a fortnight and then look for a situation in the time. After we are married you can have all you wish for, so you will have enough money for the present time, as you do not want to boy anything; all the clothes you have will do for the present, till we are married, and on Wednesday, after we are man and wife for life, I shall take money enough to supply all your wants and wishes, so rest happy till then, my dearest girl. I will expect to see youthen in London on Monday week, to assure your life and buy you the wedding-ring to give you to keep till the day 1 put it on your finger; the 11th August next must be the day, I cannot wait another day longer than that my dearest girl Buy nothing except you want it very much indeed, as I will buy you all you want the Wednesday after we are married on a certainty, but at the same time remember all I have told you. I am now awaiting to hear from you again; say you will do as I write by return of post — I am, dearest Mary, your ever affectionate lover, W. G. YOUNGMAN. — Kind respects to all friends, remember, do not forget what I have said; be careful keep all your letters looked up, so your mother and no one can see them, and bring them when you come here."

"8, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, July 16th, 1860. "My beloved Polly. — I received your kind and most welcome letter this morning, and was glad to hear you were enjoying good health, myself I am pretty well in health, bnt am anxious to see you again; indeed I long for the 23d, Monday, to come to see you. I suppose you will stay as you said before with Mrs. Walker, at Gloucester-terrace, till she leaves, which you said would be on 26th of this month, that would be on Thursday week, so you could stay three or four days there, and I shall be, of course, there with you once a day at least, I have made up my mind to get away from here this week, so I shall be with you next week when you come. Since I gave notice to leave here last Wednesday, our people have spoken to me in such a manner that has not suited me, and I am certain to give Mrs. Duncan a good talking to next time she goes on at me again, when I hope the Doctor will tell me to go at once, has then that is what I want, when I shall be paid my wages the same up to 11th August, when I shall go to my brother's and be able to do many things I want to do before we are married, dearest girl. I know I shall have a job to get a holiday when I want it if I stay here longer than this week, so I am in hopes of getting off from here this week, to-day; tonight I want Mrs. Duncan or the Doctor to talk to me, then I shall he ready to talk to them, and so be sent off. You understand, I am a little sharp in this. Now, my dearest Polly, I have a form to be filled up to take to the Life Assurance Company's office, that his, to answer all the written questions as asked on the printed forms, which is necessary should be done first. I know your name and address, but your occupation, I shall say you have (*none*) — you understand? But I want to know your place of birth, and date, and your certificate of birth is required to be taken to the office, just to let them see your right age; then, of course, I shall say single, and a spinster; then I want to know your father's and mother's ages, and also to know if you have ever been abroad; if so, where, and for what period of time; also, have you had the small-pox, or have you been vaccinated; have you ever had the gout, or spitting of blood, asthma, rupture, convulsions, fits of insanity, vertigo, habitual cough, disease of the lungs, complaint of the liver, or any other disease which tends to the shortening of life; let me know this, but I can say what I like, or you like, *has* any of these complaints, of *corse*, would be against your having your life assured. Then it's asked, has any member of the family died of consumption; I think you said your sister died of that dreadful complaint; but I must say no to that answer. Then they want to know the name and residence of your medical attendant; you could say you had none, to that question; but the name and residence of an intimate friend is required to be referred to for general information, that is to say, they must have some one who knows you to write to, to ask *they* how long they have known you and your family, and are they healthy, and *his* your health been good, and *his* it so now, and to ask if any member of the family have died of any bad disorder, such as I have said; and you must tell the friend, whoever you get to do this for you, to make it out in the best manner he or she can, *has* you will also do; and let them say they are not a near relation, only a friend, if ever you are. You understand that, dearest girl, *has* all must be done in the best possible manner to have them assure your life, *has* they would not take you if they thought you were unhealthy, or any of your family had died of anything bad, or *where* any of them unhealthy, that would be, of *corse*, against it, so, when they write to your friend, let them give a good letter to them — he sure and manage that with them, and to answer the letter they send by return of post; so, when you come up on Monday next, all you will have to do will be to go with me to the Assurance Office, near the Bank of England, city, and see the, medical man there, then I can give you the money to pay the first premium upon your life, which will not be a large sum to assure 100*l.* in case you should die any death, which sum would be of use to your children or me, in that case, dearest girl; but it *his* a very good thing to do, and the duty of every mother, or wife, or father to assure their lives, if they can but spare a little to pay every quarter; see what distress often arises from friends not leaving any thing to their relations or dear friends when they die! You know the benefit of all this, therefore you will, of *corse,* just send me the information I require of you, that I may take and fill up the form to take to the office, so they can write to your friend *has* I tell you. Write *has* soon *has* you can, I am anxious to get on with it before you come next Monday to London. Now, I am, with love ever to you, your loving, affectiouate, WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN. — My kindest remembrance to your friends, and quick answer I hope to have, my most beloved girl; I am indeed anxious to get all these things settled, and look forward for the happy day when you will be mine for life. Adieu, dearest."

"16, Manor-place, Newington, London, S.

"My most beloved Mary. — I received your affectionate note this morning, but I must say I am very much hurt to find you state in your note that you do not wish to have your life assured; why, my dearest girl, why do you alter your mind? I have been to the office, have told them to write to your friend, Mrs. James Bone, for the information they require, they did so yesterday, and expect her to send them answer by return of post; and I told them you would come with me on Monday for the policy, so let Mrs. James Bone write to them *has* they wish, and that you will go with me and assure your life on Monday next *has* you said you would before. Why can you go from your word? You will never lose anything by assuring your life; will not die any sooner, my dear girl And as regards your father and mother not *liken* you to do so, you can do *has* you like without them preventing. Now, say no more to them about it, but come and do *has* I wish you to do. I shall, indeed, never forgive you if you do not, *has* I, wish you to do so for a particular purpose, which I will tell you of. I will always pay for it, of *corse*, and you will never lose anything by it. I intend to get a house for you and myself near or in Brighton next week, as it will, of *corse*, be foolish for me to go there without you can go with me, even after you have assured your life; but if you will not do this, and will rather mind what your friends say to you about assuring your life, why I cannot think you would love me *has* I wish you would. You will never find any one to love you so again, and would you break my heart aud not do *has* I wish you in this little thing? Why do you not do *has* you said? Can you cease to love me? Will you now refuse to do this which is for the good of those you leave behind when you should DIE? Surely, my dearest girl, you will still love me and do this, or how can I think you do love me if you refuse? no, I cannot believe you love me. Now, my dearest girl, I have nearly settled the assurance, I have left my situation, I have look for a house for us to live in, and with your consent I have published the bans of our marriage, and you have consented to be mine next Monday week. Now, can you break my heart and act like-this? do *has* I tell you, dearest girl, and I will do anything you wish to be done, only do *has* you have agreed to do, let me assure your life on Monday next, and be mine own dear wife the following Monday *has* you promised me in your letter, and every thing you wish for shall be yours. I shall have money enough to supply more than our wants. Next Wednesday or Thursday come and be mine, and we will have all this settled, and we will go down and see all your friends in a few days after things are Bettled. I want you to go to Brighton to get a house, where I wish to live with you, my dearest Polly. Do you love me still 1 if so, do as I wish and keep your promise; be sure and bring the certificate of your birth with you on Monday, and let Mrs. James Bone answer the letter to the Assurance Company to-day, if she has not done so yesterday, so they will get answer on Monday morning before you and I go there. They will not keep you a moment, ray dear girl, only be mine and do this and be happy. You cannot do wrong in this, you will never have cause to regret; pray do *has* I wish, come and do this on Monday; come, come to me, and be mine, you will never want for a thing while you live, believe me. I cannot but be hurt, hurt, indeed, if you do not comply with my request; do make me happy, do this, it will be all for your good. Write again so I can have a letter on Monday before you come up. Oh, my dearest girl, I know you will not break my heart, I that love you more than life; be mine and never will you want for anything, I swear; but say not a word to your friends till we are married, then they shall be made glad, and we will have a jolly day near home; they will not be sorry for your having me, one that make a lady of you soon, and make you happy for life; one who loves you more thau his life, and can you not do *has* he wished you to do I say yes, dearest Mary. — I am,-with love to you, hoping you are well and happy, your ever affectionate lover, and ever more I am your best Friend, believe me; but I am hurt, pray heal me, say you will do *has* I wish, my dearest girl, I am your dearest W. G. YOUNGMAN."

"16, Manor Place, Newington, July 19, 1860.

"My most beloved Mary. — I received your kind and most welcome letter this morning about 11 o'clock; I was expecting to get it by 8 o'clock, but you put Boro' in the address too much, so it was sent to the Boro' first, which caused it to be late; put the address only as above, dearest girl. I have filled up the paper now and took it to the Life Assurance Office, aud they will write to Mrs. James Bone to-day to get answer on Saturday, so you can go with me to the office before 2 o'clock on Monday; when you come up you will arrive in London about half-past 9 o'clock on Monday morning, that was the time I arrived last Monday week. Do not, my dearest girl, say anything to your mother about what you are going to do, only say you are coming to see me and stay with me and my friends till you get a situation here in London; and I think you had better not bring all your things, only the most particular ones, the best you *has*. You will not want many things till we are married, *has* you will have some made or bought for you by me before we are married, but bring a few of your best things only, and, above all things, bring all your letters and papers, leave nothing of importance behind, *has* all little things you have I want to see, And I shall, of *corse*, go to Brighton for a time after we are married, if not before; but I shall see you on Monday morning. You must bring the certificate of your birth with you, *has* it must be taken to the office on Monday next, before the quarter's premium is paid, and I wish it to be done nest Monday morning. I will take lodgings for you and me when you come up on Monday. You need not go to Mrs. Walker's at all; keep with me and I will manage it all comfortable enough for you; don't bring all your things, you understand, and only the best bring with you, and if you can borrow a little money of your father, do so for a few days when I can give it you to send him back, you understand, *has* money is short with me till about this day week, Thursday. But I want to see you, dearest, and get your life assured, and get many things settled before then; and we will both go down and see your father and mother and friends, and surprise them, in about a week or eight days after we are married; but I am now, even now, *has* much *has* husband to you, dear girl, do *has* I tell you, and I am, with love, ever and ever to you. Do not forget to bring your birth certificate, as you cannot assure your life without it. I hope you will let me have answer by return of post, my most beloved girl, and one on Monday as well, to meet you at the station, London Bridge on Monday. I am your dear and most affectionate, W. G. YOUNGMAN." — Kind remembrance to your friends. You might bring a little of your home-made butter, and some things with you, only do not say I told you, you understand, it will be for your good, my dearest girl, I am now waiting to see you.

"16, Manor Place, London, July 21, 1860.

My dearest Mary. — I received your letter this morning. I am very much hurt to find you say you will not have your life assured, after I have troubled, and you had promised me faithfully to have it done, and to be my own dear wife on Monday next, but Tuesday will do *has* well *has* Monday, my dear girl, only your father, and mother, or any one must not know it. You promised me faithfully, over and over again, and I expect you will keep your promise that you would be mine, and that your frieuds would not know it till we were married. But now, dearest Mary, if you will only let Mrs. James Bone write to the Assurance Office at once, and go with me to have your life assured on Monday morning next, I will settle with you, and after that his done your friends may know that we are going to be married. I will arrange all things, so you and myself can go down to your house, if possible, the same day we are married, so you need not bring any of your things up with you. Keep to your promise, my dear girl, and your friends shall know we are married the same day that we are, next Tuesday week, but I must have you first assure your life, *has* I have a great wish for you to do so, and cannot believe you love me unless you do, so cannot certainly think you do love me now. I sent this in haste that Mrs. James Bone may have time to write to them to-day, so the letter will get in London on Monday morning, first post, if not, and you come, bring the letter with you, and the certificate of your birth. Now, I am in earnest; I am keeping my word; you have promised me, now if you love me do this. I am, your affectionate lover, ever till death, WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN — For your own sake, dearest girl, do *has* I say. Adieu."

"16, Manor Place, Newington, Saturday night, July 28th, 1860,

My beloved Polly. — I have posted one letter to you this afternoon, but I find I shall not have to go to Brighton to-morrow, as X have had a letter from them with what I wanted inside of it; so, my dear girl, I have quite settled my business now, and I am quite ready to see you now, therefore I send this letter to you. I will take this to London Bridge station to-morrow morning, by a quarter past 6 o'clock, and get the guard to take it to Wadhurst station, to give it to the porter there, who will get a man to take it to your place. I can only give the guard something, so you can give the man who brings this a small sum. I shall expect to see you, my dearest girl, on Monday morning, by the first train. I will await your coming at London Bridge station. I know the time the train arrives, a quarter to ten o'clock. I have promised to go to my uncle's to-morrow, so I cannot come down, but I will go back home with you on Monday night, or first thing Tuesday, so return here again Tuesday night to be ready to go anywhere on Wednesday; but you know all I have told you, and I now expect you will come up on Monday morning, when I shall be able to manage things *has* I wish to do, Excuse more, my dearest Mary. I shall now go to bed to be up early in the morning to take this letter. Bring or bum all your letters, my dear girl; do not forget, and, with kind love to you and respects to all, I now sum up, waiting to see you Monday morning, a quarter to 10 o'clock. Believe me ever your loving, affectionate, WILLIAM GODFREY YOUNGMAN. — You know all I have told you, therefore come, dearest girl; come, I am anxious now to see you. Adieu for the present."

The form of proposal was then put in, and the answer to question 13 "Has any member of your family died of consumption?" was "No" — *The policy of assurance was also put in, it was for* 100*l. effected by William Godfrey Youngman, of 16, Manor-place, Newington, retired tailor, on the life of Mary Wells Streeter, of Hunter's hall, Wadhurst, Sussex, commencing on 25th July, and renewable quarterly. The receipt for the first quarter's premium* 10s. 1d. *was produced and read.*

GUILTY — DEATH

THE END

THE BRAVOES OF MARKET-DRAYTON

To the north of the Wrekin, amid the rolling pastoral country which forms the borders of the counties of Shropshire and Staffordshire, there lies as fair a stretch of rustic England as could be found in the length and breadth of the land. Away to the south-east lie the great Staffordshire potteries; and farther south still, a long dusky pall marks the region of coal and of iron. On the banks of the Torn, however, there are sprinkled pretty country villages, and sleepy market towns which have altered little during the last hundred years, save that the mosses have grown longer, and the red bricks have faded into a more mellow tint. The traveller who in the days of our grandfathers was whirled through this beautiful region upon the box-seat of the Liverpool and Shrewsbury coach, was deeply impressed by the Arcadian simplicity of the peasants, and congratulated himself that innocence, long pushed out of the great cities, could still find a refuge amid these peaceful scenes. Most likely he would have smiled incredulously had he been informed that neither in the dens of Whitechapel nor in the slums of Birmingham was morality so lax or human life so cheap as in the fair region which he was admiring.

How such a state of things came about is difficult now to determine. It may be that the very quiet and beauty of the place caused those precautions and safeguards to be relaxed which may nip crime in the bud. Sir Robert Peel’s new police had not yet been established. Even in London the inefficient “Charley” still reigned supreme, and was only replaced by the more efficient Bow Street “runner” after the crime had been committed. It may be imagined, therefore, that among the cider orchards and sheep-walks of Shropshire the arm of Justice, however powerful to revenge, could do little to protect. No doubt, small offenses undetected had led to larger ones, and those to larger still, until, in the year 1828, a large portion of the peasant population were banded together to defeat the law and to screen each other from the consequence of their misdeeds. This secret society might have succeeded in its object, had it not been for the unparalleled and most unnatural villainy of one of its members, whose absolutely callous and selfish conduct throws into the shade even the cold-blooded cruelty of his companions.

In the year 1827 a fine-looking young peasant named Thomas Ellson, in the prime of his manhood, was arrested at Market-Drayton upon two charges — the one of stealing potatoes, and the other of sheep-lifting, which in those days was still a hanging matter. The case for the prosecution broke down at the last moment on account of the inexplicable absence of an important witness named James Harrison. The crier of the court having three times summoned the absentee without any response, the charge was dismissed, and Thomas Ellson discharged with a caution. A louder crier still would have been needed to arouse James Harrison, for he was lying at that moment foully murdered in a hastily scooped grave within a mile of the court-house.

It appears that the gang which infested the country had, amidst their countless vices, one questionable virtue in their grim fidelity to each other. No red Macgregor attempting to free a clansman from the grasp of the Sassenach could have shown a more staunch and unscrupulous allegiance. The feeling was increased by the fact that the members of the league were generally connected with one another either by birth or marriage. When it became evident that Ellson’s deliverance could only be wrought by the silencing of James Harrison, there appears to have been no hesitation as to the course to be followed.

The prime movers in the business were Ann Harris, who was the mother of Ellson by a former husband; and John Cox, his father-in-law. The latter was a fierce and turbulent old man, with two grown-up sons as savage as himself; while Mrs. Harris is described as being a ruddy-faced pleasant country woman, remarkable only for the brightness of her eyes. This pair of worthies having put their heads together, decided that James Harrison should be poisoned and that arsenic should be the drug. They applied, therefore, at several chemists’, but without success. It is a remarkable commentary upon the general morality of Market-Drayton at this period that on applying at the local shop and being asked why she wanted arsenic, Mrs. Harris ingenuously answered that it was simply “to poison that scoundrel, James Harrison.” The drug was refused; but the speech appears to have been passed by as a very ordinary one, for no steps were taken to inform the authorities or to warn the threatened man.

Being unable to effect their purpose in this manner, the mother and the father-in-law determined to resort to violence. Being old and feeble themselves, they resolved to hire assassins for the job, which appears to have been neither a difficult nor an expensive matter in those regions. For five pounds, three stout young men were procured who were prepared to deal in human lives as readily as any Italian bravo who ever handled a stiletto. Two of these were the sons of old Cox, John and Robert. The third was a young fellow named Pugh, who lodged in the same house as the proposed victim. The spectacle of three smock-frocked English yokels selling themselves at thirty-three shillings and fourpence a head to murder a man against whom they had no personal grudge is one which is happily unique in the annals of crime.

The men earned their blood-money. On the next evening, Pugh proposed to the unsuspecting Harrison that they should slip out together and steal bacon, an invitation which appears to have had a fatal seduction to the Draytonian of the period. Harrison accompanied him upon the expedition, and presently, in a lonely corner, they came upon the two Coxes. One of them was digging in a ditch. Harrison expressed some curiosity as to what work he could have on hand at that time of night. He little dreamed that it was his own grave upon which he was looking. Presently, Pugh seized him by the throat, John Cox tripped up his heels, and together they strangled him. They bundled the body into the hole, covered it carefully up, and calmly returned to their beds. Next morning, as already recorded, the court crier cried in vain, and Thomas Ellson became a free man once more.

Upon his liberation, his associates naturally enough explained to him with some exultation the means which they had adopted to silence the witness for the prosecution. The young Coxes, Pugh, and his mother all told him the same story. The unfortunate Mrs. Harris had already found occasion to regret the steps which she had taken, for Pugh, who appears to have been a most hardened young scoundrel, had already begun to extort money out of her on the strength of his knowledge. Robert Cox, too, had remarked to her with an oath: “If thee doesn’t give me more money, I will fetch him and rear him up against thy door.” The rustic villains seem to have seen their way to unlimited beer by working upon the feelings of the old country woman. One would think that the lowest depths of human infamy had been already plumbed in this matter; but it remained for Thomas Ellson, the rescued man, to cap all the iniquities of his companions. About a year after his release, he was apprehended upon a charge of fowl-stealing, and in order to escape the trifling punishment allotted to that offense, he instantly told the whole story of the doing away with James Harrison. Had his confession come from horror at their crime, it might have been laudable; but the whole circumstances of the case showed that it was merely a cold-blooded bid for the remission of a small sentence at the cost of the lives of his own mother and his associates. Deep as their guilt was, it had at least been incurred in order to save this heartless villain from the fate which he had well deserved.

The trial which ensued excited the utmost interest in all parts of England. Ann Harris, John Cox the younger, Robert Cox, and James Pugh were all arraigned for the murder of James Harrison. The wretched remnant of mortality had been dug up from the ditch, and could only be recognized by the clothes and by the colour of the hair. The whole case against the accused rested upon the very flimsiest evidence, save for Thomas Ellson's statement, which was delivered with a clearness and precision which no cross-examination could shake. He recounted the various conversations in which the different prisoners, including his mother, had admitted their guilt, as calmly and as imperturbably as though there were nothing at stake upon it. From the time when Pugh "'ticed un out o' feyther's house to steal some bacon," to the final tragedy, when he "gripped un by the throat," every detail came out in its due order. He met his mother's gaze steadily as he swore that she had confided to him that she had contributed fifty shillings towards the removing of the witness. No more repulsive spectacle has ever been witnessed in an English court of justice than this cold-blooded villain calmly swearing away the life of the woman who bore him, whose crime had arisen from her extravagant affection for him, and all to save himself from a temporary inconvenience.

Mr. Phillips, the counsel for the defense, did all that he could to shake Ellson's evidence; but though he aroused the loathing of the whole court by the skillful way in which he brought out the scoundrel's motives and character, he was unable to shake him as to his facts. A verdict of guilty was returned against the whole band, and sentence of death duly passed upon them.

On the 4th of July 1828 the awful punishment was actually carried out upon Pugh and the younger Cox, the two who had laid hands upon the deceased. Pugh declared that death was a relief to him, as Harrison was always, night and day, by his side. Cox, on the other hand, died sullenly, without any sign of repentance for the terrible crime for which his life was forfeited. Thomas Ellson was compelled to be present at the execution, as a warning to him to discontinue his evil practices.

Mrs. Harris and the elder Cox were carried across the seas, and passed the short remainder of their lives in the dreary convict barracks which stood upon the site of what is now the beautiful town of Sydney. The air of the Shropshire downs was the sweeter for the dispersal of the precious band; and it is on record that this salutary example brought it home to the rustics that the law was still a power in the land, and that, looking upon it as a mere commercial transaction, the trade of the bravo was not one which could flourish upon English soil.

THE “NEWGATE CALENDAR” ACCOUNT OF THE MARKET-DRAYTON MURDER TRIAL

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ANN HARRIS, JOHN COX THE ELDER, JOHN COX THE YOUNGER, ROBERT COX, AND JAMES PUGH Convicted of Murder.

The case of these diabolical criminals, as it was proved at the trial, which took place at Shrewsbury on the 2nd of August 1828, before Mr. Justice Gazelee, scarcely finds a parallel in the whole series which we present to our readers. It exhibits the dreadful features, of a mother and father-in- law combining to procure the commission of murder, to save their son from justice; and that son, the object of their solicitude, procuring the conviction of those by whose means he had been before saved from an ignominious end, for the offence to which they had made themselves parties on his behalf, to relieve himself from the due reward of further crime committed by himself.

It appeared that, in the neighbourhood of Market Drayton, on the borders of Shropshire and Staffordshire, there existed a dreadfully depraved set of people; and that a gang, to the amount, it was said, of from forty to sixty, was confederated for general purposes of plunder. The nucleus of this gang consisted of several persons, closely knit by ties of relationship, of connexion, and of neighbourhood, as well as of guilt; while the general depravity of the district enabled them, as occasion required, to add to their numbers, to almost any extent. One of these persons, by name Thomas Ellson, was in 1827 taken up for stealing potatoes; and, whilst in jail upon that charge, an accusation of sheep-stealing was brought against him. The chief evidence upon which this latter charge, a capital one, depended, was that of a man who had occasionally joined in the proceedings of the gang, named James Harrison. It became, therefore, the object of the friends of Ellson to get this man out of the way. First, they determined to poison him; and Ellson’s father-in-law, John Cox, went to an apothecary’s shop to buy arsenic for that purpose. The boy in the shop refused to sell it to him, unless some one else were by, which, as there was no one else in the house, could not then be the case; and Cox, probably not liking such formal proceedings, retired.

The next step was one of the most extraordinary in the whole case. Ann Harris, Ellson's mother, who had married a second husband of the name of Harris, went to a woman living in Drayton, whom she knew, and asked her if her husband were not going to Newcastle. The woman answered that he was. "I wish then," said Harris, "that he would buy me an ounce of arsenic." "What do you want it for?" "I want it to poison that damned scoundrel, James Harrison." — The woman upon this remonstrated — assured her it was a very wicked thing to poison James Harrison, — and, after some conversation, old Ann Harris went away, promising that she would not carry out her expressed intention.

Poison having failed, it was determined to have recourse to more direct means; and Ann Harris and old Cox subscribed fifty shillings apiece, to hire Cox's two sons, and a young fellow of the name of Pugh, to put Harrison to death! Harrison lodged in the house of Pugh's father, and, it was said, occupied the same bed with Pugh himself. On the night of the murder, Pugh, to use his own expression, "'ticed" Harrison out of the house, to go and steal some bacon. At a spot previously agreed upon, they met the two younger Coxes; and proceeding to a remote place, Pugh seized Harrison by the throat, while John Cox, the younger, took hold of his legs, and throwing him down, they strangled him. Meanwhile, Robert Cox was digging the grave!

The wretched man thus disposed of, everything remained perfectly quiet and unsuspected. It was generally supposed that he had gone out of the way to avoid giving evidence on Ellson's trial; though it seems very extraordinary that, after the latter had been acquitted, the non-return of Harrison excited no suspicion. No supposition of his death, however, appeared to have arisen, and the murder was discovered only by the means of Ellson himself. As soon as this fellow came out of jail, the Coxes, Pugh, and his mother, at various times, sometimes when several of them were together, and sometimes separately, told him all that had taken place, vaunting to him how they had saved him. The very night of his release, old Cox, one of his sons, and Pugh, bragged to him, that "if it had not been for them, he would not be there," — and the next day, when he was at his mother's, Robert Cox came thither, and said to her with oaths and abuse, "If thee doesn't give me more money, I will fetch him, and rear him up against thy door!" — alluding to the murdered man!

Nothing, however, transpired till towards the end of June 1828, when Ellson was taken up for stealing fowls, and then, in order to save himself from the punishment attending this offence (at the most seven years' transportation), he told all that the guilty persons had told him; and on his evidence they were apprehended.

Such are the facts of this revolting case; but we must describe some of the peculiarities of the trial itself.

The five prisoners were placed at the bar: old Ann Harris stood first; — she seemed what would ordinarily be called a smart old woman — her features were small and regularly formed, and her countenance was remarkable only for a pair of exceedingly keen and sparkling black eyes, the expression of which, however, was certainly in no degree indicative of ferocity. Old Cox stood next to her, and his countenance presented a most unpleasing, almost revolting, aspect. It was easy to believe the current story that he was at the head of the gang at Drayton — the very patriarch of all the thieves and scoundrels in that part of the country. He had, undoubtedly, brought his sons up to robbery as to a trade, and he had now hired them to commit murder! The two sons were next to him, and were not remarkable in their aspect. Pugh was last — and he was an ill-looking fellow enough, though not strikingly so.

As the trial proceeded, one of its peculiarities soon became apparent. This was that a vast proportion of the witnesses were of the closest kindred to the accused. And what was more horrid, was the fact of the father of the murdered man being called to speak to the identity of the body, which, having lain in the earth nearly a year, was so totally decomposed as to be recognizable only by the clothes; but to this the father added that "the colour of the hair was that of his son!"

It shocked all present greatly, when the father and mother of Pugh were called to speak to some minute facts with regard to the night on which Harrison was murdered, with reference to his leaving their house, where he lodged. The chief evidence was what the prisoners themselves had told to Ellson; but he being a person of execrable character, it was necessary to support his testimony by every corroborative circumstance that could be proved. Accordingly, in the early part of the trial, these wretched old people were brought forward to give testimony to facts bearing against their son's life: they were but very slight, but, as far as they went, they were confirmatory of the main story; and it is difficult to say whether the extreme coolness and composure with which the parents gave their evidence were not still more dreadful than if they had been violently affected.

Besides Ellson himself, there were also his wife, who was the daughter of one and the sister of two of the prisoners, and his sister, who was the daughter of another, called as witnesses! These young women also gave their evidence without strong emotion, although they certainly seemed far more impressed with the position in which they stood than the other witnesses named.

Ellson was calm, decided, and firm, to a degree which gave rise to unmingled disgust in every one who heard him. It will be recollected that the crime had been committed to save him — Pugh certainly committed the murder for hire; and the Coxes, perhaps, might have had some interests of their own mixed up with his; — but, even as regarded these last, the first object had been his escape; and his mother undoubtedly had dyed her hands in blood, solely to save her child.

The witness was a fine, well-looking fellow of about five-and-twenty — and, undoubtedly, until the severe cross-examination he underwent caused a struggle — though a perfectly successful one — to keep down his temper, his countenance was rather agreeable than otherwise. His story was clear, consecutive, and, no doubt, true. Each individual concerned in the transaction had, immediately on his release from jail, very naturally told to him, for whose sake it had been committed, all the circumstances regarding the murder. Pugh appears to have been the most detailed in his account, and to have rather bragged that it was he who "'ticed un out o' feyther's house, to steal some bacon," — and that it was he who had "gripped un by the throat." In some instances, the Coxes were present during these recitals, and at others they spoke of the subject to Ellson themselves. While this part of the evidence was going forward, the strongest horror was excited against the perpetrators of the crime — so treacherous as it was in its concoction, and so coldly cruel in the manner in which it was carried into effect. Moreover, the idea that Pugh certainly altogether, and the two young Coxes in great part, had committed this murder for hire was a circumstance of a character so new, and so awfully depraved, that the story carried the auditory along with it, and they forgot altogether the scoundrel who was telling it. But when he came to speak of his own mother, what must have been their sensations! Her guilt, dreadful as it was, almost disappeared; the thought could be only of the unnatural and ungrateful villain, who, to save himself from a light and temporary punishment, was thus giving to the gallows the mother who had born him, for a crime caused by her extravagant affection for him. He repeated twice or three times, in answer to the questions of the examining counsel, who felt it necessary to make the matter quite clear, that his mother had told him that she and old Cox had given fifty shillings a piece to have Harrison murdered. He said this as calmly as any other person would narrate any indifferent fact — and his mother's eyes were on his face all the time!

Mr. Charles Phillips cross-examined the witness at great length, very severely, and very skilfully: he drew from him that he had been in jail repeatedly, almost constantly, for theft of all kinds and descriptions; and he drove him into attempts to shuffle, very nearly approaching to prevarication, on several minor points, not connected with the case. But, regarding the case itself, he was not shaken at all; and although the universal sensation in the court must have been that of loathing and disgust for the mercenary cold- bloodedness of the proceedings to which he had had recourse, no serious doubt could for one moment be entertained that he was telling the truth.

The jury under these circumstances were compelled to return a verdict, consigning the wretched prisoners to a violent death.

The extreme sentence of the law was immediately passed upon the convicts, and their execution was appointed to take place on the following Monday, the 4th of the same month.

On the next day, a reprieve was granted in the case of Robert Cox, one of the sons, upon grounds which do not appear to have been well understood at the time, and he was transported for life. A respite for a week was also granted in the case of the elder Cox, and Ann Harris, who had been convicted only as accessories before the fact; but the awful punishment of death was left to be carried out in its due course upon Pugh, and John Cox the younger. The former, after his trial, declared his sense of the justice of his sentence, and that he regarded the termination of his career as a happy one, for that he constantly saw Harrison by his side; while the latter, with cold-blooded firmness, urged him to keep up his spirits, for that "he could die but once."

The execution had been appointed to take place at mid-day; and at a few minutes before twelve o’clock all the convicts, together with Ellson, were drawn up in the inner yard of the jail. Pugh and Cox were then pinioned; and while Ann Harris, old Cox, and his son Robert, were reconducted to the jail, Ellson was carried to a spot from which he must witness the conclusion of this dreadful scene. The authority by which this course was adopted, may well be doubted, for the miserable wretch was undoubtedly entitled to his discharge, as the indictment against him had been withdrawn; but it is probable that it was thought that the example afforded by such a proceeding might tend in some degree to check the thirst for crime, which appeared to exist in that district of the county.

The miserable convicts were directly afterwards led to the scaffold, dreadfully agitated, and uttering ejaculations imploring mercy for their sins; and all being in readiness, the drop fell, and they were launched into eternity.

The sentence of the wretched mother of Ellson, and of old Cox, was subsequently changed for that of transportation; and with this bare recitation of its facts, we shall close the scene upon this frightful case.

THE END

THE DEBATABLE CASE OF MRS. EMSLEY

IN the fierce popular indignation which is excited by a sanguinary crime there is a tendency, in which judges and juries share, to brush aside or to treat as irrelevant those doubts the benefit of which is supposed to be one of the privileges of the accused. Lord Tenterden has whittled down the theory of doubt by declaring that a jury is justified in giving its verdict upon such evidence as it would accept to be final in any of the issues of life. But when one looks back and remembers how often one has been very sure and yet has erred in the issues of life, how often what has seemed certain has failed us, and that which appeared impossible has come to pass, we feel that if the criminal law has been conducted upon such principles it is probably itself the giant murderer of England. Far wiser is the contention that it is better that ninety-nine guilty should escape than that one innocent man should suffer, and that, therefore, if it can be claimed that there is one chance in a hundred in favour of the prisoner he is entitled to his acquittal. It cannot be doubted that if the Scotch verdict of ‘Not proven,’ which neither condemns nor acquits, had been permissible in England it would have been the outcome of many a case which, under our sterner law, has ended upon the scaffold. Such a verdict would, I fancy, have been hailed as a welcome compromise by the judge and the jury who investigated the singular circumstances which attended the case of Mrs. Mary Emsley.

The stranger in London who wanders away from the beaten paths and strays into the quarters in which the workers dwell is astounded by their widespread monotony, by the endless rows of uniform brick houses broken only by the corner public-houses and more infrequent chapels which are scattered amongst them. The expansion of the great city has been largely caused by the covering of district after district with these long lines of humble dwellings, and the years between the end of the Crimean War and 1860 saw great activity in this direction. Many small builders by continually mortgaging what they had done, and using the capital thus acquired to start fresh works which were themselves in turn mortgaged, contrived to erect street after street, and eventually on account of the general rise of property to make considerable fortunes. Amongst these astute speculators there was one John Emsley, who, dying, left his numerous houses and various interests to his widow Mary.

Mary Emsley, now an old woman, had lived too long in a humble fashion to change her way of life. She was childless, and all the activities of her nature were centred upon the economical management of her property, and the collection of the weekly rents from the humble tenants who occupied them. A grim, stern, eccentric woman, she was an object of mingled dislike and curiosity among the inhabitants of Grove Road, Stepney, in which her house was situated. Her possessions extended over Stratford, Bow, and Bethnal Green, and in spite of her age she made long journeys, collecting, evicting, and managing, always showing a great capacity for the driving of a hard bargain. One of her small economies was that when she needed help in managing these widespread properties she preferred to employ irregular agents to engaging a salaried representative. There were many who did odd jobs for her, and among them were two men whose names were destined to become familiar to the public. The one was John Emms, a cobbler; the other George Mullins, a plasterer.

Mary Emsley, in spite of her wealth, lived entirely alone, save that on Saturdays a charwoman called to clean up the house. She showed also that extreme timidity and caution which are often characteristic of those who afterwards perish by violence — as if there lies in human nature some vague instinctive power of prophecy. It was with reluctance that she ever opened her door, and each visitor who approached her was reconnoitred from the window of her area. Her fortune would have permitted her to indulge herself with every luxury, but the house was a small one, consisting of two stories and a basement, with a neglected back garden, and her mode of life was even simpler than her dwelling. It was a singular and most unnatural old age.

Mrs. Emsley was last seen alive upon the evening of Monday, August 13th, 1860. Upon that date, at seven o’clock, two neighbours perceived her sitting at her bedroom window. Next morning, shortly after ten, one of her irregular retainers called upon some matter of brass taps, but was unable to get any answer to his repeated knockings. During that Tuesday many visitors had the same experience, and the Wednesday and Thursday passed without any sign of life within the house. One would have thought that this would have aroused instant suspicions, but the neighbours were so accustomed to the widow’s eccentricities that they were slow to be alarmed. It was only upon the Friday, when John Emms, the cobbler, found the same sinister silence prevailing in the house, that a fear of foul play came suddenly upon him. He ran round to Mr. Rose, her attorney, and Mr. Faith, who was a distant relation, and the three men returned to the house. On their way they picked up Police-constable Dillon, who accompanied them.

The front door was fastened and the windows snibbed, so the party made their way over the garden wall and so reached the back entrance, which they seem to have opened without difficulty. John Emms led the way, for he was intimately acquainted with the house. On the ground floor there was no sign of the old woman. The creak of their boots and the subdued whisper of their voices were the only sounds which broke the silence. They ascended the stair with a feeling of reassurance. Perhaps it was all right after all. It was quite probable that the eccentric widow might have gone on a visit. And then as they came upon the landing John Emms stood staring, and the others, peering past him, saw that which struck the hope from their hearts.

It was the footprint of a man dimly outlined in blood upon the wooden floor. The door of the front room was nearly closed, and this dreadful portent lay in front of it with the toes pointing away. The police-constable pushed at the door, but something which lay behind it prevented it from opening. At last by their united efforts they effected an entrance. There lay the unfortunate old woman, her lank limbs all asprawl upon the floor, with two rolls of wall-paper under her arm and several others scattered in front of her. It was evident that the frightful blows which had crushed in her head had fallen upon her unforeseen, and had struck her senseless in an instant. She had none of that anticipation which is the only horror of death.

The news of the murder of so well known an inhabitant caused the utmost excitement in the neighbourhood, and every effort was made to detect the assassin. A Government reward of £100 was soon raised to £300, but without avail. A careful examination of the house failed to reveal anything which might serve as a reliable clue. It was difficult to determine the hour of the murder, for there was reason to think that the dead woman occasionally neglected to make her bed, so that the fact that the bed was unmade did not prove that it had been slept in. She was fully dressed, as she would be in the evening, and it was unlikely that she would be doing business with wall-papers in the early morning. On the whole, then, the evidence seemed to point to the crime having been committed upon the Monday evening some time after seven. There had been no forcing of doors or windows, and therefore the murderer had been admitted by Mrs. Emsley. It was not consistent with her habits that she should admit anyone whom she did not know at such an hour, and the presence of the wall-papers showed that it was someone with whom she had business to transact. So far the police could hardly go wrong. The murderer appeared to have gained little by his crime, for the only money in the house, £48, was found concealed in the cellar, and nothing was missing save a few articles of no value. For weeks the public waited impatiently for an arrest, and for weeks the police remained silent though not inactive. Then an arrest was at last effected, and in a curiously dramatic fashion.

Amongst the numerous people who made small sums of money by helping the murdered woman there was one respectable-looking man, named George Mullins — rather over fifty years of age, with the straight back of a man who has at some period been well drilled. As a matter of fact, he had served in the Irish Constabulary, and had undergone many other curious experiences before he had settled down as a plasterer in the East-end of London. This man it was who called upon Sergeant Tanner, of the police, and laid before him a statement which promised to solve the whole mystery.

According to this account, Mullins had from the first been suspicious of Emms, the cobbler, and had taken steps to verify his suspicions, impelled partly by his love of justice and even more by his hope of the reward. The £300 bulked largely before his eyes. ‘If this only goes right I’ll take care of you,’ said he, on his first interview with the police, and added, in allusion to his own former connection with the force, that he ‘was clever at these matters.’ So clever was he that his account of what he had seen and done gave the police an excellent clue upon which to act.

It appears that the cobbler dwelt in a small cottage at the edge of an old brick-field. On this brick-field, and about fifty yards from the cottage, there stood a crumbling outhouse which had been abandoned. Mullins, it seems, had for some time back been keeping a watchful eye upon Emms, and he had observed him carrying a paper parcel from his cottage and concealing it somewhere in the shed. ‘Very likely,’ said the astute Mullins, ‘he is concealing some of the plunder which he has stolen.’ To the police also the theory seemed not impossible, and so, on the following morning, three of them, with Mullins hanging at their heels, appeared at Emms's cottage, and searched both it and the shed. Their efforts, however, were in vain, and nothing was found.

This result was by no means satisfactory to the observant Mullins, who rated them soundly for not having half-searched the shed, and persuaded them to try again. They did so under his supervision, and this time with the best results. Behind a slab in the outhouse they came on a paper parcel of a very curious nature. It was tied up with coarse tape, and when opened disclosed another parcel tied with waxed string. Within were found three small spoons and one large one, two lenses, and a cheque drawn in favour of Mrs. Emsley, and known to have been paid to her upon the day of the murder. There was no doubt that the other articles had also belonged to the dead woman. The discovery was of the first importance then, and the whole party set off for the police-station, Emms covered with confusion and dismay, while Mullins swelled with all the pride of the successful amateur detective. But his triumph did not last long. At the police-station the inspector charged him with being himself concerned in the death of Mrs. Emsley.

'Is this the way that I am treated after giving you information?' he cried.

'If you are innocent no harm will befall you,' said the inspector, and he was duly committed for trial.

This dramatic turning of the tables caused the deepest public excitement, and the utmost abhorrence was everywhere expressed against the man who was charged not only with a very cold-blooded murder, but with a deliberate attempt to saddle another man with the guilt in the hope of receiving the reward. It was very soon seen that Emms at least was innocent, as he could prove the most convincing alibi. But if Emms was innocent who was guilty save the man who had placed the stolen articles in the outhouse? and who could this be save Mullins, who had informed the police that they were there? The case was prejudged by the public before ever the prisoner had appeared in the dock, and the evidence which the police had prepared against him was not such as to cause them to change their opinion. A damning series of facts were arraigned in proof of their theory of the case, and they were laid before the jury by Serjeant Parry at the Central Criminal Court upon the 25th of October, about ten weeks after the murder.

At first sight the case against Mullins appeared to be irresistible. An examination of his rooms immediately after his arrest enabled the police to discover some tape upon his mantelpiece which corresponded very closely with the tape with which the parcel had been secured. There were thirty-two strands in each. There was also found a piece of cobbler's wax, such as would be needed to wax the string of the inner parcel. Cobbler's wax was not a substance which Mullins needed in his business, so that time theory of the prosecution was that he had simply procured it in order to throw suspicion upon the unfortunate cobbler. A plasterer's hammer, which might have inflicted the injuries, was also discovered upon the premises, and so was a spoon which corresponded closely to the spoons which Mrs. Emsley had lost. It was shown also that Mrs. Mullins had recently sold a small gold pencil-case to a neighbouring barman, and two witnesses were found to swear that this pencil-case belonged to Mrs. Emsley and had been in her possession a short time before her death. There was also discovered a pair of boots, one of which appeared to fit the impression upon the floor, and medical evidence attested that there was some human hair upon the sole of it. The same medical evidence swore to a blood mark upon the gold pencil which had been sold by Mrs. Mullins. It was proved by the charwoman, who came upon Saturdays, that when she had been in the house two days before the murder Mullins had called, bringing with him some rolls of wall-paper, and that he had been directed by Mrs. Emsley to carry it up to the room in which the tragedy afterwards occurred. Now, it was clear that Mrs. Emsley had been discussing wall-papers at the time that she was struck down, and what more natural than that it should have been with the person who had originally brought them? Again, it had been shown that during the day Mrs. Emsley had handed to Mullins a certain key. This key was found lying in the same room as the dead body, and the prosecution asked how it could have come there if Mullins did not bring it.

So far the police had undoubtedly a very strong case, and they endeavoured to make it more convincing still by producing evidence to show that Mullins had been seen both going to the crime and coming away from it. One, Raymond, was ready to swear that at eight o'clock that evening he had caught a glimpse of him in the street near Mrs. Emsley's. He was wearing a black billy-cock hat. A sailor was produced who testified that he had seen him at Stepney Green a little after five next morning. According to the sailor's account his attention was attracted by the nervous manner and excited appearance of the man whom he had met, and also by the fact that his pockets were very bulging. He was wearing a brown hat. When he heard of the murder he had of his own accord given information to the police, and he would swear that Mullins was the man whom he had seen.

This was the case as presented against the accused, and it was fortified by many smaller points of suspicion. One of them was that when he was giving the police information about Emms he had remarked that Emms was about the only man to whom Mrs. Emsley would open her door.

‘Wouldn’t she open it for you, Mullins?’ asked the policeman.

‘No,’ said he. ‘She would have called to me from the window of the area.’

This answer of his — which was shown to be untrue — told very heavily against him at the trial.

It was a grave task which Mr. Best had to perform when he rose to answer this complicated and widely-reaching indictment. He first of all endeavoured to establish an alibi by calling Mullins’s children, who were ready to testify that he came home particularly early upon that particular Monday. Their evidence, however, was not very conclusive, and was shaken by the laundress, who showed that they were confusing one day with another. As regards the boot, the counsel pointed out that human hair was used by plasterers in their work, and he commented upon the failure of the prosecution to prove that there was blood upon the very boot which was supposed to have produced the blood-print. He also showed as regards the bloodstain upon the pencil-case that the barman upon buying the pencil had carefully cleaned and polished it, so that if there was any blood upon it, it was certainly not that of Mrs. Emsley. He also commented upon the discrepancy of the evidence between Raymond, who saw the accused at eight in the evening in a black hat, and the sailor who met him at five in the morning in a brown one. If the theory of the prosecution was that the accused had spent the night in the house of the murdered woman, how came his hat to be changed? One or other or both the witnesses must be worthless. Besides, the sailor had met his mysterious stranger at Stepney Green, which was quite out of the line between the scene of the crime and Mullins’s lodgings.

As to the bulging pockets, only a few small articles had been taken from the house, and they would certainly not cause the robbers pockets to bulge.

There was no evidence either from Raymond or from the sailor that the prisoner was carrying the plasterer’s hammer with which the deed was supposed to have been done.

And now he produced two new and very important witnesses, whose evidence furnished another of those sudden surprises with which the case had abounded. Mrs. Barnes, who lived in Grove Road, opposite to the scene of the murder, was prepared to swear that at twenty minutes to ten on Tuesday morning — twelve hours after the time of the commission of the crime, according to the police theory — she saw someone moving paper-hangings in the top room, and that she also saw the right-hand window open a little way. Now, in either of these points she might be the victim of a delusion, but it is difficult to think that she was mistaken in them both. If there was really someone in the room at that hour, whether it was Mrs. Emsley or her assassin, in either case it proved the theory of the prosecution to be entirely mistaken.

The second piece of evidence was from Stephenson, a builder, who testified that upon that Tuesday morning he had seen one Rowland, also a builder, come out of some house with wall-papers in his hand. This was a little after ten o’clock. He could not swear to the house, but he thought that it was Mrs. Emsley’s. Rowland was hurrying past him when he stopped him and asked him — they were acquaintances — whether he was in the paper line.

‘Yes; didn’t you know that?’ said Rowland.

‘No,’ said Stephenson, ‘else I should have given you a job or two.’

‘Oh, yes, I was bred up to it,’ said Rowland, and went on his way.

In answer to this Rowland appeared in the box and stated that he considered Stephenson to be half-witted. He acknowledged the meeting and the conversation, but asserted that it was several days before. As a matter of fact, he was engaged in papering the house next to Mrs. Emsley’s, and it was from that that he had emerged.

So stood the issues when the Chief Baron entered upon the difficult task of summing up. Some of the evidence upon which the police had principally relied was brushed aside by him very lightly. As to the tape, most tape consisted of thirty-two strands, and it appeared to him that the two pieces were not exactly of one sort. Cobbler’s wax was not an uncommon substance, and a plasterer could not be blamed for possessing a plasterer’s hammer. The boot, too, was not so exactly like the blood-print that any conclusions could be drawn from it. The weak point of the defense was that it was almost certain that Mullins hid the things in the shed. If he did not commit the crime, why did he not volunteer a statement as to how the things came into his possession? His remark that Mrs. Emsley would not open the door to him, when it was certain that she would do so, was very much against him. On the other hand, the conflicting evidence of the sailor and of the other man who had seen Mullins near the scene of the crime was not very convincing, nor did he consider the incident of the key to be at all conclusive, since the key might have been returned in the course of the day. On the whole, everything might be got round except the hiding of the parcel in the shed, and that was so exceedingly damning that, even without anything else, it amounted to a formidable case.

The jury deliberated for three hours and then brought in a verdict of ‘Guilty,’ in which the judge concurred. Some of his words, however, in passing sentence were such as to show that his mind was by no means convinced upon the point.

‘If you can even now make it manifest that you are innocent of the charge,’ said he, ‘I do not doubt that every attention will be paid to any cogent proof laid before those with whom it rests to carry out the finding of the law.’

To allude to the possibility of a man’s innocence and at the same time to condemn him to be hanged strikes the lay mind as being a rather barbarous and illogical proceeding. It is true that the cumulative force of the evidence against Mullins was very strong, and that investigation proved the man’s antecedents to have been of the worst. But still, circumstantial evidence, even when it all points one way and there is nothing to be urged upon the other side, cannot be received with too great caution, for it is nearly always possible to twist it to some other meaning.

In this case, even allowing that the evidence for an alibi furnished by Mullins’s children was worthless, and allowing also that Mr. Stephenson’s evidence may be set aside, there remains the positive and absolutely disinterested testimony of Mrs. Barnes, which would seem to show that even if Mullins did the crime he did it in an entirely different way to that which the police imagined. Besides, is it not on the face of it most improbable that a man should commit a murder at eight o’clock or so in the evening, should remain all night in the house with the body of his victim, that he should do this in the dark — for a light moving about the house would have been certainly remarked by the neighbours — that he should not escape during the darkness, but that he should wait for the full sunlight of an August morning before he emerged?

After reading the evidence one is left with an irresistible impression that, though Mullins was very likely guilty, the police were never able to establish the details of the crime, and that there was a risk of a miscarriage of justice when the death sentence was carried out.

There was much discussion among the legal profession at the time as to the sufficiency of the evidence, but the general public was quite satisfied, for the crime was such a shocking one that universal prejudice was excited against the accused. Mullins was hanged on the 19th of November, and he left a statement behind him reaffirming his own innocence. He never attempted to explain the circumstances which cost him his life, but he declared in his last hours that he believed Emms to be innocent of the murder, which some have taken to be a confession that he had himself placed the incriminating articles in the shed. Forty years have served to throw no fresh light upon the matter.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE EMSLEY MURDER TRIAL

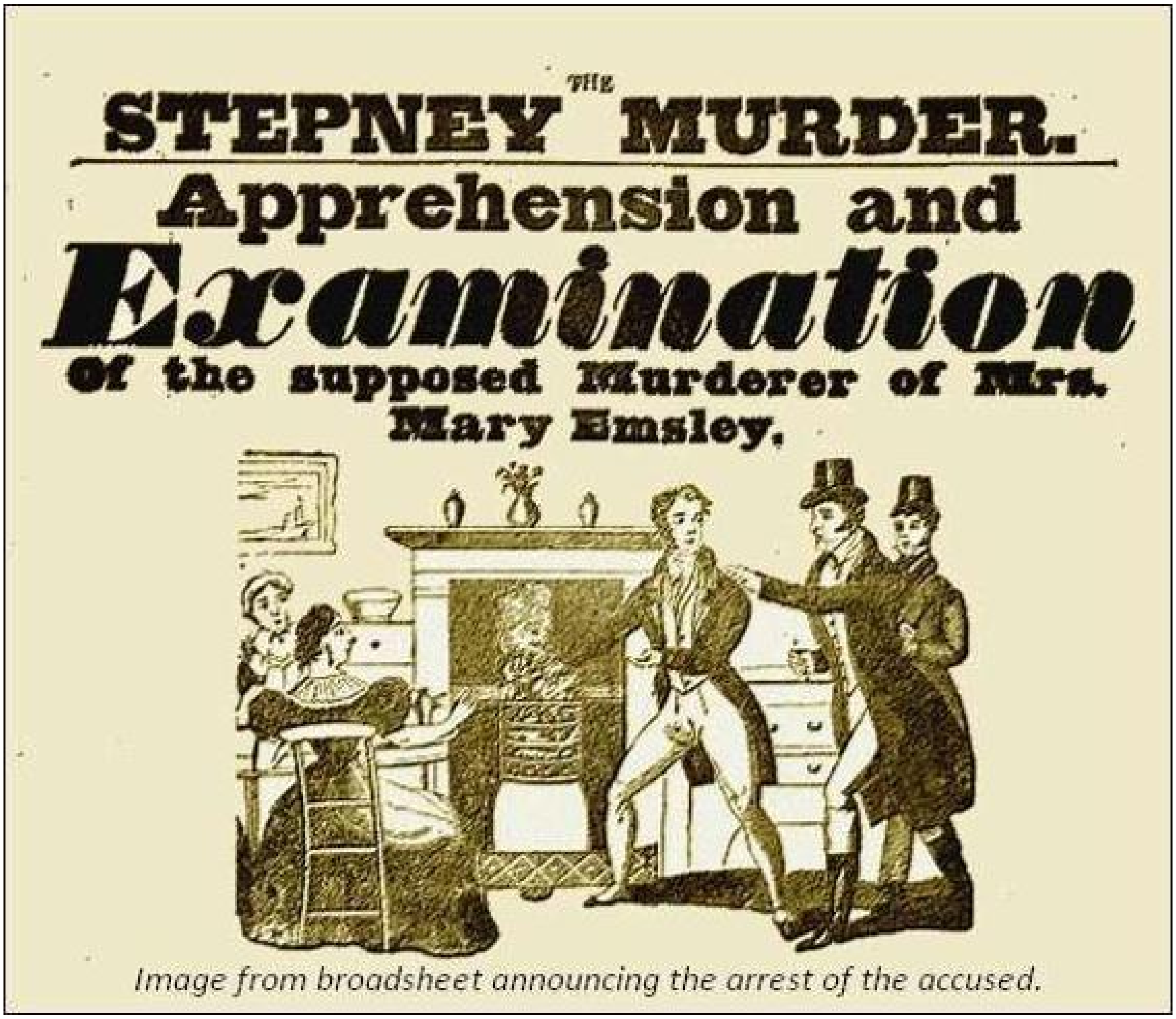

THE STEPNEY MURDER.

Apprehension and

Examination

Of the supposed Murderer of Mrs. Mary Emsley.

Image from broadsheet announcing the arrest of the accused.

Proceedings Of The Old Bailey, 22nd October 1860
Before Lord Chief Baron Pollock
Reference Number: t18601022-874

874. JAMES MULLINS (52), was indicted for the wilful murder of Mary Emsley;
he was also charged on the coroner’s inquisition with the like offence.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY, *with* MESSRS. CLERK *and* ORRIDGE *conducted the Prosecution*.

WILLIAM ROSE. I am a solicitor residing in Victoria-park square — I knew Mrs. Mary Emsley, who lived at 9, Grove-road — she was a client of mine, and had been so for some years prior to her death — she was possessed of considerable house property in that neighbourhood — she collected a great part of her rents herself from weekly tenants — she lived alone, without any servant — I know a person of the name of Walter Emm — he occasionally assisted her in the collection of rents — On Friday, 17th August, Emm called on me and made a communication to me — I did not go with him, but sent him, and appointed to meet him at the house in Grove-road — I met Dillon there — the door of the house was fastened when we got there — we knocked at the front door and there was no admittance to be gained — I then desired the constable to get over the garden wall at the back — he did so, and said the door was open, and I went over the wall and followed him in the same way — we went through the house — we found no person on the ground floor — the door of the parlour was open, and the back window appeared to be a little open — there is a front and back parlour; they open from the one to the other, and form one room — we then went up on to the first floor — the door of the front bedroom on the first floor was open — that was the room used by the deceased as her bedroom — there is a small back room as well with lumber in it — the bed appeared not to have been slept in — we then went up stairs to the second floor — the door of the front room was open, and I there saw the body of Mrs. Emsley, with her head towards the landing, near the doorway — the body was lying so much in the doorway as to prevent the door from closing — you could scarcely enter the room without treading over the body — there was a bundle of papers for papering rooms in front of her, and two pieces of paper under her arm — Dr. Gill was then sent for at my request; he came almost immediately — the deceased remained in the position in which she was lying until the doctor came, at my request, she was not disturbed in any way — when I was there that day I noticed this key (*produced*) — it is a remarkable one — I saw it in the bedroom of the deceased, on the first floor — that is the room underneath that in which she was found dead — the key was on the table — there was a table in the bedroom next to the window, and I am not sure whether it was not in a basket, I think it was — there was some biscuit in the basket, and I think some other keys, but I noticed that key particularly on account of the bow being remarkable.

Cross-examined by MR. BEST (*with* MR. PALMER). *Q.* You have known the prisoner, I believe? *A.* I don't think I ever saw him till he was in custody; I think that was the first time I ever saw him; to my knowledge I had never seen him before — I think Mrs. Emsley bad a person of the name of Rowland who assisted her in the collection of rents — I never heard of a man of the name of Wright — I am not sure that a person of the name of Wilson, of Ratcliffe, did not collect some rents — he is a tenant of hers — I have no personal knowledge of that — the fastening to the front door was a common lock and a latch-key lock — I looked at the street door and found that the door had been apparently pulled to — it was not fastened inside — there are bolts inside — those were not fastened — there did not appear to have been any force at all — there was a great quantity of blood about in this room where we found the deceased lying — not all over her; there was a pool of blood; I did not notice particularly as to any splashes about the room — the smell and appearance was so offensive I did not enter the room to examine it minutely.

EDWARD DILLON (*Police-sergeant, K 19*). On Friday, 17th August, I was called by a man, of the name of Emm, to No. 9, Grove-road — I went there and found Mr. Rose, Mr. Faith, Mr. Whitaker, and Mr. Biggs, waiting outside the house — I gained admittance at the next door, and passed over the back wall to the back yard of the deceased's house-I found the back door shut, on the latch — the front door was shut on the spring-lock, but not double-locked; it would double-lock — there were no bolts drawn — a person going out and pulling the front door after him would leave it securely latched — I next went into the back parlour, and saw the back window raised up four or five inches — the shutters were closed but not fastened; not bolted — I saw the front parlour window shutters down and the curtains drawn back — I went into the front parlour; the curtains were drawn back and the shutters open; the window was fastened by a catch above — I next proceeded to the first floor front room — I saw a bed there which did not appear to have been slept in recently; the bed was not made-the right hand window-blind in the room was drawn down and the left drawn up-I then went into the back room on the same floor, which was filled with lumber and a quantity of paper hangings — I then went up stairs, and saw the deceased lying dead in the front room — that was on the floor above the front bed-room — the left hand window in the room was raised up a few inches, the right hand window was down — the deceased was lying on her left side, with her head against the door-post; her face was towards the boards, downwards, on the left side — there were a quantity of paper-hangings in that room and a quantity behind the deceased's back; there were several pieces near her head — I noticed the floor of the landing outside, and observed a footprint in the blood — I was not present when the piece of board was cut out — Dr. Gill was then sent for — I remained there till he came — everything was left in the same state as I have described it until Dr. Gill made his appearance — from the direction of the footprint the foot would be coming from the room — I examined all the bolts of the doors and shutters in the house — I discovered no marks whatever of any violent entry having been made — I afterwards made a search of the rooms below, and found a gold mourning ring between the bed-tick and mattress — the ring is in Court; my inspector has it — I found that in the first-floor, in the bed room; it bore the inscription of Samuel Emsley, Esq. — I also saw three half-pence in coppers on a chair — I gave the ring to Inspector Kerrison — I remained on the premises till I was relieved — the garden of the house is surrounded by walls — the gardens of the houses at the back of the houses in Grove-road abut on the garden of the house of the deceased on either side — there is no road between — the houses in Grove-street are at the back of the Grove-road houses — the back door of No. 9 has a glass window in it.

Cross-examined. *Q*. You went to this room where you found the deceased lying, did you observe whether there was much blood about it? *A*. A great quantity of blood — there were a great many splashes about the floor and the wall, as if the blood had spurted out from the person who had been struck.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q*. Did you notice the direction in which the blood appeared to have flowed? *A*. It appeared to have flowed in front of the woman from the position I found her in, and a great quantity splashed behind her.

SAMUEL LAWRENCE GILL. I am a member of the Edinburgh College of Physicians, and a surgeon of London — I was called in to see the deceased — I found her lying at full length on her left side, with the face turned a little more to the left, towards the boards — she was dressed — there was no sign of her having made any preparation for going to bed — the first wound which presented itself to my notice was a large opening in the back of the skull, extending deeply into the brain — I think that was the result of repeated blows — that wound alone was quite sufficient to account for death — there were a great number of minute portions of the skull carried completely within the brain and packed under the other portion of the skull, into the interior of the substance of the brain, and deposited within the upper portion of the skull — the posterior portion of the cerebrum would be immediately exposed to that injury, the posterior portion of the big brain, and of the little brain also, the opening was so large — there were several other wounds which would have caused death besides that one — the wound over the left ear would have caused death — it was a contused wound, and the whole of the temporal bone on that side was driven in; that also being in small fragments — there was also a blow above the other ear, that was a contused wound — there was no wound in the scalp on that side, but there had evidently been a heavy blow on that side — there was also what we should almost term a lacerated wound above the left eyebrow, and another, wound in the left ear, also a lacerated wound — before I saw this hammer (*produced*) I had formed an opinion as to the character of the instrument with which these blows were inflicted — the wound, which was the result of repeated blows, might have been inflicted with the blunt side of this hammer — I had an opportunity of seeing whether the hammer fitted the wound on the eyebrow; the blade, of the hammer corresponded with the length of that wound — I consider it was. such a wound as might have been inflicted by the thin end of that hammer — I noticed a quantity of blood; there was a pool on the floor which had flowed from the body, from one point, passing away from her into the room from the doorway — from the place where the head was, the room was. inclined — I noticed a mark of blood on the under part of her petticoat, but, of course, external, as the petticoat was drawn upwards over the head — it was a superficial smear — it appeared to me as if something had been wiped on it

Cross-examined. *Q.* Could you form any opinion from the appearance of the wounds which wound was inflicted first? *A.* It would be a mere, matter of opinion, but I should rather think that the wound on the temple had been inflicted first; that appeared to have been one blow — the body was slightly decomposed when I saw it — the face was very slightly decomposed — I don’t think the incised wound on the eyebrow was as. much decomposed as the opposite side of the face — there were indications of decomposition going on, certainly — the effect of decomposition, under some circumstances, would be to cause a wound to expand, to gape — I don’t consider that it was at all distended from decomposition, because it was comparatively dry — in this case the wound would gape slightly, certainly

— I forget how long after my first examination this hammer was shown to me; I should think a week, perhaps more — I have not the slightest recollection; it might have been a fortnight; I don’t bear it in mind — I did not compare the hammer with the body — I measured the wound over the eyebrow, and probed the depth of it with my finger — I form my opinion as to the instrument which inflicted the wounds from the appearance of the wounds and from being accustomed to see wounds inflicted by all sorts of instruments — a piece of iron, an iron bar, sharp at the end, would, undoubtedly produce such wounds as these — I should think it possible, certainly, that the wounds at the back of the head might have been done with a larger instrument than this — I considered they could have been done with a hammer — the wound at the back of the head was considerably greater than this part of the hammer; it was some inches in size — I should imagine that whatever instrument was used there would be a considerable quantity of blood on it.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Could large wounds, larger than any single wound, have been inflicted by that hammer by repeated blows? *A.* By repeated blows — I measured the wound on the eyebrow; it was an inch and a half long — all I say is that this hammer might have inflicted the wounds — I gave it as my opinion when I saw the body that she had been dead, in all probability, three or four days — I saw her on Friday in the middle of the day — what I saw and observed was quite consistent with an attack on Monday, 13th August.

COURT. *Q.* You say her appearance was consistent with her being wounded on the Monday; that what happened to her might have happened on Monday? *A.* Quite likely — I could not fix within a day either way — it might have been on Monday evening, or Tuesday morning, or on the Sunday — it would depend on the state of the atmosphere.

ELIZABETH PASHLEY. I reside at 16, Grove-road, immediately opposite No. 9, where Mrs. Emsley used to live — I have lived there twelve years — I last saw her alive on Monday evening, August 13th, between 7 and 8 o’clock, sitting at her first-floor window — she usually went to bed about 10, or even before, I have seen her, but usually about 10 — the shutters of her house were always closed by dusk — I never saw them open after dusk — I noticed her house about 12 o’clock on the night of 13th August — the shutters were open — my attention was attracted by it; I thought it remarkable — I observed the house early the next morning, about daybreak; it was not quite light — the shutters were not closed — the blinds were just the same as they were on the Monday — the first floor blind was down — the window even with it was up rather more than half-way — one blind was pulled down and the other blind was rather more than half-way up — there were no blinds on the second floor — one of the windows of the second floor was slightly open — I saw a person on the Wednesday knock at the door three times — I observed other persons knocking, but I do Dot know which days they were — when persons knocked at the door of the deceased she would open the first-floor window, where she usually sat, and look out and speak to them from the window — she would sometimes speak to them from the area, which is grated over — there was no access into the house by the area — she would only let those persons in who were in the habit of going there, or who worked then — if she knew them she would come down or answer them from the window, but she always looked out from the window first

Cross-examined. *Q.* There was nobody in the house with her? *A.* No; she never kept any servants in my experience — I do not know how many persons were in the habit of visiting her during the day — she was generally out in the day — only a very few work people went into the house — I can’t say how many; not so many as a dozen — she never had any tradespeople — I have seen a paperhanger go in — I have seen Mr. Rowland go in, and Mr. Emm — I do not know Mr. Wilson, or Mr. Wright — I have seen others go in but they would be persons who were bringing things to the house, and I know she knew them.

ELIZABETH FRANCES MUGGERIDGE. I live at 17, Grove-road, nearly opposite the house of the deceased, Mrs. Emsley — On Monday, 13th August, I saw her about 7 o’clock in the evening, sitting at her first-floor bedroom window — I did not observe her doing anything — I noticed the house again that night between 10 and 11 — the parlour shutters were open and one of the curtains was drawn further back than usual, and the first-floor bedroom window was half-way up; the shutters being open at that time was an unusual circumstance — I had noticed it was her habit to close her shutters at dusk, had also observed that when persons called on her she would look out at the window or answer them up the area — on Wednesday morning, about 11 o’clock, I saw a man and woman call at the house — they knocked several times at the door and gained no admittance — I did not observe any one else particularly after that

WILLIAM SMITH. I am in Mr. Linsell's service, a draper in the Mile-end- road — I did not know Mrs. Emsley myself — I remember having to take a message there on Tuesday, the 14th August, about half-past 8 in the morning — I was sent by my master — I knocked at the door for about five minutes, loud, so that anybody must have heard, if there had been anybody in the house — I then went away and returned again in the evening between 8 and 9; I knocked again and failed to gain admittance — I looked through the key hole to see if I could see anybody.

JOHN COOK. I reside at Peckham, and am a builder — On 14th August, a little after 10 in the morning, I called at 9, Grove-road, at the house of Mrs. Emsley, about some paper hangings — I expected to buy some — I had received a note on the 10th, saying that she had some to dispose of — I knocked at the door three times and got no admittance — I then walked away round the square, and about, and came again, knocked and got no admittance.

Cross-examined, *Q.* Had you known this old lady before? *A.* About two years — I had not had dealings with her for paper-hangings before this — I am building on her ground and therefore she often came to see me — I think it was the last day in July she was at my house.

EDWIN EMM. I am the son of Walter Thomas Emm, a shoemaker, living at Mr. Emsley's brick-fields, Bethnal-green — I knew the deceased — on Monday, 13th August last, I was sent by my father to her house for some brass taps — I did not go that day, I went on the following day and knocked at the door of the house.

RICHARD TANNER. I am a sergeant of the detective police — I know the prisoner; I have only known him since the murder — I was employed to investigate this murder, with Inspector Thornton and Sergeant Thomas — I had seen the prisoner previous to his making a communication to me, about 28th August, as near as I can recollect; it was the latter end of August — he was fetched from his lodgings by Sergeant Thomas, and Mr. Thornton and myself had a consultation with him in reference to the murder of Mrs. Emsley — we sent for him for the purpose of making inquiries — on Saturday, 8th September, about 6 o'clock, he came to my house in Wood-street, Westminster — he did not wear spectacles when he came to me — he said, "I am come to give you some information; I have been to Mr. Thornton's and he is out" — I asked him into my room and he said, "You know, Sergeant Tanner, that since I saw you and Inspector Thornton, I have had my suspicions about the man who committed the murder, and I have been watching him" — I said, "Before you go any farther, Mullins, who is it 1s.; he replied, "Emms" — I believe his name is Emm, but he said "Emms" — he said, "This morning I went to Emsley's brick-field at 5 o'clock, and I remained there watching Emms, pretending to be picking herbs, and between 8 and 9 o'clock I saw Emms come out of his house and go to a ruined cottage about fifty yards in front of his house; he brought out from then a large parcel, took it indoors, remained about ten minutes, came out again, appeared to be looking about him, and he had a small parcel in his hand about the size of a pint pot; he went to a shed or a lean-to adjoining big own house, went inside, remained about two minutes, came out again with, out the parcel and went indoors" — I said, "What do you think the parcel contained?" — he said, "I can't tell" — I then left my own home with him and went to Mr. Thornton's residence which is close by — he said nothing else before we went to Mr. Thornton's — he said nothing about where the parcel was put, further than what I have stated — he did not then give any information about where the parcel was put — we went to Thornton's — he was not at home — I walked with him then as far as Palace-yard — I asked him if he would have some refreshment and he did; we had a glass of ale — when we came out, on parting he said, "Now don't go without me" — he desired to go that night — I said, "No, I can't go to-night" — I had a motive, Mr. Thornton was not there and he had charge of the case — I think I said, "Mr. Thornton is not at home; I can't go without him" — he then said, "Now don't go without me" — I said, "No, you know I have taken down the substance of your statement, in writing in a book, and no advantage shall be taken of your information; I hope you think we are beyond that" — he said, "Very well" — I said, "I will go with you tomorrow morning; I will send a sergeant for you, where shall I send for you?" — he said, "To 17, Oakum-street, Chelsea" — a reward had been offered at that time — I have got a bill (*producing one*) similar to those which were posted and placarded about — it was posted all over London; first a reward of 100*l.* and then of 300*l.* — Mullins was aware of the reward having been offered — he said on parting, "Don't go without me; if it comes off all right I will take care of you" — that is the substance of what passed between us that night — I went the next morning to Emsley's brick-field with Inspector Thornton, Sergeant Thomas, and the prisoner — we went in a cab — nothing passed with me, I was outside; Thornton and

Thomas were inside with him — this plan (*produced*) appears very correct — there is a shed by the side of Emm’s cottage in which ultimately the parcel was found — there is a ruined house shown here; that is about fifty yards from Emm’s cottage — it was about midday on Sunday morning when we arrived there — the ruin is a perfect wreck; it is a very old dilapidated cottage, in fact, there is a hole in the wall where any person can go in — there is a door to the shed by Emm’s cottage, but the lower half of it is gone, there is only the top portion complete — it was open — it appears that anybody, at any time, could have got into that shed — at the time we arrived on that morning the shed was open, and there was a slab of stone just against the side of it — that is shown on the plan — this field, which is called Emsley’s brick-field, is an open field; persons have no right there, but they can get in very easily — the palings appear to be knocked down — there is room enough for any person to go in — there is a gate also which I found open, but independent of that, there are gaps in the palings which appear to have been knocked down, and any person can get in — we arrived in Bonner’s-lane, myself, Thornton, and Thomas were walking down Bonner’s-lane, and through a gap in the place we saw Emm and a man standing in conversation — they were at the other end of the field from Emm’s house, at the extreme end, I should say quite 200 yards — we told Mullins to remain as it were about here (*pointing to the plan*), out of the field entirely so as not to be seen — we all three went to Emm; he was called aside, and Mr. Thornton made some communication to him in my presence — he was told the accusation in substance, that Mullins had made — we did not tell him that Mullins had made it — I then went, by the direction’ of Inspector Thornton, to Emm’s house and searched it — I spoke to Mrs. Emm — Emm was not there then, he was left with Mr. Thornton — we looked in the shed and at that time found nothing — we then went back to Mr. Thornton to report the result of our mission, and at that period Mullins appeared in the field, within fifty yards of us — I found Thornton and Emm had advanced to the ruined cottage; they were standing in front of it — at the time I saw Mullins in the field I went to him, and on my approach he said, “You have not half searched the place, she (meaning, I suppose, Mm. Emm) had her back to you all the while; come, I will show you where I think it is put” — I said, “No, not now; we don’t want Emm to know you are the informant,” and in the conversation we walked round between a stack of bricks and another old shed which is in the field — we halted four or five yards in front of the identical shed which he alluded to as where he saw Emm put the parcel, and he said, “There, look now, go and pull down that b — slab and turn up those bricks” — I looked at him and retired with him from the spot — I did not go towards the shed — I came back some twenty yards — I spoke to Sergeant Thomas and desired him to go and pull down the stone, at the same time telling Mullins to go to the Rising Sail and wait for me — Thomas went to the stone and returned to where Thornton, Emm, and I were — Thornton and Emm were still in front of the ruin — I saw Thomas pull the stone on one side, and saw him bring out the parcel — the slab is shown on the plan, we had simply to pull the stone forward and take it out; anyone could have placed it there without going into the shed — the parcel was opened in the presence of Emm — I cannot speak to its condition so well as Thomas; he handled it and undid it — I did not handle it in its original state — I saw it opened and saw what it contained — this is the outer paper; it was tied round the same as it is now, with this piece of tape — it is a piece of tape which might form an apron string or anything of that sort; besides that there was an inner parcel — this is it, it was tied as it is now, with a piece of shoemaker’s waxed string — it contained some pieces of newspaper, some blotting paper, one metal table spoon, and three metal tea spoons, and these two lenses or magnifying glasses; two of the spoons are lettered “W. P.” — besides these there was a cheque for 10*l.* on the Bank of London — this is it — that cheque is described in the handbill as a cheque drawn by Pickering and Carrier on the Bank of London, dated August 14th, 1860 — those were all the contents of the parcel — I was then directed to fetch Mullins back from the public-house, which I did, leaving Thornton, Thomas, and Emm still in front of the ruined shed — Mullins came back and stood in front of an old waggon that was there — he said, “Have you found anything?” — he appeared delighted, rubbed his hands, and laughed, and said, “Have you found any b — money?” — I said; “Thomas has found something, I cannot tell you what; Emm is very ill” — he appeared to laugh, rubbed his hands and said, “Oh, of course he would be” — I was then told to take him to the station in Arbour-square, which I did — Emm was also taken — he was there charged and Mullins also — he was charged by Inspector Thornton, in my presence, the charge was taken down in writing — the charge sheet is not here — it would be at Scotland-yard now — upon being charged, Mullins said, “Is this the way I am to be served, after giving information?” — I searched him

— I found that his shoe was tied with a piece of waxed string — I have it here; it is waxed with cobbler's wax — the string round the parcel is waxed with cobbler's wax — I also found on him a pocket-book and some spectacles, but nothing material to this case; the spectacles were in his pocket — I afterwards went to 33, Barnsley-street, where he occupied a room — I there found a piece of tape, which 1 produce.

COURT. *Q.* Has that piece of tape been examined so as to ascertain the number of threads it contains? *A.* It was examined by several gentlemen on the coroner's jury who were drapers; I have not counted the number of threads in it — Inspector Thornton was originally a draper — the piece of tape at the extreme end of the parcel, I thought corresponded with this piece — they appear to me to be the same tape — I think the short piece at the end of the parcel, and this piece, correspond; they appear to be exactly the same kind of tape.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* I believe you also produce a piece of wax that you found on the chimney piece in the prisoner's room? *A.* Thomas found that in my presence — I saw him take it from the chimney- piece — I was also with Mr. Thornton when he found the hammer.

Cross-examined, Q. If understand you rightly, you had been in communication with the prisoner as early as 28th August? *A.* I think about that time — a reward had been offered then; 300*l.* — the whole of the reward had been offered then — it was offered on the 24th.

COURT. *Q.* The 300*l.* had been offered before you had any communication with the prisoner? *A.* Yes.

MR. BEST. *Q.* You have told us that you left him outside the field while you went to search the shed. *A.* Yes; I supposed him during that time to be where I had directed him to wait, outside the field — when I afterward? saw him coming towards the shed, he was about fifty or sixty yards from it; he could not from where he was, have seen what we had done inside the shed — he could see us enter the shed — we remained there two minutes probably, then he came up to us — he did not first call our attention to the bricks which were lying about — he did not mention anything about searching some bricks previous to telling us about the slab — I am sure he did not, or about searching some wood — he afterwards said "Turn up those bricks" — that was before we had found the parcel — Emm is by trade a shoemaker — I found his tools in his house; his daughter was at work — I examined his tools; I believe a shoemaker's hammer was amongst them; I am not quite sure — I believe shoemakers use a hammer in their trade — Sergeant Thomas searched that portion of the house.

WILLIAM THOMAS. I am a sergeant of the detective police — On Sunday morning, 9th September, in consequence of instructions from Inspector Thornton, I went to 17, Oakum-street, Chelsea, between 10 and 11 in the day; I found the prisoner there — he came out of the house; I was just behind him — I took a turn and met him, and beckoned to him when he saw me, and he followed me into the Brompton-road — he spoke first to me, he said "Thomas, I took you to be Tanner" — he said "You know that I am very elever in these matters, I have been working hard, day and night to discover the murderer of Mrs. Emsley, and I have found him out" — I said, "Who do you suspect?" — he said, "The man Emm, who gave evidence on the coroner's inquest; he was suspected; no one had better opportunity, as he was in the habit of taking small sums of money, and would be admitted by Mrs. Emsley at any time" — I said, "Mullins, would she admit you V — he said, "Oh, no, she would answer me from the window, and up the area" — he said nothing more at that time — I had seen him before and spoken to him before — I had not know him for any number of years — I went with him to Scotland-yard, and then went with him, Inspector Thornton, and Tanner, to Bethnal-green — as we were going along in the cab, the prisoner and Thornton were in conversation, and after they had stopped, I said, "Mullins, what sort of a parcel did you see Emm place in the shed?" — he jumped up, put his hand into his coat pocket, and withdrew a handkerchief, and rolled it up to about the same size as the parcel, and said, "That is about the size."

COURT. *Q.* And was that the size? *A.* Yes; I afterwards found that to be the size.

MR. CLERK. *Q.* Was he telling Thornton in the cab what he had seen Emm do? *A.* Thornton and the prisoner were in conversation, but I did not bear all they said — When we got to the brick-field we went into the brickfield — I went to the shed that had been spoken of, adjoining the house — I looked into the shed, but did not disturb anything; I merely looked into it — after that I went into the house and searched there; I saw some papers relating to some property between the deceased and Emm — I then returned to Inspector Thornton, and at that time Mullins made his appearance in the field — I had taken him up Bonner's-lane, out of sight of Emm's place altogether, and said, "Mullins, remain here till we send for you" — that was about 150 yards from the place where I next saw him — he had some conversation with Tanner in the field — I did not hear what passed — Tanner then spoke to me, and from what he said I went again to the shed, and removed a flagstone that was just inside the door, and there I found a parcel, tied round with tape — it was behind the stone, between the stone and the wall — at the bottom there were some bricks and rubbish — the stone was buried about three or four inches outside and inside — the parcel was on the top of the bricks, between the wall and the stone — the bricks were not visible from outside, in the field, until I had removed the stone, not what was behind the stone, not in the middle, where the parcel was — the stone was two inches from the wall at the bottom part — it was standing nearly against the wall, it leant towards the wall — the brick rubbish was between the bottom of the stone and the wall — the brick rubbish was not visible when I was outside in the field — when I took the parcel I brought it to where Thornton was standing in the field — I spoked to Emm first, before I untied the parcel — Mullins was not near enough to hear what was said — I opened the parcel in Tanner's presence — it contained some spoons, a cheque for 10*l.* and two lenses — I afterwards went to 33, Barnsley-street, I went to the back room on the ground floor in that house — I had been in that room before — the prisoner lived there; I had seen him there — I there found a small bit of shoemaker's wax and a small bit of twine, together on the mantelpiece — I produce them — the street door of the house opens by a small bit of twine; anybody can open it from the outside — the door of the prisoner's room was locked — I had not the key with me; I broke it open — I afterwards went to the house, 17, Oakum-street, from which I had seen the prisoner come — a person named Kelly is the landlady of that house — I went into a back room there where I found the prisoner's wife, and in that room I found a spoon, which I produce, it has on the back of it the letters W. P.

Cross-examined. *Q.* That is the ordinary trade mark, is it not? *A.* I believe so — I believe it is the maker's mark — the spoons are ordinary sort of German metal spoons, generally in use — there is a slight difference between the appearance of the spoon found at the prisoner's house, and the spoons found in the parcel — I should say the one found in the house was worn more than those found in the parcel — two of those in the parcel are alike, and one of those in the parcel and the one found in the house are just the same pattern — when I come to look at the bowls they are a different shape (*examining them*) — three are alike; the one found in the house is similar to this — they are German silver — I first went to the house in Barnsley-street, on Tuesday, 28th August — it is a very small backroom where the prisoner lived, not very clean — I saw no one there besides himself — there was a person living up stairs, an invalid, whose name I do not know — there was no one down stairs — I do not know how many rooms there are upstairs, there are three down — the prisoner occupied one, no one occupied the others — that was the only room occupied down stairs.

DR. GILL (*re-examined*). I have examined the ends of the two pieces of tape produced — I have carefully counted the number of strands in them — Tanner was present — he counted them before me, not letting me know the number he counted; there are thirty-three strands in each.

COURT. *Q.* So that those two pieces are pieces of the same sort of tape? *A.* They are in my opinion — that is all I can say.

MR. BEST. *Q.* You are not engaged in the manufacture of tape, I suppose? *A.* No; I have been in the habit of examining all fabrics, I examine all things that I feel an interest in, under the microscope — I am in the habit of examining cotton, silk, or anything, for my own private investigation.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* It is a very beautiful investigation sometimes, is it not, to examine fabrics? *A.* It is exceedingly beautiful.

STEPHEN THORNTON. I am an inspector of the detective police — On Saturday, 8th September, the prisoner called at my house — on the following morning I went with Tanner, Thomas, and the prisoner, to Bethnal-green — as we went along, the prisoner said he had been watching Emm, who had been living in Mr. Emsley's brick-field, Bethnal-green, for some time, and on Saturday, about half-past 8 in the morning, he saw him come out of his house, go to a ruin or shed, about fifty yards from his house, bring out a parcel, and, looking about him, go into his own house, that he was there a few minutes, then came out with a smaller parcel, and went to a shed or lean-to adjoining his own house, and was there about a minute, and then came out without the parcel — he said the parcel that he fetched from his own house was a small parcel about the size of a pint pot — I went to that brickfield — directions were given to Thomas to search in the shed and the house — the parcel was afterwards brought to me — Emm was not in good health at that time; he seemed to be labouring from illness, and suffering — had given instructions to Mullins as to where he was to remain — I told him to remain outside the brick-field, and if we wanted him we would send for him — I saw him in the brick-field at the extreme or northeast end of the brick-field shortly after — some ten minutes afterwards he came up to within twenty-five yards of where I was standing, and I sent Tanner to take him away — I saw the parcel opened, and the contents have been produced here — I afterwards went to the house in Barnsley-street, and found this plasterer's hammer, which has been produced — I found it lying with other tools, I believe, on the floor in the room.

Cross-examined. *Q.* The hammer was quite open, I believe, not concealed? *A.* It was lying on the floor — there was no concealment about it — I examined it directly, and found it nearly in the same state as it is now — there was some plaster on it — it was not so clean as it is now — it appeared to me as if it had been used — I have been engaged in giving directions about this case the whole time, but part of the time I have been on leave — I have not received any communication that a person was seen to come out of the deceased's house on the Tuesday morning — in consequence of something I have made inquiries about one or two persons besides Mullins, previous to his being apprehended.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Since his apprehension, have you made inquiry about any other person? *A.* No; I have not.

JOHN JOSHUA CARRIER. I am one of the firm of Pickering and Co. 4, Suffolk- street, Cambridge-road — I knew the deceased Mrs. Emsley — I last saw her alive on Monday, 13th August last — I drew this cheque, and paid it to her — I gave it to her — it is dated 14th August; it should have been the 13th — it is an error in the date — it is a mistake I made in drawing it.

COURT. *Q.* Are you quite sure you drew it on the 13th? *A.* Quite sure, and gave it her myself on the same morning.

Cross-examined. *Q.* What time did you give it her? *A.* About 12 o'clock; it might have been a little before 12.

COURT. *Q.* How long had you been a tenant of Mrs. Emsley's? *A.* About eighteen years, the old and new firm together — I am not aware that she kept a banker — I do not know anything about that; I did not know that she did — I paid her on other occasions, sometimes by cheque, and sometimes money; more frequently by cheque — I do not know what became of the cheques after she had them — we never crossed the cheques; it was always an open cheque that I gave her — I cannot say now whether in looking over our accounts I ever ascertained when the cheques came into our bankers as paid — I know nothing about it.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q*. This cheque has never been through your bankers; it has never been paid? *A*. Never.

JOSEPH BIGGS. I live at Connaught-row, Bethnal-green. I was well acquainted with Mrs. Mary Emsley during the last four years, I think this is the fourth summer — I knew her husband before, from about the year 1820 — I was in the habit of calling upon her in general once a week, since she lived in Grove-road — I used to call there on Sunday evening mostly — I called there on Sunday, 12th August, the day before this calamitous affair — I was to have gone there on the Tuesday to see Mr. Cook, he being an acquaintance of mine — I did not go at the time appointed; instead of going at 11, it was about half-past 1 — I could not get in — I have seen some plate which the deceased deposited with me; I did not see it from the time of her depositing it with me, until the time she wanted to take something out of it, I had not any farther knowledge of it — I kept it secured as she tied it up — she took back some of that; a few articles to sell, such as a silver snuff-box, a lady’s pencil-case, and a silver watch, and gold pins with coloured stones — she took away a silver pencil-case with her about four months ago, I think, somewhere early in the summer; I cannot call to mind the time exactly; it was about four months, it might have been more or less — I did not see that pencil-case afterwards until I saw it at the police court, or rather until Tanner showed it to me — I believe that this (*produced*) was the pencil-case which she took away with her, and for this reason; when she took it out of the parcel, (indeed I did not know it was there before,) she said “Here is a pencil-case, seeming to say, “Would you like to have it?” — that was how I understood her — I took hold of it and said, “Oh, it is an old-fashioned concern” — the point was thin, very much bent, more so than it is now — that has been put in order — I said I did not think I should—”I don’t think it is of much use, it appears to be very much broke” — she said, “I don’t suppose it is;” and consequently took it back again with her — I observed the head of the pencil-case at the time; it was a round head like this; I believe this to be the very pencil-case — I saw some lenses of a telescope in her possession, something like four weeks before her decease, when she gave them to me to look at, saying, “Here are two glasses, which do you think magnifies the most?” and so on — these appear to me to be the very two glasses; I remember one was much better than the other — I believe they are the same.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Then this pencil-case is not in the same state as when it left you? *A.* It is not — it looked much older then — I believe it is the same — at the time it was shown to me, I was not aware that any one was charged with the murder — they brought it to me and said "Do you know anything of this?" — I knew nothing at all about its being sold, or bought, or the least thing, not a word — of course I said, "Yes" — there is nothing I can positively swear to about it, any more than that I believe it to be the very same — the old lady was fond of selling her articles that she took away with her — I believe she was fond of money, and was in the habit of converting the things into money — these two lenses are two simple glasses — I believe them to be the two; of course I could not say there are not two others like them — I never to my knowledge saw any like them before — I know she had two like these — I am not accustomed to look at lenses.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* You believe the pencil and the lenses to have belonged to this old lady? *A.* I believe they did; conscientiously.

ELIZABETH GOETZ. I am the wife of Joseph Goetz, of 18, Bamsley-street, Bethnal-green — I was the niece of Mrs. Emsley — I know the prisoner — I know that he was in the habit of working at times for my aunt — I remember hearing of the murder of my aunt on the Friday — I had seen her on the Monday before that at my house; she dined with me on that day — she left me at a quarter to 2 o'clock — while she was there the prisoner came there for some keys; he came first for a box lock — my aunt gave him some keys — he came twice or three times that day — he asked for keys each time — he came and said it was a key wanted, not a box; I gave him four or five keys, and he came back with several which would not do, and he had a few more — I recognize this key, it is one that was amongst the keys that I gave to Mullins — that was on the Monday that my aunt was murdered — I next saw that key at my aunt's house on the Sunday following — that was after the murder — I believe these to be the same tea-spoons that I have seen my aunt use — I have noticed one of them bent in the handle; this one (*pointing it out*) — I noticed that the last time that I tea'd in that house — I saw it about four weeks before the murder — I believe these spoons to have belonged to my aunt — I know a pencil-case that she had; it is before me; I recognize it — it appears to be a pencil-case that she used at my house several times — there is nothing particular about it that I had noticed before — I think I had seen it a few weeks before 13th August, at my house — my aunt was accustomed to visit me; she never came into Bamsley-street without coming — I am aware that there were no tea-spoons left in her house after the murder — I could not find a tea-spoon to use for my breakfast, not one of any description.

Cross-examined. *Q*. When did you examine the house? *A*. I was called in on Friday, and on Saturday morning I had breakfast there, and I could not find a tea-spoon — that was the first time I looked for spoons — I did not find any — I looked for them in a table-drawer in the kitchen, and on the dresser; they were usually kept amongst the tea-things in the kitchen — I have seen three or four spoons there at a time — I have seen more than those, but not in that house; I have seen silver spoons, but not in that house — I do not know how long the old lady was in the habit of using the pencil-case; I have seen it on and off, for some time — I have seen it a long time, perhaps four years, before — she was not in the habit of using it constantly but at different times I have seen it — I have known the prisoner about six or seven months at the outside, to the best of my recollection — I have known him as being, generally speaking, employed by my aunt — he was at work for her during that period, when there was any work to do — he was the person she employed usually to carry out her plastering jobs, and so on — since the last man died Mullins generally did the work — she had a large number of houses, and consequently there was a great deal of work to be done, constant work — when she has been staying at my house, he has called there to see her, and received his orders from her, frequently — by her orders I told him to call on that very Monday for the lock to put on a door — I gave him a box-lock first — my aunt left my house that day about a quarter to 2 o'clock — Mullins had been there from 10 to 12 o'clock, during that time — I can't say exactly at what time — he did not come back again about 2 o'clock — I am quite positive he never came to the house after my aunt left; not till Wednesday — he left, and went away to get some keys for another door — he left with my aunt — that was the third time of his leaving — he had been to and fro with keys, fitting to other doors — my aunt had other business to do, and he went away with the keys by himself; and after the third time he went away with my aunt from the door, down to the house where he lived.

ELIZABETH GEORGE. I live at 8, Cutworth-street, Bethnal-green — I knew the deceased Mrs. Emsley — I had attended her for 18 months as a charwoman — she had no other attendant than me, that I know of — I was in the habit of going to the house on Saturdays — she slept in the one-pair front room — when any one called on her, her habit was to look out from the area, or to look out of the window if it was dusk, before she answered them — that was what she did when I was there — I was last there before the murder on the Saturday, as Mrs. Emsley was supposed to be murdered on the Monday — on the Saturday before that she had received a lot of paperhangings — they were put up stairs in the two-pair front and back rooms — Mullins carried them up; no one else — I had seen him there before several times — I knew that he did work for Mrs. Emsley, aud he was in the habit of coming on a Saturday to be paid for the work he had done — I saw him there on the Saturday before the murder was supposed to be committed — he was then paid about 6s. by the deceased — she took the money from her pocket — she gave me the money to examine it, to take to the door to see if there were any sovereigns in it — it was about dusk, 7 o’clock — she said it was to look if there were any sovereigns in it — Mullins was not near enough to hear that remark of hers — there were no sovereigns — he left at 7 o’clock — I remained till past 10 o’clock, my usual time — I have seen three tea-spoons — these are exactly like them, but I cannot swear they are the same — they are exactly the same sort — there were but three kept in the kitchen — I last saw them on the Saturday — when I left at 10 o’clock I left them there.

Cross-examined. *Q.* You attended her as charwoman weekly? *A.* Yes; she employed no other servant — she was an old lady, very penurious in her habits — she was never in the habit of carrying any sovereigns in her pocket, to my knowledge — she did not live in a very humble way — it was a very respectable house, a large house — her mode of living was humble, not extravagant — I have known her 17 years, when she was first married to Mr. Emsley — during that time I never saw her with much money in her pocket — some times I saw a couple of bags on the mantel-piece, about as large as my fist, but I never saw them untied — I saw them when I went, but they were not there again — I did not see any bags on the mantel-piece on this Saturday evening — I partly cleaned that room on the Saturday — an old gentleman came on the Saturday of the name of Green — he lived up at the Park — there was also a short man came to look at the paper — I believe that to be Mr. Wright, in the Mile-end-road — I did not know him at the time — a man also came about 12 o’clock with a bundle of paperhangings — she had a great many paperhangings — she was not in the habit, till latterly, of selling them, not till a week or two before her death — a week or two before she died she had several persons call upon her about paperhangings — I never saw but this Mr. Wright.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Did Wright go away while you were there? *A.* Yes — Mr. Green is 50 or 60 years old — I do not know whether the other person bought some — Mrs. Emsley took him up stairs — I do not know whether he bought any — he passed out — he went away while I was there — this was on the Saturday — the old lady used to carry a small basket in collecting her rents, and put the money into a leather bag.

COURT. *Q.* Had she any banker? *A.* Yes; she went to the bank — I heard say she did bank; she banked with the Bank of England.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Did you ever go to the Bank of England for her? *A.* No; when the gentleman called about the paperhangings the old lady, as he left, seemed to say that he was to call another time — I did not distinctly hear — I only passed on the stairs.

WALTER THOMAS EMM. I am a shoemaker by trade — I reside at a little cottage in Emsley’s brick-field, Globe-town, Bethnal-green — I know the prisoner — I have know him from, I think, about the beginning of last February — he has visited at my house — he has had meals there — he has had tea three or four times at the house in the brick-field, and I think he has had meat and bread too there, after dinner when he has called in — I think it was about four weeks before 13th August, the day of the murder, that he had been at my cottage, but I saw him in Barnsley-street two days in that week — I had to fetch him on the Thursday before the 13th August for the old lady, to move a slab-stone in one of the houses in Barnsley-street, in the back yard — I saw him on the Friday before the murder, in the afternoon — I was frequently in the habit of seeing him — he worked for me — he worked for Mrs. Emsley, and I had to see him — I was employed by Mrs. Emsley to collect her rents, and I took jobs from her — I remember Thornton, and Thomas, and Tanner coming to me at the brick-field — that was on Sunday, 9th September, I think — I was then taken in custody — I did not know what the charge was — I was charged with having a parcel there belonging to Mrs. Emsley.

Q. We have heard that a parcel was found by Serjeaut Thomas, behind a slab in an out-house of your cottage; did you put it there? *A.* No; I had not anything whatever to do with that parcel — I had never seen that parcel before it was produced in my presence by Thomas — I was aware that a reward had been offered — I saw the old lady on the afternoon of Monday, 13th August, about 2 o'clock, at the end of Barnsley-street — that was the last time I saw her alive — after I left Mrs. Emsley on Monday, 13th August, I went into one of the houses to see a plumber, and from there I went home — I got home about half-past 3 — I then stopped at home till 6 o'clock, or a little after 6; then I went with Mr. Rowland to Bethnal-green workhouse — I stopped there for some time, till Rowland, and my wife, and a Mrs. Buckle came out — I then went on to the field again with them — I wanted Rowland to drive me to Stratford — I was on the field some length of time — I could not catch the pony to get it harnessed; that took me some time — then I went to Mr. Rumble, the owner of the pony, to see if he would come and catch it, and when I came back again Rowland and my wife, and some one else, had caught the pony — I started about 9 o'clock to go to Bromley and Stratford — it might be two or three minutes past 9, I am not exactly confident what time exactly it was — I think I got home to Globe-town about half-past 11 o'clock — my wife went with me to Stratford, and a woman of the name of Buckle; and Rumble, the owner of the pony, drove me there — we were the four that went — I have a toll-ticket that I had on that day; this is it (*produced*) — the date is the 13th of the 8th month.

Q. On the solemn oath that you have taken to tell the truth, had you anything to do with the murder of this old lady? *A.* No I had not — I remember the day I was taken into custody, when the parcel was found — on the previous day, Saturday, I think it was about half-past 9 when I got up — I was not well that day, or I should have been up before — I went out of the cottage that day, I think, about a quarter or twenty minutes past 10 — I had not left the cottage before that at all — ray daughter was in the cottage that morning — she works for me — she binds, and works on the seat — my wife was in the cottage that morning — I know a shed about 40 or 50 yards from my cottage — I did not go there that morning — I did not put any parcel there — I did not go into the shed that morning by the side of my cottage — I only went to the shed on the right side — that is — a water-closet — I went there — I returned in two or three minutes — I then remained in the house working till my dinner was ready — I was not outside any more — I collected rents for the old lady, at Stratford — that was my business that night — I went there by Mrs. Emsley's orders at 2 o'clock that day when I saw her, because I did not send my boy on Saturday — it was one house I went to, to receive 1*l.* — I did not receive the 1*l.* — I went for that purpose — I did not call at Mrs. Emsley's house after that till the following Wednesday, 15th August — I called for her to go with me to Stratford — I found no admittance to the house — afterwards, in consequence of what I had heard, I acquainted Mr. Rose, at his private house, at 8 o'clock on the following Friday morning, that I could not obtain admission to the house.

Cross-examined. *Q.* How often did you go on the Wednesday to this house? *A.* On Wednesday, the 15th, I went in the afternoon, and then, as I came home from Stratford, at half-past 9 in the evening — I knocked in the afternoon; there was no answer — I knocked again at night at half-past 9 — I did not stop there, because it was raining — I sent my wife on the Thursday morning — I went on Thursday evening myself — I knocked again; there was no answer — Mr. Whitaker, a relative of Mrs. Emsley's, lives close by there, across in the Bow-road — I can't say that I thought there was something the matter with the old lady; when I knocked twice on the Wednesday — on the Thursday night I should say I did — I did not go and tell any one then that I could not get in — I spoke to the next-door neighbour, at No. 8, who came home while I was standing there — I said, “Have you seen Mrs. Emsley to-day?” — he said, “No, I have been out all day” — he looked at my wife and said, “Why, you were here this morning” — my wife had told me she had knocked in the morning — I said, “I have been knocking now for some time; it is very strange; I was knocking here at half-past 9 last night” — he said, “Oh! then she came home late” — with that I turned to my wife and said, “Well, we had better let this be; we will call one of the youngsters up in the morning, and send them to the house, and see whether we find the house in the same position as it is now; if we find the house in the same position then I will let all that I know who know Mrs. Emsley know of it” — for that reason I called the girl up at 6 o'clock, and sent her to the house — she came home again to me, and I got my breakfast, and then I called on Mr. Rose, and told him all that had gone on — I then recollected that the boy could not get admittance on the Tuesday, and I told Mr. Rose of it — from there I sent one of the children to Mr. Biggs, and I went to Brook-street, Ratcliff, to a Mr. Churchley, thinking he might have seen Mrs. Emsley — I did not know that the old lady was subject to fits, and that she had a swimming in the head about three or four weeks previous to her being murdered — I don't think I have said that I thought she was in a fit when I called on the Wednesday — I am sure I did not say so — I could not have said such a thing as that — if I had thought that, I could have got a ladder and got into the house — I did not allege, as a reason for not telling her relatives, that I thought she was in a fit — I am sure of that — I was in the habit of going sometimes three times a week to Stratford to collect those rents, Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday — I used to take the old lady the rents as soon as I got back — I never went on a Wednesday but what I did receive some rents — on Mondays and Saturdays I did not have to call at her house — I dare say that this was the only occasion within the last month or so that I went down in a vehicle to collect these rents, but I have often been to Stratford in a vehicle — I don't know that I received tickets from the turnpike-keeper always — sometimes the driver of the cart did — it has not always been the same that drove me — when I have received them I have not taken any notice whether I have kept them, for I did not think they would be of any use to me — I found this one in my pocket — I did not think it would be any use to me — I found it in my waistcoat pocket — you are obliged to have them, because you go through two or three bars, and are obliged to sing out the number — I can't say whether I wore that waistcoat from that time up to the time I found the ticket; sometimes I put on one and sometimes another — I have got, perhaps, half-a-dozen waistcoats or more — I put on one, a thick waistcoat suitable for a chilly night, and a thin oue if it is warm — I asked the carman if he had this ticket and I felt in my pockets to see if I had got it, and I found it in one of my pockets — I can't say when — it was after my apprehension that I found it; after I was locked up — this was not the first time I have ever said anything about this ticket — I took it, I think, the first week after I was liberated — I took it to Mr. Wontner — Mr. Wontner told me to take care of it — I did not produce it before the magistrate; it was never asked for — I had it there ready if asked for — Mr. Wontner had it, and he gave it me back again, and told me to take care of it — Rowland was the name of one of the persons with me that evening — he was with me up to about 9 o'clock, but Rumble, Buckle, and my wife were the parties that went with me to Stratford — I cannot tell you when I first saw Rowland after that, for I often saw him — I saw him shortly after I was released, but he told the officers, and told Mr. Young, the same day I was locked up, before I was released, that Rumble and Buckle were with me — he knew it the day before I was discharged — it was not told in my presence — I was locked up when Rowland had got Rumble and Buckle to prove that I was there — they had not been examined then — I was not well when I saw Mullins on the Friday previous to the murder — that was a month before I was taken — I had been on and off in an ill state, the whole of that time — I had not been lying in bed till half-past 9 each morning from the time I saw Mullins first till I was taken, but in between I had — I have not been up as early as 5 o'clock — I am confident of that — I got up as early as 8 o'clock within a day or two of my being taken in custody, not earlier than 8 I am quite sure; never on any occasion that I now think of, I don't think I have been up before 8, I know that I have not; it is above thinking, I know I was not up before 8 — there was nothing for me to look after on the field; for that reason I should not have to get up — I carry on the trade of a shoemaker.

MARY ANN BUCKLE. I live at Holly-bush-gardens, Bethnal-green-road — I remember going with Emm on a Monday down to Stratford — I had been at the workhouse that day with Mrs. Emm — Mrs. Emm and I went first — Mr. Rowland came while we were there — I do not know exactly what day of the month it was; it was the 13th August I suppose; the day it was expected that the old lady was murdered — it was, as near as I can say, about half-past 6 o'clock that day, that I saw Rowland — Walter Emm was waiting outside the Union when we came out — I saw him there — I afterwards went down in a cart to Stratford with Emm and his wife — Rumble drove us — when we got back to Mr. English's it was nearly half-past 11 — he lives in Park-street, Bethnal-green — Emm was with us all that time — we stopped at Mr. English's about five minutes.

Cross-examined. *Q.* When were you first asked, and by whom, about this evening that you went to Stratford with Emm? *A.* At Arbour-square; last Tuesday, week I think — I had not been asked before — I recollected going down to Stratford on that particular day, because they said it was 13th August that the old lady was murdered — I did not hear, I think, before the Sunday that the old lady was murdered — I heard that Emm was taken in custody and charged with the murder — I knew that he was out with us that evening — I did not tell anybody so, his wife was with us at the same time — I did not hear of his being taken till the Monday morning as he was taken on the Sunday — I then went to Mrs. Emm and she was gone out — I saw her on the Monday night — I went to her house and saw him — I believe I spoke first — I can hardly recollect the words I said to him — I said. “Mr. Emm, I heard you were taken up for Mrs. Emsley” — he said, “Yes;” he was out on bail — he said, “Do you remember Monday, 13th August, I was with you at Stratford?” — I did not say anything about it — I have been at Stratford since, but never before — I went on the Tuesday after this, along with Mrs. Emm — Mr. Rowland was not with me either time — he was not with me on the Monday, only when he was in with us at the workhouse — I, Mr. and Mrs. Emm, and Mr. Rumble went to Stratford — on the Tuesday I, and Mr. and Mrs. Emm, and Mr. Rowland went, not Mr. Rumble; I think it was Mr. Rowland — I am quite sure it was Rowland — we walked down there on the Tuesday; we did not go in any vehicle.

COURT. *Q.* Who was with you on Monday? *A.* Mr. and Mrs. Emm, myself and Mr. Rumble — we started to go down there at ten minutes past 9 when we were at the end of White-horse-lane, when we got to the toll, and it was about half-past 11 when we were back in at Mr. English’s — we all came back together, and Mr. and Mrs. Emm and his eldest daughter went with me to my place, and Mr. Rumble went home.

MR. CLARK. *Q.* Had you gone down to see about a house? *A.* Yes, to collect some rents; and we went to see a house that was there to let — there were two at the time, and the lady shewed us one house, and we said we did not like the house; we thought the other one was the best — I walked down on the Tuesday to see the house again, and paid a deposit on it on the Monday night.

THOMAS RUMBLE. I live at Digby-street, Grove-lane, Bethnal-green, and a carman — I know Emm well — I keep my horse in his field — I remember Monday night, 13th August — I went out with him that night — the little boy came round to me first — I did not go round to his place; the little boy came round to me and said he could not catch the pony, and his father could not, and his father came round — I sent my little boy round with the father and they caught the pony — it was about 8 o’clock when he came round to me — about 9 o’clock, when the pony was caught, it was put in the cart opposite my place, and Mr. and Mrs. Emm, and Mrs. Buckle, and I got into the cart — I drove them from there to Bromley — Mr. and Mrs. Emm got out of the cart at Bromley, and Mrs. Buckle and I sat in the cart — after that we went on to Stratford — we got back, not to Mr. Emm’s house, but to the beershop just at the top of the street, about half-past 11.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Do you remember Emm being taken up by the police? *A.* Yes, on the Sunday — I heard of it on the Sunday, because I was in the field in the afternoon — I can’t say when my attention was first called to the day upon which I drove him and his wife down to Stratford — it was on the day when Mr. Emm was taken in the field; that is all I know; I don’t know the day — I speak with certainty as to the day I went down to Stratford; it was on the 13th.

COURT. *Q.* How do you know that; have you any book in which you entered any charge against him, or anything of that sort? *A.* No; I am confident it was Monday.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Might it have been the Monday before? *A.* No, it was Monday the 13th — I know it by the toll-ticket — I took the toll- ticket, and I believe I passed it into Mr. Emm’s hands — I cannot say that I have sees it since — I saw the date on the toll-ticket — I know that was the very day I went through the gate — I always get a ticket when I go through the gate — I have been through a good many times before and since; I always had tickets — I have got one in my pocket now but I do not know the date of it — I can’t say who first spoke to me about that particular day after Emm was taken in custody — Mr. Tanner and Thomas came to let me know about it — I can’t say the day of the month they came to me; it was a very few days after Emm was taken; I can’t say what day — they both came together — I can’t say which spoke to me first — I can’t say whether they did or not speak to me before I said anything to them — I believe they said to me,”Do you remember the day you drove Emm down to Stratford?” — they said, “Do you remember driving Emm down on Monday, 13th August last?” — it was not from what they said that I remembered the day; because the toll-ticket, as I told you before, told me the day of the month; I remember the night very well — when the man gave the toll-ticket to me I passed it to Emm, and I saw the number of it then — that was the first time I saw the date, and I did not take any notice of it till Tanner and Thomas came to me — they did not put it to me as Monday, August 13th; I can’t say whether I or they said it.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Have you any other reason for remembering the night than what you have told us? *A.* No — I first heard of the murder on the Friday, I believe — I believe it was supposed to have been committed on Monday, the 13th — I have driven Mrs. Buckle down to Stratford before — I drove her in company with Mr. and Mrs. Emm on that night, 13th August — I never drove her down to Stratford before that, to my knowledge — that was the first night I ever drove her down.

ANN EMM. I am the wife of Walter Thomas Emm — I remember my husband being taken into custody on the Sunday — he got up on the morning of the Saturday before that, about half-past 9 — he was very ill on Friday — I am quite sure he did not get up till half-past 9 — he only went out of the cottage to the water-closet and in again, and I was at the door when he went outside — that was on the Saturday morning — my husband could not have gone out to the shed by the side of our house, or have gone to the ruin, between 8 and 9 o'clock, without my knowing it, and I am sure he did not — I remember Monday, 13th August — I remember going to Stratford — I was at my father's, at the Union, before I went down to Stratford — Mrs. Buckle went with me — Mr. Rowland and my husbaud came shortly afterwards — it was pretty well 7 o'clock in the afternoon when they came to me — Mr. Rumble went down to Stratford — from 7 o'clock that afternoon till I returned from Stratford, I was with my husband — I went to Stratford about 9 at night — Mrs. Buckle, Mr. Rumble, and my husband went with me — Rowland did not go with us — he left us when we got into the cart — I am quite sure this was Monday, 13th August

Cross-Examined. *Q.* When did you first remember that was the day you went to Stratford? *A.* I knew it was on the 13th we went to Stratford, because of going to get some rent for the old lady — I used to go to Bromley getting rents of little houses there, and then accompany my husband to Stratford — I was in the habit of going on other days — I remember this particular Monday the 13th, because it was the day I went to see my father before I went — I went to see him several times, but I did not go to Stratford the same day, afterwards: that I am sure of — it was the Monday, as we found Mrs. Emsley was dead on the following Friday — it was before, not after my husband was taken in custody, that it came to my recollection; of course I was aware it was the 13th that I went — I know we all four went together to Stratford on that day — I should have known it was that particular Monday, if my husband had not been apprehended, because we rode there in a cart on the Monday — I have thought of it a good many times since — my husband is naturally a very ailing man; he often gets up late — he was very seldom out of the place unless I knew where he was going, or what for — I usually get up first — I am generally up as soon as he is — I generally know where he goes to when he goes out of the house; he tells me if he is going anywhere particular — he never goes away without saying where he is going.

SUSANNAH EMM. I am the daughter of Walter Emm — I live with him in the cottage in the brick-field — I remember the Monday morning on which the police came to our house, and took my father into custody — my father had been in a very bad state of health the day before — he had his breakfast in bed — I give it to him at about a quarter to 9 — he was then in bed — I assist him in his business — I work by the window against the shed — there are five windows to the cottage, two down stairs and three up — if a person goes from the door to the shed, they must pass the window where I was sitting at work — after I gave my father his breakfast at a quarter to 9, I was sitting at work at the window all the day, barring when I got up to my meals — my father did not go by the window to that shed while I was at work there — he could not have gone by without my seeing him — I could also see from the window the ruined cottage in the field — nobody went there from our cottage that morning — I was at work in the cottage all the day, except the time I was at my meals — I know the prisoner by sight — he has had meals at our house sometimes — in the course of that Saturday morning on which my father was in bed I saw Mullins in the brick-field — that was about half-past 2 in the afternoon — he was at the back of the school wall, right straight across the field from the window — the school is right at the opposite end of the field to our cottage — I see the cottage here (*referring to the plan*) — it was somewhere about here that I saw the prisoner at half-past 2 — this is the window where I was sitting — when I saw the prisoner in the brick-field about half-past 2, he was walking along, looking down on the ground as if he was looking for something.

Cross-examined. *Q*. How far off was he? *A*. He was three parts across the field — shoemaking is the work I follow at this window — I can look out of the window and make shoes as well; because I am not looking at the shoes perhaps every minute in the day — I look out of the window very often — I always look about the field — anybody could go to the shed without my seeing them, but not to the ruin — I do not always have my eyes fixed on the shed; on the ruin I do, but not on the shed — I look at the ruin always, because it is right level with the window — I went to work that morning before I gave my father his breakfast; and I sat at the window at work all day afterwards — I was there the day before, Friday, and the day before that — I worked all the week — I always work at the window.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* The shed where you heard of the parcel being found, is on the left of your window? *A.* Yes; therefore a person might come this way to it without my seeing them — if a person went from the door of our cottage they could not go to the shed without my seeing them.

WALTER THOMAS EMM, JUN. I remember my father being taken in custody — I am ten years old — my father was taken in custody on the Sunday — I know the prisoner Mullins — I had seen him before that Sunday — I saw him in the field on Friday, lying down with a handkerchief up to his eyes — he was lying at the back of the school wall — I saw him there about half an hour — I went away then to mind my pigs — I saw him again on Saturday, he came up towards some mound where they were putting down some drain pipes, and walked back again — it was a heap of sand in the middle of the field — he stayed there about half an hour — I did not see him there again.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Had you seen him there any days before? *A.* Yes; I saw him one or two weeks — he was getting herbs; picking up something off the ground — there were not persons putting drains down when he went up to this place by the sand; they were making a road there, there were eight men there — he did not go close to them, because there was a mound they were knocking down — he did not go and look at them; he walked up towards the mound, and then he walked back again — I do not know whether they could see him — he knew me.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* What were you doing there? *A.* I was minding my father’s pigs.

JOHN RAYMOND. I am a tailor by business, and reside at 12, Oxfordsquare — I remember the night of 13th August — I know the Grove-road — I did not know and never saw Mrs. Emeley — at the corner of Grove-road there is a public-house, of the sign of the Earl of Aberdeen — there is a urinal by the side of it; about twelve feet from it — I remember being there on the evening of 13th August, about ten minutes to 8 o’olock — there was a man there and I waited — I was facing the urinal so as to see any one that came out — I saw the man that came out; it was the prisoner — he went round the corner of the Aberdeen; going round the corner, and turning to the right, would lead to the house No. 9, on the right hand side of the way.

COURT. *Q.* How far would the place be from the house No. 9? *A.* About four hundred and twenty yards as near as possible.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Have you measured it? *A.* No; it is merely guess.

Cross-examined. Q. You are a tailor? *A.* Yes; a journeyman tailor; not a jobbing tailor — I am a coat maker — I work for Mr. James Cook, of 63, Shorediteh — he was the last pereon — in 1847, I worked for Stevens and Clark — I have not been working for anybody since — I have been working nine years for the person who employed me — I work for him now; I am quite sure — I am not obliged to send for my work at all — I go to and for the premises for my work — I went to Scotland-yard on the Friday previous to the last examination of the prisouer — the prisoner bad been examained twice, I believe, previously to my going to Scotland-yard — I had beard of it — I read the newspapers; I had not read the account of the examination in the newspapers, never but once.

COURT. *Q.* Did you know the prison by sight? *A.* I never saw him in my life — I did not know him by name — I identified him simply by seeing the account of the examination in the papers, and I was satisfied that the man I saw come out of the urinal was the man charged with the murder — that was the way in which I imagined the case — having read the papers and seen that he was termed a plasterer by trade, and seeing the person come out of the urinal I saw that that man was a plasterer — I first saw him so as to identify him on 2d October, at the police-court in Arbour-square.

MR. BEST. *Q.* You say you saw something in the papers about his being a plasterer, did you also see a description of what he was like? *A.* No, I did not, I am quite sure — I observed that he was a plasterer by the coat he wore and the billy-cocked hat — he looked like a man engaged in that capacity returning home from his work at that hour of the nigh — I only caught a casual glance of him as he came out of the urinal — I observed his face — I did not take the trouble to count how many persons there ware in the room with the prisoner when I saw him at Arbour-square — he was among a great many more; these might have been twenty — he was not in the court, bat in a room at the door of the court — I was taken there to see if I could point out the man I saw in the urinal — he had not then got on a plasterer's coat and a billy-cocked hat — I swore to him by his feature — I did see his features on the night in question, not longer perhaps than for two or three minutes — the man gave me every opportunity of looking at his countenance from what I was told and what I saw in the papers, I was satisfied that the man I had seen in the retiring-place was the man who was charged with the murder — I do not always notice the persons I see, but I was standing in this position (*folding his arms*) waiting to go in, and the man as he came out looked straight at me, up and down — it was not a casual glance that I had, the man gave me every opportunity of looking at his features, he seemed to be struck with my appearance — he stood and looked at me — I did not describe the appearance of the man before I went to the polioce court, not to a single person.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* When you went to the police-conrt was the prisoner at all pointed out to you, or did you select him from a number of other persons? *A.* I selected him instantly the door was opened — he was not pointed out to me at all.

Q. Have you any doubt at all, on the oath you have taken, that he is the man? *A.* I know I am on the charge of murder, and that, on the part of her Majesty, if I had had the least doubt previous to my going in, I should have given the prisoner the benefit thereof — he came out of the urinal and looked me in the face — I was close to him — I had a full opportunity of seeing him.

MR. BEST. *Q.* What officer went with you into the room where the prisoner was? *A.* Serjeant Tanner — I should imagine there were from fifteen to twenty persons there — I could not positively swear there were twenty — I am positively certain there were fifteen — they were men and women, apparently prisoners, charged with various offences, waiting to go before the magistrate.

MR. BEST to RICHARD TANNER. *Q.* Did you accompany the lost witness into the room? *A.* Yes; I suppose there were about twelve or fifteen persons there — it is rather difficult to tell the number of persons really in the room — there were probably three or four men of about the same age as the prisoner — I told the witness to follow me, that there would be a number of persons, to look about him, and if he saw the prisoner to say so — he stopped me and told me that the prisoner, who was then sitting down at the end of the room, was the man he had seen come out of the urinal and turn down the Grove-road.

COURT. *Q.* Was he long in coming to that conclusion? *A.* Not more than a minute.

MR. BEST. *Q.* You have seen the prisoner on several occasions, have you ever seen him with a billy-cocked hat? *A.* I never saw him but twice before he was a prisoner — I never saw him with anything of that description.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Did you in any way point out the prisoner, or suggest, or direct the witness in reference to him? *A.* No; what he did was perfectly spontaneous.

Prisoner. *Q.* Had he not the opportunity of seeing me on previous days at Arbour-square? *A.* Certainly; if he had been there.

COURT. *Q.* According to the practice would the witness be entitled to any part of the reward for giving evidence on this occasion? *A.* I think not — I have known a reward to be divided between witnesses in a case.

JOHN MITCHELL. I am a seaman — I also work at the docks — I live at Hoxton — I was working at the docks on Monday, 13th, and Tuesday, 14th August — I left my house at 4 o’clock on Tuesday morning to go to my work — on my way to the docks I passed through Stepney-green — it might be about five minutes to 5, as I was going down from the top of the Green — as I was going through the Green towards the docks I saw a man coming up the Green towards me, he was on the same side of the road as myself, the right side — there was nothing about the man at first to attract my attention, but on acloser approach he trembled — he seemed in a state of very nervous excitement — he had a flush on his cheek, he trembled, and his lips quivered — he was on the kerb and I was on the right, and he made a cross-walk and came aside of me, and as he came close to me I took my hands out of my pocket and he made a falter and trembled, and he stepped on my left and I turned round and had a look at his back afterwards — I had an opportunity of seeing his face distinctly as he came towards me — I took particular remark of all his feature — the prisoner is the man — his pockets were very bulky, particularly the right-hand pocket — I know the Grove-road — I suppose where I met the man would be about three-quarters of a mile from there — I know Barnsley-street — it would be a circuitous route to come that way from Grove-road to Barnsley-street — the Mile-end-road would be the direct way.

Cross-examined. *Q.* I believe you were quite frightened at the man, were you not? *A.* He rather alarmed me, but he did not frighten me much; I got out of his road — I stepped on one side; seeing a man in that state, of course it alarmed me; you would have been alarmed if you had been there — he had on corduroy trousers, a brown wide-awake, and a kind of a drab tweed coat, with shooting pockets, and the pockets were loaded up to the mouth, at least the mouth gaped; there was something heavy in the bottom of them — both the pockets quite bulged out, very largely indeed — he seemed to labour under the weight he was carrying — he Seemed to labour that way that it excited my suspicion that he had done something bad — it was as though he was carrying something very bulky.

Q. When did you give any information of what you had seen? *A.* I took no more notice of it till I heard of the murder on the Friday; I saw posted up at a newsvendor's the atrocious murder of an old lady, but I did not know in what part of Stepney it was; and about a week after that I went through the Grove-road and made inquiry about what was the matter, and they told me that was where the old lady was murdered, and then I directly calculated that it was the party I had seen that morning — I went and gave information to the police two or three days after, at the Robert-street station — I do not know the date — I think it was the inspector I went to; he had pen and ink before him, but whether he took heed of it or not I did not know — I went and gave information on the tuesday as the prisoner was in custody on the Monday — I heard that a man had been taken into custody, and according to the description of him I took it to be the party I had seen — I did not hear a description of him from anybody, but I heard many people talking about him, and by that I thought he was the party — I did not go to see the prisoner until I saw him at the House of Detention; that was on the Saturday as he was in custody on the Monday — I then saw the prisoner — he was in his cell by himself — nobody showed him to me; the turnkey took me round and opened every door — I saw no man completely to resemble the man but the prisoner — I saw about thirty — when the door was opened he stood sideways, all the others faced out — it was not that that made me think something was not right — I knew his features again directly, by the description I gave of him — I could not be mistaken in him — I did not go by what I heard from other people — I had been talking about this with lots of other people; before the murder was discovered and afterwards — I am a dock labourer — I was brought up a seaman — I have to be at my work at six o'clock, and I have to walk four miles and a half — I belong to the transporting gang, that remove the ships from one part to another — I heard of the reward that had been offered — that was not before I gave the information — I did not do it for the reward — I expect to be rewarded for it.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* What opportunity had you of seeing the prisoner? — how long do you think you saw him when you met him in Stepney-green? *A.* It might be about five minutes — I was abreast of Mr.

Spill’s manufactory when I saw the man coming up — he was about abreast of College-terrace — I suppose that might be 300 yards from me — he was coming up in my direction for about five minutes — I did not have that opportunity of seeing his features, not till he got closer — I remarked to myself I wondered who he was.

Q. What opportunity had you of seeing his face when he came up to you? *A.* By his ghastly appearance — when I went to the House of Detention there was nobody there but two turnkeys and one gentleman — neither of those persons pointed out the prisoner to me in any way — they opened thirty cells; I went through them all and eventually selected this man — I do not know whether a wide-awake and a billy-cocked hat are the same.

STEPHEN THORNTON (*re-examined*). A billy-cock and a wide-awake are the same thing.

WILLIAM ROWLAND. I live at 25, Barnaley-street, Bethnal-green, and am a paper-hanger — I was in the habit of doing work for Mrs. Emsley — I was for some years warrant officer, at Worship-street police court — I saw Mrs. Emsley at my house on 13th August last, and paid her some money, about 2*l.* — I never saw her afterwards — I know the prisoner — I know him as working for Mrs. Emsley occasionally — I saw him on Monday, 13th, about the middle of the day, somewhere about 1 or 2 o’clock, two I think it was, in Temple-terrace, close by Barnsley- street — I did not see him again till the Wednesday — he was to do some work for me on the Monday — I gave him directions to do it and expected he would have completed it on the Monday, but he did not till the Wednesday — he did not come to work on the Tuesday — he came on the Wednesday — I saw him at the job on the Wednesday — I said nothing to him that day — he completed the work — I saw him again on the Friday — he came to me and asked me to assist him in doing some work — I said, “I cannot very well afford the time, as I have got some other job” — he said, “If you will I will come and assist you,” and he did come and assist me in the morning, and then I went to Gaffney’s, the cooper’s, and on the road I met a person who asked me, in Mullins’s presence, “Have you heard that an old lady has been murdered in Grove-road? “I said, “No, I have not, “and the party said,” I hope it is not Mrs. Emsley” — I noticed Mullins at that time — I noticed a tremor come over him, and a slight alteration of the features — I then went on with him to Gaffney’s and finished his job — I found his work was done in a very strange manner, the paper was all turned upside down, and his mode of doing things was more like a person that was imbecile than anything else — after finishing what I agreed to do for him I left, and just afterwards I heard it confirmed that it was Mrs. Emsley that was murdered — I then went back to the cooper's where he was at work, called him out, and said, "Mullins, I want to speak to you; it is Mrs. Emsley that is murdered" — I then saw a very remarkable change in the man — he said, "Is it? come outside," in a nervous irritable way — he seemed excited, very much indeed — he said, "Come, and have some drink" — there was a public house about two doors off, and he said, "Let us have some rum, you like rum" — I do not like rum particularly, however, I did have some with him, and then I noticed that his appearance indicated something very extraordinary; he was pale, and he shook and trembled, which gave me a notion at the time that there was something very wrong about him — I next saw him on Wednesday, 5th September, previous to the apprehension of Emm on the Sunday — I met him about half-past 8 o'clock in the evening — I said to him, "Mullins, they have not found out the murderer of Mrs. Emsley; have you heard anything of the murder of Mrs. Emsley?" — he said, "No; "Nor have I, "I said — he said he was going to get something for his supper — I said, "I am going round here; "he said, "I will walk with you" — we went into a house to see a person, but did not see him — when we came out the prisoner said, "Let us have some spirits, I want some spirits, "and we did have a small drop of gin — I then went out of the house with him and I said, "Mullins, I suspect a man very strongly, and I have got him in my mind's eye now, and I will not lose sight of him till the perpetrator of this diabolical murder has been discovered" — he then assumed a very ghastly appearance; a pallor came over him, a death-like hue, and he said, "I suspect the man likewise, and I am watching him now" — I said, "I believe, Mullins, the man I suspect is not the man you suspect" — he then wanted to leave me, although he had said he was going my way — I said, "I thought you were going to get something for your supper?" — he said, "No, I shall not have any supper now" — then I put another question to him respecting the removal of the paper at Mrs. Emsley's house, which had been deposited in the parlour and which was taken up into the second floor — he said, "Some man helped me to move it" — I said, "Who was that man?" — he said, "I can't describe the man" — I said, "Why, can't you describe the man that helped you for an hour and a half, you being an old officer?" — he said, "No, I can't" — I said, "I can hardly believe you"

— he then said, “I will leave you, I won’t go any further with you, “and there I left him — I had known him before for nearly three months — I had heard of him before that, but did not know him personally — I know Mrs. Emm — on 13th August, the very day in question, I went with her to the workhouse to see a relation of hers, an old gentleman that I have known many years — her husband was with her — we went there about half-past 6, and stopped there till it was getting dark; at that time it was dark about half-past 7; we could hardly see in the ward where the old man was lying — she remained with me the whole of the time, and Emm was there — about ten minutes past 9, that same night, they went away with a man who is here, the driver of the cart — Mrs. Emm, Mrs. Buckley, and Walter Emm, four of them, went away in the cart — I saw them depart; they were going to Stratford — they wanted me to go, but I said, no, I had other business — I saw them depart about ten minutes past 9 that same night.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Mulling is a plasterer by trade is he not, not a paperhanger? *A.* Well, I don’t know exactly what he is; he was represented to me to be a plasterer, and I believe he is — it is not difficult-to put up paperhangings — as a business it is nothing, you may learn it in about six months — I don’t believe Mullins is a paper-hanger; not a tradesman — I have had several conversations with him about this poor old lady — I know he was in the habit of going to her place, and working for her — I was also in the habit of being employed by her — I was sorry to hear of her death, because I lose something by it; I felt grieved that a woman should be murdered in that way, and so would any man with any feeling — I did not see the prisoner from the 13th till the 15th — I saw him once or twice afterwards — I had no other conversation with him after the 5th September, that was the last; that was after the murder had been found out — the other conversation was before it was discovered — I saw him about the neighbourhood several times during that period — it was not because the carpenters had not finished their work that he did not finish the job, there were no carpenters employed — there was some patch-work to finish to the ceilings in some small houses, which was work that required to be done directly, as it puts them to inconvenience, and I expected him to do it — the old paper had not to be taken off, not as far as he was concerned.

Q. Do you remember what sort of a hat he wore generally? *A.* Yes, sometimes a hat and sometimes a peaked cap — when I saw him about 2 o’clock on the Monday I believe he had his hat or cap on; I really cannot tell now — I never saw him wear a billy-cock hat — I have never given any information against a man named Smith about this murder — I spoke before the Coroner of the man having some quarrel with Mrs. Emsley — that was before I know anything about this charge, it was after she was found murdered — I did not give information about Smith, I merely said that he had had a quarrel with Mrs. Emsley and the matter was referred to me — she said to me, “This man wants to rob me, Mr. Rowland, of a 50*l.* note” — I said, “No, I don’t think he does” — she had detained his rent-book and he was trying to get it and seized her basket — he was a tenant of Mrs. Emsley — I know him, he is a lame man and walks with a crutch — I settled the matter between them amicably, I found that Mrs. Emsley was wrong and the tenant was right; but she made use of an exclamation, “This man wants to rob me of a 50*l.* note, and I have got it here” — I did not tell the Coroner I had important evidence to give — I said I had evidence to give respecting the customs and habits of the late Mrs. Emsley — I was not examined then; I think not till the third time.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Do I understand you to say that this dispute whatever it was, between Mrs. Emsley and Smith was amicably settled? *A.* Yes, and they parted on friendly terms, at least they were both satisfied — Smith is a man of about forty-six years of age.

ISAAC TYRRELL. I live at 1, Temple-terrace, Bethnal-green — I know the prisoner, he has worked at my house, not for me — I remember his working there on Monday, 13th August, pointing tiles and repairing the ceiling of the front-room — I saw him at work on that day — he had a hammer that he was working with — he knocked the ceiling down with a hammer — this (*produced*) is something like the hammer.

COURT. *Q.* Is that the common hammer that is used by a plasterer? *A.* It is.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Do you remember what time he left his work? *A.* About 6 in the evening; it was not finished — I had not given directions as to its being finished — I had nothing whatever to do with it — he came next on the Wednesday, not before — he did not come at all on the Tuesday.

Cross-examined. *Q.* I believe he could not finish in consequence of some carpenter’s work being required to be done? *A.* Oh, no; he could have finished — he wanted some cement for the tiles on the copper; he could have done that — I can’t say whether he got any cement that day; I did not see him — I believe there was none there on the Monday — he had other tools with him, he had a trowel — he did not leave them behind, he took them away with him, I am confident of that — there were no boards given him to be fastened down by a carpenter, not in my house — a piece of board was given him on the Thursday to put on the trap door leading to the copper — that was not finished till the Thursday; the cement was put on on the Wednesday. THOMAS PRIOR. I am barman at the Royal Oak public-house, Keppelstreet, Chelsea — On Friday, 7th September last, I bought a pencil-case of the prisoner's wife — this is the one (*produced*) — the point of the pencilcase was bent nearly flat when I bought it — I straightened it — it was very dirty indeed — I cleaned it with rotten stone.

ANN COOPER. I am a widow living at 12, Little Orford-street, Chelsea — I know the prisoner — he, his wife and family, lodged at my house — he has five children; they left my house on 26th August — after they left Inspector Thornton came there — I saw him find a boot — I had seen that boot before; I saw it thrown out of Mullins' window on the Sunday afternoon, as they left in the evening — it was in the dust-hole when Thornton found it — this is the boot (*produced*). *Cross-examined. Q.* What part of the house were you in when you say this boot came out of the window? *A.* In the first-floor back room, looking into the yard — there are three rooms up stairs and two down, and a kitchen; it came out of the back parlour window — I was shaking a cloth out of the window from a young man's table who had been having breakfast — it was not Charles Shirley, he was not in the house at that time.

COURT. *Q.* Was the back parlour a room occupied by the prisoner? *A.* That was the room occupied by him.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Who occupied the other rooms? *A.* A person of the name of Cowper occupied the front parlour — he had been there about a week — a young man named Levick also lived in the house; he left on the following Saturday — there was no other person living there — I think Cowper served in a china-ware shop, but I don't know exactly; the other man used to drive a coal cart, his employer is a coal and coke merchant — I am sure there was no man of the name of Shirley there — I have seen a young man of that name there once or twice whilst Mullins was there.

MR. PARRY. *Q.* Who was he? did you know anything about him? *A.* I did not know much about him — I believe his father is a calenderer, a calico glazer, or something of that sort, not a plasterer — he is about twentyfive or twenty-six years of age — Mullins did not sleep at home regularly — I believe he once told me that his work laid over at Stepney, it was his habit to go out on a Monday and return on Saturday night — his wife and children were most of the time at home — I believe Mrs. Mullins used to go oat washing.

STEPHEN THORNTON (*re-examined*). I found this boot in the dust-hole described by Mrs. Cooper at the house 12, Orford-street, Marlborough-road, Chelsea — I gave instructions for a piece of the landing to be cut out on the second-floor of the house 9, Grove-road — it was done and I produce it — Sergeant Tanner actually cut it out — there is a foot mark of blood on it, of the left boot of a man, coming from the room.

WILLIAM THOMAS (*re-examined*). I was present when the piece of wood was cut out of the landing — this is the piece, it was taken from the landing on the second-floor; the top of the house.

STEPHEN THORNTON (*re-examined*). The marks on it are marks of blood — I had to wash the boot, it was in a very filthy state, it laid about two feet in the ashes — I have made a comparison of the boot with the marks on this piece of the landing — there are two nails near the too that seem to correspond exactly, and there is a licking up of the blood in the centre of the boot which appears to me a hole that would gather up the blood and leave the impression that appears to be left on that board — there is a double row of nails on the left side of the boot, and there are two nails more especially very prominent in the boot as there is on the board; if you turn the boot on to the impression you will see the two nails speak of — in washing the boot a great portion of the heel fell off; it was in a filthy state — all manner of filth had been thrown into the dust-hole.

Cross-examined. *Q*. Did you put this pencil mark round the impression? *A*. No; I think Dr. Gill did it — I had seen the marks repeatedly — these two nails in the shoe were strong in my mind — it was that which made me bring the boot away having an idea of what such an impression would leave in the warm blood — Tanner cut the mark out — a board was previously nailed over it by one of the officers — I saw it nailed over with instructions that it should be preserved.

RICHARD TANNER (*re-examined*). The piece of wood which Thornton has produced is in the same state that it was when it was first observed at the house, with the exception of the pencil mark round it, that was made by Dr. Gill in my presence — I cut it out myself — I understand the terms billycock and wide-awake to mean the same thing — in London they are generally called wide-awakes, in Staffordshire and those parts, I have heard they are called billy-cocks.

MR. BEST. *Q.* I believe you were not at the house the first time the footmark was discovered? *A.* I was the first detective at the house, Dillon was there before me, it was pointed out to me by inspector Kerrison.

WALTER KERRISON (*Police-inspector*). I produce a knife which I found in the pocket of the deceased — I searched her pockets in the morning — I saw Dillon find a ring; this is it (*produced*) it was found between the mattress and the bed — I observed some marks of blood on the landing of the room — I called Dr. Gill's attention to them — this is the piece of board that was cut out of that landing — with the exception of the pencil mark, it is in the same state as when I first observed it — I found nothing in the old lady's pockets but this knife — I found no money or anything of the kind.

DR. GILL (*re-examined*). I have examined this boot with a powerful magnifying glass — I found one hair between the welt and the sole in this broken side, the best part of it was packed within the boot; I found another hair on the surface, and a third here — I am of opinion that they were human hairs — I think I can produce them now — part of them were cut up to put under the microscope, and part of them Dr. Letheby cut up.

COURT. *Q.* Do you say that they are certainly human hairs? *A.* Certainly — I ascertained that, by means of the microscope — my experience enables me to say that they are human hairs — I could tell what colour they were — they were much the same colour as Mrs. Emsley's hair — I had some of her hair in my possession to compare the two — I compared the hairs with what I actually took from her head — they appeared to correspond in colour.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* You cannot of course say more than that? *A.* No one could say more than that — human hair is used for plaster and mortar; there is no doubt of that — I examined the pencil case that has been produced — I saw a spot on it which I imagined to be blood — it was on the edge — I asked Dr. Ansell to examine it with me, and we examined it together under the microscope — in my judgment that spot was blood — a microscope is an infallible test as far as regards the proof of blood — it is believed to be so.

MR. BEST. *Q.* You cannot tell whether that blood was human blood or not, I believe? *A.* Certainly not.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Unfortunately at present there is no test by which you can detect human blood from other blood, is there? *A.* No.

COURT. *Q.* Where is the mark you speak of? *A.* Along the line of the opening of the pencil case; between that and the head.

ROBERT WENT (*Policeman, K 160*). After the discovery of the murder I searched the coal cellar at the house, 9, Grove-road — in the coal cellar under the coal, I found a tin box — it was wrapped up in part of a handkerchief — I found in the box 16*l.* 2s. in silver, and 32*l.* in gold.

JAMES WRIGHT. I am an estate and house agent — I cany on my business in Bow-road — I called on Mrs. Emsley about some paper-hangings on Saturday, the 11th, to the best of my knowledge; the Saturday previous to the murder — I saw her in the evening about 6 o'clock — I remained with her, I dare say, an hour; not looking at the papers all the time — I went up stairs — when I first went in the passage, the charwoman who has been examined, opened the door — that was the last time I saw the old lady — there was another person in the house at the time — I saw a person sitting on the stairs — that was the person whom I saw at the Coroner's jury — his name is Mullins — I see him here now — it is the prisoner.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Where do you live? — in the neighbourhood? *A.* About two hundred yards from the place — I was not at the house at all on Tuesday, the 14th, I am quite positive — I do not know a man of the name of Stevenson — I am quite positive that I never entered the house after the Saturday — not at all in the afternoon of Tuesday — that I am quite positive of.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Is there any pretence for suggesting that you were ever near the house after the Saturday? *A.* Not any — I know the old lady before — I had done several things for her.

ELIZABETH FUKE. I am married, and live at 17 1/2, James-street, Commercial-road, East — that house belonged to the late Mrs. Emsley — I was tenant of a house of hers at No. 14, in that street — I know the prisoner — I remember hearing of this murder — he came to my house a few days before 13th August, to set a copper — that was, I believe, about twelve days before 13th August — when he came, he said Mrs. Elmsley was a miserable old wretch; that she sent men about to do work, but she did not always find them in materials to do it with — I asked him what he required and he said some cement — I asked him what quantity, he said, "About a peck" — I gave him the money and he went for it, and when he returned he further said that he had been at her house that morning; that she was sitting down to breakfast which he would not have sat down to himself, she would not even allow herself as much as a farthing's worth of milk to put in her tea; she was drinking it without, but I need not take any notice of it to her; it was a great pity such a miserable old wretch should be allowed to live.

Cross-examined. *Q.* Was that alluding to her penurious habits, and mode of life? you did not think he was going to murder her, from that? *A.* No; I believed it was in allusion to her penurious habits.

The following Witnesses were called for the Defence.

MARY MULLINS On 13th August last, I resided with my mother, at 12, Orford- street, Chelsea — my father lived at Barnsley-street at that time — two of my brothers, James and Thomas, lived at home with my mother — there was another, John, he used to be down with my father; he sometimes used to come up to mother's — I have seen this pencil-case with my brother James, in June and July, in his possession — I do not know, where my brother James is now — he is a sailor — I saw it in June last — I have seen it several times since at my mother's house, in August, and about a fortnight before my father was taken — I have had frequent opportunities of observing it — I have had it in my hand several times — I believe this to be the pencilcase I have seen with my brother.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* When did you first hear of the murder? *A.* I can't exactly say the day of the month — it was on Saturday — I read of it in the papers — I was in a situation at 9, Sloane-terraee, Chelsea, with Mr. Gibson — I have seen Mrs. Emsley once or twice — I know that my father worked for her — I had not seen my father before I heard of the murder — I saw him on the Saturday night, that was after the murder; I was dismissed the same day by Mr. Gibson from his service; on the Monday after my father was taken — he was taken on the Sunday — it was in September that I was dismissed — I was dismissed from my situation because my master read of it in the paper — that was all — I swear that — that is all the reason I can give — he told me I had better go, as my father had been taken, as he did not like to have me in the house.

Q. Was nothing said about removing a stone in the kitchen? *A.* Yes; I dropped a shilling there — the reason I was dismissed was not because I had been found removing a stone in the kitchen, and been supposed to be hiding something — it was after that, when I was paid my wages, when master told me to go — mistress paid me in the kitchen, and I dropped a shilling down by the side of the fire-place — there was a little girl came in, she saw me removing the stone — I told her to hold the candle while I removed it; she told my master after I had left — the removal of the stone was not the cause of my being dismissed — I found the shilling — no one was present when I found it — the little girl who held the light did not see me pick it up; she was called away — the bell rang for her to go up stairs — I did not find the shilling in anybody's presence — I was not dismissed for removing the stone because it was supposed I was hiding something — the master, when I took the papers up in the morning, read of it in the newspapers — he did not tell me for an hour after, for one of the young ladies was ill, and he was afraid it might disturb them, so he called me out, and told me to meet him in Sloane-street; and he asked me if I had heard about my father; he said he had seen it in the newspapers, and it was very bad, and he wished me to leave — I had got the stone up before the little girl came into the kitchen — I called her to hold the candle for me — she was accidentally called away, and did not see me find the shilling; I did not tell her not to say anything about it — I did not tell her I would give her sixpence if she did not say anything about it — I can't say exactly what time in the day it was that this stone was being removed, a little after 2 o'clock, I think — I was dismissed on the Monday after my father was taken; about 4 o'clock I think it was; between 3 and 4 o'clock — I was lifting the stone about 2 o'clock, and I was dismissed between 3 and 4 o'clock — it was after the master had told me to leave, that I was lifting the stone; I had to get my clothes and things — I last saw my brother James in July, or the beginning of August; in July I think it was — I had not seen him for some time before the murder; he did not leave home since the murder; he left some time before — I have seen this pencil-case with my brother James — I have two other brothers, John and Thomas — John used to sleep sometimes at my mother's, sometimes down at my father's; both of them, John and Thomas, slept sometimes in my mother's room, and sometimes with my father — my father used to come home very seldom; only on the Saturday — he was not in the habit of sleeping with us; only on Saturday night or Sunday — my brother went down in the country, and he heard of my brother coming home from sea, and came to see him, and he remained at home till some time after my brother came home from sea — my brother came home from sea in May — in August John and Thomas were living generally with my mother — Thomas was in a situation at a green-grocer's, in Marlborough-road, Chelsea — he was an errand-boy — he used to go there regularly every day, and slept at home — when I was out of a situation I used to sleep at home — I went to see my father on the Saturday after the murder, because I was anxious to hear about it; I was anxious to hear about Mrs. Emsley, seeing it in the papers — he did not send or come to me, I went to him, to my mother's — I was paid 12*l.* a year by Mr. Gibson — I can't say exactly how much it was that I received on the Monday when I was dismissed — it was not so much as a pound — it was 17s. or 18s. I am not sure which — I was only there for a short time — the slab that I was removing, was in the back kitchen, by the side of the fire-place; there was a hole by the side of the fender — Mr. Gibson's is a large house.

THOMAS MULLINS. I live at No. 1, Rose-court, East Smithfield — I am about sixteen years old — I work at light labouring — I have once assisted my father in his trade — I have been to see him in Barnsley- street — I stayed with him there — I remember Monday, 13th August last — I was staying with him in Barnsley-street that day, at No. 33 — my brother John was staying with him besides me — I was doing nothing that day — I was at home all day — my father was out at work — I remember what time he came home that evening from his work, it was about a quarter-past 7 — he stayed in the house after that, and did not go out any more after that — he slept there — he slept in a little bed by himself, and I and my brother slept together in the same room — I got up in the morning about half-past 7 — my father, after he got up, went and water-washed the passage ceiling, and stopped the nail holes — he was at work doing that till about 12 o'clock; he then came in and had his dinner about 12, and went out about half-past 12 — I did not go with him — I do not know this boot at all — I have never seen it — I never saw my father with a boot like that — I clean my father's boots sometimes — I know what a billy-cock hat is — I never saw my father wear one of those — one generally hears it called by that name — it is a round hat — it is the same thing as a wide-awake — he had not a brown wide-awake on the Monday evening at all, he had his hat.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARKY. *Q.* When did you last see your brother James? *A.* About three mouths ago from this time as near as I can judge — I perfectly remember the time of the murder; he was then at home.

Q. When did he leave home? *A.* Oh, he was not at home; I made a mistake — I said just now that he was at home — he left home about three or four weeks before the supposed murder.

Q. If you knew that, what made you tell me that he was at home? *A.* I bethought myself; it ran in my mind — I have been spoken to about whether my brother was at home or not at the time of the murder — it has not been very much spoken of in our family whether he was at home or not — I have heard it spoken of, because some persons asked me — I made a mistake when I said that he was at home — he never wore a wide-awake hat — there was not such a thing as a wide-awake hat in the family — he went to sea — I do not know where he is — he went in the "Mechanic" — I don't know where for; New York — I was not in work at the time of the murder — I have worked in the Marlborough-road — I was not working there in August — I can swear I was with my father on the 13th — I was not at work at a green-grocer's in Marlborough-road in August — Yes, I dare say I was; the very day I left I came down to my father's.

COURT. *Q.* Were you at work in Marlborough-road at a green-grocer's in the month of August? *A.* I do not know; I don't recollect.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Just now you said the very day you left you came down to your father's? *A.* I came down to my father's — it was on a Sunday morning that I left, and I came down on Monday to my father's — I can't answer whether I was at work at this green-grocer's on Sunday, 12th August — I have done work since 13th August, at Mr. Pinnock's — I have only been there one day, that is all the work I can recollect that I have done since 13th August — that is all that I have done since 13th August — I do recollect — before the 12th August I was at work at a green-grocer's in Marlborough-road, all that part of August up to the 12th — Pinnock is the name of the green-grocer — I was also at work for him two Saturdays ago — that is all the work I have done — I had been at work for him about six months before, and I have done one job for him since — I was dismissed — I was not sent away — I left myself, of my own accord — I did not have any other situation — I was not sent away, I am quite sure — I am quite sure I left on 12th August — I did not go with my father on the 13th — I was at Barasley-street all day on 13th August — I was there about 12 o'clock in the day time — no one went with me, only myself; that was all — my brother John was down in the room in Barnsley-street — I slept at home on the Sunday night with my father, in Orford-street — that was on the Sunday night — my father was at home on the Sunday — he left home on the Monday morning about six o’clock — no one went with him — I went to Barnsley-street at 12 o’clock in the day — I did nothing there all day — I went there to see my father, and to see how he got on with his work — that was not the reason I gave up my situation — I did not shut myself in the room all day — my brother John was there when I got there — he and I were in the room all day together; at 12 o’clock we were — I went out, but I was not long out — my brother did not go with me; he stayed in — he had slept in Barnsley-street the night before, by himself — he is older than I — I did not know that from him; I knew it by myself — I was there with him — no, not the night before; I was there all the day with him, and he slept there — I know he slept there on the Sunday night, because I went home, and my brother did not sleep with me, and when I went down there on the Monday morning he was there — I slept with my mother in Orford-street on the Sunday night — my brother John was not there — he slept at Barnsley- street — he was not doing any work at that time — he was not in work at all, neither of us — he was looking after work, he went there being near the docks — I went out for about a quarter of an hour — I have no remembrance what time of the day that was — it was about the middle of the day — I dined that day in Barnsley-street, with my father and brother — I am sure my father dined there; we had some bread and meat for dinner — we dined about one o’clock — my father came home to have his dinner — I don’t recollect at what time he came home to his dinner — there was no table in the room when I was there — there was one chair — there was no bed forme to lie on — I and my brother did not sleep on the bare floor — there were some canes there on the floor, that they make chairs of — they were on the bed and we took them off the bed and put them on the floor — the bed is a mere tressel with a sacking; my father slept there — that is the little bed I spoke of just now — my father remained in after coming home about a quarter to 7 — we had our supper afterwards — I had some bread and tea for supper — my brother and I went to bed at 9 o’clock — I did not go to sleep — I was not awake all night — we did not go to sleep till my father got into bed — I went to sleep about 12 o’clock — I went to bed about 9 and went to sleep about 12 — I could not go to sleep — I do not know what time my father went to sleep — he went to bed at the same time we did — I could not go to sleep till my father came to bed — he came to bed at 9 o’clock.

Q. Why could you not go to sleep before 12 o'clock? *A.* Because I could I not — I am really in earnest in saying that — I did not go away the next day — I remained in Barnsley-street the whole of the next day, Tuesday — I slept with I my father again on Tuesday night — I continued to sleep there till about Thursday, and then I went home again — my brother John was in the same room — I went out once on the Tuesday for a quarter of an hour again, not much more — the room is a very small room on the ground-floor — I and my brother remained in that room the whole of Monday and Tuesday — I got there on Monday, about 12 o'clock; alone — I first heard of the murder on Saturday evening — I then remembered that I had slept there on the Monday night — when I first heard of the murder on the Saturday evening I remembered that I had slept there on the Monday night — I first heard of the murder when my father came home — there was a row in the house with Mrs. Emsley and another woman, I was in the room — that was, I believe, on the Monday — a row in No. 33, Barnsley-street — that was one of Mrs. Emsley's houses — there were some children used to sleep in the room; Mrs. Musick's — they slept in the room my father occupied — I can't recollect where they slept on the Monday night — they did not sleep with me — I do not know about their sleeping in the same room; I don't recollect it — those children are about seven or eight years old; the eldest — there are three children — I can't recollect whether they slept in the room that same night — I don't recollect whether they did on the Tuesday night — I have slept in the same room with those children, in Barnsley-street — I can't tell whether they slept with me on the Monday night — I don't know whether my brother can — I can't tell you — I don't recollect whether they slept there on the Tuesday, or on the Wednesday or Thursday.

COURT. *Q.* When did you last sleep in Barnsley-street? *A.* On Wednesday night — I never went there any more after — I came up to look after work — I last slept in Barnsley-street on the Wednesday after 13th August — there was a Mrs. Musick, the mother of these children, who slept there — I had slept there before the Monday — I was in the habit of sleeping then sometimes.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Did you sleep there on the Saturday nigh before the Monday? *A.* No — Mrs. Emsley did not turn Mrs. Musiek out — she ordered her to go — she stayed there by my father's permission while he was away — when my father was up at Brompton she used to sleep in the same room — that is what I have been told — I have never slept in the same room when she has been sleeping there — I do not know where she slept on the night of 13th August — I believe she was in the house — when my father was there she used to sleep in the back kitchen, and her children used sometimes to sleep in my father's room.

Q. I will again ask you how you came to know, on the Saturday following the murder, that the murder was committed on Monday, 13th August; how was your attention called to the date? *A.* Well, hearing of the row, in Barnsley-street on the Monday when I was there — I did not know that the murder was committed on the Monday night; I did not say it had been committed on the Monday night — no one asked me on the Saturday whether I remembered having slept there on the Monday — I understood by the papers that the murder was committed on the 13th — I heard that on the Saturday evening; I heard that it was committed on the Monday or Tuesday.

MR. BEST. *Q.* When you heard of this murder having been committed did you remember the row in Barnsley-street? *A.* Yes — it was from that that I remembered being in Barnsley-street on the Monday — the bed of rushes was not a very comfortable bed; I could not go to sleep because it was so hard.

JOHN MULLINS. I am the son of the prisoner, and live at No. 1, Rose-court, East Smithfield — I am a labourer — at present I am out of employ — when I am employed it is at the docks — I remember my father living at 33, Barnsley-street, right well; I lived there with him — I was there on Monday, 13th August last — my father was there on that day, and my brother, the last witness — my father went out at his regular time in the morning, a little after 8, after breakfast — he came home again about 12, I should say, and had his dinner; he then went to work again — I next saw him at 7 o'clock; it might want a few minutes to 7 — he came into the room where I was — he had his supper at 8 o'clock and went to bed at 9 — I went to bed there — I slept in that room — my father slept in the bed — I did not go to sleep for some time after I went to bed; it is not every time you can go to sleep when you lie down — I got up in the morning about the same time, half-past 7 — my father got up, he had his breakfast a little after 8 o'clock, and then he water washed the passage and stopped the nail-holes — at 12 o'clock he came in to his dinner, and at half-past 12 he told me he was going to Cambridge-road to work there; he then left — I never saw this boot in all my life — I know right well what a billy-cock hat is — it is what they wear in Ireland — my father never wore one of those.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Did you ever wear one? *A.* At times, in Ireland, I might have one for about a month — I am not at work now — I was not at work at the time I spoke of in August — I have not been at work since — I should say it was about four months since I was at work in the docks; during that time I have done nothing, because my health would not allow me — I have lived with my father during that time in Barnsley-street, and at Brompton, in Orford-street — I went there once or twice — my father slept at home on the night of the murder — I mean in Little Orford-street.

Q. You said just now that he got up about 8, his usual time, on the Monday morning, is that so? *A.* You speak a little too fast for me; I recollect my father getting up on Monday morning, 13th August — if you speak a little easier I shall understand you.

COURT. *Q.* Where did you sleep on Monday night, 13th August? *A.* At 33, Barnsley-street.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* You are quite sure of that? *A.* On Monday night I slept in Barnsley-street; and on Sunday night, with my father — he had his breakfast on Monday morning, I recollect that.

Q. Who slept with your father on the Sunday night besides yourself?

A. On Sunday night? he used to go home of a Saturday night.

Q. Never mind what he used to do; you say you slept with your father on the Sunday night, at Barnsley-street, who slept with you? *A.* On Sunday night? you are mistaken, you spoke too fast; I did not understand what you said.

Q. You said distinctly that you slept with your father in Barnsley- street, and that your father got up to breakfast at 8 o'clock in the morning, is that true or false? *A.* You say, where he had his breakfast on Monday morning, don't you? well, he had it in Oakum-street, no, not in Oakum-street, at 33, Barnsley-street.

COURT. *Q.* On Monday morning he had his breakfast in Barnsley- street, is that so? *A.* On Monday morning had he his breakfast in Barnsley-street? he used to go away on Monday morning from Oakum-steeet.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Were you at home all day on the Monday, it seems to puzzle you about the breakfast? *A.* No, it does not puzzle me — I cannot say whether he did breakfast in Barnsley-street on the Monday morning — he used to come home on Saturday night to his own place — to the best of my knowledge I was at 33, Barnsley-street on the Sunday night — I did not sleep there on the Tuesday night; I went up to Little Orford-street — I can’t say how long I stayed there; my father was out at work on the Monday and I was in the room along with my brother Thomas — on Sunday night I think I slept with myself — if I said I slept with my father I was mistaken — I did not do any work on Monday — I did not go out the whole of the day — I sat in the little room all day reading an almanack, that was all that there was there — there was a little bedstead in the room, only one — my brother Thomas slept with me on the Monday night — I know three little children of the name of Musick — they used to sleep in the kitchen — they have; slept in my father’s room — on Monday night they slept in the kitchen — I won’t swear that they did; they must either have slept in the room or in the kitchen — I swear they slept in the house, I used to hear them asking their mother for a good many things — I did not leave the house till Tuesday evening — I remained in the house all day doing nothing — there were other persons in the house at 33, Barnsley-street — I know a young woman named Brimson — I think Mrs. Musick saw my father water-washing the passage and stopping the nail-holes; she was in and out — I don’t know where she is now; we can’t find her; she is put out of the way, there is no doubt about it — I remember right well when my brother went to sea, it was in July — I cannot tell where these children slept on the night in question, except that they slept in the house.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Have you tried to find Mrs. Musick? *A.* Yes, we have made inquiries about her and cannot find her out — I had no billy-cock hat on this Monday.

CAROLINE BARNES. I live at Laurestine-cottage, Grove-road — I know No. 9, Grove-road, where Mrs. Emsley lived — my house is nearly opposite to that house — I remember Monday, 13th August last — I saw Mrs. Einsley, on that day — I saw the house on the Tuesday morning — I saw some one moving the paper on the Tuesday morning — the paper was very white outside, paper-hangings — it was in the top room — it was about twenty minutes to 10 o’clock when I saw this — I saw the right hand window of the top room open a little way, which attracted my attention — I saw the window move; it attracted me being opened; I saw it opening — I could not tell who the person was that was in the room.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q*. When was your attention first called to this matter; when did you hear of the murder? *A*. On the Friday — I told Mr. Rose about this; I said I supposed it to be Mrs. Emsley, but I did not see the old lady — I said I had not seen her since I saw her moving the paper — I supposed it to be her; I did not take any notice — I was very busy at the time — it was about twenty minutes to 10 on the Tuesday.

MR. BEST. *Q*. I believe you gave evidence of this before the coroner? *A*. I did.

JAMES STEVENSON. I am a builder, and reside at 3, Library-road, Oldford — I had occasion to go to Grove-road on Tuesday morning, 14th August last — I called at 3, Grove-road, at the house of a man named Piper — I did not see him, but I saw his family, and left a message for him — that was just turned half-past 10 o'clock — since I heard of the circumstance I have noticed the house where Mrs. Emsley used to live, No. 9, Grove-road — I had not noticed it previously — I passed by that house about half-past 9 o'clock, or a few minutes later that morning — I went round into the Grove-road, and left a message for Mr. Piper, the plasterer, and after leaving there I walked on the other side of the way towards Bow station, undecided whether I should go home by bus or not — after I had walked a few paces towards the Bow-railway station I looked down the Bow-road, and in looking down the Bow-road I saw a tall man coming out of a garden there with some paper under his arm — whether it was three or four pieces I cannot be positive — he was coming out of a garden apparently about the number of the house, No. 9 — I then returned, and walked a few paces towards the city of London, and as I was walking I looked down the Grove-road again, and saw the person coming towards the Mile-end-road or Bow-road, some people call it one and some the other — after that I crossed over the road, one door from the Grove- road, and then I made up my mind to go home — I was walking towards home, and had just turned the corner to go down the Grove-road when I met the party face to face, nearly in each other's arms — I said, "Hallo, what, are you in the paper line?" — he said, "Yes, "in a flurried manner (*speaking in a faltering tone*) — I thought it might be from my coming on him all of a sudden — he said, "Yes, didn't you know that?" — I said, "No, I didn't know it; had I known it I could have given you a job, for I have got about 180 pieces of paper being hung" — he said, "Oh, yes, I have served my time at it"—"Well," I said, "I shall want some more done by and by, and the first job I have I know where you live, in Barnsley-street, Bethnal-green."

COURT. *Q.* Then you knew the man? *A.* Yes, I knew him well, it was Mr. Rowland.

MR. BEST. *Q.* Did you give any information of this to any one? *A.* Not till some days afterwards — I told my sister-in-law — on the Saturday afternoon I went to Mr. Rose, the solicitor of Mrs. Emsley, and made him acquainted with it — that was the day after the murder was made known — I heard of it on the Friday, and on the Saturday I went and made him acquainted with it — he recommended me to go to Scotland-yard — I did not go that evening, but I went next morning, Monday; and gave information to Sergeant Tanner, and from that Sergeant Tanner and Inspector Thornton came to my house, and after that Inspector Kerrison, and I was summoned on the inquest, but was not examined. I gave in a written statement at the time to Sergeant Tanner.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* I don't know whether you were aware that there was a house being papered next door to the deceased's? *A.* No, I did not know anything about that — I did not even know that she lived there until after the affair — I do not know whether that was so or not — this was on the Tuesday morning, 14th August — I did not recognize Mr. Rowland until I came upon him as I have described — I did not know previously that he was a paper-hanger by trade — I only knew it from what he stated.

MICHAEL GAFFNET. I live at 7, Queen's-row, Cambridge-road, Bethnalgreen — I know the prisoner — he was doing work for me in August — I remember Tuesday, 14th August — he came to work for me on that day — he came about 1 o'clock — I had never seen him before the Monday when he came to look at the work.

Cross-examined by MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* What time do you say he was working for you? *A.* It was about 1 o'clock on the Tuesday when he came — he had not been at work on the Monday for me — he only came to look at the work — I asked him when he would be there, so as I might clear the things out of the way for him, and he said he would be there on the Tuesday morning — he did not name the time, but he came about 1 o'clock in the day.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY in reply re-called

WILLIAM ROWLAND. I know James Stevenson the builder; I see him in Court — I did not see him in Grove-road on 14th August last — I was not near the place — several witnesses can prove that I was some two miles from there at the time, and the whole of the day — I did not come out of any house there — perhaps it may be necessary to explain that I saw Mr. Stevenson some time previous, nearly a week before, and I then had some paper under my arm — I have known him for some years, and I know he is a man labouring under some impressions, in fact, I have the impression that he was not quite right in his mind.

CAROLINE BRIMSON. I am single — I work in a laundry — I have an aunt who lodged at 33, Barnsley-street — Mrs. Musick used sometimes to attend upon her, she is an invalid — she is not bed ridden, but she was so for nine months — Mrs. Musick used to attend upon her — in consequence of Mrs. Musick going away, I went to Barnsley-street to attend upon my aunt — I had just left service — I went on the Tuesday — I do not know the day of the month, but it was on the Tuesday as Mrs. Emsley was supposed to be murdered on the Monday — I am quite sure of that — I went there at 10 o’clock in the morning — I was there the whole of that day and the next, and have been there ever since — I know the two young men, the Mullins, I saw them there — I saw one on the Tuesday, the shortest one (*Thomas*) — the other one was not there at all on the Tuesday — he was there on the Tuesday’week; the following Tuesday — I remember the place being waterI washed — I was there at the time, because the prisoner borrowed my aunt’s pail to do it with — the prisoner water-washed the place on the Thursday, not on the Tuesday, but Thursday — that was not the first time I had seen the prisoner there — I saw him on the Tuesday morning between 9 and 10 o’clock — I am quite sure the water-washing was on the Thursday.

Cross-examined by MR. BEST. *Q.* Were you attending upon your aunt at this time? *A.* Yes, I was principally engaged with my aunt during the day, I when I had nothing to do at the laundry — my aunt had the up stairs apartmeats — I was up and down — I did not go in and out of Mullins’s room — I was never in his room in my life — he washed the passage — on the Thursday, it was a wash of a yellowish cast — I did not notice whether it, was first white-washed on the Saturday.

MR. SERJEANT PARRY. *Q.* Did Mullins do anything at all on the Tuesday in the way of water-washing? *A.* No.

GUILTY. — DEATH.

THE END

THE LOVE AFFAIR OF GEORGE VINCENT PARKER

THE student of criminal annals will find upon classifying his cases that the two causes which are the most likely to incite a human being to the crime of murder are the lust of money and the black resentment of a disappointed love. Of these the latter are both rarer and more interesting, for they are subtler in their inception and deeper in their psychology. The mind can find no possible sympathy with the brutal greed and selfishness which weighs a purse against a life; but there is something more spiritual in the case of the man who is driven by jealousy and misery to a temporary madness of violence. To use the language of science it is the passionate as distinguished from the instinctive criminal type. The two classes of crime may be punished by the same severity, but we feel that they are not equally sordid, and that none of us is capable of saying how he might act if his affections and his self-respect were suddenly and cruelly outraged. Even when we indorse the verdict it is still possible to feel some shred of pity for the criminal. His offence has not been the result of a self-interested and cold-blooded plotting, but it has been the consequence — however monstrous and disproportionate — of a cause for which others were responsible. As an example of such a crime I would recite the circumstances connected with George Vincent Parker, making some alteration in the names of persons and of places wherever there is a possibility that pain might be inflicted by their disclosure.

Nearly forty years ago there lived in one of our Midland cities a certain Mr. Parker, who did a considerable business as a commission agent. He was an excellent man of affairs, and during those progressive years which intervened between the Crimean and the American wars his fortune increased rapidly.

He built himself a villa in a pleasant suburb outside the town, and being blessed with a charming and sympathetic wife there was every prospect that the evening of his days would be spent in happiness. The only trouble which he had to contend with was his inability to understand the character of his only son, or to determine what plans he should make for his future.

George Vincent Parker, the young man in question, was of a type which continually recurs and which verges always upon the tragic. By some trick of atavism he had no love for the great city and its roaring life, none for the weary round of business, and no ambition to share the rewards which successful business brings. He had no sympathy with his father’s works or his father’s ways, and the life of the office was hateful to him. This aversion to work could not, however, be ascribed to viciousness or indolence. It was innate and constitutional. In other directions his mind was alert and receptive. He loved music and showed a remarkable aptitude for it. He was an excellent linguist and had some taste in painting. In a word, he was a man of artistic temperament, with all the failings of nerve and of character which that temperament implies. In London he would have met hundreds of the same type, and would have found a congenial occupation in making small incursions into literature and dabbling in criticism. Among the cotton-brokers of the Midlands his position was at that time an isolated one, and his father could only shake his head and pronounce him to be quite unfit to carry on the family business. He was gentle in his disposition, reserved with strangers, but very popular among his few friends. Once or twice it had been remarked that he was capable of considerable bursts of passion when he thought himself ill-used.

This is a type of man for whom the practical workers of the world have no affection, but it is one which invariably appeals to the feminine nature. There is a certain helplessness about it and a naïve appeal for sympathy to which a woman’s heart readily responds — and it is the strongest, most vigorous woman who is the first to answer the appeal.

We do not know what other consolers this quiet dilettante may have found, but the details of one such connection have come down to us. It was at a musical evening at the house of a local doctor that he first met Miss Mary Groves. The doctor was her uncle, and she had come to town to visit him, but her life was spent in attendance upon her grandfather, who was a very virile old gentleman, whose eighty years did not prevent him from fulfilling all the duties of a country gentleman, including those of the magisterial bench.

After the quiet of a secluded manor-house the girl in the first flush of her youth and her beauty enjoyed the life of the town, and seems to have been particularly attracted by this refined young musician, whose appearance and manners suggested that touch of romance for which a young girl craves. He on his side was drawn to her by her country freshness and by the sympathy which she showed for him. Before she returned to the Manor-house friendship had grown into love and the pair were engaged.

But the engagement was not looked upon with much favour by either of the families concerned. Old Parker had died, and his widow was left with sufficient means to live in comfort, but it became more imperative than ever that some profession should be found for the son. His invincible repugnance to business still stood in the way. On the other hand the young lady came of a good stock, and her relations, headed by the old country squire, objected to her marriage with a penniless young man of curious tastes and character. So for four years the engagement dragged along, during which the lovers corresponded continually, but seldom met. At the end of that time he was twenty-five and she was twenty-three, but the prospect of their union seemed as remote as ever. At last the prayers of her relatives overcame her constancy, and she took steps to break the tie which held them together. This she endeavoured to do by a change in the tone of her letters, and by ominous passages to prepare him for the coming blow.

On August 12th, 18 — she wrote that she had met a clergyman who was the most delightful man she had ever seen in her life. ‘He has been staying with us,’ she said, ‘and grandfather thought that he would just suit me, but that would not do.’ This passage, in spite of the few lukewarm words of reassurance, disturbed young Vincent Parker exceedingly. His mother testified afterwards to the extreme depression into which he was thrown, which was the less remarkable as he was a man who suffered from constitutional low spirits, and who always took the darkest view upon every subject. Another letter reached him next day which was more decided in its tone.

‘I have a good deal to say to you, and it had better be said at once,’ said she. ‘My grandfather has found out about our correspondence, and is wild that there should be any obstacle to the match between the clergyman and me. I want you to release me that I may have it to say that I am free. Don’t take this too hardly, in pity for me. I shall not marry if I can help it.’

This second letter had an overpowering effect. His state was such that his mother had to ask a family friend to sit up with him all night. He paced up and down in an extreme state of nervous excitement, bursting constantly into tears. When he lay down his hands and feet twitched convulsively. Morphia was administered, but without effect. He refused all food. He had the utmost difficulty in answering the letter, and when he did so next day it was with the help of the friend who had stayed with him all night. His answer was reasonable and also affectionate.

‘My dearest Mary,’ he said. ‘Dearest you will always be to me. To say that I am not terribly cut up would be a lie, but at any rate you know that I am not the man to stand in your way. I answer nothing to your last letter except that I wish to hear from your own lips what your wishes are, and I will then accede to them. You know me too well to think that I would then give way to any unnecessary nonsense or sentimentalism. Before I leave England I wish to see you once again, and for the last time, though God knows what misery it gives me to say so. You will admit that my desire to see you is but natural. Say in your next where you will meet me. Ever, dearest Mary, your affectionate GEORGE.’

Next, day he wrote another letter in which he again implored her to give him an appointment, saying that any place between their house and Standwell, the nearest village, would do. ‘I am ill and thoroughly upset, and I do not wonder that you are,’ said he. ‘We shall both be happier and better in mind as well as in body after this last interview. I shall be at your appointment, *coûte qu’il coûte*. Always your affectionate GEORGE.’

There seems to have been an answer to this letter actually making an appointment, for he wrote again upon Wednesday, the 19th. ‘My dear Mary,’ said he, ‘I will only say here that I will arrive by the train you mention and that I hope, dear Mary, that you will not bother yourself unnecessarily about all this so far as I am concerned. For my own peace of mind I wish to see you, which I hope you won’t think selfish. *Du reste* I only repeat what I have already said. I have but to hear from you what your wishes are and they shall be complied with. I have sufficient *savoir faire* not to make a bother about what cannot be helped. Don’t let me be the cause of any row between you and your grandpapa. If you like to call at the inn I will not stir out until you come, but I leave this to your judgment.’

As Professor Owen would reconstruct an entire animal out of a single bone, so from this one little letter the man stands flagrantly revealed. The scraps of French, the self-conscious allusion to his own *savoir faire*, the florid assurances which mean nothing, they are all so many strokes in a subtle self-portrait.

Miss Groves had already repented the appointment which she had given him. There may have been some traits in this eccentric lover whom she had abandoned which recurred to her memory and warned her not to trust herself in his power. — My dear George,’ she wrote — and her letter must have crossed his last one—’I write this in the greatest haste to tell you not to come on any account. I leave here today, and can’t tell when I can or shall be back. I do not wish to see you if it can possibly be avoided, and indeed there will be no chance now, so we had best end this state of suspense at once and say good-bye without seeing each other. I feel sure I could not stand the meeting. If you write once more within the next three days I shall get it, but not later than that time without its being seen, for my letters are strictly watched and even opened. Yours truly, MARY.’

This letter seems to have brought any vague schemes which may have been already forming in the young man’s mind to an immediate head. If he had only three days in which he might see her he could not afford to waste any time. On the same day he went to the county town, but as it was late he did not go on to Standwell, which was her station. The waiters at the Midland Hotel noticed his curious demeanour and his vacant eye. He wandered about the coffee-room muttering to himself, and although he ordered chops and tea he swallowed nothing but some brandy and soda. Next morning, August 21st, he took a ticket to Standwell and arrived there at half-past eleven. From Standwell Station to the Manor-house where Miss Groves resided with the old squire is two miles. There is an inn close to the station called “The Bull’s Head.” Vincent Parker called there and ordered some brandy. He then asked whether a note had been left for his, and seemed much disturbed upon hearing that there was none. Then, the time being about a quarter past twelve, he went off in the direction of the Manor-house.

About two miles upon the other side of the Manor-house, and four miles from the Bull’s Head Inn, there is a thriving grammar school, the head master of which was a friend of the Groves family and had some slight acquaintance with Vincent Parker. The young man thought, therefore, that this would be the best place for him to apply for information, and he arrived at the school about half-past one. The head master was no doubt considerably astonished at the appearance of this dishevelled and brandy-smelling visitor, but he answered his questions with discretion and courtesy.

‘I have called upon you,’ said Parker, ‘as a friend of Miss Groves. I suppose you know that there is an engagement between us?’

‘I understood that there *was* an engagement, and that it had been broken off,’ said the master.

‘Yes,’ Parker answered. ‘she has written to me to break off the engagement and declines to see me. I want to know how matters stand.’

‘Anything I may know,’ said the master, ‘is in confidence, and so I cannot tell you.’

‘I will find it out sooner or later,’ said Parker, and then asked who the clergyman was who had been staying at the Manor-house. The master acknowledged that there had been one, but refused to give the name. Parker then asked whether Miss Groves was at the Manor-house and if any coercion was being used to her. The other answered that she was at the Manor-house and that no coercion was being used.

‘Sooner or later I must see her,’ said Parker. ‘I have written to release her from her engagement, but I must hear from her own lips that she gives me up. She is of age and must please herself. I know that I am not a good match, and I do not wish to stand in her way.’

The master then remarked that it was time for school, but that he should be free again at half-past four if Parker had anything more to say to him, and Parker left, promising to return. It is not known how he spent the next two hours, but he may have found some country inn in which he obtained some luncheon. At half-past four he was back at the school, and asked the master for advice as to how to act. The master suggested that his best course was to write a note to Miss Groves and to make an appointment with her for next morning.

‘If you were to call at the house, perhaps Miss Groves would see you,’ said this sympathetic and most injudicious master.

‘I will do so and get it off my mind,’ said Vincent Parker.

It was about five o’clock when he left the school, his manner at that time being perfectly calm and collected.

It was forty minutes later when the discarded lover arrived at the house of his sweetheart. He knocked at the door and asked for Miss. Groves. She had probably seen him as he came down the drive, for she met him at the drawing-room door as he came in, and she invited him to come with her into the garden. Her heart was in her mouth, no doubt, lest her grandfather should see him and a scene ensue. It was safer to have him in the garden than in the house. They walked out, therefore, and half an hour later they were seen chatting quietly upon one of the benches. A little afterwards the maid went out and told Miss Groves that tea was ready. She came in alone, and it is suggestive of the views taken by the grandfather that there seems to have been no question about Parker coming in also to tea. She came out again into the garden and sat for a long time with the young man, after which they seem to have set off together for a stroll down the country lanes. What passed during that walk, what recriminations upon his part, what retorts upon hers, will never now be known. They were only once seen in the course of it. At about half-past eight o'clock a labourer, coming up a long lane which led from the high road to the Manor-house, saw a man and a woman walking together. As he passed them he recognised in the dusk that the lady was Miss Groves, the granddaughter of the squire. When he looked back he saw that they had stopped and were standing face to face conversing.

A very short time after this Reuben Conway, a workman, was passing down this lane when he heard a low sound of moaning. He stood listening, and in the silence of the country evening he became aware that this ominous sound was drawing nearer to him. A wall flanked one side of the lane, and as he stared about him his eye caught something moving slowly down the black shadow at the side. For a moment it must have seemed to him to be some wounded animal, but as he approached it he saw to his astonishment that it was a woman who was slowly stumbling along, guiding and supporting herself by her hand against the wall. With a cry of horror he found himself looking into the face of Miss Groves, glimmering white through the darkness.

'Take me home!' she whispered. 'Take me home! The gentleman down there has been murdering me.'

The horrified labourer put his arms round her, and carried her for about twenty yards towards home.

'Can you see anyone down the lane?' she asked, when he stopped for breath.

He looked, and through the dark tunnel of trees he saw a black figure moving slowly behind them. The labourer waited, still propping up the girl's head, until young Parker overtook them.

'Who has been murdering Miss Groves?' asked Reuben Conway.

'I have stabbed her,' said Parker, with the utmost coolness.

‘Well, then, you had best help me to carry her home,’ said the labourer. So down the dark lane moved that singular procession: the rustic and the lover, with the body of the dying girl between them.

‘Poor Mary!’ Parker muttered. ‘Poor Mary! You should not have proved false to me!’

When they got as far as the lodge-gate Parker suggested that Reuben Conway should run and get something which might stanch the bleeding. He went, leaving these tragic lovers together for the last time. When he returned he found Parker holding something to her throat.

‘Is she living?’ he asked.

‘She is,’ said Parker.

‘Oh, take me home!’ wailed the poor girl. A little farther upon their dolorous journey they met two farmers, who helped them.

‘Who has done this?’ asked one of them.

‘He knows and I know,’ said Parker, gloomily. ‘I am the man who has done this, and I shall be hanged for it. I have done it, and there is no question about that at all.’

These replies never seem to have brought insult or invective upon his head, for everyone appears to have been silenced by the overwhelming tragedy of the situation.

‘I am dying!’ gasped poor Mary, and they were the last words which she ever said. Inside the hall-gates they met the poor old squire running wildly up on some vague rumour of a disaster. The bearers stopped as they saw the white hair gleaming through the darkness.

‘What is amiss?’ he cried.

Parker said, calmly, ‘It is your grand-daughter Mary murdered.’

‘Who did it?’ shrieked the old man.

‘I did it.’

‘Who are you?’ he cried.

‘My name is Vincent Parker.’

‘Why did you do it?’

‘She has deceived me, and the woman who deceives me must die.’

The calm concentration of his manner seems to have silenced all reproaches.

‘I told her I would kill her,’ said he, as they all entered the house together. ‘She knew my temper.’

The body was carried into the kitchen and laid upon the table. In the meantime Parker had followed the bewildered and heart-broken old man into the drawing-room, and holding out a handful of things, including his watch and some money, he asked him if he would take care of them. The squire angrily refused. He then took two bundles of her letters out of his pocket — all that was left of their miserable love story.

‘Will you take care of these?’ said he. ‘You may read them, burn them, do what you like with them. I don’t wish them to be brought into court.’

The grandfather took the letters and they were duly burned.

And now the doctor and the policeman, the twin attendants upon violence, came hurrying down the avenue. Poor Mary was dead upon the kitchen table, with three great wounds upon her throat. How, with a severed carotid, she could have come so far or lived so long is one of the marvels of the case. As to the policeman, he had no trouble in looking for his prisoner. As he entered the room Parker walked towards him and said that he wished to give himself up for murdering a young lady. When asked if he were aware of the nature of the charge he said, ‘Yes, quite so, and I will go with you quietly, only let me see her first.’

‘What have you done with the knife?’ asked the policeman.

Parker produced it from his pocket, a very ordinary one with a clasp blade. It is remarkable that two other penknives were afterwards found upon him. They took him into the kitchen and he looked at his victim.

‘I am far happier now that I have done it than before, and I hope that she is.’ said he.

This is the record of the murder of Mary Groves by Vincent Parker, a crime characterized by all that inconsequence and grim artlessness which distinguish fact from fiction. In fiction we make people say and do what we should conceive them to be likely to say or do, but in fact they say and do what no one would ever conceive to be likely. That those letters should be a prelude to a murder, or that after a murder the criminal should endeavour to stanch the wounds of his victim, or hold such a conversation as that described with the old squire, is what no human invention would hazard. One finds it very difficult on reading all the letters and weighing the facts to suppose that Vincent Parker came out that day with the preformed intention of killing his former sweetheart. But whether the dreadful idea was always there, or whether it came in some mad flash of passion provoked by their conversation, is what we shall never know. It is certain that she could not have seen anything dangerous in him up to the very instant of the crime, or she would certainly have appealed to the labourer who passed them in the lane.

The case, which excited the utmost interest through the length and breadth of England, was tried before Baron Martin at the next assizes. There was no need to prove the guilt of the prisoner, since he openly gloried in it, but the whole question turned upon his sanity, and led to some curious complications which have caused the whole law upon the point to be reformed. His relations were called to show that madness was rampant in the family, and that out of ten cousins five were insane. His mother appeared in the witness-box contending with dreadful vehemence that her son was mad, and that her own marriage had been objected to on the ground of the madness latent in her blood. All the witnesses agreed that the prisoner was not an ill-tempered man, but sensitive, gentle, and accomplished, with a tendency to melancholy. The prison chaplain affirmed that he had held conversations with Parker, and that his moral perception seemed to be so entirely wanting that he hardly knew right from wrong. Two specialists in lunacy examined him, and said that they were of opinion that he was of unsound mind. The opinion was based upon the fact that the prisoner declared that he could not see that he had done any wrong.

‘Miss Groves was promised to me,’ said he, ‘and therefore she was mine. I could do what I liked with her. Nothing short of a miracle will alter my convictions.’

The doctor attempted to argue with him. ‘Suppose anyone took a picture from you, what steps would you take to recover it?’ he asked.

‘I should demand restitution,’ said he ‘if not, I should take the thief’s life without compunction.’

The doctor pointed out that the law was there to be appealed to, but Parker answered that he had been born into the world without being consulted, and therefore he recognised the right of no man to judge him. The doctor’s conclusion was that his moral sense was more vitiated than any case that he had seen. That this constitutes madness would, however, be a dangerous doctrine to urge, since it means that if a man were only wicked enough he would be screened from the punishment of his wickedness.

Baron Martin summed up in a common-sense manner. He declared that the world was full of eccentric people, and that to grant them all the immunity of madness would be a public danger. To be mad within the meaning of the law a criminal should be in such a state as not to know that he has committed crime or incurred punishment. Now, it was clear that Parker did know this, since he had talked of being hanged. The Baron accordingly accepted the jury’s finding of ‘Guilty,’ and sentenced the prisoner to death.

There the matter might very well have ended were it not for Baron Martin’s conscientious scruples. His own ruling had been admirable, but the testimony of the mad doctors weighed heavily upon him, and his conscience was uneasy at the mere possibility that a man who was really not answerable for his actions should lose his life through his decision. It is probable that the thought kept him awake that night, for next morning he wrote to the Secretary of State, and told him that he shrank from the decision of such a case.

The Secretary of State, having carefully read the evidence and the judge’s remarks, was about to confirm the decision of the latter, when, upon the very eve of the execution, there came a report from the gaol visitors — perfectly untrained observers — that Parker was showing undoubted signs of madness. This being so the Secretary of State had no choice but to postpone the execution, and to appoint a commission of four eminent alienists to report upon the condition of the prisoner. These four reported unanimously that he was perfectly sane. It is an unwritten law, however, that a prisoner once reprieved is never executed, so Vincent Parker’s sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life — a decision which satisfied, upon the whole, the conscience of the public.

THE END

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS VOLUMES I-VI

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TO GENERAL SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON THIS CHRONICLE OF THE GREAT WAR
IN WHICH HE RENDERED SUCH INVALUABLE SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY IS DEDICATED

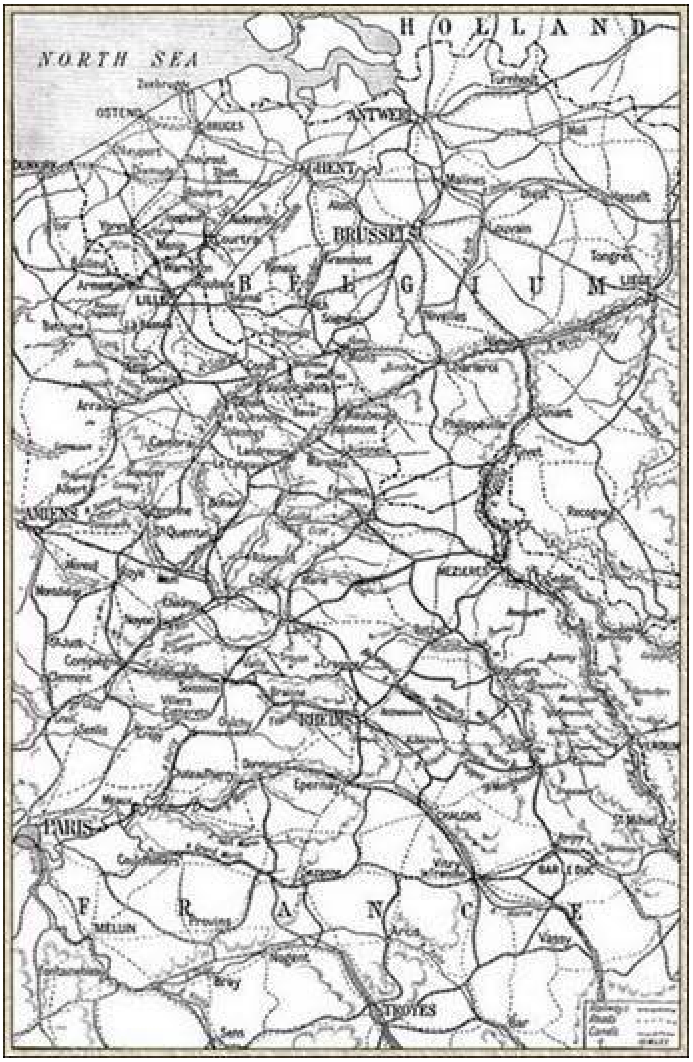
HOLLAND
NORTH SEA
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GHENT
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BELGIUM
LILLE
AMIENS
MEZIERES
RHEIMS
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FRANCE
MELUN
Epernay
CHALONS
BAR LE DUC
TROYES

Map to illustrate the British Campaign in France and Flanders, 1914

VOLUME I.

PREFACE

IT is continually stated that it is impossible to bring out at the present time any accurate history of the war. No doubt this is true so far as some points of the larger strategy are concerned, for the motives at the back of them have not yet been cleared up. It is true also as regards many incidents which have exercised the minds of statesmen and of many possibilities which have worried the soldiers. But so far as the actual early events of our own campaign upon the Continent are concerned there is no reason why the approximate truth should not now be collected and set forth. I believe that the narrative in this volume will in the main stand the test of time, and that the changes of the future will consist of additions rather than of alterations or subtractions.

The present volume deals only with the events of 1914 in the British fighting-line in France and Belgium. A second volume dealing with 1915 will be published within a few months. It is intended that a third volume, covering the current year, shall carry on this contemporary narrative of a tremendous episode.

From the first days of the war I have devoted much of my time to the accumulation of evidence from first-hand sources as to the various happenings of these great days. I have built up my narrative from letters, diaries, and interviews from the hand or lips of men who have been soldiers in our armies, the deeds of which it was my ambition to understand and to chronicle. In many cases I have been privileged to submit my descriptions of the principal incidents to prominent actors in them, and to receive their corrections or endorsement. I can say with certainty, therefore, that a great deal of this work is not only accurate, but that it is very precisely correct in its detail. The necessary restrictions which forbade the mention of numbered units have now been removed, a change made possible by the very general rearrangements which have recently taken place. I am able, therefore, to deal freely with my material. As that material is not always equally full, it may have occasionally led to a want of proportion, where the brigade occupies a line and the battalion a paragraph. In extenuation of such faults, and of the omissions which are unavoidable, I can only plead the difficulty of the task and throw myself upon the reader’s good nature. Some compensation for such shortcoming may be found in the fact that a narrative written at the time reflects the warm emotions which these events aroused amongst us more clearly than the more measured story of the future historian can do.

It may seem that the political chapters are somewhat long for a military work, but the reader will find that in subsequent volumes there are no further politics, so that this survey of the European conditions of 1914 is a lead up to the whole long narrative of the actual contest.

I would thank my innumerable correspondents (whom I may not name) for their very great help. I would also admit the profit which I have derived from reading Coleman's *Mons To Ypres*, and especially Lord Ernest Hamilton's *The First Seven Divisions*. These books added some new facts, and enabled me to check many old ones. Finally, I desire to thank my friend Mr. P.L. Forbes for his kind and intelligent assistance in arranging my material.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE,
WINDLESHAM, CROWBOROUGH,
October 1916.

I. THE BREAKING OF THE PEACE

IN the frank, cynical, and powerful book* of General Bernhardi which has been so often quoted in connection with the war there is one statement which is both true and important. It is, that no one in Great Britain thought seriously of a war with Germany before the year 1902. As a German observer he has fixed this date, and a British commentator who cast back through the history of the past would surely endorse it. Here, then, is a point of common agreement from which one can construct a scheme of thought.

[Deutschland und der nächste Krieg (Germany And The Next War), Cotta Verlag, Stuttgart 1912.]*

Why then should the British people in the year 1902 begin to seriously contemplate the possibility of a war with Germany? It might be argued by a German apologist that this date marks an appreciation by Great Britain that Germany was a great trade rival who might with advantage be crushed. But the facts would not sustain such a conclusion. The growth of German trade and of German wealth was a phenomenon with which the British were familiar. It had been constant since the days when Bismarck changed the policy of his country from free trade to protection, and it had competed for twenty years without the idea of war having entered British minds. On the contrary, the prevailing economic philosophy in Great Britain was, that trade reacts upon trade, and that the successful rival becomes always the best customer. It is true that manufacturers expressed occasional irritation at the methods of German commerce, such as the imitation of British trade-marks and shoddy reproductions of British products. The Fatherland can produce both the best and the worst, and the latter either undersold us or forced down our own standards. But apart from this natural annoyance, the growing trade of Germany produced no hostility in Great Britain which could conceivably have led to an armed conflict. Up to the year 1896 there was a great deal of sympathy and of respect in Great Britain for the German Empire. It was felt that of all Continental Powers she was the one which was most nearly allied to Britain in blood, religion, and character. The fact that in 1890 Lord Salisbury deliberately handed over to Germany Heligoland — an island which blockaded her chief commercial port and the harbour of her warships — must show once for all how entirely Germany lay outside of any possible world-struggle which could at that time be foreseen. France has always had its warm partisans in this country, but none the less it can most truthfully be said that during all the years that Britain remained in political isolation she would, had she been forced to take sides, have assuredly chosen to stand by the Triple Alliance. It is hard now to recall those days of French pinpricks and of the evil effects which they produced. Germany’s foreign policy is her own affair, and the German people are the judges of those who control it, but to us it must appear absolutely demented in taking a line which has driven this great world-power away from her side — or, putting it at its lowest, away from an absolute neutrality, and into the ranks of her enemies.

In 1896 there came the first serious chill in the relations between the two countries. It arose from the famous telegram to Kruger at the time of the Jameson Raid — a telegram which bore the name of the Kaiser, but which is understood to have been drafted by Baron Marschall von Bieberstein. Whoever was responsible for it did his country a poor service, for British feelings were deeply hurt at such an intrusion into a matter which bore no direct relation to Germany. Britons had put themselves thoroughly in the wrong. Britain admitted and deplored it. Public opinion was the more sensitive to outside interference, and the telegram of congratulation from the Emperor to Kruger was felt to be an uncalled-for impertinence. The matter passed, however, and would have been forgiven and forgotten but for the virulent agitation conducted against us in Germany during the Boer War — an agitation which, it is only fair to say, appeared to receive no support from the Kaiser himself, who twice visited England during the course of the struggle. It could not be forgotten, however, that Von Bülow, the Chancellor, assumed an offensive attitude in some of his speeches, that the very idea of an Anglo-German Alliance put forward by Chamberlain in 1900 was scouted by the German Press, and that in the whole country there was hardly a paper which did not join in a chorus of unreasoned hatred and calumny against ourselves, our policy, and our arms. The incident was a perfectly astounding revelation to the British, who looked back at the alliance between the two countries, and had imagined that the traditions of such battles as Minden or Dettingen, where British blood had been freely shed in Prussia’s quarrel, really stood for something in their present relations. Britons were absolutely unconscious of anything which had occurred to alter the bonds which history had formed. It was clear, once for all, that this was mere self-deception, and as the British are a practical race, who are more concerned with what is than why it is, they resigned themselves to the situation and adjusted their thoughts to this new phase of their relations.

But soon a new phenomenon engaged their attention. They had already realised that the Germans, for some motive which appeared to them to be entirely inadequate, were filled with hatred, and would do the British Empire an injury if they had the power. Hitherto, they had never had the power. But now it was evident that they were forging a weapon which might enable them to gratify their malevolence. In 1900 was passed the famous German law regulating the increase of their navy. The British, preoccupied by their South African War, took no great notice of it at the time, but from 1902 onwards it engaged their attention to an ever-increasing degree. The original law was ambitious and far-reaching, but it was subjected to several modifications, each of which made it more formidable. By a system as inexorable as Fate, year after year added to the force which was being prepared at Wilhelmshaven and at Kiel — a force entirely out of proportion to the amount of German commerce to be defended or of German coast-line to be protected. The greatest army in the world was rapidly being supplemented by a fleet which would be dangerously near, both in numbers and quality, to our own. The British Admiralty, more influenced by party politics than the German, showed at times commendable activity, and at other periods inexcusable indifference. On the whole, it was well ahead in its building programmes, for a wide circle of the public had become thoroughly awakened to the danger, and kept up a continual and most justifiable agitation for a broader margin of safety. Fortunately, the two final rulers of the Navy — McKenna and Churchill — rose to their responsibilities, and, in spite of a clamour from a section of their own party, insisted upon an adequate preponderance of naval construction. A deep debt of gratitude is owed also to the action of Lord Fisher, who saw the danger afar off and used all his remarkable powers of organisation and initiative to ensure that his country should be ready for the approaching struggle.

Great Britain, being much exercised in mind by the menacing tone of Germany, expressed not only in her great and rapid naval preparations, but in an astonishing outburst of minatory speeches and literature from professors, journalists, and other leaders of the people, began from 1902 onwards to look round her for allies. Had she continued to remain isolated, some turn of the political wheel might have exposed her to a Continental coalition under the leadership and inspiration of this bitter enemy. But for the threats of Germany, Britain would in all probability have been able to keep aloof from entanglements, but as it was, the enemies of her enemy became of necessity her friends. In an attempt to preserve her independence of action so far as was still possible, she refused to form an alliance, and only committed herself in a vague fashion to an ill-defined *entente*. By settling several outstanding causes of friction with The France, an agreement was come to in the year 1903 which was extended to Russia in 1907. The general purport of such an arrangement was, that the sympathies of Great Britain were with the Dual Alliance, and that these sympathies would be translated into action if events seemed to warrant it. An aggressive policy on the part of France or Russia would be absolutely discountenanced by Britain, but if France were attacked Britain would pledge herself to do her utmost to prevent her from being overwhelmed. It was recognised that a victorious Germany would constitute a serious menace to the British Empire — a fact which neither the Pan-German fanatics nor the German national Press would ever permit us to forget. In this policy of insuring against a German attack King Edward VII. took a deep interest, and the policy is itself attributed to him in Germany, but as a matter of fact it represented the only sane course of action which was open to the nation. Germans are fond of representing King Edward's action as the cause of subsequent events, whereas a wider knowledge would show them that it was really the effect of five years of German irritation and menace. This, then, was the political situation up to the time of the actual outbreak of war. Upon the one side were the German and Austrian Empires in a solid alliance, while Italy was nominally allied, but obviously moved upon an orbit of her own. On the other hand, Russia and France were solidly allied, with Britain moving upon an independent orbit which had more relation with that of her friends than Italy's with that of Central Europe. It might clearly have been foreseen that Britain's fate would be that of France, while Italy would break away under any severe test, for a number of open questions divided her vitally from her secular enemy to the north-east, The whole story of the campaign of Tripoli in 1911 showed very clearly how independent, and even antagonistic, were the interests and actions of Italy.

Germany, in the meanwhile, viewed with considerable annoyance the formation of the elastic but very real ties which united France and Britain, while she did not cease to continue the course of action which had encouraged them. It had been one of the axioms of Wilhelmstrasse that whilst the British occupied Egypt, no friendship was possible between them and the French. Even now they were incredulous that such a thing could be, and they subjected it to a succession of tests. They desired to see whether the friendship was a reality, or whether it was only for fair-weather use and would fly to pieces before the stress of storm. Twice they tried it, once in 1905 when they drove France into a conference at Algeciras, and again in 1911, when in a time of profound peace they stirred up trouble by sending a gunboat to Agadir in south-western Morocco, an event which brought Europe to the very edge of war. In each case the *entente* remained so close and firm that it is difficult to imagine that they were really surprised by our actions in 1914, when the enormous provocation of the breach of the Belgian treaty was added to our promise to stand by France in any trouble not of her own making.

Allusion has been made to the campaign of threats and abuse which had been going on for many years in Germany, but the matter is of such importance in its bearing upon the outbreak of war that it requires — some fuller discussion. For a long period before matters became acute between the two countries, a number of writers, of whom Nietzsche and Treitschke are the best known, had inoculated the German spirit with a most mischievous philosophy, which grew the more rapidly as it was dropped into the favourable soil of Prussian militarism. Nietzsche’s doctrines were a mere general defence of might as against right, and of violent brutality against everything which we associate with Christianity and Civilisation. The whooping savage bulked larger in this perverted philosophy than the saint or the martyr. His views, however, though congenial to a certain class of the German people, had no special international significance. The typical brute whom he exalted was blonde, but a brute of any other tint would presumably suffice. It was different in the case of Treitschke. He was a historian, not a philosopher, with nothing indefinite or abstract about his teaching. He used his high position as Professor in the Berlin University to preach the most ardent Chauvinism, and above all to teach the rising generation of Germans that their special task was to have a reckoning with England and to destroy the British Empire, which for some reason he imagined to be degenerate and corrupt. He has passed away before he could see the ruin which he helped to bring about, for there is no doubt that his deeds lived after him, and that he is one of half a dozen men who were prominent in guiding their country along the path which has ended in the abyss. Scores of other lesser writers repeated and exaggerated his message. Prominent among these was General von Bernhardi, a man of high standing and a very great authority upon theoretical warfare. In the volume on *Germany And The Next War*, which has been already quoted, he declared in the year 1911 that Germany should and would do exactly what it has done in 1914. Her antagonists, her allies, and her general strategy are all set forth with a precision which shows that German thinkers had entirely made up their minds as to the course of events, and that the particular pretext upon which war would be waged was a matter of secondary importance. These and similar sentiments naturally increased the uneasiness and resentment in Great Britain, where the taxation had risen constantly in the endeavour to keep pace with German preparations, until it was generally felt that such a state of things could not continue without some crisis being reached. The cloud was so heavy that it must either pass or burst.

The situation had been aggravated by the fact that in order to win popular assent to the various increases of the naval estimates in Germany, constantly recurring anti-British agitations were deliberately raised with alarms of an impending attack. As Britain had never thought of attacking Germany during the long years when she had been almost defenceless at sea, it was difficult to perceive why she should do so now; but none the less the public and the politicians were gulled again and again by this device, which, while it achieved its purpose of obtaining the money, produced a corresponding resentment in Great Britain. Sometimes these manoeuvres to excite public opinion in favour of an increased navy went to extreme lengths which might well have justified an official remonstrance from England. A flagrant example was the arrest, trial, and condemnation of Captain Stewart for espionage upon the evidence of a suborned and perjured criminal. It is a story which is little to the credit of the Imperial Government, of the High Court at Leipzig, or of the British authorities who failed to protect their fellow-countryman from most outrageous treatment.

So much for the causes which helped to produce an evil atmosphere between the two countries. Looking at the matter from the German point of view, there were some root-causes out of which this monstrous growth had come, and it is only fair that these should be acknowledged and recorded. These causes can all be traced to the fact that Britain stood between Germany and that world-empire of which she dreamed. This depended upon circumstances over which this country had no control, and which she could not modify if she had wished to do so. Britain, through her maritime power and through the energy of her merchants, had become a great world-power when Germany was still a collection of petty States. When Germany became a powerful Empire with a rising population and an immense commerce, she found that the choice places of the world, and those most fitted for the spread of a transplanted European race, were already filled up. It was not a matter which Britain could help, nor could she alter it, since Canada, Australasia, and South Africa would not, even if she had desired it, be transferred to German rule. And yet it formed a national grievance, and if we can put ourselves in the place of the Germans we may admit that it was galling that the surplus of their manhood should go to build up the strength of an alien and possibly a hostile State. To this point we could fully see that grievance — or rather that misfortune, since no one was in truth to blame in the matter. It was forgotten by their people that the Colonial Empire of the British and of the French had been built up by much outlay of blood and treasure, extending over three centuries. Germany had existed as a united State for less than half a century, and already during that time had built up a very considerable oversea dominion. It was unreasonable to suppose that she could at once attain the same position as her fully grown rivals.

Thus this German discontent was based upon fixed factors which could no more be changed by Britain than the geographical position which has laid her right across the German exit to the oceans of the world. That this deeply rooted national sentiment, which for ever regarded Britain as the Carthage to which they were destined to play the part of Rome, would sooner or later have brought about war, is beyond all doubt. There are a score of considerations which show that a European war had long been planned, and that finally the very date, determined by the completion of the broadened Kiel Canal, had been approximately fixed. The importations of corn, the secret preparations of giant guns, the formations of concrete gun-platforms, the early distribution of mobilisation papers, the sending out of guns for auxiliary cruisers, the arming of the German colonies, all point to a predetermined rupture. If it could not be effected on one pretext, it certainly would on another. As a matter of fact, an occasion was furnished by means which have not yet been fully cleared up. It was one which admirably suited the German book, since it enabled her to make her ally the apparent protagonist and so secure her fidelity to the bond. At the same time, by making the cause of quarrel one which affected only the Slavonic races, she hoped to discourage and detach the more liberal of the Western Powers and so divide the ranks of the Allies from the outset. It is possible, though not certain, that she might have effected this in the case of Great Britain, but for her own stupendous blunder in the infraction of Belgian neutrality, which left us a united nation in our agreement as to the necessity of war.

The political balance of the Great Powers of Europe is so delicately adjusted that any weakening of one means a general oscillation of all. The losses of Russia in a sterile campaign in East Asia in 1904 disturbed the whole peace of the world. Germany took advantage of it at once to bully France over Morocco; and in 1908, judging correctly that Russia was still unfit for war, Austria, with the connivance and help of Germany, tore up the Treaty of Berlin without reference to its other signatories, and annexed the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia immediately issued a futile protest, as did Great Britain, but the latter had no material interest at stake. It was otherwise with Russia. She was the hereditary guardian of Slav interests which were directly attacked by this incorporation of an unwilling Slav population into the Austrian Empire. Unable for the moment to prevent it, she waited in silent wrath for the chance of the future, humiliated and exasperated by the knowledge that she had been bullied at the moment of her temporary weakness. So great had been the indignity that it was evident that were she to tolerate a second one it would mean the complete abandonment of her leadership of the race. On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austrian Empire, made a state visit to Sarajevo in the newly annexed provinces. Here he was assassinated, together with his wife. The immediate criminals were two youths named Princip and Cabrinovic, but what exact forces were at the back of them, or whether they merely represented local discontent, have never yet been clearly shown. Austria was, however, naturally incensed against Serbia, which was looked upon as the centre of all aggressive Slavonic action. Politics take fantastic shapes in this south-eastern corner of Europe, and murder, abduction, forgery, and perjury are weapons which in the past have been freely used by all parties. The provocation in this instance was so immense and the crime so monstrous that had it been established after trustworthy examination that Serbia had indeed been directly connected with it, there is no doubt that the whole of Europe, including Russia, would have acquiesced in any reasonable punishment which could be inflicted. Certainly the public opinion of Great Britain would have been unanimous in keeping clear of any quarrel which seemed to uphold the criminals.

Austria seems to have instantly made up her mind to push the matter to an extreme conclusion, as is shown by the fact that mobilisation papers were received by Austrians abroad, bearing the date June 30, so that they were issued within two days of the crime. An inquiry was held in connection with the trial of the assassins, which was reported to have implicated individual Serbians in the murder plot, but no charge was made against the Serbian Government. Had Austria now demanded the immediate trial and punishment of these accomplices, she would once again have had the sympathy of the civilised world. Her actual action was far more drastic, and gave impartial observers the conviction that she was endeavouring not to obtain reparation but to ensure war. It is inconceivable that so important a document as her ultimatum was launched without the approval of Berlin, and we have already seen that Germany was in a mood for war. The German newspapers, even before the Austrian demands were made, had begun to insist that in view of the distracted domestic politics of Great Britain, and of the declaration by M. Humbert in the French Senate that the army was unprepared, the hour for definite settlements had arrived.

The Austrian ultimatum was such a demand as one nation has never yet addressed to another. Indeed, it could hardly be said that Serbia would remain a nation if she submitted to it. Some clauses, though severe, were within the bounds of reason. That papers should not be allowed to incite hatred, and that secret societies which were supposed to be connected with the crime should be forcibly suppressed, were not unfair demands. So, too, that all accessories to the plot, some of whom are mentioned by name, should be tried, and that certain measures to prevent a possible recurrence of such plots should be adopted. All these demands might be justified, and each of them was, as a matter of fact, accepted by Serbia. The impossible conditions were that Austrian judges should sit in Serbia upon political cases and that delegates of Austria should have partial administrative control in the neighbouring kingdom. Even these outrageous demands were not rejected absolutely by the Serbian Government, though it proclaimed itself to be unable to accept them in the crude form in which they were presented. A humble and conciliatory reply concluded with an expression of the desire to submit any point still open to impartial of the arbitration. The Austrian Government — or the forces behind it — appeared, however, to have no desire at all to find a peaceful solution. So precipitate were they in their action, that on the receipt of the Serbian reply, in less than an hour the Austrian Minister had left Belgrade, and a diplomatic rupture, the immediate prelude to war, had taken place between the two countries. So far only two figures were on the stage, but already vast shadows were looming in the wings, and all the world was hushed at the presentiment of coming tragedy.

It has been shown that Russia, the elder brother of the Slav races, had once already been humiliated over Austrian policy and could not be indifferent to this new attempt to coerce a Slavonic people. The King of Serbia in his sore need appealed to the Czar and received a sympathetic reply. A moderate castigation of Serbia might have been condoned by Russia, but she could not contemplate unmoved a course of action which would practically destroy a kindred State. The Austrian army was already mobilising, so Russia also began to mobilise in the south. Events crowded rapidly upon each other. On July 28 came the declaration of war from Austria to Serbia. Three days later — days which were employed by Great Britain in making every possible effort to prevent the extension of the mischief — Germany as Austria’s ally declared war upon Russia. Two days later Germany declared war upon France. The current ran swiftly as it drew nearer to Niagara.

The scope of this chronicle is more immediately concerned with the doings of Great Britain in this sudden and frightful misfortune which had fallen upon Europe. Her peaceful efforts were thrust aside, for she was dealing with those who had predetermined that there should be no peace. Even Austria, the prime mover in discord, had shown herself inclined to treat at the last moment, but Germany had hastened her onwards by a sudden ultimatum to Russia. From that instant the die was cast. The attitude of France was never in doubt. She was taken at a disadvantage, for her President was abroad when the crisis broke out, but the most chivalrous of nations could be relied upon to fulfil her obligations. She took her stand at once by the side of her ally. The one all-important question upon which the history of the world would depend, as so often before, was the action of Great Britain.

Sir Edward Grey had proposed a conference of ambassadors to deal with the situation, a suggestion which was set aside by Germany. So long as the matter was purely Balkan it was outside the sphere of special British interests, but day by day it was becoming more clear that France would be involved, and a large party in Great Britain held that it would be impossible for us to stand by and witness any further dismembering of our neighbour. Thus the shadow which had settled so heavily upon the south-east of Europe was creeping across from east to west until it was already darkening the future of Britain. It was obviously the German game, whatever her ultimate designs might be upon the British Empire, to endeavour to keep it peaceful until she had disposed of her Continental opponents. For this reason a strong bid was made for British neutrality upon July 29, through the Ambassador at Berlin, Sir Edward Goschen. In an official conversation German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, declared that of the Germany was ready to pledge herself to take no territory from France in case of victory. He would make no promise as regards the French colonies, nor was anything said as to the French Fleet, nor as to the gigantic indemnity which was already discussed in some of the German papers. In a word, the proposition was that Great Britain was to abandon her friend at the hour of her need on condition that she should be robbed but not mutilated. Subsequent experience of German promises may lead us to doubt, however, whether they would really have insured France against the worst that the victor could inflict.

Sir Edward Grey answered with as much warmth as the iced language of diplomacy will permit. His dispatch of July 30 begins as follows:

“His Majesty’s Government cannot for a moment entertain the Chancellor’s proposal that they should bind themselves to neutrality on such terms.

“What he asks us in effect is, to engage to stand by while French colonies are taken and France is beaten so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the colonies.

“From the material point of view such a proposal is unacceptable, for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a great Power, and become subordinate to German policy.

"Altogether apart from that, it would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the, good name of this country would never recover."

At a subsequent period the Premier, Mr. Asquith, voiced the sentiment of the whole nation when he declared that the proposal was infamous.

The immediate concern of the British Government was to ascertain the views of the rival Powers upon the question of Belgian neutrality, which had been solemnly guaranteed by France, Prussia, and ourselves. How faithfully this guarantee had been observed by France in the past is shown by the fact that even when an infraction of the frontier at Sedan in 1870 would have saved the French Army from total destruction, it had not been attempted. There were signs in advance, however, that Germany proposed to turn the French defences by marching through Belgium. The arrangement of the new German strategic railways upon the frontier all pointed to such a plan. It was evident that such an action must at once bring Britain into the struggle, since it is difficult to see how she could ever hold up her head again if, after promising protection to a smaller nation, she broke her bond at the moment of danger. The French, too, who had left their northern frontier comparatively unfortified in reliance upon the integrity of Belgium, would have rightly felt that they had been betrayed by Britain if they suffered now through their confidence in the British guarantee. The Balkans were nothing to Great Britain, but she had more than her interests, she had her national honour at stake upon the Belgian frontier.

On July 31 the British Government asked France and Germany whether they were still prepared to stand by their pledge. France answered promptly that she was, and added that she had withdrawn her armies ten kilometres from the frontier, so as to prove to the world that her position was defensive only. From Germany there came an ominous silence. Meanwhile, in Brussels the German representative, Herr von Below-Saleske, was assuring the Belgian Government that nothing was further from the intention of Germany than an infraction of the frontier. These assurances were continued almost to the moment of the arrival of German troops in Belgium, and give one more instance of the absolute want of truth and honour which from the days of Frederick the Great has been the outstanding characteristic of German diplomacy. Just as the Seven Years' War was begun by an attack upon an ally in times of peace, so her last two campaigns have been opened, the one by the doctored telegram of Ems, and the other by the perfidy to Belgium, which is none the less shameful because it has been publicly admitted by the Chancellor.

Another incident of these crowded days deserves some record, as it has been quoted in Germany as an instance of Great Britain having stood in the way of a localisation of the war. This impression is produced by suppressing a telegram in which it is shown that the whole episode arose from a mistake upon the part of Prince Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador. On August 1 Sir Edward Grey, still feeling round for some way in which the evil might be minimised, suggested through the telephone to Prince Lichnowsky that if both Germany and France could see their way to stand out, the conflict would then be limited to Austria and Russia. This practical and possible suggestion was transmitted to Berlin in the absurd form that Britain would hold France out of the war, while Russia would be abandoned to Germany and Austria. The Kaiser lost no time in assenting to so delightful a proposal. It was at once pointed out to Prince Lichnowsky that he had made a mistake, and the Prince telegraphed to Berlin a correction of his previous message. This second telegram was suppressed by the German Government, while, some weeks afterwards, they published the inaccurate dispatch in order to give the world the impression that Britain had actually made a move towards peace which had been withdrawn when it was found that it was eagerly welcomed by Germany. The very idea that Britain could in any way pledge the actions of France is grotesque upon the face of it. Whilst making this false suggestion as to the action of Britain, the German Government carefully concealed the fact that Sir Edward Grey had actually gone the extreme length in the interests of peace, of promising that we should detach ourselves from our Allies if a conference were held and their unreasonable attitude was an obstacle to an agreement.

Whether, if Belgian neutrality had been honoured, Great Britain would or would not have come into the war is an academic question which can never be decided. Certainly she would never have come in as a united nation, for public opinion was deeply divided upon the point, and the Cabinet is understood to have been at variance. Only one thing could have closed the ranks and sent the British Empire with absolute unanimity into the fight. This was the one thing which Germany did. However great her military power may be, it seems certain that her diplomatic affairs were grievously mismanaged, and that, in spite of that cloud of spies who have been the precursors of her Uhlans in each of her campaigns, she was singularly ill-informed as to the sentiments of foreign nations. The columns of a single honest British paper would have told her more of the true views and spirit of the nation than all the eavesdroppers of her famous secret service.

We now come to the critical instant as regards Britain, leading to a succession of incidents in Berlin so admirably described in Sir Edward Goschen's classical report that it seems a profanation to condense it. Having received no reply to their request for a definite assurance about Belgium, the British Government instructed their Ambassador to ask for an immediate answer upon August 4. The startling reply from Von Jagow, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, was that the German troops had actually crossed the frontier. With a cynical frankness the German statesman explained that it was a matter of life or death to the Imperial Army to get their blow in quickly by the undefended route. In answer to the shocked remonstrance of the British Ambassador, he could only assert that it was now too late to reconsider the matter. About seven in the evening Sir Edward Goschen conveyed an ultimatum upon the subject to the German Government, declaring war unless by midnight a more satisfactory answer could be given.

From Herr von Jagow the Ambassador passed to the Chancellor, whom he found much agitated. He broke into a harangue in which he used the phrase, now become historic, that he could not understand the British Government making such a fuss about a mere scrap of paper, and declared that a breach of territorial neutrality was a matter of no great consequence. A recollection of the history of his own country would none the less have reminded him that it was precisely on account of an infringement of their frontier by the troops of Napoleon that Prussia had entered upon the ill-fated war of 1806. He continued by saying that he held Great Britain responsible for all the terrible events which might happen. Sir Edward pointed out that it was a matter of necessity that Great Britain should keep her engagements, and added with dignity that fear of the consequences could hardly be accepted as a valid reason for breaking them.

Such in brief was the momentous interview which determined the question of peace or war between these two great Empires. Sir Edward immediately forwarded a telegraphic summary of what had occurred to London, but this telegram was never forwarded by the Berlin authorities — one more of those actions for which the word “caddish “ is the most appropriate British adjective. Throughout all our German experiences both before the war and during it, we have always found our rivals to be formidable; they have usually proved themselves to be both brave and energetic; but hardly ever have we recognised them as gentlemen. Three centuries ago the leading nations of Europe had attained something subtle and gracious which is still denied to the Germans.

The populace of Berlin hastened to show these same unamiable characteristics. Whereas the retiring Ambassadors in London, Paris, and also in Vienna, met with courteous treatment, the German mob surrounded the British Embassy and hurled vituperations, and finally stones, at its occupants. Defenceless people were hustled, assaulted, and arrested in the streets. A day or two previously the Russian Embassy had been brutally insulted by the populace of the upon its departure — a fact which produced some regrettable, but very natural, reprisals in Petrograd, to use the new name for the Russian capital. The French Ambassador and his suite had also been very badly treated in their journey to the Dutch frontier. Thus it was shocking, but not surprising, to find that the Berlin mob indulged in excesses towards the British representatives, and that shameful scenes marked the final hours of Sir Edward Goschen’s official duties. Truly, as Herr von Jagow admitted, such incidents leave an indelible stain upon the reputation of Berlin. It is pleasant to be able to add that Von Jagow himself behaved with propriety, and did what he could to mitigate the violence of the populace.

It is difficult for us to imagine how any German could possibly for an instant have imagined that Great Britain would stand by in silent acquiescence while the little country which she had sworn to protect was overrun by German troops; but that such a delusion existed is shown not only by the consternation of the Chancellor at Sir Edward’s message, but also by the extreme irritation of the Emperor. What part Emperor William had played in the events which led up to the war may possibly remain for ever the subject of debate. There are those who argue that the Crown Prince and the military party had taken advantage of his absence on one of his Norwegian tours, and had hurried matters into such an *impasse* that he was unable to get them back to more peaceful lines. One would wish to think that this were true, and there is evidence that on previous occasions his influence has been exerted upon the side of peace to of the an extent which was unwelcome to many of his own subjects. On the other hand, it is very difficult to believe that such a situation, led up to by many preparatory steps which included the *fons et origo mali*, the provocative and impossible Austrian ultimatum, could have been arranged without the assent of a man who has notoriously continually interfered directly in all large, and many small, transactions of state. However this may be, it is beyond dispute that the action of Great Britain deprived him for the instant of his usual dignity and courtesy, and he dispatched a verbal message by one of his aides-de-camp in the following terms:

"The Emperor has charged me to express to your Excellency his regret for the occurrences of last night, but to tell you at the same time that you will gather from those occurrences an idea of the feelings of his people respecting the action of Great Britain in joining with other nations against her old allies of Waterloo. His Majesty also begs that you will tell the King that he has been proud of the titles of British Field-Marshal and British Admiral, but that in consequence of what has occurred he must now at once divest himself of those titles."

The Ambassador adds feelingly that this message lost nothing of its acerbity by the manner of its delivery. Some artist of the future will do justice to the scene where the benign and dignified old diplomatist sat listening to the rasping utterances of the insolent young Prussian soldier. The actual departure of the Embassy was effected without molestation, thanks once more to the good offices of Herr von Jagow. On the same day, in the presence of a large but silent crowd, the German Ambassador left London and embarked for home in a vessel placed at his disposal by the British Government. His voyage back, via Flushing, was safely accomplished, but it is worth recording that it was only the warning from a British warship which prevented him and his staff from being blown up by the mines which had already, within a few hours of the outbreak of hostilities, been strewn thickly by his countrymen in the path of neutral shipping across the highway of commerce in the North Sea. Should our kinsmen of America ever find themselves in our place, let them remember that it is "all in" from the beginning with the Germans.

Let America also remember our experience that no pupil can go to a German school, no scholar to a German university, and no invalid to a German health-resort, without the chance of some sudden turn of politics leaving them as prisoners in the country. Even the elderly heart patients at Nauheim were detained by the German authorities. An old admiral among them, Admiral Neeld, made a direct appeal as sailor to sailor to Prince

Henry of Prussia, and was answered by the proverb that “War is war.” Our contention is that such actions are *not* war, and that their perpetration will never be forgotten or forgiven by the nations of the world, who can have no security that when their subjects pass the German frontier they will ever get clear again. Such practices are, of course, entirely distinct from that of interning reservists or males of fighting age, which was freely done by the Allies. It is only fair to say that after a long delay there was a release of schoolgirls, and afterwards one of doctors, by the Germans, but many harmless travellers, students, and others were held for a long period of the war at a time when tens of thousands of Germans were free in Great Britain.

By a gross perversion of facts German publicists have endeavoured to show that Great Britain was to blame for the final rupture. The pretence is too absurd to deceive any one, and one can hardly think that they believe it themselves. One has only to ask what had Great Britain to do with the death of the Heir Apparent of Austria, with the sending of the fatal ultimatum, with the declaration of war against Russia and France, or, finally, with the infraction of the Belgian frontier? She had nothing to do with any one of these things, which all, save the first, emanated from Vienna or Berlin, and were the obvious causes of the war. Britain was only involved because she remained true to her solemn contract, a breach of which would have left her dishonoured. It is mere effrontery to pretend that she desired war, or that she left anything undone which could have prevented it. We lay our record with confidence before foreign nations and posterity. We have nothing to conceal and nothing to regret.

On the other hand, supposing that one were to grant the whole of the German contention, suppose one were to admit that Germany did not know of the terms of the Austrian ultimatum or foresee its effect upon the other nations of Europe, that she took her stand by the side of Austria purely out of motives of chivalrous loyalty to an ally, and that she was forced, by so doing, to find herself at variance with Russia and France — suppose so inconceivable a hypothesis as this, even then it cannot in any way condone the admitted wrong which Germany did in invading Belgium, nor does it show any possible cause why, because Germany was false to her word in this matter, Britain should be so also. This point is so unanswerable that the only defence, if it can be called a defence, which Germany has ever put forward is, that if she had not infringed Belgian neutrality, somebody else would have done so. Not one shadow of evidence has ever been put forward to justify so monstrous an assertion, which is certainly not endorsed by the Belgians themselves.

In this connection one may allude to the so-called secret military engagements which were found and published by the Germans at Brussels and which were supposed to show that Great Britain herself contemplated the infraction of Belgian neutrality. One can only realise how bankrupt is Germany of all reason and argument when one considers such a contention as this. For years the German threats had been obvious to all the world. They had brought their strategic railways to the frontier of Belgium, and erected their standing camps there. Naturally Belgium was alarmed at such preparations and took counsel with Great Britain how her pledge should be redeemed and how her soil could be defended in case Germany proved perfidious. It was a simple military precaution which involved not the breach of a treaty but the fulfilment of one — not the invasion of Belgium but its protection after it was invaded. Each successive so-called "revelation " about the actions of Great Britain has only proved once more that —

"Whatever record leaps to light
She never shall be shamed."

These attempts to confuse the issue irresistibly recall the message of Frederic to Podowils when he The was about to seize Silesia even as William seized Belgium. "The question of right," he said, "is the affair of ministers. It is your affair. It is time to work at it in secret, for the orders to the troops are given." March first and find some justification later.

Germany would have stood higher in the world's esteem and in the estimate of history if, instead of playing in most grotesque fashion the wolf to the lamb, and accusing her unprepared and distracted neighbours of making a surprise attack upon her at the moment when she was at the height of her preparations, she had boldly stated her true position. Her dignity and frankness would have been undeniable if she had said, "I am a great power. I believe I am the greatest. I am willing to put it to the test of war. I am not satisfied with my geographical position. I desire a greater seaboard. You must give it to me or I shall take it. I justify my action by the fact that the position of every state rests ultimately upon its strength in war, and that I am willing to undergo that test."

Such a contention would have commanded respect, however much we might resent it. But these repeated declarations from the Emperor himself, the Chancellor, and so many others that they were deliberately attacked, coupled with appeals to the Almighty, make up the most nauseous mixture of falsehood and blasphemy which the world has ever known. The whole conception of religion became grotesque, and the Almighty, instead of a universal Father of the human race, was suddenly transformed into “our good old God,” a bloodthirsty tribal deity worthy of those Prussian pagans who as late as the fourteenth century offered human sacrifices to their idols in the Eastern Mark. The phenomenon was part of that general national madness to which, it is to be hoped, the German of the future will look back with bewilderment and shame.

One contention put forward by certain German apologists in connection with the war would hardly be worth referring to, were it not for the singular light which it casts upon the mental and moral position of a large number of the German public. It was that some special culture had been evolved by Germany which was of such value that it should be imposed by force upon the rest of the world. Since culture must in its nature be an international thing, the joint product of human development, such a claim can only be regarded as a conspicuous sign of its absence. In spiritual and intellectual matters it could not be asserted that Germany since 1870 had shown any superiority over France or England. In many matters she was conspicuously behind. It might fairly be claimed that in chemistry, in music, and in some forms of criticism, notably biblical exegesis, she was supreme. But in how many fields was she inferior to Great Britain? What name had she in poetry to put against Tennyson and Browning, in zoology to compare with Darwin, in scientific surgery to excel that of Lister, in travel to balance Stanley, or in the higher human qualities to equal such a man as Gordon? The fruits of German culture do not bear out the claim that it should forcibly supplant that of either of the great Western nations.

We have now seen how the great cloud which had hung so long over Europe burst at last, and the blast of war swept the land from end to end. We have passed through the years of hopes and alarms, of the *ententes* of optimists and the *detentes* of politicians, of skirmishes between journals and wrestles of finance, until we reach the end of it all — open primitive warfare between the two great branches of the Germanic family. In a purple passage Professor Cramb spoke of the days when the high gods of virility would smile as they looked down upon the chosen children of Odin, the English and the Germans, locked in the joy of battle. The hour had struck, and it is a partial record of those crowded and heroic days which is here set forth with such accuracy of detail as diligence may command and circumstances allow.

II. THE OPENING OF THE WAR

THERE can be no doubt that if Germany had confined her operations to an attack upon France without any infraction of Belgian neutrality, the situation in Great Britain would have been extraordinarily difficult. The Government was the most democratic that has ever been known in our political history, and it owed its power to an electorate, many of whom were passionate advocates for peace at almost any conceivable price. The preparations for naval war, necessitated by the ever-growing German power, had been accompanied and occasionally retarded by a constant murmur of remonstrance which swelled periodically into a menacing expostulation. McKenna and Churchill found their only opponents in the members of their own party, who persistently refused to look obvious facts in the face, and impatiently swept aside the figures of the German armaments while they indulged in vague and amiable aspirations towards international friendship. This large and energetic party would certainly have most strenuously resisted British interference in a Continental war. The statesmen who foresaw that the conquest of France would surely lead to the conquest of Britain might have carried the country with them, but none the less they would have gone to war with such an incubus upon them as the traitorous Charles James Fox and his party had been in the days of Napoleon. A disunited British against a united German Empire would have been a grievous disadvantage, be our allies who they might, for, as Shakespeare sang, “If England to herself be true,” it is then only that she is formidable.

This great misfortune, however, was obviated by the policy of Germany. The most peace-loving Briton could not face the national dishonour which would have been eternally branded upon him had his country without an effort allowed its guarantee to be treated as waste paper by a great military nation. The whole people were welded into one, and save for a few freakish individuals who obeyed their own perversity of mind or passion for notoriety, the country was united as it has never been in history. A just war seemed to touch the land with some magic wand, which healed all dissensions and merged into one national whole those vivid controversies which are, in fact, a sign rather of intense vitality than of degeneration. In a moment the faddist forgot his fad, the capitalist his grievance against taxation, the Labour man his feud against Capital, the Tory his hatred of the Government, even the woman her craving for the vote. A political millennium seemed to have dawned. Best and most important of all was the evident sign that the work done of late years to win the friendship of Ireland had not been in vain. If the mere promise of domestic institutions has ranged all responsible Irishmen upon one side on the day of battle, what may we not hope for ourselves and for the Empire when they have been fully established and Time has alleviated the last lingering memories of an evil past? It is true that at a later period of the war this fair prospect was somewhat overcast by an insane rebellion, in which the wrongs of Ireland, once formidable and now trivial, were allowed by a colossal selfishness to outweigh the martyrdom of Belgium and the mutilation of France. Still the fact remains (and it must sustain us in our future efforts for conciliation) that never before have we had the representative nationalists of Ireland as our allies in a great struggle.

The leaders of the Unionist party, Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, had already, on August 2, signified to the Government that they considered Britain to be honour-bound to France, and would support without hesitation every practical step to give effect to the alliance. Fortified by this assurance, the Government could go strongly forward. But after the Belgian infraction, its position was that of the executive of a united nation. Sir Edward Grey’s analysis in Parliament of the causes which had brought us to war convinced the reason and claimed the sympathy of every political party, and even the most fervent advocates of peace found themselves silenced in the presence of the huge German aggression which could never admit of a peace founded upon mutual respect and equality, but only of that which comes from ascendancy on the one side and helplessness upon the other.

Should Britain ever be led into an unjust war, she will soon learn it from the fearless voices of her children. The independent young nations which are rising under the red-crossed flag will not be dragged, in the train of the Mother-Country, into any enterprise of which their conscience does not approve. But now their assent was whole-hearted. They were vehement in their approval of the firm stand made for the pledged word of the nation. From every quarter of the world deep answered deep in its assurance that the sword should not be sheathed until the wrong was righted and avenged.

Strong, earnest Canada sent her 30,000 men, with her promise of more. Fiery Australia and New Zealand prepared as many, Maori vying with white man in his loyalty to the flag. South Africa, under the splendid leadership of Botha, began to arm, to speak with the foe in her own gates. India poured forth money and men with a lavish generosity which can never be forgotten in this country. The throb of loyalty to the old land passed through every smallest Dependency, and then beyond the frontier to those further lands which had known us as a just and kindly neighbour. Newfoundland voted a contingent. Ceylon sent of her best. Little Fiji mustered her company of fighting men, and even the mountains of Nepaul and the inaccessible plateaux of Thibet were desirous of swelling that great host, gathered from many races, but all under the one banner which meant to each a just and liberal rule.

On the very eve of the outbreak of hostilities one man was added to the home establishment whose presence was worth many army corps. This was Lord Kitchener, whose boat was actually lying with steam up to bear him away upon a foreign mission, when, at the last instant, either the universal public demand or the good sense of the Government recalled him to take supreme charge of the war. It was a strange and a novel situation that a soldier who was no party politician should assume the role of War Minister in a political Cabinet, but the times called for decided measures, and this was among them. From that day onwards until the dark hour which called him from his uncompleted task the passer-by who looked up at the massive front of the War Office was gladdened by the thought that somewhere in the heart of it those stern, immutable eyes were looking out at Britain’s enemies, and that clear, calculating brain was working for their downfall. Slow, safe, methodical, remorseless, carefully preparing the means at every stage that led him to the distant but preordained end, he had shown, both in the Soudan and South Africa, that the race of great British generals was not yet extinct. He knew and trusted his instrument even as it knew and trusted him.

That instrument was an army which was remarkably well prepared for its work. It cannot be said that the Boer War had increased the prestige of the British forces, though only those who have studied the subject can realise how difficult was the task with which they were then faced, or how considerable an achievement it was to bring it to a success. But the campaign had left behind it a valuable legacy, all the richer because so great a proportion of the land forces had been drawn into the struggle. In 1914 a large proportion of senior officers and a considerable number of non-commissioned officers and reservists had passed through that ordeal, and learned by experience what can be done, and, even more important, what cannot be done, in face of modern rifles in skilful hands.

The lesson had been well pressed home after the war, and every general, from Lord Roberts downwards, had laid emphasis upon the importance of cover and of accuracy of fire. Apart from the sound technical training of the soldiers, the administration of the Army had, after an experimental period, fallen into the hands of Lord Haldane, who has left his mark more deeply than any one since Cardwell upon the formation of the land forces. A debt of gratitude is owing to him for his clear thought and his masterful dispositions. Had he been a prophet as well as organiser, he would no doubt have held his hand before he made the smallest decrease of our regular forces; but, on the other hand, by turning our haphazard, amateurish volunteers into the workman-like Territorials, in forming the invaluable Officers’ Training Corps which tapped our public schools for something better than athletic talent, and in rigidly defining our expeditionary corps and providing the special reserves for its reinforcements, he did work for which he can never adequately be thanked. The weapon which he had fashioned was now thrust into the strong right hand of the new Minister of War.

It is well to survey this weapon before we show how it was used. The total personnel of the Army with its reserves called up was about 370,000 men. Of this 160,000 were set aside as an expeditionary force, but only a portion of this number could be counted as immediately available on the outbreak of war, though the system of mobilisation had been brought to a fine point. It was hoped that three army corps numbering about 110,000 men, with two divisions of cavalry, about 10,000 horsemen, would be immediately available, petty numbers as compared with the millions of the Continent, but highly trained professional soldiers, capable, perhaps, of turning the balance in the clash of equal hosts. The rest of the Regular Army had to provide garrisons for India, Egypt, Gibraltar, and other dependencies, but it was hoped that in time nearly all of it would be available for service.

Behind these first-line troops was the special reserve, something under 100,000 in number, who were the immediate reinforcements to fill the gaps of battle. Next in order came the Territorials, whose full complement was 340,000 men. Unhappily at this time they were nearly 100,000 under strength, and there are many who think that if the National Service League in their earnest campaign, which was inspired by a clear vision of the coming danger, had insisted upon a great enlargement of this constitutional force, instead of agitating for a complete change which presented practical and political difficulties, their efforts would have been more fruitful. These troops were raw, inexperienced, and only enlisted for home service, but with a fine spirit they set to work at once to make themselves efficient, and the great majority signified their readiness to go anywhere at the country's call. Many brigades were sent abroad at once to relieve the regulars in Egypt and India, while others were ready to join the fighting line on the Continent after a few months, where, as will be shown, they acquitted themselves remarkably well. The enthusiasm for the war rapidly sent the numbers of the Territorials up to nearly half a million. In addition to these troops there was the promise of 70,000 highly trained men (one quarter of whom were British regulars) from India. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand came forward to offer some 60,000 men between them, with the promise of as many more as should be called for. Brave and hardy, these were splendid raw material, though their actual technical training was not, save in some special corps, more advanced than that of the British Territorials. Altogether, the British War Lord could see, at the very beginning of hostilities, nearly 1,000,000 of men ready to his hand, though in very different stages of efficiency.

But already he had conceived the idea of a campaign of attrition, and, looking forward into the years, he was convinced that these forces were insufficient. Some entirely new *cadres* must be organised, which should have no limitations, but be as reliable an instrument as the regular forces of the Crown. With a prescience which found no counterpart either among our friends or our foes he fixed three years as a probable term for the war, and he made preparation accordingly. Early in August he called for half a million fresh volunteers for the war, and early in October he had got them. Still unsatisfied, he called for yet another half-million, and before Christmas his numbers were again complete. It was a wonderful autumn and winter in Britain. Every common and green was loud with the cries of the instructors, and bare with the tramp of the men. Nothing has ever been seen in the world's history which can compare in patriotic effort with that rally to the flag, for no bounty was offered, and no compulsion used. The spirit of the men was extraordinarily high. Regiments were filled with gentlemen who gave up every amenity of life in order to face an arduous and dangerous campaign, while even greater patriotism was shown by the countless thousands of miners, artisans, and other well-paid workmen who sacrificed high wages and a home life in order to serve for an indefinite time upon the humble pay of the soldier, leaving, very often, a wife and children in straitened circumstances behind them. It is at such times that a democratic country reaps the rich fruits of its democracy, for if you make the land such that it is good to live in, so also does it become good to die for. These forces could not be ready, even with the best of wills, and the most intensive culture, before the summer of 1915, but at that date, including her sea forces. Great Britain had not less than 2,000,000 volunteers under arms and ready for immediate use, a number which had risen to 4,000,000 by the end of that year, and 5,000,000 by the spring of 1916.

So much for the wise provisions of Lord Kitchener, which would have been useless had they not been supported by a stern and self-sacrificing national spirit. The crisis was met with a cold determination which gave some superficial observers the impression that the nation was listless, when it was, in truth, far too earnest for mere shoutings or flag-waving. “Wakened at last!” cried some foreign cartoon when a German outrage aroused the country for an instant to some visible gleam of wrath. A deeper observer might have known that a country which finds 5,000,000 volunteer fighters, and which, instead of putting the expenses of the war upon future generations, as was done by Germany, elects to meet a considerable proportion of them by present taxation, is in grim earnest from the start. The income tax was doubled without a remonstrance by a unanimous vote of the Commons, thus finding an extra £40,000,000 a year for the prosecution of the war. Other taxes were levied by which the working classes bore their air share of the burden, and they also elicited no complaints. Before Christmas no less than £450,000,000 had been raised by a loan, a gigantic financial effort which was easily borne at a charge of 4 per cent.

But if Britain was able to face the future with confidence, both in finance and in her military preparation, it was entirely to her silent, invisible, but most efficient Navy that she owed it. By wise foresight the Grand Fleet, numbering some 400 vessels, had been assembled for Royal inspection before the storm broke and when it was but a rising cloud-bank upon the horizon. This all-important move has been attributed to Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, but it could not have been done without the hearty concurrence and cooperation of Mr. Winston Churchill, who should share the honour, even as he would have shared the blame had we been caught unawares. The so-called inspection had hardly been completed at Spithead before war was upon us, and the Fleet, ready manned, provisioned, and armed, moved straight away to take up its war stations. The main fighting squadrons vanished into a strategic mist from which they did not emerge for very many months, but it was understood that they were assembled at centres like Scapa Flow and Cromarty Firth which were outside the radius of the German torpedo-boats and smaller submarines, while they were near enough to the enemy's ports to be able to bring him to action should he emerge.

Numerous patrols of small vessels were let loose in the North Sea to keep in touch with our opponents, who were well known to be both daring and active. It is said that no less than 3000 ships, large and small, were flying the white ensign of St. George. A portion of these were told off for the protection of the great commercial sea-routes, and for the hunting down of some score of German cruisers which were known to be at sea. Some of these gave a very good account of themselves and others were innocuous; but the net result in loss, which had been discounted in advance as 5 per cent of the merchant fleet at sea, worked out at less than half that figure, and, by the new year, the marauders had been practically exterminated.

Now as always — but now more than ever in the past — it was absolutely vital to hold the seas. Who wins the sea wins Britain. Of every five loaves in the country four come to us from abroad, and our position in meat is no better. It is victory or starvation when we fight upon the sea. It is ill to play for such stakes, however safe the game — worse still when it is a game where the value of some of the cards is unknown. We have little to fear from a raid, nothing from invasion, everything from interference with our commerce. It is one of the points in which our party politics, which blind so many people to reason, might well have brought absolute ruin upon the country. The cultivation of British food supplies should never have been a question of free trade or protection, but rather of vital national insurance.

Had the war come ten years later we might have been in deadly danger, owing to the rapidly growing power of the submarine. These engines turned upon our food-carriers might well have starved us out, especially if we had continued our national folly in being scared by bogeys from building a Channel tunnel. But by a merciful Providence the struggle came at a moment when the submarine was half of the developed, and had not yet reached either the speed or the range of action which would make it the determining factor in a war. As it was, the fruits of submarine warfare, in spite of a wise and timely warning on the eve of hostilities by Admiral Sir Percy Scott, astonished the public, but the mischief done was a very small thing compared to the possibilities which have to be most carefully guarded against in the future.

In their present stage of development, the submarine could only annoy. With the great fleet in existence and with the shipbuilding facilities of Great Britain, nothing could vitally harm her save the loss of a pitched battle. The British superiority was rather in her small craft than in her large ones, but in capital ships she was able to place in line at the beginning of the war enough to give a sufficient margin of insurance. There was never any tendency to underrate the excellence of the hostile ships, nor the courage and efficiency of the men. It was well understood that when they came out they would give a good account of themselves, and also that they would not come out until the circumstances seemed propitious. They were under a disadvantage in that the Russian fleet, though small, was not negligible, and therefore some portion of the German force on sea as well as on land had always to face eastwards. Also the British had the French for their allies, and, though the great ships of the latter were nearly all in the Mediterranean, a swarm of small craft was ready to buzz out of her western ports should the war come down-channel.

Yet another advantage lay with the British in that their geographical position put a six-hundred-mile-long breakwater right across the entrance to Germany, leaving only two sally-ports north and south by which commerce could enter or raiders escape. The result was the immediate utter annihilation of Germany’s sea-borne commerce. Altogether it must be admitted that Germany was grievously handicapped at sea, and that she deserves the more credit for whatever she accomplished, save when, as on land, she transgressed and degraded the recognised laws of civilised warfare. It is time now to turn to those military events upon the Continent which were the precursors of that British campaign which is the subject of this volume.

Want of space and accurate material make it impossible to do justice here to the deeds of our Allies, but an attempt must be made to indicate briefly the main phases of the struggle abroad, since its course reacted continually upon the British operations. It may be shortly stated, then, that so far as the western theatre of war was concerned, hostilities commenced by two movements, one an attack by the French upon the occupants of those lost provinces for which they had mourned during forty-four years, and the other the advance of the Germans over the Belgian frontier.

The former was a matter of no great importance. It took two distinct lines, the one from the Belfort region into Alsace, and the other from Nancy as a centre into Lorraine. The Alsatian venture gained some ground which was never wholly lost, and was adorned by one small victory near Mülhausen before it was checked by the German defence. The Lorraine advance had also some initial success, but was finally thrown back on August 20 in a severe action in which the French, were defeated. Luneville, across the of the French frontier, was occupied by the Germans, but they made no headway, and their subsequent attempts upon Nancy were repulsed by the army of General Castelnau. General Pau, a fiery, one-armed septuagenarian, was the French leader in the Alsatian invasion, but it was soon realised by General Joffre that he and the bulk of his men would be more useful at the vital point upon the northern frontier, to which early in September they were transferred.

The main drama, however, quickly unfolded upon the Belgian frontier. Speed and secrecy were vital to the German plans. On July 31, before any declaration of war, and while the German representative at Brussels was perjuring his soul in his country’s service by representing that no infringement was possible, three German army corps, the seventh, ninth, and tenth, fully mobilised and highly equipped, were moving up from their quarters so as to be ready for a treacherous pounce upon their little neighbour whom they were pledged to defend. Von Emmich was in command. On the night of Saturday, August 1, the vanguard of the German armies, using motor traffic followed by trains, burst through the neutral Duchy of Luxemburg, and on August 3 they were over the Belgian line at Verviers. The long-meditated crime had been done, and, with loud appeals to God, Germany began her fatal campaign by deliberate perjury and arrogant disdain for treaties. God accepted the appeal, and swiftly showed how the weakest State with absolute right upon its side may bring to naught all the crafty plottings of the strong. For time was the essence of the situation. For this the innumerable motors, for this the light equipment and the lack of transport. It was on, on, at The top speed, that there be no hindrance in the path of of the the great hosts that soon would be closing up behind. But time was life and death for the French also, with their slower mobilisation, their backward preparation, and their expectations from Great Britain. Time was the precious gift which little Belgium gave to the Allies. She gave them days and days, and every day worth an army corps. The Germans had crossed the Meuse, had taken Visé, and then had rushed at Liège, even as the Japanese had rushed at Port Arthur. With all their military lore, they had not learned the lesson which was taught so clearly in 1904 — that a fortress is taken by skill and not by violence alone.

Leman, a great soldier, defended the forts built by Brialmont. Both defender and designer were justified of their work. On August 5 the seventh German Corps attempted to rush the gaps between the forts. These gaps were three miles wide, but were filled with entrenched infantry. The attack was boldly pressed home, but it completely failed. The German loss was considerable. Two other corps were called up, and again on August 7 the attack was renewed, but with no better result. The defenders fought as befitted the descendants of those Belgae whom Caesar pronounced to be the bravest of the Gauls, or of that Walloon Guard which had so great a mediaeval reputation. There were 25,000 in the town and 120,000 outside, but they were still outside at the end of the assault.

Liège, however, had one fatal weakness. Its garrison was far too small to cover the ground. With twelve forts three miles apart it is clear that there were intervals of, roughly, thirty-six miles to be covered, and that a garrison of 25,000 men, when you had deducted the gunners for the forts, hardly left the thinnest skirmish line to cover the ground. So long as the Germans attacked upon a narrow front they could be held. The instant that they spread out there were bound to be places where they could march almost unopposed into the town. This was what occurred. The town was penetrated, but the forts were intact. General Leman, meanwhile, seeing that the town itself was indefensible, had sent the garrison out before the place was surrounded. Many a Belgian soldier fought upon the Yser and helped to turn the tide of that crowning conflict who would have been a prisoner in Germany had it not been for the foresight and the decision of General Leman.

The Germans were in the town upon the 8th, but the forts still held out and the general advance was grievously impeded. Day followed day, and each beyond price to the Allies. Germany had secretly prepared certain monstrous engines of war — one more proof, if proof were needed, that the conflict had been prearranged and deliberately provoked. These were huge cannon of a dimension never before cast — 42 centimetres in bore. More mobile and hardly less effective were some smaller howitzers of 28-centimetre calibre said to have come from the Austrian foundries at Skoda. Brialmont, when he erected his concrete and iron cupolas, had not foreseen the Thor’s hammer which would be brought to crush them. One after another they were smashed like eggs. The heroic Leman was dug out from under the debris of the last fort and lived to tell of his miraculous escape. Liège was at last in the hands of the invaders. But already the second week of of the August was at an end — the British were crowding into France, the French line was thickening along the frontier — all was well with the Allies. Little David had left a grievous mark upon Goliath.

The German mobilisation was now complete, and the whole vast host, over a million strong, poured over the frontier. Never was seen such an army, so accurate and scientific in its general conception, so perfect in its detail. Nothing had been omitted from its equipment which the most thorough of nations, after years of careful preparation, could devise. In motor transport, artillery, machine guns, and all the technique of war they were unrivalled. The men themselves were of high heart and grand physique. By some twisted process of reasoning founded upon false information they had been persuaded that this most aggressive and unnecessary of wars was in some way a war of self-defence, for it was put to them that unless they attacked their neighbours now, their neighbours would certainly some day or other attack them. Hence, they were filled with patriotic ardour and a real conviction that they were protecting their beloved Fatherland. One could not but admire their self-sacrificing devotion, though in the dry light of truth and reason they stood forth as the tools of tyranny, the champions of barbarous political reaction and the bullies of Europe. It was an ominous fact that the troops were provided in advance with incendiary discs for the firing of dwellings, which shows that the orgy of destruction and cruelty which disgraced the name of the German Army in Belgium and in the north of France was prearranged by some central force, whose responsibility in this matter can only be described as terrific. They brought the world of Christ back to the days of Odin, and changed a civilised campaign to an inroad of pagan Danes. This wicked central force could only be the Chief Staff of the Army, and in the last instance the Emperor himself. Had Napoleon conducted his campaigns with as little scruple as William II., it can safely be said that Europe as we know it would hardly exist to-day, and the monuments of antiquity and learning would have been wiped from the face of the globe. It is an evil precedent to be expunged from the records for ever — all the more evil because it was practised by a strong nation on a weak one and on a defenceless people by one which had pledged themselves to defend them. That it was in no wise caused by any actions upon the part of the Belgians is clearly proved by the fact that similar atrocities were committed by the German Army the moment they crossed the frontiers both of France and of Poland.

The Allies had more than they expected from Liège. They had less from Namur. The grey-green tide of German invasion had swept the Belgian resistance before it, had flooded into Brussels, and had been dammed for only a very few days by the great frontier fortress, though it was counted as stronger than Liège. The fact was that the Germans had now learned their lesson. Never again would they imagine that the *Furor Teutonicus* alone could carry a walled city. The fatal guns were brought up again and the forts were crushed with mechanical precision, while the defenders between the forts, after enduring for ten hours a severe shelling, withdrew from their trenches. On August 22 the fortress surrendered, some of General Michel’s garrison being taken, but a considerable proportion effecting its retreat with the French Army which had come up to support the town. By the third week of August the remains of the Belgian forces had taken refuge in Antwerp, and the Germans, having made a wide sweep with their right wing through Brussels, were descending in a two-hundred-mile line upon Northern France.

The French plans had in truth been somewhat disarranged by the Belgian resistance, for the chivalrous spirit of the nation would not permit that their gallant friends be unsupported. Fresh dispositions had been made, but the sudden fall of Namur brought them to naught. Before that untoward event the French had won a small but indubitable victory at Dinant, and had advanced their line from Namur on the right to Charleroi on the left. With the fall of Namur their long wall had lost its corner bastion, and they were at once vigorously attacked by all the German armies, who forced the

Sambre on August 22, carried Charleroi, and pushed the French back with considerable loss of guns and prisoners along the whole line. There was defeat, but there was nothing in the nature of a rout or of an envelopment. The line fell back fighting tooth and nail, but none the less Northern France was thrown open to the invaders. In this general movement the British forces were involved, and we now turn to a more particular and detailed account of what befell them during these most momentous days.

III. THE BATTLE OF MONS

The landing of the British in France — The British leaders — The advance to Mons — The defence of the bridges of Nimy — The holding of the canal — The fateful telegram — The rearguard actions of Frameries, Wasmes, and Dour — The charge of the Lancers — The fate of the Cheshires — The 7th Brigade at Solesmes — The Guards in action — The Germans' rude awakening — The Connaughts at Pont-sur-Sambre

THE bulk of the British Expeditionary Force passed over to France under cover of darkness on the nights of August 12 and 13, 1914. The movement, which included four infantry divisions and a cavalry division, necessitated the transportation of approximately 90,000 men, 15,000 horses, and 400 guns, It is doubtful if so large a host has ever been moved by water in so short a time in all the annals of military history. There was drama in the secrecy and celerity of the affair. Two canvas walls converging into a funnel screened the approaches to Southampton Dock. All beyond was darkness and mystery. Down this fatal funnel passed the flower of the youth of Britain, and their folk saw them no more. They had embarked upon the great adventure of the German War. The crowds in the streets saw the last serried files vanish into the darkness of the docks, heard the measured tramp upon the stone quays dying farther away in the silence of the night, until at last all was still and the great steamers were pushing out into the darkness.

No finer force for technical efficiency, and no body of men more hot-hearted in their keen desire to serve their country, have ever left the shores of Britain. It is a conservative estimate to say that within four months a half of their number were either dead or in the hospitals. They were destined for great glory, and for that great loss which is the measure of their glory.

Belated pedestrians upon the beach of the southern towns have recorded their impression of that amazing spectacle. In the clear summer night the wall of transports seemed to stretch from horizon to horizon. Guardian warships flanked the mighty column, while swift shadows shooting across the surface of the sea showed where the torpedo-boats and scouts were nosing and ferreting for any possible enemy. But far away, hundreds of miles to the north, lay the real protection of the flotilla, where the smooth waters of the Heligoland Bight were broken by the sudden rise and dip of the blockading periscopes.

It is well to state, once for all, the composition of this force, so that in the succeeding pages, when a brigade or division is under discussion, the diligent reader may ascertain its composition. This, then, is the First Army which set forth to France. Others will be chronicled as they appeared upon the scene of action. It may be remarked that the formation of units was greatly altered with the progress of the campaign, so that it has been possible without indiscretion to raise the veil of secrecy which was once so essential.

THE FIRST ARMY CORPS — GENERAL HAIG.

DIVISION I — General Lomax.

1st Infantry Brigade — General Maxse.

1st Coldstream Guards.

1st Scots Guards.

1st Black Watch.

2nd Munster Fusiliers.

2nd Infantry Brigade — General Bulfin.

2nd Sussex.

1st N. Lancs.

1st Northampton.

2nd K.R. Rifles.

3rd Infantry Brigade — General Landon.

1st West Surrey (Queen’s).

1st S. Wales Borderers.

1st Gloucester.

2nd Welsh.

Artillery — Colonel Findlay.

25th Brig. R.F.A. 113, 114, 115.

26th Brig. R.F.A. 116, 117, 118.

39th Brig. R.F.A. 46, 51, 54.

43rd (How.) Brig. R.F.A. 30, 40, 57.

Engineers — Colonel Schreiber.

23 F. Co.

26 F. Co.

1 Signal Co.

DIVISION II — General Munro.

4th Infantry Brigade — General Scott-Kerr.

2nd Grenadier Guards.

2nd Coldstream Guards.

3rd Coldstream Guards.

1st Irish.

5th Infantry Brigade — General Haking

2nd Worcester.

2nd Ox. and Bucks. L.I.

2nd Highland L.I.

2nd Connaught Rangers

6th Infantry Brigade — General Davies.

1st Liverpool (King’s).

2nd S. Stafford.

1st Berks.

1st K.R. Rifles.

Artillery — General Perceval.

34th Brig. R.F.A. 22, 50,70.

36th Brig. R.F.A. 15, 48, 71.

41st Brig. R.F.A. 9, 16, 17.

How. Brig. R.F.A. 47, 56, 60.

35th Batt. R.G.A.

R.E. 5, 11, Field Cos.

THE SECOND ARMY CORPS — GENERAL SMITH-DORRIEN.

DIVISION III — General Hamilton

7th Infantry Brigade — General McCracken.

3rd Worcester.

2nd S. Lancs.

1st Wilts.

2nd Irish Rifles.

8th Infantry Brigade — General B. Doran.

2nd Royal Scots.

2nd Royal Irish.

4th Middlesex.

1st Gordon Highlanders.

9th Infantry Brigade — General Shaw.

1st North. Fusiliers.

4th Royal Fusiliers.

1st Lincoln.

1st Scots Fusiliers.

Artillery — General Wing.

23rd Brigade 107, 108,109.

30th Brigade (How.) 128, 129, 130.

40th Brigade 6, 23, 49.

42nd Brigade 29, 41, 45.

48th Batt. R.G.A.

R.E. — Colonel Wilson.

56, 57 F. Corps.

3 Signal Co.

DIVISION V — General Ferguson.

13th Infantry Brigade — General Cuthbert.

2nd K.O. Scot. Bord.

2nd West Riding.

1st West Kent.

2nd Yorks. Light Infantry.

l4th Infantry Brigade — General Bolt.

2nd Suffolk.

1st East Surrey.

1st D. of Cornwall’s L.I.

2nd Manchester.

15th Infantry Brigade — General Gleichen.

1st Norfolk.

1st Bedford.

1st Cheshire.

1st Dorset.

Artillery — General Headlam.

15th Brig. R.F.A. 11, 52, 80.

27th Brig. R.F.A. 119,120,121.

28th Brig. R.F.A. 122,123,124.

8 How. Brig. 37, 61, 65.

Heavy G.A. 108 Battery.

R.E. — Colonel Tulloch.

17th and 59th Field Cos.

5 Signal Co.

The Cavalry consisted of four Brigades forming the first cavalry division, and of one extra Brigade.

They were made up thus:

1st Cavalry Brigade (Briggs). — 2nd and 5th Dragoon Guards; 11th Hussars.

2nd Cavalry Brigade (De Lisle). — 4th Dragoon Guards; 9th Lancers; 18th Hussars.

3rd Cavalry Brigade (Gough). — 4th. Hussars; 5th Lancers; 16th Lancers.

4th Cavalry Brigade (Bingham). — 3rd Hussars; 6th Dragoon Guards; Comp. Guards Regt.

5th Cavalry Brigade (Chetwode). — Scots Greys; 12th Lancers; 20th Hussars.

D, E, I, J, and L batteries of Horse Artillery were attached to these Brigades.

Such, was the Army which first set forth to measure itself against the soldiers of Germany. Prussian bravery, capacity, and organising power had a high reputation among us, and yet we awaited the result with every confidence, if the odds of numbers were not overwhelming. It was generally known that during the period since the last war the training of the troops had greatly progressed, and many of the men, with nearly all the senior officers, had had experience in the arduous campaign of South Africa. They could also claim those advantages which volunteer troops may hope to have over conscripts. At the same time there was no tendency to underrate the earnest patriotism of our opponents, and we were well aware that even the numerous Socialists who filled their ranks were persuaded, incredible as it may seem, that the Fatherland was really attacked, and were whole-hearted in its defence.

The crossing was safely effected. It has always been the traditional privilege of the British public to grumble at their public servants and to speak of “muddling through” to victory. No doubt the criticism has often been deserved. But on this occasion the supervising General in command, the British War Office, and the Naval Transport Department all rose to a supreme degree of excellence in their arrangements. So too did the Railway Companies concerned. The details were meticulously correct. Without the loss of man, horse, or gun, the soldiers who had seen the sun set in Hampshire saw it rise in Picardy or in Normandy. Boulogne and Havre were the chief ports of disembarkation, but many, including the cavalry, went up the Seine and came ashore at Rouen. The soldiers everywhere received a rapturous welcome from the populace, which they returned by a cheerful sobriety of behaviour. The admirable precepts as to wine and women set forth in Lord Kitchener’s parting orders to the Army seem to have been most scrupulously observed. It is no slight upon the gallantry of France — the very home of gallantry — if it be said that she profited greatly at this strained, over-anxious time by the arrival of these boisterous over-sea Allies. The tradition of British solemnity has been for ever killed by these jovial invaders. It is probable that the beautiful tune, and even the paltry words of “Tipperary,” will pass into history as the marching song, and often the death-dirge, of that gallant host. The dusty, poplar-lined roads resounded with their choruses, and the quiet Picardy villages re-echoed their thunderous and superfluous assurances as to the state of their hearts. All France broke into a smile at the sight of them, and it was at a moment when a smile meant much to France.

Whilst the various brigades were with some deliberation preparing for an advance up-country, there arrived at the Gare du Nord in Paris a single traveller who may be said to have been the most welcome British visitor who ever set foot in the city. He was a short, thick man, tanned by an outdoor life, a solid, impassive personality with a strong, good-humoured face, the forehead of a thinker above it, and the jaw of an obstinate fighter below. Overhung brows shaded a pair of keen grey eyes, while the strong, set mouth was partly concealed by a grizzled moustache. Such was John French, leader of cavalry in Africa and now Field-Marshal commanding the Expeditionary Forces of Britain. His defence of Colesberg at a critical period when he bluffed the superior Boer forces, his dashing relief of Kimberley, and especially the gallant way in which he had thrown his exhausted cavalry across the path of Cronje’s army in order to hold it while Roberts pinned it down at Paardeberg, were all exploits which were fresh in the public mind, and gave the soldiers confidence in their leader.

French might well appreciate the qualities of his immediate subordinates. Both of his army corps and his cavalry division were in good hands. Haig, like his leader, was a cavalry man by education, though now entrusted with the command of the First Army Corps, and destined for an ever-increasing European reputation. Fifty-four years of age, he still preserved all his natural energies, whilst he had behind him long years of varied military experience, including both the Soudanese and the South African campaigns, in both of which he had gained high distinction. He had the advantage of thoroughly understanding the mind of his commander, as he had worked under him as Chief of the Staff in his remarkable operations round Colesberg in those gloomy days which opened the Boer War.

The Second Army Corps sustained a severe loss before ever it reached the field of action, for its commander, General Grierson, died suddenly of heart failure in the train between Havre and Rouen upon August 18. Grierson had been for many years Military Attaché in Berlin, and one can well imagine how often he had longed to measure British soldiers against the self-sufficient critics around him. At the very last moment the ambition of his lifetime was denied him. His place, however, was worthily filled by General Smith-Dorrien, another South African veteran whose brigade in that difficult campaign had been recognised as one of the very best. Smith-Dorrien was a typical Imperial soldier in the world-wide character of his service, for he had followed the flag, and occasionally preceded it, in Zululand, Egypt, the Soudan, Chitral, and the Tirah before the campaign against the Boers. A sportsman as well as a soldier, he had very particularly won the affections of the Aldershot division by his system of trusting to their honour rather than to compulsion in matters of discipline. It was seldom indeed that his confidence was abused.

Haig and Smith-Dorrien were the two generals upon whom the immediate operations were to devolve, for the Third Army Corps was late, through no fault of its own, in coming into line. There remained the Cavalry Division commanded by General Allenby, who was a column leader in that great class for mounted tactics held in South Africa a dozen years before. It is remarkable that of the four leaders in the initial operations of the German War — French, Smith-Dorrien, Haig, and Allenby — three belonged to the cavalry, an arm which has usually been regarded as active and ornamental rather than intellectual. Pulteney, the commander of the Third Army Corps, was a product of the Guards, a veteran of much service and a well-known heavy-game shot. Thus, neither of the more learned corps were represented among the higher commanders upon the actual field of battle, but brooding over the whole operations was the steadfast, untiring brain of Joffre, whilst across the water the silent Kitchener, remorseless as Destiny, moved the forces of the Empire to the front. The last word in each case lay with the sappers.

The general plan of campaign was naturally in the hands of General Joffre, since he was in command of far the greater portion of the Allied Force. It has been admitted in France that the original dispositions might be open to criticism, since a number of the French troops had engaged themselves in Alsace and Lorraine, to the weakening of the line of battle in the north, where the fate of Paris was to be decided. It is small profit to a nation to injure its rival ever so grievously in the toe when it is itself in imminent danger of being stabbed to the heart. A further change in plan had been caused by the intense sympathy felt both by the French and the British for the gallant Belgians, who had done so much and gained so many valuable days for the Allies. It was felt that it would be unchivalrous not to advance and do what was possible to relieve the intolerable pressure which was crushing them. It was resolved, therefore, to abandon the plan which had been formed, by which the Germans should be led as far as possible from their base, and to attack them at once. For this purpose the French Army changed its whole dispositions, which had been formed on the idea of an attack from the east, and advanced over the Belgian frontier, getting into touch with the enemy at Namur and Charleroi, so as to secure the passages of the Sambre. It was in fulfilling its part as the left of the Allied line that on August 18 and 19 the British troops began to move northwards into Belgium. The First Army Corps advanced through Le Nouvion, St. Remy, and Maubeuge to Kouveroy, which is a village upon the Mons-Chimay road. There it linked on to the right of the Second Corps, which had moved up to the line of the Condé-Mons Canal. On the morning of Sunday, August 23, all these troops were in position. The 5th Brigade of Cavalry (Chetwode’s) lay out upon the right front at Binche, but the remainder of the cavalry was brought to a point about five miles behind the centre of the line, so as to be able to reinforce either flank. The first blood of the land campaign had been drawn upon August 22 outside Soignies, when a reconnoitring squadron of the 4th Dragoon Guards under Captain Hornby charged and overthrew a body of the 4th German Cuirassiers, bringing back some prisoners. The 20th Hussars had enjoyed a similar experience. It was a small but happy omen.

The forces which now awaited the German attack numbered about 86,000 men, who may be roughly divided into 76,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry, and 312 guns. The general alignment was as follows:

The First Army Corps held the space between Mons and Binche, which was soon contracted to Bray as the eastward limit. Close to Mons, where the attack was expected to break, since the town is a point of considerable strategic importance, there was a thickening of the line of defence. From that point the Third Division and the Fifth, in the order named, carried on the British formation down the length of the Mons-Condé Canal. The front of the Army covered nearly twenty miles, an excessive strain upon so small a force in the presence of a compact enemy. If one looks at the general dispositions, it becomes clear that Sir John French was preparing for an attack upon his right flank. From all his information the enemy was to the north and to the east of him, so that if they set about turning his position it must be from the Charleroi direction. Hence, his right wing was laid back at an angle to the rest of his line, and the only cavalry which he kept in advance was thrown out to Binche in front of this flank. The rest of the cavalry was on the day of battle drawn in behind the centre of the Army, but as danger began to develop upon the left flank it was sent across in that direction, so that on the morning of the 24th it was at Thulin, at the westward end of the line.

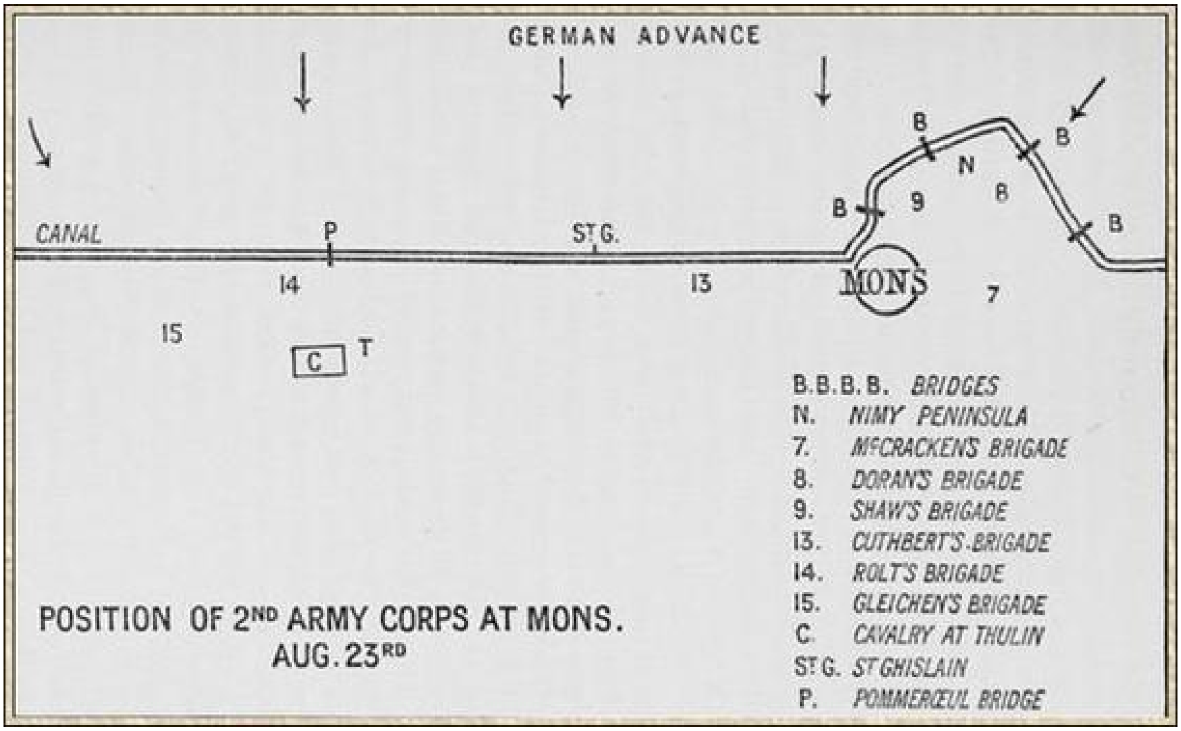
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N. NIMY PENINSULA
7. McCRACKEN'S BRIGADE
8. DORAN'S BRIGADE
9. SHAW'S BRIGADE
13. CUTHBERT'S BRIGADE
14. ROLT'S BRIGADE
15. GLEICHEN'S BRIGADE
C. CAVALRY AT THULIN
ST G. ST GHISLAIN
P. POMMERŒUL BRIDGE
POSITION OF 2ND ARMY CORPS AT MONS.
AUG. 23RD

Position of 2nd Army Corps at Mons, August 23, 1914

The line of the canal was a most tempting position to defend from Condé to Mons, for it ran as straight as a Roman road across the path of an invader. But it was very different at Mons itself. Here it formed a most awkward loop. A glance at the diagram will show this formation. It was impossible to leave it undefended, and yet troops who held it were evidently subjected to a flanking artillery Are from each side. The canal here was also crossed by at least three substantial road bridges and one railway bridge. This section of the defence was under the immediate direction of General Smith-Dorrien, who at once took steps to prepare a second line of defence, thrown back to the right rear of the town, so that if the canal were forced the British array would remain unbroken. The immediate care of this weak point in the position was committed to General Beauchamp Doran's 8th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Royal Scots, 2nd Royal Irish, 4th Middlesex, and 1st Gordon Highlanders. On their left, occupying the village of Nimy and the western side of the peninsula, as well as the immediate front of Mons itself, was the 9th Brigade (Shaw's), containing the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, together with the 1st Lincolns. To the left of this brigade, occupying the eastern end of the Mons-Condé line of canal, was Cuthbert's 13th Brigade, containing the 2nd Scottish Borderers, 2nd West Ridings, 1st West Kents, and 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. It was on these three brigades, and especially on the 8th and 9th, that the impact of the German army was destined to fall. Beyond them, scattered somewhat thinly along the line of the Mons-Condé Canal from the railway bridge west of St. Ghislain, were the two remaining brigades of the Fifth Division, the 14th (Rolt's) and the 15th (Gleichen's), the latter being in divisional reserve. Still farther to the west the head of the newly arrived 19th Brigade just touched the canal, and was itself in touch with French cavalry at Condé. Sundry units of artillery and field hospitals had not yet come up, but otherwise the two corps were complete.

Having reached their ground, the troops, with no realisation of immediate danger, proceeded to make shallow trenches. Their bands had not been brought to the front, but the universal singing from one end of the line to the other showed that the men were in excellent spirits. Cheering news had come in from the cavalry, detachments of which, as already stated, had ridden out as far as Soignies, meeting advance patrols of the enemy and coming back with prisoners and trophies. The guns were drawn up in concealed positions within half a mile of the line of battle. All was now ready, and officers could be seen on every elevation peering northwards through their glasses for the first sign of the enemy. It was a broken country, with large patches of woodland and green spaces between. There were numerous slag-heaps from old mines, with here and there a factory and here and there a private dwelling, but the sappers had endeavoured in the short time to clear a field of fire for the infantry. In order to get this field of fire in so closely built a neighbourhood, several of the regiments, such as the West Kents of the 13th and the Cornwalls of the 14th Brigades, had to take their positions across the canal with bridges in their rear. Thrilling with anticipation, the men waited for their own first entrance upon the stupendous drama. They were already weary and footsore, for they had all done at least two days of forced marching, and the burden of the pack, the rifle, and the hundred and fifty rounds per man was no light one. They lay snugly in their trenches under the warm August sun and waited. It was a Sunday, and more than one have recorded in their letters how in that hour of tension their thoughts turned to the old home church and the mellow call of the village bells.

A hovering aeroplane had just slid down with the news that the roads from the north were alive with the advancing Germans, but the estimate of the aviator placed them at two corps and a division of cavalry. This coincided roughly with the accounts brought in by the scouts and, what was more important, with the forecast of General Joffre. Secure in the belief that he was flanked upon one side by the 5th French Army, and on the other by a screen of French cavalry, whilst his front was approached by a force not appreciably larger than his own. General French had no cause for uneasiness. Had his airmen taken a wider sweep to the north and west,* or had the French commander among his many pressing preoccupations been able to give an earlier warning to his British colleague, the trenches would, no doubt, have been abandoned before a grey coat had appeared, and the whole Army brought swiftly to a position of strategical safety. Even now, as they waited expectantly for the enemy, a vast steel trap was closing up for their destruction.

[*An American correspondent, Mr. Harding Davis, actually saw a shattered British aeroplane upon the ground in this region. Its destruction may have been of great strategic importance. This aviator was probably the first British soldier to fall in the Continental War.]

Let us take a glance at what was going on over that northern horizon. The American Powell had seen something of the mighty right swing which was to end the combat. Invited to a conference with a German general who was pursuing the national policy of soothing the United States until her own turn should come round, Mr. Powell left Brussels and chanced to meet Von Kluck’s legions upon their western and southerly trek. He describes with great force the effect upon his mind of those endless grey columns, all flowing in the same direction, double files of infantry on either side of the road, and endless guns, motor-cars, cavalry, and transport between. The men, as he describes them, were all in the prime of life, and equipped with everything which years of forethought could devise. He was dazed and awed by the tremendous procession, its majesty and its self-evident efficiency. It is no wonder, for he was looking at the chosen legions of the most wonderful army that the world had ever seen — an army which represented the last possible word on the material and mechanical side of war. High in the van a Taube aeroplane, like an embodiment of that black eagle which is the fitting emblem of a warlike and rapacious race, pointed the path for the German hordes.

A day or two before, two American correspondents, Mr. Irvin Cobb and Mr. Harding Davis, had seen the same great army as it streamed westwards through Louvain and Brussels. They graphically describe how for three consecutive days and the greater part of three nights they poured past, giving the impression of unconquerable energy and efficiency, young, enthusiastic, wonderfully equipped. “Either we shall go forward or we die. We do not expect to fall back ever. If the generals would let them, the men would run to Paris instead of walking there.” So spoke one of the leaders of that huge invading host, the main part of which was now heading straight for the British line. A second part, unseen and unsuspected, were working round by Tournai to the west, hurrying hard to strike in upon the British flank and rear. The German is a great marcher as well as a great fighter, and the average rate of progress was little less than thirty miles a day.

It was after ten o’clock when scouting cavalry were observed falling back. Then the distant sound of a gun was heard, and a few seconds later a shell burst some hundreds of yards behind the British lines. The British guns one by one roared into action. A cloud of smoke rose along the line of the woods in front from the bursting shrapnel, but nothing could be seen of the German gunners. The defending guns were also well concealed. Here and there, from observation points upon buildings and slag-heaps, the controllers of the batteries were able to indicate targets and register hits unseen by the gunners themselves. The fire grew warmer and warmer as fresh batteries dashed up and unlimbered on either side. The noise was horrible, but no enemy had been seen by the infantry, and little damage done.

But now an ill-omened bird flew over the British lines. Far aloft across the deep blue sky skimmed the dark Taube, curved, turned, and sailed northwards again. It had marked the shells bursting beyond the trenches. In an instant, by some devilish cantrip of signal or wireless, it had set the range right. A rain of shells roared and crashed along the lines of the shallow trenches. The injuries were not yet numerous, but they were inexpressibly ghastly. Men who had hardly seen worse than a cut finger in their lives gazed with horror at the gross mutilations around them. “One dared not look sideways,” said one of them. Stretcher-bearers bent and heaved while wet, limp forms were hoisted upwards by their comrades. Officers gave short, sharp words of encouragement or advice. The minutes seemed very long, and still the shells came raining down. The men shoved the five-fold clips down into their magazines and waited with weary patience. A senior officer peering over the end of a trench leaned tensely forward and rested his glasses upon the grassy edge. “They’re coming!” he whispered to his neighbour. It ran from lip to lip along the line of crouching men. Heads were poked up here and there above the line of broken earth. Soon, in spite of the crashing shells overhead, there was a fringe of peering faces. And there at last in front of them was the German enemy. After all the centuries, Briton and Teuton faced each other at last for the test of battle.

A stylist among letter-writers has described that oncoming swarm as grey clouds drifting over green fields. They had deployed under cover whilst the batteries were preparing their path, and now over an extended front to the north-west of Mons they were breaking out from the woods and coming rapidly onwards. The men fidgeted with their triggers, but no order came to fire. The officers were gazing with professional interest and surprise at the German formations. Were these the tactics of the army which had claimed to be the most scientific in Europe? British observers had seen it in peace-time and had conjectured that it was a screen for some elaborate tactics held up for the day of battle. Yet here they were, advancing in what in old Soudan days used to be described as the twenty-acre formation, against the best riflemen in Europe. It was not even a shoulder to shoulder column, but a mere crowd, shredding out in the front and dense to the rear. There was nothing of the swiftly weaving lines, the rushes of alternate companies, the twinkle and flicker of a modern attack. It was mediaeval, and yet it was impressive also in its immediate display of numbers and the ponderous insistence of its onward flow. It was not many weeks before the stern lesson of war taught very different formations to those of the grand Kaiser manoeuvres.

The men, still fingering their triggers, gazed expectantly at their officers, who measured intently the distance of the approaching swarms. The Germans had already begun to fire in a desultory fashion. Shrapnel was bursting thickly along the head of their columns but they were coming steadily onwards. Suddenly a rolling wave of independent firing broke out from the British position. At some portions of the line the enemy were at eight hundred, at others at one thousand yards. The men, happy in having something definite to do, snuggled down earnestly to their work and fired swiftly but deliberately into the approaching mass. Rifles, machine-guns, and field-pieces were all roaring together, while the incessant crash of the shells overhead added to the infernal uproar. Men lost all sense of time as they thrust clip after clip into their rifles. The German swarms staggered on bravely under that leaden sleet. Then they halted, vacillated, and finally thinned, shredded out, and drifted backwards like a grey fog torn by a gale. The woods absorbed them once again, whilst the rain of shells upon the British trenches became thicker and more deadly.

There was a lull in the infantry attack, and the British, peering from their shelters, surveyed with a grim satisfaction the patches and smudges of grey which showed the effect of their fire. But the rest was not a long one. With fine courage the German battalions re-formed under the shelter of the trees, while fresh troops from the rear pushed forward to stiffen the shaken lines. “Hold your fire!” was the order that ran down the ranks. With the confidence bred of experience, the men waited and still waited, till the very features of the Germans could be distinguished. Then once more the deadly fire rippled down the line, the masses shredded and dissolved, and the fugitives hurried to the woods. Then came the pause under shell fire, and then once again the emergence of the infantry, the attack, the check, and the recoil. Such were the general characteristics of the action at Mons over a large portion of the British line — that portion which extended along the actual course of the canal.

It is not to be supposed, however, that there was a monotony of attack and defence over the whole of the British position. A large part of the force, including the whole of the First Army Corps, was threatened rather than seriously engaged, while the opposite end of the line was also out of the main track of the storm. It beat most dangerously, as had been foreseen, upon the troops to the immediate west and north of Mons, and especially upon those which defended the impossible peninsula formed by the loop of the canal.

There is a road which runs from Mons due north through the village of Nimy to Jurbise. The defences to the west of this road were in the hands of the 9th Brigade. The 4th Royal Fusiliers, with the Scots Fusiliers, were the particular battalions which held the trenches skirting this part of the peninsula, while half the Northumberland Fusiliers were on the straight canal to the westward. To the east of Nimy are three road-bridges — those of Nimy itself, Lock No.5, and Aubourg Station. All these three bridges were defended by the 4th Middlesex, who had made shallow trenches which commanded them. The Gordons were on their immediate right. The field of fire was much interfered with by the mines and buildings which faced them, so that at this point the Germans could get up unobserved to the very front. It has also been already explained that the German artillery could enfilade the peninsula from each side, making the defence most difficult. A rush of German troops came between eleven and twelve o’clock across the Aubourg Station Bridge. It was so screened up to the moment of the advance that neither the rifles nor the machine-guns of the Middlesex could stop it. It is an undoubted fact that this rush was preceded by a great crowd of women and children, through which the leading files of the Germans could hardly be seen. At the same time, or very shortly afterwards, the other two bridges were forced in a similar manner, but the Germans in all three cases as they reached the farther side were unable to make any rapid headway against the British fire, though they made the position untenable for the troops in trenches between the bridges. The whole of the 8th Brigade, supported by the 2nd Irish Rifles from McCracken’s 7th Brigade, which had been held in reserve at Ciply, were now fully engaged, covering the retirement of the Middlesex and Gordons. At some points the firing between the two lines of infantry was across the breadth of a road. Two batteries of the 40th Artillery Brigade, which were facing the German attack at this point, were badly mauled, one of them, the 23rd R.F.A., losing its gun teams. Major Ingham succeeded in reconstituting his equipment and getting his guns away.

It is well to accentuate the fact that though this was the point of the most severe pressure there was never any disorderly retirement, and strong reserves were available had they been needed. The 8th Brigade, at the time of the general strategical withdrawal of the Army, made its arrangements in a methodical fashion, and General Doran kept his hold until after nightfall upon Bois la Haut, which was an elevation to the east of Mons from which the German artillery might have harassed the British retreat, since it commanded all the country to the south. The losses of the brigade had, however, been considerable, amounting to not less than three hundred and fifty in the case of the 4th Middlesex, many being killed or wounded in the defence, and some cut off in the trenches between the various bridge-heads. Majors Davey and Abell of the Middlesex were respectively wounded and killed, with thirteen other officers.

It has as already been said that the line of the 4th Royal Fusiliers extended along the western perimeter up to Nimy Road Bridge, where Colonel MacMahon’s section ended and that of Colonel Hull, of the Middlesex Regiment, began. To the west of this point was the Nimy Railway Bridge, defended also by Captain Ashburner’s company of the 4th Royal Fusiliers. This was assaulted early, and was held for nearly five hours against an attack of several German battalions. The British artillery was unable to help much in the defence, as the town of Mons behind offered no positions for guns, but the 107th Battery in the immediate rear did good work. The defence was continued until the Germans who had already crossed to the east were advancing on the flank. Lieutenant Maurice Dease, five times wounded before he was killed, worked his machine-gun to the end, and every man of his detachment was hit. Lieutenant Dease and Private Godley both received the Victoria Cross. The occupants of one trench, including Lieutenant Smith, who was wounded, were cut off by the rush. Captain Carey commanded the covering company and the retirement was conducted in good order, though Captain Bowden Smith, Lieutenant Mead, and a number of men fell in the movement. Altogether, the Royal Fusiliers lost five officers and about two hundred men in the defence of the bridge, Lieutenant Tower having seven survivors in his platoon of sixty. Captain Byng’s company at the Glin Bridge farther east had severe losses and was driven in in the same way. As the infantry retired a small party of engineers under Captain Theodore Wright endeavoured to destroy this and other bridges, Lieutenant Day was twice wounded in his attempt upon the main Nimy Bridge. Corporal Jarvis received the V.C. for his exertions in preparing the Jemappes bridge for destruction to the west of Nimy. Captain Wright, with Sergeant Smith, made an heroic endeavour under terrific fire to detonate the charge, but was wounded and fell into the canal. Lieutenant Holt, a brave young officer of reserve engineers, also lost his life in these operations.

Having held on as long as was possible, the front line of the 9th Brigade fell back upon the prepared position on high ground between Mons and Frameries, where the 107th R.F.A. was entrenched. The 4th Royal Fusiliers passed through Mons and reached the new line in good order and without further loss. The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, however, falling back to the same point on a different route through Flénu, came under heavy machine-gun fire from a high soil heap, losing Captain Rose and a hundred men.

The falling back of the 8th and 9th Brigades from the Nimy Peninsula had an immediate effect upon Cuthbert’s 13th Brigade, which was on their left holding the line up to the railway bridge just east of St. Ghislain. Of this brigade two battalions, the 1st West Kent on the right and the 2nd Scottish Borderers on the left, were in the trenches while the 2nd West Riding and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry were in support, having their centre at Boussu. The day began by some losses to the West Kent Regiment, who were probably, apart from cavalry patrols, the first troops to suffer in the great war. A company of the regiment under Captain Lister was sent across the canal early as a support to some advancing cavalry, and was driven in about eleven o’clock with a loss of two officers and about a hundred men.

From this time onwards the German attacks were easily held, though the German guns were within twelve hundred yards. The situation was changed when it was learned later in the day that the Germans were across to the right and had got as far as Flénu on the flank of the brigade. In view of this advance. General Smith-Dorrien, having no immediate supports, dashed off on a motor to Sir Douglas Haig’s headquarters some four miles distant, and got his permission to use Haking’s 5th Brigade, which pushed up in time to re-establish the line.

It has been shown that the order of the regiments closely engaged in the front line was, counting from the east, the 1st Gordons, the 4th Middlesex, the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Scots Fusiliers, half the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 1st West Kents, and the 2nd Scottish Borderers, the other regiments of these brigades being in reserve. The last-named battalion, being opposite a bridge, was heavily engaged all day, losing many men, but holding its position intact against repeated advances. On the left hand or western side of the Scottish Borderers, continuing the line along the canal, one would come upon the front of the 14th Brigade (Rolt’s), which was formed by the 1st Surrey on the right and the 1st Duke of Cornwall’s on the left. The German attack upon this portion of the line began about 1 P.M., and by 3 P.M. had become so warm that the reserve companies were drawn into the firing line. Thanks to their good work, both with rifles and with machine-guns, the regiments held their own until about six o’clock in the evening, when the retirement of the troops on their right enabled the Germans to enfilade the right section of the East Surreys at close range. They were ordered to retire, but lost touch with the left section, which remained to the north of the canal where their trench was situated. Captain Benson of this section had been killed and Captain Campbell severely wounded, but the party of one hundred and ten men under Lieutenant Morritt held on most gallantly and made a very fine defence. Being finally surrounded, they endeavoured to cut their way out with cold steel, Lieutenant Ward being killed and Morritt four times wounded in the attempt. Many of the men were killed and wounded, and the survivors were taken. Altogether the loss of the regiment was five officers and one hundred and thirty-four men.

On the left of the East Surreys, as already stated, lay the 1st Duke of Cornwall's of the same brigade. About four o'clock in the afternoon the presence of the German outflanking corps first made itself felt. At that hour the Cornwalls were aware of an advance upon their left as well as their front. The Cornwalls drew in across the canal in consequence, and the Germans did not follow them over that evening.

The chief point defended by the 14th Brigade upon this day had been the bridge and main road which crosses the canal between Pommeroeul and Thulin, some eight or nine miles west of Mons. In the evening, when the final order for retreat was given, this bridge was blown up, and the brigade fell back after nightfall as far as Dour, where it slept.

By the late afternoon the general position was grave, but not critical. The enemy had lost very heavily, while the men in the trenches were, in comparison, unscathed. Here and there, as we have seen, the Germans had obtained a lodgment in the British position, especially at the salient which had always appeared to be impossible to hold, but, on the other hand, the greater part of the Army, including the whole First Corps, had not yet been seriously engaged, and there were reserve troops in the immediate rear of the fighting line who could be trusted to make good any gap in the ranks before them. The German artillery fire was heavy and well-directed, but the British batteries had held their own. Such was the position when, about 5 P.M., a telegram from General Joffre was put into Sir John French's hand, which must have brought a pang to his heart. From it he learned that all his work had been in vain, and that far from contending for victory, he would be fortunate if he saved himself from utter defeat.

There were two pieces of information in this fatal message, and each was disastrous. The first announced that instead of the two German corps whom he had reason to think were in front of him, there were four — the Third, Fourth, Seventh, and Fourth Reserve Corps — forming, with the second and fourth cavalry divisions, a force of nearly 200,000 men, while the Second Corps were bringing another 40,000 round his left flank from the direction of Tournai. The second item was even more serious. Instead of being buttressed up with French troops on either side of him, he learned that the Germans had burst the line of the Sambre, and that the French armies on his right were already in full retreat, while nothing substantial lay upon his left. It was a most perilous position. The British force lay exposed and unsupported amid converging foes who far outnumbered it in men and guns. What was the profit of one day of successful defence if the morrow would dawn upon a British Sedan? There was only one course of action, and Sir John decided upon it in the instant, bitter as the decision must have been. The Army must be extricated from the battle and fall back until it resumed touch with its Allies.

But it is no easy matter to disengage so large an army which is actually in action and hard-pressed by a numerous and enterprising enemy. The front was extensive and the lines of retreat were limited. That the operation was carried out in an orderly fashion is a testimony to the skill of the General, the talents of the commanders, and the discipline of the units. If it had been done at once and simultaneously it would certainly have been the signal for a vigorous German advance and a possible disaster. The positions were therefore held, though no efforts were made to retake those points where the enemy had effected a lodgment. There was no possible use in wasting troops in regaining positions which would in no case be held. As dusk fell, a dusk which was lightened by the glare of burning villages, some of the regiments began slowly to draw off to the rear. In the early morning of the 24th the definite order to retire was conveyed to the corps commanders, whilst immediate measures were taken to withdraw the impedimenta and to clear the roads.

Such, in its bare outlines, was the action of Mons upon August 23, interesting for its own sake, but more so as being the first clash between the British and German armies. One or two questions call for discussion before the narrative passes on. The most obvious of these is the question of the bridges. Why were they not blown up in the dangerous peninsula? Without having any special information upon the point, one might put forward the speculation that the reason why they were not at once blown up was that the whole of Joffre’s advance was an aggressive movement for the relief of Namur, and that the bridges were not destroyed because they would be used in a subsequent advance. It will always be a subject for speculation as to what would have occurred had the battle been fought to a finish. Considering the comparative merits of British and German infantry as shown in many a subsequent encounter, and allowing for the advantage that the defence has over the attack, it is probable that the odds might not have been too great and that Sir John French might have remained master of the field. That, however, is a matter of opinion. What is not a matter of opinion is that the other German armies to the east would have advanced on the heels of the retiring French, that they would have cut the British off from their Allies, and that they would have been hard put to it to reach the coast. Therefore, win or lose, the Army had no possible course open but to retire. The actual losses of the British were not more than three or four thousand, the greater part from the 8th, 9th, and 13th Brigades. There are no means as yet by which the German losses can be taken out from the general returns, but when one considers the repeated advances over the open and the constant breaking of the dense attacking formations, it is impossible that they should have been fewer than from seven to ten thousand men. Each army had for the first time an opportunity of forming a critical estimate of the other. German officers have admitted with soldierly frankness that the efficiency of the British came to them as a revelation, which is not surprising after the assurances that had been made to them. On the other hand, the British bore away a very clear conviction of the excellence of the German artillery and of the plodding bravery of the German infantry, together with a great reassurance as to their own capacity to hold their own at any reasonable odds.

After a night of flames and of uproar the day dawned, a day of great anxiety to the British commanders and of considerable pressure upon a portion of the troops. Sir John French had given instructions that the First Corps, which had been only slightly engaged the day before, should pretend to assume the offensive upon the extreme right wing in the direction of Binche, whilst the Second Corps began its retirement. The enemy was following up rapidly, however, along the whole length of the British line, both flanks of which were exposed. Shortly after dawn the evacuated positions had been occupied, and Mons itself was in the hands of the advancing Germans. The Second Corps began its retreat, helped by the feint which was carried out by General Haig upon the right, and by the bulk of the batteries of both corps, but the pursuit was vigorous and the shell-fire incessant. A shell from the rear is more intimidating than twenty in the front. Hamilton’s Third Division, including the 8th and 9th Brigades, who had done such hard work the day before, sustained the most severe losses, especially at Frameries, four miles south of Mons. The 2nd Royal Scots of the 8th Brigade about midnight had been attacked by a heavy German column which got so near that the swish of their feet through the long grass put the regiment on the alert. The attack was blown back by a volley at close quarters. The 9th Brigade (Shaw’s), which covered the retreat, was closely pressed from dawn by the pursuing Germans, and was subjected to a very heavy shell-fire. A barricade, erected in the village and manned by Captain Sandilands, of the Northumberlands, with his company, held up the German advance, and they were never permitted to reach the line nor to hustle the retirement. Butler’s 23rd Artillery Brigade helped with its fire. The chief losses in this skilful covering action fell upon the 1st Lincolns and upon the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, each of which lost about 150 men, including Captain Rose, Lieutenants Bulbe, Welchman, and others. There was a stational ambulance in the village of Frameries, and a foreign nurse in its employ has left a vivid picture of the wounded British rushing in grimy and breathless to have their slighter wounds dressed and then running out, rifle in hand, to find their place in the firing line.

The remaining brigade of the Third Division, McCracken’s 7th Brigade, had detached one regiment, the 2nd Irish Rifles, upon the day before to reinforce the 8th Brigade, and this regiment had, as already mentioned, some severe fighting, holding back the German advance after the retirement from the Nimy Peninsula of the Middlesex and the Gordons. It did not find its way back to its brigade until the evening of the 24th. The brigade itself, during the first day of the retreat,, held a position near Ciply, to the south of Mons, where it was heavily attacked in the early morning, and in some danger as its flank was exposed. At ten o’clock it was ordered to retire via Genly towards Bavai, and it carried out this difficult movement in the face of a pushful enemy in perfect order, covered by the divisional artillery. The principal losses fell upon the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment, which came under heavy fire from German machine-guns posted upon slag-heaps. This regiment was very hard hit, losing several hundred men. The brigade faced round near Bavai and held off the pursuit.

Cuthbert’s 13th Brigade, keeping in line with their comrades on the right, halted at Wasmes, some four miles from the canal, where they prepared some hasty entrenchments. Here, at the dawn of day, they were furiously attacked by the German vanguard at the same time that the 9th Brigade was hustled in Frameries, but for two hours the assailants were beaten back with heavy losses. The brunt of the fighting fell upon the 2nd West Riding Regiment, who lost heavily, were at one time nearly surrounded, and finally, with dour Yorkshire pertinacity, shook themselves clear. Their losses included their commander. Colonel Gibbs, their adjutant, 300 men, and all their officers save five. The 1st West Kents also lost about 100 men and several officers, including Major Pack-Beresford. For the remainder of the day and for the whole of the 25th the brigade, with the rest of the Fifth Division, fell back with little fighting via Bavai to the Le Cateau line.

On the evening of the 23rd the 14th Brigade, still farther to the west, had fallen back to Dour, blowing up the bridge and road over the canal. After dark the Germans followed them, and Gleichen’s 15th Brigade, which had not yet been engaged, found itself in the position of rearguard and immediately exposed to the pressure of the German flanking movement. This was now threatening to envelop the whole of Ferguson’s Fifth Division. The situation was particularly difficult, since this General had to make a flank movement in the face of the enemy in order to close up with his comrades of the Third Division. He was soon compelled to call for assistance, and Allenby, with his cavalry division, was advanced to help him. It was evidently the intention of the enemy to strike in upon the western side of the division and pin it to its ground until it could be surrounded.

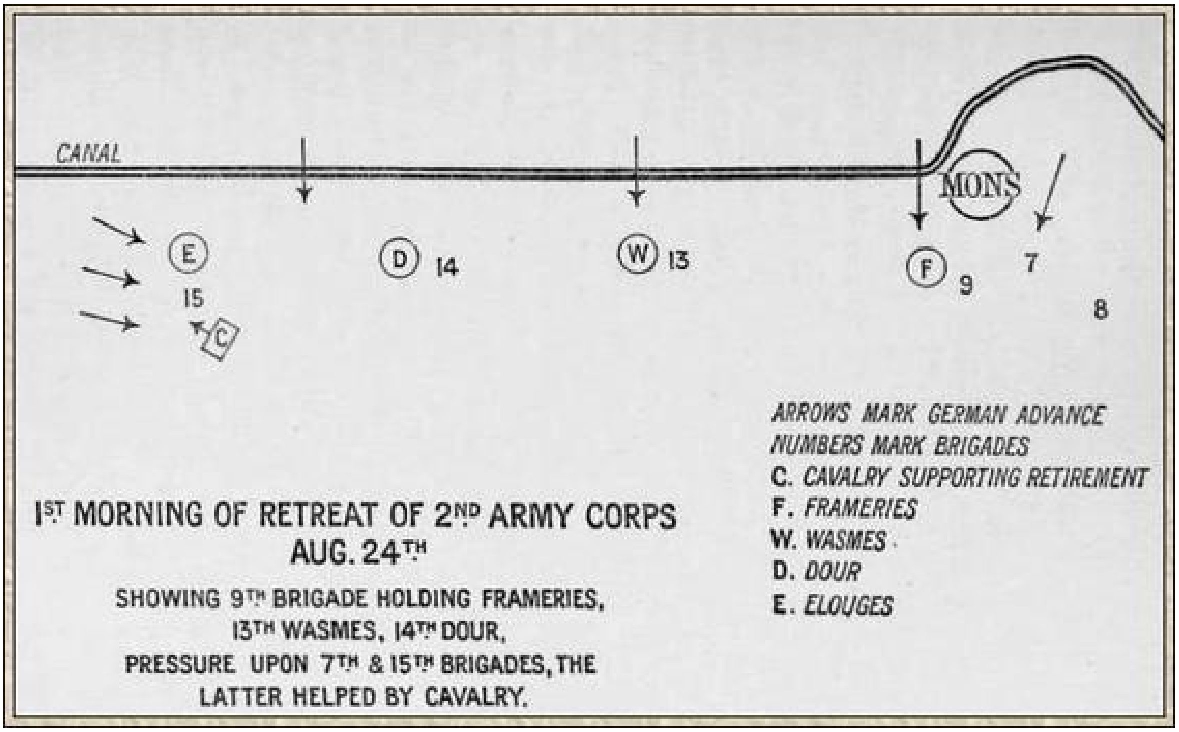
CANAL
MONS
E
15
C
D 14
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8
ARROWS MARK GERMAN ADVANCE
NUMBERS MARK BRIGADES
C. CAVALRY SUPPORTING RETIREMENT
F. FRAMERIES
W. WASMES
D. DOUR
E. ELOUGES
1ST MORNING OF RETREAT OF 2ND ARMY CORPS
AUG. 24TH
SHOWING 9TH BRIGADE HOLDING FRAMERIES, 13TH WASMES, 14TH DOUR, PRESSURE UPON 7TH & 15TH BRIGADES, THE LATTER HELPED BY CAVALRY.

First Morning of Retreat of 2nd Army Corps, August 24, 1914

The first menacing advance in the morning of the 24th was directed against the flank of the British infantry who were streaming down the Elouges-Dour high-road. The situation was critical, and a portion of De Lisle’ s 2nd Cavalry Brigade was ordered to charge near Andregnies, the hostile infantry being at that time about a thousand yards distant, with several batteries in support. The attack of the cavalry was vigorously supported by L Battery of Horse Artillery. The charge was carried out by three squadrons of the 9th Lancers, Colonel Campbell at their head. The 4th Dragoon Guards under Colonel Mullens was in support. The cavalry rode forward amidst a heavy but not particularly deadly fire until they were within a few hundred yards of the enemy, when, being faced by a wire fence, they swung to the right and rallied under the cover of some slag-heaps and of a railway embankment. Their menace and rifle fire, or the fine work of Major Sclater-Booth’s battery, had the effect of holding up the German advance for some time, and though the cavalry were much scattered and disorganised they were able to reunite without any excessive loss, the total casualties being a little over two hundred. Some hours later the enemy’s pressure again became heavy upon Ferguson’s flank, and the 1st Cheshires and 1st Norfolks, of Gleichen’s 15th Brigade, which formed the infantry flank-guard, incurred heavy losses. It was in this defensive action that the 119th R.F.A., under Major Alexander, fought itself to a standstill with only three unwounded gunners by the guns. The battery had silenced one German unit and was engaged with three others. Only Major Alexander and Lieutenant Pollard with a few men were left. As the horses had been destroyed the pieces had to be man-handled out of action. Captain the Hon. F. Grenfell, of the 9th Lancers, bleeding from two wounds, with several officers, Sergeants Davids and Turner, and some fifty men of the regiment, saved these guns under a terrible fire, the German infantry being within close range.

During the whole long, weary day the batteries and horsemen were working hard to cover the retreat, while the surgeons exposed themselves with great fearlessness, lingering behind the retiring lines in order to give first aid to the men who had been hit by the incessant shell-fire. It was in this noble task — the noblest surely within the whole range of warfare — that Captain Malcolm Leckie, and other brave medical officers, met with a glorious end, upholding to the full the traditions of their famous corps.

It has been stated that the 1st Cheshires, in endeavouring to screen the west flank of the Second Corps from the German pursuit, were very badly punished. This regiment, together with the Norfolks, occupied a low ridge to the north-east side of the village of Elouges, which they endeavoured to hold against the onflowing tide of Germans. About three in the afternoon it was seen that there was danger of this small flank-guard being entirely cut off. As a matter of fact an order had actually been sent for a retreat, but had not reached them. Colonel Boger of the Cheshires sent several messengers, representing the growing danger, but no answer came back. Finally, in desperation. Colonel Boger went himself and found that the enemy held the position previously occupied by the rest of Gleichen’s Brigade, which had retired. The Cheshires had by this time endured dreadful losses, and were practically surrounded. A bayonet charge eased the pressure for a short time, but the enemy again closed in and the bulk of the survivors, isolated amidst a hostile army corps, were compelled to surrender. Some escaped in small groups and made their way through to their retreating comrades. When roll was next called, there remained 5 officers and 193 men out of 27 officers and 1007 of all ranks who had gone into action. It speaks volumes for the discipline of the regiment that this remnant, under Captain Shore, continued to act as a useful unit. These various episodes, including the severe losses of Gleichen’s 15th Brigade, the attack of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and the artillery action in which the 119th Battery was so severely handled, group themselves into a separate little action occurring the day after Mons and associated either with the villages of Elouges or of Dour. The Second German Corps continued to act upon the western side of the Second British Corps, whilst the rest of General von Kluck’s army followed it behind. With three corps close behind him, and one snapping at his flank. General Smith-Dorrien made his way southwards, his gunners and cavalry labouring hard to relieve the ever-increasing pressure, while his rear brigades were continually sprayed by the German shrapnel.

It is to be noted that Sir John French includes the Ninth German Corps in Von Kluck’s army in his first dispatch, and puts it in Von Bülow’s second army in his second dispatch. The French authorities are of opinion that Von Kluck’s army consisted of the Second, Third, Fourth, Seventh, and Fourth Reserve Corps, with two divisions of cavalry. If this be correct, then part of Von Bülow’s army was pursuing Haig, while the whole of Von Kluck’s was concentrated upon Smith-Dorrien. This would make the British performance even more remarkable than it has hitherto appeared, since it would mean that during the pursuit, and at the subsequent battle, ten German divisions were pressing upon three British ones.

It is not to be supposed that so huge a force was all moving abreast, or available simultaneously at any one point. None the less a General can use his advance corps very much more freely when he knows that every gap can be speedily filled.

A tiny reinforcement had joined the Army on the morning after the battle of Mons. This was the 19th Brigade under General Drummond, which consisted of the 1st Middlesex, 1st Scots Rifles, 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This detached brigade acted, and continued to act during a large part of the war, as an independent unit. It detrained at Valenciennes on August 23, and two regiments, the Middlesex and the Cameronians, may be said to have taken part in the battle of Mons, since they formed up at the east of Condé, on the extreme left of the British position, and received, together with the Queen’s Bays, who were scouting in front of them, the first impact of the German flanking corps. They fell back with the Army upon the 24th and 25th, keeping the line Jenlain — Solesmes, finally reaching Le Cateau, where they eventually took up their position on the right rear of the British Army.

As the Army fell back, the border fortress of Maubeuge with its heavy guns offered a tempting haven of rest for the weary and overmatched troops, but not in vain had France lost her army in Metz. Sir John French would have no such protection, however violently the Germans might push him towards it. “The British Army Invested in Maubeuge” was not destined to furnish the headline of a Berlin special edition. The fortress was left to the eastward, and the tired troops snatched a few hours of rest near Bavai, still pursued by the guns and the searchlights of their persistent foemen. At an early hour of the 25th the columns were again on the march for the south, and for safety.

It may be remarked that in all this movement what made the operation most difficult and complicated was, that in the retirement the Army was not moving direct to the rear, but diagonally away to the west, thus making the west flank more difficult to cover as well as complicating the movements of transport. It was this oblique movement which caused the Third Division to change places with the Fifth, so that from now onwards it was to the west of the Army.

The greater part of the Fourth Division of the Third Army Corps, coming up from the lines of communication, brought upon this day a welcome reinforcement to the Army and did yeoman work in covering the retirement. The total composition of this division was as follows: —

THIRD ARMY CORPS — GENERAL PULTENEY.

Division IV. — General Snow.

10th Infantry Brigade — General Haldane.

1st Warwicks.

2nd Seaforths.

1st Irish Fusiliers.

2nd Dublin Fusiliers.

11th Infantry Brigade — General Hunter-Weston.

1st Somerset L. Infantry.

1st East Lancashires.

1st Hants.

1st Rifle Brigade.

12th Infantry Brigade — General Wilson.

lst Royal Lancaster Regiment.

2nd Lancs. Fusiliers.

2nd Innis. Fusiliers.

2nd Essex.

Artillery — General Milne.

XIV. Brig. R.F.A. 39, 68, 88.

XXIX. Brig. R.F.A. 125, 126, 127.

XXXII. Brig. R.F.A. 27, 134, 135.

XXXVII. Brig. R.F.A. (How.) 31, 35, 55.

Heavy R.G.A. 31 Battery.

R.E. 7, 9 Field Cos.

These troops, which had been quartered in the Ligny and Montigny area, received urgent orders at one in the morning of the 25th that they should advance northwards. They marched that night to Briastre, where they covered the retreat of the Army, the Third Division passing through their lines. The Fourth Division then retired south again, having great difficulty in getting along, as the roads were choked with transport and artillery, and fringed with exhausted men. The 12th Brigade (Wilson's) was acting as rearguard, and began to experience pressure from the pursuers, the Essex men being shelled out of the village of Bethencourt, which they held until it was nearly surrounded by the German cavalry. The line followed by the division was Briastre-Viesly-Bethencourt-Caudry-Ligny and Haucourt, the latter village marking the general position which they were to take up on the left of the Army at the line of Le Cateau. Such reinforcements were mere handfuls when compared with the pursuing hosts, but their advent heartened up the British troops and relieved them of some of the pressure. It has been remarked by officers of the Fourth Division that they and their men were considerably taken aback by the worn appearance of the weary regiments from Mons which passed through their ranks. Their confidence was revived, however, by the undisturbed demeanour of the General Headquarters Staff, who came through them in the late afternoon of the 25th. "General French himself struck me as being extremely composed, and the staff officers looked very cheerful." These are the imponderabilia which count for much in a campaign.

Tuesday, August 25, was a day of scattered rearguard actions. The weary Army had rested upon the evening of the 24th upon the general line Maubeuge -Bavai-Wargnies. Orders were issued for the retirement to continue next day to a position already partly prepared, in front of the centre of which stood the town of Le Cateau. All rearguards were to be clear of the above-mentioned line by 5:30 A.M. The general conception was that the inner flanks of the two corps should be directed upon Le Cateau.

The intention of the Commander-in-Chief was that the Army should fight in that position next day, the First Corps occupying the right and the Second Corps the left of the position. The night of the 25th found the Second Corps in the position named, whilst their comrades were still at Landrecies, eight miles to the north-east, with a cavalry brigade endeavouring to bridge the gap between. It is very certain, in the case of so ardent a leader as Haig, that it was no fault upon his part which kept him from Smith-Dorrien's side upon the day of battle. It can only be said that the inevitable delays upon the road experienced by the First Corps, including the rear-guard actions which it fought, prevented the ensuing battle from being one in which the British Army as a whole might have stemmed the rush of Von Kluck's invading host.

Whilst the whole Army had been falling back upon Solesmes, the position which had been selected for a stand, it was hoped that substantial French reinforcements were coming up from the south. The roads were much blocked during the 25th, for two divisions of French territorials were retiring along them, as well as the British Army. As a consequence progress was slow, and the German pressure from the rear became ever more severe. Allenby's cavalry and horse-guns covered the retreat, continually turning round and holding off the pursuers. Finally, near Solesmes, on the evening of the 25th, the cavalry were at last driven in, and the Germans came up against McCracken's 7th Brigade, who held them most skilfully until nightfall with the assistance of the 42nd Brigade R.F.A. and the 30th Howitzer Brigade. Most of the fighting fell upon the 1st Wiltshires and 2nd South Lancashires, both of which had substantial losses. The Germans could make no further progress, and time was given for the roads to clear and for the artillery to get away. The 7th Brigade then followed, marching, so far as possible, across country The Battle and taking up its position, which it did not reach until after midnight, in the village of Caudry, on the line of the Le Cateau — Courtrai road. As it faced north once more it found Snow's Fourth Division upon its left, while on its immediate right were the 8th and the 9th Brigades, with the Fifth Division on the farther side of them. One unit of the 7th Brigade, the 2nd Irish Rifles, together with the 41st R.F.A., swerved off in the darkness and confusion and went away with the cavalry. The rest were in the battle line. Here we may leave them in position while we return to trace the fortunes of the First Army Corps.

Sir Douglas Haig's corps, after the feint of August 24, in which the Second Division appeared to be attacking with the First in support, was cleverly disengaged from the enemy and fell back by alternate divisions. It was not an easy operation, and it was conducted under a very heavy shell-fire, which fell especially upon the covering guns of Colonel Sandilands' 34th Artillery Brigade. These guns were exposed to a concentration of fire from the enemy, which was so intense that a thick haze of smoke and dust blotted out the view for long periods at a time. It was only with difficulty and great gallantry that they were got away. An officer of the 6th Brigade, immediately behind them, writes: "Both going in and coming back the limbers passed my trench at a tearing gallop, the drivers lying low on the horses' necks and screaming at them to go faster, while on the return the guns bounded about on the stubble field like so many tin cans behind a runaway dog."

The guns having been drawn in, the corps retired by roads parallel to the Second Corps, and were able to reach the line Bavai — Maubeuge by about 7 P.M. upon that evening, being on the immediate eastern flank of Smith-Dorrien's men. It is a striking example of the historical continuity of the British Army that as they marched that day many of the regiments, such as the Guards and the 1st King's Liverpool, passed over the graves of their predecessors who had died under the same colours at Malplaquet in 1709, two hundred and six years before.

On August 25 General Haig continued his retreat. During the day he fell back to the west of Maubeuge by Feignies to Vavesnes and Landrecies. The considerable forest of Mormal intervened between the two sections of the British Army. On the forenoon of this day the vanguard of the German infantry, using motor transport, overtook Davies' 6th Brigade, which was acting as rearguard to the corps. They pushed in to within five hundred yards, but were driven back by rifle-fire. Other German forces were coming rapidly up and enveloping the wings of the British rearguard, but the brigade, through swift and skilful handling, disengaged itself from what was rapidly becoming a dangerous situation. The weather was exceedingly hot during the day, and with their heavy packs the men were much exhausted, many of them being barely able to stagger. In the evening, footsore and weary, they reached the line of Landrecies, Maroilles, and Pont-sur-Sambre. The 4th Brigade of Guards, consisting of Grenadiers, Coldstream, and Irish, under General Scott-Kerr, occupied the town of Landrecies. During the day they had seen little of the enemy, and they had no reason to believe that the forest, which extended up to the outskirts of the town, was full of German infantry pressing eagerly to cut them off. The possession of vast numbers of motor lorries for infantry transport introduces a new element into strategy, especially the strategy of a pursuit, which was one of those disagreeable first experiences of up-to-date warfare which the British Army had to undergo. It ensures that the weary retreating rearguard shall ever have a perfectly fresh pursuing vanguard at its heels.

The Guards at Landrecies were put into the empty cavalry barracks for a much-needed rest, but they had hardly settled down before there was an alarm that the Germans were coming into the town. It was just after dusk that a column of infantry debouched from the shadow of the trees and advanced briskly towards the town. A company of the 3rd Coldstream under Captain Monck gave the alarm, and the whole regiment stood to arms, while the rest of the brigade, who could not operate in so confined a space, defended the other entrances of the town. The van of the approaching Germans shouted out that they were French, and seemed to have actually got near enough to attack the officer of the picket and seize a machine-gun before the Guardsmen began to fire. There is a single approach to the village, and no means of turning it, so that the attack was forced to come directly down the road.

Possibly the Germans had the impression that they were dealing with demoralised fugitives, but if so they got a rude awakening. The advance party, who were endeavouring to drag away the machine-gun, were all shot down, and their comrades who stormed up to the houses were met with a steady and murderous fire which drove them back into the shadows of the wood. A gun was brought up by them, and fired at a range of five hundred yards with shrapnel, but the Coldstream, reinforced by a second company, lay low or flattened themselves into the doorways for protection, while the 9th British Battery replied from a position behind the town. Presently, believing that the way had been cleared for them, there was a fresh surge of dark masses out of the wood, and they poured into the throat of the street. The Guards had brought out two machine-guns, and their fire, together with a succession of volleys from the rifles, decimated the stormers. Some of them got near enough to throw hand-bombs among the British, but none effected a lodgment among the buildings.

From time to time there were fresh advances during the night, designed apparently rather to tire out the troops than to gain the village. Once fire was set to the house at the end of the street, but the flames were extinguished by a party led by Corporal Wyatt, of the 3rd Coldstream. The Irish Guards after midnight relieved the Coldstream of their vigil, and in the early morning the tired but victorious brigade went forward unmolested upon their way. They had lost 170 of their number, nearly all from the two Coldstream companies. Lord Hawarden and the Hon. Windsor Clive of the Coldstream and Lieut. Vereker of the Grenadiers were killed, four other officers were wounded. The Germans in their close attacking formation had suffered very much more heavily. Their enterprise was a daring one, for they had pushed far forward to get command of the Landrecies Bridge, but their audacity became foolhardy when faced by steady, unshaken infantry. History has shown many times before that a retreating British Army still retains a sting in its tail.

At the same time as the Guards' Brigade was attacked at Landrecies there was an advance from the forest against Maroilles, which is four miles to the eastward. A troop of the 15th Hussars guarding a bridge over the Sambre near that point was driven in by the enemy, and two attempts on the part of the 1st Berkshires, of Davies' 6th Brigade, to retake it were repulsed, owing to the fact that the only approach was by a narrow causeway with marshland on either side, where it was not possible for infantry to deploy. The 1st Rifles were ordered to support the Berkshires, but darkness had fallen and nothing could be done. The casualties in this skirmish amounted to 124 killed, wounded, or missing. The Landrecies and Maroilles wounded were left behind with some of the medical staff. At this period of the war the British had not yet understood the qualities of the enemy, and several times made the mistake of trusting surgeons and orderlies to their mercy, with the result that they were inhumanly treated, both by the authorities at the front and by the populace in Germany, whither they were conveyed as starving prisoners of war. Five of them, Captains Edmunds and Hamilton, Lieut. Danks (all of the Army Medical Corps), with Dr. Austin and Dr. Elliott, who were exchanged in January 1915, deposed that they were left absolutely without food for long periods. It is only fair to state that at a later date, with a few scandalous exceptions, such as that of Wittenberg, the German treatment of prisoners, though often harsh, was no longer barbarous. For the first six months, however, it was brutal in the extreme, and frequently accompanied by torture as well as neglect. A Spanish prisoner, incarcerated by mistake, has given very clear neutral evidence of the abominable punishments of the prison camps. His account reads more like the doings of Iroquois than of a Christian nation.

A Small mishap — small on the scale of such a war, though serious enough in itself — befell a unit of the First Army Corps on the morning after the Landrecies engagement. The portion of the German army who pursued General Haig had up to now been able to effect little, and that little at considerable cost to themselves. Early on August 26, however, a brisk action was fought near Pont-sur-Sambre, in which the 2nd Connaughts, of Haking's Fifth Brigade, lost six officers, including Colonel Abercrombie, who was taken prisoner, and 280 men. The regiment was cut off by a rapidly advancing enemy in a country which was so thickly enclosed that there was great difficulty in keeping touch between the various companies or in conveying their danger to the rest of the brigade. By steadiness and judgment the battalion was extricated from a most difficult position, but it was at the heavy cost already quoted. In this case again the use by the enemy of great numbers of motor lorries in their pursuit accounts for the suddenness and severity of the attacks which now and afterwards fell upon the British rearguards.

Dawn broke upon August 26, a day upon which the exhausted troops were destined to be tried to the limit of human endurance. It was the date of Von Kluck's exultant telegram in which he declared that he held them surrounded, a telegram which set Berlin fluttering with flags. On this day the First Army Corps was unmolested in its march, reaching the Venerolles line that night. There was woody country upon the west of it, and from beyond this curtain of trees they heard the distant roar of a terrific cannonade, and knew that a great battle was in progress to the westward. It was on Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps and upon the single division of the Third Corps that the full storm of the German attack had broken. In a word, a corps and a half of British troops, with 225 guns, were assailed by certainly four and probably five German corps, with 600 guns. It is no wonder that the premature tidings of a great German triumph were forwarded that morning to make one more item in that flood of good news which from August 21 to the end of the month was pouring in upon the German people. A glittering mirage lay before them. The French lines had been hurled back from the frontier, the British were in full retreat, and now were faced with absolute disaster. Behind these breaking lines lay the precious capital, the brain and heart of France. But God is not always with the big battalions, and the end was not yet.

IV. THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU

The order of battle at Le Cateau — The stand of the 2nd Suffolks — Major Yate’s V.C. — The fight for the quarries — The splendid work of the British guns — Difficult retirement of the Fourth Division — The fate of the 1st Gordons — Results of the battle — Exhaustion of the Army — The destruction of the 2nd Munsters — A cavalry fight — The news in Great Britain — The views of General Joffre — Battery L — The action of Villars-Cotteret — Reunion of the Army

REFERENCE has already been made to the retirement of Smith-Dorrien’s Second Corps, covered by Allenby’s cavalry, throughout the 25th. The heads of columns arrived at the Le Cateau position at about 3 P.M., but the rearguards were fighting into the night, and came in eventually in an exhausted condition. The Fourth Division, which was still quite fresh, did good and indeed vital service by allowing the tired units to pass through its ranks and acting as a pivot upon which the cavalry could fall back.

Sir John French had reconsidered the idea of making a stand at Le Cateau, feeling, no doubt, that if his whole Army could not be consolidated there the affair would be too desperate. He had moved with his staff during the evening of the 25th to St. Quentin, leaving word that the retirement should be continued early next morning. Smith-Dorrien spent the afternoon and evening going round the position, but it was not until 2 A.M. upon the morning of the 26th that he was able to ascertain the whereabouts of all his scattered and weary units. About that time General Allenby reported that his cavalry had been widely separated, two and a half brigades being at Chatillon, six miles east of Le Cateau, the other one and a half brigades being near Ligny, four miles west of the same town. General Smith-Dorrien was in the position that his troops were scattered, weary, and in danger of losing their morale through continued retreat in the presence of an ever-pressing enemy. Even with the best soldiers such an experience too long continued may turn an army into a rabble. He therefore made urgent representations by telephone to the Commander-in-Chief, pointing out that the only hope of checking the dangerous German pursuit was to stagger them by a severe counter. “The only thing for the men to do when they can’t stand is to lie down and fight,” said he. Sir John assented to the view, with the proviso that the retirement should be continued as soon as possible. Smith-Dorrien, taking under his orders the cavalry, the Fourth Division, and the 19th Brigade, as well as his own corps, issued instructions for the battle which he knew must begin within a few hours.

Owing to the gap of eight miles between the nearest points of the two corps, both flanks of the position were in the air. Smith-Dorrien therefore requested the cavalry brigades from Chatillon to move in and guard the east flank, while the rest of the cavalry watched the west. He was less anxious about the latter, as he knew that Sordet's French cavalry was in that direction.

The exhausted infantry, who had now been marching for about a week, and fighting for three days and the greater part of three nights, flung themselves down where best they could, some to the north-east of Le Cateau, some in the town, and some along the line of very inadequate trenches hastily prepared by civilian labour. In the early dawn they took up their position, the Fifth Division being to the right near the town. Of this division, the 14th Brigade (Rolt's) was on the extreme right, the 13th (Cuthbert's) to the left of it, and the 15th (Gleichen's) to the left again. To the west of the Fifth Division lay the Third, their trenches covering the villages of Troisville (9th Brigade), Audencourt (8th Brigade), and Caudry (7th Brigade). Behind Caudry one and a half brigades of cavalry were in reserve to strengthen the left wing. From Caudry the line was thrown back to meet a flanking movement and extended to Haucourt. This portion was held by Snow's Fourth Division. Sordet's cavalry had passed across the rear of the British position the day before, and lay now to the left flank and rear of the Army. There were rumours of approaching French forces from the south, which put heart into the weary men, but, as a matter of fact, they had only their own brave spirits upon which to depend. Their numbers, putting every unit at its full complement, were about 70,000 men. Their opponents were four army corps at the least, with two divisions of cavalry — say, 170,000 men with an overpowering artillery. Subsequent reports showed that the guns of all five army corps had been concentrated for the battle.

It has been said that Rolt's 14th Brigade was at the extreme right of the line. This statement needs some expansion. The 14th Brigade consisted of the 1st East Surrey, 2nd Suffolk, 2nd Manchester, and 1st Cornwalls. Of these four regiments, half of the East Surrey had been detached on escort duty and the other half, under Colonel Longley, with the whole of the Cornwalls, bivouacked in the northern suburbs of Le Cateau on the night of the 25th. In the early morning of the 26th the enemy's advanced guard got into the town, and this detachment of British troops were cut off from their comrades and fired upon as they assembled in the streets of the town. They made their way out, however, in orderly fashion and took up a position to the south-east of the town, where they fought an action on their own account for some hours, quite apart from the rest of the Army, which they could hear but not see. Eventually the division of cavalry fell back from Chatillon to join the Army and picked up these troops en route, so that the united body was able to make its way safely back to their comrades. These troops were out of the main battle, but did good work in covering the retreat. The whole signal section of the 14th Brigade was with them, which greatly hampered the brigade during the battle. Two companies of the 1st East Surreys under Major Tew had become separated from their comrades after Mons, but they rejoined the British line at Troisville, and on the morning of August 26 were able to fall in on the rear of the 14th Brigade, where, as will be seen later, they did good service.

The 19th Brigade had also bivouacked in Le Cateau and was nearly cut off, as the two regiments of the 14th Brigade had been, by the sudden intrusion of the enemy. It had been able to make its way out of the town, however, without being separated from the rest of the Army, and it took up its position on the right rear of the infantry line, whence it sent help where needed and played the part of a reserve until towards the close of the action its presence became very vital to the Fifth Division. At the outset the 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands were in the front line of this brigade and the 1st Middlesex supporting them, while the other two battalions, the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers and 1st Scots Rifles, with a battery of artillery had been taken as a reserve by the force commander. No trenches had been prepared at this point, and the losses of the two front battalions from shell-fire were, from the beginning, very heavy. The other two battalions spent a day of marching rather than fighting, being sent right across to reinforce the Fourth Division and then being brought back to the right flank once more.

It was the Fifth Division, on the right of the line, who first experienced the full effect of the heavy shelling which about seven o’clock became general along the whole position, but was always most severe upon the right. There was a dangerous salient in the trenches at the cross-roads one mile west of Le Cateau which was a source of very great weakness. Every effort was made to strengthen the trenches, the 15th Brigade and 59th Company R.E. working especially hard in the Troisville section. The

Germans were moving round upon this right wing, and the murderous hail of missiles came from the flank as well as from the front, being supplemented by rifle and machine-gun fire. The 2nd Suffoiks and 2nd Manchesters, the remaining half of Rolt's 14th Brigade, being on the extreme right of the line, suffered the most. The guns immediately supporting them, of the 28th Artillery Brigade, were quite overmatched and were overwhelmed by the devastating rain of shells, many of them being put out of action. A heavy battery, The Battle the 108th, some little distance behind the line, kept Le Cateau. up a steady and effective fire which long held back the German advance. The pressure, however, was extreme, and growing steadily from hour to hour until it became well-nigh intolerable. Especially it fell upon the 2nd Suffolks, who held their shallow trenches with splendid tenacity. Their colonel, Brett, was killed. Major Doughty was wounded in three places, Captains Orford and Cutbill, with eight lieutenants, were on the ground. Finally, when the position of the brigade became untenable and it was ordered to retreat, the gallant Suffolks held on to their line with the desire of saving the disabled guns, and were eventually all killed, wounded, or taken, save for about 250 men, while their neighbours, the 2nd Manchesters, lost 14 officers and 350 of their men. In this way the extreme right of the British line was practically destroyed.

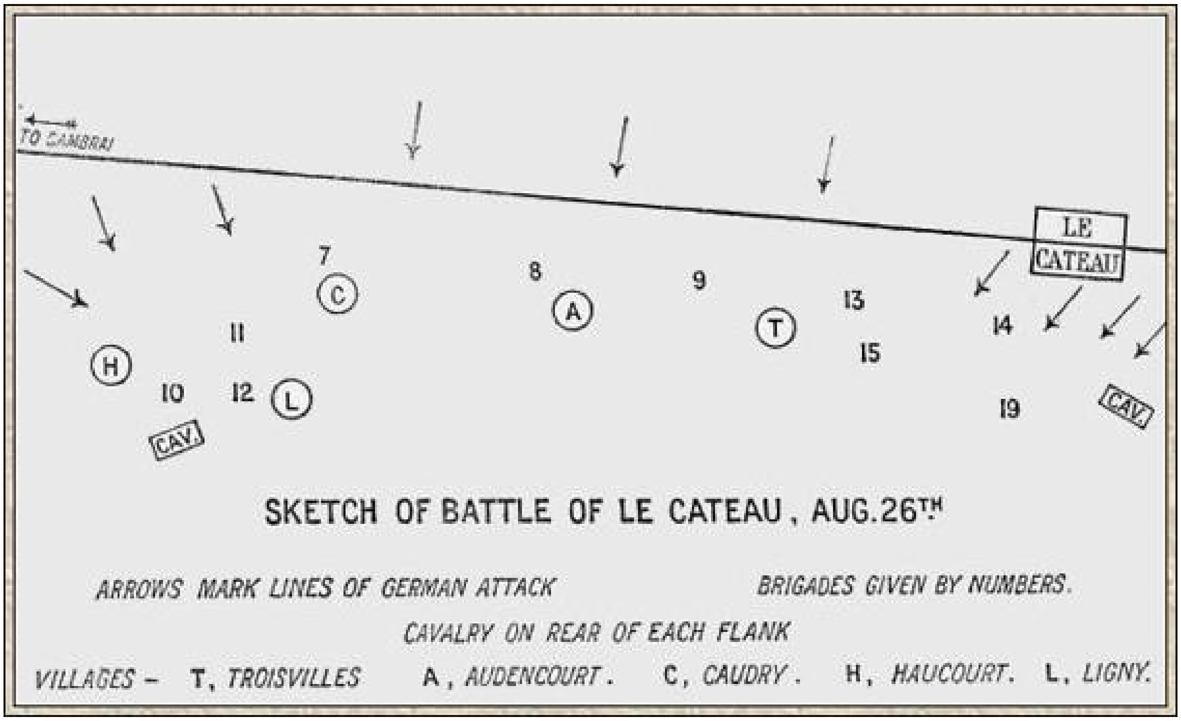
TO CAMBRAI
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SKETCH OF BATTLE OF LE CATEAU, AUG. 26TH
ARROWS MARK LINES OF GERMAN ATTACK
BRIGADES GIVEN BY NUMBERS.
CAVALRY ON REAR OF EACH FLANK
VILLAGES – T, TROISVILLES A, AUDENCOURT. C, CAUDRY. H, HAUCOURT. L, LIGNY.

Sketch of the Battle of Le Cateau, August 26, 1914

The 19th Brigade, in the rear of the 14th, were able to observe the fate of their comrades, and about midday the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had already lost a good many men from shell-fire, advanced in the chivalrous hope of relieving the pressure. The battalion went forward as if on parade, though the casualties were numerous. They eventually gained the shelter of some trenches near the remains of the 14th Brigade, but their gallant effort, instead of averting the threatened destruction, ended by partially involving them in the same fate. They could do nothing against the concentrated and well-directed artillery fire of the enemy. When eventually they fell back, part of two companies were cut off in their trench and taken. The rest of the regiment, together with the 1st Middlesex and two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers from the 9th Brigade, formed a covering line on a ridge in the rear and held back the German advance for a long time. This line did not retire until 5 P.M., when it was nearly enveloped. General Drummond, commanding the 19th Brigade, had met with an injury in the course of the action, and it was commanded during the latter part by Colonel Ward, of the Middlesex.

The retirement or destruction of the 14th Brigade exposed the flank of the 13th (Cuthbert’s) to murderous enfilade fire, which fell chiefly upon the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. This brigade had defended itself successfully for six hours against various frontal attacks, but now the flank-fire raked it from end to end and practically destroyed the Yorkshiremen, who were the most exposed to it. On them and on the 2nd Scottish Borderers fell the great bulk of the losses, for the West Kents and the survivors of the West Ridings were in reserve. Of the two companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry who held the foremost trenches, that on the right had only fifteen men left, with whom Major Yate attempted a final charge, finding his Victoria Cross in the effort, while the next company, under Major Trevor, had only forty-one survivors, the whole losses of the battalion being 600 men, with 20 officers. Both the Yorkshire and the Scottish Border battalions lost their colonels in the action. Their losses were shared by the two companies of the 1st East Surreys under Major Tew, who had been placed between the 14th and 13th Brigades, and who fought very steadily in shallow trenches, holding on to the last possible moment.

Whilst the battle was going badly on the right, the Third Division in the centre and the Fourth Division on the left had held their own against a succession of attacks. The 8th and 9th Brigades drove off the German infantry with their crushing rifle-fire, and endured as best they might the shelling, which was formidable and yet very much less severe than that to which the Fifth Division had been exposed. In the case of the 7th Brigade (McCracken's) the village of Caudry, which it defended, formed a salient, since the Fourth Division on the left was thrown back. The attack upon this brigade from daylight onwards was very severe, but the assailants could neither drive in the line nor capture the village of Caudry. They attacked on both flanks at short rifle range, inflicting and also enduring heavy losses. In this part of the field the British guns held their own easily against the German, the proportion of numbers being more equal than on the right of the line.

Whilst the right flank was crumbling before the terrific concentration of German guns, and while the centre was stoutly holding its own, farther to the west, in the Haucourt — Ligny direction, the Second German Army Corps was beating hard against Snow's Fourth Division, which was thrown back to protect the left flank of the Army, and to cover the Cambrai-Esnes road. Hunter-Weston's 11th Brigade was on the right, south of Fontaine, with Wilson's 12th upon its left, and Haldane's 10th in reserve at Haucourt. As the German attack came from the left, or western flank, the 12th Brigade received the first impact. The artillery of the division had not yet come up, and the 1st Royal Lancasters, stretched in a turnip patch, endured for some time a severe The fire which cost them many casualties, including their Colonel Dykes, and to which little reply could be made. There were no cavalry scouts in front of the infantry, so that working parties and advanced posts were cut up by sudden machine-gun fire. Some of the covering parties both of the Lancasters and of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were never seen again. At about seven the British guns came up, the 14th Brigade R.F.A. on the left, the 29th in the centre, and the 32nd on the right, with the howitzers of the 37th behind the right centre on the high ground near Selvigny. From this time onward they supported the infantry in the most self-sacrificing way. The German infantry advance began shortly afterwards, and was carried out by wave after wave of men. A company of the 2nd Essex Regiment, under Captain Vandeleur, upon the British left, having good cover and a clear field of fire, inflicted very heavy losses on the Germans, though they were finally overwhelmed, their leader having been killed. The 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers in the front line were also heavily attacked, and held their own for several hours. About ten o’clock the pressure was so great that the defence was driven in, and two battalions lost their machine-guns, but a new line was formed in the Haucourt-Esnes road, the retirement being skilfully covered by Colonel Anley, of the Essex, and Colonel Griffin, of the Lancashire Fusiliers. There the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 1st Royal Lancasters, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, and the 2nd Essex held firmly on until the afternoon under very heavy and incessant fire, while the 11th Brigade upon their right were equally involved in the fight. Two battalions of the 10th Brigade (Haldane’s), the 1st Irish Fusiliers and 2nd Seaforths, had dug themselves in on the high ground just north of Selvigny and repulsed every attack, but two others, the 2nd Dublins and 1st Warwicks, had got involved with the 12th Brigade and could not be retrieved. The Signal Corps had not yet arrived, and the result was that General Snow had the greatest difficulty in ensuring his connections with his brigadiers, the orders being carried by his staff officers. At two o’clock, as there was a lull in the German advance, Wilson of the 12th Brigade made a spirited counter-attack, recovering many of the wounded, but being finally driven back to the old position by intense artillery and machine-gun fire.

It is worth recording that during this advance the Essex men found among the German dead many Jaeger with the same Gibraltar badge upon their caps which they bore themselves. It was a Hanoverian battalion who had been comrades with the old 56th in the defence of the fortress one hundred and fifty years before.

The 11th Brigade (Hunter-Weston), on the right of the 12th, had meanwhile played a very vital part in the fight. This brigade was defending a position called Les Carrières, or the quarry pits, which was east of Fontaine and to the north of the village of Ligny. It was a desperate business, for the British were four times driven out of it and four times came back to their bitter work amid a sleet of shells and bullets. Parties of the 1st Somersets and of the 1st East Lancashires held the quarries with the 1st Hants and 1st Rifle Brigade in immediate support, all being eventually drawn into the fight. Major Rickman, of the latter regiment, distinguished himself greatly in the defence, but was seriously wounded and left behind in the final retirement. Besides incessant gun-fire, the defenders were under infantry fire of a very murderous description from both flanks. In spite of this, the place was held for six hours until the retirement of the line in the afternoon caused it to be untenable, as the enemy was able to get behind it.

The brigade then fell back upon Ligny under heavy shrapnel-fire, moving steadily and in good order. The Germans at once attacked the village from the east and north-east. Could they have taken it, they would have been upon the flank of the British line of retirement. They were twice driven back, however, by the fire of the infantry, losing very heavily upon both occasions. About four o'clock, the Army being in full retreat, the brigade received orders to abandon Ligny and march upon Malincourt. The effect of a heavy shrapnel-fire was minimised by this movement being carried out in small columns of fours. A loss of 30 officers and 1115 men in a single day's fighting showed how severe had been the work of Hunter- Weston's brigade. The 12th Brigade had also lost about a thousand men. Many of the guns had run short of shells. A spectator has described how he saw the British gunners under a heavy fire, sitting in gloomy groups round the guns which they had neither the shells to work, nor the heart to abandon.

Such was the general fortune of the British left. At the extreme edge of it, in the gap between the left of the Fourth Division and the town of Cambrai, Sordet's French cavalry had been fighting to prevent the British wing from being turned. There was some misconception upon this point at the time, but in justice to our Ally it should be known that General Smith-Dorrien himself galloped to this flank in the course of the afternoon and was a witness of the efforts of the French troopers, who had actually marched 40 miles in order to be present at the battle.

The narrative has now taken the movements of the left wing up to the point of its retirement, in order to preserve the continuity of events in that portion of the field, but the actual abandonment of their position by Snow's Fourth Division was due to circumstances over which they had no control, and which had occurred at a considerable distance. Both the centre and the left of the Army could have held its own, though it must be admitted that the attack to which they were exposed was a very violent one gallantly pushed home.

All might have gone well had the Germans not been able to mass such an overpowering artillery attack upon the right of the line. It was shortly after mid-day that this part of the position began to weaken, and observers from the centre saw stragglers retiring over the low hill in the Le Cateau direction. At that hour the artillery upon the right of the British line was mostly silenced, and large masses of the German infantry were observed moving round the right flank. The salient of the Suffolks was in the possession of the enemy, and from it they could enfilade the line. It was no longer possible to bring up ammunition or horses to the few remaining guns. The greater part of the troops held on none the less most doggedly to their positions, A steady downpour of rain was a help rather than a discomfort, as it enabled the men to moisten their parched lips. But the situation of the Fifth Division was growing desperate. It was plain that to remain where they were could only mean destruction. And yet to ask the exhausted men to retire under such a rain of shells would be a dangerous operation. Even the best troops may reach their snapping point. Most of them had by the afternoon been under constant shrapnel-fire for eight hours on end. Some were visibly weakening. Anxious officers looked eagerly over their shoulders for any sign of reinforcement, but an impassable gap separated them from their comrades of the First Army Corps, who were listening with sinking hearts to the rumble of the distant cannonade. There was nothing for it but to chance the retirement. About three o’clock commanders called to officers and officers to men for a last great effort. It was the moment when a leader reaps in war the love and confidence which he has sown in peace. Smith-Dorrien had sent his meagre reserve, which consisted of one battery and two battalions, to take up a rearguard position astride the Le Cateau-St. Quentin road. Every available detail, that could pull a trigger, down to Hildebrand’s signallers of the Headquarters Staff, who had already done wonderful work in their own particular line, were thrust into the covering line. One by one the dishevelled brigades were drawn off towards the south. One section of the heavy guns of the 108th Heavy Battery was ordered back to act with two battalions of the 19th Brigade in covering the Reumont-Maritz road, while the 1st Norfolks were put in echelon behind the right flank for the same purpose.

The Fifth Division, with the 15th Brigade as rearguard, considerably disorganised by its long hammering, retreated along the straight Roman road via Maritz and Estrées. The Third Division fell back The through Berthy and Clary to Beaurevoir, the 9th Brigade forming a rearguard. The cavalry, greatly British helped by Sordet’s French cavalry upon the west, flung itself in front of the pursuit, while the guns sacrificed themselves to save the retiring infantry. Every British battery was an inferno of bursting shells, and yet every one fought on while breech-block would shut or gunner could stand. Many batteries were in the state of the 61st R.F.A., which fired away all its own shells and then borrowed from the limbers of other neighbouring batteries, the guns of which had been put out of action. Had the artillery gone the Army would have gone. Had the Army gone the Germans had a clear run into Paris. It has been said that on the covering batteries of Wing, Milne, and Headlam may, on that wet August afternoon, have hung the future history of Europe.

Wing's command included the 23rd, 30th, 40th, and 42nd Brigades, with the 48th Heavy Battery; Headlam's were the 15th, 27th, 28th, and 8th, with the 108th Heavy; Milne's, the 14th, 29th, 32nd, and 37th, with the 31st Heavy. These numbers deserve to be recorded, for every gun of them did great service, though many were left in ruins on the field. Some, like those of the 37th R.F.A., were plucked from under the very noses of the Germans, who were within a hundred yards of them when they were withdrawn, a deed of valour for which Captain Reynolds of that battery received the Cross. One by one those batteries which could move were drawn off, the cavalry covering the manoeuvre by their rifle-fire, and sometimes man-handling the gun from the field. Serving one day as charging cavaliers, another as mounted infantry in covering a retreat, again as sappers in making or holding a trench, or when occasion called for it as gun-teams to pull on the trace of a derelict gun, the cavalry have been the general utility men of the Army. The days of pure cavalry may have passed, but there will never be a time when a brave and handy fighting man who is mobile will not be invaluable to his comrades.

It was about four o'clock that the Fourth Division, on the left flank, who had been maintaining the successful defensive already described, were ordered to begin their retirement. The 12th Brigade was able to withdraw with no great difficulty along the line Walincourt-Villiers-Vendhuile, reaching the latter village about nine-thirty. The doings of the 11th Brigade have been already described. There was considerable disintegration but no loss of spirit. One of the regiments of the 12th, the 2nd Royal Lancasters, together with about three hundred Warwicks, from the 10th Brigade, and some detachments of other regiments, were by some mischance, isolated in the village of Haucourt with no definite orders, and held on until ten o'clock at night, when the place was nearly surrounded. They fought their way out, however, in a most surprising fashion, and eventually made good their retreat. One party, under Major Poole of the Warwicks, rejoined the Army next day. Captain Clutterbuck, with a small party of Royal Lancasters, wandered into Haumont after it was occupied by the Germans.

Summoned to surrender the gallant officer refused, and was shot dead, but his men charged with the bayonet and fought their way clear to a post which was held by Major Parker of the same regiment, to the immediate south of the village. This officer, finding that he was the last rearguard, withdrew in the face of heavy German forces. Being joined by Major Christie of the Warwicks with 200 men, they followed the Army, and, finally, by a mixture of good luck and good leadership, picked their way through the German advance guards, and on the third day rejoined the colours at Noyon.

Haldane’s 10th Brigade had got split up during the confused fighting of the day, half of it, the 1st Warwicks and 2nd Dublins, getting involved with the 12th Brigade in the fighting on the Haucourt Ridge. The other two battalions, the 2nd Seaforths and 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, kept guard as a reserve over the left flank of the division. Towards evening General Haldane, finding it hopeless to recover control of his lost regiments, collected the rest of his brigade, and endeavoured to follow the general line of retreat. He lost touch with the remainder of the Army, and might well have been cut off, but after a most exhausting experience he succeeded in safely rejoining the division at Roisel upon the 27th. It may be said generally that the reassembling of the Fourth Division after the disintegration they had experienced was a remarkable example of individualism and determination.

It is impossible to doubt that the Germans, in spite of their preponderating numbers, were staggered by the resistance which they had encountered. In no other way can one explain the fact that their pursuit, which for three days had been incessant, should now, at the most critical instant, have eased off. The cavalry and guns staved off the final blow, and the stricken infantry staggered from the field. The strain upon the infantry of the Fifth Division may be gathered from the fact that up to this point they had lost, roughly, 143 officers, while the Third Division had lost 92 and the Fourth 70. For the time they were disorganised as bodies, even while they preserved their morale as individuals.

When extended formations are drawn rapidly in under the conditions of a heavy action, it is often impossible to convey the orders to men in outlying positions. Staying in their trenches and unconscious of the departure of their comrades, they are sometimes gathered up by the advancing enemy, but more frequently fall into the ranks of some other corps, and remain for days or weeks away from their own battalion, turning up long after they have helped to swell some list of casualties. Regiments get intermingled and pour along the roads in a confusion which might suggest a rout, whilst each single soldier is actually doing his best to recover his corps. It is disorganisation — but not demoralisation.

It has been remarked above that in the widespread formations of modern battles it is difficult to be sure of the transmission of orders. An illustration of such a danger occurred upon this occasion, which gave rise to an aftermath of battle nearly as disastrous as the battle itself. This was the episode which culminated in the loss of a body of troops, including a large portion of the 1st Gordon Highlanders. This distinguished corps had been engaged with the rest of Beauchamp Doran’s 8th Brigade at Mons and again upon the following day, after which they retreated with the rest of their division. On the evening of the 25th they bivouacked in the village of Audencourt, just south of the Cambrai — Le Cateau highway, and on the morning of the 26th they found themselves defending a line of trenches in front of this village. From nine o’clock the Gordons held their ground against a persistent German attack. About 3:30 an order was given for the battalion to retire. This message only reached one company, which acted upon it, but the messenger was wounded en route, and failed to reach battalion headquarters. Consequently the remainder of the battalion did not retire with the Army, but continued to hold its trenches, greatly helped by the flank (D) Company of Royal Scots, until long after nightfall, when the enemy in great force had worked round both of its flanks. It should be understood that the withdrawal of the Royal Scots was under direct order emanating from brigade headquarters, but an officer of the Gordons, not knowing that such an order had been issued, and perceiving that their flank would be exposed if D Company left their trench, said a few words to them which had such an effect upon their fiery souls that they rushed back to stand by the Highlanders, their Captain being shot dead as he waved his men back into their trench. From that time onwards this company of Royal Scots, finely led by two young lieutenants, Graves and Graham Watson, shared all the dangers and the ultimate fate of the Gordons, as did a handful of Royal Irish upon the other flank. When it was dusk it became clear to Colonel Gordon, who was now in command of the mixed detachment, that he and his men were separated from the Army and surrounded on every side by the advancing Germans. At that time the men, after supreme exertion for several days, had been in action for twelve hours on end. He therefore decided, as against annihilation in the morning, that retreat was the only course open. The wounded were left in the trenches. The transport, machine-guns, and horses had already been destroyed by the incessant shelling. The detachment made a move towards the south, the operation being a most difficult one in pitch darkness with the enemy within a few hundred yards. The success attained in this initial stage was largely due to the way in which the Master of Saltoim conveyed the orders which drew in the flanks to the centre. Having made good the Audencourt-Caudry road at 1 A.M. on August 27, the troops managed to traverse some miles of road, with blazing villages all about them, and had a fair chance of reaching safety when unfortunately at Montigny they took a wrong turn, which brought them into Bertry which was held by the Germans. Some confusion was caused by the latter challenging in French. A confused fight followed in the darkness, in the course of which many individual acts of great bravery and devotion were performed. The enemy were now all round the Highlanders, and though the struggle continued for fifty minutes, and there was no official surrender, the little body of men was embedded in Von Kluck’s army, and no escape could be found. The utmost discipline and gallantry were shown by all ranks. It must be some consolation to the survivors to know that it is freely admitted that their resistance in the trenches for so long a period undoubtedly facilitated the safe withdrawal of the Third, and to some extent of the Fourth Divisions. Major Leslie Butler, Brigade-Major of the 8th Brigade, who had made a gallant effort to ride to the Gordons and warn them of their danger, was entangled among the Germans, and only succeeded six days later in regaining the British lines.

So ended the perilous, costly, and almost disastrous action of Le Cateau. The loss to the British Army, so far as it can be extracted from complex figures and separated from the other losses of the retreat, amounted to between seven and eight thousand killed, wounded, and missing, while at the time of the action, or in the immediate retreat, a considerable quantity of transport and thirty-six field-pieces, mostly in splinters, were abandoned to the enemy. It was an action which could hardly have been avoided, and from which the troops were extricated on better terms than might have been expected. It will always remain an interesting academic question what would have occurred had it been possible for the First Corps to line up with the rest of the Army. The enemy’s preponderance of artillery would probably have prevented a British victory, and the strategic position would in any case have made it a barren one, but at least the Germans would have been hard hit and the subsequent retreat more leisurely. As it stood, it was an engagement upon which the weaker side can look back without shame or dishonour. One result of it was to give both the Army and the country increased confidence in themselves and then: leaders. Sir John French has testified to the splendid qualities shown by the troops, while his whole-hearted tribute to Smith-Dorrien, in which he said, “The saving of the left wing of the Army could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been Chapter present to personally conduct the operation,” will surely be endorsed by history.

It is difficult to exaggerate the strain which had been thrown upon this commander. On him had fallen the immediate direction of the action at Mons; on him also had been the incessant responsibility of the retreat. He had, as has been shown in the narrative, been hard at work all night upon the eve of the battle; he superintended that trying engagement, he extricated his forces, and finally motored to St. Quentin in the evening, went on to Noyon, reached it after midnight, and was back with his Army in the morning, encouraging every one by the magnetism of his presence. It was a very remarkable feat of endurance.

Exhausted as the troops were, there could be no halt or rest until they had extricated themselves from the immediate danger. At the last point of human endurance they still staggered on through the evening and the night time, amid roaring thunder and flashing lightning, down the St. Quentin road. Many fell from fatigue, and having fallen, continued to sleep in ditches by the roadside, oblivious of the racket around them. A number never woke until they found themselves in the hands of the Uhlan patrols. Others slumbered until their corps had disappeared, and then, regaining their senses, joined with other straggling units so as to form bands, which wandered over the country, and eventually reached the railway line about Amiens with wondrous Bill Adams tales of personal adventures which in time reached England, and gave the impression of complete disaster. But the main body were, as a matter of fact, holding well together, though the units of infantry had become considerably mixed and so reduced that at least four brigades, after less than a week of war, had lost 50 per cent of their personnel. Many of the men threw away the heavier contents of their packs, and others abandoned the packs themselves, so that the pursuing

Germans had every evidence of a rout before their eyes. It was deplorable that equipment should be discarded, but often it was the only possible thing to do, for either the man had to be sacrificed or the pack. Advantage was taken of a forked road to station an officer there who called out, “Third Division right. Fifth Division left,” which greatly helped the reorganisation. The troops snatched a few hours of rest at St. Quentin, and then in the breaking dawn pushed upon their weary road once more, country carts being in many cases commandeered to carry the lame and often bootless infantry. The paved chaussées, with their uneven stones, knocked the feet to pieces, and caused much distress to the tired men, which was increased by the extreme heat of the weather.

In the case of some of the men the collapse was so complete that it was almost impossible to get them on. Major Tom Bridges, of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoons, being sent to round up and hurry forward 250 stragglers at St. Quentin, found them nearly comatose with fatigue. With quick wit he bought a toy drum, and, accompanied by a man with a penny whistle, he fell them in and marched them, laughing in all their misery, down the high road towards Ham. When he stopped he found that his strange following stopped also, so he was compelled to march and play the whole way to Roupy. Thus by one man’s compelling personality 250 men were saved for the Army. But such complete collapse was rare. The men kept their morale. “Beneath the dirt and grime and weariness I saw clear eyes and grim jaws even when the men could hardly walk.” So spoke Coleman, the gallant American volunteer.

Up to now nothing had been seen of the French infantry, and the exposed British force had been hustled and harried by Von Kluck’s great army without receiving any substantial support. This was through no want of loyalty, but our gallant Allies were themselves hard pressed. Sir John French had sent urgent representations, especially to General Sordet, the leader of the cavalry operating upon the western side, and he had, as already shown, done what he could to screen Smith-Dorrien’s flank. Now at last the retiring Army was coming in touch with those supports which were so badly needed. But before they were reached, on the morning of the 27th, the Germans had again driven in the rearguard of the First Corps.

Some delay in starting had been caused by the fact that only one road was available for the whole of the transport, which had to be sent on in advance. Hence the rearguard was exposed to increased pressure. This rearguard consisted of the 1st Brigade. The 2nd Munsters were the right battalion. Then came the 1st Coldstream, the 1st Scots Guards, and the 1st Black Watch in reserve. The front of the Munsters, as it faced round to hold back the too pushful Germans, was from the north of Fesmy to Chapeau Rouge, but Major Charrier, who was in command, finding no French at Bergues, as he had been led to expect, sent B and D Companies of Munsters with one troop of the 15th Hussars to hold the cross-roads near that place. At about 12:30 a message reached Major Charrier to the effect that when ordered to retire he should fall back on a certain line and act as flank-guard to the brigade. He was not to withdraw his two companies from Chapeau Rouge until ordered. The Germans were already in force right on the top of the Irishmen, the country being a broken one with high hedges which restricted the field of fire. A section of guns of the 118th R.F.A. were served from the road about fifty yards behind the line of the infantry. A desperate struggle ensued, in the course of which the Munsters, suffering heavily, overlapped on each flank, and utterly outnumbered, held on bravely in the hope of help from the rest of the brigade. They did not know that a message had already been dispatched to them to the effect that they should come on, and that the other regiments had already done so. Still waiting for the orders which never came, they fell back slowly through Fesmy before the attack, until held up at a small village called Etreux, where the Germans cut off their retreat. Meanwhile the Brigadier, hearing that the Munsters were in trouble, gave orders that the Coldstream should reinforce them. It was too late, however. At Oisy Bridge the Guards picked up sixty men, survivors of C Company. It was here at Oisy Bridge that the missing order was delivered at 3 P.M., the cycle orderly having been held up on his way. As there was no longer any sound of fixing, the Coldstream and remnant of Munsters retired, being joined some miles back by an officer and some seventy men. Together with the transport guard this brought the total survivors of that fine regiment to 5 officers and 206 men. All the rest had fought to the end and were killed, wounded, or captured, after a most desperate resistance, in which they were shot down at close quarters, making repeated efforts to pierce the strong German force at Étreux. To their fine work and that of the two lost guns and of a party of the 15th Hussars, under Lieutenant Nicholson, who covered the retreat it may have been due that the pursuit of the First Corps by the Germans from this moment sensibly relaxed. Nine gallant Irish officers were buried that night in a common grave. Major

Charrier was twice wounded, but continued to lead his men until a third bullet struck him dead, and deprived the Army of a soldier whose career promised to be a brilliant one. Among others who fell was Lieutenant Chute, whose masterly handling of a machine-gun stemmed again and again the tide of the German attack. One of the most vivid recollections of the survivors was of this officer lying on his face in six inches of water — for the action was partly fought in tropical rain — and declaring that he was having "the time of his life." The morale both of this disaster and that of the Gordons must be the importance of sending a message in duplicate, or even in triplicate, where the withdrawal of a regiment is concerned. This, no doubt, is a counsel of perfection under practical conditions, but the ideal still remains.

During the retreat of the First Corps its rear and a cavalry right flank had been covered by the 5th Cavalry Brigade (Chetwode). On August 28 the corps was continuing its march towards La Fère and the cavalry found itself near Cerizy. At this point the pursuing German horsemen came into touch with it. At about five in the afternoon, three squadrons of the enemy advanced upon one squadron of the Scots Greys, which had the support of J Battery. Being fired at, the Germans dismounted and attempted to advance upon foot, but the fire was so heavy that they could make no progress and their led horses stampeded. They retired, still on foot, followed up by a squadron of the 12th Lancers on their flank. The remainder of the 12th Lancers, supported by the Greys, rode into the dismounted dragoons with sword and lance, killing or wounding nearly all of them. A section of guns had fired over the heads of the British cavalry during the advance into a supporting body of German cavalry, who retired, leaving many dead behind them. The whole hostile force retreated northwards, while the British cavalry continued to conform to the movements of the First Corps. In this spirited little action the German regiment engaged was, by the irony of fate, the 1st Guard Dragoons, Queen Victoria's Own. The British lost 43 killed and wounded. Among the dead were Major Swetenham and Captain Michell of the 12th Lancers. Colonel Wormald of the same regiment was wounded. The excited troopers rode back triumphantly between the guns of J Battery, the cavalrymen exchanging cheers with the horse-gunners as they passed, and brandishing their blood-stained weapons.

On the evening before this brisk skirmish, the flank-guards of the British saw a considerable body of troops in dark clothing upon their left, and shortly afterwards perceived the shell-bursts of a rapid and effective fire over the pursuing German batteries. It was the first contact with the advancing French. These men consisted of the Sixty-first and Sixty-second French Reserve Divisions, and were the van of a considerable army under General D’Amade. From that moment the British forces were at last enabled, after a week of constant marching, covering sometimes a good thirty miles a day, and four days of continual fighting against extreme odds, to feel that they had reached a zone of comparative quiet.

The German cavalry still followed the Army upon its southerly march, but there was no longer any fear of a disaster, for the main body of the Army was unbroken, and the soldiers were rather exasperated than depressed by their experience. On the Friday and Saturday, however, August 28 and 29, considerable crowds of stragglers and fugitives, weary and often weaponless, appeared upon the lines of communication, causing the utmost consternation by their stories and their appearance. Few who endured the mental anxiety caused in Great Britain by the messages of Sunday, August 30, are likely to forget it. The reports gave an enormous stimulus to recruiting, and it is worthy of record and remembrance that, in the dark week which followed before the true situation was clearly discerned, every successive day brought as many recruits to the standards as are usually gained in a year. Such was the rush of men that the authorities, with their many preoccupations, found it very difficult to deal with them. A considerable amount of hardship and discomfort was the result, which was endured with good humour until it could be remedied. It is to be noted in this connection that it was want of arms which held back the new armies. He who compares the empty arsenals of Britain with the huge extensions of Krupp’s, undertaken during the years before the war, will find the final proof as to which Power deliberately planned it.

To return to the fortunes of the men retreating from Le Cateau, the colonels and brigadiers had managed to make order out of what was approaching to chaos on the day that the troops left St. Quentin. The feet of many were so cut and bleeding that they could no longer limp along, so some were packed into a few trains available and others were hoisted on to limbers, guns, wagons, or anything with wheels, some carts being lightened of ammunition or stores to make room for helpless men. In many cases the whole kits of the officers were deliberately sacrificed. Many men were delirious from exhaustion and incapable of understanding an order. By the evening of the 27th the main body of the troops were already fifteen miles south of the Somme river and canal, on the line Nesle — Ham — Flavy. All day there was distant shelling from the pursuers, who sent their artillery freely forward with their cavalry.

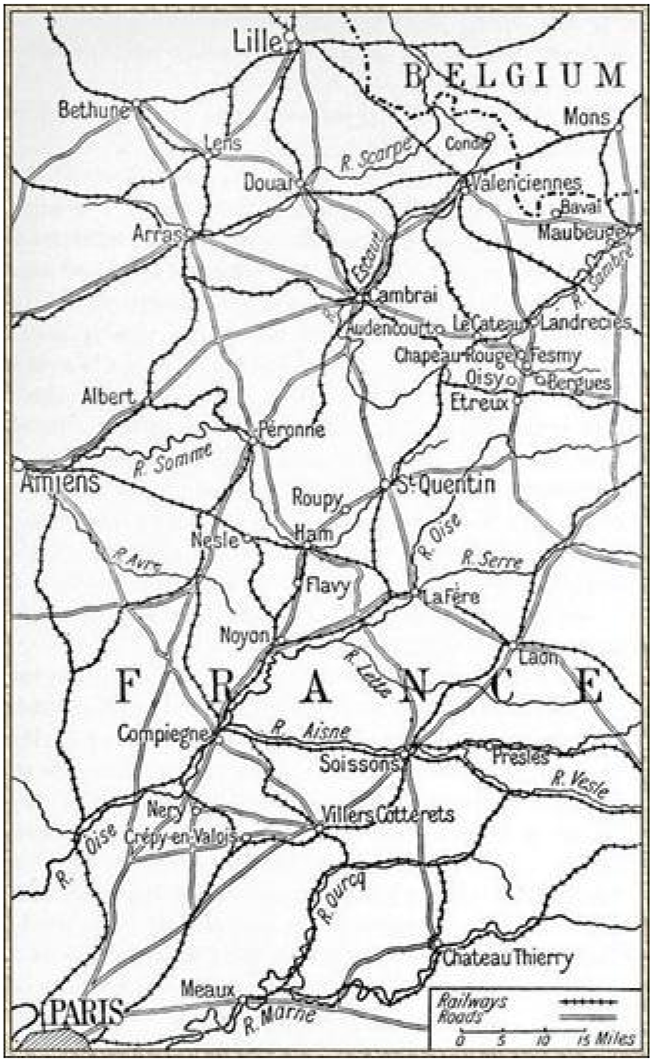
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R. Sambre
Cambrai
Audencourt
Le Cateau
Landrecies
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Fesmy
Oisy
Bergues
Etreux
Albert
Peronne
R. Somme
Amiens
St Quentin
Roupy
Ham
R. Oise
Nesle
R. Avre
R. Serre
Flavy
La Fère
Noyon
Laon
FRANCE
R. Lette
Compiegne
R. Aisne
Soissons
Presles
R. Vesle
Nery
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Line of Retreat from Mons

On the 28th the Army continued its retreat to the line of the Oise near Noyon. Already the troops were re-forming, and had largely recovered their spirits, being much reassured by the declarations of the officers that the retreat was strategic to get them in line with the French, and that they would soon turn their faces northwards once more. As an instance of reorganisation it was observed that the survivors of a brigade of artillery which had left its horses and guns at Le Cateau still marched together as a single disciplined unit among the infantry. All day the enemy's horse artillery, cavalry, and motor-infantry hung on the skirts of the British, but were unable to make much impression. The work of the Staff was excellent, for it is on record that many of them had not averaged two hours' sleep in the twenty-four for over a week. the Army.

On the next day, the 29th, the remainder of the Army got across the Oise, but the enemy's advance was so close that the British cavalry was continually engaged. Gough's 3rd Cavalry Brigade made several charges in the neighbourhood of Plessis, losing a number of men but stalling off the pursuit and dispersing the famous Uhlans of the Guard. On this day General Pulteney and his staff arrived to take command of the Third Army Corps, which still consisted only of the Fourth Division (Snow) with the semi-independent 19th Infantry Brigade, now commanded by Colonel Ward, of the 1st Middlesex. It was nearly three weeks later before the Third Corps was made complete.

There had been, as already mentioned, a French advance of four corps in the St. Quentin direction, which fought a brave covering action, and so helped to relieve the pressure upon the British. It cannot be denied that there was a feeling among the latter that they had been unduly exposed, being placed in so advanced a position and having their flank stripped suddenly bare in the presence of the main German army. General Joffre must have recognised that this feeling existed and that it was not unreasonable, for he came to a meeting on this day at the old Napoleonic Palace at Compiègne, at which Sir John French, with Generals Haig, Smith-Dorrien, and Allenby, was present. It was an assemblage of weary, overwrought men, and yet of men who had strength enough of mind and sufficient sense of justice to realise that whatever weight had been thrown upon them, there was even more upon the great French engineer, whose spirit hovered over the whole line from Verdun to Amiens. Each man left the room more confident of the immediate future. Shortly afterwards Joffre issued his kindly recognition of the work done by his Allies, admitting in the most handsome fashion that the flank of the long French line of armies had been saved by the hard fighting and self-sacrifice of the British Army.

On August 30, the whole Army having crossed the Oise, the bridges over that river were destroyed, an operation which was performed under a heavy shell fire, and cost the lives of several sapper officers and men. No words can exaggerate what the Army owed to Wilson's sappers of the 56th and

57th Field Companies and 3rd Signal Company, as also to Tulloch’s, of the 17th and 59th Companies and 5th Signal Company, whose work was incessant, fearless, and splendid.

The Army continued to fall back on the line of the Aisne, the general direction being almost east and west through Crépy-en-Valois. The aeroplanes, which had conducted a fine service during the whole of the operations, reported that the enemy was still coming rapidly on, and streaming southwards in the Compiègne direction. That they were in touch was shown in dramatic fashion upon the early morning of September 1. The epic in question deserves to be told somewhat fully, as being one of those incidents which are mere details in the history of a campaign, and yet may live as permanent inspirations in the life of an army.

The 1st Cavalry Brigade, greatly exhausted after screening the retreat so long, was encamped near Néry, to the south of Compiègne, the bivouac being a somewhat extended one. Two units were close to each other and to the brigade headquarters of General Briggs. These were the hard-worked 2nd Dragoon Guards (the Bays) and L Battery of Horse Artillery. Reveille was at four o’clock, and shortly after that hour both troopers and gunners were busy in leading their horses to water. It was a misty morning, and, peering through the haze, an officer perceived that from the top of a low hill about seven hundred yards away three mounted men were looking down upon them. They were the observation officers of three four-gun German batteries. Before the British could realise the situation the guns dashed up and came into action with shrapnel at point-blank range. The whole twelve poured their fire into the disordered bivouac before them. The slaughter and confusion were horrible. Numbers of the horses and men were killed or wounded, and three of the guns were dismounted. It was a most complete surprise, and promised to be an absolute disaster. A body of German cavalry had escorted the guns, and their rifles added to the volume of fire.

It is at such moments that the grand power of disciplined valour comes to bring order out of chaos. Everything combined to make defence difficult — the chilling hour of the morning, the suddenness of the attack, its appalling severity, and the immediate loss of guns and men. A sunken road ran behind the British position, and from the edge of this the dismounted cavalrymen brought their rifles and their machine-gun into action. They suffered heavily from the pelting gusts of shrapnel. Young Captain de Crespigny, the gallant cadet of a gallant family, and many other good men were beaten down by it.

The sole hope lay in the guns. Three were utterly disabled. There was a rush of officers and men to bring the other three into action. Sclater-Booth, the major of the battery, and one lieutenant were already down. Captain Bradbury took command and cheered on the men. Two of the guns were at once put out of action, so all united to work the one that remained.

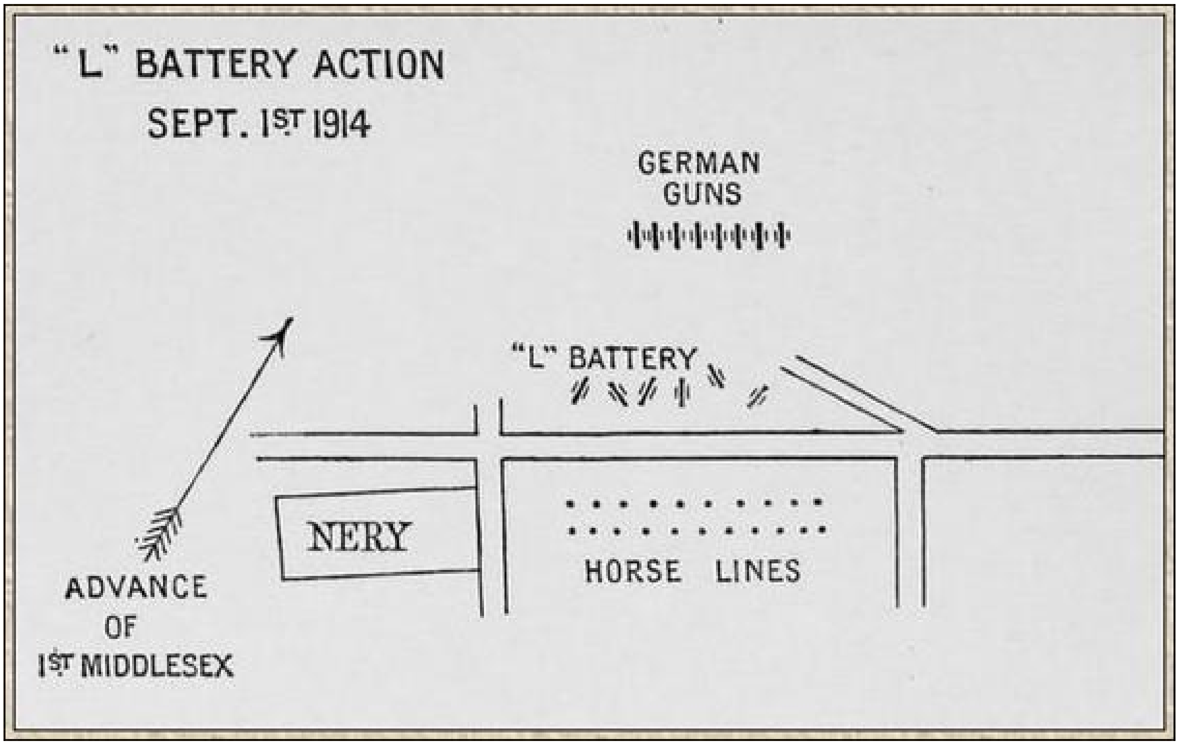

“L” Battery Action, September 1, 1914

What followed was Homeric. Lieutenant Giffard in rushing forward was hit in four places. Bradbury’s leg was shattered, but he lay beside the trail encouraging the others and giving his directions. Lieutenant Mundy, standing wide as observation officer, was mortally wounded. The limber could not be got alongside and the shell had to be man-handled. In bringing it up Lieutenant Campbell was shot. Immediately afterwards another shell burst over the gun, killed the heroic Bradbury, and wounded Sergeant Dorell, Driver Osborne, and Gunners Nelson and Derbyshire, the only remaining men. But the fight went on. The bleeding men served the gun so long as they could move, Osborne and Derbyshire crawling over with the shells while Nelson loaded and Dorell laid. Osborne and Derbyshire fainted from loss of blood and lay between limber and gun. But the fight went on. Dorell and Nelson, wounded and exhausted, crouched behind the shield of the thirteen-pounder and kept up an incessant fire. Now it was that the amazing fact became visible that all this devotion had not been in vain. The cluster of Bays on the edge of the sunken road burst out into a cheer, which was taken up by the staff, who, with General Briggs himself, had come into the firing-line. Several of the German pieces had gone out of action. The dying gun had wrought good work, as had the Maxim of the Bays in the hands of Lieutenant Lamb. Some at least of its opponents had been silenced before the two brave gunners could do no more, for their strength had gone with their blood. Not only had the situation been saved, but victory had been assured.

About eight in the morning news of the perilous situation had reached the 19th Brigade. The 1st Middlesex, under Colonel Rowley, was hurried forward, followed by the 1st Scottish Rifles. Marching rapidly upon the firing, after the good old Maxim, the Middlesex found themselves in a position to command the German batteries. After two minutes of rapid fire it was seen that the enemy had left their guns. Eight guns were captured, two of them still loaded. About a dozen German gunners lay dead or wounded round them. Twenty-five of the escort were captured, as was an ambulance with some further prisoners a mile in the rear. The cavalry, notably the 11th Hussars, endeavoured to follow up the success, but soon found themselves in the presence of superior forces. New wheels and new wheelers were found for the injured guns, and Battery L came intact out of action — intact save for the brave acolytes who should serve her no more. Bradbury, Nelson, and Doxell had the Victoria Cross, and never was it better earned. The battery itself was recalled to England to refit and the guns were changed for new ones. It is safe to say that for many a long year these shrapnel-dinted thirteen-pounders will serve as a monument of one of those deeds which, by their self-sacrifice and nobility, do something to mitigate the squalors and horrors of war.

The success was gained at the cost of many valuable lives. Not only had the personnel of the battery been destroyed, but the Bays lost heavily, and there were some casualties among the rest of the brigade who had come up in support. The 5th Dragoon Guards had 50 or 60 casualties, and lost its admirable commander, Colonel Ansell, who was shot down in a flanking movement which he had initiated. Major Cawley, of the staff, also fell. The total British loss was not far short of 500 killed and wounded, but the Germans lost heavily also, and were compelled to abandon their guns.*

[*The German cavalry were the Fourth Cavalry Division, including the 2nd Cuirassiers, 9th Uhlans, 17th and 18th Dragoons. They published in their losses for the “Combat of Néry” 643 casualties. This is not the complete loss, as the artillery does not seem to have been included.]

The German advance guards were particularly active upon this day, September 1, the anniversary of Sedan. Although the Soissons Bridge had been destroyed they had possession of another at Vic, and over this they poured in pursuit of the First Corps, overtaking about 8 A.M. near Villars-Cotteret the rearguard, consisting of the Irish Guards and the 2nd Coldstream. The whole of the 4th Guards Brigade was drawn into the fight, which resolved itself into a huge rifle duel amid thick woods, Scott-Kerr, their Brigadier, riding up and down the firing line. The Guards retired slowly upon the 6th Infantry Brigade (Davies), which was aided by Lushington’s 41st Brigade of Artillery, just south of Pisseleux. The Germans had brought up many guns, but could make no further progress, and the British position was held until 6 P.M., when the rearguard closed up with the rest of the Army. Lushington’s guns had fought with no infantry in front of them, and it was a matter of great difficulty in the end to get them off, but it was accomplished by some very brilliant work under an infernal fire. After this sharp action, in which Colonel Morris of the Irish Guards lost his life, the retreat of the First Army Corps was not seriously interfered with. The losses at that date in this corps amounted to 81 officers and 2180 of all ranks.

So much attention is naturally drawn to the Second Army Corps, which both at Mons and at Le Cateau had endured most of the actual fighting, that there is some danger of the remarkable retreat effected by the First Corps having less than its fair share of appreciation. The actual fighting was the least of the difficulties. The danger of one or both flanks being exposed, the great mobility of the enemy, the indifferent and limited roads, the want of rest, the difficulty of getting food cooked, the consequent absolute exhaustion of the men, and the mental depression combined to make it an operation of a most trying character, throwing an enormous strain upon the judgment and energy of General Haig. who so successfully brought his men intact and fit for service into a zone of safety.

On the night of September 1, the First and Second Army Corps were in touch once more at Betz, and were on the move again by 2 A.M. upon the 2nd. On this morning the German advance was curiously interlocked with the British rear, and four German guns were picked up by the cavalry near Ermenonville. They are supposed to have been the remaining guns of the force which attacked Battery L at Néry. The movements of the troops during the day were much impeded by the French refugees, who thronged every road in their flight before the German terror. In spite of these obstructions, the rearward services of the Army — Supply columns, ammunition columns, and medical transport — were well conducted, and the admiration of all independent observers. The work of all these departments had been greatly complicated by the fact that, as the Channel ports were now practically undefended and German troops, making towards the coast, had cut the main Calais-Boulogne line at Amiens, the base had been moved farther south from Havre to St. Nazaire, which meant shifting seventy thousand tons of stores and changing all arrangements. In spite of this the supplies were admirable. It may safely be said that if there is one officer more than another for whom the whole British Army felt a glow of gratitude, it was for Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Commissariat, who saw that the fighting man was never without his rations. Greatly also did they appreciate the work of his subordinates, who, wet or fine, through rainfall or shell-fall, passed the food forward to the weary men at the front.

A difficult movement lay in front of the Army which had to cross the Marne, involving a flank march in the face of the enemy. A retirement was still part of the general French scheme of defence, and the British Army had to conform to it, though it was exultantly whispered from officer to sergeant and from sergeant to private that the turn of the tide was nearly due. On this day it was first observed that the Germans, instead of pushing forward, were swinging across to the east in the direction of Château-Thierry. This made the task of the British a more easy one, and before evening they were south of the Marne and had blown up the bridges. The movement of the Germans brought them down to the river, but at a point some ten miles east of the British position. They were reported to be crossing the river at La Ferté, and Sir John French continued to fall back towards the Seine, moving after sundown, as the heat had been for some days very exhausting. The troops halted in the neighbourhood of Presles, and were cheered by the arrival of some small drafts, numbering about 2000, a first installment towards refilling the great gaps in the ranks, which at this date could not have been less than from 12,000 to 15,000 officers and men.

Here for a moment this narrative may be broken, since it has taken the Army to the farthest point of its retreat and reached that moment of advance for which every officer and man, from Sir John French to the drummer-boys, was eagerly waiting. With their left flank resting upon the extreme outer forts of Paris, the British troops had finally ended a retreat which will surely live in military history as a remarkable example of an army retaining its cohesion and courage in the presence of an overpowering adversary, who could never either cut them off or break in their rearguard. The British Army was a small force when compared with the giants of the Continent, but when tried by this supreme test it is not mere national complacency for us to claim that it lived up to its own highest traditions. “It was not to forts of steel and concrete that the Allies owed their strength,” said a German historian, writing of this phase of the war, “but to the magnificent qualities of the British Army.” We desire no compliments at the expense of our brothers-in-arms, nor would they be just, but at least so generous a sentence as this may be taken as an advance from that contemptuous view of the British Army with which the campaign had begun.

Before finally leaving the consideration of this historical retreat, where a small army successfully shook itself clear from the long and close pursuit of a remarkably gallant, mobile, and numerous enemy, it may be helpful to give a chronology of the events, that the reader may see their relation to each other.

HAIG’S FIRST CORPS	SMITH-DORRIEN’S SECOND CORPS
August 22	
Get into position to the east of Mons,	

Get into position to the west of Mons, covering the line Mons — Bray.

covering the line Mons — Condé.

August 23

Artillery engagement, but no severe attack.

Ordered to retreat in conformity with Second Corps.

Strongly attacked by Von Kluck’s army.

Ordered to abandon position and fall back.

August 24

Retreat with no serious molestation upon Bavai.

Here the two Corps diverged and did not meet again till they reached Betz upon September 1.

Retreat followed up by the Germans.

Severe rearguard actions at Dour, Wasmes, Frameries.

Corps shook itself clear and fell back on Bavai.

August 25

Marching all day.

Overtaken in evening at Landrecies and Maroilles by the German pursuit. Sharp fighting. Marching all day.

Reinforced by Fourth Division. Continual rearguard action becoming more serious towards evening, when Cambrai —

Le Cateau line was reached.

August 26

Rearguard actions in morning.

Marching south all day, halting at the Venerolles line. Battle of Le Cateau.

German pursuit stalled off at heavy cost of men and guns.

Retreat on St. Quentin.

August 27

Rearguard action in which Munsters lost heavily.

Marching south all day.	Marching south. Reach the line Nesle — Ham — Flavy.

Battle of Le Cateau.

August 28

Cavalry actions to stop German pursuit.

Marching south on La Fère.	Marching south, making for the line of the Oise near

Noyon. Light rearguard skirmishes.

August 29, 30, and 31

Marching on the line of the Aisne, almost east and west.

Crossed Oise. Cavalry continually engaged.

General direction through Crépy-en-Valois.

September 1

Sharp action at Néry with German vanguard.

Later in the day considerable infantry action at Villars — Cotteret. Unite at Betz. Retreat upon Paris continued.

Late this night the two Corps unite once more at Betz.

September 2

Crossed the Marne and began to fall back on the Seine.

Halted near Presles.	Crossed the Marne and began to fall back on the Seine.

V. THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

The general situation—”Die grosse Zeit” — The turn of the tide — The Battle of the Ourcq — The British advance — Cavalry fighting — The 1st Lincolns and the guns — 6th Brigade’s action at Hautvesnes — 9th Brigade’s capture of Germans at Vinly — The problem of the Aisne — Why the Marne is one of the great battles of all time

THERE are several problems connected with the strategical opening of the great war which will furnish food for debate among military critics for many years come. One of these, already alluded to, is the French offensive taken in Alsace and Lorraine. It ended in check in both cases, and yet its ultimate effects in confusing the German plans and deflecting German armies which might have been better used elsewhere may be held to justify the French in their strategy.

Another remarkable and questionable move now obtrudes itself, this time upon the part of the Germans. Very shortly after the outbreak of war, the Russians had pushed their covering armies over the frontier of East Prussia, and had defeated a German force at Gumbinnen, with a loss of prisoners and guns. A few days later the left wing of the widespread, and as yet only partially mobilised, Russian army struck heavily at the Austrians in the south near Lemberg, where after a week of fighting they gained a great victory, with prisoners, which amounted to over 70,000 men and a large booty of guns and supplies. Before this blow had befallen their cause, and influenced only by the fact that the Russian right wing was encroaching upon the sacred soil of the Fatherland, a considerable force was detached from the invading armies in France and dispatched to the Eastern front. These men were largely drawn from the Third (Saxon) Army of Von Haussen. Such a withdrawal at such a time could only mean that the German general staff considered that the situation in France was assured, and that they had still sufficient means to carry on a victorious invasion. Events were to show that they were utterly mistaken in their calculation. It is true that, aided by these reinforcements, Von Hindenburg succeeded on August 31 in inflicting a severe defeat upon the Russians at the battle of Tannenberg, but subsequent events proved that such a victory could have no decisive result, while the weakening of the armies in France may have had a permanent effect upon the whole course of the war. At the very moment that the Germans were withdrawing troops from their Western front the British and French were doing all they could to thicken their own line of resistance, especially by the transference of armies from Alsace and the south. Thus the net result was that, whereas the Germans had up to August 25 a very marked superiority in numbers, by the beginning of September the forces were more equal. From that moment the chance of their taking Paris became steadily more and more remote.

The first month of the war represented a very remarkable military achievement upon the part of Germany. In her high state of preparation as compared with the Allies, it was to be expected that the beginning of hostilities would be all in her favour, but the reality exceeded what could have been foreseen. Her great armies were ready to the last button. Up to the eve of war the soldiers did not themselves know what their field uniform was like. At the last moment two millions of men filed into the depots and emerged in half an hour clad in grey, with new boots, equipment, and every possible need for the campaign. On her artillery surprises she set special store, and they were upon a vast scale. The machine-gun had been developed to an extent unknown by other armies, and of these deadly little weapons it is certain that very many thousands were available. From the tiny quick-firer, carried easily by two men upon a stretcher, to the vast cannon with a diameter of sixteen-and-a-half inches at the mouth, taking three railway trucks for its majestic portage, every possible variety of man-killing engine was ready in vast profusion. So, too, was the flying service, from the little Taube to the huge six-hundred-foot Zeppelin. From these latter devices great results were expected which were not destined to materialise, for, apart from reconnaissances, they proved themselves to be machines rather for the murder of non-combatants than for honest warfare.

Making every allowance for the huge advantage which the nation that *knows* war is coming must always enjoy over those which merely fear that it may come, it would be foolish to deny the vast military achievement of Germany in the month of August. It reflects great credit upon the bravery and energy of her troops, as well as upon the foresight of her organisers and the capacity of her leaders. Though we are her enemies, our admiration would have been whole-hearted were it not for the brutalities which marked her advance both in Poland, in Belgium, and in France. Consider that wonderful panorama of victory which was known all over the Fatherland as *“Die grosse Zeit,”* On August 10 fell the great fortress of Liège, on the

22nd the great fortress of Namur, early in September that of Maubeuge, while the smaller strongholds went down as if they were open cities. On August 10 was a considerable victory at Mülhausen, on the 20th the Belgians were defeated at Tirlemont, on the same day Brussels was occupied. On the 22nd the French central army of ten corps was defeated in a great battle near Charleroi, losing, according to the Germans, some 20,000 prisoners and 200 guns. On the left flank the Crown Prince’s army won the battle of Longwy, taking 10,000 prisoners and many more guns. On August 23 the Duke of Würtemberg won a battle in the Ardennes. Upon the same date the British were driven from their position at Mons. Upon the 26th they were defeated at Le Cateau. Most of Belgium and the North of France were overrun. Scattered parties of Uhlans made their way to the shores of the Atlantic spreading terror along the Channel coast. The British bases were in such danger that they had to be moved.

Finally, upon the last day of the month, a great battle took place at Tannenberg in East Prussia, in which the Russian invading army was almost completely destroyed. I do not know where in history such a succession of victories is to be found, and our horror of the atrocities of Louvain, Aerschot, Dinard, and so many other places must not blind us to the superb military achievement.

Marne. It was not, it is true, an unbroken series of successes — even in the West. The French in the early days won a victory at Dornach in Alsace, and another smaller one at Dinant in the Ardennes. They held the enemy in the neighbourhood of Nancy, fought a fairly equal battle at St. Quentin in taking the pressure off the British at the end of August, and had a success at Guise. These, however, were small matters as compared with the sweeping tide of German victory. But gradually the impetus of the rush was being stayed. Neither the French nor the British lines were broken. They grew stronger from compression, whilst the invaders grew weaker from diffusion. Even as they hoped to reach the climax of their success, and the huge winning-post of the Eiffel Tower loomed up before their racing armies, the dramatic moment arrived, and the dauntless, high-hearted Allies had the reward of their constant, much-enduring valour.

September 6 was a day of great elation in the armies of the Allies, for it marked the end of the retreat and the beginning of their victorious return. It is clear that they could in no case have gone farther south without exposing Paris to the danger of an attack. The French Government had already been transferred to Bordeaux and the city put into a state which promised a long and stubborn defence, but after the surprising rapidity of the capture of Namur there was a general distrust of fortresses, and it was evident that if only one or two of the outer ring of forts should be overwhelmed by the German fire, the enemy would be in a position to do terrible damage to the city, even if they failed to occupy it. The constant dropping of bombs from German aeroplanes, one of which had already injured the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame, gave a sinister forecast of the respect which the enemy was likely to show to the monuments of antiquity.

Fortunately, the problem of investing Paris while the main French armies remained unbeaten in the field proved to be an insuperable one. The first German task, in accordance with the prophet Clausewitz, was to break the French resistance. Everything would follow after that, and nothing could precede it. Von Kluck, with his army, comprising originally something over 200,000 men, had lost considerably in their conflicts with the British, and were much exhausted by rapid marching, but they were still in good heart, as the roads over which they passed seemed to offer ample evidence that their enemy was in full flight before them. Knowing that they had hit the British hard, they hoped that, for a time at least, they might disregard them, and, accordingly, they ventured to close in, by a flank march, on to the other German armies to the east of them, in order to combine against the main line of French resistance and to make up the gaps of those corps which had been ordered to East Prussia. But the bulldog, though weary and somewhat wounded, was still watching with bloodshot eyes. He now sprang suddenly upon the exposed flank of his enemy and got a grip which held firm for many a day to come.

Without going into complicated details of French strategy, which would be outside the scope of this work, it may be generally stated that the whole French line, which had stretched on August 22 from Namur along the line of the Sambre to Charleroi and had retired with considerable loss before the German advance, was now extended in seven separate armies from Verdun to the west of Paris.

General Joffre had assembled Maunoury’s Sixth Army, which consisted of the Seventh Regular Corps, one reserve corps, and three territorial divisions, with Sordet’s cavalry, in the neighbourhood of Amiens, and at the end of the month they lay with their right upon Roye. Thus, when Von Kluck swerved to his left, this army was on the flank of the whole great

German line which extended to Verdun. Next to this Sixth Army and more to the south-east were the British, now no longer unsupported, but with solid French comrades upon either side of them. Next to the British, counting from the left or westward end of the defensive line, was the Fifth French Army under General d'Esperey, of four corps, with Conneau's cavalry forming the link between. These three great bodies, the French Sixth, the British, and the French Fifth, were in touch during the subsequent operations, and moved forward in close co-operation upon September 6. Their operations were directed against the First (Von Kluck's) and Second (Von Bülow's) Armies. On the right of the Fifth French Army came another extra, produced suddenly by the prolific Joffre and thrust into the centre of the line. This was General Foch's Seventh, three corps strong, which joined to the eastward General Langlé de Gary's Fourth Army. Opposed to them were the remains of Von Haussen's Third Saxon Army and the Prince of Würtemberg's Fourth Army. Eastward of this, on the farther side of the great plain of Chalons, a place of evil omen for the Huns, were the Third (Sarrail), Second (Castelnau), and First (Dubail) French Armies, which faced the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh German, commanded respectively by the Crown Prince of Prussia, the Crown Prince of Bavaria, and General von Heeringen. Such were the mighty lines which were destined to swing and sway for an eventful week in the strain of a close-locked fight.

The eastern portion of this great battle is outside the scope of this account, but it may briefly be stated that after murderous fighting neither the French nor the German lines made any marked advance in the extreme east, but that the Crown Prince's army was driven back by Dubail, Sarrail, and Castelnau from all its advanced positions, and held off from Nancy and Verdun, which were his objectives. It was at the western end of the Allied line that the strategical position was most advantageous and the result most marked. In all other parts of that huge line the parallel battle prevailed. Only in the west were the Germans outflanked, and the shock of the impact of the Sixth French Army passed down from Meaux to Verdun as the blow of the engine's buffer sends the successive crashes along a line of trucks. This French army was, as already stated, upon the extreme outside right of Von Kluck's army, divided from it only by the River Ourcq. This was the deciding factor in the subsequent operations.

By mid-day upon September 6, according to the dispatch of Sir John French, the Germans had realised their dangerous position. The British

Army, consisting of five divisions and five cavalry brigades, with its depleted ranks filled up with reinforcements and some of its lost guns replaced, was advancing from the south through the forest of Crecy, men who had limped south with bleeding feet at two miles an hour changing their gait to three or four now that they were bound northward. The general movement of the Army cannot, however, be said to have been rapid. Von Kluck had placed nothing more substantial than a cavalry screen of two divisions in front of them, while he had detached a strong force of infantry and artillery to fight a rearguard action against the Sixth French Army and prevent it from crossing the Ourcq.

The desperate struggle of September 6, 7, 8, and 9 between Von Kluck and Maunoury may be looked upon as the first turning-point of the war. Von Kluck had originally faced Maunoury with his Fourth Reserve Corps on the defensive. Recognising how critical it was that Maunoury should be crushed, he passed back two more army corps — the Seventh and Second — across the Ourcq, and fell upon the French with such violence that for two days it was impossible to say which side would win. Maunoury and his men fought magnificently, and the Germans showed equal valour. At one time the situation seemed desperate, but 20,000 men, odds and ends of every kind — Republican Guards, gendarmes, and others — were rushed out from Paris in a five-mile line of automobiles, and the action was restored. Only on the morning of the 10th did the Germans withdraw in despair, held in their front by the brave Maunoury, and in danger of being cut off by the British to the east of them.

The advance of the British upon September 6 was made in unison with that of the Fifth French Army (D’Esperey’s) upon the right, and was much facilitated by the fact that Von Kluck had to detach the strong force already mentioned to deal with Maunoury upon the left. The British advanced with the Fourth Division upon the left, the Second Corps in the centre and the First Corps upon the right. The high banks of the Grand Morin were occupied without serious fighting, and the whole line pushed forward for a considerable distance, halting on the Coulommiers-Maisoncelles front. The brunt of the fighting during the day was borne by the French on either wing, the Third and Fourth German Corps being thrown back by D’Esperey’s men, among whom the Senegal regiments particularly distinguished themselves. The fighting in this section of the field continued far into the night.

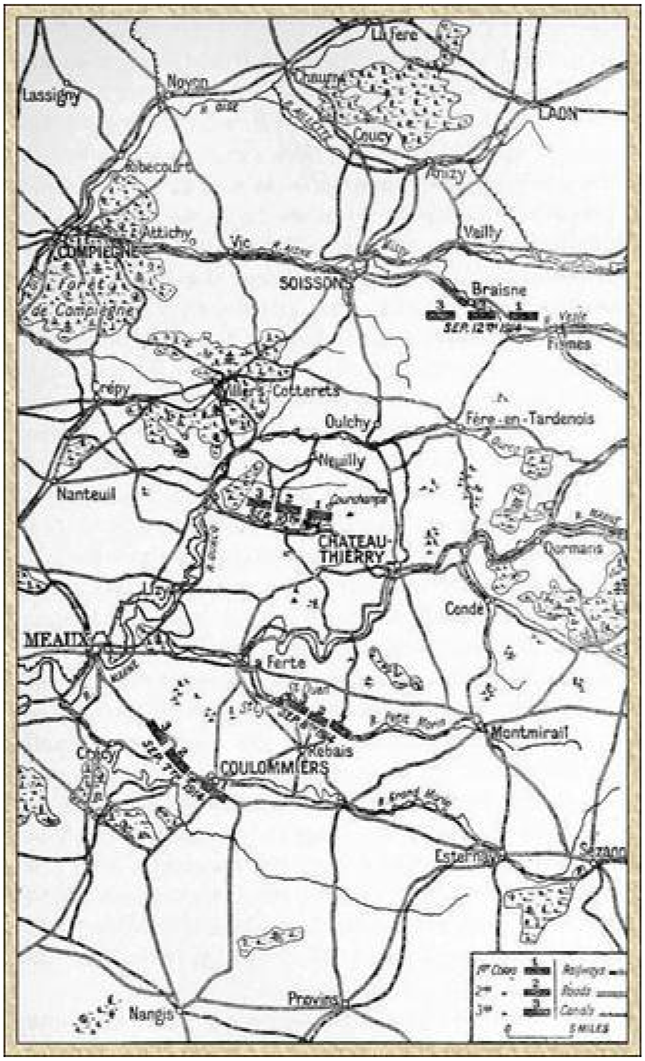
La Fere
Lassigny
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Coucy
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Forêt de Compiègne
SOISSONS
Braisne
SEP. 12th 1914
Fismes
Crépy
Villers-Cotterets
Oulchy
Fère-en-Tardenois
Neuilly
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Dormans
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Condé
MEAUX
Ferte
Montmirail
Crécy
Rebais
COULOMMIERS
Esternay
Sezanne
Nangis
Provins
Railways
Roads
Canals
5 MILES

British Advance during the Battle of the Marne

On September 7 the British and the Fifth French were still moving northwards, while the Sixth French were continuing their bitter struggle upon the Ourcq. The British infantry losses were not heavy, though a hidden battery cost the South Lancashires of the 7th Brigade forty-one casualties. Most of the fighting depended upon the constant touch between the British cavalry and the German. It was again the French armies upon each flank who did the hard work during this eventful day, the first of the German retreat. The Sixth Army were all day at close grips with Von Kluck, while the Fifth drove the enemy back to the line of the Petit Morin River, carrying Vieux-Maisons at the point of the bayonet. Foch's army, still farther to the east, was holding its own in a desperate defensive battle.

Of the cavalry skirmishes upon this day one deserves some special record. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade (De Lisle) was acting at the time as flank guard with, the 9th Lancers in front. Coming into contact with some German dragoons near the village of Moncel, there followed a face-to-face charge between two squadrons, each riding through the Marne. other. The American, Coleman, who saw the encounter, reckons the odds in numbers to have been two to one against the Lancers. The British Colonel Campbell was wounded, and the adjutant, Captain Reynolds, transfixed through the shoulder by a lance. While drawing the weapon out Captain Allfrey was killed. The other casualties were slight, and those of the German dragoons were considerably greater. This example of shock tactics was almost instantly followed by an exhibition of those mounted rifleman tactics which have been cultivated of late years. A squadron of the 18th Hussars, having dismounted, was immediately charged by a German squadron in close order. About 70 Germans charged, and 32 were picked up in front of the dismounted Hussars, while the few who passed through the firing line were destroyed by the horse-holders. It may fairly be argued that had the two squadrons met with shock tactics, no such crushing effect could possibly have been attained. It is interesting that in one morning two incidents should have occurred which bore so directly upon the perennial dispute between the partisans of the *arme blanche* and those of the rifle.

On the 8th the orders were to advance towards Château-Thierry and to endeavour to reach the Marne. The Germans were retreating fast, but rather on account of their generally faulty strategical position than from tactical compulsion, and they covered themselves with continual rearguard actions, especially along the line of the Petit Morin. It is one of the noticeable results, however, of the use of aircraft that the bluff of a rearguard has disappeared and that it is no longer possible to make such a retreat as Masséna from Torres Vedras, where the pursuer never knew if he were striking at a substance or a shadow. Gough’s Second Cavalry Division, which consisted of the 3rd and 5th Brigades, swept along, and the infantry followed hard at the heels of the horses, Doran’s 8th Brigade suffering the loss of about 100 men when held up at the crossing of the Petit Morin River near Orly, which they traversed eventually under an effective covering fire from J Battery, R.H.A.

The First Army Corps upon this day forced the Petit Morin at two places, both near La Trétoire, north of Rebaix. The First Division secured the passage at Sablonnières, where the Black Watch seized the heights, causing the German rearguard some losses and taking 60 prisoners. The Second Division met with considerable resistance, but the 2nd Worcesters got over at Le Gravier and the 2nd Grenadier Guards at La Forge. The enemy was then driven from the river bank into the woods, where they were practically surrounded and had eventually to surrender. Eight machine-guns and 350 prisoners, many of them from the Guards' Jaeger Battalion, were captured. Six of these machine-guns fell to the Irish Guards.

The Second Army Corps passed the Petit Morin near St. Cyr and St. Ouen, the 13th Brigade attacking the former and the 14th the latter, both being villages on the farther side of the river. Such fighting as there was in this quarter came largely to the 1st East Surrey and 1st Cornwalls, of the 14th Brigade, but the resistance was not great, and was broken by the artillery fire. To the soldiers engaged the whole action was more like a route march with occasional deployments than a battle.

On the 9th the Army was up to the Marne and was faced with the problem of crossing it. The operations extending over many miles were unimportant in detail, though of some consequence in the mass. The real hard fighting was falling upon the Sixth French Army north of Ligny, which was still in desperate conflict with the German right, and upon Foch's army, which was fighting magnificently at Fère-Champenoise. The advance of the British, and their own exertions, caused the Germans to retire and cleared the passage over the Ourcq for our Allies. The chief losses during the day upon the British side fell upon the Guards' Brigade, the 1st Lincolns, and the 1st Cornwalls, most of which were inflicted by invisible quick-firing batteries shrouded by the woods which flank the river. The latter regiment lost Colonel Turner, Major Cornish-Bowden, and a number of other killed or wounded in a brilliant piece of woodland fighting, where they drove in a strong German rearguard. The 1st East Surrey, who were very forward in the movement, were also hard hit, having 6 officers and about 120 men out of action.

The British infantry was able on this day to show that woods may serve for other purposes besides hiding batteries. The 1st Lincolns, being held up by a rapid and accurate fire from invisible guns, dispatched two companies, C and D, to make in single file a detour under the shelter of the trees. Coming behind the battery, which appears to have had no immediate support, they poured in a rapid fire at two hundred and fifty yards, which laid every man of the German gunners upon the ground. The whole battery was captured. The casualties of the Lincolns in this dashing exploit, which included Captains Hoskyns and Ellison, with Lieutenant Thruston, were unavoidably caused by British shrapnel, our gunners knowing nothing of the movement.

On this date (September 9) both the First and the Second Army Corps were across the Marne, and advanced some miles to the north of it, killing, wounding, or capturing many hundreds of the enemy. The Sixth French Army was, as stated, fighting hard upon the Ourcq, but the Fifth had won a brilliant success near Montmirail and driven the enemy completely over the river.

Pulteney's Third Corps, still a division short, had been held up by the destruction of the bridges at La Ferté, but on September 10 they were across and the whole Army sweeping northwards. The cavalry overrode all resistance and rounded up a number of prisoners, over 2000 in all. It was a strange reversal of fortune, for here within a fortnight were the same two armies playing the converse parts, the British eagerly pushing on with a flushed consciousness of victory, while the Germans, tired and dispirited, scattered in groups among the woods or were gathered up from the roadsides. It was a day of mist and rain, with muddy, sodden roads, but all weather is fine weather to the army that is gaining ground. An impression of complete German demoralisation became more widespread as transport, shells, and even guns were found littering the high-roads, and yet there was really even less cause for it than when the same delusion was held by the Germans. The enemy were actually making a hurried but orderly retreat, and these signs of disaster were only the evidence of a broken rearguard resistance. German armies do not readily dissolve. There is no more cohesive force in the world. But they were undoubtedly hard pressed.

About eight o'clock upon the morning of the 6th 10th the 6th Brigade (Davies') observed a column of the enemy's infantry on a parallel road near the village of Hautvesnes. Artillery fire was at once opened upon them, and a vigorous infantry attack, the 1st Rifles advancing direct with the 1st Berkshires on their right, whilst the 1st King's Liverpool worked round each flank in Boer fashion. The 2nd Staffords were in support. The Germans had taken refuge in a sunken road, but they were mercilessly lashed by shrapnel, and 400 of them ran forward with their hands up. The sunken road was filled with their dead and wounded. Some hundreds streamed away across country, but these were mostly gathered up by the Third Division on the left.

In this brisk little action the 50th R.F.A., and later the whole of the 34th Brigade R.F.A., put in some fine work, the shrapnel-fire being most deadly and accurate. The British had pushed their guns freely forward with their cavalry and did much execution with them, though they had the misfortune on this same date, the 10th, to lose, by the answering shell-fire of the enemy. General Findlay, artillery commander of the First Division. In this second action, in which the German rearguard, infantry as well as artillery, was engaged, the 2nd Sussex Regiment, which was leading the First Division, sustained considerable losses near Courchamps or Priez, as did the 1st Northamptons and the 1st North Lancashires. Some 300 of Bulfin’s 2nd Brigade were hit altogether, among whom was Colonel Knight, of the North Lancashires. The enemy came under heavy fire, both from the infantry and from the guns, so that their losses were considerable, and several hundred of them were captured. The country was very hilly, and the roads so bad that in the exhausted state of men and horses the pursuit could not be sufficiently pressed. Thirty large motor cars were seen at Priez in front of the 2nd Brigade, carrying the enemy’s rearguard.

On this same date the 9th Brigade captured 600 German infantry, the survivors of a battalion, at the village of Vinly. This seems to have been an incident of the same character as the loss of the Cheshires or of the Munsters in the British retreat, where a body of troops fighting a covering action was left too long, or failed to receive the orders for its withdrawal. The defence was by no means a desperate one, and few of the attacking infantry were killed or wounded. On this date the Fifth and Sixth French Armies were hardly engaged at all, and the whole Allied Force, including General Foch’s Seventh French Army on the right of the Fifth, were all sweeping along together in a single rolling steel-crested wave, composed of at least twelve army corps, whilst nine German corps (five of Von Kluck and four of Bülow) retired swiftly before them, hurrying towards the chance of re-forming and refitting which the Aisne position would afford them.

On September 11 the British were still advancing upon a somewhat narrowed front. There was no opposition and again the day bore a considerable crop of prisoners and other trophies. The weather had become so foggy that the aircraft were useless, and it is only when these wonderful scouters are precluded from rising that a general realises how indispensable they have become to him. As a wit expressed it, they have turned war from a game of cards into a game of chess. It was still very wet, and the Army was exposed to considerable privation, most of the officers and men having neither change of clothing, overcoats, nor waterproof sheets, while the blowing up of bridges on the lines of communication had made it impossible to supply the wants. The undefeatable commissariat, however, was still working well, which means that the Army was doing the same. On the 12th the pursuit was continued as far as the River Aisne. Allenby's cavalry occupied Braine in the early morning, the Queen's Bays being particularly active, but there was so much resistance that the Third Division was needed to make the ground good. Gough's Cavalry Division also ran into the enemy near Chassemy, killing or capturing several hundred of the German infantry. In these operations Captain Stewart, whose experience as an alleged spy has been mentioned, met with a soldier's death. On this day the Sixth French Army was fighting a considerable action upon the British left in the vicinity of Soissons. the Germans making a stand in order to give time for their impedimenta to get over the river. In this they succeeded, so that when the Allied Forces reached the Aisne, which is an unfordable stream some sixty yards from bank to bank, the retiring army had got across it, had destroyed most of the bridges, and showed every sign of being prepared to dispute the crossing.

Missy Bridge, facing the Fifth Division, appeared at first to be intact, but a daring reconnaissance by Lieutenant Pennecuick, of the Engineers, showed that it was really badly damaged. Condé Bridge was intact, but was so covered by a high horse-shoe formation of hills upon the farther side that it could not be used, and remained throughout under control of the enemy. Bourg Bridge, however, in front of the First Army Corps, had for some unexplained reason been left undamaged, and this was seized in the early morning of September 13 by De Lisle's cavalry, followed rapidly by Bulfin's 2nd Brigade. It was on the face of it a somewhat desperate enterprise which lay immediately in front of the British general. If the enemy were still retreating he could not afford to slacken his pursuit, while, on the other hand, if the enemy were merely making a feint of resistance, then, at all hazards, the stream must be forced and the rearguard driven in. The German infantry could be seen streaming up the roads on the farther bank of the river, but there were no signs of what their next disposition might be. Air reconnaissance was still precluded, and it was impossible to say for certain which alternative might prove to be correct, but Sir John French's cavalry training must incline him always to the braver course. The officer who rode through the Boers to Kimberley and threw himself with his weary men across the path of the formidable Kronje was not likely to stand hesitating upon the banks of the Aisne. His personal opinion was that the enemy meant to stand and fight, but none the less the order was given to cross.

September 13 was spent in arranging this dashing and dangerous movement. The British got across eventually in several places and by various devices. Bulfin's men, followed by the rest of the First Division of Haig's Army Corps, passed the canal bridge of Bourg with no loss or difficulty. The 11th Brigade of Pulteney's Third Corps got across by a partially demolished bridge and ferry at Venizel. They were followed by the 12th Brigade, who established themselves near Bucy. The 13th Brigade was held up at Missy, but the 14th got across and lined up with the men of the Third Corps in the neighbourhood of Ste. Marguerite, meeting with a considerable resistance from the Germans. Later, Count Gleichen's 15th Brigade also got across. On the right Hamilton got over with two brigades of the Third Division, the 8th Brigade crossing on a single plank at Vailly and the 9th using the railway bridge, while the whole of Haig's First Corps had before evening got a footing upon the farther bank. So eager was the advance and so inadequate the means that Haking's 5th Brigade, led by the Connaught Rangers, was obliged to get over the broad and dangerous river, walking in single file along the sloping girder of a ruined bridge, under a heavy, though distant, shell-fire. The night of September 13 saw the main body of the Army across the river, already conscious of a strong rearguard action, but not yet aware that the whole German Army had halted and was turning at bay. On the right De Lisle' s cavalrymen had pushed up the slope from Bourg Bridge and reached as far as Vendresse, where they were pulled up by the German lines.

It has been mentioned above that the 11th and 12th Brigades of the Fourth Division had passed the river at Venizel. These troops were across in the early afternoon, and they at once advanced, and proved that in that portion of the field the enemy Maine. were Undoubtedly standing fast. The 11th Brigade, which was more to the north, had only a constant shell-fall to endure, but the 12th, pushing forward through Bucy-le-long, found itself in front of a line of woods from which there swept a heavy machine-gun- and rifle-fire. The advance was headed by the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, supported by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers. It was across open ground and under heavy fire, but it was admirably carried out. In places where the machine-guns had got the exact range the stricken Fusiliers lay dead or wounded with accurate intervals, like a firing-line on a field day. The losses were heavy, especially in the Lancashire Fusiliers. Colonel Griffin was wounded, and 5 of his officers with 250 men were among the casualties. It should be recorded that fresh supplies of ammunition were brought up at personal risk by Colonel Seely, late Minister of War, in his motor-car. The contest continued until dusk, when the troops waited for the battle of next day under such cover as they could find.

The crossing of the stream may be said, upon the one side, to mark the end of the battle and pursuit of the Marne, while, on the other, it commenced that interminable Battle of the Aisne which was destined to fulfil Bloch’s prophecies and to set the type of all great modern engagements. The prolonged struggles of the Manchurian War had prepared men’s minds for such a development, but only here did it first assume its full proportions and warn us that the battle of the future was to be the siege of the past. Men remembered with a smile Bernhardi’s confident assertion that a German battle would be decided in one day, and that his countrymen would never be constrained to fight in defensive trenches.

The moral effect of the Battle of the Marne was greater than its material gains. The latter, so far as the British were concerned, did not exceed 5,000 prisoners, 20 guns, and a quantity of transport. The total losses, however, were very heavy. The Germans had perfected a method of burning their dead with the aid of petrol. These numerous holocausts over the country-side were found afterwards by the peasants to have left mounds of charred animal matter which were scattered by their industrious hands on the fields which they might help to fertilise. The heat of cremation had dissolved the bones, but the teeth in most cases remained intact, so that over an area of France it was no uncommon thing to see them gleaming in the clods on either side of the new-cut furrow. Had the ring of high-born German criminals who planned the war seen in some apocalyptic vision the detailed results of their own villainy, it is hard to doubt that even their hearts and consciences would have shrunk from the deed.

Apart from the losses, the mere fact that a great German army had been hustled across thirty miles of country, had been driven from river to river, and had finally to take refuge in trenches in order to hold their ground, was a great encouragement to the Allies. From that time they felt assured that with anything like equal numbers they had an ascendancy over their opponents. Save in the matter of heavy guns and machine-guns, there was not a single arm in which they did not feel that they were the equals or the superiors. Nor could they forget that this foe, whom they were driving in the open and holding in the trenches, was one who had rushed into the war with men and material all carefully prepared for this day of battle, while their own strength lay in the future. If the present was bright, it would surely be incomparably brighter when the reserves of France and the vast resources of the British Empire were finally brought into line. There had never from the beginning been a doubt of final victory, but from this time on it became less an opinion and more a demonstrable and mathematical certainty.

The battle must also be regarded as a fixed point in military history, since it was the first time since the days of the great Napoleon that a Prussian army had been turned and driven. In three successive wars — against the Danes, the Austrians, and the French — they had lived always in the warm sunshine of success. Now, at last, came the first chill of disaster. Partly from their excellent military qualities, but even more on account of their elaborate and methodical preparations, joined with a want of scruple which allowed them to force a war at the moment when they could take their adversary at a disadvantage, they had established a legend of invincibility. This they left behind them with their cannon and their prisoners between the Marne and the Aisne. It had been feared that free men, trained in liberal and humane methods, could never equal in military efficiency those who had passed through the savage discipline which is the heritage of the methods that first made Prussia great at the expense of her neighbours. This shadow was henceforth for Chapter ever lifted from men’s minds, and it was shown that the kindly comradeship which exists in the Western armies between officers and men was not incompatible with the finest fighting qualities of which any soldiers are capable.

VI. THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE

The hazardous crossing of the Aisne — Wonderful work of the sappers — The fight for the sugar factory — General advance of the Army — The 4th (Guards) Brigade's difficult task — Cavalry as a mobile reserve — The Sixth Division — Hardships of the Army — German breach of faith — Tâtez toujours — The general position — Attack upon the West Yorks — Counter-attack by Congreve's 18th Brigade — Rheims Cathedral — Spies — The siege and fall of Antwerp

THE stretch of river which confronted the British Army when they set about the hazardous crossing of Aisne was about fifteen miles in length. It lay as nearly as possible east and west, so that the advance was from south to north. As the British faced the hazardous river the First Army Corps was on the right of their line, together with half the cavalry. In the centre was the Second Corps, on the left the Third Corps, which was still without one of its divisions (the Sixth), but retained, on the other hand, the 19th Brigade, which did not belong to it. Each of these British corps covered a front of, roughly, five miles. Across the broad and swift river a considerable German army with a powerful artillery was waiting to dispute the passage. On the right of the British were the French Fifth and Seventh Armies, and on their left, forming the extremity of the Allied line, was the French Sixth Army, acting in such close co-operation with the British Third Corps in the Soissons region that their guns were often turned upon the same point. This Sixth French Army, with the British Army, may be looked upon as the left wing of the huge Allied line which stretched away with many a curve and bend to the Swiss frontier. During all this hurried retreat from the Marne, it is to be remembered that the Eastern German armies had hardly moved at all. It was their four armies of the right which had swung back like a closing door, the Crown Prince's Fifth Army being the hinge upon which it turned. Now the door had ceased to swing, and one solid barrier presented itself to the Allies. It is probable that the German preponderance of numbers was, for the moment, much lessened or even had ceased to exist, for the losses in battle, the detachments for Russia, and the operations in Belgium had all combined to deplete the German ranks.

The Belgian Army had retired into Antwerp before the fall of Brussels, but they were by no means a force to be disregarded, being fired by that sense of intolerable wrong which is the most formidable stimulant to a virile nation. From the shelter of the Antwerp entrenchments they continually buzzed out against the German lines of communication, and although they were usually beaten back, and were finally pent in, they still added to the great debt of gratitude which the Allies already owed them by holding up a considerable body, two army corps at least, of good troops. On the other hand, the fortress of Maubeuge, on the northern French frontier, which had been invested within a few days of the battle of Mons, had now fallen before the heavy German guns, with the result that at least a corps of troops under Von Zwehl and these same masterful guns were now released for service on the Aisne.

The more one considers the operation of the crossing of the Aisne with the battle which followed it, the more one is impressed by the extraordinary difficulty of the task, the swift debonair way in which it was tackled, and the pushful audacity of the various commanders in gaining a foothold upon the farther side. Consider that upon the 12th the Army was faced by a deep, broad, unfordable river with only one practicable bridge in the fifteen miles opposite them. They had a formidable enemy armed with powerful artillery standing on the defensive upon a line of uplands commanding every crossing and approach, whilst the valley was so broad that ordinary guns upon the corresponding uplands could have no effect, and good positions lower down were hard to find. There was the problem. And yet upon the 14th the bulk of the Army was across and had established itself in positions from which it could never afterwards be driven. All arms must have worked well to bring about such a result, but what can be said of the Royal Engineers, who built under heavy fire in that brief space nine bridges, some of them capable of taking heavy traffic, while they restored five of the bridges which the enemy had destroyed! September 13, 1914, should be recorded in their annals as a marvellous example of personal self-sacrifice and technical proficiency.

Sir John French, acting with great swiftness and decision, did not lose an hour after he had established himself in force upon the northern bank of the river in pushing his men ahead and finding out what was in front of him. The weather was still very wet, and heavy mists drew a veil over the German dispositions, but the advance went forward. The British right wing, consisting of the First Division of the Aisne. First Corps, had established itself most securely, as was natural, since it was the one corps which had formed an unbroken bridge in front of it. The First Division had pushed forward as far as Moulins and Vendresse, which lie about two miles north of the river. Now, in the early hours of the 14th, the whole of the Second Division got over. The immediate narrative, therefore, is concerned with the doings of the two divisions of the First Corps, upon which fell the first and chief strain of the very important and dangerous advance upon that date.

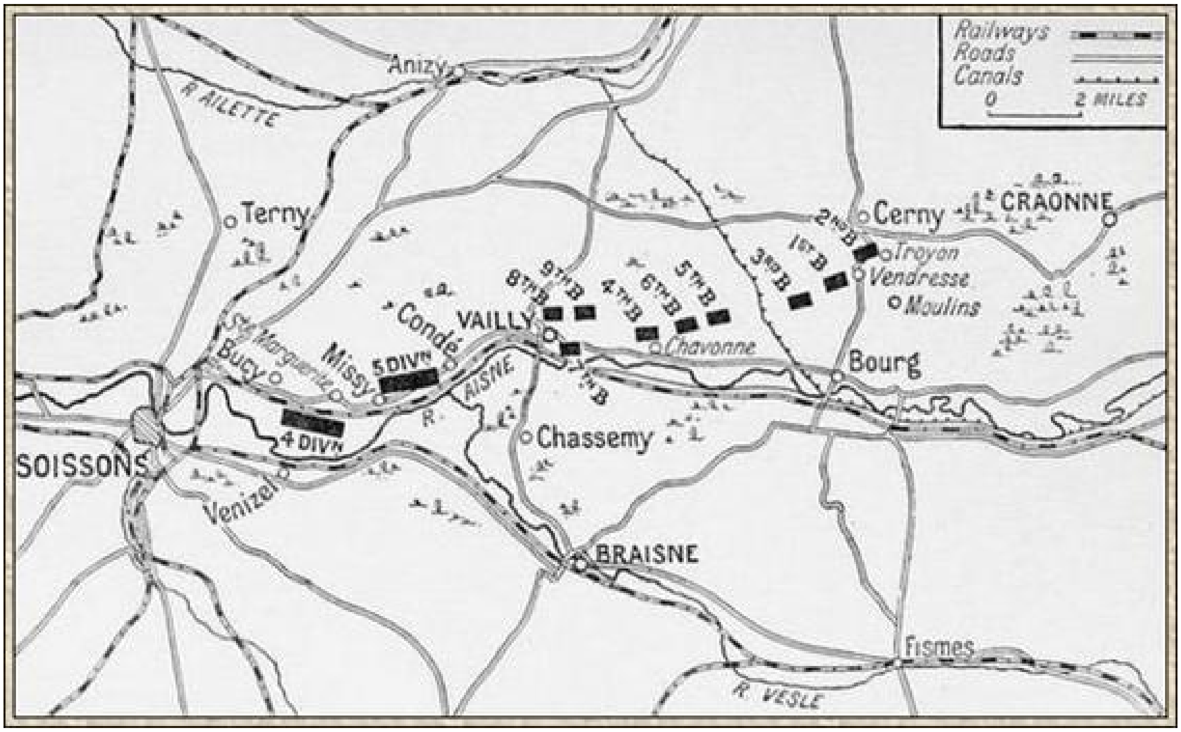
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6TH B
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9TH B
8TH B
7TH B
VAILLY
Chavonne
Condé
Missy
5 DIVN
Ste Marguerite
Bucy
R. AISNE
4 DIVN
Chassemy
Bourg
SOISSONS
Venizel
BRAISNE
Fismes
R. VESLE

British Advance at the Aisne

On the top of the line of chalk hills which faced the British was an ancient and famous highway, the Chemin-des-Dames, which, like all ancient highways, had been carried along the crest of the ridge. This was in the German possession, and it became the objective of the British attack. The 2nd Infantry Brigade (Bulfin’s) led the way, working upwards in the early morning from Moulins and Vendresse through the hamlet of Troyon towards the great road. This brigade, consisting of the 2nd Sussex, 1st Northamptons, 1st North Lancashire, and 2nd Rifles, drawn mostly from solid shire regiments, was second to none in the Army. Just north of Troyon was a considerable deserted sugar factory, which formed a feature in the landscape. It lay within a few hundred yards of the Chemin-des-Dames, while another winding road, cut in the side of the hill, lay an equal distance to the south of it, and was crossed by the British in their advance. This road, which was somewhat sunken in the chalk, and thus offered some cover to a crouching man, played an important part in the operations.

Lieutenant Balfour and a picket of the 2nd Rifles, having crept up and reconnoitred the factory, returned with the information that it was held by the Germans, and that twelve guns were in position three hundred yards to the east of it. General Bulfin then — it was about 3:30 in the morning of a wet, misty day — sent the 2nd Rifles, the 2nd Sussex Regiment, and the 1st NorthamptonS forward, with the factory and an adjoining whitewashed farmhouse as their objective. The 1st North Lancashires remained in reserve at Vendresse. The attacking force was under the immediate command of Colonel Serocold of the Rifles. The three advanced regiments drove in the pickets of the Germans, and after a severe fight turned the enemy out of his front trench, A Company of the Sussex capturing several hundred prisoners. A number of men, however, including Colonel Montresor and Major Cookson, were shot while rounding up these Germans and sending them to the rear. The advanced line had suffered severely, so the North Lancashires were called up and launched at the sugar factory, which they carried with a magnificent bayonet attack in spite of a fierce German resistance. Their losses were very heavy, including Major Lloyd, their commander, but their victory was a glorious one. The two batteries of the enemy were now commanded by machine-guns, brought up to the factory by Lieutenant Dashwood of the Sussex. The enemy made a brave attempt to get these guns away, but the teams and men were shot down, and it was a German Colenso. The British, however, unlike the Boers, were unable to get away the prizes of their victory. The factory was abandoned as it was exposed to heavy fire, and the four regiments formed a firing-line, taking such cover as they could find, but a German shell fire developed which was so deadly that they were unable to get forward.

A small party of Rifles, under Cathcart and Foljambe, clung hard to the captured guns, sending repeated messages: “For God’s sake bring horses and fetch away these pieces!” No horses were, however, available, and eventually both the guns and the buildings were regained by the Germans, the former being disabled before they were abandoned by their captors, and the factory being smashed by the shells. Major Green and a company of the Sussex, with some of the Coldstream under Major Grant, had got as far forward as the Chemin-des-Dames, but fell back steadily when their flank was finally exposed. Two companies of the 1st Coldstream, under Colonel

Ponsonby, had also pushed on to the road, and now came back. Nothing could exceed the desperate gallantry of officers and men. Major Jelf, severely wounded, cheered on his riflemen until evening. Major Warre of the same regiment and Major Phillips rallied the hard-pressed line again and again. Lieutenant Spread, of the Lancashires, worked his machine-gun until it was smashed, and then, wounded as he was, brought up a second gun and continued the fight. Major Burrows rallied the Lancashires when their leader, Major Lloyd, was hit. Brigade-Major Watson, of the Queen's, was everywhere in the thick of the firing. No men could have been better led, nor could any leaders have better men. A large number of wounded, both British and Germans, lay under the shelter of some haystacks between the lines, and crawled slowly round them for shelter, as the fire came from one side or the other — a fitting subject surely for a Verestschagin!

Meanwhile, it is necessary to follow what had been going on at the immediate left of Bulfin's Brigade. Maxse's 1st Brigade had moved up in the face of a considerable fire until it came to be nearly as far north as the factory, but to the west of it. The 1st Coldstream had been sent across to help the dismounted cavalry to cover Bulfin's right, since the main German strength seemed to be in that quarter. The 1st Scots Guards was held in reserve, but the other regiments of the 1st Brigade, the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Camerons, a battalion which had taken the place of the brave but unfortunate Munsters, lined up on the left of the factory and found themselves swept by the same devastating fire which had checked the advance. This fire came from the fringe of the woods and from a line of trenches lying north-east of the factory on the edge of the Chemin-des-dames. Up to this time the British had no artillery support on account of the mist, but now Geddes' 25th Brigade R.F.A., comprising the 113th, 114th, and 115th Batteries, was brought to its assistance. It could do little good in such a dim light, and one battery, the 115th, under Major Johnstone, which pushed up within eight hundred yards of the enemy's position, was itself nearly destroyed. The 116th R.F.A., under Captain Oliver, also did great work, working its way up till it was almost in the infantry line, and at one time in advance of it. The whole infantry line, including a mixture of units, men of the Rifles, Sussex, and North Lancashires, with a sprinkling of Guardsmen and Black Watch from the 1st Brigade, came slowly down the hill—"sweating blood to hold their own," as one of them described it — until they reached the sunken road which has been already mentioned.

There General Bulfin had stationed himself with the reserve, and the line steadied itself, re-formed, and, with the support of the guns, made head once more against the advancing Germans, who were unable to make any progress against the fire which was poured into them. With such spades and picks as could be got, a line of shallow trenches was thrown up, and these were held against all attacks for the rest of the day.*

[*Until an accurate German military history of the war shall appear, it is difficult to compute the exact rival forces in any engagement, but in this attack of the 2nd Brigade, where six British regiments may be said to have been involved, there are some data. A German officer, describing the same engagement, says that, apart from the original German force, the reinforcements amounted to fourteen battalions, from the Guards' Jaeger, the 4th Jaeger Battalion, 65th, 13th Reserve, and 13th and 16th Landwehr Regiments.]

It was the haphazard line of these hurriedly dug shelters which determined the position retained in the weeks to come. As this was the apex of the British advance and all the corps upon the left were in turn brought to a standstill and driven to make trenches, the whole line of the First Corps formed a long diagonal slash across the hillside, with its right close to the Chemin-des-dames and its left upon the river in the neighbourhood of Chavonne. The result was that now and always the trenches of the 2nd Brigade were in an extremely exposed position, for they were open not only to the direct fire of the Germans, which was not very severe, but to an enfilading fire from more distant guns upon each flank. Their immediate neighbours upon the right were the 1st Queen's Surrey, acting as flank-guard, and a Moroccan corps from the Fifth French chapter Army, which had not reached so advanced a position, but was in echelon upon their right rear.

It has already been shown how the 1st Brigade was divided up, the 1st Coldstream being on the right of the 2nd Brigade. The rest of the 1st Brigade had carried out an advance parallel to that described, and many of the Black Watch, who were the right-hand regiment, got mixed with Bulfin's men when they were driven back to what proved to be the permanent British line. This advance of the 1st Brigade intercepted a strong force of the enemy which was creeping round the left flank of the 2nd Brigade. The counter-stroke brought the flank attack to a standstill. The leading regiments of the 1st Brigade suffered very severely, however, especially the Cameron Highlanders, whose gallantry carried them far to the front. This regiment lost Lieutenant-Colonel MacLachlan, 2 majors, Maitland and Nicholson, 3 captains, 11 lieutenants, and about 300 rank and file in the action. Some of these fell into the hands of the enemy, but the great majority were killed or wounded. The 1st Scots Guards upon the left of the brigade had also heavy casualties, while the Black Watch lost their Colonel, Grant Duff, their Adjutant, Rowan Hamilton, and many men. When the line on their right fell back, they conformed to the movement until they received support from two companies of the 1st Gloucesters from the 3rd Brigade upon their left rear.

The 4th (Guards) Brigade, forming the left of the Second Division, was across the river in battle array by ten o’clock in the morning and moving northwards towards the village of Ostel. Its task was a Supremely difficult one. Dense woods faced it, fringed with the hostile riflemen, while a heavy shell-fire tore through the extended ranks. It Aisne. is safe to say that such an advance could not have been carried out in the heavy-handed German fashion without annihilating losses. As it was, the casualties were heavy, but not sufficient to prevent a continuance of the attack, which at one o’clock carried the farm and trenches which were its objective. The steep slopes and the thick woods made artillery support impossible, though one section of a battery did contrive to keep up with the infantry. The 3rd Coldstream being held up in their advance on the Soupir front, the 1st Irish were moved up on their right flank, but the line could do little more than hold its own. Captain Berners, Lord Guernsey, Lord Arthur Hay, and others were killed at this point. The German infantry advanced several times to counter-attack, but were swept back by the fire of the Guards.

At one period it was found that the general German advance, which had followed the holding of the British attack, was threatening to flow in between the two divisions of the First Army Corps. The 3rd Brigade (Landon’s) was therefore deployed rapidly from the point about a mile south of Vernesse where it had been stationed. Two regiments of the brigade, the 2nd Welsh and the 1st South Wales Borderers, were flung against the heavy German column advancing down the Beaulne ridge and threatening to cut Haig’s corps in two. The Welshmen, worthy successors of their ancestors who left such a name on the battlefields of France, succeeded in heading it off and driving it back so that they were able to extend and get in touch with the right of the Second Division. This consisted of the 5th Brigade (Haking’s) with the 6th (Davies’) upon its left. Both of these brigades had to bear the brunt of continual German counter-attacks, involving considerable losses, both from shell and rifle fire. In spite of this they won their way for a mile or more up the slopes, where they were brought to a standstill and dug themselves into temporary shelter, continuing the irregular diagonal line of trenches which had been started by the brigades upon the right.

It is impossible not to admire the way in which the German general in command observed and attempted to profit by any gap in the British line. It has already been shown how he tried to push his column between the two divisions of the First Corps and was only stopped by the deployment of the 3rd Brigade. Later, an even fairer chance presented itself, and he was quick to take advantage of it. The advance of the Guards Brigade to the Ostel ridge had caused a considerable gap between them and the nearest unit of the Second Corps, and also between the First Corps and the river. A German attack came swarming down upon the weak spot. From Troyon to Ostel, over five miles of ground, Haig’s corps was engaged to the last man and pinned down in their positions. It was not possible to fill the gap. Not to fill it might have meant disaster — disaster under heavy shell-fire with an unfordable river in the rear. Here was a supreme example of the grand work that was done when our cavalry were made efficient as dismounted riflemen. Their mobility brought them quickly to the danger spot. Their training turned them in an instant from horsemen to infantry. The 15th Hussars, the Irish Horse, the whole of Briggs’ 1st Cavalry Brigade, and finally the whole of De Lisle’s 2nd Cavalry Brigade, were thrown into the gap. The German advance was stayed and the danger passed. From now onwards the echelon formed by the units of the First Corps ended with these cavalry brigades near Chavonne to the immediate north of the river.

The Third Division of the Second Corps, being on the immediate left of the operations which have been already described, moved forward upon Aizy, which is on about the same level as Ostel, the objective of the Guards. The 8th (Doran’s) Brigade moved north by a tributary stream which runs down to the Aisne, while the 9th (Shaw’s) tried to advance in line with it on the plateau to the right. Both brigades found it impossible to get any farther, and established themselves in entrenchments about a mile north of Vailly, so as to cover the important bridge at that place, where the 7th Brigade was in reserve. The three Fusilier regiments of the 9th Brigade all lost heavily, and the Lincolns had at one time to recross the river, but recovered their position.

The attack made by the Fifth Division near Missy was held up by a very strong German position among the woods on the Chivres heights which was fronted by wire entanglements. The regiments chiefly engaged were the Norfolks and Bedfords of the 15th Brigade, with the Cornwalls and East Surreys of the 14th Brigade, the remains of the Cheshires being in close support. They crossed the wire and made good progress at first, but were eventually brought to a stand by heavy fire at close range from a trench upon their right front. It was already dusk, so the troops ended by maintaining the position at Missy and Ste. Marguerite, where there were bridges to be guarded.

The Fourth Division of Pulteney’s Third Corps had no better success, and was only able to maintain its ground. It may be remarked, as an example of valiant individual effort, that this division was largely indebted for its ammunition supply to the efforts of Captain Johnston of the Sappers, who, upon a crazy raft of his own construction, aided by Lieutenant Flint, spent twelve hours under fire ferrying over the precious boxes. The familiar tale of stalemate was to be told of the Sixth French Army in the Soissons section of the river. Along the whole Allied line the position was the same, the greatest success and probably the hardest fighting having fallen to the lot of the Eighteenth French Corps, which had taken, lost, and finally retaken Craonne, thus establishing itself upon the lip of that formidable plateau which had been the objective of all the attacks.

In the Vailly region the 5th Cavalry Brigade found itself in a difficult position, for it had crossed the stream as a mounted unit in expectation of a pursuit, and now found itself under heavy fire in the village of Vailly with no possibility of getting forward. The only alternative was to recross the river by the single narrow bridge, which was done at a later date under very heavy fire, the troopers leading their horses over in single file. This difficult operation was superintended by Captain Wright of the Engineers, the same brave officer who had endeavoured to blow up the bridge at Mons. Unhappily, he was mortally wounded on this occasion. On the afternoon of the 14th — it being found that the British artillery was shelling our own advanced trenches — Staff-Captain Harter of the 9th Brigade galloped across the bridge and informed the gunners as to the true position.

Towards evening, in spite of the fact that there were no reserves and that all the troops had endured heavy losses and great fatigue, a general advance was ordered in the hope of gaining the high ground of the Chemin-des-Dames before night. It was nearly sunset when the orders were given, and the troops responded gallantly to the call, though many of them had been in action since daybreak. The fire, however, was very heavy, and no great progress could be made. The First Division gained some ground, but was brought to a standstill. The only brigade which made good headway was Haking's 5th, which reached the crest of the hill in the neighbourhood of Tilleul-de-Courtecon. General Haking sent out scouts, and finding German outposts upon both his flanks, he withdrew under cover of darkness.

Thus ended the sharp and indecisive action of September 14, the Germans holding their ground, but being in turn unable to drive back the Allies, who maintained their position and opposed an impassable obstacle to the renewed advance upon Paris. The battle was marked by the common features of advance, arrest, and entrenchment, which occurred not only in the British front, but in that of the French armies upon either flank. When the action ceased, the 1st Northamptons and the 1st Queen's, sent to guard the pressure point at the extreme right of the line, had actually reached the Chemin-des-Dames, the British objective, and had dug themselves in upon the edge of it. From this very advanced spot the British line extended diagonally across the hillside for many miles until it reached the river. Several hundred prisoners and some guns were taken in the course of the fighting. When one considers the predominant position of the Germans, and that their artillery was able to give them constant assistance, whereas that of the British and French was only brought up with the utmost difficulty, we can only marvel that the infantry were able to win and to hold the ground.

The next day, September 15, was spent for the most part in making good the position gained and deepening the trenches to get some protection from the ever-growing artillery fire, which was the more intense as the great siege guns from Maubeuge were upon this day, for the first time, brought into action. At first the terrific explosions of these shells, the largest by far which had ever been brought into an actual line of battle, were exceedingly alarming, but after a time it became realised that, however omnipotent they might be against iron or concrete, they were comparatively harmless in soft soil, where their enormous excavations were soon used as convenient ready-made rifle-pits by the soldiers. This heavy fire led to a deepening of the trenches, which necessitated a general levy of picks and shovels from the country round, for a large portion of such equipment had been lost in the first week of the campaign.

Only two active movements were made in the course of the day, one being that Hamilton’s Third Division advanced once more towards Aizy and established itself a mile or more to the north in a better tactical position. The 7th Brigade suffered considerable casualties in this change, including Colonel Hasted, of the 1st Wilts. The other was that Ferguson’s Fifth Division fell back from Chivres, where it was exposed to a cross fire, and made its lines along the river bank, whence the Germans were never able to drive it, although they were only four Aisne. hundred yards away in a position which was high above it. For the rest, it was a day of navvy’s toil, though the men worked alternately with rifle and with pick, for there were continual German advances which withered away before the volleys which greeted them. By the 16th the position was fairly secure, and on the same day a welcome reinforcement arrived in the shape of the Sixth Division, forming the missing half of Pulteney’s Third Corps.

Its composition is here appended:

DIVISION VI. — GENERAL KEIR

16th Infantry Brigade — General Ing. Williams.

1st East Kent.

1st Leicester.

1st Shropshire Light Infantry.

2nd York and Lancaster.

11th Infantry Brigade — General Walter Doran.

1st Royal Fusiliers.

1st N. Stafford.

2nd Leinsters.

3rd Rifle Brigade.

18th Infantry Brigade — General Congreve, V.C.

1st W. York.

1st E. York.

2nd Notts and Derby (Sherwood Foresters).

2nd Durham Light Infantry.

Artillery.

2nd Brig. 21, 42, 63.

12th Brig. 43, 86, 87.

24th Brig. 110, 11], 112.

38th Brig. 24, 34, 72.

R.G.A. 24.

This division was kept in reserve upon the south side of the river. The French Commander-in-Chief had intimated that he intended to throw in reinforcements upon the left of the Sixth French Army, and so, as he hoped, to turn the German right. It was determined, therefore, that there should be no attempt at a British advance, but that the Allies should be content with holding the enemy to his positions. The two armies lay facing each other, therefore, at an average distance of about five hundred yards. The pressure was still most severe upon the 2nd Brigade on the extreme right. Bulfin's orders were to hold on at all costs, as he was the pivot of the whole line. He and his men responded nobly to the responsibility, although both they and their neighbours of Maxse's 1st Brigade had sustained a loss of over 1000 men each upon the 14th — 25 per cent of their number. The shell-fire was incessant and from several converging directions. German infantry attacks were constant by night and by day, and the undrained trenches were deep in water. The men lay without overcoats and drenched to the skin, for the rain was incessant. Yet the sixth day found them on the exact ground upon which they had thrown their weary bodies after their attack. Nations desire from time to time to be reassured as to their own virility. Neither in endurance nor in courage have the British departed from the traditions of their ancestors. The unending strain of the trenches reached the limits of human resistance. But the line was always held.

On September 16 occurred an incident which may be taken as typical of the difference in the spirit with which the British and the Germans make war. Close to the lines of the Guards a barn which contained fifty wounded Germans was ignited by the enemy's shells. Under a terrific fire a rescue party rushed forward and got the unfortunate men to a place of safety.

Several of the British lost their lives in this exploit, including Dr. Huggan, the Scottish International footballer. The Germans mock at our respect for sport, and yet this is the type of man that sport breeds, and it is the want of them in their own ranks which will stand for ever between us.

September 17 was a day of incessant attacks upon the right of the line, continually repulsed and yet continually renewed. One can well sympathise with the feelings of the German commanders who, looking down from their heights, saw the British line in a most dangerous strategical position, overmatched by their artillery, with a deep river in their rear, and yet were unable to take advantage of it because of their failure to carry the one shallow line of extemporised trenches. Naturally, they came again and again, by night and by day, with admirable perseverance and daring to the attack, but were always forced to admit that nothing can be done against the magazine rifle in hands which know how to use it. They tried here and they tried there, these constant sudden outpourings of cheering, hurrying, grey-clad men. They were natural tactics, but expensive ones, for every new attack left a fresh fringe of stricken men in front of the British lines.

One incident upon the 17th stands out amid the somewhat monotonous record of trench attacks. On the extreme right of the British line a company of the 1st Northamptons occupied a most exposed position on the edge of the Chemin-des-Dames. The men in a German trench which was some hundreds of yards in front hoisted a white flag and then advanced upon the British lines. It is well to be charitable in all these white flag incidents, since it is always possible on either side that unauthorised men may hoist it and the officer in command very properly refuse to recognise it; but in this case the deception appears to have been a deliberate one. These are the facts. On seeing the flag, Captain Savage, of B Company Northamptons, got out of the trench and with Lieutenant Dimmer, of the Rifles, advanced to the Germans. He threw down his sword and revolver to show that he was unarmed. He found a difficulty in getting a direct answer from the Germans, so he saluted their officer, who returned his salute, and turned back to walk to his own trench. Dimmer, looking back, saw the Germans level their rifles, so he threw himself down, crying out, “For God’s sake get down.” Captain Savage stood erect and was riddled with bullets. Many of the Northamptons, including Lieutenant Gordon, were shot down by the same volley. The Germans then attempted an advance, which was stopped by the machine-guns of the 1st Queen’s. Such deplorable actions must always destroy all the amenities of civilised warfare. On the afternoon of the same day, September 17, a more serious attack was made upon the right flank of the advanced British position, the enemy reoccupying a line of trenches from which they had previously been driven. It was a dismal day of wind, rain, and mist, but the latter was not wholly an evil, as it enabled that hard-worked regiment, the 1st Northamptons, under their Colonel, Osborne Smith, to move swiftly forward and, with the help of the 1st Queen’s, carry the place at the bayonet point. Half the Germans in the trench were put out of action, thirty-eight taken, and the rest fled. Pushing on after their success, they found the ridge beyond held by a considerable force of German infantry. The 2nd Rifles had come into the fight, and a dismounted squadron of the composite cavalry regiment put in some good work upon the flank. The action was continued briskly until dark, when both sides retained their ground with the exception of the captured line of trenches, which remained with the British. Seven officers and about 200 men were killed or wounded in this little affair.

The 18th found the enemy still acting upon the Napoleonic advice of *Tâtez toujours*. All day they were feeling for that weak place which could never be found. The constant attempts were carried on into the night with the same monotonous record of advance leading to repulse. At one time it was the line of the 1st Queen’s — and no line in the Army would be less likely to give results. Then it was the left flank of the First Division, and then the front of the Second. Now and again there were swift counters from the British, in one of which an enemy’s trench was taken by the 1st Gloucesters with the two machine-guns therein. But there was no inducement for any general British advance. “We have nothing to lose by staying here,” said a General, “whereas every day is of importance to the Germans, so the longer we can detain them here the better.” So it seemed from the point of view of the Allies. There is a German point of view also, however, which is worthy of consideration. They were aware, and others were not, that great reserves of men were left in the Fatherland, even as there were in France and in Britain, but that, unlike France and Britain, they actually had the arms and equipment for them, so that a second host could rapidly be called into the field. If these legions were in Belgium, they could ensure the fall of Antwerp, overrun the country, and seize the seaboard. All this could be effected while the Allies were held at the Aisne. Later, with these vast reinforcements, the Aisne. German armies might burst the barrier which held them and make a second descent upon Paris, which was still only fifty miles away. So the Germans may have argued, and the history of the future was to show that there were some grounds for such a calculation. It was in truth a second war in which once again the Germans had the men and material ready, while the Allies had not.

This date, September 18, may be taken as the conclusion of the actual Battle of the Aisne, since from that time the operations defined themselves definitely as a mutual siege and gigantic artillery duel. The casualties of the British at the Aisne amounted, up to that date, to 10,000 officers and men, the great majority of which were suffered by Haig’s First Army Corps. The action had lasted from the 13th, and its outstanding features, so far as our forces were concerned, may be said to have been the remarkable feat of crossing the river and the fine leadership of General Haig in the dangerous position in which he found himself. It has been suggested that the single unbroken bridge by which he crossed may have been a trap purposely laid by the Germans, whose plans miscarried owing to the simultaneous forcing of the river at many other points. As it was, the position of the First Corps was a very difficult one, and a reverse might have become an absolute disaster. It was impossible for General French to avoid this risk, for since the weather precluded all air reconnaissance, it was only by pushing his Army across that he could be sure of the enemy’s dispositions. The net result was one more demonstration upon both sides that the defensive force has so great an advantage under modern conditions that if there be moderate equality of numbers, and if the flanks of each be guarded, a condition of stalemate will invariably ensue, until the campaign is decided by economic causes or by military movements in some other part of the field of operations.

There is ample evidence that for the time the German Army, though able with no great effort to hold the extraordinarily strong position which had been prepared for it, was actually in very bad condition. Large new drafts had been brought out, which had not yet been assimilated by the army. The resistance of Maubeuge had blocked one of their supply railroads, and for some time the commissariat had partially broken down. Above all, they were mentally depressed by meeting such resistance where they had been led to expect an easy victory, by their forced retreat when almost within sight of Paris, and by their losses, which had been enormous. In spite of their own great superiority in heavy guns, the French light field-pieces had controlled the battlefields. There is ample evidence in the letters which have been intercepted, apart from the statements and appearance of the prisoners, to show the want and depression which prevailed. This period, however, may be said to mark the nadir of the German fortunes in this year. The fall of Maubeuge improved their supplies of every sort, their reserves and Landwehr got broken in by the war of the trenches, and the eventual fall of

Antwerp and invasion of Western Belgium gave them that moral stimulus which they badly needed.

Some wit amongst the officers has described the war as “months of boredom broken by moments of agony.” It is the duty of the chronicler to record, even if he attempts to alleviate, the former, for the most monotonous procession of events form integral parts of the great whole. The perusal of a great number of diaries and experiences leaves a vague and disconnected recollection behind it of personal escapes, of the terror of high explosives, of the excellence of the rear services of the Army, of futile shellings — with an occasional tragic mishap, where some group of men far from the front were suddenly, by some freak of fate, blown to destruction, — of the discomforts of wet trenches, and the joys of an occasional relief in the villages at the rear. Here and there, however, in the monotony of what had now become a mutual siege, there stand out some episodes or developments of a more vital character, which will be recorded in their sequence.

It may be conjectured that, up to the period of the definite entrenchment of the two armies, the losses of the enemy were not greater than our own. It is in the attack that losses are incurred, and the attack had, for the most part, been with us. The heavier guns of the Germans had also been a factor in their favour. From the 18th onwards, however, the weekly losses of the enemy must have been very much greater than ours, since continually, night and day, they made onslaughts, which attained some partial and temporary success upon the 20th, but which on every other occasion were blown back by the rifle-fire with which they were met. So mechanical and halfhearted did they at last become that they gave the impression that those who made them had no hope of success, and that they were only done at the bidding of some imperious or imperial voice from the distance. In these attacks, though any one of them may have only furnished a few hundred casualties, the total spread over several weeks must have equalled that of a very great battle, and amounted, since no progress was ever made, to a considerable defeat.

Thus on September 19 there was a succession of attacks, made with considerable vivacity and proportional loss. About 4 P.M. one developed in front of the 4th and 6th Brigades of the First Corps, but was speedily stopped. An hour later another one burst forth upon the 7th and 9th Brigades of the Second Corps, with the same result. The artillery fire was very severe all day and the broad valley was arched from dawn to dusk by the flying shell. The weather was still detestable, and a good many were reported ill from the effects of constant wet and cold. The 20th was the date of two separate attacks, one of which involved some hard fighting and considerable loss. The first, at eight in the morning, was upon Shaw’s 9th Brigade and was driven off without great difficulty. The second was the more serious and demands some fuller detail.

On the arrival of the Sixth Division upon the 18th, Sir John French had determined to hold them in reserve and to use them to relieve, in turn, each of the brigades which had been so hard-worked during the previous week. Of these, there was none which needed and deserved a rest more than Bulfin’s 2nd Brigade, which, after their attack upon the Chemin-des-Dames upon the 14th, had made and held the trenches which formed both the extreme right and the advanced point of the British line. For nearly a week these men of iron had lain where the battle had left them. With the object of relieving them, the 18th Brigade (Congreve’s) of the Sixth Division was ordered to take their places. The transfer was successfully effected at night, but the newcomers, who had only arrived two days before from England, found themselves engaged at once in a very serious action. It may have been coincidence, or it may have been that with their remarkable system of espionage the Germans learned that new troops had taken the place of those whose mettle they had tested so often; but however this may be, they made a vigorous advance upon the afternoon of September 20, coming on so rapidly and in such numbers that they drove out the occupants both of the front British trenches — which were manned by three companies of the 1st West Yorkshires — and the adjoining French trench upon the right, which was held by the Turcos. The West Yorkshires were overwhelmed and enfiladed with machine-guns, a number were shot down, and others were taken prisoners.

Fortunately, the rest of the brigade were in immediate support, and orders were given by General Congreve to advance and to regain the ground that had been lost. The rush up the hill was carried out by the 2nd Notts and Derby Regiment (Sherwood Foresters) in the centre, with the remainder of the West Yorks upon their right, and the 2nd Durham Light Infantry upon their left. They were supported by the 1st East Yorks and by the 2nd Sussex, who had just been called out of the line for a rest. The 4th Irish Dragoon Guards at a gallop at at first, and then dismounting with rifle and bayonet, were in the forefront of the fray. The advance was over half a mile of ground, most of which was clear of any sort of cover, but it was magnificently carried out and irresistible in its impetus. All the regiments lost heavily, but all reached their goal. Officers were hit again and again, but staggered on with their men. Captain Popham, of the Sherwood Foresters, is said to have carried six wounds with him up the slope. Fifteen officers and 250 men were shot down, but the lost trench was carried at the point of the bayonet and the whole position re-established. The total casualties were 1364, more than half of which fell upon the West Yorkshires, while the majority of the others were Sherwood Foresters, East Yorkshires, and Durhams. Major Robb, of the latter regiment, was among those who fell. The Germans did not hold the trenches for an hour, and yet the engagement may be counted as a success for them, since our losses were certainly heavier than theirs. There was no gain, however, in ground. The action was more than a mere local attack, and the British line was in danger of being broken had it not been for the determined counterattack of the 18th Brigade and of the Irish dragoons. To the north of this main attack there was another subsidiary movement on the Beaulne ridge, in which the 5th and 6th Brigades were sharply engaged. The 1st King’s, the 2nd H.L.I., and the 2nd Worcesters all sustained some losses.

About this period both the British and the French armies began to strengthen themselves with those heavy guns in which they had been so completely overweighted by their enemy. On the 20th the French in the neighbourhood of our lines received twelve long-range cannon, firing a 35 lb. shell a distance of twelve kilometres. Three days later the opened fire with four new batteries of six-inch howitzers. From this time onwards there was no such great disparity in the heavy artillery, and the wounded from the monster shells of the enemy had at least the slight solace that their fate was not unavenged. The expenditure of shells, however, was still at the rate of ten German to one of the Allies. If the war was not won it was no fault of Krupp and the men of Essen. In two weeks the British lost nearly 3000 men from shell-fire.

It was at this time, September 20, that the Germans Rheims put a climax upon the long series of outrages and vandalisms of which their troops had been guilty by the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral, the Westminster Abbey of France. The act seems to have sprung from deliberate malice, for though it was asserted afterwards that the tower had been used as an artillery observation point, this is in the highest degree improbable, since the summit of the ridge upon the French side is available for such a purpose. The cathedral was occupied at the time by a number of German wounded, who were the sufferers by the barbarity of their fellow-countrymen. The incident will always remain as a permanent record of the value of that *Kultur* over which we have heard such frantic boasts. The records of the French, Belgian, and British Commissions upon the German atrocities, reinforced by the recollection of the burned University of Louvain and the shattered Cathedral of Rheims, will leave a stain upon the German armies which can never be erased. Their conduct is the more remarkable, since the invasion of 1870 was conducted with a stem but rigid discipline, which won the acknowledgment of the world. In spite of all the material progress and the superficial show of refinement, little more than a generation seems to have separated civilisation from primitive barbarity, which attained such a pitch that no arrangement could be made by which the wounded between the lines could be brought in. Such was the code of a nominally Christian nation in the year 1914.

Up to now the heavier end of the fighting had been borne by Haig’s First Corps, but from the 20th onwards the Second and Third sustained the impact. The action just described, in which the West Yorkshires suffered so severely, was fought mainly by the 18th Brigade of Pulteney’s Third Corps. On the 21st it was the turn of the Second Corps. During the night the 1st Wiltshire battalion of McCracken’s 7th Brigade was attacked, and making a strong counter-attack in the morning they cleared a wood with the bayonet, and advanced the British line at that point. A subsequent attack upon the same brigade was repulsed. How heavy the losses had been in the wear and tear of six days’ continual trench work is shown by the fact that when on this date the 9th Brigade (Shaw’s) was taken back for a rest it had lost 30 officers and 860 men since crossing the Aisne.

The German heavy guns upon the 21st set fire to the village of Missy, but failed to dislodge the 1st East Surreys who held it. This battalion, in common with the rest of Ferguson’s Division, were dominated night and day by a plunging fire from above. It is worth recording that in spite of the strain, the hardship, and the wet trenches, the percentage of serious sickness among the troops was lower than the normal rate of a garrison town. A few cases of enteric appeared about this time, of which six were in one company of the Coldstream Guards. It is instructive to note that in each case the man belonged to the uninoculated minority.

A plague of spies infested the British and French lines at this period, and their elaborate telephone installations, leading from haystacks or from cellars, showed the foresight of the enemy. Some of these were German officers, who bravely took their Lives in their hands from the patriotic motive of helping their country. Others, alas, were residents who had sold their souls for German gold. One such — a farmer — was found with a telephone within his house and no less a sum than a thousand pounds in specie. Many a battery concealed in a hollow, and many a convoy in a hidden road, were amazed by the accuracy of a fire which was really directed, not from the distant guns, but from some wayside hiding place. Fifteen of these men were shot and the trouble abated.

The attacks upon the British trenches, which had died down for several days, were renewed with considerable vigour upon September 26. The first, directed against the 1st Queen's, was carried out by a force of about 1000 men, who advanced in close order, and, coming under machine-gun fire, were rapidly broken up. The second was made by a German battalion debouching from the woods in front of the 1st South Wales Borderers. This attack penetrated the line at one point, the left company of the regiment suffering severely, with all its officers down. The reserve company, with the help of the 2nd Welsh Regiment, retook the trenches after a hot fight, which ended by the wood being cleared. The Germans lost heavily in this struggle, 80 of them being picked up on the very edge of the trench. The Borderers also had numerous casualties, which totalled up to 7 officers and 182 men, half of whom were actually killed.

The Army was now in a very strong position, for the trenches were so well constructed that unless a shell by some miracle went right in, no harm would result. The weather had become fine once more, and the flying service relieved the anxieties of the commanders as to a massed attack. The heavy artillery of the Allies was also improving from day to day, especially the heavy British howitzers, aided by aeroplane observers with a wireless installation. On the other hand, the guns were frequently hit by the enemy's fire. The 22nd R.F.A. lost a gun, the 50th three guns, and other batteries had similar losses. Concealment had not yet been reduced to a science.

At this period the enemy seems to have realised that his attacks, whether against the British line or against the French armies which flanked it, and had fought throughout with equal tenacity, were a mere waste of life. The assaults died away or became mere demonstrations. Early in October the total losses of the Army upon the Aisne had been 561 officers and 12,980 men, a proportion which speaks well for the coolness and accuracy of the enemy’s sharp-shooters, while it exhibits our own forgetfulness of the lessons of the African War, where we learned that the officer should be clad and armed so like the men as to be indistinguishable even at short ranges. Of this large total the Second Corps lost 136 officers and 3095 men, and the First Corps 348 officers and 6073 men, the remaining 77 officers and 3812 men being from the Third Corps and the cavalry.

It was at this period that a great change came over both the object and the locality of the operations. This change depended upon two events which had occurred far to the north, and reacted upon the great armies locked in the long grapple of the Aisne. The first of these controlling circumstances was that, by the movement of the old troops and the addition of new ones, each army had sought to turn the flank of the other in the north, until the whole centre of gravity of the war was transferred to that region. A new French army under General Castelnau, whose fine defence of Nancy had put him in the front of French leaders, had appeared on the extreme left wing of the Allies, only to be countered by fresh bodies of Germans, until the ever-extending line lengthened out to the manufacturing districts of Lens and Lille, where amid pit-shafts and slag-heaps the cavalry of the French and the Germans tried desperately to get round each other’s flank. The other factor was the fall of Antwerp, which had released very large bodies of Germans, who were flooding over Western Belgium, and, with the help of great new levies from Germany, carrying the war to the sand-dunes of the coast. The operations which brought about this great change open up a new chapter in the history of the war. The actual events which culminated in the fall of Antwerp may be very briefly handled, since, important as they were, they were not primarily part of the British task, and hence hardly come within the scope of this narrative.

The Belgians, after the evacuation of Brussels in August, had withdrawn their army into the widespread fortress of Antwerp, from which they made frequent sallies upon the Germans who were garrisoning their country. Great activity was shown and several small successes were gained, which had the useful effect of detaining two corps which might have been employed upon the Aisne. Eventually, towards the end of September, the Germans turned their attention seriously to the reduction of the city, with a well founded confidence that no modern forts could resist the impact of their enormous artillery. They drove the garrison within the lines, and early in October opened a bombardment upon the outer forts with such results that it was evidently only a matter of days before they would fall and the fine old city be faced with the alternative of surrender or destruction. The Spanish fury of Parma's pikemen would be a small thing compared to the *furor Teutonicus* working its evil deliberate will upon town-hall or cathedral, with the aid of fire-disc, petrol-spray, or other products of culture. The main problem before the Allies, if the town could not be saved, was to ensure that the Belgian army should be extricated and that nothing of military value which could be destroyed should be left to the invaders. No troops were available for a rescue, for the French and British old formations were already engaged, while the new ones were not yet ready for action. In these circumstances, a resolution was come to by the British leaders which was bold to the verge of rashness and so chivalrous as to be almost quixotic. It was determined to send out at the shortest notice a naval division, one brigade of which consisted of marines, troops who are second to none in the country's service, while the other two brigades were young amateur sailor volunteers, most of whom had only chapter been under arms for a few weeks. It was an extraordinary experiment, as testing how far the average sport-loving, healthy-minded young Briton needs only his equipment to turn him into a soldier who, in spite of all rawness and inefficiency, can still affect the course of a campaign. This strange force, one-third veterans and two-thirds practically civilians, was hurried across to do what it could for the failing town, and to demonstrate to Belgium how real was the sympathy which prompted us to send all that we had. A reinforcement of a very different quality was dispatched a few days later in the shape of the Seventh Division of the Regular Army, with the Third Division of Cavalry. These fine troops were too late, however, to save the city, and soon found themselves in a position where it needed all their hardihood to save themselves.

The Marine Brigade of the Naval Division under General Paris was dispatched from England in the early morning and reached Antwerp during the night of October 3. They were about 2000 in number. Early next morning they were out in the trenches, relieving some weary Belgians. The Germans were already within the outer enceinte and drawing close to the inner. For forty-eight hours they held the line in the face of heavy shelling. The cover was good and the losses were not heavy. At the end of that time the Belgian troops, who had been a good deal worn by their heroic exertions, were unable to sustain the German pressure, and evacuated the trenches on the flank of the British line. The brigade then fell back to a reserve position in front of the town.

On the night of the 5th the two other brigades of the division, numbering some 5000 amateur sailors, arrived in Antwerp, and the whole force assembled on the new line of defence. Mr. Winston Churchill showed his gallantry as a man, and his indiscretion as a high official, whose life was of great value to his country by accompanying the force from England. The bombardment was now very heavy, and the town was on fire in several places. The equipment of the British left much to be desired, and their trenches were as indifferent as their training. None the less they played the man and lived up to the traditions of that great service upon whose threshold they stood. For three days these men, who a few weeks before had been anything from schoolmasters to tram-conductors, held their perilous post. They were very raw, but they possessed a great asset in their officers, who were usually men of long service. But neither the lads of the naval brigades nor the war-worn and much-enduring Belgians could stop the mouths of those inexorable guns. On the 8th it was clear that the forts could no longer be held. The British task had been to maintain the trenches which connected the forts with each other, but if the forts went it was clear that the trenches must be outflanked and untenable. The situation, therefore, was hopeless, and all that remained was to save the garrison and leave as little as possible for the victors. Some thirty or forty German merchant ships in the harbour were sunk and the great petrol tanks were set on fire. By the light of the flames the Belgian and British forces made their way successfully out of the town, and the good service rendered later by our Allies upon the Yser and elsewhere is the best justification of the policy which made us strain every nerve in order to do everything which could have a moral or material effect upon them in their darkest hour. Had the British been able to get away unscathed, the whole operation might have been reviewed with equanimity if not with satisfaction, but, unhappily, a grave misfortune, arising rather from bad luck than from the opposition of the enemy, came upon the retreating brigades, so that very many of our young sailors after their one week of crowded life came to the end of their active service for the war.

On leaving Antwerp it had been necessary to strike to the north in order to avoid a large detachment of the enemy who were said to be upon the line of the retreat. The boundary between Holland and Belgium is at this point very intricate, with no clear line of demarcation, and a long column of British somnambulists, staggering along in the dark after so many days in which they had for the most part never enjoyed two consecutive hours of sleep, wandered over the fatal line and found themselves in firm but kindly Dutch custody for the rest of the war. Some fell into the hands of the enemy, but the great majority were interned. These men belonged chiefly to three battalions of the 1st Brigade. The 2nd Brigade, with one battalion of the 1st, and the greater part of the Marines, made their way to the trains at St. Gilles-Waes, and were able to reach Ostend in safety. The remaining battalion of Marines, with a number of stragglers of the other brigades, were cut off at Morbede by the Germans, and about half of them were taken, while the rest fought their way through in the darkness and joined their comrades. The total losses of the British in the whole misadventure from first to last were about 2500 men — a high price, and yet not too high when weighed against the results of their presence at Antwerp. On October 10 the Germans under General Von Beseler occupied the city. Mr. Powell, who was present, testifies that 60,000 marched into the town, and that they were all troops of the active army.

It has already been described how the northern ends of the two contending armies were endeavouring to outflank each other, and there seemed every possibility that this process would be carried out until each arrived at the coast. Early in October Sir John French represented to General Joffre that it would be well that the British Army should be withdrawn from the Aisne and take its position to the left of the French forces, a move which would shorten its line of communications very materially, and at the same time give it the task of defending the Channel coast. General Joffre agreed to the proposition, and the necessary steps were at once taken to put it into force. The Belgians had in the meanwhile made their way behind the line of the Yser, where a formidable position had been prepared. There, with hardly a day of rest, they were ready to renew the struggle with the ferocious ravagers of their country. The Belgian Government had been moved to France, and their splendid King, who will live in history as the most heroic and chivalrous figure of the war, continued by his brave words and noble example to animate the spirits of his countrymen.

From this time Germany was in temporary occupation of all Belgium, save only the one little corner, the defence of which will be recorded for ever. Little did she profit by her crime or by the excuses and forged documents by which she attempted to justify her action. She entered the land in dishonour and dishonoured will quit it. William, Germany, and Belgium are an association of words which will raise in the minds of posterity all that Parma, Spain, and the Lowlands have meant to us — an episode of oppression, cruelty, and rapacity, which fresh generations may atone for but can never efface.

VII. THE LA BASSÉE — ARMENTIÈRES OPERATIONS
(From October 11 to October 31, 1914)

The great battle line — Advance of Second Corps — Death of General Hamilton — The farthest point — Fate of the 2nd Royal Irish — The Third Corps — Exhausted troops — First fight of Neuve Chapelle — The Indians take over — The Lancers at Warneton — Pulteney's operations — Action of Le Gheir

IN accordance with the new plans, the great transference began upon October 3. It was an exceedingly difficult problem, since an army of more than 100,000 had to be gradually extricated by night from trenches which were often not more than a hundred yards from the enemy, while a second army of equal numbers had to be substituted in its place. The line of retreat was down an open slope, across exposed bridges, and up the slope upon the southern bank. Any alarm to the Germans might have been fatal, since a vigorous night attack in the middle of the operation would have been difficult to resist, and even an artillery bombardment must have caused great loss of life. The work of the Staff in this campaign has been worthy of the regimental officers and of the men. Everything went without a hitch. The Second Cavalry Division (Gough's) went first, followed immediately by the First (De Lisle's). Then the infantry was withdrawn, the Second Corps being the vanguard; the Third Corps followed, and the First was the last to leave. The Second Corps began to clear from its trenches on October 3-4, and were ready for action on the Aire-Bethune line upon October 11. The Third Corps was very little behind it, and the First had reached the new battle-ground upon the 19th. Cavalry went by road; infantry marched part of the way, trained part of the way, and did the last lap very often in motor-buses. One way or another the men were got across, the Aisne trenches were left for ever, and a new phase of the war had begun. From the chalky uplands and the wooded slopes there was a sudden change to immense plains of clay, with slow, meandering, ditch-like streams, and all the hideous features of a great coal-field added to the drab monotony of Nature. No scenes could be more different, but the same great issue of history and the same old problem of trench and rifle were finding their slow solution upon each. The stalemate of the Aisne was for the moment set aside, and once again we had reverted to the old position where the ardent Germans declared, “This way we shall come,” and the Allies, “Not a mile, save over our bodies.”

The narrator is here faced with a considerable difficulty in his attempt to adhere closely to truth and yet to make his narrative intelligible to the lay reader. We stand upon the edge of a great battle. If all the operations which centred at Ypres, but which extend to the Yser Canal upon the north and to La Bassée at the south, be grouped into one episode, it becomes the greatest clash of arms ever seen up to that hour upon the globe, involving a casualty list — Belgian, French, British, and German — which could by no means be computed as under 250,000, and probably over 300,000 men. It was fought over an irregular line, which is roughly forty miles from north to south, while it lasted, in its active form, from October 12 to November 20 before it settled down to the inevitable siege stage. Thus both in time and in space it presents difficulties which make a concentrated, connected, and intelligible narrative no easy task. In order to attempt this, it is necessary first to give a general idea of what the British Army, in conjunction with its Allies, was endeavouring to do, and, secondly, to show how the operations affected each corps in its turn.

During the operations of the Aisne the French had extended the Allied line far to the north in the hope of outflanking the Germans. The new Tenth French Army, under General Foch, formed the extreme left of this vast manoeuvre, and it was supported on its left by the French cavalry. The German right had lengthened out, however, to meet every fresh extension of the French, and their cavalry had been sufficiently numerous and alert to prevent the French cavalry from getting round. Numerous skirmishes had ended in no definite result. It was at this period that it occurred, as already stated, to Sir John French that to bring the whole British Army round to the north of the line would both shorten very materially his communications and would prolong the line to an extent which might enable him to turn the German flank and make their whole position impossible. General Joffre having endorsed these views, Sir John took the steps which we have already seen. The British movement was, therefore, at the outset an aggressive one. How it became defensive as new factors intruded themselves, and as a result of the fall of Antwerp, will be shown at a later stage of this account.

As the Second Corps arrived first upon the scene it will be proper to begin with some account of its doings from October 12, when it went into action, until the end of the month, when it found itself brought to a standstill by superior forces and placed upon the defensive. The doings of the Third Corps during the same period will be interwoven with those of the Second, since they were in close co-operation; and, finally, the fortunes of the First Corps will be followed and the relation shown between its doings and those of the newly arrived Seventh Division, which had fallen back from the vicinity of Antwerp and turned at bay near Ypres upon the pursuing Germans. Coming from different directions, all these various bodies were destined to be formed into one line, cemented together by their own dismounted cavalry and by French reinforcements, so as to lay an unbroken breakwater before the great German flood.

The task of the Second Corps was to get into touch with the left flank of the Tenth French Army in the vicinity of La Bassée, and then to wheel round its own left so as to turn the position of those Germans who were facing our Allies. The line of the Bethune-Lille road was to be the hinge, connecting the two armies and marking the turning-point for the British. On the 11th Gough's Second Cavalry Division was clearing the woods in front of the Aire-Bethune Canal, which marked the line of the Second Corps. By evening Gough had connected up the Third Division of the Second Corps with the Sixth Division of the The Third Corps, which was already at Hazebrouck. On the 12th the Third Division crossed the canal, operations, followed by the Fifth Division, with the exception of the 13th Brigade, which remained to the south of it. Both divisions advanced more or less north before swinging round to almost due east in their outflanking movement. The rough diagram gives an idea of the point from which they started and the positions reached at various dates before they came to an equilibrium. There were many weary stages, however, between the outset and the fulfilment, and the final results were destined to be barren as compared with the exertions and the losses involved. None the less it was, as it proved, an essential part of that great operation by which the British — with the help of their good allies — checked the German advance upon Calais in October and November, even as they had helped to head them off from Paris in August and September. During these four months the little British Army, far from being negligible, as some critics had foretold would be the case in a Continental war, was absolutely vital in holding the Allied line and taking the edge off the hacking German sword.

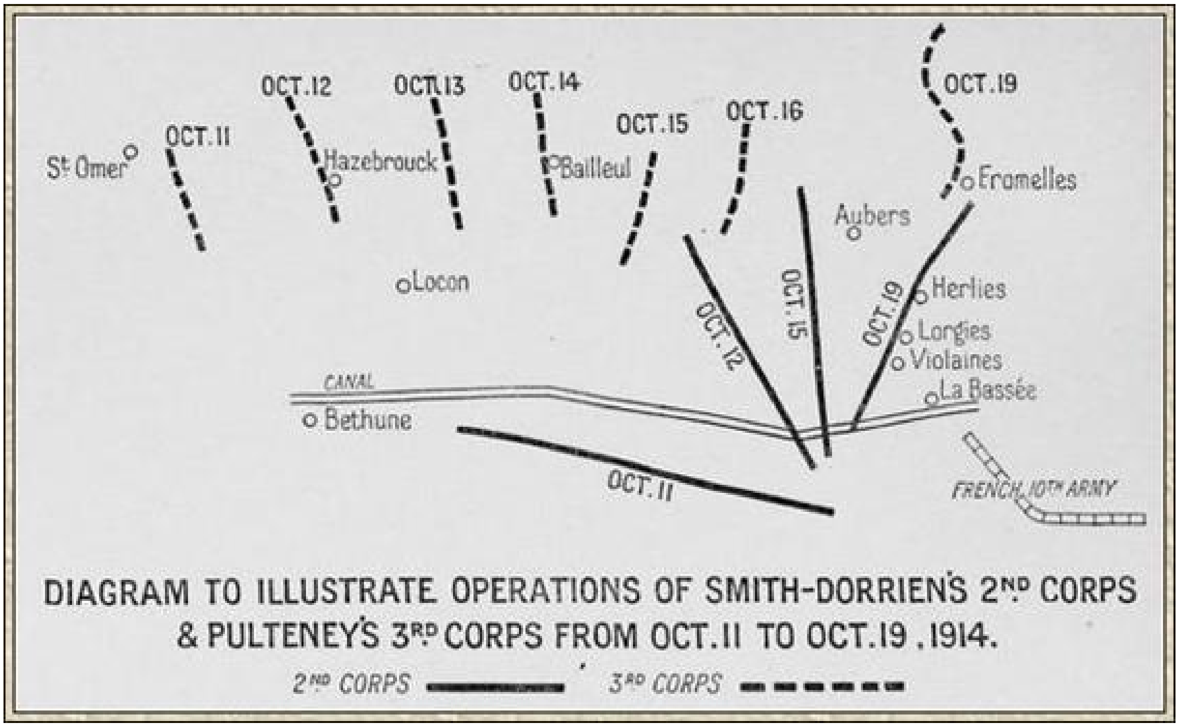
OCT. 11
OCT. 12
OCT. 13
OCT. 14
OCT. 15
OCT. 16
OCT. 19
St. Omer
Hazebrouck
Bailleul
Fromelles
Aubers
Locon
Herlies
Lorgies
Violaines
La Bassée
CANAL
Bethune
OCT. 12
OCT. 15
OCT. 19
OCT. 11
FRENCH 10TH ARMY
DIAGRAM TO ILLUSTRATE OPERATIONS OF SMITH-DORRIEN'S 2ND CORPS & PULTENEY'S 3RD CORPS FROM OCT. 11 TO OCT. 19. 1914.
2ND CORPS
3RD CORPS

Operations of Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps and Pulteney's Third Corps, October 11-19, 1914

The Third Corps, which had detrained at St. Omer and moved to Hazebrouck, was intended to move in touch with the Second, prolonging its line to the north. The First and Second British Cavalry Divisions, now under the command of De Lisle and of Gough, with Allenby as chief, had a role of their own to play, and the space between the Second and Third Corps was now filled up by a French Cavalry Division under Conneau, a whole-hearted soldier always ready to respond to any call. There was no strong opposition yet in front of the Third Corps, but General Pulteney moved rapidly forwards, brushed aside all resistance, and seized the town of Bailleul. A German position in front of the town, held by cavalry and infantry without guns, was rushed by a rapid advance of Haldane's 10th Infantry Brigade, the 2nd Seaforths particularly distinguishing themselves, though the 1st Warwicks and 1st Irish Fusiliers had also a good many losses, the Irishmen clearing the trenches to the cry of "Faugh-a-Ballagh!" which has sounded so often upon battlefields of old. The 10th Brigade was on the left of the corps, and in touch with the Second Cavalry Division to the north. The whole action, with its swift advance and moderate losses, was a fine vindication of British infantry tactics. On the evening of October

15 the Third Corps had crossed the Lys, and on the 18th they extended from Warneton in the north to almost within touch of the position of the Second Corps at Aubers upon the same date.

The country to the south in which the Second Corps was advancing upon October 12 was an extraordinarily difficult one, which offered many advantages to the defence over the attack. It was so flat that it was impossible to find places for artillery observation, and it was intersected with canals, high hedgerows, and dykes, which formed ready-made trenches. The Germans were at first not in strength, and consisted for the most part of dismounted cavalry drawn from four divisions, but from this time onwards there was a constant fresh accession of infantry and guns. They disputed with great skill and energy every position which could be defended, and the British advance during the day, though steady, was necessarily slow. Every hamlet, hedgerow, and stream meant a separate skirmish. The troops continually closed ranks, advanced, extended, and attacked from morning to night, sleeping where they had last fought. There was nothing that could be called a serious engagement, and yet the losses — almost entirely from the Third Division — amounted to 300 for the day, the heaviest sufferers being the 2nd Royal Scots.

On the next day, the 13th, the corps swung round its left so as to develop the turning movement already described. Its front of advance was about eight miles, and it met resistance which made all progress difficult. Again the 8th Brigade, especially the Royal Scots and 4th Middlesex, lost heavily. So desperate was the fighting that the Royal Scots had 400 casualties including 9 officers, and the Middlesex fared little better. The principal fighting, however, fell late in the evening upon the 15th Brigade (Gleichen’s), who were on the right of the line and in touch with the Bethune Canal. The enemy, whose line of resistance had been considerably thickened by the addition of several battalions of Jaeger and part of the Fourteenth Corps, made a spirited counterattack on this portion of the advance. The 1st Bedfords were roughly handled and driven back, with the result that the 1st Dorsets, who were stationed at a bridge over the canal near Givenchy, found their flanks exposed and sustained heavy losses, amounting to 400 men, including Major Roper. Colonel Bols, of the same regiment, enjoyed one crowded hour of glorious life, for he was wounded, captured, and escaped all on the same evening. It was in this action also that Major Vandeleur* was wounded and captured.

[*Major Vandeleur was the officer who afterwards escaped from Krefeld and brought back with him a shocking account of the German treatment of our prisoners. Though a wounded man, the Major was kicked by the direct command of one German officer, and his overcoat was taken from him in bitter weather by another.]

A section of guns which was involved in the same dilemma as the Dorsets had to be abandoned after every gunner had fallen. The 15th Brigade was compelled to fall back for half a mile and entrench itself for the night. On the left the 7th Brigade (McCracken’s) had some eighty casualties in crossing the Lys, and a detachment of Northumberland Fusiliers, who covered their left flank, came under machine-gun fire, which struck down their adjutant, Captain Herbert, and a number of men. Altogether the losses on this day amounted to about twelve hundred men.

On the 14th the Second Corps continued its slow advance in the same direction. Upon this day the Third Division sustained a grievous loss in the shape of its commander, General Sir Hubert Hamilton, who was standing conversing with the quiet nonchalance which was characteristic of him, when a shell burst above him and a shrapnel bullet struck him on the temple, killing him at once. He was a grand commander, beloved by his men, and destined for the highest had he lived. He was buried that night after dark in a village churchyard. There was an artillery attack by the Germans during the service, and the group of silent officers, weary from the fighting line, who stood with bowed heads round the grave, could hardly hear the words of the chaplain for the whiz and crash of the shells. It was a proper ending for a soldier.

His division was temporarily taken over by General Colin Mackenzie. On this date the 13th Brigade, on the south of the canal, was relieved by French troops, so that henceforward all the British were to the north. For the three preceding days this brigade had done heavy work, the pressure of the enemy falling particularly upon the 2nd Scottish Borderers, who lost Major Allen and a number of other officers and men.

The 15th was a day of spirited advance, the Third Division offering sacrifice in the old warrior fashion to the shade of its dead leader. Guns were brought up into the infantry line and the enemy was smashed out of entrenched positions and loopholed villages in spite of a most manful resistance. The soldiers carried long planks with them and threw them over the dykes on their advance. Mile after mile the Germans were pushed back, until they were driven off the high road which connects Estaires with La Bassée. The 1st Northumberland and 4th Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, and the 2nd Royal Scots and 4th Middlesex of the 8th, particularly distinguished themselves in this day of hard fighting. By the night of the 15th the corps had lost 90 officers and 2500 men in the four days, the disproportionate number of officers being due to the broken nature of the fighting, which necessitated the constant leading of small detachments. The German resistance continued to be admirable.

On the 16th the slow wheeling movement of the Second Corps went steadily though slowly forward, meeting always the same stubborn resistance. The British were losing heavily by the incessant fighting, but so were the Germans, and it was becoming question which could stand punishment longest. In the evening the Third Division was brought to a stand by the village of Aubers, which was found to be strongly held. The Fifth Division was instructed to mark time upon the right, so as to form the pivot upon which all the rest of the corps could swing round in their advance on La Bassée. At this date the Third Corps was no great distance to the north, and the First Corps was detraining from the Aisne. As the Seventh Division with Byng’s Third Cavalry Division were reported to be in touch with the other forces in the north, the concentration of the British Army was approaching a successful issue. The weather up to now during all the operations which have been described was wet and misty, limiting the use of artillery and entirely preventing that of aircraft.

On the 17th the advance was resumed and was destined to reach the extreme point which it attained for many a long laborious month. This was the village of Herlies, north-east of La Bassée, which was attacked in the evening by Shaw’s 9th Brigade, and was carried in the dusk at the point of the bayonet by the 1st Lincolns and the 4th Royal Fusiliers. About the same time the Scots Fusiliers and Northumberlands had stormed Aubers. The 7th Brigade was less fortunate at the adjoining village of Illies, where they failed to make a lodgment, but the French cavalry on the extreme left, with the help of the 2nd Royal Irish, captured Fromelles. The Fifth Division also came forward a little, the right flank still on the canal, but the left bending round so as to get to the north of La Bassée. The 1st Devons, who had taken the place of the Dorsets, pushed forward with such fire that they were half a mile ahead of the Army and in great danger of being cut off, but by individual coolness and resource they managed to get back to safety.

On the 18th, Sir Charles Ferguson, who had done good work with the Army from the first gunshot of the war, was promoted to a higher rank and the command of the Fifth Division passed over to General Morland. Thus both divisions of the Second Corps changed their commanders within a week. On this date the infantry of the 14th Brigade, with some of the 13th Brigade, were within eight hundred yards of La Bassée, but found it so strongly held that it could not be entered, the Scottish Borderers losing heavily in a very gallant advance. The village of Illies also remained impregnable, being strongly entrenched and loopholed. Shaw’s 9th Brigade took some of the trenches, but found their left flank exposed, so had to withdraw nearly half a mile and to entrench. In this little action the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers bore the brunt of the fighting and the losses. Eight officers and nearly 200 men of this regiment were killed or wounded. A fresh German division came into action this day and their artillery was stronger, so that the prospects of future advance were not particularly encouraging. The British artillery was worked very hard, being overmatched and yet undefeatable. The strain both upon the men and the officers was constant, and the observation officers showed great daring and tenacity.

On the 19th neither the Third nor the Fifth Divisions made any appreciable progress, but one battalion was heavily engaged and added a fresh record to its ancient roll of valour. This was the 2nd Royal Irish under Major Daniell, who attacked the village of Le Pilly rather forward from the British left in co-operation with the French cavalry. The Irish infantry charged over eight hundred yards of clear ground, carried the village by storm, and entrenched themselves within it. This advance and charge, which was carried out with the precision of an Aldershot field day, although 130 men fell during the movement, is said by experienced spectators to have been a great feat of arms. The 20th saw a strong counter-attack of the Germans, and by the evening their two flanks had lapped round Le Pilly, pushing off on the one side the French cavalry of Conneau, and on the other a too small detachment of the Royal Fusiliers who were flanking the Irishmen. All day the defenders of Le Pilly were subjected to a terrific shell-fire, and all attempts to get messages to them were unavailing. In the evening they were surrounded, and only two or three men of the battalion were ever seen again. The gallant Daniell fell, and it is on record that his last audible words were a command to fix bayonets and fight to the end, the cartridges of the battalion being at that time exhausted. A German officer engaged in this attack and subsequently taken prisoner has deposed that three German battalions attacked the Royal Irish, one in front and one on each flank, after they had been heavily bombarded in enfilade. Several hundred Irish dead and wounded were taken out of the main trench.

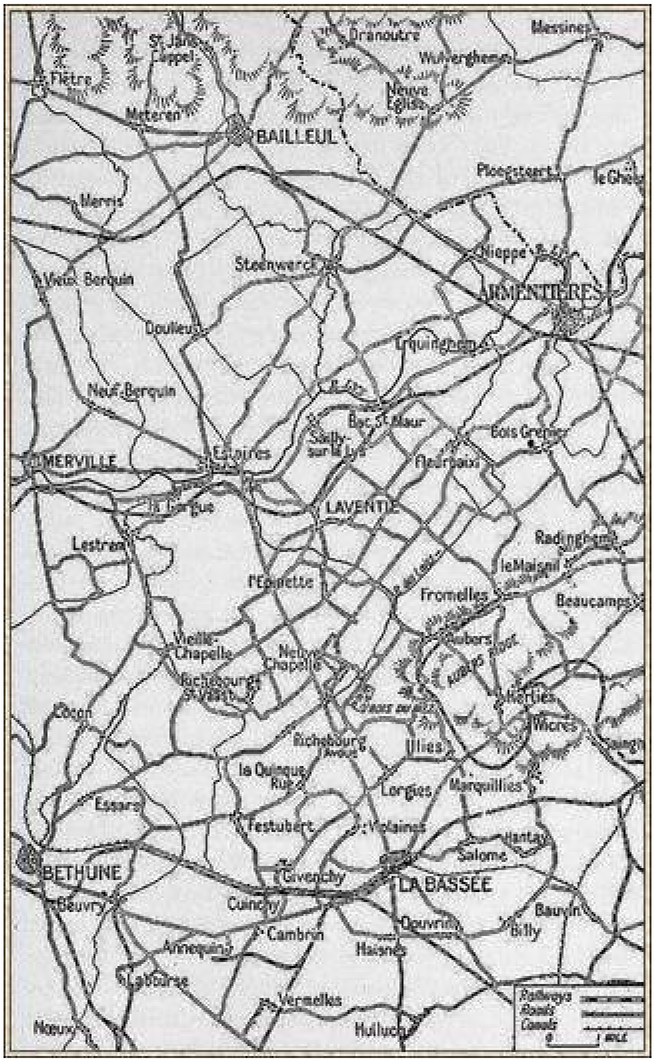
St. Jans Cappel
Dranoutre
Messines
Wulverghem
Fletre
Neuve Eglise
Meteren
BAILLEUL
Ploegsteert
le Gheer
Merris
Nieppe
Steenwerck
Vieux Berquin
ARMENTIERES
Doulieu
Erquinghem
Neuf Berquin
Bac St. Maur
Sailly-sur la Lys
Bois Grenier
MERVILLE
Estaires
Fleurbaix
la Gorgue
LAVENTIE
Lestrem
Radinghem
le Maisnil
l'Epinette
Fromelles
Beaucamps
Aubers
AUBERS RIDGE
Vieille Chapelle
Neuve Chapelle
Richebourg St. Vaast
Herlies
Zelobes
Wicres
Richebourg l'Avoué
Illies
la Quinque Rue
Lorgies
Marquillies
Essars
Festubert
Violaines
Hantay
Salome
BETHUNE
Givenchy
LA BASSEE
Beuvry
Cuinchy
Bauvin
Cambrin
Douvrin
Billy
Annequin
Haisnes
Labourse
Vermelles
Noeux
Hulluch
Railways
Roads
Canals
0
1 MILE

Southern End of British Line

There was now ample evidence that the Germans had received large reinforcements, and that their line was too strong to be forced. The whole object and character of the operations assumed, therefore, a new aspect. The Second and Third Corps had swung round, describing an angle of ninety degrees, with its pivot upon the right at the La Bassée Canal, and by this movement it had succeeded in placing itself upon the flank of the German force which faced the Tenth French Army. But there was now no longer any flank, for the German reinforcements had enabled them to prolong their line and so to turn the action into a frontal attack by the British. Such an attack in modern warfare can only hope for success when carried out by greatly superior numbers, whereas the Germans were now stronger than their assailants, having been joined by one division of the Seventh Corps, a brigade of the Third Corps, and the whole of the Fourteenth Corps, part of which had already been engaged.

Third increased pressure was being felt by the Third Corps on the Lys, as well as by the Second to the south of them; indeed, as only a few miles intervened between the two, they may be regarded as one for these operations. We have seen that, having taken the town of Bailleul, Pulteney's Corps had established itself across the Lys, and occupied a line from Warneton to Radinghem upon October 18. The latter village had been taken on that day by the 16th Brigade in an action in which the 1st Buffs and 2nd York and Lancasters lost heavily, the latter being ambushed as it pursued the enemy and losing 11 officers and 400 men. Colonel Cobbold fell back upon the village and held it successfully. Pulteney was now strongly attacked, and there was a movement of the Germans on October 20 as if to turn his right and slip in between the two British corps. The action was carried on into the 21st, the enemy still showing considerable energy and strength. The chief German advance during the day was north of La Bassée. It came upon the village of Lorgies, which was the point where the South Lancashires, of McCracken's 7th Brigade, forming the extreme right of the Third Division, were in touch with the East Surreys and Duke of Cornwall's of the 14th Brigade, forming the extreme left of the Fifth Division. It is necessary to join one's flats carefully in the presence of the Germans, for they are sharp critics of such matters. In this instance a sudden attack near Illies drove in a portion of the 2nd South Lancashires. This attack also destroyed the greater part of a company of the 1st Cornwalls in support. An ugly gap was left in the line, but the remainder of the Cornwalls, with the help of a company of the 1st West Kents and the ever-constant artillery, filled it up during the rest of the day, and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry took it over the same night, the Cornishmen retiring with heavy losses but a great deal of compensating glory. The temporary gap in the line exposed the right flank of the 3rd Worcesters, who were next to the South Lancashires. They lost heavily in killed and wounded, their colonel, Stuart, being among the latter, though his injury did not prevent him from remaining in the battle line. Apart from this action at Lorgies, the 19th Brigade (Gordon’s), upon the flank of Pulteney’s Corps, sustained a very heavy attack, being driven back for some distance. It had been ordered to occupy Fromelles, and so close the gap which existed at that time between the left of the Second and the right of the Third Corps, situated respectively at Aubers and Radinghem. The chief fighting occurred at the village of Le Maisnil, close to Fromelles. This village was occupied by the 2nd Argylls and half the 1st Middlesex, but they were driven out by a severe shell-fire followed by an infantry advance. The brigade fell back in good order, the regiments engaged having lost about 300 men. They took up a position on the right of the 16th Infantry Brigade at La Boutillerie, and there they remained until November 17, one severe attack falling upon them on October 29, which is described under that date.

On the morning of October 22 the Germans, still very numerous and full of fight, made a determined attack upon the Fifth Division, occupying the village of Violaines, close to La Bassée. The village was held by the 1st Cheshires, who, for the second time in this campaign, found themselves in a terribly difficult position. It is typical of the insolent high spirits of the men, in spite of all that they had endured, that upon the Germans charging forward with a war-cry which resembled, “Yip, Yip, Yip!” the British infantry joined in with “I-addy-ti-ay!” — the whole forming the chorus of a once popular Gaiety song. The Cheshires inflicted heavy losses upon the stormers with rifle-fire, but were at last driven out, involving in their retirement the 1st Dorsets, who had left their own trenches in order to help them. Both regiments, but especially the Cheshires, had grievous losses, in casualties and prisoners. On advancing in pursuit the Germans were strongly counter-attacked by the 2nd Manchesters and the 1st Cornwalls, supported by the 3rd Worcesters, who, by their steady fire, brought them to a standstill, but were unable to recover the ground that had been lost, though the Cornwalls, who had been fighting with hardly a pause for forty-eight hours, succeeded in capturing one of their machine-guns. In the night the British withdrew their line in accordance with the general rearrangement to be described. Some rearguard stragglers at break of day had the amusing experience of seeing the Germans making a valiant and very noisy attack upon the abandoned and empty trenches.

On this date, October 22, not only had Smith-Dorrien experienced this hold-up upon his right flank, but his left flank had become more vulnerable, because the French had been heavily attacked at Fromelles, and had been driven out of that village. An equilibrium had been established between attack and defence, and the position of the Aisne was beginning to appear once again upon the edge of Flanders. General Smith-Dorrien, feeling that any substantial advance was no longer to be hoped for under the existing conditions, marked down and occupied a strong defensive position, from Givenchy on the south to Fauquissart on the north. This involved a retirement of the whole corps during the night for a distance of from one to two miles, but it gave a connected position with a clear field of fire. At the same time the general situation was greatly strengthened by the arrival at the front of the Lahore Division of the Indian Army under General Watkis. These fine troops were placed in reserve behind the Second Corps in the neighbourhood of Locon.

It is well to remember at this point what Smith-Dorrien's troops had already endured during the two months that the campaign had lasted. Taking the strength of the corps at 37,000 men, they had lost, roughly, 10,000 men in August, 10,000 in September, and 5000 up to date in these actions of October. It is certain that far less than 50 per cent of the original officers and men were still with the Colours, and drafts can never fully restore the unity and spirit of a homogeneous regiment, where every man knows his company leaders and his platoon. In addition to this they had now fought night and day for nearly a fortnight, with broken and insufficient sleep, laying down their rifles to pick up their spades, and then once again exchanging spade for rifle, while soaked to the skin with incessant fogs and rain, and exposed to that most harassing form of fighting, where every clump and hedgerow covers an enemy. They were so exhausted that they could hardly be woken up to fight. To say that they were now nearing the end of their strength and badly in need of a rest is but to say that they were mortal men and had reached the physical limits that mortality must impose.

The French cavalry divisions acting as links between Pulteney and Smith-Dorrien were now relieved by the 8th (Jullundur) Indian Infantry Brigade, containing the 1st Manchesters, 59th (Scinde) Rifles, 15th and 47th Sikhs. It may be remarked that each Indian brigade is made up of three Indian and one British battalion. This change was effected upon October 24, a date which was marked by no particular military event save that the Third Division lost for a time the services of General Beauchamp Doran, who returned to England. General Doran had done great service in leading what was perhaps the most hard-worked brigade in a hard-worked division. General Bowes took over the command of the 8th Infantry Brigade.

On the night of October 24 determined attacks were made upon the trenches of the Second Corps at the Bois de Biez, near Neuve Chapelle, but were beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy, who had massed together twelve battalions in order to rush a particular part of the position. The main attack fell upon the 1st Wiltshires and the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, belonging to McCracken’s 7th Brigade, and also upon the 15th Sikhs, who seem to have been the first Indians to be seriously engaged, having nearly two hundred casualties. The 8th Brigade were also involved in the fight. The Germans had some temporary success in the centre of the trenches of the Third Division, where, in the darkness, they pushed back the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who lost very heavily. As the Highlanders fell back, the 2nd Royal Scots, upon their right, swung back its flank companies, covered the retirement, and then, straightening their ranks again, flung the Germans, at the point of their bayonets, out of the trenches. It was one of several remarkable feats which this fine battalion has performed in the war. Next morning the captured trenches were handed over to the care of the 4th Middlesex.

The pressure upon the exhausted troops was extreme upon this day, for a very severe attack was made also upon the Fifth Division, holding the right of the line. The soldiers, as already shown, were in no condition for great exertions, and yet, after their wont, they rose grandly to the occasion. The important village of Givenchy, destined for many a long month to form the advanced post upon the right of the Army, was held by the 1st Norfolks and 1st Devons, who defied all efforts of the enemy to dislodge them.

Nevertheless, the situation was critical and difficult for both divisions, and the only available support, the 1st Manchesters from the Lahore Division, were pushed up into the fighting line and found themselves instantly engaged in the neighbourhood of Givenchy. It was dreadful weather, the trenches a quagmire, and the rifle-bolts often clogged with the mud. On the 26th Sir John French, realising how great was the task with which the weary corps was faced, sent up two batteries of 47 guns, which soon lessened the volume of the German artillery attack. At the same time

General Maistre, of the Twenty-first French Corps, sent two of his batteries and two of his battalions. Thus strengthened, there was no further immediate anxiety as to the line being broken, especially as upon the 26th Marshal French, carefully playing card after card from his not over-strong hand, placed the Second Cavalry Division and three more Indian battalions in reserve to Smith-Dorrien's corps. The German advance had by no means spent itself, as on this day they came to close grips with the 2nd Irish Rifles and established themselves firmly in the village of Neuve Chapelle, near the centre of the British line, inflicting heavy loss upon the Royal Fusiliers, who tried to restore the position. A number of attacks were made to regain this village next day, in which as strange a medley of troops were employed as could ever before have found themselves as comrades in so minor an operation. There were South Lancashires, Royal Fusiliers, 9th Bhopal Infantry, 47th Sikhs, Chasseurs Alpins, and other units. In spite of — or possibly on account of — this international competition the village remained with the Germans, who were strongly reinforced, and managed by their shell-fire to clear some of the nearest trenches and gain some additional ground, hitting the 1st Wiltshires and 2nd Irish Rifles hard and making a number of prisoners, two or three hundred in all. Again the times had become critical, the more so as the 8th Indian Brigade to the north had also been attacked and roughly handled.

The indomitable Smith-Dorrien was determined to have his village, however, and in the neighbouring French cavalry commander, General Conneau, he found a worthy colleague who was ready to throw his last man into the venture. The Second Cavalry, now under General Mullens, was also ready, as our cavalry has always been, to spring in as a makeweight when the balance trembled. The German losses were known to have been tremendous, and it was hoped that the force of their attack was spent. On the 28th the assault was renewed, prefaced by a strong artillery preparation, but again it was brought to a standstill. The 47th Sikhs fought magnificently from loopholed house to house, as did the Indian sappers and miners, while the cavalry showed themselves to be admirable infantry at a pinch, but the defence was still too strong and the losses too severe, though at one time Colonel McMahon, with his Fusiliers, had seized the whole north end of the village.

Some 60 officers and 1500 men had fallen in the day's venture, including 70 of the cavalry. The night fell with Neuve Chapelle still in the hands of the enemy, and the British troops to the north, east, and west of it in a semicircle. The 14th Brigade, coming up after dark, found the 1st West Kent Regiment reduced to 2 officers and 150 men, and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry at about the same strength, still holding on to positions which had been committed to them three days before. The conduct of these two grand regiments upon that and the previous days excited the admiration of every one, for, isolated from their comrades, they had beaten off a long succession of infantry attacks and had been enfiladed by a most severe shell-fire. Second-Lieutenant White, with a still younger officer named Russell, formed the whole staff of officers of the West Kents. Major Buckle, Captain Legard, and many others having been killed or wounded, Penny and Crossley, the two sergeant-majors, did great work, and the men were splendid. These shire regiments, raised from the very soil of England, reflect most nearly her national qualities, and in their stolid invincibility form a fitting framework of a great national army. Speaking to the West Kents of this episode, General Smith-Dorrien said: “There is one part of the line which has never been retaken, because it was never lost. It was the particular trenches which your battalion held so grimly during those terrific ten days.”

These determined efforts were not spent in vain, for the Germans would not bide the other brunt. Early on the 29th the British patrols found that Neuve Chapelle had been evacuated by the enemy, who must have lost several thousand men in its capture and fine subsequent defence. In this village fighting the British were much handicapped at this time by the want of high explosive shells to destroy the houses. The enemy’s artillery made it impossible for the British to occupy it, and some time later it reverted to the Germans once more, being occupied by the Seventh Westphalian Corps. It was made an exceedingly strong advance position by the Germans, but it was reoccupied by the British Fourth Corps (Rawlinson’s) and the Indian Corps (Willcocks’) upon March 10 in an assault which lasted three days, and involved a loss of 12,000 men to the attackers and at as many to the defenders. This battle will be described among the operations of the spring of 1915, but it is mentioned now to show how immutable were the lines between these dates.

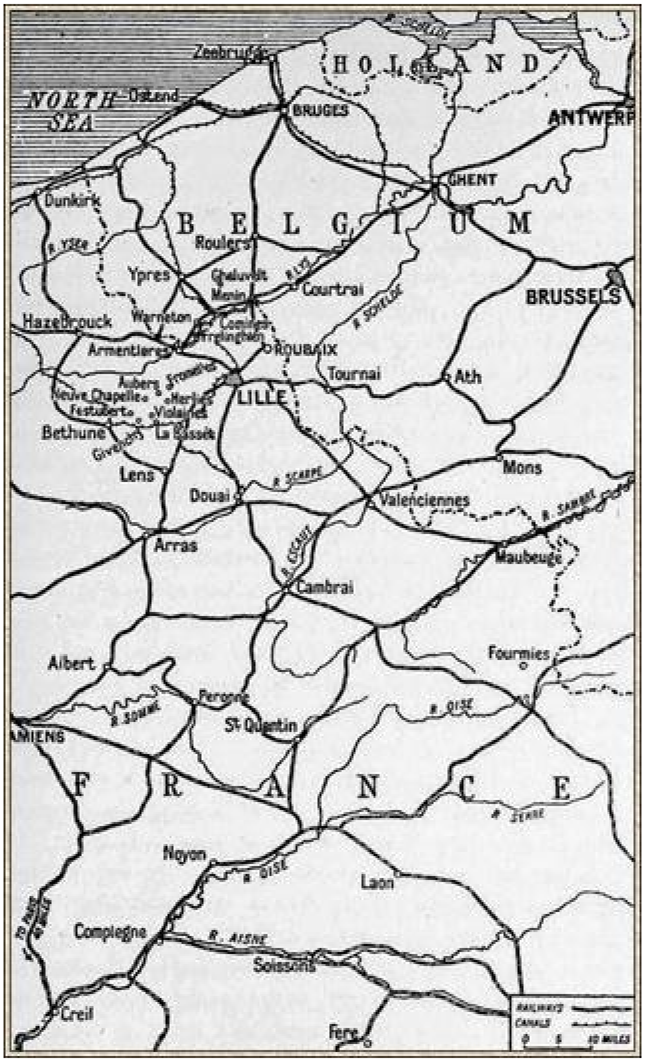
R. SCHELDE
Zeebrugge
HOLLAND
NORTH SEA
Ostend
BRUGES
ANTWERP
GHENT
Dunkirk
R. YSER
BELGIUM
Roulers
Ypres
Gheluvelt
Menin
R. LYS
Courtrai
R. SCHELDE
BRUSSELS
Hazebrouck
Warneton
Comines
Armentieres
ROUBAIX
Tournai
Ath
Aubers
Fromelles
Neuve Chapelle
Herlies
Festubert
Violaines
LILLE
Bethune
Givenchy
La Bassée
Lens
Douai
R. SCARPE
Mons
Valenciennes
R. SAMBRE
Arras
Maubeuge
R. ESCAUT
Cambrai
Fourmies
Albert
Peronne
R. SOMME
St Quentin
R. OISE
AMIENS
FRANCE
R. SERRE
Noyon
R. OISE
Laon
Compiegne
R. AISNE
Soissons
Creil
Fere
RAILWAYS
CANALS
0 5 10 MILES

General View of Seat of Operations

The southern or La Bassée end of the line had also been attacked upon the 28th and 29th, and the 2nd Manchesters driven from their trenches, which they instantly regained, killing seventy of the enemy and taking a number of prisoners. It was in this action that Lieutenant Leach and Sergeant Hogan earned the V.C., capturing a trench at the head of ten volunteers and disposing of some fifty Germans. Morland’s Fifth Division had several other skirmishes during these days, in which the Duke of Cornwall’s, Manchesters, and 1st Devons, who had taken the place of the Suffolks in the 14th Brigade, were chiefly engaged. The Devons had come late, but they had been constantly engaged and their losses were already as great as the others. For sixteen days they had held on with desperate resolution, their Colonel Gloster and a considerable proportion of the officers and men being hit. When they were at last relieved they received the applause of the Army. On the whole, the general line was held, though the price was often severe. At this period General Wing took command of the Third Division instead of General Mackenzie — invalided home — the third divisional change within a fortnight.

The arduous month of October was now drawing to a close, and so it was hoped were the labours of the weary Second Corps. Already, on the top of all their previous casualties, they had lost 360 officers and 8200 men since on October 12 they had crossed the La Bassée Canal. The spirit of the men was unimpaired for the most part — indeed, it seemed often to rise with the emergency — but the thinning of the ranks, the incessant labour, and the want of sleep had produced extreme physical exhaustion. Upon October 29 it was determined to take them out of the front line and give them the rest which they so badly needed. With this end in view, Sir James Willcocks' Indian Corps was moved to the front, and it was gradually substituted for the attenuated regiments of the Second Corps in the first row of trenches. The greater part of the corps was drawn out of the line, leaving two brigades and most of the artillery behind to support the Indians. That the latter would have some hard work was speedily apparent, as upon this very day the 8th Gurkhas were driven out of their trenches. With the support of a British battalion, however, and of Vaughan's Indian Rifles they were soon recovered, though Colonel Venner of the latter corps fell in the attack. This warfare of unseen enemies and enormous explosions was new to the gallant Indians, but they soon accommodated themselves to it, and moderated the imprudent gallantry which exposed them at first to unnecessary loss.

Here, at the end of October, we may leave the Second Corps. It was speedily apparent that their services were too essential to be spared, and that their rest would be a very nominal one. The Third Corps will be treated presently. They did admirably all that came to them to do, but they were so placed that both flanks were covered by British troops, and they were less exposed to pressure than the others. The month closed with this corps and the Indians holding a line which extended north and south for about twenty miles from Givenchy and Festubert in the south to Warneton in the north. We will return to the operations in this region, but must turn back a fortnight or so in order to follow the very critical and important events which had been proceeding in the north. Before doing so it would be well to see what had befallen the cavalry, which, when last mentioned, had, upon

October 11, cleared the woods in front of the Second Corps and connected it up with the right wing of the Third Corps. This was carried out by Gough's Second Cavalry Division, which was joined next day by De Lisle's First Division, the whole under General Allenby. This considerable force moved north upon October 12 and 13, pushing back a light fringe of the enemy and having one brisk skirmish at Mont des Cats, a small hill, crowned by a monastery, where the body of a Prince of Hesse was picked up after the action. Still fighting its way, the cavalry moved north to Berthen and then turned eastwards towards the Lys to explore the strength of the enemy and the passages of the river in that direction. Late at night upon the 14th General de Lisle, scouting northwards upon a motor-car, met Prince Alexander of Teck coming southwards, the first contact with the isolated Seventh Division.

On the night of the 16th an attempt was made upon Warneton, where the Germans had a bridge over the river, but the village was too strongly held. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade was engaged in the enterprise, and the 16th Lancers was the particular regiment upon whom it fell. The main street of the village was traversed by a barricade and the houses loopholed. The Germans were driven by the dismounted troopers, led by Major Campbell, from the first barricade, but took refuge behind a second one, where they were strongly reinforced. The village had been set on fire, and the fighting went on by the glare of the flames. When the order for retirement was at last given it was found that several wounded Lancers had been left close to the German barricade. The fire having died down, three of the Lancers — Sergeant Glasgow, Corporal Boyton, and Corporal Chapman — stole down the dark side of the street in their stockinged feet and carried some of their comrades off under the very noses of the Germans. Many, however, had to be left behind. It is impossible for cavalry to be pushful and efficient without taking constant risks which must occasionally materialise. The general effect of the cavalry operations was to reconnoitre thoroughly all the west side of the river and to show that the enemy were in firm possession of the eastern bank.

From this time onwards until the end of the month the cavalry were engaged in carrying on the north and south line of defensive trenches, which, beginning with the right of the Second Corps (now replaced by Indians) at Givenchy, was prolonged by the Third Corps as far as Frelingham. There the cavalry took it up and carried it through Comines to

Wervicq, following the bend of the river. These lines were at once strongly attacked, but the dismounted troopers held their positions. On October 22 the 12th Lancers were heavily assaulted, but with the aid of an enfilading fire from the 5th Lancers drove off the enemy. That evening saw four more attacks, all of them repulsed, but so serious that Indian troops were brought up to support the cavalry. Every day brought its attack until they culminated in the great and critical fight from October 30 to November 2, which will be described later. The line was held, though with some loss of ground and occasional set-backs, until November 2, when considerable French reinforcements arrived upon the scene. It is a fact that for all these weeks the position which was held in the face of incessant attack by two weak cavalry divisions should have been, and eventually was, held by two army corps.

It is necessary now to briefly sketch the movements of the Third Corps (Pulteney's). Its presence upon the left flank of the Second Corps, and the fact that it held every attack that came against it, made it a vital factor in the operations. It is true that, having staunch British forces upon each flank, its position was always less precarious than either of the two corps which held the southern and northern extremities of the line, for without any disparagement to our Allies, who have shown themselves to be the bravest of the brave, it is evident that we can depend more upon troops who are under the same command, and whose movements can be certainly co-ordinated. At the same time, if the Third Corps had less to do, it can at least say that whatever did come to it was excellently well done, and that it preserved its line throughout. Its units were extended over some twelve miles of country, and it was partly astride of the River Lys, so that here as elsewhere there was constant demand upon the vigilance and staunchness of officers and men. On October 20 a very severe attack fell upon the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, who held the most advanced trenches of Congreve's 18th Brigade. They were nearly overwhelmed by the violence of the German artillery fire, and were enfiladed on each side by infantry and machine-guns. The 2nd Durhams came up in reinforcement, but the Foresters had already sustained grievous losses in casualties and prisoners, the battalion being reduced from 900 to 250 in a single day. The Durhams also lost heavily. On this same day, the 20th, the 2nd Leinsters, of the 17th Brigade, were also driven from their trenches and suffered severely.

On October 21 the Germans crossed the River Lys in considerable force, and upon the morning of the 22nd they succeeded in occupying the village of Le Gheir upon the western side, thus threatening to outflank the positions of the Second Cavalry Division to the north. In their advance in the early morning of the 22nd they stormed the trenches held by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, this regiment enduring considerable losses. The trenches on the right were held by the 1st Royal Lancasters and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers. These two regiments were at once ordered by General Anley, of the 12th Brigade, to initiate a counter-attack under the lead of Colonel Butler. Anley himself, who is a hard-bitten soldier of much Egyptian fighting, moved forward his men, while General Hunter-Weston, the indefatigable blower-up of railway lines in South Africa, supported the counterattack with the Somerset Light Infantry and the 1st East Lancashires. The latter regiment, under Colonel Lawrence, passed through a wood and reached such a position that they were able to enfilade the Germans in the open, causing them very heavy losses. The action was a brilliant success. The positions lost were reoccupied and the enemy severely punished, over a thousand Germans being killed or wounded, while 300 were taken prisoners. These belonged to the 104th and 179th Saxon regiments. It was a strange turn of fate which, after fifteen hundred years, brought tribesmen who had wandered up the course of the Elbe face to face in deadly strife with fellow-tribesmen who had passed over the sea to Britain. It is worth remarking and remembering that they are the one section of the German race who in this war have shown that bravery is not necessarily accompanied by coarseness and brutality.

On October 25 the attacks became most severe upon the line of Williams’ 16th Brigade, and on that night the trenches of the 1st Leicesters were raked by so heavy a gunfire that they were found to be untenable, the regiment losing 350 men. The line both of the 16th and of the 18th Brigades was drawn back for some little distance. There was a lull after this, broken upon the 29th, when Gordon’s 19th Brigade was attacked with great violence by six fresh battalions — heavy odds against the four weak battalions which composed the British Brigade. The 1st Middlesex Regiment was driven from part of its trenches, but came back with a rush, helped by their comrades of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The Germans were thrown out of the captured trenches, 40 were made prisoners, and 200 were slain. This attack was made by the 223rd and 224th Regiments of the XXIV. German Reserve Corps. It was not repeated.

On the 30th another sharp action occurred near St. Yves, when Hunter-Weston’s 11th Brigade was momentarily pierced after dusk by a German rush, which broke through a gap in the Hampshires. The Somerset Light Infantry, under Major Prowse, came back upon them and the trenches were regained. In all such actions it is to be remembered that where a mass of men can suddenly be directed against scattered trenches which will only hold a few, it is no difficult matter to carry them, but at once the conditions reverse themselves and the defenders mass their supports, who can usually turn the intruders out once more.

This brings the general record of the doings of the Third Corps down to the end of October, the date on which we cease the account of the operations at the southern end of the British line. We turn from this diffuse and difficult story, with its ever-varying positions and units, to the great epic of the north, which will be inseparably united for ever with the name of Ypres.

VIII. THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES
(Up to the Action of Gheluvelt, October 31)

The Seventh Division — Its peculiar excellence — Its difficult position — A deadly ordeal — Desperate attacks on Seventh Division — Destruction of 2nd Wilts — Hard fight of 20th Brigade — Arrival of First Corps — Advance of Haig's Corps — Fight of Pilken Inn — Bravery of enemy — Advance of Second Division — Fight of Kruiseik cross-roads — Fight of Zandvoorde — Fight of Gheluvelt — Advance of Worcesters — German recoil — General result — A great crisis

IT has already been seen that the Seventh Division (Capper's), being the first half of Rawlinson's Fourth Army Corps, had retired south and west after the unsuccessful attempt to relieve Antwerp. It was made up as follows: —

DIVISION VII. — GENERAL CAPPER.

20th Infantry Brigade — General Ruggles-Brise.

1st Grenadier Guards.

2nd Scots Guards.

2nd Border Regiment.

2nd Gordon Highlanders.

21st Infantry Brigade — General Watts.

2nd Bedfords.

2nd Yorks.

2nd Wilts.

2nd Scots Fusiliers,

22nd Infantry Brigade — General Lawford.

1st South Staffords.

2nd Warwicks.

2nd Queen’s West Surrey.

1st Welsh Fusiliers.

Artillery.

22nd Brigade R.F.A.

35th Brigade R.F.A.

3rd R.G.A.

111th R.G.A.

112th R.G.A.

14th Brigade R.H.A. C.F.

Engineers.

54 65, F. Co.

7 Signal Co.

Divisional Cavalry.

Northumberland Yeomanry.

It is not too much to say that in an army where every division had done so well no single one was composed of such fine material as the Seventh. The reason was that the regiments composing it had all been drawn from foreign garrison duty, and consisted largely of soldiers of from three to seven years' standing, with a minimum of reservists. In less than a month from the day when this grand division of 18,000 men went into action its infantry had been nearly annihilated, but the details of its glorious destruction furnish one more vivid page of British military achievement. We lost a noble division and gained a glorious record.

The Third Cavalry Division under General Byng was attached to the Seventh Division, and joined up with it at Roulers upon October 13. It consisted of: —

THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION — GENERAL BYNG.

6th Cavalry Brigade — General Makings.

3rd Dragoon Guards.

10th Hussars.

1st Royals.

7th Cavalry Brigade — General Kavanagh.

1st Life Guards.

1st Horse Guards.

2nd Life Guards.

K Battery, R.H.A.

The First Army Corps not having yet come up from the Aisne, these troops were used to cover the British position from the north, the infantry lying from Zandvoorde through Gheluvelt to Zonnebeke, and the cavalry on their left from Zonnebeke to Langemarck from October 16 onwards. It was decided by Sir John French that it was necessary to get possession of the town of Menin, some distance to the east of the general British line, but very important because the chief bridge, by means of which the Germans were receiving their ever-growing reinforcements, was there. The Seventh Division was ordered accordingly to advance upon this town, its left flank being covered by the Third Cavalry Division.

The position was a dangerous one. It has already been stated that the pause on the Aisne may not have been unwelcome to the Germans, as they were preparing reserve formations which might be suddenly thrown against some chosen spot in the Allied line. They had the equipment and arms for at least another 250,000 men, and that number of drilled men were immediately available, some being Landwehr who had passed through the ranks, and others young formations which had been preparing when war broke out. Together they formed no less than five new army corps, available for the extreme western front, more numerous than the whole British and Belgian armies combined. This considerable force, secretly assembled and moving rapidly across Belgium, was now striking the north of the Allied line, debouching not only over the river at Menin, but also through Courtrai, Iseghem, and Roulers. It consisted of the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th, and 27th reserve corps. Of these the 22nd, and later the 24th, followed the Belgians to the line of the Yser, but the other corps were all available for an attack upon the flank of that British line which was faced by formidable opponents — a line which extended over thirty miles and had already been forced into a defensive attitude.

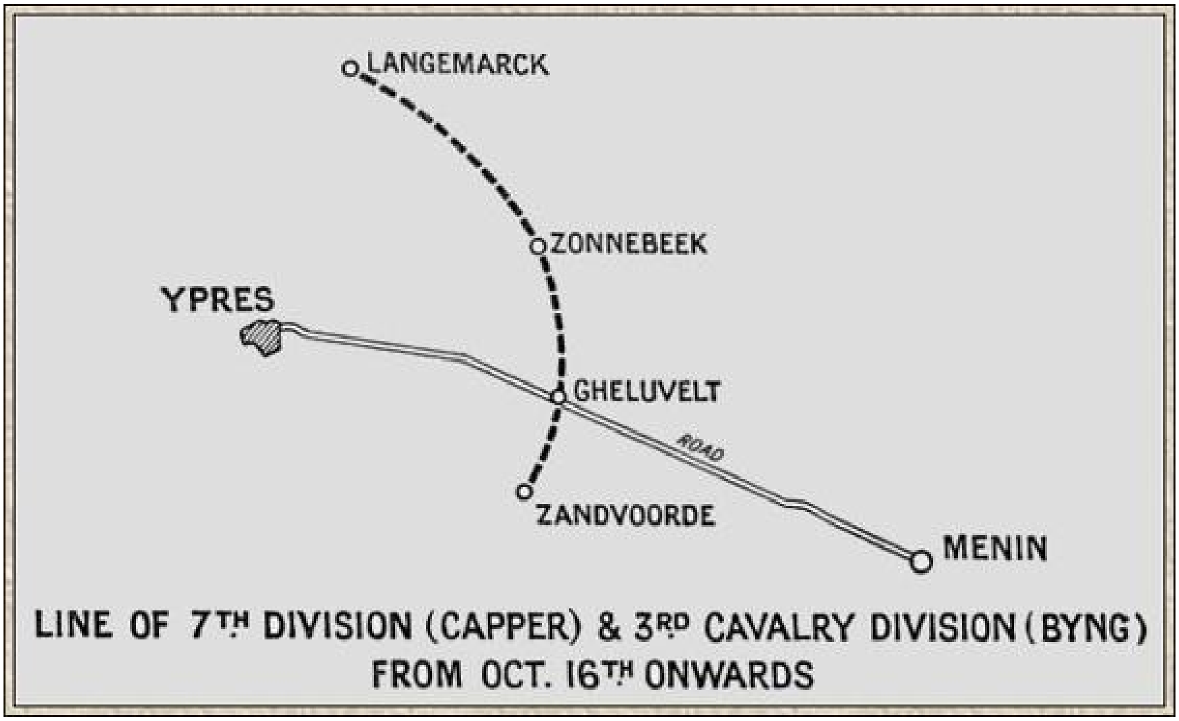

Line of Seventh Division and Third Cavalry

That was the situation when the Seventh Division faced round near Ypres. Sir John French was doing all that he could to support it, and Sir Douglas Haig was speeding up his army corps from the Aisne to take his place to the north of Ypres, but there were some days during which Rawlinson’s men were in the face of a force six or seven times larger than themselves.

Upon October 16th and 17th the division had advanced from Ypres and occupied the line already mentioned, the right centre of which rested about the ninth kilometre on the Ypres-Menin road, the order of the brigades from the north being 22nd, 21st, and 20th. On October 18 the division wheeled its left forward. As the infantry advanced, the covering cavalry soon became aware of grave menace from Roulers and Courtrai in the north. A large German force was evidently striking down on to the left flank of the advance. The division was engaged all along the line, for the 20th Brigade upon the right had a brisk skirmish, while the 21st Brigade in the centre was also under fire, which came especially heavily upon the 2nd Bedfords, who had numerous casualties. About ten o’clock on the morning of the 19th the pressure from the north increased, and the 7th Cavalry Brigade was driven in, though it held its own with great resolution for some time, helped by the fine work of K Battery, R.H.A. The 6th Cavalry Brigade was held up in front, while the danger on the flank grew more apparent as the hours passed. In these circumstances General Rawlinson, fortified in his opinion by the precise reports of his airmen as to the strength of the enemy upon his left, came to the conclusion that a further advance would place him in a difficult position. He therefore dropped back to his original line. There can be little doubt that, if he had persevered in the original plan, his force would have been in extreme danger. As it was, before he could get it back the 1st Welsh Fusiliers were hard hit, this famous regiment losing a major, 5 captains, 3 lieutenants, and about 200 men. The order to retire had failed to reach it, and but for the able handling of Colonel Cadogan it might well have been destroyed.

On October 20, the situation being still obscure, the 20th Brigade carried out a reconnaissance towards Menin. The 2nd Wilts and 2nd Scots Fusiliers, of the 21st Brigade, covered their left flank. The enemy, however, made a vigorous attack upon the 22nd Brigade to the north, especially upon the Welsh Fusiliers, so the reconnaissance had to fall back again, the 1st Grenadier Guards sustaining some losses. The two covering regiments were also hard pressed, especially the Wiltshires, who were again attacked during the night, but repulsed their assailants.

From this time onwards the Seventh Division was to feel ever more and more the increasing pressure as the German army corps from day to day brought their weight to bear upon a thin extended line of positions held by a single division. It will be shown that they were speedily reinforced by the First Corps, but even after its advent the Germans were still able to greatly outnumber the British force. The story from this time onwards is one of incessant and desperate attacks by day and often by night. At first the division was holding the position alone, with the help of their attendant cavalry, and their instructions were to hold on to the last man until help could reach them. In the case of some units these instructions were literally fulfilled. One great advantage lay with the British. They were first-class trained soldiers, the flower of the Army, while their opponents, however numerous, were of the newly raised reserve corps, which showed no lack of bravery, but contained a large proportion of youths and elderly men in the ranks. Letters from the combatants have described the surprise and even pity which filled the minds of the British when they saw the stormers hesitate upon the edge of the trenches which they had so bravely approached, and stare down into them uncertain what they should do. But though the ascendancy of the British infantry was so great that they could afford to disregard the inequality of numbers, it was very different with the artillery. The German gunners were as good as ever, and their guns as powerful as they were numerous. The British had no howitzer batteries at all with this division, while the Germans had many. It was the batteries which caused the terrific losses. It may be that the Seventh Division, having had no previous experience in the campaign, had sited their trenches with less cunning than would have been shown by troops who had already faced the problem of how best to avoid high explosives.

Either by sight or by aeroplane report the Germans got the absolute range of some portions of the British position, pitching their heavy shells exactly into the trenches, and either blowing the inmates to pieces or else burying them alive, so that in a little time the straight line of the trench was entirely lost, and became a series of ragged pits and mounds. The head-cover for shrapnel was useless before such missiles, and there was nothing for it but either to evacuate the line or to hang on and suffer. The Seventh Division hung on and suffered, but no soldiers can ever have been exposed to a more deadly ordeal. When they were at last relieved by the arrival of reinforcements and the consequent contraction of the line, they were at the last pitch of exhaustion, indomitable in spirit, but so reduced by their losses and by the terrific nervous strain that they could hardly have held out much longer.

A short account has been given of what occurred to the division up to October 20. It will now be carried on for a few days, after which the narrative must turn to the First Corps, and show why and how they came into action to the north of the hard-pressed division. It is impossible to tell the two stories simultaneously, and so it may now be merely mentioned that from October 21 Haig’s Corps was on the left, and that those operations which will shortly be described covered the left wing of the division, and took over a portion of that huge German attack which would undoubtedly have overwhelmed the smaller unit had it not been for this addition of strength. It is necessary to get a true view of the operations, for it is safe to say that they are destined for immortality, and will be recounted so long as British history is handed down from one generation to another.

On the 21st the enemy got a true conception of the salient in front of the Seventh Division, and opened a vigorous attack, which lasted all day and assumed several different phases at different points. The feature of the morning of the 21st was the severe and, indeed, disastrous artillery fire upon Lawford's 22nd Brigade. The exact range of the British position seems to have been discovered with deadly results. Men, trenches, and machine-guns were all blown to pieces together. The 2nd Warwicks and the 1st Welsh Fusiliers were the two battalions upon which the storm beat hardest, and each of them had some hundreds of casualties. In three days the Welsh Fusiliers, who were on the exposed left flank, lost three-quarters of their effectives, including twenty three of their officers, and yet preserved their military spirit. It became clearer as experience accumulated that the best trenches, if they are once fairly located, can be made untenable or turned into the graves of their occupants by the use of high explosives. The German fire was so severe that it was reckoned that one hundred and twenty shells an hour into or round a trench was a not uncommon rate of fall. The 2nd Queen's also lost seven officers and many men in this day's fighting. In spite of the heavy losses from gunfire the German infantry could make no progress, being held up by a flanking fire of the South Staffords. In the afternoon of October 21 a strong attack was made upon the 21st Brigade in the centre of the line. The brigade was holding a front of two and a half miles, and, although the attack was generally beaten back, a certain number of stormers got through between the trenches and into the woods beyond. Here they lurked for a couple of days, during which time the 2nd Yorkshire Regiment, behind whose line they were lying, were often compelled to have each alternate man facing a different way to keep down the fire. The battalion sent itself reinforcements by hurrying its right company over to help to clear its left. This movement was successful, but was attended with heavy losses, including several officers. Some of the Royal Scots Fusiliers had been forced out of their trenches on the right, and made, under Major Ian Forbes, a gallant attempt to re-establish them, in which Captain Fairlie and many men were lost. The Wiltshires also endured a very severe attack, which they repulsed with great loss to the enemy. On this same eventful day, the 21st, the Second Cavalry Division had been pushed back at Holbeke, and the Germans got round the right flank of the hard-pressed infantry. It was then that General Rawlinson brought his Third Cavalry Division round and established it upon his right instead of his left flank. From this time until October 30 this cavalry division was holding Zandvoorde Ridge, sharing day by day in all the perils and the glories of their comrades of the Seventh Division. There was no more dangerous point than that which was held by the cavalry, and their losses, especially those of the 10th Hussars, were in proportion to the danger. In the course of a few days the Hussars lost Colonel Barnes, Majors Mitford and Crichton and many officers and men.

On October 22 the Second Division of Haig's First Corps, which had been fully occupied to the north with operations which will presently be described, moved down to cover the ground vacated by the Third Cavalry Division and to relieve the pressure upon the infantry of the Seventh Division. The 4th Guards Brigade took its position upon their immediate left. It was time. For four days they had covered the enormous front of eight miles against at least four times their own number, with more than six times their weight of artillery. It was touch and go. They were nearly submerged. It was indeed a vision of joy when the worn and desperate men, looking over their shoulders down the Ypres-Menin road, saw the head of a British column coming swiftly to the rescue. It was the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Worcesters, dispatched from the 5th Brigade, and never was reinforcement more needed. Shortly afterwards further help in the shape of a detachment of the Munster Fusiliers, two troops of the ever-helpful Irish Horse, and one section of artillery appeared upon the scene.

Upon this date (October 22) the 22nd Infantry Brigade of the Seventh Division had fallen back to the railway crossings near Zonnebeke. Thus the salient which the Germans had been attacking was straightened out. Unhappily, the change caused another smaller salient farther south, at the point which was held by the 2nd Wiltshires. On the 22nd and 23rd there was a tremendous shelling of this sector, which was followed on the 24th by an infantry advance, in which the Wiltshires, who had been previously much reduced, were utterly overwhelmed and practically destroyed. The disastrous attack broke upon the British line just after daybreak. The enemy pushed through behind each flank of the Wiltshires, elbowing, off the Scots Fusiliers on one side and the Scots Guards on the other. The Germans got in force into the Polygon Woods behind. There were no reserves available save the Northumberland Hussars, a corps which has the honour of being the first British territorial corps to fight for its country. With the aid of some divisional cyclists, this handful of men held back the Germans until the 2nd Warwicks from the north were brought to stem the advance. The Warwicks charged through the wood, their gallant Colonel Loring riding his horse beside them without boot or legging, having been wounded some days before. “Where my men go I go as well,” was his answer to medical remonstrance. He was killed by a bullet, but he died at a moment of victory, for his last earthly vision was that of his infantry driving the last Germans out of the wood. Besides their colonel, the regiment lost many officers and men in this fine advance, which was most vigorously supported by the 2nd Worcesters, the only reinforcement within reach. The Worcesters lost 6 officers and 160 men, but did much execution and took a number of prisoners.

At this time the 20th Brigade, being the extreme Hard fight right of the Seventh Division, held an extended line Brigade. from Kruiseik cross-roads, about a mile east of Gheluvelt village, to near Zandvoorde, with a salient at the village of Kruiseik. On the night of the 25th the Germans planned a furious attack upon the whole salient. The assailants, who were mostly Saxons, broke through the 2nd Scots Guards just north of Kruiseik and got behind the line, which was pushed back for some distance, though Captain Paynter, with the right-hand company, held his position. A counter-attack by the Guards retook the line, together with 200 prisoners, including 7 officers. On the morning of the 26th the Germans were back on them, however, and began by blowing in the trenches of the Border Regiment south of Kruiseik. The German guns had found the exact range of the trenches, and the defenders had the same terrible and intolerable experience which had befallen some of their comrades two days before. It was simply impossible to stand up against the incessant shower of shattering shells. So great was the concussion and the nervous strain that many of the men exposed to it got completely dazed or even became delirious. Grenadiers, Scots Guards, and South Staffords, of the 20th Brigade, held the line until the front trenches were carried by the Germans and many of the occupants made prisoners. It was pitch dark, and it was impossible to tell friend from foe. Major Fraser of the Scots Guards, going forward to reconnoitre, was shot dead and his party was destroyed. A house in a field taken by the Guards yielded no fewer than 200 prisoners, but in the confused fighting in the darkness our losses were greater than our gains. It was in this night-fighting that Lord Dalrymple, Colonel Bolton, and other officers, with some hundreds of men, fell into the hands of the enemy after a most heroic resistance to overpowering numbers and to a weight of artillery which was crushing in its effect. The King’s Company of the 1st Grenadiers was isolated and in great danger, but managed to link up with the British line.

The 1st South Staffords also lost some hundreds of men, and was only saved by fine handling on the part of Colonel Ovens. Kruiseik was abandoned, and a new line taken up half a mile farther back. It was a critical night, during which the energy and firmness of General Capper were splendidly employed in reforming and stiffening his sorely tried division. On the 26th the 20th Brigade, which had been so heavily hit the day before, was drawn out of the line for a rest, and the two other brigades closed up to cover a shorter line. The work of the 20th at Kruiseik had been magnificent, but their losses were appalling, including their Brigadier, Ruggles-Brise, who was wounded. Here, for the instant, we shall leave the Seventh Division, though their ordeal was by no means done, and we shall turn to those other forces which had been forming in the northern or Ypres section of the long battle line.

The reader will remember, if he casts his mind back, that the whole British line, as it extended from the south about October 18, consisted of the Second Corps and the advance guard of the Indians near La Bassée; then, in succession, the Third Corps in the Armentières district, the First Cavalry and Second Cavalry near Messines and Wytschaete, the Seventh Division near Gheluvelt, and finally the Third Cavalry on their left, joining up with the French, who carried the line to where the Belgians were reforming on the Yser. The First Corps had detrained from the Aisne, and was concentrated between St. Omer and Hazebrouck upon October 18 and 19. They represented a last British reserve of about thirty-five thousand men to set against the large new armies who were advancing from the north. The urgent question to be decided was where they should be placed, since there were so many points which needed reinforcement.

Sir John French has explained in his dispatch the reasons which swayed him in deciding this question.

“I knew,” he said, “that the enemy were by this time in greatly superior strength upon the Lys and that the Second and Third Cavalry and Fourth Corps were holding a much wider front than their strength and numbers warranted. Taking these facts alone into consideration, it would have appeared wise to throw the First Corps in to strengthen the line, but this would have left the country north and east of Ypres and the Ypres Canal open to a wide turning movement by the Third Reserve Corps and at least one Landwehr Division which I knew to be operating in that region. I was also aware that the enemy was bringing large reinforcements up from the east, which could only be opposed for several days by two or three French cavalry divisions, some French Territorials, and the Belgian Army."

He proceeds to state his opinion that the Belgian Army was in no condition to withstand unsupported such an attack, and that if it were allowed to sweep past us it was very likely to wash away all opposition before it, and get into the Channel ports in our rear. With this consideration in his mind. Sir John French took the bold and dangerous, but absolutely necessary, step of leaving the long, thin, thirty-mile line to do the best it could, and prolonging it by another ten or twelve miles by forming up the First Corps on the same alignment, so as to present as long a British breakwater as possible to the oncoming flood. There was nothing else to be done, and the stronger the flood the more need there was to do it, but it is safe to say that seldom in history has so frail a barrier stood in the direct track of so terrible a storm.

In accordance with this resolution, Haig's First Corps moved, on October 20, through Poperinghe and Ypres and took their place upon the north or left side of the Seventh Division. On their own left in this position was the French cavalry corps of General de Mitry, while the Third Division of British cavalry was on their right. As the movement commenced Sir John French had a personal interview with General Haig, in which he held out hopes that the greater part of the new German levies had been deflected to hold our southern advance, and that he would only find the Third Reserve Corps and some Landwehr in front of him to the north of Ypres. His object was to advance upon the line of Bruges and drive the enemy towards Ghent. Meanwhile the gallant little Belgian army, which was proving itself a glutton at fighting, was entrenched along the line of the Ypres Canal and the Yser River, where they held their own manfully in spite of all that they had endured.

The first large landmark in the direction of Bruges was Thorout, and towards this the First Corps, with the Third Cavalry Division upon its right, took its first steps, little thinking that it was butting forward against an approaching army of at least double its own strength. It was very quickly made to realise its position, however, and any dreams of a victorious entry into Bruges were speedily dispelled. Only too fortunate would it be if it could hold its own line without retreat and disaster. Upon the 21st Haig's men attacked Poel-Chapelle and Passchendaale, French cavalry and Territorials (the Eighty-seventh and Eighty-ninth Divisions) under General

Bidon advancing on their left, while the Seventh Division, as already described, kept pace upon its right. There was strong opposition from the first, but the corps advanced in spite of it until the pressure from the north became too severe for the French, whose flank was exposed to the full force of it.

The British attack upon the morning in question was planned as follows. The Second Division was to advance upon Passchendaale. The First had orders to take Poel-Chapelle. The latter movement was headed by the 3rd Brigade, who were directed by General Landon to go forward about nine o'clock, the 1st Queen's having the station for their objective while the 1st South Wales Borderers attacked the village. The 1st Gloucesters were in reserve. The enemy met the attack with shell-fire, which it was difficult to locate, as the country was flat and enclosed. The progress of the movement, however, was steady though slow. About ten o'clock there were signs of a considerable hostile infantry advance from the north. The attack, however, made good progress up to midday, when there was a general retirement of the French Territorials, followed later by the French cavalry upon the British left. They moved back towards Bixschote. The Gloucester Regiment, who had been thrown out to reinforce that flank, were also driven back, and were in turn reinforced by the Coldstream Guards. This battalion executed a bayonet charge in clearing the small village of Koekuit, but later on had to retire, finding their flank exposed. It should be mentioned that one French corps, the Seventh Cavalry Division, kept its position upon the British left, and it is also only fair to point out that as the German advance was mainly from the north, it was upon the left flank, covered by the French, that it would fall. The 1st Camerons were now dispatched to the flank to stiffen the French resistance, taking up their position near the inn which is midway upon the road between Steenstraate and Langemarck, north of the village of Pilken — an inn with which they were destined to have stirring associations. With the support of the 46th Battery, the Highlanders held up a German brigade which was thrusting through behind our main line; but farther west, in the Steenstraate direction, the defence against a northern advance was miserably thin, consisting only of one company of the Sussex Regiment and the 116th Battery. In the circumstances the more success Haig's troops attained in front, and the more they advanced, the more dangerous was their position upon the flank.

About 2:30 the German advance from the north became more formidable, and the 1st South Welsh Borderers, between Langemarck and Poel-Chapelle, were heavily counter-attacked and suffered considerable loss, between two and three hundred in all. Two companies of the 2nd Welsh were pushed up to their help. It was clear, however, that the advance could not be continued. The 1st Brigade was therefore ordered to hold the line between Steenstraate and Langemarck, with their centre at the inn north of Pilken, so as to face the German advance from the north. Then from Langemarck the British line turned southwards, being carried on for two miles by the 3rd Brigade to hold the enemy who were coming from the east. The 2nd Brigade was in reserve at Boesinghe. During this long and difficult day the Second Division, operating upon the right of the First, was not subjected to the same anxiety about its flank. It advanced upon its objective in the face of severe opposition, ending more than once in a brief bayonet encounter. Several counter-attacks were made by the Germans, but they were all beaten back with loss. About two o'clock, however. the Second Division learned of the flank pressure which was holding up the First Division, and also of the extreme need for help experienced by the 22nd Brigade of the Seventh Division on their right. In these circumstances it was necessary to abandon the idea of further advance and to send south those reinforcements, the opportune arrival of which has been already described.

As a net result of the two days' operations General Haig was not able to attain the line of Passchendaale — Poel-Chapelle, as originally planned, but he gained sufficient ground to establish himself from Langemarck to Zonnebeke, more than half-way to his objective. The whole character of the operations during these days was more of the familiar British type, being conducted upon the surface of the earth rather than under it, and cavalry making its last appearance for many a long day. Many fine deeds of valour were done. In one of these Captain Rising, of the Gloucester Regiment, with ninety men, defended some point with such heroic tenacity that when, some days afterwards, the Brigadier attempted to get the names of the survivors for commendation not one could be found. Quaintly valorous also is the picture of Major Powell, of the North Lancashires, leading his wing with a badly-sprained ankle, and using a cottage chair for a crutch, upon which he sat down between rushes. It is hopeless, however, and even invidious to pick instances where the same spirit animated all. The result was definite. It had been clearly shown that the enemy were in considerably greater strength than had been imagined, and instead of a rearguard action from weak forces the British found themselves in the presence of a strong German advance. All day large forces of the enemy were advancing from Roulers and were impinging upon different points of the Franco-British line. These troops were composed of partially-trained men, volunteers and reservists, but they attacked with the utmost determination, and endured heavy losses with great bravery. It is a remarkable proof of the elaborate preparations for war made by Germany that, behind all their original gigantic array, they still had ready within the country sufficient arms and uniforms to fit out these five new army corps. He who plans finds it easy to prepare, and whoever will compare this profusion of munitions in Germany with the absolute lack of them in the Allied countries will have no further doubt as to which Government conspired against the peace of the world.

On October 21, Sir John French began to feel that there were new factors in his front. In the evening, at a meeting with Haig and Rawlinson, he discussed the unexpected strength of the German reinforcements and admitted that the scheme of an advance upon Bruges would become impossible in the face of such numbers. Intelligence reports indicated that there was already a German army corps in front of each British division. General Joffre had promised considerable French reinforcements upon October 24, and all that could be done was for the British troops to hold their ground to the last man and to resist every pressure until the equality of the forces could be restored. Could they hold the line till then? That was the all-important question.

October 22 was the first day of that long ordeal of incessant attacks which the First Corps was called upon to endure, until by constant attrition it had become almost as worn as the Seventh Division to the south. On this day the German attack, which attained the full volume of later days, spent itself here and there along the extended lines. Only at one point did the enemy have some success, which, however, was the prelude to disaster.

The line from Steenstraate to Langemarck, defending the British left flank, was held by the 1st Brigade, the Scots Guards upon the extreme left, then the Cameron Highlanders, and the Black Watch in reserve. In the middle of the line north of Pilken was a solitary inn, already mentioned, round which trenches had been cut in horse-shoe fashion, the concavity of the shoe pointing southwards. This point marked the junction between the Camerons and the Scots Guards. About 3 P.M. this position was driven in and captured by a sudden and determined advance of the enemy. The German charge was a fine feat of arms, for it was carried out largely by *Einjährige*, who may be roughly compared to the Officers' Training Corps of our British system. These high-spirited lads advanced singing patriotic songs, and succeeded in carrying the trenches in the face of soldiers who are second to none in the British Army — soldiers, too, who had seen much service, while the German cadets were new to the work. The performance was much appreciated by British officers and men.

The Black Watch endeavoured without success to restore the line, and the 1st Northamptons were called upon from divisional reserve, while from all parts troops converged towards the gap. On the arrival of the Northamptons they pushed up towards the interval which, now existed between the Scots Guards and the remains of the Camerons, but found the gap broader than had been thought, and strongly occupied. It was then evening, and it was thought best to delay the counter-attack until morning and so have time to bring up reinforcements. The 1st North Lancashires and the 2nd South Staffords were accordingly ordered up, together with the 1st Queen's Surrey and the 2nd Rifles, the whole operation being under the immediate command of General Bulfin. The advance began at six in the morning, over very difficult ground which had been barb- wired during the night. The progress was slow but steady, and at eleven o'clock an assault upon the inn was ordered. The position was critical, since the enemy was now firmly lodged in the very centre of the flank of the British position, and was able to enfilade all the trenches of the First Division. The Queen's Surrey, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, and the 1st North Lancashires charged home with splendid energy, capturing the trenches round the inn, besides releasing sixty Camerons and taking over five hundred prisoners. The trenches were carried by the North Lancashires, led by Major Carter. It was the second time within six weeks that this battalion had made a decisive bayonet charge. The price paid was six officers and 150 men. The inn itself was rushed by Captain Creek's company of the Queen's, while Major Watson, of the same regiment, organised the final advance. The fighting at this point was not finished for the day. In the late evening the enemy, with fine tenacity of purpose, attacked the inn once more and drove the Queen's out of a salient. The line was then straightened on each side of the inn and remained firm. Both the attack on the inn and the defence of the line were splendidly supported by the field artillery.

Whilst the 1st Brigade had in this fashion got into and out of a dangerous position, there had been a severe attack upon two regiments of Landon's 3rd Brigade stationed at Langemarck. The defending units were the 2nd Welsh Regiment and the 1st Gloucesters. Aided by a strong artillery backing, they beat off these attacks and inflicted a very heavy loss upon the enemy. The Allied line to the north was solid and unbroken.

The British losses during these operations of the First Corps amounted to 1500 men, while those of the Germans were exceedingly heavy. These inexperienced troops advanced with an indiscriminating enthusiasm which exposed them to severe retaliation. It is doubtful if at any time in the campaign the British fire found so easy a mark. One thousand five hundred dead were counted in the vicinity of Langemarck, and the total loss (including over six hundred prisoners) could not have been less than 10,000 men. Correspondence afterwards captured showed that the Twenty- third Reserve Corps sustained such losses that for a time at least it was out of action. The Twenty-seventh Reserve Corps was also hard hit. A letter from a soldier in the 246th Regiment mentions that only eighty men were left of his battalion after the action of the 24th.

On October 24 and 25 the arrival of French reinforcements allowed the British to shorten up their defensive line, which had been unduly extended. The Seventeenth Division of the Ninth French Army Corps took over the line of the Second Division, which was drawn back to St. Jean, and in turn took over part of the front of the Seventh Division. French territorial troops, under General de Mitry, relieved the First British Division on the line Hannebeke — Ypres. Langemarck — Steenstraate. The First Division was drawn back to Zillebeke.

Meantime the Second Division, having the Ninth Corps upon its left and the Seventh Division upon its right, made an attack towards Bacelaer, taking two guns and some prisoners. This advance was renewed upon the 26th, this being the day upon which, as already described, the Germans pushed back the 20th Brigade of the Seventh Division at the Kruiseik salient, creating a situation which brought the Second Division to a standstill.

In this movement forward of the Second Division from October 24 to 26, the Guards' 4th Brigade were on the right, the 6th Brigade on the left, with the French to the left of them. The 5th Brigade were in reserve. Two small villages were taken by storm, the Germans being driven out of loopholed houses, though at a considerable cost of officers and men. It was in this operation that Colonel Bannatyne, the gallant leader of the 1st King’s Liverpool, was killed. Ten other officers and several hundred men of this corps were killed or wounded. The 1st Berkshires, fighting to the left of the King’s, shared in its losses and in its success. The Irish Guards were held up before Reutel and separated from the rest of the force, but managed to extricate themselves after some anxious hours.

On October 27, Sir John French came in person to Hooge, at the rear of the fighting line, and inquired into the state of the hard-pressed troops. He found the Seventh to be now such a skeleton division that it was thought best to join it with Haig’s First Corps, forming one single command.

The attendant Third Cavalry Division was also attached to the First Corps. These readjustments took place upon October 27. They were, of course, of a temporary character until the eagerly awaited Eighth Division should arrive and so give General Rawlinson a complete Fourth Corps. At present there was a very immediate prospect that half of it might be annihilated before the second half appeared. The general arrangement of this section of the battlefield was now as depicted, the Seventh Division being entirely south of the Ypres — Menin roadway.

This date, the 27th, was memorable only for an advance of the 6th Brigade. These continual advances against odds were wonderful examples of the aggressive spirit of the British soldiers. In this instance ground was gained, but at the cost of some casualties, especially to the 1st Rifles, who lost Prince Maurice of Battenberg and a number of officers and men.

And now the great epic of the first Battle of Ypres was rising to its climax, and the three days of supreme trial for the British Army were to begin. Early upon October 29, a very heavy attack developed upon the line of the Ypres-Menin road. There is a village named Gheluvelt, which is roughly half-way upon this tragic highway. It lay now immediately behind the centre of the British line. About half a mile in front of it the position ran through the important cross-roads which lead to the village of Kruiseik, still in the British possession. The line through the Kruiseik cross-roads was that which was furiously assailed upon this morning, and the attack marked the beginning of a great movement to drive in the front continuing throughout the 30th and culminating in the terrible ordeal of the 31st, the crisis of the Ypres battle and possibly of the Western campaign.

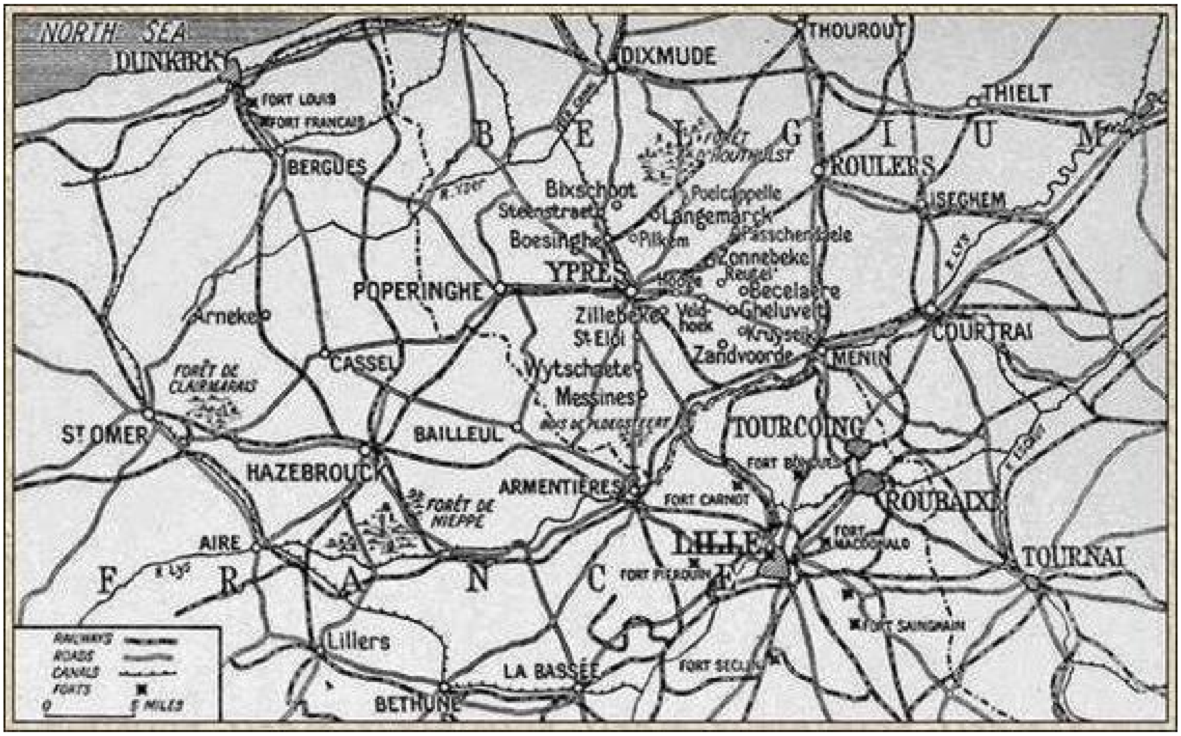
NORTH SEA
DUNKIRK
FORT LOUIS
FORT FRANCAIS
BERGUES
DIXMUDE
THOUROUT
THIELT
B E L G I U M
ROULERS
ISEGHEM
Bixschoot
Poelcappelle
Steenstraete
Langemarck
Boesinghe
Pilkem
Passchendaele
Zonnebeke
YPRES
Reutel
Becelaere
POPERINGHE
Zillebeke
Gheluvelt
Kruiseik
St Eloi
Zandvoorde
MENIN
COURTRAI
Arneke
CASSEL
Wytschaete
Messines
FORÊT DE CLAIRMARAIS
St OMER
BAILLEUL
TOURCOING
HAZEBROUCK
ARMENTIÈRES
FORT CARNOT
ROUBAIX
FORÊT DE NIEPPE
AIRE
LILLE
TOURNAI
F R A N C E
R. Lys
FORT SAINGHAIN
Lillers
LA BASSÉE
FORT SECLIN
BETHUNE
RAILWAYS
ROADS
CANALS
FORTS
0
5 MILES

General Scene of Operations

FitzClarence’s 1st Brigade lay to the north of the road, and the battered, much-enduring 20th Brigade upon the south. They were destined together to give such an example of military tenacity during that day as has seldom been equalled and never exceeded, so that the fight for the Kruiseik crossroads may well live in history amongst those actions, like Albuera and Inkermann, which have put the powers of British infantry to an extreme test. The line was held by about five thousand men, but no finer units were to be found in the whole Army. The attack was conducted by an army corps with the eyes of their Emperor and an overpowering artillery encouraging them from the rear. Many of the defending regiments, especially those of the 20th Brigade, had already been terribly wasted. It was a line of weary and desperate men who faced the German onslaught.

The attack began in the mists of the early morning. The opening was adverse to the British, for the enemy, pushing very boldly forward upon a narrow front and taking full advantage of the fog, broke a way down the Menin road and actually got past the defending line before the situation was understood. The result was that the two regiments which flanked the road, the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Grenadiers, were fired into from behind and endured terrible losses. Among the Grenadiers Colonel Earle, Majors

Forrester and Stucley, Lord Richard Wellesley, and a number of other officers fell, while out of 650 privates only 150 were eventually left standing. The 2nd Gordons, upon the right of the Grenadiers, suffered nearly as heavily, while the 1st Coldstream, upon the left of the Black Watch, was perhaps the hardest hit of all, for at the end of that dreadful day it had not a single officer fit for duty. The right company of the 1st Scots Guards shared the fate of the Coldstream. The line was pushed back for a quarter of a mile and Kruiseik was evacuated, but the dead and wounded who remained in the trenches far exceeded in numbers those who were able to withdraw.

Two small bodies who were cut off by the German advance did not fall back with their comrades, and each of them made a splendid and successful resistance. The one near Kruiseik was a mixed party under Major Bottomley of the 2nd Queen’s West Surrey. The other was C Company of the 2nd Gordons under Captain B.G.R. Gordon and Lieutenant Laurence Carr. These small islands of khaki, in the midst of a broad stream of grey, lay so tight and fired so straight that they inflicted very great damage upon the enemy, and were able to hold their own, in ever-diminishing numbers, until under the protection of darkness the survivors regained the British line.

In the meantime, a number of small dashing counter-attacks by the indomitable infantry was bringing the British line forward again. South of the road the Gordons, under Colonel Uniacke, dashed themselves again and again against the huge host which faced them, driving them back, and then in their turn recoiling before the ponderous advance of the army corps. They were maddened by the sound of the rolling fire ahead of them, which showed that their own C Company was dying hard. In one of these counter-attacks Captain Brooke brought every straggler into the fray, and died while trying to cut his way through to his comrades. To the north of the road Captain Stephen, with the remains of the 1st Scots Guards, threw themselves upon the German flank and staggered it by their fire. The Germans, who had almost reached Gheluvelt, were now worried in this way on either flank, while the 2nd Border battalion and the Welsh Borderers with the rallied remains of the broken regiments were still facing them in front. The enemy was held, was stricken front and flank with a murderous fire, and recoiled back down the Menin road. Imperial eyes and overmastering guns were equally powerless to drive them through that iron defence. Five thousand British soldiers had driven back an army corps, but had left more than half their number upon the scene of victory.

The Second Division, to the north of the road in the direction of Reutel, had been ordered to counter-attack, and the other brigades of the Seventh Division to the south did the same. While Haig had a man standing he was ready to hit back. Between these two flanking forces there was a movement in the centre to follow the Germans back and to recover some of the lost ground. Landon's Third Brigade, less the Gloucester Regiment, was pushed forward. These troops moved past Gheluvelt and advanced along the line of the road, the 1st Queen's, their right-hand unit, linking up by a happy chance with their own 2nd Battalion, who were now on the left of the 22nd Brigade of the Seventh Division. Left of the Queen's were the 2nd Welsh to the immediate south of the main road, while to their left again lay the 1st South Wales Borderers, in front of the village of Gheluvelt. By evening these troops had recovered some of the ground, but the village of Kruiseik, which had always constituted a salient, was now abandoned. The cross-roads also remained in the hands of the enemy. Landon's Brigade continued to bar the further German advance preparing in stern resignation for the renewed and heavier blow which all knew to be in readiness, and which was destined two days later to bring them a glorious annihilation.

It was clear upon the evening of the 29th that serious mischief was afoot, for there were great signs of movement on the German side, and all night, the continual rattle of wheels was heard to the eastward. These menacing sounds were actually caused by a very strong reinforcement, the Fifteenth German Corps (Strasburg) of the regular army, which, followed by the Thirteenth Corps and the Second Bavarian Corps, were coming into the battle line with the declared intention of smashing their way through to Ypres. Correspondence, afterwards captured, showed that the German Emperor had issued a special appeal to these troops, declaring that the movement was one which would be of decisive importance to the war. It was, of course, not the venerable town of Ypres which had assumed such a place in the mind both of the Emperor and his people, but it was Calais and the Channel coast to which it was the door. Once in the possession of these points, it seemed to their perfervid minds that they would be in a position to constrain Great Britain to an ignominious peace, a course which would surely have ruined the cause of the Allies and placed the whole world under the German heel. No less was the issue at stake. The British Army from

Langemarck in the north to La Bassée in the south were resolutely determined that the road was barred, while to left and to right they had stout-hearted comrades of Belgium and of France.

At half-past six upon October 30 a very heavy attack developed, which involved the whole line of the First Corps and also the French Ninth Corps upon its left. This attack upon the left was carried out by the Reserve Corps 26 and 27, with whom we had had previous dealings, and it was repulsed with considerable loss by the French and the 6th British Brigade. To the south, however, the British were very violently engaged down the whole line of trenches from the position of the Seventh Division near the Ypres-Menin road, through Zandvoorde, where the Third Cavalry Division was holding on under great difficulties, and on southward still, past the position of the Second Cavalry down to Messines, where the First Cavalry Division was also heavily engaged. The front of battle was not less than twelve miles in length, with one continuous long-drawn rattle of small arms and roar of guns from end to end.

The British may have anticipated that the chief blow would fall at the same spot as had been attacked the day before. As a matter of fact, it was directed farther south, at Zandvoorde, on the immediate right of the Seventh Division.

The first sign of success for the strenuous German efforts upon October 30 was the driving in of Kavanagh’s 7th Guards’ Cavalry Brigade from their trenches at the Zandvoorde Ridge. On this ridge. which is not more than a hundred and twenty feet high, the Germans concentrated so tremendous and accurate a fire that the trenches were in many places demolished and became entirely untenable. The survivors of the Life Guards and Blues who made up this brigade withdrew steadily through the reserve trenches, which were held by the 6th cavalry Brigade, and reformed at Klein Zillebeke in the rear. Two squadrons, however, and Lord Worsley’s machine-gun section were killed or taken by the assailants. The unoccupied trenches were seized by the Sixth Bavarian Reserve Division, who advanced rapidly in order to improve their advantage, while their artillery began to pound the reserves. The cavalry had been strengthened, however, by the Greys and 3rd Hussars upon the left, while the 4th Hussars lined up on the right, and C, I, and K Horse Artillery batteries vigorously supported. In spite of great pressure, the position was held. Farther south the First Cavalry Division was also at very close grips with the Twenty-sixth

Division of the Thirteenth German Army Corps, and was hard put to it to hold its own. Along the whole cavalry position there was extreme strain. A squadron of the 1st Royals were forced to evacuate the château of Holebeke, and the line in this quarter was pushed back as far as St. Eloi, thus flattening a considerable salient.

The danger of a position which consists of so long a line with few reserves is that any retirement at any point immediately exposes the flanks of the neighbouring units to right and left. Thus the evacuation of Zandvoorde threw open the right flank of the Seventh Division, even as its left had been in the air upon the day before. On getting through, the Germans were on the right rear of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers and enfiladed them badly, destroying all the officers and a first considerable proportion of the regiment, which had already been greatly reduced. Colonel Cadogan was among those who fell. The 22nd Brigade was forced to fall back, and the 2nd Yorkshires and 2nd Scots Fusiliers, of the 21st Brigade, being left in a salient, suffered heavily, especially the latter battalion, the conduct of which from first to last was remarkable even among such men as fought beside them. These two regiments held on with the greatest determination until orders to retire reached them, which were somewhat belated, as several orderlies were killed in bringing them. The 2nd Bedfords, who had themselves sustained very severe losses from the German artillery fire, covered the retirement of the remains of these two gallant units. The Seventh Division then covered the line from the canal through Klein Zillebeke and along the front of the woods to near Gheluvelt.

The position was now most critical. The Germans were in possession of Zandvoorde Ridge on the British right flank, a most important position whence guns could command a considerable area. Ypres was only four miles distant. There was nothing but a line of weary and partially broken infantry to protect the flank from being entirely pierced. The whole of a German active army corps was attacking upon this line. The order was given to hold the new positions at all costs, but on the evening of the 30th the situation was full of menace for the morrow. The German flood was still thundering against the barrier, and the barrier seemed to be giving. At about 2 P.M. on October 30 the 1st Irish Guards and the 2nd Grenadiers, who were in reserve to two battalions of the Coldstream in trenches in the Polygon Wood, near Reutel Village, were ordered to help the Seventh Division. General Capper subsequently directed them to take the place of the cavalry on the right of his division. The Irish Guards were accordingly on the right of the Seventh Division from now onwards, and the Grenadiers were on their right, extending down to the canal in front of Klein Zillebeke. The commander of the Ninth French Corps also, with that fine loyalty which his comrades have shown again and again during the war, easing many a difficult and perhaps saving some impossible situations, put three battalions and some cavalry at the disposal of the British. Two regiments of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade were also brought across and thrust into the gap. But the outlook that evening was not cheering. The troops had been fighting hard for two days without a break. The losses had been heavy. The line had been driven back and was greatly strained. It was known that the Germans were in great strength and that the attack would be renewed on the morrow. The troops and their leaders faced the immediate future in a spirit of sombre determination.

During the 30th Landon's Brigade had strengthened their position near Gheluvelt, and General Haig, realising that this was the key of his line, moved up the 2nd King's Royal Rifles and the 1st North Lancashires to form a reserve under the orders of General Landon. These regiments took a position south-west of Gheluvelt and connected up more closely between the Seventh Division and the 3rd Brigade of the First Division. It was well that a closely-knitted line had been formed, for at the dawn of day upon the 31st a most terrific attack was made, which was pushed with unexampled fierceness during the whole day, falling chiefly upon the centre and left of the Seventh Division and upon the 1st Queen's and 2nd Welsh of the Third Brigade.

A weak point developed, unfortunately, in the front line, for the Seventh Division in its enfeebled condition was further weakened by forming somewhat of a salient in the Kruiseik direction. They behaved with all their usual magnificent gallantry, but they were not numerous enough to hold the ground. The line was broken and the remains of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, after being exposed to heavy fire from 5:30 A.M., were outflanked and surrounded in the early afternoon. The bulk of the survivors of this battalion had been sent to reinforce the line elsewhere, but the remainder, some sixty in number, were killed, wounded, or taken, including their gallant colonel, Baird Smith, who had been hit the day before. The Picton tradition which disregards wounds unless they are absolutely crippling was continually observed by these stern soldiers. On the left of the

Scots Fusiliers the 2nd Bedfords were also involved in the catastrophe, but drew off with heavy losses.

The left wing of the Seventh Division began to retire, and the 1st Queen’s upon the right of the 3rd Brigade had both their flanks turned and were reduced to a handful under Major Watson and Lieutenant Boyd, who still held together as a unit. It was a great morning in the history of this regiment, as the two battalions had fought side by side, and their colonels. Pell and Coles, had both fallen in the action.

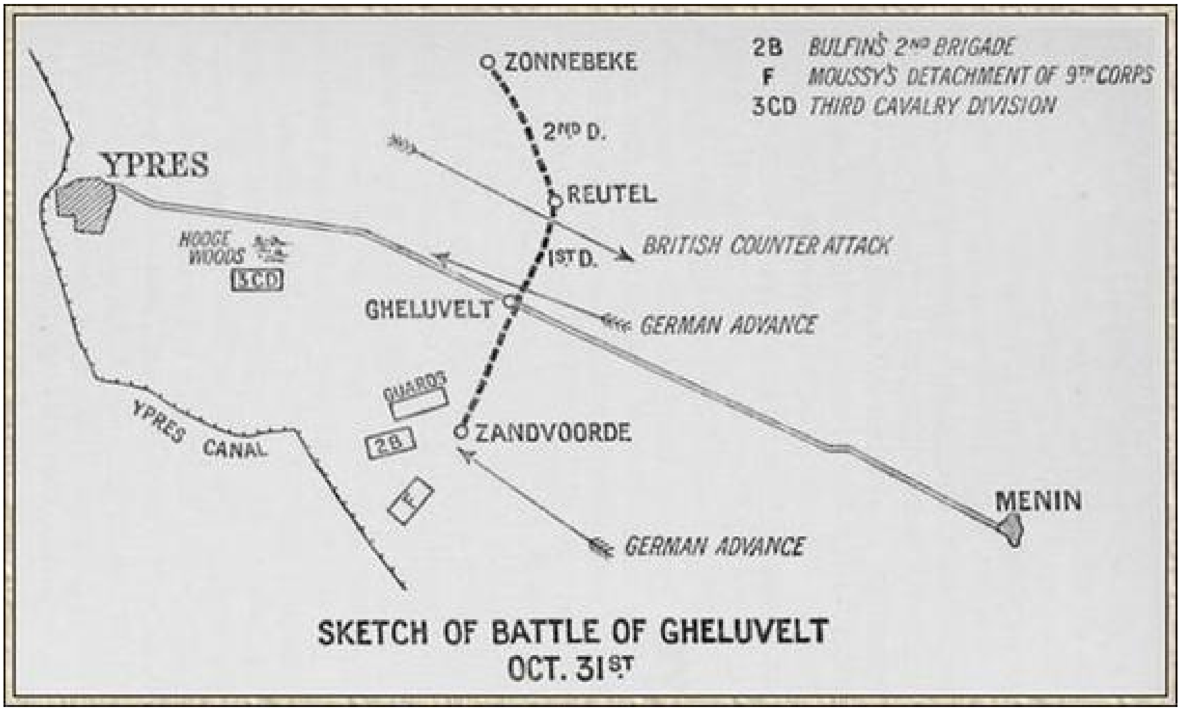
2B BULFIN'S 2ND BRIGADE
F MOUSSY'S DETACHMENT OF 9TH CORPS
3CD THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION
ZONNEBEKE
2ND D.
YPRES
REUTEL
BRITISH COUNTER ATTACK
HOOGE WOODS
3CD
1ST D.
GHELUVELT
GERMAN ADVANCE
GUARDS
YPRES CANAL
2B
ZANDVOORDE
F
MENIN
GERMAN ADVANCE
SKETCH OF BATTLE OF GHELUVELT
OCT. 31ST

Sketch of Battle of Gheluvelt, October 31

The line of the 3rd Brigade had been drawn up across the Menin road some four hundred yards to the east of the village. The road itself was held by the 2nd Welsh Regiment, supported by the 54th Battery (Major Peel), which was immediately behind the village. Both the battalion and the battery fought desperately in a most exposed situation. The Welsh Regiment were driven out of their trenches by a terrific shell-fire followed by an infantry attack. They lost during the day nearly six hundred men, with sixteen officers, killed, wounded, or missing. Colonel Morland was killed and Major Prichard badly wounded. Finally, after being pushed back, holding every possible point, they formed up under Captain Rees across the open in a thin skirmishing line to cover the battery, which was doing great work by holding back the German advance. One German gun was in action upon the Menin road. Lieutenant Blewitt took a British gun out on to the bare road to face it, and a duel ensued at five hundred yards, which ended by the German gun being knocked out at the third shot by a direct hit.

When the First Division at the centre of the British line were driven in, as already described, and the Seventh Division were pushed back into the woods, the situation became most critical, for there was a general retirement, with a victorious enemy pressing swiftly on upon the British centre. The men behaved splendidly, and the officers kept their heads, taking every opportunity to form up a new line. The 2nd Rifles and 1st North Lancashires in immediate support of the centre did all that men could to hold it firm. The German artillery lengthened their range as the British fell back, and the infantry, with their murderous quick-firers scattered thickly in the front line, came rapidly on. Communications were difficult, and everything for a time was chaos and confusion. It looked for an hour or two as if Von Deimling, the German leader, might really carry out his War Lord’s command and break his road to the sea. It was one of the decisive moments of the world’s history, for if the Germans at that period had seized the Channel ports, it is difficult to say how disastrous the result might have been both to France and to the British Empire. At that moment of darkness and doubt a fresh misfortune, which might well have proved overwhelming, came upon the hard-pressed forces. About 1:30 a shell exploded in the headquarters at the château of Hooge, and both General Lomax, of the First Division, and General Munro, of the Second, were put out of action, the first being wounded and the second rendered unconscious by the shock. It was a brain injury to the Army, and a desperately serious one, for besides the two divisional commanders the single shell had killed or wounded Colonels Kerr and Perceval, Major Paley, Captains 0mmany and Trench, and Lieutenant Giffard. General Landon, of the 3rd Brigade, took the command of the First Division at a moment’s notice, and the battle went forward. A line was hurriedly formed, men digging as for their lives, whilst broken units threw themselves down to hold off the rolling grey wave that thundered behind. The new position was three-quarters of a mile back and about four hundred yards in advance of Veldhoek, which is the next village down the Ypres road. The Seventh Division had also been rolled back, but the fiery Capper, their divisional chief, who has been described as a British

Samurai, was everywhere among his regiments, reforming and bracing them.

The British soldiers, with their incomparable regimental officers, rose to the crisis, whilst General Haig was behind the line at Hooge, directing and controlling, like a great engineer who seeks to hold a dam which carries an overpowering head of water. By three o'clock the new line was firmly held.

Now General Haig, seeking round for some means of making a counter-attack, perceived that on his left flank he had some reserve troops who had been somewhat clear of the storm and might be employed. The 2nd Worcesters were ordered to advance upon Gheluvelt, the initiative in this vital movement coming from General FitzClarence of the 1st Brigade. On that flank the troops had not joined in the retirement, and, including the South Wales Borderers of the 3rd Brigade, were still in their original trenches, being just north of the swathe that had been cut in the British line, and just south of where the Second Division, extended to cracking point, with one man often for every eight or nine feet, and no supports, were defending the left flank of the Army.

When the village of Gheluvelt and the trenches to the north of it had been captured by the enemy, a gap had been left of about five hundred yards between the northern edge of the village and these South Wales Borderers. This gap the 2nd Worcesters were ordered to fill. They were in reserve at the time in the south-west corner of the Polygon Wood, but on being called upon they made a brilliant advance under Major Hankey. One company (A) was detached to guard the right flank of the advance. The other three companies came on for a thousand yards. At one point they had to cross two hundred and twenty yards of open under heavy shrapnel-fire. One hundred men fell, but the momentum of the charge was never diminished. Their rapid and accurate fire drove back the German infantry, while their open order formation diminished their own losses. Finally they dashed into the trenches and connected up the village with the line of the Welsh Borderers. Their right platoons, under Captain Williams, held the village until nearly midnight. Altogether the advance cost the battalion 187 casualties, including 3 officers, out of 550 who were in the ranks that day. Up to dusk the Worcesters were exposed to heavy shrapnel fire, and small detached parties of the enemy came round their right flank, but their position was strengthened and strongly held until the final readjustment of the line. It was a fine advance at a critical moment, and did much to save the situation.

The whole movement was strongly supported by the guns of the 42nd Battery, and by some of the 1st Scots Guards upon the left of the Welsh Borderers.

It has been stated that a line had been formed near Veldhoek, but this difficult operation was not performed in an instant, and was rather the final equilibrium established after a succession of oscillations. The British were worn to a shadow. The 2nd Queen's had 2 officers and 60 men left that night, the 2nd Welsh had 3 officers and 93 men. Little groups, who might have been fitted into a large-sized drawing-room, were settling a contention upon which the fate of the world might depend. But the Germans also had spent all their force. The rattle of musketry behind their advance was enough to tell them that the British were still in their trenches, and the guns were for ever playing on them with deadly effect. Gradually they began to dissolve away among the thick woods which flank the road. They were learning that to penetrate the line of a resolute adversary is not necessarily the prelude to victory. It may mean that the farther you advance the more your flanks are exposed. So it was now, when the infantry to the north on one side and the Third Cavalry Division on the other were closing in on them. That long tentacle which was pushing its way towards Ypres had to be swiftly withdrawn once more, and withdrawn under a heavy fire from the 29th, 41st, and 45th field batteries.

The Scattered German infantry who had taken refuge in the woods of Hooge, which lie to the south of the road, were followed up by mounted and dismounted men of the Royals, 10th Hussars, and 3rd Dragoon Guards, aided by some French cavalry. These troops advanced through the woods, killing or taking a number of the enemy. By nightfall the Germans had fallen back along the whole debated line; the various British units, though much disorganised, were in close touch with each other, and the original trenches had in the main been occupied, the Berkshire Regiment helping to close the gap in the centre. The flood had slowly ebbed away, and the shaken barrier was steady once more, thanks to the master-hands which had so skilfully held it firm. The village of Gheluvelt remained in the hands of the Germans, but the British trenches were formed to the west of it, and the road to the sea was barred as effectually as ever. These are the main, facts of the action of Gheluvelt, which may well be given a name of its own, though it was only one supremely important episode in that huge contention which will be known as the First Battle of Ypres.

In the southern portion of the Ypres area at Klein Zillebeke a very sharp engagement was going on, which swung and swayed with as much violence and change as the main battle on the Menin road. The German attack here was hardly inferior in intensity to that in the north. Having pushed back Lawford's weak brigade (22nd) it struck full upon part of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade, which had been detached from the First Division and sent to cover the right of the Seventh Division. Its own flank was now exposed, and its situation for a time was critical. The German advance was sudden and impetuous, coming through a wood which brought the dense mass of the enemy's leading formation almost unseen right up to the British line. The position of the 2nd Brigade was pierced, and the two regiments present, the 2nd Sussex and the 1st Northamptons, were driven back with loss. Their brigadier rallied them some hundreds of yards to the rear, where they formed up into a skirmish line in the open, and, though unable to advance, kept back the Germans with their rifle-fire. The losses still continued, however, and the enemy came on again and again with numbers which seemed inexhaustible. Suddenly there was a charging yell from behind a low slope covering the rear, and over the brow there appeared some three hundred survivors of the 2nd Gordons, rushing at full speed with fixed bayonets. At the same moment the dismounted troopers of the 6th Cavalry Brigade and a company of sappers ran forward to join in the charge. The whole British force was not one to three of its opponents, but as the reinforcing line swept on, cheering with all its might, the survivors of the hard-pressed brigade sprang up with a shout and the united wave burst over the Germans. Next moment they had broken and were flying for their lives through the Zwartelen Wood. The pursuit lasted for some distance, and a great number of the enemy were bayoneted, while several hundreds were taken prisoners.

There have been few more critical occasions in British operations than this action upon October 31, when the Germans so nearly forced their way to Ypres. It is the peculiarity of modern warfare that, although vast armies are locked in a close struggle, the number of men who can come into actual contact at any one point is usually far more limited than in the old days, when each host could view the other from wing to wing. Thus the losses in such an action are small as compared with the terrific death-roll of a Napoleonic battle. On the other hand, when the operations are viewed broadly and one groups a series of actions into one prolonged battle, like the Aisne or Ypres, then the resulting losses become enormous. The old battle was a local conflagration, short and violent. The new one is a widespread smoulder, breaking here and there into flame. In this affair of Gheluvelt the casualties of the British did not exceed 2000 or 3000, while those of the Germans, who were more numerous and who incurred the extra loss which falls upon the attack, could not have been less than twice that figure. One thousand five hundred dead were actually picked up and six hundred prisoners were taken. Some hundreds of prisoners were also taken by the enemy. The British artillery, which worked desperately hard all day, had many losses both upon the 30th and the 31st. The 12th Battery had all its guns silenced but one, and many others were equally hard hit.

On the night of the 31st considerable French reinforcements began to arrive, and it was high time that they did so, for the First Corps, including the Seventh Division, were likely to bleed to death upon the ground that they were holding. It had stood the successive attacks of four German corps, and it had held its line against each of them. But its own ranks had been grievously thinned and the men were weary to death. The strain, it should be added, was equally great upon the Ninth French Corps to the north, which had its own set of assailants to contend with. Now that the line of the Yser, so splendidly guarded by the Belgians, had proved to be impregnable, and that the French from Dixmude in the north had repulsed all attacks, the whole German advance upon Calais, for which Berlin was screaming, was centred upon the Ypres lines. It was time, then, that some relief should come to the hard-pressed troops. For several days the French on the right and the left took the weight of the attack upon themselves, and although the front was never free from fighting, there was a short period of comparative rest for Haig’s tired men. In successive days they had lost Kruiseik, Zandvoorde, and Gheluvelt, but so long as they held the semicircle of higher ground which covers Ypres these small German gains availed them nothing.

Looking back at the three actions of the 29th, a great 30th, and especially of the 31st of October, one can clearly perceive that it was the closest thing to a really serious defeat which the Army had had since Le Cateau. If the Germans had been able to push home their attack once again, it is probable that they would have taken Ypres, and that the results would have been most serious. Sir John French is reported as having said that there was no time in the Mons retreat when he did not see his way, great as were his difficulties, but that there was a moment upon October 31 when he seemed to be at the end of his resources. To Sir John at Ypres converged all the cries for succour, and from him radiated the words of hope and encouragement which stiffened the breaking lines. To him and to his untiring lieutenant, Douglas Haig, the Empire owed more that day than has ever been generally realised. The latter was up to the firing line again and again rallying the troops. The sudden removal of the two divisional commanders of the First Corps was a dreadful blow at such a moment, and the manner in which General Landon, of the 3rd Brigade, took over the command of the First Division at a moment's notice was a most noteworthy performance. The fact that three divisions of infantry with brigades which resembled battalions, and battalions which were anything from companies to platoons, destitute of reserves save for a few dismounted cavalry, barred the path to a powerful German army, is one of the greatest feats of military history. It was a very near thing. There was a time, it is said, when the breech-blocks had actually been taken from the heavy guns in order to disable them, and some of the artillery had been passed back through Ypres. But the line held against all odds, as it has done so often in the past. The struggle was not over. For a fortnight still to come it was close and desperate. But never again would it be quite so perilous as on that immortal last day of October, when over the green Flemish meadows, beside the sluggish water-courses, on the fringes of the old-world villages, and in the heart of the autumn-tinted woods, two great Empires fought for the mastery.

Such was the British epic. There was another to the north which was no less wonderful, and which will be celebrated by the poets and historians of the lands to which the victors belong. It will tell of the glorious stand during this critical ten days of the Belgians, so weary, so battered, and yet so indomitable. It will tell how they made head against the hosts of the Duke of Würtemberg, and how in the end they flooded their own best land with the salt water which would sterilise it in order to cover their front. It will tell also of the splendid Frenchmen who fought at Dixmude, of Ronarch with his invincible marines, and of Grossetti, the fat and debonair, seated in an armchair in the village street and pointing the road to victory with his cane. Not least, perhaps, in that epic will be the tale of the British monitors who, with the deadly submarines upon one side of them and the heavy German batteries upon the other, ran into the Flemish coast and poured their fire upon the right flank of the attacking Germans. Ten days the great battle swung and swayed, and then here as at Ypres the wave of the invaders ebbed, or reached its definite flood. It would be an ungenerous foe who would not admit that they had fought bravely and well. Not all our hatred of their national ideals nor our contempt for their crafty misleaders can prevent us from saluting those German officers and soldiers who poured out their blood like water in the attempt to do that which was impossible.

IX. THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES (continued)
(From the Action of Gheluvelt to the Winter Lull)

Attack upon the cavalry — The struggle at Messines — The London Scots in action — Rally to the north — Terrible losses — Action of Zillebeke — Record of the Seventh Division — Situation at Ypres — Attack of the Prussian Guard — Confused fighting — End of the first Battle of Ypres — Death of Lord Roberts — The Eighth Division

WHILST this severe fighting had been going on to the north of the British position, the centre, where the first dismounted cavalry were holding the line of trenches, was so terribly pressed that it is an extraordinary thing that they were able to hold their own. The Second Corps, which at that time had just been withdrawn for a rest from the La Bassée lines, were the only available reinforcements. When news was flashed south as to the serious state of affairs, two regiments, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 2nd Scottish Borderers from the 13th Infantry Brigade, were sent up in motor-buses by road to the relief. Strange indeed was the sight of these vehicles flying along the Flemish roads, plastered outside with the homely names of London suburbs and crammed with the grimy, much-enduring infantry. The lines at Messines were in trouble, and so also were those at Wytschaete farther to the north. To this latter place went two battalions of Shaw's 9th Brigade, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and the 1st Lincolns. Hard work awaited the infantry at Messines and at Wytschaete, for in both places Allenby's troopers were nearly rushed off their feet.

It has already been shown that on October 30 a severe assault was made upon the Third Cavalry Division, when the 7th Brigade (Kavanagh's) was forced out of Zandvoorde by the Fifteenth German Army Corps. Upon this same date a most strenuous attack, made in great force and supported by a terrific shell-fire, was directed along the whole line of the cavalry from Wytschaete to Messines. No British troops have been exposed to a more severe ordeal than these brave troopers, for they were enormously outnumbered at every point, and their line was so thin that it was absolutely impossible for them to prevent it from being pierced by the masses of infantry, from the Twenty-fourth Corps and Second Bavarian Corps, which were hurled against them. From the extreme left of the Second Cavalry Division near Wytschaete to the right of the First Cavalry Division south of

Messines the same reports came in to the anxious General, of trenches overwhelmed or enfiladed, and of little isolated groups of men struggling most desperately to keep a footing against an ever-surging grey tide which was beating up against them and flowing through every gap. In the north Gough’s men were nearly overwhelmed, the 5th Irish Lancers were shelled out of a farmhouse position, and the 16th Lancers, shelled from in front and decimated by rifles and machine-guns from the flank, were driven back for half a mile until three French battalions helped the line to reform. The pressure, however, was still extreme, the Germans fighting with admirable energy and coming forward in never-ending numbers.

An Indian regiment of the 7th (Ferozepore) Brigade, Ypres. the 129th Baluchis, had been helping the cavalry in this region since October 23, but their ranks were now much decimated, and they were fought almost to a standstill. Two more British regiments from the Second Corps, the 1st Lincolns and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, together with their Brigadier, Shaw, who was a reinforcement in himself, were, as already stated, hurried off from the south in motor-buses to strengthen Gough’s line. Advancing into what was to them an entirely strange position these two veteran regiments sustained very heavy losses, which they bore with extreme fortitude. They were surprised by the Germans on the road between Kern in el and Wytschaete on the night of October 31, the same night upon which the London Scottish to the south of them were so heavily engaged. Colonel Smith succeeded in extricating the Lincolns from what was a most perilous position, but only after a loss of 16 officers and 400 men. The Fusiliers were almost as hard hit. For forty-eight hours the battle swung backwards and forwards in front of Wytschaete, and in the end the village itself was lost, but the defensive lines to the west of it were firmly established. By November the second strong French reinforcements had appeared, and it was clear that this desperate attempt to break through the very centre of the British position had definitely failed.

The struggle at Messines, some five miles to the south, had been even more severe and sanguinary than at Wytschaete. In the early morning of the 31st the Bays and the 5th Dragoon Guards upon the left of the Messines position, after a heavy shell-fire, were driven out of their trenches by a sudden furious advance of the German infantry. The front of the village of Messines was held by Wild’s 57th Rifles, who were driven in by the same attack, every officer engaged being killed or wounded. A reserve company of Wild’s Rifles and a squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards endeavoured to restore the fight, but could not hold the torrent. The 9th Lancers, also in front of the village and to the right of the Indians, held on for a long time, repulsing the infantry attacks, until they were driven back by the deadly shell-fire. At one time they were enfiladed on both sides and heard the Germans roaring their war-songs in the dark all round them; but they were able, owing to the coolness of Colonel Campbell and the discipline of his veteran troopers, to fall back and to reform upon the western side of the village. Lance-Corporal Seaton distinguished himself by covering the retreat of his whole squadron, remaining single-handed in his trench until his maxim was destroyed, after he had poured a thousand shots into the close ranks of his assailants.

The situation was so serious after dawn upon the 31st that General De Lisle had to call for help from Wilson’s Fourth Infantry Division, holding the line upon his right. The Inniskilling Fusiliers were extended so as to relieve his right flank. The struggle within Messines was still going forward with fighting from house to house, but the Germans, who were coming on with overpowering numbers and great valour, were gradually winning their way forward. The Oxfordshire Hussars, fresh from the base, were thrown into the combat. A second line of defence had been arranged a mile or so to the west, near Wulverghem, but if Messines must go the victors should at least pay the price down to the last drop of blood which could be wrung from them. Reinforcements were within sight, both French and British, but they were scanty in quantity though superb in quality. It was a most critical position, and one cannot but marvel at the load of responsibility which Sir John French had to bear upon this day, for from the left of Haig’s First Corps in the north down to Neuve Chapelle in the south, a stretch of twenty-five miles, there was hardly a point which was not strained to the verge of cracking. Cool and alert, he controlled the situation from his central post and threw in such reinforcements as he could find, though, indeed, they could only be got by taking them from places where they were wanted and hurrying them to places where they were needed even more urgently. He was strengthened always by the knowledge that General Joffre behind him was doing all that a loyal colleague could to find fresh columns of his splendid infantrymen to buttress up the hard-pressed line.

For the moment, however, none of these were available, and Messines was still partly in British, partly in German hands. Briggs’s 1st Brigade —

Bays, 5th Dragoon Guards, and 11th Hussars — with the Oxfords, held on to the western edge of the town. To their left, linking up with Gough's men in the Wytschaete sector, was the 4th Dragoon Guards. Late in the afternoon the 2nd Scots Borderers and the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, the joint detachment under Major Coke, arrived from the south, and were at once advanced upon Messines to stiffen the defence. Under heavy fire they established themselves in the village. Evening fell with desperate street fighting and the relative position unchanged. Twice the Bavarians stormed into the central square, and twice they fell back after littering it with their bodies. It seemed hopeless to hold the village against the ever-growing pressure of the Germans, and yet the loss of the village entailed the loss of the ridge, which would leave a commanding position in the hands of the enemy. Village and ridge were mutually dependent, for if either were lost the other could not be held.

As it proved, it was the ridge and not the village which could no longer sustain the pressure. On the night of October 31 Mullen's 2nd Cavalry Brigade — 9th Lancers, 4th Dragoon Guards, and 11th Hussars — took over the defence from Briggs. Of these, the 4th Dragoon Guards were to the left of the village upon the ridge. The London Scottish had been brought up, and they were placed upon the left of the 4th Dragoon Guards, forming a link of the defence which connected up the Second Cavalry Division with the First. The right-hand regiment of the latter, the 6th Carbineers, of Bingham's 4th Brigade, were upon the left of the London Scottish. These two regiments held the centre of the ridge. The London Scottish had already suffered considerable losses. Hurried up from the lines of communication to St. Eloi, they were pushed forward at once into action, and were exposed for hours to all the nerve-racking horrors of a heavy shell-fire endured in most insufficient trenches. A more severe ordeal was in store for them, however, during the grim night which lay before them. The admirable behaviour of Colonel Malcolm's men excited the more attention as they were the first Territorial infantry to come into action, and they set a standard which has been grandly sustained by the quarter-million of their comrades who have from first to last come into the line.

On the early morning of November 1 there had been a strong attempt within the village to improve the British position, and some ground was actually gained by the cavalrymen, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the Scots Borderers. What occurred, however, on the ridge to the north made all further effort a useless waste of life. The Bavarian infantry had come with an irresistible rush against the thin British line. The order to hold their ground at all costs was given, and the London Scots answered it in a way which gained the highest praise from the many soldiers who saw it. It is not claimed that they did better than their Regular comrades. That would be impossible. The most that can be said is that they proved themselves worthy to fight in line with them. After being exposed for several hours to heavy shell-fire, it was no light task for any troops to be called upon to resist a direct assault. From nine in the evening of October 31 to two in the morning, under the red glare of burning houses. Colonel Malcolm’s Scottish and Colonel Annesley’s Carbineers held back the Bavarian advance, an advance which would have meant the piercing of the British line. At two o’clock the Bavarians in greatly predominant force were all round the Scots, and even the reserve companies found work for their bayonets, preventing the enemy from encircling their companions. The losses were very heavy — 400 men and 9 officers, including their gallant doctor, McNab, who was villainously stabbed as he bandaged a patient. In spite of the great pressure, the ground was held all night, and it was not till dawn, when the regiment found that it was outflanked on both sides and nearly surrounded, that, under cover of the fire of E Battery R.H.A., it fell back. The Carbineers and the Scots were close together, and the Germans, with their usual quick ingenuity, approached the former with a cry of “We are the London Scots.” A disaster might have occurred in the darkness but for the quickness and bravery of a young officer, Lieutenant Hope Hawkins, who rushed forward, discovered the identity of the Germans, and fell, riddled with bullets, even while he gave warning to his comrades.

The Germans had won the ridge, but the British line was still intact and growing stronger every hour. The village was held by the Scots Borderers and Yorkshiremen until nearly ten o’clock, when they were ordered to fall back and help to man the new line. The shock had been a rude one, but the danger-hour was past here as in the north.

The fateful November 1 had come and gone. The villages of Messines and Wytschaete were, it is true, in German hands, but French reinforcements of the Sixteenth Corps were streaming up from the south, the line, though torn and broken, still held firm, and the road to Calais was for ever blocked. There was still pressure, and on November 2 the 11th Hussars were badly cut up by shell-fire, but the line was impregnable. Sir

John French summed up in a few terse words the true meaning of the operations just described, when he said afterwards, in addressing the 9th Lancers, “Particularly I would refer to the period, October 31, when for forty-eight hours the Cavalry Corps held at bay two German army corps. During this period you were supported by only three or four battalions, shattered and worn by previous fighting, and in so doing you rendered inestimable service.” There have been few episodes in the war which have been at the same time so splendid and so absolutely vital. The First Cavalry Division lost 50 per cent of its numbers between October 30 and November 2, and the Second Division was hardly in better case, but never did men give their lives to better purpose. Their heroism saved the Army.

Meanwhile the current of operations was evidently running strongly towards the northern end of the British line, where help was badly needed, as Haig’s men had been fought almost to exhaustion. There was no British reinforcement available save only the weary Second Corps, the remains of which from this date began to be drafted northwards. It was already known that the German Emperor had appeared in person in that region, and that a great concentration of his troops was taking place. At the same time the French were making splendid exertions in order to stiffen their own line and help us in those parts, like Messines, Wytschaete, and Ploegsteert, where the attack was most formidable. It was a great gathering towards the north, and clearly some hard blows were to be struck. Northwards then went General Morland, of the Fifth Division, taking with him four more weak battalions. The whole line had moved upwards towards the danger spot, and these troops now found themselves east of Bailleul, close to the village of Neuve Église. For the moment General Smith-Dorrien was without an army, for half his men were now supporting General Willcocks in the south and half General Allenby or General Haig in the north.

The British leaders all along the line were, as usual, desperately endeavouring to make one man do the work of three, but they were buoyed up by the knowledge that good Father Joffre, like some beneficent earthly Providence, was watching over them from the distance, and that fresh trainfuls of his brave little men were ever steaming into the danger zone. Day by day the line was thickening and the task of the Kaiser becoming more difficult. It was hoped that the crisis was past. If our troops were exhausted so also, it was thought, were those of the enemy. We could feel elated by the knowledge that we had held our ground, while they could hardly fail to be depressed by the reflection that they had made little progress in spite of so many heroic efforts, and that Calais was as far from them as ever.

The narrative must now return to the defenders of the Ypres approaches, who were left in a state of extreme exhaustion by the critical action of October 31. On November 1 the First Corps was not in a condition to do more than to hold its line. This line was now near to Veldhoek, to the west of Gheluvelt village, and to that extent the Germans had profited by their desperate fighting, but this was a detail of small consequence so long as an unbroken British Army covered the town that was still the objective of the enemy. The Ninth French Corps to the north of the British had lost heavily, but to the south of the canal lay the Sixteenth French Corps, which was in comparatively good condition. This corps now made an advance to take some of the pressure off the British line, while Moussy's regiments to the north of the canal were to co-operate with Bulfin's men upon their left. Upon the left of Bulfin's 2nd Brigade were two battalions of the 4th Brigade of Guards.

One of these battalions had a terrible experience upon this morning. For some reason the trenches of the Irish Guards were exposed to an enfilading fire from the high explosives of the Germans, which wrought even more than their customary damage. For hours the Guardsmen lay under a terrific fire, to which they could make no reply, and from which they could obtain no protection. When at last, in the afternoon, they were compelled to fall back, their losses had been great, including their colonel, Lord Ardee, 7 other officers, and over 300 men. It is the hard fate of the side which is weaker in artillery to endure such buffetings with no possibility of return.

The French attack of the Sixteenth Corps had been brought to a speedy standstill, and a severe counter-attack, preceded by a heavy shell-fire, had fallen upon General Moussy's men and upon the half of the 2nd Brigade. Help was urgently needed, so the remains of the 7th Brigade from the Third Cavalry Division were hurried forward. The Germans were now surging up against the whole right and right-centre of the line. It seems to have been their system to attack upon alternate days on the right and on the centre, for it will be remembered that it was on October 29 that they gained the Gheluvelt cross-roads, and on October 31 Gheluvelt village, both in the centre, while on October 30 they captured the Zandvoorde ridge upon the

British right, and now, on November 1, were pressing hard upon the right once more.

That morning the Army sustained a loss in the person of General Bulfin, who was wounded in the head by shrapnel. Fortunately his recovery was not a lengthy one, and he was able to return in January as commander of the Twenty-eighth Division. Upon his fall, Lord Cavan, of the 4th Brigade, took over the command upon the hard-pressed right wing. At half-past one the hundred survivors of the 2nd Gordons, on the right of the Seventh Division, and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, were desperately hard pressed by a strong German infantry advance, and so were the remains of the Sussex and Northamptons. The only available help lay in the 23rd Field Company of Royal Engineers. Our sappers proved, as they have so often done before, that their hearts are as sound as their heads. They pushed off the enemy, but incurred heavy losses. The situation was still critical when at the summons of Lord Cavan the 2nd Grenadiers advanced and cleared the Germans from the woods in the front and flank, while the 10th Hussars supported their advance. A gap had been left in the trenches from which the Irish Guards had been pushed, but this was now filled up by cavalry, who connected up with the French on their right and with the Guards upon their left. The general effect of the whole day’s fighting was to drive the British line farther westward, but to contract it, so that it required a smaller force. Two battalions — the Gordons and the Sussex — could be taken out and brought into reserve. The centre of the line had a day’s rest and dug itself into its new positions, but the units were greatly mixed and confused.

November 2 brought no surcease from the constant fighting, though the disturbance of these days, severe as it was, may be looked upon as a mere ground swell after the terrific storm of the last days of October.

On the morning of the 2nd the Ninth French Corps upon the British left, under General Vidal, sent eight battalions forward to the south and east in the direction of Gheluvelt. Part of this village was actually occupied by them. The Germans meanwhile, with their usual courage and energy, were driving a fresh attack down that Menin road which had so often been reddened by their blood. It was the day for a centre attack on their stereotyped system of alternate pushes, and it came duly to hand. An initial success awaited them as, getting round a trench occupied by the Rifles, they succeeded in cutting off a number of them. The 3rd Brigade was hurried up by General Landon to the point of danger, and a French Zouave regiment helped to restore the situation. A spirited bayonet charge, in which the Gloucesters led, was beaten back by the enemy’s fire. After a day of confused and desultory fighting the situation in the evening was very much as it had been in the morning. Both that night and the next day there was a series of local and sporadic attacks, first on the front of the Second Division and then of the Seventh, all of which were driven back. The Germans began to show their despair of ever gaining possession of Ypres by elevating their guns and dropping shells upon the old Cloth Hall of that historic city, a senseless act of spiteful vandalism which exactly corresponds with their action when the Allied Army held them in front of Rheims.

November 4 was a day of menaces rather than of attacks. On this day, units which had become greatly mixed during the incessant and confused fighting of the last fortnight were rearranged and counted. The losses were terrible. The actual strength of the infantry of the First Division upon that date was: 1st Brigade, 22 officers, 1206 men; 2nd Brigade, 43 officers, 1315 men; 3rd Brigade, 27 officers, 970 men; which make the losses of the whole division about 75 per cent. Those of the Second Division were very little lighter. And now for the 25 per cent remainder of this gallant corps there was not a moment of breathing space or rest, but yet another fortnight of unremitting work, during which their thin ranks were destined to hold the German army, and even the Emperor’s own Guard, from passing the few short miles which separated them from their objective. Great was the “will to conquer” of the Kaiser’s troops, but greater still the iron resolve not to be conquered which hardened the war-worn lines of the soldiers of the King.

November 5 was a day of incessant shell-fire, from which the Seventh Division, the 4th and the 6th Brigades were the chief sufferers. On this day the Seventh Division, which had now been reduced from 12,000 infantry to 2333, was withdrawn from the line. In their place were substituted those reinforcements from the south which have already been mentioned. These consisted of eleven battalions of the Second Corps under General McCracken; this corps, however, was greatly worn, and the eleven battalions only represented 3500 rifles. The Seventh Division was withdrawn to Bailleul in the south, but Lawford’s 22nd Brigade was retained in corps reserve, and was destined to have one more trial before it could be spared for rest. The day was memorable also for a vigorous advance of the Gloucester Regiment, which was pushed with such hardihood that they sustained losses of nearly half their numbers before admitting that they could not gain their objective.

A description has been given here of the events of the north of the line and of the cavalry positions, but it is not to be supposed that peace reigned on the south of this point. On the contrary, during the whole period under discussion, while the great fight raged at Ypres, there had been constant shelling and occasional advances against the Third Corps in the Armentières section, and also against the Indians and the Second Corps down to the La Bassée Canal.

The most serious of these occurred upon November 9. Upon this date the Germans, who had knocked so loudly at Messines and at Wytschaete without finding that any opening through our lines was open to them, thought that they might find better luck at Ploegsteert, which is a village on the same line as the other two. Wytschaete is to the north, Messines in the middle, and Ploegsteert in the south, each on the main road from Ypres to Armentières, with about four miles interval between each. The German attack was a very strong one, but the hundredfold drama was played once more. On the 3rd Worcesters fell the brunt, and no more solid fighters have been found in the Army than those Midland men from the very heart of England. A temporary set-back was retrieved and the line restored. Major Milward, of the Worcesters, a very gallant officer, was grievously wounded in this affair. The counter-attack which restored the situation was carried out mainly by the 1st East Lancashires, who lost Major Lambert and a number of men in the venture.

Upon November 6, about 2 P.M., a strong German advance drove in those French troops who were on the right of Lord Cavan’s Brigade — 4th — which occupied the extreme right of Haig’s position. The point was between Klein Zillebeke and the canal, where a German lodgment would have been most serious. The retirement of the French exposed the right flank of the 1st Irish Guards. This flank was strongly attacked, and for the second time in a week this brave regiment endured very heavy losses. No. 2 company was driven back to the support trenches, and No. 1 company, being isolated, was destroyed. Their neighbours on the left, the 2nd Grenadiers stood fast, but a great and dangerous alley-way was left for the Germans round the British right wing. The situation was splendidly saved by Kavanagh’s 7th Cavalry Brigade, who galloped furiously down the road to the place where they were so badly needed. This hard-worked *corps* *d’élite*, consisting of the 1st and 2nd Life Guards supported by the Blues, now dismounted and flung themselves into the gap, a grimy line of weather-stained infantry with nothing left save their giant physique and their spurs to recall the men who are the pride of our London streets. The retiring French rallied at the sight of the sons of Anak. An instant later the Germans were into them, and there was a terrific *mêlée* of British, French, and Prussians, which swung and swayed over the marshland and across the road. Men drove their bayonets through each other or fired point-blank into each other’s bodies in a most desperate fight, the Germans slowly but surely recoiling, until at last they broke. It was this prompt and vigorous stroke by Kavanagh’s Brigade which saved a delicate situation. Of the three cavalry regiments engaged, two lost their colonels — Wilson of the Blues and Dawnay of the 2nd Life Guards. Sixteen officers fell in half an hour. The losses in rank and file were also heavy, but the results were great and indeed vital. The whole performance was an extraordinarily fine one.

Early on the morning of November 7 Lawford’s 22nd Brigade, which was now reduced to 1100 men, with 7 officers, was called upon to retake a line of trenches which the enemy had wrested from a neighbouring unit. Unbroken in nerve or spirit by their own terrific losses, they rushed forward, led by Lawford himself, a cudgel in his hand, carried the trench, captured three machine-guns, held the trench till evening, and then retired for a time from the line. Captains Vallentin and Alleyne, who led the two regiments into which the skeleton brigade had been divided, both fell in this feat of arms. After this action there remained standing the brigadier, 3 officers, and 700 men. The losses of the brigade work out at 97 per cent of the officers and 80 per cent of the men, figures which can seldom have been matched in the warfare of any age, and yet were little in excess of the other brigades, as is shown by the fact that the whole division on November 7 numbered 44 officers and 2336 men. It is true that many British regiments found themselves in this campaign with not one single officer or man left who had started from England, but these were usually the effects of months of campaigning. In the case of the Seventh Division, all these deadly losses had been sustained in less than three weeks. Britain’s soldiers have indeed been faithful to the death. Their record is the last word in endurance and military virtue.

The division was now finally withdrawn from the fighting line. It has already been stated that there were reasons which made its units exceptionally fine ones. In General Capper they possessed a leader of enormous energy and fire, whilst his three brigadiers — Watts, Lawford, and Ruggles-Brise — could not be surpassed by any in the Army. Yet with every advantage of officers and men there will always be wonder as well as admiration for what they accomplished. For three days, before the First Corps had come thoroughly into line, they held up the whole German advance, leaving the impression upon the enemy that they were faced by two army corps. Then for twelve more days they held the ground in the very storm-centre of the attack upon Ypres. When at last the survivors staggered from the line, they had made a name which will never die.

The bulk of Smith-Dorrien’s Corps had now been brought north, so that from this date (November 7) onwards the story of the First and Second Corps is intimately connected. When we last saw this corps it will be remembered that it had been withdrawn from the front, having lost some twelve thousand men in three weeks of La Bassée operations, and that the Indian Corps had taken over their line of trenches. Such fighting men could not, however, be spared in the midst of such a fight. The hospital was the only rest that any British soldier could be afforded. Whilst they had still strength to stand they must line up to the German flood or be content to see it thunder past them to the coast. They were brought north, save only Bowes’ 8th Brigade and Maude’s l4th, which remained with the Indians in the south. Although the Seventh Division had been drawn out of the line, its attendant cavalry division still remained to give its very efficient help to General Haig.

The British position, though by no means secure, was getting stronger day by day, for General d’Urbal of the Eighth French Army to the north, and General Maud’huy to the south, had both been strongly reinforced, and with their usual good comradeship did all they could to strengthen the flanks and shorten the front of the British line.

The men of the Second Corps who had come north from the La Bassée district were not left long unmolested in their new sphere of operations. On the afternoon of November 7 there was a hot German attack upon that portion of the line which had just been vacated by the Seventh Division. The trenches were now held by the Fifth Division (Morland’s).

The enemy may have hoped for some advantage from a change which they may well have observed, but they found that, though the units might be different, the same old breed still barred their path. On this occasion, after the early rush had spent itself upon the 1st Lincolns, it was the 2nd West Ridings who led the counter-charge. The line, however, was never fully re-established. A number of smaller attacks broke upon the front of the Second Division on the same day, leaving a few score of prisoners behind them as they ebbed. On the same day, November 7, the enemy got into the trenches of the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and remained in them, for all of them were bayoneted or taken. Upon this day the London Scottish were brought up into the Ypres line — a sign, if one were needed, that after the action described they were accepted as the peers of their comrades of the Regular Army, for no empty compliments are passed when the breaking of a unit may mean the enfilading of a line.

November 8 was a quiet day, but it was well known from every report of spy, scout, and aeroplane to be the lull before the storm. One German brigade came down the Menin road, and went up it again, leaving a hundred dead on or beside the causeway. This attack inflicted some loss upon the 1st North Lancashires and on the 1st Scots Guards. The 1st Bedfords captured a trench that night. The 9th and the 10th were uneventful, and the tired troops rested on their arms, though never free for an hour from the endless pelting of shells. To the north and east the Eagles were known to be gathering. There were the Emperor, the Emperor’s Guard, and a great fresh battle of the Germans ready for one grand final dash for Calais, with every rifle in the firing line and every cannon to support it. Grave messages came from headquarters, warning words were passed to anxious brigadiers, who took counsel with their colonels as to fire-fields and supports. Batteries were redistributed, depleted limbers refilled, and observation posts pushed to the front, while the untiring sappers gave the last touches to traverse and to trench. All was ready for the fray. So close were the lines that at many points the conversations of the enemy could be heard.

The Germans had already concentrated a large number of troops against this part of the British line, and they were now secretly reinforced by a division of the Prussian Guard. Documents found afterwards upon the dead show that the Guard had had special orders from the Emperor to break the line at all costs. The brigades which attacked were made up of the 1st and 2nd Foot Guards, the Kaiser Franz Grenadiers No. 2, the Königin Augusta Grenadiers No. 4, and the battalion of Garde Jäger — 13,000 men in all. It was to be victory or death with the *corps d’élite* of the German army, but it was no less victory or death with the men who opposed them. After an artillery preparation of appalling intensity for three hours along the line of both the First and Second Divisions, the infantry advance began about 9:30 on the morning of November 11 amid a storm of wind and rain. They are gregarious fighters, the Germans, finding comfort and strength in the rush of serried ranks. Even now the advance was made in a close formation, but it was carried out with magnificent dash, amazing valour, and a pedantic precision which caused, for example, the leading officers to hold their swords at the carry. The Prussian Guardsmen seemed to have lost nothing, and also to have learned nothing, since their famous predecessors lay dead in their ranks before St. Privat, forty-four years before. The attack was directed against the front of the two divisions of the First British Army Corps, but especially on the 1st Brigade, so that Guardsman faced Guardsman, as at Fontenoy. There were none of the chivalrous greetings of 1745, however, and a stern hatred hardened the hearts of either side. The German Guard charged on the north of the Menin road, while a second advance by troops of the line was made upon the south, which withered away before the British fire. Nothing could stop the Guards, however. With trenches blazing and crackling upon their flank, for the advance was somewhat diagonal, they poured over the British position and penetrated it at three different points where the heavy shells had overwhelmed the trenches and buried the occupants, who, in some cases, were bayoneted as they struggled out from under the earth. It was a terrific moment. The yells of the stormers and the shrill whistles of their officers rose above the crash of the musketry-fire and roar of the guns. The British fought in their customary earnest silence, save for the short, sharp directions of their leaders. “They did not seem angry — only business-like,” said a hostile observer. The troops to the immediate north of the Menin road, who had been shelled out of their trenches by the bombardment, were forced back and brushed aside into the woods to the north, while the Germans poured through the gap. The 4th Royal Fusiliers of the 9th Brigade, upon the right of the point where the enemy had penetrated, were enfiladed and lost their gallant colonel, MacMahon, a soldier who had done great service from the day of Mons, and had just been appointed to a brigade. The regiment, which has worked as hard and endured as great losses as any in the campaign, was reduced to 2 officers and 100 men.

The German Guard poured on into the woods which lay in the immediate rear of the British position, but their formation was broken and the individualism of the Briton began to tell. Next to MacMahon’ s regiment lay the 1st Scots Fusiliers, sister battalion to that which had been destroyed upon October 31. With fierce joy they poured volleys into the flank of the Guard as the grey figures rushed past them into the woods. Four hundred dead Germans were afterwards picked out from the underwood at this point. The Scots Fusiliers were also hard hit by the German fire.

At this period the Germans who had come through the line had skirted the south of a large wood of half-grown trees, called the Polygon Wood, and had advanced into the farther one, named Nonnebusch. At this point they were close to the British artillery, which they threatened to overwhelm. The 41st Brigade R.F.A., and especially the 16th Field Battery, were in the immediate line of their advance, and the gunners looking up saw the grey uniforms advancing amid the trees. Colonel Lushington, who commanded the artillery brigade, hurriedly formed up a firing line under his adjutant, composed partly of his own spare gunners and partly of a number of Engineers, reinforced by cooks, officers’ servants, and other odd hands who are to be found in the rear of the army, but seldom expect to find themselves in the van of the fight. It was a somewhat grotesque array, but it filled the gap and brought the advance to a halt, though the leading Germans were picked up afterwards within seventy yards of the guns. Whilst the position was critical at this point of the front, it was no less so upon the extreme right, where the French detachment, who still formed a Link between the canal on the south and the British right flank, were shelled out of their trenches and driven back. Lord Cavan’s 4th Brigade, their nearest neighbours, were too hard pressed to be able to help them. To the north of the Menin road a number of British units were intact, and these held up the German flood in that region. There are two considerable woods — the Polygon to the north and the Nonnebusch to the south-west of the Polygon — the edges of which have defined the British position, while their depths have harboured their artillery. Now the 1st King’s Liverpool Regiment held firm to the south of the Polygon Wood, while north of them were the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, with a field company of Engineers. Farther to the south-west were the 1st Connaught Rangers, while on the other side of the Nonnebusch road was the 7th Cavalry Brigade. In the afternoon of this day the enemy, skirting the south of the Polygon Wood, had actually entered the Nonnebusch Wood, in which it faced the artillery as already described. In the Polygon Wood, when they penetrated the trenches of the 1st Brigade, they had the Bang's Liverpool Regiment on their right, which refused to move, so that for a long time the Prussian Guard and the King's lay side by side with a traverse between them. "Our right is supported by the Prussian Guard," said the humorous adjutant of the famous Lancashire regiment. While the main body of the Guard passed on, some remained all day in this trench.

The German Guardsmen had been prevented from submerging the 41st Brigade of Artillery, and also the 35th Heavy Battery, by the resistance of an improvised firing line. But a more substantial defence was at hand. The 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, which had been in divisional reserve near Ypres, had been brought forward and found itself at Westhoek, near the threatened guns. This regiment is the old 52nd, of the Peninsular Light Division, a famous corps which threw itself upon the flank of Napoleon's Guard at Waterloo and broke it in the crisis of the battle. Once again within a century an Imperial Guard was to recoil before its disciplined rush. Under Colonel Davies the regiment swept through the wood from north-west to south-east, driving the Germans, who had already been badly shaken by the artillery fire, in a headlong rout. Many threw down their arms. The loss to the Oxfords was surprisingly small, well under fifty in all. As they emerged from the wood they were joined by some of the 1st Northamptons from the 2nd Brigade upon the right, while on the left there was a rush of Connaughts and Highland Light Infantry from their own (Haking's) brigade and of Engineers of the 25th Field Company, who showed extraordinary initiative and gallantry, pushing on rapidly, and losing all their officers save one and a number of their men without flinching for an instant. A party of the Gloucesters, too, charged with the Northamptons upon the right, for by this time units were badly mixed up, as will always happen in woodland fighting. "It was all a confused nightmare," said one who tried to control it. The line of infantry dashed forward, a company of the Oxfords under Captain H. M. Dillon in the lead, and the khaki wave broke over a line of trenches which the Germans had taken, submerging all the occupants. There was another line in front, but as the victorious infantry pushed forward to this it was struck in the flank by a fire from French batteries, which had been unable to believe that so much progress could have been made in so short a time.

It was now nearly dark, and the troops were in the last stage of exhaustion. Of the 1st Brigade something less than 400 with 4 officers could be collected. It was impossible to do more than hold the line as it then existed. Two brave attempts were made in the darkness to win back the original front trenches, but it could not be done, for there were no men to do it. Save for one small comer of the Polygon Wood, the Germans had been completely cleared out from the main position. At twelve and at four, during the night, the British made a forward movement to regain the advanced trenches, but in each case the advance could make no progress. At the very beginning of the second attempt General FitzClarence, commanding the 1st Brigade, was killed, and the movement fizzled out. Besides General FitzClarence, the Army sustained a severe loss in General Shaw of the 9th Brigade, who was struck by a shell splinter, though happily the wound was not mortal. The German losses were exceedingly severe: 700 of their dead were picked up within a single section of the British line, but the main loss was probably sustained in the advance before they reached the trenches. Killed, wounded, and prisoners, their casualties cannot have been less than 10,000 men.*

[* The German returns for the Guard alone at this battle are reported at 1170 dead, 3991 wounded, 1719 missing.]

It was a fine attack, bravely delivered by fresh troops against weary men, but it showed the German leaders once for all that it was impossible to force a passage through the lines. The Emperor’s Guard, driven on by the Emperor’s own personal impetus, had recoiled broken, even as the Guard of a greater Emperor had done a century before from the indomitable resistance of the British infantry. The constant fighting had reduced British brigades to the strength of battalions, battalions to companies, and companies to weak platoons, but the position was still held. They had, it is true, lost about five hundred yards of ground in the battle, but a shorter line was at once dug, organised, and manned. The barrier to Ypres was as strong as ever.

The strain upon the men, however, had been terrific. “Bearded, unwashed, sometimes plagued with vermin, the few who remained in the front line were a terrible crew,” says the American, Coleman. “They were like fierce, wild beasts,” says another observer. They had given their all, almost to their humanity, to save Britain. May the day never come when Britain will refuse to save them.

Glancing for a moment down the line to the south, there had been continuous confused contention during this time, but no great attack such as distinguished the operations in the north. Upon November 7 two brisk assaults were made by the Germans in the Armentières area, one upon the Fourth Division of the Third Corps and the other upon the Seaforth Highlanders, who were brigaded with the Indians. In each case the first German rush carried some trenches, and in each the swift return of the British regained them. There were moderate losses upon both sides. On the same date the 13th Infantry Brigade lost the services of Colonel Martyn of the 1st West Kents, who was seriously wounded the very day after he had been appointed to a brigade.

This attack upon November 11 represents the absolute high-water mark of the German efforts in this battle, and the ebb was a rapid one. Upon November 12 and the remainder of the week, halfhearted attempts were made upon the British front, which were repulsed without difficulty. To the north of the line, where the French had held their positions with much the same fluctuations which had been experienced by their Allies, the German assault was more violent and met with occasional success, though it was finally repelled with very great loss. The 14th was to the French what the 11th had been to the British — the culmination of violence and the prelude of rest. The weather throughout this period was cold and tempestuous, which much increased the strain upon the weary troops. Along the whole line from Ypres to Bethune there were desultory shellings with an occasional dash by one side or the other, which usually ended in the capture of a trench and its recapture by the supports in the rear. It was in one of these sporadic German attacks in the Klein Zillebeke section that the 2nd King’s Royal Rifles held their trench against heavy odds, and their machine-gun officer, Lieutenant Dimmer, thrice wounded and still fighting, won the coveted Cross by his valour. Each gallant advance and capture of the Germans was countered by an equally gallant counter-attack and recapture by the British. The long line sagged and swayed, but never bent or broke. The era of battles had passed, but for thirty miles the skirmishes were incessant. So mixed and incessant had been the fighting that it was a very difficult task during these days to tidy up the line and get each scattered group of men back to its own platoon, company, and battalion.

On Tuesday, November 17, the fighting suddenly assumed a more important character. The attack was again in the Ypres section and fell chiefly upon the battalions of the Second Corps, if so dignified a name as “ battalion “ can be given to bodies of men which consisted very often of less than a normal company, commanded, perhaps, by two junior officers. The 4th Brigade of Guards was also heavily engaged this day, and so were the cavalry of the Third Division. The general locale of the action was the same as that which had been so often fought over before, the Second Corps being to the south of the Ypres-Menin road, with Lord Cavan’s Guardsmen upon their right and the cavalry upon the right of the Guards. After a severe shelling there was a serious infantry advance, about one o’clock, which took some trenches, but was finally driven back and chased for a quarter of a mile. McCracken’s 7th Brigade bore a chief part in this fighting, and the 1st Wiltshires particularly distinguished themselves by a fine charge led by Captain Cary-Barnard. The 2nd Grenadiers did great work during the day.

An even heavier advance was made in the afternoon to the south of that which was broken in the morning. This involved an oblique advance across the British front, which was stopped and destroyed before it reached the trenches by the deadly fire of rifles and machine-guns. Over a thousand dead were left as a proof of the energy of the attack and the solidity of the resistance. Farther to the south a similar attack was beaten back by the cavalry after a preliminary shelling in which the 3rd Dragoon Guards suffered severely. This attack was repelled by the Third Cavalry Division, to which the Leicestershire and North Somerset Yeomanry were now attached. The latter did fine service in this action. Altogether, November 17 was a good day for the British arms and a most expensive one for the Germans.

We have now reached the end of the Battle of Ypres, which attained its maximum fury, so far as the British line was concerned, from October 29 to November 11. This great contest raged from the sand dunes of the north, where the Belgians fought so well, through the French Marine Brigade at Dixmude, and the Ninth French Corps, to General Haig’s Corps, which was buttressed on the right towards the latter part of the battle by the Sixteenth French Corps. Farther south yet another French corps supported and eventually took the place of the British cavalry opposite the lost villages of Wytschaete and Messines. From there ran the unbroken lines of the imperturbable Third Corps, which ended to the south in the trenches originally held by the Second British Corps, and later by the Indians. Across the La Bassée Canal the French once again took up the defence.

It is not an action, therefore, which can be set down to the exclusive credit of any one nation. Our Allies fought gloriously, and if their deeds are not set down here, it is from want of space and of precise information, not from want of appreciation. But, turning to the merely British aspect of the fight — and beyond all doubt the heavier share fell upon the British, who bore the brunt from the start to the end, — it may be said that the battle lasted a clear month, from October 12, when Smith-Dorrien crossed the La Bassée Canal, to November 11, when the German Guard reeled out of the Nonnebusch Wood. We are so near these great events that it is hard to get their true proportion, but it is abundantly clear that the battle, in its duration, the space covered, the numbers engaged, and the losses endured, was far the greatest ever fought up to that time by a British Army. At Waterloo the losses were under 10,000. In this great fight they were little short of 50,000. The fact that the enemy did not recoil and that there was no sensational capture of prisoners and guns has obscured the completeness of the victory. In these days of nations in arms a beaten army is buttressed up or reabsorbed by the huge forces of which it is part. One judges victory or defeat by the question whether an army has or has not reached its objective. In this particular case, taking a broad view of the whole action, a German force of at least 600,000 men set forth to reach the coast, and was opposed by a force of less than half its numbers who barred its way. The Germans did not advance five miles in a month of fighting, and they lost not less than 150,000 men without any military advantage whatever, for the possession of such villages as Gheluvelt, Wytschaete, or Messines availed them not at all. If this is not a great victory, I do not know what military achievement would deserve the term. Ypres was a Plevna — but a Plevna which remained for ever untaken.

On November 15 Lord Roberts died whilst visiting Army, having such an end as he would have chosen, within earshot of the guns and within the lines of those Indian soldiers whom he loved and had so often led. The last words of his greatest speech to his fellow-countrymen before the outbreak of that war which he had foreseen, and for which he had incessantly tried to prepare, were that they should quit themselves like men. He lived to see them do so, and though he was not spared to see the final outcome, his spirit must at least have been at rest as to the general trend of the campaign. The tradition of his fascinating character, with its knightly qualities of gentleness, bravery, and devotion to duty, will remain as a national possession.

About this time, though too late for the severe fighting, there arrived the Eighth Division, which would enable Sir Henry Rawlinson to complete his Fourth Corps.

The Eighth Division was composed as follows: —

EIGHTH DIVISION — GENERAL DAVIES.

23rd Infantry Brigade. — General Penny.

2nd Scots Rifles.

2nd Middlesex.

2nd West Yorkshires.

2nd Devons.

24th Infantry Brigade — General Carter.

1st Worcesters.

2nd East Lancashires.

1st Notts and Derby.

2nd Northamptons.

25th Infantry Brigade — General Lowry Cole.

2nd Lincolns.

2nd Berkshires.

1st Irish Rifles.

2nd Rifle Brigade.

13th London (Kensingtons).

Artillery.

5th Brigade R.H.A., G.O.Z.

45th Brigade R.F.A.

33rd Brigade R.F.A.

Heavy Batteries 118, 119.

2, 5, F. Cos. R.E.

8 Signal Co.

Divisional Cavalry.

Northampton Yeomanry.

8th Cyclists.

We have now arrived at what may be called the great winter lull, when the continuation of active operations was made impossible by the weather conditions, which were of the most atrocious description. It was the season which in a more classic age of warfare was spent in comfortable winter quarters. There was no such surcease of hardship for the contending lines, who were left in their trenches face to face, often not more than fifty yards apart, and each always keenly alert for any devilry upon the part of the other. The ashes of war were always redly smouldering, and sometimes, as will be seen, burst up into sudden furious flame. It was a period of rainstorms and of frost-bites, of trench mortars and of grenades, of weary, muddy, goat-skinned men shivering in narrow trenches, and of depleted brigades The first resting and recruiting in the rearward towns. Such Ypres. was the position at the Front. But hundreds of miles to the westward the real future of the war was being fought out in the rifle factories of Birmingham, the great gun works of Woolwich, Coventry, Newcastle, and Sheffield, the cloth looms of Yorkshire, and the boot centres of Northampton. In these and many other places oversea the tools for victory were forged night and day through one of the blackest and most strenuous winters that Britain has ever known. And always on green and waste and common, from Cromarty to Brighton, wherever soldiers could find billets or a village of log huts could be put together, the soldier citizens who were to take up the burden of the war, the men of the Territorials and the men of the new armies, endured every hardship and discomfort without a murmur, whilst they prepared themselves for that great and glorious task which the future would bring. Even those who were too old or too young for service formed themselves into volunteer bands, who armed and clothed themselves at their own expense. This movement, which sprang first from the small Sussex village of Crowborough, was co-ordinated and controlled by a central body of which Lord Desborough was the head. In spite of discouragement, or at the best cold neutrality from Government, it increased and prospered until no fewer than a quarter of a million of men were mustered and ready entirely at their own expense and by private enterprise — one of the most remarkable phenomena of the war.

X. A RETROSPECT AND GENERAL SUMMARY

Position of Italy — Fall of German colonies — Sea affairs — Our Allies

THERE has been no opportunity during this somewhat breathless narrative of the great events which ever be associated with the names of Mens, the Marne, the Aisne, and Ypres to indicate those factors which were influencing the course of the war in other regions. They do not come properly within the scope of this narrative, nor does the author profess to have any special information concerning them, but they cannot be absolutely omitted without interfering with a correct view of the general situation. They will therefore be briefly summarised in retrospect before the reader is carried on into a more particular account of the trench warfare of the early winter of 1914.

The most important European event at the outbreak of the war, outside the movement of the combatants, was the secession of Italy from the Central Powers on the grounds that her treaty applied only to wars of defence whilst this was manifestly one of aggression. Italian statesmen could speak with the more decision upon the point since the plot had been unfolded before their eyes. A year previously they had been asked to join in an unprovoked attack upon Serbia, and in refusing had given clear warning to their allies how such an outrage would viewed. The Central Powers, however, puffed up general by their vainglory and by the knowledge of their secret preparations, were persuaded that they had ample strength to carry out their intentions without aid from their southern ally. Italy, having denounced the treaty, remained a neutral, but it was always clear that she would sooner or later throw in her strength with those who were at war with Austria, her secular enemy. It was not, however, until May 1915 that she was in a position to take a definite step. It should be remembered to her eternal honour that the time at which she did eventually come in was one which was very overcast for the Allies, and that far from fulfilling the cynical German prophecy that she would “hasten to the assistance of the conqueror,” she took grave risks in ranging herself Fall of upon the side of her Latin sister. Upon August 24 colonies. Japan also declared war, and by November 7 had completed her share of the common task, for Tsingtau, the only German colony in Eastern Asia, was captured by a Japanese expeditionary force aided by a British contingent. Already the vast Colonial erection of Germany, those numerous places in the sun which she had annexed all over the globe, were beginning to crumble. The little Togoland colony fell upon August 26. New Zealand took over German Samoa upon August 31. The Australians occupied the Bismarck Archipelago upon September 7, and New Guinea upon the 25th. These smaller twigs were easily lopped, but the main boughs were made of tougher stuff. A premature attack upon German East Africa by an expeditionary force from India met with a severe check immediately after landing. In South Africa the Germans succeeded in blowing into a small flame the smouldering ashes of the old Boer War. De Wet and others broke their oaths and took up arms, but the majority remained splendidly loyal, and by the beginning of December Botha had brought the insurrection to an end, and was able henceforth to devote his grand powers of leadership and organisation to the extinction of the enemy’s south-western colony.

A word, too, about sea affairs before we turn to the further detailed account of the British winter upon the Continent. In good time the Fleet had been ordered to her war-stations at the north and east of Scotland, with the result that German ocean commerce was brought to an immediate and absolute stop. The German ships *Goeben* and *Breslau*, which were cut off at the outbreak of the war in the Mediterranean, succeeded in a very clever fashion in reaching the Dardanelles and safety. Having taken refuge at Constantinople, these ships played a prominent part in determining Turkey to take action against the Allies on October 31, a most disastrous decision both for Turkey, which met her ruin, and for the Allies, who found their task greatly increased through the excellent fighting power of the Turkish forces.

A brisk action was fought upon August 28 in the Heligoland Bight, when Admiral Beatty with his cruiser-squadron and a number of light craft visited the enemy in his own waters, sinking three German warships and sustaining no losses himself. Among the prisoners was the son of Chief Admiral Von Tirpitz. Numerous minor actions led to no noteworthy result, but the power of the submarine, already prophesied before the war, speedily made itself manifest. Several small British cruisers were destroyed by these craft, and finally a considerable disaster occurred through the sinking of the three cruisers, *Hogue*, *Aboukir*, and *Cressy*, upon September 22. This dashing and cool-headed exploit was brought off by a young Lieutenant named Weddigen. Much as we suffered from his action, it was recognised in Britain as having been a remarkable deed of arms upon a very different plane to those execrable murders of civilians with which the German submarine service was afterwards associated. Some months later Weddigen's submarine rose amongst the Grand Fleet whilst it was in motion, and was rammed and destroyed by the *Dreadnought*.

The outbreak of war had seen a considerable number of German cruisers at large, and these would undoubtedly have been strongly reinforced had it not been for the speed with which the British Fleet took up its war-stations. As it was, the amount of damage to commerce was not serious, and by the New Year all the wanderers had been rounded up. The most successful raider was the *Emden*, under Captain Müller, which captured and destroyed numerous British merchant-ships, bombarded the Madras gas-works, and sank by a surprise attack a small Russian cruiser and a French destroyer before it was finally cornered and sunk by the Australian cruiser *Sydney* off Cocos Island upon November 10. Captain Müller, though forced by circumstances to adopt certain measures not recognised in honourable naval warfare, behaved on the whole in the manner which one associates with the term naval officer. The *Karlsruhe* had also considerable success as a naval raider, but met her end through an unexplained explosion some little time after her consort the *Emden*. On the whole, the damage inflicted by German commerce destroyers was very much less than had been anticipated.

On November 1, Admiral Craddock's squadron, consisting of the *Monmouth*, the *Good Hope*, and two small vessels, was engaged by a superior squadron under Admiral von Spee at Coronel off the coast of Chile. The result was a British defeat, the two cruisers being sunk by gun-fire with all hands. This disaster was dramatically revenged, as within six weeks, upon December 8, a special cruiser-squadron dispatched from England under Admiral Sturdee entirely destroyed the fleet of Von Spee in the Battle of the Falkland Islands. The British Fleet was considerably stronger, and little credit can be claimed save for the admirable strategy which enabled Sturdee to find the enemy in that vast waste of waters as promptly and directly as if the meeting had been by appointment.

There were no other outstanding naval events in 1914 save a raid upon Cuxhaven by aeroplanes, escorted by light cruisers, which probably did little harm as the weather was misty. This occurred upon Christmas Day 1914. It had been preceded by an attack by German cruisers on December 16 upon West Hartlepool, Scarborough, and Whitby. As the two latter towns were open watering-places, and as numerous civilians were the victims of the raid, it was recognised from this time onwards that the German Navy was as little trammelled by international law or by the feelings of humanity as the German Army had shown itself to be in France, Belgium, and Russia.

The general movement of the French armies has been touched upon in recording the experiences of the British, for after their glorious victory at the Marne and the hold-up at the Aisne, it was at Ypres that the real fighting was done, the rest of the long line down to the Swiss frontier playing a subsidiary part. The Russians, however, had experienced both extremities of fortune, for their victory at Lemberg over the Austrians upon September 2 was of a very glorious character, while their defeat by the Germans at Tannenberg in East Prussia was no less decisive.

All the events of the outset of the war were inglorious for Austria, who received rapidly the punishment which she deserved for her wanton disturbance of the world’s peace. Apart from the blows which she received from Russia, she was severely defeated by the Serbians on August 17, and her invading army was driven out of the country which she had wronged. At the end of the year she had lost the whole of Galicia to the Russians, who in turn had been pushed out of East Prussia by the German armies under Von Hindenburg. An invasion of Poland by the Germans was held up after very severe fighting, failing to reach Warsaw, which was its objective.

These were the main incidents of the world’s war during the months which have been under review. As those months passed the terrific nature of the task which they had undertaken became more and more clear to the British, but further reflection had confirmed them in their opinion that the alternative course of abandoning their friends and breaking their pledge to Belgium was an absolutely unthinkable one, so that however great the trials and sacrifices in blood and treasure, they were not further embittered by the reflection that they could possibly a have been avoided. Very greatly were they cheered in that dark hour by the splendid, whole-hearted help from India, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, help which was even more valuable from a moral than from a material standpoint. With this brief synopsis we will now return to those operations which are the proper subject of this volume.

XI. THE WINTER LULL OF 1914

Increase of the Army — Formation of the Fifth Corps — The visit of the King — Third Division at Petit Bois — The fight at Givenchy — Heavy losses of the Indians — Fine advance of Manchesters — Advance of the First Division — Singular scenes at Christmas

THE winter lull may be said to have extended from the great combats at Ypres of the middle of November to the opening of the spring campaign in March 1915; but we will only follow it here up to the end of the year. It was a period of alternate rest and discomfort for the troops with an ever-present salt of danger. For days they found themselves billeted with some approach to comfort in the farmhouses and villages of Flanders, but such brief intervals of peace were broken by the routine of the trenches, when, in mud or water with a clay cutting before their faces and another at their backs, they waited through the long hours, listening to the crack of the sniper’s rifle, or the crash of the bursting shell, with an indifference which bordered upon thankfulness for anything that would break the drab monotony of their task. It was a scene of warfare which was new to military experience. The vast plain of battle lay in front of the observer as a flat and lonely wilderness, dotted with ruined houses from which no homely wreath of smoke rose into the wintry air. Here and there was an untidy litter of wire; here and there also a clump of bleak and tattered woodland; but nowhere was there any sign of man. And yet from the elevation of an aeroplane it might be seen that the population of a large city was lurking upon that motionless waste. Everywhere the airman would have distinguished the thin brown slits of the advance trenches, the broader ditches of the supports and the long zigzags of the communications, and he would have detected that they were stuffed with men — grey men and khaki, in every weird garment that ingenuity could suggest for dryness and for warmth — all cowering within their shelters with the ever-present double design of screening themselves and of attacking their enemy. As the German pressure became less, and as more regiments of the Territorials began to arrive, taking some of the work from their comrades of the Regulars, it was possible to mitigate something of the discomforts of warfare, to ensure that no regiments should be left for too long a period in the trenches, and even to arrange for week-end visits to England for a certain number of officers and men. The streets of London got a glimpse of rugged, war-hardened faces, and of uniforms caked with the brown mud of Flanders, or supplemented by strange Robinson Crusoe goat-skins from the trenches, which brought home to the least imaginative the nature and the nearness of the struggle.

Before noting those occasional spasms of activity — epileptic, sometimes, in their sudden intensity — which broke out from the German trenches, it may be well to take some note of the general development of those preparations which meant so much for the future. The Army was growing steadily in strength. Not only were the old regiments reinforced by fresh drafts, but two new divisions of Regulars were brought over before the end of January. These formed the Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth Divisions under Generals Snow and Bulfin, two officers who had won a name in the first phase of the war. The two Divisions together formed the Fifth Army Corps under General Plumer, the officer who had worked so hard for the relief of Mafeking in 1900. The Divisions, composed of splendid troops who needed some hardening after tropical service, were constituted as follows, the list including territorial battalions attached, but excluding the artillery as well as the four original regular units in each brigade:

FIFTH ARMY CORPS — GENERAL PLUMER.

27th Division — General Snow.

80th Brigade — General Fortescue.

Princess Pat. Canadians.

4th Rifle Brigade.

3rd King’s Royal Rifles.

4th King’s Royal Rifles.

2nd Shrop. Light Infantry.

8lst Brigade — General MacFarlane.

9th Royal Scots (T.F.).

2nd Cameron Highlanders.

lst Argyll and Sutherlands.

1st Royal Scots.

2nd Gloucesters.

9th Argyll and Sutherlands (T.F.)

82nd Brigade — General Longley.

1st Leinsters.

2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers.

2nd Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry.

1st Royal Irish.

1st Cambridge (T.F.).

Army Troops, 6th Cheshires.

28th Division — General Bulfin.

83rd Brigade — General Boyle.

2nd E. Yorkshire.

1st King’s Own York. Light Infantry.

1st Yorks. and Lancasters.

2nd Royal Lancasters.

3rd Monmouths (T.F.).

6th Royal Lancasters (T.F.).

84th Brigade — General Winter.

2nd Northumberland Fusiliers.

1st Suffolks.

1st Welsh.

2nd Cheshires.

12th London Rangers (T.F.).

1st Monmouths (T.F.).

85th Brigade — General Chapman.

2nd East Kent.

2nd East Surrey.

3rd Middlesex.

3rd Royal Fusiliers.

8th Middlesex (T.F.).

Besides this new Fifth Army Corps, there had been a constant dribble of other territorial units to the front, where they were incorporated with various regular brigades. The London Scottish, which had done so well, was honoured by admission to the 1st Brigade of Guards. The Artists' Rifles, 28th London, had the unique distinction of being set aside as an officers' training corps, from which officers were actually drawn at the rate of a hundred a month. The Honourable Artillery Company, brigaded with the 7th Brigade, was among the first to arrive. Conspicuous among the newcomers were the London Rifle Brigade, the 4th Suffolk, the Liverpool Scottish, the 5th and 6th Cheshires, the 1st Herts, the 2nd Monmouthshires, Queen Victoria Rifles, and Queen's Westminsters. These were among the earlier arrivals, though it seems invidious to mention names where the spirit of all was equally good. Among the yeomanry, many had already seen considerable service — notably the North and South Irish Horse, who had served from the beginning, the Northumberland Hussars, the North Somersets, the Oxford Hussars, and the Essex Yeomanry. Most of the troops named above shared the discomfort of the winter campaign before the great arrival of the new armies from England in the spring. There can be no better earned bar upon a medal than that which stands for this great effort of endurance against nature and man combined.

To take events in their order: beyond numerous gallant affairs of outposts, there was no incident of importance until the evening of November 23, when the Germans, who had seemed stunned for a week or so, showed signs of returning animation. On this day, some eight hundred yards of trench held by Indian troops in the neighbourhood of Armentières were made untenable by the German artillery, especially by the *Minenwerfer* — small mortars which threw enormous bombs by an ingenious arrangement whereby the actual shell never entered the bore but was on the end of a rod outside the muzzle. Some of these terrible missiles, which came through the air as slowly as a punted football, were 200 lbs. in weight and shattering in their effects. There was an advance of the 112th Regiment of the Fourteenth German Corps, and the empty trenches were strongly occupied by them — so strongly that the first attempt to retake them was unsuccessful in the face of the rifle and machine-gun fire of the defenders. A second more powerful counter-attack was organised by General Anderson of the Meerut Division, and this time the Germans were swept out of their position and the line re-established. The fighting lasted all night, and the Ghurkas with their formidable knives proved to be invaluable for such close work, while a party of Engineers with hand-bombs did great execution — a strange combination of the Asiatic with the most primitive of weapons and the scientific European with the most recent. It was a substantial victory as such affairs go, for the British were left with a hundred prisoners, including three officers, three machine-guns, and two mortars.

The first week of December was rendered memorable by a visit of the King to the Army. King George reviewed a great number of his devoted soldiers, who showed by their fervent enthusiasm that one need not be an autocratic Warlord in order to command the fierce loyalty of the legions. After this pleasant interlude there followed a succession of those smaller exploits which seem so slight in any chronicle, and yet collectively do so much to sustain the spirit of the Army. Now this dashing officer, now that, attempted some deed upon the German line, and never failed to find men to follow him to death. On November 24 it was Lieutenant Impey, with a handful of 2nd Lincolns; on November 25, Lieutenants Ford and Morris with a few Welsh Fusiliers and sappers; on November 26, Sir Edward Hulse with some Scots Guards; on the same day. Lieutenant Durham with men of the 2nd Rifle Brigade — in each case trenches were temporarily won, the enemy was damaged, and a spirit of adventure encouraged in the trenches. Sometimes such a venture ended in the death of the leader, as in the case of Captain the Honourable H. L. Bruce of the Royal Scots. Such men died as the old knights did who rode out betwixt the lines of marshalled armies, loved by their friends and admired by their foes.

December 9 was the date of two small actions. In the first the 1st Lincolns of the 9th Brigade, which had been commanded by Douglas Smith since the wounding of General Shaw, made an attack upon the wood at Wytschaete which is called Le Petit Bois. The advance was not successful, the three officers who led it being all wounded, and forty-four men being hit. The attempt was renewed upon a larger scale five days later. The other action was an attack by the enemy upon some of the trenches of the Third Corps. This Corps, though it had not come in for the more dramatic scenes of the campaign, had done splendid and essential work in covering a line of fourteen miles or so against incessant attacks of the Germans, who never were able to gain any solid advantage. On this occasion the impact fell upon Gordon’s 19th Brigade, especially upon the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the 1st Middlesex. It was driven back with heavy loss.

On December 14 the second and more sustained effort was made to get possession of the Petit Bois at Wytschaete, which had been attacked by the Lincolns upon the 9th. D’Urbal’s Eighth French Army was co-operating upon the left. The British attack was conducted by Haldane’s Third Division, and the actual advance was carried out, after a considerable artillery preparation from the batteries of two Corps, by Bowes’ 8th Brigade, with the 2nd Royal Scots and the 1st Gordons in the lead. At 7:45 the guns were turned upon the big wood beyond Petit Bois, through which the supports might be advancing, and at the same hour the two regiments named swarmed forward, the Lowlanders on the left and the Highlanders on the right. The Royal Scots, under Major Duncan, carried Petit Bois with a rush, taking fifty prisoners and two machine-guns, while the Germans fled out at the other end of the wood. The Scots at once entrenched themselves and got their own machine guns into position. The Gordons, under Major Baird, advanced with splendid dash and gained some ground, but found the position such that they could not entrench upon it, so they were forced to fall back eventually to their original position. Both they and the 4th Middlesex, who supported them, lost considerably in the affair. The total casualties in the Petit Bois action came to over four hundred, with seventeen officers, figures which were considerably swollen by the losses of the Suffolks and Irish Rifles, who continued to hold the captured position in the face of continued bombing. The French in the north had no particular success and lost 600 men. The importance of such operations is not to be measured, however, by the amount of ground won, but by the necessity of beating up the enemies’ quarters, keeping them pinned to their positions, and preventing them from feeling that they could at their own sweet wills detach any reinforcements they chose to thicken their line upon the Eastern frontier, where our Russian Allies were so insistently pressing.

On the morning of December 19 an attack was made upon the German lines in the Festubert region by Willcocks’ Indian Corps, the Meerut Division, under General Anderson, attacking upon the left, and the Lahore, under General Watkis, upon the right. The object of the movement was to co-operate with the French in an advance which they had planned. The

Meerut attack was successful at first, but was driven back by a counter-attack, and some hundreds of Indian infantry were killed, wounded, or taken. In the case of the Lahore attack the storming party consisted of the 1st Highland Light Infantry and the 4th Ghurkas. Both of these units belong to the Sirhind Brigade, but they were joined in the enterprise by the 59th Scinde Rifles of the Jullundur Brigade. These latter troops had a long night march before reaching the scene of the operations, when they found themselves upon the right of the attack and within two hundred and fifty yards of the German trenches. Judging the operations from the standard reached at a later date, the whole arrangement seems to have been extraordinarily primitive. The artillery preparation for a frontal attack upon a strong German line of trenches lasted exactly four minutes, being rather a call to arms than a bombardment. The troops rushed most gallantly forward into the dark of a cold wet winter morning, with no guide save the rippling flashes of the rifles and machine-guns in front of them. Many were so sore-footed and weary that they could not break into the double. Some of the Indians were overtaken from behind by a line of British supports, which caused considerable confusion. An officer of Indians has left it on record that twice running he had a revolver clapped to his head by a British officer. All of the battalions advanced with a frontage of two companies in columns of platoons. Both the Ghurkas and Highlanders reached the trench in the face of a murderous fire. The left of the 59th, consisting of Punjabi Mahomedans, also reached the trench. The right, who were Sikhs, made an equally gallant advance, but were knee-deep in a wet beetroot field and under terrific machine-gun fire. Their gallant leader, Captain Scale, was struck down. as was every Indian officer, but a handful of the survivors, under a Sikh Jemadar, got into a German sap, which they held for twenty-four hours, taking a number of prisoners.

Day had dawned, and though the British and Indians were in the enemy trenches, it was absolutely impossible to send them up reinforcements across the bullet-swept plain. The 59th discovered a sap running from their left to the German line, and along this they pushed. They could not get through, however, to where their comrades were being terribly bombed on either flank by the counter-attack. It was an heroic resistance. Colonel Ronaldson, who led the party, held on all day, but was very lucky in being able to withdraw most of the survivors after nightfall. Of the hundred Punjabis who held one flank, only three returned, while thirteen wounded were reported later from Germany. The others all refused to surrender, declaring that those were the last orders of their British officers, and so they met their honoured end. It had been a long and weary day with a barren ending, for all that had been won was abandoned. The losses were over a thousand, and were especially heavy in the case of officers.

The Germans, elated by the failure of the attack, were in the mood for a return visit. In the early dawn of the next day, December 20, they began a heavy bombardment of the Indian trenches, followed by an infantry attack extending over a line of six miles from south of the Bethune Canal to Festubert in the north. The attack began by the explosion of a succession of mines which inflicted very heavy losses upon the survivors of the Ghurkas and Highland Light Infantry. The weight of the attack at the village of Givenchy fell upon the exhausted Sirhind Heavy Brigade, who were driven back, and the greater part of Givenchy was occupied by the enemy. General Brunker fell back with his Brigade, but his line was stiffened by the arrival of the 47th Sikhs of the 8th Jullundur Brigade, who were in divisional reserve. These troops prevented any further advance of the Germans, while preparations were made for an effective counter-stroke.

Little help could be given from the north, where the line was already engaged, but to the south there were considerable bodies of troops available. The situation was serious, and a great effort was called for, since it was impossible to abandon into the hands of the enemy a village which was an essential bastion upon the line of defence. The German attack had flooded down south of Givenchy to the Bethune Canal, and a subsidiary attack had come along the south of the Canal with the object of holding the troops in their places and preventing the reinforcement of the defenders of Givenchy. But these advances south of the village made no progress, being held up by the 9th Bhopals and Wilde’s 57th Rifles of the 7th Ferozepore Brigade between Givenchy and the canal, while the 1st Connaught Rangers of the same brigade stopped it on the southern side of the canal. Matters were for a moment in equilibrium. To the south of the canal energetic measures were taken to get together a force which could come across it by the Pont Fixe or road bridge, and reestablish matters in the north.

The struggle had broken out close to the point of junction between the British forces and those of General Foch of the Tenth French Army, so that our Allies were able to co-operate with us in the counter-attack. It was directed by General Carnegy, and the assault was made by the 1st

Manchesters, the 4th Suffolk Territorials, and some French territorials. The Manchesters, under the leadership of Colonel Strickland, made a most notable attack, aided by two companies of the Suffolks, the other companies remaining in reserve on the north bank of the canal. So critical was the position that the 3rd Indian Sappers and Miners were set the dangerous task, under very heavy shell-fire, of mining the bridge over the canal. The situation was saved, however, by Colonel Strickland’s fine advance. His infantry, with very inadequate artillery support, pushed its way into Givenchy and cleared the village from end to end. Three hundred of the Manchesters fell in this deed of arms. Not only did they win the village, but they also regained some of the lost trenches to the north-east of Givenchy. This was the real turning-point of the action. There was at the time only the one very wet, very weary, and rather cut-up Jullundur Brigade between the Germans and Bethune — with all that Bethune stood for strategically. To the east the 9th Bhopals and 57th Rifles still held on to their position. It was only to the north that the enemy retained his lodgment.

But the fight to the north had been a bitter one all day, and had gone none too well for the British forces. The Indians were fighting at an enormous disadvantage. As well turn a tiger loose upon an ice-floe and expect that he will show all his wonted fierceness and activity. There are inexorable axioms of Nature which no human valour nor constancy can change. The bravest of the brave, our Indian troops were none the less the children of the sun, dependent upon warmth for their vitality and numbed by the cold wet life of the trenches. That they still in the main maintained a brave, uncomplaining, soldierly demeanour, and that they made head against the fierce German assaults, is a wonderful proof of their adaptability.

About ten o’clock on the morning of the 20th the German attack, driving back the Sirhind Brigade from Givenchy, who were the left advanced flank of the Lahore Division, came with a rush against the Dehra-Dun Brigade, who were the extreme right of the Meerut Division. This Brigade had the 1st Seaforth Highlanders upon its flank, with the 2nd Ghurkas upon its left. The Ghurkas were forced to retire, and the almost simultaneous retirement of the defenders of Givenchy left the Highlanders in a desperate position with both flanks in the air. Fortunately the next Brigade of the Meerut Division, the Garhwal Brigade, stood fast and kept in touch with the 6th Jats, who formed the left of the Dehra Dun Brigade, and so prevented the pressure upon that side from becoming intolerable. The 9th Ghurkas came up to support the 2nd Ghurkas, who had not gone far from their abandoned trenches, and the 58th Indian Rifles also came to the front. These battalions upon the left rear of the Highlanders gave them some support. None the less the position of the battalion was dangerous and its losses heavy, but it faced the Germans with splendid firmness, and nothing could budge it. Machine-guns are stronger than flesh and blood, but the human spirit can be stronger than either. You might kill the Highlanders, but you could not shift them. The 2nd Black Watch, who had been in reserve, established touch towards nightfall with the right of the Seaforths, and also with the left of the Sirhind Brigade, so that a continuous line was assured.

In the meantime a small force had assembled under General MacBean with the intention of making a counter-attack and recovering the ground which had been lost on the north side of Givenchy, With the 8th Ghurkas and the 47th Sikhs, together with the 7th British Dragoon Guards, an attack was made in the early hours of the 21st. Colonel Lempriere of the Dragoon Guards was killed, and the attack failed. It was renewed in the early hours of the morning, but it again failed to dislodge the Germans from the captured trenches.

December 21 dawned upon a situation which was not particularly rosy from a British point of view. It is true that Givenchy had been recovered, but a considerable stretch of trenches were still in the hands of the Germans, their artillery was exceedingly masterful, and the British line was weakened by heavy losses and indented in several places. The one bright spot was the advance of the First Division of Haig’s Corps, who had come up in the night-time. The three brigades of this Division were at once thrown into the fight, the first being sent to Givenchy, the second given as a support to the Meerut Division, and the third directed upon the trenches which had been evacuated the day before by the Sirhind Brigade. All of these brigades won their way forward, and by the morning of the 22nd much of the ground which had been taken by the Germans was reoccupied by the British. The 1st Brigade, led by the Cameron Highlanders, had made good all the ground between Givenchy and the canal. Meanwhile the 3rd Brigade had re-established the Festubert position, where the 2nd Welsh and 1st South Wales Borderers had won their way into the lost trenches of the Ghurkas. This was not done without very stark fighting, in which of all the regiments engaged none suffered so heavily as the 2nd Munsters (now attached to the 3rd Brigade). This regiment, only just built up again after its practical extermination at Étreux in August, made a grand advance and fought without cessation for nearly forty-eight hours. Their losses were dreadful, including their gallant Colonel Bent, both Majors Day and Thomson, five other officers, and several hundreds of the rank and file. So far forward did they get that it was with great difficulty that the survivors, through the exertions of Major Ryan, were got back into a place of safety. It was the second of three occasions upon which this gallant Celtic battalion gave itself for King and Country. Let this soften the asperity of politics if unhappily we must come back to them after the war.

Meanwhile the lines upon the flank of the Seaforths which had been lost by the Dehra-Dun Brigade were carried by the 2nd Brigade (Westmacott), the 1st North Lancashire and 1st Northamptons leading the attack with the 2nd Rifles in support. Though driven back by a violent counter-attack in which both leading regiments, and especially the Lancashire men, lost heavily, the Brigade came again, and ended by making good the gap in the line. Thus the situation on the morning of the 22nd looked very much better than upon the day before. On this morning, as so many of the 1st Corps were in the advanced line, Sir Douglas Haig took over the command from Sir James Willcocks. The line had been to some extent re-established and the firing died away, but there were some trenches which were not retaken till a later date.

Such was the scrambling and unsatisfactory fight of Givenchy, a violent interlude in the drab records of trench warfare. It began with a considerable inroad of Germans into our territory and heavy losses of our Indian Contingent. It ended by a general return of the Germans to their former lines, and the resumption by the veteran troops of the First Division of the main positions which we had lost. Neither side had gained any ground of material value, but the balance of profit in captures was upon the side of the Germans, who may fairly claim that the action was a minor success for their arms, since they assert that they captured some hundreds of prisoners and several machine-guns. The Anglo-Indian Corps had 2600 casualties, and the First Corps 1400, or 4000 in all. The Indian troops were now withdrawn for a rest, which they had well earned by their long and difficult service in the trenches. To stand day after day up to his knees in ice-cold water is no light ordeal for a European, but it is difficult to imagine all that it must have been to a Southern Asiatic. The First Corps took over the La Bassée lines.

About the same date as the Battle of Givenchy there was some fighting farther north at Rouge Banc, where the Fourth Corps was engaged and some German trenches were taken. The chief losses in this affair fell upon those war-worn units, the 2nd Scots Guards and 2nd Borderers of the 20th Brigade. Henceforward peace reigned along the lines for several weeks — indeed Christmas brought about something like fraternisation between British and Germans, who found a sudden and extraordinary link in that ancient tree worship, long anterior to Christianity, which Saxon tribes had practised in the depths of Germanic forests and still commemorated by their candle-lit firs. For a single day the opposing forces mingled in friendly conversation and even in games. It was an amazing spectacle, and must arouse bitter thoughts concerning those high-born conspirators against the peace of the world, who in their mad ambition had hounded such men on to take each other by the throat rather than by the hand. For a day there was comradeship. But the case had been referred to the God of Battles, and the doom had not yet been spoken. It must go to the end. On the morning of the 26th dark figures vanished reluctantly into the earth, and the rifles cracked once more. It remains one human episode amid all the atrocities which have stained the memory of the war.

So ended 1914, the year of resistance. During it the Western Allies had been grievously oppressed by their well-prepared enemy. They had been overweighted by numbers and even more so by munitions. For a space it had seemed as if the odds were too much for them. Then with a splendid rally they had pushed the enemy back. But his reserves had come up and had proved to be as superior as his first line had been. But even so he had reached his limit. He could get no further. The danger hour was past. There was now coming the long, anxious year of equilibrium, the narrative of which will be given in the succeeding volume of 1915. Finally will come the year of restoration which will at least begin, though it will not finish, the victory of the champions of freedom.

THE END

VOLUME II.

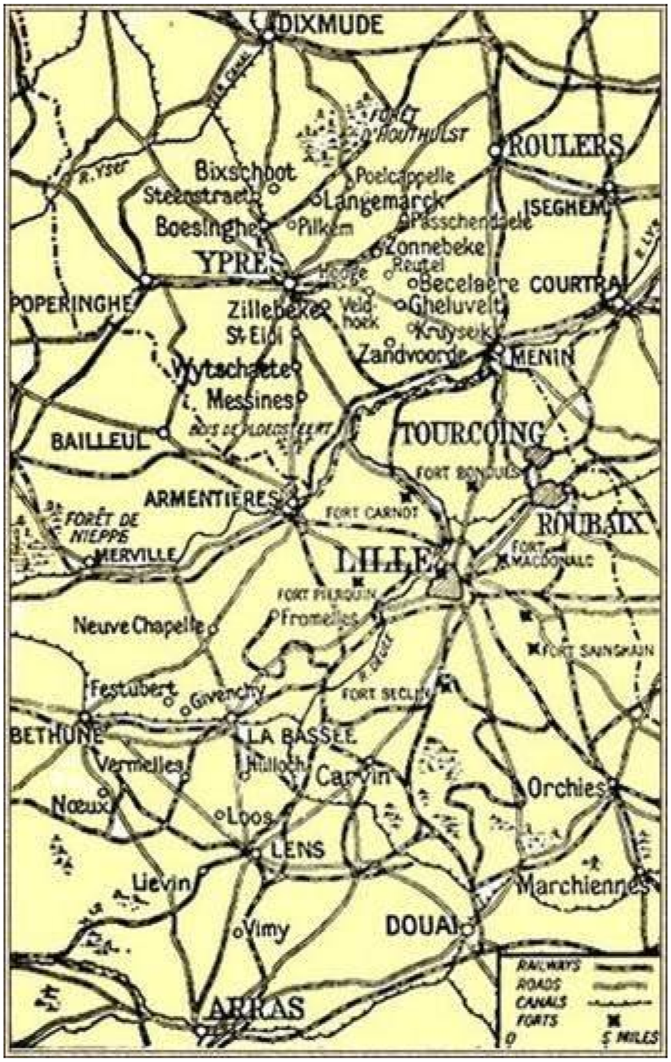
DIXMUDE
FORÊT D'HOUTHULST
ROULERS
R. Yser
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Poelcappelle
Steenstraet
Langemarck
ISEGHEM
Boesinghe
Pilkem
Passchendaele
Zonnebeke
YPRES
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Reutel
POPERINGHE
Becelaere
COURTRAI
Zillebeke
Veldhoek
Gheluvelt
St Eloi
Kruyseik
Zandvoorde
MENIN
Wytschaete
Messines
BAILLEUL
TOURCOING
FORT BONDUES
ARMENTIERES
FORT CARNOT
ROUBAIX
FORÊT DE NIEPPE
MERVILLE
LILLE
FORT MACDONALD
FORT PILRQUIN
Fromelles
Neuve Chapelle
FORT SAINGHAIN
Festubert
Givenchy
FORT SECLIN
BETHUNE
LA BASSÉE
Vermelles
Hulloch
Carvin
Orchies
Noeux
Loos
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5 MILES

The British Front in 1915

PREFACE

IN the previous volume of this work, which dealt with the doings of the British Army in France and Flanders during the year 1914, I ventured to claim that a great deal of it was not only accurate but that it was very precisely correct in its detail. This claim has been made good, for although many military critics and many distinguished soldiers have read it there has been no instance up to date of any serious correction. Emboldened by this I am now putting forward an account of the doings of 1915, which will be equally detailed and, as I hope, equally accurate. In the late autumn a third volume will carry the story up to the end of 1916, covering the series of battles upon the Somme.

The three years of war may be roughly divided into the year of defence, the year of equilibrium, and the year of attack. This volume concerns itself with the second, which in its very nature must be less dramatic than the first or third. None the less it contains some of the most moving scenes of the great world tragedy, and especially the second Battle of Ypres and the great Battle of Loos, two desperate conflicts the details of which have not, so far as I know, been given up to now to the public.

Now, as before, I must plead guilty to many faults of omission, which often involve some injustice, since an author is naturally tempted to enlarge upon what he knows at the expense of that about which he is less well informed. These faults may be remedied with time, but in the meantime I can only claim indulgence for the obvious difficulty of my task. With the fullest possible information at his disposal, I do not envy the task of the chronicler who has to strike a just balance amid the claims of some fifty divisions.

Arthur Conan Doyle, Windlesham, Crowborough, April 1917.

I. THE OPENING MONTHS OF 1915

Conflict of the 1st Brigade at Cuinchy, and of the 3rd Brigade at Givenchy — Heavy losses of the Guards — Michael O'Leary, V.C. — Relief of French Divisions by the Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth — British Pressure on the Fifth Corps — Force subdivided into two armies — Disaster to 16th Lancers — The dearth of munitions

THE weather after the new year was atrocious, heavy CHAPTER rain, frost, and gales of wind succeeding each other L with hardly a break. The ground was so sodden that The . all movements of troops became impossible, and the months trench work was more difficult than ever. The British, with their steadily increasing numbers, were now able to take over some of the trenches of the French and to extend their general line. This trench work came particularly hard upon the men who were new to the work and often fresh from the tropics. A great number of the soldiers contracted frost-bite and other ailments. The trenches were very wet, and the discomfort was extreme. There had been some thousands of casualties in the Fifth Corps from this cause before it can be said to have been in action. On the other hand, the medical service, which was extraordinarily efficient, did everything possible to preserve the health of the men. Wooden troughs were provided as a stance for them in the trenches, and vats heated to warm them when they emerged. Considering that typhoid fever was common among the civilian residents the health of the troops remained remarkably good, thanks to the general adoption of inoculation, a practice denounced by a handful of fanatics at home, but of supreme importance at the front, where the lesson of old wars, that disease was more deadly than the bullet, ceased to hold good.

On January 25 the Germans again became aggressive. If their spy system is as good as is claimed, they must by this time have known that all talk of bluff in connection with the new British armies was mere self-deception, and that if ever they were to attempt anything with a hope of success, it must be speedily before the line had thickened. As usual there was a heavy bombardment, and then a determined infantry advance this time to the immediate south of the Bethune Canal, where there was a salient held by the 1st Infantry Brigade with the French upon their right. The line was thinly held at the time by a half- battalion 1st Scots Guards and a half-battalion 1st Coldstream, a thousand men in all. One trench of the Scots

Guards was blown up by a mine and the German infantry rushed it, killing, wounding, or taking every man of the 130 defenders. Three officers were hit, and Major Morrison-Bell, a member of parliament, was taken after being buried in the debris of the explosion. The remainder of the front line, after severe losses both in casualties and in prisoners, fell back from the salient and established themselves with the rest of their respective battalions on a straight line of defence, one flank on the canal, the other on the main Bethune-La Bassée high road. A small redoubt or keep had been established here, which became the centre of the defence.

Whilst the advance of the enemy was arrested at this line, preparations were made for a strong counter-attack. An attempt had been made by the enemy with their heavy guns to knock down the lock gates of the canal and to flood the ground in the rear of the position. This, however, was unsuccessful, and the counter-attack dashed to the front. The advancing troops consisted of the 1st Black Watch, part of the 1st Camerons, and the 2nd Rifles from the reserve. The London Scottish supported the movement. The enemy had flooded past the keep, which remained as a British island in a German lake. They were driven back with difficulty, the Black Watch advancing through mud up to their knees and losing very heavily from a cross fire. Two companies were practically destroyed. Finally, by an advance of the Rifles and 2nd Sussex after dark the Germans were ousted from all positions in advance of the keep, and this line between the canal and the road was held once more by the British. The night fell, and after dark the 1st Brigade, having suffered severely, was withdrawn, and the 2nd Brigade remained in occupation with the French upon their right. This was the action of Cuinchy falling upon the 1st Brigade, supported by part of the 2nd.

Whilst this long-drawn fight of January 25 had been going on to the south of the canal, there had been a vigorous German advance to the north of it, over the old ground which centres on Givenchy. The German attack, which came on in six lines, fell principally upon the 1st Gloucesters, who held the front trench. Captain Richmond, who commanded the advanced posts, had observed at dawn that the German wire had been disturbed and was on the alert. Large numbers advanced, but were brought to a standstill about forty yards from the position. These were nearly all shot down. Some of the stormers broke through upon the left of the Gloucesters, and for a time the battalion had the enemy upon their flank and even in their rear, but they showed great steadiness and fine fire discipline. A charge was made presently upon the flank by the 2nd Welsh aided by a handful of the Black Watch under Lieutenant Green, who were there as a working party, but found more congenial work awaiting them. Lieutenant Bush of the Gloucesters with his machine-guns did particularly fine work. This attack was organised by Captain Kees, aided by Major MacNaughton, who was in the village as an artillery observer. The upshot was that the Germans on the flank were all killed, wounded, or taken. A remarkable individual exploit was performed by Lieutenant James and Corporal Thomas of the Welsh, who took a trench with 40 prisoners. A series of attacks to the north- east of the village were also repulsed, the South Wales Borderers doing some splendid work.

Thus the results of the day’s fighting was that on the north the British gained a minor success, beating off all attacks, while to the south the Germans could claim an advantage, having gained some ground. The losses on both sides were considerable, those of the British being principally among Scots Guards, Coldstream and Black Watch to the south, and Welsh to the north. The action was barren of practical results.

There were some days of quiet, and then upon January 29 the Fourteenth German Corps buzzed out once more along the classic canal. This time they made for the keep, which has already been mentioned, and endeavoured to storm it with the aid of axes and scaling ladders. Solid Sussex was inside the keep, however, and ladders and stormers were hurled to the ground, while bombs were thrown on to the heads of the attackers. The Northamptons to the south were driven out for an instant, but came back with a rush and drove off their assailants. The skirmish cost the British few casualties, but the enemy lost heavily, leaving two hundred of his dead behind him. “Having arranged a code signal we got the first shell from the 40th R.F.A. twelve seconds after asking for it.” So much for the co-operation between our guns and our infantry.

On February 1 the Guards who had suffered in the first fight at Cuinchy got back a little of what was owing to them. The action began by a small post of the 2nd Coldstream of the 4th Brigade being driven back. An endeavour was made to reinstate it in the early morning, but it was not successful. After daylight there was a proper artillery preparation, followed by an assault by a storming party of Coldstream and Irish Guards, led by Captain Leigh Bennett and Lieutenant Graham. The lost ground and a

German trench beyond it were captured with 32 prisoners and 2 machine-guns. It was in this action that Michael O’Leary, the gallant Irish Guardsman, shot or bayoneted eight Germans and cleared a trench single-handed, one of the most remarkable individual feats of the War, for which a Victoria Cross was awarded. Again the fight fell upon the 4th Brigade, where Lord Cavan was gaining something of the reputation of his brother peer, Lord “Salamander” Cutts, in the days of Marlborough. On February 6 he again made a dashing attack with a party of the 3rd Coldstream and Irish, in which the Germans were driven out of the Brickfield position. The sappers under Major Fowkes rapidly made good the ground that the infantry had won, and it remained permanently with the British.

Another long lull followed this outburst of activity in the region of the La Bassée Canal, and the troops sank back once more into their muddy ditches, where, under the constant menace of the sniper, the bomb and the shell, they passed the weary weeks with a patience which was as remarkable as their valour. The British Army was still gradually relieving the French troops, who had previously relieved them. Thus in the north the newly-arrived Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth Divisions occupied several miles which had been held on the Ypres salient by General D’Urbal’s men. Unfortunately, these two divisions, largely composed of men who had come straight from the tropics, ran into a peculiarly trying season of frost and rain, which for a time inflicted great hardship and loss upon them. To add to their trials, the trenches at the time they took them over were not only in a very bad state of repair, but had actually been mined by the Germans, and these mines were exploded shortly after the transfer, to the loss of the new occupants. The pressure of the enemy was incessant and severe in this part of the line, so that the losses of the Fifth Corps were for some weeks considerably greater than those of all the rest of the line put together. Two of the veteran brigades of the Second Corps, the 9th Fusilier Brigade (Douglas Smith) and the 13th (Wanless O’Gowan), were sent north to support their comrades, with the result that this sector was once again firmly held. Any temporary failure was in no way due to a weakness of the Fifth Army Corps, who were months to prove their mettle in many a future fight, but came from the fact, no doubt unavoidable but none the less unfortunate, that these troops, before they had gained any experience, were placed in the very worst trenches of the whole British line. “The trenches (so called) scarcely existed,” said one who went through this trying experience, “and the ruts which were honoured with the name were liquid. We crouched in this morass of water and mud, living, dying, wounded and dead together for 48 hours at a stretch.” Add to this that the weather was bitterly cold with incessant rain, and more miserable conditions could hardly be imagined. In places the trenches of the enemy were not more than twenty yards off, and the shower of bombs was incessant.

The British Army had now attained a size when it was no longer proper that a corps should be its highest unit. From this time onwards the corps were themselves distributed into different armies. At present, two of these armies were organised. The First, under General Sir Douglas Haig, comprised the First Corps, the Fourth Corps (Rawlinson), and the Indian Corps. The Second Army contained the Second Corps (Ferguson), the Third Corps (Pulteney), and the Fifth Corps (Plumer), all under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. The new formations as they came out were either fitted into these or formed part of a third army. Most of the brigades were strengthened by the addition of one, and often of two territorial battalions. Each army consisted roughly at this time of 120,000 men. The Second Army was in charge of the line to the north, and the First to the south.

On February 14 Snow’s Twenty-seventh Division, which had been somewhat hustled by the Germans in the Ypres section, made a strong counter-attack under the cover of darkness, and won back four trenches near St. Eloi from which they had been driven by a German rush. This dashing advance was carried out by the 82nd Brigade (Longley’s), and the particular battalions which were most closely engaged were the 2nd Cornwalls, the 1st Royal Irish, and 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers. They were supported by the 80th Brigade (Fortescue’s). The losses amounted to 300 killed and wounded. The Germans lost as many and a few prisoners were taken. The affair was of no great consequence in itself, but it marked a turn in the affairs of Plumer’s Army Corps, whose experience up to now had been depressing. The enemy, however, was still aggressive and enterprising in this part of the line. Upon the 20th they ran a mine under a trench occupied by the 16th Lancers, and the explosion produced most serious effects. 5 officers killed, 3 wounded, and 60 men *hors de combat* were the fruits of this unfortunate incident, which pushed our trenches back for 40 yards on a front of 150 yards. The Germans had followed up the explosion by an infantry attack, which was met and held by the remains of the 16th, aided by a handful of French infantry and a squadron of the 11th Hussars. On this same day an accidental shot killed General Gough, chief staff officer of the First Corps, one of the most experienced and valuable leaders of the Army.

On the 21st, the Twenty-eighth Division near Ypres had a good deal of hard fighting, losing trenches and winning them, but coming out at the finish rather the loser on balance. The losses of the day were 250 killed and wounded, the greatest sufferers being months the Royal Lancasters. Somewhat south of Ypres, at Zwarteleen, the 1st West Kents were exposed to a shower of projectiles from the deadly *Minenwerfer*, which are more of the nature of aerial torpedoes than ordinary bombs. Their losses under this trying ordeal were 3 officers and 19 men killed, 1 officer and 18 men wounded. There was a lull after this in the trench fighting for some little time, which was broken upon February 28 by a very dashing little attack of the Princess Patricia’s Canadian regiment, which as one of the units of the 80th Brigade had been the first Canadian Battalion to reach the front. Upon this occasion, led by Lieutenants Crabb and Papineau, they rushed a trench in their front, killed eleven of its occupants, drove off the remainder, and levelled it so that it should be untenable. Their losses in this exploit were very small. During this period of the trench warfare it may be said generally that the tendency was for the Germans to encroach upon British ground in the Ypres section and for the British to take theirs in the region of La Bassée.

With the opening of the warmer weather great preparations had been made by Great Britain for carrying on the land campaign, and these now began to bear fruit. Apart from the numerous Territorial regiments which had already been incorporated with regular brigades some fifty battalions in all there now appeared several divisions entirely composed of Territorials. The 46th North Midland and 48th South Midland Divisions were the first to form independent units, but they were soon followed by others. It had been insufficiently grasped that the supply of munitions was as important as that of men, and that the months expenditure of shell was something so enormous in modern warfare that the greedy guns, large and small, could keep a great army of workmen employed in satisfying their immoderate demands. The output of shells and cartridges in the month of March was, it is true, eighteen times greater than in September, and 3000 separate firms were directly or indirectly employed in war production; but operations were hampered by the needs of batteries which could consume in a day what the workshops could at that time hardly produce in a month. Among the other activities of Great Britain at this period was the great strengthening of her heavy artillery, in which for many months her well- prepared enemy had so vast an advantage. Huge engines lurked in the hearts of groves and behind hillocks at the back of the British lines, and the cheery news went round that even the heaviest bully that ever came out of Essen would find something of its own weight stripped and ready for the fray.

There was still considerable activity in the St. Eloi sector south-east of Ypres, where the German attacks were all, as it proved, the preliminaries of a strong advance. So persistent were they that Plumer’s men were constantly striving for elbow room. On March 2 part of Fortescue’s 80th Brigade, under Major Widdington of the 4th Rifles, endeavoured to push back the pressure in this region, and carried the nearest trench, but were driven out again by the German bombs. The losses were about 200, of which 47 fell upon the 3rd, and 110 upon the 4th Rifles. In these operations a very great strain came upon the Engineers, who were continually in front of the trenches at night, fixing the wire entanglements and doing other dangerous work under the very rifles of the Germans. It is pleasing to record that in this most hazardous task the Territorial sappers showed that they were worthy comrades of the Regulars. Major Gardner, Commander of the North Midland Field Company, and many officers and men died in the performance of this dangerous duty.

II. NEUVE CHAPELLE AND HILL 60

The opening of the spring campaign — Surprise of Neuve Chapelle — The new artillery — Gallant advance and terrible losses — The Indians in Neuve Chapelle — A sterile victory — The night action of St. Eloi — Hill 60 — The monstrous mine — The veteran 13th Brigade — A bloody battle — London Territorials on the Hill — A contest of endurance — The first signs of poison

WE now come to the close of the long period of petty and desultory warfare, which is only relieved from Neuve insignificance by the fact that the cumulative result during the winter was a loss to the Army of not less than twenty thousand men. With the breaking of the spring and the drying of the water-soaked meadows of Flanders, an era of larger and more ambitious operations had set in, involving, it is true, little change of position, but far stronger forces on the side of the British. The first hammer-blow of Sir John French was directed, upon March 10, against that village of Neuve Chapelle which had, as already described, changed hands several times, and eventually remained with the Germans during the hard fighting of Smith-Dorrien’s Corps in the last week of October. The British trenches had been drawn a few hundred yards to the west of the village, and there had been no change during the last four months. Behind the village was the Aubers Ridge, and behind that again the whole great plain of Lille and Turcoing. This was the spot upon which the British General had determined to try the effects of his new artillery.

His secret was remarkably well kept. Few British and and no Germans knew where the blow was to fall. The boasted spy system was completely at fault. British The success of Sir John in keeping his secret was surprisingly largely dependent upon the fact that above the British lines an air space had been cleared into which no German airman could enter save at his own very great peril. No great movement of troops was needed since Haig’s army lay opposite to the point to be attacked, and it was to two of his corps that the main assault was assigned. On the other hand, there was a considerable concentration of guns, which were arranged, over three hundred in number, in such a position that their fire could converge from various directions upon the area of the German defences.

It was planned that Smith-Dorrien, along the whole line held by the Second Army to the north, should demonstrate with sufficient energy to hold the Germans from reinforcing their comrades. To the south of the point of attack, the First Army Corps in the Givenchy neighbourhood had also received instructions to make a strong demonstration. Thus the Germans of Neuve Chapelle, who were believed to number only a few battalions, were isolated on either side. It was advisable also to hinder their reinforcements coming from the reserves in the northern towns behind the fighting lines. With this object, instructions were given to the British airmen at any personal risk to attack all the railway points along which the trains could come. This was duly done, and the junctions of Menin, Courtrai, Don, and Douai attacked, Captain Carmichael and other airmen bravely descending within a hundred feet of their mark.

The troops chosen for the assault were Rawlinson's Fourth Army Corps upon the left and the Indian Corps upon the right, upon a front of half a mile, which as the operation developed broadened to three thousand yards. The object was not the mere occupation of the village, but an advance to the farthest point attainable. The Second Division of Cavalry was held in reserve, to be used in case the German line should be penetrated. All during the hours of the night the troops in single file were brought up to the advanced trenches, which in many cases were less than a hundred yards from the enemy. Before daylight they were crammed with men waiting most eagerly for the signal to advance. Short ladders had been distributed, so that the stormers could swarm swiftly out of the deep trenches.

The obstacle in front of the Army was a most serious one. The barbed wire entanglements were on an immense scale, the trenches were bristling with machine-guns, and the village in the rear contained several large outlying houses with walls and orchards, each of which had been converted into a fortress. On the other hand, the defenders had received no warning, and therefore no reinforcement, so that the attackers were far the more numerous. It is said that a German officer's attention was called to the stir in the opposing trenches, and that he was actually at the telephone reporting his misgivings to headquarters when the storm broke loose.

It was at half-past seven that the first gun boomed from the rear of the British position. Within a few minutes three hundred were hard at work, the gunners striving desperately to pour in the greatest possible number of shells in the shortest period of time. It had been supposed that some of the very heavy guns could get in forty rounds in the time, but they actually fired nearly a hundred, and at the end of it the huge garrison gunners were lying panting like spent hounds round their pieces. From the 18-pounder of the field- gun to the huge 1400-pound projectile from the new monsters in the rear, a shower of every sort and size of missile poured down upon the Germans, many of whom were absolutely bereft of their senses by the sudden and horrible experience. Trenches, machine-guns, and human bodies flew high into the air, while the stakes which supported the barbed wire were uprooted, and the wire itself torn into ribbons and twisted into a thousand fantastic coils with many a gap between. In front of part of the Indian line there was a clean sweep of the impediments. So also to the right of the British line. Only at the left of the line, to the extreme north of the German position, was the fatal wire still quite unbroken and the trenches unapproachable. Meanwhile, so completely was the resistance flattened out by the overpowering weight of fire that the British infantry, with their own shells flowing in a steady stream within a few feet of their heads, were able to line their parapets and stare across at the wonderful smoking and roaring swirl of destruction that faced them. Here and there men sprang upon the parapets waving their rifles and shouting in the hot eagerness of their hearts. “Our bomb-throwers,” says one correspondent, “started cake-walking.” It was but half an hour that they waited, and yet to many it seemed the longest half-hour of their lives. It was an extraordinary revelation of the absolute accuracy of scientific gunfire that the British batteries should dare to shell the German trenches which were only a hundred yards away from their own, and this at a range of five or six thousand yards.

At five minutes past eight the guns ceased as suddenly as they had begun, the shrill whistles of the officers sounded all along the line, and the ardent infantry poured over the long lip of the trenches. The assault upon the left was undertaken by Pinney’s 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Eighth Division. The 25th Brigade of the same division (Lowry-Cole’s) was on the right, and on the right of them again were the Indians. The 25th Brigade was headed by the 2nd Lincolns (left) and the 2nd Berkshires (right), who were ordered to clear the trenches, and then to form a supporting line while their comrades of the 1st Irish Rifles (left) and the 2nd Rifle Brigade (right) passed through their ranks and carried the village beyond. The 1st Londons and 13th London (Kensingtons) were pressing up in support. Colonel McAndrew, of the Lincolns, was mortally hit at the outset, but watched the assault with constant questions as to its progress until he died. It was nothing but good news that he heard, for the work of the brigade went splendidly from the start. It overwhelmed the trenches in an instant, seizing the bewildered survivors, who crouched, yellow with lyddite and shaken by the horror of their situation, in the corners of the earthworks. As the Berkshires rushed down the German trench they met with no resistance at all, save from two gallant German officers, who fought a machine- gun until both were bayoneted.

It was very different, however, with the 23rd Brigade upon the left. Their experience was a terrible one. As they rushed forward, they came upon a broad sheet of partly-broken wire entanglement between themselves and the trenches which had escaped the artillery fire. The obstacle could not be passed, and yet the furious men would not retire, but tore and raged at the edge of the barrier even as their ancestors raged against the scythe-blades of the breach of Badajoz. The 2nd Scottish Rifles and the 2nd Middlesex were the first two regiments, and their losses were ghastly. Of the Scottish Rifles, Colonel Bliss was killed, every officer but one was either killed or wounded, and half the men were on the ground. The battalion found some openings, however, especially B Company (Captain Ferrers), upon their right flank, and in spite of their murderous losses made their way into the German trenches, the bombardiers, under Lieutenant Bibby, doing fine work in clearing them, though half their number were killed. The Middlesex men, after charging through a driving sleet of machine-gun bullets, were completely held up by an unbroken obstacle, and after three gallant and costly attacks, when the old “Diehards” lived up to their historic name, the remains of the regiment were compelled to move to the right and make their way through the gap cleared by the Scottish Rifles. “Rally, boys, and at it again!” they yelled at every repulse. The 2nd Devons and 2nd West Yorkshires were in close support of the first line, but their losses were comparatively small. The bombers of the Devons, under Lieutenant Wright, got round the obstacle and cleared two hundred yards of trench. On account of the impregnable German position upon the left, the right of the brigade was soon three hundred yards in advance and suffered severely from the enfilade fire of rifles and machine-guns, the two flanks being connected up by a line of men facing half left, and making the best of the very imperfect cover.

It should be mentioned that the getting forward of the 23rd Brigade was largely due to the personal intervention of General Pinney, who, about 8:30, hearing of their difficult position, came forward himself across the open and inspected the obstacle. He then called off his men for a breather while he telephoned to the gunners to reopen fire. This cool and practical manoeuvre had the effect of partly smashing the wires. At the same time much depended upon the advance of the 25th Brigade. Having, as stated, occupied the position which faced them, they were able to outflank the section of the German line which was still intact. Their left flank having been turned, the defenders fell back or surrendered, and the remains of the 23rd Brigade were able to get forward into an alignment with their comrades, the Devons and West Yorkshires passing through the thinned ranks in front of them. The whole body then advanced for about a thousand yards.

At this period Major Carter Campbell, who had been wounded in the head, and Second Lieutenant Somervail, from the Special Reserve, were the only officers left with the Scottish Rifles; while the Middlesex were hardly in better case. Of the former battalion only 150 men could be collected after the action. The 24th Brigade was following closely behind the other two, and the 1st Worcesters, 2nd East Lancashires, 1st Sherwood Foresters, and 2nd Northampton were each in turn warmly engaged as they made good the ground that had been won. The East Lancashires materially helped to turn the Germans out of the trenches on the left.

Whilst the British brigades had been making this gallant advance upon the left the Indians had dashed forward with equal fire and zeal upon the right. It was their first real chance of attack upon a large scale, and they rose grandly to the occasion. The Garhwali Brigade attacked upon the left of the Indian line, with the Dehra Duns (Jacob) upon their right, and the Bareillys (Southey) in support, all being of the Meerut Division. The Garhwalis, consisting of men from the mountains of Northern India, advanced with reckless courage, the 39th Regiment upon the left, the 3rd Gurkhas in the centre, the 2nd Leicesters upon the right, while the 8th Gurkhas, together with the 3rd London Territorials and the second battalion of the Garhwalis, were in support. Part of the front was still covered with wire, and the Garhwalis were held up for a time, but the Leicesters, on their right, smashed a way through all obstacles. Their Indian comrades endured the loss of 20 officers and 350 men, but nonetheless they persevered, finally swerving to the right and finding a gap which brought them through. The Gurkhas, however, had passed them, the agile little men slipping under, over, or through the tangled wire in a wonderful fashion. The 3rd Londons closely followed the Leicesters, and were heavily engaged for some hours in forcing a stronghold on the right flank, held by 70 Germans with machine-guns. They lost 2 officers, Captain Pulman and Lieutenant Mathieson, and 50 men of A Company, but stuck to their task, and eventually, with the help of a gun overcame the resistance, taking 50 prisoners. The battalion lost 200 men and did very fine work.

Gradually the Territorials were winning their place and in the Army. “They can’t call us Saturday night soldiers now,” said a dying lad of the 3rd Londons; and he spoke for the whole force who have endured perverse criticism for so long.

The moment that the infantry advance upon the trenches had begun, the British guns were turned upon the village itself. Supported by their fire, as already described, the victorious Indians from the south and the 25th Brigade from the west rushed into the streets and took possession of the ruins which flanked them, advancing with an ardour which brought them occasionally into the zone of fire from their own guns. By twelve o’clock the whole position, trenches, village, and detached houses, had been carried, while the artillery had lengthened its range and rained shrapnel upon the ground over which reinforcements must advance. The Rifles of the 25th Brigade and the 3rd Gurkhas of the Indians were the first troops in Neuve Chapelle.

It is not to be imagined that the powerful guns of the enemy had acquiesced tamely in these rapid developments. On the contrary, they had kept up a fire which was only second to that of the British in volume, but inferior in effect, since the latter had registered upon such fixed marks as the trenches and the village, while the others had but the ever-changing line of an open order attack. How dense was the fall of the German shells may be reckoned from the fact that the telephone lines by which the observers in the firing line controlled the gunners some miles behind them were continually severed, although they had been laid down in duplicate, and often in triplicate. There were heavy losses among the stormers, but they were cheerfully endured as part of the price of victory. The jovial exultation of the wounded as they were carried or led to the dressing stations was one of the recollections which stood out clearest amid the confused impressions which a modern battle leaves upon the half-stunned mind of the spectator.

At twelve o’clock the position had been carried, and yet it was not possible to renew the advance before three. These few hours were consumed in rearranging the units, which had been greatly mixed up during the advance, in getting back into position the left wing of the 25th Brigade, which had been deflected by the necessity of relieving the 23rd Brigade, and in bringing up reserves to take the place of regiments which had endured very heavy losses. Meanwhile the enemy seemed to have been completely stunned by the blow which had so suddenly fallen upon him. The fire from his lines had died down, and British brigades on the right, forming up for the renewed advance, were able to do so unmolested in the open, amid the horrible chaos of pits, mounds, wire tangles, splintered woodwork, and shattered bodies which marked where the steel cyclone had passed. The left was still under very heavy fire.

At half-past three the word was given, and again The the eager khaki fringe pushed swiftly to the front, On the extreme left of the line of attack Watts’s 21st Brigade pushed onwards with fierce impetuosity. This attack was an extension to the left of the original attack. The 21st was the only brigade of the Seventh Division to be employed that day. There is a hamlet to the north- east of Neuve Chapelle called Moulin-du-Piètre, and this was the immediate objective of the attack. Several hundreds of yards were gained before the advance was held up by a severe fire from the houses, and by the discovery of a fresh, undamaged line of German trenches opposite to the right of the 21st Brigade. Here the infantry was held, and did no more than keep their ground until evening. Their comrades of the Eighth Division upon their right had also advanced, the 24th Brigade (Carter’s) taking the place of the decimated 23rd in the front line; but they also came to a standstill under the fire of German machine-guns, which were directed from the bridge crossing the stream of the little Des Layes River in front of them.

The Bois du Biez is an important wood on the south-east of Neuve Chapelle, and the Indians, after their successful assault, directed their renewed advance upon this objective. The Garhwali Brigade, which had helped to carry the village, was now held back, and the Dehra Dun Brigade of 1st and 4th Seaforths, Jats, and Gurkhas, supported by the Jullundur Brigade from the Lahore Division, moved forward to carry the wood. They gained a considerable stretch of ground by a magnificent charge over the open, but were held up along the line of the river as their European comrades had been to the north. More than once the gallant Indians cleared the wood, but could not permanently hold it. The German post at the bridge was able to enfilade the line, and our artillery was unable to drive it out. Three regiments of the 1st Brigade were brought up to Richebourg in support of the attack, but darkness came on before the preparations were complete. The troops slept upon the ground which they had won, ready and eager for the renewal of the battle in the morning. The losses had been heavy during the day, falling with undue severity upon a few particular battalions; but the soldiers were of good heart, for continual strings of German prisoners, numbering nine hundred in all, had been led through their lines, and they had but to look around them to assure themselves of the loss which they had inflicted upon the enemy. In that long winter struggle a few yards to west or east had been a matter for which a man might gladly lay down his life, so that now, when more than a thousand yards had been gained by a single forward spring, there was no desire to flinch from the grievous cost.

It has already been stated that the British had made demonstrations to right and to left in order to hold the enemy in their trenches. In the case of Smith-Dorrien's Second Army, a bombardment along the line was sufficient for the purpose. To the south, however, at Givenchy, the First Corps made an attack upon the trenches two hundred yards in front of them, which had no success, as the wire had been uncut. This attack was carried out by Fanshawe's 6th Infantry Brigade, and if it failed the failure was not due to want of intrepid leading by the officers and desperate courage of the men. The 1st King's (Liverpool) suffered very heavily in front of the impassable wire. "Our boys took their bayonets and hacked away. It was impossible to break through." Colonel Carter was wounded, but continued to lead his men. Feveran and Suatt, who led the assault, were respectively killed and wounded. The officers were nearly all hit, down to the young Subaltern Webb, who kept shouting "Come on, the King's!" until he could shout no more. A hundred were killed and 119 wounded in the ranks. Both the 2nd South Staffords and the 1st King's Royal Rifles joined in this brave, but ineffectual, attack, and lost very heavily. The total loss of the brigade was between six and seven hundred, but at least it had prevented this section of the line from reinforcing Neuve Chapelle. All along the line the night was spent in making good the ground that had been won.

The morning of the 11th broke with thick mist, a condition which continued during the whole of the day. Both the use of the aircraft and the direction of the artillery were negatived by the state of the weather — a grievous piece of ill-fortune, as it put a stop to any serious advance during the day, since it would have been a desperate business to march infantry against a difficult front without any artillery preparation. In this way the Germans gained a precious respite during which they might reinforce their line and prepare for a further attack. They essayed a counter-attack from the Bois du Biez in the morning, but it was easily repulsed by the Indians. Their shell- fire, however, was very murderous. The British infantry still faced Moulin-du- Piètre in the north and the Bois du Biez in the south, but could make no progress without support, while they lost heavily from the German artillery. The Indians were still at the south of the line, the 24th Brigade in the middle and the 21st in the north. Farther north still, at a point just south of Armentières, a useful little advance was made, for late at night, or early in the morning of the 12th, the 17th Infantry Brigade (Harper’s) had made a swift dash at the village of 1’Epinette, calculating, no doubt, that some of its defenders had been drafted south to strengthen the stricken line. The place was carried by storm at the small cost of five officers and thirty men, and the line carried forward at this point to a depth of three hundred yards over a front of half a mile. A counter-attack upon the 13th was driven off with loss.

So far as the main operation was concerned, the Third day. weather upon the 12th was hardly more favourable than upon the 11th. The veil of mist still intervened between the heavy artillery and its target. Three aeroplanes were lost in the determined efforts of the airmen to get close observation of the position. It also interfered with the accuracy of the German fire, which was poured upon the area held by the British troops, but inflicted small damage upon them. The day began by an attack in which the Germans got possession of a trench held by the 1st Sherwood Foresters. As the mist rose the flank company of the 2nd West Yorks perceived these unwelcome neighbours and, under the lead of Captain Harrington, turned them out again. Both the Indians on the right and the Seventh Division on the left lost a number of men during the morning in endeavouring, with poor success, to drive the German garrisons out of the various farmhouses, which were impregnable to anything but artillery. The gallant 20th Brigade, which had done such great work at Ypres in October, came into action this day and stormed up to the strongholds of the Moulin-du-Piètre. One of them, with three hundred Germans inside, was carried by the 2nd Borders, the defenders being made prisoners. All the battalions of the brigade the 2nd Scots Guards, the 1st Grenadiers, the 2nd Gordons, and their Territorial comrades, the 6th Gordons lost heavily in this most desperate of all forms of fighting. Colonel McLean of the latter regiment died at the head of his men. “Go about your duty,” was his last speech to those who tended him. The Grenadiers fought like heroes, and one of them, Corporal Fuller, performed the extraordinary feat of heading off fifty Germans by fleetness of foot, and single-handed compelling the surrender of all of them. At the other end of the line, the 25th Brigade, led by the Rifle Brigade, also made desperate efforts to get on, but were brought to a standstill by the trenches and machine-guns in the houses. The losses of the British upon this day were heavy, but they were a small matter compared to those of the Germans, who made several counter-attacks in close formation from dawn onwards in the vain hope of recovering the ground that had been lost. It is doubtful if in the whole war greater slaughter has been inflicted in a shorter time and in so confined a space as in the case of some of these advances, where whole dense bodies of infantry were caught in the converging fire of machine-guns and rifles. In front of the 1st Worcesters, of the 24th Brigade, alone more than a thousand dead were counted. From the ridge of Aubers, half a mile to the eastward, down to the front of the Indian and British line, the whole sloping countryside was mottled grey with the bodies of the fallen. All that the British had suffered in front of the barbed wire upon the 10th was repaid with heavy interest during the counter-attacks of the 12th. Gradually they faded away and were renewed no more. For the first time in the war the Germans finally abandoned a position that they had lost, and made no further attempt to retake it. The Battle of Neuve Chapelle was at an end, and the British, though their accomplishment fell far short of their hopes, had none the less made a permanent advance of a thousand yards along a front of three thousand, and obtained a valuable position for their operations in the future. The sappers were busy all evening in wiring and sand-bagging the ground gained, while the medical organisation, which was strained to the uttermost, did its work with a bravery and a technical efficiency which could not be surpassed.

Upon the last day of the fighting some 700 more Result of prisoners had been taken, bringing the total number to 30 officers and 1650 men. The original defenders had been men of the Seventh German Corps, raised from Karlsruhe in Westphalia; but the reinforcements which suffered so heavily were either Saxons or Bavarians. The losses of the Germans were estimated, and possibly overestimated, at 18,000 men. The British losses were very heavy, consisting of 562 officers and 12,239 men. Some 1800 of these were returned as “Missing,” but these were the men who fell in the advanced attack upon ground which was not retained. Only the wounded fell into the enemy’s hands. The Fourth Corps lost 7500 men, and the Indians about 4000.

Of the six brigades of the Fourth Corps, all suffered about equally, except the 22nd, which was not so hard hit as the others. The remaining brigades lost over 25 per cent of their numbers, but nothing of their efficiency and zeal, as they were very soon to show in the later engagements. When one remembers that Julius Caesar describes an action as a severe one upon the ground that every tenth man was wounded, it may be conjectured that he would have welcomed a legion of Scottish Rifles or Sherwood Foresters.

Certainly no British soldier was likely to live long and enough to have his teeth worn down by the ration bread, as was the case with the Tenth Legion. The two units named may have suffered most, but the 2nd Lincolns, 2nd Berkshires, 2nd Borders, 2nd Scots Fusiliers, 1st Irish Rifles, 2nd Rifle Brigade, the two battalions of Gordons, and the 1st Worcesters were all badly cut up. Of the five commanding officers of the 20th Brigade, Uniacke of the 2nd Gordons, McLean of the 5th Gordons, and Fisher Rowe of the Grenadiers were killed, while Paynter of the 2nd Scots Guards was wounded. The only survivor, the Colonel of the Borders, was shot a few days later. It was said at the time of the African War that the British colonels had led their men up to and through the gates of Death. The words were still true. Of the brave Indian Corps, the 1st Seaforths, 2nd Leicesters, 39th Garhwalis, with the 3rd and 4th Gurkhas, were the chief sufferers. The 1st Londons, 3rd Londons, and 13th (Kensingtons) had also shown that they could stand punishment with the best.

So ended the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, a fierce and murderous encounter in which every weapon of modern warfare the giant howitzer, the bomb, and the machine-gun was used to the full, and where the reward of the victor was a slice of ground no larger than a moderate farm. And yet the moral prevails over the material, and the fact that a Prussian line, built up with four months of labour, could be rushed in a couple of hours, and that by no exertion could a German set foot upon it again, was a hopeful first lesson in the spring campaign.

On March 12 an attack was made upon the enemy’s trenches south-west of the village of Wytschaete — the region where, on November 1, the Bavarians had forced back the lines of our cavalry. The advance was delayed by the mist, and eventually was ordered for four in the afternoon. It was carried out by the 1st Wilts and the 3rd Worcesters, of the 7th Brigade (Ballard), advancing for two hundred yards up a considerable slope. The defence was too strong, however, and the attack was abandoned with a loss of 28 officers and 343 men. It may be said, however, to have served the general purpose of diverting troops from the important action in the south. It is to be hoped that this was so, as the attack itself, though fruitless, was carried out with unflinching bravery and devotion.

On March 14, two days after the Battle of Neuve Action of Chapelle, the Germans endeavoured to bring about a counter-stroke in the north which should avenge their defeat, arguing, no doubt, that the considerable strength which Haig’s First Army had exhibited in the south meant some subtraction from Smith- Dorrien at the other end of the line. This new action broke out at the hamlet of St. Eloi, some miles to the south-east of Ypres, a spot where many preliminary bickerings and a good deal of trench activity had heralded this more serious effort. This particular section of the line was held by the 82nd Brigade (Longley’s) of the Twenty-seventh Division, the whole quarter being under the supervision of General Plumer. There was a small mound in a brickfield to the south-east of the village with trenches upon either side of it which were held by the men of the 2nd Cornish Light Infantry. It is a mere clay dump about seventy feet long and twenty feet high. After a brief but furious bombardment, a mine which had been run under this mound was exploded at five in the evening, and both and mound and trenches were carried by a rush of German stormers. These trenches in turn enfiladed other ones, and a considerable stretch was lost, including two support trenches west of the mound and close to it, two breastworks and trenches to the north-east of it, and also the southern end of St. Eloi village.

So intense had been the preliminary fire that every wire connecting with the rear had been severed, and it was only the actual explosion upon the mound an explosion which buried many of the defenders, including two machine-guns with their detachments which made the situation clear to the artillery in support. The 19th and 20th Brigades concentrated their thirty-six 18-pounders upon the mound and its vicinity. The German infantry were already in possession, having overwhelmed the few survivors of the 2nd Cornwalls and driven back a company of the 2nd Irish Fusiliers, who were either behind the mound or in the adjacent trenches to the east of the village. The stormers had rushed forward, preceded by a swarm of men carrying bombs and without rifles. Behind them came a detachment of sappers with planks, fascines, and sand-bags, together with machine-gun detachments, who dug themselves instantly into the shattered mound. The whole German organisation and execution of the attack were admirable. Lieutenants Fry and Aston of the Cornwall Light Infantry put up a brave fight with their handful of shaken men. As the survivors of the British front line fell back, two companies of the 1st Cambridge Territorials took up a rallying position. The situation was exceedingly CHAPTER obscure from the rear, for, as already stated, all wires had been cut, but daring personal reconnaissance by individual officers, notably Captain Follett and and Lieutenant Elton, cleared it up to some extent. By nine o’clock preparations had been made for a counter-attack, the 1st Leinsters and 1st Royal Irish, of the 82nd Brigade, being brought up, while Fortescue’s 80th Brigade was warned to support the movement.

It was pitch-dark, and the advance, which could only be organised and started at two in the morning, had to pass over very difficult ground. The line was formed by two companies of the Royal Irish, the Leinster Regiment, and the 4th Rifles in general support. The latter regiment was guided to their position by Captain Harrison, of the Cornwalls, who was unfortunately shot, so that the movement, so far as they were concerned, became disorganised. Colonel Prowse, of the Leinsters, commanded the attack. The Irishmen rushed forward, but the Germans fought manfully, and there was a desperate struggle in the darkness, illuminated only by the quick red flash of the guns and the flares thrown up from the trenches. By the light of these the machine-guns installed upon the mound held up the advance of the Royal Irish, who tried bravely to carry the position, but were forced in the end, after losing Colonel Forbes, to be content with the nearest house, and with gaining a firm grip upon the village. The Leinsters made good progress and carried first a breastwork and then a trench in front of them, but could get no farther. About 4:30 the 80th Brigade joined in the attack. The advance was carried out by the 4th Rifle Brigade upon the right and the Princess Patricia’s (Canadians) upon the left, with the Shropshires and the 3rd Rifles in support.

It was all-important to get in the attack before day-light, and the result was that the dispositions were necessarily somewhat hurried and incomplete. The Canadians attacked upon the left, but their attack was lacking in weight, being confined to three platoons, and they could make no headway against the fire from the mound. They lost 3 officers and 24 men in the venture. Thesiger’s 4th Rifle Brigade directed its attack, not upon the mound, but on a trench at the side of it. This was carried with a rush by Captain Mostyn Pryce’s company. Several obstacles were also taken in succession by the Riflemen, but though repeated attempts were made to get possession of the mound, all of them were repulsed. One company, under Captain Selby-Smith, made so determined an attack upon one barricade that all save four were killed or wounded, in spite of which the barricade was actually carried. A second one lay behind, which was taken by Lieutenant Sackville’s company, only to disclose a third one behind. Two companies of the Shropshires were brought up to give weight to the further attack, but already day was breaking and there was no chance of success when once it was light, as all the front trenches were dominated by the mound. This vigorous night action ended, therefore, by leaving the mound itself and the front trench in the hands of the Germans, who had been pushed back from all the other trenches and the portion of the village which they had been able to occupy in the first rush of their attack. The losses of the British amounted to 40 officers and 680 men killed, wounded, and missing, about 100 coming under the last category, who represent the men destroyed by the explosion.

The German losses were certainly not less, but it must be admitted that the mound, as representing the trophy of victory, remained in their hands. In the and morning of the 15th the Germans endeavoured to E turn the Leinsters out of the trench which they had recaptured, but their attack was blown back, and they left 34 dead in front of the position.

It is pleasing in this most barbarous of all wars to be able to record that all German troops did not debase themselves to the degraded standards of Prussia. Upon this occasion the Bavarian general in charge consented at once to a mutual gathering in of the wounded and a burying of the dead things which have been a matter of course in all civilised warfare until the disciples of Kultur embarked upon their campaign. It is also to be remarked that in this section of the field a further amenity can be noted, for twice messages were dropped within the British lines containing news as to missing aviators who had been brought down by the German guns. It was hoped for a time that the struggle, however stern, was at last about to conform to the usual practices of humanity a hope which was destined to be wrecked for ever upon that crowning abomination, the poisoning of Langemarck.

A month of comparative quiet succeeded the battle of Neuve Chapelle, the Germans settling down into their new position and making no attempt to regain their old ones. Both sides were exhausted, though in the case of the Allies the exhaustion was rather in munitions than in men. The regiments were kept well supplied from the depots, and the brutality of the German methods of warfare ensured a steady supply of spirited recruits. That which was meant to cow had in reality the effect of stimulating. It is well that this was so, for so insatiable are the demands of modern warfare that already after eight months the whole of the regiments of the original expeditionary force would have absolutely disappeared but for the frequent replenishments, which were admirably supplied by the central authorities. They had been far more than annihilated, for many of the veteran corps had lost from one and a half times to twice their numbers. The 1st Hants at this date had lost 2700 out of an original force of 1200 men, and its case was by no means an exceptional one. Even in times of quiet there was a continual toll exacted by snipers, bombers, and shells along the front which ran into thousands of casualties per week. The off-days of Flanders were more murderous than the engagements of South Africa. Now and then a man of note was taken from the Army in this chronic and useless warfare. The death of General Gough, of the staff of the First Army, has already been recorded. Colonel Farquhar, of the Princess Patricia Canadians, lost his life in a similar fashion. The stray shell or the lurking sniper exacted a continual toll, General Maude of the 14th Brigade, Major Leslie Oldham, one of the heroes of Chitral, and other valuable officers being killed or wounded in this manner.

Battle of On April 17 there began a contest which was destined to rage with great fury, though at intermittent intervals, for several weeks. This was the fight for Hill 60. Hill 60 was a low ridge about fifty feet high and two hundred and fifty yards from end to end, which faced the Allied trenches in the Zillebeke region to the south-east of Ypres. This portion of the line had been recently taken over by Smith Dorrien’s Army from the French, and one of the first tasks which the British had set themselves was to regain the hill, which was of considerable strategic importance, because by their possession of it the Germans were able to establish an observation post and direct the fire of their guns towards any portion of the British line which seemed to be vulnerable. With the hill in British hands it would be possible to move troops from point to point without their being overseen and subjected to fire. Therefore the British had directed their mines towards the hill, and ran six underneath it, each of them ending in a chamber which contained a ton of gunpowder. This work, begun by Lieutenant Burnyeat and a hundred miners of the Monmouth battalions, was very difficult owing to the wet soil. It was charged by Major Norton Griffiths and the 171st Mining Company Royal Engineers. At seven in the evening of Saturday, April 17, the whole was exploded with terrific effect. Before the smoke had cleared away the British infantry had dashed from their trench and the hill was occupied. A handful of dazed Germans were taken prisoners and 150 were buried under the debris.

The storming party was drawn from two battalions storming of the veteran 13th Brigade, and the Brigadier Wanless O’Gowan was in general control of the operations under General Morland, of the Fifth Division. The two battalions immediately concerned were the 1st Royal West Kents and the 2nd Scottish Borderers. Major Joslin, of the Kents, led the assault, and C Company of that regiment, under Captain Moulton Barrett, was actually the first to reach the crest while it was still reeking and heaving from the immense IL explosion. Sappers of the 2nd Home Counties Company raced up with the infantry, bearing sandbags and entrenching tools to make good the ground, while a ponderous backing of artillery searched on every side to break up the inevitable counter- attack. There was desperate digging upon the hill to raise some cover, and especially to cut back communication trenches to the rear. Without an over- crowding which would have been dangerous under artillery fire, there was only room for one company upon the very crest. The rest were in supporting trenches immediately behind. By half-past one in the morning of the 18th the troops were dug in, but the Germans, after a lull which followed the shock, were already thickening for the attack. Their trenches came up to the base of the hill, and many of their snipers and bomb-throwers hid themselves amid the darkness in the numerous deep holes with which the whole hill was pocked. Showers of bombs fell upon the British line, which held on as best it might.

At 3:30 A.M. the Scots Borderers pushed forward to take over the advanced fire trench from the Kents, who had suffered severely. This exchange was an expensive one, as several officers, including Major Joslin, the leader of the assault, Colonel Sladen, and Captains Bering and Burnett, were killed or wounded, and in the confusion the Germans were able to get more of their bombers thrown forward, making the front trench hardly tenable. The British losses up to this time had almost entirely arisen from these bombs, and two attempts at regular counter-attacks had been nipped in the bud by the artillery fire, aided by motor machine-guns. As the sky was beginning to whiten in the east, however, there was a more formidable advance, supported by heavy and incessant bombing, so that at half-past five the 2nd West Ridings were sent forward, supported by the 1st Bedfords from the 15th Brigade. A desperate fight ensued. In the cold of the morning, with bomb and bayonet men stood up to each other at close quarters, neither side flinching from the slaughter. By seven o’clock the Germans had got a grip of part of the hill crest, while the weary Yorkshiremen, supported by their fellow-countrymen of the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, were hanging on to the broken ground and the edge of the mine craters. From then onwards the day was spent by the Germans in strengthening their hold, and by the British in preparing for a renewed assault. This second assault, more formidable than the first, since it was undertaken against an expectant enemy, was fixed for six o’clock in the evening.

At the signal five companies of infantry, three from the West Ridings and two from the Yorkshire Light Infantry, rushed to the front. The losses of the storming party were heavy, but nothing could stop them. Of C Company of the West Ridings only Captain Barton and eleven men were left out of a hundred, but none the less they carried the point at which their charge was aimed. D Company lost all its officers, but the men carried on. After a fierce struggle the Germans were ejected once again, and the whole crest held by the British. The losses had been very heavy, the various craters formed by the mines and the heavy shells being desperately fought for by either party. It was about seven o’clock on the evening of the 18th that the Yorkshiremen of both regiments drew together in the dusk and made an organised charge across the whole length of the hill, sweeping it clear from end to end, while the 59th and Company Royal Engineers helped in making good the ground. It was a desperate tussle, in which men charged each other like bulls, drove their bayonets through each other, and hurled bombs at a range of a few yards into each other’s faces. Seldom in the war has there been more furious fighting, and in the whole Army it would have been difficult to find better men for such work than the units engaged.

From early morning of that day till late at night the Brigadier- General 0’ Go wan was in the closest touch with the fighting line, feeding it, binding it, supporting it, thickening it, until he brought it through to victory. His Staff-Captain Egerton was killed at his side, and he had several narrow escapes. The losses were heavy and the men exhausted, but the German defence was for the time completely broken, and the British took advantage of the lull to push fresh men into the advanced trenches and withdraw the tired soldiers. This was done about midnight on the 18th, and the fight from then onwards was under the direction of General Northey, who had under him the 1st East Surrey, the 1st Bedfords, and the 9th London (Queen Victoria) Rifles. Already in this murderous action the British casualties had been 50 officers and 1500 men, who lay, with as many of the Germans, within a space no larger than a moderate meadow.

During the whole of the daylight hours of April 19 a furious bombardment was directed upon the hill, on and behind which the defenders were crouching. Officers of experience described this concentration of fire as the worst that they had ever experienced. Colonel Griffith of the Bedfords held grimly to his front trench, but the losses continued to be heavy. During that afternoon a new phenomenon was observed for the first time an indication of what was to come. Officers seated in a dug-out immediately behind the fighting line experienced a strong feeling of suffocation, and were driven from their shelter, the candles in which were extinguished by the noxious air. Shells bursting on the hill set the troops coughing and gasping. It was the first German experiment in the use of poison an expedient which is the most cowardly in the history of warfare, reducing their army from being honourable soldiers to the level of assassins, even as the sailors of their submarines had been made the agents for the cold- blooded murder of helpless civilians. Attacked by this new agent, the troops still held their ground.

Tuesday, April 20, was another day of furious Desperate shell-fire. A single shell upon that morning blew in a parapet and buried Lieutenant Watson with twenty men of the Surreys. The Queen Victorias under Colonel Shipley upheld the rising reputation of the Territorial troops by their admirable steadiness. Major Lees, Lieutenant Summerhays, and many others died an heroic death; but there was no flinching from that trench which was so often a grave. As already explained, there was only one trench and room for a very limited number of men on the actual crest, while the rest were kept just behind the curve, so as to avoid a second Spion Kop. At one time upon this eventful day a handful of London Territorials under a boy officer, Woolley of the Victorias, were the only troops upon the top, but it was in safe keeping none the less. This officer received the Victoria Cross. Hour after hour the deadly bombardment went on. About 7:30 in the evening the bombers of the enemy got into some folds in the ground within twenty yards and began a most harassing attack. All night, under the sudden glare of star shells, there were a succession of assaults which tried the half-stupefied troops to the utmost. Soon after midnight in the early morning of Wednesday, April 21, the report came in to the Brigadier that the 1st Surreys in the trenches to the left had lost all their officers except one subaltern. As a matter of fact, every man in one detachment had been killed or wounded by the grenades. It was rumoured that the company was falling back, but on a message reaching them based upon this supposition, the answer was, “We have not budged a yard, and have no intention of doing so.” At 2:30 in the morning the position seemed very precarious, so fierce was the assault and so worn the defence. Of A Company of the Surreys only 55 privates were left out of 180, while of the five officers none were now standing, Major Paterson and Captain Wynyard being killed, while Lieutenant Koupell, who got the Cross, and two others were wounded. It was really a subalterns’ battle, and splendidly the boys played up.

All the long night trench-mortars and mine-throwers played upon them, while monstrous explosions flung shattered khaki figures amid a red glare into the drifting clouds of smoke, but still the hill was British. With daylight the 1st Devons were brought up into the fight, and an hour later the hill was clear of the enemy once more, save for a handful of snipers concealed in the craters of the north-west corner. In vain the Germans tried to win back a foothold. Nothing could shift that tenacious infantry. Field-guns were brought up by the attackers and fired at short range at the parapets hastily thrown up, but the Devons lay flat and held tight. It had been a grand fight. Heavy as were the strokes of the Thor hammer of Germany, they had sometimes bent but never shattered the iron line of Britain. Already the death-roll had been doubled, and 100 officers with 3000 of our men were stretched upon that little space, littered with bodies and red with blood from end to end. But now the action was at last drawing to its close. Five days it had raged with hardly a break. British guns were now run up and drove the German ones to cover. Bombers who still lurked in the craters were routed out with the bayonet. In the afternoon of the 21st the fire died gradually away and the assaults came to an end. Hill 60 remained with the British. The weary survivors were relieved, and limped back singing ragtime music to their rest-camps in the rear, while the 2nd Cameron Highlanders, under Colonel Campbell, took over the gruesome trenches.

It was a fine feat of arms for which the various brigadiers, with General Morland of the Fifth Division, should have the credit. It was not a question of the little mound important as that might be, it could not justify so excessive a loss of life, whether German or British. Hill 60 was a secondary matter. What was really being fought for was the ascendancy of the British or the Prussian soldier that subtle thing which would tinge every battle which might be fought thereafter. Who would cry “Enough!” first? Who would stick it to the bitter end? Which had the staying-power when tried out to a finish? The answer to that question was of more definite military importance than an observation post, and it was worth our three thousand slain or maimed to have the award of the God of battles to strengthen us hereafter.

This description may well be ended by the general order in which Sir John French acknowledged the services of the troops engaged in this arduous affair: “I congratulate you and the troops of the Second Army on your brilliant capture and retention of the important position at Hill 60. Great credit is due to Lieutenant- General Sir Charles Ferguson, commanding Second Corps; Major- General Morland, commanding Fifth Division; Brigadier-General Wanless O’Gowan, commanding 13th Brigade; and Brigadier- General Northey, commanding 15th Brigade, for their energy and skill in carrying out the operations. I wish particularly to express my warmest admiration for the splendid dash and spirit displayed by the battalions of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Brigades which took part under their respective commanding officers. This has been shown in the first seizure of the position, by the fire attack of the Royal West Kents and the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, and in the heroic tenacity with which the hill has been held by the other battalions of these brigades against the most violent counter-attacks and terrific artillery bombardment. I also must commend the skilful work of the Mining Company R.E., of the 59th Field Company R.E., and 2nd Home Counties Field Company R.E., and of the Artillery. I fully recognise the skill and foresight of Major-General Bulfin, commanding

Twenty- eighth Division, and his C.R.E., Colonel Jerome, who are responsible for the original conception and plan of the undertaking.”

It will be noticed that in his generous commendation Sir John French quotes the different separate units of Engineers as a token of his appreciation of the heavy work which fell upon them before as well as and during the battle. Many anecdotes were current in the Army as to the extraordinary daring and energy of the subterranean workers, who were never so happy as when, deep in the bowels of the earth, they were planning some counter-mine with the tapping of the German picks growing louder on their ears. One authentic deed by Captain Johnston’s 172nd Mining Company may well be placed upon record. The sapping upon this occasion was directed against the Peckham Farm held by the Germans. Finding that the enemy were countermining, a camouflet was laid down which destroyed their tunnel. After an interval a corporal descended into the shaft, but was poisoned by the fumes. An officer followed him and seized him by the ankles, but became unconscious. A private came next and grabbed the officer, but lost his own senses. Seven men in succession were in turn rescuers and rescued, until the whole chain was at last brought to the surface. Lieutenants Severne and Williams, with Corporal Gray and Sappers Hattersley, Hayes, Lannon, and Smith, were the heroes of this incident. It is pleasant to add that though the corporal died, the six others were all resuscitated.

It is with a feeling of loathing that the chronicler turns from such knightly deeds as these to narrate the next episode of the war, in which the gallant profession of arms was degraded to the level of the assassin, and the Germans, foiled in fair fighting, stole away a few miles of ground by the arts of the murderer. So long as military history is written, the poisoning of Langemarck will be recorded as a loathsome incident by which warfare was degraded to a depth unknown Neuve among savages, and a great army, which had long been and honoured as the finest fighting force in the world, became in a single day an object of horror and contempt, flying to the bottles of a chemist to make the clearance which all the cannons of Krupp were unable to effect. The crime was no sudden outbreak of spite, nor was it the work of some unscrupulous subordinate. It could only have been effected by long preparation, in which the making of great retorts and wholesale experiments upon animals had their place. Our generals, and even our papers, heard some rumours of such doings, but dismissed them as being an incredible slur upon German honour. It proved now that it was only too true, and that it represented the deliberate, cold-blooded plan of the military leaders. Their lies, which are as much part of their military equipment as their batteries, represented that the British had themselves used such devices in the fighting on Hill 60. Such an assertion may be left to the judgment of the world.

III. THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

Stage I. The Gas Attack, April 22-30

Situation at Ypres — The poison gas — The Canadian ordeal — The fight in the wood of St. Julien — The French recovery — Miracle days — The glorious Indians — The Northern Territorials — Hard fighting — The net result — Loss of Hill 60

IT may be remembered that the northern line of the Ypres position, extending from Steenstraate to Langemarck, with Pilken somewhat to the south of the centre, had been established and held by the British during the fighting of October 21, 22, and 23. Later, when the pressure upon the British to the east and south became excessive, the French took over this section. The general disposition of the Allies at the 22nd of April was as follows.

The Belgians still held the flooded Yser Canal up to the neighbourhood of Bixschoote. There the line was carried on by the French Eighth Army, now commanded by General Putz in the place of General d'Urbal. His troops seem to have been all either Colonial or Territorial, two classes which had frequently shown the utmost gallantry, but were less likely to meet an unexpected danger with steadiness than the regular infantry of the line. These formations held the trenches from Bixschoote on the canal to the Ypres-Poelcapelle road, two thousand yards east of Langemarck, on the right. At this point they joined on to Plumer's Fifth Corps, the Canadian Division, Twenty-eighth and Twenty- seventh British Divisions, forming a line which passed a mile north of Zonnebeke, curling round south outside the Polygon Wood to the point where the Fifth Division of the Second Corps kept their iron grip upon Hill 60. The average distance from Ypres to all these various lines would be about five miles. Smith-Dorrien, as commander of the Second Army, was general warden of the district.

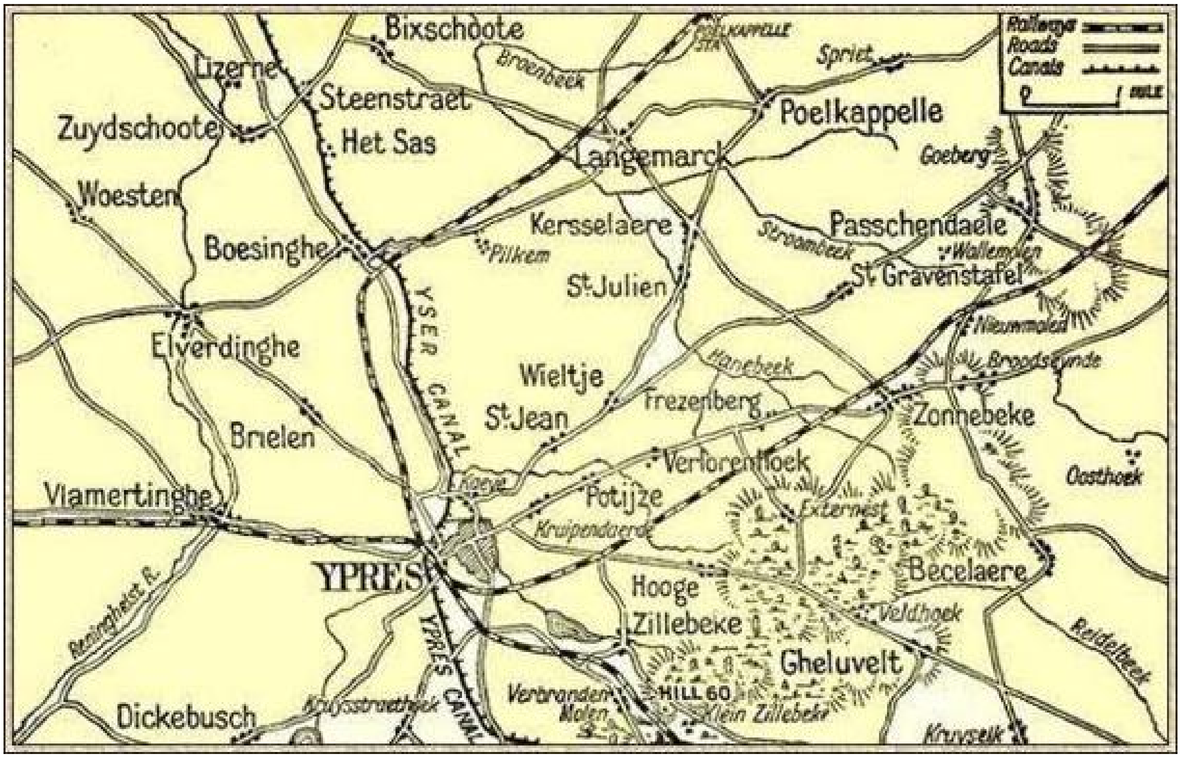
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Goeberg
Woesten
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Passchendaele
Boesinghe
Pilkem
Stroombeek
Wallemolen
St Julien
St Gravenstafel
Nieuwmolen
Elverdinghe
YSER CANAL
Hanebeek
Broodseynde
Wieltje
Frezenberg
St Jean
Zonnebeke
Brielen
Verlorenhoek
Oosthoek
Vlamertinghe
La Brique
Potijze
Externest
Kruipendaerde
YPRES
Hooge
Becelaere
Reninghelst R.
Zillebeke
Veldhoek
Gheluvelt
Reutelbeek
YPRES CANAL
Dickebusch
Kruisstraethoek
Verbranden Molen
HILL 60
Klein Zillebeke
Kruyseik

Ypres District

Up to the third week of April the enemy opposite the French had consisted of the Twenty-sixth Corps, with the Fifteenth Corps on the right, all under the Duke of Würtemberg, whose headquarters were at Thielt. There were signs, however, of secret concentration which had not entirely escaped the observation of the Allied aviators, and on April 20 and 21 the German guns showered shells on Ypres. About 5 P.M. upon Thursday, April 22, a furious artillery bombardment from Bixschoote to Langemarck began along the French lines, including the left of the Canadians, and it was reported that the Forty- fifth French Division was being heavily attacked. At the same time a phenomenon was observed which would seem to be more in place in the pages of a romance than in the record of an historian. From the base of the German trenches over a considerable length there appeared jets of whitish vapour, which gathered and swirled until they settled into a definite low cloudbank, greenish-brown below and yellow above, where it reflected the rays of the sinking sun. This ominous bank of vapour, impelled by a northern breeze, drifted swiftly across the space which separated the two lines.

The French troops, staring over the top of their parapet at this curious screen which ensured them a temporary relief from fire, were observed suddenly to throw up their hands, to clutch at their throats, and to fall to the ground in the agonies of asphyxiation. Many lay where they had fallen, while their comrades, absolutely helpless against this diabolical agency, rushed madly out of the mephitic mist and made for the rear, over-running the lines of trenches behind them. Many of them never halted until they had reached Ypres, while others rushed westwards and put the canal between themselves and the enemy. The Germans, meanwhile, advanced, and took possession of the successive lines of trenches, tenanted only by the dead garrisons, whose blackened faces, contorted figures, and lips fringed with the blood and foam from their bursting lungs, showed the agonies in which they had died. Some thousands of stupefied prisoners, eight batteries of French field-guns, and four British 4-7's, which had been placed in a wood behind the French position, were the trophies won by this disgraceful victory. The British heavy guns belonged to the Second London Division, and were not deserted by their gunners until the enemy's infantry were close upon them, when the strikers were removed from the breech-blocks and the pieces abandoned. It should be added that both the young officers present, Lieuts. Sandeman and Hamilton Field, died beside their guns after the tradition of their corps.

By seven o'clock the French had left the Langemarck district, had passed over the higher ground about Pilken, and had crossed the canal towards Brielen. Under the shattering blow which they had received, a blow particularly demoralising to African troops, with their fears of magic and the unknown, it was impossible to rally them effectually until the next day. It is be remembered in explanation of this disorganisation that it was the first experience of these poison tactics, and that the troops engaged received the gas in a very much more severe form than our own men on the right of Langemarck. For a time there was a gap five miles broad in the front of the position of the Allies, and there were many hours during which there was no substantial force between the Germans and Ypres. They wasted their time, however, in consolidating their ground, and the chance of a great coup passed for ever. They had sold their souls as soldiers, but the Devil's price was a poor one. Had they had a corps of cavalry ready, and pushed them through the gap, it would have been the most dangerous moment of the war.

A portion of the German force, which had passed through the gap left by the retirement of the French, moved eastwards in an endeavour to roll up the Canadian line, the flank of which they had turned. Had they succeeded in doing this the situation would have become most critical, as they would have been to the rear of the whole of the Fifth Army Corps. General Alderson, commanding the Canadians, took instant measures to hold his line. On the exposed flank were the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 15th (48th Highlanders), both of the 3rd Brigade. To the right of these were the 8th Canadians and 5th Canadians in the order named. The attack developed along two-thirds of a front of five thousand yards, but was most severe upon the left, where it had become a flank as well as a frontal assault; but in spite of the sudden and severe nature of the action, the line held splendidly firm. Any doubt as to the quality of our Canadian troops if any such doubt had existed was set at rest for ever, for they met the danger with a joyous and disciplined alacrity. General Turner, who commanded the 3rd Brigade upon the left, extended his men to such an extent that, while covering his original front, he could still throw back a line several thousand yards long to the south-west and so prevent the Germans breaking through. By bending and thinning his line in this fashion he obviously formed a vulnerable salient which was furiously attacked by the Germans by shell and rifle fire, with occasional blasts of their hellish gas, which lost something of its effectiveness through the direction of the wind. The Canadian guns, swinging round from north to west, were pouring shrapnel into the advancing masses at a range of two hundred yards with fuses set at zero, while the infantry without trenches fired so rapidly and steadily that the attack recoiled from the severity of the punishment. The British 118th and 365th Batteries did good work in holding back this German advance.

Two reserve battalions had been brought up in hot haste from Ypres to strengthen the left of the line. These were the 16th (Canadian Scottish) and the 10th Canadians. Their advance was directed against the wood to the west of St. Julien, in which lay our four guns which, as already described, had fallen into the hands of the Germans. Advancing about midnight by the light of the moon, these two brave regiments, under Colonels Leckie and Boyle, rushed at the wood which the Germans had already entrenched and carried it at the point of the bayonet after a furious hand-to-hand struggle. Following at the heels of the flying Germans, they drove them ever deeper into the recesses of the wood, where there loomed up under the trees the huge bulk of the captured guns. For a time they were once again in British hands, but there was no possible means of removing them, so that the Canadians had to be content with satisfying themselves that they were unserviceable. For some time the Canadians held the whole of the wood, but Colonel Leckie, who was in command, found that there were Germans on each side of him and no supports. It was clear, since he was already a thousand yards behind the German line, that he would be cut off in the morning. With quick decision he withdrew unmolested through the wood, and occupied the German trenches at the south end of it. Colonel Boyle lost his life in this very gallant advance, which may truly be said to have saved the situation, since it engaged the German attention and gave time for reinforcements to arrive. The immediate pressing necessity was to give the French time to re-form, and to make some sort of line between the Canadian left and the French right. As early as half-past two in the morning, while the two Canadian regiments were struggling in the wood of St. Julien, the First Cavalry Division were showing once again the value of a mobile reserve. De Lisle’s horsemen were despatched at full speed to get across the Canal, so as to act as a support and an immediate reserve for the French. The 2nd East Yorks from the Twenty-eighth Division was also sent on the same errand.

April 23. With the dawn it became of most pressing importance to do something to lessen, if not to fill, the huge gap which yawned between the left of the Canadians and the canal, like a great open door five miles wide leading into Ypres. Troops were already streaming north at the call of Smith-Dorrien from all parts of the British lines, but the need was quick and pressing. The Canadian 1st Brigade, which had been in reserve, was thrown into the broad avenue down which the German army was pouring. The four battalions of General Mercer’s Brigade the 1st (Ontario), 4th, 2nd, and 3rd (Toronto) advanced south of Pilken. Nearer still to St. Julien was the wood, still fringed by their comrades of the 10th and the 16th, while to the east of St. Julien the remaining six battalions of Canadians were facing north-eastwards to hold up the German advance from that quarter, with their flank turned north-west to prevent the force from being taken in the rear. Of these six battalions the most northern was the 13th Royal Canadian Highlanders, and it was on the unsupported left flank of this regiment that the pressure was most severe, as the Germans were in the French trenches alongside them, and raked them with their machine-guns without causing them to leave their position, which was the pivot of the whole line.

Gradually, out of the chaos and confusion, the The crisis. facts of the situation began to emerge, and in the early morning of April 23 French saw clearly how great an emergency he had to meet and what forces he had with which to meet it. The prospect at first sight was appalling if it were handled by men who allowed themselves to be appalled. It was known now that the Germans had not only broken a five-mile gap in the line and penetrated two miles into it, but that they had taken Steenstraate, had forced the canal, had taken Lizerne upon the farther side, and had descended the eastern side as far south as Boesinghe. At that time it became known, to the great relief of the British higher command, that the left of the Canadian 1st Brigade, which had been thrown out, was in touch with six French battalions much exhausted by their terrible experience on the east bank of the canal, about a mile south-east of Boesinghe. From that moment the situation began to mend, for it had become clear where the reinforcements which were now coming to hand should be applied. A line had been drawn across the gap, and it only remained to stiffen and to hold it, while taking steps to modify and support the salient in the St. Julien direction, where a dangerous angle had been created by the new hasty rearrangement of the Canadian line.

It has been said that a line had been drawn across the gap, but dots rather than a line would have described the situation more exactly. Patrols had reached the French, but there was no solid obstacle to a German advance. This was partially remedied through the sacrifices of a body of men, who have up to now received the less credit in the matter because, being a mere chance collection of military atoms, they had no representative character. No finer proof of soldierly virtue could be given than the behaviour of these isolated British regiments which were now pushed up out of their rest camps near Ypres, many of them wearied from recent fighting, and none of them heartened by the presence of the comrades and superior officers who had formed their old brigades. The battalions were the 2nd Buffs, half of the 3rd Middlesex, the 1st York and Lancasters, the 5th Royal Lancasters, the 4th Rifle Brigade, the 2nd Cornwalls, the 9th Royal Scots, and half the 2nd Shropshires. These odd battalions were placed under the command of Colonel Geddes of the Buffs, and may be described as Geddes' Detachment. These scattered units, hardly conscious of each other's presence, were ordered upon April 23 not only to advance and fill the gap, but actually to attack the German Army, so as to give the impression of strength, and bring the assailants to a halt while reinforcements were being hurried to the Ypres front. These battalions, regardless of fire and gas, marched straight across country at the Germans, got right up to their line, and though unable to break it, held them fast in their positions. The 1st Royal Irish, under Colonel Gloster, had done the same farther to the eastward. For three days these battalions played their part in the front line, deliberately sacrificing themselves for the sake of the army. Colonel Geddes himself, with many senior officers, was killed, and the losses of some of these stubborn units were so heavy that it is reported that an observer approached a long row of prostrate men, whom he took to be the 1st York and Lancaster, only to find that it was the helpless swathe of their dead and wounded filling a position from which the survivors had been moved. The other battalions were in no better case, but their audacity in attacking at a time when even a defence might seem a desperate business, had its effect, and held up the bewildered van of the enemy. It might well be quoted as a classical example of military bluff. Nearly all these battalions were in reserve to the 27th or 28th Divisions, who were themselves holding a long line in face of the enemy, and who, by turning their reserves to the West, were like a bank which transfers money to a neighbour at a time when it may have to face a run upon its own resources. But the times were recognised as being desperate, and any risk must be run to keep the Germans out of Ypres and to hold the pass until further help should come from the south. It was of course well understood that, swiftly as our reinforcements could come, the movement of the German troops, all swirling towards this sudden gap in the dam, would necessarily be even swifter, since they could anticipate such a situation and we could not. The remains of these battalions had by the evening of the 23rd dug themselves in on a line which roughly joined up the French and the Canadians.

In the afternoon of the 23rd those of the French troops who had escaped the gas attack advanced gallantly to recover some of their ground, and their movement was shared by the Canadian troops on the British left wing and by Geddes’ detachment. The advance was towards Pilken, the French being on the left of the Ypres-Pilken road, and the British on the right. Few troops would have come back to the battle as quickly as our allies, but these survivors of the Forty-fifth Division were still rather a collection of brave men than an organised force. The strain of this difficult advance upon a victorious enemy fell largely upon the 1st and 4th Battalions of Mercer’s 1st Canadian Brigade. Burchall, of the latter regiment, with a light cane in his hand, led his men on in a debonair fashion, which was a reversion to more chivalrous days. He fell, but lived long enough to see his infantry in occupation of the front German line of trenches. No further progress could be made, but at least the advance had for the moment been stayed, and a few hours gained at a time when every hour was an hour of destiny.

A line had now been formed upon the left, and the Canadian Germans had been held off. But in the salient to gal1 the right in the St. Julien section the situation was becoming ever more serious. The gallant 13th Canadians (Royal Highlanders) were learning something of what their French comrades had endured the day before, for in the early dawn the horrible gases were drifting down upon their lines, while through the yellow mist of death there came the steady thresh of the German shells. The ordeal seemed mechanical and inhuman such an ordeal as flesh and blood can hardly be expected to bear. Yet with admirable constancy the 13th and their neighbours, the 15th, held on to their positions, though the trenches were filled with choking and gasping men. The German advance was blown back by rifle-fire, even if the fingers which pulled the triggers were already stiffening in death. No soldiers in the world could have done more finely than these volunteers, who combined the dashing American spirit with the cool endurance of the North. Little did Bernhardi think when he penned his famous paragraph about our Colonial Militia and their uselessness upon a European battlefield that a division of those very troops were destined at a supreme moment to hold up one of the most vital German movements in the Western campaign.

The French upon the left were not yet in a position to render much help, so General Alderson, who was in command of this movement, threw back his left wing and held a line facing westwards with the 4th Rifle Brigade and a few Zouaves, so as to guard against a German advance between him and the canal. When the night of the 23rd fell it ended a day of hard desultory fighting, but the Allies could congratulate themselves that the general line held in the morning had been maintained, and even improved.

Reinforcements were urgently needed by the advanced line, so during the early hours of the morning of April 24 two battalions of the York and Durham Territorial Brigade the 4th East Yorkshires and another were sent from the west to Ypres to reinforce the weary 13th Brigade, much reduced by its exertions at Hill 60, which was in immediate support near Brielen. There was no fighting at this point during the night, but just about daybreak some of the 2nd Canadian Brigade upon the right of the British line, who were still holding their original trenches, were driven out of them by gas, and compelled to re-form a short distance behind them.

Though the British advance upon the left had gained touch with the Canadian 3rd Brigade, the latter still formed a salient which was so exposed that the edge of it, especially the 13th and 15th battalions, were assailed by infantry from the flank, and even from the rear. To them it seemed, during the long morning of April 24, as if they were entirely isolated, and that nothing remained but to sell their lives dearly. They were circumstances under which less spirited troops might well have surrendered. So close was the fighting that bayonets were crossed more than once, Major Norsworthy, of the 13th, among others, being stabbed in a fierce encounter. Very grim was the spirit of the Canadians. “Fine men, wonderful fellows, absolutely calm, and I have never seen such courage,” wrote a Victoria Rifle Territorial, who had himself come fresh from the heroic carnage of Hill 60. It may be added that, good as the Canadian infantry was, their artillery was worthy to stand behind it. It is on record that one Canadian heavy battery, that of Colonel McGee, was so pre-eminently efficient that it was in demand at any threatened portion of the line.

It was clear on the morning of April 24 that the advanced angle, where the French and Canadians had been torn apart, could no longer be held in face of the tremendous shell-fire which was directed upon it and the continuous pressure of the infantry attacks. The 3rd Canadian Brigade fell slowly back upon the village of St. Julien. This they endeavoured to hold, but a concentrated fire rained upon it from several sides and the retreat continued. A detachment of the 13th and 14th Canadians were cut off before they could get clear, and surrounded in the village. Here they held out as long as their cartridges allowed, but were finally all killed, wounded, and taken. The prisoners are said to have amounted to 700 men. The remainder of the heroic and decimated 3rd Brigade rallied to the south of St. Julien, but their retirement had exposed the flank of the 2nd Canadian Brigade (Curry’s), even as their own flank had been exposed by the retirement of the French Forty-fifth Division. This 2nd Brigade flung back its left flank in order to meet the situation, and successfully held its ground.

In doing this they were greatly aided by supports The arrival which came from the rear. This welcome reinforcement consisted of three battalions of the 84th Brigade, under Colonel Wallace. These three battalions were ordered to advance about four o’clock in the afternoon, their instructions being to make straight for Fortuin. Their assault was a desperate one, since there was inadequate artillery support, and they had to cross two miles of open ground under a dreadful fire. They went forward in the open British formation the 1st Suffolks in the van, then the 12th London Rangers, and behind them the 1st Monmouths. Numerous gassed Canadians covered the ground over which they advanced. The losses were very heavy, several hundred in the Suffolks alone, but they reached a point within a few hundred yards of the enemy, where they joined hands with the few Canadians who were left alive in those trenches. They hailed their advent with cheers. The whole line lay down at this point, being unable to get farther, and they were joined at a later date by the 9th Durhams, who came up on the right. This body, which may be called Wallace's detachment, remained in this position during the night, and were exposed to severe attack next day, as will be seen later. So perilous was their position at the time the 9th Durhams came up that preparations had been made for destroying all confidential records in view of the imminent danger of being overwhelmed.

In this and subsequent fighting the reader is likely to complain that he finds it difficult to follow the movements or order of the troops, but the same trouble was experienced by the generals at the time. So broken was the fighting that a regimental officer had units of nine battalions under him at one moment. The general situations both now and for the next three days may be taken to be this: that certain well-defined clumps of British troops Twenty-eighth Division, 10th Brigade, Canadians, and so forth are holding back the Germans, and that odd battalions or even companies are continually pushed in, in order to fill the varying gaps between these ragged forces and to save their flanks, so far as possible, from being turned. These odd battalions coalesced into irregular brigades which are named here Geddes', Tuson's, or Wallace's detachment, after their senior officer.

Every hour of this day was an hour of danger, fresh ground had been abandoned and heavy losses incurred. None the less it may be said that on the evening of Saturday, April 24, the worst was over. From the British point of view it was a war of narrow escapes, and this surely was among the narrowest. The mystics who saw bands of bowmen and of knights between the lines during the retreat from Mons did but give definite shape to the undeniable fact that again and again the day had been saved when it would appear that the energy, the numbers, or the engines of the enemy must assure a defeat. On this occasion the whole front had, from an unforeseen cause, fallen suddenly out of the defence. Strong forces of the Germans had only five miles to go in order to cut the great nerve ganglion of Ypres out of the British system. They were provided with new and deadly devices of war. They were confronted by no one save a single division of what they looked upon as raw Colonial Militia, with such odds and ends of reinforcements as could be suddenly called upon. And yet of the five miles they could only accomplish two, and now after days of struggle the shattered tower of the old Cloth Hall in front of them was as inaccessible as ever. It needs no visions of overwrought men to see the doom of God in such episodes as that. The innocent blood of Belgium for ever clogged the hand of Germany.

Reinforcements were now assembling to the immediate south of St. Julien. By evening the Northumberland Brigade and the Durham Light Infantry Brigade both of the Fiftieth Territorial Division had reached Potijze. More experienced, but not more eager, was Hull’s 10th Regular Brigade, which had come swiftly from the Armentières region. All these troops, together with Geddes’ detachment and two battalions of the York and Durham Territorials, were placed under the hand of General Alderson for the purpose of a strong counter- attack upon St. Julien. This attack was planned to take place on the morning of Sunday, April 25. When night fell upon the 24th the front British line was formed as follows:

The Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth Divisions held their original trenches facing eastwards. In touch with their left was the 2nd Canadian Brigade, with one battalion of the 1st Canadian Brigade. Then came Wallace’s detachment with two battalions of the York and Durham Territorials joining with the remains of the 3rd Canadian Brigade. Thence Geddes’ detachment and the 13th Brigade prolonged the line, as already described, towards the canal. Behind this screen the reinforcements gathered for the attack.

April 25. The advance was made at 6:30 in the morning of April 25, General Hull being in immediate control of the attack. It was made in the first instance by the 10th Brigade and the 1st Royal Irish from the 82nd Brigade. The remains of the indomitable 3rd Canadian Brigade kept pace with it upon the right. Little progress was made, however, and it became clear that there was not weight enough behind the advance to crush a way through the obstacles in front. Two flank battalions retired, and the 2nd

Seaforths were exposed to a terrible cross-fire. “We shouted to our officers (what was left of them) to give the order to charge, knowing in our minds that it was hopeless, as the smoke was so thick from their gas shells that we could see nothing on either side of us.” Some cavalry was seen, the first for many days, but was driven off by the machine-gun of the Highlanders. Finally a brigade of Northumberland Territorials came up to sustain the hard-pressed line, passing over some two miles of open country under heavy fire on their advance. It was then nearly mid- day. From that point onwards the attackers accepted the situation and dug themselves in at the farthest point which they could reach near the hamlet of Fortuin, about a mile south of St. Julien.

It will be remembered that Wallace’s detachment had upon the day before already reached this point. They were in a position of considerable danger, forming a salient in front of the general line. Together with the 9th Durhams upon their right, they sustained several German assaults, which they drove back while thrusting wet rifle rags into their mouths to keep out the drifting gas. From their right trenches they had the curious experience of seeing clearly the detraining of the German reserves at Langemarck Station, and even of observing a speech made by a German general before his troops hurried from the train into the battle. This advanced line was held by these troops, not only during the 25th, but for 1 three more days, until they were finally relieved after suffering very heavy losses, but having rendered most vital service.

Whilst the British were vainly endeavouring to advance to the north, a new German attack developed suddenly from the north-east in the region of Broodseinde, some five miles from St. Julien. This attack was on a front of eight hundred yards. The trenches attacked were those of the 84th and 85th Brigades of the Twenty-eighth Division, and no doubt the Germans held the theory that these would be found to be denuded or at least fatally weakened, their occupants having been drafted off to stiffen the Western line. Like so many other German theories, this particular one proved to be a fallacy. In spite of a constant shower of poison shells, which suffocated many of the soldiers, the enemy were vigorously repulsed, the 2nd East Surrey Regiment getting at one time to hand-to-hand fighting. The few who were able to reach the trenches remained in them as prisoners. Great slaughter was caused by a machine-gun of the 3rd Royal Fusiliers under Lieutenant Mallandain. Still, the movement caused a further strain upon the resources of the British General, as it was necessary to send up three battalions to remain in reserve in this quarter in case of a renewal of the attack. On the other hand, the 1 1th Brigade (Hasler), less the 1st East Lancashires, came up from the south to join the 10th, and Indian troops were known to be upon the way. The flank of the 85th Brigade was in danger all day, and it was covered by the great devotion of the 8th Durham Light Infantry to the north of it. This battalion lost heavily both in killed, wounded, and prisoners, but it fought with remarkable C valour in a very critical portion of the field. Early in the morning of the 26th the 1st Hants, on the right of the newly-arrived 11th Brigade, joined up with the 3rd Royal Fusiliers on the left of the 85th Brigade, and so made the line complete. Shortly after the arrival of the Hampshires the enemy charged through the dim dawn with a shout of “Ve vos the Royal Fusiliers.” Wily Hampshire was awake, however, and the trick was a failure.

Up to the evening of Sunday, April 25, the 2nd Canadian Brigade had succeeded in holding its original line, which was along a slight eminence called the Gravenstrafel Ridge. All the regiments had fought splendidly, but the greatest pressure had been borne by Colonel Lipsett’s 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles), who had been gassed, enfiladed, and bombarded to the last pitch of human endurance. About five o’clock their trenches were obliterated by the fury of the German bombardment, and the weary soldiers, who had been fighting for the best part of four days, fell back towards Wieltje. That evening a large part of the Canadian Division, which had endured losses of nearly 50 per cent and established a lasting reputation for steadfast valour, were moved into reserve, while the Lahore Indian Division (Keary) came into the fighting line. It is a remarkable illustration, if one were needed, of the unity of the British Empire that, as the weary men from Montreal or Manitoba moved from the field, their place was filled by eager soldiers from the Punjab and the slopes of the Himalayas.

That evening a fresh French Division, the One Hundred and Fifty-second, under General de Ligne, came up from the south, and two others were announced as being on their way, so that a powerful French offensive was assured for next day upon the further side of the Canal. De Lisle’s First Division of Cavalry continued to support the French opposite Lizerne, while Kavanagh’s Second Division was dismounted and pushed into the French territorial trenches in front of Boesinghe. The enemy had come within shelling distance of Poperinghe, and caused considerable annoyance there, as the town was crowded with wounded.

Splendid work was done during these days by the motor ambulances, which on this one evening brought 600 wounded men from under the very muzzles of the German rifles in front of St. Julien. Several of them were destroyed by direct hits, but no losses damped their splendid ardour.

The Lahore Division having now arrived, it was directed to advance on the left of the British and on the right of the French, along the general line of the Ypres-Langemarck road. Encouraged by this reinforcement, and by the thickening line of the French, General Smith-Dorrien, who had spent several nightmare days, meeting one dire emergency after another with never-failing coolness and resource, ordered a general counter-attack for the early afternoon of April 26. There was no sign yet of any lull in the German activity which would encourage the hope that they had shot their bolt. On the contrary, during the whole morning there had been confused and inconclusive fighting along the whole front, and especially along the Gravenstrafel Ridge, where the British 10th and 11th Brigades were now opposing the advance. The 11th Brigade and 85th Brigade suffered heavily from shell-fire. About two o’clock the counter-attack was set in motion, all forces co-operating, the general idea being to drive the enemy back from the line between Boesinghe on the left and Zonnebeke on the right. Of the French attack on the east of the Canal one can only say that it kept pace generally with the British, but on the west of the Canal it was pushed very strongly in the direction of the village of Lizerne, where the Germans had established an important bridge-head.

The Indians advanced to the right of the French, with the Jullundur Brigade upon the right and the Ferozepore Brigade upon the left, the Sirhind Brigade in reserve. This Indian advance was an extraordinarily fine one over fifteen hundred yards of open under a very heavy shell-fire. They had nearly reached the front line of German trenches, and were making good progress, when before them there rose once more the ominous green-yellow mist of the poisoners. A steady north-east wind was blowing, and in a moment the Indians were encircled by the deadly fumes. It was impossible to get forward. Many of the men died where they stood. The mephitic cloud passed slowly over, but the stupefied men were in no immediate condition to resume their advance. The whole line was brought to a halt, but the survivors dug themselves in, and were eventually supported and relieved by the Sirhind Brigade, who, with the help of the 3rd Sappers and Miners and the 34th Pioneers, consolidated the front line. General Smith-Dorrien tersely summed up the characteristics of this advance of the Lahore Division when he said that it was done “with insufficient artillery preparation, up an open slope in the face of overwhelming shell, rifle, and machine-gun fire and clouds of poison gas, but it prevented the German advance and ensured the safety of Ypres.” In this war of great military deeds there have been few more heroic than this, but it was done at a terrible cost. Of the 129th Baluchis, only a hundred could be collected that night, and many regiments were in little better case. The 1st Manchesters and 1st Connaughts had fought magnificently, but it cannot be said that there was any difference of gallantry between Briton and Indian.

Farther to the eastwards another fine advance had been made by the Northumberland Brigade of Territorials (Eiddell) of the Fiftieth Division, who had just arrived from England. Some military historian has remarked that British soldiers never fight better than in their first battle, and this particular performance, carried out by men with the home dust still upon their boots, could not have been improved upon. In this as in other attacks it was well understood that the object of the operations was rather to bluff the Germans into suspending their dangerous advance than to actually gain and permanently hold any of the lost ground. The brigade advanced in artillery formation which soon broke into open order. The fire, both from the German guns, which had matters April 26. all their own way, and from their riflemen, was incessant and murderous. The 6th Northumberland Fusiliers were on the left with the 7th upon the right, the other two battalions being nominally in second line but actually swarming up into the gaps. In spite of desperately heavy losses the gallant Geordies won their way across open fields, with an occasional rest behind a bank or hedge, until they were on the actual outbuildings of St. Julien. They held on to the edge of the village for some time, but they had lost their Brigadier, the gallant Eiddell, and a high proportion of their officers and men. Any support would have secured their gains, but the 151st Durham Light Infantry Brigade behind them had their own hard task to perform. The battalions which had reached the village were compelled to fall back. Shortly after six in the evening the survivors had dropped back to their own trenches. Their military career had begun with a repulse, but it was one which was more glorious than many a facile success.

On their right the Twenty-eighth Division had been severely attacked, and the pressure was so great that two and a half battalions had to be sent to their help, thus weakening the British advance to that extent. Had these battalions been available to help the Northumbrians, it is possible that their success could have been made good. The strain upon our overmatched artillery may be indicated by the fact that on that one afternoon the 366th Battery of the Twenty-eighth Division fired one thousand seven hundred and forty rounds. The troops in this section of the battlefield had been flung into the fight in such stress that it had been very difficult to keep a line without gaps, and great danger arose from this cause on several occasions. Thus a gap formed upon the left of the Hampshire Regiment, the flank of the 11th Brigade, through which the Germans poured. Another gap formed on the right of the Hampshires between them and the 3rd Royal Fusiliers of the 85th Brigade. One company of the 8th Middlesex was practically annihilated in filling this gap, but by the help of the 8th Durham Light Infantry and other Durham and Yorkshire Territorials the line was restored. The 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry also co- operated in this fierce piece of fighting, their Colonel Bridgford directing the operation.

The Indians upon the left had suffered from the gas attack, but the French near the Canal had been very badly poisoned. By 3:30 they had steadied themselves, however, and came forward once again, while the Indians kept pace with them. The whole net advance of the day upon this wing did not exceed three hundred yards, but it was effected in the face of the poison fumes, which might well have excused a retreat. In the night the front line was consolidated and the Sirhind reserve brigade brought up to occupy it. It was a day of heavy losses and uncertain gains, but the one vital fact remained that, with their artillery, their devil’s gas, and their north-east wind, the Germans were not a yard nearer to that gaunt, tottering tower which marked the goal of their desire.

The night of the 26th was spent by the British in reorganising their line, taking out the troops who were worn to the bone, and substituting such reserves as could be found. The French had been unable to get forward on the east of the Canal, but on the west, where they were farther from the gas, they had made progress, taking trenches between Boesinghe and Lizerne, and partially occupying the latter village. April 27. In the early afternoon of the 27th our indomitable Allies renewed their advance upon our left. They were held up by artillery fire, and finally, about 7 P.M., were driven back by gas fumes. The Sirhind and Ferozepore Indian Brigades kept pace with the French upon the right, but made little progress, for the fire was terrific. The losses of the Sirhind Brigade were very heavy, but they held their own manfully. The 1st and 4th Gurkhas had only two officers left unwounded in each battalion. The 4th King's also made a very fine advance. Four battalions from Ypres. corps reserve the 2nd Cornwalls, 2nd West Ridings, 5th King's Own, and 1st York and Lancaster were sent up at 3 P.M., under Colonel Tuson, to support the Indians. The whole of this composite brigade was only one thousand three hundred rifles, three out of the four battalions having been with Geddes' decimated force. The advance could not get forward, but when in the late evening the French recoiled before the deadly gas, the left of the Sirhind Brigade would have been in the air but for the deployment of part of Tuson's detachment to cover their flank. At 9 P.M. the Morocco Brigade of the French Division came forward once more and the line was re-formed, Tuson's detachment falling back into support. Once again it was a day of hard fighting, considerable losses, and inconclusive results, but yet another day had gone and Ypres was still intact. On the right of the British the 10th and 11th Brigades had more than held their own, and the line of the Gravenstrafel Ridge was in their hands. Across the Canal also the French had come on, and the Germans were being slowly but surely pushed across to the farther side. By the evening of the 28th a continuation of this movement had entirely cleared the western side, and on the eastern had brought the French line up to the neighbourhood of Steenstraate.

At this point the first phase of the second battle Results. of Ypres may be said to have come to an end, although for the next few days there was desultory fighting here and there along the French and British fronts. The net result of the five days' close combat had been that the Germans had advanced some two miles nearer to Ypres. They had also captured the four large guns of the London battery, eight batteries of French field-guns, a number of machine- guns, several thousand French, and about a thousand British prisoners. The losses of the Allies had been very heavy, for the troops had fought with the utmost devotion in the most difficult circumstances. Our casualties up to the end of the month in this region came to nearly 20,000 men, and at least 12,000 French would have to be added to represent the total Allied loss. The single unit which suffered most was the British 10th Brigade (Hull), consisting of the 1st Warwicks, 2nd Seaforths, 1st Irish Fusiliers, 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, and 7th Argyll and Sutherlands. These battalions lost among them no fewer than 63 officers and 2300 men, a very high proportion of their total numbers. Nearly as high were the losses of the three Canadian brigades, the first losing 64 officers and 1862 men; the second 71 officers and 1770 men; while the third lost 62 officers and 1771 men. The Northumbrian Division was also very hard hit, losing 102 officers and 2423 men, just half of the casualties coming from the Northumberland Infantry Brigade. The Lahore Division had about the same losses as the Northern Territorials, while the Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth Divisions each lost about 2000. General Hasler, of the 11th Brigade, General Riddell, of the Northumberlands, Colonel Geddes, of the Buffs, Colonels Burchall, McHaig, and Boyle, of the 4th, 7th, and 10th Canadians, Colonel Martin, of the 1st King's Own Lancasters, Colonel Hicks, of the 1st Hants, with many senior regimental officers, were among the dead. No British or Canadian guns were lost save the four heavy pieces, which were exposed through the exceptional circumstance of the gas attack. The saving of all the Canadian guns was an especially fine achievement, as two-thirds of the horses were killed, and it was necessary to use the same teams again and again to get away pieces which were in close contact with the enemy.

The airmen, too, did great work during this engagement, bombarding Steenstraate, Langemarck, Poelcapelle, and Paschendaale. In so short an account of so huge an operation it is difficult to descend to the individual, but no finer deed could be chronicled in the whole war than that of Lieutenant Rhodes-Moorhouse, who, having been mortally wounded in the execution of his duty, none the less steered his machine home, delivered her at the hangar, and made his report before losing consciousness for ever.

As to the German losses, they were very considerable. The Twenty-sixth Corps returned a casualty list of 10,572, and the Twenty-seventh of 6101. These are great figures when one considers that it was almost entirely to their rifles that the British had to trust. There were many other units engaged, and the total could not have been less than 25,000 killed, wounded, or taken.

In this hard-fought battle the British, if one includes the whole area of contest, had seven divisions engaged the Fourth, Fifth, Twenty-seventh, Twenty- eighth, Fiftieth, Canadian, and Lahore. Nearly half of these were immobile, however, being fixed to the long line of eastern trenches. Forty thousand men would be a fair estimate of those available from first to last to stop the German advance. It would be absurd to deny that the advantage rested with the Germans, but still more absurd to talk of the honours of war in such a connection. By a foul trick they gained a trumpery advantage at the cost of an eternal slur upon their military reputation. It was recognised from this time onwards that there was absolutely nothing at which these people would stick, and that the idea of military and naval honour or the immemorial customs of warfare had no meaning for them whatever. The result was to infuse an extraordinary bitterness into our soldiers, who had seen their comrades borne past them in the agonies of asphyxiation. The fighting became sterner and more relentless, whilst the same feeling was reflected in Great Britain, hardening the resolution with which the people faced those numerous problems of recruiting, food supply, and munitions which had to be solved. Truly honesty is the better policy in war as in peace, for no means could have been contrived by the wit of man to bring out the full, slow, ponderous strength of the British Empire so effectively as the long series of German outrages, each adding a fresh stimulus before the effect of the last was outworn. Belgium, Louvain, Rheims, Zeppelin raids, Scarborough, poison-gas, the *Lusitania*, Edith Cavell, Captain Fryatt these were the stages which led us on to victory. Had Germany never violated the Belgian frontier, and had she fought an honest, manly fight from first to last, the prospect would have been an appalling one for the Allies. There may have been more criminal wars in history, and there may have been more foolish policies, but the historian may search the past in vain for any such combination of crime and folly as the methods of “frightfulness “ by which the Germans endeavoured to carry out the schemes of aggression which they had planned so long.

The gain of ground by the Germans from north to south in this engagement necessitated a drawing-in of the line from east to west over a front of nearly eight miles in order to avoid a dangerous projecting salient at Zonnebeke. It was hard in cold blood to give up ground which had been successfully held for so many months, and which was soaked with the blood of our bravest and best. On the other hand, if it were not done now, while the Germans were still stunned by the heavy losses which they had sustained and wearied out by their exertions, it might be exposed to an attack by fresh troops, and lead to an indefensible strategic position.

Upon Sunday, May 2, they made a fresh attack May 2. on the north of Ypres along the front held by the French to the immediate south of Pilken and along the British left to the east of St. Julien, where the newly-arrived 12th Brigade (Anley) and the remains of the 10th and 11th were stationed. The 12th Brigade, which came up on May 1, consisted at that time of the 1st King’s Own Lancasters, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd Essex, 5th South Lancashires (T.F.), 2nd Monmouths (T.F.), and 2nd Royal Irish. The attack was in the first instance carried out by means of a huge cloud of gas, which was ejected under high pressure from the compressed cylinders in their trenches, and rapidly traversed the narrow space between the lines. As the troops fell back to avoid asphyxiation they were thickly sprayed by shrapnel from the German guns. The German infantry followed on the fringe of their poison cloud, but they brought themselves into the zone of the British guns, and suffered considerable losses. Many of the troops in the trenches drew to one side to avoid the gas, or even, in some cases, notably that of the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, waited for the gas to come, and then charged swiftly through it to reach the stormers upon the other side, falling upon them with all the concentrated fury that such murderous tactics could excite. The result was that neither on the French nor on the British front did the enemy gain any ground. Two battalions of the 12th Brigade the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2nd Essex suffered heavily, many of the men being poisoned. The Lancashire Fusiliers lost 300 men from this cause, among them the heroic machine-gunner, Private Lynn, who stood without a respirator in the thick of the fumes, and beat off a German attack almost single-handed, at the cost of a death of torture to himself.

It was found that even when the acute poisoning had been avoided, a great lassitude was produced for some time by the inhalation of the gas. In the case of Hull’s 10th Brigade, which had been practically living in the fumes for a fortnight, but had a specially bad dose on May 2, it was found that out of 2500 survivors, only 500 were really fit for duty. The sufferings of the troops were increased by the use of gas shells, which were of thin metal with highly- compressed gas inside. All these fiendish devices were speedily neutralised by means of respirators, but a full supply had not yet come to hand, nor had the most efficient type been discovered, so that many of the Allies were still poisoned.

Upon May 3 the enemy renewed his attack upon the 11th Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier General Prowse, and the 1st Rifle Brigade, which was the right flank regiment, was badly mauled, their Ypres. trenches being almost cleared of defenders. The Mays. 1st Somersets also suffered heavily. Part of the 1st York and Lancasters and the 5th King's Own Lancasters were rushed up to the rescue from the supports of the Twenty-eighth Division. The gallant Colonel of the latter battalion, Lord Richard Cavendish, was wounded while waving on his men with his cane and shouting, "Come along, King's Own." At the same time the German infantry tried to push in between the 11th Brigade on our left and the 85th on the right, at the salient between the Fourth and Twenty- eighth Divisions, the extreme north-east corner of the British lines. The fight was a very desperate one, being strongly supported by field-guns at short ranges. Three more British battalions the 2nd Buffs, 3rd Fusiliers, and 2nd East Yorks were thrown into the fight, and the advance was stopped. That night the general retirement took place, effected in many cases from positions within a few yards of the enemy, and carried out without the loss of a man or a gun. The retirement was upon the right of the British line, and mainly affected the Twenty-seventh, and to a less degree the Twenty-eighth, Divisions. The Fourth Division upon the left or north did not retire, but was the hinge upon which the others swung. During the whole of these and subsequent operations the Fourth Division was splendidly supported by the French artillery, which continually played upon the attacking Germans.

Before closing this chapter, dealing with the gas attacks to the north of Ypres, and beginning the next one, which details the furious German assault upon the contracted lines of the Fifth Army Corps, it would be well to interpolate some account of the new development at Hill 60. This position was a typical one for the German use of gas, just as the Dardanelles lines would have been for the Allies, had they condescended to such an atrocity upon a foe who did not themselves use such a weapon. Where there is room for flexibility of manoeuvre, and a temporary loss of ground is immaterial, the gas is at a discount; but where there is a fixed and limited position it is without respirators practically impossible to hold it against such an agency. Up to now the fighting at Hill 60 had furnished on both sides a fine epic of manliness, in which man breasted man in honest virile combat. Alas, that such a brave story should have so cowardly an ending! Upon the evening of May 1 the poisoners got to work, and the familiar greenish gas came stealing out from the German trenches, eddied and swirled round the base of the hill, and finally submerged the summit, where the brave men of the Dorsets in the trenches were strangled by the chlorine as they lay motionless and silent, examples of a discipline as stern as that of the Roman sentry at Herculaneum. So dense were the fumes that the Germans could not take possession, and it was a reinforcement of Devons and Bedfords of the 15th Brigade who were the first to reach the trenches, where they found the bodies of their murdered comrades, either fixed already in death or writhing in the agonies of choking. It is said that the instructions of the relieving force were to carry up munitions and to carry down the Dorsets. One officer and 50 men had been killed at once, while 4 officers and 150 men were badly injured, many of them being permanently incapacitated. The 59th Company of the Royal Engineers were also overwhelmed by the fumes, three officers and many men being poisoned.

The gas attack upon Hill 60 on May 1 may have been a mere experiment upon the part of the Germans to see how far they could submerge it, for it was not followed up by an infantry advance. A more sustained and more successful attack was made by the same foul means upon May 5. Early in the morning the familiar cloud appeared once more, and within a few minutes the British position was covered by it. Not only the hill itself, but a long trench to the north of it was rendered untenable, and so was another trench two thousand yards north of Westhoek.

The 2nd West Ridings were holding the front trench at the time, and suffered horribly from the poison. Mr. Valentine Williams, in his admirable account of the episode, says: “There appeared staggering towards the dug-out of the commanding officer of the Duke’s in the rear two figures, an officer and an orderly. The officer was as pale as death, and when he spoke his voice came hoarsely from his throat. Beside him his orderly, with unbuttoned coat, his rifle clasped in his hand, swayed as he stood. The officer said slowly, in his gasping voice, ‘They have gassed the Duke’s. I believe I was the last man to leave the hill. The men are all up there dead. They were splendid. I thought I ought to come and report.’ That officer was Captain Robins... They took him and his faithful orderly to hospital, but the gallant officer died that night.” His two subalterns, Lieut. Miller and another, both remained in the front trench until they died.

Such was the upshot of the fighting at Hill 60. What with the shells and what with the mines, very little of the original eminence was left. The

British still held the trenches upon the side while the Germans held the summit, if such a name could be applied. The British losses, nearly all from poison, had been considerable in the affair, and amounted to the greater part of a thousand men, the Dorsets, Devons, Bedfords, and West Ridings being the regiments which suffered most heavily. When the historian of the future sums up the deeds of the war it is probable that he will find nothing more remarkable than the patient endurance with which the troops faced a death of torture from the murderous gas in the days when no protection had yet been afforded them.

One incident of this period may be quoted as showing the peculiar happenings of modern warfare. The village of Poperinghe was at this time the chief depot for stores and resting-place for wounded, being ten miles to the rear of the line. Great surprise and confusion were caused, therefore, by a sudden fall of immense shells, which came out of space with no indication whatever as to their origin. They caused more fright than damage, but were excessively unnerving. From their measured fall it was clear that they all came from one single gun of gigantic power behind the far distant German line. To the admirable aeroplanes was given the task of solving the mystery, and regardless of gun-fire or hostile craft they quartered the whole country round until at last, by a combination of luck and skill, they concluded that a Belgian barn, five miles behind the enemy line and fifteen from Poperinghe, was the lair of the monster. A large British gun came stealthily up and lay concealed till dawn when it opened upon the barn. The third or fourth shell went home, a magazine exploded, the barn went up, and there was peace henceforth in Poperinghe.

IV. THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

Stage II. The Bellewaarde Lines

The second phase — Attack on the Fourth Division — Great stand of the Princess Pats — Breaking of the line — Desperate attacks — The cavalry save the situation — The ordeal of the 11th Brigade — The German failure — Terrible strain on the British — The last effort of May 24 — Result of the battle — Sequence of events

IT was upon the evening of May 4 that the difficult operations were finished by which the lines of the British Army on the north-east of Ypres were brought closer to the city. The trenches which faced north, including those which looked towards Pilken and St. Julien, were hardly affected at all by this rearrangement. The section which was chiefly modified was the long curved line which was held from Zonnebeke southwards by the Twenty-seventh and Twenty- eighth Divisions. Instead of averaging five miles from Ypres, these troops were now not more than three from that centre, and the curve of their line was from Wieltje and Frezenberg to past the Bellewaarde wood and lake, and so through Hooge and on to Hill 60.

The second phase of this great battle, which began with the poisoning of Langemarck, is dated from the time that the British line was readjusted. The Germans were naturally much encouraged by so general a withdrawal, and it seemed to them that, with a further effort, they would be able to burst their way through and take possession at last of this town which faced them, still inviolate, after nearly eight months of incessant attack. Their guns, aided by their aeroplanes, after wasting a day in bombarding the empty trenches, hastened to register upon the new line of defences.

During the 5th, 6th, and 7th the enemy were perfecting their new arrangements, but no peace or rest was given to that northern portion of the line which was still in its old trenches. The bombardment was turned on to this or that battalion in turn. On the evening of the 5th it was the 5th South Lancashires, on the right of the 12th Brigade, who were torn to pieces by jets of steel from the terrible hose. The battalion was relieved by the 2nd Monmouths, who beat off an attack next morning. All day upon the 7th the Germans were massing for an attack, but were held back by the steady fire of the French and British batteries. On the 8th, however, the new preparations were complete, and a terrible storm, destined to last for six unbroken days days never to be forgotten by those who endured them broke along the whole east, north-east, and north of the British line.

It has been shown in the last chapter that during the long and bitter fight which had raged from the 22nd to the 28th of April the two British divisions which together formed the Fifth Army Corps had not only been closely engaged in their own trenches, but had lent battalions freely to the Canadians, so that they had at one time only a single battalion in their own reserve. During the period of the readjustment of the line nearly all these troops returned, but they The second came back grievously weakened and wearied by the Ypres. desperate struggle in which they had been involved. None the less, they got to work at once in forming and strengthening the new dyke which was to keep the German flood out of Ypres. Day and night they toiled at their lines, helped by working parties from the Fifth Division, the 50th Northumbrian Division, and two field companies of sappers from the Fourth Division. All was ready when the German attack broke upon the line. The left of this attack was borne by the Fourth Division, the centre, in the Frezenberg sector, was held by the Twenty- eighth Division, and the right by the Twenty-seventh Division, who joined up with the Fifth Division in the south. This was at first almost entirely an artillery attack, and was of a most destructive character. Such an attack probably represents the fixed type of the future, where the guns will make an area of country impossible for human life, and the function of the infantry will simply be to move forward afterwards and to occupy. Along the whole line of the three divisions for hour after hour an inexhaustible rain of huge projectiles fell with relentless precision into the trenches, smashing them to pieces and burying the occupants in the graves which they had prepared for themselves. It was with joy that the wearied troops saw the occasional head of an infantry assault and blew it to pieces with their rifles. For the greater part it was not a contest between men and men, but rather one between men and metal, in which our battalions were faced by a deserted and motionless landscape, from which came the ceaseless downpour of shells and occasional drifting clouds of chlorine. At one point, near Frezenberg, the trenches had been sited some 70 yards down the forward slope of a hill, with disastrous results, as the 3rd Monmouths Ypres. and part of the 2nd Royal Lancasters who held this section were almost destroyed. When the 3rd Monmouths were eventually recalled the Battalion H.Q. and some orderlies and signallers were all who appeared in answer to the summons.

About seven o’clock the German infantry attack developed against that part of the line — the northern or left wing — which was held by the Fourth Division. The advance was pushed with great resolution and driven back with heavy losses, after getting within a hundred yards of the trenches. “Company after company came swinging forward steadily in one long, never-ending line,” says an observer of the 11th Brigade, describing the attack as it appeared from the front of the 1st East Lancashires and of the 5th London Rifle Brigade. “Here and there their attack slackened, but the check was only temporary. On they came again, and the sight was one that almost mesmerised us. They were near enough for us to hear the short, sharp cries of the officers, and the rain of bullets became more deadly than ever. It was simple murder.” The barbed wire in front of the defences was choked and heaped with dead and wounded men. This desperate German attack had more success farther to the south.

At this part of the line the Germans had pushed through a gap and had seized the village of Wieltje, thus getting behind the right rear of the 12th Brigade. It was essential to regain the village, for it was a vital point in the line. The 1st Royal Irish, which had been attached to this brigade, together with two companies of the 5th South Lancashire, were ordered to advance, while two reserve battalions of the 1st Irish Fusiliers and the 7th Argyll and Sutherlands, all under General Anley, supported the attack. It is no light matter with an inferior artillery to attack a village held by German troops, but the assault was brilliantly successful and the village was regained, while the dangerous gap was closed in the British line. That night there was some desperate righting round Wieltje, which occasionally got down to bayonet work. The 1st Hants and 1st East Lancashire from the 11th Brigade had come up and helped in the fierce defence, which ended where it began, with the British line still intact.

So much for the fighting on May 8 in front of the Fourth Division. Farther down the line to the south the situation was more serious. A terrific bombardment had demolished the trenches of the Fifth Corps, and a very heavy infantry advance had followed, which broke the line in several places.

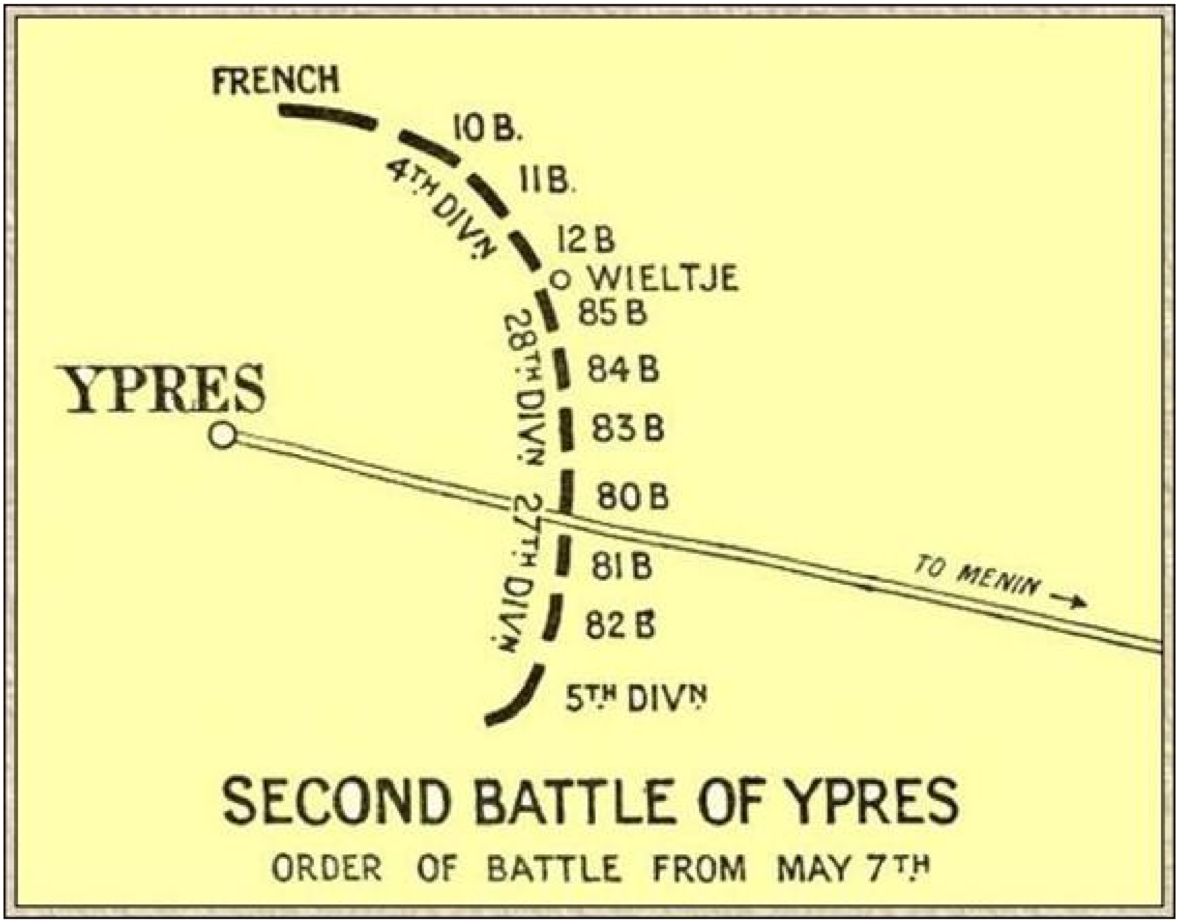
FRENCH
10 B.
11 B.
4TH DIVN
12 B
WIELTJE
85 B
84 B
83 B
28TH DIVN
YPRES
80 B
27TH DIVN
81 B
82 B
TO MENIN →
5TH DIVN
SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES
ORDER OF BATTLE FROM MAY 7TH

Order Of Battle from May 7th

The weight of this attack fell upon the Twenty-eighth Division in front of Frezenberg, and very particularly upon the 83rd Brigade, which formed the unit on the right flank. The German rush was stemmed for a time by the staunch North of England battalions which made up this brigade the 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry on the extreme right, and their neighbours of the 5th Royal Lancasters, the 2nd Royal Lancasters, and the 2nd East Yorkshires. Great drifts of gas came over, and the gasping soldiers, with their hands to their throats and the tears running down their cheeks, were at the same time cut to pieces by every kind of shell beating upon them in an endless stream. Yet they made head against this accumulation of horrors. The East Yorkshires were particularly badly cut up, and the Monmouths, who were in support, endured a terrible and glorious baptism of fire while advancing in splendid fashion to their support. But the losses from the shell-fire had been very heavy, and the line was too weak to hold. Of 2500 men in the Frezenberg trenches only 600 men were left standing. The brigade had to fall back. The left flank of the 80th Brigade of the Twenty-seventh Division upon the right was consequently exposed and in the air. A glance at the accompanying diagram will show the situation created by the retirement of any unit.

The flank trench was held by the Princess Patricia Great Canadians, and their grand defence of it showed once more the splendid stuff which the Dominion had sent us. Major Gault and all the other senior officers were killed or wounded, and the command devolved upon Lieutenant Niven, who rose greatly to the occasion. Besides the heavy shelling and the gas, the trenches were raked by machine-guns in neighbouring buildings. So accurate was the German artillery that the machine-guns of the Canadians were buried again and again, but were dug up and spat out their defiance once more. Corporal Dover worked one of these guns till both his leg and his arm had been shot away. When the trenches were absolutely obliterated the Canadians manned the communication trench and continued the desperate resistance. The 4th Rifle Brigade sent up a reinforcement and the fight went on. Later a party of the 2nd Shropshires pushed their way also into the fire-swept trenches, bringing with them a welcome supply of cartridges. It was at this hour that the 83rd Brigade upon the right of the Twenty-eighth Division had to fall back, increasing the difficulty of holding the position. The enemy charged once more and got possession of the trench at a point where all the defenders had been killed. There was a rush, however, by the survivors in the other sections, and the Germans were driven out again. From then until late at night the shell-fire continued, but there was no further infantry advance. Late that night, when relieved by the Rifles, the Canadian regiment, which had numbered nearly 700 in the morning, could only muster 150 men. Having read the service over their comrades, many of whom had already been buried by the German shells, they were led back by Lieutenants Niven, Clark, Vandenburg, and Papineau after a day of great stress and loss, but of permanent glory. “No regiment could have fought with greater determination or endurance,” said an experienced British general. “Many would have failed where they succeeded.”

It has already been described how the 83rd Brigade had been riven back by the extreme weight of the German advance. Their fellow brigade upon the left, the 84th (Bowes), had a similar experience. They also held their line under heavy losses, and were finally, shortly after mid-day, compelled to retire. The flank regiment on the right, the 1st Suffolk, were cut off and destroyed even as their second battalion had been at Le Cateau.

At this time the 1st Suffolk was so reduced by the losses sustained when it had formed part of Wallace's detachment, as described in the last chapter, that there were fewer than 300 men with the Colours.

When the Germans broke through the left flank of the 83rd Brigade they got partly to the rear of the Suffolk trenches. The survivors of the Suffolks were crowded down the trench and mixed up with the 2nd Cheshires, who were their immediate neighbours. The parapets were wrecked, the trenches full of debris, the air polluted with gas, and the Germans pushing forward on the flank, holding before them the prisoners that they had just taken from the 83rd Brigade. It is little wonder that in these circumstances this most gallant battalion was overwhelmed. Colonel Wallace and 130 men were taken. The 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers and the 1st Monmouths sustained also very heavy losses, as did the 12th London Rangers. The shattered remains of the brigade were compelled to fall back in conformity with the 83rd upon the right, sustaining fresh losses as they were swept with artillery fire on emerging from the trenches. This was about 11:30 in the morning. The 1st Monmouths upon the left of the line seem, however, to have kept up their resistance till a considerably later hour, and to have behaved with extraordinary gallantry. Outflanked and attacked in the rear after the Germans had taken the trenches on the right, they still, under their gallant Colonel Robinson, persevered in what was really a hopeless resistance. The Germans trained a machine-gun upon them from a house which overlooked their trench, but nothing could shift the gallant miners who formed the greater part of the regiment. Colonel Robinson was shot dead while passing his men down the trench one by one in the hope of forming a new front. Half the officers and men were already on the ground. The German stormers were on the top of them with cries of “Surrender! Surrender!” “Surrender be damned!” shouted Captain Edwards, and died still firing his revolver into the grey of them. It was a fine feat of arms, but only 120 men out of 750 reassembled that night.

After this severe blow battalions held back in reserve were formed up for a counter-attack, which was launched about half-past three. The attack advanced from the point where the Fourth and Twenty-eighth Divisions adjoined, and two battalions of the Fourth Division the 1st Warwicks and the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers together with the 2nd East Surreys, 1st York and

Lancasters, and 3rd Middlesex, of the 85th Brigade, took part in it, pushing forwards towards the hamlet of Frezenberg, which they succeeded in occupying. On their left the 12th London Regiment (the Rangers) won their way back to the line which their brigade, the 84th, had held in the morning, but they lost very heavily in their gallant attack. Two other reserve battalions, the 1st East Lancashires, of the 11th Brigade, and the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, of the 10th, fought their way up as already mentioned on the extreme left in the neighbourhood of Wieltje, and spliced the line at the weak point of the junction of divisions. All these attacks were made against incessant drifts of poison-gas, as well as heavy rifle and shell fire. It was a day of desperate and incessant fighting, where all General Plumer's skill and resolution were needed to restore and to hold his line. The Germans claimed to have taken 500 prisoners, mostly of the 84th Brigade.

The net result of the fighting upon May 8 was that the area held in the north-east of Ypres was further diminished. Early upon the 9th the Germans, encouraged by their partial success, continued their attack, still relying upon their massive artillery, which far exceeded anything which the British could put against it. The attack on this morning came down the Menin road, and the trenches on either side of it were heavily bombarded. At ten o'clock there was an infantry advance upon the line of the 81st Brigade (Croker), which was driven back by the 2nd Cameron Highlanders and the 2nd Gloucesters. The shell-fire was continued upon the same line until 4 P.M., when the trench was obliterated, and a second advance of the German infantry got possession of it. A counter-attack of the Gloucesters was held up with considerable loss, the advance of the regiment through the wood being greatly impeded by the number of trees cut down by shells and forming abattis in every direction, like the windfalls of a Canadian forest. This trench was the only capture made by the Germans during the day, and it did not materially weaken the position. The Gloucesters lost Colonel Tulloh, five other officers, and 150 men.

These attacks along the line of the Menin road and to the north of Lake Bellewaarde were all directed upon the Twenty-seventh Division, but the Twenty- eighth Division immediately to the north, which had been defending the sector which runs through Frezenberg and Wieltje, had also been most violently shelled, but had held its line, as had the Fourth Division to the north. All these divisions had considerable losses. The general result was a further slight contraction of the British line. It could not be broken, and it could not be driven in upon Ypres, but the desperate and (apart from the gas outrages) valorous onslaughts of Germans, aided by their overpowering artillery, gained continually an angle here and a corner there, with the result that the British position was being gradually whittled away.

On the 10th the Germans again attacked upon the line of the Menin road, blasting a passage with their artillery, but meeting with a most determined resistance. The weight of their advance fell chiefly upon the 80th Brigade to the north of the road, the 4th Rifle Brigade and the 4th Rifles bearing the brunt of it and suffering very severely, though the 2nd Camerons and 9th Royal Scots, of the 81st Brigade, were also hard hit. So savage had been the bombardment, and so thick the gas, that the German infantry thought that they could safely advance, but the battalions named, together with the 3rd Battalion of Rifles, drove them back with heavy loss. It was always a moment of joy for the British infantry when for a brief space they were faced by men rather than machines. The pitiless bombardment continued; the garrison of the trenches was mostly killed or buried, and the survivors fell back on to the support trenches west of the wood. This defence of the Riflemen was as desperate a business as that of the Canadians upon the 8th. Several of the platoons remained in the shattered trenches until the Germans had almost surrounded them, and finally shot and stabbed a path for themselves till they could rejoin their comrades. It was on this day that the 9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered heavy losses, including their splendid Colonel, James Clark.

On May 11 the attack was still very vigorous. The Twenty-seventh Division was strongly pressed in the morning. The 80th Brigade was to the north and somewhat to the west of the 81st, which caused the latter to form a salient. With their usual quickness in taking advantage of such things, the Germans instantly directed their fire upon this point. After several hours of heavy shelling, an infantry attack about 11 A.M. got into the trenches, but was driven out again by the rush of the 9th Royal Scots. The bombardment was then renewed, and the attack was more successful at 4 P.M. an almost exact repetition of the events upon the day before, save that the stress fell upon the 81st instead of the 80th Brigade. During the night the Leinsters of the 82nd Brigade drove the Germans out again, but found that the trench was untenable on account of the shell-fire. It was abandoned, therefore, and the line was drawn back into the better cover afforded by a wood.

Afterwards the trench was partly reoccupied by a company of the 2nd Gloucestershires under Captain Fane.

By this date many of the defending troops had been fighting with hardly a break from April 22. It was an ordeal which had lasted by day and by night, and had only been interrupted by the labour of completing the new lines. The losses had been very heavy, and reinforcements were most urgently needed. Some idea of the stress may be gathered from the fact that at the time the six battalions of the 83rd Brigade had been formed into one composite battalion under Colonel Worsley Gough. At the same time it was impossible to take any troops from the northern sector, which was already hardly strong enough to hold a violent German attack. In the south the Army had, as will be shown, become involved in the very serious and expensive operations which began at Kichebourg on May 9. In these difficult circumstances it was to the never-failing cavalry that General Plumer had to turn. It is sinful extravagance to expend these highly trained horsemen, who cannot be afterwards improvised, on work that is not their own, but there have been many times in this war when it was absolutely necessary that the last man, be he who he might, should be put forward. So it was now, and the First and Third Cavalry Divisions, under General de Lisle, were put into the firing line to the north of Lake Bellewaarde, taking the place of the Twenty-eighth Division, which at that time had hardly a senior regimental officer left standing. The First Cavalry Division took the line from Wieltje to Verlorenhoek, while the Third carried it on to Hooge, where it touched the Twenty-seventh Division. Their presence in the front firing line was a sign of British weakness, but, on the other hand, it was certain that the Germans had lost enormously, that they were becoming exhausted, and that they were likely to wear out the rifling of their cannon before they broke the line of the defence. A few more days would save the situation, and it was hoped that the inclusion of the cavalry would win them.

May 12. They took over the lines just in time to meet the brunt of what may have been the most severe attack of all. The shelling upon May 12 can only be described as terrific. The Germans appeared to have an inexhaustible supply of munitions, and from morning to night they blew to pieces the trenches in front and the shelters behind which might screen the supports.

It was a day of tempestuous weather, and the howling wind, the driving rain, and the pitiless fire made a Dantesque nightmare of the combat. The attack on the right fell upon the Third Cavalry Division. This force had been reorganised since the days in October when it had done so splendidly with the Seventh Infantry Division in the fighting before Ypres. It consisted now of the 6th Brigade (1st Royals, 3rd Dragoon Guards, North Somerset Yeomanry), the 7th Brigade (1st and 2nd Life Guards and Leicestershire Yeomanry), and the 8th Brigade (Blues, 10th Hussars, and Essex Yeomanry). This Division was exposed all morning to a perfectly hellish fire, which was especially murderous to the north of the Ypres-Roulers road. At this point the 1st Royals, 3rd Dragoon Guards, and Somerset Yeomanry were stationed, and were blown, with their trenches, into the air by a bombardment which continued for fourteen hours. A single sentence may be extracted from the report of the Commander-in-Chief , which the Somersets should have printed in gold round the walls of their headquarters. “The North Somerset Yeomanry on the right of the brigade,” says the General, “although also suffering severely, hung on to their trenches throughout the day and actually advanced and attacked the enemy with the bayonet.” The Royals came up in support, and the brigade held its own. On one occasion the enemy actually got round the left of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, who were the flank regiment, upon which Captain Neville, who was killed later upon the same day, gave the order, “Even numbers deal with the enemy in the rear, odd numbers carry on!” which was calmly obeyed with complete success. On the right the flank of the Twenty-seventh Division had been exposed, but the 2nd Irish Fusiliers were echeloned back so as to cover it. So with desperate devices a sagging line was still drawn between Ypres and the ever-pressing invaders. The strain was heavy, not only upon the cavalry, but upon the Twenty- seventh Division to the south of them. There was a time when the pressure upon the 4th Rifle Brigade, a battalion which had endured enormous losses, was so great that help was urgently needed. The Princess Patricia’s had been taken out of the line, as only 100 men remained effective, and the 4th Rifles were in hardly a better position, but the two maimed battalions were formed into one composite body, which pushed up with a good heart into the fighting line and took the place of the 3rd Rifles, who in turn relieved the exhausted Rifle Brigade.

On the left of the cavalry line, where the First Cavalry Division joined on to the Fourth Infantry Division, near Wieltje, the artillery storm had burst also with appalling violence. The 18th Hussars lost 150 men out of their already scanty ranks. The Essex Regiment on their left helped them to fill the gap until the 4th Dragoon Guards came up in support. This fine regiment and their comrades of the 9th Lancers were heavily punished, but bore it with grim stoicism. To their right Briggs’ 1st Brigade held splendidly, though all of them, and especially the Bays, were terribly knocked about. In the afternoon the 5th Dragoon Guards were momentarily driven in by the blasts of shell, but the 11th Hussars held the line firm.

The situation as the day wore on became somewhat more reassuring. The British line had been badly dented in the middle, where the cavalry had been driven back or annihilated, but it held firm at each end. South of the Menin road the Twenty-seventh The Division, much exhausted, were still holding on, officers and men praying in their weary souls that the enemy might be more weary still. These buttressed the right of the line, while three miles to the north the Fourth Division, equally worn and ragged, was holding the left. The 10th Brigade had sustained such losses in the gas battle that it was held, as far as possible, in reserve, but the 11th and 12th were hard pressed during the long, bitter day, in which they were choked by gas, lashed with artillery fire, and attacked time after time by columns of infantry. The 11th Brigade in that dark hour showed to a supreme degree the historic qualities of British infantry, their courage hardening as the times grew worse. The 1st East Lancashires had their trenches destroyed, lost Major Rutter and many of their officers, but still, under their gallant Colonel Lawrence, held on to their shattered lines. Every point gained by the stubborn Germans was wrenched from them again by men more stubborn still. They carried a farmhouse near Wieltje, but were turned out again by the indomitable East Lancashires after desperate fighting at close quarters. It is said to have been the fourth time that this battalion mended a broken line. Severe attacks were made upon the trenches of the 1st Hampshires and the 5th London Rifle Brigade, but in each case the defenders held their line, the latter Territorial battalion being left with fewer than 200 men. It was in this action that Sergeant Belcher, of the London Rifle Brigade, with eight of his Territorials and two Hussars, held a vital position against the full force of a German infantry attack, losing half their little band, but saving the whole line from being enfiladed.

The 12th Brigade had been drawn back into reserve, but it was not a day for rest, and the 2nd Essex was hurried forward to the relief of the extreme left of the cavalry, where their line abutted upon the Fourth Division. The battalion made a very tine counter-attack under a hail of shells, recovering some trenches and clearing the Germans out of a farmhouse, which they subsequently held against all assailants. This attack was ordered on the instant by Colonel Jones, of the Essex, and was carried out so swiftly that the enemy had no time to consolidate his new position.

Whilst each buttress held firm, a gallant attempt was made in the afternoon to straighten out the line hi the centre where the Third Cavalry Division had been pushed back. The 8th Brigade of Cavalry, under Bulkeley- Johnson, pushed forward on foot and won their way to the original line of trenches, chasing the Germans out of them and making many prisoners, but they found it impossible to hold them without supports under the heavy shell-fire. They fell back, therefore, and formed an irregular line behind the trenches, partly in broken ground and partly in the craters of explosions. This they held for the rest of the day.

Thus ended a truly desperate conflict. The had failed in this, which proved to be their final and supreme effort to break the line. On the other hand, the advance to the north of the Bellewaarde Lake necessitated a further spreading and weakening of the other forces, so that it may truly be said that the prospects never looked worse than at the very moment when the Germans had spent their strength and could do no more. From May 13 the fighting died down, and for some time the harassed and exhausted defenders were allowed to re-form and to recuperate. The 80th Brigade, which had suffered very heavily, was drawn out upon the 17th, the Second Cavalry Division, under Kavanagh, taking its place. Next day the 81st Brigade, and on May 22 the 82nd, were also drawn back to the west of Ypres, their place being taken by fresh troops. The various units of the Twenty-eighth Division were also rested for a time. For the gunners and sappers there was no rest, however, but incessant labour against overmastering force.

The second phase of this new Battle of Ypres may be said to have lasted from May 4 to May 13. It consisted of a violent German attack, pushed chiefly by poison and by artillery, against the Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth Divisions of the Fifth British Corps and the Fourth Division to the north of them. Its aim was, as ever, the capture of Ypres. In this aim it failed, nor did it from first to last occupy any village or post which gave it any return for its exertions. It inflicted upon the British a loss of from

12,000 to 15,000 men, but endured itself at the very least an equal slaughter without any compensating advantage. The whole operation can only be described, therefore, as being a costly failure. Throughout these operations the British infantry were provided with respirators soaked in alkalis, while many wore specially- constructed helmets to save them from being poisoned.

To such grotesque expedients had Germany brought the warfare of the twentieth century.

There is no doubt that the three British regular divisions and the cavalry were worn to a shadow at the end of these operations. Since the enemy ceased to attack, it is to be presumed that they were in no better case. The British infantry had been fighting almost day and night for three weeks, under the most desperate conditions. Their superiority to the infantry of the Germans was incontestable, but there was no comparison at all between the number of heavy guns available, which were at least six to one in favour of the enemy. Shells were poured down with a profusion, and also with an accuracy, never before seen in warfare, and though the British infantry continually regained trenches which had been occupied by the German infantry, it was only to be shelled out of them again by a fire against which they could make no adequate answer. An aerial observer has described that plain simply flaming and smoking from end to end with the incessant heat of the shells, and has expressed his wonder that human life should have been possible under such a fire. And yet the road to Ypres was ever barred.

All the infantry losses, heavy as they were, are eclipsed by those of the Third Cavalry Division, which bore the full blast of the final whirlwind, and was practically destroyed in holding it back from Ypres. This splendid division, to whom, from first to last, the country owes as much as to any body of troops in the field, was only engaged in the fighting for one clear day, and yet lost nearly as heavily in proportion as either of the infantry divisions which had been in the firing line for a week. Their casualties were 91 officers and 1050 men. This will give some idea of the concentrated force of the storm which broke upon them on May 12. It was a most murderous affair, and they were only driven from their trenches when the trenches themselves had been blasted to pieces. It is doubtful whether any regiments have endured more in so short a time. These three brigades were formed of *corps d’élites*, and they showed that day that the blue blood of the land was not yet losing its iron. The casualty lists in this and the succeeding action of the 24th read like a society function. Colonel Ferguson, of the Blues, Colonel the Hon. Evans-Freke, Lord Chesham, Captain the Hon. J. Grenfell, Lord Leveson-Gower, Sir Robert Sutton, Lord Compton, Major the Hon. C. B. Mitford, the Hon. C. E. A. Phillips, Viscount Wendover so runs the sombre and yet glorious list. The sternest of Radicals may well admit that the aristocrats of Britain have counted their lives cheap when the enemy was at the gate. Colonel Smith- Bingham, of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, Colonel Steele, of the 1st Royals, Colonel Freke, of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and many other senior officers were among the dead or wounded. The Leicester Yeomanry suffered very severely, but their comrades of Essex and of Somerset, the Blues and the 1st Royals, were also hard hit. The losses of the First Cavalry Division were not so desperately heavy as those of the Third, but were none the less very serious, amounting to 54 officers and 650 men.

It is possible that the German attack desisted because the infantry were-exhausted, but more probable that the great head of shells accumulated had been brought down to a minimum level, and that the gas cylinders were empty. For ten days, while the British strengthened their battered line, there was a lull in the fighting.

There was no change, however, in the German plan of campaign, and the fight which broke out again upon May 24 may be taken as the continuation of the battle which had died down upon the 13th. Fresh reservoirs of poison had been accumulated, and early in the morning in the first light of dawn the infernal stuff was drifting down wind in a solid bank some three miles in length and forty feet in depth, bleaching the grass, blighting the trees, and leaving a broad scar of destruction behind it. A roaring torrent of shells came pouring into the trenches at the instant that the men, hastily aroused from sleep, were desperately fumbling in the darkness to find their respirators and shield their lungs from the strangling poison. The front of this attack was from a farm called “Shell-trap,” between the Poelcapelle and Langemarck roads on the north, to Bellewaarde Lake on the south. The surprise of the poison in that weird hour was very effective, and it was immediately followed by a terrific and accurate bombardment, which brought showers of asphyxiating shells into the trenches. The main force of the chlorine seems to have struck the extreme right of the Fourth Division and the whole front of the Twenty-eighth Division, but the Twenty-seventh and the cavalry were also involved in a lesser degree.

Anley’s 12th Brigade was on the left of the British line, with Hull’s 10th Brigade upon its right, the 11th being in reserve. On the 12th and 10th fell the full impact of the attack. The 12th, though badly mauled, stood like a rock and blew back the Germans as they tried to follow up the gas. “They doubled out of their trenches to follow it up half an hour after the emission,” wrote an officer of the Essex. “They were simply shot back into them by a blaze of fire. They bolted back like rabbits.” All day the left and centre of the 12th Brigade held firm. The Royal Irish upon the right were less fortunate. The pressure both of the gas and the shells fell very severely upon them, and the few survivors were at last driven from their trenches, some hundreds of yards being lost, including the Shell-trap Farm. The Dublin Fusiliers, in the exposed flank of the 10th Brigade, were also very hard hit. Of these two gallant Irish regiments only a handful remained, and the Colonels of each, Moriarty and Loveband, fell with their men. Several of the regiments of the 10th Brigade suffered severely, and the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were left with only 2 officers and 76 men standing. These two officers, by some freak of fate, were brothers named Scott, the sole hale survivors of thirty-six who had been attached to the battalion.

This misfortune upon the right left the rest of the 12th Brigade in a most perilous position, attacked on the front, the flank, and the right rear. No soldiers could be subjected to a more desperate test. The flank battalion was the 1st Royal Lancasters (Colonel Jackson), who lived up to the very highest traditions of the British Army. Sick and giddy with the gas, and fired into from three sides, they still stuck doggedly to their trenches. The Essex battalion stood manfully beside them, and these two fine battalions, together with the East Lancashires and Rifle Brigade, held their places all day and even made occasional aggressive efforts to counter-attack. At eight in the evening they were ordered to form a new line with the 10th Brigade, five hundred yards in the rear. They came back in perfect order, carrying their wounded with them. Up to this moment the Fourth Division had held exactly the same line which they had occupied from May 1.

To return to the events of the morning. The next unit from the north was the 85th Brigade (Chapman), which formed the left flank of the Twenty-eighth Division. Upon it also the gas descended with devastating effect. There was just enough breeze to drift it along and not enough to disperse it. The 2nd East Surrey, the flank battalion, held on heroically, poison-proof and heedless of the shells. Next to them, just south of the railway, the 3rd Royal Fusiliers were so heavily gassed that the great majority of the men were absolutely incapacitated. The few who could use a rifle resisted with desperate valour while two companies of the Buffs were sent up to help them, and another company of the same regiment was despatched to Hooge village, where the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade were very hard pressed. On the left of the cavalry, between Hooge and Bellewaarde, was the Durham Territorial Brigade, which was pushed forward and had its share of the gas and of the attack generally, though less hard pressed than the divisions of regular troops upon their left. In a war of large numbers and of many brave deeds it is difficult and perhaps invidious to particularise, but a few sentences may be devoted to one isolated combat which showed the qualities of the disciplined British soldier. Two platoons of the 7th Durhams, under two 19-year-old lieutenants, Arthur Rhodes and Pickersgill, were by chance overlooked when the front line was withdrawn 200 yards. They were well aware that a mistake had been made, but with a heroic if perhaps Quixotic regard for duty they remained waist-deep in water in their lonely trench waiting for their certain fate, without periscopes or machine guns, and under fire from their own guns as well as those of the enemy. Both wings were of course in the air. In the early morning they beat back three German attacks but were eventually nearly all killed or taken. Rhodes was shot again and again but his ultimate fate is unknown. Pickersgill was wounded, and the survivors of his platoon got him to the rear. The loss of such men is to be deplored, but the tradition of two platoons in cold blood facing an army is worth many such losses.

The Durham Territorial Artillery did excellent work in supporting the cavalry, though they were handicapped by their weapons, which were the ancient fifteen-pounders of the South African type. These various movements were all in the early morning under the stress of the first attack. The pressure continued to be very severe on the line of the Royal Fusiliers and Buffs, who were covering the ground between the railway line on the north and Bellewaarde Lake on the south, so the remaining company of the Buffs was thrown into the fight. At the same time, the 3rd Middlesex, with part of the 6th and 8th Durham Light Infantry, advanced to the north of the railway line. The German pressure still increased, however, and at mid-day the Buffs and Fusiliers, having lost nearly all their officers and a large proportion of their ranks, fell back into the wood to the south of the railway.

A determined attempt was at once made to recapture the line of trenches from which they had been forced. The 84th Brigade (Bowes), hitherto in reserve, was ordered to move along the south of the line, while the whole artillery of the Fifth Corps supported the advance. Meanwhile, the 80th Brigade (Fortescue) was pushed forward on the right of the 84th, with orders to advance upon Hooge and restore the situation there. It was evening before all arrangements were completed. About seven o’clock the 84th advanced with the 2nd Cheshires upon the left and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers upon the right, supported by the 1st Welsh, the Monmouths, and the feeble remains of the 1st Suffolks. Darkness had fallen before the lines came into contact, and a long and obstinate fight followed, which swayed back and forwards under the light of flares and the sudden red glare of bursting shells. So murderous was the engagement that the 84th Brigade came out of it without a senior officer left standing out of six battalions, and with a loss of 75 per cent of the numbers with which it began. The machine-gun fire of the Germans was extremely intense, and was responsible for most of the heavy losses. At one time men of the Welsh, the Suffolks, and the Northumberland Fusiliers were actually in the German trenches, but at dawn they were compelled to retire. Late in the evening the 3rd and 4th Brigades of Cavalry were pushed into the trenches on the extreme right of the British position, near Hooge, to relieve the 1st and 2nd Brigades, who had sustained heavy losses for the second time within ten days.

The general result of the attack of May 24 was that this, the most profuse emission of poison, had no more solid effect than the other recent ones, since the troops had learned how to meet it. The result seems to have convinced the Germans that this filthy ally which they had called in was not destined to serve them as well as they had hoped, for from this day onwards there was no further attempt to use it upon a large scale in this quarter. In this action, which may be known in history as the Battle of Bellewaarde, since it centred round the lake of that name, the British endured a loss of some thousands of men killed, wounded, or poisoned, but their line, though forced back at several points, was as firm as ever.

In all the fighting which forms the second half of this great battle one is so absorbed by the desperate efforts of regimental officers and men to hold on to their trenches that one is inclined to do less than justice to the leaders who bore the strain day after day of that uphill fight. Plumer, of the Second

Army; Ferguson, of the Fifth Army Corps; Wilson, Snow, and Bulfin, of the Fourth, Twenty-seventh, and Twenty-eighth Divisions, De Lisle of the Cavalry these were the men who held the line in those weeks of deadly danger.

On May 25 the line was consolidated and straightened out, joining the French at the same point as before, passing through Wieltje, and so past the west end of Lake Bellewaarde to Hooge. At this latter village there broke out between May 31 and June 3 what may be regarded as an aftermath of the battle which has just been described. The château at this place, now a shattered ruin, was the same building in which General Lomax was wounded and General Monro struck senseless in that desperate fight on October 31. Such was the equilibrium of the two great forces that here in May the fight was still raging. Château and village were attacked very strongly by the German artillery, and later by the German infantry, between May 30 and June 3, but no impression was made. The post was held by the survivors of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, and the action, though a local one, was as fine an exhibition of tenacious courage as has been seen in the war. The building was destroyed, so to a large extent was the regiment, but the post remained with the British. of This narrative is a brief outline of the series of events which make up the second phase of that battle which, beginning in the north of the Allied lines upon April 22, was continued upon the north-eastern salient, and ended, as shown, at Hooge at the end of May. In this fighting at least 100,000 men of the three nations were killed or wounded. The advantage with which the Germans began was to some extent neutralised before the end, for our gallant Allies had never rested during this time, and had been gradually re-establishing their position, clearing the west of the canal, recapturing Steenstraate and Het Sas, and only stopping short of Pilken. On the other hand, the British had been compelled to draw in for two miles, and Ypres had become more vulnerable to the guns of the enemy. If any advantage could be claimed the balance lay certainly with the Germans, but as part of a campaign of attrition nothing could be devised which would be more helpful to the Allies. The whole of these operations may be included under the general title of the second Battle of Ypres, but they can be divided into two clearly separated episodes, the first lasting from April 22 to the end of the month, which may be called the Battle of Langemarck, and the second from May 4th to the 24th, with a long interval in the centre, which may, as already stated, be known as the

Battle of Bellewaarde. In this hard-fought war it would be difficult to say that Ypres. any action was more hard-fought than this, and it will survive for centuries to come if only in the glorious traditions of the Canadian Division, who first showed that a brave heart may rise superior to bursting lungs. These were the greatest of all, but they had worthy comrades in the Indians, who at the end of an exhausting march hurled themselves into so diabolical a battle; the Northern Territorial Division, so lately civilians to a man, and now fighting like veterans; the 13th Brigade, staggering from their exertions at Hill 60, and yet called on for this new effort; the glorious cavalry, who saved the situation at the last moment; and the much-enduring Fourth, Twenty-seventh, and Twenty- eighth Divisions of the line, who bore the bufferings of the ever-rising German tide. Their dead lie at peace on Ypres plain, but shame on Britain if ever she forgets what she owes to those who lived, for they and their comrades of 1914 have made that name a symbol of glory for ever.

It may help the reader’s comprehension of the sequence sequence of events, and of the desperate nature of this second Battle of Ypres, if a short resume be here given of the happenings upon the various dates. A single day of this contest would have appeared to be a considerable ordeal to any troops. It is difficult to realise the cumulative effect when such blows fell day after day and week after week upon the same body of men. The more one considers this action the more remarkable do the facts appear.

April 22. Furious attack upon the French and Canadians. Germans gain several miles of ground, eight batteries of French guns, and four heavy British guns by the use of poison-gas. The Canadians stand firm.

April 23. Canadians hold the line. Furious fighting. French begin to re-form. Reserves from the Twenty-seventh and Twenty-eighth British Divisions, 13th Brigade, and cavalry buttress up the line.

April 24. Desperate fighting. Line pushed farther back, and Germans took about a thousand prisoners. Line never broken.

April 25. Battle at its height. 50th Northern Territorial Division come into the fight. 10th Regular Brigade come up. Canadians drawn out. The French advancing.

April 26. 11th Regular Brigade thrown into the fight. Also the Lahore Division of Indians. Trenches of Twenty-eighth Division attacked.

April 27. The French made some advance on the left. There was equilibrium on the rest of the line. Hard fighting everywhere.

April 28. The enemy still held, and his attack exhausted for the moment. French made some progress.

May 1. British 12th Brigade came into line.

May 2. Renewed German assault on French and British, chiefly by gas. Advance held back with difficulty by the Fourth Division.

May 3 and 4. Contraction of the British position, effected without fighting, but involving the abandonment of two miles of ground at the north- eastern salient.

May 5. German attack upon Fourth Division.

May 6. Attack still continued.

May 7. Artillery preparation for general German attack.

May 8. Furious attack upon Fourth, Twenty-eighth, and Twenty- seventh British Divisions. Desperate fighting and heavy losses. The British repulsed the attack on their left wing (Fourth Division), but sustained heavy loss on centre and right.

May 9. Very severe battle continued. British left held its ground, but right and centre tended to contract.

May 10. Fighting of a desperate character, falling especially upon the Twenty-seventh Division.

May 11. Again very severe fighting fell upon the Twenty-seventh Division on the right of the British line. Losses were heavy, and there was a slight contraction.

May 12. Readjustment of British line. Two divisions of cavalry put in place of Twenty-eighth Division. Furious artillery attack, followed by infantry advance. Cavalry and Twenty-seventh Division terribly punished. Very heavy losses, but the line held. Fourth Division fiercely engaged and held its line.

May 13. The Germans exhausted. The attack ceased. Ten days of mutual recuperation.

May 24. Great gas attack. Fourth Division on left had full force of it, lost heavily, but could not be shifted. In the evening had to retire five hundred yards for the first time since the fighting began. General result of a long day of furious fighting was some contraction of the British line along its whole length, but no gap for the passage of the enemy. This may be looked upon as a last despairing effort of the Germans, as no serious attempt was afterwards made that year to force the road to Ypres.

Such, in a condensed form, was the record of the second Battle of Ypres, which for obstinacy in attack and inflexibility in defence can only be compared with the first battle in the same section six months before. Taking these two great battles together, their result may be summed up in the words that the Germans, with an enormous preponderance of men in the first and of guns in the second, had expended several hundred thousand of their men with absolutely no military advantage whatever.

V. THE BATTLE OF RICHEBOURG FESTUBERT
May 9-24

The new attack — Ordeal of the 25th Brigade — Attack of the First Division — Fateful days — A difficult situation — Attack of the Second Division — Attack of the Seventh Division — British success — Good work of the Canadians — Advance of the Forty-seventh London Division — The lull before the storm

WHILST this desperate fighting was going on in the north a very extensive and costly operation had been begun in the south, a great attack being made by the First Army, with the main purpose of engaging the bourg Festubert German troops and preventing them from sending help to their comrades, who were hard pressed by the French near Arras. In this the movement was entirely successful, but the direct gain of ground was not commensurate with the great exertions and losses of the Army. For some days the results were entirely barren, but the patient determination of Sir John French and of Sir Douglas Haig had their final reward, and by May 25, when the movement had been brought to a close, there had been a general advance of 600 yards over a front of four miles, with a capture of 10 machine guns and some 800 prisoners. These meagre trophies of victory may, however, hardly be said to compensate us for the severe and unavoidable losses which must always in the case of the attack be heavier than those of the bourg. This important attack was made upon May 9, over a front of about ten miles from the Laventie district in the north to that of Richebourg in the south. In the case of the northern attack it was carried out by Rawlinson’s Fourth Corps, and was directed upon the sector of the German lines to the north-west of Fromelles at the point which is named Rouges Banes. The southern attack was allotted to the Indian Corps (Willcocks) and the First Corps acting together. These two efforts represented the real foci of activity, but a general action was carried on from one end of the line to the other in order to confuse the issue, and hold the enemy in his trenches.

Both in the north and in the south the special attack was opened by a sudden and severe bombardment, which lasted for about forty minutes. This had been the prelude to the victory of Neuve Chapelle, but in the case of

Neuve Chapelle the British attack had been a complete surprise, whereas in this action of May 9 there is ample evidence that the Germans were well informed as to the impending movement, and were prepared for it. Their trenches were very deep, and more vulnerable to high explosives, in which we were deficient, than to shrapnel. None the less, the bombardment was severe and accurate, though, as it proved, insufficient to break down the exceedingly effective system of defence, based upon barbed wire, machine guns, and the mutual support of trenches.

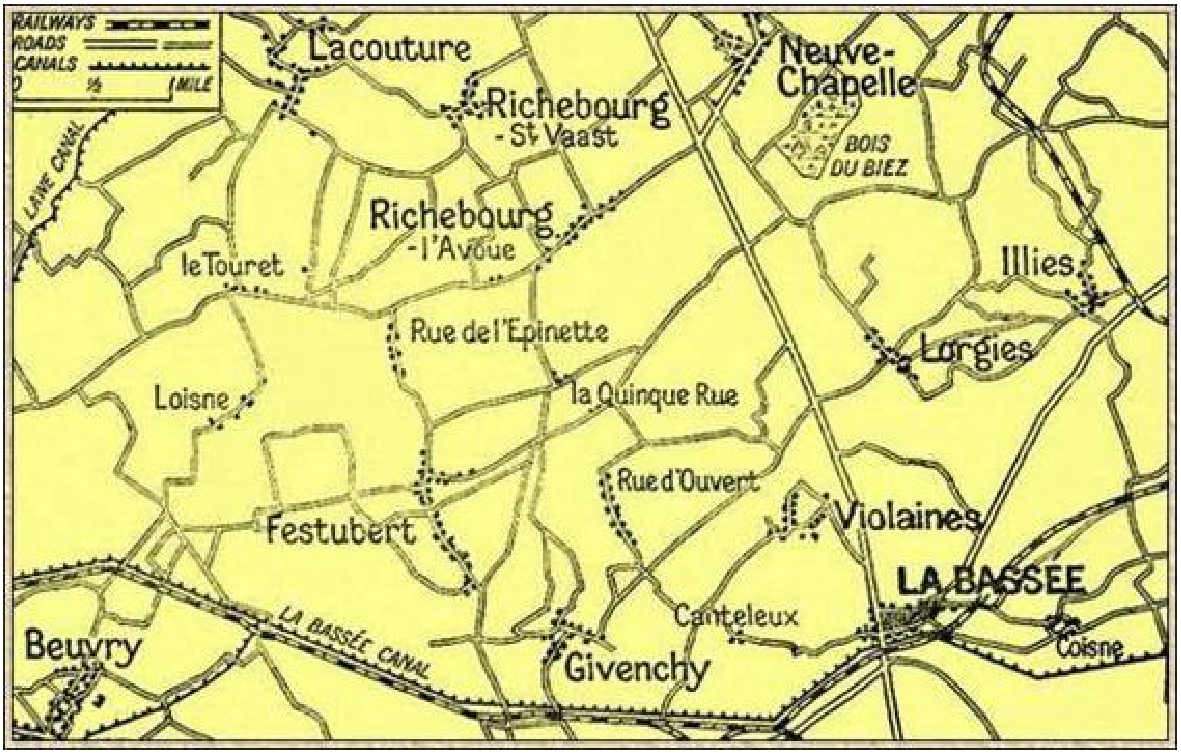
RAILWAYS
ROADS
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0
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LAWE CANAL
Lacouture
Richebourg -St Vaast
Neuve-Chapelle
BOIS DU BIEZ
Richebourg -l'Avoue
le Touret
Illies
Rue de l'Epinette
Lorgies
Loisne
la Quinque Rue
Rue d'Ouvert
Violaines
Festubert
LA BASSEE
LA BASSÉE CANAL
Canteleux
Beuvry
Givenchy
Coisne

Richebourg District

The attack in the north was confided to Lowry-Cole’s 25th Brigade, supported by the remainder of the Eighth Division. This brigade consisted of the 1st Irish Rifles, 2nd Berkshires, 2nd Rifle Brigade, 2nd Lincoln, and two Territorial battalions the 1st London and the 13th London (Kensington), The latter regiment was given a special task, which was to seize and hold a considerable mine-crater upon the left of the line. The rest of the brigade were ordered at 5:30 to charge the German trenches, which was done with the greatest dash and gallantry. Through a terrific fire of rifles and machine-guns the wave of men rolled forward, and poured into the trench, the 1st Irish Rifles and the 2nd Rifle Brigade leading the assault. It was found, however, that further progress could not be made. As the men sprang over the parapets they were mowed down in an instant. Long swathes of our dead marked the sweep of the murderous machine-guns. The Brigadier himself with his Brigade-major at his heels, sprang forward to lead the troops, but both were shot down in an instant, Lowry-Cole being killed and Major Dill badly wounded. It was simply impossible to get forward. No bravery, no perseverance, no human quality whatever could avail against the relentless sleet of lead. The 1st Londons coming up in support deployed and advanced over 400 yards of open with the steadiness of veterans, but lost nearly half their numbers. The Kensingtons in their crater had a similar experience, and could only hold on and endure a most pitiless pelting. For a long day, until the forenoon of the 10th, the ground which had been won was held. Then at last the bitter moment came when the enfeebled survivors, weakened by thirty-six hours of fighting, and fiercely attacked on all sides, were compelled to fall back upon their original lines. The retirement was conducted with a steadiness which verged upon bravado.

“These God-like fools!” was the striking phrase of a generous German who observed the thin ranks sauntering back under a crushing fire, with occasional halts to gather up their wounded. The casualty figures show how terrific was the ordeal to which the men had been exposed. The Irish Rifles lost the very heavy numbers of 9 officers killed, 13 wounded, and 465 men out of action. The total of the 2nd Rifle Brigade was even more terrible, working out as 21 officers and 526 men dead or wounded. The figures of the 2nd Berkshires and of the 2nd Lincolns were heavy, but less disastrous than those already quoted. The former lost 20 officers and 263 men, the latter 8 officers and 258 men. The 24th Brigade (Oxley) which, had supported the 25th, and had also reached the first trenches, endured losses which were almost as disastrous. The 2nd East Lancashires lost 19 officers and 435 men; the 1st Sherwood Foresters, 17 officers and 342 men; the 2nd Northamptons, 12 officers, and 414 men; the 5th Black Watch, 8 officers and 140 men. The losses of the 23rd Brigade, which remained in support, were by no means light, for the Scottish Rifles lost 12 officers and 156 men; while the 2nd Devons lost 7 officers and 234 men. Altogether the Eighth Division lost 4500 men, a single brigade (the 25th), accounting for 2232 of these casualties. Deplorable as they are, these figures must at least show that officers and men had done all that could be attempted to achieve the victory. When it is remembered that these were the same battalions which had lost so terribly at Neuve Chapelle just two months before, one can but marvel at the iron nerve which, enabled them once again to endure so searching a test.

It has been stated that the Kensingtons were given a separate mission of their own in the capture and bourg defence of a mine-crater upon the left of the British line. They actually carried not only the crater, but a considerable section of the hostile trenches, penetrating at one time as deep as the third line; but reinforcements could not reach them, their flanks were bare, and they were at last forced to retire. “It was bitter and damnable!” cries one of them out of his full heart. It was with the greatest difficulty that the remains of the gallant band were able to make their way back again to the British line of trenches. Nine officers were killed, 4 wounded, and 420 men were hit out of about 700 who went into action.

Such was the attack and bloody repulse which began the Battle of Richebourg. At the same hour the Indians and the First Corps had advanced upon the German lines to the north of Givenchy with the same undaunted courage, the same heavy losses, and the same barren result. The events of May 9 will always stand in military history as among the most honourable, but also the most arduous, of the many hard experiences of the British soldiers in France.

In the case of the Indians, the attack was checked early, and could make no headway against the terribly arduous conditions. Their advance was upon the right of that already described of the Fourth Corps. Farther still to the right or to the south in the region of Richebourg l’Avoué was the front of the First Division, which was fated to be even more heavily punished than the Eighth had been in the north. In this case also there was a prelude of forty minutes’ concentrated fire a period which, as the result L showed, was entirely inadequate to neutralise the many obstacles with which the stormers were faced.

During the night, the sappers had bridged the ditches between the front trenches and the supports, and had also crept out and thrown bridges over the ditches between the two lines. The 2nd Brigade (Thesiger), consisting of the 1st Northamptons, 2nd and 5th Sussex, 2nd Rifles, 1st North Lancashires, and 9th Liverpools, attacked upon the right indeed, they formed at that moment the extreme right of the whole British Army, save for the Forty-seventh London Division to the south. The weather was bright and clear, but the effect of the bombardment was to raise such a cloud of dust that two men from each platoon in the front line were able to carry forward a light bridge with which they gained a line about eighty yards from the enemy’s parapet. The instant that the guns ceased, the infantry dashed forward, but were met by a withering fire. The 1st Northamptons and 2nd Sussex were in the lead, and the ground between the armies was littered with their bodies. In a second wave came the 2nd Rifles and the 5th Sussex, but human valour could do nothing against the pelting sleet of lead. The wire had been very imperfectly cut, and it was impossible to get through. The survivors fell back into the front trenches, while their comrades lay in lines and heaps upon the bullet-swept plain. The 5th Sussex Territorials had their baptism of fire, the first and last for many, and carried themselves like men. A line of German machine-guns was posted in a very close position almost at right angles to the advance, and it was these which inflicted the heaviest losses. Hardly a single man got as far as the German parapet. At 6:20 the assault was a definite failure.

On the left, the 3rd Brigade had kept pace with the 2nd, and had shared its trials and its losses. The van of the charging brigade was formed by the 2nd Munsters and the 2nd Welsh. The 1st Gloucesters, 1st South Wales Borderers, and 4th Welsh Fusiliers were in close support. Their attack was on the German line at the Rue des Bois, 300 yards away. They reached the trenches, though Colonel Richard of the Munsters and very many of his men were killed. This was the third Munster Colonel Charrier, Bent, Richard to be killed or disabled in the war. The men surged over the parapet, Captain Campbell-Dick standing on the crest of it, and whooping them on with his cap as if they were a pack of hounds. He fell dead even as they passed him. The trenches were taken, but could not be held, as there were no supports and the assault had failed on either side. Under cover of a renewed artillery fire the survivors came slowly and sullenly back. Once more, and for the third time, the 2nd Munsters were reduced to 200 rank and file. Three officers emerged unhurt from the action. A second attack was ordered for mid-day, the regiments being shifted round so as to bring the supports into the front line. It was soon found, however, that the losses had already been so heavy that it was impossible, especially in the 2nd Brigade, to muster sufficient force for a successful advance. The 1st Guards Brigade (Lowther) was therefore brought to the front, and after a renewed bombardment at 4 o’clock the two leading battalions the 1st Black Watch and the 1st Cameron Highlanders rushed to the assault over the bodies of their fallen comrades. It is on record that as the Highlanders dashed forward, a number of the wounded who had been lying in the open since morning, staggered to their feet and joined in the charge. It was a desperate effort, and the khaki wave rolled up to the trenches, and even lapped over them in places; but the losses were too heavy, and the advance had lost all weight before it reached the German line. At one point a handful of Black Watch got over the line, but it was impossible to reinforce them, and they were compelled to fall back. The 3rd Brigade on their flank had pushed forward the 1st Gloucester s and 1st South Wales Borderers. They found the enemy "standing 3 and 4 deep in their breastworks and fighting like demons." The British threw themselves down, and their guns showered shrapnel on the crowded German trenches. The enemy losses were great but the machine-guns were intact and no advance was possible. At 6 o'clock the survivors of both Brigades were back in their trenches once more. Late the same night the 5th Brigade of the Second Division was brought up to take over the line, and the remains of the First Division were withdrawn to the rear.

The losses of the 2nd Brigade were 70 officers and 1793 men, which might have been cited as possibly the highest number incurred in the same length of time up to that time, had it not been for the terrible figures of the 25th Brigade upon the same fatal day. The other two brigades of the Division were hard hit, the total losses of the Division amounting to nearly 5000 men. If the loss of the Indian Corps be included, the number of casualties in this assault cannot have been less than from 12,000 to 13,000 men; while the losses to the enemy inflicted by the artillery could not possibly have approximated to this figure, nor had any advantage been obtained.

There are few single periods of the War so crowded with incident as from May 7 to 9, 1915. In the north the second Battle of Ypres was at its height. In the south the Battle of Richebourg had begun. But a third incident occurred upon the earlier date which struck the civilised world with a horror which no combat, however murderous, could inspire. It was the day when nearly 1200 civilians, with a considerable proportion of women and little children, were murdered by being torpedoed and drowned in the unarmed liner the *Lusitania*. Such incidents do not come within the direct scope of this narrative, and yet this particular one had an undoubted military bearing upon the War, since it hardened our resolve, stimulated our recruiting, and nerved our soldiers in a very marked degree, while finally removing any possibility of peace based upon compromise. No such crime against civilians has been committed in deliberate warfare since the days of Tamerlane or Timour the Tartar; yet it is dreadful to have to add that it was hailed as a triumph from one end of Germany to the other, that medals were struck to commemorate it, and that no protest appeared in the German Press. To such depths of demoralisation had this once Christian and civilised nation been reduced! Touch Germany where one would, on land or air, on the sea or under it, one came always upon murder.

It is impossible not to admire the tenacity of Sir John French under the very difficult circumstances in which he was now placed. His troops at Ypres were still fighting with their backs to the wall. Their position on May 10 was precarious. The only reinforcements they could hope for in case of disaster were from the south. And yet the south had itself received a severe rebuff. Was it best to abandon the attack there, and reassume the defensive, so as to have the men available in case there should come an urgent call from the north? A weaker general would have said so, and accepted his check at Festubert. Sir John, however, was not so easily to be deflected from his plans. He steadied himself by a day or two of rest, during which he not only prepared fresh forces for striking, but got the measure of the enemy’s power at Ypres. Then it was determined that the action should proceed, but that it should be directed to the more southerly area of the British position, where it would be in closer touch with the French, and receive some support from their admirable artillery.

The centre of the British movement was still at Richebourg l’Avoué, but the direction of the advance was to the south and west. It had already been shown that the passage of open spaces under machine-gun fire was difficult and deadly by daylight, so it was determined that night should be used for the advance. Several successive nights were unfavourable, but the days were spent in a deliberate artillery preparation until the action was recommenced upon May 15. In the interval, the Second Division had taken the place of the First in the Givenchy sector, and the Seventh Division of the Fourth Corps had been brought round from the Laventie district, and was now upon the right of their comrades of the First Corps. The Canadian Division was brought up in support, while the Indian Corps still preserved its position upon the left. The general line of attack was from Richebourg by the Rue des Bois, and so south in front of Festubert. The advance was made by the Indians upon the left, and the Second Division upon the right at 11:30 on the night of May 15. The Indians were held up, Festubert and maintained from that time onwards a defensive position. When it is remembered that the Meerut Division had suffered heavily at Neuve Chapelle, that the Lahore Division had been very hard hit at Ypres, and that there was only a limited facility for replacing the losses of the native regiments, it is not to be wondered at that the Corps had weakened. The Second Division, however, would take no denial. The attack was in the hands of the 5th and 6th Brigades, with the 4th Guards Brigade in support. It was to sweep over the ground, which had been the scene of the repulse of the 9th, but it was to be screened by darkness. Soon after ten o’clock the men passed silently over the front trench, and lay down in four lines in the open waiting for the signal. At 11:30 the word was passed, and they advanced at a walk. The front line of the 5th Brigade was composed of the 2nd Worcesters upon the left, and the Inniskilling Fusiliers (taken from the 12th Brigade) upon the right. The leading battalions of the 6th Brigade were the 1st Rifles, the 1st King’s Liverpools, 1st Berkshires, and upon the extreme right two companies (A and B) of the 7th King’s Liverpools. Flares were suddenly discharged from the German trenches, and a ghostly flickering radiance illuminated the long lines of crouching men. There were numerous ditches in front, but the sappers had stolen forward and spanned them with rude bridges. The German fire was terrific, but the uncertain quivering light made it less deadly than it had been during the daytime, though very many fell. It was insufficient to determined rush of the British infantry. The rifles could not hold them back, and sweeping jets from machine-guns could not kill them fast enough: nothing but Death could hold that furious line. In three minutes they had swarmed across the open, and poured into the trenches, killing or taking all the Germans who were in the front line. The 2nd Worcesters on the left were held up by unbroken barbed wire, and were unable to get forward; but all the other battalions reached the trench, and cleared it for a considerable distance on either flank, the bombers rushing along it and hurling their deadly weapons in front of them. The remainder rushed down the communication trench, and seized the second line of defences some hundreds of yards behind the first. On the morning of Sunday, May 16, the Second Division had gained and firmly held about half a mile in breadth and a quarter of a mile in depth of the German trenches. There was still an open plain in the rear between the advanced troops and their supports, which as the light grew clearer was so swept by German fire that it was nearly impossible to get across it. About 8:30 in the morning, the remainder of the 7th King’s Liverpools with some of their comrades of the 5th King’s Liverpools endeavoured to join the others in front, but were shot to pieces in the venture. During the whole of the morning, however, single volunteers kept running forward carrying fresh supplies of bombs and bandoliers of cartridges for the men in front. The names of most of these brave men are to be found in the casualty lists, and their memory in the hearts of their comrades.

Four hours after this successful attack by the Second Division, at 3:30 on the morning of Sunday May 16 another assault was made some miles to the south, just to the north of Festubert. The attack bourg was made by the 20th Brigade (Heyworth) upon the left and the 22nd (Lawford) upon the right. The 2nd Borders and 2nd Scots Guards led the rush of the 20th, supported later by the 1st Grenadiers and 2nd Gordons; while the 1st Welsh Fusiliers and 2nd Queen’s Surrey were in the van of the 22nd with the 2nd Warwicks, 8th Royal Scots, and 1st South Staffords behind them. The famous Seventh Division has never yet found its master in this campaign, and the Seventh Prussian Corps in the south could make no more of it than the Fifteenth had done in the north.

In the case of the 20th Brigade the Borders upon the left were held up for a time, but the Scots Guards advanced with a fury which took them far beyond the immediate objective, and was carried to such an extent that one company outdistanced all their comrades, and being isolated in the German position, were nearly all cut off. The rest of the Guards, however, having crossed the trench line, swung across, so that they were in the rear of the Germans who were holding up the Borders, so that the defenders were compelled to surrender. The 1st Grenadiers came up in support and the ground was made good. Meanwhile the 22nd Brigade upon the right had some desperate fighting. The 2nd Queen’s Surrey had been temporarily stopped by heavy machine-gun fire, but two companies of the Welsh Fusiliers rushed the trenches opposite them and were quickly joined by the rest of the battalion. The Queen’s Surrey refused to be rebuffed, and with the support of the 1st Staffords they again came forward, dashing through a sleet of bullets got to the bourg German line. Colonel Gabbett of the Fusiliers and Major Bottomley of the Queen’s, one of the heroes of Gheluvelt, both met their death in this fine attack. On reaching the trenches the South Staffords sent their bombers under Lieutenant Hassell down the alleys of the Germans, gathering in many prisoners. A surprising feat was performed by Sergeant-Major Barter of the Welsh Fusiliers, while engaged in similar work, for he and seven men brought back 94 Germans, including 3 officers. The leading companies of the South Staffords under Major Lord and Captain Bearman got well forward into the enemy's ground, and held on there for three days under a terrible shell-fall, until they handed the position over to the 21st Brigade. Meanwhile, upon the left a mixed lot of men from the Welsh Fusiliers, Scots Guards, and Warwicks, all under Captain Stockwell, struggled along, actually swimming one ditch which was too deep to wade, and got into the Orchard which had been assigned as their objective. These men were afterwards withdrawn to the German front line trenches in order to escape from the very severe bombardment on the Orchard. Great difficulty was experienced in bringing in the wounded, owing to the space covered and to the incessant and extreme shelling. It is on record that the men of the field ambulance, under Lieutenant Greenlees of the Royal Medical Corps, were at work for thirty-six hours with three hours' break, always in the open and always under fire. These are the men who have all the dangers of war without its thrills, working and dying for the need of their comrades and the honour of their corps.

In this fine day's work, in which the Seventh Division lived up to its own reputation, Colonel Wood of the Borders and Colonel Brook of the 8th Royal Scots were killed, making four losses in one day among commanding officers of battalions.

On the night of May 16 the Germans made a counter-attack, which pushed back the extreme apex of the ground gained by the Seventh Division. All other points were held. The British had now cut two holes in the German front over a distance of about three miles; but between the two holes into which the heads of the Second and Seventh Divisions had buried themselves, there lay one portion of a thousand yards inviolate, strongly defended by intricate works and machine-guns. Desperate endeavours had been made upon the 16th to get round the north of this position by the Second Division, but the fire was too murderous, and all were repulsed. At half-past nine in the morning of the 17th the attempt was renewed from both sides with a strong artillery support. On the north the Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks made a strong attack, while on the south the 21st Brigade pushed to the front. The 4th Camerons, a Gaelic-speaking battalion of shepherds and gillies, kept fair pace with the veteran regular battalions of the Brigade, but lost their gallant Colonel, Fraser. The fiery valour of the Camerons is shown by the fact that afterwards bodies of the fallen were found far ahead of any point reached that day by the main advance. Gradually the valiant defenders were driven from post to post, and crushed under the cross fire. About mid-day the position was in the hands of the British, 300 survivors having been captured. After this consolidation of their front, the two attacking divisions drove on together to the eastward, winning ground but meeting everywhere the same stark resistance. Farmhouse after farmhouse was carried. At one point a considerable body ‘Of Germans rushed out from an untenable position; but on their putting up their hands and advancing towards the British, they were mowed down to the number of some hundreds by the rifles and cannon of their comrades in the rear. South of Festubert the thick spray of bombers and bayonet men thrown out by the Seventh Division into the German trenches were also making ground all day, and the enemy’s loss in this quarter was exceedingly heavy. The 57th Prussian Regiment of Infantry, among others, is said to have lost more than two-thirds of their numbers during these operations.

By the evening of Monday, May 17, the hostile front had been crushed in for a space of over two miles, and the British Army had regained the ascendancy which had been momentarily checked upon May 9. If a larger tale of prisoners was not forthcoming as a proof of victory, the explanation lay in the desperate nature of the encounter. The sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the murders by poison-gas, were in the thoughts and on the lips of the assaulting infantry, and many a German made a vicarious atonement. At the same time the little mobs of men who rushed forward with white flags in one hand, and in many cases their purses outstretched in the other, were given quarter and led to the rear, safe from all violence save from their own artillery. There were many fierce threats of no quarter before the engagement, but with victory the traditional kindliness of the British soldier asserted itself once more.

On the evening of the 17th the men in the front Festubert line were relieved, Lord Cavan’s 4th Guards Brigade taking over the advanced trenches in which the 1st King’s Liverpools and other battalions of the 5th and 6th Brigades were lying. The Guards had to advance a considerable distance under very heavy fire to reach their objective, and there is a touch of other days in the fact that the Bishop of Khartoum stood by the trenches and blessed them as they passed. They lost many men from the terrible artillery fire, but in spite of this they at once advanced in a most gallant attack which won several hundred yards of ground. The Irish and 2nd Grenadiers were the attacking battalions with the Herts territorials in close support. The Irish Guards were especially forward and held the ground gained, but lost 17 officers and several hundred men. All day of the 18th the Guards held the advanced front line until relieved at midnight of that date by the advance of another Division.

The 18th saw the general advance renewed, but it was hampered by the fact that the heavy weather made it difficult to obtain the artillery support which is so needful where buildings have to be carried. The Indians upon the left sustained a heavy attack upon this day, the losses falling chiefly upon the Sirhind Brigade, and especially on the 1st Highland Light Infantry and the 15th Sikhs. It was in this action that Lieutenant Smyth and Private Lai Singh of the latter regiment saved the fight at a critical moment by bringing up a fresh supply of bombs. Ten men started on the venture, and only the two won home. The 19th was wet and misty. It was upon this date that the two hard-working and victorious Divisions, the Second and the Seventh, were relieved respectively by the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division and by the Canadians, the guns of the two regular Divisions being retained. The operations which had hitherto been under Monro of the First Corps, were now confided to Alderson of the Canadians. At this time, the general level of the advance was the road which extends from La Quinque to Bethune. The change of troops did not entail any alteration in strategy, and the slow advance went forward. Upon the night of May 20-21 the Canadians continued the work of the Seventh Division, and added several fresh German trenches to the area already secured. From Richebourg to the south and east there was now a considerable erosion in the German position. The first objective of the Canadians was an orchard in the Quinque Rue position, which was assaulted by the 14th Montreal Regiment (Meighen) and the 16th Canadian Scottish (Leckie), after a gallant reconnaissance by Major Leckie of the latter regiment. The Canadians were thrust in between the 3rd Coldstream Guards of the Second Division upon their left, and the 2nd Wiltshires of the Seventh Division upon their right. The orchard was cleared in most gallant fashion, and a trench upon the flank of it was taken, but the Canadian loss was considerable in the battalions named and in the 13th Royal Canadian Highlanders in support.

Another Canadian battalion, the 10th, had attacked the German line a mile to the south of the orchard, and had been repulsed. A heavy bombardment was organised, and the attempt was renewed upon the following day, two companies of the 10th, preceded by a company of grenade-throwers, carrying 400 yards of the trench at a very severe cost. It was partly recaptured by the Germans upon May 22, while part remained in the hands of the Canadians. Several counter-attacks were made upon the Canadians during this day, but all withered away before the deadly fire of the Western infantry.

On May 24 the Canadians were attacking once more at the position where the 10th Battalion had obtained a partial success upon the 22nd. It was a strongly fortified post, which had been named “Bexhill” by the British. The assault was carried out at daybreak by two companies of the 5th Battalion under Major Edgar, with a company of the 7th British Columbians in support. Before six o’clock the position had been carried, and was held all day in face of a concentrated shell-fire from the German guns. It was a terrible ordeal, for the Brigade lost 50 officers and nearly 1000 men, but never their grip of the German trench. On the same night, however, another Canadian attack delivered by the 3rd Battalion (Rennie) with great fire, was eventually repulsed by the machine-guns.

This long-drawn straggling action, which had commenced with such fury upon May 9, was now burning itself out. Prolonged operations of this kind can only be carried on by fresh relays of troops. The Forty-seventh London Territorial Division was brought up into the front line, and found itself involved at once in some fierce fighting at the extreme right of the British line near Givenchy. The Forty-seventh Division (formerly the Second London Division) was in reality the only London division, since the battalions which composed the first, the Artists, Victorias, Rangers, Westminsters, etc., had already been absorbed by regular brigades. The division commanded by General Barter consisted of the 140th (Cuthbert), 141st (Thwaites), and 142nd (Willoughby) Brigades. On the evening of May 25 the latter Brigade, which occupied the front-line trench, was ordered to make an attack upon the German line opposite, whilst the 18th Battalion of the 141st Brigade made a strong feint to draw their fire. The first-line battalions were the 23rd and 24th (Queen’s), of which the 23rd upon the left had some 300 yards of open to cross, while the 24th upon the right had not more than 150. Both battalions reached their objective in safety, and within three minutes had established telephonic communications with their supports of the 21st and 22nd Battalions. The capture of the trenches had not been difficult, but their retention was exceedingly so, as there was a ridge from which the German machine-guns commanded the whole line of trench. Each man had brought a sandbag with him, and these were rapidly filled, while officers and men worked desperately in building up a defensive traverse a labour in which Sergeant Oxman greatly distinguished himself. Three German counter-attacks got up within ten yards of the 24th, but all were beaten back. The German bombers, however, were deadly, and many officers and men were among their victims. The 21st Battalion had followed up the 23rd, and by 10:30 they were able to work along the line of the German trench and make good the position. All day upon May 26 they were exposed to a very heavy and accurate German fire, but that afternoon about 4 P.M. they were relieved by the 20th London from Thwaites' 141st Brigade. The line was consolidated and held, in spite of a sharp attack on the afternoon of May 28, which was beaten off by the 20th Battalion.

Whilst the London Division had been thrust into the right of the British line, the Canadian infantry had been relieved by bringing forward into the trenches the dismounted troopers of King Edward's and Strathcona's Horse, belonging to Seely's Mounted Canadian Brigade, who fought as well as their fellow-countrymen of the infantry a standard not to be surpassed. From this time onwards there was a long lull in this section of the British line. The time was spent in rearranging the units of the Army, and in waiting for those great reinforcements of munitions which were so urgently needed. It was recognised that it was absolutely impossible to make a victorious advance, or to do more than to hold one's ground, when the guns of the enemy could fire six shells to one. In Britain, the significance of this fact had at last been made apparent, and the whole will and energy of the country were turned to the production of ammunition. Not only were the old factories in full swing, but great new centres were created in towns which had never yet sent forth such sinister exports. Mr. Lloyd George, a man who has made atonement for any wrong that he did his country in the days of the Boer War by his magnificent services in this far greater crisis, threw all his energy and contagious enthusiasm into this vital work, and performed the same miracles in the organisation and improvisation of the tools of warfare that Lord Kitchener had done in the case of the New Armies. They were services which his country can never forget. Under Kitchener’s inspiration the huge output of Essen and the other factories of Germany were equalled, and finally surpassed by the improvised and largely amateur munition workers of Britain. The main difficulty in the production of high explosives had lain in the scarcity of picric acid. Our Free Trade policy, which has much to recommend it in some aspects, had been pushed to such absurd and pedantic lengths that this vital product had been allowed to fall into the hands of our enemy, although it is a derivative of that coal tar in which we are so rich. Now at last the plants for its production were laid down. Every little village gasworks was sending up its quota of toluol to the central receivers. Finally, in explosives as in shells and guns, the British were able to supply their own wants fully and to assist their Allies. One of the strangest, and also most honourable, episodes of the War was this great economic effort which involved sacrifices to the time, comfort, and often to the health of individuals so great as to match those of the soldiers. Grotesque combinations resulted from the eagerness of all classes to lend a hand. An observer has described how a peer and a prize-fighter have been seen working on the same bench at Woolwich, while titled ladies and young girls from cultured homes earned sixteen shillings a week at Erith, and boasted in the morning of the number of shell cases which they had turned and finished in their hours of night shift. Truly it had become a National War. Of all its strange memories none will be stranger than those of the peaceful middle-aged civilians who were seen eagerly reading books upon elementary drill in order to prepare themselves to face the most famous soldiers in Europe, or of the schoolgirls and matrons who donned blue blouses and by their united work surpassed the output of the great death factories of Essen.

VI. THE TRENCHES OF HOOGE

The British line in June 1915 — Canadians at Givenchy — Attack of 154th Brigade — 8th Liverpool Irish Third Division at Hooge — 11th Brigade near Ypres — Flame attack on the Fourteenth Light Division — Victory of the Sixth Division at Hooge

THE spring campaign may be said to have ended at the beginning of June. It had consisted, so far as the British were concerned, in three great battles.

The first was that of Neuve Chapelle. The second, and incomparably the greatest, was the second Battle of Ypres, extending from April 22 to the end of May, in which both sides fought themselves to a standstill, but the Germans, while gaining some ground, failed to reach their final objective. The third was the Battle of Bichebourg, from May 9 to May 18, which began with a check and ended by a definite but limited advance for the British. The net result of the whole operations of these three months was a gain of ground to the Germans in the Ypres section and a gain of ground to the Allies in the region of Festubert and Arras. Neither gain can be said to have been of extreme strategic importance, and it is doubtful if there was any great discrepancy between the losses of the two sides. There now followed a prolonged lull, during which the Germans were content to remain upon the defensive upon the west while they vigorously and successfully attacked the Russians in the east, combining their forces with those of Austria, and driving their half-armed enemy from the passes of the Carpathians right across Poland until the line of the Vistula had been secured. The Allies meanwhile pursued their ill-fated venture in the Dardanelles, while they steadily increased their numbers and, above all, their munitions of war in France and Flanders, having learned by experience that no bravery or devotion can make one gun do the work of six, or enable infantry who have no backing from artillery to gain ground from infantry which are well supported. For a long period to come the most important engagements were a series of fights upon June 16, July 30, and August 9, which may be looked upon as a single long-drawn-out engagement, since they were all concerned with the successive taking and retaking of the same set of trenches near Hooge, in the extreme northern section of the line. Before giving some account of these events it would be well to interrupt the narrative for a time in order to describe that vast expansion of the British Army which was the most unexpected, as it was the most decisive, factor in the war. Without entering into the question of the huge muster of men within the island, and leaving out of consideration the forces engaged in the Near East, the Persian Gulf, and the various Colonial campaigns, an attempt will be made to show the reader the actual battle-line in France, with the order and composition of the troops, during the summer of 1915.

The extreme left wing of the Allied Army consisted now, as before, of the Belgians and of a French corps, the right Moroccan Division of which was the neighbour of the British Army. The British line had been extended northwards as far as the village of Boesinghe.

If now the reader could for a moment imagine himself in an aeroplane, flying from north to south down the Imperial battle-line, he would see beneath him first Keir's Sixth Army Corps, which was composed of the Fourth Division (Wilson) and of the Sixth Division (Congreve). To the south of these lay the Forty- ninth West Riding Division of Territorials (Baldock). These three divisions, the Fourth, the Sixth, and the Forty-ninth, formed Keir's Sixth Army Corps, lying to the north of Hooge. Upon their right, in the neighbourhood of Hooge, holding the ground which had been the recent scene of such furious fighting, and was destined to be the most active section of the line in the immediate future, was Allenby's Fifth Corps. General Allenby had been taken from the command of the cavalry, which had passed to General Byng, and had filled Plumer's place when the latter took over Smith-Dorrien's Army at the end of April. Allenby's Corps consisted of the veteran Third Division (Haldane's) on the north. Then came, defending the lines of Hooge, the new Fourteenth Light Division (Couper). Upon its right was the Forty-sixth North Midland Division (Stuart-Wortley). These three divisions, the Third Regular, Fourteenth New, and Forty-sixth Territorial, made up the Fifth Corps.

The Second Army Corps (Ferguson) lay to the south of Hooge. Their northern unit was the old Regular Fifth Division (Morland). To its south was a second Regular division Bulfin's Twenty-eighth, of Ypres renown. On its right was the Fiftieth Northumbrian Division (Lindsay), consisting of those three gallant Territorial brigades which had done so splendidly in the crisis of the gas battle. The Third Army Corps (Pulteney's) came next in the line. This was the strongest corps in the whole Hooge. force, containing no fewer than four divisions. These were, counting as ever from the north, the Canadian Division (Alderson), the Twelfth New Division (Wing), the Twenty-seventh Division of Regulars (Snow), and the Eighth Division of Regulars (Davies). All these troops, the Sixth, Fifth, Second, and Third Corps, made up Plumer's Second Army, which contained no fewer than thirteen divisions, or, approximately, 260,000 men.

The First Army, under Haig, which occupied the southern section of the British line, consisted of three Army Corps. To the north, in the Festubert region, was the hard-worked and depleted Indian Corps, which had fought under such extraordinary difficulties and shown such fine military qualities. Attached to them was the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division (Bannatine-Allason). The first two brigades of this were pure Scottish, but the third contained three battalions from that nursery of British regiments, Lancashire. South of the Indians came the glorious old First Corps, and south of it the equally glorious Seventh Division (Capper), forming part of Rawlinson's Fourth Corps. Next to the Seventh Division was the new Ninth Division (Landon), composed of Scottish regiments a very fine unit. South of these, carrying the British line over the Bethune La Bassée Canal, and six miles towards Arras, were the Forty-seventh London Division (Barter) and the Forty-eighth South Midland Division (Fanshawe), drawn mostly from Warwick, Worcester, Gloucester, and Bucks. Altogether, Haig's First Army at the end of June contained nine divisions, or, roughly, 180,000 men. The whole great Army, then, which extended from north of Ypres to north of Arras, may have mustered in the line about 440,000 men, backed by an efficient field service, which may easily have numbered 120,000 more.

When one contemplates this magnificent force and remembers that ten months earlier the whole British Army at Mons had been four divisions, that at the Aisne there were six, that in the days of the first Ypres battle there were eight, and that now there were twenty-two, one marvels at the extraordinary powers of creation and organisation which had created so efficient and powerful a machine. It was rapidly made, and yet in no way was it crude or feeble. Particularly pleasing was it to note the names of the divisional commanders, and to see how many of the heroic leaders of brigades in those early classical conflicts Landon, Snow, Bulfin, Davies, Morland, Wing, Haldane, Wilson, and Congreve were now at the head of small armies of their own. Of the quality of this great force it is superfluous to speak. The whole of this chronicle is a record of it. One observation, however, should in justice be made. With that breadth and generosity of mind which make them the truly imperial people of the world, the English and the English press have continually extolled the valour of the Scots, Irish, Welsh, or men of the Overseas Dominions. There has hardly ever been a mention of the English as such, and the fact has given rise to some very false impressions. It is for the reader to bear in mind, none the less, that four-fifths of this great army was purely English, and that the English Divisions, be they North or South, have shown a sobriety of discipline and an alacrity of valour which place them in the very first place among fighting races. The New Army like the Old Fleet was in the main a triumph of England. Of its first thirty-three divisions all but five were predominantly English.

The men and the generals were there. The delay was still with the guns and the munitions. A heavy gun is not the product of a week or of a month, and before a great increase can be made in the output of shells the machinery for producing them has itself to be produced. But energetic minds and capable hands were busied with the problem from one end of Britain to the other, and the results were rapidly taking form. A considerable amount of the product was being despatched to Archangel to help our hard-pressed Russian Allies, and constant supplies were being despatched to the Dardanelles; but an accumulation was also being stored behind the lines in Flanders. The whole progress of the campaign depended upon this store being sufficient to sustain a prolonged attack, and the time had not yet come.

Before turning to the trenches of Hooge, where the greater part of the fighting occurred during this period of the war, some description must be given of a brisk action upon June 15, opposite Givenchy, immediately to the north of the La Bassée Canal, where the Canadian Division attacked with great gallantry and partly occupied a position which it was not found possible to retain. In this attack the Canadians displayed their usual energy and ingenuity by bringing up two eighteen-pounder field-pieces into their front trench, and suddenly opening fire point-blank at the German defences only seventy-five yards away. Captain Stockwell, with Lieutenants Craig and Kelly The and their men, obviously took their lives in their Hooge. hands, as their guns became the immediate mark of the German artillery, with the result that one was destroyed by a direct hit, and the crew of the other were put out of action by a shrapnel-burst. But before they were silenced the two guns did great damage to the German front-line defence, knocking out several machine-guns and cutting the barbed wire to pieces. After a quarter of an hour of glorious activity they were out of action; but they had smoothed the path for the infantry, who at six in the evening were over the parapet and into the trench opposite. The attack was made by the 1st Ontario Battalion (Hill), supported by the rest of the 1st Canadian Brigade. The storming-party was checked for a moment by the explosion of their own mine, which threw back with disastrous results, killing Lieutenant- Colonel Beecher and burying the bomb-store of the front line. Having seized the German trench, some remained to reverse the parapet, while others rushed on to the second trench, which they also carried. The supply of bombs ran short, however, and could not be replenished. Four messengers in succession rushing back for more were shot dead by the enemy’s fire. A fort upon the left had not been taken, and the machine-guns from its loopholes swept down the captured trench and made it untenable. Slowly the Canadians were forced back, and before ten o’clock what was left of the Ontarios were back in their own trench once more. When it is stated that of 23 officers who took part in the advance 20 were killed or wounded, no further proof is needed of the stern insistence of the attack.

This gallant though fruitless attack of the Canadians at Givenchy was, as it appears, intended to Hooge. coincide with an advance by the Seventh Division on their left, and of the Fifty-first upon the right of them. In the case of the Seventh Division there were two advances, one by day and one by night, in which single battalions were employed and no result achieved. In the second of these the 2nd Gordons lost heavily, having occupied a deserted trench which proved to be so commanded as to be untenable. Before regaining their own lines D Company was cut off and destroyed. On the right the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division had an experience which was equally unsatisfactory. Hibbert’s 154th Brigade made an advance which was bravely urged and bloodily repelled. The preparatory bombardment was answered by a very intense German fire, which was so heavy and accurate that it buried a number of men in the advance trenches, destroyed the bomb-stores, and made all communication nearly impossible. The secret of this extreme readiness of the Germans was divulged by a deserter who came over into the British trenches at the last moment, and said that they all knew that the attack was for six o’clock that day. It was at that very hour that the 6th Scottish Rifles and the 4th North Lancashires, of the Brigade, rushed the German position. Each battalion lost its commanding officer and its adjutant in the first few minutes, but the line of trenches was carried at one tiger-spring. The enemy's shell-fire was exceedingly heavy, and the losses were considerable. Having cleared the trench, the attacking line, especially the Scottish Rifles upon the left, came on unbroken wire, so they dug themselves in in the open and awaited supports. These for some reason were slow in coming up, and as the Germans were in force on either side, and the North Lancashires were also held up by wire, there was a danger lest the forward line might be cut off. It fell back, therefore, closely followed by the enemy, until an advance of the 4th Royal Lancasters helped them to form a line. The whole night was spent in a prolonged rifle duel, the two sides being at very close quarters, and the action resolving itself into a series of stubborn encounters by little groups of men holding shell-craters or fragments of trenches, and offering a sullen resistance to the considerable forces which were now pressing upon them. All order had been lost, the three battalions were hopelessly mixed together, and the command of each little group fell into the hands of any natural leader who won the confidence of the comrades round him. Slowly the ragged line retired, until they found themselves in the early morning back in the position from which they had started, having suffered and inflicted grievous losses, but with no gain of ground to justify them.

It might well have seemed that the attack had failed, or at least that another brigade would be needed to put matters right; but a reserve battalion had not yet gone into action, and to this unit was given the hard task of putting the Germans out once more from the trench which they had re-occupied. There have been days when the Liverpool Irish have proved themselves to be pugnacious in riotous times at home, but now they were to efface all such memories by their splendid bearing at this critical hour. It was 4 P.M. upon June 16, when, with a true Celtic yell, the 8th King's Liverpool, led by Major Johnson, dashed over the parapet and stormed through a hellish sleet of shrapnel to the Hooge. German trenches. "It was pattering like hail upon a window-pane." Officers and men went down in heaps, but nothing could stop the glorious impetuosity of the charge, delivered in the full light of a summer afternoon. "It's sure death, but remember we are Irish!" yelled a sergeant as he bounded on to the sand-bags. Next instant he had been blown to pieces. Captain Finegan, leading the rush, was shot down, as were the greater number of the regimental officers. Finegan’s body was found afterwards at the extreme point of the advance, with twelve of his men lying round him. The Germans were swept out of the front trenches once more, and the Irishmen held desperately on to it for a long time against all the shell-fire of the enemy. It was a great day for Liverpool, July 16, when two of their citizen regiments, the 8th in the south and the 10th in the north, helped to stem the tide of two separate battles. The 8th King’s lost nearly 500 men, and gained a reputation which will not easily die. The survivors were too few, however, to permanently hold the shell-raked trench which they had gained. The 153rd Brigade (Campbell), consisting of Gordons and Black Watch, relieved them in the front line, and the exhausted and decimated battalion was drawn off. In the meantime the 152nd Brigade, upon the left, had been unable to make progress. Of the attackers of the Fifty-first Division some 1500 men had fallen, and there was no permanent gain of ground.

On Wednesday, June 16, there occurred a brisk action to the immediate north of Hooge, at a point to the west and south-west of the Château, where the German line formed somewhat of a salient. This it was determined to straighten out in the familiar fashion, and a considerable force of artillery was secretly concentrated. The assault was assigned to the Third Division, and was carried out by Bowes’ 8th Brigade on the left, and on the right by the 9th Brigade, which consisted of the three Fusilier battalions and the Lincolns, together with the 10th Liverpool Scottish. The latter battalion had been seven months at the Front, doing every sort of hard work, but never getting an opportunity for distinction in action. The 9th Brigade, now commanded by General Douglas Smith, was in reserve near Poperinghe, but it was brought forward through Ypres for the assault. They marched through the shattered town on the Tuesday evening. “The sight of the ruined beauties of that once glorious old town did lots to make us just long to get at the Vandals who had done this wanton act of destruction.” It was a longing which was soon to be appeased. By midnight the troops were in position, and at three in the morning of June 16 the bombardment began. It lasted with terrific intensity for about an hour, and was helped by the guns of the French Thirty-sixth Corps firing towards Pilken, whence the supports might come. Black and yellow clouds covered the whole line of the front German trench, which lay at the fringe of a wood, and out of this mist of death trees, sand-bags, and shattered human bodies flew high in the air. The barbed wire was shattered to pieces and the front parapets knocked to atoms.

Then, in an instant, the guns lifted on to the more distant support trenches, and the infantry, swarming over the low barricades, dashed in perfect order over the two hundred yards which separated them from the Germans.

It was an admirable advance, and could not have been better carried out. The front of the assault was about a quarter of a mile. The three Fusilier battalions in one long line, Northumberland Fusiliers on the left, Royals in the centre, and Scots on the right, rushed forward with terrific impetus, the rising sun glinting upon their lines of bayonets. They were over the lip of the front trench without a check, and rushed on for the second one. The supports, who were the Lincolns on the right and the Liverpool Scots on the left, followed closely after them, and seizing the German survivors, sent them to the rear, while they did what they could to reverse the parapet and prepare for a counter-attack. As they charged forward, it had been observed that one German trench upon the left was at right angles to the line of advance, and that it had been untouched by the bombardment. It was only about forty yards in length, but the fire from it was very murderous as it swept across the open ground. With quick decision the rear company of the Liverpool Scottish turned aside, and in spite of unbroken barbed wire carried the trench, capturing all the occupants.

Meanwhile the German artillery had opened with an intensity which was hardly inferior to that of the British, and they shelled with great accuracy the captured trench. The Fusiliers had dashed onwards, while the Liverpool Scots and Lincolns followed swiftly behind them, leaving the captured trench to the leading battalions of the 7th Brigade (Ballard), which was immediately in the rear of the attackers. So eager was every one that the van of the supporting brigade was mixed with the rear of the attacking one. Thus the Honourable Artillery Company were exposed to a baptism of fire only second in severity to that of their Territorial comrades from Liverpool. They and the 3rd Worcesters, together with the 1st Wiltshires upon the flank, endured a very violent shelling, but held on for many hours to the captured positions. The Worcesters had over 300 casualties, including their colonel (Stuart), who had led them ever since Mons. The Honourable Artillery Company and Wiltshires suffered almost as heavily.

The advance still continued with great fury. It should have ended on the taking of the second line of trenches, but it was impossible to restrain the men, who yelled, “Remember the Lusitania!” to each other as they surged over the parapets and dashed once more at the enemy with bayonet and bomb. The third trench was carried, and even the fourth. But the assault had gone too far. The farther spray of stormers had got as far as the Bellewaarde Lake. It was impossible to hold these advanced positions. The assailants dropped sullenly back, and finally contented themselves by settling into the first line and consolidating their position there on a front of a thousand yards. The losses had been heavy, especially from the high-explosive shells, which, as usual, blew both trenches and occupants to pieces. Men died happy, however, with the knowledge that the days were past when no artillery answer could be made, and that now at least they had given the enemy the same intolerable experience which they had themselves so often endured. The Liverpool Scots suffered especially heavily, losing about 400 men and 20 officers. All the battalions of the 9th Brigade paid the price of victory, and the 8th Brigade, upon the left, sustained considerable losses, but these were certainly not larger than those of the Germans. Altogether, it was a very brisk little fight, and a creditable victory small, of course, when measured by the scale of Neuve Chapelle or Eichebourg, but none the less heartening to the soldiers. Two hundred prisoners and a quantity of material were taken. The trenches gained were destined to be retaken with strange weapons by the enemy upon July 30, and were again carried at the point of the bayonet by the British upon August 9. These actions will be described later. A pause of nearly three weeks followed, broken only by the usual bickerings up and down the line, where opposite trenches ran mines up to each other or exchanged fusillades of hand-bombs. There was no serious movement upon either side, the Germans being concentrated upon their great and successful Eastern advance; while the Allies in the West were content to wait for the day when they should have accumulated such a head of shell as would enable them to make a prolonged effort which would promise some definite result. More and more it had become clear, both from the German efforts and our own, that any coup de main was impossible, and that a battle which would really achieve a permanent gain must be an affair which would last a month or so, with steady, inexorable advance from day to day. This could only be hoped for by the storage of a very great quantity of ammunition. Hence the pause in the operations.

The The lull was broken, however, by a sharp fight upon July 6, in which Prowse’s 11th Brigade of the Fourth Division took, and permanently held, a section of the German line. This considerable action was fought at the extreme northern end of the British line, where it joined on to the French Moroccan troops to the north of Ypres. The sudden and swift advance of the 1st Rifle Brigade, the leading British battalion, seems to have taken the Germans by surprise, and, dashing forwards, they seized two lines of trenches and established themselves firmly within them. The 1st Somerset Light Infantry shared the credit and the losses of the charge. They were in immediate support of the Rifle Brigade, their task being to dig a communication trench. A hundred prisoners and a number of mortars and machine-guns were the immediate trophies. Three times during the day did the Germans counter-attack in force, and three times they were driven back with heavy loss. Their total casualties certainly ran into a thousand. On the other hand, both the Rifle Brigade and the Somersets suffered severely, partly from flanking machine-gun fire in the attack, but chiefly, as usual, from heavy shell-fire afterwards. Indeed, it may be said that a victorious battalion was too often an exhausted battalion, for since the German guns had the precise length of the captured trench, the more heroically it was held the heavier the losses. Until the artillery of the Allies should be able to dominate that of the enemy, it was difficult to see how ground could be gained without this grievous after-price to be paid. On this occasion it was paid to the full, but the ground was permanently occupied, and a heavy blow was struck at the Bavarians and Prussians who held that portion of the line.

Part of the 12th Brigade (Anley) took over some of the captured trenches from the 11th, and came in for some of the German anger in consequence. The 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were very heavily shelled, losing their commanding officer, Colonel Griffin, the machine-gun officer, and the adjutant on the morning of July 7. A sap ran up to the trench, and this was the scene of desperate bomb-fighting, the Fusiliers expending eight thousand bombs in two days. So great was the pressure that part of the 1st Warwicks came up in support. There were several infantry advances of the enemy, which were all crushed by the British fire. No dervishes could have shown more devoted courage than some of the Germans. In one rush of sixty men all were shot down, which did not prevent another forty from emerging later from the same trench. Gradually they learned that their task was impossible, and the position remained with the British. Altogether the Lancashire Fusiliers lost 8 officers and 400 men in this action.

The succession of British successes which have been recorded in their order was broken at this point by a temporary reverse, which involved no permanent loss of ground, but cost many valuable lives. It is a deplorable thing that, when fighting against men who are usually brave and sometimes heroic, we are obliged continually to associate any success which they may obtain with some foul breach of the ancient customs of war. With the Germans no trick was too blackguardly or unsoldierly for them to attempt. At the end of April, as already shown, they nearly snatched an important victory by the wholesale use of poison. Now, at the end of July, they gained an important local success by employing the cruel expedient of burning petrol. These different foul devices were hailed by the German Press at the time as various exhibitions of superior chemical methods; whereas in fact they were exhibitions of utter want of military chivalry and of that self-restraint which even in the fiercest contest prevents a civilised nation from sinking to such expedients. It is the most pressing objection to such methods that if they are once adopted the other side has no choice but to adopt them also. In the use of gas devices, both aggressive and offensive, the British engineers soon acquired an ascendency, but even if the Germans learned to rue the day that they had stooped to such methods the responsibility for this unchivalrous warfare must still rest with them.

The attack fell upon that section of trench which had been taken by the British in the Hooge district on June 16. It was held now by a brigade of the Fourteenth Light Infantry Division (Couper), which had the distinction of being the first unit of the New Army to be seriously engaged. Nothing could have been more severe indeed, terrific than the ordeal to which they were subjected, nor more heroic than the way in which it was borne. Under very desperate conditions, all the famous traditions of the British rifle regiments were gloriously upheld. They were destined for defeat but such a defeat as shows the true fibre of a unit as clearly as any victory.

Nugent’s 41st Brigade, which held this section of trench, consisted of the 7th and 8th King’s Royal Rifles, with the 7th and 8th Rifle Brigade. The position was a dangerous little salient, projecting Hooge. right up to the German line.

It is clear that the Germans mustered great forces, both human and mechanical, before letting go their attack. For ten days before the onset they kept up a continuous fire, which blew down the parapets and caused great losses to the defenders. On July 29 the 7th King’s Royal Rifles and the 8th Rifle Brigade manned the front and supporting trenches, taking the place of their exhausted comrades. They were just in time for the fatal assault. At 3:20 in the morning of July 30 a mine exploded under the British parapet, and a moment afterwards huge jets of flame, sprayed from their diabolical machines, rose suddenly from the line of German trenches and fell in a sheet of fire into the front British position. The distance was only twenty yards, and the effect was complete and appalling. Only one man is known to have escaped from this section of trench. The fire was accompanied by a shower of aerial torpedoes from the Minenwerfer, which were in themselves sufficient to destroy the garrison. The Germans instantly assaulted and occupied the defenceless trench, but were held up for a time by the reserve companies in the supporting trenches. Finally these were driven out by the weight of the German attack, and fell back about two hundred yards, throwing themselves down along the edges of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, in the immediate rear of the old position. What with the destruction of the men in the front trench and the heavy losses of the supports, the two battalions engaged had been very highly tried, but they still kept their faces to the foe, in spite of a terrific fall of shells. The British artillery was also in full blast. For many hours, from dawn onwards, its shells just skimmed over the heads of the front British line, and pinned the Germans down at a time when their advance might have been a serious thing, in the face of the shaken troops in front of them. It is said that during fourteen hours only five of their shells are known to have fallen short, though they fired from a distance of about three miles, and only a couple of hundred yards separated the lines a testimony to the accuracy of the munition-workers as well as of the gunners.

The position gained by the Germans put them behind the line of trenches held upon the British right by two companies of the 8th Rifle Brigade. These brave men, shot at from all sides and unable to say which was their parapet and which their parados, held on during the whole interminable July day, until after dusk the remains of them drew off into the shelter of the prophetically- named Sanctuary Wood. Another aggressive movement was made by the German stormers down the communication trenches, which enabled them to advance while avoiding direct fire; but this, after hard fighting, was stopped by the bombers of the Riflemen.

The two battalions of the 41st Brigade, which had just been relieved and were already on their way to a place of rest, were halted and brought back. They were the 8th King’s Royal Rifles and the 7th Rifle Brigade. These two battalions had been eight days under incessant fire in the trenches, with insufficient food, water, and sleep. They were now hurried back into a hellish fire, jaded and weary, but full of zeal at the thought that they were taking some of the pressure on their comrades. An order for an instant counter-attack had been given, but it was recognised that two brigades at least were necessary for such a task, and that even then, without a very thorough artillery preparation, the affair was desperate, since the Germans had already consolidated the position, and their artillery, large and small, was very masterful. For some reason, however, instead of a brigade, only two fresh battalions could be spared. These were the 9th King’s Royal Rifles, of the 42nd Brigade, and the 6th Cornwalls, of the 43rd. Of these the 9th King’s Royal Rifles attacked, not from the wood, but from the Menin road upon the left.

There had been three-quarters of an hour of intense bombardment before the attack, but it was not successful in breaking down the German resistance. At 2:45 P.M. the infantry advance began from the wood, all four units of the 41st Brigade taking part in it. It is difficult to imagine any greater trial for troops, since half of them had already been grievously reduced and the other half were greatly exhausted, while they were now asked to advance several hundred yards without a shadow of cover, in the face of a fire which was shaving the very grass from the ground. “The men behaved very well,” says an observer, “and the officers with a gallantry no words can adequately describe. As they came out of the woods the German machine-gun fire met them and literally swept them away, line after line. The men struggled forward, only to fall in heaps along the edge of the woods.” The Riflemen did all that men could do, but there comes a time when perseverance means annihilation. The remains of the four battalions were compelled to take shelter once more at the edge of the wood. Fifty officers out of 90 had fallen. By 4 P.M. the counter-attack had definitely failed.

The attack of the 9th King’s Royal Rifles, along the Menin road, led by Colonel Chaplin, had rather better success, and was pushed home with great valour and corresponding loss. At one time the stormers reached the original line of trenches and took possession of one section of it. Colonel

Chaplin was killed, with many of his officers and men, by a deadly machine-gun fire from the village of Hooge. A gallant lad, Lieutenant Geen, with a handful of men, charged into this village, but never emerged. The attack was not altogether unproductive, for, though the advanced position was not held, the 9th retained trenches which linked up the Menin road with the left of the Zouave Wood. With the darkness, the wearied and thinned ranks of the 41st Brigade were withdrawn into reserve.

It was not destined, however, that Nugent's hard-worked brigade should enjoy the rest that they needed so badly. They had left the 10th Durham Light Infantry and the 6th Cornwall Light Infantry to defend the wood, but at 2:20 in the morning the Germans renewed their diabolical tactics with liquid fire, which blazed over the trenches and scorched the branches overhead. This time the range was farther and the effect less deadly. An attack was evidently impending, and the Riflemen were hurried back to reinforce the two battalions left in possession. There was a night of alarms, of shell-fire, and of losses, but the German infantry advance was not serious, and those who reached the woods were driven out again.

For some days afterwards there was no change in Hooge. the general situation. Sixty officers and 2000 men were the terrible losses of the 41st Brigade during this action. The 9th battalion, in its flank attack, lost 17 officers and 333 of the ranks. The 43rd Brigade (Cockburn) endured considerable losses whilst in support of the 41st, especially the 6th Cornwalls, who bore the brunt of the fighting. This battalion had only seven officers left when it returned to Ypres, and by the unfortunate mischance of the fall of a ruined house, they lost immediately afterwards four more, including Major Barnett, the temporary chief, and the adjutant Blagrove. These officers perished whilst endeavouring to save their men who were buried among the ruins.

This difficult and trying action was fought under the immediate supervision of General Nugent, of the 41st Brigade, who was with the firing- line in the woods during the greater part of it. When the brigade, or the shattered remains of it, were withdrawn upon August 1, General Nugent remained behind, and consulted with General Cockburn, of the 43rd Brigade, as to the feasibility of a near attack. The consultation took the form of a reconnaissance conducted on hands and knees up to a point close to the enemy line. After this inspection it was determined that the position was far too formidable for any merely local attempt. It was determined that General

Congreve, of the Sixth Division, should take the matter over, that several days should be devoted to preparatory bombardment, and that the whole division should be used for the assault.

All foul advantages, whether they be gas, vitriol, Hooge. or liquid fire, bring with them their own disadvantages. In this case the fall of their comrades filled the soldiers with a righteous anger, which gave them a fury in the assault which nothing could withstand. The preparations were completed in a week, and the signal was given in the early morning of August 9. Artillery had been concentrated during the interval, and the bombardment was extraordinarily intense and accurate. So perfect was the co-ordination between the infantry and the guns, that the storming battalions dashed out of the trenches whilst the German lines were still an inferno of exploding shells, with the certain conviction that the shell-fire would have ceased before they had actually got across the open. The cease-fire and the arrival of the panting, furious soldiers were practically simultaneous. On the left, some of our men ran into our own shrapnel, but otherwise all went, to perfection.

The infantry assault had been assigned to the Sixth Division, who advanced at 3:15, with two brigades in front and one in support. The 18th Brigade (Ainslie) was upon the right. Colonel Towsey was in immediate command. The 2nd Durham Light Infantry were in the lead, and got across two companies in front with little loss; while the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, who followed, were caught in shell-fire and had very many casualties. The attack on this flank was supported by the 1st East Yorks and the Westminsters, who lay in the woods to the rear, the East Yorks being speedily engaged. The wave of infantry were over the German parapet in an instant. All resistance was vain, and those who stood were bayoneted, while the fugitives were pelted with bombs from traverse to traverse wherever they attempted to make head against their pursuers. So sudden had been the British rush that many of the Germans were found in the dug-outs and in the old mine-crater, from which they had not time to emerge and to meet the assault for which they were waiting. Over a hundred of these were taken prisoners. The whole place was a perfect charnel-house, for there were 200 German dead in the crater, 300 in front of the line, and a great number also of the Riflemen who had been killed nine days before.

On the left of the line a no less dashing attack had been made by the 16th Brigade (Nicholson), and the trenches were carried in line with those now held by the 18th. This successful advance was carried out by the 1st Shropshires, the 1st Buffs, and the 2nd York and Lancasters, with the 1st Leicesters in support. The distance between the lines at this point was very much less than on the right, which partly accounts for the smaller casualties.

When the trenches had been taken, the sappers, with their usual cool disregard of danger, sprang forward into the open and erected barbed wire. The gains were rapidly consolidated, men were sent back to avoid overcrowding, and protective cover raised against the heavy shelling which always follows swiftly upon the flight of the German infantry. It came in due course, and was succeeded by an attempt at a counter-attack. “At about 10 o’clock the enemy was observed creeping in four parties towards us. They were very near us, and came forward on their hands and knees, laden with bombs and hand-grenades. We opened fire with rifles and machine-guns. Our bomb-throwers worked like machines, and did work they did. The Germans were all mowed down and blown to atoms, or else ran for their lives.” Many of our prisoners were killed by German shells before they could be removed. In spite of the failure of the German infantry, the artillery fire was very deadly, both the Durhams and the Sherwood Foresters being hard put to it to hold on to their trenches. At 4:30 in the afternoon the Sherwood Foresters fell back to the edge of the wood, some of their trenches having entirely ceased to exist.

There were several German infantry attempts during the day, but all of them met the same fate as the first. The loss of the enemy, both in the attack and in the subsequent attempts at recapture, was very heavy, running certainly into some thousands of dead or wounded; while the British losses in the actual attack, owing to the admirable artillery arrangements, were very moderate. Some hundreds of prisoners were taken, sixty of whom by a strange freak surrendered to an unarmed observation officer named Booth. It was a fair revenge for the setback of July 30, and it was won in honest, virile fashion by the use of the legitimate weapons of civilised warfare.

During the long day the Germans strove hard, by an infernal shell-fire, raking all the trenches from the direction of Hill 60, to drive the infantry from the captured position. They clung desperately to what they had won, but they were cut off from all supplies. Many of the Westminsters lost their lives in heroically bringing up water and food to the advanced line. For fourteen hours the men were under a murderous fire, and for the same period the British artillery worked hard in supporting them. Men can endure punishment far more cheerfully when they hear the roar of their own shells overhead and know that the others are catching it also. “The guns put heart into us,” said one of the survivors. Finally, night put an end to the slaughter and the uproar. Under the shadow of darkness relieving troops crept to the front, and the weary, decimated, but triumphant brigades were drawn off to the rear.

Some of the more forward of the troops had got right across the Menin road and established themselves in positions so far in advance that for some time no orders could reach them; nor was their situation known until desperate messengers came back from them clamouring for cartridges and bombs. These men were only drawn in on the morning of the 10th, after enduring nearly thirty hours of desperate fighting, without food, water, or help of any kind.

The losses were, as usual, far heavier in holding the trenches than in winning them. The 16th Brigade lost 400 and the 18th 1300 men. The 2nd Durhams were the chief sufferers, with 12 officers and 500 men out of action; but the Shropshires lost no fewer than 19 officers with 250 men. The 2nd Sherwoods, 1st East Yorkshires, 1st Buffs, and 2nd York and Lancasters were all hard hit.

A considerable change in the general arrangement of the Army was carried out early in August. This consisted in the formation of a third army under General Monro, an officer whose rapid rise was one of the phenomena of the war. This army consisted of the Seventh Corps (Snow) and the Tenth Corps (Morland). The rearrangement would be of little importance, since most of the units have already been mentioned, but it was accompanied by a large extension of the British line. Up to this date it had joined the French about six miles south of the La Bassée Canal. Now the Tenth French Army (Foch) was left in position before Lens, and the British took up the line again upon the farther side of them, carrying it from the south of Arras to the neighbourhood of Albert, thus adding a dozen miles or so to the British region, and bringing the total to about fifty a small proportion, it is true, but a very vital sector, and the one most free from any natural feature of protection. There was at this time an ever-thickening flow of reinforcements, as well as of munitions, from across the Channel, but the new movements of Germany in the Near East made it very evident that their use would not be confined to the lines of Flanders. It was towards the end of this summer that the length of the war and the increasing pressure of the blockade began to interfere with the food-supplies of the German people. It had been pretended that this was so before, but this was an attempt by the German Government to excite sympathy in neutrals. There is no doubt, however, that it was now a fact, and that it continued to slowly tighten from month to month, until it finally became extreme. There are few Britons who feel satisfaction at such a method of warfare, but so long as armies represent the whole manhood of a nation, it is impossible to make any provision by which food shall reach the civilian and not the soldier. It is always to be borne in mind that the British, with an almost exaggerated chivalry, considering the many provocations which they had received, did not exert their full power of blockade for many months. It was only when Germany declared the British Islands to be blockaded as from February 18, 1915, and that food-ships would be destroyed, that the British in retaliation, by an Order of Council in March of the same year, placed German food upon the index. Thus by one more miscalculation the Germans called down trouble upon their own heads, for whereas their decree proved to be worthless, that of Britain was ever more effective. It is curious to remember that only forty-five years before, the Germans, without one word of protest from any of their people, had starved the two millions of Paris, while Bismarck, in his luxurious rooms at Versailles, had uttered his brutal jest about roast babies. They are not so very slow those mills of God!

Before passing on to an account of the great Battle of Loos, which terminated the operations upon the British front for this year, a few words may be said of those happenings elsewhere which do not come within the immediate scope of this narrative, but which cannot be entirely omitted since every failure or success had an indirect influence upon the position in France. This is particularly true of the naval campaign, for the very existence of our Army depended upon our success in holding the command of the sea. This was fully attained during the year 1915 by the wise provisions of Admiral Jellicoe, who held back his Grand Fleet in such a manner that, far from the attrition upon which the German war-prophets had confidently counted, it was far stronger at the end of the year than at the beginning, while its influence had been such that the German High Sea Fleet might as well have never existed for all the effect which it had upon the campaign. In spite of the depredations of German submarines, which were restrained by no bonds of law or humanity, British commerce flowed in its double tide, outwards and inwards, with a volume which has seldom been surpassed, and the Channel crossing was guarded with such truly miraculous skill that not a transport was lost. It was a task which the Navy should never have been called upon to do, since the need of a Channel tunnel had for years been obvious; but granting that it had to be done, nothing could exceed the efficiency with which it was carried out. The success, however, cannot blind us to the waste of merchant tonnage or of convoying cruisers absorbed in this vital task, nor to the incessant delays and constant expense due to the want of foresight upon the part of those who opposed this necessary extension of our railway system. There was little naval fighting during the year, for the simple reason that our sailors had nothing to fight. Upon January 24 a German squadron of battle-cruisers attempted a repetition of the Scarborough Raid, but was nearly intercepted by a British squadron of greater power under Admiral Beatty. In a running fight which only came to an end when the Germans had gained the protection of their mine-fields considerable punishment was inflicted upon them, which included the loss of the 15,000-ton armoured cruiser *Blücher*. There were 123 survivors out of a crew of 800. Some damage was inflicted upon the Lion, but the British casualties were slight and no vessel was lost, save in the Berlin papers.

Upon February 20 the adventure of the Dardanelles was begun by a bombardment of the outer forts by the Allied Fleets. The British ships engaged in these operations were pre-Dreadnought battleships, with the notable exception of the new cruiser *Queen Elizabeth*. On March 18, in an attempt to force the Straits, the *Ocean* and the *Irresistible* were lost by floating torpedoes. On May 13 we lost in the same locality the *Goliath*, which was also torpedoed in a very gallant surface attack delivered at night by a Turkish or German boat. On the 26th the *Triumph* fell a victim to a submarine in the same waters. The other naval events of the year include numerous actions of small craft with varying results, and the final destruction of the *Dresden*, the *Königsberg*, and every other German warship left upon the face of the waters. The British anti-submarine devices in home waters reached a high point of efficiency, and the temporary subsidence of submarine warfare is to be attributed rather to the loss of these vessels than to any remonstrances upon the part of neutrals.

Some allusion should be made to the Zeppelins which were malevolently active during the year, but whose efficiency fortunately fell very far short of either the activity or the malevolence. Instead of proving a blessing to mankind, the results of the energy and ingenuity of the aged German inventor were at once turned to the most devilish use conceivable, for their raids effected no possible military object, but caused the death or mutilation of numerous civilians, including a large number of women and children. The huge bombs were showered down from the airships with no regard at all as to whether a legitimate mark lay beneath them, and the huge defenceless city of London was twice attacked on the plea that the possession of munition works made the whole of it a fortress. The total result of all the raids came to about 1500 killed and wounded. It is probable that the destruction of the invading of airships in 1916 killed more German fighting adults than were killed in England by all their raids combined. They effected nothing decisive save the ignominy of the murderers who used them.

Of the Dardanelles Campaign nothing need be said, since it will be fully treated in many separate accounts, save that our general position was greatly weakened by the large number of vessels needed for the conduct of these operations, nor did we profit much by their abandonment since the call of Salonica soon became equally insistent. We were able during the year to continue the absorption of the German Colonial Empire, none of which, save East Africa, remained intact at the end of it. Egypt was successfully defended against one or two half-hearted advances upon the part of the Turks. The Mesopotamian Campaign, however, had taken at the close of the year a sinister turn, for General Townshend, having pushed forward almost to the gates of Bagdad with a very inadequate force, was compelled to retreat to Kut, where he was surrounded and besieged by a considerable Turkish army. The defence was a heroic one, and only ended in the spring of 1916, when the starving survivors were forced to surrender.

As to the affairs of our Allies, some allusion will be made later to the great French offensive in Champagne, which was simultaneous with our own advance at Loos. For the rest there was constant fighting along the line, with a general tendency for the French to gain ground though usually at a heavy cost. The year, on the other hand, had been a disastrous one for the Russians who, half-armed and suffering terrible losses, had been compelled to relinquish all their gains and to retreat for some hundreds of miles. As is now clear, the difficulties in the front were much increased by lamentable political conditions, including treachery in high places in the rear. For a time even Petrograd seemed in danger, but thanks to fresh supplies of the munitions of war from Britain and from Japan they were able at last to form a firm line from Riga in the north to the eastern end of the Romanian frontier in the south.

The welcome accession of Italy upon May 23 and the lamentable defection of Bulgaria on October 11 complete the more salient episodes of the year.

VII. THE BATTLE OF LOOS

The First Day — September 25

General order of battle — Check of the Second Division — Advance of the Ninth and Seventh Divisions — Advance of the First Division — Fine progress of the Fifteenth Division — Capture of Loos — Work of the Forty-seventh London Division

WHILST the Army had lain in apparent torpidity during the summer a torpidity which was only broken by the sharp engagements at Hooge and elsewhere great preparations for a considerable attack had been going forward. For several months the sappers and the gunners had been busy concentrating their energies for a serious effort which should, as it was hoped, give the infantry a fair chance of breaking the German line. Similar preparations were going on among the French, both in Foch’s Tenth Army to the immediate right of the British line, and also on a larger scale in the region of Champagne. Confining our attention to the British effort, we shall now examine the successive stages of the great action in front of Hulluch and Loos the greatest battle, both as to the numbers engaged and as to the losses incurred, which had ever up to that date been fought by our Army.

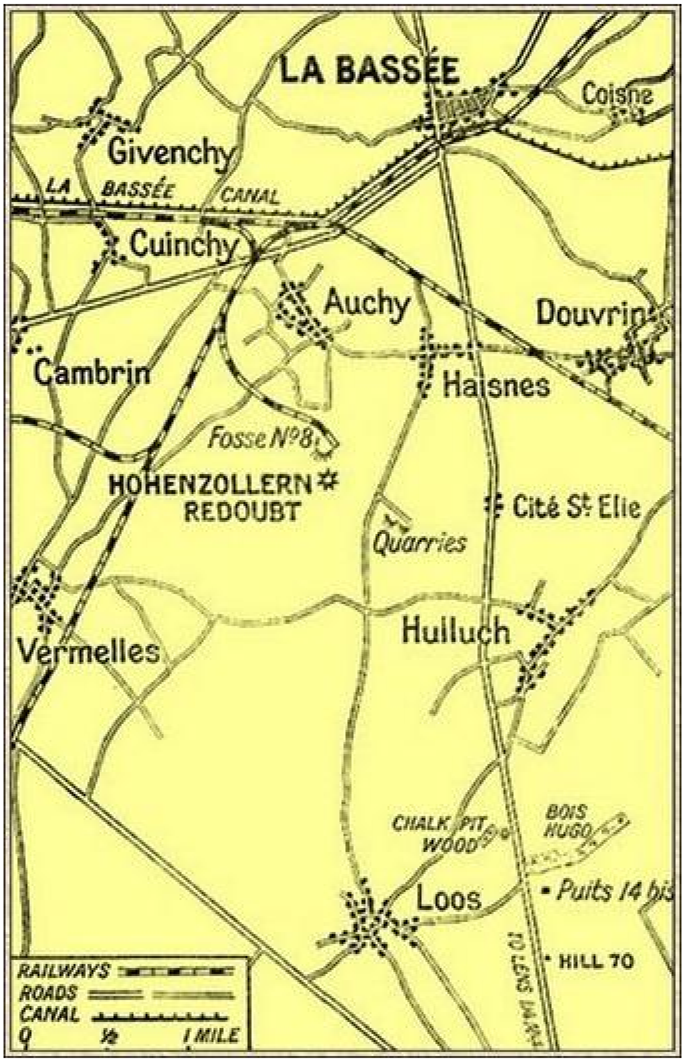
LA BASSÉE
Coisne
Givenchy
LA BASSÉE CANAL
Cuinchy
Auchy
Douvrin
Cambrin
Haisnes
Fosse No8
HOHENZOLLERN REDOUBT
Cité St Elie
Quarries
Hulluch
Vermelles
CHALK PIT WOOD
BOIS HUGO
Loos
Puits 14 bis
HILL 70
TO LENS
RAILWAYS
ROADS
CANAL
0 ½ 1 MILE

Loos District

The four days which preceded the great attack of September 25 were days of great activity. An incessant and severe bombardment was directed upon the German lines along the whole front, but especially in the sector to the immediate south of the La Bassée Canal, where the main thrust was to be made. To this severe fire the Germans made hardly any reply, though whether from settled policy or from a comparative lack of munitions is not clear. On each of the days a feint attack was made upon the German line so far as could be done without actually exposing the men. The troops for the assault were gradually brought into position, and the gas-cylinders, which were to be used for the first time, were sunk in the front parapets.

The assault in the main area was to extend from the La Bassée Canal in the north to the village of Grenay in the south, a front of about seven miles, and it was to be supported and supplemented by many subsidiary attacks along the whole line up to the Ypres salient, and northwards still to where the monitors upon the coast held the German coastguards to their sand-dunes. For the moment we will deal only with the fortunes of the main attack. This was to be delivered by two army corps, both belonging to Haig's First Army, that tempered blade which has so often been the spear-head for the British thrust. The corps were the First (Hubert Gough's) and the Fourth (Rawlinson's). It will be remembered that a British army corps now consisted of three divisions, so that the storming line was composed of six divisions, or about seventy thousand infantry.

The line of the advance was bisected by a high road from Vermelles to Hulluch. This was made the boundary line between the two attacking corps. To the left, or north of this road, was the ground of the First Corps; to the right, or south, of the Fourth.

The qualities of the Regular and Territorial regiments had already been well attested. This was the first occasion, however, when, upon a large scale, use was made of those new forces which now formed so considerable a proportion of the whole. Let it be said at once that they bore the test magnificently, and that they proved themselves to be worthy of their comrades to the right and the left. It had always been expected that the new infantry would be good, for they had in most cases been under intense training for a year, but it was a surprise to many British soldiers, and a blow to the prophets in Berlin, to find that the scientific branches, the gunners and the sappers, had also reached a high level. "Our enemy may have hoped," said Sir John French, "not perhaps without reason, that it would be impossible for us, starting with such small beginnings, to build up an efficient artillery to provide for the very large expansion of the Army. If he entertained such hopes he has now good reason to know that they have not been justified by the result. The efficiency of the artillery of the new armies has exceeded all expectations." These were the guns which, in common with many others of every calibre, worked furiously in the early dawn of Saturday, September 25, to prepare for the impending advance. The high explosives were known to have largely broken down the German system of defences, but it was also known that there were areas where the damage had not been great and where the wire entanglements were still intact. No further delay could be admitted, however, if our advance was to be on the same day as that of the French. The infantry, chafing with impatience, were swarming in the fire trenches. At 5.40 A.M. the gas-cylinders were turned on. At 6:30 A.M. the guns ceased fire, and the ardent soldiers Regulars, New, and Territorials dashed forward upon their desperate venture.

The following rough diagram of the action will help the reader to understand the order in which the six divisions attacked, and in a very rough way the objectives in front of them. It is impossible to describe simultaneously the progress of so extended a line.

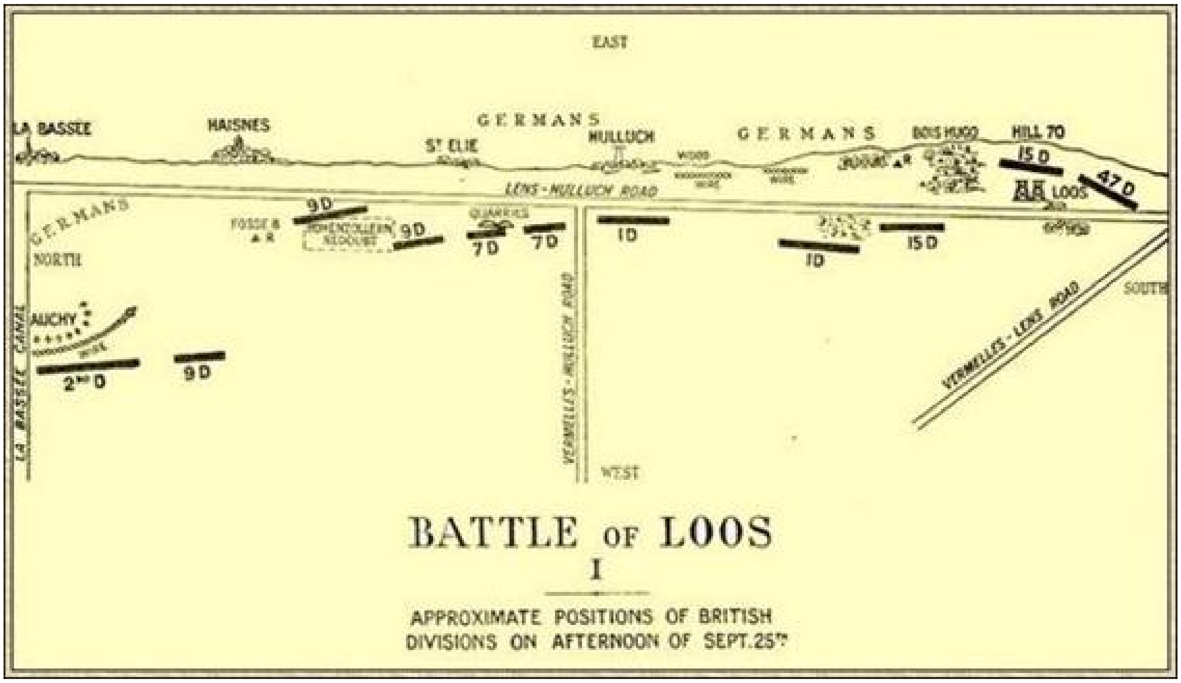
EAST
LA BASSEE
HAISNES
GERMANS
ST ELIE
HULLUCH
GERMANS
BOIS HUGO
HILL 70
15 D
47 D
LOOS
WOOD
WIRE
WIRE
LENS-HULLUCH ROAD
GERMANS
NORTH
FOSSE 8
9 D
HOHENZOLLERN REDOUBT
9 D
QUARRIES
7 D
7 D
1 D
1 D
15 D
SOUTH
AUCHY
WIRE
2ND D
9 D
LA BASSEE CANAL
VERMELLES-HULLUCH ROAD
VERMELLES-LENS ROAD
WEST
BATTLE OF LOOS
I
APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF BRITISH
DIVISIONS ON AFTERNOON OF SEPT. 25TH

Battle of Loos

It will be best, therefore, to take the various divisions from the northern end, and to follow the fortunes of each until it reached some definite limit. Afterwards an attempt will be made to co-ordinate these results and show their effects upon each other.

The second regular division (Home), acting upon the extreme left of the main attack, had two brigades north of the La Bassée Canal and one to the south. The most northern was the 5th (Cochrane’s), and its operations really formed part of the subsidiary attacks, and will be treated under that head. South of it was the 6th (Daly’s), to the immediate north of the canal. The gas, drifting slowly up the line before a slight southern breeze, had contaminated the air in this quarter, and many of the men were suffering from the effects. None the less, at half-past six the advance was made in a most dashing manner, but the barbed wire defences were found to be only partially damaged and the trenches to be intact, so no progress could be made. The 2nd South Staffords and 1st King’s Liverpools on the left and right reached the German position, but in face of a murderous fire were unable to make good their hold, and were enduring heavy losses, shared in a lesser degree by the 1st Rifles and 1st Berks in support. Upon their right, south of the canal, was the 19th Brigade (Robertson). The two leading regiments, the 1st Middlesex and 2nd Argylls, sprang from the trenches and rushed across the intervening space, only to find themselves faced by unbroken and impassable wire. For some reason, probably the slope of the ground, the artillery had produced an imperfect effect upon the defences of the enemy in the whole sector attacked by the Second Division, and if there is one axiom more clearly established than another during this war, it is that no human heroism can carry troops through uncut wire. They will most surely be shot down faster than they can cut the strands. The two battalions lay all day, from morning till dusk, in front of this impenetrable obstacle, lashed and scourged by every sort of fire, and losing heavily. Two companies of the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, who gallantly charged forward to support them, shared their tragic experience. It was only under the cover of dusk that the survivors were able to get back, having done nothing save all that men could do. Their difficult situation was rendered more desperate by the fact that the wind drifted the gas that filthy and treacherous ally over a portion of the line, and some of our soldiers were poisoned by the effects. The hold-up was the more unfortunate, as it left the Germans the power to outflank the whole advance, and many of the future difficulties arose from the fact that the enemy’s guns were still working from Auchy and other points on the left rear of the advancing troops. In justice to the Second Division, it must be remembered that they were faced by the notoriously strong position called “the railway triangle,” and also that it is on the flanking units The that the strain must especially fall, as was shown equally clearly upon the same day in the great French advance in Champagne.

The advance of the next division, the Ninth Scottish Division (Thesiger’s) of the new armies, was of a most energetic nature, and met with varying fortunes according to the obstacles in their path. The valour and perseverance of the men were equally high in each of its brigades. By an unfortunate chance, General Landon, the officer who had played so essential a part on the fateful October 31, 1914, and who had commanded the Ninth Division, was invalided home only two days before the battle. His place was taken by General Thesiger, who had little time in which to get acquainted with his staff and surroundings. The front to be assaulted was of a most formidable nature. This Hohenzollern Redoubt jutted forward from the main German line, and was an enclosure seamed with trenches, girdled with wire, and fringed with machine- guns. Behind and to the north of it lay the slag-heap Fosse 8. The one favourable point lay in the fact that the attacking infantry had only a hundred yards to cross, while in the other parts of the line the average distance was about a quarter of a mile.

The attack of the Ninth Division was carried out with two brigades, the 26th (Ritchie) and 28th (Dickens), with the 27th (Bruce) in close support.

Continuing the plan of taking each unit from the north, we will follow the tragic fortunes of the 28th Brigade on the left. This brigade seems to have been faced by the same unbroken obstacles which had held up their neighbours of the Second Division upon the left, and they found it equally impossible to get forward, though the attack was urged with all the constancy of which human nature is capable, as the casualty returns only too clearly show.

The most veteran troops could not have endured a more terrible ordeal or preserved a higher heart than these young soldiers in their first battle. The leading regiments were the 6th Scottish Borderers and the 11th Highland Light Infantry. Nineteen officers led the Borderers over the parapet. Within a few minutes the whole nineteen, including Colonel Maclean and Major Hosley, lay dead or wounded upon the ground. Valour could no further go. Of the rank and file of the Borderers some 500 out of 1000 were lying in the long grass which faced the German trenches. The Highland Light Infantry had suffered very little less. Ten officers and 300 men fell in the first rush before they were checked by the barbed wire of the enemy. Every accumulation of evil which can appal the stoutest heart was heaped upon this brigade not only the two leading battalions, but their comrades of the 9th Seaforths and 10th H.L.I, who supported them. The gas hung thickly about the trenches, and all of the troops, but especially the 10th H.L.I., suffered from it. Colonel Graham of this regiment was found later incoherent and half unconscious from poisoning, while Major Graham and four lieutenants were incapacitated in the same way. The chief cause of the slaughter, however, was the uncut wire, which held up the brigade while the German rifle and machine-gun fire shot them down in heaps. It was observed that in this part of the line the gas had so small an effect upon the enemy that their infantry could be seen with their heads and shoulders clustering thickly over their parapets as they fired down at the desperate men who tugged and raved in front of the wire entanglement. An additional horror was found in the shape of a covered trench, invisible until one fell into it, the bottom of which was studded with stakes and laced with wire. Many of the Scottish Borderers lost their lives in this murderous ditch. In addition to all this, the fact that the Second Division was held up exposed the 28th Brigade to fire on the flank. In spite of every impediment, some of the soldiers fought their way onwards and sprang down into the German trenches; notably Major Sparling of the Borderers and Lieutenant Sebold of the H.L.I, with a handful of men broke through all opposition. There was no support behind them, however, and after a time the few survivors were compelled to fall back to the trenches from which they had started, both the officers named having been killed. The repulse on the left of the Ninth Division was complete. The mangled remains of the 28th Brigade, flushed and furious but impotent, gathered together to hold their line against a possible counter-attack. Shortly after mid-day they made a second attempt at a forward movement, but 50 per cent of their number were down, all the battalions had lost many of their officers, and for the moment it was not possible to sustain the offensive.

A very different fate had befallen the 26th Brigade upon their right. The leading battalions of this brigade were the 5th Camerons on the left, gallantly led by Lochiel himself, the hereditary chieftain of the clan, and the 7th Seaforths on the right. These two battalions came away with a magnificent rush, closely followed by the 8th Gordons and the 8th Black Watch. It was a splendid example of that *furor Scoticus* which has shown again and again that it is not less formidable than the Teutonic wrath. The battalions were over the parapet, across the open, through the broken wire, and over the entrenchment like a line of Olympic hurdlers. Into the trenches they dashed, seized or killed the occupants, pressed rapidly onwards up the communications, and by seven o’clock had made their way as far as Fosse 8, a coal-mine with a long, low slagheap lying in the rear of the great work, but linked up to it in one system of defences. It was a splendid advance, depending for its success upon the extreme speed and decision of the movement. Many officers and men, including Lord Sempill, the gallant Colonel of the Black Watch, were left upon the ground, but the front of the brigade rolled ever forwards. Not content with this considerable success, one battalion, the 8th Gordons, with a handful of the Black Watch, preserved sufficient momentum to carry it on to the edge of the fortified village of Haisnes, in the rear of the German position. The reserve brigade, the 27th, consisting of the 11th and 12th Royal Scots, 10th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and 6th Scots Fusiliers, swept onwards in support of this movement. This brigade had varying fortunes, part of it being held up by wire. It did not get so far forward as the brigade upon its left, but it reached and took Fosse Alley, to the immediate west of the Lens-Hulluch road. This position it held against bombing attacks upon each flank until the morning of Monday the 27th, as will be described later. The Highlanders upon their left, who had got nearly to Haisnes, dropped back when they found themselves unsupported, and joined the rest of their brigade in the neighbourhood of Fosse 8.

It should be mentioned that the field-guns of the 52nd Brigade E.F.A. pushed up in the immediate rear of the firing line of the Ninth Division, and gave effective support to the infantry. The fact that they could do this across the open tends to show that infantry supports could be pushed up without being confined unduly to the communication trenches. The spirited action of these guns was greatly appreciated by the infantry.

For the moment we will leave the Ninth Division, its left held up in line with the Second Division, its right flung forward through the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse 8 until the spray from the wave had reached as far as Haisnes. Let us turn now to the veterans of the Seventh Division, the inheritors of the glories of Ypres, who filled the space between the right of the Ninth Division and the road from Vermelles to Hulluch which divided Gough’s First and Rawlinson’s Fourth Corps. This division was constituted as before, save that the 8th and 9th Devons of the New Army had taken the place of the two Guards battalions in the 20th Brigade. Upon receiving the word to advance, “Over the top and the best of luck!” the men swarmed on short ladders out of the fire trenches and advanced with cool, disciplined valour over the open ground. On reaching the German wire the leading brigades the 22nd on the left with the 2nd Warwicks and 1st South Staffords in the lead, the 20th on the right with the 2nd Gordons and 8th Devons in the place of honour lay down for a short breather, while each soldier obeyed instructions by judging for himself the point at which the broken, tangled mass of writhing strands could most easily be penetrated. Then once more the whistles blew, the men rushed forward, and, clearing the wire, they threw themselves into the front trench. The garrison of 200 men threw their arms down and their hands up with the usual piteous but insincere cry of “Kameraden!” Flooding over the line of trenches, the division pushed rapidly on without a check until they reached the Quarries, a well-marked post in front of the village of Hulluch. Here more prisoners and eight field-guns were taken by the 20th Brigade. From the Quarries to the village is roughly half a mile of uphill ground, devoid of cover. The impetus of the advance carried the men on until they were at the very edge of the village, where they were held up by the furious fire and by a line of barbed wire, which was bravely cut by Private Vickers of the 2nd Warwicks and other devoted men. Another smaller village, Cité St. Élie, to the north of Hulluch, was also reached, the 2nd Queen’s Surrey making good the western edge of it. At both these points the division had reached its limit, but still farther to the north its left-hand brigade was at the southern outskirts of Haisnes in touch with-the gallant men of the Ninth Division, who were to the west of that important village. These advanced lines could not be held without supports; the 21st Brigade had already been absorbed farther back, and the men of the Seventh Division fell back about 4 P.M. as far as the Quarries, where for a time they remained, having lost many officers and men, including Colonel Stansfeld of the 2nd Gordons, a gallant officer who was hit by a shell in the first advance, but asked only that he should be let lie where he could see his men. Colonel Heath of the Surreys was also killed after the return to the Quarries.

Such was the advance of the First Army Corps, ending in a bloody repulse upon the left of the line and a hardly less bloody success upon the right. Across the Vermelles-Hulluch high road, the Fourth Army Corps had been advancing on the same line, and its fortunes had been very similar to those of its neighbour. The First Division was operating on the left of the corps, with the Fifteenth Scottish Division (New) in the centre and the Forty-seventh Territorial (London) on the right. Thus the First Division was advancing upon Hulluch on the immediate right of the Seventh Division, so that its operations are the next to be considered.

The attack of this division was carried out by the 1st Brigade upon the left and by the 2nd upon the right, while the 3rd was in support. Two battalions, the 9th King’s Liverpool and the London Scottish, acted as a small independent unit apart from the brigades. The respective objectives for the two leading brigades were the Chalk Pit and Fosse 14 for the 2nd, while the 1st was to aim at Hulluch. These objectives were somewhat diverging, and the two Territorial battalions, forming what was called Green's Force, were to fill up the gap so occasioned, and to prevent any German counter-attack coming through.

Both brigades soon found great difficulties in their path. In the case of each the wire was but imperfectly cut, and the German trenches were still strong.

We will first follow the fortunes of the 1st Brigade. Their rush was headed by two brave battalions of the New Army, the 8th Berkshires on the left and the 10th Gloucesters on the right. Both of these units did extraordinarily well, and after bearing down a succession of obstacles got as far as the edge of Hulluch, capturing three lines of trenches and several guns upon the way. The 1st Camerons pressed close at their heels, lending them the weight to carry them over each successive difficulty. The advance took some time and was very costly. The Berkshires alone in the course of the day lost 17 officers and 400 men, and were led by a young sub-lieutenant (Lawrence) at the close. The Gloucesters and Camerons suffered almost as heavily.

The experience of the 2nd Brigade to the immediate south was still more trying, and it was held up to an extent which had a serious bearing upon the fortunes of the day. The German trenches near Lone Tree, which faced the brigade, were found to be intact and strongly covered by wire. They were attacked by the 2nd Rifles and 1st North Lancashires, with the 2nd Sussex in immediate support, but no progress could be made. The 1st Northamptons threw themselves into the fight, but still the trench was held at a time when it was vital that the 2nd Brigade should be at its post in the general scheme of advance. The ground was taken, however, on each flank of the Lone Tree position, and Green's Force, whose function had been to link up the diverging operations of the two brigades, was brought up for the attack. The two battalions advanced over six hundred yards by platoon rushes under heavy gusts of fire. As they reached a point within fifty yards of the German line, a few grey-clad, battle-stained infantrymen clambered slowly on to the parapet with outstretched hands. Upon the British ceasing their fire a party of 3 officers and 400 men were marched out of the trenches and gave themselves up. Their stout resistance is a lesson in the effect which a single obstinate detachment can exert in throwing a large scheme out of gear.

The 1st Brigade had now got through upon the left, and the 2nd was able to follow them, so that the whole force advanced as far as the Lens-Hulluch road, getting in touch with the 20th Brigade of the Seventh Division on the left. Here the resistance was strong and the fire heavy. The division had lost very heavily. Of the 9th King’s Liverpool only Colonel Ramsay, 4 subalterns, and 120 men were left, while many of the other battalions were almost as hard hit. It was now raining and the light was failing. The men dug themselves in near the old German trenches, the 3rd Brigade coming up and taking its position on the right flank, where late that night it connected up by means of its outer unit, the 2nd Welsh, with the Twenty-fourth Division, which had come up in support.

The temporary check to the advance of the First Division had exposed the left flank of its neighbour to the south, the Fifteenth (M’Cracken’s) Scottish Division of the New Army. The two divisions were to have met at Fosse 14, but the Fifteenth Division arrived there some hours before the others, for the reason already stated. In spite of this a very fine advance was made, which gained a considerable stretch of ground and pierced more deeply than any other into the German line. The 46th Brigade was on the left, consisting of the 7th Scots Borderers and 12th Highland Light Infantry in front, with the 8th Borderers and 10th Scottish Rifles behind them. It was upon the parapet in front of this brigade that Piper Laidlaw marched up and down before the attack under a heavy fire, warming the blood of the crouching men with the maddening scream of his war-pipes. Not until he was shot down did this gallant man cease to urge forward his comrades. The 46th Brigade dashed forward at the signal, and with a fine fury flooded over the German trenches, which they carried at a rush, storming onwards across the Lens road and up the long slope of Hill 70, taking Fosse 14 upon the way, and eventually reaching the summit of the incline. The 45th supporting Brigade came along after them, detaching, as they passed, 100 bombers of the 6th Camerons to help the First Division to get forward. These brave Highlanders held the advanced line for some hours under heavy fire from the Lens batteries.

The 44th Brigade upon the right of the 46th had made an advance which was equally fiery and successful. In this brigade the 9th Black Watch and 8th Seaforths were in the lead, with the 7th Camerons and 10th Gordons behind. This brigade dashed into the main street of Loos, where they met the Londoners of Barter's Forty-seventh Division. They helped to consolidate this flank and to clear the houses of Loos, while some of them pushed forward towards Hill 70. When they reached the crest of the hill they found the remains of the 46th Brigade, consisting of remnants of the 12th H.L.I., 7th Scots Borderers, and 10th Scottish Rifles, upon their left. It is possible that they could have dug in and held their own, but the objective as given in the original orders had been the village of St. Augustine, and with heroic perseverance these brave men would be contented with nothing less than the full performance or death in the attempt. Alas! for many of them it was the latter. Gathering themselves together, they flung themselves forward over the crest. On the other side was a long, low slope with isolated houses at the bottom, the suburbs of the village of St. Laurent, which they mistook for St. Augustine. These crackled at every window with machine-gun fire. Of the devoted band who rushed forward none reached the houses. The few survivors fell back upon the crest, and then, falling back about one hundred and fifty yards, they dug in upon the slope on the west side of it. Their position was an extraordinarily dangerous one, for they had no protection upon the left flank, where lay a thick wood the Bois Hugo through which a German attack might come which would cut them off from the Army. Colonel Purvis, of the Highland Light Infantry, with quick foresight, built up a thin line of resistance upon this side from Fosse 14 in the south to the advanced left point, manning it with a few of his own men under Lieutenant M'Neil. A welcome reinforcement of the 6th Camerons and 7th Scots Fusiliers from the 45th Brigade were thrown in to strengthen this weak point. This was done about 1 P.M. It was only just in time, for in the afternoon the German infantry did begin to debouch from the wood, but finding organised resistance they dropped back, and their advance on this line was not renewed until the next morning, when it fell upon the Twenty-first Division. For a time the pressure was very great, but the men rallied splendidly round a tattered flag bearing the Cameron tartan, and, though it was impossible to get forward, they still, in a mixed and straggling line with hardly any officers, held firmly to their ground. Late in the evening the 13th Royal Scots and the 11th Argyll and Sutherlands came up to thicken the line.

Leaving the Fifteenth Division holding on desperately to that advanced position where, as Captain Beith has tersely said, a fringe of Jocks and

Sandies lie to mark the farthest point of advance, we turn to the remaining division upon the right the Forty-seventh London, under General Barter. This division upheld splendidly upon this bloody day the secular reputation of the Cockney as a soldier. With a keen, quick brain, as well as a game heart, the Londoner, like the Parisian, has proved that the artificial life of a great city does not necessarily dull the primitive qualities which make the warrior. The cream of the London Territorial regiments had already been distributed among regular brigades, and had made themselves an individual name, but this was the first occasion upon which a whole division was engaged in a really serious operation.

The left of the division was formed by Thwaites' 141st Brigade with the 18th London Irish in the front line and the 20th Blackheath Battalion in immediate support. To their right was Cuthbert's 140th Brigade, which formed the extreme right of the whole attack, a position which caused them to think as much of their flank protection as of their frontal advance. This brigade had the 6th and 7th Londons in the van, with the 8th and 15th (Civil Service) in support. The 142nd Brigade (Willoughby) was in the second line.

The advance of the 141st Brigade was a splendid one. At the whistle the 18th London Irish, with a fighting yell, flooded over the parapet with their regimental football kicked in front of them, and were into the German trench like a thunderbolt. A few minutes later they were followed by the Blackheath men, who passed the captured trench, rushed on to the second, and finally won the third, which opened for them the road to Loos. Into the south end of Loos they streamed, while the 44th Brigade of the Fifteenth Division rushed the north end, turning out or capturing the 23rd Silesians, who held the post. The 19th St. Pancras Battalion followed up the attack, while the 17th (Poplar) were in reserve. Meanwhile, the 140th Brigade had done most useful work by making a lodgment on the Double Grassier, formidable twin slag-heaps which had become a German fort. The ground to the immediate south of Loos was rapidly seized and consolidated by the Londoners, several guns being captured in the chalk pits near the village. This operation was of permanent importance, as the successful British advance would inevitably form a salient projecting into the hostile lines, which would be vulnerable if there were not some good defensive position on the flank. The work of the Forty-seventh Division assured such a line in the south.

By mid-day, as has been shown, the British advance had spent its momentum, and had been brought to a standstill at all points. The German lines had been almost but not quite shattered. A map of the photographed trenches shows that beyond the point reached by the advanced troops there was only the last line which held them up. To the east of that was open country. But the German reserves were hurrying up from all quarters in their rear, from Roulers, from Thielt, from Courtrai and Menin and Douai. At the latter place was a division of Guards just brought across from the Russian front. These also were hurried into the fight. The extreme British line was too thin for defence, and was held by exhausted men. They were shelled and bombed and worn down by attack after attack until they were compelled to draw slowly back and re-form on interior lines. The grand salient which had been captured with such heroic dash and profuse loss of life was pared down here and contracted there. The portion to the south held by the Londoners was firmly consolidated, including the important village of Loos and its environs. An enormous mine crane, three hundred feet high, of latticed iron, which had formed an extraordinarily good observation point, was one of the gains in this direction. The Fifteenth Division had been driven back to the western side of Hill 70, and to the line of the Lens-Hulluch-La Bassée road. The Seventh and Ninth Divisions had fallen back from Haisnes, but they still held the western outskirts of Hulluch, the edge of St. Élie, the Quarries, and Fosse 8. It was at this end of the line that the situation was most dangerous, for the failure of the Second Division to get forward had left a weak flank upon the north, which was weaker because the heavily-gunned German position of Auchy lay to the north-west of it in a way that partially enfiladed it.

The struggle was particularly desperate round the slag-heaps which were known as Fosse 8. This position was held all day by the 5th Camerons, the 8th Black Watch, and the 7th Seaforths of the 26th Brigade, the remaining battalion of which, the 8th Gordons, were with the bulk of the 27th Brigade in the direction of Haisnes. These three battalions, under a murderous fire from the Auchy guns and from the persistent bombers, held on most tenaciously till nightfall. When the welcome darkness came, without bringing them the longed-for supports, the defenders had shrunk to 600 men, but their grip of the position was not relaxed, and they held it against all attacks during the night. About five next morning the 73rd Brigade of the Twenty-fourth Division a unit straight from home pushed up to their help under circumstances to be afterwards explained, and shared their great dangers and losses during the second day of the fighting.

The battalions of the Ninth Division which had got as far as the outskirts of Haisnes held on there until evening. By that time no reinforcements had reached them and they had lost very heavily. Both their flanks were turned, and at nightfall they were driven back in the direction of the Quarries, which was held by those men of the Seventh Division (mostly of the 22nd Brigade) who had also been compelled to fall back from Hulluch. During the night this position was wired by the 54th Company of Royal Engineers, but the Germans, by a sudden and furious attack, carried it, driving out the garrison and capturing some of them, among whom was General Bruce, the Brigadier of the 27th Brigade. After the capture of the Quarries, the flanks of the 27th Brigade were again turned, and it was compelled to return as far as the old German front line. The 20th Brigade had fallen back to the same point. These misfortunes all arose from the radically defective position of the northern British line, commanded as it was by German guns from its own left rear, and unprotected at the flank.

Whilst this set-back had occurred upon the left of the attack, the right had consolidated itself very firmly. The position of the Forty-seventh Division when darkness fell was that on their right the 140th Brigade had a strong grip of part of the Double Grassier. On their left the 19th Battalion (St. Pancras), which had lost its Colonel, Collison-Morley, and several senior officers, was holding South-east Loos in the rear of the right flank of the Fifteenth Division. The 20th was holding the Loos Chalk Pit, while the 17th and 18th were in the German second-line trenches.

There is reason to believe that the rapid dash of the stormers accomplished results more quickly than had been thought possible. The Twenty - first and Twenty-fourth Divisions were now brought up, as Sir John French clearly states in his dispatch, for a specific purpose: “To ensure the speedy and effective support of the First and Fourth Corps in the case of their success, the Twenty-first and Twenty-fourth Divisions passed the night of the 24th and 25th on the line of Beuvry Noeux-les-Mines.”

Leaving the front line holding hard to, or in some cases recoiling from, the advanced positions which they had won, we will turn back and follow the movements of these two divisions. It is well to remember that these divisions had not only never heard the whistle of a bullet, but they had never even been inside a trench, save on some English down-side. It is perhaps a pity that it could not be so arranged that troops so unseasoned in actual warfare should occupy some defensive line, while the older troops whom they relieved could have marched to battle. Apart, however, from this inexperience, which was no fault of their own or of their commanders, there is no doubt at all that the men were well-trained infantry and full of spirit. To bring them to the front without exciting attention, three separate night marches were undertaken, of no inordinate length, but tiring on account of the constant blockings of the road and the long waits which attended them. Finally they reached the point at which Sir John French reported them in his dispatch, but by ill-fortune their cookers came late, and they were compelled in many cases to move on again without a proper meal. After this point the cookers never overtook them, and the men were thrown back upon their iron rations. Providence is not a strong point of the British soldier, and it is probable that with more economy and foresight at the beginning these troops would have been less exhausted and hungry at the end. The want of food, however, was not the fault of the supply services.

The troops moved forward with no orders for an instant attack, but with the general idea that they were to wait as a handy reserve and go forward when called upon to do so. The 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division was sent on first about eleven o’clock, but the other brigades were not really on the road till much later. The roads on which they moved those which lead through Vermelles to Hulluch or to Loos were blocked with traffic: guns advancing, ambulances returning, troops of all sorts coming and going, Maltese carts with small-arm ammunition hurrying forward to the fighting-line. The narrow channel was choked with the crowd. The country on either side was intersected with trenches and laced with barbed wire. It was pouring with intermittent showers. The soldiers, cold, wet, and hungry, made their way forward with many stoppages towards the firing, their general direction being to the centre of the British line.

“As we got over this plain,” writes an officer, “I looked back, and there was a most extraordinary sight; as far as you could see there were thousands and thousands of our men coming up. You could see them for miles and miles, and behind them a most colossal thundercloud extending over the whole sky, and the rain was pouring down. It was just getting dark, and the noise of our guns and the whole thing was simply extraordinary.”

Early on the march the leading brigade, the 73rd, was met by a staff officer of the First Army, who gave the order that it should detach itself, together with the 129th Field Company of Sappers, and hasten to the reinforcement of the Ninth Division at Fosse 8. They went, and the Twenty-fourth Division knew them no more. The other two brigades found themselves between 9 and 10 P.M. in the front German trenches. They had been able to deploy after leaving Vermelles, and the front line were now in touch with the 63rd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division upon the right, and with the 2nd Welsh Regiment, who represented the right of the 3rd Brigade of the First Division, upon their left. The final orders were that at eleven o’clock next day these three divisions First, Twenty-fourth, and Twenty-first were to make a united assault past Hulluch, which was assumed to be in our hands, and on to the main German line. This, then, was the position of the reserves on the night of September 25-26.

It was a nightmare night in the advanced line of the Army. The weather had been tempestuous and rainy all day, though the men had little time to think of such matters. But now they were not only tired and hungry, but soaked to the skin. An aggressive enemy pelted them with bombs from in front, and their prospects seemed as black as the starless sky above them. It is, however, at such a time that the British soldier, a confirmed grumbler in his hours of ease, shows to the best advantage. The men knew that much ground had been gained. They had seen prisoners by hundreds throwing up their hands, and had marked as they rushed past them the vicious necks of the half-buried captured cannon. It was victory for the Army, whatever might be their own discomfort. Their mood, therefore, was hilarious rather than doleful, and thousands of weary Mark Tapleys huddled under the dripping ledges of the parapets. “They went into battle with their tails right up, and though badly mauled have their tails up still.” So wrote the officer of a brigade which had lost more than half its effectives.

VIII. THE BATTLE OF LOOS
The Second Day — September 26

Death of General Capper — Retirement of the Fifteenth Division — Advance of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-first Divisions — Heavy losses — Desperate struggle — General retirement on the right — Rally round Loos — Position in the evening

SUNDAY the 26th was a day of hard fighting and of heavy losses, the reserves streaming up from the rear on both sides, each working furiously to improve its position. From early in the day the fighting was peculiarly bitter round Fosse 8 in the section carried and held by the Ninth Division. It has been already mentioned that three battalions, the 5th Camerons, 7th Seaforths, and 8th Black Watch of the 26th Brigade, held this place all the evening of the 25th and all night, until reduced to less than the strength of a regiment. It has also been stated that the 73rd Brigade had been detached from the Twenty- fourth Division to their aid. These men, with no preliminary hardening, found themselves suddenly thrust into one of the very hottest corners of a desperate fight. Under these circumstances it is all to the credit of these troops that they were able to hold their position all day, though naturally their presence was not of the same value as that of a more veteran brigade.

The 73rd Brigade were put into German trenches to the east of Fosse 8, their order from the left being 7th Northamptons, 12th Royal Fusiliers, and 9th Sussex, with the 13th Middlesex echeloned on their right rear. They were constantly attacked, but were suffering more from cold, hunger, and exhaustion than from the Germans. All day they and the remains of the Scots held the place against intermittent assaults, which occasionally had some partial success, but never quite enabled the enemy to re-establish his position. It was not, however, until the morning of the 27th, as will afterwards be narrated, that their most severe ordeal was to come.

Close to Fosse 8, and on the south of it, was the Death of position of the Quarries, from which the 22nd Brigade (Capper) of the Seventh Division had been driven by a sudden rush of the Germans during the night. After an abortive but expensive attack by the 9th Norfolks next morning, there was a more serious effort by a body of mixed troops, led by Captain Carter and including several units of the Second Division, notably the 2nd Worcesters and 1st Rifles. These battalions pushed their way up to the Quarries, and although they were unable to evict the Germans they established themselves firmly close to the south- western edge and there awaited events. To the south of them the 20th Brigade of the Seventh Division held firmly to their line. It was on this day that they lost their heroic leader, Sir Thomson Capper, the fine soldier who had so often braced by word and example their ever-thinning lines during the black days of Ypres, with which his name and that of his division will be eternally associated. There was no more valiant or trusted leader in the Army. He was shot through the lungs, was carried to the rear, and died in hospital next day. “We are here to do the impossible” was one of the fiery aphorisms which he left to the Army.

On the southern front of the British there was also an inclination to contract the line upon the morning of the 26th. The fact that the French attack upon the right on the day before had not had much success rendered that wing very open to a flank attack. The Fifteenth Scottish Division still held on hard to the slopes of Hill 70, but early in the day their line had been driven somewhat to the westward. At nine o’clock they had renewed their attack upon Hill 70, supported by some reinforcements. They were not strong enough, nor was their artillery support sufficiently powerful to enable them to carry the crest of the hill. When their advance was checked the Germans returned upon them with a series of counter-attacks which gradually drove them down the hill. In the desperate series of rallies in which they made head against the Germans it is difficult to distinguish regiments, since the men fought for the most part in a long, scattered fringe of mixed units, each dour infantryman throwing up his own cover and fighting his own battle. The 6th Camerons preserved their cohesion, however, and particularly distinguished themselves, their gallant leader, Douglas Hamilton, falling at their head in the thick of the fight. “I must get up! I must get up!” were his last words before he expired. The final effect of these episodes was to drive the British off the greater part of the slope of Hill 70, and down towards the village of Loos.

It will be remembered that the weary Twenty-fourth The Division (Ramsay), with its comrade the Twenty-first (Forestier-Walker) upon its right and the Regular First Division upon its left, had received its orders to advance at eleven o’clock. It had been supposed that Hulluch was in British hands, but this was found not to be so. The orders, however, still held good. The Twenty- fourth Division had already been stripped of the 73rd Brigade, and now it was further denuded by two battalions of the 71st, the 9th Norfolks and 8th Bedfords, who were told off to help to retake the Quarries. The Norfolks made an attack upon a strong position, and lost 200 men and officers in the attempt. The Bedfords, who were in support, lost touch both with their own division and with the one that they were helping, so that they were not strongly engaged during the day.

The hour had now come for the general advance. General Mitford with the 72nd Brigade was leading, with two battalions of the 71st Brigade behind, and his pioneer battalion in support. On his left was the 2nd Welsh, and, as he imagined, the whole of the First Division. On his right was the 63rd Brigade and the rest of the Twenty-first Division, less the 62nd Brigade, as afterwards explained. It formed a solid wall of 20,000 infantry which might well turn the tide of a great battle.

We shall follow this advance of the Twenty-fourth Division upon the left, who were compelled to go forward with their flank exposed on account of some delay in the attack by the First Division. Afterwards we shall return to consider the movements of the Twenty-first Division on their right. The leading brigade, the 72nd, moved forward with the 8th West Kents upon the left, and the 9th East Surreys upon the right. Behind them were the 8th Queen’s Surreys (left) and the 8th Buffs (right), with the pioneer battalion, the 12th Sherwood Foresters, in support. They were followed by the two remaining battalions of the 71st Brigade, the 9th Suffolks and the 11th Essex. As the advance continued the second line joined with the first, and the 11th Essex from behind also pushed its way abreast of the foremost. The line of advance was to the south of Hulluch, and this line was preserved. As matters turned out, the numerous guns in the south of that village were all available for defence against the advance of the Twenty-fourth Division. This caused them very heavy losses, but in spite of them they swept onwards with an unfaltering energy which was a monument to those long months of preparation during which Sir John Ramsay had brought his men to a high state of efficiency. Under every possible disadvantage of hunger, cold, exhaustion, and concentrated fire, they behaved with a steadiness which made them worthy of the honoured names which gleamed upon their shoulder- straps. One platoon of the Essex diverged into Hulluch in a vain attempt to stop the machine-guns and so shield their comrades. Hardly a man of this body survived. The rest kept their eyes front, took their punishment gamely, and pushed on for their objective. The breadth of the attack was such that it nearly covered the space between Hulluch in the north and the Bois Hugo in the south. About mid-day the Twenty-fourth Division had reached a point across the Lens-Hulluch road which was ahead of anything attained in this quarter the day before. They were up against unbroken wire with an enfilade rifle and machine- gun fire from both flanks and from Hulluch on their left rear, as well as a heavy shell-fire of asphyxiating shells. A gallant attempt was made to pierce the wires, which were within fifty yards of the German position, but it was more than flesh and blood could do. They were driven back, and in the retirement across the long slope which they had traversed their losses were greatly increased. Their wounded had to be left behind, and many of these fell afterwards into the hands of the Germans, receiving honourable treatment from them. The losses would have been heavier still had it not been that the Suffolks in support lined up in a sunken road three hundred yards south of Hulluch, and kept down the fire of the machine-guns. Some of these raw battalions endured losses which have never been exceeded in this war before they could finally persuade themselves that the task was an impossible one. The 8th West Rents lost their Colonel, Vansittart, 24 officers, and 556 men; the 8th Buffs their Colonel, Homer, 24 officers, and 534 men; the other battalions were nearly as hard hit. These figures speak for themselves. Mortal men could not have done more. The whole brigade lost 78 officers and 2000 men out of about 3600 engaged in the attack. When these soldiers walked back and there is testimony that their retirement was in many cases at a walk they had earned the right to take their stand with any troops in the world. The survivors resumed their place about 1:30 in the German trenches, where for the rest of the day they endured a very heavy shelling. The movements of the Twenty-first Division upon the right were of a very much more complex nature, and there is a conflict of evidence about them which makes the task of the historian a peculiarly difficult one. The great outstanding fact, however, which The story presents itself in the case of each of the three brigades is that the men in nearly every instance behaved with a steady gallantry under extraordinarily difficult circumstances which speaks volumes for their soldierly qualities. Sir Edward Hutton, who raised them, and General Forestier-Walker, who led them, had equal cause to be contented with the personnel. “The men were perfectly magnificent, quite cool and collected, and would go anywhere,” says one wounded officer. “The only consolation

I have is the memory of the magnificent pluck and bravery shown by our good men. Never shall I forget it," cries another. It is necessary to emphasise the fact, because rumours got about at the time that all was not as it should be rumours which came from men who were either ignorant of all the facts or were not aware of the tremendous strain which was borne by this division during the action. These rumours were cruel libels upon battalions many of which sustained losses in this their first action which have seldom been matched during the war. We will follow the fortunes of each brigade in turn, holding the balance as far as possible amid evidence which, as already stated, is complex and conflicting.

The 62nd Brigade (Wilkinson), consisting of the 8th East Yorks, 10th Yorks, 12th and 13th Northumberland Fusiliers, with the 14th Northumberland Fusiliers as pioneer battalion, was hurried away separately and taken to the south and east of Loos to reinforce the Fifteenth Division, which had sustained such losses on the 25th that they could not hold both the front and the flank.

The 62nd pushed on, reached the point of danger The as early as the night of the 25th, and occupied a line of slag-heaps to the south-east of Loos, where there was a gap through which the enemy could penetrate from the flank. It was a prolongation of the same general defensive line which had been established and held by the Forty-seventh Division, and it was the more important as the French advance upon our right had not progressed so far as our own, leaving our right flank in the air, exactly as our left flank had been left open by the holding up of the Second Division. The 62nd Brigade was only just in time in getting hold of the position, for it was strongly attacked at five in the morning of the 26th. The attack fell mainly upon the 8th East Yorkshires and the 10th Yorkshires, who were driven back from the farther side of the great dump which was the centre of the fight, but held on to the Loos side of it with the support of the 13th Northumberland Fusiliers. This line was held all day of the 26th. So stem was the fighting that the Fusiliers lost 17 officers and 400 men, while the 8th East Yorkshires at the slag-heaps lost the same heavy proportion of officers and 300 men. More than once the fighting was actually hand to hand, especially with the East Yorkshires. Colonel Hadow, together with Majors Noyes and Dent, all of the 10th Yorkshires, were killed, while Colonel Way of the East Yorkshires was wounded. It will be noted, then, that the 62nd Brigade was working independently of the rest of the Twenty-first Division on one flank, as the 73rd of the Twenty-fourth Division was upon the other.

The main attack of the division was carried out by the 63rd and 64th Brigades, the only ones which The remained under the command of General Forestier-Walker. A formidable line of obstacles faced them as they formed up, including the Chalk Pit and the Chalk Pit Wood, and on the other side of the Lens-Hulluch road, upon their right front, Fosse 14 and the Bois Hugo, the latter a considerable plantation full of machine-guns and entanglements. The original plan had been that the advance should be simultaneous with that upon the left, but the enemy were very active from an early hour upon this front, and the action seems, therefore, to have been accelerated. Indeed, the most reasonable view of what occurred seems to be that the enemy had themselves planned a great attack at this point at that hour, that the bickerings of the morning were their preliminary bombardment, and that the British attack became speedily a defensive action, in which the 63rd Brigade was shattered by the weight of the enemy attack, but inflicted such loss upon it that it could get no farther, and ceased to endanger the continuity of our line. It is only on this supposition of a double simultaneous attack that one can reconcile the various statements of men, some of whom looked upon the movement as an attack and some as a defence.

The 63rd Brigade (Nicholls) moved forward with the 8th Lincolns upon the right and the 12th Yorkshires upon the left. These regiments advanced to a point just east of the Lens-Hulluch road. In support, on the immediate west of the road, lining the Chalk Pit Wood, were the 10th Yorks and Lancasters, with the 8th Somersets. For several hours this position was maintained under a heavy and deadly fire.

“The shells ploughed the men out of their shallow trenches as potatoes are turned from a furrow,” says an officer. Two companies of the 8th Somersets, however, seem to have lost direction and wandered off to Hill 70, where they were involved in the fighting of the Fifteenth Division. Two companies of the Yorks and Lancasters were also ordered up in that direction, where they made a very heroic advance. A spectator watching them from Hill 70 says: “Their lines came under the machine-guns as soon as they were clear of the wood. They had to lie down. Many, of course, were shot down. After a bit their lines went forward again and had to go down again. They went on, forward a little and then down, and forward a little and then down, until at last five gallant figures rose up and struggled forward till they, too, went down... The repeated efforts to get forward through the fire were very fine.”

These four companies having left, there remained only two of the Somersets and two of the Yorks and Lancasters in the wood. Their comrades in advance had in the meantime become involved in a very fierce struggle in the Bois Hugo. Here, after being decimated by the machine-guns, they met and held for a time the full force of the German attack. The men of Yorkshire and of Lincolnshire fought desperately against heavy masses of troops, thrown forward with great gallantry and disregard of loss. For once the British rifle-fire had a chance, and exacted its usual high toll. “We cut line after line of the enemy down as they advanced.” So rapid was the fire that cartridges began to run low, and men were seen crawling up to their dead comrades to ransack their pouches.

The enemy was dropping fast, and yet nothing could stop him. Brigadier Nicholls walked up to the firing line with reckless bravery and gave the order to charge. Bayonets were actually crossed, and the enemy thrown back. The gallant Nicholls fell, shot in the thigh and stomach, and the position became impossible. The Lincolns had suffered the appalling loss of all their officers and 500 men. The Yorkshires were in no better case. The survivors fell back rapidly upon the supports.

Fortunately, these were in close attendance. As the remains of the Lincolns and the West Yorkshires, after their most gallant and desperate resistance to the overwhelming German attack, came pouring back with few officers and in a state of some confusion from the Bois Hugo and over the Lens-Hulluch road, the four companies under Majors Howard and Taylor covered their retreat and held up for a time the German swarms behind them, the remains of the four battalions fighting in one line.

One party of mixed Lincolns and Yorkshires held out for about seven hours in an advanced trench, which was surrounded by the enemy about eleven, and the survivors, after sustaining very heavy losses—”the trench was like a shambles” — did not surrender until nearly six o’clock, when their ammunition had all been shot away. The isolation of this body was caused by the fact that their trenches lay opposite the south end of the Bois Hugo. The strong German attack came round the north side of the wood, and thus, as it progressed, a considerable number of the Lincolns and some of the West Yorks, still holding the line upon the right, were entirely cut off.

Colonel Walter of the Lincolns, with Major Storer, Captains Coates and Stronguist, and three lieutenants, are known to have been killed, while almost all the others were wounded. A number of our wounded were left in the hands of the Germans. There is no doubt that the strength of the German attack and the resistance offered to it were underrated by the public at the time, which led to the circulation of cruel and unjust rumours.

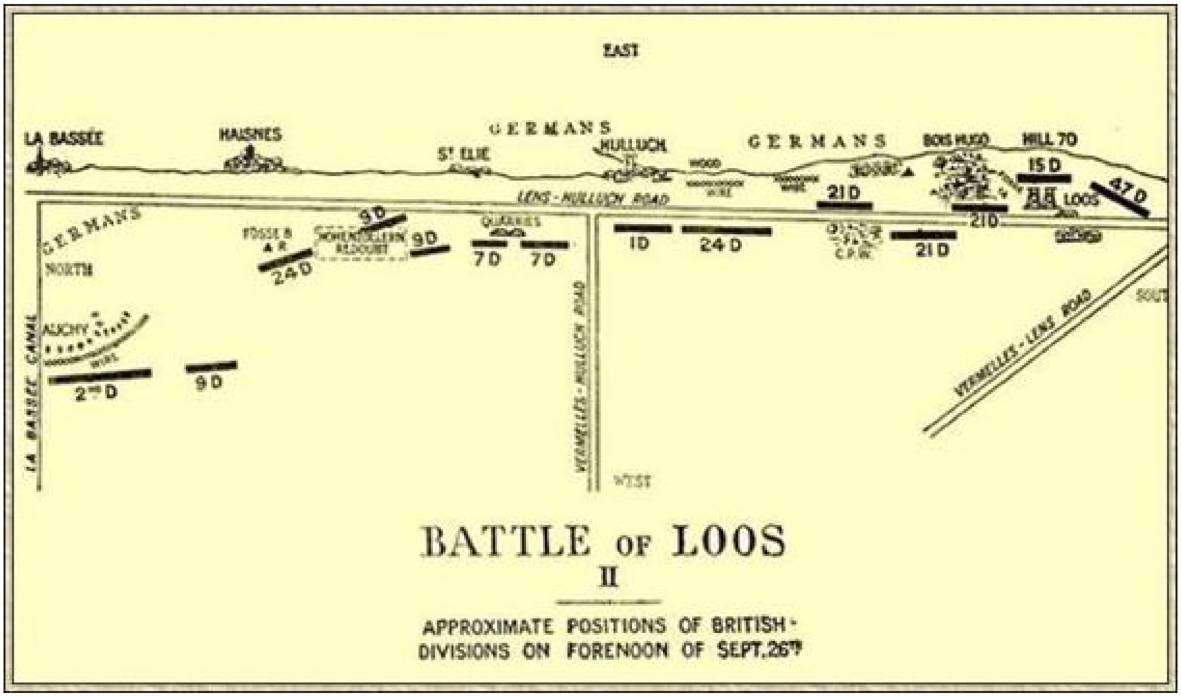
EAST
LA BASSÉE
HAISNES
GERMANS
ST ELIE
HULLUCH
WOOD
WIRE
GERMANS
BOIS HUGO
HILL 70
15 D
21 D
LOOS
47 D
LENS-HULLUCH ROAD
21 D
GERMANS
NORTH
FOSSE 8
9 D
HOHENZOLLERN REDOUBT
9 D
QUARRIES
24 D
7 D
7 D
1 D
24 D
C.P.H.
21 D
SOUTH
AUCHY
WIRE
2ND D
9 D
LA BASSÉE CANAL
VERMELLES-HULLUCH ROAD
VERMELLES-LENS ROAD
WEST
BATTLE OF LOOS
II
APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF BRITISH DIVISIONS ON FORENOON OF SEPT. 26TH

Battle of Loos 2

The 64th Brigade (Gloster) was in support some little distance to the right rear of the 63rd, covering the ground between the Lens-Hulluch road and Loos. About noon a message was received by them to the effect that the 63rd was being very strongly pressed, and that help was urgently needed. The 14th Durham Light Infantry was moved forward in support, and came at once under heavy fire, losing its Colonel (Hamilton), 17 officers, and about 200 men. The 15th Durham Light Infantry was then thrown into the fight, and sustained even heavier losses. Colonel Logan, 18 officers, and 400 men were killed or wounded. About one o’clock the two Durham battalions were in the thick of the fight, while Captain Liebenrood, machine-gun officer of the 64th Brigade, did good work in keeping down the enemy fire. The two battalions of Yorkshire Light Infantry (9th and 10th) were held in reserve. About 2:30 the pressure upon the front of the

63rd Brigade had become too great, and both it and the two Durham battalions were driven back. Their resistance, however, seems to have taken the edge off the dangerous counter-attack, for the Germans did not come on past the line of the road and of the Chalk Pit Wood.

It will be remembered that when the two advanced brigades of the Fifteenth Division established themselves in hastily-dug trenches upon the western slope of Hill 70, they threw back their left flank obliquely down the hill towards Fosse 14 in order to avoid being at the mercy of any force which endeavoured to get behind them on this side. Only a very thin line of men could be spared for this work, under a young Australian subaltern named M’Neil. These soldiers held the post for twenty-four hours, but when the heavy German attack which drove in the Twenty-first Division and cut off the Lincolns struck up against them, they were all killed or wounded, including their gallant leader, who managed, with several bullets in him, to get back to the British line. This led to the final retirement down Hill 70 of the men of the Scotch Division, who dug themselves in once more at the foot of the hill, not far from the village of Loos.

The losses. It may be noted that the losses of the two supporting divisions were about 8000 men. Their numbers in infantry were about equal to the British troops at Waterloo, and their casualties were approximately the same. Mention has already been made of the endurance of Mitford’s 72nd Brigade. The figures of the 63rd and their comrades of the 64th are little inferior. Of these troops more than 40 per cent of the rank and file, 65 per cent of their officers, and 75 per cent of their commanders lay upon the field of battle. When one recollects that 33 per cent was reckoned a high rate of loss by the greatest authorities upon warfare, and when one remembers that these were raw troops fighting under every discomfort and disadvantage, one feels that they have indeed worthily continued the traditions of the old Army and founded those of the new. There were isolated cases of unordered retirement, but in the main the regiments showed the steadiness and courage which one would expect from the good North-country stock from which they came.

The divisional artillery of the Twenty-first Division had come into action in the open behind the advancing infantry, and paid the price for their gallant temerity. The 94th Brigade E.F.A. lost especially heavily, eight of its guns being temporarily put out of action. Major Dobson of this brigade was among the killed. It is to be feared that the guns did not always realise the position of the infantry, and that many of the 64th Brigade especially were hit by their own shrapnel. Such painful incidents seem almost inseparable from modern warfare. The artillery kept its place, and afterwards rendered good service by supporting the advance of the Guards.

Whilst this advance and check had taken place in the centre and right centre of the British position, the London Division, upon the extreme right, was subjected rather to bombardment than to assault. A heavy fall of asphyxiating shells was experienced a little after 9 A.M., and many men were gassed before they were able to put on their helmets. The second German line of captured trenches was held very firmly by General Thwaites with the rest of the 141st Brigade, while the 140th retained a defensive flank, the whole forming a strong *point d'appui* for a rally and reorganisation. Men of the Twenty-first Division re-formed upon this line, and the battle was soon re-established. This re-establishment was materially helped by the action of the 9th and 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry battalions previously mentioned of the Twenty-first Division, who had become a divisional reserve. These two battalions now advanced and gained some ground to the east of Loos on the enemy's left flank. It may be mentioned that one of these battalions was ordered to discard its packs in order to ease the tired soldiers, and that on advancing from their trenches these packs were never regained. Their presence afterwards may have given the idea that equipment had been abandoned, whereas an actual order had been obeyed. The movement covered the reorganisation which was going on behind them. One small detachment under Captain Laskie of the 10th Y.L.I, did especially good work. The Yorkshiremen were aided by men of the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 62nd Brigade, who held on to the trenches to the east of Loos. A cavalry detachment from Campbell's 6th Cavalry Brigade, under Campbell himself, had also appeared about 4 P.M. as a mobile reserve and thrown itself into Loos to strengthen the defence.

The evening of this day, September 26, found the British lines contracted as compared with what they had been in the morning. The Forty-seventh Division had, if anything, broadened and strengthened their hold upon the southern outskirts of Loos. The western slope of Hill 70 was still held in part. Thence the line bent back to the Loos-La Bassée road, followed the line of that road for a thousand yards, thence onwards to near the west end of the village of Hulluch, and then as before. But the exchanges would seem to have been in favour of the Germans, since they had pushed the British back for a stretch of about a mile from the Lens-Hulluch road, thus making a dent in their front. On both sides reserves were still mustering. The Guards’ Division had been brought up by Sir John French, and were ready for operations upon the morning of the 27th, while the Twenty-eighth Division was on its way. The Germans, who had been repeatedly assured that the British Army extension was a bluff, and that the units existed only upon paper, must have found some food for thought as the waves rolled up.

IX. THE BATTLE OF LOOS
From September 27 to the End of the Year

Loss of Fosse 8 — Death of General Thesiger — Advance of the Guards — Attack of the Twenty-eighth Division — Arrival of the Twelfth Division — German counter-attacks — Attack by the Forty-sixth Division upon Hohenzollern Redoubt — Subsidiary attacks — General observations — Return of Lord French to England

THE night of September 26 was a restless and tumultuous one, the troops being much exhausted by their long ordeal, which involved problems of supply unknown in any former wars. The modern soldier must be a great endurer as well as an iron fighter.

The Germans during the night were very pushful in all directions. Their reserves are said to have been very mixed, and there was evidence of forty-eight battalions being employed against the British line, but their attacks were constant and spirited. The advanced positions were, however, maintained, and the morning of the 27th found the attackers, after two days of incessant battle, still keeping their grip upon their gains.

The main part of the day began badly for the British, however, as in the early morning they were pushed off Fosse 8, which was an extremely important point and the master-key of the whole position, as its high slag-heap commanded Slag Alley and a number of the other trenches to the south of it, including most of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. The worn remains of the 26th Brigade were still holding the pit when morning dawned, and the units of the 73rd Brigade (Jelf) were in a semicircle to the east and south of it. These battalions, young troops who had never heard the whiz of a bullet before, had now been in close action for thirty-six hours, and had been cut off from all supplies of food and water for two days. Partly on account of their difficult tactical position, and partly because they were ignorant of how communications are kept up in the trenches, they had become entirely isolated. It was on these exhausted troops that the storm now broke. The northern unit consisted of the 7th Northamptons, whose left wing seems to have been in the air. Next to them were the 12th Royal Fusiliers. There had been several infantry attacks, which were repulsed during the night. Just at the dawn two red rockets ascended from the German lines, and at the same moment an intense bombardment opened upon Fosse 8, causing great loss among the occupants. It was at this time that General Thesiger, Commander of the Ninth Division, together with his Staff- Major, Burney, was killed by a shell. Colonel Livingstone, Divisional C.O. of Engineers, and Colonel Wright, of the 8th Gordons, were also hit. In the obstinate defence of the post the 90th Company R.E. fought as infantry, after they had done all that was possible to strengthen the defences.

A strong infantry attack had immediately followed the bombardment. They broke in, to the number of about a thousand, between the Northamptons and Fusiliers. By their position they were now able to command Fosse 8, where the 9th Sussex had been, and also to make untenable the position of the 27th Brigade, which occupied trenches to the south which could be enfiladed. In “The First Hundred Thousand” will be found a classical account of the straits of these troops and their retirement to a safer position. General Jelf telephoned in vain for the support of heavy guns, and even released a carrier pigeon with the same urgent request. Seeing that Fosse 8 was lost, he determined to hold on hard to the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and lined its trenches with the broken remains of his wearied brigade. The enemy at once attacked with swarms of well-provided bombers in the van, but were met foot to foot by the bombers of the 73rd Brigade, who held them up. The 26th Brigade endeavoured to counter-attack, but were unable to get forward against the machine-guns, but their bombers joined those of the English brigade and did splendid work. The ground was held until the troops, absolutely at the limit of human endurance, were relieved by the 85th Brigade of the Twenty-eighth Division, as will be described later. The trench held by the Sussex was commanded from above and attacked by bombers from below, so that the battalion had a very severe ordeal. Lieutenant Shackles defended a group of cabarets at one end of the position until he and every man with him was dead or wounded. Having taken that corner, the Germans bombed down the trench. Captain Maclvor with thirty men on that flank were all killed or wounded, but the officer leading the bombers was shot by Captain Langden and the position saved. Nineteen officers and 360 men fell in this one battalion.

“We gained,” said one of them, “two Military Crosses and many wooden ones.” It had been an anxious day for all, and most of all for General Jelf, who had been left without a staff, both his major and his captain having fallen.

Up to mid-day of the 27th the tide of battle had The set against the British, but after that hour there came into action a fresh force, which can never be employed without leaving its mark upon the conflict. This was the newly-formed division of Guards (Lord Cavan), consisting of the eight battalions which had already done such splendid service from Mons onwards, together with the newly-formed Welsh Guards, the 3rd and 4th Grenadier Guards, the 2nd Coldstream, and the 2nd Irish.

On September 25 the Guards reached Noeux-les-Mines, and on September 26 were at Sailly-la-Bourse. On the morning of the 27th they moved forward upon the same general line which the previous attack had taken that is, between Hulluch on the left and Loos on the right and relieved the two divisions which had suffered so heavily upon the previous day. The general distribution of the Guards was that the 1st Brigade (Fielding), consisting of the 2nd Grenadiers, 2nd and 3rd Coldstream, and 1st Irish, were on the left. They had taken over trenches from the First Division, and were now in touch upon their left with the Seventh Division. On the right of the 1st Guards' Brigade was the 2nd (Ponsonby), consisting of the 3rd Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, 1st Scots, and 2nd Irish. On their right again, in the vicinity of Loos, was the 3rd Brigade (Heyworth), the 1st and 4th Grenadiers, 2nd Scots, and 1 st Welsh. These last two brigades, upon which the work fell for the 1st Brigade remained in a holding position were operating roughly upon the same ground as the Twenty- first Division had covered the Before, and had in their immediate front the same wood — the Chalk Pit Wood — from which we had been driven, and the Chalk Pit near the Lens-Hulluch road, which we had also lost, while a little more to the right was the strong post of Fosse 14 and the long slope of Hill 70, the whole of which had passed back into the hands of the enemy. These formidable obstacles were the immediate objective of the Guards. During the night of the 26th-27th many stragglers from the Twenty -first and Twenty-fourth Divisions passed through the Guards, informing them that their front was practically clear of British troops, and that they were face to face with the enemy.

At 2:30 P.M. the British renewed their heavy bombardment in the hope of clearing the ground for the advance. There is evidence that upon the 25th the enemy had been so much alarmed by the rapid advance that they had hurriedly removed a good deal of their artillery upon the Lens side. This had now been brought back, as we found to our cost. At four o'clock the heavy guns eased off, and the two brigades of Guards (2nd and 3rd) advanced, moving forward in artillery formation that is, in small clumps of platoons, separated from each other.

The 2nd Irish were given their baptism of fire by being placed in the van of the 2nd Brigade with orders to make good the wood in front. The 1st Coldstream were to support them. Advancing in splendid order, they reached the point without undue loss, and dug themselves in according to orders. As they lay there their comrades of the 1st Scots passed on their right under very heavy fire in salvos of high-explosive shells, and carried Fosse 14 by storm in the most admirable manner, while the Irish covered them with their rifle-fire. Part of the right-hand company of the Irish Guards got drawn into this attack and rushed forward with the Scots. Having taken Fosse 14, this body of men pushed impetuously forward, met a heavy German counter-attack, and were driven back. Their two young leaders, Lieutenants Clifford and Kipling, were seen no more. The German attack came with irresistible strength, supported by a very heavy enfilade fire. The remains of the Scots Guards were driven with heavy losses out of Fosse 14, and both they and the Irish were thrown back as far as the line of the Loos-Hulluch road.

The remains of the shaken battalions were joined by two companies of the 2nd Coldstream and reformed for another effort. In this attack of the 2nd Brigade upon Fosse 14, the Scots were supported by two companies of the 3rd Grenadiers, the other two being in general reserve. These two companies, coming up independently somewhat later than the main advance, were terribly shelled, but reached their objective, where they endured renewed losses. The officers were nearly all put out of action, and eventually a handful of survivors were brought back to the Chalk Pit Wood by Lieutenant Ritchie, himself severely wounded.

Captain Alexander, with some of the Irish, had succeeded also in holding their ground in the Chalk Pit Wood, though partly surrounded by the German advance, and they now sent back urgently for help. A fresh advance was made, in the course of which the other two companies of Coldstreamers pushed forward on the left of the wood and seized the Chalk Pit. It was hard soil and trenching was difficult, but the line of the wood and of the pit was consolidated as far as possible. A dangerous gap had been left between the 1st Coldstream, who were now the extreme left of the 2nd Brigade, and the right of the 1st Brigade. It was filled up by 150 men, hastily collected, who frustrated an attempt of the enemy to push through. This line was held until dark, though the men had to endure a very heavy and accurate shelling, against which they had little protection. In the early morning the 1st Coldstream made a fresh advance from the north-west against Fosse 14, but could make no headway against the German fire. The line of Chalk Pit Wood now became the permanent line of the Army.

The 3rd Brigade of Guards had advanced at the same time as the 2nd, their attack being on the immediate right on the line of Fosse 14 and Hill 70. It may indeed be said that the object of the 2nd Brigade attack upon Fosse 14 was very largely to silence or engage the machine-guns there and so make it easier for the 3rd Brigade to make headway at Hill 70. The Guardsmen advanced with great steadiness up the long slope of the hill, and actually gained the crest, the Welsh and the 4th Grenadiers in the lead, but a powerful German redoubt which swept the open ground with its fire made the summit untenable, and they were compelled to drop back over the crest line, where they dug themselves in and remained until this section of the line was taken over by the Twelfth Division.

The Guards had lost very heavily during these operations. The 2nd Irish had lost 8 officers and 324 men, while the 1st Scots and 1st Coldstream had suffered about as heavily. The 3rd Brigade had been even more severely hit, and the total loss of the division could have been little short of 3000. They continued to hold the front line until September 30, when the 35th and 36th Brigades of the Twelfth Division relieved them for a short rest. The Fifteenth Division had also been withdrawn, after having sustained losses which had probably never been excelled up to that hour by any single division in one action during the campaign. It is computed that no fewer than 6000 of these gallant Scots had fallen, the greater part upon the blood-stained slope and crest of Hill 70. Of the 9th Black Watch little more than 100 emerged safely, but an observer has recorded that their fierce and martial bearing was still that of victors.

The curve of the British position presented a perimeter which was about double the length of the arc which marked the original trenches. Thus a considerably larger force was needed to hold it, which was the more difficult to provide as so many divisions had already suffered heavy losses.

The French attack at Souchez having come to a standstill, Sir John French asked General Foch, the Commander of the Tenth Army, to take over the defence of Loos, which was done from the morning of the 28th by our old comrades of Ypres, the Ninth Corps. During this day there was a general rearrangement of units, facilitated by the contraction of the line brought about by the presence of our Allies. The battle-worn divisions of the first line were withdrawn, while Bulfin's Twenty-eighth Division came up to take their place.

The Twenty-eighth Division, of Ypres renown, had reached Vermelles in the early morning of Monday the 27th — the day of the Guards' advance. The general plan seems to have been that it should restore the fight upon the left half of the battlefield, while the Guards' Division did the same upon the right. General Bulfin, the able and experienced Commander of the Twenty-eighth, found himself suddenly placed in command of the Ninth also, through the death of General Thesiger. The situation which faced him was a most difficult one, and it took cool judgment in so confused a scene to make sure where his force should be applied. Urgent messages had come in to the effect that the defenders of Fosse 8 had been driven out, that as a consequence the whole of the Hohenzollern Redoubt was on the point of recapture, and that the Quarries had been wrested from the Seventh Division by the enemy. A very strong German attack was surging in from the north, and if it should advance much farther our advance line would be taken in the rear. It was clear that the Twenty-eighth Division had only just arrived in time. The 85th Brigade under General Pereira was hurried forward, and found things in a perilous state in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, where the remains of the 26th and 73rd Brigades, driven from Fosse 8 and raked by guns from the great dump, were barely holding on to the edge of the stronghold. The 2nd Buffs dashed forward with all the energy of fresh troops, swept the enemy out of the redoubt, pushed them up the trench leading northwards, which is called "Little Willie" ("Big Willie" leads eastward), and barricaded the southern exit. Matters were hung up for a time by the wounding both of General Pereira and of his Brigade-Major Flower, but Colonel Roberts, of the 3rd Royal Fusiliers, carried on. The Royal Fusiliers relieved the Buffs, and the 2nd East Surrey took over the left of the line.

An attack was organised upon the powerful position at Fosse 8, but it had to be postponed until the morning of September 28. At 9 A.M. the 2nd

Buffs delivered a very strong assault. The 3rd Middlesex were to have supported them, but came under so heavy a fire in their trenches that they were unable to get forward. The Buffs, in the face of desperate opposition, scrambled up the difficult sides of the great dump a perfect hill self-erected as a monument of generations of labour. They reached the summit, but found it swept by gusts of fire which made all life impossible. Colonel Worthington and fifteen of his officers were killed or wounded in the gallant venture. Finally, the remains of the battalion took cover from the fire in Dump Trench at the bottom of the hill. It was in this trench that the Middlesex men had been held. Their Colonel, Neale, had also been killed. From this time onwards Fosse 8 was left in the hands of the Germans, and the action of the Twenty-eighth Division became more of a defensive one to prevent any further whittling away of the ground already gained.

As the pressure was still great from the direction of Fosse 8, two battalions of the 83rd Brigade, the 1st York and Lancasters and 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry, were sent up to reinforce the line. On the 29th they helped to repel two attacks all along the front of the redoubt, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, when the Germans came on to the surface only to be shot back into their burrows again. On the same day the 83rd and 84th Brigades relieved the weary Seventh Division in the Quarries. Whilst these operations had been carried on upon the north half of the field of battle, to the left of the bisecting road, the Twelfth Division, a South England unit of the New Army, had moved forward into the space to the right of the road, taking over the trenches held by the Guards, and connecting up with the French at Loos. Save in the sector occupied by the Twenty-eighth Division the action had died down, and the British, aided partly by those pioneer battalions which had been formed out of ordinary infantry regiments to do work usually assigned to the sappers, strengthened their hold upon the ground that they had won, in the sure conviction that they would soon have to defend it. The shell-fire continued to be heavy upon both sides, and in the course of it General Wing, of the Twelfth Division, was unfortunately killed, being struck by a shell outside his divisional headquarters. He had been one of the artillery officers who had most to do with the fine handling of the guns of the Second Corps at Le Cateau, and was a very rising soldier of the most modern sort. Three divisional generals killed Capper, Wing, and Thesiger and one brigadier a prisoner! Such losses in the higher ranks are hardly to be matched in our history. To equal them one has to go back a hundred years to that supreme day when Picton, De Lancy, Ponsonby, and so many others died in front of their troops upon the historic plateau of Waterloo.

On October 1, at eight in the evening, Bulfin’s men were hard at work once more. It will be remembered that the “Little Willie” Trench had been plugged at the southern end by the Buffs three days before. The Germans still held the main line of it, but could not get down it into the Hohenzollern Redoubt. It was now charged most brilliantly and carried by the 1st Welsh, of the 84th Brigade, but after holding it for a day they lost so heavily that they were compelled to resume their old position once more. The 1st Suffolk tried to win the ground back, but without success.

Upon the afternoon of Sunday, October 3, the fighting, which had died down, broke out once more. The front line at this date was formed by the Ninth French Corps, our splendid comrades of Ypres, upon the right, occupying Loos and that portion of the slopes of Hill 70 which had remained in our hands. On their left was the Twelfth British Division up to the Vermelles-Hulluch road, and to their left Bulfin’s Twenty-eighth Division, holding the northern area, including the Hohenzollern Redoubt. For several days the bombing parties of the enemy had been eating their way into this fortress, and upon the 3rd the greater part of it reverted into their hands, the enemy driving in the 84th Brigade. These attacks were based upon their strong positions in the north, and supported by the machine-guns of Fosse 8 and the heavy artillery of Auchy. On the same day a strong force advanced against the right of the Twenty-eighth Division between the Quarries and the Vermelles-Hulluch road, but this attack was repulsed with heavy loss.

On October 4 and 5 the Twenty-eighth Division was withdrawn, and the Guards, after three days’ rest, were called upon once more, the 3rd Guards Brigade taking its position at the section of the Hohenzollern Redoubt which we held, while the 1st was on their right, and the 2nd in reserve at Vermelles. At the same time the First Division moved to the front on the right of the Guards, relieving the Twelfth Division. All these troops were keenly alive to the fact that the Germans were unlikely to sit down under their defeat, and that the pause was only the preliminary to a great counter-attack. All efforts were therefore made to consolidate the ground. The great The expectations were fulfilled, for upon October 8 the enemy brought up their reserves from far and near, determined to have back the ground that they had lost. The British and French were no less inexorable in their grip of that which had cost them so much to win. It is the attacker in modern warfare who pays the price. Sometimes he gets the value of his blood, sometimes he pays it freely and gets nothing whatever in exchange. So it was in this instance. Along the whole long curve of the defence, from the southern trenches of the Hohenzollern Redoubt in the north to the French position in the south, the roar of the battle went up. On the left of the French was the First Division, on their left the Twelfth, on theirs the Guards, on theirs the Seventh, stout fighters all. The Germans rushed on boldly, swarms of bombers in front, lines of supporting infantry behind. Everywhere they were cut down and brought to a stand by the sleet of bullets. It was the British machine-gunner who now crouched under cover and spread death fan-wise before him, while it was the German infantryman who rushed and tripped and rose and fell in the desperate effort to carry out the plans of his chiefs. All honour to him for the valour of his attempt.

To appreciate the nature of a great deal of this fighting one must remember that the whole scene of it was intersected by a perfect maze of trenches which belonged to the original German third line of defence, and were therefore familiar to them, while they were strange to those British troops who now occupied them. All along these zigzag lines the two parties were only from thirty to fifty yards apart, so that the broad, deserted plain was really intersected with narrow runways of desperately active life. Attacks developed in an instant, bombing parties sprang forward at any moment, rifles were used at point-blank range, so that an exposed bayonet was often snapped off by a bullet. “Close to the bombers’ keep fifty small bayonet periscopes, four bayonets, and five foresights of rifles were shot off in an hour and a half,” says an officer present. Over traverses men pelted each other with anything that was deadly, while above their heads the great shells for ever screamed and rumbled.

A great effort was made against the trench called “Big Willie,” running out from the Hohenzollern Redoubt, which had been taken over by the Guards. In the afternoon of the 8th, after a heavy bombardment had flailed the position for four hours, there was a determined rush of bombers upon these trenches, the Germans, our old friends of the Seventh Westphalian Corps, coming on in three battalions, each of them down a different communication trench. The general direction of the attack was from the north and east. The trenches assaulted were held by the 1st and 2nd

Brigades of Guards, both of which were heavily engaged. The riflemen, however, were useless, as only a bomber can meet a bomber. At first the stormers had some success, for, pushing along very valiantly and with great technical precision, they broke into the section of trench held by the 3rd Grenadiers, putting out of action most of the bombers and machine-gunners of that corps. "Our fellows were being bombed back from traverse to traverse, and we could just see the top of the Boche helmets going along The the trench." Lieut. Williams, with a machine-gun, stopped the rush, but was soon shot through the head. General Ponsonby, commanding the 2nd Brigade, called, however, for the bombers of the 3rd Coldstream, who swept down the trench, pelted the Germans out of it, and gloriously avenged the prostrate Grenadiers. The 2nd Coldstream had themselves been driven back, and their bomb- store was temporarily captured, but they came back and regained it after some stark face-to-face fighting, in which Sergeant Brooks, a British berserker, won his V.C. The remains of the 3rd Grenadiers also came back, led by Lieut. Geoffrey Gunnis, and cleared the last corner of what they had lost. The Guards lost 100 men in this action, many of them blown to pieces by the bombs, but they entirely cleared the trenches and regained every inch of lost ground. The fight lasted for two hours and a half, in the course of which 9000 bombs were thrown by the British.

Another focus of strife upon October 8 was the Chalk Pit upon the Lens-Hulluch road, that tragic spot which had seen in turn the advance of the Fifteenth Division, of the Twenty-first, and of the Guards. It had now been taken over by the First Division, who had come back into the line after a rest. Across that road of death, the Loos Hulluch highway, lay the ill-omened Bois Hugo, which offered a screen for the German advance. Twelve battalions were attacking, and as many more on the line held by the French. Here the Germans lost very heavily, going down in heaps before the rifle-fire of the 1st Gloucesters, 2nd Munster Fusiliers, 9th King's Liverpool, and other battalions in the First Division firing line. The French 75's had been equally deadly and successful. Between the position held by the Guards near the Hohenzollern Redoubt on the left and that of the First Division at the Chalk Pit on the right, the ground was held by the Twelfth Division, the 37th Brigade of which (Fowler) was briskly engaged. The 6th Buffs of this brigade was immediately to the right of the Vermelles-Hulluch road, with the 6th Royal West Kent continuing the line northwards down to the Quarries. The 6th Queen’s Surrey and 7th East Surrey were in support. Somewhat to the right front of this brigade was a position one hundred and fifty yards wide, called Gun Trench, which was one of the scattered forts which the enemy still held to the west of the Loos-Hulluch road. An attack was organised upon this position by Colonel Venables of the West Kents, who was badly wounded in the venture. The British, led by Captain Margetts, reached the trench in spite of terrific fire and corresponding losses, including the whole crew of a machine-gun of the East Surreys which had been most gallantly rushed to the front by Lieutenant Gibson. Half the trench was cleared, but the Germans had themselves been on the point of attacking, and the communications leading eastwards were stuffed with men a prolongation, no doubt, of the same attack which was breaking to the north upon the Guards. The weak spray of British stormers could make no progress against the masses in the supporting trenches, and were bombed back to their own position. It was a brave but fruitless attempt, which was destined to be renewed with greater success a few days later, when Gun Trench passed completely into the hands of the British. The West Kents lost 200 killed and wounded in this affair. At night the whole line of the French and British defences was inviolate, and though there was an acute controversy between the official accounts as to the number of German casualties, it is certain that, whatever they may have been, they had nothing to show in return, nor is it a sign of military virtue to recoil from an enterprise with little loss. The German fighter is a tougher fellow than the cutters-down of his casualty lists will allow. British losses were comparatively small.

Though the Germans had gained no ground upon the 8th, the British were averse from allowing them to remain in undisputed possession of that which they had won upon the 3rd. It was especially upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt that the British fighting line fixed a menacing gaze, for it had long been a centre of contention, and had now passed almost completely into the possession of the enemy. It was determined to make a vigorous attempt to win it back. The Forty- sixth North Midland Territorial Division (Stuart-Wortley), who were veterans of nine months’ service at trench warfare, but had not yet been heavily engaged, were brought up from the rear, and upon October 12 they relieved the Guards Division on the left of the front line. At the same time it was planned that there should be an attack of the First Division to the west of Hulluch, and of the Twelfth Division in the region of the Quarries. Of these we shall first describe the attack of the Territorials upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

On October 13, at noon, a severe bombardment was opened which concentrated upon the enclosure of the redoubt, and the space between that and Fosse 8.

This bombardment for some reason does not seem to have been effective, and even while it went on the sniping and machine-guns were active in the enemy line. An hour later there was an emission of gas, borne by a brisk breeze towards the German trenches, and later still a smoke-cloud was sent out to cover the advance. At two o’clock the troops dashed over the parapet, the 138th Brigade, consisting of men of Lincoln and Leicester, upon the left, while the 137th, the men of Stafford, were on the right. In immediate support was the 139th, a Sherwood Forester Brigade. The line upon the left was headed by the 4th Leicesters and 5th Lincolns, the men, with that light-hearted courage which is so intolerable to the heavier German spirit, singing, “Here we are, here we are, here we are again!” as they vaulted out of their trenches. The attack upon the right was led by the 5th North and 5th South Staffords. The advance was splendidly executed, and won the critical admiration of some of the Guards who were privileged to see it. In the face of a murderous fire the attacking line swept, in an order which was only broken by the fall of stricken men, up to the front-line trench, two hundred yards in front. Here, however, the attack was held up by an overwhelming fire. The 5th North Staffords, whose objective was “Big Willie,” were exterminated for all immediate military purposes, their losses being 19 officers and 488 men. The gallant survivors succeeded in getting as far as a communication trench which led to “Big Willie,” and held on there. The advance of the 5th South Staffords upon the right was conditional upon the success of their comrades to the left. The officer commanding the left companies saw that little progress had been made, and exercised his discretion in holding back his men. The officer on the right of the South Staffords could not see what was going on, and advanced his company, with the result that they ran into the same fatal fire, and lost terribly. The two reserve companies coming up were only able with very great difficulty to reach the British frontline trenches, dropping half their number in the venture. The result of all this slaughter, which seems to have been entirely due to inadequate artillery preparation, was that the second line of attack upon the right, consisting of the 6th North and 6th South Staffords, could do no more than garrison the frontline trenches, and lost very heavily in doing so.

On the left, however, things had gone better, for at that part our guns seemed to have made more impression. The advance of the 4th Leicesters and 5th Lincolns swept over the Hohenzollern Redoubt and carried the whole of this formidable work up to Fosse Trench. About a hundred yards short of this point the advance was held up by concentrated machine-gun fire. The losses had been very heavy, especially in officers. The rear companies won forward to the front none the less, and the 4th Lincolns came up also to thicken the attenuated firing-line. They held their ground with difficulty, but were greatly helped by their pioneer battalion, the 1st Monmouths, veterans of Ypres, who rushed forward with rifle and with spade to consolidate the captured ground.

Bombing parties had been sent out by the British, those on the right to reach and bomb their way down “ Big Willie,” those on the left to clear Fosse Trench. The parties upon the right, drawn from the various Stafford regiments, got into “Big Willie,” and stuck to their work until they were all destroyed, officers and men. The enemy bombers then counter-attacked, but were met by Lieutenant Hawkes with a party of the 5th South Staffords, who drove them back again. The pressure was very severe, however, until about four in the afternoon, when the action upon the right died down into a duel of heavy guns upon either side. On the left, however, where the gallant Territorial infantry held hard to its gains, the action was very severe. The bombing attacks went on with varied fortunes, a company of the 5th Leicesters bombing its way for more than two hundred yards up “Little Willie” Trench before its supplies ran out and it had to retire. At three o’clock there was a fresh infantry advance, the 7th Sherwood Foresters of the reserve 139th Brigade endeavouring to get forward, but losing so many in crossing the redoubt that they were unable to sally out from the farther side. The redoubt was now so crowded with mixed units all under heavy fire that there might have been a Spion Kop but for the steadiness of all concerned. At one time the men, finding themselves practically without officers, began to fall back, but were splendidly rallied by Colonel Evill of the 1st Monmouths and a few other survivors. The advent of two companies of the 5th Leicesters retaining their disciplined order helped to avert the danger, and the line was formed once again along the western face of the redoubt. During this movement the 7th Sherwood Foresters who remained in the north-east of the redoubt were cut off, but with splendid pertinacity they held their ground, and made their way back when darkness fell. In the early morning of the 14th, Captain Checkland, with a company of the 5th Sherwood Foresters, pushed an advance up to the place where their comrades of the 7th Battalion had been, and found Captain Vickars of that regiment, who, with a bravery which deserves to be classical, defended almost single-handed a barrier, while he ordered a second one to be built behind him, cutting him off from all succour. He was desperately wounded, but was brought back by his comrades.

The 8th Sherwood Foresters had also come to the front, and made a spirited attack in the early morning of the 14th, driving the enemy from the western side of the redoubt and firmly establishing the British gains in that quarter. This gain was permanent, though it proved to be rather a visible prize for valour than a useful strategic addition to the line. So long as the sinister, low-lying dump of Fosse 8 overlooked it and was itself untaken, it was impossible to make much use of the redoubt. For forty-eight hours the advanced line was held by the 139th Brigade against several brisk counter-attacks. At the end of that time the position was handed over to the safe custody of the Guards, while the Forty-sixth North Midland Division withdrew from that front line which was of their own creation. Colonel Martin of the 4th Leicesters, who was shot through the knee, but refused to move until he saw the result of the attack, Colonel Fowler of the 8th Sherwoods, Colonel Sandall of the 5th Lincolns, Major Cooper of the 4th Lincolns, and nearly 4000 officers and men, were among the casualties during the forty-eight hours of exposure.

The action was a very desperate one, and nothing could have been finer than the conduct of all engaged. “It was not the actual advance, but the holding of the position afterwards, that was dreaded, as the Germans are so quick at counter-attacking.” So wrote one of the combatants. The dread was well founded, for the Germans proved to be very numerous and aggressive, and there can be little doubt that at this period their bombers had a technical proficiency which was superior to our own, whether their opponents were Guards or Territorials. It is characteristic of the unique warfare now prevailing that the contending parties had practically abandoned rifles, save as so many pikes, and that each man carried a pouch full of projectiles, the size of a duck’s egg, and capable of disabling a dozen in a single burst. It may be added that both sides wore leathern helmets, sometimes with the visors up and sometimes with the face entirely concealed, so that it appeared to be a murderous strife of the strange, goggle-eyed, mask-faced creatures of a nightmare. Such were the extraordinary products of modern European warfare. Could all the ground taken have been permanently held, this would have been a fine little victory. So constant has been the phenomenon that the extreme point cannot be held that it could now be stated as an axiom for either side, and seemed to suggest that the methods of attack should be in some way modified. Each successive line of resistance has decreased the momentum of the stormers and has helped to lessen their store of bombs, while the farther they have advanced the more difficult it is for fresh men or supplies to reach them. Then, again, their diminished numbers have caused a contraction and bunching of the line, so enabling the counter-attack to get round their flanks. Add to this the physical exhaustion caused by extreme exertions while carrying a considerable weight, and one has the factors which always produce the same result, and which led eventually to the more fruitful tactics of the limited objective.

When the Forty-sixth Midland Division advanced upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt on October 13, there was a brisk attack also by the Twelfth Division upon their right, and by the First Division on the right of the Twelfth. In the case of the Twelfth Division, now commanded by General Scott, the 37th Brigade (Fowler) was heavily engaged. The 7th East Surreys of this brigade carried and permanently held the Gun Trench, a position which had cost them the lives of many officers and men upon the 8th. Attacking the same line of trenches to the left, the 6th Buffs lost heavily under oblique fire, without any appreciable gain. Of three companies who went out, 11 officers and 400 men were left upon the ground, and a photograph has revealed the perfect alignment of the dead. The 35th Brigade (Straubensee) had a similar experience to the left near the Quarries, the losses falling most heavily upon the 5th Berkshires and the 7th Norfolks.

At the same hour the First Division, with a smoke and gas screen before them, had broken in upon the German lines to the south-west of Hulluch, near the Hulluch-Lens road. About a thousand yards of trenches were taken, but the shell-fire was so murderous that it was found to be impossible to retain them. On the whole, it must be admitted that, although ground was gained along the whole line from the Hohenzollern Redoubt to Hulluch by this very desperate fighting, the losses were so heavy and the results so barren that there was no adequate return for the splendid efforts of the men. The attack was urged by Territorials upon the left, New Army men in the centre, and Regulars upon the right, and at all points it was equally gallant. The operations at the main seat of action, the Loos sector, have been treated continuously in order to make a consecutive narrative, but we must now return to consider the subsidiary attacks along the line upon September 25.

While the First and Fourth Corps, supported by subsidiary the Eleventh, had been delivering this great attack between La Bassée and Grenay, a series of holding actions had been fought from the coast downwards, so as to pin the Germans so far as possible to their places. Some of these attacks were little more than demonstrations, while others in less serious times would have appeared to be considerable engagements.

The Second Regular Division (Horne), acting upon the extreme left of the main attack, was astride of the La Bassée Canal. The most northern brigade, the 5th (Cochrane’s), was opposite to Givenchy, and its advance seems to have been intended rather as a distraction than as a serious effort. It took place half an hour or so before the general attack in the hope of misleading them as to the British plans. At the signal the three leading regiments, the 1st Queen’s Surrey, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, and the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, dashed forward and carried the trench line which faced them. The 9th Glasgow Highlanders advanced upon their right. The attack was unable to make any further progress, but the fight was sustained for several hours, and had the desired effect of occupying the local forces of the enemy and preventing them from detaching reinforcements to the south.

The same remark would apply to the forward movement of the 58th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division to the immediate north of Givenchy. This division of the New Army is mainly English in composition, but on this their first serious engagement the work fell chiefly upon two Welsh battalions, the 9th Welsh and the 9th Welsh Fusiliers. Both these corps sustained heavy losses, but sacrificed themselves, as so many others were obliged to do, in keeping up the appearance of an attack which was never seriously intended.

Taking the subsidiary attacks from the south upwards, we come next to that of the Indians in the vicinity of Neuve Chapelle. This was a very brilliant affair, carried out with the true Indian tiger spring. Had it been possible to support by adequate reserves of men and an unrestricted gun-fire, it had in it the possibility of a fine victory. The attack was carried out by the Meerut Division, with the Garhwali Brigade on the right and the Bareilly upon the left, the Dehra Dun being in reserve. On the right the Garhwalis were partly held up by wire, but the Bareillys came through everything and swept into the front-line trenches, taking 200 unwounded prisoners of the Seventh Westphalian Corps. Two battalions of the Black Watch, the 2nd and 4th, with the 69th Sikhs, were in the lead, a combination which has broken many a battle line before. The 58th Rifles (Vaughan's) and a second Sikh regiment, the 33rd, thickened the attack, and they swept forward into the second-line trenches, which they also cleared. They were now half a mile within the enemy's position, and both their flanks were open to attack. The reserve brigade was hurried up, but the trenches were blocked with wounded and prisoners, so that progress was very difficult. The German counter-attack was delivered with great energy and valour. It took the form of strong bombing parties acting upon each exposed flank. The 8th Gurkhas, who had been the only battalion which succeeded in breaking through on the right, linked up with the 4th Black Watch, holding back the flank advance to the south, but to the north the Germans got so far forward that the advanced Indians were practically cut off. The immediate neighbours of the Indians to the north were the 60th Brigade of the Twentieth Division, another English division of the New Army. Two battalions of this brigade, the 12th Rifle Brigade and the 6th Shropshires, were thrown into the fight, and covered the threatened flank until their supply of bombs more and more an essential of modern warfare was exhausted. It was clearly necessary that the advanced troops should be drawn back, since the reserves could not be got up to support them, and the need was becoming very great. In a little they might be attacked on front and rear with the chance of disaster. The Sikhs and Highlanders fell back, therefore, with great steadiness, but enduring heavy losses. In the end no ground was gained, but considerable punishment was inflicted as well as suffered, the German trenches being full of their dead. The primary purpose of holding them to their ground was amply fulfilled. It cannot be denied, however, that in this, as in so many other episodes of the Battle of Loos, the German showed himself to be a stubborn fighter, who rises superior to temporary defeat and struggles on while there is still a chance of victory. His superior supply of bombs had also a good deal to do with the success of his counter-attack.

Whilst this very sharp conflict had been raging on the Indian line, the Eighth Division to the north was engaged in a very similar operation in the region of Bois-Grenier. The course of events was almost exactly the same in each instance. The attack of the Eighth Division was carried out by the 25th Brigade (Stephens). The 2nd Rifle Brigade were on the right, the 2nd Berks in the centre, and the 2nd Lincoln upon the left. The front trench was carried, and 120 men of the Sixth Bavarian Reserve Division fell into the hands of the stormers. Part of the second line was also captured. The positions were held for the greater part of the day, and it was not until four in the afternoon that the increasing pressure of the counter-attack drove the British back to their original line. Here again the object of detention had been fully achieved.

The most important, however, of all the subsidiary attacks was that which was carried out to the extreme north of the line in the district of Hooge. This attack was made by the Fifth Corps, which had changed both its general and its divisions since the days of its long agony in May. It was now commanded by General Allenby, and it consisted of the Third Regular Division (Haldane), the Fourteenth Light Infantry Division of the New Army (Couper), and the Forty- sixth Division of Midland Territorials (Stuart-Wortley), the fine work of which at a later stage of the operations has already been described. The first two of these units bore the brunt upon September 25. The advance, which was across the old bloody ground of Bellewaarde, was signalled by the explosion of a large mine under the German position in the trenches immediately south of that Via Dolorosa, the Ypres-Menin road.

The attack upon the left was made by the 42nd Brigade (Markham), all four battalions, the 5th Oxford and Bucks, 5th Shropshires, 9th Rifle Brigade, and 9th Rifles being strongly engaged. The German trenches were reached and occupied, but after some hours the counter-attack proved to be too strong, and the brigade fell back to its original line.

Two brigades of the Third Division attacked in the centre in the direction of Bellewaarde Lake. The 7th Brigade upon the left ran into unbroken wire, before which the leading regiments, the 2nd Irish Rifles and the 2nd South Lancashire, sustained heavy losses while making no progress. The 8th Brigade to the south of them had better fortune, however. This brigade, strengthened by the 1st Scots Fusiliers, made a fine advance immediately after the great mine explosion. Some 200 prisoners and a considerable stretch of trench were captured. A redoubt had been taken by the 4th Gordons, and was held by them and by the 4th Middlesex, but the bombardment in the afternoon was so terrific that it had to be abandoned. By evening the original line had been reoccupied, the division having certainly held the Germans to their ground, but at very heavy cost to themselves. As these various attacks from the 5th Brigade at the La Bassée Canal to the Fourteenth Division at Ypres never entered into the scheme of the main fight, it is not to be wondered at that they ended always as they began. Heavy loss of life was doubtless incurred in nearly every case. Sad as it is that men should die in movements which are not seriously intended, operations of this kind must be regarded as a whole, and the man who drops in an attack which from the beginning has been a mere pretence has enjoyed as heroic an end as he who falls across the last parapet with the yell of victory in his dying ears.

A modern battle is a sudden furious storm, which may blow itself out in two or three days, but leaves such a tempestuous sea behind it that it is difficult to say when the commotion is really over. In the case of the Battle of Loos, or of Loos Hulluch, it may be said to have begun with the British advance upon September 25, and to have ended with the establishment of an equilibrium on the northern flank of our salient on October 13. From that time onwards for many weeks comparative peace rested upon this sector. A time therefore, has come when the operations may be reviewed as a whole. The net result was a gain to the British of nearly seven thousand yards of front and four thousand of depth, though if one be asked what exact advantage this gain brought, save as a visible sign of military virtue, it is hard to find an answer. Had the gain gone to that farther distance which was hoped for and aimed at, the battle might, as in the case of the French in Champagne, have been a considerable victory. As it was, the best that we can claim is that one or two more such advances in the same neighbourhood would bring the valuable French coal-fields back to their rightful owners. The most substantial proofs of victory were 3000 prisoners, including 57 officers, 26 field-guns, and 40 machine-guns. On the other hand, in the mixed fighting of the 26th we lost not fewer than 1000 prisoners, including a brigadier-general. Altogether the losses to the Army during the three weeks of fighting were not less than 50,000 men and 2000 officers. A large proportion of these were wounded.

There are some consolations for our limited success in this venture. Having started to endeavour to break the German line in one movement, it was natural to persevere, but now that we can see from how strong a hand our enemy played, we may well ask ourselves whether a more successful advance upon the 26th and 27th might not have led to grave troubles. The French had been held on the right; the Second Division was stationary upon the left. Therefore we were advancing from a contracted base, and the farther the advance went the more it resembled a long, thin tongue protruded between the jaws of the enemy. There was considerable danger that the enemy, closing in on either flank while holding the advance in front, might have bitten it off, for we know for certain that we had none of those successive rolling waves of reinforcement coming up which would turn an ebb to a flood. However, as it was we had much for which to be thankful. When one thinks of the almost superstitious reverence with which the German army used to be regarded an army which had never once been really beaten during three European campaigns it is surely a just cause for sober satisfaction that a British force, half of which consisted of new formations, should have driven such an enemy with loss of prisoners and guns out of a triple line of fortifications, strengthened by every device of modern art, and should afterwards have permanently held the greater part of the field against every effort at reconquest.

The account of this great battle, a battle in which from first to last no fewer than twelve British divisions were engaged in the Loos area alone, cannot be concluded without a word as to the splendid French success won in Champagne during the same period. There is a great similarity between the two operations, but the French attacked with at least three times as many men upon a threefold broader front. As in our own case, their best results were gained in the first spring, and they were able to continue their gains for several days, until, like ourselves, they found that the consolidating defence was too strong for the weakening attack. Their victory was none the less a very great one, yielding 25,000 prisoners and 125 captured cannon. It is impossible to doubt that both French and British if they duly learned their lessons, and if they continued to accumulate their resources, were now on the path which would lead them to final victory.

Before settling down into the inactivity enforced by the Flemish mud, there was one further brisk skirmish upon October 20 in that old battle-ground, the Hohenzollern Redoubt. This was a bombing attack, organised by the 2nd Irish Guards and led by Captain Hubbard. The Irishmen were new to the game, and somewhat outclassed at first by the more experienced Germans, but under the gallant encouragement of Lieutenant Tallents, who rallied them after being himself badly wounded, they turned the tide, and, aided by the Coldstream, made good the section attacked. Lieutenant Hamilton was killed and 60 men killed or wounded in this brisk encounter.

Coming of So, for a second time, wet, foggy winter settled down upon the water-logged, clay-bottomed trenches. Little did those who had manned them at Christmas of 1914 imagine that Christmas of 1915 would find them in the same position. Even their brave hearts would have sunk at the thought. And yet a move back of a couple of miles at Ypres, and a move forward of the same extent in the south, were all that either side could show for a year's hard work and the loss of so many thousand lives. Bloch, the military prophet of 1898, had indeed been justified of his wisdom. Far off, where armies could move, the year had seen great fluctuations. The Russians had been pushed out of Poland and far over their own borders. Serbia had been overrun. Montenegro was on the verge of utter destruction. The great attempt upon the Dardanelles had been made and had failed, after an epic of heroism which will surely live for ever in our history and in that of our brave Australian and New Zealand brothers. We had advanced in Mesopotamia to within sight of the minarets of Bagdad, and yet again we had been compelled to leave our task unfinished and our little force was besieged at Kut. The one new gleam of light in the whole year had been the adhesion of Italy to the cause of Freedom. And yet, though nearly every detail had been adverse to us, our deepest instincts told us that the stream did in truth move with us, however great and confusing might be the surface current. Here on the long western line, motionless, but not passive, locked in a vast strain which grew ever more tense, was the real war. All others were subsidiary. And here in this real war, the one theatre where decisive results could be looked for, our position was very different in the opening of 1916 to that which 1915 had shown us. In the year our actual Army in France had grown three- and fourfold. The munitions had increased in far greater proportions. The days had gone for ever when a serious action meant three months of shell economy before the fight and three months of recuperation after it. To the gunners it was like an evil dream to look back to the days when three shots per day was the allowance, and never save on a definite target. Now, thanks to the driving power of

Lloyd George and his admirable band of assistants, there would never again be a dearth, and no attack should ever languish for want of the means to follow it up. Our guns, too, were clustering ever more thickly and looming ever larger. Machine-guns were pouring forth, though there, perhaps, we had not yet overtaken our enemy. Above all, our Fleet still held the seas, cries of distress or at least of discomfort from within Germany rose ever more clearly, and it was certain that the sufferings which she had so wantonly and wickedly inflicted upon others were beginning to be repaid to her. “Gott” does indeed “strafe,” and needs no invocation, but now, as always, it is on the guilty that the rod falls. The close of 1915 found the Empire somewhat disappointed at the past, but full of grim resolution for the future.

One event had occurred in the latter end of the year which cannot be allowed to pass without comment. This was the retirement of Sir John French, and his return as Lord French to take command of the home forces. It is a difficult matter to get the true proportion, either of events or of characters, in so great an epoch as this. It will be years before the true scale will gradually be found. At the same time it can be said now with absolute certainty that the name of John French will go down to history for the sterling work that he has done during sixteen months of extreme military pressure. Nothing which the future could bring, however terrific our task, could be charged with the same possibilities of absolute disaster as those operations of the past through which he and his brilliant subordinates had successfully brought the Army. His was the preparation of the troops before the campaign, his the responsibilities of mobilisation, and his the primary credit that they were in the fighting line by August 22, 1914 — they who, upon August 4, had been scattered without their reserves or full equipment over a dozen garrison towns. This alone was a great feat. Then came the long, desperate fight to make head against a superior foe, the rally, the return, the fine change of position, the long struggle for the coast, the victory saddened by the practical annihilation of the old Regular Army, the absorption and organisation of the new elements, the resumption of the offensive, and that series of spirited actions which, if they never attained full success, were each more formidable than the last, and were all preparatory exercises for the great Somme battles of 1916. This was the record which Lord French took back with him to the Horse Guards, and it is one which can never be forgotten by his fellow-countrymen.

Sir Douglas Haig, who succeeded to the chief command, was the leader who would undoubtedly have been called to the vacant post by both Army and public had leaders been chosen in the old Pretorian fashion. From the beginning he and Smith-Dorrien had been the right and left hands of the Chief, and now that ill- health had unhappily eliminated the latter, Haig’s claim was paramount. Again and again he had borne the heaviest part in the fighting, and had saved the situation when it seemed desperate. He was a man of the type which the British love, who shines the brighter against a dark background. Youthful for so high a command, and with a frame and spirit which were even younger than his years, with the caution of a Scotchman and the calculated dash of a leader of cavalry, he was indeed the ideal man for a great military crisis. No task might seem impossible to the man who had held back the German tide at Ypres. With Haig in command and with an Army which was ever growing in numbers, in quality, and in equipment, the British waited with quiet confidence for the campaign of 1916.

VOLUME III.

PREFACE

IN two previous volumes of this work a narrative has been given of those events which occurred upon the British Western Front during 1914, the year of recoil, and 1915, the year of equilibrium. In this volume will be found the detailed story of 1916, the first of the years of attack and advance.

Time is a great toner down of superlatives, and the episodes which seem world-shaking in our day may, when looked upon by the placid eyes of historical philosophers in days to come, fit more easily into the general scheme of human experience. None the less it can be said without fear of ultimate contradiction that nothing approaching to the Battle of the Somme, with which this volume is mainly concerned, has ever been known in military history, and that it is exceedingly improbable that it will ever be equalled in its length and in its severity. It may be said to have raged with short intermissions, caused by the breaking of the weather, from July 1 to November 14, and during this prolonged period the picked forces of three great nations were locked in close battle. The number of combatants from first to last was between two and three millions, and their united casualties came to the appalling total of at least three-quarters of a million. These are minimum figures, but they will give some idea of the unparalleled scale of the operations.

With the increasing number and size of the units employed the scale of the narrative becomes larger. It is more difficult to focus the battalion, while the individual has almost dropped out of sight. Sins of omission are many, and the chronicler can but plead the great difficulty of his task and regret that his limited knowledge may occasionally cause disappointment.

The author should explain that this volume has had to pass through three lines of censors, suffering heavily in the process. It has come out with the loss of all personal names save those of casualties or of high Generals. Some passages also have been excised. On the other hand it is the first which has been permitted to reveal the exact identity of the units engaged. The missing passages and names will be restored when the days of peace return.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
February 3, 1918.

I. JANUARY TO JULY 1916

General situation — The fight for the Bluff — The Mound of St. Eloi — Fine performance of Third Division and Canadians — Feat of the 1st Shropshires — Attack on the Irish Division — Fight at Vimy Ridge — Canadian Battle of Ypres — Death of General Mercer — Recovery of lost position — Attack of Thirty-ninth Division — Eve of the Somme

THE Great War had now come into its second winter — a winter which was marked by an absolute cessation of all serious fighting upon the Western front. Enormous armies were facing each other, but until the German attack upon the French lines of Verdun at the end of February, the infantry of neither side was seriously engaged. There were many raids and skirmishes, with sudden midnight invasions of hostile trenches and rapid returns with booty or prisoners. Both sides indulged in such tactics upon the British front. Gas attacks, too, were occasionally attempted, some on a large scale and with considerable result. The condition of the troops, though it could not fail to be trying, was not so utterly miserable as during the first cold season in the trenches. The British had ceased to be a mere fighting fringe with nothing behind it. The troops were numerous and eager, so that reliefs were frequent. All sorts of devices were adopted for increasing the comfort and conserving the health of the men. Steadily, as the winter advanced and the spring ripened into summer, fresh divisions were passed over the narrow seas, and the shell-piles at the bases marked the increased energy and output of the workers in the factories. The early summer found everything ready for a renewed attempt upon the German line.

The winter of 1915-16 saw the affairs of the Allies in a condition which could not be called satisfactory, and which would have been intolerable had there not been evident promise of an amendment in the near future. The weakness of the Russians in munitions had caused their gallant but half-armed armies to be driven back until the whole of Poland had fallen into the hands of the Germanic Powers, who had also reconquered Galicia and Bukovina. The British attempt upon Gallipoli, boldly conceived and gallantly urged, but wanting in the essential quality of surprise, had failed with heavy losses, and the army had to be withdrawn. Serbia and Montenegro had both been overrun and occupied, while the efficient Bulgarian army had ranged itself with our enemies. The Mesopotamian Expedition had been held up by the Turks, and the brave Townshend, with his depleted division, was hemmed in at Kut, where, after a siege of five months, he was eventually compelled, upon April 26, to lay down his arms, together with 9000 troops, chiefly Indian. When one remembers that on the top of this Germany already held Belgium and a considerable slice of the north of France, which included all the iron and coal producing centres, it must be admitted that the Berlin Press had some reason upon its side when it insisted that it had already won the War upon paper. To realise that paper, was, however, an operation which was beyond their powers.

What could the Allies put against these formidable successes? There was the Colonial Empire of Germany. Only one colony, the largest and most powerful, still remained. This was East Africa. General Smuts, a worthy colleague of the noble Botha, had undertaken its reduction, and by the summer the end was in sight. The capture of the colonies would then be complete. The oceans of the world were another asset of the Allies, These also were completely held, to the absolute destruction of all German oversea commerce. These two conquests, and the power of blockade which steadily grew more stringent, were all that the Allies could throw into the other scale, save for the small corner of Alsace still held by the French, the southern end of Mesopotamia, and the port of Salonica, which was a strategic checkmate to the southern advance of the Germans. The balance seemed all against them. There was no discouragement, however, for all these difficulties had been discounted and the Allies had always recognised that their strength lay in those reserves which had not yet had time to develop. The opening of the summer campaign of 1916, with the capture of Erzeroum, the invasion of Armenia, and the reconquest of Bukovina, showed that the Russian army had at last found its second wind. The French had already done splendid work in their classical resistance at Verdun, which had extended from the last weeks of February onwards, and had cost the Germans over a quarter of a million of casualties. The opening of the British campaign in July found the whole army most eager to emulate the deeds of its Allies, and especially to take some of the weight from the splendid defenders of Verdun. Their fight against very heavy odds in men, munitions, and transport, was one of the greatest deeds of arms, possibly the greatest deed of arms of the war. It was known, however, before July that a diversion was absolutely necessary, and although the British had taken over a fresh stretch of trenches so as to release French reinforcements, some more active help was imperatively called for.

Before describing the summer campaign it is necessary to glance back at the proceedings of the winter and spring upon the British line, and to comment upon one or two matters behind that line which had a direct influence upon the campaign. Of the minor operations to which allusion has already been made, there are none between the Battle of Loos and the middle of February 1916 which call for particular treatment. Those skirmishes and mutual raidings which took place during that time centred largely round the old salient at Ypres and the one at Loos, though the lines at Armentières were also the scene of a good deal of activity. One considerable attack seems to have been planned by the Germans on the north-east of Ypres in the Christmas week of 1915 — an attack which was preceded by a formidable gas attack. The British artillery was so powerful, however, that it crushed the advance in the trenches, where the gathered bayonets of the stormers could be seen going down before the scourging shrapnel like rushes before a gale. The infantry never emerged, and the losses must have been very heavy. This was the only considerable attempt made by either side during the winter.

At the time of Lord French's return another change was made at home which had a very immediate bearing upon the direction of the War. Britain had suffered greatly from the fact that at the beginning of hostilities the distinguished officers who composed the central staff had all been called away for service in the field. Lord Kitchener had done wonders in filling their place, but it was impossible for any man, however great his abilities or energy, to carry such a burden upon his shoulders. The more conscientious the man the more he desires to supervise everything himself and the more danger there is that all the field cannot be covered. Already the recruiting service, which had absorbed a great deal of Lord Kitchener's energies with most splendid results, had been relegated to Lord Derby, whose tact and wisdom produced fresh armies of volunteers. Now the immediate direction of the War and the supervision of all that pertained to the armies in the field was handed over to Sir William Robertson, a man of great organising ability and of proved energy. From this time onwards his character and judgment bulked larger and larger as one of the factors which made for the success of the Allies.

In January 1916 Britain gave her last proof of the resolution with which she was waging war. Already she had shown that no question of money could diminish her ardour, for she was imposing direct taxation upon her citizens with a vigour which formed the only solid basis for the credit of the Allies. Neither our foes nor our friends have shown such absolute readiness to pay in hard present cash, that posterity might walk with a straighter back, and many a man was paying a good half of his income to the State. But now a sacrifice more intimate than that of money had to be made. It was of that personal liberty which is as the very breath of our nostrils. This also was thrown with a sigh into the common cause, and a Military Service Bill was passed by which every citizen from 19 to 41 was liable to be called up. It is questionable whether it was necessary as yet as a military measure, since the enormous number of 5,000,000 volunteers had come forward, but as an act of justice by which the burden should be equally distributed, and the shirker compelled to his duty, it was possible to justify this radical departure from the customs of our fathers and the instincts of our race. Many who acquiesced in its necessity did so with a heavy heart, feeling how glorious would have been our record had it been possible to bring forward by the stress of duty alone the manhood of the nation. As a matter of fact, the margin left over was neither numerous nor important, but the energies of the authorities were now released from the incessant strain which the recruiting service had caused.

The work of the trenches was made easier for the British by the fact that they had at last reached an equality with, and in many cases a superiority to, their enemy, in the number of their guns, the quantity of their munitions, and the provision of those smaller weapons such as trench mortars and machine-guns which count for so much in this description of warfare. Their air supremacy which had existed for a long time was threatened during some months by the Fokker machines of the Germans, and by the skill with which their aviators used them, but faster models from England soon restored the balance.

There had been a time also when the system and the telescopic sights of the German snipers had given them an ascendancy. Thanks to the labours of various enthusiasts for the rifle, this matter was set right and there were long stretches of the line where no German head could for an instant be shown above the parapet. The Canadian sector was particularly free from any snipers save their own.

The first serious operation of the spring of 1916 upon the British line was a determined German attack upon that section which lies between the Ypres-Comines Canal and the Ypres-Comines railway on the extreme south of the Ypres salient; Hill 60 lies to the north of it. In the line of trenches there was one small artificial elevation, not more than thirty feet above the plain. This was called the Bluff, and was the centre of the attack. It was of very great importance as a point of artillery observation. During the whole of February 13 the bombardment was very severe, and losses were heavy along a front of several miles, the right of which was held by the Seventeenth Division, the centre by the Fiftieth, and the left by the Twenty-fourth. Finally, after many of the trenches had been reduced to dirt heaps five mines were simultaneously sprung under the British front line, each of them of great power. The explosions were instantly followed by a rush of the German infantry. In the neighbourhood of the Bluff, the garrison, consisting at that point of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, were nearly all buried or killed. To the north lay the 10th Sherwood Foresters and north of them the 8th South Staffords, whose Colonel, though four times wounded, continued to direct the defence. It was impossible, however, to hold the whole line, as the Germans had seized the Bluff and were able to enfilade all the trenches of the Sherwoods, who lost twelve officers and several hundred men before they would admit that their position was untenable. The South Staffords being farther off were able to hold on, but the whole front from their right to the canal south of the Bluff was in the hands of the Germans, who had very rapidly and skilfully consolidated it. A strong counter-attack by the 7th Lincolns and 7th Borders, in which the survivors of the Lancashire Fusiliers took part, had some success, but was unable to permanently regain the lost sector, six hundred yards of which remained with the enemy. A lieutenant, with 40 bombers of the Lincolns, 38 of whom fell, did heroic work.

The attack had extended to the north, where it had fallen upon the Fiftieth Division, and to the Twenty-fourth Division upon the left of it. Here it was held and eventually repulsed. Of the company of the 9th Sussex who held the extreme left of the line, a large portion were blown up by a mine and forty were actually buried in the crater. Young Lieutenant McNair, however, the officer in charge, showed great energy and presence of mind. He held the Germans from the crater and with the help of another officer, who had rushed up some supports, drove them back to their trenches. For this McNair received his Victoria Cross. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, a veteran regular battalion, upon the right of the Sussex, had also put up a vigorous resistance, as had the central Fiftieth Division, so that in spite of the sudden severity of the attack it was only at the one point of the Bluff that the enemy had made a lodgment — that point being the real centre of their effort. They held on strongly to their new possession, and a vigorous fire with several partial attacks during the next fortnight failed to dislodge them.

Early in March the matter was taken seriously in hand, for the position was a most important one, and a farther advance at this point would have involved the safety of Ypres. The Seventeenth Division still held the supporting trenches, and these now became the starting-point for the attack. A considerable artillery concentration was effected, two brigades of guns and two companies of sappers were brought up from the Third Division, and the 76th Brigade of the same Division came up from St. Omer, where it had been resting, in order to carry out the assault. The general commanding this brigade was in immediate command of the operations.

The problem was a most difficult one, as the canal to the south and a marsh upon the north screened the flanks of the new German position, while its front was covered by shell-holes which the tempestuous weather had filled with water. There was nothing for it, however, but a frontal attack, and this was carried out with very great gallantry upon March 2, at 4:30 in the morning. The infantry left their trenches in the dark and crept forward undiscovered, dashing into the enemy’s line with the first grey glimmer of the dawn. The right of the attack formed by the 2nd Suffolks had their revenge for Le Cateau, for they carried the Bluff itself with a rush. So far forward did they get that a number of Germans emerged from dug-outs in their rear, and were organising a dangerous attack when they were pelted back into their holes by a bombing party. Beyond the Bluff the Suffolks were faced by six deep shelters for machine-guns, which held them for a time but were eventually captured. The centre battalion consisted of the 8th Royal Lancasters, who lost heavily from rifle fire but charged home with great determination, flooding over the old German front line and their support trenches as well as their immediate objective. The left battalion in the attack were the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who had a most difficult task, being exposed to the heaviest fire of all. For a moment they were hung up, and then with splendid spirit threw themselves at the hostile trenches again and carried everything before them. They were much helped in this second attack by the supporting battalion, the 7th Lincolns, whose bombers rushed to the front. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers, who were supporting on the right, also did invaluable service by helping to consolidate the Bluff, while the 9th

West Ridings on the left held the British front line and repulsed an attempt at a flanking counter-attack.

In spite of several counter-attacks and a very severe bombardment the line now held firm, and the Germans seem to have abandoned all future designs upon this section. They had lost very heavily in the assault, and 250 men with 5 officers remained in the hands of the victors. Some of the German trench taken was found to be untenable, but the 12th West Yorkshires of the 8th Brigade connected up the new position with the old and the salient was held. So ended a well-managed and most successful little fight. Great credit was due to a certain officer, who passed through the terrible German barrage again and again to link up the troops with headquarters. Extreme gallantry was shown also by the brigade-runners, many of whom lost their lives in the all-important work of preserving communications.

Students of armour in the future may be interested to note that this was the first engagement in which British infantry reverted after a hiatus of more than two centuries to the use of helmets. Dints of shrapnel upon their surfaces proved in many cases that they had been the salvation of their wearers. Several observers have argued that trench warfare implies a special trench equipment, entirely different from that for surface operations.

In the middle of March the pressure upon the French at Verdun had become severe, and it was determined to take over a fresh section of Hue so as to relieve troops for the north-eastern frontier. General Foch’s Tenth Army, which had held the sector opposite to Souchez and Lorette, was accordingly drawn out, and twelve miles were added to the British front. From this time forward there were four British armies, the Second (Plumer) in the Ypres district, the First (Monro) opposite to Neuve Chapelle, the Third (Allenby) covering the new French sector down to Arras, the Fourth (Rawlinson) from Albert to the Somme.

A brisk skirmish which occurred in the south about this period is worthy of mention — typical of many smaller affairs the due record of which would swell this chapter to a portentous length. In this particular instance, a very sudden and severe night attack was directed by the Germans against a post held by the 8th East Surreys of the Eighteenth Division at the points where the British and French lines meet just north of the Somme. This small stronghold, known as Ducks’ Post, was at the head of a causeway across a considerable marsh, and possessed a strategic importance out of all proportion to its size. A violent bombardment in the darkness of the early morning of March 20 was followed by an infantry advance, pushed well home. It was an unnerving experience. “As the Huns charged,” says one who was present, “they made the most hellish screaming row I ever heard.” The Surrey men under the lead of a young subaltern stood fast, and were reinforced by two platoons. Not only did they hold up the attack, but with the early dawn they advanced in turn, driving the Germans back into their trenches and capturing a number of prisoners. The post was strengthened and was firmly held.

The next episode which claims attention is the prolonged and severe fighting which took place from March 27 onwards at St. Eloi, the scene of so fierce a contest just one year before. A small salient had been formed by the German line at this point ever since its capture, and on this salient was the rising known as the Mound (not to be confounded with the Bluff), insignificant in itself since it was only twenty or thirty feet high, but of importance in a war where artillery observation is the very essence of all operations. It stood just east of the little village of St. Eloi. This place was known to be very strongly held, so the task of attacking it was handed over to the Third Division, which had already shown at the Bluff that they were adepts at such an attack. After several weeks of energetic preparation, five mines were ready with charges which were so heavy that in one instance 30,000 pounds of ammonal were employed. The assault was ordered for 4:15 in the morning of March 27. It was known to be a desperate enterprise and was entrusted to two veteran battalions of regular troops, the 4th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. A frontal attack was impossible, so it was arranged that the Royals should sweep round the left flank and the Northumberlands the right, while the remaining battalions of the 9th Brigade, the 12th West Yorks and 1st Scots Fusiliers, should be in close support in the centre.

At the appointed hour the mines were exploded with deadly effect, and in the pitch darkness of a cloudy rainy morning the two battalions sprang resolutely forward upon their dangerous venture. The trenches on each flank were carried, and 5 officers with 193 men of the 18th Reserve Jaeger fell into our hands. As usual, however, it was the retention of the captured position which was the more difficult and costly part of the operation. The Northumberlands had won their way round on the right, but the Fusiliers had been partially held up on the left, so that the position was in some ways difficult and irregular. The guns of the Third Division threw forward so fine a barrage that no German counter-attack could get forward, but all day their fire was very heavy and deadly upon the captured trenches, and also upon the two battalions in support. On the night of the 27th the 9th Brigade was drawn out and the 8th took over the new line, all access to it being impossible save in the darkness, as no communication trenches existed. The situation was complicated by the fact that although the British troops had on the right won their way to the rear of the craters, one of these still contained a German detachment, who held on in a most heroic fashion and could not be dislodged. On March 30 the situation was still unchanged, and the 76th Brigade was put in to relieve the 8th. The 1st Gordons were now in the line, very wet and weary, but declaring that they would hold the ground at all costs. It was clear that the British line must be extended and that the gallant Germans in the crater must be overwhelmed. For this purpose, upon the night of April 2, the 8th Royal Lancasters swept across the whole debatable ground, with the result that 4 officers and 80 men surrendered at daylight to the Brigade-Major and a few men who summoned them from the lip of the crater. The Divisional General had himself gone forward to see that the captured ground was made good. “We saw our Divisional General mid-thigh in water and splashing down the trenches,” says an observer. “I can tell you it put heart into our weary men.” So ended the arduous labours of the Third Division, who upon April 4 handed over the ground to the 2nd Canadians. The episode of the St. Eloi craters was, however, far from being at an end. The position was looked upon as of great importance by the Germans, apart from the artillery observation, for their whole aim was the contraction, as that of the British was the expansion, of the space contained in the Ypres salient. “Elbow room! More elbow room!” was the hearts’ cry of Plumer’s Second Army. But the enemy grudged every yard, and with great tenacity began a series of counter-attacks which lasted with varying fortunes for several weeks.

Hardly had the Third Division filed out of the trenches when the German bombers were buzzing and stinging all down the new line, and there were evident signs of an impending counter-attack. Upon April 6 it broke with great violence, beginning with a blasting storm of shells followed by a rush of infantry in that darkest hour which precedes the dawn. It was a very terrible ordeal for troops which had up to then seen no severe service, and for the moment they were overborne. The attack chanced to come at the very moment when the 27th Winnipeg Regiment was being relieved by the 29th Vancouvers, which increased the losses and the confusion. The craters were taken by the German stormers with 180 prisoners, but the trench line was still held. The 31st Alberta Battalion upon the left of the position was involved in the fight and drove back several assaults, while a small French Canadian machine-gun detachment from the 22nd Regiment distinguished itself by an heroic resistance in which it was almost destroyed. About noon the bombardment was so terrific that the front trench was temporarily abandoned, the handful of survivors falling back upon the supports. The 31st upon the left were still able to maintain themselves, however, and after dusk they were able to reoccupy three out of the five craters in front of the line. From this time onwards the battle resolved itself into a desperate struggle between the opposing craters. During the whole of April 7 it was carried on with heavy losses to both parties. On one occasion a platoon of 40 Germans in close formation were shot down to a man as they rushed forward in a gallant forlorn hope. For three days the struggle went on, at the end of which time four of the craters were still held by the Canadians. Two medical men particularly distinguished themselves by their constant passage across the open space which divided the craters from the trench. The consolidation of the difficult position was admirably carried out by the C.R.E. of the Second Canadian Division.

The Canadians were left in comparative peace for ten days, but on April 19 there was a renewed burst of activity. Upon this day the Germans bombarded heavily, and then attacked with their infantry at four different points of the Ypres salient. At two they were entirely repulsed. On the Ypres-Langemarck road on the extreme north of the British position they remained in possession of about a hundred yards of trench. Finally, in the crater region they won back two, including the more important one which was on the Mound. Night after night there were bombing attacks in this region, by which the Germans endeavoured to enlarge their gains. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were now opposed to them and showed the same determination as the men of the West. The sector held by the veteran First Canadian Division was also attacked, the 13th Battalion having 100 casualties and the Canadian Scots 50. Altogether this fighting had been so incessant and severe, although as a rule confined to a very small front, that on an average 1000 casualties a week were recorded in the corps. The fighting was carried on frequently in’ heavy rain, and the disputed craters became deep pools of mud in which men fought waist deep, and where it was impossible to keep rifle or machine-gun from being fouled and clogged. Several of the smaller craters were found to be untenable by either side, and were abandoned to the corpses which lay in the mire.

The Germans did not long remain in possession of the trench which they had captured upon the 19th in the Langemarck direction. Though it was almost unapproachable on account of the deep mud, a storming column of the 1st Shropshires waded out to it in the dark up to their waists in slush, and turned the enemy out with the point of the bayonet. Upon April the 21st the line was completely re-established, though a sapper is reported to have declared that it was impossible to consolidate porridge. In this brilliant affair the Shropshires lost a number of officers and men, including their gallant Colonel, Luard, and Lieutenant Johnstone, who was shot by a sniper while boldly directing the consolidation from outside the parapet without cover of any kind. The whole incident was an extraordinarily fine feat of arms which could only have been carried out by a highly disciplined and determined body of men. The mud was so deep that men were engulfed and suffocated, and the main body had to throw themselves down and distribute their weight to prevent being sucked down into the quagmire. The rifles were so covered and clogged that all shooting was out of the question, and only bombs and bayonets were available for the assault. The old 53rd never did a better day’s work.

During the whole winter the Loos salient had been simmering, as it had never ceased to do since the first tremendous convulsion which had established it. In the early part of the year it was held by cavalry brigades, taking turns in succession, and during this time there was a deceptive quiet, which was due to the fact that the Germans were busy in running a number of mines under the position. At the end of February the Twelfth Division took over the north of the section, and for ten weeks they found themselves engaged in a struggle which can only be described as hellish. How constant and severe it was may be gauged from the fact that without any real action they lost 4000 men during that period. As soon as they understood the state of affairs, which was only conveyed to them by several devastating explosions, they began to run their own mines and to raid those of their enemy. It was a nightmare conflict, half above ground, half below, and sometimes both simultaneously, so that men may be said to have fought in layers. The upshot of the matter, after ten weeks of fighting, was that the

British positions were held at all points, though reduced to an extraordinary medley of craters and fissures, which some observer has compared to a landscape in the moon. The First Division shared with the Twelfth the winter honours of the dangerous Loos salient.

On April 27 a considerable surface attack developed on this part of the line, now held by the Sixteenth Irish Division. Early upon that day the Germans, taking advantage of the wind, which was now becoming almost as important in a land as it had once been in a sea battle, loosed a cloud of poison upon the trenches just south of Hulluch and followed it up by a rush of infantry which got possession of part of the front and support Hues in the old region of the chalk-pit wood. The 49th Brigade was in the trenches. This Brigade consisted of the 7th and 8th Inniskillings, with the 7th and 8th Royal Irish. It was upon the first two battalions that the cloud of gas descended, which seems to have been of a particularly deadly brew, since it poisoned horses upon the roads far to the rear. Many of the men were stupefied and few were in a condition for resistance when the enemy rushed to the trenches. Two battalions of Dublin Fusiliers, however, from the 48th Brigade were in the adjoining trenches and were not affected by the poison. These, together with the 8th Inniskillings, who were in the rear of the 7th, attacked the captured trench and speedily won it back. This was the more easy as there had been a sudden shift of wind which had blown the vile stuff back into the faces of the German infantry. A Bavarian letter taken some days later complained bitterly of their losses, which were stated to have reached 1300 from poison alone. The casualties of the Irish Division were about 1500, nearly all from gas, or shell-fire. Coming as it did at the moment when the tragic and futile rebellion in Dublin had seemed to place the imagined interests of Ireland in front of those of European civilisation, this success was most happily timed. The brunt of the fighting was borne equally by troops from the north and from the south of Ireland — a happy omen, we will hope, for the future.

Amongst the other local engagements which broke the monotony of trench life may be mentioned one upon May 11 near the Hohenzollern Redoubt where the Germans held for a short time a British trench, taking 127 of the occupants prisoners. More serious was the fighting upon the Vimy Ridge south of Souchez on May 15. About 7:30 on the evening of that day the British exploded a series of mines which, either by accident or design, were short of the German trenches. The sector was occupied by the

Twenty-fifth Division, and the infantry attack was entrusted to the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 9th North Lancashires, both of the 74th Brigade. They rushed forward with great dash and occupied the newly-formed craters, where they established themselves firmly, joining them up with each other and cutting communications backwards so as to make a new observation trench.

The Twenty-fifth Division lay at this time with the Forty-seventh London Division as its northern neighbour, the one forming the left-hand unit of the Third Army, and the other the extreme right of the First. Upon the 19th the Londoners took over the new position from the 74th, and found it to be an evil inheritance, for upon May 21, when they were in the very act of relieving the 7th and 75th Brigades, which formed the front of the Twenty-fifth Division, they were driven in by a terrific bombardment and assault from the German lines. On the front of a brigade the Germans captured not only the new ground won but our own front line and part of our supporting line. Old soldiers declared that the fire upon this occasion was among the most concentrated and deadly of the whole War. With the new weapons artillery is not needed at such short range, for with aerial torpedoes the same effect can be produced as with guns of a great calibre.

In the early morning of April 30, there was a strong attack by the Germans at Wulverghem, which was the village to the west of Messines, to which our line had been shifted after the attack of November 2, 1914. There is no doubt that all this bustling upon the part of the Germans was partly for the purpose of holding us to our ground while they dealt with the French at Verdun, and partly to provoke a premature offensive, since they well knew that some great movement was in contemplation. As a matter of fact, all the attacks, including the final severe one upon the Canadian lines, were dealt with by local defenders and had no strategic effect at all. In the case of the Wulverghem attack it was preceded by an emission of gas of such intensity that it produced much sickness as far off as Bailleul, at least six miles to the west. Horses in the distant horse lines fell senseless under the noxious vapour. It came on with such rapidity that about a hundred men of the Twenty-fourth Division were overcome before they could get on their helmets. The rest were armed against it, and repelled the subsequent infantry attacks carried out by numerous small bodies of exploring infantry, without any difficulty. The whole casualties of the Fifth Corps, whose front was attacked, amounted to 400, half by gas and half by the shells.

In May, General Alderson, who had commanded the Canadians with such success from the beginning, took over new duties and gave place to General Sir Julian Byng, the gallant commander of the Third Cavalry Division.

Upon June 2 there began an action upon the Canadian front at Ypres which led to severe fighting extending over several weeks, and put a very heavy strain upon a corps the First Division of which had done magnificent work during more than a year, whilst the other two divisions had only just eased up after the fighting of the craters. Knowing well that the Allies were about to attack, the Germans were exceedingly anxious to gain some success which would compel them to disarrange their plans and to suspend that concentration of troops and guns which must precede any great effort. In searching for such a success it was natural that they should revert to the Ypres salient, which had always been the weakest portion of the line — so weak, indeed, that when it is seen outlined by the star shells at night, it seems to the spectator to be almost untenable, since the curve of the German line was such that it could command the rear of all the British trenches. It was a region of ruined cottages, shallow trenches commanded by the enemy's guns, and shell-swept woods so shattered and scarred that they no longer furnished any cover. These woods, Zouave Wood, Sanctuary Wood, and others lie some hundred yards behind the front trenches and form a rallying-point for those who retire, and a place of assembly for those who advance.

The Canadian front was from four to five miles long, following the line of the trenches. The extreme left lay upon the ruined village of Hooge. This part of the line was held by the Royal Canadian Regiment. For a mile to their right, in front of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, the Princess Patricia's held the line over low-lying ground. In immediate support was the 49th Regiment. These all belonged to the 7th Canadian Brigade. This formed the left or northern sector of the position.

In the centre was a low hill called Mount Sorel, in which the front trenches were located. Immediately in its rear is another elevation, somewhat higher, and used as an observing station. This was Observatory Hill. A wood, Armagh Wood, covered the slope of this hill. There is about two hundred yards of valley between Mount Sorel and Observatory Hill, with a small stream running down it. This section of the line was essential for the British, since in the hands of the enemy it would command all the rest. It was garrisoned by the 8th Brigade, consisting of Canadian Mounted Rifles.

The right of the Canadian line, including St. Eloi upon the extreme limit of their sector, was held by troops of the Second Canadian Division. This part of the line was not involved in the coming attack. It broke upon the centre and the left, the Mount Sorel and the Hooge positions.

The whole operation was very much more important than was appreciated by the British public at the time, and formed a notable example of anticipatory tactics upon the part of the German General Staff. Just as they had delayed the advance upon the west by their furious assault upon Verdun on the east, so they now calculated that by a fierce attack upon the north of the British line they might disperse the gathering storm which was visibly banking up in the Somme Valley. It was a bold move, boldly carried out, and within appreciable distance of success.

Their first care was to collect and concentrate a great number of guns and mine-throwers on the sector to be attacked. This concentration occurred at the very moment when our own heavy artillery was in a transition stage, some of it going south to the Somme. Hardly a gun had sounded all morning. Then in an instant with a crash and a roar several mines were sprung under the trenches, and a terrific avalanche of shells came smashing down among the astounded men. It is doubtful if a more hellish storm of projectiles of every sort had ever up to that time been concentrated upon so limited a front. There was death from the mines below, death from the shells above, chaos and destruction all around. The men were dazed and the trenches both in front and those of communication were torn to pieces and left as heaps of rubble.

One great mine destroyed the loop of line held by the Princess Patricia’s and buried a company in the ruins. A second exploded at Mount Sorel and did great damage. At the first outburst Generals Mercer and Williams had been hurried into a small tunnel out of the front line, but the mine explosion obliterated the mouth of the tunnel and they were only extricated with difficulty. General Mercer was last seen encouraging the men, but he had disappeared after the action and his fate was unknown to friend or foe until ten days later his body was found with both legs broken in one of the side trenches. He died as he had lived, a very gallant soldier. For four hours the men cowered down in what was left of the trenches, awaiting the inevitable infantry attack which would come from the German lines fifty yards away.

When at last it came it met with little resistance, for there were few to resist. Those few were beaten down by the rush of the Würtembergers who formed the attacking division. They carried the British line for a length of nearly a mile, from Mount Sorel to the south of Hooge, and they captured about 500 men, a large proportion of whom were wounded. General Williams, Colonel Usher, and twelve other officers were taken.

When the German stormers saw the havoc in the trenches they may well have thought that they had only to push, forward to pierce the line and close their hands at last upon the coveted Ypres. If any such expectation was theirs, they must have been new troops who had no knowledge of the dour tenacity of the Canadians. The men who first faced poison gas without masks were not so lightly driven. The German attack was brought to a standstill by the withering rifle-fire from the woods, and though the assailants were still able to hold the ground occupied they were unable to increase their gains, while in spite of a terrific barrage of shrapnel fresh Canadian battalions, the 14th and 15th from the 3rd Canadian Brigade, were coming up from the rear to help their exhausted companions.

The evening of June 2 was spent in confused skirmishing, the advanced patrols of the Germans getting into the woods and being held up by the Canadian infantry moving up to the front. Some German patrols are said to have got as far as Zillebeke village, three-quarters of a mile in advance of their old line. By the morning of June 3 these intruders had been pushed back, but a counter-attack before dawn by the 9th Brigade was held up by artillery fire, Colonel Hay of the 52nd (New Ontario) Regiment and many officers and men being put out of action. The British guns were now hard at work, and the Würtembergers in the captured trenches were enduring something of what the Canadians had undergone the day before. About 7 o’clock the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades, veterans of Ypres, began to advance, making their way through the woods and over the bodies of the German skirmishers. When the advance got in touch with the captured trenches it was held up, for the Würtembergers stood to it like men, and were well supported by their gunners.

On the right the 7th and 10th Canadians got well forward, but had not enough weight for a serious attack. It became clear that a premature counter-attack might lead to increased losses, and that the true method was to possess one’s soul in patience until the preparation could be made for a decisive operation. The impatience and ardour of the men were very great, and their courage had a fine edge put upon it by a churlish German official communiqué, adding one more disgrace to their military annals, which asserted that more Canadian prisoners had not been taken because they had fled so fast. Canadians could smile at the insult, but it was the sort of smile that is more menacing than a frown. The infantry waited grimly while some of the missing guns were recalled into their position. Up to this time the losses had been about 80 officers and 2000 men.

The weather was vile, with incessant rain which turned the fields into bogs and the trenches into canals. For a few days things were at a standstill, for the clouds prevented aeroplane reconnaissance and the registration of the guns. The Corps lay in front of its lost trenches like a wounded bear looking across with red eyes at its stolen cub. The Germans had taken advantage of the lull to extend their line, and on June 6 they had occupied the ruins of Hooge, which were impossible to hold after all the trenches to the south had been lost. In their new line the Germans awaited the attack which they afterwards admitted that they knew to be inevitable. The British gun-fire was so severe that it was very difficult for them to improve their new position.

On the 13th the weather had moderated and all was ready for the counter-attack. It was carried out at two in the morning by two composite brigades. The 3rd (Toronto) and 7th Battalions led upon the right, while the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 16th (Canadian Scots) were in the van of the left, with their pipers skirling in front of them. Machine-guns supported the whole advance. The right flank of the advance, being exposed to the German machine-guns, was shrouded by the smoke of 200 bombs. The night was a very dark one and the Canadian Scots had taken advantage of it to get beyond the front line, and, as it proved, inside the German barrage zone, so that heavy as it was it did them no scathe. The new German Hue was carried with a magnificent rush, and a second heave lifted the wave of stormers into the old British trenches — or the place where they had been. Nine machine-guns and 150 prisoners from the 119th, 120th, 125th, and 127th Würtemberg Regiments were captured. To their great joy the Canadians discovered that such munitions as they had abandoned upon June 2 were still in the trenches and reverted into their hands. It is pleasant to add that evidence was found that the Würtembergers had behaved with humanity towards the wounded. From this time onwards the whole Canadian area from close to Hooge (the village still remained with the enemy) across the front of the woods, over Mount Sorel, and on to Hill 60, was consolidated and maintained. Save the heavy reciprocal losses neither side had anything to show for all their desperate fighting, save that the ruins of Hooge were now German. The Canadian losses in the total operations came to about 7000 men — a figure which is eloquent as to the severity of the fighting. They emerged from the ordeal with their military reputation more firmly established than ever. Ypres will surely be a place of pilgrimage for Canadians in days to come, for the ground upon the north of the city and also upon the south-east is imperishably associated with the martial traditions of their country. The battle just described is the most severe action between the epic of Loos upon the one side, and that tremendous episode in the south, upon the edge of which we are now standing.

There is one other happening of note which may in truth be taken as an overture of that gigantic performance. This was the action of the Seventeenth Corps upon June 30, the eve of the Somme battle, in which the Thirty-ninth Division, supported by guns from the Thirty-fifth and Fifty-first Divisions upon each side of it, attacked the German trenches near Richebourg at a spot known as the Boar’s Head. The attack was so limited in the troops employed and so local in area that it can only be regarded as a feint to take the German attention from the spot where the real danger was brewing.

After an artillery preparation of considerable intensity, the infantry assault was delivered by the 12th and 13th Royal Sussex of the 116th Brigade. The scheme was that they should advance in three waves and win their way to the enemy support line, which they were to convert into the British front line, while the divisional pioneer battalion, the 13th Gloster, was to join it up to the existing system by new communication trenches. For some reason, however, a period of eleven hours seems to have elapsed between the first bombardment and the actual attack. The latter was delivered at three in the morning after a fresh bombardment of only ten minutes. So ready were the Germans that an observer has remarked that had a string been tied from the British batteries to the German the opening could not have been more simultaneous, and they had brought together a great weight of metal. Every kind of high explosive, shrapnel, and trench mortar bombs rained on the front and support line, the communication trenches and No Man’s Land, in addition to a most hellish fire of machine-guns. The infantry none the less advanced with magnificent ardour, though with heavy losses. On occupying the German front line trenches there was ample evidence that the guns had done their work well, for the occupants were lying in heaps. The survivors threw bombs to the last moment, and then cried, “Kamerad!” Few of them were taken back. Two successive lines were captured, but the losses were too heavy to allow them to be held, and the troops had eventually under heavy shell-fire to fall back on their own front lines. Only three officers came back unhurt out of the two battalions, and the losses of rank and file came to a full two-thirds of the number engaged. “The men were magnificent,” says one who led them, but they learned the lesson which was awaiting so many of their comrades in the south, that all human bravery cannot overcome conditions which are essentially impossible. A heavy German bombardment continued for some time, flattening out the trenches and inflicting losses, not only upon the 39th but upon the 51st Highland Territorial Division. This show of heavy artillery may be taken as the most pleasant feature in the whole episode, since it shows that its object was attained at least to the very important extent of holding up the German guns. Those heavy batteries upon the Somme might well have modified our successes of the morrow.

A second attack made with the same object of distracting the attention of the Germans and holding up their guns was made at an earlier date at a point called the triangle opposite to the Double Grassier near Loos. This attack was started at 9:10 upon the evening of June 10, and was carried out in a most valiant fashion by the 2nd Rifles and part of the 2nd Royal Sussex, both of the 2nd Brigade. There can be no greater trial for troops, and no greater sacrifice can be demanded of a soldier, than to risk and probably lose his life in an attempt which can obviously have no permanent result, and is merely intended to ease pressure elsewhere. The gallant stormers reached and in several places carried the enemy’s line, but no lasting occupation could be effected, and they had eventually to return to their own fine. The Riflemen, who were the chief sufferers, lost 11 officers and 200 men.

A word should be said as to the raids along the line of the German trenches by which it was hoped to distract their attention from the point of attack, and also to obtain precise information as to the disposition of their units. It is difficult to say whether the British were the gainers or the losers on balance in these raids, for some were successful, while some were repelled. Among a great number of gallant attempts, the details of which hardly come within the scale of this chronicle, the most successful perhaps were two made by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, both of the Thirty third Division. In both of these cases very extensive damage was done and numerous prisoners were taken.

When one reads the intimate accounts of these affairs, the stealthy approaches, the blackened faces, the clubs and revolvers which formed the weapons, the ox-goads for urging Germans out of dug-outs, the dark lanterns and the knuckle-dusters — one feels that the age of adventure is not yet past and that the spirit of romance was not entirely buried in the trenches of modern war. There were 70 such raids in the week which preceded the great attack.

Before plunging into the huge task of following and describing the various phases of the mighty Battle of the Somme a word must be said upon the naval history of the period which can all be summed up in the Battle of Jutland, since the situation after that battle was exactly as it had always been before it. This fact in itself shows upon which side the victory lay, since the whole object of the movements of the German Fleet was to produce a relaxation in these conditions. Through the modesty of the British bulletins, which was pushed somewhat to excess, the position for some days was that the British, who had won everything, claimed nothing, while the Germans, who had won nothing, claimed everything. It is true that a number of our ships were sunk and of our sailors drowned, including Hood and Arbuthnot, two of the ablest of our younger admirals. Even by the German accounts, however, their own losses in proportion to their total strength were equally heavy, and we have every reason to doubt their accounts since they not only do not correspond with reliable observations upon our side, but because their second official account was compelled to admit that their first one had been false. The whole affair may be summed up by saying that after making an excellent fight they were saved from total destruction by the haze of evening, and fled back in broken array to their ports, leaving the North Sea now as always in British keeping. At the same time it cannot be denied that here as at Coronel and the Falklands the German ships were well fought, the gunnery was good, and the handling of the fleet, both during the battle and especially under the difficult circumstances of the flight in the darkness to avoid a superior fleet between themselves and home, was of a high order. It was a good clean fight, and in the general disgust at the flatulent claims of the Kaiser and his press the actual merit of the German performance did not perhaps receive all the appreciation which it deserved.

II. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Seventh and Eighth Corps on Gommecourt, Serre, and Beaumont Hamel

Line of battle in the Somme sector — Great preparations — Advance of Forty-sixth North Midland Division — Advance of Fifty-sixth Territorials (London) — Great valour and heavy losses — Advance of Thirty-first Division — Advance of Fourth Division — Advance of Twenty-ninth Division — Complete failure of the assault

THE continued German pressure at Verdun which had reached a high point in June called insistently for an immediate allied attack at the western end of the line. With a fine spirit of comradeship General Haig had placed himself and his armies at the absolute disposal of General Joffre, and was prepared to march them to Verdun, or anywhere else where he could best render assistance. The solid Joffre, strong and deliberate, was not disposed to allow the western offensive to be either weakened or launched prematurely on account of German attacks at the eastern frontier. He believed that Verdun could for the time look after herself, and the result showed the clearness of his vision. Meanwhile, he amassed a considerable French army, containing many of his best active troops, on either side of the Somme. General Foch was in command. They formed the right wing of the great allied force about to make a big effort to break or shift the iron German line, which had been built up with two years of labour, until it represented a tangled vista of trenches, parapets, and redoubts mutually supporting and bristling with machine-guns and cannon, for many miles of depth.

Never in the whole course of history have soldiers been confronted with such an obstacle. Yet from general to private, both in the French and in the British armies, there was universal joy that the long stagnant trench life should be at an end, and that the days of action, even if they should prove to be days of death, should at last have come. Our concern is with the British forces, and so they are here set forth as they stretched upon the left or north of their good allies.

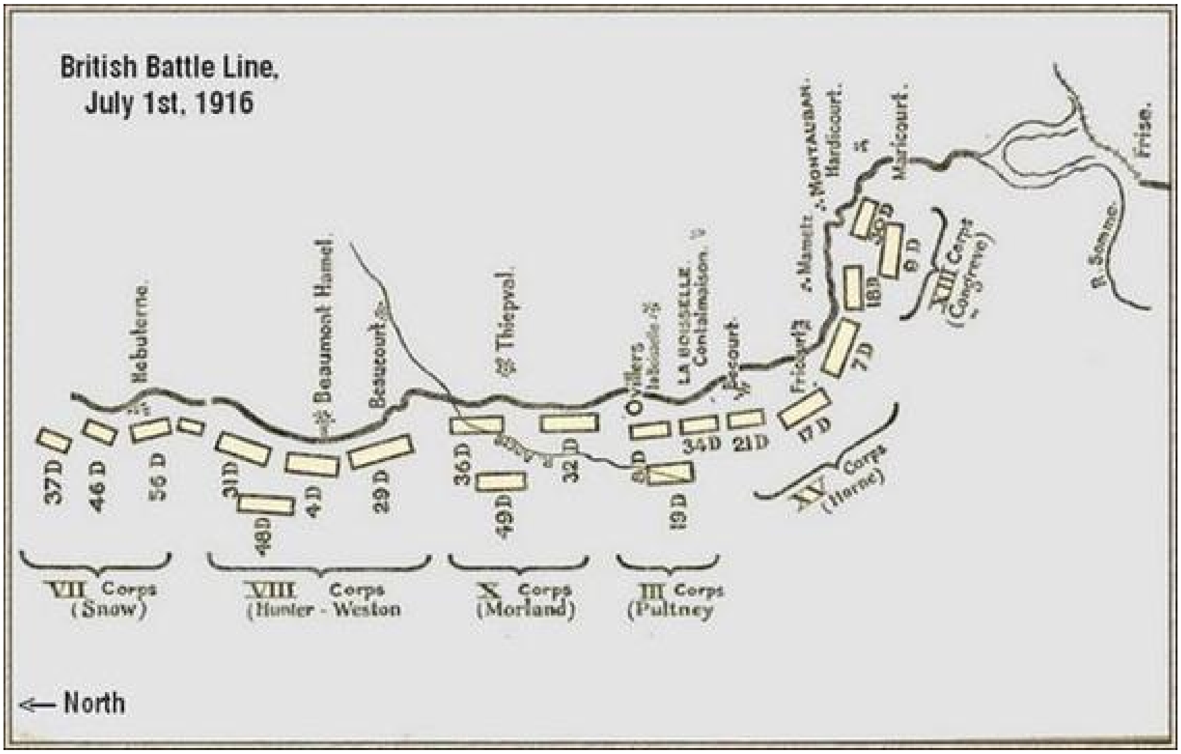
British Battle Line.
July 1st, 1916
Hebuterne.
Beaumont Hamel
Beaucourt
Thiepval
Ovillers
LA BOISSELLE
Contalmaison
Becourt
Fricourt
Mametz
MONTAUBAN
Hardicourt.
Maricourt.
Frise.
R. Somme
37 D
46 D
56 D
31 D
48 D
4 D
29 D
36 D
49 D
32 D
8 D
19 D
34 D
21 D
17 D
7 D
18 D
30 D
9 D
VII Corps (Snow)
VIII Corps (Hunter - Weston
X Corps (Morland)
III Corps (Pultney
XV Corps (Horne)
XIII Corps (Congreve)
North

British Battle Line, July 1st, 1916

The southern end of the whole British line was held by the Fourth Army, commanded by General Rawlinson, an officer who has always been called upon when desperate work was afoot. His army consisted of five corps, each of which included from three to four divisions, so that his infantry numbered about 200,000 men, many of whom were veterans, so far as a man may live to be a veteran amid the slaughter of such a campaign. The Corps, counting from the junction with the French, were, the Thirteenth (Congreve), Fifteenth (Horne), Third (Pulteney), Tenth (Morland), and Eighth (Hunter-Weston). Their divisions, frontage, and the objectives will be discussed in the description of the battle itself.

North of Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, and touching it at the village of Hébuterne, was Allenby’s Third Army, of which one single corps, the Seventh (Snow), was engaged in the battle. This added three divisions, or about 30,000 infantry, to the numbers quoted above.

It had taken months to get the troops into position, to accumulate the guns, and to make the enormous preparations which such a battle must entail. How gigantic and how minute these are can only be appreciated by those who are acquainted with the work of the staffs. As to the Chief Staff of all, if a civilian may express an opinion upon so technical a matter, no praise seems to be too high for General Kiggell and the others under the immediate direction of Sir Douglas Haig, who had successively shown himself to be a great Corps General, a great Army leader, and now a great General-in-Chief. The preparations were enormous and meticulous, yet everything ran like a well-oiled piston-rod. Every operation of the attack was practised on similar ground behind the lines. New railheads were made, huge sidings constructed, and great dumps accumulated. The corps and divisional staffs were also excellent, but above all it was upon those hard-worked and usually overlooked men, the sappers, that the strain fell. Assembly trenches had to be dug, double communication trenches had to be placed in parallel lines, one taking the up-traffic and one the down, water supplies, bomb shelters, staff dug-outs, poison-gas arrangements, tunnels and mines — there was no end to the work of the sappers. The gunners behind laboured night after night in hauling up and concealing their pieces, while day after day they deliberately and carefully registered upon their marks. The question of ammunition supply had assumed incredible proportions. For the needs of one single corps forty-six miles of motor-lorries were engaged in bringing up the shells. However, by the end of June all was in place and ready. The bombardment began about June 23, and was at once answered by a German one of lesser intensity. The fact that the attack was imminent was everywhere known, for it was absolutely impossible to make such preparations and concentrations in a secret fashion. “Come on, we are ready for you,” was hoisted upon placards on several of the German trenches. The result was to show that they spoke no more than the truth.

There were limits, however, to the German appreciation of the plans of the Allies. They were apparently convinced that the attack would come somewhat farther to the north, and their plans, which covered more than half of the ground on which the attack actually did occur, had made that region impregnable, as we were to learn to our cost. Their heaviest guns and their best troops were there. They had made a far less elaborate preparation, however, at the front which corresponded with the southern end of the British line, and also on that which faced the French. The reasons for this may be surmised. The British front at that point is very badly supplied with roads (or was before the matter was taken in hand), and the Germans may well have thought that no advance upon a great scale was possible. So far as the French were concerned they had probably over-estimated the preoccupation of Verdun and had not given our Allies credit for the immense reserve vitality which they were to show. The French front to the south of the Somme was also faced by a great bend of the river which must impede any advance. Then again it is wooded, broken country down there, and gives good concealment for masking an operation. These were probably the reasons which induced the Germans to make a miscalculation which proved to be an exceedingly serious one, converting what might have been a German victory into a great, though costly, success for the Allies, a prelude to most vital results in the future.

It is, as already stated, difficult to effect a surprise upon the large scale in modern warfare. There are still, however, certain departments in which with energy and ingenuity effects may be produced as unforeseen as they are disconcerting. The Air Service of the Allies, about which a book which would be one long epic of heroism could be written, had been growing stronger, and had dominated the situation during the last few weeks, but it had not shown its full strength nor its intentions until the evening before the bombardment. Then it disclosed both in most dramatic fashion. Either side had lines of stationary airships from which shell-fire is observed. To the stranger approaching the lines they are the first intimation that he is in the danger area, and he sees them in a double row, extending in a gradually dwindling vista to either horizon. Now by a single raid and in a single night, every observation airship of the Germans was brought in flames to the earth. It was a splendid coup, splendidly carried out. Where the setting sun had shone on a long German array the dawn showed an empty eastern sky. From that day for many a month the Allies had command of the air with all that it means to modern artillery. It was a good omen for the coming fight, and a sign of the great efficiency to which the British Air Service under General Trenchard had attained. The various types for scouting, for artillery work, for raiding, and for fighting were all very highly developed and splendidly handled by as gallant and chivalrous a band of heroic youths as Britain has ever enrolled among her guardians. The new F.E. machine and the de Haviland Biplane fighting machine were at this time equal to anything the Germans had in the air.

The attack had been planned for June 28, but the weather was so tempestuous that it was put off until it should moderate, a change which was a great strain upon every one concerned. July 1 broke calm and warm with a gentle south-western breeze. The day had come. All morning from early dawn there was intense fire, intensely answered, with smoke barrages thrown during the last half-hour to such points as could with advantage be screened. At 7:30 the guns lifted, the whistles blew, and the eager infantry were over the parapets. The great Battle of the Somme, the fierce crisis of Armageddon, had come. In following the fate of the various British forces during this eventful and most bloody day we will begin at the northern end of the line, where the Seventh Corps (Snow) faced the salient of Gommecourt.

This corps consisted of the Thirty-seventh, Forty-sixth, and Fifty-sixth Divisions. The former was not engaged and lay to the north. The others were told off to attack the bulge on the German line, the Forty-sixth upon the north, and the Fifty-sixth upon the south, with the village of Gommecourt as their immediate objective. Both were well-tried and famous territorial units, the Forty-sixth North Midland being the division which carried the Hohenzollern Redoubt upon October 13, 1915, while the Fifty-sixth was made up of the old London territorial battalions, which had seen so much fighting in earlier days while scattered among the regular brigades. Taking our description of the battle always from the north end of of the the line we shall begin with the attack of the Forty-sixth Division.

The assault was carried out by two brigades, each upon a two-battalion front. Of these the 137th Brigade of Stafford men were upon the right, while the 139th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were on the left, each accompanied by a unit of sappers. The 138th Brigade, less one battalion, which was attached to the 137th, was in reserve. The attack was covered so far as possible with smoke, which was turned on five minutes before the hour. The general instructions to both brigades were that after crossing No Man’s Land and taking the first German fine they should bomb their way up the communication trenches, and so force a passage into Gommecourt Wood. Each brigade was to advance in four waves at fifty yards interval, with six feet between each man. Warned by our past experience of the wastage of precious material, not more than 20 officers of each battalion were sent forward with the attack, and a proportional number of N.C.O.’s were also withheld. The average equipment of the stormers, here and elsewhere, consisted of steel helmet, haversack, water-bottle, rations for two days, two gas helmets, tear-goggles, 220 cartridges, two bombs, two sandbags, entrenching tool, wire-cutters, field dressings, and signal-flare. With this weight upon them, and with trenches which were half full of water, and the ground between a morass of sticky mud, some idea can be formed of the strain upon the infantry.

Both the attacking brigades got away with splendid steadiness upon the tick of time. In the case of the 137th Brigade the 6th South Staffords and 6th North Staffords were in the van, the former of the being on the right flank where it joined up with the left of the Fifty-sixth Division. The South Staffords came into a fatal blast of machine-gun fire as they dashed forward, and their track was marked by a thick litter of dead and wounded. None the less, they poured into the trenches opposite to them but found them strongly held by infantry of the Fifty-second German Division. There was some fierce bludgeon work in the trenches, but the losses in crossing had been too heavy and the survivors were unable to make good. The trench was held by the Germans and the assault repulsed. The North Staffords had also won their way into the front trenches, but in their case also they had lost so heavily that they were unable to clear the trench, which was well and stoutly defended. At the instant of attack, here as elsewhere, the Germans had put so terrific a barrage between the fines that it was impossible for the supports to get up and no fresh momentum could be added to the failing attack.

The fate of the right attack had been bad, but that of the left was even worse, for at this point we had experience of a German procedure which was tried at several places along the line with most deadly effect, and accounted for some of our very high losses. This device was to stuff their front line dug-outs with machine-guns and men, who would emerge when the wave of stormers had passed, attacking them from the rear, confident that their own rear was safe on account of the terrific barrage between the lines.

In this case the stormers were completely trapped. The 5th and 7th Sherwood Foresters dashed through the open ground, carried the trenches and pushed forward on their fiery career. Instantly the barrage fell, the concealed infantry rose behind them, and their fate was sealed. With grand valour the leading four waves stormed their way up the communication trenches and beat down all opposition until their own dwindling numbers and the failure of their bombs left them helpless among their enemies. Thus perished the first companies of two fine battalions, and few survivors of them ever won their way back to the British lines. Brave attempts were made during the day to get across to their aid, but all were beaten down by the terrible barrage. In the evening the 5th Lincolns made a most gallant final effort to reach their lost comrades, and got across to the German front line which they found to be strongly held. So ended a tragic episode. The cause which produced it was, as will be seen, common to the whole northern end of the line, and depended upon factors which neither officers nor men could control, the chief of which were that the work of our artillery, both in getting at the trench garrisons and in its counter-battery effects had been far less deadly than we had expected. The losses of the division came to about 2700 men.

The attack upon the southern side of the Gommecourt peninsula, though urged with the utmost devotion and corresponding losses, had no more success than that in the north. There is no doubt that the unfortunate repulse of the 137th Brigade upon their left, occurring as it did while the Fifty-sixth Division was still advancing, enabled the Germans to concentrate their guns and reserves upon the Londoners, but knowing what we know, it can hardly be imagined that under any circumstances, with failure upon either side of them, the division could have held the captured ground. The preparations for the attack had been made with great energy, and for two successive nights as many as 3000 men were out digging between the lines, which was done with such disciplined silence that there were not more than 50 casualties all told. The 167th Brigade was left in reserve, having already suffered heavily while holding the water-logged trenches during the constant shell-fall of the last week. The 7th Middlesex alone had lost 12 officers and 300 men from this cause — a proportion which may give some idea of what the heavy British bombardment may have meant to the Germans. The advance was, therefore, upon a two-brigade front, the 168th being on the right and the 169th upon the left. The London Scottish and the 12th London Rangers were the leading battalions of the 168th, while the Westminsters and Victorias led the 169th with the 4th London, 13th Kensingtons, 2nd London and London Rifle Brigade in support. The advance was made with all the fiery dash with which the Cockney soldiers have been associated. The first, second, and third German lines of trench were successively carried, and it was not until they, or those of them who were left, had reached the fourth line that they were held. It was powerfully manned, bravely defended, and well provided with bombs — a terrible obstacle for a scattered line of weary and often wounded men. The struggle was a heroic one. Even now had their rear been clear, or had there been a shadow of support these determined men would have burst the only barrier which held them from Gommecourt. But the steel curtain of the barrage had closed down of the behind them, and every overrun trench was sending out its lurking occupants to fire into their defenceless backs. Bombs, too, are essential in such a combat, and bombs must ever be renewed, since few can be carried at a time. For long hours the struggle went on, but it was the pitiful attempt of heroic men to postpone that retreat which was inevitable. Few of the advanced line ever got back. The 3rd London, particularly, sent forward several hundred men with bombs, but hardly any got across. Sixty London Scots started on the same terrible errand. In the late afternoon the remains of the two brigades were back in the British front line, having done all, and more than all, that brave soldiers could be expected to do. The losses were very heavy. Never has the manhood of London in one single day sustained so grievous a loss. It is such hours which test the very soul of the soldier. War is not all careless slang and jokes and cigarettes, though such superficial sides of it may amuse the public and catch the eye of the descriptive writer. It is the most desperately earnest thing to which man ever sets his hand or his mind. Many a hot oath and many a frenzied prayer go up from the battle line. Strong men are shaken to the soul with the hysteria of weaklings, and balanced brains are dulled into vacancy or worse by the dreadful sustained shock of it. The more honour then to those who, broken and wearied, still hold fast in the face of all that human flesh abhors, bracing their spirits by a sense of soldierly duty and personal honour which is strong enough to prevail over death itself.

It is pleasing to be able to record an instance of good feeling upon the part of the enemy. Some remains of the old German spirit would now and again, though with sad rarity, shake itself free from the acrid and poisonous Prussian taint. On this occasion a German prisoner was sent back from our lines after nightfall with a note to the officer in command asking for details as to the fate of the British missing. An answer was found tied on to the barbed wire in the morning which gave the desired information. It is fair to state also that the wounded taken by the enemy appear to have met with good treatment.

So much for the gallant and tragic attack of the Seventh Corps. General Snow, addressing his men after the battle, pointed out that their losses and their efforts had not been all in vain. “I can assure you,” he said, “that by your determined attack you managed to keep large forces of the enemy at your front, thereby materially assisting in the operations which were proceeding farther south with such marked success.” No doubt the claim is a just one, and even while we mourn over the fate of four grand Army corps upon the left wing of the Allied Army, we may feel that they sacrificed themselves in order to assure the advance of those corps of their comrades to the south who had profited by the accumulation of guns and men to the north of them in order to burst their way through the German line. It is possible that here as on some other occasions the bitter hatred which the Germans had for the British, nurtured as it was by every lie which could appeal to their passions, had distorted their vision and twisted their counsels to an extent which proved to be their ruin.

The Eighth Corps, a magnificent body of troops, was under the command of General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston. It consisted of the Forty-eighth South Midland Territorial Division, the Fourth Regular Division, the Twenty-ninth Regular Division, and the Thirty-first Division of the New Army. Their front extended from Hébuterne in the north, where they joined on to the Fifty-sixth Division, down to a point just north of the Ancre, and it faced the very strong German positions of Serre in the north, and of Beaumont Hamel in the centre. The latter was an exceptionally difficult place, for it contained enormous quarries and excavations in which masses of Germans could remain concealed, almost immune to shell-fire and ready to sally out when needed. In spite of the terrific bombardment the actual damage done to the enemy was not excessive, and neither his numbers, his moral, nor his guns had been seriously diminished. The order of battle was as follows: the Forty-eighth Division was in reserve, save for the 143rd Warwick Brigade. Of this brigade two battalions, the 5th and 6th Warwicks, were placed on a defensive line with orders to hold the trenches for about a mile south of Hébuterne. The 7th and 8th Warwicks were attached to the Fourth Division for the assault.

Immediately south of the defensive line held by the two Warwick battalions was the Thirty-first Division, having Serre for its objective. South of this, and opposite to Beaumont Hamel, was the Fourth, and south of this again was the Twenty-ninth Division, which had returned from the magnificent failure of the Dardanelles, bearing with it a high reputation for efficiency and valour. Incorporated with it was a regiment of Newfoundlanders, men recruited from among the fishers and farmers of that northern land, the oldest colony of Britain. Such was the force, comprising nearly 50,000 excellent infantry, who set forth upon the formidable adventure of forcing the lines of Beaumont Hamel. They were destined to show the absolute impossibility of such a task in the face of a steadfast unshaken enemy, supported by a tremendous artillery, but their story is a most glorious one, and many a great British victory contains no such record of tenacity and military virtue.

At a quarter past five the assaulting lines were in the assembly trenches, and shortly afterwards the smoke and artillery barrages were released. At 7:20 an enormous mine, which had been run under Hawthorn Redoubt in front of the Fourth Division, was exploded, and a monstrous column of debris, with the accompanying shock of an earthquake, warned friend and foe that the hour of doom, the crisis of such mighty preparations, was at hand. At 7:30 the whistles blew, and the men, springing with eager alacrity over the parapet, advanced in successive lines of assault against the German trenches.

Before giving in detail the circumstances which determined the result in each division, it may be well to avoid wearisome iteration by giving certain facts which are common to each. In every case the troops advanced in an extended formation of companies in successive waves. In nearly every case the German front line was seized and penetrated, in no case was there any hesitation or disorder among the advancing troops, but the highest possible degree of discipline and courage was shown by regulars, territorials, and men of the New Army, nor could it be said that there was any difference between them. In each case also the Germans met the assault with determined valour; in each case the successive lines of trenches were more strongly held, and the assailants were attacked from the the rear by those who emerged from the dug-outs behind them, and above all in each case a most murderous artillery fire was opened from a semi-circle all round the German position, but especially from one huge accumulation of heavy guns, said to number a hundred batteries, stationed on the high ground near Bucquoy and commanding the British position. These guns formed successive lines of barrage with shrapnel and high explosives, one of them about 200 yards behind the British line, to cut off the supports; another 50 yards behind; another 60 yards in front; and a fourth of shrapnel which was under observed control, and followed the troops in their movements. The advanced lines of assault were able in most cases to get through before these barrages were effectively established, but they made it difficult, deadly, and often impossible for the lines who followed.

None the less it is the opinion of skilled observers that the shell-fire alone, however heavy, could not have taken the edge from the inexorable insistence of the British attack. It is to the skill and to the personal gallantry of the German machine-gunners that the result is to be traced. The bombardment of the German line had been so severe that it was hoped that most of the machine-guns had been rooted out. So indeed they had, but they had been withdrawn to the safety of excavations in the immediate rear. Suspecting this, the British artillery sprayed the ground behind the trenches with showers of shrapnel to prevent their being brought forward again. This barrage was not sufficient to subdue the gunners, who dashed forward and established their pieces at the moment of the assault upon the various parapets and points of vantage, from which, regardless of their own losses, they poured a withering fire upon the infantry in the open. These brave Würtembergers were seen, with riflemen at their side, exposed waist-deep and dropping fast, but mowing the open slope as with a scythe of steel. “I cannot,” said a general officer, who surveyed the whole scene, “adequately express my admiration for the British who advanced, or for the Germans who stood up under such a heavy barrage to oppose them.” It was indeed that contest between the chosen children of Odin in which Professor Cramb has declared that the high gods of virility might well rejoice.

We will now turn to the left of the line and carry on the detailed description of the general assault from that of the 56th Territorials in the north, who were linked up by the defensive line of the Warwicks. The Thirty-first Division was on the left of the Eighth Corps. Of this division, two brigades, the 93rd and the 94th, were in the line, with the 92nd in reserve. The 93rd, which consisted of the l0th, 16th, 18th West Yorks, and the 18th Durhams, was on the right, the 94th, including the 11th East Lancashires, and the 12th, 13th, and 14th York and Lancasters, was on the left. The advance was made upon a front of two companies, each company on a front of two platoons, the men extended to three paces interval. On the left the leading battalions were the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, the latter on the extreme left flank of the whole division. That this position with its exposed flank was the place of honour and of danger, may be best indicated by the fact that the of the colonel and six orderlies were the only men who could be collected of this heroic Sheffield battalion upon the next morning. On the right the leading troops were the 15th and 16th West Yorks. These grand North-countrymen swept across No Man’s Land, dressed as if on parade, followed in succession by the remaining battalions, two of which, the 13th and 14th York and Lancasters, were the special town units of Barnsley and Leeds. “I have never seen and could not have imagined such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline, and determination,” said the observer who was been already quoted. The men fell in lines, but the survivors with backs bent, heads bowed, and rifles at the port, neither quickened nor slackened their advance, but went forward as though it was rain and not lead which lashed them. Here and elsewhere the German machine-gunners not only lined the parapet, but actually rushed forward into the open, partly to get a flank fire, and partly to come in front of the British barrage. Before the blasts of bullets the fines melted away, and the ever-decreasing waves only reached the parapet here and there, lapping over the spot where the German front lines had been, and sinking for ever upon the farther side. About a hundred gallant men of the East Lancashires, favoured perhaps by some curve in the ground, got past more than one fine of trenches, and a few desperate individuals even burst their way as far as Serre, giving a false impression that the village was in our hands. But the losses had been so heavy that the weight and momentum had gone out of the attack, while the density of the resistance thickened with every yard of advance. By the middle of the afternoon the survivors of the two attacking brigades were back in their own front line trenches, having lost the greater part of their effectives. The 15th West Yorks had lost heavily in officers, and the 16th and 18th were little better off. The 18th Durhams suffered less, being partly in reserve. Of the 94th Brigade the two splendid leading battalions, the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, had very many killed within the enemy line. The heaviest loss in any single unit was in the 11th East Lancashires. The strength of the position is indicated by the fact that when attacked by two divisions in November, with a very powerful backing of artillery, it was still able to hold its own.

The experiences of all the troops engaged upon the left of the British attack were so similar and their gallantry was so uniform, that any variety in description depends rather upon the units engaged than upon what befell them. Thus in passing from the Thirty-first Division to the Fourth upon their right, the general sequence of cause and effect is still the same. In this instance the infantry who rushed, or rather strode, to the assault were, counting from the right, the 1st East Lanes, the 1st Rifle Brigade, and the 8th Warwicks, who were immediately followed by the 1st Hants, the 1st Somersets, and the 6th Warwicks, advancing with three companies in front and one in support. The objective here as elsewhere upon the left was the capture of the Serre-Grandcourt Ridge, with the further design of furnishing a defensive flank for the operations lower down. The troops enumerated belonged to the 11th Brigade, led by the gallant Prowse, who fell hit by a shell early in the assault, calling after his troops that they should remember that they were the Stonewall Brigade.

The attack was pressed with incredible resolution, and met with severe losses. Again the front line was carried and again the thin fringe of survivors had no weight to drive the assault forward, whilst they had no cover to shelter them in the ruined lines which they had taken. The Somerset men had the honour of reaching the farthest point attained by the division. “If anything wants shifting the Somersets will do it.” So said their General before the action. But both their flanks were in the air, and their position was an impossible one, while the right of the attack north of Beaumont Hamel had been entirely held up. Two units of the 10th Brigade advanced about 9 o’clock on the right, and two of the 12th on the left. These were in their order, the 2nd Dublins, 2nd Seaforths, 2nd Essex, and 1st King’s Own Lancasters. All went forward with a will, but some could not get beyond their own front trenches, and few got over the German line. Ail the weight of their blood so lavishly and cheerfully given could not tilt the scale towards victory. Slowly the survivors of the Somersets and Rifle Brigade were beaten back with clouds of bombers at their heels. The 8th Warwicks, who, with some of the 6th Warwicks, had got as far forward as any of the supporting line, could not turn the tide. Late in the afternoon the assault had definitely failed, and the remainder were back in their own front trenches, which had now to be organised against the very possible counter-attack. Only two battalions of the division remained intact, and the losses included General Prowse, Colonel the Hon, C.W. Palk of the Hampshires, Colonel Thicknesse of the Somersets, Colonel Wood of the Rifle Brigade, and Colonel Franklin of the 6th Warwicks, all killed; while Colonels Innes of the 8th Warwicks, Hopkinson of the Seaforths, and Green of the East Lancashires were wounded. For a long time a portion of the enemy’s trench was held by mixed units, but it was of no value when detached from the rest and was abandoned in the evening. From the afternoon onwards no possible course save defence was open to General Lambton. There was considerable anxiety about one company of Irish Fusiliers who were in a detached portion of the German trench, but they succeeded in getting back next morning, bringing with them not only their wounded but some prisoners.

Immediately to the right of the Fourth Division was the Twenty-ninth Division* from Gallipoli, which rivalled in its constancy and exceeded in its losses its comrades upon the left. The 86th Brigade and the 87th formed the first line, with the 88th in support.

[* Since the constituents of this famous regular Division have not been given in full (as has been done with their comrades in preceding volumes) they are here enumerated as they were on July 1, 1916:
86th Brigade. — 2nd Royal Fusiliers, 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, 16th Middlesex.
87th Brigade. — 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st South Wales Borderers, 1st Scottish Borderers, 1st Border Regiment.
88th Brigade. — 1st Essex, 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, Newfoundland Regiment.]

The van of the attack upon the right of the division was formed by the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Welsh Borderers, while the van upon the left was formed by the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. The other battalions of the brigades formed the supporting line, and two battalions of the 88th Brigade, the Essex and the Newfoundlanders, were also drawn into the fight, so that, as in the Fourth Division, only two battalions remained intact at the close, the nucleus upon which in each case a new division had to be formed.

Upon the explosion of the great mine already mentioned two platoons of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers with machine-guns and Stokes mortars rushed forward to seize the crater. They got the near lip, but the enemy were already in possession of the far side, and no farther advance could be made. At this point, and indeed at nearly all points down the line, the wire was found to have been very thoroughly cut by the artillery fire, but for some reason our own wire had not been cut to the same extent and was a serious obstacle to our own advance.

Parties of the leading regiments were speedily up to the German front-line trench, but their advance beyond it was delayed by the fact that the dug-outs were found to be full of lurking soldiers who had intended no doubt to rush out and attack the stormers in the rear, as in the case of the Forty-sixth and Fifty-sixth Divisions in the north, but who were discovered in time and had to fight for their lives. These men were cleared out upon the right, and the advance then made some progress, but on the left by 9 o’clock the 86th Brigade had been completely held up by a murderous machine-gun fire in front of Beaumont Hamel, a position which, as already explained, presented peculiar difficulties. The Essex and Newfoundland men of the 88th Brigade were ordered forward and charged with such splendid resolution that the advance was carried forward again, and the whole situation changed for the better. By 10:15 casualties had become so great, however, through the fire of flanking machine-guns, that it was clear that the attack could not possibly reach its objective. The huge crater left by the explosion of the Beaumont Hamel mine was held for hours as a redoubt, but it also was enfiladed by fire and became untenable. By half-past ten the action had resolved itself into a bombardment of the German front line once more, and the assault had definitely failed. There was an attempt to renew it, but when it was found that the 86th Brigade and the 87th Brigade were equally reduced in numbers, it was recognised that only a defensive line could be held. It is true that the Divisional General had the Worcesters and the Hants still in hand, and was prepared to attack with them, but a further loss might have imperilled the Divisional line, so no advance was allowed.

All the troops of the Twenty-ninth Division had lived up to their fame, but a special word should be said of the Newfoundlanders, who, in their first action, kept pace with the veterans beside them. This battalion of fishermen, lumbermen, and farmers proved once more the grand stuff which is bred over the sea — the stuff which Bernhardi dismissed in a contemptuous paragraph. “They attacked regardless of loss, moving forward in extended order, wave behind wave. It was a magnificent exhibition of disciplined courage.” Well might General Hunter -Weston say next day after visiting the survivors: “To hear men cheering as they did, after undergoing such an experience, and in the midst of such mud and rain, made one proud to have the command of such a battalion.” The losses of the Newfoundlanders were severe. Losses are always the index of the sorrow elsewhere, but when they fall so heavily upon a small community, where every man plays a vital part and knows his neighbour, they are particularly distressing. From Cape Race to the coast of Labrador there was pride and mourning over that day. The total losses of the division were heavy, and included Colonels Pierce and Ellis of the Inniskillings and Borderers.

It must have been with a heavy heart that General Hunter-Weston realised, with the approach of night, that each of his divisions had met with such losses that the renewal of the attack was impossible. He, his Divisional Commanders, his officers and his men had done both in their dispositions and in their subsequent actions everything which wise leaders and brave soldiers could possibly accomplish. If a criticism could be advanced it would be that the attack was urged with such determined valour that it would not take No until long after No was the inevitable answer. But grim persistence has won many a fight, and no leader who is worthy to lead can ever have an excess of it. They were up against the impossible, as were their companions to right and left. It is easy to recognise it now, but it could not be proved until it had been tested to the uttermost. Could other tactics, other equipment, other methods of guarding the soldiers have brought them across the fatal open levels? It may be so, and can again only be tried by testing. But this at least was proved for all time, that, given clear ground, unshaken troops, prepared positions, and ample artillery, no human fire and no human hardihood can ever hope to break such a defensive line. It should be added that here as elsewhere the British artillery, though less numerous than it became at a later date, was admirable both in its heavy and in its lighter pieces. Observers have recorded that under its hammer blows the German trenches kept momentarily changing their shape, while the barrage was as thick and accurate and the lifting as well-timed as could have been wished. There was no slackness anywhere, either in preparation or in performance, and nothing but the absolute impossibility of the task under existing conditions stood in the way of success.

III. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Tenth and Third Corps, July 1, 1916

Magnificent conduct of the Ulster Division — Local success but general failure — Advance of Thirty-second Division — Advance of Eighth Division — Advance of Thirty-fourth Division — The turning-point of the line

MORLAND'S Tenth Corps consisted of the Thirty-sixth, Forty- ninth, and Thirty-second Divisions. It lay between Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps upon the left and Pulteney's Third Corps upon the right. It covered a front from a mile north of Hamel to a mile north of Ovillers. At its northern end it was cut by the river Ancre, a sluggish canalised stream, running between two artificial dykes which the Germans periodically cut by their artillery fire and the British mended as best they might. This sector of attack, together with the one farther south which faced the Third Corps, presented peculiar difficulties to the assailants, as the ground sloped upward to the strong village of Thiepval with the ridge behind it, from which German guns could sweep the whole long glacis of approach. Nowhere were there more gallant efforts for a decision and nowhere were they more hopeless.

The division to the north of the Tenth Corps was the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division. This division was composed of magnificent material, for the blend of Scot and Celt to be found in the North of Ireland produces a soldier who combines the fire of the one with the solidity of the other. These qualities have been brought to a finer temper by the atmosphere of opposition in which they have lived, and the difficult economical circumstances which they have overcome in so remarkable a way. Long ago in unhappy civil strife they had shown their martial qualities, and now upon a nobler and wider stage they were destined to confirm them. It might well seem invidious to give the palm to any one of the bands of heroes who shed their blood like water on the slopes of Picardy, but at least, all soldiers would agree that among them all there was not one which could at its highest claim more than equality of achievement that day with the men of Ulster.

The objective of this division was the German position from Beaucourt-sur-Ancre on the north to the northern edge of Thiepval. When the signal was given the two leading brigades, the 108th and the 107th, came away at a deliberate pace which quickened into the rush of a released torrent, and went roaring over the German trenches. “They were like bloodhounds off the leash.” Like every one else they were horribly scourged by shrapnel and machine-fire as they rushed across, but whether it was that some curve in the ground favoured part of their line, or whatever the cause, they suffered less than the other divisions, and struck on to the German front line with their full shattering momentum, going through it as though it were paper. The 108th Brigade, Consisting of the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the 11th, 12th, and 13th Irish Rifles, was on the left. The Two of these, the Fusiliers and one of the Irish Rifle battalions, were on the north side of the Ancre, and were acting rather with the Twenty-ninth Division upon their left than with their own comrades on the right. This detachment fought all day side by side with the regulars, made their way at one time right up to Beaucourt Station, and had finally to retire to their own trenches together with the rest of the line north of the Ancre. Next morning the survivors crossed the Ancre, and from then onwards the Eighth Corps extended so as to take over this ground.

South of the Ancre the two remaining battalions of the 108th Brigade, and the whole of the 107th Brigade, consisting of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 15th Irish Rifles, advanced upon a front of 3000 yards. The men had lost very heavily in the assembly trenches, and two companies of the 10th Irish Rifles had dwindled to two platoons before ever they got clear of the shattered wood in which they gathered. None the less, the fire and fury of their onset was terrific and sustained. “The place was covered with smoke and the explosion of heavy shells,” says one who saw the scene from a front observation post. “I felt that no attack was possible, when suddenly out of the clouds I saw men advancing as if on parade, quite slowly. It seemed impossible, and yet they went on, stormed at on the left by high explosive and shrapnel, and on the right by enfilade machine-gun fire. Suddenly they charged, and when I could next see through the clouds on the slope (less than a mile away) I saw that they had taken the front trench, and in another minute the trench behind was taken, as our fellows shouting, ‘No surrender!’ got through — God knows how! As they advanced the fire of the guns became more and more enfilade, but nothing could stop their steady progress.

The long line of Irish Riflemen had rolled over every obstacle, and although their dead and wounded lay thick behind them they still stormed forwards with the same fury with which they started. Bunching up into platoons in artillery formation they pushed on and carried the third line. Ahead of them, across a considerable interval, was a fourth line, with a large redoubt upon the flank. They steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then dashing onwards once again they captured both the fourth line and the redoubt. So far forward were they now that they had reached regions north of Thiepval which were never trodden by a British foot again until three months of constant fighting had cleared a way to them. It was the great Schwaben Redoubt which was now before them. The reserve brigade, the 109th, consisting of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Inniskilling Fusiliers, with the 14th Irish Rifles, had dashed forward at 10.40, leaving only the pioneer battalion, the 16th Irish Rifles, to guard the trenches. With the additional weight of the survivors of this reinforcing line the fringe of stormers, for they were now a fringe and nothing more, again rushed forward and threw themselves into the Schwaben trenches. This was their limit, and for most of them their grave. They had no further supports, no ammunition could reach them, and they were embedded in the depths of the German line at a point far deeper than any unit upon the left of the line had attained. The village of Thiepval commanded them from their right rear. Some remained in little groups, huddling in some coign of vantage, and fighting to the last cartridge, absolutely refusing to take one step to the rear. To the Germans they were as dangerous as so many cornered wolves. Others fell back in orderly fashion, but not an inch farther than was needful, for they held on all day to the frontage taken by them. The first two lines were kept in their fierce grip till nightfall of the next day, when they handed them over to the relieving division.

In this splendid deed of arms the Thirty-sixth Division left half its number upon the battlefield. The instances of gallantry were innumerable, and so equally distributed that their General, when asked to name a special battalion, could only answer that the whole twelve had done equally well. Had the divisions to right and left been able to get as far, the whole gain would have been permanent. As it was, 540 prisoners were brought in, and few were lost save the wounded, chief of whom was Colonel Craig, who directed the movements of his men long after he was unable to direct his own. Colonel Bernard of the 10th Rifles, Captain Davidson, who worked his machine-gun after his leg was shattered, Captain Gaffikin, who died while leading his company with an orange handkerchief waving in his hand, are but a few of the outstanding names. The pressure upon the different brigades is indicated by the losses in officers of the 107th, the 108th, and the 109th.

A very detailed account would be necessary to bring home to the reader the full gallantry of this deed of arms. Experienced soldiers who saw it were moved to the limit of human speech. “I wish I had been born an Ulsterman,” cried one of them. “But I am proud to have been associated with these wonderful men.” To have penetrated all alone for two miles into the German line, and to withdraw from such a salient in military order, holding fast to all that could be retained, was indeed a great feat for any troops to have performed. The requiem for their fallen was best expressed by one of the survivors, who wrote that “they died for the cause of Liberty, Honour, and Freedom, for the Old Flag, the emblem of Britain, died for Ireland, died for Ulster!”

The Thirty-second Division was on the immediate right of the men of Ulster. Their advance was carried out with the 96th Brigade on the left, the 97th upon the right, and the 14th in support. The reader may be warned that from this time onwards he will often find, as in this case, that old brigades have been added to new formations, so that the former simplicity of numbering is often disturbed. The storming lines went forward in each case with two battalions abreast in front and two in succession in support. The front line of attack taken from the north, or left, consisted of the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 16th Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 16th and 17th Highland Light Infantry. Of these four battalions the 16th Northumberland Fusiliers came under very heavy fire, and were unable to press their attack home. On the right the Highlanders had crawled up to within a hundred yards of the Leipzig salient and were into it with a rush the moment that the barrage lifted. The 15th Lancashire Fusiliers upon the left made a particularly brilliant advance. The right company was held up in front of Thiepval village, but the left company swept on with the Thirty-sixth Division, keeping pace with their magnificent advance. It appears to have reached the east end of Thiepval, but there it was buried deeply in the enemy’s position and was never heard of again. The supporting battalions of the 96th Brigade, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, tried hard to regain touch with their lost comrades, but in vain. These various gallant bodies who, at different points of our line, pushed forward into impossible positions, were no doubt for the greater part killed or wounded, but from among them came the 850 prisoners whom the Germans claimed to have taken on the northern part of the line on that day. The left of the divisional line was so weakened by these losses that they were compelled to withdraw to their own front trenches.

On the right, however, the Highlanders were able to hold on to a part of the Leipzig salient. The losses, however, upon this flank had been very heavy, not only in the front wave, but among the 1st Dorsets and the 11th Borders as they came out from a wood in support. Coming under a concentrated fire of machine-guns, these two battalions suffered heavily. Colonel Machell, gallantly leading his Borders, was shot dead, his adjutant. Lieutenant Gordon, was badly wounded as he stooped over his body, Major Diggle was wounded, and the greater number of the officers were on the ground. Colonel Machell, it may be remarked, was a high civil official of the Egyptian Government, Under-Secretary for the Interior, whose patriotism had led him to join the New Armies and thus to meet his death upon the field of battle. The 1st Dorsets lost nearly as heavily as the men of the Border; their leader. Major Shute, was disabled, and their ranks thrown into temporary confusion. They were splendidly rallied, however, by the adjutant, who led them on and succeeded with the survivors in reaching the Leipzig Redoubt. Colonel Laidlaw, of the 16th Highland Light Infantry, of the had also been wounded, the third commanding officer killed or injured on this wing of the attack.

There had been no flinching anywhere, and the military virtue shown had been of the highest possible quality; but the losses from the machine-guns and from the barrage were so heavy that they deprived the attack of the weight and momentum necessary to win their way through the enemy’s position. Under the desperate circumstances, it might well be considered a remarkable result that a stretch of the Leipzig Redoubt should be won and permanently held by the Highlanders, especially by the 17th Highland Light Infantry. The sappers had prepared a Russian sap running up to the enemy line, and this was invaluable as a communication trench. On the 2nd and 3rd the enemy endeavoured to turn out the intruders, but the 2nd Manchesters and 15th Highland Light Infantry not only held their ground, but enlarged it. On the night of the 3rd the division was relieved by the Twenty-fifth Division and withdrew to refit after its tragic but splendid exertions.

Out of the novel conditions of what may be called Bloch warfare certain rules and axioms are slowly evolving. That it is impossible without artificial protection to attack over the open against an unshaken enemy provided with machine-guns is the most certain. But there is another which might be formulated thus: If there are sharp salients in the enemy line, either these salients must be taken first or the attack must be made out of range of them, otherwise their guns must flank the whole advance. Very many examples might be quoted where the disregard of this axiom has brought disaster to either side. A conspicuous case would be that of the Third Corps now to be described, where the sinister salient of Thiepval protruded to the north, and a smaller but very efficient one to the south, so that the whole advance was conducted under the fire of two lines of guns which raked it from end to end. In addition the opposing infantry included a division of the Prussian Guard. In the whole long position there would appear to be no sector where there was less prospect of success, and yet there was no sector where it was more essential to hold the enemy fast, since victory might await us to the immediate south.

The Third Corps, under General Pulteney, occupied the front immediately to the east of Albert. This large town was almost exactly in the centre of its rear, and the important road from Albert to Bapaume bisected the British position. Ovillers to the north, within the German fines, and Bécourt to the south, in the British, marked roughly the two ends of the sector. It was a comparatively narrow stretch, so that only two divisions were in the firing fine, and one in reserve. These were respectively the Eighth Regular Division to the north, the Thirty-fourth of the New Army to the south, and the Nineteenth, also of the New Army, in support.

Had the Thirty-second Division succeeded in holding its grip upon Thiepval upon the north, there might have been some chance of success, but as it was, the machine-guns from that quarter shaved the whole of No Man’s Land as a mower may shave a lawn, and after the first rush, which carried the brave fellows of the Eighth Division over the trenches, it proved to be absolutely impossible to send them either supports or supplies. The main body of this magnificent division disappeared into the smoke and haze of the battle, and their comrades in the trenches waited with aching hearts, their eyes fixed upon their front where the roar of battle rose from the other side of the pelting sleet of bullets. All day they waited, dashing out occasionally and being beaten back with ever-dwindling numbers. After dusk, they searched the shell-holes and brought in some 400 wounded. A few bewildered men came staggering in during the night, half-delirious with fatigue and strain, and unable themselves to say how they had got back across the enemy’s front line from the depths to which they had penetrated.

This tragic but heroic attack in which the whole force who went forward fought literally to the death, was carried out in the following order:

On the right was the 23rd Brigade; in the centre the 25th; and on the left the 70th. The 23rd and 25th were the old hard-working units of Neuve Chapelle and many another fray. The 70th was a particularly fine brigade of the New Army. This division had up to the last moment been without a pioneer battalion, but the infantry had dug themselves particularly good assembly and communication trenches, which helped them much upon the day of battle. They had also, under the direction of the Commander of Divisional sappers, run two covered ways up to the enemy’s trenches which might have been a vital factor in the day’s work, had it not been that the stormers pushed on, leaving it to others to secure their gains. The result was that the advancing infantry passed rather than occupied the front trenches, the barrage cut off supports, the enemy emerged from their dug-outs, and the line still remained under their control, forbidding the use or even the disclosure of the covered ways, since men could not emerge in single file in an enemy trench.

Following the plan of describing operations always from the north, we will first picture from such reliable material as is available the attack of the 70th Brigade, which contained some of the finest North-country stuff that ever fought the battles of the country. This brigade was separated on the north by a clear space of about 300 yards from the Highland Light Infantry of the 97th Brigade, who formed the extreme right of the Thirty-second Division. The 8th York and Lancaster was the flank battalion, with the 8th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon its right. The 9th York and Lancaster were behind their comrades, and the 11th Sherwood Foresters behind the Light Infantry.

As it is impossible to give with any fulness the story of any one regiment, and as each may be taken as typical of the others, we may follow the front flank battalion on its advance. This, the 8th York and Lancaster, consisted almost entirely of miners, a class of men who have furnished grand military material to the New Armies. This unit came chiefly from the Rotherham district. The frontage of the battalion was 750 yards.

As the hour of attack approached, the enemy’s counter-bombardment became so violent that there was the utmost difficulty in getting the men into the front-line trenches. Many were killed and even buried before the advance had begun. When the whistles blew the stormers went forward in four waves with 50 yards between, the supporting battalions following instantly. The machine-guns were sweeping the ground and about 350 yards had to be covered between the lines. Officers and men went down in heaps under the enfilade fire from four lines of guns, one behind the other, in the Thiepval district. The approach was over a billiard-table glacis with no cover of any kind. The ranks kept formation and trudged steadily forward, throwing themselves headlong into the front German trenches. There they steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then advancing once more sprang down into the second German line which was strongly held. Colonel Maddison had been shot down early in the attack. Captain Dawson, the adjutant, had been wounded, but staggered on with the men until he was killed at the second line of trenches. “Come on, boys! let’s get at ‘em and clear ‘em out!” were his last words. On this second line the battalion, together with its support, beat itself to pieces. A few survivors unable to get back were taken prisoners, and a German report has stated that they were very proud and defiant when marched away. At night a number of wounded were carried in along the whole divisional front from No Man’s Land, but many lives were lost in the gallant work, and many of the wounded also lost their lives in trying to crawl back, for the Germans turned their machine-guns during the daytime upon everything that moved in front of their lines.

To show how uniform was the experience, one may quote the doings of a battalion of the 23rd Brigade. This brigade was on the right of the Eighth Division line, and the 2nd Middlesex, the battalion in question, formed the right battalion joining on with the Tyneside Scottish of the Thirty-fourth Division to the south. Upon its left was the 2nd Devons. The supporting troops, two companies of the 2nd West Yorkshires and the 2nd Scottish Rifles, seem to have been held back when it was seen how fatal was the advance, and so in part escaped from the catastrophe. The Middlesex advanced almost opposite to La Boiselle. There was a slight dip in the ground to the immediate front which formed a partial protection from the machine-guns, so that although the losses were very heavy, about 300 men with six Lewis guns made good their footing in the German front-line trench. Their gallant commander was wounded twice, but still kept at their head while they swept onwards to the second line. It was stuffed with Germans, but the handful of British stormers flung themselves in among them and cleared a standing place in the trench. The German guns, however, had the exact range, and four out of the six Lewis guns were blown into the air. Finally, only five men and a sergeant were left unwounded in this trench. This handful made its way back. One hundred and thirty of the Middlesex men seem to have got through or round on to the Pozières road, but their fate was never cleared up. Finally, only 30 men of this grand battalion answered the roll-call that night.

The space between the two attacks described from the point of view of the two wing battalions of the division was occupied by the 25th Brigade, whose advance and losses were exactly similar to those which have been narrated. The 2nd Lincolns and 2nd Berkshires were the leading battalions, and their devotion in attempting the impossible was as great as that of their comrades to right and left.

Both regiments suffered heavily, and it is probable that the Berkshires went deeper than any other. The 1st Irish Rifles had occupied the trenches for six days in dreadful weather, and had suffered heavily from the retaliatory bombardment of the Germans. They were therefore held in reserve, but none the less made repeated efforts and with great loss to cross the barrage and help their comrades, for which they afterwards received a special message of thanks from the Divisional Commander.

Up to this point the writer has been faced by the painful and monotonous task of one long record of failure from Gommecourt in the north to La Boiselle in the south. It cannot be doubted that we had over-estimated the effects of our bombardment, and that the German guns were intact to a degree which was unexpected. Our one consolation must be that the German reserves were held in their position, and that improved prospects were assured for the remainder of the British line and for the whole of the French line. Had the front of the battle covered only the region which has been treated up to now, the episode would have been a tragic one in British military history. Thousands of men had fallen, nor could it be truthfully said that anything of permanence had been achieved. Next day the remains of the Eighth Division were withdrawn, the 70th Brigade was restored to the Twenty-third Division, to which it rightfully belonged, and the Twelfth Division came forward to fill the gap in the line, helped by the gunners and sappers of the Eighth, who remained at their posts until July 4.

On the right of the Eighth Division was the Thirty-fourth, a unit which consisted of one mixed The English and Scotch Brigade; while the other two were raised respectively from the Tyneside Irish and from the Tyneside Scots, hardy and martial material from the coal pits and foundries of the North. They attacked upon the front between the Albert-Bapaume road on the north and the village of Bécourt on the south. The idea was to storm La Boiselle village, and to push the attack home both north and south of it upon Contalmaison, which lay behind it. Immediately before the assault two great mines were blown, one of which, containing the unprecedented amount of 60,000 lbs. of gun-cotton, threw hundreds of tons of chalk into the air. Within a few minutes of the explosion the Thirty-fourth Division were out of their trenches and advancing in perfect order upon the German trenches. The 101st Brigade, consisting of the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, the 10th Lincolns, and 11th Suffolks, were on the right, the Tyneside Scots upon the left, and the Tyneside Irish in support behind the right brigade. In the immediate rear lay the Nineteenth Division with instructions to hold and consolidate the ground gained.

In no part of the line was the advance more gallant, and it marks the point at which unalloyed failure began first to change to partial success, ripening into complete victory in the southern section. Some slight cover seems to have helped the troops for the first few hundred yards, and it would appear also that though the small-arm fire was very severe, the actual shell-fire was not so heavy as that which devastated the divisions in the north. None the less, the obstacles were sufficient to test to the highest any troops in the world, and they were gloriously surmounted by men, none of whom had been in action before.

“I, their commander,” wrote the Divisional General, “will never forget their advance through the German curtain of fire. It was simply wonderful, and they behaved like veterans.” The scream of the war-pipes, playing “The Campbells are coming,” warmed the blood of the soldiers.

Upon the left, the Tyneside Scots penetrated two lines of trenches and found themselves to the north of the village of La Boiselle, where further progress was made impossible by a murderous fire from front and flank. Of the four battalions of the 101st Brigade, the two English units were nearly opposite the village, and though they advanced with great resolution, they were unable to get a permanent lodgment. The two Royal Scots battalions upon the flank got splendidly forward, and some of them made their way deeper into the German line than any organised body of troops, save only the Ulster men, had succeeded in doing, getting even as far as the outskirts of Contalmaison. The valiant leader of the advanced party of the 15th Royal Scots was wounded, but continued to encourage his men and to try to consolidate his desperate position, which was nearly a mile within the German lines. He was again severely wounded, and Lieutenant Hole was killed, upon which the only remaining officer fell back to a point some hundreds of yards westward, called Round Wood or Round Alley. Here the Scots stuck fast, and nothing could budge them. Germans were in front of them, were in La Boiselle upon their left rear, and were behind them in the trenches, which led from the village. By all the laws of war, the detachment was destroyed; but in practice the Germans found that they could not achieve it. A small reinforcement of the 27th Northumberland Fusiliers (from the 103rd of the Brigade), under an experienced soldier, had joined them, and their situation was less forlorn because they were in slight touch with the skirts of the 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, who had also, as will presently be shown, won a very forward position. By means of this division communication was restored with the isolated detachment, and the colonel of the 16th Royal Scots, a very well-known volunteer officer of Edinburgh, succeeded in reaching his men. His advent gave them fresh spirit, and under his leadership they proceeded next morning not only to hold the position, but to enlarge it considerably, sending bombers down every sap and endeavouring to give the impression of great numbers. Two companies of the East Lancashire Regiment from the Nineteenth Division made their way forward, and joined with effect in these attacks. This small body of men held their own until the afternoon of July 3, when the advance of the Nineteenth Division upon La Boiselle enabled them to be relieved. It was time, for the water was exhausted and munitions were running low. It was a glad moment when, with their numerous German captives, they joined up with their cheering comrades. It should be said that in this fine feat of arms a small party of the 11th Suffolks played a valiant part. General Pulteney issued a special order thanking these troops for their stout defence, and the matter was in truth of wider importance than any local issue, for it had the effect of screening the left flank of the Twenty-first Division, enabling them to make good their hold upon Crucifix Trench and the Sunken Road, as will now be told.

Before leaving the Thirty-fourth Division it should be said that although La Boiselle remained untaken, the Tyneside Scots and Irish carried a number of trenches and returned with many prisoners. It has been the universal experience of our soldiers that the Germans, though excellent with their guns, and very handy with their bombs, are wanting in that spice of devilry called for in bayonet work — a quality which their ally the Turk possesses to a marked degree. In this instance, as in many others, when the Tyneside men swept roaring into the trenches the Germans either fled or threw up their hands. The condition of the prisoners was unexpectedly good. “They have new uniforms, new brown boots, leggings, and are as fat as butter,” said one spectator, which is at great variance with descriptions from other parts of the line.

We have now completed our survey of that long stretch of line in which our gallant advance was broken against an equally gallant resistance. The account has necessarily had to concern itself with incessant details of units and orders of battle, since these are the very essence of such an account, and without them it might read, as contemporary descriptions did read, like some vague combat in the moon. But, casting such details aside, the reader can now glance up that long line and see the wreckage of that heroic disaster — the greatest and also the most glorious that ever befell our arms.

IV. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Attack of the Fifteenth and Thirteenth Corps, July 1, 1916

The advance of the Twenty-first Division — Of the 64th Brigade — First permanent gains — 50th Brigade at Fricourt — Advance of Seventh Division — Capture of Mametz — Fine work by Eighteenth Division — Capture of Montauban by the Thirtieth Division — General view of the battle — Its decisive importance

IMMEDIATELY to the south of Pulteney’s Third Corps, and extending from Bécourt in the north to a point opposite Fricourt village, lay Horne’s Fifteenth Corps. The general task of this Corps was to attack Mametz on the right, contain Fricourt in the centre, and attack between there and La Boiselle towards Mametz Wood. It consisted of the Twenty-first, the Seventh, and the Seventeenth Divisions. Of these, the most northerly was the Twenty-first, that fine North-country division which had so terrible an ordeal when it came up in support upon the second day of Loos. Those who held that in spite of defeat its conduct upon that occasion was soldierly, were borne out by its achievement on the Somme, where it made a lodgment in the enemy’s line upon the first day, and did good service at later stages of the battle. Let us now turn our attention to its advance. It may first be mentioned that the units were the same as those enumerated in the description of Loos, save that in each brigade one regular battalion had been substituted. Thus the 1st Lincolns, 4th Middlesex, and 1st East Yorks took the place of the 8th East Yorks, 12th West Yorks, and 14th Durhams respectively. The 50th Brigade of the Seventeenth Division was attached to the Twenty-first Division for the purpose of the attack, and will be included with it in this summary of the operations. The rest of the Seventeenth Division was in reserve.

The attack was on a three-brigade front, the 64th Brigade upon the north, just south of La Boiselle, and in close touch with the Thirty-fourth Division. To the right of the 64th was the 63rd Brigade, and to the right of that the 50th, which advanced straight upon Fricourt. The 62nd Brigade was in reserve. It will be best to deal with the attack of the 64th Brigade with some detail, as its exploits had a very direct bearing upon the issue of the battle.

This brigade advanced upon the signal with the 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the left in touch with the Royal Scots of the 101st Brigade. On their right was their 9th namesake battalion. Behind them in immediate support were the 1st East Yorks (left) and 15th Durhams (right). The advance was greatly helped by the formation of a Russian sap between the lines on which the front companies could assemble. It was found, however, upon the men advancing that the fire was so severe that they could only get forward by crawling from hole to hole, with the result that the barrage lifted before they could reach, the front trenches, and the Germans were able to mount the parapet and slate them with rifle-fire. Colonel Lynch of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry was killed by a shell between trenches, as were all four captains, but the men stuck to their work and finally the leading battalions swept over the German lines, which had been greatly disorganised by the artillery, and they killed or captured the occupants with no very severe resistance. Two fixed points lay in front of the brigade, which were part of the definite objectives of the division. The first was a sunken road 1100 yards from the British front, the second was a trench 400 yards farther, on which, by the irony of Fate, a large wayside crucifix looked down, so that it was called Crucifix Trench. Beyond these on the left front were several shattered woods. Shelter Wood and Birch-tree Wood, which gave the enemy good cover, and to the right was a large ruined building, Fricourt Farm, which raked the advance with its snipers and machine-guns.

On passing the front German line the successive British waves lost their formation and clubbed together, so that a long loose line of Yorkshire and Durham men scrambled onwards into, out of and over the successive impediments, beating down all resistance as they went. When the fire became too hot, the men crawled forwards upon their stomachs or made short sharp rushes from one shell-hole to another, but the advance was steady and unbroken. The smoke from the shells was as dense as a Scotch mist. Every now and then through the haze the flashes of a machine-gun would be spied and possibly the vague figures of the German gunners as they swept it across in their deadly traverse, but a rush of furious infantry put each in turn out of action. The evidence seems to be conclusive that some at least of these gunners were found to be chained to their guns, which may well have happened at their own request, as a visible proof that they would never desert their post. They fired up to the last instant, and naturally they received no quarter from the stormers. Now and again the ragged line of men would stumble suddenly upon a section of proper trench, would spring down into it, clear up the occupants, and then sit in flushed, hard-breathing groups until a whistle from the officer and a cheer from their comrades would call them on once more.

In this sector there appears, however, to have been a systematic, if superficial, examination of the dug-outs before a trench was passed. One does not hear of those surprise attacks from the rear which were so common and so fatal to the north. The examination usually took the form of a sharp summons at the mouth of the burrow, quickly followed — if there were no response — by a Mills bomb. Then, as often as not, there would crawl out of the black orifice eight or ten terrified and bleeding men, who would join the numerous small convoys trailing backwards to the rear. These prisoners were nearly all from the 110th and 111th Reserve Bavarian Regiments, and the alacrity with which they made for the rear with their hands above their heads, formed the only comic touch in a tragic day. One made a grab for a rifle. “He lived about five seconds,” says the narrator. “They were thin, unshaven, and terrified,” says an officer, talking of the particular batch he handled. “Most had dark hair — a very different type from the Prussians.”

Having overrun the German trenches, the infantry were now faced with a considerable stretch of open which lay between them and the Sunken Road, leading from Fricourt to Contalmaison. Many were hit upon this perilous passage. A subsidiary line of German trenches lay in front of this road, and into this the British tumbled. The colonel of the 15th Durhams was the senior officer who had got up, and he took command at this point, rallying the weary men of all four battalions for a fresh advance. A few of the Royal Scots of the Thirty-fourth Division were found already in possession, the fringe of that body who have previously been described as making so invaluable a stand at Round Wood.

At this point the 64th Brigade was found to be some distance in front of the main body of the Thirty-fourth Division on the left, and of their comrades on the right, so that they could get no farther for the moment without their flanks being badly exposed. In front through the haze they could dimly see the Crucifix which was their ultimate objective. The men had to cower low, for the bullets were coming in a continuous stream from Fricourt Farm on the right and from the woods on the left. The Sunken Road was ten or twelve feet deep at the spot, and though it was exposed at the sides, by rapid digging the men got some cover, though many dropped before they could make a shelter. Here the survivors of the advance waited for some hours, spending some of the time in ransacking the enormous thirty-foot deep dug-outs which the Germans had excavated at certain points along the side of the road. Into these the wounded were conveyed, and refreshed by the good things of life, from Seltzer-water to gold-tipped cigarettes, which were found within.

In the afternoon the General Officer Commanding had come up as far as the Sunken Road, and had examined the position for himself. The 63rd Brigade was now well forward upon the right and the advance could be resumed. It was pushed swiftly onwards and Crucifix Trench was occupied, nearly a mile from the British front line. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshires, though wounded by shrapnel, seems to have been the first to lead a party into this advanced trench, but soon it was strongly occupied. The pressing need was to consolidate it, for it was swept by gusts of fire from both flanks. Another lieutenant of the Yorkshires, also a wounded man, took over the direction, and the men, with very little cover, worked splendidly to strengthen the position. Their numbers were so reduced that a counter-attack would have been most serious, but the splendid support given by the artillery held the German infantry at a distance. A few of the British tried to advance upon Shelter Wood, but the machine-guns were too active and they had to fall back or lie in shell-holes until after dark, only seventeen out of sixty getting back.

A captain of the 10th Yorkshires took over the advanced command and sent back to the colonel of the Durhams, who had meantime been wounded at the Sunken Road, to ask for instructions. The answer was to hold on and that help was at hand. This help was in the form of the 62nd Reserve Brigade, the leading battalions of which, the 1st Lincolns and 10th Yorkshire Regiment, came swinging splendidly across the open and flung themselves into Crucifix Trench. From that time the maintenance of the ground was assured. The men of the 64th Brigade who had done so finely were drawn back into the Sunken Road, having fully secured their objective. One cannot but marvel here, as so often elsewhere, at the fine work done by young subalterns when the senior officers have been disabled. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry found himself in command of the whole battalion at the most critical moment of the engagement, and on leaving could only hand it over to a brother subaltern, who carried on with equal courage and ability. The brigade was drawn back to the German first line, where it lay for forty-eight hours, and finally acted as reserve brigade to the successful advance undertaken by the 62nd Brigade, by which Shelter Wood was captured on July 3.

Such, in some detail, were the adventures of the 64th Brigade, which may be taken as parallel to those of the 63rd upon the right, who were faced by much the same obstacles, having the Sunken Road ahead and the Fricourt houses upon their right. The 8th Somersets were on the left in touch with the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry, and supported by the 8th Lincolns. On the right were the 4th Middlesex and the 10th York and Lancasters. They were able to get well up to Fricourt Farm upon the left of the village, but the ground was unfavourable and they never got as far forward as their comrades on the left. Of the German resistance on this front, it can be said that it was worthy of the reputation which the Bavarians have won in the War. The men were of splendid physique and full of courage. They fought their machine-guns to the last. All was ready for a vigorous advance next morning. The artillery of the Twenty-first Division, which has won a name for exceptional efficiency, was up nearly level with the infantry at 10 P.M. that night, a road having been laid in that time from the original gun position to a point half a mile inside the German front line.

On the immediate right of the 63rd Brigade, in front of Fricourt, was the 50th Brigade (Glasgow), to which was assigned the task of attacking the village while the Twenty-first Division got part of it upon the north. The brigade advanced gallantly, the front line consisting of two fine Yorkshire battalions, the 10th West Yorks and the 7th East Yorks, with part of the 7th Yorkshires. The attack reached and partly occupied the front trenches, but the fire and the losses were both very heavy, the 10th West Yorkshires being specially hard hit. The survivors behaved with great gallantry, and some of them held on all day, though surrounded by enemies. In the afternoon a second advance was made by Yorkshires and East Yorkshires, with 6th Dorsets in support, but again the losses were heavy and no solid foothold could be got in the village. When dusk fell some of the troops who had held their own all day were able to get back to the British trenches bringing prisoners with them. A notable example is that of a lieutenant of the West Yorks, who managed to stagger back with three wounds upon him and three Germans in front of him. The 51st Brigade was brought up in the evening to continue the assault, but with the morning of the 2nd it was found that the work had been done, and that the advance upon both flanks had caused the evacuation of the village.

The line of trenches takes a very peculiar turn just south of Fricourt, which is shown in the diagram of the battle, so that the attack of the Seventh Division, which was the next in the line, was from almost due south, whilst all the others had been from due west. The project was that a holding attack to engage the defenders should be made upon Mametz, whilst the remaining divisions in the line, the Seventh of the Fifteenth Corps, with the Eighteenth and Thirtieth of the Thirteenth Corps, should advance upon the line Mametz-Montauban. Their success would obviously make the position both of Fricourt and of Mametz impossible, the more so if the Twenty-first Division could maintain its position at the Sunken Road to the north of Fricourt. This was the calculation, and it worked to perfection, so that both these villages fell eventually into our hands with a minimum loss of life to the assailants. Every honour is due to the leaders who devised and to the soldiers who carried out the scheme, but it should at the same time be understood that in the case of these southern divisions, and also of the French Army of General Foch upon the right, they were attacking a portion of the line which was far less organised, and manned by very inferior troops to those in the north. All this section of attack seems to have been a complete surprise to the Germans.

The famous Seventh Division was now commanded by one of the three Brigadiers who had led it during its heroic days at Ypres. Its units, however, had changed considerably, and the 91st Brigade had taken the place of the 21st. This Brigade, consisting partly of Manchester battalions and partly of old units of the Seventh Division (2nd Queen’s Surrey, 1st South Staffords, 21st and 22nd Manchesters), attacked upon the right, while the 20th Brigade advanced upon the left, having the 2nd Gordons and 9th Devons in the van, with the 8th Devons and 2nd Borders in support. The front trenches were overrun without much difficulty. The order of battle was the 22nd Manchesters upon the right with the 1st South Staffords in close support. In the centre were the 2nd Gordons and upon their left the 9th Devons. The right got forward with comparatively small losses and overran the front German line. The Gordons had their left company held up by uncut wire, but got forward none the less with considerable losses. The 9th Devons were the most exposed and suffered very severely, but in spite of a casualty list which included half the officers and men, they never winced or wavered for an instant, showing what had been often shown before, that the spirit of old days still lives in the country of Drake and of Raleigh. The survivors seized and held Tirpitz Trench. The 2nd Borders had also seized Danube Support, and the whole front line was in British hands.

The 91st Brigade were now closing in upon the right of Mametz village and had entered Danzig Alley, from which they were for a time driven by a brisk counter-attack. The 1st South Staffords had won their way into the outskirts of Mametz, but the losses were heavy, and half of the 21st Manchesters came racing up to reinforce. At one o’clock the Danzig Alley had again been occupied by the Manchesters. Half the 2nd Warwicks were sent up to reinforce the Gordons and the line of infantry dashed forward upon the village, 600 of the enemy throwing up their hands in front of them. The 20th Manchesters also advanced, losing heavily by the fire from Fricourt, but pushing on as far as the Sunken Road on the extreme left of the advance. There is a tangle of trenches at this point, the chief of which is the Rectangle, but with the aid of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers they were all cleared and the flank of the Division made good, and consolidated, since it had advanced farther than the troops to the left. In the morning however, when it was found that Fricourt had been evacuated, the whole division was able to get forward and by July 3 had occupied Bottom Wood, while the 2nd Royal Irish had actually penetrated Mametz Wood, taking 2 guns and 50 prisoners. Some days later, Mametz Wood had become a different proposition, but the general orders at the time were that it should not be seriously attacked. Altogether in these Mametz operations the Seventh Division took 1500 prisoners, seven field-guns, and much booty of different kinds.

We have now recorded in succession the repulse of the Seventh Corps at Gommecourt, that of the Eighth Corps at Serre and Beaumont Hamel, and that of the Tenth Corps at Thiepval. The record of heroic disaster was then alleviated by the partial success of the Third Corps at La Boiselle, the considerable success of the Fifteenth Corps at Mametz, and now by the complete success of the Thirteenth Corps at Montauban. South of this point along the whole French line the victory was never in doubt. These latter operations do not come within the direct scope of this narrative, though some short account must be given of them later, in order to co-ordinate the results of the two wings of the Allied Armies.

The Thirteenth Corps was commanded by General Congreve, who, it will be remembered, gained his V.C. in the affair of the guns where young Roberts met his death at Colenso. It consisted of the Eighteenth, the Thirtieth, and the Ninth Divisions of the New Army. Of these the Eighteenth was on the left in touch with the victorious Seventh, the Thirtieth was on the right in touch with the French, and the Ninth, the Scottish Division which had done such great work at Loos, was in reserve.

The Eighteenth Division, which had done no serious fighting before, established a remarkable record for good service during the whole course of the Somme battle, into which it was thrust again and again, never without leaving its mark. It was entirely an English division. Some complex and successful trench-digging had been done on this part of the front. Eight covered saps had been driven forward and reached a point within twenty yards of the German trenches without their knowledge. Upon the advance being ordered the ends of these were opened up, machine-guns and flame-throwers were thrust through, and the saps behind were quickly unroofed and turned into communication trenches. It was a variant of the device adopted in the Eighth Division, and was superior to it in that its success did not depend upon the actual capture of the trench.

The front of the attack was about 2500 yards, and it was carried out by three brigades abreast, each covering about 700 yards. Each brigade had two battalions in front, one in support and one in reserve. Each was also allotted its own particular artillery apart from the general divisional artillery. There are many good arguments for such a formation of divisional attack, as compared with the two-brigades-in-front and one-in-the-rear formation. Upon this occasion, at any rate, it worked very smoothly. The objectives were from the immediate western end of Montauban upon the right, along Montauban Alley to a point east of Mametz where they should touch the right units of the Seventh Division.

Of the three brigades the 55th was on the right, the 53rd in the centre, and the 54th on the left. In accordance with the general scheme of description we will begin with the latter.

The 54th Brigade had the 7th Bedford on the right, the 11th Royal Fusiliers on the left, the 6th Northants in support, and the 12th Middlesex in reserve. As they rushed forward they faced a feeble barrage, but a heavy machine-gun fire. It was found, however, here, and along the whole divisional front, that the German wire was utterly destroyed, thanks largely to the work of the trench mortars which had supplanted field-guns for this particular purpose. The first trenches were taken without a pause, and parties remained behind to clear out the dug-outs.

“Cowering in the trench,” says one of the stormers, “clad in the pale grey uniforms we had longed for twelve months to see, unarmed and minus equipment, with fear written on their faces, were a few of those valiant warriors of the Kaiser whose prowess we were out to dispute. Here let me say that the exact moment selected for our attack had taken the Huns by surprise. This view was subsequently confirmed by prisoners, who said that they had expected us earlier in the day and had since stood down.” This idea of a surprise only refers of course to the front trench. Soon the fighting grew very severe.

The first serious check was in front of a strong point called the Pommiers Redoubt. The wire here had been invisible from long grass so that its presence was a surprise. Again and again the machine-guns swept away the leading files of the attack. The redoubt could be outflanked, however, and an officer of the Fusiliers brought his bombers round and eventually to the rear of it. Snipers held him for a time, but they were rushed by an officer and a few men. The Germans still held bravely to their point, but Bedfords and Fusiliers swarmed in upon them until their arms went down and their hands up. From this strong point bombing parties were sent down the communication trenches, the infantry following closely and occupying the new ground.

The brigade was now in some danger from its own success, for it had outrun the 91st Brigade of the Seventh Division upon its left, and its own comrades of the 53rd Brigade upon its right. The 6th Northants held the defensive flank on the left. Later in the day the 53rd came into line upon the right, and before dark the 54th was able to move on again with little resistance until it had reached its full objective at Montauban Alley.

The 53rd Brigade was on the right of the 54th. Its assaulting line was formed by the 8th Norfolk upon the right, and the 6th Berkshires upon the left, with the 10th Essex in support and the 8th Suffolk in reserve. The first two lines were taken in their stride with little loss. A strong point behind these lines held them up for a short time, but was rushed, and its garrison of the 109th Regiment was captured. Further progress of the Norfolks was made ¦ difficult, however, by a flanking fire and by a second redoubt in front. As in the case of the 53rd Brigade it was found that the way round is often the shorter. Two bombing parties under gallant subalterns worked up the trenches on the flank, while that murderous weapon, a Stokes gun, was brought up and opened fire. The combined effect was decisive and 150 Germans threw down their arms. Sixty more were taken in another redoubt to the left.

Whilst the Norfolks had been fighting their way forward in this fashion the Berkshires upon their left, following very closely upon their own barrage, had attained their objective in twenty minutes, and had to hold it for some hours until the Norfolks had made good. During this time their right flank was necessarily exposed. This flank was defended successfully by means of bombing parties and a Lewis gun, while the left company instead of resting lent a hand to their neighbours of the 54th Brigade in carrying Pommiers Redoubt.

Meanwhile the Norfolks had come ahead again, but the advance of the Berkshires was held up by a small but determined band of bombers and snipers in a strong position. A Stokes mortar drove back the bombers, but the snipers still held fast, and killed in succession Lieutenant Rushton and Lieutenant Saye who gallantly attacked them. A sergeant-major of the Berkshires was more fortunate, however, and killed the chief sniper whose automatic rifle had played the part of a machine-gun. In doing so he was severely wounded himself. The Essex had come up into the firing line, but progress was still slow until an invaluable Stokes mortar was again brought to bear and with its shower of heavy bombs blasted the strong point out of existence. When night fell the whole line of Montauban Alley had been successfully won and the various units were in close touch and were busily organising their position.

Great obstinacy was shown by the Germans in their defence, which was a gallant one, and might well have been successful against a less skilful attack. Among other instances of their tenacity was one in which a sniper in a trench behind the stormers continued to fire from some subterranean retreat and defied all efforts to get at him, until it was found necessary to blow in the whole face of the dug-out and so to bury him within his own stronghold.

The hardest fighting of any fell to the lot of the 55th Brigade upon the right. The advance was made with the 8th East Surrey and 7th Queen’s Surrey in front, the latter to the left. The 7th Buffs were in support and the 7th West Kents in reserve. No sooner had the troops come out from cover than they were met by a staggering fire which held them up in the Breslau Trench. The supports had soon to be pushed up to thicken the ranks of the East Surrey — a battalion which, with the ineradicable sporting instinct and light-heartedness of the Londoner had dribbled footballs, one for each platoon, across No Man's Land and shot their goal in the front-line trench. A crater had been formed by a mine explosion, forming a gap in the German front, and round this crater a fierce fight raged for some time, the Germans rushing down a side sap which brought them up to the fray. Into this side sap sprang an officer and a sergeant of the Buffs, and killed 12 of the Germans, cutting off their flow of reinforcements, while half a company of the same battalion cleared up the crater and captured a machine-gun which had fought to the last cartridge. It is worth recording that in the case of one of these machine-guns the gunner was actually found with a four-foot chain attaching him to the tripod. Being badly wounded and unable to disengage himself, the wretched man dragged himself, his wound, and his tripod for some distance before being captured by the British. The fact was duly established by a sworn inquiry.

The brigade was winning its way forward, but the hard resistance of the Germans had delayed it to such a point that there was a danger that it would not be in its place so as to cover the left flank of the 90th Brigade, who were due to attack Montauban at 10 A.M. Such a failure might make the difference between victory and defeat. At this critical moment the officer commanding the East Surreys dashed to the front, re-formed his own men with all whom he could collect and led them onwards. Captain Neville was killed in gallantly leading the rush, but the wave went forward. There was check after check, but the point had to be won, and the Suffolks of the 53rd Brigade were brought round to strengthen the attack, while the West Kents were pushed forward to the fighting line. By mid-day two platoons of West Kents were into Montauban Alley, and had seized two houses at the western end of Montauban, which were rapidly fortified by a section of the 92nd Field Company. The flank of the 90th was assured. A South African officer led the first group of Surrey men who seized Montauban. He is said during the action to have slain seventeen of the enemy.

The rest of the brigade, however, had desperate work to get into line with the village. The East Surreys and Buffs were coming along well, but the Queen's Surreys had lost heavily and were held up by a strong point called Back Trench. A major of the Queen's gathered his men together, called up a bombing party from the 8th Sussex, the pioneer of the battalion of the brigade, and then by a united front and flank attack carried the position. One hundred and seventy Germans remained alive in the trench. The infantry then surged forward to the line of the Mametz-Montauban road, where they lay under machine-gun fire with their left in the air, for a considerable gap had developed between them and the 53rd Brigade. The main line of Montauban Alley in front of them was still strongly held by the enemy. Once again the Stokes guns saved what looked like a dangerous situation. They blasted a hole in Montauban Alley, and through the hole rushed a furious storming party of the Queen's. As evening fell, after that long day of fighting, the weary Eighteenth Division, splendid soldiers, splendidly led, held the whole line from Montauban to the junction with the Seventh Division near Mametz. One does not know which to admire most — the able dispositions, the inflexible resolution of the troops, or the elastic adaptability which enabled the initiative of the officers upon the spot to use ever-varying means for getting over the successive difficulties. The losses were very heavy, amounting to about 3000 officers and men, something under 1000 being fatal. Of the Germans 700 were captured, 1200 were buried after the action, and the total loss could not possibly have been less than those incurred by the British. It should be added that a great deal of the success of the attack was due to the 82nd, 83rd, 84th, and 85th Brigades, Royal Field Artillery, forming the divisional artillery, who earned the deepest gratitude of the infantry, the highest reward to which the gunner can attain. Some of the artillery of the Ninth Division was also engaged.

A few words may be said of the immediate future of the Eighteenth Division before the narrative of July 1 is completed by a consideration of the work of the Thirtieth Division. The ground captured included part of what may be called the Montauban Ridge, and the possession of this point proved to be of great service for observation in connection with the immediate operations at Bottom, Shelter, and Mametz Woods by the Fifteenth Corps. The guns were at once advanced and patrols were thrown out in front which penetrated and eventually occupied Caterpillar Wood, a long winding plantation on the immediate front of the Division. These various patrols picked up no less than twelve German field-guns abandoned by the enemy. The front was held until July 8, when the Eighteenth was relieved by the Third Division.

As to the fighting of the Germans upon this front, it was excellent as usual — but it is needful to accentuate it, as there is a tendency to depreciate the enemy at a point where he is beaten, which is an injustice to the victors. The latter had no doubts about the matter. “There is one thing we have all learned and that is that the Hun is a jolly good soldier and engineer, so don’t listen to any other nonsense. If you get hand-to-hand with him he gives in at once, but he practically never lets you get so close. As long as Fritz has a trench and a gun he will stick there till he is made crows’ rations. We know we are just slightly better than he is, but there’s nothing much in it — nothing to justify contempt or liberties,” Such was the considered opinion of an experienced soldier.

If the advance of the Eighteenth Division was successful, that of the Thirtieth upon its right of the was not less so. This division had been raised originally from Liverpool and Manchester, the battalions being all of the King’s Liverpool or of the Manchester Regiments. The greater part of these battalions, which owe their origin largely to that great patriot, Lord Derby, were recruited on the “pal” system, by which friends in peace should be comrades in war. So close was Lord Derby’s connection with the division that his brother commanded one brigade, and three of his family served with the guns, one of them commanding an artillery unit. This was the first appearance of this fine force in actual battle, and it can truly be said that no division could have been more fortunate or have given a better account of itself. It may be explained that it had exchanged its 91st Brigade for the 21st of the Seventh Division, and that several of the veteran battalions of the old Seventh now served with the Thirtieth.

The objective of this division was the important village of Montauban deep within the enemy’s line. It seemed an ambitious mark in a war where every yard means an effort, but it was accomplished with surprising ease, for the advance was as determined as the defence was slack. On the right opposite Maricourt the attack fell to the 89th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Bedfords and the 17th, 19th, and 20th King’s Liverpool battalions. On their left was the 21st Brigade, while the 90th Brigade was in immediate support with orders to go through and seize the village itself. From the start the attack went like clockwork. The artillery was admirable, the infantry inexorable, and the leading all that could be desired. The ever-ready machine-guns put up a fierce defence, especially on the left flank, where the 18th King’s Liverpools, led by their popular colonel, lost three-quarters of their effectives but carried their objective none the less. The 2nd West Yorks behind them were also terribly scourged, but gained the line of the Glatz Redoubt all the same. Here, as with the Eighteenth Division, there was every sign that the garrison of the front trenches had been surprised. “The Germans gave us plenty of machine-gun fire while we were advancing upon them; when we reached the trench only a few showed fight. The rest flung up their arms and cried: ‘Mercy, Kamerad!’“ It was clear they had been taken by surprise, for many of them were barefooted, none of them had any equipment. When there was no attack at 4 A.M. they were then told that they could lie down and have a rest, “as the British would not now come out till four in the afternoon.” It is abundantly clear that the famous German intelligence department was absolutely at fault in the southern sector of the great battle.

Although the first three trenches were carried without a hitch, the garrison of the fourth had time to stand to arms, and were greatly assisted in their defence by a flank fire from the still untaken village of Mametz, and from machine-guns in the southern corner of Mametz Wood which lies to the north of Montauban. The resistance caused considerable losses, including that of Colonel Johnson of the 17th Manchesters, but the advance was irresistible, and swept over every obstacle until they had reached their objective. On the right, the Liverpool brigade, the 17th and 18th King’s Liverpools in the lead, fought their way up to the brick-fields, which lie nearly level with Montauban, but to the south of it. A company seized these and a good bunch of prisoners. There it consolidated in close touch with the famous “iron corps” of the French army upon their right, while on the left the blue and yellow advance-flags of the Thirtieth formed a continuous line with the red and yellow of the Eighteenth Division. On the left of the Liverpools the Manchesters with the Scots Fusiliers of the 90th Brigade had stormed their way into Montauban, the first of that long list of village fortresses which were destined in the succeeding months to fall into the hands of the British. It was carried with a rush in spite of the determined resistance of small groups of Germans in various houses, which had already been greatly mauled by our artillery. The British fought their way from room to room, drove their enemies down into the cellars, and hurled bombs on to them from above. The German losses were heavy, and several hundreds of prisoners were sent to the rear. By the early afternoon the whole village was in the hands of the 90th Brigade, who had also occupied

Montauban Alley, the trench 200 yards upon the farther side of it, whence by their rifle-fire they crushed several attempts at counter-attack. These were feeble during the day, but a very heavy one came during the night, aided by a powerful shrapnel fire. The Germans, advancing in the closest order, for a time won a lodgment in the new British front trench, killing a party of the 17th Manchesters, but they were unable to hold it, and with daylight they were ejected once more. The reader who is weary of hearing of British losses will be interested to know, on the authority of Colonel Bedell of the 16th that out of a garrison of 3500 men from the 6th Bavarian Reserve Regiments only 500 escaped from the Montauban front. All these operations were carried out in close touch with the French upon the right, so close indeed that the colonel of the 17th King's Liverpools, seeing that the French colonel of the flank battalion was advancing beside his men, sprang out and joined him, so that the two colonels shook hands in the captured position.

Some stress has in this narrative been laid upon the fact that the difficulties to be overcome in the south were less than those in the north. Such an assertion is only fair to the gallant men who failed. At the same time nothing should detract from the credit due to those splendid southerly divisions who really won the battle and made the hole through which the whole army eventually passed.

Though the French operations do not primarily come within the scope of this record, it is necessary to give some superficial account of them, since they form an integral and essential part of the battle. So important were they, and so successful, that it is not too much to say that it was the complete victory upon their line which atoned for our own want of success in the north, and assured that the balance of this most bloody day should be in our favour. It is true, as they would be the first to admit, that the troops of General Foch had none of those impassable barrages, concentrations of machine-guns, and desperately defended inner lines of trenches which inflicted such losses upon our stormers. Both the positions and the men who held them were less formidable. On the other hand, it is for us to bear in mind that the French had already made their great effort in the common cause at Verdun, and that this attack upon the West was primarily a British offensive in which they were playing a subsidiary part. It is the more remarkable that their success should have been so great and that they should have been able for months to come to play so notable a part in the battle that the tale of their prisoners and booty was not less than our own.

The attack of the British was roughly upon a twenty-mile front, from the Gommecourt salient to Maricourt. On this stretch they broke the German lines for 7 miles from the north of Fricourt to Montauban. The French front was about 8 miles long, and moved forward for its whole extent. Thus it may be said that the whole battle line was 28 miles, and that more than one-half, or 15 miles, represented the area of victory. During the whole operations for many months the French army was cut in two by the marshy valley of the Somme, the detachment to the north of it acting in close unison with the British Thirteenth Corps upon their left. We will call these the northern and the southern French armies, both being under the direction of General Foch.

It may briefly be stated that the advance of the French army was carried out with great dash and valour on both banks of the river. After carrying several lines of trenches at very little loss to themselves, the northern army found itself, on the evening of July 1, holding the outskirts of the villages of Curlu and of Hardecourt. On July 2 Curlu was entirely occupied, and shortly afterwards Hardecourt also fell. The southern army, which consisted of of the the fiery Colonial Division upon the left and the Twentieth upon the right, under the immediate leadership of General Fayolle, had even greater success. Not only all the lines of trenches but the villages of Dompierre, Becquincourt, Bussu, and Fay were stormed upon July 1. On the 2nd Frise and the Moreaucourt Wood had also been taken, and several counter-attacks repelled. On that evening the French were able to report that they had taken 6000 prisoners, while the British operations had yielded 3500 — or 9500 in all.

When the sun set upon that bloody day — probably the most stirring of any single day in the whole record of the world — the higher command of the Allies must have looked upon the result with a strange mixture of feelings, in which dismay at the losses in the north and pride at the successes in the south contended for the mastery. The united losses of all the combatants, British, French, and Germans, must have been well over 100,000 between the rising and the setting of one summer sun. It is a rout which usually swells the casualties of a stricken army, but here there was no question of such a thing, and these huge losses were incurred in actual battle. As the attackers our own casualties were undoubtedly heavier than those of the enemy, and it is natural that as we turn from that list we ask ourselves the question whether our gains were worth it. Such a question might be an open one at Neuve Chapelle or at Loos, but here the answer must be a thousand times Yes. Together we had done the greatest day's work in the War up to that time — a day's work which led to many developments in the future, and eventually to a general German retreat over 70 miles of front. It was not a line of trenches which we broke, it was in truth the fortified frontier of Germany built up by a year and a half of unremitting labour. By breaking it at one point we had outflanked it from the Somme to the sea, and however slow the process might be of getting room for our forces to deploy, and pushing the Germans off our flank, it was certain that sooner or later that line must be rolled up from end to end. It was hoped, too, that under our gunfire no other frontier of similar strength could grow up in front of us. That was the great new departure which may be dated from July 1, and is an ample recompense for our losses. These young lives were gladly laid down as a price for final victory — and history may show that it was really on those Picardy slopes that final victory was in truth ensured. Even as the day of Gettysburg was the turning-point of the American Civil War, and as that of Paardeberg was the real death-blow to the Boers, so the breaking of the line between Fricourt and Frise may well prove to have been the decisive victory in the terrible conflict which the swollen dreams of Prussia had brought upon the world.

When one considers the enormous scale of the action, the desperate valour of the troops engaged, and the fact that the German line was fairly and permanently broken for the first time, one feels that this date should be for ever marked in British military annals as the glorious First of July.

V. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
From July 2 to July 14, 1916

General situation — Capture of La Boiselle by Nineteenth Division — Splendid attack by 36th Brigade upon Ovillers — Siege and reduction of Ovillers — Operations at Contalmaison — Desperate fighting at the Quadrangle by Seventeenth Division — Capture of Mametz Wood by Thirty-eighth Welsh Division — Capture of Trones Wood by Eighteenth Division

THE terrible fighting just described, during which the German line was broken at its southern end, was but the opening of a most desperate battle, which extended of the over many months. This, while it cost very heavy losses on both sides, exacted such a toll from the Germans in prisoners and lost material, as well as in casualties, that it is probable that their army would have been largely disorganised had not the wet weather of October come to hamper the operations. As it was, the letters of the soldiers and the intercepted messages of the Generals show an amount of demoralisation which proves the mighty pressure applied by the allied armies. It was a battle which was seldom general throughout the curve into which the attackers had encroached, but which confined itself to this or that limited objective — to the north, to the east, or to the south, the blow falling the more suddenly, since during the whole of this time the Allies preserved the command of the air to an extent which actually enabled them to push their guns forward across the open. Sometimes it was a fortified village which was carried. Sometimes it was the trenches between villages, so that the garrisons might feel in danger of being cut off. Sometimes — the worst obstacle of all — it was one of the patches of wood dotted over the country-side, which had to be cleared of the enemy’s stubborn infantry and machine-gunners. But whatever the task might be, it may be stated generally that it was always carried out, if not at the first, then at the second, third, or some subsequent attempt. It may also be said that never once during all that time did a yard of ground which had been taken by the Allies pass permanently back to the enemy. Before the winter had fallen more than forty villages had been carried and held by the attack — but not one by the counter-attack. The losses were heavy, sometimes very heavy, but so perfect now was the co-ordination between infantry and guns, and so masterful the allied artillery, that it is highly probable that at last the defence was losing as many as the attack. Those deep ravines which had enabled the Germans to escape the effects of the early bombardments no longer existed in the new lines, and the superficial ditches which now formed the successive lines of defence offered little protection from a fire directed by a most efficient air service. On the other hand, since the German air service had been beaten out of the sky, the sight of the German gunners was dim, and became entirely blind when by their successive advances the Allies had pushed them over the low ridges which formed their rearward positions. The map, however skilfully used, is a poor substitute for the observation officer and the aeroplane.

Standing on the edge of this welter, and gazing at this long haze info which vigorous divisions continually plunge, relieving exhausted units, only to stagger out in their turn, rent and torn, while yet others press to the front, one feels appalled at the difficulty of following such complex operations and of conveying them clearly and in their due order to the mind of the reader. Some fixed system must evidently be followed if the narrative is to remain intelligible and the relation of the various actions to each other to be made evident. Therefore the course of events will still, so far as possible, be traced from the north, and each incident be brought to some sort of natural pause before we pass onwards down the line. We can at once eliminate the whole northern portion of the British line from the Gommecourt salient down to Albert, since for that long stretch attack had changed definitely to defence, and we start our narrative from the south of the Albert-Bapaume road. From that point four villages immediately faced the old British line, and each was now a centre of fighting. From the north they were La Boiselle, Fricourt, Mametz, and Montauban. The latter had been held against a strong counter-attack on the early morning of July 2, and it was firmly in the possession of the Thirtieth Division. Mametz was held by the Seventh Division, who were pushing on to the north, driving a weak resistance before them. Fricourt had been deserted by the morning of July 2, and had been occupied by the Seventeenth Division, who also at once pushed on towards the woodlands behind. La Boiselle was closely assailed with part of the Thirty-fourth Division to the south of it, and the Twelfth and Nineteenth Divisions with other troops all round it. These four villages and the gaps between them represented the break in the German front line.

The second German main line ran through the Bazentins and Longueval, and it was reached and carried by the British Army upon July 14. The intervening fortnight between the battle of the front and of the second line was occupied in clearing the many obstacles, consisting for the most part of woods and subsidiary trenches which filled the space between the two lines, and also in attacking the two villages of Ovillers and Contalmaison, which hampered operations upon the left wing. It will help the reader very much to understand these apparently complex movements if he will realise that they divide themselves into three distinct groups of activity, counting from the north of the line. The first group is concerned with the capture of Ovillers, and in it the Twelfth, Nineteenth, Thirty-second, and Twenty-fifth Divisions are concerned. The second group is connected with the capture of the strong position which is bastioned by Contalmaison upon one side and Mametz Wood at the other, with the Quadrangle system of trenches between. In this very severe conflict the Twenty-third, Seventeenth, Seventh, and Thirty-eighth Divisions were engaged. Finally there is the group of operations by which the right wing was advanced through Bernafoy Wood and up to Trones Wood. In these, the Ninth, Thirtieth, and Eighteenth Divisions were chiefly concerned. We shall now take each of these in turn, beginning with the northern one, the taking of Ovillers, and carrying each narrative to a definite term. Before embarking upon this account it should be mentioned that the of the two northern corps of Rawlinson’s army — the Eighth and Tenth — were from now onwards detached as a separate Fifth Army under Sir Hubert Gough, one of the most rising commanders in the Service. The functions of this Army were to hold the line from La Boiselle to Serre, and to form a defensive flank and pivot for the Third, Fifteenth, and Thirteenth Corps to the south.

We shall first follow the further fortunes of the troops which operated in the north. Upon July 3 there was a short but severe action upon that part of the old British line immediately to the left of the gap which had been broken. In this action, which began at 6 A.M., the Thirty-second Division, already greatly weakened by its exertions two days before, together with the 75th Brigade, lent them by the Twenty-fifth Division, tried to widen the rent in the’ German line by tearing open that portion of it which had been so fatal to the Eighth Division. The attack failed, however, though most bravely delivered, and the difficulties proved once more to be unsurmountable. The attempt cost us heavy casualties, a considerable proportion of which fell upon the 75th Brigade, especially upon the 11th Cheshires, whose colonel was killed, and upon the 2nd South Lancashires, who ran into wire and were held up there. The 8th Borders reached their objective, but after one-and-a-half hours were forced to let go of it. The operation proved that whatever misfortunes had befallen the Germans to the south, they were still rooted as firmly as ever in their old positions. The same lesson was to be taught us on the same morning at an adjacent portion of the line.

This episode was at the immediate south of the unsuccessful attack just described. It has already been stated that the Twelfth, the English division which had seen so much hard fighting at Loos, had taken over part of the trenches of the Eighth Division, and so found themselves facing Ovillers. Their chances of a successful advance upon the village were increased by the fact that the Nineteenth Division, after hard fighting, had got into La Boiselle to the south, and so occupied a flank to their advance.

Some further definition is required as to the situation at La Boiselle, how it was brought about, and its extreme importance to the general plan of operations. When the left of the Thirty-fourth Division had failed to hold the village, while some mixed units of the right brigade had established themselves within the German lines as already narrated, it became very vital to help them by a renewed attempt upon the village itself. For this purpose the Nineteenth Division had moved forward, a unit which had not yet been seriously engaged. It was under the command of a fighting Irish dragoon, whose whimsical expedient for moving forwards the stragglers at St. Quentin has been recorded in a previous volume. On the evening of July 1, one battalion of this division, the 9th Cheshires, had got into the German front line trench near the village, but they were isolated there and hard put to it to hold their own during a long and desperate night. On the following afternoon, about 4 o’clock, two of their fellow-battalions of the 58th Brigade, the 9th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the 6th Wilts, charged suddenly straight across the open at the village, while by a clever device the British barrage was turned elsewhere with the effect of misleading the German barrage which played upon the wrong area. By 9 P.M. on July 2 the south end of the village had been captured, but the resistance was still very fierce. Early next morning the whole of the division was drawn into this street fighting, and gradually the Germans were pushed back. There was one desperate counter-attack during which the British line was hard put to it to hold its own, and the house-to-house fighting continued throughout the whole day and night. Two British colonels, one of the 7th South Lancashires and the other of the 8th Gloucesters, particularly distinguished themselves in this close fighting. The latter, a dragoon like his commander, was a hard soldier who had left an eye in Somaliland and a hand at Ypres, but the sight of him in this day of battle, tearing out the safety-pin of bombs with his teeth and hurling them with his remaining hand, was one which gave heart to his men. Slowly the Germans were worn down, but the fighting was fierce and the British losses heavy, including three commanding officers, Wedgwood of the North Staffords, Royston Piggott of the 10th Worcesters, and Heath of the 10th Warwicks, the first two killed, the latter wounded. In the midst of the infantry fighting a single gun of the 19th Battery galloped with extraordinary gallantry right into the village and engaged the enemy point-blank with splendid effect. For this fine performance Captain Campbell and ten men of the gun's crew received decorations. By the evening of the 6th the whole village was solidly consolidated by the Nineteenth Division, they had broken up a strong counter-attack from the direction of Pozières, and they had extended their conquest so as to include the redoubt called Heligoland. We must turn, however, to the attack which had in the meanwhile been prepared upon the line to the immediate north of La Boiselle by the Twelfth Division.

This attack was carried out at three in the morning of July 7 by the 35th and the 37th Brigades. The fighting line from the right consisted of the 5th Berks, 7th Suffolks, 6th Queen's Surrey, and 6th West Kent, with the other battalions in close support. Unhappily, there was a group of machine-guns in some broken ground to the north of La Boiselle, which had not yet been reached by the Nineteenth Division, and the fire of these guns was so deadly that the battalions who got across were too weak to withstand a counter-attack of German bombers. They were compelled, after a hard struggle, to fall back to the British line. One curious benefit arose in an unexpected way from the operation, for part of the 9th Essex, losing its way in the dark, stumbled upon the rear of the German defenders of the northern edge of La Boiselle, by which happy chance they took 200 prisoners, helped the Nineteenth in their task, and participated in a victory instead of a check.

It was evident that before the assault was renewed some dispositions should be made to silence the guns which made the passage perilous. With this in view, another brigade, the 74th from the Twenty-fifth Division, was allotted to the commander of the Twelfth Division, by whom it was placed between his own position and that held by the Nineteenth at La Boiselle. It was arranged that these fresh troops should attack at eight o'clock in the morning of of the July 7, approaching Ovillers from the south, and overrunning the noxious machine-guns, while at 8:30 the 36th Brigade, hitherto in reserve, should advance upon Ovillers from the west. By this difference of half an hour in the attack it was hoped that the 74th would have got the guns before the 36th had started.

After an hour's bombardment the signal was given and the 74th Brigade came away with a rush, headed by the 13th Cheshires and 9th North Lancashires, with the 2nd Irish Rifles and 11th Lancashire Fusiliers in support. The advance found the Germans both in front and on either flank of them, but in spite of a withering fire they pushed on for their mark. Nearly every officer of the 13th Cheshires from Colonel Finch down to Somerset, the junior subaltern, was hit. Half-way between La Boiselle and Ovillers the attack was brought to a halt, and the men found such cover as they could among the shell holes. Their supporting lines had come up, but beyond some bombing parties there was no further advance during the day. Fifty yards away the untaken machine-gun emplacements lay in front of them, while Ovillers itself was about 600 yards distant upon their left front.

In the meantime, after waiting half an hour, the 36th Brigade had advanced. The machine-guns were, however, still active on either flank of them, and on their immediate front lay the rubbish-heap which had once been a village, a mass of ruins now. But amid those ruins lay the Fusiliers of the Prussian Guard — reputed to be among the best soldiers in Europe, and every chink was an embrasure for rifle or machine-gun. The advance was one which may have been matched in the glorious annals of the British infantry, but can never have been excelled. The front line consisted of the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers, one upon each wing, the 7th Sussex in the centre, and the 11th Middlesex in support — south-country battalions all. They had lain waiting for the signal in trenches which were beaten to pieces by a terrific German shelling. There were considerable casualties before the first man sprang from fire-step to parapet. As they crossed No Man's Land bullets beat upon them from every side. The advance was rendered more frightful by the heavy weather, which held down the fumes of the poison shells, so that the craters in which men took refuge were often found to be traps from which they never again emerged. Many of the wounded met their death in this terrible fashion. Still the thin lines went forward, for nothing would stop them save death or the voice of their company officers. They were up and over the first German line. A blast of fire staggered them for a moment, and then with a splendid rally they were into the second trench, and had seized the line of hedges and walls which skirt the western edge of the village. Five hundred men were left out of those who had sprung from the British trench; but the 500 still went forward. The two Fusilier battalions had hardly the strength of a company between them, and the leaders were all down — but every man was a leader that day. Their spirit was invincible. An officer has recorded how a desperately wounded man called out, “Are the trenches taken, sir?” On hearing that they were, he fell back and cried, “Thank God! for nothing else matters.” In the centre the Sussex men still numbered nearly 300, and their colonel aided and directed while they consolidated the ground. One hundred and fifty were hit as they did so, but the handful who were left defied every effort of shell, bomb, or bayonet to put them out. A lodgment had been made, and nothing now could save the village. By a wise provision, seeing that no supplies could reach them, every man had been loaded up with twenty bombs, and had been instructed to use every captured German bomb or cartridge before any of his own. As dusk fell, two companies of the supporting Middlesex battalion were sent up, under heavy fire, to thicken the line, which was further strengthened next day by two battalions from the 37th Brigade, while the 75th Brigade prolonged it to the south. In the morning of July 9 the Twelfth Division, sorely stricken but triumphant, was drawn from the line, leaving the northern half of the Ovillers front to the Thirty-second Division and the southern half to the Twenty-fifth, the scattered brigades of which were now reunited under one general.

That commander had found himself during these operations in a difficult position, as the 74th Brigade had been moved from him and allotted to the Twelfth Division, and the Seventy-fifth by the Thirty-second Division. None the less, he had carried on vigorously with his remaining Brigade — the 7th, and had enlarged and strengthened the British position in the Leipzig salient. During July 5 and 6 the 1st Wilts and the 3rd Worcesters had both broadened and extended their fronts by means of surprise attacks very well carried out. On the 7th they pushed forward, as part of the general scheme of extension upon that day, advancing with such dash and determination that they got ahead of the German barrage and secured a valuable trench.

When upon Sunday, July 9, the Thirty-second Division had entirely taken over from the Twelfth on the west of Ovillers, the 14th Brigade were in the post of honour on the edge of the village. The 2nd Manchesters on the left and the 15th Highland Light Infantry on the right, formed the advanced line with the 1st Dorsets in support, while the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers were chiefly occupied in the necessary and dangerous work of carrying forward munitions and supplies. Meanwhile, the pioneer battalion, the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers, worked hard to join up the old front trench with the new trenches round Ovillers. It should be mentioned, as an example of the spirit animating the British Army, that Colonel Pears of this battalion had been invalided home for cancer, that he managed to return to his men for this battle, and that shortly afterwards he died of the disease.

On July 10 at noon the 14th Brigade advanced upon Ovillers from the west, carrying on the task which had been so well begun by the 36th Brigade. The assailants could change their ranks, but this advantage was denied to the defenders, for a persistent day and night barrage cut them off from their companions in the north. None the less, there was no perceptible weakening of the defence, and the Prussian Guard lived up to their own high traditions. A number of them had already been captured in the trenches, mature soldiers of exceptional physique. Their fire was as murderous as ever, and the 2nd Manchesters on the north or left of the line suffered severely. The 15th Highlanders were more fortunate made good progress. The situation had been improved by an advance at 9 P.M. upon this date, July 10, by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers from the Sixth Division, higher up the line, who made a lodgment north-west of Ovillers, which enabled a Russian sap to be opened up from the British front line. The Inniskillings lost 150 men out of two companies engaged, but they created a new and promising line of attack.

The British were now well into the village, both on the south and on the west, but the fighting was closer and more sanguinary than ever. Bombardments alternated with attacks, during which the British won the outlying ruins, and fought on from one stone heap to another, or down into the cellars below, where the desperate German Guardsmen fought to the last until overwhelmed with bombs from above, or stabbed by the bayonets of the furious stormers. The depleted 74th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth

Division had been brought back to its work upon July 10, and on the 12th the 14th Brigade was relieved by the 96th of the same Thirty-second Division. On the night of July 12 fresh ground was gained by a surge forward of the 2nd South Lancashires of the 75th Brigade, and of the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers, these two battalions pushing the British line almost up to Ovillers Church. Again, on the night of the 13th the 3rd Worcesters and 8th Borders made advances, the latter capturing a strong point which blocked the way to further progress. On the 14th, however, the 10th Cheshires had a set-back, losing a number of men. Again, on the night of July 14 the 1st Dorsets cut still further into the limited area into which the German resistance had been compressed. On the night of the 15th the Thirty-second Division was drawn out, after a fortnight of incessant loss, and was replaced by the Forty-eighth Division of South Midland Territorials, the 143rd Brigade consisting entirely of Warwick battalions, being placed under the orders of the General of the Twenty-fifth Division. The village, a splintered rubbish-heap, with the church raising a stumpy wall, a few feet high, in the middle of it, was now very closely pressed upon all sides. The German cellars and dug-outs were still inhabited, however, and within them the Guardsmen were as dangerous as wolves at bay. On the night of July 15-16 a final attack was arranged. It was to be carried through by the 74th, 75th, and 143rd Brigades, and was timed for 1 A.M. For a moment it threatened disaster, as the 5th Warwicks got forward into such a position that they were cut off from supplies, but a strong effort was made by their comrades, who closed in all day until 6 P.M., when the remains of the garrison surrendered. Two German officers and 125 men were all who remained unhurt in this desperate business; and it is on record that one of the officers expended his last bomb by hurling it at his own men on seeing that they had surrendered. Eight machine guns were taken. It is said that the British soldiers saluted the haggard and grimy survivors as they were led out among the ruins. It was certainly a very fine defence. After the capture of the village, the northern and eastern outskirts were cleared by the men of the Forty-eighth Territorial Division, which was partly accomplished by a night attack of the 4th Gloucesters. From now onwards till July 29 this Division was engaged in very arduous work, pushing north and and east, and covering the flank of the Australians in their advance upon Pozières.

So much for the first group of operations in the intermediate German position. We shall now pass to the second, which is concerned with the strong fortified line formed by the Quadrangle system of trenches between Contalmaison upon our left and Mametz Wood upon our right.

It has been mentioned under the operations of the Twenty-first Division in the last chapter that the 51st Brigade passed through the deserted village of Fricourt upon the morning of July 2, taking about 100 prisoners.

On debouching at the eastern end they swung to the right, the 7th Lincolns attacking Fricourt Wood, and the 8th South Staffords, Fricourt Farm. The wood proved to be a tangle of smashed trees, which was hardly penetrable, and a heavy fire stopped the Lincolns. The colonel, however, surmounted the difficulty by detaching an officer and a party of men to outflank the wood, which had the effect of driving out the Germans. The South Staffords were also successful in storming the farm, but could not for the moment get farther. Several hundreds of prisoners from the 111th Regiment and three guns were captured during this advance, but the men were very exhausted at the end of it, having been three nights without rest. Early next day (July 3) the advance was resumed, the 51st Brigade still to the fore, working in co-operation with the 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division upon their left. By hard fighting, the Staffords, Lincolns, and Sherwoods pushed their way into Railway Alley and Railway Copse, while the 7th Borders established themselves in Bottom Wood. The operations came to a climax when in the afternoon a battalion of the 186th Prussian Regiment, nearly 600 strong, was caught between the two Brigades in Crucifix Trench and had to surrender; altogether the 51st Brigade had done a very strenuous and successful spell of duty. The ground gained was consolidated by the 77th Field Company, Royal Engineers.

The 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, supported by the 63rd, had moved parallel to the 51st Brigade, the 1st Lincolns, 10th Yorkshires, and two battalions of Northumberland Fusiliers advancing upon Shelter Wood and carrying it by storm. It was a fine bit of woodland fighting, and the first intimation to the Germans that their fortified forests would no more stop British infantry than their village strongholds could do. The enemy, both here and in front of the Seventeenth Division, were of very different stuff from the veterans of Ovillers, and surrendered in groups as soon as their machine-guns had failed to stop the disciplined rush of their assailants. After this advance, the Twenty-first Division was drawn out of line for a rest, and the Seventeenth extending to the left was in touch with the regular 24th Brigade, forming the right of Babington’s Twenty-third Division, who were closing in upon Contalmaison. On the right the 17th were in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the Seventh Division, which was pushing up towards the dark and sinister clumps of woodland which barred their way. On the night of July 5 an advance was made, the Seventh Division upon Mametz Wood, and the Seventeenth upon the Quadrangle Trench, connecting the wood with Contalmaison. The attack upon the wood itself had no success, though the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers reached their objective, but the 52nd Brigade was entirely successful at Quadrangle Trench, where two battalions — the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers — crept up within a hundred yards unobserved and then carried the whole position with a splendid rush. It was at once consolidated.

The Twenty-third Division had advanced upon the left and were close to Contalmaison. On the night of July 5 the Seventh Division was drawn out and the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division took over the line which faced Mametz Wood.

The Seventeenth Division, after its capture of the Quadrangle Trench, was faced by a second very dangerous and difficult line called the Quadrangle Support, the relative position of which is shown upon the diagram on the next page.

It is clear that if either Mametz Wood or Contalmaison were to fall, this trench would become untenable for the Germans, but until those two bastions, or at least one of them, was in our hands, there was such a smashing fire beating down upon an open advance of 600 yards, that no harder task could possibly be given to a Division. The trench was slightly over the brow of a slope, so that when the guns played upon it the garrison were able to sUp quickly away and take refuge in Mametz Wood, coming back again in time to meet an assault which they were well aware could only be delivered by troops which had passed through an ordeal of fire which must shake and weaken them.

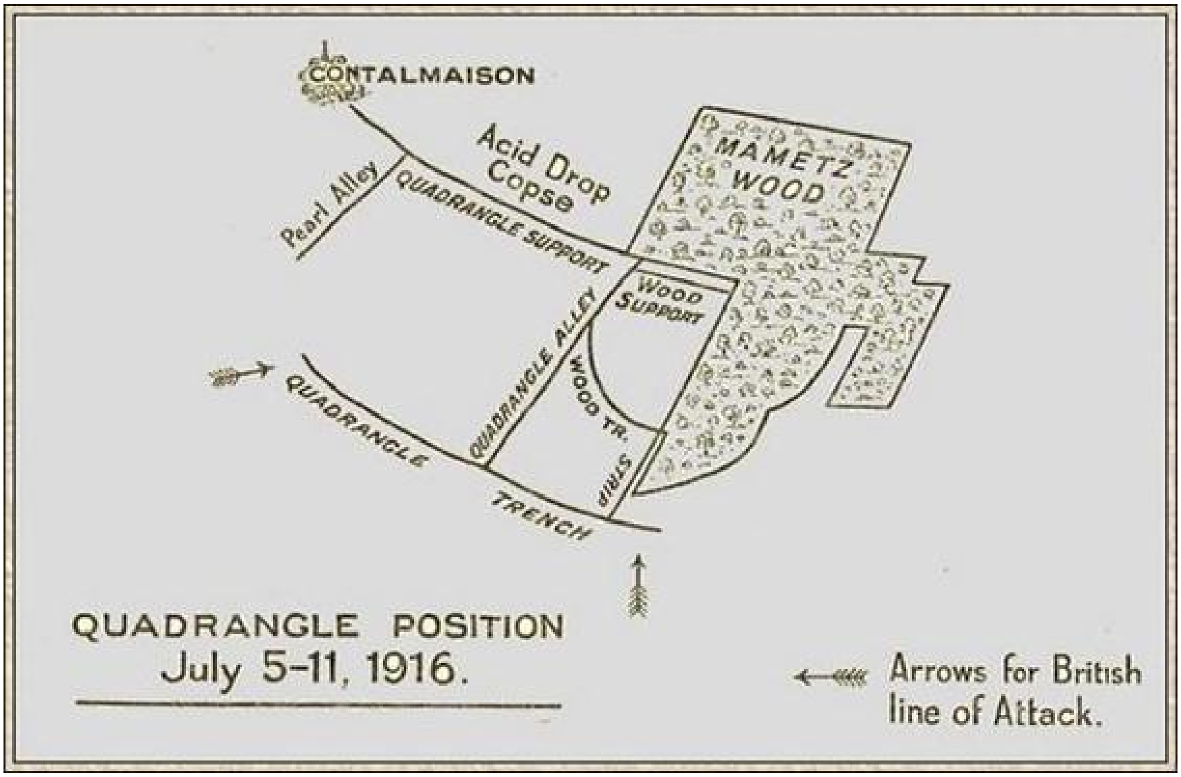
CONTALMAISON
Acid Drop Copse
MAMETZ WOOD
Pearl Alley
QUADRANGLE SUPPORT
WOOD SUPPORT
QUADRANGLE ALLEY
WOOD TR.
STRIP
QUADRANGLE TRENCH
QUADRANGLE POSITION
July 5-11, 1916.
Arrows for British line of Attack.

Quadrangle Position, July 5-11, 1916

It seemed that the best chance to bring a striking force up to the trench was to make the attempt at night, so at 2 A.M. of July 7 the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, the same battalions which had already taken Quadrangle Trench, advanced through the darkness of an inclement night upon their objective. The enemy proved, however, to be in great force, and their trench was stuffed with men who were themselves contemplating an attack. A party of Lancashire Fusiliers got into Pearl Alley, which is on the left near Contalmaison, but the village stands on a slight eminence, and from it the trench and the approaches can be swept by fire. The British attack was driven back with loss, and was followed up by the 9th Grenadiers of the Prussian Guard, who were in turn driven back by the left of the British line, consisting of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers and some of the 1st Worcesters. In the morning another attempt was made upon Quadrangle Support, this time by the 9th West Ridings and the 12th Manchesters. Small parties got up to Acid Drop Copse, close to Contalmaison, but they were too weak to hold on. At the end of this attack the 52nd Brigade, which had been so badly mauled, was drawn out and the 51st put back in its place.

This severe fighting at the Quadrangle was part of a wider action, which was to include an attack by the Twenty-third Division upon Contalmaison and an attack by the Thirty-eighth upon Mametz Wood. The Contalmaison attack won its way into the north-west side of the village at 11 o'clock on the morning of July 7, but by 12 o'clock it had been held and eventually repulsed. By 4:30 the 24th Brigade of the Twenty-third Division, which was on the immediate left of the Seventeenth Division, had been driven of the back to its trenches, the 1st Worcesters, 2nd East Lancashires, and 2nd Northamptons suffering heavily.

Whilst the Contalmaison attack had failed upon the left, that upon Mametz Wood had no better success upon the right. It was to have been carried out by the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division, but in its approach such opposition was encountered to the wood that the 16th Welsh (City of Cardiff) and 10th South Wales Borderers could not get forward. Meanwhile, the 50th Brigade from the Seventeenth Division had been told off to co-operate with this attack, and naturally found themselves with their right flank in the air, the 7th East Yorks suffering severely in consequence. None the less, some advance was made upon this side.

In the night of July 7 a third attack was made upon Quadrangle Support, with no better result than the others. On this occasion the 51st Brigade had relieved the 52nd, and it was the 10th Sherwood Foresters which endured the heavy losses, and persevered until they were within bomb-throw of their objective, losing Major Hall Brown, a gallant Ceylon planter, and many officers and men. At the same hour the 50th Brigade had again tried to gain ground in the direction of Mametz Wood, but had failed on account of uncut wire. The military difficulties of the situation during this day were greatly enhanced by the state of the ground, owing to most unseasonable heavy rain, which left four feet of mud in some of the trenches. Altogether, when one considers the want of success at Ovillers, the repulse at Contalmaison, the three checks in one day at the Quadrangle, and the delay of the attack on Mametz Wood, the events of July 7 showed that the task of the British, even inside a broken German line, was still a very heavy one. General Horne upon the line and Sir Douglas Haig behind it must both have felt the strain that night.

At six in the morning of July 8 the undefeatable Seventeenth Division was again hard at work encompassing the downfall of its old opponents in Quadrangle Support. Since it could not be approached above ground, it was planned that two brigades, the 51st and the 50th, should endeavour to bomb their way from each side up those trenches which were in their hands. It is wonderful that troops which had already endured so much, and whose nerve might well be shattered and their hearts broken by successive failures, should still be able to carry out a form of attack which of all others call for dash and reckless courage. It was done, none the less, and with some success, the bombers blasting their way up Pearl Alley on the left to the point where it joins on to the Quadrangle Support. The bombers of the 7th Lincolns did particularly well. “Every attempted attack by the Boche was met by them with the most extraordinary Berserker fury. They utterly cowed the enemy.” So wrote an experienced spectator. On the right the 50th Brigade made some progress also up Quadrangle Alley. Artillery fire, however, put a term to the advance in both instances, the guns of Contalmaison dominating the whole position. In the evening a fresh bombing attack was made by the same troops, whose exertions seem really to have reached the limit of human capacity. This time the 7th Borders actually reached Quadrangle Support, but were unable to get farther. The same evening some of the 50th Brigade bombed down Wood Trench towards Mametz Wood, so as to facilitate the coming attack by the Thirty-eighth Division. On July 9 both Brigades again tried to bomb their way into Quadrangle Support, and were again held up by the enemy’s fire. This was the sixth separate attempt upon the same objective by the same soldiers — an example surely of the wonderful material of which the New Armies were composed.

But their labours were not yet done. Though both brigades were worn to shadows, it was still a point of honour to hold to their work. At 11:20 that night a surprise attack was made across the open under the cover of night. The 8th South Staffords on the left — charging with a yell of “Staffords!” — reached the point where Pearl Alley joins the Quadrangle Support (see Diagram), and held on most desperately. The 50th Brigade on the right were checked and could give no assistance. The men upon the left strove hard to win their way down Quadrangle Support, but most of the officers were down, the losses were heavy, and the most that they could do was to hold on to the junction with Pearl Alley. The 50th were ready to go forward again to help them, and the Yorkshire men were already on the move; but day was slowly breaking and it was doubtful if the trench could be held under the guns of Contalmaison. The attack upon the right was therefore stopped, and the left held on as best it might, the South Staffords, having lost grievously, nearly all their officers, including the Adjutant, Coleridge, being on the ground.

We may now leave this heroic tragedy of the of the Quadrangle and turn our attention to what had been going on at Mametz Wood upon the right, which was really the key to the situation. It has already been stated that the wood had been attacked in vain by a brigade of the Seventh Division, and that the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division had found some difficulty in even approaching it. It was indeed a formidable obstacle upon the path of the army. An officer has described how he used to gaze from afar upon the immense bulk, the vast denseness and darkness of Mametz Wood, and wonder, knowing the manifold dangers which lurked beneath its shadows, whether it was indeed within human power to take it. Such was the first terrible task to which the Welshmen of the New Army were called. It was done, but one out of every three men who did it found the grave or the hospital before the survivors saw the light shine between the further tree-trunks.

As the Welshmen came into the line they had the Seventeenth Division upon their left, facing Quadrangle Support, and the Eighteenth upon their right at Caterpillar Wood. When at 4:15 on the morning of July 10 all was ready for the assault, the Third Division had relieved the Eighteenth on the right, but the Seventeenth was, as we have seen, still in its position, and was fighting on the western edge of the wood.

The attack of the Welshmen started from White Trench, which lies south-east of the wood and meanders along the brow of a sharp ridge. Since it was dug by the enemy it was of little use to the attack, for no rifle fire could be brought to bear from it upon the edge of the wood, while troops coming over the hill and down the slope were dreadfully exposed. Apart from the German riflemen and machine-gunners, who lay thick among the shell-blasted stumps of trees, there was such a tangle of thick undergrowth and fallen trunks lying at every conceivable angle that it would take a strong and active man to make his way through the wood with a fowling-piece for his equipment and a pheasant for his objective. No troops could have had a more desperate task — the more so as the German second line was only a few hundred yards from the north end of the wood, whence they could reinforce it at their pleasure.

The wood is divided by a central ride running north and south. All to the west of this was allotted to the 113th Brigade, a unit of Welsh Fusilier battalions commanded by a young brigadier who is more likely to win honour than decorations, since he started the War with both the V.C. and the D.S.O. The 114th Brigade, comprising four battalions of the Welsh Regiment, was to carry the eastern half of the wood, the attack being from the south. The front line of attack, counting from the right, consisted of the 13th Welsh (2nd Rhonddas), 14th Welsh (Swansea), with its left on the central ride, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the van of the 113th Brigade. About 4:30 in the morning the barrage lifted from the shadowy edge of the wood, and the infantry pushed forward with all the Cymric fire which burns in that ancient race as fiercely as ever it has done, as every field of manly sport will show. It was a magnificent spectacle, for wave after wave of men could be seen advancing without hesitation and without a break over a distance which in some places was not less than 500 yards.

The Swansea men in the centre broke into the wood without a check, a lieutenant of that battalion charging down two machine-guns and capturing both at the cost of a wound to himself. The 13th on the right won their way also into the wood, but were held for a time, and were reinforced by the 15th (Carmarthens). Here for hours along the whole breadth of the wood the Welsh infantry strove desperately to crawl or burst through the tangle of tree-trunks in the face of the deadly and invisible machine-guns. Some of the 15th got forward through a gap, but found themselves isolated, and had great difficulty in joining up with their own battle line once more. Eventually, in the centre and right, the three battalions formed a line just south of the most southern cross ride from its junction with the main ride.

On the left, the 16th Welsh Fusiliers had lost heavily before reaching the trees, their colonel, Garden, falling at the head of his men. The circumstances of his death should be recorded. His Welsh Fusiliers, before entering action, sang a hymn in Welsh, upon which the colonel addressed them, saying, “Boys, make your peace with God! We are going to take that position, and some of us won’t come back. But we are going to take it.” Tying his handkerchief to his stick he added, “This will show you where I am.” He was hit as he waved them on with his impromptu flag; but he rose, advanced, was hit again, and fell dead.

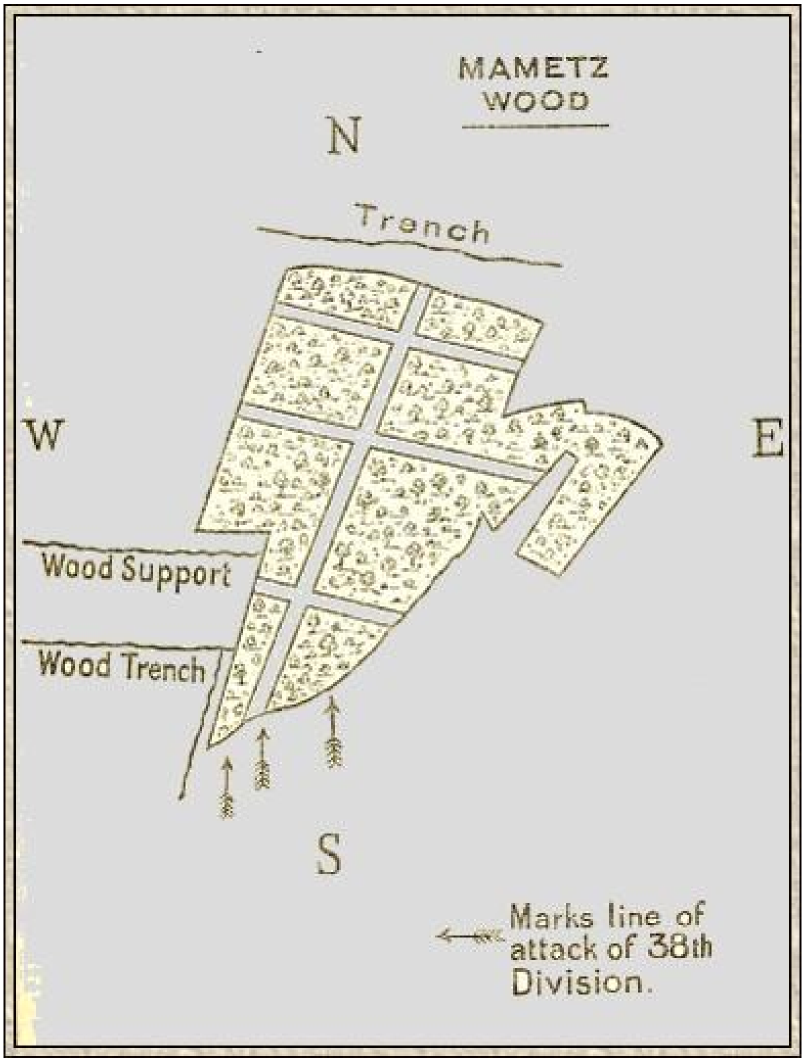

Mametz Wood

Thickened by the support of the 15th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the line rushed on, and occupied the end of the wood until they were abreast of their comrades on the right. Once among the trees, all cohesion was lost among the chaos of tangled branches and splintered trunks, every man getting on as best he he might, with officers rallying and leading forward small groups, who tripped and scrambled onwards against any knot of Germans whom they could see. On this edge of the wood some of the Fusiliers bombed their way along Strip Trench, which outlines the south-western edge, in an endeavour to join hands with the 50th Brigade on their left. At about 6:30 the south end of the wood had been cleared, and the Welshmen, flushed with success, were swarming out at the central ride. A number of prisoners, some hale, some wounded, had been taken. At 7 o’clock the 113th were in touch with the 114th on the right, and with the 50th on the left.

Further advance was made difficult by the fact that the fire from the untaken Wood Support Trench upon the left swept across the ride. The losses of the two Fusilier battalions had been so heavy that they were halted while their comrades of the 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under Colonel Flower, who was killed by a shell, attacked Wood Support — eventually capturing the gun which had wrought such damage, and about 50 Germans. This small body had succeeded, as so often before and since, in holding up a Brigade and disorganising an advance. Until the machine-gun is checkmated by the bullet-proof advance, the defensive will maintain an overpowering and disproportionate advantage.

The 10th Welsh had now come up to reinforce the left of the 114th Brigade, losing their colonel, Rickets, as they advanced into the wood. The 19th Welsh Pioneer Battalion also came forward to consolidate what had been won. There was a considerable pause in the advance, during which two battalions — the 17th Welsh Fusiliers and the 10th South Wales Borderers from the Reserve Brigade, 115th — came up to thicken the line. At about four, the attack was renewed, until at least two-thirds of the wood had been gained. The South Wales Borderers worked up the eastern side, pushing the defenders into the open, where they were shot down by British machine-guns in Caterpillar Wood and Marlborough Wood. About 50 yards from the northern end the khaki line was at last held up and remained there, crouching in shell-holes or behind broken trunks. The main resistance came from a trench outside the wood, and it was eventually determined to bombard it, for which purpose the troops were withdrawn some hundreds of yards. Late in the evening there was another gallant attempt to get the edge of the wood, but the trench was as venomous as ever, and the main German second line behind it was sweeping the underwood with bullets, so the advance was halted for the night.

During the night the 115th Brigade had come to the front, and in the morning of July 11 had relieved the 113th and 114th Brigades. The relief in a thick wood, swept by bullets, and upon a dark night in the close presence of a formidable enemy, was a most difficult operation. The morning was spent in reconnaissance, and it was only at 3. 15 P.M. that the advance could be made upon the main German defence, a trench just outside the north end of the wood. About 4 o’clock the Brigade swept on, and after a sharp bayonet fight gained the trench towards the north-east, but the Germans still held the centre and swept with their fire the portion in our possession. The 11th South Wales Borderers (2nd Gwents) held on splendidly, in spite of their heavy losses. The situation was now such, with only 300 yards to go to reach the German second line, that it was deemed well to relieve the Thirty-eighth Division by the Twenty-first Division, who had been selected for the coming battle. This change was carried out by the morning of July 12.

The action of the Thirty-eighth Division in capturing Mametz Wood had been a very fine one, and the fruit of their victory was not only an important advance, but 398 prisoners, one field gun, three heavy guns, a howitzer and a number of smaller pieces. It was the largest wood in the Somme district, and the importance attached to it by the Germans may be gathered from the fact that men of five different German regiments, the 3rd Lehr, 16th Bavarians, 77th, 83rd, and 122nd, were identified among our opponents. Among many instances of individual valour should be mentioned that of a colonel of the Divisional Staff, who twice, revolver in hand, led the troops on where there was some temporary check or confusion. It is impossible to imagine anything more difficult and involved than some of this fighting, for apart from the abattis and other natural impediments of a tangled wood, the place was a perfect rabbit-warren of trenches, and had occasional land mines in it, which were exploded — some of them prematurely, so that it was the retreating Germans who received the full force of the blast. Burning petrol was also used continually in the defence, and frequently proved to be a two-edged weapon. Some of the garrison stood to their work with extraordinary courage, and nothing but the most devoted valour upon the part of their assailants could have driven them out. “Every man of them was killed where he stood,” said a Welsh Fusilier, in of the describing the resistance of one group. “They refused offers of quarter right to the last, and died with cheers for the Kaiser or words of defiance on their lips. They were brave men, and we were very sorry indeed to have to kill them, for we could not but admire them for their courage.” Such words give honour both to victors and vanquished. The German losses were undoubtedly very heavy — probably not less than those of the Welsh Division.

Though the Welsh Division had overrun Mametz Wood from south to north, there was still one angle in the north-west which had lain out of their course, and had not been taken by them. This part of the wood was occupied upon the evening of July 11 by the 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, which had already performed such notable services upon the Somme. Eight field-guns were discovered in this part of the wood and were captured by the Brigade.

The situation had now greatly improved for the Seventeenth Division in front of Quadrangle Support, for not only was Mametz Wood mostly in the hands of the Welsh, but the Twenty-third Division on the left, who after their temporary check at Contalmaison had fallen back upon the line Peake Alley — Birch Tree Wood — Shelter Wood, now came forward again and occupied Bailiff Wood upon the north of Contalmaison. Under these circumstances, the 50th Brigade upon the right again attempted to get forward in order to keep level with the Welsh in the wood. Connection had not yet been made at that point, however, and the 7th East Yorks, who were the leading battalion, suffered heavy losses before being compelled to abandon the attempt.

Victory, however, was at last coming to reward the living and vindicate the dead. At four in the afternoon of July 10, the Twenty-third Division advanced from Bailiff Wood for its second assault upon Contalmaison. This time everything went to perfection, and the much-enduring infantry were able to take possession of the village, while a counter-attack by the third Reserve Division of the Prussian Guards came under concentrated artillery fire, and was completely disorganised and destroyed. It was the wounded of the Guard from this attack who were seen at Potsdam, and described by Mr. Curtin, the American journalist, in one of the most brilliant articles of the War. Carried into furniture vans, they were conveyed to their hospitals with every secrecy, in order to conceal from the populace the results of the encounter between the famous Corps and those men of the New Army who for more than a year had been the favourite butt of the *Witz-Blätter* of Berlin. Old Father Time has a humour of his own, and his laugh is usually the last. Besides the Guard the 70th Jaeger and the 110th, 114th, and 119th Regiments were included in this defeat.

The two bastions having fallen, the problem of the Quadrangle Support became a very different one, and the 51st Brigade, joining up with the right of the Twenty-third Division in the evening, was able to get hold of the left end of it. Even now, however, the Germans fought hard to the right, and both the 7th East Yorks and the 6th Dorsets had to push strongly before they could win through. They were encouraged in their efforts when, in the waning light, they were able to see small bodies of the enemy retiring in the distance out of the fringe of the wood. By ten o’clock that night the long task had been accomplished, and the dead might sleep in peace, for Quadrangle Support was in the hands of the Seventeenth Division. They were relieved by the Twenty-first Division upon July 11.

At or about the same time as the relief of the Seventeenth Division, the Twenty-third upon their left were also relieved, their line being taken over by the First Division. Since the capture of Contalmaison and the heavy repulse of the German Guard Division the British had made further progress, so that both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa to the north of the village were firmly in their hands. The instructions to the First Division were to endeavour to improve this advantage, and an advance was at once made which, occurring as it did upon the night of July 15, may be best described under the heading which treats of the breaking of the second German line.

Having dealt with the operations upon the left and those in the centre of the intermediate German position, we will now turn to those upon the right, which are concerned with the Eighteenth and the Thirtieth Divisions, supported by the Ninth. After the fall of Montauban, these Divisions advanced, the one upon Caterpillar Wood, and the other to Bernafoy Wood, both of which were occupied. For the occupation of Bernafoy Wood the 27th Brigade of the Ninth Division had been put at the disposal of the commander of the Thirtieth, and this force occupied the position without much loss, but were exposed afterwards to a most deadly shell-fire, which caused heavy losses to the two front battalions — the 6th King’s Own Scottish Borderers and the the 6th Scots Rifles. The wood was held, however, together with three guns, which were found within it. On July 5 the Thirtieth Division handed over that line to the Ninth. On that date they sustained the heavy loss of Colonels Trotter and Smith — both killed by distant shell-fire.

The rest of the Thirtieth Division only lasted for a very few days, and upon July 7 they were facing the enemy position from Malzhorn Farm upon the right to Trones Wood upon the left, and were about to be initiated in that terrible wood fighting which cost us so dear. There is no fighting in the world which is more awesome to the mind and more exhausting to the body than such combats as these amid the ghostly atmosphere of ruined woods, with Death lurking in the shadows on every hand, and the thresh of the shells beating without cessation by night and by day. Trones, Mametz, High Wood, Delville — never has the quiet, steadfast courage of the British soldier been put to a more searching test than in those haunts of gloom and horror. In the case of Trones Wood some account must be given of the peculiar tactical difficulties of the situation, and then we shall turn to the sombre but glorious narrative of the successive attacks.

The tactical problem was a remarkable one. The wood was connected up on the German side by good lines of trenches with Malzhorn Farm on the south, with Guillemont on the east, and with Waterlot Farm on the north — each of these points being from 400 to 700 yards away. It was also commanded by a large number of heavy guns. The result was that if the British stormers held the wood in strength, they were shelled out with heavy losses. If, on the other hand, the wood were lightly held, then the German infantry pouring in from the east and north could drive them out. The British, on the other hand, had no trenches leading up to the wood, though in other respects the Germans found the same difficulties in holding the place that they did. It was a terrible contest in tenacity between the infantry of the two nations, and if in the end the British won it must at least be admitted that there was no evidence of any demoralisation among the Germans on account of the destruction of their main line. They fought well, were well led, and were admirably supported by their guns.

The first attack upon Trones Wood was carried out from the south upon July 8 by the 21st Brigade. There was no suspicion then of the strength of the German position, and the attack was repulsed within a couple of hours, the 2nd Yorks being the chief sufferers.

There was more success upon the right of the line where the French were attacking Malzhorn Farm. A company of the 2nd Wilts made their way successfully to help our Allies, and gained a lodgment in the German trenches which connect Malzhorn Farm with the south end of Trones Wood. With the aid of some of the 19th Manchesters this position was extended, and two German counter attacks were crushed by rifle- fire. The position in this southern trench was permanently held, and it acted like a self-registering gauge for the combat in Trones Wood, for when the British held the wood the whole Southern Trench was British, while a German success in the wood always led to a contraction in the holding of the trench.

At one o’clock upon July 8 the 21st Brigade renewed their attempt, attacking with the 2nd Wiltshires in the lead from the side of Bernafoy

Wood. The advance was a fine one, but Colonel Gillson was badly wounded, and his successor in command. Captain Mumford, was killed. About three o’clock the 18th and 19th Manchesters came up in support. German bombers were driving down from the north, and the fighting was very severe. In the evening some of the Liverpools came up to strengthen the line, and it was determined to draw out the weakened 21st, and replace it by the 90th Brigade. At the same time a party of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers of this Brigade took over Malzhorn Trench, and rushed the farmhouse itself, capturing 67 prisoners. The whole of the trench was afterwards cleared up with two machine-guns and 100 more prisoners. It was a fine bit of work, worthy of that splendid battalion.

Upon July 9 at 6.40 A.M. began the third attack upon Trones Wood led by the 17th Manchesters. They took over the footing already held, and by eight o’clock they had extended it along the eastern edge, practically clearing the wood of German infantry. There followed, however, a terrific bombardment, which caused such losses that the 17th and their comrades of the 18th were ordered to fall back once more, with the result that the Scots Fusiliers had to give up the northern end of their Malzhorn Trench. An enemy counter-attack at 4:30 P.M. had no success. A fresh British attack (the fourth) was at once organised, and carried out by the 16th Manchesters, who at 6.40 P.M. got into the south end of the wood once more, finding a scattered fringe of their comrades who had held on there. Some South African Highlanders from the Ninth Division came up to help them during the night. This fine battalion lost many men, including their colonel, Jones, while supporting the attack from Bernafoy Wood. In the morning the position was better, but a gap had been left between the Manchesters in the wood and the Scots in the trench, through which the enemy made their way. After much confused fighting and very heavy shelling, the evening of July 10 found the wood once more with the Germans.

In the early morning of July 11 the only remaining British Brigade, the 89th, took up the running. At 3:50 the 2nd Bedfords advanced to the attack. Aided by the 19th King’s Liverpools, the wood was once again carried and cleared of the enemy, but once again a terrific shell-fall weakened the troops to a point where they could not resist a strong attack. The Bedfords fought magnificently, and had lost 50 per cent of their effectives before being compelled to withdraw their line. The south-east corner of the wood was carried by the swarming enemy, but the south-west corner was still in the hands of our utterly weary and yet tenacious infantry. At 9:30 the same evening the 17th King’s Liverpools pushed the Germans back once more, and consolidated the ground won at the southern end. So the matter stood when the exhausted division was withdrawn for a short rest, while the Eighteenth Division took up their difficult task. The Lancashire men had left it unfinished, but their conduct had been heroic, and they had left their successors that one corner of consolidated ground which was needed as a jumping-off place for a successful attack.

It was the 55th Brigade of the Eighteenth Division which first came up to take over the fighting line. A great responsibility was placed upon the general officer commanding, for the general attack upon the German line had been fixed for July 14, and it was impossible to proceed with it until the British held securely the covering line upon the flank. Both Trones Wood and the Malzhorn Trench were therefore of much more than local importance, so that when Haig found himself at so late a date as July 12 without command of this position, it was a very serious matter which might have far-reaching consequences. The orders now were that within a day, at all costs, Trones Wood must be in British hands, and to the 55th, strengthened by two battalions of the 54th Brigade, was given the desperate task. The situation was rendered more difficult by the urgency of the call, which gave the leaders no time in which to get acquainted with the ground.

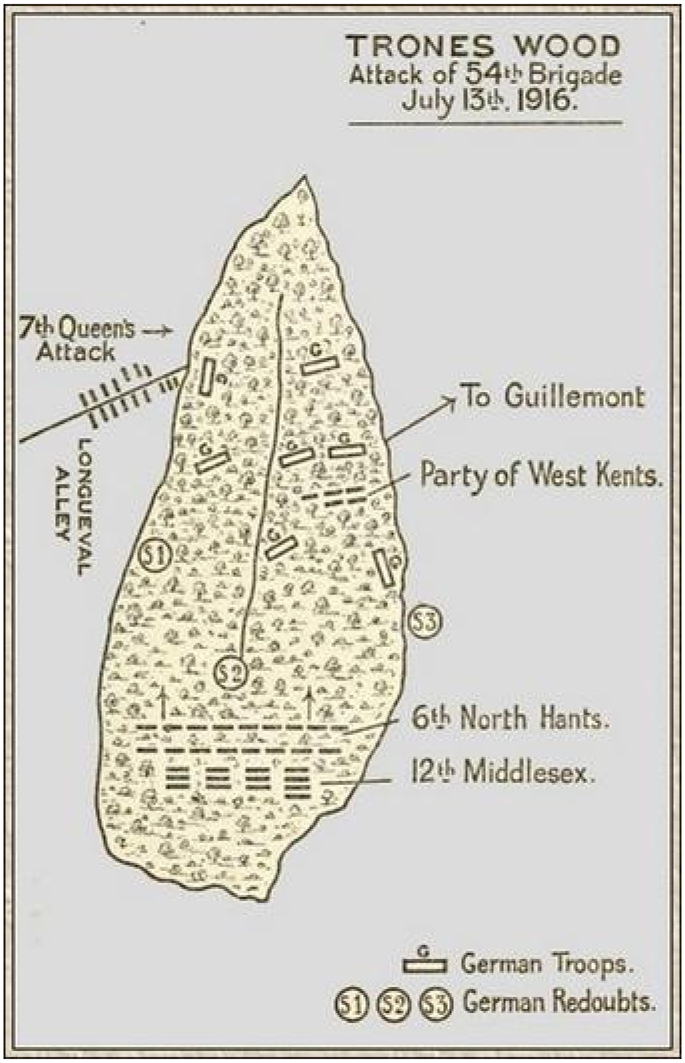
TRONES WOOD
Attack of 54th Brigade
July 13th. 1916.
7th Queen's Attack
LONGUEVAL ALLEY
To Guillemont
Party of West Kents.
S1
S2
S3
6th North Hants.
12th Middlesex.
G
German Troops.
S1 S2 S3 German Redoubts.

Trones Wood: Attack of 54th Brigade, July 13, 1916

The German defence had become a strong one. They had formed three strong points, marked S1, S2, and S3 in the Diagram, p. 141. These, together with several trenches, dotted here and there, broke up every attack, and when once order was broken it was almost impossible in the tangle and obscurity for the troops to preserve any cohesion or direction. Those troops which penetrated between the strong points found themselves with the enemy in their rear and were in a disorganised condition, which was only overcome by the individual bravery of the men, who refused to be appalled by the difficult situation in which they found themselves. The attack of the 55th Brigade was made from of the the sunken road immediately south of the wood, and it ran at once into so heavy a barrage that it lost heavily before it had reached even the edge of its objective. The 7th West Kents, who formed the attacking force, were not to be denied, however, and they pushed forward through a deepening gloom, for it was seven in the evening before the signal had been given. Whilst the Kents fought up from the south, the Queen’s Surreys attempted to wan a lodgment on the north-west where the Longueval Alley led up from Bernafoy Wood. They also suffered heavily from the barrage, and only a few brave men reached the top of the wood and held on there for some hours. The West Kents passed the line of strong points and then lost touch with each other, until they had resolved themselves into two or three separate groups holding together as best they could in the darkness with the enemy all round them, and with the communications cut behind them. The telephone wires had all been broken by the barrage, and the anxious commanders could only know that the attack had failed, that no word came back from the front, and that a British battalion had been swallowed up by the wood.

The orders were peremptory, however, that the position should be taken, and General Maxse, without hesitation, threw a second of his brigades into the dangerous venture. It was the 54th Brigade which moved to the attack. It was just past midnight when the soldiers went. forward. The actual assault was carried out from south to north, on the same line as the advance of the West Kents. The storming battalions were the 6th Northamptons and 12th Middlesex, the former to advance direct through the and the latter to clean up behind them and to form a defensive flank on the right.

The attack was a fine feat of arms. Though heavily hit by the barrage, the Northamptons, closely followed by two companies of the Middlesex, pushed their way into the wood and onwards. It was pitch dark, and the men were stumbling continually over the fallen trees and the numerous dead bodies which lay among the undergrowth. None the less, they kept touch, and plodded steadily onwards. The gallant Clark was shot, but another officer led the Northamptons against the central strong point, for it had been wisely determined to leave no enemy in the rear. Shortly after dawn on July 14 this point was carried, and the Northamptons were able to get forward. By 8 o’clock the wood was full of scattered groups of British infantry, but the situation was so confused that the colonel went forward and rallied them into a single line which formed across the wood. This line advanced until it came level with the strong point S 3, which was captured. A number of the enemy then streamed out of the eastern side of the wood, making for Guillemont. These men came under British machine-gun fire and lost heavily. The remaining strong point at S1 had been taken by a mixed group of Buffs and Middlesex about 9 A.M. These three strong points having been occupied, the whole wood was now swept clear and was permanently occupied, though still subjected to very heavy shell fire by the enemy. Thus, the right flank of the army was covered, and the important operations of July 14 were enabled to go forward without danger of the of molestation. Of the two gallant battalions who mainly achieved this important result, the losses of the Northamptons were about 300, and of the Middlesex about half that amount.

There was an epilogue which was as honourable to the troops concerned as the main attack had been. This concerns the fate of the men of West Kent, who, as will be remembered, had been cut off in the wood. The main body of these, under the regimental adjutant, together with a few men of the Queen’s, formed a small defensive position and held out in the hope of relief. They were about 200 all told, and their position seemed so hopeless that every excuse might have been found for surrender. They held out all night, however, and in the morning they were successfully relieved by the advance of the 54th Brigade. It is true that no severe attack was made upon them during the night, but their undaunted front may have had something to do with their immunity. Once, in the early dawn, a German officer actually came up to them under the impression that they were his own men — his last mistake upon earth. It is notable that the badges of six different German regiments were found in the wood, which seemed to indicate that it was held by picked men or volunteers from many units. “To the death!” was their password for the night, and to their honour be it said that they were mostly true to it. So also were the British stormers, of whom Sir Henry Rawlinson said: “The night attack on and final capture of Trones Wood were feats of arms which will rank high among the best achievements of the British Army.”

An account of this fortnight of desperate and almost continuous fighting is necessarily concerned chiefly with the deeds of the infantry, but it may fitly end with a word as to the grand work of the artillery, without whom in modern warfare all the valour and devotion of the foot-soldier are but a useless self-sacrifice. Nothing could exceed the endurance and the technical efficiency of the gunners. No finer tribute could be paid them than that published at the time from one of their own officers, which speaks with heart and with knowledge: “They worked their guns with great accuracy and effect without a moment’s cessation by day or by night for ten days, and I don’t believe any artillery have ever had a higher or a longer test or have done it more splendidly. And these gunners, when the order came that we must pull out and go with the infantry — do you think they were glad or willing? Devil a bit! They were sick as muck and only desired to stay on and continue killing Boches. And these men a year ago not even soldiers — much less gunners! Isn’t it magnificent — and is it not enough to make the commander of such men uplifted?” No cold and measured judgment of the historian can ever convey their greatness with the conviction produced by one who stood by them in the thick of the battle and rejoiced in the manhood of those whom he had himself trained and led.

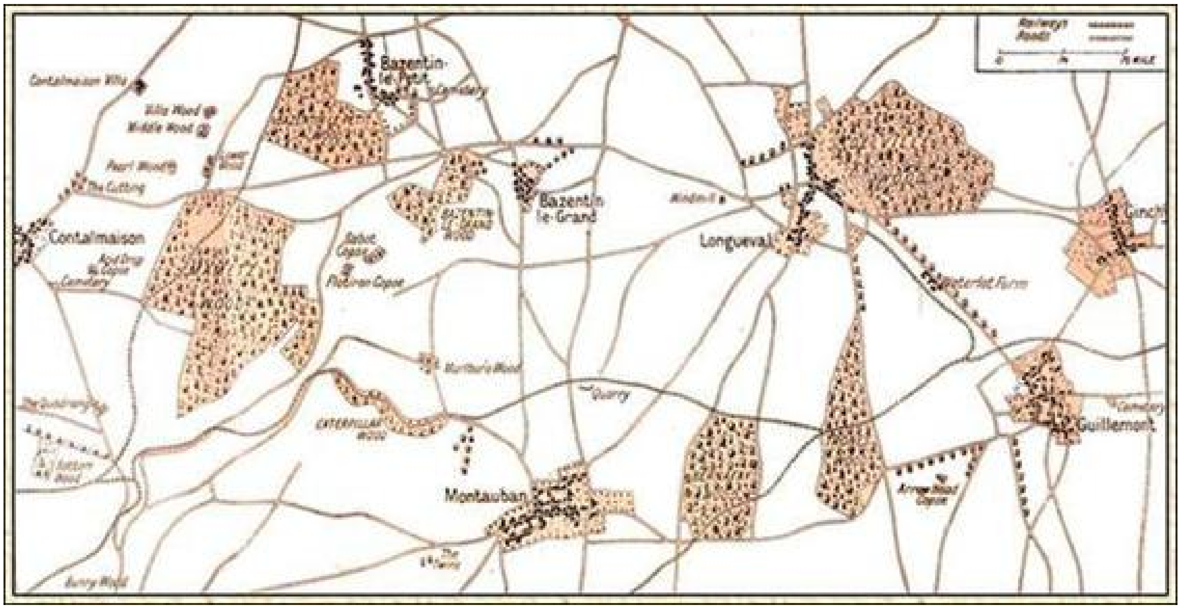
Railways
Roads
Contalmaison Villa
Bazentin-le-Petit
Cemetery
Middle Wood
The Cutting
Contalmaison
Cemetery
Bazentin le-Grand
Sabot Copse
Flatiron Copse
Windmill
Longueval
Waterlot Farm
Ginch
Quarry
Caterpillar Wood
Bottom Wood
Montauban
Cemetery
Guillemont
Arrow Head Copse

The Second German Line, Bazentins, Delville Wood, etc.

VI. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
The Breaking of the Second Line. July 14, 1916

The great night advance — The Leicester Brigade at Bazentin — Assault by Seventh Division — Success of the Third Division — Desperate fight of Ninth Division at Longueval — Operations of First Division on flank — Cavalry advance

WITH the fall of Mametz Wood, the impending capture of Trones Wood upon the right, and the close investment of Ovillers upon the left flank, the army could now face the second line of German defences. The ground in front of them sloped gently upwards until it reached the edge of a rolling plateau. Upon this edge were three villages: Little Bazentin upon the left, Grand Bazentin upon the centre, and Longueval upon the right, all nestling among orchards and flanked by woods. Through these lay the enemy's position, extending to Pozières upon the one side, and through Guillemont to the French junction on the other. These two flanks were for the time to be disregarded, and it was determined to strike a heavy frontal blow which would, as it was hoped, crush in the whole middle of their line, leaving the sides to be dealt with at our leisure. It was a most formidable obstacle, for all three villages were as strong as the German sappers could make them, and were connected up with great lines of trenches, the whole front which was to be attacked covering about 6000 yards. A small wood screened Little Bazentin on the left, while behind Longueval, facing the right attack, was a larger plantation which, under the name of Delville Wood, has won for itself a terrible and glorious name in British military history.

The heavy guns had been advanced and the destruction of the German wire and trenches had begun upon July 11. On the evening of the 13th the troops mustered for the battle. They were all divisions which had already been heavily engaged, and some of them had endured losses in the last fortnight which might have seemed to be sufficient to put them out of action. None the less they were not only eager for the fight, but they were, as it proved, capable of performing the most arduous and delicate of all operations, a night march in the face of the enemy. More than a thousand yards of clear ground lay at many points between the British outposts and the German trenches. To cover it in daylight meant, as they had so often learned, a heavy loss. It was ordered, therefore, that the troops should move up to within striking distance in the darkness, and dash home with the first glimmer of morning light. There was no confusion, no loss of touch as 25,000 stormers took up their stations, and so little sound that the Germans seem to have been unaware of the great gathering in their immediate front. It was ticklish work, lying for hours within point-blank range with no cover, but the men endured it as best they might. With the first faint dawn the long line sprang to their feet and with a cheer dashed forward at the German trenches, while the barrage rose and went roaring to eastward whence help might come to the hard-pressed German defence.

On the extreme left of the section attacked was the First Regular Division, which took no part in the actual advance but held the flank in the neighbourhood of Contalmaison Villa, and at one period of the day sent forward its right-hand battalion, the 1st North Lancashires, to aid their neighbours in the fight.

The left of the line of actual attack was formed by the Twenty-first Division opposite to Bazentin-le-Petit. This attack was carried out upon a single brigade front, and the Brigade in question was the 110th from the Thirty-seventh Division. This division made no appearance as a unit in the Battle of the Somme, but was several times engaged in its separate brigades. On this occasion the 110th, consisting entirely of men of Leicester, took the place of the 63rd Brigade, much reduced by previous fighting. Their immediate objective was the north end of Bazentin-le-Petit village and the whole of the wood of that name. Led by the 8th and 9th Leicesters the brigade showed, as has so often been shown before, that the British soldier never fights better than in his first engagement. Owing to the co-operation of the First Division and to a very effective smoke screen upon their left, their advance was not attended with heavy loss in the earlier stages, and they were able to flow over the open and into the trenches opposite, capturing some 500 prisoners. They continued to fight their way with splendid steadiness through the wood and held it for the remainder of the day. Their greatest trouble came from a single German strong-point which was 200 yards away from the corner of the wood, and, therefore, beyond their objective. The machine-guns in this redoubt caused great loss whenever the edge of the wood was approached. This strong-point was destroyed next day, but meanwhile the position was consolidated and was firmly held for the next four days, after which the division was withdrawn for a rest.

On the right of the Twenty-first Division lay the Seventh Division, to which had been assigned the assault of the Bazentin-le-Petit village. The leading brigade was the 20th, and the storming battalions, the 8th Devons and 2nd Borders, crept up to their mark in the darkness of a very obscure night. At 3.25 the barrage was lifted, and so instantaneous was the attack that there was hardly an interval between the last of the shrapnel and the first of the stormers. The whole front line was captured in an instant, and the splendid infantry rushed on without a pause to the second line, springing into the trenches once more at the moment that the gunners raised their pieces. In ten minutes both of these powerful lines had fallen. Several dug-outs were found to be crammed with the enemy, including the colonel of the Lehr Battalion, and with the machine-guns which they had been unable to hoist into their places before the wave had broken over them. When these were cleared, the advance was carried on into Bazentin-le-Grand Wood, which was soon occupied from end to end. A line in front of the wood was taken up and consolidated.

In the meanwhile the 22nd Brigade had taken up the work, the 2nd Warwicks pushing forward and occupying, without any opposition from the disorganised enemy, the Circus Trench, while the 2nd of the Royal Irish advanced to the attack of the village of Bazentin-le-Petit. Their leading company rushed the position with great dash, capturing the colonel commanding the garrison, and about 100 of his men. By 7:30 the place was in their hands, and the leading company had pushed into a trench on the far side of it, getting into touch with the Leicesters on their left.

The Germans were by no means done with, however, and they were massing thickly to the north and north-east of the houses where some scattered orchards shrouded their numbers and their dispositions. As the right of the brigade seemed to be in the air, a brave sergeant of the 2nd Warwicks set off to establish touch with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, who formed the left unit of the Third Division upon the right. As he returned he spotted a German machine-gun in a cellar, entered it, killed the gunner, and captured four guns. The wings of the two divisions were then able to co-operate and to clear the ground in front of them.

The Irishmen in the advance were still in the air, however, having got well ahead of the line, and they were now assailed by a furious fire from High “Wood, followed by a determined infantry assault. This enfilade fire caused heavy losses, and the few survivors of those who garrisoned the exposed trench were withdrawn to the shelter afforded by the outskirts of the village. There and elsewhere the Lewis guns had proved invaluable, for every man of intelligence in the battalion had been trained to their use, and in spite of gunners being knocked out, there was never any lack of men to take their place. The German counter-attack pushed on, however, and entered the village, which was desperately defended not only by the scattered infantrymen who had been driven back to it, but also by the consolidating party from the 54th Field Company Royal Engineers and half the 24th Manchester Pioneer Battalion. At this period of the action a crowd of men from various battalions had been driven down to the south end of the village in temporary disorganisation due to the rapidity of the advance and the sudden severity of the counterattack. These men were re- formed by the adjutant of the Irish, and were led by him against the advancing Germans, whom they drove back with the bayonet, finally establishing themselves on the northern edge of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, which they held until relieved later by the 2nd Gordons of the 20th Brigade. At the same time the village itself was cleared by the 2nd Warwicks, while the 1st Welsh Fusiliers drove the Germans out of the line between the windmill and the cemetery. The trench held originally by the Irish was retaken, and in it was found a British officer, who had been badly wounded and left for a time in the hands of the enemy. He reported that they would not dress him, and prodded at him with their bayonets, but that an officer had stopped them from killing him. No further attempt was made by the Germans to regain the position of Bazentin. The losses, especially those of the Royal Irish, had been very heavy during the latter part of the engagement.

Much had been done, but the heavy task of the Seventh Division was not yet at an end. At 3:20 P.M. the reserve Brigade (91st) were ordered to attack the formidable obstacle of High Wood, the 100th Brigade of the Thirty-third Division (Landon) co-operating from the left side, while a handful of cavalry from the 7th Dragoon Guards and 20th Deccan Horse made an exhilarating, if premature, appearance upon the right flank, to which some allusion is made at the end of this chapter. The front line of the 91st Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Queen’s Surrey and 1st South Staffords, marched forward in the traditional style of the British line, taking no notice of an enfilade fire from the Switch Trench, and beating back a sortie from the wood. At the same time the Brigadier of the 100th Brigade upon the left pushed forward his two leading battalions, the 1st Queen’s Surrey and the

9th Highland Light Infantry, to seize and hold the road which led from High Wood to Bazentin-le-Petit. This was done in the late evening of July 14, while their comrades of the Seventh Division successfully reached the south end of the wood, taking three field guns and 100 prisoners. The Queen’s and part of the Highland Light Infantry were firmly in possession of the connecting road, but the right flank of the Highlanders was held up owing to the fact that the north-west of the wood was still in the hands of the enemy and commanded their advance. We will return to the situation which developed in this part of the field during the succeeding days after we have taken a fuller view of the doings upon the rest of the line during the battle of July 14. It may be said here, however, that the facility with which a footing was established in High Wood proved to be as fallacious as the parallel case of Mametz Wood, and that many a weary week was to pass, and many a brave man give his heart’s blood, before it was finally to be included in the British lines. For the present, it may be stated that the 91st Brigade could not hold the wood because it was enfiladed by the uncaptured Switch Trench, and that they therefore retired after dusk on the 15th.

To return to the story of the main battle. The centre of the attack was carried out by the Third Division, one of the most famous units in the Army, though it now only retained three of the veteran battalions which had held the line at Mons. The task of the Third Division was to break the centre of the German line from Grand Bazentin upon the left where it touched the Seventh to Longueval on the right where it joined with the Ninth Division. The 8th Brigade was on the right, the 9th upon the left, while the 76th was in support. The attacking troops advanced in the darkness in fours, with strong patrols in front, and deployed within 200 yards of the German wire, capturing a German patrol which blundered into their ranks. Upon the word being given at the first faint gleam of dawn, the leading battalions trudged forward in the slow, determined fashion which had been found to be more effective than the spectacular charge. From the left the front line consisted of the 12th West Yorkshires, the 13th King’s Liverpools, the 7th Shropshires, and the 8th East Yorks. The wire upon the right was found to be very partially cut, and the line of stormers was held up under a murderous fire. There were gaps here and there, however, so that the colonel at the head of his Shropshires was able to force a passage at one point, while two gallant platoons of the East Yorkshires got through at another, and pushed boldly on into the German line. The main body, however, were forced for a time to take cover and keep up a fire upon the enemies' heads as they peered occasionally from over the parapets.

The left brigade had been more fortunate, finding the wire to be well cut. The front trench was not strongly held, and was easily carried. Both the King's Liverpools and the West Yorkshires got through, but as they had separated in the advance the greater part of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers were thrust into the gap and restored the line. These men, supported by Stokes guns, carried the village of Grand Bazentin by 6:30 A.M. There was a deadly fire from the Grand Bazentin Wood upon the left, but as the Seventh Division advanced this died away, and the 12th West Yorkshires were able to get round to the north edge of the village, but could get no farther on account of the hold-up of the 8th Brigade upon the right. There was a considerable delay, but at last by 1 P.M. a renewed bombardment had cut the wires, and strong bombing parties from the supporting battalions, the 2nd Royal Scots and 1st Scots Fusiliers, worked down the front trench from each end. The whole brigade was then able to advance across the German front line, which was at once consolidated.

The losses in this attack had been heavy, the 12th West Yorkshires alone having 15 officers, including their colonel, and 350 men out of action. The results, however, were solid, as not only was the whole front of the German position crushed in, but 36 officers with 650 men were taken, together with four small howitzers, four field-guns, and fourteen machine-guns. A counter-attack was inevitable and consolidation was pushed forward with furious energy. "Every one was digging like madmen, all mixed up with the dead and the dying." One counter-attack of some hundreds of brave men did charge towards them in the afternoon, but were scattered to the winds by a concentration of fire. The position was permanently held.

The Ninth Division was on the immediate right of the Third, facing Longueval, a straggling village which lay against the sinister background of Delville Wood. The Division was, as will be remembered, the first of the new armies, and had distinguished itself greatly at Loos. It had been entirely a Highland Division, but it had undergone a picturesque change by the substitution of the South African Infantry Brigade in place of the 28th. The attack upon Longueval was carried out by the 26th Brigade, the 8th Black Watch and 10th Argyll and Sutherlands in the lead, with the 9th Seaforths in support and the 5th ,Camerons in reserve. The advance was so fine as to rouse the deepest admiration from an experienced French officer who observed it. “Who would believe,” he wrote, “that only a few months ago not one of these men knew anything of the soldier’s profession? They carried themselves as superbly as the Old Guard. Once I was near enough to see their faces as they deployed for attack under the devastating fire rained on them... Their teeth were set and their eyes were fixed firmly on the goal towards which they were advancing. They were determined to achieve their object, and nothing but death would stop them... Only those who were seriously hit thought of dropping out. The others pressed proudly on, regardless of the pain they suffered, and took part in the final charge in which the enemy were driven from the position.” Such a of the tribute from a soldier to soldiers is indeed a glory.

The village and the trenches around it were taken with a splendid rush, but the fighting among the houses was of a desperate character, “more so,” says the same observer, “than any I had seen before.” The Germans refused to give or take quarter. When the Highlanders broke the line they cut off those who held the trench. The officer in command offered quarter. The German commander refused. “I and my men,” he replied, “have orders to defend this ground with our lives. German soldiers know how to obey orders. We thank you for your offer, but we die where we stand.” When the Highlanders finally took possession of the trench, all but a mere handful of the defenders were dead. It is episodes like this which would make us ready to take a German by the hand if it were not that his country’s hand is red with innocent blood.

The defence was not everywhere equally desperate. As the Highlanders dashed past the trenches and into the scattered group of houses which marked the village, grey figures darted round corners, or rushed out with hands to heaven. Many prisoners were taken. Here and there groups of brave men sold their lives dearly, especially in some ruins at the east end of the village. The blast of fire from this place was so hot that for a moment the advance was staggered; but a brave piper ran to the front, and the joyous lilt of “The Campbells are coming” sent the clansmen flooding onwards once more. Neither bullets, bombs, nor liquid fire could stop them, and the last German was stabbed or shot amid the broken walls of his shattered fort.

The main part or west of Longueval was now in the hands of the Scotsmen, but the place is peculiarly shaped, tailing away in a thin line to the northwards, the scattered houses in that direction being commanded by the wood, which runs right up to them on their southern side. It was clear that no complete conquest could be made until this wood also was in the hands of our stormers. The operation was a difficult one, and far too large to be carried out upon that day. The South African Brigade was therefore ordered up from Montauban, with instructions that they should attack Delville Wood at dawn of July 15.

Here we may break off the narrative of the battle of July 14, though it is difficult to do so, since these operations shade imperceptibly into each other, and the fighting never really came to an end. The main results, however, had become clear by that evening, and they amounted to a very great success, unalloyed by any failure. Every division had carried its point and added to its glories. Four villages, three woods, 6000 yards of front, and 2000 of depth had been added to our lines. Two thousand more prisoners had been taken, bringing the total for the fortnight to the substantial figure of 10,000; while twelve heavy and forty-two field-guns had also been taken during that time. Above all, the British had got their grip firmly upon the edge of the plateau, though many a weary day of fighting was to follow before the tenacious enemy had been driven from it, and the whole position was in British hands.

The reader is to understand clearly that though the operations of July 14 crushed in the face of the German line along the whole central position, the flanks both to the right and to the left were still inviolate. Upon the German right the whole range of powerful fortifications which extended through Pozières to Thiepval were untouched, while upon the German left the equally formidable line stretching from Longueval through Waterlot Farm and Guillemont to Falfemont Farm was also intact. It is correct, then, to say that the German second line had been stormed and penetrated, but it had not been captured throughout its full extent, and the greater part of the autumn campaign was to pass before this had been accomplished. The reduction of the German right wing will be recounted in the chapters which deal with Gough’s army, to whom the task was assigned. That of the left wing is covered by the narrative, which gives some details of the numerous, bloody, and protracted attacks which ended in the capture of Guillemont.

Meanwhile a word may be said as to the operations of the First Division, who had been upon the left of the attack upon July 14, and had covered that flank without attempting an advance. Upon the night of July 15 they moved forward to attack the continuation of the German second line system between the captured Bazentin and the uncaptured Pozières. The attack was made by the 3rd Brigade, the 2nd Munsters being to the left, the 1st South Wales Borderers to the right, and the 1st Gloucesters in the centre with the 2nd Welsh in reserve. No less than 1200 yards of No Man's Land had to be crossed, but this was the more easy since both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa were occupied. A daring daylight reconnaissance by the colonel of the Gloucesters greatly helped the advance. The men were marched silently in platoons along the road, and then re-formed into line on the far side of the enemy's barrage, a manoeuvre which in the darkness called for great steadiness and discipline, the line being dressed on a shaded lamp in the wood. On the word the eager troops pushed on with such speed that they crossed the German front trenches and were into the second before their own barrage had properly lifted. Pushing forward again, they were soon some hundreds of yards past their objective, where they halted close to the formidable Switch Line, having occupied all of the second line system in their front. Their formation was now so dense, and they were so close to the German machine-guns, that there was a possibility of disaster, which was increased by the Welsh Borderers losing direction and charging towards a body of men whom they dimly saw in front of them, who proved to be the Gloucesters. Fine restraint upon both sides prevented a catastrophe. Officers and men were now keen to push on and to attack the Switch Line, from which flares were rising; but prudence forbade the opening up of an entirely new objective, and the men were drawn back to the captured German trenches. So ended a successful and almost bloodless operation.

It has been stated in the account of the action of July 14 that at one stage of the battle the cavalry advanced, but it was impossible to stop the description of a large movement to follow the fortunes of this small tactical stroke. None the less the matter was important, as being the first blood lost or drawn by cavalry, as cavalry, since the early months of the War. The idea was, that by a sudden move forward a small body of horse might establish itself in advance of the general line, and occupy a position which it could hold until the slower infantry came forward to take it over. This was actually done, and the movement may therefore be claimed as a successful experiment. The two detachments from the Deccan Horse and 7th Dragoon Guards galloped three miles from the rear, so as to be under observation as short a time as possible, passed swiftly through the lines of the astonished and jubilant infantry, and riding right into the enemy’s position upon our right centre, established themselves in a strong point, and, aided by a friendly monoplane, beat off the German attacks. The advance was at six in the evening, and it was able to hold on until nightfall and to hand over in the early morning to the infantry. Some 40 Germans fell to lance or sabre, and a few were taken prisoners by the daring cavaliers, who suffered somewhat heavily, as they might well expect to do in so novel and desperate a venture.

VII. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
July 14 to July 31

Gradual advance of First Division — Hard fighting of Thirty-third Division at High Wood — The South Africans in Delville Wood — The great German counter-attack — Splendid work of 26th Brigade — Capture of Delville Wood by 98th Brigade — Indecisive fighting on the Guillemont front

THE central fact of the situation after the battle of Bazentin was that although the second German line had been broken, the gap made was little more than three miles wide, and must be greatly extended upon of the either flank before a general advance upon the third line could take place. This meant that the left wing must push out in the Pozières direction, and that the right wing must get Ginchy and Guillemont. For the time the central British position was not an advantageous one, as it formed a long salient bending from High Wood through Delville Wood to Guillemont, so placed that it was open to direct observation all along, and exposed to converging fire which could be directed with all the more accuracy as it was upon points so well known to the Germans, into which the guns, communications, and reserves were now crammed. Sir Douglas Haig’s great difficulties were increased by a long spell of wet and cloudy weather, which neutralised his advantages in the air. Everything was against the British General except the excellence of his artillery and the spirit of his troops.

The French upon the right, whose tally of guns and prisoners were up to date higher than those of the British, had an equally hard front to attack, including the four strong villages of Maurepas, Le Forest, Raucourt, and Fregicourt, with many woods and systems of trenches. Their whole work in the battle had been worthy of their military history, and could not be surpassed, either in the dispositions of General Foch or in the valour of his men. Neither their infantry nor ours had ever relinquished one square yard that they had wrenched from the tight grip of the invader.

In each area of the battle of July 14 some pressing task was left to be accomplished, and the fighting was very severe at certain points for some days later. We shall first turn to the north of the line, where new divisions had come into action. One of these already mentioned was the First Division. It was indeed pleasing and reassuring to observe how many of the new divisional generals were men whose names recalled good service as regimental officers. Many who now wore the crossed swords upon their shoulders had been battalion commanders in 1914. It is indeed well with an army when neither seniority nor interest but good hard service upon the field of battle puts officers in charge of the lives of men.

The First Division had taken the place of the Twenty-third after the fall of Contalmaison, and had pushed its way up until it was level with the line of their comrades on the right, whence in the manner described at the end of the last chapter they drove their line forward upon July 15. On the 20th they received a rebuff, however, the 1st Northants being held up by a very formidable German trench called Munster Alley. The ground already gained was consolidated, however, and the division lay with its left touching the Australians on the right of Gough’s army, and its right connected with the Thirty-third Division, whose doings at High Wood will presently be considered. For the purpose of continuity of narrative it will be best to continue with a short summary of the doings of the First Division upon the left wing of the advance, their general task being to hold that flank against German counter-attacks, and to push forward wherever possible. It was continuous hard work which, like so many of these operations, could gain little credit, since there was no fixed point but only a maze of trenches in front of them. The storming of a nameless ditch may well call for as high military virtue as the taking of a historic village, and yet it seems a slighter thing in the lines of a bulletin. Munster Alley and the great Switch Line faced the First Division, two most formidable obstacles. On July 23, in the early morning, the 2nd Brigade of the First Division attacked the Switch Line, in conjunction with the Australians, on the left, and the Nineteenth Division to the right. The attack was held up, Colonel Bircham of the 2nd Rifles and many officers and men being killed. Colonel Bircham was a particularly gallant officer, who exposed himself fearlessly upon every occasion, and it is on record that when remonstrated with by his adjutant for his reckless disregard of danger, he answered, “You know as well as I do where a colonel of the 60th ought to be.” Such lives are an example and such deaths an inspiration. Altogether the 2nd Rifles lost about 250 men in this night attack, and the other first line battalions — the 2nd Sussex, 10th Gloucesters, and 1st Cameron Highlanders — were all hard hit. The failure seems to have been partly due to misdirection in the dark.

Upon July 25 the 1st South Wales Borderers of the 3rd Brigade attacked Munster Alley, but were again unable to get forward on account of the machine-guns. Nothing daunted, the 2nd Welsh had another fling at Munster Alley next day, and actually took it, but had not weight enough to consolidate and to hold it. On the other hand, the British line was held inviolate, and a strong German attack upon July 25 towards Pozières was repulsed with loss.

The Twenty-third Division relieved the First and were in turn relieved by the Fifteenth in this sector, which faced the Switch Trench and Martinpuich. The Switch Line was exposed to a very heavy fire for several days, at the end of which it was attacked by this famous division, the same in number at least as that which had left nearly two-thirds of its rank and file upon the bloody slopes of Hill 70. On August 12 the advance was carried out with great dash: the 45th Brigade upon the left and the 46th upon the right. The attack was only partially successful, and the 46th Brigade was held up through the fact that the Germans had themselves been in the act of attack, so that the trenches were very strongly held. The operations continued, however, and the initial gains were enlarged, until upon August 20 the whole Switch Line fell and was permanently consolidated.

Leaving this left sector we must turn to the Thirty-third Division on its right, two battalions of which had got forward on July 15, as far as the line of the road connecting High Wood with Little Bazentin. The right flank of the Highland Light Infantry had been held up by fire from this wood, and in the evening the 91st Brigade of the Seventh Division had evacuated the southern edge of the wood in order to allow of bombardment. That was the position on the night of July 15.

The line of the road was held all night, and early next morning the advance was ordered upon the German Switch Trench in front. It was hoped that the wood had been cleared during the night, but in the morning the Highlanders found themselves still galled by the continual fire upon their right. It was clear that the attack could not go forward with such an impediment upon the flank — one more instance of a brigade being held up by a handful of concealed men. It was hoped that the enemy had been silenced, and the attack was made, but no sooner had it developed than a murderous fire burst from the wood, making it impossible for the Highlanders to get along farther than the road. The 1st Queen’s, however, being farther from the wood were able to get on to the Switch Trench, but found it heavily wired and stiff with men. Such a battalion does not take “No” easily, and their colonel, with a large proportion of their officers and men, was stretched in front of the fatal wire before it became evident that further perseverance would mean destruction. The 16th Rifles and half the 2nd Worcesters, the remaining battalions of the 100th Brigade, were brought up, but not further advance was possible until the wire could be cut by the guns. About four in the afternoon of July 16 the remains of the brigade were back in the road from which they had started. The attack had failed, partly from the enfilade fire of High Wood, partly from the impassable wire.

The 98th Brigade was on the left of the 100th, filling up the gap to Bazentin village. They had extended their right in order to help their sorely tried comrades, and they had themselves advanced upon the line of the Switch Trench — the 1st Middlesex leading, with the 4th Suffolk in support. The 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands with the 4th King’s Liverpool were in reserve. They got well forward, but ceased their advance when it was found that no progress could be made upon the right. Thus, for the time, the division was brought to a stand. That night the 19th Brigade relieved the 100th, which had been very hard hit in this action. After the change the 1st Scottish Rifles and the 20th Royal Fusiliers formed the front line of the 19th Brigade, the Rifles in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the 7th upon their right, while the Fusiliers were in touch with the 98th Brigade upon their left.

The general situation did not admit of an immediate attack, and the Germans took advantage of the pause to strengthen and slightly to advance their position. On July 17 the hard-worked Twenty-first Division upon the left was drawn out, and both the Thirty-third and Seventh had to extend their fronts. On the other hand, the First Division came in upon the left and occupied a portion of the Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The position at that time was roughly that the Seventh Division covered the front from High Wood to Bazentin Grand, the Thirty-third Division from Bazentin Grand to Bazentin Petit, the First was from their left to Pozières.

Upon July 18 there was a very heavy German attack upon Delville Wood, which is treated elsewhere. This was accompanied by a severe barrage fire upon the Bazentins and upon Mametz Wood, which continued all day. That night the Nineteenth Division came into line, taking over Bazentin Petit, both village and wood. The Thirty-third Division moved to the right and took some pressure off the Seventh, which had done such long and arduous service. These incessant changes may seem wearisome to the reader, but without a careful record of them the operations would become chaos to any one who endeavoured to follow them in detail. It is to be emphasised that though divisions continually changed, the corps to which they temporarily belonged did not change, or only at long intervals, so that when you are within its area you can always rely upon it that in this particular case Horne of the Fifteenth Corps is the actual brain which has the immediate control of the battle.

As the pressure upon Congreve’s Thirteenth Corps on the right at Delville Wood and elsewhere was considerable, it was now deemed advisable to attack strongly by the Fifteenth Corps. The units for attack were the Thirty-third Division upon the left, and the depleted Seventh upon their right. There was to be no attack upon the left of the Thirty-third Division, but the 56th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division was handed over to the 33rd Division to strengthen the force. The objectives to be attacked were once again High Wood (Bois des Foureaux), Switch Trench, and the connecting trench between them. The Seventh Division attacked east of the wood on the line between it and Delville Wood.

The assault upon High Wood was assigned to the 19th Brigade. The 2nd Worcesters of the 98th Brigade were pushed out so as to cover the left flank of the assaulting column. At 2 A.M. of July 20 the two advance battalions of stormers, the 5th Scottish Rifles on the right, the 1st Scottish Rifles upon the left, were formed up in open ground outside the British wire. Preceded by scouts, they went silently forward through the gloom until they approached the south-western edge of the wood. A terrific bombardment was going on, and even those stout northern hearts might have quailed at the unknown dangers of that darksome wood, lit from moment to moment by the red glare of the shells. As the barrage lifted, the wave of infantry rushed forward, the 5th Scottish Rifles making for the eastern edge, while the 1st Regular Battalion pushed on in the endeavour to win through and secure the northern edge.

It was speedily found that the tenacious enemy had by no means loosened his grip of the wood. A portion of the Switch Trench runs through it, and this was strongly held, a line of spurting flames amid the shadow of the shattered trees. Machine-guns and wire were everywhere. None the less, the dour Scots stuck to their point, though the wood was littered with their dead. Both to east and to north they slowly pushed their way onwards to their objectives. It was a contest of iron wills, and every yard won was paid for in blood. By 9 o'clock the whole of the southern half of the wood had been cleared, the leading troops being helped by the 20th Fusiliers, who followed behind them, clearing up the lurking Germans. At that hour the northern end of the wood was still strongly held by the enemy, while the stormers had become much disorganised through loss of officers and through the utter confusion and disintegration which a night attack through a wood must necessarily entail.

The remaining battalion of the 19th Brigade, the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, was, at this critical moment, thrown into the fight. A heavy barrage was falling, and considerable losses were met with before the wood was entered; but the Fusiliers went forward with splendid steadiness and dash, their colonel taking entire local command. In the early afternoon, having got abreast of the exhausted Scottish Rifles, who had been under the hottest fire for nearly twelve hours, the Welsh attacked the north end of the wood, their advance being preceded by a continuous fire from our Stokes mortars, that portable heavy artillery which has served us so well. The enemy was still unabashed, but the advance was irresistible, and by 7 P.M. the British were for a time in possession of the whole of the blood-sodden plantation. It was a splendid passage of arms, in which every devilry which an obstinate and ingenious defence could command was overcome by the inexorable British infantry. The grim pertinacity of the Scots who stood that long night of terror, and the dash of the Welsh who carried on the wave when it was at the ebb, were equally fine; and solid, too, was the work of the public school lads of the 20th Fusiliers, who gleaned behind the line. So terrific was the shell-fire of the disappointed Germans upon the north end of the wood, that it was impossible to hold it; but the southern part was consolidated by the 18th Middlesex Pioneer Battalion and by the 11th Company Royal Engineers.

Whilst the Thirty-third Division stormed High Wood, their neighbours upon the right, the Seventh Division, depleted by heavy losses but still full of spirit, had been given the arduous and important task of capturing the roads running south-west from High Wood to Longueval. The assaulting battalions, the 2nd Gordons on the left and the 8th Devons on the right, Aberdeen and Plymouth in one battle line, advanced and took their first objective through a heavy barrage. Advancing farther, they attempted to dig in, but they had got ahead of the attack upon the left, and all the machine-guns both of Switch Trench and of High Wood were available to take them in flank and rear. It was a deadly business — so deadly that out of the two leading platoons of Gordons only one wounded officer and five men ever got back. Finally, the whole line had to crawl back in small groups to the first objective, which was being consolidated. That evening, the Fifth Division took over the lines of the Seventh, who were at last drawn out for a rest. The relief was marked by one serious mishap, as Colonel Gordon, commanding a battalion of his clansmen, was killed by a German shell.

It has been stated that the 56th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division had been placed under the orders of the Thirty-third Division during these operations. Its role was to cover the left flank of the attack and to keep the Germans busy in the Switch Line position. With this object the 56th Brigade, with the 57th Brigade upon its left, advanced its front line upon the night of July 22, a movement in which the 7th South Lancashires upon The the right of the 56th Brigade were in close touch with the 2nd Worcesters upon the left of the 100th Brigade. Going forward in the darkness with German trenches in front of them and a raking fire from High Wood beating upon their flank the Lancashire men lost heavily and were unable to gain a footing in the enemy’s position. This brigade had already suffered heavily from shell-fire in its advance to the front trenches. Two deaths which occurred during this short episode may be cited as examples of the stuff which went to the building up of Britain’s new armies. Under the shell-fire fell brave old Lieutenant Webb, a subaltern in the field, a Master of Foxhounds at home, father of another dead subaltern, and 64 years old. In the night operation, gallantly leading his company, and showing his comrades in the dark how to keep direction by astronomy, fell Captain Gerard Garvin, student, poet, essayist, and soldier, just 20 years of age. A book might be written which would be a national inspiration dealing with the lives of those glorious youths who united all that is beautiful in the mind with all that is virile in the body, giving it unreservedly in their country’s cause. They are lives which are more reminiscent of Sydney, Spencer, and the finer of the Elizabethans than anything we could have hoped to evolve in these later days. Raymond Asquith, Rupert Brooke, Charles Lister, Gerard Garvin, Julian Grenfell, Donald Hankey, Francis Ledwidge, Neil Primrose, these are some at least of this finest flower of British culture and valour, men who sacrificed to the need of the present their inheritance as the natural leaders of the future.

Though the Nineteenth Division was able to make no progress upon the night of July 22, upon the next night one of their brigades, the 58th, reinforced by two other battalions, made a strong movement forward, capturing the strong point upon the edge of the wood which had wrought the mischief the night before, and also through the fine work of the 10th Warwicks and 7th King’s Own carrying the whole British line permanently forward upon the right, though they could make no headway upon the left. Some conception of the services of the Nineteenth Division may be gathered from the fact that during the month of July it had lost 6500 casualties.

The Thirty-third Division was given a well deserved rest after their fine exploit in High Wood. During seven days’ fighting it had lost heavily in officers and men. Of individual battalions the heaviest sufferers had been the two Scottish Rifle battalions, the 20th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Queen’s Surrey, 9th Highland Light Infantry, and very specially the 16th King’s Royal Rifles.

Whilst this very severe fighting had been going on upon the left centre of the British advance, an even more arduous struggle had engaged our troops upon the right, where the Germans had a considerable advantage, since the whole of Delville Wood and Longueval formed the apex of a salient which jutted out into their position, and was open to a converging artillery fire from several directions. This terrible fight, which reduced the Ninth Scottish Division to about the strength of a brigade, and which caused heavy losses also to the Third Division, who struck in from the left flank in order to help their comrades, was carried on from the time when the Highland Brigade captured the greater part of the village of Longueval, as already described in the general attack upon July 14.

On the morning after the village was taken, the South African Brigade had been ordered to attack Delville Wood. This fine brigade, under a South African veteran, was composed of four battalions, the first representing the Cape Colony, the second Natal and the Orange River, the third the Transvaal, and the fourth the South African Scotsmen. If South Africa could only give battalions where others gave brigades or divisions, it is to be remembered that she had campaigns upon her own frontiers in which her manhood was deeply engaged. The European contingent was mostly

British, but it contained an appreciable proportion of Boers, who fought with all the stubborn gallantry which we have good reason to associate with the name. Apart from the infantry, it should be mentioned that South Africa had sent six heavy batteries, a fine hospital, and many labour detachments and special services, including a signalling company which had the reputation of being the very best in the army, every man having been a civilian expert.

The South Africans advanced at dawn, and their broad line of skirmishers pushed its way rapidly through the wood, sweeping all opposition before it. By noon they occupied the whole tract with the exception of the north-west corner. This was the corner which abutted upon the houses north of Longueval, and the murderous machine-guns in these buildings held the Africans off. By night, the whole perimeter of the wood had been occupied, and the brigade was stretched round the edges of the trees and undergrowth. Already they were suffering heavily, not only from the Longueval guns upon their left, but from the heavy German artillery which had their range to a nicety and against which there was no defence. With patient valour they held their line, and endured the long horror of the shell-fall during the night.

Whilst the South Africans were occupying Delville Wood, the 27th Brigade had a task which was as arduous, and met in as heroic a mood, as that of their comrades on the day before. Their attack was upon the orchards and houses to the north and east of Longueval, which had been organised into formidable strong points and garrisoned by desperate men. These strong points were especially dangerous on account of the support which they could give to a counter-attack, and it was thus that they did us great mischief. The Scottish Borderers, Scots Fusiliers, and Royal Scots worked slowly forward during the day, at considerable cost to themselves. Every house was a fortress mutually supporting every other one, and each had to be taken by assault. “I saw one party of half-a-dozen Royal Scots rush headlong into a house with a yell, though there were Germans at every window. Three minutes later one of the six came out again, but no more shots ever came from that house.” Such episodes, with ever-varying results, made up that long day of desperate fighting, which was rendered more difficult by the heavy German bombardment. The enemy appeared to be resigned to the loss of the Bazentins, but all their energy and guns were concentrated upon the reconquest of Longueval and Delville Wood. Through the whole of the 16th the shelling was terribly severe, the missiles pitching from three separate directions into the projecting salient. Furious assaults and heavy shell-falls alternated for several days, while clouds of bombers faced each other in a deadly and never-ending pelting match. It was observed as typical of the methods of each nation that while the Germans all threw together with mechanical and effective precision, the British opened out and fought as each man judged best. This fighting in the wood was very desperate and swayed back and forwards.

“It was desperate hand-to-hand work. The enemy had no thought of giving in. Each man took advantage of the protection offered by the trees, and fought until he was knocked out. The wood seemed swarming with demons, who fought us tooth and nail.” The British and Africans were driven deeper into the wood. Then again they would win their way forwards until they could see the open country through the broken trunks of the lacerated trees. Then the fulness of their tide would be reached, no fresh wave would come to carry them forwards, and slowly the ebb drew them back once more into the village and the forest. In this mixed fighting the Transvaal battalion took 3 officers and 130 men prisoners, but their losses, and those of the other African units, were very heavy. The senior officer in the firing line behaved with great gallantry, rallying his ever-dwindling forces again and again. A joint attack on the evening of July 16 by the Cape men, the South African Scots, and the 11th Royal Scots upon the north-west of the wood and the north of the village was held up by wire and machine-guns, but the German counter-attacks had no better fate. During the whole of the 17th the situation remained unchanged, but the strain upon the men was very severe, and they were faced by fresh divisions coming up from Bapaume. The Brigadier himself made his way into the wood, and reported to the Divisional Commander the extremely critical state of affairs.

On the morning of July 18 the Third Division were able to give some very valuable help to the hard-pressed Ninth. At the break of day the 1st Gordons, supported by the 8th King’s Liverpools, both from the 76th Brigade, made a sudden and furious attack upon those German strong points to the north of the village which were an ever-present source of loss and of danger. “Now and again,” says a remarkable anonymous account of the incident, “during a lull in the roar of battle, you could hear a strong Northern voice call out: ‘On, Gor-r-r-dons, on!’ thrilling out the r’s as only Scotsmen can. The men seldom answered save by increasing their speed towards the goal. Occasionally some of them called out the battle-cry heard so often from the throats of the Gordons: ‘Scotland for ever!’... They were out of sight over the parapet for a long time, but we could hear at intervals that cry of ‘On, Gor-r-r-dons, on!’ varied with yells of ‘Scotland for ever!’ and the strains of the pipes. Then we saw Highlanders reappear over the parapet. With them were groups of German prisoners.”

The assault won a great deal of ground down the north-west edge of Delville Wood and in the north of the village; but there were heavy losses, and two of the strong points were still intact. All day the bombardment was continuous and deadly, until 4:30 in the afternoon, when a great German infantry attack came sweeping from the east, driving down through the wood and pushing before it with an irresistible momentum the scattered bodies of Scottish and African infantry, worn out by losses and fatigue. For a time it submerged both wood and village, and the foremost grey waves emerged even to the west of the village, where they were beaten down by the Lewis guns of the defenders. The southern edge of the wood was still held by the British, however, and here the gallant 26th Brigade threw itself desperately upon the victorious enemy, and stormed forward with all the impetuosity of their original attack. The Germans were first checked and then thrown back, and the south end of the wood remained in British hands. A finer or more successful local counter-attack has seldom been delivered, and it was by a brigade which had already endured losses which made it more fit for a rest-camp than for a battle line. After this second exploit the four splendid battalions were but remnants, the Black Watch having lost very heavily, while the Argylls, the Seaforths, and the Camerons were in no better case. Truly it can never be said that the grand records of the historic regular regiments have had anything but renewed lustre from the deeds of those civilian soldiers who, for a time, were privileged to bear their names.

Whilst this severe battle had been in progress, the losses of the South Africans in Delville Wood had been terrible, and they had fought with the energy of desperate men for every yard of ground. Stands were made in the successive rides of the wood by the colonel and his men. During the whole of the 19th these fine soldiers held on against heavy pressure.

The colonel was the only officer of his regiment to return. Even the Newfoundlanders had hardly a more bloody baptism of fire than the South Africans, or emerged from it with more glory.

The situation now was that the south of the wood was held by the British, but the north, including the greater part of the village, was still held by the

Germans. The worn-out Ninth Division, still full of spirit, but lacking sadly in numbers, was brought out of line upon July 19, and the Eighteenth English Division, fresh from its own great ordeal in Trones Wood, came forward to take its place. At seven in the morning of the 19th the 53rd Brigade attacked from the south, the situation being so pressing that there was no time for artillery preparation. The infantry went forward without it, and no higher ordeal could be demanded of them. It was evident that there was great danger of the strong German column breaking through to westward and so outflanking the whole British line. Only a British attack from north and from south could prevent its progress, so that the Third Division were called upon for the one, and the Eighteenth for the other. This wood of infamous memory is cut in two by one broad ride, named Princes Street, dividing it into two halves, north and south (*vide* p. 181). The southern half was now attacked by the 8th Norfolks, who worked their way steadily forward in a long fringe of bombers and riflemen. The Brigade-Major, Markes, and many officers and men fell in the advance. After a pause, with the help of their Lewis guns, the Norfolks pushed forward again, and by 2 o’clock had made their way up to Princes Street along most of the line, pushing the enemy down into the south-eastern corner. The remaining battalions of the brigade, the 10th Essex on the right and the 6th Berkshires on the left, tried to fight their way through the northern portion, while the 8th Suffolk attacked the village. Half of the of the village up to the cross-roads in the centre was taken by the Suffolk, but their comrades on the right were held up by the heavy machine-gun fire, and at 5 P.M. were compelled to dig themselves in. They maintained their new positions, under a terrific shell-fire, for three weary and tragic days, at the end of which they were relieved by the 4th Royal Fusiliers, a veteran battalion which had fired some of the first shots of the War.

These Fusiliers belonged to the Third Division which had, as already said, been attacking from the north side of the wood, while the Eighteenth were on the south side. On July 19 this attack had been developed by the 2nd Suffolk and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the two remaining battalions of the 76th Brigade. The advance was made at early dawn, and the Welsh Fusiliers were at once attacked by German infantry, whom they repulsed. The attack was unfortunate from the start, and half of the Suffolks who penetrated the village were never able to extricate themselves again. The Welsh Fusiliers carried on, but its wing was now in the air, and the machine-guns were very deadly. The advance was held up and had to be withdrawn. In this affair fell one of the most promising of the younger officers of the British army, a man who would have attained the very highest had he lived, Brigade-Major Congreve, of the 76th Brigade, whose father commanded the adjacent Thirteenth Corps. His death arose from one of his many acts of rash and yet purposeful valour, for he pushed forward alone to find out what had become of the missing Suffolks, and so met his end from some lurking sniper.

On July 20 matters had come to a temporary equilibrium in Delville Wood, where amid the litter of corpses which were strewn from end to end of that dreadful grove, lines of British and German infantry held each other in check, neither able to advance, because to do so was to come under the murderous fire of the other. The Third Division, worn as it was, was still hard at work, for to the south-west of Longueval a long line of hostile trenches connected up with Guillemont, the fortified farm of Waterlot in the middle of them. It was to these lines that these battle-weary men were now turned. An attack was pending upon Guillemont by the Thirtieth Division, and the object of the Third Division was to cut the trench line to the east of the village, and so help the attack. The advance was carried out with great spirit upon July 22 by the 2nd Royal Scots, and though they were unable to attain their full objective, they seized and consolidated a post midway between Waterlot Farm and the railway, driving back a German battalion which endeavoured to thrust them out. On July 23 Guillemont was attacked by the 21st Brigade of the Thirtieth Division. The right of the attack consisting of the 19th Manchesters got into the village, but few got out again; and the left made no progress, the 2nd Yorkshires losing direction to the east and sweeping in upon the ground already held by the 2nd Royal Scots and other battalions of the 8th Brigade. The resistance shown by Guillemont proved that the siege of that village would be a serious operation and that it was not to be carried by the *coup-de-main* of a tired division, however valiantly urged. The successive attempts to occupy it, culminating in complete success, will be recorded at a later stage.

On the same date, July 23, another attempt was made by mixed battalions of the Third Division upon Longueval. This was carried out with the co-operation of the 95th Brigade, Fifth Division, upon the left. The attack on the village itself from the south was held up, and the battalions engaged, including the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 12th West Yorkshires, and 13th

King’s Liverpools, all endured considerable losses. Two battalions of the Thirty-fifth Division (Bantams), the 17th Royal Scots and 17th West Yorks, took part in this attack. There had been some movement all along the line during that day from High Wood in the north-east to Guillemont in the south-west; but nowhere was there any substantial progress. It was clear that the enemy was holding hard to his present line, and that very careful observation and renewed bombardment would be required before the infantry could be expected to move him. Thus, the advance of July 14, brilliant as it had been, had given less durable results than had been hoped, for no further ground had been gained in a week’s fighting, while Longueval, which had been ours, had for a time passed back to the enemy. No one, however, who had studied General Haig’s methods during the 1914 fighting at Ypres could, for a moment, believe that he would be balked of his aims, and the sequel was to show that he had lost none of the audacious tenacity which he had shown on those fateful days, nor had his well-tried instrument of war lost its power of fighting its way through a difficult position. The struggle at Longueval had been a desperate one, and the German return upon July 18 was undoubtedly the most severe reaction encountered by us during the whole of the Somme fighting; and yet after the fluctuations which have been described it finished with the position entirely in the hands of the British. On the days which followed the attack of July 23 the Thirteenth Brigade of the Fifth Division pushed its way gradually through the north end of the village, the 1st Norfolks bearing the brunt of the fighting. They were relieved on the 27th by the 95th Brigade, who took the final posts on the north and east of the houses, the 1st East Surreys holding the northern front. The 12th Gloucesters particularly distinguished themselves on this occasion, holding on to three outlying captured posts under a very heavy fire. The three isolated platoons maintained themselves with great constancy, and were all retrieved, though two out of three officers and the greater part of the men were casualties. This battalion lost 320 men in these operations, which were made more costly and difficult by the fact that Longueval was so exaggerated a salient that it might more properly be called a corner, the Germans directing their very accurate fire from the intact tower of Ginchy Church.

The Second Division had now been brought down to the Somme battle-front, and upon July 26 they took over from the Third Division in the area of Delville Wood. So complicated was the position at the point occupied, that one officer has described his company as being under fire from the north, south, east, and west, the latter being presumably due to the fact that the distant fire of the British heavies fell occasionally among the front line infantry. At seven in the morning of July 27 the 99th Brigade, now attached to the Second Division, was ordered to improve our position in the wood, and made a determined advance with the 1st Rifles upon the right, and the 23rd Fusiliers upon the left, the 1st Berkshires and 22nd Royal Fusiliers being in support. Moving forward behind a strong barrage, the two battalions were able with moderate loss to force their way up to the line of Princes Street, and to make good this advanced position. A trench full of dead or wounded Germans with two splintered machine-guns showed that the artillery had found its mark, and many more were shot down as they retired to their further trenches. The 1st Berkshires held a defensive flank upon the right, but German bombers swarmed in between them and the Rifles, developing a dangerous counter-attack, which was finally beaten off after a sharp fight, in which Captain Howell of the latter battalion was mortally wounded after organising a splendid defence, in which he was greatly helped by a sergeant. At 11 o’clock the left flank of the advance was also very heavily attacked at short range, and the two companies of the Rifles on that side were in sore straits until reinforced by bombers from the 23rd Fusiliers, and also by the whole of the 22nd Fusiliers. The German barrage fell thickly behind the British advance, and it was a difficult and costly matter to send forward the necessary supports, but before evening part of the 17th Fusiliers and of the 17th Middlesex from the 5th Brigade had pushed forward and relieved the exhausted front line. It was a most notable advance and a heroic subsequent defence, with some of the stiffest fighting that even Delville Wood had ever witnessed. The East Anglian Field Company Royal Engineers consolidated the line taken. The 1st Rifles, upon whom the greater part of the pressure had fallen, lost 14 officers, including their excellent adjutant, Captain Brocklehurst, and more than 300 men. The immediate conduct of the local operations depended upon the colonel of this battalion. The great result of the fight was that Delville Wood was now in British hands, from which it never again reverted. It is a name which will ever remain as a symbol of tragic glory in the records of the Ninth, the Third, the Eighteenth, and finally of the Second Divisions. Nowhere in all this desperate war did the British bulldog and the German wolf-hound meet in a more prolonged and fearful grapple. It should not be forgotten in our military annals that though the 99th Brigade actually captured the wood, their work would have been impossible had it not been for the fine advance of the 95th Brigade of the Fifth Division already recorded upon their Longueval flank.

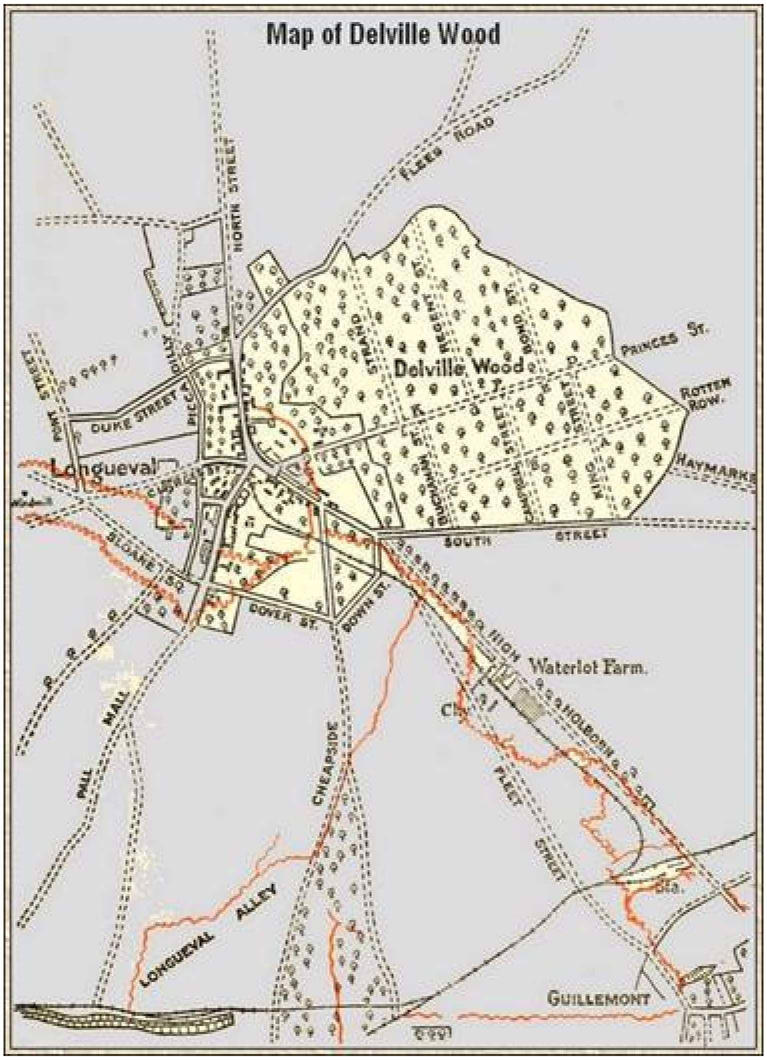
Map of Delville Wood
Flers Road
North Street
Princes St.
Rotten Row.
Haymarket
Strand
Regent St.
Bond St.
Delville Wood
Buchanan St.
Campbell Street
King Street
South Street
Pont Street
Duke Street
Piccadilly
Longueval
Sloane St.
Dover St.
Down St.
High Holborn
Waterlot Farm.
Fleet Street
Cheapside
Pall Mall
Longueval Alley
Sta.
Guillemont

Map of Delville Wood

We shall now turn our attention to what had been going on in the extreme right-hand part of the line, where in conjunction with the French three of our divisions, the 55th Lancashire Territorials, the 35th Bantams, and the hard-worked 30th, had been attacking with no great success the strong German line which lay in front of us after the capture of Trones Wood. The centre of this defence was the village of Guillemont, which, as already mentioned, had been unsuccessfully attacked by the 21st Brigade upon July

23. About this date the Thirty-sixth Bantam Division had a repulse at the Malzhorn Farm to the south of Guillemont, both the 104th and 105th Brigades being hard hit, and many of the brave little men being left in front of the German machine-guns.

A week later a much more elaborate attack was made upon it by the rest of the Thirtieth Division, strengthened by one brigade (the 106th) of the Thirty-fifth Division. This attack was carried out in cooperation with an advance of the Second Division upon Guillemont Station to the left of the village, and an advance of the French upon the right at Falfemont and Malzhorn.

The frontal advance upon Guillemont from the Trones Wood direction appears to have been about as difficult an operation as could be conceived in modern warfare. Everything helped the defence and nothing the attack. The approach was a glacis 700 yards in width, which was absolutely commanded by the guns in the village, and also by those placed obliquely to north and south. There was no cover of any kind. Prudence would no doubt have suggested that we should make good in the north at Longueval and thus outflank the whole German line of defence. It was essential, however, to fit our plans in with those of the French, and it was understood that those were such as to demand a very special, and if needs be, a self-immolating effort upon the right of the line.

The attack had been arranged for the morning of July 30, and it was carried out in spite of the fact that during the first few hours the fog was so dense that it was hard to see more than a few yards. This made the keeping of direction across so broad a space as 700 yards very difficult; while on the right, where the advance was for more than a mile and had to be coordinated with the troops of our Allies, it was so complex a matter that there was considerable danger at one time that the fight in this quarter would resolve itself into a duel between the right of the British Thirtieth and the left of the French Thirty-ninth Division.

The 89th Brigade advanced upon the right and the 90th upon the left, the latter being directed straight for the village. The two leading battalions, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers and the 18th Manchesters, reached it and established themselves firmly in its western suburbs; but the German barrage fell so thickly behind them that neither help nor munitions could reach them. Lieutenant Murray, who was sent back to report their critical situation, found Germans wandering about behind the line, and was compelled to shoot several in making his way through. He carried the news that the attack of the Second Division upon the station had apparently failed, that the machine-gun fire from the north was deadly, and that both battalions were in peril. The Scots had captured 50 and the Manchesters 100 prisoners, but they were penned in and unable to get on. Two companies of the 17th Manchesters made their way with heavy loss through the fatal barrage, but failed to alleviate the situation. It would appear that in the fog the Scots were entirely surrounded, and that they fought, as is their wont, while a cartridge lasted. Their last message was, that their ranks and munition supply were both thin, their front line broken, the shelling hard, and the situation critical. None of these men ever returned, and the only survivors of this battalion of splendid memories were the wounded in No Man's Land and the Headquarter Staff. It was the second time that the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers had fought to the last man in this war. Of the 18th Manchesters few returned, and two companies of the 16th Manchesters were not more fortunate. They got into the village on the extreme north, and found themselves in touch with the 17th Royal Fusiliers of the Second Division; but neither battalion could make good its position. It was one of the tragic episodes of the great Somme battle.

The 89th Brigade upon their right had troubles of their own, but they were less formidable than those of their comrades. As already described, they had the greatest difficulty in finding their true position amid the fog. Their action began successfully by a company of the 2nd Bedford s, together with a French company, rushing an isolated German trench and killing 70 men who occupied it. This was a small detached operation, for the front line of the advancing brigade was formed by the 19th Manchesters on the left, and by the 20th on the right, the latter in touch with the French 153rd of the line. The 19th reached the south-eastern corner of Guillemont, failed to get in touch with the Scots Fusiliers, and found both its flanks in the air. It had eventually to fall back, having lost Major Rolls, its commander, and many officers and men. The 20th Manchesters advanced upon the German Malzhorn Trenches and carried the front one, killing many of the occupants. In going forward from this point they lost 200 of their number while passing down a bullet-swept slope. Three out of four company commanders had fallen. Beyond the slope was a sunken road, and at this point a young lieutenant, Musker, found himself in command with mixed men from three battalions under his orders. Twelve runners sent back with messages were all shot, which will give some idea of the severity of the barrage. Musker showed good powers of leadership, and consolidated his position in the road, but was unfortunately killed, the command then devolving of the upon a sub-lieutenant. The Bedfords came up to reinforce, and some permanent advance was established in this quarter — all that was gained by this very sanguinary engagement, which cost about 3000 men. The Bantams lost heavily also in this action though they only played the humble role of carriers to the storming brigades.

The whole of the fighting chronicled in this chapter may be taken as an aftermath of the action of July 14, and as an endeavour upon our part to enlarge our gains and upon the part of the Germans to push us out from what we had won. The encroachment upon High Wood upon the left, the desperate defence and final clearing of Delville Wood in the centre, and the attempt to drive the Germans from Guillemont upon the right — an attempt which was brought later to a successful conclusion — are all part of one system of operations designed for the one end.

It should be remarked that during all this fighting upon the Somme continual demonstrations, amounting in some cases to small battles, occurred along the northern line to keep the Germans employed. The most serious of these occurred in the Eleventh Corps district near Fromelles, opposite the Aubers Ridge. Here the Second Australians upon the left, and the Sixty-first British Division upon the right, a unit of second-line Territorial battalions, largely from the West country, made a most gallant attack and carried the German line for a time, but were compelled, upon July 20, the day following the attack. to fall back once more, as the gun positions upon the Aubers Ridge commanded the newly-taken trenches. It was particularly hard upon the Australians, whose grip upon the German position was firm while the two brigades of the Sixty-first, though they behaved with great gallantry, had been less successful in the assault.

VIII. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
The Operations of Gough's Army upon the Northern Flank up to September 15

Advance, Australia! — Capture of Pozières — Fine work of Forty-eighth Division — Relief of Australia by Canada — Steady advance of Gough's Army — Capture of Courcelette

ALL the fighting which has been described was carried out by Rawlinson's Fourth Army, consisting of the Third, the Fifteenth, and the Thirteenth Corps. A new element was now, however, introduced upon the left flank. It will be remembered that Sir Hubert Gough had been given a Fifth or reserve army, consisting of the Eighth and Tenth Corps, with which to hold the flank. Of these, the Tenth, including the Forty-ninth, Forty-eighth, and First Australian Divisions, was now pushed forward into the fighting, with the intention of attacking Pozières and widening the British front.

This was the first serious appearance of the Australians upon a European battle-field, and it may be said at once that the high reputation which they had gained as dogged and dashing fighters in the Gallipoli campaign was fully endorsed in France.

From General Birdwood, their admirable leader, down through every unit of their divisions, there ran an indomitable spirit, united to an individuality and readiness of resource which made them soldiers of the highest type. Their physique, too, was extraordinarily fine, and even the stay-at-home Londoner who had seen the lithe figures and the eager, clean-cut, aquiline faces under the broad-rimmed hats, bringing a touch of romance into our drab streets, would need no assurance that the men were splendid. A nation of sportsmen had changed themselves very easily into a nation of soldiers. Of all the strange turns of fate in this extraordinary war, surely there are few more quaint than that the black-fellow call of "Cooee!" should many a time have resounded at the crisis of a European battle.

As the First Australian Division lay upon July 22, it had the straggling and strongly entrenched village of Pozières in front of it. Upon the right they were in touch with the First Division filling the gap between Pozières and Bazentin, as described at the beginning of Chapter VII. On their left was the Forty-eighth Division of South Midland Territorials. The village had been reduced to a mere rubbish-heap by the guns, but was none the less dangerous on that account.

On the early morning of July 23, before it was light, the Australians made their first eruption into the Somme fighting. “The difficulty,” as their chronicler truly declares, “was not to get the men forward, but to hold them.” With an eager rush the men of New South Wales overwhelmed the front trench across the face of the village. It was dotted with German bodies, killed by the artillery. The second trench in the village itself was found to be obliterated in places. It was occupied as far as possible after a sharp hand-to-hand fight, and daylight found the Australians, chiefly Victorians, in full possession of the southern and western end of the village. There was no counter-attack during July 23, and the day was spent in consolidating and in rounding-up prisoners from the dug-outs. For three days there was very heavy German shelling, but the division had served too long an apprenticeship to be shaken by such means. They lay low and held on tightly.

On Tuesday, July 25, came the first German attack, but it was broken up so completely by the British barrage that the Australians had only distant glimpses of the enemy infantry crawling from under the sleet which beat upon them. The merciless pounding of the bombardment continued, and then again in the late afternoon came another infantry attack, which was again scattered by the dominant all-observing guns. Up to now 150 prisoners, including two German colonels, had fallen into our hands.

Whilst the Australians had been attacking Pozières from the south, the Forty-eighth Division had made a similar advance from the south-west, and had made good the ground upon the left side of the Albert-Bapaume road, including the western outskirts of the village and part of the Leipzig salient. In our admiration for our kinsmen from across the seas we must not forget, nor will they, that these lads from the very heart of rural England went step by step with them up Pozières Hill, and shared the victory which awaited them upon it.

The 143rd Brigade, consisting entirely of Warwick battalions (5, 6, 7, and 8), the 144th of Glosters (4 and 6) and Worcesters (7 and 8), and the 145th from The Gloucester (5), Buckingham, Oxford and Buckingham (4), and Berkshire (4), took it in turns to surge against the formidable German line, showing the greatest valour and perseverance, overcoming difficulty after difficulty, and always getting slowly forward from the first movement upon July 22, until upon July 26 they had overcome every obstacle and joined hands with the Australians at the cemetery which marks the north end of the village of Pozières. Many prisoners and a fine extension of the line were the fruits of their exertions. The 5th Royal Sussex Pioneer Battalion, amidst considerable difficulties and heavy shell-fire, consolidated all that had been won. The 4th Gloucesters and 7th Worcesters particularly distinguished themselves at this time by their persistent day-by-day work against the German trench line.

On the morning of July 26 the Australian advance was resumed. There were two obstacles immediately in front — the one a strong redoubt, the other a line of trench. The redoubt was most gallantly attacked by the men of Queensland and of South Australia, and was overwhelmed by their bombs. The Victorians, meanwhile, had won their way into the trench, but as it communicated by many runways with the main German system behind, an endless flow of reinforcements were able to come into it, and the length of the trench enabled the Germans to attack upon both flanks. It was a most bloody and desperate conflict which swung and swayed down the long ditches, and sometimes over the edges of them into the bullet-swept levels between. Men threw and threw until they were so arm-weary that not another bomb could be lifted. If ever there were born natural bombers it must surely be among the countrymen of Spofforth and Trumble — and so it proved at that terrible international by Pozières village. A British aeroplane swooped down out of the misty morning, and gave signals of help and advice from above, so as to dam that ever-moving stream of reinforcement.

The trenches in dispute were of no vital importance themselves, but they were the outposts of the great German second line which stretched behind its broad apron of barbed wire within a few hundred yards to the north-east of the village. The ground sloped upwards, and the Germans were on the crest. This was the next objective of the Australians, and was attacked by their Second Division on July 29. On the flank of the hill to the left the Victorians won a lodgment, but the main position was still impregnable — and almost unapproachable. Sullenly and slowly the infantry fell back to their own trenches, leaving many of their best and bravest before or among the fatal wires.

The position had been improved upon the left, however, by an advance of the Forty-eighth Division. The Warwick Brigade upon their right made no great progress, but the 145th Brigade upon the left took the trench in front of it and pushed that flank well forward. This successful attack was at seven in the evening of July 27. The leading battalions were the 4th Berks upon the right and the 6th Gloucesters on the left, and these two sturdy battalions captured all their objectives. A number of the 5th Regiment of the Prussian Guard were killed or captured in this affair. As the whole line had to turn half left after leaving the taking-off trench, it was a fine piece of disciplined fighting. General Gough was a personal witness of this attack,

On August 4, six days later, the Australians came back to the attack with all the dour pertinacity of their breed. This time their success was triumphant. A steady bombardment had laid the German front open, and in the dark of the night the Australian infantry, advancing over their own dead, rushed the position, surprising the Germans at a moment when a relief was being carried out. Many of the Germans who had been expecting a rest from their labours got one indeed — but it was in England rather than in their own rear. With the early morning the Australians were on the Pozières Ridge, and one of the few remaining observation posts of the enemy had passed from him for ever. In front of them was the land of promise — the long slope seamed by German trenches, the distant German camps, the churches and villages of that captive France which they had come so far to redeem.

Once again the left flank of the Australians was in close co-operation with a British Division. The Forty-eighth had been withdrawn and replaced by the Twelfth, a division which was rapidly acquiring a very solid reputation in the army. The men of the 7th Sussex upon the right and those of Surrey and of Kent upon the left were in the front of the battle-line, which rolled slowly up the slope of Pozières, continually driving the German resistance before it. The ground gained early in August was some 2000 yards of frontage with a depth of 400 yards, and though the whole ridge, and the windmill which marks it, had not yet been cleared, the fact that the British had a good foothold upon it was of the utmost strategical importance, apart from the continual stream of prisoners who fell into their hands. The Sussex battalion linked up with the Australians, and nothing could have been closer than the co-operation between the two, so much so that it is on record that with a glorious recklessness a bunch of Australians pushed forward without orders in order to keep the Sussex men company in one of their attacks. The South Saxons have again and again shown that there is no more solid military material in England. It is said that a rampant pig with “We won’t be druv!” as a motto was an old emblem of that ancient county. Her sons assuredly lived up to the legend during the War.

On the morning of the 6th and of the 7th two counter-attacks stormed up to the new British line. The first was small and easily repelled, a sporadic effort by some gallant hot-headed officer, who died in the venture, clicking his Mauser to the last. The second was serious, for three battalions came very gallantly forwards, and a sudden rush of 1500 Germans, some of whom carried *Flammenwerfer*, burst into the trenches at two separate points, making prisoners of some 50 Australians who were cut off from their comrades. The attack was bravely delivered in broad daylight, the enemy coming on in good line in the face of severe fire; but the Australians, with their usual individuality, rallied, and not only repulsed the enemy, but captured many of them, besides recapturing the prisoners whom they had taken. This was the supreme German attempt to recapture the position, but they were by no means able to reconcile themselves to the loss of it, and came on again and again in smaller assaults spread over several days, which had no result save to increase their already very heavy losses in this region.

This *Flammenwerfer* attack had broken also upon the outposts of the 36th Brigade to the left, eight of these infernal machines coming forward with a throng of bombers behind them. The captain of the 9thRoyal Fusiliers, instead of awaiting the attack in a crowded trench, rushed his men forward in the open, where they shot down the flame-bearers before they could bring their devilish squirts to bear. The bombers, who had followed the advance, led the flight. On this day 127 Germans who had been caught in a pocket between the British trenches were forced to surrender, after a very creditable resistance. On August 12 the Twelfth Division attacked once more upon a broad front, the 35th Brigade upon the right, the 37th upon the left. The result of the attack was a satisfactory accession of ground, for although the Surreys and West Kents were held up, the Norfolks and Essex attained their objective and held it. Some 40 prisoners and a useful line of trench were the results. That night the 48th South Midlanders replaced the Twelfth Division once more, resuming their old station upon the left of the Australians, whose various divisions rang changes upon each other, men from every corner of the great island continent, from the burning plains of the Northern Territories to the wind-swept hills of Tasmania, relieving each other in the ever-advancing line of trenches and strong points which slowly ate into the German front. One day it was the West Australians who blew back an attack with their rifle fire. On the next it was the Melbourne men who had rushed another position. On the summit of the Ridge was the stump of an old windmill, which lay now between the two lines, and it was towards this and along the slope of the crest that the advance was gradually creeping. It is worth noting that in this part of the line some sort of amenity was introduced concerning the wounded, and that neither party sniped the other so long as a Red Cross flag was shown. It is grievous to think that such a condition needs to be recorded.

August 10 and 11 witnessed two night attacks by the 4th and 6th Gloucesters respectively, neither of which made much progress. The Territorials of the Forty-eighth Division still kept step, however, with the Australians in all that desperate advance up the long slope of Pozières Hill, the two units striving in a generous rivalry of valour, which ended in deep mutual confidence and esteem.

On August 14 the enemy counter-attacked with some vigour, and momentarily regained a trench near the windmill. On the 15th the line had been restored. On the 17th there was a strong attack in six successive lines upon the Forty-eighth British and the First Australian Divisions, but it had no result. On the 18th, however, the 5th and 6th Warwicks paid a return visit with great success, carrying three lines of trenches and capturing 600 prisoners. This was a very fine exploit, carried out at 5 P.M. of a summer evening.

It was about this date that a new movement began upon the British left, which extended their line of battle. Since the capture of Ovillers, a month before, the flank of the army to the left of the attack upon Pozières had been guarded by the Forty-ninth Division of Yorks Territorials, but no attack had been attempted in this quarter. On August 18 of the the Twenty-fifth Division relieved the Forty-ninth, and an advance upon a small scale which gradually assumed more importance was started in the direction of Thiepval, the German village fortress of sinister reputation, which lay upon the left flank on the hither side of the River Ancre. Upon this General Gough had now fixed a menacing gaze, and though his advance was gradual, it was none the less inexorable until his aim had been attained; and not only Thiepval itself but the important heights to the north and east of it which dominate the valley of the Ancre were in the hands of his persevering troops. The first obstacles in his path were a stronghold named the Leipzig Redoubt, and to the east of it a widespread farm, now spread even wider by British shells. This nest of snipers and machine-guns was known as Mouquet Farm. Upon the 19th, as part of the general attack along the line, which will be more fully dealt with elsewhere, not only was our Pozières front pushed forward past the windmill for 300 yards, but the 1st Wiltshires of the Twenty-fifth Division, operating upon the left of the Forty-eighth, which in turn was on the left of the Australians, made an important lodgment on the high ground to the south of Thiepval. The Forty-eighth Division also made some advance, the 4th Gloucesters upon the night of the 19th capturing 400 yards of trench with 200 prisoners. Their comrades of the 6th Battalion had less fortune, however, in an attack upon the German trenches on August 22, when they had two companies partially destroyed by machine-gun fire, while every officer engaged was hit, including Major Coates, who was killed. On this same day there was again an Australian advance near Pozières, whilst at the other end of the line, which was biting like acid into the German defences, the Twenty-fifth Division began to encroach upon the Leipzig salient, and were within 1000 yards of Thiepval. In this entirely successful attack a new invention, the push pipe-line, was used for the first time with some success, having the double effect of blowing up the enemy’s strong point, and of forming a rudimentary communication trench in the track of its explosion. In this connection it may be stated generally that while the Germans, with their objects clear in front of them, had used before the War far greater ingenuity than the British in warlike invention, as witness the poison gas, *Minenwerfer* and flame-throwers, their methods became stereotyped after War broke out; while the more individual Britons showed greater ingenuity and constructive ability, so that by the end of 1916 they had attained a superiority upon nearly every point. Their heavy artillery, light machine-guns, aeroplanes, bombs, trench-mortars, and gas apparatus were all of the very best; and in their tanks they were soon to take an entirely new departure in warfare. It is as difficult in our British system to fix the responsibility for good as for evil, but there is ample evidence of a great discriminating intelligence in the heart of our affairs.

The Hindenburg Trench was the immediate object of these attacks, and on August 24 a stretch of it, containing 150 occupants, was carried. A pocket of Germans was left at one end of it, who held on manfully and made a successful resistance against a Company of the 8th North Lancashires, who tried to rush them. Ultimately, however, these brave men were all taken or killed.

Day by day the line crept on, and before the end of the month the 1000 yards had become 500, whilst every advance yielded some new trench with a crop of prisoners. The enemy was fully alive, however, to the great importance of the Thiepval position, which would give the British guns an opportunity of raking Beaumont Hamel and their other strongholds upon the north of the Ancre. A very strong counterattack was made, therefore, by some battalions of the Prussian Guard on the evening of August 25, preceded by a shattering bombardment. The attack — the edge of which was blunted by the British barrage — fell mainly upon the 7th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division. The result was a German defeat, and the menacing line drew ever nearer to Thiepval, though an attack by the North Lanes upon the Prussian Fusilier Guards upon August 28 was not successful. On the day before, however, the Forty-eighth Division upon the right of the Twenty-fifth made a successful advance, taking a good line of trench with 100 of the redoubtable Guards. Between Thiepval and Pozières the ruins of Mouquet Farm had been taken by the West Australians and the Tasmanians, and was found to be a perfect warren of snipers, so that it was some time before it was absolutely clear. On the Pozières Ridge ground and prisoners were continually being gained, and the trenches between the Ridge and Mouquet Farm were cleared by Queensland on the right and by Tasmania on the left. It was a most spirited fight, where Australian and Prussian stood up to each other within short bomb-throw. But nothing could stand against the fire of the attack. The whole line of trench upon the right was captured. There was a dangerous gap, however, upon the the Tasmanian left, and this the Tasmanians were compelled to endure for two days and nights, during which they were hard pressed by never-ending shelling and incessant German attacks. It is on record that their constant reports of their parlous state sent on to headquarters concluded always with the words: “But we will hold on.” If Tasmania needs a motto, she could find no better one, for her sons lived and died up to it during those terrible hours. When at last they were relieved, their numbers were sorely reduced, but their ground was still intact. At the other side of the gap, however, the West Australians, hard pressed by an overpowering bombardment, had been pushed out from Mouquet Farm, which came back into German hands, whence it was destined soon to pass.

It was during this severe fighting that a little scene occurred which, as described by Mr. Bean, the very able Australian chronicler, must stir the blood of every Imperialist. A single officer “of middle age, erect, tough as wire, with lines on his face such as hard fighting and responsibility leave on every soldier,” appeared in the Australian communication trenches, asking to see the officer-in-charge. He spoke the same tongue but with a different intonation as he explained his mission. He was the forerunner of the relieving force, and the First Division of Canada was taking over the line from Australia — a line which was destined to bring glory to each of them. Surely a great historical picture might be made in more peaceful times of this first contact of the two great nations of the future, Separated by half the world from each other, and yet coming together amid blood and fire at the call of the race. An hour later, Canadian Highlanders in a long buoyant line were pushing swiftly forward to occupy the trenches which Australia had won and held. “Australians and Canadians,” says Mr. Bean, “fought for thirty-six hours in those trenches inexorably mixed, working under each other’s officers. Their wounded helped each other from the front. Their dead lie, and will lie, through all the centuries, hastily buried, beside the tumbled trenches and shell-holes where, fighting as mates, they died.” So ended the Australian epic upon the Somme. It is to be remembered that the New Zealanders formed an entirely separate division, whose doings will presently be considered.

Whilst the Overseas troops had been fighting hard before Pozières, there had been a considerable movement upon their left to attack northwards along the Thiepval Spur. This was carried out by the Thirty ninth Division north of the Ancre, the Forty-ninth and the Twenty-fifth upon September 3. Some ground was gained, but the losses were heavy, especially in the 75th Brigade, where the 2nd South Lancashires suffered considerably. This battalion had been in shallow trenches exposed to fire and weather for six days previous to the attack, and was greatly worn. This attack was part of the general battle of September 3, but from Mouquet Farm northwards it cannot be said to have given any adequate return for our losses.

Our narrative of the events upon the left wing of the army has now got in front of the general account, but as the operations of General Gough’s force have definite objectives of their own, the story may now be continued up to

September 15, after which we can leave this flank altogether for a time and concentrate upon the happenings in the centre, and especially of the upon the right flank where Delville Wood, Ginchy and Guillemont had presented such impediments to the advance. At or about the time, September 4, when the Canadians took over the lines of the Australians at Pozières and Mouquet Farm, the Eleventh British Division, the First English Division of the New Army, which had come back from hard service in the East, relieved the Twenty-fifth Division upon the Canadian left. For a week there was quiet upon this part of the line, for a great forward move along the whole eleven-mile front had been planned for September 15, and this was the lull before the storm. On the evening before this great assault, the Eleventh Division crept up to and carried the main German stronghold, called the Wonderwork, which lay between them and Thiepval. There was some sharp bayonet work, and the defeated garrison flying towards Thiepval ran into the barrage so that the enemy losses were heavy, while the British line crept up to within 350 yards of the village. This advance stopped for ever the flank fire by which the Germans were able to make Mouquet Farm almost untenable, and the Canadians were able to occupy it. The capture of the Wonderwork was carried out by Price’s 32nd Infantry Brigade of Yorkshire troops. The most of the work and the heaviest losses fell upon the 9th West Yorks, but the 8th West Ridings and the 6th Yorks were both engaged, the latter losing their colonel, Forsyth. The total casualties came to 26 officers and 742 men.

On September 15 the Eleventh Division held the flank in front of Thiepval, but the Second and Third Canadian Divisions shared in the general advance, and pushed forward their line over the Pozières Ridge and down for 1000 yards of the slope in front, joining hands with the Fifteenth Scottish Division in Martinpuich upon the right. This fine advance crossed several German trenches, took the fortified position of the Sugar Refinery, and eventually included in its scope the village of Courcelette, which had not been included in the original scheme. All Canada, from Halifax in the east to Vancouver in the west, was represented in this victory; and it was particularly pleasing that the crowning achievement — the capture of Courcelette — was carried out largely by the 22nd Battalion of the 5th Brigade French Canadians of the Second Division. French Canada, like Ireland, has been diverted somewhat by petty internal influences from taking a wide and worthy view of the great struggle against German conquest, but it can truly be said in both cases that the fine quality of those who came did much to atone for the apathy of those who stayed. Thirteen hundred German prisoners were brought back by the Canadians. During the Courcelette operations, the Third Canadian Division was working upon the left flank of the Second as it attacked the village, protecting it from enfilade attack. The work and the losses in this useful movement fell chiefly upon the 8th Brigade.

This considerable victory was, as will afterwards be shown, typical of what had occurred along the whole line upon that great day of battle and victory. It was followed, so far as the Canadians were concerned, by a day of heavy sacrifice and imperfect success. The Third Division, still operating upon the left of the Second, endeavoured to carry the formidable Zollern Trench and Zollern Redoubt to the north of Courcelette. The 7th and 9th Brigades were in the attacking line, but the former was held up from the beginning. The latter got forward, but found itself confronted by the inevitable barbed wire, which stayed its progress. No good was done, and two gallant battalions, the 60th (Montreal) and the 52nd (New Ontario), lost 800 men between them. The operation was suspended until it could be renewed upon a larger scale and a broader front.

At this point we may suspend our account of the operations of Gough’s Fifth Army, while we return to the Fourth Army upon the south, and bring the record of its work up to this same date. Afterwards, we shall return to the Fifth Army and describe the successful operations by which it cleared the Thiepval Ridge, gained command of the Ancre Valley, and finally created a situation which was directly responsible for the great German retreat in the early spring of 1917.

IX. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
August 1 to September 15

Continued attempts of Thirty-third Division on High Wood — Cooperation of First Division — Operation of Fourteenth Division on fringe of Delville Wood — Attack by Twenty-fourth Division on Guillemont — Capture of Guillemont by 47th and 59th Brigades — Capture of Ginchy by Sixteenth Irish Division

AFTER the very hard fighting which accompanied and followed the big attack of July 14, continuing without a real break to the end of the month, there was a lull of a couple of weeks, which were employed by the German commentators in consoling articles to prove that the allied offensive was at an end, and by the Allies in bringing forward their guns and preparing for a renewed effort. The middle of August heard the drum fire break out again and the operations were continued, but on a local rather than a general scale. Many isolated positions had to be mastered before a general surge forward could be expected or attempted, and experience was to prove that it is precisely those isolated operations which are most difficult and costly, since they always mean that the whole concentration of the German guns can be turned upon the point which is endangered.

It will simplify the following operations to the reader if he will remember that the whole left wing of the army is excluded, being treated separately as Gough's flank advance. We only deal therefore with Rawlinson's Army. The front which faces us may be divided into several well-defined areas, each of which is in turn subjected to attack. There is High Wood on the extreme left, with the Intermediate Trench and the Switch Trench within it, or to its north. There is the line of trenches, Switch Trench, Wood Trench, Tea Trench, etc., linking up High Wood with Delville Wood. There is the north-eastern fringe of Delville Wood, there are the trenches between Delville Wood and Ginchy, there is Ginchy itself, there are the trenches between Ginchy and Guillemont, there is Guillemont itself, and finally there is a stretch of trench between Guillemont and the French left at Falfemont. This is the formidable barrier which was attacked again and again at various points between August 1 and September 15 as will now be told.

August 16 witnessed another attack by the Thirty-third Division upon High Wood, a position which had once already been almost entirely in their hands, but which had proved to be untenable on account of the concentration of fire which the German guns could bring to bear upon its limited space. None the less, it was determined that it should be once again attempted, for it was so situated that its machine guns raked any advance between it and Delville Wood. The attack upon this occasion was carried out on the eastern side by the 98th Brigade, strengthened for the work by the addition of the 20th Royal Fusiliers and a wing of the 1st Middlesex. It might well seem depressing to the soldiers to be still facing an obstacle which they had carried a month before, but if this portion of the British line was stationary it had gained ground upon either wing, and it might also be urged that in a combat destined to be ended by military exhaustion it is the continued fighting rather than the local result that counts. If High Wood had cost and was to cost us dearly to attack, it assuredly was not cheap to defend; and if their artillery had made it too deadly for our occupation our own guns must also have taken high toll of the German garrison. Such broader views are easy for the detached reasoner in dug-out or in study, but to the troops who faced the ill-omened litter of broken tree-trunks and decaying bodies it might well seem disheartening that this sinister grove should still bar the way.

At 2:45 in the afternoon the infantry advanced, the 4th King’s Liverpool upon the left and the 4th Suffolks on the right, keeping well up to the friendly shelter of their own pelting barrage. The enemy, however, had at once established a powerful counter barrage, which caused heavy losses, especially to the King’s, most of whose officers were hit early in the action. The two leading company commanders were killed and the advance held up. The Suffolks had got forward rather better, and part of them seized the German trench called Wood Lane to the south-east of the wood, but unhappily the only surviving officer with the party was killed in the trench, and the men being exposed to bombing attacks and to heavy enfilade fire from the eastern corner of High Wood were compelled to fall back after holding the trench for fifty minutes.

These two battalions had attacked upon the flank of the wood. The wood itself was entered by three companies of the Argyll and Sutherlands, who found it laced with wire and full of machine-guns. The Highlanders stuck gamely to their task, and some of them — little groups of desperate men —

actually crossed the wood, but their losses were heavy and, as is usual in forest fighting, all cohesion and direction became impossible. The whole attack was hung up. The 20th Royal Fusiliers, one of the public school battalions, was sent forward therefore to get the line moving once again. They shared in the losses, but were unable to retrieve the situation. So worn were the battalions that there was some question whether the 98th Brigade could hold its own line if there should be a vigorous counter-attack. The 19th Brigade was therefore brought up to support and eventually to relieve their comrades. The losses of the 98th amounted to over 2000 men, showing how manfully they had attempted a task which the result showed to be above their strength. The causes of the failure were undoubtedly the uncut wire in the wood, and that our gunners had been unsuccessful in beating down the machine-guns of the enemy.

Whilst the Thirty-third Division had been making these vigorous attacks upon High Wood, a corresponding movement had taken place upon the north side of the wood, where the First Division had come into line upon August 15, taking the place of the Thirty-fourth Division. They plunged at once into action, for the 2nd Brigade upon August 16 made a successful advance, the 1st Northants and 2nd Sussex pushing the line on for some hundreds of yards at considerable cost to themselves, and driving back a half-hearted counter-attack, which endeavoured to throw them out of their new gains. This attack was renewed with much greater weight, however, upon August 17, and both the 1st and 2nd Brigades were driven back for a few hours. In the afternoon they rallied and regained most of the lost ground. Immediately in font of them stretched a long German trench termed the Intermediate Trench, being the chief one between the second and third lines. Towards evening the 1st Brigade attacked this trench, the 1st Black Watch being the most advanced battalion. There was a hard fight, but the position was still too strong. Next morning, August 18, the gallant Highlanders were back at it once more, but the day was very misty, and the advance seems to have lost its exact bearings. The left company stumbled upon a pocket of 30 Germans, whom it took or killed, but could not find the trench. The right company got into the trench, but were not numerous enough to resist a very vigorous bombing attack, which reestablished the German garrison. The 8th Berkshires pushed forward to try their luck, but a smoke cloud thrown out by a division on the left came drifting down and the attack was enveloped in it, losing both cohesion and direction. The Intermediate Trench was still German in the evening.

Although the 1st Brigade had been held up at this point the 2nd Brigade had made some progress upon their right, for a successful attack was made by the 1st Northamptons and by the 1st North Lancashires upon a German trench to the north-west of High Wood. Colonel Longridge of the staff, a valuable officer, was killed in this affair, but the place was taken, and a strong point established. During the night two platoons of the Northamptons made an audacious attempt to steal an advance by creeping forwards 400 yards and digging in under the very noses of the Germans, on a small ridge which was of tactical importance. There was a considerable bickering all day round this point, the Sussex endeavouring to help their old battle-mates to hold the fort, but the supports were too distant, and eventually the garrison had to regain their own line.

Upon August 20 there was a severe German attack upon the line of the First Division, which was held at the time by the 1st Northamptons and the 2nd Rifles. The advance developed in great force, driving in the outpost line and part of the Northamptons. The brave old “Cobblers” were a very seasoned battalion, and took a great deal of shifting from their shallow trench, hand-to-hand fighting taking place along the line. With the help of two companies of the Rifles the advance was stayed on the Northampton front; but a second attack developed out of High Wood upon the right flank of the Rifles. Two platoons under Lieutenant Stokes showed great gallantry in holding up this sudden and dangerous incursion. The platoons were relieved by the Gloucesters, but as there was no officer with the relief, Stokes remained on with the new garrison, and helped to drive back two more attacks, showing a splendid disregard for all danger, until he was finally killed by a shell. Captain Johnstone, who had led the Riflemen in their relief of the Northamptons, was also killed, while Major Atkinson and 130 men of the Rifles were hit. The losses of the Northamptons were even more heavy, but the German advance came to nought.

At the risk of carrying the account of the operations near High Wood and between High Wood and the west edge of Delville Wood to a point which will compel a considerable return in order to bring up the narrative of the rest of the line, we shall still continue them to the date of the great advance of September 15, when the whole vast array from Pozières upon the left to Leuze Wood upon the right heaved itself forward, and local attacks gave place to a big concerted movement. We shall therefore continue to follow the fortunes of the First Division in their hard task in front of the Intermediate Trench. After the failure of their attempt to get forward upon August 19 the action died down, and for four days there was no fresh advance. The 3rd Brigade had come up into the front line, and upon August 24 the Munsters made an attempt upon the German trench without success. Colonel Lyon lost his life in this affair. Upon August 25 another battalion of the Brigade, the South Wales Borderers, made a bombing attack, and again were in the trench and once again were driven out. They were not to be denied, however, and upon August 26 actually occupied 180 yards of it, taking one of the deadly guns which had wrought such damage. On the 27th a German counter-attack was heavily repulsed, but an attempt of the South Wales Borderers to improve their success was also a failure. On the evening of this day the Fifteenth Scottish Division took over the position in front of the Intermediate Trench, the First Division moving to the right and enabling the Thirty-third Division upon its flank to move also to the right. The Fifteenth Division was able in very tempestuous weather partly to outflank the Intermediate Trench, with the result that upon the afternoon of August 30 the remains of the garrison, finding that they were in a trap, surrendered. Two machine-guns with 140 men were taken.

Upon August 12 the Fourteenth Light Division, of the which in spite of its initial misfortune at Hooge had won the name of being one of the finest divisions of the New Army, came up into line. Its first station was in the Delville Wood area, which was still a most difficult section, in spite of our occupation of the wood. Orchards lay upon its fringes, and the German trenches around it swept the edges with fire, while several German strong points lay just outside it. An attempt was made by the Fourteenth Division to enlarge an area outside Longueval upon August 18. At 2:45 that day the 41st Brigade advanced upon the right of the Thirty-third Division with Orchard Trench as an objective, while the 43rd Brigade kept pace with them to the north and east of the wood. The German front trenches were carried without much difficulty, but, as usual, the process of consolidation was an expensive one. The men in small groups dug themselves in as best they could under fire from both flanks. The 7th Rifle Brigade upon the extreme left of the line was in the air, and their left company was almost entirely destroyed. The new line was held, however, and knotted together with three strong points which defied German attack. This was attempted upon the 19th, but was a total failure. In these operations the Fourteenth Division took 279 prisoners.

For the sake of consecutive narrative, the doings in the High Wood and Delville Wood district have been given without a break, but in order to bring the rest of the chronicle level one has to turn back a few days and turn our attention to the long right flank of the army, from Longueval in the north to Falfemont, where we joined on to the French in the south.

The northern angle of this position was, as has already explained, extremely disadvantageous to us, forming an almost fantastic peninsula, which jutted out into the German positions. Even if their infantry could not carry it, their guns could at all times rake it from three sides, and could command the whole Montauban valley, along which our supplies were bound to pass. Therefore it became very necessary to get more elbow-room along this line.

South-east of Delville Wood was the strongly-fortified village of Ginchy, and between the wood and the village were what may be called the “Alcoholic” system of trenches, where the long and powerful Beer Trench, stretching a few hundred yards north of the wood, was connected up with Vat Alley, Hop Alley, and Ale Alley, the whole forming a formidable labyrinth. To the south of Ginchy lay the very strongly organised village of Guillemont, which could not be approached save over a long quarter of a mile of open ground. Ginchy and Guillemont were linked up in a strong line, of which Waterlot Farm and Guillemont Station were two nodal points. South of Guillemont came Wedge Wood and finally Falfemont Farm, where the right of Rawlinson’s Fourth Army joined on to the French. The whole of this long line was most powerfully defended, both by material appliances and by that constant human valour without which all appliances are useless. How to push it back was the pressing and difficult question which now faced the British commanders. Guillemont had already been attacked upon July 30 by the Thirtieth Division as described in a previous chapter. This attack had been most valiantly urged, but the losses had been heavy, and the gains small. The Second Division had relieved of the Thirtieth on this point, and were in turn relieved upon August 10 by the Twenty-fourth, a division which had seen a good deal of rough service in that famous forcing-house for young soldiers — the Ypres salient.

A few days later it closed in upon Guillemont with orders to reconnoitre and then attack. A partial attack was made upon August 16 upon the outskirts of the village by the 72nd Brigade, which was rather in the nature of a reconnaissance in force. The place was found to be very strong and the advancing troops drew oft after incurring some losses, which were heaviest in the 9th East Surreys, who came under a blast of machine-gun fire, and dropped nine officers and over 200 men. The division drew off, broadened their front of attack, and came on again upon August 18 in a wide advance which covered the whole enemy line, striking not only at the village itself, but at the station, quarry, and farm to the north of it, covering a front of nearly a mile.

The 73rd Brigade attacked the village and the quarry. The right attack was led by the 13th Middlesex and supported by the 2nd Leinster, but it had no success, and ended in heavy losses, especially to the English regiment. The men who got across were unable to penetrate, and after a hand-to-hand fight were driven back. Upon the left of the brigade things went better. The attack upon that side was led by the 7th Northants, supported by the 9th Sussex. The Cobblers had lost their colonel from a wound in the morning. This colonel was the famous international three-quarter Mobbs, who gave one more illustration of the fact that the fine sportsman turns rapidly into the fine soldier. His successor had been a few hours in command. The direction of the fight was none the less admirable. The Midlanders dashed with great fire across the 300 yards of open which separated them from the Quarries, while the Sussex crowded up into the advanced trenches, sending on company after company in response to demands for help. The British barrage had lifted, and it was no easy matter in face of the flank fire to get the men across, so that only a percentage reached the hard-pressed firing-line upon the other side. The colonel of the Sussex held back therefore, and sent his third company over as dusk fell, so that they came in on the flank of the Northamptons with little loss, while the fourth followed later with supplies. The lodgment made by the leading battalions was secured, and some ground to the north of the village passed into British hands.

Although Guillemont itself remained for the moment with the Germans, the assault of the Twenty-fourth Division had a success along the whole of the rest of the line and greatly improved the position of the British upon this flank. The 17th Brigade had attacked the station and after a severe fight had captured it, the 3rd Rifle Brigade especially distinguishing itself in this affair. Farther still to the north the line of trenches leading up to and in front of Waterlot Farm had fallen also to the 17th Brigade, the 8th Buffs having the heavier share of the work. These attacks, which cost the division more than 3000 men, were carried out in co-operation with French attacks to the south and east of Guillemont, the net result being partly to isolate that stubborn village and turn it into a salient on the German line.

The Twenty-fourth Division was now drawn out for a short period, and the Twentieth replaced it and held firmly to the conquered line.

The Germans were acutely uneasy as to the erosion of their line which was going on from Longueval to Guillemont, and upon August 23 endeavoured to win back the ground gained at Guillemont Station, but their counter-attack, stronger as usual in its artillery preparation than in its infantry advance, had no success, though it cost the Twentieth Division some heavy losses. It was one clear sign of the degeneration of the German soldier that the overture should so continually be better than the performance. The machines were as formidable as ever, but the human element was slowly wilting, and that subtle sentiment was developing upon either side which means the ascendancy of one and the decline of the other. The ease with which the prisoners surrendered, the frequent failure to hold ground and the constant failure to gain it, all pointed to the same conclusion.

Upon August 24 a very widespread and determined attempt was made by the British to enlarge their area on the right wing, and the attack extended along the whole line to the north of Guillemont. It was carried out by three divisions, the Thirty-third which had side-stepped to the right, and now covered the ground to the immediate left of Delville Wood, the Fourteenth Light Division which covered the north of Delville Wood and the Alcohol system of trenches, and finally the Twentieth Division covering Ginchy and the rest of the line down to Guillemont.

Describing these operations from the left of our line, the first unit of attack was the 100th Brigade, which had for its objective Tea Trench and other German defences which were to the north-west of Delville Wood, The Longueval-Flers road separated their right flank from the left flank of the 42nd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division. In order to carry out the attack the three leading battalions of the Brigade had to be crowded forward into a narrow front before daylight upon August 24.

All day they lay there, but towards evening the bombardment which they endured changed into an immense barrage which fell like a steel guillotine in front of our line, the British counter battery work being unable to check it. Shortly before 7 o’clock in the evening the leading companies of the attack belonging from the left to the 1st Queen’s, 16th Rifles and 2nd Worcesters, crept forward until they were on the edge of the barrage. At 7 o’clock they took the plunge, advancing with brisk alacrity into that terrible pelt of missiles. By 7:30 the Queen’s had established themselves in the German position and were bombing their way up Wood Lane Trench. The other two battalions had also at that hour got well forward, and the 42nd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division upon the right had been equally successful. The new positions were at once consolidated by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by parties of the 222nd Field Company, together with the 18th Middlesex pioneers, under a very heavy fire. The Worcesters were in good touch with the 16th Rifles upon their left, but a considerable and dangerous gap had formed between the left of the Rifles and the right of the Queen’s — a gap which might have let in a fatal counter-attack had it not been for the admirable barrage of the artillery, which beat down each of the attempted advance. A trench was at once put in hand to link up the new line, the sappers labouring at it during the night, but the gap had not been entirely closed by the morning. The assaulting battalions were then relieved, and the 98th Brigade took the place of their comrades of the 100th. Thus ended this very successful little advance, the result being to push forward and strengthen our position between the two woods. The casualties were not high, and this fact was due to the fine co-operation of the guns, and to a very effective smoke barrage thrown out between the left wing of the attack and the machine-guns of High Wood.

The Fourteenth Division had advanced upon the immediate right of the Longueval-Flers road, the 42nd Brigade upon the left keeping in touch w^th the 100th, while the 41st Brigade upon the right had not only to reach its own objective, but to act as a protective flank against the Germans in the village of Ginchy. The 43rd Brigade was in reserve, but contributed one battalion, the 6th Yorkshire Light Infantry, to strengthening the reserve of the 42nd Brigade, whose formidable task was the carrying of the outlying fringe of Delville Wood. At last that tragic grove, the scene of such a prolonged struggle, was to be utterly cleared from our front. Three gallant battalions of the 42nd Brigade — the 5th Oxford and Bucks on the left, the 5th Shropshires in the centre, and the 9th Rifles upon the right — swept forward with the bayonet in the good old style and cleared it from end to end, helped greatly by the accurate barrage behind which they advanced.

The German counter-barrage was heavy, but the troops tramped through it with no more deflection than if it had been a rainstorm, though a trail of dead and wounded marked their path. Every officer of the Rifle battalion was hit. The first barrier was a trench cut 150 yards from the north of the wood and called Inner Trench. This was taken at the first rush, the enemy surrendering freely. Two gallant N.C.O.'s of the Rifles, Sergeant Hamp and Corporal Ord, rushed up a machine-gun at the cost of their own lives. One party of 50 men of the enemy seem to have taken up arms again after three of the storming lines had passed, and to have blazed into their backs with a machine-gun, but a fourth line swept over them and all were engulfed. The Oxford and Bucks on the left of the line moved forward splendidly, picking up 200 prisoners as they passed, clearing the edge of the wood and digging in about 200 yards to the north of it, the 89th F Company Royal Engineers and the 11th King's Liverpool consolidating the position. The enemy's opposition upon the right flank had, however, been very much sterner and more successful, so that the flank battalion of the 42nd Brigade and the Rifle battalions of the 41st Brigade had all fallen short of their final objectives.

Altogether the day was a great success, for the losses were not excessive, and the gains though not sensational were general all along the line and prepared the way for the successful assaults of the next week. The fact that the right flank had not come on as far as the left, caused each successive battalion to find itself with its right flank exposed, but the line was held by a clever readjustment under heavy fire, by which the flank battalions faced half right with the Oxfords still in the advanced position joining up with the Thirty-third Division, while the line slanting, but unbroken, sloped backwards to Inner Trench upon the right.

The eastern corner of Deville Wood was still dominated by a strong point, but upon the rain-swept evening of August 27 this was finally cleared out by the 43rd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division, the 6th Somerset, Yorkshire and Cornwall battalions of light infantry, together with the 10th Durhams, all doing good service.

The remains of the hard-worked Seventh Division had been thrust in front of those Alcohol trenches which still remained intact, filling up the gap separating Delville Wood from Ginchy. The 22nd Brigade was on the left, and shared in the advance of the 43rd, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers capturing Hop Alley, Beer Trench, and part of Vat Alley. The impending attack upon

Ginchy, which was to co-operate with the attack upon Guillemont farther south, was forestalled and postponed by a very strong advance of the German infantry upon the north and north-east of Delville Wood. The 91st Brigade had relieved the 22nd, and the brunt of this attack outside the wood fell upon the 1st South Staffords, who repulsed the onslaught on three separate occasions, enduring a heavy shelling between each German advance. Upon the fourth attack the persevering German infantry succeeded in penetrating the north-east corner of the wood and regaining Hop Alley. The 2nd Queen’s relieved the exhausted Staffords, and at noon of September 2 made a vigorous bombing attack which had some success, though the assailants were considerably mystified by the appearance of a party of Germans who had dressed themselves in the khaki and helmets taken the night before. This powerful attack fell also upon the Twentieth Division, and upon the Fourteenth to the right of the Seventh, but although it inflicted heavy losses, especially upon the 60th Brigade of the Twentieth Division, it failed to gain any ground or to obtain any strategic advantage.

On September 3 at noon the attack upon Ginchy was carried out by the 22nd Brigade, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers attacking to the north of the village, the 20th Manchesters moving on to the village itself, and the 2nd Warwicks on to the trenches to the west of the village. The Manchesters succeeded about one o’clock in forcing their way into the village, sending back 200 of the garrison as prisoners. The first rush behind the barrage sustained few casualties, and it was not until the Manchesters in their fiery eagerness began to push on beyond their mark that they ran into a very severe fire from the north, which mowed down their ranks, including nearly all their officers. The Welsh Fusiliers upon the left had been unable to get forward, and as a consequence the Manchester men were in so precarious a position and so reduced in numbers that they had to fall back through the village, while the 2nd Royal Irish, who had passed on as far as Ginchy Telegraph, had now to retire, as their rear was in danger. The 2nd Warwicks, however, held on to the south of the village, and refused to be dislodged, keeping their position there against all attacks until the night of September 5. In the afternoon, two companies of the Irish attempted to retrieve the situation by a renewed advance upon the village, but their losses were heavy, and they could not get farther than the western outskirts. The casualties during the day were severe, and in the night it was thought advisable to replace the 22nd by the 20th Brigade. The latter made a fresh attack upon the village at eight in the morning of September 4 by the 9th Devons, but again it was found impossible, in the face of the inexorable machine-guns, to effect a permanent lodgment. The 2nd Queen’s, however, on the left of the Brigade, improved our position at the north-eastern corner of Delville Wood. There was a short lull in the fighting, and then at 5:30 A.M. upon the 6th the 2nd Gordons stormed into the orchards round the village, but had to dig themselves in upon the western edge. At 2 P.M. they again attacked, aided by two companies of the 9th Devons, getting as far as the middle of the village, and capturing some prisoners, but the Germans came back with so heavy a counter-attack that the evening found our troops back in their own front line once more. On the night of September 7 the division was taken out — the 16th (Irish) and 55th moving up to the Ginchy Front.

This severe fighting by the Seventh Division from the 3rd onwards was an excellent example of how a force may be called upon to sacrifice itself without seeing the object of its sacrifice until it learns the general plans of the Commander. The assaults upon Ginchy, unsuccessful at the moment, were of the greatest value as leading to the capture of Guillemont in the south. The task allotted to the Seventh Division was a very difficult one, involving an advance from a salient with the left flank exposed, and the magnitude of this task was greatly increased by the truly execrable weather. If no successful efforts were made to counter-attack upon Guillemont, the reason undoubtedly lay in the absorption of the German strength at Ginchy.

On this same day the battle raged from Ginchy along the whole right of our line through Waterlot Farm, Guillemont and Falfemont Farm to the left flank of the French. The annexed diagram will give some idea of the forces engaged and their several objectives on September 3.

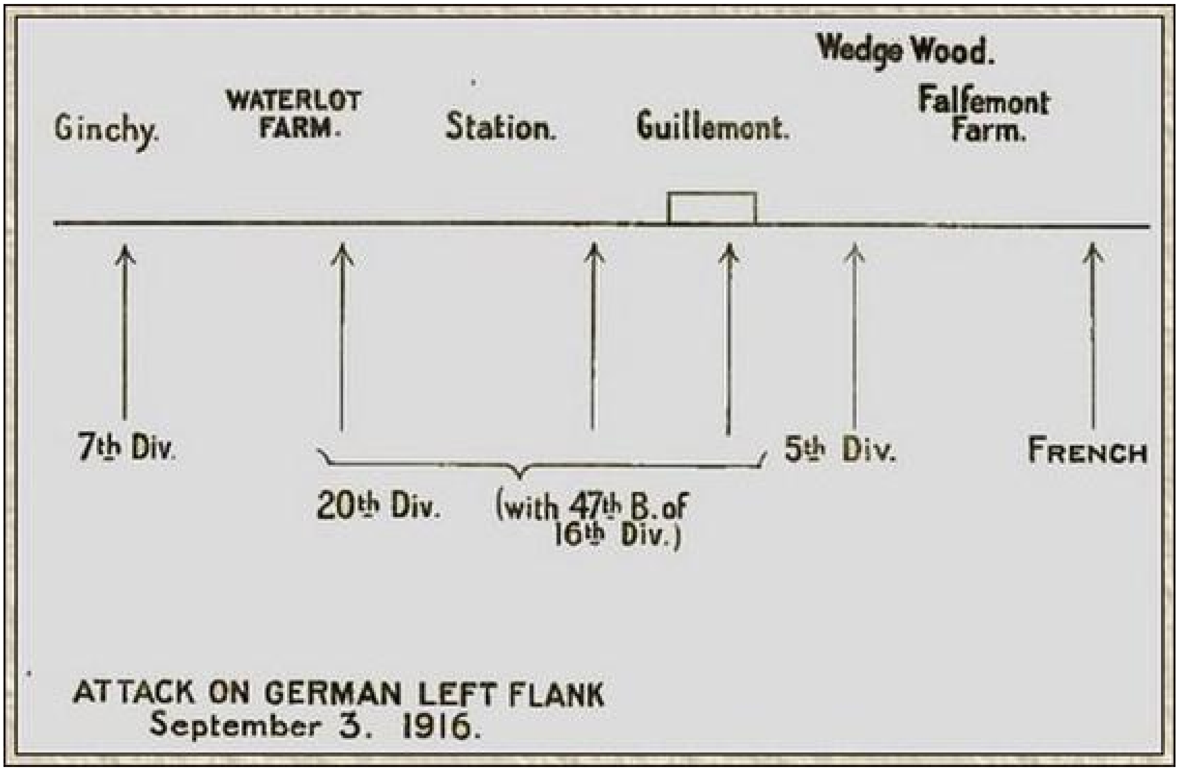
Wedge Wood.
Ginchy.
WATERLOT FARM.
Station.
Guillemont.
Falfemont Farm.
7th Div.
5th Div.
FRENCH
20th Div.
(with 47th B. of 16th Div.)
ATTACK ON GERMAN LEFT FLANK
September 3. 1916.

Attack on German Left Flank, September 3, 1916

As will be seen by this plan, the Fifth Division formed the unit next to the French, and the 13th Brigade were ordered to help our gallant allies in attacking the extreme southern point at Falfemont, while the 95th Brigade covered the ground between their comrades of the 13th and the village of Guillemont. The advance was made shortly after mid-day, and though the operations were long, bloody, and difficult, the famous old division, inheritors of the glories of Mons and Le Cateau, was not to be denied. The resistance was very strenuous, and only the most devoted constancy could have eventually overcome it. To follow the fortunes of the 13th Brigade first it may be briefly stated that upon Sunday, September 3, they first gained the Falfemont Farm, and then lost it again. That night they were reinforced by three battalions of the 15th Brigade, and were able next day to push in between the Farm and Guillemont, pressing the defenders upon every side. It was a widespread building, with many loopholed outhouses, and one of these fell after the other until only the central ruin, still spouting fire like an anchored battleship, remained in the hands of the defenders. Their position was hopeless, however, and by the morning of September 5 the changes in the line to the north of them, and especially the loss of Guillemont, caused them to evacuate the position.

The advance of the 95th Brigade upon the left of the Fifth Division had been a very gallant one, though the objectives which they so bravely won were nameless lines of trenches and a sunken road. The first line of the attack was formed by the 1st Duke of Cornwall's on the left, and the 12th Gloucesters upon the right, closely followed by the 1st Devons and 1st East Surreys. They were in close touch with the 69th Brigades of the Twentieth Division, who were attacking Guillemont upon their left. Within two hours of the first attack all three objectives had been captured, and the remains of the victorious battalions were digging in upon the line Ginchy — Wedge Wood. The losses were heavy in each battalion, but particularly so in the 12th Gloucesters. For a time they were under fire from both the British and the German batteries. Yet they held on to their ultimate objective, and the following extract from the impression which they produced upon an experienced regular colonel is worth quoting, if only to show the pitch of soldiership to which our amateur volunteers had reached.

"The battalion came on in their extended lines as steadily as on parade, and, without wavering, though suffering heavy losses, passed through a hot German barrage in the most gallant manner. The lines were also much troubled by long-range machine-gun fire from the direction of Fallemont, but although gaps appeared and the fines were rapidly thinning out, I never saw the slightest sign of wavering. No troops could have carried through such a difficult task with more indifference to consequences." Gloucestershire was once the favourite forcing-ground for the champions of the British ring. The old fighting breed still lives. Altogether the 95th Brigade advanced 3000 yards in this action, and was responsible for the capture both of Wedge Wood and of Leuze Wood.

Upon the left of the Fifth Division the difficult task of storming Guillemont had been entrusted to the Rifle and Rifle Brigade battalions of the 59th Brigade upon the right, and to the 47th Brigade of the Sixteenth Irish Division. This brigade had come temporarily under the command of General Douglas Smith upon the left, taking the place of the 60th Brigade, which had lost heavily in strength from cold, wet, and continual German gassing and bombardment. The 61st was in divisional reserve. The attack was ordered for noon. Profiting by previous experiences it was planned that the whole village should not be rushed at once, but that the attack should proceed with method in three definite stages. The guns of the Sixth and of the Twenty-fourth Divisions joined in the preliminary bombardment. At noon, the infantry leapt over their parapets and charged home. The enemy was taken unawares. The 10th and 11th Rifle Brigade with the 10th and 11th King’s Royal Rifles, supported by the 6th Oxford and Bucks, carried all before them on the south and west of the village, while the Leinsters, Connaughts, and Royal Irish did as much in the north. The Quarries, which was a nest of machine-guns, was taken in their stride. No more valiant or successful advance had been seen during the War, and it may take a place beside the attack of the 36th Brigade at Ovillers as a classical example of what British infantry can do with all the odds against them. The Riflemen fought in grim silence, but the Irish went through with a wild Celtic yell which, blending with the scream of their pipes, must have added one more to the horrors of the shaken and hard-pressed garrison. Neck and neck the two brigades, English and Irish, went through the German line. Hand-to-hand fights took place in the village, but all resistance was soon beaten down. By 12:30 the first objectives were solid, and at 1:20 the whole village was taken and the survivors of the enemy streaming out to eastward. The English losses were heavy and equally distributed. The Irish were also heavy, especially in the case of the 6th Connaughts, who also lost their colonel. At this time, through the failure of recruiting in Ireland, these brave battalions were below full strength, in spite of which within six days they stormed or helped to storm two of the strongest villages upon the line. One hardly knows which emotion is stronger — one’s pride in those who went, or one’s contempt for those who bided at home. No one admired the splendid dash of the Irish stormers more heartily than the British Riflemen, who kept pace with them in their desperate venture. Equally brave, they were more deliberate in their methods, with the result that more than once pockets of fighting Germans who had been overrun by the Irish, but were still venomous, were cleared up by the Riflemen on the flank. So infectious, however, was the fiery dash of the Irish, that Mr. Philip Gibbs has left it on record in one of his admirable letters that an English sergeant of Rifles complained that he had almost blown his teeth away in whistling his men back from overrunning their objectives. The garrison, it may be remarked, were chiefly Hanoverian, and once again our men were amused and amazed to see “Gibraltar” printed upon their hats, a reminiscence of the days when they formed part of the British army.

Whilst the attack had been in progress, two battalions of the 61st Brigade, the 7th Somersets and 12th King’s Liverpools, were in close support, advancing steadily through the German barrage. The enemy were, as already shown, strongly held at Ginchy on the left flank of the Guillemont advance, but in spite of their preoccupations they made strong attempts at a counter-attack from this direction, which fell upon the Connaughts, who had been reinforced by two companies of the 12th King’s. This small flanking force pushed out posts which behaved with great gallantry, holding off the enemy until evening, though at considerable loss to themselves. One of these posts, under Sergeant Jones of the 12th King’s, was cut off by the Germans and held out for two days without food or water — a deed for which the sergeant received the Victoria Cross. On September 4 the positions were put into a state of defence, and on the 5th the Twentieth Division drew out of the line after their fine deed of arms.

The Fourteenth Division had been in support upon the left during the attack upon Guillemont, and the 43rd Brigade had moved up to the northern edge of the village itself, losing a number of officers and men, including the colonel of the 6th Somersets, who, though badly wounded, remained with his battalion until it had consolidated its new position. A German advance was attempted at this point about 8 P.M., but the 43rd Brigade helped to drive it back. It may be said that the whole of September 3 was a series of small victories, making in the aggregate a very considerable one, and breaking down the whole of the flank German defences.

The Irish Division was now brought up to face Ginchy, the one point still untaken upon the second line, whilst the Fifth Division pursued its victorious way up to Leuze Wood and to the lower corner of Bouleaux Wood, always in close touch with the French upon their right. The 47th Brigade of the Irish had already lost near half its numbers, and other units of the division, both infantry and sappers, especially the 7th and 8th Irish Fusiliers, had lost heavily in supporting the Fifth Division in its attack, but the battalions were still full of fight.

In the late afternoon of September 9 the final attack upon Ginchy by the Irish tore that village from the close grip of its Bavarian and Pomeranian garrison. The Fifty-fifth Division made a supporting attack upon the left, but the main advance was left for the now depleted but indomitable division. It dashed forward upon a two-brigade front, the 47th upon the right and the 48th upon the left, the brigades being strengthened by three battalions of the 49th, so that practically all the reserves were in the line from the start, but the commander had the comforting assurance that the

Guards were moving up in his rear. On the right the first wave consisted of the 6th Royal Irish and the 8th Munsters, who dashed forward with great gallantry but were held up by machine-guns. The same fire held up the 1st Munsters upon the right of the 48th Brigade, but some natural cover was found which enabled them to continue to advance. On their left the 7th Irish Rifles and 7th Irish Fusiliers had broken into the German line in the first determined advance.

By six in the evening the 8th and 9th Dublins had reinforced the attack and had pushed on into the village, where the 156th Field Company Royal Engineers at once consolidated — a swift measure which was fully justified since two attacks stormed out of the darkness of the night and were beaten back into it again. Next morning the Sixteenth Division was relieved by the Guards and returned for the time from the line which they had so materially helped to enlarge and consolidate. Their losses had been heavy. Five battalion commanders were among the casualties. They fell out of the line upon September 10. A few days earlier the Fifth Division had been relieved by the Fifty-sixth.

The total effect of these operations had been to extend the whole British position for several thousand yards in frontage and nearly a mile in depth. At least 2000 more prisoners had fallen into our hands. The attack of July 14 had broken in the centre of the German second line, but the two flanks had held firm. The fall of Pozières upon our left before the Australians and the Forty-eighth Division, and of Guillemont upon our right before the Twentieth and Fifth, meant that the flanks also had gone, and that the whole front was now clear. A third strong line ran through Warlencourt and Le Transloy, but very numerous impediments — woods, villages, and trenches — lay in front of the army before they could reach it. It proved, however, that the worst impediment of all — vile weather and a premature winter — was to be the only real obstacle to the complete success of the army.

In order to complete this description of these widespread operations, which are difficult to synchronise and bring into any settled plan, one must return to what was going on upon the left of Delville Wood. Towards the end of August the Thirty-third Division, which had covered the line between Delville and High Woods, was relieved by the Twenty-fourth. Upon the left of the Twenty-fourth the First Division was still continuing that series of operations upon High Wood which have been already described. On their left in turn was the Fifteenth Scottish Division, the left unit of Rawlinson’s Army. They were busy from this time onwards in digging their assembly trenches for the great assault.

The first incident which calls for attention was a very sudden and violent German attack upon August 31 upon the Twenty-fourth Division. The German onslaught met with some success at first, as it burst through the line of the 13th Middlesex, a battalion which had lost heavily in the attack upon Guillemont ten days before, and was for the moment more fit for a rest-camp than the forefront of the battle. The 9th Sussex, who were on the right of the Middlesex, stood firm, and the German advance, which had penetrated some distance down the long communication trench which is known as Plum Street, was eventually brought to a halt. This result was partly brought about by the initiative and determination of a 2nd Lieutenant of the Middlesex, “a little pale-faced fellow,” who carried off a Lewis gun, and worked it from different positions down the trench, continually holding up the Germans and giving time for the Sussex men to gather such a force at the end of Plum Street as prevented the Germans from debouching into the larger trenches which led down towards Longueval. The attack had been equally severe upon the 72nd Brigade, who held the right of the division, which included the northern end of Delville Wood. They entirely repulsed the Germans with great loss, the 8th Queen’s Surrey being the battalion which bore the brunt of the fight.

On the next day, September 1, the 17th Brigade came up to restore the situation on the left, and by evening the position had been almost cleared. On the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th there were fresh German attacks, but the line was now firmly held and no impression was made. None the less, the fighting had been costly, and the depleted division had 2000 more names upon its roll of honour. It was drawn out shortly afterwards, but its artillery, which was left in the line, had the misfortune to lose its distinguished chief. General Phillpotts, upon September 8.

We shall now move a mile eastwards to follow the First Division in its difficult and, as it proved, impossible task of improving our position as regards High Wood, a spot which caused us more delay and loss than any other upon the German line.

On September 3 a strong attack by the whole of the 1st Brigade was made upon the wood, which was gridironed with trenches and studded with strong points. The immediate objectives were the main trench in the wood and the trenches to the southeast of the wood. The 1st Camerons, supported by the 8th Berks, advanced upon the right, the Black Watch, supported by the 10th Gloucesters, on the left. The attack had considerable success, which could not, however, be maintained. The battalions on the right won home, but the consolidating parties were delayed. On the left, the attack was only partially successful, being held up at a large mine-crater. When eventually a strong German counter-attack swept forward from the north-east of High Wood, the British had to fall back to their own original line, taking, however, 80 German prisoners with them. The ground had been won, but there had not been weight enough to hold it. The losses of the two Highland battalions were severe.

On September 8 the 3rd Brigade penetrated into the western part of High Wood, but again it was found impossible to make more than a temporary lodgment. The 2nd Welsh, 1st South Wales Borderers and 1st Gloucesters were all involved in this affair, as was the 9th Black Watch of the Fifteenth Division, who played a very gallant part. Next day the attack was renewed with the 2nd Brigade upon the right, the 3rd upon the left. In the centre the 1st Northants captured the crater, but were driven out of it later in the day, after a hard fight. On the left the Munsters and Gloucesters were held up by machine-gun fire. On the right the advance of the 2nd Sussex and of the 2nd Rifles met with gratifying success. The important trench called Wood Lane was stormed, with a loss to the assailants of a couple of hundred men, after the hostile machine-guns had been deftly put out of action by our trench-mortars. The Rifles were in touch not only with their comrades of Sussex upon the left, but with the 5th King’s Liverpool upon the right, so that the line was complete. It was consolidated that night by the 1st North Lancashires and was permanently held, an attempt at counterattack next day being crushed by our barrage. After this little victory the First Division was relieved upon the evening of September 10 by the New Zealanders.

X. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Breaking of the Third Line, September 15

Capture of Martinpuich by Fifteenth Division — Advance of Fiftieth Division — Capture of High Wood by Forty-seventh Division — Splendid advance of New Zealanders — Capture of Flers by Forty-first Division — Advance of the Light Division — Arduous work of the Guards and Sixth Divisions — Capture of Quadrilateral — Work of Fifty-sixth Division on flank — Debut of the tanks

THE Army had been temporarily exhausted by its extreme efforts and the consequent losses, but was greatly buoyed up by the certainty that with their excellent artillery and their predominant air service they were inflicting more punishment than they were receiving. Steadily from week to week the tale of prisoners and of captured guns had been growing, the British and the French keeping curiously level in the numbers of their trophies. Fresh divisions, ardent for battle, were streaming down from the Northern line, while old divisions, already badly hammered, filled up rapidly with eager drafts, and were battle-worthy once again in a period which would have been pronounced absolutely impossible by any military critic before the War. All the rearward villages were choked with the supports. There was rumour also of some new agency to be used, and wondrous stories were whispered as to its nature and its powers. The men were in high heart, therefore, and by the middle of September Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, which now included three corps, was ready to spring forward once again. The main German line was miles behind them, and the headquarters of British brigades and divisions now nested comfortably in those commodious dug-outs which two years of unremitting German labour had constructed — monuments for many a year to come of their industry and of their failure. It was realised that the obstacles in front, however formidable, could not possibly be so difficult as those which had already been surmounted; and yet our aeroplanes were able to report that the whole country was still slashed across and across in a fanciful lacework of intricate patterns in which fire, support, and communication trenches formed one great network of defence.

The left flank of the Army was formed by Gough’s Fifth Army, which had pushed forward in the manner already described, the Second Corps (Jacob) and the Canadians (Byng) being in the line upon September 15. On their immediate right, and joining them in the trenches which face Martinpuich, was Pulteney's Third Corps, which covered the whole line down to High Wood. From the north-west of High Wood to the trenches opposite Flers, Horne's long-suffering Fifteenth Corps still urged the attack which it had commenced upon July 1. The units, it is true, had changed, but it is difficult to exaggerate the long strain which had been borne by this commander and his staff. An appreciation of it was shown by his elevation to the command of the First Army at the conclusion of the operations. From the right of Horne's Corps to the point of i unction with the French the line was filled by the Fourteenth Corps, under Lord Cavan of Ypres fame. In the movement, then, which we are immediately considering, it is the Third, Fifteenth, and Fourteenth Corps which are concerned. AVe shall take them as usual from the left, and follow the fortunes of each until their immediate operations reached some definite term. It is a gigantic movement upon which we look, for from the Eleventh Division in the Thiepval sector to the left, along ten miles of crowded trenches to the Fifty-sixth Division near Combles upon the right, twelve divisions, or about 120,000 infantry, were straining on the leash as the minute hand crawled towards zero and the shell streams swept ever swifter overhead.

The three divisions which formed the Third Corps were, counting from the left, the Fifteenth, the Fiftieth, and the Forty-seventh. Of these, the Scots Division was faced by the strong line of defence in front of Martinpuich and the village of that name. The north of England territorials were opposite to the various German trenches which linked Martinpuich to High Wood. The Londoners were faced by the ghastly charnel-house of High Wood itself, taken and retaken so often, but still mainly in German hands. At 6:20 A.M. the assault went forward along the line.

The Fifteenth Division, which had been strengthened by the 103rd Brigade, advanced upon the line of trenches which separated them from Martinpuich, the 46th Brigade being upon the left and the 45th upon the right. The 10th Highland Light Infantry upon the left of the 46th Brigade were in close touch with the Canadians upon their left, forming the right-hand unit of Gough's Army. This brigade, consisting of Highland Light Infantry, Scots Borderers, and Scottish Rifles, swarmed over the German defences while their comrades upon the right, including Royal Scots, Scots Fusiliers, Camerons, and Argylls, were no less successful. The fact that the whole line was engaged removed the old bugbears of enfilade fire which had broken up so many of our advances. The German barrage was heavy, but the advance was so swift and the close fight of the trenches came so quickly, that it was less effective than of old. A creeping barrage from the British guns, going forward at a pace of fifty yards a minute, kept in front of the infantry, whose eager feet were ever on the edge of the shrapnel. With the 44th Highland Brigade in close support the whole division swept roaring over the trenches, and with hardly a pause flooded into Martinpuich, where they met the fringe of the Canadians, whose main advance was to the north-west of the village.

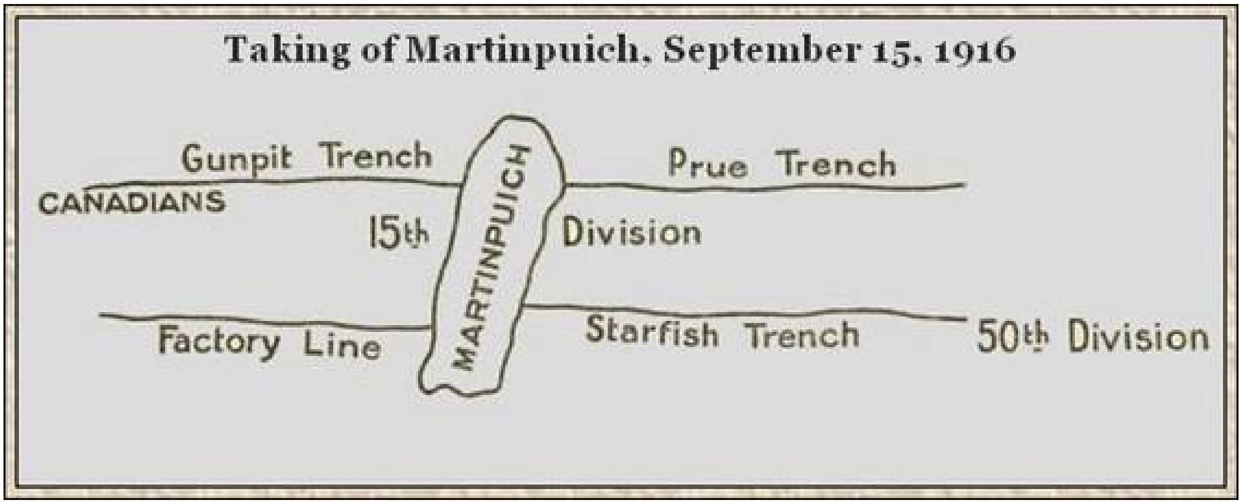

Final Position at Capture of Martinpuich

It was a magnificent advance, and the more noteworthy as the men of the 15th Division had already been for six unbroken weeks in the line, digging, working, fighting, and continually under shell-fire. Some groups of Germans in the village attempted a short and hopeless resistance, but the greater number threw their arms down and their hands up. It is said that a detachment of six Argylls got into Martinpuich some little time before their comrades, owing to some gap in the defences, and that they not only held their own there, but were found when reinforced to be mounting guard over fifty prisoners. Among many anecdotes of military virtue may be cited that of a sergeant of this same battalion, which combined within one episode all the qualities which distinguish the very best type of British soldier. He first attacked single-handed a number of German dug-outs. From one of these a German officer was emerging with his hands up. A soldier dashed forward in act to kill him, upon which the sergeant threatened his comrade with the bomb which he held in his hand. The German officer, as a sign of gratitude, presented Cunningham on the spot with his Iron Cross, which the sergeant at once despatched home to be sold for the benefit of the wounded. It was a quaintly beautiful exhibition of a noble nature.Immediate steps were taken to consolidate the village and to connect up firmly with the Fiftieth Division on the line of Starfish Trench, and with the Canadians on the line of Gunpit Trench, the general final position being as shown in the diagram. The trophies upon this occasion amounted to 13 machine-guns, 3 field-guns, 3 heavy howitzers, and about 700 prisoners. There was a counter-attack upon the morning of September 16, which was easily repulsed: and afterwards, save for constant heavy shelling, the village was left in the hands of the victors, until a few days later the Fifteenth was relieved by the Twenty-third Division.

Whilst this brilliant advance had been conducted upon their left, the Fiftieth Division, the same north country Territorial Division which had done such vital service during the gas battle at Ypres, had carried the trenches opposed to them. They had no village or fixed point at their front with which their success can be linked; but it may be said generally that they kept the centre level with the two victorious wings, and that in the evening of September 15 they extended from the Starfish trench on the left to the new position of the Forty-seventh Division upon the right. This position was a magnificent one, for High Wood had been finally taken, and the British line had been carried forward by these splendid London battalions, until in the evening the 140th Brigade upon the right had been able to join up with the New Zealanders upon the Flers line. Advancing upon a one-brigade front, with the 6th and 15th London in the lead, the London territorials, after one slight check, rushed the wood, and by 11 o’clock not only had it in their complete possession but had won 150 yards beyond it, where they consolidated. Two tanks which had been allotted to them were unfortunately unable to make their way through that terrible chaos of fallen trees, irregular trenches, deep shell-holes, and putrescent decay, which extended for a third of a mile from south to north. The wood now passed permanently into British hands, and the Forty-seventh Division has the honour of the final capture; but in justice to the Thirty-third and other brave divisions which had at different times taken and then lost it, it must be remembered that it was a very much more difficult proposition to hold it when there was no general attack, and when the guns of the whole German line could concentrate upon the task of making it uninhabitable.

So much for the capture of High Wood by the Forty-seventh Division. Speaking generally, it may be said that each of the three divisions forming Pulteney's Third Corps was equally successful in reaching and in retaining the objectives assigned for the attack.

The dividing line between the Third Corps and Horne's Fifteenth Corps was to the south of High Wood in the neighbourhood of Drop Trench. The order of the divisions in the latter corps from the left was the New Zealanders, the Forty-first Division, and the Fourteenth Light Division. We shall follow each in its turn.

The New Zealand Division had confirmed in France the high reputation which their predecessors had founded in South Africa, and which they had themselves renewed on the Gallipoli peninsula. They were troops with a splendid spirit, and no Londoner who has seen their tall lithe figures with the crimson hatbands which distinguish them from other oversea troops, needs to be told how fine was their physique. They were fortunate, too, in a divisional commander of great dash and gallantry. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that in this, their first serious battle, they carried themselves with great distinction and made good the objective which had been assigned to them.

This objective was the famous Switch Trench between High Wood and Delville Wood, a section which was held by the Fourth Bavarian Division. Good as the Bavarians are, they had no chance when it came to close quarters with the stalwart men of Auckland and Otago, who formed the 2nd Brigade in the front line of the New Zealand battle. The irresistible fire which they had to face was heavy and deadly, especially for the Otagos, who were on the left near High Wood. They poured on, however, in an unbroken array, springing down into Switch Trench, bayoneting part of the garrison, sending back the survivors as prisoners, and rapidly forming up once more for a fresh advance. The New Zealand Rifle Brigade passed over the captured trench and lay down under the barrage 300 yards beyond it, whence at 6.40 they went forward upon a new advance with such impetuosity that they could hardly be kept out of the of the friendly fire in front of them. The next obstacle, Fat Trench, was easily surmounted, and by noon the Flers Trench and Flers Support Trench had both fallen to this fine advance. The village of Flers was not in the direct line of the advance, but the fringe of the New Zealanders passed through the edge of it, and connected up with the Forty-first Division who had occupied it.

When, as will presently be shown, the left-hand brigade of this division was temporarily driven back by a sharp German counter-attack, the New Zealanders were bare upon their right, while a gap existed also upon their left. In spite of this they held on to their advanced position to the north-west of the village, the line being strengthened by battalions from Wellington, Hawke’s Bay, and West Coast, who pushed forward into the fight.

In the morning of the 1 6th the reserve brigade had come up and the advance was renewed as far as Grove Alley upon the left, the Canterbury battalion clearing and holding the new ground, with the Aucklanders and Otagos in immediate support. With this new advance the New Zealanders had come forward 3000 yards in two days — a notable performance — and were within short striking distance of the great German systems of Gird Trench and Gird Support. Two German counters that evening, one upon the Rifle Brigade and the other on the 1st Wellington battalion, had no success.

On the right of the New Zealanders was the Forty-first Division under one of the heroes of the original Seventh Division. His objective after surmounting the German trench lines was the fortified village of Flers. His artillery support was particularly strong, for his C.R.A. had under him the very efficient guns of the Twenty-first Division, as well as those of his own unit. The infantry advance was carried out with the 122nd Brigade on the left, the 124th on the right, and the 123rd in reserve. All the battalions save one were South of England, and most of them from the home counties, a district which has furnished some of the finest infantry of the War. As they advanced they were in close touch with the 2nd New Zealanders upon the left and with the 41st Brigade upon the right. The first objective* Tea Support Trench, was rapidly overrun by the Royal Riflemen, Hampshire, and Queen’s Surrey battalions who formed the front line. The garrison surrendered. The continuation of Switch Trench stretched now in front of them, and both front brigades, with a ten minutes’ interval in favour of the left one, made good the sections in front of them. The division was fortunate in its tanks, for seven out of ten got over the first line, and some survived for the whole day, spreading dismay in front of them and amused appreciation behind. The resistance was by no means desperate save by a few machine-gunners, who were finally scared or butted out of their emplacements by the iron monsters. Two tanks did good service, cutting the wire to the west of

Flers road, and the village was opened up to the stormers, who rushed into it shortly after eight o'clock. One tank went up the east side of the village and crushed in two houses containing machine-guns, while another one passed down the main street; and yet another cleared up the west side. Nowhere upon this day of battle did these engines of warfare justify themselves so well as at Flers.

By ten o'clock the village was cleared and consolidated, but the German guns were very active, and there was a strong counter-attack from fresh infantry, which fell heavily upon the already worn troops who had now passed beyond the village and got as far as the Box and Cox trenches. There had been a large number of officer casualties. Shortly after ten o'clock an officer of the 18th King's Royal Rifles had got far forward with a mixed party of 100 men with some Lewis guns, and had established a strong point at Box and Cox, which he held until about one. During those three hours the shell-fall was very severe. The division had become somewhat scattered, partly owing to the street fighting in Flers and partly because the 124th Brigade upon the right, although it had kept touch with the 41st Brigade, had lost touch with its own comrades upon the left. Finding that its left flank was open, it fell back and took up the line of the Sunken Road, a quarter of a mile south of Flers, where it remained.

Meanwhile the 122nd Brigade was in some trouble. The pressure of counter-attack in front of it had become so heavy that there was a general falling back of the more advanced units. This retrograde movement was stopped by the Brigade-Major, who collected a section of the 228th Field Company of Royal Engineers, together with little groups of mixed battalions in Flers Trench, and sent them forward again, working in conjunction with the New Zealand 3rd (Rifle) Brigade to the north end of the village, avoiding the centre of Flers, which was flaring and flaming with shells like the live crater of a volcano, these troops skirted the flank of the houses and by 2 P.M. had arrived once more at the north and north-west of the hamlet. Five Vickers guns were brought up, and the position made good by 2 P.M., the Brigadier-General being personally most active in this reorganisation of his line.

Whilst the 122nd Brigade had met and overcome this momentary set-back, the 124th upon the right had endured a similar experience and had come out of it with equal constancy. Shortly after one they had fallen back to Flers Trench, where they were rallied by their Brigadier, and moved forward again accompanied by some stray units of the Fourteenth Division. About 3 P.M. they were reinforced by two fresh companies of the 23rd Middlesex from the reserve brigade. By half-past four the whole of the remains of the division were north of Flers in a ragged but indomitable line, steadily winning ground once more, and pushing back the German attack. By half-past six they had got level with Flea Trench and Hogshead, and were close to the great Gird Trench. Some of the 124th tried hard to establish themselves in this important work, but lost heavily from a irresistible established in a cornfield upon their right. At seven o'clock the advanced line was consolidated, and the scattered units reorganised so far as the want of officers would permit. Very many of the latter, including Colonel Ash of the 23rd Middlesex, had been killed or wounded. The 11th Queen's, from the reserve brigade, was sent up to strengthen the front posts, while an officer of the same battalion was placed in charge of the Flers defences. No tank was left intact in the evening, but they had amply justified themselves and done brilliant work in this section of the battlefield.

The morning of September 16 saw a forward movement in this quarter upon the Gird Trench, which was shared in by the divisions upon both wings. The 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division had been placed under the orders of the General commanding the Forty-first for the purpose of this attack, so that the subsequent losses fell upon the North-country men. The advance got forward about 200 yards and established itself close to the great trench, but the losses were heavy, the machine-guns active, and farther progress was for the moment impossible. The 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry and 15th Durham Light Infantry were the chief sufferers in this affair. Upon September 17 the Fifty-fifth Division relieved the Forty-first, whose record for the battle was certainly a glorious one, as in one day they had taken Tea Support, Switch Trench, Flers Trench, Flers village, Box and Cox and Flea Trench, any one of which might be considered an achievement. How great their efforts were may be measured by the fact that nearly 50 per cent had fallen. The losses of the 124th were almost as heavy, and those of the 123rd were considerable. Altogether 149 officers out of 251 and 2994 out of about 7500 were killed or wounded. The opponents both of the Forty-first and of the Fourteenth Divisions were the Fifth Bavarian Division, who held the German line from Flers to Ginchy, and must have been well-nigh annihilated in the action.

The story of the Fourteenth Light Division has been to some extent told in recounting the experiences of the Forty-first Division, as the two advanced side by side upon prolongations of the same trenches, with equal dangers and equal successes. No village fell within the sphere of their actual operations, though a complete victory would have brought them to Guedecourt, but it was part of their task to sweep up the German trenches to the north of Delville Wood, especially the Tea Support and the Switch Trench. This task was committed to the 41st Brigade, consisting entirely of Rifle Brigade or Royal Rifle Battalions. The advance was for 500 yards downhill, and then up a long slope of 700 yards, which leads to a plateau about 200 yards across, with the Switch Trench in the centre of it. The Riflemen swept over this space with a splendid dash which showed that they had inherited all those qualities of the old 60th which were cultivated by Sir John Moore and celebrated by Napier, qualities which were always shared by their comrades of the Rifle Brigade. Regardless of the enemy’s fire, and so eager that they occasionally were struck on the backs by their own shrapnel, the long thin lines pushed forward in perfect formation, the 8th Rifles and 8th Rifle Brigade in front, with the 7th Battalions of the same regiments in close support.

By ten o’clock they had cleared the network of trenches in front of them and gone forward 2000 yards. The main attack was carried on by the 42nd Brigade, composed also of Riflemen with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 5th Shropshires. This brigade pushed on, keeping in close touch with the Forty-first Division upon-the left, but gradually losing touch with the Guards upon their fight, so that a dangerous gap was created. It was covered by the 7th Divisional Artillery as well as by its own guns. In its advance it passed through the ranks of its fellow-brigade, which had cleared the first trenches up to and including the line of the Switch Trench. The front line from the left consisted of the 5th Shropshires and 9th Rifle Brigade, with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 9th Rifles behind. From the beginning the brigade was under heavy fire, and the colonel of the Oxfords was twice wounded, which did not prevent him from still leading his battalion. The first obstacle. Gap Trench, was safely carried, and the line swept onwards to Bulls Road where they were cheered by the sight of a tank engaging and silencing a German battery, though it was itself destroyed in the moment of victory. The losses in the two rifle battalions were especially heavy as the right flank was exposed owing to the gap which had formed. This deadly fire held up the flank, with the result that the Shropshires and Oxfords who were less exposed to it soon found themselves considerably in advance of their comrades, where they formed a line which was extended about mid-day by the arrival of the 9th Rifles. At this period large reinforcements of the enemy were seen flocking into Gird Trench and Gird Support Trench in front. So strong were they that they attempted a counter-attack upon the right front of the 42nd Brigade, but this was brought to a stand, and finally broken up by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. The supporting 43rd Brigade came up in the evening and took over the ground gained, together with four German guns which had been captured. The final result, therefore, was that the division had won its way to the edge of that Gird Trench which represented the next great task which should be attempted by the Army — a task which, as already shown, was attempted by three divisions upon the morning of September 16, but proved to be too formidable for the their depleted and wearied ranks.

This fine advance of the Fourteenth Division brought them over the low ridge which had faced them. “It was a grand sight,” says a Rifleman, “to see the promised land lying green at one’s feet, with Germans moving across the open, and ammunition waggons going at a trot to and from their batteries, but the grandest sight of the day was seeing the battalions advance, the men dancing along only too anxious to get to close grips with the enemy.”

Among many brave deeds recorded of the division there was none finer than those of a captain and a corporal, both of the Medical Service, who stayed in the open all day in spite of wounds, tending those who were hardly worse than themselves.

On the evening of September 16 there was an advance of the 43rd Brigade, consisting of Somerset, Durham, Cornish, and Yorkshire Light Infantry, which succeeded in establishing itself in the Gird Trench, though they found it impossible to get as far as the Gird Support. This successful advance was supported by the Shropshire and Oxford battalions of the 42nd Brigade, who established flank protections and got into touch with the Guards in Gap Trench upon the right. The Fourteenth Division was withdrawn from the line after this, and their place taken by the Twenty-first.

We have now briefly considered the operations carried out during this great battle by Horne’s Fifteenth Corps. Upon their right, stretching from the neighbourhood of Ginchy to the left of the French Army in the neighbourhood of Combles, was Cavan’s Fourteenth Corps, which contained in its battle line the Guards, the Sixth Division, and the 56th London Territorial Division. Taking them, as always, from of the the left, we will begin by tracing the progress of the Guards.

The Guards Division had taken over the Ginchy Section some days previously from the Irish Division, and had at once found themselves involved in very [heavy fighting, which left them a good deal weakened [for the great advance. They were faced by a strong system of trenches, and especially by one stronghold upon their right front, called the Quadrilateral, which was a most formidable thorn, not only in their side but also in that of the Sixth Division upon the right. On September 13 and 14 these two divisions strove hard, and sustained heavy losses in the endeavour to clear their front of, and to outflank, this serious obstacle, and some account of these preliminary operations may be here introduced, although, as explained, they were antecedent to the general engagement. The attack upon the German trenches on the evening of September 13 was begun by the Sixth Division, which advanced with the 71st Brigade upon the left, the Sixteenth upon the right, and the Eighteenth in reserve. For 500 yards the advance was successful until it reached the sunken road which leads from Ginchy to Leuze Wood. Here the leading battalions of the 71st Brigade, the 2nd Sherwood Foresters upon the left and the 9th Suffolk upon the right, were held up by a furious fire which caused them heavy losses. The 8th Bedford, one of the leading battalions of the 16th Brigade, was also heavily punished. Many officers fell, including Major Mack of the Suffolks, a civilian-bred soldier over sixty years of age, who had distinguished himself by his fiery courage. The 2nd Brigade of Guards had advanced upon the left, near Ginchy Telegraph, and had also forced their way as far as the road, where they were held up partly by a terrific barrage from the north-east and partly by the murderous fire from the Quadrangle. The whole line dug in upon the ground they had won and waited for a farther push in the morning. In this action No. 2 Company of the 2nd Irish Guards suffered heavy casualties from close-range fire.

On September 14 a second attempt was made to get forward, the action being a purely local one, but extending over a considerable space from Ginchy to near Leuze Wood, with its centre on the line of Ginchy Telegraph. The 3rd Brigade of Guards came into action this morning and made some progress in the orchard north of Ginchy. At the same time, the 2nd

Sherwoods got astride of the little railway which intersected their position. The gains were inconsiderable, however, which could not be said for the losses, mostly due to machine-gun fire from the Quadrangle. The fact that this point was still untaken gave the whole Fourteenth Corps a very difficult start for the general action upon September 15 to which we now come.

On the signal for the general advance the Guards Division advanced on the front between Delville Wood and Ginchy. The 1st Guards Brigade was on the left, the 2nd on the right, and the 3rd in reserve. The front line of battalions counting from the left were the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Coldstreams with the 3rd Grenadiers as right flank. Behind, in the second line from the left, were the 1st Irish, 2nd Grenadiers, 2nd Irish, and 1st Scots. Disregarding the Quadrilateral upon their right, which was holding up the Sixth Division, the Guards swept magnificently onwards, losing many officers and men, but never their direction or formation. From 6:20 in the morning until 4 P.M. they overcame one obstacle after another, and continually advanced, though the progress was unequal at different points on the line. There was a short sharp bout of hand-to-hand fighting in the front line trench, but the rush of the heavy disciplined Guardsmen was irresistible, and the defenders were soon overwhelmed. In this melee the battalions got badly mixed up, part of the 2nd Irish getting carried away by the 1st Brigade. The 1st Brigade found a more formidable obstacle in front of them in Vat Alley, but this also was cleared after a struggle, the left-hand I units getting mixed with the right-hand units of the Fourteenth Division. About one o’clock the 3rd Coldstreams on the extreme left were held up by a wired strong point. They were weak in numbers and almost without officers, so they dug in as best they could and waited. On the right the 2nd Brigade made good progress, and about mid-day its leading line topped the low ridge and saw the land of promise beyond, the green slope leading up to Lesboeufs, and in the middle of the slope, not more than a thousand yards away, a battery of field-guns raining shrapnel upon them. They could get no farther, and they consolidated at this point, digging in under heavy shell-fire. The German infantry was seen at one time marching down in artillery formation for a counter-attack, but the movement was soon dispersed. In the evening the front line, terribly worn and consisting of a jumble of exhausted men, held on firmly to the last inch that they had won. Too weak to advance and too proud to retire, they lay under the torment of the shells and waited for dusk. The colonel of the 3rd Coldstreams, in temporary command of his brigade, had sent back during the afternoon for help, and the 2nd Scots were sent up from the 3rd Brigade, but the German barrage was so terrific that they sustained very heavy losses, including Colonel Tempest, Wynne-Finch, the adjutant, and many other officers. The battalion, or what remained of it, arrived in time to help to crush a dangerous counter-attack, which was sweeping down from between Guedecourt and Lesboeufs, a repulse which was entirely inflicted by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. A lieutenant seems to have been the senior officer present at this critical moment, and to have met it as our subalterns have so often met large emergencies during the War. The advanced line was held until upon the next day the 60th Brigade, and finally the whole of the Twentieth Division, took over the new positions, which may be regarded as a protective flank line in continuation of that of the Fifty-sixth Division. It should be mentioned that the 61st Brigade of the Twentieth Division had been lent to the Guards during the battle, and had done very sterling and essential work. For a short time the Guards were rested after this splendid but costly service.

In the meantime the gallant Sixth Division was left face to face with the hardest problem of all, the Quadrilateral trenches, which, as the name would indicate, were as formidable in the flanks or rear as in front. With a tenacity which was worthy of the traditions of this great division it settled down to the task of clearing its front, meeting with check after check, but carrying on day and night until the thing was done. On the first assault upon September 15, the 1st Leicesters of the 71st Brigade were able to make some progress, but the 8th Bedford of the 16th Brigade, who shared the attack, were completely held up at the starting-point by the terrific fire, while the 1st Buffs had heavy losses in endeavouring to come up to their aid. By about mid-day a mixture of battalions, which numbered about 200 of the York and Lancasters, 50 Buffs and 50 Bedfords, had made their way into the advanced German line, but the Quadrilateral was still intact. The General, seeing the certain losses and uncertain results which must follow from a frontal attack, determined to work round the obstacle, and before evening the 16th Brigade, which had already lost 1200 men, was ready for the advance. The 18th Brigade had gone forward past the Quadrilateral upon the left, working up to the Ginchy-Morval road, and in close touch with the 1st Scots Guards on the extreme flank of the Guards Division. It now worked down towards the north face of the German stronghold, and in the course of September 16 the 2nd Durham Light Infantry, by a bold advance laid hold of the northern trench of the Quadrilateral down to within a hundred yards of the Ginchy-Morval road. Here they were relieved by the 1st West Yorks, who took over the task upon the 17th, keeping up constant pressure upon the garrison whose resistance was admirable. These brave men belonged to the One hundred and eighty-fifth German Division. By this time they were isolated, as the British wave had rolled far past them on either side, but their spirit was as high as ever. A second trench to the north of the work was rushed upon September 17 by the Leicesters, who bayoneted fifty Germans in a hand-to-hand conflict. Early in the morning of September 18 came the end when, British battalions, led by the 1st Shropshire Light Infantry, closed suddenly in and stormed the position. Seven machine-guns (five of which fell to the Shropshires) and a few hundred exhausted or wounded prisoners represented the trophies of this very difficult operation. The Sixth Division now connected up with the Twentieth upon their left, and with the Fifty-sixth upon their right, after which, upon September 19, they handed over their front for a time to the Fifth Division.

There now only remains the Fifty-sixth Division upon the extreme right of the Army — the division which contained many of the crack London Territorial Battalions, re-formed and reinforced since its terrible losses at the Gommecourt Salient upon July 1. In following the fortunes of this fine division upon September 15, it is necessary to go back for some days, as a series of operations had been undertaken before the great battle, which were as arduous as the battle itself. On coming into the line on September 9, the division had at once been given the task of advancing that wing of the Army. Upon that date the 168th and 169th Brigades were attacking upon the line of the road which connects Ginchy with Combles, the general objects of the advance being gradually to outflank Combles on the one side and the Quadrilateral upon the other. Some ground was permanently gained by both brigades upon that day, the Victoria Rifles and the 4th London doing most of the fighting.

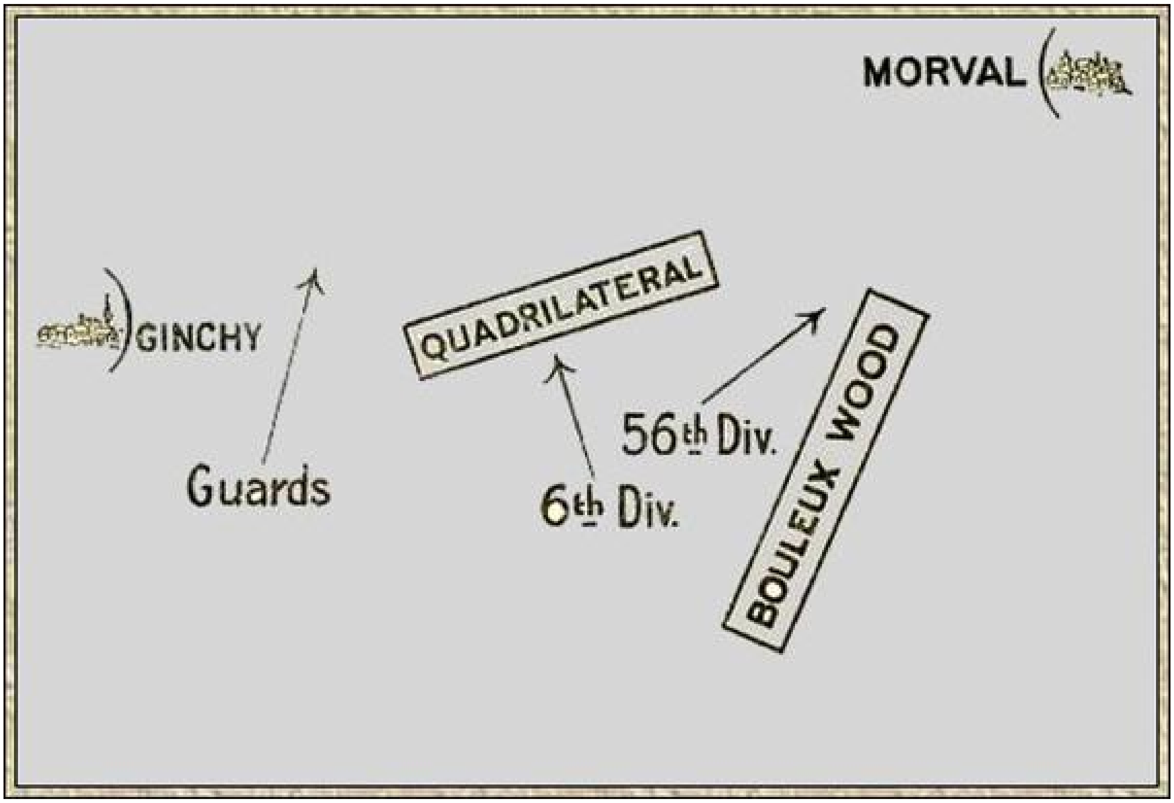

Attack on Quadrilateral, September 15, 1916

Upon September 10 the advance was continued, a scattered clump of trees called Leuze Wood being The the immediate obstacle in front of the right-hand brigade, while the left-hand brigade was trying to get into touch with the division upon their left, and were confronted by the continuation of the same system of trenches. The 169th Brigade upon the right was advancing through Leuze Wood, and suffered heavy losses before reaching its objective. On the left the London Scottish and the Rangers were extending east along the Ginchy road, endeavouring to link up with the Guards, for there was an awkward gap at that date between the divisions. This was filled, however, by the advent of the Fifth and subsequently of the Sixth Division. The object of all the above operations was to get the right flank of the Army into its allotted position for the battle to come. Upon September 15 the London Division went forward with the whole line at 6:20 in the morning, the 167th Brigade on the left, the 169th upon the right. The original direction of advance had been north and south, but it soon became almost from west to east as the division, pivoting upon Leuze Wood, swung round to attack Bouleaux Wood to the north of it, and to hold a defensive flank for the whole army. Their front was a very narrow one to allow for the fact that their essential work was lateral.

The 167th Brigade fought its way bravely into Bouleaux Wood, where they endured the usual horrors of this forest fighting, which came especially upon the 7th Middlesex battalion, who lost 400 men, chiefly from the fire of unseen machine-guns. There was a very heavy barrage between Ginchy and Bouleaux Wood so that all reserves and supports endured heavy losses before they could get up. By mid-day the 1st London and the 8th were involved in the wood and some progress was being made, while the 2nd London The of the 169th Brigade had taken and consolidated a trench near the Sunken Road, but a further attack upon a second trench to the east of Leuze Wood, two days later, was a failure. On this same day, September 18, the 168th Brigade relieved the 167th in Bouleaux Wood, while the whole division, like one blade of a scissors, edged its way eastwards towards Combles to meet the French Second Division, who were closing in from the other side. Already rumours were current that the Germans were evacuating this important little town, but many very active German trenches and strong points still lay all round it, through which the Allies, from either side, were endeavouring to force their way. On the night of September 18-19, the 5th Cheshires, pioneer battalion of the division, constructed a long trench parallel to Bouleaux Wood, which formed a defensive flank for the operations. The whole of this wood had now been cleared with the exception of the extreme northern corner. Here we may leave the Fifty-sixth Division, for the fall of Combles will fit in more properly to our next survey, when we shall have once again to go down the whole line from left to right and to show one more stage in the advance.

This Battle of Flers may be said to mark an epoch in military history on account of the use of the so-called tank, an instrument which had no vital effect upon the course of the fight, but which was obviously capable of being much enlarged, and of being made in every way more formidable. It had been a common criticism up to this date that our military equipment had always been an imitation, very belated, of that of our enemy. Now at last Great Britain, warming to the War, was giving her inventive and manufacturing as well as her military talents full scope — and the tank was the first-born of her fancy. It is a matter of history that Britain has been the inventor of processes and Germany the adapter of them, so that we had a valuable asset in that direction could we break through our bonds of red tape and get without hindrance from the thinker in his study to the fighter in the trench. Those who have had the experience of discussing any military problem in the Press, and have found by the next post fifty letters from men of all ranks and professions, presenting solutions for it, can best understand how active is the inventive brain of the country. In this instance, Mr. Winston Churchill is said, during his tenure of office, to have first conceived the idea of the tanks, but the actual details were worked out by a number of men. Especially they are owing to Colonel Stern, a civilian before the War, who used his knowledge of motor manufacture and his great organising ability to put the construction through in the shortest time, to Commander d'Eyncourt of the Navy, and to Colonel Swinton, R.E., who looked after the crews and equipment. On an average six of these engines, strange modern resuscitations of the war-chariots of our ancestors, were allotted to each division. The whole affair was frankly experimental, and many got into trouble through the breakdown of machinery, the limits of carrying capacity, and the slipping of the caterpillar driving-bands at the sides. Their pace, too, was against them, as they could only go twenty yards per minute as against the fifty of the infantry. Hence they had to be sent ahead down lanes in the barrage, with the result that the element of surprise was lessened. Their vision also was very defective, and they were bad neighbours, as they drew fire. The result was a very mixed report from various Divisional Commanders, some of whom swore by, and others at them. The net result, however, was summed up by the words of commendation from General Haig in his despatch, and there were some cases, as at Flers itself, where the work done was simply invaluable, and the machine-guns were nosed out and rooted up before they could do any damage. The adventures of individual tanks could, and no doubt will, fill a volume to themselves, some of them, either in ignorance or recklessness, wandering deep into the enemy's lines, and amazing rearward batteries by their sudden uncouth appearance. Several were destroyed, but none actually fell into the German hands. Enough was done to show their possibilities, and also to prove that the Navy and the Flying Service had not sufficed to exhaust our amazing supply of high-spirited youths ready to undertake the most nerve-shaking tasks so long as a touch of sport gave them a flavour. The very names of these land cruisers, *Crème de Menthe* and the like, showed the joyous, debonair spirit in which their crews faced the unknown dangers of their new calling.

Summing up the events of September 15, it was without any doubt the greatest British victory, though not the most important, which had been gained up to date in the War. July 1 was the most important, and all subsequent ones arose from it, since it was then that the Chinese Wall of Germany was breached. July 14 was also a considerable victory, but it was only a portion of the line which was attacked, and that portion was partly regained for a time by the German counter-attacks. The battle of September 15, however, was on as huge a scale as that of July 1, but was devoid of those long stretches of untaken trench which made us pay so heavy a price for our victory. From the Pozières Ridge upon the left to Bouleaux Wood upon the right twelve divisions moved forward to victory, and, save in the small section of the Quadrilateral, everything gave way at once to that majestic advance. The ultimate objectives had been carefully defined, for the Battle of Loos had taught us that the infantry must not outrun the guns, but this pre-ordained limit was attained at almost every spot. Martinpuich, High Wood, Flers, Delville, and Leuze Wood, all passed permanently within the British lines, and the trophies of victory amounted to 5000 prisoners and a dozen guns. At this stage no less than 21,000 prisoners had been taken by the British and 34,000 by the French since the great series of battles was commenced upon July 1.

XI. THE GAINING OF THE THIEPVAL RIDGE

Assault on Thiepval by Eighteenth Division — Heavy fighting — Cooperation of Eleventh Division — Fall of Thiepval — Fall of Schwaben Redoubt — Taking of Stuff Redoubt — Important gains on the Ridge

HAVING treated the successful advance made by Rawlinson’s Fourth Army upon September 15, it would be well before continuing the narrative of their further efforts to return to Gough’s Army upon the north, the right Canadian wing of which had captured Courcelette, but which was occupied in the main with the advance upon the Thiepval Ridge.

The actual capture of Thiepval was an operation of such importance that it must be treated in some detail. The village, or rather the position, was a thorn in the side of the British, as it lay with its veteran garrison of Würtembergers, girdled round and flanked by formidable systems of trenches upon the extreme left of their line. Just above Thiepval was a long slope ending in a marked ridge, which was topped by the Schwaben Redoubt. Both armies recognised the extreme importance of this position, since its capture would mean a fire-command over all the German positions to the north of the Ancre, while without it the British could never reap the full result of their success in breaking the line upon July 1. For this reason, instructions had been given to the picked German troops who held it to resist at all costs, even to the death. They had massed at least four hundred guns in order to beat down every assault. Yet the attempt must be made, and it was assigned to Jacob’s Second Corps, the actual Divisions engaged being the Eighteenth and the Eleventh, both of them units recruited in the South of England. The latter was distinguished as the first English Division of the New Armies, while the former had already gained great distinction in the early days of the Somme battle when they captured Trones Wood. They were supported in their difficult venture by a considerable concentration of artillery, which included the guns of the Twenty-fifth and Forty-ninth Divisions as well as their own. Jacob, their Corps leader, was an officer who had risen from the command of an Anglo Indian Brigade to that of a Corps within two years. The whole operation, like all others in this region, was under the direction of Sir Hubert Gough.

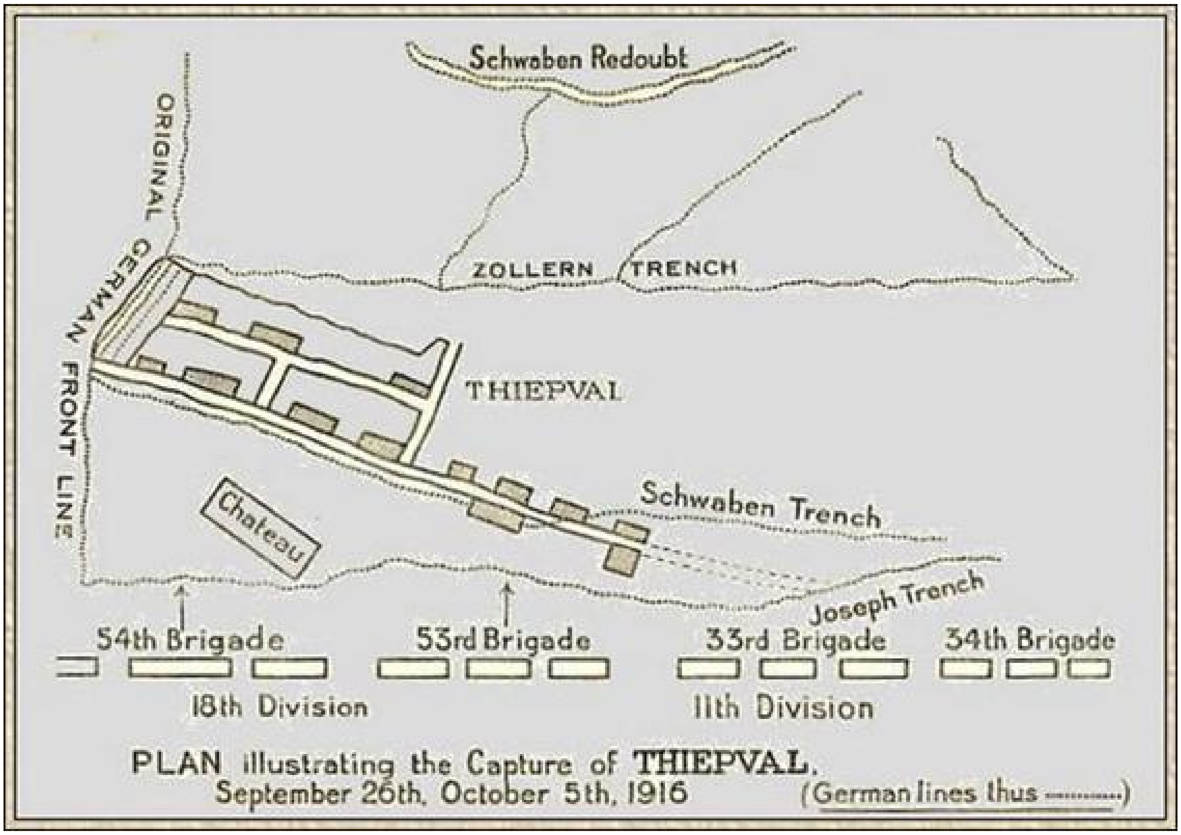
Schwaben Redoubt
ORIGINAL GERMAN FRONT LINE
ZOLLERN TRENCH
THIEPVAL
Schwaben Trench
Chateau
Joseph Trench
54th Brigade
53rd Brigade
33rd Brigade
34th Brigade
18th Division
11th Division
PLAN illustrating the Capture of THIEPVAL,
September 26th, October 5th, 1916
(German lines thus ....)

Plan illustrating the Capture of Thiepval, September 26, October 5, 1916

Every possible preparation was made for the assault, and all the requirements of prolonged warfare were used to minimise the losses and ensure the success of the storm-troops. Four tanks were brought up to co-operate, and one of them, as will be shown, was of vital use at a critical moment. Instructions were given to the advancing battalions to let their own shrapnel strike within a few yards of their toes as they advanced, huddling in a thick line behind the screen of falling bullets which beat down the machine-guns in front. With fine judgment in some cases the supports were taken out of the advanced trenches and concealed here or there so that the answering barrage of the enemy fell upon emptiness. So war-wise were the British, and so cool their dispositions, that certain of the enemy trenches were actually exempted from bombardment, so that they might form an intact nucleus of defence when the place was taken.

The Canadian Corps were to attack from Courcelette upon the right, but their advance was only indirectly concerned with Thiepval Village, being directed towards the ridge which runs north-west of Courcelette to the Schwaben Redoubt. Next to the Canadians on the left was the Eleventh

Division, and on their left the Thirteenth, which had been strengthened by the addition of the 146th Brigade of the Forty-ninth Division. The latter brigade held the original British front line during the action so as to release the whole of the Eighteenth Division for the advance. The immediate objective of this division was Thiepval Village, to be followed by the Schwaben Redoubt. Those of the Eleventh Division on its right were Zollern and Stuff Redoubts.

The Eighteenth Division assaulted with two brigades, the 53rd on the right, the 54th on the left, each being confronted by a network of trenches backed by portions of the shattered village. The advance was from south to north, and at right angles to the original British trench line. The hour of fate was 12.35 in the afternoon of September 26.

The average breadth of No Man's Land was 250 yards, which was crossed by these steady troops at a slow, plodding walk, the pace being regulated by the searching barrage, which lingered over every shell hole in front of them. Through the hard work of the sappers and Sussex pioneers, the assembly trenches had been pushed well out, otherwise the task would have been more formidable.

Following the fortunes of the 53rd Brigade upon the right, its movements were supposed to synchronise with those of the 33rd Brigade upon the left flank of the Eleventh Division. The right advanced battalion was the 8th Suffolk, with the 10th Essex upon the left, each of them in six waves. Close at their heels came the 8th Norfolk, whose task was to search dug-outs and generally to consolidate the ground won. The front line of stormers rolled over Joseph Trench, which was the German advanced position, but before they had reached it there was a strange eruption of half-dressed unarmed Germans yelling with terror and bolting through the barrage. Many of them dashed through the stolid Suffolks, who took no notice of them, but let them pass. Others lost their nerve like rabbits at a battle, and darted here and there between the lines until the shrapnel found them. It was an omen of victory that such clear signs of shaken moral should be evident so early in the day. There was sterner stuff behind, however, as our men were speedily to learn.

The advance went steadily forward, cleaning up the trenches as it went, and crossing Schwaben Trench, Zollern Trench, and Bulgar Trench, in each of which there was sharp resistance, only quelled by the immediate presence of our Lewis guns, or occasionally by the rush of a few determined men with bayonets. It was 2:30 before the advance was brought to a temporary stand by machine-gun fire from the right. After that hour a small party of Suffolks under Lieutenant Mason got forward some distance ahead, and made a strong point which they held till evening, this gallant young officer falling under the enemy's fire.

The The success of the Suffolks upon the right was equalled by that of the Essex on the left, passing through the eastern portion of Thiepval without great loss, for the usual machine-gun fire seemed to have been stamped out by the British guns. The whole of this fine advance of the 53rd Brigade covered about 1000 yards in depth and accounted for a great number of the enemy in killed, wounded, and prisoners. The advance made and the cost paid both showed that our officers and soldiers were learning the lessons of modern warfare with that swift adaptability which Britain has shown in every phase of this terrific and prolonged test. This old, old nation's blood has flowed into so many younger ones that her own vitality might well be exhausted; but she has, on the contrary, above all the combatants, given evidence of the supple elasticity of youth, moulding herself in an instant to every movement of the grim giant with whom she fought.

Great as had been the success of the 53rd Brigade, it was not possible for them to get on to the Schwaben Redoubt, their ultimate objective, because, as will be shown, matters were more difficult upon the left, and one corner of the village was still in German possession. They ended the day, therefore, with two battalions consolidating the Zollern Line, a third in support in the Schwaben Trench, and a fourth, the 6th Berks, bringing up munitions and food to their exhausted but victorious comrades. The front line was much mixed, but the men were in good heart, and a visit from their Brigadier in the early morning of the 27th did much to reassure them. To carry on the story of this brigade to the conclusion of the attack it may be added that the whole of the 27th was spent on consolidation and on a daring reconnaissance by a captain of the 53rd Trench Mortar Battery, who crawled forward alone, and made it clear by his report that a new concerted effort was necessary before the Brigade could advance.

We shall now return to 12.35 P.M. on September 26, and follow the 54th Brigade upon the left. The advance was carried out by the 12th Middlesex, with instructions to attack the village, and by the 11th Royal Fusiliers, whose task was to clear the maze of trenches and dug-outs upon the west of the village, while the 6th Northamptons were to be in close support. So difficult was the task, that a frontage of only 300 yards was allotted to the Brigade, so as to ensure weight of attack — the Fusiliers having a front line of one platoon.

The advance ran constantly into a network of trenches with nodal strong points which were held with resolution and could only be carried by fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Captain Thompson, Lieutenants Miall-Smith and Cornaby, and many of their Fusiliers in the leading company, were killed or wounded in this desperate business. So stern was the fight that the Fusiliers on the left got far behind their own barrage, and also behind their Middlesex comrades on the right, who swept up as far as the château before they were brought to a temporary halt. Here, at the very vital moment, one of the tanks, the only one still available, came gliding forward and put out of action the machine-guns of the château, breaking down in the effort, and remaining on the scene of its success. Across the whole front of the advance there were now a series of small conflicts at close quarters, so stubborn that the left wing of the Fusiliers was held stationary in constant combat for the rest of the day. Extraordinary initiative was shown by privates of both leading battalions when left without officers in this scattered fighting, and here, no doubt, we have a result depending upon the formed educated stuff which went to the making of such troops as these London units of the new armies. Private Edwards and Private Ryder each gained their V.C. at this stage of the action by single-handed advances which carried forward the line. Corporal Tovey lost his life in a similar gallant venture, bayoneting single-handed the crew of a machine-gun and silencing it. Fierce battles raged round garrisoned dug-outs, where no quarter was given or taken on either side. One considerable garrison refused to surrender and perished horribly in the flames of their wood-lined refuge. Those who fled from their refuges were cut down by Lewis guns, a lieutenant of the Fusiliers getting 50 in this manner. This officer also distinguished himself by his use of a captured map, which enabled him to lead his men to the central telephone installation, where 20 operators were seized by a corporal and two files of Fusiliers, who afterwards put the wires out of gear.

These great results had not been obtained without heavy losses. Colonel Carr of the Fusiliers, Major Hudson, and the Adjutant had all fallen. About three in the afternoon the village had all been cleared save the north-west corner, but the battalions were very mixed, the barrage deadly, the order of the attack out of gear, and the position still insecure. The 54th Brigade was well up with the 53rd upon the right, but upon the left it was held up as already described. The German egg bombs were falling in this area as thick as snowballs in a schoolboy battle, while the more formidable stick bombs were often to be seen, twenty at a time, in the air.

A great deal now depended upon the supports, as the front line was evidently spent and held. The immediate support was the 6th Northamptons. In moving forward it lost both Colonel Ripley and the Adjutant, and many officers fell, two companies being left entirely to the charge of the sergeants, who rose finely to their responsibilities. When by four o’clock the battalion had got up through the barrage, there were only two unwounded company officers left standing, both second lieutenants. It was one more demonstration of the fact that a modern barrage can create a zone through which it is practically impossible for unarmoured troops to move. The result was that the battalion was so weak by the time it got up, that it was less a support to others than a unit which was in need of support. The three depleted battalions simply held their line, therefore, until night, and under the cover of darkness they were all drawn off, and the remaining battalion, the 7th Bedfords, took their place. That this could be done at night in strange trenches within a few yards of the German line is a feat which soldiers will best appreciate. The result was that as day broke on the 27th the Germans were faced not by a fringe of exhausted men, but by a perfectly fresh battalion which was ready and eager for immediate attack.

The whole of Thiepval had been taken upon the 26th, save only the north-west corner, and it was upon this that two companies of the Bedfords were now directed, their objectives being defined for them by a captain who had fought over the ground the day before. Thanks to the gallant leadership of another captain and of Lieutenant Adlam (the latter gaining his Victoria Cross), the place was carried at small loss, and this last refuge of the Thiepval Germans was cleared out. It was a glorious achievement, for by it this very strong point, held against all attacks, French or British, for two years, passed permanently into our hands. The losses were not excessive for such a gain, amounting to about 1500 men. Those of the Germans were very much heavier, and included 600 prisoners drawn from four different regiments. Over 1000 dead were counted.

We will now hark back to 12.35 P.M., the hour of assault, and follow the fortunes of the Eleventh or first English Division of the New Armies which was advancing, upon the right of the Eighteenth Division. Within half an hour of the assault the 33rd Brigade and the 34th had crossed both the Joseph and the Schwaben Trenches, the 6th Borders, 9th Sherwood Foresters, 8th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 9th Lancashire Fusiliers forming the front line. Keeping some sort of touch with Maxse's men on the left they pushed on until their right wing was held up by violent machine-gun fire from the Zollern Redoubt and from Mouquet Farm, the losses falling especially upon the 5th Dorsets. Between six and seven in the evening a mixed body of troops from the division, assisted by the machine-guns of two stranded tanks, attacked Mouquet and finally carried it.

The Eighteenth Division had still a very formidable task before it to be undertaken with the co-operation of the Eleventh upon its right. This was the capture of the formidable stronghold, made up of many trenches and called the Schwaben Redoubt. It was a thousand yards distant up a long broken slope. No time was lost in tackling this new labour, and at 1 P.M. on September 28 the troops moved forward once again, the same brigades being used, but the worn battalions being replaced by fresh units drawn from the 55th Brigade. The 53rd Brigade on the right had the undefeatable Suffolks and the 7th Queen's Surreys in the van with Norfolks and Essex behind. The 54th upon a narrower front had the 7th Bedfords in front, with the 5th West Yorks from the Forty-ninth Division in immediate support, the Buffs and East Surrey being in Divisional Reserve. The Germans had got a captive balloon into the air, but their gunnery was not particularly improved thereby.

At the first rush the Suffolk and Queen's on the right took Bulgar and Martin Trenches, while the Eleventh Division took Hessian. By 2:30 Market Trench had also fallen. The troops were now well up to Schwaben, and small groups of men pushed their way home in spite of a furious resistance. The Eleventh Division had won home on the right, and the Suffolks were in touch with them and with the Queen's, so that the position before evening was thoroughly sound. Part of this enormous stronghold was still in German hands, however, and all our efforts could not give us complete control.

Upon the left the 7th Bedfords, leading the 54th Brigade, had made a very notable advance, crossing Market Trench and getting well up to the western face of the great Redoubt. The Reserves, however, lost direction amid the chaos of shell-holes and trenches, drifting away to the left. The

Schwaben was occupied at several points, and the first-fruits of that commanding position were at once picked, for the light machine-guns were turned upon the German fugitives as they they rushed with bent backs down the sloping trenches which led to St. Pierre Divion. The West Yorkshires were well up, and for a time these two battalions and the Germans seem to have equally divided this portion of the trench between them. There was stark fighting everywhere with bomb and bayonet, neither side flinching, and both so mixed up that neither German nor British commanders could tell how the units lay. In such a case a General can only trust to his men, and a British General seldom trusts in vain.

As night fell in this confused scene where along the whole line the Eighteenth Division had reached its objective but had not cleared it, attempts were made to bring up new men, the Berkshires, a battalion of young drafts, relieving the Suffolks on the right. In the morning two local counter-attacks by the Germans succeeded in enlarging their area. At the same time the 55th Brigade took over the front, the four battalions being reunited under their own! Brigadier. It was clear that the German line was thickening, for it was a matter of desperate urgency to them to recover the Redoubt. They still held the northern end of the labyrinth. On September 30 the East Surreys, moving up behind a massive barrage, took it by storm, but were driven out again before they could get their roots down. The Germans, encouraged by their success, surged south again, but could make no headway. On October 1 the tide set northwards once more, and the Buffs gained some ground. From then till October 5, when the Eighteenth Division was relieved by the Thirty-ninth, there were incessant alarms and excursions, having the net result that at the latter date the whole Redoubt with the exception of one small section, afterwards taken by the Thirty-ninth, was in our hands. So ended for the moment the splendid service of the Eighteenth Division. Nearly 2000 officers and men had fallen in the Schwaben operations, apart from the 1500 paid for Thiepval. It is certain, however, that the Schwaben garrison had suffered as much, and they left 232 prisoners in the hands of the victors.

For the purpose of continuity of narrative, we have kept our attention fixed upon the Eighteenth Division, but the Eleventh Division, which we have left at Mouquet Farm some pages before, had been doing equally good work upon the right. In the afternoon of September 27 the 6th Borders, rushing suddenly from Zollern Trench, made a lodgment in Hessian Trench, to which they resolutely clung. On their left the 6th Yorks and 9th West Yorks had also advanced and gained permanent ground, winning their way into the southern edge of Stuff Redoubt. Here they had to face a desperate counter-attack, but Captain White, with a mixed party of the battalions named, held on against all odds, winning his V.C. by his extraordinary exertions. During the whole of September 29 the pressure at this point was extreme, but the divisional artillery showed itself to be extremely efficient, and covered the exhausted infantry with a most comforting barrage.

The 32nd Brigade was now brought up, and on September 30 the advance was resumed, the whole of this brigade and the 6th Lincolns and 7th South Staffords of the 33rd being strongly engaged. The results were admirable, as the whole of Hessian Trench and the south of Stuff Redoubt were occupied. That night the Eleventh Division was relieved by the Twenty-fifth, and it will now be told how the conquest of the Ridge was finally achieved. The Eleventh withdrew after having done splendid work and sustained losses of 144 officers and 3500 men. Their prisoners amounted to 30 officers and 1125 of all ranks, with a great number of machine-guns and trench mortars.

After the fall of Thiepval and the operations which immediately followed it the front British line in this quarter ran approximately east and west along the Thiepval-Courcelette ridge. As far as part of the front was concerned we had observation over the Valley of the Ancre, but in another part the Germans still held on to the Stuff Redoubt, and thence for a stretch they were still on the crest and had the observation. The Stuff Redoubt itself on the southern face had been occupied by the Eleventh, when the Schwaben Redoubt was taken by the Eighteenth Division, but the northern faces of both were still in the hands of the enemy. These had now to be taken in order to clear up the line. A further stronghold, called The Mounds, immediately to the north, came also within the operation.

The Twenty-fifth Division had, as stated, relieved the Eleventh, and this new task was handed over to it. Upon October 9 the first attack was made by the 10th Cheshires, and although their full objective was not reached, the result was satisfactory, a lodgment being made and 100 of the garrison captured, with slight casualties to the stormers, thanks to the good barrage and the workmanlike way in which they took advantage of it. A strong attempt on the part of the Germans to prevent consolidation and to throw out the intruders was quite unsuccessful.

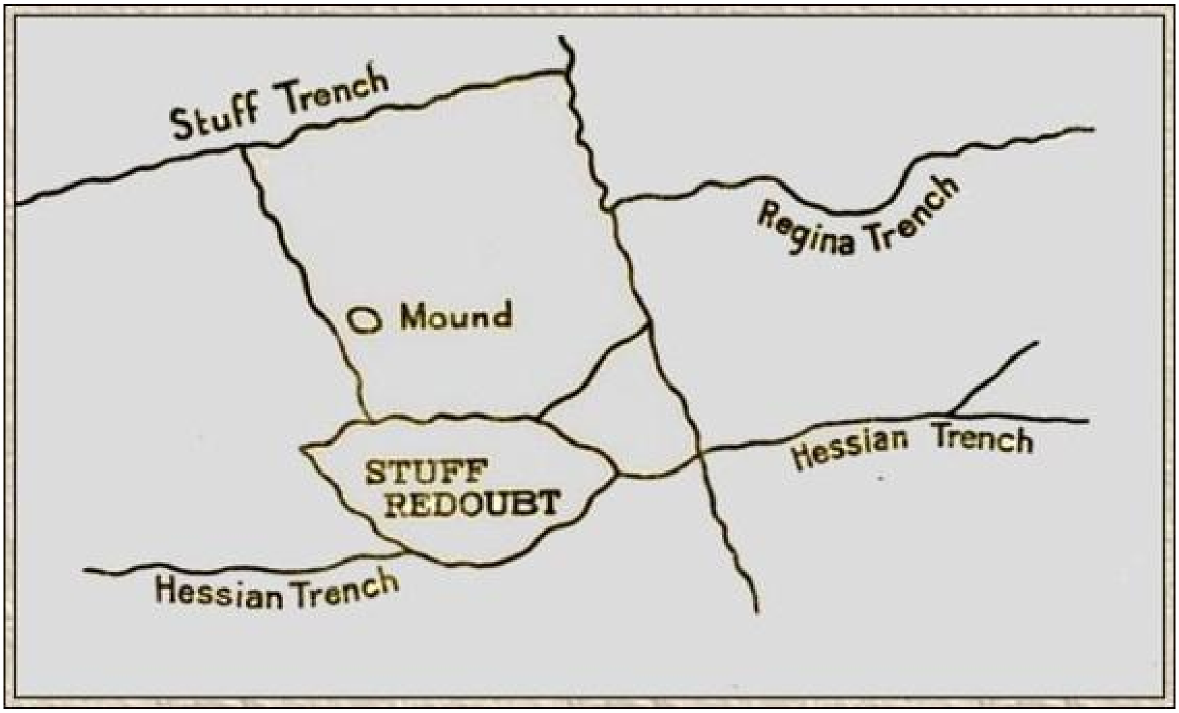

Stuff Redoubt System, showing Hessian, Regina, and Stuff

The 8th North Lancs were now placed in the position of the Cheshires, while the Thirty-ninth Division upon the left joined in the pressure. Upon October 10 an attack was made by the 1 6th Sherwoods supported by the 17th Rifles of the 117th Brigade; but it had no success. On the 12th there was a renewed attack by units of the 118th Brigade, chiefly the 4th Black Watch. This succeeded in advancing the line for a short distance, and upon October 15 it repulsed two local counter-attacks. Upon the right the 8th North Lanes upon October 14 had a very successful advance, in which they carried with moderate loss the stretch of line opposite, as well as the position called The Mounds. Two machine-guns and 125 prisoners were taken.

The British now had observation along the whole ridge with a line of observation posts pushed out beyond the crest. There were formidable obstacles upon their right front, however, where the Regina Trench and a heavily fortified quadrilateral system lay in front of the troops already mentioned, and also of the Canadians on the Courcelette line. In order to get ready for the next advance there was some sidestepping of units, the hard-worked Eighteenth coming in on the right next the Canadians, the Twenty-fifth moving along, and the Thirty-ninth coming closer on the left. On

October 8 the Canadians had a sharp action, in which the Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Winnipeg Battalions showed their usual resolution, and took a couple of hundred prisoners, but were unable to gain much ground. A concerted movement of the whole line was now organised.

The great Stuff Trench, which was roughly a continuation of the Regina, was opposite the centre of the attack, and was distant some 300 yards from the British front. The barrage arrangements coordinated by the Second Corps (Jacob), to which these units now belonged, worked most admirably. The attack was made all along the line and was eminently successful. At 12.35 upon October 21 the general advance began, and at 4:30 the whole objective, including Stuff and Regina, was in the hands of the British and Canadians. It was a fine victory, with 20 machine-guns and 1000 prisoners of the 5th Ersatz and Twenty-eighth Bavarian Divisions as trophies. So rapid was the consolidation that before morning trenches were opened out between the captured line and the old British position. A curious incident in this most successful attack was that the 8th Border Regiment advanced at least a thousand yards beyond its objective, but was successful in getting back. By this brilliant little action the enemy was finally driven down upon a three-mile front north of Thiepval and Courcelette, until he had no foothold left save the marshes to the south of the Ancre, where he cowered in enfiladed trenches for that final clearing up which was only delayed by the weather. It should be added that on this same date, October 21, the left of the British line, formed by the Thirty-ninth Division, was attacked by storm-troops of the German Twenty-eighth Reserve Division, armed with *Flammenwerfer* and supported by 60 light batteries. The attack was formidable, and twice got into the British line, but was twice driven out again, leaving many prisoners and trophies behind. The Sussex and Hampshire troops of the 116th Brigade, aided by the 17th Rifles, stood Splendidly to their work, and ended by holding every inch of their ground, and adding a new German trench which was carried by the 14th Hants.

From this time onwards this northern section of the line was quiet save for small readjustments, until the great effort upon November 13, which brought the autumn campaign to a close with the considerable victory of Beaumont Hamel. From the point which the Second Corps had now reached it could command with its guns the Valley of the Ancre to the north of it, including some of those positions which had repulsed our attack upon July 1 and were still in German hands. So completely did we now outflank them from the south that it must have been evident to any student of the map that Haig was sure, sooner or later, to make a strong infantry advance over the ground which was so completely controlled by his artillery. It was the German appreciation of this fact which had caused their desperate efforts at successive lines of defence to hold us back from gaining complete command of the crest of the slope. It will be told in the final chapter of this volume how this command was utilised, and a bold step was taken towards rolling up the German positions from the south — a step which was so successful that it was in all probability the immediate cause of that general retirement of the whole German front which was the first great event in the campaign of 1917.

XII. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

From September 15 to the Battle of the Ancre

Capture of Eaucourt — Varying character of German resistance — Hard trench fighting along the line — Dreadful climatic conditions — The meteorological trenches — Hazy Trench — Zenith Trench — General observations — General von Arnim's report

HAVING described the Battle of Flers, which began upon September 15 and which extended over one, two, or three days according to the completeness of the local victory, or the difficulty of reaching any definite limit, we will now turn once more to the left of the line (always excepting Gough's flanking army, which has been treated elsewhere), and we shall follow the deeds of the successive divisions in each sector up to the end of the operations. We will begin with the Third Corps, who abutted upon the Canadians in the Martinpuich sector, and covered the line up to Drop Alley, north-east of High Wood, where they joined up with the Fifteenth Corps.

The line on this western section was less active than on the right, where the great villages of Combles, Lesboeufs, and Morval were obvious marks for the advance. After the battle of September 15, the Twenty-third Division, relieving the Fifteenth, took its station at the extreme left of the line, just north of Martinpuich. To the right of the Twenty-third, occupying the Starfish and Prue system of trenches,

On their right was the First, who had relieved the Forty-seventh Division, the victors of High Wood, these three divisions, Twenty-third, Fiftieth, and First, now formed the Third Corps. Their fighting patrols were thrown well out during the days after the battle, and their front posts were as far north as Crescent Alley and Hook Trench. The general attack of September 25, which amounted to a considerable battle, did not seriously affect this portion of the line. The only operation of note before the^end of the month was an attack upon a farm in the front of their line by the 70th Brigade of the Twenty-third Division — a brigade which had greatly distinguished itself during the time it had fought with the Eighth Division upon July 1. This attack failed the first time, but it was repeated with success at dawn upon September 29, and the line moved forward to that limited extent. Another small advance was made by the First Division on the night of

September 25, east of Eaucourt, when a piece of trench was carried by the gallantry of a platoon of the 2nd Rifles, consisting almost entirely of Rhodesian volunteers, samples of those wandering Britons who have played a part in this War which can never be chronicled. The way in which the distant sons, prodigal or otherwise, came back to the help of their hard-pressed mother is one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of the Empire.

The Flers front-line trench bends away from the British position as it trends towards the north-west, so that although it had been made good over a large portion in the Battle of Flers, it was still intact opposite the Third Corps. Upon October 1, however, it was attacked, and was taken without any great difficulty, though the Fiftieth in the centre had to fight hard for their section. The storming battalions, after re-forming, continued their advance, and occupied the line between Le Sars and Flers. The village of Eaucourt lay in their path, and was well guarded upon the west by uncut wire, but a tank rolled its majestic path across it and the shouting infantry crowded close behind. The 141st Brigade of the Forty-seventh Division, which had come back once again into the line, was the first to enter this village, which was the sixteenth torn by the British from the grip of the invaders since the breaking of the line, while the French captures stood at an even higher figure. There was a strong counter-attack upon Eaucourt during the night, accompanied by a shortage of bombs owing to the fact that the store had been destroyed by an unlucky shell. The Germans for the time regained the village, and the ruins were partly occupied by both armies until October 3, when the British line, once more gathering volume and momentum, rolled over it for the last time. It had been stoutly defended by men of a German reserve division, and its capture had cost us dear. One of the mysteries of the fighting at this stage was the very varied quality of the resistance, so that the advancing British were never sure whether they would find themselves faced by demoralised poltroons, capable of throwing up their hands by the hundred, or by splendid infantry, who would fight to the death with the courage of despair.

Having won Eaucourt, the next village which, faced the British line in this sector was Le Sars, immediately to the north-west. The advance upon this was carried out amid rain and slush which made military operations almost impossible. It was again found that the resistance was very spirited, but the place was none the less carried and consolidated upon October 7.

In the week preceding the final assault there was hard fighting, during which the 70th Brigade won its way forward into a favourable position for the attack. The 8th York and Lancasters particularly distinguished themselves by their gallantry in clearing by bombing the outlying German defences. Major Sawyer and Lieutenant de Burgh of that battalion winning the Cross for their fine leadership upon that occasion. The decisive attack was carried out by the other two brigades of the Twenty-third Division, which advanced upon the village, whilst the Forty-seventh Division made an attempt upon the formidable Butte of Warlencourt. The latter venture met with no success, but the former was brilliantly carried out. The advance was made by the 68th Brigade upon the right and the 69th upon the left, the Martinpuich-Warlencourt road being the dividing line between the two divisions. The attack was at 1:45 P.M., and in broad daylight the battalions concerned, notably the 12th and 13th Durhams and the 9th Yorks, clambered over their sodden sandbags and waded through the mud which separated them from the Germans. The numbers were so reduced that the companies formed only two weak platoons, but none the less they advanced very steadily. Captain Blake, leading the first company of Durhams, was shot dead; but another captain took over both companies and led them straight at the village, both the 12th Durhams and 9th Yorks reaching the sunken road in front of the houses at about the same moment. They worked their way down this and bombed many Germans in their dug-outs. Here, as elsewhere, experience proved that this system of taking refuge from shell-fire in deep burrows has very serious military disadvantages, not merely on account of the difficulty of getting out, but from the more serious objection that the men, being trained to avoid danger, continued to shrink from it when it was essential that they should rush out and face it. The yellow faces and flaccid appearance of our prisoners showed also the physical results of a troglodytic life.

A single tank which had accompanied the advance was set on fire by a shell, but the infantry pressed on undismayed, and well backed up by the 10th and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers and 8th Seaforths, they soon seized the whole village and firmly consolidated their position. The success was partly due to the fine handling of machine-guns, which turned the favourite weapon of the Germans against themselves. Five of these guns, 8 officers, and 450 men were taken during the operation.

The Forty-seventh Division, meanwhile, in attempting to make similar progress upon the right was held up by very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Immediately afterwards, this division, much worn by its splendid service, was taken out of the line, being replaced by the Ninth Scottish Division. Their companion Division, the Fifteenth, had come back upon their left. The weather now became so abominable and the mud so abysmal, that all prospect of farther progress in this section had to be abandoned.

The old prehistoric mark called the Butte of Warlencourt, which had long stood up as a goal in front of the British trenches, proved really to be the final mark of the advance until a new season should dawn.

Upon October 12 there was an attempt to get forward, but the conditions were impossible, and the results unsatisfactory. In this affair the gallant Ninth Division had considerable losses, their advance being conducted with the 26th Brigade upon the right and the South Africans upon the left. Some small gain was achieved by the former, but the latter were held up by a deadly machine-gun fire. The Thirtieth Division was upon the right of the Ninth at this period, and twice endeavoured to get forwards — once upon the 12th and once upon the 18th; but neither of these attempts had good success, partly owing to the very bad weather, and partly to the excellent resistance of the Sixth Bavarian Reserve Division, which is described by those who have fought against it as one of the very best divisions in the German army. On the 20th a fresh attack was made by the 27th Brigade with no success and heavy losses to the 6th Scottish Borderers. Early in November a renewed attempt was made by the Fiftieth Division to advance in this quarter, but the country was a morass and no progress was possible. The Canadians, Forty-eighth and Fiftieth Divisions, who held the Le Sars front, were condemned to inactivity. From that time onwards the line of the Third Corps was undisturbed, save for a strong counter-attack upon November 6, which neutralised a small advance made upon the 5th. Le Sars and Eaucourt were consolidated and continued to be the British advanced posts in this quarter. The conditions of mud and discomfort can only be described as appalling.

Having briefly traced the work of the Third Corps The from the action of September 15 to the coming of the of the winter, we shall now turn to the Fifteenth Corps upon the right and follow their operations from the same date. It will be remembered that the New Zealanders formed the left-hand division, and that they had advanced so finely that by the evening of

September 16 they were up to, but not in, Goose Alley and Factory Corner, from which the) were within striking distance of the Gird System.

Before attacking this, however, it was necessary to get a firmer hold of Flers Trench, which in its western reaches was still in the hands of the Germans. It was a desperate business of bombing from traverse to traverse and overcoming successive barricades upon a very narrow front where a few determined men could hold up a company. This difficult business was taken in hand at 8:30 on the night of September 21 by the 2nd Canterbury Battalion, who advanced down the trench. It was a Homeric conflict, which lasted for the whole night, where men stood up to each other at close quarters, clearing away the dead and dying in order to make room for fresh combatants in the front line. Down Flers Trench and Drop Alley raged the long struggle, with crash and flare of bombs, snarl of machine-guns, shrill whistles from rallying officers, and shouts from the furious men. The New Zealand Black Watch had gained a portion of the trench, but the German reinforcements streamed down a communication trench which opened behind them, and found themselves between the two bodies of New Zealanders. It was a great fight, but by morning it had been definitely decided in favour of the men from oversea. The long section of Flers Trench was cleared and part of Goose Alley, opening out of it, was held. No less than 350 German dead were picked up, and a handful of prisoners were left with the victors. The New Zealand losses were about 150 of all ranks.

On September 25 the New Zealanders tightened their grip upon Goose Alley, which connects up the Flers and the Gird Systems of trenches. In the meantime the divisions upon their right were moving to the north-east of Flers towards the village of Guedecourt, which lay upon the farther side of the Gird Trenches. The actual attack upon the village was committed to the Twenty-first Division, who advanced on a two-brigade front, the 110th Leicester Brigade making straight for the village itself, while the 64th Brigade upon its right, strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Lincolns, was ordered to occupy 1000 yards of front to the right. The two brigades were not equally fortunate. The Leicester brigade, by a fine advance, pierced the Gird Trench, and made their way beyond it. The 64th Brigade was held up by uncut wire, which they could not penetrate. The result was that the Leicesters, being heavily counter-attacked, and having their flanks open, were forced back as far as the Gird Trench, to which they clung. The position in the evening was a curious one, for we held the Gird Trench at two different points, but between them lay a stretch of 1000 yards still occupied by the Germans and faced with uncut wire. Orders reached the Divisional General during the night that at all costs the position must be carried. By a happy inspiration he sent for a tank from Flers, and ordered the Leicesters to bomb down Gird Trench in co-operation with the tank, which crawled along parapet. A strong point had been erected at the far end of the trench, and the Germans as they rushed away from the danger ran into a deadly machine-gun fire. The upshot was that a great number were killed, while 8 officers and 362 men were taken, with a loss to the attackers of 5 wounded. To add to the quaintness of the operation, an aeroplane flew low over the trench during its progress, helping with its bombs to make the victory complete. The result was far more than the capture of the trench, for the 64th Brigade, led by the Durhams, at once swept forward and captured their objective, while the 110th Brigade upon the left reached Guedecourt under happier auspices and remained in possession of the village.

Although the Gird line had been pierced at this point, it was held in its western length, and this was attacked upon September 27 by the New Zealanders and the Fifty-fifth Lancashire Territorial Division, both of which gained their objectives, so that the whole end of this great trench system from a point north of Flers passed definitely into the British possession.

On October 1 there was a fresh general advance which led to no great change in this part of the line, save that both the New Zealanders and the Twenty-first Division improved their position, the latter getting as far as Bayonet Trench. Shortly afterwards the New Zealanders were drawn out, having been 23 consecutive days in the line, and earned themselves a great reputation. “The division has won universal confidence and admiration,” said Sir Douglas Haig. “No praise can be too high for such troops.”

We now turn to the Fourteenth Corps, which filled the remainder of the British line up to the point of its junction with the French. During the battle the division of Guards had, as will be remembered, held the left of this line, but on the day after it was replaced for a short time by the Twentieth Division, whose 61st Brigade, especially the 7th Cornwalls and 12th King’s, were heavily engaged. The 60th Brigade had pushed up into the fighting line, and received a strong German counter-attack in the morning of the 17th, which broke down before the rifles of the 6th Shropshire Light Infantry. In the afternoon the 59th Brigade advanced upon the left and the 60th upon the right, closing in upon the Morval position. The 12th King’s

Royal Rifles of the latter brigade was held up by a strong point and lost heavily, but the general effect was to bring the British line nearer to the doomed village. Twice upon the 18th, German counter-attacks swarmed down upon the exposed right flank of the 60th Brigade, but each time they were blown back by the fire of the 12th Rifle Brigade and the 12th Rifles. The 59th Brigade had made no progress, the two Rifle Brigade battalions (10th and 11th) having particularly heavy losses upon the 17th, but they were holding their line strongly. It was impossible to do more for the moment, for the Sixth Division upon their right was still hung up, as already described, by the Quadrilateral. Shortly after that obstacle had been overcome, the Guards took over once more from the Twentieth, and were ready in conjunction with the Sixth and Fifth Divisions for a serious advance upon Morval and Lesboeufs.

On September 22 the 3rd Guards Brigade was in touch with the Twenty-first Division upon the left, which was now holding Gird Trench and Gird Support as far north as Watling Street. On this day the 4th Grenadiers, reverting after centuries to the weapon which their name implies, were bombing their way up Gas Alley, which leads towards Lesboeufs. On the 23rd the Twenty-first on the left, the Guards in the centre, and the Sixth Division were advancing and steadily gaining ground to the north-east, capturing Needle Trench, which is an off-shoot from the Gird System. On the 24th the Germans counter-attacked upon the 16th Brigade, the blow falling upon the 1st Buffs, who lost four bays of their trench for a short period, but speedily drove the intruders out once more. The 14th Durham Light Infantry also drove off an attack. The Fifth Division was now coming up on the right of the Sixth, and played a considerable part in the decisive attack upon September 25.

On this date an advance of the four divisions on this section of the line carried all before it, the Twenty-first being north of Delville Wood, the 3rd Brigade of the Guards operating on the German trenches between Guedecourt and Lesboeufs, the 1st Brigade of Guards upon the left of the village of Lesboeufs, the Sixth Division upon the right of Lesboeufs, and the Fifth Division on Morval.

In this attack the 4th Grenadiers upon the extreme left of the Guards were badly punished, for the Twenty-first upon their left had been held up, but the rest came along well, the 1st Welsh forming a defensive flank upon the left while the other battalions reached their full objective and dug in, unmolested save by our own barrage. The 1st Irish and 3rd Coldstream, who were on the left of the 1st Brigade, also got through without heavy loss and occupied the trenches to the immediate north and north-east of Lesboeufs.

The 2nd Grenadiers, who led the right of the Brigade, with their supporting battalion the 2nd Coldstream, headed straight for the village, and were held up for a time by uncut wire, but the general attack upon the right was progressing at a rate which soon took the pressure off them.

The British infantry were swarming round Lesboeufs in the early afternoon, and about 3:15 the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade penetrated into it, establishing touch with the Guards upon their left. They were closely followed by their old battle companions, the 2nd Durham Light Infantry. The German resistance was weaker than usual, and the casualties were not severe. On the Morval front the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division, with the 95th Brigade upon their right, were making a steady and irresistible advance upon Morval. The 1st Norfolks and 1st Cheshires were in the front, and the latter battalion was the first to break into the village with the 1st Bedfords, 2nd Scots Borderers, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in close support. The 1st Cheshires particularly distinguished itself; and it was in this action that Private Jones performed his almost incredible feat of capturing single-handed and bringing in four officers and 102 men of the 146th Würtemberg Regiment, including four wearers of the famous Iron Cross. The details of this extraordinary affair, where one determined and heavily-armed man terrorised a large company taken at a disadvantage, read more like the romantic exploit of some Western desperado who cries “Hands up!” to a drove of tourists, than any operation of war. Jones was awarded the V.C, and it can have been seldom won in such sensational fashion.

Whilst the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division attacked the village of Morval the 95th Brigade of the same division carried the German trenches to the west of it. This dashing piece of work was accomplished by the 1st Devons and the 1st East Surreys. When they had reached their objective, the 12th Gloucesters were sent through them to occupy and consolidate the south side of the village. This they carried out with a loss of 80 men. In the evening a company of the 6th Argylls, together with the 2nd Home Company Royal Engineers, pushed on past the village and made a strong point against the expected counter-attack; while the 15th Brigade extended and got into touch with the 2nd York and Lancasters of the Sixth Division upon their left. It was a great day of complete victory with no regrets to cloud it, for the prisoners were many, the casualties were comparatively few, and two more village sites were included by one forward spring within the British area. The Town Major of Morval stood by his charge to the last and formed one of the trophies. On the 26th the Germans came back upon the Guards at about one o’clock, but their effort was a fiasco, for the advancing lines came under the concentrated fire of six batteries of the 7th Divisional Artillery. Seldom have Germans stampeded more thoroughly. “Hundreds of the enemy can be seen retiring in disorder over the whole front. They are rushing towards Beaulencourt in the wildest disorder.” Such was the report from a forward observer. At the same time a tank cleared the obstacles in front of the Twenty-first Division and the whole line was straight again. The British consolidated their positions firmly, for it was already evident that they were likely to be permanent ones. The Guards and Fifth Division were taken out of the line shortly afterwards, the Twentieth Division coming in once more upon September 26, while upon September 27 the French took over part of the line, pushing the Twentieth Division to the left, where they took over the ground formerly held by the Twenty-first. Upon October 1 the 61st Brigade was ordered to push forward advanced posts and occupy a line preparatory to future operations. This was well carried out and proved of great importance when a week later attacks were made upon Cloudy and Rainbow Trenches.

Leaving this victorious section of the line for the moment, we must turn our attention to the hardworked and splendid Fifty-sixth Division upon their right, whose operations were really more connected with those of the French on their right than with their comrades of the Fourteenth Corps upon the left. By a happy chance it was the French division of the same number with which they were associated during much of the time. It will be remembered that at the close of the Flers action (September 15 and on), the Fifty-sixth Division was holding a defensive flank to the south, in the region of Bouleaux Wood, part of which was still held by the Germans. They were also closing in to the southwards, so as to co-operate with the French, who were approaching Combles from the other side. On September 25, while the Fifth were advancing upon Morval, the Fifty-sixth played an important part, for the 168th, their left brigade, carried the remainder of Bouleaux Wood, and so screened the flank of the Fifth Division. One hundred men and four machine-guns were captured in this movement. On the 26th, as the woods were at last clear, the division turned all its attention to Combles, and at 3:15 in the afternoon of that day fighting patrols of the 169th Brigade met patrols of the French in the central square of the town. The Germans had cleverly evacuated it, and the booty was far less than had been hoped for, but none the less its capture was of great importance, for it was the largest place that had yet been wrenched out of the iron grasp of Germany. After the fall of Combles the French, as already stated, threw out their left wing upon that side so as to take over the ground which had been covered by the Fifty-sixth Division, and afterwards by the Fifth Division.

On September 30 the Fifty-sixth Division took over from the Guards, and again found itself upon the right of the British line, and in touch w4th the new dispositions of the French. On its left was the Twentieth Division, and on their left the Sixth. These three divisions now found themselves opposite to a long line of trenches, to which various meteorological names had been given, though the actual meteorological conditions at the time formed a greater obstacle than the defences in front of them. A simple diagram will show more clearly than any words how these formidable trenches lay with regard to the British advance.

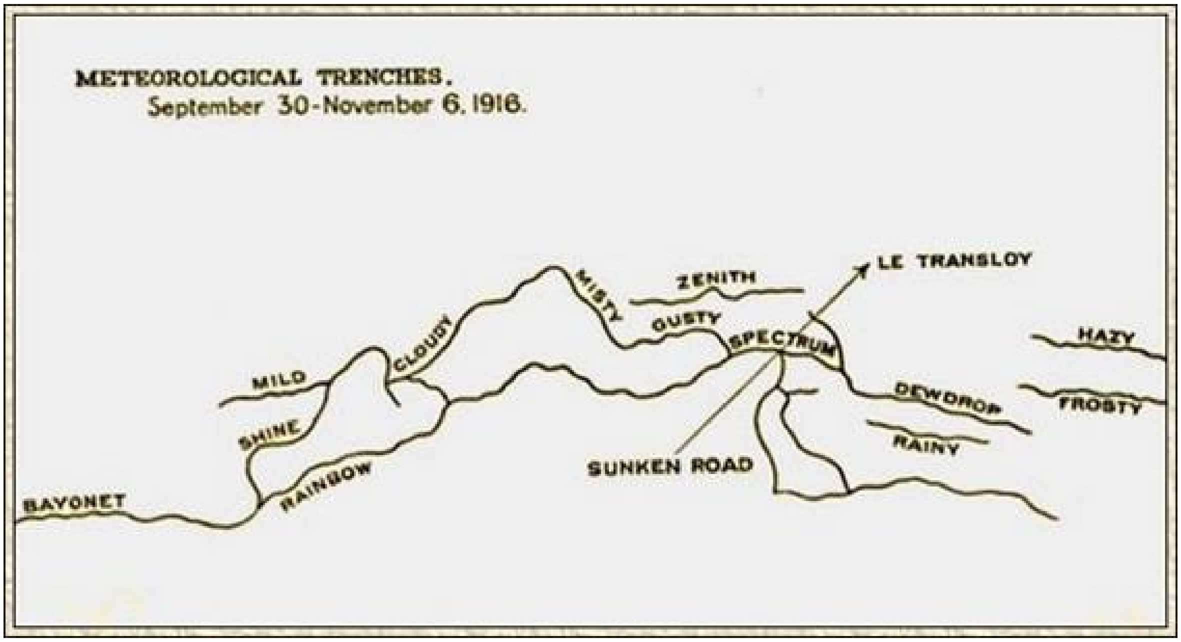
METEOROLOGICAL TRENCHES.
September 30-November 6. 1916.
LE TRANSLOY
ZENITH
MISTY
GUSTY
SPECTRUM
HAZY
CLOUDY
MILD
DEWDROP
FROSTY
SHINE
RAINY
SUNKEN ROAD
RAINBOW
BAYONET

Meteorological Trenches, September 30-November 6, 1916

It may well seem to the reader that the defenders are bound to have the best of the argument when they can thus exchange one line for another, and as quickly as they are beaten out of one set of strongholds confront their enemy with another one. No doubt so long as the lines are stoutly held this is true as regards the rate of advance. But as far as it concerns the losses which mark that vital attrition which was wearing Germany to the bone it was very different, These trenches were not like the old permanent fortifications where German officers in a 30-foot dug-out could smile over the caricatures in *Ulk* and smoke an indolent cigarette, while the impotent British shells pitted the earth-surface far above them. There was no such shelter in these hastily-constructed burrows, while the guns which raked and pounded them grew stronger and more numerous from day to day. Let the machine-gun do its worst, the heavy gun is still the master of the field, for the machine-gun can only levy its toll when circumstances favour it, while day or night the heavy gun is a constant dread. We have had to mourn the swathes of our dead in the open, but the Germans lay as thick amid the clay and chalk of the Picardy ditches. With fine manhood they clung to them and beat back our infantry where they could, but the tales of deserters, the letters found on the wounded, and the condition of the trenches when taken, all told the same story of terrible loss.

On October 7 there was an infantry attack upon this trench system in which the Forty-first, Twelfth, Twentieth, and Fifty-sixth Divisions, together with the French, all took part in the order named from the left. The weather was most execrable, and its vileness told entirely against the Allies, since it was they who had to move, and since the superior gun-power needed for a modern attack was largely neutralised by the difficulty in using aircraft observation. The attack was at 1:45 P.M., when the troops advanced under a heavy barrage along the whole sodden and slippery front. The results were unequal, though the infantry behaved everywhere with their wonted valour and perseverance.

The 122nd Brigade upon the extreme left of the attack could only get on about a hundred yards, so heavy was the fire; while the 124th to the right of them could do little better, and eventually dug in at a point 200 yards short of the Bayonet Trench, which was their immediate objective. Seventy officers and nearly 1300 men fell during this attack of the Forty-first Division, which was handicapped in many ways, for the men were weary, it was too cloudy for reconnaissance, the battalions were already depleted, and the enemy was fresh and unshaken. The success of the Twelfth Division upon the right of the Forty-first was little better. The 36th and 37th Brigades endured heavy losses, especially in the case of the two Royal Fusilier battalions and of the 6th Buffs, whose colonel greatly distinguished himself. In spite of every effort and considerable loss there were no permanent gains of importance at this point.

Things went better, however, with the Twentieth Division upon the right. The two brigades in the front line were the 61st upon the left and the 60th on the right. The leading battalions, counting from the left, were the 7th Yorks Light Infantry, 12th King’s Liverpool, 6th Oxford and Bucks, and 12th Rifle Brigade. The troops had to endure a considerable shelling before leaving their trenches, but it seemed only to add additional fire to their advance, which swept over the low ridge in front of them, and took a long stretch of Rainbow Trench. The right attack was slower than the left, as it ran into a dip of the ground in which the Germans had some cleverly-sited wire entanglement, unseen and untouched by our guns. Nothing daunted, the Oxford and Bucks proceeded to cut lanes through the wire under heavy fire, and one officer of the battalion had actually succeeded in crawling under it when he was shot at point-blank range from the German trench. The front line had now done its work and rested in Rainbow, while the second line — consisting, from the left, of the 7th Somersets, 7th Cornwalls, 6th Shropshires, and 12th Rifles — swept onwards in splendid form, capturing both Cloudy and Misty Trenches. There the victorious infantry dug themselves in on the forward slope of the ridge. The brigades were ahead of their comrades, with the result that their flanks were exposed, they suffered from enfilade fire, and it was necessary to form defensive flanks. Two counter attacks were made during the day, but both were beaten of!. The prisoners captured in this fine advance were 5 officers and 187 men, with 5 machine guns and 2 trench-mortars. By the morning of the 8th strong points had been made and the whole line was defiant of recapture.

The Fifty-sixth Division had advanced with equal valour upon the right and had made good progress, though its gains had not been so substantial as those of the Twentieth. The 167th Brigade had attacked upon the left and the 168th upon the right. They ended with the 7th Middlesex, their flank battalion upon the left in touch with the Twentieth . Division in Rainbow, while the London Scots on the extreme right were in touch with the French in Hazy Trench. The fighting was bitter, however, the men wearied, and the conditions abominable. All the battalions lost heavily, the 4th London being the chief sufferer, for it was on the left flank of the 168th Brigade and was held up by a particularly murderous machine-gun. In the evening a strong German counter-attack, rushing in upon Hazy Trench behind a thick shower of bombs, drove back both the 168th Brigade and the French to their own original line. For the time the advance had failed upon the right.

The 167th Brigade had held on to Rainbow and were now bombing their way down Spectrum. They held their ground there during the night, and on October 8 were still advancing, though the 3rd London coming up to reinforce ran into a heavy barrage and were sadly cut up. The British barrage was found to be practically useless because the guns had been brought up too near. The 169th Brigade had come up on the right and was hotly engaged, the London Rifle Brigade getting up close to Hazy and digging in parallel to it, with their left in touch with the Victorias. The Germans, however, were still holding Hazy, nor could it be said in the evening that the British were holding either of the more advanced trenches, Dewdrop or Rainy. In the evening the London Rifle Brigade were forced to leave their new trench because it was enfiladed from Hazy, and to make their way back to their old departure trenches as best they could, dragging with them a captured machine-gun as a souvenir of a long and bloody day’s work. On October 9 the British held none of the points in dispute in this section on the right, save only a portion of Spectrum. There was a pause in this long and desperate fight which was conducted by tired infantry fighting in front of tired guns, and which left the survivors of both sides plastered with mud from head to heel. When it was resumed, the two British divisions, the Twentieth and Fifty-sixth, which had done such long service in the line, and were greatly reduced, had been withdrawn. The Fourth Division had taken the place of the Londoners, while the Sixth, itself very worn, had relieved the Twentieth.

On October 12 both these divisions delivered an attack together with the French and with the Fifteenth Corps upon their left. The 14th Durham Light Infantry were in Rainbow on the left and were in touch with the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade upon their right, but could find no one upon their left, while the German pressure was very strong. The 18th Brigade worked along Rainbow, therefore, until it got into touch with the Twelfth Division upon their left. The Twelfth Division had been lent the 88th Brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division, and this gallant body, so terribly cut up on July 1, had an instalment of revenge. They won their objective, and it is pleasant to add that the Newfoundlanders especially distinguished themselves. The 16th Brigade upon the right attacked Zenith Trench, the 2nd York and Lancaster leading the rush. The position could not be held, however, by battalions which were depleted by weeks of constant strain and loss. A report from a company officer says: "The few unwounded sheltered in trench holes and returned in the dusk. The fire was too strong to allow them to dig in. The Brigade line is therefore the same as before the attack."

Whilst the Sixth Division had been making this difficult and fruitless attack the Fourth Division upon their right had been equally heavily engaged in this horrible maze of mud-sodden trenches, without obtaining any more favourable result. The 12th Brigade fought on the immediate right of the 16th, some of them reaching Spectrum, and some of them Zenith. The 2nd West Ridings and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were the heaviest sufferers, the latter holding a line of shell-holes in front of Spectrum where they were exposed to a terrible barrage. The 10th Brigade were on their right, and one battalion, the 1st Warwick, reached Foggy, but was unable to hold it under the crushing fire. By the evening of October 13, however, the whole of Spectrum had at last been seized, and the enemy, who attempted to bomb along it from Dewdrop, were repulsed. On October 18, the 88th Brigade again had a success, the 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters doing particularly well. For a time the fighting died down, the British licking their wounds and sharpening their claws for a fresh grapple with these redoubtable trenches.

This came upon October 23, when there was an advance at 2:45 in the afternoon by the Fourth Division upon the right and the Eighth Division upon the left. The three-brigade front covered by the Eighth Division is indicated by the fact that the 2nd East Lancashires, the left battalion of the left brigade (24th), was directed upon the junction between Mild and Cloudy, while the right brigade (23rd) had Zenith for its objective. The first attack of the left brigade failed, but the second brought them into Cloudy. By 4:15 the 2nd Scots Rifles of the 23rd Brigade had penetrated the right of Zenith, and some small parties had even moved on to Orion beyond. The central brigade (25th) had won its way up to Misty, the 2nd Lincolns, 2nd Berks, and 2nd Rifle Brigade in the lead. In the meantime the East Lancashires on the left were endeavouring to bomb their way down the maze of trenches, filled with yard-deep mud, which separated them from their comrades. The fighting was desperate, however, and the losses considerable. The 2nd Lin coins had got detached in the labyrinth, and were out of touch with their companions. At 6:45 the Germans came again in strength and those of the Scots Rifles who had gained Orion were driven back. The casualties in this splendid battalion, which had suffered so often and so much, were once again very severe.

The Fourth Division had also had a hard fight upon the right and had made no great progress. The French upon their right had been held up after an initial advance. The 12th Brigade attacked Dewdrop, but were unable to hold it. The 11th had seized Hazy, but their grip of it was still precarious. Every position was raked with machine-guns and clogged with the all-pervading and often impassable morass. In mud and blood and driving rain, amid dirt and death, through day and night, the long death-grapple never ceased until exhaustion and winter brought a short surcease.

Upon the 24th the hard-earned gains in these trenches were consolidated. In the sector of the Eighth Division they were substantial and justified the hope that this obdurate line would go the way of all the others which had barred the army. Had it been earlier in the season it would have been easy to wait for clear weather, beat them into pulp with heavy guns, and then under a good barrage capture them by assault. But this could not be done, for Sir Douglas Haig could not afford to wait, with winter coming on and only a few weeks or days left in which to bring his men forward to their final line. The general position upon October 24 was that the 2nd Middlesex of the 24th Brigade held Zenith in part, that the 25th Brigade was in Gusty and held part of Misty, while the 23rd Brigade had made no advance upon the right but their left was in Cloudy and Mild.

Upon this date the Thirty-third Division came up to relieve the Fourth, and upon September 28 it made a brilliant advance which altered the whole situation in this section. At 7 A.M. on that date the 4th King’s Liverpool of the 98th Brigade by a sudden dash carried the whole of Dewdrop, taking 100 prisoners. The 19th Brigade upon the right kept up with the advance, and before evening Frosty, Gunpits, and Dewdrop had all been included in the British line. There was a pause after this advance, and then upon November 5 there was another advance of the Thirty-third, together with the French. Again there was a good gain, which was effected by the 100th Brigade on the right, and the 19th upon the left. Mirage, Boritzka, and Hazy were all reported as being at last in our hands. The 5th Scottish Rifles, 16th

King’s Royal Rifles, and 20th Fusiliers all distinguished themselves, and all — especially the last-named — met with considerable losses in this attack. The Seventeenth Division, which had for a few days taken the place of the Eighth, joined in this advance and extended the ground upon their front, the fighting falling chiefly to the 50th Brigade, in which the 7th York and 7th East York were the principal sufferers. Great work was also done by the 51st Brigade, the 7th Borders and the 7th Lincolns particularly distinguishing themselves. These battalions not only cleared up Zenith Trench, but upon the Germans countering they reserved their fire until the stormers were within 40 yards of them, and then mowed down several hundreds of them, “The men marched back seven miles last night,” wrote one of the officers, “after fighting for forty-eight hours without sleep, singing at the tops of their voices all the way. Priceless fellows!”

On November 7 the Eighth Division was at work again, taking 1100 yards of front, 5 machine-guns, and 80 prisoners. The season was now far advanced and prematurely wet and cold, so that winter lines were formed by the British in this quarter with the village of Le Transloy in their immediate front. Over the rest of the line facing north there had been no serious attempt at advance during this period, and the only fighting to be recorded was on the part of the Anzac Corps, who came in at the end of October, and took over the whole front of the Fifteenth Corps in the centre of the line. These troops joined the attack already recorded upon November 5, and captured that portion of Gird Support Trench which was not yet in our possession. For a time they held Bayonet Trench, but were driven out by a strong bombing attack by the 5th Regiment of the Fourth Prussian Guards Division. The Australians and the 50th Brigade worked in close co-operation during these hard days, and it is pleasing to find the high opinion which they entertained of each other, “On several occasions,” says an Australian, “we had to rely on Yorkshire grit to support our division at critical moments, and the Tikes never failed us once. We owe a big debt to the East Yorkshires in particular. We found them the most loyal of comrades.” This sentiment was heartily reciprocated by the Imperial troops.

The fighting now died down in this quarter and the winter lull had set in, leaving the front British trenches some hundreds of yards from Le Transloy and the Bapaume road. It would be an ungenerous of the Briton who would not admit that in holding us off from it so long, even if we make every allowance for the weather and its disastrous consequences to the attack, the

Germans performed a fine feat of arms. It was done by fresh units which had not suffered from the gruelling which their comrades had received upon the Somme, and which would no doubt have been worn down in time, as the others had been, but they fought with great tenacity and certainly prevented our winter line from being as far forward as we had hoped.

Whilst giving the German army every credit for its tenacious resistance and for the hard digging by which it constructed so many lines of defence that five months of hard fighting and a dozen separate victories had been unable to carry the attackers through them, we must still insist upon the stupendous achievement of the British. Nearly every division had passed through the fiery ordeal of the Somme, many of them twice and thrice, and each had retired with fresh honour and new records of victory. Apart from great days of battle like July 1, July 14, September 15, and September 26, when many miles of German trench were carried with a corresponding number of prisoners and guns, there was a separate epic round each village and wood, so that the names of many of them will find immortality in military history. High Wood, Trones Wood, Mametz Wood, and Deville Wood each represents a very terrible local battle. So, too, do such village names as Ovillers, Contalmaison, Pozières, Thiepval, Longueval, Ginchy, and especially Guillemont. Every one of these stern contests ended with the British infantry in its objective, and in no single case were they ever driven out again.

So much for the tactical results of the actions. As to the strategic effect, that was only clearly seen when the threat of renewed operations in the spring caused the German army to abandon all the positions which the Somme advance had made untenable, and to fall back upon a new line many miles to the rear. The Battle of the Marne was the turning-point of the first great German levy, the Battle of the Somme that of the second. In each case the retirement was only partial, but each clearly marked a fresh step in the struggle, upward for the Allies, downward for the Central Powers.

In the credit for this result the first place must be given to the efficiency of British leadership, which was admirable in its perseverance and in its general conception, but had, it must be admitted, not yet attained that skill in the avoidance of losses which was gradually taught by our terrible experiences and made possible by our growing strength in artillery. The severe preliminary bombardment controlled by the direct observation which is only possible after air supremacy has been attained, the counter-battery work to reduce the enemy’s fire, the creeping barrage to cover the infantry, the discipline and courage which enable infantry to advance with shrapnel upon their very toes, the use of smoke clouds against flank fire, the swift advance of the barrage when a trench has fallen so as to head off fugitives and stifle the counterattack, all these devices were constantly improving with practice, until in the arts of attack the British Army stood ahead even of their comrades of France. An intercepted communication in the shape of a report from General von Arnim, commanding the Fourth German Army, giving his experience of the prolonged battle, speaks of British military efficiency in every arm in a manner which must have surprised the General Staff if they were really of opinion that General Haig’s army was capable of defence but not of attack. This report, with its account of the dash and tenacity of the British infantry and of the efficiency of its munitions, is as handsome a testimonial as one adversary ever paid to another, and might be called magnanimous were it not that it was meant for no eye save that of his superiors.

But all our leadership would have been vain had it not been supported by the high efficiency of every branch of the services, and by the general excellence of the materiel. As to the actual value of the troops, it can only be said with the most absolute truth that the infantry, artillery, and sappers all lived up to the highest traditions of the Old Army, and that the Flying Corps set up a fresh record of tradition, which their successors may emulate but can never surpass. The materiel was, perhaps, the greatest surprise both to friend and foe. We are accustomed in British history to find the soldier retrieving by his stubborn valour the difficulties caused by the sluggish methods of those who should supply his needs. Thanks to the labours of the Ministry of Munitions, of Sir William Robertson, and of countless devoted workers of both sexes, toiling with brain and with hand, this was no longer so. That great German army which two years before held every possible advantage that its prolonged preparation and busy factories could give it, had now, as General von Arnim’s report admits, fallen into the inferior place. It was a magnificent achievement upon which the British nation may well pride itself, if one may ever pride oneself on anything in a drama so mighty that human powers seem but the instruments of the huge contending spiritual forces behind them. The fact remains that after two years of national effort the British artillery was undoubtedly superior to that of the Germans, the British Stokes trench-mortars and light Lewis machine-guns were the best in Europe, the British aeroplanes were unsurpassed, the British Mills bomb was superior to any other, and the British tanks were an entirely new departure in the art of War. It was the British brain as well as the British heart and arm which was fashioning the future history of mankind.

XIII. THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE
November 13, 1916

The last effort — Failure in the north — Fine work of the Thirty-ninth, Fifty-first, and Sixty-third Divisions — Surrounding of German Fort — Capture of Beaumont Hamel — Commander Freyberg — Last operations of the season — General survey—"The unwarlike Islanders"

THIS considerable British victory may well have a name of its own, though it was merely an extension of gigantic effort upon the Somme. The fact, however, that it was fought upon the banks of a small subsidiary stream, and also that it was separated by a month or more from any other serious engagement, give it a place of its own in the narrative of the War. It has already been shown at the conclusion of the chapter which deals with the flank operations by the Fifth Army, commanded by Sir Hubert Gough, that the British position after the capture of the Schwaben and other redoubts which defended the high ground to the north of Thiepval was such that the guns were able to take the German front line to the north of the Ancre in enfilade and almost in rear. Under such circumstances it might well seem that their trenches were untenable, but their position, although difficult, was alleviated by the fact that they had been able partly to find and partly to make a series of excavations in the chalk and clay soil of the district which of the gave them almost complete protection against the heaviest shell-fire. Whole battalions led a troglodytic life in subterranean caverns from which they were trained to rush forth upon the alarm of an infantry advance. It was clear, however, that if the alarm should be too short their refuges might very easily become traps, as has so often been the case in the German lines of defence. The safety from shells is dearly paid for when a squad of furious stormers with Mills bombs in their hands and death in their faces glare in from the door. Their minds were kept easy, however, by the knowledge that broad fields of barbed wire, so rusty and so thick that they resembled ploughland from a distance, lay between them and the British. A very large garrison drawn from seven divisions, one of them being the 2nd Guards Reserve, held this dangerous salient in the German line.

For the attack General Gough had mustered two Army Corps of six divisions, three of which, forming the Second Corps, were to advance from the south under General Jacob, having the almost impassable mud slopes of the Ancre in front of them. Three others of the Fifth Corps, under General E. A. Fanshawe, were to storm the German line north of the Ancre. This latter movement was to be directed not only from the new British positions, but also from the old lines as far north as Serre. The advance from the west divided the enemy’s gun-power, and distracted his attention from the south, so that its failure and the loss which that failure involved, were part of the price paid for the victory.

After a two days’ bombardment, which started on November 11, and which uprooted the greater part of the German wire, the actual attack was made at six in the foggy, misty morning of November 13. It is inconceivable that the Germans were not standing to arms, since dawn had long been the hour of doom, and the furious drum-fire was certainly the overture to a battle. The thick weather, however, shrouded the British movements, and the actual rush of the infantry seems at the end to have been a surprise. Both in the western and southern advance, which covered respectively 5000 and 3000 yards, every refinement of artillery barrage which years of experience could suggest was used to form such a downpour as would protect the assailants, and beat the German riflemen and gunners back into their burrows.

Of the three divisions which attacked the old German line from the west, the most northern was the Thirty-first, with as objective the second and third German line, and to form a defensive flank between Gommecourt and Serre. This division, which contained some splendid North-country battalions from great Yorkshire towns, advanced with great intrepidity. So skilful was the barrage arranged that the 12th East Yorkshires on the left and 13th East Yorkshires on the right (10th and 11th East Yorkshires in reserve), belonging to the 92nd Brigade, had little difficulty in reaching the German front line, which was quickly mopped up. The going between the first and second line was so heavy, and the German snipers so numerous, that the barrage got ahead of the advancing waves, but after a sharp rifle fight the second line was captured, which was the final objective of the left (12th East Yorkshires) battalion. The 13th East Yorkshires, whose final objective was the third German line, had a very severe fight before reaching that position. Owing to the failure of the division on the right of the 13th

East Yorkshires to get forward, the Germans later on put in several heavy bombing counter-attacks against their right flank, which eventually drove them back to the second line, where they took up their position alongside the 12th, and for the remainder of the day repulsed numerous counter-attacks. As soon as the 12th East Yorkshires on the left had reached their objectives they consolidated it, and with the aid of the 93rd Brigade, to whom was attached the Machine-Gun Sections of the Lucknow and Sialkote Cavalry Brigades, beat off a very strong counter-attack which developed about 9:30 A.M., practically wiping it out and several minor ones during the day.

At 2:30 P.M. the German bombardment against the 92nd became very intense, and was kept up till 5:30 P.M., in spite of which the 12th and 13th East Yorkshires stuck to their gains. It was only at 9 P.M. when the Divisional General saw that there was no prospect of the division on the right advancing that the 12th and 13th were ordered to fall back to their original line.

The experience of the Third Division upon the right or south of the Thirty-first was a very trying one. There is a strip of Picardy between those lines from Serre to the Ancre, where more Britons have given their lives for their country and for the cause of humanity than in any area in this or any other war. Twice it has been the scene of tragic losses, on July 1, and vet again on November 13, though, as already said, it is well in each case to regard the general result rather than the local tragedy.

Once again the Third Division gave itself freely and unselfishly for the common cause. In this case, also, the cause of the scanty results lay in the heavy ground and the uncut wire. In the case of the 76th Brigade, which may be taken as typical of its neighbours, it advanced to the immediate south of the 93rd, and experienced even more difficult conditions. The 2nd Suffolks and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers were in the van, but the 8th Royal Lancasters and 1st Gordons came up in support, the whole thick line of men clustering in front of the wire and endeavouring to hack a way. Sergeants and officers were seen in front of the obstacle endeavouring to find some way through. Here and there a few pushful men, both from the 76th Brigade and from the 9th upon its right, did succeed in passing, but none of these ever returned. Finally, a retreat was ordered through a pelting barrage, and even in their own front-line trenches the troops were exposed to a furious shell-fall. It was an unfortunate business and the losses were heavy.

Immediately upon the right of the Third Division was the Second Division, which attacked with the 5th and 6th Brigades in the van, the latter being on the immediate flank of the Third Division, and sharing in the obstacles which faced that division and the check which resulted from them. The immediate objective was the great Munich Trench lurking within its far-flung spider-web of wire. Although all of the 6th Brigade save the right-hand battalion were brought to a stand, and wound up in their own trenches, the 5th Brigade got well forward and might have got farther had it not meant the exposure of their left flank. In the evening the 99th Brigade, the victors of Delville Wood, were brought up with orders to form a defensive flank to the north, while they furnished two battalions for a farther advance to continue the success gained by the 5th Brigade. In the early morning of November 14 these two units, the 1st Rifles and 1st Berkshires, advanced in a proper November fog, which caused some misdirection, and eventually the failure of the attack, for two smaller trenches were carried under the impression that each was the Munich. Some ground and prisoners were, however, gained, but not the main objective.

Meanwhile, to return to the narrative of the previous day, a very different tale was to be told of those divisions which were operating farther to the south, where the ridge between Serre and Beaumont Hamel sheltered the attack from the formidable German gun-power at Pusieux and Bucquoy in the north.

Of the three divisions attacking from the south the Thirty-ninth was to the south of the Ancre, the Sixty-Third Naval Division upon its left on the north bank of the Ancre, and the Fifty-first Highland Division still farther to the left opposite Beaumont Hamel. The task of the Thirty-ninth Division was to clear out the Germans who held on to the Hansa line, the last German trench system between the British front and the river. Their chief protection was the almost incredible condition of the ground, which consisted of tenacious mud of varying and occasionally of dangerous depth. Munitions could only be got across it upon pack-horses, on special paths. In spite of these difficulties, the Thirty-ninth Division carried the lines of trenches and the village of St. Pierre Divion as well, the resistance being far from heroic. The attack was made by the 117th Brigade, which advanced with such speed that the front waves, consisting of the 16th Rifle Brigade upon the right and the 17th Sherwood Foresters upon the left, were into the German trenches before the barrage could fall. It did fall, however, and did great harm to the supports, both the 17th Rifles and 16th Sherwoods losing heavily, especially the former. The British line was pushed right up to the river, and the survivors of the garrison — some 1400 in number — were compelled to lay down their arms. This attack to the south of the river was an isolated, self-contained operation, apart from the larger and more serious movement on the north bank.

The right of the main assault was carried out by the gallant Sixty-third Royal Naval Division, whose emergency baptism of fire at Antwerp has been mentioned in this narrative, though its subsequent splendid services at Gallipoli have not come within its scope. After the evacuation of Gallipoli and the subsequent redistribution of the eastern army, at least three fine divisions, the Eleventh, the Forty-second, and the Naval, besides the splendid Australian and New Zealand infantry, were transferred to the French front. This action of the Ancre was the first opportunity which these volunteer sailors had had of showing upon a large European stage those qualities which had won them fame elsewhere.

The Naval Division attacked to the immediate north of the Ancre, having the river upon their right. The lines of assault were formed under cover of darkness, for the assembly trenches were inadequate and the ground occupied was under direct observation from the German lines. The division in this formation was a thick mass of 10,000 infantry on a front of about 1600 yards with a depth of 300. Fortunately, the screen of the weather covered them completely, and there was little and random shelling during the night, but the men were stiff and chilled by their long vigil, during which they might neither speak nor smoke. At last, just before dawn, the crash of the barrage told that the hour had come, and the lines moved forward, keeping well up to the shower of shrapnel which crept on at the rate of 100 yards in five minutes, searching every hollow and crevice of the ground.

The first objective was the enemy’s front-line system of triple trenches. The second was a road in the hollow behind called Station Road, with trenches on either side of it. The third was the trenches which fringed the village of Beaucourt. The fourth, which was only to be attempted after the third was consolidated, was the village itself, which lies among trees upon the north side of the river.

The advance of the 189th Brigade on the right of the Naval Division, consisting of the Hood, Hawke, Nelson, and Drake battalions, was comparatively easy, as they were partly protected from flank fire by the dead ground formed by the low-lying northern slope down to the river. With great dash and vigour they carried the successive lines of trenches, and before mid-day they were consolidating the third objective with the village in their immediate front.

A much more difficult task confronted the centre of the advance, consisting of the left half of the right brigade, and the right half of the 188th Brigade, which contained the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Marines, the Ansons and the Howes. In the very track of their course lay a formidable German redoubt, bristling with machine-guns, and so concealed that neither the observers nor the bombardment had spotted it. This serious obstacle caused heavy losses to the central attack, and as it completely commanded their advance it held them to such cover as they could find. The left of the advance got past the redoubt, however, and reached the sunken road, where they were in close touch with the Scotsmen upon their left. Thus at this period of the advance the Naval Division formed a deep curve with its right wing well forward, its centre held back, and its left wing nearly as far advanced as its right. The mist was so thick that it was very difficult to tell from the rear what was going on in the battle, but the 190th Brigade held in reserve was aware that some hitch had occurred, and pushing forward in the hope of retrieving it, found itself involved in the fierce fighting round the redoubt, where it also was exposed to heavy loss. This brigade, it may be mentioned, was not naval, but contained the 1st Honourable Artillery Company, the 4th Bedfords, 7th Royal Fusiliers, and 10th Dublins. The German fort could not be reduced, nor could progress be made in the centre in face of its machine-guns; but the infantry, which had passed it on either side, extended along the Sunken Road behind it, and joined hands so as to cut it off. The whole German second line was then in their possession, and the right third of their third line as well. The enemy still held firm, however, in the centre of the first-line system, and showed no signs of weakening, although they must have known that British troops were in their rear. An attempt was made to re-bombard this portion of the line, but it was difficult for the gunners without aerial observation to locate the exact portion of the line which still remained with the enemy, and there was great danger of the shells falling among our own infantry. About three in the afternoon the conclusion was reached that it was better for the time to leave this great pocket of Germans alone, cutting them off from either escape or reinforcement.

The 111th Brigade from the Thirty-seventh Division was therefore sent up, battalion by battalion, along the river-bank until it passed the central obstacle and reached the Sunken Road. Thence the 13th Rifles were sent forward with orders to reach the advanced line, where the Hoods and Drakes, somewhat reduced in numbers but not in spirit, were lying in front of Beaucourt. It was dark before these changes could be made. The Riflemen, when they had attained their position, rested their right upon the Ancre, and prolonged their left, clearing the Germans out in that direction. This movement to the left was strengthened in the early morning when the 13th Rifle Brigade and the 13th Royal Fusiliers of the same brigade came up to join in, whilst the H.A.C. also advanced and took up a position on the right of the naval men.

About seven o’clock the assault upon the village was ordered, under the direction and leadership of Commander Freyberg of the Hoods, already twice wounded, and wounded once again before his task was finished. Sailors and Riflemen rushed forward at the signal, and dashed with fierce impetuosity over the German line and down the streets of the hamlet. The Honourable Artillery Company upon the right joined in the charge. It was completely successful, the houses were rapidly cleared, the dug-outs taken, and many hundreds of prisoners secured. The Riflemen emerging on the farther side of the village immediately dug in under the direction of their only remaining company officer. A footbridge was at the same time thrown across the Ancre, so as to connect up with the Thirty-ninth Division on the south.

The German redoubt had held out manfully until its line of retreat was entirely cut off, and even then showed signs of continued resistance. The tanks had already won such a position in the army that they had become one of the last resources of the commander who was in difficulties. During the night of November 13 three of these engines were sent for to help in reducing the intractable German centre. Their performance was typical both of their weakness and of their value in this early stage of their evolution. One was hit and disabled before ever it crossed the lines. A second stuck in the mud and refused to budge. The third won its way over the German front line and so terrorised the obstinate garrison that they were finally induced to lay down their arms. Eight hundred prisoners came from this one pocket, and the whole capture of the Naval Division amounted to nearly 2000 men.

The advance of the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division upon the immediate left of the Naval Division had been equally successful, and had ended in the capture of the important village of Beaumont Hamel with all its network of caverns, a great store of machine-guns, and 1500 of the garrison. The objectives of the division may be said to have been the continuation of those of the Naval Division, substituting Beaumont Hamel for Beaucourt, but the position was complicated by a deep ravine, called after its shape the Y Ravine, which ran down from the village to the German trenches. The ground over which the advance was made was still littered with the skeletons clad in rags which represented the men who had fallen in the attack of July 1. Now, after five months, they were gloriously avenged. The rush of the division was headed by the 153rd Brigade, with the 4th and 7th Gordons in the lead. These two fine battalions carried the front German lines, but on reaching the Sunken Road they gave place to the 6th and 7th Black Watch behind them, who carried the attack up the Y Ravine and on to Beaumont, while the Seaforths and Argylls of the other brigades, with their staunch Lowland comrades of the 9th Royal Scots, thickened the line of attack, and gave it the weight to carry each successive obstacle. Only in the Y Ravine was there any momentary check to the fiery advance. There for a short time the Germans stood stoutly to their task, and there was some of that man-to-man work which the Scotsman loves. Then the last signs of resistance died out, and before the late afternoon the whole position was in the hands of the assailants, who pushed on and occupied the low ridge to the north which separates it from Serre. One curious incident connected with the close of the action was, that a mopping-up party of Gordons in one of the front lines of trenches were suddenly surprised and captured by a considerable body of Germans, who emerged suddenly from an underground tunnel. In the evening, however, the positions were reversed, and the prisoners were rescued, while the Germans had to surrender to the victors. Fifteen hundred prisoners and 54 machine-guns were the spoils of the Fifty-first Division; but these were considerably increased when the dug-outs were more carefully examined next day. Altogether nearly 7000 officers and men were captured in the course of the action.

Whilst the considerable action of Beaumont Hamel was fought upon the left, the various divisions upon the south of the river forming the remainder of Gough’s Fifth Army all made a forward movement and gained ground. Of these divisions, the Thirty-ninth, whose doings have already been described, was nearest to the main battle, and was most heavily engaged, winning a complete success. Upon its right in the order given were the Nineteenth and the Eighteenth, connecting up with Rawlinson’s Fourth Army upon the right. These various divisions all moved their lines forward in the direction of the river-bank, with the villages of Grandcourt and Petit Miraumont in their front. These movements were rather in the nature of a feint and a demonstration, so that they were not accompanied by any severe fighting. It had been planned, however, that as these divisions advanced to the north the space which would be left, between Gough’s right and Rawlinson’s left should be filled up by the Thirty-second Division, which, should push on in the direction of Lys. This movement gave rise to some severe fighting in which the historical 14th Brigade sustained some heavy losses. The immediate obstacle in front of the division was a powerful system of trenches lying amid morasses caused by the recent heavy rains, and known as the Munich Line, with the Frankfort line behind it. Upon November 17 the division took over the advanced trenches, while the Eighteenth Division side-stepped to the left. The Thirty-second Division had formed its line for attack, with the 14th Brigade upon the left and the 97th upon the right, the leading battalions from left to right being the 15th Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Manchesters, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, and another battalion of H.L.I. The advance was to have been upon the 17th, but from the beginning a series of misfortunes occurred, arising largely from the weather, the condition of the trenches, and the severe German barrage behind the line, which made all preparations difficult and costly. The attack was postponed till the 18th, and even then the advancing battalions were short of bombs, without which trench fighting becomes impossible. The ground behind the troops was so awful that one mile in an hour was considered remarkable progress for an unladen messenger; while the enemy’s fire was so severe that of six runners sent with a despatch only the last arrived unwounded. The Germans in front appeared to be both numerous and full of fight, and upon the 17th they made a vain attack upon the advanced line ‘of the 14th Brigade. Two companies of the Manchesters sustained upon this day the losses of half their number as they lay, an object lesson in silent patient discipline in the muddy bottom of a shell-swept ditch.

At 6:10 in the morning of the 18th an advance was made, but the bomb supplies had not yet come up and the disadvantages were great. None the less, the first line of German trenches was successfully carried by the Manchesters, but the 15th Highland Light Infantry were held up by wire and were unable to get forward, while the Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the right got through at some points and were held at others. The Manchesters even penetrated to the second line of trenches and sprang into them, but the fatal want of bombs tied their hands, and a counter-attack of the Germans retook the position. The Highland Light Infantry had fallen back upon Serre Trench, and were pressed by a party of the enemy, but fortunately some of the 1st Dorsets came up from the rear with some bombs, and the situation was saved. In the meantime the position of those Manchesters and Yorkshiremen who had got forward as far as the second trench, and were exposed without bombs to a bombing attack, was very serious. They had taken a number of prisoners and some of these they managed to send back, but the greater part of the British were bombed to pieces, and all died where they fought or were taken by the enemy. A single survivor who returned from the final stand made by these gallant men stated that he was the last man who had crawled out of the trench, and that his comrades lay dead or dying in a group in front of a blazing dug-out, the woodwork of which had taken fire. A patrol next day came upon the bodies of an officer and forty men who had died fighting to the last in a single group.

On the left of the Thirty-second Division some movement forward had been necessary upon the part both of the Eighteenth Division and of the Nineteenth, in order to keep the left flank of Jacob’s Second Corps on the south of the river level with the right flank of Fanshawe’s Fifth Corps upon the northern bank. This operation did not involve much work upon the part of the Eighteenth, but the movement of the Nineteenth was difficult and complex, with Grandcourt as a possible objective. It meant an attack upon a maze of trenches under the worst possible terrestrial conditions, while the advance had really to be in three The different directions — due north, north-east, and almost due east. The 57th Brigade, strengthened by the 7th South Lancashires of the 56th Brigade, was chosen for the difficult task. At 6 A.M. upon November 18 in a sharp snow-storm the advance began.

It was the last concerted operation of the year, but it was not unfortunately destined for success. The garrison of the trenches appear to have been as numerous as the stormers and far more advantageously placed. The ground was such that an advance over it without opposition would have been no easy matter. Upon the left two battalions, the 7th South Lanes and the 8th Gloucesters, old battle companions of La Boiselle, pushed vigorously forward and seized the western outskirt of Grandcourt, where they held on against every attempt to dislodge them. Stick bombs, egg bombs, rifle-grenades, and every sort of evil missile crashed and splintered around them, but they had in command two leaders who might be trusted to hold what they had taken. Only next evening when the rest of the attack had definitely failed did these two battalions withdraw to a new line on the immediate west of the village, taking 150 prisoners with them.

The other three battalions had fared ill owing to numerical weakness, lack of knowledge of the ground, loss of direction, bad weather, and deadly machine guns. Half of the 8th North Staffords won their way through to the objective, but their comrades could not support them, and they were so isolated that, after a gallant resistance, they were nearly all destroyed or captured, under very much the same circumstances as the 2nd Manchesters upon the preceding day. The commander of the North Staffords, Colonel Anderson, a gallant South African, and several other officers were wounded and taken. Colonel Torrie of the 7th East Lancashires was also killed in this engagement. An attempt upon the part of the 9th Cheshires later in the evening to get into touch with their lost comrades only served to swell the casualty lists, for it was dark before it was initiated, and all direction was impossible amid the labyrinth of mud-channels which faced them. Two days later the Nineteenth Division was relieved by the Eleventh. It is difficult to exaggerate the extreme hardships which had been endured by the whole of Jacob’s corps during these operations amid the viscid mud slopes of the Ancre. Napoleon in Poland had never better cause to curse the fourth element. The front trenches were mere gutters, and every attempt to deepen them only deepened the stagnant pool within. The communications were little better. The mud was on the men’s bodies, in their food, and for ever clogging both their feet and their weapons. The hostile shelling was continuous. It was a nightmare chapter of the campaign. Winter had now settled down once more cheerless and prolonged. There was much to be done in those months of gloom — divisions to be refilled, fresh divisions to be brought out, munitions of every sort to be stored for the days of wrath to come. But apart from the preparations for the future, the army was never quiet, for one long succession of trench raids, exploratory attacks, and bombardments helped to retain that ascendancy which had been gained in the long Battle of the Somme. Before the narrative passes to the German retreat of 1917, and the dramatic battles which followed it, it would be well to take a brief survey of the other events which had occurred during the last half of the year, all of which reacted more or less directly upon the campaign in the west.

The chief of these is undoubtedly the magnificent French recovery at Verdun. As already stated, the German pressure was very severe in June, but it was rapidly lessened by the counter-pressure of the Allied advance upon the Somme. In their attempt to hold back the Franco-British advance the Germans denuded their Verdun line to an extent which weakened it so much that, far from advancing, it could not hold its own. In two splendid assaults upon October 24 and December 15, the first yielding 5000 prisoners and the second 11,000 with 115 guns, the French drove the Germans back until a considerable portion of their former hard-won gains had disappeared. Considering the efforts which France was making upon the Somme it was a splendid achievement, and it may fairly be added to the credit of the Somme Battle, since without it, it could hardly have been possible.

The second considerable factor was one of those great Russian advances which, alternating with equally great Russian retreats, each of them coming with a constant rhythm, made the war of the Eastern Front resemble some sort of majestic and terrible tide, with an ebb and flow which left death and destruction strewn over those unhappy border countries. On this occasion the advance was in the Brody and Stanislau direction, and was pushed with such energy and success by the fiery Brusiloff that nearly 400,000 prisoners — or perhaps Slavonic refugees would be a more accurate description — were taken by our Allies. The movement extended from June to September, and might have been a vital one, had it not been for the political disorganisation and treachery in the rear.

Italian armies had in the meanwhile given a splendid account of themselves, as every one who had seen them in the field, predicted that they would. Though hard pressed by a severe Austrian attack in the Trentino in May, they rallied and held the enemy before he could debouch upon the plains. Then with three hard blows delivered upon August 6 to August 9, where they took the town of Gorizia and 12,000 prisoners, on October 10, and on November 1 they broke the Austrian lines and inflicted heavy losses upon them. The coming of winter saw them well upon their way to Trieste.

On August 4 the British forces in Egypt defeated a fresh Turco-German attack upon that country. The battle was near Romani, east of the Suez Canal, and it ended in a creditable victory and the capture of 2500 prisoners. This was the end of the serious menace for Egypt, and the operations in this quarter, which were carried on by General Murray, were confined from this time forwards to clearing up the Sinai peninsula, where various Turkish posts were dispersed or taken, and in advancing our line to the Palestine Frontier.

On August 8 our brave little ally, Portugal, threw her sword into the scale of freedom, and so gave military continuity to the traditions of the two nations. It would have rejoiced the austere soul of the great Duke to see the descendants of his much-valued Caçadores, fighting once more beside the great-grandsons of the Riflemen and Guardsmen of the Peninsula. Two divisions appeared in France, where they soon made a reputation for steadiness and valour.

In the East another valiant little nation had also ranged herself with the Allies, and was destined, alas, to meet her ruin through circumstances which were largely beyond her own control. Upon August 27 Romania declared war, and with a full reliance upon help which never reached her, advanced at once into the south of Hungary. Her initial successes changed to defeat, and her brave soldiers, who were poorly provided with modern appliances of war, were driven back before the pressure of Falkenhayn’s army in the west and Mackensen’s, which eventually crossed the Danube, from the south. On December 6 Bucharest fell, and by the end of the year the Romanians had been driven to the Russian border, where, an army without a country, they hung on, exactly as the Belgians had done, to the extreme edge of their ravaged fatherland. To their Western allies, who were powerless to help them, it was one of the most painful incidents of the War.

The Salonica expedition had been much hampered by the sinister attitude of the Greeks, whose position upon the left rear of Sarrail’s forces made an advance dangerous, and a retreat destructive. King Constantine, following the example of his brother-in-law of Berlin, had freed himself from all constitutional ties, refused to summon a parliament, and followed his own private predilections and interests by helping our enemies, even to the point of surrendering a considerable portion of his own kingdom, including a whole army corps and the port of Kavala, to the hereditary enemy, the Bulgarian. Never in history has a nation been so betrayed by its king, and never, it may be added, did a nation which had been free allow itself so tamely to be robbed of its freedom.

Venezelos, however, showed himself to be a great patriot, shook the dust of Athens from his feet, and departed to Salonica, where he raised the flag of a fighting national party, to which the whole nation was eventually rallied. Meanwhile, however, the task of General Sarrail was rendered more difficult, in spite of which he succeeded in regaining Monastir and establishing himself firmly within the old Serbian frontier — a result which was largely due to the splendid military qualities of the remains of the Serbian army.

On December 12 the German Empire proposed negotiations for peace, but as these were apparently to be founded upon the war-map as it then stood, and as they were accompanied by congratulatory messages about victory from the Kaiser to his troops, they were naturally not regarded as serious by the Allies. Our only guarantee that a nation will not make war whenever it likes is its knowledge that it cannot make peace when it likes, and this was the lesson which Germany was now to learn. By the unanimous decision of all the Allied nations no peace was possible which did not include terms which the Germans were still very far from considering — restitution of invaded countries, reparation for harm done, and adequate guarantees against similar unprovoked aggression in the future. Without these three conditions the War would indeed have been fought in vain.

This same month of December saw two of the great protagonists who had commenced the War retire from that stage upon which each had played a worthy part. The one was Mr. Asquith, who, weary from long labours, gave place to the fresh energy of Mr. Lloyd George. The other was “Father” Joffre, who bore upon his thick shoulders the whole weight of the early campaigns. Both of the names will live honourably in history.

And now as the year drew to its close, Germany, wounded and weary, saw as she glared round her at her enemies, a portent which must have struck a chill to her heart. Russian strength had been discounted and that of France was no new thing. But whence came this apparition upon her

Western flank — a host raised, as it seemed, from nowhere, and yet already bidding fair to be equal to her own? Her public were still ignorant and blind, bemused by the journals which had told them so long, and with such humorous detail, that the British army was a paper army, the creature of a dream. Treitschke's foolish phrase, "The unwarlike Islanders," still lingered pleasantly in their memory. But the rulers, the men who knew, what must have been their feelings as they gazed upon that stupendous array, that vision of doom, a hundred miles from wing to wing, gleaming with two million bayonets, canopied with aeroplanes, fringed with iron-clad motor monsters, and backed by an artillery which numbered its guns by the thousand? Kitchener lay deep in the Orkney waves, but truly his spirit was thundering at their gates. His brain it was who first planted these seeds, but how could they have grown had the tolerant, long-suffering British nation not been made ready for it by all those long years of Teutonic insult, the ravings of crazy professors, and the insults of unbalanced publicists? All of these had a part in raising that great host, but others, too, can claim their share: the baby-killers of Scarborough, the Zeppelin murderers, the submarine pirates, all the agents of ruthlessness. Among them they had put life and spirit into this avenging apparition, where even now it could be said that every man in the battle line had come there of his own free will. Years of folly and of crime were crying for a just retribution. The instrument was here and the hour was drawing on.

VOLUME IV.

PREFACE

This, the fourth volume of The British Campaign in France and Flanders, carries the story through the long and arduous fighting of 1917, which culminated in the dramatic twofold battle of Cambrai. These events are cut deep into the permanent history of the world, and we are still too near it to read the whole of that massive and tremendous inscription. It is certain, however, that this year marked the period in which the Allies gained a definite military ascendancy over the German forces, in spite of the one great subsequent rally which had its source in events which were beyond the control of the Western powers. So long as ink darkens and paper holds, our descendants, whose freedom has been won by these exertions, will dwell earnestly and with reverence upon the stories of Arras, Messines, Ypres, Cambrai, and other phases of this epic period.

I may be permitted to record with some thankfulness and relief, that in the course of three thick volumes, in which for the first time the detailed battle-line of these great encounters has been set out, it has not yet been shown that a brigade has ever been out of its place, and even a battalion has seldom gone amiss. Such good fortune cannot last for ever. *Absit omen!* But the fact is worth recording, as it may reassure the reader who has natural doubts whether history which is so recent can also lay claim to be of any permanent value.

The Censorship has left me untrammelled in the matter of units, for which I am sufficiently grateful. The ruling, however, upon the question of names must be explained, lest it should seem that their appearance or suppression is due to lack of knowledge or to individual favour or caprice. I would explain, then, that I am permitted to use the names of Army and Corps Commanders, but only of such divisional Generals as are mentioned in the Headquarters narrative. All other ranks below divisional Generals are still suppressed, save only casualties, in connection with the action where they received the injury, and those who won honours, with the same limitation. This regulation has little effect upon the accuracy of the narrative, but it appears in many cases to involve some personal injustice. To record the heroic deeds of a division and yet be compelled to leave out the name of the man who made it so efficient, is painful to the feelings of the writer, for if any one fact is clearer than another in this war it is that the good leader makes the good unit.

The tremendous epic of 1918 will call for two volumes in its treatment. One of these, bringing the story up to June 30, 1918, is already completed, and should appear by the summer. The other may be ready at the end of the year.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE,
Crowborough,
January 20, 1919.

I. THE GERMAN RETREAT UPON THE ARRAS-SOISSONS FRONT

Hindenburg's retreat — The advance of the Fifth and Fourth Armies — Capture of Bapaume and Peronne — Atrocious devastation by the Germans — Capture of guns at Selency — Definition of the Hindenburg Line — General survey

IN the latter days of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, the British Army, which had in little more than two years expanded from seven divisions to over fifty, took over an increased line. The movement began about Christmas time, and early in the New Year Rawlinson's Fourth Army, side-stepping always to the south, had covered the whole of the French position occupied during the Somme fighting, had crossed the Somme, and had established its right flank at a point near Roye. The total front was increased to 120 miles, which may seem a small proportion as compared to the whole. In making such a comparison, however, one must bear in mind the difference in the effort of sustaining an army in one's own country and in a foreign land with all communications by water. The task of the British was continually made more difficult by the precarious nature of their connection with their base. Dullness of vision may be as dangerous to a nation as treason, and no enemies could have harmed the country more than those perfectly sincere and patriotic individuals who had for so long opposed the construction of a Channel Tunnel.

The general disposition of the British forces after prolongation to the south was as follows. Plumer's Second Army still held that post of danger and of honour which centred round the Ypres salient. South of Plumer, in the Armentières district, was the First Army, now commanded by General Horne, whose long service with the Fifteenth Corps during the Somme Battle had earned him this high promotion. Allenby's Third Army carried the line onwards to the south of Arras. From the point upon which the British line had hinged during the Somme operations Gough's Fifth Army took over the front, and this joined on to Rawlinson's Fourth Army near the old French position. From the north then the order of the armies was two, one, three, five, and four.

The winter was spent by both sides in licking their wounds after the recent severe fighting and in preparing for the greater fighting to come.

These preparations upon the part of the British consisted in the addition to the army of a number of fresh divisions, and the rebuilding of those divisions, fifty-two in number, which had taken part in the Somme fighting, most of them more than once. As the average loss in these divisions was very heavy indeed, the task of reconstructing them was no light one. None the less before the campaign re-opened, though the interval was a short three months, the greater part of the battalions were once again at full strength, while the guns and munitions were very greatly increased. A considerable addition to the strength of the army was effected by the civilian railway advisers, under Sir Eric Geddes, who by the simple expedient and re-laying them in France, enormously improved the communications of the army.

In the case of the Germans their army changes took the form of a considerable new levy from those classes which had been previously judged to be unfit, and a general comb-out of every source from which men could be extracted. A new law rendered every citizen liable to national service in a civilian capacity, and so released a number of men from the mines and the factories. They also increased the numbers of their divisions by the doubtful expedient of reducing the brigades, so that the divisions were shorn of a third of their strength. The battalions thus obtained were formed into new divisions. In this way it was calculated that a reserve force had been created which would be suddenly thrown in on one or the other front with dramatic effect. Some such plan may have been in contemplation, but as a matter of fact the course of events was such that the German generals required every man and more for their own immediate needs during the whole of the year.

It has been shown in the narrative of 1916 how the British had ended the campaign of that year by the brilliant little victory of Beaumont Hamel, which gave them not merely 7000 prisoners, but command of both sides of the Valley of the Ancre. This victory had been the sequel to the capture of the Thiepval Ridge, and this again had depended upon the general success of the Somme operations, so that the turn of events which led to such considerable results always traces back to the tragic and glorious 1st of July.

It was clear that whenever the weather permitted the resumption of hostilities, Sir Douglas Haig was in so commanding a position at this point that he was perfectly certain to drive the enemy out of the salient which they held to the north of Beaumont Hamel. The result showed that this expectation was well founded, but no one could have foreseen how considerable was the retreat which would be forced upon the enemy — a retreat which gave away for nothing the ground which cost Hindenburg so much to regain in the following year.

Although the whole line from the sea to the Somme was a scene of activity during the winter, and though hardly a day, or rather a night, went by that some stealthy party did not cross No-Man’s-Land to capture and to destroy, still for the purposes of this narrative the three northern armies may be entirely ignored in the succeeding operations since they had no occasion to alter their lines. We shall fix our attention in the first instance upon Gough’s Army in the district of the Ancre, and afterwards upon Rawlinson’s which was drawn into the operations. Gough’s Army consisted, at the beginning of the year, of three corps, the Fifth (E.A. Fanshawe) to the left covering the ground to the north of the Ancre, the Second Corps (Jacob) immediately south of the river, and the First Australian Corps (Birdwood) extending to the junction with Rawlinson’s Army, and covering the greater part of the old British line upon the Somme. It was upon the Fifth and the Second Corps that the immediate operations which opened the campaign were to devolve.

The Fifth Corps was formed at this period of three divisions, the Eleventh, Thirty-first, and Seventh. Each of these divisions by constant pressure and minor operations, backed by a powerful artillery fire, played a part in the wearing process of constant attrition which ended in making the position of the Germans impossible. On January 10, the 32nd Yorkshire Brigade of the Eleventh Division carried an important trench due east of Beaumont Hamel, taking 140 prisoners. On the next day the movement extended farther north, where three-quarters of a mile of trench with 200 prisoners was the prize. On January 17, another 600 yards north of Beaumont fell into British hands. Of the 1228 prisoners who were taken in January a considerable proportion came from this small section of the line, though the largest single haul consisted of 350 men who were captured by a brilliant advance of the Australians in the Le Transloy sector upon January 29. The movement along the valley of the Ancre was continued in February, but at an accelerated pace, the Second Corps, which consisted of the Sixty-third, Eighteenth, and Second Divisions, moving in conformity with Fanshawe’s men upon the northern bank.

The chief initiative still rested with the latter, and upon February 3 another push forward of 500 yards upon a mile front yielded a hundred more prisoners, while two sharp counter attacks by the Germans only served to increase their losses. A number of small spurs run down to the river upon the northern bank, and each of these successive advances represented some fresh ridge surmounted. Upon February 6 the Second Corps was moving upon Beaucourt, which is to the immediate south of the river, and upon the 7th the village was evacuated — the first of that goodly list which was to adorn the official communiqués during the next two mouths. On the 9th the advance crept onwards upon both banks, gathering up a hundred prisoners, while eighty more were taken in Baillescourt Farm upon the north bank. These men were Hamburgers of the 85th Regiment.

Upon February 10 the left of the Fifth Corps began to feel out towards Serre, that village of sinister memories, and 215 prisoners were taken from the trenches to the south of the hamlet. This provoked a new counter from the enemy which was beaten back upon February 12. A period of impossible weather suspended the advance, but again upon February 17 the British tide swelled suddenly into a wave which swept forward on either bank, engulfing some crowded trenches north of Baillescourt Farm, which yielded 12 officers and 761 men of the 65th, 75th, and 395th Prussians. The main success was gained by the Sixty-third Division upon the left of the Second Corps, but it was aided by the work of the Eighteenth and Second Divisions to the south of the Ancre. The latter met with strong resistance and had considerable losses. The burden of this work fell chiefly upon the 99th and 54th Brigades, both of which reached their objectives in the face of mist, darkness, uncut wire, heavy fire, and vigorous resistance. This blow stung the enemy into a sharp reaction, and three waves of infantry stormed up to the lost position, which for a time they entered, but were again beaten out of. During their temporary success they claim to have taken 130 prisoners.

All these advances, with their accompanying and ever-extending bombardments, had been like those multiplied causes, each small in itself, which eventually loosen and start a great landslide. The effect must undoubtedly have been begun some weeks before when the Germans perceived that they could no longer hold on, and favoured by wind, rain, and fog, started their rearward movement to the great permanent second line, the exact position of which was still vague to the Allies. Upon February 25 the whole German front caved in for a depth of three miles both north and south of the Ancre. Wading through seas of mud Gough’s infantry occupied Serre, Pys, Miraumont, Eaucourt, Warlencourt, and all the ground for eleven miles from Gomiecourt in the north to Gueudecourt in the south. On February 28 Gomiecourt itself had been occupied by the North Country troops of the Thirty-first Division, while Puisieux and Thilloy had also been added to the British line. The advance was not unopposed. The battle-patrols continually extended to attack some trench of snipers or nest of machine-guns. Mined roads and all manner of obstructions impeded the onward flow of the army. The retreat was orderly and skilful, and the pursuit was necessarily slow and wary. By a pleasing coincidence the Thirty-first Division, which occupied Serre, was the same brave North Country Division which had lost so heavily upon July 1 and November 13 on the same front. On entering the village they actually found the bodies of some of their own brave comrades who had got as far forward seven months before.

On March 4 the advance which had steadily continued in the north spread suddenly southwards to Bouchavesnes north of Peronne, the sector held by the Twentieth and Forty-eighth Divisions of Rawlinson’s Army, which from this time onward was more and more engaged in the forward movement. Three machine-guns and 172 prisoners were taken.

There was some interruption of the operations at this stage owing to severe snowstorms, but upon March 10 Irles, west of Bapaume, was taken by assault by the Eighteenth Division. This was a formidable point, well wired and trenched, so that the artillery in full force was needed for preparation. The infantry went forward before sunrise, and within an hour the village with 15 machine-guns and 290 prisoners was in British hands. The losses were light and the gain substantial. Grevillers also fell next day. This advance in front of Bapaume was of importance as it turned Loupart Wood, forming part of a strong defensive line which might have marked the limit of the German retreat. It was clear from that day onwards that the movement was not local but far reaching. The enemy was still too strong to be hustled, however, especially upon the northern sector of the operations, where Jacob’s Second Corps was feeling the German line along its whole front. An attempt at an advance at Bucquoy upon the night of March 13, carried out by the 137th Brigade of the Forty-sixth North Midland Division, met with a check, though most bravely attempted. The two battalions concerned, the 5th South Staffords and 5th North Staffords, found themselves entangled in the darkness amid uncut wire and suffered considerable loss before they could extricate themselves from an impossible position.

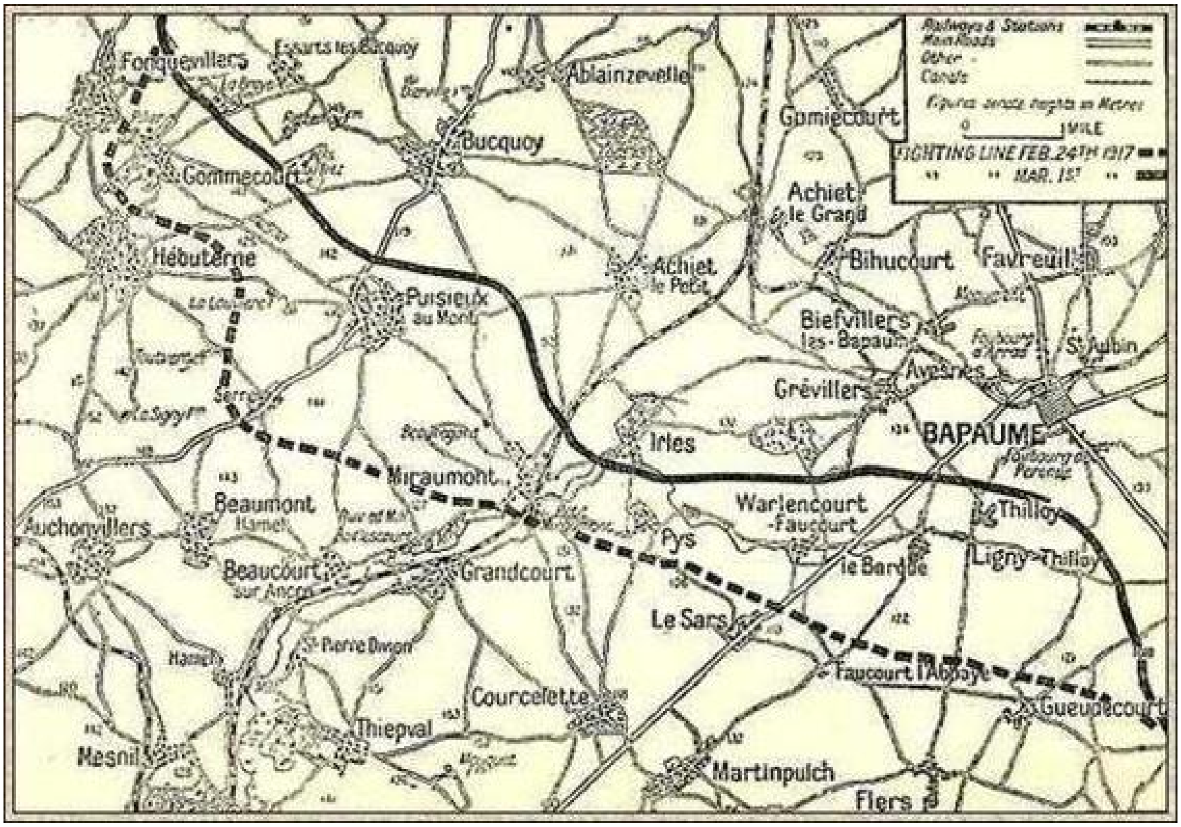
Railways & Stations
Main Roads
Other
Canals
Figures denote heights in Metres
0
1 MILE
FIGHTING LINE FEB. 24TH 1917
" " MAR. 1ST "
Fonquevillers
Essarts les Bucquoy
Ablainzevelle
Gomiecourt
Bucquoy
Gommecourt
Achiet le Grand
Hébuterne
Puisieux au Mont
Achiet le Petit
Bihucourt
Favreuil
Biefvillers les-Bapaume
St Aubin
Avesnes
Grévillers
Serre
Irles
BAPAUME
Faubourg de Péronne
Miraumont
Beaumont Hamel
Warlencourt -Faucourt
Thilloy
Auchonvillers
Pys
Beaucourt sur Ancre
Grandcourt
le Barque
Ligny-Thilloy
Le Sars
St Pierre Divion
Hamel
Faucourt l'Abbaye
Courcelette
Gueudecourt
Thiepval
Mesnil
Martinpuich
Flers

Fighting Line, February 24, 1917, and Fighting Line, March 1,1917

On March 19 and 20 the whole movement had become much more pronounced, and the French as well as the British were moving over a seventy-mile front, extending from Arras in the north to Soissons in the south. Each day now was a day of joy in France as some new strip of the fatherland was for a time recovered, but the joy was tempered by sorrow and anger as it was learned with what barbarity the Germans had conducted their retreat. To lay a country waste is no new thing in warfare. It has always been held to be an occasional military necessity though the best commander was he who used it least. In all Napoleon’s career it is difficult to recall an instance when he devastated a district. At the same time it must be admitted that it comes within the recognised chances of war, and that when Sherman’s army, for example, left a black weal across the South the pity of mankind was stirred but not its conscience. It was very different here. These devils — or to be more just — these devil-driven slaves, with a malignity for which it would be hard to find a parallel, endeavoured by every means at their command to ruin the country for the future as well as for the present. Buildings were universally destroyed, including in many cases the parish churches. Historical monuments, such as the venerable Castle of Coucy, were blown to pieces. Family vaults were violated and the graves profaned. The furniture of the most humble peasants was systematically broken. The wells were poisoned and polluted. Worst of all, the young fruit-trees were ringed so as to destroy them for future seasons. It was considered the last possibility of savagery when the Mahdi’s men cut down the slow-growing palm-trees in the district of Dongola, but every record upon earth has been swept away by the barbarians of Europe. As usual these outrages reacted upon the criminals, for they confirmed those grim resolutions of the Allies which made that peace by compromise for which the Germans were eternally working an absolute impossibility. Their Clausewitz had taught them that it is of supreme importance to make peace before there comes a turn of the tide, but he had not reckoned upon his descendants being so brutalised that a peace with them was a self-evident impossibility.

Turning from the deeds of savages to those of soldiers, we have now to trace the progress and scope of the great German retreat, the first pronounced movement upon either side on the Western Front since September 1914. From Arras to Roye the British Army was advancing while the movement was carried on to Soissons by the French. On the curve of the trenches the front measured more than a hundred miles. So close was the touch between the two Allied armies that the patrols of French and British cavalry rode together into Nesle. On March 18 the Australians had occupied Bapaume, with the Seventh Division moving upon their left and the Twentieth upon their right, the cavalry fringe being formed of the Indian Lucknow Cavalry Brigade of the Fourth Division. To the south the Warwick Brigade of the Forty-eighth South Midland Division passed through Peronne. At each end of the long curve the Germans held fast, Arras in the north and Soissons in the south being the two fixed points, but the country between, to a depth of ten miles in the British sector and of thirty miles in the French, was rapidly overrun by the Allies, the cavalry patrols feeling their way everywhere while the infantry followed hard upon the heels of the horses. Guns and munitions had been successfully removed by the Germans but incredible quantities of barbed wire and other defensive material had been abandoned in their positions. Towards the end of March the left of the French and the right of the British were in touch in the immediate front of St. Quentin. There had been scattered fighting all along the line, and the resistance thickened each day, so that it was evident that the final German position had been nearly reached. On March 24 the Australians had a sharp fight at Beaumetz between Bapaume and Cambrai. The village was taken, lost, and retaken with considerable loss upon both sides. It was clear that in this quarter a definite German line had been approached. Similar reports soon came in from Croisilles, from Lagnicourt, from Ronssoy, from Jeancourt, and all along from Arras to St. Quentin. So gradually the famous Hindenburg line defined itself, and the Allied Generals became more clearly aware of the exact nature and extent of this new German position. Early in April, by pushing up to it and brushing aside the advanced forces which screened it, its outlines were more clearly mapped. This process of definition led to more serious fighting, the worst of which, as will presently be shown, fell upon the Australians at Bullecourt, some ten miles from the Arras end of the new line. Some foretaste, however, of the considerable resistance which they were about to meet with in their section was encountered by the Australians at Noreuil on April 2. The brunt of the attack upon the village was borne by the South Australians, who behaved with great gallantry, having to rush a difficult position intersected by sunken roads. A small body of the stormers, some sixty in number, were cut off and overwhelmed, but the main body captured the village, taking 137 German prisoners. Among other brisk skirmishes occurring at the beginning of April was one at Epehy, fifteen miles north of St. Quentin, where the 144th Brigade of the Forty-eighth South Midland Division cleared the hamlet and sugar-factory of St. Emilie. In this operation, which was carried out chiefly by the 4th Gloucesters, 5 officers and 80 men fell, but the German loss was considerable. A few days later the 145th Brigade of the same division distinguished itself by the capture after sharp fighting of Ronssoy and of Lempire, the first village being carried by the 4th Berks and the latter by the 5th Gloucesters. This brought the British line in that quarter up to the final German position.

Some sharp fighting had also taken place at Savy and Selency to the immediate west and north-west of St. Quentin, upon the front of the Thirty-second Division, which, together with the Thirty-fifth and Sixty-first, had been pressing the German line. On the morning of April 2 the 14th Brigade of this division was ordered to attack Selency. On the two previous days the village of Savy had been taken, and a strong attack made upon the Bois de Savy by the 96th and 97th Brigades. The advance of April 2 was at early dawn and the veteran 2nd Manchester Battalion was in the lead. The whole operation was conducted under heavy machine-gun fire, but by swift movement and a judicious use of the ground the losses were minimised. Whilst the Lancashire men made direct for the village the 15th Highland Light Infantry kept pace with them upon their right flank. A battery of six German field-guns opened fire in the very faces of the stormers, but C Company of the Manchesters, with admirable steadiness and presence of mind, swerved to each side and rushed the guns from the flank, capturing them all. The attack was at 5 A.M., and by 6:30 the whole objective had been captured. No further advance was possible as the April. front line was already close to St. Quentin, which was a German stronghold. The position at the end of the action was that the village was in the hands of the British but that the six guns with their caissons were in the open where the Germans could cover them with their fire. The victors were determined to have their trophies, and their enemy was no less eager to make it impossible. The moment that darkness had fallen a party of Manchesters, under the lead of Lieut. Thomas, the adjutant, and Lieut. Ward of the 161st R.F.A., endeavoured to man-handle the guns into the British lines, but directly they began to haul so sharp a fire of shrapnel was opened at a range of 800 yards that they were compelled to desist. A covering party of the 15th Highland Light Infantry lay round the guns till dawn, and during the day they remained safe under the rifles of the infantry. At eight o'clock on April 3 a further attempt to bring them in was made by Major Lumsden of the Staff, with Lieutenants Ward and Lomax of the gunners. Horse teams were brought down, and amid a terrific barrage the gun wheels began at last to revolve. Maddened by the sight seen under the glare of their star shells, the German infantry surged forward and for a time were all round the Highlanders who still guarded the guns. One small party of Germans dashed in upon the guns with a charge of dynamite and managed to blow in the breech of one of them. They were driven off, however, and the six guns were all brought in, while upon April 4 the six artillery caissons were also salved. So ended a most satisfactory little operation for which Major Lumsden received a Victoria Cross and later the command of a brigade, while the other April, On April 2 in the north of the new line, near the spot where very great things were pending. Snow’s Seventh Corps had taken Henin and Croisilles, with the aid of the Fifth Army upon their right. It was a small operation in itself, but it was preparing the jumping-off place for the great battle of April 9. There was continued bickering along the line where the British were pushing in the German outliers. In this work the Thirty-fifth Division in the Epehy district distinguished itself greatly during the early summer. One attack upon a hill held by the Germans and carried by the 15th Chesters and 15th Sherwoods of the 105th Brigade was particularly brilliant. In addition, upon April 4, the village of Metz with the adjoining position was taken after a sharp fight by the 59th Brigade of the Twentieth Division. The 10th and 11th K.R.R. were the battalions chiefly engaged in this fight, which at one time had an ugly aspect, as the Germans slipped into a gap between the Twentieth on the left and the Eighth Division on the right. They were cleared out, however, and the line was advanced beyond the village to the right of the Australians.

A more serious action was that which began upon April 13, when the Thirty-second Division was ordered to support the left of the French in their unsuccessful attack upon St. Quentin. The task assigned to the British division, with the Thirty-fifth Division co-operating upon its left, was to attack the village of Fayet. This was carried out very gallantly by the 97th Brigade, with the 2nd York Light Infantry and the 16th Highland Light Infantry in the lead. The village with 100 prisoners was taken at the first rush, but it was found to be more difficult to get possession of a wood called the Twin Copses, beyond the village. So severe was the fighting that the General of the 97th Brigade had seven battalions under his command before it was finished. Finally, the Twin Copses were splendidly carried by the 11th Borders. The total of prisoners came to 5 officers and 334 men in this very spirited operation.

With the conclusion of the German retreat and the solidification of the new line, some more general view may be taken of the whole operation. It cannot be denied that it was cleverly planned and deftly carried out, though it can hardly be said to have deserved the ecstasies of admiration which were bestowed upon it by the German Press. It was not, for example, as formidable an operation as the British withdrawal from Gallipoli, an extraordinarily clever manoeuvre which received less than its fair share of recognition at home, because it was associated with the sad ending of high hopes. It was also universally taken for granted in Germany that Hindenburg was going to “reculer pour mieux sauter” as he had done once before at Tannenberg, and that some extraordinary burst of energy at some other point would soon change the exultation of the Allies into despair. Nothing of the sort occurred during that year, and it speedily became evident that the old Marshal had simply moved because his lines were untenable, and because by shortening them he could make some compensation for the terrific losses of men at the Somme. That he ever regained the ground was due only to the subsequent Russian debacle.

We have it upon the authority of Sir Douglas Haig that the great local retreat of the Germans had no very great effect in modifying the Allied plans. Those plans, so far as the British were concerned, were to make a combined assault from the north and from the south upon the Ancre salient, Gough attacking from the south and Allenby from the north. As the salient had now ceased to exist, the role of Gough was confined to following up the German retreat until he came to the new Hindenburg line, which was an obstacle of so formidable a character that it checked anything short of a very powerful attack. Allenby’s part of the programme was still feasible, however, and resolved itself into an attack upon the high ground held by the Germans and their whole line down to the point where the new positions began. How Allenby carried out this task, and the great success which attended his efforts, will be described in the coming chapters.

Before passing to this and the other great battles which will make the year 1917 for ever memorable in our history, it would be well to briefly enumerate those world events which occurred during these three months and which directly or indirectly influenced the operations in France. The French line had remained stationary save for the forward movement already described. In Russia the lines had also remained firm, and there was no outward indication of the convulsions into which that unhappy country was about to be thrown by the revolution which broke out on March 12 of this year. From Italy also there was nothing momentous to report. The most cheering news which reached the Allies was from the British Eastern lines of battle, where both in the Sinai Peninsula to the east of Egypt, and in Mesopotamia, good progress was being made. The Sinai desert had been practically cleared of that enemy who had advanced so boastfully to the capture of Egypt, and the British lines were now upon the green terrain which faces Gaza upon the frontier of Palestine. The chief success, however, lay in Mesopotamia. A great soldier had apparently appeared in the person of General Maude, whose name may be recalled by the reader as the Commander of the 14th Brigade upon the Western front. Leaving his limited activities in the prosaic trenches of Flanders, he had suddenly reappeared, moving swiftly along the track of so many of the old conquerors, and leading his picturesque force of Britons and Indians against the ancient capital of Haroun-el-Raschid. In February he had avenged Townshend by recapturing Kut with more than 2000 prisoners. Following up his victory with great speed, he entered Bagdad upon March 11 at the heels of the defeated Turks, and chased them north along the line of the German railway, the constructors of which had never dreamed what strange stationmaster might instal himself at their terminus. The approach of a Russian force seemed to hold out hopes for further combined operations, but meanwhile the whole of southern Mesopotamia remained in the hands of the British, and no Turk was left within forty miles of the ancient capital. The chief event in Great Britain was the successful flotation of the great war loan, which attained proportions never heard of before, and ended by bringing in the huge total of one thousand million pounds.

Beyond the usual skirmishes of light craft and isolated sinkings of warships by mine or submarine, there was nothing of importance in naval warfare, but an immense influence was brought to bear upon the course of the war by the German decision in February to declare a war zone round the allied countries, and to torpedo every merchant ship, whether neutral or hostile, which entered it. The measure was a counsel either of ignorance or of despair, for no one who knows the high spirit of the American people could imagine for a moment that they would permit their vessels to be destroyed and their fellow-citizens to be killed in such a manner. Within two days of the declaration of unlimited submarine warfare the President of the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, an act which was the precursor of war, though this was not formally declared until April 5. Great as were the loss, discomfort, and privation caused to Great Britain, and in a less degree to the other Allies, the accession of the United States with its enormous reserves of men and money to the cause of Democracy was far more than a sufficient make-weight. As events progressed, and as it became evident that Russia, swinging from the extreme of autocracy to the extreme of individualism, had ceased for a long time to come to be a useful ally, it grew more and more clear that the help of America was likely to save the Western Powers, not indeed from defeat, but from that pernicious stalemate and inconclusive peace which could only be the precursor of other wars to follow. Apart from the vast material help, the mere thought that the great race which has inherited our speech and so many of our traditions was lined up with us upon the day of Armageddon was a joy and an inspiration to every Briton.

II. THE BATTLE OF ARRAS
April 9 to April 23, 1917

Vast preparations — Attack of Snow's Seventh Corps — The Ibex Trench — Attack of Haldane's Sixth Corps — Attack of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps — A Scottish Front — The splendid Canadians — Capture of Monchy — Essex and Newfoundland — A glorious episode — The Chemical Works — Extension of the battle to the north — Desperate fight of the Australians at Bullecourt

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WHILST the German line was falling back to its new positions, and the Allies were eagerly following it across the ravished countryside until the increased resistance and the familiar lines of barbed wire warned them that the immediate retreat had come to an end, Sir Douglas Haig had managed, without relaxing his pursuit, to collect a strong striking force at the point of junction between the new German line and the old. The blow which he contemplated was no small local advance, but was a wide movement extending from the neighbourhood of Lens in the north to Arras in the south, a front of more than twelve miles. Upon this sector a tremendous concentration of artillery had been effected, and four corps were waiting the signal for the assault, the three southern ones forming Allenby's Third Army, while the fourth or northern one was the right-hand corps of Horne's First Army. The southern corps were the Seventh (Snow), which operated, to the south of Arras, having Croisilles for its southern boundary; the Sixth (Haldane), which advanced due east from Arras with the Scarpe for its northern boundary; the Seventeenth (Fergusson), which had its right on the Scarpe and its left on Thelus, with its front facing the three spurs which form this end of the Vimy Ridge; and finally the Canadian Corps (Byng), which faced this long and sinister slope, the scene of so much bloodshed in the past. Each corps was marshalled with three divisions in front and one in reserve, so that there were roughly 120,000 men in the storming line with 40,000 advancing behind them. Maxse's Eighteenth Corps was in reserve in the rear of the Third Army, while M'Cracken's Thirteenth Corps was behind the First Army. The Germans had six divisions, the Eleventh Prussian, Fourteenth Bavarian, First Bavarian Reserve, and the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Seventy-ninth reserve in the line. Their guns also were numerous, as subsequent captures were to prove, but it is probable that an extension of the Hindenburg retreat was in contemplation, and that some of the heavy artillery was already on the move. A second strong line from Drocourt to Quéant was known to exist, and its occupation would form a natural sequel to the retirement in the south.

The German strategists had imagined that by withdrawing their troops over a long front they would throw out of gear all the preparations of the Allies for the spring offensive. What they actually did was to save their force in the Gommecourt peninsula from being cut off, which would surely have been their fate had they waited. But in the larger issue they proved to be singularly ill-informed, for they had stayed their retreat at the very points of the line on which the offensive had been prepared, so that the plans of attack were neither modified nor delayed. That this is true is evident, since such tremendous blows as Arras in the north and Rheims in the south could not possibly have been delivered had the preparations only begun after the Hindenburg retreat.

One of the most difficult problems of this attack was how to arrange it upon that section which was covered by the town of Arras. It is true that the German line was 1700 yards east of the market-place, but the suburbs extended right up to it, and it was fringed with houses. The town itself, in which the storming troops must assemble and through which all supports and supplies must pass, was full of narrow streets within easy range of the German guns, and previous French experience had proved that each exit was so carefully and accurately barraged by the German fire that it was most difficult for the troops to debouch from it. This problem was solved by a fine piece of military engineering. The large cellars and other subterranean excavations with which the place abounded were connected up and fresh tunnels constructed, so that it was eventually found to be possible to put three whole divisions underground, with permanent headquarters and every necessary detail, including water, electric light, and a three-foot tramway. This fine work was carried out by the New Zealand, the 179th, and the 184th Tunnelling Companies. A huge dressing-station with 700 beds was also constructed. In this great underground place of assembly the greater part of the Sixth Corps was assembled, while many of the tunnels on the south side of the town were allotted to the use of the Seventh Corps. All this had been carried out during the winter in the anticipation of a big attack being made at this point. For purposes of communication, over 1000 miles of twin cable was buried in six-foot trenches or secured to the sides of tunnels. Besides these special preparations, the usual immense labour of preparing for a modern attack had been thoroughly carried out along the whole line, including the construction of very many gun positions, trench mortar emplacements, dressing-stations, and innumerable dumps of munitions and engineering stores. Some dislocation had been caused in the plans by a partial withdrawal in the enemies' front trenches upon March 18, opposite the right end of the British lines. The abandoned works were occupied and linked up with the old system, so that upon April 9 all was in order for the assault. The extreme difficulties caused by the formidable defensive preparations of the enemy were fully realised, but everything which human forethought could suggest had been done to meet them. Above all, two great lessons taught by the Somme experience had been thoroughly assimilated; the one that the broader the attack the more successful it is likely to be, as it prevents a concentration of the German guns upon a single area; the other that it is wiser, even in the heat of battle and the glow of victory, to limit your objective to an area which is well within the range of your guns. That last blue line so far forward upon the map has been the cause of many a rebuff.

The British bombardment, which came in gusts during the days preceding the attack, did enormous damage to the German defences. The evidence of prisoners showed that for several days they had been reduced to their emergency rations. The wire, which in places was a hundred yards thick, was mostly destroyed in the first line, and greatly damaged in the second, though in the third it was found to be largely intact, save upon the left of the line. The space between the first and second German lines was roughly 500 yards. Between the second and third it was about 3000. The usual forms of bombardment were varied upon April 4 by the use of a large number of Liven's gas projectors, throwing drums of compressed gas, which were seen to burst in the second German line. Fifteen hundred of these were discharged upon the front of a single corps, and they were said to have considerable effect, the reports of prisoners stating that in the suburb of Blangy alone there were 460 casualties from this cause. On April 8 there was a severe gas bombardment from 4-inch trench mortars. Finally, in the early morning of April 9, came the fearful whirlwind of fire which was the prelude to the attack. Some idea of its intensity may be gathered from the fact that the number of guns was so great that they could have rubbed wheels from end to end of the line had they been so placed. At 5:30 the word was given, and in the first dim grey of a rainy, windy, and sleety morning, the infantry dashed forward to the attack—”wave after wave of grimy, mud-covered, determined men, with hearts as hard as steel and as light as feathers,” to use the words of one of them. The events may best be described from the south of the line as being the nearest to Arras from which the battle derives its name.

Snow’s Seventh Corps had the Twenty-first North Country Division upon the extreme right, the Thirtieth Lancashire Division in the centre, the Fifty-sixth London on their left, and the Fourteenth Light Division upon the extreme northern wing. The soldiers, soaked to the skin, with the rain beating upon their backs, and their feet ankle-deep in the mud, set about their task in a calm, businesslike fashion which would take no denial. No village or notable fixed points lay in their path, but they plodded without a check or halt over the first two lines of entrenchments, finding no very strong resistance, save at one point upon the left of their line, and suffering little loss from the German artillery. Considerable numbers of the enemy were found scattered in their shattered trenches or cowering in the dug-outs. Over a thousand of these were sent to the rear. The advance was at the point where the new German line branched away from the old one, the Twenty-first Division on the right joining the left of Gough’s Army in the neighbourhood of the Cojeul River, while the Fourteenth Division was in touch with the Third Division on the north.

The immediate objectives of the various divisions of this Seventh Corps were Telegraph Hill in the north opposite to the Fourteenth Division, Neuville Vitasse opposite to the Fifty-sixth Division, St. Martin-sur-Cojeul opposite the Thirtieth Division, and the Hindenburg line opposite the Twenty-first Division. Taking them in turn from the south, we shall first follow the fortunes of the north countrymen of Campbell’s Division. This division upon the first day was not expected to do more than make a strong demonstration, because both it, and to a less extent the division upon its left, had in front of it sheets of uncut wire and all the devilries of the fixed German line. The object, therefore, was that they should make a holding attack in the hope that the northern divisions of the corps should get well forward to the east, and their swing to the south in such a way as to make the German position untenable. This was eventually done, and a way was cleared so that the two divisions in the south should be able to advance with the remainder of the line. The whole operation of the Seventh Corps has to be continually judged by the fact that they were on the edge of the abandoned area, and that therefore their southern front bulged out to the east in a way which brought the successive divisions almost into an echelon formation.

On the left of the Twenty-first Division were the Lancashire pals of the Thirtieth Division. Upon April 8 they had made a good start, as the 2nd Bedfords carried the village of St. Martin, an outlier of the Hindenburg line, but on the same date the 21st Brigade was held up in an attempt to advance upon the left. They advanced on April 9 with the 21st Brigade upon the left and the 90th upon the right. The first dash behind a splendid barrage was most successful, but the 21st Brigade, after passing the front German lines, ran into uncut wire and was held, the 18th Liverpools suffering severely. The brigade upon the right managed, however, to get forward for some distance, but it also was faced by uncut wire, and was compelled to dig in as best it could. The attack was renewed two days later with the aid of four tanks, but the wire still held, though the devoted infantry tried again and again. Finally, however, the Fifty-sixth Division having cleared its own front sent the Victoria Rifles bombing down the front of the Thirtieth Division, who in turn cleared the front of the Twenty-first Division on their right, and so by the evening of April 11 the line was finally advanced. The clearing of the front of the Twenty-first was done by the 18th Manchesters, who, unsupported, bombed their way down 1700 yards of Hindenburg line, a very notable achievement.

To Hull’s Fifty-sixth Division, the next upon the north, was assigned the capture of Neuville Vitasse and the strong-works which surrounded it. The advance was carried out at 7:45 — the zero time was earlier as it travelled up the line — and was led by the 167th Brigade upon the right and by the 168th Brigade upon the left, while the 169th were in support. “The bombardment and the covering. fire were magnificent,” says one who marched in the ranks; “I almost felt sorry for the poor old Hun, only, after all, he is such a Hun.” The chief fighting was on the right, where the 3rd London and 8th Middlesex stormed the main portion of the village. At 10:30 all the eastern edge had been secured, and the 1st London moved forward to take the Cojeul Switch line. Unfortunately, they struck up against uncut wire and a very heavy belt of fire. Colonel Smith, the commanding officer, and the great majority of the other officers were killed or wounded, and the advance was brought to a stand. The 18th Liverpools of the 21st Brigade upon the right had also been halted by the uncut wire. The colonel of the 7th Middlesex took command of this difficult situation so far as it affected the advance of his brigade, and threw his battalion in to strengthen the 1st Londons, so that together they captured the Cojeul Switch Trench. The Londoners were then well ahead of the Liverpool The men upon their right, so the 1st London threw back a defensive flank while the 7th Middlesex stormed forward against the powerful Ibex Trench. Three separate attempts were made, much impeded by the deep mud, and all ending in failure, so that darkness fell before the task had been accomplished, but with true British tenacity, at 3 A.M., in the darkest hour before dawn, the Middlesex men tried once more and carried Ibex, taking a number of prisoners. The 168th Brigade had with varying fortunes kept pace upon the left, and in the early morning the London Scottish on its right were in touch with Ibex Trench. The position of the 167th was still dangerous upon the flank, as it was always ahead of its southern neighbours, so that instead of advancing eastwards, the colonel of the Middlesex now turned south, his depleted ranks being strengthened by the 9th London (Victorias) from the reserve brigade. The enemy were only forty yards off upon the flank, with a perfect warren of trenches, and the mud was so dreadful that some men who got in could hardly be dragged out again alive. In spite of every difficulty the Londoners, after an initial check, swept trimnphantly down Ibex and Zoo trenches, clearing in one wild, glorious rush the whole position, capturing 197 more prisoners of the 31st Prussian Regiment with several machine-guns. Captain Cousens, who led this charge, after being badly wounded, was unhappily killed by a sniper in the moment of victory. The Victorias were too late to join in the victorious charge which stands to the credit of the 7th Middlesex, but they helped to hold and to extend what had been won. The general effect of the advance of this division was to turn the flank of the southern German defences and to open up a road for the Thirtieth and Twenty-first Divisions upon the right.

The Fourteenth Light Division to the north of the Londoners was faced by the slight slope and formidable defences of Telegraph Hill. They went forward in close conformity with the Sixth Corps upon their left, the 42nd Brigade being upon the left and the 43rd upon the right. Their movement during the day was a particularly fine one, and they not only took the strong position of Telegraph Hill, but they carried the British line to a point far to the east of it. Their whole advance was largely regulated by the situation upon their northern flank, and they were exposed to such an enfilade fire whenever they got at all ahead, that they found it impossible to act entirely upon their own.

Upon the left of the front was a strong German position called “The Harp,” which was very gallantly carried by the 42nd Brigade. Sixteen tanks which were to have lent them a hand in this difficult operation failed for some reason to arrive in time, and the infantry had to advance with no help save their own stout hearts. The attack was carried out by the 9th K.R.R. with the 4th Royal Fusiliers of the Third Division acting upon their left, and their comrades of the 6th Oxford and Bucks upon their right. Their only serious opponents here as elsewhere were snipers and machine-gunners, but these were all of the best, and caused heavy losses before the whole objective with its garrison had been captured. By 9:15 in the morning it was entirely in British hands, and as the day wore on the division kept steadily improving their position, though still short of their final objective, that elusive line, which is so easy to draw and so hard to attain. In the evening, an attempt was made by the Fourteenth Division to struggle still further eastwards. This advance had no success, and so the forward units of the whole Seventh Corps dug in on the general line from Feuchy Chapel road in the north to near Croisilles in the south, having after a desperate day’s fighting achieved a gain which averaged two or three miles, and a total of nearly 2000 prisoners with a number of guns. Concerning these prisoners, it may be unsafe to generalise, but it is certain that many of them surrendered very readily. As to their general type the opinion of a commanding officer who handled many of them may be quoted: “The officers were mild persons, none of the bullet-headed, bristly-moustached, truculent Prussian type. The prisoners generally do not inspire one with respect. Braggarts and bullies in prosperity, in adversity they cringe.”

Haldane’s Sixth Corps was to the immediate left of the Seventh, and its operations were directed due east of Arras. The three front divisions, counting from the south, were the Third, the Twelfth South of England, and the Fifteenth Scottish, with the Thirty-seventh English in reserve. The troops of the assaulting divisions had been assembled for three days in the caves under Arras, but on the night of April 8 they were silently passed into the assembly trenches, an operation which was carried through with little interference or loss. The vile weather may have been a blessing in disguise, as it covered all the preparations from the German observation.

The right of the attacking line was formed by the 76th Brigade of the Third Division, a unit which had distinguished itself greatly in previous fighting. The 8th and 9th Brigades were in close support. Its front was south of the Arras-Cambrai road. To the left of the 76th Brigade the line was carried on by the 37th and 36th Brigades of the Twelfth Division. Their right rested on the Arras-Cambrai road. To their left were the 44th and 45th of the Fifteenth Division. Their left rested upon the Scarpe. Nothing could have gone more smoothly than the advance, which kept well up with the barrage. Only at Observation Hill was vigorous resistance encountered, and the German barrage was so belated that it fell upon empty trenches after the stormers had left them. The line of infantry as it swept forward in its irresistible advance was formed, counting from the south, by the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the 1st Gordons, the 6th Queen's, the 7th East Surreys, the 11th Middlesex, the 7th Sussex, the 8/10th* Gordons, the 9th Black Watch, the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers, and the 11th Argyll and Sutherlands. To the courage which had always been their birthright, the infantry now added all the cool war wisdom which experience of many battles must bring with it, and all those devices for overcoming the scattered forts of the enemy and avoiding their machine-guns, which had been learned on the Somme and the Ancre, were now practised to keep down the losses of the assault.

[*Where two numbers are given for one battalion, it means that two battalions with these numbers have been telescoped into one.]

The advance of the 76th Brigade had been to the south of the great high road which leads from Arras to Cambrai — a road which was destined to be second only to the Menin road as a centre of hard fighting.

The Gordons led the attack and took the front line with a number of the Prussian 38th Regiment. The The l0th Welsh Fusiliers then passed through the ranks of the Highlanders and captured Devil's Wood. So swift were these movements that the German barrage was always in the rear. Having thus secured the first objective, the 9th Brigade, strengthened by the 2nd Suffolks, stormed forward to the next line of defence. The 4th Royal Fusiliers on the right took Nomeny, Spring, and Lynx Trenches, w^hen the Suffolks passed through them and took Neuilly Trench. The 12th West Yorkshires took Tilloy village. The 13th Liverpool, after being held up on the left, carried the line forward and, by getting its machine-gun on to the roof of Tilloy Château, dominated the country to the extreme discomfort of the German snipers. Besides these numerous trenches and strong points, the

9th Brigade helped to take the fortified position known as The Harp, an exploit in which they were much assisted by a couple of tanks. Here a considerable number of prisoners were made, including most of a battalion of the 162nd Regiment, together with its commander.

It will save confusion if we follow the fortunes of each division for the day, regardless of what is going on upon its flank, as it is impossible to understand a narrative which switches continually from one portion of the line to another. The whole operation of the Sixth Corps was somewhat behind the time appointed, as each division had met with some delays, but the advance towards the third objective was begun about one o’clock in this southern area. The-8th Brigade had now taken up the running, and the 9th had fallen into support. Reinforced by the two reserve battalions of the 76th Brigade, the victorious advance was resumed, the 2nd Royal Scots and 7th Shropshires carrying the Bois des Boeufs to the south of the Cambrai road, together with five guns which had been concealed in it. To those who had experienced what the capture of a wood meant in the Somme fighting, it was indeed a promise for the future that this considerable plantation should offer so slight a resistance. The 8th Brigade fought its way onwards for another mile or more until it had attained the line of Feuchy Chapel. Here the German resistance had thickened and the artillery fire had increased in the same ratio as the British had weakened. A halt was called, therefore, and the infantry consolidated their advanced position. An attempt by the Gordons and the 8th Royal Lancasters to reach the extreme final objective was checked in the evening by a very heavy fire upon both flanks.

In the centre, the Twelfth Division had met with strong resistance at several points, which caused the assault to fall behind the barrage. These centres of German resistance were usually isolated houses or small redoubts, so that it was possible in many cases to mask them and to push onwards. No village or large fixed defence lay in their path, and in spite of a check for some time at the estaminet upon the Cambrai road, they were able to line up with their comrades to the south upon the second objective about half-past twelve o’clock. At this point the 35th Brigade passed through the advanced lines and moved to the front. A number of difficult positions were taken, including Observation Hill, and th-e ground was so thoroughly cleared that the assailants were able to go forward with the assurance that their wounds would not be in the back. It was found, however, as they neared the line of the third German position, that considerable stretches of wire had been imperfectly cut, and that the machine-gun fire was so severe as to make the final assault impossible. The infantry dug in, therefore, and waited for further support from the guns, many of which were already on the move. The 9th Essex upon the right actually reached the Feuchy Chapel Work and held their grip of it, keeping in line with the 8th Brigade upon the south.

The Fifteenth Division to the north of the corps' front had before them the very strong position called the Railway Triangle, where the line to Lens branches away from the line to Douai. This formidable place was attacked by the Scotch infantry, and after a severe struggle it was captured about 11:30 save for its eastern side, which was finally taken later in the morning, the artillery aiding the assailants by some extraordinarily good shooting. The advance was then resumed, and the division found itself shortly after noon in the line of the second objective. Six brigades of field artillery had followed closely upon the heels of the infantry and managed, in spite of the unfavourable state of the ground, to take up a position to cover the further attack. When one recalls the dreadful weather and the shell-pocked state of the countryside, it was a remarkable feat upon the part of the gun-teams to get their pieces so rapidly forward. Several tanks came forward also, and did good work not only upon this front, but at Tilloy and The Harp. The Fifteenth Division was now somewhat behind the others, but shortly after two o'clock the 46th Lowland Brigade advanced upon the third objective.

These splendid soldiers brushed aside every obstacle, and when fired upon at short range by German guns rushed onwards with a yell and captured the battery. By 4 P.M. they had fully reached their final line and had pushed out their patrols some hundreds of yards to the eastwards. This fine advance, which was the only one to reach the extreme limit upon this front, was carried out by the 7th Scots Borderers, 10th Scots Rifles, and 12th Highland Light Infantry, with the 10/11th Highland Light Infantry mopping up behind them.

At 7 P.M. an attempt was made by the two southern divisions to get forward from the Feuchy Chapel Line and gain a position level with the 46th Brigade. Evening was setting in, however, the men were weary and the difficulties manifold, so that no progress was made^both the Third and the Fourteenth Divisions suffering additional losses in the attempt.

The Thirty-seventh Division, composed entirely of English troops. North, South, and Midland, had moved up in the rear of the fighting line, and in the middle of the afternoon it found itself in the German second line system, while the corps' mounted troops had followed behind the Fifteenth Division, as far as the Railway Triangle. As evening fell, the Thirty-seventh Division pushed forward with the intention of reaching the extreme point attained by the Fifteenth Division and then swinging to the right in the hope of capturing Monchy. The advance seems, however, to have taken a direction rather too much to the south, with the result that instead of finding the opening made by the 46th Brigade they came upon the more contracted Feuchy line held by the Twelfth and Third Divisions. Here they were held up by a field of wire as their comrades had already been, and the two brigades concerned — the 111th upon the left and the 112th upon the right — remained in line with the 35th and the 8th Brigades, the units being considerably intermingled. The 63rd Brigade, however, which was now a brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division, though the reader will associate it with the Twenty-first Division in the past, was able to keep its true direction, and before night had finally established itself at the north end of Orange Hill well up to the third objective and in touch with the 46th Brigade. The corps' cavalry also pushed forward along the south bank of the Scarpe, capturing three 8-inch howitzers upon the way, and halting opposite Fampoux, where they were in touch with the Fourth Division upon the northern bank of the river.

Such was the splendid day's work of Haldane's Corps. It is true that in the south the uncut wire had made it impossible for them to reach their ultimate objective, but they had in the space of the one Easter day captured the villages of Feuchy and of Tilloy, the strong redoubts of The Harp and the Railway Triangle, gained some thirty-six square miles of ground, and taken 2000 prisoners with 60 guns. It was a most notable achievement. We shall now pause on the evening of this first day of battle and we shall go back to reconstruct the operations upon the northern bank of the Scarpe.

The Seventeenth Corps (Fergusson) was upon the left of the Sixth. Its right-hand unit, Lukin's Ninth Division, consisting of two Scottish and one South African brigade, was operating upon the immediate north of the Scarpe. This division was to attack with three brigades in line, the 26th on the right, 27th on the left, and South Africans between. Upon the left of the Ninth was Nicholson's Thirty-fourth Division, drawn largely from Scotland and Tyneside, the same fine division which had been the very pivot upon which the battle of July 1 had turned. Upon the left of the corps was the

Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division which had distinguished itself so greatly at Beaumont Hamel five months before. It may be said, therefore, that the fighting line of the Seventeenth Corps upon this great day was predominantly Scottish, but Lambton’s veteran Fourth Division was in immediate support. The whole battle-front was from the right bank of the Scarpe near Arras up to the post known as the Commandant’s House, just south of Thelus. There were no villages over the greater part of this front, but there were great numbers of fortified farms and strong posts of every description, besides the usual lines of wired trenches. The ground was in successive ridges and a big tactical obstacle existed in the Lens — Arras railroad in its alternate cuttings and embankments. The long eager line of Highlanders, Tynesiders, and South Africans rolled over every obstacle, and by ten o’clock had mastered all the first objectives, which were the three lines of German trenches. In the south the Ninth Division, led by a well-known South African Imperial soldier, had carried first Blangy and then Athies by storm. There was a time when the 26th Brigade upon the right was hung up, but with fine initiative the right flank of the Transvaal Regiment worked down along the railway cutting and helped to clear the front of its neighbours. In the centre, the Thirty-fourth Division, after a short check at a network of trenches called “The Pump,” had reached its allotted positions. In the north the clansmen, who as Territorials were sprung from the very soil of the Highlands, had swiftly advanced to the south of Thelus and had covered the right wing of the First Canadians while they captured that village. It was victory all along the line, and victory without those excessive losses which have made many of our greatest successes as tragic as they are glorious. The artillery barrage had been found to be a powerful antidote against the deadly machine-guns. “When our barrage lifted off the railway cutting, the machine-guns had been silenced and all the gunners were found to be dead.” Such was the report of a South African officer.

Allusion has been made to the check caused by the strong point called “The Pump” and the trenches called the Kleemanstellung just east of it. Some detail should be added in this matter, for it retarded the attack of the flanks of two divisions, and the delay caused by it had the effect that the Canadians on the left and the Ninth upon the right were further forward in the late afternoon than part of the Fifty-first and the Thirty-fourth, which might have caused a dangerous situation. The Thirty-fourth Division had advanced upon a three-brigade front, which consisted from the south of the 101st, the 102nd, and the 103rd. On the north of the 103rd was the 152nd Brigade of the Fifty-first Division with the Seaforths as the flank battalion. This pestilent strong point, armed with well-served and well-concealed machine-guns, lay between the two brigades and held up the flanks of both, inflicting considerable losses not only on the Seaforths, but on the 25tb Northumberland Fusiliers, who were on Chapter the left of the Thirty-fourth Division. For a considerable time the advance was held. The 27th reserve battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers were sent up, and one of its companies, led with a fine mixture of valour and cunning, carried the place by storm. The whole line then got forward, but the losses had been heavy, including Colonel Hermon of the 24th Northumberland Fusiliers. In the evening it was found that the final objective had not yet been fully attained at this quarter of the field, for it had been marked at a farm called Maison de la Côte, from which the front line was still a thousand yards distant. A brilliant little attack, however, by the 103rd Brigade, in the early morning of April 10, captured the whole position. Besides the check at The Pump, there had been another on the Fifty-first divisional front at a post called the "Deutsches Haus." The consequence of this was a loss of the barrage and a delay which led to the isolated left of the Fifty-first losing direction entirely and wandering round in a half-circle. The circumstances were so complex that it was not until next morning that they could be cleared up. Had the Germans had the spirit for a counter-attack, they would certainly have found a considerable gap in the line.

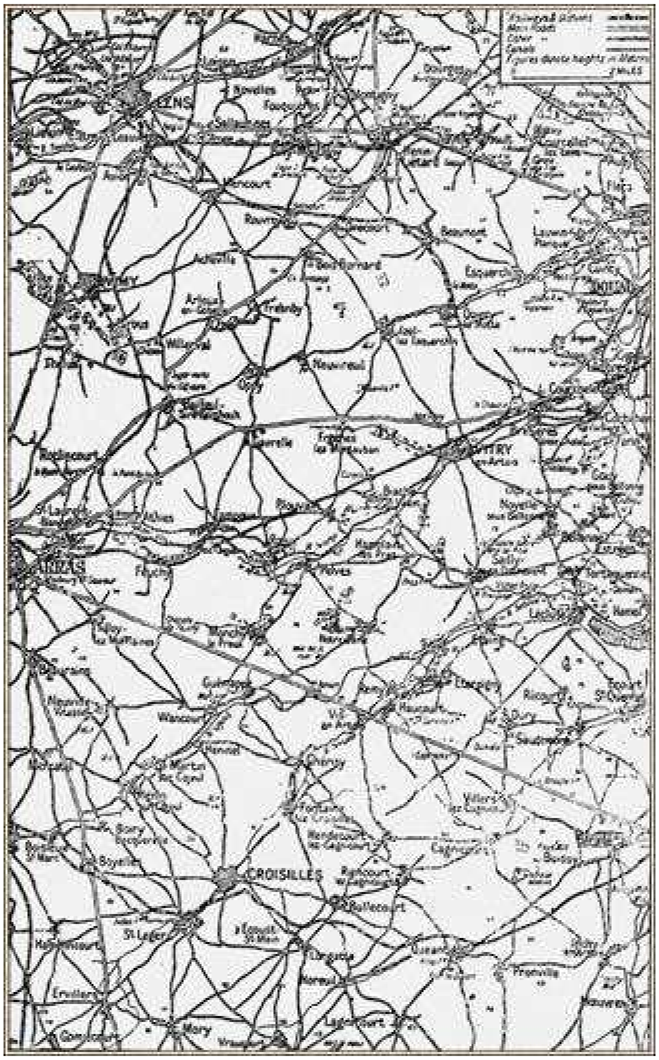

The Arras Front

These events were in the northern area of the Seventeenth Corps. In the southern portion, at about eleven o’clock, the reserve division came forward, and, passing through the weary ranks of the Ninth, pushed on along the northern bank of the river. The advance had already been a splendid one, the Ninth Division having 2000 prisoners to its credit, but this movement of the Fourth Division against an enemy who was already badly shaken was a very fruitful one. The 12th Brigade was nearest the Scarpe, with the 11th upon the left, while the 10th moved forward in close support. Two obstacles faced the division, the straggling village of Fampoux upon the bank of the river, and the Hyderabad Redoubt, a considerable fort to the north of the village. The 12th Brigade moved swiftly forward in the nearest approach to open warfare that had been seen for years. The 1st Royal

Lancasters were on the right of the swift flexible line, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers in the centre, and the 2nd Essex upon the left. The brigade fought its way in the teeth of a very hot fire to the outskirts of Fampoux, where the reserve battalion, the 2nd West Ridings, passed through the King’s Own and carried the village in splendid style late in the evening at the point of the bayonet. It is a remarkable fact that the wire in front of the village had not been cut by the artillery, and the infantry passed in single file through the gaps in it, after disposing of the only German machine-gunner who offered resistance. At the same time the 11th Brigade kept pace upon their left flank — the Hampshires to the left and Somersets to the right, while the 1st Rifle Brigade, passing through them, rushed the strong position of the Hyderabad Redoubt, and the East Lancashires formed a defensive flank. Communication was at once opened across the Scarpe with Haldane’s Corps upon the south side. By this fine advance of the Fourth Division the right of the Seventeenth Corps had got considerably further forward than the centre, so that a defensive line had to be formed sloping back from this advanced point. This was the position upon the evening of the first day of battle, and it was destined to remain so in the south for many a day to come, for the formidable Chemical Works lay immediately to the east on either side of the Arras-Douai railway track, and these were to prove a very grave obstacle to a further advance on this line. Meanwhile, 3500 prisoners with 50 captured guns testified to the success of the Seventeenth Corps.

Following upon this brief sketch of the work done by the Seventh, Sixth, and the Seventeenth Corps upon the first day of the Battle of Arras, we must now turn to the splendid achievement of the Canadian Corps upon the left. The reputation of the Canadians as brilliant soldiers, as dashing in attack as they were steady in defence, had already been solidly established by a long series of military feats beginning with the ever-memorable second battle of Ypres and continuing on to the capture of Courcelette and the fine fighting of the Somme. Hitherto, they had acted in comparatively small bodies, but now the whole might of Canada was drawn together in the four fine divisions which lay facing the historic Vimy Ridge — a long gradual slope which reaches a height of more than 450 feet at the summit. They were arranged in their numerical order from the south, the First (Currie) being in touch with the Fifty-first British Division, while the Fourth (Watson) had upon its left Holland’s First Corps, which was not engaged in the first day’s operations. The front covered by the Canadians was from the south end of the Ridge to the Souchez River, close to Lens. Nothing could have been more magnificent or more successful than their advance, the Second and Third Divisions (Burstall and Lipsett) attaining their full objectives at every point, and the First doing the same after a short check. There was no rebuff save in the extreme north of the line. Sweeping onwards with irresistible fury, they overran three lines of German trenches, including the famous La Folie Farm, captured the village of Farbus, and secured the splendid total of 70 officers and 3500 men as prisoners, the same number as were taken by their British comrades to the immediate south. They not only crowned the redoubtable ridge, but they made their way down the eastern slope and established their line beyond it. Many of the German infantry were captured in the great chalk excavations in which they had taken refuge, two large tunnels in particular — the Volker and the Prinz Arnault Tunnels — being crammed with men. Incredible incidents happened in these subterranean burrows, where small bodies of Canadian moppers-up were faced suddenly by large numbers of armed Germans in hiding. In one well-authenticated case four Canadians bluffed and captured 2 officers and 70 men from a Bavarian unit who were found in such a pocket, an incident which meant a V.C. for Major Macdowell. When the Kaiser in prophetic mood had spoken about what would happen when his Bavarians met the British, such an incident was far from his thoughts. It should be mentioned that the Fifth British Division was in close support of the Canadians, and that the 13th Brigade of this division was incorporated with the Second Canadians upon that day. It was used in conjunction with the 6th Canadian Brigade on its right to take the final objectives, the eastern slopes of the Ridge, just north of Farbus Wood, which they did successfully with slight losses.

During the night of the 9/1 0th April there was fighting at several points, notably at the north end of the Vimy Ridge. Here the Fourth Canadian Division had some difficulty in holding its ground against several strong counter-attacks of the Germans. It is probable that no body of troops in the whole battle had a harder task, or stuck to it more tenaciously, than this Fourth Canadian Division. Hill 145, which was an outlier of the Ridge, was very strongly held and desperately defended, so that it would have turned any but first-class troops. The final clearing of this point was effected upon April 10, and led to further operations in conjunction with British troops to the north, which will be afterwards described.

The second day of the Battle of Arras, April 10, was spent partly in the consolidation of the ground gained and partly in increasing the area now occupied. The troops were in high heart, for although the full extent of the victory had not yet been realised, it was already known that at least 10,000 prisoners and 100 guns had fallen into their hands, figures which showed that the battle had been the most serious military disaster which had yet befallen the enemy. A fuller enumeration taken some days later gave 13,000 men, 3 howitzers, 28 heavy guns, 130 field-guns, 84 trench-mortars, and 250 machine-guns as the total capture. It may be mentioned that over 1000 prisoners were taken from each of the six different German divisions already enumerated, which disposes of their mendacious assertion that only two divisions occupied their front. It was certainly the greatest blow delivered by the British Army up to that date; and the only other day's fighting at all comparable in its results was the French attack upon the Champagne front on September 25, 1915, where the number of prisoners was greater but the capture of guns was

The Battle of Arras may be considered as having been in truth a one-day battle in the same sense as the succeeding Battle of Messines, for in each case the attack was delivered in order to gain a definite objective, which was the ridge from which observation could be obtained. The extreme limit of advance had not, however, been reached either in the south or in the north, and so in both these areas hard fighting continued, due partly to the efforts of the British to enlarge their gains and partly to the rally of the Germans and their attempts at counter-attack. There was no concentration of troops or guns, however, upon the side of the British, and no attempt at any considerable advance. We shall first follow these operations in the south where they centred chiefly round the village of Monchy and Wancourt in the areas of the Sixth and Seventh Corps. These we shall weave into a connected narrative, after which we shall return to the Vimy region and trace the movements which led to hard fighting in that quarter.

In the Seventh Corps to the south the Fifty-sixth Division of London Territorials had, as already described, enlarged the area which it had taken the day before in the Neuville Vitasse sector. The general curve of the line was such that it was not possible for the units of the Seventh Corps to get forward until the Sixth Corps to the north had won some ground, but upon the afternoon of the 12th a very fine advance was made, by which the 169th Brigade stormed Heninel. The Cojeul River was crossed by the Fourteenth

Light Division, and the heights upon the eastern bank were occupied. The 41st Brigade of this unit had now come into the line. The first attempt upon the heights failed with heavy losses Next morning it was found that Hill 90 had been evacuated, and they were able to advance and seize Wancourt. This brought the left flank of the Seventh Corps up to the right flank of the Sixth Corps, and ensured close co-operation in those operations to the north which will presently be more fully described. This storming of the German position in this section was the more important as the troops were faced by the new Hindenburg Line. It was well known that an alternative line from Drocourt to Quéant existed some miles to the eastward, but none the less the fall of the front section at a period when much of its wire was still intact proved to the Germans how impossible it was to hold off British troops by mere passive obstacles. The tanks were of great assistance to the assailants in this difficult operation. Upon April 13 and 14 the Twenty-first Division, with the aid of the 19th Brigade from the Thirty-third Division, carried forward the line to the high ground about 1000 yards east of the stream at Henin, astride of that portion of the Hindenburg Line. Here all further attempts to advance were stopped by fresh German troops, until the operations were renewed upon April 23. This advance of the Twenty-first Division upon April 13 and 14 was in connection with a general movement of Snow’s Corps, but neither the Fifty-sixth London Territorials in the centre nor the Fiftieth North Countrymen on the left, both of them enfiladed from the north, could make much progress beyond the line of Wancourt Tower, and there was little to show for a hard day’s work. The Thirty-third Division (Pinney) now took over the front from the Twenty-first.

The immediate task which lay before the Sixth Corps upon April 10 was to get the Third and Twelfth Divisions forward to the same line which the Fifteenth Division had reached. It will be remembered that the 46th Brigade of the latter division, together with the 63rd Brigade from the supporting Thirty-seventh Division, had pushed on as far as Orange Hill, half a mile farther eastward than the Feuchy Line which formed the front of the two southern Divisions. Six brigades of field artillery had been hurried up, and with the help of these guns, aided by trench-mortars, the wire which held up the advance was partly blown away. The Third and Twelfth Divisions were then able to move forward and to make one line with the Fifteenth — an operation which was completed by mid-day, the 8th Brigade doing some brilliant work. The strongly fortified-village of Monchy, elevated above the plain, lay immediately in front of the Sixth Corps, and its capture was their next task. With this object in view, the 63rd Brigade was swung found from the north and worked its way south and east, getting into touch with the other brigades of the Thirty-seventh Division, which passed through the newly captured third objective and occupied the ground upon the west of the village. A general advance was then made on each side of the village, the 112th Brigade occupying La Bergère upon the Cambrai road due south of Monchy, while the 1/1 1th Brigade, with the 9th and 10th Royal Fusiliers in the lead, in the face of a considerable opposition, pushed onwards until it gained a footing on the outskirts of the village and on the high ground to the north of it, where the 154th Company R.E. dug a temporary line. This was the position on the evening of April 10, while the British line had been strengthened by the presence of the 7th Brigade of Cavalry from the Third Cavalry Division, who were following closely behind the Thirty-seventh Division. In all these operations the weather greatly impeded progress, as it prevented the advance of the guns needed to break down wire and other obstacles.

During the night of April 10 the Twelfth Division was withdrawn into reserve, and the advance was resumed in the early morning by the remaining divisions and the cavalry. At 5 A.M. the infantry was. closing in upon Monchy under a heavy fire. The line of advance extended right across the Cambrai road, the 76th Brigade finding itself opposite to the village of Guémappe. Here they were exposed to a very heavy fire of machine-guns, and this famous brigade sustained heavy losses, which were increased by a second attempt to get forward in the afternoon. The 76th Brigade finally entrenched itself some half a mile to the west of Guémappe and waited for developments. The 8th Royal Lancasters were particularly hard hit in their attack.

In the meantime the 111th Brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division had advanced directly upon Monchy, and after severe fighting, in which the splendid infantry struggled onwards in the face of every possible difficulty of German resistance and of driving snowstorms, the place was carried by assault. The three regiments of cavalry from the 8th Brigade, the Royal Horse Guards, 10th Hussars, and Essex Yeomanry, advanced at a gallop and did splendid service by taking part in the attack, following closely upon the infantry, and helping to consolidate the village. By nine o’clock in the morning the I3th K.R.R. and 13th Rifle Brigade, greatly aided by a very active and April 11. efficient tank, had driven their way to the farthest houses upon the eastern side. About 150 of the garrison remained in their hands, while very many lay dead among the ruins of the shattered buildings. The cavalry, who lost their brave leader. General Bulkeley Johnson, emerged on the eastern side of the village and lost heavily at that point, especially in horses, some 500 of which were hit. They had the satisfaction, however, of getting their light guns fairly on to the Germans, as they streamed across the open. One who was present says: “The cavalry filled the gap between us and the 112th Brigade. They lost heavily, and their conduct was magnificent.” The new gain was instantly consolidated by the Colonel of the Rifles.

The Fifteenth Division upon the left of the Thirty-seventh had been fighting its way forward upon the north, endeavouring to keep in line with the Thirty-seventh. It had got somewhat ahead of the Fourth Division, however, which was to the north of the Scarpe, and in consequence had to face the whole fire from the strong village of Roeux, which held them up. The general line of the corps that night was La Bergère, Monchy, and then the line of the Monchy-Fampoux road as far as the Scarpe. To the north of the Scarpe there had been no forward movement, as the Chemical Works to the east of Fampoux presented an obstacle which was beyond the immediate scope of Sir Charles Fergusson’s operations.

On the night of April 11 the Thirty-seventh Division, which had suffered considerably in the capture of Monchy, and the Fifteenth which had lived up to its reputation during fifty-six hours of incessant fighting under most inclement conditions, were withdrawn for a short rest, while the Twelfth Division returned into the line, and the Seventeenth took the place of the Thirty-seventh. April 12 was spent in consolidation and in bringing up heavy howitzer batteries along the Cambrai road, and placing them in positions between Feuchy and Tilloy where they could support the coming operations.

From the time that the British had captured the village, both it and the whole front line in that area had been subjected to a most severe German bombardment, which tried the troops extremely, but did not prevent them from repulsing several attempts at counter-attack, none of which reached the front trenches. On the night of April 12 the Twelfth Division, which was considerably worn from its exertions, was drawn out and was replaced by the famous Twenty-ninth Regular Division, which had gained such honour and suffered such losses at Gallipoli and on the Somme. There was no forward movement upon April 13 in the region of Monchy, but farther south the 9th Brigade, which had. taken the place of the 76th in front of Guémappe, endeavoured to reach that village, but were met and checked by' the same murderous machine-gun fire which had held up their comrades, a fire which came both from the hamlet itself and from the high ground to the south which lay within the area of the Seventh Corps. The 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and 12th West Yorks, which led the attack, both suffered severely. As no large movement was contemplated upon this front it was now held by only two divisions, the Twenty-ninth to the south and the Seventeenth to the north, covering the whole broad area from the north of the Cojeul River to the south of the Scarpe.

At 5:30 upon April 14 both divisions advanced in order to test the German strength and, if possible, to push them farther back from Monchy. It was an unsuccessful day, and yet it was one of those failures which will be remembered where facile successes have been forgotten, for it brought with it one episode which elicited in the highest degree the historical qualities of British infantry. It had been arranged that the 88th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, 1st Essex, and the Newfoundland Regiment, should attack due east of Monchy, while another brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division should advance to their right, and the Seventeenth Division guard their flank upon the left. Both of the flank attacks failed, however, and the result was that the storming line of the 88th Brigade, consisting of the Essex men on the left and the Newfoundlanders on the right, found themselves in possession of the German trenches on Infantry Hill, east of Monchy, but with both wings exposed and with so terrific a barrage behind them that they were practically cut off from assistance. This might have mattered little under ordinary circumstances, since two such battalions might be counted upon to hold their ground, but by an evil chance their advance had coincided with a considerable German counter-attack from the Bois du Sart, made by a whole Bavarian division with the intention of retaking Monchy. The result was a Homeric contest in which two battalions held up a whole division, shattered a considerable attack, and were practically annihilated in doing so. Of some companies not a single man returned and yet few were ever reported as prisoners in Germany. No more gallant feat of arms has been performed in the war. The 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters in support did their best to help their comrades, and sustained considerable losses themselves in the attempt, but they were never able to reach the real front line, and it is undoubtedly true that the two battalions alone received and broke the full strength of the Bavarian Division, which was entirely fresh, having taken no part in any previous fighting. It was difficult in the barrage and confusion — the ground being unreconnoitred — to direct reinforcements to the points where they were so urgently needed, but a lieutenant of the Essex passed through the German barrage and managed to bring up one company of the 2nd Hants, who came too late to retrieve the fight, but were able to take up the defence of the northern flank and to prevent the Germans from getting round in that quarter. Small parties of the enemy got up to the fringes of the village, but the edge had been taken completely from their assault, and in spite of the heavy barrage, the staff of the brigade headquarters, who were the only troops available, were sufficient to hold them off; Colonel Forbes Robertson doing particularly good work with a Lewis gun. No German set foot in Monchy. Of the headquarter staff there were only nine survivors, each of whom was decorated.

Apart from the attack so heroically repelled, a second had developed to the south-east of Monchy which was driven back by rifles and machine-guns. The total German losses during the day must have been very heavy, and they had nothing to show for it, though the British casualties amounted to some 4000, chiefly in the Twenty-ninth Division.

It must be admitted that the Germans, who had been strongly reinforced in men and in guns, were fighting with great resolution on this front, and their defence and counter-attacks were equally gallant.

From this date onwards until April 22, there was no particular forward movement, and every effort was concentrated upon the improvement of defences and communications. There were no fresh German counter-attacks, but there was constant and heavy bombardment upon both sides, the Germans pouring shells into Monchy and raking every road which led to the front, while the British overwhelmed Guémappe, Roeux, and Pelves with their fire. The only change of troops was that upon the night of April 19 the Fifteenth Scottish Division, after its short rest, pushed in upon the right of the Twenty-ninth Division, taking over the ground between La Bergère on the north and the Cojeul River on the south. The order of battle of the Sixth Corps was therefore from the north the Seventeenth, Twenty-ninth, and Fifteenth Divisions. We shall now retrace our steps to glance at what had been going on since the first day of the battle upon the front of the Seventeenth Corps to the immediate north of the Scarpe. It has already been recorded how the flank unit, the Fourth Division, after relieving the Ninth Division found itself faced with the strongly-fortified Chemical Works and the village of Roeux. The position was a very formidable one, as future tragic experiences were to prove. Two brigades of the Ninth Division, the 27th Lowlanders upon the left and the South Africans upon the right, were ordered to pass the line of the Fourth Division and to endeavour to carry the place by assault. The attempt was not successful, though it was urged with great valour. The wastage of the division had already been such that neither brigade numbered 2000 bayonets. The average strength of the South African regiments was about 400 men. As a result, the attack was wanting in weight, and was repulsed with considerable loss, which fell chiefly upon the 1st Cape and 2nd Natal battalions in the front line of the South Africans. The attackers endured heavy losses in debouching from the narrow exits of Fampoux under fire, and they were afterwards faced with 700 yards of open ground swept by bullets. In spite of this, some of the stormers did actually penetrate the German lines, as was proved later by the discovery of their bodies.

To the north of this section of fierce fighting the line, which had sagged upon the evening of April 9, had been brought level upon April 10 by the readjustment of the Fifty-first Division, and by the attack of the 103rd Brigade of Tyneside Scottish upon the Maison de la Côte position. From that time the British front was firm in this region, and a strong counter-attack of four German battalions, who could be seen streaming westwards in lines of motor ‘buses, was broken to pieces upon the night of April 11 by the steady rifle-fire of the 27th Northumberland Fusiliers who occupied the front trenches.

Facing this section of the line was the village of Bailleul which was abandoned by the Germans, and was taken over by Pereira’s Second Division, who had relieved the Highland Territorials upon April 13. Shortly afterwards the Sixty-third Naval Division took over from the Thirty-fourth. These two divisions belonged to the Thirteenth Corps (M’Cracken), which from now onward occupied a space in the line between the Seventeenth to the south and the Canadians to the north. The strong villages of Oppy and of Gavrelle lay now in front of the British in this quarter, but the German line was destined to remain unbroken for a considerable period. An attack was made upon Gavrelle by the 190th Brigade, the landsman unit of the Naval Division, but this was only partially successful. Farther to the north the Second Division had no better fortune against Oppy, which was attempted more than once. The further advance against these places will be found recorded further on, where it will fit into its place among the other incidents of the renewed general attack upon April 23. The Canadians in the Vimy Ridge area were occupied during three days of dreadful weather in consolidating their new positions, and in pushing the Germans out of that northern portion which they still held. The Fourth Canadian Division had suffered much from machine-gun fire from Hill 145 in the Souchez district, but this was taken upon April 10. There was still a good deal of work to be done, however, at that end of the line, and upon April 12 a joint attack of Canadians and British cleared the ground in this quarter. Attacking at dawn in a snowstorm, the resolute Canadian infantry drove their way over the northern limits of Vimy Ridge, capturing among other positions an outlier of the Vimy Ridge, the venomous little hill called The Pimple, which had been a thorn in their side. At the same time the Twenty-fourth British Division moved forward nearly opposite to Lens, the river Souchez separating them from the Canadians. The immediate obstacle which faced the British troops was a scattered wood, the Bois-en-Haches, which was most gallantly attacked by the 73rd Brigade. The front line in this fine advance was formed by the 9th Sussex on the left and the 2nd Leinsters upon the right, supported by the 13th Middlesex and 7th Northamptons. Both the Sussex and the Irish battalions, especially the latter, had heavy losses, but they never faltered until their objective was won. Upon April 13 there was a general forward movement along the whole Canadian line, in the course of which they occupied Willerval in the south and both Vimy and Givenchy-en-Gohelle in the north. On the same date the 15th and 95th Brigades of the British Fifth Division took over from the Fourth Canadian Division from the Souchez River to south of Givenchy-en-Gohelle. These two brigades actually took over on the move forward, and did not stop until they had reached a line Cité-des-Petits-Bois to the Vimy-Lens road just short of La Coulotte.

The Twenty-fourth Division in the north joined in this attack as, to a limited extent, did the Sixth Division upon its left. It may be explained that both of these divisions, together with the Forty-sixth in support of them, formed Holland’s First Corps. The Twenty-fourth Division advanced upon a three-brigade front, the 72nd, 17th, and 73rd Brigades in that order from the left, sweeping forward in one line. Complete success attended their efforts. Angres, Lievin, and Cité St. Pierre were all stormed and occupied. The 17th Brigade, which had been strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Marine. Battalion, did particularly well, for it was faced by two dangerous strong points called Crook and Crazy, both of which were carried, the 3rd Rifle Brigade being conspicuous in each operation. Some days later, the Forty-sixth Division took over from the Twenty-fourth and the new line was firmly held, the area of the Forty-sixth being from the Souchez River in the south to Fosse 12 de Lens in the north. Farther to the north the Sixth Division had made some progress, but had not been able to surmount the old enemy, Hill 70, the long, clear glacis of which had cost the British such losses at Loos. The Twenty-fourth Division had lost 3000 men in these operations, but their services had been of great value, for the grip upon Lens was appreciably tighter, and according to Sir Douglas Haig's despatch it was the capture of this position which prevented the Germans from attempting the retaking of the positions which they had lost. The British Army was close to the great mining centre, one of the springs of wealth in France. Ominous explosions and dense plumes of dark smoke seemed to show that it was a spring which would be sealed for many a day. So precipitate had been the German retreat in this area that candles were found burning in the dug-outs, meals were half consumed, and large stores of engineering materials and grenades were left behind.

Pausing for a moment at this instant, with the line advanced from three to six miles along the whole front, one may take a glance at the practical results of this great battle. As a mere military triumph it was a considerable one, since the total booty in the immediate battle came by this date to some 14,000 men and 180 guns. Its strategical result was to win the high ground along the whole of a front which had been considered impregnable, and so to give both better observation and drier foothold to the army. It was clear that it must entail a prolongation of the same operation to the north, and this was manifested two months later at the victory of Messines. That again pointed to a fresh prolongation towards the higher ground round Ypres, which led to the severe but successful fighting in the autumn. Thus the Arras Battle was the prologue to the whole campaign of 1917.

It is impossible, even in so brief an account as this, to turn away from this great victory without a word as to the splendid service of the airmen, and the glorious efforts by which they secured the supremacy over their brave adversaries. The air, the guns, the infantry — those are the three stages which lead from one to the- other in a modern battle. Starting with every possible disadvantage, our knight-errants of the air, as without hyberbole they may well be called, by a wonderful mixture of reckless dare-devil bravery and technical skill brought their side to victory. The mixture of the Berserk fighter and of the cool engineer, ^s ready with the spanner and oil-can as with the pistol and machine-gun, is indeed a strange product of modern tactics. No mention of these grand men, most of them hardly more than boys in their years, could be complete which did not specially name one who is likely to remain as a great memory and inspiration in the Service, Captain Albert Ball, a gallant youth whose bravery and modesty were equally beautiful. He brought down not less than forty-three German planes in single combat before meeting his own glorious end.

Whilst this battle had been raging along the Arras front, the great southern curve which marked the eventual halting-place of the German retreat was the scene of continual fighting, which attained no great intensity save at Bullecourt, but smouldered all along the line, as the British drove in the outlying German posts and impinged upon the main Hindenburg position from Croisilles to St. Quentin. Detail of these smaller operations hardly comes within the scale of this narrative, but some indication of their nature and sequence may be given. On April 2 had been the successful advance upon Ecoust, Noreuil, Louverval, and Doignies, which was carried out to the immediate south of the Seventh Corps area by the left of Gough’s Fifth Army. The troops engaged were the British Divisions — the Seventh, Fifty-eighth, and Sixty-second upon the left near Croisilles, the Fourth Australians at Noreuil, and the Fifth Australians at Doignies and Hermies. This brought the army in this section up to the front Hindenburg Line, which the Australians with little support behind them proceeded at once to break, a most valiant but rather rash undertaking, as it was clear that the task was one which required the massed batteries of several army corps to bring it to success. The idea was to connect up with the flank of the Third Army in its new positions and the Sixty-second British Division advance on the left for the same purpose. The attack, which began upon April 12, was directed against the line at a point between Bullecourt village upon the left and Lagnicourt upon the right. A broad apron of barbed wire covered the whole German front, and the only means of piercing it, in the absence of heavy gun power, was by the crushing force of tanks. The attack was delivered across the snow in the early morning by men many of whom had never seen snow in their lives until they entered the war zone. In some places the tanks broke the wire, but for the greater part the infantry — West Australians and New South Welshmen on right, Victorians on left — with extraordinary gallantry and with considerable loss worked its way through it, taking the village of Riencourt. On the farther side, however, they were met with repeated bombing attacks which continued through the morning and afternoon with such pertinacity that the Australian supply of bombs was exhausted. There were only three tanks, and though they behaved with the greatest audacity they were all put out of action. The artillery support being inadequate, the infantry had to fall back, and one considerable party, some 700 in number, were unable to get through the wire, so that after doing all that men could do they were compelled to surrender. Several of these men escaped later with fresh tales of that German brutality to prisoners which has been their constant policy, with a few honourable exceptions, since the first days of the war. When the large national issues have been settled or forgotten, these smaller villainies will leave Germans as outcasts among the civilised nations of the earth, with no living men save the murderers of Armenia with whom they can hold equal converse. This temporary repulse upon the Hindenburg Line by no means disheartened the Australians, who argued that if with so little support they could effect so much, a more deliberate assault could hardly fail of success. Within three weeks, as will be shown, they were to prove the truth of their contention.

In the meantime, a considerable German attack had been prepared which fell upon the Australian line in the early morning of April 15. Two Guards Divisions and two ordinary divisions took part in it, so that it was no small matter. The outposts were weak and a number of the field-guns had been brought forward into the front line, so that the first onset crashed through the defences and brought about a situation which might have been dangerous. The front line rallied, and with the aid of support’s advanced so swiftly upon the Germans that they had little time to injure the guns which had come for the moment into their power. The front of the attack was nearly six miles, from Hermies to Noreuil, with its centre at Lagnicourt, and all along this extended position the stormers had rushed forward in heavy masses into the Australian line. It was easier to break than to destroy, for every scattered post spat out bullets from rifles and Lewis guns, fighting viciously until it was either submerged or rescued. In some posts, notably that of Subaltern Pope, an old warrant-officer of the Navy from West Australia, the men fired away every cartridge and then all died together, stabbing and thrusting with their bayonets into the grey clouds which hemmed them in. Seventy German dead were found round his position. In front of Lagnicourt, the Germans had the advanced guns in their hands for nearly two hours, but they had been dismantled by the gunners before they were abandoned, and the Prussian Guardsmen had apparently no means of either moving or of destroying them. All of them, save five, were absolutely intact when retaken. A rush of Queenslanders and New South Welshmen drove back the intruders, retrieved the guns, and followed the fugitives into Lagnicourt. Large numbers of the Germans were shot down in their retreat, especially in their efforts to get back through the gaps in their own wire. Both sides took several hundred prisoners in this action, but the German losses were heavy, and nothing at all was gained.

The units which have been mentioned, the Seventh Fifty-eighth, and Sixty-second Divisions, with the Fourth and Fifth Australian Divisions, constituted for the moment the whole of Gough’s Fifth Army. To its south, extending from the right of the Australians at Hermies down to the junction with the French at St. Quentin, lay Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, which consisted at this period of the Fifteenth Corps (Du Cane) upon the left, with the Twentieth, Eighth, and Forty-eighth Divisions in the line. To the south of this was the Third Corps with the Fifty-ninth, Thirty-fifth, and Thirty-second Divisions in the line. Their general instructions were to push the enemy back so as to gain complete observation of the Hindenburg system. The Twentieth Division pushed up into Havrincourt Wood, and gradually by many skirmishes cleared it of the enemy, an operation which extended over some time, but was not accompanied by any hard fighting.

A sharp little action, already described, was fought at the extreme south of the British line upon April , 13, in which the Thirty-second Division was engaged. This unit captured Fayet, which is only one mile north of St. Quentin. At the same time, the two divisions upon the left, the Thirty-fifth and the Fifty-ninth, advanced and captured the ground in front of them. After some fighting, these two divisions occupied the Gricourt — Pontruet line. This section of the line ceased after April to concern the British commanders, for the St. Quentin end of it was taken over by the French, while the trenches north of that were occupied by Canadian and Indian cavalry, so as to release fresh divisions for the operations in the north.

The full objects of the Arras battle, so far as they could be attained, had been reached after a week of fighting. Had he only himself to consult. Sir Douglas would have assumed a strict defensive from that time onwards and begun at once to transfer his forces for those operations which he had planned in Flanders. It was essential, however, that he should hold and use up as many German divisions as possible in order to help the French offensive which was about to start in the south. How successful the British General had been already in this design is shown by his own statement that after this week of fighting the Germans had twice as many divisions opposite to him as they had at the beginning, and were driven into constant counter-attacks which cost them heavy losses. The whole aftermath of the Battle of Arras, extending until the end of May, is to be judged from this point of view, and though we may be inclined to wince at the heavy losses and the limited results, we have to bear in mind continually the wider strategic meaning of the operations.

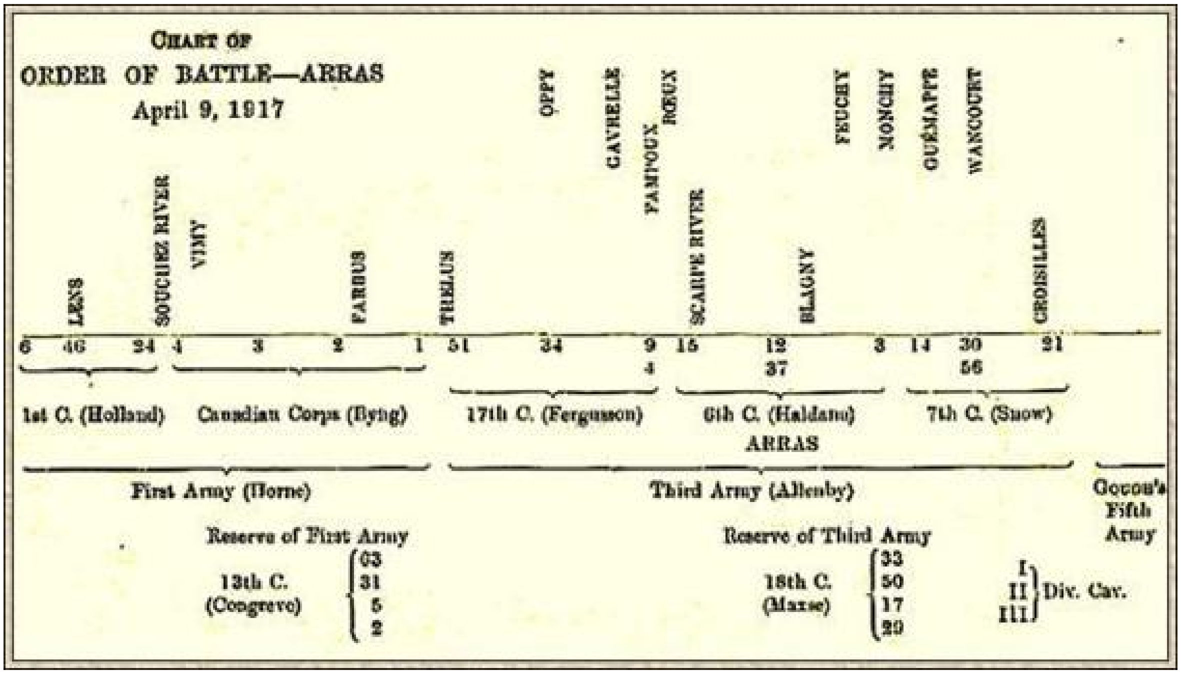
CHART OF
ORDER OF BATTLE—ARRAS
April 9, 1917
LENS
SOUCHEZ RIVER
VIMY
FARBUS
THELUS
OPPY
GAVRELLE
FAMPOUX
ROEUX
SCARPE RIVER
BLANGY
FEUCHY
MONCHY
GUÉMAPPE
WANCOURT
CROISILLES
6
46
24
4
3
2
1
51
34
9
4
15
12
37
3
14
30
56
21
1st C. (Holland)
Canadian Corps (Byng)
17th C. (Fergusson)
6th C. (Haldane)
7th C. (Snow)
ARRAS
First Army (Horne)
Third Army (Allenby)
Gough's Fifth Army
Reserve of First Army
13th C. (Congreve)
63
31
5
2
Reserve of Third Army
18th C. (Maxse)
33
50
17
29
I
II
III
Div. Cav.

Chart of Order of Battle, Arras, April 9, 1917

III. OPERATIONS IN THE ARRAS SECTOR FROM APRIL 23 ONWARDS

Advance of April 23 — Middlesex and Argyll — Grand fighting of the Fifteenth Division — H.A.C. at Gavrelle — Operations of May 3 — The Gavrelle Windmill — Loss of Fresnoy — Capture of Roeux — The long fight at Bullecourt

UPON April 16 the great French offensive had broken out upon the Aisne, directed against the line of Chalk Downs which the British had learned to know so well in 1914, and aiming at that ancient road, the Chemin des Dames, which some of the First Division had actually reached in that year. The attack was very successful in the outset, a haul of prisoners and guns being secured which brought their factory to a level with that at Arras. After a time, however, the defence became too strong for the attack, and the [French losses became very serious. Whilst they were gathering their strength for a fresh blow, which was brilliantly delivered later in the year, it was necessary for Sir Douglas to keep up his pressure to the north, and to engage guns and troops which should, according to his original plan, have been diverted long ago to the Flemish front. This had the effect of delaying the operations there, and this in turn brought us into the premature rainy season which began upon August 1 and lasted with very few breaks for the rest of the autumn. Thus the circumstances at this date, unavoidable as they were, had a malign effect upon the year’s campaign, which was greatly increased by the wild proceedings of the new Russian rulers, if the organisers of anarchy can be known by such a name. These preposterous people, who began their career of democracy by betraying all the democracies of the world, and exemplified their morality by repudiating the loans which had been made to Russia in her need, reduced the armies to such a state of impotence that they were useless as allies, so that the Latin and Anglo-Saxon races had to fight with the full weight of the military autocracies. This fact made the situation both upon the Italian and upon the Western fronts infinitely more serious than it would otherwise have been, since not only the men, but the munitions of the Germans, could be concentrated upon their undoing.

Upon April 23 there was a renewal of the advance all along the British line, which took for its objectives, counting from the south, Bois du Vert, Bois du Sart, Pelves, Roeux, Gavrelle, Oppy, Acheville, etc.

Upon this date, Snow’s Seventh Corps in the south had the Thirty-third Division upon its right, the Thirtieth in the centre, and the Fiftieth upon the left. It was a day of hard fighting and of very limited gains, for General Snow experienced all the disadvantages which the attack has against the defence, when there is no overwhelming artillery to blast a road for the infantry. All three divisions made some progress in the early hours of dawn, but the whole of the two northern divisions and the centre of the Thirty-third Division were soon held up and were finally driven back to their starting-point by very heavy machine-gun fire. About 11 A.M. a heavy German counter-attack, preceded by a terrific shower of shells, came rolling down the Cojeul Valley, driving back the Fiftieth Division after their very fine initial advance. The obstacle in front of the troops was nothing less than the Hindenburg front line, so that they might well find it a difficult nut to crack. The Thirtieth Division fell back in touch with the Fiftieth, but the Thirty-third managed to hold on to its gain of ground on the flank which had brought it into the German front line south of the Sensée River.

The position at this part of the line had become serious, and was ever more so as the evening passed into night, for the forward position of the Thirty-third Division had exposed its whole left flank, its advanced units were cut off, and the Germans, pushing back the Lancashire men of the Thirtieth Division, had worked forward to an extent” which threatened the guns. If the advance continued, the Thirty-third Division must either fall back under most difficult conditions or be overwhelmed. General Pinney held his ground, and was comforted in doing so by the sounds all night of a brisk rifle-fire upon his front, though it was impossible to ascertain what troops were in so isolated a position. With the first light of morning, two battalions of the 19th Brigade, the 20th Royal Fusiliers and 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, were pushed forward to clear up the situation. They came after advancing 1200 yards upon the remains of two grim, battle-stained companies, one of the 1st Middlesex and one of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had spent some fifteen hours in the heart of the enemy’s advance, seeing their attacks sweeping past them, but keeping as steady as two rocks in a stream. Apart from the other hardships of their position, they had endured the whole of the British barrage put down to stop the German advance.

This stout defence not only screened the face of the Thirty-third Division, but to some extent covered the flank of the Thirtieth — a striking example of what may be accomplished by a small body of determined men who refuse to despair, be the situation ever so desperate. In their shell-holes were found a score or so of German prisoners whom they had held in their clutch. Lieutenant Henderson of the Highlanders received the V.C. over the fine stand made by his troops, and Lieut. Archibald of the same battalion, together with Captain Belsham and Lieut. Rutter of the Middlesex, received decorations for valour, as did many of their brave followers. It was a deed which was worthy of the famous 91st and of the old Die-Hards of Albuera. Altogether upon this day the Thirty-third Division gained great distinction, and, as a visible sign of its prowess, 750 prisoners from the German Sixty-first Division.

The attack, so far as the Sixth Corps was concerned, was launched in the early morning of April 23, with the 44th and 45th well-tried Scottish Brigades upon the right; on their left were the 88th and 87th Brigades of Regulars, and farther north still was the 51st Brigade with one battalion of the 50th. The remaining brigades were in reserve, with the Third Division in support behind them.

The advance was met by an extremely heavy machine-gun fire and by a desperately destructive barrage of heavy artillery. In spite of this, the infantry made good progress at several points. The Highlanders of the 44th and the Lowlanders of the 45th Brigades faced the deadly fire with equal bravery, and had soon established themselves to the north and partly to the east of Guémappe. The Twenty-ninth Division had also made a fine advance, being screened from the flank fire which told heavily upon their comrades to north and south. By nine o’clock they had reached the line which had been marked out as their objective, and though the Germans came swarming down from Pelves, they could not budge them from their new positions. On the British left, however, the advance had failed, for the guns in Roeux on the north side of the Scarpe commanded their flank, and the 51st Brigade was unable to get forward in the north, and only slightly in the south. The German counter-attacks developed so strongly in the course of the morning that the Fifteenth Division had to fall back from their advanced positions, taking up a line due north of Guémappe, where it was in very close touch with the Germans in front and with the 88th Brigade upon the left. Both brigades of the Twenty-ninth Division, thrown out in a large semi-circle, held fast to their ground all day. At six in the evening the support brigade of the Fifteenth Division, the 46th Brigade, advanced and again won the forward line, including the village of Guémappe; but the Seventeenth Division upon the left was unable to get forward. The 46th Brigade, as night fell, found its isolated position so precarious that it fell back a little so as to get into closer touch with the right of the Twenty-ninth Division, but still held on to the village. It was a long and hard day's fighting, in which both parties gave and took severe blows. The German resistance was very strong from the first, and though a fair amount of ground was gained, it was at a considerable cost, which was only justified by the fact that the enemy in their counter-attacks suffered even more heavily. At nightfall, a portion only of the first objective had been won. Bavarian and Scot had fought till they were weary round Guémappe, and never had the dour tenacity of our northern troops been more rudely tested. It was a fine exhibition of valour on both sides, but the village stayed with the Scots.

The Seventeenth Corps on the other side of the Scarpe had very similar experiences upon this day of battle as their neighbours in the south. The Thirty-seventh Division was on their left and the Fifty-first upon the right. The Thirty-seventh pushed their line forward to their final objective, which did not contain any particular village. This advanced line they were able to hold. The Fifty-first Division, charging forward with the old Celtic fire, carried the Chemical Works by assault, and the Corona Trench beyond them; but after a desperate day of alternate advance and retreat, their final line was to the west of the Chemical Works. It was a very hard day's work upon this sector, and the losses upon both sides were very heavy.

The Thirteenth Corps upon the same day had attacked Oppy and Gavrelle to the north, with the result that the Sixty-third Division captured the latter. Oppy had proved to be, for the time, inviolable; but the assault upon Gavrelle was brilliantly successful, the village being stormed with a splendid rush, in spite of the most deadly fire, by the 189th and 190th Brigades of the Sixty-third Naval Division. The German losses were greatly increased upon this occasion by their unsuccessful counter-attacks, which spread over several successive days, and never made an impression. It is on record that one gathering of 2000 men, collected in a hollow, was observed and signalled to the guns, with the result that they were simply shot to pieces by a sudden concentration of fire. An officer- who observed this incident has made a statement as to the complete nature of the catastrophe. More than 1000 prisoners were taken on this front, and nearly 3000 in all. To the north of the line the Fifth Division also advanced on the German position, the chief attack being carried out by the 95th Brigade, having the Electric Generating Station as its objective. In this operation the 1st Cornwalls particularly distinguished themselves. The result of the advance was a mere readjustment of the line, for the 15th Brigade upon the right was stopped by uncut wire, though the Germans were actually seen holding up their hands in the trenches. Seeing the attack at a standstill, the Germans brought up their machine-guns and drove it back. Upon the immediate north of the Fifth Division, the Sherwood Forester Brigade of the Forty-sixth Division was brought to a stand in front of Hill 65 and Fosse 3, two strong positions bristling with machine-guns. The 6th and 8th Foresters suffered heavily in this attack, 9 officers and 200 men being killed, wounded, or taken. Farther still to the north, the Sixth Division had moved towards the Dynamite Magazine and Nash Alley, but here also the attack was held by the defence. On the whole, in spite of the prisoners and in spite of Guémappe and Gavrelle, it was doubtful if the gains made up for the losses upon the day’s balance.

A second day of hard fighting was destined to follow that of April 23, though the advance began later in the day. In the area of the Seventh Corps some advance was made in the centre and two field-guns were captured. The Sixth Corps also went forward again. The front attacked was strong, the fire heavy, and the attacking troops had again and again been through the furnace, which had only tempered their courage, but had woefully consumed their numbers. The Fifteenth Division in the south got forward some distance and dug themselves in on the new line. The Twenty-ninth also made some gains, but were unable to retain them, and fell back upon their old line. In the movement some of the parties to flank and rear were overwhelmed, and 250 men, including 3 officers, were taken. In the north, the Seventeenth Division held its old line, and did not join in the advance. After nightfall the Twelfth Division came into line again, relieving the weary Twenty-ninth. Farther north the Seventeenth Corps and the First Army were driving back counter-attacks.

The next day (April 25) saw the long struggle still renewed. In the early morning the 50th and 52nd Brigades of the Seventeenth Division went forward and made some progress, as did the indomitable Fifteenth Division in the south. It was clear, however, that the forces available for attack were not strong enough to attain any considerable result in this portion of the line. The Fifteenth, however, were not to be denied, and with extraordinary tenacity they made a sudden night attack upon April 26, and for a time got possession of a strong German post, called Cavalry Farm, which barred the way. The enemy counter-attacked in the early morning of April 27 and re-occupied the Farm, but the Scotsmen held firmly to the trenches immediately south of it. At this date the Seventeenth drew out of the line and the Third came in again in the centre of the Corps front, while the Twelfth moved to the left. They were just in time to meet a strong German night attack upon April 27, which broke before the rifle and machine-gun fire of the infantry at the point of contact between, the two divisions. The German losses were heavy, and they left a few prisoners behind them.

April 28 had been fixed for a forward movement of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps on the north of the Scarpe, so the Twelfth Division on the south bank advanced in sympathy with it. This attack gained possession of part of Bayonet Trench, a formidable line which crossed the front, but a further attack was unable to clear the whole of it, on account of the very severe machine-gun fire down the Scarpe Valley. It was a day of hard fighting to the north of the Scarpe, which only affected the line of the Sixth Corps to the extent that the Thirty-fourth Division failed to carry the Chemical Works on the north bank of the river. It was the possession by the enemy of this position and of the village of Roeux to the east of it which was so fatal to all advances south of the Scarpe, as the guns from these places enfiladed the southern line. But for this the Twelfth Division might have reached their whole objective. The Thirty-fourth Division made another attempt upon Roeux in the middle of the night, but again without success, and the Second Division farther north had no better luck in front of Oppy.

Although the progress had been very limited at the southern end of the line, there were better results to the north. The Canadians, whose staying power in this long-drawn fighting was as remarkable as their valour, had taken Arleux, together with a considerable section of trench upon either side of it. This fine assault was opposed by wire, by sunken roads, and by a desperate hand-to-hand encounter amid the ruins, all of which failed to hold the Canadian infantry. On their right the 5th and 6th Brigades of the Second Division were heavily engaged in front of Oppy and Oppy Wood with some success at first, but this was neutralised by a strong German counter-attack. Some progress had been made also by the Thirty-seventh Division upon the left, and by the Thirty-fourth Division to the right of the Seventeenth Corps to the north of Gravrelle, and on the slopes of the long incline known as Greenland Hill between Gavrelle and Roeux. In these two days of defensive fighting the German bulletins claimed a victory, but the fact that they had lost ground and nearly 1000 prisoners was sufficient to show how hollow was the pretence. Their losses were greatly increased by the continual unsuccessful counter-attacks which they threw against the new positions in the Oppy line, which had now reached the edge of the village. Gavrelle village was attacked no less than seven times, and each time the stormers were completely repulsed.

One particular deed of valour connected with these operations demands some fuller exposition. The front of the German line which had been breached between Gavrelle on the south and the Bailleul-Gavrelle railway upon the north, was a narrow one, and the Naval Division had penetrated here to a depth of nearly 1000 yards, thus creating a narrow salient into the German defences with its apex at a fortified windmill. The 4th Bedfords, supported by the 7th Royal Fusiliers, were responsible for this advance. The attacks at the north had failed. Thus the troops in the salient had a most difficult task in holding the position in view of the determined counter-attacks, which had continued with hardly a check from April 23, when the salient was formed. The pressure fell upon the 190th Brigade, and very especially upon the 7th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Honourable Artillery Company.

The orders had been given to endeavour to widen the base of the salient by bombing up the German trenches to the northward, and this work was committed to Major Osmond of the H.A.C. The attack was to be carried on in two parallel lines — the one up the original front trench and the other up the original support trench. Three young lieutenants — Pollard, O’Brien, and Haine — led the bombers, and they came away with a rush which would have gladdened the hearts of the many generations of soldiers who have served in this ancient corps. The railway to the north was their limit, and they had almost reached it when Haine’s party found itself held up by a fortress containing 200 of the Fusilier Guards. He sat down before it, repulsed a severe counter-attack, sent back for trench mortars, and upon April 28, after a rest during which the 1st Marine Battalion maintained and enlarged the line, he attacked it in due form. After a short but vigorous bombardment, he captured it with two machine-guns and fifty of the garrison. He was ordered to leave a platoon in the captured post, but they, in turn, were besieged by an attacking force of the German Guards coming down-trench, and driving in the extreme right of the Second Division in the north. The platoon, or what was left of it, blew up the guns and retreated upon the main body of their Company, who were assembled, under Haine, just south of the railway. There they established a block and remained fast, while Pollard threw out his bombers on the left to form a defensive flank.

Whilst the Royal Marines had held the line they had endeavoured to push the Germans to the north and had lost heavily in the venture. They — or the scanty remains of them — were now relieved by the 4th Bedfords and 7th Royal Fusiliers. Encouraged by this strengthening of the general line, the indefatigable Haine, whose company now numbered only thirty-five men, assembled his miniature siege-train, beleaguered the fort once more, and captured it for the second time with its garrison. Pollard with his men then pushed past, and took the northern objective which had already cost so dearly. Having seized it, he called to his aid men of the Bedfords, the 7th Fusiliers, and of the 22nd Royal Fusiliers of the Second Division to hold the new line. The battle swung and swayed for a time as the Germans made successive efforts, but the whole Naval Division front and part of the Second Division front was cleared. The total trench line taken by Pollard was about a |mile, and 1000 yards of this he cleared with the help of four bombers, while Haine repelled no fewer than fourteen attacks. Altogether it was a remarkable example of what audacity and initiative can do, and both these young officers obtained the V.C. for their determined valour, while Major Osmond, in local charge of the operation, won his D.S.O.

May 3 was a day of general battle upon the British front, the attack being arranged to help the coming French advance due upon May 5. The main action raged from Vimy in the north to the Scarpe, while to the south of the Scarpe the Sixth Corps and Seventh Corps still continued their indefatigable struggles to get forward past the Monchy-Guémappe line on to Pelves and Cherisy. The upshot of the long day’s fighting was the capture of Fresnoy by the Canadians at one end of the line, and of a part of the new German line by the Australians at the other end. The Oppy position was also enlarged and strengthened, and progress was made all along the front as far south as Croisilles. Nearly a thousand additional prisoners were taken by the Seventh Corps.

The operations in the southern area upon May 3 were carried out by the hard-worked Twenty-first Division upon the right, the Eighteenth in the centre, and the Fourteenth on the left. Good progress was made all along the line, which extended in the evening roughly from the St. Rohart Factory through a point 1000 yards west of Cherisy to the west edges of Fontaine. All three divisions had hard fighting, and all three lived up to their high reputations. At one time, the 53rd Eastern County Brigade of the Eighteenth Division had actually entered and passed Cherisy, but the pressure of the counter-attacks and of the guns was too strong, and they had to relax their grip. In commenting upon this achievement. General Snow remarked: “I have never met a division which so persistently pushed its way forward during the intervals between heavy fighting, and the ground (over 1000 yards) won in this manner stands to its credit.” The 8th Norfolk and 10th Essex did particularly well. In the Fourteenth Division the 42nd Brigade was in close touch with the Londoners on their left, while the 44th were on the right. The first 1500 yards’ advance of this division was easy going, but here as elsewhere the darkness caused loss of touch and some confusion, which was not improved by the severe fire into which the troops came with the breaking of the dawn. It is a dismal experience at any time to trudge through that leaden sleet, but most dismal surely in that cold ghostly hour of early I morning. The 8th Rifle Brigade and 7th K.R.R. did all that men could do, and held a flank for the Eighteenth Division when they advanced upon Cherisy, but when at last the latter was forced back the Fourteenth Division retired also, and found themselves by 10:30 in the morning little advanced from I where they started.

The exertions and losses of the 42nd Brigade upon the left of the divisional front were not less than those upon the right, nor had they anything solid to show for them. Their advance was led by the 5th Oxford and Bucks upon the right, with the 9th Rifle Brigade upon the left. The Oxfords with great gallantry captured a position called New Trench, and endeavoured to consolidate it, but after sustaining a shattering fire from every sort of missile, and after having lost 300 men, they were charged by six or seven waves of infantry, each wave being j about 150 strong. Their numbers and the volume of their fire were not sufficient to stop such an advance, and the remnants fell back after having taken heavy toll of their assailants.

The advance to the immediate south of the Scarpe was started at an hour before dawn, and was carried out by the Fifty-sixth, Third, and Twelfth Divisions of the Sixth Corps in the order named from south to north. This attack from the onset met with the same terrific machine-gun fire which had limited all our gains and made them so costly upon this front. On the extreme right the 69th Brigade made a most dashing advance, passing through Cavalry Farm in the darkness, and making good their footing in the German system of trenches to the east of it. In this quarter the gain of ground was permanent, but the 167th Brigade upon the left was not so successful, and was held up by wire and machine-guns, as was the 8th Brigade upon its left. All the leading battalions in this quarter sustained crushing losses, especially the 1st London, the 7th Middlesex, and the 2nd Royal Scots. For some reason the British artillery preparation seems to have been entirely inadequate. “As soon as the first wave topped the ridge between our front line and the German trench, it was obvious that the latter had never been adequately dealt with, and had apparently escaped the barrage, as it was full of infantry standing shoulder to shoulder, and waiting for our men to come on. In consequence, while isolated groups got forward, the great bulk of our men were attacked by a withering fire, and pinned down into shell holes from which they were unable to emerge until after darkness.”

The hostile shelling in all this St. Rohart area was almost incessant during the day, and of so heavy a volume that it was such as had hardly ever been witnessed by any one present. “If we had another day of it I verily believe we should have been reduced to idiocy.” So wrote a brave veteran who endured it. It was therefore clear that the British counter-battery work had been at fault. Add to this that the start before dawn had the same effect as in other parts of the line, causing clubbing of units with loss of direction, and it must be admitted that the experience of the soldiers upon May 3 was not a happy one. Deverell’s Third Division upon the left of the Fifty-sixth found much the same conditions and could make little progress. On the extreme left, however, the 36th Brigade of the Twelfth Division, the same unit which had done so well at Ovillers, made a fine advance, gaining the position known as Scabbard Trench. They lost it temporarily to a counter-attack, but it was again taken and permanently held by the 7th Sussex. The fact that the corresponding point on the north bank of the Scarpe had not yet been taken by the flank unit of the Seventeenth Corps made it impossible to get farther forward in this quarter. The difficulty of the Twelfth Division, which had made the farthest advance in the morning, was that they had gone forward in the darkness, and had lost direction and touch with each other, while leaving behind them scattered parties of German infantry. The result was that when the Germans began their counter-attacks the front British lines were practically surrounded, and several small parties of the 37th Brigade were cut off. One little post of the 6th Buffs was entirely isolated a thousand yards ahead of the British line, but held off the enemy all day, and 15 men, the survivors out of 40, made their way back in the evening, scrambling through German trenches and shooting down all opposition. By that time the whole right of the Twelfth Division had been forced back to its original line, but the left still held firm in Scabbard Trench. The division had 2000 casualties in this day’s fighting.

The 169th Brigade had in the meanwhile maintained a difficult position with very great gallantry. This position had been always isolated upon the left, but it was covered upon the right by the successful advance of the Fourteenth Light Division to the south of the Cojeul River. About mid-day, however, a strong German advance forced the Fourteenth Division back to their original line, with the result that the right flank of the 169th Brigade became exposed. It was only when there seemed an imminent possibility of being cut off that this gallant brigade, which contained the 2nd London, Victorias, Westminsters, and London Rifle Brigade, was compelled to drop back to their original line. It was a barren and bloody day in this section of the line, save for the limited gain upon the south of the Scarpe. Two machine-guns and 100 prisoners were the meagre trophies of a long day’s fighting. Yet in estimating results, one must never lose sight of that necessity for constant action which is the only method by which the side which has the stronger reserves can assert its eventual superiority in a war of attrition.

To the north, the Fourth Division gained ground east of the Chemical Works and penetrated into Roeux, but were driven out once more, the 10th and 11th Brigades, especially the 1st Somersets and 2nd Seaforths, having very heavy losses. The Ninth Division got well forward upon their left, some of them over-shooting their objective — Uit Trench — and being cut off. Very heavy counter-attacks in the afternoon broke upon this and upon the other sections of the Third Army. In the evening, both the Fourth and Ninth Divisions with gallant pertinacity tried to get forward again in the hope that their advanced posts might still be rescued, but they had no success. A hundred prisoners were taken, but at least as many were lost, including Highlanders, West Ridings, and Lancashire Fusiliers, victims of their own push and valour.

To the north of the Ninth Division, two divisions of the Thirteenth Corps, the Thirty-first to the south and the Fifth to the north, had beaten furiously against the German line upon the Oppy — Gavrelle sector. The efforts of these divisions were greatly handicapped, as in the case of others, by the very early hour at which the action had begun, and by moonlight in the earlier hours, which exposed the assembly of the troops. Starting in pitch darkness the brigades lost touch and direction, so that they were unable to reach their objectives with the speed and precision which is so necessary if barrages and machine-guns are to be avoided. The 92nd East Yorkshire Brigade of the Thirty-first Division advanced upon Oppy Wood, and found itself among trees in the darkness with criss-cross lacings of barbed wire from the branches in every direction, and a heavy fire beating on their ranks. The obstacles would have been difficult in day-time, but were impossible at night. The battalions got completely mixed up, and finally a strong German attack drove them back to their trenches, in spite of a most strenuous resistance, notable for many deeds of valour, for one of which, the single-handed attack upon a machine-gun, Lieutenant Harrison of the 11th East Yorks received a posthumous Victoria Cross.

The 93rd West Yorkshire Brigade had got off well and had reached its objective, but this successful German attack exposed the 16th West Yorkshires, who were the flank battalion, to pressure upon its left rear, so that they had eventually to fall back. This exposed the 15th and part of the 18th West Yorkshires, who were now holding Gavrelle village and the trenches to the immediate north of it. For a time things were very critical, and the windmill which commanded the village was retaken by the enemy. The Colonel of the 15th West Yorks collected sixty men of his battalion and held splendidly to the east side of the village for the whole day. One company of the 18th Durhams under Lieutenant Hitchings was sent to retake the windmill, which they did, but were driven out again by the shattering fire of the enemy. They re-formed at the foot of the slope and attacked and recaptured the mill once more, only to be driven out for the third time. Again they took the mill, and this time they drove back the German counter-attack and held on to the position. Sixty out of a hundred in the British ranks had fallen, but when the battle painter of the future is in search for a subject, he will find none better than that of the forty survivors under their boy leader, wearied, blood-stained, but victorious in their shot-torn mill. The whole Gavrelle position was now held, the 93rd being strengthened by two battalions from the 94th York and Lancaster Brigade.

The one outstanding success of the day was the capture of Fresnoy by the First Division of Canadians, which was carried out with the usual dash and gallantry of this veteran unit, whose worth had now been proved upon so many battlefields. The fighting was the more severe as the village was full of German troops mustered for an attack. Fresnoy was, however, most difficult to hold, as the enemy had retained trench systems both to the north and to the south of it. Shortly after its capture the First Canadians were drawn out of the line for a rest, and the Thirteenth Corps extended to the left, so as to take over its front and to connect with the Second Canadians.

In the early dawn of May 8 the garrison of the village was driven out by a powerful attack from three German divisions. This attack fell at the point of contact between the left of the British and the right of the Canadians, and was so severe that both were pushed back. The 95th Brigade of the Fifth Division, which had moved down from the Lens area, was the particular one which bore the brunt upon the British line, and the two front battalions, the 1st East Surreys and 12th Gloucesters, lost heavily under the terrible concentrated shell-fire which a survivor who had tested both described as being “as bad as Longueval.” For some reason the artillery support was deficient, and the S.O.S. signals were unanswered. The infantry were driven out by the German rush, and a gallant counter-attack led by a Major of the Gloucesters, with some of their men and some of the 1st Cornwalls, failed to recover the position. The Canadians made no less desperate efforts, but it was impossible to stand against the concentrated bombardment. “You could not see for mud in the air,” says an observer. Fresnoy became once more a part of the German line. The price paid, however, was a very heavy one, for it was only the second attacking division, who were the famous 5th Bavarians, which effected a lodgment after the leading division had been broken and driven back with very heavy losses by the rapid fire of the defenders. Upon the British side a large proportion of the small garrison was killed or wounded, while 300 were taken. The 1st Devons came up in the evening and the line was reconstructed about 600 yards to the rear of the old one. It was determined, however, to push it forward at once, and in the early morning of May 9 the Fourth Canadians upon the left, the Devons in the centre, and the 15th Brigade upon the right, pushed on once more, and established the line close to the village, which still remained in the hands of the enemy.

Up to this point the new British offensive which had started upon April 9, and had now come practically to an end, had yielded the splendid results of 400 officers and 19,100 men prisoners, 98 heavy guns, and 159 field-pieces captured, together with 227 trench mortars, 464 machine-guns, and other material. The battle of May 3, which had ended by some gain of ground, and by the capture of nearly 1000 prisoners (as against some 300 which were lost upon that day), was the last general action along the new line, though it was followed by numerous local engagements.

On May 10, in the dusk of the evening, the lull upon the Scarpe was broken by a most successful attack by the Fourth Division upon Roeux Station, the Cemetery, the Chemical Works, and finally the village itself, every one of these points being taken by storm. The value of this success may be judged by the fact that this was the ninth assault upon the position, a fact which gives an index both of the pertinacity of British infantry and of the steadfast courage of the successive German garrisons. The 10th Brigade, led by that man of many wounds and honours, de Wiart, took the village itself, the Dublin Fusiliers and the newly formed battalion, made from dismounted Household Cavalry, doing good service. Berners’ 11th Brigade had advanced upon the left and captured all their objectives, the 1st Hants taking the Château, whilst the 1st East Lancashires and the 1st Rifle Brigade got the Chemical Works, the scene of so many combats. The place was defended by the 362nd Brandenburgers, who were nearly all killed or taken, the prisoners being over 500 in number. The Fourth Division handed over Roeux to the 51st Highland Territorials, who successfully held it during a very desperate counter-attack upon the night of May 13. The incessant and costly counter-attacks of the Germans in all these regions proved how vital they considered these lost positions. On May 11 there was another sharp little action which improved the British position. Upon that date the 168th Brigade of the Fifty-sixth Division made a sudden attack at nightfall upon Tool Trench, an awkward position which ran along a small spur and had been a cause of loss in the previous attack. It was captured with a rush, together with a handful of prisoners and six machine-guns. This position was consolidated and permanently held. On the same night the 169th Brigade on the right advanced its line between Cavalry Farm and the Cojeul River. Next day an attempt was made to carry forward this success along the northern portion of the corps line, but was met with so heavy a barrage that it was not possible to carry it out.

The strain upon the divisions during this continuous fighting had been so great that it was found necessary to give them all the rest and relief possible. With this object in view, the Sixth Corps front was held now by only two divisions, the Fifty-sixth upon the right and the Twenty-ninth on the left. In order to cover the whole line, the Corps mounted troops were advanced and were placed in the trenches upon the south of the Scarpe, which were less vulnerable since the capture of Roeux by the Fourth Division.

In the dim light of the very early morning of May 16, after a heavy shell-fall, a new division of the enemy was thrust forward just north of the Scarpe. In a long day’s fighting it was practically destroyed, for though in its first ardent advance it flowed over the shot-shattered advance posts, it was finally held, and then after a long tussle was shot out of its new positions by the rifles and Lewis guns, until before evening it was back whence it started. In this brisk action thousands of the assailants w^ere killed or wounded with nothing to show for it save the substantial losses which they inflicted.- This very severe attack fell mainly upon the Fifty-first Division, who showed once more that British formations, even if penetrated, are very far from being defeated.

On May 18 there was a spirited local operation by the 8th Middlesex of the 167th Brigade, in which they made a very gallant bombing attack upon that portion of Tool Trench which was not yet in British hands. The opposition, however, was so strong that no permanent good could be effected. On the next day there was a further attempt to get forward, both by the 167th and by its neighbour, the 87th Brigade. The fire was too deadly, however, and the advance was not successful. This failure seems to have been due to a knowledge on the part of the enemy as to the coming assault, for the machine-gun fire and the barrage opened in full force at the very moment when the leading line of infantry sprang over the lips of their assembly trenches.

May 20 marked a successful advance of the Thirty-third Division on the right of the Seventh Corps, against the Hindenburg Line in the Sensée Valley and southwards towards Bullecourt. On this occasion there was no preliminary bombardment and no creeping barrage. A mist helped the 98th Brigade to deploy unobserved under the bulge of the chalk hills that rise to the south of the Sensée Valley. When this mist rose the Germans had a fine, though transitory, view of British tactics, for the battalions were advancing as upon an Aldershot field day. The 100th Brigade worked down the Hindenburg Line north of the river, crossed it, and joined hands with their comrades on the south. It was a complete surprise, and counter-attack was checked by the volume of the British gun-fire which tore up the whole rear of the German defences. The result was the capture of more than a mile of the front line on either side of the Sensée River, with half a mile of the support line, and 170 prisoners, with many machine-guns. The losses in this well-managed affair were well under a thousand.

For ten days after this the southern front was quiet, and the only change consisted in the withdrawal of the Fifty-sixth and the substitution of the Thirty-seventh Division. On May 30 a minor operation was carried out upon a small section of German trench by the 88th Brigade, assisted by the 8th East Lancashires from the 112th Brigade. This attack had some partial success, but was eventually driven out of the captured position by a strong counter-attack, with the result that a small body of the 3rd Middlesex Regiment, some thirty in number, were isolated and taken or slain. Greater success, however, attended the next operation, which was an attack upon June 14 upon Infantry Hill, which included Hook Trench and Long Trench. This very successful advance was carried out by the 1st Gordons and 2nd Suffolks, the two regular battalions of the 76th Brigade. The whole position was stormed by a surprise attack and 180 prisoners were taken. A counter-attack was broken up by the British artillery. The losses of the storming battalions were well under 400 men. Two days later the Germans again made a strong effort to thrust back the British advance, but again they failed with considerable loss, save at the more advanced posts which they occupied. A British attempt next morning to regain these lost posts was not successful. Upon June 18, the anniversary of the great day when Germany and Britain fought together for freedom, there was a fresh attack to retake Hook and Long Trench. It surged up to and into the trenches, but could not disperse the sturdy men of Suffolk, who held them. The German wave lost its momentum and broke up into pools, which soon were swept back with the ebbing tide. Nearly 200 prisoners were taken in this spirited affair.

The Seventeenth Corps had a brisk day upon June 5, which extended into three days of fighting. On this date the Ninth Division upon the right and the Thirty-fourth upon the left moved forward suddenly in the evening, covering the space between Roeux and Gavrelle. The attack was directed against a dangerous network of trenches called Curly, Charlie, and Cuthbert, which guarded the rising slope known as Greenland Hill. The brunt of the fighting was borne by the 27th or Lowland Brigade in the south, and by the 102ud Tyneside Brigade in the north. In the latter brigade the 20th and 21st Northumberland Fusiliers carried the trenches opposite to them, while the Scottish infantry kept pace with them upon the right. After hard fighting the whole front German position fell into the hands of the stormers, who had to defend it against a long series of desultory counter-attacks, which lasted until June 7, when the enemy finally gave up the attempt to regain the ground which he had lost. Six officers and 217 men were captured, and the German losses in killed were very heavy, each front battalion reckoning that there were between three and four hundred enemy dead scattered in front of it. It was a spirited local action attended by complete success.

It is necessary now to go back in point of time and pick up the narrative at the northern end of the line.

On Thursday, May 24, the operations at Lens, in abeyance since April 23, broke out once more, when the Forty-sixth Division, which had extended its left so as to occupy much of the ground formerly held by the Sixth Division, made an attempt upon Nash Alley and other trenches in front of it. The attack was made by the 137th Stafford Brigade, and was launched at seven in the evening. The objectives with twenty-eight prisoners were easily secured. It was found impossible, however, to hold the captured ground, as every German gun within range was turned upon it, and a furious succession of assaults wore down the defenders.

Captain McGowan beat off five of these onslaughts before he was himself blown to pieces by a bomb. Every officer being down, Major MacNamara came forward from Headquarters to take command, and in the morning withdrew the detachment, an operation which was performed with great steadiness, the men facing back and firing as they retired. Major MacNamara was himself killed in conducting the movement. There were incessant skirmishes, but no other outstanding action for some time in the north of the line, so we must again return to the extreme south and follow the fortunes of the Australians and their British comrades upon the Bullecourt sector.

The operations of the Australians and of the British divisions were renewed upon May 3 in front of Bullecourt and Lagnicourt, the scene of the brave but unsuccessful attack of April 11, when the Australian infantry with little support penetrated the Hindenburg Line. On this second occasion the British gun-power was very much heavier and cleared a path for the attack, while laying down an excellent barrage. The original advance was in the first glimmer of daylight, and by 6:30 it had penetrated well into the Hindenburg Line, the wire having been blown to pieces. The advance made its way by successive rushes to the right of Bullecourt village, where it clung for the rest of the day, the infantry engaged being almost entirely men from Victoria. Laterally by their bombing parties they extended their hold upon the two front lines of German trenches to the right, in which quarter the attack had originally been held up. In the meantime the 62nd Yorkshire Territorial Division had fought their way up to the village and were engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting among the shattered brick houses. An English aviator, flying at a height of only 100 feet or so, passed up and down the Australian battle-line helping with his machine-gun, and finally dropping a message, “Bravo, Australia!” a few moments before a bullet through the petrol tank brought him at last to earth. The greeting of this brave lad might well have been the voice of the Empire, for the Australian infantry wrought wonders that day. The British division having been held at Bullecourt, the assault was that the Australians projected as a salient into the Hindenburg Line, and that they were attacked on both flanks as well as in front, but they still held on, not only for May 3, but for two days that followed, never losing their grip of the trenches which they had won. On the right the Germans made counter-attacks which have been described by the admirable Australian Official Chronicler as being done in “School of Seals” formation, where a hundred grey-backs all lived together from one shell crater to another. none of these attacks got up, owing to the rapid and accurate rifle fire which met them.

The German bombing attacks down the trenches were met by showers of trench-mortar bombs, which broke them up. The Germans had trench-mortars also, however, and by their aid they made some of the right-hand positions untenable, but West Australian bombers restored the fight, and the New South Welshmen added further to the gains. In vain a battalion of Prussian Guards and a column of picked storm-troops beat up against that solid defence. The position once taken was always held. The Seventh Division had relieved the Sixty-second, and had tightened its grip upon the outskirts of Bullecourt and from this time onwards its daily task was on the on hand to push farther into the ruins and to eradicate more of the scattered German posts, and on the other to move out upon the right and get close touch with the Australians so as to cover one side of their dangerous salient. Each object was effected in the midst of fighting which was local and intermittent, but none the less very desperate and exhausting.

During a week continual counter-attacks moving up from Riencourt broke themselves upon either the British or Australian lines. The 9th and 10th Devon battalions of the 20th Brigade, and their comrades of the 2nd Borders and 2nd Black Watch were especially hard pressed in these encounters. With inexorable pressure they enlarged their lines however, and by May 17 the British Fifty-eighth Division of London Territorials (Cator), which had taken over the work, could claim to have the whole of Bullecourt in their keeping, while their brave Oversea comrades had fairly settled into the gap which they had made in the Hindenburg front line. Though the operations were upon a small scale as compared with great battles like Arras, no finer exploit was performed upon the Western front during the year than this successful advance, in which the three British divisions and the Australians shattered no less than fifteen attacks delivered by some of the best troops of Germany. Sir Douglas Haig, who is no prodigal of praise, says in his final despatch: “The defence of this 1000 yards of double trench line exposed to attack on every side, through two weeks of constant fighting, deserves to be remembered as a most gallant feat of arms.” The losses were naturally heavy, those of the three British divisions — the Seventh, Fifty-eighth, and Sixty-second — being approximately the same. They had been opposed by Guards Regiments and Brandenburg Grenadiers, the very cream of the Prussian Army, and had rooted them out of their carefully prepared position.

IV. THE BATTLE OF MESSINES
June 7, 1917

Plumer's long vigil — The great mines — Advance of Australians — Of New Zealanders — Of the Twenty-fifth Division — Of the Irish Divisions — Death of Major Redmond — Advance of Nineteenth Division — Of the Forty-first Division — Of the Forty-seventh Division — Of the Twenty-fourth Division — General results

THE operations upon the Somme in the autumn of 1916 had given the British command of the high ground in the Somme district. The next move was to obtain a similar command in the continuation of the same high ground to the north. This was accomplished from Arras to Lens in the great battle which began upon April 9, 1917. After the complete conquest of this Vimy position, the next step was obviously to attack the prolongation of the same ridge in the Ypres direction. This was carried out with great success upon June 7 in the Battle of Messines, when nine miles of commanding country were carried and permanently held, from the neighbourhood of Ploegstrate in the south to Hill 60 and Mount Sorel in the north. Thus many spots which will for ever be associated with the glorious dead — Hill 60 itself, with its memories of the old 13th and l0th Brigades; Wytschaete, where the dismounted troopers fought so desperately in the fall of 1914; Messines, sacred also to the memory of the cavalry and of the British and Indian infantry who tried hard to hold it; finally the long, gently sloping ridge which was reddened by the blood of the gallant London Scots when they bore up all night amid fire and flame against the ever-increasing pressure of the Bavarians — all these historic places came back once more into British keeping. It is this action, so splendid both in its execution and in its results, which we have now to examine, an action which was a quick sequel to the order of the German command that "the enemy must not get Messines Ridge at any price."

For two thankless years Sir Herbert Plumer, the officer who in his younger days had held on in such bulldog fashion to the country north of Mafeking, had been the warden of the Ypres salient. His task had been a peculiarly difficult and responsible one — indeed, many a military critic might have said *a priori* that it was an impossible one. The general outline of the British trenches formed a loop rather than a salient, and there was no point in it which could not be shot into from behind. Add to this that all the rising ground, and therefore all the observation, lay with the enemy, and that the defending troops were very often skeleton divisions which had come up exhausted from the south. Taking all these circumstances together, one can understand the facts which turned General Plumer’s hair white during these two years, but never for an instant weakened the determination of his defence. There was no one in the Army who did not rejoice, therefore, when it was learned that the Second Army had been chosen for the next attack, and that the long-suffering Plumer was at last to have a chance of showing that he could storm a line as well as hold one.

Preparatory to the attack, some twenty great mines had been driven into the long, low hill, which is really little more than a slope, attaining a height of 250 feet at the summit. These mines contained 600 tons of explosives, and had been the work of constant relays of miners during many months. These tunnelling companies of miners, drawn from all sorts of material and officered by mining engineers and foremen, did some splendid work in the war, and the British finally outfought the Germans under the earth as completely as they did both on it and above it. The accumulation of guns was even greater than at Arras, and they were packed into about half the length of front, so that the effect of the massed fire when it broke out in the morning of June 7 was crushing to an extent never before known in warfare. What with the explosions of the mines and the downpour of shells, the German front line, with its garrison, may be said to have utterly disappeared, so that when at 3:20 in the first faint flush of a summer morning the infantry dashed forward to the attack, the path of victory had already been laid out before them. Let us examine the general composition of the British line before we follow the fortunes of the various units.

General Plumer’s Army had been moved down the line so as to cover all its objectives, and Gough’s Fifth Army from the south had been put in to the north of it, occupying the actual salient. This Army was not in the first instance engaged. The Second Army consisted of three Corps. The northern of these was Morland’s Tenth Corps, which was in the region of St. Eloi. This Corps consisted, counting Chapter from the north, of the Twenty-third, Forty-seventh and Forty-first Divisions with the Twenty-fourth in reserve. Upon its right, facing Wytschaete, was Hamilton Gordon’s Ninth Corps, containing from the north the Nineteenth, Sixteenth, and Thirty-sixth Divisions, with the Eleventh in reserve. Still farther to the right was the

Second Anzac Corps (Godley) facing Messines with the Twenty-fifth British Division, the New Zealanders, and the Third Australians in line from the north, and the Fourth Australians in reserve. This was the British battle-line upon the eventful dawn of June 7, 1917.

To take the work of individual units, we shall begin with the Third Australian Division (Monash) upon the extreme right. The men, like their comrades all along the line, had endured very heavy shelling in their assembly trenches, and sprang eagerly forward when the word to advance was given. The First and Second Australian Divisions had given so splendid an account of themselves already in the Hindenburg Line, that it was no surprise to find that their mates were as battleworthy as any troops in the Army. The whole country in front of them was drenched with gas, which hung heavy with the mists of morning, but the weird lines of masked men went swiftly onwards in open order through the poison region, dashed over the remains of the German trenches, crossing the small river Douve upon the way, and then pushing on from one shot-shattered building to another, keeping well up to the roaring cloud, of the barrage, occupied without a hitch the whole of their allotted position. With a single pause, while Messines was being occupied upon their left, the leading line of Victorians and Tasmanians drove straight on for their ultimate goal, sending back a stream of captured prisoners behind them. Only at one trench was there a sharp hand-to-hand fight, but in general so splendid was the artillery and so prompt the infantry that the enemy had never a chance to rally. It was a perfect advance and absolutely successful. Some indications of counter-attacks came up from the Warneton direction during the afternoon and evening, but they were beaten out so quickly by the shrapnel that they never came to a head. Half-a-dozen field-guns, as well as several hundred prisoners, fell to the lot of the Australians.

Upon the immediate left of the Australians was the New Zealand Division (Russell), which had done so splendidly at the Somme. Their Rifle Brigade had been given the place of honour exactly opposite to Messines, and by eight o’clock they had occupied the village and were digging in upon the farther side. Thirty-eight machine-guns and a number of prisoners were the trophies of their advance. There was no severe fighting, so well had the mines and the guns together done their work; but the men who stormed the village found numerous cellars and dug-outs still occupied, into which they swiftly penetrated with bayonet or bomb. In one of these regimental headquarters was found a message from General von Lafiert ordering the 17th Bavarian Regiment to hold the village at all costs. It is certainly extraordinary how these unfortunate and gallant Bavarians were thrust into every hot corner, and if the reason lies in the fact that their Prince Rupprecht had the honour of commanding the German Army of Flanders, then it is an honour which will leave its grievous trace upon his country for a century to come. It is an extraordinary historical fact that the Bavarians, who were themselves overrun and crushed by the conquering Prussians in 1866, should have paid without demur the enormous blood tribute to their conquerors in a cause in which they had no direct interest, since no annexation of Briey metals or Belgian lands would bring prosperity to Bavaria.

The losses of the New Zealanders in their fine advance were not heavy, but they had a number of casualties that evening and next morning in their newly consolidated position, which included unfortunately Brigadier-General Brown, one of the finest officers in the force, who was killed by a burst of shrapnel.

Upon the immediate left of the New Zealanders was the Twenty-fifth (Bainbridge), a sound, hard-working British Division, which had a fine and a very long record of service upon the Somme. The task allotted to this division was a formidable one, consisting of an attack upon a 1200-yard front, which should penetrate 3000 yards and cross nine lines of German trenches, the concealed Steenebeek Valley, and crush the resistance of a number of fortified farms. In spite of these numerous obstacles, the advance, which was well-covered by General Kincaid-Smith’s guns, was splendidly successful. The 74th Brigade was on the right, the 7th upon the left, with the 75th in reserve. Observers have recorded how at the very instant that the men surged forward under their canopy of shells^ six miles of S.O.S. rockets rose in one long cry for help from the German line. From the right the British wave of stormers consisted of the 2nd Irish Rifles, the 13th Cheshire, the 3rd Worcesters, and the 8th North Lancashires, veterans of Ovillers and the Leipzig Redoubt.

Keeping close behind a barrage of sixty guns, they flooded over the enemy trenches, just missing the answering barrage which came pattering down behind them. These troops advanced without a check to the line of the Steenebeek, where the work was taken up by the second wave, consisting of the 9th Lanes., 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, 10th Cheshires, and 1st Wilts, the order being taken from the right. For a time there was a dangerous gap between the Wiltshires and the flank of the Ulstermen to the left, but this was bridged over, and the advance rolled on, with a constant capture of prisoners and machine-guns. Only at one point, named Middle Farm, was there a notable resistance, but the Lancashire Fusiliers and Irish Rifles combined to crush it. All this attack had been carried out in a dim light, half mist and half dust-laden from explosions, where obstacles were hardly seen until they were reached, and where it took fine leading and discipline to preserve direction, so that numbers of men lost touch with their own battalions and went forward as best they might. These are the times when shirkers have their chance and when the true individual quality of troops is most highly tested. Out of touch with officers on either side, the British advanced and the Germans surrendered.

On the capture of all the first objectives the 8th South Lancashires and 11th Cheshires of the 75th Brigade passed through the victorious ranks of their fellow brigades and pushed on against the strong October system of trenches beyond. The 8th Borders followed closely behind, consolidating the ground won by the forward, line. It was still only four in the morning. As the 75th Brigade swept forward, it found the 1st New Zealand Brigade upon its right, and the 107th Ulster Brigade upon its left, all moving swiftly in one great line. By eight o’clock all immediate opposition had been beaten down, and the full objectives were being consolidated by the 106th Field Company Royal Engineers, five field-guns having been added to the other trophies. These might have been got away by the enemy had not the machine-guns knocked out the gun teams. The 110th and 112th Brigades of British artillery had been pushed up after the infantry, and though some delay was caused by the unfortunate destruction of Major Campbell and his whole battery staff by a single shell, the batteries were in action within the German lines by 11 A.M.

About midday a counter-attack began to develop along the front of the Second Anzac Corps, involving both British, New Zealanders, and Australians, but the blow already received had been too severe, and there was no resilience left in the enemy. The attempt died away under a withering fire from rifles and machine-guns. By 2 P.M. all was quiet once more.

The British effort was not yet at an end, however. The long summer day was still before them, and there was a good reserve division in hand. This was the Fourth Australian Division (Holmes), two brigades of which passed through the ranks of the Twenty-fifth and New Zealand Divisions, about 3:15 P.M. Their objective was a further system of trenches 500 yards to the east and well down the other slope of the Messines Hill. The advance of each brigade was admirable, but unfortunately they diverged, leaving a dangerous gap between, in which for two days a party of the enemy, with machine-guns, remained entrenched.

At the end of that time two battalions of the 13th Australian Brigade, the 50th and 52nd, carried the place most gallantly by storm and solidified the line. Passing from the area of the Anzac Corps to that of the Ninth Corps, we come first upon Nugent’s Thirty-sixth Ulster Division, which had not reappeared in any battle since its day of glory, and of tragic loss in front of Thiepval. It was now, by a happy chance or by a beneficent arrangement, fighting upon the right flank of the Sixteenth Southern Irish Division (Hickie) and the two may be treated as one, since they advanced, step by step, in the same alignment up the bullet-swept slope, and neither halted until they had reached their full objectives. The Ulstermen went forward with the 107th Brigade of Irish Rifles upon the right in close touch with the Twenty-fifth Division, while the 108th was on the left, keeping line with their fellow-countrymen, both Irish divisions dashing forward with great fire and resolution.

The Sixteenth Irish Division for the purpose of the attack consisted of four brigades, having been strengthened by the addition of the 33rd Brigade from the Eleventh Division. In the attack, the 47th Brigade was upon the right and the 49th upon the left. If some further detail may be permitted in the case of men who were playing so loyal a part at a time when part of Ireland had appeared to be so disaffected, it may be recorded that the Irish line counting from the right consisted of the 6th Royal Irish, the 7th Leinsters, the 7/8th Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the 7th Inniskilling Fusiliers. These battalions sprang up the Wytschaete slope, closely followed by their second line, which was formed by the 1st Munster Fusiliers, 6th Connaught Rangers, 2nd Royal Irish and 8th Inniskillings. In this order, in close touch with the Ulstermen upon their right and the English Nineteenth Division upon their left, they swept up the hill, their Celtic yell sounding high above the deep thunder of the guns. The explosion of the huge mines had a disconcerting effect at the first instant, for great masses of debris came showering down upon the men in the advanced positions, so that the dense smoke and the rain of falling earth and stones caused confusion and loss of direction. The effect was only momentary, however, and the eager soldiers dashed on. They swarmed over Wytschaete village and wood, beating down all resistance, which had already been badly shaken by the accurate fire of General Charlton’s guns. It was in the assault of the village that that great Irishman, Major Willie Redmond, fell at the head of his men. “He went in advance when there was a check. He was shot down at once. As he fell, he turned towards his men and tried to say something. No words came, but he made an eloquent gesture with his right arm towards the German line, and the Irish swept forward.” The profound gratitude of every patriot is due to him, to Professor Kettle, to Mr. Stephen Gwynn, M.P., and to all those Nationalists who had sufficient insight to understand that Ireland’s true cause was the cause of the Empire, and that it was the duty of every Irishman of all shades of opinion to uphold it in arms. *O si sic omnes!* An Irishman could then hold his head higher to-day!

By 3:45 A.M. the first objective had been taken, and by five the second, save in front of the Leinsters, where there was a stout resistance at a German machine-gun post, which was at last overcome. It was at this period that a dangerous gap developed between the retarded wing of the right-hand brigade and the swiftly advancing flank of the left, but this opening was closed once more by seven o’clock. By 7:30 the third objective had been cleared by the 1st Munsters on the right and the 2nd Irish Rifles on the left, for the second line had now leap-frogged into the actual battle. By eight o’clock everything had fallen, and the field-guns of the 59th and 113th Brigades R.F.A. had been rushed up to the front, well-screened by the slope of the newly conquered hill. The new position was swiftly wired by the 11th Hants and Royal Engineers.

There now only remained an extreme line which was, according to the original plan, to be the objective of an entirely new advance. This was the Oostaverne Line, so called from the hamlet of that name which lay in the middle of it. Its capture meant a further advance of 2000 yards, and it was successfully assaulted in the afternoon by the 33rd Brigade, consisting of the 7th South Staffords, 9th Sherwoods, 6th Lincolns, and 6th Borders. It has been frequently remarked, and Guillemont might be quoted as a recent example, that both Englishmen and Irishmen never fight better than when they are acting together and all national difference is transmuted suddenly into generous emulation. So it was upon the field of Messines, for the advance of the 33rd Brigade was a worthy continuation of a splendid achievement. Keeping pace with the 57th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division to their north, they dashed aside all obstacles, and by 5:45 were in complete possession of the farthest point which had ever been contemplated in the fullest ambition of the Generals.

The enemy had been dazed by the terrific blow, but late in the evening signs of a reaction set in, for the German is a dour fighter, who does not sit down easily under defeat. It is only by recollecting his constant high qualities that one can appreciate the true achievement of the soldiers who, in all this series of battles — Arras, Messines, and the Flanders Ridges — were pitch-forking out of terribly fortified positions the men who had so long been regarded as the military teachers and masters of Europe. Nerved by their consciousness of a truly national cause, our soldiers fought with a determined do-or-die spirit which has surely never been matched in all our military annals, while the sagacity and adaptability of the leaders was in the main worthy of the magnificence of the men. As an example of the insolent confidence of the Army, it may be noted that on this, as on other occasions, all arrangements had been made in advance for using the German dumps. “This should invariably be done,” says an imperturbable official document, “as the task of rapidly getting forward engineer stores is most difficult.”

A line of mined farms formed part of the new British line, and upon this there came a series of German bombing attacks on June 8, none of which met with success. The 68th Field Company of the Engineers had inverted the position, turning the defences from west to east, and the buildings were held by the Lincolns and Sherwoods, who shot down the bombers before they could get within range even of the far-flying egg-bomb which can outfly the Mills by thirty paces, though its effect is puny in comparison with the terrific detonation of the larger missile. From this time onwards, the line became permanent. In this long day of fighting, the captures amounted to 8 officers and 700 men with 4 field-guns and 4 howitzers. The losses were moderate for such results, being 1100 men for the Irish and 500 for the 33rd Brigade. Those of the Ulster Division were also about 1000.

Upon the left of the Irishmen the advance had been carried out by Shute’s Nineteenth Division. Of this hard fighting division, the same which had carried La Boiselle upon the Somme, the 56th Lancashire Brigade and the 58th, mainly Welsh, were in the line. The advance was a difficult one, conducted through a region of shattered woods, but the infantry cleared all obstacles and kept pace with the advance of the Irish upon the right, finally sending forward the reserve Midland Brigade as already stated to secure and to hold the Oostaverne Line. The ground to be traversed by this division, starting as it did from near Wulverghem, was both longer and more exposed than that of any other, and was particularly open to machine-gun fire. Without the masterful artillery the attack would have been an impossibility. None the less, the infantry was magnificently cool and efficient, widening the front occasionally to take in fortified posts, which were just outside its own proper area. The 9th Cheshires particularly distinguished itself, gaining part of its second objective before schedule time and having to undergo a British barrage in consequence. This fine battalion ended its day's work by blowing to shreds by its rifle-fire a formidable counter-attack. The Welsh battalions of the same 58th Brigade, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, 9th Welsh, and 5th South Wales Borderers fought their way up through Grand Bois to the Oostaverne Line with great clash and gallantry. The village of that name was itself taken by the Nineteenth Division, who consolidated their line so rapidly and well that the German counter-attack in the evening failed to make any impression. Particular credit is due to the 57th Brigade, who carried on the attack after their own proper task was completed.

We have now roughly sketched the advance of the Ninth Corps, and will turn to Morland's Tenth Corps upon its left. The flank Division of this was the Forty-first under the heroic leader of the old 22nd Brigade at Ypres. This unit, which was entirely English, and drawn mostly from the south country, had, as the reader may remember, distinguished itself at the Somme by the capture of Flers. It attacked with the 122nd and 124th Brigades in the line. They had several formidable obstacles in their immediate front, including the famous Dammstrasse, a long causeway which was either trench or embankment according to the lie of the ground. An estaminet upon this road was a lively centre of contention, and beyond this was Ravine Wood with its lurking guns and criss-cross of wire.- All these successive obstacles went down before the steady flow of the determined infantry, who halted at their farthest line in such excellent condition that they might well have carried the attack-forward had it not been prearranged that the Twenty-fourth, the reserve division, should pass through their ranks, as will presently be described.

To the left of the Forty-first was the Forty-seventh London Territorial Division containing the victors of Loos and of High Wood. The effect of the mines had been particularly deadly on this front, and one near Hill 60 is stated by the Germans to have taken up with it a whole Company of Wurtembergers. The position attacked by the Londoners was on each side of the Ypres-Comines Canal, and included some formidable obstacles, such as a considerable wood and a ruined country-house named “The White Château.” Again and again the troops were held up, but every time they managed to overcome the obstacle. Around the ruined grandeur of the great villa, with all its luxuries and amenities looking strangely out of place amid the grim trimmings of rusty wire and battered cement, the Londoners came to hand-grips with the Prussians and Wurtembergers who faced them. In all 600 prisoners were sent to the rear.

To the left of the Forty-seventh London division, and forming the extreme flank of the attack, was the Twenty-third Division (Babington) of Contalmaison fame, a unit which was entirely composed of tough North of England material. It was in touch with the regular Eighth Division upon the left, this being the flank division of the Fifth Army. The latter took no part in the present advance, and the Twenty-third had the task of forming a defensive flank in the Hooge direction, while at the same time it attacked and conquered the low ridges from which the Germans had so long observed our lines, and from which they had launched their terrible attack upon the Canadians a year before. No long advance was expected from this division, since the object of the whole day’s operations was to flatten out an enemy salient, not to make one upon our own side. Sufficient ground was occupied, however, to cover the advance farther south, and without this advance it would have been impossible for the supporting division to carry on, without exposing its flank, the work which had been done by the two divisions upon the right. At 3:10 in the afternoon, the Twenty-fourth Division under General Bols, an officer whose dramatic experience in the La Bassé fighting of 1914 has been recounted in a previous volume, advanced through the ranks of the Forty-first and Forty-seventh Divisions at a point due east of St. Eloi, its attack being synchronised with that upon the Oostaverne line farther south. The operation was splendidly successful, for the 73rd Brigade upon the left and the 17th upon the right, at the cost of about 400 casualties, carried that section of the Dammstrasse and the whole of the historic, blood-sodden ground upon either side of it, so rounding off the complete victory of the Second Army. So close to the barrage was the advance of the infantry, that the men of the 1st Royal Fusiliers and 3rd Rifle Brigade, who led the 17th Brigade, declared that they had the dust of it in their faces all the way.

It only remains to be added that on the extreme left of the line the Germans attempted a counter-attack while the main battle was going on. It was gallantly urged by a few hundred men, but it was destined to complete failure before the rifles of the 89th Brigade of the Thirtieth Division (Williams). Few of these Germans ever returned.

It was a one day's battle, a single hammer-blow upon the German line, with no ulterior operations save such as held the ground gained, but the battle has been acclaimed by all critics as a model and masterpiece of modern tactics, which show the highest power of planning and of execution upon the part of Sir Herbert Plumer and his able Chief-of-Staff. The main trophy of course was the invaluable Ridge, but in the gaining it some 7200 prisoners fell into British hands, including 145 officers, which gives about the same proportion to the length of front attacked as the Battle of Arras. The Germans had learned wisdom, however, as to the disposition of their guns in the face of "the unwarlike Islanders," so that few were found within reach. Sixty-seven pieces, however, some of them of large calibre, remained in possession of the victors, as well as 294 machine-guns and 94 trench mortars. The British losses were about 16,000. The military lesson of the battle has been thus summed up in the words of an officer who took a distinguished part in it: " The sight of the battle-field with its utter and universal desolation stretching interminably on all sides, its trenches battered out of recognition, its wilderness of shell-holes, debris, tangled wire, broken rifles, and abandoned equipment, confirms the opinion that no troops, whatever their morale or training, can stand the fire of such overwhelming and concentrated masses of artillery. With a definite and limited objective and with sufficient artillery, complete success may be reasonably guaranteed." It is the big gun then, and not, as the Germans claimed, the machine-gun which is the Mistress of the Battle-field. The axiom laid down above is well proved, but it works for either side, as will be shown presently where upon a limited area the weight of metal was with the Germans and the defence with the British.

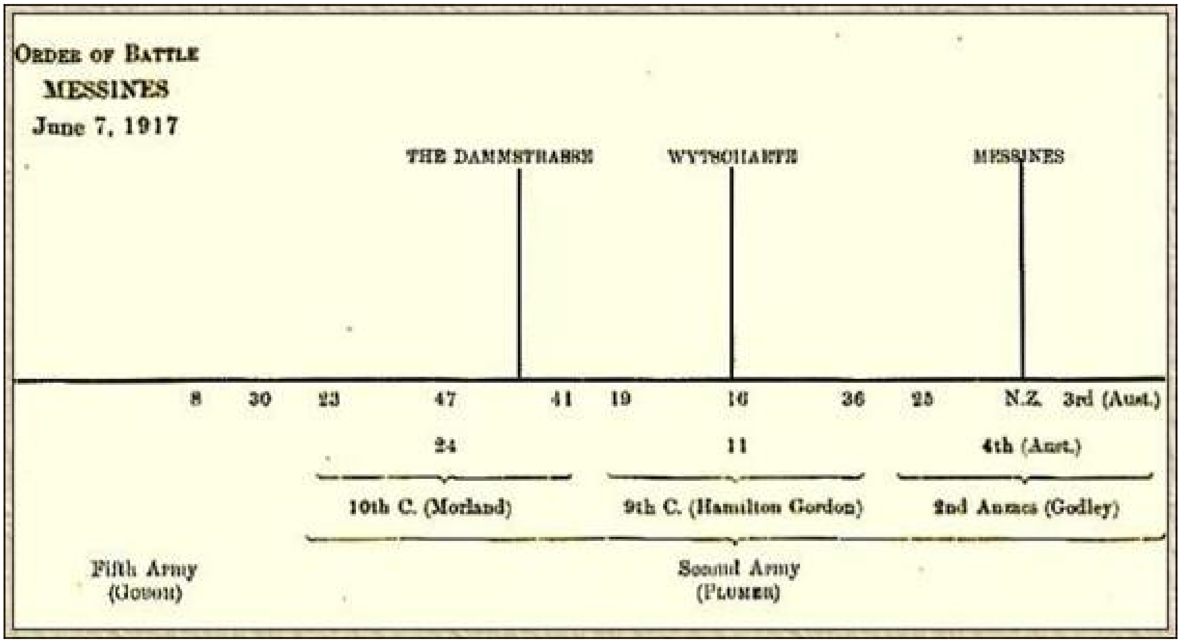
ORDER OF BATTLE
MESSINES
June 7, 1917
THE DAMMSTRASSE
WYTSCHAETE
MESSINES
8
30
23
47
41
19
16
36
25
N.Z.
3rd (Aust.)
24
11
4th (Aust.)
10th C. (Morland)
9th C. (Hamilton Gordon)
2nd Anzacs (Godley)
Fifth Army
(Gough)
Second Army
(Plumer)

Order of Battle, Messines, June 7, 1917

So fell Messines Ridge. Only when the British stood upon its low summit and looked back upon the fields to westward did they realise how completely every trench and post had been under German observation during these years. No wonder that so much of the best blood of Britain has moistened that fatal plain between Ypres in the north and Ploegstrate in the south. “My God!” said an officer as he looked down, “it is a wonder that they let us live there at all.” “It is great to look eastwards,” said another, “and see the land falling away, to know that we have this last height and have wrested it from them in three hours.” It was a nightmare which was lifted from the Army upon June 7, 1917.

V. OPERATIONS FROM JUNE 10 TO JULY 31

Fighting round Lens — Good work of Canadians and Forty-sixth Division — Action on the Yser Canal — Great fight and eventual annihilation of 2nd K.R.R. and 1st Northamptons — An awful ordeal — Exit Russia

THE Battle of Messines was so complete and clean-cut within its pre-ordained limitations that it left few readjustments to be effected afterwards. Of these, the most important were upon the left flank of the Anzac Corps, where, as already narrated, some Germans had held out for some days in the gap left between the two forward brigades of the Fourth Australians. These were eventually cleared out, and upon the night of June 10 the 32nd Brigade of the Eleventh Division extended the front of the Ninth Corps to the south, and occupied all this sector, which had become more defensible since, by the energy and self-sacrifice of the 6th South Wales Borderers, a good road had been driven right up to it by which stores and guns could proceed.

It was determined to move the line forward at this point, and for this purpose the Twenty-fifth Division was again put in to attack, with the 8th Borders on the left and the 2nd South Lanes on the right, both of the 75th Brigade. The objective was a line of farmhouses and strong posts immediately to the east. The men were assembled for the attack in small driblets, which skirmished forward and coalesced into a line of stormers almost unseen by the enemy, crouching behind hedges and in the hollows of the ground. At 7:30 in the evening, before the Germans realised that there had been an assembly, the advance began, while the New Zealanders, who had executed the same manoeuvre with equal success, kept pace upon the right. The result was a complete success within the limited area attacked. The whole line of posts, cut off from help by the barrage, fell into the hands of the British in less than half-an-hour. The enemy was found lying in shell-holes and improvised trenches, which were quickly cleared and consolidated for defence. After this second success, the Twenty-fifth Division was drawn out, having sustained a total loss of about 3000 during the operations. Their prisoners came to over 1000, the greater number being Bavarians.

For a time there was no considerable action along the British line, but there were large movements of troops which brought about an entirely new arrangement of the forces, as became evident when the operations were renewed. Up to the date of the Battle of Messines the Belgians had held the ground near the coast, and the five British Armies had lain over their hundred-mile front in the order from the north of Two, One, Three, Five, and Four. Under the new arrangement, which involved a huge reorganisation, it was the British Fourth Army (Rawlinson) which came next to the coast, with the Belgians upon: their immediate right, and an interpolated French army upon the right of them. Then came Gough's Fifth Army in the Ypres area, Plumer's Second Army extending to the south of Armentières, Horne's First Army to the south end of the Vimy Ridge, and Byng's Third Army covering the Cambrai front, with dismounted cavalry upon their right up to the junction with the French near St. Quentin. Such was the general arrangement of the forces for the remainder of the year.

Save for unimportant readjustments, there were no changes for some time along the Messines front, and little activity save at the extreme north of that section on the Ypres-Comines Canal. Here the British gradually extended the ground which had been captured by the Forty-seventh Division, taking some considerable spoil-heaps which had been turned into machine-gun emplacements by the Germans. This supplementary operation was brought off upon June 14 and was answered upon June 15 by a German counter-attack which was completely repulsed. Some brisk fighting had broken out, however, farther down the line in the Lens sector which Holland's First Corps, consisting of the Sixth, Twenty-fourth, and Forty-sixth Divisions, had faced during the Battle of Arras. This sector was rather to the north of the battle, and the German line had not been broken as in the south. These divisions had nibbled their way forward, however, working up each side of the Souchez River until they began to threaten Lens itself. The Germans, recognising the imminent menace, had already blown up a number of their depots and practically destroyed everything upon the surface, but the real prize of victory lay in the coal seams underground. Huge columns of black smoke which rose over the shattered chimneys and winding gears showed that even this, so far as possible, had been ruined by the enemy.

On June 8, the Forty-sixth Division carried out a raid upon so vast a scale that both the results and the losses were greater than in many more serious operations. The whole of the 138th Brigade was concerned in the venture, but the brunt was borne by the 4th Lincolns and 5th Leicesters. On this occasion, use was made upon a large scale of dummy figures, a new device of the British. Some 400 of these, rising and falling by means of wires, seemed to be making a most heroic attack upon an adjacent portion of the German line, and attracted a strong barrage. In the meanwhile, the front trenches were rushed with considerable losses upon both sides. When at last the assailants returned, they brought with them twenty prisoners and a number of machine-guns, and had killed or wounded some hundreds of the enemy, while their own losses came to more than 300. A smaller attack carried out in conjunction with the 11th Canadian Brigade upon the right also gave good results.

On June 19, the 138th Brigade, moving in conjunction with the Canadians, took and consolidated some of the trenches opposite them. Unhappily, their position did not seem to be clearly appreciated, as some of our own gas projectors fell in their new trench, almost exterminating a company of the 5th Leicesters. The sad tragedy is only alleviated by so convincing if painful a proof of the powerful nature of these weapons, and their probable effect upon the Germans.

The combined pressure of the Forty-sixth Division and of the Fourth Canadians began now to close in upon Lens. Upon June 25 the 6th South Staffords, with the brave men of the Dominion operating to the south of them, pushed the Germans off Hill 65. Upon June 28 there was a further advance of the 137th and 138th Brigades, which was much facilitated by the fact that the Canadians upon the day before had got up to the village of Leuvette upon the south. A number of casualties were caused by the German snipers after the advance, and among the killed was M. Serge Basset, the eminent French journalist, who had followed the troops up Hill 65.

A successful advance was made by the Forty-sixth Division and by the Canadians upon the evening of June 28, which carried them into the village of Avion and ended in the capture of some hundred prisoners. This operation was undertaken in conjunction with the Fifth Division near Oppy, upon the right of the Canadians. Their advance was also attended with complete success, the 95th and 15th Brigades clearing by a sudden rush more than a mile of German line and killing or taking the occupants. To the north of them both the 4th Canadians and the 46th Midlanders carried the success up the line. The advance was an extraordinary spectacle to the many who looked down upon it from the Vimy heights, for a violent thunderstorm roared with the guns, and a lashing downpour of rain beat into the faces of the Germans. They were tired troops, men of the Eleventh Reserve division, who had already been overlong in the line, and they could be seen rushing wildly to the rear before the stormers were clear of their own trenches. An unfired and brand-new machine-gun was found which had been abandoned by its demoralised crew. The flooded fields impeded the advance of the Canadians, but the resistance of the enemy had little to do with the limits of the movement.

Upon June 30 the 6th North Staffords and 7th Sherwood Foresters made a fresh advance and gained their objectives, though with some loss, especially in the case of the latter battalion. This operation was preparatory to a considerable attack upon July 1. This was carried out upon a three-brigade front, the order being 139th, 137th, 138th from the north. The 139th were in close touch with the Sixth Division, who had lent two battalions of the 71st Brigade to strengthen the assailants. The objective was from the Souchez River in the south, through Aconite and Aloof Trenches, to the junction point of the Sixth Division, north-west of Lens. The day’s fighting was a long and varied one, some ground and prisoners being gained, though the full objective was not attained. The dice are still badly loaded against the attack save when the guns throw their full weight into the game. The Lincoln and Leicester Brigade in the south had the suburb of Cité du Moulin as their objective, and the 4th Lincolns next to the Canadians got well up; but the 5th Lincolns on their left were held up by wire and machine-guns. Through the gallantry of Sergeant Leadbeater one party penetrated into the suburb and made a lodgment in outlying houses, although their flank was entirely in the air. As the day wore on, the line of the 138th Brigade was driven in several times by the heavy and accurate shell-fire, but was each time reoccupied by the enduring troops, who were relieved in the morning by the 4th and 5th Leicesters, who spread their posts over a considerable area. One of these small posts, commanded by Lieutenant Bowell, was forgotten, and held on without relief, food, or water until July 5, when finding himself in danger of being surrounded this young officer effected a clever withdrawal — a performance for which he received the D.S.O.

Whilst the 138th Brigade had established itself in the fringes of Cité du Moulin, the Stafford men upon their left (137th Brigade) had captured

Aconite Trench and also got among the houses. A number of the enemy were taken in the cellars, or shot down as they escaped from them, the Lewis guns doing admirable work. About one o’clock, however, a strong attack drove the Stafford men back as far as Ague Trench. The support companies at once advanced, led by Major Graham of the 5th North Staffords, who was either killed or taken during the attack, which made no progress in face of the strong masses of German infantry. The result of this failure was that the remnants of two companies of the 5th North Staffords, who had been left behind in Aconite Trench, were cut off and surrounded, all who were not killed being taken. In spite of this untoward result, the fighting on the part of the battalions engaged had been most spirited, and the conflict, after the fall of most of the officers and sergeants, had been carried on with great ardour and intelligence by the junior non-commissioned officers.

On the left, the Sherwood Forest Brigade (strengthened by the 2nd Regular battalion of their own regiment) advanced upon the Lens-Lievin road and the network of trenches in front of them. It was all ideal ground for defence, with houses, slag-heaps, railway embankments, and everything which the Germans could desire or the British abhor. The brigade had advanced upon a three-battalion front, but as the zero hour was before dawn, and the ground was unknown to the Regular battalion upon the right, the result was loss of direction and confusion. Separated parties engaged Germans in isolated houses, and some very desperate fighting ensued. In the course of one of these minor sieges, Captain Chidlow-Roberts is said to have shot fifteen of the defenders, but occasionally it was the attackers who were overpowered by the number and valour of the enemy. The Germans tried to drive back the British line by a series of counter-attacks from the Lens-Bethune road, but these were brought to a halt during the morning, though later in the afternoon parties of German bombers broke through the scattered line, which presented numerous gaps. The losses of the Sherwood Forester Brigade were considerable, and included 5 officers and 186 men, whose fate was never cleared up. Most of these were casualties, but some remained in the hands of the enemy. The total casualties of the division in this action came to 50 officers and about 1000 men.

This hard-fought action concluded the services of the North Midland Division in this portion of the front. It had been in the line for ten weeks, and under constant fire for the greater part of that time. The strength of the battalions had been so reduced by constant losses, that none of them could muster more than 300 men. Upon July 2 the Forty-sixth Division handed over their line to the Second Canadians and retired for a well-earned rest. Save for two very fruitful raids in the Hulluch district in the late autumn, this Division was not engaged again in 1917.

The Germans had strengthened the defence of Lens by flooding the flats to the south of the town, submerging the Cité St. Augustin, so that the Fourth Canadians on the right of the Forty-sixth Division could not push northwards, but they had advanced with steady perseverance along the south bank of the Souchez, and got forward, first to La Coulotte and then as far as the village of Avion, which was occupied by them upon June 28 — a date which marked a general move forward on a front of 2000 yards from the river to Oppy. Meanwhile, the Sixth Division had also pushed in upon the north and north-west of Lens, which was closely invested. The First Canadian Division relieved the Sixth Division early in July, so that now the pressure upon Lens was carried out by three Canadian Divisions, one to the north, one to the west, and one to the south of the town. No actual attack was made until the middle of August, but for the sake of continuity of narrative we may reach forward and give some short account of the operations upon that occasion. After constant pressure, and the drifting of a good deal of gas over the huge house-covered area which faced them, the Canadians made an attack upon August 15, which brought them into the very suburbs of the town, while advancing their line both to the north and to the south of it. Two Canadian divisions, the First upon the left and the Second upon the right, made the main attack, while the Fourth Division guaranteed their southern flank. The First Division found itself in what was practically the old British line, as it was defined at the end of the Battle of Loos in September 1915, nearly two years before. This veteran division had not far to go to find its enemy, for the German trenches were not more than 120 yards away. Flooding over them after a heavy discharge of flaming oil drums, the Canadians swept with little loss up that deadly slope of Hill 70, sacred to the memory of the Scots of the Fifteenth Division and of many other brave men who found their last rest upon it. The 3rd Brigade upon the left and the 2nd upon the right topped the low hill and charged roaring down into the Cité St. Auguste beyond. There was a fierce fight at Cinnebar Trench and the other points which made up the German second line. The enemy infantry stood up stoutly to the push of bayonet, and there was some bloody work before the line was finally taken and consolidated by the Canadians. The Second Division in the meanwhile, advancing with the 5th Brigade upon the left and the 4th upon the right, had carried their charge right up to the edge of the city itself, and had established themselves among the shattered houses. As the 5th Brigade rushed forward, they encountered a body of German infantry advancing as if to an attack, so that for a few glorious minutes there was close bludgeon work in No-Man's-Land before the German formation was shattered and the stormers rushed on. A counter-attack developed about mid-day in front of the First Division, and the grey-clad troops could be clearly seen marching up in fours, breaking into artillery formation and finally deploying in line, all after the most approved British fashion — a fact which was explained later by the discovery in the dug-outs of official copies of a translation of the latest Aldershot regulations — surely a most unexpected result of the clash of the two nations, and one which is a compliment to our military instructors. The British methods of defence, however, proved upon this occasion to be more efficient than those for attack, and the Germans were shot back into the rubble-heaps behind them. The losses of the Canadians in this advance were not heavy, save in the 5th Brigade, which had in front of it a network of trenches in front of Cité St. Emile, and carried a hard task through with great valour and perseverance. From this time forward the advanced line was held, and it was only the deflection of the Canadian Corps to the north which prevented them from increasing their gains at Lens.

The seven weeks of comparative peace between the conclusion of the Battle of Messines and the beginning of those long-drawn operations which may be called the Battle of the Ridges, was broken by one tragic incident, which ended in the practical annihilation of two veteran battalions which held a record second to none in the Army. As misfortunes of this sort have been exceedingly rare in the progress of the war, it may be well to narrate this affair in greater detail than the general scale of this chronicle would justify.

Strickland's First Division had taken over the sector which was next the sea, close to the small town of Nieuport. The frontage covered was 1400 yards and extended to Lombardzyde, where Shute's Thirty-second Division carried the line along. The positions had not been determined by the British commander, but were the same as those formerly occupied by the French. It was evident that they were exceedingly vulnerable and that any serious attempt upon the part of the Germans might lead to disaster, for the front line was some six hundred yards beyond the Yser River, and lay among sand dunes where the soil was too light to construct proper trenches or dug-outs. The river was crossed by three or four floating bridges, which, as the result showed, were only there so long as the enemy guns might choose. The supporting battalions were east of the river, but the two battalions in the trenches were to the west, and liable to be cut off should anything befall the bridges behind them. It was indeed a very difficult situation both for Strickland and Shute, for the Germans had complete local supremacy both-in guns and in the air.

Upon July 10, the day of the tragedy, the two battalions in front were the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, next the sea, and the 1st Northamptons, upon their right. The Brigadier of the 2nd Brigade had been wounded only a few days before, and a new man was in local command. The story of what actually occurred may be told from the point of view of the Riflemen, who numbered about 550 on the day in question. Three companies, A, D, and B, in the order given from the left, were in the actual trenches, while C Company was in immediate support. The night of July 9-10 was marked by unusually heavy fire, which caused a loss of seventy men to the battalion. It was clear to Colonel Abadie and his officers that serious trouble was brewing. An equal shell- fall was endured by the Northamptons on the right, and their casualties were nearly as heavy. So weakened was A Company in its post along the sand dunes that it was drawn into reserve in the morning of July 10, and C Company took its place. During this night an officer and twenty men, all Rhodesians, from B Company, were pushed forward upon a raid, but lost nine of their number on their return. From 8:50 in the morning until 1 P.M. the fire was exceedingly heavy along the whole line of both battalions, coming chiefly from heavy guns, which threw shells capable of flattening out any dug-out or shelter which could be constructed in such loose soil. For hour after hour the men lay motionless in the midst of these terrific ear-shattering explosions, which sent huge geysers of sand into the air and pitted with deep craters the whole circumscribed area of the position. It was a horrible ordeal, borne by both battalions with the silent fortitude of veterans. Many were dead or shattered, but the rest lay nursing the breech-blocks of their rifles and endeavouring to keep them free from the drifting sand which formed a thick haze over the whole position. The two supporting battalions across the canal, the 2nd Sussex and 1st North

Lancashire, were also heavily shelled, but their position was more favourable to taking cover. There was no telephone connection between the Rifles’ Headquarters and the advanced trenches, but Lieutenant Gott made several journeys to connect them up, receiving dangerous wounds in the attempt. About twelve, the dug-out of B Company was blown in, and a couple of hours later that of C Company met the same fate, the greater part of the officers in each case being destroyed. An orderly brought news also that he had found the dug-out of D Company with its inmates dead, and a dead Rifleman sentry lying at its door. As the man was staggering and dazed with shell-shock, it was hoped that his message was an exaggeration. The telephone wire to the rear had long been cut, and the doomed battalions had no means of signalling their extreme need, though the ever-rising clouds of sand were enough to show what they were enduring. No message of any sort seems to have reached them from the rear. The fire was far too hot for visual signalling, and several pigeons which were released did not appear to reach their destination. With sinking hearts shaken and dazed survivors waited for the infantry attack which they knew to be at hand.

There were really no means of resistance, for, in spite of all care, it was found that the all-pervading sand, which nearly choked them, had put out of gear the mechanism of all the machine-guns and most of the rifles. The divisional artillery was doing what it could from the other side of the Yser, but the volume of fire from the heavies was nothing as compared with the German bombardment. To add to the misery of the situation, a number of German aeroplanes were hawking backwards and forwards, skimming at less than 100 feet over the position, and pouring machine-gun fire upon every darker khaki patch upon the yellow sand.

Both the battalion commanders behaved with the utmost intrepidity and coolness. Of Colonel Abadie of the Rifles, it was said by one of the few survivors: “He inspired all with the utmost confidence. He did everything in his power and was splendid the whole time.” Great hopes were entertained that some diversion would be effected by the gunboats upon the flank, but for some reason there was no assistance from this quarter. Hour after hour passed, and the casualties increased until the dead and wounded along the line of both battalions were more numerous” than the survivors. At 3 P.M. the regimental dug-out of the Rifles showed signs of collapse under the impact of two direct hits. Those who could move betook themselves to an unfinished tunnel in the sand in which a handful of Australian miners were actually working. These men had changed their picks for their rifles, and were ready and eager to help in the defence of the position. In little groups, unable to communicate with each other, each imagining itself to be the sole survivor, the men waited for the final German rush. At 7:15 it came. A division of German marines made the attack, some skirting the British line along the seashore and approaching from the flank or even from the rear. As many Riflemen as could be collected had joined the Australians in the tunnel, but before they could emerge the Germans were dropping bombs down the three ventilation shafts, while they sprayed liquid fire down the entrance. The men who endured this accumulation of horrors had been under heavy fire for twenty-four hours with little to eat or drink, and it would not have been wonderful if their nerve had now utterly deserted them. Instead of this, every one seems to have acted with the greatest coolness. "The Colonel called to the Riflemen to sit down, and they did so with perfect discipline." By this means the spray of fire passed over them. The entrances were blown in, and the last seen of Colonel Abadie was when, revolver in hand, he dashed out to sell his life as dearly as possible. From this time the handful of survivors, cut off from their Colonel by the fall of part of the roof, saw or heard no more of him. The few groups of men. Rifles or Northamptons, who were scattered about in the sandy hollows, were overwhelmed by the enemy, the survivors being taken. Four officers, who had been half-buried in the tunnel, dug their way out, and finding that it was now nearly dark and that the Germans were all round them, proceeded to make their way as best they could back to the bank of the river. An artillery liaison officer made a gallant reconnaissance and reported to the others that there was a feasible gap in the new line which the enemy was already digging. The adjutant of the battalion, with the second-in-command, and his few comrades, who included an Australian corporal, crept forward in the dusk, picking their way among the Germans. Altogether, there were 4 officers, 20 Australians, and 15 Riflemen. One of the Australians, named McGrady, was particularly cool and helpful, but was unfortunately killed before the party reached safety. Even at this crisis the military code was strictly observed, and the confidential documents of the battalion carefully destroyed by the adjutant. As the British emerged into the gloom from one end of the tunnel, a party of Germans began to enter at the other, but were so skilfully delayed by two Riflemen, acting as rear-guard, that they were unable to stop the retreat. The men streamed out at the farther end under the very noses of their enemies, and crept swiftly in small parties down to the river, which at this point is from 70 to 100 yards broad. Across their path lay a camouflage screen some twelve feet high, which had been set on fire by the shells. It was a formidable obstacle, and held them up for some time, but was eventually crossed. Here they were faced by the problem of the broken bridges, and several were shot while endeavouring to find some way across. Finally, however, the swimmers helping the others, the greater number, including the four Rifle officers, got safely across, being nearly poisoned by gas shells as they landed upon the farther side. Of the Northamptons, it would appear that only one officer, Captain Martin, made his escape, though badly wounded. Colonel Tollemache was heard calling out to his men: “It may be the last time, but fight like Englishmen!” He and all his staff became casualties or prisoners. The Northampton front was not more than forty yards from that of the Germans, and the rifle-fire of the latter swept the parapet to such an extent that it was impossible to stop the rush. A private who was No. 1 of a machine-gun, with two other men, who knew nothing of the mechanism, rushed a gun out upon the flank and held up the grey wave for a minute or so before being submerged, while a sergeant also distinguished himself by a determined resistance and by finally crossing the Canal to explain the situation to those in command there.

So ended an experience which can have had few parallels even in this era of deadly adventure. Of the Riflemen, it was found next day that 3 officers and 52 men had rejoined their brigade. If so many got away it was largely due to the action of Rifleman Wambach, who swam the canal with a rope in his mouth, and fixed it for his more helpless comrades. Even fewer of the Northamptons ever regained the eastern bank. “Like the Spartans at Thermopylae the men of Northampton and the Riflemen had died where they had been posted. Heroism could do no more.” Out of about 1200 men, nearly all, save the casualties, fell into the hands of the victors. Every officer seems to have behaved with the utmost possible gallantry, and not least the battalion surgeon, Captain Ward, who stood by his wounded until both he and they fell into the hands of the Germans. Such was the deplorable affair of Nieuport, a small incident in so great a War, and yet one which had an individuality of its own which may excuse this more extended account. The total German advance was 600 yards in depth, upon a front of three-quarters of a mile.

The attack had extended to the eastward upon the farther side of the Geleide Creek, but here the positions were more favourable for defence, as there were supports available and the communications had not been broken. It is a most significant sign of the enormous respect which the German authorities entertained for the British Army, that this limited action in which only two weak British battalions were overwhelmed was solemnly announced by them in their official bulletin to be “a great and magnificent victory.” When one remembers how the British in turn would have dismissed so small an action as a mere incident in the campaign, had they been the victors, it is indeed a most memorable tribute. The main cause of the defeat, apart from the faulty position, appears to have been that the infantry took over the new line more quickly than the artillery, and that the French heavies had withdrawn before the British heavies were ready for action. A British officer, afterwards released, was informed by the Germans that they had 182 batteries concentrated upon the position, while there were only 13 ready for the defence.

It was hoped in Germany and feared in Britain that the new position gained by the Germans at the north of the Yser River would enable them to outflank the British defences at Lombardzyde, and to destroy the 97th Brigade, which lay to the north of the river. The situation certainly looked most alarming in the map, and no military critic could have imagined that the position could be held. The British soldier has a way of doing, however, what the lecture-rooms would denounce, and after some very desperate fighting the lines were maintained. The attack was not on so overwhelming a scale as on the left, but it was severe and long continued, from 7:30 P.M. till the evening of July 11. The enemy had at one time won three lines of defence, but they were eventually thrust back, General Shute feeding his fighting line from his reserves until he had the upper hand. The main strain fell upon the 11th Borders and 16th H.L.I. , but as the action went on the 17th Highland Light Infantry, 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, and 16th Northumberland Fusiliers were all in turn involved. It was a real infantry fight, often in the dark and sometimes at close grips, and it ended with the line as it was before the attack commenced. The severity of the action may be judged by the fact that the brigade had nearly a thousand casualties. From this time the line remained unchanged until the great Battle for the Flanders Ridges turned the thoughts of both parties to larger issues.

Before we enter upon an account of that terrific and protracted engagement, one should mention a brisk action which was fought by those stark fighters the New Zealand Division, upon the Warneton front, to the immediate south of the Messines area. There is a small ruined village, hardly rising to the dignity 3f a mention upon the maps, called La Basseville, which was held by the Germans under the very noses of the men with the red hatbands. Upon the night of July 27 the Wellington battalion, a name of good military omen, captured this place with some of its Bavarian garrison. In the early morning the Germans came again with a rush, however, and regained the place. The New Zealanders attacked once more in the night of July 31, so that their venture may appear to have been in connection with the larger operations in the north. Once more the village was captured by the Wellington and Auckland infantry with some fifty more prisoners and seven machine-guns. The Germans lost heavily in killed, and the losses were doubled or trebled by their gallant but unsuccessful counter-attacks, which were undertaken often by such limited groups of men that they seemed the results less of reasoned tactics than of desperation. From this time La Basseville passed into the British system.

This month of July was signalised by the last efforts of the Russian Army so long as it remained a serious force. Under Brusiloff and Korniloff they made an attack upon the Austro-German lines, but after “initial successes they were paralysed by the growing disaffection and disorganisation of the soldiery, who had all the want of discipline of the old .French republicans without the fiery valour and patriotism. From this time onward Russia played no real military part in the great war, save as the betrayer of Romania, the deserter of Serbia, and the absorber of such ill-spared supplies as she could get from her former allies.

VI. THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES
July 31, 1917

Attack of July 31 — Advance of the Guards — Of the “Welsh — Capture of Pilkem — Capture of St. Julien by Thirty-ninth Division — Advance of Fifty-fifth Division — Advance of Jacob’s Second Corps — General results

IT had been accepted as an axiom at this stage of the war that no great operation could be in the nature of a surprise — an axiom which, like most other axioms, was shown later in the year to have some startling exceptions. To pack the base of the historic Ypres salient with guns, and to assemble within and behind its trenches the storming troops for a great advance was, however, an operation which could not possibly be concealed. British aircraft might have an ascendency in observation, but that did not prevent the German fliers from being both daring and skilful. All camouflage, therefore, was thrown aside, and throughout the month of July Sir Douglas Haig openly assembled his forces for the widening or destruction of the iron bands which had so long constricted us in this northern area. The Fifth Army gathered for the venture, still commanded by Sir Hubert Gough, the victor of Thiepval. On his left, opposite Bixschoote, on the edge of the inundations, was a French army under General Antoine, a genial giant who impresses those who meet him as a mixture of Porthos and d’Artagnan. The general role of the French Army was to cover the British from counter-attack from the north, especially from Houthulst Forest, in the depths of which great reserves might lurk, for it covers no less than 600 acres. Upon the right, and engaged in a subsidiary degree in the operations, was the Second Army, under Sir Herbert Plumer, fresh from the triumph of Messines.

The direction of this new attack against the ridges of Flanders was the logical sequence from the preceding operations of the year. The high ground of the Ancre had been taken late in 1916. The high ground of Vimy fell into British hands in April. In June the Germans had been driven in one strenuous day from the high ground of Messines. The whole line of ridges from end to end was in British hands save only those which girt in Ypres and dominated it from the north and north-east. It is true that these so-called ridges were often little more than undulations, but they meant firmer ground, artillery observation, self-concealment, and everything which makes for military advantage. For these reasons Sir Douglas Haig turned his strength now in that direction. After his successive advances he might say with Wellington: “Knowing well that if we laid our bloody hands upon a town it was fated to fall.” The men who took Ciudad Rodrigo or stormed the dreadful breach of Badajos could teach nothing in hardihood and contempt of death to those who carried Guillemont or Ovillers.

In attacking a salient like that of Ypres and in endeavouring to flatten it out, it is obvious that the efforts must be made at the sides rather than in the centre, since success in the latter case would simply mean a larger salient. Of the two sides of the Ypres salient the success of Messines had already relieved the pressure in the south, and this area was clearly less important than the north, since it was farther from the sea. It was evident that any considerable success upon the northern side would advance the British line towards Bruges, and an occupation of Bruges would surely mean the abandonment by Germany of the Flemish coast. For these reasons the effort of the British was chiefly directed towards the north-east, a tract of ground which was difficult when dry, but which became grotesque in its difficulties when it rained and the small low-lying streams or “beeks” which meandered through it spread out into broad marshy bottoms. These all-pervading morasses, when ploughed up with innumerable shell-holes, were destined to form an almost insuperable military obstacle. In attacking at such a point Sir Douglas could only hope that the weather would abide as a neutral, but as a fact, now as so often before, its action was bitterly hostile. Up to the very day of the advance it smiled deceitfully only to break into a month of rain from the very hour of the attack. If Berlin needs one more monument in her meretricious “Siegesallee,” she may well erect one to the weather, which has” saved her cause as surely as the geese of old saved Rome.

So notorious were the British preparations, culminating in the usual terrific bombardment, that the approaching conflict was discussed in the German papers weeks before it occurred. Their preparations had been gigantic, and took a new form which called for corresponding ingenuity upon the side of the stormers if it was to be successfully countered. The continuous trench had, save in the old system, been discarded as offering too evident a mark for the shattering guns. The ground was held by numerous disconnected trenches, and strong points arranged in depth rather than in breadth, so that the whole front should form one shock-absorber which would yield at first, but must at the last bring any pressure to a stand. Scattered thickly among these small posts there were concrete forts, not unlike the Martello towers of our ancestors, but sunk deeply into the ground, so as to present a small mark to gun-fire. These forts were made of cement and iron with walls so enormously thick that a direct hit from anything less than a six-inch gun could not possibly harm them. The garrisons of each were composed of twenty or thirty men, with two or three machine-guns. There was usually no visible opening, the entrance being approached by a tunnel, and the windows mere slits which gave a broad traverse for a machine-gun. They were contrivances which might well hold up an army, and it was a fine example of British adaptability as well as courage that they were able to make progress against them. The days of the gallant bull-headed rush were over, and the soldiers had learned in a cruel school that the fighting man must be wary as well as brave.

At four o’clock in the morning, in the-first grey light of a rainy morning, under a canopy of grey sweeping clouds, and in a fog-girt landscape of bedraggled fields and brown patches of mire, the French and British infantry sprang forward with splendid alacrity upon this dangerous venture which should culminate in taking the last dominant ridge upon the British front from those who had held them so long.

The French attacked upon the extreme left of the Ypres. line, and had an extremely difficult task, which they accomplished with a dash and spirit which won the unstinted admiration of their British comrades. In front of them was the canal, but they had succeeded in throwing across some troops in the days before the battle. It was fitting that they should advance the fine in this sector, for they were starting from the very spot to which their comrades had been pushed in the poison-gas battle of April 22, 1915, more than two years before. The ground-in front of them was very marshy, and as a background to the German position loomed the great forest of Houthulst, which was known to be a strong gun position and place of arms. It was subjected, however, to such a shattering bombardment that it was nearly silent when the attack advanced, and the French poilus, pushing rapidly on from point to point, seized the village of Steenstraate, and finally the larger village of Bixschoote, establishing their line well to the north of that point. It was a most valorous advance, and if no detail can be given of it save this passing mention, it is because it belongs to that weighty and wonderful volume which shall record the glorious military deeds of France, a volume which can only be written with proper appreciation and knowledge by a French pen.

The British line of battle was formed by five corps, the Fourteenth (Cavan) to the north, the Eighteenth (Maxse) upon its right, the Nineteenth (Watts) upon the right of that, the Second (Jacob) came next, and then upon the southern edge of the area, and hardly engaged in the main fighting, was the Tenth (Morland). Each corps had two divisions in the line and two in reserve. We will take each in turn. Starting from the north. It should be noted that the first four corps made up Gough’s Fifth Army, and that the Tenth Corps was the only part of Plumer’s Army to be engaged.

Cavan’s Fourteenth Corps was next to the French, with the Guards in immediate touch with our allies, and the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division upon its right. The Twentieth and the Twenty-ninth Divisions were in support. We shall now follow the splendid advance of the Guards, a division which more and more as the war progressed reasserted its position as the very cream of the Army.

On the days preceding the action a number of bridges had been thrown across the canal, and the attacking brigades had been passed over this impediment, so that they were able to deploy rapidly and escape the German barrage which fell, for the most part, behind them. This most useful work was carried out by the 1st Guards Brigade, especially by the 3rd Coldstream and 1st Irish, who got across the first. This brigade was relieved, and on the day of battle the 3rd Brigade was upon the left in close liaison with the French, while the 2nd Brigade was on the right with their flank touching the Welshmen. Two “Hate Companies,” as they were called, were thrown out on the divisional front, whose task it was to make special discharges of oil drums, thermite, and other missiles which might smooth the way for the advance of the infantry. At 4:24 the whistles of fate were heard shrilly all along the line, and the Guards rose up from their wet assembly ditches, and went forward in their usual sedate and inexorable fashion. The front line of battle of the two brigades, counting from the French flank, were the 1st Welsh, 1st Grenadiers, 2nd Irish, and 1st Scots, while behind them in the second line were their comrades of the 2nd Scots, 4th Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, and 3rd Grenadiers. Each platoon of the Irish carried a green flag adorned with the Irish harp.

The attack at first was so strong or the opposition so weak that in ten minutes the first-line objective had been gained. From this point the shock-absorber system began to act, a system which must prevail save where the attackers know when to suspend their effort so that the spring of resistance is never pressed back to the uttermost. The British generals had learned this lesson and the aims of any one day's battle were strictly limited. Thus, although the losses grew and the difficulties increased, the Guards were well within their powers, in gradually pushing forwards to the Steenbeek stream, which was the extreme limit assigned to them. As they advanced sections were told off to deal with the various concrete forts and other strong points, a method of attack which gave great scope for the initiative of individual junior officers or non-commissioned officers, and which was fruitful in acts of valour. About six o'clock the German machine-guns in Hey Wood held up the line for a time, and the 2nd Brigade had the chagrin of seeing some German guns limbering up and withdrawing in front of them, while their own barrage fell as an invisible steel curtain which covered them from seizure. It was remarked generally of the British barrage that though extremely accurate as a rule, it still consisted too much. of shrapnel and not enough of high explosives, so that it had not the shattering third and uprooting effect which was needful. The Germans had read the lessons differently, for at this period of the war their barrage consisted almost entirely of 5.9 "crumps" with a small admixture of shrapnel.

By the early afternoon the front lines of the Guards had fulfilled their programme, and a number of prisoners, including the commanding officer and adjutant of the 73rd Hanoverians, had been conducted to the rear. The losses of the Guards had not been excessive, save in the right flank battalions, especially the 1st Scots, but they included many valuable officers killed or wounded, including Colonel Greer of the 2nd Irish, Colonel Romilly of the 1st Scots, and Colonel Lord Gort of the 4th Grenadiers. Among many deeds of valour which were added to the records of the division upon that morning there may be mentioned that of the heroic surgeon David Lees, who was decorated for passing five times through the barrage carrying wounded, and of the brave Irish priest. Father Knapp, who absolutely refused to take shelter when his men were exposed, and met his death rather than leave them. It is invidious, however, to mention brave men where all were brave. About three o'clock the 1st Guards Brigade passed through the ranks of their comrades and carried the advance forward to its limit. The order of their advance from the left was the 2nd Coldstream, with the 2nd Grenadiers on the right, while the 3rd Coldstream and 1st Irish took the corresponding places in the second line. The 2nd Grenadiers lost heavily from a flank fire, its difficulties and those of all the right flank being increased by the fact that the railway line, dotted with German strong points, ran as the boundary between divisions. Captain Ritchie, of Loos fame, was among the casualties. The Grenadiers got so far ahead that the protective barrage became thin and erratic, hardly existing in many places. The whole brigade moved forward in close touch with the 113th Brigade of Welshmen upon their right.

The latter after the final objective was reached were shelled for a time out of their position, so that the Irish and Grenadiers had to throw back a defensive flank, but the Welsh with dogged spirit came back to their work and re-established their line late in the evening. Their work will presently be described, but so far as the Guards are concerned it may be added that, with the help of the 55th and 76th Field Company R.E., all they took they kept, although the physical surroundings were appalling, for they found themselves for three days lying on the forward slope of a low ridge under heavy rain in deep puddles of water, exposed to German shelling and to the constant stinging of invisible German snipers. No conditions could have been more trying, but the Guards stuck it out with a quiet patient discipline which was as fine as the valour of their assault. “We are just lying in a snipe bog in the rain,” wrote an Irish officer. Due dispositions were made for relief among the three brigades, and the line was held until a farther advance should become possible — an event which was continually postponed by the incredible weather.

Passing to the 38th Welsh Division upon the right of the Guards, their battle line consisted of the 113th Brigade upon the left, consisting entirely of battalions of Welsh Fusiliers, while the 114th Brigade, formed from the Welsh Regiment, was on the right. The order of the foremost battalions taken from the left was the 16th and 13th Welsh Fusiliers, with the 13th and 10th Welsh.

The experiences of the division upon its advance were, as might be expected, not unlike those of the Guards. “It was still dark,” says one graphic correspondent, “and all we had to guide us was our barrage moving forward like a living line of fire, from left to right as far as the eye could see.” The first objective was captured with little loss, a fair number of prisoners being taken in the Caesar Support Trench. In attacking the second objectives the reserve line came through the front one, so that the order of the troops, taken again from the. left in the 114th Brigade, was the 15th and 14th Welsh, while in the 113th Brigade, which had a less difficult task, there was a mere change of companies in the units already engaged. The opposition now became fiercer and the losses more severe. Marsouin Farm, and Stray Farm on the right, and the village of Pilkem upon the left poured bullets upon the advancing infantry, who slipped from shell-hole to shell-hole, taking such cover as they could, but resolutely pushing onwards. Again and again the machine-gun forts were isolated, surrounded, and compelled to surrender. The Welshmen had reached their second objective in the scheduled time. The 15th Welsh Fusiliers were now pushed into the firing-line upon the left, and the advance went forward. A gap had formed between the Welshmen and the Highlanders of the Fifty-first Division upon their right. In this gap lay Rudolph Farm, spitting fire from every cranny and window. A platoon of the 15th Welsh turned aside from their path and captured or killed all who were in the German post. To the immediate left of this point lay another stronghold called Iron Cross. This was rushed by the 14th Welsh, at considerable loss to themselves, but twenty of the garrison were bayoneted, forty captured, and three machine-guns secured. Just beyond the Iron Cross was a German dressing-station which yielded forty more prisoners.

The 15th Welsh Fusiliers on the left had in the meanwhile a severe ordeal, for so heavy, a fire poured upon them from the clump of trees known as Battery Copse that they were left with hardly an officer and with their protective barrage rapidly receding into the distance. The men were staggered for a time, but struggled forward again with fine resolution, and at last established themselves upon the same line as Iron Cross.

Whilst the fighting line had been getting forward as described, the 113th carrying among other obstacles the village of Pilkem, and both brigades, but especially the 114th, bursting through three separate battalions of the famous Käferlein regiment of the Guards, the reserve brigade had been keeping in close attendance in spite of the German barrage. Now two battalions of the 115th Brigade were slipped into the front, the 11th S.W. Borderers and the 17th Welsh Fusiliers. These fine fresh troops took up the running and made for the final objective, which was the Steenbeek stream. This was successfully reached, in spite of the ever-growing resistance, and the final line was formed with posts upon the farther side of the Steenbeek. Shortly after three o'clock a strong counter-attack broke upon this Welsh line, and for a time the Borderers were forced from the post at “Au bon gîte” which they had occupied and were thrown across the river. Aided by a good barrage of artillery and machine-guns the attack was finally beaten off, about a hundred Germans who had charged through the barrage being shot down by rifle fire. After this there was no attempt upon this day to disturb the new front of the Welsh Division, though upon August 1 in the afternoon there was some sign of a counter-attack, which was broken up by the British artillery before it could materialise. From then onwards the weather made further operations impossible. On August 6 the Twentieth Division took over this new line.

The advance of the Welsh Division, including as it did the two exploits of capturing the strongly fortified village of Pilkem, and of utterly scattering three battalions of one of the most famous regiments in the Prussian service, was worthy of the great reputation which they had won at Mametz Wood. The way in which the men followed up the barrage and tackled the concrete forts was especially worthy of mention. The Cockchafers mentioned above were the dandy regiment of Berlin, and their utter defeat at the hands of a brigade of the New Army must indeed have been bitter to those who remembered the cheap jests which had been made at that Army's expense. Four hundred prisoners from this regiment found their way to the cages. Altogether 700 prisoners were taken, nearly all Guardsmen from the Third Division. The Welsh had about 1300 casualties, including Colonels Radice, Norman, and Taylor. Among the dead was one. Private Ellis H. Evans of the 15th Welsh Fusiliers, whose position and importance were peculiarly Cymric, since he was the winner of the Bardic chair, the highest honour of the Eisteddfod. An empty Bardic chair was afterwards erected over his grave. It is only in Wales that the traditions of Athens are preserved, and contests of the body and of the mind are conducted in public with equal honour to the victors.

To the south of Cavan's Fourteenth Corps lay Maxse's Eighteenth Corps, extending from the right of the Thirty-eighth Division to a point opposite to the village of St. Julien. Maxse's Eighteenth Corps consisted of four divisions, the Fifty-first supported by the Eleventh being upon the left, and the Thirty-ninth supported by the Forty-eighth upon the right. South of the St. Julien front they connected up with Watts' Nineteenth Corps to the south. It should be mentioned that the whole corps’ front was occupied for some weeks before the battle by the 33rd Brigade, who at great strain and loss to themselves held this long stretch in the face of constant gassings and shellings, in order that the attacking divisions might be able to practise for the day of battle.

Taking the narrative once more from the north, the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division (Harper), a unit which has seen an extraordinary amount of service during the war, advanced with the usual dash of these magnificent clansmen. Everything went down before their disciplined rush. There was no particular geographical point in the area which they conquered, but their whole front was covered by fortified posts, some of which fell with ease, while others put up a considerable resistance. Prominent among the latter was Rudolph Farm, which was on the line between the Thirty-eighth and Fifty-first Divisions, pouring a flanking fire upon each and holding up the left of the Fifty-first. This post was eventually stormed by the Welsh. Finally the Highlanders, clearing the ground carefully behind them, reached their full day’s objective, which was the line of the Steenbeek. Here they dug themselves in and beat off an enemy counter-attack.

On the right of the Highland Territorial Division was the Thirty-ninth Division, consisting of the 116th Sussex Brigade, the 117th Rifle and Sherwood Foresters Brigade, and the 118th mixed Territorial Brigade. The attack was undertaken by the 117th Brigade upon the north in touch with the Highlanders, and the 116th upon the south. Both of these brigades got forward in excellent style, but the position was strong and the losses were heavy. Canadian Farm was taken by the 117th Brigade, and the 116th also attained its full objective. Finally, the spare brigade, the 118th, passed through the ranks of the others, and fought their way into St. Julien, where no British foot had been placed since April 24, 1915, when the heroic remnant of the Canadians had been cut off and overpowered in its streets.

The operation would have been entirely successful had it not been for the attempt to advance beyond the village. This was carried out by the same brigade, the 118th, with the 6th Cheshires upon the right, the 1st Herts in the centre, and the 4/5th Black Watch upon the left. The Cambridge Battalion was in support. The attack was extraordinarily gallant, but was held up by uncut wire and very severely punished. No permanent gain was effected, but greater constancy has seldom been seen. The Hertfordshire men were particularly fine. Their Colonel Page and their adjutant were both killed, and every combatant Chapter officer was on the casualty list, so that it was the sergeant-major who withdrew the 120 men who had gone forth as a strong battalion. The doctor was wounded, and only the chaplain was left, who distinguished himself by being the last man to recross the Steenbeek with a wounded man slung over his shoulder. Such was the experience of the Herts, and that of the Cheshires and of the Highlanders differed only in detail.

A counter-attack along the whole corps' front was beaten back upon the evening of July 31, but the concentration of German artillery upon St. Julien was so terrific that it was found necessary next day to withdraw the 1st Cambs who garrisoned the village, the adjacent bridge over the Steenbeek being retained. Next day the village was reoccupied.

The Thirty-ninth Division, very hard hit by its victorious but strenuous service, was relieved upon August 4, after a terrible four days of constant rainfall and shell-fall, by the Forty-eighth South Midland Territorial Division, while a few days later their Highland comrades were relieved by the Eleventh Division. So battered was the Thirty-ninth Division that it was taken forthwith out of the line and its place in the corps was filled by the Fifty-eighth.

To return to the order of the advance. Watts' Nineteenth Corps, which was the next one to the south, consisted of the Fifty-fifth West Lancashire Territorials with the Thirty-sixth Ulsters upon the left, while the Fifteenth Scottish Division supported by the Fourteenth Light Division were on the right. Of these we will deal first with the attack of the men of Lancashire.

The advance was made by the 166th Brigade upon the left, and by the 165th upon the right. The first German line was rapidly carried, and the only serious fighting was at the strong point J known as Pommern Redoubt, which held out for some time but was eventually captured about 10 A.M. The 166th Brigade, which covered the space between St. Julien in the north and the Wieltje-Gravenstafel road in the south, was led by the 5th King's Royal Lancasters and the 5th North Lancashires, while the 165th Brigade, with their left upon the road and their right in touch with the Fifteenth Division, were composed entirely of battalions of the King's Liverpool Regiment, the 5th and 6th in front, the 7th and 9th in the. second line. This brigade upon being counter-attacked used its liquid fire apparatus with good results. "From under the mantle of fire ran blazing Huns with heartrending cries, but I cannot say we had any sympathy for them. We remembered John Lynn and the other Lancashire lads who had been gassed and roasted round Ypres in the battles of other days, and we felt that the Huns were only being paid back in their own coin.” The losses in the first stages of the advance were not severe and came chiefly from the machine-gun fire of the three strongholds of Bank Farm, Spree Farm, and Pommern Castle. The latter was very formidable, spouting bullets on three sides, so that the 165th Brigade was held up by it for a time. In the second stage of the attack the 164th Brigade with the 4th North Lancashires on their right and the 5th Lanes Fusiliers upon their left pushed through the ranks of their comrades and carried the advance on, taking Hindu Cott and Gallipoli, and finally reaching the most advanced objective, whence they pushed out patrols to Toronto and Aviatik Farms. They were exposed to strong counter-attacks as will be shown.

This fine advance had been matched by Reed’s Fifteenth Scots Division on the right. Of their conduct that day it can only be said that it was worthy of the reputation which they had gained at Loos and at the Somme. The Scottish bands who fought under Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years’ War left a renown in Germany which lingers yet, and it is certain that some memory of the terrible “Hell-hags,” as they were called by the German soldiers, will preserve the record of Scotch military prowess so long as any of their adversaries are alive to speak of it. Two brigades led the advance, the 44th upon the right and the 46th upon the left. As in the case of the Lancashire men upon their left the first stages of the attack were easy. On getting past the German line, however, the full blast of fire struck the infantry from Douglas Villa, Frezenberg Redoubt, Pommern Castle, Low Farm, Frost House, and Hill 37. By ten o’clock, however, the second objectives had been taken. The 45th Brigade now pushed through, and though held up on the right by Bremen Redoubt, they attained the full objective upon the left, and kept in close touch with the 164th Brigade. The position, however, was perilous and, as it proved, impossible, for Watts’ Corps was now well ahead of either of its neighbours. About two o’clock a violent German drive struck up against the exposed flank of the Fifty-fifth Division, causing great losses, especially to the 4th Royal Lancasters, some of whom were cut off. Another counter-attack beat against the left of the enfeebled 45th Brigade. As a result the remains of the four front line battalions were pushed back some hundreds of yards, but at 5 P.M. the edge was taken off the attack and the German infantry were seen to be retiring. About 1 P.M. next day this attack was renewed down the line of the Ypres-Roulers Railway, and again the Fifteenth Division bore a heavy strain which forced it back once to the Frezenberg Ridge, but again it flooded forward and reoccupied its line. So severe had been the exertions and the losses of these two divisions that they were drawn out of the line as soon as possible, their places being taken by the 36th Ulsters upon the left and the 16th Irish upon the right.

We now come to Jacob's Second Corps lying to the south of the Nineteenth with its left resting upon the Ypres — Roulers Railway. It contained no less than five divisions, three of which were in the line and two in support. Those in the line, counting from the north, were the Eighth Regular Division with its left on the railway and its right at Sanctuary Wood, the Thirtieth Lancashire Division in the centre, and the Twenty-fourth Division opposite Shrewsbury Forest with its right resting upon the Zillebeke-Zandvoorde road. In support was the Twenty-fifth Division upon the left, and the Eighteenth Division upon the right.

The Eighth Division advanced upon a two-brigade front, the 23rd upon the left and the 24th upon the right. Many strong posts including several woods faced the assailants, and from the beginning the resistance was very obstinate. None the less, in spite of numerous checks and delays, the advance was carried forward for half a mile and captured the whole of the front line trenches without much loss, for the German barrage was slow and late whereas the British artillery support was excellent. Indeed it may be remarked that one of the features of the battle was the remarkable preparation by which General Jacob, with the aid of his two artillery leaders, managed to place nearly a thousand pieces into a line which was fully exposed to enemy observation. It was done at a considerable loss of men and guns, but it was absolutely essential to the advance.

The low rising called the Bellewaarde Ridge was the first objective of the division and was easily taken. The two magnificent Regular brigades swept onwards with a perfect order which excited the admiration of spectators. As they passed over the curve of the ground they came into heavy fire from the farther rise near Westhoek, but it neither slowed nor quickened their gait. Hooge, Bellewaarde Lake, The White Château, all the .old landmarks were passed. When the full objective had been reached after more than half a mile of steady advance the 25th Brigade passed through the ranks of their comrades and carried on until, as they neared Westhoek, they ran into a very heavy flank fire from Glencorse Wood in the south. This was in the area of the southern division, so that the 25th Brigade were aware that their flank was open and that the Thirtieth Division had not come abreast of them. They halted therefore just to the west of Westhoek, and as their flank remained open all day they had to content themselves with consolidating the ground that they had won and beating back two counter-attacks. The left of the division kept their station well forward upon the Ypres-Roulers Railway, with their left in close touch with the Scotsmen to the north. The division was relieved next day by the Twenty-fifth Division.

All the battalions had done great things in the action, but some specially fine work was put in by the 1st Sherwood Foresters upon the left of the advance of the 24th Brigade. At one point it was necessary to cut through wire which held up the advance, and the gallantry of the wire-cutting detachment was such that the dying continued to snip at the strands, while even the dead contrived to fall forward in an attempt to screen with their bodies their living comrades. The losses were very heavy, but the historic old 45th Foot, the “old Stubborns” of the Peninsula, never in its long career carried through more gallantly in so fierce a fight. The 2nd Northamptons also increased their high reputation upon this arduous day, during which they took many prisoners.

The Thirtieth Division, which consisted, as will be remembered, to a large extent of “Pal” battalions from Liverpool and Manchester, advanced to the south of the Eighth. Sanctuary Wood and other strong points lay in front of the 90th and 21st Brigades which provided the first lines of stormers. The resistance was strong, the fire was heavy, and the losses were considerable, so that the assailants were held up and were unable to do more than carry the front trenches, whence they repulsed repeated counter-attacks during the rest of the day. In the initial advance the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, that phoenix of a battalion, so often destroyed and so often renewed, wandered in the dusk of the morning away from its allotted path and got as far north as Château Wood in the path of the 24th Brigade. This caused some dislocation of the front line, but the Manchester men on the right of the Scots pushed on and struck the Menin road as far forward as Clapham Junction. The 21st Brigade in the meantime had to pass a great deal of difficult woody ground and met so much opposition that they lost the barrage, that best friend of the stormer. Bodmin Copse was reached, but few penetrated to the eastern side of it. The strong point of Stirling Castle was, however, taken by the Manchesters of the 90th. It was the line of Dumbarton Lakes which proved fatal to the advance, and though two battalions of the 89th and finally the East Anglians of the 53rd Brigade from the supporting Eighteenth Division were thrown into the fight, the latter winning forward for some distance, they found that it was finally rather a question of holding ground than gaining it. The ultimate line, therefore, was across from Clapham Junction. Since neither of the divisions on either side was in any way held up, save perhaps at one point, it is probable that the southern advance would have been more successful but for the limited advance of the Thirtieth Division.

Upon August 2, much exhausted, they were drawn out of the line and the Eighteenth Division took their place, and held the Clapham Junction and Glencorse Wood, which their own 53rd Brigade had largely been instrumental in winning, against repeated attacks.

Upon the right of the Thirtieth Division was the Twenty-fourth, a famous fighting unit which was the only division able to boast that it had been present at Vimy Ridge, Messines, and Ypres — three great battles in the one year. The ground in front of this division was broken and woody, including Shrewsbury Forest and other natural obstacles. None the less good progress was made, especially upon the right, while the left was only retarded by the fact of the limited advance in the north. The advance was made upon a three-brigade front, the 17th upon the left, the 73rd in the centre, and the 72nd upon the right. The 17th, advancing with that fine battalion the 3rd Rifle Brigade alone in the front line, carried all before it at first, but found both flanks exposed and was compelled to halt. The 73rd, led by the 2nd Leicesters and the 7th Northamptons, were held up by a strong point called Lower Star Post in front of them. On the right the 72nd, with the 8th Queen’s and the North Staffords in the lead, gained the house called the Grunenburg Farm, which marked the line of their immediate objective. There they dug in and held firmly, connecting up with the left of Plumer’s Army to the south. Several unsuccessful counter-attacks were made in the succeeding days upon this point, in one of which on August 5 Colonel de la Fontaine of the 9th East Surreys was killed.

If the attack of the Second Corps upon this and other occasions met with limited success, it is to be remembered that the long clear slope leading to Glencorse and Inverness Woods upon either side of the Menin road represented as impossible a terrain for an advancing force as could be imagined. When finally these woods were won, officers who stood among the tree-stumps and looked back were amazed to think that such ground could have been taken, and were filled with surprise that the Ypres salient could have been held so long under an observation from which nothing could be concealed. When such positions are held by troops which have a world-wide reputation, in concrete fortifications, one should be surprised, not that the assailants should have failures but that they should have the dour resolution which brought them at last to success.

All the four corps already mentioned, covering the front from the junction with the French in the north to Shrewsbury Forest in the south, belonged to Gough’s Fifth Army. Of Plumer’s Second Army only a portion of the extreme left, consisting of Morland’s Tenth Corps, was engaged upon July 31. The flank unit, the Forty-first English Division, was in the front line opposite Basseville, with the New Zealanders upon their right. There was no intention to advance the line to any distance in this locality, but the whole task assigned to the troops was completely carried out, and the front was pushed forward until it was level with the right of the Twenty-fourth Division. It has been explained by Sir Douglas Haig, however, that the attack in this quarter had never any serious intentions, and that it was in the nature of a feint in order to distribute the German reserve of men and guns. None the less the ground captured by the 123rd Brigade of the Forty-first Division represented a substantial gain, including the village of Hollebeke and all the broken and difficult country to the north of the bend of the Ypres-Comines Canal and east of Battle Wood. The advance along this portion of the front varied from 200 to 300 yards, while the New Zealanders at the right of the line covered the short area assigned to them in their usual workmanlike fashion, taking after a short fight the hamlet of La Basseville. On the right of the New Zealanders were the Australians, whose movement, in accordance with the general plan was a small one, including the capture of a ruined windmill opposite-their position. This was captured, retaken, and captured once again in a spirited little fight, and August 1 saw more fighting in this sector under very trying conditions of weather and ground.

We have now briefly reviewed the work of each of the twelve divisions which were in line upon the 31st of July. In some places success was absolute, in some it was partial, in none was there failure. Speaking generally it may be said that the Thirty-ninth, Fifty-first, Welsh, and

Guards, had captured their full objectives, including the villages of St. Julien, Pilkem, and the Pilkem Ridge; that the Fifty-fifth and Fifteenth had carried the first and second lines, with the villages of Verlorenhoek and Frezenberg and the all-important ridge; finally that the units upon their right had captured the German first lines, including Hooge, Hollebeke, Stirling Castle, and a line of woods. Apart from the gain of important and dominant positions, 6000 prisoners and 133 officers were taken, together with 25 guns, exclusive of those which had been captured by General Antoine to the north. The progress of the French had been admirable, and they had not only reached their full objectives but had gone beyond them and seized the village of Bixschoote, driving back one severe German counter-attack which surged up to the point of junction between them and the Guards. With such results the first day of the third Battle of Ypres was undoubtedly a British victory, but it was a victory which was absolutely complete in the north, and incomplete in the south. Only one British disaster occurred during the day, and that was in the appearance of that constant and formidable ally of the Central Powers, the autumn rain. That night it began, and for many weeks it continued in a dreary downpour upon a land which at the best of times is water-laden and soft. For two months to come it may be said that operations were really impossible, and that if they were occasionally driven forward by the fiery determination of the British leaders, they were undertaken at such a desperate disadvantage that large results were out of the question. Impassable mud and unfordable craters covered the whole German front, and a swimming collar might well have been added to those many appliances with which the patient British soldier was already burdened.

VII. THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES
August 1 to September 6

Dreadful weather — German reaction — Attack of August 16 — Advance of Cavan’s Corps — Capture of Langemarck — Dreadful losses of the two Irish Divisions — Failure in the south — Splendid field-gunners — The Forty-second Division upon September 6

FROM the evening of July 31 till that of August 1, there were intermittent and sporadic German attacks along the whole of the new line, which were the more dangerous as the wretched weather made it impossible for the aircraft to operate and the artillery support was therefore unreliable. None the less, the wet and weary infantry huddling in the puddles and ditches were not to be forced back. Only at St. Julien, as already described, was there a temporary loss of ground. In this quarter, the Thirty-ninth Division, especially the 118th Brigade, sustained very heavy losses, some of the battalions being almost annihilated for military purposes. For days in succession they lay in improvised trenches sodden and cold in the pitiless rain, and when the rising waters drove them out they were shot down by the enemy. None the less, the ground was held and the abandoned village was regained.

Another point at which the German reaction was particularly severe upon August 1 was near Bremen Redoubt and the Roulers Railway. Here at 3:30 P.M. the enemy attacked with great valour, the blow falling chiefly upon the 24th Brigade on the left of the Eighth and the 44th on the right of the Fifteenth Divisions. The 10th Gordons, 2nd Northamptons, and 1st Sherwood Foresters were for a time fighting for their lives, the regimental staff of the Gordons having to defend the burrow which served as Headquarters. The 7th Camerons were also engaged in this desperate conflict which was fought ankle-deep in mud and under driving rain-clouds. Finally a body of Highlanders under Captain Geddes of the Gordons made so fierce a charge that the Germans were driven back and abandoned the attempt in despair. Their advance, however, had been so sudden and so fierce that there was a time when the line was in grave danger. Captain Symon of the Camerons did great work also in the charge which turned the tide. Both Geddes and Symon were decorated for their valour.

From the first day of the battle the front had been quiet in the sector of the Second Corps, save for constant reciprocal bombardments, the Germans endeavouring to hinder consolidation, while the British prepared for an advance upon Glencorse and Inverness Woods. Upon August 10 an attempt was made to carry the line forward, the Twenty-fifth Division advancing upon the left opposite to Westhoek ^nd the Eighteenth Division coming forward upon the right. The operation was a local one, but was attended with some success, the Twenty-fifth reaching heir full objective and occupying the village of Westhoek. This attack was carried out by the 74th Brigade, and was a model operation of the kind. Westhoek itself was rushed by the 2nd Irish Rifles, but the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers on the north did equally well, fighting their way to the advanced line and capturing several houses with their garrisons. The 9th North Lancashires had also a very fine day's work, but the 13th Cheshires, coming up in support, lost heavily from the barrage which had been too slow to catch the main attack. None the less the survivors made their way to the extreme line, where they joined up with some 7th Bedfords from the 54th Brigade to the south, and held a covering flank so as to block any attack upon Westhoek. The Cheshires did particularly well in this strenuous day's work, they and the Fusiliers having repeated hand-to-hand fights with the German counter-attacks. At one time a body of the Cheshires were quite cut off, but they held their own with determined bravery until their comrades rescued them. The Eighteenth Division were held up by the heavy flanking fire from Inverness Copse. The left of the advance got into the south-western edge of Glencorse Wood, touching the 74th Brigade south of Westhoek, but the right brigade could not get farther than the road east of Stirling Castle. On the whole, however, it was a good advance, and in the meantime the Twenty-fourth Division had drawn closer to Lower Star Post, the obstinate strong point which had held up the 73rd Brigade upon July 31. The Germans showed their resentment at these new advances by five counter-attacks on the evening of August 10, all of which, especially the last, were strongly pressed. These attacks were most strongly made against the 76th Brigade upon the left, but by the exertions of the 106th and 130th Field Companies Royal Engineers, and their pioneers, the 6th South Wales Borderers, they had consolidated to such an extent that they held out against extreme pressure, The 7th Bedfords and 7th Queens in the front of the Eighteenth Division had also much to endure, and were pushed to the very edge of Glencorse Wood. All day the Irish

Riflemen in Westhoek could see the Germans in small bodies dribbling over into the Hannebeek valley in front of them until in the evening a large force had accumulated. From ten in the morning the drift had been going on. The 10th Cheshires and 3rd Worcesters of the 7th Brigade had come up to thicken the attenuated line, but the danger was threatening, and rockets and pigeons were sent up to warn the guns. A very heavy barrage was laid down by them and stopped the attack. The enemy could be seen running for safety in every direction. At the same time an attack broke upon the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers to the north. An isolated house, which was occupied by a small party of this battalion, was so closely attacked that three Germans were shot as they clambered through the windows, but the North Countrymen stood fast, and forty-eight dead were picked up round this post in the morning. This ended the enemy's attempts to recover the lost ground. The fighting had been severe, and the British losses were heavy. For a second time within a year the 13th Cheshires had their commanding officer and every other officer of the battalion upon the casualty list. When one reads such figures one can ask with confidence whether all the exclusiveness of a special caste with its codes of honour and appeals to violence can exceed the quiet courage of those civilian gentlemen who undertook the leading of our new armies. Six field-guns with 8 officers and 300 men were taken in this Westhoek operation. The enemy consisted of the German Fifty-fourth Reserve Division, and all accounts agree that both in defence and in counter-attack their conduct was admirable.

The ground was still very wet and the conditions deplorable, but the advance must be continued at all costs if the preparations were not to be thrown away and winter to find us still within the old pent-house of Ypres. By the end of the second week in August the higher ground was beginning to dry, though the bogs in between were already hardly passable. One more fortnight would be invaluable, but Sir Douglas could not afford to waste another day. Upon August 16 the advance was renewed.

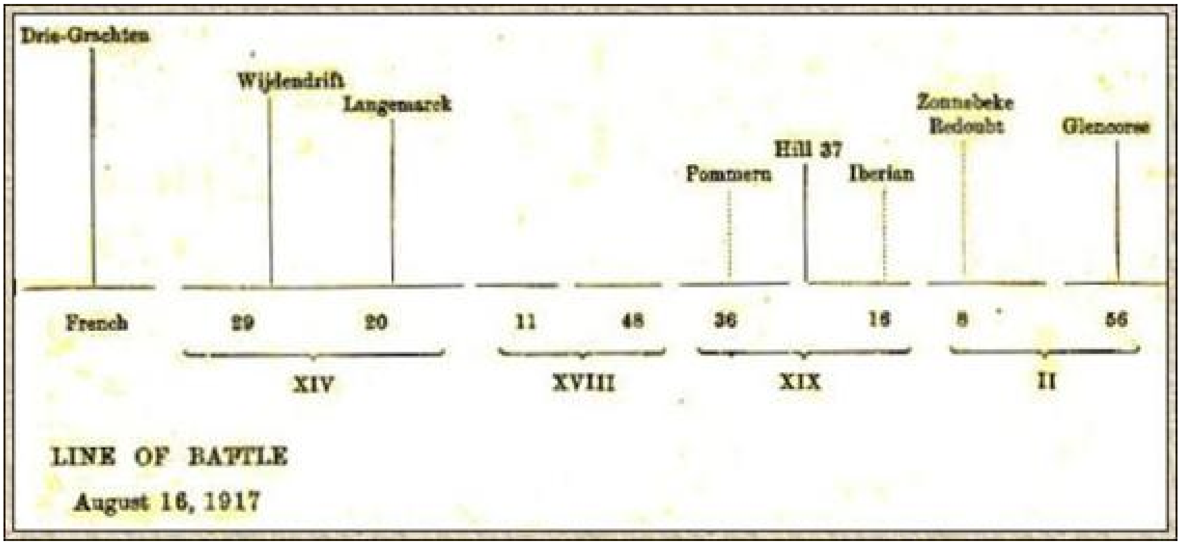

Line of Battle, August 16, 1917

As the original attack had been from a concavity which was almost a semicircle, and as it had encroached upon the German area round the whole circumference, the result was that the front was now too large for simultaneous attack, and the whole of the units of Plumer’s Army which had formerly taken part in the battle were now to the south of the storm-area. The line of battle extended from the French positions in the north down to the north-west corner of Inverness Wood. Along this line the four corps of Cavan (Fourteenth), Maxse (Eighteenth), Watts (Nineteenth), and Jacob (Second), were extended in their former order. In each case the divisions which had borne the brunt of July 31 were now in support, while the old supporting divisions were in the line. As before. we will take the corps in their order from the north, premising that after the usual heavy bombardment the attack began at 4:45 in the morning.

Of the French upon the extreme left of the line it can only be said that they did all and more than they were asked to do. With the grand, swift dash which is the characteristic of their infantry they stormed the various fortified farms along the line of the Steenbeek, though some of them held out long after the main lines of our Allies had passed them. The two ends of the Bridge which crosses the stream at the village of Drie-Grachten were secured, and the whole of the peninsula made good.

The front of Cavan’s Fourteenth Corps was formed by the grand old Twenty-ninth Division upon the left, and the Twentieth Light Division, the heroes of many fights, upon the right. Both divisions lived up to their highest that day, which means that many a brave man died at. his highest to carry on the record. On the whole, the Mebus* or pill-boxes, the new German concrete forts, were less effective in the north than in the south, which may have depended upon the general lie of the country which gave them a shorter area of fire. Small bodies of brave men — sometimes a single brave man — managed to get up to them and to silence them by hurling a sudden bomb through the porthole from which the gun protruded.

[*Mebus = *Manschafts-Eisenbeton-Unterstände*, literally “reinforced-concrete personnel shelters.”]

The advance of the Twenty-ninth Division was begun by crossing in the early dawn the bridges thrown over the Steenbeek. Starting from the line of the stream, the advanced mud-beplastered lines, extending as they crossed country, coalescing as they concentrated upon any obstacle, moved swiftly forwards to their objectives, which were taken in their entirety. Passerelle Farm was carried by the veterans of the Twenty-ninth, and so was Martin’s Mill upon the right, many prisoners being sent to the rear. Another heave took them across the grass-grown lines of the abandoned railway and on into the hamlet of Wijdendrift, the line being established well to the north-east of that place.

Whilst the Twenty-ninth Division had made this fine advance upon the left, the Twentieth had done equally well upon the right, and had ended their brilliant attack by storming after a short but sharp contest the village of Langemarck, that old battle centre of 1914.

The start of the attack was as fine as its execution, for the two brigades were marshalled into their positions in pitch darkness upon ground which was bewildering in its badness, close under the untaken redoubt of Au Bon Gîte, whose garrison at any moment might give the alarm. So silent was the operation that the enemy was utterly ignorant of it, though they kept up a continual machine-gun fire all night which made the assemblage even more difficult. In the early dawn the German fort was rushed by two companies of the 11th Rifle Brigade under Captain Slade.

Then keeping within thirty yards of the barrage the attack moved forward as best it might through the swamps. The 60th Brigade was on the right and the 61st upon the left. The latter had never yet failed to carry its objective, and now it surged through the village of Langemarck and out at the farther side. The 12th King’s Liverpool with the 7th Battalion of the Sussex, Durham, and Yorkshire Light Infantry were the heroes of this exploit. The

German colonel commanding the 3rd Battalion 261st Regiment, and a crowd of very shaken prisoners from the 79th Prussian Reserve Division were picked out of the ruins. On the right the 60th Brigade had made an equally fine advance, the King’s Royal Rifles being on the flank in touch with the 12th King’s Liverpool, with the 6th Shropshires on their right, while the 6th Oxford and Bucks cleared up the numerous pill-boxes at Au Bon Gîte on the banks of the Steenbeek. There were many casualties in the advance, including Colonel Prioleau of the Rifle Brigade, caused chiefly by the fire of the murderous Mebus which studded the ground. These were engaged by small groups of men, specially trained for the work, who frequently, by their cool, purposeful courage, succeeded in silencing what would seem to be an impenetrable stronghold. Sergeant Cooper of the Rifles attacked one of these places with twelve men, and had his whole party shot down. None the less, he closed with it, and firing through the loop-hole with a borrowed revolver, he caused the surrender of the garrison of forty men with seven guns, winning his V.C. Such deeds were done all along the line, and without them the advance must have been held up. Finally the 60th Brigade established themselves upon the line of Langemarck, in touch with the captors of the village, but in the late afternoon a heavy German attack broke in between the King’s Liverpools and the Rifles, annihilating the left flank Company of the latter battalion, which fought desperately to the end under Captain Dove, who was among those who fell. So critical was the situation at one time that a defensive flank 200 yards in length was held by an officer and fifteen men, with hardly any cartridges in their pouches. Touch was kept, however, between the two Brigades, and before evening they had dug in and consolidated the new position. There had been victory along all this front, and by sunset the whole of the objectives of the Fourteenth Corps, with the exception of a small length of trench to the north-east of Langemarck, were in the hands of Cavan’s infantry.

Maxse’s Eighteenth Corps was formed by the Eleventh Division upon the left, and the Forty-eighth South Midland Territorials upon the right. The advance was over the Langemarck-Zonnebeke road, and on over broken Mebus-studded country with no village nor even any farm-house to give a name and dignity to the considerable gain of ground. The advance was, though not complete, of great tactical importance, as it screened the flank of the successful corps in the North.

Brilliant success had marked the operations of the Fourteenth Corps, and modified success those of the Eighteenth. In the case of the four gallant divisions which formed the front of the Nineteenth and Second Corps, it can hardly be said that they had any gains, while their losses were always heavy, and in some cases simply disastrous. Yet, conditions of weather, and ground and position being what they were, it was impossible to impute a shadow of blame to officers or men, who faced a difficult and often an impossible task with the spirit of heroes. To show how desperate that task was, and the extraordinary punishment which was endured by the infantry, the narrative of the Sixteenth and Thirty-sixth Divisions which formed Watts' Corps may be told at greater length. The Sixteenth which is treated first was on the right of the Corps in the Frezenberg sector of the attack.

This division, which had occupied under torrential rain and heavy fire the Frezenberg Ridge since August 4, was much exhausted before the advance began. The losses had fallen mainly upon the 47th Brigade, which had held the line, but the attacking brigades which now took its place were by no means immune. On the day before the battle, Brigadier-General Leveson-Gower of the 49th Brigade and practically all his staff became casualties from gas poisoning, and the command had to be taken over by the CO. of the Irish Fusiliers. So heavy was the pressure upon the division that 107 officers and 1900 men were on the casualty lists before the advance had begun. None the less, the spirit of the troops was high, and all were eager for the clash. On August 16 the attack was made at 4-45 in the morning, the Thirty-sixth North of Ireland Division being on the left and the Eighth upon the right of the Sixteenth Division. It was upon a two-brigade front, the 48th being on the right and the 49th upon the left. So difficult were the conditions that it was-only a quarter of an hour before zero that the concentration was complete, most of the troops being more fit for a rest than for a battle.

The line of advance was formed by the 7th Irish Rifles and 9th Dublin Fusiliers upon the right, while the 7th and 8th Inniskilling Fusiliers were on the left. At the signal they went forward over very heavy ground, the barrage slowing down to five minutes per hundred yards. We shall first follow the right attack.

Both the Irish Rifles and the Dublin Fusiliers found themselves at once within the sweep of numerous machine-guns which caused very heavy casualties. The Rifles for a time were in touch with the 2nd Middlesex of the Eighth Division upon their right, but the latter got caught in their own barrage with the result that it had to fall back. The Rifles, who had lost practically every officer, moved down the railway and across the Hannebeek, but were so reduced in number that it was not possible for the few survivors to hold the German counter-attack advancing about 4 P.M. from Zonnebeke. The Dublin Fusiliers, who had wilted under a heavy enfilade fire from Vampire Farm and Bremen Redoubt, were in equally bad case, and all officers and orderlies who tried to get forward to the assaulting companies were killed or wounded. Two companies of the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers which came up in support shared in the catastrophe and were practically annihilated. Of one company two officers and three men survived unscathed. Of another one non-commissioned officer and ten men. Such figures will show the absolute devotion with which the Irishmen stuck to their work and are not, so far as can be known, exceeded by any losses endured by considerable units during the war. Some of these scattered remains lay out until the evening of August 17, endeavouring to hold a new line, until after dusk they fell back to the trenches from which they had started.

On the left the Inniskilling Fusiliers got away in fine style with the 7/8th Irish Fusiliers in close support moving so swiftly that they avoided the German barrage. Beck House and other strong points were rapidly taken. A fort named Borry Farm upon the right could not be reduced, however, and its five machine-guns raked the advancing lines. Three separate attacks upon the concrete emplacements of this position all ended in failure. Part of the attacking force remained in front of the untaken position, while another portion passed it on the north side working on to the neighbourhood of Zevenkote. At this side there had been more success as the 7th Inniskillings had taken Iberian Trench and consolidated it. Thence they moved forward to the eminence called Hill 37, but met with heavy blasts of fire from that position and from Zonnebeke. The enemy now counter-attacked from Hill 37, and as the left flank of the Inniskillings was entirely exposed, since they had outrun the Ulster men upon their left, they were forced to retire to a position at Delva Farm. This was untenable, however, since both flanks were now exposed, so the whole line fell back to Iberian Trench. This, however, proved to be also impossible to hold on account of the truly terrible losses. In the whole force in that quarter of the field only one officer seems to have been left standing. Both the 8th Fusiliers upon the right and the Ulster men upon the left had retired, and by 9:30 A.M. there was no alternative for the shattered remnants of the 49th Brigade but to seek the shelter of their own line, while the 6th Connaughts and 7th Leinsters were brought up to support them. Of the 7th Inniskillings there were left one wounded officer and no formed body of men at all, while no other battalion of the brigade was of greater strength than half a company. It was indeed a dreadful day in all this Southern section of the line. The losses had been so heavy that no further attack could be organised, and in spite of the fact that scattered men were still lying out, it was impossible to form a new line. Upon the night of August 17 the Fifteenth Division came forward again to relieve the exhausted but heroic infantry, who had done all that men could do, and more than men could be expected to do, but all in vain.

Nor had their brother Irishmen of the Thirty-sixth Division upon their left any better fortune. The failure of one division may always be due to some inherent weakness of its own, but when four divisions in line, of the calibre of the Thirty-sixth, Sixteenth, Eighth, and Fifty-sixth all fail, then it can clearly be said, as on the first day of the Somme Battle, that they were faced by the impossible. This impossible obstacle took the immediate form of many concrete gun emplacements arranged chequer-wise across the front, each holding five guns. But the contributory causes in the case of all the divisions except the Fifty-sixth was their long exposure in dreadful weather to a sustained bombardment which would have shaken the nerves of any troops in the world, apart from thinning their ranks. In the Sixteenth Division alone 1200 men were under treatment for trench fever and swollen feet, besides the heavy losses from shell fire.

The fortunes of the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division were in all ways similar to those of the Sixteenth. There was the same initial advance, the same experience of devastating fire from concrete strong points, the same slaughter, and the same retreat of a few survivors over ground which was dotted with the bodies of their comrades. Upon the right the attack was urged by the 108th Brigade with the 9th Irish Fusiliers upon the right and the Irish Rifles upon the left, with two other battalions of the same regiment in support. The third attack starting from the line of Pommern Castle got forward as far as Gallipoli Farm, but there it was faced by a machine-gun fire, coming chiefly from Hill 35, which was simply annihilating in its effect. Only the remains of the 9th Irish Fusiliers ever got back to their original line. For many hours the Irish Rifles held on to the rising ground to the north-east of Pommern Castle, but by four in the afternoon the shattered 108th Brigade was back in its own trenches. The attack of Jacob's Second Corps was carried out upon August 16 by two divisions, the Eighth (which had relieved the Twenty-fifth) in the Ypres-Roulers Railway — Westhoek line, and the Fifty-sixth London Territorials which had relieved the Eighteenth Division in the Glencorse Wood-Stirling Castle line.

The Eighth Division advanced with the 23rd Brigade upon the left and the 25th upon the right. The barrage was excellent, the infantry were on the top of their form, and all went well. Starting at 4:45 A.M., within an hour they had taken Zonnebeke Redoubt, Iron Cross Redoubt, and Anzac. This marked their limit, however, for heavy machine-gun fire was sweeping across from machine-gun emplacements of concrete in Nonneboschen Wood in the south. The right flank of the 25th Brigade fell back therefore to the line of the Hannebeek, and the stormers of Zonnebeke Redoubt, men of the 2nd West Yorkshire, were compelled to fall back also to the same line. The Germans were now in an aggressive mood, and were seen several times advancing in large numbers down the wooded slopes in front of the British positions, but were always stopped by the heavy barrage.

About 2:30 P.M. their pressure caused a short retirement, and the situation was made more difficult by the failure of the 23rd Brigade to find touch with the division upon their left. The pressure of the counter-attacks still continued, and the German losses were heavy, but the machine-gun fire was so deadly in the exposed Hannebeek Valley that a further withdrawal was ordered until the troops were almost in the line from which they had started.

The advance of the Fifty-sixth Division upon the right could not be said to be more successful. The 167th Brigade were on the left, the 169th in the centre with the desperate task of carrying Nonneboschen and Glencorse, while the hard-worked 53rd Brigade of the Eighteenth Division was detailed to form a defensive flank upon the south. It was really the failure of this attack which contributed greatly to the failure of the whole, for there was a strong point at the north-west corner of Inverness Copse with strong machine-gun emplacements which could sweep the area to the north over a wide arc. Thus all the troops north of this point were faced from the start by a devastating fire. The 167th Brigade got well forward to Nonneboschen, but was stopped by bogs and so fell behind the barrage. On the left they reached Albert Redoubt, but were driven in by a strong counter-attack. The

169th reached the east end of Glencorse Wood where they killed many Germans and captured sixty gunners, but the counter-attacks gradually drove the line back to whence it started. A German officer captured a few days later has described how he saw the London men, mostly without officers, walking slowly back in front of his advance. It was a day of hard slogging upon this sector with very little to show for it. So serious were the losses of the Fifty-sixth Division that the Fourteenth Division took its place next day, while the other London Territorial unit, the Forty-seventh Division (Gorringe) took over the line of the hard-worked Eighth.

Thus we have passed down the whole line upon August 16, and have noted the victory of the north, the stalemate of the centre, and the failure on the south. There can be no doubt that the losses of the British were very much in excess of those of the Germans, for the line of the latter could be held cheaply owing to the Mebus system which presented a new and formidable problem for the British generals. On the other hand the actual trophies of victory lay with the attack, since in the north they had possessed themselves of the German third line, and had captured 30 guns with more than 2000 prisoners.

During the wet and miserable fortnight which followed this engagement the British line was advanced at many points by local operations, each small in itself but yielding in the aggregate some hundreds of prisoners, and representing a gain of ground of about 800 yards for two miles upon the St. Julien front. The Eleventh and Forty-eighth Divisions which still held this sector were responsible for the greater part of this advance which was carried out by three efforts, upon August 19, 22, and 27. Upon the earlier date the advance of the South Midlanders was particularly fine, when the 145th Brigade was heavily engaged, the Gloucesters and Buckinghams leading a fine assault which gained an appreciable section of ground. The bombing parties of the 4th Berkshires, a battalion recruited from Reading, did particularly good service, following up the first line and reducing a number of strong points which had been left untaken. The losses among the stormers were heavy, but the results were substantial and there were some hundreds of prisoners. Especially fine during this and subsequent actions was the conduct of the field-gunners, British, Canadian, and Australian, who habitually worked their guns in the open with their horses in attendance, changing positions, advancing and unlimbering in the good old fashion with no attempt at camouflage, and defiant of the German shells or aeroplanes. The team-drivers had little to do in the war up to now, but when their chance came they and their gallant horses went through the barrage and the poison clouds as if they were no more than London fogs. The admiration of the gunners for each other was mutual. Mr. Bean, the Australian chronicler, narrates how a British artillery Major complimented the neighbouring Australian battery saying: “We could not believe you could carry on in such a fire”: to which the Australian Major replied: “Well, do you know, we were thinking exactly the same thing about you.” Of such are the ties of Empire.

On August 22 the Fourteenth Division carried out an attack upon Glencorse and Inverness Woods, going over the top at 7 A.M. The 42nd Brigade was on the left facing Glencorse, the 43rd upon the right facing Inverness. The light infantry battalions went forward in fine style, the 5th Shropshires and 6th Cornwalls upon the left carrying all before them and attaining their full objective, which was strictly limited in its extent. This was held and consolidated. The 6th Somersets and 10th Durhams went forward on the right, but the fighting was severe and the progress slow. None the less it was sure, and before evening the greater part of Inverness Copse was in the hands of these four battalions, together with nearly 200 prisoners. An Aug. 1 to attempt next morning, August 23, to capture Fitz-Clarence Farm, just north of Inverness Copse, though supported by three tanks, was not a success, two of the tanks being hit by gun-fire and the third reaching the Farm without any infantry at its heels. At the same time a counter-attack upon the 5th Shropshires was beaten back by rifle fire. On the next day there was still heavy fighting in this sector, for the Germans could not bear to give up this wood, and made many attempts to regain it. The 42nd Brigade held every inch of their line in Glencorse, but the 43rd were pushed back to the western edge of Inverness where they held on.

There had been a slight forward movement upon each side of the Fourteenth Division during these three days of battle, the Forty-seventh Division taking an advanced line in the north, while the steadfast Twenty-fourth, still in the line of battle, came forward in the south. The 17th Brigade upon the right of the Fourteenth Division guarded its flank during the advance, and a dashing exploit was performed by one of its officers, Lieutenant Stonebanks of the 1st Royal Fusiliers, who took a strong point with its garrison by a sudden attack, so gaining his cross.

Among the other operations which were carried out between the larger engagements in the hope of improving the local position were a series which covered the ground from Fortuin in the north to the south of the Roulers Railway. This point, which was still occupied by the Nineteenth Corps, was covered upon the left by the Sixty-first Division, a second line English Territorial unit, which faced Hill 35, while on the right the Fifteenth Division had come back into the battle once more. These two divisions made two advances upon August 22 and upon August 27 in an endeavour to enlarge their front, but neither was successful. Early in September the Forty-second Division, which had returned with a considerable reputation from Gallipoli, took the place of the hard-worked Fifteenth. Upon September 6 they again endeavoured to get forward, but the fact that Hill 37 on their left flank had not been taken proved fatal to their advance. The ground was swept from this position of vantage so that when the Forty-second Division went forward upon September 6 to try and storm the line of farms, Iberian, Beck, and Borry, which lay in front of them, they were smitten on their left flank by this deadly fire and suffered heavy losses — the more heavy because with heroic tenacity they held to their task long after its failure was inevitable. The 125th Brigade showed an intrepidity in this attack which in any former war would have been historical, but in this prolonged exhibition of human and military virtue does but take its place among many as good. The 5th and 6th Lancashire Fusiliers who led the stormers had practically ceased to exist after the action, while the 7th and 8th in support had heavy losses. The general lesson of such attacks would seem to be here, as on the Somme, that it is better to wait for a general advance in order to rectify inequalities of the line, rather than to approach them by local attacks — also that an untaken strong point upon the flank is absolutely fatal to any isolated effort. From this time onwards the line was quiet, making preparation- for the great coming attack.

On the rest of the Allied battle-line the principal event of August was a successful Italian attack upon the Isonzo Front beginning upon August 19, which not only gained ground but brought in no less than 20,000 prisoners. On the Verdun Front upon August 20 the French had a fine little victory, winning back the last remains of what they had lost in the great struggle, and taking over 5000 prisoners. Since April 9 the Allied gains in prisoners had been British 45,000, French 43,000, Italians 40,000, Russians 33,000.

The British at this date held 102,000 Germans as against 43,000 British prisoners held by the Germans.

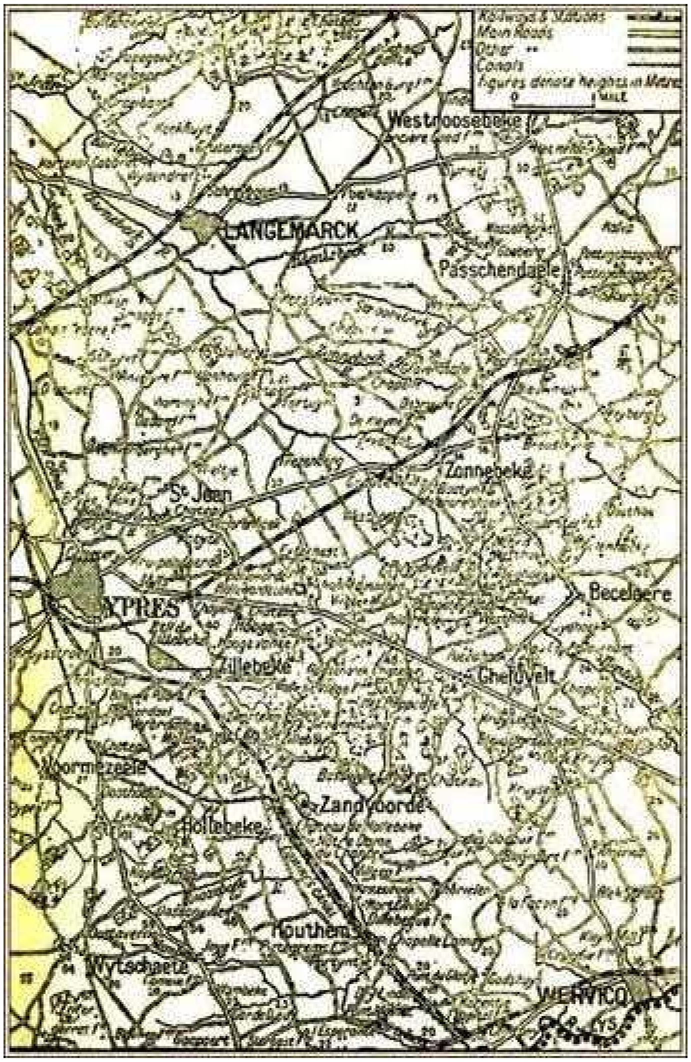
Railways & Stations
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Hollebeke
Houthem
Wytschaete
WERVICQ
LYS

The Ypres Front

VIII. THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES
September 6 to October 3, 1917

Engagement of Plumer’s Second Army — Attack of September 20 — Fine advance of Fifty-fifth Division — Advance of the Ninth Division — Of the Australians — Strong counter-attack upon the Thirty-third Division — Renewed advance on September 20 — Continued rain — Desperate fighting

THE attack of August 16, with its varying and not wholly satisfactory results, had been carried out entirely by the armies of Antoine and of Gough. It was clear now to Sir Douglas Haig that the resistance of the Germans was most formidable along the line of the Menin road, where the long upward slope and the shattered groves which crowned it made an ideal position for defence. To overcome this obstacle a new force was needed, and accordingly the Second Army was closed up to the north, and the command in this portion of the field was handed over to General Plumer. This little white-haired leader with his silky manner, his eye-glass, and his grim, inflexible resolution^ had always won the confidence of his soldiers, but the complete victory of Messines, with the restraint which had prevented any aftermath of loss, had confirmed the whole army in its high appreciation of his powers.

These changes in the line, together with the continued rain, which went from bad to worse, had the effect of suspending operations during the remainder of the month save for the smaller actions already recorded. Fresh dispositions had to be made in order to meet the new German method o defence, which had abandoned the old trench system, and depended now upon scattered strong points, lightly held front lines, and heavy reserves with which to make immediate counter-attacks upon the exhausted stormers. The concrete works called also for a different artillery treatment, since they were so strong that an eighteen-pounder or even a 5.9 gun made little impression. These new problems all pressed for solution, and the time, like the days, was growing shorter.

The front of the new attack upon September 20 was about eight miles in length, and corresponded closely with the front attacked upon July 31, save that it was contracted in the north so that Langemarck was its limit upon this side. Upon the south the flank was still fixed by the Ypres-Comines

Canal, just north of Hollebeke. The scheme of the limited objective was closely adhered to, so that no advance of more than a mile was contemplated at any point, while a thousand yards represented the average depth of penetration which was intended. The weather, which had given a treacherous promise of amendment, broke again upon the very night of the assembly, and the troops were drenched as they lay waiting for the signal to advance. Towards morning the rain stopped, but drifting clouds and a dank mist from the saturated soil deprived the attackers of the help of their aircraft — so serious a handicap to the guns. But the spirits of the men rose with the difficulties, after the good old British fashion, and at 5:40 on this most inclement morning, wet and stiff and cold, they went forward with cheerful alacrity into the battle.

The field of operations was now covered by two British armies, that of Gough in the north extending from beyond Langemarck to the Zonnebeke front, while Plumer’s Army covered the rest of the line down to Hollebeke. It may be said generally that the task of the men in the south was the more difficult, since they had farther to advance over country which had seemed to be almost impregnable. None the less the advance in the north was admirably executed and reached its full objectives. Cavan’s Fourteenth Corps still held the extreme north of the British line, but neither they nor the French upon their left were really engaged in the advance. They covered the front as far south as Schreiboom, where the right of the Twentieth Division joined on to the left of the Fifty-first Highlanders. This latter division formed the left flank of the main advance, though the 59th Brigade, the 60th Brigade, and the 2nd Brigade of Guards did push their line some short distance to the front, on either side of the Ypres — Staden Railway, the 59th Brigade capturing Eagle Trench and the 60th Eagle House. This was a very formidable position, crammed with machine-guns, and it took four days for its conquest, which was a brilliant feat of arms carried out by men who would be discouraged by no obstacle. The garrison were picked troops, who fought desperately, and everything was against the attack, but their pertinacity wore down the defence and eventually, upon Sept. 23, the 10th Rifle Brigade and the 12th Royal Rifles cleared up the last corner of the widespread stronghold.

The hard-worked Highland Territorials of the Fifty-first Division were worn with service but still full of fire. Their advance was also an admirable one, and by nine o’clock they had overcome all obstacles and dug in upon their extreme objective. Quebec Farm was a special stronghold which held the Highlanders up for a time, but finally fell to their determined assault. Rose Farm, Delva Farm, and Pheasant Farm were also strongly defended. About 10 A.M. many strong counter-attacks were made in this area, one of which for a time drove back the line of the Highlanders, but only for a short period. This particular attack was a very gallant one effected by Poles and Prussians of the Thirty-sixth and Two hundred and eighth Divisions. It was noted upon this day that the Prussians fought markedly better than the Bavarians, which has not always been the case. The method adopted both by the Highland Division and in some other parts of the line in order to overcome strong points, such as farms, was a concentration of portable trench-mortars firing heavy charges with a shattering effect. Pheasant Farm was a particularly difficult proposition, and yet it was so smothered by a cloud of these missiles that the distracted garrison was compelled to surrender. This use of what may be called a miniature and mobile heavy artillery became a feature of the last year of the War.

Next to the Fifty-first Division, and covering the ground to the north and east of St. Julien was the Fifty-eighth Division, a new unit of second line London Territorials which had done a good deal of rough service in the line, but had not yet been engaged in an important advance. Upon this occasion it bore out the old saying that British troops are often on their top form in a first engagement. Their advance was a brilliant one and attained its full objective, taking upon the way the strongly-fortified position of Wurst Farm. Nowhere in the line was the ground more sodden and more intersected with water jumps. The 173rd Brigade was on the. right, the 174th upon the left, the. former being led by the young hero of the Ancre Battle and the youngest Brigadier, save perhaps one, in the whole army. It was a magnificent battle debut for the Londoners and their coolness under fire was particularly remarkable, for in facing the difficult proposition of Wurst Farm they avoided making a frontal attack upon it by swinging first left and then right with all the workmanlike precision of veterans. The capture of Hubner Farm by the 2/6th and 2/8th London was also a particularly fine performance, as was the whole work of Higgins’ 174th Brigade.

The two divisions last mentioned, the Fifty-first and the Fifty-eighth, formed the fighting line of Maxse’s Eighteenth Corps upon this day. On their right was Fanshawe’s Fifth Corps, which had taken the place of the

Nineteenth Corps. The most northern division was that sterling West Lancashire Territorial Division, the Fifty-fifth, which had now been in and out of the fighting line but never out of shell fire since the evening of July 31, or seven weeks in all. In spite of its long ordeal, and of the vile ground which lay at its front, it advanced with all its usual determination, the 164th Brigade upon the left, and ‘the 165th upon the right, each of them being stiffened by one battalion from the Reserve Brigade. The 8th Liverpool Irish were upon the extreme left, which moved down the left bank of the Hannebeek and struck up against the third difficult obstacle of Schuber Farm, which they succeeded, with the co-operation of the 2/4th London and of two Tanks, in carrying by assault. Farther south a second farm-house, strongly held, called the Green House, was carried by the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, while the 4th North Lancashire took Fokker Farm upon the right. When one considers that each of these was a veritable fortress, stuffed with machine-guns and defended by 2nd Guards Reserve regiment, one cannot but marvel at the efficiency to which these Territorial soldiers had attained. The 4th Royal Lancasters kept pace upon the right. The advance of the 165th Brigade was equally successful in gaining ground, and there also were formidable obstacles in their path. After crossing the Steenbeek they had to pass a very heavy barrage of high explosives and shrapnel which, however, burst upon percussion and was neutralised to some extent by the softness of the ground. The line of advance was down the Gravenstafel road. A formidable line of trenches were carried and Kavnorth Post was captured, as were Iberian and Gallipoli, strong points upon the right. A counter-attack in the afternoon which moved down against the two brigades, was broken by their rifle-fire, aided by the advent of the two supporting battalions, the 5th South Lancashires and 5th North Lancashires. The ground thus taken was strongly held until next evening, September 21, when under cover of a very heavy fire the enemy penetrated once more into the positions in the area of the 164th Brigade. Just as darkness fell, however, there was a fine advance to regain the ground, in which the whole of the headquarters staff, with bearers, signallers, runners, and men-servants, swept up to the position which was captured once more. Among other positions taken upon September 20 was Hill 37, which had been so formidable a stronghold for the Germans in the murderous fighting of August 16. This commanding point was taken and held by the 5th, 6th, and 9th King’s Liverpools, with part of the 5th South Lancashires, all under the same officer who led the 36th Brigade in their fine attack upon Ovillers. The position was strongly organised, and upon the next day it beat back a very determined German counter-attack.

The Ninth Division was on the right of the Fifty-fifth with the South Africans upon the left flank. At the opening of the attack the 3rd (Transvaal) and 4th (Scottish) South African regiments advanced upon the German line. Within an hour the latter had carried Borry Farm, which had defied several previous assaults. At eight o'clock both these regiments had reached their full objectives and the supporting units, the 1st (Cape) and 2nd (Natal) regiments went through their ranks, the men of the Transvaal cheering the men of Natal and the Cape as they passed. By 9:30 the second objectives, including Beck House, had also fallen. There was a considerable concentration of Germans beyond, and the 6th Camerons came up in support, as an attack appeared to be imminent. The artillery fire dispersed the gathering, however, and the 2nd Regiment spreading out on the left to Waterend House established touch with the Lancashire men to their north. Bremen Redoubt had been captured, and this was made a nodal point against any counter-attack, as was Vampire Redoubt. By mid-day the 1st Regiment on the right had lost heavily and was forced to dig in and act upon the defensive as German concentrations were visible in the Hannebeke Woods. A second battalion of the 26th Brigade, the 7th Seaforths, were at this time sent up in support. The left flank was also checked and a defensive post organised at Mitchell's Farm. The shelling from the direction of Hill 37 was very heavy, the more so as the Africans were ahead of the 165th Brigade upon their left. A number of German aeroplanes flying low and using their machine-guns complicated a situation which was already sufficiently serious, for the small-arm ammunition was running low and only a few hundred exhausted men with a thin sprinkling of officers remained in the fighting line. The artillery played up splendidly, however, and though the enemy massed together at Bostin Farm he could never get a sufficient head of troops to carry him through the pelting British barrage. Thus the day drew to a close with heavy losses cheerfully borne, and also with a fine gain of ground which included several of the most sinister strong points upon the whole line. The South Africans have been few in number, but it cannot be disputed that their record in the field has been a superb one.

In the meantime the 27th Brigade, upon the right of the South Africans, had also done a splendid day’s work. In the first dash the battalion upon the left front, the 12th Royal Scots, had taken Potsdam Redoubt with its garrison. Thence the line rolled on, the Scots Fusiliers and Highland Light Infantry joining in turn in the advance, until evening found them with the same difficulties and also with the same success as their African comrades. As night fell this right wing was in touch with the Australians near Anzac, and thence passed through the wood and along the railway bank to the junction with the left brigade, which in turn stretched across to Gallipoli and to Hill 37, which was now in the hands of their Lancashire neighbours and bristling with their machine-guns. That night the Ninth Division lay upon the ground that they had won, but the men had been without sleep or warm food for three days and nights under continual fire, so that, hardy as they were, they had nearly reached the limit of human endurance. It is worthy of remark that the wounded in this part of the field were attended to in many cases by captured German surgeons, and that one of these had an experience of Prussian amenities, for his brains were scattered by a sniper’s bullet.

The First and Second Australian Divisions joined the left unit of Plumer’s Army, but worked in close co-operation with the Ninth Division upon their right. In a day of brilliant exploits and unqualified successes there was nothing to beat their performance, for they were faced by that which tries the nerves of the stoutest troops — an area which has already been tested and found to be impregnable. With all the greater fire did the brave Australian infantry throw itself into the fray, and they had the advantage over their predecessors in that the line was well up on either side of them, and that enemy guns upon their flanks were too busy upon their own front to have a thought of enfilading. The result of the Australian advance was instant and complete, for the remainder of Glencorse Wood and Nonneboschen were over-run and by ten o’clock the “Diggers” were through the hamlet of Polygonveld and into the original German third line beyond it. The western part of Polygon Wood was also cleared, and so, after a sharp fight, was the strong point called “Black Watch Corner,” which is at the south-western extremity of the wood. At this point the advance of the Australians was not less than a mile in depth over ground which presented every possible obstacle. Over at least one of their captured redoubts their own Australian flag with the Southern Cross upon it was floating proudly in the evening. The losses of the division were serious, the greater part being due to an enfilade fire from the right, coming probably from the high ground in the south near Tower Hamlets, which struck their flank as they approached the south of Polygon Wood. Anzac upon the left marked their northern limit. Nothing could have been finer than the whole Australian attack. “They went into battle,” says their scribe, “not singing and laughing like many British regiments, but very grim, very silent, with their officers marching quietly at the head of each small string of men.” They are dour, determined fighters, flame-like in attack, iron in defence, and they have woven a fresh and brilliant strand into the traditions of the Imperial armies. It should be mentioned that it was the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 7th Brigades which carried forward the line to victory.

Good as the Australian advance had been it could not be said to have been better than Babington’s Twenty-third Division upon their right. They, too, had to cross ground which had been littered by the bodies of their comrades, and to pass points which brave men had found impassable. But all went well upon this day, and every objective was seized and held. Inverness Copse, of evil memory, was occupied at the first rush, and the advance went forward without a check to Dumbarton Lakes and on past them until the Veldhoek Ridge had fallen. A counter-attack which broke upon them was driven back in ruin. The advance was across the marshy Basseville Beek and through the dangerous woods beyond, but from first to last there was never a serious check. It was on the Yorkshires, the West Yorkshires, and the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 68th and 69th Brigades that the brunt of the early fighting fell, and as usual the North-country grit proved equal to the hardest task which could be set before it. The final stage which carried the Veldhoek Ridge was also a North-country exploit in this section of the line, as it was the 10th West Ridings and the 12th Durhams, who with fixed bayonets cleared the ultimate positions, reaching the western slopes of the upper Steenbeek Valley where they dug in the new temporary lines.

On the extreme south of the line the advance had been as successful as elsewhere, and at nearly every point the full objective was reached. Upon the right of the Twenty-third Division was the Forty-first, a sound English Division which had distinguished itself at the Somme by the capture of Flers. The leading brigades, the 122nd and 124th, with Royal Fusiliers, King’s Royal Rifles, and Hampshires in the lead, lost heavily in the advance. The snipers and machine-guns were very active upon this front, but each obstacle was in turn surmounted, and about 8:30 the Reserve Brigade, the 123rd, came through and completed the morning's work, crossing the valley of the Basseville Beek and storming up the slope of the Tower Hamlets, a strong position south of the Menin road. Among the points which gave them trouble was the Papooje farm, which was found to be a hard nut to crack — but cracked it was, all the same. This same brigade suffered much from machine-guns east of Bodmin Copse, both it and the 124th Brigade being held up at the Tower Hamlet Plateau, which exposed the wing of the 122nd who had reached all their objectives. So great was the pressure that the Brigadier of the 124th Brigade came up personally to reorganise the attack. The 11th West Kent, the southern unit of the 122nd, had their right flank entirely exposed to German fire. Two young subalterns, Freeman and Woolley, held this dangerous position for some time with their men, but Freeman was shot by a sniper, the losses were heavy, and the line had to be drawn in. Colonel Corfe of the 11th West Kent and Colonel Jarvis of the 21st K.R.R. were among the casualties. In spite of all counter-attacks the evening found the left of the Forty-first Division well established in its new line, and only short of its full objective in this difficult region of the Tower Hamlets, where for the following two days it had to fight hard to hold a line. The losses were heavy in all three brigades.

On the right of the 41st and joining the flank unit of Morland's Tenth Corps was the Thirty-ninth Division. This Division attacked upon a single brigade front, the 117th having the post of honour. The 16th and 17th Sherwood Foresters, the 17th Rifles, and the 16th Rifle Brigade were each in turn engaged in a long morning's conflict in which they attained their line, which was a more limited one than that of the divisions to the north.

South of this point, and forming the flank of the whole attack, was the Nineteenth Division, which advanced with the West- countrymen of the 57th Brigade upon the right, and the Welshmen of the 58th Brigade upon the left. Their course was down the spur east of Zillebeke and then into the small woods north of the Ypres-Comines Canal. The 8th Gloucesters, 10th Worcesters, 8th North Staffords, 6th Wiltshires, 9th Welsh, and 9th Cheshires each bore their share of a heavy burden and carried it on to its ultimate goal. The objectives were shorter than at other points, but had special difficulties of their own, as every flank attack is sure to find. By nine o'clock the work was thoroughly done, and the advance secured upon the south, the whole Klein Zillebeke sector having been made good. The captors of La Boisselle had shown that they had not lost their power of thrust.

This first day of the renewed advance represented as clean-cut a victory upon a limited objective as could be conceived. The logical answer to the German determination to re-arrange his defences by depth was to refuse to follow to depth, but to cut off his whole front which was thinly held, and then by subsequent advances take successive slices off his line. The plan worked admirably, for every point aimed at was gained, the general position was greatly improved, the losses were moderate, and some three thousand more prisoners were taken. The Germans have been ingenious in their various methods of defence, but history will record that the Allies showed equal skill in their quick modifications of attack, and that the British during this year’s campaign had a most remarkable record in never being once held by any position which they attacked, save only at Cambrai. It is true that on some sections, as in the south of the line on August 16, there might be a complete check, but in every action one or other part of the attack had a success. In this instance it was universal along the line.

The Germans did not sit down quietly under their defeat, but the reserve counter-attack troops came forward at once. Instead, however, of finding the assailants blown and exhausted, as they would have been had they attempted a deep advance, they found them in excellent fettle, and endured all the losses which an unsuccessful advance must bring. There were no less than eleven of these attempts upon the afternoon and evening of September 20, some of them serious and some perfunctory, but making among them a great total of loss. They extended over into September 21, but still with no substantial success. As has already been recorded, the front of the 55th Division, at Schuler Farm, east of St. Julien, was for a time driven in, but soon straightened itself out again. In this advance, which embraced the whole front near St. Julien, the German columns came with the fall of evening driving down from Gravenstafel and following the line of the Roulers Railway. They deployed under cover of a good barrage, but the British guns got their exact range and covered them with shrapnel. They were new unshaken troops and came on with great steadiness, but the losses were too heavy and the British line too stiff. Their total lodgment was not more than 300 yards, and that they soon lost again. By nine o’clock all was clear.

Among the British defences the ex-German pill-boxes were used with great effect as a safe depository for men and munitions. This considerable German attack in the north was succeeded next day by an even larger and more concentrated effort which surged forward on the line of the Menin road, the fresh Sixteenth Bavarian Division beating up against the Thirty-third and the Australian Divisions. There was some fierce give-and-take fighting with profuse shelling upon either side, but save for some local indentations the positions were all held. The Victorians upon the right flank of the Australians' position at Polygon Wood were very strongly attacked and held their ground all day. Finney's Thirty-third Division had come into line, and the German attack upon the morning of September 25 broke with especial fury upon the front of the 98th Brigade, which fought with a splendid valour which marks the incident as one of the outstanding feats of arms in this great battle. Small groups of men from the two regular battalions, the 1st Middlesex and the 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands, were left embedded within the German lines after their first successful rush, but they held out with the greatest determination, and either fought their way back or held on in little desperate groups until they were borne forward again next day upon the wave of the advancing army.

The weight of the attack was so great, however, that the front of the 98th Brigade was pushed back, and there might have been a serious set-back had it not been for the iron resistance of the 100th Brigade, who stretched south to the Menin road, joining hands with the 1 1th Sussex of the Thirty-ninth Division upon the farther side. The 100th Brigade was exposed to a severe assault all day most gallantly urged by the German Fiftieth Reserve Division and supported by a terrific bombardment. It was a to terrible ordeal, but the staunch battalions who met it, the 4th Liverpools who linked up with their comrades of the 98th Brigade, the 2nd Worcesters, 9th Highland Light Infantry, and 1st Queens, were storm-proof that day. On the Menin road side the two latter battalions were pushed in for a time by the weight of the blow, and lost touch with the Thirty-ninth Division, but the Colonel of the Queens, reinforced by some of the 16th K.R.R., pushed forward again with great determination, and by 9 A.M. had fully re-occupied the support line, as had the 9th Highland Light Infantry upon their left. So the situation remained upon the night of the 25th, and the further development of the British counter-attack became part of the general attack of September 26. It had been a hard tussle all day, in the course of which some hundreds in the advanced line had fallen into the hands of the enemy. It should be mentioned that the troops in the firing-line were occasionally short of ammunition during the prolonged contest, and that this might well have caused disaster had it not been for the devoted work of the 18th Middlesex Pioneer Battalion who, under heavy fire and across impossible ground, brought up the much-needed boxes and bandoliers. The resistance of the Thirty-third Division was greatly helped by the strong support of the Australians on their flank. It was a remarkable fact, and one typical of the inflexibility of Sir Douglas Haig's leadership and the competence of his various staffs, that the fact that this severe action was raging did not make the least difference in his plans for the general attack upon September 26.

At 5:50 in the morning of that date, in darkness and mist, the wonderful infantry was going forward as doggedly as ever over a front of six miles, extending from the north-east of St. Julien to the Tower Hamlets south of the Menin road. The latter advance was planned to be a short one, and the real object of the whole day's fighting was to establish a good jumping-off place for an advance upon the important Broodseinde Ridge. Some of the war- worn divisions had been drawn out and fresh troops were in the battle line. The Northern Corps was not engaged, and the flank of the advance was formed by the Eleventh Division (Ritchie) with the 58th Londoners upon their right, the two forming the fighting front of Maxse's Eighteenth Corps. Their advance, which was entirely successful and rapidly gained its full objectives, was along the line of St. Julien-Poelcapelle road. The total gain here, and in most other points of the line, was about 1000 yards.

Upon the right of Maxse's Corps was the Fifty-eighth Division, which also secured its full objective. The German line upon this front was held by the Twenty-third Saxon Division (Reserve), which yielded a number of prisoners. The Londoners fought their way down the line of the Wieltje-Gravenstafel road, overcoming a series of obstacles and reaching the greater portion of their objectives. There were no notable geographical points to be captured, but the advance was a fine performance which showed that the Fifty-eighth was a worthy compeer of those other fine London territorial divisions which had placed the reputation of the mother city at the very front of all the Imperial Armies. The Forty-seventh, the Fifty-sixth, the Fifty-eighth, and the Sixtieth in Palestine had all shown how the citizen-soldier of the Metropolis could fight.

Fanshawe’s Corps consisted upon this date of the Fifty-ninth Division upon the left, and the Third upon the right. The Fifty-ninth Division, which consisted of second-line battalions of North Midland Territorials, made a fine advance upon the right of the Gravenstafel road, keeping touch with the Londoners upon the left. Here also almost the whole objective was reached. The German positions, though free from fortified villages, were very thick with every sort of mechanical obstruction, in spite of which the attack went smoothly from start to finish. It is clear that the British advance was fully expected at the south end of the line, but that for some reason, probably the wretched state of the ground, it was not looked for in the north.

The Third Division had kept pace with the Australians to the south and with the Midlanders to the north, and had captured the village and church of Zonnebeke, which formed their objective. Very strong counter-attacks upon all the part of the land to the immediate north of Polygon Wood were beaten down by the masterful fire of the British artillery.

To the right of the Fifth Corps the Australians k pursued their victorious career,, going to their M full limit, which entailed the possession of the whole of Polygon Wood. The Fourth and Fifth Divisions were now in the battle line. Pushing onwards they crossed the road which connects Bacelaer with Zonnebeke, and established themselves firmly on the farther side south of Zonnebeke. Some 300 prisoners with a number of machine-guns were taken in this fine advance. The pressure upon the Australians was especially heavy upon the right flank of the Fifth Australian Division, since the left of the Thirty-third Division had been driven in, as already described, by the very heavy German attacks upon September 25, so that the Victorians of the 15th Australian Brigade at the south end of the line started with their flank exposed. They were in close touch throughout with the 19th Brigade of the British Division, and the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers found themselves intermingled with the Victorians in the advance, with whom they co-operated in the capture of Jut Farm. It was a fine feat for the Victorians to advance at all under such circumstances, for as they went forward they had continually to throw out a defensive flank, since the Germans had re-occupied many of the trenches and Mebus, from which they had been ejected upon the 20th. This strip of ground remained for a time with the Germans, but the Thirty-third Division had also advanced upon the right of it, so that it was left as a wedge protruding into the British position.

Cameron House was taken at the . joining point of the two divisions, and gradually the whole of the lost ground was re-absorbed.

To the right of the Australians the Thirty-third Division went forward also to its extreme objective, gathering up as it went those scattered groups of brave men who had held out against the German assault of the preceding day. This gallant division had a particularly hard time, as its struggle against the German attack upon the day before had been a very severe one, which entailed heavy losses. Some ground had been lost at the Veldhoek Trench north of the Menin road, where the 100th Brigade was holding the line, but this had been partially regained, as already described, by an immediate attack by the First Queen's West Surrey and 9th Highland Light Infantry. The 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands were still in the front line, but for the second time this year this splendid battalion was rescued from the desperate situation which only such tried and veteran soldiers could have carried through without disaster. Immediately before the attack of September 26, just after the assembly of the troops, the barrage which the Germans had laid down in order to cover their own advance beat full upon the left of the divisional line, near Glencorse Wood, and inflicted such losses that it could not get forward at zero, thus exposing the Victorians, as already recorded. Hence, although the 100th Brigade succeeded in regaining the whole of the Veldhoek Trench upon the right, there was an unavoidable gap upon the left between Northampton Farm and Black Watch Corner. The division was not to be denied, however, and by a splendid effort before noon the weak spot had been cleared up by the Scottish Rifles, the 4th King's Liverpools, and the 4th Suffolks, so that the line was drawn firm between Veldhoek Trench in the south and Cameron House in the north. A counter-attack by the Fourth Guards Division was crushed by artillery fire, and a comic sight was presented, if anything can be comic in such a tragedy, by a large party of the Guards endeavouring to pack themselves into a pill-box which was much too small to receive them. Many of them were left lying outside the entrance.

Farther still to the right, and joining the flank of the advance, the Thirty-ninth Division, like its comrades upon the left, found a hard task in front of it, the country both north and south of the Menin road being thickly studded with strong points and fortified farms. It was not until the evening of September 27, after incurring heavy losses, that they attained their allotted line. This included the whole of the Tower Hamlets spur with the German works upon the farther side of it. The extreme right flank was held up owing to German strong points on the east of Bitter Wood, but with this exception all the objectives were taken and held by the 116th and 118th, the two brigades in the line. The fighting fell with special severity upon the 4th Black Watch and the 1st Cambridge of the latter brigade, and upon the 14th Hants and the Sussex battalions of the former, who moved up to the immediate south of the Menin road. The losses of all the battalions engaged were very heavy, and the 111th Brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division had to be sent up at once in order to aid the survivors to form a connected line.

The total result of the action of September 26 was a gain of over half a mile along the whole front, the capture of 1600 prisoners with 48 officers, and one more proof that the method of the broad, shallow objective was an effective answer to the new German system of defence by depth. It was part of that system to have shock troops in immediate reserve to counter-attack the assailants before they could get their roots down, and therefore it was not unexpected that a series of violent assaults should immediately break upon the British positions along the whole newly- won line. These raged during the evening of September 26, but they only served to add greatly to the German losses, showing them that their ingenious conception had been countered by a deeper ingenuity which conferred upon them all the disadvantages of the attack. For four days there was a comparative quiet upon the line, and then again the attacks carried out by the Nineteenth Reserve Division came driving down to the south of Polygon Wood, but save for ephemeral and temporary gains they had no success. The Londoners of the Fifty-eighth Division had also a severe attack to face upon September 28 and lost two posts, one of which they recovered the same evening.

Up to now the weather had held, and the bad fortune which had attended the British for so long after August 1 seemed-to have turned. But the most fickle of all the gods once more averted her face, and upon October 3 the rain began once more to fall heavily in a way which announced the final coming of winter. None the less the work was but half done, and the Army could not be left under the menace of the commanding ridge of Paschendaale. At all costs the advance must proceed.

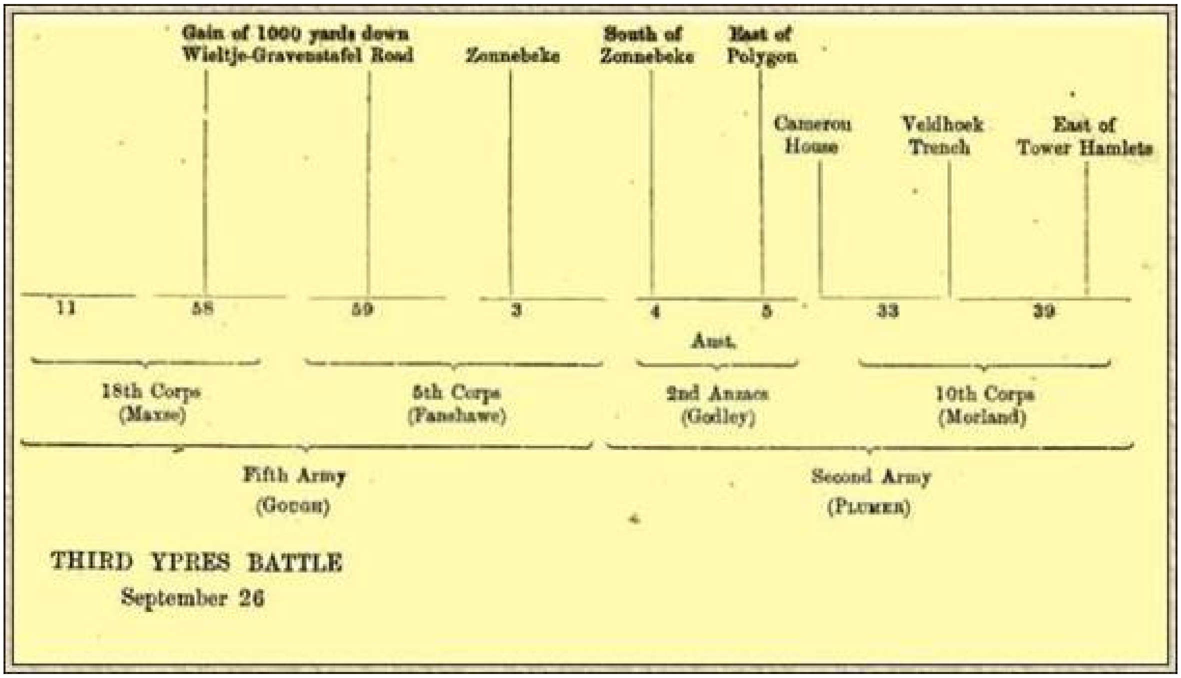
Gain of 1000 yards down Wieltje-Gravenstafel Road
Zonnebeke
South of Zonnebeke
East of Polygon
Cameron House
Veldhoek Trench
East of Tower Hamlets
11
58
59
3
4
5
33
39
Aust.
18th Corps (Maxse)
5th Corps (Fanshawe)
2nd Anzacs (Godley)
10th Corps (Morland)
Fifth Army (Gough)
Second Army (Plumer)
THIRD YPRES BATTLE
September 26

Third Ypres Battle, September 26, 1917

IX. THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES
October 4 to November 10, 1917

Attack of October 4 — Further advance of the British line — Splendid advance of second-line Territorials — Good work of H.A.C. at Reutel — Abortive action of October 12 — Action of October 26 — Heavy losses at the south end of the line — Fine fighting by the Canadian Corps — Capture of Paschendaale — General results of third battle of Ypres

AT early dawn upon October 4, under every possible disadvantage of ground and weather, the attack was renewed, the infantry advancing against the main line of the ridge east of Zonnebeke. The front of Oct. 4 to the movement measured about seven miles, as the sector south of the Menin road was hardly affected. The Ypres-Staden railway in the north was the left flank of the Army, so that the Fourteenth Corps was once more upon the move. We will trace the course of the attack from this northern end of the line.

Cavan's Corps had two divisions in front — the Twenty-ninth upon the left and the Fourth upon the right, two fine old regular units which had seen as much fighting as any in the Army. The Guards held a defensive flank together with the French between Houthulst Forest and the Staden railway. The advance of the Twenty-ninth was along the line of the railway, and it covered its moderate objectives without great loss or difficulty. Vesten Farm represented the limit of the advance.

The Fourth Division (Matheson) started from a point east of Langemarck and ended from 1000 to 1500 yards farther on. They advanced upon a two-brigade front with the 11th Brigade upon the right, with the northern edge of Poelcapelle as its objective, while the 10th Brigade upon the left moved upon the line of 19-Metre Hill. The fire from this strong point was very severe, and it drove back the 2nd Seaforths, who were the right battalion of the 10th Brigade, thus exposing the flank of the 1st Hants, who were on the left of the 11th. The veteran Highlanders soon rallied, however, and the line was strengthened at the gap by the advance into it of the 1st East Lancashires. Both the Seaforths and the Lancashire men lost very heavily, however, by a devastating fire from machine-guns. The 1st Somersets upon the right had a misadventure through coming under the fire of British artillery, which caused them for a time to fall back. They came on again, however, and established touch with the 33rd Brigade, who had occupied Poelcapelle.

There the Fourth Division lay on their appointed line, strung out over a wide front, crouching in heavy rain amid the mud of the shell-holes, each group of men unable during the day to see or hold intercourse with the other, and always under fire from the enemy. It was an experience which, extended from day to day in this and other parts of the line, makes one marvel at the powers of endurance latent in the human frame. An officer who sallied forth to explore has described the strange effect of that desolate, shell-ploughed landscape, half-liquid in consistence, brown as a fresh-turned field, with no movement upon its hideous expanse, although every crevice and pit was swarming with life, and the constant snap of the sniper’s bullet told of watchful, unseen eyes. Such a chaos was it that for three days there was no connection between the left of the Fourth and the right of the Twenty-ninth, and it was not until October 8 that Captain Harston of the 11th Brigade, afterwards slain, together with another officer ran the gauntlet of the sharp-shooters, and after much searching and shouting saw a rifle waved from a pit, which gave him the position of the right flank of the 16th Middlesex. It was fortunate he did so, as the barrage of the succeeding morning would either have overwhelmed the Fourth Division or been too far forward for the Twenty-ninth. Upon the right of the Fourth Division was the Eleventh. Led by several tanks, the 33rd Brigade upon the left broke down all obstacles and captured the whole of the western half of the long straggling street which forms the village of Poelcapelle.

Their comrades upon the right had no such definite mark before them, but they made their way the right of the Eleventh Division, the 48th South Midland Territorials had a most difficult advance over the marshy valley of the Stroombeek, but the water-sodden morasses of Flanders were as unsuccessful as the chalk uplands of Pozières in stopping these determined troops. Warwicks, Gloucesters, and Worcesters, they found their way to the allotted line. Winchester Farm was the chief centre of resistance conquered in this advance.

To the right of the Midland men the New Zealanders — that splendid division which had never yet found its master, either on battlefield or football ground — advanced upon the Gravenstafel spur. Once more the record of success was unbroken and the full objective gained. The two front brigades, drawn equally from the North and South Islands, men of

Canterbury, Wellington, Otago, and Auckland, splashed across the morass of the Hannebeek and stormed their way forward through Aviatik Farm and Boetleer, their left co-operating with the Midlanders in the fall of the Winzic strong point. The ground was thick with pill-boxes, here as elsewhere, but the soldiers showed great resource and individuality in their methods of stalking them, getting from shell-hole to shell-hole until they were past the possible traverse of the gun, and then dashing, bomb in hand, for the back door, whence the garrison, if they were lucky, soon issued in a dejected line. On the right, the low ridge magniloquently called “Abraham’s Heights” was carried without a check, and many prisoners taken. Evening found the whole of the Gravenstafel Ridge in the strong hands of the New Zealanders, with the high ruin of Paschendaale Church right ahead of them as the final goal of the Army.

These New Zealanders formed the left unit of Godley’s Second Anzac Corps, the right unit of which was the Third Australian Division. Thus October 4 was a most notable day in the young, but glorious, military annals of the Antipodean Britons, for, with the First Anzac Corps fighting upon the right, the whole phalanx made up a splendid assemblage of manhood, whether judged by its quality or its quantity. Some 40,000 infantry drawn from the islands of the Pacific fronted the German and advanced the British line upon October 4. Of the Third Australians it can only be said that the showed themselves to be as good as their comrades upon either flank, and that the attained the full objective which had been marked as their day’s work. By 1:15 the final positions had been occupied and held.

Gravenstafel represents one end of a low eminence which stretches for some distance. The First and Second Australian Divisions, attacking upon the immediate right of the Second Anzac Corps, fought their way step by step up the slope alongside of them and established themselves along a wide stretch of the crest, occupying the hamlet of Broodseinde. This advance took them across the road which leads from Bacelaer to Paschendaale, and it did not cease until they had made good their grip by throwing out posts upon the far side of the crest. The fighting was in places very sharp, and the Germans stood to it like men. The official record says: “A small party would not surrender. It consisted entirely of officers and N.C.O.’s with one medical private. Finally grenades drove them out to the surface, when the Captain was bayoneted and the rest killed, wounded, or captured. One machine-gunner was bayoneted with his finger still pressing his trigger.” Against such determined fighters and on such ground it was indeed a glory to have advanced 2000 yards and taken as many prisoners. In one of the captured Mebus a wounded British officer was found who had been there for three days. His captors had treated him with humanity, and he was released by the Australians, none the worse for his adventure. There is no doubt that in all this portion of the line the Germans were themselves in the very act of advancing for an assault when the storm broke loose, and the British lines trampled down and passed over the storm troops as they made for their allotted objectives.

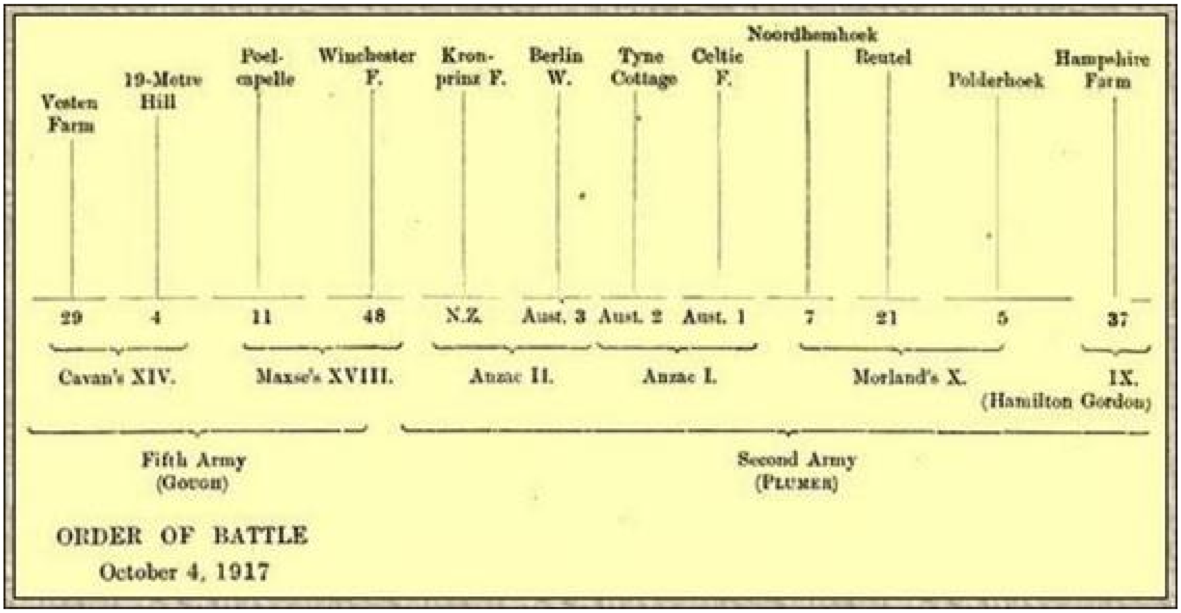
Noordhemhoek
Vesten Farm
19-Metre Hill
Poel-capelle
Winchester F.
Kron-prinz F.
Berlin W.
Tyne Cottage
Celtic F.
Reutel
Polderhoek
Hampshire Farm
29
4
11
48
N.Z.
Aust. 3
Aust. 2
Aust. 1
7
21
5
37
Cavan's XIV.
Maxse's XVIII.
Anzac II.
Anzac I.
Morland's X.
IX. (Hamilton Gordon)
Fifth Army (Gough)
Second Army (Plumer)
ORDER OF BATTLE
October 4, 1917

Order of Battle, October 4, 1917

On the immediate right of the Australians was Morland’s Tenth Corps, with the Seventh, Twenty-first, and Fifth Divisions in the battle line. The Seventh Division had stormed their way past a number of strongholds up the incline and had topped the ridge, seizing the hamlet of Noordhemhoek upon the other side of it. This entirely successful advance, which maintained the highest traditions of this great division, was carried out by the Devons, Borderers, and Gordons of the 20th Brigade upon the left, and by the South Staffords and West Surreys of the 91st Brigade upon the right. The full objectives were reached, but it was found towards evening that the fierce counter-attacks to the south had contracted the British line in that quarter, so that the right flank of the 91st Brigade was in the air. Instead of falling back the brigade threw out a defensive line, but none the less the salient was so marked that it was clear that it could not be permanent, and that there must either be a retirement or that some future operation would be needed to bring up the division on the right.

To the right of Noordhemhoek the Twenty-first Division had cleared the difficult enclosed country to the east of Polygon Wood, and had occupied the village of Reutel, but encountered such resolute opposition and such fierce counter-attacks that both the advancing brigades, the 62nd and the 64th, wound up the day to the westward of their full objectives, which had the effect already described upon the right wing of the Seventh Division. Both front brigades had lost heavily, and they were relieved in the front line by the 110th Leicester Brigade of their own division. During the severe fighting of the day the losses in the first advance, which gained its full objectives, fell chiefly upon the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry. In the second phase of the fight, which brought them into Reutel, the battalions engaged were the 8th East Yorks and 12th Northumberland Fusiliers, which had to meet a strong resistance in difficult country, and were hard put to it to hold their own. The German counter-attacks stormed all day against the left of the line at this point around Reutel, making the flanks of the Fifth and Seventh Divisions more and more difficult, as the defenders between them were compelled to draw in their positions. A strong push by the Germans in the late afternoon got possession of Judge Copse, Reutel, and Polderhoek Château. The two former places were recovered in a subsequent operation.

On the flank of the main attack the old Fifth Division, going as strongly as ever after its clear three years of uninterrupted service, fought its way against heavy opposition up Polderhoek Château. The Germans were massed thickly in this quarter and the fighting was very severe. The advance was carried out by those warlike twins, the comrades of many battles, the 1st West Kents and 2nd Scots Borderers upon the right, while the 1st Devons and 1st Cornwalls of the 95th Brigade were on the left, the latter coinciding with the edge of Polygon Wood and the former resting upon the Menin road. The 13th actually occupied Polderhoek Château, but lost it again. The 95th was much incommoded by finding that the Reutelbeek was now an impassable swamp, but they swarmed round it and captured their objectives, while its left got beyond Reutel, and had to throw back a defensive flank on its left, and withdraw its front to the west of the village. The chief counter-attacks of the day were on the front of the Fifth and Twenty-first Divisions, and they were both numerous and violent, seven in succession coming in front of Polderhoek Château and Reutel. This fierce resistance restricted the advance of Morland’s Tenth Corps and limited their gains, but enabled them to wear out more of the enemy than any of the divisions to the north.

Upon the flank of the attack, the advance of the Thirty-seventh Division had been a limited one, and had not been attended with complete success, as two of the German strongholds — Berry Cottages and Lewis House — still held out and spread a zone of destruction round them. The 8th Somersets, 8th Lincolns, and a Middlesex battalion of the 63rd Brigade all suffered heavily upon this flank. On the northern wing the 13th Rifles, 13th Rifle Brigade, and Royal Fusiliers of the 111th Brigade drove straight ahead, and keeping well up to the barrage were led safely by that stern guide to their ultimate positions, into which they settled with a comparative immunity from loss, but the battalions were already greatly exhausted by long service and scanty drafts, so that the 13th Rifles emerged from the fight with a total strength of little over a hundred. It must be admitted that all these successive fights at the south of the Menin road vindicated the new German systems of defence and caused exceedingly heavy losses which were only repaid by scanty and unimportant gains of desolate, shell-ploughed land.

The total result of this Broodseinde action was a victory gained under conditions of position and weather which made it a most notable, accomplishment. Apart from the very important gain of ground, which took the Army a long way towards its final objective, the Paschendaale Ridge, no less than 138 officers and 5200 men were taken as prisoners. The reason for this considerable increase in captures, as compared to recent similar advances, seems to have been that the Germans had themselves contemplated a strong attack upon the British line, especially the right sector, so that no less than five of their divisions had been brought well up to the front line at the moment when the storm burst. According to the account of prisoners, only ten minutes intervened between the zero times allotted for the two attacks. The result was not only the increase in prisoners, but also a very high mortality among the Germans, who met the full force of the barrage as well as the bayonets of the infantry. In spite of the heavy punishment already received, the Germans made several strong counter-attacks in the evening, chiefly, as stated, against the hues of the Fifth and Twenty-first Divisions north of the Menin road, but with limited results. An attack upon the New Zealanders north of the Ypres-Roulers railway had even less success. Victorious, and yet in the last extremity of human misery and discomfort, the troops held firmly to their advanced line amid the continued pelting of the relentless rain.

The bravery and the losses of the British artillery were among the outstanding incidents of this and subsequent fighting. It was not possible on that water-sodden soil to push forward the great guns. Therefore it became necessary to make the very most of the smaller ones, and for this object the 18-pounder batteries were galloped up all along the line and then Nov ^10 unlimbered and went into action in the open within a mile of the enemy. By this spirited action the infantry secured a barrage which could not otherwise have been accurately laid down. It should be emphasised that in this and other advances the numbers of the German were very little inferior to those of the British, which makes the success of the attacks the more surprising. Thus, in this instance, Plumer had eight divisions in line in the southern area of the battle, while opposed to him he had the Tenth Ersatz, Twentieth Division, Fourth Guards, part of Forty-fifth, part of Sixteenth, the Nineteenth Reserve, and the Eighth Division.

In Sir Douglas Haig’s long and yet concise despatch, which will always serve the historian as the one firm causeway across a quagmire of possibilities and suppositions, we are told frankly the considerations which weighed with the British Higher Command in not bringing the Flanders Campaign to an end for the year with the capture of the Gravenstafel-Broodseinde Ridge. The season was advanced, the troops were tired, the weather was vile, and, worst of all, the ground was hardly passable. All these were weighty reasons why the campaign should cease now that a good defensible position had been secured. There were however some excellent reasons to the contrary. The operations had been successful, but they had not attained full success, and the position, especially in the north, was by no means favourable for the passing of the winter, since the low-lying ground at Poelcapelle and around it was exposed to fire both from the Paschendaale Ridge and from the great forest upon the left flank and rear. If our troops were weary, there was good evidence that the Germans were not less so: and their minds and morale could not be unaffected by the fact that every British attack had been attended by loss of ground and of prisoners. Then again, it was known that the French meditated a fresh attack in the Malmaison quarter, and good team play called for a sustained effort upon the left wing to help the success of the right centre. Again, the rainfall had already been abnormally high, so that on a balance of averages there was reason to hope for better weather, though at the best it could hardly be hoped that the watery October sunshine would ever dry the fearsome bogs which lay between the armies. Of two courses it has always been Sir Douglas Haig's custom to choose the more spirited, as-his whole career would show, and therefore his decision was now given for the continuance of the advance. In the result the weather failed him badly, and his losses were heavy, and yet the verdict of posterity may say that he was right. Looking back with the wisdom that comes after the event, one can clearly see that had the whole operation stopped when the rains fell after the first day, it would have been the wisest course, but when once such a movement is well under way it is difficult to compromise.

Since the line had already been established upon high ground to the south, it was evidently in the north that the new effort must be made, as the front of advance was contracted to six miles from the extreme left wing, where the French were still posted, to a point east of Zonnebeke. The wind was high, the rain intermittent, and the night cloudy and dark; in spite of all these hindrances the storming troops were by some miracle of disciplined organisation ready to in their assembly trenches, and the advance went forward at 5:20 on the morning of October 9.

Upon the left an extremely successful advance was carried out by the French and by the Guards. Of our gallant Allies it need only be said that on this day as on all others they carried out to the full what was given them to do, and established their advanced posts a mile or so to the eastward on the skirts of Houthulst Forest, taking St. Janshoek and pushing on, up to their waists sometimes in water, to the swamps of Corverbeck.

Cavan's Corps consisted of the Guards upon the left, the Twenty-ninth in the centre, and the Fourth Division upon the right. The advance of the Guards was as usual a magnificent one, and the 1st Brigade upon the right, the 2nd on the left, pushed forward the line on their sector for more than a mile, beginning by the difficult fording of the deep flooded Brombeek and then taking in their stride a number of farmhouses and strong points, as well as the villages of Koekuit and Veldhoek — the second hamlet of that name which had the ill-fortune to figure upon the war-map. Four hundred prisoners were left in their hands, mostly of the 417th Regiment, who had only taken over the line at four that morning. The 2nd Brigade of Guards worked all day in close touch with the French, amid the dangerous swamps in the north, while the 1st Brigade kept their alignment with the 4th Worcesters, who formed the left unit of the 88th Brigade upon their right. Even under the awful conditions of ground and weather the work of the Guards was as clean and precise as ever.

The ground in front of the Guards was sown very thickly with the German concrete forts, but it was the general opinion of experienced soldiers that, formidable as were these defences, they were less so than the old trench systems, which in some cases could not be passed by any wit or valour of man. At this stage of its development the Mebus could usually be overcome by good infantry, for if its loopholes were kept buzzing with the rifle bullets of the stormers, and if under cover of such fire other parties crawled round and girt it in, its garrison had little chance. The infantry attained considerable proficiency in these operations, and “to do in a pill-box” became one of the recognised exercises of minor tactics. The losses of the Guards in this brilliant affair were not very heavy, though towards the latter stage the 1st Irish upon the right got ahead of the Newfoundlanders and were exposed to a severe flank fire in the neighbourhood of Egypt House. The 1st Coldstreams upon the extreme left flank were also held up by a strong point near Louvois Farm. It was eventually taken with its forty inmates. The gallant German officer absolutely refused to surrender, and it was necessary to bayonet him. Altogether the two brigades lost 53 officers and 1300 men. In connection with their advance and with the subsequent operations it should be mentioned that the Guards artillery was worthy of the infantry, and that the way they followed up in order to give protective barrages, slithering anywhere over the wet ground so long as they could only keep within good slating distance of the counter-attacks, was a fine bit of work. The pioneer battalion, the 4th Coldstreams, and the three R.E. Companies, 55, 75, and 76, put in a great deal of thankless and unostentatious work in the elaborate and difficult preparations for the advance.

The Twenty-ninth Division upon the right of the Guards had the 88th Brigade in front, with the Newfoundlanders behind the Worcesters on the left flank. Their task was to push along the Langemarck-Staden railway and reach the forest. They carried the line forward to Cinq Chemins Farm, where they established their new line. The 1st Essex and 2nd Hants were also heavily engaged, and all four battalions lived up to their high reputation.

To the right of the Twenty-ninth was the 12th Brigade of the Fourth Division, who had taken over the front line from their comrades in that fearsome wilderness already described. The line of advance was along the Ypres — Staden railway, and the front w^as kept level with that of the Guards. Reinforced by the 1st Rifle Brigade, the advance went swiftly forward over dreadful ground until it reached its limits at Landing Farm, about half a mile north-east of Poelcapelle.

Maxse’s Corps upon the right still consisted of the Eleventh and Forty-eighth Divisions. The Eleventh Division had already captured the half of the long village of Poelcapelle, and now after some very hard fighting the second half up to the Eastern skirts fell into the hands of the 32nd Brigade. As they advanced, the Forty-sixth Midland men kept pace with them upon the right. These troops had the very worst of the low-lying ground, though they had the advantage of being in position and not having to assemble in the dark and rain, as was the fate of the more southern troops. The gallant Yorkshire battalions of the 32nd Brigade made several attempts to carry the strong point at the Brewery, east of the village, and the Midlanders had the same difficulties at a machine-gun centre called Adler Farm and Ypres. Burn’s House. These two points, both still untaken, marked the furthest limits of the advance in either case, and in the evening the ground gained was contracted not so much on account of German action as because it was impossible to get supplies up to the extreme line under the observation from the ridge.

Upon the right of Maxse’s Corps and forming the left of the Second Anzac Corps was another Territorial Division, the Forty- ninth, drawn from the County of Broad Acres. This division, although it has seldom appeared up to now in the central limelight of battle, had done a great amount of solid work near the Ancre during the Somme battle, and on other occasions. All that will be said about the difficulties of the Sixty-sixth Division apply also to the Forty-ninth, and it may be added that in the case of both units the barrage was too fast, so that it was impossible for the infantry to keep up with it. None the less, they struggled forward with splendid courage, and if they did not win their utmost objective, at least they gained a broad belt of new ground. A limit was put to their advance by Bellevue, a stronghold on one of the spurs under Paschendaale, which was so tough a nut to crack that the weary fighting line was brought at last to a halt. The Sixteenth Rhineland Division, who held this part of the line, won the respect of their adversaries by their tenacity. The West Yorkshires of the 146th Brigade and the York and Lancasters and Yorkshire Light Infantry of the 148th bore the brunt of the battle.

On the immediate right of the Yorkshire men was the Sixty-sixth Division, a second-line unit of East Lancashire Territorials only recently arrived upon the seat of war, and destined, like many other new arrivals, to do conspicuously good work on their first venture. The General who commanded the Division would be the first to admit his obligations to the officers who had sent over these battalions in so battle-worthy a condition. Indeed the country owes more than it ever knows to these retired officers, veterans of the Old Imperial wars, who, far from the honours and excitements of the line, devoted their time and strength to the training of the raw material at home. They lead no charges and capture no villages, and their names are read in few gazettes: and yet it is their solid work, based upon their own great experience, which has really led many a charge to victory and proved the downfall of many a village. “If there be a procession through London, the ‘dug-outs’ should lead the van,” said a soldier who had that broader vision which sees both the cause and the effect.

In the case of all these divisions the conditions before the attack were almost inconceivable. For four days and nights the men were in shell-holes without shelter from the rain and the biting cold winds, and without protection from the German fire. At 6 P.M. on the evening of October 13 the Sixty-sixth and also the Forty-ninth fell in to move up the line and make the attack at dawn. So dark was the night and so heavy the rain that it took them eleven hours of groping and wading to reach the tapes which marked the lines of assembly. Then, worn out with fatigue, wet to the skin, terribly cold, hungry, and with weapons which ‘were often choked with mud, they went with hardly a pause into the open to face infantry who were supposed to be second to none in Europe, with every form of defence to help them which their capable sappers could devise. And yet these men of Yorkshire and Lancashire drove the Prussians before them and attained the full limit which had been given them to win.

The Sixty-sixth Division advanced with the 197th Brigade on the right of the Ypres-Roulers railway. It consisted entirely of battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers, a regiment which from Minden onwards has been in the van of England’s battles. Upon their left was the 198th Brigade, consisting half of East Lanes and half of Manchester battalions. So covered with mud were the troops after their long night march that the enemy may well have wondered whether our native soldiers were Hot once more in the line. Savagely they stuck to their task with that dour spirit which adverse conditions bring out in our soldiers; every obstacle went down before them; they reached their utmost limit, and then, half buried in the mud and stiff with cold, their blue and cramped fingers still held steady to their triggers and blew back every counter-attack which the Germans could launch. It was a fine performance, and the conditions of the attack cannot be defined better than by the following extract from the account of an officer engaged: “After advancing through the mud for a further three hours, I halted the Company in shell-holes to enable me to discover our exact whereabouts; this was a bad mistake, because when I found the direction we had to go in could not awake the poor fellows, who had fallen asleep as soon as they had sat down. I had to slave-drive, and somehow got them a little further forward before getting blown up myself. It should be added that at a later date some Australians who got up close to Paschendaale reported that they found “not far from the village some of the dead of the second-line Lancashire Territorials, who had fought beside us in an earlier battle.”

Upon the south of the Second Anzac Corps were the Australian divisions, who carried forward the movement they had so splendidly initiated. The advance set before them on this day was not a deep one, but such as it was it was carried 600 yards over the ground north of Broodseinde. Owing to the difficult lie of the ground, the attacking troops were particularly exposed to machine-gun fire, especially at the cutting of the Roulers railway which at this point comes through the low ridge. The result was a considerable loss of men. The Australians had been a week in the line without rest in continual fighting, and they were very weary, but still full of dash and zeal and sympathy for others. “We met one British officer,” says Mr. Bean, “stumbling back with both his puttees long since lost in the mud. ‘Bitterly disappointed we were late,’ he said. ‘Hard luck, too, upon the Australians.’ One thought to oneself when one heard of the conditions, that it was only due to their undiluted heroism that they ever got there at all.” It was the Second Australian Division which was chiefly engaged in this difficult battle, and it was they who carried Daisy Wood, the chief obstacle in that area. The First Australian Division were hardly included in the original scheme, being too far to the right; but being unable to witness a fight without joining in it they advanced upon Celtic Wood, passed through it, and had some excellent fighting with a strong German trench upon the further side of it. The operation was a raid rather than an advance, but it was very useful, none the less, as a distraction to the Germans.

On the extreme south of the line Reutel, which had been left in German hands upon October 4, was now carried by storm in a very brilliant operation which removed the salient of the Seventh Division to which allusion has already been made. This advance was carried out by two battalions, the 2nd Warwicks upon the left and the 2nd Honourable Artillery Company upon the right. The former took, after hard fighting, the outlying woods and trenches to the north of the village, but the Londoners achieved the more difficult task of carrying the village itself. It was a desperate enterprise, carried out under heavy fire, which was so deadly that when the depleted ranks reached their further objective not an officer was left standing. The high quality of the rank and file is shown in the prompt way in which they took the necessary steps upon their own initiative, by which the new line should be held. As to their losses, they can be best indicated by the dry official comment: “The remnants of A, C and D Companies were withdrawn to Jolting Trench and organised into two platoons under Sergeant Jenkinson.” The Colonel might well be proud of his men, and London of her sons.

The extreme right of the British attacking line upon October 9 was formed by the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division. Once again they got into the Polderhoek Château, and once again they had to retire from it and resume the position in front of it. There have been few single points in the War which have been the object of such fierce and fluctuating strife.

The net effect of this battle in the mud was to fling the whole line forward, the advance being much more shallow in the south than in the north. The line had rolled down from the Broodseinde Ridge, crossed the shallow valley, and now established itself upon the slope of Paschendaale. Two thousand one hundred prisoners had been taken in this advance. It was clear, however, that matters could not remain so, and that, be the weather what it might (and worse it could not be!) Sir Douglas was bound to plant his men upon the higher ground of Paschendaale before he called his halt for the winter.

Upon October 12, under conditions which tended to grow worse rather than better, Sir Douglas Haig made a fresh attempt to get forward. As the Paschendaale Height became more clearly the final objective, the attack narrowed at the base, so that instead of extending from the Menin road in the south, it was now flanked by the Ypres-Roulers railway, and so had a front of not more than five miles. The new attack was carried out largely by the same troops as before in the north, save that the 51st Brigade of the Seventeenth Division was pushed in between the Guards upon the left and the 12th Brigade of the Fourth Division upon the right. Advancing along the line of the Ypres-Sladen railway, the 3rd Brigade of Guards and their comrades of the Fourteenth Corps got forward to their limited objectives, where they sank once more into the sea of mud through which they had waded. On both sides the making of trenches had entirely ceased, as it had been found that a few shell-holes united by a small cutting were sufficient for every purpose as long as the head of the soldier could be kept out of the water. So useful were these holes as shelters and rifle-pits that it became a question with the British artillery whether they should not confine their fire entirely to shrapnel, rather than run the risk of digging a line of entrenchments for the enemy.

In this advance the 51st Brigade did remarkably well, advancing 1200 yards and securing two objectives. It is amongst the curiosities of the campaign that Major Peddie of the 7th Lincolns, with another officer and four men, took 148 prisoners from a farm — a feat for which he received the D.S.O.

On Maxse’s front the Eighteenth and Ninth Divisions had taken over the front line. The Eighteenth made some progress, but the Ninth, of which it can truly be said that they never leave a front as they found it, took the village of Wallemolen, making a good advance.

The New Zealanders were on the right of the Ninth Division, covering a front of 1600 yards from Adler House on the left to the Ravebeek upon the right, where they joined the Australian Division. They were faced partly by uncut wire in the Bellevue position and partly by marsh. The conditions for the Australians upon their right were no better. The matter was made worse by the impossibility of getting the heavier guns forward, while the light ones slid their trails about in the mud after every discharge in a manner which made accurate shooting well-nigh impossible. The losses were heavy in the attack, two Colonels of New Zealand battalions being among the dead. The New Zealand Rifle Brigade were particularly hard hit. It was found that progress was impossible under such conditions, and the attack was called off. So far as the Germans went, 1000 more were added to the occupants of the cages — so far as the mud and weather went, they gained a clear victory over the British Army, for the losses were heavy, and there was very little gain of ground in exchange.

Upon October 22, the ground having dried a little, there was some movement at the northern end of the line, the position being improved and 200 prisoners taken. The two operations which effected these results were carried out in the north by Franks' Thirty-fifth Division co-operating with the French, and in the Poelcapelle region by the 53rd Brigade of the Eighteenth Division, which carried the point known as Meunier Hill, the Essex, Suffolks, and Norfolks of this splendid unit covering themselves once more with glory. The Thirty-fourth Division, which had taken the place of the Fourth upon the right of Cavan's corps, also moved forward in correspondence with the flanking units, the Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade keeping touch with the 8th Norfolks of the 53rd.

Some hard fighting was associated with the attack of the Thirty-fifth Division in the north. It may be remarked that the Bantam idea had not proved to be a successful one. It had been abandoned, and the Thirty-fifth was now undistinguishable from any division either in its physique or in its spirit. Upon this occasion both the 105th Brigade upon the left and the 104th upon the right fought with magnificent courage. The advance of the former Brigade was particularly fine in the region of Panama House. The 14th Glosters and 16th Cheshires attained their fullest objective, and though the latter were finally bent back by the strong German attacks in th6 afternoon, the Glosters' fighting line, reinforced by some of the 16th Sherwood Foresters, held fast under the most desperate circumstances. Their Colonel might well be proud of the fact that in an attack carried out by one French and two British divisions his battalion of Glosters was the only one which remained rooted and unshaken upon the ultimate line. The Lancashire Fusiliers shone greatly also in the attack, though they were unable to maintain their most advanced positions. The German shell-fire, and especially the German snipers from the wood on the left, and from a covered road, were the cause of heavy losses, but the troops were in excellent fettle, and the 104th Brigade actually executed a little raid on its own during the night, bringing back a machine-gun and five more prisoners.

On October 26, the rain still pouring down as heavily as ever, and the earth about as liquid as the heavens, the advance was once again renewed upon a narrow front which was mostly on the slope of the hill and therefore offered some foothold for the struggling infantry. Paschendaale was but a few hundreds of yards away, and it was imperative that it should be held before the season ended. Haig’s troops were weary, and several fresh divisions which I he could have called upon were already earmarked for the surprise attack which he was planning in the south. It was imperative, however, to have some fresh thrusting force which could be trusted to break down the remaining obstacles and not only seize the dominant village, but hold it after seizure. For this object the close Canadian beleaguerment of Lens, which was to have ended in an assault, was abandoned. and the Canadian Corps was brought round to the front, taking the place of the Anzac Corps. In the new advance it occupied, therefore, the central position of the line.

There had been several divisional changes in the north. The front of General Cavan’s line consisted now of the Fiftieth Division next the French, the Thirty-fifth Division, and the Fifty-seventh Division. Maxse’s battle line was the Fifty-eighth London Division and the Sixty-third Naval. In spite of every possible disadvantage, fresh ground was gained by these units, and Varlet Farm, Bray Farm, and Banff House were added to the British area.

The conditions of these low-lying valleys to the north, which had long been difficult, had now become really impossible, and this was the last attempt to advance in the Houlthulst Forest area. It takes personal and detailed narrative to enable the reader to realise the situation which the troops had to face. An officer of the 170th Brigade, a Lancashire unit which displayed great valour and lost half its numbers upon this date, writes: “I have never seen such a sight as that country was in the valley of the Broombeek and Watervlietbeek just south of Houthulst Forest. Nothing on earth but the wonderful courage of the Lancashire lads enabled them to get so far as they did. We went over with our rifles and Lewis guns bound up with flannel so as to keep the mud out, and with special cleaning apparatus in our pockets, but you can’t clean a rifle when your own hands are covered an inch thick! We killed a great number — one of the Sergeants in the ‘Loyals’ laid out 13 with his bayonet; altogether we actually killed over 600 with the bayonet; but, as I say, the ground was too heavy to allow us to out-manoeuvre the pill-boxes, and though we took three or four, the rest did us in. In one box we got 38 Boche, killed them all with a Lewis gun through the porthole.” After that day no more advance was tried in the low-lying valleys named. The impossibility was seen.

The Canadian Corps went forward with one brigade of the Fourth Division upon the right and two brigades of the Third Division upon the left. A brigade of the First Australian Division supported their left upon the Ypres-Roulers railway, and the Sixty-third Naval Division continued the attack. Each of these units gained ground under the most desperate conditions. The Australians captured Decline Wood, so securing the flank of the attack. The Canadians pushed forward on each side of the Revebeek, one of the innumerable streams which meander through this country. The Third Canadian Division advanced finely, but their right-hand brigade was held up by the machine-gun fire from Bellevue Spur, which had wrought such damage in the former attack, and was compelled to fall back upon its original line. The Canadians rallied for a second spring, and in the afternoon by a splendid effort, when all their Northern grit and energy were needed, they flooded over the obstacle and lined up with their comrades. They were now right astride of the main ridge and close up to the edge of the village. To the north, the Sixty-third Naval Division, which formed the right unit of Maxse’s Corps, pushed forward to the line of the Paddebeek, while the Londoners of the Fifty-eighth Division kept their place upon the left. The German third artillery had greatly increased in strength, thanks to Ypres. the Russian collapse, and every fresh idiocy of Petrograd was transmuted into showers of steel and iron in the plains of Flanders. Their infantry also became more aggressive with this stronger support, and two heavy counters broke upon the Canadians in the afternoon of October 26. In spite of every obstacle, it was an important day in this section of the line for Paschendaale was almost reached, and the Germans must have viewed with despair the ever-advancing line, which neither they nor Nature had been able to stop.

In the south the operations during the day were not so successful, and the subsidiary aims were not attained. In the morning, the Fifth Division attacked and once again captured the Wood and Château of Polderhoek. The 1st West Kents and 13th Warwicks of the 13th Brigade carried out this dashing and arduous operation, and took some 200 men, who formed the garrison. The Seventh Division meanwhile had advanced upon Gheluvelt, the 2nd West Surrey, 1st South Staffords and Manchesters of the 91st Brigade advancing to the south of the Menin road in order to guard the flank of their comrades who followed the line of the road which would lead them to this famous village. The flanking brigade was held up, however, at the old stumbling-block near Lewis House and Berry Cotts, where the German fire was very deadly. This failure enabled the enemy to bring a very heavy cross-fire upon the 2nd Borderers and 2nd Gordons of the 20th Brigade, forming the column of attack. In spite of this fire, the stormers forced their way into Gheluvelt, but found themselves involved in very hard fighting, while their guns were choked with mud, and useless save as pikes or clubs. Under these circumstances they were forced back to their own line. Encouraged by this success, the Germans then advanced in very heavy masses and attacked the new positions of the Fifth Division with such fury that they also had to loose their grip of the precious twice-conquered Château and fall back on the line whence they started. It cannot be denied, therefore, that though the British gained ground in the north upon October 26, they sustained nothing but losses after their great exertions in the south upon that date. The two outstanding features of the fighting seem to have been the extreme difficulty of keeping the weapons in a serviceable condition, a factor which naturally told in favour of the stationary defence, and also the innocuousness of percussion shells, since in such a swamp they bury themselves so deeply that their explosion does little harm. Some 500 prisoners were made in the southern area, but many more in the north.

Upon October 30, in cold and windy weather, the attack was renewed upon a comparatively narrow front, with the First Australian Division upon the extreme right, then the Fourth Canadians, then the Third Canadians, and finally the Sixty-third Division upon the left. The Canadians advancing along the ridge towards the doomed village were faced by a terrific concentration of German guns upon that limited space and by strong infantry attacks, none of which turned them from their purpose. The direction of the attack was from west and south-west. The Fourth Canadians soon had all their objectives and held them firmly, taking Crest Farm on the edge of the village. The Third Canadians had heavy resistance to overcome, but captured the spur in O front of them and joined up with their comrades at Graf. The Sixty-third Division found it very difficult to get forward, however, and this held back the left wing of the Canadians. Five severe attacks were made upon the Canadians, but were all beaten off by their steady fire. In some cases, notably at Crest Farm, the machine-guns captured from the Germans were turned upon their late owners as they debouched from the village. There was considerable evidence of demoralisation among the German’ infantry upon this occasion whenever the British could get to grips with it, and some sections actually ran away at the outbreak of the fight, which is a very unusual occurrence in so disciplined and brave an army. The latter part of the action was fought in driving rain, which hardly allowed vision of more than a couple of hundred yards.

All these heroic exertions were consummated at six on the morning of November 6, when the Canadian infantry, advancing with heroic dash, flung themselves upon the village and carried the British line right through it, emerging upon the naked ridge beyond. The advance on the left was made by the 1st Brigade, while the 5th Brigade took the village. Many strong points lay just north of the hamlet, but each of them was rushed in turn. It was a splendid success, and wrought by splendid men. The chronicler cannot easily forget how by a wayside Kentish station he saw the wounded from this attack lying silent and patient after their weary journey, and how their motionless, clay-spattered figures, their set, firm faces and their undaunted eyes, gave him an impression of military efficiency and virtue such as none of the glitter and pride and pomp of war have ever conveyed. So fell Paschendaale, and so, save for some minor readjustments upon the Ridge, ended the great battle which can only be all included in the title “The Third Battle of Ypres.”

Several attempts were made to clear the whole of the ridge but the rain was still continuous, the ground a nightmare, and the fire of the German guns was concentrated upon so limited a space that the advance was hardly possible. Jacob’s Second Corps had come back into the line, and one of its units, the First Division, came up upon November 9 on the left of the Canadians, and endeavoured in cooperation with them to extend the position. The Germans had cleverly removed their heavy guns to such a position that they could reach the ridge, while the British guns, immobile in the mud, could not attempt any counter-battery work. In this way a very intense fire, against which no reply could be made, was kept up on the ridge. On November 10 the 2nd Canadian Brigade upon the right and the 3rd British Brigade upon the left endeavoured to work forward; but the losses were heavy and the gains slight. The two leading British battalions, the 1st South Wales Borderers and the 2nd Munsters, were the chief sufferers. It was clear that the season was too far advanced to attempt any useful work. On November 12 the Thirty-second Division relieved the First, and the line was again slightly advanced; but no more could be done and the troops settled down into the quagmire to spend the winter as best they might. The Eighth Corps took over the lines of the Canadians, who returned, after their splendid and arduous work, to their old sector at Lens.

On the other sectors of the northern front there had been a lull while this last stage of the Paschendaale fighting was in progress. It was broken only by a sharp, sudden attack by the Fifth Division upon its old enemy, the Poldershoek Château, upon November 6. After some severe fighting the attack failed and the British line remained as before.

Thus, after a continuance of three months, the long struggle came to an end. Only the titanic Battle of the Somme had exceeded it in length and severity. The three great Battles of Ypres are destined to become classical in British history, and it will be a nice question for the judgment of posterity which of the three was the most remarkable military performance. Though the scene was the same, the drama was of a very different quality in each act, but always equally intense. In the first, inferior numbers of British troops with a vastly inferior artillery held up the German Army in its first rush for the coast, and, by virtue of the high training and close cohesion of the old regulars, barred their path even at the cost of their own practical annihilation. In the second, a less homogeneous and less trained British force, still with a very inferior artillery, held back a German line which was formidable, less for its numbers than for the sudden use of new methods of warfare against which their opponents could neither guard nor reply. The line receded under the pressure, but the way was still barred. In the third, the British advanced and steadily pushed back a German Army which was probably inferior in numbers — and certainly was so in gun power — but which held a series of predominating positions stiffened by every method which experience could suggest or ingenuity devise. Their resistance was helped by the most adverse weather conditions which could be conceived. The net result of the fighting was not only the capture of the crest of the final ridge, but the taking of 24,000 prisoners and 72 guns. When one remembers that the Germans in the days of their ascendancy could not in the two battles of Ypres put together have taken more than 5000 men, one can measure the comparative success of each army in this conflict of giants. It would be vain to pretend that we did not hope for a greater gain of ground in this great autumn movement, but the reach of a General must often exceed his grasp, and here it was no small prize which still remained with the victor.

One can only sum up the matter by quoting the measured words of the Field-Marshal in Command: “This offensive, maintained for three-and-a-half months under the most adverse conditions of weather, had entailed almost superhuman exertions on the part of the troops of all arms and services. The enemy had done his utmost to hold his ground, and in his endeavours to do so had used up no less than seventy-eight divisions, of which eighteen had been engaged a second or third time in the battle, after being withdrawn to rest and refit. Despite the magnitude of his efforts, it was the immense natural difficulties, accentuated manifold by the abnormally wet weather, rather than the enemy’s resistance, which limited our progress and prevented the complete capture of the ridge.”

Whilst this long and arduous struggle had been raging the chief events upon the other seats of war had been a fine French victory on the Aisne which yielded nearly 10,000 prisoners. This was upon September 23, but the rejoicings of the Allies were turned to sorrow by the news next day of the set-back of the second Italian army at Caporetto, where the soldiers, demoralised by insidious propaganda, offered at the most critical sector hardly any resistance to the enemy who had been reinforced by some German divisions. The result was that the other Italian armies upon right and left were compelled to fall back and could find no standing ground until they had crossed the Piave. Udine and the whole Friulian Plain were lost and all the results of so many heroic months were undone. It was one of the saddest tragedies of the war, though destined in the future to be most gloriously avenged.

X. THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

First Phase of Battle, November 20

Tanks en masse — Attack on the Tunnel Trench — Byng’s great advance — Fine work of the Sixty-second Division — Hard fighting of Pulteney’s Third Corps — Exploit of Fort Garry Horse — Second day of battle — Rally of Germans — Capture of Bourlon Wood by Fortieth Division — Attack by the Guards on La Fontaine

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THE year 1917 had begun with high hopes for the Allies since . they had planned a common offensive which could hardly have failed to break the German resistance. Both France and England had honourably carried out their share in the common contract. It was the sudden and absolute break down of Russia which caused the year to set in gloom rather than in glory. The phenomenon of that great fermenting putrefying country was more like some huge cataclysm of nature, some monstrous convulsion of the elements, than any ordinary political movement, so that anger and contempt were softened into pure amazement as the gradual dissolution of the vast organism took place from week to week before a wondering world. It was as though a robust man had suddenly softened into liquid putrescence before one’s eyes. But from a military standpoint it was a disaster of the first order for the Allies and checked their victorious career in the West, where the failing German line could always be buttressed up by fresh guns and fresh divisions from the East. Now on the top of this misfortune another unforeseen and almost incredible occurrence placed them at a further disadvantage. The Italian army had done so splendidly well and had won such unfailing ascendancy over the Austrians that their stability seemed as firm as the mountains amid which they fought. It seems, however, that insidious and treasonable propaganda of the familiar type had spread disaffection in the ranks, and the Second Army, which held the very centre of the Gorizian line, collapsed suddenly. The result was a very great success for the Austrian and German forces, who pushed through the breach, and with little loss to themselves captured more than 200,000 prisoners and nearly 2000 guns. It was a very severe blow for the Allies, and never was their fine spirit better shown than by the instant steps which they took to hold Italy up in the moment of her extreme need.

By road and by rail reinforcements poured through the passes of the Alps and along the shores of the Mediterranean. Whilst the flanking armies of the Italians fell back upon new lines French and British divisions were hastening forward to share their pressing danger. The Isonzo and the Tagliamento had been in succession abandoned, for a severe flanking attack from the north threatened to break through the passes and debouch upon the Friulian Plain. Finally the line of the Piave was reached which still covered Venice. Here the steadier troops were halted. In the First Army upon the right there had been little disorganisation, and their retreat along the coast under constant pressure was a fine bit of work. Ten batteries of British heavies were among the artillery of this army, and every one of them was man-handled to the new positions. By mid-winter two French and two British Corps, veterans of many battles, were lined up on or near the Piave, waiting eagerly to try conclusions with these new adversaries. This detached British army was commanded by General Plumer, with Generals Lord Cavan and Haking as his Corps commanders. The two Corps, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth, were made up of the Fifth, Seventh, Twenty-third, Forty-first, and Forty-eighth Divisions, grand units all. It was a sore loss to the battle-line of Flanders — a loss which in the case of two of them was but temporary.

We shall now descend the line to the section which extends from Bullecourt in the north to Villers-Ghislain in the south, opposite to the important town of Cambrai, some seven miles behind the Hindenburg Line. It was here that the Field-Marshal had determined to strike his surprise blow, an enterprise which he has described in so lucid and detailed a despatch that the weary chronicler has the rare experience of finding history adequately recorded by the same brain which planned it. The plan was a very daring one, for the spot attacked was barred by the full unbroken strength of the Hindenburg main and support lines, a work so huge and solid that it seems to take us back from these superficial days to the era of the Cyclopean builder or the founder of the great monuments of antiquity. These enormous excavations of prodigious length, depth, and finish are object lessons both of the strength of the Germans, the skill of their engineers, and the ruthlessness with which they exploited the slave and captive labour with which so much of it was built. Besides this terrific barricade there was the further difficulty that the whole method of attack was experimental, and that to advance without artillery fire against such a position would appear to be a most desperate venture. On the other hand it was known that the German line was thin and that their man-power had been attracted northwards by the long epic of the Paschendaale attack. There was a well-founded belief that the tanks would prove equal to the task of breaking the front, and sufficient infantry had been assembled to take advantage of any opening which might be made. The prize, too, was worth a risk, for apart from the possibility of capturing the important centre of Cambrai, the possession of the high ground at Bourlon would be of great strategic value. The enterprise was placed in the hands of General Byng, the famous leader of the Third Cavalry Division and afterwards of the Canadian Corps, who had taken Allenby's place at the head of the Third Army. Under him were from the north, the Sixth, Fourth, Third, and Seventh Corps under Haldane, Woolcombe, Pulteney, and Snow, containing some of the most seasoned fighting material in the army. The troops were brought up stealthily by night, and the tanks which were crawling from every direction towards the trysting-place were carefully camouflaged. The French had been apprised of the attack, and had made arrangements by which, if there were an opening made to the south some of their divisions should be available to take advantage of it.

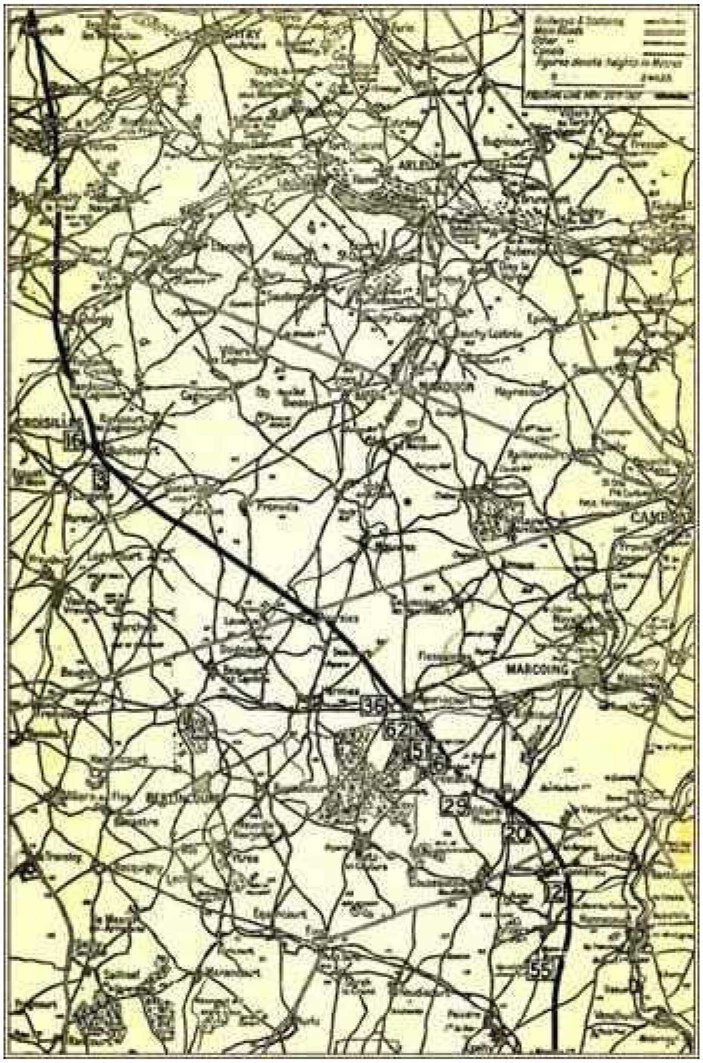

Fighting Line, November 20, 1917

The tanks were about four hundred in number and were under the separate command of General Elles, a dashing soldier who inspired the utmost enthusiasm in his command. It had always been the contention of the tank designers in England that their special weapon needed, what it had never yet found, virgin ground which was neither a morass nor a wilderness of shell-holes. The leading lines of tanks had been furnished with enormous faggots of wood which they carried across their bows and which would be released so as to fall forward into any ditch or trench and to form a rude bridge. These ready-made weight-bearers were found to act admirably.

One difficulty with which the operations were confronted was that it was impossible for the guns to register properly without arousing suspicion. It was left to the gunners, therefore, to pick up their range as best they might after the action began, and this they did with a speed and accuracy which showed their high technical efficiency.

Taking the description of the operations upon November 20th from the north end of the line we shall first deal with the subsidiary but very important and successful attacks carried out by Haldane’s Sixth Corps in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. The Hindenburg Line at this point consisted of a front trench with a second or support trench 300 yards v behind it, and many scattered Mebus or concrete machine-gun forts. The British had already a lodgment in part of the front trench, and the main objective now was the support trench which was called “Tunnel Trench” because it had a tunnel 30 or 40 feet down along its whole length with staircase entrances every 25 yards. The units to whom the attack was entrusted were the Third Division upon the right, and the Sixteenth Irish Division upon the left.

The morning of November 20 was overcast but not actually raining, with low visibility, which may account for the fact that the German barrage was feeble, slow, and inaccurate.

The advance of the Sixteenth Division was by three brigades, the 47th on the right, the 48th in the centre, and the 49th upon the left. Every up-to-date infantry-saving device, the artillery barrage, the machine-gun barrage, and the Stokes-mortar smoke-screen was used to the full. The guns had been reinforced by a portion of the artillery of the Thirty-fourth Division, and the support which they gave was admirably effective. We will trace the attack from the right.

The flank battalion was the 6th Connaughts with the 1st Munsters upon their left. Their objective was taken with a spring. The Munsters were able to consolidate at once. The Connaughts had more trouble as a rush of German bombers came down upon their right, driving the flank company in and forcing it back down the sap. For several hours there was hard fighting at this point, which was often hand-to-hand when the Irish bayonet men rushed at the German bomb-throwers. Finally a block and a defensive flank were formed, and two big Mebus, Mars and Jove, were left in the hands of the stormers.

In the centre the advance of the 10th Dublin Fusiliers and of the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers was entirely successful. So sudden was the attack that many of the enemy were found wearing their gas masks. Two large Mebus, Juno and Minerva, with a good stretch of tunnel trench remained, together with many prisoners, in the hands of the stormers. The position was rapidly wired with concertina wire and new trenches dug for defence and communication by the l55th Field Co. R.E. and the 11th Hants Pioneer battalion.

On the left the storming battalions were the 2nd Royal Irish and the 7/8th Irish Fusiliers. The Royal Irish carried both tunnel and support trenches with the Flora Mebus, taking 200 prisoners. Many Germans retreated into the tunnel, but were pelted out again by Mills grenades. The Fusiliers were equally successful, but had one short hold-up owing to the determined resistance of a single officer and ten men. This little party made a brave fight, and were so situated that they commanded two lines of trench. Eventually they were all killed. The support trench was occupied, the tunnel cleared by the 174th Tunneling Company, and the whole position made good in a most workmanlike way. A series of counter-attacks were stamped out by the barrage before they could get properly going.

The tunnel, as explained, was a continuous gallery opening into the trench and extending eastwards. It had numerous chambers leading off, fitted with wire bunks, tables, etc. This section was elaborately mined, but the position of the leads had been accurately disclosed by a deserter, and they were soon cut by the sappers.

In this swift and successful operation some 635 prisoners of the 470th and 471st Regiments were taken, with many minor trophies. Many Germans had been killed, 330 bodies being counted in the trenches alone. Altogether it was a remarkably smooth-running operation, and the model of an attack with limited objective, upon which General Haldane and all concerned might be congratulated. It was the more remarkable as it was carried out without preliminary bombardment, and no help from the tanks.

While the Irish had attacked upon the left a single brigade of the Third Division, the 9th, advanced upon their right, and keeping pace with their comrades carried out a most successful attack, securing a further length of the tunnel trench. There was no further fighting of consequence in this area of the battle, save for some movement forward on the part of the Irish division and one short counter-attack by the Germans. It will be understood that this attack was some miles to the north of the main battle, and that a long section of unbroken Hindenburg Line intervened between the two. Along this line the Fifty-sixth Division kept up a spirited Chinese attack all day. The real advance was upon a frontage of six miles which covered the front from Hermies in the north to Gonnelieu in the south. Every company of the advancing units had been instructed to fall in behind its own marked tank. At 6:20, just after dawn, in a favouring haze, General Elles gave the signal, his ironclad fleet flowed forward, the field of wire went down with a long splintering rending crash, the huge faggots were rolled forward into the gaping ditches, and the eager infantry crowded forward down the clear swathes which the monsters had cut. At the same moment the guns roared out, and an effective smoke-barrage screened the whole strange spectacle from the German observers.

The long line of tanks, magnified to monstrous size in the dim light of early dawn, the columns of infantry with fixed bayonets who followed them, all advancing in silent order, formed a spectacle which none who took part in it could ever forget. Everything went without a hitch, and in a few minutes the whole Hindenburg Line with its amazed occupants was in the hands of the assailants. Still following their iron guides they pushed on to their further objectives. As these differed, and as the fortunes of the units varied, it will be well to take them in turn, always working from the left of the line.

The British front was cut across diagonally by a considerable canal with deep sides, the Canal du Nord. Upon the north side of this was one division. This flank unit was the famous Thirty-sixth Ulsters, who behaved this day with their usual magnificent gallantry. Advancing with deliberate determination, they carried all before them, though exposed to that extra strain to which a flank unit must always submit. Their left was always enfiladed by the enemy and they had continually to build up a defensive line, which naturally subtracted from their numbers and made a long advance impossible. None the less, after rushing a high bank bristling with machine-guns they secured the second Hindenburg Line, where they were firmly established by 10:30 after a sharp contest with the garrison. They then swept forward, keeping the canal upon their right, until by evening they had established themselves upon the Bapaume-Cambrai road. It was the brigade moving parallel to the Sixty-second Division upon which the heavier work fell.

Upon the immediate right of the Irishmen was Braithwaite’s Sixty-second Division of West Riding Yorkshire Territorials — one of those second line units whose solid excellence has been one of the surprises of the war. Six of them had already come to the front, and not one of the six which had not made its mark. On this occasion the men of the West Riding made an advance which was the admiration of the army, and which the Field-Marshal, who weighs his words carefully, described as “a brilliant achievement.” The first obstacle in front of the 185th West Yorkshire Brigade upon the right was the village of Havrincourt, which, with the aid of the tanks, they carried in dashing style, though the resistance from the Château was very fierce. Behind it lay the reserve German line, which also was taken at the point of the bayonet. Upon the left the 187th Brigade, containing two Yorks and Lancaster and two Yorkshire Light Infantry battalions, swept gloriously forward and got every objective, including the northern half of Havrincourt.

The 2/5th Yorkshire Light Infantry was particularly fine, as it charged without tanks and yet kept up with the line. The 186th Brigade, consisting of four battalions of the West Riding Regiment, then passed through in a splendid rush which carried them up to and through the village of Graincourt, regardless of the fact that Flesquières on the right was untaken. Surging on the 188th Reserve Brigade reached and captured the important village of Graincourt, much aided by two audacious tanks. With an energy which was still unabated they pushed on to Anneux, where they reached the fringe of the houses. It was a truly splendid day’s work, in which four and a half miles of every devilry which German sappers could build or German infantry defend was inexorably beaten down. In all these operations they were aided and supported, not only by the tanks, but by the 11th Hussars, and also by a body of King Edward’s Horse. Thirty-seven guns and 2000 prisoners were the fine trophies of this one division.

Upon the right of Braithwaite’s Yorkshiremen was the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division. They also made a fine advance, but were held up by the strongly organised village of Flesquières. The approach to it was a long slope swept by machine-gun fire, and the co-operation of the tanks was made difficult by a number of advanced field-guns which destroyed the slow-moving machines as they approached up the hill. If the passage of the Hindenburg Line showed the strength of these machines, the check at Flesquières showed their weakness, for in their present state of development they were helpless before a well-served field-gun, and a shell striking them meant the destruction of the tank, and often the death of the crew. It is said that a single Prussian artillery officer, who stood by his gun to the death and is chivalrously immortalised in the British bulletin, destroyed no less than sixteen tanks by direct hits. At the same time the long and solid wall of the

Château formed an obstacle to the infantry, as did the tangle of wire which surrounded the village. The fighting was very severe and the losses considerable, but before evening the Highlanders had secured the ground round the village and were close up to the village itself. The delay had, however, a sinister effect upon the British plans, as the defiant village, spitting out flames and lead from every cranny and window, swept the ground around and created a broad zone on either side, across which progress was difficult and dangerous. It was the resistance of this village, and the subsequent breaking of the bridges upon the canal, which prevented the cavalry from fulfilling their full role upon this first day of battle. None the less as dismounted units they did sterling work, and one small mounted body of Canadian Cavalry, the Fort Garry Horse from Winnipeg, particularly distinguished itself, getting over every obstacle, taking a German battery, dispersing a considerable body of infantry, and returning after a day of desperate adventure without their horses, but with a sample of the forces which they had encountered. It was a splendid deed of arms, for which Lieutenant Henry Strachan, who led the charge after the early fall of the squadron leader, received the coveted Cross.

Upon the right of the Fifty-first Division was the Sixth, which was faced by the village of Eibecourt. Into this it stormed, and after some heavy street and house fighting it cleared it of its German garrison. The advance was carried out with the 71st Brigade upon the right and the 18th upon the left. The village was carried by storm by the 9th Norfolks of the 71st Brigade passing through the 1st Leicesters, who, together with the 2nd Sherwood Foresters, had stormed the Hindenburg Line, following close upon the tanks, upon whose iron flanks they could hear the rifle bullets patter like hailstones. The losses of the division were light, as their instructions were to dig in upon the further side of the village and act as a connecting link. The Foresters, however, had at least one sharp tussle before they gained their full objective. A shock battalion charged them, and there was a period of desperate fighting during which the Germans displayed a valour which sometimes was almost that of fanatics. “One of their companies was cut off. We offered them quarter, but they would not hear of it. The last to go was a young sub. When he saw that all was up he drew his revolver and shot himself. As he fell I ran forward in the hope to save him, for he was a brave lad. When I got to his side he looked at me with a look of intense hate and tried to take aim with his pistol. It fell from his hand and he fell dead with that look of hate still on his face.”

In connection with this advance of the Sixth Division it should be stated that the 2nd Durham Light Infantry upon the left charged a battery and captured the guns, a fine feat of arms.

Upon the right of the Sixth Division was the Twenty-ninth Regular Division which was held back from the advance until its flank was secured upon the right. When this had been accomplished by the Twelfth Division it dashed swiftly forward upon a three-brigade fronts the 87th and 86th Brigades seizing respectively Marcoing and Neuf Wood which is immediately beyond it. Here they found themselves in very close collaboration with the Sixth Division, through whom they passed in their advance. On the right the 88th Brigade, after hard fighting in the Hindenburg support line, captured Les Rues Vertes and part of Mesnières. The taking of these two villages was really of great importance in the general scheme of operations, and the advances of the divisions upon either flank may be looked upon as simply a screen to cover the Twenty-ninth while it sped forward upon its venture. The reason of this was that the Canal de l’Escaut, a very formidable obstacle, covered the whole German front south of Cambrai, and that unless it were taken all advance in this direction was impossible. There were bridges at Mesnières and Marcoing, and these were the nearest points to the British line. Hence it was that the flanks of the Twenty-ninth were carefully covered and a clear opening made for it, that with one tiger-spring it might seize this vital position. The bridge at Marcoing was captured intact, the leading tank shooting down the party who were engaged in its demolition. At Mesnières, which is the more important point, the advancing troops were less fortunate, as the bridge had already been injured and an attempt by a tank to cross it led to both bridge and tank crashing down into the canal. This proved to be a serious misfortune, and coupled with the hold-up at Flesquières, was the one untoward event in a grand day’s work. Both the tanks and the cavalry were stopped by the broken bridge, and though the infantry still pushed on their advance was slower, as it was necessary to clear that part of the village which lay north of the canal and then to go forward without support over open country.

Thus the Germans had time to organise resistance upon the low hills from Eumilly to Crèvecoeur and to prevent the advance reaching its full limits. A footbridge was secured by the Newfoundlanders at Mesnières, and it may be mentioned as a curious example of the wide sweep of the British Empire that the first man to get across it, and to lose his life in the gallant deed, was an Esquimaux from Labrador. The centre brigade got about 1500 yards beyond Marcoing, but there the Germans from Cambrai had formed a new line which could not be forced. The enemy recognised this advance as being for the moment the most menacing part of the British line, and at once adopted the very strongest measures to push it back and secure the bridgeheads of the canal. Several times upon November 21 they raged against this point of the line and made desperate attempts to gain the two villages. Noyelle, which was held by the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, was also strongly attacked upon that day, but with the aid of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and 16th Middlesex the village was held against a series of onslaughts, one position changing hands seven times. Some of these counter-attacks were delivered by Prussian Guards, hastily brought from Lens, and the fighting was as severe as it usually is when the Kaiser’s own men put in an appearance. These events, however, were on the 21st, and we must return to the first day of the battle.

On the right of the Twenty-ninth was the Twentieth Division. In front of them, upon the farther side of the line, had lain the powerfully fortified farm of La Vacquerie, and this they had taken with their first rush. Beyond lay a long slope, strongly held by the Germans, called the Welsh Ridge. This also was stormed by the Twentieth, who kept pace with the right flank of the Twenty-ninth, and pushed their advance forward as far as the canal. At the same time the 59th Brigade was thrown out upon the right to make a prolongation of the defensive flank built up by the Twelfth Division and so screen the main attack. All went well with the right of this advance, but the left, consisting of the 10th K.R.R., was held for a time by a strong point which eventually surrendered and yielded 200 prisoners. Some of this battalion saw the enemy running towards Mesnières and pursued them to the main bridge. The troops received a most affectionate welcome from the inhabitants of the houses along Cambrai road. The attack upon the left was carried out by the 12th K.R.R. and 6th Oxfords of the 60th Brigade, which swept with little resistance over the Hindenburg Line, but had some trouble with strong points beyond. One of these points of resistance which was carried by the 12th K.R.R. accounted for all the officers of the party and 62 out of 96 men, before it was put out of action by the survivors. Captain

Hoare, a veteran Rifleman who had risen from the ranks, was killed at this point, and his orderly, a lad of twenty named Shepherd, took over the direction of the party and carried the operation through with, such dash and valour that he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

We now come to the Twelfth Division upon the flank, the first English division of the New Army, a unit which had greatly distinguished itself at Ovillers and elsewhere. Its task was in some ways the most difficult of any, as it had not only to advance upon important objectives but to build up a flank line of resistance as it went, since the whole attack might have been checked and brought to ruin by an enemy assault from the south. The 36th Brigade upon the left advanced with the 9th Royal Fusiliers and 7th Sussex in their front line, while two companies of the 8th Fusiliers were thrown out upon the left to aid in the attack upon La Vacquerie. On the right by the Banteaux Spur was the 35th Brigade with the 9th Essex and 5th Berkshires in the front. The latter battalion lost heavily from the fire of guns on their right. When on the line of Bleak House the supporting battalions, two companies of Fusiliers and the 11th Middlesex upon the left, the 7th Suffolks and part of the 7th Norfolks upon the right, passed on to the objective. The 37th Brigade then passed through upon the right and settled in an echelon of battalions along the flank, the 7th East Surreys and 6th Buffs starting the line, while the 6th West Kent and 6th West Surrey prolonged it. While executing this delicate and complicated movement the battalions were under heavy fire and had to clear Lateau Wood of the enemy, so that it was a fine bit of work on the part both of the leaders and of the men. The two chief points of German resistance outside the wood were the forts of Pam-Pam and Bonavis, both of which were attacked by tanks and then carried by storm by the Kentish infantry. By 11 o’clock the whole advance, covering a front of 2000 with a depth of 5500 yards, had reached its full objectives at every point. The total losses of the division were about 1300 men. Major Alderman, commanding the West Kents, was among those who fell. It may be added that from this day until the fateful 30th the division was out of the battle and made no move, save that on November 24 the 35th and 36th Brigades pushed a short way down the slope eastwards to the St. Quentin Canal.

Some allusion has already been made to the dispositions of the cavalry. The original plan was that the First and Fifth Cavalry Divisions, closely supported by the Second, should, the instant that the way was clear, push forward to surround and isolate Cambrai, and also to isolate and threaten Bourlon Wood from the north and east. The situation was never such, however, as to allow any large body of cavalry to get through. At dawn on the morning of the 21st a patrol of 5th Lancers ascertained that the Germans still held the Marcoing — Beaurevoir line in force. On the left, however, the success of the Fifty-first Division had made more open space, and on this side the Bays and the 4th Dragoon Guards penetrated upon the 21st as far as Fontaine and did some useful work.

The Twelfth Division formed the flank of Pulteney's Third Corps. Upon its right was Snow's Seventh Corps, the left-hand unit of which was the Fifty-fifth Division of Lancashire Territorials, which had not been involved in the advance, and indeed was nominally resting after its supreme exertions at Ypres where it had taken a notable part in battle after battle. It had been planned, however, that some demonstration should be made upon this front in order to divert the enemy's forces and to correspond with the attack at Bullecourt upon the north. This was carried out by the 164th Brigade and may have had the desired effect although it gave no permanent gain. A point called the Knoll, with an adjacent farm, was carried by the stormers and was held for most of the day, but they were forced back to their own old lines in the evening, after a long day of battle in which they incurred such heavy losses that the brigade was seriously crippled at a later date when the full strength of the division was urgently needed. This ended the first day of the battle, which represented a considerable victory, and one which vindicated the enterprise and brain-power of the British inventor and engineer as much as the valour of the soldier. The German line was deeply indented over a front of 6 miles and to a depth of 4j miles. More than 5000 prisoners with many guns had been taken. The famous Hindenburg Line had been severed. The villages of Havrincourt, Graincourt, Ribecourt, Marcoing, Noyelle, and Mesnières were all in British hands. It was a good beginning, so good that it was determined not to suspend the operations, but to try the results of a second day and see what could be attained before the arrival of the full German supports. Even with their excellent rear organisation and their great junction at it was hoped that a clear forty-eight hours must pass from the opening of the battle before they could build up a really formidable line.

There were no operations of any importance during the night of the 20th, but early upon November 21 the British line began to move forward once more, the same divisions being engaged in the advance. In the north the Ulstermen, who had attained the line of the Cambrai-Bapaume road, crossed that boundary and pushed onwards up the slope for about a mile until they reached the outskirts of the village of Moeuvres which they were unable to retain. It was soon apparent, both here and at other points along the line, that the Germans with their usual military efficiency had brought up their reserves even more rapidly than had been expected, and the resistance at Moeuvres was so determined that the tired division was unable to overcome it. The 169th Brigade of the Fifty-sixth Division pushed up on the left of the Ulstermen and occupied the German outpost line, from which they were able later to attack the main Hindenburg Line.

The Sixty-second Division upon the right of the Ulstermen had got to the edge of Anneux upon the night before, and now the 2/4th West Ridings were able to complete their conquest. The 186th Brigade then drove across the Cambrai road and reached the edge of the Considerable plantation called Bourlon Wood which rises upon a swelling hill, the summit being so marked in that gently undulating country that it becomes a landmark in the distance. Here there was very strong opposition, with so murderous a machine-gun fire that all progress was arrested, though a number of tanks drove their way in among the trees in an effort to break down the resistance. In the meantime the flank of the Yorkshiremen had been protected by the capture of the village of Cantaing with several hundred more prisoners.

Early in the day the Fifty-first had got round the northern edge of Flesquières, the village which had held up the centre of the advance upon the first day. As a consequence it fell and the front was cleared for a further advance. The Scotch infantry was then able to make a rapid advance of nearly three miles, taking Cantaing with 500 prisoners upon the way, and winding up in front of the village of Fontaine-Nôtre-Dame, which they stormed in a very brilliant fashion with the aid of tanks and of some squadrons of the First Cavalry Division as already noted.

Farther south the Sixth and Twenty-ninth Divisions acting in close co-operation had pushed their way through Mesnières, where they met and defeated a counter-attack from the direction of Rumilly. It was clear that every hour the German line was thickening in this quarter. Whilst the Sixth cleared the ground upon the left, the Twenty-ninth pushed forward and reached Noyelle, where with the aid of those useful allies, the dismounted troopers of the First and Fifth Cavalry Divisions, including the Umballa Brigade of Indians, they made goad the village as already described.

In the meantime the 10th Rifle Brigade of the Twentieth Division upon the right had first taken and then lost Les Rues des Vignes, an important position upon the British side of the canal. In the afternoon the 11th Rifle Brigade managed to cross the canal and endeavoured to push up towards Crèvecoeur, but at this point the river Scheldt ran on the farther side and offered an impediment which could not be crossed. Orders were issued by General Byng that a fresh attempt should be made next morning, but the troops were weary and the losses heavy so the instructions were cancelled and the line remained unaltered at this point.

The end of the second day of battle found the British Command faced with a difficult problem, and we have the Field-Marshal's own lucid analysis of the alternative courses open, and as to the reasons which prompted his decision. The capture of Cambrai had never been the goal of the operations, though a cavalry raid which would have disorganised the communications through that town had at one time seemed possible. A turning of the line to the south with the co-operation of some French divisions which were ready upon the spot, was part of the original conception, and was baulked by the insufficient hold established upon the farther side of the Canal de l'Escaut. But the central idea had been the capture of the high ground of Bourlon Hill and Wood for with this in British possession a considerable stretch of the defensive German line would lie open to observed artillery fire, and its retention would probably mean a fresh withdrawal to the east. It had been hoped that the goal would have been attained within forty-eight hours, but this time had elapsed and the assailants were at the bottom instead of the summit of the hill, with a resistance in front which was continually growing more obstinate. What was to be done?

The troops could not remain where they were, for the Bourlon Hill overlooked their position. They must carry it or retire. There was something to be said for the latter policy, as the Flesquières Ridge could be held and the capture of 10,000 prisoners and over 100 guns had already made the victory a notable one, while the casualties in two days were only 9000. On the other hand, while there is a chance of achieving a full decision it is hard to abandon an effort; reinforcements were coming up, and the situation in

Italy demanded a supreme effort upon the Western front. With all these considerations in his mind the Field-Marshal determined to carry on.

November 22 was spent in consolidating the ground gained, in bringing up reinforcements, and in resting the battle- weary divisions. There was no advance upon the part of the British during the day, but about one o’clock in the afternoon the Germans, by a sudden impetuous attack, regained the village of Fontaine and pushed back the Fifty-first Division in this quarter. No immediate effort was made to regain it, as this would be part of the general operations when the new line of attack was ready to advance. Earlier in the day the Germans had thrown themselves upon the front of the Sixty-second, driving back its front line, the 2/6th and 2/8th West Yorkshires, to the Bapaume-Cambrai road, but the Yorkshiremen shook themselves together, advanced once more, and regained the lost ground with the help of the 2/4th York and Lancasters. The Germans spent this day in building up their line, and with their better railway facilities had probably the best of the bargain, although the British air service worked with their usual utter self-abnegation to make the operation difficult.

The new advance began upon the night of November 22, when the 56th Londoners reinforced the Ulsters upon the left of the line on the outskirts of the village of Moeuvres. To the west of the village, between it and the Hindenburg Line, was an important position, Tadpole Copse, which formed a flank for any further advance. This was carried by a surprise attack in splendid style by the 1st Westminsters of the 169th Brigade. During the day both the Londoners and the Ulstermen tried hard, though with limited success, to enlarge the gains in this part of the field.

The attack was now pointing more and more to the north, where the wooded height of Bourlon marked the objective. In the southern part the movements of the troops were rather holding demonstrations than serious attacks. The real front of battle was marked by the reverse side of the Hindenburg Line upon the left, the hill, wood, and village of Bourlon in the centre, and the flanking village of Fontaine upon the right. All of these were more or less interdependent, for if one did not take Bourlon it was impossible to hold Fontaine which lay beneath it, while on the other hand any attack upon Bourlon was difficult while the flanking fire of Fontaine was unquenched. From Moeuvres to Fontaine was a good six miles of most difficult ground, so that it was no easy task which a thin line of divisions was asked, to undertake — indeed only four divisions were really engaged, the Thirty-sixth and Fifty-sixth on the left, the Fortieth in the centre, and the Fifty-first on the right.

The operations of November 23 began by an attack by the enduring Fifty-first Division, who had now been four days in the fighting line against Fontaine Village — an attempt in which they were aided by a squadron of tanks. Defeated in the first effort, they none the less renewed their attack in the afternoon with twelve more tanks, and established themselves close to the village but had not sufficient momentum to break their way through it. There they hung on in most desperate and difficult fighting, screening their comrades in the main Bourlon attack, but at most grievous cost to themselves.

Meanwhile the Thirty-sixth Division had again attacked Moeuvres, and at one time had captured it all, save the north-west corner, but heavy pressure from the enemy prevented them retaining their grasp of it. The two brigades of this division upon the east of the canal were unable, unfortunately, to make progress, and this fact greatly isolated and exposed the Fortieth Division during and after its attack.

This main attack was entrusted to the Fortieth Division, a unit which had never yet found itself in the full lurid light of this great stage, but which played its first part very admirably none the less. It was a terrible obstacle which lay in front of it, for the sloping wood was no less than 600 acres in extent, a thick forest with autumn foliage, hardly touched by shell-fire, while the village upon its north-western flank came also within the area of their attack. The men, however, had been specially exercised in wood fighting, a precaution which all agree to have been of the greatest possible value in the day of battle. When at 10:30 A.M. the signal was given to advance the 121st Brigade went forward with alacrity upon the left, while on the right the 119th Brigade plunged into the wood, the brigadier, a dare-devil little warrior, setting an example to his men which none who followed him will forget. About thirty tanks lumbered forward in front of the advancing lines. The west edge of the wood formed the dividing line between the right and left attack.

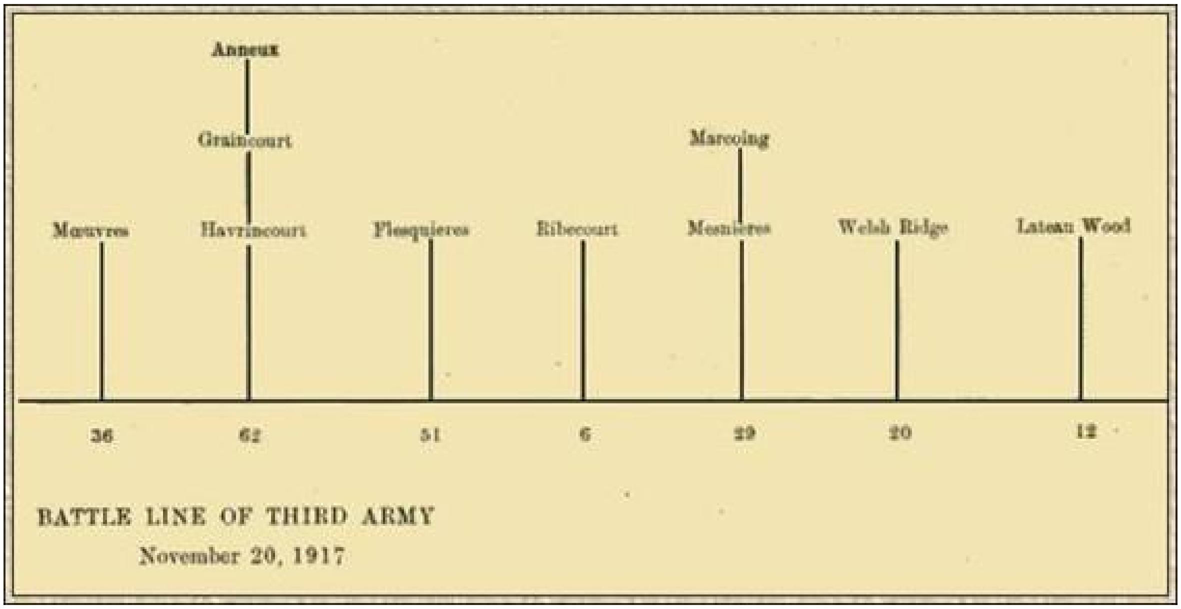

Battle Line of Third Army, November 20, 1917

It was arranged that the tanks should, so far as possible, go down those rides which are so conspicuous a feature of every French forest, while the infantry should move up between them. The 119th Brigade moved forward with the 19th Welsh Fusiliers upon the right, the 12th South Wales Borderers on the left, while the 17th Welsh were in close reserve. It was the second occasion in the war when a splendid piece of woodland fighting was carried through by the men of the Principality, and even Mametz was not a finer performance than Bourlon. They rapidly broke through the German front line, capturing numerous prisoners and machine-guns. The Colonel of the Fusiliers pushed his way forward to the north edge where he established posts, while the flank of the Welsh Borderers brushed the village of Bourlon and got north of that point. The 17th Welsh meanwhile formed defensive flanks upon either side, while the 18th Welsh came up to reinforce, and pushed ahead of their comrades with the result that they were driven in by a violent counter-attack. The line was re-established, however, and before one o’clock the 119th Brigade were dug in along the whole northern edge of the forest. It was a fine attack and was not marred by excessive losses, though Colonel Kennedy of the 17th Welsh was killed. Among many notable deeds of valour was that of Sergeant-Major Davies of the 18th Welsh, who knelt down in the open and allowed his shoulder to be used as the rest for a Lewis gun, until a bullet struck him down.

It was clear that the Germans would make every effort to regain the wood, and immediate steps were taken to strengthen the defence, which was already firmly established. The 14th Argyll and Sutherlands were sent up to thicken the line, as were the 15th Hussars, who were doing great service as a mobile foot battalion. More machine-guns were also pushed to the front. The result of these measures, all taken before nightfall, was that the inevitable counter-attacks, which materialised before dawn, were shot back by a blaze of fire from the fringe of brushwood. Early in the morning of November 24, a resolute endeavour of the German stormers gained a lodgment for them to the right of the British line, where they captured some of the machine-guns. During the whole of this day the enemy pressed hardly upon the weakening line, and at three in the afternoon had pushed them back from the whole of the right half of the wood, but Welshmen, Highlanders, and Hussars gathered themselves for a supreme effort, and dashing at the Germans swept them back once more to their old position. We shall leave the 119th Brigade still holding fast upon the evening of the 24th to their advanced position, while we follow the fortunes of the 121st Brigade from the time of the original attack upon November 23.

This Brigade had, as already stated, advanced upon the village of Bourlon with the 20th Middlesex upon the right and the 13th Yorkshires upon the left, the latter in close touch with the 107th Brigade of Ulstermen upon the west of their front, the whole line to swing round and attack the western edge of the village. The 21st Middlesex were in close support to give Weight to the left of the line, while the 12th Phase. Suffolks Were in reserve. The Ulstermen had been Nov. 24. held up by heavy machine-gun fire which exposed the left flank of the Yorkshires, who in turn could not get forward. This in turn brought the two Middlesex battalions to a halt, who were already well up to the village. Three out of six tanks upon this flank were put out of action by armour-piercing bullets. After a pause both the Yorkshires and some of the Middlesex got into the village, but their flank was always bare, and the best they could do was to hold on to the southern edge. None the less the line was firm and formidable, as was found by a German attack carried out by the 9th Grenadier Regiment in the late afternoon, which was swept back by the British fire. All day the enemy strove hard to clear the village, and all day the 121st Brigade held splendidly to its gains. Where all were fine the non-commissioned officers were particularly splendid. Sergeant-Major Hall of the 21st Middlesex, three times wounded and still rallying his company, was but one of many. Some critic has finely said that if the Day of Judgment were to come a British non-commissioned officer would still be found imploring his neighbours not to get the wind up. It is an interesting fact that the attack by the 121st Brigade had been countermanded, but the wires were broken and the message miscarried, so that the whole fine episode was strictly unofficial.

During the night the hard-pressed line was thickened by the arrival of the 19th Hussars and Bedford Yeomanry, who took over the left of the position. The 14th H.L.I. were also brought up from the reserve brigade, and twelve more tanks came into line. The 12th Suffolks had formed upon the left of the Highlanders, and these two battalions with the cavalry and tanks made a united attack upon the remaining portion of the village of Bourlon on the morning of the 24th, which was countered by the Germans in the afternoon. In the confusion of house-to-house combat the two battalions were separated, the Suffolks getting penned in at the south corner of the village, while the Highlanders, who had made a splendid advance, were isolated in the north-east. The situation was serious, and two reserve battalions, the 13th Surreys and 12th Royal Lancasters, were brought up after dusk. A body of dismounted cavalry drawn from the 2nd and 5th Dragoon Guards and the 11th Hussars were also pushed into the fight. With these troops the Brigadier made a strong attempt upon the morning of November 25 to force his way through the village, which was now mostly in German hands, but the tanks which he had expected did not arrive, and his infantry were not strong enough for the task. Colonel Batty e of the Highlanders had been killed, and Colonel Warden of the East Surreys, who had assumed local command, did all that a man could do, but the losses were too heavy, and the Highlanders were seen no more. Up to the 26th Colonel Warden, with his headquarters in the firing line, was able to send up rations to the survivors of the three isolated companies who had made a wonderful resistance for nearly two days. In the end it was only by great skill that his own battalion, the East Surreys, were rescued from their dangerous position, for the forces of the Germans were in overwhelming strength, and overlapped the village upon both sides. Some of the East Surreys were cut off for two days in the south-eastern part of the village before the survivors could be got clear. Colonel Warden received the D.S.O. for his splendid work.

In the meantime, from the morning of the 25th, the 119th Brigade had made a splendid fight in the wood against fierce attacks which beat up against their right flank. The Guards had come up to relieve the 51st Highlanders, and on this date three battalions of the 3rd Guards Brigade, the 2nd Scots Guards, 1st and 4th Grenadier Guards, were thrown in to help the Fortieth Division in its heavy task. Two companies of the 11th Royal Lancasters were also brought forward, and succeeded in doing some very brilliant work. The flank was held during the day. Upon that night the weary division was drawn out, being relieved by the Sixty-second Yorkshire Division, which by some miracle after only two days of rest was judged to be battle worthy once more. It was indeed a case of - the tired relieving those who were only a little less tired than themselves, but the line had to be held and not another man was available. The artillery of the Fortieth Division, which had shown remarkable efficiency and co-operated very closely with the infantry, remained in action. During its brilliant spell of service the Fortieth Division had taken 750 prisoners, but its casualties were very heavy, amounting to 172 officers and more than 3000 men.

The British position was now a difficult one, for the enemy held the ridge above Fontaine and also the high ground between Bourlon and the Hindenburg Line, so that they had commanding observation upon both sides. With great persistence, however, in spite of the continual thickening of the German line the British commanders determined, after a pause for breath, to make one more effort to capture both Fontaine, which had relapsed into enemy hands, and the village of Bourlon with the whole of the Ridge. The Guards, the Forty-seventh London Territorials, and the Second Division had all appeared upon the scene, so that the striking force was stronger than before. Upon November 27 the Guards made a strong effort upon Fontaine, having relieved the Fifty-first Division in that sector. The 3rd Guards Brigade had already become involved, as described in the defence by the Fortieth Division of Bourlon Wood. It was the 2nd Brigade which was now marshalled to attack upon a very wide front from Fontaine village on the right to Bourlon village on the left, this latter advance being in support of the attack by the Sixty-second Division upon the position which had been lost. This attack made at 6:20 in the morning of November 27, after a night of snow and tempest, was carried out by the 186th and 187th Brigades, the object being to get back Bourlon wood and village. The latter brigade got half-way through the village at one time, but could not make good the ground. The 186th, working through the woods to the north-west of Fontaine, gained their objectives, but had both flanks in the air, and were eventually in the evening compelled to fall back, all the West Riding battalions having lost heavily. Meanwhile the 2nd Brigade of Guards had been fighting hard in support of the Sixty-second. This attack was carried out by the 2nd Irish, while the 3rd Grenadiers, 1st Coldstream, and 1st Scots were respectively upon the left, centre, and right of the advance upon the village, which came down the line of the Cambrai road.

The attack started at 6:20 in the morning after a night of snow and tempest. The flank battalion of Scots Guards by the use of a sunken road got well up to the village without heavy loss, but a blast of machine-gun fire from a small house about 200 yards away played havoc with the 3rd Grenadiers, who none the less rushed forward, stormed the house, and secured their first objective. The Coldstreams also suffered heavily from machine-gun fire from a post north of the railway, and half their numbers were on the ground before they also reached their objective. The remains of these two gallant battalions cleared the whole village and captured about a thousand prisoners, but were unable to get more than six hundred to the rear. By ten o’clock the whole position had been taken, but the victors had suffered so severely that they were unable to cover so large a perimeter, and about eleven o’clock the Germans, passing through the numerous gaps in the defence, bade fair to cut off the whole British force. The 4th Grenadiers of the 3rd Brigade was sent up under Lord Gort to reinforce, and the remains of the 2nd Brigade was drawn clear of the village and settled into trenches in front of it. The attack was in many ways a very difficult one, for the village was strongly fortified, there was much wire intact south of the Cambrai road, and the machine-gun fire from La Folie Wood swept all the approaches. Eventually the force of the enemy was so strong, and it had penetrated so far round the flanks of the battalions that Lord Fielding, who commanded the Guards division, gave orders that they retire to their original line. The brigade lost- heavily in the venture.

Meanwhile the gallant Yorkshiremen of the Sixty-second, together with the 2nd Irish Guards, drove their way through Bourlon Wood in spite of a desperate resistance from a German line which included several battalions of the Guards. Many prisoners were taken, but many others escaped in the confused fighting among the brushwood and tree-trunks. Once again the counter-attacks were too strong for the thin ranks who had reached their goal, and the British, after reaching both the village and the north end of the wood, were pushed out once more. At the same time the British held a strong position on the hill and in the wood, so that there were still hopes of a successful issue if the German resistance could be outworn. It should be remarked that through all the fighting the battle line was greatly strengthened by the fact that a dismounted battalion was formed from each brigade of cavalry, or nine in all, who relieved and supported the very weary infantry. The trophies of the battle up to date had been over 100 German guns, 10,500 prisoners, 350 machine-guns, and, above all, the valuable stretch of Hindenburg’s Line.

It was in this last phase of the advance, and indeed after the fighting had ended, that General Bradford was killed by a chance shell. This young soldier, who, at the age of twenty-five commanded one of the brigades of the Sixty-second Division, was one of the great natural leaders disclosed by the war. It was indeed a cruel fate which took him away between full promise and full performance. “He had the dash and enthusiasm of youth tempered by the knowledge and experience which comes to most men only with later years.” So wrote his immediate commander. England could ill spare such a man at such a time.

All was quiet for the next few days, during which the Fifty-ninth Division relieved the Guards, while the Forty-seventh Division relieved the Sixty-second Yorkshiremen.

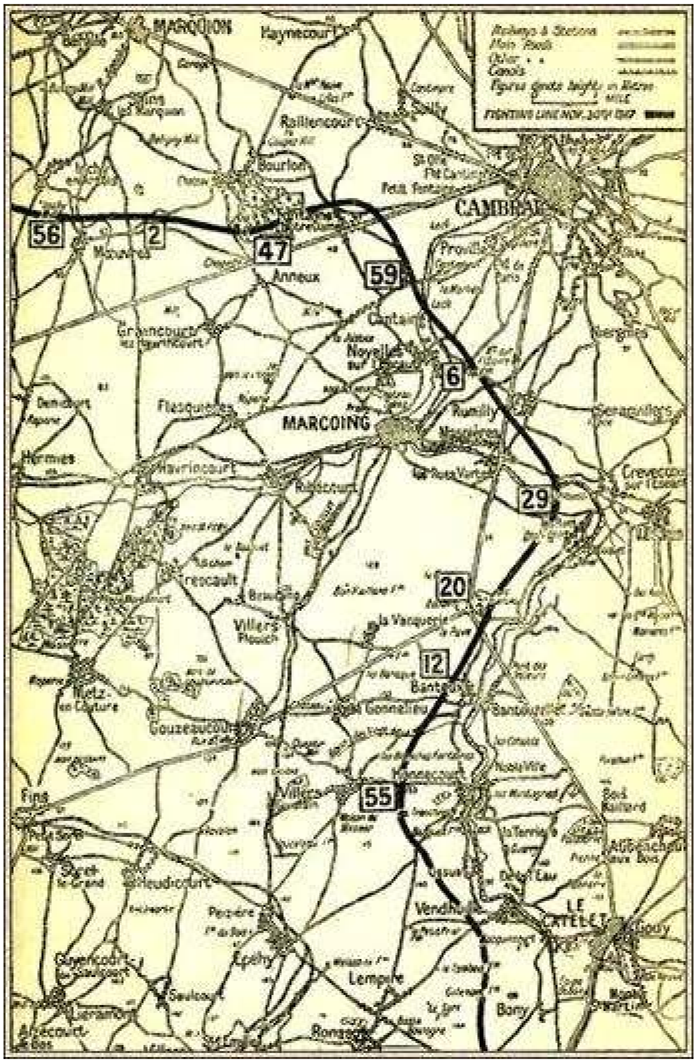
Railways & Stations
Main Roads
Other
Canals
Figures denote heights in Metres
MILE
FIGHTING LINE NOV. 30TH 1917
MARQUION
Haynecourt
Raillencourt
Bourlon
CAMBRAI
Proville
56
2
47
59
6
29
20
12
55
Moeuvres
Anneux
Graincourt
Cantaing
Noyelles
Flesquières
MARCOING
Rumilly
Demicourt
Hermies
Havrincourt
Ribécourt
Crèvecoeur
Trescault
Villers Plouich
la Vacquerie
Banteux
Metz-en-Couture
Gouzeaucourt
Gonnelieu
Villers Guislain
Fins
Sorel-le-Grand
Heudicourt
Peizière
Epéhy
Vendhuile
LE CATELET
Lempire
Bony
Ronssoy
Saulcourt
Guyencourt
Liéramont

Fighting Line, November 30, 1917

XI. THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

Second Phase of Battle, November 30

Great German attack — Disaster to three divisions — Desperate fight of Twenty-ninth Division — Fine advance by the Guards — Capture and recapture of Gouzeaucourt — Hard battle in the Bourlon Sector — Heavy losses of the Germans — Retraction of the British line

IT was clear to the British Commanders before the end of November that the enemy had grown so strong that the initiative had passed to him, and that instead of following up attacks it was a question now of defending positions against a determined endeavour to shove back the intruders and splice the broken line. The multifarious signs of activity behind the German lines, the massing of troops, the planting of batteries, and the registration of ranges, all warned the experienced observers that a great counter-offensive was about to begin. There was no question of a surprise at any point of the line, but Bourlon was naturally the place where the enemy might be expected to be at his full strength, since it was vital that he should regain that position. At the same time it was clearly seen that the storm would break also at the south end of the line, and General Snow had given every instruction to General Jeudwine of the Fifty-fifth Division which held the position next to the scene of action. This experienced leader took every step which could be thought of, but he was sadly handicapped by the state of his division which had been so severely hammered at Ypres, and had in the last few days had one brigade knocked to pieces at Knoll. With only two brigades, full of young troops who had taken the place of the casualties incurred in the north, he had to cover at least 10,000 yards of ground. His line was stretched until it was little more than a string of sentries with an occasional strong point dotted up and down. We will begin by endeavouring to follow what occurred in this southern sector, and then turn to the equally important, though less dramatic, doings in the north.

The attack in the south was delivered upon a front of ten miles from Vendhuille in the south to Mesnières in the north. To take a single comprehensive view of it, it hardly affected the Twenty-fourth Division upon the right of Snow’s Seventh Corps, it crashed with full force upon the Fifty-fifth Division, especially the left brigade, it swept impetuously upon the Twelfth and Twentieth Divisions, driving in part of the line of each of these units, and finally it raged with equal fury but less success against the Twenty-ninth Division, in the region of Mesnières. The weight and swiftness of the blow, coming with the shortest possible artillery preparation, and strongly supported by low-flying aeroplanes, must add to the reputation of General von Marwitz who planned it. It was a success, and it is difficult to see how it could have been prevented from being a success by any means which the defenders had it in their power to adopt. The undulating country in which troops could assemble, and the morning mist which screened them from observation were two factors which contributed to the result.

Shortly after seven in the morning the tempest suddenly broke loose. The surprise was so well carried out that though the British General was expecting an attack, and though he had his wire patrols pushed up to the German trenches only a hundred yards off, still their reports at dawn gave no warning of any sound to herald the coming rush. It came like a clap of thunder. An experienced officer in the front British trench said: “My first impression was that of an earthquake. Then it seemed to me that an endless procession of aeroplanes were grazing my head with their wheels. On recovering from the first shock of my surprise the Germans were far behind me.” There was no question of protective barrage, for the quickest answer to the most urgent S.O.S. would have been too late to. help.

This account refers particularly to the 166th Brigade, upon the left of the Fifty-fifth Division, which got the full blast of the storm. It and the guns behind it were overrun in an instant by the weight and speed of the advance. The General in command did all that could be done in such an emergency, but it was impossible to form a fixed line. The alternative was to swing back hinging upon the right of the division, and this was done so that there was always a flank formed upon the left of the stormers. There was a ravine, called Ravine 22 upon the maps, which ran down between the Fifty-fifth and Twelfth Divisions. With the terrific force of a flood the Germans poured down this natural runway, destroying the British formations upon each side of it. The Fifty-fifth Division was shattered to pieces at this point by so terrific an impact upon their feeble line, but the small groups into which they were broken put up as good a fight as they could, while the line formed anew between the village of Villers-Guislain and the farm Vaucelette which was a strong pivot of resistance. In this part of the field units of the 165th Brigade of Liverpool battalions, together with the 5th Royal Lancasters and the 10th Liverpool Scottish of the 166th Brigade, stood stoutly to their work, and though the enemy after penetrating the lines were able to get the village of Villers-Guislain, which they had turned and surrounded, they were never able to extend their advance to the south on account of this new line of defence through Vaucelette, though it was composed entirely of infantry with no artillery support. However, even with this limitation the situation was bad enough, since the 166th Brigade was almost cut to pieces, and so complete was the destruction upon the extreme left that one battalion, the 5th South Lancashires, was entirely destroyed, and nothing heard of it until its leader, Colonel James, was reported as a badly wounded prisoner in Germany. Of the division generally it was said by a higher General that " they fought like tigers," as might be expected of men who had left a great name on the battle of Ypres, and who were destined for even greater fame when four months later they held Givenchy at the critical moment of the terrible battle of Armentières. Here, as always, it is constancy in moments of adversity and dour refusal to accept defeat which distinguish both the British soldier and his leaders.

We shall now see what happened to the Twelfth Division upon the left of the Fifty-fifth. When the German stormers poured down Ravine 22 their left-handed blow knocked out the 166th Brigade, while their right-handed crushed in the side of the Twelfth Division. From the ravine in the south to Quarry Farm in the north, the German infantry surged round the position like a mountain spate round some rock-hearted islet, where the edges might crumble and be washed out by the torrent, but the solid core would always beat back the waters. The line of the division was a curved one, with the 35th Brigade upon the right, the 36th in the centre, and the 37th upon the left. It was upon the right-hand brigade that the storm burst with its full shattering force. The 7th Suffolks next to the fatal ravine shared the fate of the 5th South Lancashires upon the southern edge of it. By a coincidence the Colonel had been invalided for appendicitis the day before, but Major Henty who was in command was killed. The 5th Berks and 9th Essex, broken up into small parties and enveloped in a smoke cloud through which they could only catch dim glimpses of rushing Germans, were pushed back to the north and west, still keeping some sort of cohesion, until they reached the neighbourhood of Bleak House where they rallied once more and gathered for a counter-attack. Everywhere over this area small parties were holding on, each unconscious of all that was passing outside its own little smoke-girt circle. Close to Villers-Guislain upon the south side of the ravine Sapper Company 70, together with the 5th Northampton Pioneers, held on bravely for many hours, shooting into the flank of the German ‘advance who poured over the British gun positions which were well forward at this point in order to support the troops in Mesnières and Marcoing. Some of the incidents round the guns were epic in character, for the British gunner does not lightly take leave of his piece. Many were fought to the last instant with their crews hacking at them with pickaxes and trenching tools to disable them even while the Germans swarmed in. Lieut. Wallace, of the 363rd Battery, with five men served three guns point-blank, their trails crossing as they covered three separate fields of fire. Each of this band of heroes received a decoration, their leader getting the V.C. The 92nd R.F.A. near La Vacquerie also repulsed four separate attacks, firing with open sights at a range of 200 yards, before they were forced to dismantle their guns and retire.

The 7th Norfolks on the left edge of the 35th Brigade were farthest from the storm-centre, and stoutly beat off all attacks. Only one lieutenant was left upon his feet at the end of the day. Separated from their comrades the Norfolks were rather part of the 36th Brigade upon their left, who were also fiercely attacked, but were more happily situated as regarded their flank. The 9th Royal Fusiliers were pushed back to the Cambrai road on the north, but with some of the Norfolks built up a solid line of resistance there. Next to them upon the left the two companies of the 8th Royal Fusiliers which were in the line, were practically annihilated in spite of a splendid attempt to rescue them made by the other two companies led by their heroic Colonel Elliott Cooper. In this brave effort the leader gained his Victoria Cross, but also unhappily a wound from which he eventually died. This counter-attack drove the Germans back for the first time in this terrible morning, but their lines were reinforced and they came on once more.

The 37th Brigade upon the left had their own set of troubles to contend with. The Germans had beaten hard upon the neighbouring Twentieth Division, breaking into their line upon the right of their flank 59th Brigade. In this way they got into Lateau Wood and on to the Bonavis Ridge, which placed them upon the left rear of the 37th Brigade. The unit was in imminent danger of being cut off, but held strongly to its line, the pressure falling particularly heavily upon the 7th East Surreys and upon the 6th

Buffs. Pam-Pam Farm was the centre of some very desperate fighting on the part of these two units. The Brigade was sorely tried and forced backwards but still held its own, facing upon two and even three different fronts, as the enemy drifted in from the north and east.

In the meantime a train of independent circumstances had built up a reserve line which was destined ‘to be of great importance in limiting the German advance until reinforcements could arrive. Their stormers had within an hour or two reached not only Villers-Guislain and Gonnelieu, but had even entered Gouzeaucourt, three miles deep in the British line. This village, or rather a quarry upon its eastern edge, was the Headquarters of the Twenty-ninth Division, and the Germans were within an ace of capturing General de Lisle, its famous commander. The amazed Commandant of the local hospital found a German sentry at his door instead of a British one, and with the usual British good-humour sent him out a cup of tea. No doubt he did the same to the Irish Guardsman who in turn relieved the German in the afternoon. The C.R.A. of the Twenty-ninth Division was wounded and taken, and Captain Crow of the Staff was killed. General de Lisle with quick decision organised a temporary defence for the south end of the village, and then hurried up to join his hard-pressed men at Marcoing. The General of the Twelfth Division had energetically hurried up the two battalions which he held in reserve. They were the 6th West Surreys and the 11th Middlesex. Some hundred of odds and ends near Headquarters were also formed into a unit and pushed to the front. These went forward towards the firing with the vaguest notion of the situation, meeting broken groups of men and catching occasional glimpses of advancing Germans. The Brigadier of the 35th Brigade had been nearly caught in Gonnelieu, and found the enemy between him and his men. As he came back with his staff, still very lightly clad, pausing occasionally to fire at the advancing Germans, he passed Ganche Wood and there met the advancing battalions, which he helped to marshal along a low ridge, the Revelon Ridge. The Northumberland Hussars lined up on the right of these troops and two brigades of cavalry coming up from the south formed on the left of them at a later hour. The whole held firm against all enemy attacks and made a bulwark until the time when the Guards advanced in the afternoon. As will afterwards be described, when that event occurred this Revelon line formed roughly a prolongation of the new line established by the Guards and Cavalry, so that a long dam was formed. Commanding officers in this critical part of the field gave a sigh of relief in the early afternoon as they realised that the worst was over.

The Twentieth Light Division was on the left of the Twelfth, and its experience was equally trying. It was upon the Riflemen of the 59th Brigade that the main shock fell, and it came with such sudden violence that the Germans were through the right unit and in the rear of the rest before the situation was fully realised. The 61st Brigade upon the left had also a most desperate time, their flank being penetrated and turned so that tor a time they were cut off from their comrades of the Twenty-ninth Division at Mesnières. By this determined German attack the south bank of the canal was partially cleared for their advance, which put them in the position that they could possibly push along that bank and get hold of Les Rues Vertes and the southern ends of the bridges so as to cut off those British troops who were across the canal. In this dangerous movement they nearly had success, and it was only the desperate fighting of some of the 86th Brigade which saved the situation. The prospects were even worse upon the right of the Division for the Germans broke through Lateau Wood, and so got completely behind the 10th K.R.R., who were the flank battalion. From the desperate struggle which ensued only 4 officers and 16 Riflemen ever emerged, for the battalion was attacked on three sides and was overwhelmed after a long and splendid defence, which twice repulsed heavy frontal attacks before the flank advance rolled up the line. The battalion got separated from its own headquarters in Lateau Wood, and Colonel Sheepshanks with the twenty odd men who composed the Staff fought a little battle of its own against the stormers coming down towards the Bonavis-Mesnières road. The survivors of the brigade rallied upon the reserve battalion, the 11th R.B. on the Hindenburg Line. The 11th K.R.R. on the left of the brigade front had endured a similar experience but their losses were not so terribly severe. The aeroplane attack worried the troops almost as much as the infantry, so that it is no exaggeration to say that there were times when they were assailed from four sides, the front, each flank and above at the same instant. These aeroplanes gave the impression of being armour-clad and invulnerable to rifle-fire.

Upon the left of the Twentieth Division, with its centre at the village of Mesnières, was the Twenty-ninth Division, a good unit to have in the heart of such a crisis. The Twenty-ninth and Sixth Divisions held the centre of the British line that day, and were the solid nucleus upon which the whole battle hinged both to left and right of them. Both divisions were seriously compromised by the push-back to the south of them, and their battery positions were taken in reverse, but they held the whole of their ground without giving an inch and completely beat off every German attack. A Guernsey battalion made its mark in the fighting that day and rendered most excellent service, as did the Newfoundlanders; but the main strength of the divisions lay of course in their disciplined British veterans, men whose war-hardened faces, whether in Gallipoli or Flanders, had never been turned from an enemy. It is no light matter to drive such a force, and the four German divisions who drove in from Mesnières to Bauteaux were unable to make even a dint in that formidable line. For two days the villages, both Marcoing and Mesnières, were firmly held, and when at last a re-adjustment of the line was ordered it was carried out voluntarily and deliberately in accordance with the new plans made necessary by the events in north and south.

In this great fight the 86th Brigade was on the right at Mesnières with the 16th Middlesex upon the right, the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers upon the left, and the 2nd Royal Fusiliers by the sugar factory east of the village — details which have been rescued by the industry of Mr. Percival Phillips. The 87th Brigade extended to the left, covering a wide front as far as the Cambrai road. The 1st Inniskillings were on their right, the 1st Borders on their left, and the 2nd South Wales Borderers in support. The 88th Brigade was in reserve at the time of the attack, but quickly moved up and was in the heart of the subsequent fighting.

Masses of German infantry were reported at Crèvecoeur, and within a very short time a rush of grey infantry was swirling down past the flank of the Middlesex men, and breaking the connection with the Twentieth Division on the right. Some of the assailants got along the south bank, and actually seized Les Rues Vertes at the same moment that a counter-attack by the Guernsey men swept into the village and drove them out again. This was a really vital point, as the capture and retention of the village would have been most serious. Many soldierly actions were performed in this clash of arms, showing that the mechanical side of modern warfare can never quite eliminate the brave pushing heart and the strong arm. Captain Gee of the Staff, among others, rescued an ammunition dump armed with a revolver and a heavy stick, with which he beat down all opposition at the cost of a serious wound to himself — a fair price to pay for a subsequent

V.C. The Germans were foiled for the moment, but they had found the weak spot in the line, and all day they hammered at it with characteristic tenacity, while all day the men of the Twenty-ninth stood up to one attack after another, their dwindling line fraying to the last degree, but never breaking before the enemy.

Les Rues Vertes became a Golgotha of Germans, but it was still in the evening safe in the hands of the British defenders. One of the classical examples of British courage and discipline during the war, fit to rank with Colonel Pears and his cancer at Ovillers, was furnished by Colonel Forbes Robertson of the 16th Middlesex, now a V.C, who, stricken in both eyes and temporarily blind, was still led by his orderly up and down the line in order to steady it. Let such a story help our descendants to realise the kind of men who stood between Germany and the conquest of the world.

Next morning saw no surcease of the fighting in this quarter of the field. If anything, the ranks of the assailants were thicker and their rushes more insistent upon the morning of the 21st. But the Twenty-ninth had called up its reserves, and stood with every bristle on end across the German path. The trouble behind the line had greatly weakened the artillery support, but the trench-mortars gave all the help possible to the hard-worked infantry. The villages were knocked to pieces by the enemy guns, but the British stuck like leeches to the ruins. The General of the 86th Brigade was among his men in the front of the battle, encouraging them to dwell upon their aim and steadying their weary ranks. The 87th Brigade in the north, though itself attacked, spared some reinforcements for the hard-pressed men in the south. Once Les Rues Vertes was lost, but a counter-attack led by the Brigade-Major won it back again. This was still the position when on the night of December 1 the orders were given for the general readjustment of the line by the evacuation of the Mesnières salient. Well might Sir Douglas Haig send a special order to General de Lisle thanking him for the magnificent services rendered during two days and a night by the Twenty-ninth Division.

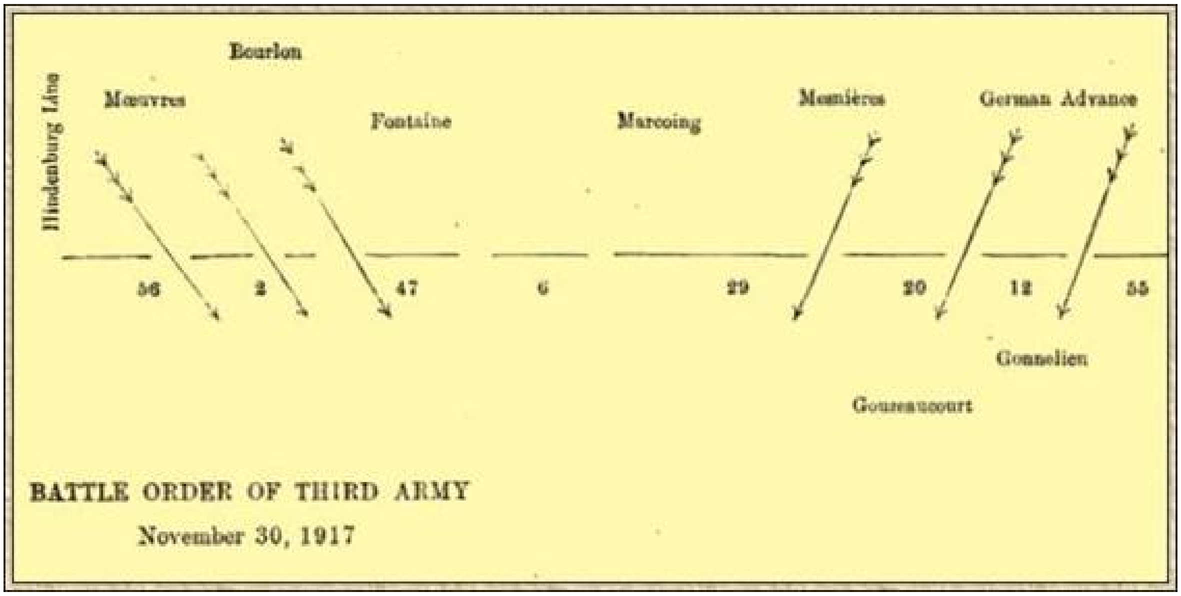

Battle Order of Third Army, November 30, 1917

It has been stated that the Mesnières salient was evacuated, but two battalions of the Twenty-ninth Division, the Newfoundlanders and the South Wales Borderers, had been left upon the north bank of the canal — with them was the 16th Brigade of the Sixth Division who had been sent up to aid and relieve the Twenty-ninth. These troops had a cruel experience, as the enemy upon December 3 concentrated so heavy a fire upon them that they were driven back across the canal, the 16th Brigade being partly broken by the severity of the attack. This incident led to a retraction of the line in this quarter.

For the sake of continuity of narrative we shall now, before turning to the very important episodes in the north, show how the Guards came up in the south and how the new line was firmly established in this critical quarter of the field. The reader will therefore carry back his mind to that fateful hour when the left of the Fifty-fifth had been swept away, the Twelfth and Twentieth shattered, and the Twenty-ninth was holding on with all its strength in the first spate of the German flood.

The Guards, who had been drawn out after their hard spell of service in the Bourlon attack, were moving into a rest camp behind the lines when they were stopped by the amazing tidings that the British line was broken and that the Germans were scattered anywhere over the undulating country in front of them.- It was 11:15 and they were marching from the hamlet of Metz when the first news of disaster reached them — news which was very quickly followed by signs as gunners were met coming back with the sights and sometimes the broken breech-blocks of their abandoned guns in their hands. Over the ridge between Metz and the Gouzeaucourt Wood a number of gunners, sappers, and infantry came in driblets, none of them hurrying, but all with a bewildered air as though uncertain what to do. To these worried and broken people the sight of the taut lines of the Guards must indeed have been a great stay in their trouble. “There were a good many men,” says one officer, “coming towards us without arms or equipment, but these I presumed to belong to some unit resting in the vicinity.” It is only fair to state that several labour companies had been caught in the sudden storm and that many of the broken formations seem to have been from their ranks, though others behaved with extraordinary valour, and exchanged their spades for rifles with the greatest alacrity. The Guards moved forward in the direction of the turmoil, but their progress was slow, as there were gun-teams upon the narrow road. The 1st Brigade under General de Crespigny was leading, being the unit which had suffered least in the Bourlon fighting. The young Brigadier, a famous sportsman as well as a dashing but cool-headed soldier, galloped ahead in an effort to clear up the situation, and after doing a mile or so across country he suddenly saw the grey coats of German infantry among the trees around him. Riding back he halted his brigade in a hollow by Gouzeaucourt Wood, fixed bayonets, and then, deploying them into the line, advanced them in extended order across the fields. There was no artillery support at all, but from the front there came an occasional shell, with the constant cracking of machine-guns, which increased as they topped the low ridge before them. “We advanced into the blue in perfect lines,” says one who was present. Once under fire the brigade went forward in. short rushes of alternate companies. “Our fellows were not shouting,” says the same witness, “but chatting among themselves, and smiling in a manner that boded ill for the Huns.” The 2nd Coldstreams were on the right, the 2nd in the centre, and the 1st Irish upon the left, with the 2nd Grenadiers-in close support. As de Crespigny’s brigade came upon the fringes of the German advance they swept them up before them, keeping the Metz-Gouzeaucourt road as their right boundary, while a force of dismounted cavalry moved up upon the farther side. The Irish upon the left passed through the wood and broke with a yell about 2 P.M. into Gouzeaucourt village, which was not strongly held. The Germans bolted from the eastern exits and the Guardsmen passing through made a line beyond, getting in touch upon the left with the 4th Grenadier Guards of the 3rd Brigade, which formed up and advanced upon that side. They were aided in this advance by a small detached body representing the Headquarters' Guard of the Twenty-ninth Division and by a company of North Midland R.E. who held their post inviolate all day, and were now very glad to join in an offensive . As the line advanced beyond the village they came into a very heavy fire, for the St. Quentin Ridge faced them, and it bristled with machine-guns. Field-guns and 5.9's were also playing upon them, but nothing could check that fine advance, which was in time to save a number of heavy guns which could by no possibility be removed. It was itself aided in the later stages by the 20th Hussars upon the right and by a brigade of guns of the Forty-seventh London Division which swung into action straight from the line of march and did good service in supporting the attack. By nightfall the total ground Nov. 30. gained was over two miles in depth, and a definite line of Guardsmen and cavalry of the Second and Fifth Divisions covered all this section of the field, limiting and defining the German advance. General Byng must surely have breathed more freely when the good news reached his Headquarters for, but for this energetic operation, there was nothing to prevent the Germans flooding into the country behind and getting to the rear of the whole northern portion of the Third Army.

The real work of the Guards had been done when once they had dammed the stream, and their strength after their recent labours was hardly sufficient to carry them through a long battle, but in spite of this they were advancing once more upon the morning of December 1. The same two brigades were in front, but the 2nd Grenadiers and 3rd Coldstreams formed the fighting line of the 1st Brigade, joining up on the left with the Welsh Guards of the 3rd Brigade. Cavalry was moving on the right of them, while on the left they were in touch with the Rifle battalions of the 60th Brigade covering the village of La Vacquerie. The two brigades had different objectives, the left brigade being directed upon Gonnelieu, while the right moved upon Ganche Wood, the divisional tanks supporting the advance. The first brigade advanced with the battalions already named, and they swept in magnificent order up to the fringe of the wood where they were met by two successive counter-attacks which they repelled. The wood was cleared but there were many snipers in the trees, and the losses of officers and N.C.O.'s were proportionately high. The tanks were held up by the denseness of the forest.

Cavalry came up upon the right, and with their assistance the wood was finally secured, together with some guns and several hundred prisoners. It was a fine feat of arms.

The 2nd Brigade had a difficult task at Gonnelieu and the Quentin Ridge. The 1st Welsh on the right and the 4th Grenadiers on the left headed the advance, but they were held up at once by machine-guns on the right until a tank lumbered up and saved the situation. Isolated parties of the 2nd Grenadiers forced their way into the village, but it bristled with machine-guns and could not be held. Finally the line was formed 200 yards from the western edge.

That night the Guards were drawn out after their onerous and splendid service, being relieved by the Ninth Division. In the week they had lost 125 officers and 3000 men, but they had turned the tide of battle upon the critical instant of a critical day, when, amid commencing disorganisation, the presence of the most highly disciplined and steadiest force in the British Army was particularly needed. Few of our units can be fairly said to have added to their laurels in this sector of the second phase of Cambrai, but at least the Twenty-ninth Division and the Guards can look back to it with every satisfaction.

At La Vacquerie village and its environs, to the left of the Guards' advance, some very fierce fighting had broken out upon the morning of December 1. The enemy began by endeavouring to out-flank the village upon the right, pressing down from Gonnelieu and attacking; the sunken road known as Forster Lane which is north of Gonnelieu. A company of the 9th Essex, somewhat shaken by its previous experience, and the 12th Rifles held this position. The Colonel and the Headquarters Staff of the Rifle battalion found itself engaged in a very lively free fight with the heavy masses of enemy infantry who were pouring down Fusilier Ridge. By trickling forward small parties they managed to. capture Forster Lane, but all their attempts to get beyond it were beaten back. Captain Lloyd of the Rifles, who was prominent in the defence, fell mortally wounded, but the line, though heavily shelled and hard pressed, still held its ground. All this occurred to the south of the village which had itself been heavily attacked after a very heavy shell-fall. The German bombers, who came on very bravely, drove their way into the village . but were ejected once more, the Riflemen leaving their trenches to pelt them with bombs. A second attack was even more fiercely pressed. "The Germans who attacked La

Vacquerie," says one who was present, "were brave and determined men and their bombers were well trained, but our men had been told to hold the village at all costs, and gallantly led by their officers and N.C. officers they carried out their orders." In the evening the Riflemen still held the shattered ruins of the village, but they were utterly exhausted by their splendid exertions, and never was a relief more welcome than when the 183rd Brigade of the Sixty-first South Midland Division came up after nightfall and took over the hazardous charge. In the final readjustment of the British line the village of La Vacquerie remained with the Germans.

The enemy had suffered heavily, and as will be shown gained absolutely nothing in the north, but in the south it must be admitted that he had substantial trophies, including a strip of British line, some thousands of prisoners, and about 100 guns.

It was the first truly successful offensive on a large scale which he had made since the gas attack upon April 22, 1915, nearly two and a half years before, and it would be a sign of a poor spirit if we did not admit it, and applaud the deftness and courage of the attack.

After several days of quiet the Germans tried one other taste of the quality of the Guards by a sudden assault upon their new line on December 5. They advanced bravely in two lines from Gonnelieu, but were beaten off by close rifle-fire. As they turned their flight was greeted with a volley of bombs from their own people behind them. It was observed that the stormers upon this occasion carried their packs as though they meant to stay. A good many of them did so. Next day the Guards were relieved by the Ninth Division.

We shall now turn to Woolcombe's Fourth Corps in the northern sector which extends from Tadpole Copse upon the left to that solid centre of resistance furnished by the two veteran divisions at Marcoing and at Mesnières. It was upon the left of this curve that the German attack broke upon November 30 from the Hindenburg Line to the village of Fontaine, a front of about six miles, the object being to cut off the whole Bourlon salient. The attack, which began about nine o'clock, differed from that on the south, because the element of surprise was wanting and because the ground was such that the attacking troops could be plainly seen. The final result was to push back the British line, but this was mainly as a readjustment to correspond to the change in the south. To effect this small result all accounts are agreed in stating that the Germans incurred such murderous losses that it is improbable that any have been more severe since the early days of the war. If, on the balance, the British lost the day in the south, they gained it in the north, for with limited loss to themselves they inflicted most severe punishment upon the enemy.

The arrangement of the troops upon the northern curve of the battle line was as follows. Forming a defensive flank between the old British line and Tadpole Copse was the 168th Brigade, and to its right, facing Moeuvres, the 169th Brigade, both of them of the Fifty-sixth London Territorial Division, which had been a week in the fighting line and was very worn. Next to them upon the right was the Second Regular Division under General Pereira, from Moeuvres to Bourlon, with elements of the 5th, 6th, and 99th Brigades in front. Upon their right was the Forty-seventh London Territorial Division occupying the line drawn through Bourlon Wood. Upon their right again was the Fifty-ninth South Midland Territorials near Fontaine, who in turn linked up with the left of the Sixth Division, thus completing the semicircle of battle.

After a short but very severe bombardment the German infantry advanced upon the line from Tadpole Copse to Bourlon Wood, a front of about four “miles. There were four fresh German divisions, with three others in reserve, and the attack was driven on with the utmost resolution, falling upon the outlying British outposts with a force which often destroyed them, although the furious resistance of these scattered bodies of men took all the edge off the onslaught. It was also beaten into the earth by the British artillery, which had wonderfully fine targets as the stormers in successive lines came pouring over the open ground between Moeuvres and Bourlon. The artillery of the Fortieth Division had been left in the line, and a gunner officer of this unit described how his guns swung round and enfiladed the German attack upon the right as it stormed up to the line of the Forty-seventh Division. “It was one howitzer battery, D 178, that first tumbled to the fact that the Boches were attacking and had driven in some of the Second Division posts. This battery swung its guns round at right angles, getting on to the advancing enemy in enfilade and over open sights. Every other battery in the country opened within five minutes.” Every observer agrees that the targets were wonderful, and that it was only in places where the ground gave him protection that the German storm troops could reach the expectant British infantry, who received him with such a murderous fire of rifles and Lewis-guns that his dead were heaped thickly along the whole front. Seven brigades of British artillery were enjoying themselves. Taking the action from the left the outposts of the 169th Brigade were driven in, but put up a series of desperate fights. From Moeuvres to Tadpole Copse the action raged, and then the enemy poured out from the back of that portion of the Hindenburg Line which ran upon the flank of the 168th Brigade so that both units were involved in heavy fighting with a limited field, of fire which gave fewer advantages to the defence than were found on the rest of the line. The Westminsters, the London Scottish, the Post Office Rifles, and the 2nd Londons all bore themselves with special bravery in a long day of desperate fighting during which Commanding Officers were in at least one instance compelled to stand, bomb in hand, defending their own headquarters. It was a grim battle, and the losses were heavy, coming upon troops which had already lost enough to shake the morale of any ordinary infantry, but the thin ranks held firm and the positions were retained. At one time the Germans were round the right flank of the 169th Brigade, and so cut off a company of the 13th Essex. There is a wonderfully dour military spirit amongst these East Saxons. It was an anxious situation, and it was saved by the utter self-abnegation of the company in question, who held a hurried council of war in which they swore to fight to the death. This grim gathering, which might furnish a theme for a great artist, consisted of Captain Robinson, Lieut. Corps, Sergeant-Major Edwards, Platoon-Sergeants Phillips, Parsons, Fairbrass, Lodge, and Legg. With a hand-clasp they returned to their work, and during the whole night their rifle-fire could be heard, though no help could reach them. In the morning they lay with their faces to the sky and their men around them, all true to their vow to death. It is a story to remember.

The left flank of the Second Division was held by this same 13th Essex, the 2nd South Stafford, and 17th Middlesex battalions of the 6th Brigade. This brigade was cut into two parts by the Canal du Nord, a huge trough of brick-work without any water, eighty feet across, with steep sloping sides. The bridges across were swept by German fire, and the only transit was by ropes to help the climber. All day the fight raged furiously here, the Germans within bombing distance of the defence, which was never penetrated for an instant. Save for one small isolated trench with about seventy men this whole line held firm against every form of attack. Snipers and bombers fired across from bank to bank, while down in the dried bed of the canal there was constant close-range fighting. All night the difficult post was held, as was the line on the extreme left where the 17th Middlesex were blowing back every attack with their well-sustained fire. There was no more wonderful individual record in the battle than that of Captain MacReady-Diarmid of the 17th Middlesex, who fought like a d'Artagnan of romance, and is said to have killed some eighty of the enemy in two days of fighting before he at last himself met that fate from which he had never shrunk. A V.C. was assigned to his family.

On the right of the 6th Brigade was the 99th Brigade, the victors of Delville Wood, who were also furiously engaged, meeting such waves of German infantry as were able to get past the zone of the British barrage. German field-guns unlimbered suddenly on the crest looking down on the British lines only a few hundred yards off. The crews were shot down so swiftly that only one gun got in three rounds. Then there came a rush of two battalions in full marching order, debouching in fours from Bourlon village, and deploying in the open. These also were shot to bits. The whole front of the brigade was dotted with broken guns and huddled grey figures, while many, despairing of getting back, threw up their hands and sought refuge in the British lines. Battalion after battalion was thrown in at this point, until the best part of a division was spread bleeding over some twenty acres of ground. The three battalions chiefly engaged, the 1st Berkshires, 17th Royal Fusiliers, and 1st Rifles from right to left, had such a day as trench warfare could never afford.

At the outset the force of the attack pressed back the 1st Berkshires upon the right, together with the left wing of the Forty-seventh Division. For a few moments the situation was alarming. However, after three hours of ding-dong fighting the volume of fire was too much for the stormers and they fell back. At the same time the 17th Royal Fusiliers, who had rallied under cover of their outposts, shot down everything in front of them. The 1st K.R. Rifles had a day of wonderful fighting — snipers, rifle grenadiers, Lewis gunners, and machine-gunners were all equally glutted with slaughter. “The Germans in mass formation came on in waves offering a splendid target at a range from- 1500 to point-blank. In addition they were enfiladed by the machine-gunners and subjected to very heavy fire from our guns for two and a half hours. The second attempt never looked like succeeding and was smothered in a very short time.”

The 17th Royal Fusiliers have been mentioned as being in the line at this point though they really belonged to the 5th Brigade. The fact was that in a previous operation they had won a long trench advancing at right angles to the British position and leading up to the Germans. This was called the “Rat’s Tail” on account of its shape, and it was still occupied by the Royals when the attack broke out, so that they were placed in a most difficult position and were pressed back down this long trench, fighting a desperate rearguard as will be told later. Their presence in the “Rat’s Tail” was the more unfortunate as it helped to screen the Germans, and to contract the fire-field of the main line behind them. After clearing the “Rat’s Tail” the remains of the battalion found themselves upon the right of the 1st K.R.R.

The remaining brigade of the division, the 5th, had some of its men also in the front line and as busy as its comrades. It is stated in the account already quoted that even the wounded men of the 2nd H.L.I. were propped up, so that they might continue to fire upon the Germans. It was a brigade which had suffered many an evil quarter of an hour in the past, and it is no wonder that the men took a fierce joy in such a fight when at last they could meet their hated enemy face to face. Side by side with the Highlanders were those veterans of 1914, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, the battalion that broke the Prussian Guard. They also had many an arrear to wipe off, nor were their less experienced comrades of the Royal Fusiliers less intent upon the work in hand. It was a costly experience for the War-lord and his legions.

In the evening, save for the one loss at the Canal lock which has been already recorded, the whole 3500-yard front of the Second Division stood inviolate, and was clearly defined when the British force withdrew by the thick pile of German dead which marked it. Indeed it is claimed that at the end of the day the posts which were thrown forward by the defenders were more advanced than before the attack had broken. Those posts which had been overwhelmed in the morning were found to have perished most gloriously, for in almost every case the British dead were ringed round with the bodies of their assailants.

Among the many epics of these isolated posts none is more glorious than that of a platoon of the 17th Fusiliers under the two Company Officers, Captain Stone and Lieut. Benzeery, both mentioned in despatches, who fought absolutely to the last man in order to give time for the main body behind them to get ready for the assault. The official report of the officer commanding says: “The rearguard was seen fighting with bayonet, bullet, and bomb to the last. There was no survivor.” The annals of war can give few finer examples of military virtue.

Another splendid epic had been furnished by the posts of the 1st Berkshire battalion upon the right of the Second Division. They were all drawn from one Company under the command of Lieut. Valentin, also mentioned for his gallantry. The Germans surged in upon them in the afternoon, and there was a most grim and terrible fight. Three of the posts were destroyed, but when the ground was regained it was difficult to find the British bodies on account of the piles of German dead which were heaped round and over them. Six other posts remained intact after six hours of close fighting, in which they were continually attacked by superior numbers who fell in heaps before the steady fire of these experienced soldiers. Rapid fire had been brought to perfection by the training system of the Second Division, and General Pereira was justified of his wisdom. The six weary posts which remained intact after the storm had passed are said to have killed not less than five hundred of their assailants.

Gorringe’s Forty-seventh London Territorial Division upon the right had endured a similar experience to that of their comrades of the Second Division, and Kennedy’s 140th Brigade upon the left had been particularly strongly engaged. The 6tn London Rifles and the l0th Civil Service Rifles held the post of honour, and the conditions were much the same as those already described, save that the field of fire was more restricted. In the afternoon attack, a gap was formed between these two battalions, but was quickly closed by one of those heterogeneous musters of signallers, orderlies, and general utility men who have so often done good and unobtrusive service — silent supers who suddenly spring into the limelight, play the part of the hero, and then fade away to the wings once more. This attack of the afternoon fell with great force upon the right unit of the division, the 141st Brigade who lay in their gas-masks half poisoned with mephitic vapours among the brush-wood of Bourlon Forest. These fine troops, the London Irish, Poplar, St. Pancras, and Blackheath battalions, endured all that gun or gas could do, and held their whole line intact until the evening.

In the early morning Woolcombe’s Fourth Corps, exhausted in body but triumphant in the knowledge of the terrible losses which they had inflicted upon the enemy, withdrew unmolested and in absolute order to the smaller perimeter which had been marked out for them by General Byng when he had time to realise the exact effect of the German gains upon the south end of his line. Everything portable was carried off by the retiring troops, who made it a point of honour to leave nothing at all to the enemy. Three days later, in conformity with the general plans, the lines were laid down afresh along the Flesquières Ridge, so that the whole salient was smoothed out, and yet Byng's troops held all the solid advantages gained upon November 20 in the shape of a long stretch of the Hindenburg Line. This continued to be the permanent position of the Third Army during the winter, and up to the fateful 21st of March 1918, when the great German thunderbolt was hurled. In the movements entailed by this withdrawal there was no molestation from the enemy save that the rearguards of the Forty-seventh Division were strongly engaged. Two companies of the 15th Civil Service Rifles were for a time cut off, but broke their way through all resistance and rejoined the main body.

On the north of that new portion of the line which had been established by the Guards and taken over by the Ninth Division there was a long ridge called Welsh Ridge, running up from La Vacquerie Farm. The enemy was still strong in this quarter where the British artillery was particularly weak — a defect which was partly compensated for by the loyalty of the neighbouring French Commander. The Sixty-first South Midland Territorial Division had taken over from the Twelfth in this area and found themselves involved in several days of hard fighting, in the course of which La Vacquerie Farm was lost to the Badeners, but the general line of the ridge was maintained, consolidated, and turned into the permanent front of the Army.

So ended the swaying fortunes of this hard-fought and dramatic battle, beginning with a surprise attack of the British upon the Germans, and ending by an attack of the Germans upon the British which, if not a surprise to the commanders, at least produced some surprising and untoward results. The balance of these varied actions was greatly in favour of the British, and yet it could not be denied that something of the glory and satisfaction of Byng's splendid original victory were dimmed by this unsatisfactory epilogue which was only made less disastrous to the British cause by the very heavy losses which their enemy incurred upon the northern sector. On the balance in ground gained the British had a solid grip of 11,000 yards of the famous Hindenburg Line, as against an unimportant British section between Vendhuille and Gonnelieu. In prisoners the British had 11,000 as against 6000 claimed by the Germans. In guns the British took or destroyed 145 against 100 taken or destroyed by their enemies. In the larger field of strategy the whole episode was fruitful as it stopped all reinforcement of the Germans in Italy during the critical weeks while the Italians were settling down upon the line of the Piave. One result of the action was a reorganisation of the British machine-gun system which was found to have acted in an unequal fashion during the operations, some formations giving excellent results while others were less satisfactory.

The Battle of Cambrai virtually brought the fighting of 1917 to an end, although there were several sharp local actions at different points along the line — actions which would have filled special editions in former wars, and now can hardly be afforded a paragraph if any just proportion be observed. Chief among them was a spirited German attack upon the Sixty-third Naval Division upon December 29 in the sector of the Canal du Nord, which began by the loss of some trench elements, but ended with little change. There was a sharp fight also early in December at that blood-stained country-house, Polderhoek Château, where the New Zealanders attacking upon a narrow front made an attempt upon one of the most difficult points in the Flanders line. The men of Otago and of Canterbury proved once more what extraordinarily good military material is bred in the great Pacific island, but after a sharp tussle in which both sides lost heavily, there was no substantial change in the position.

Another local fight which was sufficiently serious to demand mention here was upon December 2, when the 26th Brigade of the Eighth Division with part of the Thirty-second Division stirred up the German line in the Flanders area. After two days of fighting matters remained here much as they started.

The year 1917 had been a very glorious one both to the French and to the British Armies, which, pursuing their system of the limited objective, had hardly met with a single repulse in a long campaign. The victories of Arras, Messines, Langemarck, Paschendaale, and Cambrai were added to the great record of Sir Douglas Haig and his men, while the French, save for the losses incurred in their great April attack, had an unbroken record of success. And yet in spite of these results in the West the year was a disappointing one for the Allies, since the Russian defection which involved Rumania in ruin, greatly weakened their position and clearly showed that the year 1918 would find them confronted with the whole force of Germany aided by contingents of her Allies. Storm clouds piled high in the East. Only from over the far Western rim of the Atlantic came a slowly waxing light.

VOLUME V.

PREFACE

THIS fifth volume deals with one of the most tremendous episodes in history, when the vigour of the German attack and the desperate resistance of the British both on the Somme and in Flanders, held an awestruck world in suspense. A million men released from the Russian front, rolled across Europe and, swelling that great tide which was already banked up before the British breakwater, it washed over all the front line barriers and threatened at one time to sweep down to the sea. The account of how the British Army, upon which incomparably the greater pressure fell, rose to the occasion and first slowed and then held the terrific flood is one of the most wonderful of military epics. At the same time every credit must be given to the loyalty of the French commanders who, while guarding their own extended lines, endeavoured to spare all possible help to their hard-pressed Allies. This volume carries the story of the German attack to its close. The next and final one will describe the enormous counter-attack of the Allies leading up to their final victory.

The Chronicler has been faced by many obstacles in endeavouring to preserve both accuracy and historical proportion while writing contemporary history. He would gratefully acknowledge that his critics in the press have shown a kindly indulgence, which arises, no doubt, from an appreciation of these difficulties. There has, however, been one conspicuous exception to which he would desire to call attention, since a large question of literary etiquette is involved. From the beginning a series of unflattering and anonymous articles have appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, commenting adversely upon each volume in turn, and picking out the pettiest details for animadversion. Upon enquiry, these articles — in whole or part — are admitted to have been written by the Hon. J.W. Fortescue, who is himself the official historian of the War. On being remonstrated with, this gentleman could not be brought to see that it is not fitting that he should make anonymous attacks, however *bona fide*, upon a brother author who is working upon the same subject and is therefore in the involuntary position of being a humble rival.

Having stated the facts they may be left to the judgment of the public.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
Crowborough, May 1, 1919.

I.
EVENTS UPON THE BRITISH FRONT UP TO MARCH 21, 1918

The prospects of the Allies — Great dangers from the Russian collapse — State of the British line — Huge German preparations — Eve of the Great Offensive

THE New Year of 1918, the fourth of the world war, opened with chequered prospects for the Allies. Upon all subsidiary fields of action the developments were good. In Palestine, General Allenby, the victor of Arras, had shown himself to be a fine soldier upon the larger scale, and. had fought his way up the old highway of history which leads from Egypt by Gaza to Jerusalem. Homely crusaders in tattered khaki stood where once Godfrey de Bouillon and his chivalry had worshipped before the shrine of religion, and the cavalry of Australia, the yeomen of the Shires, and the infantry of London won once more the ground which Richard of the Lion Heart with his knights and bowmen had contested in the long ago. Surely in all the strange permutations and combinations of the world war there could be none more striking than that! By April the British force covered all the northern approaches to the city and extended its right wing to the Jordan, where our Arab allies in the land of Moab were pushing the Turks back along the line of the Damascus railway.

On another road of world conquest, that from Bagdad to Nineveh, the British and Indian columns were also both active and victorious. The knightly Maude had perished from cholera contracted by his own courtesy in drinking a proffered cup of village water. His successor, General Marshall, formerly his Chief of Staff, and as such conversant with his aims and his methods, carried on both one and the other, moving his men north until the spectator who compared their numbers with the immensity of the spaces around them, was appalled at the apparent loneliness of their position. By May his raiding cavalry were not far from the Turkish supply depot of Mosul, where the barren mounds, extending over leagues of desert, proclaim both the greatness and the ruin of Nineveh. Salonica continued in its usual condition of uneasy and malarial somnolence, but gratifying reports came of the belated rally of the Greeks, who, acting with the French, won a smart little victory against their Bulgarian enemies upon May 31. German East Africa had at last been cleared of German forces, but General Lettow-Vorbeck, to whom we cannot deny remarkable fortitude and leadership, wandered with his piebald commands in the depths of the forests and marshes of Mozambique, still evading his inevitable capture, and master only of the ground on which he camped.

But these distant campaigns had only a remote and indirect effect upon the war in Europe. Here the late winter and the early spring of 1918 saw the balance tilted against the British and their comrades in the West; through causes over which they had no control. Russia had completely broken down. In her case, with a rapidity which made it difficult to realise the situation, autocracy had changed to liberty, liberty to license, and license to chaos. The absolute dissolution of all fighting power was partly due to national folly and partly to deliberate treachery. The leaders of the extreme party had arrived from Switzerland with a free pass granted by the German authorities. Instantly they set to work to subvert the comparatively sane government with which the name of Kerensky is chiefly associated. Lenin and his associates seized the reins of power and guided their mad team up to and over the precipice. It was clear to any observer that such a frenzy of insanity must have its reaction, and great pity was felt for those more honourable Russians who were compelled to look on at the degradation of their country. The new super-democracy began its career by repudiating its debts of honour, and by betraying all the other democracies of the world. Such conditions could not last; but meanwhile the Germans overran the country at their pleasure, practically annexed both Finland and the Ukraine, and helped themselves to harvests, warships, or anything else they might desire. Chivalrous little Romania, with the foe in front and the traitor in the rear, was compelled to make such hard terms as she might — surely one of the most bitter tragedies of history.

As a result of this huge defection the whole force of Germany and of Austria, together with a good deal of captured Russian artillery, was available for the Western war, and from November to March an endless succession of troop trains were bearing the divisions which had extended from the Baltic to the southern frontiers of Russia, in order to thicken the formidable array already marshalled across France. A great Austrian army assembled on the line of the Piave, where the Italians had formed their new front, while a second force in the mountains upon their flank seemed to hang suspended like an avalanche, ready at any instant to crash down into the valleys. In spite of this imminent danger the situation was so threatening in France that half of the British and French force in Italy had to be recalled, while the gallant Italians actually sent some divisions of their own best troops to aid the Allies in the more vital theatre of war. It was not only the vast concentration of infantry which formed the immediate menace, but it was the addition to the German gun power, in which the Austrians greatly assisted. The enemy was acting also upon internal lines and with excellent radiating communications, so that by assembling large bodies in certain central points he could hurl them against any portion of a long arc of the Allied line and depend upon several days of battle before the reinforcements could intervene. This, as it proved, was a very great advantage. He had also used his Russian experiences to initiate and improve a new form of attack by which he was confident, with a confidence which proved to be well justified, that he could certainly make a deep impression upon the Allied line, and turn the war, for a time at least, into one of open movement. Such was the very favourable position of the German army at the opening of the tremendous campaign of 1918, which was enhanced by the fact that they had reduced to slavery the population in their rear, and had thus gained a very solid present advantage at the cost of a universal hatred and execration of which no man now living will see the end. In the hope of being a nation of victors they took steps which will brand them as a nation of monsters so long as history is read — a nation with modern minds but with worse than mediaeval souls.

The Allies were not without their consolations, though they lay rather in the future than in the present. Their veteran armies, though somewhat outnumbered, had done so well in the offensive of the year before that they had good reason to believe that, acting upon the defensive, they would either hold the German onslaught, or at worst inflict such losses that they would gradually bring them to an equilibrium. Neither France nor Britain had called upon its last reserves to the same extent as Germany, and behind both was the mighty power of America. Up to date the American forces landed in France had not been sufficiently trained or numerous to influence the course of events, but from the spring onwards there was a steady flow, and hardly a day elapsed without one or more transports laden with troops arriving in the British or French ports. The men were of splendid spirit and physique, and the mere sight of them revived the weary souls of those who had fought the hard fight so long. It was the knowledge of these reinforcements and the constant drafts from Britain which stiffened men's courage and steeled their breasts in the desperate days to come.

Turning our eyes now from the general prospect and concentrating our attention upon the dispositions of the British army, it may be said that the ranks had been filled once more after the very expensive fighting of the autumn. Divisions were, however, weaker than before for, following the German model, one battalion had been taken out of each brigade, so that in future a division consisted of nine ordinary units and one pioneer. Of the six divisions lent to Italy three had been brought back in view of the German menace. The line still ran from Houthulst Forest and Passchendaele in the north along the familiar curve by La Bassé and Lens to the east of Vimy Ridge, and thence along the first Hindenburg Line, with the one six-mile breach in front of Cambrai. The Third Army, under Sir Julian Byng, covered the ground between Arras and Cambrai, whilst the Fifth, under Sir Hubert Gough, carried it south from that point. His junction with the French was an indeterminate one and was twice moved to the south, the second move on February 15 carrying his right wing across the Oise as far south as Barisis, eight miles beyond La Fère. There is no doubt that in lengthening his line to this extent Sir Douglas Haig took on more ground than his troops could be reasonably expected to hold, and that General Gough was given a hard task. It was done, as was shown in a subsequent debate, against the better judgment of the British at the urgent behest of M. Clemenceau. We must remember, however, that our Allies had frequently taken risks in order to help us, and that it was for us to reciprocate even though it might occasionally, as in this instance, lead to trouble. There was a tendency at the time for soldiers and politicians to put the blame upon each other, whereas all were equally the victims of the real cause, which was the crushing burden placed upon us by the defection of our Ally. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it was impossible to tell with any certainty where the impending blow might fall, and M. Clemenceau was very naturally anxious about the French line in Champagne, which was strengthened by this extension of the British flank. There is in truth no need for mutual reproach, as everyone acted for the best under the almost intolerable circumstances imposed by the new conditions.

Before referring in detail to the tremendous storm which was visibly banking up in the East, and which broke upon March 21 along the British lines from the Scarpe to the Oise, some allusion should be made to one or two sharp German attacks in the extreme north, by which the enemy endeavoured to draw the attention of the Allies away from the district in which their first real attack was planned. In the first of these, delivered upon March 8 to the south of Houthulst Forest, in the area formerly occupied by the Second Army, the German stormers, attacking on a mile of front, gained a footing in the advanced trenches over a space of 500 yards, but were driven out again and past their own front line by a spirited counter-attack. The losses of the Thirty-sixth Reserve Division, who carried out the operation, were considerable, and their gains were nil. The second attack was made upon the same evening in the neighbourhood of Polderhoek Château, to the south of the Ypres front. Here again some trench elements were secured in the first rush, but were entirely regained by the 10th K.R.R. and 13th Fusiliers of the 111th Brigade, who restored the line. Neither attempt was serious, but they were operations on a considerably larger scale than any others during the winter. These attacks were delivered upon the front of Jacob’s Second Corps, which belonged to Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, but within a few days Plumer had returned from Italy, and he, with the Second British Army, took over this sector once again.

We must now turn to the long stretch from in the north to La Fère in the south, a front of fifty miles, upon which the great German blow was about to fall. It is said that after a tour of the whole line General Ludendorff determined upon this as being the most favourable region for a grand attack. Granting that for general motives of policy the assault should be on the British rather than on the French army, it is clear that he could have come to no other decision since Flanders at that time of year might have been a morass, and the rest of the line was to a large extent upon commanding ground. On the other hand the desolate country which had been already occupied and abandoned by the Germans was in front of their new advance, and it was likely that this would act as a shock-absorber and take the momentum off a victorious advance before it could reach any point of vital strategic importance. The German Staff scepis, however, to have placed great confidence upon their secrecy, their numbers, and their new methods. Their ambitious plan was to break right through to Amiens, to seize the line of the Somme so as to divide the Allied armies, and then to throw their weight to right or to left as might seem best, the one movement threatening the Channel ports and the other Paris. Their actual success, though it was considerable, fell so far short of their real intentions that disappointment rather than triumph must have been their prevailing emotion. Looking first upon their side of the line one can appreciate in a general way the efficient methods which they took to ensure success. The troops had been exercised in the back areas during the whole winter in the new arts of attack, which will be more fully indicated when the battle opens. They were then assembled at various railway junctions, such as Valenciennes, Maubeuge, Wassigny, and Vervins, sufficiently far from the front to escape direct observation. Then for seven nights in successive marches the troops were brought forward, finally reaching the front lines on the night before the attack, while the guns, the mine-throwers, and the munition dumps had already been prepared. The whole affair was upon a gigantic scale, for sixty divisions, or half a million of infantry, were thrown into the battle upon the first day, with half as many in immediate reserve. Secrecy was preserved by every possible precaution, though the British aeroplanes, casting down their flare lights upon crowded roads, gave few hopes that it could be sustained. Three of the most famous generals in the German service were in immediate charge of the operations. General Otto von Below, the victor of the Italian disaster, with the Seventeenth Army in the north; General von Marwitz, who had distinguished himself at Cambrai, with the Second Army in the centre; and General von Hutier, the conqueror of Riga and the inventor of the new tactics, with the Eighteenth Army in the south. It was to the last, which was under the nominal command of the Crown Prince, that the chief attack was allotted. Forty divisions, with large reserves, were placed under his command for an assault upon General Gough’s lines between Cambrai and the Oise, while twenty divisions, with corresponding reserves, were thrown against the British Third Army, especially that section of it opposite Croisilles and Bullecourt. Never in the history of the world had a more formidable force been concentrated upon a fixed and limited objective. The greatest possible expectations were founded upon the battle, which had already been named the “*Kaiser- Schlacht,*” while the day chosen had been called Michael’s day, or the day of Germany’s revenge.

We shall now turn from the German preparations and examine that British position upon which the attack was about to fall. It was divided into two sections, a point north of Gauche Wood upon the Cambrai front being roughly the point of division between the Third and the Fifth Armies. These armies were of equal strength, each having twelve divisions of infantry in the line or in immediate support. These divisions with their respective positions and varying experiences will presently be enumerated. For the moment it may be stated that the Third Army consisted of four cOrps, the Seventeenth (Fergusson) in the Arras — Monchy sector, the Sixth (Haldane) carrying the line past Bullecourt, the Fourth (Harper) continuing it to near the Cambrai district, and the Fifth (Fanshawe) covering that important point where the gap in the Hindenburg Line seemed to make an attack particularly Likely. The Fifth Army in turn consisted of the Seventh Corps (Congreve) in the southern part of the Cambrai district, the Nineteenth Corps (Watts) from south of Ronssoy to Maissemy, the Eighteenth Corps (Maxse) in front of St. Quentin, and the Third Corps (Butler) covering the great frontage of 30,000 yards from Urvillers, across the Oise, down to Barisis, eight miles south of La Fère. This long curve of fifty miles chapter was strongly fortified throughout its whole length, but the position was stronger in the north where the British had been in their lines for a year or more. In the southern sector the new ground which had been taken over was by no means so strongly organised as its defenders desired, either in the portion formerly held by the British or in the French sector, where only two lines existed. In the north a system of successive lines had been adopted, called respectively the forward line, the corps line, and the army line. In the south there was less depth to the defence, but every possible effort was made to improve it, the work proceeding night and day, and the soldiers being tied to it to an extent which gave little time for military exercises. In this work the cavalry and special entrenching battalions gave valuable help. As a result, by the third week of March the south was as well prepared as the number of men available would allow. There were not enough to man continuous lines of trenches over so great a front. A system was adopted, therefore, by which there was an advanced zone, consisting of a thin line of infantry supported by numerous small redoubts, each of which contained several machine-guns and a company of infantry. These were to take off the edge of the assault, and it was hoped, as half a mile separated the two armies, and the fields of fire were good, that before reaching the position at all the enemy would suffer severely. A thousand yards behind the ‘advance zone was the true battle zone, where the main body of the infantry lay behind barbed wire with the support of isolated forts. Beyond these again was a third zone, 2000 yards farther to the rear, but this had not yet been completed. Behind the whole position in the southern part of the line was the great bend of the River Somme, which was also being organised as a reserve line, but was very incomplete. It should be emphasised that these deficiencies were in no way due to the British command, which was so assiduous in its preparations that it rather raised the ridicule of certain unimaginative people upon the spot who cannot see a danger until it actually materialises in front of them. The fact that General Gough had been a cavalry general, and that his actions in the war had been aggressive rather than defensive, gave a false impression at the time in certain quarters. It is certain that nothing was neglected in the way of defence which skill could devise or industry carry out.

The general situation then upon the night of March 20, when the German preparations were complete, was that along the whole front the Germans were crouching for their spring, and that their first line consisted of sixty divisions, or more than half a million infantry, against the twenty-four divisions, or about 200,000 infantry, who awaited them. The odds were greatly increased by the fact that the Germans held some thirty divisions in immediate reserve, whereas the British reserves, especially in the south of the line, were few and distant. The German concentration of gun power was more than twice that of the British. The published account of a German officer claims it as fourfold, but this is probably an overstatement. In describing the results of this great attack we shall deal first with the sequence of events in the sector of the Third Army in the north, and then turn to those connected with the Fifth Army in the south.

II. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack upon the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps

Disposal of the Third Army — Attack upon the Third Division — Upon the Thirty-fourth Division — Upon the Fifty-ninth Division — Terrible losses — Loss of Henin Hill — Arrival of Thirty-first Division — Hard fighting of the Fortieth Division — The East Yorkshires at Ervillers — The 10th West Yorks at Moyenneville — Recapture of Ayette — Grand resistance of Third, Fifteenth, and Fourth Divisions before Arras — Final German check in the north

TAKING the account of this great action upon March 21 from the north, we shall begin with Sir Julian Byng’s Third Army. The left of this force joined the Thirteenth Corps, which formed the flank of the First Army, to the north of Fampoux, while the extreme right touched the left of the Seventh Corps, the northern unit of the Fifth Army to the east Metz-en-Couture opposite to Cambrai.

The Seventeenth Corps consisted of the Fifteenth and Fourth Divisions with the Guards Division in reserve. They extended as far south as the Sensée River, and were not seriously engaged upon March 21, though exposed to heavy shelling. We may for the time leave them out of the narrative. It was immediately to the south of them, upon the Sixth Corps commanded by General Haldane, that the storm burst in its full fury. Nothing can exaggerate the concentrated weight of the blow which fell upon this and the next portion of the line. The divisions from the north were the old fighting Third upon the Sensée section, the Thirty-fourth to Third the south of it, and the Fifty-ninth North Midland Territorials on the right. The Fortieth Division was in close support. These were the devoted units who upon that terrible day had to bear the heavy end of the load in the northern half of the line. Let us turn first to the arduous experiences of the Third Division. This veteran division, still commanded by General Deverell, had all three brigades in the line, the 76th upon the left, the 8th in the centre, arid the 9th upon the right, the battalions in the advanced line being the 2nd Suffolks, 2nd Royal Scots, and 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. The front covered was 8000 yards from Croisilles to the Arras-Cambrai road in the north, both inclusive. This front had been strengthened by every device which experience could suggest, and was organised, as already explained upon three lines, which may be called the front, support, and reserve lines. Its backing of artillery was formidable, its moral high, and it offered a solid barrier to any enemy, however numerous.

The preliminary bombardment here as elsewhere broke out shortly after five in the morning, and contained a large proportion of gas-shells which searched the rear lines and battery positions as well as the front defences. So far as the 76th Brigade in the north was concerned no serious infantry attack followed, and save for some sporadic advances which were easily shot to pieces, there was no organised attempt upon their sector. The same applies, though in a less degree, to the central unit, the 8th Brigade. Here there were continual blasts of heavy fire during the day which decimated but were unable to shake the Royal Scots in the front trenches. Several times the enemy infantry made what was rather a menace than an attack, but on each occasion it dissolved into nothing. It is clear that nothing serious was intended and that these demonstrations were to hold the troops to their ground. On the right, however, in front of the 9th Brigade, the attempts were far more deadly and earnest. The first of these lasted from 7:30 till 10, and gained a footing in the front trenches, but failed before a determined attack by bombing parties of the Northumberland Fusiliers. In the afternoon the intermittent shelling became very severe, the trench mortar fire upon the front lines being so heavy as to knock them to pieces and stop all lateral communication. It was a nerve-shattering ordeal to the garrisons of these posts, crouching hour after hour in the midst of these terrible explosions. The bravest man on earth may find his spirit wilt under such conditions. Finally, about half-past three, there came a forward surge of grey infantry from Fontaine Wood which reached and occupied the front line, or the irregular hummocks where the front line had been. Every effort to extend this advantage was crushed almost before it could get started. There was complete stability here, but it was known that things were not altogether well with the Thirty-fourth Division upon the right, and masses of German infantry were seen moving down the Cherisy valley in that direction, a fair mark for the heavy guns. The 4th Royal Fusiliers were brought forward to reinforce their old comrades of Northumberland, and the line on the right was thrown back to get touch with the 11th Suffolks of the The 101st Brigade. In this support position they were solidly linked with the units to right and left, so that the close of the day found the whole of this portion of the front absolutely intact, save for the loss of the obliterated front line.

We shall now turn to the fortunes of the next unit upon the right, the Thirty-fourth Division, a composite hard fighting body composed of Northumbrians, Scots, and East Anglian troops. General Nicholson, commanding this division, had learned from a prisoner that the coming German attack would begin at Bullecourt and then turn to the north. Such incidents make one doubtful of the wisdom of that policy of “teaching men to take an intelligent interest in the operations” which is so often advocated. In this case flank defences were arranged and all due preparation was made.

The blow fell even as had been foretold, but the portion of the line which was crushed in was on the front of the Fifty-ninth Division, to the right of the Thirty-fourth. The result was, however, that after the capture of Bullecourt, which occurred about ten, the German stormers began to work round the right rear of the 102nd Brigade, the nearest unit of the Thirty-fourth Division. The flanking line of defence was manned by the 22nd Northumberland Fusiliers and strengthened by many Lewis guns, so that it took heavy toll from the masses of German infantry who were moving across. This flanking line was thickened by the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers and by the 1st East Lancashires. The heavy blow had forced back the Fifty-ninth Division, and by one o’clock Ecoust also was in the hands of the enemy, bringing them considerably to the rear of the fourth. Up to 4:30 in the afternoon the Germans were attacking the 102nd Brigade from the flank, but up to that hour they had not succeeded in shifting the solid Tynesiders who held the improvised line. Nevertheless the heavy and constant shelling reduced the strength of the defenders, who in many cases were quite cut off, and had to hold their positions with bombs and rifles as best they could. Farther south the Germans, passing Noreuil in their western advance, had turned in considerable numbers to the north, well to the rear of the flanking line, so that the British in reserve found themselves facing south-west, but fought on none the less, the 22nd, 23rd, and 25th Northumberland Fusiliers in a mixed line holding firmly to their ground at the imminent risk of being cut off, while the 160th Brigade R.F.A. were firing at ranges of 800 yards. As the German flood rolled on it engulfed these guns, but the gunners withdrew the blocks and retired slowly, fighting in line with the infantry. This movement in turn affected the British garrisons of the more forward trenches, who in any case were very severely pressed by the German bombers, so that there was a general retirement towards the north in the direction of Croisilles. Outside this village the remains of the 101st and 102nd Brigades formed a line, and with the aid of the 10th Lincolns and 9th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade held the enemy off from occupying it. The Fortieth Division was, as will be shown, coming up to fill the gap, and thus, although the Thirty-fourth had been curled backwards as if a huge steel plough had driven a furrow to the south of them, there was still no absolute fracture of the Towards evening patrols of the enemy had succeeded in filtering through into the village of Croisilles, but General Haldane had already seen that his corps front needed reorganisation in view of what had occurred to the south. Orders were given, therefore, to the 15th Royal Scots, who were still holding on near Croisilles, to abandon the village and take up new positions to the west of it. With the help of the 119th Brigade of the Fortieth Division these changes were made, and a line built up in front of Henin Hill for the next day’s battle. The general result, therefore, of the day’s fighting was, so far as the Thirty-fourth Division was concerned, that the left flank was still in touch with the Third Division in the northern support line, but that the right and centre had to hinge back upon it on account of the break through to the south of them, and had been compelled to uncover Croisilles and abandon it to the enemy. The casualties had been high, especially in the 102nd Brigade upon the defensive flank. Of these, about 1200 out of a total trench strength of 1800 were lost, some being cut off but the greater number injured by the bombardment. Three companies of the 25th Northumberland Fusiliers were engulfed in the German tide and submerged, as were the field-guns already mentioned, which were fought by their crews until the very last instant. The 11th Suffolks upon the left flank of the 101st Brigade held absolutely fast all day, and by their fire gave great help to the Third Division to their north.

The next unit upon the line was the Fifty-ninth North Midland Division (Romer) which had a front of over 5000 yards. They covered the important Chapter villages of Bullecourt, Ecoust, and Noreuil, the former being in the very front line. The 178th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were upon the right and the 176th of Staffords upon the left, with the 177th of Lincolns and Leicesters in reserve. In the southern section of this position was the long shallow slope of the Noreuil valley, the nearer half of which came within the Fifty-ninth area, while the farther was held by the Sixth Division. It was speedily apparent by the intensity of the bombardment and by the rumoured concentration of the infantry that this was the centre of danger. About ten o’clock a demonstration was made against the 2/6 Sherwood

Foresters upon the left, but the real attack came later when on the right centre a heavy mass of the enemy surged through the outpost line and established itself within the support line. At about the same hour the German infantry struck in great force up the channel of the Noreuil valley, and having pushed their way as far as the western edge of Noreuil turned to the north-west, working along a hollow road between Noreuil and Longatte. Two companies of the 2/5 Sherwoods, together with the 470th Field Company R.E., were caught between the pincers of this double German attack, and were entirely destroyed on the Noreuil-Ecoust road, only one officer and six sappers making their way safe to Vraucourt. The 2/5 Lincolns of the supporting brigade, moving up to the support of their comrades, were themselves involved in the tragedy and three companies were practically annihilated. This rapid German advance, with the heavy British losses, had all taken place by 11 A.M., and created the situation which reacted so unfavourably upon the Thirty-fourth in the north. The Germans having got so far forward in the south were able to assail the flank of the 176th Brigade in the north, which threw out a defensive line as far as Ecoust and defended itself strongly. Their position, however, was an almost impossible one, and when later in the day the enemy took Ecoust and swung round to their rear these battalions, already much reduced, were overwhelmed by the attack, the survivors joining up with the Thirty-fourth Division in their retreat. The machine-guns, so long as they were in action, caused heavy casualties to the enemy, but the latter were swarming on all sides, and eventually the guns had either to withdraw or were captured.

With the two front brigades destroyed and the whole position occupied, the Germans may well have thought that a long advance was within their power, but in this they were soon undeceived. The support brigade, the 177th, still barred their way, and it had been strengthened by Headquarters staffs, bands, transport men and others, and very especially by the pioneer battalion, the 6/7 Scots Fusiliers. These men occupied the third defence line, and from the Hog’s Back on which it was sited, they defied every effort of the Germans to get forward from Ecoust. This position was well covered by artillery and supported by machine-guns. So strong was the defence that the enemy were beaten back three times, and on the last occasion, late in the afternoon, fairly took to their heels. Shortly afterwards the 120th Brigade from the Fortieth Division came into support, and the situation was saved for the day. How terrific had been the strain upon the

Fifty-ninth Division may be reckoned from the fact that their losses were close upon 5000 out of a ten-battalion unit. It is true that they had been driven by vastly superior numbers out of their two front lines with the attendant villages, but evening found them still defiant, and, for the time, victorious, with their right still linked up with the Sixth Division and their left with the Thirty-fourth. There could not have been a finer recovery under more arduous circumstances. It was the last of the Fifty-ninth Division, however, for many a day to come, for the Fortieth (Ponsonby) taking charge in this sector, gathered to itself the fifteen field-guns still left of the artillery and the only remaining brigade. It was as well, for they would need every gun and every rifle in the dark days to come. Four German divisions, the 111th, 221st, 6th Bavarian, and 2nd Guards Reserve, had been engaged in the attack. Even admitting that some of these divisions were concerned also with the attack upon the Thirty-fourth Division, the latter had the 234th and some smaller units in front of it, so that it is within the mark to say that five German had attacked two British divisions, and by the aid of a vastly superior light and heavy artillery equipment had pushed them back to their reserve line, but had failed to break them. It was not a fight of which either nation need be ashamed.

This completes a superficial view of the experiences of the Sixth Corps upon March 21. In order to get the full picture one should understand that the Sixth Division upon the right had also been driven from their sector, including several important villages. For the sake of continuity of narrative it will be best to merely indicate this fact for the moment, and to continue to follow the fortunes of Haldane’s Corps during the fateful days which followed, casting a glance also to the north where the Seventeenth Corps was gradually involved in the fight. We shall bear in mind, then, the long slanting front from the old positions on the left to Henin Hill and the Hog’s Back upon the right, and we shall return to the Third Division at the northern end of the line.

The night had been quiet along the whole corps front, which seemed to imply some exhaustion of the attack. In the morning this lull still continued in the region of the Third Division, which had up to now been just outside the track of the storm. During the morning and afternoon of March 22 no serious attack was made upon this point, but in the evening the enemy, having made a lodgment upon Henin Hill in the south-west, was able to make a powerful onslaught from the flank which met with very little success. Its first onrush pushed back the 20th K.R.R., pioneer battalion of the division, in the trench called Hind Avenue, but the ground was regained by the 13th King's Liverpool, while the 4th Royal Fusiliers loosened the German grip of another small corner of trench. Up to nightfall the attempts continued, alternating with bombardments, but no progress was made, the 9th Brigade beating down every new advance.

About ten o'clock at night orders reached the division that as the Seventeenth Corps were falling back for strategic reasons to the west of Monchy on the north, while the Thirty-fourth were also retreating upon the south, the Third Division must retire in conformity with them. It was no easy task under a heavy shell-fall and with an elated enemy in close contact. It was of importance that the telephoned orders should not be tapped, and it is suggestive of the world-wide services of the British soldier that they were sent over the wires in Arabic and Hindustani. Before morning the weary troops had been quickly withdrawn without confusion or mishap, and all were safely aligned in their new positions. Their defence of their battleground had been a splendid one, and though they had no huge mass attack to contend with, such as had dashed the line of the Fifty-ninth to pieces, still they had constant severe pressure and had withstood it completely.

We left the Thirty-fourth Division upon the evening of March 21 still holding its reserve lines, with its three brigades in line, the 103rd on the right in touch with the Fortieth Division, and the 101st on the left where the Third Division joined it. A spirited little body, the J Special Company R.E., had joined the fighting line of the Thirty-fourth, and did good work with it. About 8 A.M. upon March 22nd the enemy attacked the 102nd Brigade in the Croisilles sector, but two attempts had no result, though the general British line was now 500 yards west of the village. About ten o'clock a misfortune occurred, for a heavy column of the enemy, moving up through a dense mist, broke through the 101st Brigade and carried the greater part of Henin Hill, a most important strategic point. The possession of the hill was, however, contested most strongly by the Fortieth Division machine-gun company and by the 11th Suffolks, who by their valiant resistance prevented the enemy from gaining the whole crest, though they could not stop them from extending north and south, which turned the line of the troops at the flanks and caused them to fall back. The troops to the south, the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, withdrew slowly to a new position west of

Boyelles; the remains of the 102nd Brigade (it was but 500 strong at the beginning of the action) fell back upon the supports; while the valiant men of Suffolk, aided by Colonel Roberts' machine-guns, still fought stoutly upon the top of the incline, though entirely isolated upon the right flank. Finally the shattered remains of this staunch battalion withdrew towards the north-west, their slow retreat being covered by Lieutenant Woods, who met his death in the venture, and by a handful of machine-gunners.

The chief evil result from the capture of Henin Hill was in the south, where it enabled the enemy by a joint frontal and flank attack at the junction of the Thirty-fourth and Fortieth Divisions, to push back the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 13th Yorkshire, and to get possession of the village of St. Leger. The 103rd Brigade moved back to Judas' Farm to the west of St. Leger, while the 119th Brigade prolonged the line to the south. A few machine-guns, with their feed blocks removed, were lost on Henin Hill, but otherwise no booty was obtained by the enemy. On the evening of the 22nd the infantry of the Thirty-first Division was rushed to the front, and the Thirty-fourth Division after their two days of desperate and honourable battle, were drawn back for a rest. During March 22 the 103rd Brigade held on to St. Leger and St. Leger Wood, and so blocked the valley of the Sensée.

To the south of the Thirty-fourth Division the Fifty-ninth Division had now been entirely replaced by the Fortieth, save for the 177th Brigade, the artillery, and machine-guns, some of which rendered splendid service during the day. There was little fighting in the morning of March 22, but about mid-day it was found that some hundreds of Germans s with a profusion of machine-guns ("many bullets but few men" was the key-note of the new advanced tactics) were close to the divisional front in the region of St. Leger Wood. These were driven back, and fourteen of their guns taken, after some confused but vigorous fighting, in which Lieutenant Beal captured four guns himself before meeting a glorious death. Several times the enemy pushed strong patrols between the Sixth and Fortieth Divisions in the Vaux-Vraumont sector, but these were always expelled or digested. Shortly after mid-day, however, a very strong attack broke upon this line, pushing back the left of the Sixth Division and causing heavy losses to the Highlanders of the 120th Brigade upon the right of the Fortieth Division. The 14th Argyll and Sutherlands, with the 10/11 Highland Light Infantry, were the units concerned, and they restored their line, which had been bent backwards. Finding, however, that they had lost touch with the Sixth Division to the south, they fell back until communication was restored. All day groups of German machine-gunners could be seen rushing forward, their crouching figures darting from cover to cover, while all day also the guns of the division observed and shattered the various nests which were constructed. Major Nesham distinguished himself in this work. Towards evening of the 22nd it was known that Vraumont to the south was in German possession, and orders were given to withdraw to the new general line which this change and the Capture of Henin Hill must entail. In the new position the Fortieth was still in close touch with the Sixth in the neighbourhood of Beugnatre, the general line of the withdrawal being in a south-westerly direction. The losses had been heavy during Sixth the day, and included Colonel Eardley-Wilmot of the 12th Suffolks.

The line of the Seventeenth and of the Sixth Corps, upon the morning of March 23, stretched from the south of Fampoux, west of Heninel.and of St. Leger down to Mory. The Seventeenth Corps had not yet been seriously attacked. We shall continue with the record of the Sixth Corps, which now consisted of the Third Division in the north, parts of the Guards Division, which had formed up to their right, the Thirty-first Division north of Mory, and the Fortieth Division to the west of Mory, with outposts in the village. We shall again trace the events from the northern flank. No serious movement occurred during the day in front of the Third Division or of the Guards, but there was a report of concentrations of infantry and other signs which indicated that the storms of the south would soon spread upwards in that direction. The Thirty-first Division, the well-tried Yorkshire unit, still retained two of its old brigades, but had an additional 4th Brigade of Guards, cut from the old Guards Division by the new system of smaller units. General Bridgford had taken over command just before the battle and would be the first to admit that the splendid efficiency of his troops was due to General Wanless 0’Gowan, who had been associated with them so long. They carried a high reputation into this great battle and an even higher one out of it. On the morning of March 23 the division faced the Germans to the north of Mory Copse, having the 4th Guards Brigade upon the right and the 93rd Brigade upon the left. Two German divisions which had already been engaged, the 111th and the 2nd Guards Reserve, tried to break this fresh line and were each in turn broken themselves, as were the German batteries which pushed to the front and found themselves under the double fire of the

Thirty-first and Thirty-fourth divisional artillery. Prisoners taken in this repulse gave the information that the Germans were already a full day behind their scheduled programme in this quarter. All attacks upon the Thirty-first met with the same fate during the day, but the enemy, as will be shown, had got a grip of Mory for a time, and pushed back the Fortieth in the south. Instead of a retirement the 92nd Brigade was brought from reserve and placed upon the exposed flank, while the Guards and Yorkshiremen still stood firm. In the evening the general line extended from north of Ervillers, where the 92nd Brigade was on watch, to the region of Hamelincourt, where the 93rd had their line.

The heaviest work of the day had fallen upon the Fortieth Division, which had dug itself in west of Mory and of Mory Copse, with strong posts in the village itself. The enemy attacked in the morning of March 23 in great force and got complete possession of Mory. A splendid counter-attack, however, by the 13th East Surreys and 21st Middlesex at 2:30 P.M. regained the village. A deep cutting ran up to Mory from Vraucourt in the south-east, and along this the Germans sent their reinforcements, but the artillery of the British got the range of it and caused heavy losses. The village was held all day, under the local direction of Colonel Warden of the Surreys, and was violently attacked by the enemy after dark, with the result that desultory hand-to-hand fighting went on among the houses during the whole night. At one time the British had won to the eastern edge, and then again they were forced back to the centre. When one remembers that these men had been fighting for three days, with little food and less sleep, it was indeed a fine performance. One small post of the 18th Welsh under Sergeant O’Sullivan was isolated for nearly two days and yet cut its way out, the gallant Irishman receiving a well-deserved honour. The morning of March 24 found little change along the line of the corps. If the Germans were already a day behind they showed no signs of making up their time. The 40th Machine-gun Battalion had done particularly fine work during the day. As an example of the gallantry which animated this unit it may be recorded that two of the guns having been rushed by the Germans near Ervillers, Lance-Corporal Cross volunteered to recover them single-handed, which he did in such fashion that seven German prisoners appeared carrying them and marching at the point of his revolver, an exploit for which he was decorated.

March 24 was marked by considerable activity in the Mory district, but no strong attack developed to the north of it. On the front of the Thirty-first and Fortieth Divisions, however, the battle raged with great intensity. The enemy had full possession of Mory by 9 A.M., and was attacking the depleted battalions opposed to them along the, whole divisional front so that they were compelled to fall slowly back, and by the late afternoon held a line about half a mile east of the Arras-Bapaume road. The situation to the south had been such that the Fourth Corps had to arrange to withdraw to the west of Bapaume, so that in any case the Sixth Corps would have been compelled to throw back its right flank. The Sixth Division on the immediate right had been relieved by the Forty-first, but touch had been lost and a gap formed, the enemy pushing on to Favreuil. The Forty-second Division was on the march up, however, in order to relieve the Fortieth, and two brigades of this formed a defensive line covering Gomiecourt.

These events had their reaction upon the Thirty-first Division to the north. When the enemy were seen in Mory at 9 A.M. they were upon the flank of the 4th Guards Brigade, which at the same time could see heavy columns massing to the east of St. Leger. The Guards at once dug in a new support switch line towards Ervillers and so kept touch with the Fortieth in its new position. The 93rd upon the left was in the meanwhile heavily attacked in front, the enemy coming on again and again with a powerful support from trench mortars. These attacks were all beaten back by the stout Yorkshire infantry, but nothing could prevent the enemy from working round in the south and occupying Behagnies and Sapignies. The British artillery was particularly masterful in this section, and no direct progress could be made by the Germans.

In the late afternoon of the 24th the Germans made a new and violent attack upon the exhausted Fortieth Division and upon the 4th Guards Brigade on the right of the Thirty-first. In this attack the enemy succeeded in forcing their way into Ervillers, while the Fortieth reformed upon the west of it, so as to cover Hamelincourt and Moyenneville. The situation in the morning of March 25 was exceedingly critical for the two advanced brigades of the Thirty-first, the Guards and the 93rd, who had not budged from their position. The enemy were now to the right rear, and if they advanced farther northwards there was imminent danger that the defenders would be cut off. As usual the best defence of a dashing commander is an attack, so the reserve brigade, the 92nd, was ordered to advance upon

Ervillers, which had already been consolidated by the 91st German Infantry Regiment. The 10th East Yorkshires led the attack and seized the village once again, but the situation was still critical, for the enemy were round the south-west, so that they enveloped the whole right wing of the division, which was stretched to cracking point with every man in the line. Touch had for the moment been lost with the troops on the right. As the Germans poured past the right wing of the Thirty-first they presented a menace for the future, but a most tempting mark for the present, and ten machine-guns were kept in continuous action for three hours upon ideal targets ranging from 300 to 1500 yards. The enemy losses upon this occasion were undoubtedly very heavy, but with fine persistency they kept upon their way, as one-idea'd and undeviating as a swarm of ants in a tropical, forest. A thick trail of their dead marked their westward road.

There had been comparative quiet at the north of the line so that the narrative may still concern itself with the situation which centred round the Thirty-first Division. The relief of the Fortieth upon the right was now long overdue, and the men had been worked to the bone, but the fact that Solly-Flood's Forty-second Division had been deflected to chapter the south withheld their succours. The Forty-first (Lawford), however, was gradually coming into action and thickening their shredded lines. Sapignies in the extreme south of the corps area had been taken by the Germans, but was recaptured in the morning of March 25 by parts of the 120th Brigade working with the 127th Brigade of the Forty-first Division. Strong German reinforcements came up, however, and the British line was pushed back in this quarter to the north-west until it crossed the high ground east of Gomiecourt. This southern sector was handed over before noon from the Sixth Corps to the Fourth, and in the evening the remains of the Fortieth Division were finally drawn out, having finished a splendid spell of service. The strain upon General Ponsonby, and upon his three Brigadiers, Crozier, Campbell, and Forbes, had been enormous, but under the most extreme pressure their units had always maintained the line. Part of the 126th Brigade of the Forty-second Division was now on the immediate right of the Thirty-first Division, the 10th Manchesters connecting up with the 11th East Yorks and doing great work in covering that flank.

It has already been recorded how the 92nd Brigade, all of East Yorkshire, had beaten the 91st Prussian Regiment out of the village of Ervillers. A second regiment of the 2nd Guards Reserve Division, the 77th, essayed the adventure of turning the Yorkshiremen out, but met with a bloody repulse. “It was a sight to see,” says one who was present. “We were only a battalion, probably 800 strong, while he had massed artillery and many thousands of infantry. They came over to us in columns, and they kept coming. They swarmed towards us, but they made no progress, and we could not shoot fast enough. For three and a half hours they came, and for three and a half hours we knocked them out. They were falling like ripe corn before the reaper. As fast as they fell others took their places, but they could not move the East Yorks.” The 2nd Guards Reserve were worn out by this experience, and it must be admitted that their service in the battle had been long and arduous. They were relieved by the 16th Bavarians and the 239th Division, so that there was no surcease in the endless pressure.

At 1:15 the 93rd West Yorkshires upon the left of the line were attacked, but could no more be shifted than their brother Tykes in the south. The German stormers never reached the line, partly owing to the excellent barrage and partly to the steady rifle-fire. After a long interval of following false gods, such as bombs and rifle grenades, the British soldier was reasserting himself once more as the best average shot of all the forces engaged, though it must be admitted that the specialised German snipers with their weapons of precision were of a high excellence. All day the division stood its ground and hit back hard at every attack, but by evening the salient had become so extreme that it was necessary to readjust the line. They fell back, therefore, the 92nd covering the operation, and took up the line from Moyenneville to Ablainzeville, where they faced round on the morning of March 26, the 92nd on the right of the line, the 93rd upon the left, and the 4th Guards in reserve. On their north lay the division of Guards, on their south the Forty-second Division.

It was on this morning that an incident occurred leading to the loss of a village, but also to a singular instance of military virtue. It is the episode of Moyenneville and of the 15th West Yorkshire Battalion. It appears that an officer in a state of concussion from the explosion of a shell, sent an order to the left of the line that they should retire, The Guards and other observers were surprised to see two British battalions walking back with sloped arms under no pressure from the enemy. By some chance the mistaken order did not reach the 15th West Yorkshires, who remained isolated in their position, and Colonel Twiss refused to follow the brigade until a positive command should arrive. In their loneliness they extended each flank in search of a friend, and finally stretched their left into Moyenneville village, which they found already strongly occupied by the Germans. To many minds this would have appeared to be an excellent excuse for retirement, but its effect upon the Yorkshire temperament was that they instantly attacked the village and drove the intruders out. One considerable body of Germans was driven down into a hollow and pelted with bullets until the survivors raised the white flag. Very large numbers of German wounded lay in and around the village, but it was not possible to send them to the rear. The enemy attacked Moyenneville again, but the battalion covered the western exits and denied all egress. For the whole of that day, the whole night, and up to the afternoon of March 27, this heroic body of infantry held their . ground, though shot at from every side and nearly surrounded. Not one yard backwards would they budge without a definite written order. Not only did they hold their own front but their machine-guns played upon nine successive waves of Germans advancing from Courcelles to Ayette, and sorely hampered their movements to the south. They covered 2000 yards for thirty-six hours and relieved the front of the Thirty-first Division from pressure during that time. When at last the survivors made their way back only four officers and forty men represented that gallant battalion. Colonel Twiss was among the missing. “This battalion,” says the official record, “by its brave action relieved the pressure on our front throughout the whole day and gave the division time to establish its position near Ayette.” It was as well that this pressure should have been taken off, for both upon the 26th and the 27th the ammunition question had become serious, and disaster might have followed a more extended action.

If we continue to follow the fortunes of the Thirty-first Division, so as to bring them to their natural term, we find it now covering the line from Ayette in the south to Ablainzeville. The enemy were driving up on the right of the division between Courcelles and Ablainzeville, a space which was covered by the 92nd Brigade, who were fighting as brilliantly as ever. Touch had been lost with the Forty-second upon March 27. The East Yorkshires lost their outpost line four times this morning and four times they cleared it with the bayonet. Colonel Rickman, the senior officer on the spot, fought for every inch of ground as he retired before the ever-increasing pressure. Finally the 92nd, worn to rags, were ordered to reform behind the 4th Guards Brigade at Ayette, but so high was their spirit that when during the night there was word that the Guards were themselves hard pressed they eagerly sent help forward to them, while the Guards, with equal chivalry of spirit, strictly limited the number who should come. About six in the evening the Guards threw out a line to the south and joined up with the 10th Manchesters of the Forty-second Division to the west of Ablainzeville, so that the line was once more complete.

March 28 found the battle still raging in front of the division, which had now been engaged for four days without a break and had beaten off the attacks of five separate German divisions. Two attacks were made, the one upon the 93rd Brigade, the other upon the Guards. Each attack got into the line and each was pitchforked out again. So broken was the enemy that they were seen retiring in crowds towards the north-east under a canopy of shrapnel. The British barrage was particularly good that day, and many assaulting units were beaten into pieces by it. The division was terribly worn, and the men could hardly stand for exhaustion, and yet it was a glad thought that the last glimpse which their weary and bloodshot eyes had of their enemy was his broken hordes as they streamed away from the front which they had failed to break. So thin were the ranks that the pioneer battalion, the 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry, was brought up to form the line. The Guards had taken their position somewhat to the west of Ayette, and some of the enemy from the south filtered into the village, but they were shortly afterwards put out again by Shute’s Thirty-second Division, which had come up for the relief. There was no attack upon the 29th, and upon the 30th the Thirty-first was able to withdraw, having established a record which may have been equalled but cannot have been surpassed by any division in this great battle. Five German divisions, the 111th, 2nd Guards Reserve, 239th and 16th Bavarians, and 1st Guards Reserve, had been wholly or partially engaged with the Thirty-first. Both sides had lost heavily and were exhausted. It was here, near Ervillers, that a German war correspondent has described how he saw the long line of German and British wounded lying upon either side of the main road.

It has been stated that the Thirty-second Division carried Ayette after this unit had relieved the Thirty-first Division, and the operation may be treated here to preserve continuity of narrative. It was of more than local importance, as it was one of the earliest indications that the British army was still full of fight and that in spite of every disadvantage it meant to hit back at every opportunity. On taking over his section of the front. General Shute found before him the village of Ayette, which was strongly held, but was on the forward slope of a hill so that it could obtain little help from the German guns. He at once determined to attack. The 10th Highland Light Infantry of the 14th Brigade were directed upon the village on the night of April 2, while the 96th Brigade continued the attack to the south. The result was a very heartening little success. Three companies of the Highlanders, numbering under 300 in all, carried the village, though it was held by a German battalion. On the right, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers made the attack, and in spite of one check, which was set right by the personal intervention of General Gird wood of the 96th Brigade, the objectives were reached. The two attacks were skilfully connected up by the 5/6th Royal Scots, while a party of sappers of the 20Gth Field Company under Lieutenant Cronin followed on the heels of the infantry and quickly consolidated.

Whilst these stirring events had been in progress in the south, the north of the line had slowly drawn back in order to preserve conformity. The Seventeenth Corps, as already stated, were to the west of Monchy, and the left of the Sixth Corps was on the line of Henin, where the Third Division occupied a strong defensive position. This was strongly attacked upon the forenoon of March 24, especially on the 8th Brigade front, which was the right of the line, the Germans swarming up from the south-east of Henin and trying hard to work up the Henin-Neuville-Vitasse road. This attack fell particularly upon the 1st Scots Fusiliers, and it was completely repulsed with heavy losses, though it was facilitated by the sunken roads which converged upon Henin. The Germans in their retirement had to pass along a slope where once again they lost heavily.

Shortly after noon the left of the Third Division was also attacked, and the enemy obtained a temporary footing between the 1st Gordons and 8th Royal Lancasters of the 76th Brigade. From this he was very soon ejected, and though many bombing attacks were pushed with great resolution they had no results. March 25 was quiet upon the front of the Third Division, though the right of the Guards Division to the south near Boyelles was subjected to one heavy unsuccessful attack. That evening both the Guards and the Third Division had to make some retraction of their line in order to conform to the situation already described in the south, but March 26 passed without an attack, the soldiers listening with anxious impatience to the roar of battle on their right, unable to see the fight, and yet keenly conscious that their own lives might depend upon its results. The 27th was also a day of anxious expectancy, and culminating upon the 28th in a very severe battle, which was the greater test coming after so long a period of strain. All three brigades were in the line, the 8th upon the right, 9th in the centre, and 76th in the north. Still farther to the north was the 44th Highland Brigade of Reed’s Fifteenth Division upon which the storm first burst.

This brigade at 6:45 was assailed by a bombardment of so severe a character that its trenches were completely destroyed. The German infantry pushed home behind this shattering fire and drove back the front line of the Highlanders. This enabled them to get behind the left flank of the 2nd Suffolks and nearly surround them, while at the same time they pierced the front of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers on their right. The front line of the 8th Royal Lancasters had also been penetrated, and the British infantry were pushed back and split up into various small squads of men, intermingled in the north with Highlanders of the 44th Brigade, and all fighting desperately with the enemy swarming thickly upon them. By 9:45 the whole front was in German hands. Enemy field-guns were lining Wancourt Ridge, and as the shattered formations tried to form a new line they were heavily shelled by them. The loss in officers and men was very heavy, Colonel James of the Royal Lancasters being among the dead. The withdrawal was made to the reserve line, which the 44th Brigade had already occupied in the north. This included the village of Neuville Vitasse which became untenable from shell-fire, and into the northern portion of which the enemy was able to push, but in the main the reserve system was occupied, the movement being covered by some of the 1st Gordons. At this point an equilibrium was attained and the enemy held after as desperate a conflict as any troops could be called upon to endure.

On the right of the 76th Brigade the 9th Brigade had also been fighting very hard, and been compelled to yield some ground before the overpowering weight of the attack, especially that of the preliminary trench-mortar fire. The first enemy advance in the morning was completely beaten off with great loss. A second attack had driven in the 8th Brigade on the right, which enabled the Germans to get behind the two companies of the 13th King’s Liverpool who were in the front line. These men fought to the end and were last seen standing on the parapet without a thought of surrender. At the same time a company of the Northumberland Fusiliers on their left shared their fate, save for one officer and twelve men who survived. The front line of the 8th Brigade had now ceased to exist, but the reserve line still held. An attack upon the 7th Shropshires who, with the remains of the other battalions, held on to it, was successfully shattered, even the battalion headquarters being brought into the desperate battle, while the guns on each side fought as hard as the infantry, barrage and attack succeeding each other with mechanical accuracy, and being answered by an equally efficient barrage and defence, for the British guns were extraordinarily well handled that day. About mid-day the enemy got a lodgment on the right of the reserve line, but the Fusiliers, whose Colonel, Moulton Barrett, had been hit, and the 13th King's still fought furiously for what was left, and retained their ground until dusk, when they were drawn back into the reserve line in order to conform with the 76th Brigade.

The 8th Brigade upon the extreme right of the division had also endured heavy losses in men and some loss in ground. The front line was held by companies of the 1st Scots Fusiliers and of the 7th Shropshires. The enemy, after an unsuccessful attempt, got into the trenches of the latter and bombed their way along them, clearing that section of the front. It was bomb against rifle. in the tortuous ditches, and the bomb proved the more handy weapon. The Scots Fusiliers, who were the next to be assailed, made shift with rifle-grenades, but these also ran short, and they were forced back, so that the survivors of the two front companies were driven across the Arras-Bapaume road. Finally, as in the case of the other brigades, the reserve line was successfully maintained until evening.

No soldiers could have fought with greater bravery and skill than did the Third Division on March 28. They were assailed by at least three German divisions and by a crushing artillery, but they disputed every inch of ground, and finally fought their formidable adversary to such a complete standstill that he could not, with several hours of daylight at his disposal, and disorganised ranks before him, continue his attacks. It is true that he secured Henin and Neuville Vitasse, but he paid a rich price in blood. So broken were the enemy that the British wounded came back through their ranks without let or hindrance. A strong counter would have swept them out of the ground that they had gained, but neither the Third nor the Fifteenth, which had endured an equal attack upon the left, was in a condition to advance, while the Guards had been already withdrawn in accordance with the situation on their right, sixth The blow which the Germans had received was shown even more clearly by their failure to attack upon the next day. On March 30 the Third Division was relieved by the Second Canadians.

Their record was a great one, and their losses, 139 officers and 3500 men, were a measure of their services. In nine days, before a vastly superior force, they had only gone back 7000 yards, most of which was strategic withdrawal. Well might General Byng say, “By their conduct they have established a standard of endurance and determination that will be a model for all time.”

This desperate German attack on March 28 to the north of the British line had spread right across the face of the Fifteenth Scottish Division through the line of Orange Hill and on to Telegraph Hill, finally involving the Fourth Division on the other side of the Scarpe, and the right-hand unit of the Thirteenth Corps on their left, so that Horne’s First Army was now drawn into the fray, which reached as far north as Oppy and Gavrelle. Along the whole of this long front there was constant fighting, which in the case of the Fifteenth Division was as desperate as that of the Third. All three brigades were in the line, each of them having two battalions in front and one in reserve. Never has the grand tough Scottish fibre been more rudely tested than on this terrible day of battle, and never has it stood the strain more splendidly. General Reed’s men undoubtedly saved Arras and held up at least six German divisions which broke themselves on that rugged and impenetrable line, formed in the first instance by the 7th Camerons upon the right, the 13th Royal Scots in the centre, the 9th Black Watch and 7/8 Scots Borderers on the left. As already told, the shattering bombardment destroyed a large part of the right front, burying the garrison amid the ruins of their trenches, near their junction with the Third Division. Some fifty Camerons, under Colonel MacLeod, fought most desperately round their headquarters, and then fell back slowly upon the 8/10 Gordons, who were holding the Neuville Vitasse trench behind them. This was about 6 A.M. By 7.40 the whole front line, shot to pieces and with their right flank gone, readjusted their line to correspond, winding up near the Feuchy road. There was no rest nor respite, however, for the whole German plan of campaign depended upon their getting Arras, so they poured forward their waves of attack regardless of losses. It was a really desperate battle in which the Scots, lying in little groups among the shell-holes and ditches, mowed the Germans down as they swarmed up to them, but were themselves occasionally cut off and overpowered as the stormers found the gaps and poured through them. The pressure was very great on the front of the Black Watch, north of the Cambrai road, and there General Reed determined upon a counter-attack, for which he could only spare a single company of the 10th Scottish Rifles. In spite of the small numbers it was carried out with such dash, under the personal lead of Colonel Stanley Clarke, that the front was cleared for a time, and the Germans thrown back east of Feuchy.

Meanwhile the Germans had made some advance to the north of the Scarpe, and the 7/8 Scots Borderers on the left wing had to fall back to preserve the line. At 11 A.M. the enemy were raging in the centre of the line, and the 6th Camerons, north of the Cambrai road, were forced backwards, the enemy piercing their front. Up to 1:45 the weight of the attack was mostly in the north, and ended by all three brigades moving back, with the enemy still striving with the utmost fury and ever fresh relays of men to burst the line. At 3 P.M. the German stormers had won the Bois des Boeufs, but were driven out again by the 9th Black Watch and by the 11th Argylls, who had lost their CO., Colonel Mitchell. The division was worn to a shadow, and yet the moment that the German attack seemed to ease both they and the Fourth Division on their north advanced their front. In this single bloody day the Fifteenth Division lost 94 officers and 2223 men, but there can be no doubt that their action, with that of the Third Division and the Fourth on either side of them, was the main determining factor in the whole of this vast battle. General Reed (a V.C. of Colenso) with his Brigadiers, Hilliard, Allgood, and Lumsden, might well be proud of the way they held the pass.

North of the Scarpe all three brigades of the Fourth Division were exposed to a furious attack, and lost the village of Roeux, which was defended literally to the death by the 2nd Seaforths of the 10th Brigade, but the 1st Hants in the front line of the 11th Brigade and the 2nd Essex of the 12th stood like iron, and in a long day’s fighting the enemy was never able to make any serious lodgment in the position, though the rushes of his bombing parties were said by experienced British officers to have been extraordinarily determined and clever. Very little ground was gained by the Germans, and of this a section upon the left flank near Gavrelle was regained by a sudden counter-attack of the Fourth Division. Of the attack to the north of the Third Army in the Bailleul and Oppy district, it should be noted that it fell upon the Fifty-sixth London Territorial Division, who for once had the pleasant experience of being at the right end of the machine-gun. They took every advantage of their opportunity, and there are few places where the Germans have endured heavier losses with no gains to show in return. The Westminsters and L.R.B.’s of the 169th Brigade were particularly heavily engaged, and a party of the former distinguished themselves by a most desperate defence of an outlying post, named Towy Post, near Gavrelle, which they held long after it was passed by the enemy, but eventually fought their way to safety. The attack lasted from seven in the morning till six at night, and the Londoners had full vengeance for their comrades of July 1916 or August 1917, who had died before the German wire even as the Germans died that day.

It was a successful day for the British arms, so successful that it marked the practical limit of the German advance in that quarter, which was the vital section, covering the town of Arras. There is no doubt that the attempt was a very serious one, strongly urged by six divisions of picked infantry in front and four in support, with a very powerful concentration of artillery, which was expected to smash a way through the three divisions chiefly attacked. The onslaught was whole-hearted and skilful, but so was the defence. The German losses were exceedingly high, and save for a strip of worthless ground there was really nothing to show for them. It was the final check to the German advance in this quarter of the field, so that the chronicler may well bring his record to a pause while he returns to the first day of the battle and endeavours to trace the fortunes of the Fourth and Fifth Corps, who formed the right half of the Third Army. We have fixed the northern sector of the battle-field from Bailleul in the north right across the Scarpe and down to the Cojeul in its position, from which it was destined to make no change for many months to come. It was the first solidification of the lines, for to the south all was still fluid and confused.

A word should be said before one finally passes from this portion of the great epic, as to the truly wonderful work of the Army Medical Corps. In spite of the constant fire the surgeons and bearers were continually in the front line and conveying the wounded to the rear. Many thousands were saved from the tortures of a German prison camp by the devotion which kept them within the British lines. It may be invidious to mention examples where the same spirit of self-sacrifice animated all, but one might take as typical the case of the Fortieth Division, some details of which are available. Colonel M’Cullagh and his men conveyed to the rear during five days, always under heavy fire, 2400 cases of their own or other divisions, the whole of the casualties of the Fortieth being 2800. M’Carter, a British, and Berney, an American surgeon, both had dressing-posts right up to the battle-line, the latter being himself wounded twice. Wannan, a stretcher-bearer, carried thirty cases in one day, and ended by conveying a wounded friend several miles upon his shoulders. Private M'Intosh, attacked by a German while binding an injured man, killed the cowardly fellow with his own bayonet, and then completed his task. It is hard to work detail into so vast a picture, but such deeds were infinitely multiplied along that great line of battle. Nor can one omit mention of the untiring work of the artillery, which was in action often for several days and nights on end. Occasionally in some soldier's letter one gets a glimpse of the spirit of the gunners such as no formal account can convey: "Our battery fired two days and nights without ceasing until spotted by the German observers. They then kept up a terrible fire until the British guns were silenced in succession. One officer was left standing when I was wounded. He shook my hand as they carried me away. I went, leaving him with about seven men and two guns, still carrying on as if nothing had happened. This is only one battery among hundreds which showed as great pluck and tenacity as we did."

III. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME
Attack on the Fourth and Fifth Corps

Attack on Sixth and Fifty-first Divisions — Engagement of the Twenty-fifth and Forty-first Divisions — Attack on Forty-seventh, Sixty-third, Second, and Nineteenth Divisions — The German torrent — Serious situation — Arrival of Sixty-second Division — Fighting before Albert — Gallant defence by Twelfth Division — Arrival of the New Zealanders, of the Australians, of the Thirty-fifth Division — Equilibrium

TO the immediate south of the Sixth Corps the front line upon March 21 was held by Harper's Fourth Corps, which consisted of the Sixth Division (Harden) opposite to Lagnicourt with the Fifty-first Highland Battle Division to the right of them, which famous unit was now under the command of General Carter-Campbell, whose name has been recorded in a previous volume as the only officer left standing in his battalion after the action of Neuve Chapelle. To the south of the Fourth Corps was the Fifth Corps (Fanshawe) with the Seventeenth Division (Robertson) on the left, the Sixty-third (Lawrie) in the centre, and the Forty-seventh (Gorringe) on the right covering the whole Cambrai salient from Flesquières in the north to the point near Gouzeaucourt Wood where the Third Army met the left flank of the Fifth. The line took a considerable bend at this point, marking the ground gained at the battle of Cambrai, and it was part of the German scheme to break through to the north and south, so that without attacking the Fifth Battle Corps they would either cause it to fall back or else isolate and capture it. Had their advance been such as they had hoped for, they would certainly have placed it in great peril. Even as it was, it was necessary to withdraw the line, but without undue haste or confusion. Great pressure was laid upon the Fifth Corps in later stages of the battle, but beyond a considerable shell-fall and demonstration there was no actual attack upon March 21. It was by holding certain sections of the line in this fashion that the Germans were able to pile up the odds at those places which were actually attacked.

It will be possible to describe the sequence of events with considerably less detail in this and other sectors of the line, since the general conditions of attack and defence may be taken as similar to that already described. Here also the bombardment began with its full shattering force of high explosive, blue cross invisible gas, mustard gas, phosgene, and every other diabolical device which the German chemist has learned to produce and the British to neutralise. In the case of the British infantry, many of them had to wear their gas masks for eight hours on end, and the gunners were in even worse plight; but these appliances, which will no doubt find a place in the museums of our children, were of a surprising efficiency, and hampered the experienced soldier far less than would have been thought.

The infantry advance was at 9:45, the Germans swarming in under the cover of Nature’s smoke barrage, for here, as in several other parts of the line, a thick morning mist greatly helped the attack and screened the stormers until they were actually up to the wire, which had usually been shattered in advance by the trench-mortars. The line from Flesquières to Dernicourt in the region of the Fifty-first Division was less seriously attacked, and remained inviolate, but the northern stretch from Dernicourt to Lagnicourt was struck with terrific impact, and gave before the blow to very much the same extent as the divisions to the immediate north. The 71st Brigade in the Lagnicourt sector was especially hard hit, and was very violently assailed by a strong force of Germans, which included the 1st Prussian Guard. This famous regiment was at one time all round the 9th Norfolks, who succeeded at last in fighting themselves clear, though their Colonel, Prior, and the great majority of the officers and men in the battalion were killed or wounded. Even these wounded, however, were safely carried off, thanks to the devotion of Captain Failes and a handful of brave men. In this desperate struggle the whole brigade was decimated. The 16th and 18th Brigades had also suffered severely, but the division, in spite of its losses, was splendidly solid, and fell back slowly upon the support of the 75th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division, which had hastened up to the danger point. By evening, the Germans, advancing in great numbers and with fine resolution, had occupied the four villages of Doignies, Boursies, Louverval, and Lagnicourt, their total penetration from Boursies in the south to Ecoust in the north, a stretch of seven miles, averaging about 3000 yards. This advance had completely turned the left wing of the Fifty-first, which was compelled to fall back in consequence, after stopping several attacks from across the Canal du Nord. All three brigades of the Fifty-first Division were in line, and of the three the left and centre had been seriously engaged, the enemy entering the front line of both before mid-day, and finally reaching the second system between Louverval and Lagnicourt, so that the defence lay along the Beaumetz — Morchies line. The Nineteenth

Division was in general support in this quarter, and the 57th Brigade became practically the right of the Fifty-first Division. About 7 P.M. in the evening two battalions of it, the 8th Gloucesters and 10th Worcesters of the 57th Brigade, tried to turn the tide of fight by a counter-attack, with the aid of tanks, against the village of Doignies. This attack was successful in retaking half the village, but in the course of the night it was found necessary to withdraw before the increasing pressure of the enemy, who brought many machine-guns into the village. During the night it was arranged that the Fifth Corps should fall back from its dangerous position in the Cambrai salient, and by eleven next day the divisions which composed it were ranged from Highland Ridge, through Havrincourt and Hermies, in touch with the Fourth Corps in the north and with the left of the Fifth Army in the south.

Whilst this very heavy attack had been made upon the Fourth Corps, Bainbridge's Twenty-fifth Division had been in close support of the two divisions in the front line. While the 75th Brigade, as already stated, was pushed up under very heavy fire to strengthen the Sixth Division in their desperate resistance, the 74th was allotted to the Fifty-first Division, which was in less serious need of help during the day. Griffin's 7th Brigade remained in reserve in front of Morchies, where upon the following morning its presence was invaluable as a solid unshaken nucleus of resistance. Eight German divisions were identified that day among those which attacked the two British divisions in the front line of the Fourth Corps.

There was no attack during the night, but the Germans thickened their advanced line and were all ready for another strenuous day, while the British, though hustled and overborne by the tremendous onslaught which had pushed them back, were still within their battle positions and as doggedly surly as British infantry usually are in hours of stress and trial. Three strong attacks were made in the morning and early afternoon between Hermies and Beaumetz, all of which were driven back. There is no method of gauging the losses of the enemy upon such occasions, but when one knows that the machine-guns fired as many as 9000 rounds each, and that a single Lewis gun discharged 30,000 bullets, one can say with certainty that they were very heavy. These attacks fell upon the Highlanders on the right, the 7th Brigade in the centre, and the remains of the Sixth Division upon the left. Unhappily, a chain of defence is no stronger than its weakest link, which finds itself so often at points of juncture. Upon this occasion the Germans, continually filtering forward and testing every possible orifice, found a weakness between the 120th Brigade of the Fortieth Division in the north and the Sixth in the south. This weak point was to be mended by the Forty-first Division, which had been hurried up from Favreuil, but the time was too short, or the rent was too wide, so that the Germans pushed rapidly through and seized the village of Vaulx-Vraumont, separating the Fourth Corps from the Sixth. It was an anxious moment, and coupled with the German success at Henin Hill in the north it might have meant the isolation of the Sixth Corps; but the necessary changes were rapidly and steadily effected, so that before evening the Highlanders of the 120th Brigade feeling out upon their right and fearing all would be void, joined hands suddenly with the 15th Hampshires of the Forty-first Division in the neighbourhood of Beugnatre. Before night had fallen upon March 22 the line had been restored and built up once more, though some five thousand yards westward of where it had been in the morning. That evening the Sixth Division was drawn out, weak and dishevelled, but still full of fight. With all the hammering and hustling that it had endured, it had saved its heavy guns and nearly all its field batteries. The Forty-first Division took its place, and incorporated for the time the 7th Brigade, a unit which had endured hard fortune, for it had held its ground splendidly with little loss until, after the fashion of modern war, events upon the other side of the horizon caused it to get the order to retire, an order which could not be obeyed without complete exposure and very heavy casualties, including Colonel Blackall of the 4th South Staffords. Each day of arduous battle was followed by a no less arduous night, during which, under heavy fire and every conceivable difficulty the various divisions were readjusted so that the morning light should show no impossible salients, no outlying indefensible positions, no naked flanks, and no yawning gaps. How easy are such exercises over a map upon a study table, and how difficult when conducted by dazed, overwrought officers, pushing forward their staggering, half-conscious men in the darkness of a wilderness of woods and fields, where the gleam of a single electric torch may mean disaster to all! And yet, as every morning dawned, the haggard staff-captain at the telephone could still report to his anxious chief that all was well, and his battle-line still intact between the Hun and his goal.

On the morning of the battle the general disposition of the Fifth Corps had been that the Seventeenth Division (Robertson) was in the line on the left, the Sixty-third Naval Division (Lawrie) in the centre, and the Forty-seventh Division (Gorringe) on the right, being the southern unit of the Third Army, in close liaison with the Ninth Division, the northern unit of the Fifth Army. Two divisions were in close reserve, the Second (Pereira) on the right, and the Nineteenth (Jeffreys) on the left.

The Forty-seventh Division was in a particularly important position, since it was the flank unit and the liaison between the two armies depended upon it. It had only come into line the day before the battle, taking the place of the Second Division, which was now in immediate support. On March 21 the 140th Brigade covered the right of the divisional front, and the 141st the left, the sector being that of La Vacquerie. In view of the menacing attitude of the enemy both the 142nd Brigade and the 4th Welsh Fusiliers Pioneer Battalion were brought nearer to the front line. So heavy was the gas bombardment in the morning that the front battalion of the 140th Brigade, the 17th London, had to evacuate some advanced trenches and to wear their gas masks for hours on end. The front line trenches were blown to fragments, and so also were many of their garrison. The following infantry advance, however, though vigorously conducted, had no great weight, and seems to have been the work of two battalions carrying out a subsidiary attack. By a counter-attack of the 19th London they were driven out once more.

Whilst this partial attack had been made upon the Forty-seventh Division, similar assaults had been made upon the Sixty-third in the centre, and upon the Seventeenth in the northern sector of the Fifth Corps. None of them made more than petty gains, but in each case the bombardment was formidable, chiefly with trench-mortar bombs and with gas. In the case of the Forty-seventh Division there was a considerable interval between the front brigades, because a number both of the 18th and 17th London had been absolutely destroyed, together with their trench. There were several other partial attacks during the day, but the pressure was never extreme, and the withdrawal to Highland Ridge after dusk was carried out on account of the general tactical position. All wounded men were carried back, and no booty left to the enemy.

Meanwhile the left flank of the Fifth Corps had been covered by the 58th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers being heavily engaged. During March 22, Havrincourt, Hermies, and the Beaumetz-Hermies line were held by the Seventeenth, Nineteenth, and Fifty-first divisions against repeated German attacks, and in the evening the Nineteenth was in touch with the Forty-first on its left and with the Second on its right.

On this night of March 22 the principal change was this movement backwards of the whole Fifth Corps. The retirement of the Fifth Corps continued during the day of March 23, and was caused by the necessity of conforming with the Seventh Corps to the south of it which, after valiant exertions, soon to be described, had lost Nurlu, so placing the enemy upon the right rear of the divisions in the north. Fins had also been taken in the same neighbourhood. The Fifth Corps was now heavily pressed in its retreat, all five divisions enduring considerable losses and having the menace of the enemy constantly upon their right flank. At noon the general line was east of Equancourt, and this line was held for a time, but the enemy was still thundering on in the north, his fresh divisions rolling in like waves from some inexhaustible sea. At 1:30 they were pushing their attack most desperately upon the weary fringes of riflemen and groups of tired machine-gunners, who formed the front of the Forty-first Division between Beugny and Lebucquière. In all, this division, with the Nineteenth and Fifty-first upon their right, sustained five strong attacks in the afternoon of this day, most of them from Vaulx-Vraumont. Eventually Lebucquière was taken, the enemy breaking their way at this point through the line of the exhausted Fifty-first Division, who had fought with splendid resolution. This German success placed the Nineteenth Division south of Beaumetz and at Beugny in a very serious position, as the enemy infantry got behind the 9th Welsh Fusiliers and 6th Wiltshires, who were only saved from total destruction by the staunch support of the 9th Welsh at Beugny, who held on desperately until the remains of the 58th Brigade could get back to them. These remains when the three battalions were reunited were only a few hundred men.

The case of the 57th Brigade, which was fighting a hard rearguard action all afternoon, was little better, and both the 8th Gloucesters and 10th Worcesters were almost overwhelmed by the swarms of Germans who poured up against their front and flank. A splendid stand was made by this brigade north-east of Velu, in which the men of Gloucester especially distinguished themselves. Captain Jones of A Company receiving the V.C. for his heroic resistance. Colonel Hoath of the 10th Warwicks conducted this arduous retreat, and his own battalion shares in the honours of a fight which was tragic in its losses, but essential for its effect upon the fortunes of the army. Captain Gribble of this battalion also received the V.C, his D Company falling to the last man after the best traditions of the British army. The 5th Brigade of the Second Division, upon the right of the Nineteenth Division, shared in the honours of this desperate business, the 2nd Oxford and Bucks being very heavily engaged. After the prolonged action the final line of the Nineteenth Division ran west of Bertincourt, the movement of retreat being to the south-west. So confused had been the fighting of the last two days that the Nineteenth Division which had been on the right of the Fifty-first was now upon their left. Still keeping a closely-knit line and their faces to the foe, the Third Army stretched that night from Sailly in the south to the west of Henin and Monchy. The Fourth Corps, which had been so badly mauled, was strengthened that evening by the inclusion of the Forty-second Division. The towers of Bapaume in the rear showed how far across the ravaged and reconquered land the British line had retreated.

The pressure here described had been upon the left of the Fifth Corps, but the situation upon its right flank had also been very awkward. The terrific weight thrown upon the Ninth Division had, as will be described, driven them farther westward than their left-hand companions of the Forty-seventh Division. The result was a most dangerous gap which exposed the whole rear of the Third Army. The 99th Brigade in the Equancourt district endeavoured after the fall of Fins to fill this front, but they were not nearly numerous enough for the purpose. The result was that the Forty-seventh Division, which moved back on the night of March 22 from Highland Ridge to the Metz-Dessart Wood line, had to reach out more and more upon the right in order to save the situation. In this operation two battalions, the 4th Welsh Fusiliers Pioneers and the 23rd London, sustained most of the attack and suffered very heavily upon March 23, while in the preliminary fighting upon March 22 the 18th London had many losses. By the morning of March 24, the Forty-seventh, beating off all attacks and keeping their position in the unbroken line, had fallen back to a new position, the 142nd Brigade, which formed the rearguard, fighting hard in its retreat, and having to brush aside those groups of Germans who had slipped in at the rear.

The morning of March 24 found the German March 24. torrent still roaring forward in full spate, though less formidable than before, since the heavier guns were far to the rear. Their light artillery, trench-mortars, and machine-guns were always up with the storming columns, and the latter were relieved in a manner which showed the competence of their higher command. It was a day of doubt and difficulty for the British, tor the pressure was everywhere severe, and the line had frayed until it was very thin, while officers and men had reached the last limits of human endurance. At 8:30 in the morning the enemy was pressing hard upon the Seventeenth and Forty-seventh Divisions in the region of Bus and Le Mesnil, where they were endeavouring to keep in touch with the worn remains of the heroic Ninth Division on the left of the Seventh Corps. Sailly Saillisel was still clear of the enemy, but the tide was flowing strongly towards it. The 51st Brigade of the Seventeenth Division occupied this village and threw out its left to the Londoners on the north of them. Bertincourt, which had become a dangerous salient, was evacuated, and the line now ran east of Haplincourt and Rocquigny, the three brigades of the Seventeenth Division occupying this latter village, Barastre, and Villers-au-Flos. On their north were two brigades of the Forty-seventh, the remaining brigade being south of Le Transloy. North of the Forty-seventh Division the Sixty-third Naval Division and the Second Division carried the line on to the junction with the Fourth Corps, where the exhausted Nineteenth Division lay across the Cambrai road, with the even more shattered Fifty-first Division at Riencourt to the north of them. There was some very furious fighting in front of Rocquigny about mid-day, in which the 12th Manchesters of the Seventeenth Division, and the three battalions (18th, 19th, 20th London) of the 141st Brigade made a very desperate resistance. The fighting was continued until the defenders found themselves in danger of being surrounded, when they were withdrawn. The 140th Brigade, under Colonel Dawes, also did great service that day in holding the Germans from getting behind the line. The enemy was so far round that there was the greatest difficulty in clearing the transport, which was only accomplished by the fine rearguard work of the 4th Welsh Fusiliers, aided by the 11th Motor Machine-gun Battery, and 34th Brigade R.F.A.

It was, however, to the south, where the Third and Fifth Armies were intermittently joined and vaguely interlocked, that the danger chiefly lay. About noon, the enemy, finding the weak spot between the two armies, had forced his way into Sailly Saillisel in considerable force, and pushed rapidly north and west from the village. So rapid was the German advance upon the right rear of the Fifth Corps that Rancourt and even Combles were said to have fallen. In vain the Seventeenth Division overstretched its wing to the south, trying to link up with the Seventh Corps. Early in the afternoon Morval and Les Boeufs had gone, and the troops were back upon the mud-and-blood areas of 1916. For the moment it seemed that the British line had gone, and it was hard to say what limit might be put to this very serious advance. By midnight the enemy were north of Bapaume, and had reached Ervillers, while in the south they had taken Longueval, the key village of Delville Wood. It was indeed a sad relapse to see all that the glorious dead had bought with their hearts' blood reverting so swiftly to the enemy. In the north, however, as has already been shown in the story of the Sixth Corps, the enemy's bolt was shot, and in the south his swift career was soon to be slowed and held.

In the Favreuil, Sapignies, and Gomiecourt district, north of Bapaume, the advance was mainly accomplished through the pressure of fresh German forces upon the exhausted and attenuated line of the Forty-first Division, which still struggled bravely, and in the end successfully, against overwhelming odds. In the effort to hold a line the divisions which had been drawn out as too weak for service turned back once more into the fray like wounded men who totter forward to strike a feeble blow for their comrades in distress. The Sixth Division was led in once more, and sustained fresh and terrible losses. Its left fell back to Favreuil, exposing the right wing of the Fortieth Division. The Twenty-fifth Division to the east of Achiet found itself also once more overtaken by the battle. By evening the line had been built up again in this quarter, and the dead-weary British infantry snatched a few hours of sleep before another day of battle. The Nineteenth Division, reduced to 2000 rifles, lay from Le Barque to Avesnes, with the Second upon their right and the Forty-first upon their left, while the whole of this difficult retreat had been covered by the weary but indomitable Highlanders of the Fifty-first.

The really serious situation was to the south of Bapaume upon the old Somme battle-field, where the Germans had made sudden and alarming progress. Their temporary success was due to the fact that the losses in the British lines had contracted the ranks until it was impossible to cover the whole space or to prevent the infiltration of the enemy between the units. The situation required some complete and vigorous regrouping and reorganisation if complete disaster was to be avoided. Up to this point the British Higher Command had been unable to do much to help the two hard-pressed armies, save to supply them with the scanty succours which were immediately available. Now, however, it interfered with decision at the vital spot and in the vital moment. To ensure solidity and unity, Congreve's Seventh Corps, which had been the northern unit of the Fifth Army, became from this time onwards the southern unit of the Third Army, passing under the command of General Byng. With them went the First, Second, and Third Cavalry Divisions, which had been doing really splendid service in the south. Everything north of the Somme was now Third Army. At the same time the three fine and fresh Australian Divisions, the Third, Fourth, and Fifth, were assembling near Doullens in readiness to strike, while the Twelfth British Division was also hurried towards the place of danger. The future was dark and dangerous, but there were also solid grounds for hope.

On the morning of March 25 the line of the Third Army, which had defined itself more clearly during the night, ran from Curlu near the Somme, east of Bazentin, west of Longueval, east of Martinpuich, through Ligny Thilloy, Sapignies, Ervillers, and hence as before. The enemy, whose cavalry were well up and in force, at once began his thrusting tactics in the southern section of the field, and may have expected, after his advance of the day before, to find some signs of weakening resistance. In this he was disappointed, for both the 47th Londoners in front of Contalmaison and the Second Division at Ligny Thilloy beat off several attacks with very great loss to the assailants. The units were much broken and mixed, but the spirit of the individuals was excellent. The pressure continued, however, to be very great, and in the afternoon the line was once more pushed to the westwards. There was severe fighting between Bapaume and Sapignies, where mixed and disorganised units still held the Germans back, but in the late afternoon three distinct gaps had appeared in the line, one between the Seventh and Fifth Corps, one in the Fifth Corps itself in the Pozières area of the Sixty-third Division, and one between the Fifth and the Fourth Corps. Fortunately, the resistance had been so desperate that by the time the Germans had their opportunity they were always so bedraggled themselves that they could not take full advantage of it. The general order of divisions in this area, counting from the south of Contalmaison, was Seventeenth, Forty-seventh, Sixty-third, Second, upon the morning of March 25.

The Seventh Corps, the previous adventures of which will be described under the heading of the Fifth Army, had now become the right wing of the Third Army. It had been strengthened by the advent of the Thirty-fifth

Division, and this unit now covered from west of Curlu to east of Maricourt, where it touched the right of the Ninth Division — if the thin ranks of that gallant band can be dignified by so imposing a title. The Highlanders covered the front to Montauban, where they touched the First Cavalry Division, but beyond that the enemy were pouring round their flank at Bernafoy and Mametz Woods. It was under these trying conditions that the Twelfth Division was ordered up, about noon, to secure the left of the Seventh Corps and entirely stopped the dangerous gap.

Another had formed farther north. The Seventeenth Division, who were on the right of the Fifth Corps, held from Mametz to Contalmaison. Thence to Pozières was held by the Forty-seventh. A gap existed, however, upon their left, between them and the Sixty-third Division, who were gradually falling back upon Courcelette. The left of the Naval Division was also in the air, having lost touch with the right of the Second Division who were covering Le Sars. North of them the Nineteenth Division extended from the west of Grevillers to the south of Bihucourt. The 57th Brigade in the north, under the local command of Colonel Sole, fought a fine rearguard action as the enemy tried to debouch from Grevillers. Considering how terribly mauled this brigade had been a few days before, this was a really splendid performance of these brave Midlanders, and was repeated by them more than once during the day. From their left flank to the north stretched a new division, Braithwaite’s Sixty-second, which had upheld the honour of Yorkshire so gloriously at Cambrai. Their line ran west of Sapignies and joined the Forty-second Division at the point where they touched the Sixth Corps, east of Ervillers.

The front of the Sixty-second stretched from Bucquoy to Puisieux. The enemy kept working round the right flank, and the situation there was very dangerous, for everything to the immediate south was in a state of flux, shreds and patches of units endeavouring to cover a considerable stretch of all-important country. South of Puisieux there was a gap of four or five miles before one came to British troops. Into this gap in the very nick of time came first the 4th Brigade of the Second Australian Division, and later the New Zealand Division in driblets, which gradually spanned the vacant space, It was a very close call for a breakthrough without opposition. Being disappointed in this the Germans upon March 26 spent the whole afternoon in fierce attacks upon the Sixty-second Division, but got little but hard knocks from Braithwaite’s Yorkshiremen. The 186th Brigade on the right threw back a flank to Rossignol Wood to cover the weak side.

Meanwhile the enemy had made a spirited attempt to push through between the Seventh Corps and the Fifth. With this design he attacked heavily, bending back the thin line of the Ninth Division, who were supported by the Twenty-first Division, numbering at this period 1500 men. At four in the afternoon the German stormers got into Maricourt, but they were thrust out again by the Thirty-fifth Division. They had better success farther north, where in the late evening they got round the left flank of the Forty-seventh Division and occupied Pozières. The Londoners threw out a defensive line to the north and awaited events, but the general position between the Fifth and Fourth Corps was serious, as the tendency was for the gap to increase, and for the Fourth Corps to swing north-west while the other turned to the south-west. The Twelfth Division was transferred therefore from the Seventh to the Fifth Corps, and was given a line on the west bank of the Ancre from Albert to Hamel. This move proved in the sequel to be a most effective one. In the evening of this day, March 25, the line from Bray to Albert exclusive was allotted to the Seventh Corps, which was directed to leave a covering party as long as possible on a line from the River Somme to Montauban, in order to safeguard the retirement of the Fifth Army. Then came the Twelfth Division covering Albert, then the remains of the Forty-seventh and of the Second from Thiepval to Beaumont Hamel, all moving across the Ancre. It is said that during the retreat from Moscow an officer having asked who were the occupants of a certain sledge, was answered: “The Royal Regiment of Dutch Guards.” It is in a somewhat similar sense that all mentions of battalions, brigades, and divisions must be taken at this stage of the battle. The right of the Fourth Corps was threatened by an irruption of the enemy at Pys and Irles, who threatened to get by this route round the flank of the Sixty-second Division, but found the Twenty-fifth Division still had vitality enough left to form a defensive flank looking south. At the same time the Forty-second Division had been driven back west of Gomiecourt, and was out of touch with the right of the Sixth Corps. Things were still serious and the future dark. Where was the retreat to be stayed? Was it destined to roll back to Amiens or possibly to Abbeville beyond it? The sky had clouded, the days were mirk, the hanging Madonna had fallen from the cathedral of Albert, the troops were worn to shadows. The twilight of the gods seemed to have come.

It was at that very moment that the first light of victory began to dawn. It is true that the old worn divisions could hardly be said any longer to exist, but the new forces, the Yorkshiremen of the Sixty-second in the north, the New Zealanders and the Twelfth in the centre, and very particularly the three Splendid divisions of Australians in the area just south of Albert, were the strong buttresses of the dam which at last held up that raging tide. Never should our British Imperial troops forget the debt which they owed to Australia at that supreme hour of destiny. The very sight of those lithe, rakish dare-devils with their reckless, aggressive bearing, or their staider fresh-faced brethren with the red facings of New Zealand, was good for tired eyes. There was much still to be done before an equilibrium should be reached, but the rough outline of the permanent positions had even now, in those hours of darkness and danger, been traced across the German path. There was but one gap on the morning of March 26, which lay between Auchonvillers and Hébuterne, and into this the New Zealand Division and one brigade of the Second Australians were, as already stated, hurriedly sent, the New Zealanders supporting and eventually relieving the Second British Division, while the Australians relieved the Nineteenth. The line was attacked, but stood firm, and the New Zealanders actually recaptured Colincamps.

The chief fighting both of this day and of the next fell upon Scott’s Twelfth Division, which lay before Albert, and was occupying the western side of the railway line. So vital was the part played by the Twelfth in this quarter, and so strenuous their work, that a connected and more detailed account of it would perhaps not be out of place. The 37th Brigade was in the north-east of Mesnil and Aveluy Wood, the 36th in the centre, and the 35th on the west bank of the Ancre, with outposts to cover the crossings at Albert and Aveluy. The men were fresh and eager, but had only their rifles to trust to, for they had neither wire, bombs, rifle-grenades. Very lights, or signals, having been despatched at the shortest notice to the battlefield. Their orders were to hold their ground at all costs, and most valiantly they obeyed it. It is only when one sees a map of the German forces in this part of the field, with the divisions marked upon it like flies upon fly-paper, that one understands the odds against which these men had to contend. Nor was the efficiency of the enemy less than his numbers. “The Germans scouted forward in a very clever manner, making full use of the old chalk trenches," says an observer. In the north upon the evening of March 26 the enemy crept up to Mesnil, and after a long struggle with the 6th Queen's forced their way into the village. Shortly after midnight, however, some of the 6th Buffs and 6th West Kents, together with part of the Anson battalion from the Sixty-third Division, won back the village once more, taking twelve machine-guns and a number of prisoners. The other two brigades had not been attacked upon the 26th, but a very severe battle awaited them all upon March 27. It began by a heavy shelling of Hamel in the morning, by which the garrison was driven out. The Germans then attacked southwards down the railway from Hamel, but were held up by the 6th West Kents. The pressure extended, however, to the 9th Royal Fusiliers of the 36th Brigade upon the right of the West Kents, who had a long, bitter struggle in which they were assisted by the 247th Field Company of the Royal Engineers and other elements of the 188th Brigade. This brigade, being already worn to a shadow, was withdrawn, while another shadow, the 5th Brigade, took its place, one of its battalions, the 24th Royal Fusiliers, fighting stoutly by the side of the West Kents. There was a time when the pressure was so great that all touch was lost between the two brigades; but the and line was held during the whole of the day and night of the 27th and on into the 28th. At eleven o'clock in the morning of this day a new attack by fresh troops was made upon the West Kents and the 7th Sussex, and the men of Kent were at one time driven back, but with the aid of the 24th Royal Fusiliers the line was entirely re-established. The whole episode represented forty-eight hours of continual close combat until, upon March 29, this front was relieved by the Second Division. Apart from the heavy casualties endured by the enemy, this gain of time was invaluable at a crisis when every day meant a thickening of the British line of resistance.

The fight upon the right wing of the 36th Brigade had been equally violent and even more deadly. In the fight upon March 27, when the Royal West Kents and 9th Fusiliers were so hard pressed in the north, their comrades of the 5th Berks and 7th Sussex had been very heavily engaged in the south. The Germans, by a most determined advance, drove a wedge between the Berkshires and the Sussex, and another between the Sussex and the Fusiliers, but in each case the isolated bodies of men continued the desperate fight. The battle raged for a time round the battalion headquarters of the Sussex, where Colonel Impey, revolver in hand, turned the tide of fight like some leader of old. The losses were terrible, but the line shook itself clear of Germans, and though they attacked again upon the morning of March 28, they were again beaten off, and heavily shelled as they plodded in their sullen retreat up the hillside to La Boisselle.

Meanwhile, the 35th Brigade had also been fighting for its life to the south. Albert had fallen to the Germans, for it was no part of the plan of defence to hold the town itself, but the exits from it and the lines on each side of it were jealously guarded. At 7 P.M. on March 26 the Germans were in the town, but they had practically reached their limit. Parties had crossed the Ancre, and there were attacked by the 7th Norfolks, who were supported in a long fight upon the morning of the 27th by the 9th Essex and the 5th Northants Pioneer Battalion. The line was held, partly by the aid given by the 51st Brigade of the Seventeenth Division, who numbered just 600 men and were led by Major Cubbon. Whilst the line was held outside Albert, the Germans in the town had a very deadly time, being fired at at short ranges by the 78th and 79th Brigades Royal Field Artillery. The 7th Suffolks were drawn into the infantry fight, which became a more and more desperate affair, involving every man who could be thrown into it, including two battalions, the 1st Artists and 10th Bedfords from the 190th Brigade of the Sixty-third Division. These latter units suffered very heavily from machine-gun fire before ever they reached the firing-line. At 8 A.M. upon March 28 the Germans were still pouring men through Albert, but were utterly unable to debouch upon the other side under the murderous fire of the British. A single company of the 9th Essex fired 15,000 rounds, and the whole slope which faced them was dotted with the German dead. The town of Albert formed a covered line of approach, and though the British guns were still pounding the buildings and the eastern approaches, the Germans were able to assemble in it during darkness and to form up unseen in great numbers for the attack. At ten in the morning of the 28th another desperate effort was made to get through and clear a path for all the hordes waiting behind. The British artillery smothered one attack, but a second broke over the 7th Norfolks and nearly submerged them. Both flanks were turned, and in spite of great work done by Captain Chalmers with his machine-guns the battalion was nearly surrounded. The losses were terrible, but the survivors formed up again half a mile to the west, where they were again attacked in the evening and again exposed to heavy casualties, including their commanding officer. Few battalions have endured more. Late that night the

10th West Yorkshires of the Seventeenth Division came to their relief. The whole of the Twelfth Division was now rested for a time, but they withdrew from their line in glory, for it is no exaggeration to say that they had fought the Germans to an absolute standstill.

We shall now return to March 26, a date which had been darkened by the capture of Albert. Apart from this success upon the German side, which brought them into a town which they had not held for years, the general line in this quarter began to assume the same outline as in 1916 before the Somme battle, so that Hébuterne and Auchonvillers north of Albert were in British hands, while Serre and Puisieux were once more German. The existence of the old trenches had helped the weary army to hold this definite line, and as already shown it had received reinforcements which greatly stiffened its resistance. The dangerous gap which had yawned between the Fourth and Fifth Corps was now successfully filled. In the morning of March 27 all was solid once more in this direction. At eleven on that date, an inspiriting order was sent along the line that the retreat was over and that the army must fight out the issue where it stood. It is the decisive call which the British soldier loves and never fails to obey. The line was still very attenuated in parts, however, and it was fated to swing and sway before it reached its final stability.

The fighting upon the front of the Sixty-second Division at Bucquoy upon March 27 was as heavy as on the front of the Twelfth to the south, and cost the Germans as much, for the Lewis guns had wonderful targets upon the endless grey waves which swept out of the east. The 5th West Ridings, east of Rossignol Wood, were heavily engaged, the Germans bombing their way very cleverly up the old trenches when they could no longer face the rifle-fire in the open. There were three separate strong attacks on Bucquoy, which covered the slopes with dead, but the persistent attempts to get round the right wing were more dangerous. These fell chiefly on the 2/4 Yorks Light Infantry between Rossignol Wood and Hébuterne, driving this battalion in. A dangerous gap then developed between the British and the Australians, but a strong counter-attack of the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry after dark, with the Australians and four tanks co-operating, recovered nearly all the lost ground.

On March 28 there was again a very heavy attack upon the 1 86th Brigade. The stormers surged right up to the muzzles of the rifles, but never beyond them. Over 200 dead were found lying in front of one company.

One isolated platoon of the 5th West Ridings was cut off and was killed to the last man. Farther to the right there were several determined attacks upon the 187th Brigade and the 4th Australian Brigade, the latter being under the orders of the Sixty-second Division. These also were repulsed in the open, but the bombing, in which the Germans had the advantage of a superiority of bombs, was more difficult to meet, and the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry were driven from Rossignol Wood and the ground which they had so splendidly captured the night before.

About 11 A.M. on this day the Forty-first Division had been ordered up to man the east of Gommecourt. A brigade of this division, the 124th, co-operated with the 8th West Yorkshires and some of the Australians in a fresh attack upon Rossignol Wood, which failed at first, but eventually, after dark, secured the north end of the wood, and greatly eased the local pressure. On March 29 and 30 the positions were safely held, and the attacks less dangerous. On the evening of the latter date the Sixty-second Division was relieved by the Thirty-seventh.

Whilst these events had occurred upon the front of the Sixty-second Division, Russell’s New Zealanders were holding the line to the south in their usual workmanlike fashion. From March 26 they held up the Germans, whose main attacks, however, were north and south of them, though March 27 saw several local advances against the Canterburys and the Rifles. On March 30 the New Zealanders hit back again at La Signy Farm, with good results, taking 295 prisoners. It was a smart little victory at a time when the smallest victory was indeed precious.

Reverting now to the general situation upon March 27, the weak point was north and south of the Somme to the south of Albert. Between the river and Harbonnière the left wing of the Fifth Army had been broken, as will be told when we come to consider the operations in that area. The German advance was pouring down the line of the river with the same fierce rapidity with which it had recently thundered forward over the old Somme battlefields. Having annihilated the local resistance on the left bank of the river, where Colonel Horn and 400 nondescripts did all that they could, they were pushing on from Cerisy to Corbie. General Watts of the Nineteenth Corps, whose defence was one of the outstanding features of the whole operations, was hard put to it to cover his left wing, so in loyal co-operation the Third Army north of the river detached the hard-worked Cavalry Corps, who were always called upon at moments of supreme crisis, and who never failed to answer the call. It was actually engaged to the north of the river at the time, but disengaged itself in part, though the enemy was holding Cerisy and Chipilly and had got a bridge across the river which would enable them to get to the rear of General Watts' Corps. The means by which this very dangerous German move was kept within bounds comes within the history of the Fifth Army. Suffice it to say that the cavalry passed over the river and that the Seventh Corps, north of the river, extended to cover the wider front, throwing out a defensive flank along the north bank from Sailly-le-Sec to Aubigny.

Along the whole line to the north the pressure was great all day upon March 27, but the attacks upon the Fourth Corps, which were particularly severe, were repulsed with great loss at Beaumont Hamel, Bucquoy, north of Puisieux, and at Ablainzeville. Near Bucquoy the Sixty-second Division in these two days repelled, as already narrated, eight separate German attacks. This fighting has to be fitted in with that recounted in the previous chapter near Ayette, in connection with the Thirty-first Division, in order to get a complete view of the whole German effort and the unbroken British line. Hamel was the only fresh village to the north of Albert which was taken by the Germans that day.

March 28 was remarkable for the very desperate engagement upon the front of the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps, which has been already described, and which marked the limit of the whole German advance in the northern area. The Fourth Corps farther south had its own share of the fighting, however, as already told in connection with the defence of Bucquoy by the Sixty-second Division. The line was held, however, and save for a small strip of Rossignol Wood, no gain at all came to solace the Germans for very heavy losses.

All through these operations it is worthy of note that an important part was played by reorganised bodies of men, so mixed and broken that no name can be assigned to them. Officers stationed in the rear collected these stragglers, and led them back into gaps of the line, where their presence was sometimes of vital importance. A divisional general, speaking of these curious and irregular formations, says: "There was no panic of any kind. The men of all divisions were quite willing to halt and fight, but as the difficulty of orders reaching them made them uncertain as to their correct action, they came back slowly and in good order. Once they received some definite orders they fell into line and dug themselves in at once." At one point 4000 men were collected in this fashion.

In the Australian area the enemy occupied Dernancourt, but otherwise the whole line was intact. It was still necessary, however, to keep a defensive line thrown back along the north bank of the Somme, as the situation to the south, especially at Marcelcave, was very dangerous. Thus, the Seventh Corps covered this flank from Corbie to Sailly, and then ran north to Treux on the Albert — Amiens Railway. The arrival of the cavalry to the south of the river had spliced the weak section, so that on the morning of March 29 the British commanders from north to south had every cause to be easier in their minds. An inactive day was the best proof of the severity of the rebuff which the Germans had sustained the day before, nor were matters improved from their point of view when upon March 30 they attacked the Australians near Dernancourt and lost some thousands of men without a yard of gain, or when the New Zealanders countered them, with the capture of 250 prisoners and many machine-guns.

This small chronicle of huge events has now brought the southern half of the Third Army to the same date already reached in the previous chapter' by the northern half. The narrative has by no means reached the limit of the fighting carried on by this portion of the line, but equilibrium has roughly been attained, and if the story be now continued it leaves too wide a gap for the reader to cross when he has to return to the history of the Fifth Army upon the 21st of March. Therefore we shall leave the Third Third Army for the time and only return to it when we have followed the resistance of the Fifth Army up to the same date.

Before starting upon this new epic, it would be well to remind the reader of the general bearing of the events already described, as it is very easy in attention to detail to lose sight of the larger issues. The experience of the Third Army then, put in its briefest form, was that the attack upon March 21 fell with terrific violence upon the two central corps, the Sixth and Fourth; that these, after a most valiant resistance, were forced to retire; that the strategical situation thus created caused the Seventeenth Corps in the north and the Fifth Corps in the south to fall back, and. that both of them were then pressed by the enemy; that for six days the army fell slowly back, fighting continual rearguard actions against superior numbers; that this movement involved only a short retreat in the north, but a longer one in the south, until in the Albert region it reached its maximum; that finally the

Germans made a determined effort upon March 28 to break the supple and resilient line which had always faced them, and that this attempt, most gallantly urged, involved the Corps in the north as well as the whole line of the Third Army. The result of this great battle was a bloody defeat for the Germans, especially in the northern sector, where they made hardly any gain of ground and lost such vast numbers of men that their whole enterprise was brought to a complete standstill and was never again resumed in that quarter.

The losses of the Third Army during that week of desperate fighting when, in spite of the heroic efforts of the Medical Corps, the wounded had frequently to be abandoned, and when it was often impossible to get the guns away intact, were very severe. Many divisions which numbered their 9000 infantry upon March 21 could not put 1500 in the line upon March 28. These losses were not, however, so great as they might appear, since the constant movement of troops, carried on very often in pitch darkness, made it impossible to keep the men together. An official estimate taken at the time and subject to subsequent revision put the loss of guns at 206, only 23 of which were above the 6-inch calibre. Forty three others were destroyed. The casualties in the Third Army during the period under review might be placed approximately at 70,000, divided into 10,000 killed, 25,000 missing, and 35,000 wounded. The heaviest losses were in the Fifty-ninth Division, which gave 5765 as its appalling total, but the Sixth Division was little behind it, and the Forty-second, Forty-seventh, and Fifty-first were all over 4000. The Thirty-fifth Division had also a most honourable record, enduring very heavy losses in which the numbers of missing were comparatively small. Its work, however, was chiefly done at a later date than that which closes this chapter. In the estimate of losses there has to be included practically the whole personnel of the devoted battalions who held the forward line upon the first day of the German attack. In connection with the large number of stragglers, who were afterwards gathered together and showed by their conduct that they had no want of stomach for the fight, it is to be remembered that the men had been accustomed to the narrow routine of trench operations, that most of them had no idea of open warfare, and that when they found themselves amidst swift evolutions over difficult country, carried on frequently in darkness, it was very natural that they should lose their units and join the throng who wandered down the main roads and were eventually rounded up and formed into formations at the river crossings or other places where they could be headed off. Among the casualties were many senior officers, including General Bailey of the 142nd Brigade.

IV. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack upon the Fifth Army, March 2

The Fifth Army front — The story of a Redoubt — Attack upon Congreve’s Seventh Corps — Upon Watts’ Nineteenth Corps — Upon Maxse’s Eighteenth Corps — Upon Butler’s Third Corps — Terrific pressure — Beginning of the Retreat — Losses of Guns

IN dealing with the German attack upon the Fifth Army, the first point which should be emphasised is, that heavy as the fighting was in the north, still it was this southern advance which was the main one. The official account of the disposition of the German forces brings this fact out very clearly. From the Sensée River to the Bapaume-Cambrai road they are stated to have had nine divisions in line and eight in close reserve, covering a front of nine miles. In the eight miles from Cambrai road to La Vacquerie they had four divisions. In the southern area from La Vacquerie down to La Fère they had twenty-three divisions in the line and seventeen in reserve, covering a front of over forty miles. This front was defended by eleven British divisions, with three divisions of infantry and three of cavalry in reserve. So far as infantry was concerned the odds were 40 to 14, while the German guns numbered about 3500 to 1300 on the British line. These odds were serious enough if directed equally along the whole area, but when thrown in on special sectors they became more crushing. To add to the total picture of German strength, it should be added that twenty-five fresh divisions were thrown into the fight during the first week, nine upon Scarpe front, three between the Ancre and the Somme, seven between the Somme and Montdidier, and six between Montdidier and the Oise. Against these have to be set British reinforcements, and the influx of French from the south. It was only on the first five days of battle that the odds were so overpoweringly with the Germans.

In this chapter we shall endeavour to gain a superficial view of the general course of events upon the whole front of the Fifth Army upon the fateful March 21. We shall then be in a position to appreciate the situation as it was in the evening and to understand those decisions on the part of General Gough and his subordinates which influenced the subsequent operations.

The front of the Fifth Army extended from its junction with the Third Army in the neighbourhood of La Vacquerie to Barisis, a village some miles south of the Oise, the total frontage being nearly forty miles. This was occupied by four corps. The northern was the Seventh, under General Congreve, a well-known soldier, whose V.C. and shattered arm proclaimed his past services to the Empire. This corps covered the southern part of the dangerous Cambrai salient and extended to the region of Ronssoy. From this point to Maissemy the line was held by General Watts with the Nineteenth Corps. Upon his right, extending as far as north of Essigny, was General Maxse with the Eighteenth Corps. From thence to Barisis lay, the Third Corps under General Butler. All four were soldiers of wide experience, their leader, General Gough, had never failed in any task to which he had laid his hand, and the troops in the line comprised some of the flower of the British army, so that in spite of all disparity of numbers there was a reasonable hope for success. Arrangements had been made by which the French or British could send lateral help to each other; but it must be admitted that the liaison work proved to be defective, and that the succours were slower in arriving, and less equipped for immediate action, than had been expected.

The fortifications along the front of the Fifth Army were of various degrees of strength, depending upon the nature of the ground and upon the time that it had been in British possession, the north being stronger than the south. The Oise, which had been looked upon as an obstacle, and the presence of which had seemed to justify the extraordinarily long sector held by the Third Corps, had to some extent dried up and had ceased to be a real protection. In the main, the defences consisted of a forward line, a chain of small redoubts, each with four machine-guns and all connected by posts; a battle-line which was strongly wired and lay about 3000 yards behind the forward line; and a rear zone, the fortifications of which were not complete. If anything were wanting in the depth of the defences it has to be remembered that we are speaking of a vast tract of country, and that to dig a serviceable trench from London, we will say, to Guildford, furnishing it with sandbags and wire, is a mighty task. There were no enslaved populations who could be turned on to such work. For months before the attack the troops, aided by the cavalry and by several special entrenching battalions, were digging incessantly. Indeed, the remark has been made that their military efficiency was impaired by the constant navvy work upon which they were employed. There is no room for criticism upon this point, for everything possible was done, even in that southern sector which had only been a few weeks in British possession.

Before beginning to follow the history of March 21, it would be well to describe the position and number of the reserves, as the course of events depended very much upon this factor. Many experienced soldiers were of opinion that if they had been appreciably more numerous, and considerably nearer the line, the positions could have been made good. The three infantry divisions in question were the Thirty-ninth, which was immediately behind the Seventh Corps, the Twentieth, which was in the neighbourhood of Ham, and was allotted to the Eighteenth Corps, and the Fiftieth, which was in general army reserve, and about seven hours' march from the line. The First Cavalry Division was in the rear of the Nineteenth Corps, while the Second Cavalry Division was on the right behind the Third Corps. The Third Cavalry Division was in billets upon the Somme, and it also was sent to the help of the Third Corps. Besides these troops the nearest supports were at a distance of at least three days' journey, and consisted of a single unit, the Eighth Division.

The German preparations for the attack had not been unobserved and it was fully expected upon the morning of the battle, but what was not either expected or desired was the ground mist, which seems to have been heavier in the southern than in the northern portion of the line. So dense was it that during the critical hours when the Germans were pouring across No Man's Land it was not possible to see for more than twenty yards, and the whole scheme of the forward defence, depending as it did upon machine-guns, placed in depth and sweeping every approach, was completely neutralised by this freak of nature, which could not have been anticipated, for it was the first time such a thing had occurred for two months. Apart from the machine-guns, a number of isolated field-guns had been sown here and there along the front, where they had lurked in silence for many weeks waiting for their time to come. These also were rendered useless by the weather, and had no protection from the German advance, which overran and submerged them.

The devastating bombardment broke out along the line about five o'clock, and shortly after ten it was known that the German infantry had advanced and had invaded the whole of the forward zone, taking a few of the redoubts, but in most cases simply passing them in the fog, and pushing on to the main British line. As it is impossible to give the experiences of each redoubt in detail, the story of one may be told as being fairly typical of the rest. This particular one is chosen because some facts are available, whereas in most of them a deadly silence, more eloquent than words, covers their fate. The Enghien redoubt was held by Colonel Wetherall with a company of the 2/4 Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry upon the front of the Sixty-first Division. The redoubt formed the battalion headquarters, and was connected to brigade headquarters by a cable buried eight feet deep. In front were two companies of the battalion in the outpost line; behind was the fourth company ready for counter-attack. Early in the morning heavy trench-mortar fire was raining bombs upon the redoubt, and the wire was flying in all directions. At 6 the redoubt was so full of gas that even the masks could not hold it out, so the men were ordered below and put up gas blankets to fend it off. This could be safely done, as when gas is so thick it is not possible for the stormers to advance. At 6:15, what with fog and gas and blurred respirators, it was hardly possible to see anything at all. At 7:30 the gas cleared and there was a shower of high explosive shells with shattering effect. At 9:30 the barrage lifted and the garrison rushed up from their shelters and manned their posts, but the fog rolled white and thick across their vision. The cloud banked right up to their wire, while from behind it came all the noises of the pit. So nerve-shaking was the effect that some of the outlying men came creeping into the redoubt for human company. At 9.40 the whizzing of bullets all around showed that the infantry was on the move. The garrison fired back into the mist, whence came vague shoutings and tramplings. A request was cabled back for a protective barrage, but the inadequate reply showed that the British guns had suffered in the shelling. Suddenly the mist darkened at one point; it broke into running figures, and a wave of men rushed forward, scrambled through the broken wire, and clambered into the redoubt. The Oxfords rushed across and bombed them back into the mist again. There was a pause, during which the attack was reorganised, and then at 11 o’clock the German stormers poured suddenly in from three sides at once. The garrison stood to it stoutly and drove them out, leaving many bodies on the broken wire. The fort was now entirely surrounded, and there was a fresh attack from the rear which added fifty or sixty more to the German losses. At 11:45 there was some lifting of the fog, and Colonel Wetherall endeavoured to get across to the village, 300 yards behind him, to see if help could be obtained. He found it deserted. Stealing back to his fort he was covered suddenly by German rifles, was dragged away as a prisoner, but finally, late in the evening, escaped and rejoined the main body of his own battalion. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Cunningham had taken over the defence of Enghien redoubt, assisted by Lieutenant Richards with the machine-guns. Hour after hour fresh attacks were repelled, but showers of bombs fell in the confined space, and the garrison were continually thinned out. Despairing messages —"What shall we do? What shall we do?" — were sent back over the cable, but nothing could be done, for these outliers are the *enfants perdus* of the army, marked from the first for destruction. Finally, at 4:30, the great deep all around them sent one heavy wave to submerge them, and the cable was for ever silent.

Such is the typical history of a redoubt. Some succumbed more readily, some survived until the afternoon of the next day; but the difference may sometimes have depended upon the various degrees of severity of attack, which was by no means the same upon all sectors. The total effect was the complete destruction of the eleven gallant battalions which held the advanced line of the Fifth Army, and the loss of all material therein. One can but hope that the enemy paid a full price. Occasionally a sudden rise of the mist gave the defence a splendid opening for their machine-guns. On one occasion such a chance exposed a German officer standing with a large map in his hand within thirty yards of the fort, his company awaiting his directions beside him. Few of them escaped.

We shall now follow the line of the Fifth Army from the north. The Seventh Corps upon the left consisted of the Ninth (Tudor), the Twenty-first (Campbell), and the Sixteenth (Hull) Divisions in the order named, and it carried the line down as far as Ronssoy, where it joined on to Watts' Nineteenth Corps. The Ninth Division had two brigades in the line, and all the battalions both of the Twenty-sixth and of the South Africans were in the forward zone and exposed to the usual devastating losses. Their front joined that of the Forty-seventh Division at Fifteen Ravine in the north, and the Twenty-first at Chapel Hill in the south. About eleven o'clock the main advance of the Germans struck up against this front. There was no action upon the left between Gauche Wood and the canal, though the bombardment was exceedingly heavy. On the right in the neighbourhood of Gauche Wood the fighting was very severe all day, and the stormers were able to make little progress, although they attacked again and again with the utmost resolution. This attack fell mainly upon the South African Brigade, who held on with the same firm courage which they had shown at Delville Wood, and proved once more that there are no better soldiers in all the vast army of the Empire. It was only at this point, however, near the junction with the Twenty-first Division that the Ninth Division was attacked, for the German infantry was crushed by the artillery fire upon the left in front of Gonnelieu, so that the total losses of the Ninth upon this murderous day were probably less than those of other divisions in the Fifth Army. Gauche Wood was continually attacked, but the Quentin redoubt to the immediate north of it was left alone during the whole day. It was the 2nd or Natal South African regiment which held the extreme front, and after a very fine resistance they were driven through the wood, until at 11:30 the Germans held it all, but the Africans still clung to the system of Chapel trenches to the immediate west and south of it. To this they held all day, being much helped by a local rise in the mist about eleven, which enabled the guns in Quentin redoubt to see their targets in the south. Finally, the Germans were compelled to dig in in Gauche Wood, and give up the attempt to get farther. No other point was gained upon the Ninth Divisional front.

Meanwhile, the enemy had pressed their attack with great violence upon the immediate right, where it fell with special strength upon the 2nd Lincolns of the Twenty-first Division. At 12 they were well behind the right rear of the Africans, who were compelled to throw back a flank. The Lincolns held on splendidly, however, and the danger was arrested. At 3:30 a new concentration of the enemy developed in front of Vaucelette Farm, and was heavily shelled by the British guns. At 5 o’clock the fight was very desperate upon Chapel Hill on the southern limit of the South African area, where the Lincolns were still holding out but were being gradually pressed back. The 4th South African Regiment (South African Scots) was therefore ordered to counter-attack in this direction, which was done with great dash, the position upon Chapel Hill being re-established. Such was the general situation when at 8:15 orders were issued for the withdrawal of all units to the rear zone. This was done during the night, the general line of retirement being towards Sorel and Heudicourt, while the Scottish Brigade kept position upon the left. The order to retire came as a complete surprise, as all was well upon the immediate front, but the reason given was the penetration of the line at other points.

Upon the right of the Scots and South Africans of the Ninth Division the line was held by Campbell’s Twenty-first Division, consisting of the Leicester Brigade and two brigades of North Country troops, all of them the veterans of many battles. They covered the ground from south of Gauche Wood in the north to Epehy in the south. Two brigades were in the line, the 62nd in the north and the 110th in the south, and were exposed all day to a very severe attack which they held up with great steadiness and resolution. Heudicourt, Peizière, and Epehy were the scenes of particularly severe fighting. In the evening these places, and the whole line through Quentin Ridge and east of Gouzeaucourt, were still firmly held by the defenders. It may truly be said that along the whole fifty-mile front of battle there was no point where the enemy met with a more unyielding resistance than in the area of the Twenty-first Division. During the long day three German divisions essayed the task of forcing Epehy and overcoming the defence of Chapel Hill, but as the night drew in all three lay exhausted in front of their objectives, and there would certainly have been no British retirement had it not been for the movements in the other sections of the line. Only at one seventh post had the enemy made any lodgment, namely at Vaucelette Farm, and here he could have been thrown out by a counter-attack had the general situation permitted it. The Leicesters and the Northumberland Fusiliers upheld the fame of their historic regiments on this day of battle, but two of the outstanding exploits in the fight lie to the credit of the Lincolns, who kept an iron grip upon Chapel Hill, and to the 15th Durhams, who made a dashing counter-attack which swept back the German advance when it tried to penetrate between Epehy and Chapel Hill. The village of Peizière was held by the 7th Leicesters of the 110th Brigade, who fought as this brigade has always fought and held the Germans out. Once with the help of flame-throwers they gained a lodgment among the houses, but the brave Midlanders came back to it and threw them out once more. It was a party of this same Leicester regiment which held the farm of Vaucelette, and fought it out to the very last man before they suffered it to pass from their keeping.

The fighting upon Chapel Hill was particularly severe, and was the more important as this eminence, lying almost upon the divisional boundary, enfiladed the Ninth Division to the north. There was a trench in front of the hill, called Cavalry Trench, and a farm behind called Revelon Farm, and the battle swung and swayed all day, sometimes the British holding all the ground, and sometimes being pushed back as far as the farm. The 1st Lincolns gained great honour that day, but they could not have held the hill were it not for the co-operation of the South Africans, who twice helped to retake it when it had been temporarily lost. The 11th Royal Scots from the Ninth Division Reserve Brigade struck in also with effect when the enemy filtered round the north edge of the hill and worked to the rear of it. They had got as far as Genin Copse when the Royal Scots attacked and hunted them back once more. The weak point of the Twenty-first Division lay upon their right where they had to throw out a defensive flank 3000 yards deep. They had not troops enough to cover this ground, and it was only the splendid work of the batteries of the 94th Brigade R.F.A. which prevented a disaster.

The Sixteenth Irish Division (Hull) lay upon the right of the Twenty-first Division, carrying the line to the south of Ronssoy. This division had two brigades in the line, the 48th to the left and the 49th to the right, and it appears to have sustained an attack which was of a peculiarly crushing nature. It cannot be denied that the wretched parochial politics which tear Ireland in two, and which are urged with such Celtic extravagance of language, cannot have a steadying effect upon national troops, but none the less every soldier will admit that the men who carried Guillemont and breasted the slope of the Messines Ridge have proved themselves to be capable of rising to the highest exercise of military virtue. If, therefore, they gave way upon this occasion while others stood, the reason is to be sought rather in the extra severity of the attack, which had the same crushing effect upon other divisions both in the north and in the south of the line. All these brigades were desperately engaged during the day, as was the 1 1 6th Brigade of the Thirty-ninth Division which came to the help of the Irish, while the other two brigades of this supporting division endeavoured to strengthen the line of defence in the rear zone with a switch line from Saulcourt to Tincourt Wood. On the right the attack was too severe to be withstood, and not only the advance line but the battle position also was deeply penetrated, the Germans pouring in a torrent down the Catelet valley and occupying Ronssoy and Lempire, by which they turned the flanks both of the Twenty-first in the north and of the Sixty-sixth Division in the south. Especially fierce was the resistance offered by the 48th Brigade in the north, some units of which were swung round until they found themselves sharing with the Twenty-first Division in the defence of Epehy. The 2nd

Munsters lived up to their high reputation during a long day of hard fighting, and were for the third or fourth time in the war practically destroyed. Colonel Ireland was hit about 10:30 in the morning, and one company, which counter-attacked near Malassise Farm, was annihilated in the effort; but the survivors of the battalion were undismayed, and under Major Hartigan they continued to oppose every effort of the stormers. One of the features of the battle in this area was the fight maintained all day by C Company scattered in little parties over Ridge Reserve and Tetard Wood. Lieutenant Whelan was the soul of this fine defence, contesting every bay of his trench, and continuing to rally and lead his dwindling band until noon of the next day. A road ran past this position, and it was all-important for the enemy to move their artillery down it in order to press the retreat; but the Irishmen shot down the horse teams as they came up until the passage was blocked with their bodies. Finally, all the scattered bands rallied near Epehy village where, under Captain Chandler, who was killed in the contest, they fought to the last, until in the late evening their cartridges gave out, and the gallant Hartigan, with the headquarter staff of the battalion, was overwhelmed. Lieutenant Whelan, meanwhile, held his post near Epehy until noon of March 22, when he and his men fired their last round and threw their last bomb before surrender. The defence of Malassise Farm by Lieutenant Kidd and his men was also a glorious bit of fighting to the last man and the last cartridge.

The general situation upon the front of the Seventh Corps on the night of March 21 was that the Sixteenth Division, reinforced by the 116th Brigade, held the main battle positions, save on the extreme right, as far north as St. Emilie. Thence the line followed approximately the railway round and east of Epehy, in the region of the Twenty-first Division. East of Chapel Hill and Chapel Crossing it entered the holding of the Ninth Division, and passed west of Gauche Wood, through Quentin redoubt and so to the original line. Behind this indented position the 118th and 117th Brigades with the Sappers and Pioneers of the Thirty-ninth Division were hard at work upon the switch line, which should form a cover for retreat or a basis for reorganisation.

Upon the right of the Seventh Corps lay Watts’ Nineteenth Corps, which had two divisions in the line, the Sixty-sixth Lancashire Territorial Division (Malcolm) in the north, and the Twenty-fourth Division (Daly) in the south. They covered a front from south of Ronssoy to south of Maissemy. The

Lancashire Division, the same which behaved so splendidly in the mud battle of Broodseinde, had all three brigades in the front, covering 4000 yards, and were exposed all day to a most terrific assault. From the north they were in the order 197th, 199th, 198th. To the south of them an even more strenuous attack was launched upon the Twenty-fourth Division, which had two brigades in the line. These were the 17th upon the left and the 72nd upon the right, with the 1st North Staffords, 8th West Kents, 1st Rifle Brigade, and 8th Queen’s in front. About 11 o’clock the news came that the enemy was pushing through at the point of junction with the Eighteenth Corps upon the right, where there seems to have been a gap of some hundreds of yards between divisions, and later that they had penetrated into the village of Hargicourt in the rear of the Sixty-sixth Division. There was heavy fighting all day, and by evening the whole forward zone held by the 2/3 Lanes Fusiliers, East Lancashires, and Manchesters had passed into the hands of the enemy. Colonel Stokes-Roberts of the former battalion being among the casualties. The twelve redoubts which constituted the main defences of the. battle zone held out stoutly all day, all three brigades fighting with great valour. The Germans were continually pushing in, however, upon the right of the Twenty-fourth Division and enlarging their gains in that direction, so that the First Cavalry Division was called up, and the Pioneer Battalion of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was thrown in on the right of the Sixty-sixth Division near Roisel to form a defensive flank. By 1 o’clock the battle zone of the Twenty-fourth Division was seriously compromised. The 72nd Brigade upon the right had been turned and the village of Maissemy had been taken by the Germans. Stone’s 17th Brigade Corps held a tight grip, however, upon the hamlet of Le Verguier, and though many assaults were made upon it the place remained untaken in the evening. In the area of the Sixty-sixth Division the enemy was still gaining ground, however, and they had pushed on from Hargicourt to Templeux, where a counter-attack by the 6th Lancashire Fusiliers held them for a time. The fighting continued to be very bitter until late in the evening, for though the Germans had infiltrated all the ground between the redoubts, they were unable to overcome their resistance, or to take possession of their gains. At 10:15 the order from General Watts was that there should be no retreat, and that however great the odds against them — and it was manifest that they were indeed very great — the two divisions should prepare for a fight to a finish. Meanwhile, the Fiftieth Division

(Stockley) in army reserve had been ordered, after a march of seven hours, to support the line of the Nineteenth Corps, taking up a position in the rear from the Omignon River to the Cologne River, upon a front which had been partly wired. With the early morning of March 22 there came a renewed German attack which forced back the left of the Sixty-sixth, who were always much handicapped by the deep incursion the enemy had made into the area of the Sixteenth Division to the north, which continually endangered their flank and even their rear.

The battle was soon general along the whole front, and everywhere the resistance was most desperate, though the troops were gradually pressed back by the ever-increasing weight of the attack as Hindenburg's legions came rolling in from the east. Many a bitter curse went up that day from overwrought men against the perjured traitors on the Russian front, who to ease their own burden had thrown a double weight upon those who had helped and trusted them. At 11:30 in the morning the post of Le Verguier, which had been held so long and so gallantly by the 8th West Surreys, was at last carried by storm and its brave garrison destroyed or taken, though Colonel Peirs, who had been the soul of this defence, dashed out, revolver in hand, at this last moment, and got away in the mist. The whole line of the Twenty-fourth Division was shaken by the gap thus created. The pressure was very great also at Roisel, and the 151st Brigade from the Fiftieth Division had to be hurried up in order to hold back the advance down the valley of the Cologne, which would have turned the right flank of the Lancashire men to the north. The 9th Sussex was heavily engaged in this quarter and suffered severely. About noon a valiant attempt was also made by some tanks and dismounted troopers . to turn the tide by recapturing the village of Hervilly, which had some temporary success. The German penetration had been too deep, however, and there was very pressing danger of isolation unless the corps fell back. This they did in the late afternoon and evening, passing through the ranks of the Fiftieth Division behind them. "They were nearly all gassed and dead weary," said one who observed them as they passed. The 11th Hussars and 19th Entrenching Battalion most gallantly covered the retreat. The enemy were close at their heels, however, in great force and most aggressive mood, as the Fiftieth Division soon discovered. This unit will be remembered as the famous Yorkshire Territorial division who helped to turn the tide at the second battle of Ypres, and have shown their worth upon many fields; but on this occasion the odds were too heavy, though they held the enemy for the rest of the day.

The lower half of the line between the Omignon and the Cologne rivers was held by Riddell’s 149th Brigade of Northumberland Fusiliers, while the northern half was held by Rees’ 150th Brigade of Yorkshiremen. Against this thin wall dashed the full tide of the German advance as it swept on in the wake of the Nineteenth Corps. It was a long and hard fight in which the enemy had heavy losses, especially in front of Poeuilly, where considerable sheets of wire lay in front of the position of the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers. It was a most gallant affair — gallant on both sides. Their Colonel, Robinson, laid out his machine-guns in the long grass upon each side of this wire and enfiladed the German line with most murderous results. In the south the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers were attacked in front and on the right flank, and the pressure was so great that they had to abandon Caulaincourt, which was then recaptured and again abandoned by the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers from the supporting line. The enemy, with his usual wile, telephoned from the mausoleum, a central building, that reinforcements be sent to that point. Upon asking the name of the officer and getting no reply, General Riddell, in local command, turned on five batteries of 18-pounders and blew the mausoleum to pieces. At Poeuilly also there had been two successful counter-attacks, but the enemy was swarming round the southern flank in great numbers, and the river, which is not more formidable than an average South of England trout stream, was of little use as a protection. An important point named Nobescourt Farm, lying near the junction of brigades, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and the village of Poeuilly was also taken. By evening the Fiftieth Division had done its work, however, as it had held up the pursuit and enabled the Nineteenth Corps to reach the line of the Somme without severe pressure. That night they received orders to withdraw, which were carried out in the morning of March 23, Martin’s 149th Brigade in the south making a show of fighting in order to cover the movements of their companions in the north who were moving over a perfectly flat plain from Mons to Brie. Finally, General Riddell destroyed Tertry bridge and dropped back to St. Christ. During all these operations the German infantry were moving slowly forward in successive lines of skirmishers, about a thousand yards from the British, who retired in leisurely fashion, continually turning and holding them up, so that the whole spectacle was exactly that of a well-ordered field-day. When the main body had reached the bridges, a single company of the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers lay out in the higher ground, under the leadership of Captain Proctor, who received the D.S.O. for his able conduct of the operation. This company held up a brigade for two hours, and then, their comrades being safely across, they withdrew in their turn, leaving half their number behind them. Every one being across, both the St. Christ and Brie bridges were blown up. The latter was a brand-new construction and was in charge of an American officer of engineers who distinguished himself by his cool courage, starting out alone, and bringing across the river a train full of ammunition which lay upon the farther side. The Twenty-fourth Division had crossed at Falvy, the rearguard action being fought by the depleted battalions of the 72nd Brigade. Colonel Pope of the 1st North Staffords, Colonel Charlton of the 4th Yorks, and Colonel Le Fleming of the 9th East Surreys were among those who had fallen.

The Nineteenth Corps was now covering a total front of 20,000 yards along the western bank of the stream, which is shallow and marshy in these reaches. Their line was from Rouy-le-Crane in the south to near Peronne, with some small outposts to the east of the river. The Eighth Division (Heneker) had come up on the morning of March 23, and occupied the southern end of the line, with the remains of the Twenty-fourth, the Sixty-sixth, and the Fiftieth extending to the north. There we shall leave them while we return to the history of the front line upon March 21.

On the right of the Nineteenth Corps was Maxse’s Eighteenth Corps covering the ground from the Omignon valley to a point just west of St. Quentin, with three divisions in the line. These were the Sixty-first on the left, the Thirtieth in the centre, and the Thirty-sixth in the south. The Sixty-first Division, under General Colin Mackenzie, was one of those fine second-line Territorial units which have done so well in the later stages of the war. All three brigades were in the line, the 183rd Brigade of Scottish troops in the north, the 184th in the centre, and the 182nd in the south, both of the last being from the South Midlands. The 2/4th Oxfords, 2/5th Gordons, and 2/8th Worcesters were the devoted battalions which held the forward line, and so fierce was their defence that the battle-line was able to maintain itself along the whole divisional front, in spite of very valiant efforts upon the part of the German stormers, who showed absolute contempt of death in their efforts to cut the wire at those points where their artillery had failed to do so.

The story of the Enghien redoubt and its devoted defence has already been told, but belongs to the record of this division. The battle zone ran in the main along the eastern edge of the Bois d’Holnon, and this was desperately defended from morning to night. In the afternoon the high ground south of Maissery, in the left rear of the division and outside their area, had been captured, and the 2/4th Berkshires endeavoured to help the Twenty-fourth Division in their counter-attack. The Berkshires lost heavily in this venture, and their gallant Colonel, Dimmer, who had won the V.C. in the early days of the war, was shot through the head leading his men on horseback to the very lip of a trench full of Germans. Horse and groom fell before the same volley. The Sixty-first resumed its line after this action in the north, and it maintained it intact until evening, the three divisions of the German attack being practically held up by the three heroic battalions in the front line, so that the full weight of attack never reached the main line. It was as solidly established in the evening as in the morning. The position of the enemy on their left rear had become more and more menacing, as after taking Maissemy they had pressed on to Villescholes. This led to dangerous attacks from the north on the early morning of March 22, in the course of which the 183rd Brigade had to fight desperately to preserve the flank of the division. The weight of this fighting fell chiefly upon the 8th Argyll and Sutherlands, who counter-attacked most valiantly, aided by the remains of the gallant 2/4 Berkshires, who had suffered so severely the day before. Colonel M’Alpine Downie of the Argylls was wounded, and died next day. Even when the enemy had got as far westward as Vermand, the Sixty-first Division was still rooted to its ground, and the Highlanders on the left flank recovered by a spirited advance nine guns which had been overrun by the German advance between Maissemy and Villescholes. The 9th Royal Scots extended their line to the westward, and facing north presented an unbroken front to the constant hordes of Germans who were moving down the northern slopes of the Omignon valley in the direction of Caulaincourt. It was not until late in the afternoon of March 22 that the Sixty-first Division retired, still fighting, to a prepared position north of Vaux.

Next to the Sixty-first Division was the Thirtieth under General Williams. This division had two brigades — the 21st (Goodman) and the 90th (Poyntz) — in the line, the latter officer being known to all sportsmen as the famous Somerset batsman. The front of 4000 yards was from the immediate west of St. Quentin to the Somme, and included two notable strong points, Manchester Hill and the Épine du Dallon. The 89th Brigade under General Stanley was in the immediate rear. It was not used as a unit during the day, but the three fine battalions of the King’s Liverpool Regiment, the 17th, 18th, and 19th, were dispersed in the evening to reinforce three separate units.

The fighting along the front of the Thirtieth Division was of a very desperate character. The forward battalions were the 2nd Wilts and the 16th Manchesters. Rushing through the gaps in their line of defence, the Germans flung themselves upon the battle zone, where after long fighting which lasted into the afternoon they gained possession of the two posts already mentioned, and worked into the main battle-line at Savy. Both brigades lost very heavily during these attacks, but the addition of the 18th and 19th King’s from Stanley’s brigade helped them to carry on under most trying conditions. Both these reinforcing battalions came in for severe fighting in the evening, and the 18th King’s, which joined in a counter-attack by the 21st Brigade, was particularly hard hit, while the 19th had hardly an officer left, the colonel falling at the head of his men. As a final result of the day’s battle both the brigades were somewhat driven in upon the front, but each held its . line and was ready to renew the battle next morning. The 2nd Bedfords particularly distinguished themselves during this day of incessant fighting, making no less than six successful counter-attacks in order to clear their sector when it was partly occupied by the Germans. Up to 4 o’clock in the afternoon of March 22 the Thirtieth were still firm in their positions, and it was only the general situation of the Army which finally compelled them to abandon them. They dropped back upon the general line of Ham, where the three scattered battalions of the 89th Brigade had been ordered to form one unit once more. Of the Manchester men in the front rank upon the day of battle hardly a man ever got away, and their splendid Colonel Elstob lay dead with the greater part of his battalion around him. He had said: “The Manchesters will defend Manchester Hill to the last,” and he lived and died true to his word. A superior officer reporting upon this episode said: “At about 11 o’clock Colonel Elstob informed me that the Germans had broken through and were swarming round the redoubt. At about 2 P.M. he said that most of his men were killed or wounded, including himself; that they were all getting dead beat, that the Germans had got into the redoubt and hand-to-hand fighting was going on. He was still quite cheery. At 3:30 he was spoken to on the telephone and said very few were left and that the end was nearly come. After that no further answer could be got.”

On the right of the Thirtieth Lancashire Division was the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division under the command of General Nugent, one of the many good soldiers who were trained by South Africa for this greater ordeal. That scrambling and difficult campaign has, though its lessons were most imperfectly apprehended, proved to be an invaluable preparation for the leaders in the world’s war of the future. The Ulster division had all three brigades in the line, the 109th (Ricardo) to the north, the 107th (Witteycombe) in the centre, and the 108th (Griffiths) in the south. The three outlying battalions were the 12th and 15th Irish Rifles and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, which suffered the common fate of all who held that post of danger. Not a man returned, save a few of the Irish Rifles, who swam down the canal that night.

The front held by the Ulstermen was from the Somme on the left to the neighbourhood of Urvillers Battle on the right, a distance of 6000 yards. Three German divisions attacked upon this frontage, but the edge of their onslaught was blunted by the splendid resistance of the three doomed battalions in the van. None the less, it surged with great violence all along the edge of the battle zone, but it was everywhere held save only at the hamlet of Contescourt, where the Germans obtained a lodgment. The whole defence of the division was imperilled, however, by the fact that the Germans had bitten deeply into the British line to the south of the 108th Brigade, getting as far as Essigny on their right rear, with the effect that a deep defensive flank had to be thrown back in this direction, which used up all the reserves of the division. Thus, when the Germans late that day and in the following morning pressed their advantage at Contescourt, and were stopped by the magnificent resistance of the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers at the neighbouring village of Fontaine-les-Clercs, they should have been permanently held, as they were driven back in twelve successive attacks. As there were no reserves available for a counter-attack, however, the defence was gradually worn down by a great disparity of numbers, so that by March 22 the Germans had advanced into the sector of the line which ran down the course of the rivulet which is dignified by the name of the Somme.

Such, in brief, was the experience of the three divisions which held the line of the Eighteenth Corps on March 21. The Twentieth Division in reserve was not employed during the day, nor were its services needed, for

Maxse’s Corps, though attacked by eight German divisions, was able to hold its ground, thanks largely to the splendid resistance of the shock-absorbing battalions in the front-line. Up to 4 P.M. of March 22 the enemy had made no permanent advance into the battle zone, but at that hour both flanks of the Corps had been turned at Maissemy in the north and at Essigny in the south, and the alternative was retirement or absolute isolation and destruction. It may then briefly be said that, thanks to the resolute resistance of the battalions in the forward zone, and to the solidity of those in the battle zone, the Eighteenth Corps was able to maintain its ground until it was ordered to leave it, and that save for some indentation of its front, especially at Contescourt, its main positions remained inviolate.

Upon the right of the Eighteenth Corps lay the Third Corps, which covered the enormous front of 30,000 yards. Of the nine brigades in the corps, eight were in the line and only one in reserve, so that between the tenuity of the line and its want of support it was an extremely tempting mark for the German assault, especially as by ignoring the two brigades south of the Oise they could concentrate their whole force upon the six brigades in line in the north. It is true that the wide marshes of the Oise offered an impediment which covered part of the British line, but as already remarked, the waters were exceedingly low for the time of year, and the Germans very cleverly overcame whatever obstacle was left.

The three divisions which formed Butler’s Third Corps were the Fourteenth Light Division (Cowper), which extended as far south as Moy, the Eighteenth Division (Lee) covering the ground between Moy and Travecy, and finally the Fifty-eighth Division (Cator) extending to Barisis, five or six miles south of the Oise. As usual, we will take them from the north, confining the narrative to the point at which the fighting in the front line came to an end.

The Fourteenth Division had all three brigades in the line, their order being 41st, 42nd, and 43rd from the north. This division, composed entirely of light infantry battalions, has had more than its share of desperate adventures during its service in France. Again and again, notably in the fire-attack before Ypres in 1915, in the third battle of Ypres, and upon the present occasion, they have been exposed to ordeals of the most tremendous kind. Their frontage was 5500 yards, which was not excessive as compared with that of other divisions, and it contained some high ground north of Essigny which should have been valuable for observation and defence, but none the less the attack was so severe and so concentrated that it rapidly made an impression upon the defence, which became more serious as the day wore on. The three outlying battalions were the 8th and 9th King's Royal Rifles and the 6th Somerset Light Infantry, and these, as usual, were sacrificed almost to a man. The enemy then stormed in upon the line, making his advance here, as elsewhere, with a systematic skill which showed how thoroughly he had been drilled and exercised behind the line. This process of infiltration by which small bodies here, there, and everywhere extend their advance where they find a cranny into which to push and establish machine-gun posts which, unless they be instantly rooted out, soon grow into formidable positions, shows the remarkable adaptability of the German soldier — a quality with which, it must be admitted, the world had not credited him in the past.

It may also be admitted that we yielded too easily to such tactics, and that there was a tendency, as Third was pointed out in a memorandum from the Higher Command, to consider a position as untenable because it was outflanked, instead of closing in upon the intruders and pressing each side of the nut-crackers against the intrusive nut. In many cases this was done, but in others small bodies of daring men with a few machine-guns were able to dislodge whole lines which they had managed to enfilade. On this occasion the Germans pushed in upon both flanks of the Fourteenth Division, but their most serious gains occurred about mid-day, when they captured Manufacture Farm north of Essigny, and .shortly afterwards the weighbridge west of that village. The 41st Brigade on the left were driven out of their headquarters, while the 43rd on the right were pushed back to the Gibercourt road. A very weak point was evidently developing, so General Butler hurried up part of the Second Cavalry Division (Greenly), and also his only spare infantry brigade, the 54th (Sadleir-Jackson) in order to make a line of resistance at the switch line between Camas and Lizerolles. About 1:30 the Germans had got in between Essigny and Benay and taken Lambay Wood. In view of their accelerating advance and the ominous reports which were also coming in from the 173rd Brigade on the right. General Butler continued to build up his rear line, putting into it not only all three brigades of the Second Cavalry and the 54th Infantry Brigades, but also the 12th and Entrenching Battalions, thus covering the whole rear zone of the corps. Isolated parties of the 41st Brigade were holding out in the main position upon the left, but Hinacourt had also fallen and the line was slowly rolling westward, so that by evening the Fourteenth Division had practically lost its hold of the whole of its battle position.

Things were going better, however, with the Eighteenth Division, which held 9000 yards of front in the centre of the Third Corps. As this great frontage was maintained by only two brigades, the 53rd (Higginson) in the north and the 55th (Wood) in the south, it must have been very thinly held, and even admitting that the pressure was less than on either of the wing divisions, it was none the less a fine achievement to keep a grip on so wide an area. Three battalions were in the forward zone, the 8th Berks on the left, the 7th West Kents in the centre, and the 7th Buffs on the right, all of whom did splendidly, so that the defence of Fort Vendeuil, Cork, Cardiff, Durham, and other redoubts upon this point form a whole series of epics. Besides the infantry, the 79th Company Royal Engineers shared in the peril and the glory of this defence. The wires connecting up these forward garrisons were speedily cut, and no news came back all day, save the rattle of their rifle-fire. The first definite tidings of the German advance came back through the fog about 12 o’clock, when some gunners emerged from its folds and announced that the advanced guns had been overrun by the enemy. Soon after came a runner with a message from Colonel Crosthwaite of the West Kents to say that his headquarters was surrounded, and asking for a barrage on one side of it. A second message arrived from him: “Still holding, 12:30 P.M. Boche all round within fifty The yards except rear. Can only see forty yards, so it is difficult to kill the blighters.” It was the last word.

At 1:30 the enemy had closed in on the battle zone, and the high ground at Cerisy in the area of the 53rd Brigade had been lost. On the front of the 55th Brigade at the same hour strong parties of the enemy who had pushed between the redoubts in the fog had occupied Vendeuil, while a section of guns in Ronquenet Wood had been rushed by them. The reserve company of the Buffs in front of the battle zone fought desperately against these intruders, while near the Dublin redoubt Captain Dennis fought his guns till 5 P.M., inflicting heavy losses upon the Germans, who collected in masses in front of the wire at this point. Eventually his gun-pits were rushed, all the gunners being killed or taken. The main weight of the attack fell upon the 53rd Brigade upon the left, and by the middle of the afternoon all the redoubts upon this front had gone, while the 55th was still well covered. The battle zone, however, was still intact, though the enemy massed heavily in front of Moulin Farm and opposite the switch line from Vendeuil to Ly-

Fontaine. They came forward several times, but the mist had risen and the rifle-fire was accurate so that they made no progress. At Caponne Farm there was also a brisk attack, but the 10th Essex, the only battalion left in the brigade, held firmly to its position, though much plagued by low-flying aeroplanes who skimmed their very heads, while the British Headquarters was equally disturbed by a captured anti-tank gun with which the Germans kept up a point-blank fire. To ease the pressure upon this wing, General Lee put in the 8th East Surreys from divisional reserve to thicken the line in the neighbourhood of Remigny.

At 3:30 the covering forts upon the front of the 55th Brigade were still holding out. Fort Vendeuil had made a particularly fine defence and broke up a heavy attack. There was lamp signalling from this fort till 6 P.M., when the lamp went out for ever. The 7th Buffs, who had charge of all this portion of the battle front, did a magnificent day’s work, and the famous regiment to which this battalion belongs has won no prouder laurels in all the centuries. Little is known of their fate save the pregnant facts that the front was screened all day, that repeated messages for help were received up to 8:30 in the evening, and that rifle-fire was heard from their posts till midnight. Bald words — and yet to him who can see they convey a sure picture of fading light, dwindling cartridges, and desperate men, baited from all sides and dying with clenched teeth amid the ever-flowing German hordes.

About 4 o’clock the Germans had not only penetrated deeply into the battle zone of the Fourteenth Division to the north, but had also dented that of the Fifty-eighth in the south, so that both wings of the Eighteenth were in a perilous state. The East Surreys were pushed forward, therefore, into the switch line from Gibercourt to Ly-Fontaine. Two regiments of dismounted cavalry from the Second Division were sent also to form a defensive flank upon the right of the 55th Brigade. At 6 P.M. the attack upon the battle zone of the Eighteenth had ceased, but it was being pushed hard upon the two wing divisions, and the Fifty-eighth had lost both Quessy and Fargniers. Orders were then issued to get behind the Crozat Canal after dark, this having always been chosen as the second line of defence. The 64th Brigade, which behaved with great steadiness, was directed to cover the retirement of the Fourteenth Division, and the guns were withdrawn first, so as to cover the infantry at the canal crossings. A few of the outlying posts were gathered up and brought back in safety. The East Surreys covered the withdrawal of the poor remains of the 53rd Brigade, while the 3rd Hussars covered the 55th Brigade on the right. It was a most difficult and delicate operation with a victorious and elated enemy swarming upon the rear, but it was successfully carried out, and by 6 A.M. the Third Corps were all across the canal, and the bridges in that sector had been destroyed.

The performance of the Eighteenth Division had been a very fine one, and- it was one of the units which could boast that on the evening of that terrible day they still held the main position which they had covered in the morning. The main German attack seems to have been conducted by four divisions, the Thirty-fourth, Thirty-seventh, One hundred and third, and Two hundred and eleventh, while four more were identified as either partly engaged or in immediate reserve. The direction of the attack was mainly from the north and came upon the front and flank of the 53rd Brigade, which could hardly call itself a battalion in the evening. The gunners had to fire by guess until the mist lifted, after which time they did great execution, and stuck to their pieces to the last moment. A particularly notable performance was that of Captain Haybittle of C Battery, 83rd Brigade Royal Field Artillery, whose guns, just south of Benay, were rushed in the mist at noon. He and his crews removed the blocks and held a neighbouring position with their rifles, directing at the same time the fire of two guns in the rear which played upon the German masses as they debouched from Lambay Wood. Afterwards he and his men fell back upon these guns and fought them until late in the evening, when both of them were knocked out. Nineteen hundred rounds were fired, and this stubborn defence did much to hold the northern flank of the battle zone.

It only remains now to give some account of the events upon the front of the 173rd Brigade (Worgan) of the Fifty-eighth London Division (Gator) upon the extreme right, in order to complete this rapid bird’s-eye view of the events of March 21 upon the front of the Fifth Army. This brigade, which filled the space between Travecy on the left and the Oise upon the right, had the 2/1 Londons in the forward zone, the 2/4 Londons in the battle zone opposite La Fère, and the 2/3 Londons in the rear zone upon the Crozat Canal.* The single battalion in front was attacked by the impossible odds of three German divisions, but held out for a long time with great constancy. Their brave Colonel, Richardson, was last seen surrounded by the enemy, but still fighting with his headquarters troops around him.

* When two numbers are given to a Territorial battalion, for instance 2/4 Londons, it means that the 4th Londons have two battalions and that this is the second of them.

The Germans stormed forward to the battle zone, but there on the high ground across the Oise they also met with a very vigorous resistance from the 4th Londons, aided by some sappers and a company of pioneers. It was indeed a great achievement of Colonel Dann and his men to hold up the attack with such disparity of numbers, for according to the official German account several divisions took part in the attack. Finally, as the afternoon wore on the enemy obtained a lodgment in the left of the position, and before evening they occupied Travecy and part of Fargniers, winding up by the capture of Quessy. The 2/3 Londons had been drawn into the fight, and now the 2/8 Londons from the 174th Brigade were brought north and placed in reserve along the line of the Crozat Canal, across which the troops were now ordered to fall back. This battalion with the 18th Entrenching Battalion guarded the whole canal line from Condren Crossing on the right to the junction with the Eighteenth Division on the left. By 5 A.M. all troops were across and the bridges had been destroyed. The 2/4th Londons succeeded in removing all their stores and munitions, and their remarkable achievement in holding the high ground of La Fère against ten times their numbers for as many hours, during which they inflicted very heavy losses upon their assailants and repulsed six separate attacks, was among the outstanding military feats of that difficult day.

It is needless to say that the losses in men were very heavy on March 21, though it is difficult to separate them from the general losses of the retreat, which will be recorded later. Among senior officers of note who died for their country that day, besides those already mentioned, were Colonels Acklom of the Northumberland Fusiliers, Thorne of the North Staffords, Wrenford of the East Lancashires, and Stewart of the Leicesters.

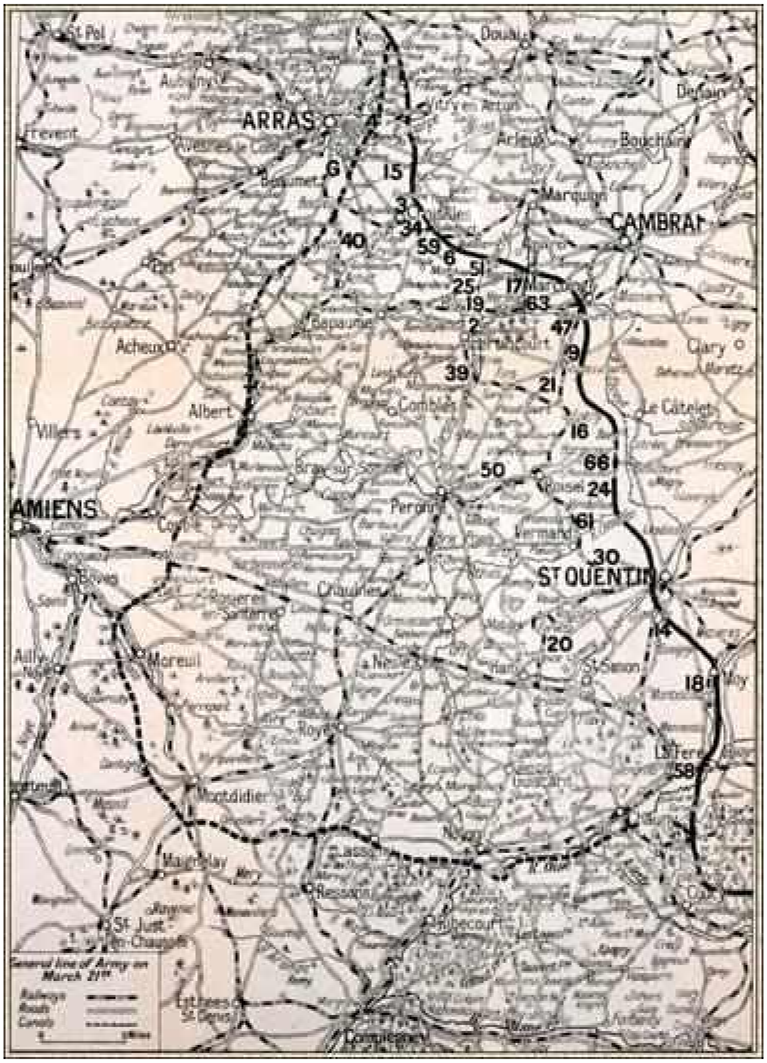
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Villers
Peronne
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Le Catelet
Clary
Vermand
St Quentin
Chaulnes
Moreuil
Nesle
Roye
Ham
La Fere
Montdidier
Maignelay
Ressons
Ribecourt
St Just en Chaussée
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General line of Army on March 21st
Railways
Roads
Canals

British Battle Line, March 21

V. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Retreat of the Seventh and Nineteenth Corps

Problems before General Gough — His masterful action — Arrival of Thirty-ninth, Twentieth, and Fiftieth Divisions — Retreat of Tudor's Ninth Scottish Division — Destruction of the South Africans — Defence of the Somme — Arrival of the Eighth Division — Desperate fighting — The Carey line — Death of General Feetham—"Immer fest daran" — Advance, Australia! — Great achievement of General Watts

THE reader is now in a position to form some conception of the situation of the Fifth Army upon the evening of March 21, and to understand the problems which confronted its commander. He was of opinion, and the opinion was shared by some at least of his corps commanders, that had he had four or five Fifth divisions of reserves within easy call, he could unquestionably have held the line. He had, however, to deal with the situation as it stood, and no man could have had a more difficult and responsible task. His own reserves were already practically engaged. On the other hand, both his air service and the reports of prisoners assured him that those of the enemy were numerous and near. His line had been deeply dented in four places: in the sector of the Sixteenth Division at Ronssoy, in that of the Twenty-fourth Division at Maissemy, in that of the Fourteenth Division at Essigny, and in that of the Fifty-eighth Division opposite La Fère. These various points are, it will be observed, almost equidistant along the line, which tends to show that the German attack was conducted upon a plan which threw such forces upon limited areas that the result was almost a certainty, whatever troops might be holding them. It was the misfortune and not the fault of these gallant divisions that their thin ranks were in the very places which huge hordes of the enemy had marked in advance as their objectives.

It must have been clear to General Gough and to his corps commanders that a second day of battle, with the German reserves pouring up, would certainly mean a penetration of the line at these various weak points, and that the enemy would then be in a position to cut off large portions of the force. These units, be they divisions or corps, would no doubt fight to the last, but the end must surely be annihilation. In that case the general situation would have been an appalling one. It might indeed have been decisive for the whole war. There was nothing between the Germans and

Amiens. Pouring westwards they would have destroyed all reserves almost before they could have alighted from their trains or their motors, and within a few days would have entirely cut off the British from the French, with the estuary of the Somme between the two armies. Any hesitation would have been fatal. An immediate decision was imperative. That decision could only be that the British Army should retard the German advance by an obstinate rearguard action, that it should endeavour to preserve its line, and allow no unit to be cut off, that it should fall back in an orderly fashion upon its reserves, and that when it met them it should turn at bay and prevent the enemy from reaching his objective. This was the plan which General Gough instantly formed, and which he proceeded with firmness and moral courage to carry out. Orders were at once given that the weaker portions of the line should drop back behind the obstacles which had already been marked out as the best defensive lines. At the same time with great foresight he gave orders that the old French Somme trenches, from the river southwards, should be set in order as a last line of defence. He despatched his chief army engineer. General Grant, to carry out this order, and it was eventually a very vital one in ensuring the safety of the army in the last stages of its retreat.

The orders to each corps commander were given in the form of general indications, the details being left to his own judgment, for the position of each corps and the pressure upon it formed a number of independent problems. We shall turn to the north therefore, where, upon the whole, the situation was least critical, and we shall follow first the Seventh and then the Nineteenth Corps in their various movements until a condition of equilibrium was at last safely established. Let it be at once stated that the design was duly carried out along the whole line, and that the operation, which at the time was designated as a disaster, was really a remarkable example of how by the coolness of commanders and the discipline of their men, the most desperate situation may be saved and the most powerful and aggressive foe foiled in his attempts. What complicated the military problem of the Fifth Army was that the German threat was really aimed at Paris as much as at Amiens, and that if they could have got through at Essigny and cut off the Fifty-eighth Division there were hardly any reserves between them and the all-important metropolis.

The morning of March 22 again presented those conditions of fog and low visibility which are favourable to the attack. There was no advance in the early hours upon the new positions of the Ninth Division, but the enemy directed his attention entirely to the Chapel Hill front of the Twenty-first Division upon the right, which was still held by the Lincolns. An attempt was made to relieve them by the Scots battalion of the South Africans, who took over some of the northern line. The defence was a splendid one, but by 4 o'clock in the afternoon the Germans had gained most of this high ground by outflanking it, and the South Africans at Revelon Farm, who had been reinforced by the 11th Royal Scots Battalion from the 27th Brigade, were badly enfiladed in consequence by rifle and machine-gun fire from the south. Colonel M'Leod of the South African Scots, and many officers and men, were among the casualties. There was a withdrawal therefore of the right of the Ninth Division, and about 6:30 P.M. the Germans had got as far as Heudicourt, and the brigade staff at Sorel had to line up in order to resist his turning movement to the north. So far round had the Germans penetrated that the Africans were compelled to fall back due north for some distance until their rear was clear, when they retreated with the rest of the division westwards towards Nurlu. By two in the morning of March 23 the new positions had been reached, and the attenuated South African Brigade, which had borne the brunt of the fighting, was taken into divisional reserve.

This difficult retreat was rendered possible by the The desperate resistance offered by the 6th Scots Borderers, who formed a defensive flank south of Sorel and gave the troops to the north time to gain the new position. One company of the 11th Royal Scots was cut off in Revelon Farm, but managed to fight their way back, bringing with them an officer and eighteen other prisoners. No guns were lost by the Ninth Division save ten, which were without teams and were therefore destroyed.

At this period there was some dislocation between the left of the Ninth Division and the right of the Forty-seventh, as is likely to occur where each belongs to a different corps and army. For a time there was a gap between them. This was partly overcome, however, on the evening of the 22nd by means of the Second Division, which lay in reserve behind the Forty-seventh and put its 99th Brigade under the orders of the Ninth Division so as to ensure unity of command in this position of danger.

Turning to the right wing of the Seventh Corps allusion has been made in the last chapter to the severe pressure upon the Sixteenth Division and its determined resistance. It will be remembered that it was reinforced by the 116th Brigade of the Thirty-ninth Division, and all three brigades were involved in the same heavy fighting on the morning of March 22, the German attack being relentless in its vigour. In the course of this severe action the village of St. Emilie was lost, and was afterwards retaken in a very gallant fashion by the 1st Hertfords, a battalion which had greatly distinguished itself already at St. Julien and elsewhere. The orders were to retreat, however, and in this movement the switch line from Saulcourt dug and manned by the 117th and 118th Brigades proved invaluable. The army policy was to fight rearguards and delay the enemy, and this was most efficiently done during the evening of March 22, the flank of the Twenty-first Division being covered in its retirement, and the line held against vigorous attacks. Many of the guns of the Thirty-ninth Divisional artillery were lost through their extreme devotion in covering the retreat of the Sixteenth Division, for they frequently carried on until the infantry were behind them. The enemy was pressing his attacks with great vigour, and every withdrawal was followed up by strong bodies of troops and of field artillery.

During these Operations General Hornby had been in command of the division, but on March 23 General Feetham returned from leave and took over the duties. All day the Thirty-ninth Division was fighting rearguard actions as it fell back upon the Somme. In the course of them General Hornby, now in command of the 116th Brigade, was severely wounded. The roads running westwards to Peronne and Clery were crowded with traffic, but the Thirty-ninth Division turned at bay again and again, giving them time to get clear. By evening the remains of the Sixteenth Division had been practically squeezed out of the line, and the Thirty-ninth had the Sixty-sixth Division on its right and the Twenty-first on its left. At night it held a line from La Maisonnette along the canal to south of Ommiecourt. The enemy appeared to be much exalted by the capture of Peronne, and the 118th Brigade on the right heard them singing lustily during the night.

On March 23 the German attack continued to be very heavy upon the front of the two Scottish brigades of the Ninth Division, which were in touch with the Fifth Corps in the north and with the Twenty-first seventh Division in the south. So close and violent was the fighting that the 6th Scots Borderers were only extricated with difficulty. At 2 P.M. the line was east of Bouchavesnes, but by 4 P.M. the Twenty-first Division on the right had lost ground, and the flank and even the rear of the Ninth was for a time exposed until the Natal Regiment was thrown out south of Bouchavesnes to cover it. The three brigades of the Twenty-first Division were engaged all day as they slowly retreated before the swarming enemy.

March 23 was a most arduous day for both the Highland and the Lowland brigades, for each of them was attacked again and again with the utmost violence. Though the attacks were repulsed each of them had the effect of weakening still further these units which were already much exhausted by hard fighting and incessant exertion. Gradually they were pushed to the westward until they found themselves lining the eastern edge of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, and manning the ridge which extended from that forest to the ruins of Saillisel. Their left at this period seems to have been in the air, as the 99th Brigade had been returned to its division, and they had failed to make contact with the Seventeenth Division, who were at the time just west of Saillisel. At this period the front of the Ninth Division seems to have covered 11,000 yards, and to have extended for at least two miles into the area of the Third Army, showing how desperate were the exertions needed to cover the ground and to prevent a break-through.

In the morning of March 24 the Scots could see the German infantry streaming forward over the open ground which had been evacuated upon the evening before. It was clear that a great attack was imminent, and at 9 o’clock, after a very heavy cannonade, it developed along the whole line. For three hours the Germans made repeated efforts to force their way through the Ninth Division, but on each occasion they were repulsed, and their losses at this point were exceedingly heavy. About mid-day, however, they had gained so much ground upon the flanks that the South Africans were almost surrounded, and shot into from north and south. The general British line had fallen back to the ridge east of Combles, 1000 yards behind, but General Dawson found it impossible to withdraw in daylight, so that his brigade was compelled to defend itself in its isolated position at Marrières Wood as best it could. The result was a disaster, but one of a most glorious kind, for the men fought until their last cartridges had been expended, and a large proportion of the survivors were wounded men. General Dawson was among the prisoners. It was reported afterwards from German sources that he was taken while working a machine-gun with his brigade-major lying dead beside him. The whole defence was said by the Germans to have been one of the finest things in the war. From that time forward the South African Brigade had practically ceased to exist until it was reorganised in Flanders. The supporting parties alone were left, and these were formed at once into a composite battalion under Colonel Young, for no rifle could be spared from the fighting line at such a time, Whilst the South Africans had been engaged in this death struggle the 27th Lowland Brigade had been in a similar plight. All these battalions, the 6th Scots Borderers and the 11th and 12th Royal Scots, were very hard pressed, particularly the former. The seventh Lowlanders extricated themselves from an almost desperate situation and fell back from St. Pierre Vaast to the position covering Combles. So great was the general dislocation of troops that one portion of the 5th Camerons found themselves that evening fighting with the Forty-seventh Division, while another was with the Seventeenth.

The main effort of the enemy upon March 24 was directed against the-Fifth and Seventh Corps in the centre of the British line, though his energy at other points was sufficient to engage the full attention of all the other units. Heavy and fresh masses were poured in at the centre and the pressure was great. For the Seventh Corps it was the fourth day of incessant and desperate fighting. There were few men left, and these were very exhausted. Towards evening the left of the Seventh had been turned, and had been compromised by the occupation of Sailly Saillisel. All attempts at counter-attack, however gallant, were destined to failure, or at the best evanescent success, for there was not the weight to carry them through. At 4:15 the report was: “The enemy is through on the right flank and has occupied Combles, Morval, and Lesboeufs.” The Seventh Corps then fell back to the line Hem — Maurepas and threw out every stray unit it could get together — troops of cavalry, Canadian motor-guns, crews and machine-guns of tanks, and all the powdered debris of broken formations, in the direction of Bernafoy Wood to cover the exposed flank. It was still out of touch with the Fifth Corps. This movement gave the line an awkward angle from Peronne and made it almost impossible to hold the stretch of river. For the time the right of the Third Army was a good five miles behind the left of the Fifth Army — the result, as Sir Douglas Haig has stated, of an unauthorised local withdrawal due to misunderstanding of orders. The line near Peronne was still held by the Thirty-ninth Division. Throughout the morning of the 24th strong enemy forces were seen by them pushing forwards between Clery and Rancourt, where they were harassed by the British fire in enfilade, particularly on the roads, where the artillery of the Sixteenth and Thirty-ninth Divisions caused much havoc and confusion, doing great work at short range over open sights. Many excellent targets were missed, however, owing to that difficulty in liaison between the infantry and the guns, which was one of the greatest problems of the operations. During the day the average number of rounds fired per battery was 3000, most of which were observed fire.

As March 24 wore on the position of the Thirty-ninth Division became untenable, as they heard upon one side of the loss of Saillisel, and on the other of the forcing of the Somme at Brie, Pagny, and Bethencourt. They moved back, therefore, at night with orders to hold the line from Buscourt to Feuillères. The average strength of brigades at this time was not more than 20 officers and 600 men. From the morning of March 25 the Thirty-ninth Division passed to the command of the Nineteenth Corps, and its further arduous. work will be found under that heading. During all this day Campbell's Twenty-first Division, still fighting hard in a succession of defensive positions, had its right upon the Somme, while its left was in Battle intermittent touch with the Ninth Division.

The Ninth Division had fallen back, the two seventh Scottish brigades being continually in action until they reached the Maricourt — Montauban line, where they supported the First Cavalry Division who were in front of Bernafoy Wood. The general line at this period from Montauban southwards was held ^ by the Ninth Division, the First Cavalry, the newly-arrived and most welcome Thirty-fifth Division (Franks), the Twenty-first Division, now reduced to a single composite brigade under General Headlam, and then some oddments under Colonel Hunt. This brought the line to the Somme, on the south side of which were the remains of the Sixteenth and Thirty-ninth Divisions. This might sound an imposing force upon so short a front, but save for the Thirty-fifth each division was *nominis magni umbra*, none of them stronger than brigades. The Forty-seventh Division was retiring at this time upon Contalmaison, and a gap of several miles was appearing between the Fifth and Seventh Corps. During the movements upon March 24 the guns of the 65th and 150th K.F.A. did great work and earned the warm gratitude of the weary infantry. The enemy targets round Combles were all that a gunner could wish.

All troops north of the Somme were upon March 25 transferred to the Fifth Corps, and became part of the Third Army. The 27th Brigade was drawn out of the line, and the 26th was under the orders of the Thirty-fifth Division which took over the defence of this sector, relieving the exhausted Twenty-first Division. March 25 saw heavy attacks on Bernafoy, which was lost once, but regained by the 106th Brigade. There was still a gap to the north, and no touch had been made with the Seventeenth Division, though the cavalry had built up a defensive flank in that direction. At 2 P.M. the Germans attacked from Ginchy towards Trones Wood, names which we hoped had passed for ever from our war maps. In the first onset they pressed back the 12th and 18th Highland Light Infantry of the 106th Brigade, but there was a strong counter-attack headed by the 9th Durhams which retook Faldere Wood and restored the situation. A second attack about 3 P.M. upon the Thirty-fifth Division was also repulsed. The German pressure was so great, however, that the line of defence was taken back during the night to the Bray — Albert position. The enemy followed closely at the heels of the rearguards, though the guns were active to the last so as to conceal the retreat as long as possible. Early in the morning of March 26 the Lowland Brigade was again attacked with great violence, but the 12th Royal Scots, upon whom the main assault fell, drove it back with loss. Changes in other parts of the line, however, necessitated a withdrawal across the Ancre, so as to keep in touch with the Twelfth Division which had now come up on the left. The Ninth Division upon this date numbered 1540 rifles with 20 machine-guns. It was shortly afterwards drawn from the line after as severe a spell of service as troops could possibly endure. The story of the retreat of the Seventh Corps has been indicated mainly from the point of view of this northern unit, but it will be understood that the Twenty-first, as tried and as worn as its Scottish neighbour, was keeping its relative position to the south, while the Sixteenth was conforming in the same way until the time when it passed into the Nineteenth Corps.

The Thirty-fifth Division, newly arrived from Flanders, did great and indeed vital work in upholding the weakening-line at the moment of its greatest strain. A consecutive account of its work may make this clear. Pushing through the remains of the Twenty-first Division on March 24, Franks threw his men instantly into the thick of the fight, attacking the Germans in front of Clery. Marindin’s 105th Brigade did great work that day, the 15th Cheshires on the right and 15th Sherwood Foresters on the left, attacking and, for a time, carrying the ridge of Clery, though it was impossible in view of the general retreat to hold it for long. The Germans were staggered by the sudden, unexpected blow, and they poured troops against their new antagonist, losing very heavily in their reconquest of the ridge. Finally the front line of the Sherwoods was practically annihilated, and the Cheshires were in almost as bad a way, but with the help of some Sussex men who were formed into an emergency unit, together with some signallers, they were able to draw off, and a line of defence was organised under General Marindin, but general orders arrived for a withdrawal to the front Curlu — Maurepas, which was safely carried out, the 17th Royal Scots covering the rear. It was a most ticklish business, as touch had been lost with the Ninth Division, but the wounded were safely evacuated, and all withdrew in good order, the 12th Highland Light Infantry finally bridging the gap upon the left. This battalion had lost in these operations its splendid Colonel, Anderson, whose work has earned a posthumous V.C. The enemy followed closely, and attacked again before dusk. but was driven off. The attack was renewed on the morning of March 25, but still without success, the 4th North Staffords bearing the brunt. The weary troops of the Scottish division, who had been engaged for four long days, were rallied here and formed into provisional fighting units, which did good service by relieving the 106th Brigade at Maricourt, when it was forced back. The pressure upon the division was desperately severe, but was slightly eased by the arrival of a Northumberland Fusilier battalion from the Twenty-first Division. That night the order was to withdraw to the line Bray — Albert.

The general command of the retiring line in this section, including the Ninth, Twenty-first, and Thirty-fifth Divisions had for the time fallen to General Franks, who handed his own division over to General Pollard. The position was exceedingly critical, as not only were the units weak, but ammunition had run low. The line was still falling back, and the enemy was pressing on behind it with mounted scouts in the van. In this retreat tanks were found of the greatest service in holding the German advance. The route was through Morlancourt and Ville-sur-Ancre to a defensive position upon the right bank of the Ancre in the Dernancourt area, the orders being to hold the line between that village and Buire. Both villages were attacked that evening, but the Thirty-fifth Division on the right and the 26th Brigade on the left, drove back the enemy. By the morning of March 28 the line seemed, to have reached equilibrium in this part, and the welcome sight was seen of large bodies of troops moving up from the rear. This was the head of the Australian reinforcements. During the day the enemy got into Dernancourt, but was thrown out again by the 19th Northumberland Fusiliers Pioneer Battalion. The 104th Brigade also drove back an attack in front of Treux Wood. It was clear that the moving hordes were losing impetus and momentum. That same evening the Australians were engaged upon the right and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. On the night of March 30 the Thirty-fifth Division, which had lost nearly half its numbers, was relieved by the Third Australians.

We shall now follow the Nineteenth Corps in its perilous retreat. It will be remembered that on the evening of the first day of the battle it had been badly outflanked to the north, where the Sixty-sixth Division had made so stout a resistance, and had also lost a great deal of the battle zone in the south, which was made more disastrous by the fall of Le Verguier at nine on the morning of March 22. The supporting line formed by the Fiftieth Division had also been pushed in at Poeuilly and other points, and it was with no little difficulty that the depleted and exhausted corps was able to get across the Somme on the morning of March 23, where they were ordered to hold the whole front of the river, including the important crossings at Brie. This, as a glance at the map will show, was a very considerable retreat, amounting to no less than ten miles in two days, but it was of the first importance to get a line of defence, and also to lessen the distance between the sorely tried army and its reserves. It was hard indeed to give up ground and to be back on the line of Peronne, but there was at least the small solace that this was the ravaged ground which the Germans had themselves turned into a waste land, and that there was no town of any consequence nor any military point of importance in its whole extent.

By the late afternoon of March 23 the bulk of the Nineteenth Corps was across the Somme. The Germans had followed closely, and there was rear-guard fighting all the way in which the Fiftieth Division slowed down the pursuit of the enemy. The officers who were entrusted with the defence of the line of river soon realised that they had a difficult task, for the dry weather had shrunk it into insignificance in this section, and owing to trees and thick undergrowth the fields of fire were very limited, while the thin line of defenders scattered over some twelve miles of front offered, even after the advent of the Eighth Division, an ineffective screen against the heavy advance from the east. Heneker’s Eighth Division, a particularly fine unit consisting entirely of Regular battalions, had made heroic exertions to reach the field of battle, ‘and fitted itself at once into its correct position in that very complicated operation in a way which seemed marvellous to soldiers on the spot.

In the evening of March 23 a number of Germans, some of them cavalry, were observed upon the farther side of the Somme and were heavily punished by artillery fire. None got across before dark, but during the night numerous bodies established themselves upon the western side. Local reserves had been placed near the probable crossings, and these in several cases hunted the enemy across again; but the fact was that the river could be forded anywhere, and that a German concentration on a Battle given point could always overpower the thin local defence. The line of resistance was further weakened by the First Cavalry Division, which had linked up the Nineteenth Corps with the Eighteenth Corps on the south, being now ordered to join the Seventh Corps in the north. The general order of the troops at this moment was, that the newly arrived Eighth Division was on the extreme right touching elements of the Eighteenth Corps at Bethencourt and extending with the aid of one brigade of the Fiftieth as far as Éterpigny, nearly eight miles. From Éterpigny to Biaches, south of Peronne, were the remains of the Sixty-sixth Division, covering about four miles, and joining the Thirty-ninth Division on the right of the Seventh Corps near that point. The Twenty-fourth was lining up between Hattencourt and Chaulnes.

It was on the front of the Eighth Division, at Bethencourt, at Pargny, and at St. Christ, that the Germans made their chief lodgments upon the western banks of the river on the morning of March 24. The Bethencourt attack was particularly formidable, both for its energy and because it aimed at the junction of the two corps. By two in the afternoon the German infantry were across in considerable numbers, and had forced back the right flank of the Eighth Division, which fell back hinging upon the river farther north, so as to oppose the repeated efforts which were made to enfilade the whole line. General Watts' responsibilities were added to next morning, March 25, for the two much exhausted divisions of the Seventh Corps which were holding the northern bend of the river from Biaches to beyond Frise were handed over to him when the rest of Congreve's Corps was incorporated in the Third Army. These two divisions were the Thirty-ninth and the Sixteenth, the former holding as far as Frise and the latter the Somme crossings to the west of that point.

March 25 was a day of great anxiety for General Watts, as the enemy were pressing hard, many of his own units were utterly exhausted, and the possibilities of grave disaster were very evident. A real fracture of the line at either end might have led to a most desperate situation. The French were now at the south end of the river position, but their presence was not yet strongly felt, and with every hour the pressure was heavier upon the bent line of the Eighth Division, on which the whole weight of the central battle had fallen. By 10 o’clock on the morning of March 25, the defensive flank of the Eighth Division had been pushed back to Licourt, and had been broken there, but had been mended once more by counter-attack, and was still holding with the aid of the Fiftieth. The cyclists of the Nineteenth Corps, the armoured-car batteries, and other small units were thrust in to stiffen the yielding line, which was still rolled up, until after one o’clock it lay back roughly from Cizancourt to Marchelepot and the railway line west of that place. Later in the day came the news of fresh crossings to the north at St. Christ and Éterpigny where the Sixty-sixth Division had been pushed back to Maisonette. It was evident that the line was doomed. To stay in it was to risk destruction. At 4:15 the order was given to withdraw to a second position which had been prepared farther westward but to retain the line of the Somme as the left flank. During these operations the Eighth Division had performed the remarkable feat of holding back and defeating fourteen separate German divisions during thirty-six hours on a nine-mile front, and finally withdrew in perfect order. Every unit was needed to cover the ground, and the general disposition of divisions was roughly as drawn:

R. - Hattencourt. Chantres. Estrées. Assevillers. Herbecourt. Frise - L.
24 8 50 66 39 16

It will be seen that General Watts’ command had increased from two divisions to six, but it is doubtful whether the whole six had the normal strength of two. The new line had not yet been completed and was essentially unstable, but none the less it formed a rallying point for the retreating troops. It should be noted that from the morning of March 25 General Fayolle took over the command south of the Somme.

The Twenty-fourth Division, which had suffered so severely in the first two days of the action, was again heavily engaged during this arduous day. In the morning it had been directed to counter-attack in the direction of Dreslincourt in co-operation with the French Twenty-second Division. In the meantime, however, the whole situation had been changed by the right flank of the Eighth Division being turned, so that General Daly’s men as they went up for the attack were themselves heavily attacked near Curchy, while the junction with the French could not be made. They fell back therefore upon their original position where hard fighting ensued all day, and a most anxious situation developed upon the southern flank, where a wide gap existed and the enemy was mustering in force. Colonel Walker, C.R.E. of this division, was killed that day.

On the morning of March 26 the new line had been occupied. The Seventeenth Corps had retired in the night to the Bray — Albert line, which left a considerable gap in the north, to the west of Frise, but this was filled up by an impromptu line made up of stragglers and various odds and ends from the rear of the army. It was in the south, however, that the attack was most severe, and here it soon became evident that the line was too long and the defenders too weak, so that it could not be maintained against a determined assault. Before the sun had risen high above the horizon it had been shaken from end to end, the Twenty-fourth Division being hard put to it to hold Fonches, while the Sixty-sixth were driven out of Herbecourt. At 9:30 the order was given to withdraw, and with their brave rearguards freely sacrificing themselves to hold back the swarming enemy, the troops — some of them in the last stage of exhaustion — fell back upon a second position. It was at this period of the battle that Major Whitworth, the gallant commander of the 2/6 Manchesters, stood at bay with his battalion, which numbered exactly 34 men. He and 17 of his men were dead or wounded after this last stand, and 17 survivors were all that could be mustered that evening.

Before the right wing fell back to Vrely there had been a good deal of fighting. The Twenty-fourth Division, which was now a mere skeleton, was strongly attacked in the morning of March 27, and Dugan’s 73rd Brigade was pushed back towards Caix, the 8th Sussex having very heavy losses, including Colonel Hill, and Banham, the second-in-command.

The situation upon the other flank of the Twenty-fourth Division was also particularly desperate, and the 9th East Surrey, under Major Clark, sacrificed itself to cover the withdrawal of the 72nd Brigade. There were few more gallant actions in the war. Major Clark, writing from a German prison, gave a small account which enables us to get a glimpse of the actual detail of such a combat. The enemy’s infantry were in force, he says, within 100 yards of his scattered line. “We managed to get back some hundred yards when I saw that our position was really desperate. The enemy were sweeping up from the south, and several lines of them were in between us and our next defensive line.... We were seen and the enemy began to surround us, so I decided to fight it out. We took up position in a communication trench, and used our rifles with great effect. Grant was doing good work till shot through the head, and Warre-Dymond behaved admirably. It was a fine fight, and we held them until ammunition gave out. They then charged and mopped up the remainder. They were infuriated with us. My clothing had been riddled with shrapnel, my nose fractured, and my face and clothing smothered with blood. There are 3 officers and 59 men unwounded. The rest of the battalion are casualties. It was a great fight, and the men were simply splendid. I have the greatest admiration for them. It was a glorious end." Such were the class of men whom the East End of London sent into the New Army.

The new position on March 26 may be depicted as follows:

R. - Rouvroy. Rosierea. Vauvillers. Framerville. Proyart. Froissy. - L.
24 8 50 66 39 16

The Germans followed up closely all along the line, the pressure being great everywhere, but greatest on the left, where the Thirty-ninth and Sixty-sixth disengaged themselves with difficulty, both of them being heavily attacked, and the Cambridgeshires fighting a fine rearguard action in Biaches. About two in the afternoon the troops were solidly established in their new positions, but the extreme north of the line was in a very unstable condition, as the Sixteenth were fired upon from the north of the river and their left was in no condition to meet an attack. On the right, however, there was earlier in the day some very spirited fighting, for the Eighth and Fiftieth Divisions, though very worn, were in far better shape than their comrades who had endured the gassings and the losses of the first day.

The Fiftieth Division fought particularly hard to stop the enemy's advance, turning at every rise, and hitting back with all the strength that was left it. A very fine little delaying action was fought by its rearguard this day upon the line Lihons — Vermandovillers — Foucaucourt. The 5th and 8th Durhams, with a few of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and a couple of batteries, held up the advance for several hours and stood their ground with such resolution that two platoons of the Northumberlands were never seen again, for they held on to Foucaucourt until both they and the village were submerged. As the day wore on and the pressure increased, the Sixty-sixth Division was forced to let go of Framerville, for these men had fought without sleep for five days and nights. They staggered back through the rear ranks of the Fiftieth Division, consisting of the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers, who at once, under the personal leading of General Riddell and

Colonel Anstey, both of them on horseback and in red-banded caps, rushed the village once again. It was a fine The advance which was much helped by the way in which Captain Thompson in Vauvillers brought his machine-guns to bear upon the flank of the Germans advancing to the south of him. Brigade-Major Paget, a very rising officer, was killed in this spirited affair.

No gains could ever be held, as the general line was receding, but all such successful blows were of use as slowing down the German advance, teaching him caution, and gaining time — for time was the very essence of the matter. If there were time the line could be built up behind. If there were no time Amiens must fall. “I will fight before Amiens, in Amiens, or behind Amiens!” cried Foch. Brave words, but if Amiens went, the future was dark indeed.

At eight on the morning of March 27 the Germans were raging once more along the whole line of the British breakwater. The gallant weary Eighth Division was heavily attacked near Rosières and the stormers reached the village, but Heneker’s men counter-attacked in most heroic fashion, and cleared them out again, taking a number of prisoners. The 2nd Devons, 1st Sherwoods, and 22nd Durham Light Infantry were the units engaged in this fine action.

News was bad from the north end of the line, and it was understood that the Germans were in Proyart, so both the Eighth and Fiftieth Divisions, out of their scanty ranks, sent reinforcements (R.E. details and the 2nd Devons) to help the Thirty-ninth Division. At 3 P.M. on March 27 the Germans were in Framerville, and an hour later were on the top of the Eighth and Fiftieth once more, in front of Harbonnière. The rearguard of the latter were the 4th and 6th Northumberland Fusiliers. The German guns were in full blast that morning, and the infantry full of ginger, but they could not break that protective line, thin, disciplined, and flexible. The two battalions could not cover the around, and the Germans streamed past their flank. In order to support the advanced line every available man was assembled on the reverse slope of a rise, just out of sight of the Germans. In front of them they could hear the roar of the battle, ever growing nearer as the British line was rolled back. “We were a mixed crowd,” says one who was among them. “Staff officers in red caps, clerks in spectacles, signalling officers, cooks, sappers, and that extraordinary never-beaten infantry.” It was indeed one of the crises of the war, for the situation was desperate just south of the Somme, and if the enemy was through at this point also the line would be in fragments. The whole array waited over the curve of the hill, and as the enemy, in eight or ten waves, poured over the brow they fired at close range in the traditional Busaco fashion of the peninsula. A bayonet charge as of old completed the transaction, and the enemy broke and fled, with a barrage beating down upon his supports. The British infantry from the top of the rise was treated to the welcome, and, as it must be confessed, unusual sight of a large force of Germans all shredded out and hurrying for the nearest shelter, "like a football crowd caught in the rain." It is an instance of the incurable levity of British troops that they broke into the refrain of *"Goodbyee! Goodbyee! There's a silver lining in the skyee!"*

In spite of their cheerfulness, however, the losses had been heavy, both Colonel Robinson of the 6th and Colonel Wright of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers being among the casualties. Each of the battalions now numbered little more than a hundred men.

This brisk counter-attack was a healthy little reminder to the Germans upon this section of the line that the British infantry might be overborne by numbers or by strategy, but that they were still the men who had in the previous year chased them again and again from the most formidable positions which, they could construct. But these points of aggressive resistance were now rare and the men were worn out. It does indeed seem to be an extreme example of the weakness of the reserves at this period in France, that in spite of the fact that the battle broke out upon March 21, no help save the one division had in the course of a week reached the overmatched and exhausted troops. It is true that the Higher Command may well have reckoned upon the French as reserves, and this would have been perfectly true had they been able to take over the ground in the south and contract the British line. They did take over the ground, but they took over most of the two British Corps as well, so that the Nineteenth Corps was little the better for their presence. Unaided by either their own people or by the French, the Nineteenth Corps still held on desperately with dwindling numbers to a line which was far beyond their strength.

Bad as was the position of the Nineteenth Corps, it was made worse by the ever-changing position in the north. When the Seventh Corps fell back to the line of Bray it was behind the left flank of the Nineteenth Corps. But now it was compelled to make a further move to the line Chipilly — Morlancourt, while all bridges were ordered to be destroyed up to Cherisy. This disposition was absolutely necessary in view of what was happening in the Third Army but it made the position more and more difficult for the men in the south, who had either to fall back or to see the gap of undefended river upon their left rear grow wider and wider. General Watts is a stubborn fighter with no idea of going back if it can be in any way avoided, so he held on in the south and fought a brisk, successful action there, while he sent such poor reinforcements as he could to the Sixteenth Division in the north, stopping the dangerous rent with any odds and ends upon which he could lay his hands. Three hundred improvised infantry, six Lewis guns, and a battery in armoured cars were the best that he could do, and these troops actually did hold the river line in the north from the early morning of March 27 until nightfall, against an ever-growing menace. But they could not cover all the ground, and the enemy, as was foreseen, was coming over the river and getting behind the British line. The Sixteenth Division was practically destroyed, and the Thirty-ninth was in little better case, though General Feetham showed great energy in re-organising all the debris of units upon the road, so that the line of resistance was very weak. In the afternoon a considerable party of Germans with machine-guns had got across the river at Cherisy, west of Morcourt, held by seventy men of the Sixteenth Division, and pushed on in the most daring way south-west to Lamotte and Bayonvillers. They were right across the rear of the Nineteenth Corps, and a great disaster seemed inevitable, but weary as the men were, and tired as were their leaders, they were still capable of clear decision and swift action. The river was for the moment abandoned, the left of the line was swung south, and early upon March 28 they faced north in this sector, along the track of the Amiens-La Fère railway. Roughly, the new position may be traced as follows:

R. - Warvillers. Vrely. Caix. Gillancourt. Wiencourt — Marcelcave. - L.
24 8 50 66 39

This very difficult-and remarkable disengagement was particularly trying for the Thirty-ninth Division since it had farthest to go and was in close contact with the enemy. It was carried out in broad daylight in the morning of March 28, and with such skill that there was no great loss in the 118th Brigade which covered it, but so close was the enemy that both General Bellingham and his brigade-major, Major F. Gunner, were captured while personally supervising the withdrawal. After this operation the remains of the Thirty-ninth Division were occupying the line from Marcelcave to Wiencourt inclusive, along the railway track. Germans were found in

Wiencourt, and the two brigades, now reduced to two composite battalions under Colonel Saint, attacked them with success, but eventually occupied a line to the west. All the guns had been saved and were in action once more.

On the occasion of the reforming of the line as already described on March 28, the Fiftieth Division had fallen back upon Caix, where it held fast to the important bridge across the River Luce upon which a number of troops from various units were converging. Many of these were disorganised, and some, to use the expression of a spectator, “stone-cold”; but the same witness has recorded the splendid moral effect produced by one battalion which, marching in fours and with everything in most precise order, came swinging down the road, with no change after its seven days of purgatory save that two-thirds of its personnel had disappeared. This was Colonel Hancock’s 1st Battalion of Royal Fusiliers from the Twenty-fourth Division — an object-lesson to all who saw it as to how discipline can outlast the most terrific tests which a soldier can be asked to endure.

The enemy, still working down from the north, had threatened the new defensive flank at a point between Caix and Cayeux, but were held by a very spirited attack made by the men of the 22nd Entrenching Battalion. With considerable loss both to themselves and to the Germans, they held the line of the river until reinforcements arrived. The Thirty-ninth from the north and the Eighth and Twenty-fourth from the south were all converging upon the one point to take up their new positions. A Brigadier in command of the infantry, with 800 men and 3 batteries, held the bridge; but the Germans might have rushed it had it not been for a charge by the 151st Brigade, when the 5th and 7th Durhams drove back their advancing line. This spirited attack was led by General Jackson in person, who encouraged his men by blasts upon his hunting-horn. Speaking of one of their military heroes, a French historian has said: *“Il avait la graine de folie dans sa bravoure que les Français aiment.”* All soldiers love it, and it is a wise leader who knows how to employ it. It was a time when every possible device was needed to hold the men, for the enemy was close upon the bridge, and the safety of the remains of several divisions depended upon the bridge being held.

Returning to the general survey of the line of the Nineteenth Corps the Sixteenth Division was now rather a crowd of warlike particles than an organised unit. It was ordered, however, that every individual particle should be reassembled at Hamel so that the nucleus of a division should exist once more. Hard marching and hard fighting had reduced the Twenty-fourth Division to almost the same condition, though, thanks to a miraculous survival of most of the senior officers, the unit was still efficient. On the other hand, the Sixty-first Division from the Eighteenth Corps, numbering at this period 2400 men, was given to General Watts to help to form his new line. It was at first intended with the aid of these new troops to endeavour to clear the left flank, and for this purpose a counter-attack upon Lamotte was ordered. The newly-arrived men from the south, the 183rd and 184th Brigades, who could hardly stagger a mile, did actually carry the twin village of Warfusée and hold the edge of it for a time under very heavy fire — an operation in which Major Bennett of the Oxfords did conspicuously fine work. Several grand soldiers fell in this attack, including Captain Willick who had commanded the 2/4 Berkshires after the fall of the heroic Dimmer. His last speech to his men is worth recording. It was, "I know how you feel, boys, tired and worn out, but we have to stop them from breaking through." The support to this brave attack is said to have been "one gun, firing wildly."

The line sloped back now from Demuin in the south to the Somme at a point opposite Sailly-le-Sec, the Sixty-first occupying the general sector just south of the Lamotte-Amiens road. From there to the river had been a gap which it was absolutely vital to fill. An old line of trench existed here, extending from the river to Demuin, and early in the battle General Gough, amid all his preoccupations, had realised that it might be of great importance to have ready as a rallying place. He had therefore deputed General Grant, his own chief of engineers, together with Colonel Harvey, his chief of staff, to organise it and to endeavour to man it, with any spare troops that they could find. This had been done, and after three days of feverish work, Grant had prepared a line and had thrust into it a most curious assortment of all sorts of details, made up of entrenching troops, American sappers, the staffs of various army schools, reinforcing units, and stragglers. On the third day General Grant was recalled to his official duties, but General Carey happened to be passing from the front to take over a divisional command, and he was deflected and placed in charge of this assembly of military samples, which included 500 cases out of hospital. There was a sprinkling of machine-guns with trained instructors to use them, but the line was thin and there was a want of cohesion in the elements which formed it. The great thing, however, was that the gulf was spanned between Watts in the south and Congreve in the north. There was still a trench and a line of British soldiers between the Germans and the open country that led to Amiens.

March 28 was a day of destiny along the line, for upon that date were the first definite signs that the assault had failed so far as its ultimate objective was concerned, and that the Germans were not destined to overcome the British resistance. In the north, this was clearly indicated by the victory in front of Arras. In the south, the situation was still obscure and dangerous; but the mere fact that the day was got over without a catastrophe was in itself a success, for on March 27 the prospects were very ominous. The line now ran from Demuin to Marcelcave, and thence the improvised trench garrison carried it on to the river. The First Cavalry Division, which had come across from the north bank, formed a link between the Sixty-first in the north of Watts' line, and what we will now call the Carey line. The cavalry men were still full of fight, but they had done wonderful work since the first day of the battle, cementing every weak seam, and they were terribly reduced in numbers if not in spirit. Nothing can exaggerate the debt which the infantry owed to all three divisions of cavalry for their tireless support during that awful week. They now tried to advance towards Lamotte, but they came upon the right flank of a very strong German force moving south-west from Cherisy, and though they endeavoured to harass it they were unable to make much impression. The 61st was also terribly worn. Upon this day the 184th Brigade lost Colonel Belton, its fifth commander, and was taken over by Colonel Pagan of the Gloucesters. The southern end of the British line had troubles enough before, but they were now accentuated by the fact that the Germans had made a very rapid advance in the Montdidier sector which placed them in the right rear of the Nineteenth Corps. On this right flank there was much confused fighting, and a mixture of units which reached such a point before the morning of March 29 that the Twenty-fourth, or what remained of it, found that it had unwittingly changed from the right to the left flank of the Eighth Division. There could perhaps be no clearer illustration of the dimensions to which the division had shrunk. These confused movements caused loss of touch, and there was a time when Corps Headquarters had completely lost the right of the line, which was badly disorganised. It was a time of great danger. Yet another division, however, the Twentieth, was given to Watts, and though it was already worn to the bone, and could not reckon a thousand men in all three brigades, it was still battleworthy and formed an invaluable asset at such a time. They were lined up, or perhaps dotted along would be a fitter term, upon the front of Mézières — Demuin, and formed a frail barrier behind which the hard-pressed men could have a brief breathing space while they endeavoured to reform. By the late afternoon of March 28 this operation was in progress, and before 11 P.M. the new positions were actually occupied. The line, which was partly wired, now ran from Mézières, through Demuin, Marcelcave, and Hamel to the Somme, but it would be hard to add the exact alignment of the units, as in many places they were inextricably mixed. The Sixty-first and the Cavalry had been placed behind Carey's line in order to support it should it weaken. South of this was the Twentieth Division, reinforced by fragments of other divisions, which among them had the strength and spirit to beat off a strong German attack delivered by the force which had been engaged by the cavalry in the morning. The country here was seamed by the old French trenches, which were woefully out of repair but none the less were of great value to the defence. Carey's force was involved in this German attack on March 28, but with the help of the First Cavalry Division they managed to hold their line. Upon that date the exhausted troops received the following well-timed message from the Fifth Army Battle commander: "By the grand and stubborn way you are holding out and delaying the advance of the enemy, the British and French reserves are being given the necessary time to come up and assume the offensive. Your great exertions and sacrifices are not being thrown away: they are of immense importance, and your resistance and your deeds in this great battle will live for all time, and will save our country."

March 29 was another eventful and critical day for the Nineteenth Corps, and began badly for them, since the remains of the Eighth and Twenty-fourth Divisions had, as already explained, been thrust out of their positions and were mostly on the west side of the Avre and out of the line. The Fiftieth Division was only partly in position, the fighting strength of the Sixty-sixth was reckoned at 750 bayonets, and that of the Thirty-ninth at 500 bayonets. The Nineteenth Corps at this moment was nominally composed of eight infantry divisions — Eighth, Twentieth, Twenty-fourth, Sixteenth, Thirty-ninth, Fiftieth, Sixty-first, and Sixty-sixth; but it is questionable whether their united strength greatly exceeded that of a single full division, to such a point had the army been reduced. On the other hand, there was no direct evidence of excessive wastage upon the part of the Germans, who could be seen in large well-organised bodies moving in front of the British lines. The one consolation lay in the fact that their heavy guns, and even a good many of their field-guns, had been left behind. The machine-guns, however, and their newly-developed light field artillery were as energetic as ever. The British artillery had been weakened by capture and destruction, but it was greatly supplemented by several armoured-car batteries, Nineteenth Canadian and British, which did splendid service during these all-important days.

About mid-day on March 29 the French, and the remains of the Thirtieth Division under the French Higher Command, had abandoned Mézières upon the right flank of the Nineteenth Corps, and by so doing they exposed the right of the steadfast Twentieth Division. The fighting extended from the River Avre to Demuin. The 59th Brigade, which was in the south of the line, was forced to fall back, but two battalions of the 60th Brigade were thrown out to cover the flank and hold the German advance from getting behind the British line. At 2 o'clock these two brigades gathered their thin ranks together for a counter-attack, aided by the Fiftieth Division, which had now been telescoped into a single weak brigade. It was a remarkable attack, for most of the men were stumbling with utter fatigue, and could hardly totter forward with their rifles at the port. It was the Riflemen and Shropshires who made the advance upon Mézières while their comrades stormed the surrounding woods. The 5th Durhams, 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 22nd Entrenching Battalion of the Fiftieth Division also did great things. There is evidence from the prisoners that the Germans at that particular point had lost very heavily and were much distressed, so that the combat was like those closing rounds of a hard-fought boxing contest, where the two exhausted combatants can but push and paw as they lurch against each other. The village was actually carried by the British, and a temporary easement secured, together with a handful of the 352nd Regiment, who stated that they had lost three entire companies in their first advance upon Mézières. This spirited counter-attack was Nineteenth covered by the guns of the Fiftieth Division which, under Major Johnson, had worked very hard during those last trying days.

About 2 o'clock on March 29 Watts' Corps was reinforced by another skeleton division, the Eighteenth — 2000 bayonets in all. It was merged with the Sixty-first and placed in the Berteaucourt — Bois de Blangy line.

The thin ranks of the Twenty-fourth were still able to muster at the south end of the position, but only one brigade of the Eighth Division, the Twenty-fifth, was in a condition for service. This unit moved to the edge of Moreuil Wood, and co-operated with the French One hundred and thirty-third Division which was holding the line at that point. From this time onwards the Moreuil — Ailly-sur-Noye road and everything south of it was French. As the British force dwindled its front also contracted, otherwise the situation would have indeed been impossible.

As it was, it continued to be desperately critical, for beyond the telescoping of units and the contraction of front there was no help for the British line, while the assailants were still very numerous and aggressive. About noon on this day, March 29, the Thirty-ninth Division, and indeed the whole army, sustained a severe loss in the person of General Feetham, a leader of great valour and experience, who was killed by a shell while walking with Colonel Gosset, his chief of staff, in the village of Demuin.

His death was to some extent revenged at once by his devoted troops, for a German attack which followed at once down the valley of the Luce was driven back with heavy loss by the rifles of the Nineteenth infantry. General Feetham was replaced next day by General Blacklock. It is a remarkable fact that Feetham was the second commander of the Thirty-ninth Division killed within a fortnight, for General Cape, his *locum tenens*, fell upon the 13th of March.

On the morning of March 30 the 61st Brigade of the Twentieth Division was on the south end of the line covering the bridge over the Luce at Hangard, while the 59th covered that at Dornart, the 60th lining up from Dornart to Berteaucourt. The Fiftieth Division had been now incorporated in the- Twentieth. All the bridges had been prepared for demolition. The enemy were slowly pushing the French out of the Moreuil Wood upon the extreme right, small bodies of infantry gradually infiltrating the whole position. The Germans soon developed activity also in the Luce valley, and finally along the whole corps front. The Second Cavalry Division was sent into Moreuil Wood to help the French, but the whole right of the line began gradually to crumble in face of the repeated assaults. The remains of the Sixty-sixth and Twentieth Divisions were bent back, though the latter continued for a long time to hold the Demuin — Marcelcave line of road, but about 8 A.M. the Sixty-sixth Division was pushed out of Aubercourt.

There was some weakness farther north also, between Villers and Marcelcave, but the never-failing First Cavalry Division stiffened the yielding line. At 10 o'clock the situation had improved in Moreuil Wood, where Seely's Canadian cavalry, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade in support, were making their presence felt. They held the line along the edge of the wood from east of Moreuil, but had lost touch with the Twentieth upon their left. Later in the morning there was a strong German counter in this quarter which drove the cavalry back into the wood. Here at a later hour they were reinforced by the Eighth Division, if such a sonorous name can be given to a handful of dazed and exhausted men. The line at mid-day ran roughly as follows:

Moreuil Wood.   Demuin.   W.of Aubercourt.   W.of Marcelcave.
2nd Cav.   20th.   63th.   Carey.   61st.   1st Cav.

The great bulk of the British force lay to the north of the Luce River, and the Germans were making every effort to push the flank backwards or aside and to ford the stream. A wood named Little Wood lay in such a position as to help or hinder such an attempt, and it was the scene of some fierce fighting. It was first occupied by one of the enemy's advanced parties. It was then retaken by some of the West Yorkshires of the 60th Brigade. These in turn were pushed out by the enemy. Finally, in the. evening the 12th Rifles and 12th Rifle Brigade, with some French and scattered units of the Fiftieth Division, charged forward through the twilight, recaptured the wood, and re-established the whole line in this quarter. Nine machine-guns and fifty-three prisoners were taken. Well might General Watts telegraph: "Well done, the Twentieth! Such a counter-attack after all your hard work is splendid."

Now at last there were signs of some relaxation in the dreadful strain. On this, the ninth day of the battle, the first British reserves, save only the Eighth Division, began to appear in the line. They were the 9th Australian Brigade, who came into the fight between Demuin and Aubercourt with their usual brisk gallantry. Their attack made some progress, and the 12th Lancers who advanced with them shared something of the glory. Although the final objectives were not attained, the line north of the Luce was stayed by their presence and made firm for the morrow. On, this evening several of those heroic units which had fought themselves to the last point of human endurance from the beginning of the battle were taken from that stage where they had played so glorious and tragic a part. The remains of the

Thirty-ninth, the Fiftieth, the Sixteenth, and the Sixty-sixth were all drawn back for re-organisation. It was theirs to take part in what was a defeat and a retreat, but their losses are the measure of their endurance, and the ultimate verdict of history upon their performance lies in the one single undeniable fact that the Germans could never get past them. Speaking of these troops an observer remarked: “They had been fighting for nine days, but were very cheerful and still full of vigour.” The losses of some units and the exertions of the individuals who composed them can seldom have been matched in warfare. The 2/6th Lancashire Fusiliers, for example, had fought in the rearguard of the Sixty-sixth Division for the whole retreat under Captain Porter, the only officer left standing. They were now reduced to about a hundred men. Many battalions were in no better condition. Carey’s nondescript force was also broken up on the evening of March 30. They had served a most useful purpose at a critical moment of the battle, and their formation may have prevented a disaster, but it should be emphasised that their existence was not impromptu, but had been pre-arranged by the wise foresight of General Gough.

On March 31 there were signs that the German flood was reaching full tide. They had acted to a wonderful degree up to their own saying: *“Immer fest daran!”* but they had now far outstripped their artillery support and the tenacious elastic British defence had worn them down. There was no attack on the morning of this day, but about noon the fighting broke out once more in the Moreuil Woods, the enemy pushing their way through them and slowly driving back the line of the Eighth and the Twentieth, while the French were again driven out of the village of Moreuil. North of Marcelcave there was a day of quiet and re-organisation. The Sixty-first was still holding the Berteaucourt — Gentilles line, while the Eighteenth was holding the line of the Luce. In the evening the Eighth and Twentieth were again reinforced by the cavalry, and by the superior and heroic exertions of every one concerned the position on the right flank was maintained. The 2nd Berkshires distinguished themselves in this fighting. There is something more than a name even in this stage of the war in the old Regular battalions, for the chronicler finds that they stand out amidst the other units out of all proportion to their numbers. The 2nd Bedfords, 1st Royal Fusiliers, 2nd Scots Fusiliers, and many others upheld the honour of the grand old force.

The right wing had been considerably hustled in the Moreuil quarter on March 31, but on April 1 the Second Cavalry Division, which included the Canadian Brigade, made a sudden fierce counter-attack which threw the enemy back. Fifty prisoners and thirteen machine-guns were the fruits of this action. The British guns had played upon the wood during the whole night, and the enemy had suffered severely, for the assailants found the brushwood to be full of dead Germans. There was no other movement of importance on this day. The reformed Fourteenth Division was brought back into the battle and took the place of the Twentieth, the Fiftieth, and of the cavalry upon the front to the south of the Luce. Speaking of the latter troops after their nine days of martyrdom, a senior officer who saw them at this stage said: “In the last attack they were driven back about a mile towards Amiens, but after the first Bosch onrush they stood like rocks, repelling attack after attack, counter-attacking and regaining ground in such a manner that every day I marvelled at the doing of it, and at the men who did it.”

April 2 and 3 were quiet days, but on the 4th there was a very violent and general attack along the line of the Nineteenth Corps, and of the Thirty-sixth French Corps (General Nollet) which lay to the immediate south. The main weight of the battle fell upon the Fourteenth Division in their new positions, and by nine o’clock in the morning the Germans had gained some success to the north of the main Amiens road. The Australian 9th Brigade, which was south of the road, held their line, but had to fall back 500 yards in order to conform with the general position. At 11:30 the enemy was still making progress, mostly on the front of the Fourteenth Division, and had reached the east edge of Hamel and of Bois de Vaire. The Third Cavalry Division, those indomitable troops, were thrown in to thicken the line of the Fourteenth, and the Canadian motor guns from Villers-Bretonneux were also brought into the battle. Later two battalions of the invaluable Australian infantry came up at the double from the 15th Australian Brigade. If ever the arrival of strong loyal men in a time of darkness brought joy and comfort with it, it was when the Australians relieved the British line in these later days of the second battle of the Somme. “God bless them!” was the silent prayer that went down the weary line. Ground had been lost south of Villers-Bretonneux, and the line was bent, but the whole of the Third and Fifth Australian Divisions were streaming down to their places in the defence. The end of the retreat was at hand.

Upon the evening of April 4, the line which was to be permanent for many months to come began to define itself, and order gradually evolved out of ever-shifting chaos. Lee’s Eighteenth Division was now in touch with the Thirty-sixth French Corps at Hangard. Then at the Bois l’Abbé lay the 9th Australian Brigade. North of this, at the Bois de Gentilles, was the Third Cavalry Division. Thence in succession came the 15th Australian Brigade, the 43rd Brigade, the remains of the Twenty-fourth Division, the 8th Australian Brigade, the other elements of the Fourteenth Division, the Fifth Australian Division near Aubigny, and the Fifty-eighth Division in the north. This summary will show how Australia had braced the line. Upon the next day, April 5, Butler’s Third Corps took over the whole area of the Nineteenth Corps, and the episode was at an end. The retreat of General Watts across the ravaged country, his attempt to hold the long front of the Somme, his successive short retreats, his continual stands, and his eventual success, will always remain one of the most remarkable incidents in the war. This officer, who at the beginning of hostilities was a “dug-out,” hardly rescued from a premature ending of his military career, showed in the highest degree those qualities of never despairing, and of rapidly adapting means to an end, which mark the competent soldier. He began with two units under his control, and he ended with fifteen, but no general ever had to handle more weary troops, or had more need of a clear head and a high heart. The strain upon him had been extraordinary — though indeed that is true of every corps and divisional commander in the line. As to the special features of this operation, it may be said to be remarkable for the improvisations of troops, for the continual use of entrenching battalions as combatants, for the work of the dismounted cavalry, for the self-sacrifice and energy of the motor batteries, and very specially for the degree of mobility attained by the heavy artillery and the rapidity with which it came into action in successive positions. Military critics will draw many deeper lessons from these operations, but these at least are sufficiently obvious to catch the eye of the least experienced student.

The total losses of the Nineteenth Corps during this fourteen days of battle came to from 35,000 to 40,000, killed, wounded, and missing. The losses in guns were 41 heavy pieces and 73 field-guns, twelve of which were anti-tank guns in the forward line. The pressure sustained by some of the divisions would be incredible if the facts were not fully authenticated. Thus the Eighth English Division was attacked from first to last by eighteen different German divisions, including three of the Guards. Prisoners were taken from each so that their identity could not be disputed. Yet this same Eighth Division was engaged within three weeks in the victorious advance at Villers-Bretonneux. The German oracle Clausewitz has said that a retreating army should go back not like a hunted deer but like a wounded lion. His commentators would hardly find a better example than the British armies in the second battle of the Somme.

VI. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME
The Retreat of the Eighteenth Corps, March 21-29

Retreat of the Sixty-first Division — The Gloucesters at Beauvais — Fall of Ham — Retreat of the Thirtieth and Thirty-sixth Divisions — Great privations of the men — Fine feat at Le Quesnoy — Summary of the experience of Maxse's Corps

IT has been shown that Maxse's Eighteenth Corps, covering the St. Quentin front, maintained its whole position on March 21, thanks to the splendid conduct of the three battalions in the forward line, and to the stout resistance in the zone of battle. It has also been told how the Sixty-first Division, the most northern unit, withdrew on the afternoon of March 22, very attenuated but still full of fight, to a prepared position between Vaux and Villeveque.

At 4 P.M. that day the three brigades, or what was left of them, were in line 1500 yards east of Beauvais, the 184th being in the centre, with the 182nd on its right, and the 183rd on its left. As they faced their pursuers they could plainly see the Germans pouring in successive waves from Atilly. The central brigade was commanded by General the Hon. Robert White, one of two gallant brothers who sowed their military wild oats in the Jameson Raid, and this unit, reduced now to a mere handful of Gloucesters, Berkshires, and Oxfords, was exposed to a scourging fire of shrapnel, which further thinned their ranks, their General being one of the casualties. No field ambulances were available at the moment, and as General White was led away badly wounded he saw the German cavalry breaking into the south side of Beauvais, while a large artillery dump west of the village was exploded by the enemy fire. The whole situation was chaotic, but the British infantry still hung together, retreating slowly and turning continually upon their pursuers. Some twenty German aeroplanes were quartering the district like so many fierce hawks, and diving with great daring from time to time into the very streets of the village, while the British falling back into cover fired up at them with their 'rifles and light machine-guns. Two of them came crashing down upon the roofs of the houses. It was rumoured that the enemy had already got close to Ham upon the right rear of the division, and they were round the left flank in the region of Holnon Wood. There was little artillery support available, for sixty per cent of the forward guns had been taken or destroyed in Holnon Wood, and the remaining batteries were getting away with their reduced teams, so that the retreat of the infantry was correspondingly slow in order to cover the withdrawal.

In the north the Scotsmen of the 183rd Brigade were moving back near Villescholles in touch with the 72nd Brigade of the Twenty-fourth Division, both of them being much helped in their retirement by the 11th Hussars. All along the line the Germans were pressing very closely, but the Sixty-first kept wonderfully steady, though at Beauvais, where Colonel Wetherall had taken over the command when General White was wounded, the two parties were continually intermingled, so ardent was the pursuit and so leisurely the retreat. So mixed were the combatants that Major Howitt, brigade-major of the 184th, was dragged out from among his men, and was in the hands of the Germans for some exciting and instructive hours. “I must say the officers treated me well, though the escorts were very rough,” says he. “For all my hatred I could not help admiring them intensely, for their deployment, discipline, and preparation were an eye-opener. They extended into battle order with hardly a sound and lay down preparatory for the next assault, bringing up mules dragging light trench-mortars, machine-guns, and ammunition.” Major Howitt finally broke away from his escort, and by keeping so near to a burning ammunition dump that no one dared to follow him, he succeeded in regaining his own lines.

The defence of the line in front of Beauvais was kept up with remarkable tenacity and ended by 150 men of the 2/5th Gloucester battalion performing what was an extraordinary feat, even in this war of miracles, for they held on to a line 2000 yards in length until 3:30 in the morning of March 23, holding up the whole German advance. All night the enemy tried to rush or to bomb this thin line of determined men, but it was not until the cartridges ran low that the British made their retreat, sneaking round the outskirts of the village which blazed behind them, and making their way to Longuevoisin where they joined their comrades, who had already given them up as lost, for they had been five miles behind the army. Colonel Lawson was in command during this heroic episode, and was ably supported by his two lieutenants, Rickerby and Dudbridge. Of the latter, it is recorded that in a later stage of the retreat he was in such a condition of absolute exhaustion that he was wounded three times in the course of a single day without ever observing it until evening. Utter nerve fatigue has its compensations as well as its terrors.

The Thirtieth Division had held on to its ground until four in the afternoon of March 22. Some units lingered to cover the retreat, the 2nd Yorkshires and the 17th Manchesters holding on to their redoubts until six o’clock, when they were in danger of isolation.

During their withdrawal both the Sixty-first Division and the Thirtieth Division to the south of it were covered by the 59th and 60th Brigades of the Twentieth Division. These two fine brigades, still intact and full of fight, allowed the weary soldiers to pass through their ranks, while they opposed a tenacious resistance to the pursuing Germans. When the Sixty-first and Thirtieth were across the canal of the Somme the covering division fell back in orderly fashion, and itself crossed the canal between Canizy and Bethencourt, the 60th Brigade being on the right and the 59th on the left. The 60th Brigade was compelled to fight hard to make good its retirement, and it struck back again and again at the German vanguard. In this fighting the 12th Rifle Brigade particularly distinguished itself, but its losses were heavy, and included its gallant Colonel, Maclachlan.

Early in the morning of March 23 it was known that the enemy had crossed the line of the Somme at Ham. The Thirtieth Division had retreated upon the important little town, which had been thrown into a state of defence by General Stanley of the 89th Brigade, but his garrison was so utterly inadequate to cover the ground that his dispositions were useless, as the Germans could get round him on either side. He had with him in the first instance two entrenching battalions, the 21st and 23rd, two companies of gas engineers, the corps cyclists, and a mere handful of infantry. Late on March 22 he was joined, however, by his own three attenuated battalions of the King’s, each of which had been heavily engaged in different parts of the battle. At the same time the 90th Brigade dropped back to the left of Ham and the 21st to the right. The division was bare on both flanks, however, and it was determined to continue the retreat. The bridges were blown up and such rolling stock as was possible was destroyed, but there were very many stores in the town which had to be abandoned to the enemy. It was a very great disaster, for it supplied him with much, and indeed served him as an advanced base, all ready-made for his operations in this part of the field. As to the loss of the river line, it has already been explained that in these higher reaches it is a very slight barrier.

When the enemy had taken Ham he pushed along swiftly towards Esmery-Hallon on the heels of the retiring Thirtieth Division. The Thirty-sixth Division, which had been assisted in its retreat by the 61st Brigade of the Twentieth, had crossed the Somme to the east of Ham, and was now to the right of the Thirtieth (right and left being used all through these operations on the supposition that the unit is turning and facing the enemy). The Thirty-sixth Division crossed the Somme Canal at St. Simon, closely pressed by the enemy, and the 121st Field Company Royal Engineers and other sapper units performed great work under heavy fire, destroying e no less than twenty-seven bridges. After the passing of the river by the Germans there were constant rear-guard actions, one of the most spirited of which was at Villeselve, where the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the Royal Dragoons fought together and drove in the German vanguard. The general situation of Maxse's Corps upon the forenoon of March 23 was that the Thirty-sixth Division was over the Somme and near Golancourt and Bronchy, that the Thirtieth Division was dropping back upon Esmery-Hallon, and that the Sixty-first Division, retreating in the direction of Nesle had crossed the Somme at Voyennes and Offoy, continuing its retreat to the Nesle Canal. Between the Thirtieth and Sixty-first Divisions were the 60th Brigade on the right and the 59th on the left, who were also covering the Nesle Canal, but were quite ready to counter-attack should an opening present itself.

A British corps does not allow itself to be driven without hitting back, however great the odds may seem. A series of brisk skirmishes was going on all along the line. In one of these, just south of Ham, Colonel Watson with the 17th Bang's Liverpools came back on his pursuers and held them up for a time. More serious was the counter-attack organised by the main body north of Esmery-Hallon. This attack struck southwards from Canizy and hit upon the right flank of the Germans, staggering them for the instant. It was carried out by the 60th Brigade and the 182nd Brigade, all under General Duncan of the former Unit. This spirited advance was led upon the field by Colonel Bilton of the Sixty-first Division, and was delivered with such force that this small British detachment drove back for some distance the great army which was rolling westwards. It was impossible, of course, to recover ground permanently, but it gained invaluable time and eased the pressure upon the south end of the line for the whole of a critical evening. It was clear, however, that the capture of Ham and the crossing of the stream had turned the flank of the Twentieth and Sixty-first Divisions, who were defending the higher reaches of the same river. They were not to be frightened prematurely out of their positions, however, and at Bethencourt the 11th Rifle Brigade drove back a German attempt at crossing, while at Offoy the 12th Rifles also inflicted a sharp repulse upon the pursuers. That evening, March 23, the Sixty-first Division was practically amalgamated with the Twentieth, and both were concentrated near Nesle. They received at this time a most useful reinforcement in the shape of two batteries (16 guns) of Canadian motor machine-guns under Captain Meerling. There is not an officer or man of these much-tried battalions who would not admit a deep debt of gratitude to these splendidly efficient and energetic guns, which had such mobility that they were always where they were most wanted. The troops had on the morning of March 24 got behind the Somme Canal, which runs beside the river, all bridges had been broken, and patrols were pushed across where practicable so as to keep in touch with the enemy. It was not in this southern area, however, but at Bethencourt that the Germans did actually get across in force, by which they turned the flank of the 25th Brigade of the Eighth Division in the north and of the 59th Brigade in the south. An attack was instantly organised by the 11th Rifle Brigade, who had lost their Colonel, Cotton, the day before, and were now led by Major Bertie. They succeeded by a fine effort in driving the Germans for the time across the canal and gaining touch with the Eighth Division. The Germans pushed across once more at Pargny, upon the other flank of the Eighth Division, and also renewed their attempt in greater force at Bethencourt, getting possession of the higher ground there. This time it was the Highlanders and Royal Scots of the 183rd Brigade who counter-attacked, acting as part of the Twentieth Division, and by half-past two in the afternoon the position had once more been re-established. The Canadian motor-guns were invaluable in this operation.

Upon the morning of March 24 the Sixty-first Division was barring the road from Ham to Nesle. The German progress had been checked in this direction by a spirited counter-attack carried out by the 5th Cornwalls, the pioneer battalion of that division, together with a mixed array of police, bandsmen, and other details, who advanced from Offoy to a depth of five miles, under Major Bennett. This little improvised force held on all night, and seems eventually to have joined up with the French in the neighbourhood of Esmery-Hallon.

The British were still holding the crossings at Voyennes and Offoy, but very hard fighting had broken out to the south, and the Germans, who had poured over in the neighbourhood of Ham, were now thrusting hard for Canizy. The road bridges had all been destroyed, but there was a railway bridge at Ham which had been taken out of the hands of the army authorities and left in charge of the railway department. This was either uninjured or at any rate inadequately destroyed, and was of immediate use to the enemy, enabling him to keep uninterrupted pressure upon the retiring troops. Canizy was now taken, but the 12th Rifles made an immediate counter-attack and forced the Germans back from the village.

In this spirited operation they lost their gallant Colonel, Moore, who had led them with the utmost fearlessness.

Whilst the Germans were pushing forward at Canizy they had also maintained strong and continuous pressure upon the Thirtieth Division near Moyencourt, and upon the Thirty-sixth Division at Golancourt, causing the Ulster men, whose left wing was entirely in the air, to fall back westwards. The next line of defence, after the Somme had been forced, lies along what is called the Libermont Canal between Nesle and Libermont. It was necessary to fall back, fighting as best they could, and to place this obstacle, narrow as it was, between the weary soldiers and their pursuers. It was the third day since the men had had a decent meal or an uninterrupted rest, and they were very disorganised and broken. “Hundreds of men were streaming back,” says one observer. “They had been without food for days and were done in completely. They were stopped and reformed at the bridges, where as many as 2000 were collected.” It is such plain sobering sentences which help one to realise that war is not, as large scale descriptions might seem to imply, a question of the moving of pieces upon a board, but that underneath the strategy lie the countless human tragedies, the tortured frames, the broken nerves, the prayers of brave men that they may still be brave, the torturing anxiety of officers, the ever-pressing burden which sometimes breaks the weary back which tries to hold it. Strategy reckons nothing of these things, but their accumulation makes up the terrible human tragedy of war, which brings humility to the most proud and fear to the most valiant. All equally feel the weakness of nature, but he is blessed who has the strength of spirit to cover and to combat it.

By mid-day on March 24 the Thirtieth Division was over the Libermont Canal, holding from Buverchy to Libermont, with the village and bridge of Raincourt as a joining point between the 90th Brigade to the north and the 89th to the south. It may be recorded, to descend suddenly from divisions to individuals, that the first sign of the new German advance was a single scout who appeared in the open in front of the canal, and was engaged in a prolonged and deliberate rifle duel by Lieutenant Harrop, with the result that he was finally brought in as a wounded prisoner. The Twentieth Division had also fallen back, the orders of brigades from the south being the 60th with its flank on Buverchy, the 59th resting on Quiquery, and the 183rd to link up with the Eighth Division near Mesnil St. Nicaise. The Thirty-sixth Division prolonged the line to the south of Libermont. The French reinforcements from the south were beginning by the afternoon of this day to get as far north as this section, and if not very weighty at the moment they were of great moral use as a promise for the future.

From the new positions of the British line the German infantry could now be seen advancing in platoon columns in three lines on each side of the Voyenne road and heading for the Libermont Canal. Second Several parties of horsemen could be seen also, who Battle were conjectured to be battery staffs, keeping up with the fight. The weak point was still near Bethencourt, between the Twentieth and the Eighth Divisions, where the gap tended to be wider as the enemy got more troops across and endeavoured to push the 25th Brigade north as has been described in dealing with the experiences of the Nineteenth Corps. They were reported before evening as having got as far as Morchain. The flank brigade of the Eighteenth Corps, the 183rd, was ordered to extend as far to the north-west as Potte in the hope of regaining touch, but though they reached that village they were still unable to bridge the gap. During the night there were heavy attacks upon Mesnil St. Nicaise in this region, which fell chiefly upon the Rifle battalions of the 59th Brigade, which had been reinforced by the 20th Entrenching Battalion and the 1 1th Durhams, the divisional pioneer battalion. The general result was to force the British line some little distance to the westward. At Buverchy in the evening the German infantry also advanced in great numbers, but came under the very efficient guns of the Thirtieth Division, and lost very heavily. The enemy artillery was also very active so that both the Thirtieth near Buverchy and the Thirty-sixth farther south had many casualties. The French relief was making itself more felt, however, in this southern section, where they were already outnumbering the British. The latter were greatly worn — so much so that the 21st Brigade of the Thirtieth Division could hardly be said to exist, only about 100 of the Yorkshires being left in the line. By evening the centre chapter of the position was near Moyencourt, some little distance to the west.

In spite of the French reinforcements, which were not accompanied with artillery, the attack was still markedly stronger than the defence, so that March 25 was a most dangerous and critical day in this quarter of the field. To trace the developments from the north the enemy continued to press through the gap between the two corps, the Nineteenth and the Eighteenth, making a series of heavy attacks towards Mesnil-le-Petit and Nesle from the direction of Potte. This movement, powerfully followed up, pushed back the left flank from Quiquery to a point on the high ground 1000 yards west of Nesle. The 183rd Brigade, which was now a mere handful of Scottish infantry, superb in quality but reduced to the last stage of exhaustion, together with the thin ranks of the 59th Brigade of Rifles, could not, even with the aid of the Canadian motor-guns, hold the heavy masses who pressed down upon them. The French One hundred and thirty-third Division moving up in support had dug a line between Billancourt and Herly, but Nesle was abandoned to the enemy, the Twenty-second French Division retiring from this sector and falling back towards Roye. The 60th Brigade of the Twentieth Division, much helped by the 23rd Entrenching Battalion — these valiant diggers made their presence felt all along the line — still held stoutly to their positions from Quiquery to Buverchy, but their left and left rear were so compromised that it was clear they could not hold out longer. To the south the French, who had relieved the Thirty-sixth Division at Libermont, had been pushed back, and the British position was turned in their direction also. By the afternoon the French had taken over the line as far north as Buverchy, and the Thirtieth Division was ordered to fall back, but the Germans had advanced so rapidly from Libermont and got so far to their Eighteenth right rear that it was no easy matter either for the British or the French to get past them. Many had to swim the canals which striate this part of the country, and the 2nd Bedfords were especially hard-pressed before they were able to get away. The Twenty-second French Division was doing all it could to cover the approaches to Nesle upon the south, and the 184th Brigade cheered them loudly as they passed through their ranks. “They looked very fine men and seemed very much for it.” General Wetherall of this brigade was badly wounded by a shell splinter in this period of the battle. And we have a vivid pen-picture drawn by a spectator of Brigade-Major Howitt, some of whose adventures have already been recorded, holding Wetherall’ s wounded artery with one hand, while he wrote brigade orders with the other, for more than two hours on end. The 184th lost five commanders during the retreat.

Even if the local pressure had not caused a rapid withdrawal at this portion of the line, it would have been enforced by the general strategic position, for the German advance in the south had been so masterful that on this night of March 25 Roye was taken, which is far to the south-west of Nesle. The 61st Brigade had been sharing the hard fortunes of the Thirty-sixth Division, but now, as the latter had been drawn out, it was restored to the Twentieth Division. So severe had been the strain upon it that it only numbered about 500 bayonets, and some battalions, such as the 2/6th Royal Warwicks, had not a single combatant officer left standing. None the less, it was at once sent to man a supporting line stretching through Gruny, Cremery, and Liancourt, and had hardly reached it before the Germans were also at Liancourt. The brigade held them, however, and so enabled the front line to fall back upon an organised position whence, on the next morning, a swift retreat became necessary.

After dark on March 25 the One hundred and thirty-third French Division had come up to relieve the Twentieth and Sixty-first, but the situation was such along the line of the Nesle Canal that no fixed line could be formed, and the three divisions were finally greatly mixed up in the darkness and there was a good deal of confusion in their councils, since the general directions of the French were, to fall back to the south, while the line of retreat of the British lay rather to the west. There was little time for deliberation, for word had come in that the Germans were closing in upon Liancourt, pressing south and west, in a way which threatened to cut off the whole forward line. At midnight, the British, many of them hardly able to move for fatigue, staggered off in such formations as they could assemble, with orders to concentrate north and east of Roye. Thanks largely to the presence of the remnants of the 61st Brigade near Liancourt, this most hazardous march was successfully accomplished, but as Roye was within the grasp of the enemy the movement was continued so as to reach a line between Hangest and Le Quesnel. The Germans were close upon them in the north, so the 61st Brigade, now down to 400 men, acted as flank-guard, fending off their constant attacks.

The war has shown few finer instances of disciplined and tenacious valour than in the case of the three handfuls of men who represented what had once been the 12th King’s, 7th Somersets, and 7th Cornwalls. The enemy were in Liancourt, and their patrols were in actual hand-to-hand fighting with a French detachment aided by some of the Somersets. Other German troops pouring down from the north and using to the utmost the gap which had opened between the corps, endeavoured to cut in and to seize Le Quesnoy (not to be confused with Le Quesnel, towards which the troops were marching). It was, however, upon their line of retreat, and about halfway to their destination, so that a German occupation would have been serious. The post was most desperately defended by Captain Combe, the brigade-major of the 61st Brigade, with two Lewis guns and 100 men. Only eleven were left standing at the end of this defence, but the village was held for the necessary time, and the survivors only withdrew upon receipt of a positive order. Thus the flank march of the British from Roye to Le Quesnel upon the morning of March 26 was successfully accomplished, owing to the devotion of their covering party to the north. “It was very much of a rabble,” says an officer, “and there was great difficulty in sorting out the men and arranging the units.” None the less the future was to show that the force was no more beaten than were the old contemptibles after Mons.

The Thirtieth Division had been drawn out of the line on the arrival of the French, but they were hardly started on their movement towards the rest which they had earned so well, when this great pressure arose, and every man who could still carry a rifle was needed once more in the line. On the morning of March 26 they were back then, between Bouchoir and Kouvroy. The 21st Brigade had now entirely disappeared, but the remains of the 2nd Yorks and the South Lancashire Pioneer Battalion were added to the 89th Brigade which was in the north at Rouvroy, while the 90th, under General Poyntz, filled the gap to Bouchoir. The Thirtieth Division had got considerably to the west of this line before they were recalled, and it was only by some splendid marching that they were able at last to throw themselves down upon the coveted ground before the German armies, which were streaming along the Roye-Amiens road, were able to reach it. As they faced the Germans the Twenty-fourth, now the mere shadow of a division, was on their left at Warvillers, while the Sixty-first and Twentieth were in support at Beaufort and Le Quesnel. Near Erches the Thirty-sixth Ulster men, whose relief, like that of the Thirtieth, had proved to be impossible, were still battling bravely, retaking the village of Erches after it had fallen to the enemy. The 109th Brigade also distinguished itself greatly in this area, the Irish Fusiliers Battalions of which it is composed holding on most desperately to the village of Guerbigny, at the extreme south of the corps front, and continuing a heroic defence during March 26, and long after it was isolated upon March 27. The artillery of the Ulster Division was particularly good in its covering fire during these operations, gaining the very grateful acknowledgments of the French troops and generals who were more and more concerned with this southern sector of the line. Speaking generally the troops had now reached the region of the old French trenches, which grid-ironed a considerable area of country, so that it was certain that if men could be found to man them, the pursuit would no longer continue at the Battle pace of the last two days.

Great work was done at this period by four of the Canadian motor-guns at the cross-roads, north-west of Rouvroy, where they not only inflicted heavy losses upon the enemy but delayed his advance while the exhausted troops were settling down into this new position. Every hour was of importance as giving reinforcements time to come up from the rear, and the general orders to the divisional generals were to hold on at all costs wherever defence was possible. A small body of corps cyclists under Lieutenant Quartermain co-operated splendidly with the motor-guns and did good service at this critical period of the retreat, during which there was very little artillery support behind the thin line of infantry.

The German pressure on March 27 fell chiefly, as already shown, upon the Twenty-fourth Division and the other units on the extreme south of the Nineteenth Corps, which were forced back for some distance, and so threatened the stability of the line in the south. The 17th King’s Liverpool, which was the flank battalion, held fast, however, and flung back their left to form a defensive line to the north. A small body of German cavalry performed a brilliant piece of audacious work in the darkness of the early morning of this date, pushing through the outposts of the Thirty-sixth Division in the south near Guerbigny, and capturing the Brigade Headquarters of the 109th Brigade, and also the chief staff officer of the division.

The future was full of menace, for the Germans were pressing on in great numbers. An observer near Bouchoir that evening (March 27) says: “I have never seen so many Germans in all my life — one huge dark mass about a mile away. With glasses one could see howitzers, machine-guns, trench-mortars, and field batteries, as well as infantry. It was a most wonderful sight. They seemed to be coming down the Roye road, then moving off to the south, and some stopping in a mass.”

The main German attack upon the extreme south of the corps line on March 27 fell upon the Thirty-sixth Division in the direction of Erches, with the result that the Ulster men fell slowly back upon Arvillers, the 60th Brigade throwing back a defensive flank to correspond. By 12:30 Bouchoir, held by the 90th Brigade, was gained by the Germans, but the British formed a new line to the immediate westward of the village. An attack upon Folies was thrown back by the 59th Brigade. Towards evening some order came out of a rather tangled position, which may well be obscure both to writer and reader, since soldiers upon the spot found the greatest difficulty in separating the various confused elements. As night fell upon March 27 after much desultory and inconclusive local fighting, there was no great change in the British line which ran from Warvillers, still held by the Twenty-fourth Division, to the west of Bouchoir, where the Thirtieth held the line, and down to Arvillers held by the 60th Brigade of the Twentieth Division, which was temporarily out of touch with the Thirty-sixth Division. Hangest was held by the Sixty-first Division, and Le Quesnel by the Sixty-first and the French. That night the Twentieth Division was ordered to join the Nineteenth Corps, and their record under this new command will be found in the preceding chapter. One would have thought that they had reached the limits of human endurance, and their total numbers were not more than a thousand, and yet they were but at the beginning of a new chapter in their glorious history.

The same words apply to their comrades of the Sixty-first Division, who were also ordered north. They were relieved by the French at Arvillers, and this portion of the line was on March 28 pressed back to the west of Hangest.

The removal of the Twentieth Division at so critical a time could only be justified by the extreme and pressing need of the Nineteenth Corps, for it had the effect of producing an almost impossible position for the line in the south. Had it been possible to replace it at once with a solid French division, it would have mattered less, but as matters stood the One hundred and thirty-third French Division had itself been involved in the retreat and was greatly worn. There was so little time also to get it into its new positions that there was never any solid bastion upon that corner of the line. The result was speedily seen in the morning of March 28, when the

Thirtieth Division were first subjected to a very heavy bombardment, and then looking south saw a general retreat going on from Arvillers, while their left flank at Warvillers was also very weak, since the Twenty-fourth Division was hardly strong enough to maintain itself. By 2 P.M. both flanks were bare, and the enemy were well round them in the north and in the south at Hangest. At one time it seemed impossible for the division to get clear, and even now their extrication seems miraculous to the officers who effected it. A rapid retreat was made through Mézières and on to Moreuil, which only just avoided the closing pincers of the German advance. The French, who were in the act of relieving the Thirtieth Division, came away with them and had the same narrow escape. The block upon the road which formed the only egress is described as having been appalling, fugitives, refugees, and small disciplined columns of troops being crowded together from one end of it to the other. "The men were excellent," says an officer of the Thirtieth Division. "Their discipline was not a bit shaken." Such words, could not truthfully be said of every unit, and yet soldiers can have seldom been more highly tried in any operation in history. Even the Imperial Guard may reach its breaking point, as the retreat from Moscow has shown. At Moreuil there is only one bridge, and had the German artillery been able to find it the result would have been a Beresina. As it was, the troops got across and speedily reformed upon the farther side of the river Avre.

This may be taken as the limit of the retreat of the Eighteenth Corps, since the stand in the north of the line and the thickening French resistance in the south brought the momentum of the German advance to a halt. How terrible the ordeal had been may be gathered from the fact that the Twentieth Division, as already mentioned, was not more than 1000 strong, the Thirtieth Division about 2000 strong, the Sixty-first Division 2100 strong, and the Thirty-sixth Division only a little stronger at the end of it. Again and again it had been on the brink of absolute disaster, but always by the wise dispositions of General Maxse and his divisional generals, seconded by the splendid tenacity of his men, the worst consequences had been avoided. Rapid readjustments had been needed, but a fatal break was always averted. The troops were handicapped in every possible way, for not only was their artillery far below strength, but for some reason the British Air Service during these days of stress was very weak in this southern area, while the German machines were very numerous and aggressive. The artillery officers were splendidly cool and efficient all through, and in the case of the 92nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery near Esmery-Hallon, it is said that the last gun was just 25 yards from the Germans when it limbered up. For two days the whole corps artillery was with the French, and did fine work with them, but to the great detriment of their own infantry. Some of the batteries remained for a long time with the French, and one French general has left it upon record that the failure of the Germans to capture Moreuil on April 4 was almost entirely due to the splendid shooting of the 306th Brigade Royal Field Artillery. After the first two days of the retreat no guns were abandoned by the Eighteenth Corps. The total losses of guns might be put at about 90 field pieces and 4.5 howitzers, with about 60 heavier pieces.

VII. THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Retreat of the Third Corps

Movement across the Crozat Canal — Fight of the 173rd Brigade — Forcing of the Canal Line — Arrival of the French — Fight of Ffieres Wood — Splendid work of the Cavalry — Loss of Noyon — Final equilibrium — General retrospect of the Battle

WE shall now complete this slight survey of a vast subject by following the fortunes of Butler’s Corps upon the extreme right of the whole British Army. It has already been shown that the condition of this corps at the end of the first day of battle was most perilous, as its left flank in the region of Essigny, where the battle zone of the Fourteenth Division had been deeply pierced, was completely turned. The Eighteenth Division in the centre had, it is true, retained its ground, but the left brigade of the Fifty-eighth Division upon the right, the only brigade of that unit which was engaged, had also after a very desperate resistance lost their front positions at Quessy opposite to La Fère. Therefore orders had been given to draw off the troops during the night of March 21 across the Crozat Canal, and a covering line had been built up from the 54th Brigade, the Second Cavalry Division, and the 12th and 18th Entrenching Battalions in order to hold the German pursuit and to give the somewhat dishevelled troops time to re-organise their ranks. By 5 A.M. on March 22 they were over the canal and the bridges had been destroyed. The artillery had been got over first to cover the crossings, and the 54th Brigade, which had covered the rear of the Fourteenth Division, was lined up from Jussy to Mennessis. The Eighteenth Division (less the 54th Brigade) fell back in the line of Frières Wood, behind the canal. Many guns had been lost but the cavalry had thrown the 3rd and 6th Brigades of the R.H.A. into the firing-line to support the infantry, and two new batteries of the 96th K.F.A., only arrived the day before from England, came in at the nick of time.

It was of the first importance to destroy the bridges along the canal, but this was found to be no easy matter. They had all been mined and prepared for destruction some time before by the French, but either the lapse of time or faulty material had caused such deterioration that the charges failed to explode, and had to be renewed and discharged under circumstances of great difficulty and danger. It was carried out none the less with great tenacity by the British sappers, but several weak points remained, notably a canal lock which had been so injured that the bed of the canal was exposed for some distance. The railway bridges here, as elsewhere, were also a source of weakness.

As the corps turned to face the enemy upon the south side of the canal the general line of battle showed the 41st Brigade just south of St. Simon, connected up on the left by the only surviving battalion of the 42nd Brigade with the 61st Brigade of the Twentieth Division who were in support of the Thirty-sixth Ulsters at that place. Then came 43rd and 54th Brigades, facing Jussy and Mennessis with the 3rd and 5th Dismounted Cavalry Brigades in support. South of this point were the 4th Cavalry Brigade, the 55th Brigade, and the 63rd Brigade, all in the Frières area. Then came the 173rd Brigade in the Vouel neighbourhood with the 18th Entrenching Battalion and the 6th Dismounted Cavalry Brigade. This force had already lost heavily, and many of the men were suffering from gas, but they were sustained by the certainty that French reinforcements would speedily reach them from the south, as a system of mutual lateral support had been agreed upon between the commanders.

A line of trenches had been begun in this neighbourhood by the French some time before, and it had been carried on by Italian labour, but it was still very unfinished, with many gaps, so that the tired soldiers had to lay down their rifles and take to their trenching tools to get some cover. It was already clear that they would need it, for with early daybreak on March 22 the Germans showed that they had reached the north bank of the canal at Jussy. It was again very misty, and they were able to bring up their machine-guns and small artillery with perfect impunity and place them under cover. It was not until between 10 and 11 A.M. that the mist began to lift, and the British outposts peering through it could see the flash of the guns among the plantations on the farther side. At an earlier hour the Germans had tried to cross at Jussy, but had been driven back. It was already evident, however, that they were in a position to repair the bridges in such a way as to find a passage wherever they desired. The general situation might be described as a curious reproduction of the first action of the war when the two armies lay upon either side of the Mons Canal.

The French Sixth Army on the right had acted with loyal promptitudc, and the One hundred and twenty-fifth Division, under General Diebold, was already moving up from the south. One would have imagined that the most efficient relief would have been to replace the two British brigades in the south of the Oise, and so re-unite the Fifty-eighth Division. For some reason this was not done, and General Worgan's 173rd Brigade continued to be a lone unit. A very welcome reinforcement consisted of nine batteries of French 75's. It was understood also that the whole Fifth French Corps, under General Pelle, was due at Noyon that evening, and that the Third British Corps would be relieved by it as soon as possible, but further help was slow in materialising.

At about 1 P.M. on March 22 the enemy made their first crossing of the canal in the region of the 173rd Brigade. They advanced from Fargniers in the direction of Tergnier village. The range of vision in this water-sodden region was not more than fifty yards, which greatly handicapped Colonel Dervicke-Jones of the 8th London, who was in local command of this sector, as it put his machine-gun defence out of action. The troops were spread over a front of 3000 yards, so that the various companies were widely separated. The first German advance was made across a lock gate by a number of men dressed in the uniforms of some of the 1st London, taken the day before — a ruse which was the more successful as a number of genuine stragglers had actually been coming in in this fashion during the morning. An attack followed during which C Company of the 8th Londons, while holding the enemy in front, were attacked by these pretended comrades upon the right rear, so that they were almost entirely destroyed. A road was thus opened across the canal, and the enemy opened out both north and south of the Quessy-Tergnier road, cutting off those of the 3rd and 8 th March 22. London who were on the farther side. These men fought to a finish, and only a few of them ever got back. Colonel Dervicke-Jones had taken up a position in an old French reserve line called the Butt line, with two companies of his battalion and some machine-guns, and was able to hold up the enemy all day in his immediate front, and to prevent several battalions from deploying out of Tergnier. The artillery also got on to the German infantry in this part of the field with good results. This Butt position was maintained until the morning of March 23. Farther up the line, in the region of the Fourteenth Division, other troubles had developed, and the pressure of the enemy was great. At 4:30 P.M. the defenders were reinforced, but the enemy were already across at several points and were advancing upon Cugny. There was desultory fighting along the whole corps front, and though there was promise of immediate French relief, no French troops seem to have been actually engaged upon March 22. About 6 o'clock in the evening the enemy was across at Jussy Bridge and also at Montague, but a fine counter-attack was made at this point by the 7th Bedfords and 6th Northamptons of the 54th Brigade, aided by the 16th Lancers, which drove the German infantry across once more and caused considerable losses. In spite of this success the general situation upon the evening of March 22 was not cheering, and the task of the Third Corps which had been ordered to stand fast and form the southern hinge upon which the whole retreat should turn, was clearly a very difficult one. It was the more alarming, as the rapid progress of the enemy at Beauvais and Vaux at the centre of the army led to a demand for cavalry which could not be complied with without denuding the line to a dangerous and almost impossible extent.

It was soon clear on the morning of March 23 that the Butt position on the right could not be maintained. The French had taken it over, but they were unable to hold it. A line was built up near Noreuil, where the remains of the 8th and 3rd Londons, aided by some French details, endeavoured all day to check the German advance. The main attacks were driving down from the north, and were heralded by a very severe machine-gun barrage, which rained bullets over the British position. The defence was much aided by a French armoured car upon the Quessy-Rouez road, and by a battery of 76's. The 4th London were to the south of the village and less exposed to the force of the advance. About six, after an hour of intense shelling, the Germans closed in upon Noreuil, the defenders, after a stout resistance which occasionally came to hand-to-hand fighting, being driven westwards. Colonel Burt, commanding the 6th Cavalry Brigade, barricaded his headquarters in the village and held the Germans off a long time by his deadly fire. It was not until long after the lines had been withdrawn that this brave officer had to be specially summoned to leave his post and fall back on Chaimy. Finally, the retreat became general, but was rallied at the end of the Noreuil valley, where some 200 men collected, and with a good field of fire to help them, remained for some time on the defence. Late at night this small force was ordered to fall back to a new line at Chauny. Battle

It has already been stated that two companies (C and D) of the 8th London (Post Office Rifles) had been cut off when the Germans got across the lock-gate on the afternoon of March 22. These men, under Captain Gunning, had made a remarkable defence, crawling out with Lewis guns on to the lock-gates in order to enfilade the advancing Germans. In the afternoon of March 23 they found themselves with the Germans on three sides of them and the canal on the fourth. Captain Gunning and Captain Kelly with the survivors then fought their way through to Condren, where they still continued their resistance. These soldiers, who made so admirable a resistance, were largely men who had been combed from the Army Service Corps.

Whilst the 23rd of March had brought this heavy fighting to the 173rd Brigade, it had been a day of severe trial to all the other units of the corps front. The 54th Brigade was still covering the crossing at Jussy and Montague, but the pressure was rapidly increasing as fresh German divisions made their presence felt. The situation was the more serious as General Butler already knew that the enemy were across the canal at Ham and had turned his left flank, but it was still hoped that a counter-attack in this quarter might throw him back, and so it was determined to hold on to the line. An emergency force of odds and ends, dismounted troopers, labour men, and returned leave men were gathered together at Crisolles and placed under the command of General Harman to co-operate with General Greenly who now led the remains of the Fourteenth Division, in guarding the left wing. Meanwhile there was very brisk fighting at Jussy, where the German infantry had once again, under the cover of many guns, got a footing upon the south side of the canal. They were at once vigorously attacked by a small body of the 11th Royal Fusiliers and of the Scots Greys and penned up in the village of Jussy. At 11 A.M. the Germans had also got across at Mennessis, but came under the fire of four machine-guns of the Canadian Mounted Brigade which inflicted heavy losses upon them. None the less at a second effort the Germans were across once more, driving back by the weight of their attack the worn ranks of the 7th Bedfords and of the 9th Scottish Rifles. At 11:30 they were half a mile south of Jussy, and might have got round the flank of the Bedfords but for the interposition of 200 Canadian dragoons. “These grim, square-faced men, with their parchment skins and their granite features, were a glad sight to our weary eyes,” says one who was fighting beside them. There was a time when it was doubtful whether in this quarter there was anything but a line of dismounted troops between the enemy and Paris.

Every man who could be spared was hurried up to hold the weak points of the line, including the 8th Sussex, the pioneer battalion of the Eighteenth Division, the rest of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and the 7th Cavalry

Brigade, but the mischief had gone too far, and the situation upon the right of the line was even worse than at Jussy. The counter-attack of the French One hundred and twenty-fifth Division in the direction of Tergnier had not been a success, which is not to be wondered at, for the French infantry had come fast and far, their ammunition was not plentiful, and they were working over strange ground against an aggressive and victorious enemy. Next to the French on that front was the 7th Queen’s. Colonel Bushell found himself at one period in command of the left of the French as well as of his own Surrey men, and he led on this mixed following under an intense fire, being himself severely wounded and yet rallying them again and again. Little progress could be made, but at least he held the line firm for a time. This gallant colonel, after having his wound dressed, returned to the field of battle, fell insensible, and had at last to be carried off. Next to the 7th Queen’s was the 8th East Surreys (both of 55th Brigade), which was also in the thick of the battle, as was the neighbouring 12th Entrenching Battalion. This line made a very fine resistance, but was slowly pressed back by weight of numbers until at 4 P.M. they were on the line Noreuil — Frières — Faillouel, to the left of the spot where the 173rd Brigade was still holding its ground. The remains of the 7th Buffs fell back also with the rest of the 55th Brigade, fighting hard, through Frières Wood, where to the south-west of the wood they found some old French trenches, in which, with the aid of the survivors of the Queen’s, they, under Colonel Ransome, organised a line for the rest of that arduous day. This resistance held up some strong drives of the enemy which were evidently intended, in conjunction with the attack from Jussy in the north, to cut off all the troops in the woody country round Frières, and it acted as a most efficient screen during the withdrawal of the rest of the line.

The whole eastern limit of the British area was spotted at this period by small bodies of men who were working desperately to keep the German infantry from sweeping in from that side. At Noreuil, as has been shown, were the remains of the 173rd Brigade. At Frières Wood were the decimated 55th Brigade. Opposite Jussy were the 54th Brigade and the dismounted cavalry, slowly retiring before the ever-increasing pressure. In between these organised bodies were many smaller units all striving hard for the same end. Among these may be mentioned two companies of sappers, 80th and 92nd Field Companies R.E., who were extended upon the road north of Noreuil in touch with the 173rd Brigade on one side. These valiant men not only held their position all day, but actually made a counter-attack under Lieutenant Richardson in the evening, when they advanced until they were nearly surrounded. Finally they fought their way back to the Caillouel area.

As evening drew in the situation had become more and more difficult. The enemy had been driving in from every quarter all day without a respite, and the troops, many of whom had been engaged for more than two days without a moment for rest or re-organisation, were in a great state of exhaustion. Only a handful of several battalions remained as a fighting force. The confusion was made worse by the fact that the light blue uniforms of the French were mistaken for the grey of the Germans, so that misleading and alarming reports were continually brought in to the commanders. All reserves were in the fight, and the need of relief was urgent. About 4 o’clock the Faillouel position was found to be no longer tenable, and the troops fell back through the village, which was immediately occupied by the enemy who were pushing up their troops in motor-lorries in this quarter. By 5 o’clock the right wing had come back 500 yards, and by evening the main position was at Caillouel, when the 54th assembled, numbering 650 bayonets all told, the three battalions of Bedfords, Northamptons, and Royal Fusiliers being each a little over 200 strong. Detachments of the Scots Greys and 20th Hussars joined them at that village.

The 53rd Brigade, fighting upon the left of the 55th Brigade^ was as heavily engaged on March 23 as the other units of the Third Corps on the south side of the canal. At noon they had lent the 10th Essex to support their neighbours, and they consisted henceforth of only two weary battalions, the 6th Berks and 7th West Kents. At 3 o’clock in the afternoon they were heavily attacked and were pushed slowly back, struggling hard to keep the line. Major Tween led a counter-attack of his battalion headquarters, and checked the German advance at a critical moment, but was mortally wounded in the gallant endeavour. The two battalions were so weak that they had been telescoped into one, but good steel remains tough be it ever so thin, and the line still held. At 5:30 the 9th French Cuirassiers, long-booted giants, came up to help them, as did the 79th Field Company and various small details. At 7 the remains of the 55th Brigade were falling back through their ranks. When they had passed, the 53rd was also withdrawn as far as Commenchon, while the 55th reassembled at

Bethencourt to the north. Three gallant Cuirassier regiments of the 1st French Cavalry Division covered the rear. All the troops that night were worn to rags, for it is to be remembered always that the great local disparity of force enabled the Germans to bring up perpetually lines of perfectly fresh men with a new impetus and inspiration, against men, many of whom had been gassed on the first day, and who were now weary to death and hardly able either to stand or to think, to order or to understand an order. On the whole long, tormented, struggling line there was no time or place where the pressure was greater than here. In spite of all the ardour of the attack the stubborn constancy of the defence may be measured by the fact that, save for one battery which was destroyed by shell-fire upon the afternoon of the 23rd, no guns were lost in this corps either upon March 22 or 23. On the other hand, so great had been the destruction of machine-guns, especially upon the first day, that only two were left out of forty-eight in the Eighteenth Division, though these were augmented by six new ones on March 24.

The Sixth French Army, on the right of the British, was doing all it could to send up help, but it seems certain that none of this force was actually engaged before March 23, though it is stated upon good authority that in the liaison plans of the army the aid from the south was promised for the very first day. Any delay was not due to want of energy or loyalty of officers and men upon the spot. By the evening of March 23 the French units in the fighting-line were the One hundred and twenty-fifth Division, which made the unsuccessful counter-attack towards Tergnier, the First French Dismounted Cavalry Division, who fought side by side with the Eighteenth British Division, the Ninth and the Tenth French Divisions, both of which were on the extreme left of the Third Corps, and can hardly be said to have been engaged. As the French troops were now predominating in this sector, the command passed on the evening of March 23 to General Humbert, a dark, wiry little French veteran, commanding the Third Army. General Butler continued, of course, to command his own corps.

On the morning of March 24 the situation to the south of the Crozat Canal was as follows. The Fifty-eighth Division still held its original line from Barisis to the Buttes de Rouy, with a party holding the bridgehead at Condren. Then on the general line north and north-east of Chauny were the broken but indomitable remains of the Londoners of the 173rd Brigade, mixed up with fragments of the French One hundred and twenty-fifth

Division, the 18th Entrenching Battalion, and troopers of the 6th Dismounted Cavalry Brigade, together with the dust of smaller broken units. Up to La Neuville was covered by the worn brigades of the Eighteenth Division supporting the French Cuirassiers. North of that was the 326th Regiment of the Ninth French Division, and north of that what was left of the British Fourteenth Division up to a point within a mile of Cugny, which was in German hands. On the extreme left flank on this sector the Thirty-sixth Division and the 61st Brigade were in Ollezy and Eaucourt. There had been some fighting on the front of the Fifty-eighth Division during the night, but otherwise it was quiet, and the soldiers were able to snatch a few hours of sleep.

Once again there was a thick morning fog, under cover of which the German infantry broke suddenly upon the One hundred and twenty-fifth French Division, north-east of Chauny, driving them back towards Abbecourt. This placed the British troops at Condren in a perilous position, but it was essential to hold the line of the Oise, and any abandonment of the bridge would have been fatal. The Fifty-eighth Division was ordered to stand fast therefore, and the 173rd Brigade was reinforced by the 16th and 18th Entrenching Battalions. These entrenching battalions are, it may be remarked, entirely apart from the Labour Corps, and were soldiers, well officered and organised, formed from those units which remained over after the re-organisation of the three-battalion brigades. Apart from these were the labour battalions who also in those hard days were occasionally the final weight which tilts the balance where the fate of armies and finally of empires was in the scale. Manfully they rose to the occasion, and the Empire owes them a very special word of thanks. During the afternoon all the British and French troops in this quarter passed over the Oise, mostly in the Abbecourt district, blowing up the bridges behind them and passing under the command of General Duchesne of the Sixth French Army. This left a blank upon the right of the Eighteenth Division upon the north of the river, but General Seely brought up his cavalry and endeavoured to cover it, while the Second Dismounted Cavalry Division was pushed out upon the left of the Fourteenth Division in the north, to preserve the connection between the Third and Eighteenth Corps. The Third Cavalry Division under General Harman was thrown in also at this point, and about 2:30, having mounted their horses, they charged most gallantly in order to re-establish the line north of Villeselve on the front of the Ulster Division. The Royal

Dragoons were prominent in this fine charge in which they sabred many of the enemy, took over 100 prisoners, and relieved the pressure upon the Irish Fusiliers of the 109th Brigade at a time when it was very heavy.

The whole corps front was slowly falling back during the day, partly on account of the steady pressure of the German attack and partly in order to conform with the line to the north. The Fourteenth Division, moving south-west through Crisolles, found itself in the evening on the west side of the Noyon Canal, covering the two crossings at Haudival and Beaurains. A vamped-up detachment of stragglers and nondescripts under Colonel Curling were placed to fill up the gap between the Fourteenth Division and Noyon. The left of the Fourteenth Division at Guiscard was covered by General Harman’s detachment, and it is characteristic of the adaptability of the British soldier that seventy Northumberland Hussars who had become cyclists were suddenly whipped off their machines, put upon horses and sent up to reinforce the thin ranks of the cavalry.

The centre of the line covering Caillouel was held all day by the Eighteenth Division, with the First French Cavalry Division still acting as a breakwater before the advancing flood. In spite of the gallant Cuirassiers the pressure was very great from the 54th Brigade who were in the north, through the 55th and down to the 53rd, which covered the north of Noyon. Some of the edge was taken from the German attack by the efficient work of the 82nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery and the 3rd and 5th Royal Horse Artillery, who were hard at it from morning to night. The French infantry on the left of the Eighteenth Division lost Guivry towards evening, but they held fast to Beaugies until after nightfall. About ten o’clock, however, the German infantry was into Beaugies, and the situation became dangerous as they were getting round the left flank of the Eighteenth Division, so that there was a general retreat to the rearward position called the Crepigny Ridge, which was not fully reached and occupied until 3 A.M. on March 25. That evening the Fifty-eighth Division reported that early in the day they had blown up all bridges and also the Royal Engineer dump at Chauny. So intersected is the whole country at the back of the line of the Fifth Army by watercourses, that the total number of bridges blown up during the retreat amounted to about 250; and only in two cases, that of the Ham road bridge and that at Chipilly, was the result unsatisfactory.

In the early morning of March 25 the Germans, who were still marching rapidly and fighting hard, were close to Guiscard, pushing on so swiftly that special troops had to be detailed to cover the heavy guns. General Butler had so far as possible pulled his dismounted troopers out of the fight and had restored them to their proper role, so that now he possessed a force of about 2000 horsemen, who were ready to execute the all-important functions of mounted infantry, so invaluable in a retreat. Under Generals Greenly and Pitman these horsemen did great work during the remainder of the operations.

Since the German pressure was still very heavy and the enemy were sweeping onwards in the north, it was necessary to continue the withdrawal of the line north of the Oise, while holding fast to the southern bank along its whole length. The first movement in this withdrawal was to the line Mondescourt — Grandru, and the second to the line Appilly — Baboeuf — Mont de Béthéricourt. By 8:30 the Eighteenth Division in the middle of the line was effecting this retirement, the northern flank, which was the post of danger, being covered by the 11th Royal Fusiliers of the 54th Brigade. It was a most difficult and delicate business with the enemy pressing down continually through the woods and villages with which the country is studded. On the south the 53rd Brigade and the French Cuirassiers were withdrawing through Mondescourt in some disorder. When the troops were rallied and rearranged, there were no French troops upon the right. At 10 A.M. the 54th Brigade had reached the Grandru position, but were out of touch both with the French on their left and with the 55th Brigade on their right. They therefore continued to fall back upon Béthencourt. At 1 o’clock a strong German infantry attack, in many lines, developed upon the right near Appilly and a heavy machine-gun barrage burst out over the 53rd Brigade and their immediate comrades upon the right, the 289th French Regiment. Up to 3 o’clock the Allies in this quarter were retiring under a very heavy fire, much helped by four valiant cars of the French Cavalry’s Mitrailleuses Automobiles, who did splendid service in covering the exhausted infantry. The German infantry, pressing eagerly forward in expectation of that general debacle which never occurred, was riddled by the fire of these motor-guns and left swathes of dead behind them. The attack had the effect, however, of driving back the Allied line to such a point that a French force which was defending Mont Béthéricourt was entirely isolated and in great peril of destruction. Under these circumstances the French officer in command appealed to General Sadleir-Jackson of the 54th Brigade to make a great effort to rescue his imperilled men. Sadleir-

Jackson without hesitation led back his men into the village of Baboeuf, cleared it of the Germans, captured ten machine-guns with nearly 300 prisoners, and regained touch with the French, who were enabled to withdraw. The 7th Bedfords and 11th Royal Fusiliers were the heroes of this chivalrous exploit, where we were able to repay the loyalty which the French have so often shown to us. It should be added that a company of the 12th Entrenching Battalion, which like all the other entrenching units had gone through this severe infantry fighting without light artillery, signals, or any of the ordinary adjuncts of well-equipped infantry, was still so full of military spirit that without orders it joined in this victorious charge.

On March 25 the Germans were within shelling distance of Noyon, and the British evacuated successfully nearly 2000 wounded from that town. The counter-attack of the 54th Brigade had stopped the German advance for a time, and the Eighteenth Division w^as able to get across the river Oise, the guns and transport passing in the afternoon while the infantry got across that night and in the morning of March 26, without serious molestation, being covered by their sappers and pioneers, who blew up the bridges as soon as the troop’s were safely across. At two in the morning of March 26 the French abandoned Noyon. At this time there were no British troops upon the north of the river save the remains of the Fourteenth Division which were finally relieved upon this date, and the Second and Third Cavalry Divisions, now under Generals Pitman and Portal, who harassed the German advance at every opportunity, and rendered constant help to the French rearguards. The Second Cavalry Division secured the high ground immediately west of Noyon, and held it until it could be handed over to the French infantry. The general line of the cavalry was facing north-east from west of Noyon, through Suzoy to Lagny, where they were in touch with the Tenth French Division. The left of the Second Cavalry Division had been prolonged by the addition of the Canadian Dismounted Brigade. These men soon found themselves involved in some hard fighting, for the Germans attacked the French at Lagny and drove them out. On one occasion this day, at the Bois des Essarts, the troopers of the Second British Cavalry Division galloped through the French infantry to hold off the attacking Germans, an episode in which Lieutenant Cotton and other officers gained the honour of mention in the French order of the day. The left of the cavalry was compelled to fall back finally to Dives, and the Canadians after a determined struggle were driven out of the woods which they occupied.

Finally, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade (Bell-Smyth), consisting of the 5th and 16th Lancers with the 4th Hussars were nearly surrounded, and had the greatest difficulty in fighting their way out. Before night they were in touch once more both with the French and with their comrades of the 4th Brigade. On the morning of March 27 word came that the British cavalry was imperatively needed at the junction between the French and British, armies. It was despatched forthwith to do splendid service in the north after having played a glorious part in the south.

From now onwards the fighting upon the Roye and Montdidier front (both towns passed soon into German possession) was no longer connected with the Third Corps. The position to the south of the Oise showed that the Fifty-eighth British Division held from Barisis to Manicamp. Thence to Bretigny was the One hundred and twenty-fifth French Division. Thence to the east of Varennes were the Fifty-fifth French Division, with cavalry, and the First French Division up to Sempigny. Thence the line ran in an irregular curve through Lassigny to Canny, the enemy being well past that line on the north, and the direction of attack being rather from the north-west. On the morning of March 28 orders were issued that the remains of the Third Corps should be transferred to the north, where they should join their comrades of the Fifth Army, from whom they were now separated by a considerable distance. Within the next two days, after some difficulties and delays in extricating the artillery, these orders were carried out, though it was not till some days later that the Fifty-eighth London Division could be relieved. This unit had not, save for the 173rd Brigade, been engaged in the recent fighting, but it had held a line of over ten miles of river, along the whole of which it was within touch with the enemy. One effort of the Germans to get across at Chauny on March 31 was met and repelled by the 16th Entrenching Battalion, who killed many of the assailants and captured nearly 100 prisoners.

So ended the vicissitudes of the Third Corps, which had the strange experience of being swept entirely away from the army to which it belonged, and finding itself under French command, and with French troops fighting upon either wing. Its losses were exceedingly heavy, including 20 heavy and Third 100 field-guns, with about 15,000 killed, wounded, or missing. The Fourteenth Division was the chief sufferer with 5880 casualties, 4500 of which came under the head of “Missing,” and represent the considerable detachments which were cut off in the first day of the battle. The losses of some of the battalions approached annihilation. In spite of all pressure and all misfortunes there was never a time when there was a break, and the whole episode was remarkable for the iron endurance of officers and men in the most trying of all experiences — an enforced retirement in the face of an enemy vastly superior both in numbers and in artillery support. When we realise how great was the disparity it is amazing how the line could have held, and one wonders at that official reticence which allowed such glorious epics to be regarded as part of a great military disaster. Against the two and a half British divisions which were in the line on March 21 there were arrayed seven German divisions, namely, the Fifth Guards, First Bavarians, Thirty-fourth, Thirty-seventh, One hundred and third. Forty-seventh, and Third Jaeger. There came to the Third Corps as reinforcements up to March 26 two British cavalry divisions, one French cavalry division, and three French infantry divisions, making eight and a half divisions in all, while seven more German divisions, the Tenth, Two hundred and eleventh, Two hundred and twenty-third, Eleventh Reserve, Two hundred and forty-first, Thirty-third, and Thirty-sixth came into line, making fourteen in all. When one considers that these were specially trained troops who represented the last word in military science and efficiency, one can estimate that an unbroken retreat may be a greater glory than a victorious advance.

Every arm — cavalry, infantry, and artillery — emerged from this terrible long-drawn ordeal with an addition to their fame. The episode was rather a fresh standard up to which they and others had to live than a fault which had to be atoned. They fought impossible odds, and they kept on fighting, day and night, ever holding a fresh line, until the enemy desisted from their attacks in despair of ever breaking a resistance which could only end with the annihilation of its opponents. Nor should the organisation and supply services be forgotten in any summing up of the battle. The medical arrangements, with their self-sacrifice and valour, have been already dealt with, but of the others a high General says: “A great strain was also cast upon the administrative staffs of the army, of corps and of divisions, in evacuating a great mass of stores, of hospitals, of rolling stock, of more than 60,000 non-combatants and labour units, while at the same time supplying the troops with food and ammunition. With ever varying bases and depots, and eternal rapid shifting of units, there was hardly a moment when gun or rifle lacked a cartridge. It was a truly splendid performance.”

We have now traced the movements and the final positions of the eight corps which were involved in this terrible battle from the foggy morning which witnessed the German attack, up to those rainy days of early April which showed a stable line — a line which in spite of occasional oscillations continued from that date until the great British victory in August, to mark the point of equilibrium of the giant forces which leaned from east and from west. In this account we have seen the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps in the north fall back upon Arras and the Vimy Ridge, where they turned and dealt their pursuers such a blow that the battle in that sector was at an end. We have seen the Fourth, Fifth, and Seventh Corps struggling hard to make a line from Arras to Albert and down to the Somme; we have seen the Nineteenth Corps covering a huge front and finally holding firm near Villers-Bretonneux, and we have seen the Eighteenth and Third Corps intermixed with our French Allies helping to determine the line in the southern area of the great field of battle. That line running just to the west of Montdidier, Moreuil, and Albert was destined for four months to be a fixed one, though it was advanced during that time by the splendid audacity of the Australians, who gave their opponents no rest, and finally, with the help of the British Eighth Division, entirely re-won the town of Villers-Bretonneux when it was temporarily lost, and extended our outposts a mile or more to the east of it, as will be presently described. Save for this action there was no movement of importance during that time, though the general set of the tide was rather eastwards than westwards.

One cannot leave so vast a theme as the second battle of the Somme without a few words as to the general impression left upon the mind of the writer by the many documents bearing upon the subject which he has had to peruse. In the first place, we cannot possibly deny that it was a great German victory, and one which was well earned, since it depended upon clever and new dispositions entailing laborious preparation with the intelligent and valiant co-operation of officers and men. The overpowering force of the blow, while it removed all reproach from those who had staggered back from it, depended upon the able way in which it was delivered. Having said so much, we must remind the German commentator that he cannot have it both ways, and that if a gain of guns, prisoners, and ground which fails to break the line is, as we admit, a victory to the Germans, then a similar result is a victory to the British also. He cannot claim the second battle of the Somme to be a victory, and yet deny the term to such battles as Arras, Messines, and Passchendaele. The only difference is that the Germans really did try to break the line upon March 21, and failed to do so, while no such design was in General Haig's mind during the battles of 1917, save perhaps in the last series of operations.

There was a regrettable tendency after the battle to recriminations in the Press, and General Gough, who had been the head of the Fifth Army, was sacrificed without any enquiry as to the dominant force which he had to face, or as to the methods by which he mitigated what might have been a really crushing disaster. It can be safely stated that in the opinion of many of those who are in the best position to know and to judge, there was absolutely nothing upon the military side which could have been bettered, nor has any suggestion ever been made of anything which was left undone.

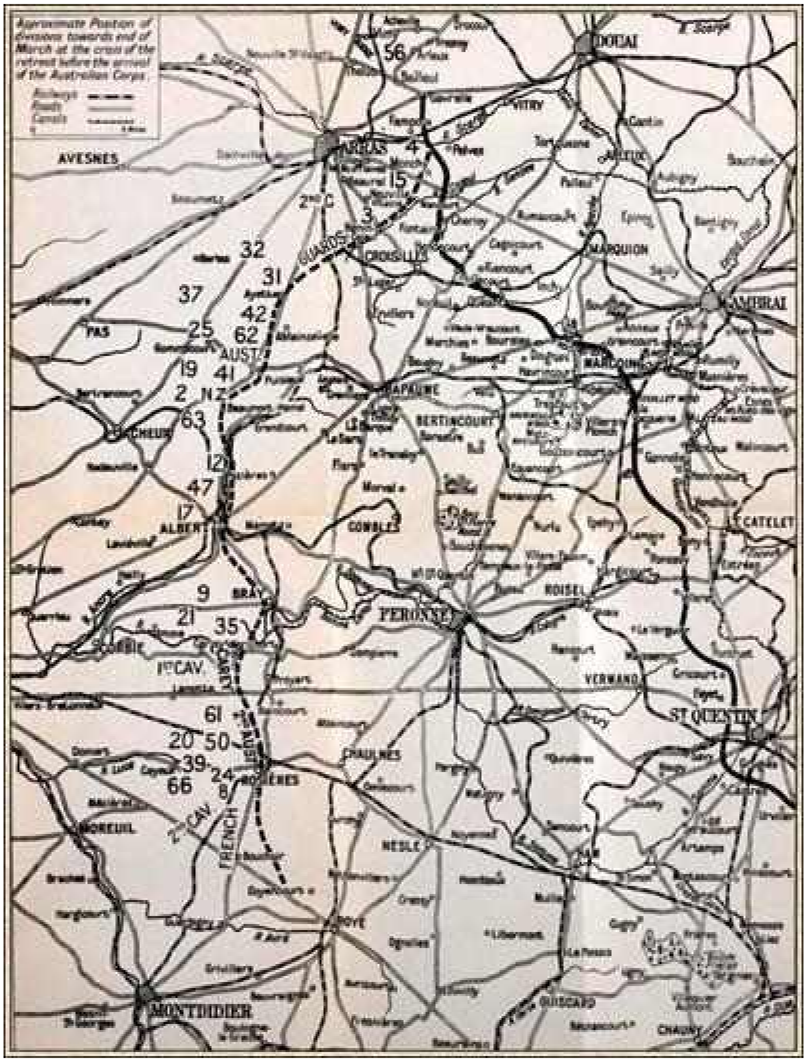
Approximate Position of divisions towards end of March at the crisis of the retreat before the arrival of the Australian Corps.
Railways
Roads
Canals
AVESNES
DOUAI
VITRY
ARRAS
CROISILLES
MARQUION
CAMBRAI
PAS
BAPAUME
BERTINCOURT
DOULLENS
ALBERT
COMBLES
CATELET
BRAY
PERONNE
ROISEL
CORBIE
VERMAND
ST QUENTIN
CHAULNES
ROSIERES
MOREUIL
NESLE
ROYE
GUISCARD
MONTDIDIER
CHAUNY
GUARDS
AUST.
NZ
1st CAV.
2nd CAV.
FRENCH
56
4
15
3
32
31
37
42
25
62
19
41
2
63
12
47
17
9
21
35
61
20
50
39
24
66
8

Position at the Close of the Great Retreat, March 30

The entrenching had been carried out for several months with an energy which raised protests from the men who had to do it. There might almost be room for the opposite criticism that in the constant work of the navvy the training of the soldier had been unduly neglected; but that was the result of the unavoidable scarcity of non-military labour. The extension of the front was undoubtedly too long for the number of men who had to cover it; but this was done at the express request of the French, who had strong military reasons for drawing out and training a number of their divisions. It was taking a risk undoubtedly, but the risk was forced upon the soldiers, and in any case the French have taken risks before now for us. The blowing up of the bridges was well done, and the only exception seems to have been in the case of railway bridges which, for some reason, were taken out of the hands of the army commander. The reserves were insufficient and were perhaps too far back, but the first item at least depended upon the general weakness of manpower. Nowhere can one lay one's hand upon any solid ground for complaint, save against the rogues and fools of Brest-Litovsk, who by their selfish and perjured peace enabled the Germans to roll a tidal wave of a million men from east to west, with the certainty that they would wash away the first dam against which they struck. If there is any military criticism to be made, it lies rather in the fact that the French help from the south was nearly sixty hours before it made itself felt at the nearest part of the British line, and also in the surprising number of draft reserves kept in England at that date. Within a month of the battle 350,000 had been sent to the front — a very remarkable feat, but a sign, surely, of an equally remarkable omission. Had ten emergency divisions of infantry been made out of the more forward of these drafts, had they been held ready in the rear zones, and had the actual existing reserves been pushed up to the front, it is safe to say that the German advance would have been stopped earlier and would probably not have got beyond the Peronne — Noyon line. If, as was stated in Parliament, it was confidently expected that the German attack would strike exactly where it did, then it does seem deplorable that the nearest reserve to the Fifth Army, a single division, had, through our weak man-power, to be kept at a three days' journey from the point of danger. If, instead of searching the record of the General for some trace of weakness, our critics had realised the rapidity of his decision, with the moral courage and grasp of actuality which he showed by abandoning his positions — no easy thing for one of his blood and record — and falling back unbroken upon a new line of defence beyond the German heavy artillery, they could not have failed to admit that the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to General Gough. Had he hesitated and his army been isolated and destroyed, the whole war might well have taken a most sinister turn for the worse.

Granting, however, that the disaster was minimised by the prompt appreciation of the situation by the General in command, by the splendid work of his four corps-commanders, and by the co-operation of every one concerned, it is still undeniable that the losses were very heavy, and the result, even after making every allowance for German wastage, a considerable military disaster. In killed, wounded, and missing in the Fifth Army alone the figures could not be less than 50,000, including Feetham and Malcolm, army divisional generals, with Dawson, Bailey, White, Bellingham, and numerous other brigadiers and senior officers. In field-guns 235 were lost or destroyed out of 600, in medium heavies 108 out of 494, in 8-inch or over pieces 19 out of 98. Great quantities of stores, especially at Ham, fell into the hands of the enemy, but so far as possible they were burned or made useless. Bad as the episode seemed at the time, it is clear now to any one who looks back upon it that it had no evil effect upon the result of the war. The Germans were exposed to very heavy losses which they could ill afford. They have admitted to 180,000 in documents published since the armistice but this may be an understatement. They were drawn away from their famous lines to which they did not return until they were so reduced that they could not hold them. Finally, it led to that concentration of power in the hands of Marshal Foch which was worth many sacrifices to attain. Sir Douglas Haig, from his many services and long experience, might well have put forward claims to the supreme place, and it is characteristic of the nobility of this great soldier that it was in response to a telegram from him to the Prime Minister, in which he named General Foch for the position, that the change was eventually carried through.

VIII. THE SOMME FRONT FROM APRIL 1 ONWARDS

The last waves of the storm — The Twelfth Division at Albert — The Forty-seventh Division at Aveluy Wood — The Australians in the south — Capture of Villeis-Bietonneux by the Germans — Recapture by Australians and Eighth Division — Fierce fighting — The first turn of the tide

THE limit and results of the second battle of the Somme had been defined when the Australians, New Zealanders, Second Canadians, and fresh British divisions took the place of their exhausted comrades towards the end of March. The German reserves, great as they were, were, nearly exhausted, and they had no more men to put into the fight. The final line began to clearly define itself, running from a few miles east of Arras where the Seventh and Sixth Corps had struck back so heavily at the German pursuit, through Neuville Vitasse, Boyelles, Ayette, Bucquoy, Hébuterne, Auchonvillers, Aveluy, just west of Albert, Denancourt, Warfusée, and Marcelcave. The worst storm was over, but even as the sinking sea will still send up one great wave which sweeps the deck, so the German battle front would break from time to time into a spasm of energy, which could effect no great purpose and yet would lead to a considerable local engagement. These episodes must at least be indicated in the order of their occurrence.

One great centre of activity was the ruined town of Albert, for the Germans were able to use it as a covered approach, and thus mass their troops and attempt to break through to the westward. The order of divisions in this sector showed that the Sixty-third and Forty-seventh, still fighting in spite of their wounds, were to the immediate north-west. The Twelfth Division was due west. South-west was the Third Division of Australians and south of these the Fourth. On each of these, and sometimes upon all of them, the strain was very great, as the Germans struggled convulsively to burst the bonds of Albert. It should be noted that the Fifth Army had for the time passed out of being, and that all the southern end of the line was now held by the Fourth Army under General Rawlinson.

The main attack upon the Albert sector was on April 4, when the Germans made a violent effort, and the affair reached the proportions of a considerable battle. About eight in the morning the action began by a severe and sudden attack upon the Australian Division 1000 yards south of Albert, and also on the railway near Denancourt. The Australians fought as Australians have always fought in this war, but the onset was very heavy, supported by a shattering fire, and they were forced to yield some ground.

North of the Australians was the Twelfth Division with the 35th and 36th Brigades in the line, in that order from the south. The temporary recoil of the Australians rendered the 35th Brigade vulnerable, and the Germans with their usual quick military perception at once dashed at it. About 1 o'clock they rushed forward in two waves, having built up their formation under cover of the ruined houses of Albert. The attack struck in between the 7th Suffolks and 9th Essex, but the East Anglians stood fast and blew it back with their rifle-fire, much helped by the machine-guns of the 5th Berks. Farther north the attack beat up against the left of the Forty-seventh and the right of the Sixty-third Divisions, but neither the Londoners nor the naval men weakened. The pressure was particularly heavy upon the Forty-seventh, and some details of the fighting will presently be given. The next morning, April 5, saw the battle still raging along the face of these four divisions. The Germans attempted to establish their indispensable machine-guns upon the ridge which they had taken on the south, but they were driven off by the Australians. The 36th Brigade in the north of the Albert sector had lost some ground at Aveluy, but about noon on April 5 the 9th Royal Fusiliers with the help of the 7th Sussex re-established the front, though the latter battalion endured very heavy losses from an enfilade fire from a brickfield. The 5th Berks also lost heavily on this day. So weighty was the German attack that at one time the 4th Australians had been pushed from the high ground, just west of the Amiens-Albert railway, and the 35th Brigade had to throw back a defensive wing. The position was soon re-established, however, though at all points the British losses were considerable, while those of the Germans must have been very heavy indeed.

It has been stated that to the north of the Twelfth Division, covering Bouzincourt and partly occupying Aveluy Wood, was the Forty-seventh Division (Gorringe), which had been drawn out of the line, much exhausted by its prolonged efforts, some days before, but was now brought back into the battle. It stood with the 15th and 20th London of the 140th Brigade on the right, while the 23rd and 24th of the 142nd Brigade were on the left. Units were depleted and the men very weary, but they rose to the crisis, and their efforts were essential at a time of such stress, for it was felt that this was probably the last convulsive heave of the dying German offensive. It was on April 5 that the German attack from the direction of Albert spread to the front of the Forty-seventh Division. The bombardment about 8 A.M. reached a terrific pitch of intensity and was followed by an infantry advance through clouds of gas and smoke. The main attack fell upon the left of the divisional line, and was met by a sustained rifle, Lewis gun, and artillery fire, which could not be faced by the stormers. At one time the left of the 23rd London was penetrated, but a rally re-established the position. The enemy were rushing forward in mass formations, and their desperate tactics offered targets which ensured very heavy losses.

About 9 o'clock the right brigade was also involved in the fighting, the enemy advancing in force towards Aveluy Wood. Here also the assault was very desperate and the defence equally determined. The 15th (Civil Service Rifles) was heavily attacked, and shortly afterwards the Blackheath and Woolwich men of the 20th Battalion saw the enemy in great numbers upon their front. The whole line of the division was now strongly engaged. About 10 A.M. a company of the 24th London was driven from its position by concentrated rifle-grenade fire, but a support company sprang to the front and the line was unbroken. At 10:30, however, things took a grave turn, for a sudden rush brought the assailants into the line between the two left flank battalions, outflanking and destroying the outlying company of the 23rd London. These men fought bravely to the end and took heavy toll of the enemy. At the same time the 20th London came under a shattering shell-fire which put every Lewis gun out of action. It was also enfiladed by machine-guns from the corner of Aveluy Wood, where the Germans had penetrated the line. The 20th threw out a defensive flank and held on. The 15th on their right were still in their original positions.

At 11.40 the 23rd London, which had suffered from the German penetration of its left company, was exposed all along its line to machine-gun fire from its left rear, where the enemy had established three posts. The result was that the position in Aveluy Wood had to be abandoned. The 22nd London from the reserve brigade was now pushed up into the firing-line where the pressure was very great. The weight of the attack was now mainly upon the 20th, who held their posts with grim determination in spite of very heavy losses, chiefly from trench mortars and heavy machine-guns. It was a bitter ordeal, but the enemy was never able to get nearer than 300 yards to the line of the 20th, and if they caused heavy losses they endured as much from the British fire. About 12.40 the enemy seemed to be mustering at the south end of the wood for a grand final attack, but the gathering was dispersed by the machine-guns of the Londoners.

At four in the afternoon, after a truly terrible day, the Forty-seventh Division determined to counter-attack, and the 22nd Battalion was used for this purpose. They had already endured heavy losses and had not sufficient weight for the purpose, though eight officers and many men had fallen before they were forced to recognise their own inability. The failure of this attack led to a further contraction of the line of defence. The Sixty-third Division on the left had endured a similar day of hard hammering, and it was now very exhausted and holding its line with difficulty. For a time there was a dangerous gap, but the exhausted Germans did not exploit their success, and reserves were hurried up from the Marines on the one side and from the 142nd Brigade on the other to fill the vacant position.

When night fell after this day of incessant and desperate fighting the line was unbroken, but it had receded in the area of Aveluy Wood and was bent and twisted along the whole front. General Gorringe, with true British tenacity, determined that it should be re-established next morning if his reserves could possibly do it. Only one battalion, however, was available, the pioneer 4th Welsh Fusiliers, who had already done conspicuous service more than once during the retreat. An official document referring to this attack states that “no troops could have deployed better or advanced more steadily under such intense fire, and the leadership of the officers could not have been excelled.” The casualties, however, were so heavy from the blasts of machine-gun fire that the front of the advance was continually blown away and no progress could be made. Two platoons upon the left made some permanent gain of ground, but as a whole this very gallant counter-attack was unavailing.

This attack near Albert on April 4 and 5 was the main German effort, but it synchronised with several other considerable attacks at different points of the line. One was just north of Warfusée in the southern April 5. sector, where once again the Australians were heavily engaged and prevented what at one time seemed likely to be a local break-through. As it was the line came back from Warfusée to Vaire, where the Australian supports held it fast. Farther north the Fourth Australian Division was sharply attacked opposite Denancourt, and had a very brisk fight in which the 13th Brigade, and more particularly the 52nd Regiment, greatly distinguished itself. The object of the fight was to hold the railway line and the position of the Ancre. The tenacity of the Australian infantry in the face of incessant attacks was most admirable, and their artillery, ranging upon the enemy at 1500 yards, as they came over the higher ground behind Denancourt, inflicted very heavy losses. One gun fired 1250 rounds without a stop.

The village of Hangard and Hangard Wood were at that time the points of junction between the French and British armies. The extreme right unit of the British was Smith's 5th Brigade of the Second Australian Division (Rosenthal). The 20th Battalion on the southern flank was involved on this and the following days in a very severe and fluctuating fight in which Hangard Wood was taken and lost several times. Colonel Bennett, an Australian veteran whose imperial services go back as far as the Suakin expedition, had to cover 3500 yards with 600 men, knowing well that there were no reserves behind him and that the point was vital. With heavy losses he managed, with the 19th Battalion beside him, to dam the German flood until help could arrive. So fierce was the fighting that 750 dead Germans were picked up in the Hangard Wood. On April 7 the wood was abandoned, but under no compulsion and in accordance with the general movement of the line.

About 10 A.M. on April 6 the enemy renewed his attack upon the junction between the Forty-seventh and Sixty-third Divisions, but it was the British turn to mow down advancing lines with machine-gun fire. No progress was made, and there were such signs of German weakening that the British made a sudden local advance, capturing two machine-guns and some prisoners. In this affair it is characteristic of the spirit which still remained in the weary British troops, that Corporal March of the 24th London went forward and shot the opposing German officer, bringing back his maps and papers.

The German commanders were well aware that if the line was to be broken it must be soon, and all these operations were in the hope of finding a fatal flaw. Hence it was that the attacks which began and failed upon April 4 extended all along the northern line on April 5. Thus the New Zealand Division on the left of the points already mentioned was involved in the fighting, the right brigade, consisting of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, being fiercely attacked by some 2000 storm troops who advanced with great hardihood, and at the second attempt recaptured the farm of La Signy. The

German officers seem upon this occasion to have given an example to their men which has often been conspicuously lacking. “A tall Wurtemburger,” says the New Zealand recorder, “ran towards our line with nine of his men. In one hand he carried a cane, and over his arm a light waterproof coat. He was a fine big fellow over six feet high.... Just at the critical moment some Lewis-gunners took a hand in the business, the officer was shot dead, and most of the others were killed or wounded.”

On the left of the New Zealanders the attack was extended to the road between Ayette and Bucquoy. Here a brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division in the south and of the Forty-second in the north were heavily attacked and Bucquoy was taken, but before the evening the defenders returned and most of the lost ground was regained. The right of the Thirty-seventh Division had advanced in the morning upon Rossignol Wood, that old bone of contention, and had in a long day’s struggle got possession of most of it. Three machine-guns and 130 men were the spoils.

From this time onwards there were no very notable events for some weeks in the Somme line, save for some sharp fighting in the Aveluy Wood sector on April 21 and 22, in which the Seventeenth, Thirty-fifth, and Thirty-eighth Divisions were all involved. The enemy tried hard to improve his position and did succeed in gaining some ground. The attacks were costly to both sides but the results were futile. The British outposts, and particularly those of the Australians, maintained an aggressive attitude throughout, and it was more and more impressed upon the German mind that in spite of his considerable advance and large captures, it was an unbeaten army which lay before him.

On the morning of April 24 a very determined attack was made by the Germans upon the front of Butler’s Third Corps in the area of Villers-Bretonneux. This small town is of great importance, as it stands on a curve of the rolling downs from which a very commanding view of Amiens is obtained, the cathedral especially standing out with great clearness. Already the city had suffered great damage, but the permanent loss of Villers-Bretonneux would mean its certain destruction. The attack was urged by four German divisions and was supported by tanks which did good service to the enemy and broke in the British line, held mainly at this point by Heneker’s Eighth Division which had hardly recovered from its heroic services upon the Somme.

It is suggestive of the value of the tanks whether in German or in British hands that where the attack was unsupported by these machines it broke down under the British fire, as on the right of Gator’s Fifty-eighth Division to the south and on the left of the Eighth Division. There were fifteen German tanks in all, so their array was a formidable one, the more so in a mist which was impenetrable at fifty yards. It was for the British now to experience the thrill of helpless horror which these things can cause even in brave hearts when they loom up out of the haze in all their hideous power. The 2/4th Londons on the south of the village were driven back to the line Cachy — Hangard Wood, so that their neighbours of the 2/2nd London had to conform. The 2/ 10th London counter-attacked at once, however, and penetrated Hangard Wood, doing something to ease the situation. The 2nd Middlesex and 2nd West Yorks were overrun by the tanks, much as the Roman legionaries were by the elephants of Pyrrhus, and even the historical and self-immolating stab in the belly was useless against these monsters. The 2nd Rifle Brigade were also dislodged from their position and had to close up on the 2nd Berkshires on their left. The 2nd East Lancashires had also to fall back, but coming in touch with a section of the 20th Battery April 24. of divisional artillery they were able to rally and hold their ground all day with the backing of the guns.

The 2nd Devons in reserve upon the right were also attacked by tanks, the first of ‘which appeared suddenly before Battalion Headquarters and blew away the parapet. Others attacked the battalion, which was forced to move into the Bois d’Aquenne. There chanced to be three heavy British tanks, in this quarter, and they were at once ordered forward to restore the situation. Seven light whippet tanks were also given to the Fifty-eighth Division. These tanks then engaged the enemy’s fleet, and though two of the heavier and four of the light were put out of action they silenced the Germans and drove them back. With these powerful allies the infantry began to move forward again, and the 1st Sherwood Foresters carried out a particularly valuable advance.

Shortly after noon the 173rd Brigade of the Fifty-eighth Division saw the Germans massing behind tanks about 500 yards east of Cachy, with a view to attacking. There were three whippets still available, and they rushed out and did great work, catching two German battalions as they deployed.

The Fifty-eighth had good neighbours upon their right in the shape of the Moroccan corps, a unit which is second to none in the French Army for attack. These were not engaged, but under the orders of General Debeney they closed up on the left so as to shorten the front of General Gator’s division, a great assistance with ranks so depleted. His troops were largely lads of eighteen sent out to fill the gaps made in the great battle, but nothing could exceed their spirit, though their endurance was not equal to their courage.

On the evening of April 24 General Butler could say with Desaix, “The battle is lost. There is time to win another one.” The Germans not only held Villers-Bretonneux, but they had taken Hangard from the French, and held all but the western edge of Hangard Wood. The farthest western point ever reached by the Germans on the Somme was on this day when they occupied for a time the Bois l’Abbé, from which they were driven in the afternoon by the 1st Sherwoods and 2nd West Yorks. They had not attained Cachy, which was their final objective, but none the less it was very necessary that Villers-Bretonneux and the ground around it should be regained instantly before the Germans took root.

For this purpose a night attack was planned on the evening of April 24, and was carried out with great success. The operation was important in itself, but even more so as the first sign of the turn of the tide which had run so long from east to west, and was soon to return with such resistless force from west to east.

For the purposes of the attack the fresh 13th Australian Brigade (Glasgow) was placed under the General of the Eighth Division, and was ordered to attack to the south of Villers, while the 15th Australian Brigade made a similar advance upon the north. Each of these was directed to pass beyond the little town, which was to be cleared by an independent force. On the right of the Australians was the balance of the Eighth Division, which had to clear up the Bois d’Aquenne.

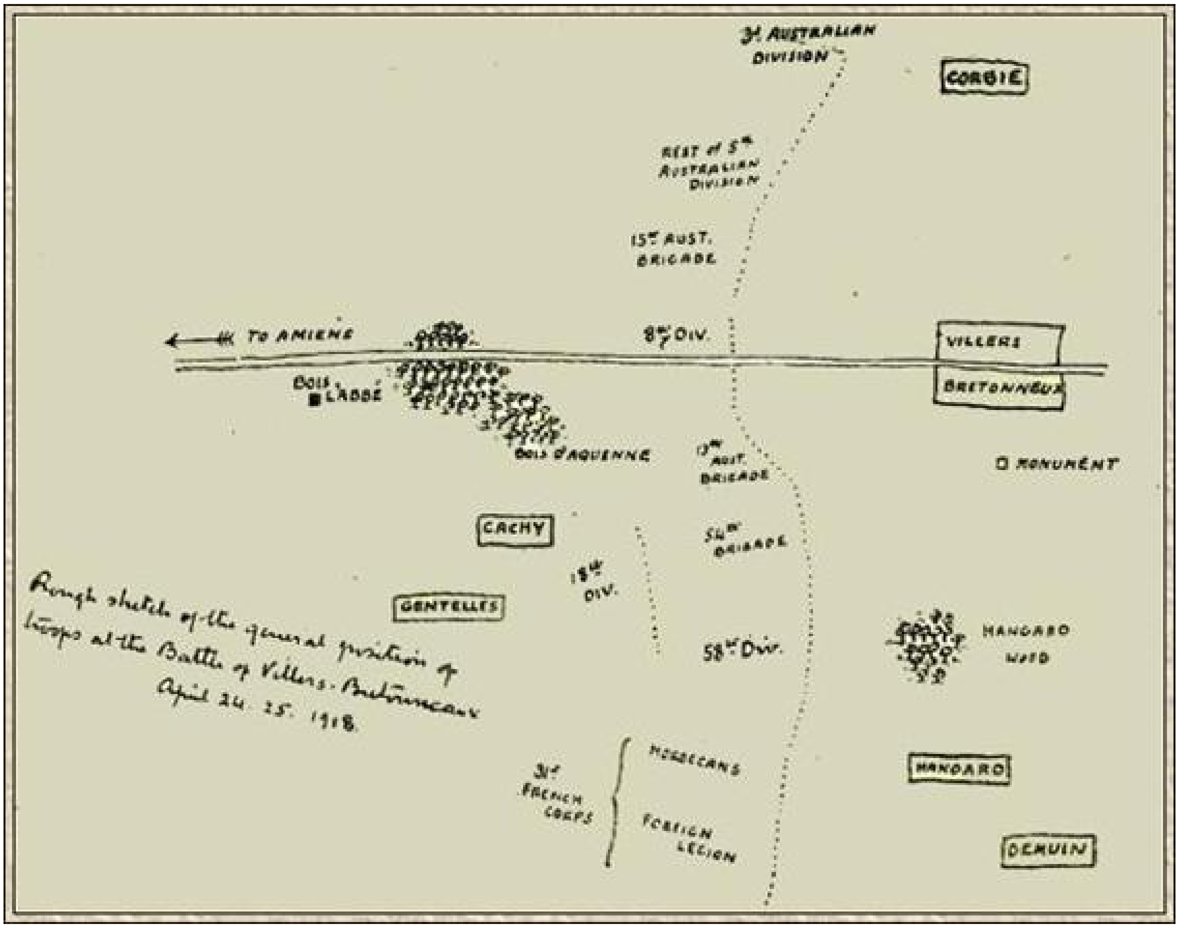
3rd AUSTRALIAN DIVISION
CORBIE
REST of 5th AUSTRALIAN DIVISION
15th AUST. BRIGADE
TO AMIENS
8th DIV.
VILLERS BRETONNEUX
BOIS L'ABBÉ
BOIS d'AQUENNE
13th AUST. BRIGADE
MONUMENT
CACHY
54th BRIGADE
18th DIV.
GENTELLES
58th DIV.
HANGARD WOOD
Rough sketch of the general position of troops at the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux April 24. 25. 1918
MOROCCANS
3rd FRENCH CORPS
FOREIGN LEGION
HANGARD
DEMUIN

Rough sketch of the general position of troops at
the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, April 24-25, 1918.

The attack was carried out at 10 P.M., the infantry having white arm-bands for identification in the darkness. There was no artillery preparation, and the advance was across unknown country, so that it may be placed among the most hazardous operations in the war. In the case of the 13th Australian Brigade, the 52nd Battalion was on the right in touch with the British, while the 51st was on the left, with the 50th in support. From the onset the machine-gun fire was very severe, especially against the 51st Regiment, but the admirable individuality of the Australian soldiers was of great service to them, every man getting forward through the darkness as best he could. The weather was ideal, for there was sufficient moon to give direction, but not enough to expose the troops to distant fire. The German flares were rather a help to the attack by defining the position. The Australian front got as far forward as Monument Wood, level with the village, but the 173rd Brigade on their right was in some difficulty, and they themselves were badly enfiladed from the town, so they could not maintain their more advanced position. The 2nd Northamptons, attached to the 13th Australian Brigade, had been told off to take the town itself, but both their colonel and their adjutant were killed during the assembly, and some confusion of orders caused the plans to miscarry. On the north of the town the 15th Australian Brigade, with the 22nd Durhams attached, had been an hour late in starting, but the 60th and 59th Regiments got up, after some confused fighting, to a point north of the town, which was entered after dawn and cleared up by the 2nd Berkshires, aided by a company of the Australian 58th Battalion. The The German tanks had done good work in the attack, and some of the British tanks were very useful in the counter-attacks, especially three which operated in the Bois d'Aquenne and broke down the obstinate German resistance in front of the Eighth Division. Daylight on April 25 found the British and Australian lines well up to the village on both sides, and a good deal of hard fighting, in which the troops got considerably mixed, took place. One unusual incident occurred as two blindfolded Germans under a flag of truce appeared in the British line, and were brought to Colonel Whitham of the 52nd Australian Regiment. They carried a note which ran: "My Commanding Officer has sent me to tell you that you are confronted by superior forces and surrounded on three sides. He desires to know whether you will surrender and avoid loss of life. If you do not he will blow you to pieces by turning his heavy artillery on to your trenches." No answer was returned to this barefaced bluff, but the messengers were detained, as there was considerable doubt as to the efficiency of the bandages which covered their eyes.

By 4 P.M. on April 25 the village had been cleared, and the troops were approximately in the old front line. The 22nd Durham Light Infantry had mopped up the south side of the village. About a thousand prisoners had been secured. The 54th Brigade of Lee's Eighteenth Division, which had been in support, joined in the fighting during the day, and helped to push the line forward, winning their way almost to their final objective south of the village and then having to yield 200 yards to a counter-attack. The fast whippet tanks were used during this action, and justified themselves well, though, as in the case of all tanks, the value of the instrument depends mainly upon the courage of the crew who handle it. One British tank, under the command of a leader named Craig, seems to have been all over the field wherever it was most needed, so that some weeks after the fight the present chronicler in visiting the field of battle still heard the legend of his prowess. As to the German resistance a skilled observer remarks: “The enemy handled his machine-guns with great boldness. The manner in which he pushes forward numbers of guns, relying upon the daring and initiative of the crews to use them to best advantage, may lead to a greater number being lost, but he certainly inflicts enormous casualties in this way.”

There was an aftermath of the battle on April 26 which led to some very barren and sanguinary fighting in which the losses were mainly incurred by our gallant Allies upon the right. There was a position called The Monument, immediately south of Villers, which had not yet been made good. The Moroccan Division had been slipped in on the British right, and their task was to assault the German line from this point to the north edge of Hangard Wood. Part of the Fifty-eighth Division was to attack the wood itself, while on the left the Eighth Division was to complete the clearance of Villers and to join up with the left of the Moroccans. The Eighth Division had already broken up three strong counter-attacks on the evening of April 25, and by the morning of April 26 their part of the programme was complete. The only six tanks available were given to the Moroccans. At 5:15 on the morning of April 26 the attack opened. It progressed well near the town, but on the right the Foreign Legion, the very cream of the fighting men of the French Army, were held by the murderous fire from the north edge of Hangard Wood. The 10th Essex and 7th West Kents, who had been lent to the Fifty-eighth Division’ by the 53rd Brigade, were held by the same fire, and were all mixed up with the adventurers of the Legion, the losses of both battalions, especially the West Kents, being terribly heavy. The Moroccan Tirailleurs in the centre were driven back by a German counter-attack, but were reinforced and came on again. Hangard village, however, held up the flank of the French. In the evening about half the wood was in the hands of the Allies, but it was an inconclusive and very expensive day.

The battle of Villers-Bretonneux was a very important engagement, as it clearly defined the *ne plus ultra* of the German advance in the Somme valley, and marked a stable equilibrium which was soon to turn into an eastward movement. It was in itself a most interesting fight, as the numbers were not very unequal. The Germans had five divisions engaged, the Fourth Guards, Two hundred and twenty-eighth. Two hundred and forty-third.

Seventy-seventh Reserve, and Two hundred and eighth. The British had the Eighth, Fifty-eighth, Eighteenth, and Fifth Australian, all of them very worn, but the Germans may also have been below strength. The tanks were equally divided. The result was not a decided success for any one, since the line ended much as it had begun, but it showed the Germans that, putting out all their effort, they could get no farther. How desperate was the fight may be judged by the losses which, apart from the Australians, amounted to more than 9000 men in the three British divisions, the Fifty-eighth and Eighth being the chief sufferers.

As this was the first occasion upon which the Germans seem to have brought their tanks into the line of battle, some remarks as to the progress of this British innovation may not be out of place — the more so as it became more and more one of the deciding factors in the war. On this particular date the German tanks were found to be slow and cumbrous, but were heavily armed and seemed to possess novel features, as one of them advanced in the original attack upon April 24 squirting out jets of lachrymatory gas on each side. The result of the fighting next day was that two weak (female) British tanks were knocked out by the Germans while one German tank was destroyed and three scattered by a male British tank. The swift British whippet tanks were used for the first time upon April 24, and seem to have acted much like Boadicea’s chariots, cutting a swathe in the enemy ranks and returning crimson with blood.

Treating the subject more generally, it may be said that the limited success .attained by tanks in the shell-pocked ground of the Somme and the mud of Flanders had caused the Germans and also some of our own high authorities to underrate their power and their possibilities of development. All this was suddenly changed by the battle of Cambrai, when the Germans were terrified at the easy conquest of the Hindenburg Line. They then began to build. It may be said, however, that they never really gauged the value of the idea, being obsessed by the thought that no good military thing could come out of England. Thus when in the great final advance the tanks began to play an absolutely vital part they paid the usual price of blindness and arrogance, finding a weapon turned upon them for which they had no adequate shield. If any particular set of men can be said more than another to have ruined the German Empire and changed the history of the world, it is those who perfected the tank in England, and also those at the German headquarters who lacked the imagination to see its possibilities. So terrified were the Germans of tanks at the end of the war that their whole artillery was directed to knocking them out, to the very great relief of the long-suffering infantry.

From this time onwards this front was the scene of continuous aggressive action on the part of the Australians, which gradually nibbled away portions of the German line, until the day came for the grand advance of August 8. One of the most successful of these was on May 19, when the village of Ville-sur-Ancre was taken by a sudden assault with 20 machine-guns and 360 prisoners. A second very sharp fight, which may be mentioned here, though it is just beyond the scope of this volume, was on July 1 and following days in the Aveluy sector, near the Ancre, where the Twelfth and Eighteenth Divisions had three bouts of attack and counter-attack, in which the 37th and o4th Brigades were heavily engaged, the honours of the action being about equally divided between the British and the Germans.

IX. THE BATTLE OF THE LYS
April 9-12

The Flanders front — Great German onslaught — Disaster of the Portuguese — Splendid stand at Givenchy of the Fifty-fifth Division — Hard fight of the Fortieth Division — Loss of the Lys — Desperate resistance of the Fiftieth Division — Thirty-fourth Division is drawn into the Battle — Attack in the north upon the Ninth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-fifth Divisions — British retreat — General survey of the situation

NEARLY a hundred German divisions had been used against the British alone in the great Somme offensive which began on March 21 and ended in the first week of April. At this time the British forces in France, including Portuguese and Overseas divisions, numbered sixty in all. Of these no less than forty-four had been engaged in the great battle, and all of these were either still in the line, tied to the Amiens front, or else had been drawn out in a shattered and disorganised condition, having lost on an average not less than from 4000 to 5000 men each. It will be seen that there was only a very small margin over, and that if the Germans by a supreme effort had burst the line and reached the estuary of the Somme, it would have been possible to have caused a great military disaster. Especially would this have been the case if the northern flank of the British could have been driven in as well as the southern, for then the mutilated and shaken army would have been hurled in upon itself and would have found itself crowded down upon a sea-coast which would have given few facilities for embarkation. In the hopes of a debacle in the south the Germans had prepared out of their huge reserves a considerable force in the north which would have formed the second claw of their deadly embrace.

When the first claw missed its grip and could get no farther it was determined that the other should at least go forward and endeavour to reach the Channel ports. Although the Somme estuary had not been attained, none the less the Germans knew well that three-quarters of the whole British force had been engaged, and that most of it was not fit to take its place in a renewed battle. Therefore they had reason to hope for great results from their new offensive in Flanders, and they entered upon it with a good heart.

The omens were certainly propitious, but there were two factors which were in favour of the British — factors which could not yet have been adequately appreciated by the Germans. The first was the new unity of command under General Foch, a soldier famous for his writings in peace and for his deeds in war. This great leader, who had distinguished himself again and again since the first month of the war, when he had played a vital part in checking the German rush for Paris, was selected with the cordial consent of every one concerned, and especially of Sir Douglas Haig, as Generalissimo of the Allied forces. Therefore a common control and a common policy were ensured, so that the German chiefs could not turn their whole force upon half of the Allies with the assurance that the other half would find the operations outside their war map. Hence the British in Flanders, though they would have to fight their own battle for a week or two, could count confidently upon receiving help at the end of that time.

The second and more immediate factor, was that by a fine national effort a splendid stream of efficient drafts had been despatched from England during the great battle — young soldiers it is true, but full of spirit and most eager to meet the Germans and to emulate the great deeds of their elders. Their training had been short, but it had been intense and practical, with so excellent a result that one could but marvel at the old pre-war pundits who insisted that no soldier could be made under two years. These high-spirited lads flocked into the depleted battalions, which had often to be reformed from the beginning, with a skeleton framework of officers and N.C.O.'s upon which to build. It was of course impossible to assimilate these drafts in the few days at the disposal of the divisional generals, but at least they had adequate numbers once more, and they must be taught to be battle-worthy by being thrown into the battle, as Spartan fathers have taught their boys to swim.

One more sign of the times was the quick appreciation by the American authorities of the desperate nature of the crisis all along the Allied line. With magnanimous public spirit they at once gave directions that such American troops as were available and had not yet been formed into special American divisions should be placed under British or French command and fitted temporarily into their organisation. The few complete organised American divisions in France had been on the Alsace line, but some of these were now brought round to thicken the French army on the Oise. But most important of all was the effect upon the shipment of American troops, which had averaged about 50,000 a month and now rose at a bound to 250,000, a number which was sustained or increased for several months in succession. This result was helped by the whole-hearted co-operation of the

British mercantile marine, which was deflected from its other very pressing tasks, including the feeding of the country, in order to carry these troops, and actually handled about two-thirds of them whilst the British Navy helped to find the escorts. So efficiently were the transport arrangements carried out both by British and Americans, that when a million men had been conveyed they were still able to announce that the losses upon the voyage were practically nil. Even the lie-fed bemused German public began to realise in the face of this fact that their much boomed submarines were only one more of their colossal failures.

The German attack upon the British lines by the army of General von Quast in Flanders broke on the morning of April 9. There had been considerable shelling on the day before along the whole line, but as the hour approached this concentrated with most extreme violence on the nine-mile stretch from the village of Givenchy in the south to Fleurbaix, which is just south of Armentières in the north. This proved to be the area of the actual attack, and against this front some eight German divisions advanced about 6 o'clock of a misty morning. So shattering had been their bombardment and so active their wire-cutters, who were covered by the fog, that the advanced positions could hardly be said to exist, and they were able to storm their way at once into the main defences.

The point upon which this attack fell was held the by four divisions, all of which formed part of Horne's First Army. The general distribution of the troops at that time was that the Second Army stretched from the junction with the Belgians near Houthulst Forest down to the Messines district where it joined the First Army. The First Army had weakened itself by an extension to the south, and Plumer's force was about to extend also, and take over the Laventie district, when the storm suddenly burst upon the very point which was to be changed.

Two corps were involved in the attack, the Fifteenth (De Lisle) in the Armentières region, and the Eleventh (Haking) in the region of Givenchy. The latter had two divisions in the line, Jeudwine's Fifty-fifth West Lancashire Territorials defending the village and adjacent lines, while the Portuguese Second Division (Da Costa) covered the sector upon their left. The depleted Fiftieth Division (Jackson) was in immediate reserve. On the left of the Portuguese was Ponsonby's Fortieth Division which had lost five thousand men in the Somme battle only a fortnight before, and now found itself plunged once more into one of the fiercest engagements of the war, where it was exposed again to very heavy losses.

The main force of the German attack fell upon the Portuguese fine, and it was of such strength that no blame can be attached to inexperienced troops who gave way before so terrific a blow, which would have been formidable to any soldiers in the world. The division held the line from 2000 yards south of Richebourg l’Avoué to the east of Picantin, a frontage of 9350 yards, or more than half of the total front of the assault. The division had all three brigades in the line, and even so was very extended to meet a serious assault. The 3rd Brigade from the First Portuguese Division was in immediate support. The 5th Brigade was on the right, covering Le Touret, the 6th in the middle, and the 4th on the left, covering Laventie. Behind the whole position lay the curve of the River Lys, a sluggish stream which moves slowly through this desolate plain, the Golgotha where so many men have died, Indians, French, British, and German, since the first months of the war. In all that huge flat canalised space it was only at Givenchy that some small ridge showed above the dreary expanse.

The Portuguese had been in the line for some months, but had never experienced anything to approach the severity of the shattering bombardment which poured upon them from four in the morning. When an hour or two later the storming columns of the German infantry loomed through the thick curtain of mist, the survivors were in no condition to stand such an attack. All telephone and telegraph wires had been cut within the first half-hour, and it was impossible to direct any protective barrage. The artillery in the rear, both British and Portuguese, had been much weakened by a concentration of gas-shells extending as far as Merville, so that the infantry were left with insufficient support. The gunners stood to their work like men, and groups of them continued to fire their guns after the infantry had left them exposed. These brave men were killed or captured by the enemy, and their batteries were taken. In the rear the roads had been so shattered by the German fire that it was impossible to get a tractor or lorry up to the heavy guns, and there was no way of removing them. All observers agree that the crews or the heavy guns did excellently the Lys. well. The whole front had fallen in, however, and in spite of scattered groups of infantry who showed the traditional Portuguese courage — that courage which had caused the great Duke to place them amongst his best soldiers — the position was in the hands of the enemy. By mid-day they were at Le Touret upon the right, and the guns there were blown up and abandoned. About the same time they had reached Estaires upon the left and Bout Deville in the centre. Before evening the German line was four miles from its starting-point, and had reached the River Lawe, a small affluent of the Lys. From this time onwards the Fiftieth Division, coming up from the rear, had taken over the front, and the Portuguese were out of the battle. The Germans in their day's work had taken 6000 prisoners and 100 guns, many of them in ruins. It should be mentioned that the Portuguese ordeal was the more severe, as breast-works had taken the place of trenches in this sector. All were agreed that General da Costa did what was possible. "He is a fine man, who does not know what fear is," said a British officer who was with him on the day of the battle.

The caving in of the front of the line had a most serious effect upon the two British divisions, the Fifty-fifth and the Fortieth, who were respectively upon the right and the left of the Portuguese. Each was attacked in front, and each was turned upon the flank and rear. We shall first consider the case of the Fifty-fifth Division which defended the lines of Givenchy with an energy and success which makes this feat one of the outstanding incidents of the campaign. This fine division of West Lancashire Territorials, containing several battalions from Liverpool, had some scores to settle with the Germans, by whom they had been overrun in the surprise at Cambrai at the end of the last November. At Givenchy they had their glorious revenge.

The position of the Fifty-fifth Division was a strong one, extending for some thousands of yards from the hamlet of Le Plantin in the south to Cailloux in the north, with a section of the old British line a thousand yards in front, a deserted trench half full of water and festooned with rusty wire. There were outpost companies along the scattered line of ruined houses, and a few posts were thrown far out near the old trench. The village line consisted of a series of well-concealed breast-works and loopholed walls without any continuous trench, the whole so cunningly arranged that it was difficult to get the plan of it from in front. Each post or small fort had its own independent scheme of defence, with good enfilade fire, concrete emplacements, belts of wire, and deep ditches. Very early in the day the left flank of the position had been entirely exposed by the retirement of the Portuguese, so that during the whole long and desperate struggle the general formation of the division was in the shape of an L, the shorter arm being their proper front, and the longer one facing north and holding up the

German attack from inside the old lines. The northern defensive flank does not seem to have been entirely improvised, as some precautions of this nature had already been taken. The new front extended from the hamlet of Loisne upon the stream of that name, through a second hamlet called Le Plant in, and so down to the canal. The first strain of the fighting fell chiefly upon the 165th Brigade (Boyd-Moss), consisting of three battalions of the famous King’s Liverpool Regiment. The 6th and 7th Battalions were in the line with the 5th in support at Gorre, but as the day wore on and the pressure increased, units from both the other brigades were drawn into the fight, so that all participated in the glory of the victory. By 8:30 the flank was entirely naked, and the Germans in small but audacious bodies, with a constant rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire, were pushing in between the outer posts of the British division, overwhelming and obliterating some of them by a concentrated fire of trench mortars. Some of these isolated garrisons held out in the most desperate fashion, and helped to take the pressure off the main village line. One particularly brilliant example was that of Captain Armstrong of the l/4th South Lancashires, who with A Company of that battalion defended a moated farm, literally to the death, having been warned that it was a key position. About mid-day the German attack was still creeping in, and had gained one important outpost called Princes’ Island. The 10th Liverpool Scots from the 166th Brigade, a battalion which has a great record for the war, had come up to thicken the line of defenders. Amid the crash and roar of constant shells, and a storm of bullets which beat like hail upon every wall and buzzed through every crevice, the stubborn infantry endured their losses with stoic patience, firing steadily through their shattered loopholes at any mark they could see. At 1 o’clock some audacious stormers had got so far forward on the left that they were in the rear of the Brigade Headquarters, and were only held there by spare men from the transport lines who chanced to be available. The attack was drifting down more and more from the new ground, so about this hour the 5th South Lancashires, also of the 166th Brigade, were sent across to the north of Loisne to hold the stream. Each flank was attempted in turn by the wily assailants, so that when the left proved impervious they charged in upon the right, and captured Windy Corner, which is near the canal upon that side, continuing their advance by attacking Le Plantin South from the rear and the flank, so that the defenders were in an impossible position. Having taken this point it seemed as if the Germans would roll up the whole long thin line from the end, and they actually did so, as far as Le Plantin North. Here the British rallied, and the survivors of the 6th and 7th King's made a furious advance, pushed the Germans back, retook Le Plantin South, and captured a number of prisoners. The position was still serious, however, as the Germans held Windy Corner, and had penetrated between the British right and the canal, so as to get into the rear of the position. A great effort was called for, and the men responded like heroes. The 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers from the 164th Brigade (Stockwell) had come up, and these fine soldiers, with the weary remains of the two King's Liverpool battalions, rushed the whole German position, dragging them out from the pockets and ruins amid which they lurked. In this splendid counter-attack more than 700 prisoners were taken in all, with a number of machine-guns. At the end of it the British right was absolutely intact.

Whilst these stirring events had taken place on the right flank, there had been heavy fighting also on the left. Here the British defence had been based upon two small but strong forts, called Cailloux North and Route A Keep. The latter fell early in the action, the German infantry coming upon it so unexpectedly in the fog that the machine-guns were at the moment mounted upon the parapet and elevated for indirect fire. They were put out of action, and the place was surrounded and taken. This greatly weakened the left wing of the defence. Farther still to the left the Germans were pushing through Loisne, and the fort called Loisne Central was heavily engaged. This portion of the line was held by the 166th Brigade. Once the German wave actually lapped over into the little fort, but the place was not taken, and its machine-guns still clattered and flashed. All day the Germans were held at this point though the pressure was great. During the night the 13th King's Liverpools from the 9th Brigade were sent as a reserve to the weary line. At 7.40 on the morning of April 10 the enemy, under cover of a murderous barrage, attacked Loisne once more, striving hard to break in the left of the British defence. The garrison suffered terribly, but none the less the stormers were shot back into their shell-holes and lurking-places. Two successive attacks on the forts of Cailloux and Festubert had no better success and were less strongly urged. At seven in the evening they again, with a sudden rush, got a footing in the fort of Loisnes, and again were driven out, save for twenty-one who remained as prisoners. Another day had passed, and still Lancashire stood fast and the lines were safe. On April 11 the whole position was swept by a heavy shell-storm, and the German infantry clustered thickly in front of the crumbling The barricades. The guns both of the Fifty-fifth and of the Eleventh Division played havoc with them April 9-1 2. as they assembled, so that the attack was paralysed on the right, but on the left the two little forts of Festubert East and Cailloux were both overwhelmed. The former, however, was at once retaken by a mixed storming party from the 5th and 13th King’s Liverpools. Late in the evening Cailloux Keep was also stormed, and once more the position was intact.

There was now only Route A Keep in possession of the enemy, and it was determined to regain it. The guns had quickly registered upon it during the day, and at midnight they all burst into a concentrated bombardment which was followed by a rush of two companies, one drawn from the Liverpool Scots and the other from the 13th King’s Liverpools. The place was carried by assault, and the garrison held it strongly on the 12th and 13th against a series of attacks. It was a most murderous business, and the brave little garrisons were sadly cut about, but they held on with the utmost determination, having vowed to die rather than give the fort up. The survivors were still there, crouching among the ruins and exposed to constant heavy shelling, when on April 15 the old epic was ended and a new one was begun by the relief of the Fifty-fifth Division by Strickland’s First Division. The episode will live in history, and may match in tenacity and heroism the famous defence of Ovillers by the German Guards. The casualties were heavy, but it may be safely said that they were small compared with those of the attacking battalions.

The story has been carried forward in this quarter for the sake of connected narrative, but we must now return to the events of April 9, and especially to the effect produced upon the Fortieth Division the Lys. by the exposure of their southern flank. This fine unit, with its terrible wounds only half healed, was exposed all day to a desperate attack coming mainly from the south, but involving the whole of their line from Laventie to Armentières. The division, which is predominantly English, but contains one brigade of Highland troops, fought most valiantly through the long and trying day, enduring heavy losses, and only yielding ground in the evening, when they were attacked in the rear as well as in front and flank.

In the morning the Fortieth Division had the 119th Brigade (18th Welsh, 21st Middlesex, and 13th East Surrey) on the right, while the 121st Brigade (20th Middlesex, 12th Suffolks, and 13th Yorks) was on the left, joining up with Nicholson’s Thirty-fourth Division which held the Armentières front.

The right of the Fortieth was involved in the heavy initial bombardment and also in the subsequent infantry advance, which established a footing in the front trenches of the 119th Brigade. Whilst a counter-attack was being organised to drive the stormers out, it was found that the right and the rear of the position were threatened by the advance through the Portuguese. The 120th Scottish Brigade in reserve was ordered to form a defensive flank, but the 10/ 11th Highland Light Infantry, the nearest unit, found itself almost overlapped, and the brigade had to fall back upon the bridges at Nouveau Monde in order to protect the river crossings. The 2nd Scots Fusiliers covered the bridge-head, while the whole of the 119th Brigade fell back to the line of the Lys, save only the garrison of Fleurbaix. The 121st Brigade was still holding its line in the Bois Grenier sector. By 1 o'clock the bulk of the Fortieth Division was across the Lys, the bridges being destroyed one by one as the day advanced.

The destruction was not in all cases complete, and in that of the Pont Levis at Estaires was absolutely checked by a chance shell which destroyed the leads, and prevented the explosion. The enemy, under cover of machine-guns mounted in the houses of Bac St. Maur, were able to cross the river here and get a footing upon the northern bank. The 74th Brigade from the Twenty-fifth Division and the 150th from the Fiftieth were coming up, however, and it was still hoped that the German advance might be checked. So severe had the fighting been that the 18th Welsh had only 5 officers and 120 men standing in the evening.

The 121st Brigade were in the meanwhile endeavouring to hold the Fleurbaix defences on the left of the line. At 11:30 A.M. the Germans were in the east of the village, but the 12th Suffolks, who formed the garrison, put up a most determined resistance, in which they were aided by a company of the 12th Yorkshires Pioneer Battalion. It was not till 5:30 that the village was nearly enveloped, and the troops had to make their way as best they could to the north bank of the Lys. The 20th Middlesex and 13th Yorkshires, with their flank badly compromised, still held on to the Bois Grenier sector. These battalions on the left were taken over by the Thirty-fourth Division, with whom they were now in close liaison.

On the morning of April 10 the two brigades which had crossed the river were in very evil case, having sustained heavy losses. They were concentrated about Le Mortier. The 74th Brigade was in the Lys. position south of Croix du Bac in touch on the right with the 150th Yorkshire

Territorials. All day the enemy were pushing west and north, but meeting a strong resistance from the British who had an excellent trench, the Steenwerck switch, to help them. Some ground was lost, but much of it was regained in the evening by a spirited counter-attack of the 14th and lO/llth Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, and the 21st Middlesex, which advanced over 600 yards. The pressure was great and unceasing, however, so that the morning of April 11 found the line farther back again. The two brigades were reduced to about 1000 men, who were concentrated at Strazeele, while the 92nd and 93rd Brigades of the Thirty-first Division came up in their place. A brave counter-attack by the 93rd Brigade at Le Verrier gained its objective, but created a dangerous gap between it and the 92nd Brigade on its right, which was filled, however, by the 11th East Yorkshires. On the 12th the remains of all three brigades were strung out to cover Strazeele and Hazebrouck from the east and south-east, but next day they were relieved by the welcome appearance of the First Australian Division, whose advent will afterwards be explained. It had been a very desperate term of service, in which for three days the sappers of the 224th, 229th, and 231st Field Companies Royal Engineers had to fight as hard as the infantry. The Fortieth, like the other divisions described, were driven back, but only as the buffer is driven back, with the ultimate result of stopping the force which drove it. They were much aided by the guns of the Fifty-seventh Division under General Wray. The losses of the division were 185 officers and 4307 other ranks. When one reflects that the losses on the three weeks before had been equally heavy, one can but marvel.

We shall now follow the fortunes of the Thirty-fourth Division (Nicholson), which was on the immediate left of the Fortieth, covering a sector of 8000 yards, including the town of Armentières. On the north, near Frelinghien, it joined the right of the Twenty-fifth Division. On the night of April 7 the enemy fired an enormous number, 30,000 or 40,000, of gas-shells into Armentières, and soaked it to such an extent with mephitic vapours that it became uninhabitable. Otherwise there was no warning of an impending attack, which came indeed as a surprise to all the forces engaged.

On April 9 the division lay with the 103rd Brigade upon the right section and the 102nd upon the left, with the guns of the Thirty-eighth Division behind them. The main attack on this day was entirely upon the two divisions, the Portuguese and the Fortieth, to the south. There was heavy shelling, however, of the back areas, especially Armentières and Erquinghem. When as the day advanced everything on the right had given way or weakened, the 103rd Brigade threw back a long thin defensive line, facing south, which ended in the direction of Fleurbaix. At the same time the reserve 101st Brigade was ordered up to cover Bac St. Maur Bridge. One battalion of the Reserve Brigade, the 11th Suffolks, got into Fleurbaix, when by a happy chance they were able to reinforce their own comrades of the 12th Battalion. These two sturdy East Anglian units held the village in a very desperate fight for many hours. The 15th and 16th Royal Scots of the same brigade had some hard fighting also as they continued the defensive line formed by the 103rd Brigade, and tried to prevent the victorious Germans from swarming round and behind the Thirty-fourth Division. Some idea of the danger may be gathered from the fact that of two brigades of artillery engaged one was firing south-west and the other due east. The original front was never in danger, but it was a desperate conflict upon the refused flank.

During the afternoon the Germans crossed the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur, though the bridge at the latter place had been destroyed. Their progress, however, had slowed down and become uncertain. The 74th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division had come under the orders of General Nicholson, and was at once directed against the village of Croix du Bac, with the ultimate design of recovering the Bac St. Maur crossing. The 74th Brigade succeeded in clearing Croix du Bac of the enemy, but night fell before they could get farther. The morning found this brigade sandwiched in between the Fortieth and Thirty-fourth Divisions, while the 147th Brigade had also moved up in support. It was soon found, however, that the enemy had got so far west in the south that they outflanked the 74th Brigade, who had to retire on April 10 through Croix du Bac and Steenwerck. On the same morning the Twenty-fifth Division had been attacked near Frelinghien, and the Germans penetrated as far as the northern bend of the Lys, north of Armentières.

The left of the Thirty-fourth Division was now entirely in the air. It was clear, therefore, that a retirement north of the Lys was necessary, and about 3 P.M. in a sedate and orderly fashion it was started and carried through, covered by the fire of the 147th Brigade. The Thirty-fourth drew off in fine order, the rearguards stopping from time to time, especially in the streets of Armentières, for the purpose of beating back the advancing German patrols.

All bridges were destroyed, and no unwounded prisoners were left. The men of the Thirty-fourth were loud in praise of the way in which the Yorkshire Territorials of the 147th Brigade covered their right flank during this difficult and dangerous extrication. We will now, having traced the effects upon the Fifty-fifth to the south, and upon the Fortieth and Thirty-fourth Divisions to the north, return to the situation created on April 9 by the breaking of the Portuguese.

Jackson's Fiftieth Division, without its artillery, had only arrived from the Somme on April 8, having lost half its old soldiers, so that 50 per cent of the personnel were drafts. It had also suffered severely in officers, and was very battle-weary and exhausted. It was placed in billets at Merville, with two battalions of the 151st Brigade holding redoubts at Lestrem south of the Lys close to Estaires.

As soon as it was seen that the situation was serious, about 8 o'clock in the morning, the division was put in motion. The 151st Brigade was ordered to extend its left into Estaires, while the 150th prolonged the line north of Estaires. The 149th was held in reserve, though one of its battalions, the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers, was sent in to strengthen the right. The intention was that the Fiftieth Division should hold the line until the reserves could be brought to the point of danger.

By two in the afternoon the Germans could be seen all along the front, and some of the Portuguese had made their way through and between the ranks. A very heavy fire was opened by both lines of infantry, and the Germans advancing by short rushes made continuous progress towards the eastern bank of the stream. Yorkshire and Durham stood solid upon the farther side, however, and 5000 recruits endured a long and terrible baptism of fire from the afternoon to the evening of that spring day. It was on the right at Lestrem, where the British were to the east of the Lys, that the pressure was most severe, and eventually the 151st Brigade found it impossible to hold this point, while farther to the north, upon the left of the Yorkshire men, the German infantry of the 370th Regiment had won a footing upon the western bank of the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur. The British guns were beginning to concentrate, however, and invaluable time had been gained by the resistance of the Fiftieth Division. As night fell the 5th Durhams were still holding Estaires, while the 5th and 6th Northumberland Fusiliers from the reserve were standing firm along the stretch north and east of Estaires. Farther north still were the 4th East Yorks, 4th Yorks, and 5th Yorks in that order from the south, all very weary, but all holding tenaciously to their appointed line. During the night the Fifty-first Highland Division (Carter-Campbell) came up on the right of the 151st Brigade to cover the weak point at Lestrem and all the line to the south of it. A brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division also came up to Steenwerck north of where the river line had been broken, but it was too late for an effective counter-attack, as considerable forces were already across, which were spreading out north and south on the western bank.

The fall of night made no change in the battle, and the darkness was lit up by the red glare of the incessant fire. For many hours the line was held, though the Germans had brought up fresh divisions for their attack. Early in the morning of April 10, however, they won a footing in Estaires, which was desperately defended by the 5th Durhams. By 8:45, after long-continued street fighting, the Germans held the whole town, with the exception of the south- western extremity. The fight raged all day backwards and forwards through this little straggling place, the infantry upon either side showing the most determined valour. About 9:30 the 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, under Colonel Temperley, made a brilliant counter-attack, crossing 1500 yards of open country with only three batteries to cover the movement. Before 10 o’clock they were into Estaires and had cleared the main street, rushing house after house and driving the Germans down to the river edge, where they rallied and remained. The 149th Brigade had promptly sent forward its machine-guns, and these were mounted on the highest houses at the south end of the town, to fife on any enemy reserves coming up south of the Lys. They raked the Germans on the farther bank and caused heavy losses. All day the remains of the 6th Durhams and 6th Northumberlands fought desperately in Estaires, and held nearly all of it in the evening, which was in a way a misfortune, since it allowed the Germans to concentrate their heavies upon it during the night in a whole-hearted fashion which rendered it absolutely untenable. The morning of April 11 found Estaires a No Man’s Land between the lines of the infantry. In spite of a fresh advance by the 4th and 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, it was found impossible to regain the place, while the Germans gradually extended their line from the river crossings which they had retained all through. By mid-day on April 11, the British line was 500 yards west of the town.

In the southern portion of the line the 151st Brigade of Durhams had been slowly forced back from the Lestrem sector until they were on the line of the Lys, which they reached in the evening of April 10. At that date the 150th Yorkshire Brigade was still firm upon the river, but the left-hand battalion , the 5th Yorks, had thrown back its flank, since the enemy, brushing aside the right wing of the Fortieth Division, had crossed the stream and turned the Fiftieth from .the north. The Fortieth was still fighting hard, as already described, and endeavouring to hold back the attack, so that the German advance was slow. Early in the morning of April 11 the attack became very severe, and broke through to the west of Estaires — the river at this point runs from west to east — driving back the Durham Brigade, which was absolutely exhausted after forty-eight hours of ceaseless fighting without assistance. Their resistance had been an extraordinarily fine one, but there comes a limit to human powers. The whole division was at the last extremity, but fortunately at 12 o’clock on the 11th, two brigades of the Twenty-ninth Division (Cayley) came up in relief.

So close was the fighting, however, and so desperate the situation, that General Riddell of the 149th Northumberland Fusiliers Brigade refused to disengage his men from the battle, since the confusion of a relief might have led to disaster. He was at the time holding the line astride the Meteren Becque, north of Estaires, covering about 1000 yards of vital ground. Here the Germans attacked all day, making prodigious efforts to push the 4th and 5th Northumberland Fusilliers out of Trou Bayard. The ground between this point and Pont Levis, the bridge at the east end of Estaires, was dead flat, and afforded no particle of cover. Fifteen British machine-guns stationed beside the infantry swept all this expanse, and cut down each wave of attack. Four times the place was supposed to have fallen, and four times the Germans fell back, leaving long grey swathes of their dead. It was not until 3 P.M. that the stubborn Northumbrians found that their right was completely exposed, and were forced to retire from a position which they had sold at a terrible price.

Instead of dying down the German advance was attaining a greater proportion with every day that passed, for it seemed to their commanders that with so favourable an opening some very great success lay within their power. In spite of the arrival of the Fifty-first and Twenty-ninth Divisions the battle raged most furiously, and the weight of the attack was more than the thin line could sustain. The Germans had rapidly followed up the 151st

Brigade as it drew out, and there was a fierce action round Merville and Robermetz in the early afternoon of April 11. The exhausted Durhams turned furiously upon their pursuers, and there was fierce hand-to-hand work in which even General Martin and his Headquarters Staff found themselves handling rifles and revolvers. The Thirty-first Division (Bridgford) had come up and taken position in the rear of the Twenty-ninth, with their left flank facing east to hold off the enemy, who were now close to Steenwerck in the north. By nightfall Merville had gone, and so had Neuf Berquin, which lay between the 151st and the 149th Brigade, rather in the rear of the latter’ s right. At this period the Twenty-ninth Division, with the Thirty-first behind it, was on the left or north of the 149th Brigade, covering the ground between Neuf Berquin and Steenwerck. The enemy had turned the right of this line as already described, and now through the events in the north, which will soon be narrated, the left of the Twenty-ninth Division was also turned, and the situation became most dangerous, for the enemy was in great force in front. A consultation was held by the various general officers affected, and it was decided to make a side slip under the cover of darkness to the line of Vierhouck — Meteren Becque. The British had to fight, however, to gain this position, so far had the enemy outflanked them, and when the 149th Brigade, with their indomitable Northumbrians, now reduced to a few hundred men, had cut their way through to Vierhouck it was only to find it empty and the British line about 1000 yards to the west of it, where the 4th Guards Brigade of the Thirty-first Division had just begun to arrive. The Northumbrians held on to Vierhouck none the less on the morning of April 12, and the Guards Brigade came forward.

Whilst this stern fighting had been in progress, and while the Fifty-fifth kept its iron grip upon Givenchy and Festubert, the Fifty-first Highland Division to its north, along the line of the Lawe Canal, had been very hard pressed. All three brigades had been engaged in most desperate defence and counter-attack, the fighting being so close that two at least of the Brigadiers had been compelled to drop maps and binoculars, while they seized rifles from their oderlies. The canal was half dry and offered a poor front, but it was sustained until the Germans got across in the north where the left flank of the 153rd Brigade was turned and had to fall back. The Gordons and Black Watch of this unit fought most fiercely in the neighbourhood of Vieille Chapelle, and the Germans will long remember their meeting with the clansmen. Finally their line swung back west of Lestrem, keeping in touch with the right flank of the Fiftieth Division.

At this period the 184th Brigade was the only one in the Highland Division which was still capable of service, for the others had lost so heavily and were so wearied that rest was absolutely necessary. The Sixty-first Division (Colin Mackenzie), still very weak after its service on the Somme, came up in the Robecq sector, and, with the aid of the surviving Highland Brigade, formed a barrier to the terrific German pressure, the whole coming under General Mackenzie. This line was held by these troops up to the 23rd of April.

Meanwhile, to revert to the early days of the battle, the German attack was raging with great fury upon the centre and left of this line, and finding a gap between the Twenty-ninth Division and the 149th Brigade it poured through it with most menacing results, but the 4th Guards Brigade counter-attacked and retrieved the situation west of the Vieux Berquin-Neuf Berquin road, as will be told in detail in the next chapter. Farther north, however, the German attack made more progress and rolled forward to the south of the village of Merris. The 6th Northumbrians with only two officers left standing — one of them their gallant Colonel, Temperley, — still held on to their old stance at Vierhouck, though reduced to the strength of a company, and in such a state of physical exhaustion that the men fell to the ground fast asleep between the attacks. One young soldier woke up during his nap to find the Germans among them, on which he sprang up, shot the German officer, and organised a charge which re-established the line. As darkness fell on the evening of April 12 the survivors of the Fiftieth Division were drawn from the line, though some were so entangled with other units that they stayed and shared in the severe fighting of April 13.

As already shown the Givenchy bastion was held firm, which meant that the Fifty-first Division was also to some extent helped to resist attack, since an enfilade fire from the Fifty-fifth would beat upon any advance against them. Such advances were repeatedly made upon April 11 and were splendidly countered. North of this point the Fiftieth, Twenty-ninth, and Thirty-first Divisions had all suffered heavily, while the line had been bent back in a curve from the La Bassé Canal to a maximum depth of ten miles, ending on the night of April 12 in a position from west of Merville through the two Berquins to Merris. The Twenty-ninth Division, which is a particularly good comrade in a tight place, had been very hard pressed, with its brigades sent hither and thither wherever a leak was to be stopped.

It was in this action that Colonel Forbes Robertson, one of the heroes of Cambrai, earned the coveted Cross by fighting on horseback at the head of his men like some knight of old, and repeatedly restoring the line when it was broken. In spite of all valour, however, the general movement was westwards. Whilst these misfortunes had occurred in the southern sector, others not less serious had occurred in the north, owing to the great extension of the German attack. It is to these that we must now turn.

The enemy had achieved a considerable success upon April 9 when they succeeded in establishing themselves across the Lys at Sailly and Bac St. Maur, because by doing so they had got to the south-west of Armentières. They had prepared another attack in the north, and it was evident that if it had any success the Armentières position would be impossible. Early in the morning of April 10 the usual shattering and pulverising bombardment which preceded a full-dress German attack broke out upon the right of the Second Army, involving the front from the Ypres — Comines Canal in the north down to the Lys River at Armentières, thus joining up with the battle of yesterday, and turning the ten-mile front into one of twenty. The chief points in this line are Hollebeke in the north, Wytschaete in the centre, and Messines in the south, with Ploegsteert Wood and village and Nieppe as the final connecting links with Armentières. It was all classic and sacred ground drenched with the blood of our bravest. There can be few regiments in the British Army which have not at one time or another left their dead upon this shell-pitted slope, or upon the levels which face it.

The order of the Second Army from the north at this time was Twenty-second, Eighth, Second, and Ninth Corps. It was the Ninth Corps (Hamilton-Gordon) which was now attacked. The order of the divisions upon this front was Campbell’s Twenty-first Division astride the Ypres-Menin road, the Ninth (Tudor) in the Hollebeke district, the Nineteenth (Jeffreys) covering 6000 yards east of Messines and Wytschaete from Ravine Wood in the north to the Douve in the south, and finally the Twenty-fifth Division (Bainbridge) on the right, which was already in a most unfavourable position, as its right flank was menaced by the driving in of the Fortieth and threat to the Thirty-fourth on the preceding day, while one of its brigades, the 74th, had been taken away to cover Steenwerck from the German advance at Bac St. Maur. It was upon these divisions, and, in the first instance, upon the two southern ones that the new German attack from the Fourth Army of our old enemy General von Armin broke on April 10. It should be remembered that, like so many of their fellow-units, both of these divisions had been very heavily engaged in the south, and that their losses within the last two weeks had been very great. Verily we have travelled far from the day when it was laid down as an axiom that a corps which had lost a quarter of its numbers would not stand to its work until time had effaced the shock.

Since the main assault on April 10 fell upon the Nineteenth Division the story can be most plainly told from their central point of view. The left of their line was held by the 58th Brigade (Glasgow), consisting of the 6th Welsh and 9th Welsh Fusiliers, The right was held by the 57th Brigade (Cubitt) which contained the 10th Warwick, 8th Gloucester, and 10th Worcesters. The 56th (Heath) was in reserve. It was upon these troops that there fell the strain of an attack which can seldom have been exceeded in severity. The total German force on the corps front was eleven divisions, and of these no less than five were directed on the morning of April 10 upon the depleted ranks of General Jeffreys' unit. A very thick mist prevailed, and through this protective screen the German infantry advanced about 6 o'clock, driving swiftly through all the forward posts, and putting them out of action in exactly the same fashion as on March 21. The enemy were in great numbers, and their advance was swift and resolute. Within half an hour of the first alarm they had made a lodgment in the main position of the 57th Brigade, and had also broken in the face of the left wing of the Twenty-fifth Division to the south. The garrisons of the outlying posts were never seen again, and it was observed that they were greatly hampered by their camouflage screens which they had no time to tear away in the face of so rapid and overwhelming an attack. At 6.40 the enemy were deep in the position of the 57th Brigade, especially near Gapard Spur, which marked the centre of that unit. At 7:30 the whole brigade was in difficulties, which was more marked in the centre than on either flank, but was serious at every point of the fine. The 8th North Staffords of the Reserve Brigade were brought up at this hour to help in the defence of this weakening sector. Before they could arrive upon the scene the enemy had made such progress that he had reached the crest of the ridge and had occupied the village of Messines. The 68th Brigade in the north had not yet been attacked, but General Glasgow seeing his right flank entirely exposed had thrown back a defensive line. Close to this line was a post named Pick House, and upon this the mixed elements on the left of the 67th Brigade, chiefly men of the 10th Warwicks, now rallied and formed a strong centre of resistance. The Twenty-fifth Division to the south had been also very hard pressed, and was in immediate danger of losing the important knoll, Hill 63, so that the reserve brigade of the Nineteenth Division had to send the two remaining battalions, the 4th Shropshires and 9th Cheshires, to strengthen their defence. There was thus no longer any support for the Nineteenth Divisional fighting line in their great need, save for the 5th South Wales Borderers, their pioneer battalion, and the 81st Field Company R.E., both of whom were thrown into the battle, the pioneers pushing bravely forward and connecting up with the 10th Warwicks at Pick House. Meanwhile the 8th North Stafford s had made a fine attempt to retake Messines, and had actually reached the western edge of the village, but were unable to gain a permanent footing. Their right was in touch with the 8th Gloucesters, and some sort of stable line began to build itself up before the Germans. They had been unable to occupy Messines in force, owing to the rifle-fire which became more deadly with the rising of the mist. The scattered groups of infantry lying upon the ridge on either side of Messines were greatly heartened by the splendid work of A Battery, 88th R.F.A., under Captain Dougall, which remained among them, firing over open sights at the advancing Germans. “So long as you stick it I will keep my guns here!” he shouted, and the crouching men cheered him in return. He was as good as his word, and only withdrew what was left of his battery, manhandling it across almost impossible ground, when he had not a shell in his limbers. This brave officer received the Victoria Cross, but unhappily never lived to wear it.

The 8th North Staffords, still lying opposite Messines, extended their left down the Messines-Wytschaete road in an endeavour to join up with the men at Pick House. Thus a frail curtain of defence was raised in this direction also. Shortly after mid-day things began to look better, for the gallant South African Brigade (Tanner) of the Ninth Division was despatched to the rescue. So severe had been its losses, however, that it numbered only 1600 bayonets, and had hardly been re-organised into battalions. Late in the afternoon it advanced, the 1st Battalion on the left, 2nd on the right, and though it had not the weight to make any definite impression upon the German front it entirely re-established the line of the road from Messines to Wytschaete, and reinforced the thin fragments of battalions who were holding this precarious front. The South Africans incurred heavy losses from machine-gun fire in this very gallant attack.

The Ninth Division had hardly relinquished its Reserve Brigade when it found that it was itself in urgent need of support, for about 2 o'clock on August 10 the attack spread suddenly to the northern end of the line, involving the 25th, 26th, and 58th Brigades, all under General Tudor, who was now responsible for the Wytschaete front. So infernal was the barrage which preceded the attack, that the right of the Ninth Division in the vicinity of Charity Farm was driven in, and the 58th Brigade, with both flanks in the air and smothered under a rain of shells, was compelled also to fall back upon its support line.

About 4 P.M. the 58th Brigade was broken near Torreken Farm, and the 6th Wiltshires, who were the flank battalion on the right, were cut off and lost heavily. The enemy were driving hard at this period towards Wytschaete, but the 9th Welsh stood fast in a cutting to the south of the village, and held the Germans off with their rifle-fire. So ended a most trying and unfortunate day, where the overborne troops had done all that men could do to hold their ground, fighting often against five times their own number. The prospects for the morrow looked very black, and the only gleam of light came with the advent, about midnight, of the 108th Brigade (Griffiths) from the Ulster Division, with orders to fight alongside the exhausted 57th, whose commander, General Cubitt, was now directing the local operations to the west of Messines. The Wytschaete front was also strengthened by the inclusion in the Ninth Division of the 62ncl and later of the 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division. Farther south the 75th Brigade north of Armentières had been driven back by the enemy's attack, and the 7th Brigade on its left, finding its flank uncovered, had hinged back upon Ploegsteert Wood, where it held its line as best it might. Thus on the left, the centre, and the right there had been the same story of unavailing resistance and loss of valuable, dearly-bought ground . Even more serious, however, than the local loss was the strategical situation which had been created by the German advance in the lower sector, by their crossing the Lys, and by the fact that on the night of April 10 they were closing in upon Steenwerck and La Crèche far to the right rear of the defenders of the Messines line. It was a situation which called for the highest qualities of generals as of soldiers.

By the morning of April 11 General Plumer, dealing out his reserves grudgingly from his fast diminishing supply, placed the 147th Brigade of the Forty-ninth Yorkshire Territorial Division (Cameron) behind the Twenty-fifth Division in the Ploegsteert region, and a brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division to the north of it. Such succours were small indeed in the face of what was evidently a very great and well-prepared attack which had already shaken the whole northern front to its foundations. The Higher Command had, however, some points of consolation. If the vital sectors could be held there was the certainty that strong reinforcements would arrive within a few days from the south. The Amiens line was now certainly stabilised, and if once again an equilibrium could be secured then the last convulsive efforts of this titanic angel of darkness would have been held With no illusions, but with a dour determination to do or die, the British line faced to the east.

The immediate danger was that a gap had opened between Messines and Wytschaete, while another was threatened farther south between Ploegsteert and the Nieppe-Armentières road. The pressure upon the Damstrasse was also very great in the region of the Ninth Division. The first disposition in the Messines area was to strengthen the line of resistance by pushing up the three battalions of the 108th Brigade, the 1st Irish Fusiliers on the left near Pick House, the 9th Irish Fusiliers west of Messines, and the 12th Irish Rifles in the Wulverghem line. The attack on the morning of April 11 was not heavy in this direction, but was rather directed against the Twenty-fifth Division in the Ploegsteert district, where it came omniously close to Hill 63, a commanding point from which, the Messines position of the British would be taken in reverse. General Jeffreys of the Nineteenth Division determined none the less to stand his ground, but he threw out a defensive flank along the Messines-Wulverghem road, and mounted machine-guns to hold any attack from the south. Meanwhile the 67th, South African, and 108th Brigades, in spite of this menace to their right rear continued to hold the Messines front. There was severe fighting on this sector during the afternoon in which the remains of the 2nd and 4th (Transvaal Scots) Battalions were pushed back for some distance, but counter-attacked under the lead of Captain Green, regaining most of the ground that they had lost, and connecting up with the 6th South Wales Borderers, who were still holding fast near Pick House. This line was maintained until the general withdrawal. It was further strengthened by the 146th Brigade, one of the three units of the Forty-ninth Division, which were all engaged at different points. One battalion, the 7th West Yorkshires, called on suddenly to fill a gap, made a very fine advance under heavy fire, and restored the situation. It remained in the line until, on April 16, it was almost annihilated by a terrific German attack upon it.

But the situation on the right rear was getting worse and worse. In the evening it was definitely known that Hill 63 had at last fallen after a long and obstinate struggle. The Twenty-fifth, and later the Thirty-fourth Divisions had held up against great odds, but the main force of the enemy was now striking upon that line, and the British were forced to withdraw from Le Bizet towards Nieppe. These April 9-12. (German gains enforced a completely new re-arrangement of the forces in the north if they were to avoid being taken in the rear. This change of a wide and far-reaching character was quickly and safely effected during the night of April 11 and 12. It involved moving back the three northern corps into their battle zones, leaving only outposts in advance. They still covered Ypres, but the retirement meant that all that had been won in the mud-and-blood struggle of 1917 had passed into German keeping, and coupled with the loss of Messines it seemed to threaten that the old salient might be renewed in as disastrous a fashion as ever. This retirement was rather in the nature of a precaution against the possibilities of the future. What was of most immediate importance was the withdrawal of the lines which were at such close grips with the enemy to the west of Messines. By the morning of April 12 the general line of the Nineteenth Corps was Steeuwerck Station, Pont-d’Achelles, Neuve Église, Wulverghem, Wytschaete. No immediate German attack followed on the withdrawal. This abstention on the part of the enemy was due in part to the wonderful work done by a small nest of four machine-guns on the Messines-Wulverghem road under the command of Lieutenant Hodgson. This small unit had already fought for forty-eight hours, but on this third day of the battle their services were invaluable, for they shot down hundreds of Germans as they endeavoured to debouch from Messines and descend the slope. Save for two wounded men none of this band of heroes ever returned. Among other detachments who behaved with great heroism were a few men of the 5th South Wales Borderers, B Company, under Captain Evans, who maintained themselves at Pick House, north and east of Messines, for three days, until they were at last rescued by the 58th Brigade from the north.

Whilst these fresh dispositions and general retrogressions had been made on this front the Thirty-fourth Division to the south had also been compelled to rearrange its positions. It has already been described how, under cover of the 147th Brigade, they withdrew in absolute order across the Lys. April 11 saw such continued pressure, however on the right of the Twenty-fifth and the whole of the Thirty-fourth Divisions that it became clear early in the afternoon of April 11 that further retirement was imperative. This began at dusk, the three brigades retiring by the Armentières-Bailleul road, while the 147th still acted as rearguard. They retired through the 74th and 88th Brigades near Bailleul Station, fighting back all the way and considerably harassed by the German guns. On the morning of the 12th the general line was Steam-mill — Bailleul Station — southern border of La Crèche to a point about 500 yards north-east of Pont d'Achelles on the Bailleul road. Along this line the order of battle from the south was the 147th, 75th, 101st, 74th, 102nd, and 88th Brigades. Nieppe, which had been evacuated, was occupied by the enemy later in the day, and on the evening of April 12 the line was pushed a little farther back to De Seule.

There was no fighting on the new line opposite Messines on April 12, but the battle was, as has been shown, raging furiously elsewhere, and the The situation in the south, where the enemy was making progress, must deeply affect that in the north. Had an aviator taken a swift flight from Hollebeke to Givenchy on this day, following the deep curve which had formed in the British line, his observations would have been roughly as follows: in the Hollebeke district he would have found no extreme pressure, and that the Ninth Division, reinforced by the 58th Brigade, was holding the line not far westward of their original position. From there onwards he would have skirted the new line of the Ninth Corps, as already indicated, and would have seen the remains of the Nineteenth Division covering the north of it, the Twenty-fifth Division, also in fragments, about Neuve Église, and the Thirty-fourth Division near Steenwerck. He would next observe with consternation or joy according to his colours, that there was a considerable gap before Bailleul. At the other side of this gap he would come upon elements of the Thirty-first and Twenty-ninth Divisions, hard-pressed and worried by the advance which the enemy had made through Merville on their right. He would catch a glimpse also of some thin lines of resistance, still farther south, which represented all that was left of the Fiftieth

Division. Finally, he would see the Fifty-first and the Fifty-fifth on the extreme south, both of them standing firm in their positions. Looking eastwards he would see pouring across the Lys the legions of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, hurrying to improve their blow, while behind the British lines he would see new divisions, the Fifty-ninth Midlanders at Wulverghem, the Thirty-third near Bailleul, the Sixty-first near Robecq, the 4th Guards Brigade followed by the First Australians near Hazebrouck, all hastening with heavy hearts but the most grim determination to throw themselves across the path of this German invasion which already threatened the most vital points in Flanders. Far to the south also our aviator would perhaps have seen the smoke of many trains, and out at sea might have made out the little dots which marked in the one case French, in the other British, reinforcements. Such was the general panorama upon the Flanders front on the evening of April 12.

X. THE BATTLE OF THE LYS
April 13 to May 8

Desperate situation — Sir Douglas Haig’s “Win or Die” message — Epic of the 4th Guards Brigade at Hazebrouck — Arrival of First Australian Division — Splendid services of Thirty-third Division — Loss of Armentières, Bailleul, and Neuve Église — The First Division at Givenchy — Fall of Kemmel — Battle of Ridge Wood — Great loss of ground — Equilibrium

UP to April 13 twenty-eight German divisions had been traced in the battle of Flanders. Since the whole British Army consisted of sixty divisions, and only thirteen had been engaged in Flanders, one can gather how terrible had been their task.

By the fourth day of the battle the purpose of the enemy became more clear. It was evident now that his attack consisted really of three movements. The northern of these, consisting of about six divisions, had for its task to drive through Wytschaete and Messines to Bailleul. At present it was held up in the north by the Ninth Division, but had made its’ way in the south until Neuve Église was the only village which intervened between it and Bailleul. The central attack, consisting of the main force, had taken Armentières and penetrated ten miles deep, capturing Merville, reaching the Clarence River, touching Robecq, and threatening St. Venant. This deep penetration reacted upon the British flanks to north and south of it. Finally, there was an advance by seven or eight divisions in the south, which had been held at Givenchy, but had bent the line back from that point, Bethune being the immediate objective. The hammering of the Germans was remorseless and terrific. All that the British needed was a little time, but it seemed as if it would be denied them. Help was coming, but it did not arrive so quickly as the new divisions which Von Armin and Von Quast were pouring over the Messines Ridge and across the plain of the Lys.

The position was very menacing, as was shown by an order of the day from the British Commander-in-Chief which is unique perhaps in our military annals — a stern call to duty and to death, pitched on the very note which would arouse the historic tenacity of the British soldier. Documents have been avoided in this chronicle, but this one at least must be quoted in full. It was addressed to all ranks of the British Army under his command.

“Three weeks ago to-day,” said Sir Douglas Haig, “the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports, and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 divisions into the battle, and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has, as yet, made little progress towards his goals. We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops.

“Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our army under the most trying circumstances.

“Many amongst us now are tired. To these I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest.

“The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

“There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end.

“The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind depend alike upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.”

No words can describe the danger of the crisis more clearly than this clear call from a leader remarkable for his judgment and restraint, exhorting his men to fight to the death with their faces to the raging German line, and their backs to those all-important harbours on which the fate of the world was now depending. The German vanguard was forty miles from Calais on the day that the appeal was made, and there was no strong line to be forced, save that strongest of all lines which was formed by Sir Herbert Plumer and his men.

A new unit had come into line on April 13. This was the Thirty-third Division under General Pinney. It was at once thrust in to fill the gap in front of Bailleul, where it found itself involved from that date onwards in most desperate fighting, in which it was associated with the Thirty-first Division. The narrative of the services and trials, both of them very great, which were rendered and endured by these divisions may be best told in consecutive form, as a too strict adhesion to the order of dates produces an effect which makes it difficult to follow the actual happenings. We shall first consider the operations at Hazebrouck and Meteren, where these two divisions and the First Australian Division were chiefly concerned, and we shall afterwards return to the north and follow the fortunes of the Nineteenth, Twenty-fifth, Forty-ninth, Thirty-fourth, and other divisions which were holding the northern curve.

The line was very weak on April 12 in front of Hazebrouck, and yet it was absolutely vital that this important railway junction should not fall into German hands. The need was pressing and desperate, for the German attack was furious and unremitting, while the British line was so thin, and composed of such weary units, that it seemed impossible that it could hold. The exhausted remains of the Fiftieth Division, who had been at it continually ever since the breaking of the Portuguese front, were hardly capable now of covering or defending any serious front. Yet if the ground could be held, the First Australian Division, brought hurriedly back from the Somme and in the act of detraining, would be in the line within twenty-four hours. There have been few moments more heavy with fate during the whole of the campaign. Everything depended for the moment upon Finney’s Thirty-third Division, upon the worn remnants of the Twenty-ninth Division, upon the 92nd and 93rd Brigades, and upon the 4th Guards Brigade of the Thirty-first Division who were brought up from Pradelles, and thrown hurriedly across the path of the advancing Germans. Of the Thirty-first Division the 92nd and 93rd Brigades had already been heavily engaged on April II as already recorded. The Guards Brigade had been delayed in its journey and was still fresh. General Reedman of the 92nd Brigade was in local command, and the situation was a particularly difficult one. At all costs Hazebrouck must be covered until reinforcements could arrive, for if the line were cut there was no end to the possible evils. When Merris fell General Reedman still held the heights west of Merris with the 10th East Yorkshires, while the 11th East Lancashires were to the south, and the remnants of the 86th and 87th Brigades of the Twenty-ninth Division held on to Vieux Berquin. This line held until 5 P.M. on April 13 in spite of very stormy attacks and very little help from the guns. About that hour the right of the line gave way under severe pressure, and Vieux Berquin was taken, but the Germans were bottled up in it and were unable to get forward. There they remained until the great turn of the tide. We must now, however, turn our gaze to the immediate south and follow the phases of the wonderful stand made by the remaining brigade of the Thirty-first Division, the 4th Guards Brigade, who found themselves involved in a desperate battle in front of Hazebrouck.

Without enumerating a number of obscure hamlets which are rather confusing than helpful, it may be said that the brigade under General Leslie Butler covered the north of the main road from Merville to Hazebrouck, with their right resting upon the Bourre, a small sluggish stream. Vierhouck represented roughly the centre of their line. It was a country of flat cultivated fields, with many roads and water-courses lined with willows, which cut the view. There were untouched farms with their human and animal occupants on every side. To the west lay the great forest of Nieppe. On the right were the 3rd Coldstream, on the left the 4th Grenadiers, with the 2nd Irish in close support. They were in position on the morning of April 12, and at once found the enemy in front of them, who after a strong preliminary bombardment advanced in great numbers along the whole line. The rifle-fire of the Guardsmen was too deadly, however, and the attack dissolved before it. The German machine-gunners were exceedingly aggressive, “not to say impudent,” as a Guards officer explained it, and many losses were sustained from their fashion of pushing forward upon the flanks, and worming their way into every unoccupied crevice. Nothing could exceed both the gallantry and the intelligence of these men. Having cleared their front the Guards endeavoured to advance, but the Coldstream on the right met with murderous fire from the village of Pures Becques, and the movement could get no farther, nor were the Grenadiers much more fortunate on the left, though Captain Pryce with his company broke into some outlying houses, killing a number of Germans, seven of whom fell to that officer’s own automatic. This whole gallant episode occurred under the very muzzles of a German battery, firing with open sights at a range of 300 yards.

At this period the brigade seems to have got ahead of the general British line, and to have had both flanks entirely exposed to every sort of enfilade fire. About four in the afternoon the right company of the Coldstream, numbering only forty men, had to turn south to face the enemy. The Germans had thrust into the centre of the Coldstream also, but No. 2 Company of the supporting Irish, acting without orders upon the impulse of the moment, and aided by the surviving Coldstream, completely re-established the line. The Irish, who were led by Captain Bambridge, were almost annihilated in their dashing effort to ease the pressure upon their English comrades. Their leader was wounded. Lieutenant Dent was killed, and only eleven men of the company were left standing. On the left the

Germans were 500 yards in the rear, and here a rearrangement was called for and steadily carried out. An hour later another violent attack was made at the junction of the two battalions, but it also was driven back in disorder.

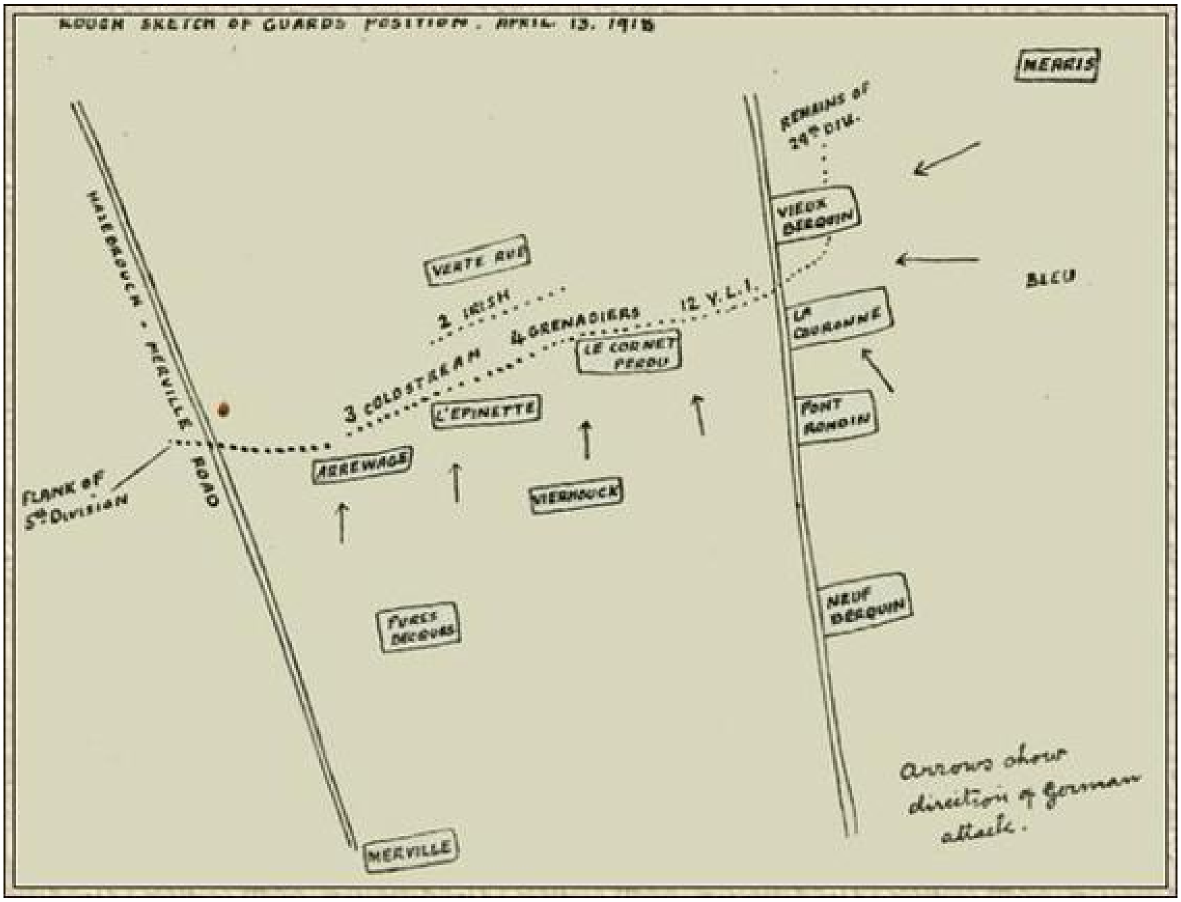
ROUGH SKETCH OF GUARDS POSITION. APRIL 13. 1918
MERRIS
REMAINS OF 29TH DIV.
VIEUX BERQUIN
BLEU
VERTE RUE
2 IRISH
4 GRENADIERS
12 Y.L.I.
LA COURONNE
3 COLDSTREAM
LE CORNET PERDU
L'EPINETTE
PONT RONDIN
HAZEBROUCK - MERVILLE ROAD
ARREWAGE
VIERHOUCK
FLANK OF 5TH DIVISION
PURES BECQUES
NEUF BERQUIN
Arrows show direction of German attack.
MERVILLE

Rough Sketch of Guards’ Position, April 13

The Germans had brought their guns well forward and into the open, but they met their match in Lieutenant Lewis of the 152nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery, who directed the scanty British artillery, and handled his pieces in a way which was much appreciated by the weary Guardsmen.

The readjustment of the line enabled the 4th Guards Brigade to link up with the 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry, pioneer battalion of their own division, which was holding the line at La Couronne, and fought that day with the utmost tenacity and resolution. On the left flank of the Yorkshiremen, near Vieux Berquin, were the worn remains of the Twenty-ninth Division.

Night fell upon a sorely-tried but unconquered line. The two front battalions had lost at least a third of their effectives. Under the screen of darkness the position was re-organised, and it was hoped that the Fifth Division, drawn back from Italy, would be able to effect a relief. This could not be fully accomplished, however, and at best only a small contraction of the front could be effected, so that the morning of April 13 found the exhausted Coldstream and Grenadiers still facing the German attack. Their line had been strengthened by the 210th Field Co. of the Royal Engineers. The front to be held was A still very wide for so weakened a force.

It had been a hard day, but it was only the prelude of a harder one. On April 13 the morning began with thick mist, of which the Germans took advantage to rush their machine-guns to very close quarters. At early dawn the Coldstream found themselves once more heavily attacked, while an armoured car came down the road and machine-gunned the outposts at a range of ten yards. After severe mixed fighting the attack was driven back. At 9:15 it was renewed with greater strength, but again it made no progress. It is typical of the truly desperate spirit of the men, that when every man save one in an outpost had been killed or wounded, the survivor. Private Jacotin of the Coldstream, carried on the fight alone for twenty minutes before he was blown to pieces with a grenade. The left flank of this battalion had also been heavily attacked, the enemy, with their usual diabolical ingenuity, shouting as they advanced through the fog that they were the King’s Company of the Grenadier Guards. They were blown back none the less into the mist from which they had emerged. The 12th Yorkshire Light Infantry was also four separate times attacked, but held to its appointed line. This gallant unit fairly earned the title of the “Yorkshire Guards “ that day, for they were the peers of their comrades. Meanwhile, however, outside the area of this grim fight the Germans had taken Vieux Berquin, pushing back the scanty line of defence at that point, so that they were able to bring up trench-mortars and guns to blast the Yorkshire battalion at La Couronne out of its shallow trenches. Captain Pryce, on the extreme left of the Guards, found the Germans all round him, and his Grenadiers were standing back to back and firing east and west. The company was doomed, and in spite of the gallant effort of a party of Irish Guards, who lost very heavily in the venture, the whole of them perished, save for Sergeant Weedon and six men who reported the manner in which their comrades had met their end. Captain Pryce had led two bayonet charges, first with eighteen men, which was entirely successful, and later with fourteen men, who buried themselves in the grey of the German ranks, and there remained. Such was the end of No. 2 Company of the 4th Grenadiers, and of its commander. This brave man received a posthumous V.C. in the record of which it is stated that with forty men he had held up a German battalion for ten hours and so saved a break through.

Apart from this flank company the centre company of the Grenadiers at this period consisted of six unwounded men, while the right company was twenty strong. All the officers were down. They were hemmed in on two sides by the enemy, but they were still resisting as the shades of night fell upon them. By dawn the Grenadier battalion had ceased to exist.

The 3rd Coldstream on the right were hardly in better case. The right company was surrounded, and fought until there was only a handful left. A few survivors fell back upon the Fifth Division and the Australians who were now well up to the line. The orders to the Guards had been to keep the Germans out until the Australians could arrive. They had been faithfully obeyed. The total casualties had been 39 officers and 1244 rank and file, the greater part from two weak battalions; 17 per cent of the brigade mustered after the action. Soldiers will appreciate the last words of the official report which are: “No stragglers were reported by the A.P.M.” It is an episode which needs no comment. Its grandeur lies in the facts. Well might General de Lisle say: “The history of the British Army can record nothing finer than the story of the action of the 4th Guards Brigade on April 12 and 13.”

Whilst the Guards had made their fine stand to the east of Hazebrouck, the rest of the Thirty-first Division, covering a front of 9000 yards, had a most desperate battle with the German stormers. The fine north country material which makes up the 92nd and 93rd Brigades had never been more highly tried, for they were little more than a long line of skirmishers with an occasional post. In some parts of the line they were absolutely exterminated, but like their comrades of the Guards, they managed somehow or other to retain the positions and prevent a penetration until reinforcements arrived. The remains of the Twenty-ninth Division on the left had also fought with the utmost devotion and held the line at the price of a heavy drain upon their weakened ranks. It has been calculated that the line held by the 31st Division upon these days was 5| miles long, and that it was attacked by the 35th and 42nd German divisions, the 1st Bavarian Reserve, and 10th, 11th, and 81st Reserve divisions. It would be well to continue the action upon the Hazebrouck front by giving at once an account of the operations of the First Australian Division under General Sir Harold

Walker, which had the remarkable experience of being sent from Flanders to the Amiens front, being engaged there, and now being back in the Flanders front once more, all in little over a week. They detrained on April 12, and on the 13th their 2nd Brigade (Heane) found themselves in front of Hazebrouck with the remains of the 92nd British Brigade on their left and with the hard-pressed 4th Guards Brigade in front of them. In the evening the remains of the Guards were withdrawn through their line, and they were facing the pursuing Germans. On their left the Australians were in touch with the 1st Cameronians of the 19th Brigade in the Meteren area.

This fierce fighting was going on in a country which was new to war, with unbroken soil, whole cottages, and numerous refugees, who by their flight before the German vanguard complicated a situation which was already so chaotic that it was very difficult for the generals on the spot to grasp the relative positions of the attack and the defence.

On April 14 the Germans, advancing behind a deadly barrage, came forward through Merris and Vieux Berquin. They soon found, however, that they had before them fresh and steady troops who were not to be driven. The immediate German objective was the high ground from Mont de Merris to Strazeele. The 2nd Australian Brigade was on the right and the 1st (Leslie) on the left. Both were equally attacked, and both met their assailants with a shattering fire which piled the level plain with their bodies. Three lines swept forward, but none reached the shallow trenches of the “digger” infantry. The 3rd and 4th Battalions held the line to the north where the pressure was greatest. The One hundred and twenty-third French Division was in support, but there was never any need to call for their co-operation. Strazeele, however, was blown to pieces by the German guns.

April 15 and 16 were comparatively quiet, and the Australians busily strengthened their lines. On the 17th sharp attack was made upon the 1st and 4th Battalions on the left and centre of the 1st Australian Brigade, the advance coming up the valley between Merris and Meteren. This also was cut to pieces by rifle and gun-fire, so that it made no progress whatever.

The 3rd Australian Brigade (Bennett) had been in reserve, but it was destined for severe service after Meteren had passed out of the hands of the Thirty-third Division in the manner elsewhere described. They had actually relieved some of the worn elements of the British Thirty-third and of the French One hundred and thirty-third Divisions to the west of Meteren, and on April 22 and 23 they endeavoured by two separate movements upon either flank to fight their way back into the little town. The first operations carried out by the 11th and 12th Battalions were successful, but the final push into the town by the 9th and 10th met with heavy opposition, and the casualties were so great that the attempt had to be abandoned. The three Australian brigades were shortly relieved, after their very valuable spell in the line. They were destined soon to find themselves with their comrades on the Somme once again.

Whilst the 1st Brigade had won a complete defensive victory in the north of the line, the 2nd Brigade had done equally well in the south. The 7th and 8th Battalions were in the line, and both were heavily engaged, especially the latter, which faced Vieux Berquin. The German attack was once again a complete failure, and it was clear that the Australians had the historical honour in Flanders as well as on the Somme, of saying, “Thus far and no farther,” Area. upon the sector which they manned.

We pass on to the movements of the Thirty-third Division, which arrived upon the scene of action on April 11, and from that time onwards played an ever increasing part in this great world crisis. General Pinney had the experience of first being denuded of large part of his own proper force, which was given away, brigade by brigade, to points of danger, and afterwards of not only seeing them reunited under his hand, but of having the remains of four divisions and a great number of details under him, and so being in actual command of the whole operations to the south and west of Bailleul. To his coolness, firmness, and well-tried fortitude, the nation owed much during those few desperate days.

The 100th Brigade (Baird) was moved forward at once to come under the orders of General Bainbridge, who, with his Twenty-fifth Division, had endured so much in the Ploegsteert district and was in urgent need of help. We shall follow them from the date of their detachment to that of their return to their own unit. On April 11, after dusk, they took their position, covering Neuve Église, the 16th King’s Royal Rifles on the right of the line, the 2nd Worcesters in the centre, and the 9th Highland Light Infantry in reserve, the 148th Brigade being on the left, and the 75th Brigade on their right, the latter much exhausted by two days of battle. Immediately to the north lay the much-enduring battle line of the Nineteenth Division, which has already been fully described. Two points can hardly be described simultaneously, but these facts are to be read in conjunction with those already given in the last chapter, and it is to be understood that the whole situation at Neuve Église reacted from hour to hour upon that farther north, since a German capture of the town would place the enemy in the rear of General Jeffreys and his men.

On April 12 there was no direct attack upon this area, but about 4 P.M. the 75th Brigade on the right, which was much worn, was driven back and a gap created, which was filled in by such reserves as could be got together at the shortest notice. In the morning of April 13 it was found that this flank was still very open, the nearest organised unit being the 88th Brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division, which was also stretching out its left in the hope of making connection. The enemy, however, pushed through early on April 13, getting to the rear of the 100th Brigade, and swinging north into Neuve Èglise which they captured. The Glasgow Highlanders, the only battalion of the Highland Light Infantry which wears Highland costume, attacked at once with all the vigour of fresh troops, and cleared the Germans out of the town at the point of the bayonet. The enemy had filtered into the brigade line, however, and parties of them were in the rear of the Worcesters. The hardest part of all was borne by the 16th King's Royal Rifles, who, being the flank battalion, bore all the weight of an advance which had enveloped them upon three sides, front, flank, and rear. Of this gallant battalion there were hardly any survivors. The Worcesters threw back their right flank, therefore, in order to cover Neuve Église upon the south and south-east, while the Twenty-fifth Division were on the north and north-east.

The mishaps of a dark day were still not over, for the enemy about 4:30 made a determined attack and again punctured the over-stretched line. Some of them drove their way once more into Neuve Église, brushing aside or scattering the thin line of defence. Another strong force broke into the front of the 100th Brigade and drove a wedge between the Glasgow Highlanders and the Worcesters. The headquarters of the latter battalion was in the Municipal Building of Neuve Église, and put up a desperate, isolated resistance for many hours. Colonel Stoney and his staff finally making their way back to their comrades. In this defence the Chaplain, the Rev. Tanner, greatly distinguished, himself. The survivors of the 2nd Worcesters had also maintained themselves in Neuve Église as house neighbours to the German stormers, but after mid-day on April 14, finding themselves entirely cut off, they fought their way out, leaving the Square round the Church and Mairie piled with corpses. The town was now entirely German, with results already described upon the northern section of the outflanked line. Once more the Worcesters, the heroes of the old Gheluvelt battle, had placed fresh laurels upon their faded and battle-stained colours. The remains of the 100th Brigade were now reassembled on the Ravelsberg ridge, west of Neuve Église, where they faced their enemy once more. So worn was it that the survivors of the Rifles and of the Highlanders were clubbed together to form one very weak composite battalion. On their right now was a collection of odds-and-ends under General Wyatt about a thousand strong, while on their left was the 103rd Brigade of the Thirty-fourth Division, in support.

This latter brigade had aided in the defence of Neuve Église, and done very severe service, two of the battalions, the 4th Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 4th York and Lancasters, having sustained heavy losses. During the two days in which the fate of the village hung in the balance these battalions were engaged in constant defence and counter-attack, especially on April 13, when in one desperate sally they captured a German colonel and nearly a hundred of his men. When the village fell on April 14 the gallant Yorkshiremen still held on close to it and gave no ground until they were ordered that night into reserve. The other battalion of the brigade, the 5th York and Lancaster, had been ordered to Steenwerck, where also it had borne a distinguished part in the fight.

The Germans were now nursing their wounds and also digesting their gains, so that there was a very welcome pause which was mainly in favour of the defence, who had good hope of reinforcement. A number of French batteries appeared as the forerunners of relief, and helped to break up an advance upon the Ravelsberg on the morning of April 16. A second attack had no better luck. Some posts were taken but were won back again with the help of the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 103rd Brigade.

April 17 saw a fresh attack which was preceded by a barrage which tore gaps in the thin line of the Highlanders. It developed into an infantry attack, which gave the enemy possession of an orchard near the line. The Highlanders, aided by some of the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers of the 177th Brigade, tried hard to win it back, but could at best only block the exits. After dark that night the brigade was relieved by the 148th Brigade, and staggered out of the line with only 800 men unscathed. General Baird’s infantry had endured an ordeal which exceeded what the most disciplined troops could be expected to survive: 58 officers and 1424 men had fallen in their splendid defence of Neuve Église.

The other brigades of the Thirty-third Division had meanwhile been involved in situations hardly less critical than those which had faced Baird's Brigade at Neuve Église. Maitland's 98th Brigade, which found itself on April 12 in the Ravelsberg area, was placed to the north of Bailleul as a support to that place, and the narrative of its doings will be found in the subsequent account of the defence of Meteren.

The 19th Brigade (Mayne) of the Thirty-third Division had been detailed to cover Meteren to the west of Bailleul against the northward sweep of the Germans. At 9.40 on April 12 it was known that the enemy had got through at Merville, that their cavalry had been seen at Neuf Berquin, and by noon that this swiftly advancing tide was submerging Merris only three miles south of Meteren. General Pinney, deprived of two of his brigades, had only under his hand the 19th Brigade, with the 18th Middlesex Pioneers, 11th and 222nd Field Companies Royal Engineers, and the 33rd British Machine-gun Corps under Colonel Hutchinson, an officer who until he was gassed, was a tower of strength to the defence. At mid-day the place was under heavy shell-fire. There is a windmill in a prominent position south of the town overlooking the dead flats of Flanders. In and around this was stationed the 1st Queen's West Surrey. East of the town, facing Bailleul, was the 5th Scottish Rifles, while the 1st Scottish Rifles (The Cameronians) were in reserve. The whole situation was under the direct control of General Pinney, and he was reinforced in the course of the day by several very welcome units — 9th Corps Cyclists, 22nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, and others. Strazeele was included in the line of defence, which joined up in the night with the hard-worked Twenty-ninth Division.

The situation on April 12 in this quarter of the field was most alarming. Everything in the south seemed to be in a state of chaos, and the line was for the moment absolutely fluid. The fall of Merville and of Estaires had been exploited with extraordinary energy by the Germans, who were rushing on at the very heels of the retiring and often disorganised troops, who were dead-beat after two days and nights of constant exertion. It was all important to build up some sort of line south of Meteren, but events were moving so fast that it was doubtful if it could be done. It was here that the value of the new machine-gun organisation, perfected during the winter, was brilliantly exemplified. Colonel Hutchinson was able to throw forward the whole of his guns to make up for the local weakness of the infantry, and he ran great risks in doing so, since he had only broken men and stragglers to man the gaps between his gun positions. The crisis was such, however, that any risk had to be taken, and the 33rd Battalion of the Machine-gun Corps saved the situation. On the other hand it is not too much to say that a humble hero, Driver Sharpies, whose motor-lorry was handy, saved the 33rd Battalion, for he not only rushed up eight guns under heavy fire, with their crews, but he brought up afterwards on his own initiative the wire and other essentials which enabled them to hold their position. It was a supreme example of what can be done by one brave, clear-headed man. The German tide was flowing at a rate which was measured as 1½ miles in forty minutes, but now it was to reach its limit, when it came under the fire of these eight guns upon Windmill Hill. The advance was not only from Merris in the south but even more along the Bailleul-Meteren road, which was crowded with their troops. By dusk the infantry of the 19th Brigade had taken the place of the weary fragments who lined the front, and the immediate danger of a complete rupture of the line was over.

At 5:30 A.M. on April 13 the attack upon Meteren April 13. commenced with a strong advance against the 1st Queen’s at the Windmill, and gained some ground in the centre. The usual tactics of rushing up machine-guns was tried, but in spite of the mist they had very limited success. The 98th Brigade was now in support, and the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were ordered forward to cover Meule Houck Hill on that side. At 10:30 the Queen’s were again fiercely attacked, and after changing hands three times the windmill in their position remained with the stormers. At noon a well-knit line had been formed in front of Meteren, with the Yorkshiremen of the 92nd Brigade in touch on the right, while their brother Yorkshiremen of the 147th Brigade were on the left, drawn respectively from the Thirty-first and the Forty-ninth Divisions. There were cheering rumours that the First Australians and the One hundred and thirty-third French were both speeding upon their way, but the need of the present was very great, for the German guns were many, while there was hardly one to aid in the defence.

At 4 P.M. the Germans were beating once more along the whole front of the division, but by 5:30 were back in their own line, what was left of them, much the worse for the venture. News came, however, that Vieux Berquin had fallen, and that Meteren was to be taken next day at all costs. Meanwhile, in spite of the severe fighting, the losses had not been heavy, save in the 1st Queen’s, which had borne all the brunt of three separate attacks. Colonel Kemp-Welch and his men had a very severe ordeal that day. Cavalry appeared more than once in front of the position, and one body, 200 strong, were cut to pieces by a sudden concentration of machine-guns. The splendid machine- guns still played a prominent part in the battle. One of them having been submerged by a rush of the enemy. Corporal Hurd returned single-handed, advancing 200 yards beyond the line, and brought it back upon his shoulder. At one time the supplies of belts ran short, but they were brought up in most dashing fashion. “At noon,” says an officer, “the fighting limbers with belt-boxes, barrels, and S.A.A. were galloped through a hail of shell to our gun positions in a style reminiscent of the Royal Horse Artillery upon an Aldershot field-day.” The result was great. “Gunners and gun-commanders report having piled the dead enemy before their guns.”

Shortly after dawn on April 14 the 1st Queen’s was in the wars once more, and from six to eight there were constant attacks along the whole line from Strazeele on the right to Bailleul Station on the left, the latter forming the front of the Thirty-fourth Division. The 1st Cameronians, those stern descendants of the Covenanters, beat the enemy away from Strazeele about noon. At one time there were renewed attacks upon both the Queen’s and the Cameronians. It is difficult to know which was the more admirable, the perseverance of the attacks or the tenacity of the defence. About five in the evening another fierce wave of storm-troops swept up from the south; and for one critical moment found a gap in the line. Two companies of the stalwart labourers of the 2nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion threw themselves into the breach, and the position was restored. When night fell, the whole line, though shaken, was still intact, and the assault had been a complete and a costly failure. Such operations, which littered the fields of Flanders with their dead, go far to explain the German weakness in the latter part of this campaign of 1918.

April 15 was quiet in the morning on the front April i5. of Meteren, but the afternoon proved to be disastrous at Bailleul, since Ravelsberg and Mont de Lille were stormed by the Germans, with the result that the town had to be vacated. The Thirty-fourth Division had been withdrawn from this position, and the Fifty-ninth North Midlanders (Romer) had taken their place, but this division had, as already described, suffered extraordinary losses on the Somme front, and was in no condition to undertake another considerable operation. It had already been partly engaged in Flanders, and its losses had been increased.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that the determined assault of the Germans should have forced the line. It would appear upon the map that this German success entirely outflanked the position of the Thirty-third Division, but fortunately a switch line had been constructed which was now manned by the remains of the Thirty-fourth Division, while the Fifty-ninth passed through it and concentrated in the rear. In this way an extension of the German success was prevented, in spite of great energy upon the part of the enemy, who had his patrols a kilometre to the west of the town before night. The 98th Brigade had now taken the place of the 19th in the line, the 4th King's Liverpools relieving the Queen's at the Windmill, while the 5th Scottish Rifles relieved the Cameronians near Strazeele.

In the efforts to stop the German advance from Bailleul the 147th Brigade of Cameron's Forty-ninth Yorkshire Division played an important part. This unit, containing the 4th, 6th, and 7th Battalions of the West Riding Regiment found themselves in the front line on the evening of April 15, and held hard to a defensive position north-west of Bailleul. For two more days, April 16 and 17, they maintained the fight, inflicting and receiving heavy losses, but with the balance well in their favour. The dour Yorkshiremen made it clear at last to their equally dour assailants, that there was no road through their ranks, however they might thin them.

In the early morning of April 16 the enemy by a very sudden and violent attack broke through the switch line and made a lodgment in the eastern outskirts of Meteren. In spite of determined counter-attacks made during the morning by the 1st Middlesex, the 4th King's, and the gallant New Zealand Trench Battalion, it was not possible to clear these houses to which the enemy s machine-gun parties clung with great bravery. Evening found them still in possession, but all efforts to debouch to the north and west had been stopped. The Australians were coming up on the right, so that the Thirty-third were able to shorten their line.

One farm west of Meteren was penetrated by a pushful party of Germans, but they were beaten out of it and destroyed by the 11th Field Company of sappers, who took a number of prisoners.

On April 17 the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had come into the line, relieving the 18th Middlesex Pioneers. About 10 A.M. this battalion was violently attacked, but drove back its assailants, as did the Thirty-fourth Division on the left at about the same hour. At six in the evening another very severe attack developed upon the front of the 4th

King’s. For a time the line appeared to be penetrated, but the 1st Middlesex and units of the One hundred and thirty-third French Division, which had newly arrived, made a brisk counter-attack, and the situation was completely restored. It must indeed have been discomposing to the enemy to find that each success which he won, whether it was the taking of Neuve Église, of Bailleul, or later of Mount Kemmel, instead of being an opening which led to victory, was . only a passage to further trials and further losses in an unending vista. The edge of the attack had now been completely blunted in this quarter. April 18 was quiet, and on the 19th, as the Australians and French were up, arrangements were made for drawing the Thirty-third out of the line which they had so splendidly made good. Their losses in the six days amounted to 145 officers and 3302 men. A few days later Monsieur Clemenceau arrived to convey to General Pinney and his battle-worn men the thanks of the French Republic for their iron defence of an essential line.

The Thirty-fourth Division was last mentioned in this narrative when it fell back from Nieppe on April 12, and was afterwards compelled to take position on the right of the Twenty-fifth Division in the De Seule neighbourhood. Among other losses during the retreat was a tried soldier, General Gore of the 101st Brigade.

On the 13th the enemy made several tentative attacks, but had no success. Late in the afternoon, however, he had succeeded in penetrating the line of the Twenty-fifth Division between Neuve Église and De Seule. This success left the left flank of the Thirty-fourth in the air. The 103rd Brigade had moved to the Ravelsberg Ridge, however, and so gave a definite line upon which to withdraw, extending from Bailleul Station to Crucifix Corner, which was a very important position. The 103rd Brigade was now on the left of the line, and the 102nd on the right. There followed, on April 15, a day of very severe fighting, the enemy making continual and very fiery attacks along the whole line, especially upon the three points. Steam Mill, Mont de Lille, and Crucifix Corner. The latter was carried by the enemy and then was retaken by the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers. Mont de Lille was held by the 74th Brigade, and Steam Mill by the 147th, each the centre of a very deadly combat. Steam Mill was lost and yet again retaken by the Yorkshire Territorials who were aided by the 1st Middlesex from the Thirty-third Division. It was a long and arduous day of battle, inexpressibly trying to the wearied troops engaged. General Nicholson had under his hand six brigades that day, and senior officers upon the spot have testified to the masterly use which he made of them.

That night the Fifty-ninth came up into the front line and relieved the exhausted infantry. The relief, however, was but a momentary one, for on the afternoon of April 15 the Germans delivered yet another strong attack upon the Ravelsberg line, now held by the Forty-ninth, Fifty-ninth, and Thirty-third Divisions. The Fifty-ninth, as already described, fell back through the Thirty-fourth Division, which again found itself in the front line. The two flank divisions both fell back to conform, and lined up with the remains of the Thirty-fourth on the new line near St. Jans Cappel, which held firm from April 16.

On April 17 there was yet another day of heavy fighting upon this line, both flanks and the Meule Hook being strongly attacked, but the position was successfully held, and one more limit seemed to have been reached in the advance. The same six brigades under General Nicholson, reduced now to the strength of battalions, were still throwing an iron, bar across the German path. From the right the 147th, 74th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, and 88th, all of them with set teeth, held on to the appointed line which receded under pressure and was yet again re-established. The 88th, under that remarkable young soldier, General Freyberg, had some especially hard work to do. Late on April 20 this goodly fellowship in arms was dissolved, the three separate brigades returned to heir divisions, and the Thirty-fourth was relieved by the French. The artillery of the Thirty-eighth Area. Welsh Division fought throughout these awful days onwards, at the back of the infantry, who could not say too much for these guns or for General Topping who commanded them. Save two howitzers hit on April 9, no gun of this division was lost during all this close and severe fighting. South of the Lys many of the Royal Army Medical Corps remained with their wounded, and were taken prisoners, sharing with their charges the wretched treatment which was still meted out to British captives, especially behind the lines and before reaching the camps in Germany.

It should be added that the sappers of the 207th, 208th, 209th Field Companies and the 18th Northumberland Fusiliers Pioneers fought like ordinary infantry, and did splendid and essential service in holding the line.

We shall now turn to Jeffreys’ Nineteenth Division which we left on the 12th of April, holding on to the Wulverghem — Wytschaete front, with formidable enemies in front of them, but an even more formidable menace upon their right flank, whence came constant rumours that the enemy had at last penetrated the hard-pressed Twenty-fifth Division, had occupied Neuve Église, and was pushing up along the lines of the northward roads which would turn the whole of the position. Late at night on April 12 it had been ascertained that these reports were premature.

The units of the 108th Ulster Brigade on the right of the line and connecting with the Twenty-fifth Division had been penetrated and driven back, but were strengthened and stayed by the advent of the 8th Gloucesters. The situation was obscure on the right, and there was a dangerous gap which was filled early in the morning of April 13 by the energy and initiative of Captain Macintosh of the 94th Field Company Royal Engineers, who with a handful of the 10th Worcesters pushed his way in, and showed a bold front to the enemy.

The 2/5th Sherwood Foresters from the 178th Brigade (Stansfeld) of the Fifty-ninth North Midland Division had also been ordered to face south and with the help of some machine-guns to hold off the turning movement from that quarter. All these movements were carried out in pitch darkness and amid a situation so confused that it was impossible to define which was the attacking line and which the line of defence. The general scheme of the battle in this area on the morning of April 13 was that the Twenty-fifth Division, with the help of the 148th Brigade of Yorkshire Territorials, was fighting desperately in and around Neuve Église to the north of those units of the 100th Brigade, whose defence of the town has already been described. Next to them on the north lay the remains of the 108th Brigade, then the battalion of Sherwood Foresters, and then the 57th Brigade with the 8th Gloucesters on the southern flank. All the morning the roar of battle rose from Neuve Église where the German stormers fought hand to hand with the British infantry, who had been strengthened by the addition of that fine battalion, the 4th Shropshires from the Nineteenth Division. The contest swung and swayed as fresh German troops were thrown into the struggle, but at last about half-past ten in the morning the attack was defeated, the German infantry fell back in sullen groups under the constant fire of the defenders, and the British line was pushed forward to the south of the village.

During the day, which was spent under heavy fire of artillery and the imminent menace of attack from the grey clouds seen gathering upon the Messines Ridge, the remaining battalions of the 178th Brigade, the 2/6th and the 7th Sherwood Foresters, were pushed into the line to relieve the exhausted 108th Brigade. It was clear that great German concentrations were being made upon Neuve Église, and that the village was in danger, so every arrangement was made to accommodate the line to the situation which would arise if that important point were taken, and the Wulverghem position became in consequence untenable. This new line would run from Meteren through Kemmel and Spy Farm to Spanbrockmolen. The night of April 13 would have been quiet upon the front of the Nineteenth Division had it not been for the constant pre-occupation and alarm caused by the varying fortunes of the fighting at Neuve Église, in which they were well aware that their own fate was concerned. The attack had been renewed with fresh forces, and the Twenty-fifth Division was extremely exhausted and could only be helped by other units which were in no better case. Again and again the Germans were deep in the village. Again and again they were evicted. It seemed to be the beginning of the end, however, when it was announced towards morning that the Twenty-fifth Division was out of touch with the British troops upon its south flank, and that the Germans filtering through this gap had got to Nordhoek, west of Neuve Èglise, and were pushing to the north in the rear of the British position. By morning of April 14 Neuve Église had been abandoned, though it does not appear to have been solidly occupied by the enemy until mid-day, and snipers of both armies infested the ruins.

The loss of the village and of the low ridge which adjoined it had a most sinister effect upon the general strategic position to the north, and it was indeed fortunate that measures had been taken in advance to deal with the new situation. The Nineteenth Division on April 14 found itself shelled heavily all day, while it was machine-gunned and trench-mortared from the right where its flank was now in the air. The position of the right-hand unit, the 4th Shropshires, south of the Neuve Église-Wulverghem road, became impossible, as the Germans were in the rear, and indeed upon three sides of them.

Major Wingrove stuck to his position till mid-day, and no battalion could have given a more cogent example of steadiness and fortitude in adversity. About 2 P.M. the Germans began to emerge in force from the villages, beating up against the gallant Shropshires, who retired slowly and steadily, taking toll of their assailants, while the Sherwood Foresters of the 178th Brigade helped them to hold the enemy at arm’s length.

As the day wore on the pressure became more insistent, until about seven in the evening Major Wingrove, of whom it has been stated by his General that “his tenacity, gallantry, and determination had held the much-tried and isolated line up to this time,” was severely wounded. When his inspiring presence was removed there was a break to the north of Neuve Église and the Twenty-fifth Division, now reduced to a handful, were retreating westwards, while the Nineteenth was being rolled up from the south.

General Jeffreys’ force was now in so dangerous a position that it had actually to form a front to the west as well as to the east, a difficult manoeuvre which was carried out with great coolness and skill by Colonel Sole of the 10th Worcesters, who was in charge of the new line, aided by Major Parkes of the 8th Gloucesters. The men were rallied, led into their new positions, and a dangerous penetration was narrowly averted. Later a new line was built up with the Forty-ninth Yorkshire Territorial Division in the place of the Twenty-fifth Division on the right, reinforced by the 71st Brigade from the Sixth Division. Next to them on the left was the 178th Sherwood Foresters Brigade, then the 108th Brigade, and finally the 58th Brigade, standing, just in their old positions. The changes in the British line were such that whereas it used to face east, it now faced almost south from near Meteren to Kemmel and Spanbrockmolen. The latter marked the point of junction upon the left with the right of the Ninth Division. This line was not fully occupied till April 16.

On April 15 the intermediate positions were attacked, the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, on the extreme left of the line, and the remains of the 6th Wiltshires being heavily engaged. No impression was made. At a different point the Germans had better results to show with the 108th Brigade, and made some progress, but the Sherwood Foresters once more mended the line. In the evening it was reported that the enemy had taken Crucifix Corner and were moving westwards. The strength of all battalions had now fallen to such a point, owing to constant shelling and incessant attacks, that it was very difficult to form more than a line of outposts. By evening of April 15 all the troops concerned, the remains of the Twenty-fifth, the Forty-ninth, and the Nineteenth Divisions were on the general line Meteren — Kemmel, facing south to the German advance, but also threatening the German right flank if they should press too far to the west. The remnant of the 108th Ulsters was relieved that night.

A heavy attack was made at 6 A.M. on the morning of April 16 upon the front of the Ninth Division, which had withdrawn in conformity with the new northern line. The 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division had, as already stated, been put under the orders of General Tudor of the Ninth Division, for his unit had been greatly weakened by the terrible losses of the South Africans. The North Countrymen of the 62nd fought desperately against great odds, but they were pushed out of Spanbrockmolen, and later out of Wytschaete.

They found a new line to the north, however, and the Germans tried in vain to bend it. The 58th Brigade had thrown back its own line to correspond, and joined up with the 62nd at Lacache Farm. Late that evening the worn and weary troops were deeply comforted by the sight of a small group of blue-clad men with classical helmets surveying the German lines through their glasses. It was the vanguard and the observers of the Twenty-eighth and One hundred and thirty-third French Divisions which were coming up to the aid of the Ninth. It was clear that the commanding position of Kemmel, a hill which overlooks a wide range of country, was the immediate objective of the enemy in this quarter. About 10 A.M. on April 17 they put down a heavy barrage, and then pushed on in force with the intention of breaking in the British line and capturing the hill. The battalions attacked were the three Sherwood Foresters units, with the 8th North Staffords and 10th Warwicks of the 57th Brigade. This attack was a complete failure. Weary as they were the sturdy Englishmen stood fast to their lines, and beat their assailants back in blood and ruin. Machine-gun fire from the crest of the hill contributed to the result, and the guns also did their share. The only German gain was a post called Donegal Farm between the Nineteenth and the Forty-ninth Divisions. A fresh attack was made upon the 10th Warwicks in the evening, but this also was thrown back with heavy loss.

Meanwhile, on the northern sector, the Ninth Division endeavoured to regain the ground which they had lost the day before, but their efforts had no great success, save that the 7th Seaforths of the 26th Brigade in a very brilliant advance fought their way into Wytschaete once more, and took possession of the village which they held until the following day, when the general position forced them to abandon it. On April 18 the fighting died down upon this front, and in the evening the gallant Nineteenth Division, after most glorious service, was relieved by the French Twenty-eighth

Division, which took over the defence of Kemmel Hill. The total losses of this division had been nearly 4000 men, which, coming on the top of the heavy losses on the Somme in the previous fortnight, formed such a record as had seldom been equalled. Nor was their ordeal yet at an end, and many a stout battle was still to be fought before a rest should come.

All these stirring episodes, including the glorious destruction of the 4th Brigade of Guards, the formation of a permanent line by the Australians, the defence of Meteren and Bailleul by the Thirty-third and other divisions, the fighting at Neuve Église, and the defence of the Wytschaete and Messines fronts by the Nineteenth and Ninth Divisions with odd brigades to help them, all came within the area of Plumer’s Second Army, which still consisted of the Ninth and Fifteenth Corps in the line. It should be mentioned that of fourteen divisions contained in this army on March 21 no less than twelve had been sent down to the Somme, while the remaining two, the Forty-ninth and Twenty-ninth, were under orders to go at the moment when the great battle in Flanders broke out.

We shall now for a moment turn to the left flank of the First Army in the south which had so far, in spite of heavy attacks, lost very little ground. It has already been described how the Fifty-fifth Lancashire Division stood like a rock at Givenchy and Festubert, while the Fifty-first and afterwards the Fourth Division struggled desperately to hold back the attack on their left. The former had been relieved on April 16 by Strickland’s First Division, while the Highlanders and April le. Fourth Division also had been drawn out, and gave place to Deverell’s Third Division, which had done so splendidly and lost so heavily upon the Somme. After the repulse from the Fifty-fifth Division, the Germans had contented themselves with shelling but they had pushed on, as already narrated, to the north of the position, and had got as far as Locon. The result was that the First Southern Division had a long frontage which faced due north and a shorter frontage to the east.

The Fourth Division held the front at this period to the east of Robecq, being on the right of the Sixty-first, with the 184th Brigade between them. It was used on April 14 for a counter-attack which was carried out at night, and which achieved a local success by the recapture of the village of Riez, with 150 prisoners. This operation was carried out by the 11th Brigade, with the 1st Hants and 1st Somersets in the lead, and was a very workmanlike little action which was the more valuable when coming at a period of general recoil.

On April 18 the new German attack upon the First Division at Givenchy began, with a bombardment of great violence. Their plan upon this day was to carry Givenchy and Festubert by storm, and to win the line of the canal as far west as Gorre. They would then capture the high ground at Hinges, and so command the canal right up to Robecq. No doubt they calculated, and with justice, that if they could overcome the men on the spot they would find that the reserves had all been drawn away to the north. Their plan was wrecked, however, by the fact that the men on the spot were not to be overcome. Eighteen German battalions moved forward to the attack, and all of them suffered, heavily without gaining any appreciable advantage. So heavy was the slaughter that many German companies were reduced before evening to twenty or thirty effectives, while the three battalions of one regiment were left under the respective command of one lieutenant and two sub-lieutenants. There have been few more costly failures, considering the scale of the operations, in the whole campaign.

The infantry attack was on the two flanks of the British line which looked northwards, the one attack being in front of Hinges and the other covering the space from Loisne to the south of Givenchy, including Festubert. Three German regiments, the 98th, 361st, and 202nd Reserve, advanced in this quarter. They had constructed two bridges during the night to cross a broad ditch in front of the British line, but machine-guns were trained upon them, and the troops which tried to cross were exposed to heavy losses, which left both the bridges and the banks heaped with bodies. The mist, the smoke, and the dust from the shells were so thick, however, that a hundred yards was the limit of visibility. The German shell-storm continued to be very heavy, but the British were snugly ensconced in trenches with a parapet and parados, both of which were several feet thick, so that no very great harm was done. The worst losses were at the advanced keep at Festubert, which was blown to bits, only eight men of the garrison surviving.

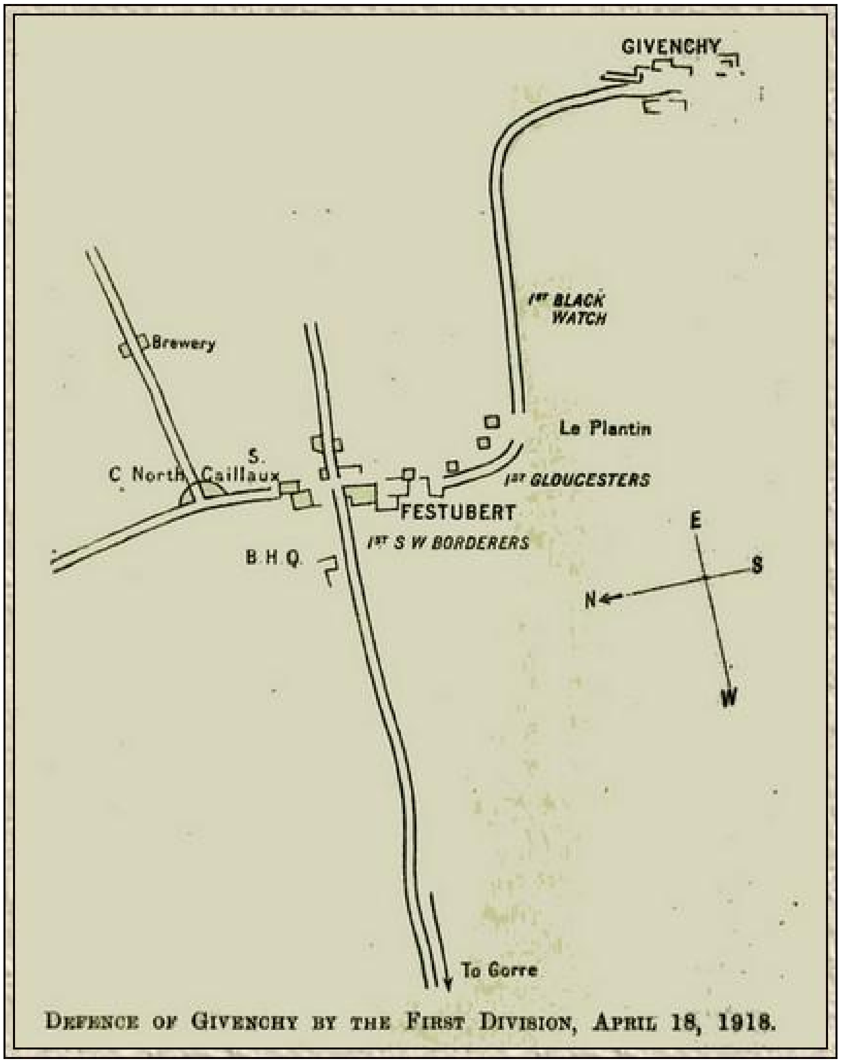
GIVENCHY
1ST BLACK WATCH
Le Plantin
Brewery
S.
C North Caillaux
1ST GLOUCESTERS
FESTUBERT
1ST S W BORDERERS
B.H.Q.
E
S
N
W
To Gorre
DEFENCE OF GIVENCHY BY THE FIRST DIVISION, APRIL 18, 1918.

Defence of Givenchy by the First Division, April 18, 1918.
(This rough plan was drawn by an officer engaged in the action.)

The First Division had two brigades in the line, the 1st on the right holding from Givenchy to Le Plantin, and the 3rd to the left from Le Plantin to Festubert. The fighting was particularly severe in the latter sector of the line. As the garrison looked north they saw through the rising mist about 8:15 in the morning the enemy advancing in small groups of light machine-guns, coming over a slight rise some 900 yards east of Festubert. These troops pushed bravely on, though they had no cover but shell-holes and they suffered very severely. The 1st Gloucesters, under Colonel Tweedie, on the right and the 1st South Wales Borderers on the left, battalions with the halo of the first Ypres battle round their heads, held the line and littered the open ground with their steady rifle-fire. There was a gap in the defences at a point called Willow Road, and into this the enemy poured more quickly than they could be shot down.

Their rush carried them through, and into the houses and gardens of Le Plantin. A company of the Gloucesters under Captain Handford was cut in two, but both sections stood fast, Lieutenant Hall on one side, end the company commander on the other, closing in on the centre and preventing reinforcement, while Lieutenant Gosling attacked with the reserve company. The Germans ran field-guns right up, but the crews were shot down. So matters remained until the afternoon, the stormers being in the British position, but so pinned down by rifle-fire that they could not raise their heads. On the other hand, German snipers in the houses and trees were very deadly to any runners or other exposed defenders. Whilst matters were in this stage in the Le Plantin area, they were even more critical at Festubert. The enemy, moving up behind a good barrage, overran a part of the South Wales Borderers and forced their way into an orchard just south of the keep known as Route A. Thence they tried to get into the rear of the defence. About eleven Sergeant-Major Biddle of D Company ran the gauntlet to Brigade Headquarters to explain the situation and ask for help. Captain Smith got together a party of odds and ends, under twenty in number, who made their way up the west side of Festubert and prevented the extension of this dangerous German movement.

By two o’clock the attack was definitely defeated, and by three the Germans were retiring along the whole line. They found it, however, very difficult to disengage themselves from their advance positions. They tried to crawl back from shell-hole to shell-hole, while the British stood up all along the parapets and shot them in scores. Absolutely demoralised, many of the Germans threw away their arms. Their retirement probably cost as much as their advance. Those who had got into Le Plantin had to run the gauntlet between two halves of the Gloucesters in getting out, and few of them escaped. The performance of the 1st Gloucesters was remarkable, for they were at one time attacked front, flank, and rear by a force estimated at four battalions. It is recorded that the barrels of their new Lewis guns were worn smooth by the intensity of one day of battle. The 1st Brigade on the right of the defence from the canal to Le Plantin was also heavily attacked, though their ordeal was not so long or severe as that of their comrades on the left. The 1st Black Watch, the flank battalion next to the Gloucesters, had some especially heavy fighting, but kept their ground intact, and did their full share towards the victorious result. The whole affair was a fine feat of arms, for the German gun power had greatly increased since April 9, while the repulse was even more decisive. It proved to be a final one, as the Germans made no further attempt to force their passage to Bethune. During all this long fight the Third Division beyond Loisne on the left was holding the line firmly against all German pressure. So ended April 18. Before the evening of the 20th all outlying posts had been cleared of the Germans. On this same date, April 18, there was a sharp action to the immediate left of this Givenchy fighting, when the Fourth Division held up a German attack, and afterwards countered, capturing the Bois Paquan in the Robecq sector. Two hundred prisoners were the fruits of this action, but they were dearly bought, for many officers and men were killed or wounded. Among the former were two grand soldiers. Colonel Armitage of the 1st Hants and Brigade-Major Harston of the 11th Brigade. This forward movement was continued later by the Sixty-first Division, who did very good work on April 23, General Pagan of the 184th Brigade being a leader in the advance, which was notable for a fine attack by the 2/5th Gloucesters under Colonel Lawson. Shortly afterwards General Colin Mackenzie of this division, who had done splendid work from the first days of the war, was wounded while reconnoitring in front of his line and had to return to England.

There now followed a short pause in the German attack, and we may look around and follow the general line of the defence at this period before the action was renewed. On the extreme north of the Second Army the Belgians had relieved the Thirtieth Division, and thus shortened the British line. Then came the Ninth and Twenty-first British Divisions near Wytschaete. South and west of this point the front line had been taken over by General de Mitry with the Thirty-sixth French Corps, which now succeeded the Ninth British Corps in this sector. The Thirty-fourth and One hundred and thirty-third French Divisions were in the line, with the Second French Cavalry Corps in co-operation. This most welcome and indeed vital reinforcement had taken over Kemmel, Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, Mont Vidaigne, and Mont des Cats, the range of kopjes which screen the Ypres plain from the south. On the right of the French was the weary Fifteenth Corps, with the First Australian Division as the flank unit near Meteren. The British divisions in the north were in close support to the French, the Nineteenth and Thirty-fourth being near Poperinghe, and the Twenty-fifth behind Kemmel. Such was the general position in that northern sector, to which the battle was now more and more confined. Before following the further events it should be mentioned that on April 17 the Belgians in the neighbourhood of Bixschoote had been exposed to a very severe attack from four German divisions, which would have shaken the whole line of defence had it succeeded. It was met, however, with very great courage, and the Belgians proved themselves to be valiant soldiers, well worthy to be admitted upon entirely equal terms into the battle-line of the larger nations. They fought the action with heroic gallantry, and gave the Germans a severe check, killing some 2000 of them, and taking 700 prisoners with several guns. It was a notable performance, and the more welcome in a period of such stress.

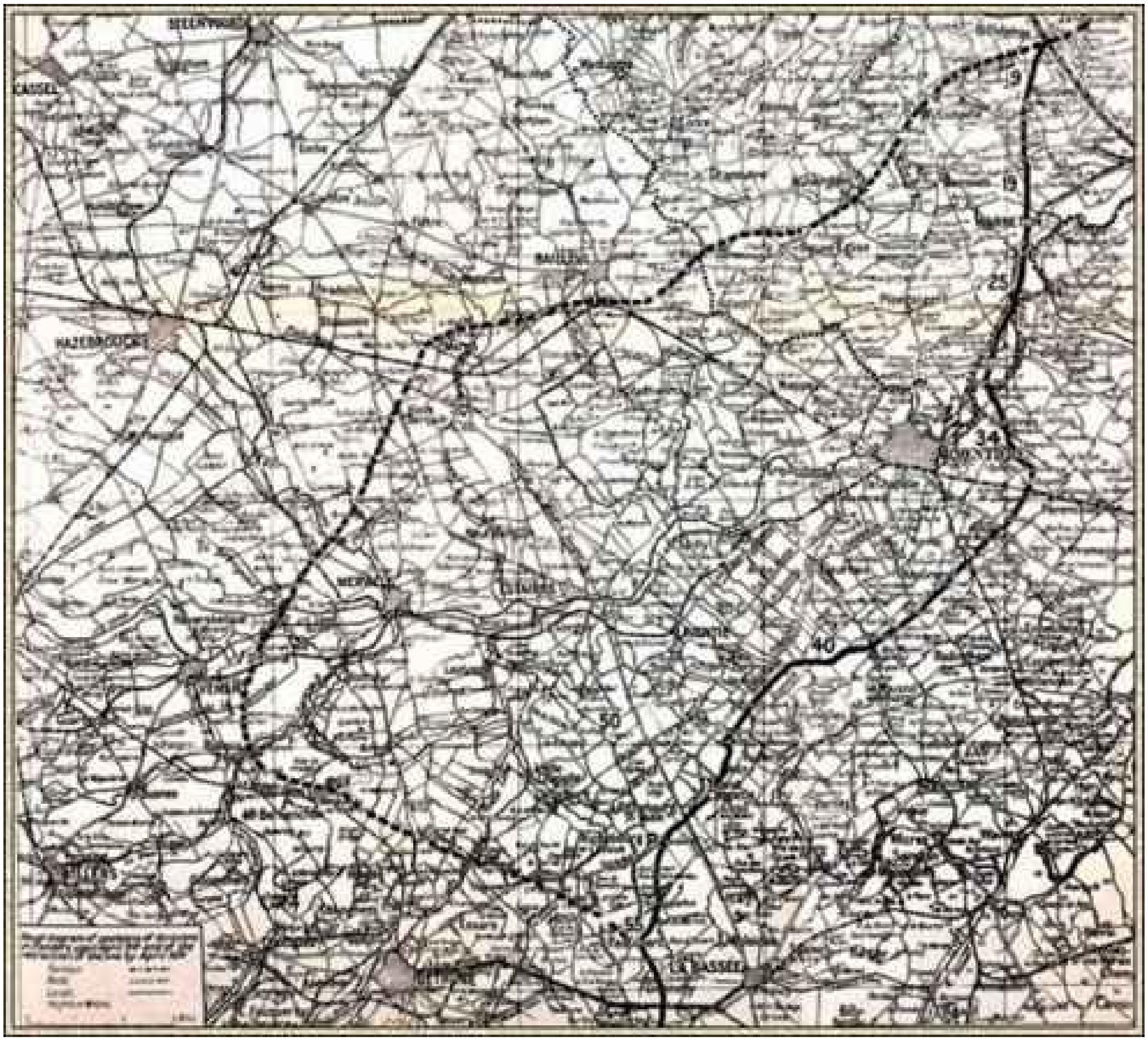

Position of the Line in Flanders, April 9

On April 25, at an early hour of the morning, the Germans made an attack upon the northern line from a point north of Bailleul to the east of Wytschaete, a distance of about ten miles. The whole of this front, save the extreme eastern portion, was held by the French, who made a very gallant resistance to as fierce an assault as the war has seen. The main German objective was the very important height of Mount Kemmel, a bluff five hundred feet high, wooded upon the sides. This was held by the Twenty-eighth French Division, who fought most gallantly, but were finally overpowered by the four German divisions which were brought against it, including a division of Alpine troops, especially trained for hill fighting.

The Allied line was pushed back along its whole front, Dranoutre and St. Eloi falling into the hands of the Germans, together with 6000 prisoners. It was the darkest hour of the Flemish battle, and was the more depressing as it came after a week of equilibrium in which the tide of invasion seemed to have been finally dammed. The German infantry had penetrated through the joining point of the French and British near Wytschaete, and at the same time through the French at Dranoutre, so that they were able to assail Kemmel Hill from both sides. It had fallen by nine o’clock. The Ninth Division in the north was forced to fall back upon the line of La Clytte, after enduring heavy losses in a combat lasting nine hours, during which they fought with their usual .tenacity, as did the 64th and 146th Brigades, who fought beside them. The Germans, having got through the French upon the right flank, had got round to the rear of the 27th Brigade, with the result that the 12th Royal Scots were almost entirely destroyed, and the Scottish Borderers were also very hard hit. None the less, with the enemy in front and rear, the Lowland infantry held out, finally making their way back in orderly fashion during the night. Farther north the line of the 64th and the 146th Brigades was broken and the remnants reformed in Cheapside, where their reserve battalions thickened their array. The 26th Highland Brigade threw back all attacks in front, and formed a defensive flank to the south, withdrawing at leisure and in order after dark.

Even the Ninth Division has seldom had a harder day, or a more honourable one. On the 26th General Cameron of the Forty-ninth Division took over this sector, and the Ninth went out of the line with very special messages of thanks from both the British and French marshals.

Some small British units were involved in the disaster of Mount Kemmel as they were on the hill helping in the defence. Among these were the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers (Pioneers), the 456th Field Company R.E., and part of the 49th Battalion Machine-gun Corps, all drawn from the Forty-ninth Division.

A determined effort was at once made to retrieve the situation, and a counter-attack upon the new German line was ordered for 3 A.M. on April 26. It was carried out by the Thirty-ninth French Division on the right, and by the Twenty-fifth Division (Bainbridge) on the left. The French advance was held by severe machine-gun fire on the line of the Kemmel Brook. The British advancing from La Clytte had more success, but were unable to maintain the ground which they had won. They went forward with Griffin's 7th Brigade on the left and Bethell's 74th on the right. The water was up to the men's waists as in the cold of the early morning they splashed their way across the Kemmel Brook. It was dismal and desperate work, but the spirit of the men, in spite of all that this division had endured, was still high, and they beat down all obstacles until they had forced their way into the village of Kemmel, where they secured 200 prisoners. Their own losses were heavy, however, including Colonel Cade of the 1st Wilts, Colonel Stewart of the 4th South Staffords, Colonel Reade of the 10th Chesters, and several other senior officers. It was now found that the flanks of both brigades were in the air, and as the losses were increasing through the enfilade fire, they were ordered to withdraw. It was still early, and the morning mist Northern screened what would otherwise have been a very murderous operation. The final line held by the Twenty-fifth Division was about 1000 yards in advance of the starting-point.

It should be remembered that in this difficult and gallant night attack against a victorious enemy the young 19-year-old recruits, who now made up a considerable proportion of the decimated division, showed a very fine spirit and kept up with the veterans beside them.

Having repulsed the counter-attack of the French and of the Twenty-fifth Division, the enemy tried with great energy to improve his advantage, and Von Armin thundered during the whole of April 26 against the Allied line, trying especially to drive in the northern sector at Wytschaete and Eloi. The fighting on this line was very desperate during the day, and in spite of every effort the troops were pushed back from their forward positions. The strain fell chiefly upon the remains of the 26th Brigade of the Ninth Division, the

Twenty-first Division, the 21st Brigade of the Thirtieth Division, and the Thirty-ninth Division. The 21st Brigade defended the northern portion of the line, and one of the outstanding feats of the day was the defence of the Old Bluff from morning to dusk by that grand battalion, the 2nd Bedfords. Farther south the two points called the Brasserie and the Spoil-Bank were eventually won by the Germans, but they were defended with great determination by units of the Thirty-ninth Division, the 1st Herts, the Cambridgeshires, and the Sussex battalions. It was a day of struggle, and the most that the Allies could say was that they had North prevented a break in their line. That night there was another general withdrawal along the front which brought the Allied position into very much the same trenches as had been occupied in the autumn of 1914. Such a result of four years' fighting might well have caused depression, and yet these brave hearts never for one instant relinquished their high hopes of the victory to come.

The enemy had gained a spectacular advantage at Kemmel, and high hopes were raised in Germany that some great ulterior result would come of it, but in spite of strong efforts it was not destined that there should be any particular consequences from their victory. Observation can be obtained from a balloon as easily as from a hill, and the space upon the summit was so limited that the Allied guns could make it almost untenable. Strong efforts were at once made to push on upon the line Locre — La Clytte, which was held by the French. They repulsed three strong attacks on April 27, and though in the evening the Germans got into Locre, they were thrown out again by our tenacious Allies. Again on the morning of April 29 the enemy attacked along the whole line from Mont Vidaigne to Zillebeke Lake. This attack was repulsed with severe loss to the enemy, and must have gone far to convince him that he was not destined to develop his Kemmel success. The battle involved not only the front of the Thirty-sixth French Corps, but also that of the Twenty-fifth, Forty-ninth, and Twenty-first Divisions, all of which stood like a wall and beat off every assault. These attacks extended from north of Kemmel to Voormezeele. The Twenty-fifth Division was next to the French on the right of the line, in the British centre was the Forty-ninth, while on the left the Twenty-first Division connected up with the Ninth, which was out of the direct line of attack.

The 75th Brigade formed the fighting line of the Twenty-fifth Division on this day of battle. They found themselves on the western side of the

Kemmel Brook, while the 3rd Prussian Guards lay on the farther side and advanced to the attack. To do this they had to pass over the smooth slope which led down to the stream, and they fell in heaps in the attempt. They huddled for shelter behind a group of huts, but the guns got on to them and blew them to pieces. Four distinct attacks were all equally murderous and unsuccessful. The 8th Border Battalion was particularly conspicuous in the defence. Next to them, near Ridge Wood, were the well-tried Yorkshiremen of the Forty-ninth. For some reason the Germans at this point advanced in close formation with bayonets fixed. Such tactics received the slating which they deserved. Both the West Riding Battalions of the 147th Brigade and the York and Lancasters of the 148th were in the firing-line, and they amply repaid themselves for many a distressful hour. Once for three minutes the Germans made a lodgment, but at the end of that time a rush of bayonet-men pitchforked them out of their only gain. The Twenty-first Division held the line above Ridge Wood and on towards Voormezeele. Upon them came the heaviest attack of all, and the slaughter Chapter of the Germans, coming on at a range of 400 yards under machine-gun and rifle-fire, was very murderous.

The Leicester Brigade did particularly well this day, and so did the worn 89th Brigade of the Thirtieth Division, which had come under the orders of General Campbell of the Twenty-first Division. The German attack struck very hard against the front of this unit near the Brasserie on the Vierstraat — Ypres Road, and all three battalions, the 17th, 18th, 19th King’s Liverpools, had desperate fighting, the 17th coming in for particularly rough treatment. It had each flank penetrated and one company surrounded, but still managed to shake itself clear.

The Belgians were also involved in this widespread attack, and both their lines in the north and those of the French round the Sharpenberg and Mont Rouge were held intact. This severe check, inflicted upon a force which was not less than twelve divisions, marked the beginning of the collapse of the great German offensive in Flanders, which had now lasted for twenty days of constant battle.

Early in May the Franco-British line still lay from Kemmel village in the south to Ypres in the north, taking Voormezeele upon the way. If the Germans could succeed in bursting through here they would partly encircle Ypres, and would probably cause an evacuation, an event which might be of no great military importance, but could not fail to have a moral and political repercussion. Ypres stood like an oriflamme of war amid the ranks of the British Army. Here it was that in October 1914 they had said to the Germans, “Thus far and no farther!” Now in the fourth year the words still held good. If after all the efforts, all the self-sacrifice, all the good blood so cheerfully shed, it was now to pass from their hands, no consoling lectures upon strategy could soften the heavy blow which it would be to those who relaxed the grip which their comrades had held so firmly. Yet it was this and no less which was at stake in these early days of May. A crushing German victory with the capture of the coast was no longer to be feared. But an important local success, which would reverberate through the world, was still well within their hopes and their power.

At the moment of this important attack the southern sector of this line was held by the One hundred and twenty-ninth and Thirty-second French Divisions, the latter being next to the British just to the south of Vierstraat. To the north of the French lay the 30th Composite Brigade (Currie), which had been formed by telescoping the remains of the Thirtieth Division into a single unit. It had two splendid though attenuated Regular battalions, the 2nd Bedfords and 2nd Yorkshires in the line with the 17th King’s Liverpools in immediate support. Still farther to the north lay Finney’s well-tried Thirty-third Division with the 98th Brigade (Maitland) in front. Their battle line consisted of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders,, the 4th King’s Liverpools, and the 1st Middlesex, from south to north. Farther north still from the Voormezeele region to the southern suburbs of ruined Ypres lay Marden’s Sixth Division which was not involved to any great degree in the fighting.

In the centre of the position was a well-marked line of trees forming the edge of Ridge Wood. Behind the British line was the village of Dickebush with the Dickebush Lake. These two points were the first objectives of the German attack, which broke with great violence at 7:30 in the morning of May 8. It was preceded by a lavish use of mustard gas shells, a hellish device which was used more and more from this time forward. This poison may be kept out of lungs by a mask, but cannot be kept from the body, where it raises such blisters and irritation as may prove fatal in the same fashion as a bad burn. When enough has been poured into any position it can be made untenable by troops, since in heavy weather it hangs about for days, and has the unpleasant property of appearing to have vanished and yet becoming active again when exposed to moisture. Many a battalion which has crossed a dew-moistened field within the battle area has had reason afterwards to regret it.

Coming after so deadly a preparation the first rush of the Germans met with success, and they penetrated the line, both of the Thirty-second French Division and of the 30th Composite Brigade. Their advance brought them roughly to the south end of Dickebush Lake, whereupon the 98th Brigade threw back a flank from Ridge Wood to the lake, so as to cover themselves from a southern attack.

At seven in the evening a strong attempt was made to re-establish the line, the 19th Brigade (Mayne) being thrown into the battle. The counter-attack was made by the 1st Cameronians, advancing across the Hallebast-La Clytte road, but they were in full view of the enemy whose machine-gun fire was sweeping the very grass from the ground in front of their feet. They could not get forward, and many of them never got back. A fine advance was made, however, by the composite King's Liverpools with the help of some of the Bedfords. It actually reached the old front line, but had lost so heavily that it was unable to retain it in the face of a renewed German assault, but stuck on as near as it could.

It should be explained that this King's Liverpool unit was really the old 89th Brigade which had been worn down to such an extent that the 17th, 18th, and 19th King's were now compressed into one battalion, 750 strong. Their heavy losses upon the Somme had been greatly increased in Flanders, and included Colonel Watson, the gallant and veteran leader of the 17th Battalion. Now under Colonel Rollo their sentiment was that of one of their officers who wrote, We are still the 89th Brigade, call us what they <2ike and put us in what division they please. The old spirit remains as ever." This was the unit whose swan song is here recorded. Next day the survivors made good their line, and handed it over intact to their relief.

To the north of this composite battalion (which was independent of the 30th Divisional Brigade already mentioned) the counter-attack was made by the 5th Scottish Rifles near Dickebush Lake, and by the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at Ridge Wood. Both of these battalions won home and gained their full objectives. The great German local effort, urged by four strong divisions, the Fifty-second and Fifty-sixth in front, the Twenty-ninth and Thirty-first in support, had been held. Each of these convulsive efforts of Von Armin's tired army brought the final equilibrium and ultimate retirement more close.

The fighting died down entirely in this quarter, and the Fourteenth French Division took it over from the British. Indeed this day of strenuous battle may be said to have marked the end of the great Battle of the Lys, which had raged ever since April 9. The Germans had been fought to a standstill. They had in the course of a month’s fighting won ground, prisoners, and guns, but it is possible in winning a battle to lose a war, and this is exactly what they had accomplished. An expensive and barren success had been achieved by a lavish use of their reserves, and on the day when those reserves were vitally needed, they had been wastefully strewn over the plains of the Somme and of Flanders. Never had the British Army been more severely tried than at this time when their General issued his famous “back to the wall” appeal, and never had the individual soldier risen to a greater height. “The British Army,” says an Italian observer who was present throughout the crisis, “impresses one with its inherent moral soundness. The German,” he adds, “uses almost exclusively machine-guns and bombs, but the Englishman loves his rifle, and knows much better how to use it. He is a better marksman, he is more contemptuous of danger, and he is calmer, steadier, and feels himself individually superior to his enemy. The cheerfulness of the men is due in great measure to the noble, dignified, serene example of their officers, so simple in their gentlemanly bearing, so conscious of the reasons and the end of the war, so proud of their country and of its unshakeable prestige.” It is a noble tribute, but none who know the men could say that it was a strained one.

No account of the battle of the Lys can close without a word as to the splendid work done by General Plumer, never wearied, never flurried, during those fateful days. Hardly less arduous was the experience of General Horne in the southern sector. The three corps commanders, too, who bore the brunt and very especially General de Lisle, who only took over his command on the second day of the battle, will always be associated with one of the most desperate incidents of the war. But above and behind all is the commanding and heroic figure of Douglas Haig, impassive, serene, still working as he had worked four years before, at the mending of broken lines and the bracing of weak ones, until the hour should strike for his tremendous revenge.

XI. THE BATTLES OF THE CHEMIN DES DAMES AND OF THE ARDRES

May 27 to June 2

The rest cure of the Aisne — Attack upon the Fiftieth Division — Upon the Twenty-first — Fifth Battery R.F.A. — Glorious Devons — Adventure of General Rees — Retreat across the Aisne — Over the Vesle — Arrival of Nineteenth Division — Desperate fighting — Success of 4th Shropshires — General Pelle's tribute — General prospect of the Allies midway through 1918

IT had been determined to rest four of the crippled British divisions which had been heavily engaged first on the Somme and then in the battle of the Lys. These divisions were the Twenty-fifth (Bainbridge), Twenty-first (Campbell), Eighth (Heneker), and Fiftieth (Jackson), all forming the Ninth Corps (Hamilton-Gordon). Each of them had been cut to pieces twice in the course of little more than a month, and should by every pre-war precept have been incapable of exertion for a long time to come. They were reconstituted with numbers of recruits under fresh officers, both leaders and men with slight experience of actual warfare. They were then sent, via the outskirts of Paris, the direct route being under fire from the German guns in front of Amiens, and they were thrust into the French line just north of the Aisne in the region of the Chemin des Dames. The intention was to give them repose, but the change was looked upon with misgiving by the divisional generals, one of whom wrote to the present chronicler at the time saying, "They think it will be a rest cure, but to my mind it is more likely to be a fresh centre of storm.

As a matter of fact the Germans, who had now made two colossal thrusts, the one on March 21 on the Somme, the other at the Lys on April 9, were planning a third desperate attack at this very point. The competent military historian of the future with all the records before him will no doubt be able to pronounce how far it was wise for the German high command to leave two unfinished tasks in order to undertake a third one. On the face of it, it seemed an unlikely thing to do, and that perhaps is why they did it. The line at this position had few natural advantages and was not strongly held. In the opinion of British generals it would have been wise if it could have been drawn south of the Aisne, since a broad river is a good friend in one's front, but a treacherous enemy in one's rear. There were reasons, however, why it was not easy for the French to abandon the north bank, for they had spent much time, labour, and human life in capturing Craonne, the California Plateau, and other positions within that area, and it was a dreadful thing to give them up unless they were beaten out of them. They held on, therefore — and the British divisions, now acting as part of the French army, were compelled to hold on as well. The Fiftieth Northern Territorial Division had a frontage of 7000 yards from near Craonne to Ville-aux-Bois, including the famous California Plateau; on their immediate right was the Regular Eighth Division, and to the right of that in the Berry-au-Bac sector, where the lines cross the Aisne, was the Twenty-first Division, this British contingent forming the Ninth Corps, and having French troops upon either side of them. The Twenty-fifth Division was in reserve at Fismes to the south of the river. The total attack from Crecy-au-Mont to Berry was about thirty miles, a quarter of which — the eastern quarter — was held by the British.

Confining our attention to the experience of the British troops, which is the theme of these volumes, we shall take the northern unit and follow its fortunes on the first day with some detail, remarking in advance that the difficulties and the results were much the same in. the case of each of the three front divisions, so that a fuller account of one may justify a more condensed one of the others. The position along the whole line consisted of rolling grass plains where the white gashes in the chalk showed out the systems of defence. The Germans, on the other hand, were shrouded to some extent in woodland, which aided them in the concentration of their troops. The defences of the British were of course inherited, not made, but possessed some elements of strength, especially in the profusion of the barbed wire. On the other hand, there were more trenches than could possibly be occupied, which is a serious danger when the enemy comes to close grips. The main position ran about 5000 yards north of the Aisne, and was divided into an outpost line, a main line of battle, and a weak system of supports. The artillery was not strong, consisting of the divisional guns with some backing of French 75's and heavies.

The Fiftieth Division, like the others, had all three brigades in the line. To the north the 150th Brigade (Rees) defended Craonne and the slab-sided California Plateau. On their right, stretching across a flat treeless plain, lay the 151st Brigade (Martin). To the right of them again was the 149th Brigade (Riddell), which joined on near Ville-aux-Bois to the 24th Brigade (Grogan) of the Eighth Division. It may give some idea of the severity with which the storm broke upon the Fiftieth Division, when it is stated that of the three brigadiers mentioned one was killed, one was desperately wounded, and a third was taken before ten o’clock on the first morning of the attack.

The German onslaught, though very cleverly carried out, was not a complete surprise, for the experienced soldiers in the British lines, having already had two experiences of the new methods, saw many danger signals in the week before the battle. There was abnormal aircraft activity, abnormal efforts also to blind our own air service, occasional registering of guns upon wire, and suspicious movements on the roads. Finally with the capture of prisoners in a raid the suspicions became certainties, especially when on the evening of May 26 the Germans were seen pouring down to their front lines. No help arrived, however, for none seems to have been immediately available. The thin line faced its doom with a courage which was already tinged with despair. Each British brigade brought its reserve battalion to the north bank of the Aisne, and each front division had the call upon one brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division. Otherwise no help was in sight.

The bombardment began early in the morning of May 27, and was said by the British veterans to be the heaviest of the war. Such an opinion meant something, coming from such men. The whole area from Soissons to Rheims was soaked with gas and shattered with high explosives, so that masks had to be worn ten kilometres behind the lines. A German officer declared that 6000 guns were employed. Life was absolutely impossible in large areas. The wire was blown to shreds, and the trenches levelled. The men stuck it, however, with great fortitude, and the counter-barrage was sufficiently good to hold up the early attempts at an infantry advance. The experiences of the 149th Infantry Brigade may be taken as typical. The front battalion was the 4th Northumberland Fusiliers under Colonel Gibson. Twice the enemy was driven back in his attempt to cross the shattered wire. At 4 A.M. he won his way into the line of outposts, and by 4:30 was heavily pressing the battle line. His tactics were good, his courage high, and his numbers great. The 6th Northumberland Fusiliers, under Colonel Temperley, held the main line, and with the remains of the 4th made a heroic resistance. At this hour the Germans had reached the main lines both of the 151st Brigade on the left and of the 24th on the right. About five o’clock the German tanks were reported to have got through on the front of the Eighth Division and to be working round the rear of the 149th Brigade. Once again we were destined to suffer from the terror which we had ourselves evolved. The main line was now in great confusion and breaking fast. The 5th Northumberland Fusiliers were pushed up as the last reserve. There was deep shadow everywhere save on the California Plateau, where General Rees, with his three Yorkshire battalions, had repulsed repeated assaults. The French line had gone upon his left, however, and the tanks, with German infantry behind them, had swarmed round to his rear, so that in the end he and his men were all either casualties or captives.

Colonel Gibson meanwhile had held on most tenaciously with a nucleus of his Fusiliers at a post called Centre Marceau. The telephone was still intact, and he notified at 5:45 that he was surrounded. He beat off a succession of attacks with heavy loss to the stormers, while Temperley was also putting up a hopeless but desperate fight. Every man available was pushed up to their help, and they were ordered to hold on. A senior officer reporting from Brigade Headquarters says: “I could hear Gibson’s brave, firm voice say in reply to my injunctions to fight it out, ‘Very good, sir. Good-bye!’“ Shortly afterwards this gallant man was shot through the head while cheering his men to a final effort.

The experience of the Durhams of the 151st had been exactly the same as that of the Northumberlands of the 149th. Now the enemy were almost up to the last line. The two brigadiers, Generals Martin and Riddell, together with Major Tweedy of the reserve battalion, rushed out to organise a local defence, drawing in a few scattered platoons for the purpose. As they did so they could see the grey figures of the Germans all round them. It was now past six o’clock, and a clear, sunny morning. As these officers ran forward, a shell burst over them, and General Martin fell dead, while Riddell received a terrible wound in the face. In spite of this, he most heroically continued to rally the men and form a centre of resistance so as to cover Pontavert as long as possible. The 5th Northumberland Fusiliers with a splendid counter-attack had regained the position of Centre d’Evreux, and for the moment the pressure was relieved. It was clear, however, both to General Jackson and to General Heneker that both flanks were exposed, and that their general position was an acute salient far ahead of the Allied line. The Twenty-first Division was less affected, since it already lay astride of the river, but the French line on the left was back before mid-day as far as Fismes, so that it was absolutely necessary if a man were to be saved to get the remains of the two British divisions across the Aisne at once. Pontavert, with its bridges over river and canal, was in the hands of the Germans about 7 A.M., but the bridge-heads at Concevreux and other places were firmly held, and as the men got across, sometimes as small organised units, sometimes as a drove of stragglers, they were rallied and lined up on the south bank. The field-guns had all been lost but the heavies and machine-guns were still available to hold the new line. Some of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers were entirely cut off, but fought their way through the Germans, and eventually under Major Leatheart reported themselves at the bridges. So rapid had been the hostile advance that the dressing-stations were captured, and many of our doctors and wounded fell into the hands of the Germans to endure the hard fate which these savages so often reserved for the brave but helpless men who fell into their power. It is a terrible fact which should not be forgotten, that among these torturers the nurses and the doctors held in many cases a prominent position. The 150th Brigade, under General Rees, which was defending the Craonne position, had endured an even heavier ordeal than the others. It was. on the extreme left of the British line, on the right of the French 118th Regiment. This latter seems to have been entirely destroyed or taken early in the attack.

The British brigade lay in front of Craonne upon the edge of the California Plateau, with the 5th Yorks on the right and the 4th East Yorks on the left. The 4th Yorks were in brigade reserve in Craonelle, immediately behind the fighting line. The Germans got through the French on the left, also through a gap down the Corbeny railroad on the right of the 150th and left of the 151st Brigade. Colonel Thomson of the 5th Yorks, a very brave and experienced soldier who was said by those who knew him best to be worth half a battalion in his own person upon the day of battle, was in charge on the right, and hung on with tooth and claw to every inch of ground, but his little force, already greatly weakened by the cannonade, was unable to resist the terrible onslaught of the German infantry. Two counter-attacks were attempted by reserve companies, but each was swept away. The Germans were on the flank in Craonne and enfiladed the line with a machine-gun. Colonel Thomson’s last words over the telephone to Headquarters were, “Good-bye, General, I’m afraid I shall not see you again.” He was killed shortly afterwards. Major Haslett of the East Yorks made an equally desperate resistance on the other flank, and finally he and a wounded sergeant-major were captured with their empty pistols in their hands. Meanwhile the Brigade Headquarters at La Hutte were practically surrounded and under a terrible fire. General Kees endeavoured to get into touch with his only remaining battalion, the 4th Yorks, but they had already been overrun by the enemy. Colonel Kent, with sixteen men, had thrown himself into a house in Craonelle, and had fought until the whole party were killed or wounded. The enemy was now several miles to the rear of the few survivors of the 150th Brigade, who endeavoured to make their way back as best they might. It gives some idea of how completely they were cut off that General Rees, after many adventures and escapes, was finally stopped and taken by encountering the main line of the German traffic coming down the road which he had to cross. This was late in the day of May 27, when the enemy was well across the Aisne. It may be of interest to add that General Rees was taken before the Kaiser next morning, whom he found upon the California Plateau. The emperor behaved with courtesy to his prisoner, though he could not refrain from delivering a monologue of the usual type upon the causes of the war and the iniquity of Great Britain in fulfilling her treaty obligations. Some account must now be given of the experiences of Heneker’s Eighth Division which occupied the centre of the British line. This division, like the others, had been sent to the Aisne for a rest cure after its terrific exertions upon the Somme. Full of raw soldiers and inexperienced officers it would have seemed to be entirely unfit for battle, but it had the two solid assets of experienced leading in the senior officers and great regimental traditions, that ever present stand-by of the British Army. Young as were the troops they took General Heneker’s orders literally when he issued the command that the posts were to be held at all costs, and, as a consequence. hardly a single battalion existed as a fighting unit after the engagement.

The British field-batteries were mostly to the north the river, and were greatly damaged by the preliminary German fire. They were accurately located by the enemy, and were smothered in poison and steel. So were the Gernicourt defences, which formed an important tactical position with a permanent garrison on the right of the division. All three brigades were in the line, the 25th on the right, the 24th in the centre, and the 23rd on the left. The outpost line was utterly overwhelmed in the first rush, the experience being much the same as on March 21, for each small body of men found itself isolated, and could only do its best to hold its own patch of ground. Thus at 5:15 A.M. a pigeon message was sent, “H.Q. 2nd Berks, consisting of Colonel Griffin, Captain Clare, and staff, are surrounded. Germans threw bombs down dug-out and passed on. Appeared to approach from right rear in considerable strength. No idea what has happened elsewhere. Holding on in hopes of relief.” Their position was typical of many similar groups along the front, marooned in the fog, and soon buried in the heart of the advancing German army. The right of the 25th Brigade had been thrust back, but on the left the 2nd Berkshires made a desperate resistance. The whole front was intersected by a maze of abandoned trenches, and it was along these that the enemy, shrouded in the mist, first gained their fatal footing upon the flank. The 2nd East Lancashires were brought up in support, and a determined resistance was made by the whole brigade within the main zone of battle. The German tanks were up, however, and they proved as formidable in their hands as they have often done in our own. Their construction was cumbrous and their pace slow, but they were heavily armed and very dangerous when once in action. Eight of them, however, were destroyed by the French anti-tank artillery. At 6:30 the 25th Brigade, in shattered remnants, was back on the river at Gernicourt.

The attack on this front was developing from the right, so that it came upon the 24th Brigade an hour later than upon its eastern neighbour. The 2nd Northamptons were in front, and they were driven in, but rallied on the battle zone and made a very fine fight, until the German turning movement from the south-east, which crossed the Miette south of the battle zone, took the line in flank and rear. In the end hardly a man of the two battalions engaged got away, and Haig, the brigadier, with his staff, had to cut their way out at the muzzle of their revolvers, shooting many Germans who tried to intercept them. The 23rd Brigade was attacked at about the same time, and the 2nd West Yorkshires managed to hold even the outpost line for a time. Then falling back on the battle position this battalion, with the 2nd Devons and 2nd Middlesex near the Bois des Buttes, beat off every attack for a long time. The fatal turning movement threatened to cut them off entirely, but about 7:30 General Grogan, who had set his men a grand example of valour, threw out a defensive flank. He fell back eventually across the Aisne south of Pontavert, while the enemy, following closely upon his heels, occupied that place.

Many outstanding deeds of valour are recorded in all the British divisions during this truly terrible experience, but two have been immortalised by their inclusion in the orders of the day of General Berthelot, the French general in command. The first concerned the magnificent conduct of the 5th Battery R.F.A., which, under its commander, Captain Massey, stuck to its work while piece after piece was knocked out by an overwhelming shower of German shells. When all the guns were gone Captain Massey, with Lieutenants Large and Bution and a handful of survivors, fought literally to the death with Lewis guns and rifles. One man with a rifle, who fought his way back, and three unarmed gunners who were ordered to retire, were all who escaped to tell the heroic tale. The other record was that of the 2nd Devons, who went on fighting when all resistance round them was over, and were only anxious, under their gallant Colonel Anderson-Morshead, to sell their lives at the price of covering the retreat of their comrades. Their final stand was on a small hill which covered the river crossing, and while they remained and died themselves they entreated their retiring comrades to hurry through their ranks. Machine-guns ringed them round and shot them to pieces, but they fought while a cartridge was left, and then went down stabbing to the last. They were well avenged, however, by one post of the Devons which was south of the river and included many Lewis guns under Major Cope. These men killed great numbers of Germans crossing the stream, and eventually made good their own retreat. The main body of the battalion was destroyed, however, and the episode was heroic. In the words of the French document: “The whole battalion, Colonel, 38 officers, and 552 in the ranks, offered their lives in ungrudging sacrifice to the sacred cause of the Allies.” A word as to the valour of the enemy would also seem to be called for. They came on with great fire and ardour. “The Germans seemed mad,” says one spectator, “they came rushing over the ground with leaps and bounds. The slaughter was frightful. We could not help shooting them down.”

Whilst this smashing attack had been delivered upon the Fiftieth and Eighth Divisions, Campbell’s Twenty-first Division on the extreme right of the British line had also endured a hard day of battle. They covered a position from Loivre to Berry-au-Bac, and had all three brigades in action, six battalions in the line, and three in reserve. Their experience was much the same as that of the other divisions, save that they were on the edge of the storm and escaped its full fury. The greatest pressure in the morning was upon the 62nd Brigade on the left, which was in close liaison with the 25th Brigade of the Eighth Division. By eight o’clock the posts at Moscou and the Massif de la Marine had been overrun by the overpowering advance of the enemy. About nine o’clock the 7th Brigade from the Twenty-fifth Division came up to the St. Auboeuf Wood within the divisional area and supported the weakening line, which had lost some of the outer posts and was holding on staunchly to others. The Germans were driving down upon the west and getting behind the position of the Twenty-first Division, for by one o’clock they had pushed the 1st Sherwood Foresters of the Eighth Division, still fighting most manfully, out of the Gernicourt Wood, so that the remains of this division with the 75th Brigade were on a line west of Bouffignereux. This involved the whole left of the Twenty-first Division, which had to swing back the 62nd Brigade from a point south of Cormicy, keeping in touch with the 7th Brigade which formed the connecting link. At 3:20 Cormicy had been almost surrounded and the garrison driven out, while the 64th Brigade on the extreme right was closely pressed at Cauroy. At six in the evening the 7th Brigade had been driven in at Bouffignereux, and the German infantry, beneath a line of balloons and aeroplanes, was swarming up the valley between Guyencourt and Chalons le Vergeur, which latter village they reached about eight, thus placing themselves on the left rear of the Twenty-first Division. Night fell upon as anxious a situation as ever a harassed general and weary troops were called upon to face. The Twenty-first had lost few prisoners and only six guns during the long day of battle, but its left had been continually turned, its position was strategically impossible, and its losses in casualties were- very heavy. It was idle to deny that the army of General von Boehm had made a very brilliant attack and gained a complete victory with, in the end, such solid trophies as 45,000 Allied prisoners and at least 400 guns. It was the third great blow of the kind within nine weeks, and Foch showed himself to be a man of iron in being able to face it, and not disclose those hidden resources which could not yet be used to the full advantage.

The capture of Pontavert might have been a shattering blow to the retreating force, but it would seem that the Germans who had pushed through so rapidly were strong enough to hold it but not, in the first instance, strong enough to extend their operations. By the afternoon of May 27 they were over at Maizy also, and the force at Concevreux, which consisted of the remains of the Fiftieth and part of the Eighth and Twenty-fifty Divisions, was in danger of capture. At 2 P.M. the Germans had Muscourt. The mixed and disorganised British force then fell back to near

Ventclay, where they fought back once more at the German advance, the Fiftieth Division being in the centre, with the 75th and 7th Brigades on its right. This latter brigade had been under the orders of the Twenty-first Division and had helped to hold the extreme right of the position, but was now involved in the general retreat. Already, however, news came from the west that the Germans had not got merely to the Aisne but to the Vesle, and the left flank and rear of the Ninth Corps was hopelessly compromised. Under continuous pressure, turning ever to hold up their pursuers, the remains of the three divisions, with hardly any artillery support, fell back to the south. On the western wing of the battle Soissons had fallen, and Rheims was in a most perilous position, though by some miracle she succeeded in preserving her shattered streets and desecrated cathedral from the presence of the invaders.

The Eighth Division had withdrawn during the night to Montigny, and, in consequence, the Twenty-first Division took the general line, Hermonville — Montigny Ridge, the 64th Brigade on the right, with the 62nd and 7th in succession on the left. Every position was outflanked, however, touch was lost with the Eighth on the left, and the attack increased continually in its fury. Pronilly fell, and the orders arrived that the next line would be the River Vesle, Jonchery marking the left of the Eighth Division. On the right the Twenty-first continued to be in close touch with the French Forty-fifth Division. All units were by this time very intermingled, tired, and disorganised. The 15th Durhams, who had fought a desperate rearguard action all morning upon the ridge north of Hervelon Château, had almost ceased to exist. The one gleam of light was the rumoured approach of the One hundred and thirty-fourth French Division from the south. It had been hoped to hold the line of the River Vesle, but by the evening of May 28 it was known that the Germans had forced a passage at Jonchery, where the bridge would have been destroyed but for the wounding of the sapper officer and the explosion of the wagon containing the charges. On the other hand, the Forty-fifth French Division on the right was fighting splendidly, and completely repulsed a heavy German attack. When night fell the British were still for the most part along the line of the Vesle, but it was clear that it was already turned upon the west. Some idea of the truly frightful losses incurred by the troops in these operations may be formed from the fact that the Eighth Division alone had lost 7000 men out of a total force of about 9000 infantry. About eight in the morning of May 29 the enemy renewed his attack, pushing in here and there along the line in search of a gap. One attempt was made upon the Twenty-first Division, from Branscourt to Sapicourt, which was met and defeated by the 1st Lincolns and 6th Leicesters. Great activity and movement could be seen among the German troops north of the river, but the country is wooded and hilly, so that observation is difficult. Towards evening, the right flank of the fighting line was greatly comforted by the arrival of the French Division already mentioned, and the hearts of the British were warmed by the news that one of their own divisions had come within the zone of battle, as will now be described.

When the Ninth Corps was sent to the Aisne, another very weary British division, the Nineteenth and of the (Jeffreys), had also been told off for the French front with the same object of rest, and the same actual result of desperate service. So strenuous had the work of this division been upon the Somme and in Flanders, that the ranks were almost entirely composed of new drafts from England and Wales. Their destination was the Chalons front, where they remained for exactly twelve days before the urgent summons arrived from the breaking line on the Aisne, and they were hurried westwards to endeavour to retrieve or at least to minimise the disaster. They arrived on the morning of May 29, and found things in a most critical condition. The Germans had pushed far south of the Aisne, despite the continued resistance of the survivors of the Eighth, Twenty-fifth, and Fiftieth British Divisions, and of several French divisions, these debris of units being mixed up and confused, with a good deal of mutual recrimination, as is natural enough when men in overwrought conditions meet with misfortunes, the origin of which they cannot understand. When troops are actually mixed in this fashion, the difference in language becomes a very serious matter. Already the Allied line had been pushed far south of Fismes, and the position of the units engaged was very obscure to the Higher Command, but the British line, such as it was, was north of Savigny on the evening of May 28. Soissons had fallen, Rheims was in danger, and it was doubtful whether even the line of the Marne could be held. Amid much chaos it must, indeed, have been with a sense of relief that the Allied generals found a disciplined and complete division come into the front, however young the material of which it was composed.

A gap had opened in the line between the Thirteenth French Division at Lhery and the One hundred and fifty-fourth near Faverolles, and into this the 57th and 58th Brigades were thrust. The artillery had not yet come up, and the rest of the Allied artillery was already either lost or destroyed, so there was little support from the guns. It was a tough ordeal for boys fresh from the English and Welsh training camps. On the left were the 10th Worcesters and 8th Gloucesters. On the right the 9th Welsh Fusiliers and 9th Welsh. It was hoped to occupy Savigny and Brouillet, but both villages were found to be swarming with the enemy. Remains of the Eighth and Twenty-fifth Divisions were still, after three days of battle, with their faces to the foe on the right of the Nineteenth Division. They were very weary, however, and the 2nd Wiltshires were brought up to thicken the line and cover the divisional flank north of Bouleuse. This was the situation at 2 P.M. of May 29.

The tide of battle was still rolling to the south, and first Savigny and then Faverolles were announced as being in German hands. A mixed force of odd units had been formed and placed under General Craigie-Hackett, but this now came back through the ranks of the Nineteenth Division. On the right also the hard-pressed and exhausted troops in front, both French and British, passed through the 2nd Wiltshires, and endeavoured to reform behind them. The Nineteenth Division from flank to flank became the fighting front, and the Germans were seen pouring down in extended order from the high ground north of Lhery and of Treslon. On the right the remains of the of the Eighth Division had rallied, and it was now reinforced by the 2nd Wilts, the 4th Shropshire Light Infantry, and the 8th Staffords, the latter battalions from the 56th Brigade. With this welcome addition General Heneker, who had fought such a long uphill fight, was able in the evening of May 29 to form a stable line on the Bouleuse Ridge. By this time the guns of the Nineteenth Division, the 87th and 88th Brigades Royal Field Artillery, had roared into action — a welcome sound to the hard-pressed infantry in front. There was a solid British line now from Lhery on the left to the eastern end of the Bouleuse Ridge, save that one battalion of Senegal Tirailleurs was sandwiched in near Faverolles. Liaison had been established with the Thirteenth and One hundred and fifty-fourth French Divisions to left and right.

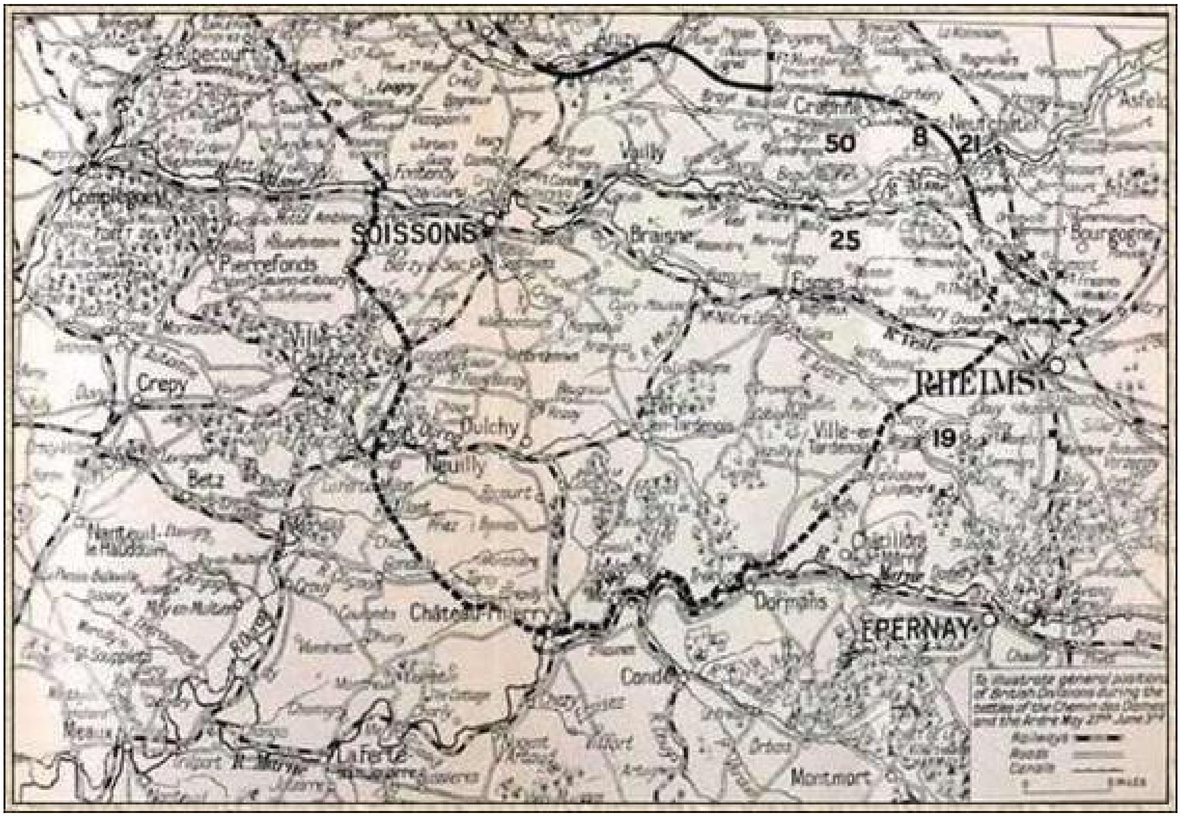
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Dulchy
Neuilly
Betz
Ville-en-Tardenois
Châtillon
Château-Thierry
Dormans
Condé
Montmort
La Ferté
Meaux
Bourgogne

The general positions of the British Divisions during the battles of the Chemin des Dames and the Ardre, May 27-June 3.

The early morning of May 30 witnessed a very violent attack along all this portion of the line. By 6 A.M. the enemy had worked round the left flank of. the 10th Worcesters at Lhery, driving before them some of the troops, French and British, who were exhausted from the long battle. It is difficult for either writer or reader to imagine the condition of men who have fought a losing battle for three days without cessation. If Foch saved up his reserves during these weeks of agony, it was surely at a precious cost to the men who bore the weight. The left company of the 10th Worcesters lost all its officers and 60 per cent of its men, and Lhery had to be left to the enemy. Meanwhile, the Senegalese, who, like all tropical troops, are more formidable in attack than in defence, were driven in near Faverolles, the Germans making a frontal attack in eight lines. They pushed through the gap, outflanked the 9th Welsh Fusiliers on the left and the 2nd Wiltshires on the right, cutting off a platoon of the former battalion. Both these battalions suffered very heavily, the Welsh Fusiliers especially being cut to pieces. At both ends of the line the remains of the front battalions had to fall back upon their supports. The 74th Composite Brigade, already referred to as being under General Craigie-Hackett, fought on the left of the Nineteenth Division, and was ordered to hold the Lhery-Rohigny road. The pressure, however, upon these tired troops and upon the remains of the 10th Worcesters continued to be very great, and by 11 A.M. the situation was critical on the left of the line, the flank having been driven in, and the 8th Gloucesters enfiladed so that the D’Aulnay Wood could no longer be held. These changes enabled the Germans to close in upon the 9th Welsh and the remains of the 9th Welsh Fusiliers, attacking them in front and flank. The troops on their right gave way, and the assailants were then able to get round the other flank of these two devoted battalions, and practically to surround them, so that very few won their way back. The whole front line had gone with the exception of the 10th Warwicks on the left. For a time it seemed as if there was nothing to limit this powerful thrust of the enemy, but in the usual miraculous fashion a composite party of odds and ends, drawn from stragglers and details, hastily swept together by General Jeffreys, were hurried up to the high ground south of Ville-en-Tardenois. With the aid of four machine-guns from the Nineteenth Division this force held the victorious enemy from coming further, covered the left flank of the 10th Warwicks, and formed a bastion from which a new wall could be built. A second bastion had been made by the 5th South Wales Borderers, pioneers of the Nineteenth Division, who had dug in south of Rohigny and absolutely refused to shift. Up to 2 P.M. the 2nd Wilts also held their ground north of Bouleuse. Between these fixed points the 57th and 58th Brigades were able to reorganise, the 15th Warwicks and 9th Cheshires covering the respective fronts. On the right the Twenty-eighth French Division had relieved the One hundred and fifty-fourth, while the 4th Shropshires and 8th North Staffords, both still intact, formed a link between the two Allies. Touch had been lost on the left, and patrols were sent out to endeavour to bridge the gap. At this period General Jeffreys of the Nineteenth Division commanded the whole British line. A serious loss had been caused by the wounding of General Glasgow, the experienced leader of the 58th Brigade. General Heath of the 56th Brigade took over the command of both units.

The Germans had reached their limit for the day, though some attempt at an attack was made in the afternoon from the wood of Aulnay, which was beaten back by the British fire. It was rumoured, however, that on the left, outside the British area, he was making progress south of Rohigny, which made General Jeffreys uneasy for his left wing. Up to now the British had been under the general command of the Ninth British Corps, but this was now withdrawn from the line, and the Nineteenth Division passed to the Fifth French Corps under General Pelle, an officer who left a most pleasant impression upon the minds of all who had to deal with him. On May 31 the front consisted of the French Fortieth on the left, the French Twenty-eighth on the right, and the British Nineteenth between them, the latter covering 12,000 yards. The weary men of the original divisions were drawn out into reserve after as severe an ordeal as any have endured during the whole war. The 74th Composite Brigade was also relieved. Some idea of the losses on the day before may be gathered from the fact that the two Welsh battalions were now formed into a single composite company, which was added to the 9th Cheshires.

The morning of the 31st was occupied in a severe duel of artillery, in which serious losses were sustained from the German fire, but upon the other hand a threatened attack to the south-west of Ville-en-Tardenois was dispersed by the British guns. About two o’clock the enemy closed once more upon the left, striking hard at the 6th Cheshires, who had been left behind in this quarter when the rest of the 74th Composite Brigade had been relieved. The 10th Warwicks were also attacked, and the whole wing was pushed back, the enemy entering the village of Ville-en-Tardenois. The Warwicks formed up again on high ground south-east of the village, the line being continued by the remains of the 10th Worcesters and 8th Gloucesters. Whilst the left wing was driven in, the right was also fiercely attacked, the enemy swarming down in great numbers upon the French, and the 9th Cheshires. The former were driven off the Aubilly Ridge, and the latter had to give ground before the rush.

General Jeffreys, who was on the spot, ordered an immediate counter-attack of the 2nd Wilts to retrieve the situation. Before it could develop, however, the French were again advancing on the right, together with the 4th Shropshires. A local counter-attack had also been delivered by the 9th Cheshires, led on horseback with extreme gallantry by Colonel Cunninghame. His horse was shot under him, but he continued to lead the troops on foot, and his Cheshire infantry followed him with grim determination into their old positions. The ground was regained though the losses were heavy, Colonel Cunninghame being among the wounded.

The attack of the 2nd Wiltshires had meanwhile been developed, and was launched under heavy fire about seven in the evening, moving up to the north of Chambrecy. The position was gained, the Wiltshires connecting up with the Cheshires on their right and the Gloucesters on their left. Meanwhile, advances of the enemy on the flank were broken up by artillery fire, the 87th and 88th Brigades of guns doing splendid work, and sweeping the heads of every advance from the Tardenois-Chambrecy road. So ended another very severe day of battle. The buffer was acting and the advance was slowing. Already its limit seemed to be marked.

On the morning of May 31 the British position extended from a line on the left connecting Ville-en-Tardenois and Champlat. Thence the 57th Brigade covered the ground up to the stream which runs from Sarcy to Chambrecy. Then the 56th Brigade began, and carried on to 1000 yards east of the river Ardres. The line of battalions (pitiful remnants for the most part) was from the left, 10th Warwicks, 10th Worcesters, 8th Gloucesters, 2nd Wilts, 9th Cheshires, 8th Staffords, and 4th Shropshires. Neither brigade could muster 1000 rifles, while the 58th Brigade in reserve was reduced to three sapper field companies, the personnel of the trench-mortar batteries, and every straggler who could be scraped up was thrust forward to thicken the line.

The German attack was launched once more at 4 P.M. on June 1, striking up against the Fortieth French Division and the left of the British line. Under the weight of the assault the French were pushed back, and the enemy penetrated the Bonval Wood, crossed the Tardenois-Jonchery road, and thrust their way into the woods of Courmont and La Cohette. Here, however, the attack was held, and the junction between the French and the Warwicks remained firm. The front of the 57th Brigade was attacked at the same time, the 8th Gloucesters and the 2nd Wilts on their right being very hard pressed. The enemy had got Sarcy village, which enabled them to get on the flank of the Gloucesters, and to penetrate between them and the Wiltshires. It was a very critical situation. The right company of the Gloucesters was enfiladed and rolled up, while the centre was in deadly danger. The left flank and the Worcesters held tight, but the rest of the line was being driven down the hill towards Chambrecy. A splendid rally was effected, however, by Captain Pope of B Company, who led his west countrymen up the hill once more, driving the enemy back to his original line. For this feat he received the D.S.O. At this most critical period of the action, great help was given to the British by the 2nd Battalion of the 22nd French Regiment, led in person by Commandant de Lasbourde, which joined in Pope’s counter-attack, afterwards relieving the remains of the Gloucesters. Lasbourde also received the D.S.O.

The success of the attack was due partly to the steadiness of the of the 10th Worcesters on the left, who faced right and poured a cross-fire into the German stormers. It was a complete, dramatic little victory, by which the high ground north of Chambrecy was completely regained. A withdrawal of the whole line was, however, necessary on account of the German penetration into the left, which had brought them complete possession of the Wood of Courmont on the British left rear. The movement was commenced at seven in the evening, and was completed in most excellent order before midnight. This new line, stretching from Quisles to Eligny, included one very important position, the hill of Eligny, which was a prominence from which the enemy could gain observation and command over the whole valley of the Ardres, making all communications and battery positions precarious. The general order of units in the line on June 2 was much the same as before, the 5th South Wales Borderers being held in reserve on the left, and the 2/22nd French on the right of the Nineteenth Division. These positions were held unbroken from this date for a fortnight, when the division was eventually relieved after its most glorious term of service. The British Ninth Corps was busily engaged during this time in reorganising into composite battalions the worn and mixed fragments of the Eighth, Twenty-fifth, and Fiftieth Divisions, which were dribbled up as occasion served to the new battle-line. A composite machine-gun company was also organised and sent up.

Several days of comparative quiet followed, during which the sappers were strengthening the new positions, and the Germans were gathering fresh forces for a renewed attack. Congratulatory messages from General Franchet d’Esperey, the French Army Commander, and from their own Corps General put fresh heart into the overtaxed men. There was no fresh attack until June 6. On that date the line of defence from the left consisted of the Fortieth French Division, the Eighth Division Composite Battalion (could a phrase mean more than that?), the 10th Warwicks, 10th Worcesters, 8th Gloucesters, 58th Brigade Composite Battalion, 9th Cheshires, 8th North Staffords, 4th Shropshires, and Twenty-eighth French Division. At 3 A.M. there began a tremendous bombardment, mostly of gas-shell, which gave way to the infantry advance at 4 A.M., the attack striking the right and centre of the British line, in the section of the all-important Bligny Hill. As the enemy advanced upon the front of the 58th Composite Battalion, the men who were the survivors of the 2nd Wilts, 9th Welsh Fusiliers, and 9th Welsh, fired a volley, and then, in a fashion which would have delighted the old Duke, sprang from their cover and charged with the bayonet, hurling the Germans down the slope. It was a complete repulse, as was a second attack upon the front of the Gloucesters and Worcesters who, with a similar suggestion of the legendary Peninsula tactics, waited till they could see their foemen's eyes before firing, with the result that the storming column simply vanished, flinging itself down in the long grass and hiding there till nightfall. There was no attack on the left of the line, but the 9th Cheshires and the North Staffords both had their share in the victory. The Twenty-eighth French Division on the right had given a little before the storm, and the British line was bent back to keep touch. Otherwise it was absolutely intact, and the whole terrain in front of it was covered with German dead.

The German is a determined fighter, however, and his generals well knew that without the command of Bligny Hill no further progress was possible for him in the general advance. Therefore they drew together all their strength and renewed the attack at 11 A.M. with such energy and determination that they gained the summit. An immediate counter by the 9th Cheshires, though most gallantly urged, was unable to restore the situation, but fortunately a battalion was at hand which had not lost so grievously in the previous fighting. This was the 4th Shropshires, which now charged up the hill, accompanied by the remains of the undefeated 9th Cheshires. The attack was delivered with magnificent dash and spirit, and it ended by the complete reconquest of the hill. For this feat the 4th Shropshires received as a battalion the rare and coveted distinction of the Croix de Guerre with the palm. This local success strengthened the hands of the French on the right, who were able in the late afternoon to come forward and to retake the village of Bligny. June 6 was a most successful day, and gave fresh assurance that the German advance was spent.

There was no further close fighting in this neighbourhood up to June 19, when the young soldiers of the Nineteenth and other divisions were withdrawn after a sustained effort which no veterans could have beaten. In the official report of General Pelle to his own Higher Command, there occurs the generous sentence: *“L'impression produite sur le moral des* *troupes françaises par la belle attitude de leurs alliés a été très bonne.”* Both Allies experienced the difficulty of harmonising troops who act under different traditions and by different methods. At first these hindrances were very great, but with fuller knowledge they tended to disappear, and ended in complete mutual confidence, founded upon a long experience of loyalty and devotion to the common end.

From this date until the end of June no event of importance affecting the British forces occurred upon the Western front. The German attack extended gradually in the Aisne district, until it had reached Montdidier, and it penetrated upon the front as far south as the forest of Villers-Cotteret, where it threatened the town of Compiègne. In the middle of June the German front was within forty miles of Paris, and a great gun specially constructed for the diabolical work was tossing huge shells at regular intervals into the crowded city. The bursting of one of these projectiles amidst the congregation of a church on a Sunday, with an appalling result in killed and wounded, was one of those incidents which Germans of the future will, we hope, regard with the same horror as the rest of the world did at the time.

The cause of the Allies seemed at this hour to be at the very lowest. They had received severe if glorious defeats on the Somme, in Flanders, and on the Aisne. Their only success lay in putting limits to German victories. And yet with that deep prophetic instinct which is latent in the human mind, there was never a moment when they felt more assured of the ultimate victory, nor when the language of their leaders was prouder and more firm. This general confidence was all the stranger, since we can see as we look back that the situation was on the face of it most desperate, and that those factors which were to alter it — the genius of Foch, the strength of his and of the reserves, and the numbers and power of the American Army — were largely concealed from the public. In the midst of the gloom the one bright light shone from Italy, where, on June 17, a strong attack of the Austrians across the Piave was first held and then thrown back to the other bank. In this most timely victory Lord Cavan’s force, which now consisted of three British Divisions, the Seventh, Twenty-third, and Forty-eighth, played a glorious part. So, at the close of the half year Fate’s curtain rang down, to rise again upon the most dramatic change in history.

VOLUME VI.

I. THE OPENING OPERATIONS

From July 1 to August 8, 191

The general position — German attack of July 16 — French counter-attack of July 18 — Turn of the tide — Fifty-first and Sixty-second Divisions on the Ardres — Desperate fighting — The Fifteenth Scots Division at Buzancy — Le Glorieux Chardon d'Ecosse — Nicholson's Thirty-fourth Division at Oulchy-le-Château — The campaigns on the periphery

WHEN the year 1918 had run half its course the Germans appeared to be triumphantly in the ascendant. In Flanders they had pushed back the British to positions which were, on an average, to the rear of those occupied in 1914. On the Somme they had more than neutralised all the Allied gains of 1916, and were stretched now from Arras to Montdidier, covering ground which they had not touched since the early days of the war. On the Aisne they had reconquered all that the French had so laboriously won in three campaigns, and were back along the Marne and within gun-shot of Paris. These results had been achieved in three great battles which had cost the Allies some 200,000 prisoners and nearly 2000 guns. In July it would have seemed that the German Empire was victorious, and yet ere the year had ended the very name had changed its meaning in the map of Europe, and was known only in the list of evil things which have had their day and then have passed. How this extraordinary change — the most sudden and dramatic in all history — came to pass is the theme of this final volume.

There were certain factors which even at the zenith of Germany's fortunes may have prepared a cool-headed critic for a swing of the scales, though the wisest and best informed could not have conceived how violent the oscillation would be. In the first place, the ever-pressing strangle-hold of the Navy, combined with an indifferent harvest and the exhaustion of certain stocks within the Empire, notably of copper, rubber, wool, and lubricants, produced great internal difficulties which grew worse with every month. Then again German successes had been bought in reckless fashion at a very heavy price, and if they brought a million men across from the Russian frontier it is probable that they had squandered nearly as many in the three great battles. Finally, there was the all-important factor of the American reinforcements which had been speeded up to meet the pressing emergency. By splendid international co-operation the Americans put all their proverbial energy into marshalling and equipping the men, while Great Britain threw every available unit of her sea power, mercantile or naval, into the task of getting them across. The long-suffering people of this island gladly cut down their requirements in every possible direction so as to secure the tonnage for this marvellous transfer. At a steady rate of a quarter of a million every month the Americans flowed into France — magnificent raw material which was soon to show how quickly it could develop into the most highly finished article. This constant addition to the Allied forces, with the moral confidence which they brought with them, was the third contributory cause to the sudden change of fortune. It would be ungenerous, however, not to add that a fourth, without which all others might have been vain, lay in the commanding personality and extraordinary genius of the great Frenchman who now controlled the whole Allied battle front from the sea to the Alps, while two great civilians, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, rallied the home fronts of the two weary nations which had borne the brunt of the war.

It will be remembered from the last volume that in the first half of 1918 the sun of victory had never once in Western Europe rested upon the standards of the Allies save in Italy, where the Austrians had been defeated upon the Piave. June 17 was in truth the turning-point of the war, for from that date everything went well with the forces of freedom. The change in the West came later, however, than in Italy, and on July 16 the Germans attempted a new advance upon the largest scale, which seemed to have some small success at first though it was in truth the starting-point of all their misfortunes. Their previous advances had brought them forward on the line from Montdidier to Rheims, and now they enlarged their front by 25 miles on the eastern side of Rheims, while their attack also covered about the same distance to the west of that city, making some progress in this latter sector, which led them down the valley of the Oise, towards Villers-Cotterets, Compiègne, and finally Paris. The whole world held its breath in a hush of horror as it saw Foch’s soldiers desperately struggling and yet losing mile after mile of the short stretch which separated the Teutonic barbarians from the centre of the world’s civilisation and culture. They had crossed the Marne that evening and had pushed the French and American line back for some miles, but the latter rallied and regained some of the ground. The most important point of the struggle, however, was to the east of Rheims, where that splendid soldier, General Gouraud, a one-armed bearded veteran of Gallipoli, created a false front which the enemy captured, and then whilst they were still in disorder attacked them from the real front, pushing them back with great loss. This development on the east of the line fully compensated for the German advance on the west, which was brought to a final halt within two days. Foch had now bled the Germans until they had lost some of their power of resistance. The moment for his great counter-attack was at hand, and the carefully husbanded reserves were ready for the crisis — those reserves which it was his supreme merit to have hoarded up when the temptation to spend them was more than the firmest will could have been expected to resist.

On July 18 the blow fell, and the Germans recoiled in a movement which was destined never to stop until they had crossed the Rhine. All important as the operations were they are only indicated here since this chronicle is necessarily confined to the British action, and no British troops were as yet engaged. Issuing under the cover of a storm from the great forest of Villers-Cotterets which had screened his preparations, the French Marshal hurled his line of tanks upon the enemy, clearing a path for his infantry. At the same moment the French-American line went forward over a front of 27 miles from the Oise to the Marne, striking the whole flank of the German advance. The attack extended from Vingre in the north to Château-Thierry. Everywhere the German flank fell back, their front had to withdraw across the Marne, Château-Thierry was reoccupied and 20,000 prisoners with 400 guns were left in the hands of the victors. Gradually, as the attack developed from day to day, a huge pocket was formed, bulging southwards from the Aisne, with its lower edge upon the Marne, the whole assuming much the shape which Spain does upon the map of Europe. This protrusion, instead of being a menacing point directed towards Paris, was now a much battered salient attacked simultaneously upon all sides, by Mangin in the west and by Gouraud in the south and east. Americans and French were on the Marne, French alone to the west of it, and British with French on the east of it. All were fighting with the cold fury of men who have reached a crisis where death is nothing and victory all. Nurses at the forward hospitals have testified how the French wounded were brought in mutilated and dying, but delirious with joy because they knew that the tide had turned. What matter anything else — What matter life or limb — The grey cloud was slowly, slowly drifting back whence it came.

But it was very slow, for the German soldier had never fought better, nor had his leaders ever shown greater skill in drawing him out from danger and yet selling every rearward position at the highest price of Allied blood. All three Allies were tried to their utmost, for the enemy had not yet learned that he was fated to retreat. The British, who had their own great task already planned, were in weak force, though that force was of the highest quality, for two better divisions than Campbell's Fifty-first Highlanders and Braithwaite's Sixty-second Yorkshiremen did not exist in the Army. It is their operations which we have now to examine, since the grand work of their American comrades-in-arms can only be included in the scope of this work where they actually fought in the British formations.

They occupied a point on the eastern face of the attack, nearly midway between the Marne and Rheims, and it was their task to force their way up that valley of the Ardres down which the remains of the British Ninth Corps had retreated from the disaster of the Aisne, and across which the Nineteenth Division had been drawn when it stopped the German advance near Bligny, as described in the last volume. Some memory of island valour should linger in that valley, for much good British blood has been shed there. The two divisions which were now hurried up to take their place in the French line formed the Twenty-second Corps under Sir John Godley, and were accompanied by some New Zealand and Australian Cavalry. They relieved a mauled Italian Corps, while they had Frenchmen on their left and Algerians on their right, so that it would be difficult to cosmopolitan line of defence. The country in front was hilly and very difficult, and the line was bisected by the River Ardres, the Sixty-second advancing on the right of the stream and the Fifty-first on the left.

It was a very desperate and difficult business, which lasted for ten days, during which each division showed the most splendid courage and endurance, as can be proved by the fact that their united losses came to 8000 men out of about 16,000 engaged, and that they met and defeated four German divisions, capturing 1500 prisoners, 140 machine-guns, and 40 cannon. The opening attack, during which the advancing lines passed through the ranks of the Second Italian Corps, was greatly stimulated by the news of the splendid Allied advance of the two previous days, July 18 and 19.

The fighting of both divisions was made very difficult by the underwood and the standing corn which lay before them, thickly sown with German machine-guns. On July 20 the 2/4th York and Lancasters, on the extreme right of the British line, captured Bouilly, but were driven out again. At the same time the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry was held up and lost heavily in front of the Château of Commetreuil. It was a long, difficult, and expensive day for the 187th Brigade, and its only remaining battalion, the 2/4th Yorkshire Light Infantry, lost heavily as well.

The 185th Brigade on July 20 occupied the left of the divisional line, with the Highlanders on the other side of the Ardres. Marfaux and Cuitron lay before them, but neither could be quite reached, though again and again the assailants were on the very edge of the villages. Once some of the men of the 2/4th Hampshires from the supporting brigade actually penetrated the village, but they were seen no more. The 2/4th West Ridings, south of the village, were also held up. Meanwhile the 5th West Ridings attempted to work around Marfaux from the north, through the wood of Petit Camp. All attempts to debouch from the wood were vain, however, and again the attack was brought to nought, home ground had been gained during the day, but both main efforts had failed, and all three brigades of the Sixty-second Division had been badly mauled. With no British reserves behind, General Braithwaite must have been sorely exercised in his mind that night.

On July 21 the attack eased down on the left, but on the right the 187th Brigade deployed and attacked the Bouilly Ridge. The 9th Durham Pioneers made a very fine advance, as did the 2/4th York and Lancasters, and some valuable ground was taken, but none of the villages. The attackers were encouraged, however, by learning from prisoners that the Germans had endured heavy losses, and had been compelled to demand reinforcements.

On July 22 the situation began to clear a little as Burnett’s 106th Brigade, represented mainly by the 5th West Ridings, attacked the wood of Petit Camp, an ominous grove, already littered with British dead. So deliberate was their advance, in consequence of the difficult ground to be searched, that the barrage was at the rate of 100 yards in ten minutes. The place was one long succession of gun posts “en echelon,” which were so concealed that they had no field of fire, and were the more deadly on that account as they fired by sound out of the bushes, and could not possibly be seen until one walked up to them. None the less the Yorkshiremen, helped by a wing of the 5th Devons, fought their way through this dreadful wood, dropping small posts as they went. Two hundred prisoners and 41 machine-guns remained in their hands, with 700 yards of new ground. The German losses were heavy but so were the British, Captain Cockhill's company of the West Ridings emerging with two officers and six men able to report for duty. It was a fine operation, well conceived and well carried through. The Germans fought with great tenacity all day.

On July 23 the south-western corner of the Petit Camp Wood, which was still in German hands, was cleared by the 6th West Ridings. The main attack, however, on Marfaux and Cuitron was carried out by the Durhams and the New Zealand Cyclist Battalion with magnificent success. Marfaux fell to the New Zealanders. The stormers broke through both villages and made their line 400 yards beyond. Two French tanks did good service in this assault. Two hundred prisoners and eight French 75's, taken previously by the Germans, were among the trophies of this fine advance. The Seventy-seventh French Division had attacked upon the right with equal success.

Up to this period the Highlanders of the Fifty-first Division had been striving hard on the southern side of the Ardres, with a task which was not less difficult than that of their English comrades on the north.

On July 20 they found the enemy opposite to them in great strength, as was shown by the fact that prisoners from three divisions, the Twenty-second (Saxe-Meiningen), the Hundred and third (Hessian), and the Hundred and twenty-third (Saxon) were taken that day. The great straggling wood of Courton, with a fringe of farms, mills, and other buildings, formed a strong advanced position. The Fifty-first Division has gained so splendid a record in the war that advantage may be taken of this action to give in fuller detail its glorious units. The attack that morning was carried out by the 154th Brigade, consisting of the 4th Seaforths, 4th Gordons, and 7th Argyll and Sutherlands, on the right flank. On the left was the 153rd Brigade, consisting of the 6th and 7th Black Watch and 7th Gordons. In reserve was the 152nd Brigade, 5th and 6th Seaforths and 6th Gordons, with the 8th Royal Scots as pioneer battalion. The attack was supported by French artillery and also by the guns of the 255th and 256th Brigades R.F.A.

The advance was a most arduous one, especially after the first victorious rush when the troops found themselves involved in the thick brushwood which prevented co-operation to such an extent that the two brigades were entirely separated, but each struggled on independently, small knots of determined men fighting their way forward as best they might. The progress was better upon the left than on the right, but the casualties were heavy, for the German machine-guns had survived the barrage and were very deadly. Colonel Bickmore of the 4th Gordons led a company of his battalion against a German post but was brought down by a bomb, and his men driven back. When the ground was recovered the Colonel had been carried off as a prisoner. The German infantry seem to have taken hardly any part in the battle, which was fought between the splendid Scottish infantry on one side, and the determined German machine-gunners on the other. The Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade found an even blacker watch fighting on their flank, for the Senegalese infantry of the French Ninth Division went forward with them and did good work during he whole arduous day. So sweeping was the machine-gun fire that at many points it was found to be impossible even to creep forward through the two-foot corn.

By evening the attack had been definitely held, and the Highlanders were forced to be content with their initial gains, while the French on the left, who had been assaulting the hamlet of Paradis all day, were also stationary. At 6.30 a company of German infantry attacked the Argylls, but were driven back with heavy loss. So the long day ended, the troops being much exhausted. The capture of 8 officers and 360 men, with many machine-guns, was an inadequate return for such heroic exertions. All day the enemy had been withdrawing upon the Marne front, and the holding of his flanks was so vitally essential that he was prepared to make any sacrifice for the purpose.

The attack was continued next morning, the 152nd Brigade pushing forward into the front line, while the other depleted units supported it and guarded its flanks. Things went badly at the outset, for the line had been altered during the night and the barrage was miscalculated in consequence, so that it was no great help to the 6th Gordons in their advance. All day mixed fighting went on in the wood, and it was most difficult to determine the exact position of the various units, groups of men stalking the machine-guns as hunters might stalk tigers, the fight ending as often in the death of the hunter as of the tiger. Once again the evening of a bloody day found things very much as they had been in the morning. It cannot be denied that the German resistance was a very stern one.

After a pause of a day the Highland Division renewed its attack along a portion of its front, the main advance being carried out by the 152nd Brigade. Once more the deadly woods were penetrated, and once more there was a limited advance and considerable losses. On this occasion the barrage was more useful, though some French batteries on the left fell short and caused heavy casualties to a company of the 6th Gordons in their point of assembly. Such are the unavoidable chances of modern warfare. The 8th Royal Scots were thrown into the fight, and made a fine advance. Altogether there were signs this day of a weakening on the German front, which was confirmed in the patrol fighting of the next few days. There were many casualties in the 152nd Brigade, including Major Moir, CO. of the 5th Seaforths, who was badly wounded.

Major operations were in abeyance until July 27, when severe fighting broke out once again upon the south side of the Ardres. The 187th Brigade had been sent across by General Braithwaite, and it now took its place in General Carter-Campbell’s sector, with the 152nd on its right and the 153rd on its left, with the intention of making a vigorous attack upon the German line on this front. Tanks had been allotted, but rain had set in, the ground was marshy, and the monsters immovable. All immediate objectives were easily taken. The villages of Espilly and Nappes had both been occupied. So soft did the front appear that the Australian horsemen were pushed forward, while the troops north of the river moved on in sympathy. The final line was north-west of Chaumuzy. Here, on July 28, a very stiff German resistance was encountered, and Chambrecy on the left flank represented the No Man’s Land between the armies.

The Montagne de Bligny position, where the Nineteenth Division had distinguished itself in June, now lay immediately ahead, and the 8th West Yorkshires (Leeds Rifles) were ordered to attack it. They went forward so swiftly and with such spirit that they were into and over the position before the Germans realised what had happened. It was a notable performance, for the place was of great strength and strategic significance. The French Government bestowed a special mark of honour upon the 8th West Yorks for this deed, and it is certainly a singular coincidence that, of the few British battalions thus honoured, two should have won it at the same spot. There was no artillery support, and the casualties were heavy, but Yorkshire won home in spite of it. The enemy tried to regain it until the high corn was full of his dead, but it was all in vain. This day, with the co-operation of the French, Bligny village was also taken. No further ground was gained on July 29, as a new German division, the Two hundred and fortieth, had come into line with orders to hold on at all costs. The fighting was very severe at the junction between the French and British, where the liaison was so close between the two nations that it is on record that, when at a critical moment the French ran out of cartridges, the rifles and ammunition of the British casualties were handed over to them and saved the situation. Shortly afterwards the two British divisions were drawn from the line and returned to their own army. In a generous appreciation of their services General Berthelot, after enumerating their captures, said:

"Thanks to the heroic courage and proverbial tenacity of the British, the continued efforts of this brave Army Corps have not been in vain....You have added a glorious page to your history. Marfaux, Chaumuzy, Montague de Bligny — all those famous names will be written in letters of gold in the annals of your regiments." The French official bulletins offered also a very special tribute of praise to the 6th Black Watch, a Perthshire battalion, which, under Colonel Tarleton, had done particularly fine work during the long and arduous service of the Fifty-first Division.

Whilst the Twenty-second British Corps had, as described, distinguished itself greatly in the valley of the Ardres on the east of the German salient, the Fifteenth Scottish Division under General H. L. Heed, V.C., had been detailed to aid the French line in its advance on Buzancy on the western German flank. This veteran division was thrown into the fight on July 28, and made its mark at once upon the formidable German position which faced it. It had relieved the First American Division which was much worn by its long and splendid service in General Mangin's Tenth Army. The Americans left their guns in the line to cover the advance, so that, for the first time in history, British, Americans, and French were all engaged as allies upon the same battleground The village was very strongly held, and the high ground to the east of it was bristling with machine-guns, but the Scots infantry would take no denial. The 44th Brigade (Thomson) had attacked the village itself, the 5th Gordons and 8th Seaforths leading the assault. The latter battalion lost its commander, Colonel Smith, but was the first into the objective, while the Gordons held and consolidated the ground to the north of it. Farther north still the 45th Brigade had advanced its whole line, while at the south flank of the attack the 91st French Infantry was clearing the woods in front of it. The machine-gun fire at this point was very heavy, however, and the French, after a gallant struggle, were forced back to their original line, with the result that the right of the attack was in the air. The Seaforths had carried the Château of Buzancy as well as the village, and the orders were at all costs to hold on to these important points; so part of the 4/5th Black Watch was pushed forward to strengthen the defenders, who were hard pressed and heavily gassed. There was desperate fighting all round the village, which was declared by a veteran French flammenwerfer section attached to the Highlanders to be the most bloody work seen by them in the war. With their flank naked the remains of the brave battalions were exposed about six o’clock in the evening to an overpowering German counter-attack which rolled up from the south-east and drove them, still fighting tooth and claw, through the village, from which six German officers and 200 men were brought as prisoners. Thus by seven in the evening the 44th Brigade, after their day of most heroic effort, were back on their original line. It was a sad end to a splendid deed of arms, but there was no disposition to blame the Eighty-seventh French Division on the right, who were already worn with much fighting, and who were faced with very difficult country. Many of the Highlanders wept bitter tears of rage and mortification when they found that the deaths of so many of their comrades had not bought the village for which they gave their blood so willingly.

Orders were now received from the French Corps that the Scots Fifteenth Division should change place with its neighbour, the Eighty-seventh French Division, a difficult operation which was successfully accomplished, the artillery in each case being left in position. The new operation was to consist of an attack upon Hartennes Forest, the Twelfth French Division working round the south and the Fifteenth Scots Division round the north end of it, both meeting to the east, with Droisy as an ultimate objective. The attacking troops were concealed so far as possible in the cornfields on July 31, and went forward about eight o’clock in the morning of August 1, after the completion of a successful French advance further down the line. The brunt of this new advance was borne by the 6th Camerons and 13th Royal Scots of the 45th Brigade (Orr-Ewing), together with the 10th Scots Rifles and 7/8th Scottish Borderers of the 46th Brigade (Fortune). The left of the line made fine progress and reached the east side of the Soissons Road, but the 45th Brigade on the right was held up by terrible machine-gun fire, part of which came from several derelict French tanks. These were dealt with and blown to pieces by trench mortars. The advance was then resumed, the French Twelfth Division coming forward also in the south. About midday the Camerons had reached their mark but were out of touch with the

Borderers on their right, so that they were compelled to form a defensive flank from the cemetery to the road. The Germans lay in a series of wooded hills upon the right, and though these were smothered with shells the brave machine-gunners still clung to their position. So heavy was their fire that the right flank could get no farther, and it was determined to hold on to the ground gained. During the night the 44th Brigade, in spite of its heavy losses three days before, took the place of the 46th.

It was evident on the morning of August 2 that the stern combat of the previous day had not been without its effect. The enemy was retreating all along the line, and his positions were being rapidly evacuated. The Twelfth French Division on the right was able to advance almost without opposition past the Hartennes Wood. There followed an exhilarating pursuit up to the banks of the Crise River. The 9th Gordon Pioneer Battalion pushed in with great dash, and was in Villeblain before evening, while the French Eighty-seventh Division reached the river east of Buzancy. The Fifteenth Division was then relieved by the Seventeenth French Division, and was restored to the First British Army amid a shower of congratulatory messages from French Generals and comrades. So deep was the feeling among the French over the magnificent fighting and heavy losses of the Scots Division that a monument was at once raised in their honour in front of the old German position with the inscription: *“Ici fleurira toujours le glorieux Chardon d’Écosse parmi les Roses de France.”* Many brave Scots will lie for ever round this monument. Three splendid battalion commanders, Smith of the Gordons, Turner of the Royal Scots, and Kennedy of the Seaforths, were slain, while Hart of the Scots Borderers and Macleod of the Camerons were incapacitated — five Colonels out of ten battalions. The sufferings from gas were very severe, and all the Brigade Headquarters were severely affected, General Thomson and his staff holding on for the duration of the battle, but collapsing on the evening of August 2.

Whilst the Fifteenth Division had been performing this notable service the Thirty-fourth British Division (Nicholson) had also been incorporated for the moment into Mangin’s Fifteenth Army, and was heavily engaged in the battle line opposite Grand Rozoy, rather south of the point where the Scots were fighting.

So great had been the losses of this splendid Tyneside division in the terrible contests of the Somme and of Flanders that it was now entirely reconstituted with nothing of its previous personnel save its veteran commander and a handful of war-worn officers. The infantry were mostly Territorials from the Palestine campaign. On July 18 the Thirty-fourth became part of the Tenth French Army near Senlis. On the 22nd it was incorporated into General Penet's Thirtieth Corps, and relieved the French Thirty-eighth Division in the battle zone, on a line parallel to the Château-Thierry — Soissons Road, having its right just west of Coutremain and its left in Parcy Tigny. Woodcock's 101st Brigade was on the right, Williams' 102nd on the left, while Chaplin's 103rd Brigade was in support. French divisions, the Nineteenth and the Fifty-eighth, were on either side, so that Nicholson's men formed a curious isolated little bit of fighting England.

At 6 a.m. on the morning of July 25 the whole line in this section attacked with the intention of carrying the important road already mentioned from Château-Thierry to Soissons. It was a hard and disappointing day, for the French divisions on either side were held by the heavy fire from the Bois de Plessier and Tigny. The 101st Brigade was not more successful, but the 102nd on the left got forward nearly a mile, and then lay with its left flank thrown back to connect up with its French neighbours. Considering that it was the first experience which these men had had of German artillery and machine-guns, General Nicholson was well satisfied with his new material.

On July 27 the division was relieved by the extension of the flanks of its two neighbours, but it was at once fitted into the line again, filling a battle-front of 1500 yards, with its right east of Oulchy-le-Château. It was just in time for an attack which opened at 5 a.m. on July 29, and it was only by great exertions that the guns were registered and the infantry in their places. The objective was a horse-shoe ridge from Beugneux in the east to Grand Rozoy in the west. The 103rd Brigade was on the right, the 101st upon the left.

The barrage was not as deadly as usual on account of the pressure of time which had hampered the preparation and registration. The slopes were long and open, swept by the deadly machine-guns. It was all odds against the attack. The 103rd Brigade got to the outskirts of Beugneux, but was held up by the murderous fire from an adjacent mill. The 101st surmounted the ridge between Grand Rozoy and Beugneux, but could get no farther, for it was all open ground to the north.

In the early afternoon the 102nd Brigade advanced from the wood in which it lay with the intention of helping the 101st to storm Beugneux, but as it came forward it met the 101st falling back before a strong counter-attack. This movement was checked by the new-comers and the line was sustained upon the ridge.

The net result of an arduous day was that the division was still short of the coveted road, but that it had won about 2000 yards of ground, including a good position for future operations. Casualties were heavy, and included Colonel Jourdain of the 2nd North Lancashires as well as Captain Weeks, CO. of the 4th Royal Sussex. The French had got Grand Rozoy upon the left flank, and though they were driven out of it again they won their way back in the early morning of July 30. All this day and the next the troops prepared for a new effort, lying under heavy shell-fire which, among other casualties, killed Colonel Dooner, the chief staff officer of the division.

On August 1 the attack was renewed under a very heavy and efficient barrage, which helped the infantry so much that within two hours all objectives had been won. Beugneux fell after the hill which commanded it had been stormed by the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in a very gallant advance. Colonel Barbow fell while leading his men to victory. On the left the French Twenty-fifth Division had been held up by the deadly fire from a knoll, but Major Atkinson of the 2nd North Lancashires realised the situation and diverted his reserve company to storm the obstacle, enabling the French right to get forward. It was planned that two British battalions should push on beyond their objectives in order to cover the flanks of a further French advance. One of these, the 4th Cheshires, carried out its part to perfection in spite of heavy losses, which included Colonel Swindells, its commander. The 1st Herefords, however, whose rôle was to cover the left of the Sixty-eighth French Division, was unable to do so, as that division was itself held up. That night the enemy was in full retreat all along this line, and falling back upon the River Vesle. On August 3 the Thirty-fourth Division was returned to the area of the Second British Army, having done a fine spell of service which brought the warmest compliments from the French commanders, not only to the infantry, but to General Walthall’s guns (152nd and 160th Brigades) as well as Colonel Dobson’s 207th, 208th, and 209th Field Companies.

The northward advance of the French, Americans, and British was slow up to the end of July, but became accelerated in the first week of August, Soissons falling to the French on August 2, and the Germans being driven to the line of the Vesle, when they held on very tenaciously for a time, their rearguards showing their usual high soldierly qualities. The Americans had a particularly hard struggle, being faced by some of the elite of the German Army, including the 4th Prussian Guards, but winning their way steadily forward in spite of many strong counter-attacks. The situation upon the Vesle and the Aisne seemed for the moment to have reached an equilibrium, when Marshal Foch called Marshal Haig to his assistance and a new attack was launched in which British troops were once more employed on the grand scale. Their great march had started which was to end only at the bank of the Rhine.

Before embarking upon this narrative, it would be well to prevent the necessity of interrupting it by casting a glance at those general events connected with the world war which occurred during this period, which reacted upon the Western front. It has already been shortly stated that the Austrian Army had been held in their attempt to cross the Piave in mid June, and by the end of the month had been driven over the river by the Italians, aided by a strong British and French contingent. The final losses of the Austrians in this heavy defeat were not less than 20,000 prisoners with many guns. From this time until the final Austrian débâcle there was no severe fighting upon this front. In the Salonican campaign the Greek Army was becoming more and more a factor to be reckoned with, and the deposition of the treacherous Constantine, with the return to power of Venizelos, consolidated the position of the Allies. There was no decided movement, however, upon this front until later in the year. In Palestine and in Mesopotamia the British forces were also quiescent, Allenby covering the northern approaches of Jerusalem, and preparing for his last splendid and annihilating advance, while Marshall remained in a similar position to the north of Bagdad. A small and very spirited expedition sent out by the latter will no doubt have a history of its own, for it was adventurous to a degree which was almost quixotic, and yet justified itself by its results. This was the advance of a handful of men over 700 miles of desert separating the Bagdad front from the Caspian. Arriving at the town of Baku they kept the German-Turks out of that town for six weeks at a time when oil supplies were a most pressing problem for them, and so influenced the course of the war. Finally they withdrew in safety after a most remarkable exploit, hardly realised amid the clash of greater forces. Russia still remained in its distracted condition, hag-ridden by forces which at their worst surpassed all the classical excesses of the French Revolution. Regeneration began to appear out of chaos, however, though the end was still afar. Allied forces in Siberia and on the Murman Coast formed nuclei upon which the supporters of civilisation could rally. On the water the atrocities of the German submarines and their sinking of hospital ships, accompanied in several cases by the drowning of the sick and wounded men, were the outstanding feature. In the main, therefore, it can be said that there was a hush upon the periphery, while in the centre the Allies with concentrated energy hurled themselves upon their enemy with the fixed determination to have done with the thing for ever, fighting without a break until either they could fight no more or the German menace had passed from the world which it had overshadowed so long. Nowhere was there a thought of compromise. There could be no justice unless it were thorough justice. The criminal methods by which the war had been waged forbade every thought of an incomplete settlement. With stern and deliberate determination the French and British turned to their task, strengthened by the knowledge that the vanguard of America was already in the field, weak as yet in numbers, but the head of that long column which extended across the Atlantic and was based upon the virile nation of a hundred million souls beyond.

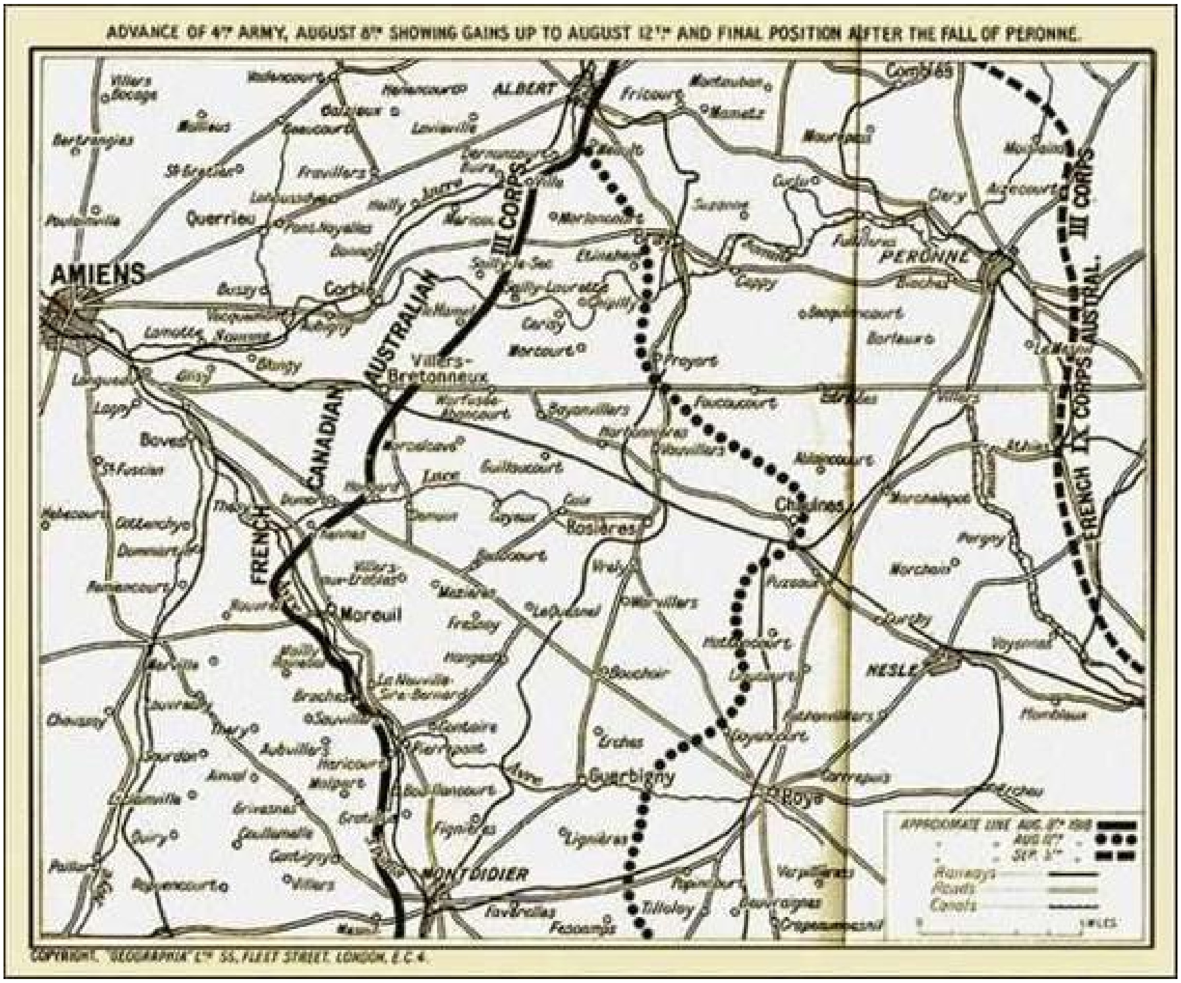
ADVANCE OF 4TH ARMY, AUGUST 8TH SHOWING GAINS UP TO AUGUST 12TH AND FINAL POSITION AFTER THE FALL OF PERONNE.
AMIENS
ALBERT
PERONNE
NESLE
MONTDIDIER
Combles
Querrieu
Corbie
Boves
Villers-Bretonneux
Moreuil
Rosières
Chaulnes
Roye
Guerbigny
FRENCH
CANADIAN
AUSTRALIAN
III CORPS
FRENCH IX CORPS
AUSTRAL.
III CORPS
APPROXIMATE LINE AUG. 8TH 1918
AUG. 12TH
SEP. 3RD
Railways
Roads
Canals
MILES
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Advance of Fourth Army, August 8, showing Gains up to August 12, and Final Position after the Fall of Peronne

II. ATTACK OF RAWLINSON’S FOURTH ARMY
The Battle of Amiens, August 8–22

Great British victory — Advance of the Canadians — Of the Australians — Of the Third Corps — Hard struggle at Chipilly — American assistance — Continuance of the operations — Great importance of the battle

IN the tremendous and decisive operations which we are now about to examine, it is very necessary to have some fixed scheme in the method of description s lest the reader be inextricably lost in the long line of advancing corps and armies. A chapter will be devoted, therefore, to the attack made by Rawlinson’s Fourth Army whilst it was operating alone from August 8 to August 22. At that date Byng’s Third Army joined in the fray, and subsequently, on August 28, Horne’s First Army came into action. For the present, however, we can devote ourselves whole-heartedly to the record of Rawlinson’s Army, all the rest being inactive. When the others come in, that is, after August 22, a definite system of narrative will be adopted.

Before describing the great battle some reference should be made to the action of Le Hamel fought on July 4, noticeable as having been the first Allied offensive since the early spring. Its complete success, after the long series of troubles which had plunged all friends of freedom into gloom, made it more important than the numbers engaged or the gain of ground would indicate. It was carried out by the Australian Corps, acting as part of the Fourth Army, and is noticeable because a unit from the Thirty-third American Division took part in the operations. Le Hamel was taken and the Vaire Wood to the immediate south of the Somme. The gain of ground was about a mile in depth on a front of several miles, and the advance was so swift that a considerable number of prisoners, 1500 in all, were taken, many of them still encumbered by their gas-masks. Some sixty tanks took part in the advance, and did splendid work in rolling out the machine-gun nests of the Germans. Si John Monash has attributed some of the splendid efficiency of the Australian arrangements and their cunning in the mutual support of guns, tanks, and infantry, so often to be shown in the next four months, to the experience gained in this small battle.

The front of the new and most important attack, which began in the early morning of August 8, was fifteen miles in length, and extended from near Morlancourt in the north to Braches upon the Avre River to the south. The right of the attack from Hangard onwards was formed by General Debeney’s First French Army, while General Rawlinson’s Fourth Army formed the left, the British position being roughly three-fourths of the whole. The entire battle was under the command of Marshal Haig.

The preparations had been made with the skill which the British Command has so often shown in such operations, so that the Germans were swept off their feet by an attack which came upon them as a complete surprise. It was half-past four on a misty morning when the enemy’s advanced line heard the sudden crash of the gun-fire, and a moment later saw the monstrous forms of the tanks looming up through the grey light of dawn. Behind the tanks and almost in touch of them came the grim war-worn infantry. Everything went down before that united rush. The battle was won as soon as begun. The only question was how great the success would be.

Taking a bird’s-eye view of the advance, before examining the operations more closely, one may say that the Canadian Corps, now under a Canadian commander, General Currie, was on the extreme right of the British fine, in touch with the French. Next to them, in the Morlancourt district, where they had never ceased for the last four months to improve their position and to elbow the invaders away from Amiens, were the indomitable and tireless Australians under General Monash. On their left, just south of Albert, was Butler’s Third Corps, burning to avenge itself for the hustling which it had endured during that perilous and heroic week in March. These were the three units concerned in the new advance.

The opening barrage, though only a few minutes in length, was of a shattering severity, and was directed against very different defences from those which had defied the Army two years before upon the Somme. Everything flattened out before it, and even the German guns seemed to have been overwhelmed, for their reply was slow and ineffective. Only the machine-guns remained noxious, but the tanks rolled them down. Nowhere at first was there any check or delay. The French on the right of the line had done equally well, and by midday were storming forward upon the north bank of the Avre, their victory being the more difficult and honourable because the river prevented the use of tanks at the first attack.

The Canadians were on the top of their form that day, and their magnificent condition gave promise of the splendid work which they were to do from that hour until almost the last day of the war. They were probably the most powerful and efficient corps at that moment in the whole Army, for they had lain in front of Lens with few losses, while nearly every other corps had been desperately engaged and sustained heavy casualties, hastily made good by recruits. They had also kept their brigades up to a four battalion standard, and their divisions had that advantage of permanence denied to all British corps. When to these favouring points are added the great hardihood and valour of the men, proved in so many battles, it is probable that in the whole world no finer body could on that day have been let loose behind a barrage. They were weary from long marches before the battle began, but none the less their great spirit rose high above all physical weakness as they pushed forward against the German line.

They were faced at the outset by a problem which might well have taxed the brains of any staff and the valour of any soldiers. This was the crossing of the River Luce, which was covered upon the farther bank by several scattered woods, ideal haunts of machine-guns. So difficult was this operation that the French to the south had to pause for an hour after the capture of the front German line, to give time for it to be carried out. At the end of that period the very complex operation had been carried through, and the whole Allied front was ready to advance. The Canadians had three divisions in the line, the Third (Lipsett) next to the French, the First (Macdonell) in the middle, and the Second (Benstall) on the left. The 2nd and 3rd British Cavalry Brigades with the Fourth Canadian Infantry Division (Watson) were in reserve. There was also a mobile force, called the Canadian Independent Force, which was kept ready to take advantage of any opening. This consisted of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Motor Machine-gun Brigades, with the Corps Cyclists, and some movable trench mortars on lorries.

The width of the Canadian attack was some 5000 yards from the Amiens — Roye Road to the Villers-Bretonneux Railway. Once across the river the whole line came away with a grand rush and every objective was soon attained, each division sweeping forward without a check. The prisoners reported that an attack had indeed been expected, but not so soon, and we can readily believe that the German Army, which had been so repeatedly assured that the British were finally dead and out of the war, must have been greatly amazed by this vigorous resurrection. By 10.40, Caix, which is a good five miles to the eastward, was reported by contact aeroplanes to be surrounded by tanks. The Cavalry and the Independent Force were both pushing to the front, and the latter deviated to the right in order to help the French who were temporarily in difficulties near Mezières. In the afternoon the Cavalry Division had passed through the victorious and cheering lines of the Second Canadians, and were carrying out a number of spirited enterprises upon the German supporting lines. About the same time the Fourth Canadian Infantry Division pushed forward and was reported to the east of Beaufort and Cayeux. By evening all along the line the full objectives had been reached save at one point near Le Quesnel. In their splendid day’s work men of the Dominion had taken some 5000 prisoners and great quantities of booty. Many of the prisoners and guns were taken by the cavalry, who had their best day in the war. “The best hunt we ever had, forty minutes and a kill in the open,” was the characteristic description of one hard-riding dragoon.

We shall now turn to the advance of Monash’s Australians in the centre of the British line. Fate owed Monash a great victory in this sector, for, during months of quiet but ceaseless work, he had been improving his position as the keen runner ensures his foothold and crouches his body while he awaits the crack of the pistol.

For once Fate paid its debts, and with such a corps under his hand it would have been strange had it not been so. All those advantages already described in the case of the Canadians applied equally to the Australians, and if the former outlasted the others, it must be remembered that the Australians had been in the line for four months before the fighting began — months which included the severe action of Villers-Bretonneux. They were a grand corps, and they did grand work for the Empire — work which we can never forget so long as our common history endures.

The order of battle of the Australian Corps on August 8 was that the Second Division (Smyth) was on the right in touch with the Canadians, while the Third Division (Gillibrand) was on the left in touch with the Fifty-eighth British Division, the Somme being the dividing line between them. Behind the Second Australians was the Fifth (Hobbs), and behind; the Third the Fourth (Maclagan), with orders in each case to leapfrog over their leaders when the first objectives were carried. The First Division (Glasgow) was in the immediate rear. Thus at least 50,000 glorious infantry marched to battle under the Southern Cross Union Jack upon this most historic day — a day which, as Ludendorfi has since confessed, gave the first fatal shock to the military power of Germany.

All depended upon surprise, and the crouching troops waited most impatiently for the zero hour, expecting every instant to hear the crash of the enemy's guns and the whine of the shrapnel above the assembly trenches. Every precaution had been taken the day before, the roads had been deserted by all traffic, and aeroplanes had flown low during the night, so that their droning might cover the noise of the assembling tanks. Some misgiving was caused by the fact that a sergeant who knew all about it had been captured several days before. By a curious chance the minutes of his cross-examination by the German intelligence officer were captured during the battle. He had faced his ordeal like a Spartan, and had said no word. It is not often that the success of a world-shaking battle depends upon the nerve and the tongue of a single soldier.

Zero hour arrived without a sign, and in an instant barrage tanks, and infantry all burst forth together, though the morning mist was so thick that one could only see twenty or thirty yards. Everywhere the enemy front posts went down with hardly a struggle. It was an absolute surprise. Now and then, as the long, loose lines of men pushed through the mist, there would come the flash of a field-piece, or the sudden burst of a machine-gun from their front; but in an instant, with the coolness born of long practice, the men would run crouching forward, and then quickly-close in from every side, shooting or bayoneting the gun crew. Everything went splendidly from the first, and the tanks did excellent service, especially in the capture of Warfusee.

The task of the two relieving divisions, the Fourth on the left and the Fifth on the right, was rather more difficult, as the Germans had begun to rally and the fog to lift. The Fourth Australians on the south bank of the Somme were especially troubled, as it soon became evident that the British attack on the north bank had been held up, with the result that the German guns on Chipilly Spur were all free to fire across from their high position upon the Australians in the plain to the south. Tank after tank and gun after gun were knocked out by direct hits, but the infantry was not to be stopped and continued to skirmish forward as best they might under so deadly a fire, finishing by the capture of Cerisy and of Morcourt. The Fifth Division on the right, with the 8th and 15th Brigades in front, made an equally fine advance, covering a good stretch of ground.

Having considered the Canadians and the Australians, we turn now to the Third Corps on the north of the line. They were extended from Morlancourt to the north bank of the Somme, which is a broad canalised river over all this portion of its course. On the right was the Fifty-eighth London Division (Ramsay), with Lee’s Eighteenth Division to the north of it, extending close to the Ancre, where Higginson’s Twelfth Division lay astride of that marshy stream. North of this again was the Forty-seventh Division (Gorringe), together with a brigade of the Thirty-third American Division. Two days before the great advance, on August 6, the Twenty-seventh Würtemburg Division had made a sudden strong local attack astride of the Bray — Corbie Road, and had driven in the Eighteenth Divisional front, taking some hundreds of prisoners, though the British counter-attack regained most of the lost ground on the same and the following days. This unexpected episode somewhat deranged the details of the great attack, but the Eighteenth played its part manfully none the less, substituting the 36th Brigade of the Twelfth Division for the 54th Brigade, which had been considerably knocked about. None of the British prisoners taken seem to have given away the news of the coming advance, but it is probable that the sudden attack of the Würtemburgers showed that it was suspected, and was intended to anticipate and to derange it.

In the first phase of the attack the little village of Sailly-Laurette on the north bank of the Somme was carried by assault by the 2/10th Londons. At the same moment the 174th Brigade attacked Malard Wood to the left of the village. There was a difficulty in mopping up the wood, for small German posts held on with great tenacity, but by 9 o’clock the position was cleared. The 173rd Brigade now went forward upon the really terrible task of getting up the slopes of Chipilly Hill under the German fire. The present chronicler has looked down upon the line of advance from the position of the German machine-guns and can testify that the affair was indeed as arduous as could be imagined. The village of Chipilly was not cleared, and the attack, after several very-gallant attempts, was at a stand. Meantime the 53rd Brigade on the left had got about half-way to its objective and held the ground gained, but could get no farther in face of the withering fire. Farther north, however, the Twelfth Division, moving forward upon the northern slopes of the

Ancre, had gained its full objectives, the idea being that a similar advance to the south would pinch out the village of Morlancourt. There was a time in the attack when it appeared as if the hold-up of the Eighteenth Division would prevent Vincent's 35th Brigade, on the right of the Twelfth Division, from getting forward, but the situation was restored by a fine bit of work by the 1st Cambridgeshires, who, under Colonel Saint, renewed the attack in a most determined way and finally were left with only 200 men standing, but with 316 German prisoners as well as their objective. A wandering tank contributed greatly to this success.

The partial nature of the local victory was due not only to the excellent German dispositions and resistance, but to some want of liaison between tanks and infantry, as well as to the total disability of the flying service to furnish any reports before 12 o'clock. This want was partly made good by the excellent scouting of the Northumberland Hussars. The remainder of the day was spent in clearing the ground gained and holding a series of counter-attacks, one of which drove back an advanced line of the 53rd Brigade.

Summing up, then, the result of the first day's fighting, it may be briefly said that seven German Divisions had been cut to pieces, that 10,000 prisoners and 200 guns had been counted, and that an advance had been made which in the French sector reached Beaufort, and laid the British line well up to Caix, Framerville, and Chipilly. To those who associated those village names with the dark days when the Fifth Army, exhausted and decimated, was compelled to retreat through them, it was indeed an added joy that they should be the milestones of victory. The whole penetration, though not more than three miles north of the Somme, was seven or eight miles at the deepest point, which is the greatest ever yet attained on the first day of any Allied attack.

The battle was vigorously renewed on the morning of August 9, and once more the tide flowed eastwards, carrying the average depth of progress two or three miles farther. In the south the French directed their general advance rather to the right and reached Arvillers as their final point. Their take of prisoners had amounted altogether to 4000, and their depth of advance was over eight miles. To their north the Canadians had reached Rosières, and the Australians Rainecourt and Morcourt. To the north of the Somme the Third Corps had been temporarily hung up by the very vigorous German resistance in a strong position between Chipilly and Morlancourt. Before evening General Rawlinson was able to report the capture of a total for the two days of 17,000 prisoners and 250 guns.

To take the events of this second day of battle in closer detail, the Canadians resumed their attack at 10 a.m. with the same order of divisions in the line, but with their Fourth Division acting with the Independent Force upon the right, where in the early morning it captured Le Quesnel. There was heavy fighting all day along the Corps front, but the advance was pushed forward for another 2500 yards. Many villages were contained in this area, the Third Canadians on the right getting Folies and Bouchoir, the Second Canadians on the left Vrely, Rosières, and Meharicourt, while the First Canadians in the centre got Warvillers, Beaufort, and Rouvroy. The Germans had rushed up their anti-tank guns, and the casualties were heavy that day, especially near Le Quesnel, where many tanks were destroyed by direct hits from concealed batteries. To make a complete and connected narrative of the doings upon this front it may here be added that on August 10 the resistance thickened and the advance slowed. Le Quesnel was taken early by the Third Canadians, upon which the Thirty-second British Division passed through their ranks and carried the advance on to the outskirts of Parvillers and Damery. The Fourth Canadian Division in turn had very stubborn fighting and considerable losses, but it ended the day in possession of Fouquescourt, Maucourt, Chilly, and Hallu. At night, great fires reddening the whole eastern sky gave promise of a further German retreat. On August it was clear, however, that no further important advance could be made without fresh preparation, and orders were given for consolidation. A French attack on the right on Bois en Z had no success, nor was the Thirty-second Division able to take Damery. Instead of advance it was rather a day of strong counter-attacks, against which the attenuated lines, after three days of battle, were hard put to it to hold their own, a flank fire from Lihons helping the German attack at Hallu and Chilly. The line was in the main held, however, and a total take of 8000 prisoners was in the Canadian cages that evening, while 167 guns had been taken by the one Corps. We shall now turn back and follow the fortunes of the Australians on the second and third days of the battle.

Upon August 9 General Monash’s Corps still carried forward its victorious career, though a halt was called for the Fourth Division on the left which awaited developments upon the north bank of the river. On the right the Second Division passed through the Fifth in order to continue the advance, while the First Division thrust itself in upon the right flank, next to the Canadians. Progress was slower everywhere, but none the less it was substantial, Framerville being taken by the 7th Brigade. There was a misunderstanding about time, with the result that the First Division advanced some hours before their Canadian neighbours, with tragic consequences to their own right flank, formed by the 2nd Brigade. The advance was over open country, with the Lihons ridge and village in front, from which heavy gun-fire played upon the attack and caused considerable losses, while on the right a deadly fire was maintained from Rosières Station. So heavy were the casualties in the First and Second Divisions that reinforcements had to be sent up when the advance was resumed. In the evening some relief was obtained, for the region of the old French trenches was reached and the men were at last able to get some cover. Many of the Australians who fought through this long hot day had marched for five hours in order to reach the field of battle, so that it was a remarkable test of endurance Finally Crepy and Crepy Wood were taken and held against three severe counter-attacks which broke upon them next day. On August Lihons Ridge fell and the village was occupied by the 2nd Brigade, which again had to face determined attacks. The Germans fully appreciated the vital worth of this position, which commanded the plain both to west and east, so they strained every nerve first to hold and afterwards to recover it, but it was in stronger hands than theirs. The 3rd Brigade on the left of Lihons was particularly heavily attacked but threw back its assailants in confusion. Every yard gained was held. A final very serious German counter-attack in successive waves, with 400 in a wave, drove down from Lihu Wood in the north-east and actually penetrated the front Australian lines, but the 8th Battalion in support threw itself into the fight and soon the position had been completely restored.

In the meantime, the Fourth Australian Division had been released by the fact that the remains of the Fifty-eighth Division and the 131st American Infantry Regiment had, as will be told, cleared the Chipilly Ridge north of the river. Part of the Fourth Australians had crossed the river, fraternising greatly with the Americans, so that the officers on both sides had some trouble in sorting out their men — the more so as the comradeship had often taken the form of an exchange of hats and coats. On the night of August 10 the whole of the Fourth Australians had crossed to the north bank of the Somme near Sailly-le-Sec, and their commander, General

Maclagan, had taken under him the Americans and also the 173rd and 174th Brigades of the British Fifty-eighth Division, much the worse for wear.

The Third Australian Division had taken the place south of the Somme vacated by their fellow-countrymen, and on the morning of August they continued the attack in the direction of Proyart, that village being eventually carried by the 10th Brigade. It is needless to say that books might, and probably will, be written as to individual adventures and deeds of heroism, which in their aggregate supplied the driving force which carried the line ever more and more to the eastward. In giving a condensed account of the effects one can hardly get down to the more human story of the causes. Yet few greater deeds of valour can have been anywhere done than that of Sergeant Statton of the 40th Battalion, who in this engagement of Proyart seeing a neighbouring battalion, the 37th, held up by a nest of machine-guns, ran across to their aid, shot all the gunners at one gun, captured three guns single-handed, and chased the crews from two others. Many a battalion has spent itself in doing less.

We shall now turn to the British Third Corps on the north of the Somme and so complete the account of the attack of the Fourth Army. It will be remembered that on the evening of August 8 they had made headway along the whole line but had been held up on the Chipilly Spur.

The attack upon Chipilly was renewed at 4.15 next afternoon, the delay being caused by the need of assembling the reserves, which consisted of the remainder of the Fifty-eighth Division and of the 131st Regiment of the Thirty-third Division (Bell) of he United States Army. The assault was made by the 6th and 2/10th London Battalions, but they were opportunely and very efficiently aided by two companies of the Americans, who had lost their direction for the main attack planned to the north, but who seemed indifferent which fight they were in so long as they were fighting. There was a check at the outset, but the attack, while demonstrating from the: west, really materialised from the north, and both village and ridge were captured with a number of prisoners. This was a very important little victory from the point of view of the Australians to the south who had been commanded by the German guns from this elevated position.

The main attack was north of the Chipilly Spur, and was planned to gain Cressaire Wood and a line across from the Somme to the Ancre corresponding with such an advance. The assault was made by two weak brigades of the Fifty-eighth Londoners upon the right, the 131st American

Regiment in the centre, and the remains of the Fifty-eighth upon the left. Farther north the Twelfth Division, with the 37th Brigade in front, carried on the line. Both Londoners and Americans advanced with equal valour, and after a stiff fight the main portion of the objectives was won, though it took three hours of hard work to win them. Much credit was due to all, but most to the American infantry, who had their first experience of modern fighting and who were naturally embarrassed by the disappearance of two of their companies which had drifted into the Chipilly affair. For a time there was a gap between divisions, but before evening the Twelfth extended to the right and all was well. The correction was very necessary, for at 3 a.m. on August 10 a German counter-attack broke without effect upon this very point of junction. The Twelfth Division had had a very good day on August 9, Incledon-Webber's 37th Brigade especially distinguishing itself. The 6th Buffs and 6th West Kents had heavy losses, but took 350 prisoners, two field-guns, and a number of machine-guns. Two of these were taken single-handed by Sergeant Harris of the West Kents, who met his death in attacking a third. The Victoria Cross was his posthumous reward.

On August 10 the Third Corps front was pushed forward in the morning by a system of infiltration, British and American patrols scouting and fighting through the eastern portion of Cressaire Wood. Before evening, without any serious fighting, they reached the old French Amiens defence line, which was the original full objective upon this front. Having entirely accomplished his arduous task General Butler, who had been handicapped by an illness which he disregarded while his work called for his presence, took a short spell of rest, his place being taken by General Godley. The Forty-seventh Division (Gorringe) came across to the right wing, relieving the Eighteenth Division, while shortly after the Thirty-third American Division, to the great regret of their British comrades, entrained for the south to join the main American army, but not before their 133rd Regiment, acting with the 13th Australian Brigade, had taken Etinehem Spur, to the north of the River Somme. The action now died down in this quarter. In the three days of fighting General Butler's Corps had taken 90 guns and 3000 prisoners, while, in the words of General Rawlinson, "in protecting the left flank of the Fourth Army they were given a difficult task which was carried out with a determination and gallantry beyond all praise " The losses had been 6500, 500 of which were from the American Regiment. The general result of the battle by the night of August was that the French had taken

8000 and the British 21,000 prisoners with 400 guns, so that it was already clear that the greatest victory which the British Army had yet won was that which initiated the final advance. In spite of all this success it is to be borne in mind, however, that the Allies had only reached the old German front line trenches of 1916, which were now a valuable barrier for the rear of the retreating army. There was a pause now while the Fourth Army was waiting for their comrades of the Third Army on the left to develop their extension of the attack. Meanwhile many small actions and local advances on Rawlinson’s front kept his opponents from having time to reorganise. On August 13, as already mentioned, Americans and Australians advanced the line to the north of the river along the strip which is bounded upon the left by the Bray — Corbie Road. On August 14 the Canadian 7th Brigade took Parvillers after some very stiff local fighting. They were driven out again that night by the heavy concentration of the German artillery, but next morning, with the cooperation upon their flank of their comrades of the 9th Brigade, they won it once more. In this operation the 52nd Battalion took Damery, while the French carried the wood to the south of the village. There was a strong counter-attack in the afternoon by the German One hundred and twenty-first Division, but it was beaten back, leaving a number of prisoners. About August 20 the Canadians began to slip quietly out of the line, and were conveyed, unknown to the Germans, to a new front where they came under the command of General Home of the First Army. Their exploits upon this new stage will be described later. The French were now on the immediate right of the Australians until the time came for the advent of the British Ninth Corps.

Amid the tremendous events which followed each other in a stupendous historical procession during the latter half of 1918 it is hard to select those which were decisive from those which were merely great. It may safely be said, however, that three dates stand out as great military crises — the turn of the tide on July 18, the British advance on August 8, and the breaking of the Hindenburg Line on September 29. It has been admitted by General Ludendorff that it was the second of these which broke the confidence of the German Staff and finally convinced them that the war must go against them. A very special honour rests, therefore, with the three corps, British, Australian, and Canadian, who brought about this victory, as well as to the tanks, the cavalry, and the airmen who led or followed the victorious infantry and the masterful guns during these days of doom.

III. CONTINUATION OF THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON’S FOURTH ARMY

From August 22 to the Battle of the Hindenburg Line, September 29

Further advance of the Australians — Of the Third Corps — Capture of Albert — Advance across the old Somme battlefield — Capture of Mont St. Quentin — Splendid Australian exploit — Fall of Peronne — Début of the Yeomanry (Seventy-fourth) Division — Attack on the outliers of the Hindenburg Line — Appearance of the Ninth Corps — Eve of the Judgment

WE have now reached the date when Byng’s Third Army joined in the fray, and it is necessary to find some means of co-ordinating the narrative and carrying it on in definite stages. The next well-marked crisis which affects each of the armies engaged is the great general attack on September 29, which broke the Hindenburg Line. Therefore, in separate chapters the operations of each army will be brought up to that date, and then further chapters will cover the doings of each up to the date of the Armistice. Since we have dealt with the Fourth Army, we may as well continue with it now until we are in close touch with the Hindenburg Line, premising only that instead of an inert neighbour upon the left we have a very active advancing British Army. We shall then go on to the Third and to the First Armies, and bring each of them in turn up to the same point.

On August 22 and the following days, the Fourth Army, with only two Corps — the Third and the Australians — in front, renewed its attack, greatly strengthened by the movement of the Third Army on its left, which ensured that at least five British corps were all moving forward together, distributing the advance over so wide an area that the Germans were less able to concentrate reserves of men or of guns at any one point — a result which was much aided by the fine work of General Mangin’s Army on the right.

The main part of the fighting on the front of the Fourth Army on August 22 was north of the Somme, where the Third Australian Division covered the right flank of the Third Corps. On the south of the river the Australian Corps advanced on a front of 4½ miles, and took all their limited objectives, which represented a depth of 1½ miles. This was effected by the Fifth

Australian Division on the right and the Fourth on the left, supported and finally supplanted by the First Australian and Lambert's Thirty-Second British Divisions, the latter on the right. The advance, which began at dawn, was no easy one, as the country was much cut about with many obstacles, seamed with trenches, and dotted with scattered woods.

The determined infantry would take no denial, however, and Herleville, Chuignies, and several other small village sites were captured. The heaviest fighting was in the woods, but a skilful system of encircling points of danger had been carefully worked out, and the losses were less than might have been anticipated. Sixteen guns, 80 officers, and 2463 men were the trophies of the day. Early in the morning of August 24 the Third Australian Division moved suddenly forward north of the river, captured the town of Bray, and formed a permanent line upon the further side. On August 25 this same unit advanced 3000 yards on a 4000-yard front with very little resistance, always covering the right of the Third Corps.

Let us now follow the work of this Corps from August 22 onwards.

It covered the ground from Albert in the north, where it was working in close liaison with the Welsh Division on the right of the Fifth Corps, down to a point near the Somme where it was in touch with the Australians. The immediate object of the operations was to eject the enemy from the positions in and around Albert which he had held for four months, and also from his whole defensive system opposite to the Amiens defence line, which latter had been regained in the previous fighting. On the day of battle the Forty-seventh London Division was on the right of the Corps line, the Twelfth Division in the centre, and the Eighteenth Division on the left. To this last was confided the difficult and important operation of clearing Albert, and of establishing light bridges over the Ancre so as to cross that stream and attack the high ground east of the town on the Becourt Road. There was to be no preliminary bombardment, but machine-gun and artillery barrages were to cover the infantry.

The zero hour was 4.45, and at the signal the Forty-seventh and Twelfth Divisions advanced behind a creeping barrage, moving at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes, and as thick as 250 field-guns could make it. With such a van of destruction in front the infantry came forward without undue losses, though a particular strong point named the Pear Tree just on the inter-divisional boundary held fast and was destined to give trouble for several days to come. As an observer remarked, "Anything British, from a helmet to a tank, which showed over the crest was met by the sweeping fire of many machine-guns, while shells from trench mortars fell in the ranks of men following up. It was only when the general attack was continued that this hornet's nest could be cleared." Save for this point the general objectives marked out for these divisions, which meant an advance of between two and three miles, were successfully made good, but an attempt to follow up with cavalry and whippet tanks could not be persevered in, so stiff was the opposition. It was soon found that the enemy in the Forty-seventh Division sector was not only capable of defence, but of aggression, for about 4 in the afternoon his infantry advanced in a strong attack with a powerful artillery backing, and drove with such violence into the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th Londons, forming the 142nd Brigade, that they were temporarily thrown back. Their right held firm, however, as did the Third Australian Division to the south, so that no gap was formed. Being reinforced by the 175th Brigade from the Fifty-eighth Division in reserve, the Londoners soon reformed their ranks, greatly thinned both by their advance in the morning and by the German onslaught in the afternoon. The enemy's front was so menacing that the rest of the day and part of August 23 were spent in reorganisation and consolidation.

Meanwhile on the left, Lee's Eighteenth Division, a famous all-English unit of the type which, however brilliant its comrades, has always formed the solid core of the magnificent tireless Imperial Army, was carrying out its difficult task at Albert. It had two brigades in the line, the 54th to the south and the 55th to the north of the town. The Germans in front held the line of the Ancre, with Albert as a bridgehead, the ruins and cellars of the town being sown with snipers and machine-guns. To clear the town, to occupy the high ground to the east, and by these operations to cover the flanks of two armies was the function of this Division, and also to secure crossings at Albert by which the Welsh on their left could get across.

The stream in this part was 6 feet deep and 14 wide, with swampy banks strongly held by the enemy. There were unguarded bits, however, and patrols got across on the 21st, which simplified the task, though it deranged at the last moment all the preparations for barrage. Part of the 6th Northamptons and the 11th Royal Fusiliers crossed early on the 22nd and formed up along the edge of the Albert — Meaulte Road, while the rest of the 6th Northamptons fought hard for elbow-room on the right flank, working in close liaison with the 36th Brigade on the left of the Twelfth

Division who were attacking Meaulte. About 6 the whole front line advanced in this quarter, flooding over the scattered German posts, and capturing eighty machine-guns with their crews. At the same time the 8th East Surreys on the left had rushed Albert, and after some fine confused fighting had cleared the ruins and taken the whole town, with the river crossings. The 7th Buffs at once pushed out on the Albert — Pozières road, but were held up by very heavy fire. The 11th Royal Fusiliers further south had also been held up by the guns on the summit of Shamrock Hill, east of the town, but a company of the 2nd Bedfords, led by Captain Doake, captured this strong point and the line went forward. Altogether it was a good day's work, and save on the extreme left most of the objects were attained at the cost of reasonable casualties, which included General Sadleir-Jackson of the 54th Brigade, who was badly wounded in the leg. The 53rd Brigade continued their advance up to 10 P.M., so as to gain the high ground on the Becourt Road, and thus prepare for the next day's operations.

The 113th Brigade of the Welsh Division on the left had been passed over by the Albert bridges, and the 53rd had also passed in the night. The plan of August 23 was that these two brigades should attack Usna and Tara Hills respectively, on the high ground to the west of Becourt Wood. The Usna attack is described under the operations of the Fifth Corps. The Tara attack was completely successful, and four tanks rendered conspicuous service. The work was carried out by the 10th Essex, 7th West Kents, and the 7th Queen's from the 55th Brigade. It was a fine military feat, far more important than 350 prisoners would imply, for it broke the girdle round Albert and cleared the road for the advance. No progress was made at the other portions of the corps front on this date, save for some advance on the left of the Twelfth Division near Meaulte.

It had been determined to keep up incessant pressure, and to test Hindenburg's incautious maxim that the side with the best nerves would wear down the other. At 1 A.M. on August 24 the whole line burst into flame once more, and under a clear moon the Army rolled forward. On the right the Forty-seventh Division had ample revenge for its temporary check, as its 140th, together with the 175th Brigade of the Fifty-eighth Division, Londoners all, swept across the debated land of the Happy Valley and secured it. The Eighteenth Division also made good its objectives, the chief impediment being the historical mine craters of 1916 at La Boiselle; 250

prisoners were taken out of these by the 8th Royal Berks, a party of whom under Captain Nicholson, covered by Captain Sutherst's 53rd Trench Mortar Battery, cleared up this difficult point. In the morning the Eighteenth Division was well to the east of Becourt. The only check was in the centre, where the general advance of the Twelfth Division was still held up by that Pear Tree strong point which had already caused so much trouble. Before evening, however, it was clear that the enemy was effecting a general retreat, and the 37th Brigade was able to take possession of this very well defended portion of the ridge.

It was clear now that the German front was crumbling, and the whole British line was pushing ahead. The chief obstacle on the morning of August 25 came from an all-pervading mist. There was no check, however, anywhere in the advance up to 2 P.M., when the general line of the front was up to Mametz. The hardest fighting of the day was done at Billon Wood by the 173rd Brigade, all three battalions, the 2/2nd, 3rd, and 2/4th London, having real hard work, and standing to it like men. The place was strongly held with powerful artillery support, but it had been cleared before nightfall. By the same hour the Twelfth Division was east of Mametz, and the 8th East Surreys were on the far side of Mametz Wood. As these familiar places came once more into their possession the troops felt that the tide had indeed turned. On August 26 the Eighteenth Division had cleared the ruins of Montauban, and the Twelfth, Carnoy, while the Fifty-eighth pushed on from Billon Wood, and wound up within a few hundred yards of Maricourt. This village was passed the next day, and altogether, on August 27 and 28, another three miles were added to the advance of the Twelfth and Fifty-eighth Divisions, the progress never ceasing, but being continually accompanied by fighting and maintained always against severe artillery fire. The Germans had thrown in three fresh divisions upon this front and the resistance was still very stiff.

This was especially evident at Trones Wood, which was carried for the second time in this way by the Eighteenth Division on August 27. This fine assault was made by the 8th Berks and 7th West Kents, who carried it out with both flanks open to the enemy since the Welsh had been held in front of Delville. So heavy were the losses that the Berkshires were in danger of not being strong enough to hold what they had gained, so the 10th Essex were pushed into the fight. At 8 A.M. on August 27 a German Guards battalion drove through Trones Wood and pushed out the British stormers, but they held on by their teeth to the eastern edge of Bernafoy Wood. Here General Barker of the 53rd Brigade reorganised his very weary ranks, which had been greatly mixed in the advance and retreat. Just as evening was falling the remains of the gallant brigade darted forward once more and came to grips with the Francis Joseph Prussian Guards, who lay with many a machine-gun among the brushwood. Led by Colonel Banks of the 8th Berkshires, the English infantry rushed into the wood and poured over the German position, taking forty machine-guns and completely overcoming the resistance. It was a fine exploit, and when the 53rd Brigade gave place to the 54th on the morning of August 28 they handed over to them the whole of this terrible grove, which has been so drenched by the bravest blood of two great nations. There was no further action in this quarter on August 28, but on the 29th the 54th Brigade, now under Colonel Perceval, was heavily engaged. Guillemont was passed, though no trace of this large village could be distinguished, and all day the 2nd Bedfords on the left and the 6th Northants on the right were working forward across the grim old battlefield. On August 28 the Twelfth Division took Hardecourt, and General Higginson, who may well have been disturbed by the constant flow of youngsters into his ranks to take the place of his disabled veterans, must have had his fears removed and his heart gladdened by the splendid conduct that day of 250 men of the 9th Royal Fusiliers under Colonel Van Someren, none of whom had been in France more than three weeks. On August 30 a great centre of German resistance was Priez Farm, which held up the 11th Royal Fusiliers, and also the Forty-seventh Division which had taken the place of the Twelfth in the centre of the corps. The enemy was clinging hard to Morval, also in the Welsh area, and this made any advance on the front of the Eighteenth Division impossible. It was clear that a regular battle with artillery preparation was needed, and this was arranged for September 1. The right wing of the corps had in the meantime got to the line of Maurepas, and on August 31 the Forty-seventh Division in the centre made a good advance up to Long Wood with a number of prisoners to show for it. The Fifty-eighth Division closed in upon Marrières Wood, which they took after some heavy fighting, avenging the brave South Africans who had died so gallantly there five months before. It was clear that the enemy were now standing in a strong line, and were by no means beaten, which was shown also by the bearing of the prisoners, whose morale was high, and who spoke with as much pride and assurance as ever of the ultimate military success of their country. Yet during the last week they had been steadily driven back some 3000 yards every day by the remorseless barrage of the British guns followed by the disciplined rush of the British infantry.

We shall now leave the Third Corps for a time at this line of fixed resistance and return to consider the advance of the Australians to the south. This had been victorious and unbroken, though no very serious resistance had to be overcome. Smoke by day and fire by night, with explosions at all hours, heralded the German retreat. On August 26 Cappy was occupied. On the 27th Vaux Wood was occupied north of the river, while Foucaucourt and Vermandovillers were submerged to the south, villages no longer, but at least marks of progress upon the map. On the 28th the Germans were still retreating with the toes of the Australians upon their very heels, but the heavier shelling warned General Monash that there was a fixed line ahead, as might well be expected, since his men were now nearing the point where the bend of the Somme brought the river right across their front. Dompierre, Fay, Estrées, and other old centres of contention were taken that day. On the 29th the 3rd Australians got Hem, while on the south the rest of the corps advanced 2000 yards to the bank of the river, taking the whole line of villages from Biaches to Villers-Carbonnel. The task of capturing such places was much complicated by the difficulty of knowing where they were after you had got them. The present writer was in Carbonnel, which was a considerable place, some weeks later, and was unable to find any trace of habitation save a signboard upon which was printed the words: “Here was the village of Villers-Carbonnel.”

At the end of August the resistance had stiffened, and it was clear that the Germans meant to take advantage of the unique situation of Peronne in order to make it a strong centre of resistance. To the civilian observer it would have seemed that such a place was impregnable against assault, for it is girt in with reedy marshes on the west, and with a moat on the north, while the south is defended by the broad river, even as in the days when Quentin Durward formed part of the garrison. Yet the Australians took it in their stride by a mixture of cleverness and valour which must have greatly rejoiced General Rawlinson, who saw so formidable an obstacle removed from his path. As a preliminary operation the Third Australian Division had taken Clery in the north, which they held against a vigorous counter-attack on September 30. Halles was afterwards captured. The question now was how to approach the town. Immediately to the north of it there lies a formidable hill, well marked, though of no great height. This place, which is called Mont St. Quentin, commanded all approaches to the town as well as the town itself. The Germans had recognised the importance of the position and had garrisoned it with picked troops with many machine-guns. Standing upon its pitted crest, where one is often ankle-deep in empty cartridges, one cannot imagine as one looks west how a rabbit could get across unscathed. This was the formidable obstacle which now faced the Australians.

They went at it without a pause and with characteristic earnestness and directness, controlled by very skilful leadership. Two brigades, the 5th and 6th of Rosenthal’s Second Australian Division, had been assembled on the north of the Somme bend, the men passing in single file over hastily constructed foot-bridges. By this means they had turned the impassable water defences which lie on the westward side of Peronne, but they were faced by a terrible bit of country, seamed with trenches, jagged with wire, and rising to the village of St. Quentin, which is a little place on the flank of the hill. The hill itself is crowned by a ragged wood some acres in extent. Mont St. Quentin lies about equidistant, a mile or so, from Peronne in the south, and from the hamlet of Feuillaucourt in the north. On this front of two miles the action was fought.

Early in the morning of August 31 the 5th Brigade, under General Martin, advanced upon the German position. The 17th Battalion was in the centre opposite to Mont St. Quentin. The 19th was on the right covering the ground between that stronghold and Peronne, the 20th on the left, extending up to Feuillaucourt, with that village as one of its objectives. The 18th was in close support. A very heavy and efficient artillery bombardment had prepared the way for the infantry assault, but the defending troops were as good as any which Germany possessed, and had endured the heavy fire with unshaken fortitude, knowing that their turn would come.

From the moment that the infantry began to close in on the German positions the battle became very bitter and the losses very serious. The 19th Battalion on the right were scourged with fire from the old fortified walls of Peronne, from St. Denis, a hamlet north of the town, and from scattered woods which faced them. Every kind of missile, including pineapple-bombs and rifle-grenades, poured down upon them. The long thin line carried on bravely, halted, carried on once more, and finally sank down under such poor cover as could be found, sending back a message that further artillery bombardment was a necessity. On the left of the attack the 20th Battalion seems to have had a less formidable line before it, and advancing with great speed and resolution, it seized the village of Feuillaucourt. In the centre, however, a concentration of fire beat upon the 17th Battalion, which was right under the guns of Mont St. Quentin. Working on in little groups of men, waiting, watching, darting forward, crouching down, crawling, so the scattered line gradually closed with its enemy, presenting a supreme object lesson of that individual intelligence and character which have made the Australian soldier what he is. A little after 7 o'clock in the morning the survivors of two companies drew together for the final rush, and darted into the village of Mont St. Quentin, throwing out a line of riflemen upon the far side of it. On that far side lay the culminating slope of the hill crowned with the dark ragged trees, their trunks linked up with abattis, laced with wire, and covering machine-guns. The place was still full of Germans and they had strong reserves on the further side of the hill.

The 17th had reached their goal, but their situation was very desperate. Their right was bent back and was in precarious contact with the 19th Battalion. Their left flank had lost all touch. They were a mere thin fringe of men with nothing immediately behind them. Two companies of the supporting battalion had already been sent up to stiffen the line of the 19th Battalion, and the remaining two companies were now ordered forward to fill the gap between the 17th and 20th. Not a rifle was left in reserve, and the whole strength of the Brigade was in the firing-line. It was no time for hedging, for everything was at stake.

But the pressure was too severe to last. The Australian line could not be broken, but there comes a point when it must bend or perish. The German pressure from the wood was ever heavier upon the thin ranks in front of it. A rush of grey infantry came down the hill, with showers of bombs in front of them. One of the companies in the village had lost every officer. The fire was murderous. Guns firing over open sights had been brought up on the north of the village, and were sending their shells through the ruined houses. Slowly the Australians loosened their clutch upon their prize and fell back to the west of the village, dropping down in the broken ground on the other side of the main Peronne Road, and beating back five bombing attacks which had followed them up. Still the fire was murderous, and the pressure very heavy, so that once more, by twos and threes, the survivors fell back 250 yards west of the road, where again they lay down, counting their dwindling cartridges, and dwelling upon their aim, as the grey crouching figures came stealthily forward. The attack was at an end. It had done splendidly, and it had failed. But the scattered survivors of the 5th Brigade still held on with grim tenacity, certain that their comrades behind would never let them down.

All night there was spasmodic fighting, the Germans pushing their counter-attack until the two lines were interlocked and the leading groups of the 5th Brigade were entirely cut off. In some places the more forward Germans finding a blank space — and there were many — had pushed on until they were 500 yards west of the general line of the 5th Brigade. Thus when Robertson's 6th Brigade attacked at an early hour of September 1, they came on German infantry posts before they connected up with the main line of their own comrades. Their advance had been preceded by a crashing bombardment from everything which would throw a projectile, so that the crest of the hill was fairly swept with bullets and shells. Then forward went the line, the 23rd Battalion on the right, the 24th on the left, 21st and 22nd in support. From the start the fire was heavy, but all opposition was trampled down, until the two leading battalions were abreast of the hill. Then once more that terrible fire brought them to a halt. The 23rd on the right was held by the same crossfire which had beaten upon the 19th the day before. Its losses were heavy. The 24th got forward to Feuillaucourt and then, having occupied it, turned to the right and endeavoured to work down to Mont St. Quentin from the north. But the fire was too murderous and the advance was stopped. Other elements were coming into action, however, which would prevent the whole German effort being concentrated upon the defence of the one position. In the north the 10th Brigade of the Third Australian Division, with the 229th British Yeomanry Brigade upon their left, were swinging round and threatening to cut in on the German flank and rear. In the south the 14th Australian Brigade of the Fifth Division was advancing straight upon the town of Peronne, attacking from the south and east simultaneously. But even now the nut was too hard for the crackers. The British and the 10th Australian Brigades were fighting their way round in the north and constant progress was being made in that indirect pressure. But the 6th Brigade after its splendid advance was held up, and old Peronne, spitting fire from its ancient walls, was still keeping the 14th Brigade at a distance. At 8 o'clock the attack had again failed. Orders were then given for the reorganisation of the troops and for a renewed effort at half-past one. The artillery had been brought up and reinforced, so that it now fairly scalped the hill. At the hour named the direct advance of the 6th Brigade was resumed, the fresh 21st Battalion being pushed into the centre, between the 23rd and 24th which had both suffered severely in the morning. This time General Rosenthal was justified of his perseverance. At the signal the troops poured forward and under a hail of bullets seized the ruins of the village once more, streaming out at the further side and falling into a long skirmish line on the western edge of the wood. The brave German defenders were still unabashed and the losses were so heavy that the wood could not instantly be carried, but the position was consolidated and held, with the absolute certainty that such close grips in front with the threatening movements upon his flank must drive him from the hill. So it proved, for when on the morning of September 2 the 7th Brigade passed over the fatal plain, which was sown with the bodies of their comrades, they went through the village and on past the wood with little opposition, forming up at last in a defensive line facing south-east, while the Fifth Division on the south drove home its attack upon Peronne, where the defence was already hopelessly compromised by the various movements to the north.

Thus fell Mont St. Quentin, and as a consequence Peronne. Sir Henry Rawlinson in his official dispatch remarked that he was “filled with admiration for the surpassing daring” of the troops who had taken a position of the greatest “natural strength and eminent tactical value.” Men of the Second Guards Division and of four other German Divisions were found among the prisoners. The Australian exploit may be said to have been of a peculiarly national character, as there was not one of the Australian communities — Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, West Australia, Tasmania — which did not play some honourable part in the battle.

Passing northward from the victorious Australians, September 1 saw the attack carried all along the line, the 3rd Corps advancing upon Rancourt, Priez Farm, and the line to Bouchavesnes. On the left the hard-worked 54th and 55th Brigades did splendidly, especially the 8th East Surrey under Colonel Irwin. Surrey men and Germans lay thick round Priez Farm, but this key-position remained in the hands of the English, after a very bitter struggle. The 7th Queen’s took Fregicourt, while the 7th West Kents helped the Welshmen at Sailly-Sallisel. The trench mortar batteries, pushing right up regardless of all risk and smothering the German strong points by their concentrated fire, did great work in these operations, especially the 142nd T. M. Battery near Priez Farm. All these various advances were as remarkable for their tactical skill as for the valour shown by all ranks. The latter had been a constant asset, but the former grew with time.

Meanwhile the Forty-seventh and Fifty-eighth Divisions had each done splendidly and secured their objectives, including Rancourt and Bouchavesnes. The main road from Bapaume to Peronne had been passed and the whole of the old Somme battlefield been cleared in this direction. Prisoners were taken from four different divisions in the course of the fight. It had taken four months' fighting in 1916 to conquer the ground which had been now cleared by the Fifth and Third Corps inside of ten days.

The advance was continued on September 2, as it was argued that however exhausted the victors might be the vanquished would surely be even more so. A new actor made a first appearance in the greatest of all dramas about this time, for the Seventy-fourth Division, which had done good service in Palestine under General Girdwood, made its first attack in a European line of battle. This unit was originally composed entirely of Yeomanry, and it had still retained a large proportion of this splendid material in the ranks, with a broken spur as their witty and picturesque divisional emblem. The tale of the British Yeomanry in the East is one which will be among the most romantic in the war; and the way in which farmers' sons from Dorset or Fife charged with cold steel and rode down the Eastern cavalry or broke the ranks of the Turkish infantry is as fantastic an incident as the mind of a prophetic novelist could have furnished. Indeed it may be said generally that none of the many imaginary forecasts of the coming war equalled the reality in the broad sweep of its incidents and the grotesque combinations which ensued.

The Seventy-fourth had now taken over from the Fifty-eighth Division. They were pushed at once into heavy fighting, advancing rapidly down the western slope of the Tortille valley, through Moislains, and over the canal. In their eager zeal they had not mopped up sufficiently, and they soon found themselves under a fire from front and rear which no troops could endure. They were driven back to near the point from which they started and their losses were considerable. The Australians formed a defensive flank on the south, and the Forty-seventh on the north, and a line of resistance was built up between them from Haut Allaines on the right to the western bank of the

Tortille. The Yeomanry had before evening endured a very terrible welcome to the Western front.

The Eighteenth Division on the left had also had some severe fighting which fell chiefly upon the depleted 53rd Brigade. It secured the high ground in the north of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, the whole of which was cleared by the 8th Berkshires. On September 3 and 4 the division continued to advance across the canal and the Tortille upon the line of Nurlu. On the evening of September 4 its long term of hard and glorious service was ended and the Twelfth Division took its place. Its losses had been 2700, while it had captured during the battle some 1800 prisoners and many guns.

From this date until September 10, which saw them in front of the outposts of the Hindenburg Line, the record of the Third Corps was one of steady and uninterrupted progress. The German machine-guns were now, as always, a cause of constant worry, loss, and delay, but the remorseless drive of the British infantry was for ever beating in the obstinate rearguards. September 6 marked an advance of nearly three miles along the whole Corps front, the Twelfth, Forty-seventh, and Seventy-fourth moving in line and flooding over the village sites of Nurlu, Templeux, Driencourt, and Longavesnes. The work of Owen’s 35th Brigade at Nurlu was particularly trying, for it was held up by wire and machine-guns, the 7th Sussex, 7th Norfolks, and 9th Essex all losing heavily in some very desperate fighting which gave little result. Finally, on September 6, the 1st Cambridge and 5th Berkshires reinforced the troops already mentioned and, under a renewed barrage, they broke the line and carried the position. On this date the Forty-seventh Londoners, who had done such solid work, were ordered off to join another corps, the Fifty-eighth moving up once more to take their place.

On September 7 the weather, which had been excellent since August 22, broke badly, but the Corps improved its position in spite of wind and rain, closing up to what was known to be the German fixed position. On the 8th both Epéhy and Peizières were touched, but the Germans were fairly at bay now, and instant counter-attacks showed that their resistance would be serious. The final position was about 1000 yards west of these villages. The Fifty-eighth Division on September 10 endeavoured to gain more ground in this quarter, but neither they nor the Seventy-fourth upon their right could make any impression upon the strong German line. There was a definite pause, therefore, while tanks, guns, and all other appliances for a serious assault upon a fortified position were hurried to the front. On this date, September 12, General Butler was able to resume his command of the Third Corps, while General Godley, after his term of brilliant service, returned to his own unit, the Twenty-second Corps.

We must now return to the Australian Corps on the right, whom we left in the flush of victory after their fine conquest of Peronne. Up to the end of August, Monash and his men had accounted for 14,500 prisoners and 170 guns since the beginning of the advance. On September 1, as already mentioned, Peronne had been penetrated by the Fifth Australian Division, but after the fall of Mont St. Quentin, and the failure of their efforts at recovery, the Germans must have seen that it was hopeless to hold the place, so that the stormers were eventually only faced by a rearguard of stalwarts. Anvil Wood to the north-east was taken on the same day. The order of the Divisions upon the Australian front at this time was that the Third was on the extreme left, acting with the Third Corps, the Second was just north of Peronne, the Fifth was opposite to Peronne, and the Thirty-second British Division was on the extreme right, near Brie and St. Christ, in touch with the French.

Early in the morning of September 2 Rosenthal’s indefatigable Second Division continued to advance from Mont St. Quentin, attacking to the north-east so as to get possession of the high ground south-west of Aizecourt. They attained their objectives and formed a flank along the spur from Mont St. Quentin to Aizecourt in order to protect the Third Corps in the difficult operations already described. By this movement to the north the Second Australian got in front of the Third Australian Division, which was crowded out of the line, all but two battalions. The Fifth Australians spent the day in clearing up Peronne. Altogether some 500 additional prisoners fell into their hands during the day.

There was some readjustment and reorganisation necessary after this strenuous work, but by September 5 the advance was going forward again and Flamicourt was taken. It is an open rolling country of large horizons, and the Germans were slowly retreating with strong rearguards. Doingt, Le Mesnil, and the river crossings of Brie and St. Christ were all occupied, though the latter cost a severe fight, with 150 prisoners as trophies. On the 6th and 7th the Corps were sweeping on with their own 13th Australian Light Horse doing the cavalry work in front of them, fit representatives of those splendid horsemen who have left an enduring reputation in Egypt and Palestine. Late in the afternoon of September 7 the Corps front crossed the railway between Vermand and Vendelles, and began to approach the historic point which had marked the British line before March 21. On September 10 Strickland's First British Division arrived in this area, and with the Thirty-second Division and some other units began to form the nucleus of another Corps, the Ninth, which should operate under General Braithwaite to the right of the Australians. On the 12th the Australians took Jean-court, and were in touch with the outlying defences of the great Hindenburg Line, which they at once proceeded to attack. On September 13 there was a sharp fight round Le Verguier, and an advance all along the line in which the objectives were taken and the tanks did some particularly fine work. Tanks and barrages that day combined to keep the Australian losses at a very low figure, and yet some 40 guns and 4500 prisoners had been taken before next morning. The First Australian Division on the left secured all the front defences which guarded the main Hindenburg position, while the Fourth on the right worked its way well forward, though hardly level with its neighbours. The Ninth Corps on the right had also come on, though it was also rather behind the Australians. The average advance of the latter amounted to three miles in depth on a four-mile front.

Nothing could be more in-and-out than the German fighting during all this stage of the war. Sometimes their conduct was heroic in the extreme, sometimes it was exceedingly cowardly and slack. The observer could not but recall the famous description which an American General of old gave of his militia when he said with native raciness that "they either fought like the devil or ran like hell." The machine-gunners were usually, however, in the former category, and they, with the heavy guns, represented the real resistance, while the infantry only needed to be reached — in some cases not even that — to throw up their hands and come over as joyful captives. There were already two Germans in British hands for every Briton in Germany, in spite of the heavy losses in March and April.

Returning to the Third Corps, which we left in front of the Hindenburg system in the second week of September in the Epéhy district. The obstacle in front of the British was very formidable, for it con, sisted of their own old trench lines of March, with the Hindenburg system behind them. They had now reached the former British reserve line which had Ronssoy, Lempire, Epéhy, and Peizières as *points d'appui*. It was a front so strong that in March it is doubtful if the Germans could have carried it had the line not given way elsewhere. It was particularly necessary that the enemy should hold on to this stretch, because it covered the point where the great Canal du Nord ran under a tunnel for six miles between Bellicourt and Vandhuile — the only place where tanks could be used for an advance. The Germans had therefore massed strong forces here, including their famous Alpine Corps.

The first task of the Third Corps was to get possession of the old British line in front of it, whence observation could be got of the Hindenburg position. This attack would form part of a general movement by the two southern Corps of the Third Army, the three Corps of the Fourth Army, and the northern portion of the First French Army. On that great day of battle, September 18, there was a universal advance along the line, which was carried out in the case of the Third Corps by the Seventy-fourth Division (Girdwood) on the right, the Eighteenth (Lee) right centre, the Twelfth (Higginson) left centre, and the Fifty-eighth Division left. Many of the characteristics of old trench warfare had come back into the battle, which was no longer open fighting, but is to be conceived as an attack upon innumerable scattered trenches and posts very strongly held by the Germans, and their ultimate reduction by independent platoons and companies acting under their own regimental officers.

The advance was at 5.20 in the morning, with a thick mist and driving rain to cover, and also to confuse, the movement. The Yeomen of the Seventy-fourth upon the right came away in excellent style, keeping in close touch with the Australian left, and were soon in possession of the Templeux quarries, a very formidable position. At the other end of the line a brigade of the Fifty-eighth Londoners did excellently well, and by 10 o’clock had a good grip upon the village of Peizières. In the centre, however, the resistance was very stiff and the losses heavy. None the less the Eighteenth Division, which has always been a particularly difficult unit to stop, made their way through Ronssoy and Lempire. The Eighteenth Division did wonderful work that day, and though nominally only the 54th and 55th Brigades were engaged, they were each strengthened by a battalion from the spare brigade. There were particular difficulties in the path of the 55th Brigade, but General Wood personally accompanied the leading battalion and so kept in touch with the situation, varying his activities by throwing bricks and old boots down a German dug-out, and so bringing out 20 prisoners as his own personal take. He was wounded in the course of the day. Ronssoy, which fell to the 55th Brigade, was held by the

Alexander Regiment of Prussian Guards, several hundred samples being taken for the British cages. The taking of Lempire, carried out mainly by the 11th Royal Fusiliers, was also a very gallant affair, though it was a day or two before it was completely in British possession. The Twelfth; which is also an all-English division with a splendid fighting record, was held for a time before Epéhy, but would take no denial, and after heavy losses and severe fighting was east of that village by 11 o'clock. Thus by midday the whole line of villages was in the hands of General Butler's Corps. The left was out of touch with the Fifth Corps, but all else was in perfect order. These positions were full of wire and concrete, and were defended by the hardy German Alpine Corps who fought to the death, so that the achievement was a great one.

All four divisions endeavoured to improve their positions in the afternoon, but they had no great success. The Seventy-fourth Division did the best, as on the right it was able to secure Benjamin's Post, but on the left it was held up by the general stagnation of the line. The centre divisions met a German counter-attack delivered by the Hundred and twenty-first Division, who had been rushed up in buses from Maretz, and this they entirely dispersed, but neither they nor the Fifty-eighth on the left were able to make any notable advance.

The troops were now faced by a perfect warren of trenches and posts which were held with great gallantry by the Alpine Corps. There was no rest for the British, and the night of the 18/19th was spent by the same men who had been fighting all day in bombing up the trenches and endeavouring to enlarge their gains. The same sort of fighting, carried on by small groups of determined men led by subalterns or non-commissioned officers, and faced by other small groups equally determined, went on along the whole line during September 19 and 20. In those two days the advance went steadily on, in spite of many a local rebuff and many a temporary check. On September 21 the battle was renewed still in the same fashion with heavy losses upon both sides. At one time the steady flow of the British tide turned for a time to an ebb, as a very strong German counter-attack came rolling into it, and swept it back along the whole front from the positions which it had overflowed in the morning. The Seventy-fourth was forced out of Quinnemont Farm, the Eighteenth out of Doleful Post, the Twelfth were checked at Bird Trench, while the Fifty-eighth, intermingled with men from the right wing of the Fifth Corps, could not get past Kildare Avenue. These fanciful names, unseen on any save a large-scale trench map, bulked large in this bloody battle, for they were master points which controlled the ground around. The sun set with the Germans in the ascendant, and the British clawing desperately at a series of posts and farms which they could just hold against very heavy pressure. One of the most severe engagements was that of the 10th Essex of the 53rd Brigade when they attempted the Knoll, a position from which the whole Hindenburg Line would have been exposed. It was said by experienced soldiers that more severe machine-gun fire had seldom been seen than on this occasion, and the tanks engaged were unable to use their own guns, so thick were the driving storms of bullets which beat upon their iron sides and searched every aperture. The Essex men lost heavily, and the Knoll was not taken. This and the other posts mentioned above were the cause of much trouble to the Americans on September 27.

It was a disappointing day, but the British soldiers, dog-weary as they were, were in no mood to leave matters undecided. The operations must be carried to a successful end. “Hard pounding, gentlemen,” as the great Duke said, “but we shall see who can pound longest!” Just after midnight the tired ranks were stumbling forward once more, determined to have those posts back if human resolution could win them. They had their reward, and it was a conspicuous illustration of the maxim that, however weary you may be, the enemy may be even more so. Before the full light of morning half the line of posts was in the hands of the persevering British. The capture of Bracton Post by Colonel Dawson’s 6th West Kents was a particularly brilliant bit of work. The success stretched along the whole Corps front, and though the afternoon of September 22 saw a whole series of counter-attacks, especially upon the Seventy-fourth and Eighteenth Divisions, there was no weakening of the new line. One German battalion engaged in these counter-attacks was literally annihilated as a barrage fell behind them through which they could not retire. It is on record that in spite of the very arduous service the spirits and morale of the men were never higher. Twice after a German repulse the men of the 6th Northants and 11th Royal Fusiliers could not be held back from jumping out of the trenches and tearing after them, while a stretcher-bearer was observed to run up and down the parados of the trench throwing cartridges down to the defenders and shouting, “Shoot, boys, shoot!”

By September 23 the Third Corps had gained most of those posts which had been its objectives on September 18, and if the battle took longer than had been anticipated it was all the greater drain upon the worn resources of the Germans. They were still intent upon making machines do the work of men, and it was no unusual thing to take about as many machine-guns as prisoners in some of their posts. The situation was still not quite clear on the left, where the right flank of the Fifth Corps was engaged in severe local fighting in the neighbourhood of Kildare and Limerick Post. The Egg Post on the front of the Eighteenth Division had also been able to maintain itself in the German line. These various isolated strong points were the same which had held out with such unavailing gallantry on March 21, when, instead of forming the German rear, they were the extreme outliers of Gough's Army.

Whilst the Third Corps on the left of the Fourth Army had been gradually fighting its way forward from September 18 onwards, beating down one after the other the outposts and obstacles which, like the moraine before a glacier, formed a rugged line in front of the great main Hindenburg system, Sir John Monash and his men were keeping pace with them, step by step, on their right, the First Australian Division being in close liaison on September 18 with the Seventy-fourth Yeomanry. Many a separate volume will be written upon the exploits of our Australian brothers, and General Monash has himself written a record of their last glorious hundred days, so that the chronicler has the less compunction if he is not always able to give the amount of detail which he would desire.

At 5.20 on September 18 the Australians went forward with a rapidity which seems to have completely taken aback the German defenders, who in many cases ran from their guns, or threw up their hands in detachments, when they saw the active figures of the infantrymen springing eagerly forward behind the line of tanks. The weather was bad, the ground slippery with rain, and the attack expected, but none of these factors interfered with the result. The First Australians, as stated, were in the line on the left, the 1st and 3rd Brigades in the van, while on the right were the 4th and 12th Brigades of the Fourth Australian Division in close touch with the British First Division on their right. By midday everything had gone down before them, and the measure of their success was the 146 officers and 3900 men with 77 guns which formed their trophies before evening. On one side they had reached Le Verguier, and on the other they were past Templeux. A minefield containing thirty-five mines was found in front of the Fourth Australian Division, another instance of the fact that the tanks had brought a nautical element into warfare. The Australian casualties were surprisingly light considering their splendid results, for they did not amount to more than a thousand men.

Some description must now be given of the work of the Ninth Corps, which had assembled under General Braithwaite on the extreme right of the British Army and which first came into action on September 18 in this hard fight for the Hindenburg Outpost Line. The Corps consisted at this time of three divisions, the First, Sixth, and Thirty-second, under Strickland, Marden, and Lambert. On September 18 the Corps attacked with the Sixth Division in touch with the French on the right, and the First Division with the Fourth Australians on the left. The order of brigades from the right was 71, 16, 1, and 2. It was known that two German divisions, the Seventy-ninth and Twenty-fifth, with two others in reserve, were lying opposite behind strong defences, so that a hard battle might well be expected.

The Thirty-fourth French Division on the immediate right brought off a very useful and successful coup on September 17 by capturing Round Hill and part of Savy Wood, which reassured General Marden as to the safety of his right flank. This division appeared to have the more difficult task as Badger Copse, the village of Fresnoy, and part of the very strong system known as the Quadrilateral came within their area.

The attack went forward under pelting rain at 5.20 in the morning of September 18. Following the operations from the north we have to deal first with the 2nd Brigade on the flank. The left-hand battalion; the 2nd Sussex, kept up with the Australians, who had advanced without a check and carried every obstacle. The 2nd King’s Royal Rifles, on the other hand, had lost direction and, wandering too far south across the face of their neighbours, found themselves mixed up with the Sixth Division in its fruitless attempt upon the powerfully defended village of Fresnoy. The 1st Brigade, to the south, was led by the 1st Camerons and the 1st Loyal North Lancashires. The former stormed on, breaking through all opposition and throwing out defensive flanks as their valour carried them ahead of the line. Meanwhile the failure of the Sixth Division to take Fresnoy made it impossible to pass along the valley which is overlooked by that village, so that the right of the First Division was entirely hung up. On the other hand, the 2nd King’s Royal Rifles recovered their bearings as the day went on, and fought their way up the right side of the Omignon valley in splendid style until they were in touch with the 2nd Sussex on the northern slope. In the south, however, the task of the Sixth Division continued to be a very hard one, and the Seventy-ninth German Division resisted with great determination. The Quadrilateral consisted of a system of trenches sited on the highest part of the plateau between Holnon and Fayet, its northern face at this time forming part of the German front line. This proved to be an exceedingly difficult work to silence, as reinforcements could be dribbled up through cleverly concealed communication trenches. In spite of everything; however, the 71st Brigade and their French neighbours captured Holnon village and the western edge of the Quadrilateral by 8 A.M. The main body of the work was not yet taken, however, so the East Anglians of the 71st Brigade had to form a defensive line facing towards it and the village of Selency, to meet any counter-attack which might sweep up against the flank of the Corps. The left of the line then got forward in safety, and the 2nd Brigade was able to report at noon that both they and the Fourth Australians were on their extreme objective. Indeed the latter, having completely crumpled up the One hundred and nineteenth German Division, were now considerably ahead of the allotted line.

Berthaucourt had been captured by the First Division, but progress in the Fresnoy direction was still very slow. About 3.30 P.M. hostile counter-attacks were launched south of Berthaucourt and opposite Fresnoy. These were repulsed by steady rifle-fire, but the general situation was still obscure. All the afternoon there was very heavy fighting on the front of the Sixth Division, especially east of Holnon village, and on the west side of the Quadrilateral. The French had been held up on the right. So matters remained until evening. It had been a day of hard work and varying success on this portion of the line, but the capture of 18 officers and 541 men with 8 field-guns showed that some advance had been made. It was short, however, of what had been hoped.

The next morning saw the battle renewed. The neighbourhood of Fresnoy and of the Quadrilateral was now more strongly held than ever, the Germans being encouraged, no doubt, by their successful defence of the day before. The fighting during this day was desultory, and no particular advance was made by either division. In the south the French failed to capture Manchester Hill, which was an ugly menace to the right flank of the Ninth Corps.

The Forty-sixth Division (Boyd) had been added to the strength of the Ninth Corps, and when this welcome addition had been put in upon the left wing it enabled the others to contract their front and thicken their array. At 7 P.M. on September 22 the Germans attacked the Forty-sixth Division in its new position, just east of Berthaucourt, but they were driven back after a slight initial success.

There was a fresh attack on September 24 in which the Ninth Corps co-operated with the Thirty-sixth Corps on its right, in order to try and overcome the German strongholds on the right of their front which were holding them of from the Hindenburg Line. The order of the British line was that the Sixth Division was on the right, the First in the centre, and the Forty-sixth on the left.

Although this attack, which was launched at 5 A.M., was expected by the enemy, good progress was made along the whole front. The Quadrilateral again proved, however, that it was a very formidable obstacle, and there was stout resistance from Pontruet village, just east of Berthaucourt. The Sixth Division had closed in on the Quadrilateral from north, west, and south, and were at close grips with it at all three quarters. There was continuous bomb-fighting all day in this neighbourhood, but the situation was still obscure, and until it cleared no progress could be made towards Selency. The First Division in the centre had made splendid progress, but the Forty-sixth Division had been unable to take Pontruet, and the guns from this village struck full against the left flank of the 2nd Brigade in its advance, causing very heavy losses to the 1st Northamptons. So murderous were the casualties in this portion of the field that the position of the forward troops was untenable, and the remains of the Northamptons had to throw back a protective flank to the north to cover the approaches from Pontruet. The 2nd Sussex on their right managed to retain their advanced position, and one company, though very weak and short of cartridges, baffled a counter-attack by a sudden bayonet charge in which they took 50 prisoners.

The attack upon Fresnoy village was made by the 3rd Brigade, the 1st Gloucesters being immediately opposite to it. Advancing under a strong barrage the West Country men went straight for their objective, taking both the village and the strongly organised cemetery to the south of it. On the left of the village the British were held up by strong wire and several vicious machine-guns, but the Germans made the gallant mistake of running out in front of the wire with bombs in their hands, upon which they were charged and many of them were taken by the Gloucesters. The German gunners in the rear then turned their pieces upon both captors and captives, so the company concerned was held down in shell holes all day and withdrew as best they could after dark. The 3rd Brigade then extended, getting into touch with the 2nd Brigade near Cornovillers Wood.

On the left of the 3rd Brigade the strong position of Fresnoy Cemetery had been carried, and the tireless infantry swarmed on into Marronnières Wood, which was full of lurking machine-guns and needed careful handling. It was finally surrounded by the 3rd Brigade, who mopped it up at their leisure, taking out of it a large number of prisoners. The 2nd King's Royal Rifles of the 2nd Brigade kept parallel with their advance, and also cleared a considerable stretch of woodland, while the 3rd Brigade, seeing signs of weakening on the German front, pushed forward and seized Gricourt, a most important point, the 2nd Welsh gaining the village and driving back a subsequent counter-attack. Finally, the complete victory in this portion of the field was rounded off when, after dark, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles secured a dangerous sunken road across the front which had been a storm-centre all day.

Meanwhile the Forty-sixth Division had fought its way to the north of Pontruet, but as this unit was relied upon for the great pending operations on the Hindenburg Main Line, it was thought impolitic to involve it too deeply in local fighting. The line was drawn, therefore, to the west of the village. The total captures of the day had been 30 officers and 1300 men. The French to the south had also had a good day, capturing all their objectives except Manchester Hill.

The Sixth Division had not yet cleared the Quadrilateral, and the whole of September 25 was devoted to that desperate but necessary work. It was a case of bomb and bayonet, with slow laborious progress. Finally, about 6 P.M. General Marden was able to announce that the whole wide entanglement had been occupied, though not yet mopped up. The village of Selency had also fallen, while on the right the French had attacked and captured Manchester Hill. Strong resistance was encountered by the First Division near Gricourt. The German soldiers were again and again seen to hold up their hands, and then to be driven into the fight once more by their officers with their revolvers. Late on the 26th, after a short hurricane bombardment, the 3rd Brigade rushed forward again. The enemy had disappeared into their dug-outs under the stress of the shells, so that the British infantry were able to get on to them before they could emerge and to make many prisoners. Colonel Tweedie of the Gloucesters was in local command of this well-managed affair. Altogether it was a good day for the First Division, which had gained a line of positions, repelled heavy counters, and secured 800 prisoners, 600 falling to the 3rd Brigade, who had done the heavy end of the work.

All was now ready for the great move which should break the spine of the whole German resistance. There was still some preliminary struggling for positions of departure and final readjustments of the line, but they were all part of the great decisive operation of September 29 and may best be included in that account. The chronicler can never forget how, late upon the eve of the battle, he drove in a darkened motor along pitch-black roads across the rear of the Army, and saw the whole eastern heaven flickering with war light as far as the eyes could see, as the aurora rises and falls in the northern sky. So terrific was the spectacle that the image of the Day of Judgment rose involuntarily to his mind. It was indeed the day of Judgment for Germany — the day when all those boastful words and wicked thoughts and arrogant actions were to meet their fit reward, and the wrong-doers to be humbled in the dust. On that day Germany’s last faint hope was shattered, and every day after was but a nearer approach to that pit which had been dug for her by her diplomatists, her journalists, her professors, her junkers, and all the vile, noisy crew who had brought this supreme cataclysm upon the world.

The reader will note then that we leave the Fourth Army, consisting from the right of the Ninth Corps, the Australians, and the Third Corps, in front of the terrific barrier of the main Hindenburg Line. We shall now hark back and follow the advance of Byng’s Third Army from its attack on August 21st until, five weeks later, it found itself in front of the same position, carrying on the line of its comrades in the south.

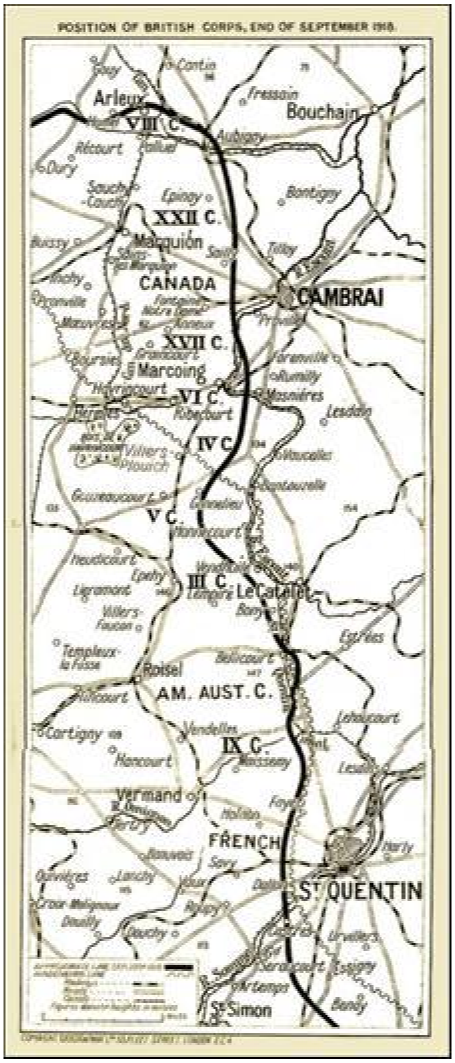
POSITION OF BRITISH CORPS, END OF SEPTEMBER 1918.
Cantin
Arleux
Fressain
Bouchain
VIII C.
Aubigny
Récourt
Palluel
Dury
Bantigny
Epinoy
XXII C.
Marquion
Buissy
Tilloy
Sains-lez-Marquion
CANADA
CAMBRAI
Inchy
Pronville
Fontaine Notre Dame
Anneux
Mœuvres
XVII C.
Graincourt
Proville
Boursies
Marcoing
Forenville
Rumilly
Havrincourt
VI C.
Masnières
Hermies
Ribécourt
Lesdain
IV C.
Villers Plouich
Vaucelles
Bantouzelle
Gouzeaucourt
Gonnelieu
V C.
Honnecourt
Heudicourt
Vendhuile
Epéhy
III C.
Lempire
Le Catelet
Liéramont
Bony
Villers-Faucon
Estrées
Templeux-la-Fosse
Roisel
Bellicourt
AM. AUST. C.
Hancourt
Lehaucourt
Cartigny
Vendelles
IX C.
Maissemy
Hancourt
Lesdins
Vermand
Holnon
Fayet
Poeuilly
FRENCH
Harly
Beauvois
Savy
Ouvrières
Lanchy
Vaux
Dallon
ST QUENTIN
Croix-Moligneaux
Roupy
Douilly
Ugny
Urvillers
Seraucourt
Essigny
Artemps
St Simon
Benay

Position of British Corps, end of September 1918

IV. THE ATTACK OF BYNG’S THIRD ARMY
August 21, 1918, to September 29, 1918

Advance of Shute’s Fifth Corps — Great feat in crossing the Ancre — Across the old battlefield — Final position of Fifth Corps opposite Hindenburg’s Main Line — Advance of Haldane’s Sixth Corps — Severe fighting — Arrival of Fifty-second Division — Formation of Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps — Recapture of Havrincourt — Advance of Harper’s Fourth Corps — Great tenacity of the troops — The New Zealanders and the Jaeger — Final position before the decisive battle.

ON August 20 General Mangin had pushed forward the Tenth French Army, which formed the left of his force, and attacked along a sixteen-mile front from the Oise to the Aisne, thus connecting up the original operations with those initiated by Marshal Haig. The movement was very successful, taking some 10,000 prisoners and gaining several miles of ground. We have now to turn to the left of Rawlinson’s advance, and to consider the new movement which brought Byng’s Third British Army into the fray.

Upon the left of the Third Corps, which was, as already described, fighting its way along the north bank of the Somme, there lay the Fifth Corps (Shute). On its left was the Fourth Corps (Harper), and north of that the Sixth Corps (Haldane). It was to these three units that the opening of the attack was entrusted. The frontage was about ten miles, extending from Moyenneville in the north to the Ancre in the south, so that it just cleared the impossible country of the first Somme battlefield — which even now a spectator cannot survey without a feeling of wondering horror, so churned up is it from end to end by the constant thresh of shells, burst of mines, and the spade-work of three great armies. The result of the first day’s fighting was an advance of several miles along the whole front, with the capture of Beaucourt, Bucquoy, Moyenneville, and other villages, the farthest advance coming close to the Arras-Albert Railway, and to the village of Achiet-le-Grand.

There had been some recent retirement of the German line at Serre, which gave the clue to the British Commanders that a general retreat might take place on this particular portion of the front. It was very necessary, therefore, to strike at once while there was certainly something solid to strike against — and all the more necessary if there was a chance of catching the enemy in the act of an uncompleted withdrawal.

It was nearly five o’clock when the battle began, and it was the turn of the Germans to find how fog may disarrange the most elaborate preparations for defence. The mist was so thick that it could only be compared to that which had shrouded the German advance on March 21. Several miles of undulating country lay immediately in front of the attackers, leading up to a formidable line of defence, the old Albert-Arras Railway lying with its fortified embankments right across the path of the British Army. Bucquoy in the centre of the line, with the Logeast Wood to the east of it, and the muddy, sluggish Ancre with its marshy banks on the extreme right, were notable features in the ground to be assaulted.

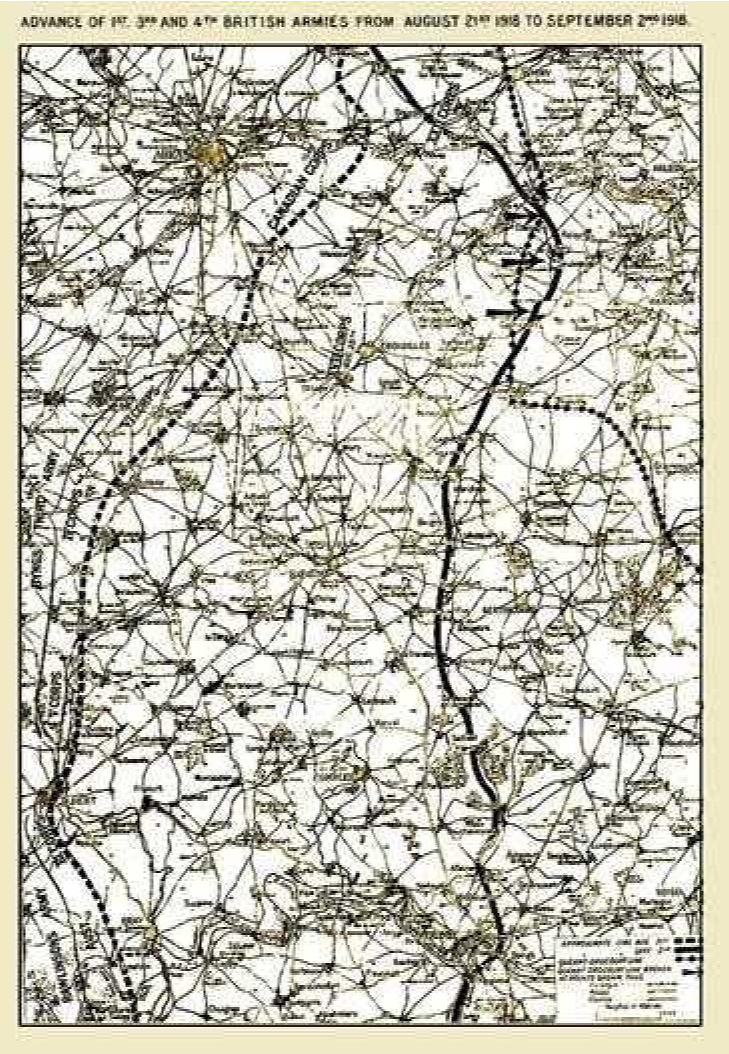
ADVANCE OF 1ST. 3RD AND 4TH BRITISH ARMIES FROM AUGUST 21ST 1918 TO SEPTEMBER 2ND 1918.

Advance of First, Third, and Fourth British Armies
from August 21, 1918, to September 2, 1918.
Arrows point to the Rupture of the Quéant-Drocourt Line.

The Fifth Corps, under General Shute, followed the curve of the River Ancre on a front of 9000 yards. It was poorly provided with guns as the Corps to the left required a concentration of artillery, and it had no tanks since the marshy valley and sluggish stream lay before it. The Thirty-eighth Welsh Division (Cubitt) lay on the right and Campbell's Twenty-first on the left, each of them with two brigades in front and one in reserve. The Seventeenth Division (Robertson) was in support. The problem in front of General Shute's Corps was a most difficult one. Before it lay this evil watercourse which had been flooded by the Germans and was 300 yards wide at one part. All bridges were gone, and the banks were low and boggy. The main stream was over six feet deep, and its channel could not be distinguished from the general flood. The whole morass was covered by a tangle of fallen trees, reeds, and artificial obstructions. To the east of the river ran high ground, strongly held and fortified, from Tara Hill above Albert to the Thiepval Height, south of Grandcourt. The west bank was so overlooked that no one could move unscathed. And yet it was clear that until this formidable obstacle was surmounted it was neither possible for Rawlinson to advance from Albert, nor for the Fourth Corps on the left to assault Miraumont.

The movements of Shute's Corps on August 21 were preliminary to their real attack. On that date the Twenty-first Division advanced on the left flank, in close touch with the Forty-second Division of the Fourth Corps. Beaucourt was taken in the movement. By this operation the Twenty-first Division reached a point where the flood was narrower at St. Pierre Divion, and here some bridges could be constructed and preparations made for the passage.

In the case of Harper's Fourth Corps on the left the advance on August 21 was limited, since no serious attack could be made upon Miraumont while the high ground to the south was untaken. At this date Harper's Corps consisted of five divisions, the Fifth, Thirty-seventh, Forty-second, Sixty-third, and the New Zealanders. Of these the Thirty-seventh Division (Williams) was on the left, covering the flank of the Sixth Corps, while the Forty-second (Solly-Flood) was on the right. We shall now follow in the first instance the work of the Fifth Corps on the extreme right from the beginning of the battle until the pause preceding the attack of September 18.

There are, it is true, objections to continuous narrative, since it stands in the way of a bird's-eye view of the whole operation; but on the other hand the object and scope of any series of advances become unintelligible unless they are linked up from day to day. We shall therefore take the Fifth Corps as one story until it reaches the Hindenburg Line. We shall then follow the work of the other flank corps of Byng's Third Army, which was Haldane's Sixth Corps, bringing it up to the same point. It will finally, after we have established two solid bastions, be easy to deal with the central unit, Harper's Fourth Corps, which filled up the space between. We shall then have a narrative which will cover four strenuous weeks in which the Third Army carried out a notable advance.

It has been explained that Shute's Fifth Corps found itself with 9000 yards of river in front of it, and that on August 21 the Twenty-first Division had seized a favourable point for crossing near St. Pierre Divion. There was no further advance on the morning of the 22nd, but to the south Rawlinson's left was fighting its way to the eastern exits of Albert, and the bridges in the town were being got ready for use. All day a heavy fire was kept up on the German lines east of the river, and especially upon the rising ground called Usna Hill. As the day passed small bodies of troops began to cross the Ancre from the Fifth Corps front and to make a lodgement at the farther side. South-west of Thiepval part of the 14th Welsh from the 114th Brigade, wading over breast deep with their rifles and pouches held high, got into a trench on the farther bank and held their own. The Twenty-first Division also got some companies across at St. Pierre, while it beat off several attacks upon the north side of the river. During the night the 50th Brigade of the Seventeenth Division was slipped into the line, between Campbell's North Countrymen on the left and Cubitt's Welshmen on the right. General Shute was now ready for his great effort in crossing the river.

The first stage in this difficult operation was carried out early on August 23, when the 113th Welsh Brigade, which had quickly passed over the Albert bridges, made a sudden attack about dawn on Usna Hill, at the same time as the Eighteenth Division to the south attacked Tara Hill. The position was taken with 200 prisoners, while the 115th Welsh Brigade got up to the chalk-pit, east of Aveluy, where they joined hands with their comrades on the Usna line. Thus, before evening of August 23 the Thirty-eighth Division was east of the river from Albert to Aveluy, while the Twenty-first still held its bridgeheads at St. Pierre Divion. The slope of the Thiepval Ridge with all its fortifications still lay in front, and this was the next objective of the Fifth Corps. It was carried by a night attack on August 23-24.

A large portion of the central line was so flooded that no advance was possible. It was planned, therefore, that the assault should be on both wings, the area around Authuille being nipped out and cleared at a later stage. The operation began on the evening of August 23 by a movement along the northern bank of the river to the south-east of Miraumont, so as to partly encircle that village and help forward the Fourth Corps on the left, who were still held up in front of it. The main Ancre attack was carried out by the 113th Brigade on the right, who came away with a fine impetus on the eastern slopes of Usna Hill, capturing La Boiselle and reaching a point 1100 yards west of Ovillers. The 114th Brigade on the left had with great difficulty and corresponding valour crossed the Ancre under machine-gun fire and had established themselves on the slopes, fighting their way forward all day until they reached a point north-west of Pozières. All around Thiepval there was close fighting in which this brigade acted in close liaison with the 50th Brigade. In this struggle many gallant deeds were done, and it is recorded, among others, how Lieutenant Griffiths of the Welsh Regiment advanced using his Lewis gun as if it were a rifle. He is said to have slain sixteen Germans in this novel fashion before his own wounds brought him fainting to the ground. According to the plan the two converging brigades left a large central section untouched, which was promptly mopped up by the 115th Brigade, so that every man of the Thirty-eighth Division was engaged in this fine operation.

Farther to the left the 6th Dorsets of the 50th Brigade, in spite of gas clouds and machine-guns had crossed the Ancre in its narrowest reach, where some sort of bridges had been prepared. With great energy and initiative they cleared up the front trenches and pockets so as to give room for a deployment, pushing their patrols out towards Thiepval, but they were driven in again by an attack from the Schwaben Redoubt. The rest of the 50th Brigade (Gwyn-Thomas) had followed, most of the infantry wading across in the dark up to their waists in mud and water. Pushing on, as part of the general advance, all three battalions of the 50th Brigade went forward, capturing several hundred prisoners, but deviating so far from their course that when they thought and reported that they had captured Courcelette it was really Pozières which they had got. In the early afternoon Allason’s 52nd Brigade was pushed in on the right of the 50th Brigade, connecting them up with the Welshmen. The mistake in the direction of the 50th Brigade was not an unmixed evil, for while it left the Twenty-first Division with its right flank exposed and in considerable difficulty, it made a pocket of a large number of Germans in front of the Welshmen, 900 of whom were captured. General Robertson saved the situation on the left by pushing in his reserve brigade, the 51st (Dudgeon), and so filling the gap between his division and that of General Campbell.

The latter division, especially the 64th Brigade, which had pushed on to Miraumont the night before, had some desperate fighting. The whole brigade was passed in single file over two foot-bridges. At 11.30 P.M. they were assembled upon the south bank and ready to start. A barrage had been arranged for their attack, but owing to changes in plan it was not thick or effective. The advance was made by the 15th Durhams on the right and the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry on the left with the 1st East Yorks in support, the column being guided by means of compass bearing, and by the presence of the Ancre on the left flank. This nocturnal march in the face of the enemy was a very remarkable and daring one, for the ground was pitted with craters and there were two ravines with sheer sides at right angles to the advance. Touch was kept by shouting, which seems to have confused rather than informed the enemy, who only fought in patches. Grandcourt was overrun with 100 prisoners, 20 machine-guns, and 4 field-pieces. Early in the morning General McCulloch, who had conducted the operation, was badly wounded and the command passed to Colonel Holroyd Smith of the Durhams. When full daylight came the brigade was deeply embedded in the German line, and the enemy closed in upon it but their attacks were repulsed. The soldiers were compelled to lie flat, however, in order to escape from the heavy fire. The 110th Brigade of the same division had advanced on the right, but it was acting in close liaison with the Seventeenth Division, and independent of the isolated unit, which was now completely alone on the hill south of Miraumont, their East Yorkshire supports being at Grandcourt, and so much out of touch with the advanced line that the Officer Commanding imagined the stragglers to be all that was left of the brigade. The first intimation of the true state of affairs was given by the wounded Brigadier as he passed on his way to the casualty station. About 10.30 Captain Spicer, the Brigade Major, got back by crawling, and reported that the advanced line still held, though weak in numbers. Aeroplane reconnaissance confirmed the report. All day the valiant band held out until in the evening the advance of the Forty-second Division on their left, and of their own comrades of the 110th Brigade on their right, rescued them from a desperate situation. Their work had been exceedingly useful, as their presence had partially paralysed the whole German system of defence. Great credit in this remarkable affair was due not only to General Campbell and his staff, upon whom the initial responsibility lay, but to the gallant and inspiring leading of General McCulloch and of the battalion leaders, Holroyd Smith and Greenwood. It was indeed a wonderful feat to advance three miles over such country upon a pitch-dark night and to reach and hold an objective which was outflanked on both sides by the successful German defence. The troops had been heartened up by messages with promises of speedy succour which were dropped by aeroplanes during the day.

The 62nd Brigade had now pushed in between the 64th on the right and the Forty-second Division on the left, touching the latter in the neighbourhood of Pys, so that by the late afternoon of August 24 the whole line was solid and the crossing of the Ancre with the capture of the ridge were accomplished facts. There have been few more deft pieces of work in the war. The German fixed line had been driven back and the remaining operations consisted from this date onwards in a pursuit rather than an attack. It was a pursuit, however, where the retreat was always covered by an obstinate rearguard, so that there was many a stiff fight in front of the Fifth Corps in the days to come.

Divisions had been instructed that the pursuit was to be continued in a relentless fashion, and Corps cavalry, drawn from the 8th and 20th Hussars, were told off to throw out patrols and keep in close touch with the German rearguard. The immediate objectives of the infantry were Longueval and Flers for the Welshmen, Gueudecourt for the Seventeenth, and Beaulencourt for the Twenty-first Division. The general movement was extraordinarily like the advance in the spring of 1917, but the British were now more aggressive and the Germans were less ‘Measured and sedate in their dispositions. On August 25 the pressure was sustained along the whole line, and the Germans, fighting hard with their machine-guns which swept the exposed ridges, were none the less being pushed eastwards the whole day. The Welsh took Contalmaison and reached the edge of Mametz Wood, where so many of their comrades had fallen just two years before. The Seventeenth, fighting hard, captured Courcelette and Martinpuich. The

Twenty-first got Le Sars and the Butte de Warlencourt, that strange old tumulus which now marked the joining point with the Fourth Corps still advancing on the left. At no point was there a battle and at no point was there peace, but a constant ripple of fire rose and fell along the thin fluctuating line. It is noted in the diaries of some of the British Generals as being the first day of purely open warfare in offensive fighting which their troops had ever experienced.

On the morning of August 26 the Welsh overran Bazentin-le-Grand, but the 115th Brigade were held up for a time at the old stumbling-block High Wood. Later in the day it was taken, however, while the 113th Brigade got as far as the edge of Longueval, meeting, a severe counter-attack which was rolled back in ruin by rifles and machine-guns. The Seventeenth Division gained some ground, but both brigades, the 51st and 52nd, were held up by a withering fire before reaching Flers. The 64th Brigade on their left met with equal opposition and could not get forward. Everywhere there were signs of a strong German rally for the evident purpose of covering the removal of their guns and stores. It was well maintained and well organised, so that the object was attained. It became clearer with every day that an artillery barrage was still a necessity for an infantry advance.

On August 27 the advance was continued. Outside the Fifth Corps boundaries the Fourth Corps on the left was encircling Bapaume and pushing advanced guards on to Maplecourt and Frémicourt, while Rawlinson’s men on the right were facing Trones Wood and the Guillemont Ridge. In the early morning, with a moon shining brightly, the whole front of the Fifth Corps was on fire once more and rolling eastwards. By 9 A.M. the 113th Brigade were through Longueval and in touch with the Fourth Army near the Sugar Refinery. The 114th Brigade attempted to pass north of Delville Wood, but after some confused fighting were held on the line of the Flers — Longueval Road. Flers, however, had been taken by the 50th Brigade, though the Germans made a strong fight of it and at one time reoccupied the village. Whatever the general morale of the enemy may have been there was no immediate weakening in the actual fighting power of his line. The Twenty-first Division made only a moderate advance, but they got ahead of their neighbours. The 6th Dragoon Guards, who were now furnishing the patrols, were withdrawn, as it was clear that the Germans meant to stand.

On the morning of August 28 they were still in position, and the day was mainly devoted to reorganising the infantry and bombarding the German lines, together with all the roads which lay eastwards. Early next morning the Welsh advanced once more, the 113th Brigade on one side of Delville Wood and the 114th on the other, with the result that this sinister graveyard was surrounded and the line carried definitely to the east of it. Morval still held out, but Lesboeufs was overrun. There was weakening all along the German line, which meant no doubt that they had completed the withdrawal of their more essential impedimenta. Flers and Gueudecourt both fell to the Seventeenth Division, almost without a battle. The Twenty-first Division was also able to move forward with no great difficulty as far as Beaulencourt and the line of the road from that village to Bapaume. This new line was held with great determination by the enemy, who were still, as must be admitted, masters of the situation to the extent that though forced to retire they would still retire in their own fashion. The Welsh attacking Morval that night found the place was strongly held and no progress possible.

August 30 was to show that the German rearguards were by no means demoralised and were not to be unduly hustled. It is impossible not to admire the constancy in adversity of Hans and Fritz and Michel, whatever one may think of the mentality of the Vons who had placed them in this desperate position. Morval still held its own against the Welsh, and the Seventeenth Division could not reach the clear line in front of them which is furnished by the Peronne — Bapaume Road. Beaulencourt was also retained by the enemy, as the patrols discovered to their cost. The line was still strong and menacing. There was inaction on August 31, which was spent in bombardment and preparation.

At 2 A.M. on September 1 the Twenty-first Division attacked Beaulencourt and carried it with a rush, and a strong attempt to regain it after dawn cost the enemy heavy losses. During the morning the Welshmen on the right flank attacked Morval and were at last successful in taking this strong position. There was very heavy fighting all day round Sailly-Sallisel, where the 113th and 115th Welsh Brigades made repeated efforts to envelop and capture the village. There were several checks, but the gallant Welshmen stuck to their task, and before evening the place had fallen and the general British line was well to the east of it. On the other hand, the Seventeenth and Twenty-first Divisions had a bad day in front of Le

Transloy and the Sugar Factory, having nothing to show for considerable losses, the 9th West Ridings being especially hard hit. None the less the Seventeenth was hard at it again next morning, for it was imperative to keep up the pressure without any relaxation. On this day, September 2, the plan was that the 50th and 52nd Brigades should work round on each side of the village while the artillery kept the defenders from interfering. This attack, though delayed for some time, eventually succeeded, the 6th Dorsets clearing up the ruins, while the Twenty-first Division, after several brave attempts, drove the tenacious German garrison out of the Sugar Factory. The 10th West Yorkshires, under Colonel Thomas, did particularly good work in linking up the two divisions. Altogether it was a very satisfactory morning's work, and the 50th Brigade added to it in the evening by capturing in a fine attack the village of Rocquigny, and pushing patrols on into Barastre, which was found to be empty. On this day, as the Corps front had contracted, the Twenty-first Division was drawn back into reserve. It may be remarked that in all these operations Robertson's Seventeenth Division had the supreme satisfaction of hurling the enemy out of a long series of villages which they had themselves been forced to relinquish under the pressure of the great March advance.

It was clear now that the Germans, either of their own will or driven by the constant pressure, were withdrawing their rearguards, so that in the early morning of September 3 no touch could be gained by patrols. By 6 A.M. the British advance guards were well on their way, streaming forward to the Canal du Nord, from the eastern bank of which the eternal machine-guns were rapping away once more, stopping the 50th Brigade in an attempt to make a direct advance. There were no bridges left, so nothing further could be done that day, which brought the corps front up to the western bank from Manancourt to the north-east of Etricourt. On September 4, however, the crossing was effected without any very great difficulty, and bridge-heads established by both the divisions in the line.

On September 5 the 114th Brigade attacked the trench system round Equancourt without success. The 51st Brigade had better luck to the north of the village and gained a good bit of ground. The 7th Lincolns were held up with considerable loss in the first advance on account of some misunderstanding about the starting-point and insufficient touch with the Forty-second Division on their left. The 7th Borders, a battalion made up of Cumberland and Westmoreland Yeomanry, carried on the attack and found the village deserted. The day ended with the right flank of the Fifth Corps in touch with the Third Corps to the north-west of Nurlu, while the left flank joined the Fourth Corps north of Vallulart Wood. That night the Twenty-first Division came back into line, taking the place of the Welshmen who had done such splendid and strenuous service since August 22.

September 6 and 7 were occupied in a slow but steady advance which absorbed Equancourt, Fins, and Sorel-le-Grand. On September 8 matters were less one-sided, as the Twenty-first Division, acting in close liaison with Rawlinson at Peizières, attacked Vaucelette Farm and Chapel Crossing. It must have been with peculiar ardour and joy that General Campbell and his men flung themselves upon the positions which they had held so heroically upon March 21. Here after six months were their complete vindication and revenge. The fighting was carried on into September 9, the Seventeenth Division joining in on the left in close touch with the New Zealanders of the Fourth Corps. It was clear that the Germans meant standing if they could and the struggle was a very hard one, but before evening much of the ground had reverted to the two divisions which were both, by a peculiar coincidence, more or less in their old positions. There were attack and counter-attack, and a good price paid for all that was gained. There are days when land is cheap and days when it is the dearest thing upon earth. At the end of this fight the Germans were in a continuous trench on one side of the ridge and the British in a corresponding position on the other. It became more and more clear that the days of pursuit and rearguard actions were over, and that the whole British front in this quarter was up against a fixed battle position of the enemy — or at the least against the strong outposts in front of a fixed battle position. This important fact regulates the whole situation up to the great attack of September 29.

September 10 and 11 were spent in local encounters in the Chapel Crossing and Vaucelette Farm district, the Germans striving hard by these outpost engagements to prevent the British line from getting within striking distance of the old Hindenburg position, behind which they hoped to rally their dishevelled forces. The British were equally eager to break down this screen and get at the solid proposition behind it. The weather was terrible, rising at one time to the height of a cyclone, which disarranged the assembly. On September 12 there was a more serious British advance, the Fourth Corps on the left attacking the Trescault Spur, while the Welsh, who had now relieved the Seventeenth Division, were to go forward on their flank. The Germans clung desperately to their ground, however, and after a long day of alternate advance and retreat the British line was where it had been in the morning. A position called African Trench lay in front of the Welshmen, and it was not possible to carry it in face of the very severe machine-gun fire. From this date until September 18 there was no advance and no change on the front of the Fifth Corps save that Pinney’s Thirty-third Division came in to patch its worn array.

On September 18 the Fifth Corps attacked once more in conjunction with Rawlinson’s Army on its right, the final objective being the trench lines south of Villers-Guislain — Gauche Wood. The advance was made by the Welsh Division opposite to Gouzeaucourt, the Seventeenth in front of Gauche Wood, and the Twenty-first to the immediate south. It was preceded by field barrage, heavy barrage, machine barrage, trench mortar bombardment, and every refinement of artillery practice as elaborated in this long war. The results of a hard day’s fighting were rather mixed. The Welsh Division was held near Gouzeaucourt and finished up in its own original line, leaving the left flank of the 52nd Brigade exposed. The two other divisions were able, after hard fighting, to reach their objectives, including Gauche Wood. The Twenty-first Division had a particularly trying and yet successful day, all three brigades being heavily engaged and enduring considerable losses in capturing the very ground which they had held on March 21. Their advance was complicated by a mine-field, laid down by themselves and so well laid that it was still in a very sensitive condition, while the dug-outs had been so undisturbed that the 1st Lincolns actually found their own orderly papers upon the table. In the fighting the 62nd Brigade led the way with complete success, and it was not until the 64th and the 110th Brigades passed through it and began to debouch over the old No Man’s Land that the losses became serious, Epéhy and Peizières being thorns in their flesh. Colonel Holroyd Smith of the 15th Durhams was killed, but the 64th Brigade made good its full objective, the 1st East Yorks capturing a German howitzer battery, together with the horses which had just been hooked in. At one time the Germans got round the left flank of the Division and the situation was awkward, but Colonel Walsh of the 9th Yorks Light Infantry, with his H.Q. Staff, made a dashing little attack on his own, and drove the enemy back, receiving a wound in the exploit. The Twenty-first Division, save on the right, had all its objectives. The left of the Third Corps had not prospered equally well, so that a defensive line had to be built up by Campbell in the south, while Robertson did the same in the north, the whole new position forming a marked salient. Two efforts of the enemy to regain the ground were beaten back. The southern divisions had been much troubled by flanking fire from Gouzeaucourt, so an effort was made that night to get possession of this place, the 6th Dorsets and 10th West Yorkshires of the 50th Brigade suffering in the attempt. This attack was led by General Sanders, who had succeeded Gwyn, Thomas as Brigadier of the 50th, but he was himself killed by a shell on September 20. Some 2000 prisoners and 15 field-guns were the trophies taken in this operation by the Fifth Corps. Gouzeaucourt was shortly afterwards evacuated, but there was no other change on the front until the great battle which shattered the Hindenburg Line and really decided the war. All of this fighting, and especially that on September 18, has to be read in conjunction with that already narrated in the story of the Fourth Army on the right.

Having brought Shute's Fifth Corps up to the eve of the big engagement we shall now ask the reader to cast his mind back to August 21, the first day of General Byng's advance, and to follow Haldane's Sixth Corps on the northern flank of the Army during these same momentous and strenuous weeks. It will then be more easy to trace the operations of Harper's Fourth Corps, which was intermediate between Shute and Haldane.

Haldane's Sixth Corps, like its comrades of the Third Army, had gone through the arduous days of March and had many a score to pay back to the Germans. It was a purely British Corps, consisting upon the first day of battle of five fine divisions, the Second (Pereira), Third (Deverell), Sixty-second (Braithwaite), Fifty-ninth (Whigham), and the Guards. With four Regular units out of five, Haldane's Sixth Corps might have been the wraith of the grand old Mons army come back to judgment. The First Cavalry Division, also reminiscent of Mons, was in close support, ready to take advantage of any opening.

The first advance in the early morning was made by the 99th Brigade of the Second Division on the south, and the 2nd Guards Brigade on the north, the latter being directed upon the village of Moyenneville, while the 99th Brigade was to carry Moyblain Trench, the main German outpost position, 1000 yards in front of the line. The right of the line was formed by the 1st Berks and the left by the 23rd Royal Fusiliers, the latter having a most unpleasant start, as they were gas-shelled in their assembly places and had to wear their masks for several hours before zero time. Any one who has worn one of these contrivances for five consecutive minutes will have some idea what is meant by such an ordeal, and how far it prepares a man for going into battle. Only a very expert man can keep the goggles clean, and one is simultaneously gagged, blinded, and half smothered, with a horrible death awaiting any attempt at amelioration.

At five o’clock nine tanks moved forward behind a crashing stationary barrage, and the infantry followed eagerly through a weak German fire. In spite of all precautions the Fusiliers had lost 400 men from gas, but otherwise the casualties were very small. It may be remarked that many of these serious gas cases occurred from the reek of the gas out of the long grass when the sun dried the dew, showing how subtle and dangerous a weapon is this distillation of mustard. Some small consolation could be gained by the British soldier suffering from these hellish devices, by the knowledge that our chemists, driven to retaliate, had in mustard gas, as in every other poison, produced a stronger brew than the original inventor. Well might the German garrison of Lens declare that they wished they could have dropped that original inventor into one of his own retorts.

The advance of the Guards kept pace on the left with that of the Second Division. The 2nd Brigade went forward with Moyenneville for its immediate objective. The 1st Coldstream in the north were to carry the village, while the 1st Scots were to assemble in the low ground north of Ayette, and to carry the attack to the Ablainzeville-Moyenneville Ridge. The 3rd Grenadiers were then to pass through the Scots and to capture the line of the railway. The opening of the attack was much the same as in the case of the troops on the right, save that no difficulty was experienced from gas. There were few losses in the two leading battalions, which took many prisoners, and it was only the 3rd Grenadiers who, as they neared the railway, met a good deal of machine-gun fire, but pushed on in spite of it and made good the line of their objective.

In the meantime the 9th Brigade of the Third Division had moved through the ranks of the 99th Brigade, and had carried on the advance in the southern area. They advanced with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers on the right and 4th Royal Fusiliers behind them. The latter had the misfortune to lose Colonel Hartley and 50 men from a shell-burst while moving into position. The left front of the brigade was formed by the 13th King’s Liverpools. The whole line advancing in open order passed on without a check, save from mist which caused loss of direction and constant reference to the compass. Over a series of trenches the line plodded its way, clearing up occasional machine-guns and their crews. By 9.15 they were on the railway embankment.

The 8th Brigade (Fisher) of the Third Division had also advanced on the left of the 9th, keeping pace with it so far as the fog would allow. The 7th Shropshires were on the left, in touch with the Guards. The 1st Scots Fusiliers were on the right and the 2nd Royal Scots in support. The attack was directed upon Courcelles, which was carried by the Scots Fusiliers and mopped up by the 8th Royal Lancasters. From the village a sharp slope leads down to the railway line and here the opposition was very strong, the ground being closely swept by rifle and machine-gun fire. Behind two tanks the leading battalions rushed forward and the railway was rushed, with 200 prisoners. The position was organised, and touch established with the Guards on the left and with the 9th Brigade on the right. The 9th Brigade found it difficult, however, to get touch with the Sixty-third Naval Division on their right, that unit having experienced considerable difficulties and losses. The 76th Brigade, the remaining unit of the Third Division, had the 2nd Suffolks and 1st Gordons close up to the line, and all of these battalions were much mixed up owing to the persistent fog.

A very determined pocket of German infantry and machine-gunners had remained in front of the left flank of the Sixty-third Division, formed by the 188th Brigade. These men were now on the right rear of the 9th Brigade, but the situation was obscure and nothing was certain save that the British line was not yet continuous and solid. In spite of a concentration of artillery the Germans were still holding out next morning, being the only hostile units to the west of the railway line on the Sixth Corps sector.

An attempt had been made to get forward to Achiet-le-Grand, in which part of the Sixty-third Division on the right and two companies of the Gordons participated. The Ansons and the Gordons both lost considerably in this attack and were unable to reach the village, though they advanced the line by 500 yards. Lack of artillery support, while the enemy guns were numerous and active, was the cause of the check.

The night of August 21 was quiet on most parts of this new front of the Third Army, but at early dawn a counter-attack developed before the Sixty-third Division and before the 8th Brigade. An S.O.S. barrage was called for and promptly given in each case, which entirely extinguished the attack upon the Sixty-third. On the 8th Brigade front some of the German infantry got as far forward as the railway line but were quickly hurled back again by bombs and the bayonet. At 7.45 A.M. the enemy again made a rush and occupied one post of the railway, from which, as well as from the posts on the right of the 9th Brigade where the railway line was not yet in British hands, he enfiladed the front defences during the day, causing many casualties, until in the evening the post was retaken by the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. Among the gas cases sent to the rear this day, though his injuries had been incurred during the assembly, was General Fisher of the 8th Brigade.

The Guards in the north had also encountered the attack of the early morning of August 22, which seems to have been general along the line, though at no part very vigorous. This particular section of it was delivered near Hamelincourt by the Fortieth Saxon Division, who suffered terribly in the venture. The rest of the day was comparatively quiet and was spent in arranging the attack for the morrow. This attack was planned with the idea of outflanking the German position at Achiet-le-Grand, which had shown itself to be dangerously strong. It was determined to outflank it both upon the north and the south. With this intention the Third Division was to capture Gomiecourt during the night of August 22. Farther north two fresh divisions, the famous Fifty-sixth London Territorials, and the Fifty-second from Palestine, were ordered to prolong the line of the Guards, all under General Haldane, and to capture Hamelincourt, Boyelles, and Boiry Becquerelle, with as much more as they could get, on the early morning of August 23. On the front of the Fourth Corps on the right the advance was entrusted to the Thirty-seventh Division and to the Forty-second Division on the bank of the Ancre.

The attack upon Gomiecourt, which was to be the prelude of the day’s work, since all advance to the south was impossible while that village was in German hands, was carried out by the well-tried 76th Brigade, the 8th Royal Lancasters and 2nd Suffolks in the front line, with the 1st Gordons in close support. Tanks were to lead the van, but they were unable to get across the railway embankment in time. The assault, which began at 4 in the morning, was preceded by a short crashing bombardment of heavy shells upon the doomed village. It had hardly ceased before the Suffolks and Lancasters were swarming down the street, and the place was secured with little loss. Whilst this brisk and successful affair was going on, the 13th King’s Liverpools of the 9th Brigade on the right made an advance to keep the line level, taking some prisoners and three guns. This was the more important as the weak point of the situation had always been to the south and most of the damage sustained was by enfilade fire from this direction.

The 8th Brigade, now under the command of Colonel Henderson, kept pace with the 76th Brigade in their advance, occupying the ground north of Gomiecourt. The 2nd Royal Scots and 7th Shropshires were in the lead. There was very heavy fire and the losses were considerable, but the machine-gun nests were rooted out with the bayonet, and the full objective was attained. Farther north the attack was carried on by the 3rd Grenadier Guards and the 1st Scots. These were successful in taking the village of Hamelincourt and the trench system south of it, while keeping in touch with the Fifty-sixth Division to the north of them. The 1st Coldstream was then pushed through and crossed the Arras — Bapaume Road, gaining a position eventually from which they looked south upon Ervillers.

Farther north still both the Fifty-sixth and the Fifty-second Divisions had joined in the advance, moving forward to the line of the great high road which runs from north to south. Bridges had been thrown over the Cojeul River by the sappers of the Fifty-ninth Division, who had held this front — the workers having to wear gas masks during their labours. To the 470th Field Company R.E. belongs the credit of this most difficult job, under the direction of Colonel Coussmaker. Over these bridges passed the Fifty-second Division, while south of them the attack was urged by the 168th Brigade of the Fifty-sixth Division, with several villages for their objective. The 13th London (Kensingtons) were on the right, the 4th London in the centre, and the 14th London (London Scottish) on the left. The advance went without a hitch, save that touch was lost with the Guards on the right. This was regained again in the evening, however, when the Brigade found itself to the north of Croisilles and close to the old Hindenburg Line. The Fifty-second Division had also reached the line where it runs across the Sensée valley.

The main advance in front of Haldane’s Corps had been entrusted to the Second Division, who advanced through the ranks of the Third Division after the capture of Gomiecourt. This advance was on a three-brigade front. On the right was the 99th Brigade, in touch with the 63rd Brigade of the Thirty-seventh Division to the south of them. This Brigade was told off to keep the flank, but it captured 500 prisoners in the process. On the left was the 6th Brigade, which had been ordered, with the help of eight whippets, to attack Ervillers. In the centre the 5th Brigade with ten whippets was to carry Behagnies and Sapignies. This considerable attack was timed for 11 o’clock.

Gomiecourt having fallen, the 5th Brigade used it as a screen, passing round to the north of it and then turning south to Behagnies. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry headed for that village, while the 24th Royal Fusiliers advanced to the storm of Sapignies. The 2nd Oxford and Bucks were in reserve. The ten light tanks which led tie attack had a series of adventures. Three were knocked out by a gun on the railway. The other seven under heavy gun-fire swerved to the right, got out of the divisional area, and on the principle that any fight is better than no fight, joined with the Thirty-seventh Division in their attack upon Achiet-le-Grand, where they did good service. In the meantime, the tankless 5th Brigade moved round Gomiecourt, coming under very heavy fire on their left flank. Colonel Brodie, a most gallant V.C. officer of the Highland Light Infantry, was killed, and Colonel Cross of the Oxfords wounded, by this fire. The day was very hot, the men exhausted, and the losses severe. The new position was organised, therefore, and the advance suspended for the present.

The 6th Brigade had advanced on the left of the 5th, heading for Ervillers, with the let King’s Liverpools and the 2nd South Staffords in the lead. The front waves, assisted by light tanks, rapidly broke down all opposition, and Ervillers was taken about 2 P.M. All movement beyond the village was checked by very heavy fire from the high ground to the north-east, so that Mory Copse, the next objective, was found to be unattainable. The object of the British Commanders was never to pay more for a position than it was worth, or buy a machine-gun at the cost of half a battalion. On the other hand, papers captured during the day showed beyond all doubt that the object of the Germans was to make an orderly retreat as far as the Hindenburg Line, so that it was clearly the game to hustle and bustle them without cessation.

August the 24th was a heavy day in the Sixth Corps, who were ordered to push on and gain ground to the utmost extent along the whole front. In order to strengthen the movement, the Canadian Corps had been very quietly and deftly removed from the right wing of Rawlinson’s Army and transferred to the left wing of Byng’s Army, in touch with the Fifty-second Division.

It will be remembered that the Second Division, though they had taken Ervillers, had been pinned down there by German fire, while they had failed to take Behagnies or Sapignies. Both these movements were now resumed. In the night of August 23-24 the 1st King's Liverpools advanced from Ervillers upon Mory, but were held up by very heavy fire. The 3rd Guards Brigade on the north was advancing successfully upon St. Leger and this had the effect of outflanking the Mory position on that side. St. Leger was taken by the 2nd Scots Guards and the 1st Welsh, who cleared it in the course of the afternoon. They could get no farther, however, until the Second Division had completed its task at Mory. This was now in the hands of the 99th Brigade, who, headed by the 1st Berkshires, with the 1st Royal Rifles behind them, and a spearhead of tanks in front, broke down all opposition and captured Mory Copse, a very formidable position full of emplacements and dug-outs. By this success the threat was removed from the right of the Guards, and all was clear for their further advance upon Ecoust.

The Sixty-second Yorkshire Division had now moved up to relieve the Second Division, but the latter were determined before their withdrawal to complete their unfinished tasks. In the early morning of August 25 the attacks upon the two obdurate villages were resumed, after a very heavy bombardment. The new venture was splendidly successful. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 24th Royal Fusiliers rushed into Behagnies while it was still dark and cleared out the whole village. This enabled the force to get to the rear of Sapignies, which was stormed by the 2nd Oxfords — a battalion with such proud traditions that even now in semi-official documents it is still the 52nd Light Infantry. 300 prisoners and 150 machine-guns were taken in the village, a proportion which illustrates how far machines were taking the places of men in the depleted German Army. Haring gloriously tidied up its front the Second Division now stood out while the Sixty-second took its place.

It will be remembered that the Fifty-second and Fifty-sixth Divisions had fought their way to the Hindenburg Line on August 23. This was too formidable an obstacle to be taken in their stride, and the most that could be hoped was that they should get into a good position for the eventual attack. The Fifty-second Division had shown the metal of the Palestine Army by a very fine advance which made them masters of Henin. On their right was the 167th Brigade, with the 1st London and the 7th and 8th Middlesex in the line. These troops pushed right into the outskirts of Croisilles, but it was clear that new German divisions were in the line, and that the resistance had very much hardened. The Londoners were unable to hold the village, and the Fifty-second Division was also held up on Henin Hill by very strong fire. Matters seemed to have come to a stand in that quarter.

Early on the morning of the 25th the Guards 3rd Brigade and the 186th and the 187th Brigades of the Sixty-second Division made a resolute advance to clear their front and get nearer to that terrible paling which was meant to enclose the German domain. It was a day of very hard fighting for all three brigades, and they had ample evidence that the German line had indeed been powerfully reinforced, and had no intention of allowing General Byng to establish himself in the very shadow of their fortifications if they could hold him off. The opening was inauspicious, for by some mistake there was an error of half an hour in starting-time between the two divisions. As a result the Guards found themselves on the line of road between Mory and St. Leger with an open flank and under heavy enfilade fire, which made many gaps in the ranks of the 1st Grenadiers. At the same time the leading tanks were put out of action on that flank. In the centre the tanks lost their way in the mist, but the 2nd Scots Guards pushed ahead in spite of it. Banks Trench, however, in front of them was very strongly held and the assault was not pressed. On the left the 1st Welsh were in St. Leger Wood, but Croisilles was still untaken and the advance could not be carried forward as the machine-guns from this village swept the country. About 9 A.M. the enemy buzzed out of the Hindenburg Line and fell upon the Scots Guards, but were shot back again into their cover. During these operations the Guards captured a battery of field-guns.

The Sixty-second West Yorkshire Territorials on the right of the Guards had an equally arduous day. They had found the same difficulties in getting forward, but at 5 P.M. the enemy had the indiscretion to counter-attack, and when once he masks his own machine-guns he has ceased to be formidable. His attack was near Mory Copse and aimed at the junction between the two divisions, but it was heavily punished and shredded away to nothing. About 7 P.M. he tried another advance upon the right of the Sixty-second Division and won his way up to the line, but was thrown out again by the 5th West Ridings and driven eastward once more. The 186th Brigade, forming the right of the division, co-operated with the Fourth Corps in their attack upon Favreuil, which place was captured.

On the evening of August 25 Haldane’s Sixth Corps, which had become somewhat unwieldy in size, was limited to the north on a line just south of Croisilles, so that the Fifty-second, Fifty-sixth, and Fifty-seventh Divisions all became Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps, which was thus thrust between the Sixth Corps and the Canadians, who had not yet made their presence felt upon this new battle-ground. The Seventeenth Corps was now the left of the Third Army, and the Canadians were the right of the First Army. The immediate task of both the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps was the hemming in and capture of Croisilles, and the reoccupation of the old army front line. August 26 was a quiet day on this front, but on August 27 the Guards and the Sixty-second Division were ordered forward once more, the former to attack Ecoust and Longatte, the other to storm Vaulx-Vraucourt. The First German Division encountered was easily driven in. The second, however, the Thirty-sixth, was made in a sterner mould and was supported by a strong artillery, large and small. The 2nd Grenadiers and 2nd Coldstream in the front line of the Guards 1st Brigade got forward for nearly a mile on each flank, but were held up by a withering fire in the centre, so that the flanks had eventually to come back. The Fifty-sixth Division of the Seventeenth Corps had not yet captured Croisilles, from which a counter-attack was made upon the left flank of the 2nd Coldstream, which was handsomely repulsed.

On the whole, however, it had been an unsatisfactory day and the Sixty-second had been equally unable to get forward, so that none of the objectives had been gained. The Seventeenth Corps and the Canadians in the north were both advancing, however, and it was possible that the position in the south might alter as a consequence.

Such was indeed found to be the case on August 28, for the Fifty-sixth Division was able this day to get possession of Croisilles, which eased the situation to the south. The Guards and the Sixty-second pushed forwards, following always the line of least resistance, so that by evening they were 1200 yards forward at some points, though the right of the Sixty-second Division was still pinned to its ground. That evening the Third Division replaced the Guards, and the same tactics were pursued on the following day. The 76th Brigade was now in the front line to the south of Croisilles, with the hard-worked Sixty-second Division still on their right. A sugar factory was the chief impediment in front of the latter. The right of the division got forward during the day and occupied the old army trenches.

August 30 was once again a day of heavy fighting, the Seventeenth and Sixth Corps, represented by the Fifty-sixth, Third, and Sixty-second Divisions, closing in upon the Hindenburg Line and attacking the last villages which covered its front. The tanks had miscarried, and the infantry at 5 A.M. had to go forward alone. On the right the 185th and 186th Brigades of the Sixty-second Division both made good progress, the obnoxious sugar factory was taken, and though Vaulx could not be cleared it was partly occupied. Next day saw the dour Yorkshiremen still sticking to their point, and fighting with varying success in and out of the village. At times they had flooded through it, and yet again they were beaten back. By the morning of September 1 the 186th Brigade had possession of Vaulx-Vraucourt and were on the high ground to the east of the village. Next morning they had Vaux Trench as well, but about ten o'clock in the forenoon of September 2 a strong counter sent them reeling back in some disorder. Gathering themselves together in grim North Country fashion they went forward again and cleared Vaulx Wood before evening. That night, after a very desperate and costly term of service, the Sixty-second was relieved by the Second Division.

The experiences of the Third Division from the August 30 attack were as arduous as those already described. On that morning the 76th Brigade, with the Suffolks and Gordons in the lead, got forward well at the first, though they lost touch with the Londoners to the north. The Suffolks were on that side and the gap enabled the Germans to get round to their left rear with disastrous results, as the losses were heavy and the battalion had to fall back. The Gordons had to adjust their line accordingly. This rebuff had lost most of the ground which had been gained early in the day, General Deverell now sent up the 9th Brigade, as the 76th was much worn, but the 1st Gordons remained in the fight.

On August 31 the 9th Brigade attacked the Vraucourt position, with the 1st Gordons, battle-weary but still indomitable, on the right, the 4th Royal Fusiliers in the centre, and the 13th King's Liverpools on the left. It was known that no less than three new German divisions had been thrown in, and however the fighting might turn it was certain that the attrition was going merrily forward. The assembly was unfortunately much disturbed by the German barrage, which fell with particular severity upon the Fusiliers in the centre. At 5.15 A.M. the line moved forward, but again the luck was against the Fusiliers, who were opposed by a particularly dangerous machine-gun nest in a sunken road. One company endeavoured to rush it, but all the officers save one, and most of the men, were mown down. A tank which endeavoured to help them met with a strange fate, as a German officer managed, very gallantly, to get upon the top of it, and firing through the ventilation hole with his revolver, put the whole crew out of action — a feat for which in the British service he would certainly have had his V.C.

The Fusiliers were hung up, but the King's on the left had carried the village of Ecoust, getting in touch with the right of the Fifty-sixth Division in Bullecourt Avenue. Many hundreds of the enemy were taken, but some pockets still remained on the southern edge of the village, and fired into the flank of the unfortunate Fusiliers. The King's then attempted during the long day to throw out their right flank and get in touch with the left of the Gordons so as to obliterate the sunken road, which was the centre of the mischief. The ground was absolutely open, however, and the fire commanded it completely. Under these circumstances Colonel Herbert of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, which was in reserve, suggested that the attack be postponed until dusk. This was done, and at 8 P.M. Herbert's men overran the sunken road, capturing the guns. Ecoust was also completely cleared of the enemy. So ended this day of vicissitudes in which the 9th Brigade, with heavy loss, had struggled through many difficulties and won their victory at the last. A further advance during the night by both the 9th and the 76th Brigades straightened the whole line from Ecoust to the south.

On the morning of September 1 the Fifty-second Division had relieved the Fifty-sixth Division, both of the Seventeenth Corps, in the Croisilles sector, and was in close touch with the Third Division to the south. Both divisions went forward with no great difficulty at the appointed hour, the three battalions of the 9th Brigade being all in the line once more. The important trench known as Noreuil Switch was captured in this advance. It may well seem to the reader that the gains were tardily and heavily bought at this stage of the operations, but it is to be always borne in mind that Fergusson and Haldane in particular were up against the old intricate trench system, and away from that open fighting which can alone give large results. To others there was always some way round, but here there was an unbroken obstacle which must be frontally attacked and broken down by pure persistence. In these operations the new machine-gun organisation proved to be particularly efficient, and B Company of the 3rd Battalion Machine-Gun Corps did essential work in winning the way for the 9th

Brigade. The whole battle was a long steady contest of endurance, in which the Germans were eventually worn out by the persistence of their opponents.

The advance was renewed along this area on September 2, the object of the Fifty-second Division being to encircle Quéant from the south and west, while that of the Third and Sixty-second Divisions was to gain the east of Lagnicourt and the high ground east of Morchies. The fortunes of the Sixty-second Division have already been briefly described. On the front of the Third Division the 8th Brigade, strengthened by one battalion from each of the other brigades, took up the heavy task, the 7th Shropshires, 2nd Royal Scots, and 1st Scots Fusiliers forming from right to left the actual line of battle. The last-named battalion by a happy chance joined up on the left with its own 5th Battalion in the Fifty-second Division. They assembled under heavy shelling, some of which necessitated the use of box-respirators. No sooner had the advance begun than the Shropshire men came under machine-gun fire and lost the three tanks which led them. They had gained some ground, but were first brought to a halt and then compelled to retire. In the centre the Royal Scots took Noreuil, which was found to be lightly held. In attempting to get on to the east of this village they found the trenches strongly manned and the fire, both of rifles and machine-guns, so murderous that it was impossible to get forward. The Scots Fusiliers were also faced with strong resistance, including a belt of wire. Three company and eight platoon commanders were down before this obstacle and the sunken road behind it were crossed. Without the aid of tanks the depleted battalion moved on under very heavy fire, and eventually halted in a line with the Royal Scots on their right. To the right of these, as already shown, the Sixty-second Division had also been brought to a stand. A formidable trench, called in the old British days Macaulay Avenue, barred the way and had only been reached by a few of the assailants. It is a fact, however, that Lieutenant R. R. MacGregor of the Scots Fusiliers with five men did force their way in upon this morning, and tenaciously held on to their position until after dark, forming just that little nucleus of determined men by whom great battles are so often won.

There was a momentary check, but it was retrieved by Captain Nagle’s company of the 2nd Suffolks, who charged with two companies of the Royal Scots and won a section of the trench. The utmost difficulty was experienced by the Brigadier in keeping in touch with the action, as the ground was so exposed that nearly every runner sent back from the front line was killed or wounded. Colonel Henderson came forward, therefore, about three o'clock and reorganised his dispositions, with the result that before evening the line had been straightened and advanced, with the capture of many prisoners and machine-guns. Meanwhile Quéant to the north had been captured by the Fifty-second Division, and the whole German system of defence was weakening and crumbling, the Seventeenth Corps strongly co-operating with the Canadians upon their left. The enemy's purpose during all this very hard contest was to sacrifice his rearguards if necessary, in order to cover the retreat of his main body across the Canal du Nord. There were few more difficult problems in local fighting during the whole war than how to carry these successive positions, bravely held and bristling with machine-guns. That it was finally done was a great achievement upon the part both of those who commanded and those who obeyed. Colonel Vickery's guns, covering the infantry, had much to do with the final success. How great that success was could only be judged upon the following morning when the new divisions which had taken over the front, the Guards on the left and the Second on the right, found that all the kick had been taken out of the Germans, and that a substantial advance could be made with little loss.

Neither the Guards nor the Third Division encountered serious opposition upon September 3, and a steady, if cautious, forward movement went on all day. The Seventeenth Corps upon the left had turned south in order to clear Moouvres and Tadpole Copse. By midday the Second Division had cleared both Hermies and Demicourt. Before evening the 2nd Guards Brigade was in the old British front line, which was held during the night. The Canal du Nord was just ahead, and it was realised that this would mark what the Germans intended to make their permanent line. It was all-important to push the rearguard across it and to get any bridges with their eastern exits, if it were in any way possible.

The advance on September 4 was resumed in the face of some sporadic opposition, but by the evening of the 6th the enemy was all across the Canal, and the Sixth Corps was awaiting developments elsewhere. On September 11 steps were taken, however, to get into striking position for the final fracture of the Hindenburg Line, in view of which it was necessary to gain the Hindenburg front system west of the Canal. On September 12 the main attack was delivered, though on September 11 the Second Division had secured the western ends of the Canal crossings. The centre of the new operation was the attack upon Havrincourt by Braithwaite’s Sixty-second Division. This operation was carried out by the 186th and 187th Brigades, the pioneer battalion, 9th Durham Light Infantry, being attached to the former, while eight brigades of field-guns and three groups of heavies lent their formidable assistance. The right of the Sixty-second was in close touch with the Thirty-seventh Division, which was attacking Trescault. The advance of both brigades was uninterrupted, though strongly opposed. The 2/4th Hants and 5th West Ridings on the right, and the 2/4th York and Lancasters with the 5th Yorkshire Light Infantry on the left, trampled down all opposition. The individual is almost lost to sight in the scale of such operations, but a sentence must be devoted to Sergeant Calvert of the last-named battalion, who attacked two machine-guns, bayoneted four and shot three of the crews, taking the rest prisoners. At 7.30, the western edge of the village of Havrincourt had fallen, but the fortified château on the south, in the area of the 186th Brigade, still held its own. It was attacked by the 2/4th West Riding Battalion, who had a most difficult task in the tangled gardens which surrounded the house. At the same time the 2/4th Hants pushed into the village and fought their way right through it. They had to sustain a heavy counter-attack delivered about 7 in the evening by the Twentieth Hanoverian Division, supported by a flight of low-flying aeroplanes. This attack was broken up with great loss by the steady fire of the men of Hampshire and Yorkshire.

In the early morning of September 13 the village was strongly attacked by the enemy, who effected a lodgment in the cemetery and pushed back the British line for 200 yards. A fine return was made by the 5th Devons of the 185th Brigade, who cleared the village once again. Two of the divisional machine-guns held out close to the posts occupied by the Germans — so close that the sergeant in charge shot the battalion leader of the enemy with his revolver. From this time the Sixty-second were left in possession of Havrincourt, which they had thus won for the second time, since it was carried by them in the Cambrai battle of November 20, 1917. General Braithwaite, who was the victor upon each occasion, remarked that if his men had to take it a third time they should, on the cup-tie principle, be allowed to keep it for ever.

Meanwhile the Second Division on the left had made its way slowly but without any serious check as far as London Trench, which brought them nearly level with the Sixty-second, while the Thirty-seventh in the south had captured Trescault and were also well up to the Hindenburg Line. There was no further serious fighting for several days on this front save that the 185th Brigade advanced its line to Triangle Wood on the morning of September 14. This attack was carried out by the 2/20th Londons and was completely successful, as was their subsequent defence against a brisk counter-attack. On September 16 the Sixty-second Division was relieved by the Third, and the Second Division by the Guards. There was no further fighting until September 18, that general day of battle, when a very severe German attack was made about 6 o'clock in the evening, which covered the whole front of the Third Division and involved the left of the Thirty-seventh Division in the area of the Fourth Corps. After a heavy bombardment there was a determined advance of infantry, having the recapture of Havrincourt for its objective. A number of low-flying aeroplanes helped the German infantry. The attack fell chiefly upon the 1st Scots Fusiliers and 2nd Royal Scots, and some gain was effected by a rush of bombers aided by flame-throwers, but they were finally held and eventually driven back, while 100 prisoners were retained. C Company of the Royal Scots particularly distinguished itself in this action, forming a solid nucleus of resistance round which the whole defence was organised. Nothing further of importance occurred until September 27, the day of the general advance, in this northern portion of the British line.

In order to complete this account of the doings of Byng's Third Army from August 21 onwards, some account must now be given of what was originally the central unit, Harper's Fourth Corps, though its general progress has already been roughly defined by the detailed desoription of the two Corps on its flanks.

The first task set for this Corps on August 21 was to capture the general line between Irles in the south and Bihucourt in the north, while the flank of this main attack was to be guarded by a subsidiary advance along the valley of the Ancre, and between Puisieux and Miraumont. The first objective of the main attack was Bucquoy, Ablainzeville, and the important high ground to the immediate east of these villages.

The advance commenced in a thick mist, and was undertaken in the case of the main attack by Williams' Thirty-seventh English Division. It was completely successful, and aided by the fire of six heavy and fifteen field brigades of artillery, it swept over its first objectives, the tanks helping materially to break down the opposition. The moral effect of a tank in a fog can be pictured by the least imaginative. Two field-guns and many lighter pieces were taken. The veteran Fifth Division on the right and the Sixty-third Naval Division on the left then passed through the ranks of the Thirty-seventh to enlarge the opening that they had made, carrying the advance on to the limit of the field artillery barrage, and halting at last just west of Achiet-le-Petit. The naval men met with a blaze of machine-gun fire from the edge of Logeast Wood, but they rooted out the nests and occupied the position, though the passage through the tangled brushwood and trees disorganised the units, and progress became slow. The railway line ran right across the front, and this, as usual, had become a formidable and continuous obstacle, which could not be turned. The reserve brigade of the Fifth Division on the right carried Achiet-le-Petit, but could not get over the railway. The Sixty-third was also unable to reach the railway, and found a considerable concentration of Germans opposite to them in the brickworks and cemetery west of Achiet-le-Grand. The tanks had wandered off in the mist, and for the moment the advance had reached its limit. Many of the tanks, as the mist lifted, were hit by the anti-tank guns of the enemy, though some most gallantly crossed the railway line and penetrated the German positions, doing such harm as they could, until they were eventually destroyed.

Meanwhile, the subsidiary attack on the right flank had also been successful up to a point. The New Zealanders on the immediate south of the Fifth Division had gone forward in their usual workmanlike fashion, and had taken Puisieux. Upon their right, and next to the Fifth Corps who were beginning their arduous crossing of the Ancre, was the Forty-second Division (Solly-Flood), an ex-Palestine unit of Lancashire Territorials which had won laurels in the March fighting. It had come away with a flying start, and had got as far as the important point named Beauregard Dovecote. There it remained until the early morning of August 22, when the enemy regained it by a spirited attack from a new division. The total effect of the day’s work along the whole front of the Fourth Corps had been the capture of 1400 prisoners, of a number of guns, and of an extent of ground which was important, though less than had been hoped for. The main resistance had always been the railway, and the German guns behind it, so that to that extent his line was really inviolate. Indeed from his point of view the whole work of the Third Army on that date might be represented as an attack upon a false front, the real position remaining intact.

The enemy was by no means abashed, and early in the morning of August 22 he showed that he did not propose to surrender the field until he had fought to regain it. At dawn the Fifty-second German Division deployed through Miraumont and fell upon the left of the Fifth Division in one direction, and the Forty-second in the other. As already stated they succeeded in driving back the latter, and Beauregard Dovecote remained as a prize of victory. Some three hundred Germans pushed through between the Fifth Division and the New Zealanders, but were at once attacked by a party of the 1st Devons, assisted by some of the New Zealanders. Corporal Onions of the Devons showed great initiative in this affair, which ended in the capture of the whole of the intruders. He received the V.C. for his gallantry.

It was a day of reaction, for the Sixty-third Division in the north was strongly attacked, and was at one time pushed as far as Logeast Wood. They rallied however and came back, but failed to regain the railway at Achiet-le-Grand. Early in the morning of August 23 the Beauregard Dovecote was finally captured by units of the Forty-second and New Zealanders, the enemy falling back to Miraumont. About the same hour in the morning the Sixth Corps in the north had taken Gomiecourt as already described, which strengthened the general position.

Early on August 23 the Thirty-seventh Division came up on the left and relieved the Naval Division. Guns had been pushed into position, so at it o’clock in the forenoon it was possible to deliver a strong attack under an adequate barrage upon the line of the railway. The result was a complete success, in spite of the formidable nature of the defences. The imperturbable English infantry flooded over every obstacle, took its inevitable losses with its usual good humour, and established itself upon the farther side of the position, while the tanks, taking advantage of a level crossing, burst through and did very great work. Both Achiet-le-Grand and Bihucourt fell to the Thirty-seventh Division, while the Fifth captured the high ground overlooking Irles, and subsequently pushed on eastwards as far as Loupart Wood. Since Miraumont was still German the flank of Ponsonby’s Division was scourged by the machine-guns, and an attempt by the Forty-second Division to relieve the pressure by taking the village had no success, but the Fifth maintained all its gains in spite of the heavy enfilading fire. In this fine operation the Thirty-seventh Division alone captured 1150 prisoners. There were signs, however, of German reaction, especially on the southern flank, where a new division, the Third Naval, had been brought into line.

August 24 was another day of victory. The New Zealanders passed through the depleted ranks of the Fifth Division and made good not only the whole of Loupart Wood, but also Grevillers to the north-east of it. An even more useful bit of work was the storming of Miraumont by the Forty-second Division in the south. This village, which had been nearly surrounded by the advance on the flanks, gave up 500 prisoners and several guns. The Forty-second continued its career of victory to Pys, which they took, and were only stopped eventually by the machine-guns at Warlencourt. This advance greatly relieved the situation on the right flank, which had been a cause for anxiety, and it also, by winning a way to the Ancre, solved the water problem, which had been a difficult one. This day of continued victorious advance was concluded by the occupation of Biefvillers by the united action of the Thirty-seventh and of the New Zealanders.

At 5 A.M. upon August 25 the advance was resumed, with the Sixty-third Division on the right, the New Zealanders in the centre, and the Thirty-seventh on the left. The naval men found a head wind from the first, for the Germans were holding Le Barque and Thilloy in great strength. No great progress could be made. On the left the New Zealanders and the Thirty-seventh both reached the very definite line of the Bapaume — Arras Road, where they were held by very heavy fire from Bapaume on the right and Favreuil on the left. The splendid Thirty-seventh, with some assistance from the New Zealanders on their south, rushed the wood and village of Favreuil and helped to beat off a German counter-attack by the fresh Hundred and eleventh Division, which was so mauled by aircraft and artillery that it never looked like reaching its objective. Many dead and some abandoned guns marked the line of its retirement.

On August 26 these indefatigable troops were still attacking. It was indeed a most marvellous display of tenacity and will-power. The general idea was to encircle Bapaume from the north and to reach the Cambrai Road. In this the Fifth Division and the New Zealanders were successful, the former reaching Beugnatre, while the latter got as far as the road, but sustained such losses from machine-gun fire that they could not remain there. In the south Thilloy still barred the advance of the Naval Division, which was again repulsed on August 27, when they attacked after a heavy bombardment. There was a pause at this period as the troops were weary and the supplies had been outdistanced. On August 28 the Sixty-third left the Fourth Corps and the Forty-Second took over their line and repeated their experience, having a setback before Thilloy. On August 29 there was a general withdrawal of the German rear-guards, the whole opposition dissolved, Thilloy fell to the Forty-second Division, and the New Zealanders had the honour of capturing Bapaume. Up to this time the advance of the Fourth Corps had yielded 100 guns and 6800 prisoners.

On August 30 the whistles were sounding once more and the whole British line was rolling eastwards. It will mark its broader front if we say that on this date the Fifth Corps on the right was in front of Beaulencourt, while the Sixth Corps on the left had taken Vaulx, Vraucourt. The Forty-second Division on this day was unable to hold Riencourt, but the rest of the line got well forward, always fighting but always prevailing, until in the evening they were east of Bancourt and Frémicourt, and close to Beugny. Always it was the same programme, the exploring fire, the loose infantry advance, the rapping machine-guns, the quick concentration and rush — occasionally the summoning of tanks or trench mortars when the strong point was obstinate. So the wave passed slowly but surely on.

On August 31 the Germans, assisted by three tanks, made a strong attack upon the New Zealanders, and a small force pushed in between them and the Fifth Division. They were surrounded, however, a German battalion commander was shot and some sixty of his men were taken. The whole line was restored. On this day the Lancashire men on the right took Riencourt with some prisoners and a battery of guns.

September 2 was a day of hard battle and of victory, the three Corps of General Byng’s Army attempting to gain the general line Barastre — Haplincourt — Le Bucquière. The Forty-second Division captured Villers-au-Flos and advanced east of it, while the New Zealanders made good the ridge between there and Beugny. Some 600 prisoners were taken. There was some very fierce fighting round Beugny in which the Fifth Division lost six tanks and many men with no particular success. The place was afterwards abandoned.

The British line was now drawing close to the Hindenburg position, and the Fourth Corps like all the others was conscious of the increased effort which the Germans were making in order to prevent the attackers from gaining all the outlying posts, and being able to carry the main line before every preparation had been made for its defence. For several days there were wrestles for this position or that, which culminated on September 9 in a very sharp tussle between the New Zealanders and a German Jaeger Division at African Trench on the ridge west of Gouzeaucourt. It was a very desperate fight, which some of the old New Zealanders declared to have been the most intense and close which they had experienced since they met the Turks at Gallipoli — a compliment to the Jaeger, but somewhat a reflection upon other units of the German army. In the end the New Zealanders were unable to hold African Trench and had to be content with African Support. The Fifth Division shared in this fighting. This engagement was part of a local co-operation in an attack made by the Fifth Corps in the south.

On September 12 there was a combined attack, which has already been mentioned, by which the Fourth and Sixth Corps should capture Trescault Spur and Havrincourt. It will be remembered that the latter was captured by the Sixty-second Yorkshire Division. The New Zealanders advanced upon the Spur, where they met with very vigorous opposition from their old enemies, the Jaeger, who fought with great tenacity. The Thirty-seventh Division turned the Spur from the south, however, capturing both Trescault and Bilhem. Two guns and 500 prisoners were captured. On September 18 the Fifth Division together with the Welsh Division of the Fifth Corps undertook a local operation against African Trench, but the indefatigable German Jaeger still remained masters of the situation. At 5.20 P.M. on that day the initiative passed to the enemy, who broke suddenly into a very heavy bombardment, followed by a furious attack upon the left of the Thirty-seventh Division. It made some progress at first and the British losses were heavy, especially in the case of the 1st Herts, a battalion which has many times shown great steadiness and gallantry. Lieutenant Young of this unit rallied his men and counter-attacked at a critical moment, dying single-handed amid the German ranks but winning a posthumous V.C.

We have now brought the record of the Fourth Corps level with that of the Fifth to the south and of the Sixth to the north. It is necessary to give some fuller account of the Seventeenth Corps which had been formed on the left of the Sixth. This will complete the account of General Byng’s operations with his Third Army from their inception on August 21 until the eve of the great general battle which was to break out at the end of September.

It has already been stated that on August 25 Sir Charles Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps was formed on the left of General Byng's Third Army and became the northern unit in that force, having the Sixth Corps on its right and the Canadian Corps on its left. It contained at first three divisions, the Fifty-second (Hill), Fifty-sixth (Hull), and Fifty-seventh (Barnes). Two of these had already been heavily engaged in the new advance before becoming part of the Seventeenth Corps. Indeed on the day preceding the entrance of the Corps into the line, the evening of August 24, the Fifty-sixth Division had attacked the Hindenburg Line at Summit Trench and Hill Switch, near Croisilles, without effect. They had now established themselves near their objective and were waiting orders to try again.

The Fifty-second Division, one of the fine units which had been released from Palestine owing to the reinforcements of Indian troops in that country, had also tried for the Hindenburg Line and taken a bit of it upon August 24, but they had found it too hot to hold. They were now lying low on the western borders of Henin Hill, hoping to co-operate with the Canadians of the First Army on their left at some later date. A line of British divisions was now crouching in front of Hindenburg's bars all ready for a spring.

In the new attack it was planned that the Fifty-sixth Londoners should co-operate with the Sixth Corps on their right, and clear the village of Croisilles by outflanking it, while the Fifty-second Division should work on the north of the Cojeul stream in close touch with the big Canadian attack, advancing towards Fontaine-les-Croisilles. The effect of these movements would be that the portion of the Hindenburg Line which faced the Seventeenth Corps would be attacked from the rear instead of the front.

On August 26 at 3 A.M. the Canadians went forward, as will be told under the head of their operations. The Fifty-second Division kept its place on their right flank, working up along the Cojeul River, and carrying all the objectives allotted to them. By 10.35 A.M. their task had been completed and they were still in close touch with the Canadians. In the afternoon the 155th Brigade on the extreme left, consisting of Scottish Territorials, attacked Henin Hill from the north-west, capturing a succession of machine-gun positions. The crews of these guns got — and indeed accepted — little quarter, fighting staunchly to the last. By 4 o'clock the Fifty-second Division was well into the Hindenburg Line from the Cojeul northwards;

and by 5 o’clock the 155th Brigade was across Henin Hill, moving southeast. The whole of this very important position was now in British possession, though there were pockets of the enemy scattered here and there who were holding out to the last. The Fifty-sixth Division on the right was still in front of Croisilles, sending out occasional patrols which reported that the village was still strongly held. Its orders were to maintain pressure but not to advance until the development of the movement in the north should shake the enemy’s resistance.

On August 27 Croisilles and the strong trenches around it were kept under bombardment. The Fifty-sixth Division began to thrust forward its left flank, and made some progress, but was eventually held by very heavy fire from the south. At midday the Fifty-second Division was driving down from the north, getting to the Sensée River about Fontaine and endeavouring to help the left of the Fifty-sixth Division by moving along the Hindenburg Line. This was partly accomplished, but it was impossible for the Fifty-sixth to get ahead as the troops on their right in the Ledger Trenches had also been held up. That evening the Fifty-second Division after a fine term of service was drawn out and the Fifty-seventh took its place.

Early on August 28 it was evident that the scheme for pinching out Croisilles had been successful. At 8 A.M. a contact aeroplane reported the village to be empty, and at 8.30 the London patrols were in the main street. There now lay Bullecourt in front of the Fifty-sixth, and Hendecourt and Riencourt in front of the Fifty-seventh Division. At 12.30 the attack was in full swing, lines of the gallant Territorials of London and Lancashire streaming across the low dun-coloured curves which are cut by the famous trenches. It was a long uphill fight, but by 4.30 in the afternoon the 169th Brigade, containing the London Rifle Brigade, the 2nd Londons, and the Westminsters, had fought their way into Bullecourt. There they were held, however, for there were numerous pockets of Germans in their rear, and the machine-guns pelted them from every side, while the village was far from clear. The 167th Brigade on the right had also been held up by machine-guns, all three battalions, the 1st London and the 7th and 8th Middlesex, having heavy losses and being forced back for a time. The Fifty-seventh Division on the left of the line encountered the same desperate resistance, which could only have been overcome by troops who would take no denial. Hendecourt was not reached, but all the gains of the morning were held as a basis for a future advance. The liaison on either flank with the Sixth Corps and the Canadians was complete. It had been a day of very hard and expensive fighting and of no very marked success.

The battle was renewed about midday on August 29, the morning having been devoted to re-pulverising the powder-heap of Bullecourt with heavy artillery-, and to clearing up some of the pockets in the immediate front of the advance. The Fifty-sixth Division advanced once more, the 168th Brigade having taken the right of the line. The machine-guns were still very destructive, and the right and centre were held up, though the left made some progress. The general result was to get the British line all round Bullecourt, but the village itself was still defiant. The Fifty-seventh Division on the left had another day of desperate fighting, in which the Lancashire Territorials showed their usual valour. At 4.30 some of them had got through Hendecourt and had penetrated, with great difficulty and suffering heavily, into Riencourt. It was afterwards found that some ardent spirits had even forced their way into the Drocourt — Quéant line, and left their dead there as a proof for those who followed after. The line in the evening was the western outskirts of Hendecourt, where they were in touch with the right of the Canadian Division.

At 5 A.M. on the morning of August 30 the Germans, who had a perfectly clear vision of the fact that the loss of the Hindenburg Line must entail the loss of the war, attacked in great force along the general line Ecoust — Bullecourt — Hendecourt, and made some considerable dents in the British front, especially at Bullecourt, which had to be evacuated. The Fifty-seventh were pushed back to the line of the Hendecourt — Bullecourt Road, and abandoned the ruins of an old factory, which is a marked position. This attack corresponds with the one already detailed when the Third Division were driven out of Ecoust, and it is heavy weather indeed when the Third Division begins to make leeway. The Fifty-sixth tried very gallantly to regain Bullecourt by a bombing attack, but it could not be done. The Germans got a footing in Hendecourt, but could not clear it, and the evening saw the Lancashire Territorials and their enemy at close grips among the ruins.

On the morning of August 31 the indefatigable Londoners attacked once more, the 4th Londons, London Scottish, and Kensingtons of the 168th Brigade carrying on the work. The factory was soon retaken and so was the Station Redoubt, but Bullecourt itself, squirting flames from every cranny, was still inviolate. On the right the Third Division had recaptured Ecoust, which relieved the general situation. The British bombers got into Bullecourt in the afternoon and before evening they had made good the greater part of the ruins, a handful of Germans still clinging manfully to the eastern edge. That night the Fifty-second came to the front and relieved the Fifty-sixth. In the five days’ battle the London division had lost 123 officers and 2600 men. On the other hand they had captured 29 officers and over a thousand men, while they had inflicted very heavy losses upon the enemy.

September 1 saw this long-drawn battle still in full progress. There is nothing more amazing than the way in which the British divisions at this stage of the war without reinforcements carried on the fight from day to day as though they were sustained by some prophetic vision of the imminent victory which was so largely the result of their heroic efforts. With the early morning the Fifty-seventh Division was into Hendecourt, and before seven o’clock the 171st Brigade had completely cleared the village and joined hands with the Canadians on the farther side. There was a great deal of actual bayonet work in this assault, and Lancashire came out triumphant. On the right the Fifty-second Division had a busy morning in clearing out the dug-outs and cellars of Bulle-court. In the afternoon they advanced eastwards and cleared another 500 yards of ground, when they came under very heavy fire from Noreuil on their right flank. The 155th Brigade was lashed with a pelting rain of bullets, one battalion, the 4th Scots Borderers, losing 10 officers and 140 men in a few minutes. The advance was continued, however, until Tank Avenue, the immediate objective, was reached and cleared. It was a splendid example of indomitable perseverance.

The 171st Brigade, which was still advancing on the left, had also undergone the torment of the machine-guns, but some skilful flanking movements by supporting platoons enabled progress to be made and the German posts soon surrendered when there was a danger of being surrounded. Riencourt fell, and by 6.30 the extreme objectives had been gained and touch established on either flank.

The success of this spirited attack, with the heavy losses inflicted, seemed to have cowed the enemy before the Fifty-seventh Division, for the night passed quietly on that front, which was very helpful in allowing the preparations to go forward for the considerable operation planned for next morning.

September 2 was the date for the main attack by the First Army upon the Drocourt — Quéant line south of the Scarpe, to which all the fighting which has been detailed was but a preliminary. The rôle assigned to the Seventeenth Corps was to co-operate with the Canadians by thrusting forward their left flank so as to gain position for an attack upon Quéant from the north. The Sixth Corps on their right was ordered to attack Morchies and Lagnicourt and then push forward vigorously towards Beaumetz. The First Canadian Division, with Gagnicourt for its objective, was on the immediate left of the Seventeenth Corps. The orders to the Seventeenth Corps were that the Fifty-seventh Division should support the Canadian attack, that the Fifty-second Division should conform to the movements of the Fifty-seventh on its left and of the Third on its right, and finally that the Sixty-third Naval Division, now added to the Corps, should move up in support and improve whatever advantages were gained.

At 5 A.M. the barrage fell and the troops moved forward upon one of the critical battles of the war. The grand part played by the Canadians in the north is described elsewhere. The .172nd Brigade of the Fifty-seventh Division advanced splendidly towards the gap which had been formed, a storm of gas shells bursting among their stolid ranks. The leading battalion, the 1st Munster Fusiliers, followed the men of the Dominion through the breach which they had made in the Drocourt — Quéant switch, and then according to plan swung sharply to the right, smashing their way with bomb and bayonet down the whole line of the German position and so clearing the front for their comrades. It was a fine exploit and worthy of the great battalion which carried it out. They were strongly counter-attacked at the moment when, panting and weary, they had reached their full objective, and yet they retained sufficient vitality to drive back the German stormers.

Other elements of the 172nd Brigade had worked south on the right of the Munsters, and got forward as far as Possum Lane, so that they formed a useful defensive flank on the left of the Fifty-second Division. Meanwhile the 171st Brigade had advanced directly from Riencourt Ridge and had cleared up the trenches opposite, which were enfiladed by their comrades.

The Sixty-third Division was now brought forward to play its part, with the 188th Brigade, consisting of Ansons, Marines, and Royal Irish, in the van. At 9 A.M. it passed through the left of the Fifty-seventh Division about a mile south of Gagnicourt. From this point it was continually advancing during the day, being in touch with the First Canadians on the left and with the Fifty-seventh on the right. By nine in the evening it was seated firmly in the Hindenburg Line. The switch line of Drocourt — Quéant had been ruptured as early as 8 in the morning, which was the signal for the Fifty-second Division on the south to advance upon the main Hindenburg Line south-west of Quéant. The 156th Brigade was in the van. Some few parties reached the main objective, but by 10 o’clock the advance had been suspended, as operations had not yet progressed sufficiently elsewhere. The Fifty-second continued, however, to exert pressure at the point of junction between the switch and the Hindenburg support line. All day progress was being made in proportion as the attack drove down from the north, so that by 3 P.M. the front line had been cleared, and before midnight the whole of the German defences, a perfect maze of trenches and wire, were in the hands of the British infantry. At this hour patrols had penetrated into Quéant and found it clear. Such was the close, so far as the Seventeenth Corps was concerned, of one of the most decisive days’ fighting in the whole of the war. Late that night the tireless Sixty-third Division had reached Pronville, where they added more prisoners to their considerable captures. Altogether about a thousand were taken by the Corps during the day, with a large amount of material.

September 3 saw the Sixty-third Division still adding to its gains. In the morning it occupied Tadpole Copse and advanced upon the Canal du Nord. It then captured Inchy, but was held up in front of Moeuvres by strong enemy rearguards. This marked a definite line of equilibrium which was maintained until the general dispositions of the Army allowed a further advance. For a considerable time the only fighting upon this Corps front was in connection with Moeuvres, a village which remained as a sort of No Man’s Land until, on September 19, a spirited attack by the 155th Scottish Brigade of the Fifty-second Division put it finally into British hands. After this there was quiet on the left flank of the Third Army until the great operations at the end of the month.

V. THE ADVANCE OF HORNE’S FIRST ARMY
From August 26 to September 27

The indefatigable Fifty-first Division — Capture of Greenland Hill — Fine advance of the Canadians — Breaking of the Drocourt — Queant line — Fine work of the Sixty-third Naval Division — Great day for the Dominion — Demeanour of German prisoners.

ON August 8 Rawlinson had attacked on the south with the Fourth Army. On August 22 Byng followed on his left with the Third Army. Four days later Horne took it up in turn south of the Scarpe with his First Army. The general function of that Army was to co-operate with the attack of the Third Army on its right, and to cover the flank of that Army from the north. Therefore the First and Eighth Corps stood fast, while the Canadians, who had been brought up from the southern sector, advanced. They formed the right unit of the First Army, and were in touch to the south with Fergusson’s newly formed Seventeenth Corps, which was the left unit of the Third Army. As only the Canadians were seriously engaged up to the end of September the narrative of the First Army can be easily summarised.

It will be necessary first to explain some preliminary operations. After its return from its hard fighting in the French line, where it had co-operated with the Sixty-second Division in attacking the great German salient upon the Ardres, the famous Fifty-first Highland Division had only a few days’ rest before it was in action once more. It was now placed on the north bank of the Scarpe in the Arras sector. The 170th Brigade of the Fifty-seventh Lancashire Territorial Division lay to the south of the stream, and this was placed under the command of Carter-Campbell, General of the Fifty-first, so that he had four brigades under him, with instructions to advance along the line of the river, as opportunity served, in order to screen the left of the attack now about to break out in the south. Carter-Campbell covered from Feuchy in the south to the east of Bailleul, about 8000 yards.

It was known that the enemy was withdrawing its advanced positions in front of the Army, and it was therefore very necessary for Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps to keep in touch with the Germans in that region. With this object in view the 170th Brigade in conjunction with the Fifteenth Division on their right moved along the south bank of the river to seize the advanced German trenches. This was done at 1 A.M. of August 19, when a considerable stretch of ground was occupied with little opposition. An endeavour to increase their gains on the next night was met by a sharp counter-attack. On the same night two brigades of the Fifty-first Division pushed forwards north of the river, but met with very strong resistance. On August 20 there was another German attack upon Moray Trench, south of the Scarpe, but the Lancashire men broke it up by artillery and rifle-fire. By 9 P.M., however, the 170th Brigade were ordered back from their advanced position, having been badly harried all day. On August 24 in the early morning the Fifty-seventh Division advanced with good results, the 153rd Brigade capturing Pippin Trenoh and other important points. The 152nd Brigade lay to the immediate west of Fampoux, and did not move, but the advance was again carried on upon the left on August 25 with some gain of ground.

Meanwhile the Canadian Corps had quietly taken the place of Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps to the south of the Scarpe, pushing them to the south, and all was ready for the big battle which broke out on August 26, and was a continuation to the north of the large movement already going on down the line. In this important attack, the Third Canadian Division was on the left, and the Second on the right, the two of them bridging the space between the Scarpe and the left of the Third Army. It was stated by prisoners that the attack had been foreseen, and that they had withdrawn 2000 yards the day before. However that may be, everything went very well, and the men of the Dominion showed their usual determined valour. The 7th and 8th Canadian Brigades, just south of the river, swept along with hardly a check, save for a time when the 8th was held up behind Orange Hill. At 7.35, Monchy, important as a place of observation, was in British hands once more. At 10.45, the 4th Canadian Brigade had captured Guémappe, and in the afternoon, Wancourt Ridge had also fallen to the Second Canadian Division. Here, as elsewhere, a single day had given what weeks of effort had once failed to achieve; 2000 prisoners were taken.

On the north bank, the Fifty-first Division, which was now part of the Canadian Corps, made a similar advance, both the 152nd and 153rd Brigades sweeping forward, and occupying Roeux, Gavrelle and the Chemical Works, with little opposition. The Eighth Division was to the north of the Fifty-first, and it also pushed forward its line, its patrols occupying Oppy after dusk.

The Eighth Division, reconstituted under its veteran commander, General Heneker, after its murderous and heroic experience upon the Aisne, was the right-hand unit of Hunter-Weston’s Eighth Corps, which was the next unit of the First Army. The front of this Corps was formed by the Twentieth Division in the north and the Eighth in the south, and its rôle at this period was to stand fast, but by a succession of well-conducted enterprises the Eighth Division was continually encroaching upon the German lines. Presently, as will be seen, when the line was advanced on the south, the Eighth Corps was unleashed and sprang forward in combination with the general advance on either flank. On its left, and following its general movements, was Holland’s First Corps, which was allotted, after September 20, to the Fifth Army, so that instead of being Horne’s northern unit it became the southern Corps of Birdwood.

On August 27 the Canadians went forward once more, the 9th Brigade on the left near the river, while the 4th and 5th were on the right. Again there was a day of steady advance, which was rather a slow pursuit than a battle. In the evening the line ran east of Cherisy, but west of Pelves and Haucourt. In the north the Fifty-first Division attacked Greenland Hill, which was a most important piece of high ground — so important that it may be said to be the point on which the whole great advance to the Canal du Nord pivoted. The attack was delivered with great spirit by the 7th Gordons and 6th Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade, but they were unable to get the summit; while the 6th Seaforths to the south of them were also held up by machine-gun fire. Some advance was made, however, by the 154th Brigade, which had now come in on the north of the line. That night the 25th Brigade of the Eighth Division took over this northern section.

August 28 saw the Canadians still continuing their slow but inexorable advance. On that morning their 7th Brigade took Pelves and Boiry. There were two strong counter-attacks upon the Second Canadian Division in the evening near Artillery Hill, and for a time the front line was pushed back, but it soon recovered and held firm. There was quiet now on the Canadian front, but on August 29 the 154th Brigade of the Highland Division made a fresh attack upon Greenland Hill, which was captured by the 4th Gordons and 7th Argyll and Sutherlands with only slight losses. This important success caused the evacuation by the enemy of several positions commanded by the hill, especially Delbar Wood. This capture screened the left flank of the Canadians and drew from their General a generous message of thanks, in which he said, “That your division after its continuous fighting for the last year was able to take and keep the strong position of Greenland Hill, testifies to the fact that the fighting qualities of the Fifty-first are second to none in the Allied armies.”

There were some changes of troops at this date in preparation for the big attack upon the Hindenburg switch line which was impending. The Twenty-second Corps (Godley) now formed on the left of the Canadians, took over the Fifty-first Division, and also occupied the south bank of the Scarpe with the Eleventh Division. It retained the Forty-ninth Division (Cameron) in reserve. On the other hand, the Fourth British Division was attached to the Canadians, and came into their centre at Remy and Haucourt. At dawn on August 30 the Canadian First Division attacked Upton Wood and the trenches near, with the object of straightening the line and maintaining close touch with the Seventeenth Corps on the right. This movement was splendidly successful, and 500 prisoners were taken. The Fourth British Division advanced at the same time and their line in the evening was just east of Eterpigny. Next day they were held up once at St. Servin Farm, but took it at the second attempt. Meanwhile, the Eleventh Division was moving steadily forward on the south bank of the river. It was relieved on October 1 by the Fifty-sixth London Division, acting under the Twenty-second Corps.

On September 1 the Canadian Corps was outside the Arras — Cambrai Road, with the Fourth British Division forming its left flank, the Fourth Canadian its centre, and the First Canadian on the right. It was a day of local attacks and bickerings, but great preparations were on foot for the morrow. The first light of dawn had hardly begun to glimmer in front of the eager lines of infantry before the signal was given for the advance upon the Drocourt — Quéant line. This line is not the main Hindenburg Line, but it is a northern extension of the Hindenburg system, and it may be said to cover the towns of Douai and Cambrai. The advance of the First Army was on a front of five brigades — one belonging to the British Fourth Division on the left, and two of each first line Canadian Division to their right. The general idea of the day’s operations — among the most important of the war — was to break through the German line upon a narrow front, and afterwards to roll up the flanks of the enemy, both north and south. This having been done, the main attack was to push through, seize the higher ground overlooking the Canal du Nord, and if possible cross the Canal and seize the farther bank.

The attack should be from the Sensée River, southwards, and the function of the Twenty-second Corps was to form a defensive flank on the left of the attack, taking up consecutive positions eastwards along the River Sensée, and working in close collaboration with the British Fourth Division.

There was a preliminary bombardment, but the guns had been busy wire-cutting during the last three days, so that the great metal aprons which extended from the German position were ragged and torn. Hence they offered small impediment to the infantry who dashed through at the first rush, and easily captured the outlying trenches which stretched across a low hill. The village of Gagnicourt lay imbedded in the German trenches, and this was a centre both of attack and resistance. By 8 o'clock the Canadian infantry of the First Division had carried the village, while the Canadian Fourth Division was in Dury on the left, and had made its way into Dury Wood. The advance had already covered about 3000 yards. Both the barrage and the tanks were admirable, and the combination beat down the German defence which at first was not formidable — indeed many of the German front-liners escaped the shrapnel by running in front of it and surrendering the moment the battle began.

As the advance progressed the German resistance grew stiffer, especially in front of the Fourth Canadian Division at Dury Wood, where there was some very desperate fighting. All along the line, pockets of German snipers and machine-gunners did what they could to redeem the honour of the German Army. Astride the Cambrai Road there was a particularly strong point of opposition. The defenders were numerous all along the line — so much so that prisoners from six different German divisions were captured, including the First and Seoond Guards Reserve, and the Third Division which had only arrived the night before with orders to advance into the Canadian area. Many of them did so as far as the prisoners' cage.

This splendid advance of the Canadians had been covered and supported on the right by the Fifty-seventh Lancashire Division of Fergusson's Seventeenth Corps, which had cleared up the villages of Riencourt and Hendecourt in a preliminary operation on September 1. The Lancashire men made good the Canadian flank, and then the Sixty-third Naval Division of the same Corps skirted the southern edge of Gagnicourt, passing the Canadian troops, and pushed on to Buissy, nearly two miles further east.

This advance was on a front of a mile, and brought the victors into contact with six other German divisions, each of which provided samples for the cages. Not content with this fine performance, the Naval Division, who were now ahead of their guns and without tanks, pushed on again in the evening, and inclining to the south they captured the village of Pronville, thus getting to the east of Quéant, which was still held by the Germans. The Drake, Anson, Hood, and Hawke battalions, together with the Royal Marine units, were all heavily engaged during this long day of fighting.

Meanwhile the Canadians had carried on along the original line of advance, the First Canadian Division clearing the woods of Loison and Bouche. On the extreme left the Fourth British Division added to its great fighting record another strenuous day of battle. It had in front of it a very strong position, Prospect Farm, which offered a desperate resistance, but was eventually taken. It was afternoon, however, before the place fell, which prevented the attainment of the full objectives of the day. They were still advancing in the morning of September 3, and before noon they had taken all their original objectives, including Etaing and Lecluse, while on the same morning the Fourth Canadians got as far forward as Rumancourt.

It was a fine victory, which will make September 2, 1918, memorable to Canadians. Great work was done by the British divisions on either side of them, but the stress of the attack and the consequent credit lay with our comrades from across the Atlantic. More than 10,000 prisoners were taken during the day. Their demeanour as described by Mr. Perry Robinson, the well-known correspondent of The Times, is of interest as reflecting the softening and disintegrating influences in the German Army. “As the newcomers arrived they were greeted with shouts of laughter and welcome by their comrades already behind the wires, and greetings and badinage and names were called back and forth. Those inside were mostly eating, and held up bully-beef tins and biscuits for the new arrivals to see, and the latter cheered responsively...Many were very tired, but the whole scene suggested a new train-load of revellers at some annual bean-feast being welcomed by fellow-holiday-makers.”

The Germans had dammed the river which flows down the Trinquis valley in front of the Twenty-second Corps, and this had now formed a considerable lake which hampered operations to the north. The Fresnes — Rouvroy line when tested by patrols seemed to be still strongly held. It soon became evident, however, that on the south the Germans had withdrawn behind the Canal du Nord. The Canadians on September 3 closed up to the western bank, occupying with little resistance Recourt and Baralle. During the day the First British Division relieved the Fourth British Division, while the Second and Third Canadians relieved respectively the First and Fourth Canadians. The Canal was found to be full, and all the bridges down, so that progress was for the time suspended, and a period of inaction followed, which was accompanied by a bad spell of boisterous weather, lasting for more than a week. During this time the First British Division was sent south to form part of the Ninth Corps on the extreme south of the line next to the French. The Fifty-sixth London Division took its place on the right of the Twenty-second Corps, and on September 19 it extended so as to take over the ground held by the Third Canadians, thus contracting the Canadians’ front on that flank, while it was extended to the south, where it took over from the Fifty-second Division on the left of the Seventeenth Corps. The Cambrai Road became the dividing line between the British and the Canadians. To preserve uniformity of treatment we shall now return to Rawlinson’s Fourth Army in the south, and we shall carry each successive Army forward from the end of September to the date of the German surrender.

VI. THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY
From the Battle of the Hindenburg Line (September 29)
to the Battle of the Selle, October 17

The first American operations — The rupture of the Hindenburg Line — Predicament of Twenty-Seventh American Division — Their gallant resistance — Great Australian attack — Remarkable feat by the Forty- Sixth North Midland Territorial Division — Exeunt the Third Corps and the Australians — Entrance of the Thirteenth Corps — Rupture of the Beaurevoir line — Advance to the Selle River.

TURNING to Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which were last seen in contact with the old Hindenburg Line along its formidable front from Vandhuile on the left to Gricourt on the right, it will be remembered that it consisted of Butler's Third Corps on the left, the Australian Corps in the centre, and Braithwaite's Ninth Corps on the right in contact with the French. The time had now come for an attack on the largest scale in order to endeavour to carry this Chinese Wall of Germany by storm. The part assigned to the Third Corps in this important operation was not a large one, and their front was now contracted to 2000 yards, while two of their divisions, the Fifty-eighth Londoners and the Seventy-fourth Yeomanry, were transferred to another area. There remained only the Twelfth and Eighteenth Divisions in line, which had to cover the left flank of the main attack which was to be made by the Australian and Second American Corps, and by Braithwaite's Ninth Corps to the south of them.

At this point the great Canal de l'Escaut passes under a tunnel which is nearly six miles in length. Thus it is the only place in the whole line where tanks could be used to advantage. The general plan was that this section of the line should be carried by the Second American Corps as far north as the northern entrance of the tunnel. This done they would extend their gains to the left in a north-easterly direction beyond Vandhuile, so as to open up a way for the Fifth Corps. After the line had been taken Australian Divisions were to move forward through the Americans and push the advantage to the east. The rôle of the Third Corps was to cover the left of the Americans, and then, when the latter had moved northwards, to mop up Vandhuile, establish bridge-heads east of that point, and bridge the canal for the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division on the right of the Fifth Corps to get across.

Before the general attack which took place on that *dies irae,* September 29, the Americans had a brisk fight of their own, which deserves some special mention as it was the first large operation of an American force acting as part of a British Army. The Second American Army Corps (General Read) had been specially selected to lead the attack on September 29, and as a preparation for this great effort they were ordered to make some advance along their whole front in order to gain an advantageous point from which to start. They lay roughly along the front of the Hindenburg outpost line, but they needed to draw up closer to the main line before the day of battle. On the night of September 24, General O’Ryan’s Twenty-seventh American Division from New York on the left relieved the Eighteenth and Seventy-fourth British Divisions, taking over a front of 4500 yards opposite to Gouy. The defences immediately before them were particularly strong, including the notorious danger points, the Knoll, Quinnemont Farm, and Guillemont Farm. The 53rd American Brigade (Pierce) took over the line, with the 106th Infantry Regiment in front and the 105th in support. The entire American front was from near Vandhuile in the north to Bellicourt in the south.

The tunnel, which formed a special feature in the next great battle, deserves some description, as it was a remarkable feature dating back to the First Empire, and still bearing upon its arches the laconic N of the great Corsican. It is 6000 yards long and averages 50 feet below the surface, with a breadth of about 70 feet. The Germans had converted it into an extraordinary military work, for it was stuffed with barges in which a whole division could take absolute refuge from the heaviest barrage ever launched. There were all sorts of bolt-holes in every direction for getting in or out, and there were powerful machine-gun emplacements along the top. Altogether it was as awkward a nut to crack as any military engineer could conceive. The main Hindenburg Line lay a couple of hundred yards west of the tunnel, a heavily-wired system of trenches. About a mile farther east was a strong support line joining the villages of Nauroy and Le Catelet, while two or three miles farther on was yet another strong position, known as the Beaurevoir line. The way in which Americans, Australians, and British combined with equal valour to hunt the Germans out of this terrific series of positions is a story which will go down in the common traditions of the English-speaking race.

At 5.30 A.M. on September 27 there was the preliminary operation, already mentioned, which should gain the ground necessary for the jumping-off place. This was done by General Lewis’ Thirtieth American Division on the right with little difficulty. It was different with the Twenty-seventh on the left. On this flank a depth of about 1100 yards had to be gained, coinciding roughly with the rearmost trenches of the Hindenburg outpost line. This task was carried out by the 106th Infantry with all three battalions in line and four tanks ahead of each battalion. The leading companies, following the barrage, reached their objectives in most cases, but were involved in desperate fighting at the points already mentioned, which were connected by crosscuts with the main German line, from which there flowed an endless supply of reinforcements. All day attack and counter-attack followed each other, both parties fighting with great valour and enduring heavy loss. By night the 53rd American Brigade was well advanced on its right, but its left was still battling hard to reach the allotted line: 8 officers and 259 Germans had been taken in the fighting. That night the 54th Brigade (Blanding) took over the new front and lay ready for the coming battle, with the 108th Infantry on the right and the 107th on the left. On the front of the Thirtieth Division the 60th Brigade (Faison) was in line, with the 119th and 120th Infantry in the van, the latter to the right, in touch with the British Ninth Corps to the south of them.

The task which lay before the New Yorkers of the Twenty-seventh American Division was particularly difficult, because the men were so scattered over 1100 yards of depth that the barrage had to be thrown forward to cover that area of ground. Thus the main body of the stormers had to cross that space before getting the full protection of the artillery. There were no American guns in action, but the British artillery was as splendidly efficient as ever, crashing down at 5.30 A.M. upon the starting line, where it lingered for four minutes and then advanced at the rate of 100 yards in every four minutes. The German barrage came down instantly in reply, and though it was not very heavy it inflicted considerable damage upon the supporting troops. What with fog and smoke it was difficult to see more than a few feet in any direction, and this was a great advantage to the stormers, the more so to troops who are so individual as the Americans. The Thirtieth Division on the right, a unit raised in the Carolinas and Tennessee, dashed through the main Hindenburg Line in the most gallant fashion, capturing Bellicourt on the way, while the veteran Australian Fifth Division passed through their cheering ranks after they had reached their allotted limit. The 117th American Regiment on the right was in close touch to the south with the Forty-sixth British Division, whose fine advance is chronicled elsewhere, so that the British, American, and Australian dead lay along the same battle-line. The 120th American Regiment on the left had taken and held Nauroy, but had been forced to bend its line back at the north end as far as the tunnel, on account of the fire which beat upon them on that flank.

The Twenty-seventh Division had met with grave difficulties from the start, for the tanks encountered mines and traps, while the infantry as already explained had practically no barrage, and found a strongly posted enemy in front of them. The men behaved with the utmost gallantry and the officers led them with great devotion, but no troops in the world could have carried the defences under such circumstances. For a thousand yards north of the inter-divisional boundary, near the village of Bony, they got into the main line, and from point to point all along the front bold parties pushed forward as far as Gouy and Le Catelet, many of whom never got back. The more successful were ruined by their own success, for as the mist rose it was found that in their swift advance they had left many pockets and strong points behind them which fired into their backs when they rose to advance. The Third Australians, following up the attack, could do little to make matters better, for all this part of the field of battle was such a complete mix-up, and the two armies were so dovetailed into each other, that it was impossible to use artillery, and yet the situation was such that without artillery it was quixotic madness for the infantry to advance. The reinforcing Australians were held up on the line between the Knoll and Guillemont Farm. Groups of brave men gathered together from time to time, and stormed up to Guillemont and Quinnemont Farms, which were among the most deadly of the German strongholds. A British Divisional General assured the present chronicler immediately after the action that he had never seen the dead lie so thick at any spot during the war as the Americans lay round Guillemont Farm. Neither the blue-clad infantry of Grant nor the grey Confederates of Lee showed a higher spirit than the khaki-clad lads who fought alongside the British that day. The best that could be done, however, was to hold such ground as had been gained, and to wait until the advance of the Fifth Australians from the south, and of the Eighteenth British Division from the north, should make all their section of line untenable for the Germans. The Twenty-seventh Americans and Third Australians had in the meantime held on to every inch of ground they had gained, and also to every prisoner whom they had taken. On the night of September 30, the Americans, shattered in numbers, but with unabated spirit, were withdrawn from the line. Altogether 40 officers and 1100 men had been taken from the enemy.(*)

(*) It was the privilege of the present writer to see the actual operations during this decisive action which broke the Hindenburg Line. His account, written at the time, of his personal experience is too slight for the text, but has been reproduced in the Appendix, where it can be consulted or avoided by the reader.

It is necessary now to state the difficult and confused events of September 29 from the point of view of the Fifth Australian Division, who had almost as severe a day as their compatriots on the left. General Hobbs' Division went forward with the 8th Brigade on the right, which was in constant touch with the British troops. On the left was the 15th Brigade, which eventually found its northern flank in the air on account of the hold-up in that quarter. At 9.40 the line of the 8th Brigade passed Bellicourt, which the Americans had cleared. As they advanced, however, they were scourged by a very heavy fire from the direction of Nauroy. At midday the 32nd Battalion of Australians on the right were in touch with the 4th Leicesters on Knobkerry Hill. As the Brigade advanced they came upon concrete pill-boxes of the familiar type behind Nauroy which caused heavy losses. Jon-court on the right was taken by the 32nd Battalion, and at 8 in the evening the general line of Nauroy — Le Catelet had been reached.

The 15th Brigade on the left had the harder task. The fog and the rapidity of the American advance had combined to leave a number of machine-guns still active, and there was constant opposition. Touch was maintained with the 44th Battalion of the Third Australian Division on the left. A great many scattered groups of Americans were reached, most of whom came on with the Australians. The Brigade had been well provided with tanks, but in the space of fifteen minutes all the heavies and most of the whippets had been knocked out. So mixed were the conditions and so thick the clouds over the battlefield that for a time the 59th Australian Battalion on the left was altogether lost, but the 57th and 58th fought on together, and with their

American friends reached the Le Catelet line, a bunch of Germans remaining in the trench between the two battalions. The 59th was afterwards found to have trended northwards and to be in close liaison with the right of the Third Australian Division.

The fighting had been mixed on September 29, but it became still more so next day, and it will tax the industry of some Antipodean historian to trace each unit, Australian or American, and define their relations to each other. The rôle of the 15th Brigade was simple as it was directed to make good the rest of the Nauroy — Le Catelet line, which was in time accomplished. The 14th Brigade was ordered to attack northwards in order to help the left flank which had encountered such difficulties on the first day, while the 11th Brigade was also directed towards the north-east, and ordered to take a strong impediment called the Knob, which was eventually done. The 53rd Battalion which led the 14th Brigade distinguished itself greatly, advancing with a steady persistence which always gained its ends, and overflowing the German field-guns. It was finally held up, however, and a strong counter-attack drove it to take refuge in that part of the Le Catelet — Nauroy line which was already in British hands. There was a good deal of close fighting in this quarter but the gains were held by the 15th Brigade, which failed, however, to get Cabaret Wood Farm. On October 1 the 56th Australian Battalion, with the aid of tanks, carried Estrées.

We shall now follow the work of General Braithwaite’s Ninth Corps on the extreme right of the whole British Army on this great day of battle. This Corps consisted now of the First, Sixth, Thirty-second, and Forty-sixth Divisions. Of these, the Sixth Division (harden) was in touch with the French, the First (Strickland) was in the centre, and the Forty-sixth (Boyd) was on the left. Opposite the Corps lay the broad and deep St. Quentin Canal, and the storm troops of the Forty-sixth Division were fitted up with 3000 life-belts, having proved by experiment that they were buoyant enough to support a fully-equipped man. Since the Spanish infantry of Alva waded out neck-deep to attack the Dutch defences on the Frisian Islands there has surely never been a more desperate enterprise than this, when one remembers that on the farther side of the Canal was every devilment which German sappers could construct, while no tanks could lead the van of the stormers. The general plan was that the Forty-sixth North Midlanders should take the whole position between Bellenglise and Riqueval; that the

Thirty-second Division (Lambert) should then pass through their ranks and push onwards to Tronquoy and beyond; while the First Division should carry out a difficult turning movement by swinging its left flank north-east to form a defensive line between Pontruet and the Canal at the right of the Forty-sixth Division's advance. The Sixth Division was to make threatening demonstrations.

The very special obstacles which lay in the path of the Ninth Corps had led to a reinforcement of their artillery, so that it was after a two days' bombardment from 500 pieces of all calibres that the assault was made at the same hour as that of the Americans on the left. The Stafford men of the 137th Brigade led, with the 1st Regular Brigade covering their right flank. An advance line of German trenches intervened between the British and the Canal. Favoured by the thick mist the attackers were able to overrun these without any great loss, killing most of the garrison who fought bravely for every inch of ground, and winning their way to the Canal. In the meantime the 1st North Lancashires cleared the trenches on their right, while farther south the 1st Black Watch pushed forward from Pontruet, cleared the trenches north-east of that place, and finally, squeezing out the North Lancashires, fought their way down to the right flank of the Stafford stormers.

The 3rd Infantry Brigade had also become strongly engaged on the right of the First Division. The 1st Gloucesters were pushed along the high ground a mile south-east of Pontruet. Here they were held up for the time, but the 1st South Wales Borderers came in on their left and connected up with the Black Watch. All day the 3rd Brigade threw back a long flank north of Gricourt to the Sixth Division, which was ordered to hold its ground.

The 137th Brigade having fought its way to the banks of the St. Quentin Canal proceeded now to force the passage. The 6th South Staffords on the right found the water low and there was little swimming to be done, but the 5th South Staffords in the centre, and the 6th North Staffords on the left were hard put to it to get across. The men dashed backwards and forwards on the bank, like hounds that are balked, looking for the most hopeful spot, and then springing into the water, sink or swim, with their gallant officers trailing ropes behind them as they got across. In a few minutes the whole smooth surface of the Canal for a mile or more was dotted with the heads of the English infantry, while cables, broken bridges, extempore rafts, and leaking boats were all pressed into the service. Within a few minutes the dripping ranks were into the trenches on the eastern bank, where the moral effect of their dashing achievement took all the iron out of the defenders. At Riqueval the bridge was intact and the enemy pioneers in the act of blowing it up when the British sappers and infantry swarmed in upon them and bayoneted them with the lanthorns in their hands. This bridge and a second pontoon bridge made later by the engineers and pioneers of the Forty-sixth and Thirty-second Divisions, were invaluable as a means of communication.

The trenches and the tunnel entrance at Bellenglise were soon occupied and the perilous passage had been safely made. The advance then continued, the teams of four guns being shot down as they tried to get away. The 138th Lincolns and Leicesters with the 139th Sherwood Forester Brigade had relieved the Stafford battalions, which dropped back after having performed one of the most notable feats of the war. These two brigades began to go forward preceded by twelve tanks which had made their way round over the solid ground on the Australian front. The advance was much impeded, however, by some German guns on the west side of the Canal, to the south of the point where it had been crossed. These guns, firing into the back of the 139th Brigade on the right, knocked out by direct fire every one of the six tanks allotted to it. A party of the Foresters then recrossed the Canal, shot or bayoneted these gunners, and extinguished the opposition in the rear.

The 138th Brigade on the left advanced well, and by 12.30 was near Magny and Le Haucourt, but it was necessary to call a halt, as the failure to hold Nauroy upon the left had exposed the north flank of the division, while the south flank had always been somewhat in the air. During the delay the barrage got ahead, but the infantry soon overtook it once more, racing eagerly for the protection of that slowly-moving cyclone. By 3 P.M. all objectives allotted to the Forty-sixth Division had been taken, and by 4 P.M. the Thirty-second Division had passed through their ranks — a glorious military picture on a day of victory — with the old 14th Brigade in the van. The leading lines of the infantry were now well up with the German guns, and it is on record that the German gunners fought with the greatest valour and continued to fire their guns at pointblank range up to the last. Many great deeds were done as small bodies of infantry closed in on these guns, often dashing through their own pelting barrage in their determination that the enemy should not have time to limber up and get away. Nauroy had now fallen save only the north end, which was still a scourge to the left flank of Braithwaite’s Corps. Late in the afternoon the 97th Brigade captured the southern half of Joncourt, and before night Le Tronquoy had fallen also. From there the final line ran west of Le Vergies, and then back to Etricourt, where it was in touch with the Thirtieth American Division.

Late at night the Sixth Division on the extreme right, which had endured heavy fighting all along its front during the day, was relieved by the extension northwards of the Fifteenth French Corps. The Sixth Division went into reserve. All night there was a bickering of machine-guns and rifle-fire along the front, and before morning the 14th Brigade had completed the mopping up of the villages which it had captured.

It was a most glorious day’s work which reflects great credit upon General Braithwaite and his men, who were allotted a task which it seemed presumptuous to demand and yet carried it out to the last inch. The stormers captured 90 guns and 5400 prisoners during the day, the vast majority of which (70 guns and 4000 prisoners) fell to the Midland Territorials. It was fitting that in so intimate a struggle as that between Great Britain and Germany it was men from the very inner heart of England who at the critical moment struck the most deadly blow.

On September 30 there was a continued forward movement on the front of the Ninth Corps. The First Division took Thorigny and the Thirty-second Division took Le Vergies during the day, with some 700 prisoners. The general movement of troops was from the south, the French taking ground to the left in order to release the British for that north-eastern movement which promised the more decisive results.

On the morning of October 1 the Thirty-second Division, in close liaison with the Australians, completed the capture of Joncourt, and made progress towards Sequehart. During the afternoon the glad news arrived that the French were progressing splendidly in the south and that their pioneers were in St. Quentin. All day the Thirty-second Division was flowing slowly onwards, taking Sequehart and establishing its van in the Fonsomme line, which extends from that village to Beaurevoir. The Germans had given fanciful names to all of these lines which were taken with such unfailing regularity by the Allies. There were the Siegfried line, the Wotan line, and other Wagnerian titles, which led some wit to remark at the time that if they went far enough through the list of that composer’s operas, they would certainly come, sooner or later, to the Flying Dutchman. There was some confused fighting in the line south of Ramicourt, but the setting sun found the Thirty-second Division in full possession. It was clear, however, that heavy fighting was ahead, as the Intelligence Department learned that three fresh divisions, the Eighty-fourth, Two hundred and twenty-first, and Two hundred and forty-first, had come forward to buttress the line of defence. These newcomers were strong enough to bar the way successfully to the weary Thirty-second Division on the morning of October 2. In the evening the Germans passed to the attack and, backed by strong gun-fire, they got temporary possession of Sequehart, the British line being drawn across the high ground to the west of that village. We must now pause to consider what was going on in the north.

As regards the part played by the Third Corps in these operations it was mainly limited to the action of the 54th and 55th Brigades of the Eighteenth Division, with elements of the Twelfth Division. On the left the 54th Brigade attacked the position known as the Knoll, which was occupied by the 6th Northants who repelled several severe counter-attacks. Any further movement was hampered, however, by the deadly fire of the enemy from Guillemont Farm. The 55th Brigade was unable, as planned, to get down the Macquincourt valley as the Hindenburg Line, which commanded it, was still intact. Next morning, however (September 30), it was found possible to get forward as far as Guillemont Farm and Vandhuile village, which were occupied with little loss, but the enemy was still in force in the Hindenburg Line behind it, and attempts to cross the Canal were checked by the German machine-guns. The 37th Brigade of the Twelfth Division held the front line to the north-west of Vandhuile, with outposts along the Canal, which they also were unable to cross. On October 1 it was realised that the Australians working north had got in contact with the remains of the Twenty-seventh American Division, and also with the 55th Brigade in the Macquincourt valley. On the left the Fifth Corps had also reached the Canal. At noon on October 1 the long term of service of the Third Corps was at an end, and their section was taken over by Morland’s Thirteenth Corps. The work of the Third Corps during that time had been very brilliant. Between August 8 and September 30 the five divisions which composed it met and overthrew twenty German divisions, including a number of the very best troops which the enemy retained in the field. They pushed them back over 25 miles of difficult country, and captured 15,700 prisoners in all with 150 guns. The achievement was the more remarkable as the troops employed were mostly young and untried, the successors of those veterans who had laid the foundations of the great reputation of these grand divisions. 1100 officers and 24,000 men in the list of casualties attest the severity of the service. In estimating the work of the latter period it is to be remembered that the Germans were in the line which they had been taught to consider impregnable, with very heavy artillery support, so that it is not surprising that it took six days to drive them back 4000 yards to the main outpost line, and another week to gain the Canal 2000 yards farther east. This remark applies equally to the Corps on either side.

Braithwaite's Ninth Corps having passed the St. Quentin Canal in the dashing way already described, had established itself firmly upon the other side during the first two days of October. On October 3 it made a further forward movement in close liaison with the Australians on the left. The two very tired divisions which had fought incessantly for four days, the Forty-sixth on the left and the Thirty-second on the right, were still in the van. There was some hope of a break from these repeated hammer-blows, so the Fifth Cavalry Brigade were close behind the infantry, waiting hopefully for the developments of the day. The First Division on the right was told off to keep in touch with the French Fifteenth Corps which was joining in the attack.

Both divisions, starting at 6.25 in the morning, made excellent progress. Ramicourt was carried by the Midlanders in the first rush, and it had been cleared before 7.30. By 8, Sequehart, with 200 prisoners, had fallen to the Thirty-second Division. The final objective was the village of Montbrehain and Mannequin Hill. On the left the Second Australian Division, advancing with irresistible dash, had occupied Wiancourt and were making good progress towards Beau-revoir. By 11, some of the Forty-sixth Division were on Mannequin Hill, and some on the left were in the outskirts of Montbrehain, but the Australians had been held up to the north of that village, which made the situation very difficult. By 3 P.M., however, the whole of this important point had fallen, with the large capture of 70 officers and 2000 men. There was very severe and close fighting in the village all day, and the northern flank of the Midland Territorials was still bare to enfilade fire, so they were drawn back to the western outskirts, which are on the reverse slope of the hill east of Ramicourt. At 7 P.M. the Germans counter-attacked on the British right and for a time regained the crest of Mannequin Hill, but they were pushed off again after dark. Another counter-attack against the Thirty-second Division about the same hour at Sequehart was a complete failure. During the night one brigade of the First Division and a dismounted section of the 5th Cavalry Brigade reinforced the utterly weary Forty-sixth Division on the left. In the meantime the French Fifteenth Corps, which had attacked with no marked success during the day, elongated its line to the north so as to relieve the First Division.

The breach made during this day's fighting in the Beaurevoir — Fonsomme line, together with the action of the New Zealanders, presently to be described, in keeping their grip of Crevecoeur in the north, had completely destroyed the resistance of the last of the great organised defences of the Hindenburg system to which the enemy had trusted as being impregnable. Officers who went over these works immediately after the fighting were amazed at the breadth and strength of the wire and the depth of the dug-outs and trenches. Their final destruction was due to the action of many forces, British, American, and Australian, all equally heroic, but the historian of the future surveying the whole field with the detailed facts before him, will probably agree that the outflanking forces at either end, the New Zealanders in the north and the Englishmen of the Midland Division in the south, stand pre-eminently out in this wonderful achievement. Sir Douglas Haig visited the Ninth Corps on October 4 and congratulated it upon the vital work which it had accomplished.

October 3 had been a day of desperate fighting for the Second Australian Division on the left of the Ninth Corps, which had taken the place of the Fifth Australians, while the Eighteenth British had relieved the Third. Their attack was upon the Beau-revoir line, including the village of Beaurevoir, and though the latter was not taken considerable progress was made. The advance was made with Martin's 5th Brigade on the right, while the 7th Brigade (Wisdom) was in touch with the Fiftieth British Division on the left. Sixteen tanks lumbered in front of the line of infantry. The honours of the day rested with the 18th, 19th, and 25th Battalions, in that order from the right, who swept forward against the formidable German position. So terrible was the fire and the wire that the two right-hand battalions drew back and lay down while the guns were again turned on. They then rushed the line almost before the flying fragments of splintered wire had reached the ground. Two hundred prisoners and eighteen machine-guns were the fruits, while the 25th on the left got the village of Lormisset. The first phase of the action ended with the possession of the German line from this village to the divisional boundary on the right, and the formation of a defensive flank by the 7th Brigade, facing north. The 17th and 20th Battalions then pushed in and got Wiancourt. Altogether 11 battalions, with an average strength of 200, were concerned in this operation, and they took 6500 yards of double-trenched system. They lost roughly 1000 men, but killed as many Germans, besides taking 1200 prisoners, 11 guns, and 163 machine-guns. A German officer summed up the enemy view by saying, “You Australians are all bluff. You attack with practically no men and are on the top of us before we know where we are.”

The total effect of the fighting on October 3 in this section of the line had been extraordinarily good, though all objectives had not been taken. As the net result the British held the line for 10,000 yards from Sequehart to the west of Beaurevoir. At one time the gains had been greater but the enemy had countered with great valour, the Twenty-first Reserve Division, Twenty-fifth, and One hundred and nineteenth all making very strong attacks, so that the advanced line was retaken all along. On October 5, however, the division in the north got Beaurevoir while the 6th Australian Brigade carried out a very dashing attack by which the village of Montbrehain, which had already been taken and lost, was now permanently occupied. This hard struggle was begun by the 21st and 24th Battalions, but both were very worn, and there was not sufficient weight and impetus to drive the attack home. It was at this crisis that the 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion, which had never been in action, made a fine advance, losing 400 of its number but saving the situation and capturing the village with 600 prisoners.

Immediately after this battle the Second American Corps took over the whole line from the Australians, who retired for a rest which proved to be a final one. So exit from the world’s drama one of its most picturesque figures, the lithe, hawk-faced, dare-devil man of the South. His record had always been fine, and twice on a day of doom his firm ranks stood between the Empire and absolute disaster. The end of March on the Somme, and the middle of April in Flanders, are two crises in which every man who speaks the English tongue the whole world over owes a deep debt of gratitude to the men who stemmed the rush of German barbarism which might have submerged the world. But their supreme effort lay in those last hundred days when, starting from the Abbé Wood, west of Villers-Bretonneux and close to Amiens, they carried their line forward in an almost constant succession of battles until they were through the last barrier of the desperate and redoubtable enemy. The men were great; the officers, chosen only by merit, were also great; but greatest of all, perhaps, was their commander, Sir John Monash, a rare and compelling personality, whose dark, flashing eyes and swarthy face might have seemed more in keeping with some Asiatic conqueror than with the prosaic associations of a British Army. He believed in his men, and his men believed in him, and their glorious joint history showed that neither was deceived in the other. So exit Australia. *Ave et vale!*

It has been already stated that Morland's Thirteenth Corps took over the sector which formed the left of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, after the Third Corps which had occupied this position was drawn out for a rest and reorganisation. The same relative positions were maintained, so that from October 1 when they first came into action till the end of the war the Thirteenth Corps had the Fifth Corps of the Third Army on their left, and the Australians and their successors on their right. They came into line at that very critical moment when the great Hindenburg Line had been broken on their south by the Americans and Australians, but when the situation was difficult on account of a large body of the former, the remains of the Twenty-seventh Division, being embedded in the German lines, having advanced with such speed that the trenches had not been cleared, so that they found themselves with as many enemies on their rear as in their front. That under these circumstances there was no great surrender speaks volumes for the spirit and constancy of the men.

The Thirteenth Corps took over Lee's seasoned Eighteenth Division from the Third Corps. It contained also the Twenty-fifth Division (Charles), which had been practically annihilated in the three desperate battles described in the previous volume, but had now been rebuilt largely of men from the Italian front where the reduction of brigades to the three-battalion scale had liberated a number of trained and veteran soldiers. It was now commanded by General Charles, an officer who had signalised his professional youth by riding round the rear of the Boer army in the company of young Captain Hunter-Weston. There was also the Fiftieth Division (Jackson) which has so often been described in the van of the battle. It had also been reconstituted after its practical destruction, and now contained no less than six Regular battalions from the East, full of experience and also, unfortunately, of malaria. Finally there was Bethell's Sixty-sixth Division, a Lancashire Territorial unit which had played a fine part on several historic occasions. The South African Brigade now formed part of this Division. Altogether General Morland had a sound hard-working team under his hand, with a strong backing of artillery.

The Fourth Army was now across the line of the Canal de l'Escaut, but it was necessary to clear a way for General Byng's Third Army to cross on the north. With this object it was wise to push the attack in the south and so to outflank the Germans that they would have to abandon the whole position. It was with this object that the Ninth Corps and the Australians were ordered to attack on October 3 as already described in order to secure the high ground east and north of Beaurevoir and the villages of Montbrehain and Sequehart, while the Thirteenth Corps conformed, pivoting on its left, and capturing, as will be shown, the villages of Gouy and Le Catelet and the rising ground known as Prospect Hill. The two villages which lie in a basin surrounded by hills were powerfully held and fortified. To the west of Le Catelet the St. Quentin Canal runs between steep banks, which rise 50 feet above the water at that part, but come down to the normal at Vandhuile.

On the front of Morland's Corps only one division, the 50th, was in line, the others being arranged in depth behind it. Sugden's 151st Brigade was on the right in close touch with the Australians, the 149th on the left. The latter was to hold its ground and form a hinge round which everything in the south should swing.

Early on October 3 the attack started in a thick mist, which made observation impossible — not an unmixed evil when a strong defensive position is to be stormed. The troops went forward with splendid dash, meeting with varied experiences as they encountered the strong posts of the enemy, but continually getting forward, though they had not attained the level of the Australians when about 9 A.M. the latter had occupied the Masnières — Beaurevoir line. The 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers who had been told oil to take Prospect Hill had been drawn into the fighting in the village of Gouy, but the 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry pushed in on their right and sweeping past the village, caught up the barrage and captured the hill which it at once consolidated. By 10 o'clock the whole of the original objective, including both villages, had been occupied, while the Australians were in Estrées to the south. The rest of the day was spent, however, in holding the new line against very vigorous counter-attacks which drove down from the north-east and pushed the 4th King’s Royal Rifles of the 150th Brigade (Rollo), who had already lost heavily, out of Gouy. They rallied, however, and reinforced by the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers they restored the situation after some heavy fighting which came to close grips among the houses. The Second Australian Division on the right had also lost its hold of Beaurevoir and been driven by a heavy counter-attack to Beaurevoir Mill. The night closed down upon these lines, the British having failed to hold all their furthest points, but having greatly enlarged their foothold on the far side of the St. Quentin Canal, which had now been crossed and held from a point 400 yards south-east of Vandhuile. The Fiftieth Division had used seven battalions and incurred heavy losses, but it had won Gouy, Le Catelet, and Prospect Hill, with some 300 prisoners. The tactical success was complete, but the strategic aim was not yet attained, as the Germans still held the Canal in front of the Third Army to the left. It was decided, therefore, to renew the operations at once, bringing in the Twenty-fifth Division on the right. There was a marked salient in the German line which included the villages of Beaurevoir and Ponchaux. The plan was to cut in to the north and south of this salient and pinch it out. The 151st Brigade came into line on the left and Hickie’s 7th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division on the right, while it was arranged with General Shute on the left that the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division should support the attack of the 151st Brigade. There were nests of trenches upon the high ground north of Gouy and Le Catelet and these were the main obstacles in front.

At 6 o’clock on October 4 the attack went forward in thick fog, so thick that it was not until 11 that the position of the Divisions could be defined. At that hour it was learned that the right of the 7th Brigade was in the high ground west of Ponchaux and in touch with the Australians on the Torrens Canal. They were also holding the line of railway near the cemetery, but were under very heavy fire from the villages which raked their position. Neither of the villages had fallen, so that the attack on the left seemed to have miscarried. The reports from the Fiftieth Division were that some progress had been made towards La Pannerie, but that the left was held up by heavy fire. At 1 o’clock La Pannerie was reported as taken, but the situation was still unsatisfactory, and the troops were under the guns of the Germans to the north, especially from Hargival Farm, which, however, was taken in the late afternoon. About 6 o’clock the glad news came in from

General Jackson that the enemy appeared to be weakening, and he suggested a farther advance. This was held over until the Welsh Division should be available, while all preparations were made for a fresh attack upon the salient and the villages next morning.

At 6 A.M. on October 5 the untiring infantry were off once more, through the usual dense obscurity which shrouds that region of marshes and canals. At 9 it cleared. The 7th Brigade had been held on the right, but the 74th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division under Craigie-Hackett, had fought its way past Beaurevoir Mill, and its left-hand battalion, the 11th Sherwood Foresters, had reached its objective in a sunken road north-east of Guisancourt Farm. Some small parties were reported by the aeroplanes to be on the east side of Beaurevoir, but the Germans were still in the village. They were fighting with fine resolution, and a heavy counter-attack once more re-established their line, save that Bellevue Farm remained in the hands of the 74th Brigade. Further British efforts met with no better success, so it was decided to reorganise and attack again at dusk. The glad news had arrived that in the north the Welsh Division had found all clear in front of it and that the Fifth Corps was streaming across the Canal. The Fiftieth Division then fell into line, with the Welsh sharing in their advance. Fryell’s 75th Brigade was now assembled in the dead ground west of Beaurevoir, and about 6.30 dashed at it with levelled bayonets and a determination which would take no denial. The enemy were swept out of it and the line carried forward 500 yards to the east of it, while junction was established with the Australians upon the Estrées — Le Cateau Road. Nearly 600 prisoners were taken during this day. That night the Second American Corps took over from the Australians on the right of the Thirteenth Corps.

There was now in front of General Morland a high waterless plateau extending from the St. Quentin Canal to the Selle River. As it is a country of large, open spaces intersected with sunken roads, it offers great facilities for the use of machine-guns. It is dotted with villages nestling in their orchards, but the wide stretches between are given over to beetroot cultivation. As the German rearguards were still hanging on to their position, a big attack was arranged for October 8 which would entail an advance of the Thirteenth Corps to the Premont — Serain — Walincourt Road, meaning a depth of 6000 yards on a 4000-yard frontage. The Twenty-fifth Division had one brigade on the right in touch with the Americans, the

Sixty-sixth were in front of Serain with two brigades, while the Fiftieth Division with one brigade was on the left.

The general fight was preceded by a local attack by units of the Fiftieth Division, at 1 o’clock in the morning of October 8, upon the strong German post called Villers Farm which overlooked their line. This was successfully taken, but a simultaneous attack by the Thirty-eighth Division upon the village of Villers-Outreaux to the north was held up, with the unfortunate sequel that a heavy German barrage fell upon the troops as they assembled for the main attack. They endured tragic casualties with silent patience, carrying through their preparations with absolute disregard of the shower of projectiles. The attack was launched at 5.20, the order of brigades from the right being the 7th, the South Africans, the 198th, and the 151st.

This attack was a complete success. There was a stiff fight at Ponchaux, but the village was soon carried. The whippet tanks moved up with great daring in front of the infantry but suffered severely from shells and anti-tank rifles. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, who were eagerly awaiting a chance to be unleashed, found no opening during the day. The infantry got forward finely, however, and by 11 A.M. all objectives were held save on the front of Hunter’s 198th Brigade, which was badly handicapped by the fact that Villers-Outreaux was still in German hands. By 3 P.M. the Fifth Corps had taken this village and the left of the Thirteenth Corps got forward to its extreme point. The Twenty-fifth and Sixty-sixth Divisions were at once ordered to push forward and improve the success in every way, and the final line was from the eastern outskirts of Premont and Serain up to the distillery on the Elincourt — Malincourt Road. Some 800 prisoners had been taken.

The battle was continued on the morning of October 9 with a prompt vigour which was amazing considering the continual exertions of the troops. It was speedily evident that these attacks had shaken the enemy and that he had been unable to get his roots down in his new positions. Much ground was gained with little loss, Elincourt, Avelu, and Maretz all passing into British hands. It was hoped at one time that the passages of the Selle River might be seized that day, but the infantry were too exhausted and the distances too great. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, pressing forward in small parties, got past Reumont and cut off some of the Germans, but larger bodies of cavalry were faced always with murderous machine-gun fire from scattered positions. The Sixty-sixth Division had overtaken the Canadian Cavalry before evening, and the line of the Corps was west of Escaufort but clear of the eastern edge of Honnechy towards Bertry Station. They were coming at last into the old battle-ground of 1914. The wheel had swung full circle.

At 5.30 on October 10 these indefatigable soldiers were off again. They made good progress until the western slopes of the Selle valley were reached. Here the Twenty-fifth Division was checked by the fire from St. Benin, which appeared to be strongly held. At noon the Sixty-sixth Division was in Le Cateau, but under heavy fire from the south-west of Forest. About 2 P.M. the 74th Brigade, consisting of the 9th Yorkshires, 11th Sherwood Foresters, and 13th Durhams, made a very dashing assault upon the village of St. Benin, and drove the enemy at the point of the bayonet across the river. It was a fine achievement but led to no immediate advance, as the stream was unbridged and strongly defended. The Sixty-sixth Division meanwhile attacked the ridge to the east of Le Cateau, going forward with the 6th Connaught Rangers on the left and the 18th King's Liverpools on the right. The Irishmen rushed the town with great gallantry and got through to the railway cutting on the far side. The latter battalion got as far as Montay, but found the banks of the river heavily wired and were unable to cross. The Connaught men were ordered back, therefore, after dusk, as both their flanks were in the air. They continued to hold the western bank of the Selle, where it passes through the town of Le Cateau.

There we may leave them preparing for the important battle of the Selle River, while we bring up the Second American and Ninth British Corps on the right until they also are in line upon the Selle. These two Corps worked in close liaison, forming the extreme right of the whole line of the British Armies, which was now rolling forward in an unbroken wave more than a hundred miles in length, gathering speed and volume as it went. Some half-cynical Italian critic had remarked early in the war that the British may only win one battle in a war but it is always the final one. The hour had now struck and the line was irresistible in its cold and purposeful determination.

October the 8th was a great day of battle, in which the Second Americans on the left, the Ninth British in the centre, and the Fifteenth French on the right were all heavily engaged, the men advancing with ardour from the knowledge that at last the open land of France lay before them, and that the nightmares of barbed wire and permanent lines were behind. Taking the line from the north, the immediate object of the Americans was to capture Brancourt and Premont, including a total advance of 6000 yards. The attack was made by the 59th Brigade of the Thirtieth Division, with the 60th Brigade in support. The advance was supported by a number of heavy tanks and of whippets. The machine-guns were numerous and deadly, but the Americans would take no denial, fighting with that grim earnestness which is as much their national characteristic in battle, as is the débonnaire light-heartedness of the British, or the exalted abandonment of the French. By evening both villages had fallen and all objectives attained. Early next morning the 59th American Brigade advanced once more, maintaining the fight until the early afternoon when the 60th American Brigade passed through their thin ranks, taking the towns of Busigny and Becquigny. To carry on a connected narrative of the American Corps it may be added that they were still attacking on October 10, endeavouring to secure the command of the Selle River and the high ground beyond. The 119th American Regiment in the north captured Escaufort and St. Souplet, and in collaboration with Morland's Corps got possession of St. Benin in face of a very hot fire. Finally the 119th Regiment forced its way to the western bank of the Selle. The 120th American Regiment on the right had been checked by enfilade fire near Vaux Andigny, and had to throw out a defensive line to the south, being for the moment ahead of the general line. This regiment had suffered very heavily in its fine advance, and it was relieved on the early morning of October 11 by the 118th Regiment, who found their comrades so stretched out that they were covering a front of 5000 yards. The left American sector then remained stationary, but the 118th Regiment swept forward and took at the point of the bayonet the villages of Vaux Andigny and La Haie Manneresse, making an advance of 1000 yards. That night the Twenty-seventh Division came forward and relieved the Thirtieth. We shall now return and follow the movements of the Ninth Corps on the right during these five days of battle.

This Corps had joined vigorously in the attack on October 8, advancing with the 71st Brigade of the Sixth Division on the left, the 16th Brigade in the centre, and the 139th Sherwood Foresters Brigade on the right, the function of the latter being to keep in touch with the French. The line sped forward without a check for 2000 yards, a squadron of whippets leading them gallantly on. The 16th Brigade had the hardest task, but they forced their way eastwards, and by midday Mannequin and Doon Hills with Beauregard Farm were all within the British lines. The cavalry tried to get through, but the machine-guns were still their masters, and it could only have been done at the cost of unjustifiable losses. Cerise Wood was a serious obstacle, but the resistance there suddenly collapsed before the stern insistence of the 16th Brigade, and 190 prisoners gave themselves up. Mericourt also was taken. Out of Mannequin Wood 200 more Germans were extracted. Altogether it was a very successful day, as 4 guns, 35 machine-guns, and 1200 prisoners remained with the victors. The Corps line on the left was well forward on its objectives, though on the right the advance had not been as far as was expected.

In order to strengthen the right the Forty-sixth Division was put in between the Sixth Division on the left and the French. With this greater weight of attack things went very much better on October 9. The new-comers captured Fresnoy-le-Grand, while the Sixth Division took Jonnecourt Farm which had been a lion in the path upon the previous day. A railway lay across the front and the Germans tried to build up a fresh line upon it, but in the afternoon they had lost their grip. The usual organised retreat of the Germans showed signs now of hurry and demoralisation. Late in the evening the Sixth Division occupied Bohain, which was found to contain several thousands of civilians, many of whom had not touched food for three days, but who forgot their hunger in the joys of liberty.

The next day, October 10, the whole Corps front was moving forward, but resistance thickened as it advanced, and finally in the evening they appeared to be once more faced by an organised line of battle. The Sixth Division was now in touch with the Thirtieth Americans at Vaux Andigny. On October 11 a fresh German division, the Fifth Reserve, had come into line, and it was very difficult to get forward in face of their fire. The casualties were low, however, and indeed it may be remarked that the greater tactical skill acquired by years of practice showed itself now, not merely by the defeat of the enemy but also by the cheapness of the cost. The iron front of the tank took many a bullet which in earlier days would have found the breast of the stormer, for brain work in England had come to the aid of valour in France. Up to now, in all these momentous operations from the 18th of September, the total casualties of the Ninth Corps had only been 6000, less than those of many a futile trench attack in the early years. On the other hand their prisoners were 12,000, a most remarkable record.

VII. THE OPERATIONS OF RAWLINSON'S FOURTH ARMY

From the Battle of the Selle, October 17, to the end

Attack upon the line of the Selle River — Stubborn work by the Second American Corps — Success of the Ninth Corps — Hard fighting at Le Cateau — Great feat of the South Africans — Continued advance — Delay-action mines — Capture of Landrecies — Dramatic exit of the German machine-gunner — Splendid work of the First Division.

THERE was a pause now on the front of the Fourth Army, and a period for preparation and reorganisation which was badly needed after the rapid and unremitting advance. The Selle River in front of the American section of the line had been carefully reconnoitred and was found to be fordable except for occasional deep holes. The position opposite to this Corps was very difficult, the enemy holding the east bank strongly, with outposts near St. Souplet in the north and Molain in the south. Across the stream and parallel with it was the railway, which had an embankment rising in places as high as thirty feet. Behind the railway was rising ground.

The Americans attacked with both their divisions in the line, the Thirtieth being on the right. The 301st American Tank Battalion led them on. The attack was on a three-brigade front, the Twenty-seventh Division having both its units in the fighting line. It should be explained that an American division has only two brigades as against the three in the British system, but that each brigade is very much stronger, consisting nominally of 6000 bayonets. These particular brigades, however, were already very worn, and a great strain was thrown upon them by the failure of the reinforcing organisation which, for some reason, had been unable to make good the very serious casualties already incurred.

The battle began at 5.20 in the morning of October 17. The left of the American line had its jumping-off place in the partially destroyed village of St. Souplet, and it was no easy matter to get forward from the beginning. None the less the whole line fought its way across the stream and up to the high railway embankment beyond. This, as in the area of the Thirteenth Corps, proved to be a very formidable obstacle, the more so as the fog made cohesion of attack and accurate observation equally impossible. Bandoval Farm on the left of the line poured out a destructive volume of machine-gun fire, but it was eventually rushed by the American Infantry. The right of the Twenty-seventh Division got the village of Arbre Guernon. The difficulties of this unit were greatly increased by the fact that their tanks could not ford the stream, and though it had been arranged that they should join them from the south, where there was a crossing, only two did eventually arrive, both of which were destroyed by shell-fire. In spite of everything, however, the Twenty-seventh Division fought their way forward to the Le Cateau — Arbre Guernon Road, where they finally halted, as both of their flanks were, for the moment, in the air.

The Thirtieth American Division had encountered a fierce resistance from the start at the villages of Molain and St. Martin, so that they were held up in crossing the river. After taking these villages they were faced by heavy fire from the ridge across the river. They formed a defensive flank, however, up to the point which their comrades had reached on the left. The total achievement of the Second American Corps was a fine one, for their prisoners amounted to nearly 1500 men, while their front had been advanced for 4000 yards.

Next morning, October 18, the attack was renewed by General Read, the Thirtieth Division bringing up the 60th Brigade which had been in reserve on the day before. In front of it was a line of well-fortified villages, two of which, Ribeauville and Ecaillon, were captured before evening, while a third, Mazinghien, was ringed round and American patrols were in the streets. This success represented a further advance of 1500 yards. The last-named village was completely cleared by the bayonet on the morning of October 19 and the advance was carried on for a further distance of 3000 yards. The objective of this day’s attack was the high ground overlooking the Canal, and by night the west slope of this ridge had been reached all along the divisional front.

The Twenty-seventh Division had advanced on the left and had taken Jonquière Farm, pushing its patrols across the St. Maurice River and up to the ridge beyond, behind which lay Le Catillon. A pause was now ordered while fresh dispositions were made all along the British front, and during this pause the two American divisions, which had fought a succession of severe actions ever since September 27, were drawn out. Their losses had been very heavy, and as already stated no replacements had been received.

In their term of service the Second American Corps had taken 81 German guns, 6000 prisoners, and a large amount of material, while their own casualties amounted to the very honourable total of 364 officers and 12,826 men. They left the line with the deep respect and affection of their British comrades, who well appreciated the difficulties which newcomers, however brave, must meet with in work which calls for so terrible an apprenticeship.

We will now return to the operations of the Ninth Corps, on the right flank of the Americans, from October 17 onwards. The action was started with the Forty-sixth Division on the right and the Sixth on the left, while the First Division was in close support, ready to come through when needed. A great forest lay on their front and the general idea was that the Ninth Corps should encircle this from the north and join beyond the wood with the Fifteenth French Corps, General Braithwaite coming forward with his headquarters to the immediate rear of the battle so as to keep control of what would be a delicate and difficult operation. One battalion of the 139th Brigade, attacking on the right of the British line, lost its direction in the fog and got into so false a position that upon the fog suddenly lifting it was exposed to very heavy loss from the German machine-guns. The splendid Sherwood Foresters have seldom had a more severe ordeal. The left of the battalion swung round, however, and changed direction, with the result that the situation was restored. Without any loss of spirit the brigade rushed on and captured Regnicourt, driving back a heavy counter-attack which rolled in from the east about 11.30. The other three brigades in the line, which were, counting from the right, the 138th, 18th, and 16th, all made good progress, though in the fog they left several lively machine-guns in their rear. Each captured all the objectives in front, including the wood of St. Pierre.

The First Division was now coming up behind the Sixth with the intention of passing through them, but they ran into very heavy fire before they had reached their allotted positions. Both the 1st and 2nd Brigades had to advance for 2000 yards under the constant thrashing of the machine-guns, in spite of which these veteran battalions maintained their cohesion and direction, arriving at their starting-point in the battle line at the time arranged. Passing through the Sixth Division they continued the advance, with the 1st Brigade on the right and the 2nd in touch with the Americans on the left. The village of La Vallée Mulatre was very sternly defended, but nothing could stop the fire of the attack, and by 2.30 it had been entirely occupied. The Forty-sixth Division on the right had fought their way through the woody country, and had finally completed the whole scheme by joining hands with the French at the outskirts of the great Forêt Domanial just north-west of Mennevret. It was a good day for the Ninth Corps, and the prisoners amounted to 150 officers and 1500 men, a proportion of officers which suggests that the demoralisation of the German Army had not stopped at the ranks. Among the prisoners were samples from 6 divisions, 13 regiments, and 31 battalions, indicating the urgency with which reinforcements had been hurried up to prevent a complete fracture of the line.

In the early morning of October 18 the Forty-sixth Division in co-operation with the French captured Mennevret and Le Repas. On the same morning the 3rd Brigade advanced in co-operation with the Americans on the left and pushed the line forward as far as Ribeauville. The French had come on well in the south and were now in touch with the 1st Brigade, while the Forty-sixth and Sixth Divisions were drawn out of the line. By evening on October 19 the First Division had made its way forward and was lining the western bank of the Canal. The Sixth Division now came in again on the left, and got touch with the Thirteenth Corps, thus covering the gap left by the withdrawal of the Americans.

Returning to the Thirteenth Corps, who were on the left of the Fourth Army at the battle of the Selle River on October 17, the weary Twenty-fifth Division had been drawn into reserve, while the Fiftieth, their heavy losses made good by reinforcements, were put into the right of the line once more, while the Sixty-sixth carried on to the left. The river was at once reconnoitred and found to be a serious impediment, especially in the immediate neighbourhood of Le Cateau, where it had been dammed and deepened, while it was commanded by high ground in the east and also by numerous strongly-built houses in the town. Arrangements were made, therefore, that the main attack should be lower down where the facilities were greater. The Fiftieth Division held this right sector, with St. Souplet as its southern limit for the 151st Brigade, while the 149th was near St. Benin. The Sixty-sixth covered the ground up to Le Cateau, the South African Brigade under General Tanner being north of the town. The South Africans with great skill and daring arranged their assembly within fifty yards of the German outposts on the other side of the stream, at a point where they were absolutely commanded by the German guns in case of discovery. There they lay in silence until, at the first twinkle of dawn, they sprang to their feet and rushed forward to the eight bridges which the sappers with their usual splendid efficiency had prepared for them during the night. So well had the bridge-makers worked, that in the region of the main attack they had actually been able to throw across bridges which would carry forward the ten tanks allotted for the assault.

The fog was so dense and the communications so precarious that the officers in charge of the operations had the nerve-trying experience of seeing their whole force vanish into the gloom and knowing nothing of what had become of them, save that the deafening roar of guns told of a deadly struggle. Soon there came news of disasters to the tanks. Three drove into a morass and were embedded there. Two developed engine trouble and collapsed. One never got across. The others lost their place in the fog and all hope of useful co-operation with the infantry was at an end. Then came belated news of the storm troops. The leading battalions of the Fiftieth Division had got across in safety but had been swallowed up in the fog, shrouding several German posts containing machine-guns, which opened on the supports after the front files had passed them. On the left the formidable obstacle of the station with its heavy loop-holed out-buildings held up the flank battalion of the 151st Brigade, and the whole advance was stopped and greatly disorganised at this point. The railway was a strong line of German resistance, and especially a wooded mound on its eastern side, which bristled with guns. The attack being held, the reserve of the Fiftieth Division, the 150th Brigade, was thrown into the fight which in the early afternoon was still in a condition of equilibrium.

In the meanwhile a great deed of arms had been wrought in the northern part of the line. Tanner’s South African Brigade, having reached the eastern bank of the river, had penetrated the German wire and stormed through the fog up the hill on the north of the town. The second wave was held by the concentrated fire, and the first wave was so utterly lost that the patrols could find no trace of where it had got to. Just as all hope had been given up, and it had been arranged to restart the barrage, a brave runner got through with the news that the leading South Africans were right through the town and engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand fight in the deep cutting on the farther side. In order to reach this place they had been compelled to force their way through another broad apron of untouched wire, a most remarkable achievement. Gradually the very strenuous German resistance was overcome, small bodies of South Africans dribbling up in support of their comrades. By noon this part of the German line had fallen, with a corresponding weakening along the rest of their front, for the bravest man is less brave when he begins to think that the day is already lost and that his self-sacrifice is manifestly vain.

With a view to helping the Fiftieth Division the 198th Brigade of the Sixty-sixth was now ordered to cross the river to the south of the town, and to strike in on the left of the long-drawn struggle at the station, where the assailants were now so mixed up that the two brigades were telescoped into one and all battalion order had been lost. A strong counter-attack had developed about 3 o'clock on the right of the line, where the British and American Corps joined, and this had some success, though the 4th King's Royal Rifles held on desperately to their ground. It was necessary to send in the 150th Brigade to steady the line. The 7th Wiltshires and the Munster Fusiliers were the reinforcing battalions and by their aid the position was once more restored. It was a dangerous crisis, for with the river in the rear any sort of retreat would have been disastrous.

There was now a concentrated bombardment of the obdurate station, and this seems to have broken down finally the spirit of the brave defenders. Shortly after dusk patrols forced their way into the buildings, and by 8 P.M. the whole place was in British hands, and Le Cateau, save for the extreme eastern outskirt, was cleared of the enemy. It had been a very desperate battle, the laurels of which rest with the South African Brigade, who had carried out so remarkable an assault, and also with the Fiftieth Division which had held on with such a bulldog grip to its purpose.

The day's work had not been quite completed, as the neighbouring village of Bazuel had not been captured, and this was undertaken on October 18 by the Fiftieth Division, strengthened by the inclusion of the 75th Brigade. This operation was carried out with perfect success. There was considerable opposition from scattered machine-gun posts, but before noon Bazuel and the whole ridge to the east of Le Cateau had been secured, while the Sixty-sixth Division had cleared up the suburbs of the town. Thus the whole capture and command of the Selle River had been triumphantly accomplished. To get a complete view of the battle these operations are to be read in connection with the fighting of the Third Army, as later recounted, on the left, and that of the remainder of the Fourth Army on the right.

After a pause of a few days for reorganisation and readjustment the active operations of the Thirteenth Corps were resumed in the country between the Selle and Mormal Forest, a district which was less open than the plains to the west, but presented special difficulties of its own, for it was well wooded and was also cut up into numerous small compounds with thick hedges which presented serious obstacles to any advance. However, the obstacle had never yet been found in France or Belgium which would stop a British Army, so the troops moved forward with a high heart to this new attack. The Ninth British Corps had taken the place of the Americans on the right, and was to advance to the line of the Sambre and Oise Canal, while the Thirteenth, in conjunction with the Fifth Corps of the Third Army on the left was to reach the main Le Quesnoy — Landrecies Road, near the western edge of Mormal Forest. The larger aspect of this movement was that it should cover the right flank of the Third Army while it carried out its own important attack.

The attack was launched in bright moonlight at 1.20 in the morning of October 23. The 7th Brigade advanced on the right, with the 53rd and 54th Brigades of the Eighteenth Division in the order given on its left. The first objective was the village of Pommereuil, and it was attained in the face of heavy fire from the mills and farms along the banks of the Richemont River. On the right the 7th West Kents did particularly well, especially an independent company under Captain MacDonald which attacked with such vigour that it captured Garde Hill and Garde Copse, extending its gains outside the divisional area, and taking many prisoners. The 10th Essex and 2nd Bedfords were also in the leading line. The second objective facing the Eighteenth Division was Les Tilleuls Farm, with the great Bois l'Évêque beyond it, which covered four square miles. By 9 o'clock the Eighteenth Division had got the farm and was established in the north-east corner of the wood. Wood's 55th Brigade coming through had got well forward and was advancing upon the village of Bousies in close co-operation with the Thirty-third Division of the Fifth Corps. By 11.30 the Twenty-fifth Division was also in Bois l'Évêque and the British infantry was crashing through the brushwood which makes up the greater part of the plantation. All these various points were made good, but it was found that beyond them the enemy had a fixed line of defence with wire and every other defensive arrangement, so, as the soldiers were much exhausted from a long day's labour, the attack was pushed no further. Bousies had been taken after a hard fight among the surrounding orchards, by those old battle-comrades, the 7th Buffs and 8th East Surreys of the 55th Brigade, and the woods were completely cleared. Two field-guns had been captured near the Richemont River, and the bodies of 30 men of the 8th Royal Berks within 60 yards of their muzzles showed how fierce had been both attack and defence. Altogether 50 guns and nearly 1000 prisoners had been taken.

The attack was resumed before dawn on October 24. On the right, the village of Malgarni was the first objective and this was carried and passed by the 74th Brigade. Fontaine-aux-Bois was also captured, but the Germans held part of their line on the Englefontaine — Landrecies Road and could not be dislodged. On the left, the Eighteenth Division, using the same brigades as the evening before, took Robersart and some scattered farms, but had to fight very hard for everything they got. The 7th Queen’s were the first into the captured village. The new ground was consolidated and patrols thrown out to report any weakening of the enemy line. That night General Wood, who had done such long and fine service with the 55th Brigade, was invalided and Colonel Irwin of the East Surreys took over the command.

On October 26, a day of rain and mist, the Fifth Corps was attacking Englefontaine, and the Eighteenth Division conformed by throwing forward its left, which involved the 7th West Kents and 8th Berkshires in some hard fighting. Much work was thrown upon the Thirteenth Corps on this and the following days in evacuating the civilians who swarmed in the villages, and who had no protection against the noxious fumes of the gas shells which the Germans with their usual thorough-going brutality showered amongst them. If in the peace terms the Germans found that the hearts of the Allies were hard and their thoughts stern, they have only to read the details of their own military history in order to understand the reasons.

A very large attack had now been planned in which the First French Army, the Fourth, Third, and a portion of the First British Armies should all participate. The Germans were known to be tottering and one more good blow might bring them down. It was necessary to act at once, for the German delay-action mines, which were usually in the shape of one shell set to explode among a dump of shells by the road or railway, were making the communications almost impossible. Fortunately the ingenuity of the British sappers discovered the private mark — a small star upon the cap of the fuse — by which the danger-shell could be distinguished among its neighbours, and so many a disaster was averted. It should be mentioned that on October 30 two gallant senior officers of the gunners, Colonels Thorpe and Burnyeat, were both killed by the same shell.

The general line of advance of the Fourth Army, which had been north-east, was now changed to east. The orders given to the Thirteenth Corps were to advance in that direction, astride of the Sambre and Oise Canal, to the line of the Cartignies — Dompierre — Bavai Road. The Ninth Corps was to cross the Canal simultaneously on the right of the Thirteenth at Catillon and Ors, advancing on the same objective. The general proposition before the Thirteenth Corps was a total advance of about ten miles, part of it through the south end of Mormal Forest, with the forcing of the Canal crossings thrown in.

The frontage of the Corps attack was 7500 yards, narrowing down as it advanced, so three divisions were put into the line. On the right was the Twenty-fifth Division, with the task of forcing the passage of the Canal opposite Landrecies, of capturing that town, and of clearing the country up to Maroilles. The Sixty-sixth Division was then to carry on the advance to the ultimate objective.

The Fiftieth Division was in the centre and was to fight a way through Mormal Forest, while the Eighteenth Division on the left was to storm the village of Sassegnies. The desperate determination of the Army may be gauged from the fact that a large number of life-belts were served out to the leading brigade in case it should be necessary to swim the Canal for want of bridges.

The attack, the last great concerted movement of the war, was launched at 6.15 in the morning of November 4 — a day of thick, all-pervading mist. The order of brigades from right to left in the initial advance was 75, 149, 150, 54, and 53. Good progress was made from the beginning all along the line, and the news from the Ninth Corps was uplifting. They were across south of Catillon and Ors, but the Thirty-second Division, on the immediate right of the Twenty-fifth Division, had been held up, so that they were ordered to move south and pass by the crossings already established. The Twenty-fifth and Fiftieth Divisions both got well away, the former at 9 A.M. being within 300 yards of Landrecies, while the latter was well up to the old bugbear, the Englefontaine — Landrecies Road, though Robinson’s 149th Brigade, and especially the 13th Black Watch, had lost heavily. The Eighteenth Division had also attained its first objectives and drove off a half-hearted counter-attack. The 7th West Kents had a desperate house-to-house fight in the village of Hecq, which remained in their hands, while the 2nd Bed-fords had a similar hard victory in Preux, where they were much helped by the 10th Essex.

The 75th Brigade had forced its way down to the Canal bank. The 5th Gloucesters had the good fortune to discover two German foot-bridges and poured across. It was indeed a proof of German deterioration that such an oversight should have occurred, for it is in attention to detail that the merit of German soldiering lies. The 8th Worcesters followed their comrades and these two battalions began to encircle the town from the south. There was no bridge higher up the Canal, but a fine feat of arms was performed by a small party of the 122nd Tunnelling Company, who dashed forward, seized the lock gates, and cut the wires which were meant to blow them up. On the extreme left some of the 1/8 Warwicks discovered another forgotten bridge and pushed across to the north of the town, which was now practically surrounded so that the garrison was soon taken or killed. The official report remarks: “The capture of t andrecies was an operation which might well have absorbed the energies of a whole division. Success was accomplished with a single brigade and was due to the spirited leading of the officers, the bravery of the troops, and that element of good fortune which any well-planned and boldly-executed enterprise deserves.”

The Eighteenth and Fiftieth Divisions had pushed on through the forest with hardly a check and surrounded a considerable number of Germans, who for the most part put up a very resolute resistance. About two o’clock there were signs, however, that the whole line was shaking, but it was impossible to advance farther until the Ninth Corps was in line. The final position on this most successful day was east of Landrecies, through Le Preseau, along the west bank of the Sambre to Hachette, and on to Locquignol.

It was guessed that the enemy was in a bad way, but on this evening it was confirmed by the capture of a cavalry orderly bearing a message ordering the troops to withdraw to the Sambre during the night, and to continue the retirement upon Maubeuge. Their skeleton rearguards still hung on, however, and put up a spirited resistance. Next morning, November 5, the corps advanced once more, the 74th Brigade taking La Rosière, while Maroilles fell before noon to the same division. The Eighteenth Division had pushed ahead and occupied Sassegnies, while the Fifth Corps were in Berlaimont on their left and were crossing the Sambre.

The Fiftieth Division had more difficulty as the ground was very waterlogged and the resistance considerable. The day’s advance finished by the 74th Brigade, still in the van, capturing Basse Noyelle, while at dusk the 149th Brigade got across the Grande Helpe, a stream behind which the Germans were expected to build up a new line.

A steady advance was maintained next morning, November 6, though the constant tapping of machine-guns in front told of the German sporadic resistance. That night the line of the Thirteenth Corps was east of Marbaix and Dompierre. It was found that the small enclosed fields were very helpful in dealing with German machine-guns, as a concealed flank attack could always be carried out. Armoured cars on the roads were also found to be of great help to the infantry. On November 8 there was a sharp fight on the line of the Avesnes — Maubeuge Road. After the road was won there was a very spirited counter-attack, the German machine-gunners coming forward with great heart, though the infantry would not face the fire. The 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers and 1st Yorkshire Light Infantry bore the brunt of this engagement, which lasted several hours.

The state of supplies made it impossible for the Corps to advance farther, but the 12th Lancers went on as cavalry, supported by small mobile columns. A line was reached which ran north and south through Hestrud, and this proved to be the farthest east of the Thirteenth Corps, as it was gathering itself there for an attack when the final white flag was hoisted. Up to the last moment there was local skirmishing and even a small German attack, which was driven back and added a few more to the monstrous death-roll of the war. The whole British Army has an admiration for the German machine-gunner, and one closing incident of the war may be recorded. At two minutes from the moment of the Armistice a machine-gun opened up about 200 yards from the British line, and fired a whole belt without a pause. The gunner was then seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and turning about walk slowly to the rear. In his person there vanished from the stage a brave and formidable character in the war. His last action was as typical of the remorseless valour of his corps as that of the British infantry who refrained from shooting him was characteristic of their chivalrous and sporting instincts. When the hour of fate struck, the line of the vanguard of the Thirteenth Corps was just west of Montbliart and Sautain, being the most eastern point of any troops in the British Armies in France.

During the five weeks that Morland's Corps had been in the line it had captured 8554 prisoners and 340 guns, while its take of machine-guns was at least 2500. It had engaged units of no less than forty-four divisions, which gives a vivid idea of the state of disruption which the German Army had reached. From thirteen of these divisions prisoners varying from 100 to 1000 had been taken, showing that these at least had been substantially engaged.

Having brought Morland's Thirteenth Corps to the goal of all its hopes and efforts, we shall now turn back to the days after the battle of the Selle River and carry the Ninth Corps on the right on to the same goal.

On October 23 broke out the general engagement which will be known as the battle of the Oise — Sambre Canal. The order of battle of the Ninth Corps on this day was the First Division on the right, with the 2nd and 3rd Brigades in the line, and the Sixth Division on the left, with the 18th and 71st in the line. It was a night attack launched at 1 in the morning, and though a heavy German barrage, mixed with gas, beat upon it, none the less both divisions made good progress at first, though many obstinate strong points had to be reduced. By 8 in the morning the First Division was reported as being on all its objectives from Catillon southwards, with patrols pushed into the town. The Sixth Division had great difficulty on its left flank while endeavouring to clear Bois l'Évêque, but late in the afternoon they got forward again. It was clear by night, however, that the Germans, who were battling hard, still held some parts of the west bank of the Canal, including Catillon and Ors. Next morning the Sixth Division, working in close liaison with the Twenty-fifth Division on the flank of Morland's Corps, got well forward, but were still short of their full objective on the left. Every day after this in a series of minor operations the Corps improved its footing on the west side of this great obstacle, which was of a most formidable nature, 60 feet wide, unfordable, with steep slippery banks and wire mixed with wooden abattis along the farther edge. Such was the new line of defence behind which the German Army had raffled, and which offered a fresh problem to the victorious British leaders.

Most of the western bank had been occupied by November 2, including the village of Ors, but there were points where deep marshes and German redoubts on this side had prevented the assailants from reaching the edge of the Canal. There was also a spur at the bend of the Canal which enfiladed the line, but this was taken as a preliminary operation by the Thirty-second

Division. It was retaken, however, by the Germans in a very strong counter-attack supported by an overwhelming drum-fire. On November 3 the British again got the spur known as Happe-Garbes, but once again in the afternoon of the same day the Germans regained it in a very determined advance. This heavy fighting fell upon the 96th Brigade and specially upon the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, who were exposed to great pressure all day. Among many brave records that of Sergeant John Clarke of this battalion is pre-eminent, who took four machine-guns single-handed, bayoneting the crews, and fighting with desperate courage at the head of his platoon from morning till night. The idea of capturing the place before the general attack of November 4 was then given up, and other steps were taken to neutralise it. The main crossing of the Canal was planned to be at Ors, just south of Ors, and at two other points.

This the last great battle of the war broke out as already stated at 5.45 on November 4, the infantry advance being covered by a tremendous barrage. The First Division attacked on the right, the Thirty-second on the left, while the Forty-sixth was in close support. On the left and in the centre of the Thirty-second Division two bridges were thrown across the Canal under intense machine-gun fire, only to be destroyed immediately, before any large number of troops could get across. On the right of the division, however, the 14th Brigade gained a considerable success, the 1st Dorsets getting across over a bridge of kerosene tins which was most cleverly constructed by the Engineers and laid down in the darkness and mist, so that it was a complete surprise to the enemy. A smoke barrage and a concentration of machine-guns helped the stormers to get across. No praise can be too great for the sappers who worked amid clouds of poison gas in the completion of this essential bridge upon which the fate of the battle might depend. To one of them, Sapper Adams, of the 21st Field Company, the V.C. was awarded, but there was not a man round him who did not deserve the same honour.

In the meantime the First Division had advanced under cover of a thick mist, and four bridges having been thrown across, the two leading battalions got over the Canal, just escaping the German barrage which came roaring down behind them. The further experiences of this division, and especially of the 3rd Brigade at Catillon, should be told in some detail.

A special task was assigned to the brigade, which was to clear the outlying portion of the town, to occupy the rest of it, and to force the crossing of the Sambre Canal at the broken bridge. The order of the battalions on the east side of the Canal was that the 2nd Welsh were on the right, the` 1st Gloucesters in the centre, and the 1st South Wales Borderers on the left, good old comrades who had fought together from the first. There were still strong enemy posts on the west of the Canal, and the enemy had fought tenaciously for every inch of ground. On the far side of the Canal were many houses which contained machine-guns, and their fire was always heavy and accurate. The actual attack upon the town began at 5.45 in the morning of November 4, and was carried out in the midst of a very dense fog by the 1st Gloucesters under Major Guild. The portion of the town to the west of the bridge was first conquered, with the efficient aid of an aggressive tank. Many machine-guns were taken in the suburban orchards and in the town itself. The bridge was commanded by a heavy machine-gun, but its position was spotted and the tank put it out of action by accurate fire. The British barrage was falling thickly across the Canal, and the British regimental leaders, those wonderful men on the spot who adapt themselves to every emergency, crossed at once, so that when the Germans emerged from their cellars as the barrage lifted they were received into the expectant arms of the Gloucesters. Over a hundred were taken at this spot. The battalion then, having formed a bridge-head, pushed on through the town, mopping up as they went, while the Welshmen cleared the orchards on both sides. The captures in this well-managed affair amounted altogether to 550 Germans, while of the British only 70 casualties were reported. No less than ten different German regiments were identified by the 2nd Brigade during this operation, which indicates how mixed and broken the hostile army had become under the constant pounding.

At the same time as the 3rd Brigade were capturing Catillon, the 2nd Brigade on their right had shown great gallantry in forcing their section of the Canal. They had been ordered to cross by a lock south of the town, but it was a desperate business, for the lock itself was hard to reach, with banks and water in front of it, all strenuously defended. The infantry, with their attendant bridging parties of sappers, were held up for a time, but Colonel Johnson of the 2nd Sussex restored the situation, personally leading the assault forward. It was again checked by the hurricane of fire, but he again rallied it and eventually led it across. In the subsequent official report attached to his V.C., it was stated that the offensive spirit that he had inspired in his Sussex men was entirely responsible for the successful crossing.

By 8.45 the Thirty-second Division reported that their right brigade had got across, but owing to the enfilade fire two battalions of the left brigade had been unable to do the same. About midday, however, they were all over and had established themselves in a position south-west of Landrecies. The First Division was now touching Mezières with its left, where it was pushing on to Fesmy, while the German line seemed to be dissolving in front of it. It was a great day for the old division which had fought so gallantly from the first gunshot of the war to this which was so nearly the last one. Much of the credit of the victory is due to General Cartwright, the Corps Engineer, upon whom the weight of these various arrangements had fallen.

The Germans were now so fluid that a light cavalry screen was pushed out in front of the Corps, and the Forty-sixth Division advanced on November 5 behind it. By 9 A.M. the Thirty-second Division was in Favril, in touch with the Twenty-fifth on their left. Late on November 6 Cartignies was occupied. The advance rolled forward without serious interruption, though there was some bickering round Avesnes, and on November 8 the Thirty-second Division was established upon the high ground east of that town. At this time, as already recorded, the operations of the Fourth Army were confined to the single mobile column commanded by General Bethell, which was all that could be sent forward on account of the want of every sort of supply. Two days later came the sudden news of the signing of the Armistice. Never was there so sudden and wonderful a change. From dark cloud to bright sunshine seemed to have been the work of an hour. The long hurricane had blown out at last and left only the weals across the country which marked its passage. British officers have recorded how they sped eastwards in motor cars, and noted as far as the eye could range the white flags of joy and enfranchisement flying from the farm-houses and the village spires. The only signs of the invaders were the litter of abandoned equipment, lorries, and guns along the roads. For many a week, however, they left terrible marks of their passage in their delay-action mines, which, with their usual ruthless and reckless brutality, they had left in railway stations and other crowded points along the line of their operations, and which exploded long after the Armistice had been declared. This also was weighed against them in the day of doom, but indeed the scale was already overfull, and nothing which they could do could add to the horror and detestation with which they were regarded by the world, or to the absolute determination that they should never again raise their heads — or at least that those heads should never be crowned by the helmet of war. Such was the ultimate result of the doctrine of the Superman, of might is right, and of the whole material philosophy which had emanated from Frederick, miscalled the Great, and poisoned all Central Europe.

So ended the splendid work of Braithwaite’s Ninth Corps. Its total advance since September 18 had been 50 miles, during which time it had captured nearly 17,000 prisoners and 318 guns.

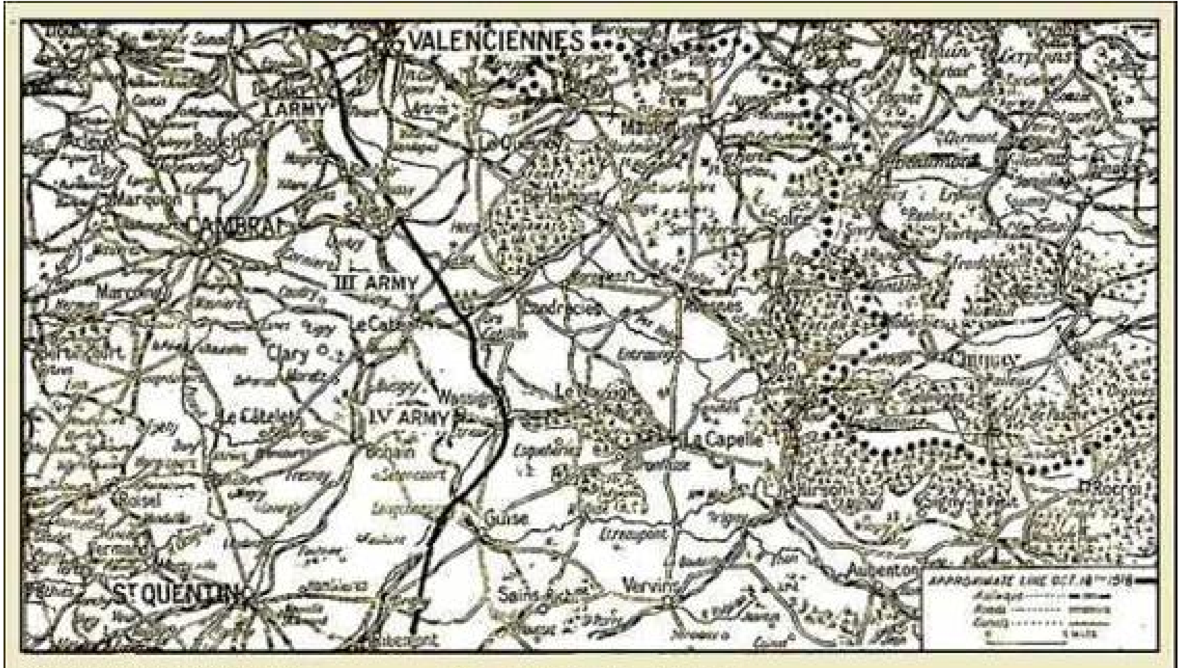
VALENCIENNES
I ARMY
CAMBRAI
III ARMY
Le Cateau
Clary
IV ARMY
Le Câtelet
Bohain
La Capelle
Guise
Vervins
Aubenton
ST QUENTIN
APPROXIMATE LINE OCT. 18th 1918
Railways
Roads
Canals

THE ATTACK ON THE SELLE.

VIII. OPERATIONS OF BYNG'S THIRD ARMY
From the Battle of the Hindenburg Line (September 29)
to the Battle of the Selle (October 17)

Fighting at L'Escaut Canal — Dash of the New Zealanders — The Guards in a hot corner — Crossing of the Canal — Back on the old ground — Great work by all four Corps of the Third Army.

HAVING for the sake of continuous narrative carried the Fourth Army to the end of its labours, we shall now return to the Third Army, which we last saw on September 18 and following days, when it made good its way through the outposts of the enemy, and closed with the Hindenburg Line. We shall begin with the Fifth Corps on the right of the line, which was acting in close liaison with the Third Corps on the left of the Fourth Army.

On September 27 there was no particular action on the front of the Fifth Corps, save that the Twenty-first Division, that hard-bitten old scrapper, had a prolonged fight in front of African Trench, which it alternately took and lost, until on September 28 it got its iron claws fairly fastened in it. On this day it also pushed patrols to the east of Gouzeaucourt.

On September 29, the day of general battle along the line, the Thirty-third Division (Pinney) and the Twenty-first (Campbell) attacked at half-past three in the morning, advancing upon the Hindenburg Line on the front Honnecourt — Bantouzelle, while the Welsh Division operated to the north of that point. There was some progress at first and Villers-Guislain was occupied, but the enemy was strong and aggressive, so that the advance was first held and then forced back to its starting-point. It was not a successful day, and there seemed no choice but to settle down and subject these powerful lines to a renewed bombardment. On the morning of September 30 it was found, however, that the enemy had withdrawn his immediate front on account of the success in the south, and the Corps was able to push forward to the western bank of the Canal de l'Escaut. The Germans were still standing on guard on the eastern side. All bridges were destroyed, and for three days General Shute prepared for the difficult task of forcing this broad waterway — a formidable obstacle, it is true, but not one which was likely to stop the men who had carried the line of the Ancre. We shall now pass to the Fourth Corps on the left and bring them to the same point.

On September 27 Harper’s Fourth Corps had been given the task to capture Beauchamp Ridge and Highland Ridge, and clear the front system of the Hindenburg Line as far as the Couillet valley. The assault was launched at 5.20 in the morning. The Fifth Division on the right was from the outset sadly hampered by the fire from African Trench, which struck upon its flank and inflicted heavy losses. The division showed its usual gallantry, but the position was an impossible one until the Fifth Corps got farther forward. The left of the division, however, and the Forty-second Division made good progress, though the fighting was very severe about Beauchamp, which was taken but could not be held, as a fresh German division, advancing about 7 o’clock in the evening, drove the defenders back to the west of it. The success of the Sixth Corps in the north, however, at Flesquières, had an encouraging effect upon the whole line, and about 2.30 P.M. of September 28 both the Fifth and Forty-second Divisions came on once more, the latter being particularly successful in getting prisoners and guns. The Fifth Division got Beauchamp and Highland Ridge, but was still held up on the right. By evening the line was well forward on the western slopes of Welsh Ridge, and some 1700 prisoners had come in. It was clear that the German line was sagging, so in order to press the advantage General Harper ordered up Russell’s New Zealanders to carry the battle on through the night. There could be no more stringent test of the quality and discipline of troops, for the advance had to be made over unknown country covered with trenches and wire entanglements, with only a fitful, sinking moon to guide them. At 3 A.M. of a dark, cold night the splendid Colonials passed through the ranks of the Forty-second Division and, driving forward, thrust the enemy off Welsh Ridge and Bonavis Ridge beyond it, captured 1600 prisoners, and made good the line of the Canal de l’Escaut. North and South Island brigades kept line in the advance. More than thirty guns were among the trophies of this magnificent achievement. The Fifth Division on their right swept forward at the same time near La Vacquerie, but as Gonnelieu upon their flank had not yet been captured by the Fifth Corps, their attack was limited on that side. This was remedied shortly after dawn, when the Fifth Division, weary as it was, cleared their own right flank, captured Gonnelieu, and finally took Banteux with 250 prisoners. The indefatigable New Zealanders had also gone forward after dawn as blithely as though it was their first attack, clearing the whole of the west bank of the Canal, and penetrating at one time into Crevecoeur, where, however, they were unable to remain. They did great work here, however, by holding and partly saving the bridge, all others having been destroyed, and establishing some sort of bridgehead.

The total result of these attacks since September 27 on the front of the Fourth Corps had been the capture of the whole front system of the Hindenburg Line from Havrincourt Wood to the Canal, and the capture of 40 guns with 4000 prisoners. Beyond the Canal, however, lay formidable dangers. Only the Crevecoeur bridge remained British. Beyond was a strongly-wired line of trenches known as the Beaurevoir — Masniéres line, which ran roughly southwards from Crevecoeur. On October 1 the New Zealanders had got a footing, however, in Crevecoeur, and had begun to push troops over the bridge, but it was desperate work, and the attacking brigade suffered heavy losses. It was, however, work of the first importance, as it turned the whole of the Beaurevoir line. There we may leave them, level with the Fifth Corps on their right, while we turn to follow the progress of the Sixth Corps to the north, which completes our survey of the Third Army.

The old Third Division — the “Iron” Division, as its admirers had begun to call it — attacked on the right, and the Guards on the left. Deverell’s men went forward in splendid form, the 8th and 9th Brigades overrunning the first objectives, and the 76th passing through them to the further positions. They captured Flesquières, the village which had held us up in the Cambrai battle, and by the afternoon they were east of Ribecourt, with 1000 prisoners trailing back to the rear. The Guards meanwhile, with the 2nd Brigade in front, had some very tough work at the onset, but fought their way forward, and were succeeded by the 1st Brigade who had reached by the afternoon the old British front line. Continuing from here they captured Orival Wood, and reached Premy Chapel, though this farthest point could not be maintained, as the party which had won it had lost touch with the main body. The whole advance represented a notable gain of ground. The losses were heavy, and were partly due to the fact that the flank of the Guards passed Graincourt before the Fifty-seventh Division in the Seventeenth Corps had captured that place, so that they were exposed to heavy fire. Even the Guards have seldom been in a hotter corner or shown more conspicuous examples of personal courage than during this long and trying day, which brought three Victoria Crosses to the battalions engaged. Lord Gort, who commanded the 1st Grenadiers, the leading unit of the 3rd Brigade, was wounded as the troops formed up, but took no notice of his injury, led on in the advance upon the Canal, was wounded again, lay for a time half unconscious upon a stretcher, struggled once more to his feet, and continued to lead his victorious Guardsmen through a hellish fire with the final result of large captures of the men and guns who were opposing them. The crossing of the Canal was signalised also by a remarkable exploit by Captain Frisby and Corporal Jackson, who, with two other Coldstream Guardsmen, climbed down one side and up the other of the dry Canal in order to capture a machine-gun with a crew of nine who were lying amid the broken end of a bridge on the farther bank. Jackson unhappily did not survive to receive the Cross which he had won.

In the meantime the Sixty-second Division, now under General Whigham, passed through the Third Division, and continued their victorious career. Two companies of the 8th West Yorkshires got forward as far as the north-west outskirts of Marcoing and Nine Wood, but were exposed to a raking fire from the high ground on the south side of the Ribecourt valley, so had finally to fall back. That night the Sixty-second continued to hold its advanced line while the Second Division took the place of the Guards, and all was ready for the further advance next morning.

On September 28 the Sixty-second dashed forward as soon as it was light, and were soon in possession of Marcoing. There was no severe resistance. The Second Division on the left kept well in line with the Yorkshiremen, and were soon the masters of Nine Wood. By 10 o’clock the steady flow of the British infantry had enveloped Marcoing Copse, and the 186th Brigade had reached the Canal, where several bridges were found to be still intact. Noyelles had fallen to the Second Division, who were now fighting over the ground which they had held in the old Bourlon days, only nine months ago in time, and yet seeming so far off on account of the great succession of events which had elapsed. Some attempts were made to get across the Canal, but the Germans were there in strength, and nothing could be done without deliberate preparation. In the evening the Sixty-second extended its boundaries, and consolidated what it held. A small party of the Second Division got across the Canal during the night, but were unable to establish any permanent bridge-head. In the morning of September 29, however, one brigade of this division made a lodgment upon the farther side, and remained there, though with wire and machine-guns before them. Pontoons were brought up during the day and many bridges thrown across. The Sixty-second meanwhile had cleared Les Rues Vertes and Masnières and was well to the east of those villages.

No progress was made on September 30, and the day was mainly spent in strenuous preparations by General Harper for his renewed advance. The Sixty-second Division cleared some more ground, and the Second Division failed in a village attack, but neither movement was important. During the evening the Third Division was brought forward on the right and took the place of the Sixty-second, so that they might advance next morning in conjunction with the New Zealanders on their right. This was duly carried out, the 5th Brigade leading on the left, and the 76th on the right. It was a day of heavy fighting and of stout resistance. The immediate object was the capture of Rumilly, which was entered, but could not be entirely cleared by the 76th Brigade. The 5th Brigade found Mont sur l’Oeuvre, which faced them, a particularly tough proposition, and could make no headway. Altogether the losses on this day were greater than the gains, but the troops were undismayed and eager to get forward again on the morrow.

In the morning of October 1 they came back to their work, the 5th Brigade still carrying on, while the 8th Brigade took the place of the 76th. By 10 o’clock Rumilly had fallen, which gave the British a most important point as regards the passages over the river and canal. It took a great deal of clearing, for it was honeycombed with cellars and dugouts, and there were continual outflames of unexpected fire. Before evening it was solidly British. No action of importance took place during the next few days, and the 4th of October found the Sixth Corps in the same position as the rest of Byng’s Army, solidly established upon the western bank of the Escaut Canal and River, and with some bridge-heads on the farther side.

On September 27 Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps, which had done such splendid work in breaking a section of the main Hindenburg Line on September 2, was called into vigorous action once more. Its rôle was to advance in the general attack which was made on that date by the First and Third Armies in order to drive the enemy over the Canal de l’Escaut. The Fifty-second Lowland Scottish Territorial Division was on the right of the Seventeenth Corps, and the Sixty-third Naval Division on the left, while the Fifty-seventh Lancashire Territorials had been assigned the duty of following up the initial advance, and passing through the Sixty-third

Division to reach the final objective. On the immediate right of the Corps were the Guards Division of the Sixth Corps, while on the left were the Fourth Canadians. The first line of objectives was the Hindenburg support line, the second included the villages of Anneux and Graincourt, while the third, if it could indeed be attained, would include Fontaine, Cantaing, and the west edge of La Folie Wood.

A very desperate day of fighting lay ahead of the Seventeenth Corps before this ambitious programme could be carried through, and yet the fire and ardour of the troops carried them eventually to the farthest limit. The 156th Brigade crossed the Canal du Nord on the right of the Sixty-third Division, in spite of clouds of gas and very heavy shelling upon their places of assembly. The 4th Royal Scots led the advance, and were soon in the first objective. Here they were heavily attacked, however, and there was no further forward movement until the 7th Scottish Rifles came up to thicken the line. Meanwhile the 157th Brigade was dealing with that portion of the Hindenburg Line which was west of the Canal, their operations being on the extreme right flank of the Corps in close liaison with the Guards. This heavy work fell upon the 6th Highland Light Infantry aided by three tanks, and they got well forward, but the 7th Highland Light Infantry on their left were badly held up by thick wire and impossible conditions. The 7th Scottish Rifles in the north had more success, however, and they now worked south, which gave invaluable help to their comrades in that quarter. Before midday all the ground east of the Canal attacked by the 156th Brigade, between the Moeuvres — Graincourt Road and the Bapaume — Cambrai Road, was in the possession of the Scottish infantry.

On the left of the Fifty-second Division the Sixty-third had got off in excellent style, with the 190th Brigade leading, and the 188th immediately behind it. They were encouraged by constant good news from the north, where the Fourth Canadians were in Bourlon Wood. In front of the Sixty-third Division lay an important point called the Factory, an old bone of contention in the days of the Cambrai battle of 1917. This point was reached by the Anson Battalion, but they were driven out of it again, and the Germans put in a heavy garrison. It was then methodically bombarded, and shortly after 4 o’clock it was again attacked by the 188th Brigade with complete success, 11 guns and many prisoners being taken. Shortly afterwards both Graincourt and Anneux were overrun by the advancing waves of the Sixty-third Division. About 5 o’clock the Fifty-seventh

Division was ordered up to take the place of the Sixty-third, moving round their north flank with the intention of attacking Cantaing. The German resistance had very much stiffened, however, and there was a menace of counter-attack, so that this final movement did not fully develop. The night fell with the 171st and 172nd Brigades in the advanced line which represented the farthest east of the Sixty-third Division. A thousand prisoners were taken during the day. Of the eleven tanks employed no less than nine were knocked out by the German fire — a proportion which shows how great the risks are which are taken by the brave men who form the crews. Each had done splendid work before it met its fate, and ever more and more the infantry learned, when at the last extremity before impassable wire and death-dealing trenches, to look behind them in the hope of catching sight of one of these lumbering ironclad monsters who had so often been their salvation.

On the morning of September 28 the two brigades of the Fifty-seventh Division were ordered to continue their advance and to force the passage of the Canal de l’Escaut, while the Sixty-third were to follow up and exploit any success which was gained. The immediate task of the 171st Brigade was to clear the ground between Anneux and Fontaine, and to establish touch with the Canadians on their left. This they had done while the day was still young. From about midday, however, the attack slowed up in this section of the line. The Marcoing position was very strong, and it held the 171st Brigade. By 2 o’clock a small force from the Fifty-seventh Division had got across the Canal, and at about the same hour the Drake Battalion of the 189th Brigade advanced upon Cantaing. The orders were to push on and cross the Canal, thrusting forward as far as was possible, while the cavalry were held in leash at the south end of La Folie Wood. It was soon clear, however, that the line of the canal and river could not be easily rushed, for all the possible crossings were swept by a deadly fire. The 171st Brigade was held under fire upon the spur east of Fontaine, and the Canadians on the left had not yet made good the Marcoing line. Two battalions of the 189th Brigade, the Drake and Hood, were in Folie Wood, endeavouring to force a crossing, but the night fell before it could be accomplished. Before morning two companies of Drakes had established posts upon the farther side, others getting across the river as well, over a broken bridge. Farther to the right the Sixth Corps had three companies of the Second Division also across the Canal. A thousand more prisoners had been taken during the day.

On September 29 all three brigades of the Sixty-third Division were across the Canal. Before midday the Fifty-seventh Division had managed to clear the Marcoing line from the Bapaume — Cambrai Road to the Canal. The men were getting terribly worn, but it was reckoned that the Germans were even more so and that, at all costs, the long-drawn fight should continue. Therefore on September 30 both the Fifty-seventh and Sixty-third Divisions made some advance east of the Canal de l'Escaut. On October 1 the Fifty-seventh Division pushed out to the north and north-east of Proville, but the advance was not successful. Later in the day there was a renewed advance, but again it was not pushed, and did not get very far. The nearest enemy post, the Faubourg de Paris, was strongly held, and there were several small counter-attacks, one of which overwhelmed a British trench containing 40 men and 2 machine-guns. There followed a considerable pause while fresh dispositions and reorganisations were made along the whole line of the Army. These changes included very radical alterations in the Seventeenth Corps, which lost the Fifty-second Division, while it was strengthened by the addition of the Nineteenth (Jeffreys), the Twenty-fourth (Daly), and the Sixty-first (Duncan). With this strong reinforcement General Fergusson turned with confidence to his next task.

We shall now return to the operations of the rest of Byng's Third Army from the time that they fairly settled down to the crossing of the Escaut Canal, and the final occupation of the whole of the Hindenburg Line. We shall begin as before with Shute's Fifth Corps on the right. The attack of this Corps on October 4 was largely dependent upon the success of the Second American Corps, and as this was only partial some modifications had to be made. The immediate result of the American operations was that Morland's Thirteenth Corps, which was on their left and on the right of the Fifth Corps, had to undertake an advance against Le Catelet and Gouy on October 3. During this movement the Fiftieth Division on the left of Morland's Corps was to take possession of the high ground 1500 yards north of Le Catelet, and were then to be relieved by the Welsh Division of the Fifth Corps. This was duly carried out by the evening of October 4. The rôle of the Welsh Division was afterwards to attack northwards across the front of the Fifth Corps so as to clear the Hindenburg Line as far north as Rancourt Farm. It was found, however, on October 5 that as a result of the operations of the Fourth Army the enemy had withdrawn and crossings were effected by the Twenty-first and Thirty-third Divisions along the whole Corps front, while the Welshmen east of Vandhuile found that the line to the north of them had been abandoned. They pushed on, therefore, and took possession of the Nauroy — Le Catelet line, finishing up to the east of the village of Aubencheul, while the 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division moved forward and occupied the same line on their left. So far all had gone splendidly, but it was soon found that the enemy’s retreat was not unlimited, for the Masnières — Beaurevoir line was strongly held, and the Welsh Division on October 6 was unable to penetrate it, though the Twenty-first gained a limited footing at one point, which gave good hopes for the future. After a day of reorganisation the attack was vigorously resumed on October 8, the objectives being Malincourt on the right and Walincourt on the left. The troops were now in green and virgin country unscarred by any previous battles, and a most pleasant contrast to that terrible wilderness in which they had marched and fought so long. The attack of October 8 was made by night, the zero hour being 1 o’clock in the morning. All three brigades of the Welsh Division were concerned in the advance on the right, and all had heavy fighting and some setbacks, but persevered with fine valour, and succeeded before evening in piercing the Beaurevoir line, driving in the strong German rearguards and establishing their final position to the east of Malincourt. The Twenty-first Division on the left also came away with great dash and made rapid progress in their moonlight advance. By dawn most of the high ground in front of them, including Angles Château and Hurtebise Farm, had been taken and the 62nd Reserve Brigade moved forward to continue the operation, which resulted in the capture of the whole Beaurevoir line on that front. Before evening, after several temporary checks, the Twenty-first Division had reached a line 500 yards west of Walincourt, though the left of their advance had not passed the Sargrenon River. Nearly 1000 Germans were taken during this long day of battle. That night the Seventeenth Division took over from the Twenty-first, while the Thirty-third moved through the ranks of the Thirty-eighth, so as to be all ready for a continuation of the pressure in the morning.

On this October 8, when the enemy was reported to be withdrawing from the front of the Fifth and Fourth Corps, and it was probable that the movement would spread across the face of the Sixth and Seventeenth Corps, it was very necessary, if possible, to catch them in the very act. An attack was therefore ordered in which the Third Division to the south should move, supported by the Guards, upon Wambaix, while the Seventeenth Corps should take Niergnies as its general objective. The Sixty-third Division made the actual attack on a front of about a mile, with seven tanks in the van. The 188th Brigade on the right had Niergnies in front of it, approaching it from the north-east, while one battalion of the 189th Brigade attacked from the south, the rest forming a protective flank. The Fifty-seventh Division was at the same time to make a subsidiary attack. The advance started at 4.30, but by 6.30 the Fifty-seventh Division had made little progress, its tank being ditched and its 170th Brigade held up by an obstinate trench. By 8 o'clock the line had got forward, and all the first objectives were gained, but the Germans were still firing from the edge of the Faubourg de Paris. A little later a very spirited counter-attack was launched by the enemy from the direction of Awoingt, which was supported by seven British-made tanks, captured in the March operations. For a time the 188th Brigade and the Second Division on the right were thrown back, but by 10 o'clock they were going forward once again, and at that hour, or shortly afterwards, a very welcome pigeon message arrived from the Hoods of the 189th Brigade to say that they were through Niergnies. By the late afternoon every objective had been captured, but the evening saw another strong German advance which struck upon the right of the Seventeenth Corps and upon the front of the Second Division. The Naval men stood fast, however, and not only cleared their own front, but by their enfilade fire were of great assistance to their neighbours in the south. Nearly a thousand prisoners had been captured during the day, and the little flags had moved eastwards once more upon the war maps.

On October 9 the troops were going forward shortly after dawn. It was soon found that the Germans had retreated, leaving only a few devoted machine-guns to impede the pursuit. Gard Wood and Clary were occupied by the Thirty-third Division, who came on so rapidly that they picked up a battery of field-guns near the village and captured the officers drinking in an estaminet, quite unconscious that their enemy was upon them. Bertry was occupied by the 19th Brigade, and before evening Troisvilles had also been captured. On the left without any opposition at all, the 51st Brigade of the Seventeenth Division passed through Malincourt, Selvigny, and Caullery. The German machine-guns made some show at Montigny, but the place was soon occupied, as was Tronquoy. There was no barrage this day in front of the Fifth Corps, and the advance was one long cross-country chase of six or seven miles, with an occasional skirmish. Early on the morning of October 10, the Thirty-third Division crossed the Inchy — Le Cateau Road, and with the mention of the latter name that huge circle seemed at last to be nearing completion, the line of which had begun to describe its strange curve in August 1914. The soldiers knew that the graves of their comrades were at last within their reach. The Seventeenth Division on this day flowed through Audencourt and Inchy, and the 7th East Yorkshires actually got up to Neuvilly in a fine attack, but had to be withdrawn. The Selle River in its shallow valley lay right across the Corps front, and this, as was clear from the increasing artillery fire, marked the new German front. Here we may leave the Fifth Corps while we hark back to bring up their comrades of the Third Army. On the evening of October 11, the situation was that the Thirty-third Division on the right had established one strong post upon the farther river bank, the Seventeenth on the left were lining the western bank of the Selle, while the enemy were reported to be holding the line of the Le Cateau — Solesmes railway in strength, and especially the village of Neuvilly to the east of the river.

Turning now to Harper’s Fourth Corps on the left, and harking back to October 5, it became evident on that morning that the enemy was withdrawing from that point, as a result of the success of Rawlinson’s Army to the south, and even more so to the possession of Crevecoeur by Russell’s New Zealanders. The retreat was closely followed by the Thirty-seventh and the New Zealand Divisions, and Vaucelles, with a portion of the Masnières line south of Crevecoeur, was occupied without resistance. The Masnières line was still strongly held, though the glow of great fires in the east at night seemed to proclaim a coming retreat. October 6 and 7 were spent in preparing for a great attack upon the 8th, in which it was hoped that the Masnières line would be forced. This assault made by the Thirty-seventh and New Zealanders was completely successful, in spite of belts of wire which were often thirty yards wide and had to be crossed in the dim light of dawn. There was hard fighting round Briseaux Wood, but everywhere the attack prevailed and the Germans were beaten out of their positions. Lesdin fell to the New Zealanders and Rifle Brigade. Once the enemy tanks advanced, and there was a short check, but the forward movement was soon resumed. Over 2100 prisoners were taken in this successful day.

On the 9th and 10th the advance was as swift and successful as in the case of the Fifth Corps already described. The Thirty-seventh occupied Caudry, Bethencourt, and Viesly, while the New Zealanders, men of Otago and Canterbury, took Esnes, and finally crossed the Cambrai — Le Cateau Road. Up to now this district of France might have been a land without inhabitants, a mere stage for the drama of war; but now considerable numbers of the French civilians were liberated, no less than 2500 at Caudry, all with the same tales of German bullying and violence. In the early morning, the Thirty-seventh and their comrades of New Zealand were opposite the Selle River and had passed some elements across on each side of Biastre. We may leave them here on the eve of the battle of the Selle River and extend our view so as to take in the work of the Sixth Corps to the north of them.

In the case of Haldane's Sixth Corps there was a general German withdrawal on October 5, which did not prevent a very firm front being shown upon the general line which was held on October 8. The attack upon that day was made by the 9th Brigade of the Third Division on the right, and by the 99th Brigade of the Second Division on the left. The village of Seranvillers was the immediate objective of the 9th Brigade, which was strengthened by the 2nd Suffolk Battalion. Both the 9th and 99th Brigades got well forward at the start, but had very hard fighting, and at one time were driven back by a German counter-attack supported by tanks. The village had been taken, but the cellars were still full of Germans. La Targatte, the other village on the front, repulsed two attacks and was vigorously defended, the 2nd Suffolk having heavy losses in front of it. Later in the day, however, it was taken by a fine advance of the 8th Royal Lancasters and the 1st Gordons of the 76th Brigade. On the left flank both the 99th Brigade and the Sixty-third Division upon their left had encountered strong opposition from the village of Forenville and had suffered from the counter-attack already mentioned, but three of the German tanks were destroyed, and the advance was resumed with the result that before evening Forenville had been taken, and the whole line of the original objective secured. It was only attained, however, after a day of very desperate battle and heavy losses. During the evening the Guards came up, with their 1st and 2nd Brigades in the line, and early in the morning, supported by the fire of nine brigades of field artillery, they reached the line of railway along the whole Corps front, and took the village of Wambaix.

News from the north now showed that the enemy was retreating upon a broad front and in no half-hearted manner. Patrols of the Seventeenth Corps were reported to have passed through Cambrai, while north of that the troops of the First Army had crossed the canal at Ramillies with little opposition. Previous experience had shown that such a retreat would certainly be conducted in an orderly fashion, and would be covered by rearguards composed mainly of machine-gun units. The main thing, however, was to sustain the pressure and keep as close to the retiring masses as possible. Led by that veteran body, the Oxfordshire Hussars, acting as advanced scouts, the infantry of the Sixth Corps hurried forward in pursuit with much the same general experience as the two Corps on their right. Estourmel, Igniel, and Boistrancourt marked the main line of the advance, and were occupied by the Guards, who were in touch with the New Zealanders of the Fourth Corps on their right and with the Twenty-fourth Division of the Seventeenth Corps on their left. On October 10 the Guards were through St. Hilaire, and up to St. Vaast, which latter village was cleared after a stiff local skirmish on October 11. The Germans still seemed inclined to fight in this quarter to the west of the Selle River, especially at St. Aubert and Solesmes. They were brushed aside, however, and on October 13 the Guards gained that portion of St. Python which is west of the Selle, a stream about thirty feet across and of some depth. It was evident that an organised full-scale attack would have to be made at this point, so the Sixth Corps waited for the general signal.

Returning to the Seventeenth Corps: On the morning of October 9 the attack was renewed by Daly’s Twenty-fourth Division, a unit which has always been in the heart of the fighting in the past, and now was in the line once more. It was a great day, for early in the morning, as is recorded elsewhere, the Canadians and the Fifty-seventh Division had entered Cambrai. The situation seemed fluid, and the enemy disorganised, so the 6th Dragoon Guards were ordered forward to work towards Cagnoncles, while the 72nd Brigade, having taken Awoingt, gave way to the 73rd Brigade, who advanced towards Cauroir and west of Romilly. The Germans, however, were in a strong line of rifle-pits behind triple wire, so that the cavalry could gain no ground. The infantry were also unable to get forward very far on that day, but evening saw them in close touch with the German covering rearguards, the Twenty-fourth Division touching the Guards on the right, the Canadians on the left. In the morning of October 10 the screen had dissolved and the leading lines of the Seventeenth Corps, consisting of the 17th Brigade, were soon to the east of Cagnoncles, which fell to the 7th Northamptons, while the Dragoon Guards were pushing ahead once more. Rieux and Avesnes were both taken by the Twenty-fourth Division during the day, and before evening the line was well to the east of Cambrai, General Daly pushing the advance with great vigour.

On October 11 it was found that the Germans were in strength and apparently meant to make a serious stand. At about ten o’clock they counter-attacked with tanks, and pushed back both the Canadians on the left and the Twenty-fourth Division on the right. The former had taken Iwuy in the morning. No further advance was made during the day, but general orders were issued that the way should be cleared up to the Selle River, and that the high ground over the river should be secured in order to safeguard the crossings. On October 12 the Canadian Corps on the left was drawn out of the line, and the Seventeenth Corps found themselves with the Forty-eighth Division of the Twenty-second Corps as their northern neighbours. On this day the Germans again began to retreat, and the Corps front was advanced down to the Selle River, between Haussy and Saulzoir. There was hardly any opposition. All day the Twenty-fourth Division was advancing with the Forty-ninth on their left and the Guards on their right. That evening the 17th Brigade of the Twenty-fourth Division made progress over the river, entering Montrecourt and securing the undamaged bridge. The posts on the farther side were swept by machine-gun fire and driven back next morning, that portion of the bank being commanded by rising ground on the east.

We have thus traced all four Corps of the Third Army from the date August 21, when it started from the line of Albert, until October 13, when it found itself after seven weeks of immense and continuous exertion and of uninterrupted victory upon the western bank of the Selle. In the compressed narrative of this chronicle it might seem no more complex than the forward movement of pieces upon a board, but no detailed account could ever make real the problems, the anxiety, the organisation, the unwearied heroic efforts which such an advance must entail when the great German army, now composed of veterans deeply skilled in every wile of modern warfare, were beaten out of position after position, and could find no safe refuge anywhere from the nation whose military weakness had for so long been its standing jest.

IX. OPERATIONS OF BYNG’S THIRD ARMY From the Battle of the Selle, October 12, to the end

The battle of the Selle River — Reversion to open warfare — The valour of Lancashire — Haig’s incessant blows — Weakening of the German morale — The battle of Mormal Forest — New Zealanders and the mediaeval fortress — Capture of the great forest — The Sambre bridged — A grand Division — Advance of Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps — The last phase.

THE River Selle is a small stream, only thirty feet across but of some depth, and it ran right athwart the course of the Army, with every indication that the enemy had built up a line of resistance behind it. How far this was a strong rearguard or how far it was a do-or-die line of battle could only be determined by actual assault. The river runs through swampy meadows from Neuvilly past Biastre to Solesmes. On the far bank the ground slopes up uniformly to a hog-backed ridge, with a road and railway running between Neuvilly and Solesmes, rather more than half-way up the slope. The railway joined other lines south of the latter town, forming a triangular embankment of great strength strongly defended by machine-guns, as was the whole railway line and the string of villages across the Army front, which was the northern prolongation of that described previously. It was a position of great natural strength, made more awkward by the presence of civilians in the villages, and by a damming of the river which broadened it in parts into a lake. The first move of General Byng was to endeavour to seize the high ground on the east of the river, so as to make a strong point which would cover the bridge-building operations. We shall describe the successive operations from the south or right, beginning with Shute’s Fifth Corps, still working in close liaison with Morland’s Thirteenth Corps on the right, the flank unit of the Fourth Army. It may be premised that the warfare from now onwards was very different from that which had preceded the capture of the great German lines. The trench, the bomb, and the wire all played subsidiary parts. An officer of pre-war Aldershot experience, or even the great Duke himself with his Peninsular prejudices, would have found himself able to appreciate the situation. That great shade, could he have ridden Copenhagen in the heart of this wonderful army, would have seen, as of yore, shells which burst over the enemy’s position; he would have seen cavalry scouts who were the advanced posts of the marching army; he would have seen lines of skirmishers behind them; he would have seen mounted officers who carried personal reports; and he would have seen columns of route marching in fours down every road, and breaking up into small clumps of artillery formation as they came under fire. All this would have been familiar, and all this he would have seen had he been present in these later phases of the great war.

The attack was launched at 5 A.M. on October 12, when the advanced guard of the Thirty-third and Seventeenth Divisions, under Generals Pinney and Robertson, advanced upon the high ground which faced them. They were working in close liaison with the Thirty-seventh on the left, and with the Sixty-sixth Lancashire Territorials on the right, these being the flank units of the Fourth and Thirteenth Corps respectively. The line of the advance was to the north of Montay, and it went very well at first, so that by 7.45 Pinney's men were far forward and consolidating on the left, though on the right they were unable to penetrate beyond the railway line. The attack of the Seventeenth on the left reached the high ground 1000 yards north-east of Neuvilly, but on the south side of that village could not get past the line of the Montay — Neuvilly Road, where the 9th West Ridings of the 52nd Brigade were heavily engaged. Neuvilly was gained, but while the troops were mopping it up a strong German counter-attack drove down from the Amerval direction, dashed up against the left of Pinney's Division and threw it back to the line of the railway. So great was the pressure and so continuous, that the Thirty-third could not hold any of its gains, and found itself in the afternoon on the west of the Selle River once more, save for the right-hand battalion, who held tight all day along the line of the road between the railway and the river.

The Seventeenth Division on the high ground north-east of Neuvilly was now in a very dangerous position, as the Thirty-seventh had not come up on its left, so that both its flanks were in the air. The 12th Manchesters stood firm, however, with little support, until about 3 P.M., when a creeping barrage with an infantry attack behind it drove them west of the railway, with serious losses, to a point 200 yards east of the river. The result was that the final line, when night fell upon this long and trying day, was across the river at both extreme flanks, but west of the river in the middle.

From the point of view of the Fourth Corps on the left the 12th had not been a very satisfactory day either. The Thirty-seventh had reached the crest of the opposite hill, but the New Zealanders on their left had not taken Bellevue, while Neuvilly on the right had never been thoroughly cleared. About 5 P.M. the German counter-attack, made in four waves, came down upon the Thirty-seventh, supported by flank fire from both villages. It reached Neuvilly in the Seventeenth Division sector, and then turned right so as to enfilade the Thirty-seventh, with the result that the latter were forced to evacuate both the hill and the railway line, but still held on to the east bank of the river, where a steep escarpment gave some protection. Thus ended this weary day, which had not involved the Sixth Corps on the north, but had exposed both the southern Corps of the Third Army to heavy losses with barren results.

A week now elapsed, which was marked by very heavy artillery work on both sides, the Germans endeavouring to prevent the British from assembling, while the British tried to break down the machine-gun nests and strong points which faced them, especially in Neuvilly. There were several daring minor engagements in which patrols endeavoured to widen or strengthen the front, so keen being the contest that sometimes posts were taken and retaken several times in one night. There was, it must be admitted, no obvious local sign of any failure in German morale. It was not until October 20 that the offensive was resumed upon a large scale by the Fifth and Fourth Corps, in conjunction with a full-dress attack by the whole of the Fourth Army in the south.

The Fifth Corps advanced with Cubitt’s Thirty-eighth Welsh on the right, and the Seventeenth Division on the left. Neither line had far to go before clashing with the enemy, for the outposts were almost touching each other. The attack began in the dark at 2 in the morning, the British having indulged in previous heavy shoots at night, in the hope, which was justified by the result, that the real barrage would be taken as being of a similar temporary nature. The Welshmen had a desperate experience at first, a quarry, a farm, and the old railway embankment all forming difficult obstacles. In the case of the quarry, every man of the original storming party became a casualty, but it was taken by their successors. The rain was heavy, the slopes slippery, the mud deep, and the whole of the conditions about as bad as they could be, which was the more serious as the tanks were put out of action thereby.

The 50th Brigade of the Seventeenth Division, with the 7th East Yorks and 6th Dorsets in the lead, had been launched upon Neuvilly with instructions to avoid a frontal attack, but to endeavour to get round to north and south so as to pinch it out; while the guns bombarded it and kept the machine-gunners in their lairs. South of the village the attack advanced rapidly through the mirk of a most inclement night. The first lines of machine-guns were overrun and destroyed. The wave of men then fought their way through some wire, and got as far as the embankment, which was thickly garnished with light artillery. Before dawn the 10th West Yorkshires closed in upon Neuvilly, and in spite of several obstinate machine-guns cleared the place and took the survivors prisoners, most of them being dragged out of cellars. Pushing on, the Seventeenth Division after several vicissitudes captured the village of Amerval, but were pushed out of it again by a counter-attack, finally regaining it after dark. The 7th Borders took this village, but lost both their commander and their adjutant in doing so. The Thirty-eighth had kept its line all through, so that by evening the whole objective was practically in the hands of the British after a very prolonged and stubborn fight, in the course of which the Corps had taken four guns and 600 prisoners.

Meanwhile Harper's Fourth Corps on the left had also gone forward at 2 A.M., their objective being the high ground to the south of Solesmes. The plan was that the Sixth Corps should take the ground to the north of the village, but the whole operations were made very difficult by the knowledge that the civilian inhabitants were still there, and that the guns had therefore to be used sparingly. When once the points on both sides had been occupied it was hoped that the Sixty-second Division of the Sixth Corps would be able to capture the place. The advance of the Fourth Corps was made with the Fifth Division on the right and the Forty-second on the left. The line of the railway and the high ground east of it were successively occupied, though the fire was heavy and the finest qualities were needed in the soldiers who breasted the hill with lines of machine-guns flashing at them from the hawthorn hedges of the embankment. In the attack upon the hamlet of Marou the 127th Brigade of the Forty-second Division showed the usual Lancastrian gallantry. There are no finer, tougher soldiers in the world, either in attack or defence, than these North Countrymen. On one occasion on this day, a company of the 5th Manchesters being pinned down, it was essential to convey news of their position to their supports. Four volunteers started in succession across the open bullet-swept plain, and all four were shot down. None the less Private Wilkinson volunteered as the fifth and actually got through unscathed and saved the situation. For this and other exertions during the day he received the Victoria Cross. The 1st and 3rd Guards Brigade had gone forward on the front of the Sixth Corps, with the 2nd Brigade in immediate support, and these magnificent troops, taking St. Python in their stride, beat down all opposition and by 7.30 were in their appointed place to the north of the village. The two flanks being thus secured, the Sixty-second went in between them with their usual vigour and, according to plan, assaulted the place from the west, fighting their way into it and out at the other side, the 186th Brigade taking the village while the 185th passed through it for a fresh advance. The 2/4 York and Lancaster aided in mopping up the village, which entailed some very severe fighting from house to house, as dangerous often as entering a cave in which lurks some wounded beast of prey. It was on this occasion that Corporal Daykins won his Cross, leading the twelve men, who were the only survivors of his platoon, with that mixture of wile and courage which is the ideal combination. He not only cleared the front of his own platoon, but perceiving that his neighbours were held up he started out alone to their assistance, with such success that he brought back a machine-gun and 25 more prisoners as the prize of his own unaided effort.

The 3rd Guards Brigade on the extreme left attempting to make good the Solesmes — Valenciennes Road, were checked for a time by very heavy fire, but overcame the difficulty, and soon the Guards had their full objective, and were in touch with the Nineteenth Division on the flank of the Seventeenth Corps on their left at Maison Blanche. The Forty-second Division on the right had got well forward, but was checked at last on the line of the Beart brook, which caused the Sixty-second on their left to throw out a defensive flank and put limits to their advance. The Fifth Division on the extreme right had also been held, and were finally driven off the high ground south of Marou by a sharp counterstroke of the enemy. By evening the Fifth and Forty-second had secured almost their full objectives, the Manchester battalions having borne the brunt of the fighting. The Fourth Corps had taken over 1000 prisoners. The Sixth Corps had also gone to its full limit, the Guards and Sixty-second having cleared everything in front of them and sent back 700 prisoners. It had been a most successful day; but the hardest work had fallen upon the Fourth Corps, both divisions having been badly knocked about. It was determined to spend a day therefore in consolidating the gains, and to continue the advance on October 23.

On that date the Fifth Corps on the right went forward once again, with the Thirty-third Division on the right and the Twenty-first on the left. If we attempt to describe the action from the broad point of view of the whole Corps front, the order of battle from the right was the Thirty-third, Twenty-first, Fifth, Forty-second, Third, and Second. On the front of the Sixth Corps there was a sudden outburst of artillery fire during the assembly of the troops, which unhappily caught the Third Division and caused many casualties. It is a hard test even for the most veteran troops to be under a hurricane of shells in the dark and cold of an autumn night, but the men of the Iron Division came into the battle as blithely as ever. The Harpies River, and a whole screen of villages and of woods, with the great Forest of Mormal at their back, were the immediate obstacles which confronted the Army. On the right the village of Forest was soon secured, though an obstinate pocket held out for some time to the north-east of it. The enemy in this quarter could be seen retiring in small parties towards Vendegies and the wood near that village. The Thirty-third Division on the flank had a greater volume of fire to contend with and was rather slower than the Twenty-first, which never halted until it was close to Vendegies, reaching it at 10 A.M. The defence was thickening, however, and both divisions had very heavy going in the afternoon, though the 19th Brigade of the Thirty-third Division fought its way along the north of Vendegies Wood, and reached its allotted line, while the 98th Brigade was held up by the fire from Bousies. As the farther line was reached the two reserve brigades of each division — the 62nd and the 100th Brigades — were pushed up to take the burden from those who were wearied out by the long and strenuous day. Nearly 800 prisoners had fallen to the Fifth Corps.

The Fourth Corps had the preliminary task of clearing the south side of the St. Georges River, and taking the village of Beaurain. This was allotted to the Fifth and Forty-second Divisions, but the leading brigade of the former was caught in the artillery attack already alluded to, with the result that it sustained losses which seriously crippled it. None the less the attack started up to time and was successfully carried out, save that Beaurain could not be cleared — a fact which necessitated a change in barrage, no easy matter after a great action is launched. The 125th Lancashire Fusilier Brigade of the Forty-second Division did particularly fine work. The Thirty-seventh Division and the New Zealanders, Canterbury and Otago in the van, had now passed through the ranks of their comrades, and as there were signs of German disorganisation the pressure was strenuously maintained. As a result the New Zealanders captured the crossings over the Ecaillon River before they could be destroyed, and reached the edge of Le Quesnoy, while the Thirty-seventh seized Ghissignies with its bridge. It was a great day's work for Harper's Corps.

On the left the Third and Second Divisions had advanced on single-brigade fronts, the 76th and 5th being in the lead. The 1st Gordons of the 76th advancing rapidly, cleared the village of Romeries after a very sharp tussle. A battalion commander and 600 men were taken. The rest of the brigade then passed through it and carried the line forward. It was evident this day that the Germans, though hard in patches, were really becoming demoralised under the pounding of the British, and that they had lost all stomach for the fray. Several well-placed machine-guns were abandoned by their crews without a shot being fired, and serious opposition seemed at places to be at an end. Both the 8th Royal Lancasters and the 2nd Suffolks went through every defence like paper. The 8th Brigade then took up the running, and the 2nd Royal Scots carried Vertain with 200 more prisoners, while the 1st Scots Fusiliers took Escarmain also with 200 Germans. Patrols were sent forward as far as the Ecaillon River and few of the enemy appeared to be left upon the southern bank.

Meanwhile the 5th Brigade on the left had passed to the north of Vertain and swept forward, keeping level with the Nineteenth Division on their left. They co-operated in the capture of Escarmain, and the rest of the Second Division made its way through Capelle, and lined the Capelle — St. Martin Road, the latter village having been taken by the Nineteenth Division. So demoralised did the Germans appear on this flank, with their gun-teams all out in the open ready to limber up, that it appeared as if unlimited progress could be made by Haldane's Corps, but it was known that the enemy were in a sterner mood to the south and that the Fourth and Fifth Corps, though victorious, had no assurance of an easy advance. It was determined therefore to renew the battle next morning before daylight.

At that hour the Thirty-third and Twenty-first Divisions again went forward on the right, but the opposition in this quarter was still very stiff. Poix du Nord was captured by the Twenty-first and some 3000 inhabitants were found cowering in the cellars. Englefontaine was at the same time attacked by the 100th Brigade of the Thirty-third Division, but the machine-guns were busy and it was some time before they could get a lodgment. The

Twenty-first was at the same time held up on the road north of the village. About 4 P.M. the line moved forward again behind a fresh barrage, that refreshing shower which revives the exhausted infantry. The men of the 100th Brigade got halfway through Englefontaine and remained there at close grips with their tenacious adversaries, while the Twenty-first fought their way forward to the south-east of Ghissignies, where they were again pulled up. The resistance on this southern section of the Corps front was certainly very different from that experienced by Haldane's Corps in the left flank. Meanwhile the Fourth and Sixth Corps were waiting for the Fourth Army and the Fifth Corps to swing into line, but they made a short forward movement on October 24, the Third Division passing through Ruesnes, while the New Zealanders on their right kept pace with them. Both the Fifth Corps on the right and the Seventeenth Corps on the left were for the time rather behind the general line, so that a long defensive flank had to be formed by each of the Corps between them. The Sixty-first Division had come in on the right of the Seventeenth Corps, but it had at once run into a sharp attack which drove it for the time out of Vendegiessur-Ecaillon. During this day some attempt was made by the Sixth Corps to push cavalry through, but every horse of two strong patrols of Oxfordshire Hussars was shot, so that it was impossible to persevere.

The village of Englefontaine had not yet been cleared, so after a breathing-space of one day the Thirty-third Division attacked once more, while its neighbour to the south, the Eighteenth Division, co-operated by advancing upon Mount Carmel. This attempt was entirely successful, the 100th Brigade flooding over the village and capturing 450 prisoners. The Twenty-first Division at the same time advanced its line on the north.

The Army had now outrun its communications and a halt was necessary. It was Haig's policy, however, to continue raining down hammer blows upon his reeling antagonist, so that all was ready for a big fresh advance on November 4, which should be on an immense scale, involving the fronts of the Fourth, Third, and First Armies.

The immediate objective in front of the right of the Third Army was the formidable bulk of the Mormal Forest, after which the action may well be named. The advance on the front of the Fifth Corps was made by the Thirty-eighth Welsh on the right and the Seventeenth Division on the left, each brigade succeeding the other, as the various objectives were reached. The edge of the Forest was strongly held, but when once it had been penetrated the progress along the sides was rapid and the enemy freely surrendered. So fair were the prospects that the troops were ordered not to confine themselves to the allotted objectives but to push on as far as they could. The ultimate aim was to gain a passage over the Sambre, though this seemed to be more than one day's work could possibly accomplish.

The Thirty-eighth Division attained its full objectives, but the Seventeenth met with a lively resistance in Locquignol, and was held up for a time. The weather had broken and the rain was falling, but in spite of the depressing surroundings the fighting line pressed on. The 13th Welsh Regiment moving forward with great dash pushed patrols into Sarbaras, where many rifles scattered over the ground pointed to the German demoralisation. All night the Welshmen pushed forward, and Berlaimont was taken in the early morning. At the same hour the Seventeenth Division, having overcome their difficulties, were nearly as far forward on their left. The Forest had been expected to form a greater obstacle than was really the case, for when once it was entered it was found that the clearings were so extensive that save in patches it was hardly an obstacle at all.

The Fourth Corps had gone forward on November 4 with the Thirty-seventh Division on the right and the New Zealanders on the left. The latter were to advance upon either side of Le Quesnoy, which was to be encircled and taken. The town, which was an old-fashioned walled fortress, was not shelled on account of the inhabitants, but smoke- and oil-drums were fired on to the ramparts.

The attack was a complete success and swept over every obstacle without a check, save for some short delay caused by a strong point missed by the barrage in front of the Thirty-seventh Division. Louvignies and Jolimetz were taken by the Thirty-seventh, which pushed on to establish itself within the Forest. The New Zealanders left Hart's Brigade to invest Le Quesnoy and also advanced rapidly into the Forest, capturing many prisoners and guns. Le Quesnoy was now completely isolated, but the ancient walls and gateways were strongly defended by all modern devices, and a machine-gun clattered through the slit where a bow may once have been bent. An officer with a flag of truce got no response. An aeroplane was then sent over, which dropped the message that our troops were in the Forest far to the east, and that a surrender would be the wisest course. The enemy, however, would have none of it. A forlorn hope of New Zealanders then approached with a scaling-ladder in the good old style, and swarmed up the walls. There was only one ladder and three successive walls, but in some miraculous fashion the whole of the 4th New Zealand Battalion reached the top of the rampart, with the loss of one man. This was accomplished by sweeping the walls round with such a fire that the defenders could not even peep over. On seeing that they had reached the rampart the German commander at last hoisted the white flag. The garrison consisted of about 1000 men.

The Sixth Corps advanced with the Sixty-second on the right and the Guards on the left, each on a two-brigade front. Both divisions went forward from the beginning without a hitch, prisoners streaming back. As they advanced, however, they came into heavy machine-gun fire from the orchards southwest of Frasnoy and south of Wargnies, where for a time the Guards were held up. The country here was very enclosed and thickly hedged, which made progress slow. By evening, however, the objectives had been reached, the orchards cleared, with Frasnoy, Preux-au-Sart, and 1000 prisoners to show for their day’s work. Altogether this battle of Mormal Forest had been a day of triumph for the Third Army, and especially for the Fourth Corps in the centre. It was a great victory, in which on this front alone some 7000 prisoners and about 100 guns were taken, while the Germans had been beaten, with great loss, out of a position which, in their old form, they would have held for a month. So complete was the German break-up that several batteries were taken by the Fourth Corps, with horses, mounted officers, and all complete, and were then despatched in full working order to the rear. When one recalls how their papers and critics had clamoured for open warfare against the untrained British levies the result must have surprised them. At the end of the fight the British line was well up to the great forest.

In the evening the old Fifth Division, now at last reaching the end of those labours which had lasted for more than four terrible years without a break, came into the field once more. It would be interesting to know whether there was a single man left in the ranks of those who had skirted Mormal Forest in August 1914 among the eager battalions which now faced the same obstacle. It is of course true that even the units had been largely altered in the interval, and yet some of the grand old battalions still marched in their honoured formations, changed in all save that eternal spirit which has made and kept them famous. The Fifth Division was ordered to pass through the ranks of the Thirty-seventh after dawn at the western edge of Mormal Forest, and to push onwards to the east. General Oldman of the

15th Brigade on the left advanced on a one-battalion front, and kept the 1st Bedfords, 1st Norfolks, and 1st Cheshires leapfrogging through each other as often as possible in order to minimise the difficulties of the Forest. General Norton of the 95th Brigade on the right of the line attacked with the 1st East Surreys and 1st Cornwalls in the van, and the 1st Devons in reserve. All day the Fifth Division clove its way through the great forest, the British front, like a line of beaters, putting up the game as it went. For the most part it was but a faint-hearted quarry, but here and there it stood fiercely at bay, and trench mortars had to be rushed up and strong points blown down, before the infantry could get forward. The 3rd Hussars kept pace and connected up with the New Zealanders on the left. Pelting rain, deep mud, and broken tracks delayed, but could not stop, the ardent advance, which continued until the leading line was down on the bank of the Sambre, where they were joined next day by the van of the Forty-second Division, which had relieved the New Zealanders. One bridge at Quartes was found intact and was ready for demolition, but Major Cloutman of the Sappers, commanding the 59th Field Company, with extraordinary gallantry rolled across the tow-path, swam the river, and cut the leads of the charge, all under very heavy fire. It was a most daring deed, which was rewarded by a V.C., but unhappily a small party of the enemy with equal gallantry succeeded in repairing the leads and destroying the bridge.

The operations on the right and centre of the Third Army front now took the form of an advance to complete the possession of the Forest of Mormal. On November 5 the Thirty-third and Twenty-first Divisions were back in line, and, working in close liaison with the Eighteenth Division on the left of the Fourth Army, they pushed the advance up to the bank of the Sambre. Here it was found that all bridges had been destroyed, and there was a check while the Twenty-first to the north were making good the rest of the Forest and breaking out in little groups of khaki from the eastern edge. That night they threw light bridges over the Sambre and got some infantry across, the line running from north of Leval to east of Berlaimont. The left of the Twenty-first Division was still west of the river. Next day, November 6, the remorseless advance still went on. Transport was failing, for the roads through the Forest were impossibly bad, but nothing could stop the eager infantry, who were in full cry with their quarry in the open. A number of villages were taken, each of which was full of machine-guns, and showed some fight. By dusk the line of the Avesnes — Bavay Road had been made good. On November 7 the German retreat still continued, but the British had still to fight their way and their progress was far from being a walking-tour. Both the Thirty-third and Twenty-first had a sharp fight before they could dislodge the rearguards from the Bois du Temple, Ecuelin, and Limont-Fontaine. Campbell’s men had a particularly hard task with the latter, which was strongly garrisoned and stoutly defended, while the neighbouring village of Eclaises also presented a bold front. There was a real close infantry battle, with some savage house-to-house fighting, before these points could be cleared. 130 prisoners were taken. The war had now left the open arable country and come into the country of small enclosed orchards with high hedges, which blinded the German observers, since they had already lost command of the air. This was a very vital point. On November 8 the Welsh and Seventeenth were in the front line once more, and the enemy was found to be still very organised and resolute on this sector, fighting hard and with some success to hold the line of a watercourse. Finally this opposition weakened, or it might be more fair to say that the brave rearguard, having done its work, was withdrawn. On November 9 the Fifth Corps got along rapidly, gaining the eastern edge of the Bois du Temple and the high ground east of Beaufort. For a time all contact was lost with the enemy, who were rapidly retreating, and they were not located again until they were on the line of the River Thure. The roads had been blown up, and pursuit was much retarded. The difficulties of the advance were much aggravated by the impossibility of getting the supplies forward. Many delay-action mines had gone up in the railways in the rear, which prevented rail-heads from being rapidly advanced. It is a fact, which is typical of the ghoulish humour of German methods, that after several explosions in the Le Cateau station it occurred to some one to dig up the graves which were marked in German as covering the remains of some unknown British soldiers and were placed near the line. In each case a delay-action mine was discovered all set for different dates. It was determined, therefore, in order to economise supplies, that a single Corps, the Sixth, should form the whole front of the Third Army from this time onwards. This change was accomplished, and the vanguard had just got in touch with the Germans on the River Thure, when the historic November 11 came to end the hostilities.

The troops of the Fourth Corps had moved forward from November 4 onwards in close liaison with the advance just recorded. The Fifth Division captured Pont-sur-Sambre, Boussières, and St. Remy, while the Forty-second occupied Hautmont, so that on November 9 the Corps line was the Avesnes — Maubeuge Road. There they found themselves when the bugles sounded the final “Cease fire.” The record of Harper’s Corps since August 21 can be tersely summed up in a few figures. They had lost 30,000 men. They had captured 22,500 prisoners and 350 guns, fighting for ten weeks without rest or break, and often in the worst of weather. The record of all the divisions was splendid, but this is perhaps the place to say a special word about the New Zealanders, which, in the judgement of many soldiers, was, if it be not invidious to say so, equal to the very best division in France. When it is stated that during the war they lost 57,632 men, and that the total number of prisoners taken from them is reported to have been 45, these extraordinary figures make all further comment superfluous. But what was particularly remarkable was their appreciation of a military situation which more than once altered the whole strategic situation. Thus it was their discovery that the Crevecoeur bridge was intact, and their rapidity in seizing it and tenacity in holding it and the village, which threatened the whole Beaurevoir line and helped to reduce to nullity one of the greatest defences ever created by German engineers. These men return to their island homes bearing with them the deep admiration of their comrades and the gratitude of the Empire. They joined discipline in peace to valour in war, and England was the poorer when the last red hat-band was seen in the streets of her cities.

The Sixth Corps, after the battle of Mormal Forest, pushed on to the east, and was rather impeded by the water-logged country than by the German resistance. On November 6 there was a counter-attack upon the Sixty-second Division, which made no headway and had heavy losses. Bavisaux, Obies, and many other villages were taken, the church in the latter place containing thirty machine-guns. The Guards on the left took Buvignies, while the Twenty-fourth Division upon their north held the line of the Hongnau River. On November 7 the resistance was still negligible, but the continuous rain and the wooded nature of the country made rapid progress almost impossible. That evening General Haldane received the surprising news that it was probable that the enemy would send emissaries through the Allied lines with a view to negotiating an armistice, his instructions being that if they approached his front they should be detained pending instructions from higher authority. In the evening it was learned that they had actually reached the French lines. The fighting still continued, however, and on November 9 the Sixty-second Division had reached the Sambre. The Guards on the same day pushed forward rapidly and entered the citadel of Maubeuge in the afternoon. It was difficult to get touch with the enemy, who were reported to be standing at Boussois. At this period, as already told, the Sixth Corps took over the whole Army front, and was advancing upon the Maubeuge — Charleroi front when the fateful hour struck.

The record of the Sixth Corps during their ten final weeks of work had been a magnificent one, and was strangely parallel to that of the Fourth Corps on their right. Their losses had been almost identical, about 30,000 men. Their prisoners came to over 20,000 and their captured guns were 350. The Fifth Corps, on the other hand, had endured more than its neighbours, having lost no less than 34,000 men. It had captured 13,000 prisoners. Altogether the losses of the Third Army during the final ten weeks had been 100,000 men, while they had taken about 60,000 prisoners with nearly 1000 guns.

We have considered the advance of the three southern Corps of the Third Army. In order to complete the record it is necessary to return to October 13, and to trace the operations of Fergusson’s Seventeenth Corps, which were left on that date in front of the Selle River. On October 14 the 72nd Brigade of the Twenty-fourth Division, which was in the van, gained a footing at the edge of Haussy village, which straddles the river. On October 16 this same brigade took the whole village on either bank. The left of the line was held up, however, by a particularly heavy gas screen. Later in the day the Germans were into Haussy once more, but again were pushed out from the western section of it, on which they gas-shelled it, to the destruction of a number of unfortunate civilians who had been unable to get away. 400 prisoners were taken during the day. October 17 saw the British line where it had been on the 15th, as the gas clouds hanging low over the river valley made the position down there untenable.

On October 20, a rainy and tempestuous day, the general advance of the whole Third Army was resumed. The Nineteenth Division having relieved the Twenty-fourth, carried out the advance on the front of the Seventeenth Corps, having in touch with it the Fourth Division of the Twenty-second Corps on the left, and the Guards of the Sixth Corps on the right. The attack of the Nineteenth Division had for its first objective the bridging of the Selle, the capture of the railway and high ground beyond, and of the village of East Haussy. The second stage should be the ridge to the east. Two brigades advanced — the 57th on the left and the 58th on the right — behind a fine barrage from eleven brigades of artillery.

The attack was started at 2 in the morning, and before 4 A.M. the 57th Brigade were in the whole of Haussy, the resistance having been slight. At 6 o'clock the 8th Gloucesters, on the extreme right, had reached their final objective, where they were endeavouring to get touch with the Guards in the neighbourhood of Maison Blanche. The 10th War-wicks were held up on the left, but soon cleared out the obnoxious pocket. By 9 o'clock the 58th Brigade was also on its extreme limit, and an obstinate strong point was surrounded and destroyed. In this brigade the 2nd Wiltshires had the worst ordeal, but they won through at last. Patrols on the right had reached the banks of the Harpies. The blow had, as must be admitted, been delivered in the air, but the river line had been won, and that was the essential.

On October 23 the part played by the Seventeenth Corps was subsidiary to that of the Corps to the north and to the south. On this date the Nineteenth Division was ordered to protect the left flank of the Sixth Corps in its advance on Romeries and Escarmain. This was duly carried out by the 8th Gloucesters and 10th Warwicks, and contributed greatly to the victory in the south. That night the Sixty-first South Midland Division took over from the Nineteenth Division, with an ambitious programme for next day, October 24. In the course of this attack the 183rd Brigade advanced on the right and the 182nd on the left, their objectives including the villages of Bermerain, Vendegies, and Sommaing. There followed a confused day of hard fighting, the general movement being always from west to east. All three villages were most hotly contested. Vendegies proved to be a special centre of resistance, but on the morning of October 25 it was found to be unoccupied, and the whole resistance had relaxed to such an extent that the front of the Army flowed slowly forward with hardly a check, submerging fresh areas and villages until it had reached the Rhonelle River, where a bridge-head was established on the front of the Twenty-second Corps.

On November 1 the advance was resumed, when Maresches was attacked by the Sixty-first Division, the Warwicks and Worcesters of the 182nd Brigade being in the lead. The village was taken with about three hundred of the garrison. Preseau on the left had fallen. This was the centre of a violent counter-attack in the afternoon, which involved the right of the Fourth and the left of the Sixty-first Divisions. Four German tanks co-operated, two of which were destroyed by the British guns. This attack pressed back the advance from its furthest point, but made no material change in the situation, though Preseau was regained by the Germans, with the effect that their machine-guns from this point held up the left flank of the 184th Brigade in their further advance. Nearly 800 prisoners were made during the day.

The advance was renewed next morning, November 2, and again the resistance seemed to wane, so that by midday the full objectives planned, but not attained, on the previous day had been reached with little loss, the Sixty-first moving onwards in close touch with the Fourth on their left and the Second on their right. The Sixty-first were now drawn out of the line, and the Nineteenth and Twenty-fourth each sent up a brigade to take their place.

November 3 found the front of the Corps still pushing forward without undue opposition. In the late afternoon the 9th Cheshires of the 56th Brigade were in Jenlain in touch with the Eleventh Division upon their left. The whole of the Jenlain — Le Quesnoy Road had been reached along the Corps front, and once again it seemed as if the cavalry might get their long-sought opportunity. Next morning, however, November 4, found the stubborn German still standing grimly on the defensive, and the infantry went forward once more to pitch-fork him a little farther to the east. It was a great general attack in which the three Armies, First, Third, and Fourth, all moved forward against the Avesnes — Maubeuge — Mons line. On the front of the Seventeenth Corps there was no very outstanding objective, and yet it was of course essential that they should keep well up with the line, if only in order to cover the flanks of their neighbours.

The right of the Corps when the advance began consisted of the 73rd Brigade of the Twenty-fourth Division. On its left was the 56th Brigade, and to the left of that the 58th, both of the Nineteenth Division. Both infantry and artillery had to find their battle stations in pitch darkness, but all were in their places at zero. At 6 o’clock the line went forward, faced in the first instance by a small stream, the Petit Aunelle, which was safely crossed, though its banks were in places 30 feet deep. At 10 o’clock both divisions had gained the higher ground beyond the stream. By midday the

Twenty-fourth Division had reached the Great Aunelle River, and a party of the 7th Northamptons drove away with their accurate rifle-fire the German sappers who were endeavouring to destroy the bridge, but could not themselves cross on account of the heavy German fire. The 2nd Wilts of the Nineteenth Division had their patrols in Eth. To the north the Eleventh Division was over the river, and the German position was rapidly becoming impossible, though they were counter-attacking with great valour upon the farther bank of the stream. Before evening Wargnies had fallen to the 9th Cheshires, and the whole British front was up to or over the Aunelle. The advance was carried on in pouring rain on November 5, a further area being gained up to the Hongnau River and the position strengthened, though the amount of ground on the farther side of the river was still limited and varied with the German counter-attacks which occasionally swept back the intrusive bridgeheads, but only to have them re-established once more. The troops were soaked, the ground was sodden, the infantry were over the ankles in mud, and every one was exhausted.

On the morning of November 7 this line of the Hongnau had been abandoned by the Germans and the advance was resumed. It must surely have been at this period of the war one of the most impressive sights in the whole history of the world, could one with a single sweeping glance have seen that gigantic line from the left wing of the Belgians on the Dutch frontier to the right wing of the French within view of the Swiss, moving forward every day, millions of men advancing together, with the flash of their bayonets before them and the red glare of their shells in front of them, while along that whole front of four hundred miles the grey cloud, like some visible thing of evil, rolled slowly back in front, leaving bare the ground which it had blighted and poisoned. It was clear to all men that the end was near, and yet few dared to hope how near it actually proved to be.

On November 7 the Twenty-fourth Division took over Bavay, which had just been captured by the Guards. The weather conditions were more serious than the German opposition, and the advance was held back by the dreadful roads. None the less a long succession of villages were wrenched from the enemy — Taisnières, Feignies, and others — while on November 9 the Guards were in Maubeuge on the right. From this time there was practically no more fighting, and only a slow advance on the one side and a slow retreat on the other until the fateful November 11. To quote the memorandum of a General Officer upon the spot: “The moral effect of retirement upon the enemy was very marked, and it was found that even his machine-gunners, who had fought very well all through our advance, were beginning to feel the effect, and would not stand once a field-gun was brought up to deal with them.”

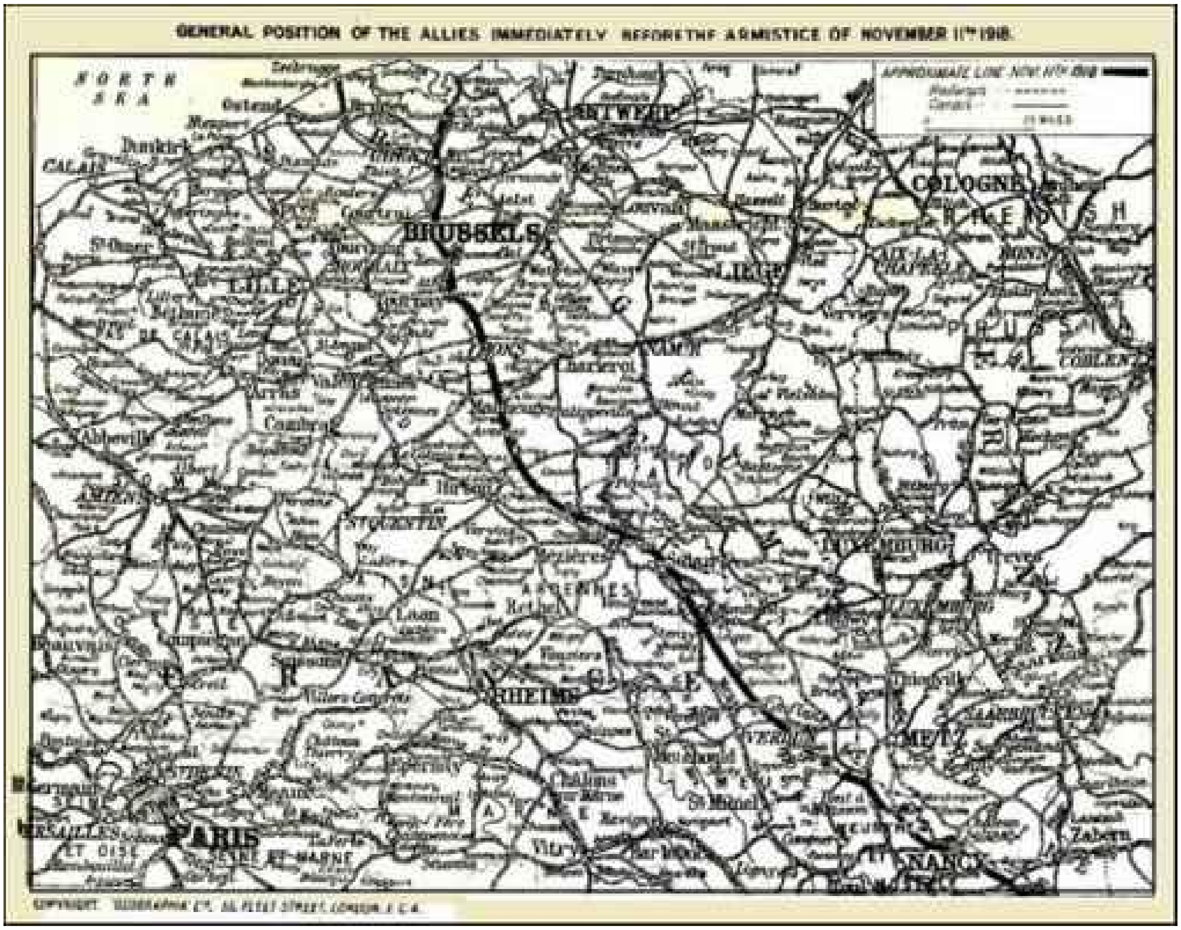
GENERAL POSITION OF THE ALLIES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE ARMISTICE OF NOVEMBER 11TH 1918.
APPROXIMATE LINE NOV. 11TH 1918
NORTH SEA
Ostend
Dunkirk
CALAIS
ANTWERP
COLOGNE
BRUSSELS
LILLE
LIEGE
AIX-LA-CHAPELLE
BONN
COBLENZ
Charleroi
Namur
Cambrai
Abbeville
AMIENS
ST QUENTIN
Laon
Rethel
ARDENNES
Soissons
RHEIMS
Sedan
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Chalons
Vitry
Bar le Duc
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General Position of the Allies immediately before
the Armistice of November 11, 1918

X. THE ADVANCE OF HORNE'S FIRST ARMY

From September 27 to the end

The Canadians at the Canal du Nord — Hard fighting at Bourlon — Strong counter attack at Abancourt — Canadian valour — Godley's Twenty-Second Corps — The Ecaillon valley — Forcing of the Rhonelle — General Heneker's attack — Capture of Douai.

ON September 27 the Canadian Corps, with the Eleventh British Division, attacked once more, the advance joining the left flank of that huge movement in which the First, Third, and Fourth Armies were all engaged. The Twenty-second and Eighth Corps to the north were not engaged, but made a vigorous demonstration in support. The Canadian attack, which began at early dawn, was on a 6000-yard front, from Moeuvres in the south to the Arras — Cambrai Road. In this advance the First and Fourth Canadian Divisions were, in the first instance, to cross the Canal du Nord, and to capture Bourlon Wood and village, with the high ground about Pilgrim's Rest. This attack was in conjunction with one upon the right made by the Seventeenth Corps, where the Fifteenth and Sixty-third Divisions stormed the line of the Canal du Nord east and south-east of Moeuvres, as already recorded. This movement was entirely successful, though there was very obstinate resistance at Graincourt, which held up the advance for a time. The Fifty-seventh Division passed through, however, to the north of this village and gained Cantaing and Fontaine, so that the defenders of Graincourt, finding British troops behind them, were forced to surrender.

The Canal du Nord had been emptied by the blowing up of sluice-gates, and was quickly passed by the Canadian troops, who scrambled down one side and up the other, with or without the aid of scaling-ladders. At the other side they found much less resistance than had been expected, which was greatly the result of a barrage which has seldom been equalled for accuracy and intensity. Captured German officers declared that nothing could live under it. The German guns were slow and feeble in their reply, and the whole work of the enemy artillery at this period showed how nervous it had become through the recent heavy captures, and how much they appreciated the necessity of keeping well to the rear. The Canadian line poured on with little loss and did not halt until it had seized its whole objective, including the ground about Bourlon, which had been the scene of such bitter and fruitless fighting ten months before. Guardsmen and Highlanders, men of Surrey and of Yorkshire, all who had fallen upon and still lay within the soil of that sinister grove, were finally justified and avenged that day. The whole manoeuvre, by which a large part of the German line was taken in the rear, elicited expressions of surprise and admiration from captured German officers.

In the second stage of the Canadian attack the First Canadian and the Eleventh British Divisions — the latter on the extreme left — took up the running, and carried the line forward in the direction of Raillencourt and Haynecourt. In the afternoon the 169th Brigade of the Fifty-sixth Division also came in upon the left, near the Arras — Cambrai Road, to clear the area between the Eleventh Division and the Canal du Nord, the latter division having taken Oisy-le-Verger. There was constant fighting during the day in this quarter, the 168th Brigade coming into action to the left of the 169th, and next morning the 8th Middlesex took Palluel. They also crossed the River Sensée and captured Arleux, but a strong barrage, followed by an infantry attack, drove them out again at 3.30 on the morning of September 29. All these attacks, both of the Eleventh and Fifty-sixth Divisions, were made, after crossing the Canal du Nord, from south to north, so as to extend the left flank of the Canadians.

One of the predominating factors in these operations was the great flood caused by the blocking of the Trinquis and Sensée rivers by the Germans, which created wide lakes shown upon no map, across the front of the Twenty-second Corps. As a matter of fact this development was regarded with some complacency by General Godley, for there had always been a chance that the Germans, by driving a really strong counter-attack along the line of the Scarpe, might checkmate the whole British advance to the south. The effect of the inundations was to freé the British higher command from any fears of the kind and to enable them to hold that part very lightly, while they thickened their line elsewhere.

We have left the Canadian line on September 28. On this date the Third Canadian Division, which had relieved part of the Fourth British on the right of the Corps front, attacked with the 7th and 9th Brigades in the van. On its left was the 10th Canadian Brigade, which in turn had the 2nd Canadian Brigade to the north of it. The Third Canadian Division made good progress and pushed through as far as Raillencourt, but the First

Canadian Division remained motionless, as it was already rather in front of the general line. The Eleventh British Division was doing continuous good work in the north, but on the morning of September 29 its 32nd Brigade was held up by a strong field of wire, and the advance was checked in that quarter, but later in the day the whole line pushed on once more, the order of brigades from the north being 32 (British), 2, 12, 7, 9 (all four Canadian). A mist covered the front, and from the heart of this impenetrable cloud came the constant rattle of the German fire, while their bullets swept every avenue of approach. The progress was irregular, but by 9.45 in the morning the 12th Canadian Brigade had taken Sancourt and had entered Blecourt, where some fierce bludgeon work was going on. At 10 A.M. the 2nd Brigade had reached Abancourt station, but the Eleventh Division were again held up in the north, which exposed the left flank of the Canadians. South of the Bapaume Road the 9th Brigade was making steady progress, while the 7th had reached Neuville St. Remy. For a moment the 12th Canadian Brigade was staggered by a heavy counter which broke upon it, but the ranks soon rallied and the ground was regained. It was desperately hard fighting, however, and it was to continue day after day until all the northern grit of General Currie’s Corps was needed to sustain it. Early in the morning of September 30 they were at it again, the immediate objects of the operations being the capture of the bridge-heads on the Canal de l’Escaut by the Third and Fourth Canadian Divisions, and secondly, that the high ground over the River Sensée should be secured by the First Canadians and Eleventh British.

The attack began well, as the Third Canadian Division got Tilloy and the Fourth got Blecourt. There was some progress also along the Cambrai Road, when the 3rd Canadians got Petit Fontaine. It was “do or die” with the Germans, however, who were keenly alive to the fact that at all costs they must hold the bridge-heads of the Canal. They had put out a great effort, and had brought up three new fighting divisions, making seven in all between Cambrai and the Sensée River. Counter-attacks rolled one after the other from the east, but the Canadians showed themselves as stiff in defence as they were ardent in attack. They might well be in high heart, for since September 27, 200 guns and 5500 prisoners were visible signs of their victory.

On October 1 the Fifty-sixth Division relieved the Eleventh and both reverted to the Twenty-second Corps. At 5 A.M. on that date the Canadian attack was renewed, synchronising with that of the Seventeenth Corps in the south and the Twenty-second in the north. The order of brigades on the Canadian front was, from the north, 1, 3, 11, and 9. The advance was made under a heavy barrage, but it met with a most desperate resistance. In this and the following day the Canadians experienced as heavy fighting as any in their great record. By 8 o'clock the general line had got as far as Canal bank — Morenchies Wood — Cuvillers — Bantigny — Abancourt. Shortly afterwards a very heavy German attack struck the whole Corps front, rolling chiefly up the Bantigny valley, the hostile infantry emerging from Paillencourt and thence pouring forward with great determination in several lines. The 1st Canadian Brigade in the north was bare upon its left flank and was in sore straits, but the 3rd Brigade held on fast to the slope which leads down to the Canal. While swarms of men attacked the British line a number of pockets developed in all the ground which had been taken that day, so that the troops were shot at from all sides. The British artillery came to the rescue, however, and caught the German masses as they advanced with murderous results — one battery of heavies firing 1600 rounds. None the less the enemy won back Abancourt, and gained some ground along the whole front, the battle centring upon Blecourt.

That night the British line, which was already much weakened by prolonged fighting, and which was clearly opposed by superior forces, halted for a time for reorganisation and reinforcement. It has since been proved that no fewer than thirteen German divisions were thrown in upon this section of the line.

The work of the Canadian Corps in crossing the Nord Canal, following upon their splendid work in breaking the Quéant — Drocourt line, reasserted the fact, so often demonstrated before, that there are no better soldiers in the world than those of the Dominion. It has been impossible to specify the innumerable acts of valour performed by these brave men, but looking at the highest record of all, as chronicled during these few days of battle, one finds that the Victoria Cross was awarded to Captain MacGregor and Lieut. Kerr of the 1st Central Ontario Regiment, the first, after being himself wounded, having killed four and taken eight of the enemy, while the latter rushed a strong point single-handed and captured four machine-guns with thirty-one prisoners. Lieut. Gregg, of the Nova Scotians, killed or wounded eleven of the enemy and took twenty-five prisoners on September 28. Lieut. Honey, of the 78th Manitobas, captured a whole nest of guns single-handed, with ten prisoners, dying of wounds on the last day of the attack, while Sergeant Merisfield of the 4th Central Ontarios cleared out two posts by his own initiative, and fought after being wounded until a second wound left him senseless upon the ground. Such were the iron men who have made the name of. Canada great in the battlefields of Europe.

For the sake of connected narrative we may carry on the story of the Canadians from October 2, when their weakened ranks, after their great and continuous exertions, were held by the strong German array in front of Abancourt. For the next few days, while gathering for a fresh spring, the Canadians saw heavy palls of smoke over Cambrai, while at night the dull red glow from great fires hinted at an approaching retreat. During the week which followed, the Seventeenth Corps was, as has been told in their own chronicle, making splendid progress to the south. On October 7 the Second and Third Canadian Divisions, rested and strengthened, renewed their advance. On that date they advanced with the old design of securing the bridge-heads over the Canal, Pont d’Aire and Ramillies being their objectives, the latter a name of good omen for any British operation. Rapid progress was made, and it was soon evident that, be the machine-guns ever so numerous and spiteful, it was still only a rear screen which faced the attack. The light of day had hardly come before the 5th Brigade, after a short, sharp tussle, had possession of Pont d’Aire, while the 6th Brigade got Ramillies. The 8th Brigade, to its own amazement, crossed the Canal without opposition, and pushed its patrols into Cambrai. It seems that at the moment of the attack the Germans were caught in the confusion of their changes. On October 8 Cambrai was cleared, huge fires were extinguished, and wires, by which the destruction of the town might be completed, were traced and cut. An air reconnaissance at dawn on October 9 showed that the enemy had cleared away from the whole area between the Sensée Canal and the Canal de l’Escaut, having destroyed all the Sensée bridges. The Seventeenth Corps sent the Twenty-fourth Division into Cambrai to take it over, while there was an immediate pursuit of the retreating enemy, in which General Currie pushed forward a mobile column, called Brutinel’s Brigade, which contained light guns and the Canadian Light Horse. Villages fell rapidly all along the line both to the Canadians and to the British Eleventh Division on their left.

On October 10 a fresh line of resistance was reached, and the Canadian Corps instantly attacked it, in conjunction with the Eleventh Division. The

4th Canadian Brigade advanced swiftly and got Naves with little opposition. The 6th Canadian Brigade took Thun St. Martin. The Eleventh Division got Estrun and reached the edge of Hem Lenglet.

On October 11 the Second Canadian Division, together with the Forty-ninth Yorkshire Territorials, who had relieved the Eleventh, continued their advance. The Canadians met with heavy opposition from Iwuy, and in the forenoon there came a heavy counter-attack, led by seven tanks, six of which paid the penalty. On October 12 the First Canadian Division in the north found that their front was apparently clear, so they swiftly advanced and took Arleux and Estrées, while the Twenty-second Corps attacked on their right and reached Hordain. On this day was the fine attack, recorded elsewhere, of the Fifty-sixth British Division, which got across the Canal at Aubigny. On October 17 the whole line of the Canal was clear, and the First Canadian Division advanced towards Douai, which was occupied by the Eighth British Division from the north.

No further important services were exacted from the Canadian Corps, which had done its share, and more than its share, of the work, so that it retired from the line with the warm admiration and respect of every British soldier who had had experience of it. From its first dreadful baptism of fire, when it faced without masks the unknown horrors of the poison gas, down to the campaign in which it broke the great Quéant switch line, and forced the Canal du Nord, there was never one single occasion upon which the Canadians did not rise to the highest point of military virtue in actual battle. Their record will be fully set out in many a book which will deal fully and in detail with their great deeds. Such a chronicle as this can only hope to help the reader to fit that fuller and more worthy record into the general plan.

We shall now follow the work of Godley’s Twenty-second Corps from the time that its right flank crossed the Canal du Nord in the Marquion sector, taking its operations consecutively, and linking them up with the Canadians on the south, who were now, as already recorded, advancing upon Cambrai, bursting through every obstacle as they went. Early in October Hunter-Weston’s Eighth Corps extended down to the Scarpe. There was great preparation for the future, but no actual fighting, save for some outpost bickerings between the 12th Brigade of the Fourth Division and the Germans on the north of the Trinquis brook, in the course of which the British posts were attacked — one of them as many as eight times — but remained untaken. On October 7 the guns of the Twenty-second Corps co-operated in the attack made on that day by the Eighth Corps in the north which captured Biache St. Vaast, and a portion of the Fresnes — Rouvroy line. On October 9 there was a reconnaissance of the northern part of the Drocourt — Quéant line by strong patrols, but it was found that it was still strongly held. It was at this period that the Canadian Corps was brought across to the left of the Twenty-second Corps, while the latter moved south, so that it now lay between the Cambrai — Saulzoir Road and the Canal de l’Escaut. Whilst this considerable movement was in progress, on October 11 the Eighth Corps on the north captured the portion of the Drocourt line which was opposite to it. The Fifty-sixth Division and First Canadians, who were on the immediate south, took some part in the fray, the Londoners capturing Fresnes, and the Canadians the high ground which faced them. After the change was carried out, the front east of Cambrai was held by the Forty-ninth Yorkshire Division on the right and by the Fifty-first Highlanders on the left.

Immediately before these fresh dispositions were carried out in the south, there was a sharp action in this sector, in which, under the direction of General Currie, the Second Canadians and the Forty-ninth British attacked Iwuy and the ground south-west of it. This was on October 11. The attack gained ground and some hundreds of prisoners, but the losses were in excess of the gains, especially in the case of the Yorkshire Territorials, who suffered considerably in a counter-attack which was urged with the help of tanks. On the morning of October 12 the Fifty-first Highlanders had taken over from the Canadians and carried on the operation. All day there was sharp fighting in front of the British divisions. The Forty-ninth made good progress and followed up the retreating enemy, but the Fifty-first found a stiff opposition on the left, where the Germans held fast to Lieu St. Amand, powerfully supported by their guns on the north bank of the Canal de l’Escaut. The right of the Highland Division captured Avesnes-le-Sec, and so came level with the left of the Forty-ninth. This latter division had continual fighting at Haspres and Saulzoir on to the line of the Selle.

On October 13 the action was renewed, both the British divisions striving hard to push through the German rearguards, which were very strong and were backed by powerful artillery from north and east. Progress was slow, for the country was an open plain without a vestige of cover. The enemy were holding the Canadians to the north of the Escaut Canal, and so were able to keep their guns well forward on that side, to enfilade the advance to the south, and to support their position on the Selle. The British had come into the region of the civil population, so that they had to be chary and discriminating in the use of their guns, while gas shells could hardly be used at all. The Third Army had now got so far ahead that it was compelled to pause for supplies, and the First Army was forced to conform.

Cameron's Forty-ninth Division was much exhausted by its exertions, so the Fourth British Division came up about October 15 to relieve it. It met with a sad misfortune immediately after it had taken its place in the line, as its commanding officer, General Lipsett, was killed while carrying out a reconnaissance in front of the line. He had recently been transferred from a Canadian division, and had a great war record, extending back to near the beginning. It is indeed tragic when one who has played a great part in the drama leaves before the final curtain falls. General Lucas took over the division.

There was no change in the situation so far as the Twenty-second Corps was concerned until October 19, when the enemy began to retire in front of the Highland Division, in conformity with a movement which had already begun north of L'Escaut, and which spread down to the front of the Fourth Division. The Germans had prepared a line of defence upon the Ecaillon River in the rear, and were now letting go of the Selle in order to reassemble their forces upon this even stronger front. The withdrawal was irregular, so that some parts of his array remained hard when others had almost ceased to exist. Thus at Haspres and the part of the Selle to the north of it, there was still some stiff fighting. He abandoned Saulzoir, however, and the Fourth Division promptly established a bridge-head which should be the base for a future advance. On the Fifty-first Divisional front the pursuit was so rapid, both by the Highlanders and by the Corps Cavalry, that there was not much time for reorganisation.

During October 20 and 21 the Germans were slowly pressed back from the high ground east of the Selle into the Ecaillon valley, and artillery was pushed up to prepare for a further attack upon the new line. The sappers did some great work in throwing, under fire, many bridges over the Selle. Noyelles and Douchy were occupied on the morning of October 20. The river was found to be strongly wired, and there were scattered lines of trenches on the farther side, which made up a strong, fortified position, called by the Germans the Hermanstellung. It was clearly a more elaborate position than that of the Selle. None the less the infantry was not to be denied and the troops crossed the river by wading, the water in many cases being up to the armpits of the men. The 10th and 11th Brigades of the Fourth Division fought their way half-way up the north-eastern slope of the valley, past the villages of Verchain and Moncheaux. The 1st Somersets and 1st Hants occupied the latter and pushed through it, securing the high ground east of the villages, but they found that their comrades of the 2nd West Riding and 1st Warwicks were held up by the German main line upon the crest of the hill, and that the Sixty-first Division, the nearest unit on their right, were temporarily checked at Vendegies. The 2nd West Riding got forward, however, and occupied a position on the crest called “The Pimple,” whilst the Fifty-first Division on the north of the 11th Brigade also got well forward up to the village of Maing. In the morning of October 25 the 12th Brigade took up the task in this sector, the 1st King’s Own on the right and the 2nd Essex on the left advancing without any very serious opposition, being in touch with the left of the Seventeenth Corps. In the late afternoon the Germans reacted strongly, and there was a counter-attack upon the front of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and upon the Highlanders to their left, but it had little effect. The 154th Brigade of Highlanders was very heavily engaged during this strenuous day, and the 6/7th Argyll and Sutherlands, among others, had serious losses. Among many brave deeds that of Lieut. Bissett is conspicuous, for he won the V.C. by repeated acts of gallantry, leading his men in a desperate bayonet charge, after all their ammunition was expended, and so saving the line. Before evening the village of Querenaing had been occupied and the line of the Artres — Famars Road; 1200 more prisoners were in the Corps cage.

The attack upon the Ecaillon position was a difficult military operation, and one which showed very clearly the marked ascendancy which the British soldier had gained over his German rival. Every factor was in favour of the defence, and yet the line was rapidly shattered by the determined advance of the two divisions concerned. The object of the action was not merely the gain of ground, though that was considerable, but it was to cover the left of the Third Army and also to assist in the advance of the Canadian Corps towards Valenciennes, all of which aims were fully carried out. The action of the infantry was all the finer because they entirely lost the time-table barrage, and had to depend upon their own fine courage and the tactical skill of their leaders. In the actual crossing of the river all ranks showed great gallantry and determination. The method in which the advance was pressed and the victory followed up by very weary soldiers was remarkable, and resulted, among other things, in the capture of the bridge-head of Artres by the Fourth Division, which proved of great value both to the Seventeenth and to the Twenty-second Corps.

A railway from Valenciennes to Le Quesnoy ran across the front of the Corps, and this was made the forming-up point for the renewed attack next morning, when the Fourth and the tireless Fifty-first went forward again under a heavy barrage. Having lost the successive lines of the Selle and the Ecaillon, the Germans were now lining up on the east bank of the Rhonelle, prepared to make a resolute defence. A party of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers got across, however, on the morning of the 26th, and established a bridge-head, and joined hands with a party from the Sixty-first Division on their right, who had also forded the stream. This point held firm, but when the 2nd Essex on the left attempted also to cross, there was a stubborn resistance. With field-guns in the face of them and a raking fire from machine-guns at Gaumont Farm on their left flank, this brave battalion had a bad half-hour. The Germans then counter-attacked, falling upon both the Highlanders and the Essex men, but both stood firm, though the gas with which the whole position was drenched made the defence difficult. In this action the leading battalion of Highlanders at the point attacked, the 6th Argyll and Sutherlands, dashed forward with the bayonet at the advancing Germans and drove them pell-mell back; 212 more prisoners were secured.

The situation on October 26 was that the Corps front was well up to the River Rhonelle, that the Fourth Division had taken Artres and established a post across the river, and that the Fifty-first had got as far as Famars, which it had occupied. Attempts of the Fourth Division to enlarge their holding on the east of the stream had no good result, but the bridge-head was still held against all attacks. On the 27th the Germans attacked the Highlanders and forced their way into Famars, but were again met with the cold steel, this time by the 4th Gordons, and thrown out of the village. Next morning, October 28, the Fifty-first advanced its line, making a lodgment upon Mont Houy on its left flank, and capturing Poirier station. Here they were stopped by a strong German attack. It must be admitted that, considering the incessant retreats and the heavy punishments which they had received, the German troops showed a fine constancy in these numerous but useless efforts to throw back the advance. On October 30 the Fifty-first Division was drawn into reserve and the Forty-ninth took their place in the line. Although there had been no eastward movement during the last few days, the Highlanders had spent them in an incessant pressure to the north-east, to aid the advance upon Valenciennes. By this means a good jumping-off place was secured, from which a Canadian brigade was to attack Valenciennes from the south, in conjunction with the main attack upon the Rhonelle line. The Highlanders withdrew from the line in great heart but very exhausted by a long spell of ceaseless work.

On November 1, under a tremendous artillery barrage, the Twenty-second Corps advanced to the forcing of the Rhonelle, the third river front within a fortnight. If the operation were successful it would be decisive of the fate of Valenciennes. The men were very weary, and their ranks had been thinned by the influenza microbe as much as by bullets, but they were cheered by victory and the visible signs of progress in the virgin country all around them. The Fourth Division were still on the right, and the Forty-ninth Yorkshire Territorials on the left. The 11th Brigade held the all-important bridge-head, and across it went the 1st Rifle Brigade, while the 1st Hants forded the river on their left. The crossing was accomplished with no great difficulty, and once across the advance was rapidly pushed. Preseau village was the first objective on this wing of the attack. The resistance was unequal and was soon disposed of, and the village was taken, together with the line of the Preseau — Marly Road. About ten o'clock there came a strong German counter-attack, which got round both flanks of the Rifle Brigade and practically surrounded them, so that the leading companies were hard put to it to fight their way back into the village and out to the west of it. The machine-gun fire was very severe. This attack was purely local, and did not affect the Hampshires or the Forty-ninth Division. Low-flying aeroplanes aided the German infantry, but were more alarming than dangerous. Eventually the Rifle Brigade dug in about 400 yards west of the village; 1700 prisoners were taken during the day.

Following the policy of giving the Germans no rest, both divisions attacked again next morning. The 2nd Seaforths of the 10th Brigade were on the right and the 1st King's Own of the 12th Brigade on the left of the Fourth Division's front. The German resistance, which was expected to be strong after the counter-attacks of the day before, suddenly collapsed, and Preseau was taken once more. So was the dangerous high ground 700 yards to the east, which was bristling with machine-guns. The Yorkshiremen on the left had advanced with equal bravery, and had taken the steel works south of Marly. Altogether about 1000 more prisoners were taken. That night the Eleventh Division relieved the Fourth, while the Fifty-sixth took the place of the Forty-ninth. The latter division was very weak in numbers, so Blacklock's Sixty-third Naval Division was transferred to the Twenty-second Corps in order to help cover the widening front.

It is worth recording that in all this recent fighting, with its approximation to open warfare, the youths who now made up the bulk of the fighting divisions were found to acquit themselves manfully. Their only deterioration from the older type was in their power of endurance and of resistance to weather, so that after two rough days there was a distinct weakening of their powers. They were trained to use their individual minds in the assault, advancing in small independent sections in single file. "In open country the employment of waves in the attack is criminal" — such was one of the last military notes of the war.

Early on the morning of November 3 the enemy showed clear signs of having had enough, and was withdrawing along the whole front, closely pursued by mounted troops and by infantry. Curgies and Saultain were taken, and the line rapidly extended. On November 4 the pace accelerated, and the crossings of the River Aunelle were forced, the Eleventh Division having a sharp fight at Sebourg. On November 5 the Belgian frontier was crossed and the villages of Mesaurain, Boisin, and Angre were occupied. There was some fighting on this day, the 168th Brigade having a sharp skirmish at Angre. Three tanks of British pattern were captured during the day. On November 6 the Grande Aunelle River had to be crossed, and the Germans made a resistance which at one time was both strenuous and successful. There was a great deal of gas, and all troops had to wear their masks. The Eleventh Division was unable to reach the river on account of the long open slope down which any advance must be made. The Fifty-sixth Division got across south of Angre, and reached the high ground to the east, the 2nd London and London Rifle Brigade in the lead. The former battalion was heavily counter-attacked in the Bois de Beaufort and was driven back to the river, while the London Rifle Brigade also suffered heavy casualties from machine-gun fire from Angre. Forty men of the 2nd Londons were entirely cut off but held on in a deep ditch in the wood, and were surrounded by the enemy. None the less they managed to cut their way out and rejoin their battalion.

On the left of the attack the Kensingtons and London Scottish crossed the river and got possession of Angre. They found themselves involved in a very fierce fight, which swayed backwards and forwards all day, each side attacking and counter-attacking with the utmost determination. Twice the Londoners were driven back and twice they regained their objectives, ending up with their grip still firm upon the village, though they could not retain the high ground beyond. Late at night, however, the 168th Brigade established itself almost without opposition upon the ridge.

On November 7 the opposition had wilted away and the Twenty-second Corps advanced with elements of three divisions in front, for the naval men were now in line on the left, “on the starboard bow of the Second Canadians,” to quote their own words. The river was crossed on the whole front and a string of villages were occupied on this and the following days. The rain was pouring down, all bridges had been destroyed, the roads had been blown up, and everything was against rapidity of movement. None the less the front flowed ever forward, though the food problem had become so difficult that advanced troops were supplied by aeroplane. The 16th Lancers had joined the Australian Light Horse, and the cavalry patrols pushed far ahead. Bavay was taken on November 10, and the Corps front had reached one mile east of Villers St. Ghislain when, on November 11, the “cease-fire” was sounded and the white flag appeared.

The general experience of the Twenty-second Corps during these last weeks of the war was that the German rearguards consisted mainly of machine-guns, some of which were fought as bravely as ever. The infantry, on the other hand, were of low morale and much disorganised. Need for mounted troops who could swiftly brush aside a thin line and expose a bluff was much felt. The roads were too muddy and broken for the cyclists, and there was no main road parallel with the advance. Owing to his machine-guns and artillery the enemy was able always to withdraw at his own time. 3200 prisoners had been taken by the Twenty-second Corps in the final ten days.

In dealing with the advance of Horne’s First Army we have examined the splendid work of the Canadian Corps and of the Twenty-second Corps. We must now turn to the operations of Hunter-Weston’s Eighth Corps on the extreme north of this Army, linking up on the left with the right of Birdwood’s Fifth Army in the neighbourhood of Lens. Up to the end of September, save for local enterprises, neither the Eighth Division on the right nor the Twentieth on the left had made any serious movement. The time was not yet ripe. At the close of September, however, when the line was all aflame both to the south and in Flanders, it was clear that the movement of the British Armies must be a general one. At that date the Eighth Division extended its flank down to the Scarpe, where it was in touch with the Forty-ninth Division, forming the left of Godley's Twenty-second Corps. Before effecting this change Heneker, on September 21, carried out a spirited local attack with his own division, by which he gained important ground in the Oppy and Gavrelle sectors. It was a hard fight, in which the 2nd Berks had specially severe losses, but a considerable area of important ground was permanently gained.

Early in October General Heneker proceeded to carry out an ambitious scheme which he had meditated for some time, and which had now received the approbation of his Corps Commander. This was an attack by his own division upon the strong Fresnes — Rouvroy line, to the north-east of Arras. His plan was to make a sudden concentrated assault upon the south end of this formidable deeply-wired line, and then to work upwards to the north, avoiding the perils and losses of a frontal advance. This enterprise was begun at 5 A.M. on October 7, and was carried through with that mixture of dash and skill which marks the ideal operation. The 23rd and 25th Brigades supplied the storm-troops, who were drawn from the 2nd Middlesex, 2nd West Yorks, and 2nd Devons, and attacked on a front of 3500 yards. The gain of ground was nearly two miles; the line was broken and Biache was taken. On the next day, October 8, the northward turning movement was carried through, the 1st Worcesters, 1st Sherwood Foresters, and 2nd Berkshires pushing into the front line, the work being mainly carried out by bombing. Altogether 37 machine-guns and 250 prisoners were taken, together with the villages of Fresnes and Neuvireuil, so that the divisional front was now brought opposite the Drocourt — Quéant line.

This strong triple system of the Hindenburg type was attacked in the early morning of October 11 in this sector by Grogan's 23rd Brigade, and by 7 A.M. both the 2nd Middlesex and 2nd Devons were through it, holding the whole front before them, with the exception of the town of Vitry on the Scarpe. The Twelfth Division had taken the place of the Twentieth on the left of the Eighth, and it had also fought its way forward, but it was still short of striking distance and could not take part in the attack. The chief danger was from the south, as the floods in the Trinquis River were holding up the First Canadian Division in that quarter, so that the German guns could all swing their muzzles to the north. This was obviated by a free use of smoke and gas, so that the British infantry were shrouded on their right flank. The barrage, by a very ingenious device, was not put down in such a fashion as to pin the Germans to their positions and make it more dangerous to fly than to stand, but it was poured upon one spot, and then moved slowly up the line at the rate of 100 yards in eight minutes, giving the garrison plenty of time to see and to avoid it by a timely flight, which most of them preferred to do. When the new position, which soon included Vitry, had been occupied, some of the 2nd Middlesex scrambled across the Scarpe by a broken bridge and took Mont Metier, the strong point on the left front of the Canadians, in the rear, so as to help their future advance. The total gain was not less than an average of three miles, with Cuincy in the centre as the most advanced point. The German line was now shattered, and though there were sporadic bickerings and resistance, with a constant resource to the ignoble warfare of land mines and booby traps, there was no serious battle. In a single day the Tunnelling Companies, which were always ready for any desperate service, removed 300 mines. On October 14 the Twelfth Division, after a spirited attack, captured Auby on the left, while the Canadians on the right had got up to the Douai Canal. On the 17th the German line was clearly recoiling, and a personal reconnaisance by Colonel Roberts of the 1st Worcesters showed that there was hope for an advance over the canal. At 2 P.M. accordingly the 2nd Rifle Brigade went forward, and their patrols, with those of the 2nd Middlesex, entered the historic old city of Douai, taking down the German flag which was still flying from the town hall. “The town was found to be fairly intact,” says a general officer on the spot, “but the inside of every house had been stripped of everything of value, and what had not been removed had been smashed to atoms...The inside and reeds of the beautiful organ in the Cathedral had been torn out, and lay in a heap on the floor.” There is no doubt that President Wilson’s note on this subject had an effect in preventing the destruction of towns from this time onwards, and that it was the salvation of Douai. No inhabitants had been left in the town.

From this period the advance on this front was a slow but steady triumphant progress. By the end of October the Eighth Division had gone forward more than thirty miles since it started, and had captured thirty-five towns and villages, including Douai, Marchiennes, and St. Amand. Beyond being greatly plagued by murderous explosive traps, 1400 of which were discovered, and being much incommoded by the destruction of roads and bridges and by the constant canals across its path, there was no very serious resistance. Great floods early in November made the situation even more difficult. On November 5 the Eighth Division was relieved by the Fifty-second, and quitted the line for the last time.

This splendid division has had some injustice done to it, since it was the one Regular division in France in 1914 which was somewhat invidiously excluded from the very special and deserved honours which were showered upon “the first seven divisions.” But even in 1914 it had done splendid work, and as to its performance in the following years, and especially in 1918, when it was annihilated twice over, it will live for ever, not only in the records of the British Army, but in that of the French, by whose side it fought in the direst crisis and darkest moment of the whole campaign. There were no further movements of importance on the front of the Eighth Corps, and the completion of their history covers the whole operation of Horne’s First Army in this final phase of the war. It was indeed a strange freak of fate that this general, who commanded the guns of the right wing at Mons in that momentous opening battle, should four and a half years later be the commander who brought his victorious British Army back to that very point.

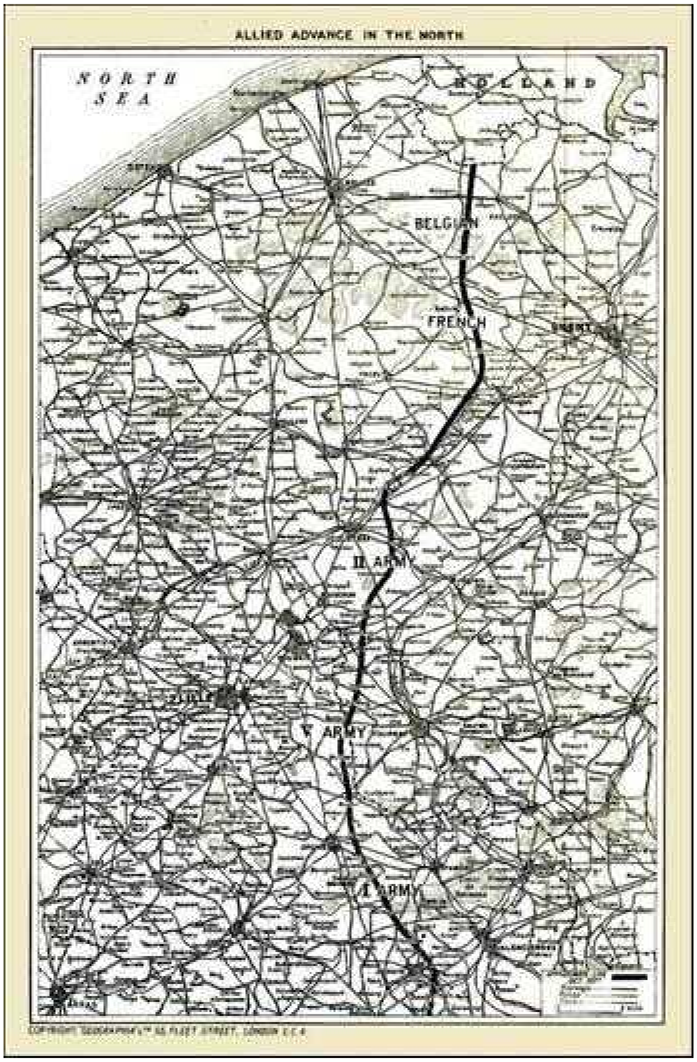
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Allied Advance in the North

XI. OPERATIONS OF THE SECOND AND FIFTH ARMIES

September 28 — November 11

King Albert in the field — Great Belgo-Franco-British advance — The last act on the old stage — The prophet of 1915 — Renewed advance — Germans desert the coast — Relief of Douai and Lille — The final stage of the subsidiary theatres of war.

WE have followed the operations of the three southern British Armies from the first blow on August 8 — a blow which Ludendorff has stated made him surrender the last hope of ultimate victory — through all their uninterrupted progress of victory until the final armistice. We shall now turn to the northern end of the British line, where the two remaining Armies, the Fifth in the Nieppe district and the Second in the area of Ypres, were waiting impatiently for their share in the advance. Flanders was a convalescent home for divisions, and there was not a unit there which was not stiff with half-healed wounds, but these Armies included many of the grand old formations which had borne the stress of the long fight, and they were filled with the desire to join in the final phase. Their chance came at last, though it was a belated one.

There were many indications in the third week of July that the Germans had planned one of their great attacks upon the front of Birdwood's Fifth Army in the Nieppe district. The succession of blows which rained upon Hindenburg's line in the south made it impossible, however, for him to attempt a new offensive. There was considerable activity along the British line, and a constant nibbling which won back by successive ventures much of the ground which had been gained by the Germans in April. Early in July the Fifth Division, forming the left unit of the Fifth Army, advanced from the edge of Nieppe Forest, where they had lain since their return from Italy, and gained a stretch of ground — the first sign of the coming recoil in the north. To the left of them lay De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps, which moved forward in turn, effecting a series of small but important advances which were eclipsed by the larger events in the south, but reacted upon those events, since they made it impossible for the Germans to detach reinforcements. On July 19 the Ninth Division with a sudden spring seized

Meteren with 453 prisoners, while on the same date the First Australian Division occupied Merris to the south of it. On August 9 the movement spread farther south, and the Thirty-first Division took Vieux Berquin. There was a slow steady retraction of the German line from this time onwards, and a corresponding advance of the British. On August 30 the ruins of Bailleul passed into the hands of the Twenty-ninth Division. On September 1 Neuve Eglise was submerged by the creeping tide, while on the 3rd Nieppe also was taken. Finally on September 4 two brigades of the Twenty-ninth Division, the 88th under Freyberg and the 86th under Cheape, captured Ploegsteert by a very smart concerted movement in which 250 prisoners were taken. Up to this date De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps had advanced ten miles with no check, and had almost restored the original battle line in that quarter — a feat for which M. Clemenceau awarded the General special thanks and the Legion of Honour.

All was ready now for the grand assault which began on September 28 and was carried out by the Belgians and French in the north and by Plumer's Second British Army in the south. The left of this great force was formed by nine Belgian and five French infantry divisions, with three French cavalry divisions in reserve. The British Army consisted of four corps: Jacob's Second Corps covering Ypres, Watts' Nineteenth Corps opposite Hollebeke, Stephens' Tenth Corps facing Messines, and De Lisle's Fifteenth Corps to the south of it. The divisions which made up each of these Corps will be enumerated as they come into action. To complete the array of the British forces it should be said that Birdwood's Fifth Army, which linked up the First Army in the south and the Second in the north, consisted at that date of Haking's Eleventh and Holland's First Corps covering the Armentieres — Lens front, and not yet joining in the operations. The whole operation was under the command of the chivalrous King of the Belgians, who had the supreme satisfaction of helping to give the *coup de grâce* to the ruffianly hordes who had so long ill-used his unfortunate subjects.

The operations of the Belgians and of the French to the north of the line do not come within the scope of this narrative save in so far as they affected the British line. General Plumer's attack was directed from the Ypres front, and involved on September 28 two Corps, the Second on the north and the Nineteenth on the south. The order of divisions from the left was the Ninth (Tudor) and the Twenty-ninth (Cayley), with the Thirty-sixth Ulsters

(Coffin) in reserve. These constituted Jacob's Second Corps, which was attacking down the old Menin Road. South of this point came the Thirty-fifth (Marindin) and the Fourteenth Division (Skinner), with Law-ford's Forty-first Division in support. These units made up Watts' Nineteenth Corps. On the left of Jacob's was the Belgian Sixth Division, and on the right of Watts' the British Tenth Corps, which was ordered to undertake a subsidiary operation which will presently be described. We shall now follow the main advance.

This was made without any bombardment at 5 in the morning of September 28, behind a heavy barrage which swept eastwards at the rate of 100 yards every three minutes. The Germans had clearly sent away reinforcements to the south and were weak in numbers as well as in spirit. The result was a very complete victory all along the line, and before evening Plumer's men had passed over all the ground which had been previously contested. For the last time the roar of battle went down the old Menin Road and rose from historic Gheluvelt. The Ninth and Twenty-ninth Divisions swept everything before them, and before evening it was not only Gheluvelt but Zandvoorde, Kruiseik, and Becelaere which had passed into their possession. The Belgians on the left had cleared the whole of Houthulst Forest, that lowering menace which had hung so long before their line. Zonnebeke and Poelcappelle had also passed into the hands of the Allies. It was a great victory, and it was not marred by heavy losses to the victors. Those of Jacob's Corps were not more than 1100, while their prisoners were 2100. The total of prisoners came to 10,000, with more than 100 guns.

On September 29 the advance was resumed with ever-increasing success all along the line. The Scots of the Ninth Division, working in close liaison with the Belgians, got Waterdamhoek, and detached one brigade to help our Allies in taking Moorslede, while another took Dadizeele, both of them far beyond our previous limits. The Twenty-ninth Division still pushed along the line of the Menin Road, while the Thirty-sixth Ulsters fought their way into Terhand. In this quarter alone in front of Jacob's Second Corps fifty guns had been taken. Meanwhile the Nineteenth Corps on the right was gaining the line of the Lys River, having taken Zandvoorde and Hollebeke; while the Thirty-fourth and Thirtieth Divisions of the Tenth Corps were into Wytsohaete and up to Messines, and the Thirty-first Division of the Fifteenth Corps was in St. Yves. In these southern sectors there was no attempt to force the pace, but in the north the tide was setting swiftly eastwards. By the evening of September 29 Ploegsteert Wood was cleared and Messines was occupied once again. The rain had started, as is usual with. Flemish offensives, and the roads were almost impossible; but by the evening of October 1 the whole left bank of the Lys from Comines southward had been cleared. On that date there was a notable hardening of the German resistance, and the Second Corps had some specially fierce fighting. The Ulsters found a tough nut to crack in Hill 41, which they gained twioe and lost twice before it was finally their own. The Ninth Division captured Ledeghem, but was pushed to the west of it again by a strong counter-attack. Clearly a temporary equilibrium was about to be established, but already the advance constituted a great victory, the British alone having 5000 prisoners and 100 guns to their credit.

In the meantime Birdwood's Fifth Army, which had remained stationary between the advancing lines of the Second Army in Flanders and of the First Army south of Lens, began also to join in the operations. The most successful military prophet in a war which has made military prophecy a by-word, was a certain German regimental officer who was captured in the La Bassée district about 1915, and who, being asked when he thought the war would finish, replied that he could not say when it would finish, but that he had an opinion as to where it would finish, and that would be within a mile of where he was captured. It was a shrewd forecast based clearly upon the idea that each side would exhaust itself and neither line be forced, so that a compromise peace would become necessary. For three years after his dictum it still remained as a possibility, but now at last, within six weeks of the end, La Bassée was forced, and early in October Ritchie's Sixteenth Division, the Fifty-fifth West Lancashire Territorials, and the Nineteenth Division under Jeffreys, were all pressing on in this quarter, with no very great resistance. South of Lens the Twentieth Division (Carey) had been transferred from the left of the First Army to the right of the Fifth, and this had some sharp fighting on October 2 at Mericourt and Acheville. Both north and south of the ruined coal capital the British infantry was steadily pushing on, pinching the place out, since it was bristling with machine-guns and very formidable if directly attacked. The Twelfth Division (Higginson), fresh from severe service in the south and anaemic from many wounds, occupied 11,000 yards between Oppy and Lens from October 7 onwards. Their orders were to press the enemy at the first sign of retreat. All three brigades were in the line, each with its own artillery, to give greater independence. The German withdrawal was gradual but there was some hard rearguard fighting, especially at the strong line of the Haute Deule Canal. There was little cover for the troops at this point save where some ruined hamlets screened their ranks. These flat levels leading up to wire and water could have been made a Golgotha had the Germans been of the old temper, but they were oppressed by the general wilting of their line. The 1st Cambridge captured Auby on October 14 and so got to the edge of the Canal. On the 16th the 5th Berks got across the broken bridge at Pont-a-Sault, though they could hardly deploy upon the farther side. After this date the only obstacle to the advance was the supply question, for the villagers were all clamouring for food and sharing the scanty rations of the soldiers. On October 23 the Scarpe was crossed, Lieutenant Egerton of the 87th Field Company RE. gallantly bridging the stream and losing his life in the effort. The 6th West Kents got across at Nivelle, but had the misfortune to lose their splendid commander, Colonel Dawson, who had already been wounded six times in the course of the war. Upon October 23 the Twelfth was relieved by the Fifty-second Division upon this front.

The attack in the north had been held partly by the vile weather and partly by the increased German resistance. The Twenty-ninth Division had got into Gheluvelt but was unable to retain it. The enemy counter-attacks were frequent and fierce, while the impossible roads made the supplies, especially of cartridges, a very serious matter. The worn and rutted Menin Road had to conduct all the traffic of two Army Corps. No heavy artillery could be got up to support the weary infantry, who were cold and wet, without either rest or cover. Time was needed, therefore, to prepare a further attack, and it was October 14 before it was ready. Then, as before, the Belgians, French, and British attacked in a single line, the advance extending along the whole Flemish front between the Lys River at Comines and Dixmude in the north, the British section being about ten miles from Comines to the Menin — Roulers Road.

Three British Corps were engaged, the Second (Jacob), the Nineteenth (Watts), and the Tenth (Stephens), the divisions, counting from the south, being the Thirtieth, Thirty-fourth, Forty-first, Thirty-fifth, Thirty-sixth, Twenty-ninth, and Ninth. The three latter divisions, forming the front of Jacob's Corps, came away with a splendid rush in spite of the heavy mud and soon attained their immediate objectives. Gulleghem, in front of the

Ulsters, was defended by three belts of wire, garnished thickly with machine-guns, but it was taken none the less, though it was not completely occupied until next day. Salines had fallen to the Twenty-ninth Division, and by the early afternoon of October 15 both divisions were to the east of Heule. Meanwhile Cuerne and Hulste had been cleared by the Ninth Division, the 1st Yorkshire Cyclists playing a gallant part in the former operation. The net result was that in this part of the line all the troops had reached the Lys either on the evening of September 15 or on the morning of September 16.

The advance in the south had been equally successful, though there were patches where the resistance was very stiff. The 103rd Brigade on the left of the Thirty-fourth Division enveloped and captured Gheluwe and were afterwards held up by field-guns firing over open sights until they were taken by a rapid advance of the 5th Scottish Borderers and the 8th Scottish Rifles. The 102nd Brigade made a lodgment in the western outskirts of Menin, which was fully occupied on the next day, patrols being at once pushed across the Lys. These were hard put to it to hold on until they were relieved later in the day by the Thirtieth Division. Wevelghem was cleared on the 15th, and on the 16th both the Ninth and Thirty-sixth Divisions established bridge-heads across the river, but in both cases were forced to withdraw them. In the north the Belgians had reached Iseghem and Cortemarck, while the French were round Roulers. By the night of October 15 Thourout was surrounded, and the Germans on the coast, seeing the imminent menace to their communications, began to blow up their guns and stores preparatory to their retreat. On October 17 the left of the Allied line was in Ostend, and on the 20th it had extended to the Dutch border. Thus after four years of occupation the Germans said farewell for ever to those salt waters of the west which they had fondly imagined to be their permanent advanced post against Great Britain. The main tentacle of the octopus had been disengaged, and the whole huge, perilous creature was shrinking back to the lairs from which it had emerged.

Events were now following each other in very rapid succession as the pressure upon the flanks increased. On the one side it was Ostend; on the other, as already recorded, it was Douai, which the Eighth Division had entered on October 17. Finally, on the morning of October 18, Haking’s Eleventh Corps from Birdwood’s Army held Lille in their grasp. The Fifty-seventh and Fifty-ninth Divisions were north and south of the town, which was occupied before evening, to the immense joy of the liberated inhabitants. Meanwhile De Lisle’s Fifteenth Corps pushed on in the north and occupied both Roubaix and Tourcoing. There was little resistance to these operations, for the Flemish advance on one side and that to Le Cateau on the other had made the position of the German garrisons impossible. By October 22 the troops were on the line of the Escaut from Valenciennes to Avelghem.

Though the advance of Birdwood’s Army was comparatively bloodless there was still some obstinate fighting in the north, and the divisions which forced the Lys had by no means a holiday task. This operation was carried out on October 20 and 21, and owing to some delay on the part of the French Seventh Corps in getting into position the flank of the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division was exposed to enfilade fire which caused great loss. As the Ulsters advanced across the river they had to throw back a defensive flank 6000 yards deep before evening of the 21st. On the 22nd the Germans were still fighting stoutly, and delivered at least one dangerous counter-attaok by storm-troops, while on the 25th they brought a new division, the Twenty-third Reserve, an old opponent of early Ypres days, into the line, and held their ground well. There were changes in the British fighting line also, as the Thirty-first relieved the Twenty-ninth, while the Thirty-fourth, coming from the south, took the place of the Ulsters.

These two divisions attacked once more on October 31, the Thirty-first surrounding Caster while the Thirty-fourth captured Anseghem, the 8th Scottish Rifles forcing their way into the town, and joining up with the French at Winterkan. That evening the enemy retired across the Escaut, and the line was definitely made good. The bridges over the river had been destroyed, but the French were advancing rapidly from the north, and on November 2 had reached Driesen and Peterghem. They then extended south and took over the whole front of the Second Corps, joining up with the left of the Nineteenth Corps. The Second Corps drew out from its last battle, having since the advance began captured 7500 prisoners and 150 guns, at a loss to itself of 11,000 casualties. At this period the operations of the north may be said to have reached their term.

The weight of the campaign never fell fully upon Birdwood’s Fifth Army, but it was comprised of divisions which had been knocked to pieces elsewhere and which would not have been battle-worthy at all had they not been of splendid individual material. Some of them were actually called B divisions, but upon one of them doing thirty-three miles in thirty hours it was decreed by their General that such an invidious title must cease. The Portuguese troops accompanied the British in the Fifth Army. There was a good deal of discontent in the ranks of this contingent, largely due to the fact that it was impossible to grant the men the same privileges in the way of leave as were given to the officers. By a great concession they were broken up, however, among the British brigades, with the result that they did very well during the last phases of the fighting. The fact that General Birdwood with his depleted and inexperienced divisions was able to drive the Germans through Merville, Estaires, La Bassée, and on over the Aubers Ridge and out of Lille, forcing the Scheldt and reaching as far as Ath, will always be a memorable military exploit. It is on record that the last bag of prisoners by this Army was at 10.57 on the 11th November, three minutes before time.

On November 15 Marshal Foch visited the Headquarters of the Fifth Army, and his remarks on that occasion were meant, no doubt, to apply to the whole British line. “Your soldiers,” he said, “continued to march when they were exhausted, and they fought, and fought well, when they were worn out. It is with such indomitable will that the war has been won. At the moment of ceasing hostilities the enemy troops were demoralised and disorganised and their lines of communication were in a state of chaos. Had we continued the war for another fortnight we might have won a most wonderful and complete military victory. But it would have been inhuman to risk the lives of one of our soldiers unnecessarily. The Germans asked for an armistice. We renounced the certainty of further military glory and gave it to them. I am deeply sensible of the fact that Lille was delivered without damage to the town, and I am grateful for the help given so generously to the inhabitants.”

So ended the Great War in the northern sector. It need not be said that while the British had been attacking again and again in the manner described, taking no heed of their own losses and exhaustion so long as they could bring the tottering giant to his knees, the French and the Americans were advancing in unison. The work of the latter in the wooded region of the Argonne was especially difficult and also especially vital, as its effect was to cut in upon the German rear and to narrow the pass through which the great multitude must make their escape from the lands which they had so wantonly invaded. On September 12 the Americans had shown their quality by their successful attack upon the St. Mihiel salient. In the advance of the Argonne the American attack extended over several weeks, was often held up, and furnished more than a hundred thousand casualties, but General Pershing and his men showed a splendid tenacity which carried them at last through all their difficulties, so that the end of the war, which their exertions had undoubtedly helped to hasten, found them with their line in Sedan and biting deeply into the German flank.

Before entering upon the terms of the Armistice and describing the subsequent conditions of peace, representing the final fruits of all the terrible sacrifices of these years of alternate hope and fear, one last glance must be cast round at the other fields of the great struggle — Italian, Salonican, Syrian, and Mesopotamian — all of which were decided at the same moment. It could almost be believed that some final spiritual fiat had gone forth placing an allotted term upon the slaughter, so simultaneous was the hostile collapse on every front. In Italy General Diaz, who had succeeded General Cadorna after the disaster of Caporetto, made a grand and victorious attack on October 25. It was a great military achievement, and justified those who had always upheld the fine quality of the Italian Army. The Austrian forces were superior in number, being roughly a million against nine hundred thousand, but they were inferior in gun power. Diaz cleverly concentrated his forces so as to have a local superiority in the central sector, but his difficulties were still very great, since a stream a mile broad lay before him, shallow in parts but deepening to five feet even at the best fords. A long island, the Grave di Papadopoli, lay near the hostile shore, and this was seized on the night of the 24th October by the 1st Welsh Fusiliers and the 2/1st Honourable Artillery Company, who held on in spite of a severe shelling and so established an advanced base for the Army. Early on October 25 crossings were made at all points, and though the bridges were frequently shot away by the Austrian guns, and one corps was unable to get a single man across, none the less those who had reached the other side, including Babington’s Fourteenth Corps, which had the Seventh and Twenty-third British Divisions in the line, with the Thirty-seventh Italian Division, made excellent headway. By the evening of October 29 this Fourteenth Corps, which had been held up by having its left flank exposed through the failure of the Eighth Corps to cross the river, found a brave comrade in the Italian Eighteenth Corps which lined up with it and crashed its way right through the Kaiserstellung position forming the battle zone of the Austrian line. It was a very complete victory, and broadened to such an extent during the next few days that by November 2 the whole Austrian army had ceased to exist, and 700,000 men with 7000 guns were in the hands of the victors. Not only had they regained by arms all the ground they had lost a year before, but Trieste surrendered on November 3 and was occupied from the sea. Trento had also been taken in the north, so that the two goals of Italian ambition had both been reached. Every part of the Italian line had been equally victorious from the Alps to the sea, and great valour was shown by every formation, as well as by the French and British contingents. The British Forty-eighth Division was engaged in the northern sector, far from its comrades, and carried through its complete objective in a manner worthy of so veteran a unit, which had learned its soldiering in the hard school of the Somme and of Flanders. On November 3 the final Armistice was signed by the Austrians, by which they withdrew into their own country and waited there for the final terms of the victors.

On September 12 began the great Franco-Serbian advance on the Salonican front — a front which had been greatly strengthened by the accession of the Greek forces. Under General Franchet d’Esperey and Marshal Misitch there was an advance on a front of sixteen miles, penetrating occasionally to a depth of four miles. By September 17 this had extended to a depth of twelve miles, and it was clear that a decisive movement was on foot. On September 18 the British and Greek troops joined in on the Lake Doiran sector, and the Bulgarians were retreating along their whole front of a hundred miles. General Milne’s troops were the first to cross the Bulgarian border, after a very severe action in which some units sustained heavy losses. All the Allied nations were advancing swiftly, and it was clear that the end was near. On September 30 the Bulgarian nation, misled by its own unscrupulous ambitions and by its unsavoury king, sent in its surrender, retired from the conflict, and waited to hear what the final punishment of its misdeeds might be. Thus fell the first of the four pillars of the Central Alliance.

The fate of Turkey was not long delayed. On September 19 General Allenby, who had halted long upon the line of Jerusalem while he gathered his forces for a supreme and final effort, gave the word for a fresh advance. The victory which followed will perhaps be accounted the most completely scientific and sweeping of the whole war. With his mixed force of British, Indians, Australians and smaller Allied contingents, Allenby broke through the enemy’s lines near the coast, and then despatched his splendid cavalry towards Damascus in a wild pursuit which can hardly be matched for calculated temerity. Some of the troopers in that wonderful ride are said to have accomplished seventy to eighty miles in the twenty-four hours. The result was that a strong force was thrown across the Turkish rear and that their Seventh and Eighth Armies were practically annihilated. In the final tally no less than 80,000 men and 250 guns were in the hands of the victors. It was a shattering blow. Damascus was occupied, the Turks were driven pell-mell out of Syria, General Marshall advanced in Mesopotamia, and Turkey was finally brought to her knees after a battle on the Tigris in which her last army was destroyed. On October 30 she signed an armistice by which the Allied fleets might enter the Dardanelles and occupy Constantinople, while all Allied prisoners should at once be returned. As in the case of the Germans the feelings with which the Allies, and especially the British, regarded the Turks were greatly embittered by their consistent brutality to the unfortunate captives whom the fortune of war had placed in their hands. There can be no peace and no sense of justice in the world until these crimes have been absolutely expiated. The last spark of sympathy which Britain retained for her old Oriental ally was extinguished for ever by the long-drawn murder of the prisoners of Kut. It should be added that the small German force in East Africa still continued to dodge the pursuing columns, and that it was intact in Rhodesia at the time when the general collapse compelled it to lay down its arms. It was a most remarkable achievement, this resistance of four years when cut away from a base, and reflects great credit upon General von Lettow-Vorbeck, whose name should certainly shine among the future reconstructors of Germany.

As to naval matters there is nothing to be said save that the submarine trouble had been greatly ameliorated by the splendid work of the Navy, much assisted by the American destroyers. The blockade was still rigorously enforced, and had much to do with the general German collapse. There was some hope that the German fleet would come out and that a more decisive Jutland might adorn the finish of the war, but the plans of the German officers were marred by the insubordination of the German men, and there was no heroic gesture to dignify the end of the great useless fleet, the most fatal and futile of all Germany’s creations, for its possession led her to her ruin.

XII. THE END

BEFORE entering into the terms of the Armistice it may be instructive to give some short outline of the course of events at the German Headquarters which led to so sudden and dramatic a collapse. No doubt the political and economic state of Germany was very bad, but the disaster was primarily a military one, as is clearly shown by the subsequent White Book published after the declaration of peace. This compilation shows that the arrogance with which the military leaders spoke during their successful offensive, and down to the middle of July, had changed in the short space of ten weeks to such utter despair that on October 1 they were sending urgent messages to Berlin that the war was to be closed down at any cost, and that even such questions as the loss of the German colonies and the cession of Alsace-Lorraine were not to weigh in the balance against the imperative necessity of staving off a tremendous military disaster. The inclined plane seems to have taken an abrupt tilt on August 14, after the first successful British advance, when it was decided to take the opportunity of the next German success to ask for peace. No success arrived, however, but rather a long succession of disasters, and Hertling, the dotard Chancellor, was unable to make up his mind what to do, so that matters were allowed to drift from bad to worse. Early in October it was announced from General Headquarters that a break through might occur at any moment. Prince Max of Baden had been made Chancellor on the understanding that he would at once appeal to President Wilson for a cessation of hostilities, which was the more urgent as Bulgaria had already dropped out of the war and Austria was on her last legs. As might have been foreseen, President Wilson refused to treat without the concurrence of his Allies, and some improvement in the German defensive line enabled them to hold on until early November, when their needs once again became overpowering, and the great twin-brethren Hindenburg and Ludendorff finally admitted defeat. Then followed in quick succession events which are political and outside the scope of this record — the revolution in the Fatherland, the flight of the Kaiser and of the Crown Prince into Holland, and the advance of the Allied armies, under the terms of the Armistice, to the left bank of the Rhine.

Some account should, however, be given of the circumstances under which the Armistice was signed, and the drastic terms which were exacted by the Allies, the fit preliminaries to a peace founded upon a stern justice. It was at nine o’clock on the evening of Thursday, November 7, that the German delegates, led by the ambiguous and scheming Erzberger, travelling along shell-broken roads, under the glare of searchlights and signal-fires, entered within the French lines near La Capelle. The roar of the battle in their rear was a constant reminder of the urgency of their mission. They came no farther than Marshal Foch’s travelling headquarters, where they were met by the Marshal himself, with Admiral Wemyss to represent that British sea-power which had done so much to promote this interview. The proceedings were short and strained. A proposition for a truce was waved aside by the victors, and a list of terms was presented which made the German delegates realise, if they had failed to do so before, the abyss into which their country had been precipitated by two generations of madmen. Disgrace abroad, revolution at home, a fugitive monarch, a splitting empire, a disbanding army, a mutinous fleet — these were the circumstances under which Germany ended her bid for the dictatorship of the world.

At 5 A.M. on Monday, November 11, the Armistice was signed, and at 11 A.M., as already recorded, the last shot of the greatest war that ever has been, or in all probability ever will be, had been fired. London and Paris were at last relieved from their terrific strain, and none who witnessed them can forget the emotions and rejoicings of the day. Those who had not realised the complete collapse of the Colossus were surprised at the severity of the terms which had been accepted in such haste. All invaded territory had to be cleared within fourteen days. All Allied prisoners to be at once returned, while those of Germany were retained. The left bank of the Rhine, together with ample bridge-heads, to be handed over, as a temporary measure, to the Allies, the Belgians holding the north, the British the Cologne area, the Americans the Coblentz area, and the French, Strasburg, with all Alsace-Lorraine. All danger of a continuation of the struggle was averted by the immediate surrender of 5000 guns, 30,000 machine-guns, and 2000 aeroplanes, together with great numbers of locomotives, lorries, waggons, and barges. All Roumanian, Russian, and other forced treaties were abrogated. East Africa was to be evacuated. All submarines and a large portion of the German navy were to be handed over to the care of the Allies until peace terms should decide their ultimate fate. The blockade was to continue. Such were the main points of the Armistice which foreshadowed the rigorous peace to come.

It was not until January 11, 1919, that the delegates from the various interested nations assembled in Paris, and their deliberations, which seemed long to us, but may appear hasty and ill-considered to our descendants, terminated on May 7, a most dramatic date, being the anniversary of that sinking of the Lusitania which will always be recorded as the supreme instance of German barbarity. So stringent were the terms that the Scheidemann Government resigned and left the unpleasant task of ratification to a cabinet of nobodies, with Herr Bauer at their head. So long as the firm signed, it mattered nothing to the Allies which particular partner was the representative. There was higgling and wriggling up to the last moment, and some small concessions were actually gained. The final results were briefly as follows:

1. Two new countries shall be formed — Poland in the north and Czecho-Slovakia in the south, the former largely at the expense of Germany, the latter of Austria. Germany shall contribute to the building up of Poland the districts of West Prussia and Posen, both of which are historically Polish. The important district of Upper Silesia — the prized conquest of Frederick from Maria Theresa — was left indeterminate, its fate to be decided by the people’s will.

2. The northern portion of Schleswig shall revert to Denmark, from which it was taken.

3. Alsace-Lorraine shall be returned to France, and that country shall receive for a time the produce of the Saar coal-fields as recompense for the destruction of her own coal-fields by the Germans.

Thus on each side, Germany was trimmed down to the lands inhabited by Germans, the Danes, the Poles, and the French borderers being emancipated. When next they march to war they will not swell their ranks by unwilling conscripts forced to fight against their own friends and interests.

4. Every effort was made by the treaty to disarm Germany, and to prevent her in the future from plotting the destruction of her neighbours. Those sudden irruptions of 1864, 1866, 1870, and 1914 were to be stopped once and for ever — if indeed we can place final terms upon a phenomenon which dates back to the days of the Roman republic.

The German General Staff — that dangerous *imperium in imperio* — was to be dissolved. The army should be only sufficiently powerful to keep internal order and to control the frontiers. Compulsory service was abolished, and the manhood of Germany — to the probable detriment of all trade competitors — was dedicated to the arts of peace. The import and export of war material were forbidden, and the great war-god, Krupp, lay prostrate in his shrine at Essen. All submarines were forbidden. The navy was limited to thirty-six vessels of mediocre strength. Zeppelins were to be handed over. German cables, fourteen in number, and all German oversea possessions passed into the hands of the Allies. With such terms, if the Allies continue to stand together and guarantee their enforcement, the Frenchman may look eastward without a tremor, and the mists of the North Sea can cloud no menace for our islands. For many a long year to come the formidable military history of Germany has reached its close. A clause which dealt with the trial of all military offenders, including the Kaiser, concluded the more important items of the Treaty.

So at last the dark cloud of war, which had seemed so endless and so impenetrable as it covered the whole heavens from the Eastern horizon to the Western, passed and drifted beyond us, while a dim sun in a cold sky was the first herald of better times. Laden with debt, heart-heavy for its lost ones, with every home shaken and every industry dislocated, its hospitals filled with broken men, its hoarded capital all wasted upon useless engines

— such was the world which the accursed German Kultur had left behind it. Here was the crop reaped from those navy bills and army estimates, those frantic professors and wild journalists, those heavy-necked, sword-trailing generals, those obsequious, arrogant courtiers, and the vain, swollen creature whom they courted. Peace had come at last — if such a name can be given to a state where international bitterness will long continue, and where within each frontier the bulk of mankind, shaken by these great events from the ruts of custom, contend fiercely for some selfish advantage out of the general chaos. In the East, Russia, like some horrible invertebrate creature, entangles itself with its own tentacles, and wrestles against itself with such intricate convulsions that one can hardly say which attacks or which defends, which is living or which already dead. But the world swings on the divine cycle. He who made the planet from the fire-mist is still at work moulding with set and sustained purpose the destinies of a universe which at every stage can only reach the higher through its combat with the lower.

Here the historian’s task is done. It has occupied and alleviated many heavy days. Whatever its sins of omission it should surely contain some trace of the spirit of the times, since many a chapter was written to the rumble of the distant guns, and twice the author was able to leave his desk and then return with such inspiration as an actual view of the battlefields could afford him. The whole British line in 1916, the Soissons and Ardennes positions of the French, the Carnic Alps, the Trentino, and the Isonzo positions of the Italians were all visited in turn; while in 1918, as recorded, the crowning mercy of September 29 was actually witnessed by the writer. He lays down his pen at last with the deep conviction that the final results of this great convulsion are meant to be spiritual rather, than material, and that upon an enlightened recognition of this depends the future history of mankind. Not to change rival frontiers, but to mould the hearts and spirits of men — there lie the explanation and the justification of all that we have endured. The system which left seven million dead upon the fields of Europe must be rotten to the core. Time will elapse before the true message is mastered, but when that day arrives the war of 1914 may be regarded as the end of the dark ages and the start of that upward path which leads away from personal or national selfishness towards the City Beautiful upon the distant hills.

APPENDIX

THE following account of some personal experiences on the day when the Hindenburg Line was finally broken — the most important day, perhaps, in the whole war — may possibly be worthy of the decent obscurity of an appendix, though it is too slight and too personal for the pages of a serious chronicle. It is appended for what it is worth, reprinted with a few additions from the columns of *The Times*: —

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.

The grand, sonorous, mystical lines of Julia Ward Howe rang in my head as I found myself by most unlooked-for chance an actual eyewitness of this, one of the historical episodes of the greatest of wars. Yes, with my own eyes I saw the rent while the men who made it were still pushing forward from the farther side of it.

Even now I can hardly realise that it was so. A kindly invitation from the Australian Government explains my presence on their front, while the energy and goodwill of a helpful soldier on the spot, a captain of Australian Artillery, brought about the rest. Let me try to transcribe what I saw. It was about 11 o’clock when we reached the edge of the battle-field on Sunday, September 29. “We” refers to Sir Joseph Cook, Colonial statesman, Commander Latham, the Australian Naval Attaché, and myself, with Captain Plunket, a twice-wounded Australian officer, as our shepherd.

The programme of the day was already clear in our heads. American Divisions were to rush the front line. The Australian Divisions were to pass through them, and carry the battle front forward. Already as we arrived the glad news came back that the Americans had done their part, and that the Australians had just been unleashed. Also that the Germans were standing to it like men.

As our car threaded the crowded street between the ruins of Templeux we met the wounded coming back, covered cars with nothing visible save protruding boots, and a constant stream of pedestrians, some limping, some with bandaged arms and faces, some supported by Red Cross men, a few in pain, most of them smiling grimly behind their cigarettes. Amid them came the first clump of prisoners, fifty or more, pitiable enough, and yet I could not pity them, the weary, shuffling, hang-dog creatures, with no touch of nobility in their features or their bearing.

The village was full of Americans and Australians, extraordinarily like each other in type. One could well have lingered, for it was all of great interest, but there were even greater interests ahead, so we turned up a hill, left our car, which had reached its limit, and proceeded on foot. The road took us through a farm, where a British anti-aircraft battery stood ready for action. Then we found open plain, and went forward, amid old trenches and rusty wire, in the direction of the battle.

We had now passed the heavy gun positions, and were among the field-guns, so that the noise was deafening. A British howitzer battery was hard at work, and we stopped to chat with the major. His crews had been at it for six hours, but were in great good-humour, and chuckled mightily when the blast of one of their guns nearly drove in our eardrums, we having got rather too far forward. The effect was that of a ringing box on the exposed ear — with which valediction we left our grinning British gunners and pushed on to the east, under a screaming canopy of our own shells. The wild, empty waste of moor was broken by a single shallow quarry or gravel-pit, in which we could see some movement. In it we found an advanced dressing station, with about a hundred. American and Australian gunners and orderlies. There were dug-outs in the sides of this flat excavation, and it had been an American battalion H.Q. up to a few hours before. We were now about a thousand yards from the Hindenburg Line, and I learned with emotion that this spot was the Egg Redoubt, one of those advanced outposts of General Gough’s Army which suffered so tragic and glorious a fate in that great military epic of March 21 — one of the grandest in the whole war. The fact that we were now actually standing in the Egg Redoubt showed me, as nothing else could have done, bow completely the ground had been recovered, and how the day of retribution was at hand.

We were standing near the eastward lip of the excavation, and looking over it, when it was first brought to our attention that it took two to make a battle. Up to now we had seen only one. Now two shells burst in quick succession forty yards in front of us, and a spray of earth went into the air. “Whizz-bangs,” remarked our soldier-guide casually. Personally, I felt less keenly interested in their name than in the fact that they were there at all.

We thought we had done pretty well to get within 1000 yards of the famous line, but now came a crowning bit of good fortune, for an Australian gunner captain, a mere lad, but a soldier from his hawk’s eyes to his active feet, volunteered to rush us forward to some coign of vantage known to himself. So it was Eastward Ho! once more, still over a dull, barren plain sloping gently upwards, with little sign of life. Here and there was the quick fluff of a bursting shell, but at a comforting distance. Suddenly ahead of us a definite object broke the sky-line. It was a Tank, upon which the crew were working with spanners and levers, for its comrades were now far ahead, and it would fain follow. This, it seems, was the grand stand which our young gunner had selected. On to the top of it we clambered — and there, at our very feet and less than 500 yards away, was the rift which had been torn a few hours before in the Hindenburg line. On the dun slope beyond it, under our very eyes, was even now being fought a part of that great fight where at last the children of light were beating down into the earth the forces of darkness. It was there. We could see it. And yet how little there was to see!

The ridge was passed and the ground sloped down, as dark and heathy as Hindhead. In front of us lay a village. It was Bellicourt. The Hindenburg position ran through it. It lay quiet enough, and with the unaided eye one could see rusty red fields of wire in front of it. But the wire had availed nothing, nor had the trench that lurked behind it, for beyond it, beside the village of Nauroy, there was a long white line, clouds of pale steam-like vapour spouting up against a dark, rain-sodden sky. “The Boche smoke barrage,” said our guide. “They are going to counter-attack.” Only this, the long, white, swirling cloud upon the dark plain, told of the strife in front of us. With my glasses I saw what looked like Tanks, but whether wrecked or in action I could not say. There was the battle — the greatest of battles — but nowhere could I see a moving figure. It is true that all the noises of the Pit seemed to rise from that lonely landscape, but noise was always with us, go where we would.

The Australians were ahead where that line of smoke marked their progress. In the sloping fields, which at that point emerged out of the moor, the victorious Americans, who had done their part, were crouching. It was an assured victory upon which we gazed, achieved so rapidly that we were ourselves standing far forward in ground which had been won that day. The wounded had been brought in, and I saw no corpses, though some friends who had reached the line to our left found eighteen American lads lying dead by the roadside. On that side the fight was very severe, and the Germans, who had been hidden in their huge dug-outs, were doing their usual trick of emerging and cutting oil the attack. So much the gathered afterwards, but for the moment it was the panorama before us which was engrossing all our thoughts.

Suddenly the German guns woke up. I can but pray that it was not our group which drew their fire upon the half-mended Tank. Shell after shell fell in its direction, all of them short, but creeping forward with each salvo. It was time for us to go. If any man says that without a call of duty he likes being under aimed shell-fire, he is not a man whose word I would trust. Some of the shells burst with a rusty red outflame, and we were told that they were gas shells. I may say that before we were admitted on to the battle-field at all, we were ushered one by one into a room where some devil's pipkin was bubbling in the corner, and were taught to use our gas-masks by the simple expedient of telling us that if we failed to acquire the art then and there a very painful alternative was awaiting us.

We made our way back, with no indecent haste, but certainly without loitering, across the plain, the shells always getting rather nearer, until we came to the excavation. Here we had a welcome rest, for our good gunner took us into his cubby-hole of a dug-out, which would at least stop shrapnel, and we shared his tea and dried beef, a true Australian soldier's meal.

The German fire was now rather heavy, and our expert host explained that this meant that he had recovered from the shock of the attack, had reorganised his guns, and was generally his merry self once more. From where we sat we could see heavy shells bursting far to our rear, and there was a general atmosphere of explosion all round us, which might have seemed alarming had it not been for the general chatty afternoon-tea appearance of all these veteran soldiers with whom it was our privilege to find ourselves. A group of sulky-looking German prisoners sat in a corner, while a lank and freckled Australian soldier, with his knee sticking out of a rent in his trousers was walking about with four watches dangling from his hand, endeavouring vainly to sell them. Far be it from me to assert that he did not bring the watches from Sydney and choose this moment for doing a deal in them, but they were heavy old Teutonic time-pieces, and the prisoners seemed to take a rather personal interest in them.

As we started on our homeward track we came, first, upon the British battery which seemed to be limbering up with some idea of advancing, and so lost its chance of administering a box on our other ear. Farther still we met our friends of the air guns, and stopped again to exchange a few impressions. They had nothing to fire at, and seemed bored to tears, for the red, white, and blue machines were in full command of the sky. Soon we found our motor waiting in the lee of a ruined house, and began to thread our way back through the wonderfully picturesque streams of men, American, Australian, British, and German, who were strung along the road.

And then occurred a very horrible incident. One knew, of course, that one could not wander about a battlefield and not find oneself sooner or later involved in some tragedy, but we were now out of range of any but heavy guns, and their shots were spasmodic. We had halted the car for an instant to gather up two German helmets which Commander Latham had seen on the roadside, when there was a very heavy burst close ahead round a curve in the village street. A geyser of red brick-dust flew up into the air. An instant later our car rounded the corner. None of us will forget what we saw. There was a tangle of mutilated horses, their necks rising and sinking. Beside them a man with his hand blown off was staggering away, the blood gushing from his upturned sleeve. He was moving round and holding the arm raised and hanging, as a dog holds an injured foot. Beside the horses lay a shattered man, drenched crimson from head to foot, with two great glazed eyes looking upwards through a mask of blood. Two comrades were at hand to help, and we could only go upon our way with the ghastly picture stamped for ever upon our memory. The image of that dead driver might well haunt one in one’s dreams.

Once through Templeux and on the main road for Peronne things became less exciting, and we drew up to see a column of 900 prisoners pass us. Each side of the causeway was lined by Australians, with their keen, clear-cut, falcon faces, and between lurched these heavy-jawed, beetle-browed, uncouth louts, new caught and staring round with bewildered eyes at their debonnaire captors. I saw none of that relief at getting out of it which I have read of; nor did I see any signs of fear, but the prevailing impression was an ox-like stolidity and dulness. It was a herd of beasts, not a procession of men. It was indeed farcical to think that these uniformed bumpkins represented the great military nation, while the gallant figures who lined the road belonged to the race which they had despised as being unwarlike. Time and Fate between them have a pretty sense of humour. One of them caught my eye as he passed and roared out in guttural English, “The old Jairman is out!” It was the only word I heard them speak. French cavalry troopers, stern, dignified, and martial, rode at either end of the bedraggled procession.

They are great soldiers, these Australians. I think they would admit it themselves, but a spectator is bound to confirm it. There is a reckless dare-devilry, combined with a spice of cunning, which gives them a place of their own in the Imperial ranks. They have a great advantage, too, in having a permanent organisation, the same five divisions always in the same Corps, under the same chief. It doubles their military value — and the same applies equally, of course, to the Canadians. None the less, they must not undervalue their British comrades or lose their sense of proportion. I had a chance of addressing some 1200 of them on our return that evening, and while telling them all that I thought of their splendid deeds, I ventured to remind them that 72 per cent of the men engaged and 76 per cent of the casualties were Englishmen of England. But this is a description of a day’s adventure on the Hindenburg line, and my deep appreciation of the Commonwealth soldiers, of their officers, and of their Commander, must appear elsewhere.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

THE END

A VISIT TO THREE FRONTS. JUNE 1916

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PREFACE

In the course of May 1916, the Italian authorities expressed a desire that some independent observer from Great Britain should visit their lines and report his impressions. It was at the time when our brave and capable allies had sustained a set-back in the Trentino owing to a sudden concentration of the Austrians, supported by very heavy artillery. I was asked to undertake this mission. In order to carry it out properly, I stipulated that I should be allowed to visit the British lines first, so that I might have some standard of comparison. The War Office kindly assented to my request. Later I obtained permission to pay a visit to the French front as well. Thus it was my great good fortune, at the very crisis of the war, to visit the battle line of each of the three great Western allies. I only wish that it had been within my power to complete my experiences in this seat of war by seeing the gallant little Belgian army which has done so remarkably well upon the extreme left wing of the hosts of freedom.

My experiences and impressions are here set down, and may have some small effect in counteracting those mischievous misunderstandings and mutual belittlements which are eagerly fomented by our cunning enemy.

Arthur Conan Doyle.
Crowborough,
July 1916.

A GLIMPSE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

I

It is not an easy matter to write from the front. You know that there are several courteous but inexorable gentlemen who may have a word in the matter, and their presence ‘imparts but small ease to the style.’ But above all you have the twin censors of your own conscience and common sense, which assure you that, if all other readers fail you, you will certainly find a most attentive one in the neighbourhood of the Haupt-Quartier. An instructive story is still told of how a certain well-meaning traveller recorded his satisfaction with the appearance of the big guns at the retiring and peaceful village of Jamais, and how three days later, by an interesting coincidence, the village of Jamais passed suddenly off the map and dematerialised into brickdust and splinters.

I have been with soldiers on the warpath before, but never have I had a day so crammed with experiences and impressions as yesterday. Some of them at least I can faintly convey to the reader, and if they ever reach the eye of that gentleman at the Haupt-Quartier they will give him little joy. For the crowning impression of all is the enormous imperturbable confidence of the Army and its extraordinary efficiency in organisation, administration, material, and personnel. I met in one day a sample of many types, an Army commander, a corps commander, two divisional commanders, staff officers of many grades, and, above all, I met repeatedly the two very great men whom Britain has produced, the private soldier and the regimental officer. Everywhere and on every face one read the same spirit of cheerful bravery. Even the half-mad cranks whose absurd consciences prevent them from barring the way to the devil seemed to me to be turning into men under the prevailing influence. I saw a batch of them, neurotic and largely bespectacled, but working with a will by the roadside. They will volunteer for the trenches yet.

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If there are pessimists among us they are not to be found among the men who are doing the work. There is no foolish bravado, no under-rating of a dour opponent, but there is a quick, alert, confident attention to the job in hand which is an inspiration to the observer. These brave lads are guarding Britain in the present. See to it that Britain guards them in the future! We have a bad record in this matter. It must be changed. They are the wards of the nation, both officers and men. Socialism has never had an attraction for me, but I should be a Socialist to-morrow if I thought that to ease a tax on wealth these men should ever suffer for the time or health that they gave to the public cause.

‘Get out of the car. Don’t let it stay here. It may be hit.’ These words from a staff officer give you the first idea that things are going to happen. Up to then you might have been driving through the black country in the Walsall district with the population of Aldershot let loose upon its dingy roads. ‘Put on this shrapnel helmet. That hat of yours would infuriate the Boche’ — this was an unkind allusion to the only uniform which I have a right to wear. ‘Take this gas helmet. You won’t need it, but it is a standing order. Now come on!’

We cross a meadow and enter a trench. Here and there it comes to the surface again where there is dead ground. At one such point an old church stands, with an unexploded shell sticking out of the wall. A century hence folk will journey to see that shell. Then on again through an endless cutting. It is slippery clay below. I have no nails in my boots, an iron pot on my head, and the sun above me. I will remember that walk. Ten telephone wires run down the side. Here and there large thistles and other plants grow from the clay walls, so immobile have been our lines. Occasionally there are patches of untidiness. ‘Shells,’ says the officer laconically. There is a racket of guns before us and behind, especially behind, but danger seems remote with all these Bairnfather groups of cheerful Tommies at work around us. I pass one group of grimy, tattered boys. A glance at their shoulders shows me that they are of a public school battalion. ‘I thought you fellows were all officers now,’ I remarked. ‘No, sir, we like it better so.’ ‘Well, it will be a great memory for you. We are all in your debt.’

They salute, and we squeeze past them. They had the fresh, brown faces of boy cricketers. But their comrades were men of a different type, with hard, strong, rugged features, and the eyes of men who have seen strange sights. These are veterans, men of Mons, and their young pals of the public schools have something to live up to.

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Up to this we have only had two clay walls to look at. But now our interminable and tropical walk is lightened by the sight of a British aeroplane sailing overhead. Numerous shrapnel bursts are all round it, but she floats on serenely, a thing of delicate beauty against the blue background. Now another passes — and yet another. All morning we saw them circling and swooping, and never a sign of a Boche. They tell me it is nearly always so — that we hold the air, and that the Boche intruder, save at early morning, is a rare bird. A visit to the line would reassure Mr. Pemberton-Billing. ‘We have never met a British aeroplane which was not ready to fight,’ said a captured German aviator the other day. There is a fine stern courtesy between the airmen on either side, each dropping notes into the other’s aerodromes to tell the fate of missing officers. Had the whole war been fought by the Germans as their airmen have conducted it (I do not speak of course of the Zeppelin murderers), a peace would eventually have been more easily arranged. As it is, if every frontier could be settled, it would be a hard thing to stop until all that is associated with the words Cavell, Zeppelin, Wittenberg, Lusitania, and Louvain has been brought to the bar of the world’s Justice.

And now we are there — in what is surely the most wonderful spot in the world, the front firing trench, the outer breakwater which holds back the German tide. How strange that this monstrous oscillation of giant forces, setting in from east to west, should find their equilibrium here across this particular meadow of Flanders. ‘How far?’ I ask. ‘180 yards,’ says my guide. ‘Pop!’ remarks a third person just in front. ‘A sniper,’ says my guide; ‘take a look through the periscope.’ I do so. There is some rusty wire before me, then a field sloping slightly upwards with knee-deep grass, then rusty wire again, and a red line of broken earth. There is not a sign of movement, but sharp eyes are always watching us, even as these crouching soldiers around me are watching them. There are dead Germans in the grass before us. You need not see them to know that they are there. A wounded soldier sits in a corner nursing his leg. Here and there men pop out like rabbits from dug-outs and mine-shafts. Others sit on the fire-step or lean smoking against the clay wall. Who would dream to look at their bold, careless faces that this is a front line, and that at any moment it is possible that a grey wave may submerge them? With all their careless bearing I notice that every man has his gas helmet and his rifle within easy reach.

A mile of front trenches and then we are on our way back down that weary walk. Then I am whisked off upon a ten mile drive. There is a pause for lunch at Corps Headquarters, and after it we are taken to a medal presentation in a market square. Generals Munro, Haking and Landon, famous fighting soldiers all three, are the British representatives. Munro with a ruddy face, and brain above all bulldog below; Haking, pale, distinguished, intellectual; Landon a pleasant, genial country squire. An elderly French General stands beside them.

British infantry keep the ground. In front are about fifty Frenchmen in civil dress of every grade of life, workmen and gentlemen, in a double rank. They are all so wounded that they are back in civil life, but to-day they are to have some solace for their wounds. They lean heavily on sticks, their bodies are twisted and maimed, but their faces are shining with pride and joy. The French General draws his sword and addresses them. One catches words like ‘honneur’ and ‘patrie.’ They lean forward on their crutches, hanging on every syllable which comes hissing and rasping from under that heavy white moustache. Then the medals are pinned on. One poor lad is terribly wounded and needs two sticks. A little girl runs out with some flowers. He leans forward and tries to kiss her, but the crutches slip and he nearly falls upon her. It was a pitiful but beautiful little scene.

Now the British candidates march up one by one for their medals, hale, hearty men, brown and fit. There is a smart young officer of Scottish Rifles; and then a selection of Worcesters, Welsh Fusiliers and Scots Fusiliers, with one funny little Highlander, a tiny figure with a soup-bowl helmet, a grinning boy’s face beneath it, and a bedraggled uniform. ‘Many acts of great bravery’ — such was the record for which he was decorated. Even the French wounded smiled at his quaint appearance, as they did at another Briton who had acquired the chewing-gum habit, and came up for his medal as if he had been called suddenly in the middle of his dinner, which he was still endeavouring to bolt. Then came the end, with the National Anthem. The British regiment formed fours and went past. To me that was the most impressive sight of any. They were the Queen’s West Surreys, a veteran regiment of the great Ypres battle. What grand fellows! As the order came ‘Eyes right,’ and all those fierce, dark faces flashed round about us, I felt the might of the British infantry, the intense individuality which is not incompatible with the highest discipline. Much they had endured, but a great spirit shone from their faces. I confess that as I looked at those brave English lads, and thought of what we owe to them and to their like who have passed on, I felt more emotional than befits a Briton in foreign parts.

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Now the ceremony was ended, and once again we set out for the front. It was to an artillery observation post that we were bound, and once again my description must be bounded by discretion. Suffice it, that in an hour I found myself, together with a razor-keen young artillery observer and an excellent old sportsman of a Russian prince, jammed into a very small space, and staring through a slit at the German lines. In front of us lay a vast plain, scarred and slashed, with bare places at intervals, such as you see where gravel pits break a green common. Not a sign of life or movement, save some wheeling crows. And yet down there, within a mile or so, is the population of a city. Far away a single train is puffing at the back of the German lines. We are here on a definite errand. Away to the right, nearly three miles off, is a small red house, dim to the eye but clear in the glasses, which is suspected as a German post. It is to go up this afternoon. The gun is some distance away, but I hear the telephone directions. '"Mother" will soon do her in,' remarks the gunner boy cheerfully. 'Mother' is the name of the gun. 'Give her five six three four,' he cries through the 'phone. 'Mother' utters a horrible bellow from somewhere on our right. An enormous spout of smoke rises ten seconds later from near the house. 'A little short,' says our gunner. 'Two and a half minutes left,' adds a little small voice, which represents another observer at a different angle. 'Raise her seven five,' says our boy encouragingly. 'Mother' roars more angrily than ever. 'How will that do?' she seems to say. 'One and a half right,' says our invisible gossip. I wonder how the folk in the house are feeling as the shells creep ever nearer. 'Gun laid, sir,' says the telephone. 'Fire!' I am looking through my glass. A flash of fire on the house, a huge pillar of dust and smoke — then it settles, and an unbroken field is there. The German post has gone up. 'It's a dear little gun,' says the officer boy. 'And her shells are reliable,' remarked a senior behind us. 'They vary with different calibres, but "Mother" never goes wrong.' The German line was very quiet. 'Pourquoi ils ne répondent pas?' asked the Russian prince. 'Yes, they are quiet to-day,' answered the senior. 'But we get it in the neck sometimes.' We are all led off to be introduced to 'Mother,' who sits, squat and black, amid twenty of her grimy children who wait upon and feed her. She is an important person is 'Mother,' and her importance grows. It gets clearer with every month that it is she, and only she, who can lead us to the Rhine. She can and she will if the factories of Britain can beat those of the Hun. See to it, you working men and women of Britain. Work now if you rest for ever after, for the fate of Europe and of all that is dear to us is in your hands. For 'Mother' is a dainty eater, and needs good food and plenty. She is fond of strange lodgings, too, in which she prefers safety to dignity. But that is a dangerous subject.

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One more experience of this wonderful day — the most crowded with impressions of my whole life. At night we take a car and drive north, and ever north, until at a late hour we halt and climb a hill in the darkness. Below is a wonderful sight. Down on the flats, in a huge semi-circle, lights are rising and falling. They are very brilliant, going up for a few seconds and then dying down. Sometimes a dozen are in the air at one time. There are the dull thuds of explosions and an occasional rat-tat-tat. I have seen nothing like it, but the nearest comparison would be an enormous ten-mile railway station in full swing at night, with signals winking, lamps waving, engines hissing and carriages bumping. It is a terrible place down yonder, a place which will live as long as military history is written, for it is the Ypres Salient. What a salient it is, too! A huge curve, as outlined by the lights, needing only a little more to be an encirclement. Something caught the rope as it closed, and that something was the British soldier. But it is a perilous place still by day and by night. Never shall I forget the impression of ceaseless, malignant activity which was borne in upon me by the white, winking lights, the red sudden glares, and the horrible thudding noises in that place of death beneath me.

II

In old days we had a great name as organisers. Then came a long period when we deliberately adopted a policy of individuality and 'go as you please.' Now once again in our sore need we have called on all our power of administration and direction. But it has not deserted us. We still have it in a supreme degree. Even in peace time we have shown it in that vast, well-oiled, swift-running, noiseless machine called the British Navy. But now our powers have risen with the need of them. The expansion of the Navy has been a miracle, the management of the transport a greater one, the formation of the new Army the greatest of all time. To get the men was the least of the difficulties. To put them here, with everything down to the lid of the last field saucepan in its place, that is the marvel. The tools of the gunners, and of the sappers, to say nothing of the knowledge of how to use them, are in themselves a huge problem. But it has all been met and mastered, and will be to the end. But don't let us talk any more about the muddling of the War Office. It has become just a little ridiculous.

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I have told of my first day, when I visited the front trenches, saw the work of 'Mother,' and finally that marvellous spectacle, the Ypres Salient at night. I have passed the night at the headquarters of a divisional-general, Capper, who might truly be called one of the two fathers of the British flying force, for it was he, with Templer, who laid the first foundations from which so great an organisation has arisen. My morning was spent in visiting two fighting brigadiers, cheery weather-beaten soldiers, respectful, as all our soldiers are, of the prowess of the Hun, but serenely confident that we can beat him. In company with one of them I ascended a hill, the reverse slope of which was swarming with cheerful infantry in every stage of dishabille, for they were cleaning up after the trenches. Once over the slope we advanced with some care, and finally reached a certain spot from which we looked down upon the German line. It was the advanced observation post, about a thousand yards from the German trenches, with our own trenches between us. We could see the two lines, sometimes only a few yards, as it seemed, apart, extending for miles on either side. The sinister silence and solitude were strangely dramatic. Such vast crowds of men, such intensity of feeling, and yet only that open rolling countryside, with never a movement in its whole expanse.

The afternoon saw us in the Square at Ypres. It is the city of a dream, this modern Pompeii, destroyed, deserted and desecrated, but with a sad, proud dignity which made you involuntarily lower your voice as you passed through the ruined streets. It is a more considerable place than I had imagined, with many traces of ancient grandeur. No words can describe the absolute splintered wreck that the Huns have made of it. The effect of some of the shells has been grotesque. One boiler-plated water-tower, a thing forty or fifty feet high, was actually standing on its head like a great metal top. There is not a living soul in the place save a few pickets of soldiers, and a number of cats which become fierce and dangerous. Now and then a shell still falls, but the Huns probably know that the devastation is already complete.

We stood in the lonely grass-grown Square, once the busy centre of the town, and we marvelled at the beauty of the smashed cathedral and the tottering Cloth Hall beside it. Surely at their best they could not have looked more wonderful than now. If they were preserved even so, and if a heaven-inspired artist were to model a statue of Belgium in front, Belgium with one hand pointing to the treaty by which Prussia guaranteed her safety and the other to the sacrilege behind her, it would make the most impressive group in the world. It was an evil day for Belgium when her frontier was violated, but it was a worse one for Germany. I venture to prophesy that it will be regarded by history as the greatest military as well as political error that has ever been made. Had the great guns that destroyed Liége made their first breach at Verdun, what chance was there for Paris? Those few weeks of warning and preparation saved France, and left Germany as she now is, like a weary and furious bull, tethered fast in the place of trespass and waiting for the inevitable pole-axe.

We were glad to get out of the place, for the gloom of it lay as heavy upon our hearts as the shrapnel helmets did upon our heads. Both were lightened as we sped back past empty and shattered villas to where, just behind the danger line, the normal life of rural Flanders was carrying on as usual. A merry sight helped to cheer us, for scudding down wind above our heads came a Boche aeroplane, with two British at her tail barking away with their machine guns, like two swift terriers after a cat. They shot rat-tat-tatting across the sky until we lost sight of them in the heat haze over the German line.

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The afternoon saw us on the Sharpenburg, from which many a million will gaze in days to come, for from no other point can so much be seen. It is a spot forbid, but a special permit took us up, and the sentry on duty, having satisfied himself of our bona fides, proceeded to tell us tales of the war in a pure Hull dialect which might have been Chinese for all that I could understand. That he was a ‘terrier’ and had nine children were the only facts I could lay hold of. But I wished to be silent and to think — even, perhaps, to pray. Here, just below my feet, were the spots which our dear lads, three of them my own kith, have sanctified with their blood. Here, fighting for the freedom of the world, they cheerily gave their all. On that sloping meadow to the left of the row of houses on the opposite ridge the London Scottish fought to the death on that grim November morning when the Bavarians reeled back from their shot-torn line. That plain away on the other side of Ypres was the place where the three grand Canadian brigades, first of all men, stood up to the damnable cowardly gases of the Hun. Down yonder is Hill 60, that blood-soaked kopje. The ridge over the fields was held by the cavalry against two army corps, and there where the sun strikes the red roof among the trees I can just see Gheluveld, a name for ever to be associated with Haig and the most vital battle of the war. As I turn away I am faced by my Hull Territorial, who still says incomprehensible things. I look at him with other eyes. He has fought on yonder plain. He has slain Huns, and he has nine children. Could any one better epitomise the duties of a good citizen? I could have found it in my heart to salute him had I not known that it would have shocked him and made him unhappy.

It has been a full day, and the next is even fuller, for it is my privilege to lunch at Headquarters, and to make the acquaintance of the Commander-in-chief and of his staff. It would be an invasion of private hospitality if I were to give the public the impressions which I carried from that charming château. I am the more sorry, since they were very vivid and strong. This much I will say — and any man who is a face reader will not need to have it said — that if the Army stands still it is not by the will of its commander. There will, I swear, be no happier man in Europe when the day has come and the hour. It is human to err, but never possibly can some types err by being backward. We have a superb army in France. It needs the right leader to handle it. I came away happier and more confident than ever as to the future.

Extraordinary are the contrasts of war. Within three hours of leaving the quiet atmosphere of the Headquarters Château I was present at what in any other war would have been looked upon as a brisk engagement. As it was it would certainly figure in one of our desiccated reports as an activity of the artillery. The noise as we struck the line at this new point showed that the matter was serious, and, indeed, we had chosen the spot because it had been the storm centre of the last week. The method of approach chosen by our experienced guide was in itself a tribute to the gravity of the affair. As one comes from the settled order of Flanders into the actual scene of war, the first sign of it is one of the stationary, sausage-shaped balloons, a chain of which marks the ring in which the great wrestlers are locked. We pass under this, ascend a hill, and find ourselves in a garden where for a year no feet save those of wanderers like ourselves have stood. There is a wild, confused luxuriance of growth more beautiful to my eye than anything which the care of man can produce. One old shell-hole of vast diameter has filled itself with forget-me-nots, and appears as a graceful basin of light blue flowers, held up as an atonement to heaven for the brutalities of man. Through the tangled bushes we creep, then across a yard—’Please stoop and run as you pass this point’ — and finally to a small opening in a wall, whence the battle lies not so much before as beside us. For a moment we have a front seat at the great world-drama, God’s own problem play, working surely to its magnificent end. One feels a sort of shame to crouch here in comfort, a useless spectator, while brave men down yonder are facing that pelting shower of iron.

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There is a large field on our left rear, and the German gunners have the idea that there is a concealed battery therein. They are systematically searching for it. A great shell explodes in the top corner, but gets nothing more solid than a few tons of clay. You can read the mind of Gunner Fritz. ‘Try the lower corner!’ says he, and up goes the earth-cloud once again. ‘Perhaps it’s hid about the middle. I’ll try.’ Earth again, and nothing more. ‘I believe I was right the first time after all,’ says hopeful Fritz. So another shell comes into the top corner. The field is as full of pits as a Gruyère cheese, but Fritz gets nothing by his perseverance. Perhaps there never was a battery there at all. One effect he obviously did attain. He made several other British batteries exceedingly angry. ‘Stop that tickling, Fritz!’ was the burden of their cry. Where they were we could no more see than Fritz could, but their constant work was very clear along the German line. We appeared to be using more shrapnel and the Germans more high explosives, but that may have been just the chance of the day. The Vimy Ridge was on our right, and before us was the old French position, with the labyrinth of terrible memories and the long hill of Lorette. When, last year, the French, in a three weeks’ battle, fought their way up that hill, it was an exhibition of sustained courage which even their military annals can seldom have beaten.

And so I turn from the British line. Another and more distant task lies before me. I come away with the deep sense of the difficult task which lies before the Army, but with a deeper one of the ability of these men to do all that soldiers can ever be asked to perform. Let the guns clear the way for the infantry, and the rest will follow. It all lies with the guns. But the guns, in turn, depend upon our splendid workers at home, who, men and women, are doing so grandly. Let them not be judged by a tiny minority, who are given, perhaps, too much attention in our journals. We have all made sacrifices in the war, but when the full story comes to be told, perhaps the greatest sacrifice of all is that which Labour made when, with a sigh, she laid aside that which it had taken so many weary years to build.

A GLIMPSE OF THE ITALIAN ARMY

One meets with such extreme kindness and consideration among the Italians that there is a real danger lest one’s personal feeling of obligation should warp one’s judgment or hamper one’s expression. Making every possible allowance for this, I come away from them, after a very wide if superficial view of all that they are doing, with a deep feeling of admiration and a conviction that no army in the world could have made a braver attempt to advance under conditions of extraordinary difficulty.

First a word as to the Italian soldier. He is a type by himself which differs from the earnest solidarity of the new French army, and from the businesslike alertness of the Briton, and yet has a very special dash and fire of its own, covered over by a very pleasing and unassuming manner. London has not yet forgotten Durando of Marathon fame. He was just such another easy smiling youth as I now see everywhere around me. Yet there came a day when a hundred thousand Londoners hung upon his every movement — when strong men gasped and women wept at his invincible but unavailing spirit. When he had fallen senseless in that historic race on the very threshold of his goal, so high was the determination within him, that while he floundered on the track like a broken-backed horse, with the senses gone out of him, his legs still continued to drum upon the cinder path. Then when by pure will power he staggered to his feet and drove his dazed body across the line, it was an exhibition of pluck which put the little sunburned baker straightway among London’s heroes. Durando’s spirit is alive to-day, I see thousands of him all around me. A thousand such, led by a few young gentlemen of the type who occasionally give us object lessons in how to ride at Olympia, make no mean battalion. It has been a war of most desperate ventures, but never once has there been a lack of volunteers. The Tyrolese are good men — too good to be fighting in so rotten a cause. But from first to last the Alpini have had the ascendency in the hill fighting, as the line regiments have against the Kaiserlics upon the plain. Caesar told how the big Germans used to laugh at his little men until they had been at handgrips with them. The Austrians could tell the same tale. The spirit in the ranks is something marvellous. There have been occasions when every officer has fallen and yet the men have pushed on, have taken a position and then waited for official directions.

But if that is so, you will ask, why is it that they have not made more impression upon the enemy’s position? The answer lies in the strategical position of Italy, and it can be discussed without any technicalities. A child could understand it. The Alps form such a bar across the north that there are only two points where serious operations are possible. One is the Trentino Salient where Austria can always threaten and invade Italy. She lies in the mountains with the plains beneath her. She can always invade the plain, but the Italians cannot seriously invade the mountains, since the passes would only lead to other mountains beyond. Therefore their only possible policy is to hold the Austrians back. This they have most successfully done, and though the Austrians with the aid of a shattering heavy artillery have recently made some advance, it is perfectly certain that they can never really carry out any serious invasion. The Italians then have done all that could be done in this quarter. There remains the other front, the opening by the sea. Here the Italians had a chance to advance over a front of plain bounded by a river with hills beyond. They cleared the plain, they crossed the river, they fought a battle very like our own battle of the Aisne upon the slopes of the hills, taking 20,000 Austrian prisoners, and now they are faced by barbed wire, machine guns, cemented trenches, and every other device which has held them as it has held every one else. But remember what they have done for the common cause and be grateful for it. They have in a year occupied some forty Austrian divisions, and relieved our Russian allies to that very appreciable extent. They have killed or wounded a quarter of a million, taken 40,000, and drawn to themselves a large portion of the artillery. That is their record up to date. As to the future it is very easy to prophesy. They will continue to absorb large enemy armies. Neither side can advance far as matters stand. But if the Russians advance and Austria has to draw her men to the East, there will be a tiger spring for Trieste. If manhood can break the line, then I believe the Durandos will do it.

‘Trieste o morte!’ I saw chalked upon the walls all over North Italy.
That is the Italian objective.

And they are excellently led. Cadorna is an old Roman, a man cast in the big simple mould of antiquity, frugal in his tastes, clear in his aims, with no thought outside his duty. Every one loves and trusts him. Porro, the Chief of the Staff, who was good enough to explain the strategical position to me, struck me as a man of great clearness of vision, middle-sized, straight as a dart, with an eagle face grained and coloured like an old walnut. The whole of the staff work is, as experts assure me, moot excellently done.

So much for the general situation. Let me descend for a moment to my own trivial adventures since leaving the British front. Of France I hope to say more in the future, and so I will pass at a bound to Padua, where it appeared that the Austrian front had politely advanced to meet me, for I was wakened betimes in the morning by the dropping of bombs, the rattle of anti-aircraft guns, and the distant rat-tat-tat of a maxim high up in the air. I heard when I came down later that the intruder had been driven away and that little damage had been done. The work of the Austrian aeroplanes is, however, very aggressive behind the Italian lines, for they have the great advantage that a row of fine cities lies at their mercy, while the Italians can do nothing without injuring their own kith and kin across the border. This dropping of explosives on the chance of hitting one soldier among fifty victims seems to me the most monstrous development of the whole war, and the one which should be most sternly repressed in future international legislation — if such a thing as international law still exists. The Italian headquarter town, which I will call Nemini, was a particular victim of these murderous attacks. I speak with some feeling, as not only was the ceiling of my bedroom shattered some days before my arrival, but a greasy patch with some black shreds upon it was still visible above my window which represented part of the remains of an unfortunate workman, who had been blown to pieces immediately in front of the house. The air defence is very skilfully managed however, and the Italians have the matter well in hand.

My first experience of the Italian line was at the portion which I have called the gap by the sea, otherwise the Isonzo front. From a mound behind the trenches an extraordinary fine view can be got of the Austrian position, the general curve of both lines being marked, as in Flanders, by the sausage balloons which float behind them. The Isonzo, which has been so bravely carried by the Italians, lay in front of me, a clear blue river, as broad as the Thames at Hampton Court. In a hollow to my left were the roofs of Gorizia, the town which the Italians are endeavouring to take. A long desolate ridge, the Carso, extends to the south of the town, and stretches down nearly to the sea. The crest is held by the Austrians and the Italian trenches have been pushed within fifty yards of them. A lively bombardment was going on from either side, but so far as the infantry goes there is none of that constant malignant petty warfare with which we are familiar in Flanders. I was anxious to see the Italian trenches, in order to compare them with our British methods, but save for the support and communication trenches I was courteously but firmly warned off.

The story of trench attack and defence is no doubt very similar in all quarters, but I am convinced that close touch should be kept between the Allies on the matter of new inventions. The quick Latin brain may conceive and test an idea long before we do. At present there seems to be very imperfect sympathy. As an example, when I was on the British lines they were dealing with a method of clearing barbed wire. The experiments were new and were causing great interest. But on the Italian front I found that the same system had been tested for many months. In the use of bullet proof jackets for engineers and other men who have to do exposed work the Italians are also ahead of us. One of their engineers at our headquarters might give some valuable advice. At present the Italians have, as I understand, no military representative with our armies, while they receive a British General with a small staff. This seems very wrong not only from the point of view of courtesy and justice, but also because Italy has no direct means of knowing the truth about our great development. When Germans state that our new armies are made of paper, our Allies should have some official assurance of their own that this is false. I can understand our keeping neutrals from our headquarters, but surely our Allies should be on another footing.

Having got this general view of the position I was anxious in the afternoon to visit Monfalcone, which is the small dockyard captured from the Austrians on the Adriatic. My kind Italian officer guides did not recommend the trip, as it was part of their great hospitality to shield their guest from any part of that danger which they were always ready to incur themselves. The only road to Monfalcone ran close to the Austrian position at the village of Ronchi, and afterwards kept parallel to it for some miles. I was told that it was only on odd days that the Austrian guns were active in this particular section, so determined to trust to luck that this might not be one of them. It proved, however, to be one of the worst on record, and we were not destined to see the dockyard to which we started.

The civilian cuts a ridiculous figure when he enlarges upon small adventures which may come his way — adventures which the soldier endures in silence as part of his everyday life. On this occasion, however, the episode was all our own, and had a sporting flavour in it which made it dramatic. I know now the feeling of tense expectation with which the driven grouse whirrs onwards towards the butt. I have been behind the butt before now, and it is only poetic justice that I should see the matter from the other point of view. As we approached Ronchi we could see shrapnel breaking over the road in front of us, but we had not yet realised that it was precisely for vehicles that the Austrians were waiting, and that they had the range marked out to a yard. We went down the road all out at a steady fifty miles an hour. The village was near, and it seemed that we had got past the place of danger. We had in fact just reached it. At this moment there was a noise as if the whole four tyres had gone simultaneously, a most terrific bang in our very ears, merging into a second sound like a reverberating blow upon an enormous gong. As I glanced up I saw three clouds immediately above my head, two of them white and the other of a rusty red. The air was full of flying metal, and the road, as we were told afterwards by an observer, was all churned up by it. The metal base of one of the shells was found plumb in the middle of the road just where our motor had been. There is no use telling me Austrian gunners can't shoot. I know better.

It was our pace that saved us. The motor was an open one, and the three shells burst, according to one of my Italian companions who was himself an artillery officer, about ten metres above our heads. They threw forward, however, and we travelling at so great a pace shot from under. Before they could get in another we had swung round the curve and under the lee of a house. The good Colonel B. wrung my hand in silence. They were both distressed, these good soldiers, under the impression that they had led me into danger. As a matter of fact it was I who owed them an apology, since they had enough risks in the way of business without taking others in order to gratify the whim of a joy-rider. Barbariche and Clericetti, this record will convey to you my remorse.

Our difficulties were by no means over. We found an ambulance lorry and a little group of infantry huddled under the same shelter with the expression of people who had been caught in the rain. The road beyond was under heavy fire as well as that by which we had come. Had the Ostro-Boches dropped a high-explosive upon us they would have had a good mixed bag. But apparently they were only out for fancy shooting and disdained a sitter. Presently there came a lull and the lorry moved on, but we soon heard a burst of firing which showed that they were after it. My companions had decided that it was out of the question for us to finish our excursion. We waited for some time therefore and were able finally to make our retreat on foot, being joined later by the car. So ended my visit to Monfalcone, the place I did not reach. I hear that two 10,000-ton steamers were left on the stocks there by the Austrians, but were disabled before they retired. Their cabin basins and other fittings are now adorning the Italian dug-outs.

My second day was devoted to a view of the Italian mountain warfare in the Carnic Alps. Besides the two great fronts, one of defence (Trentino) and one of offence (Isonzo), there are very many smaller valleys which have to be guarded. The total frontier line is over four hundred miles, and it has all to be held against raids if not invasions. It is a most picturesque business. Far up in the Roccolana Valley I found the Alpini outposts, backed by artillery which had been brought into the most wonderful positions. They have taken 8-inch guns where a tourist could hardly take his knapsack. Neither side can ever make serious progress, but there are continual duels, gun against gun, or Alpini against Jaeger. In a little wayside house was the brigade headquarters, and here I was entertained to lunch. It was a scene that I shall remember. They drank to England. I raised my glass to Italia irredenta — might it soon be redenta. They all sprang to their feet and the circle of dark faces flashed into flame. They keep their souls and emotions, these people. I trust that ours may not become atrophied by self-suppression.

The Italians are a quick high-spirited race, and it is very necessary that we should consider their feelings, and that we should show our sympathy with what they have done, instead of making querulous and unreasonable demands of them. In some ways they are in a difficult position. The war is made by their splendid king — a man of whom every one speaks with extraordinary reverence and love — and by the people. The people, with the deep instinct of a very old civilisation, understand that the liberty of the world and their own national existence are really at stake. But there are several forces which divide the strength of the nation. There is the clerical, which represents the old Guelph or German spirit, looking upon Austria as the eldest daughter of the Church — a daughter who is little credit to her mother. Then there is the old nobility. Finally, there are the commercial people who through the great banks or other similar agencies have got into the influence and employ of the Germans. When you consider all this you will appreciate how necessary it is that Britain should in every possible way, moral and material, sustain the national party. Should by any evil chance the others gain the upper hand there might be a very sudden and sinister change in the international situation. Every man who does, says, or writes a thing which may in any way alienate the Italians is really, whether he knows it or not, working for the King of Prussia. They are a grand people, striving most efficiently for the common cause, with all the dreadful disabilities which an absence of coal and iron entails. It is for us to show that we appreciate it. Justice as well as policy demands it.

The last day spent upon the Italian front was in the Trentino. From Verona a motor drive of about twenty-five miles takes one up the valley of the Adige, and past a place of evil augury for the Austrians, the field of Rivoli. As one passes up the valley one appreciates that on their left wing the Italians have position after position in the spurs of the mountains before they could be driven into the plain. If the Austrians could reach the plain it would be to their own ruin, for the Italians have large reserves. There is no need for any anxiety about the Trentino.

The attitude of the people behind the firing line should give one confidence. I had heard that the Italians were a nervous people. It does not apply to this part of Italy. As I approached the danger spot I saw rows of large, fat gentlemen with long thin black cigars leaning against walls in the sunshine. The general atmosphere would have steadied an epileptic. Italy is perfectly sure of herself in this quarter. Finally, after a long drive of winding gradients, always beside the Adige, we reached Ala, where we interviewed the Commander of the Sector, a man who has done splendid work during the recent fighting. ‘By all means you can see my front. But no motorcar, please. It draws fire and others may be hit beside you.’ We proceeded on foot therefore along a valley which branched at the end into two passes. In both very active fighting had been going on, and as we came up the guns were baying merrily, waking up most extraordinary echoes in the hills. It was difficult to believe that it was not thunder. There was one terrible voice that broke out from time to time in the mountains — the angry voice of the Holy Roman Empire. When it came all other sounds died down into nothing. It was — so I was told — the master gun, the vast 42 centimetre giant which brought down the pride of Liége and Namur. The Austrians have brought one or more from Innsbruck. The Italians assure me, however, as we have ourselves discovered, that in trench work beyond a certain point the size of the gun makes little matter.

We passed a burst dug-out by the roadside where a tragedy had occurred recently, for eight medical officers were killed in it by a single shell. There was no particular danger in the valley however, and the aimed fire was all going across us to the fighting lines in the two passes above us. That to the right, the Valley of Buello, has seen some of the worst of the fighting. These two passes form the Italian left wing which has held firm all through. So has the right wing. It is only the centre which has been pushed in by the concentrated fire.

When we arrived at the spot where the two valleys forked we were halted, and we were not permitted to advance to the advance trenches which lay upon the crests above us. There was about a thousand yards between the adversaries. I have seen types of some of the Bosnian and Croatian prisoners, men of poor physique and intelligence, but the Italians speak with chivalrous praise of the bravery of the Hungarians and of the Austrian Jaeger. Some of their proceedings disgust them however, and especially the fact that they use Russian prisoners to dig trenches under fire. There is no doubt of this, as some of the men were recaptured and were sent on to join their comrades in France. On the whole, however, it may be said that in the Austro-Italian war there is nothing which corresponds with the extreme bitterness of our western conflict. The presence or absence of the Hun makes all the difference.

Nothing could be more cool or methodical than the Italian arrangements on the Trentino front. There are no troops who would not have been forced back by the Austrian fire. It corresponded with the French experience at Verdun, or ours at the second battle of Ypres. It may well occur again if the Austrians get their guns forward. But at such a rate it would take them a long time to make any real impression. One cannot look at the officers and men without seeing that their spirit and confidence are high. In answer to my inquiry they assure me that there is little difference between the troops of the northern provinces and those of the south. Even among the snows of the Alps they tell me that the Sicilians gave an excellent account of themselves.

That night found me back at Verona, and next morning I was on my way to Paris, where I hope to be privileged to have some experiences at the front of our splendid Allies. I leave Italy with a deep feeling of gratitude for the kindness shown to me, and of admiration for the way in which they are playing their part in the world’s fight for freedom. They have every possible disadvantage, economic and political. But in spite of it they have done splendidly. Three thousand square kilometres of the enemy’s country are already in their possession. They relieve to a very great extent the pressure upon the Russians, who, in spite of all their bravery, might have been overwhelmed last summer during the ‘durchbruch’ had it not been for the diversion of so many Austrian troops. The time has come now when Russia by her advance on the Pripet is repaying her debt. But the debt is common to all the Allies. Let them bear it in mind. There has been mischief done by slighting criticism and by inconsiderate words. A warm sympathetic hand-grasp of congratulation is what Italy has deserved, and it is both justice and policy to give it.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FRENCH LINE

I

The French soldiers are grand. They are grand. There is no other word to express it. It is not merely their bravery. All races have shown bravery in this war. But it is their solidity, their patience, their nobility. I could not conceive anything finer than the bearing of their officers. It is proud without being arrogant, stern without being fierce, serious without being depressed. Such, too, are the men whom they lead with such skill and devotion. Under the frightful hammer-blows of circumstance, the national characters seem to have been reversed. It is our British soldier who has become debonair, light-hearted and reckless, while the Frenchman has developed a solemn stolidity and dour patience which was once all our own. During a long day in the French trenches, I have never once heard the sound of music or laughter, nor have I once seen a face that was not full of the most grim determination.

Germany set out to bleed France white. Well, she has done so. France is full of widows and orphans from end to end. Perhaps in proportion to her population she has suffered the most of all. But in carrying out her hellish mission Germany has bled herself white also. Her heavy sword has done its work, but the keen French rapier has not lost its skill. France will stand at last, weak and tottering, with her huge enemy dead at her feet. But it is a fearsome business to see — such a business as the world never looked upon before. It is fearful for the French. It is fearful for the Germans. May God’s curse rest upon the arrogant men and the unholy ambitions which let loose this horror upon humanity! Seeing what they have done, and knowing that they have done it, one would think that mortal brain would grow crazy under the weight. Perhaps the central brain of all was crazy from the first. But what sort of government is it under which one crazy brain can wreck mankind!

If ever one wanders into the high places of mankind, the places whence the guidance should come, it seems to me that one has to recall the dying words of the Swedish Chancellor who declared that the folly of those who governed was what had amazed him most in his experience of life.

Yesterday I met one of these men of power — M. Clemenceau, once Prime Minister, now the destroyer of governments. He is by nature a destroyer, incapable of rebuilding what he has pulled down. With his personal force, his eloquence, his thundering voice, his bitter pen, he could wreck any policy, but would not even trouble to suggest an alternative. As he sat before me with his face of an old prizefighter (he is remarkably like Jim Mace as I can remember him in his later days), his angry grey eyes and his truculent, mischievous smile, he seemed to me a very dangerous man. His conversation, if a squirt on one side and Niagara on the other can be called conversation, was directed for the moment upon the iniquity of the English rate of exchange, which seemed to me very much like railing against the barometer. My companion, who has forgotten more economics than ever Clemenceau knew, was about to ask whether France was prepared to take the rouble at face value, but the roaring voice, like a strong gramophone with a blunt needle, submerged all argument. We have our dangerous men, but we have no one in the same class as Clemenceau. Such men enrage the people who know them, alarm the people who don't, set every one by the ears, act as a healthy irritant in days of peace, and are a public danger in days of war.

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But this is digression. I had set out to say something of a day's experience of the French front, though I shall write with a fuller pen when I return from the Argonne. It was for Soissons that we made, passing on the way a part of the scene of our own early operations, including the battlefield of Villers Cotteret — just such a wood as I had imagined. My companion's nephew was one of those Guards' officers whose bodies rest now in the village cemetery, with a little British Jack still flying above them. They lie together, and their grave is tended with pious care. Among the trees beside the road were other graves of soldiers, buried where they had fallen. 'So look around — and choose your ground — and take your rest.'

Soissons is a considerable wreck, though it is very far from being an Ypres. But the cathedral would, and will, make many a patriotic Frenchman weep. These savages cannot keep their hands off a beautiful church. Here, absolutely unchanged through the ages, was the spot where St. Louis had dedicated himself to the Crusade. Every stone of it was holy. And now the lovely old stained glass strews the floor, and the roof lies in a huge heap across the central aisle. A dog was climbing over it as we entered. No wonder the French fight well. Such sights would drive the mildest man to desperation. The abbé, a good priest, with a large humorous face, took us over his shattered domain. He was full of reminiscences of the German occupation of the place. One of his personal anecdotes was indeed marvellous. It was that a lady in the local ambulance had vowed to kiss the first French soldier who re-entered the town. She did so, and it proved to be her husband. The abbé is a good, kind, truthful man — but he has a humorous face.

A walk down a ruined street brings one to the opening of the trenches. There are marks upon the walls of the German occupation. ‘Berlin — Paris,’ with an arrow of direction, adorns one corner. At another the 76th Regiment have commemorated the fact that they were there in 1870 and again in 1914. If the Soissons folk are wise they will keep these inscriptions as a reminder to the rising generation. I can imagine, however, that their inclination will be to whitewash, fumigate, and forget.

A sudden turn among some broken walls takes one into the communication trench. Our guide is a Commandant of the Staff, a tall, thin man with hard, grey eyes and a severe face. It is the more severe towards us as I gather that he has been deluded into the belief that about one out of six of our soldiers goes to the trenches. For the moment he is not friends with the English. As we go along, however, we gradually get upon better terms, we discover a twinkle in the hard, grey eyes, and the day ends with an exchange of walking-sticks and a renewal of the Entente. May my cane grow into a marshal’s baton.

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A charming young artillery subaltern is our guide in that maze of trenches, and we walk and walk and walk, with a brisk exchange of compliments between the ‘75’s’ of the French and the ‘77’s’ of the Germans going on high over our heads. The trenches are boarded at the sides, and have a more permanent look than those of Flanders. Presently we meet a fine, brown-faced, upstanding boy, as keen as a razor, who commands this particular section. A little further on a helmeted captain of infantry, who is an expert sniper, joins our little party. Now we are at the very front trench. I had expected to see primeval men, bearded and shaggy. But the ‘Poilus’ have disappeared. The men around me were clean and dapper to a remarkable degree. I gathered, however, that they had their internal difficulties. On one board I read an old inscription, ‘He is a Boche, but he is the inseparable companion of a French soldier.’ Above was a rude drawing of a louse.

I am led to a cunning loop-hole, and have a glimpse through it of a little framed picture of French countryside. There are fields, a road, a sloping hill beyond with trees. Quite close, about thirty or forty yards away, was a low, red-tiled house. ‘They are there,’ said our guide. ‘That is their outpost. We can hear them cough.’ Only the guns were coughing that morning, so we heard nothing, but it was certainly wonderful to be so near to the enemy and yet in such peace. I suppose wondering visitors from Berlin are brought up also to hear the French cough. Modern warfare has certainly some extraordinary sides.

Now we are shown all the devices which a year of experience has suggested to the quick brains of our Allies. It is ground upon which one cannot talk with freedom. Every form of bomb, catapult, and trench mortar was ready to hand. Every method of cross-fire had been thought out to an exact degree. There was something, however, about their disposition of a machine gun which disturbed the Commandant. He called for the officer of the gun. His thin lips got thinner and his grey eyes more austere as we waited. Presently there emerged an extraordinarily handsome youth, dark as a Spaniard, from some rabbit hole. He faced the Commandant bravely, and answered back with respect but firmness. ‘Pourquoi?’ asked the Commandant, and yet again ‘Pourquoi?’ Adonis had an answer for everything. Both sides appealed to the big Captain of Snipers, who was clearly embarrassed. He stood on one leg and scratched his chin. Finally the Commandant turned away angrily in the midst of one of Adonis’ voluble sentences. His face showed that the matter was not ended. War is taken very seriously in the French army, and any sort of professional mistake is very quickly punished. I have been told how many officers of high rank have been broken by the French during the war. The figure was a very high one. There is no more forgiveness for the beaten General than there was in the days of the Republic when the delegate of the National Convention, with a patent portable guillotine, used to drop in at headquarters to support a more vigorous offensive.

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As I write these lines there is a burst of bugles in the street, and I go to my open window to see the 41st of the line march down into what may develop into a considerable battle. How I wish they could march down the Strand even as they are. How London would rise to them! Laden like donkeys, with a pile upon their backs and very often both hands full as well, they still get a swing into their march which it is good to see. They march in column of platoons, and the procession is a long one, for a French regiment is, of course, equal to three battalions. The men are shortish, very thick, burned brown in the sun, with never a smile among them — have I not said that they are going down to a grim sector? — but with faces of granite. There was a time when we talked of stiffening the French army. I am prepared to believe that our first expeditionary force was capable of stiffening any conscript army, for I do not think that a finer force ever went down to battle. But to talk about stiffening these people now would be ludicrous. You might as well stiffen the old Guard. There may be weak regiments somewhere, but I have never seen them.

I think that an injustice has been done to the French army by the insistence of artists and cinema operators upon the picturesque Colonial corps. One gets an idea that Arabs and negroes are pulling France out of the fire. It is absolutely false. Her own brave sons are doing the work. The Colonial element is really a very small one — so small that I have not seen a single unit during all my French wanderings. The Colonials are good men, but like our splendid Highlanders they catch the eye in a way which is sometimes a little hard upon their neighbours. When there is hard work to be done it is the good little French piou-piou who usually has to do it. There is no better man in Europe. If we are as good — and I believe we are — it is something to be proud of.

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But I have wandered far from the trenches of Soissons. It had come on to rain heavily, and we were forced to take refuge in the dugout of the sniper. Eight of us sat in the deep gloom huddled closely together. The Commandant was still harping upon that ill-placed machine gun. He could not get over it. My imperfect ear for French could not follow all his complaints, but some defence of the offender brought forth a ‘Jamais! Jamais! Jamais!’ which was rapped out as if it came from the gun itself.

There were eight of us in an underground burrow, and some were smoking. Better a deluge than such an atmosphere as that. But if there is a thing upon earth which the French officer shies at it is rain and mud. The reason is that he is extraordinarily natty in his person. His charming blue uniform, his facings, his brown gaiters, boots and belts are always just as smart as paint. He is the Dandy of the European war. I noticed officers in the trenches with their trousers carefully pressed. It is all to the good, I think. Wellington said that the dandies made his best officers. It is difficult for the men to get rattled or despondent when they see the debonair appearance of their leaders.

Among the many neat little marks upon the French uniforms which indicate with precision but without obtrusion the rank and arm of the wearer, there was one which puzzled me. It was to be found on the left sleeve of men of all ranks, from generals to privates, and it consisted of small gold chevrons, one, two, or more. No rule seemed to regulate them, for the general might have none, and I have heard of the private who wore ten. Then I solved the mystery. They are the record of wounds received. What an admirable idea! Surely we should hasten to introduce it among our own soldiers. It costs little and it means much. If you can allay the smart of a wound by the knowledge that it brings lasting honour to the man among his fellows, then surely it should be done. Medals, too, are more freely distributed and with more public parade than in our service. I am convinced that the effect is good.

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The rain has now stopped, and we climb from our burrow. Again we are led down that endless line of communication trench, again we stumble through the ruins, again we emerge into the street where our cars are awaiting us. Above our heads the sharp artillery duel is going merrily forward. The French are firing three or four to one, which has been my experience at every point I have touched upon the Allied front. Thanks to the extraordinary zeal of the French workers, especially of the French women, and to the clever adaptation of machinery by their engineers, their supplies are abundant. Even now they turn out more shells a day than we do. That, however, excludes our supply for the Fleet. But it is one of the miracles of the war that the French, with their coal and iron in the hands of the enemy, have been able to equal the production of our great industrial centres. The steel, of course, is supplied by us. To that extent we can claim credit for the result.

And so, after the ceremony of the walking-sticks, we bid adieu to the lines of Soissons. To-morrow we start for a longer tour to the more formidable district of the Argonne, the neighbour of Verdun, and itself the scene of so much that is glorious and tragic.

II.

There is a couplet of Stevenson’s which haunts me, ‘There fell a war in a woody place — in a land beyond the sea.’ I have just come back from spending three wonderful dream days in that woody place. It lies with the open, bosky country of Verdun on its immediate right, and the chalk downs of Champagne upon its left. If one could imagine the lines being taken right through our New Forest or the American Adirondacks it would give some idea of the terrain, save that it is a very undulating country of abrupt hills and dales. It is this peculiarity which has made the war on this front different to any other, more picturesque and more secret. In front the fighting lines are half in the clay soil, half behind the shelter of fallen trunks. Between the two the main bulk of the soldiers live like animals of the woodlands, burrowing on the hillsides and among the roots of the trees. It is a war by itself, and a very wonderful one to see. At three different points I have visited the front in this broad region, wandering from the lines of one army corps to that of another. In all three I found the same conditions, and in all three I found also the same pleasing fact which I had discovered at Soissons, that the fire of the French was at least five, and very often ten shots to one of the Boche. It used not to be so. The Germans used to scrupulously return shot for shot. But whether they have moved their guns to the neighbouring Verdun, or whether, as is more likely, all the munitions are going there, it is certain that they were very outclassed upon the three days (June 10, 11, 12) which I allude to. There were signs that for some reason their spirits were at a low ebb. On the evening before our arrival the French had massed all their bands at the front, and, in honour of the Russian victory, had played the Marseillaise and the Russian National hymn, winding up with general shoutings and objurgations calculated to annoy. Failing to stir up the Boche, they had ended by a salute from a hundred shotted guns. After trailing their coats up and down the line they had finally to give up the attempt to draw the enemy. Want of food may possibly have caused a decline in the German spirit. There is some reason to believe that they feed up their fighting men at the places like Verdun or Hooge, where they need all their energy, at the expense of the men who are on the defensive. If so, we may find it out when we attack. The French officers assured me that the prisoners and deserters made bitter complaints of their scale of rations. And yet it is hard to believe that the fine efforts of our enemy at Verdun are the work of half-starved men.

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To return to my personal impressions, it was at Chalons that we left the Paris train — a town which was just touched by the most forward ripple of the first great German floodtide. A drive of some twenty miles took us to St. Menehould, and another ten brought us to the front in the sector of Divisional-General H. A fine soldier this, and heaven help Germany if he and his division get within its borders, for he is, as one can see at a glance, a man of iron who has been goaded to fierceness by all that his beloved country has endured. He is a man of middle size, swarthy, hawk-like, very abrupt in his movements, with two steel grey eyes, which are the most searching that mine have ever met. His hospitality and courtesy to us were beyond all bounds, but there is another side to him, and it is one which it is wiser not to provoke. In person he took us to his lines, passing through the usual shot-torn villages behind them. Where the road dips down into the great forest there is one particular spot which is visible to the German artillery observers. The General mentioned it at the time, but his remark seemed to have no personal interest. We understood it better on our return in the evening.

Now we found ourselves in the depths of the woods, primeval woods of oak and beech in the deep clay soil that the great oak loves. There had been rain and the forest paths were ankle deep in mire. Everywhere, to right and left, soldiers’ faces, hard and rough from a year of open air, gazed up at us from their burrows in the ground. Presently an alert, blue-clad figure stood in the path to greet us. It was the Colonel of the sector. He was ridiculously like Cyrano de Bergerac as depicted by the late M. Coquelin, save that his nose was of more moderate proportion. The ruddy colouring, the bristling feline full-ended moustache, the solidity of pose, the backward tilt of the head, the general suggestion of the bantam cock, were all there facing us as he stood amid the leaves in the sunlight. Gauntlets and a long rapier —

nothing else was wanting. Something had amused Cyrano. His moustache quivered with suppressed mirth, and his blue eyes were demurely gleaming. Then the joke came out. He had spotted a German working party, his guns had concentrated on it, and afterwards he had seen the stretchers go forward. A grim joke, it may seem. But the French see this war from a different angle to us. If we had the Boche sitting on our heads for two years, and were not yet quite sure whether we could ever get him off again, we should get Cyrano’s point of view. Those of us who have had our folk murdered by Zeppelins or tortured in German prisons have probably got it already.

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We passed in a little procession among the French soldiers, and viewed their multifarious arrangements. For them we were a little break in a monotonous life, and they formed up in lines as we passed. My own British uniform and the civilian dresses of my two companions interested them. As the General passed these groups, who formed themselves up in perhaps a more familiar manner than would have been usual in the British service, he glanced kindly at them with those singular eyes of his, and once or twice addressed them as ‘Mes enfants.’ One might conceive that all was ‘go as you please’ among the French. So it is as long as you go in the right way. When you stray from it you know it. As we passed a group of men standing on a low ridge which overlooked us there was a sudden stop. I gazed round. The General’s face was steel and cement. The eyes were cold and yet fiery, sunlight upon icicles. Something had happened. Cyrano had sprung to his side. His reddish moustache had shot forward beyond his nose, and it bristled out like that of an angry cat. Both were looking up at the group above us. One wretched man detached himself from his comrades and sidled down the slope. No skipper and mate of a Yankee blood boat could have looked more ferociously at a mutineer. And yet it was all over some minor breach of discipline which was summarily disposed of by two days of confinement. Then in an instant the faces relaxed, there was a general buzz of relief and we were back at ‘Mes enfants’ again. But don’t make any mistake as to discipline in the French army.

Trenches are trenches, and the main specialty of these in the Argonne is that they are nearer to the enemy. In fact there are places where they interlock, and where the advanced posts lie cheek by jowl with a good steel plate to cover both cheek and jowl. We were brought to a sap-head where the Germans were at the other side of a narrow forest road. Had I leaned forward with extended hand and a Boche done the same we could have touched. I looked across, but saw only a tangle of wire and sticks. Even whispering was not permitted in these forward posts.

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When we emerged from these hushed places of danger Cyrano took us all to his dug-out, which was a tasty little cottage carved from the side of a hill and faced with logs. He did the honours of the humble cabin with the air of a seigneur in his château. There was little furniture, but from some broken mansion he had extracted an iron fire-back, which adorned his grate. It was a fine, mediaeval bit of work, with Venus, in her traditional costume, in the centre of it. It seemed the last touch in the picture of the gallant, virile Cyrano. I only met him this once, nor shall I ever see him again, yet he stands a thing complete within my memory. Even now as I write these lines he walks the leafy paths of the Argonne, his fierce eyes ever searching for the Boche workers, his red moustache bristling over their annihilation. He seems a figure out of the past of France.

That night we dined with yet another type of the French soldier, General A., who commands the corps of which my friend has one division. Each of these French generals has a striking individuality of his own which I wish I could fix upon paper. Their only common point is that each seems to be a rare good soldier. The corps general is Athos with a touch of d’Artagnan. He is well over six feet high, bluff, jovial, with huge, up-curling moustache, and a voice that would rally a regiment. It is a grand figure which should have been done by Van Dyck with lace collar, hand on sword, and arm akimbo. Jovial and laughing was he, but a stern and hard soldier was lurking behind the smiles. His name may appear in history, and so may Humbert’s, who rules all the army of which the other’s corps is a unit. Humbert is a Lord Robert’s figure, small, wiry, quick-stepping, all steel and elastic, with a short, sharp upturned moustache, which one could imagine as crackling with electricity in moments of excitement like a cat’s fur. What he does or says is quick, abrupt, and to the point. He fires his remarks like pistol shots at this man or that. Once to my horror he fixed me with his hard little eyes and demanded ‘Sherlock Holmes, est ce qu’il est un soldat dans l’armée Anglaise?’ The whole table waited in an awful hush. ‘Mais, mon general,’ I stammered, ‘il est trop vieux pour service.’ There was general laughter, and I felt that I had scrambled out of an awkward place.

And talking of awkward places, I had forgotten about that spot upon the road whence the Boche observer could see our motor-cars. He had actually laid a gun upon it, the rascal, and waited all the long day for our return. No sooner did we appear upon the slope than a shrapnel shell burst above us, but somewhat behind me, as well as to the left. Had it been straight the second car would have got it, and there might have been a vacancy in one of the chief editorial chairs in London. The General shouted to the driver to speed up, and we were soon safe from the German gunners. One gets perfectly immune to noises in these scenes, for the guns which surround you make louder crashes than any shell which bursts about you. It is only when you actually see the cloud over you that your thoughts come back to yourself, and that you realise that in this wonderful drama you may be a useless super, but none the less you are on the stage and not in the stalls.

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Next morning we were down in the front trenches again at another portion of the line. Far away on our right, from a spot named the Observatory, we could see the extreme left of the Verdun position and shells bursting on the Fille Morte. To the north of us was a broad expanse of sunny France, nestling villages, scattered châteaux, rustic churches, and all as inaccessible as if it were the moon. It is a terrible thing this German bar — a thing unthinkable to Britons. To stand on the edge of Yorkshire and look into Lancashire feeling that it is in other hands, that our fellow-countrymen are suffering there and waiting, waiting, for help, and that we cannot, after two years, come a yard nearer to them — would it not break our hearts? Can I wonder that there is no smile upon the grim faces of these Frenchmen! But when the bar is broken, when the line sweeps forward, as most surely it will, when French bayonets gleam on yonder uplands and French flags break from those village spires — ah, what a day that will be! Men will die that day from the pure, delirious joy of it. We cannot think what it means to France, and the less so because she stands so nobly patient waiting for her hour.

Yet another type of French general takes us round this morning! He, too, is a man apart, an unforgettable man. Conceive a man with a large broad good-humoured face, and two placid, dark seal’s eyes which gaze gently into yours. He is young and has pink cheeks and a soft voice. Such is one of the most redoubtable fighters of France, this General of Division D. His former staff officers told me something of the man. He is a philosopher, a fatalist, impervious to fear, a dreamer of distant dreams amid the most furious bombardment. The weight of the French assault upon the terrible labyrinth fell at one time upon the brigade which he then commanded. He led them day after day gathering up Germans with the detached air of the man of science who is hunting for specimens. In whatever shell-hole he might chance to lunch he had his cloth spread and decorated with wild flowers plucked from the edge. If fate be kind to him he will go far. Apart from his valour he is admitted to be one of the most scientific soldiers of France.

From the Observatory we saw the destruction of a German trench. There had been signs of work upon it, so it was decided to close it down. It was a very visible brown streak a thousand yards away. The word was passed back to the '75's' in the rear. There was a 'tir rapide' over our heads. My word, the man who stands fast under a 'tir rapide,' be he Boche, French or British, is a man of mettle! The mere passage of the shells was awe-inspiring, at first like the screaming of a wintry wind, and then thickening into the howling of a pack of wolves. The trench was a line of terrific explosions. Then the dust settled down and all was still. Where were the ants who had made the nest? Were they buried beneath it? Or had they got from under? No one could say.

There was one little gun which fascinated me, and I stood for some time watching it. Its three gunners, enormous helmeted men, evidently loved it, and touched it with a swift but tender touch in every movement. When it was fired it ran up an inclined plane to take off the recoil, rushing up and then turning and rattling down again upon the gunners who were used to its ways. The first time it did it, I was standing behind it, and I don't know which moved quickest — the gun or I.

French officers above a certain rank develop and show their own individuality. In the lower grades the conditions of service enforce a certain uniformity. The British officer is a British gentleman first, and an officer afterwards. The Frenchman is an officer first, though none the less the gentleman stands behind it. One very strange type we met, however, in these Argonne Woods. He was a French-Canadian who had been a French soldier, had founded a homestead in far Alberta, and had now come back of his own will, though a naturalised Briton, to the old flag. He spoke English of a kind, the quality and quantity being equally extraordinary. It poured from him and was, so far as it was intelligible, of the woolly Western variety. His views on the Germans were the most emphatic we had met. ‘These Godam sons of’ — well, let us say ‘Canines!’ he would shriek, shaking his fist at the woods to the north of him. A good man was our compatriot, for he had a very recent Legion of Honour pinned upon his breast. He had been put with a few men on Hill 285, a sort of volcano stuffed with mines, and was told to telephone when he needed relief. He refused to telephone and remained there for three weeks. ‘We sit like a rabbit in his hall,’ he explained. He had only one grievance. There were many wild boars in the forest, but the infantry were too busy to get them. ‘The Godam Artillaree he get the wild pig!’ Out of his pocket he pulled a picture of a frame-house with snow round it, and a lady with two children on the stoop. It was his homestead at Trochu, seventy miles north of Calgary.

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It was the evening of the third day that we turned our faces to Paris once more. It was my last view of the French. The roar of their guns went far with me upon my way. Soldiers of France, farewell! In your own phrase I salute you! Many have seen you who had more knowledge by which to judge your manifold virtues, many also who had more skill to draw you as you are, but never one, I am sure, who admired you more than I. Great was the French soldier under Louis the Sun-King, great too under Napoleon, but never was he greater than to-day.

And so it is back to England and to home. I feel sobered and solemn from all that I have seen. It is a blind vision which does not see more than the men and the guns, which does not catch something of the terrific spiritual conflict which is at the heart of it.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
— He is trampling out the vineyard where the grapes of wrath are stored.

We have found no inspired singer yet, like Julia Howe, to voice the divine meaning of it all — that meaning which is more than numbers or guns upon the day of battle. But who can see the adult manhood of Europe standing in a double line, waiting for a signal to throw themselves upon each other, without knowing that he has looked upon the most terrific of all the dealings between the creature below and that great force above, which works so strangely towards some distant but glorious end?

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

A GLIMPSE OF THE ARMY

IF you want to enjoy God’s fresh air, and the heave and swing of the cantering horse, work in as enteric ward for a month, and then have a week’s leave of absence amid the vast clear distances of the veldt, with the exhilarating atmosphere of the camp around you, and the intense living interest of war to fill your mind.

Such a holiday was mine recently, and ere the impression becomes blurred in my mind I would set my experience down, on paper — though too near me, perhaps, to get the true focus of all that I have seen.

It was at Karee Siding that we overtook the army — or the centre column thereof. There over a great olive-green plain, heaving up into fantastic hills, there lay a portion of the greatest host which has ever marched under the British colours. These are the Guards’ Brigade and Stephenson’s Brigade (Welsh, Yorks, Essex, and Warwicks), the whole making the 11th Division. To think that we should have lived to see an English army with eleven, divisions! From Kimberley to Elandslaagte, and from Karee to Burghersdorp, well over two hundred thousand sabres and bayonets were ready for the word to advance.

How we have chafed during these five weeks — the more so at the thought of how you must have chafed at home! But now we are well-horsed and well-fed and high of heart, and our little man is off again. There will be sore hearts if we atop again on this side of Pretoria.

Walk among the fierce brown, infantry, see the splendid Colonials, mark the keenness of the cavalry, note the lines of the guns and the hard, savage faces of the men who will handle them. Who can stop this army on the open veldt, now that it has weeded out some of its incompetence and had time to learn in war a few of those lessons which should have been taught in peace? It makes one’s heart bleed to think of the deaths and the mutilations and (worse than either) the humiliations which have come from our rotten military system, which has devoted years to teaching men to walk in step, and hours to teaching them to use their weapons.

Stand in the pass at Karee, and look north in the clear, fresh morning air. Before you lies a great plain, dull green, with white farmhouses scattered here and there. One great donga slashes it across. Distant hills bound it on all sides, and at the base of those in front, dimly seen, are a line of houses and a steeple. This is Brandfort, ten miles off, and we are advancing to attack it.

The troops are moving forward, line after line of red face and khaki, with rumbling columns of guns. Two men sit their horses beside us on a knoll, and stare with their glasses at the distant houses. Gallant figures both of them: the one spruce, *débonnaire*, well-groomed, with laughing eyes and upward-curved moustache, a suggestion of schoolboy mischief about his handsome face; the other, grim, fierce, all nose and eyebrow, white scales of sun-dried skin hanging from his brick-red face. The first is Pole-Carew, General of Division; the second is Brigadier Stephenson. We are finding our men, and these are among them.

Here is another man worth noting. You could not help noting him if you tried. A burly, broad-shouldered man, with full, square, black beard over his chest, his arm in a sling, his bearing a mediaeval knight-errant. It is Crabbe, of the Grenadier Guards. He reins his horse for an instant while his Guardsmen stream past him.

"I've had my share — four bullets already. Hope I won't get another today."

"You should be in hospital."

"Ah, there I must venture to disagree with you." He rides on with his men.

Look at the young officers of the Guards, the dandies of Mayfair. No carpet soldiers, these, but men who have spent six months upon, the veldt, and fought from Belmont to Bloemfontein. Their walk is dainty, their puttees are well-rolled — there is. still the suggestion of the West End.

If you look with your glasses on the left you may see movement on the farthest sky-line. That is Hutton's Mounted Infantry, some thousands of them, to turn the flank of any resistance. As far as you can see to the right is Tucker's Division (7th). Beyond that again are Ian Hamilton's Mounted Infantry and French's Cavalry. The whole front is a good thirty miles, and 35,000 men go to the making of it.

Now we advance over the great plain, the infantry in extended order, a single company covering half a mile. Look at the scouts and the flankers — we should not have advanced like that six months ago. It is not our additional numbers so much as our new warcraft which makes us irresistible. The big donga is only two thousand yards off now, so we halt and have a good look at it. Guns are unlimbered — just as well to be ready. Pole-Carew rides up like a schoolboy on a holiday.

"Who's seen old Tucker?" says he, with his glass to his eyes: He has sent a message to the scouts. "There, now, look at that aide of mine. He has galloped along the donga to see if any Boers are in it. What right had he to do that? When I ask him he will say that he thought I was there... Halloa, you, sir, why don't you come back straight?"

"I did, sir."

"You didn't. You rode along that donga."

"I thought you were there, sir."

"Don't add lying to your other vices."

The aide came grinning back. "I was fired at, but I dare not tell the old man."

Rap! Rap! Rap! Rifles in front. "Who said 'rats'?" Everyone pricks up their ears. Is it the transient sniper or the first shot of a battle? The shots come from the farmhouse yonder. The 83rd Field Battery begins to fidget about its guns. The officer walks up and down and stares at the farmhouse. From either side two men pull out lines of string and give long, monotonous cries. They are the range-finders. A gunner on the limber is deep in a sixpenny magazine, absorbed, his chin on his hand.

"Our scouts are past the house," says an officer.

"That's all right," says the major.

The battery limbers up, and the whole force advances to the farmhouse. Off-saddle and a halt for luncheon.

Halloa! Here are new and sinister developments. A Tommy drives a smart buggy and pair, out of the yard, looted for the use of the army. The farm is prize of war, for have they not fired at our troops? They could not help the firing, poor souls, but still this sniping must be discouraged. We are taking off our gloves at last over this war. But the details are not pretty.

A frightened girl runs out.

"Is it right that they kill the fowls?"

Alas! the question is hardly worth debating, for the fowls are dead. Erect and indignant, the girl drives in her three young turkeys. Men stare at her curiously, but she and her birds, are not moltested.

Here, is something worse. A fat white pig all smothered in blood runs past. A soldier meets it, his bayonet at the charge. He lunges and lunges again, and the pig screams horribly. I had rather see a man killed. Some are up in the loft throwing down the forage. Others root up the vegetables. One drinks milk out of a strange vessel, amid the laughter of his comrades. It is a grotesque and mediaeval scene.

The General rides up, but he has no consolation for the women. “The farm, has brought it upon itself.” He rides away again.

A parson rides up. “I can’t imagine why they don’t burn it,” says he.

The little Dutch boy stares with large, wondering grey eyes. He will tell all this to his, grandchildren when we are in our graves.

“War is a terrible thing,” says the mother, in Dutch. The Tommies, with curious eyes, cluster round the doors and windows, staring in at the family. There is no individual rudeness.

One Kaffir enters the room. “A Kaffir!” cried the girl, with blazing eyes.

“Yes, a Kaffir,” said he, defiantly — but he left.

“They won’t burn the house, will they?” cried the mother.

“No, no,” we answered; “they will not burn the house.”

We advance again after lunch, the houses and steeple much nearer. Boom! Boom! Boom! Cannon at last!

But it is far away, over at Tucker’s side. There are little white puffs on the distant green hills. Those are shells bursting. If you look through your glass you will see — eight miles off — a British battery in action. Sometimes a cloud of dust rises over it. That is a Boer shell which has knocked up the dust. No Boers can be seen from here.

Boom! Boom! Boom! It becomes monotonous. “Old Tucker is getting it hot!” Bother old Tucker, let us push on to Brandfort.

On again over the great plain, the firing dying away on the right. We have had a gun knocked off its wheels and twelve men hit over there. But now Hutton’s turning movement is complete, and they close in on the left of Brandfort. A pom-pom quacks like some horrid bird among the hills. Our horse artillery are banging away. White spurts of shrapnel rise along the ridge. The leading infantry bend their backs and quicken their pace. We gallop to the front, but the resistance has collapsed. The mounted men are riding forward and the guns are silent. Long, sunlit hills stretch peacefully before us.

I ride through the infantry again. “The —— blister on my toe has bust.” “This —— water-bottle!” Every second man has a pipe between his parched lips.

The town is to the right, and two miles of plain intervene. On the plain a horseman is rounding up some mares and foals. I recognise him as I pass — a well-known figure in society. A correspondent suggests that we ride to the town and chance it. “Our men are sure to be there.” No sign of them across the plain, but we will try. He outrides me, but courteously waits, and we enter the town together. Yes, it’s all right; there’s a Rimington Scout in the main street — a group of them, in fact.

A young; Boer, new caught, stands among the horsemen. He is discomposed — not much. A strong, rather coarse, face; well-dressed; might appear, as he stands, an an English hunting-field as a young yeoman farmer.

“Comes of being fond of the ladies,” said the Australian sergeant.

“Wanted to get her out of the town,” said the Boer.

Another was brought up. “I’d have got off in a minute,” says he.

“You’d have got off as it was if you had the pluck of a louse,” says his captor. The conversation languished after that.

In came the staff, galloping grandly. The town is ours.

A red-headed American Irishman is taken on the kopje. “What the —— is that to you?” he says to every question. He is haled away to gaol — a foul-mouthed blackguard.

We find the landlady of our small hotel in tears — her husband in gaol, because a rifle has been found. We try to get him out, and succeed. He charges us 4s for half a bottle of beer, and we wonder whether we cannot get him back into gaol again.

“The house is not my own. I find great, burly men everywhere,” he cries, with tears in his eyes.

His bar is fitted with pornographic pictures to amuse our simple farmer friends — not the first or the second sign which I have seen that pastoral life and a Puritan creed do not mean a high public morality.

Sit on the stoep and smoke in the moonlight.

There comes a drunken inhabitant down the main street. A dingy Tommy stands on guard in front.

“Halt! Who goes there?”

“A friend.”

“Give the countersign.”

“I’m a free-born Englishman!”

“Give the countersign!”

“I’m a freeborn—”

With a rattle the sentry’s rifle came to his shoulder, and the moon glinted of his bayonet.

“Hi, stop !” cries a senior correspondent. “ You Juggins, you’ll be shot! Don’t fire, sentry!”

Tommy raised his rifle reluctantly and advanced to the man.

“What shall I do with him, sir?” he asked the correspondent.

“Oh, what you like!” He vanished out of history.

I talk politics with Free Staters. The best opening is to begin, in an enquiring tone, “Why did you people declare war upon us?” They have got into such an injured-innocence state that it comes quite as a shock to them when they are reminded that they were the attackers. By this Socratic method one attains some interesting results. It is evident that they all thought they could win easily, and that they are very bitter now against the Transvaal. They are mortally sick of the war; but, for that matter, so are the British officers. It has seemed to me sometimes that it would be more judicious, and even more honourable, if some of the latter were less open about the extent to which they are “fed-up.” It cannot be inspiriting for their men. At the same time there would be a mutiny in the Army if any conditions short of absolute surrender were accepted-and in spite of their talk, if a free pass were given to-day, I am convinced that very few officers would return until the job was done.

Our railway engineers are great. The train was in Brandfort next day, in spite of broken bridges, smashed culverts, twisted metals, every sort of wrecking. So now we are ready for another twenty miles Pretoria-wards. The Vet River is our goal this time, and off we go with the early morning.

Another great green plain, with dotted farms and the huge khaki column slowly spreading across it. The day was hot, and ten miles out the Guards had about enough. Stragglers lay thick among the grass, but the companies kept their double line formation, and plodded steadily along. Ten miles sounds very little, but try it in the dust of a column on a hot day, with a rifle over your shoulder, a hundred rounds of ammunition, a blanket, a canteen, an empty water-bottle, and a dry tongue.

A grey-bearded padre limped bravely beside his men.

“No, no,” says he, when offered a horse. “I must not spoil my record.”

The men are silent on the march; no band, no singing. Grim and sullen, the column flows across the veldt. Officers and men are short in their temper?

“Why don’t you,” etc., etc., bleats a subaltern.

“Because I never can hear what you say,” says the corporal.

They halt for a mid-day rest, and it seems to me, as I move among them, that there is too much nagging on the part of officers. We have paid too much attention to the German military methods. Our true model should have been the American, for it is what was evolved by the Anglo-Celtic race in the greatest experience of war which the Anglo-Celtic race has ever had.

On we go again over the great plain. Is there anything waiting for us down yonder where the low kopjes lie? The Boers have always held rivers. They held the Modder. They held the Tugela. Will they hold the Vet? Halloa, what’s this?

A startled man in a nightcap on a dapple-grey horse. He gesticulates. “Fifty of them — hot corner — captain shot — lost my helmet.” We catch bits of his talk. But what’s that on the dapple-grey’s side? The horse is shot through the body. He grazes quietly, with black streaks running down the reeking hair.

“A West Australian, sir. They shot turble bad, for we were within fifty yards before they loosed off.”

“Which kopje?”

“That one over yonder.”

We gallop forward, and pass through the open ranks of the Guards’ skirmishers. Behind us the two huge naval guns are coming majestically up, drawn by their thirty oxen, like great hock-bottles on wheels. In front a battery has unlimbered. We ride up to the side of it. Away in front lies a small, slate-roofed farm, beside the kopje. The Mounted Infantry have coalesced into one body, and are moving towards us. “Here’s the circus. There is going to be a battle,” was an infantry phrase in the American war. Our circus was coming in, and perhaps the other would follow.

The battery (84th R.F.A.) settles down to its work.

Bang! I saw the shell burst on a hillside far away. “3500,” says somebody. Bang! “3250,” says the voice. Bang! “3300.” A puff shoots up from the distant grey roof as if their chimney was on fire, “Got him that time !”

The game seems to us rather one-sided, but who is that shooting in the distance?

“Wheeeeee” — what a hungry whine, and then a dull, muffled “Ooof!” Up goes half a cartload of earth about a hundred yards ahead of the battery, The gunners take as much notice as if it were a potato.

“Wheeeeeee — oof!” Fifty yards in front this time.

“Bang! Bang!” go the crisp English guns.

“Wheeeeeee — oof!” fifty yards behind the battery. They’ll get it next time as sure as fate. Gunners go on unconcernedly.

“Wheeeeee — oof!” Right between the guns, by George! Two guns invisible for the dust. Good heavens, how many of our gunners are left? Dust settles, and they are all bending and straining and pulling the same as ever.

Another shell, and another, and then a variety, for there comes a shell which breaks high up in the air — wheeeeee — bang — with a musical resonant note, like the snapping, of a huge banjo-string, and a quarter of an acre of ground spurted into little dustclouds under the shrapnel. The gunners take no interest in it. Percussion or shrapnel, fire what you will, you must knock the gun off its wheels or the man off his pins before you settle the R.F.A. But every shell is bursting true, and it is mere luck that half the battery are not down. Once only did I see a man throw back his head a few inches as a shell burst before him. The others might have been parts of an automatic machine. But the officer decided to shift the guns — and they are shifted. They trot away for half a mile to the right, and come into action again. Good old 84th Battery! Nothing the matter with it.

The lonely hero is the man to be admired. It is easy to be collectively brave. A. man with any sense of proportion feels himself to be such a mite in the presence of the making of history that his own individual welfare seems for the moment too insignificant to think of. The unit is lost in the mass. But now we find ourselves alone on the plain with the battery away to the right. The nerves of the novice are strung up by the sound of the shells, but there is something of exhilaration in the feeling.

There is a fence about two hundred yards off, and to this we tether our horses, and we walk up and down, trying with our glasses to spot where the Boer guns are. We have suspicions, but nothing more. Our gunners may know, but we do not feel confident about it. Surely the stealthy, lurking gun is worth six guns which stand bravely forth in the open. These farmers have taught our riflemen their business, and they bid fair to alter the artillery systems of the world as well. Our guns and theirs are like a fight between a blind man and one who can see.

An artillery colonel is wandering loose, and we talk. He has no job of his own so he comes, like the coachman on a holiday, to watch some other man's guns at work. A shell falls some distance short of us.

"The next one," says the colonel, will go over our heads. Come and stand over here." I do so, with many mental reservations. Wheeeeeeee —

"Here it comes!" says the colonel. "Here I go!" think I. It burst on our level, but forty yards to the right. I secure a piece as a souvenir.

"Shall we wait for another?" I began to be sorry that I met the colonel.

But a new sensation breaks upon us. Looking back, we see that the two monster naval guns are coming into action not fifty yards off our tethered horses, which stand in a dead line before their huge muzzles. We only just got them clear in time. Bang! The father of all the bangs this time, and a pillar of white smoke with a black heart to it on the farther hill. I can see some riders, like ants, going across it — Boers on the trek. Our men take the huge brass cartridge-case out of the gun.

"Can I have that?"

"Certainly," says the lieutenant. I tie it on to my saddle, and feel apologetic towards my long-suffering horse. The great gun roars and roars, and the malignant spouts of smoke rise on the farthest hill.

A line of infantry in very open order comes past the great guns, and I advance a little way with them. They are Scots Guards. The first line goes forward, the second is halted and lying down.

"That's right! Show where you are!" cries the second line, derisively. I seem to have missed the point, but the young officer in the first line is very angry.

"Hold your tongues!" he shouts, with his red face looking over his shoulder. "Too many orders. No one gives orders but me." His men lie down. The sun is sinking low, and it is evident that the contemplated infantry assault would not come off. One of the great naval shells passes high over our heads. It is the sound of a distant train in a tunnel.

A man canters past with a stretcher over his shoulder. His bay horse lollops along, but the stretcher makes him look very top-heavy. He passes the guns and the infantry, and rides on along the edge of a maize field. He is half a mile out now, heading for the kopje. Every instant I expect to see him drop from his horse. Then he vanishes in a dip of the ground.

After a time the stretcher appears again. This time two men are carrying it, and the horseman rides beside. I have bandages in my pocket, so I ride forward also.

"Has a surgeon seen him?"

"No, sir." They lay the man down. There is a handkerchief over his face.

"Where is it?"

"His stomach and his arm." Pull up his shirt, and there is the Mauser bullet lying obvious, under the skin. It has gone round instead of penetrating. A slit with a penknife would extract it, but that had better be left for chloroform and the field hospital. Nice, clean wound in the arm.

"You will do very well. What is your name?"

"Private Smith, sir. New Zealander." I mention my name and the Langman Hospital at Bloemfontein.

"I have read your books," says he, and is carried onwards.

There has been a lull in the firing, and the sun is very low. Then after a long interval comes a last Boer shell. It is an obvious insult, aimed at nothing, a derisive good-night and good-bye. The two naval guns put up their long necks, and both roared together. It was the last word of the Empire — the mighty angry voice calling over the veldt. The red rim had sunk, and all was purple and crimson, with the white moon high, in the west. What had happened? Who had won? Were other columns engaged? No one knew anything or seemed to care. But late at night, as I lay under the stars, I saw far on the left front signal flashes from the river, and I knew that Hutton was there.

So it proved, for in the morning it was over the camp in an instant that the enemy had gone. But the troops were early afoot. Long before dawn came the weird, muffled tapping of the drums and the crackling of sticks as the camp-kettles were heated for breakfast. Then with the first light we saw a strange sight. A monstrous blister was rising slowly from the veldt. It was the balloon being inflated — our answer to the lurking guns. We would throw away no chances now, but play every card in our hand — another lesson which the war has driven into our proud hearts. We climbed the kopjes where the enemy had crouched, and saw the litter of empty Mauser cases and the sangars so cunningly built. Among the stones lay a packet of the venomous-looking green cartridges still unfired. They talk of poison, but I doubt it. Verdigris would be an antiseptic rather than a poison in a wound. It is more likely that it is some decomposition of the wax in which the bullets are dipped. Brother Boer is not a bushman, after all. He is a tough, stubborn fighter, who plays a close game, but does not cheat.

We say good-bye to the army, for our duty lies beyond us, and theirs in front. For them the bullets, for us the microbes, and both for the honour of the flag. Scattered trails of waggons, ambulance carts, private buggies, impediments of a11 kinds, radiate out from the army. It is a bad drift, and it will be nightfall before they are all over. We pass the last of them, and it seems strange to emerge from that great concourse and see the twenty miles of broad, lonely plain which lies between us and Brandfort. We shall look rather foolish if any Boer horsemen are hanging about the skirts of the army.

We passed the battlefield of last night, and stopped to examine the holes made by the shells. Three had fallen within ten yards, but the ant-heaps round had not been struck, showing how harmless the most severe shell fire must be to prostrate infantry. From the rifling marks in the clay the shells were large ones — forty-pounders, in all probability. In a little heap lay the complete kit of a guardsman — his canteen, waterbottle, cup, even his puttees. He had stripped for action, with a vengeance. Poor devil, how uncomfortable he must be today!

A Kaffir on horseback is rounding up horses on the plain. He gallops towards us — a picturesque, black figure on his shaggy Basuto mount. He waves his hand excitedly towards the east. “Englishman there — on veldt — hurt — Dutchman shoot him.” He delivers his message clearly enough.

“Is he alive?” He nods.

“When did you see him?” He points to the sun and then farther east. About two hours ago apparently.

“Can you take us there?” We buy him for two shillings, and all canter off together.

Our road is through maize fields, and then out on to the veldt. By jove, what’s that? There *is* a single black motionless figure in the middle of that clearing. We gallop up and spring from our horses. A short, muscular, dark man is lying there with a yellow, waxen face, and a blood clot over his mouth. A handsome man, black-haired, black-moustached, his expression serene. No.410 New South Wales Mounted Infantry — shot, overlooked, and abandoned. There are evident signs that he was not alive when the Kaffir saw him. Rifle and horse are gone. His watch lies in front of him, dial upwards, run down at one in the morning. Poor chap, he had counted the hours until he could see them no longer. We examine him for injuries. Obviously he had bled to death. There is a horrible wound in his stomach. His arm is shot through. Beside him lies his water-bottle — a little water still in it, so he was not tortured by thirst. And here is a singular point. On the water-bottle is balanced a red chess pawn. Has he died playing with it? It looks like it. Where are the other chessmen? We find them in a haversack out of his reach. A singular trooper this, who carries chessmen on a campaign. Or is it loot from a farmhouse? I shrewdly suspect it.

We collect the poor little effects of No. 410 — a bandolier, a stylographic pen, a silk handkerchief, a clasp-knife, a Waterbury watch, two pounds six-and-sixpence in a frayed purse. Then we lift him, our hands sticky with his Wood, and get him over my saddle — horrible to see how the flies swarm instantly on to the saddle-flaps. His head hangs down on one side and his heels on the other. We lead the horse, and when from time to time he gives a horrid dive we clutch at his ankles. Thank Heaven, he never fell. It is two miles to the road, and there we lay our burden under a telegraph post. A convoy is coming up, and we can ask them to give him a decent burial. No.410 holds one rigid arm and clenched fist in the air. We lower it, but up it springs, menacing, aggressive. I put his mantle over him; but still, as we look back, we see the projection of that raised arm. So he met his end — somebody’s boy. Fair fight, open air, and a great cause — I know no better death.

A long, long ride on tired horses over an endless plain. Here and there mounted Kaffirs circle and swoop. I have an idea, that a few mounted police might be well-employed in our rear. How do we know what these Kaffirs may do among lonely farms held by women and children? Very certain I am that it is not their own horses which they are rounding up so eagerly.

Ten miles have passed, and we leave the track to watch our horses at the dam. A black mare hard-by is rolling and kicking. Curious, that she should be so playful. We look again, and she lies very quiet. One more has gone to poison the air of the Veldt. We sit by the dam and smoke. Down the track there comes a colonial corps of cavalry — a famous corps, as we see when our glasses show us the colour of the cockades. Good heavens, will we never have sense beaten into us? How many disasters and humiliations must we endure before we learn how to soldier? The regiment passes without a vanguard, without scouts, without flankers in an enemy's country intersected by dongas. Oh, for a Napoleon who might meet such a regiment, tear the epaulettes of the colonel from his shoulders, Stellenbosch him instantly without appeal or argument. Only such a man with such powers can ever thoroughly reorganise our army.

Another six miles over the great plain. Here is a small convoy, with an escort of militia, only a mile or two out from Brandfort. They are heading wrong, so we set them right. The captain in charge is excited.

"There are Boers on that hill!" The hill is only half a mile or so away on our left; so we the object interesting. "Kaffirs!" we suggest.

"No, no, mounted men with bandoliers and rifles. Why, there they are now."

We see moving figures, but again, suggest Kaffirs. It ends by our both departing, unconvinced. We thought the young officer jumpy over his first convoy, but we owe him an apology, for next morning we learned that the Mounted Infantry had been out all night chasing the very men whom we had seen. It is likely that the accidental presence of the convoy saved us from a somewhat longer journey than we had intended. A day at Brandfort, a night in an open truck, and we were back at the Café Entérique, Boulevard des Microbes, which is our town address.

THE END

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

NOTE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the historian of the Boer War as well as the creator of *Sherlock Holmes,* the skilled student of military operations as well as the ingenious deviser of plots; he is no less an intense patriot than a clear and logical thinker.

Writing early in 1913 to call to the attention of his fellow- countrymen the warning so openly given them by General von Bernhardi in his *Germany And The Next War*, Sir Arthur took occasion to analyze the German general's "case" against England and to answer his contentions in the light of history and reason. His summing up of German motives and German plans is particularly valuable to Americans in the light of after events, and incidentally the gentle raillery with which he punctures some of Bernhardi's statements is a delight to every one who has been entertained by Brigadier Gerard. His novel plan for national defence is of peculiar interest to every American who has ever crossed the English Channel, while his advice to his Irish fellow-countrymen seems prophetic.

And it is impressive to find a member of the Anglo-German Society, who has never been a serious believer in the so-called German menace, feeling so deeply the possibilities of the "philosophy" of Bernhardi as to write, "Every one of his propositions I dispute. But that is all beside the question. We have not to do with his argument, but with its results. These results are that he, a man whose opinion is of weight and a member of the ruling class in Germany, tells us frankly that Germany will attack us the moment she sees a favorable opportunity. I repeat that we should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning."

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

I am a member of the Anglo-German Society for the improvement of the relations between the two countries, and I have never seriously believed in the German menace. Frequently I have found myself alone in a company of educated Englishmen in my opinion that it was non-existent — or at worst greatly exaggerated.

This conclusion was formed upon two grounds. The first was, that I knew it to be impossible that we could attack Germany save in the face of monstrous provocation. By the conditions of our government, even if those in high places desired to do such a thing, it was utterly impracticable, for a foreign war could not be successfully carried on by Great Britain unless the overwhelming majority of the people approved of it. Our foreign, like our home, politics are governed by the vote of the proletariat. It would be impossible to wage an aggressive war against any Power if the public were not convinced of its justice and necessity. For this reason we could not attack Germany.

On the other hand, it seemed to be equally unthinkable that Germany should attack us. One fails to see what she could possibly hope to gain by such a proceeding. She had enemies already upon her eastern and western frontiers, and it was surely unlikely that she would go out of her way to pick a quarrel with the powerful British Empire. If she made war and lost it, her commerce would be set back and her rising colonial empire would be destroyed. If she won it, it was difficult to see when she could hope for the spoils. We could not give her greater facilities for trade than she has already. We could not give her habitable white colonies, for she would find it impossible to take possession of them in the face of the opposition of the inhabitants. An indemnity she could never force from us. Some coaling stations and possibly some tropical colonies, of which latter she already possesses abundance were the most that she could hope for. Would such a prize as that be worth the risk attending such a war? To me it seemed that there could be only one answer to such a question.

It still seems to me that this reasoning is solid I still think that it would be an insane action for Germany deliberately to plan an attack upon Great Britain. But unfortunately an attack delivered from mistaken motives is as damaging as any other attack, and the mischief is done before the insanity of it is realized. If I now believe puch an attack to be possible, and it may be imminent, it is because I have been studying “Germany And The Next War,” by General von Bernhardi.

A book written by such a man cannot be set aside as the mere ravings of a Pan-Germanic Anglophobe. So far as appears, he is not a Pan-German at all. There is no allusion to that Germania *irredente* which is the dream of the party. He is a man of note, and the first living authority in Germany upon some matters of military science. Does he carry the same weight when he writes of international politics and the actual use of those mighty forces which he has helped to form? We will hope not. But when a man speaks with the highest authority upon one subject, his voice cannot be entirely disregarded upon a kindred one. Besides, he continually labors, and with success, to make the reader understand that he is the direct modern disciple of that main German line of thought which traces from Frederic through Bismarck to the present day. He moves in circles which actually control the actions of their country in a manner to which we have no equivalent For all these reasons, his views cannot be lightly set aside, and should be most carefully studied by Britons. We know that we have no wish for war, and desire only to be left alone. Unfortunately, it takes two to make peace, even as it takes two to make a quarrel. There is a very clear statement here that the quarrel is imminent, and that we must think of the means, military, naval, and financial, by which we may meet it Since von Bernhardi’s book may not be accessible to every reader of this article, I will begin by giving some idea of the situation as it appears to him, and of the course of action which he foreshadows and recommends.

He begins his argument by the uncompromising statement that war is a good thing in itself. All advance is founded upon struggle. Each nation has a right, and indeed a duty, to use violence where its interests are concerned and there is a tolerable hope of success. As to the obvious objection that such a doctrine bears no possible relation to Christianity, he is not prepared to admit the validity of the Christian ethics in international practice. In an ingenious passage he even attempts to bring the sanction of Christianity to support his bellicose views. He says: —

“Again, from the Christian standpoint, we arrive at the same conclusion. Christian morality is based, indeed, on the law of love. ‘Love God above all things, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ This law can claim no significance for the relations of one country to another, since its application to politics would lead to a conflict of duties. The love which a man showed to another country as such would imply a want of love for his own countrymen. Such a system of politics must inevitably lead men astray. Christian morality is personal and social, and in its nature cannot be political. Its object is to promote morality of the individual, in order to strengthen him to work unselfishly in the interests of the community. It tells us to love our individual enemies, but does not remove the conception of enmity."

Having thus established the general thesis that a nation should not hesitate to declare war where a material advantage may be the reward, he sets out very clearly what are some of the causes for war which Germany can see before her. The following passages throw a light upon them: —

"Strong, healthy and flourishing nations increase in numbers. From a given moment they require a continual expansion of their frontiers, they require new territory for the accommodation of their surplus population. Since almost every part of the globe is inhabited, new territory must, as a rule, be obtained at the cost of its possessors — that is to say, by conquest, which thus becomes a law of necessity."

Again: —

"Lastly, in all times the right of conquest by war has been admitted. It may be that a growing people cannot win colonies from uncivilized races, and yet the State wishes to retain the surplus population which the mother country can no longer feed. Then the only course left is to acquire the necessary territory hy war. Thus the instinct of self-preservation leads inevitably to war, and the conquest of foreign soil. It is not the possessor, but the victor, who then has the right"

And he concludes: —

"Arbitration must be peculiarly detrimental to an aspiring people, which has not yet reached its political and national zenith, and is bent on expanding its power in order to play its part nonorably in the civilized world."

And adds: —

"It must be borne in mind that a peaceful decision by an arbitration court can never replace in its effects and consequences a warlike decision, even as regards the State in whose favor it is pronounced."

To many of us it would seem a legitimate extension of the author's argument if we said that it would have a virile and bracing effect upon our characters if, when we had a grievance against our neighbor, we refrained from taking it into the law courts, but contented ourselves with breaking his head with a club. However, we are concerned here not so much witii the validity of the German general’s arguments as with their practical application so far as they affect ourselves.

Brushing aside the peace advocates, the writer continues: “To such views, the offspring of a false humanity, the clear and definite answer must be made that, under certain circumstances, it is not only the rights but the moral and political duty of the statesman to bring about a war. The acts of the State cannot be judged by the standard of individual morality.” He quotes Treitschke: “The Christian duty of sacrifice for something higher does not exist for the State, for there is nothing higher than it in the world’s history — consequently it cannot sacrifice itself to something higher.” One would have hoped that a noble ideal and a moral purpose were something higher but it would be vain to claim that any country, ourselves included, has ever yet lived fully up to the doctrine. And yet some conscious striving, however imperfect, is surely better than such a deliberate negation.

Having laid down these general propositions of the value of war, and of the non-existence of international moral obligations. General von Bernhardi then proceeds to consider very fully the general position of Germany and the practical application of those doctrines. Within the limits of this article I can only give a general survey of the situation as seen by him. War is necessary for Germany, It should be waged as soon as is feasible, as certain factors in the situation tell in favor of her enemies. The chief of these factors are the reconstruction of the Russian fleet, which will be accomplished within a few years, and the preparation of a French native colonial force, which would be available for European hostilities. This also, though already undertaken, will take some years to perfect Therefore, the immediate future is Germany’s best opportunity.

In this war Germany places small confidence in Italy as an ally, since her interests are largely divergent, but she assumes complete solidarity with Austria. Austria and Germany have to reckon with France and Russia. Russia is slow in her movements, and Germany with her rapid mobilization, should be able to throw herself upon France without fear of her rear. Should she win a brilliant victory at the outset, Russia might refuse to compromise herself at all, especially if the quarrel could be so arranged that it would seem as if France had been the aggressor. Before the slow Slavonic mind had quite understood the situation and set her unwieldy strength in motion, her ally might be struck down, and she face to face with the two Germanic Powers, which would be more than a match for her.

Of the German army, which is to be the instrument of this world-drama. General von Bernhardi expresses the highest opinion : “The spirit which animates the troops, the ardor of attack, the heroism, the loyalty which prevail among them, justify the highest expectations. I am certain that if they are soon to be summoned to arms their exploits will astonish the world, provided only that they are led with skill and determination.” How their “ardor of attack” has been tested it is difficult to see, but the world will probably agree that the German army is a most formidable force. When he goes on, however, to express the opinion that they would certainly overcome the French, the two armies being approximately of the same strength, it is not so easy to follow his argument. It is possible that even so high an authority as General von Bernhardi has not entirely appreciated how Germany has been the teacher of the world in military matters and how thoroughly her pupils have responded to that teaching. That attention to detail, perfection of arrangement for mobilization and careful preparation which have won German victories in the past may now be turned against her, and she may find that others can equal her in herownvirtues.

Poor France, once conquered, is to be very harshly treated. Here is the passage which describes her fate: —

“In one way or another we must square our account with France if we wish for a free hand in our international policy. This is the first and foremost condition of a sound German policy, and since the hostility of France once for all cannot be removed by peaceful overtures, the matter must be settled by force of arms. France must be so completely crushed that she can never again come across our path.”

It is not said how Germany could permanently extinguish France, and it is difficult to think it out. An indemnity, however large, would eventually be paid and France recover herself. Germany has found the half-German border provinces which she annexed so indigestible that she could hardly incorporate Champagne or any other purely French district. Italy might absorb some of Savoy and the French Riviera. If the country were artificially separated the various parts would fly together again at the first opportunity. Altogether the permanent sterilization of France would be no easy matter to effect. It would probably be attempted by imposing the condition that in future no army, save for police duties, would be allowed.

The history of Prussia itself, however, shows that even so stringent a prohibition as this can be evaded by a conquered but indomitable people.

Let us now turn to General von Bernhardi's views upon ourselves, and, first of all, it is of interest to many of us to know what are those historical episodes which have caused him and many of his fellow-countrymen to take bitter exception to our national record. From our point of view we have repeatedly helped Germany in the past, and have asked for and received no other reward than the consciousness of having co-operated in some common cause. So it was in Marlborough's days. So in the days of Frederic. So also in those of Napoleon. To all these ties, which had seemed to us to be of importance, there is not a single allusion in this volume. On the other hand, there are very bitter references to some other historical events which must seem to us strangely inadequate as a cause for international hatred.

We may, indeed, congratulate ourselves as a nation, if no stronger indictment can be made against us than is contained in the book of the German general. The first episode upon which he animadverts is the ancient German grievance of the abandonment of Frederic the Great by England in the year 1761. One would have thought that there was some statute of limitatiohs in such matters, but apparently there is none in the German mind. Let us grant that the premature cessation of a campaign is an injustice to one's associates, and let us admit also that a British Government under its party system can never be an absolutely stable ally. Having said so much, one may point out that there were several mitigating circumstances in this affair. We had fought for five years, granting considerable subsidies to Frederic during that time, and despatching British armies into the heart of Germany. The strain was very great, in a quarrel which did not vitally affect ourselves. The British nation had taken the view, not wholly unreasonably, that the war was being Waged in the interests of Hanover, and upon a German rather than a British quarrel. When we stood out France did the same, so that the balance of power between the combatants was not greatly affected. Also, it may be pointed out as a curious historical fact that this treatment which he so much resented was exactly that which Frederic had himself accorded to his allies some years before at the close of the Silesian campaign. On that occasion he made an isolated peace with Maria Theresa, and left his associates, France and Bavaria, to meet the full force of the Austrian attack.

Finally, the whole episode has to be judged by the words of a modern writer: “Conditions may arise which are more powerful than the most honorable intentions. The country’s own interests — considered, of course, in the highest ethical sense — must then turn the scale.” These sentences are not from the work of a British apologist, but from this very book of von Bernhardi’s which scolds England for her supposed adherence to such principles. He also quotes, with approval, Treitschke’s words: “Frederic the Great was all his life long charged with treachery because no treaty or alliance could ever induce him to renounce the right of free self-determination.”

Setting aside this ancient grievance of the Seven Years’ War, it is of interest to endeavor to find out whether there are any other solid grounds in the past for Germany’s reprobation. Two more historical instances are held up as examples of our perfidy. The first is the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, when the British took forcible possession in time of peace of the Danish fieet. It must be admitted that the step was an extreme one, and only to be justified upon the plea of absolute necessity for vital national reasons. The British Government of the day believed that Napoleon was about to possess himself of the Danish fleet and would use it against themselves. Fouche has admitted in his Memoirs that the right was indeed given by a secret clause in the Treaty of Tilsit. It was a desperate time, when the strongest measures were continually being used against us, and it may be urged that similar measures were necessary in self-defence. Having once embarked upon the enterprise, and our demand being refused, there was no alternative but a bombardment of the city with its attendant loss of civilian life. It is not an exploit of which we need be proud, and at the best can only be described as a most painful and unfortunate necessity, but I should be surprised if the Danes, on looking back to it, judge it more harshly than some more recent experiences which they have had at the hands of General von Bernhardi’s own fellow-countrymen. That he is himself prepared to launch upon a similar enterprise in a much larger and more questionable shape is shown by his declaration that if Holland will not take sides against England in the next war it should be overrun by the German troops.

General von Bernhardi’s next historical charge is the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882, which he describes as having been effected upon hypocritical pretences in a season of peace. To those who have a recollection of that event and can recall the anti-European movement of

Arabia and the massacre which preceded the bombardment, the charge will appear grotesque. But it is with a patchwork quilt of this sort that this German publicist endeavors to cover the unreasoning, but hone the less formidable, jealousy and prejudice which inflame him against this country. The foolish fiction that the British Government declared war against the Boers in order to gain possession of their gold mines is again brought forward, though one would have imagined that even the gutter-Press who exploited it twelve years ago had abandoned it by now. If General von Bernhardi can explain how the British Government is the richer for these mines, or whether a single foreign^ shareholder has been dispossessed of ^t& stock in them, he will be the first who has ever given a solid fact in favor of this ridiculous charge. In a previous paragraph of his book he declares that it was President Kruger who made the war, and that he was praiseworthy for so doing. Both statements cannot be true. If it was President Kruger who made the war, then it was not forced on by Great Britain in order to possess herself of the gold fields.

So much for the specific allegations against Great Britain. One can hardly regard them as being so serious as to wipe out the various claims, racial, religious and historical, which unite the two countries. However, we are only concerned with General von Bernhardi’s conclusions, since he declares that his country is prepared to act upon them. There remain two general grounds upon which he considers that Germany should make war upon the British Empire. The first is to act as the champion of the human race in winning what he calls the freedom of the seas. The second is to further German expansion as a world Power, which is cramped by our opposition.

The first of these reasons is difficult to appreciate. British maritime power has been used to insure, not to destroy, the freedom of the seas. What smallest Power has ever been hindered in her legitimate business? It is only the pirate, the slaver and the gun-runner who can justly utter such a reproach. If the mere fact of having predominant latent strength upon the water is an encroachment upon the freedom of the sea, then some nation must always be guilty of it. After our mild supremacy we may well say to Germany, as Charles said to James: “No one will assassinate me in order to put you upon the throne.” Her mandate is unendorsed by those whom she claims to represent.

But the second indictment is more formidable. We lie athwart Germany’s world ambitions, even as, geographically, we lie across her outlets. But when closely looked at, what is it of which we deprive her, and is its attainment really a matter of such vital importances. Do we hamper her trade? On the contrary, we exhibit a generosity which meets with no acknowledgment, and which many of us have long held to be altogether excessive. Her manufactured goods are welcomed in without a tax, while ours are held out from Germany by a twenty per cent tariff. In India, Egypt and every colony which does not directly control its own financial policy, German goods come in upon the same footing as our own. No successful war can improve her position in this respect. There is, however, the question of colonial expansion. General von Bernhardi foresees that Germany is increasing her population at such a pace that emigration will be needed soon in order to relieve it It is a perfectly natural national ambition that this emigration should be to some place where the settlers need not lose their flag or nationality. But if Great Britain were out of the way, where would they find such a place? Not in Canada, Australia, South Africa, or New Zealand. These States could not be conquered if the ‘Motherland had ceased to exist General von Bernhardi talks of the high lands of Africa, but already Germany possesses high lands in Af rica, and their colonization has not been a success. Can anyone name one single place upon the earth’s surface suitable for white habitation from which Germany is excluded by the existence of Great Britain? It is true that the huge continent of South America is only sparsely inhabited, its whole population being aboijt equal to that of Prussia. But that is an affair in which the United States, and not we, are primarily interested, and one which it is not our interest either to oppose or to support

But, however inadequate all these reasons for war may seem to a Briton, one has still to remember that we have to reckon with the conclusions exactly as if they were drawn from the most logical premises. These conclusions appear in such sentences as follows: —

“What we now wish to attain must be fought for and won against a superior force of hostile interests and Powers.”

“Since the struggle is necessary and inevitable, we must fight it out, cost what it may.”

“A pacific agreement with England is a will-o’-the-wisp, which no serious German statesman would trouble to follow. We must always keep the possibility of war with England before our eyes and arrange our political and military plans accordingly. We need not concern ourselves with any pacific protestations of English politicians, publicists and Utopians, which cannot alter the real basis of affairs.”

“The situation in the world generally shows there can only be a short respite before we once more face the question whether we will draw the sword for our position in the world or renounce such position once for all. We must not in any case wait until our opponents have completed their arming and decide that the hour of attack has come.”

“Even English attempts at a *rapprochement* must not blind us to the real situation. We may at most use them to delay the necessary and inevitable war until we may fairly imagine we have some prospect of success.”

This last sentence must come home to some of us who have worked in the past for a better feeling between the two countries.

And this is the man who dares to accuse us of national perfidy.

These extracts are but a few from a long series which show beyond all manner of doubt that Germany, so far as General von Bernhardi is an exponent of her intentions, will undoubtedly attack us suddenly should she see an opportunity. The first intimation of such an attack would, as he indicates, be a torpedo descent upon our Fleet, and a wireless message to German liners which would bring up their concealed guns, and turn each of them into a fast cruiser ready to prey upon our commerce. That is the situation as he depicts it It may be that he mistakes it. But for what it is worth, that is his opinion and advice.

He sketches out the general lines of a war between England and Germany. If France is involved, she is to be annihilated, as already described. But suppose the two rivals are left face to face. Holland and Denmark are to be bound over to the German side under pain of conquest. The German Fleet is to be held back under the protection of the land forts. Meanwhile, torpedoes, submarines and airships are to be used for the gradual whittling down of the blockading squadrons. When they have been sufficiently weakened, the Fleet is to sally out and the day has arrived. As to the chances of success, he is of opinion that in material and personnel the two fleets may be taken as being equal — ^when once the numbers have been equalized. In quality of guns, he considers that the Germans have the advantage. Of gunnery he does not speak, but he believes that in torpedo work his countrymen are ahead of any others. In airships, which for reconnaissance, if not for actual fightii^g power, will be of supreme importance, he considers also that his country will have a considerable advantage.

Such, in condensed form, is the general thesis and forecast of this famous German officer. If it be true, there are evil days coming both for his country and for ours. One may find some consolation in the discovery that wherever he attempts to fathom our feelings he makes the most lamentable blunders. He lays it down as an axiom, for example, that if we were hard- pressed the Colonies would take the opportunity of abandoning us. We know, on the other hand, that it is just such a situation which would bring about the federation of the Empire. He is under the delusion also that there is deep commercial and political jealousy of the United States in this country, and that this might very well culminate in war. We are aware that there is no such feeling, and that next to holding the trident ourselves we should wish to see it in the hands of our American cousins. One thing he says, however, which is supremely true, which all of us would endorse, and which every German should ponder: it is that the idea of a war between Germany and ourselves never entered into the thoughts of anyone in this country until the year 1902. Why this particular year? Had the feeling risen from commercial jealousy upon the part of Great Britain it must have shown itself far earlier than that — as early as the “Made in Germany” enactment. It appeared in 1902 because that was the close of the Boer War, and because the bitter hostility shown by the Germans in that war open- ^ ed our eyes to the fact that they would do us a mischief if they could. When the German Navy Act of 1900 gave promise that they would soon have the means of doing so, the first thoughts of danger arose, and German policy drove us more and more into the ranks of their opponents. Here, then, General von Bernhardi is right; but in nearly every other reference to our feelings and views he is wrong; so that it is to be hftped that in those matters in which we are unable to check him, such as the course of German thought and of German action in the future, he is equally mistaken. But I repeat that he is a man of standing and reputation, and that we should be mad if we did not take most serious notice of the opinions which he has laid down.

I have headed this article “Great Britain and the Next War’’ since it looks at the arguments and problems which General von Bernhardi has raised in his “Germany and the Next War” from the British point of view. May it prove that the title is an absurdity and the war an imaginative hypothesis. But I should wish, before I close, to devote a few pages to my view upon the defensive measures of our country. I am well aware that I speak with no expert authority, which makes it the more embarrassing that my opinions do not coincide with those of anyone whom I have encountered in this controversy. Still, it is better to be a voice, however small, than an echo.

It would simplify the argument if we began by eliminating certain factors which, in my opinion, simply darken counsel, as they are continually brought out into the front of the question to the exclusion of the real issues which lie behind them. One of them is the supposed possibility of an invasion — either on a large scale or in the form of a raid. The former has been pronounced by our highest naval authorities of the time as being impossible, and I do not think anyone can read the Wilson Memorandum without being convinced by its condensed logic Von Bernhardi, in his chapter upon the possible methods of injuring Great Britain, though he treats the whole subject with the greatest frankness, dismisses the idea either of raid or invasion in a few short sentences. The raid seems to me the less tenable hypothesis of the two. An invasion would, at least, play for a final stake, though at a deadly risk. A raid would be a certain loss of a body of tijoops, which would necessarily be the flower of the army; it could hope to bring about no possible permanent effect upon the war, and it would upset the balance of military power between Germany and her neighbors. If Germany were an island, like ourselves, she might risk such a venture. Sandwiched in between two armed nations as strong as herself , I do not believe that there is the slightest possibility of it But if, as von Bernhardi says, such plans are visionary, what is the exact object of a Territorial Army, and, even more, what would be the object of a National Service Army upon compulsory lines for home defence? Is it not a waste of money and energy which might be more profitably employed in some other form? Everyone has such an affection and esteem for Lord Roberts — especially if one has the honor of his personal acquaintance — that one shrinks from expressing a view which might be unwelcome to him. And yet he would be the first to admit that it is one’s duty to add one’s opinion to the debate, if that opinion has been conscientiously formed, and if one honestly believes that it recommends the best course of action for one’s country. So far as his argument for universal service is based upon national health and physique, I think he is on ground which no one could attack. But I cannot bring myself to believe that a case has been made out for the substitution of an enforced soldier in the place of the volunteer who has always done so splendidly in the past Great as is Lord Roberts' experience, he is talking here of a thing which is outside it, for he has never seen an enforced British soldier, and has, therefore, no data by which he can tell how such a man would compare with the present article. There were enforced British sailors once, and I have seen figures quoted to show that of 29,000 who were impressed 27,000 escaped from the Fleet by desertion. It is not such men as these who win our battles. The argument for enforced service is based upon the plea that the Territorial Army is below strength in numbers and deficient in quality. But if invasion is excluded from our calculations this is of less importance. The force becomes a nursery for the Army, which has other reserves to draw upon before it reaches it Experience has shown that under warlike excitement in a virile nation like ours, the ranks soon fill up, and as the force becomes embodied from the outbreak of hostilities, it would rapidly improve in quality. It is idle to assert that because Bulgaria can, in a day, fiood her troops into Turkey, therefore we should always stand to arms. The Turko- Bulgarian frontier is a line of poste — the Anglo-German is a hundred leagues of salt water.

But I am such an optimist as to say that there is no danger of a German war? On the contrary, I consider that there is a vast danger, that it is one which we ignore, and against which we could at a small cost effect a complete insurance. Let me try to define both the danger and the remedy. In order to do this we must consider the two different forms which such a war might take. It might be a single duel, or it might be with France as our ally. If Germany attacked Great Britain alone, it may safely be prophesied that the war would be long, tedious, and possibly inconclusive, but our role would be a comparatively passive one. ^ If she attacked France, however, that role would be much more active, since we could not let France go down, and to give her effective help we must land an expeditionary force upon the Continent. This force has to be supplied with munitions of war and kept up to strength, and so the whole problem becomes a more complex one.

The element of danger, which is serious in either form of war, but more serious in the latter, is the existence of new forms of naval warfare which have never been tested in the hands of competent men, and which may completely revolutionize the conditions. These new factors are the submarine and the airship. The latter, save as a means of acquiring information, does not seem to be formidable — or not sufficiently formidable to alter the whole conditions of a campaign. But it is different with the submarines. No blockade, so far as I can see, can hold these vessels in harbor, and no skill or bravery can counteract their attack when once they are within striking distance. One could imagine a state of things when it might be found impossible for the greater ships on either side to keep the seas on account of these poisonous craft No one can say beyond question that such a contingency is impossible. Let us see, then, how it would affect us if it should ever come to pass.

In the first place, it would not affect us at all as regards invasion or raids. If the German submarines can dominate our own large ships, our submarine can do the same for theirs. We should still hold the seas with our small craft Therefore, if Great Britain alone be at war with Germany, such a naval revolution would merely affect our commerce and food supply. What exact effect a swarm of submarines, lying off the mouth of the Channel and the Irish Sea, would produce upon the victualling of these islands is a problem which is beyond my conjecture. Other ships besides the British would be likely to be destroyed, and international complications would probably follow. I cannot imagine that such a fleet would entirely, or even to a very large extent, cut off our supplies. But it is certain that they would have the effect of considerably raising the price of whatever did reach us. Therefore, we should suffer privation, though not necessarily such privation as would compel us to make terms. From the beginning of the war, every home source would naturally be encouraged, and it is possible that before our external supplies were seriously decreased, our internal ones might be well on the way to make up the deficiency. Both of the two great protagonists — Lord Haldane and Lord Roberts — have declared that if we lost the command of the seas we should have to make peace. Their reference, however, was to complete naval defeat and not to such a condition of stalemate as seems to be the more possible alternative. As to complete naval defeat, our estimates, and the grand loyalty of the Overseas Dominions, seem to be amply adequate to guard against that. It is useless to try to alarm us by counting in the whole force of the Triple Alliance as our possible foes, for if they came into the war, the forces of our own allies would also be available. We need think only of Germany. A predominance of the submarine would, then, merely involve a period of hard times in this country, if we were fighting Germany single-handed. But if we were in alliance with France, it becomes an infinitely more important matter. I presume that I need not argue the point that it is our vital interest that France be not dismembered and sterilized. Such a tragedy would turn the western half of Europe into a gigantic Germany with a few insignificant States crouching about her feet. The period of her world dominance would then indeed have arrived. Therefore, if France be wantonly attacked, we must strain every nerve to prevent her going down, and among the measures to that end will be the sending of a British expeditionary force to cover the left or Belgian wing of the French defenses. Such a force would be cbnveyed across the Channel in perhaps a hundred troopships, and would entail a constant service of transports afterwards to carry its requirements.

Here lies, as it seems to me, the possible material for a great national disaster. Such a fleet of transports cannot be rushed suddenly across. Its preparation and port of departure are known. A single submarine amid such a fleet would be like a fox in a poultry yard, destroying victim after victim. The possibilities are appalling, for it might be not one submarine, but a squadron. The terrified transports would scatter over the ocean to find safety in any port. Their convoy could do little to help them. It would be a *débâcle* — an inversion of the Spanish Armada.

If the crossing were direct from the eastern ports to Antwerp, the danger would become greater. It is less if it should be from Portsmouth to Havre. But this a transit of seven hours, and the railways from Havre to the Belgian frontier would be insufficient for such a force. No doubt the Straits of Dover would be strongly patrolled by our own torpedo craft, and the crossing would, so far as possible, be made at night, when submarines have their minimum of efficiency; but, none the less, it seems to me that the risk would be a very real and pressing one. What possible patrol could make sure of heading off a squadron of submarines? I should imagine it to be as difficult as to bar the Straits to a school of whales.

But supposing such a wholesale tragedy were avoided, and that in spite of the predominance of submarines the army got safely to France or to Belgium, how are we to ensure the safe passage of the long stream of ships which, for many months, would be employed in carrying the needful supplies? We could not do it. The army might very well find itself utterly isolated, with its line of communications completely broken down, at a time when the demand upon the resources of all Continental countries was so great that there was no surplus for our use. Such a state of affairs seems to me to be a perfectly possible one, and to form, with the chance of a disaster to the transports, the greatest danger to which we should be exposed in a German war. But these dangers and the food question, which has already been treated, can all be absolutely provided against in a manner which is not only effective, but which will be of equal value in peace and in war. The Channel Tunnel is essential to Great Britain’s safety.

I will not dwell here upon the commercial or financial advantages of such a tunnel. Where the trade of two great nations concentrates upon one narrow tube, it is obvious that whatever corporation controls that tube has a valuable investment if the costs of construction have not been prohibitive. These costs have been placed as low as five million pounds by Mr. Rose Smith, who represents a practical company engaged in such work. If it were twice, thrice, or four times that sum it should be an undertaking which should promise great profits, and for that reason should be constructed by the nation, or nations, for their common national advantage. It is too vital a thing for any private company to control.

But consider its bearings upon a German war. All the dangers which I have depicted are eliminated. We tap (via Marseilles and the tunnel) the whole food supply of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Our expeditionary force makes its transit, and has its supplies independent of weather or naval chances. Should anything so unlikely as a raid occur, and the forces in the country seem unable to cope with it, a Franco-British reinforcement can be rushed through from the Continent. The Germans have made great works like the Kiel Canal in anticipation of war. Our answer must be the Channel Tunnel, linking us closer to our ally.

Though this scheme was discarded (under very differest naval and political conditions) some twenty years ago, no time has, as a matter of fact, been lost by the delay; as I am informed that machinery for boring purposes has so enormously improved that what would have taken thirty years to accomplish can now be done in three. If this estimate be correct, there may still be time to effect this essential insurance before the war with which General von Bernhardi threatens us breaks upon us.

Let us, before leaving the subject, glance briefly at the objections which have formerly been urged against the tunnel. Such as they are, they are as valid now as ever, although the advantages have increased to such an extent as to throw the whole weight of the argument upon the side of those who favor its construction. The main (indeed, the only) objection was the fear that the tunnel would fall into wrong hands and be used for purposes of invasion. By this was meant not a direct invasion through the tunnel itself — to invade a nation of forty-five million people through a hole in the ground twenty-five miles long would stagger the boldest mind — but that the tunnel might be seized at each end by some foreign nation, which would then use it for aggressive military purposes.

At the time of the discussion our relations with France were by no means so friendly as they are now, and it was naturally to France only that we alluded, since they would already hold one end of the tunnel We need not now discuss any other nation, since any other would have to seize both ends by surprise, and afterwards retain them, which is surely inconceivable. We are now bound in close ties of friendship and mutual interest to France. We have no right to assume that we shall always remain on as close a footing, but as our common peril seems likely to be a permanent one, it is improbable that there will be any speedy or sudden change in our relations. At the same time, in a matter so vital as our hold upon the Dover end of the tunnel, we could not be too stringent in our precautions. The tunnel should open out a point where guns command it, the mouth of it should be within the lines of an entrenched camp, and a considerable garrison should be kept permanently within call. The latter condition already exists in Dover, but the numbers ‘ might well be increased. As an additional precaution, a passage should be driven alongside the tunnel, from which it could, if necessary, be destroyed. This passage should have an independent opening within the circle of a separate fort, so that the capture of the end of the tunnel would not prevent its destruction. ‘With such precautions as these, the most nervous might feel that our insular position had not really been interfered with. The strong fortress of Sie Middle Ages had a passage under the moat as part of the defence. This is our passage.

Could an enemy in any way destroy it in time of war?

It would, as I conceive it, be sunk to a depth of not less than two hundred feet below the bed of the ocean. This ceiling would be composed of chalk and clay. No explosive form above could drive it in. If it were designed on a large scale — and, personally, I think it should be a four-line tunnel, even if the cost were doubled thereby — no internal explosion, such as might be brought about by secreting explosive packets upon the trains, would be likely to do more than temporarily obstruct it. If the very worst happened, and it were actually destroyed, we should be no worse off than we are now.

As to the expense, if we are driven into a war of this magnitude, a few millions one way or the other will not be worth considering.

Incidentally, it may be noted that General von Bernhardi has a poor opinion of our troops. This need not trouble us. We are what we are, and words will not alter it. From very early days our soldiers have left their mark upon Continental warfare, and we have no reason to think that we have declined from the manhood of our forefathers. He further calls them “mercenaries,” which is a misuse of terms. A mercenary is a man who is paid to fight in a quarrel which is not his own. As every British soldier must by law be a British citizen, the term is absurd What he really means is that they are not conscripts in the sense of being forced to fight, but that they are sufficiently well paid to enable the army as a profession to attract a sufficient number of our young men to the colors.

Our military and naval preparations are, as it seems to me, adequate for the threatened crisis. With the Channel Tunnel added our position should be secure. But there are other preparations which should be made for such a contest, should it unhappily be forced upon us. One is financial. Again, as so often before in the history of British wars, it may prove that the last guinea wins. Everything possible should be done to strengthen British credit. This crisis cannot last indefinitely. The cloud will dissolve or burst. Therefore, for a time we should husband our resources for the supreme need. At such a time all national expenditure upon objects which only mature in the future becomes unjustifiable. Such a tax as the undeveloped land tax, which may bring in a gain some day, but at present costs ten times what it produces, is the type of expenditure I mean. I say nothing of its justice or injustice, but only of its inopportuneness at a moment when we sorely need our present resources.

Another preparation lies in our national understanding of the possibility of such a danger and the determination to face the facts. Both Unionists and Liberals have shown their appreciation of the situation, and so have two of the most famous Socialist leaders. No audible acquiescence has come from the ranks of the Labor Party. I would venture to say one word here to my Irish fellow- countrymen of all political persuasions. If they imagine that they can stand politically or economically while Britain falls, they are woefully mistaken. The British Fleet is their one shield. If it be broken, Ireland will go down. They may well throw themselves heartily into the common defence, for no sword can transfix England without the point reaching Ireland behind her.

Let me say in conclusion, most emphatically, that I do not myself accept any of those axioms of General von Bernhardi which are the foundation-stones of his argument I do not think that war is in itself a good thing, though a dishonorable peace may be a worse one. I do not believe that an Anglo-German war is necessary. I am convinced that we should never, of our own accord, attack Germany, nor would we assist France if she made an unprovoked attack upon that Power. I do not think that as the result of such a war, Germany could in any way extend her flag so as to cover a larger white population. Every one of his propositions I dispute. But that is all beside the question. We have not to do with his argument, but with its results. Those results are that he, a man whose opinion is of weight and a member of the ruling class in Germany, tells us frankly that Germany will attack us the moment she sees a favorable opportunity. I repeat that we should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning.

THE END

THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN LITERATURE

A lectured delivered to the Canadian club in Montreal on June 4, 1914
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I have often heard friends from this side speak about the interest and veneration they felt when they approached the great historical centres of Europe; but I can assure you that I, who am soaked in Canadian history, felt that same feeling when yesterday we came along the old line of invasions, when we examined the site of that Fort William Henry around which so many hostile scenes have centred; when we saw the partly destroyed Fort Ticonderoga, and when we come down the line of the old Iroquois war trail, down the Richelieu River, where every yard of advance seemed to have the glamour of history. As I approached this great city I recollected the time when only a line of frail palisades lay between its population and utter barbarism, and when a sudden wild rush of savages might have driven Europe entirely from these parts. I assure you that I felt as much veneration as I know you feel when you approach the historical centres of Europe.

I might say that I have fallen under the spell of Francis Parkman, the historian – not so much under his spell as under the spell of the heroes and martyrs who he commemorated, and if there is any part of the world that is steeped in the glamour of history it is just this part upon which we stand. I talk of the glamour of history – the moment that history has left the land it seems to me that the very spirit has gone out of it – it has become mere rock and material, soil and water. It is the spirit of the land and the spirit of history that makes the land and it is just that that makes this comer of America the most interesting in the whole of the vast continent.

I had some difficulty in choosing a subject on which to address you because my interests are somewhat wide; but I recollected that if you were good enough to ask me here to speak to you it is probably because some of you have been kind enough to read my books, and it is as a literary man that I am here to-day. If I had not been a writer I should probably still have been sending up the death rate in some obscure corner of the world. Therefore it is on the subject of Literature and of a Literary career that I venture to say a few words; and, when I speak of literature I allude more to the imaginative style of literature, fiction, poetry and the drama with which I myself am best acquainted.

People often ask me what our literary crop in Great Britain is likely to produce. I think that is a question which can only be answered twenty-five years after the event. I can remember very well when I was a young man beginning to write, how all the critics were bewailing the fact that all the great men had passed away. Now when I look back and remember that among the men of that time were such dramatists like as Bernard Shaw, such novelists as Kipling and such humorists as Barrie when I consider all these and how they have come to fruition, I think the critics at the time were a little hard. And so it may be at the present time – many great trees may grow up – mere saplings may in time become great oaks. We have such men as Masefield, who I think will develop into a great poet, Galsworthy, with his broad humanitarianism and Arnold Bennett, who will worthily uphold the traditions of British literature. The very closest connection exists now between writers of fiction and the practical affairs of life. A very great impetus is given to public causes by the interest which is taken in them by these Men who can put them in the proper form. Who has developed Imperialism more than any man? It is surely the novelist Kipling. Who is to the ordinary public the mouthpiece of socialism? It is Wells. Who makes men think more than any one else, although he makes them angry? It is Bernard Shaw. Who stands for Zionism? It is Zangwill. Hardly a man who takes a mere money-making view – who does not venture out into life and employ his talents for the public good.

People sometimes ask me whether a man can learn to write. I am afraid one must be born a writer. I can remember as a boy a class in school which was called a poetry class, and in this class everyone whether they had the talent or not, had to turn out a poem, although it might be difficult to recognise it as such. I remember on one occasion we were given the Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes to write a poem on, and one of our young fellows boiled it all down into two short lines: —

She looked to heaven, her sword she drew,
And she cut Holofernes head in two.

Well, the master could not pass that and said that he really must come back and make another effort. The second time he appeared he wrote: —

Her sword she drew, she looked on high,
And she cut his throat from eye to eye.

These are shocking examples of making literature where no literature exists. One must surely have that in-born instinct, one must thrill to the music of the words.

Great literature cannot be taught. It is entirely beyond the reach of all man-fashioned laws. But what can be taught is style, and the vocabulary call be extended. Given the in-born instinct we can improve it by studying the great masters and adding constantly to our vocabulary – which is really, after all, our box of tools. In the matter of style nobody can do better than to follow Stevenson, who has helped many a lame dog into a style.

One must understand the use of words. When a new word is found, keep it, hold it and use it discreetly. I think the Elizabethans and Stevenson had extraordinary power over large vocabularies – an instinct for using the unlikely word, which word, when used expressed the thought exactly. One such on record was the Scottish Ambassador’s description of Queen Elizabeth’s dancing; he said:—”She danced high and disposedly.” Then an author, apart from these things, must cultivate his general stock of knowledge. A small-minded man is going to do no good in literature. One must have wide sympathies, a readiness to throw out tendrils in every direction, know the relation of one set of facts to another. After all this is accomplished, he must have an immense amount of good humoured patience during all those years in which he is playing ping pong with the editors. You ping out literature, he pongs it back and you must be patient. I know I wrote for ten years and pinged my literature to the editors while they ponged it back to me. I can recollect pictures being sent to me with a request to write a story to correspond to the pictures. They were pretty bad pictures, and my story certainly did correspond to them.

Another thing is his attitude towards criticism. One should not fear criticism – it is much better than flattery which makes you believe you have nothing else to learn Over-praise is apt to bring ruin upon a man – he does not try to do any better – and that is an awful thing for a young man in any profession but worst of all to anyone in the literary profession. Many a promising man has been ruined by over-praise. The safest maxim is:-

“Do your best. Having done it, think no more of it, push on to some other task and let the world decide whether you have done well or ill.”

I used to have a card hung up over my desk which I sometimes found to be a source of comfort. It had on it these lines: —

Critics flatter, no matter,
Critics curse, none the worse
Critics kind, never mind
Do your best, hang the rest.

Another thing which one needs very much in literature also, and of which, perhaps, we do not always in the rush give ourselves sufficient, is quiet detachment. You cannot put a good cargo out if you do not take a good cargo in. You have not got an endless stock of ideas, an endless stock of knowledge; the wise man is the one who remembers that, and who from time to time leaves everything and goes out into the quiet places with his books, and there takes weeks and months to build himself up, improving his own education; and then, I think, when he comes back he may possibly give the public something worthy of them and of himself. If ever a young author is dissatisfied with his reception, if he feels he has not had proper recognition, he must remember how long the great men have waited for any recognition. He must remember George Meredith who published the first edition of his Richard Feverel in 1859; the second edition was not called for till 1881, yet he knew well the value of his own work. That book is packed with beautiful passages, I was in his presence once when a young man praised one of those passages – it was the aphorism:—”Who rises from prayer a better man his prayer is answered.” Meredith remarked:—”I wrote that twenty-five years ago and you are the first man who has ever spoken to me about it.”

I feel gentlemen here in Canada that I am standing at a place which must in the process of time produce a very great literature. When I put it in the future I do not mean that it has not yet done so, but what I mean is that it will be a great volume of literature which in time to come may well influence the literature of the world. But I should be sorry to see Canada turning her whole thoughts towards such matters. It seems to me that for a strong young country with enormous practical work lying in front of it there are better things to do than dream. There is such a call for the virile upbuilding of the country that it will be unwise of it to go back to dreaming.

Great deeds are better than great sonnets and Canada’s call to her sons is a stirring one to action; for the poetry of action exists just as does the poetry of words and the great deed that is accomplished is more glorious than the great sonnet. The nations that have been building themselves up have never at any time produced literature while they have been doing it. In Rome it was five hundred years after the birth of Rome before Roman literature made its appearance. They spent their energies in the great struggles against surrounding countries. In your case it is against the vast forces of nature which have got to be subdued. Always there is a long seed time before the real harvest can arrive. I might cite as an example the State of New England. So long as New England was the great seat of activities there was no new literature; but when the seat of activities of America flowed Westward, New England became the back water, and you had your Longfellows in that little corner of the world. And so I prophesy that it will be here.

THE END

THE NEW REVELATION

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To all the brave men and women, humble or learned, who have the moral courage during seventy years to face ridicule or worldly disadvantage in order to testify to an all-important truth.
March, 1918

THE NEW REVELATION

PREFACE

Many more philosophic minds than mine have thought over the religious side of this subject and many more scientific brains have turned their attention to its phenomenal aspect. So far as I know, however, there has been no former attempt to show the exact relation of the one to the other. I feel that if I should succeed in making this a little more clear I shall have helped in what I regard as far the most important question with which the human race is concerned.

A celebrated Psychic, Mrs. Piper, uttered, in the year 1899 words which were recorded by Dr. Hodgson at the time. She was speaking in trance upon the future of spiritual religion, and she said: “In the next century this will be astonishingly perceptible to the minds of men. I will also make a statement which you will surely see verified. Before the clear revelation of spirit communication there will be a terrible war in different parts of the world. The entire world must be purified and cleansed before mortal can see, through his spiritual vision, his friends on this side and it will take just this line of action to bring about a state of perfection. Friend, kindly think of this.” We have had “the terrible war in different parts of the world.” The second half remains to be fulfilled.

A. C. D.
1918.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH

The subject of psychical research is one upon which I have thought more and about which I have been slower to form my opinion, than upon any other subject whatever. Every now and then as one jogs along through life some small incident happens which very forcibly brings home the fact that time passes and that first youth and then middle age are slipping away. Such a one occurred the other day. There is a column in that excellent little paper, Light, which is devoted to what was recorded on the corresponding date a generation — that is thirty years — ago. As I read over this column recently I had quite a start as I saw my own name, and read the reprint of a letter which I had written in 1887, detailing some interesting spiritual experience which had occurred in a seance. Thus it is manifest that my interest in the subject is of some standing, and also, since it is only within the last year or two that I have finally declared myself to be satisfied with the evidence, that I have not been hasty in forming my opinion. If I set down some of my experiences and difficulties my readers will not, I hope, think it egotistical upon my part, but will realise that it is the most graphic way in which to sketch out the points which are likely to occur to any other inquirer. When I have passed over this ground, it will be possible to get on to something more general and impersonal in its nature.

When I had finished my medical education in 1882, I found myself, like many young medical men, a convinced materialist as regards our personal destiny. I had never ceased to be an earnest theist, because it seemed to me that Napoleon’s question to the atheistic professors on the starry night as he voyaged to Egypt: “Who was it, gentlemen, who made these stars?” has never been answered. To say that the Universe was made by immutable laws only put the question one degree further back as to who made the laws. I did not, of course, believe in an anthropomorphic God, but I believed then, as I believe now, in an intelligent Force behind all the operations of Nature — a force so infinitely complex and great that my finite brain could get no further than its existence. Right and wrong I saw also as great obvious facts which needed no divine revelation. But when it came to a question of our little personalities surviving death, it seemed to me that the whole analogy of Nature was against it. When the candle burns out the light disappears. When the electric cell is shattered the current stops. When the body dissolves there is an end of the matter. Each man in his egotism may feel that he ought to survive, but let him look, we will say, at the average loafer — of high or low degree — would anyone contend that there was any obvious reason why THAT personality should carry on? It seemed to be a delusion, and I was convinced that death did indeed end all, though I saw no reason why that should affect our duty towards humanity during our transitory existence.

This was my frame of mind when Spiritual phenomena first came before my notice. I had always regarded the subject as the greatest nonsense upon earth, and I had read of the conviction of fraudulent mediums and wondered how any sane man could believe such things. I met some friends, however, who were interested in the matter, and I sat with them at some table-moving seances. We got connected messages. I am afraid the only result that they had on my mind was that I regarded these friends with some suspicion. They were long messages very often, spelled out by tilts, and it was quite impossible that they came by chance. Someone then, was moving the table. I thought it was they. They probably thought that I did it. I was puzzled and worried over it, for they were not people whom I could imagine as cheating — and yet I could not see how the messages could come except by conscious pressure.

About this time — it would be in 1886 — I came across a book called The Reminiscences of Judge Edmunds. He was a judge of the U.S. High Courts and a man of high standing. The book gave an account of how his wife had died, and how he had been able for many years to keep in touch with her. All sorts of details were given. I read the book with interest, and absolute scepticism. It seemed to me an example of how a hard practical man might have a weak side to his brain, a sort of reaction, as it were, against those plain facts of life with which he had to deal. Where was this spirit of which he talked? Suppose a man had an accident and cracked his skull; his whole character would change, and a high nature might become a low one. With alcohol or opium or many other drugs one could apparently quite change a man’s spirit. The spirit then depended upon matter. These were the arguments which I used in those days. I did not realise that it was not the spirit that was changed in such cases, but the body through which the spirit worked, just as it would be no argument against the existence of a musician if you tampered with his violin so that only discordant notes could come through.

I was sufficiently interested to continue to read such literature as came in my way. I was amazed to find what a number of great men — men whose names were to the fore in science — thoroughly believed that spirit was independent of matter and could survive it. When I regarded Spiritualism as a vulgar delusion of the uneducated, I could afford to look down upon it; but when it was endorsed by men like Crookes, whom I knew to be the most rising British chemist, by Wallace, who was the rival of Darwin, and by Flammarion, the best known of astronomers, I could not afford to dismiss it. It was all very well to throw down the books of these men which contained their mature conclusions and careful investigations, and to say "Well, he has one weak spot in his brain," but a man has to be very self-satisfied if the day does not come when he wonders if the weak spot is not in his own brain. For some time I was sustained in my scepticism by the consideration that many famous men, such as Darwin himself, Huxley, Tyndall and Herbert Spencer, derided this new branch of knowledge; but when I learned that their derision had reached such a point that they would not even examine it, and that Spencer had declared in so many words that he had decided against it on a priori grounds, while Huxley had said that it did not interest him, I was bound to admit that, however great, they were in science, their action in this respect was most unscientific and dogmatic, while the action of those who studied the phenomena and tried to find out the laws that governed them, was following the true path which has given us all human advance and knowledge. So far I had got in my reasoning, so my sceptical position was not so solid as before.

It was somewhat reinforced, however, by my own experiences. It is to be remembered that I was working without a medium, which is like an astronomer working without a telescope. I have no psychical powers myself, and those who worked with me had little more. Among us we could just muster enough of the magnetic force, or whatever you will call it, to get the table movements with their suspicious and often stupid messages. I still have notes of those sittings and copies of some, at least, of the messages. They were not always absolutely stupid. For example, I find that on one occasion, on my asking some test question, such as how many coins I had in my pocket, the table spelt out: “We are here to educate and to elevate, not to guess riddles.” And then: “The religious frame of mind, not the critical, is what we wish to inculcate.” Now, no one could say that that was a puerile message. On the other hand, I was always haunted by the fear of involuntary pressure from the hands of the sitters. Then there came an incident which puzzled and disgusted me very much. We had very good conditions one evening, and an amount of movement which seemed quite independent of our pressure. Long and detailed messages came through, which purported to be from a spirit who gave his name and said he was a commercial traveller who bad lost his life in a recent fire at a theatre at Exeter. All the details were exact, and he implored us to write to his family, who lived, he said, at a place called Slattenmere, in Cumberland. I did so, but my letter came back, appropriately enough, through the dead letter office. To this day I do not know whether we were deceived, or whether there was some mistake in the name of the place; but there are the facts, and I was so disgusted that for some time my interest in the whole subject waned. It was one thing to study a subject, but when the subject began to play elaborate practical jokes it seemed time to call a halt. If there is such a place as Slattenmere in the world I should even now be glad to know it.

I was in practice in Southsea at this time, and dwelling there was General Drayson, a man of very remarkable character, and one of the pioneers of Spiritualism in this country. To him I went with my difficulties, and he listened to them very patiently. He made light of my criticism of the foolish nature of many of these messages, and of the absolute falseness of some. “You have not got the fundamental truth into your head,” said he. “That truth is, that every spirit in the flesh passes over to the next world exactly as it is, with no change whatever. This world is full of weak or foolish people. So is the next. You need not mix with them, any more than you do in this world. One chooses one’s companions. But suppose a man in this world, who had lived in his house alone and never mixed with his fellows, was at last to put his head out of the window to see what sort of place it was, what would happen? Some naughty boy would probably say something rude. Anyhow, he would see nothing of the wisdom or greatness of the world. He would draw his head in thinking it was a very poor place. That is just what you have done. In a mixed seance, with no definite aim, you have thrust your head into the next world and you have met some naughty boys. Go forward and try to reach something better.” That was General Drayson’s explanation, and though it did not satisfy me at the time, I think now that it was a rough approximation to the truth. These were my first steps in Spiritualism. I was still a sceptic, but at least I was an inquirer, and when I heard some old-fashioned critic saying that there was nothing to explain, and that it was all fraud, or that a conjuror was needed to show it up, I knew at least that that was all nonsense. It is true that my own evidence up to then was not enough to convince me, but my reading, which was continuous, showed me how deeply other men had gone into it, and I recognised that the testimony was so strong that no other religious movement in the world could put forward anything to compare with it. That did not prove it to be true, but at least it proved that it must be treated with respect and could not be brushed aside. Take a single incident of what Wallace has truly called a modern miracle. I choose it because it is the most incredible. I allude to the assertion that D. D. Home — who, by the way, was not, as is usually supposed, a paid adventurer, but was the nephew of the Earl of Home — the assertion, I say, that he floated out of one window and into another at the height of seventy feet above the ground. I could not believe it. And yet, when I knew that the fact was attested by three eye-witnesses, who were Lord Dunraven, Lord Lindsay, and Captain Wynne, all men of honour and repute, who were willing afterwards to take their oath upon it, I could not but admit that the evidence for this was more direct than for any of those far-off events which the whole world has agreed to accept as true.

I still continued during these years to hold table seances, which sometimes gave no results, sometimes trivial ones, and sometimes rather surprising ones. I have still the notes of these sittings, and I extract here the results of one which were definite, and which were so unlike any conceptions which I held of life beyond the grave that they amused rather than edified me at the time. I find now, however, that they agree very closely, with the revelations in Raymond and in other later accounts, so that I view them with different eyes. I am aware that all these accounts of life beyond the grave differ in detail — I suppose any of our accounts of the present life would differ in detail — but in the main there is a very great resemblance, which in this instance was very far from the conception either of myself or of either of the two ladies who made up the circle. Two communicators sent messages, the first of whom spelt out as a name “Dorothy Postlethwaite,” a name unknown to any of us. She said she died at

Melbourne five years before, at the age of sixteen, that she was now happy, that she had work to do, and that she had been at the same school as one of the ladies. On my asking that lady to raise her hands and give a succession of names, the table tilted at the correct name of the head mistress of the school. This seemed in the nature of a test. She went on to say that the sphere she inhabited was all round the earth; that she knew about the planets; that Mars was inhabited by a race more advanced than us, and that the canals were artificial; there was no bodily pain in her sphere, but there could be mental anxiety; they were governed; they took nourishment; she had been a Catholic and was still a Catholic, but had not fared better than the Protestants; there were Buddhists and Mohammedans in her sphere, but all fared alike; she had never seen Christ and knew no more about Him than on earth, but believed in His influence; spirits prayed and they died in their new sphere before entering another; they had pleasures — music was among them. It was a place of light and of laughter. She added that they had no rich or poor, and that the general conditions were far happier than on earth.

This lady bade us good-night, and immediately the table was seized by a much more robust influence, which dashed it about very violently. In answer to my questions it claimed to be the spirit of one whom I will call Dodd, who was a famous cricketer, and with whom I had some serious conversation in Cairo before he went up the Nile, where he met his death in the Dongolese Expedition. We have now, I may remark, come to the year 1896 in my experiences. Dodd was not known to either lady. I began to ask him questions exactly as if he were seated before me, and he sent his answers back with great speed and decision. The answers were often quite opposed to what I expected, so that I could not believe that I was influencing them. He said that he was happy, that he did not wish to return to earth. He had been a free-thinker, but had not suffered in the next life for that reason. Prayer, however, was a good thing, as keeping us in touch with the spiritual world. If he had prayed more he would have been higher in the spirit world.

This, I may remark, seemed rather in conflict with his assertion that he had not suffered through being a free-thinker, and yet, of course, many men neglect prayer who are not free-thinkers.

His death was painless. He remembered the death of Polwhele, a young officer who died before him. When he (Dodd) died he had found people to welcome him, but Polwhele had not been among them.

He had work to do. He was aware of the Fall of Dongola, but had not been present in spirit at the banquet at Cairo afterwards. He knew more than he did in life. He remembered our conversation in Cairo. Duration of life in the next sphere was shorter than on earth. He had not seen General Gordon, nor any other famous spirit. Spirits lived in families and in communities. Married people did not necessarily meet again, but those who loved each other did meet again.

I have given this synopsis of a communication to show the kind of thing we got — though this was a very favourable specimen, both for length and for coherence. It shows that it is not just to say, as many critics say, that nothing but folly comes through. There was no folly here unless we call everything folly which does not agree with preconceived ideas. On the other hand, what proof was there that these statements were true? I could see no such proof, and they simply left me bewildered. Now, with a larger experience, in which I find that the same sort of information has come to very, many people independently in many lands, I think that the agreement of the witnesses does, as in all cases of evidence, constitute some argument for their truth. At the time I could not fit such a conception of the future world into my own scheme of philosophy, and I merely noted it and passed on.

I continued to read many books upon the subject and to appreciate more and more what a cloud of witnesses existed, and how careful their observations had been. This impressed my mind very much more than the limited phenomena which came within the reach of our circle. Then or afterwards I read a book by Monsieur Jacolliot upon occult phenomena in India. Jacolliot was Chief Judge of the French Colony of Crandenagur, with a very judicial mind, but rather biassed{sic} against spiritualism. He conducted a series of experiments with native fakirs, who gave him their confidence because he was a sympathetic man and spoke their language. He describes the pains he took to eliminate fraud. To cut a long story short he found among them every phenomenon of advanced European mediumship, everything which Home, for example, had ever done. He got levitation of the body, the handling of fire, movement of articles at a distance, rapid growth of plants, raising of tables. Their explanation of these phenomena was that they were done by the Pitris or spirits, and their only difference in procedure from ours seemed to be that they made more use of direct evocation. They claimed that these powers were handed down from time immemorial and traced back to the Chaldees. All this impressed me very much, as here, independently, we had exactly the same results, without any question of American frauds, or modern vulgarity, which were so often raised against similar phenomena in Europe.

My mind was also influenced about this time by the report of the Dialectical Society, although this Report had been presented as far back as 1869. It is a very cogent paper, and though it was received with a chorus of ridicule by the ignorant and materialistic papers of those days, it was a document of great value. The Society was formed by a number of people of good standing and open mind to enquire into the physical phenomena of Spiritualism. A full account of their experiences and of their elaborate precautions against fraud are given. After reading the evidence, one fails to see how they could have come to any other conclusion than the one attained, namely, that the phenomena were undoubtedly genuine, and that they pointed to laws and forces which had not been explored by Science. It is a most singular fact that if the verdict had been against spiritualism, it would certainly have been hailed as the death blow of the movement, whereas being an endorsement of the phenomena it met with nothing by ridicule. This has been the fate of a number of inquiries since those conducted locally at Hydesville in 1848, or that which followed when Professor Hare of Philadelphia, like Saint Paul, started forth to oppose but was forced to yield to the truth.

About 1891, I had joined the Psychical Research Society and had the advantage of reading all their reports. The world owes a great deal to the unwearied diligence of the Society, and to its sobriety of statement, though I will admit that the latter makes one impatient at times, and one feels that in their desire to avoid sensationalism they discourage the world from knowing and using the splendid work which they are doing. Their semi-scientific terminology also chokes off the ordinary reader, and one might say sometimes after reading their articles what an American trapper in the Rocky Mountains said to me about some University man whom he had been escorting for the season. “He was that clever,” he said, “that you could not understand what he said.” But in spite of these little peculiarities all of us who have wanted light in the darkness have found it by the methodical, never-tiring work of the Society. Its influence was one of the powers which now helped me to shape my thoughts. There was another, however, which made a deep impression upon me. Up to now I had read all the wonderful experiences of great experimenters, but I had never come across any effort upon their part to build up some system which would cover and contain them all. Now I read that monumental book, Myers' Human Personality, a great root book from which a whole tree of knowledge will grow. In this book Myers was unable to get any formula which covered all the phenomena called "spiritual," but in discussing that action of mind upon mind which he has himself called telepathy he completely proved his point, and he worked it out so thoroughly with so many examples, that, save for those who were wilfully blind to the evidence, it took its place henceforth as a scientific fact. But this was an enormous advance. If mind could act upon mind at a distance, then there were some human powers which were quite different to matter as we had always understood it. The ground was cut from under the feet of the materialist, and my old position had been destroyed. I had said that the flame could not exist when the candle was gone. But here was the flame a long way off the candle, acting upon its own. The analogy was clearly a false analogy. If the mind, the spirit, the intelligence of man could operate at a distance from the body, then it was a thing to that extent separate from the body. Why then should it not exist on its own when the body was destroyed? Not only did impressions come from a distance in the case of those who were just dead, but the same evidence proved that actual appearances of the dead person came with them, showing that the impressions were carried by something which was exactly like the body, and yet acted independently and survived the death of the body. The chain of evidence between the simplest cases of thought-reading at one end, and the actual manifestation of the spirit independently of the body at the other, was one unbroken chain, each phase leading to the other, and this fact seemed to me to bring the first signs of systematic science and order into what had been a mere collection of bewildering and more or less unrelated facts.

About this time I had an interesting experience, for I was one of three delegates sent by the Psychical Society to sit up in a haunted house. It was one of these poltergeist cases, where noises and foolish tricks had gone on for some years, very much like the classical case of John Wesley's family at Epworth in 1726, or the case of the Fox family at Hydesville near Rochester in 1848, which was the starting-point of modern spiritualism. Nothing sensational came of our journey, and yet it was not entirely barren. On the first night nothing occurred. On the second, there were tremendous noises, sounds like someone beating a table with a stick. We had, of course, taken every precaution, and we could not explain the noises; but at the same time we could not swear that some ingenious practical joke had not been played upon us. There the matter ended for the time. Some years afterwards, however, I met a member of the family who occupied the house, and he told me that after our visit the bones of a child, evidently long buried, had been dug up in the garden. You must admit that this was very remarkable. Haunted houses are rare, and houses with buried human beings in their gardens are also, we will hope, rare. That they should have both united in one house is surely some argument for the truth of the phenomena. It is interesting to remember that in the case of the Fox family there was also some word of human bones and evidence of murder being found in the cellar, though an actual crime was never established. I have little doubt that if the Wesley family could have got upon speaking terms with their persecutor, they would also have come upon some motive for the persecution. It almost seems as if a life cut suddenly and violently short had some store of unspent vitality which could still manifest itself in a strange, mischievous fashion. Later I had another singular personal experience of this sort which I may describe at the end of this argument. Vide Appendix III.

From this period until the time of the War I continued in the leisure hours of a very busy life to devote attention to this subject. I had experience of one series of seances with very amazing results, including several materialisations seen in dim light. As the medium was detected in trickery shortly afterwards I wiped these off entirely as evidence. At the same time I think that the presumption is very clear, that in the case of some mediums like Eusapia Palladino they may be guilty of trickery when their powers fail them, and yet at other times have very genuine gifts. Mediumship in its lowest forms is a purely physical gift with no relation to morality and in many cases it is intermittent and cannot be controlled at will. Eusapia was at least twice convicted of very clumsy and foolish fraud, whereas she several times sustained long examinations under every possible test condition at the hands of scientific committees which contained some of the best names of France, Italy, and England. However, I personally prefer to cut my experience with a discredited medium out of my record, and I think that all physical phenomena produced in the dark must necessarily lose much of their value, unless they are accompanied by evidential messages as well. It is the custom of our critics to assume that if you cut out the mediums who got into trouble you would have to cut out nearly all your evidence. That is not so at all. Up to the time of this incident I had never sat with a professional medium at all, and yet I had certainly accumulated some evidence. The greatest medium of all, Mr. D. D. Home, showed his phenomena in broad daylight, and was ready to submit to every test and no charge of trickery was ever substantiated against him. So it was with many others. It is only fair to state in addition that when a public medium is a fair mark for notoriety hunters, for amateur detectives and for sensational reporters, and when he is dealing with obscure elusive phenomena and has to defend himself before juries and judges who, as a rule, know nothing about the conditions which influence the phenomena, it would be wonderful if a man could get through without an occasional scandal. At the same time the whole system of paying by results, which is practically the present system, since if a medium never gets results he would soon get no payments, is a vicious one. It is only when the professional medium can be guaranteed an annuity which will be independent of results, that we can eliminate the strong temptation, to substitute pretended phenomena when the real ones are wanting.

I have now traced my own evolution of thought up to the time of the War. I can claim, I hope, that it was deliberate and showed no traces of that credulity with which our opponents charge us. It was too deliberate, for I was culpably slow in throwing any small influence I may possess into the scale of truth. I might have drifted on for my whole life as a psychical Researcher, showing a sympathetic, but more or less dilettante attitude towards the whole subject, as if we were arguing about some impersonal thing such as the existence of Atlantis or the Baconian controversy. But the War came, and when the War came it brought earnestness into all our souls and made us look more closely at our own beliefs and reassess their values. In the presence of an agonized world, hearing every day of the deaths of the flower of our race in the first promise of their unfulfilled youth, seeing around one the wives and mothers who had no clear conception whither their loved ones had gone to, I seemed suddenly to see that this subject with which I had so long dallied was not merely a study of a force outside the rules of science, but that it was really something tremendous, a breaking down of the walls between two worlds, a direct undeniable message from beyond, a call of hope and of guidance to the human race at the time of its deepest affliction. The objective side of it ceased to interest for having made up one’s mind that it was true there was an end of the matter. The religious side of it was clearly of infinitely greater importance. The telephone bell is in itself a very childish affair, but it may be the signal for a very vital message. It seemed that all these phenomena, large and small, had been the telephone bells which, senseless in themselves, had signalled to the human race: “Rouse yourselves! Stand by! Be at attention! Here are signs for you. They will lead up to the message which God wishes to send.” It was the message not the signs which really counted. A new revelation seemed to be in the course of delivery to the human race, though how far it was still in what may be called the John-the-Baptist stage, and how far some greater fulness and clearness might be expected hereafter, was more than any man can say. My point is, that the physical phenomena which have been proved up to the hilt for all who care to examine the evidence, are really of no account, and that their real value consists in the fact that they support and give objective reality to an immense body of knowledge which must deeply modify our previous religious views, and must, when properly understood and digested, make religion a very real thing, no longer a matter of faith, but a matter of actual experience and fact. It is to this side of the question that I will now turn, but I must add to my previous remarks about personal experience that, since the War, I have had some very exceptional opportunities of confirming all the views which I had already formed as to the truth of the general facts upon which my views are founded.

These opportunities came through the fact that a lady who lived with us, a Miss L. S., developed the power of automatic writing. Of all forms of mediumship, this seems to me to be the one which should be tested most rigidly, as it lends itself very easily not so much to deception as to self-deception, which is a more subtle and dangerous thing. Is the lady herself writing, or is there, as she avers, a power that controls her, even as the chronicler of the Jews in the Bible averred that he was controlled? In the case of L. S. there is no denying that some messages proved to be not true — especially in the matter of time they were quite unreliable. But on the other hand, the numbers which did come true were far beyond what any guessing or coincidence could account for. Thus, when the Lusitania was sunk and the morning papers here announced that so far as known there was no loss of life, the medium at once wrote: “It is terrible, terrible — and will have a great influence on the war.” Since it was the first strong impulse which turned America towards the war, the message was true in both respects. Again, she foretold the arrival of an important telegram upon a certain day, and even gave the name of the deliverer of it — a most unlikely person. Altogether, no one could doubt the reality of her inspiration, though the lapses were notable. It was like getting a good message through a very imperfect telephone.

One other incident of the early war days stands out in my memory. A lady in whom I was interested had died in a provincial town. She was a chronic invalid and morphia was found by her bedside. There was an inquest with an open verdict. Eight days later I went to have a sitting with Mr. Vout Peters. After giving me a good deal which was vague and irrelevant, he suddenly said: “There is a lady here. She is leaning upon an older woman. She keeps saying ‘Morphia.’ Three times she has said it. Her mind was clouded. She did not mean it. Morphia!” Those were almost his exact words. Telepathy was out of the question, for I had entirely other thoughts in my mind at the time and was expecting no such message.

Apart from personal experiences, this movement must gain great additional solidity from the wonderful literature which has sprung up around it during the last few years. If no other spiritual books were in existence than five which have appeared in the last year or so — I allude to Professor Lodge’s Raymond, Arthur Hill’s Psychical Investigations, Professor Crawford’s Reality of Psychical Phenomena, Professor Barrett’s Threshold of the Unseen, and Gerald Balfour’s Ear of Dionysius — those five alone would, in my opinion, be sufficient to establish the facts for any reasonable enquirer.

Before going into this question of a new religious revelation, how it is reached, and what it consists of, I would say a word upon one other subject. There have always been two lines of attack by our opponents. The one is that our facts are not true. This I have dealt with. The other is that we are upon forbidden ground and should come off it and leave it alone. As I started from a position of comparative materialism, this objection has never had any meaning for me, but to others I would submit one or two considerations. The chief is that God has given us no power at all which is under no circumstances to be used. The fact that we possess it is in itself proof that it is our bounden duty to study and to develop it. It is true that this, like every other power, may be abused if we lose our general sense of proportion and of reason. But I repeat that its mere possession is a strong reason why it is lawful and binding that it be used.

It must also be remembered that this cry of illicit knowledge, backed by more or less appropriate texts, has been used against every advance of human knowledge. It was used against the new astronomy, and Galileo had actually to recant. It was used against Galvani and electricity. It was used against Darwin, who would certainly have been burned had he lived a few centuries before. It was even used against Simpson’s use of chloroform in child-birth, on the ground that the Bible declared “in pain shall ye bring them forth.” Surely a plea which has been made so often, and so often abandoned, cannot be regarded very seriously.

To those, however, to whom the theological aspect is still a stumbling block, I would recommend the reading of two short books, each of them by clergymen. The one is the Rev. Fielding Ould’s Is Spiritualism of the Devil, purchasable for twopence; the other is the Rev. Arthur Chambers’ Our Self After Death. I can also recommend the Rev. Charles Tweedale’s writings upon the subject. I may add that when I first began to make public my own views, one of the first letters of sympathy which I received was from the late Archdeacon Wilberforce.

There are some theologians who are not only opposed to such a cult, but who go the length of saying that the phenomena and messages come from fiends who personate our dead, or pretend to be heavenly teachers. It is difficult to think that those who hold this view have ever had any personal experience of the consoling and uplifting effect of such communications upon the recipient. Ruskin has left it on record that his conviction of a future life came from Spiritualism, though he somewhat ungratefully and illogically added that having got that, he wished to have no more to do with it. There are many, however — quorum pars parva su — who without any reserve can declare that they were turned from materialism to a belief in future life, with all that that implies, by the study of this subject. If this be the devil’s work one can only say that the devil seems to be a very bungling workman and to get results very far from what he might be expected to desire.

CHAPTER II.

THE REVELATION

I can now turn with some relief to a more impersonal view of this great subject. Allusion has been made to a body of fresh doctrine. Whence does this come? It comes in the main through automatic writing where the hand of the human medium is controlled, either by an alleged dead human being, as in the case of Miss Julia Ames, or by an alleged higher teacher, as in that of Mr. Stainton Moses. These written communications are supplemented by a vast number of trance utterances, and by the verbal messages of spirits, given through the lips of mediums. Sometimes it has even come by direct voices, as in the numerous cases detailed by Admiral Usborne Moore in his book The Voices. Occasionally it has come through the family circle and table-tilting, as, for example, in the two cases I have previously detailed within my own experience. Sometimes, as in a case recorded by Mrs. de Morgan, it has come through the hand of a child.

Now, of course, we are at once confronted with the obvious objection — how do we know that these messages are really from beyond? How do we know that the medium is not consciously writing, or if that be improbable, that he or she is unconsciously writing them by his or her own higher self? This is a perfectly just criticism, and it is one which we must rigorously apply in every case, since if the whole world is to become full of minor prophets, each of them stating their own views of the religious state with no proof save their own assertion, we should, indeed, be back in the dark ages of implicit faith. The answer must be that we require signs which we can test before we accept assertions which we cannot test. In old days they demanded a sign from a prophet, and it was a perfectly reasonable request, and still holds good. If a person comes to me with an account of life in some further world, and has no credentials save his own assertion, I would rather have it in my waste-paperbasket than on my study table. Life is too short to weigh the merits of such productions. But if, as in the case of Stainton Moses, with his Spirit Teachings, the doctrines which are said to come from beyond are accompanied with a great number of abnormal gifts

— and Stainton Moses was one of the greatest mediums in all ways that England has ever produced — then I look upon the matter in a more serious light. Again, if Miss Julia Ames can tell Mr. Stead things in her own earth life of which he could not have cognisance, and if those things are shown, when tested, to be true, then one is more inclined to think that those things which cannot be tested are true also. Or once again, if Raymond can tell us of a photograph no copy of which had reached England, and which proved to be exactly as he described it, and if he can give us, through the lips of strangers, all sorts of details of his home life, which his own relatives had to verify before they found them to be true, is it unreasonable to suppose that he is fairly accurate in his description of his own experiences and state of life at the very moment at which he is communicating? Or when Mr. Arthur Hill receives messages from folk of whom he never heard, and afterwards verifies that they are true in every detail, is it not a fair inference that they are speaking truths also when they give any light upon their present condition? The cases are manifold, and I mention only a few of them, but my point is that the whole of this system, from the lowest physical phenomenon of a table-rap up to the most inspired utterance of a prophet, is one complete whole, each attached to the next one, and that when the humbler end of that chain was placed in the hand of humanity, it was in order that they might, by diligence and reason, feel their way up it until they reached the revelation which waited in the end. Do not sneer at the humble beginnings, the heaving table or the flying tambourine, however much such phenomena may have been abused or simulated, but remember that a falling apple taught us gravity, a boiling kettle brought us the steam engine, and the twitching leg of a frog opened up the train of thought and experiment which gave us electricity. So the lowly manifestations of Hydesville have ripened into results which have engaged the finest group of intellects in this country during the last twenty years, and which are destined, in my opinion, to bring about far the greatest development of human experience which the world has ever seen.

It has been asserted by men for whose opinion I have a deep regard — notably by Sir William Barratt — that psychical research is quite distinct from religion. Certainly it is so, in the sense that a man might be a very good psychical researcher but a very bad man. But the results of psychical research, the deductions which we may draw, and the lessons we may learn, teach us of the continued life of the soul, of the nature of that life, and of how it is influenced by our conduct here. If this is distinct from religion, I must confess that I do not understand the distinction. To me it IS religion — the very essence of it. But that does not mean that it will necessarily crystallise into a new religion. Personally I trust that it will not do so. Surely we are disunited enough already? Rather would I see it the great unifying force, the one provable thing connected with every religion, Christian or non-Christian, forming the common solid basis upon which each raises, if it must needs raise, that separate system which appeals to the varied types of mind. The Southern races will always demand what is less austere than the North, the West will always be more critical than the East. One cannot shape all to a level conformity. But if the broad premises which are guaranteed by this teaching from beyond are accepted, then the human race has made a great stride towards religious peace and unity. The question which faces us, then, is how will this influence bear upon the older organised religions and philosophies which have influenced the actions of men.

The answer is, that to only one of these religions or philosophies is this new revelation absolutely fatal. That is to Materialism. I do not say this in any spirit of hostility to Materialists, who, so far as they are an organized body, are, I think, as earnest and moral as any other class. But the fact is manifest that if spirit can live without matter, then the foundation of Materialism is gone, and the whole scheme of thought crashes to the ground.

As to other creeds, it must be admitted that an acceptance of the teaching brought to us from beyond would deeply modify conventional Christianity. But these modifications would be rather in the direction of explanation and development than of contradiction. It would set right grave misunderstandings which have always offended the reason of every thoughtful man, but it would also confirm and make absolutely certain the fact of life after death, the base of all religion. It would confirm the unhappy results of sin, though it would show that those results are never absolutely permanent. It would confirm the existence of higher beings, whom we have called angels, and of an ever-ascending hierarchy above us, in which the Christ spirit finds its place, culminating in heights of the infinite with which we associate the idea of all-power or of God. It would confirm the idea of heaven and of a temporary penal state which corresponds to purgatory rather than to hell. Thus this new revelation, on some of the most vital points, is NOT destructive of the beliefs, and it should be hailed by really earnest men of all creeds as a most powerful ally rather than a dangerous devil-begotten enemy.

On the other hand, let us turn to the points in which Christianity must be modified by this new revelation.

First of all I would say this, which must be obvious to many, however much they deplore it: Christianity must change or must perish. That is the law of life — that things must adapt themselves or perish. Christianity has deferred the change very long, she has deferred it until her churches are half empty, until women are her chief supporters, and until both the learned part of the community on one side, and the poorest class on the other, both in town and country, are largely alienated from her. Let us try and trace the reason for this. It is apparent in all sects, and comes, therefore, from some deep common cause.

People are alienated because they frankly do not believe the facts as presented to them to be true. Their reason and their sense of justice are equally offended. One can see no justice in a vicarious sacrifice, nor in the God who could be placated by such means. Above all, many cannot understand such expressions as the “redemption from sin,” “cleansed by the blood of the Lamb,” and so forth. So long as there was any question of the fall of man there was at least some sort of explanation of such phrases; but when it became certain that man had never fallen — when with ever fuller knowledge we could trace our ancestral course down through the cave-man and the drift-man, back to that shadowy and far-off time when the man-like ape slowly evolved into the apelike man — looking back on all this vast succession of life, we knew that it had always been rising from step to step. Never was there any evidence of a fall. But if there were no fall, then what became of the atonement, of the redemption, of original sin, of a large part of Christian mystical philosophy? Even if it were as reasonable in itself as it is actually unreasonable, it would still be quite divorced from the facts.

Again, too much seemed to be made of Christ’s death. It is no uncommon thing to die for an idea. Every religion has equally had its martyrs. Men die continually for their convictions. Thousands of our lads are doing it at this instant in France. Therefore the death of Christ, beautiful as it is in the Gospel narrative, has seemed to assume an undue importance, as though it were an isolated phenomenon for a man to die in pursuit of a reform. In my opinion, far too much stress has been laid upon Christ’s death, and far too little upon His life. That was where the true grandeur and the true lesson lay. It was a life which even in those limited records shows us no trait which is not beautiful — a life full of easy tolerance for others, of kindly charity, of broad-minded moderation, of gentle courage, always progressive and open to new ideas, and yet never bitter to those ideas which He was really supplanting, though He did occasionally lose His temper with their more bigoted and narrow supporters. Especially one loves His readiness to get at the spirit of religion, sweeping aside the texts and the forms. Never had anyone such a robust common sense, or such a sympathy for weakness. It was this most wonderful and uncommon life, and not his death, which is the true centre of the Christian religion.

Now, let us look at the light which we get from the spirit guides upon this question of Christianity. Opinion is not absolutely uniform yonder, any more than it is here; but reading a number of messages upon this subject, they amount to this: There are many higher spirits with our departed. They vary in degree. Call them “angels,” and you are in touch with old religious thought. High above all these is the greatest spirit of whom they have cognisance — not God, since God is so infinite that He is not within their ken — but one who is nearer God and to that extent represents God. This is the Christ Spirit. His special care is the earth. He came down upon it at a time of great earthly depravity — a time when the world was almost as wicked as it is now, in order to give the people the lesson of an ideal life. Then he returned to his own high station, having left an example which is still occasionally followed. That is the story of Christ as spirits have described it. There is nothing here of Atonement or Redemption. But there is a perfectly feasible and reasonable scheme, which I, for one, could readily believe.

If such a view of Christianity were generally accepted, and if it were enforced by assurance and demonstration from the New Revelation which is coming to us from the other side, then we should have a creed which might unite the churches, which might be reconciled to science, which might defy all attacks, and which might carry the Christian Faith on for an indefinite period. Reason and Faith would at last be reconciled, a nightmare would be lifted from our minds, and spiritual peace would prevail. I do not see such results coming as a sudden conquest or a violent revolution. Rather will it come as a peaceful penetration, as some crude ideas, such as the Eternal Hell idea, have already gently faded away within our own lifetime.

It is, however, when the human soul is ploughed and harrowed by suffering that the seeds of truth may be planted, and so some future spiritual harvest will surely rise from the days in which we live.

When I read the New Testament with the knowledge which I have of Spiritualism, I am left with a deep conviction that the teaching of Christ was in many most important respects lost by the early Church, and has not come down to us. All these allusions to a conquest over death have, as it seems to me, little meaning in the present Christian philosophy, whereas for those who have seen, however dimly, through the veil, and touched, however slightly, the outstretched hands beyond, death has indeed been conquered. When we read so many references to the phenomena with which we are familiar, the levitations, the tongues of fire, the rushing wind, the spiritual gifts, the working of wonders, we feel that the central fact of all, the continuity of life and the communication with the dead, was most certainly known. Our attention is arrested by such a saying as: “Here he worked no wonders because the people were wanting in faith.” Is this not absolutely in accordance with psychic law as we know it? Or when Christ, on being touched by the sick woman, said: “Who has touched me? Much virtue has passed out of me.” Could He say more clearly what a healing medium would say now, save that He would use the word “Power” instead of “virtue”; or when we read: “Try the spirits whether they be of God,” is it not the very, advice which would now be given to a novice approaching a seance? It is too large a question for me to do more than indicate, but I believe that this subject, which the more rigid Christian churches now attack so bitterly, is really the central teaching of Christianity itself. To those who would read more upon this line of thought, I strongly recommend Dr. Abraham Wallace’s Jesus of Nazareth, if this valuable little work is not out of print. He demonstrates in it most convincingly that Christ’s miracles were all within the powers of psychic law as we now understand it, and were on the exact lines of such law even in small details. Two examples have already been given. Many are worked out in that pamphlet. One which convinced me as a truth was the thesis that the story of the materialisation of the two prophets upon the mountain was extraordinarily accurate when judged by psychic law. There is the fact that Peter, James and John (who formed the psychic circle when the dead was restored to life, and were presumably the most helpful of the group) were taken. Then there is the choice of the high pure air of the mountain, the drowsiness of the attendant mediums, the transfiguring, the shining robes, the cloud, the words: “Let us make three tabernacles,” with its alternate reading: “Let us make three booths or cabinets” (the ideal way of condensing power and producing materialisations) — all these make a very consistent theory of the nature of the proceedings. For the rest, the list of gifts which St. Paul gives as being necessary for the Christian Disciple, is simply the list of gifts of a very powerful medium, including prophecy, healing, causing miracles (or physical phenomena), clairvoyance, and other powers (I Corinth, xii, 8, 11). The early Christian Church was saturated with spiritualism, and they seem to have paid no attention to those Old Testament prohibitions which were meant to keep these powers only for the use and profit of the priesthood.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMING LIFE

Now, leaving this large and possibly contentious subject of the modifications which such new revelations must produce in Christianity, let us try to follow what occurs to man after death. The evidence on this point is fairly full and consistent. Messages from the dead have been received in many lands at various times, mixed up with a good deal about this world, which we could verify. When messages come thus, it is only fair, I think, to suppose that if what we can test is true, then what we cannot test is true also. When in addition we find a very great uniformity in the messages and an agreement as to details which are not at all in accordance with any pre-existing scheme of thought, then I think the presumption of truth is very strong. It is difficult to think that some fifteen or twenty messages from various sources of which I have personal notes, all agree, and yet are all wrong, nor is it easy to suppose that spirits can tell the truth about our world but untruth about their own.

I received lately, in the same week, two accounts of life in the next world, one received through the hand of the near relative of a high dignitary of the Church, while the other came through the wife of a working mechanician in Scotland. Neither could have been aware of the existence of the other, and yet the two accounts are so alike as to be practically the same. Vide Appendix II.

The message upon these points seems to me to be infinitely reassuring, whether we regard our own fate or that of our friends. The departed all agree that passing is usually both easy and painless, and followed by an enormous reaction of peace and ease. The individual finds himself in a spirit body, which is the exact counterpart of his old one, save that all disease, weakness, or deformity has passed from it. This body is standing or floating beside the old body, and conscious both of it and of the surrounding people. At this moment the dead man is nearer to matter than he will ever be again, and hence it is that at that moment the greater part of those cases occur where, his thoughts having turned to someone in the distance, the spirit body went with the thoughts and was manifest to the person. Out of some 250 cases carefully examined by Mr. Gurney, 134 of such apparitions were actually at this moment of dissolution, when one could imagine that the new spirit body was possibly so far material as to be more visible to a sympathetic human eye than it would later become.

These cases, however, are very rare in comparison with the total number of deaths. In most cases I imagine that the dead man is too preoccupied with his own amazing experience to have much thought for others. He soon finds, to his surprise, that though he endeavours to communicate with those whom he sees, his ethereal voice and his ethereal touch are equally unable to make any impression upon those human organs which are only attuned to coarser stimuli. It is a fair subject for speculation, whether a fuller knowledge of those light rays which we know to exist on either side of the spectrum, or of those sounds which we can prove by the vibrations of a diaphragm to exist, although they are too high for mortal ear, may not bring us some further psychical knowledge. Setting that aside, however, let us follow the fortunes of the departing spirit. He is presently aware that there are others in the room besides those who were there in life, and among these others, who seem to him as substantial as the living, there appear familiar faces, and he finds his hand grasped or his lips kissed by those whom he had loved and lost. Then in their company, and with the help and guidance of some more radiant being who has stood by and waited for the newcomer, he drifts to his own surprise through all solid obstacles and out upon his new life.

This is a definite statement, and this is the story told by one after the other with a consistency which impels belief. It is already very different from any old theology. The Spirit is not a glorified angel or goblin damned, but it is simply the person himself, containing all his strength and weakness, his wisdom and his folly, exactly as he has retained his personal appearance. We can well believe that the most frivolous and foolish would be awed into decency by so tremendous an experience, but impressions soon become blunted, the old nature may soon reassert itself in new surroundings, and the frivolous still survive, as our seance rooms can testify.

And now, before entering upon his new life, the new Spirit has a period of sleep which varies in its length, sometimes hardly existing at all, at others extending for weeks or months. Raymond said that his lasted for six days. That was the period also in a case of which I had some personal evidence. Mr. Myers, on the other hand, said that he had a very prolonged period of unconsciousness. I could imagine that the length is regulated by the amount of trouble or mental preoccupation of this life, the longer rest giving the better means of wiping this out. Probably the little child would need no such interval at all. This, of course, is pure speculation, but there is a considerable consensus of opinion as to the existence of a period of oblivion after the first impression of the new life and before entering upon its duties.

Having wakened from this sleep, the spirit is weak, as the child is weak after earth birth. Soon, however, strength returns and the new life begins. This leads us to the consideration of heaven and hell. Hell, I may say, drops out altogether, as it has long dropped out of the thoughts of every reasonable man. This odious conception, so blasphemous in its view of the Creator, arose from the exaggerations of Oriental phrases, and may perhaps have been of service in a coarse age where men were frightened by fires, as wild beasts are seared by the travellers. Hell as a permanent place does not exist. But the idea of punishment, of purifying chastisement, in fact of Purgatory, is justified by the reports from the other side. Without such punishment there could be no justice in the Universe, for how impossible it would be to imagine that the fate of a Rasputin is the same as that of a Father Damien. The punishment is very certain and very serious, though in its less severe forms it only consists in the fact that the grosser souls are in lower spheres with a knowledge that their own deeds have placed them there, but also with the hope that expiation and the help of those above them will educate them and bring them level with the others. In this saving process the higher spirits find part of their employment. Miss Julia Ames in her beautiful posthumous book, says in memorable words: “The greatest joy of Heaven is emptying Hell.”

Setting aside those probationary spheres, which should perhaps rather be looked upon as a hospital for weakly souls than as a penal community, the reports from the other world are all agreed as to the pleasant conditions of life in the beyond. They agree that like goes to like, that all who love or who have interests in common are united, that life is full of interest and of occupation, and that they would by no means desire to return. All of this is surely tidings of great joy, and I repeat that it is not a vague faith or hope, but that it is supported by all the laws of evidence which agree that where many independent witnesses give a similar account, that account has a claim to be considered a true one. If it were an account of glorified souls purged instantly from all human weakness and of a constant ecstasy of adoration round the throne of the all powerful, it might well be suspected as being the mere reflection of that popular theology which all the mediums had equally received in their youth. It is, however, very different to any preexisting system. It is also supported, as I have already pointed out, not merely by the consistency of the accounts, but by the fact that the accounts are the ultimate product of a long series of phenomena, all of which have been attested as true by those who have carefully examined them.

In connection with the general subject of life after death, people may say we have got this knowledge already through faith. But faith, however beautiful in the individual, has always in collective bodies been a very two-edged quality. All would be well if every faith were alike and the intuitions of the human race were constant. We know that it is not so. Faith means to say that you entirely believe a thing which you cannot prove. One man says: “My faith is THIS.” Another says: “My faith is THAT.” Neither can prove it, so they wrangle for ever, either mentally or in the old days physically. If one is stronger than the other, he is inclined to persecute him just to twist him round to the true faith. Because Philip the Second’s faith was strong and clear he, quite logically, killed a hundred thousand Lowlanders in the hope that their fellow countrymen would be turned to the all-important truth. Now, if it were recognised that it is by no means virtuous to claim what you could not prove, we should then be driven to observe facts, to reason from them, and perhaps reach common agreement. That is why this psychical movement appears so valuable. Its feet are on something more solid than texts or traditions or intuitions. It is religion from the double point of view of both worlds up to date, instead of the ancient traditions of one world.

We cannot look upon this coming world as a tidy Dutch garden of a place which is so exact that it can easily be described. It is probable that those messengers who come back to us are all, more or less, in one state of development and represent the same wave of life as it recedes from our shores. Communications usually come from those who have not long passed over, and tend to grow fainter, as one would expect. It is instructive in this respect to notice that Christ’s reappearances to his disciples or to

Paul, are said to have been within a very few years of his death, and that there is no claim among the early Christians to have seen him later. The cases of spirits who give good proof of authenticity and yet have passed some time are not common. There is, in Mr. Dawson Roger's life, a very good case of a spirit who called himself Manton, and claimed to have been born at Lawrence Lydiard and buried at Stoke Newington in 1677. It was clearly shown afterwards that there was such a man, and that he was Oliver Cromwell's chaplain. So far as my own reading goes, this is the oldest spirit who is on record as returning, and generally they are quite recent. Hence, one gets all one's views from the one generation, as it were, and we cannot take them as final, but only as partial. How spirits may see things in a different light as they progress in the other world is shown by Miss Julia Ames, who was deeply impressed at first by the necessity of forming a bureau of communication, but admitted, after fifteen years, that not one spirit in a million among the main body upon the further side ever wanted to communicate with us at all since their own loved ones had come over. She had been misled by the fact that when she first passed over everyone she met was newly arrived like herself.

Thus the account we give may be partial, but still such as it is it is very consistent and of extraordinary interest, since it refers to our own destiny and that of those we love. All agree that life beyond is for a limited period, after which they pass on to yet other phases, but apparently there is more communication between these phases than there is between us and Spiritland. The lower cannot ascend, but the higher can descend at will. The life has a close analogy to that of this world at it its best. It is pre-eminently a life of the mind, as this is of the body. Preoccupations of food, money, lust, pain, etc., are of the body and are gone. Music, the Arts, intellectual and spiritual knowledge, and progress have increased. The people are clothed, as one would expect, since there is no reason why modesty should disappear with our new forms. These new forms are the absolute reproduction of the old ones at their best, the young growing up and the old reverting until all come to the normal. People live in communities, as one would expect if like attracts like, and the male spirit still finds his true mate though there is no sexuality in the grosser sense and no childbirth. Since connections still endure, and those in the same state of development keep abreast, one would expect that nations are still roughly divided from each other, though language is no longer a bar, since thought has become a medium of conversation. How close is the connection between kindred souls over there is shown by the way in which Myers, Gurney and Roden Noel, all friends and co-workers on earth, sent messages together through Mrs. Holland, who knew none of them, each message being characteristic to those who knew the men in life — or the way in which Professor Verrall and Professor Butcher, both famous Greek scholars, collaborated to produce the Greek problem which has been analysed by Mr. Gerald Balfour in The Ear of Dionysius, with the result that that excellent authority testified that the effect COULD have been attained by no other entities, save only Verrall and Butcher. It may be remarked in passing that these and other examples show clearly either that the spirits have the use of an excellent reference library or else that they have memories which produce something like omniscience. No human memory could possibly carry all the exact quotations which occur in such communications as The Ear of Dionysius.

These, roughly speaking, are the lines of the life beyond in its simplest expression, for it is not all simple, and we catch dim glimpses of endless circles below descending into gloom and endless circles above, ascending into glory, all improving, all purposeful, all intensely alive. All are agreed that no religion upon earth has any advantage over another, but that character and refinement are everything. At the same time, all are also in agreement that all religions which inculcate prayer, and an upward glance rather than eyes for ever on the level, are good. In this sense, and in no other — as a help to spiritual life — every form may have a purpose for somebody. If to twirl a brass cylinder forces the Thibetan to admit that there is something higher than his mountains, and more precious than his yaks, then to that extent it is good. We must not be censorious in such matters.

There is one point which may be mentioned here which is at first startling and yet must commend itself to our reason when we reflect upon it. This is the constant assertion from the other side that the newly passed do not know that they are dead, and that it is a long time, sometimes a very long time, before they can be made to understand it. All of them agree that this state of bewilderment is harmful and retarding to the spirit, and that some knowledge of the actual truth upon this side is the only way to make sure of not being dazed upon the other. Finding conditions entirely different from anything for which either scientific or religious teaching had prepared them, it is no wonder that they look upon their new sensations as some strange dream, and the more rigidly orthodox have been their views, the more impossible do they find it to accept these new surroundings with all that they imply. For this reason, as well as for many others, this new revelation is a very needful thing for mankind. A smaller point of practical importance is that the aged should realise that it is still worth while to improve their minds, for though they have no time to use their fresh knowledge in this world it will remain as part of their mental outfit in the next.

As to the smaller details of this life beyond, it is better perhaps not to treat them, for the very good reason that they are small details. We will learn them all soon for ourselves, and it is only vain curiosity which leads us to ask for them now. One thing is clear: there are higher intelligences over yonder to whom synthetic chemistry, which not only makes the substance but moulds the form, is a matter of absolute ease. We see them at work in the coarser media, perceptible to our material senses, in the seance room. If they can build up simulacra in the seance room, how much may we expect them to do when they are working upon ethereal objects in that ether which is their own medium. It may be said generally that they can make something which is analogous to anything which exists upon earth. How they do it may well be a matter of guess and speculation among the less advanced spirits, as the phenomena of modern science are a matter of guess and speculation to us. If one of us were suddenly called up by the denizen of some sub-human world, and were asked to explain exactly what gravity is, or what magnetism is, how helpless we should be! We may put ourselves in the position, then, of a young engineer soldier like Raymond Lodge, who tries to give some theory of matter in the beyond — a theory which is very likely contradicted by some other spirit who is also guessing at things above him. He may be right, or he may be wrong, but he is doing his best to say what he thinks, as we should do in similar case. He believes that his transcendental chemists can make anything, and that even such unspiritual matter as alcohol or tobacco could come within their powers and could still be craved for by unregenerate spirits. This has tickled the critics to such an extent that one would really think to read the comments that it was the only statement in a book which contains 400 closely-printed pages. Raymond may be right or wrong, but the only thing which the incident proves to me is the unflinching courage and honesty of the man who chronicled it, knowing well the handle that he was giving to his enemies.

There are many who protest that this world which is described to us is too material for their liking. It is not as they would desire it. Well, there are many things in this world which seem different from what we desire, but they exist none the less. But when we come to examine this charge of materialism and try to construct some sort of system which would satisfy the idealists, it becomes a very difficult task. Are we to be mere wisps of gaseous happiness floating about in the air? That seems to be the idea. But if there is no body like our own, and if there is no character like our own, then say what you will, WE have become extinct. What is it to a mother if some impersonal glorified entity is shown to her? She will say, “that is not the son I lost — I want his yellow hair, his quick smile, his little moods that I know so well.” That is what she wants; that, I believe, is what she will have; but she will not have them by any system which cuts us away from all that reminds us of matter and takes us to a vague region of floating emotions.

There is an opposite school of critics which rather finds the difficulty in picturing a life which has keen perceptions, robust emotions, and a solid surrounding all constructed in so diaphanous a material. Let us remember that everything depends upon its comparison with the things around it.

If we could conceive of a world a thousand times denser, heavier and duller than this world, we can clearly see that to its inmates it would seem much the same as this, since their strength and texture would be in proportion. If, however, these inmates came in contact with us, they would look upon us as extraordinarily airy beings living in a strange, light, spiritual atmosphere. They would not remember that we also, since our beings and our surroundings are in harmony and in proportion to each other, feel and act exactly as they do.

We have now to consider the case of yet another stratum of life, which is as much above us as the leaden community would be below us. To us also it seems as if these people, these spirits, as we call them, live the lives of vapour and of shadows. We do not recollect that there also everything is in proportion and in harmony so that the spirit scene or the spirit dwelling, which might seem a mere dream thing to us, is as actual to the spirit as are our own scenes or our own dwellings, and that the spirit body is as real and tangible to another spirit as ours to our friends.

CHAPTER IV.

PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

Leaving for a moment the larger argument as to the lines of this revelation and the broad proofs of its validity, there are some smaller points which have forced themselves upon my attention during the consideration of the subject. This home of our dead seems to be very near to us — so near that we continually, as they tell us, visit them in our sleep. Much of that quiet resignation which we have all observed in people who have lost those whom they loved — people who would in our previous opinion have been driven mad by such loss — is due to the fact that they have seen their dead, and that although the switch-off is complete and they can recall nothing whatever of the spirit experience in sleep, the soothing result of it is still carried on by the subconscious self. The switch-off is, as I say, complete, but sometimes for some reason it is hung up for a fraction of a second, and it is at such moments that the dreamer comes back from his dream “trailing clouds of glory.” From this also come all those prophetic dreams many of which are well attested. I have had a recent personal experience of one which has not yet perhaps entirely justified itself but is even now remarkable. Upon April 4th of last year, 1917, I awoke with a feeling that some communication had been made to me of which I had only carried back one word which was ringing in my head. That word was “Piave.” To the best of my belief I had never heard the word before. As it sounded like the name of a place I went into my study the moment I had dressed and I looked up the index of my Atlas. There was “Piave” sure enough, and I noted that it was a river in Italy some forty miles behind the front line, which at that time was victoriously advancing. I could imagine few more unlikely things than that the war should roll back to the Piave, and I could not think how any military event of consequence could arise there, but none the less I was so impressed that I drew up a statement that some such event would occur there, and I had it signed by my secretary and witnessed by my wife with the date, April 4th, attached. It is a matter of history how six months later the whole Italian line fell back, how it abandoned successive positions upon rivers, and how it stuck upon this stream which was said by military critics to be strategically almost untenable. If nothing more should occur (I write upon February 20th, 1918), the reference to the name has been fully justified, presuming that some friend in the beyond was forecasting the coming events of the war. I have still a hope, however, that more was meant, and that some crowning victory of the Allies at this spot may justify still further the strange way in which the name was conveyed to my mind.

People may well cry out against this theory of sleep on the grounds that all the grotesque, monstrous and objectionable dreams which plague us cannot possibly come from a high source. On this point I have a very definite theory, which may perhaps be worthy of discussion. I consider that there are two forms of dreams, and only two, the experiences of the released spirit, and the confused action of the lower faculties which remain in the body when the spirit is absent. The former is rare and beautiful, for the memory of it fails us. The latter are common and varied, but usually fantastic or ignoble. By noting what is absent in the lower dreams one can tell what the missing qualities are, and so judge what part of us goes to make up the spirit. Thus in these dreams humour is wanting, since we see things which strike us afterwards as ludicrous, and are not amused. The sense of proportion and of judgment and of aspiration is all gone. In short, the higher is palpably gone, and the lower, the sense of fear, of sensual impression, of self-preservation, is functioning all the more vividly because it is relieved from the higher control.

The limitations of the powers of spirits is a subject which is brought home to one in these studies. People say, “If they exist why don’t they do this or that!” The answer usually is that they can’t. They appear to have very fixed limitations like our own. This seemed to be very clearly brought out in the cross-correspondence experiments where several writing mediums were operating at a distance quite independently of each other, and the object was to get agreement which was beyond the reach of coincidence. The spirits seem to know exactly what they impress upon the minds of the living, but they do not know how far they carry their instruction out. Their touch with us is intermittent. Thus, in the cross-correspondence experiments we continually have them asking, “Did you get that?” or “Was it all right?” Sometimes they have partial cognisance of what is done, as where Myers says: “I saw the circle, but was not sure about the triangle.” It is everywhere apparent that their spirits, even the spirits of those who, like Myers and Hodgson, were in specially close touch with psychic subjects, and knew all that could be done, were in difficulties when they desired to get cognisance of a material thing, such as a written document. Only, I should imagine, by partly materialising themselves could they do so, and they may not have had the power of self-materialisation. This consideration throws some light upon the famous case, so often used by our opponents, where Myers failed to give some word or phrase which had been left behind in a sealed box. Apparently he could not see this document from his present position, and if his memory failed him he would be very likely to go wrong about it.

Many mistakes may, I think, be explained in this fashion. It has been asserted from the other side, and the assertion seems to me reasonable, that when they speak of their own conditions they are speaking of what they know and can readily and surely discuss; but that when we insist (as we must sometimes insist) upon earthly tests, it drags them back to another plane of things, and puts them in a position which is far more difficult, and liable to error.

Another point which is capable of being used against us is this: The spirits have the greatest difficulty in getting names through to us, and it is this which makes many of their communications so vague and unsatisfactory. They will talk all round a thing, and yet never get the name which would clinch the matter. There is an example of the point in a recent communication in Light, which describes how a young officer, recently dead, endeavoured to get a message through the direct voice method of Mrs. Susannah Harris to his father. He could not get his name through. He was able, however, to make it clear that his father was a member of the Kildare Street Club in Dublin. Inquiry found the father, and it was then learned that the father had already received an independent message in Dublin to say that an inquiry was coming through from London. I do not know if the earth name is a merely ephemeral thing, quite disconnected from the personality, and perhaps the very first thing to be thrown aside. That is, of course, possible. Or it may be that some law regulates our intercourse from the other side by which it shall not be too direct, and shall leave something to our own intelligence.

This idea, that there is some law which makes an indirect speech more easy than a direct one, is greatly borne out by the cross-correspondences, where circumlocution continually takes the place of assertion. Thus, in the St. Paul correspondence, which is treated in the July pamphlet of the S.P.R., the idea of St. Paul was to be conveyed from one automatic writer to two others, both of whom were at a distance, one of them in India. Dr. Hodgson was the spirit who professed to preside over this experiment. You would think that the simple words “St. Paul” occurring in the other scripts would be all-sufficient. But no; he proceeds to make all sorts of indirect allusions, to talk all round St. Paul in each of the scripts, and to make five quotations from St. Paul’s writings. This is beyond coincidence, and quite convincing, but none the less it illustrates the curious way in which they go round instead of going straight. If one could imagine some wise angel on the other side saying, “Now, don’t make it too easy for these people. Make them use their own brains a little. They will become mere automatons if we do everything for them” — if we could imagine that, it would just cover the case. Whatever the explanation, it is a noteworthy fact.

There is another point about spirit communications which is worth noting. This is their uncertainty wherever any time element comes in. Their estimate of time is almost invariably wrong. Earth time is probably a different idea to spirit time, and hence the confusion. We had the advantage, as I have stated, of the presence of a lady in our household who developed writing mediumship. She was in close touch with three brothers, all of whom had been killed in the war. This lady, conveying messages from her brothers, was hardly ever entirely wrong upon facts, and hardly ever right about time. There was one notable exception, however, which in itself is suggestive. Although her prophecies as to public events were weeks or even months out, she in one case foretold the arrival of a telegram from Africa to the day. Now the telegram had already been sent, but was delayed, so that the inference seems to be that she could foretell a course of events which had actually been set in motion, and calculate how long they would take to reach their end. On the other hand, I am bound to admit that she confidently prophesied the escape of her fourth brother, who was a prisoner in Germany, and that this was duly fulfilled. On the whole I preserve an open mind upon the powers and limitations of prophecy.

But apart from all these limitations we have, unhappily, to deal with absolute coldblooded lying on the part of wicked or mischievous intelligences. Everyone who has investigated the matter has, I suppose, met with examples of wilful deception, which occasionally are mixed up with good and true communications. It was of such messages, no doubt, that the Apostle wrote when he said: “Beloved, believe, not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.” These words can only mean that the early Christians not only practised Spiritualism as we understand it, but also that they were faced by the same difficulties. There is nothing more puzzling than the fact that one may get a long connected description with every detail given, and that it may prove to be entirely a concoction. However, we must bear in mind that if one case comes absolutely correct, it atones for many failures, just as if you had one telegram correct you would know that there was a line and a communicator, however much they broke down afterwards. But it must be admitted that it is very discomposing and makes one sceptical of messages until they are tested. Of a kin with these false influences are all the Miltons who cannot scan, and Shelleys who cannot rhyme, and Shakespeares who cannot think, and all the other absurd impersonations which make our cause ridiculous. They are, I think, deliberate frauds, either from this side or from the other, but to say that they invalidate the whole subject is as senseless as to invalidate our own world because we encounter some unpleasant people.

One thing I can truly say, and that is, that in spite of false messages, I have never in all these years known a blasphemous, an unkind, or an obscene message. Such incidents must be of very exceptional nature. I think also that, so far as allegations concerning insanity, obsession, and so forth go, they are entirely imaginary. Asylum statistics do not bear out such assertions, and mediums live to as good an average age as anyone else. I think, however, that the cult of the seance may be very much overdone. When once you have convinced yourself of the truth of the phenomena the physical seance has done its work, and the man or woman who spends his or her life in running from seance to seance is in danger of becoming a mere sensation hunter. Here, as in other cults, the form is in danger of eclipsing the real thing, and in pursuit of physical proofs one may forget that the real object of all these things is, as I have tried to point out, to give us assurance in the future and spiritual strength in the present, to attain a due perception of the passing nature of matter and the all-importance of that which is immaterial.

The conclusion, then, of my long search after truth, is that in spite of occasional fraud, which Spiritualists deplore, and in spite of wild imaginings, which they discourage, there remains a great solid core in this movement which is infinitely nearer to positive proof than any other religious development with which I am acquainted. As I have shown, it would appear to be a rediscovery rather than an absolutely new thing, but the result in this material age is the same. The days are surely passing when the mature and considered opinions of such men as Crookes, Wallace, Flammarion, Chas. Richet, Lodge, Barrett, Lombroso, Generals Drayson and Turner, Sergeant Ballantyne, W. T. Stead, Judge Edmunds, Admiral Usborne Moore, the late Archdeacon Wilberforce, and such a cloud of other witnesses, can be dismissed with the empty “All rot” or “Nauseating drivel” formulae. As Mr. Arthur Hill has well said, we have reached a point where further proof is superfluous, and where the weight of disproof lies upon those who deny. The very people who clamour for proofs have as a rule never taken the trouble to examine the copious proofs which already exist. Each seems to think that the whole subject should begin de novo because he has asked for information. The method of our opponents is to fasten upon the latest man who has stated the case — at the present instant it happens to be Sir Oliver Lodge — and then to deal with him as if he had come forward with some new opinions which rested entirely upon his own assertion, with no reference to the corroboration of so many independent workers before him. This is not an honest method of criticism, for in every case the agreement of witnesses is the very root of conviction. But as a matter of fact, there are many single witnesses upon whom this case could rest. If, for example, our only knowledge of unknown forces depended upon the researches of Dr. Crawford of Belfast, who places his amateur medium in a weighing chair with her feet from the ground, and has been able to register a difference of weight of many pounds, corresponding with the physical phenomena produced, a result which he has tested and recorded in a true scientific spirit of caution, I do not see how it could be shaken. The phenomena are and have long been firmly established for every open mind. One feels that the stage of investigation is passed, and that of religious construction is overdue.

For are we to satisfy ourselves by observing phenomena with no attention to what the phenomena mean, as a group of savages might stare at a wireless installation with no appreciation of the messages coming through it, or are we resolutely to set ourselves to define these subtle and elusive utterances from beyond, and to construct from them a religious scheme, which will be founded upon human reason on this side and upon spirit inspiration upon the other? These phenomena have passed through the stage of being a parlour game; they are now emerging from that of a debatable scientific novelty; and they are, or should be, taking shape as the foundations of a definite system of religious thought, in some ways confirmatory of ancient systems, in some ways entirely new. The evidence upon which this system rests is so enormous that it would take a very considerable library to contain it, and the witnesses are not shadowy people living in the dim past and inaccessible to our cross-examination, but are our own contemporaries, men of character and intellect whom all must respect. The situation may, as it seems to me, be summed up in a simple alternative. The one supposition is that there has been an outbreak of lunacy extending over two generations of mankind, and two great continents — a lunacy which assails men or women who are otherwise eminently sane. The alternative supposition is that in recent years there has come to us from divine sources a new revelation which constitutes by far the greatest religious event since the death of Christ (for the Reformation was a re-arrangement of the old, not a revelation of the new), a revelation which alters the whole aspect of death and the fate of man. Between these two suppositions there is no solid position. Theories of fraud or of delusion will not meet the evidence. It is absolute lunacy or it is a revolution in religious thought, a revolution which gives us as by-products an utter fearlessness of death, and an immense consolation when those who are dear to us pass behind the veil.

I should like to add a few practical words to those who know the truth of what I say. We have here an enormous new development, the greatest in the history of mankind. How are we to use it? We are bound in honour, I think, to state our own belief, especially to those who are in trouble. Having stated it, we should not force it, but leave the rest to higher wisdom than our own. We wish to subvert no religion. We wish only to bring back the material-minded — to take them out of their cramped valley and put them on the ridge, whence they can breathe purer air and see other valleys and other ridges beyond. Religions are mostly petrified and decayed, overgrown with forms and choked with mysteries. We can prove that there is no need for this. All that is essential is both very simple and very sure.

The clear call for our help comes from those who have had a loss and who yearn to re-establish connection. This also can be overdone. If your boy were in Australia, you would not expect him to continually stop his work and write long letters at all seasons. Having got in touch, be moderate in your demands. Do not be satisfied with any evidence short of the best, but having got that, you can, it seems to me, wait for that short period when we shall all be re-united. I am in touch at present with thirteen mothers who are in correspondence with their dead sons. In each case, the husband, where he is alive, is agreed as to the evidence. In only one case so far as I know was the parent acquainted with psychic matters before the war.

Several of these cases have peculiarities of their own. In two of them the figures of the dead lads have appeared beside the mothers in a photograph. In one case the first message to the mother came through a stranger to whom the correct address of the mother was given. The communication afterwards became direct. In another case the method of sending messages was to give references to particular pages and lines of books in distant libraries, the whole conveying a message. The procedure was to weed out all fear of telepathy. Verily there is no possible way by which a truth can be proved by which this truth has not been proved.

How are you to act? There is the difficulty. There are true men and there are frauds. You have to work warily. So far as professional mediums go, you will not find it difficult to get recommendations. Even with the best you may draw entirely blank. The conditions are very elusive. And yet some get the result at once. We cannot lay down laws, because the law works from the other side as well as this. Nearly every woman is an undeveloped medium. Let her try her own powers of automatic writing. There again, what is done must be done with every precaution against self-deception, and in a reverent and prayerful mood. But if you are earnest, you will win through somehow, for someone else is probably trying on the other side.

Some people discountenance communication upon the ground that it is hindering the advance of the departed. There is not a tittle of evidence for this. The assertions of the spirits are entirely to the contrary and they declare that they are helped and strengthened by the touch with those whom they love. I know few more moving passages in their simple boyish eloquence than those in which Raymond describes the feelings of the dead boys who want to get messages back to their people and find that ignorance and prejudice are a perpetual bar. “It is hard to think your sons are dead, but such a lot of people do think so. It is revolting to hear the boys tell you how no one speaks of them ever. It hurts me through and through.”

Above all read the literature of this subject. It has been far too much neglected, not only by the material world but by believers. Soak yourself with this grand truth. Make yourself familiar with the overpowering evidence. Get away from the phenomenal side and learn the lofty teaching from such beautiful books as After Death or from Stainton Moses' Spirit Teachings. There is a whole library of such literature, of unequal value but of a high average. Broaden and spiritualise your thoughts. Show the results in your lives. Unselfishness, that is the keynote to progress. Realise not as a belief or a faith, but as a fact which is as tangible as the streets of London, that we are moving on soon to another life, that all will be very happy there, and that the only possible way in which that happiness can be marred or deferred is by folly and selfishness in these few fleeting years.

It must be repeated that while the new revelation may seem destructive to those who hold Christian dogmas with extreme rigidity, it has quite the opposite effect upon the mind which, like so many modern minds, had come to look upon the whole Christian scheme as a huge delusion. It is shown clearly that the old revelation has so many resemblances, defaced by time and mangled by man's mishandling and materialism, but still denoting the same general scheme, that undoubtedly both have come from the same source. The accepted ideas of life after death, of higher and lower spirits, of comparative happiness depending upon our own conduct, of chastening by pain, of guardian spirits, of high teachers, of an infinite central power, of circles above circles approaching nearer to His presence — all of these conceptions appear once more and are confirmed by many witnesses. It is only the claims of infallibility and of monopoly, the bigotry and pedantry of theologians, and the man-made rituals which take the life out of the God-given thoughts — it is only this which has defaced the truth.

I cannot end this little book better than by using words more eloquent than any which I could write, a splendid sample of English style as well as of English thought. They are from the pen of that considerable thinker and poet, Mr. Gerald Massey, and were written many years ago.

"Spiritualism has been for me, in common with many others, such a lifting of the mental horizon and letting-in of the heavens — such a formation of faith into facts, that I can only compare life without it to sailing on board ship with hatches battened down and being kept a prisoner, living by the light of a candle, and then suddenly, on some splendid starry night, allowed to go on deck for the first time to see the stupendous mechanism of the heavens all aglow with the glory of God."

SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

I. THE NEXT PHASE OF LIFE

I have spoken in the text of the striking manner in which accounts of life in the next phase, though derived from the most varied and independent sources, are still in essential agreement — an agreement which occasionally descends to small details. A variety is introduced by that fuller vision which can see and describe more than one plane, but the accounts of that happy land to which the ordinary mortal may hope to aspire, are very consistent. Since I wrote the statement I have read three fresh independent descriptions which again confirm the point. One is the account given by "A King's Counsel," in his recent book, I Heard a Voice (Kegan Paul), which I recommended to inquirers, though it has a strong Roman Catholic bias running through it which shows that our main lines of thought are persistent. A second is the little book The Light on the Future, giving the very interesting details of the beyond, gathered by an earnest and reverent circle in Dublin. The other came in a private letter from Mr. Hubert Wales, and is, I think, most instructive. Mr. Wales is a cautious and rather sceptical inquirer who had put away his results with incredulity (he had received them through his own automatic writing). On reading my account of the conditions described in the beyond, he hunted up his own old script which had commended itself so little to him when he first produced it. He says: "After reading your article, I was struck, almost startled, by the circumstance that the statements which had purported to be made to me regarding conditions after death coincided — I think almost to the smallest detail — with those you set out as the result of your collation of material obtained from a great number of sources. I cannot think there was anything in my antecedent reading to account for this coincidence. I had certainly read nothing you had published on the subject. I had purposely avoided Raymond and books like it, in order not to vitiate my own results, and the Proceedings of the S.P.R. which I had read at that time, do not touch, as you know, upon after-death conditions. At any rate I obtained, at various times, statements (as my contemporary notes show) to the effect that, in this persisting state of existence, they have bodies which, though imperceptible by our senses, are as solid to them as ours to us, that these bodies are based on the general characteristics of our present bodies but beautified; that they have no age, no pain, no rich and poor; that they wear clothes and take nourishment; that they do not sleep (though they spoke of passing occasionally into a semiconscious state which they called 'lying asleep' — a condition, it just occurs to me, which seems to correspond roughly with the 'Hypnoidal' state); that, after a period which is usually shorter than the average life-time here, they pass to some further state of existence; that people of similar thoughts, tastes and feelings, gravitate together; that married couples do not necessarily reunite, but that the love of man and woman continues and is freed of elements which with us often militate against its perfect realisation; that immediately after death people pass into a semi-conscious rest-state lasting various periods, that they are unable to experience bodily pain, but are susceptible at times to some mental anxiety; that a painful death is 'absolutely unknown,' that religious beliefs make no difference whatever in the after-state, and that their life altogether is intensely happy, and no one having ever realised it could wish to return here. I got no reference to 'work' by that word, but much to the various interests that were said to occupy them. That is probably only another way of saying the same thing. 'Work' with us has come usually to mean 'work to live,' and that, I was emphatically informed, was not the case with them — that all the requirements of life were somehow mysteriously 'provided.' Neither did I get any reference to a definite 'temporary penal state,' but I gathered that people begin there at the point of intellectual and moral development where they leave off here; and since their state of happiness was based mainly upon sympathy, those who came over in a low moral condition, failed at first for various lengths of time to have the capacity to appreciate and enjoy it."

AUTOMATIC WRITING

This form of mediumship gives the very highest results, and yet in its very nature is liable to self-deception. Are we using our own hand or is an outside power directing it? It is only by the information received that we can tell, and even then we have to make broad allowance for the action of our own subconscious knowledge. It is worth while perhaps to quote what appears to me to be a thoroughly critic-proof case, so that the inquirer may see how strong the evidence is that these messages are not self-evolved.

This case is quoted in Mr. Arthur Hill's recent book Man Is a Spirit (Cassell & Co.) and is contributed by a gentleman who takes the name of Captain James Burton. He is, I understand, the same medium (amateur) through whose communications the position of the buried ruins at Glastonbury have recently been located. "A week after my father's funeral I was writing a business letter, when something seemed to intervene between my hand and the motor centres of my brain, and the hand wrote at an amazing rate a letter, signed with my father's signature and purporting to come from him. I was upset, and my right side and arm became cold and numb. For a year after this letters came frequently, and always at unexpected times. I never knew what they contained until I examined them with a magnifying-glass: they were microscopic. And they contained a vast amount of matter with which it was impossible for me to be acquainted." . . . "Unknown to me, my mother, who was staying some sixty miles away, lost her pet dog, which my father had given her. The same night I had a letter from him condoling with her, and stating that the dog was now with him. 'All things which love us and are necessary to our happiness in the world are with us here.' A most sacred secret, known to no one but my father and mother, concerning a matter which occurred years before I was born, was afterwards told me in the script, with the comment: 'Tell your mother this, and she will know that it is I, your father, who am writing.' My mother had been unable to accept the possibility up to now, but when I told her this she collapsed and fainted. From that moment the letters became her greatest comfort, for they were lovers during the forty years of their married life, and his death almost broke her heart.

"As for myself, I am as convinced that my father, in his original personality, still exists, as if he were still in his study with the door shut. He is no more dead than he would be were he living in America.

"I have compared the diction and vocabulary of these letters with those employed in my own writing — I am not unknown as a magazine contributor — and I find no points of similarity between the two." There is much further evidence in this case for which I refer the reader to the book itself.

THE CHERITON DUGOUT

I have mentioned in the text that I had some recent experience of a case where a "polter-geist" or mischievous spirit had been manifesting. These entities appear to be of an undeveloped order and nearer to earth conditions than any others with which we are acquainted. This comparative materialism upon their part places them low in the scale of spirit, and undesirable perhaps as communicants, but it gives them a special value as calling attention to crude obvious phenomena, and so arresting the human attention and forcing upon our notice that there are other forms of life within the universe. These borderland forces have attracted passing attention at several times and places in the past, such cases as the Wesley persecution at Epworth, the Drummer of Tedworth, the Bells of Bealing, etc., startling the country for a time — each of them being an impingement of unknown forces upon human life. Then almost simultaneously came the Hydesville case in America and the Cideville disturbances in France, which were so marked that they could not be overlooked. From them sprang the whole modern movement which, reasoning upwards from small things to great, from raw things to developed ones, from phenomena to messages, is destined to give religion the firmest basis upon which it has ever stood. Therefore, humble and foolish as these manifestations may seem, they have been the seed of large developments, and are worthy of our respectful, though critical, attention.

Many such manifestations have appeared of recent years in various quarters of the world, each of which is treated by the press in a more or less comic vein, with a conviction apparently that the use of the word “spook” discredits the incident and brings discussion to an end. It is remarkable that each is treated as an entirely isolated phenomenon, and thus the ordinary reader gets no idea of the strength of the cumulative evidence. In this particular case of the Cheriton Dugout the facts are as follows:

Mr. Jaques, a Justice of the Peace and a man of education and intelligence, residing at Embrook House, Cheriton, near Folkestone, made a dugout just opposite to his residence as a protection against air raids. The house was, it may be remarked, of great antiquity, part of it being an old religious foundation of the 14th Century. The dugout was constructed at the base of a small bluff, and the sinking was through ordinary soft sandstone. The work was carried out by a local jobbing builder called Rolfe, assisted by a lad. Soon after the inception of his task he was annoyed by his candle being continually blown out by jets of sand, and, by similar jets hitting up against his own face. These phenomena he imagined to be due to some gaseous or electrical cause, but they reached such a point that his work was seriously hampered, and he complained to Mr. Jaques, who received the story with absolute incredulity. The persecution continued, however, and increased in intensity, taking the form now of actual blows from moving material, considerable objects, such as stones and bits of brick, flying past him and hitting the walls with a violent impact. Mr. Rolfe, still searching for a physical explanation, went to Mr. Hesketh, the Municipal Electrician of Folkestone, a man of high education and intelligence, who went out to the scene of the affair and saw enough to convince himself that the phenomena were perfectly genuine and inexplicable by ordinary laws. A Canadian soldier who was billeted upon Mr. Rolfe, heard an account of the happenings from his host, and after announcing his conviction that the latter had "bats in his belfry" proceeded to the dugout, where his experiences were so instant and so violent that he rushed out of the place in horror. The housekeeper at the Hall also was a witness of the movement of bricks when no human hands touched them. Mr. Jaques, whose incredulity had gradually thawed before all this evidence, went down to the dugout in the absence of everyone, and was departing from it when five stones rapped up against the door from the inside. He reopened the door and saw them lying there upon the floor. Sir William Barrett had meanwhile come down, but had seen nothing. His stay was a short one. I afterwards made four visits of about two hours each to the grotto, but got nothing direct, though I saw the new brickwork all chipped about by the blows which it had received. The forces appeared to have not the slightest interest in psychical research, for they never played up to an investigator, and yet their presence and action have been demonstrated to at least seven different observers, and, as I have said, they left their traces behind them, even to the extent of picking the flint stones out of the new cement which was to form the floor, and arranging them in tidy little piles. The obvious explanation that the boy was an adept at mischief had to be set aside in view of the fact that the phenomena occurred in his absence. One extra man of science wandered on to the scene for a moment, but as his explanation was that the movements occurred through the emanation of marsh-gas, it did not advance matters much. The disturbances are still proceeding, and I have had a letter this very morning (February 21st, 1918) with fuller and later details from Mr. Hesketh, the Engineer.

What is the REAL explanation of such a matter? I can only say that I have advised Mr. Jaques to dig into the bluff under which he is constructing his cellar. I made some investigation myself upon the top of it and convinced myself that the surface ground at that spot has at some time been disturbed to the depth of at least five feet. Something has, I should judge, been buried at some date, and it is probable that, as in the case cited in the text, there is a connection between this and the disturbances. It is very probable that Mr. Rolfe is, unknown to himself, a physical medium, and that when he was in the confined space of the cellar he turned it into a cabinet in which his magnetic powers could accumulate and be available for use. It chanced that there was on the spot some agency which chose to use them, and hence the phenomena. When Mr. Jaques went alone to the grotto the power left behind by Mr. Rolfe, who had been in it all morning, was not yet exhausted and he was able to get some manifestations. So I read it, but it is well not to be dogmatic on such matters. If there is systematic digging I should expect an epilogue to the story.

Whilst these proofs were in the press a second very marked case of a Polter-geist came within my knowledge. I cannot without breach of confidence reveal the details and the phenomena are still going on. Curiously enough, it was because one of the sufferers from the invasion read some remarks of mine upon the Cheriton dugout that this other case came to my knowledge, for the lady wrote to me at once for advice and assistance. The place is remote and I have not yet been able to visit it, but from the full accounts which I have now received it seems to present all the familiar features, with the phenomenon of direct writing superadded. Some specimens of this script have reached me. Two clergymen have endeavoured to mitigate the phenomena, which are occasionally very violent, but so far without result. It may be some consolation to any others who may be suffering from this strange infliction, to know that in the many cases which have been carefully recorded there is none in which any physical harm has been inflicted upon man or beast.

THE VITAL MESSAGE

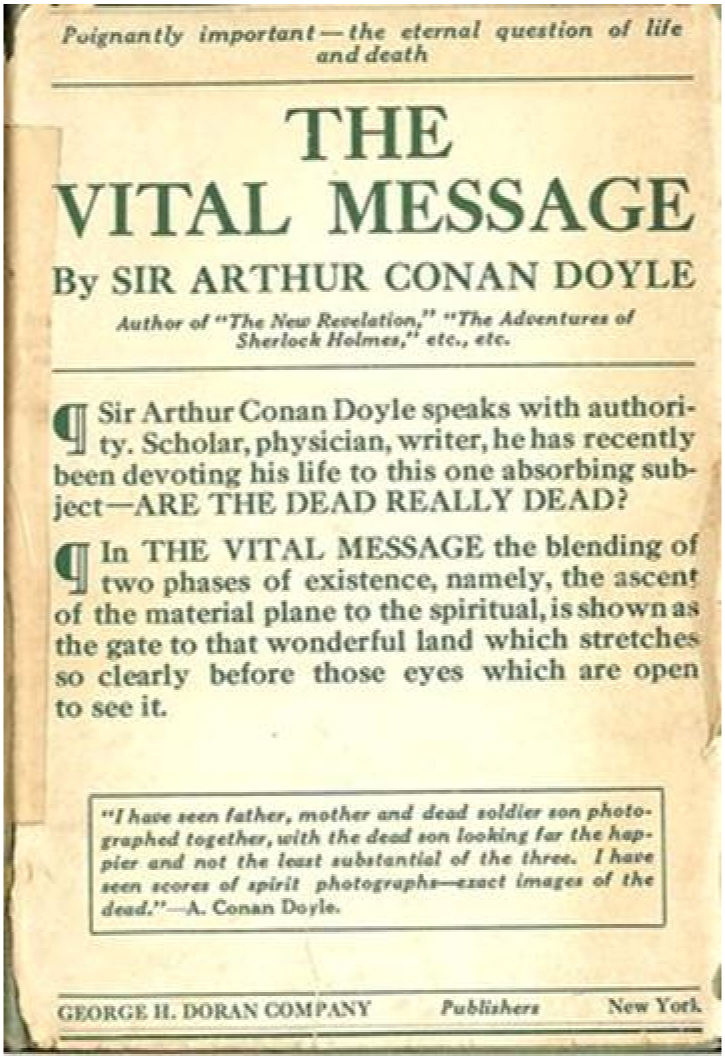

Poignantly important — the eternal question of life and death

THE
VITAL MESSAGE

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Author of "The New Revelation," "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," etc., etc.

¶ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle speaks with authority. Scholar, physician, writer, he has recently been devoting his life to this one absorbing subject—ARE THE DEAD REALLY DEAD?

¶ In THE VITAL MESSAGE the blending of two phases of existence, namely, the ascent of the material plane to the spiritual, is shown as the gate to that wonderful land which stretches so clearly before those eyes which are open to see it.

"I have seen father, mother and dead soldier son photographed together, with the dead son looking far the happier and not the least substantial of the three. I have seen scores of spirit photographs—exact images of the dead."—A. Conan Doyle.

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PREFACE

In “The New Revelation” the first dawn of the coming change has been described. In “The Vital Message” the sun has risen higher, and one sees more clearly and broadly what our new relations with the Unseen may be. As I look into the future of the human race I am reminded of how once, from amid the bleak chaos of rock and snow at the head of an Alpine pass, I looked down upon the far stretching view of Lombardy, shimmering in the sunshine and extending in one splendid panorama of blue lakes and green rolling hills until it melted into the golden haze which draped the far horizon. Such a promised land is at our very feet which, when we attain it, will make our present civilisation seem barren and uncouth. Already our vanguard is well over the pass. Nothing can now prevent us from reaching that wonderful land which stretches so clearly before those eyes which are opened to see it.

That stimulating writer, V. C. Desertis, has remarked that the Second Coming, which has always been timed to follow Armageddon, may be fulfilled not by a descent of the spiritual to us, but by the ascent of our material plane to the spiritual, and the blending of the two phases of existence. It is, at least, a fascinating speculation. But without so complete an overthrow of the partition walls as this would imply we know enough already to assure ourselves of such a close approximation as will surely deeply modify all our views of science, of religion and of life. What form these changes may take and what the evidence is upon which they will be founded are briefly set forth in this volume.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
CROWBOROUGH,
July, 1919.

THE VITAL MESSAGE

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CHAPTER I

THE TWO NEEDFUL READJUSTMENTS

It has been our fate, among all the innumerable generations of mankind, to face the most frightful calamity that has ever befallen the world. There is a basic fact which cannot be denied, and should not be overlooked. For a most important deduction must immediately follow from it. That deduction is that we, who have borne the pains, shall also learn the lesson which they were intended to convey. If we do not learn it and proclaim it, then when can it ever be learned and proclaimed, since there can never again be such a spiritual ploughing and harrowing and preparation for the seed? If our souls, wearied and tortured during these dreadful five years of self-sacrifice and suspense, can show no radical changes, then what souls will ever respond to a fresh influx of heavenly inspiration? In that case the state of the human race would indeed be hopeless, and never in all the coming centuries would there be any prospect of improvement.

Why was this tremendous experience forced upon mankind? Surely it is a superficial thinker who imagines that the great Designer of all things has set the whole planet in a ferment, and strained every nation to exhaustion, in order that this or that frontier be moved, or some fresh combination be formed in the kaleidoscope of nations. No, the causes of the convulsion, and its objects, are more profound than that. They are essentially religious, not political. They lie far deeper than the national squabbles of the day. A thousand years hence those national results may matter little, but the religious result will rule the world. That religious result is the reform of the decadent Christianity of to-day, its simplification, its purification, and its reinforcement by the facts of spirit communion and the clear knowledge of what lies beyond the exit-door of death. The shock of the war was meant to rouse us to mental and moral earnestness, to give us the courage to tear away venerable shams, and to force the human race to realise and use the vast new revelation which has been so clearly stated and so abundantly proved, for all who will examine the statements and proofs with an open mind.

Consider the awful condition of the world before this thunder-bolt struck it. Could anyone, tracing back down the centuries and examining the record of the wickedness of man, find anything which could compare with the story of the nations during the last twenty years! Think of the condition of Russia during that time, with her brutal aristocracy and her drunken democracy, her murders on either side, her Siberian horrors, her Jew baitings and her corruption. Think of the figure of Leopold of Belgium, an incarnate devil who from motives of greed carried murder and torture through a large section of Africa, and yet was received in every court, and was eventually buried after a panegyric from a Cardinal of the Roman Church — a church which had never once raised her voice against his diabolical career. Consider the similar crimes in the Putumayo, where British capitalists, if not guilty of outrage, can at least not be acquitted of having condoned it by their lethargy and trust in local agents. Think of Turkey and the recurrent massacres of her subject races. Think of the heartless grind of the factories everywhere, where work assumed a very different and more unnatural shape than the ancient labour of the fields. Think of the sensuality of many rich, the brutality of many poor, the shallowness of many fashionable, the coldness and deadness of religion, the absence anywhere of any deep, true spiritual impulse. Think, above all, of the organised materialism of Germany, the arrogance, the heartlessness, the negation of everything which one could possibly associate with the living spirit of Christ as evident in the utterances of Catholic Bishops, like Hartmann of Cologne, as in those of Lutheran Pastors. Put all this together and say if the human race has ever presented a more unlovely aspect. When we try to find the brighter spots they are chiefly where civilisation, as apart from religion, has built up necessities for the community, such as hospitals, universities, and organised charities, as conspicuous in Buddhist Japan as in Christian Europe. We cannot deny that there has been much virtue, much gentleness, much spirituality in individuals. But the churches were empty husks, which contained no spiritual food for the human race, and had in the main ceased to influence its actions, save in the direction of soulless forms.

This is not an over-coloured picture. Can we not see, then, what was the inner reason for the war? Can we not understand that it was needful to shake mankind loose from gossip and pink teas, and sword-worship, and Saturday night drunks, and self-seeking politics and theological quibbles — to wake them up and make them realise that they stand upon a narrow knife-edge between two awful eternities, and that, here and now, they have to finish with make-beliefs, and with real earnestness and courage face those truths which have always been palpable where indolence, or cowardice, or vested interests have not obscured the vision. Let us try to appreciate what those truths are and the direction which reform must take. It is the new spiritual developments which predominate in my own thoughts, but there are two other great readjustments which are necessary before they can take their full effect. On the spiritual side I can speak with the force of knowledge from the beyond. On the other two points of reform, I make no such claim.

The first is that in the Bible, which is the foundation of our present religious thought, we have bound together the living and the dead, and the dead has tainted the living. A mummy and an angel are in most unnatural partnership. There can be no clear thinking, and no logical teaching until the old dispensation has been placed on the shelf of the scholar, and removed from the desk of the teacher. It is indeed a wonderful book, in parts the oldest which has come down to us, a book filled with rare knowledge, with history, with poetry, with occultism, with folklore. But it has no connection with modern conceptions of religion. In the main it is actually antagonistic to them. Two contradictory codes have been circulated under one cover, and the result is dire confusion. The one is a scheme depending upon a special tribal God, intensely anthropomorphic and filled with rage, jealousy and revenge. The conception pervades every book of the Old Testament. Even in the psalms, which are perhaps the most spiritual and beautiful section, the psalmist, amid much that is noble, sings of the fearsome things which his God will do to his enemies. “They shall go down alive into hell.” There is the keynote of this ancient document — a document which advocates massacre, condones polygamy, accepts slavery, and orders the burning of so-called witches. Its Mosaic provisions have long been laid aside. We do not consider ourselves accursed if we fail to mutilate our bodies, if we eat forbidden dishes, fail to trim our beards, or wear clothes of two materials. But we cannot lay aside the provisions and yet regard the document as divine. No learned quibbles can ever persuade an honest earnest mind that that is right. One may say: “Everyone knows that that is the old dispensation, and is not to be acted upon.” It is not true. It is continually acted upon, and always will be so long as it is made part of one sacred book. William the Second acted upon it. His German God which wrought such mischief in the world was the reflection of the dreadful being who ordered that captives be put under the harrow. The cities of Belgium were the reflection of the cities of Moab. Every hard-hearted brute in history, more especially in the religious wars, has found his inspiration in the Old Testament. “Smite and spare not!” “An eye for an eye!”, how readily the texts spring to the grim lips of the murderous fanatic. Francis on St. Bartholomew’s night, Alva in the Lowlands, Tilly at Magdeburg, Cromwell at Drogheda, the Covenainters at Philliphaugh, the Anabaptists of Munster, and the early Mormons of Utah, all found their murderous impulses fortified from this unholy source. Its red trail runs through history. Even where the New Testament prevails, its teaching must still be dulled and clouded by its sterner neighbour. Let us retain this honoured work of literature. Let us remove the taint which poisons the very spring of our religious thought.

This is, in my opinion, the first clearing which should be made for the more beautiful building to come. The second is less important, as it is a shifting of the point of view, rather than an actual change. It is to be remembered that Christ’s life in this world occupied, so far as we can estimate, 33 years, whilst from His arrest to His resurrection was less than a week. Yet the whole Christian system has come to revolve round His death, to the partial exclusion of the beautiful lesson of His life. Far too much weight has been placed upon the one, and far too little upon the other, for the death, beautiful, and indeed perfect, as it was, could be matched by that of many scores of thousands who have died for an idea, while the life, with its consistent record of charity, breadth of mind, unselfishness, courage, reason, and progressiveness, is absolutely unique and superhuman. Even in these abbreviated, translated, and second-hand records we receive an impression such as no other life can give — an impression which fills us with utter reverence. Napoleon, no mean judge of human nature, said of it: “It is different with Christ. Everything about Him astonishes me. His spirit surprises me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and anything of this world there is no possible comparison. He is really a being apart. The nearer I approach Him and the closer I examine Him, the more everything seems above me.”

It is this wonderful life, its example and inspiration, which was the real object of the descent of this high spirit on to our planet. If the human race had earnestly centred upon that instead of losing itself in vain dreams of vicarious sacrifices and imaginary falls, with all the mystical and contentious philosophy which has centred round the subject, how very different the level of human culture and happiness would be to-day! Such theories, with their absolute want of reason or morality, have been the main cause why the best minds have been so often alienated from the Christian system and proclaimed themselves materialists. In contemplating what shocked their instincts for truth they have lost that which was both true and beautiful. Christ's death was worthy of His life, and rounded off a perfect career, but it is the life which He has left as the foundation for the permanent religion of mankind. All the religious wars, the private feuds, and the countless miseries of sectarian contention, would have been at least minimised, if not avoided, had the bare example of Christ's life been adopted as the standard of conduct and of religion.

But there are certain other considerations which should have weight when we contemplate this life and its efficacy as an example. One of these is that the very essence of it was that He critically examined religion as He found it, and brought His robust common sense and courage to bear in exposing the shams and in pointing out the better path. THAT is the hall-mark of the true follower of Christ, and not the mute acceptance of doctrines which are, upon the face of them, false and pernicious, because they come to us with some show of authority. What authority have we now, save this very life, which could compare with those Jewish books which were so binding in their force, and so immutably sacred that even the misspellings or pen-slips of the scribe, were most carefully preserved? It is a simple obvious fact that if Christ had been orthodox, and had possessed what is so often praised as a "child-like faith," there could have been no such thing as Christianity. Let reformers who love Him take heart as they consider that they are indeed following in the footsteps of the Master, who has at no time said that the revelation which He brought, and which has been so imperfectly used, is the last which will come to mankind. In our own times an equally great one has been released from the centre of all truth, which will make as deep an impression upon the human race as Christianity, though no predominant figure has yet appeared to enforce its lessons. Such a figure has appeared once when the days were ripe, and I do not doubt that this may occur once more.

One other consideration must be urged. Christ has not given His message in the first person. If He had done so our position would be stronger. It has been repeated by the hearsay and report of earnest but ill-educated men. It speaks much for education in the Roman province of Judea that these fishermen, publicans and others could even read or write. Luke and Paul were, of course, of a higher class, but their information came from their lowly predecessors. Their account is splendidly satisfying in the unity of the general impression which it produces, and the clear drawing of the Master's teaching and character. At the same time it is full of inconsistencies and contradictions upon immaterial matters. For example, the four accounts of the resurrection differ in detail, and there is no orthodox learned lawyer who dutifully accepts all four versions who could not shatter the evidence if he dealt with it in the course of his profession. These details are immaterial to the spirit of the message. It is not common sense to suppose that every item is inspired, or that we have to make no allowance for imperfect reporting, individual convictions, oriental phraseology, or faults of translation. These have, indeed, been admitted by revised versions. In His utterance about the letter and the spirit we could almost believe that Christ had foreseen the plague of texts from which we have suffered, even as He Himself suffered at the hands of the theologians of His day, who then, as now, have been a curse to the world. We were meant to use our reasons and brains in adapting His teaching to the conditions of our altered lives and times. Much depended upon the society and mode of expression which belonged to His era. To suppose in these days that one has literally to give all to the poor, or that a starved English prisoner should literally love his enemy the Kaiser, or that because Christ protested against the lax marriages of His day therefore two spouses who loathe each other should be for ever chained in a life servitude and martyrdom — all these assertions are to travesty His teaching and to take from it that robust quality of common sense which was its main characteristic. To ask what is impossible from human nature is to weaken your appeal when you ask for what is reasonable.

It has already been stated that of the three headings under which reforms are grouped, the exclusion of the old dispensation, the greater attention to Christ's life as compared to His death, and the new spiritual influx which is giving us psychic religion, it is only on the latter that one can quote the authority of the beyond. Here, however, the case is really understated. In regard to the Old Testament I have never seen the matter treated in a spiritual communication. The nature of Christ, however, and His teaching, have been expounded a score of times with some variation of detail, but in the main as reproduced here. Spirits have their individuality of view, and some carry over strong earthly prepossessions which they do not easily shed; but reading many authentic spirit communications one finds that the idea of redemption is hardly ever spoken of, while that of example and influence is for ever insisted upon. In them Christ is the highest spirit known, the son of God, as we all are, but nearer to God, and therefore in a more particular sense His son. He does not, save in most rare and special cases, meet us when we die. Since souls pass over, night and day, at the rate of about 100 a minute, this would seem self-evident. After a time we may be admitted to His presence, to find a most tender, sympathetic and helpful comrade and guide, whose spirit influences all things even when His bodily presence is not visible. This is the general teaching of the other world communications concerning Christ, the gentle, loving and powerful spirit which broods ever over that world which, in all its many spheres, is His special care.

Before passing to the new revelation, its certain proofs and its definite teaching, let us hark back for a moment upon the two points which have already been treated. They are not absolutely vital points. The fresh developments can go on and conquer the world without them. There can be no sudden change in the ancient routine of our religious habits, nor is it possible to conceive that a congress of theologians could take so heroic a step as to tear the Bible in twain, laying one half upon the shelf and one upon the table. Neither is it to be expected that any formal pronouncements could ever be made that the churches have all laid the wrong emphasis upon the story of Christ. Moral courage will not rise to such a height. But with the spiritual quickening and the greater earnestness which will have their roots in this bloody passion of mankind, many will perceive what is reasonable and true, so that even if the Old Testament should remain, like some obsolete appendix in the animal frame, to mark a lower stage through which development has passed, it will more and more be recognised as a document which has lost all validity and which should no longer be allowed to influence human conduct, save by way of pointing out much which we may avoid. So also with the teaching of Christ, the mystical portions may fade gently away, as the grosser views of eternal punishment have faded within our own lifetime, so that while mankind is hardly aware of the change the heresy of today will become the commonplace of tomorrow.

These things will adjust themselves in God’s own time. What is, however, both new and vital are those fresh developments which will now be discussed. In them may be found the signs of how the dry bones may be stirred, and how the mummy may be quickened with the breath of life. With the actual certainty of a definite life after death, and a sure sense of responsibility for our own spiritual development, a responsibility which cannot be put upon any other shoulders, however exalted, but must be borne by each individual for himself, there will come the greatest reinforcement of morality which the human race has ever known. We are on the verge of it now, but our descendants will look upon the past century as the culmination of the dark ages when man lost his trust in God, and was so engrossed in his temporary earth life that he lost all sense of spiritual reality.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWNING OF THE LIGHT

Some sixty years ago that acute thinker Lord Brougham remarked that in the clear sky of scepticism he saw only one small cloud drifting up and that was Modern Spiritualism. It was a curiously inverted simile, for one would surely have expected him to say that in the drifting clouds of scepticism he saw one patch of clear sky, but at least it showed how conscious he was of the coming importance of the movement. Ruskin, too, an equally agile mind, said that his assurance of immortality depended upon the observed facts of Spiritualism. Scores, and indeed hundreds, of famous names could be quoted who have subscribed the same statement, and whose support would dignify any cause upon earth. They are the higher peaks who have been the first to catch the light, but the dawn will spread until none are too lowly to share it. Let us turn, therefore, and inspect this movement which is most certainly destined to revolutionise human thought and action as none other has done within the Christian era. We shall look at it both in its strength and in its weakness, for where one is dealing with what one knows to be true one can fearlessly insist upon the whole of the truth.

The movement which is destined to bring vitality to the dead and cold religions has been called “Modern Spiritualism.” The “modern” is good, since the thing itself, in one form or another, is as old as history, and has always, however obscured by forms, been the red central glow in the depths of all religious ideas, permeating the Bible from end to end. But the word “Spiritualism” has been so befouled by wicked charlatans, and so cheapened by many a sad incident, that one could almost wish that some such term as “psychic religion” would clear the subject of old prejudices, just as mesmerism, after many years of obloquy, was rapidly accepted when its name was changed to hypnotism. On the other hand, one remembers the sturdy pioneers who have fought under this banner, and who were prepared to risk their careers, their professional success, and even their reputation for sanity, by publicly asserting what they knew to be the truth.

Their brave, unselfish devotion must do something to cleanse the name for which they fought and suffered. It was they who nursed the system which promises to be, not a new religion — it is far too big for that — but part of the common heritage of knowledge shared by the whole human race. Perfected Spiritualism, however, will probably bear about the same relation to the Spiritualism of 1850 as a modern locomotive to the bubbling little kettle which heralded the era of steam. It will end by being rather the proof and basis of all religions than a religion in itself. We have already too many religions — but too few proofs.

Those first manifestations at Hydesville varied in no way from many of which we have record in the past, but the result arising from them differed very much, because, for the first time, it occurred to a human being not merely to listen to inexplicable sounds, and to fear them or marvel at them, but to establish communication with them. John Wesley’s father might have done the same more than a century before had the thought occurred to him when he was a witness of the manifestations at Epworth in 1726. It was only when the young Fox girl struck her hands together and cried “Do as I do” that there was instant compliance, and consequent proof of the presence of an INTELLIGENT invisible force, thus differing from all other forces of which we know. The circumstances were humble, and even rather sordid, upon both sides of the veil, human and spirit, yet it was, as time will more and more clearly show, one of the turning points of the world’s history, greater far than the fall of thrones or the rout of armies. Some artist of the future will draw the scene — the sitting-room of the wooden, shack-like house, the circle of half-awed and half-critical neighbours, the child clapping her hands with upturned laughing face, the dark corner shadows where these strange new forces seem to lurk — forces often apparent, and now come to stay and to effect the complete revolution of human thought. We may well ask why should such great results arise from such petty sources? So argued the highbrowed philosophers of Greece and Rome when the outspoken Paul, with the fisherman Peter and his half-educated disciples, traversed all their learned theories, and with the help of women, slaves, and schismatic Jews, subverted their ancient creeds. One can but answer that Providence has its own way of attaining its results, and that it seldom conforms to our opinion of what is most appropriate.

We have a larger experience of such phenomena now, and we can define with some accuracy what it was that happened at Hydesville in the year

1848. We know that these matters are governed by law and by conditions as much as any other phenomena of the universe, though at the moment it seemed to the public to be an isolated and irregular outburst. On the one hand, you had a material, earth-bound spirit of a low order of development which needed a physical medium in order to be able to indicate its presence. On the other, you had that rare thing, a good physical medium. The result followed as surely as the flash follows when the electric battery and wire are both properly adjusted. Corresponding experiments, where effect, and cause duly follow, are being worked out at the present moment by Professor Crawford, of Belfast, as detailed in his two recent books, where he shows that there is an actual loss of weight of the medium in exact proportion to the physical phenomenon produced. The whole secret of mediumship on this material side appears to lie in the power, quite independent of oneself, of passively giving up some portion of one's bodily substance for the use of outside influences. Why should some have this power and some not? We do not know — nor do we know why one should have the ear for music and another not. Each is born in us, and each has little connection with our moral natures. At first it was only physical mediumship which was known, and public attention centred upon moving tables, automatic musical instruments, and other crude but obvious examples of outside influence, which were unhappily very easily imitated by rogues. Since then we have learned that there are many forms of mediumship, so different from each other that an expert at one may have no powers at all at the other. The automatic writer, the clairvoyant, the crystal-seer, the trance speaker, the photographic medium, the direct voice medium, and others, are all, when genuine, the manifestations of one force, which runs through varied channels as it did in the gifts ascribed to the disciples. The unhappy outburst of roguery was helped, no doubt, by the need for darkness claimed by the early experimenters — a claim which is by no means essential, since the greatest of all mediums, D. D. Home, was able by the exceptional strength of his powers to dispense with it. At the same time the fact that darkness rather than light, and dryness rather than moisture, are helpful to good results has been abundantly manifested, and points to the physical laws which underlie the phenomena. The observation made long afterwards that wireless telegraphy, another etheric force, acts twice as well by night as by day, may, corroborate the general conclusions of the early Spiritualists, while their assertion that the least harmful light is red light has a suggestive analogy in the experience of the photographer.

There is no space here for the history of the rise and development of the movement. It provoked warm adhesion and fierce opposition from the start. Professor Hare and Horace Greeley were among the educated minority who tested and endorsed its truth. It was disfigured by many grievous incidents, which may explain but does not excuse the perverse opposition which it encountered in so many quarters. This opposition was really largely based upon the absolute materialism of the age, which would not admit that there could exist at the present moment such conditions as might be accepted in the far past. When actually brought in contact with that life beyond the grave which they professed to believe in, these people winced, recoiled, and declared it impossible. The science of the day was also rooted in materialism, and discarded all its own very excellent axioms when it was faced by an entirely new and unexpected proposition. Faraday declared that in approaching a new subject one should make up one's mind a priori as to what is possible and what is not! Huxley said that the messages, EVEN IF TRUE, "interested him no more than the gossip of curates in a cathedral city." Darwin said: "God help us if we are to believe such things." Herbert Spencer declared against it, but had no time to go into it. At the same time all science did not come so badly out of the ordeal. As already mentioned, Professor Hare, of Philadelphia, inventor, among other things, of the oxy-hydrogen blow-pipe, was the first man of note who had the moral courage, after considerable personal investigation, to declare that these new and strange developments were true. He was followed by many medical men, both in America and in Britain, including Dr. Elliotson, one of the leaders of free thought in this country. Professor Crookes, the most rising chemist in Europe, Dr. Russel Wallace the great naturalist, Varley the electrician, Flammarion the French astronomer, and many others, risked their scientific reputations in their brave assertions of the truth. These men were not credulous fools. They saw and deplored the existence of frauds. Crookes' letters upon the subject are still extant. In very many cases it was the Spiritualists themselves who exposed the frauds. They laughed, as the public laughed, at the sham Shakespeares and vulgar Caesars who figured in certain seance rooms. They deprecated also the low moral tone which would turn such powers to prophecies about the issue of a race or the success of a speculation. But they had that broader vision and sense of proportion which assured them that behind all these follies and frauds there lay a mass of solid evidence which could not be shaken, though like all evidence, it had to be examined before it could be appreciated. They were not such simpletons as to be driven away from a great truth because there are some dishonest camp followers who hang upon its skirts.

A great centre of proof and of inspiration lay during those early days in Mr. D. D. Home, a Scottish-American, who possessed powers which make him one of the most remarkable personalities of whom we have any record. Home's life, written by his second wife, is a book which deserves very careful reading. This man, who in some aspects was more than a man, was before the public for nearly thirty years. During that time he never received payment for his services, and was always ready, to put himself at the disposal of any bona-fide and reasonable enquirer. His phenomena were produced in full light, and it was immaterial to him whether the sittings were in his own rooms or in those of his friends. So high were his principles that upon one occasion, though he was a man of moderate means and less than moderate health, he refused the princely fee of two thousand pounds offered for a single sitting by the Union Circle in Paris.

As to his powers, they seem to have included every form of mediumship in the highest degree — self-levitation, as witnessed by hundreds of credible witnesses; the handling of fire, with the power of conferring like immunity upon others; the movement without human touch of heavy objects; the visible materialisation of spirits; miracles of healing; and messages from the dead, such as that which converted the hard-headed Scot, Robert Chambers, when Home repeated to him the actual dying words of his young daughter. All this came from a man of so sweet a nature and of so charitable a disposition, that the union of all qualities would seem almost to justify those who, to Home's great embarrassment, were prepared to place him upon a pedestal above humanity.

The genuineness of his psychic powers has never been seriously questioned, and was as well recognised in Rome and Paris as in London. One incident only darkened his career, and it, was one in which he was blameless, as anyone who carefully weighs the evidence must admit. I allude to the action taken against him by Mrs. Lyon, who, after adopting him as her son and settling a large sum of money upon him, endeavoured to regain, and did regain, this money by her unsupported assertion that he had persuaded her illicitly to make him the allowance. The facts of his life are, in my judgment, ample proof of the truth of the Spiritualist position, if no other proof at all had been available. It is to be remarked in the career of this entirely honest and unvenal medium that he had periods in his life when his powers deserted him completely, that he could foresee these lapses, and that, being honest and unvenal, he simply abstained from all attempts until the power returned. It is this intermittent character of the gift which is, in my opinion, responsible for cases when a medium who has passed the most rigid tests upon certain occasions is afterwards detected in simulating, very clumsily, the results which he had once successfully accomplished. The real power having failed, he has not the moral courage to admit it, nor the self-denial to forego his fee which he endeavours to earn by a travesty of what was once genuine. Such an explanation would cover some facts which otherwise are hard to reconcile. We must also admit that some mediums are extremely irresponsible and feather-headed people. A friend of mine, who sat with Eusapia Palladino, assured me that he saw her cheat in the most childish and bare-faced fashion, and yet immediately afterwards incidents occurred which were absolutely beyond any, normal powers to produce.

Apart from Home, another episode which marks a stage in the advance of this movement was the investigation and report by the Dialectical Society in the year 1869. This body was composed of men of various learned professions who gathered together to investigate the alleged facts, and ended by reporting that they really WERE facts. They were unbiased, and their conclusions were founded upon results which were very soberly set forth in their report, a most convincing document which, even now in 1919, after the lapse of fifty years, is far more intelligent than the greater part of current opinion upon this subject. None the less, it was greeted by a chorus of ridicule by the ignorant Press of that day, who, if the same men had come to the opposite conclusion in spite of the evidence, would have been ready to hail their verdict as the undoubted end of a pernicious movement.

In the early days, about 1863, a book was written by Mrs. de Morgan, the wife of the well-known mathematician Professor de Morgan, entitled “From Matter to Spirit.” There is a sympathetic preface by the husband. The book is still well worth reading, for it is a question whether anyone has shown greater brain power in treating the subject. In it the prophecy is made that as the movement develops the more material phenomena will decrease and their place be taken by the more spiritual, such as automatic writing. This forecast has been fulfilled, for though physical mediums still exist the other more subtle forms greatly predominate, and call for far more discriminating criticism in judging their value and their truth. Two very convincing forms of mediumship, the direct voice and spirit photography, have also become prominent. Each of these presents such proof that it is impossible for the sceptic to face them, and he can only avoid them by ignoring them.

In the case of the direct voice one of the leading exponents is Mrs. French, an amateur medium in America, whose work is described both by Mr. Funk and Mr. Randall. She is a frail elderly lady, yet in her presence the most masculine and robust voices make communications, even when her own mouth is covered. I have myself investigated the direct voice in the case of four different mediums, two of them amateurs, and can have no doubt of the reality of the voices, and that they are not the effect of ventriloquism. I was more struck by the failures than by the successes, and cannot easily forget the passionate pantings with which some entity strove hard to reveal his identity to me, but without success. One of these mediums was tested afterwards by having the mouth filled with coloured water, but the voice continued as before.

As to spirit photography, the most successful results are obtained by the Crewe circle in England, under the mediumship of Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton. I have seen scores of these photographs, which in several cases reproduce exact images of the dead which do not correspond with any pictures of them taken during life. I have seen father, mother, and dead soldier son, all taken together with the dead son looking far the happier and not the least substantial of the three. It is in these varied forms of proof that the impregnable strength of the evidence lies, for how absurd do explanations of telepathy, unconscious cerebration or cosmic memory become when faced by such phenomena as spirit photography, materialisation, or the direct voice. Only one hypothesis can cover every branch of these manifestations, and that is the system of extraneous life and action which has always, for seventy years, held the field for any reasonable mind which had impartially considered the facts.

I have spoken of the need for careful and cool-headed analysis in judging the evidence where automatic writing is concerned. One is bound to exclude spirit explanations until all natural ones have been exhausted, though I do not include among natural ones the extreme claims of far-fetched telepathy such as that another person can read in your thoughts things of which you were never yourself aware. Such explanations are not explanations, but mystifications and absurdities, though they seem to have a special attraction for a certain sort of psychical researcher, who is obviously destined to go on researching to the end of time, without ever reaching any conclusion save that of the patience of those who try to follow his reasoning. To give a good example of valid automatic script, chosen out of many which I could quote, I would draw the reader’s attention to the facts as to the excavations at Glastonbury, as detailed in “The Gate of Remembrance” by Mr. Bligh Bond. Mr. Bligh Bond, by the way, is not a Spiritualist, but the same cannot be said of the writer of the automatic script, an amateur medium, who was able to indicate the secrets of the buried abbey, which were proved to be correct when the ruins were uncovered. I can truly say that, though I have read much of the old monastic life, it has never been brought home to me so closely as by the messages and descriptions of dear old Brother Johannes, the earth-bound spirit — earthbound by his great love for the old abbey in which he had spent his human life. This book, with its practical sequel, may be quoted as an excellent example of automatic writing at its highest, for what telepathic explanation can cover the detailed description of objects which lie unseen by any human eye? It must be admitted, however, that in automatic writing you are at one end of the telephone, if one may use such a simile, and you have, no assurance as to who is at the other end. You may have wildly false messages suddenly interpolated among truthful ones — messages so detailed in their mendacity that it is impossible to think that they are not deliberately false. When once we have accepted the central fact that spirits change little in essentials when leaving the body, and that in consequence the world is infested by many low and mischievous types, one can understand that these untoward incidents are rather a confirmation of Spiritualism than an argument against it. Personally I have received and have been deceived by several such messages. At the same time I can say that after an experience of thirty years of such communications I have never known a blasphemous, an obscene or an unkind sentence come through. I admit, however, that I have heard of such cases. Like attracts like, and one should know one’s human company before one joins in such intimate and reverent rites. In clairvoyance the same sudden inexplicable deceptions appear. I have closely followed the work of one female medium, a professional, whose results are so extraordinarily good that in a favourable case she will give the full names of the deceased as well as the most definite and convincing test messages. Yet among this splendid series of results I have notes of several in which she was a complete failure and absolutely wrong upon essentials. How can this be explained? We can only answer that conditions were obviously not propitious, but why or how are among the many problems of the future. It is a profound and most complicated subject, however easily it may be settled by the "ridiculous nonsense" school of critics. I look at the row of books upon the left of my desk as I write — ninety-six solid volumes, many of them annotated and well thumbed, and yet I know that I am like a child wading ankle deep in the margin of an illimitable ocean. But this, at least, I have very clearly realised, that the ocean is there and that the margin is part of it, and that down that shelving shore the human race is destined to move slowly to deeper waters. In the next chapter, I will endeavour to show what is the purpose of the Creator in this strange revelation of new intelligent forces impinging upon our planet. It is this view of the question which must justify the claim that this movement, so long the subject of sneers and ridicule, is absolutely the most important development in the whole history of the human race, so important that, if we could conceive one single man discovering and publishing it, he would rank before Christopher Columbus as a discoverer of new worlds, before Paul as a teacher of new religious truths, and before Isaac Newton as a student of the laws of the Universe.

Before opening up this subject there is one consideration which should have due weight, and yet seems continually to be overlooked. The differences between various sects are a very small thing as compared to the great eternal duel between materialism and the spiritual view of the Universe. That is the real fight. It is a fight in which the Churches championed the anti-material view, but they have done it so unintelligently, and have been continually placed in such false positions, that they have always been losing. Since the days of Hume and Voltaire and Gibbon the fight has slowly but steadily rolled in favour of the attack. Then came Darwin, showing with apparent truth, that man has never fallen but always risen. This cut deep into the philosophy of orthodoxy, and it is folly to deny it. Then again came the so-called "Higher Criticism," showing alleged flaws and cracks in the very foundations. All this time the churches were yielding ground, and every retreat gave a fresh jumping-off place for a new assault. It has gone so far that at the present moment a very large section of the people of this country, rich and poor, are out of all sympathy not only with the churches but with the whole Spiritual view. Now, we intervene with our positive knowledge and actual proof — an ally so powerful that we are capable of turning the whole tide of battle and rolling it back for ever against materialism. We can say: “We will meet you on your own ground and show you by material and scientific tests that the soul and personality survive.” That is the aim of Psychic Science, and it has been fully attained. It means an end to materialism for ever. And yet this movement, this Spiritual movement, is hooted at and reviled by Rome, by Canterbury and even by Little Bethel, each of them for once acting in concert, and including in their battle line such strange allies as the Scientific Agnostics and the militant Free-thinkers. Father Vaughan and the Bishop of London, the Rev. F. B. Meyer and Mr. Clodd, “The Church Times” and “The Freethinker,” are united in battle, though they fight with very different battle cries, the one declaring that the thing is of the devil, while the other is equally clear that it does not exist at all. The opposition of the materialists is absolutely intelligent since it is clear that any man who has spent his life in saying “No” to all extramundane forces is, indeed, in a pitiable position when, after many years, he has to recognise that his whole philosophy is built upon sand and that “Yes” was the answer from the beginning. But as to the religious bodies, what words can express their stupidity and want of all proportion in not running halfway and more to meet the greatest ally who has ever intervened to change their defeat into victory? What gifts this all-powerful ally brings with him, and what are the terms of his alliance, will now be considered.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT ARGUMENT

The physical basis of all psychic belief is that the soul is a complete duplicate of the body, resembling it in the smallest particular, although constructed in some far more tenuous material. In ordinary conditions these two bodies are intermingled so that the identity of the finer one is entirely obscured. At death, however, and under certain conditions in the course of life, the two divide and can be seen separately. Death differs from the conditions of separation before death in that there is a complete break between the two bodies, and life is carried on entirely by the lighter of the two, while the heavier, like a cocoon from which the living occupant has escaped, degenerates and disappears, the world burying the cocoon with much solemnity by taking little pains to ascertain what has become of its nobler contents. It is a vain thing to urge that science has not admitted this contention, and that the statement is pure dogmatism. The science which has not examined the facts has, it is true, not admitted the contention, but its opinion is manifestly worthless, or at the best of less weight than that of the humblest student of psychic phenomena. The real science which has examined the facts is the only valid authority, and it is practically unanimous. I have made personal appeals to at least one great leader of science to examine the facts, however superficially, without any success, while Sir William Crookes appealed to Sir George Stokes, the Secretary of the Royal Society, one of the most bitter opponents of the movement, to come down to his laboratory and see the psychic force at work, but he took no notice. What weight has science of that sort? It can only be compared to that theological prejudice which caused the Ecclesiastics in the days of Galileo to refuse to look through the telescope which he held out to them.

It is possible to write down the names of fifty professors in great seats of learning who have examined and endorsed these facts, and the list would include many of the greatest intellects which the world has produced in our time — Flammarion and Lombroso, Charles Richet and Russel Wallace, Willie Reichel, Myers, Zollner, James, Lodge, and Crookes. Therefore the facts HAVE been endorsed by the only science that has the right to express an opinion. I have never, in my thirty years of experience, known one single scientific man who went thoroughly into this matter and did not end by accepting the Spiritual solution. Such may exist, but I repeat that I have never heard of him. Let us, then, with confidence examine this matter of the "spiritual body," to use the term made classical by Saint Paul. There are many signs in his writings that Paul was deeply versed in psychic matters, and one of these is his exact definition of the natural and spiritual bodies in the service which is the final farewell to life of every Christian. Paul picked his words, and if he had meant that man consisted of a natural body and a spirit he would have said so. When he said "a spiritual body" he meant a body which contained the spirit and yet was distinct from the ordinary natural body. That is exactly what psychic science has now shown to be true.

When a man has taken hashish or certain other drugs, he not infrequently has the experience that he is standing or floating beside his own body, which he can see stretched senseless upon the couch. So also under anaesthetics, particularly under laughing gas, many people are conscious of a detachment from their bodies, and of experiences at a distance. I have myself seen very clearly my wife and children inside a cab while I was senseless in the dentist's chair. Again, when a man is fainting or dying, and his system in an unstable condition, it is asserted in very many definite instances that he can, and does, manifest himself to others at a distance. These phantasms of the living, which have been so carefully explored and docketed by Messrs. Myers and Gurney, ran into hundreds of cases. Some people claim that by an effort of will they can, after going to sleep, propel their own doubles in the direction which they desire, and visit those whom they wish to see. Thus there is a great volume of evidence — how great no man can say who has not spent diligent years in exploring it — which vouches for the existence of this finer body containing the precious jewels of the mind and spirit, and leaving only gross confused animal functions in its heavier companion.

Mr. Funk, who is a critical student of psychic phenomena, and also the joint compiler of the standard American dictionary, narrates a story in point which could be matched from other sources. He tells of an American doctor of his acquaintance, and he vouches personally for the truth of the incident. This doctor, in the course of a cataleptic seizure in Florida, was aware that he had left his body, which he saw lying beside him. He had none the less preserved his figure and his identity. The thought of some friend at a distance came into his mind, and after an appreciable interval he found himself in that friend's room, half way across the continent. He saw his friend, and was conscious that his friend saw him. He afterwards returned to his own room, stood beside his own senseless body, argued within himself whether he should re-occupy it or not, and finally, duty overcoming inclination, he merged his two frames together and continued his life. A letter from him to his friend explaining matters crossed a letter from the friend, in which he told how he also had been aware of his presence. The incident is narrated in detail in Mr. Funk's "Psychic Riddle."

I do not understand how any man can examine the many instances coming from various angles of approach without recognising that there really is a second body of this sort, which incidentally goes far to account for all stories, sacred or profane, of ghosts, apparitions and visions. Now, what is this second body, and how does it fit into modern religious revelation?

What it is, is a difficult question, and yet when science and imagination unite, as Tyndall said they should unite, to throw a searchlight into the unknown, they may produce a beam sufficient to outline vaguely what will become clearer with the future advance of our race. Science has demonstrated that while ether pervades everything the ether which is actually in a body is different from the ether outside it. "Bound" ether is the name given to this, which Fresnel and others have shown to be denser. Now, if this fact be applied to the human body, the result would be that, if all that is visible of that body were removed, there would still remain a complete and absolute mould of the body, formed in bound ether which would be different from the ether around it. This argument is more solid than mere speculation, and it shows that even the soul may come to be defined in terms of matter and is not altogether "such stuff as dreams are made of."

It has been shown that there is some good evidence for the existence of this second body apart from psychic religion, but to those who have examined that religion it is the centre of the whole system, sufficiently real to be recognised by clairvoyants, to be heard by clairaudients, and even to make an exact impression upon a photographic plate. Of the latter phenomenon, of which I have had some very particular opportunities of judging, I have no more doubt than I have of the ordinary photography of commerce. It had already been shown by the astronomers that the sensitized plate is a more delicate recording instrument than the human retina, and that it can show stars upon a long exposure which the eye has never seen. It would appear that the spirit world is really so near to us that a very little extra help under correct conditions of mediumship will make all the difference. Thus the plate, instead of the eye, may bring the loved face within the range of vision, while the trumpet, acting as a megaphone, may bring back the familiar voice where the spirit whisper with no mechanical aid was still inaudible. So loud may the latter phenomenon be that in one case, of which I have the record, the dead man's dog was so excited at hearing once more his master's voice that he broke his chain, and deeply scarred the outside of the seance room door in his efforts to force an entrance.

Now, having said so much of the spirit body, and having indicated that its presence is not vouched for by only one line of evidence or school of thought, let us turn to what happens at the time of death, according to the observation of clairvoyants on this side and the posthumous accounts of the dead upon the other. It is exactly what we should expect to happen, granted the double identity. In a painless and natural process the lighter disengages itself from the heavier, and slowly draws itself off until it stands with the same mind, the same emotions, and an exactly similar body, beside the couch of death, aware of those around and yet unable to make them aware of it, save where that finer spiritual eyesight called clairvoyance exists. How, we may well ask, can it see without the natural organs? How did the hashish victim see his own unconscious body? How did the Florida doctor see his friend? There is a power of perception in the spiritual body which does give the power. We can say no more. To the clairvoyant the new spirit seems like a filmy outline. To the ordinary man it is invisible. To another spirit it would, no doubt, seem as normal and substantial as we appear to each other. There is some evidence that it refines with time, and is therefore nearer to the material at the moment of death or closely after it, than after a lapse of months or years. Hence, it is that apparitions of the dead are most clear and most common about the time of death, and hence also, no doubt, the fact that the cataleptic physician already quoted was seen and recognised by his friend. The meshes of his ether, if the phrase be permitted, were still heavy with the matter from which they had only just been disentangled.

Having disengaged itself from grosser matter, what happens to this spirit body, the precious bark which bears our all in all upon this voyage into unknown seas? Very many accounts have come back to us, verbal and written, detailing the experiences of those who have passed on. The verbal are by trance mediums, whose utterances appear to be controlled by outside intelligences. The written from automatic writers whose script is produced in the same way. At these words the critic naturally and reasonably shies, with a "What nonsense! How can you control the statement of this medium who is consciously or unconsciously pretending to inspiration?" This is a healthy scepticism, and should animate every experimenter who tests a new medium. The proofs must lie in the communication itself. If they are not present, then, as always, we must accept natural rather than unknown explanations. But they are continually present, and in such obvious forms that no one can deny them. There is a certain professional medium to whom I have sent many, mothers who were in need of consolation. I always ask the applicants to report the result to me, and I have their letters of surprise and gratitude before me as I write. "Thank you for this beautiful and interesting experience. She did not make a single mistake about their names, and everything she said was correct." In this case there was a rift between husband and wife before death, but the medium was able, unaided, to explain and clear up the whole matter, mentioning the correct circumstances, and names of everyone concerned, and showing the reasons for the non-arrival of certain letters, which had been the cause of the misunderstanding. The next case was also one of husband and wife, but it is the husband who is the survivor. He says: "It was a most successful sitting. Among other things, I addressed a remark in Danish to my wife (who is a Danish girl), and the answer came back in English without the least hesitation." The next case was again of a man who had lost a very dear male friend. "I have had the most wonderful results with Mrs. —— to-day. I cannot tell you the joy it has been to me. Many grateful thanks for your help." The next one says: "Mrs. —— was simply wonderful. If only more people knew, what agony they would be spared." In this case the wife got in touch with the husband, and the medium mentioned correctly five dead relatives who were in his company. The next is a case of mother and son. "I saw Mrs. —— to-day, and obtained very wonderful results. She told me nearly everything quite correctly — a very few mistakes.” The next is similar. “We were quite successful. My boy even reminded me of something that only he and I knew.” Says another: “My boy reminded me of the day when he sowed turnip seed upon the lawn. Only he could have known of this.” These are fair samples of the letters, of which I hold a large number. They are from people who present themselves from among the millions living in London, or the provinces, and about whose affairs the medium had no possible normal way of knowing. Of all the very numerous cases which I have sent to this medium I have only had a few which have been complete failures. On quoting my results to Sir Oliver Lodge, he remarked that his own experience with another medium had been almost identical. It is no exaggeration to say that our British telephone systems would probably give a larger proportion of useless calls. How is any critic to get beyond these facts save by ignoring or misrepresenting them? Healthy, scepticism is the basis of all accurate observation, but there comes a time when incredulity means either culpable ignorance or else imbecility, and this time has been long past in the matter of spirit intercourse.

In my own case, this medium mentioned correctly the first name of a lady who had died in our house, gave several very characteristic messages from her, described the only two dogs which we have ever kept, and ended by saying that a young officer was holding up a gold coin by which I would recognise him. I had lost my brother-in-law, an army doctor, in the war, and I had given him a spade guinea for his first fee, which he always wore on his chain. There were not more than two or three close relatives who knew about this incident, so that the test was a particularly good one. She made no incorrect statements, though some were vague. After I had revealed the identity of this medium several pressmen attempted to have test seances with her — a test seance being, in most cases, a seance which begins by breaking every psychic condition and making success most improbable. One of these gentlemen, Mr. Ulyss Rogers, had very fair results. Another sent from “Truth” had complete failure. It must be understood that these powers do not work from the medium, but through the medium, and that the forces in the beyond have not the least sympathy with a smart young pressman in search of clever copy, while they have a very different feeling to a bereaved mother who prays with all her broken heart that some assurance may be given her that the child of her love is not gone from her for ever. When this fact is mastered, and it is understood that “Stand and deliver” methods only excite gentle derision on the other side, we shall find some more intelligent manner of putting things of the spirit to the proof.

I have dwelt upon these results, which could be matched by other mediums, to show that we have solid and certain reasons to say that the verbal reports are not from the mediums themselves. Readers of Arthur Hill’s “Psychical Investigations” will find many even more convincing cases. So in the written communications, I have in a previous paper pointed to the “Gate of Remembrance” case, but there is a great mass of material which proves that, in spite of mistakes and failures, there really is a channel of communication, fitful and evasive sometimes, but entirely beyond coincidence or fraud. These, then, are the usual means by which we receive psychic messages, though table tilting, ouija boards, glasses upon a smooth surface, or anything which can be moved by the vital animal-magnetic force already discussed will equally serve the purpose. Often information is conveyed orally or by writing which could not have been known to anyone concerned. Mr. Wilkinson has given details of the case where his dead son drew attention to the fact that a curio (a coin bent by a bullet) had been overlooked among his effects. Sir William Barrett has narrated how a young officer sent a message leaving a pearl tie-pin to a friend. No one knew that such a pin existed, but it was found among his things. The death of Sir Hugh Lane was given at a private seance in Dublin before the details of the Lusitania disaster had been published. On that morning we ourselves, in a small seance, got the message “It is terrible, terrible, and will greatly affect the war,” at a time when we were convinced that no great loss of life could have occurred. Such examples are very numerous, and are only quoted here to show how impossible it is to invoke telepathy as the origin of such messages. There is only one explanation which covers the facts. They are what they say they are, messages from those who have passed on, from the spiritual body which was seen to rise from the deathbed, which has been so often photographed, which pervades all religion in every age, and which has been able, under proper circumstances, to materialise back into a temporary solidity so that it could walk and talk like a mortal, whether in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, or in the laboratory of Mr. Crookes, in Mornington Road, London.

Let us for a moment examine the facts in this Crookes’ episode. A small book exists which describes them, though it is not as accessible as it should be. In these wonderful experiments, which extended over several years, Miss Florrie Cook, who was a young lady of from 16 to 18 years of age, was repeatedly confined in Prof. Crookes' study, the door being locked on the inside. Here she lay unconscious upon a couch. The spectators assembled in the laboratory, which was separated by a curtained opening from the study. After a short interval, through this opening there emerged a lady who was in all ways different from Miss Cook. She gave her earth name as Katie King, and she proclaimed herself to be a materialised spirit, whose mission it was to carry the knowledge of immortality to mortals.

She was of great beauty of face, figure, and manner. She was four and a half inches taller than Miss Cook, fair, whereas the latter was dark, and as different from her as one woman could be from another. Her pulse rate was markedly slower. She became for the time entirely one of the company, walking about, addressing each person present, and taking delight in the children. She made no objection to photography or any other test. Forty-eight photographs of different degrees of excellence were made of her. She was seen at the same time as the medium on several occasions. Finally she departed, saying that her mission was over and that she had other work to do. When she vanished materialism should have vanished also, if mankind had taken adequate notice of the facts.

Now, what can the fair-minded inquirer say to such a story as that — one of many, but for the moment we are concentrating upon it? Was Mr. Crookes a blasphemous liar? But there were very many witnesses, as many sometimes as eight at a single sitting. And there are the photographs which include Miss Cook and show that the two women were quite different. Was he honestly mistaken? But that is inconceivable. Read the original narrative and see if you can find any solution save that it is true. If a man can read that sober, cautious statement and not be convinced, then assuredly his brain, is out of gear. Finally, ask yourself whether any religious manifestation in the world has had anything like the absolute proof which lies in this one. Cannot the orthodox see that instead of combating such a story, or talking nonsense about devils, they should hail that which is indeed the final answer to that materialism which is their really dangerous enemy. Even as I write, my eye falls upon a letter on my desk from an officer who had lost all faith in immortality and become an absolute materialist. "I came to dread my return home, for I cannot stand hypocrisy, and I knew well my attitude would cause some members of my family deep grief. Your book has now brought me untold comfort, and I can face the future cheerfully." Are these fruits from the Devil's tree, you timid orthodox critic?

Having then got in touch with our dead, we proceed, naturally, to ask them how it is with them, and under what conditions they exist. It is a very vital question, since what has befallen them yesterday will surely befall us to-morrow. But the answer is tidings of great joy. Of the new vital message to humanity nothing is more important than that. It rolls away all those horrible man-bred fears and fancies, founded upon morbid imaginations and the wild phrases of the oriental. We come upon what is sane, what is moderate, what is reasonable, what is consistent with gradual evolution and with the benevolence of God. Were there ever any conscious blasphemers upon earth who have insulted the Deity so deeply as those extremists, be they Calvinist, Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Jew, who pictured with their distorted minds an implacable torturer as the Ruler of the Universe!

The truth of what is told us as to the life beyond can in its very nature never be absolutely established. It is far nearer to complete proof, however, than any religious revelation which has ever preceded it. We have the fact that these accounts are mixed up with others concerning our present life which are often absolutely true. If a spirit can tell the truth about our sphere, it is difficult to suppose that he is entirely false about his own. Then, again, there is a very great similarity about such accounts, though their origin may be from people very far apart. Thus though "non-veridical," to use the modern jargon, they do conform to all our canons of evidence. A series of books which have attracted far less attention than they deserve have drawn the coming life in very close detail. These books are not found on railway bookstalls or in popular libraries, but the successive editions through which they pass show that there is a deeper public which gets what it wants in spite of artificial obstacles.

Looking over the list of my reading I find, besides nearly a dozen very interesting and detailed manuscript accounts, such published narratives as "Claude's Book," purporting to come from a young British aviator; "Thy Son Liveth," from an American soldier, "Private Dowding"; "Raymond," from a British soldier; "Do Thoughts Perish?" which contains accounts from several British soldiers and others; "I Heard a Voice," where a well-known K.C., through the mediumship of his two young daughters, has a very full revelation of the life beyond; "After Death," with the alleged experiences of the famous Miss Julia Ames; "The Seven Purposes," from an American pressman, and many others. They differ much in literary skill and are not all equally impressive, but the point which must strike any impartial mind is the general agreement of these various accounts as to the conditions of spirit life. An examination would show that some of them must have been in the press at the same time, so that they could not have each inspired the other. “Claude’s Book” and “Thy Son Liveth” appeared at nearly the same time on different sides of the Atlantic, but they agree very closely. “Raymond” and “Do Thoughts Perish?” must also have been in the press together, but the scheme of things is exactly the same. Surely the agreement of witnesses must here, as in all cases, be accounted as a test of truth. They differ mainly, as it seems to me, when they deal with their own future including speculations as to reincarnation, etc., which may well be as foggy to them as it is to us, or systems of philosophy where again individual opinion is apparent.

Of all these accounts the one which is most deserving of study is “Raymond.” This is so because it has been compiled from several famous mediums working independently of each other, and has been checked and chronicled by a man who is not only one of the foremost scientists of the world, and probably the leading intellectual force in Europe, but one who has also had a unique experience of the precautions necessary for the observation of psychic phenomena. The bright and sweet nature of the young soldier upon the other side, and his eagerness to tell of his experience is also a factor which will appeal to those who are already satisfied as to the truth of the communications. For all these reasons it is a most important document — indeed it would be no exaggeration to say that it is one of the most important in recent literature. It is, as I believe, an authentic account of the life in the beyond, and it is often more interesting from its sidelights and reservations than for its actual assertions, though the latter bear the stamp of absolute frankness and sincerity. The compilation is in some ways faulty. Sir Oliver has not always the art of writing so as to be understanded of the people, and his deeper and more weighty thoughts get in the way of the clear utterances of his son. Then again, in his anxiety to be absolutely accurate, Sir Oliver has reproduced the fact that sometimes Raymond is speaking direct, and sometimes the control is reporting what Raymond is saying, so that the same paragraph may turn several times from the first person to the third in a manner which must be utterly unintelligible to those who are not versed in the subject. Sir Oliver will, I am sure, not be offended if I say that, having satisfied his conscience by the present edition, he should now leave it for reference, and put forth a new one which should contain nothing but the words of Raymond and his spirit friends. Such a book, published at a low price, would, I think, have an amazing effect, and get all this new teaching to the spot that God has marked for it — the minds and hearts of the people.

So much has been said here about mediumship that perhaps it would be well to consider this curious condition a little more closely. The question of mediumship, what it is and how it acts, is one of the most mysterious in the whole range of science. It is a common objection to say if our dead are there why should we only hear of them through people by no means remarkable for moral or mental gifts, who are often paid for their ministration. It is a plausible argument, and yet when we receive a telegram from a brother in Australia we do not say: “It is strange that Tom should not communicate with me direct, but that the presence of that half-educated fellow in the telegraph office should be necessary.” The medium is in truth a mere passive machine, clerk and telegraph in one. Nothing comes FROM him. Every message is THROUGH him. Why he or she should have the power more than anyone else is a very interesting problem. This power may best be defined as the capacity for allowing the bodily powers, physical or mental, to be used by an outside influence. In its higher forms there is temporary extinction of personality and the substitution of some other controlling spirit. At such times the medium may entirely lose consciousness, or he may retain it and be aware of some external experience which has been enjoyed by his own entity while his bodily house has been filled by the temporary tenant. Or the medium may retain consciousness, and with eyes and ears attuned to a higher key than the normal man can attain, he may see and hear what is beyond our senses. Or in writing mediumship, a motor centre of the brain regulating the nerves and muscles of the arm may be controlled while all else seems to be normal. Or it may take the more material form of the exudation of a strange white evanescent dough-like substance called the ectoplasm, which has been frequently photographed by scientific enquirers in different stages of its evolution, and which seems to possess an inherent quality of shaping itself into parts or the whole of a body, beginning in a putty-like mould and ending in a resemblance to perfect human members. Or the ectoplasm, which seems to be an emanation of the medium to the extent that whatever it may weigh is so much subtracted from his substance, may be used as projections or rods which can convey objects or lift weights. A friend, in whose judgment and veracity I have absolute confidence, was present at one of Dr. Crawford's experiments with Kathleen Goligher, who is, it may be remarked, an unpaid medium. My friend touched the column of force, and found it could be felt by the hand though invisible to the eye. It is clear that we are in touch with some entirely new form both of matter and of energy. We know little of the properties of this extraordinary substance save that in its materialising form it seems extremely sensitive to the action of light. A figure built up in it and detached from the medium dissolves in light quicker than a snow image under a tropical sun, so that two successive flash-light photographs would show the one a perfect figure, and the next an amorphous mass. When still attached to the medium the ectoplasm flies back with great force on exposure to light, and, in spite of the laughter of the scoffers, there is none the less good evidence that several mediums have been badly injured by the recoil after a light has suddenly been struck by some amateur detective. Professor Geley has, in his recent experiments, described the ectoplasm as appearing outside the black dress of his medium as if a hoar frost had descended upon her, then coalescing into a continuous sheet of white substance, and oozing down until it formed a sort of apron in front of her. This process he has illustrated by a very complete series of photographs.

These are a few of the properties of mediumship. There are also the beautiful phenomena of the production of lights, and the rarer, but for evidential purposes even more valuable, manifestations of spirit photography. The fact that the photograph does not correspond in many cases with any which existed in life, must surely silence the scoffer, though there is a class of bigoted sceptic who would still be sneering if an Archangel alighted in Trafalgar Square. Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton, of Crewe, have brought this phase of mediumship to great perfection, though others have powers in that direction. Indeed, in some cases it is difficult to say who the medium may have been, for in one collective family group which was taken in the ordinary way, and was sent me by a master in a well known public school, the young son who died has appeared in the plate seated between his two little brothers.

As to the personality of mediums, they have seemed to me to be very average specimens of the community, neither markedly better nor markedly worse. I know many, and I have never met anything in the least like

“Sludge,” a poem which Browning might be excused for writing in some crisis of domestic disagreement, but which it was inexcusable to republish since it is admitted to be a concoction, and the exposure described to have been imaginary. The critic often uses the term medium as if it necessarily meant a professional, whereas every investigator has found some of his best results among amateurs. In the two finest seances I ever attended, the psychic, in each case a man of moderate means, was resolutely determined never directly or indirectly to profit by his gift, though it entailed very exhausting physical conditions. I have not heard of a clergyman of any denomination who has attained such a pitch of altruism — nor is it reasonable to expect it. As to professional mediums, Mr. Vout Peters, one of the most famous, is a diligent collector of old books and an authority upon the Elizabethan drama; while Mr. Dickinson, another very remarkable discerner of spirits, who named twenty-four correctly during two meetings held on the same day, is employed in loading canal barges. This man is one gifted clairvoyants in England, though Tom Tyrrell the weaver, Aaron Wilkinson, and others are very marvellous. Tyrrell, who is a man of the Anthony of Padua type, a walking saint, beloved of animals and children, is a figure who might have stepped out of some legend of the church. Thomas, the powerful physical medium, is a working coal miner. Most mediums take their responsibilities very seriously and view their work in a religious light. There is no denying that they are exposed to very particular temptations, for the gift is, as I have explained elsewhere, an intermittent one, and to admit its temporary absence, and so discourage one’s clients, needs greater moral principle than all men possess. Another temptation to which several great mediums have succumbed is that of drink. This comes about in a very natural way, for overworking the power leaves them in a state of physical prostration, and the stimulus of alcohol affords a welcome relief, and may tend at last to become a custom and finally a curse. Alcoholism always weakens the moral sense, so that these degenerate mediums yield themselves more readily to fraud, with the result that several who had deservedly won honoured names and met all hostile criticism have, in their later years, been detected in the most contemptible tricks. It is a thousand pities that it should be so, but if the Court of Arches were to give up its secrets, it would be found that tippling and moral degeneration were by no means confined to psychics. At the same time, a psychic is so peculiarly sensitive that I think he or she would always be well advised to be a life long abstainer — as many actually are.

As to the method by which they attain their results they have, when in the trance state, no recollection. In the case of normal clairvoyants and clairaudients, the information comes in different ways. Sometimes it is no more than a strong mental impression which gives a name or an address. Sometimes they say that they see it written up before them. Sometimes the spirit figures seem to call it to them. “They yell it at me,” said one.

We need more first-hand accounts of these matters before we can formulate laws.

It has been stated in a previous book by the author, but it will bear repetition, that the use of the seance should, in his opinion, be carefully regulated as well as reverently conducted. Having once satisfied himself of the absolute existence of the unseen world, and of its proximity to our own, the inquirer has got the great gift which psychical investigation can give him, and thenceforth he can regulate his life upon the lines which the teaching from beyond has shown to be the best. There is much force in the criticism that too constant intercourse with the affairs of another world may distract our attention and weaken our powers in dealing with our obvious duties in this one. A seance, with the object of satisfying curiosity or of rousing interest, cannot be an elevating influence, and the mere sensation-monger can make this holy and wonderful thing as base as the over-indulgence in a stimulant. On the other hand, where the seance is used for the purpose of satisfying ourselves as to the condition of those whom we have lost, or of giving comfort to others who crave for a word from beyond, then it is, indeed, a blessed gift from God to be used with moderation and with thankfulness. Our loved ones have their own pleasant tasks in their new surroundings, and though they assure us that they love to clasp the hands which we stretch out to them, we should still have some hesitation in intruding to an unreasonable extent upon the routine of their lives.

A word should be said as to that fear of fiends and evil spirits which appears to have so much weight with some of the critics of this subject. When one looks more closely at this emotion it seems somewhat selfish and cowardly. These creatures are in truth our own backward brothers, bound for the same ultimate destination as ourselves, but retarded by causes for which our earth conditions may have been partly responsible. Our pity and sympathy should go out to them, and if they do indeed manifest at a seance, the proper Christian attitude is, as it seems to me, that we should reason with them and pray for them in order to help them upon their difficult way. Those who have treated them in this way have found a very marked difference in the subsequent communications. In Admiral Usborne Moore's "Glimpses of the Next State" there will be found some records of an American circle which devoted itself entirely to missionary work of this sort. There is some reason to believe that there are forms of imperfect development which can be helped more by earthly than by purely spiritual influences, for the reason, perhaps, that they are closer to the material.

In a recent case I was called in to endeavour to check a very noisy entity which frequented an old house in which there were strong reasons to believe that crime had been committed, and also that the criminal was earth-bound. Names were given by the unhappy spirit which proved to be correct, and a cupboard was described, which was duly found, though it had never before been suspected. On getting into touch with the spirit I endeavoured to reason with it and to explain how selfish it was to cause misery to others in order to satisfy any feelings of revenge which it might have carried over from earth life. We then prayed for its welfare, exhorted it to rise higher, and received a very solemn assurance, tilted out at the table, that it would mend its ways. I have very gratifying reports that it has done so, and that all is now quiet in the old house.

Let us now consider the life in the Beyond as it is shown to us by the new revelation.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING WORLD

We come first to the messages which tell us of the life beyond the grave, sent by those who are actually living it. I have already insisted upon the fact that they have three weighty claims to our belief. The one is, that they are accompanied by “signs,” in the Biblical sense, in the shape of “miracles” or phenomena. The second is, that in many cases they are accompanied by assertions about this life of ours which prove to be correct, and which are beyond the possible knowledge of the medium after every deduction has been made for telepathy or for unconscious memory. The third is, that they have a remarkable, though not a complete, similarity from whatever source they come.

It may be noted that the differences of opinion become most marked when they deal with their own future, which may well be a matter of speculation to them as to us. Thus, upon the question of reincarnation there is a distinct cleavage, and though I am myself of opinion that the general evidence is against this oriental doctrine, it is none the less an undeniable fact that it has been maintained by some messages which appear in other ways to be authentic, and, therefore, it is necessary to keep one’s mind open on the subject.

Before entering upon the substance of the messages I should wish to emphasize the second of these two points, so as to reinforce the reader’s confidence in the authenticity of these assertions. To this end I will give a detailed example, with names almost exact. The medium was Mr. Phoenix, of Glasgow, with whom I have myself had some remarkable experiences. The sitter was Mr. Ernest Oaten, the President of the Northern Spiritual Union, a man of the utmost veracity and precision of statement. The dialogue, which came by the direct voice, a trumpet acting as megaphone, ran like this: —

The Voice: Good evening, Mr. Oaten. Mr. O.: Good evening. Who are you? The Voice: My name is Mill. You know my father. Mr. O.: No, I don’t remember anyone of the name. The Voice: Yes, you were speaking to him the other day. Mr. O.: To be sure. I remember now. I only met him casually. The Voice: I want you to give him a message from me. Mr. O.: What is it? The Voice: Tell him that he was not mistaken at midnight on Tuesday last. Mr. O.: Very good. I will say so. Have you passed long? The Voice: Some time. But our time is different from yours. Mr. O.: What were you? The Voice: A Surgeon. Mr. O.: How did you pass? The Voice: Blown up in a battleship during the war. Mr. O.: Anything more?

The answer was the Gipsy song from “Il Trovatore,” very accurately whistled, and then a quick-step. After the latter, the voice said: “That is a test for father.”

This reproduction of conversation is not quite verbatim, but gives the condensed essence. Mr. Oaten at once visited Mr. Mill, who was not a Spiritualist, and found that every detail was correct. Young Mill had lost his life as narrated. Mr. Mill, senior, explained that while sitting in his study at midnight on the date named he had heard the Gipsy song from “Il Trovatore,” which had been a favourite of his boy’s, and being unable to trace the origin of the music, had finally thought that it was a freak of his imagination. The test connected with the quick-step had reference to a tune which the young man used to play upon the piccolo, but which was so rapid that he never could get it right, for which he was chaffed by the family.

I tell this story at length to make the reader realise that when young Mill, and others like him, give such proofs of accuracy, which we can test for ourselves, we are bound to take their assertions very seriously when they deal with the life they are actually leading, though in their very nature we can only check their accounts by comparison with others.

Now let me epitomise what these assertions are. They say that they are exceedingly happy, and that they do not wish to return. They are among the friends whom they had loved and lost, who meet them when they die and continue their careers together. They are very busy on all forms of congenial work. The world in which they find themselves is very much like that which they have quitted, but everything keyed to a higher octave. As in a higher octave the rhythm is the same, and the relation of notes to each other the same, but the total effect different, so it is here. Every earthly thing has its equivalent. Scoffers have guffawed over alcohol and tobacco, but if all things are reproduced it would be a flaw if these were not reproduced also. That they should be abused, as they are here, would, indeed, be evil tidings, but nothing of the sort has been said, and in the much discussed passage in “Raymond,” their production was alluded to as though it were an unusual, and in a way a humorous, instance of the resources of the beyond. I wonder how many of the preachers, who have taken advantage of this passage in order to attack the whole new revelation, have remembered that the only other message which ever associated alcohol with the life beyond is that of Christ Himself, when He said: “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

This matter is a detail, however, and it is always dangerous to discuss details in a subject which is so enormous, so dimly seen. As the wisest woman I have known remarked to me: “Things may well be surprising over there, for if we had been told the facts of this life before we entered it, we should never have believed it.” In its larger issues this happy life to come consists in the development of those gifts which we possess. There is action for the man of action, intellectual work for the thinker, artistic, literary, dramatic and religious for those whose God-given powers lie that way. What we have both in brain and character we carry over with us. No man is too old to learn, for what he learns he keeps. There is no physical side to love and no child-birth, though there is close union between those married people who really love each other, and, generally, there is deep sympathetic friendship and comradeship between the sexes. Every man or woman finds a soul mate sooner or later. The child grows up to the normal, so that the mother who lost a babe of two years old, and dies herself twenty years later finds a grown-up daughter of twenty-two awaiting her coming. Age, which is produced chiefly by the mechanical presence of lime in our arteries, disappears, and the individual reverts to the full normal growth and appearance of completed man — or womanhood. Let no woman mourn her lost beauty, and no man his lost strength or weakening brain. It all awaits them once more upon the other side. Nor is any deformity or bodily weakness there, for all is normal and at its best.

Before leaving this section of the subject, I should say a few more words upon the evidence as it affects the etheric body. This body is a perfect thing. This is a matter of consequence in these days when so many of our heroes have been mutilated in the wars. One cannot mutilate the etheric body, and it remains always intact. The first words uttered by a returning spirit in the recent experience of Dr. Abraham Wallace were “I have got my left arm again.” The same applies to all birth marks, deformities, blindness, and other imperfections. None of them are permanent, and all will vanish in that happier life that awaits us. Such is the teaching from the beyond — that a perfect body waits for each.

“But,” says the critic, “what then of the clairvoyant descriptions, or the visions where the aged father is seen, clad in the old-fashioned garments of another age, or the grandmother with crinoline and chignon? Are these the habiliments of heaven?” Such visions are not spirits, but they are pictures which are built up before us or shot by spirits into our brains or those of the seer for the purposes of recognition. Hence the grey hair and hence the ancient garb. When a real spirit is indeed seen it comes in another form to this, where the flowing robe, such as has always been traditionally ascribed to the angels, is a vital thing which, by its very colour and texture, proclaims the spiritual condition of the wearer, and is probably a condensation of that aura which surrounds us upon earth.

It is a world of sympathy. Only those who have this tie foregather. The sullen husband, the flighty wife, is no longer there to plague the innocent spouse. All is sweet and peaceful. It is the long rest cure after the nerve strain of life, and before new experiences in the future. The circumstances are homely and familiar. Happy circles live in pleasant homesteads with every amenity of beauty and of music. Beautiful gardens, lovely flowers, green woods, pleasant lakes, domestic pets — all of these things are fully described in the messages of the pioneer travellers who have at last got news back to those who loiter in the old dingy home. There are no poor and no rich. The craftsman may still pursue his craft, but he does it for the joy of his work. Each serves the community as best he can, while from above come higher ministers of grace, the “Angels” of holy writ, to direct and help. Above all, shedding down His atmosphere upon all, broods that great Christ spirit, the very soul of reason, of justice, and of sympathetic understanding, who has the earth sphere, with all its circles, under His very special care. It is a place of joy and laughter. There are games and sports of all sorts, though none which cause pain to lower life. Food and drink in the grosser sense do not exist, but there seem to be pleasures of taste, and this distinction causes some confusion in the messages upon the point.

But above all, brain, energy, character, driving power, if exerted for good, makes a man a leader there as here, while unselfishness, patience and spirituality there, as here, qualify the soul for the higher places, which have often been won by those very tribulations down here which seem so purposeless and so cruel, and are in truth our chances of spiritual quickening and promotion, without which life would have been barren and without profit.

The revelation abolishes the idea of a grotesque hell and of a fantastic heaven, while it substitutes the conception of a gradual rise in the scale of existence without any monstrous change which would turn us in an instant from man to angel or devil. The system, though different from previous ideas, does not, as it seems to me, run counter in any radical fashion to the old beliefs. In ancient maps it was usual for the cartographer to mark blank spaces for the unexplored regions, with some such legend as “here are anthropophagi,” or “here are mandrakes,” scrawled across them. So in our theology there have been ill-defined areas which have admittedly been left unfilled, for what sane man has ever believed in such a heaven as is depicted in our hymn books, a land of musical idleness and barren monotonous adoration! Thus in furnishing a clearer conception this new system has nothing to supplant. It paints upon a blank sheet.

One may well ask, however, granting that there is evidence for such a life and such a world as has been described, what about those who have not merited such a destination? What do the messages from beyond say about these? And here one cannot be too definite, for there is no use exchanging one dogma for another. One can but give the general purport of such information as has been vouchsafed to us. It is natural that those with whom we come in contact are those whom we may truly call the blessed, for if the thing be approached in a reverent and religious spirit it is those whom we should naturally attract. That there are many less fortunate than themselves is evident from their own constant allusions to that regenerating and elevating missionary work which is among their own functions. They descend apparently and help others to gain that degree of spirituality which fits them for this upper sphere, as a higher student might descend to a lower class in order to bring forward a backward pupil. Such a conception gives point to Christ’s remark that there was more joy in heaven over saving one sinner than over ninety-nine just, for if He had spoken of an earthly sinner he would surely have had to become just in this life and so ceased to be a sinner before he had reached Paradise. It would apply very exactly, however, to a sinner rescued from a lower sphere and brought to a higher one.

When we view sin in the light of modern science, with the tenderness of the modern conscience and with a sense of justice and proportion, it ceases to be that monstrous cloud which darkened the whole vision of the mediaeval theologian. Man has been more harsh with himself than an all-merciful God will ever be. It is true that with all deductions there remains a great residuum which means want of individual effort, conscious weakness of will, and culpable failure of character when the sinner, like Horace, sees and applauds the higher while he follows the lower. But when, on the other hand, one has made allowances — and can our human allowance be as generous as God's? — for the sins which are the inevitable product of early environment, for the sins which are due to hereditary and inborn taint, and to the sins which are due to clear physical causes, then the total of active sin is greatly reduced. Could one, for example, imagine that Providence, all-wise and all-merciful, as every creed proclaims, could punish the unfortunate wretch who hatches criminal thoughts behind the slanting brows of a criminal head? A doctor has but to glance at the cranium to predicate the crime. In its worst forms all crime, from Nero to Jack the Ripper, is the product of absolute lunacy, and those gross national sins to which allusion has been made seem to point to collective national insanity. Surely, then, there is hope that no very terrible inferno is needed to further punish those who have been so afflicted upon earth. Some of our dead have remarked that nothing has surprised them so much as to find who have been chosen for honour, and certainly, without in any way condoning sin, one could well imagine that the man whose organic makeup predisposed him with irresistible force in that direction should, in justice, receive condolence and sympathy. Possibly such a sinner, if he had not sinned so deeply as he might have done, stands higher than the man who was born good, and remained so, but was no better at the end of his life. The one has made some progress and the other has not. But the commonest failing, the one which fills the spiritual hospitals of the other world, and is a temporary bar to the normal happiness of the after-life, is the sin of Tomlinson in Kipling's poem, the commonest of all sins in respectable British circles, the sin of conventionality, of want of conscious effort and development, of a sluggish spirituality, fatted over by a complacent mind and by the comforts of life. It is the man who is satisfied, the man who refers his salvation to some church or higher power without steady travail of his own soul, who is in deadly danger. All churches are good, Christian or non-Christian, so long as they promote the actual spirit life of the individual, but all are noxious the instant that they allow him to think that by any form of ceremony, or by any fashion of creed, he obtains the least advantage over his neighbour, or can in any way dispense with that personal effort which is the only road to the higher places.

This is, of course, as applicable to believers in Spiritualism as to any other belief. If it does not show in practice then it is vain. One can get through this life very comfortably following without question in some procession with a venerable leader. But one does not die in a procession. One dies alone. And it is then that one has alone to accept the level gained by the work of life.

And what is the punishment of the undeveloped soul? It is that it should be placed where it WILL develop, and sorrow would seem always to be the forcing ground of souls. That surely is our own experience in life where the insufferably complacent and unsympathetic person softens and mellows into beauty of character and charity of thought, when tried long enough and high enough in the fires of life. The Bible has talked about the “Outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The influence of the Bible has sometimes been an evil one through our own habit of reading a book of Oriental poetry and treating it as literally as if it were Occidental prose. When an Eastern describes a herd of a thousand camels he talks of camels which are more numerous than the hairs of your head or the stars in the sky. In this spirit of allowance for Eastern expression, one must approach those lurid and terrible descriptions which have darkened the lives of so many imaginative children and sent so many earnest adults into asylums. From all that we learn there are indeed places of outer darkness, but dim as these uncomfortable waiting-rooms may be, they all admit to heaven in the end. That is the final destination of the human race, and it would indeed be a reproach to the Almighty if it were not so. We cannot dogmatise upon this subject of the penal spheres, and yet we have very clear teaching that they are there and that the no-man’s-land which separates us from the normal heaven, that third heaven to which St. Paul seems to have been wafted in one short strange experience of his lifetime, is a place which corresponds with the Astral plane of the mystics and with the “outer darkness” of the Bible. Here linger those earth-bound spirits whose worldly interests have clogged them and weighed them down, until every spiritual impulse had vanished; the man whose life has been centred on money, on worldly ambition, or on sensual indulgence. The one-idea'd man will surely be there, if his one idea was not a spiritual one. Nor is it necessary that he should be an evil man, if dear old brother John of Glastonbury, who loved the great Abbey so that he could never detach himself from it, is to be classed among earth-bound spirits. In the most material and pronounced classes of these are the ghosts who impinge very closely upon matter and have been seen so often by those who have no strong psychic sense. It is probable, from what we know of the material laws which govern such matters, that a ghost could never manifest itself if it were alone, that the substance for the manifestation is drawn from the spectator, and that the coldness, raising of hair, and other symptoms of which he complains are caused largely by the sudden drain upon his own vitality. This, however, is to wander into speculation, and far from that correlation of psychic knowledge with religion, which has been the aim of these chapters.

By one of those strange coincidences, which seem to me sometimes to be more than coincidences, I had reached this point in my explanation of the difficult question of the intermediate state, and was myself desiring further enlightenment, when an old book reached me through the post, sent by someone whom I have never met, and in it is the following passage, written by an automatic writer, and in existence since 1880. It makes the matter plain, endorsing what has been said and adding new points.

"Some cannot advance further than the borderland — such as never thought of spirit life and have lived entirely for the earth, its cares and pleasures — even clever men and women, who have lived simply intellectual lives without spirituality. There are many who have misused their opportunities, and are now longing for the time misspent and wishing to recall the earth-life. They will learn that on this side the time can be redeemed, though at much cost. The borderland has many among the restless money-getters of earth, who still haunt the places where they had their hopes and joys. These are often the longest to remain . . . many are not unhappy. They feel the relief to be sufficient to be without their earth bodies. All pass through the borderland, but some hardly perceive it. It is so immediate, and there is no resting there for them. They pass on at once to the refreshment place of which we tell you." The anonymous author, after recording this spirit message, mentions the interesting fact that there is a Christian inscription in the Catacombs which runs: NICEFORUS ANIMA

DULCIS IN REFRIGERIO, “Nicephorus, a sweet soul in the refreshment place.” One more scrap of evidence that the early Christian scheme of things was very like that of the modern psychic.

So much for the borderland, the intermediate condition. The present Christian dogma has no name for it, unless it be that nebulous limbo which is occasionally mentioned, and is usually defined as the place where the souls of the just who died before Christ were detained. The idea of crossing a space before reaching a permanent state on the other side is common to many religions, and took the allegorical form of a river with a ferry-boat among the Romans and Greeks. Continually, one comes on points which make one realise that far back in the world’s history there has been a true revelation, which has been blurred and twisted in time. Thus in Dr. Muir’s summary of the RIG. VEDA, he says, epitomising the beliefs of the first Aryan conquerors of India: “Before, however, the unborn part” (that is, the etheric body) “can complete its course to the third heaven it has to traverse a vast gulf of darkness, leaving behind on earth all that is evil, and proceeding by the paths the fathers trod, the spirit soars to the realms of eternal light, recovers there his body in a glorified form, and obtains from God a delectable abode and enters upon a more perfect life, which is crowned with the fulfilment of all desires, is passed in the presence of the Gods and employed in the fulfilment of their pleasure.” If we substitute “angels” for “Gods” we must admit that the new revelation from modern spirit sources has much in common with the belief of our Aryan fathers.

Such, in very condensed form, is the world which is revealed to us by these wonderful messages from the beyond. Is it an unreasonable vision? Is it in any way opposed to just principles? Is it not rather so reasonable that having got the clue we could now see that, given any life at all, this is exactly the line upon which we should expect to move? Nature and evolution are averse from sudden disconnected developments. If a human being has technical, literary, musical, or other tendencies, they are an essential part of his character, and to survive without them would be to lose his identity and to become an entirely different man. They must therefore survive death if personality is to be maintained. But it is no use their surviving unless they can find means of expression, and means of expression seem to require certain material agents, and also a discriminating audience. So also the sense of modesty among civilised races has become part of our very selves, and implies some covering of our forms if personality is to continue. Our desires and sympathies would prompt us to live with those we love, which implies something in the nature of a house, while the human need for mental rest and privacy would predicate the existence of separate rooms. Thus, merely starting from the basis of the continuity of personality one might, even without the revelation from the beyond, have built up some such system by the use of pure reason and deduction.

So far as the existence of this land of happiness goes, it would seem to have been more fully proved than any other religious conception within our knowledge.

It may very reasonably be asked, how far this precise description of life beyond the grave is my own conception, and how far it has been accepted by the greater minds who have studied this subject? I would answer, that it is my own conclusion as gathered from a very large amount of existing testimony, and that in its main lines it has for many years been accepted by those great numbers of silent active workers all over the world, who look upon this matter from a strictly religious point of view. I think that the evidence amply justifies us in this belief. On the other hand, those who have approached this subject with cold and cautious scientific brains, endowed, in many cases, with the strongest prejudices against dogmatic creeds and with very natural fears about the possible re-growth of theological quarrels, have in most cases stopped short of a complete acceptance, declaring that there can be no positive proof upon such matters, and that we may deceive ourselves either by a reflection of our own thoughts or by receiving the impressions of the medium. Professor Zollner, for example, says:

“Science can make no use of the substance of intellectual revelations, but must be guided by observed facts and by the conclusions logically and mathematically uniting them” — a passage which is quoted with approval by Professor Reichel, and would seem to be endorsed by the silence concerning the religious side of the question which is observed by most of our great scientific supporters. It is a point of view which can well be understood, and yet, closely examined, it would appear to be a species of enlarged materialism. To admit, as these observers do, that spirits do return, that they give every proof of being the actual friends whom we have lost, and yet to turn a deaf ear to the messages which they send would seem to be pushing caution to the verge of unreason. To get so far, and yet not to go further, is impossible as a permanent position. If, for example, in

Raymond’s case we find so many allusions to the small details of his home upon earth, which prove to be surprisingly correct, is it reasonable to put a blue pencil through all he says of the home which he actually inhabits? Long before I had convinced my mind of the truth of things which appeared so grotesque and incredible, I had a long account sent by table tilting about the conditions of life beyond. The details seemed to me impossible and I set them aside, and yet they harmonise, as I now discover, with other revelations. So, too, with the automatic script of Mr. Hubert Wales, which has been described in my previous book. He had tossed it aside into a drawer as being unworthy of serious consideration, and yet it also proved to be in harmony. In neither of these cases was telepathy or the prepossession of the medium a possible explanation. On the whole, I am inclined to think that these doubtful or dissentient scientific men, having their own weighty studies to attend to, have confined their reading and thought to the more objective side of the question, and are not aware of the vast amount of concurrent evidence which appears to give us an exact picture of the life beyond. They despise documents which cannot be proved, and they do not, in my opinion, sufficiently realise that a general agreement of testimony, and the already established character of a witness, are themselves arguments for truth. Some complicate the question by predicating the existence of a fourth dimension in that world, but the term is an absurdity, as are all terms which find no corresponding impression in the human brain. We have mysteries enough to solve without gratuitously introducing fresh ones. When solid passes through solid, it is, surely, simpler to assume that it is done by a dematerialisation, and subsequent reassembly — a process which can, at least, be imagined by the human mind — than to invoke an explanation which itself needs to be explained.

In the next and final chapter I will ask the reader to accompany me in an examination of the New Testament by the light of this psychic knowledge, and to judge how far it makes clear and reasonable much which was obscure and confused.

CHAPTER V

IS IT THE SECOND DAWN?

There are many incidents in the New Testament which might be taken as starting points in tracing a close analogy between the phenomenal events which are associated with the early days of Christianity, and those which have perplexed the world in connection with modern Spiritualism. Most of us are prepared to admit that the lasting claims of Christianity upon the human race are due to its own intrinsic teachings, which are quite independent of those wonders which can only have had a use in startling the solid complacence of an unspiritual race, and so directing their attention violently to this new system of thought. Exactly the same may be said of the new revelation. The exhibitions of a force which is beyond human experience and human guidance is but a method of calling attention. To repeat a simile which has been used elsewhere, it is the humble telephone bell which heralds the all-important message. In the case of Christ, the Sermon on the Mount was more than many miracles. In the case of this new development, the messages from beyond are more than any phenomena. A vulgar mind might make Christ's story seem vulgar, if it insisted upon loaves of bread and the bodies of fish. So, also, a vulgar mind may make psychic religion vulgar by insisting upon moving furniture or tambourines in the air. In each case they are crude signs of power, and the essence of the matter lies upon higher planes.

It is stated in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that they, the Christian leaders, were all "with one accord" in one place. "With one accord" expresses admirably those sympathetic conditions which have always been found, in psychic circles, to be conducive of the best results, and which are so persistently ignored by a certain class of investigators. Then there came "a mighty rushing wind," and afterwards "there appeared cloven tongues like unto fire and it sat upon each of them." Here is a very definite and clear account of a remarkable sequence of phenomena. Now, let us compare with this the results which were obtained by Professor Crookes in his investigation in 1873, after he had taken every possible precaution against fraud which his experience, as an accurate observer and experimenter, could suggest. He says in his published notes: “I have seen luminous points of light darting about, sitting on the heads of different persons” and then again:

“These movements, and, indeed, I may say the same of every class of phenomena, are generally preceded by a peculiar cold air, sometimes amounting to a decided wind. I have had sheets of paper blown about by it. . . .” Now, is it not singular, not merely that the phenomena should be of the same order, but that they should come in exactly the same sequence, the wind first and the lights afterwards? In our ignorance of etheric physics, an ignorance which is now slowly clearing, one can only say that there is some indication here of a general law which links those two episodes together in spite of the nineteen centuries which divide them. A little later, it is stated that “the place was shaken where they were assembled together.” Many modern observers of psychic phenomena have testified to vibration of the walls of an apartment, as if a heavy lorry were passing. It is, evidently, to such experiences that Paul alludes when he says: “Our gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power.” The preacher of the New Revelation can most truly say the same words. In connection with the signs of the pentecost, I can most truly say that I have myself experienced them all, the cold sudden wind, the lambent misty flames, all under the mediumship of Mr. Phoenix, an amateur psychic of Glasgow. The fifteen sitters were of one accord upon that occasion, and, by a coincidence, it was in an upper room, at the very top of the house.

In a previous section of this essay, I have remarked that no philosophical explanation of these phenomena, known as spiritual, could be conceived which did not show that all, however different in their working, came from the same central source. St. Paul seems to state this in so many words when he says: “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Could our modern speculation, forced upon us by the facts, be more tersely stated? He has just enumerated the various gifts, and we find them very close to those of which we have experience. There is first “the word of wisdom,” “the word of knowledge” and “faith.” All these taken in connection with the Spirit would seem to mean the higher communications from the other side. Then comes healing, which is still practised in certain conditions by a highly virile medium, who has the power of discharging strength, losing just as much as the weakling gains, as instanced by Christ when He said: “Who has touched me? Much virtue” (or power) “has gone out of me.” Then we come upon the working of miracles, which we should call the production of phenomena, and which would cover many different types, such as apports, where objects are brought from a distance, levitation of objects or of the human frame into the air, the production of lights and other wonders. Then comes prophecy, which is a real and yet a fitful and often delusive form of mediumship — never so delusive as among the early Christians, who seem all to have mistaken the approaching fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, which they could dimly see, as being the end of the world. This mistake is repeated so often and so clearly that it is really not honest to ignore or deny it. Then we come to the power of “discerning the spirits,” which corresponds to our clairvoyance, and finally that curious and usually useless gift of tongues, which is also a modern phenomenon. I can remember that some time ago I read the book, “I Heard a Voice,” by an eminent barrister, in which he describes how his young daughter began to write Greek fluently with all the complex accents in their correct places. Just after I read it I received a letter from a no less famous physician, who asked my opinion about one of his children who had written a considerable amount of script in mediaeval French. These two recent cases are beyond all doubt, but I have not had convincing evidence of the case where some unintelligible signs drawn by an unlettered man were pronounced by an expert to be in the Ogham or early Celtic character. As the Ogham script is really a combination of straight lines, the latter case may be taken with considerable reserve.

Thus the phenomena associated with the rise of Christianity and those which have appeared during the present spiritual ferment are very analogous. In examining the gifts of the disciples, as mentioned by Matthew and Mark, the only additional point is the raising of the dead. If any of them besides their great leader did in truth rise to this height of power, where life was actually extinct, then he, undoubtedly, far transcended anything which is recorded of modern mediumship. It is clear, however, that such a power must have been very rare, since it would otherwise have been used to revive the bodies of their own martyrs, which does not seem to have been attempted. For Christ the power is clearly admitted, and there are little touches in the description of how it was exercised by Him which are extremely convincing to a psychic student. In the account of how He raised Lazarus from the grave after he had been four days dead — far the most wonderful of all Christ’s miracles — it is recorded that as He went down to the graveside He was “groaning.” Why was He groaning? No Biblical student seems to have given a satisfactory reason. But anyone who has heard a medium groaning before any great manifestation of power will read into this passage just that touch of practical knowledge, which will convince him of its truth. The miracle, I may add, is none the less wonderful or beyond our human powers, because it was wrought by an extension of natural law, differing only in degree with that which we can ourselves test and even do.

Although our modern manifestations have never attained the power mentioned in the Biblical records, they present some features which are not related in the New Testament. Clairaudience, that is the hearing of a spirit voice, is common to both, but the direct voice, that is the hearing of a voice which all can discern with their material ears, is a well-authenticated phenomenon now which is more rarely mentioned of old. So, too, Spirit-photography, where the camera records what the human eye cannot see, is necessarily a new testimony. Nothing is evidence to those who do not examine evidence, but I can attest most solemnly that I personally know of several cases where the image upon the plate after death has not only been unmistakable, but also has differed entirely from any pre-existing photograph.

As to the methods by which the early Christians communicated with the spirits, or with the “Saints” as they called their dead brethren, we have, so far as I know, no record, though the words of John: “Brothers, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God,” show very clearly that spirit communion was a familiar idea, and also that they were plagued, as we are, by the intrusion of unwelcome spiritual elements in their intercourse. Some have conjectured that the “Angel of the Church,” who is alluded to in terms which suggest that he was a human being, was really a medium sanctified to the use of that particular congregation. As we have early indications of bishops, deacons and other officials, it is difficult to say what else the “angel” could have been. This, however, must remain a pure speculation.

Another speculation which is, perhaps, rather more fruitful is upon what principle did Christ select his twelve chief followers. Out of all the multitudes he chose twelve men. Why these particular ones? It was not for their intelligence or learning, for Peter and John, who were among the most prominent, are expressly described as “unlearned and ignorant men.” It was not for their virtue, for one of them proved to be a great villain, and all of them deserted their Master in His need. It was not for their belief, for there were great numbers of believers. And yet it is clear that they were chosen on some principle of selection since they were called in ones and in twos. In at least two cases they were pairs of brothers, as though some family gift or peculiarity, might underlie the choice.

Is it not at least possible that this gift was psychic power, and that Christ, as the greatest exponent who has ever appeared upon earth of that power, desired to surround Himself with others who possessed it to a lesser degree? This He would do for two reasons. The first is that a psychic circle is a great source of strength to one who is himself psychic, as is shown continually in our own experience, where, with a sympathetic and helpful surrounding, an atmosphere is created where all the powers are drawn out. How sensitive Christ was to such an atmosphere is shown by the remark of the Evangelist, that when He visited His own native town, where the townspeople could not take Him seriously, He was unable to do any wonders. The second reason may have been that He desired them to act as His deputies, either during his lifetime or after His death, and that for this reason some natural psychic powers were necessary.

The close connection which appears to exist between the Apostles and the miracles, has been worked out in an interesting fashion by Dr. Abraham Wallace, in his little pamphlet “Jesus of Nazareth.” Certainly, no miracle or wonder working, save that of exorcism, is recorded in any of the Evangelists until after the time when Christ began to assemble His circle. Of this circle the three who would appear to have been the most psychic were Peter and the two fellow-fishermen, sons of Zebedee, John and James. These were the three who were summoned when an ideal atmosphere was needed. It will be remembered that when the daughter of Jairus was raised from the dead it was in the presence, and possibly, with the co-operation, of these three assistants. Again, in the case of the Transfiguration, it is impossible to read the account of that wonderful manifestation without being reminded at every turn of one’s own spiritual experiences. Here, again, the points are admirably made in “Jesus of Nazareth,” and it would be well if that little book, with its scholarly tone, its breadth of treatment and its psychic knowledge, was in the hands of every Biblical student. Dr. Wallace points out that the place, the summit of a hill, was the ideal one for such a manifestation, in its pure air and freedom from interruption; that the drowsy state of the Apostles is paralleled by the members of any circle who are contributing psychic power; that the transfiguring of the face and the shining raiment are known phenomena; above all, that the erection of three altars is meaningless, but that the alternate reading, the erection of three booths or cabinets, one for the medium and one for each materialised form, would absolutely fulfil the most perfect conditions for getting results. This explanation of Wallace's is a remarkable example of a modern brain, with modern knowledge, throwing a clear searchlight across all the centuries and illuminating an incident which has always been obscure.

When we translate Bible language into the terms of modern psychic religion the correspondence becomes evident. It does not take much alteration. Thus for "Lo, a miracle!" we say "This is a manifestation." "The angel of the Lord" becomes "a high spirit." Where we talked of "a voice from heaven," we say "the direct voice." "His eyes were opened and he saw a vision" means "he became clairvoyant." It is only the occultist who can possibly understand the Scriptures as being a real exact record of events.

There are many other small points which seem to bring the story of Christ and of the Apostles into very close touch with modern psychic research, and greatly support the close accuracy of some of the New Testament narrative. One which appeals to me greatly is the action of Christ when He was asked a question which called for a sudden decision, namely the fate of the woman who had been taken in sin. What did He do? The very last thing that one would have expected or invented. He stooped down before answering and wrote with his finger in the sand. This he did a second time upon a second catch-question being addressed to Him. Can any theologian give a reason for such an action? I hazard the opinion that among the many forms of mediumship which were possessed in the highest form by Christ, was the power of automatic writing, by which He summoned those great forces which were under His control to supply Him with the answer. Granting, as I freely do, that Christ was preternatural, in the sense that He was above and beyond ordinary humanity in His attributes, one may still inquire how far these powers were contained always within His human body, or how far He referred back to spiritual reserves beyond it. When He spoke merely from His human body He was certainly open to error, like the rest of us, for it is recorded how He questioned the woman of Samaria about her husband, to which she replied that she had no husband. In the case of the woman taken in sin, one can only explain His action by the supposition that He opened a channel instantly for the knowledge and wisdom which was preter-human, and which at once gave a decision in favor of large-minded charity.

It is interesting to observe the effect which these phenomena, or the report of them, produced upon the orthodox Jews of those days. The greater part obviously discredited them, otherwise they could not have failed to become followers, or at the least to have regarded such a wonder-worker with respect and admiration. One can well imagine how they shook their bearded heads, declared that such occurrences were outside their own experience, and possibly pointed to the local conjuror who earned a few not over-clean denarii by imitating the phenomena. There were others, however, who could not possibly deny, because they either saw or met with witnesses who had seen. These declared roundly that the whole thing was of the devil, drawing from Christ one of those pithy, common-sense arguments in which He excelled. The same two classes of opponents, the scoffers and the diabolists, face us to-day. Verily the old world goes round and so do the events upon its surface.

There is one line of thought which may be indicated in the hope that it will find development from the minds and pens of those who have studied most deeply the possibilities of psychic power. It is at least possible, though I admit that under modern conditions it has not been clearly proved, that a medium of great power can charge another with his own force, just as a magnet when rubbed upon a piece of inert steel can turn it also into a magnet. One of the best attested powers of D. D. Home was that he could take burning coals from the fire with impunity and carry them in his hand. He could then — and this comes nearer to the point at issue — place them on the head of anyone who was fearless without their being burned. Spectators have described how the silver filigree of the hair of Mr. Carter Hall used to be gathered over the glowing ember, and Mrs. Hall has mentioned how she combed out the ashes afterwards. Now, in this case, Home was clearly, able to convey, a power to another person, just as Christ, when He was levitated over the lake, was able to convey the same power to Peter, so long as Peter’s faith held firm. The question then arises if Home concentrated all his force upon transferring such a power how long would that power last? The experiment was never tried, but it would have borne very, directly upon this argument. For, granting that the power can be transferred, then it is very clear how the Christ circle was able to send forth seventy disciples who were endowed with miraculous functions. It is clear also why, new disciples had to return to Jerusalem to be "baptised of the spirit," to use their phrase, before setting forth upon their wanderings. And when in turn they, desired to send forth representatives would not they lay hands upon them, make passes over them and endeavour to magnetise them in the same way — if that word may express the process? Have we here the meaning of the laying on of hands by the bishop at ordination, a ceremony to which vast importance is still attached, but which may well be the survival of something really vital, the bestowal of the thaumaturgic power? When, at last, through lapse of time or neglect of fresh cultivation, the power ran out, the empty formula may have been carried on, without either the blesser or the blessed understanding what it was that the hands of the bishop, and the force which streamed from them, were meant to bestow. The very words "laying on of hands" would seem to suggest something different from a mere benediction.

Enough has been said, perhaps, to show the reader that it is possible to put forward a view of Christ's life which would be in strict accord with the most modern psychic knowledge, and which, far from supplanting Christianity, would show the surprising accuracy of some of the details handed down to us, and would support the novel conclusion that those very miracles, which have been the stumbling block to so many truthful, earnest minds, may finally offer some very cogent arguments for the truth of the whole narrative. Is this then a line of thought which merits the wholesale condemnations and anathemas hurled at it by those who profess to speak in the name of religion? At the same time, though we bring support to the New Testament, it would, indeed, be a misconception if these, or any such remarks, were quoted as sustaining its literal accuracy — an idea from which so much harm has come in the past. It would, indeed, be a good, though an unattainable thing, that a really honest and open-minded attempt should be made to weed out from that record the obvious forgeries and interpolations which disfigure it, and lessen the value of those parts which are really above suspicion.

Is it necessary, for example, to be told, as an inspired fact from Christ's own lips, that Zacharias, the son of Barachias, was struck dead within the precincts of the Temple in the time of Christ, when, by a curious chance, Josephus has independently narrated the incident as having occurred during the siege of Jerusalem, thirty-seven years later? This makes it very clear that this particular Gospel, in its present form, was written after that event, and that the writer fitted into it at least one other incident which had struck his imagination. Unfortunately, a revision by general agreement would be the greatest of all miracles, for two of the very first texts to go would be those which refer to the “Church,” an institution and an idea utterly unfamiliar in the days of Christ. Since the object of the insertion of these texts is perfectly clear, there can be no doubt that they are forgeries, but as the whole system of the Papacy rests upon one of them, they are likely to survive for a long time to come. The text alluded to is made further impossible because it is based upon the supposition that Christ and His fishermen conversed together in Latin or Greek, even to the extent of making puns in that language. Surely the want of moral courage and intellectual honesty among Christians will seem as strange to our descendants as it appears marvellous to us that the great thinkers of old could have believed, or at least have pretended to believe, in the fighting sexual deities of Mount Olympus.

Revision is, indeed, needed, and as I have already pleaded, a change of emphasis is also needed, in order to get the grand Christian conception back into the current of reason and progress. The orthodox who, whether from humble faith or some other cause, do not look deeply into such matters, can hardly conceive the stumbling-blocks which are littered about before the feet of their more critical brethren. What is easy, for faith is impossible for reflection. Such expressions as “Saved by the blood of the Lamb” or “Baptised by His precious blood” fill their souls with a gentle and sweet emotion, while upon a more thoughtful mind they have a very different effect.

Apart from the apparent injustice of vicarious atonement, the student is well aware that the whole of this sanguinary metaphor is drawn really from the Pagan rites of Mithra, where the neophyte was actually placed under a bull at the ceremony of the TAUROBOLIUM, and was drenched, through a grating, with the blood of the slaughtered animal. Such reminiscences of the more brutal side of Paganism are not helpful to the thoughtful and sensitive modern mind. But what is always fresh and always useful and always beautiful, is the memory of the sweet Spirit who wandered on the hillsides of Galilee; who gathered the children around him; who met his friends in innocent good-fellowship; who shrank from forms and ceremonies, craving always for the inner meaning; who forgave the sinner; who championed the poor, and who in every decision threw his weight upon the side of charity and breadth of view. When to this character you add those wondrous psychic powers already analysed, you do, indeed, find a supreme character in the world’s history who obviously stands nearer to the Highest than any other. When one compares the general effect of His teaching with that of the more rigid churches, one marvels how in their dogmatism, their insistence upon forms, their exclusiveness, their pomp and their intolerance, they could have got so far away from the example of their Master, so that as one looks upon Him and them, one feels that there is absolute deep antagonism and that one cannot speak of the Church and Christ, but only of the Church or Christ.

And yet every Church produces beautiful souls, though it may be debated whether “produces” or “contains” is the truthful word. We have but to fall back upon our own personal experience if we have lived long and mixed much with our fellow-men. I have myself lived during the seven most impressionable years of my life among Jesuits, the most maligned of all ecclesiastical orders, and I have found them honourable and good men, in all ways estimable outside the narrowness which limits the world to Mother Church. They were athletes, scholars, and gentlemen, nor can I ever remember any examples of that casuistry with which they are reproached. Some of my best friends have been among the parochial clergy of the Church of England, men of sweet and saintly character, whose pecuniary straits were often a scandal and a reproach to the half-hearted folk who accepted their spiritual guidance. I have known, also, splendid men among the Nonconformist clergy, who have often been the champions of liberty, though their views upon that subject have sometimes seemed to contract when one ventured upon their own domain of thought. Each creed has brought out men who were an honour to the human race, and Manning or Shrewsbury, Gordon or Dolling, Booth or Stopford Brooke, are all equally admirable, however diverse the roots from which they grow. Among the great mass of the people, too, there are very many thousands of beautiful souls who have been brought up on the old-fashioned lines, and who never heard of spiritual communion or any other of those matters which have been discussed in these essays, and yet have reached a condition of pure spirituality such as all of us may envy. Who does not know the maiden aunt, the widowed mother, the mellowed elderly man, who live upon the hilltops of unselfishness, shedding kindly thoughts and deeds around them, but with their simple faith deeply, rooted in anything or everything which has come to them in a hereditary fashion with the sanction of some particular authority? I had an aunt who was such an one, and can see her now, worn with austerity and charity, a small, humble figure, creeping to church at all hours from a house which was to her but a waiting-room between services, while she looked at me with sad, wondering, grey eyes. Such people have often reached by instinct, and in spite of dogma, heights, to which no system of philosophy can ever raise us.

But making full allowance for the high products of every creed, which may be only, a proof of the innate goodness of civilised humanity, it is still beyond all doubt that Christianity has broken down, and that this breakdown has been brought home to everyone by the terrible catastrophe which has befallen the world. Can the most optimistic apologist contend that this is a satisfactory, outcome from a religion which has had the unopposed run of Europe for so many centuries? Which has come out of it worst, the Lutheran Prussian, the Catholic Bavarian, or the peoples who have been nurtured by the Greek Church? If we, of the West, have done better, is it not rather an older and higher civilisation and freer political institutions that have held us back from all the cruelties, excesses and immoralities which have taken the world back to the dark ages? It will not do to say that they have occurred in spite of Christianity, and that Christianity is, therefore, not to blame. It is true that Christ’s teaching is not to blame, for it is often spoiled in the transmission. But Christianity has taken over control of the morals of Europe, and should have the compelling force which would ensure that those morals would not go to pieces upon the first strain. It is on this point that Christianity must be judged, and the judgment can only be that it has failed. It has not been an active controlling force upon the minds of men. And why? It can only be because there is something essential which is wanting. Men do not take it seriously. Men do not believe in it. Lip service is the only service in innumerable cases, and even lip service grows fainter.

Men, as distinct from women, have, both in the higher and lower classes of life, ceased, in the greater number of cases, to show a living interest in religion. The churches lose their grip upon the people — and lose it rapidly. Small inner circles, convocations, committees, assemblies, meet and debate and pass resolutions of an ever narrower character. But the people go their way and religion is dead, save in so far as intellectual culture and good taste can take its place. But when religion is dead, materialism becomes active, and what active materialism may produce has been seen in Germany.

Is it not time, then, for the religious bodies to discourage their own bigots and sectarians, and to seriously consider, if only for self-preservation, how they can get into line once more with that general level of human thought which is now so far in front of them? I say that they can do more than get level — they can lead. But to do so they must, on the one hand, have the firm courage to cut away from their own bodies all that dead tissue which is but a disfigurement and an encumbrance. They must face difficulties of reason, and adapt themselves to the demands of the human intelligence which rejects, and is right in rejecting, much which they offer. Finally, they must gather fresh strength by drawing in all the new truth and all the new power which are afforded by this new wave of inspiration which has been sent into the world by God, and which the human race, deluded and bemused by the would-be clever, has received with such perverse and obstinate incredulity. When they have done all this, they will find not only that they are leading the world with an obvious right to the leadership, but, in addition, that they have come round once more to the very teaching of that Master whom they have so long misrepresented.

APPENDICES

A

DOCTOR GELEY’S EXPERIMENTS

Nothing could be imagined more fantastic and grotesque than the results of the recent experiments of Professor Geley, in France. Before such results the brain, even of the trained psychical student, is dazed, while that of the orthodox man of science, who has given no heed to these developments, is absolutely helpless. In the account of the proceedings which he read lately before the Institut General Psychologique in Paris, on January of last year, Dr. Geley says: “I do not merely say that there has been no fraud; I say, ‘there has been no possibility of fraud.’ In nearly every case the materialisations were done under my eyes, and I have observed their whole genesis and development.” He adds that, in the course of the experiments, more than a hundred experts, mostly doctors, checked the results.

These results may be briefly stated thus. A peculiar whitish matter exuded from the subject, a girl named Eva, coming partly through her skin, partly from her hands, partly from the orifices of her face, especially her mouth. This was photographed repeatedly at every stage of its production, these photographs being appended to the printed treatise. This stuff, solid enough to enable one to touch and to photograph, has been called the ectoplasm. It is a new order of matter, and it is clearly derived from the subject herself, absorbing into her system once more at the end of the experiment. It exudes in such quantities as to entirely, cover her sometimes as with an apron. It is soft and glutinous to the touch, but varies in form and even in colour. Its production causes pain and groans from the subject, and any violence towards it would appear also to affect her. A sudden flash of light, as in a flash-photograph, may or may not cause a retraction of the ectoplasm, but always causes a spasm of the subject. When re-absorbed, it leaves no trace upon the garments through which it has passed.

This is wonderful enough, but far more fantastic is what has still to be told. The most marked property of this ectoplasm, very fully illustrated in the photographs, is that it sets or curdles into the shapes of human members — of fingers, of hands, of faces, which are at first quite sketchy and rudimentary, but rapidly coalesce and develop until they are undistinguishable from those of living beings. Is not this the very strangest and most inexplicable thing that has ever yet been observed by human eyes? These faces or limbs are usually the size of life, but they frequently are quite miniatures. Occasionally they begin by being miniatures, and grow into full size. On their first appearance in the ectoplasm the limb is only on one plane of matter, a mere flat appearance, which rapidly rounds itself off, until it has assumed all three planes and is complete. It may be a mere simulacrum, like a wax hand, or it may be endowed with full power of grasping another hand, with every articulation in perfect working order.

The faces which are produced in this amazing way are worthy of study. They do not appear to have represented anyone who has ever been known in life by Doctor Geley. My impression after examining them is that they are much more likely to be within the knowledge of the subject, being girls of the French lower middle class type, such as Eva was, I should imagine, in the habit of meeting. It should be added that Eva herself appears in the photograph as well as the simulacra of humanity. The faces are, on the whole, both pretty and piquant, though of a rather worldly and unrefined type. The latter adjective would not apply to the larger and most elaborate photograph, which represents a very beautiful young woman of a truly spiritual cast of face. Some of the faces are but partially formed, which gives them a grotesque or repellant appearance. What are we to make of such phenomena? There is no use deluding ourselves by the idea that there may be some mistake or some deception. There is neither one nor the other. Apart from the elaborate checks upon these particular results, they correspond closely with those got by Lombroso in Italy, by Schrenk-Notzing in Germany, and by other careful observers. One thing we must bear in mind constantly in considering them, and that is their abnormality. At a liberal estimate, it is not one person in a million who possesses such powers — if a thing which is outside our volition can be described as a power. It is the mechanism of the materialisation medium which has been explored by the acute brain and untiring industry of Doctor Geley, and even presuming, as one may fairly presume, that every materialising medium goes through the same process in order to produce results, still such mediums are exceedingly, rare. Dr. Geley mentions, as an analogous phenomenon on the material side, the presence of dermoid cysts, those mysterious formations, which rise as small tumors in any part of the body, particularly above the eyebrow, and which when opened by the surgeon are found to contain hair, teeth or embryonic bones. There is no doubt, as he claims, some rough analogy, but the dermoid cyst is, at least, in the same flesh and blood plane of nature as the foetus inside it, while in the ectoplasm we are dealing with an entirely new and strange development.

It is not possible to define exactly what occurs in the case of the ectoplasm, nor, on account of its vital connection with the medium and its evanescent nature, has it been separated and subjected to even the roughest chemical analysis which might show whether it is composed of those earthly elements with which we are familiar. Is it rather some coagulation of ether which introduces an absolutely new substance into our world? Such a supposition seems most probable, for a comparison with the analogous substance examined at Dr. Crawford’s seances at Belfast, which is at the same time hardly visible to the eye and yet capable of handling a weight of 150 pounds, suggests something entirely new in the way of matter.

But setting aside, as beyond the present speculation, what the exact origin and nature of the ectoplasm may be, it seems to me that there is room for a very suggestive line of thought if we make Geley’s experiments the starting point, and lead it in the direction of other manifestations of psychomaterial activity. First of all, let us take Crookes’ classic experiments with Katie King, a result which for a long time stood alone and isolated but now can be approached by intermittent but definite stages. Thus we can well suppose that during those long periods when Florrie Cook lay in the laboratory in the dark, periods which lasted an hour or more upon some occasions, the ectoplasm was flowing from her as from Eva. Then it was gathering itself into a viscous cloud or pillar close to her frame; then the form of Katie King was evolved from this cloud, in the manner already described, and finally the nexus was broken and the completed body advanced to present itself at the door of communication, showing a person different in every possible attribute save that of sex from the medium, and yet composed wholly or in part from elements extracted from her senseless body. So far, Geley’s experiments throw a strong explanatory light upon those of Crookes. And here the Spiritualist must, as it seems to me, be prepared to meet an objection more formidable than the absurd ones of fraud or optical delusion. It is this. If the body of Katie King the spirit is derived from the body of Florrie Cook the psychic, then what assurance have we that the life therein is not really one of the personalities out of which the complex being named Florrie Cook is constructed? It is a thesis which requires careful handling. It is not enough to say that the nature is manifestly superior, for supposing that Florrie Cook represented the average of a number of conflicting personalities, then a single one of these personalities might be far higher than the total effect. Without going deeply into this problem, one can but say that the spirit's own account of its own personality must count for something, and also that an isolated phenomenon must be taken in conjunction with all other psychic phenomena when we are seeking for a correct explanation.

But now let us take this idea of a human being who has the power of emitting a visible substance in which are formed faces which appear to represent distinct individualities, and in extreme cases develop into complete independent human forms. Take this extraordinary fact, and let us see whether, by an extension or modification of this demonstrated process, we may not get some sort of clue as to the modus operandi in other psychic phenomena. It seems to me that we may, at least, obtain indications which amount to a probability, though not to a certainty, as to how some results, hitherto inexplicable, are attained. It is at any rate a provisional speculation, which may suggest a hypothesis for future observers to destroy, modify, or confirm.

The argument which I would advance is this. If a strong materialisation medium can throw out a cloud of stuff which is actually visible, may not a medium of a less pronounced type throw out a similar cloud with analogous properties which is not opaque enough to be seen by the average eye, but can make an impression both on the dry plate in the camera and on the clairvoyant faculty? If that be so — and it would not seem to be a very far-fetched proposition — we have at once an explanation both of psychic photographs and of the visions of the clairvoyant seer. When I say an explanation, I mean of its superficial method of formation, and not of the forces at work behind, which remain no less a mystery even when we accept Dr. Geley's statement that they are "ideoplastic."

Here we have, I think, some attempt at a generalisation, which might, perhaps, be useful in evolving some first signs of order out of this chaos. It is conceivable that the thinner emanation of the clairvoyant would extend far further than the thick material ectoplasm, but have the same property of moulding itself into life, though the life forms would only be visible to the clairvoyant eye. Thus, when Mr. Tom Tyrrell, or any other competent exponent, stands upon the platform his emanation fills the hall. Into this emanation, as into the visible ectoplasm in Geley's experiments, break the faces and forms of those from the other side who are attracted to the scene by their sympathy with various members of the audience. They are seen and described by Mr. Tyrrell, who with his finely attuned senses, carefully conserved (he hardly eats or drinks upon a day when he demonstrates), can hear that thinner higher voice that calls their names, their old addresses and their messages. So, too, when Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton stand with their hands joined over the cap of the camera, they are really throwing out a misty ectoplasm from which the forms loom up which appear upon the photographic plate. It may be that I mistake an analogy for an explanation, but I put the theory on record for what it is worth.

B

A PARTICULAR INSTANCE

I have been in touch with a series of events in America lately, and can vouch for the facts as much as any man can vouch for facts which did not occur to himself. I have not the least doubt in my own mind that they are true, and a more remarkable double proof of the continuity of life has, I should think, seldom been published. A book has recently been issued by Harpers, of New York, called "The Seven Purposes." In this book the authoress, Miss Margaret Cameron, describes how she suddenly developed the power of automatic writing. She was not a Spiritualist at the time. Her hand was controlled and she wrote a quantity of matter which was entirely outside her own knowledge or character. Upon her doubting whether her sub-conscious self might in some way be producing the writing, which was partly done by planchette, the script was written upside down and from right to left, as though the writer was seated opposite. Such script could not possibly be written by the lady herself. Upon making enquiry as to who was using her hand, the answer came in writing that it was a certain Fred Gaylord, and that his object was to get a message to his mother. The youth was unknown to Miss Cameron, but she knew the family and forwarded the message, with the result that the mother came to see her, examined the evidence, communicated with the son, and finally, returning home, buried all her evidences of mourning, feeling that the boy was no more dead in the old sense than if he were alive in a foreign country.

There is the first proof of preternatural agency, since Miss Cameron developed so much knowledge which she could not have normally acquired, using many phrases and ideas which were characteristic of the deceased. But mark the sequel. Gaylord was merely a pseudonym, as the matter was so private that the real name, which we will put as Bridger, was not disclosed. A few months after the book was published Miss Cameron received a letter from a stranger living a thousand miles away. This letter and the whole correspondence I have seen. The stranger, Mrs. Nicol, says that as a test she would like to ask whether the real name given as Fred Gaylord in the book is not Fred Bridger, as she had psychic reasons for believing so. Miss Cameron replied that it was so, and expressed her great surprise that so secret and private a matter should have been correctly stated. Mrs. Nicol then explained that she and her husband, both connected with journalism and both absolutely agnostic, had discovered that she had the power of automatic writing. That while, using this power she had received communications purporting to come from Fred Bridger whom they had known in life, and that upon reading Miss Cameron’s book they had received from Fred Bridger the assurance that he was the same person as the Fred Gaylord of Miss Cameron.

Now, arguing upon these facts, and they would appear most undoubtedly to be facts, what possible answer can the materialist or the sceptic give to the assertion that they are a double proof of the continuity of personality and the possibility of communication? Can any reasonable system of telepathy explain how Miss Cameron discovered the intimate points characteristic of young Gaylord? And then, how are we afterwards, by any possible telepathy, to explain the revelation to Mrs. Nicol of the identity of her communicant, Fred Bridger, with the Fred Gaylord who had been written of by Miss Cameron. The case for return seems to me a very convincing one, though I contend now, as ever, that it is not the return of the lost ones which is of such cogent interest as the message from the beyond which they bear with them.

C

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

On this subject I should recommend the reader to consult Coates’ “Photographing the Invisible,” which states, in a thoughtful and moderate way, the evidence for this most remarkable phase, and illustrates it with many examples. It is pointed out that here, as always, fraud must be carefully guarded against, having been admitted in the case of the French spirit photographer, Buguet.

There are, however, a large number of cases where the photograph, under rigid test conditions in which fraud has been absolutely barred, has reproduced the features of the dead. Here there are limitations and restrictions which call for careful study and observation. These faces of the dead are in some cases as contoured and as recognisable as they were in life, and correspond with no pre-existing picture or photograph. One such case absolutely critic-proof is enough, one would think, to establish survival, and these valid cases are to be counted not in ones, but in hundreds. On the other hand, many of the likenesses, obtained under the same test conditions, are obviously simulacra or pictures built up by some psychic force, not necessarily by the individual spirits themselves, to represent the dead. In some undoubtedly genuine cases it is an exact, or almost exact, reproduction of an existing picture, as if the conscious intelligent force, whatever it might be, had consulted it as to the former appearance of the deceased, and had then built it up in exact accordance with the original. In such cases the spirit face may show as a flat surface instead of a contour. Rigid examination has shown that the existing model was usually outside the ken of the photographer.

Two of the bravest champions whom Spiritualism has ever produced, the late W. T. Stead and the late Archdeacon Colley — names which will bulk large in days to come — attached great importance to spirit photography as a final and incontestable proof of survival. In his recent work, “Proofs of the Truth of Spiritualism” (Kegan Paul), the eminent botanist, Professor Henslow, has given one case which would really appear to be above criticism. He narrates how the inquirer subjected a sealed packet of plates to the Crewe circle without exposure, endeavoring to get a psychograph. Upon being asked on which plate he desired it, he said “the fifth.” Upon this plate being developed, there was found on it a copy of a passage from the Codex Alexandrinus of the New Testament in the British Museum. Reproductions, both of the original and of the copy, will be found in Professor Henslow’s book.

I have myself been to Crewe and have had results which would be amazing were it not that familiarity blunts the mind to miracles. Three marked plates brought by myself, and handled, developed and fixed by no hand but mine, gave psychic extras. In each case I saw the extra in the negative when it was still wet in the dark room. I reproduce in Plate I a specimen of the results, which is enough in itself to prove the whole case of survival to any reasonable mind. The three sitters are Mr. Oaten, Mr. Walker, and myself, I being obscured by the psychic cloud. In this cloud appears a message of welcome to me from the late Archdeacon Colley. A specimen of the Archdeacon's own handwriting is reproduced in Plate II for the purpose of comparison. Behind, there is an attempt at materialisation obscured by the cloud. The mark on the side of the plate is my identification mark. I trust that I make it clear that no hand but mine ever touched this plate, nor did I ever lose sight of it for a second save when it was in the carrier, which was conveyed straight back to the dark room and there opened. What has any critic to say to that?

By the kindness of those fearless pioneers of the movement, Mr. and Mrs. Hewat Mackenzie, I am allowed to publish another example of spirit photography. The circumstances were very remarkable. The visit of the parents to Crewe was unproductive and their plate a blank save for their own presentment. Returning disappointed, to London they managed, through the mediumship of Mrs. Leonard, to get into touch with their boy, and asked him why they had failed. He replied that the conditions had been bad, but that he had actually succeeded some days later in getting on to the plate of Lady Glenconnor, who had been to Crewe upon a similar errand. The parents communicated with this lady, who replied saying that she had found the image of a stranger upon her plate. On receiving a print they at once recognised their son, and could even see that, as a proof of identity, he had reproduced the bullet wound on his left temple. No. 3 is their gallant son as he appeared in the flesh, No. 4 is his reappearance after death. The opinion of a miniature painter who had done a picture of the young soldier is worth recording as evidence of identity. The artist says: “After painting the miniature of your son Will, I feel I know every turn of his face, and am quite convinced of the likeness of the psychic photograph. All the modelling of the brow, nose and eyes is marked by illness — especially is the mouth slightly contracted — but this does not interfere with the real form. The way the hair grows on the brow and temple is noticeably like the photograph taken before he was wounded.”

D
THE CLAIRVOYANCE OF MRS. B.

At the time of this volume going to press the results obtained by clients of this medium have been forty-two successes out of fifty attempts, checked and docketted by the author. This series forms a most conclusive proof of spirit clairvoyance. An attempt has been made by Mr. E. F. Benson, who examined some of the letters, to explain the results upon the grounds of telepathy. He admits that “The tastes, appearance and character of the deceased are often given, and many names are introduced by the medium, some not traceable, but most of them identical with relations or friends.” Such an admission would alone banish thought-reading as an explanation, for there is no evidence in existence to show that this power ever reaches such perfection that one who possesses it could draw the image of a dead man from your brain, fit a correct name to him, and then associate him with all sorts of definite and detailed actions in which he was engaged. Such an explanation is not an explanation but a pretence. But even if one were to allow such a theory to pass, there are numerous incidents in these accounts which could not be explained in such a fashion, where unknown details have been given which were afterwards verified, and even where mistakes in thought upon the part of the sitter were corrected by the medium under spirit guidance. Personally I believe that the medium’s own account of how she gets her remarkable results is the absolute truth, and I can imagine no other fashion in which they can be explained. She has, of course, her bad days, and the conditions are always worst when there is an inquisitorial rather than a religious atmosphere in the interview. This intermittent character of the results is, according to my experience, characteristic of spirit clairvoyance as compared with thought-reading, which can, in its more perfect form, become almost automatic within certain marked limits. I may add that the constant practice of some psychical researchers to take no notice at all of the medium’s own account of how he or she attains results, but to substitute some complicated and unproved explanation of their own, is as insulting as it is unreasonable. It has been alleged as a slur upon Mrs. B’s results and character that she has been twice prosecuted by the police. This is, in fact, not a slur upon the medium but rather upon the law, which is in so barbarous a condition that the true seer fares no better than the impostor, and that no definite psychic principles are recognised. A medium may under such circumstances be a martyr rather than a criminal, and a conviction ceases to be a stain upon the character.

THE WANDERINGS OF A SPIRITUALIST

On the Life Hereafter
TO MY WIFE
THIS MEMORIAL OF A JOURNEY WHICH
HER HELP AND PRESENCE CHANGED
FROM A DUTY TO A PLEASURE
A. C D.
July 18, 1921.

THE WANDERINGS OF A SPIRITUALIST

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HOW THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN.

CHAPTER I

The inception of the enterprise. — The Merthyr Seance.- Experience of British lectures. — Call from Australia. — The Holborn luncheon. — Remarkable testimony to communication. — Is individual proof necessary? — Excursion to Exeter. — Can spiritualists continue to be Christians? — Their views on Atonement. — The party on the " Naldera."

This is an account of the wanderings of a spiritualist, geographical and speculative. Should the reader have no interest in psychic things — if indeed any human being can be so foolish as not to be interested in his own nature and fate, — then this is the place to put the book down. It were better also to end the matter now if you have no patience with a go-as-you-please style of narrative, which founds itself upon the conviction that thought may be as interesting as action, and which is bound by its very nature to be intensely personal. I write a record of what absorbs my mind which may be very different from that which appeals to yours. But if you are content to come with me upon these terms then let us start with my apologies in advance for the pages which may bore you, and with my hopes that some may compensate you by pleasure or by profit. I write these lines with a pad upon my knee, heaving upon the long roll of the Indian Ocean, running large and grey under a grey streaked sky, with the rain-swept hills of Ceylon, just one shade greyer, lining the Eastern skyline. So under many difficulties it will be carried on, which may explain if it does not excuse any slurring of a style, which is at its best but plain English.

There was one memorable night when I walked forth with my head throbbing and my whole frame quivering from the villa of Mr. Southey at Merthyr. Behind me the brazen glare of Dowlais iron-works lit up the sky, and in front twinkled the many lights of the Welsh town. For two hours my wife and I had sat within listening to the whispering voices of the dead, voices which are so full of earnest life, and of desperate endeavours to pierce the barrier of our dull senses. They had quivered and wavered around us, giving us pet names, sweet sacred things, the intimate talk of the olden time. Graceful lights, signs of spirit power had hovered over us in the darkness. It was a different and a wonderful world. Now with those voices still haunting our memories we had slipped out into the material world — a world of glaring iron works and of twinkling cottage windows. As I looked down on it all I grasped my wife’s hand in the darkness and I cried aloud, My God, if they only knew — if they could only know! “ Perhaps in that cry, wrung from my very soul, lay the inception of my voyage to the other side of the world. The wish to serve was strong upon us both. God had given us wonderful signs, and they were surely not for ourselves alone.

I had already done the little I might. From the moment that I had understood the overwhelming importance of this subject, and realised how utterly it must change and chasten the whole thought of the world when it is whole-heartedly accepted, I felt it good to work in the matter and understood that all other work which I had ever done, or could ever do, was as nothing compared to this. Therefore from the time that I had finished the history of the Great War on which I was engaged, I was ready to turn all my remaining energies of voice or hand to the one great end. At first I had little of my own to narrate, and my task was simply to expound the spiritual philosophy as worked out by the thoughts and experiences of others, showing folk so far as I was able, that the superficial and ignorant view taken of it in the ordinary newspapers did not touch the heart of the matter. My own experiences were limited and inconclusive, so that it was the evidence of others which I quoted. But as I went forward signs were given in profusion to me also, such signs as were far above all error or deception, so that I was able to speak with that more vibrant note which comes not from belief or faith, but from personal experience and knowledge. I had found that the wonderful literature of Spiritualism did not reach the people, and that the press was so full of would-be jocosities and shallow difficulties that the public were utterly misled. Only one way was left, which was to speak to the people face to face. This was the task upon which I set forth, and it had led me to nearly every considerable city of Great Britain from Aberdeen to Torquay. Everywhere I found interest, though it varied from the heavier spirit of the sleepy cathedral towns to the brisk reality of centres of life and work like Glasgow or Wolverhampton. Many a time my halls were packed, and’ there were as many outside as inside the building. I have no eloquence and make profession of none, but I am audible and I say no more than I mean and can prove, so that my audiences felt that it was indeed truth so far as I could see it, which I conveyed. Their earnestness and receptiveness were my great help and reward in my venture. Those who had no knowledge of what my views were assembled often outside my halls, waving banners and distributing tracts, but never once in the course of addressing 150,000 people, did I have disturbance in my hall. I tried, while never flinching from truth, to put my views in such a way as to hurt no one’s feelings, and although I have had clergymen of many denominations as my chairmen, I have had thanks from them and no remonstrance. My enemies used to follow and address meetings, as they had every right to do, in the same towns. It is curious that the most persistent of these enemies were Jesuits on the one side and Evangelical sects of the Plymouth Brethren type upon the other. I suppose the literal interpretation of the Old Testament was the common bond.

However this is digression, and when the digressions are taken out of this book there will not be much left. I get back to the fact that the overwhelming effect of the Merthyr Seance and of others like it, made my wife and myself feel that when we had done what we could in Britain we must go forth to further fields. Then came the direct invitation from spiritual bodies in Australia. I had spent some never-to-be-forgotten days with Australian troops at the very crisis of the war. My heart was much with them. If my message could indeed bring consolation to bruised hearts and to bewildered minds — and I had boxes full of letters to show that it did — then to whom should I carry it rather than to those who had fought so splendidly and lost so heavily in the common cause? I was a little weary also after three years of incessant controversy, speaking often five times a week, and continually endeavouring to uphold the cause in the press. The long voyage presented attractions, even if there was hard work at the end of it. There were difficulties in the way. Three children, boys of eleven and nine, with a girl of seven, all devotedly attached to their home and their parents, could not easily be left behind. If they came a maid was also necessary. The pressure upon me of correspondence and interviews would be so great that my old friend and secretary, Major Wood, would be also needed. Seven of us in all therefore, and a cheque of sixteen hundred pounds drawn for our return tickets, apart from outfit, before a penny could be entered on the credit side. However, Mr. Carlyle Smythe, the best agent in Australia, had taken the matter up, and I felt that we were in good hands. The lectures would be numerous, controversies severe, the weather at its hottest, and my own age over sixty. But there are compensating forces, and I was’ constantly aware of their presence. I may count our adventures as actually beginning from the luncheon which was given us in farewell a week or so before our sailing by the spiritualists of England. Harry Engholm, most unselfish of men, and a born organiser among our most unorganised crowd, had the matter in hand, so it was bound to be a success. There was sitting room at the Holborn Restaurant for 290 people, and it was all taken up three weeks before the event. The secretary said that he could have filled the Albert Hall. It was an impressive example of the solidity of the movement showing itself for the moment round us, but really round the cause. There were peers, doctors, clergymen, officers of both services, and, above all, those splendid lower middle class folk, if one talks in our material earth terms, who are the spiritual peers of the nation. Many professional mediums were there also, and I was honoured by their presence, for as I said in my remarks, I consider that in these days of doubt and sorrow, a genuine professional medium is the most useful member of the whole community. Alas! how few they are! Four photographic mediums do I know in all Britain, with about twelve physical phenomena mediums and as many really reliable clairvoyants. What are these among so many? But there are many amateur mediums of various degrees, and the number tends to increase. Perhaps there will at last be an angel to every church as in the days of John. I see dimly the time when two congregations, the living and those who have passed on, shall move forward together with the medium angel as the bridge between them.

It was a wonderful gathering, and I only wish I could think that my own remarks rose to the height of the occasion. However, I did my best and spoke from my heart. I told how the Australian visit had arisen, and I claimed that the message that I would carry was the most important that the mind of man could conceive, implying as it did the practical abolition of death, and the reinforcement of our present religious views by the actual experience of those who have made the change from the natural to the spiritual bodies. Speaking of our own experiences, I mentioned that my wife and I had actually spoken face to face beyond all question or doubt with eleven friends or relatives who had passed over, their direct voices being in each case audible, and their conversation characteristic and evidential — in some cases marvellously so. Then with a sudden impulse I called upon those in the audience who were prepared to swear that they had had a similar experience to stand up and testify. It seemed for a moment as if the whole audience were on their feet. The Times next day said 250 out of

290 and I am prepared to accept that estimate. Men and women, of all professions and social ranks — I do not think that I exaggerated when I said that it was the most remarkable demonstration that I had ever seen and that nothing like it had ever occurred in the City of London.

It was vain for those journals who tried to minimise it to urge that in a Baptist or a Unitarian assembly all would have stood up to testify to their own faith. No doubt they would, but this was not a case of faith, it was a case of bearing witness to fact. There were people of all creeds, Church, dissent, Unitarian and ex-materialists. They were testifying to an actual objective experience as they might have testified to having seen the lions in Trafalgar Square. If such a public agreement of evidence does not establish a fact then it is indeed impossible, as Professor Challis remarked long ago, to prove a thing by any human testimony whatever. I confess that I was amazed. When I remember how many years it was before I myself got any final personal proofs I should have thought that the vast majority of Spiritualists were going rather upon the evidence of others than upon their own. And yet 250 out of 290 had actually joined hands across the border. I had no idea that the direct proof was so widely spread.

I have always held that people insist too much upon direct proof. What direct proof have we of most of the great facts of Science? We (simply take the word of those who have examined: How many of us have, for example, seen the rings of Saturn? We are assured that they are there, and we accept the assurance. Strong telescopes are rare, and so we do not all expect to see the rings with our own eyes. In the same way strong See page i THE GOD-SPEED LUNCHEON IN LONDON.

On this occasion 250 out of 290 guests rose as testimony that they were in personal touch with their dead.

mediums are rare, and we cannot all expect to experience the higher psychic results. But if the assurance of those who have carefully experimented, of the Barretts, the Hares, the Crookes, the Wallaces, the Lodges and the Lombrosos, is not enough, then it is manifest that we are dealing with this matter on different terms to those which we apply to all the other affairs of science. It would of course be different if there were a school of patient investigators who had gone equally deeply into the matter and come to opposite conclusions. Then we should certainly have to find the path of truth by individual effort. But such a school does not exist. Only the ignorant and inexperienced are in total opposition, and the humblest witness who has really sought the evidence has more weight than they.

After the luncheon my wife made the final preparations — and only ladies can tell what it means to fit out six people with tropical and semi-tropical outfits which will enable them for eight months to stand inspection in public. I employed the time by running down to Devonshire to give addresses q,t Exeter and Torquay, with admirable audiences at both. Good Evan Powell had come down to give me a last seance, and I had the joy of a few last words with my arisen son, who blessed me on my mission and assured me that I would indeed bring solace to bruised hearts. The words he uttered were a quotation from my London speech at which Powell had not been present, nor had the verbatim account of it appeared anywhere at that time. It was one more sign of how closely our words and actions are noted from the other side. Powell was tired, having given a sitting the night before, so the proceedings were short, a few floating lights, my son and my sister's son to me, one or two greetings to other sitters, and it was over.

Whilst in Exeter I had a discussion with those who would break away from Christianity. They are a strong body within the movement, and how can Christians be surprised at it when they remember that for seventy years they have had nothing but contempt and abuse for the true light- bearers of the world? Is there at the present moment one single bishop, or one head of a Free Church, who has the first idea of psychic truth? Dr. Parker had, in his day, so too Archdeacons Wilberforce and Colley, Mr. Haweis and a few others. General Booth has also testified to spiritual communion with the dead. But what have Spiritualists had in the main save misrepresentation and persecution? Hence the movement has admittedly, so far as it is an organised religion — and it has already 360 churches and 1,000 building funds — taken a purely Unitarian turn. This involves no disrespect towards Him Whom they look upon as the greatest Spirit who ever trod the earth, but only a deep desire to communicate direct without intermediary with that tremendous centre of force from and to whom all things radiate or return. They are very earnest and good men, these organised religious Spiritualists, and for the most part, so far as my /

experience goes, are converts from materialism who, having in their materialistic days said very properly that they would believe nothing which could not be proved to them, are ready now with Thomas to be absolutely wholehearted when the proof of survival and spirit communion has actually reached them. There, however, the proof ends, nor will they go further than the proof extends, as otherwise their original principles would be gone. Therefore they are Unitarians with a breadth of vision which includes Christ, Krishna, Buddha and all the other great spirits whom God has sent to direct different lines of spiritual evolution which correspond to the different needs of the various races of mankind. Our information from the beyond is that this evolution is continued beyond the grave, and very far on until all details being gradually merged, they become one as children of God. With a deep reverence for Christ it is undeniable that the organised Spiritualist does not accept vicarious atonement nor original sin, and believes that a man reaps as he sows with no one but himself to pull out the weeds. It seems to me the more virile and manly doctrine, and as to the texts which seem to say otherwise, we cannot deny that the New Testament has been doctored again and again in order to square the record of the Scriptures with the practice of the Church. Professor Nestle, in the preface to a work on theology (I write far from books of reference), remarks that there were actually officials named “ Correctors/’ who were appointed at the time of the Council of Nicaea for this purpose, and St. Jerome, when he constructed the Vulgate, complains to Pope Damasus that it is practically a new book that he is making, putting any sin arising upon the Pope’s head. In the face of such facts we can only accept the spirit of the New Testament fortified with common sense, and using such interpretation as brings most spiritual strength to each of us. Personally, I accept the view of the organised Spiritual religion, for it removes difficulties which formerly stood between me and the whole Christian system, but I would not say or do anything which would abash those others who are getting real spiritual help from any sort of Christian belief. The gaining of spirituality and widening of the personality are the aims of life, and how it is done is the business of the individual. Every creed has produced its saints and has to that extent justified its existence. I like the Unitarian position of the main Spiritual body, however, because it links the movement up with the other great creeds of the world and makes it more accessible to the Jew, the Mohammedan or the Buddhist. It is far too big to be confined within the palings of Christianity.

Here is a little bit of authentic teaching from the other side which bears upon the question. I take it from the remarkable record of Mr. Miller of Belfast, whose dialogues with his son after the death of the latter seem to me to be as certainly true as any case which has come to my notice. On asking the young soldier some question about the exact position of Christ in religion he modestly protested that such a subject was above his head, and asked leave to bring his higher guide to answer the question. Using a fresh voice and in a new and more weighty manner the medium then said : —

“ I wish to answer your question. Jesus the Christ is the proper designation. Jesus was perfect humanity. Christ was the God idea in Him. Jesus, on account of His purity, manifested in the highest degree the psychic powers which resulted in His miracles. Jesus never preached the blood of the lamb. The disciples after His ascension forgot the message in admiration of the man. The Christ is in every human being, and so are the psychic forces which were used by Jesus. If the same attention were given to spiritual development which you give to the comfort and growth of your material bodies your progress in spiritual life would be rapid and would be characterised by the same works as were performed by Jesus. The one essential thing for all on earth to strive after is a fuller knowledge and growth in spiritual living/’

I think that the phrase, “ In their admiration of the man they forgot His message/’ is as pregnant a one as I ever heard.

To come back then to the discussion at Exeter, what I said then and feel now is that every Spiritualist is free to find his own path, and that as a matter of fact his typical path is a Unitarian one, but that this in no way obscures the fact that our greatest leaders, Lodge, Barrett, Ellis Powell, Tweedale, are devoted sons of the Church, that our literature is full of Christian aspiration, and that our greatest prophet, Vale Owen, is a priest of a particularly sacerdotal turn of mind. We are in a transition stage, and have not yet found any common theological position, or any common position at all, save that the dead carry on, that they do not change, that they can under proper physical conditions communicate with us, and that there are many physical signs by which they make their presence known to us. That is our common ground, and all beyond that is matter of individual observation and inference. Therefore, we are not in a position to take on any anti- Christian agitation, for it would be against the conscience of the greater part of our own people.

Well, it is clear that if I do not begin my book I shall finish it before I have begun, so let me end this chapter by saying that in despite of all superstition we started for Australia in the good ship “ Naldera “ (Capt.

Lewellin, R.N.R.), on Friday, August 13th, 1920. As we carried two bishops in addition to our ominous dates we were foredoomed by every nautical tradition. Our party were my dear, splendid wife, who has shared both my evidence and my convictions. She it is who, by breaking up her household, leaving her beloved home, breaking the schooling of her children, and venturing out upon a sea voyage, which of all things she hates, has made the real sacrifice for the cause. As to me, I am fond of change and adventure, and heartily agree with President Roosevelt when he said that the grandest sport upon earth is to champion an unpopular cause which you know to be true. With us were Denis, Malcolm and Baby, concerning whom I wrote the “ Three of them” sketches some years ago. In their train was Jakeman, most faithful of maids, and in mine Major Wood, who has been mixed up in my life ever since as young men we played both cricket and football in the same team. Such was the little party who set forth to try and blow that smouldering glow of truth which already existed in Australia, into a more lively flame.

CHAPTER II

Gibraltar. — Spanish right versus British might. — Relics of Barbary Rovers, and of German militarists. — Ichabod! Senegal Infantry. — No peace for the world. — Religion on a liner. — Differences of vibration. — The Bishop of Kwang- Si. — Religion in China. — Whisky in excelsis. — France's masterpiece. — British errors. — A procession of giants. — The invasion of Egypt. — Tropical weather. — The Russian Horror. — An Indian experiment. — Aden. — Bombay. — The Lambeth encyclical. — A great novelist. — The Mango trick. — Snakes. — The Catamarans. — The Robber Castles of Ceylon. — Doctrine of Reincarnation. — -Whales and Whalers. — Perth. — The Bight.

We had a favourable journey across the Bay and came without adventure to Gibraltar, that strange crag, Arabic by name, African in type, Spanish by right, and British by might. I trust that my whole record has shown me to be a loyal son of the Empire, and I recognise that we must have a secure line of communications with the East, but if any change could give us Ceuta, on the opposite African coast, instead of this outlying corner of proud old Spain, it would be good policy as well as good morality to make the change. I wonder how we should like it if the French held a garrison at Mount St. Michael in Cornwall, which would be a very similar situation. Is it worth having a latent enemy who at any time might become an active one, or is it wiser to hold them to us by the memory of a great voluntary act of justice? They would pay, of course, for all quays, breakwaters and improvements, which would give us the money to turn Ceuta into a worthy substitute, which could be held without offending the pride of a great nation, as old and proud as ourselves. The whole lesson of this great war is that no nation can do what is unjust with impunity, and that sooner or later one's sin will find one out. How successful seemed all the scheming of Frederick of Prussia! But what of Silesia and of Poland now? Only on justice can you build with a permanent foundation, and there is no justice in our tenure of Gibraltar. We had only an hour ashore, a great joy to the children, and carried away a vague impression of grey-shirted Tommies, swarthy loungers, one long, cobble- stoned street, scarlet blossoms, and a fine Governor's house, in which I picture that brave old warrior, Smith-Dorrien, writing a book which will set all the critics talking, and the military clubs buzzing a year or two from now. I do not know if he was really forced to fight at Le Cateau, though our sympathies must always go to the man who fights, but I do feel that if he had had his way and straightened the salient of Ypres, there would have been a mighty saving of blood and tears. There were sentimental reasons against it, but I can think of no material ones — certainly none which were worth all the casualities of the Salient. I had only one look at the place, and that by night, but never shall I forget the murderous loop, outlined by star shells, nor the horrible noises which rose up from that place of wrath and misery.

On August 19th we were running up the eastern Spanish [coast, a most desolate country of high bare cliffs and barren uplands, studded with aged towers which told of pirate raids of old. These Mediterranean shore dwellers must have had a hellish life, when the Barbary Rover was afloat, and they might be wakened any night by the Moslem yell. Truly, if the object of human life was chastening by suffering, then we have given it to each other in full measure. If this were the only life I do not know how the hypothesis of the goodness of God could be sustained, since our history has been one hardly broken record of recurring miseries, war, famine, and disease, from the ice to the equator. I should still be a materialist, as I was of yore, if it were not for the comfort and teaching from beyond, which tells me that this is the worst — far the worst — and that by its standard everything else becomes most gloriously better, so long as we help to make it so. “ If the boys knew what it was like over here,” said a dead soldier, “ they would just jump for it.” He added however, “ If they did that they would surely miss it.” We cannot bluff Providence, or short-circuit things to our liking.

We got ashore once more at Marseilles. I saw converted German merchant ships, with names like “ Burgomeister Miiller,” in the harbour, and railway trucks with “ Mainz-Co In “ still marked upon their flanks — part of the captured loot. Germany, that name of terror, how short is the time since we watched you well-nigh all-powerful, mighty on land, dangerous on the sea, conquering the world with your commerce and threatening it with your arms! You had everything, numbers, discipline, knowledge, industry, bravery, organisation, all in the highest — such an engine as the world has never seen. And now — Ichabod! Ichabod! Your warships lie under the waves, your liners fly the flags of your enemies, your mother Rhine on either bank hears the bugles of your invaders. What was wanting in you to bring you to such a pass? Was it not spirituality? Had not your churches become as much a department of State as the Post Office, where every priest and pastor was in State pay, and said that which the State ordained? All other life was at its highest, but spiritual life was dead, and because it was dead all the rest had taken on evil activities which could only lead to dissolution and corruption. Had Germany obeyed the moral law would she not now be great and flourishing, instead of the ruin which we see? Was ever such an object lesson in sin and its consequence placed before the world? But let us look to it, for we also have our lesson to learn, and our punishment is surely waiting if we do not learn it. If now after such years we sink back into old ruts and do not make an earnest effort for real religion and real active morality, then we cumber the ground, and it is time that we were swept away, for no greater chance of reform can ever come to us.

I saw some of the Senegal troops in the streets of Marseilles — a whole battalion of them marching down for re-embarkation. They are fierce, hard soldiers, by the look of them, for the negro is a natural fighter, as the prize ring shows, and these have long service training upon the top of this racial pugnacity. They look pure savages, with the tribal cuts still upon their faces, and I do not wonder that the Germans objected to them, though we cannot doubt that the Germans would themselves have used their Askaris in Europe as well as in Africa if they could have done so. The men who had as allies the murderers of the Armenians would not stick at trifles. I said during the war, and I can clearly see now, that the way in which the war was fought will prove hardly second to the war itself as a misfortune to the human race. A clean war could end in a clean peace. But how can we ever forget the poison gas, the Zeppelin bombardments of helpless cities, the submarine murders, the scattering of disease germs, and all the other atrocities of Germany? No water of oblivion can ever wash her clean. She had one chance, and only one. It was to at once admit it all herself and to set to work purging her national guilt by punishing guilty individuals. Perhaps she may even now save herself and clear the moral atmosphere of the world by doing this. But time passes and the signs are against it. There can be no real peace in the world until voluntary reparation has been made. Forced reparation can only make things worse, for it cannot satisfy us, and it must embitter them. I long for real peace, and should love to see our Spiritualist bodies lead the van. But the time is not yet and it is realities we need, not phrases.

Old travellers say that they never remember the Mediterranean so hot. We went down it with a following breeze which just neutralised our own head wind, the result being a quivering tropical heat. With the Red Sea before us it was no joke to start our trials so soon, and already the children began to wilt. However, Major Wood kept them at work for the forenoons and discipline still flourished. On the third day out we were south of Crete, and saw an island lying there which is surely the same in the lee of which PaulV galley took refuge when Euroclydon was behaving so badly. I had been asked to address the first- class passengers upon psychic religion that evening, and it was strange indeed to speak in those waters, for I knew well that however ill my little pipsqueak might compare with that mighty voice, yet it was still the same battle of the unseen against the material, raging now as it did 2,000 years ago. Some 200 of the passengers, with the Bishop of Kwang-Si, turned up, and a better audience one could not wish, though the acoustic properties of the saloon were abominable. However, I got it across, though I was as wet as if I had fallen overboard when I had finished. I was pleased to learn afterwards that among the most keen of my audience were every coloured man and woman on the ship, Parsees, Hindoos, Japanese and Mohammedans.

“ Do you believe it is true? “ they were asked next day.

“ We know that it is true,” was the answer, and it came from a lady with a red caste-mark like a wafer upon her forehead. So far as I could learn she spoke for all the Eastern folk.

And the others? At least I set them talking and thinking. I heard next morning of a queue of six waiting at the barber’s all deep in theological discussion, with the barber himself, razor in hand, joining warmly in. “ There has never been so much religion talked on a P. & O. ship since the line was started,” said one old traveller. It was all good-humoured and could do no harm. Before we had reached Port Said all my books on the subject were lent out to eager readers, and I was being led aside into remote corners and cross- questioned all day. I have a number of good psychic photographs with me, some of them of my own taking, and all of them guaranteed, and I find these valuable as making folk realise that my words do in truth represent realities. I have the famous fairy photos also, which will appear in England in the Christmas number of the Strand. I feel as if it were a delay-action mine which I had left behind me. I can imagine the cry of “ Fake! “ which will arise. But they will stand investigation. It has of course nothing to do with Spiritualism proper, but everything which can shake the mind out of narrow, material grooves, and make it realise that endless worlds surround us, separated only by difference of vibration, must work in the general direction of truth.

“ Difference of Vibration “ — I have been trying lately to get behind mere words and to realise more clearly what this may mean. It is a fascinating and fruitful line of thought. It begins with my electric fan whizzing over my head. As it starts with slow vibration I see the little propellers. Soon they become a dim mist, and finally I can see them no more. But they are there. At any moment, by slowing the movement, I can bring them back to my vision. Why do I not see it all the time? Because the impression is so fast that my retina has not time to register it. Can we not imagine then that some objects may emit the usual light waves, long enough and slow enough to leave a picture, but that other objects may send waves which are short and steep, and therefore make so swift an impression that it is not recorded? That, so far as I can follow it, is what we mean by an object with a higher rate of vibration. It is but a feeling out into the dark, but it is a hypothesis which may serve us to carry on with, though the clairvoyant seems to be not a person with a better developed physical retina, but rather one who has the power to use that which corresponds with the retina in their own etheric bodies which are in harmony with etheric waves from outside. When a man can walk round a room and examine the pictures with the back of his head, as Tom Tyrrell has done, it is clear that it is not his physical retina which is working. In countless cases inquirers into magnetic phenomena have caused their subjects to read with various parts of their bodies. It is the other body, the etheric body, the “ spiritual “ body of Paul, which lies behind all such phenomena — that body which is loose with all of us in sleep, but only exceptionally in waking hours. Once we fully understand the existence of that deathless etheric body, merged in our own but occasionally detachable, we have mastered many a problem and solved many a ghost story.

However, I must get back to my Cretan lecture. The bishop was interested, and I lent him one of the Rev. Charles Tweedale’s pamphlets next day, which shows how sadly Christianity has wandered away from its early faith of spiritual gifts and Communion of Saints. Both have now become words instead of things, save among our ranks. The bishop is a good fellow, red and rough like a Boer farmer, but healthy, breezy, and Apostolic. “ Do mention his kind grey eyes/’ says my wife. He may die a martyr yet in that inland diocese of China — and he would not shrink from it. Meanwhile, apart from his dogma, which must be desperately difficult to explain to an educated Chinaman, he must always be a centre of civilisation and social effort. A splendid fellow — but he suffers from what all bishops and all cardinals and all Popes suffer from, and that is superannuation. A physiologist has said that few men can ever entertain a new idea after fifty. How then can any church progress when all its leaders are over that age? This is why Christianity has stagnated and degenerated. If here and there one had a new idea, how could it survive the pressure of the others? It is hopeless. In this particular question of psychic religion the whole order is an inversion, for the people are ahead of the clergy and the clergy of the bishops. But when the laymen lead strongly enough the others will follow unless they wish to see the whole Church organisation dissolve.

He was very interesting upon the state of Christianity in China. Protestantism, thanks to the joint British and American Missions, is gaining upon Roman Catholicism, and has now far outstripped it, but the Roman Catholic organisations are very wealthy on account of ancient valuable concessions and well-invested funds. In case of a Bolshevist movement that may be a source of danger, as it gives a reason for attack. The Bishop made the very striking remark that if the whites cleared right out of China all the Christian Churches of divers creeds would within a generation merge into one creed. “ What have we to do,” they say, “ with these old historical quarrels which are hardly intelligible to us? We are all followers of Christ, and that is enough.” Truly, the converted seem far ahead of those who converted them. It is the priesthoods, the organisations, the funds and the vested interests which prevent the Churches from being united. In the meanwhile ninety per cent, of our population shows what it thinks by never entering into a church at all. Personally, I can never remember since I reached manhood feeling myself the better for having gone into one. And yet I have been an earnest seeker for truth. Verily, there is something deep down which is rotten. It is want of 33c fact, want of reality, words instead of things. Only last Sunday I shuddered as I listened to the hymns, and it amazed me to look around and see the composed faces of those who were singing them. Do they think what they are saying, or does Faith atrophy some part of the brain? We are “ born through water and blood into the true church.” We drink precious blood. “ He hath broken the teeth in their jaw.” Can such phrases really mean anything to any thoughtful man? If not, why continue them? You will have your churches empty while you do. People will not argue about it — they will, and do, simply stay away. And the clergy go on stating and restating incredible unproved things, while neglecting and railing at those which could be proved and believed. On our lines those nine out of ten could be forced back to a reconsideration of their position, even though that position would not square with all the doctrines of present-day Christianity, which would, I think, have offended the early Christians as much as it does the earnest thinkers of to-day.

Port Said came at last, and we entered the Suez Canal. It is a shocking thing that the entrance to this, one of the most magnificent of the works of man, are flanked by great sky advertisements of various brands of whisky. The sale of whisky may or may not be a tolerable thing, but its flaunting advertisements, Dewar, Johnny Walker, and the rest, have surely long been intolerable. If anything would make me a total prohibitionist those would. They are shameless. I do not know if some middle way could be found by which light alcoholic drinks could remain — so light that drunkenness would be hardly possible — but if this cannot be done, then let us follow the noble example of America. It is indeed shameful to see at the very point of the world where some noble sentiment might best be expressed these huge reminders of that which has led to so much misery and crime. To a Frenchman it must seem even worse than to us, while what the abstemious Mohammedan can think is beyond my imagination. In that direction at least the religion of Mohammed has done better than that of Christ. If all those Esquimaux, South Sea Islanders and others who have been converted to Christianity and then debauched by drink, had followed the prophet instead, it cannot be denied that their development would have been a happier and a higher one, though the cast-iron doctrines and dogmas of the Moslem have dangers of their own.

Has France ever had the credit she deserves for the splendid faith with which she followed that great beneficent genius Lesseps in his wonderful work? It is beautiful from end to end, French in its neatness, its order, its exquisite finish. Truly the opposition of our people, both experts and public, was a disgrace to us, though it sinks into insignificance when compared with our colossal national stupidity over the Channel tunnel. When our descendants compute the sums spent in shipping and transhipping in the great war, the waste of merchant ships and convoys, the sufferings of the wounded, the delay in reinforcements, the dependence upon the weather, they will agree that our sin had found us out and that we have paid a fitting price for our stupidity. Unhappily, it was not our blind guides who paid it, but it was the soldier and sailor and taxpayer, for the nation always pays collectively for the individual blunder. Would a hundred million pounds cover the cost of that one? Well can I remember how a year before war was declared, seeing clearly what was coming, I sent three memoranda to the Naval and Military authorities and to the Imperial Council of Defence pointing out exactly what the situation would be, and especially the danger to our transports. It is admitted now that it was only the strange inaction of the German light forces, and especially their want of comprehension of the possibilities of the submarine, which enabled our Expeditionary Force to get across at all, so that we might have lost the war within the first month. But as to my poor memoranda, which proved so terribly correct, I might as well have dropped them into my own wastepaper basket instead of theirs, and so saved the postage. My only convert was Captain, now General, Swinton, part inventor of the tanks, who acted as Secretary to the Imperial Defence Committee, and who told me at the time that my paper had set him thinking furiously.

Which leads my thoughts to the question of the torpedoing of merchant vessels by submarines. So sure was I that the Germans would do this, that after knocking at official doors in vain, I published a sketch called “ Danger/’ which was written a year before the war, and depicted all that afterwards occurred, even down to such small details as the ships zig-zagging up Channel to escape, and the submarines using their guns to save torpedoes. I felt as if, like Solomon Eagle, I could have marched down Fleet Street with a brazier on my head if I could only call people’s attention to the coming danger. I saw naval officers on the point, but they were strangely blind, as is shown by the comments printed at the end of “ Danger,” which give the opinions of several admirals pooh-poohing my fears. Among others I saw Captain Beatty, as he then was, and found him alive to the possible danger, though he did not suggest a remedy. His quiet, brisk personality impressed me, and I felt that our national brain- errors might perhaps be made good in the end by the grit that is in us. But how hard were our tasks from our want of foresight. Admiral Von Capelle did me the honour to say during the war, in the German Reichstag, that I was the only man who had prophesied the conditions of the great naval war. As a matter of fact, both Fisher and Scott had done so, though they had not given it to the public in the same detail — but nothing had been done. We know now that there was not a single harbour proof against submarines on our whole East Coast. Truly the hand of the Lord was over England. Nothing less could have saved her.

We tied up to the bank soon after entering the Canal, and lay there most of the night while a procession of great ships moving northwards swept silently past |us in jthe ring of vivid light cast by their searchlights and our own. I stayed on deck most of the night to watch them. The silence was impressive — those huge structures sweeping past with only the slow beat of their propellers and the wash of their bow wave on either side. No sooner had one of these great shapes slid past than, looking down the Canal, one saw the brilliant head light of another in the distance. They are only allowed to go at the slowest pace, so that their wash may not wear away the banks. Finally, the last had passed, and we were ourselves able to cast off our warps and push southwards. I remained on deck seeing the sun rise over the Eastern desert, and then a wonderful slow-moving panorama of Egypt as the bank slid slowly past us. First desert, then green oases, then the long line of rude fortifications from Kantara downwards, with the camp fires smoking, groups of early busy Tommies and endless dumps of stores. Here and to the south was the point where the Turks with their German leaders attempted the invasion of Egypt, carrying flat- bottomed boats to ford the Canal. How they were ever allowed to get so far is barely comprehensible, but how they were ever permitted to get back again across one hundred miles of desert in the face of our cavalry and camelry is altogether beyond me. Even their guns got back untaken. They dropped a number of mines in the Canal, but with true Turkish slovenliness they left on the banks at each point the long bamboos on which they had carried them across the desert, which considerably lessened the work of those who had to sweep them up. The sympathies of the Egyptians seems to have been against us, and yet they have no desire to pass again under the rule of the Turk. Our dominion has had the effect of turning a very poor country into a very rich one, and of securing some sort of justice for the fellah or peasant, but since we get no gratitude and have no trade preference it is a little difficult to see how we are the better for all our labours. So long as the Canal is secure — and it is no one’s interest to injure it — we should be better if the country governed itself. We have too many commitments, and if we have to take new ones, such as Mesopotamia, it would be well to get rid of some of the others where our task is reasonably complete. “ We never let the youngsters grow up,” said a friendly critic. There is, however, I admit, another side to the question, and the idea of permitting a healthy moral place like Port Said to relapse into the hotbed of gambling and syphilis which it used to be, is repugnant to the mind. Which is better — that a race be free, immoral and incompetent, or that it be forced into morality and prosperity? That question meets us at every turn.

The children have been delighted by the fish on the surface of the Canal. Their idea seems to be that the one aim and object of our excursion is to see sharks in the sea and snakes in Australia. We did actually see a shark half ashore upon a sandbank in one of the lower lakes near Suez. It was lashing about with a frantic tail, and so got itself off into deep water. To the west all day we see the very wild and barren country through which our ancestors used to drive upon the overland route when they travelled by land from Cairo to Suez. The smoke of a tiny mail-train marks the general line of that most desolate road. In the evening we were through the Canal and marked the rugged shore upon our left down which the Israelites pursued their way in the direction of Sinai. One wonders how much truth there is in the narrative. On the one hand it is impossible to doubt that something of the sort did occur. On the other, the impossibility of so huge a crowd living on the rare wells of the desert is manifest. But numbers are not the strong point of an Oriental historian. Perhaps a thousand or two may have followed their great leader upon that perilous journey. I have heard that Moses either on his own or through his wife was in touch with Babylonian habits. This would explain those tablets of stone, or of inscribed clay burned into brick, which we receive as the Ten Commandments, and which only differ from the moral precepts of other races in the strange limitations and omissions. At least ten new ones have long been needed to include drunkenness, gluttony, pride, envy, bigotry, lying and the rest.

The weather grows hotter and hotter, so that one aged steward who has done 100 voyages declares it to be unique. One passenger has died. Several stewards have collapsed. The wind still keeps behind us. In the midst of all this I had an extensively signed petition from the second class passengers that I should address them. I did so, and spoke on deck for forty minutes to a very attentive audience which included many of the officers of the ship. I hope I got my points across to them. I was a sad example of sweated labour when I had finished. My wife tells me that the people were impressed. As I am never aware of the presence of any individual when I am speaking on this subject I rely upon my wife's very quick and accurate feminine impressions. She sits always beside me, notes everything, gives me her sympathetic atmosphere which is of such psychic importance, and finally reports the result. If any point of mine seems to her to miss its mark I unhesitatingly take it out. It interests me to hear her tell of the half-concealed sneer with which men listen to me, and how it turns into interest, bewilderment and finally something like reverence and awe as the brain gradually realises the proved truth of what I am saying, which upsets the whole philosophy on which their lives are built.

There are several Australian officers on board who are coming from the Russian front full of dreadful stories of Bolshevist atrocities, seen with their own eyes. The executioners were Letts and Chinese, and the instigators renegade Jews, so that the Russians proper seem to have been the more or less innocent dupes. They had dreadful photographs of tortured and mutilated men as corroboration. Surely hell, the place of punishment and purgatorial expiation, is actually upon this earth in such cases. One leader seems to have been a Sadie madman, for after torturing his victims till even the Chinese executioners struck, he would sit playing a violin very exquisitely while he gloated over their agonies. All these Australian boys agree that the matter will burn itself out, and that it will end in an immense massacre of Jews which may involve the whole seven millions now in Russia. God forbid, but the outlook is ominous! I remember a prophecy which I read early in the war that a great figure would arise in the north and have power for six years. If Lenin was the great figure then he has, according to the prophet, about two years more to run. But prophecy is fitful, dangerous work. The way in which the founders of the Christian faith all foretold the imminent end of the world is an example. What they dimly saw was no doubt the destruction of Jerusalem, which seems to have been equally clear to Ezekiel 600 years before, for his picture of cannibalism and dispersion is very exact.

It is wonderful what chances of gaining direct information one has aboard a ship of this sort, with its mixed crowd of passengers, many of them famous in their own lines. I have already alluded to the officers returning from Russia with their prophecies of evil. But there are many other folk with tales of deep interest. There is a Mr. Covell, a solid practical Briton, who may prove to be a great pioneer, for he has made farming pay handsomely in the very heart of the Indian plains. Within a hundred miles of Lucknow he has founded the townlet of Covellpore, where he handles 3,000 acres of wheat and cotton with the aid of about the same number of natives. This is the most practical step I have ever heard of for forming a real indigenous white population in India. His son was with him, going out to carry on the work. Mr. Covell holds that the irrigation of the North West of India is one of the greatest wonders of the world, and Jacob the engineer responsible. I had never heard of him, nor, I am ashamed to say, had I heard of Sir Leonard Rogers, who is one of those great men like Sir Ronald Ross, whom the Indian Medical Service throws up. Rogers has reduced the mortality of cholera by intravenous injections of hypertonic saline until it is only 15 per cent. General Maude, I am informed, would almost certainly have been saved, had it not been that some false departmental economy had withheld the necessary apparatus. Leprosy also seems in a fair way to yielding to Rogers' genius for investigation.

It is sad to hear that this same Indian Medical Service which has produced such giants as Fayrer, Ross, and Rogers is in a fair way to absolute ruin, because the conditions are such that good white candidates will no longer enter it. White doctors do not mind working with, or even under, natives who have passed the same British examinations as themselves, but they bar the native doctor who has got through a native college in India, and is on a far lower educational level than themselves. To serve under such a man is an impossible inversion. This is appreciated by the medical authorities at home, the word is given to the students, and the best men avoid the service. So unless a change is made, the end is in sight of the grand old service which has given so much to humanity.

Aden is remarkable only for the huge water tanks cut to catch rain, and carved out of solid rock. A whole captive people must have been set to work on so colossal a task, and one wonders where the poor wretches got water themselves the while. Their work is as fresh and efficient as when they left it. No doubt it was for the watering, not of the population, but of the Egyptian and other galleys on their way to Punt and King Solomon's mines. It must be a weary life for our garrison in such a place. There is strange fishing, sea snakes, parrot fish and the like. It is their only relaxation, for it is desert all round.

Monsoon and swell and drifting rain in the Indian Ocean. We heard that " thresh of the deep sea rain," of which Kipling sings. Then at last in the early morning the long quay of Bombay, and the wonderful crowd of men of every race who await an incoming steamer. Here at least half our passengers were disgorged, young subalterns, grey colonels, grave administrators, yellow-faced planters, all the fuel which is grown in Britain and consumed in the roaring furnace of India. So devoted to their work, so unthanked and uncom- prehended by those for whom they work! They are indeed-a splendid set of men, and if they withdrew I wonder how long it would be before the wild men of the frontier would be in Calcutta and Bombay, as the Picts and Scots flowed over Britain when the Roman legions were withdrawn. What view will the coming Labour governments of Britain take of our Imperial commitments? Upon that will depend the future history of great tracts of the globe which might very easily relapse into barbarism.

The ship seemed lonely when our Indian friends were gone, for indeed, the pick of the company went with them. Several pleased me by assuring me as they left that their views of life had been changed since they came on board the " Naldera." To many I gave reading lists that they might look further into the matter for themselves. A little leaven in the great lump, but how can we help leavening it all when we know that, unlike other creeds, no true Spiritualist can ever revert, so that while we continually gain, we never lose. One hears of the converts to various sects, but one does not hear of those who are driven out by their narrow, intolerant doctrines. You can change your mind about faiths, but not about facts, and hence our certain conquest.

One cannot spend even a single long day in India without carrying away a wonderful impression of the gentle dignity of the Indian people. Our motor drivers were extraordinarily intelligent and polite, and all we met gave the same impression.

India may be held by the sword, but it is certainly kept very carefully in the scabbard, for we hardly saw a soldier in the streets of this, its greatest city. I observed some splendid types of manhood, however, among the native police. We lunched at the Taj Mahal Hotel, and got back tired and full of mixed impressions.

Verily the ingenuity of children is wonderful. They have turned their active minds upon the problem of paper currency with fearsome results. Baby writes cheques in quaint ways upon odd bits of paper and brings them to me to be cashed. Malcolm, once known as Dimples, has made a series of pound and five pound notes of his own. The bank they call the money shop. I can trace every sort of atavism, the arboreal, the cave dweller, the adventurous raider, and the tribal instinct in the child, but this development seems a little premature.

Sunday once more, and the good Bishop preaching. I wonder more and more what an educated Chinaman would make of such doctrines. To take an example, he has quoted to-day with great approval, the action of Peter in discarding the rite of circumcision as a proof of election. That marked, according to the Bishop, the broad comprehensive mind which could not confine the mercies of God to any limited class. And yet when I take up the oecumenical pronouncement from the congress of Anglican bishops which he has just attended, I find that baptism is made the test, even as the Jews made circumcision. Have the bishops not learned that there are millions who revere the memory of Christ, whether they look upon him as God or man, but who think that baptism is a senseless survival of heathendom, like so many of our religious observances? The idea that the Being who made the milky way can be either placated or incensed by pouring a splash of water over child or adult is an offence to reason, and a slur upon the Divinity.

Two weary days upon the sea with drifting rain showers and wonderful scarlet and green sunsets. Have beguiled the time with W. B. Maxwell’s “ Lamp and the Mirror.” I have long thought that Maxwell was the greatest of British novelists, and this book confirms me in my opinion. Who else could have drawn such fine detail and yet so broad and philosophic a picture? There may have been single books which were better than Maxwell’s best — the “ Garden of Allah,” with its gorgeous oriental colour would, for example, make a bid for first place, but which of us has so splendid a list of first class serious works as “ Mrs. Thompson,” “ The Rest Cure,” “ Vivian,” “ In Cotton Wool,” above all, “ The Guarded Flame “ — classics, every one. Our order of merit will come out very differently in a generation or so to what it stands now, and I shall expect to find my nominee at the top. But after all, what’s the odds? You do your work as well as you can. You pass.

You find other work to do. How the old work compares with the other fellow's work can be a matter of small concern.

In Colombo harbour lay H.M.S. " Highflyer," which we looked upon with the reverence which everybody and everything which did well in the war deserve from us — a saucy, rakish, speedy craft. Several other steamers were flying the yellow quarantine flag, but our captain confided to me that it was a recognised way of saying " no visitors," and did not necessarily bear any pathological meaning. As we had nearly two days before we resumed our voyage I was able to give all our party a long stretch on shore, finally staying with my wife for the night at the Galle Face Hotel, a place where the preposterous charges are partly compensated for by the glorious rollers which break upon the beach outside. I was interested in the afternoon by a native conjurer giving us what was practically a private performance of the mango-tree trick. He did it so admirably that I can well understand those who think that it is an occult process. I watched the man narrowly, and believe that I solved the little mystery, though even now I cannot be sure. In doing it he began by laying several objects out in a casual way while hunting in his bag for his mango seed. These were small odds and ends including a little rag doll, very rudely fashioned, about six or eight inches long. One got accustomed to the presence of these things and ceased to remark them. He showed the seed and passed it for examination, a sort of large Brazil nut. He then laid it among some loose earth, poured some water on it, covered it with a handkerchief, and crooned over it. In about a minute he exhibited the same, or another seed, the capsule burst, and a light green leaf protruding. I took it in my hands, and it was certainly a real bursting mango seed, but clearly it had been palmed and substituted for the other. He then buried it again and kept raising the handkerchief upon his own side, and scrabbling about with his long brown fingers underneath its cover. Then he suddenly whisked off the handkerchief and there was the plant, a foot or so high, with thick foliage and blossoms, its root well planted in the earth. It was certainly very startling.

My explanation is that by a miracle of packing the whole of the plant had been compressed into the rag doll, or little cloth cylinder already mentioned. The scrabbling of the hands under the cloth was to smooth out the leaves after it was freed from this covering. I observed that the leaves were still rather crumpled, and that there were dark specks of fungi which would not be there if the plant were straight from nature's manufactory. But it was wonderfully done when you consider that the man was squatting in our midst, we standing in a semi-circle around him, with no adventitious aid whatever. I do not believe that the famous Mr. Maskeleyne or any of those other wise conjurors who are good enough occasionally to put Lodge, Crookes and Lombroso in their places, could have wrought a better illusion.

The fellow had a cobra with him which he challenged me to pick up. I did so and gazed into its strange eyes, which some devilry of man's had turned to a lapis lazuli blue. The juggler said it was the result of its skin-sloughing, but I have my doubts. The poison bag had, I suppose, been extracted, but the man seemed nervous and slipped his brown hand between my own and the swaying venomous head with its peculiar flattened hood. It is a fearsome beast, and I can realise what was told me by a lover of animals that the snake was the one creature from which he could get no return of affection. I remember that I once had three in my employ when the “ Speckled Band “ was produced in London, fine, lively rock pythons, and yet in spite of this profusion of realism I had the experience of reading a review which, after duly slating the play, wound up with the scathing sentence, “The performance ended with the production of a palpably artificial serpent.” Such is the reward of virtue. Afterwards when the necessities of several travelling companies compelled us to use dummy snakes we produced a much more realistic effect. The real article either hung down like a pudgy yellow bell rope, or else when his tail was pinched, endeavoured to squirm back and get level with the stage carpenter, who pinched him, which was not in the plot. The latter individual had no doubts at all as to the dummy being an improvement upon the real.

Never, save on the west coast of Africa, have I seen “ the league-long roller thundering on the shore,” as here, where the Indian Ocean with its thousand leagues of momentum hits the western coast of Ceylon. It looks smooth out at sea, and then you are surprised to observe that a good-sized boat has suddenly vanished. Then it scoops upwards once more on the smooth arch of the billow, disappearing on the further slope. The native catamarans are almost invisible, so that you see a row of standing figures from time to time on the crest of the waves. I cannot think that any craft in the world would come through rough water as these catamarans with their long outriggers can do. Man has made few more simple and more effective inventions, and if I were a younger man I would endeavour to introduce them to Brighton beach, as once I introduced ski to Switzerland, * or auto-wheels to the British roads. I have other work to do now, but why does not some sportsman take the model, have it made in England, and then give an exhibition in a gale of wind on the south coast. It would teach our fishermen some possibilities of which they are ignorant.

As I stood in a sandy cove one of them came flying in, a group of natives rushing out and pulling it up on the beach. The craft consists only of two planks edgewise and lengthwise. In the nine-inch slit between them lay a number of great twelve-pound fish, like cod, and tied to the side of the boat was a ten-foot sword fish. To catch that creature while standing on a couple of floating planks must have been sport indeed, and yet the craft is so ingenious that to a man who can at a pinch swim for it, there is very small element of danger. The really great men of our race, the inventor of the wheel, the inventor of the lever, the inventor of the catamaran are all lost in the mists of the past, but ethnologists have found that the cubic capacity of the neolithic brain is as great as our own.

There are two robbers’ castles, as the unhappy visitor calls them, facing the glorious sea, the one the Galle Face, the other the Mount Lavinia Hotel. They are connected by an eight-mile road, which has all the colour and life and variety of the East for every inch of the way. In that glorious sun, under the blue arch of such a sky, and with the tropical trees and flowers around, the poverty of these people is very different from the poverty of a London slum. Is there in all God’s world such a life as that, and can it really be God’s world while we suffer it to exist! Surely, it is a palpable truth that no one has a right to luxuries until every one has been provided with necessities, and among such necessities a decent environment is the first. If we had spent money to fight slumland as we spent it to fight Germany, what a different England it would be. The world moves all the same, and we have eternity before us. But some folk need it.

A doctor came up to me in the hotel and told me that he was practising there, and had come recently from England. He had lost his son in the war, and had himself become unsettled. Being a Spiritualist he went to Mrs. Brittain, the medium, who told him that his boy had a message for him which was that he would do very well in Colombo. He had himself thought of Ce}don, but Mrs. B. had no means of knowing that. He had obeyed the advice thus given, and was glad that he had done so. How much people may miss by cutting themselves away from these ministers of grace! In all this opposition to Spiritualism the punishment continually fits the crime.

Once again we shed passengers and proceeded in chastened mood with empty decks where once it was hard to move. Among others, good Bishop Banister of Kwang-si had gone. I care little for his sacramental and vicarious doctrines, but I am very sure that wherever his robust, kindly, sincere personality may dwell is bound to be a centre of the true missionary effort — the effort which makes for the real original teaching of his Master, submission to God and goodwill to our fellow men.

Now we are on the last lap with nothing but a clear stretch of salt water between our prow and West Australia. Our mission from being a sort of dream takes concrete form and involves definite plans. Meanwhile we plough our way through a deep blue sea with the wind continually against us. I have not seen really calm water since we left the Canal. We carry on with the usual routine of ship sports, which include an England and Australia cricket match, in which I have the honour of captaining England, a proper ending for a long if mediocre career as a cricketer. We lost by one run, which was not bad considering our limited numbers.

Posers of all sorts are brought to me by thoughtful inquirers, which I answer when I can. Often I can’t. One which is a most reasonable objection has given me a day’s thought. If, as is certain, we can remember in our next life ^ the more important incidents of this one^ why is it that in this one we can remember nothing of that previous spiritual career, which must have existed since nothing can be born in time for eternity?

Our friends on the other side cannot help us there, nor can even such extended spiritual visions as those of Vale Owen clear it up. On the whole we must admit that our Theosophical friends, with whom we quarrel for their absence of evidence, have the best attempt at an explanation. I imagine that man’s soul has a cycle which is complete in itself, and all of which is continuous and self conscious. This begins with earth life. Then at last a point is reached, it may be a reincarnation, and a new cycle is commenced, the old one being closed to our memory until we have reached some lofty height in our further journey. Pure speculation, I admit, but it would cover what we know and give us a working hypothesis. I can never excite myself much about the reincarnation idea, for if it be so, it occurs seldom, and at long intervals, with ten years spent in the other spheres for one spent here, so that even admitting all that is said by its supporters it is not of such great importance. At the present rate of change this world will be as strange as another sphere by the time we are due to tread the old stage once more. It is only fair to say that though many spiritualists oppose it, there is a strong body, including the whole French Allan Kardec school, who support it. Those who have passed over may well be divided upon the subject since it concerns their far future and is a matter of speculation to them as to us.

Thrasher whales and sperm whales were seen which aroused the old whaling thrill in my heart. It was the more valuable Greenland whale which I helped to catch, while these creatures are those which dear old Frank Bullen, a childlike sailor to the last, described in his “ Cruise of the Cachelot.” How is it that sailors write such perfect English. There are Bullen and Conrad, both of whom served before the mast — the two purest stylists of their generation. So was Loti in France. There are some essays of Bullen’s, especially a description of a calm in the tropics, and again of “ Sunrise seen from the Crow’s Nest,” which have not been matched in our time for perfection of imagery and diction. They are both in his “ Idyls of the Sea.” If there is compensation in the beyond — and I know that there is — then Frank Bullen is in great peace, for his whole earthly life was one succession of troubles. When I think of his cruel stepmother, his dreadful childhood, his life on a Yankee blood ship, his struggles as a tradesman, his bankruptcy, his sordid worries, and finally, his prolonged ill-health, I marvel at the unequal distribution of such burdens. He was the best singer of a chanty that I have ever heard, and I can hear him now with his rich baritone voice trolling out “ Sally Brown “ or “ Stormalong.” May I hear him once again! Our dear ones tell us that there is no great gap between what pleases us here and that which will please us in the beyond. Our own brains, had we ever used them in the matter, should have instructed us that all evolution, spiritual as well as material, must be gradual. Indeed, once one knows psychic truth, one can, reasoning backwards, perceive that we should unaided have come to the same conclusions, but since we have all been deliberately trained not to use our reason in religious matters, it is no wonder that we have made rather a hash of it. Surely it is clear enough that in the case of an artist the artistic nature is part of the man himself. Therefore, if he survives it must survive. But if it survives it must have means of expression, or it is a senseless thing. But means of expression implies appreciation from others and a life on the general lines of this one. So also of the drama, music, science and literature, if we carry on they carry on, and they cannot carry on without actual expression and a public to be served.

To the east of us and just beyond the horizon lie the Cocos Islands, where Ross established his strange little kingdom, and where the Emden met its end — a glorious one, as every fair minded man must admit. I have seen her stern post since then in the hall of the Federal Parliament at Melbourne, like some fossil monster, once a terror and now for children to gaze at. As to the Cocos Islands, the highest point is, I understand, about twenty feet, and tidal waves are not unknown upon the Pacific, so that the community holds its tenure at very short and sudden notice to quit.

On the morning of September 17th a low coast line appeared upon the port bow — Australia at last. It was the edge of the West Australian State. The evening before a wireless had reached me from the spiritualists of Perth saying that they welcomed us and our message. It was a kind thought and a helpful one. We were hardly moored in the port of Fremantle, which is about ten miles from the capital, when a deputation of these good, kind people was aboard, bearing great bunches of wild flowers, most of which were new to us. Their faces fell when they learned that I must go on in the ship and that there was very little chance of my being able to address them. They are only connected with the other States by one long thin railway line, 1,200 miles long, with scanty trains which were already engaged, so that unless we stuck to the ship we should have to pass ten days or so before we could resume our journey. This argument was unanswerable, and so the idea of a meeting was given up.

These kind people had two motors in attendance, which must, I fear, have been a strain upon their resources, for as in the old days the true believers and practical workers are drawn from the poor and humble. However, they certainly treated us royally, and even the children were packed into the motors. We skirted the Swan River, passed through the very beautiful public park, and, finally, lunched at the busy town, where Bone’s store would cut a respectable figure in London, with its many departments and its roof restaurant. It was surprising after our memories of England to note how good and abundant was the food. It is a charming little town, and it was strange, after viewing its settled order, to see the mill where the early settlers not so very long ago had to fight for their lives with the black fellows. Those poor black fellows! Their fate is a dark stain upon Australia. And yet it must in justice to our settlers be admitted that the question was a very difficult one. Was colonisation to be abandoned, or were these brave savages to be overcome? That was really the issue. When they speared the cattle of the settlers what were the settlers to do? Of course, if a reservation could have been opened up, as in the case of the Maoris, that would have been ideal. But the noble Maori is a man with whom one could treat on equal terms and he belonged to a solid race. The Aborigines of Australia were broken wandering tribes, each at war with its neighbours. In a single reservation they would have exterminated each other. It was a piteous tragedy, and yet, even now in retrospect, how difficult it is to point out what could have been done.

The Spiritualists of Perth seem to be a small body, but as earnest as their fellows elsewhere. A masterful looking lady, Mrs. Mcllwraith, rules them, and seems fit for the part. They have several mediums developing, but I had no chance of testing their powers. Altogether our encounter with them cheered us on our way. We had the first taste of Australian labour conditions at Fre- mantle, for the men knocked off at the given hour, refusing to work overtime, with the result that we carried a consignment of tea, meant for their own tea-pots, another thousand miles to Adelaide, and so back by train which must have been paid for out of their own pockets and those of their fellow citizens. Verily, you cannot get past the golden rule, and any breach of it brings its own punishment somehow, somewhere, be the sinner a master or a man.

lAnd now we had to cross the dreaded Bight, where the great waves from the southern ice come rolling up, but our luck was still in, and we went through it without a qualm. Up to Albany one sees the barren irregular coast, and then there were two days of blue water, which brought us at last to Adelaide, our port of debarkation. The hour and the place at last!

CHAPTER III

Mr. Hughes' letter of welcome. — Challenges. — Mr. Carlyle Smythe. — The Adelaide Press. — The great drought. — The wine industry. — Clairvoyance. — Meeting with Bell- chambers. — The first lecture. — The effect. — The Religious lecture. — The illustrated lecture. — Premonitions. — The spot light. — Mr. Thomas' account of the incident. — Correspondence. — Adelaide doctors. — A day in the Bush. — The Mallee fowl. — Sussex in Australia. — Farewell to Adelaide.

I was welcomed to Australia by a hospitable letter from the Premier, Mr. Hughes, who assured me that he would do what he could to make our visit a pleasant one, and added, " I hope you will see Australia as it is, for I want you to tell the world about us. We are a very young country, we have a very big and very rich heritage, and the great war has made us realise that we are Australians, proud to belong to the Empire, but proud too of our own country."

Apart from Mr. Hughes's kind message, my chief welcome to the new land came from Sydney, and took the queer form of two independant challenges to public debate, one from the Christian Evidence Society, and the other from the local leader of the materialists. As the two positions are mutually destructive, one felt inclined to tell them to fight it out between themselves and that I would fight the winner. The Christian Evidence Society, is, of course, out of the question, since they regard a text as an argument, which I can only accept with many qualifications, so that there is no common basis. The materialist is a more worthy antagonist, for though he is often as bigotted and inaccessible to reason as the worst type of Christian, there is always a leaven of honest, open-minded doubters on whom a debate might make an impression. A debate with them, as I experienced when I met Mr. MacCabe. can only follow one line, they quoting all the real or alleged scandals which have ever been connected with the lowest forms of mediumship, and claiming that the whole cult is comprised therein, to which you counter with your own personal experiences, and with the evidence of the cloud of witnesses who have found the deepest comfort and enlarged knowledge. It is like two boxers each hitting the air, and both returning to their respective corners amid the plaudits of their backers, while the general public is none the better.

Three correspondents headed me off on the ship, and as I gave each of them a long separate interview, I was a tired man before I got ashore. Mr. Carlyle Symthe, my impresario, had also arrived, a small alert competent gentleman, with whom I at once got on pleasant terms, which were never once clouded during our long travels together upon our tour. I was fortunate indeed to have so useful and so entertaining a companion, a musician, a scholar, and a man of many varied experiences. With his help we soon got our stuff through the customs, and made the short train journey which separates the Port of Adelaide from the charming city of that name. By one o'clock we were safely housed in the Grand Central Hotel, with windows in place of port holes, and the roar of the trams to take the place of the murmurs of the great ocean.

The good genius of Adelaide was a figure, already almost legendary, one Colonel Light, who played the part of Romulus and Remus to the infant city. Somewhere in the thirties of last century he chose the site, against strong opposition, and laid out the plan with such skill that in all British and American lands I have seen few such cities, so pretty, so orderly and so self-sufficing. When one sees all the amenities of the place, botanical gardens, zoological gardens, art gallery, museum, university, public library and the rest, it is hard to realise that the whole population is still under three hundred thousand. I do not know whether the press sets the tone to the community or the community to the press, but in any case Adelaide is greatly blessed in this respect, for its two chief papers the Register and the Advertiser, under Sir William Sowden and Sir Langdon Bonython respectively, are really excellent, with a worldwide Metropolitan tone.

Their articles upon the subject in which I am particularly interested, though by no means onesided, were at least informed with knowledge and breadth of mind.

In Adelaide I appreciated, for the first time, the crisis which Australia has been passing through in the shape of a two-years drought, only recently broken. It seems to have involved all the States and to have caused great losses, amounting to millions of sheep and cattle. The result was that the price of those cattle which survived has risen enormously, and at the time of our visit an absolute record had been established, a bullock having been sold for £41. The normal price would be about £13. Sheep were about £3 each, the normal being fifteen shillings. This had, of course, sent the price of meat soaring with the usual popular unrest and agitation as a result. It was clear, however, that with the heavy rains the prices would fall. These Australian droughts are really terrible things, especially when they come upon newly-opened country and in the hotter regions of Queensland and the North. One lady told us that she had endured a drought in Queensland which lasted so long that children of five had never seen a drop of rain. You could travel a hundred miles and find the brown earth the whole way, with no sign of green anywhere, the sheep eating twigs or gnawing bark until they died. Her brother sold his surviving sheep for one shilling each, and when the drought broke had to restock at 50s. a head. This is a common experience, and all but the man with savings have to take to some subordinate work, ruined men. No doubt, with afforestation, artesian wells, irrigation and water storage things may be modified, but all these things need capital, and capital in these days is hard to seek, nor can it be expected that capitalists will pour their money into States which have wild politicians who talk lightly of past obligations. You cannot tell the investor that he is a bloated incubus one moment, and go hat in hand for further incubation the next. I fear that this grand country as a whole may suffer from the wild ideas of some of its representatives. But under it all lies the solid self-respecting British stuff, which will never repudiate a just debt, however heavily it may press. Australians may groan under the burden, but they should remember that for every pound of taxation they carry the home Briton carries nearly three.

But to return for a moment to the droughts; has any writer of fiction invented or described a more long-drawn agony than that of the man, his nerves the more tired and sensitive from the constant unbroken heat, waiting day after day for the cloud that never comes, while under the glaring sun from the unchanging blue above him, his sheep, which represent all his life’s work and his hopes, perish before his eyes? A revolver shot has often ended the long vigil and the pioneer has joined his vanished flocks. I have just come in contact with a case where two young returned soldiers, demobilised from the war and planted on the land had forty-two cattle given them by the State to stock their little farm. Not a drop of water fell for over a year, the feed failed, and these two warriors of Palestine and Flanders wept at their own helplessness while their little herd died before their eyes. Such are the trials which the Australian farmer has to bear.

While waiting for my first lecture I do what I can to understand the country and its problems. To this end I visited the vineyards and wine plant of a local firm which possesses every factor for success, save the capacity to answer letters. The originator started grape culture as a private hobby about 60 years ago, and now such an industry has risen that this firm alone has £700,000 sunk in the business, and yet it is only one of several. The product can be most excellent, but little or any ever reaches Europe, for it cannot overtake the local demand. The quality was good and purer than the corresponding wines in Europe — especially the champagnes, which seem to be devoid of that poison, whatever it may be, which has for a symptom a dry tongue with internal acidity, driving elderly gentlemen to whisky and soda. The Australian product, taken in moderate doses, seems to have no poisonous quality, and is without that lime-like dryness which appears to be the cause of it. If temperance reform takes the sane course of insisting upon a lowering of the alcohol in our drinks, so that one may be surfeited before one could be drunken, then this question of good mild wines will bulk very largely in the future, and Australia may supply one of the answers. With all my sympathy for the reformers I feel that wine is so useful a social agent that we should not abolish it until we are certain that there is no via media. The most pregnant argument upon the subject was the cartoon which showed the husband saying “ My dear, it is the anniversary of our wedding. Let us have a second bottle of ginger beer.”

e We went over the vineyards, ourselves mildly interested in the vines, and the children wildly excited over the possibility of concealed snakes. Then we did the vats and the cellars with their countless bottles. We were taught the secrets of fermentation, how the wonderful Pasteur had discovered that the best and quickest was produced not by the grape itself, as of old, but by the scraped bloom of the grape inserted in the bottle. After viewing the number of times a bottle must be turned, a hundred at least, and the complex processes which lead up to the finished article, I will pay my wine bills in future with a better grace. The place was all polished wood and shining brass, like the fittings of a man-of-war, and a great impression of cleanliness and efficiency was left upon our minds. We only know the Australian wines at present by the rough article sold in flasks, but when the supply has increased the world will learn that this country has some very different stuff in its cellars, and will try to transport it to their tables.

We had a small meeting of spiritualists in our hotel sitting-room, under the direction of Mr. Victor Cromer, a local student of the occult, who seems to have considerable psychic power. He has a small circle for psychic development which is on new lines, for the neophytes who are learning clairvoyance sit around in a circle in silence, while Mr. Cromer endeavours by mental effort to build up the thought form of some object, say a tree, in the centre of the room. After a time he asks each of the circle what he or she can see, and has many correct answers. With colours in the same way he can convey impressions to his pupils. It is clear that telepathy is not excluded as an explanation, but the actual effect upon the participants is according to their own account, visual rather than mental. We had an interesting sitting with a number of these developing mediums present, and much information was given, but little of it could be said to be truly evidential. After seeing such clairvoyance as that of Mr. Tom Tyrell or others at home, when a dozen names and addresses will be given together with the descriptions of those who once owned them, one is spoiled for any lesser display.

There was one man whom I had particularly determined to meet when I came to Australia. This was Mr. T. P. Bellchambers, about whom I had read an article in some magazine which showed that he was a sort of humble Jeffries or Thoreau, more lonely than the former, less learned than the latter, who lived among the wild creatures in the back country, and was on such terms with our humble brothers as few men are ever privileged to attain. I had read how the eagle with the broken wing had come to him for succour, and how little birds would sit on the edge of his pannikin while he drank. Him at all cost would we see. Like the proverbial prophet, no one I met had ever heard of him, but on the third day of our residence there came a journalist bearing with him a rudely dressed, tangle-haired man, collarless and unkempt, with kind, irregular features and clear blue eyes — the eyes of a child. It was the man himself. “ He brought me,” said he, nodding towards the journalist. “ He had to, for I always get bushed in a town.”

This rude figure fingering his frayed cap was clearly out of his true picture, and we should have to visit him in his own little clearing to see him as he really was. Meanwhile I wondered whether one who was so near nature might know something of nature’s more occult secrets. The dialogue ran like this :

4 4 You who are so near nature must have psychic experiences.”

“ What’s psychic? I live so much in the wild that I don’t know much.”

“ I expect you know plenty we don’t know. But I meant spiritual.”

44 Supernatural? “

4 4 Well, we think it is natural, but little understood.”

“ You mean fairies and things? “

“ Yes, and the dead.”

“ Well, I gtuess our fairies would be black fairies.”

“ Why not? “

“ Weil, I never saw any.”

“ I hoped you might.”

“ No, but I know one thing. The night my mother died I woke to find her hand upon my brow. Oh, there’s no doubt. Her hand was heavy on my brow.”

“ At the time? “

“ Yes, at the very hour.”

“ Well, that was good.”

“ Animals know more about such things.” “ Yes.”

“ They see something. My dog gets terrified when I see nothing, and there’s a place in the bush where my horse shies and sweats, he does, but there’s nothing to see.”

“ Something evil has been done there. I’ve known many cases.” “ I expect that’s it.”

So ran our dialogue. At the end of it he took a cigar, lighted it at the wrong end, and took himself with his strong simple backwoods atmosphere out of the room. Assuredly I must follow him to the wilds.

Now, came the night of my first lecture. It was in the city hall, and every seat was occupied. It was a really magnificent audience of two thousand people, the most representative of the town. I am an embarrassed and an interested witness, so let me for this occasion quote the sympathetic, not to say flattering account of the Register.

“ There could not have been a more impressive set of circumstances than those which attended the first Australian lecture by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the Adelaide Town Hall on Saturday night, September 25th. The audience, large, representative and thoughtful, was in its calibre and proportions a fitting compliment to a world celebrity and his mission. Many of the intellectual leaders of the city were present — University professors, pulpit personalities, men eminent in business, legislators, every section of the community contributed a quota. It cannot be doubted, of course, that the brilliant literary fame of the lecturer was an attraction added to that strange subject which explored the ‘ unknown drama of the soul/ Over all Sir Arthur dominated by his big arresting presence. His face has a rugged, kindly strength, tense and earnest in its grave moments, and full of winning animation when the sun of his rich humour plays on the powerful features.”

“ It is not altogether a sombre journey he makes among the shadows, but apparently one of happy, as well as tender experiences, so that laughter is not necessarily excluded from the exposition. Do not let that be misunderstood. There was no intrusion of the slightest flippancy — Sir Arthur, the whole time, exhibited that attitude of reverence and humility demanded of one traversing a domain on the borderland of the tremendous. Nothing approaching a theatrical presentation of the case for Spiritualism marred the discourse. It was for the most part a plain statement. First things had to be said, and the explanatory groundwork laid for future development. It was a lucid, illuminating introduction.”

“ Sir Arthur had a budget of notes, but after he had turned over a few pages he sallied forth with fluent independence under the inspiration of a vast mental store of material. A finger jutted out now and again with a thrust of passionate emphasis, or his big glasses twirled during moments of descriptive ease, and occas- sionally both hands were held forward as though delivering settled points to the audience for its examination. A clear, well-disciplined voice, excellent diction, and conspicuous sincerity of manner marked the lecture, and no one could have found fault with the way in which Sir Arthur presented his case.”

‘ The lecturer approached the audience in no spirit of impatient dogmatism, but in the capacity of an understanding mind seeking to illumine the darkness of doubt in those who had not shared his great experiences. He did not dictate, but reasoned and pleaded, taking the people into his confidence with strong conviction and a consoling faith. ‘ I want to speak to you to-night on a subject which concerns the destiny of every man and woman in this room/ began Sir Arthur, bringing everybody at once into an intimate personal circle. ‘ No doubt the Almighty, by putting an angel in King William Street, could convert every one of you to Spiritualism, but the Almighty law is that we must use our own brains, and find out our own salvation, and it is not made too easy for us/ “

It is awkward to include this kindly picture, and yet I do not know how else to give an idea of how the matter seemed to a friendly observer. I had chosen for my theme the scientific aspect of the matter, and I marshalled my witnesses and showed how Professor Mayo corroborated Professor Hare, and Professor Challis Professor Mayo, and Sir William Crookes all his predecessors, while Russell Wallace and Lombroso and Zollner and Barrett, and Lodge, and many more had all after long study assented, and I read the very words of these great men, and showed how bravely they had risked their reputations and careers for what they knew'to be the truth. I then showed how the opposition who dared to contradict them were men with no practical experience of it at all. It was wonderful to hear the shout of assent when I said that what struck me most in such a position was its colossal impertinence. That shout told me that my cause was won, and from then onwards the deep silence was only broken by the occasional deep murmur of heart-felt agreement. I told them the evidence that had been granted to me, the coming of my son, the coming of my brother, and their message. " Plough! Plough! others will cast the seed." It is hard to talk of such intimate matters, but they were not given to me for my private comfort alone, but for that of humanity. Nothing could have gone better than this first evening, and though I had no chairman and spoke for ninety minutes without a pause, I was so upheld — there is no other word for the sensation — that I was stronger at the end than when I began. A leading materialist was among my audience. " I am profoundly impressed," said he to Mr. Smythe, as he passed him in the corridor. That stood out among many kind messages which reached me that night.

Photo: Stirling, Melbourne.

My second lecture, two nights later, was on the Religious aspect of the matter. I had shown that the phenomena were nothing, mere material signals to arrest the attention of a material world. I had shown also that the personal benefit, the conquest of death, the Communion of Saints, was a high, but not the highest boon. The real full flower of Spiritualism was what the wisdom of the dead could tell us about their own conditions, their present experiences, their outlook upon the secret of the universe, and the testing of religious truth from the viewpoint of two worlds instead of one. The audience was more silent than before, but the silence was that of suspense, not of dissent, as I showed them from message after message what it was exactly which awaited them in the beyond. Even I, who am oblivious as a rule to my audience, became aware that they were tense with feeling and throbbing with emotion. I showed how there was no conflict with religion, in spite of the misunderstanding of the churches, and that the revelation had come to extend and explain the old, even as the Christ had said that he had much more to tell but could not do it now. “ Entirely new ground was traversed,’’ says my kindly chronicler, “ and the audience listened throughout with rapt attention. They were obviously impressed by the earnestness of the speaker and his masterly presentation of the theme.” I cannot answer for the latter but at least I can for the former, since I speak not of what I think but of what I know. How can a man fail to be earnest then?

A few days later I followed up the lectures by two exhibitions of psychic pictures and photographs upon a screen. It was certainly an amazing experience for those who imagined that the whole subject was dreamland, and they freely admitted that it staggered them. They might well be surprised, for such a series has never been seen, I believe, before, including as it does choice samples from the very best collections. I showed them the record of miracle after miracle, some of them done under my very eyes, one guaranteed by Russell Wallace, three by Sir William Crookes, one of the Geley series from Paris, two of Dr. Crawford’s medium with the ecto-plasm pouring from her, four illustrating the absolutely final Lydia Haig case on the island of Rothesay, several of Mr. Jeffrey’s collection and several also of our own Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures, with the fine photograph of the face within a crystal. No wonder that the audience sat spellbound, while the local press declared that no such exhibition had ever been seen before in Australia. It is almost too overwhelming for immediate propaganda purposes. It has a stunning, dazing effect upon the spectators. Only afterwards, I think, when they come to turn it all over in their minds, do they see that the final proof has been laid before them, which no one with the least sense for evidence could reject. But the sense for evidence is not, alas, a universal human quality.

I am continually aware of direct spirit intervention in my own life. I have put it on record in my “ New Revelation “ that I was able to say that the turn of the great war would come upon the Piave months before that river was on the , Italian war map. This was recorded at the time, before the fulfilment which occurred more than a year later — so it does not depend upon my assertion. Again, I dreamed the name of the ship which was to take us to Australia, rising in the middle of the night and writing it down in pencil on my cheque-book. I wrote Nadera, but it was actually Naldera. I had never heard that such a ship existed until I visited the P. & O. office, when they told me we should go by the Osterley, while I, seeing the

Naldera upon the list, thought “ No, that will be our ship \ “ So it proved, through no action of our own, and thereby we were saved from quarantine and all manner of annoyance.

Never before have I experienced such direct visible intervention as occurred during my first photographic lecture at Adelaide. I had shown a slide the effect of which depended upon a single spirit face appearing amid a crowd of others. The slide was damp, and as photos under these circumstances always clear from the edges when placed in the lantern, the whole centre was so thickly fogged that I was compelled to admit that I could not myself see the spirit face. Suddenly, as I turned away, rather abashed by my failure, I heard cries of “ There it is,” and looking up again I saw this single face shining out from the general darkness with so bright and vivid an effect that I never doubted for a moment that the operator was throwing a spot light upon it, my wife sharing my impression. I thought how extraordinarily clever it was that he should pick it out so accurately at the distance. So the matter passed, but next morning Mr. Thomas, the operator, who is not a Spiritualist, came in great excitement to say that “a palpable miracle had been wrought, and that in his great experience of thirty years he had never known a photo dry from the centre, nor, as I understood him, become illuminated in such a fashion. Both my wife and I were surprised to learn that he had thrown no ray upon it. Mr. Thomas told us that several experts among the audience had commented upon the strangeness of the incident. I, therefore, asked Mr. Thomas if he would give me a note as to his own impression, so as to furnish an independant account. This is what he wrote : —

“ Hindmarsh Square, Adelaide.

“ In Adelaide, on September 28th, I projected a lantern slide containing a group of ladies and gentlemen, and in the centre of the picture, when the slide was reversed, appeared a human face. On the appearance of the picture showing the group the fog incidental to a damp or new slide gradually appeared covering the whole slide, and only after some minutes cleared, and then quite contrary to usual practice did so from a central point just over the face that appeared in the centre, and refused even after that to clear right off to the edge. The general experience is for a slide to clear from the outside edges to a common centre. Your slide cleared only sufficiently in the centre to show the face, and did not, while the slide was on view, clear any more than sufficient to show that face. Thinking that perhaps there might be a scientific explanation to this phenomenon, I hesitated before writing you, and in the meantime I have made several experiments but have not in any one particular experiment obtained the same result. I am ‘very much interested — as are hundreds of others who personally witnessed the phenomenon.”

Mr. Thomas, in his account, has missed the self- illuminated appearance of the face, but otherwise he brings out the points. I never gave occasion for the repetition of the phenomenon, for in every case I was careful that the slides were carefully dried beforehand.

So much for the lectures at Adelaide, which were five in all, and left, as I heard from all sides, a deep impression upon the town. Of course, the usual abusive messages poured in, including one which wound up with the hearty words : “ May you be struck dead before you leave this Commonwealth.” From Melbourne I had news that before our arrival in Australia at a public prayer meeting at the Assembly Hall, Collins Street, a Presbyterian prayed that we might never reach Australia’s shores. As we were on the high seas at the time this was clearly a murderous petition, nor could I have believed it if a friend of mine had not actually been present and heard it. On the other hand, we received many letters of sympathy and thanks, which amply atoned. “ I feel sure that many mothers, who have lost their sons in the war, will, wherever you go, bless you, as I do, for the help you have given.” As this was the object of our journey it could not be denied that we had attained our end. When I say “ we,” I mean that such letters with inquiries came continually to my wife as well as myself, though she answered them with far greater fullness and clearness than I had time to do.

Hotel life began to tell upon the children, who are like horses with a profusion of oats and no exercise. On the whole they were wonderfully good. When some domestic crisis was passed the small voice of Malcolm, once “ Dimples,” was heard from the darkness of his bed, saying, “ Well, if I am to be good I must have a proper start. Please mammie, say one, two, three, and away! “ When this ceremony had been performed a still smaller voice of Baby asked the same favour, so once more there was a formal start. The result was intermittent, and it is as well. I don’t believe in angelic children.

The Adelaide doctors entertained me to dinner, and I was pleased to meet more than one who had been of my time at Edinburgh. They seemed to be a very prosperous body of men. There was much interesting conversation, especially from one elderly professor named Watson, who had known Bully Hayes and other South Sea celebrities in the semi-piratical, black-birding days. He told me one pretty story. They landed upon some outlying island in Carpentaria, peopled by real primitive blacks, who were rounded up by the ships crew on one of the peninsulas which formed the end of the island. These creatures, the lowest of the human race, huddled together in consternation while the white men trained a large camera upon them. Suddenly three males advanced and made a speech in their own tongue which, when interpreted, proved to be an offer that those three should die in exchange for the lives of the tribe. What could the very highest do more than this, and yet it came from the lowest savages. Truly, we all have something of the divine, and it is the very part which will grow and spread until it has burned out all the rest. “ Be a Christ! “ said brave old Stead. At the end of countless seons we may all reach that point which not only Stead but St. Paul also has foreshadowed.

I refreshed myself between lectures by going out to Nature and to Bellchambers. As it was twenty-five miles out in the bush, inaccessible by rail, and only to be approached by motor roads which were in parts like the bed of a torrent, I could not take my wife, though the boys, after the nature of boys, enjoy a journey the more for its roughness. It was a day to remember. I saw lovely South Australia in the full beauty of the spring, the budding girlhood of the year, with all her winsome growing graces upon her. The brilliant yellow wattle was just fading upon the trees, but the sward was covered with star-shaped purple flowers of the knot-grass, and with familiar home flowers, each subtly altered by their transportation. It was wild bush for part of the way, but mostly of the second growth on account of forest fires as much as the woodman’s axe. Bell- chambers came in to guide us, for there is no one to ask upon these desolate tracks, and it is easy to get bushed. Mr. Waite, the very capable zoologist of the museum, joined the party, and with two such men the conversation soon got to that high nature talk which represents the really permanent things of material life — more lasting than thrones and dynasties. I learned of the strange storks, the “ native companions” who meet, 500 at a time, for their stately balls, where in the hush of the bush they advance, retreat, and pirouette in their dignified minuets. I heard of the bower birds, who decorate their homes with devices of glass and pebbles. There was talk, too, of the little red beetles who have such cunning ways that they can fertilise the insectivorous plants without being eaten, and of the great ants who get through galvanised iron by the aid of some acid-squirting insect which they bring with them to the scene of their assault. I heard also of the shark's egg which Mr. Waite had raped from sixty feet deep in Sydney Harbour, descending for the purpose in a diver's suit, for which I raised my hat to him. Deep things came also from Bellchambers' store of knowledge and little glimpses of beautiful humanity from this true gentleman.

" Yes," he said, " I am mostly vegetarian. You see, I know the beasts too well to bring myself to pick their bones. Yes, I'm friends with most of them. Birds have more sense than animals to my mind. They understand you like. They know what you mean. Snakes have least of any. They don't get friendly-like in the same way. But Nature helps the snakes in queer ways. Some of them hatch their own eggs, and when they do Nature raises the temperature of their bodies. That's queer."

Photo: \V. G. Smith, Adelaide. See page 81.

BELLCHAMBERS AND THE MALLEE FOWL. " GET ALONG WITH YOU, DO! "

I carried away a mixed memory of the things I had seen. A blue-headed wren, an eagle soaring in the distance; a hideous lizard with a huge open mouth; a laughing jackass which refused to laugh; many more or less tame wallabies and kangaroos; a dear little ‘possum which got under the back of my coat, and would not come out; noisy mynah birds which fly ahead and warn the game against the hunter. Good little noisy mynah! All my sympathies are with you! I would do the same if I could. This senseless lust for killing is a disgrace to the race. We, of England, cannot preach, for a pheasant battue is about the worst example of it. But do let the creatures alone unless they are surely noxious! When Mr. Bellchambers told us how he had trained two ibises — the old religious variety — and how both had been picked off by some unknown local “ sportsman “ it made one sad.

We had a touch of comedy, however, when Mr. Bellchambers attempted to expose the egg of the Mallee fowl, which is covered a foot deep in mould. He scraped into the mound with his hands. The cock watched him with an expression which clearly said : “ Confound the fellow! What is he up to now? “ He then got on the mound, and as quickly as Bellchambers shovelled the earth out he kicked it back again, Bellchambers in his good-humoured way crying “ Get along with you, do! “ A good husband is the Mallee 8x f cock, and looks after the family interests. But what we humans would think if we were born deep underground and had to begin our career by digging our way to the surface, is beyond imagination.

There are quite a clan of Bellchambers living in or near the little pioneer’s hut built in a clearing of the bush. Mrs. Bellchambers is of Sussex, as is her husband, and when they heard that we were fresh from Sussex also it was wonderful to see the eager look that came upon their faces, while the bush-born children could scarce understand what it was that shook the solid old folk to their marrow. On the walls were old prints of the Devil’s Dyke and Firle Beacon. How strange that old Sussex should be wearing out its very life in its care for the fauna of young Australia. This remarkable man is unpaid with only his scanty holding upon which to depend, and many dumb mouths dependent upon him. I shall rejoice if my efforts in the local press serve to put his affairs upon a more worthy foundation, and to make South Australia realise what a valuable instrument lies to her hand.

Before I left Adelaide I learned many pleasing things about the lectures, which did away with any shadow cast by those numerous correspondents who seemed to think that we were still living under the Mosaic dispensation, and who were so absent-minded that they usually forgot to sign their names. It is a curious difference between the Christian letters of abuse and those of materialists, that the former are usually anonymous and the latter signed. I heard of one man, a lame stockman, who had come 300 miles from the other side of Streaky Bay to attend the whole course, and who declared that he could listen all night. Another seized my hand and cried, “ You will never know the good you have done in this town.” Well, I hope it was so, but I only regard myself as the plough. Others must follow with the seed. Knowledge, perseverance, sanity, judgment, courage — we ask some qualities from our disciples if they are to do real good. Talking of moral courage I would say that the Governor of South Australia, Sir Archibald Weigall with Lady Weigall, had no hesitation in coming to support me with their presence. By the end of September this most successful mission in Adelaide was accomplished, and early in October we were on our way to Melbourne, which meant a long night in the train and a few hours of the next morning during which we saw the surface diggings of Ballarat on every side of the railway line, the sandy soil pitted in every direction with the shallow claims of the miners.

CHAPTER IV

Speculations on Paul and his Master. — Arrival at Melbourne. — Attack in the Argus. — Partial press boycott. — Strength of the movement. — The Prince of Wales. — Victorian football. — Rescue Circle in Melbourne. — Burke and Wills' statue. — Success of the lectures. — Reception at the Auditorium. — Luncheon of the British Empire League. — Mr. Ryan's experience. — The Federal Government. — Mr. Hughes' personality. — The mediumship of Charles Bailey. — His alleged exposure. — His remarkable record. — A second sitting. — The Indian nest. — A remarkable lecture. Arrival of Lord Forster. — The future of the Empire. — Kindness of Australians. — Prohibition. — Horse-racing. — Roman Catholic policy.

One cannot help speculating about those great ones who first carried to the world the Christian revelation. What were their domestic ties! There is little said about them, but we should never have known that Peter had a wife were it not for a chance allusion to his mother-in-law, just as another chance allusion shows us that Jesus was one of a numerous family. One thing can safely be said of Paul, that he was either a bachelor or else was a domestic bully with a very submissive wife, or he would never have dared to express his well known views about women. As to his preaching, he had a genius for making a clear thing obscure, even as Jesus had a genius for making an obscure thing clear. Read the Sermon on the Mount and then a chapter of Paul as a contrast in styles. Apart from his style one can reconstruct him as a preacher to the extent that he had a powerful voice — no one without one could speak from the historic rocky pulpit on the hill of Mars at Athens, as I ascertained for myself. The slope is downwards, sound ascends, and the whole conditions are abominable. He was certainly long-winded and probably monotonous in his diction, or he could hardly have reduced one of his audience to such a deep sleep that he fell out of the window. We may add that he was a man of brisk courage in an emergency, that he was subject to such sudden trances that he was occasionally unaware himself whether he was normal or not, and that he was probably short-sighted, as he mistook the person who addressed him, and had his letters usually written for him. At least three languages were at his command, he had an intimate and practical knowledge of the occult, and was an authority upon Jewish law — a good array of accomplishments for one man.

There are some points about Paul's august Master which also help in a reconstruction of Himself and His surroundings. That His mother was opposed to His mission is, I think, very probable. Women are dubious about spiritual novelties, and one can well believe that her heart ached to see her noble elder son turn from the sure competence of His father's business at Nazareth to the precarious existence of a wandering preacher. This domestic opposition clouded Him as one can see in the somewhat cold, harsh words which He used to her, and his mode of address which began simply as " Woman." His assertion to the disciples that one who followed His path had to give up his family points to the same thing. No doubt Mary remained with the younger branches at Nazareth while Jesus pursued His ministry, though she came, as any mother would, to be near Him at the end.

Of His own personality we know extraordinarily little, considering the supreme part that He played in the world. That He was a highly trained psychic, or as we should say, medium, is obvious to anyone who studies the miracles, and it is certainly not derogatory to say that they were done along the line of God's law rather than that they were inversions of it. I cannot doubt also that he chose his apostles for their psychic powers — if not, on what possible principle were they selected, since they were neither staunch nor learned? It is clear that Peter and James and John were the inner circle of psychics, since they were assembled both at the transfiguration and at the raising of Jairus' daughter. It is from unlearned open-air men who are near Nature that the highest psychic powers are obtained. It has been argued that the Christ was an Essene, but this seems hard to believe, as the Essenes were not only secluded from the world, but were certainly vegetarians and total abstainers, while Jesus was neither. On the other hand baptism was not a Jewish rite, and his undergoing it — if He did, indeed, undergo it — marks Him as belonging to some dissenting sect. I say " if He did " because it is perfectly certain that there were forgeries and interpolations introduced into the Gospels in order to square their teaching with the practice of the Church some centuries later. One would look for those forgeries not in the ordinary narrative, which in the adult years bears every mark of truth, but in the passages which support ceremonial or tributes to the Church — such as the allusions to baptism, " Unless a man be born again," to the sacrament, " This is my body, etc.," and the whole story of Ananias and Sapphira, the moral of which is that it is dangerous to hold anything back from the Church.

Physically I picture the Christ as an extremely powerful man. I have known several famous healers and they were all men who looked as if they had redundant health and strength to give to others. His words to the sick woman, “Who has touched me? Much power” (dunamis is the word in the original Greek) “ has gone out of me,” show that His system depended upon His losing what He gave to others. Therefore He was a very strong man. The mere feat of carrying a wooden cross strong enough to bear a man from Jerusalem to Calvary, up a hill, is no light one. It is the details which convince me that the gospel narrative is correct and really represents an actual event. Take the incident during that sad journey of Simon of Cyrene having helped for a time with the cross. Why should anyone invent such a thing, putting an actual name to the person? It is touches of this kind which place the narrative beyond all suspicion of being a pure invention. Again and again in the New Testament one is confronted with incidents which a writer of fiction recognises as being beyond the reach of invention, because the inventor does not put in things which have no direct bearing upon the matter in hand. Take as an example how the maid, seeing Peter outside the door after his escape from prison, ran back to the guests and said that it was his angel (or etheric body) which was outside. Such an episode could only have been recorded because it actually occurred.

But these be deep waters. Let me get back to my own humble experiences, these interpolated thoughts being but things which have been found upon the wayside of our journey. On reaching Melbourne we were greeted at the station by a few devoted souls who had waited for two trains before they found us. Covered with the flowers which they had brought we drove to Menzies Hotel, whence we moved a few days later to a flat in the Grand, where we were destined to spend five eventful weeks. We found the atmosphere and general psychic conditions of Melbourne by no means as pleasant or receptive as those of Adelaide, but this of course was very welcome as the greater the darkness the more need of the light. If Spiritualism had been a popular cult in Australia there would have been no object in my visit. I was welcome enough as an individual, but by no means so as an emissary, and both the Churches and the Materialists, in most unnatural combination, had done their best to make the soil stony for me. Their chief agent had been the Argus, a solid, stodgy paper, which amply fulfilled the material needs of the public, but was not given to spiritual vision. This paper before my arrival had a very violent and abusive leader which attracted much attention, full of such terms as “ black magic,” “Shamanism,” “witchcraft,” “freak religion,” “cranky faith,” “cruelty,” “

black evil," " poison," finishing up with the assertion that I represented " a force which we believe to be purely evil." This was from a paper which whole-heartedly supports the liquor interest, and has endless columns of betting and racing news, nor did its principles cause it to refuse substantial sums for the advertising of my lectures. Still, however arrogant or illogical, I hold that a paper has a perfect right to publish and uphold its own view, nor would I say that the subsequent refusal of the Argus to print any answer to its tirade was a real breach of the ethics of journalism. Where its conduct became outrageous, however, and where it put itself beyond the pale of all literary decency, was when it reported my first lecture by describing my wife's dress, my own voice, the colour of my spectacles, and not a word of what I said. It capped this by publishing so- called answers to me by Canon Hughes, and by Bishop Phelan — critics whose knowledge of the subject seemed to begin and end with the witch of Endor — while omitting the statements to which these answers applied. Never in any British town have I found such reactionary intolerance as in this great city, for though the Argus was the chief offender, the other papers were as timid as rabbits in the matter. My psychic photographs which, as I have said, are the most wonderful collection ever shown in the world, were received in absolute silence by the whole press, though it is notorious that if I had come there with a comic opera or bedroom comedy instead of with the evidence of a series of miracles, I should have had a column. This seems to have been really due to moral cowardice, and not to ignorance, for I saw a private letter afterwards in which a sub-editor remarked that he and the chief leader-writer had both seen the photographs and that they could see no possible answer to them.

There was another and more pleasing side to the local conditions, and that lay in the numbers who had already mastered the principles of Spiritualism, the richer classes as individuals, the poorer as organised churches. They were so numerous that when we received an address of welcome in the auditorium to which only Spiritualists were invited by ticket, the Hall, which holds two thousand, was easily filled. This would mean on the same scale that the Spiritualists of London could fill the Albert Hall several times over — as no doubt they could. Their numbers were in a sense an embarrassment, as I always had the fear that I was addressing the faithful instead of those whom I had come so far to instruct. On the whole their quality and organisation were disappointing. They had a splendid spiritual paper in their midst, the Harbinger of Light, which has run for fifty years, and is most ably edited by Mr. Britton Harvey. When I think of David Gow, Ernest Oaten, John Lewis and Britton Harvey I feel that our cause is indeed well represented by its press. They have also some splendid local workers, like Bloomfield and Tozer, whole-hearted and apostolic. But elsewhere there is the usual tendency to divide and to run into vulgarities and extravagances in which the Spiritual has small share. Discipline is needed, which involves central powers, and that in turn means command of the purse. It would be far better to have no Spiritual churches than some I have seen.

However, I seem to have got to some of my final conclusions at Melbourne before I have begun our actual experience there. We found the place still full of rumours and talk about the recent visit of the Prince of Wales, who seems to have a perfect genius for making himself popular and beloved. May he remain unspoiled and retain the fresh kindliness of his youth. His success is due not to any ordered rule of conduct but to a perfectly natural courtesy which is his essential self and needs no effort. Our waiter at the hotel who had waited upon him remarked : “ God never made anything nearer to Nature than that boy. He spoke to me as he might have spoken to the Governor.” It was a fine tribute, and characteristic of the humbler classes in this country, who have a vigour of speech and an independence of view which is very refreshing. Once as I passed a public house, a broken old fellow who had been leaning against the wall with a short pipe in his mouth, stepped forward to me and said: “I am all for civil and religious liberty. There is plenty of room for your cult here, sir, and I wish you well against the bigots.” I wonder from what heights that old fellow had fallen before he brought up against the public house wall?

One of my first afternoons in Melbourne was spent in seeing the final tie of the Victorian football cup. I have played both Rugby and Soccer, and I have seen the American game at its best, but I consider that the Victorian system has some points which make it the best of all — certainly from the spectacular point of view. There is no off-side, and you get a free kick if you catch the ball. Otherwise you can run as in ordinary Rugby, though there is a law about bouncing the ball as you run, which might, as it seemed to me, be cut out without harming the game. This bouncing rule was put in by Mr. Harrison who drew up the original rules, for the chivalrous reason that he was himself the fastest runner in the Colony, and he did not wish to give himself any advantage. There is not so much man-handling in the Victorian game, and to that extent it is less dramatic, but it is extraordinarily open and fast, with none of the packed scrums which become so wearisome, and with linesmen who throw in the ball the instant it goes out. There were several points in which the players seemed better than our best — one was the accurate passing by low drop kicking, very much quicker and faster than a pass by hand. Another was the great accuracy of the place kicking and of the screw kicking when a runner would kick at right angles to his course. There were four long quarters, and yet the men were in such condition that they were going hard at the end. They are all, I understand, semi-professionals. Altogether it was a very fine display, and the crowd was much excited. It was suggestive that the instant the last whistle blew a troop of mounted police cantered over the ground and escorted the referees to the safety of the pavilion.

I began at once to endeavour to find out the conditions of local Spiritualism, and had a long conversation with Mr. Tozer, the chairman of the movement, a slow-talking, steady-eyed man, of the type that gets a grip and does not easily let go. After explaining the general situation, which needs some explanation as it is full of currents and crosscurrents caused by individual schisms and secessions, he told me in his gentle, earnest way some of his own experiences in his home circle which corroborate much which I have heard elsewhere. He has run a rescue circle for the instruction of the lower spirits who are so material that they can be reached more easily by humanity than by the higher angels. The details he gave me were almost the same as those given by Mr. MacFarlane of Southsea who had a similar circle of which Mr. Tozer had certainly never heard. A wise spirit control dominates the proceedings. The medium goes into trance. The spirit control then explains what it is about to do, and who the spirit is who is about to be reformed. The next scene is often very violent, the medium having to be held down and using rough language. This comes from some low spirit who has suddenly found this means of expressing himself. At other times the language is not violent but only melancholy, the spirit declaring that he is abandoned and has not a friend in the universe. Some do not realise that they are dead, but only that they wander all alone, under conditions they could not understand, in a cloud of darkness.

Then comes the work of regeneration. They are reasoned with and consoled. Gradually they become more gentle. Finally, they accept the fact that they are spirits, that their condition is their own making, and that by aspiration and repentance they can win their way to the light. When one has found the path and has returned thanks for it, another case is treated. As a rule these errant souls are unknown to fame. Often they are clergymen whose bigotry has hindered development. Occasionally some great sinner of the past may come into view. I have before me a written lament professing to come from Alva, the bigoted governor of the Lowlands. It is gruesome enough. “ Picture to yourself the hell I was in. Blood, blood everywhere, corpses on all sides, gashed, maimed, mutilated,, quivering with agony and bleeding at every pore! At the same time thousands of voices were raised in bitter reproaches, in curses and execrations! Imagine the appalling spectacle of this multitude of the dead and dying, fresh from the flames, from the sword, the rack, the torture chambers and the gibbet; and the pandemonium of voices shrieking out the most terrible maledictions! Imagine never being able to get away from these sights and sounds, and then tell me, was I not in hell? — a hell of greater torment than that to which I believed all heretics were consigned. Such was the hell of the ‘ bloody Alva/ from which I have been rescued by what seems to me a great merciful dispensation of Almighty God.”

Sometimes in Mr. Tozer’s circle the souls of ancient clerics who have slumbered long show their first signs of resuscitation, still bearing their old-world intolerance with them. The spirit control purports to be a well-educated Chinaman, whose presence and air of authority annoy the ecclesiastics greatly. The petrified mind leads to a long period of insensibility which means loss of ground and of time in the journey towards happiness. I was present at the return of one alleged Anglican Bishop of the eighteenth century, who spoke with great intolerance. When asked if he had seen the Christ he answered that he had not and that he could not understand it. When asked if he still considered the Christ to be God he threw up his hand and shouted violently, “ Stop! That is blasphemy! “ The Chinese control said, “ He stupid man. Let him wait. He learn better” — and removed him. He was succeeded by a very noisy and bigoted Puritan divine who declared that no one but devils would come to a seance. On being asked whether that meant that he was himself a devil he became so abusive that the Chinaman once more had to intervene. I quote all this as a curious sidelight into some developments of the subject which are familiar enough to students, but not to the general public.

It is easy at a distance to sneer at such things and to ask for their evidential value, but they are very impressive to those who view them at closer quarters. As to evidence, I am informed that several of the unfortunates have been identified in this world through the information which they gave of their own careers.

Melbourne is a remarkable city, far more solid and old-established than the European visitor would expect. We spent some days in exploring it. There are few cities which have the same natural advantages, for it is near the sea, with many charming watering places close at hand, while inland it has some beautiful hills for the week-end villas of the citizens. Edinburgh is the nearest analogy which I can recall. Parks and gardens are beautiful, but, as in most British cities, the public statues are more solid than impressive. The best of them, that to Burke and Wills, the heroic explorers, has no name upon it to signify who the two figures are, so that they mean nothing at all to the casual observer, in spite of some excellent bas-reliefs, round the base, which show the triumphant start and the terrible end of that tragic but successful journey, which first penetrated the Continent from south to north. Before our departure I appealed in the press to have this omission rectified and it was, I believe, done.

Mr. Smythe, my agent, had been unfortunate in being unable to secure one of the very few large halls in Melbourne, so we had to confine ourselves to

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the Playhouse which has only seating for about 1,200. Here I opened on October 5th, following my lectures up in the same order as in Adelaide. The press was very shy, but nothing could have exceeded the warmth and receptivity of my hearers. Yet on account of the inadequate reports of the press, with occasional total suppression, no one who was not present could have imagined how packed was the house, or how unanimous the audience.

On October 14th the Spiritualists filled the Auditorium and had a special service of welcome for ourselves. When I went down to it in the tram, the conductor, unaware of my identity, said, when I asked to be put down at the Auditorium, “ It’s no use, sir; it’s jam full an hour ago.” “ The Pilgrims/’ as they called us, were in special seats, the seven of us all in a line upon the right of the chair. Many kind things were said, and I replied as best I might. The children will carry the remembrance of that warm-hearted reception through their lives, and they are not likely to forget how they staggered home, laden with the flowers which were literally heaped upon them.

The British Empire League also entertained my wife and myself to lunch, a very select company assembling who packed the room. Sir Joseph Cook, Federal Chancellor of the Exchequer, made a pleasant speech, recalling our adventures upon the Somme, when he had his baptism of fire. In my reply I pulled the leg of my audience with some success, for I wound up by saying, very solemnly, that I was something greater than Governments and the master of Cabinet Ministers.

g By the time I had finished my tremendous claims I am convinced that they expected some extravagant occult pretension, whereas I actually wound up with the words, “ for I am the man in the street.” There was a good deal of amusement caused.

Mr. Thomas Ryan, a very genial and capable member of the State Legislature, took the chair at this function. He had no particular psychic knowledge, but he was deeply impressed by an experience in London in the presence of that remarkable little lady, Miss Scatcherd. Mr. Ryan had said that he wanted some evidence before he could accept psychic philosophy, upon which Miss Scatcherd said : “ There is a spirit beside you now. He conveys to me that his name is Roberts. He says he is worried in his mind because the home which you prepared for his widow has not been legally made over to her.” All this applied to a matter in Adelaide. In that city, according to Mr. Ryan, a seance was held that night, Mr. Victor Cromer being the medium, at which a message came through from Roberts saying that he was now easy in his mind as he had managed to convey his trouble to Mr. Ryan who could set it right. When these psychic laws are understood the dead as well as the living will be relieved from a load of unnecessary care; but how can these laws be ignored or pooh-poohed in the face of such instances as this which I have quoted? They are so numerous now that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that every circle of human beings which meets can supply one.

Mr. Hughes was good enough to ask me to meet the members of the Federal Government at lunch, and the experience was an interesting one, for here round one small table were those who were shaping the course of this young giant among the nations. They struck me as a practical hard- worked rough-and-ready lot of men. Mr. Hughes dominated the conversation, which necessarily becomes one-sided as he is very deaf, though his opponents say that he has an extraordinary knack of hearing what he is not meant to hear. He told us a series of anecdotes of his stormy political youth with a great deal of vivacity, the whole company listening in silence. He is a hard, wiry man, with a high-nosed Red Indian face, and a good deal of healthy devilry in his composition — a great force for good during the war.

After lunch he conducted me through the library, and coming to a portrait of Clemenceau he cried : “ That’s the man I learned to admire in Europe.” Then, turning to one of Wilson, he added, “ And that’s the man I learned to dislike.” He added a number of instances of Wilson’s ignorance of actual conditions, and of his ungenial coldness of heart. “ If he had not been so wrapped in himself, and if he had taken Lodge or some other Republican with him, all could have easily been arranged.” I feel that I am not indiscreet in repeating this, for Hughes is not a man who conceals his opinions from the world.

I have been interested in the medium Bailey, who was said to have been exposed in France in 1910. The curious will find the alleged exposure in “ Annals of Psychical Science,” Vol. IX. Bailey is an apport medium — that is to say, that among his phenomena is the bringing of objects which are said to come from a distance, passing through the walls and being precipitated down upon the table. These objects are of the strangest description — Assyrian tablets (real or forged), tortoises, live birds, snakes, precious stones, &c. In this case, after being searched by the committee, he was able to produce two live birds in the seance room. At the next sitting the committee proposed an obscene and absurd examination of the medium, which he very rightly resented and refused. They then confidently declared that on the first occasion the two live birds were in his intestines, a theory so absurd that it shakes one’s confidence in their judgment. They had, however, some more solid grounds for a charge against him, for they produced a married couple who swore that they had sold three such birds with a cage to Bailey some days before. This Bailey denied, pointing out that he could neither speak French, nor had he ever had any French money, which Professor Reichel, who brought him from Australia, corroborated. However, the committee considered the evidence to be final, and the seances came to an end, though Colonel de Rochas, the leading member, wound up the incident by writing: “ Are we to conclude from the fraud that we have witnessed that all Bailey’s apports may have been fraudulent? I do not think so, and this is also the opinion of the members of the committee, who have had much experience with mediums and are conversant with the literature of the subject.”

Reading the alleged exposure, one is struck, as so often in such cases, with its unsatisfactory nature. There is the difficulty of the language and the money. There is the disappearance of the third bird and the cage. Above all, how did the birds get into the carefully-guarded seance room, especially as Bailey was put in a bag during the proceedings? The committee say the bag may not have been efficient, but they also state that Bailey desired the control to be made more effective. Altogether it is a puzzling case. On my applying to Bailey himself for information, he declared roundly that he had been the victim of a theological plot with suborned evidence. The only slight support which I can find for that view is that there was a Rev. Doctor among his accusers. I was told independently that Professor Reichel, before his death in 1918, came also to the conclusion that there had been a plot. But in any case most of us will agree with Mr. Stanford, Bailey’s Australian patron, that the committee would have been wise to say nothing, continue the sittings, and use their knowledge to get at some more complete conclusion.

With such a record one had to be on one’s guard with Mr. Bailey. I had a sitting in my room at the hotel to which I invited ten guests, but the results were not impressive. We saw so-called spirit hands, which were faintly luminous, but I was not allowed to grasp them, and they were never further from the medium than he could have reached. All this was suspicious but not conclusive. On the other hand, there was an attempt at a materialisation of a head, which took the form of a luminous patch, and seemed to some of the sitters to be further from the cabinet than could be reached. We had an address purporting to come from the control, Dr. Whitcombe, and we also had a message written in bad Italian. On the whole it was one of those baffling sittings which leave a vague unpleasant impression, and there was a disturbing suggestion of cuffs about those luminous hands.

I have been reading Bailey’s record, however, and I cannot doubt that he has been a great apport medium. The results were far above all possible fraud, both in the conditions and in the articles brought into the room by spirit power. For example, I have a detailed account published by Dr. C. W. McCarthy, of Sydney, under the title, “ Rigid Tests of the Occult.” During these tests Bailey was sealed up in a bag, and in one case was inside a cage of mosquito curtain. The door and windows were secured and the fire-place blocked. The sitters were all personal friends, but they mutually searched each other. The medium was stripped naked before the seance. Under these stringent conditions during a series of six sittings 138 articles were brought into the room, which included eighty-seven ancient coins (mostly of Ptolemy), eight live birds, eighteen precious stones of modest value and varied character, two live turtles, seven inscribed Babylonian tablets, one Egyptian Scarabaeus, an Arabic newspaper, a leopard skin, four nests and many other things. It seems to me perfect nonsense to talk about these things being the results of trickery. I may add that at a previous test meeting they had a young live shark about i| feet long, which was tangled with wet seaweed and flopped about on the table. Dr. McCarthy gives a photograph of the creature.

My second sitting with Bailey was more successful than the first. On his arrival I and others searched him and satisfied ourselves he carried nothing upon him. I then suddenly switched out all the lights, for it seemed to me that the luminous hands of the first sitting might be the result of phosphorised oil put on before the meeting and only visible in complete darkness, so that it could defy all search. I was wrong, however, for there was no luminosity at all. We then placed Mr. Bailey in the corner of the room, lowered the lights without turning them out, and waited. Almost at once he breathed very heavily, as one in trance, and soon said something in a foreign tongue which was unintelligible to me. One of our friends, Mr. Cochrane, recognised it as Indian, and at once answered, a few sentences being interchanged. In English the voice then said that he was a Hindoo control who was used to bring apports for the medium, and that he would, he hoped, be able to bring one for us. “ Here it is,” he said a moment later, and the medium’s hand was extended with something in it. The light was turned full on and we found it was a very perfect bird’s nest, beautifully constructed of some very fine fibre mixed with moss. It stood about two inches high and had no sign of any flattening which would have come with concealment. The size would be nearly three inches across. In it lay a small egg, white, with tiny brown speckles. The medium, or rather the Hindoo control acting through the medium, placed the egg on his palm and broke it, some fine albumen squirting out. There was no trace of yolk. “ We are not allowed to interfere with life,” said he. “ If it had been fertilised we could not have taken it.” These words were said before he broke it, so that he was aware of the condition of the egg, which certainly seems remarkable.

“ Where did it come from? “ I asked.

“ From India.”

“ What “bird is it? “

“ They call it the jungle sparrow.”

The nest remained in my possession, and I spent a morning with Mr. Chubb, of the local museum, to ascertain if it was really the nest of such a bird. It seemed too small for an Indian sparrow, and yet we could not match either nest or egg among the Australian types. Some of Mr. Bailey’s other nests and eggs have been actually identified. Surely it is a fair argument that while it is conceivable that such birds might be imported and purchased here, it is really an insult to one’s reason to suppose that nests with fresh eggs in them could also be in the market. Therefore I can only support the far more extended experience and elaborate tests of Dr. McCarthy of Sydney, and affirm that I believe Mr. Charles Bailey to be upon occasion a true medium, with a very remarkable gift for apports.

It is only right to state that when I returned to London I took one of Bailey’s Assyrian tablets to the British Museum and that it was pronounced to be a forgery. Upon further inquiry it proved that these forgeries are made by certain Jews in a suburb of Bagdad — and, so far as is known, only there. Therefore the matter is not much further advanced. To the transporting agency it is at least possible that the forgery, steeped in recent human magnetism, is more capable of being handled than the original taken from a mound. Bailey has produced at least a hundred of these things, and no Custom House officer has deposed how they could have entered the country. On the other hand, Bailey told me clearly that the tablets had been passed by the British Museum, so that I fear that I cannot acquit him of tampering with truth — and just there lies the great difficulty of deciding upon his case. But one has always to remember that physical mediumship has no connection one way or the other with personal character, any more than the gift of poetry.

To return to this particular seance, it was unequal. We had luminous hands, but they were again within reach of the cabinet in which the medium was seated. We had also a long address from Dr. Whitcombe, the learned control, in which he discoursed like an absolute master upon Assyrian and Roman antiquities and psychic science. It was really an amazing address, and if Bailey were the author of it I should hail him as a master mind. He chatted about the Kings of Babylon as if he had known them all, remarked that the Bible was wrong in calling Belthazar King as he was only Crown Prince, and put in all those easy side allusions which a man uses when he is absolutely full of his subject. Upon his asking for questions, I said: " Please give me some light as to the dematerialisation and subsequent reassembly of an object such as a bird's nest." " It involves," he answered, "some factors which are beyond your human science and which could not be made clear to you. At'the same time you may take as a rough analogy the case of water which is turned into steam, and then this steam which is invisible, is conducted elsewhere to be reassembled as visible water." I thought this explanation was exceedingly apt, though of course I agree that it is only a rough analogy. On my asking if there were libraries and facilities for special study in the next world, he said that there certainly were, but that instead of studying books they usually studied the actual objects themselves. All he said was full of dignity and wisdom. It was curious to notice that, learned as he was, Dr. Whitcombe always referred back with reverence to Dr. Robinson, another control not present at the moment, as being the real expert. I am told that some of Dr. Robinson's addresses have fairly amazed the specialists. I notice that Col. de Rochas in his report was equally impressed by Bailey's controls.

I fear that my psychic experiences are pushing my travels into the background, but I warned the reader that it might be so when first we joined hands. To get back to the earth, let me say that I saw the procession when the new Governor- General, Lord Forster, with his charming wife, made their ceremonial entry into Melbourne, with many workman-like Commonwealth troops before and behind their carriage. I knew Lord Forster of old, for we both served upon a committee over the Olympic Games, so that he gave quite a start of surprised recognition when his quick eye fell upon my face in the line of spectators. He is a man who cannot fail to be popular here, for he has the physical as well as the mental qualities. Our stay in Melbourne was afterwards made more pleasant by the gracious courtesy of Government House for, apart from attending several functions, we were invited to a special dinner, after which I exhibited upon a screen my fairy portraits and a few of my other very wonderful psychic photographs. It was not an occasion when I could preach, but no quick intelligence could be brought in contact with such phenomena without asking itself very seriously what lay behind them. When that question is earnestly asked the battle is won.

One asks oneself what will be the end of this system of little viceroys in each State and a big viceroy in the Capital — however capable and excellent in themselves such viceroys may be. The smaller courts are, I understand, already doomed, and rightly so, since there is no need for them and nothing like them elsewhere. There is no possible purpose that they serve save to impose a nominal check, which is never used, upon the legislation. The Governor-Generalship will last no doubt until Australia cuts the painter, or we let go our end of it, whichever may come first.

Personally, I have no fear of Britain's power being weakened by a separation of her dominions. Close allies which were independent might be a greater source of moral strength than actual dependencies. When the sons leave the father's house and rule their own homes, becoming fathers in turn, the old man is not weakened thereby. Certainly I desire no such change, but if it came I would bear it with philosophy. I hope that the era of great military crises is for ever past, but, if it should recur, I am sure that the point of view would be the same, and that the starry Union Jack of the great Australian nation would still fly beside the old flag which was its model.

If one took a Machiavelian view of British interests one would say that to retain a colony the surest way is not to remove any danger which may threaten her. We conquered Canada from the French, removing in successive campaigns the danger from the north and from the west which threatened our American colonies. When we had expended our blood and money to that end, so that the colonies had nothing to fear, they took the first opportunity to force an unnecessary quarrel and to leave us. So I have fears for South Africa now that the German menace has been removed. Australia is, I think, loyal to the core, and yet self-interest is with every nation the basis of all policy, and so long as the British fleet can guard the shores of the great empty northern territories, a region as big as Britain, Germany, France and Austria put together, they have need of us. There can be no doubt that if they were alone in the world in the face of the teeming millions of the East, they might, like the Siberian travellers, have to throw a good deal to the wolves in order to save the remainder. Brave and capable as they are, neither their numbers nor their resources could carry them through a long struggle if the enemy held the sea. They are natural shots and soldiers, so that they might be wiser to spend their money in a strategic railway right across their northern coast, rather than in direct military preparations. To concentrate rapidly before the enemy was firmly established might under some circumstances be a very vital need.

But so long as the British Empire lasts Australia is safe, and in twenty years' time her own enlarged population will probably make her safe without help from anyone. But her empty places are a danger. History abhors a vacuum and finds some one to fill it up. I have never yet understood why the Commonwealth has not made a serious effort to attract to the northern territories those Italians who are flooding the Argentine. It is great blood and no race is the poorer for it — the blood of ancient Rome. They are used to semi- tropical heat and to hard work in bad conditions if there be only hope ahead. Perhaps the policy of the future may turn in that direction. If that one weak spot be guarded then it seems to me that in the whole world there is no community, save only the United States, which is so safe from outside attack as Australia. Internal division is another matter, but there Australia is in some ways stronger than the States. She has no negro question, and the strife between Capital and Labour is not likely to be so formidable. I wonder, by the way, how many people in the United States realise that this small community lost as many men as America did in the great war. We were struck also by the dignified resignation with which this fact was faced, and by the sense of proportion which was shown in estimating the sacrifices of various nations.

We like the people here very much more than we had expected to, for one hears in England exaggerated stories of their democratic bearing. When democracy takes the form of equality one can get along with it, but when it becomes rude and aggressive one would avoid it. Here one finds a very pleasing good fellowship which no one would object to. Again and again we have met with little acts of kindness from people in shops or in the street, which were not personal to ourselves, but part of their normal good manners. If you ask the way or any other information, strangers will take trouble to put you right. They are kindly, domestic and straight in speech and in dealings. Materialism and want of vision in the broader affairs of life seem to be the national weakness, but that may be only a passing phase, for when a nation has such a gigantic material proposition as this continent to handle it is natural that their thoughts should run on the wool and the wheat and the gold by which it can be accomplished. I am bound to say, however, that I think every patriotic Australian should vote, if not for prohibition, at least for the solution which is most dear to myself, and that is the lowering of the legal standard of alcohol in any drink. We have been shocked and astonished by the number of young men of decent exterior whom we have seen staggering down the street, often quite early in the day. The Biblical test for drunkenness, that it was not yet the third hour, would not apply to them. I hear that bad as it is in the big towns it is worse in the small ones, and worst of all in the northern territories and other waste places where work is particularly needed. It must greatly decrease the national efficiency. A recent vote upon the question in Victoria only carried total abstinence in four districts out of about 200, but a two-third majority was needed to do it. On the other hand a trial of strength in Queensland, generally supposed to be rather a rowdy State, has shown that the temperance men all combined can out-vote the others. Therefore it is certain that reform will not be long delayed.

The other curse of the country, which is a real drag upon its progress, is the eternal horse-racing. It goes on all the year round, though it has its more virulent bouts, as for example during our visit to this town when the Derby, the Melbourne Cup, and Oaks succeeded each other. They call it sport, but I fear that in that case I am no sportsman. I would as soon call the roulette-table a sport. The whole population is unsettled and bent upon winning easy money, which dissatisfies them with the money that has to be worked for. Every shop is closed when the Cup is run, and you have lift-boys, waiters and maids all backing their fancies, not with half-crowns but with substantial sums. The danger to honesty is obvious, and it came under our own notice that it is not imaginary. Of course we are by no means blameless in England, but it only attacks a limited class, while here it seems to the stranger to be almost universal. In fact it is so bad that it is sure to get better, for I cannot conceive that any sane nation will allow it to continue. The bookmakers, however, are a powerful guild, and will fight tooth and nail. The Catholic Church, I am sorry to say, uses its considerable influence to prevent drink reform by legislation, and I fear that it will not support the anti-gamblers either. I wonder from what hidden spring, from what ignorant Italian camarilla, this venerable and in some ways admirable Church gets its secular policy, which must have central direction, since it is so consistent! When I remember the recent sequence of world events and the part played by that Church, the attack upon the innocent Dreyfus, the refusal to support reform in the Congo, and finally the obvious leaning towards the Central

Powers who were clearly doomed to lose, one would think that it was ruled by a Council of lunatics. These matters bear no relation to faith or dogma, so that one wonders that the sane Catholics have not risen in protest. No doubt the better class laymen are ahead of the clergy in this as in other religious organisations. I cannot forget how the Duke of Norfolk sent me a cheque for the Congo Reform Movement at the very time when we could not get the Catholic Church to line up with the other sects at a Reform Demonstration at the Albert Hall. In this country also there were many brave and loyal Catholics who took their own line against Cardinal Mannix upon the question of conscription, when that Cardinal did all that one man could do to bring about the defeat of the free nations in the great war. How he could face an American audience afterwards, or how such an audience could tolerate him, is hard to understand.

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CHAPTER V

More English than the English. — A day in the Bush. — Immigration. — A case of spirit return. — A Seance. — Gee- long. — The lava plain. — Good-nature of General Ryrie. — Bendigo. — Down a gold mine. — Prohibition v. Continuance. — Mrs. Knight MacLellan. — Nerrin. — A wild drive. — Electric shearing. — Rich sheep stations. — Cockatoo farmers. — Spinnifex and Mallee. — Rabbits. — The great marsh.

In some ways the Australians are more English than the English. We have been imperceptibly Americanised, while our brethren over the sea have kept the old type. The Australian is less ready to show emotion, cooler in his bearing, more restrained in applause, more devoted to personal liberty, keener on sport, and quieter in expression (as witness the absence of scare lines in the papers than our people are. Indeed, they remind me more of the Scotch than the English, and Melbourne on a Sunday, without posts, or Sunday papers, or any amenity whatever, is like the Edinburgh of my boyhood. Sydney is more advanced. There are curious anomalies in both towns. Their telephone systems are so bad that they can only be balanced against each other, for they are in a class by themselves. One smiles when one recollects that one used to grumble at the London lines. On the other hand the tramway services in both towns are wonderful, and so continuous that one never hastens one’s step to catch a tram since another comes within a minute. The Melbourne trams have open bogey cars in front, which make a drive a real pleasure.

One of our pleasant recollections in the early days of our Melbourne visit was a day in the bush with Mr. Henry Stead and his wife. My intense admiration for the moral courage and energy of the father made it easy for me to form a friendship with his son, who has shown the family qualities by the able way in which he has founded and conducted an excellent journal, Stead’s Monthly. Australia was lucky ever to get such an immigrant as that, for surely an honest, fearless and clearheaded publicist is the most valuable man that a young country, whose future is one long problem play, could import. We spent our day in the Dandenong Hills, twenty miles from Melbourne, in a little hostel built in a bush clearing and run by one Lucas, of good English cricket stock, his father having played for Sussex. On the way we passed Madame Melba’s place at Lilydale, and the wonderful woods with their strange tree-ferns seemed fit cover for such a singing bird. Coming back in Stead's light American car we tried a short cut down roads which proved to be almost impossible. A rather heavier car ahead of us, with two youths in it, got embedded in the mud, and we all dismounted to heave it out. There suddenly appeared on the lonely road an enormous coloured man; he looked like a cross between negro and black fellow. He must have lived in some hut in the woods, but the way his huge form suddenly rose beside us was quite surprising. He stood in gloomy majesty surveying our efforts, and repeating a series of sentences which reminded one of German exercises. “ I have no jack. I had a jack. Some one has taken my jack. This is called a road. It is not a road. There is no road.” We finally levered out the Australian car, for which, by the way, neither occupant said a word of thanks, and then gave the black giant a shilling, which he received as a keeper takes his toll. On looking back I am not sure that this slough of despond is not carefully prepared by this negro, who makes a modest income by the tips which he gets from the unfortunates who get bogged in it. No keeper ever darted out to a trap quicker than he did when the car got stuck.

Stead agreed with me that the Australians do not take a big enough view of their own destiny. They — or the labour party, to be more exact — are inclined to buy the ease of the moment at the cost of the greatness of their continental future. They fear immigration lest it induce competition and pull down prices. It is a natural attitude. And yet that little fringe of people on the edge of that huge island can never adequately handle it. It is like an enormous machine with a six horsepower engine to drive it. I have a great sympathy with their desire to keep the British stock as pure as possible. But the land needs the men, and somewhere they must be found. I cannot doubt that they would become loyal subjects of the Empire which had adopted them. I have wondered sometimes whether in Lower California and the warmer States of the Union there may not be human material for Australia. Canada has received no more valuable stock than from the American States, so it might be that another portion of the Union would find the very stamp of man that Queensland and the north require. The American likes a big gamble and a broad life with plenty of elbow-room. Let him bring his cotton seeds over to semi-tropical Australia and see what he can make of it there.

To pass suddenly to other-worldly things, which are my mission. People never seem to realise the plain fact that one positive result must always outweigh a hundred negative ones. It only needs one single case of spirit return to be established, and there is no more to be said. Incidentally, how absurd is the position of those wiseacres who say “ nine-tenths of the phenomena are fraud.” Can they not see that if they grant us one-tenth, they grant us our whole contention?

These remarks are elicited by a case which occurred in 1883 in Melbourne, and which should have converted the city as surely as if an angel had walked down Collins Street. Yet nearly forty years later I find it as stagnant and material as any city I have ever visited. The facts are these, well substantiated by documentary and official evidence. Mr. Junor Browne, a well-known citizen, whose daughter afterwards married Mr. Alfred Deakin, subsequently Premier, had two sons, Frank and Hugh. Together with a seaman named Murray they went out into the bay in their yacht the “ Iolanthe,” and they never returned. The father was fortunately a Spiritualist and upon the second day of their absence, after making all normal inquiries, he asked a sensitive, Mr. George Spriggs, formerly of Cardiff, if he would trace them. Mr. Spriggs collected some of the young men’s belongings, so as to get their atmosphere, and then he was able by psycho- metry to give an account of their movements, the last which he could see of them being that they were in trouble upon the yacht and that confusion seemed to reign aboard her. Two days later, as no further news was brought in, the Browne family held a seance, Mr. Spriggs being the medium. He fell into trance and the two lads, who had been trained in spiritual knowledge and knew the possibilities, at once came through. They expressed their contrition to their mother, who had desired them not to go, and they then gave a clear account of the capsizing of the yacht, and how they had met their death, adding that they had found themselves after death in the exact physical conditions of happiness and brightness which their father’s teaching had led them to expect. They brought with them the seaman Murray, who also said a few words. Finally Hugh, speaking through the medium, informed Mr. Browne that Frank’s arm and part of his clothing had been torn off by a fish.

“ A shark? “ asked Mr. Browne.

“ Well, it was not like any shark I have seen.”

Mark the sequel. Some weeks later a large shark of a rare deep-sea species, unknown to the fishermen, and quite unlike the ordinary blue shark with which the Brownes were familiar, was taken at Frankston, about twenty-seven miles from Melbourne. Inside it was found the bone of a human arm, and also a watch, some coins, and other articles which had belonged to Frank Browne. These facts were all brought out in the papers at the time, and Mr. Browne put much of it on record in print before the shark was taken, or any word of the missing men had come by normal means. The facts are all set forth in a little book by Mr. Browne himself, called " A Rational Faith." What have fraudulent mediums and all the other decoys to do with such a case as that, and is it not perfectly convincing to any man who is not perverse? Personally, I value it not so much for the evidence of survival, since we have that so complete already, but for the detailed account given by the young men of their new conditions, so completely corroborating what so many young officers, cut off suddenly in the war, have said of their experience. " Mother, if you could see how happy we are, and the beautiful home we are in, you would not weep except for joy. I feel so light in my spiritual body and have no pain, I would not exchange this life for earth life even it were in my power. Poor spirits without number are waiting anxiously to communicate with their friends when an opportunity is offered." The young Brownes had the enormous advantage of the education they had received from their father, so that they instantly understood and appreciated the new conditions.

On October 8th we had a seance with Mrs. Hunter, a pleasant middle-aged woman, with a soft South of England accent. Like so many of our mediums she had little sign of education in her talk. It does not matter in spiritual things, though it is a stumbling block to some inquirers. After all, how much education had the apostles? I have no doubt they were very vulgar provincial people from the average Roman point of view. But they shook the world none the less. Most of our educated people have got their heads so crammed with things that don't matter that they have no room for the things that do matter. There was no particular success at our sitting, but I have heard that the medium is capable of better things.

On October 13th I had my first experience of a small town, for I went to Geelong and lectured there. It was an attentive and cultured audience, but the hall was small and the receipts could hardly have covered the expenses. However, it is the press report and the local discussion which really matter.

I had little time to inspect Geelong, which is a prosperous port with 35,000 inhabitants. What interested me more was the huge plain of lava which stretches around it and connects it with Melbourne. This plain is a good hundred miles across, and as it is of great depth one can only imagine that there must be monstrous cavities inside the earth to correspond with the huge amount extruded. Here and there one sees stunted green cones which are the remains of the volcanoes which spewed up all this stuff. The lava has disintegrated on the surface to the extent of making good arable soil, but the harder bits remain unbroken, so that the surface is covered with rocks, which are used to build up walls for the fields after the Irish fashion. Every here and there a peak of granite has remained as an island amid the lava, to show what was there before the great outflow. Eruptions appear to be caused by water pouring in through some crack and reaching the heated inside of the earth where the water is turned to steam, expands, and so gains the force to spread destruction. If this process went on it is clear that the whole sea might continue to pour down the crack until the heat had been all absorbed by the water. I have wondered whether the lava may not be a clever healing process of nature, by which this soft plastic material is sent oozing out in every direction with the idea that it may find the crack and then set hard and stop it up. Wild speculation no doubt, but the guess must always precede the proof.

The Australians are really a very good-natured people. It runs through the whole race, high and low. A very exalted person, the Minister of War, shares our flat in the hotel, his bedroom being imbedded among our rooms. This is General Sir Granville Ryrie, a famous hero of Palestine, covered with wounds and medals — a man, too, of great dignity of bearing. As I was dressing one morning I heard some rather monotonous whistling and, forgetting the very existence of the General, and taking it for granted that it was my eldest boy Denis, I put my head out and said, “ Look here, old chap, consider other people’s nerves and give up that rotten habit of whistling before breakfast.” Imagine my feelings when the deep voice of the General answered, “ All right, Sir Arthur, I will! “ We laughed together over the incident afterwards, and I told him that he had furnished me with one more example of Australian good humour for my notes.

On October 13th I was at the prosperous 50,000 population town of Bendigo, which every one, except the people on the spot, believes to have been named after the famous boxer. This must surely be a world record, for so far as my memory serves, neither a Grecian Olympic athletic, nor a Roman Gladiator, nor a Byzantine Charioteer, has ever had a city for a monument. Borrow, who looked upon a good honest pugilist as the pick of humanity, must have rejoiced in it. Is not valour the basis of all character, and where shall we find greater valour than theirs? Alas, that most of them began and ended there! It is when the sage and the saint build on the basis of the fighter that you have the highest to which humanity can attain.

I had a full hall at Bendigo, and it was packed, I am told, by real old-time miners, for, of course, Bendigo is still the centre of the gold mining industry. Mr. Smythe told me that it was quite a sight to see those rows of deeply-lined, bearded faces listening so intently to what I said of that destiny which is theirs as well as mine. I never had a better audience, and it was their sympathy which helped me through, for I was very weary that night. But however weary you may be, when you climb upon the platform to talk about this subject, you may be certain that you will be less weary when you come off. That is my settled conviction after a hundred trials.

On the morning after my lecture I found myself half a mile nearer to dear Old England, for I descended the Unity mine, and they say that the workings extend to that depth. Perhaps I was not at the lowest level, but certainly it was a long journey in the cage, and reminded me of my “friend Bang’s description of the New York elevator, when he said that the distance to his suburban villa and his town flat was the same, but the one was horizontal and the other perpendicular.

It was a weird experience that peep into the profound depths of the great gold mine. Time was when the quartz veins were on the surface for the poor adventurer to handle. Now they have been followed underground, and only great companies and costly machinery can win it. Always it is the same white quartz vein with the little yellow specks and threads running through it. We were rattled down in pitch darkness until we came to a stop at the end of a long passage dimly lit by an occasional guttering candle. Carrying our own candles, and clad in miner’s costume we crept along with bent heads until we came suddenly out into a huge circular hall which might have sprung from Dore’s imagination. The place was draped with heavy black shadows, but every here and there was a dim light. Each light showed where a man was squatting toad-like, a heap of broken debris in front of him, turning it over, and throwing aside the pieces with clear traces of gold. These were kept for special treatment, while the rest of the quartz was passed in ordinary course through the mill. These scattered heaps represented the broken stuff after a charge of dynamite had been exploded in the quartz vein. It was strange indeed to see these squatting figures deep in the bowels of the earth, their candles shining upon their earnest faces and piercing eyes, and to reflect that they were striving that the great exchanges of London and New York might be able to balance with bullion their output of paper. This dim troglodyte industry was in truth the centre and mainspring of all industries, without which trade would stop. Many of the men were from Cornwall, the troll among the nations, where the tools of the miner are still, as for two thousand years, the natural heritage of the man. Dr. Stillwell, the geologist of the company, and I had a long discussion as to where the gold came from, but the only possible conclusion was that nobody knew. We know now that the old alchemists were perfectly right and that one metal may change into another. Is it possible that under some conditions a mineral may change into a metal? Why should quartz always be the matrix? Some geological Darwin will come along some day and we shall get a great awakening, for at present we are only disguising our own ignorance in this department of knowledge. I had always understood that quartz was one of the old igneous primeval rocks, and yet here I saw it in thin bands, sandwiched in between clays and slates and other water- borne deposits. The books and the strata don’t agree.

These smaller towns, like the Metropolis itself, are convulsed with the great controversy between Prohibition and Continuance, no reasonable compromise between the two being suggested. Every wall displays posters, on one side those very prosperous-looking children who demand that some restraint be placed upon their daddy, and on the other hair-raising statements as to the financial results of restricting the publicans. To the great disgust of every decent man they have run the Prince into it, and some remark of his after his return to England has been used by the liquor party. It is dangerous for royalty to be jocose in these days, but this was a particularly cruel example of the exploitation of a harmless little joke. If others felt as I did I expect it cost the liquor interest many a vote.

We had another seance, this time with Mrs. Knight MacLellan, after my return from Bendigo. She is a lady who has grown grey in the service of the cult, and who made a name in London when she was still a child by her mediumistic powers. We had nothing of an evidential character that evening save that one lady who had recently lost her son had his description and an apposite message given. It was the first of several tests which we were able to give this lady, and before we left Melbourne she assured us that she was a changed woman and her sorrow for ever gone.

On October 18th began a very delightful experience, for my wife and I, leaving our party safe in Melbourne, travelled up country to be the guests of the Hon. Agar Wynne and his charming wife at their station of Nerrin-Nerrin in Western Victoria. It is about 140 miles from Melbourne, and as the trains are very slow, the journey was not a pleasant one. But that was soon compensated for in the warmth of the welcome which awaited us. Mr. Agar Wynne was Postmaster-General of the Federal Government, and author of several improvements, one of which, the power of sending long letter-telegrams at low rates during certain hours was a triumph of common sense. For a shilling one could send quite a long communication to the other end of the Continent, but it must go through at the time when the telegraph clerk had nothing else to do.

It was interesting to us to find ourselves upon an old-established station, typical of the real life of Australia, for cities are much the same the world over. Nerrin had been a sheep station for eighty years, but the comfortable verandahed bungalow house, with every convenience within it, was comparatively modern. What charmed us most, apart from the kindness of our hosts, was a huge marsh or lagoon which extended for many miles immediately behind the house, and which was a bird sanctuary, so that it was crowded with ibises, wild black swans, geese, ducks, herons and all sorts of fowl. We crept out of our bedroom in the dead of the night and stood under the cloud-swept moon listening to the chorus of screams, hoots, croaks and whistles coming out of the vast expanse of reeds. It would make a most wonderful hunting ground for a naturalist who was content to observe and not to slay. The great morass of fNerrin will ever stand out in our memories.

Next day we were driven round the borders of this wonderful marsh, Mr. Wynne, after the Australian fashion, taking no note of roads, and going right across country with alarming results to anyone not used to it. Finally, the swaying and rolling became so terrific that he was himself thrown off the box seat and fell down between the buggy and the front wheel, narrowly escaping a very serious accident. He was able to show us the nests and eggs which filled the reed-beds, and even offered to drive us out into the morass to inspect them, a proposal which was rejected by the unanimous vote of a full buggy. I never knew an answer more decidedly in the negative. As we drove home we passed a great gum tree, and halfway up the trunk was a deep incision where the bark had been stripped in an oval shape some four foot by two. It was where some savage in days of old had cut his shield. Such a mark outside a modern house with every amenity of cultured life is an object lesson of how two systems have overlapped, and how short a time it is since this great continent was washed by a receding wave, ere the great Anglo-Saxon tide came creeping forward.

Apart from the constant charm of the wild life of the marsh there did not seem to be much for the naturalist around Nerrin. Opossums bounded upon the roof at night and snakes were not uncommon. A dangerous tiger-snake .was killed on the day of our arrival. I was amazed also at the size of the Australian eels. A returned soldier had taken up fishing as a trade, renting a water for a certain time and putting the contents, so far as he could realise them, upon the market. It struck me that after this wily digger had passed that way there would not be much for the sportsman who followed him. But the eels were enormous. He took a dozen at a time from his cunning eel-pots, and not one under six pounds. I should have said that they were certainly congers had I seen them in England.

I wonder whether all this part of the country has not been swept by a tidal wave at some not very remote period. It is a low coastline with this great lava plain as a hinterland, and I can see nothing to prevent a big wave even now from sweeping the civilisation of Victoria off the planet, should there be any really great disturbance under the Pacific. At any rate, it is my impression that it has actually occurred once already, for I cannot otherwise understand the existence of great shallow lakes of salt water in these inland parts. Are they not the pools left behind by that terrible tide? There are great banks of sand, too, here and there on the top of the lava which I can in no /

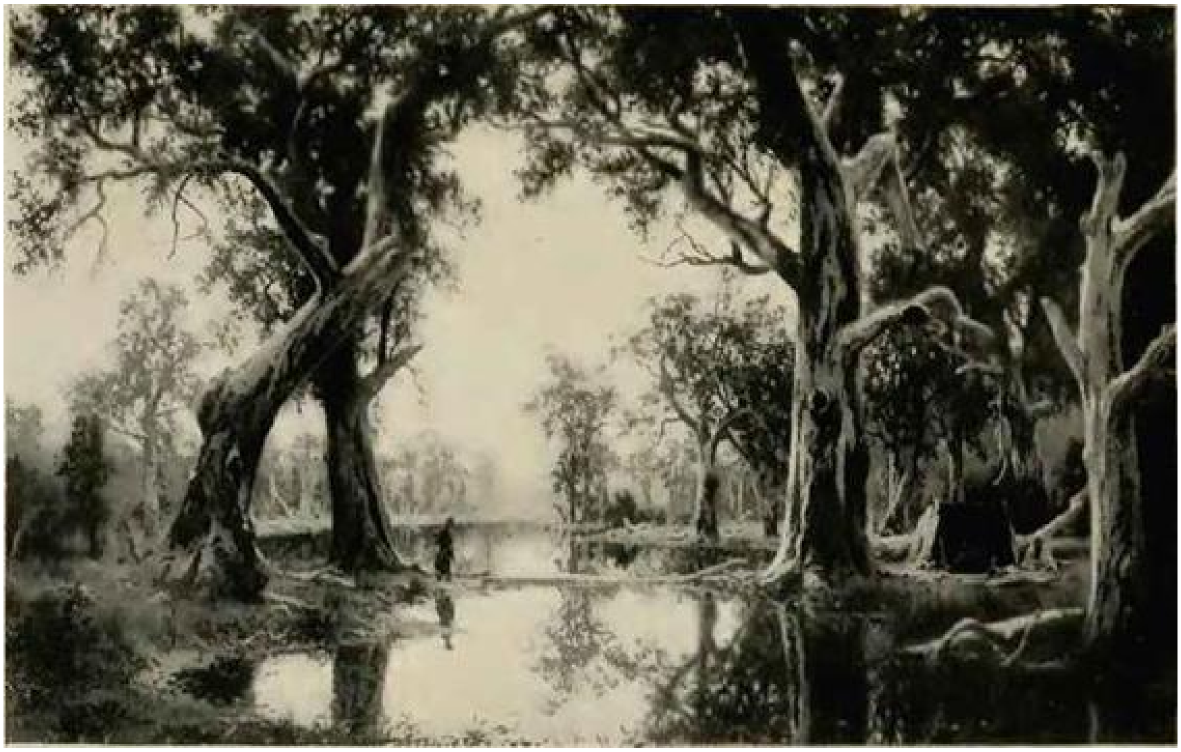

See page 127.

A TYPICAL AUSTRALIAN BACK-COUNTRY SCENE.

By H. J. Johnstone, a great painter who died unknown, (Painting in Adelaide National Gallery.)

way account for unless they were swept here in some tremendous world-shaking catastrophe which took the beach from St. Kilda and threw it up at Nerrin. God save Australia from such a night as that must have been if my reading of the signs be correct.

One of the sights of Nerrin is the shearing of the sheep by electric machinery. These sheep are merinos, which have been bred as wool-producers to such an extent that they can hardly see, and the wool grows thick right down to their hoofs. The large stately creature is a poor little shadow when his wonderful fleece has been taken from him. The electric clips with which the operation is performed, are, I am told, the invention of a brother of Garnet Wolseley, who worked away at the idea, earning the name of being a half- crazy crank, until at last the invention materialised and did away with the whole slow and clumsy process of the hand-shearer. It is not, however, a pleasant process to watch even for a man, far less a sensitive woman, for the poor creatures get cut about a good deal in the process. The shearer seizes a sheep, fixes him head up between his knees, and then plunges the swiftly-moving clippers into the thick wool which covers the stomach. With wonderful speed he runs it along and the creature is turned out of its covering, and left as bare as a turkey in a poulterer’s window, but, alas, its white and tender skin is too often gashed and ripped with vivid lines of crimson by the haste and clumsiness of the shearer. It was worse, they say, in the days of the hand-

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laid it’ out1 in wheat, cows, sheep and mixed farming. He worked from morning to night, his wife was up at four, and his child of ten was picking up stones behind the furrow. But he was already making his £500 a year. The personal equation was everything. One demobilised soldier was doing well. Another had come to smash. Very often a deal is made between the small man and the large holder, by which the latter lets the former a corner of his estate, taking a share, say one-third, of his profits as rent. That is a plan which suits everyone, and the landlord can gradually be bought out by the “ cockatoo farmer/’ as he is styled.

There is a great wool-clip this year, and prices in London are at record figures, so that Australia, which only retains 17 per cent, of her own wool, should have a very large sum to her credit. But she needs it. When one considers that the debt of this small community is heavier now than that of Great Britain before the war, one wonders how she can ever win through. But how can anyone win through? I don’t think we have fairly realised the financial problem yet, and I believe that within a very few years there will be an International Council which will be compelled to adopt some such scheme as the one put forward by my friend, Mr. Stilwell, under the name of “ The Great Plan.” This excellent idea was that every nation should reduce its warlike expenditure to an absolute minimum, that the difference between this minimum and the 1914 pre-war standard should be paid every year to a central fund, and that international bonds be now drawn upon the security of that fund, anticipating not its present amount but what it will represent in fifty years’ time. It is, in fact, making the future help the present, exactly as an estate which has some sudden great call upon it might reasonably anticipate or mortgage its own development. I believe that the salvation of the world may depend upon some such plan, and that the Council of the League of Nations is the agency by which it could be made operative.

Australia has had two plants which have been a perfect curse to her as covering the land and offering every impediment to agriculture. They are the Spinnifex in the West and the Mallee scrub in the East. The latter was considered a hopeless proposition, and the only good which could be extracted from it was that the root made an ideal fire, smouldering long and retaining heat. Suddenly, however, a genius named Lascelles discovered that this hopeless Mallee land was simply unrivalled for wheat, and his schemes have now brought seven million acres under the plough. This could hardly have been done if another genius, unnamed, had not invented a peculiar and ingenious plough, the “ stump-jump plough,” which can get round obstacles without breaking itself. It is not generally known that Australia really heads the world for the ingenuity and efficiency of her agricultural machinery. There is an inventor and manufacturer, MacKay, of Sunshine, who represents the last word in automatic reapers, etc. He exports them, a ship-load at a time, to the United States, which, if one considers the tariff which they have to surmount, is proof in itself of the supremacy of the article. With this wealth of machinery the real power of Australia in the world is greater than her population would indicate, for a five-million nation, which, by artificial aid, does the work normally done, by ten million people, becomes a ten-million nation so far as economic and financial strength is concerned.

On the other hand, Australia has her hindrances as well as her helps. Certainly the rabbits have done her no good, though the evil is for the moment under control. An efficient rabbiter gets a pound a day, and he is a wise insurance upon any estate, for the creatures, if they get the upper-hand, can do thousands of pounds’ worth of damage. This damage takes two shapes. First, they eat off all the grass and leave nothing at all for the sheep. Secondly, they burrow under walls, etc., and leave the whole place an untidy ruin. Little did the man who introduced the creature into Australia dream how the imprecations of a continent would descend upon him.

Alas! that we could not linger at Nerrin; but duty was calling at Melbourne. Besides, the days of the Melbourne Cup were at hand, and not only was Mr. Wynne a great pillar of the turf, but Mr. Osborne, owner of one of the most likely horses in the race, was one of the house-party. To Melbourne therefore we went. We shall always, however, be able in our dreams to revisit that broad verandah, the low hospitable fagade, the lovely lawn with its profusion of scented shrubs, the grove of towering gum trees, where the opossums lurked, and above all the great marsh where with dark clouds drifting across the moon we had stolen out at night to hear the crying of innumerable birds. That to us will always be the real Australia.

CHAPTER VI

The Melbourne Cup. — Psychic healing. — M. J. Bloomfield. — My own experience. — Direct healing. — Chaos and Ritual. — Government House Ball. — The Rescue Circle again. — Sitting with Mrs. Harris. — A good test case. — Australian botany. — The land of myrtles. — English cricket team. — Great final meeting in Melbourne.

It was the week of weeks in Melbourne when we returned from Nerrin, and everything connected with my mission was out of the question. When the whole world is living vividly here and now there is no room for the hereafter. Personally, I fear I was out of sympathy with it all, though we went to the Derby, where the whole male and a good part of the female population of Melbourne seemed to be assembled, reinforced by contingents from every State in the Federation. A fine handsome body of people they are when you see them en masse, strong, solid and capable, if perhaps a little lacking in those finer and more spiritual graces which come with a more matured society. The great supply of animal food must have its effect upon the mind as well as the body of a nation. Lord Forster appeared at the races, and probably, as an all round sportsman, took a genuine interest, but the fate of the Governor who did not take an interest would be a rather weary one — like that kind-hearted Roman Emperor, Claudius, if I remember right, who had to attend the gladiatorial shows, but did his business there so as to distract his attention from the arena. We managed to get out of attending the famous Melbourne Cup, and thereby found the St. Kilda Beach deserted for once, and I was able to spend a quiet day with my wife watching the children bathe and preparing for the more strenuous times ahead.

One psychic subject which has puzzled me more than any other, is that of magnetic healing. All my instincts as a doctor, and all the traditional teaching of the profession, cry out against unexplained effects, and the opening which their acceptance must give to the quack. The man who has paid a thousand pounds for his special knowledge has a natural distaste when he sees a man who does not know the subclavian artery from the pineal gland, effecting or claiming to effect cures on some quite unconventional line. And yet . . . and yet!

The ancients knew a great deal which we have forgotten, especially about the relation of one body to another. What did Hippocrates mean when he said, “ The affections suffered by the body the soul sees with shut eyes? “ I will show you exactly what he means. My friend, M. J. Bloom- field, as unselfish a worker for truth as the world can show, tried for nearly two years to develop the medical powers of a clairvoyant. Suddenly the result was attained, without warning. He was walking with a friend in Collins Street laughing over some joke. In an instant the laugh was struck from his lips. A man and woman were walking in front, their backs towards Bloomfield. To his amazement he saw the woman’s inner anatomy mapped out before him, and especially marked a rounded mass near the liver which he felt intuitively should not be there. His companion rallied him on his sudden gravity, and still more upon the cause of it, when it was explained. Bloomfield was so certain, however, that the vision was for a purpose, that he accosted the couple, and learned that the woman was actually about to be operated on for cancer. He reassured them, saying that the object seemed clearly defined and not to have widespread roots as a cancer might have. He was asked to be present at the operation, pointed out the exact place where he had seen the growth, and saw it extracted. It was, as he had said, innocuous. With this example in one’s mind the words of Hippocrates begin to assume a very definite meaning. I believe that the surgeon was so struck by the incident that he was most anxious that Bloomfield should aid him permanently in his diagnoses.

I will now give my own experience with Mr. Bloomfield. Denis had been suffering from certain pains, so I took him round as a test case. Bloomfield, without asking the boy any questions, gazed at him for a couple of minutes. He then said that the pains were in the stomach and head, pointing out the exact places. The cause, he said, was some slight stricture in the intestine and he proceeded to tell me several facts of Denis’s early history which were quite correct, and entirely beyond his normal knowledge. I have never in all my experience of medicine known so accurate a diagnosis.

Another lady, whom I knew, consulted him for what she called a “ medical reading/’ Without examining her in any way he said : “ What a peculiar throat you have! It is all pouched inside.” She admitted that this was so, and that doctors in London had commented upon it. By his clairvoyant gift he could see as much as they with their laryngoscopes.

Mr. Bloomfield has never accepted any fees for his remarkable gifts. Last year he gave 3,000 consultations. I have heard of mediums with similar powers in England, but I had never before been in actual contact with one. With all my professional prejudices I am bound to admit that they have powers, just as Braid and Esdaile, the pioneers of hypnotism, had powers, which must sooner or later be acknowledged.

There are, as I understand it, at least two quite different forms of psychic healing. In such cases as those quoted the result may be due only to subtle powers of the human organism which some have developed and others have not. The clairvoyance and the instinctive knowledge may both belong to the individual. In the other cases, however, there are the direct action and advice of a wise spirit control, a deceased physician usually, who has added to his worldly stock of knowledge. He can, of course, only act through a medium — and just there, alas, is the dangerous opening for fraud and quackery. But if anyone wishes to study the operation at its best let him read a tiny book called “ One thing I know,” which records the cure of the writer, the sister of an Anglican canon, when she had practically been given up by doctors of this world after fifteen years of bed, but was rescued by the ministrations of Dr. Beale, a physician on the other side. Dr. Beale received promotion to a higher sphere in the course of the treatment, which was completed by his assistant and successor. It is a very interesting and convincing narrative.

We were invited to another spiritual meeting at the Auditorium. Individuality runs riot sometimes in our movement. On this occasion a concert had been mixed up with a religious service and the effect was not good, though the musical part of the proceedings disclosed one young violinist, Master Hames, who should, I think, make a name in the world. I have always been against ritual, and yet now that I see the effect of being without it I begin to understand that some form of it, however elastic, is necessary. The clairvoyance was good, if genuine, but it offends me to see it turned off and on like a turn at a music hall. It is either nonsense or the holy of holies and mystery of mysteries. Perhaps it was just this conflict between the priest with his ritual and the medium without any, which split the early Christian Church, and ended in the complete victory of the ritual, which meant the extinction not only of the medium but of the living, visible, spiritual forces which he represented. Flowers, music, incense, architecture, all tried to fill the gap, but the soul of the thing had gone out of it. It must, I suppose, have been about the end of the third century that the process was completed, and the living thing had set into a petrifaction. That would be the time no doubt when, as already mentioned, special correctors were appointed to make the gospel texts square with the elaborate machinery of the Church. Only now does the central fire begin to glow once more through the ashes which have been heaped above it.

We attended the great annual ball at the Government House, where the Governor-General and his wife were supported by the Governors of the various States, the vice-regal party performing their own stately quadrille with a dense hedge of spectators around them. There were few chaperons, and nearly every one ended by dancing, so that it was a cheerful and festive scene. My friend Major Wood had played with the Governor- General in the same Hampshire eleven, and it was singular to think that after many years they should meet again like this.

Social gaieties are somewhat out of key with my present train of thought, and I was more in my element next evening at a meeting of the Rescue Circle under Mr. Tozer. Mr. Love was the medium and it was certainly a very remarkable and consistent performance. Even those who might imagine that the different characters depicted were in fact various strands of Mr. Love’s subconscious self, each dramatising its own peculiarities, must admit that it was a very absorbing exhibition. The circle sits round with prayer and hymns while Mr. Love falls into a trance state. He is then controlled by the Chinaman Quong, who is a person of such standing and wisdom in the other world, that other lower spirits have to obey him. The light is dim, but even so the characteristics of this Chinaman get across very clearly, the rolling head, the sidelong, humorous glance, the sly smile, the hands crossed and buried in what should be the voluminous folds of a mandarin’s gown. He greets the company in somewhat laboured English and says he has many who would be the better for our ministrations. “ Send them along, please! “ says Mr. Tozer. The medium suddenly sits straight and his whole face changes into an austere harshness. “ What is this ribald nonsense? “ he cries. “ Who are you, friend? “ says Tozer. “ My name is Mathew Barret. I testified in my life to the Lamb and to Him crucified. I ask again : What is this ribald nonsense? “ “ It is not nonsense, friend. We are here to help you and to teach you that you are held down and punished for your narrow ideas, and that you cannot progress until they are more charitable.” “ What I preached in life I still believe.” “ Tell us, friend, did you find it on the other side as you had preached? “ “ What do you mean? “ “ Well, did you, for example, see Christ? “ There was an embarrassed silence. “ No, I did not.” “ Have you seen the devil? “ “ No, I have not.” “ Then, bethink you, friend, that there may be truth in what we teach.” “ It is against all that I have preached.” A moment later the Chinaman was back with his rolling head and his wise smile. “ He good man — stupid man. He learn in time. Plenty time before him.”

We had a wonderful succession of “ revenants.” One was a very dignified Anglican, who always referred to the Control as “ this yellow person.” Another was an Australian soldier. “ I never thought I’d take my orders from a ‘ Chink,’” said he, “ but he says ‘ hist! ‘ and by gum you’ve got to ‘ hist’ and no bloomin’ error.” Yet another said he had gone down in the Monmouth. “ Can you tell me anything of the action? “ I asked. “ We never had a chance. It was just hell.” There was a world of feeling in his voice. He was greatly amused at their “ sky-pilot,” as he called the chaplain, and at his confusion when he found the other world quite different to what he had depicted. A terrifying Ghurkha came along, who still thought he was in action and charged about the circle, upsetting the medium’s chair, and only yielding to a mixture of force and persuasion. There were many others, most of whom returned thanks for the benefit derived from previous meetings. “ You’ve helped us quite a lot,” they said. Between each the old Chinese sage made comments upon the various cases, a kindly, wise old soul, with just a touch of mischievous humour running through him. We had an exhibition of the useless apostolic gift of tongues during the evening, for two of the ladies present broke out into what I was informed was the Maori language, keeping up a long and loud conversation. I was not able to check it, but it was certainly a coherent language of some sort. In all this there was nothing which one could take hold of and quote as absolutely and finally evidential, and yet the total effect was most convincing. I have been in touch with some Rescue Circles, however, where the identity of the “ patients,” as we may call them, was absolutely traced.

As I am on the subject of psychic experiences I may as well carry on, so that the reader who is out of sympathy may make a single skip of the lot. Mrs. Susanna Harris, the American voice- medium, who is well known in London, had arrived here shortly after ourselves, and gave us a sitting. Mrs. Harris’s powers have been much discussed, for while on the one hand she passed a most difficult test in London, where, with her mouth full of coloured water, she produced the same voice effects as on other occasions, she had no success in Norway when she was examined by their Psychic Research Committee; but I know how often these intellectuals ruin their own effects by their mental attitude, which acts like those anti-ferments which prevent a chemical effervescence. We must always get back to the principle, however, that one positive result is more important than a hundred negative ones — just as one successful demonstration in chemistry makes up for any number of failures. We cannot command spirit action, and we can only commiserate with, not blame, the medium who does not receive it when it is most desired. Personally I have sat four times with Mrs. Harris and I have not the faintest doubt that on each of these occasions I got true psychic results, though I cannot answer for what happens in Norway or elsewhere.

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AT MELBOURNE TOWN HALL, NOVEMBER I2TII, 1920.

Shortly after her arrival in Melbourne she gave us a seance in our private room at the hotel, no one being present save at my invitation. There were about twelve guests, some of whom had no psychic experience, and I do not think there was one of them who did not depart convinced that they had been in touch with preternatural forces. There were two controls, Harmony, with a high girlish treble voice, and a male control with a strong decisive bass. I sat next to Mrs. Harris, holding her hand in mine, and I can swear to it that again and again she spoke to me while the other voices were conversing with the audience. Harmony is a charming little creature, witty, friendly and innocent. I am quite ready to consider the opinion expressed by the Theosophists that such controls as Harmony with Mrs. Harris, Bella with Mrs. Brittain, Feda with Mrs. Leonard, and others are in reality nature-spirits who have never lived in the flesh but take an intelligent interest in our affairs and are anxious to help us. The male control, however, who always broke in with some final clinching remark in a deep voice, seemed altogether human.

Whilst these two controls formed, and were the chorus of the play, the real drama rested with the spirit voices, the same here as I have heard them under Mrs. Wriedt, Mrs. Johnson or Mr. Powell in England, intense, low, vibrating with emotion and with anxiety to get through. Nearly everyone in the circle had communications which satisfied them. One lady who had mourned her husband very deeply had the inexpressible satisfaction of hearing his voice thanking her for putting flowers before his photograph, a fact which no one else could know. A voice claiming to be “ Moore- Usborne Moore,” came in front of me. I said, “ Well, Admiral, we never met, but we corresponded in life.” He said, “ Yes, and we disagreed,” which was true. Then there came a voice which claimed to be Mr. J. Morse, the eminent pioneer of Spiritualism. I said, “Mr. Morse, if that is you, you can tell me where we met last.” He answered, “ Was it not in ‘ Light’ office in London? “ I said, “ No, surely it was when you took the chair for me at that great meeting at Sheffield.” He answered, “Well, we lose some of our memory in passing.” As a matter of fact he was perfectly right, for after the sitting both my wife and I remembered that I had exchanged a word or two with him as I was coming out of Light office at least a year after the Sheffield meeting. This was a good test as telepathy was excluded. General Sir Alfred Turner also came and said that he remembered our conversations on earth. When I asked him whether he had found the conditions beyond the grave as happy as he expected he answered, “ infinitely more so.” Altogether I should think that not less than twenty spirits manifested during this remarkable seance. The result may have been the better because Mrs. Harris had been laid up in bed for a week beforehand, and so we had her full force. I fancy that like most mediums, she habitually overworks her wonderful powers. Such seances have been going on now for seventy years, with innumerable witnesses of credit who will testify, as I have done here, that all fraud or mistake was out of the question. And still the men of no experience shake their heads. I wonder how long they will succeed in standing between the world and the consolation which God has sent us.

There is one thing very clear about mediumship and that is that it bears no relation to physical form. Mrs. Harris is a very large lady, tall and Junoesque, a figure which would catch the eye in any assembly. She has, I believe, a dash of the mystic Red Indian blood in her, which may be connected with her powers. Bailey, on the other hand, is a little, ginger-coloured man, while Campbell of Sydney, who is said to have apport powers which equal Bailey, is a stout man, rather like the late Corney Grain. Every shape and every quality of vessel may hold the psychic essence.

I spend such spare time as I have in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, which is, I think, absolutely the most beautiful place that I have ever seen. I do not know what genius laid them out, but the effect is a succession of the most lovely vistas, where flowers, shrubs, large trees and stretches of water, are combined in an extraordinary harmony. Green swards slope down to many tinted groves, and they in turn droop over still ponds mottled with lovely water plants. It is an instructive as well as a beautiful place, for every tree has its visiting card attached and one soon comes to know them. Australia is preeminently the Land of the Myrtles, for a large proportion of its vegetation comes under this one order, which includes the gum trees, of which there are 170 varieties. They all shed their bark instead of their leaves, and have a generally untidy, not to say indecent appearance, as they stand with their covering in tatters and their white under- bark shining through the rents. There is not the same variety of species in Australia as in England, and it greatly helps a superficial botanist like myself, for when you have learned the ti-tree, the wild fig tree and the gum trees, you will be on terms with nature wherever you go. New Zealand however offers quite a fresh lot of problems.

The Melbourne Cricket Club has made me an honorary member, so Denis and I went down there, where we met the giant bowler, Hugh Trumble, who left so redoubtable a name in England. As the Chela may look at the Yogi so did Denis, with adoring eyes, gaze upon Trumble, which so touched his kind heart that he produced a cricket ball, used in some famous match, which he gave to the boy — a treasure which will be reverently brought back to England. I fancy Denis slept with it that night, as he certainly did in his pads and gloves the first time that he owned them.

We saw the English team play Victoria, and it was pleasant to see the well-known faces once more. The luck was all one way, for Armstrong was on the sick list, and Armstrong is the mainstay of Victorian cricket. Rain came at a critical moment also, and gave Woolley and Rhodes a wicket which was impossible for a batsman. However, it was all good practice for the more exacting games of the future. It should be a fine eleven which contains a genius like Hobbs, backed by such men as the bustling bulldog, Hendren, a great out-field as well as a grand bat, or the wily, dangerous Hearne, or Douglas, cricketer, boxer, above all warrior, a worthy leader of Englishmen. Hearne I remember as little more than a boy, when he promised to carry on the glories of that remarkable family, of which George and Alec were my own playmates. He has ended by proving himself the greatest of them all.

My long interval of enforced rest came at last to an end, when the race fever had spent itself, and I was able to have my last great meeting at the Town Hall. It really was a great meeting, as the photograph of it will show. I spoke for over two hours, ending up by showing a selection of the photographs. I dealt faithfully with the treatment given to me by the Argus. I take the extract from the published account. “ On this, the last time in my life that I shall address a Melbourne audience, I wish to thank the people for the courtesy with which we have been received. It would, however, be hypocritical upon my part if I were to thank the Press. A week before I entered Melbourne the Argus declared that I was an emissary of the devil (laughter). I care nothing for that. I am out for a fight and can take any knocks that come. But the Argus refused to publish a word I said. I came 12,000

miles to give you a message of hope and comfort, and I appeal to you to say whether three or four gentlemen sitting in a board-room have a right to say to the people of Melbourne, ‘ You shall not listen to that man nor read one word of what he has to say.’ (Cries of ‘ Shame! ‘) You, I am sure, resent being spoon-fed in such a manner.” The audience showed in the most hearty fashion that they did resent it, and they cheered loudly when I pointed out that my remarks did not arise, as anyone could see by looking round, from any feeling on my part that my mission had failed to gain popular support. It was a great evening, and^ I have never addressed a more sympathetic audience. The difficulty always is for my wife and myself to escape from our kind well-wishers, and it is touching and heartening to hear the sincere “ God bless you! “ which they shower upon us as we pass.

This then was the climax of our mission in Melbourne. It was marred by the long but unavoidable delay in the middle, but it began well and ended splendidly. On November 13th we left the beautiful town behind us, and embarked upon what we felt would be a much more adventurous period at Sydney, for all we had heard showed that both our friends and our enemies were more active in the great seaport of New South Wales.

CHAPTER VII

Great reception at Sydney. — Importance of Sydney. — Journalistic luncheon. — A psychic epidemic. — ^Gregory. — Barracking. — Town Hall reception. — Regulation of Spiritualism. — An ether apport — Surfing at Manly. — A challenge. — Bigoted opponents. — A disgruntled photographer. — Outing in the Harbour. — Dr. Mildred Creed. — Leon Gellert. — Norman Lindsay. — Bishop Leadbeater. — Our relations with Theosophy. — Incongruities of H.P.B. — Of D.D. Home.

We had a wonderful reception at Sydney. I have a great shrinking from such deputations as they catch you at the moment when you are exhausted and unkempt after a long journey, and when you need all your energies to collect your baggage and belongings so as to make your way to your hotel. But on this occasion it was so hearty, and the crowd of faces beamed such good wishes upon us that it was quite a pick-me-up to all of us. “ God bless you! “ and “ Thank God you have come! “ reached us from all sides. My wife, covered with flowers, was hustled off in one direction, while I was borne away in another, and each of the children was the centre of a separate group. Major Wood had gone off to see to the luggage, and Jakeman was herself embedded somewhere in the crowd, so at last I had to shout, “ Where’s that little girl? Where’s that little boy? “ until we reassembled and were able, laden with bouquets, to reach our carriage. The evening paper spread itself over the scene.

“ When Sir Conan Doyle, his wife and their three children arrived from Melbourne by the express this morning, an assembly of Spiritualists accorded them a splendid greeting. Men swung their hats high and cheered, women danced in their excitement, and many of their number rushed the party with rare bouquets. The excitement was at its highest, and Sir Conan being literally carried along the platform by the pressing crowds, when a digger arrived on the outskirts. 4 Who’s that? ‘ he asked of nobody in particular. Almost immediately an urchin replied, 4 The bloke that wrote “ Sherlock Holmes.” ‘ When asked if the latter gentleman was really and irretrievably dead the author of his being remarked, ‘ Well, you can say that a coroner has never sat upon him.’ “

It was a grand start, and we felt at once in a larger and more vigorous world, where, if we had fiercer foes, we at least had warm and well-organised friends. Better friends than those of Melbourne do not exist, but there was a method and cohesion about Sydney which impressed us from the first day to the last. There seemed, also, to be fewer of those schisms which are the bane of our movement. If Wells' dictum that organisation is death has truth in it, then we are very much alive.

We had rooms in Petty's Hotel, which is an old-world hostel with a very quiet, soothing atmosphere. There I was at once engaged with the usual succession of journalists with a long list of questions which ranged from the destiny of the human soul to the chances of the test match. What with the constant visitors, the unpacking of our trunks, and the settling down of the children, we were a very weary band before evening.

I had no idea that Sydney was so great a place. The population is now very nearly a million, which represents more than one-sixth of the whole vast Continent. It seems a weak point of the Australian system that 41 per cent, of the whole population dwell in the six capital cities. The vital statistics of Sydney are extraordinarily good, for the death rate is now only twelve per thousand per annum. Our standard in such matters is continually rising, for I can remember the days when twenty per thousand was reckoned to be a very good result. In every civic amenity Sydney stands very high. Her Botanical Gardens are not so supremely good as those of Melbourne, but her Zoo is among the very best in the wond. The animals seem to be confined by trenches rather than by bars, so that they have the appearance of being at large. It was only after Jakeman had done a level hundred with a child under each arm that she realised that a bear, which she saw approaching, was not really in a state of freedom.

As to the natural situation of Sydney, especially its harbour, it is so world-renowned that it is hardly necessary to allude to it. I can well imagine that a Sydney man would grow homesick elsewhere, for he could never find the same surroundings. The splendid landlocked bay with its numerous side estuaries and its narrow entrance is a grand playground for a sea-loving race. On a Saturday it is covered with every kind of craft, from canoe to hundred-tonner. The fact that the water swarms with sharks seems to present no fears to these strong-nerved people, and I have found myself horrified as I watched little craft, manned by boys, heeling over in a fresh breeze until the water was up to their gunwales. At very long intervals some one gets eaten, but the fun goes on all the same.

The people of Sydney have their residences (bungalows with verandahs) all round this beautiful bay, forming dozens of little townlets. The system of ferry steamers becomes as important as the trams, and is extraordinarily cheap and convenient. To Manly, for example, which lies some eight miles out, and is a favourite watering place, the fare is fivepence for adults and twopence for children. So frequent are the boats that you never worry about catching them, for if one is gone another will presently start. Thus, the whole life of Sydney seems to converge into the Circular Quay, from which as many as half a dozen of these busy little steamers may be seen casting off simultaneously for one or another of the oversea suburbs. Now and then, in a real cyclone, the service gets suspended, but it is a rare event, and there is a supplementary, but roundabout, service of trams.

The journalists of New South Wales gave a lunch to my wife and myself, which was a very pleasant function. One leading journalist announced, amid laughter, that he had actually consulted me professionally in my doctoring days, and had lived to tell the tale, which contradicts the base insinuation of some orator who remarked once that though I was known to have practised, no living patient of mine had ever yet been seen.

Nothing could have been more successful than my first lecture, which filled the Town Hall. There were evidently a few people who had come with intent to make a scene, but I had my audience so entirely with me, that it was impossible to cause real trouble. One fanatic near the door cried out, " Anti-Christ! " several times, and was then bundled out. Another, when I described how my son had come back to me, cried out that it was the devil, but on my saying with a laugh that such a remark showed the queer workings of some people's minds, the people cheered loudly in assent. Altogether it was a great success, which was repeated in the second, and culminated in the third, when, with a hot summer day, and the English cricketers making their debut, I still broke the record for a Town Hall matinee. The rush was more than the officials could cope with, and I had to stand for ten long minutes looking at the audience before it was'settled enough for me to begin. Some spiritualists in the audience struck up " Lead, Kindly Light 1 " which gave the right note to the assemblage. Mr. Smythe, with all his experience, was amazed at our results. " This is no longer a mere success," he cried. " It is a triumph. It is an epidemic! " Surely, it will leave some permanent good behind it and turn the public mind from religious shadows to realities.

We spent one restful day seeing our cricketers play New South Wales. After a promising start they were beaten owing to a phenomenal first-wicket stand in the second innings by Macartney and Collins, both batsmen topping the hundred. Gregory seemed a dangerous bowler, making the ball rise shoulder high even on that Bulli wicket, where midstump is as much as an ordinary bowler can attain. He is a tiger of a man, putting every ounce of his strength and inch of his great height into every ball, with none of the artistic finesse of a Spofforth, but very effective all the same. We have no one of the same class, and that will win Australia the rubber unless I am — as I hope I am — a false prophet. I was not much impressed either by the manners or by the knowledge of the game shown by the barrackers. Every now and then, out of the mass of people who darken the grass slopes round the ground, you hear a raucous voice giving advice to the captain, or, perhaps, conjuring a fast bowler to bowl at the wicket when the man is keeping a perfect length outside the off stump and trying to serve his three slips. When Mailey went on, because he was slow and seemed easy, they began to jeer, and, yet, you had only to watch the batsman to see that the ball was doing a lot and kept him guessing. One wonders why the neighbours of these bawlers tolerate it. In England such men would soon be made to feel that they were ill-mannered nuisances, I am bound to testify, however, that they seem quite impartial, and that the English team had no special cause for complaint. I may also add that, apart from this cricketing peculiarity, which is common to all the States, the Sydney crowd is said to be one of the most good-humoured and orderly in the world. My own observation confirms this, and I should say that there was a good deal less drunkenness than in Melbourne, but, perhaps the races gave me an exaggerated impression of the latter.

On Sunday, 28th, the spiritualists gave the pilgrims (as they called us) a reception at the Town Hall. There was not a seat vacant, and the sight of these 3,500 well-dressed, intelligent people must have taught the press that the movement is not to be despised. There are at least 10,000 professed spiritualists in Sydney, and even as a political force they demand consideration. The seven of us were placed in the front of the platform, and the service was very dignified and impressive. When the great audience sang, “ God hold you safely till we meet once more,” it was almost overpowering, for it is a beautiful tune, and was sung with real feeling. In my remarks I covered a good deal of ground, but very particularly I warned them against all worldly use of this great knowledge, whether it be fortune telling, prophecies about races and stocks, or any other prostitution of our subject. I also exhorted them when they found fraud to expose it at once, as their British brethren do, and never to trifle with truth. When I had finished, the whole 3,500 people stood up, and everyone waved a handkerchief, producing a really wonderful scene. We can never forget it.

Once more I must take refuge behind the local Observer. " The scene as Sir Arthur rose will be long remembered by those who were privileged to witness it. A sea of waving handkerchiefs confronted the speaker, acclaiming silently and reverently the deep esteem in which he was held by all present. Never has Sir Arthur's earnestness in his mission been more apparent than on this occasion as he proceeded with a heart to heart talk with the spiritualists present, offering friendly criticisms, sound advice, and encouragement to the adherents of the great movement.

" ' He had got,' he said, ' so much into the habit of lecturing that he was going to lecture the spiritualists.' With a flash of humour Sir Arthur added : ' It does none of us any harm to be lectured occasionally. I am a married man myself' (laughter). 'I would say to the spiritualists, ' For Heaven's sake keep this thing high and unspotted. Don't let it drop into the regions of fortune telling and other things which leave such an ugly impression on the public mind, and which we find it so difficult to justify. Keep it in its most religious and purest aspect." At the same time, I expressed my view that there was no reason at all why a medium should not receive moderate payment for work done, since it is impossible, otherwise, that he can live.

Every solid spiritualist would, I am sure, agree with me that our whole subject needs regulating, and is in an unsatisfactory condition. We cannot approve of the sensation mongers who run from medium to medium (or possibly pretended medium) with no object but excitement or curiosity. The trouble is that you have to recognise a thing, before you can regulate it, and the public has not properly recognised us. Let them frankly do so, and take us into counsel, and then we shall get things on a solid basis. Personally, I would be ready to go so far as to agree that an inquirer should take out a formal permit to consult a medium, showing that it was done for some definite object, if in return we could get State recognition for those mediums who were recommended as genuine by valid spiritual authorities. My friends will think this a reactionary proposition, but none the less I feel the need of regulation almost as much as I do that of recognition.

One event which occurred to me at Sydney I shall always regard as an instance of that fostering care of which I have been conscious ever since we set forth upon our journey. I had been overtired, had slept badly and had a large meeting in the evening, so that it was imperative that I should have a nap in the afternoon. My brain was racing, however, and I could get no rest or prospect of any. The second floor window was slightly open behind me, and outside was a broad open space, shimmering in the heat of a summer day. Suddenly, as I lay there, I was aware of a very distinct pungent smell of ether, coming in waves ‘irom outside. With each fresh wave I felt my over-excited nerves calming down as the sea does when oil is poured upon it. Within a few minutes I was in a deep sleep, and woke all ready for my evening’s work. I looked out of the window and tried to picture where the ether could have come from; then I returned thanks for one more benefit received. I do not suppose that I am alone in such interpositions, but I think that our minds are so centred on this tiny mud patch, that we are deaf and blind to all that impinges on us from beyond.

Having finished in Sydney, and my New Zealand date having not yet arrived, we shifted our quarters to Manly, upon the sea coast, about eight miles from the town. Here we all devoted ourselves to surf-bathing, spending a good deal of our day in the water, as is the custom of the place. It is a real romp with Nature, for the great Pacific rollers come sweeping in and break over you, rolling you over on the sand if they catch you unawares. It was a golden patch in our restless lives. There were surf boards, and I am told that there were men competent to ride them, but I saw none of Jack London’s Sun Gods riding in erect upon the crest of the great rollers. Alas, poor Jack London! What right had such a man to die, he who had more vim and passion, and knowledge of varied life than the very best of us? Apart from all his splendid exuberance and exaggeration he had very real roots of grand literature within him. I remember, particularly, the little episodes of bygone days in “ The Jacket.” The man who wrote those could do anything. Those whom the American public love die young. Frank Norris, Harold Frederic Stephen Crane, the author of “ David Harum,” and now Jack London — but the greatest of these was Jack London.

There is a grand beach at Manly, and the thundering rollers carry in some flotsam from the great ocean. One morning the place was covered with beautiful blue jelly-fish, like little Roman lamps with tendrils hanging down. I picked up one of these pretty things, and was just marvelling at its complete construction when I discovered that it was even more complete than I supposed, for it gave me a violent sting. For a day or two I had reason to remember my little blue castaway, with his up-to-date fittings for keeping the stranger at a distance.

I was baited at Sydney by a person of the name of Simpson, representing Christianity, though I was never clear what particular branch of religion he represented, and he was disowned by some leaders of Christian Thought. I believe he was president of the Christian Evidence Society. His opposition, though vigorous, and occasionally personal, was perfectly legitimate, but his well- advertised meeting at the Town Hall (though no charge was made for admission) was not a success. His constant demand was that I should meet him in debate, which was, of course, out of the question, since no debate is possible between a man who considers a text to be final, and one who cannot take this view. My whole energies, so much needed for my obvious work, would have 161

l been frittered away in barren controversies had I allowed my hand to be forced. I had learned my lesson, however, at the M'Cabe debate in London, when I saw clearly that nothing could come from such proceedings. On the other hand, I conceived the idea of what would be a real test, and I issued it as a challenge in the public press. " It is clear," I said, " that one single case of spirit return proves our whole contention. Therefore, let the question be concentrated upon one, or, if necessary, upon three cases. These I would undertake to prove, producing my witnesses in the usual way. My opponent would act the part of hostile counsel, cross-examining and criticising my facts. The case would be decided by a majority vote of a jury of twelve, chosen from men of standing, who pledged themselves as open- minded on the question. Such a test could obviously only take place in a room of limited dimensions, so that no money would be involved and truth only be at stake. That is all that I seek. If such a test can be arranged I am ready for it, either before I leave, or after I return from New Zealand." This challenge was not taken up by my opponents.

Mr. Simpson had a long tirade in the Sydney papers about the evil religious effects of my mission, which caused me to write a reply in which I defined our position in a way which may be instructive to others. I said : —

" The tenets which we spiritualists preach and which I uphold upon the platform are that any man who is deriving spirituality from his creed, be that creed what it may, is learning the lesson of life. For this reason we would not attack your creed, however repulsive it might seem to us, so long as you and your colleagues might be getting any benefit from it. We desire to go our own way, saying what we know to be true, and claiming from others the same liberty of conscience and of expression which we freely grant to them.

“ You, on the other hand, go out of your way to attack us, to call us evil names, and to pretend that those loved ones who return to us are in truth devils, and that our phenomena, though they are obviously of the same sort as those which are associated with early Christianity, are diabolical in their nature. This absurd view is put forward without a shadow of proof, and entirely upon the supposed meaning of certain ancient texts which refer in reality to a very different matter, but which are strained and twisted to suit your purpose.

“It is men like you and your colleagues who, by your parody of Christianity and your constant exhibition of those very qualities which Christ denounced in the Pharisees, have driven many reasonable people away from religion and left the churches half empty. Your predecessors, who took the same narrow view of the literal interpretation of the Bible, were guilty of the murder of many thousands of defenceless old women who were burned in deference to the text, ‘ Suffer no witch to live.’ Undeterred by this terrible result of the literal reading, you still advocate it, although you must be well aware that polygamy, slavery and murder can all be justified by such a course.

“ In conclusion, let me give you the advice to reconsider your position, to be more charitable to your neighbours, and to devote your redundant energies to combating the utter materialism which is all round you, instead of railing so bitterly at those who are proving immortality and the need for good living in a way which meets their spiritual wants, even though it is foreign to yours.”

A photographer, named Mark Blow, also caused me annoyance by announcing that my photographs were fakes, and that he was prepared to give £25 to any charity if he could not reproduce them. I at once offered the same sum if he could do so, and I met him by appointment at the office of the evening paper, the editor being present to see fair play. I placed my money on the table, but Mr. Blow did not cover it. I then produced a packet of plates from my pocket and suggested that we go straight across to Mr. Blow’s studio and produce the photographs. He replied by asking me a long string of questions as to the conditions under which the Crewe photographs were produced, noting down all my answers. I then renewed my proposition. He answered that it was absurd to expect him to produce a spirit photograph since he did not believe in such foolish things. I answered that I did not ask him to produce a spirit photograph, but to fulfil his promise which was to produce a similar result upon the plate under similar conditions. He held out that they should be his own conditions. I

pointed out that any school boy could make a half-exposed impression upon a plate, and that the whole test lay in the conditions. As he refused to submit to test conditions the matter fell through, as all such foolish challenges fall through. It was equally foolish on my part to have taken any notice of it.

I had a conversation with Mr. Maskell, the capable Secretary of the Sydney spiritualists, in which he described how he came out originally from Leicester to Australia. He had at that time developed some power of clairvoyance, but it was very intermittent. He had hesitated in his mind whether he should emigrate to Australia, and sat one night debating it within himself, while his little son sat at the table cutting patterns out of paper. Maskell said to his spirit guides, mentally, “ If it is good that I go abroad give me the vision of a star. If not, let it be a circle.” He waited for half an hour or so, but no vision came, and he was rising in disappointment when the little boy turned round and said, “ Daddy, here is a star for you,” handing over one which he had just cut. He has had no reason to regret the subsequent decision.

We had a very quiet, comfortable, and healthy ten days at the Pacific Hotel at Manly, which was broken only by an excursion which the Sydney spiritualists had organised for us in a special steamer, with the intention of showing us the glories of the harbour. Our party assembled on Manly Pier, and the steamer was still far away when we saw the fluttering handkerchiefs which announced that they had sighted us. It was a long programme, including a picnic lunch, but it all went off with great success and good feeling. It was fairly rough within the harbour, and some of the party were sea sick, but the general good spirits rose above such trifles, and we spent the day in goodly fellowship. On Sunday I was asked to speak to his congregation by Mr. Sanders, a very intelligent young Congregational Minister of Manly, far above the level of Australasian or, indeed, British clerics. It was a novel experience for me to be in a Nonconformist pulpit, but I found an excellent audience, and I hope that they in turn found something comforting and new.

One of the most interesting men whom I met in Australia was Dr. Creed, of the New South Wales Parliament, an elderly medical man who has held high posts in the Government. He is blessed with that supreme gift, a mind which takes a keen interest in everything which he meets in life. His researches vary from the cure of diabetes and of alcoholism (both of which he thinks that he has attained) down to the study of Australian Aborigines and of the palaeontology of his country. I was interested to find the very high opinion which he has of the brains of the black fellows, and he asserts that their results at the school which is devoted to their education are as high as with the white Australians. They train into excellent telegraphic operators and other employments needing quick intelligence. The increasing brain power of the human race seems to be in the direction of originating rather than of merely accomplishing. Many can do the latter, but only the very highest can do the former. Dr. Creed is clear upon the fact that no very ancient remains of any sort are to be found anywhere in Australia, which would seem to be against the view of a Lemurian civilisation, unless the main seat of it lay to the north where the scattered islands represent the mountain tops of the ancient continent. Dr. Creed was one of the very few public men who had the intelligence or the courage to admit the strength of the spiritual position, and he assured me that he would help in any way.

Another man whom I was fortunate to meet was Leon Gellert, a very young poet, who promises to be the rising man in Australia in this, the supreme branch of literature. He served in the war, and his verses from the front attain a very high level. His volume of war poems represents the most notable literary achievement of recent years, and its value is enhanced by being illustrated by Norman Lindsay, whom I look upon as one of the greatest artists of our time. I have seen three pictures of his, “ The Goths,” “ Who Comes? “ and “ The Crucifixion of Venus,” each of which, in widely different ways, seemed very remarkable. Indeed, it is the versatility of the man that is his charm, and now that he is turning more and more from the material to the spiritual it is impossible to say how high a level he may attain. Another Australian whose works I have greatly admired is Henry Lawson, whose sketches of bush life in “ Joe Wilson ‘ and other of his studies, remind one of a subdued Bret Harte. He is a considerable poet also, and his war poem, “ England Yet,” could hardly be matched.

Yet another interesting figure whom I met in Sydney was Bishop Leadbeater, formerly a close colleague of Mrs. Besant in the Theosophical movement, and now a prelate of the so-called Liberal Catholic Church, which aims at preserving the traditions and forms of the old Roman Church, but supplementing them with all modern spiritual knowledge. I fear I am utterly out of sympathy with elaborate forms, which always in the end seem to me to take the place of facts, and to become a husk without a kernel, but none the less I can see a definite mission for such a church as appealing to a certain class of mind. Leadbeater, who has suffered from unjust aspersion in the past, is a venerable and striking figure. His claims to clairvoyant and other occult powers are very definite, and so far as I had the opportunity of observing him, he certainly lives the ascetic life, which the maintenance of such power demands. His books, especially the little one upon the Astral Plane, seem to me among the best of the sort.

But the whole subject of Theosophy is to me a perpetual puzzle. I asked for proofs and spiritualism has given them to me. But why should I abandon one faith in order to embrace another one? I have done with faith. It is a golden mist in which human beings wander in devious tracks with many a collision. I need the white clear light of knowledge. For that we build from below, brick upon brick, never getting beyond the provable fact. There is the building which will last. But these others seem to build from above downwards, beginning by the assumption that there is supreme human wisdom at the apex. It may be so. But it is a dangerous habit of thought which has led the race astray before, and may again. Yet, I am struck by the fact that this ancient wisdom does describe the etheric body, the astral world, and the general scheme which we have proved for ourselves. But when the high priestess of the cult wrote of this she said so much that was against all our own spiritual experience, that we feel she was in touch with something very different from our angels of light. Her followers appreciate that now, and are more charitable than she, but what is the worth of her occult knowledge if she so completely misread that which lies nearest to us, and how can we hope that she is more correct when she speaks of that which is at a distance?

I was deeply attracted by the subject once, but Madame Blavatsky’s personality and record repelled me. I have read the defence, and yet Hodgson and the Coulombs seem to me to hold the field. Could any conspiracy be so broad that it included numerous forged letters, trap doors cut in floors, and actually corroborative accounts in the books of a flower seller in the bazaar? On the other hand, there is ample evidence of real psychic powers, and of the permanent esteem of men like Sinnett and Olcott, whom none could fail to respect. It is the attitude of these honourable men which commends and upholds her, but sometimes it seems hard to justify it. As an example, in the latter years of her life she wrote a book, “ The Caves and Jungles of Hindustan,” in which she describes the fearsome adventures which she and Olcott had in certain expeditions, falling down precipices and other such escapes. Olcott, like the honest gentleman he was, writes in his diary that there is not a word of truth in this, and that it is pure fiction. And yet, after this very damaging admission, in the same page he winds up, “ Ah, if the world ever comes to know who was the mighty entity, who laboured sixty years under that quivering mask of flesh, it will repent its cruel treatment of H. P. B., and be amazed at the depth of its ignorance.” These are the things which make it so difficult to understand either her or the cult with which she was associated. Had she never lived these men and women would, as it seems to me, have been the natural leaders of the spiritualist movement, and instead of living in the intellectual enjoyment of far-off systems they would have concentrated upon the all-important work of teaching poor suffering humanity what is the meaning of the dark shadow which looms upon their path. Even now I see no reason why they should not come back to those who need them, and help them forward upon their rocky road.

Of course, we spiritualists are ourselves vulnerable upon the subject of the lives of some of our mediums, but we carefully dissociate those lives from the powers which use the physical frame of the medium for their own purposes, just as the religious and inspired poetry of a Verlaine may be held separate from his dissipated life. Whilst upon this subject I may say that whilst in Australia I had some interesting letters from a solicitor named Rymer. All students of spiritualism will remember that when Daniel Home first came to England in the early fifties he received great kindness from the Rymer family, who then lived at Ealing. Old Rymer treated him entirely as one of the family. This Bendigo Rymer was the grandson of Home’s benefactor, and he had no love for the great medium because he considered that he had acted with ingratitude towards his people. The actual letters of his father, which he permitted me to read, bore out this statement, and I put it on record because I have said much in praise of Home, and the balance should be held true. These letters, dating from about ‘57, show that one of the sons of old Rymer was sent to travel upon the Continent to study art, and that Home was his companion. They were as close as brothers, but when they reached Florence, and Home became a personage in society there, he drifted away from Rymer, whose letters are those of a splendid young man. Home's health was already indifferent, and while he was laid up in his hotel he seems to have been fairly kidnapped by a strong-minded society lady of title, an Englishwoman living apart from her husband. For weeks he lived at her villa, though the state of his health would suggest that it was rather as patient than lover. What was more culpable was that he answered the letters of his comrade very rudely and showed no sense of gratitude for all that the family had done for him. I have read the actual letters and confess that I was chilled and disappointed. Home was an artist as well as a medium, the most unstable combination possible, full of emotions, flying quickly to extremes, capable of heroisms and self-denials, but also of vanities and ill-humour. On this occasion the latter side of his character was too apparent. To counteract the effect produced upon one's mind one should read in Home's Life the letter of the Bavarian captain whom he rescued upon the field of battle, or of the many unfortunates whom he aided with unobtrusive charity. It cannot, however, be too often repeated — since it is never grasped by our critics — that the actual character of a man is as much separate from his mediumistic powers, as it would be from his musical powers. Both are inborn gifts beyond the control of their possessor. The medium is the telegraph instrument and the telegraph boy united in one, but the real power is that which transmits the message, which he only receives and delivers. The remark applies to the Fox sisters as much as it does to Home.

Talking about Home, it is astonishing how the adverse judgment of the Vice-Chancellor Gifford, a materialist, absolutely ignorant of psychic matters, has influenced the minds of men. The very materialists who quote it, would not attach the slightest importance to the opinion of an orthodox judge upon the views of Hume, Payne, or any free-thinker. It is like quoting a Roman tribune against a Christian. The real facts of the case are perfectly clear to. anyone who reads the documents with care. The best proof of how blameless Home was in the matter is that of all the men of honour with whom he was on intimate terms — men like Robert Chambers, Carter Hall, Lord Seaton, Lord Adare and others — not one relaxed in their friendship after the trial. This was in 1866, but in 1868 we find these young noblemen on Christian-name terms with the man who would have been outside the pale of society had the accusations of his enemies been true.

Whilst we were in Sydney, a peculiar ship, now called the “ Marella,” was brought into the harbour as part of the German ship surrender. It is commonly reported that this vessel, of very grandiose construction, was built to conduct the Kaiser upon a triumphal progress round the world after he had won his war. It is, however, only of 8,000 tons, and, personally, I cannot believe that this would have had room for his swollen head, had he indeed been the victor. All the fittings, even to the carpet holders, are of German silver. The saloon is of pure marble, eighty by fifty, with beautiful hand-painted landscapes. The smoke-room is the reproduction of one in Potsdam Palace. There is a great swimming bath which can be warmed. Altogether a very notable ship, and an index, not only of the danger escaped, but of the danger to come, in the form of the super-excellence of German design and manufacture.

Our post-bag is very full, and it takes Major Wood and myself all our time to keep up with the letters. Many of them are so wonderful that I wish I had preserved them all, but it would have meant adding another trunk to our baggage. There are a few samples which have been rescued. Many people seemed to think that I was myself a wandering medium, and I got this sort of missive :

“ Dear Sir, — I am very anxious to ask you a question, trusting you will answer me. What I wish to know I have been corresponding with a gentleman for nearly three years. From this letter can you tell me if I will marry him. I want you to answer this as I am keeping it strictly private and would dearly love you to answer this message if possible, and if I will do quite right if I marry him. Trusting to hear from you soon. Yours faithfully .

P.S. — I thoroughly believe in Spirit-ualism.1f Here is another.

“ Honored Sir, — Just a few lines in limited time to ask you if you tell the future. If so, what is your charges? Please excuse no stamped and ad. envelope — out of stamps and in haste to catch mail. Please excuse “

On the other hand, I had many which were splendidly instructive and helpful. I was particularly struck by one series of spirit messages which were received in automatic writing by a man living in the Bush in North Queensland and thrown upon his own resources. They were descriptive of life in the beyond, and were in parts extremely corroborative of the Vale

Owen messages, though they had been taken long prior to that date. Some of the points of resemblance were so marked and so unusual that they seem clearly to come from a common inspiration. As an example, this script spoke of the creative power of thought in the beyond, but added the detail that when the object to be created was large and important a band of thinkers was required, just as a band of workers would be here. This exactly corresponds to the teaching of Vale Owen’s guide.

CHAPTER VIII

Dangerous fog. — The six photographers. — Comic advertisements. — Beauties of Auckland. — A Christian clergyman. — Shadows in our American relations. — The Gallipoli Stone. — Stevenson and the Germans. — Position of De Rougemont. — Mr. Clement Wragge. — Atlantean theories. — A strange psychic. — Wellington the windy. — A literary Oasis. — A Maori Seance. — Presentation.

My voyage to New Zealand in the Maheno was pleasant and uneventful, giving me four days in which to arrange my papers and look over the many manuscripts which mediums, or, more often, would-be mediums, had discharged at me as I passed. Dr. Bean, my Theosophic friend, who had been somewhat perturbed by my view that his people were really the officers of our movement who had deserted their army, formed an officers' corps, and so taken the money and brains and leadership away from the struggling masses, was waiting on the Sydney Quay, and gave me twelve books upon his subject to mend my wicked ways, so that I was equipped for a voyage round the world. I needed something, since I had left my wife and family behind me in Manly, feeling that the rapid journey through New Zealand would be too severe for them. In Mr. Carlyle Smythe, however, I had an admirable " cobber/' to use the pal phrase of the Australian soldier.

Mr. Smythe had only one defect as a comrade, and that was his conversation in a fog. It was of a distinctly depressing character, as I had occasion to learn when we ran into very thick weather among the rocky islands which make navigation so difficult to the north of Auckland. Between the screams of the siren I would hear a still small voice in the bunk above me.

" We are now somewhere near the Three Kings. It is an isolated group of rocks celebrated for the wreck of the Elingamite, which went ashore on just such a morning as this." (Whoo-ee! remarked the foghorn). " They were nearly starved, but kept themselves alive by fish which were caught by improvised lines made from the ladies' stay-laces. Many of them died."

I lay digesting this and staring at the fog which crawled all round the port hole. Presently he was off again.

" You can't anchor here, and there is no use stopping her, for the currents run hard and she would drift on to one of the ledges which would rip the side out of her." (Whoo-ee! repeated the foghorn). " The islands are perpendicular with deep water up to the rocks, so you never know they are there until you hit them, and then, of course, there is no reef to hold you up.” (Whoo-ee!) “ Close by here is the place where the Wairarapa went down with all hands a few years ago. It was just such a day as this when she struck the Great Barrier “

m It was about this time that I decided to go on deck. Captain Brown had made me free of the bridge, so I climbed up and joined him there, peering out into the slow-drifting scud.

I spent the morning there, and learned something of the anxieties of a sailor’s life. Captain Brown had in his keeping, not only his own career and reputation, but what was far more to him, the lives of more than three hundred people. We had lost all our bearings, for we had drifted in the fog during those hours when it was too thick to move. Now the scud was coming in clouds, the horizon lifting to a couple of miles, and then sinking to a few hundred yards. On each side of us and ahead were known to be rocky islands or promontories. Yet we must push on to our destination. It was fine to see this typical British sailor working his ship as a huntsman might take his horse over difficult country, now speeding ahead when he saw an opening, now waiting for a fogbank to get ahead, now pushing in between two clouds. For hours we worked along with the circle of oily lead-coloured sea around us, and then the grey veil, rising and falling, drifting and waving, with danger lurking always in its shadow. There are strange results when one stares intently over such a sea, for after a time one feels that it all slopes upwards, and that one is standing deep in a saucer with the rim far above one. Once in the rifts we saw a great ship feeling her way southwards, in the same difficulties as ourselves. She was the Niagara, from Vancouver to Auckland. Then, as suddenly as the raising of a drop-curtain, up came the fog, and there ahead of us was the narrow path which led to safety. The Niagara was into it first, which seemed to matter little, but really mattered a good deal, for her big business occupied the Port Authorities all the evening, while our little business was not even allowed to come alongside until such an hour that we could not get ashore, to the disappointment of all, and very especially of me, for I knew that some of our faithful had been waiting for twelve hours upon the quay to give me a welcoming hand. It was breakfast time on the very morning that I was advertised to lecture before we at last reached our hotel.

Here I received that counter-demonstration which always helped to keep my head within the limits of my hat. This was a peremptory demand from six gentlemen, who modestly described themselves as the leading photographers of the city, to see the negatives of the photographs which I was to throw upon the screen. I was assured at the same time by other photographers that they had no sympathy with such a demand, and that the others were self-advertising busybodies who had no mandate at all for such a request. My experience at Sydney had shown me that such challenges came from people who had no knowledge of psychic conditions, and who did not realise that it is the circumstances under which a photograph is taken, and the witnesses who guarantee such circumstances, which are the real factors that matter, and not the negative which may be so easily misunderstood by those who have not studied the processes by which such things are produced. I therefore refused to allow my photographs to pass into ignorant hands, explaining at the same time that I had no negatives, since the photographs in most cases were not mine at all, so that the negatives would, naturally, be with Dr. Crawford, Dr. Geley, Lady Glenconnor, the representatives of Sir William Crookes, or whoever else had originally taken the photograph. Their challenge thereupon appeared in the Press with a long tirade of abuse attached to it, founded upon the absurd theory that all the photos had been taken by me, and that there was no proof of their truth save in my word. One gets used to being indirectly called a liar, and I can answer arguments with self-restraint which once I would have met with the toe of my boot. However, a little breeze of this sort does no harm, but rather puts ginger into one’s work, and my audience were very soon convinced of the absurdity of the position of the six dissenting photographers who had judged that which they had not seen.

Auckland is the port of call of the American steamers, and had some of that air of activity and progress which America brings with her. The spirit of enterprise, however, took curious shapes, as in the case of one man who was a local miller, and pushed his trade by long advertisements at the head of the newspapers, which began with abuse of me and my ways, and ended by a recommendation to eat dessicated corn, or whatever his particular commodity may have been. The result was a comic jumble which was too funny to be offensive, though Auckland should discourage such pleasantries, as they naturally mar the beautiful impression which her fair city and surroundings make upon the visitor. I hope I was the only victim, and that every stranger within her gates is not held up to ridicule for the purpose of calling attention to Mr. Blank’s dessicated corn.

I seemed destined to have strange people mixed up with my affairs in Auckland, for there was a conjuror in the town, who, after the fashion of that rather blatant fraternity, was offering £i,ooo that he could do anything I could do. As I could do nothing, it seemed easy money. In any case, the argument that because you can imitate a thing therefore the thing does not exist, is one which it takes the ingenuity of Mr. Maskelyne to explain. There was also an ex-spiritualist medium (so-called) who covered the papers with his advertisements, so that my little announcement was quite overshadowed. He was to lecture the night after me in the Town Hall, with most terrifying revelations. I was fascinated by his paragraphs, and should have liked greatly to be present, but that was the date of my exodus. Among other remarkable advertisements was one “ What has become of ‘ Pelorus Jack’? Was he a lost soul? “ Now, “ Pelorus Jack” was a white dolphin, who at one time used to pilot vessels into a New Zealand harbour, gambolling under the bows, so that the question really did raise curiosity. However, I learned afterwards that my successor did not reap the harvest which his ingenuity deserved, and that the audience was scanty and derisive. What the real psychic meaning of “ Pelorus Jack “ may have been was not recorded by the press.

From the hour I landed upon the quay at Auckland until I waved my last farewell my visit was made pleasant, and every wish anticipated by the Rev. Jasper Calder, a clergyman who has a future before him, though whether it will be in the Church of England or not, time and the Bishop will decide. Whatever he may do, he will remain to me and to many more the nearest approach we are likely to see to the ideal Christian — much as he will dislike my saying so. After all, if enemies are given full play, why should not friends redress the balance? I will always carry away the remembrance of him, alert as a boy, rushing about to serve anyone, mixing on equal terms with scallywags on the pier, reclaiming criminals whom he called his brothers, winning a prize for breaking-in a buck- jumper, which he did in order that he might gain the respect of the stockmen; a fiery man of God in the pulpit, but with a mind too broad for special dispensations, he was like one of those wonderfully virile creatures of Charles Reade. The clergy of Australasia are stagnant and narrow, but on the other hand, I have found men like the Dean of Sydney, Strong of Melbourne, Sanders of Manly, Calder of Auckland, and others whom it is worth crossing this world to meet.

Of my psychic work at Auckland there is little to be said, save that I began my New Zealand tour under the most splendid auspices. Even Sydney had not furnished greater or more sympathetic audiences than those which crowded the great Town Hall upon two successive nights. I could not possibly have had a better reception, or got my message across more successfully. All the newspaper ragging and offensive advertisements had produced (as is natural among a generous people) a more kindly feeling for the stranger, and I had a reception I can never forget.

This town is very wonderfully situated, and I have never seen a more magnificent view than that from Mount Eden, an extinct volcano about 900 feet high, at the back of it. The only one which I could class with it is that from Arthur's Seat, also an extinct volcano about 900 feet high, as one looks on Edinburgh and its environs. Edinburgh, however, is for ever shrouded in smoke, while here the air is crystal clear, and I could clearly see Great Barrier Island, which is a good eighty miles to the north. Below lay the most marvellous medley of light blue water and light green land mottled with darker foliage. We could see not only the whole vista of the wonderful winding harbour, and the seas upon the east of the island, but we could look across and see the firths which connected with the seas of the west. Only a seven- mile canal is needed to link the two up, and to save at least two hundred miles of dangerous navigation amid those rock-strewn waters from which we had so happily emerged. Of course it will be done, and when it is done it should easily pay its way, for what ship coming from Australia — or going to it — but would gladiy pay the fees? The real difficulty lies not in cutting the canal, but in dredging the western opening, where shifting sandbanks and ocean currents combine to make a dangerous approach. I see in my mind's eye two great breakwaters, stretching like nippers into the Pacific at that point, while, between the points of the nippers, the dredgers will for ever be at work. It will be difficult, but it is needed and it will be done.

The Australian Davis Cup quartette — Norman Brooks, Patterson, O'Hara Wood and another — had come across in the Maheno with us and were now at the Grand Hotel. There also was the American team, including the formidable Tilden, now world's champion. The general feeling of Australasia is not as cordial as one would wish to the United States for the moment. I have met several men back from that country who rather bitterly resent the anti-British agitation which plays such a prominent part in the American press. This continual nagging is, I am sorry to say, wearing down the stolid patience of the Britisher more than I can ever remember, and it is a subject on which I have always been sensitive as I have been a life-long advocate of Anglo- American friendship, leading in the fullness of time to some loose form of Anglo-American Union. At present it almost looks as if these racial traitors who make the artificial dissensions were succeeding for a time in their work of driving a wedge between the two great sections of the English-speaking peoples. My fear is that when some world crisis comes, and everything depends upon us all pulling together, the English-speakers may neutralise each other. There lies the deadly danger. It is for us on both sides to endeavour to avoid it.

Everyone who is in touch with the sentiment of the British officers in Flanders knows that they found men of their own heart in the brave, unassuming American officers who were their comrades, and often their pupils. It is some of the stay-at- home Americans who appear to have such a false perspective, and who fail to realise that even British Dominions, such as Canada and Australia, lost nearly as many men as the United States in the war, while Britain herself laid down ten lives for every one spent by America. This is not America's fault, but when we see apparent forgetfulness of it on the part of a section of the American people when our wounds are still fresh, it cannot be wondered at that we feel sore. We do not advertise, and as a result there are few who know that we lost more men and made larger captures during the last two years of the war than our gallant ally of France. When we hear that others won the war we smile — but it is a bitter smile.

Strange, indeed, are some of the episodes of psychic experience. There came to me at my hotel in Auckland two middle-aged hard-working women, who had come down a hundred miles from the back country to my lecture. One had lost her boy at Gallipoli. She gave me a long postmortem account from him as to the circumstances of his own death, including the military operations which led up to it. I read it afterwards, and it was certainly a very coherent account of the events both before and after the shell struck him. Having handed me the pamphlet the country woman then, with quivering fingers, produced from her bosom a little silver box. Out of this she took an object, wrapped in white silk. It was a small cube of what looked to me like sandstone, about an inch each way. She told me it was an apport, that it had been thrown down on her table while she and her family, including, as I understood, the friend then present, were holding a seance. A message came with it to say that it was from the boy's grave at Gallipoli. What are we to say to that? Was it fraud? Then why were they playing tricks upon themselves? If it was, indeed, an apport, it is surely one of the most remarkable for distance and for purpose recorded of any private circle.

A gentleman named Moors was staying at the same hotel in Auckland, and we formed an acquaintance. I find that he was closely connected with Stevenson, and had actually written a very excellent book upon his comradeship with him at Samoa. Stevenson dabbled in the politics of Samoa, and always with the best motives and on the right side, but he was of so frank and impetuous a nature that he was not trusted with any inside knowledge. Of the German rule Mr. Moors says that for the first twelve years Dr. Solf was as good as he could be, and did fair justice to all. Then he went on a visit to Berlin, and returned " bitten by the military bug," with his whole nature changed, and began to " imponieren" in true Prussian fashion. It is surely extraordinary how all the scattered atoms of a race can share the diseases of the central organism from which they sprang. I verily believe that if a German had been alone on a desert island in 1914 he would have begun to dance and brandish a club. How many cases are on record of the strange changes and wild deeds of individuals?

Mr. Moors told me that he dropped into a developing circle of spiritualists at Sydney, none of whom could have known him. One of them said, " Above your head I see a man, an artist, long hair, brown eyes, and I get the name of Stephens." If he was indeed unknown, this would seem fairly evidential.

I was struck by one remark of Mr. Moors, which was that he had not only seen the natives ride turtles in the South Sea lagoons, but that he had actually done so himself, and that it was by no means difficult. This was the feat which was supposed to be so absurd when De Rougemont claimed to have done it. There are, of course, some gross errors which are probably pure misuse of words in that writer's narrative, but he places the critic in a dilemma which has never been fairly faced. Either he is a liar, in which case he is, beyond all doubt, the most realistic writer of adventure since Defoe, or else he speaks the truth, in which case he is a great explorer. I see no possible avoidance of this dilemma, so that which ever way you look at it the man deserves credit which he has never received.

We set off, four of us, to visit Mr. Clement Wragge, who is the most remarkable personality in Auckland — dreamer, mystic, and yet very practical adviser on all matters of ocean and of air.

On arriving at the charming bungalow, buried among all sorts of broad-leaved shrubs and trees, I was confronted by a tall, thin figure, clad in black, with a face like a sadder and thinner Bernard Shaw, dim, dreamy eyes, heavily pouched, with a blue turban surmounting all. On repeating my desire he led me apart into his study. I had been warned that with his active brain and copious knowledge I would never be able to hold him to the point, so, in the dialogue which followed, I perpetually headed him off as he turned down bye paths, until the conversation almost took the form of a game.

“ Mr. Wragge, you are, I know, one of the greatest authorities upon winds and currents.”

“ Well, that is one of my pursuits. When I was young I ran the Ben Nevis Observatory in Scotland and “

“ It was only a small matter I wished to ask you. You 11 excuse my directness as I have so little time.”

“ Certainly. What is it?

“ If the Maoris came, originally, from Hawaii, what prevailing winds would their canoes meet in the 2,000 miles which they crossed to reach New Zealand? “

The dim eyes lit up with the joy of the problem, and the nervous fingers unrolled a chart of the Pacific. He flourished a pair of compasses.

44 Here is Hawaii. They would start with a north-westerly trade wind. That would be a fair wind. I may say that the whole affair took place far further back than is usually supposed. We have to get back to astronomy for our fixed date. Don’t imagine that the obliquity of the ecliptic was always 23 degrees.”

“ The Maoris had a fair wind then? “ The compasses stabbed at the map. 44 Only down to this point. Then they would come on the Doldrums — the calm patch of the equator. They could paddle their canoes across that. Of course, the remains at Easter Island prove “

44 But they could not paddle all the way.” 44 No; they would run into the south-easterly trades. Then they made their way to Rarotonga in^Tahiti. It

was from here that they made for New Zealand.”

4 4 But how could they know New Zealand was there? “

44 Ah, yes, how did they know? “ 44 Had they compasses? “ 44 They steered by the stars. We have a poem of theirs which numbers the star-gazer as one of the crew. We have a chart, also, cut in the rocks at Hawaii, which seems to be the plot of a voyage. Here is a slide of it.” He fished out a photo of lines and scratches upon a rock.

44 Of course,” said he, 44 the root of the matter is that missionaries from Atlantis permeated the Pacific, coming across Central America, and left their traces everywhere.”

Ah, Atlantis! I am a bit of an Atlantean myself, so off we went at scratch and both enjoyed ourselves greatly until time had come to rejoin the party and meet Mr. Wragge’s wife, a charming Brahmin lady from India, who was one of the most gracious personalities I have met in my wanderings. The blue-turbaned, eager man, half western science, half eastern mystic, and his dark- eyed wife amid their profusion of flowers will linger in my memory. Mrs. Wragge was eager that I go and lecture in India. Well, who knows?

I was so busy listening to Mr. Wragge’s Atlantean theories that I had no chance of laying before him my own contribution to the subject, which is, I think, both original and valid. If the huge bulk of Atlantis sank beneath the ocean, then, assuredly, it raised such a tidal wave as has never been known in the world’s history. This tidal wave, since all sea water connects, would be felt equally all over the world, as the wave of Krakatoa was in 1883 felt in Europe. The wave must have rushed over all flat coasts and drowned every living thing, as narrated in the biblical narrative. Therefore, since this catastrophe was, according to Plato’s account, not very much more than 10,000 years ago there should exist ample evidence of a wholesale destruction of life, especially in the flatter lands of the globe. Is there such evidence? Think of Darwin’s account of how the pampas of South America are in places one huge grave-yard. Think, also, of the mammoth remains which strew the Tundras of Siberia, and which are so numerous that some of the Arctic islands are really covered with bones. ^ There is ample evidence of some great flood which would exactly correspond with the effect produced by the sinking of Atlantis. The tragedy broadens as one thinks of it. Everyone everywhere must have been drowned save only the hill-dwellers. The object of the catastrophe was, according to some occult information, to remove the Atlantean race and make room for the Aryan, even as the Lemurian had been removed to make room for the Atlantean. How long has the Aryan race to run? The answer may depend upon themselves. The great war is a warning bell perhaps.

I had a talk with a curious type of psychic while I was in Auckland. He claimed to be a psychologist who did not need to be put en rapport with his object by any material starting point. A piece of clothing is, as a rule, to a psychometrist what it would be to a bloodhound, the starting point of a chase which runs down the victim. Thus Van Bourg, when he discovered by crystal gazing the body of Mr. Foxhall (I quote the name from memory) floating in the Thames, began by covering the table with the missing man's garments. This is the usual procedure which will become more familiar as the public learn the full utility of a psychic.

This gentlemen, Mr. Pearman, was a builder by trade, a heavy, rather uneducated man with the misty eye of a seer. He told me that if he desired to turn his powers upon anything he had only to sit in a dim room and concentrate his thought upon the matter, without any material nexus. For example, a murder had been done in Western Australia. The police asked his help. Using his power, he saw the man, a stranger, and yet he knew that it was the man, descending the Swan River in a boat. He saw him mix with the dockmen of Fremantle. Then he saw him return to Perth. Finally, he saw him take train on the Transcontinental Railway. The police at once acted, and intercepted the man, who was duly convicted and hanged. This was one of several cases which this man told me, and his stories carried conviction with them. All this, although psychic, has, of course, nothing to do with spiritualism, but is an extension of the normal, though undefined, powers of the human mind and soul.

The reader will be relieved to hear that I did not visit Rotorua. An itinerant lecturer upon an unpopular cause has enough hot water without seeking out a geyser. My travels would make but an indifferent guide book, but I am bound to put it upon record that Wellington is a very singular city plastered upon the side of a very steep hill. It is said that the plan of the city was entirely drawn up in England under the impression that the site was a flat one, and that it was duly carried out on the perpendicular instead of the horizontal. It is a town of fine buildings, however, in a splendid winding estuary ringed with hills. It is, of course, the capital, and the centre of all officialdom in New Zealand, but Auckland, in the north, is already the greater city.

I had the opportunity of spending the day after my arrival with Dr. Morrice, who married the daughter of the late Premier, Sir R. Seddon, whom I had known in years gone by. Their summer house was down the Bay, and so I had a long drive which gave me an admirable chance of seeing the wonderful panorama. It was blowing a full gale, and the road is so exposed that even motors are sometimes upset by the force of the wind. On this occasion nothing more serious befell us than the loss of Mr. Smythe’s hat, which disappeared with such velocity that no one was able to say what had become of it. It simply was, and then it was not. The yellow of the foreshore, the green of the shallows, the blue mottled with purple of the deep, all fretted with lines of foam, made an exhilarating sight. The whole excursion was a brief but very pleasant break in our round of work. Another pleasant experience was that I met Dr. Purdey, who had once played cricket with me, when we were very young, at Edinburgh University. Eheu fugaces / I had also the pleasure of meeting Mr. Massey, the Premier, a bluff, strong, downright man who impresses one with his force and sincerity.

I had the privilege when I was at Wellington of seeing the first edition of “ Robinson Crusoe,” which came out originally in three volumes. I had no idea that the three-decker dated back to 1719. It had a delightful map of the island which would charm any boy, and must have been drawn up under the personal guidance of Defoe himself. I wonder that map has not been taken

n as an integral part of the book, and reproduced in every edition, for it is a fascinating and a helpful document.

I saw this rare book in the Turnbull Library, which, under the loving care of Mr. Anderson (himself no mean poet), is a fine little collection of books got together by a Wellington man of business. In a raw young land such a literary oasis is like a Gothic Cathedral in the midst of a suburb of modern villas. Anyone can come in to consult the books, and if I were a Wellingtonian I would certainly spend a good deal of time there. I handled with fitting reverence a first edition of “ Lyrical Ballads,” where, in 1798, Coleridge and Wordsworth made their entry hand in hand into poetical literature. I saw an original Hakluyt, the book which has sent so many brave hearts a-roving. There, too, was a precious Kelmscott “ Chaucer,” a Plutarch and Montaigne, out of which Shakespeare might have done his cribbing; Capt. Cook's manuscript " Diary," written in the stiff hand of a very methodical man; a copy of Swinburne's " Poems and Ballads," which is one of twenty from a recalled edition, and many other very rare and worthy volumes carefully housed and clad. I spent a mellow hour among them.

I have been looking up all the old books upon the Maoris which I could find, with the special intent of clearing up their history, but while doing so I found in one rather rare volume " Old New Zealand," an account of a Maori seance, which seems to have been in the early forties, and, therefore, older than the Hydesville knockings. I only wish every honest materialist could read it and compare it with the experiences which we have, ourselves, independently reported. Surely they cannot persist in holding that such identical results are obtained by coincidence, or that fraud would work in exactly the same fashion in two different hemispheres. "

A popular young chief had been killed in battle. The white man was invited to join the solemn circle who hoped to regain touch with him. The seance was in the dark of a large hut, lit only by the ruddy glow of a low fire. The white man, a complete unbeliever, gives his evidence in grudging fashion, but cannot get past the facts. The voice came, a strange melancholy sound, like the wind blowing into a hollow vessel. " Salutation! Salutation to you all! To you, my tribe! Family, I salute you! Friends, I salute you! " When the power waned the voice cried, " Speak to me, the family! Speak to me!" In the published dialogue between Dr. Hodgson after his death and Professor Hyslop, Hodgson cries, " Speak, Hyslop! " when the power seemed to wane. For some reason it would appear either by vibrations or by concentrating attention to help the communicator. " It is well with me," said the chief. " This place is a good place." He was with the dead of the tribe and described them, and offered to take messages to them. The incredulous white man asked where a book had been concealed which only the dead man knew about. The place was named and the book found. The white man himself did not know, so there was no telepathy. Finally, with a " Farewell! " which came from high in the air, the spirit passed back to immaterial conditions.

This is, I think, a very remarkable narrative. If you take it as literally true, which I most certainly do, since our experience corroborates it, it gives us some points for reflection. One is that the process is one known in all the ages, as our Biblical reading has already told us. A second is that a young barbarian chief with no advantages of religion finds the next world a very pleasant place, just as our dead do, and that they love to come back and salute those whom they have left, showing a keen memory of their earth life. Finally, we must face the conclusion that the mere power of communication has no elevating effect in itself, otherwise these tribes could not have continued to be ferocious savages. It has to be united with the Christ message from beyond before it will really help us upon the upward path.

Before I left Wellington the spiritualists made me a graceful presentation of a travelling rug, and I was able to assure them that if they found the rug I would find the travelling. It is made of the beautiful woollen material in which New Zealand is supreme. The presentation was made by Mrs. Stables, the President of the New Zealand Association, an energetic lady to whom the cause owes much. A greenstone penholder was given to me for my wife, and a little charm for my small daughter, the whole proceedings being marked with great cordiality and good feeling. The faithful are strong in Wellington, but are much divided among themselves, which, I hope, maybe alleviated as a consequence of my visit. Nothing could have been more successful than my two meetings. The Press was splendidly sympathetic, and I left by a night boat in high heart for my campaign in the South Island.

CHAPTER IX

The Anglican Colony. — Psychic dangers. — The learned dog. — Absurd newspaper controversy. — A backward community. — The Maori tongue. — Their origin. — Their treatment by the Empire. — A fiasco. — The Pa of Kaiopoi. — Dr. Thacker. — Sir Joseph Kinsey. — A generous collector. — Scott and Amundsen. — Dunedin. — A genuine medium. — Evidence. — The shipping strike. — Sir Oliver. — Farewell.

I am afraid that the average Britisher looks upon New Zealand as one solid island. If he had to cross Cook's Strait to get from the northern to the southern half, he would never forget his lesson in geography, for it can be as nasty a bit of water as is to be found in the world, with ocean waves, mountain winds and marine currents all combining into a horrible chaos. Twelve good hours separate Wellington in the north from Lyttelton, which is the port of Christchurch in the south. A very short railway joins the two latter places. My luck held good, and I had an excellent passage, dining in Wellington and breakfasting in Christchurch. It is a fine city, the centre of the famous Canterbury grazing country. Four shiploads of people calling themselves the Canterbury Pilgrims arrived here in 1852, built a cathedral, were practically ruled over by Bishop Selwyn, and tried the successful experiment of establishing a community which should be as Anglican as New England is Nonconformist. The distinctive character has now largely disappeared, but a splendid and very English city remains as a memorial of their efforts. When you are on the green, sloping banks of the river Avon, with the low, artistic bridges, it would not be hard to imagine that you were in the Backs at Cambridge.

At Christchurch I came across one of those little bits of psychic evidence which may be taken as certainly true, and which can be regarded, therefore, as pieces which have to be fitted into the jig-saw puzzle in order to make the completed whole, at that far-off date when a completed whole is within the reach of man's brain. It concerns Mr. Michie, a local Spiritualist of wide experience. On one occasion some years ago, he practised a short cut to psychic power, acquired through a certain method of breathing and of action, which amounts, in my opinion, to something in the nature of self-hypnotisation. I will not give details, as I think all such exercises are dangerous save for very experienced students of these matters, who know the risk and are prepared to take it. The result upon Mr. Michie, through some disregard upon his part of the conditions which he was directed to observe, was disastrous. He fell into an insidious illness with certain psychic symptoms, and within a few months was reduced to skin and bone. Mr. Michie’s wife is mediumistic and liable to be controlled. One day an entity came to her and spoke through her to her husband, claiming to be the spirit of one, Gordon Stanley. He said : “ I can sympathise with your case, because my own death was brought about in exactly the same way. I will help you, however, to fight against it and to recover.” The spirit then gave an account of his , own life, described himself as a clerk in Cole’s “ Book Arcade in Melbourne, and said that his widow was living at an address in Melbourne, which was duly given. Mr. Michie at once wrote to this address and received this reply, the original of which I have seen :

“ Park Street, “ Melbourne.

“ Dear Sir, — I have just received your strange — I must say, your very strange letter. Yes, I am Mrs. Stanley. My husband did die two years ago from consumption. He was a clerk in Coles Arcade. I must say your letter gave me a great shock. But I cannot doubt after what you have said, for I know you are a complete stranger to me.”

Shortly afterwards Mr. Stanley returned again through the medium, said that his widow was going to marry again, and that it was with his full approbation. The incident may be taken by our enemies as illustrating the danger of psychic research, and we admit that there are forms of it which should be approached with caution, but I do not think that mankind will ever be warned off by putting a danger label upon it, so long as they think there is real knowledge to be gained. How could the motor-car or the aeroplane have been developed if hundreds had not been ready to give their lives to pay the price? Here the price has been far less, and the goal far higher, but if in gaining it a man were assured that he would lose his health, his reason, or his life, it is none the less his duty to go forward if he clearly sees that there is something to be won. To meet death in conquering death is to die in victory — the ideal death.

Whilst I was at Auckland Mr. Poynton,J- a stipendiary magistrate there, told me of a dogin Christchurch which had a power of thought comparable, not merely to a human being, but even, as I understood him, to a clairvoyant, as it would bark out the number of coins in your pocket and other such questions. The alternative to clairvoyance was that he was a very quick and accurate thought-reader, but in some cases the power seemed to go beyond this. Mr. Poynton, who had studied the subject, mentioned four learned beasts in history: a marvellous horse in Shakespeare's time, which was burned with its master in Florence; the Boston skipper's dog; Hans, the Russian horse, and Darkie of Christchurch. He investigated the latter himself, as one of a committee of three. On the first occasion they got no results. On the second, ninety per cent, of the questions were right, and they included sums of addition, subtraction, etc. " It was uncanny," he wrote.

I called, therefore, upon Mrs. McGibbon, the owner, who allowed me to see the dog. He was a dark, vivacious fox terrier, sixteen years old, blind and deaf, which obviously impaired his powers. In spite of his blindness he dashed at me the moment he was allowed into the room, pawing at me and trembling all over with excitement. He was, in fact so excited that he was of little use for demonstration, as when once he began to bark he could not be induced to stop. Occasionally he steadied down, and gave us a touch of his true quality. When a half-crown was placed before him and he was asked how many sixpences were in it, he gave five barks, and four for a florin, but when a shilling was substituted he gave twelve, which looked as if he had pennies in his mind. On the whole the performance was a failure, but as he had raised by exhibiting his gifts, £138 for war charities, I took my hat off to him all the same. I will not imitate those psychic researchers who imagine that because they do not get a result, therefore, every one else who has reported it is a cheat or a fool. On the contrary, I have no doubt that the dog had these powers, though age and excitement have now impaired them.

The creature's powers were first discovered when the son of the house remarked one day: " I will give you a biscuit if you bark three times." He at once did it. " Now, six times." He did so. " Now, take three off." He barked three times once again. Since then they have hardly found any problem he could not tackle. When asked how many males in the room he always included himself in the number, but omitted himself when asked how many human beings. One wonders how many other dogs have human brains without the humans being clever enough to detect it.

I had an amusing controversy in Christchurch with one of the local papers, The Press, which represents the clerical interest, and, also, the clerical intolerance of a cathedral city. It issued an article upon me and my beliefs, severe, but quite within the limits of legitimate criticism, quoting against me Professor Hyslop, " who," it said, " is Professor of Logic at

Columbia, etc.” To this I made the mild and obvious retort in the course of my lecture that as Professor Hyslop was dead, The Press went even further than I in saying that he is Professor at Columbia.” Instead of accepting this correction, The Press made the tactical error of standing by their assertion, and aggravated it by head-lines which challenged me, and quoted my statement as “ typical of the inaccuracy of a Spiritualist.” As I rather pride myself on my accuracy, which has seldom been challenged, I answered shortly but politely, as follows :

“ Sir, — I am surprised that the news of the death of Professor Hyslop has not reached New Zealand, and even more surprised that it could be imagined that I would make such a statement on a matter so intimately connected with the subject upon which I lecture without being sure of my fact. I am reported as saying ‘ some yearsbut, if so, it was a slip of the tongue for ‘ some time/ 77^ Professor died either late last year or early in the present one .”

I should have thought that my answer was conclusive, and would have elicited some sort of apology; but instead of this, The Press called loudly upon me in a leading article to apologise, though for what I know not, save that they asserted I had said “ some years,” whereas I claim that I actually said “ some time.” This drew the following rather more severe letter from me :

“ Sir, — I am collecting New Zealand curiosities, so I will take your leading article home with me. To get the full humour of it one has to remember the sequence of events. In a leading article you remarked that Professor Hyslop is Professor of Logic. I answered with mild irony that he certainly is not, as he had been dead ‘ some years y or ‘ some time’ — which of the two is perfectly immaterial, since I presume that in either case you would agree that he has ceased to be Professor of Logic. To this you were rash enough to reply with a challenging article with large head-linesy declaring that I had blundered, and that this was typical of the inaccuracy of Spiritualists. I wrote a gentle remonstrance to show that I had not blundered, and that my assertion was essentially true, since the man was dead. This you now tacitly admit, but instead of expressing regret you ask for an apology from me. I have engaged in much newspaper controversy, but I can truly say that I can recall no such instance of effrontery as this!*

This led to another leader and considerable abuse.

The controversy was, however, by no means one-sided, in spite of the shadow of the Cathedral. Mr. Peter Trolove is a man of wit as well as knowledge, and wields a pretty pen. A strong man, also, is Dr. John Guthrie, whose letter contains words so kindly that I must quote them :

“ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stands above it all, not only as a courteous gentleman, but as a fair controversialist throughout. He is, anyhow, a chivalrous and magnanimous personality, whether or not his beliefs have any truth. Fancy quoting authorities against a man who has spent great part of his life studying the subject, and who knows the authorities better than all his opponents put together — a man who has deliberately used his great gifts in an honest attempt to get at truth. I do think that Christchurch has some need to apologise for its controversialists — much more need than our distinguished visitor has to apologise for what we all know to be his honest convictions I have never met Dr. John Guthrie in the flesh, but I would thank him here, should this ever meet his eye, for this kindly protest.

It will be gathered that I succeeded at Christchurch in performing the feat of waking up a Cathedral City, and all the ex-sleepers were protesting loudly against such a disturbing inrush from the outer world. Glancing at the head lines I see that Bishop Brodie declared it to be “ A blasphemy nurtured in fraud,” the Dean of Christchurch writes it down as “ Spiritism, the abrogation of Reason,” the Rev. John Patterson calls it “ an ancient delusion,” the Rev. Mr. North says it is “a foolish Paganism,” and the Rev. Mr. Ready opines that it is “a gospel of uncertainty and conjecture.” Such are the clerical leaders of thought in Christchurch in the year 1920. I think of what the wise old Chinese Control said of similar types at the Melbourne Rescue Circle. “ He good man but foolish man. He learn better. Never rise till he learn better. Plenty time yet.” Who loses except themselves?

The enormous number of letters which I get upon psychic subjects — which I do my best to answer — give me some curious sidelights, but they are often confidential, and would not bear publication. Some of them are from devout, but narrow Christians, who narrate psychic and prophetic gifts which they possess, and at the same time almost resent them on the ground that they are condemned by the Bible. As if the whole Bible was not psychic and prophetic! One very long letter detailed a whole succession of previsions of the most exact character, and wound up by the conviction that we were on the edge of some great discovery. This was illustrated by a simile which seemed very happy. “ Have you noticed a tree covered in spider webs during a fog? Well, it was only through the law of the fog that we saw them. They were there all the time, but only when the moisture came could we see them.” It was a good illustration. Many amazing experiences are detailed to me in every town I visit, and though I have no time to verify them and go into details, none the less they fit so accurately with the various types of psychic cases with which I am familiar that I cannot doubt that such occurrences are really very common. It is the injudicious levity with which they are met which prevents their being published by those who experience them.

As an amateur philologist of a superficial type, I am greatly interested in studying the Maori language, and trying to learn whence these wonderful savages came before their twenty-two terrible canoes came down upon the unhappy land which would have been safer had as many shiploads of tigers been discharged upon its beach. The world is very old, and these folk have wandered from afar, and by many devious paths. Surely there are Celtic traces both in their appearance, their character and their language. An old Maori woman smoking her pipe is the very image of an old Celtic woman occupied the same way. Their word for water is wei, and England is full of Wye and Way river names, dating from the days before the Germans arrived. Strangest of all is their name for the supreme God. A name never mentioned and taboo among them, is Io.

“ J “ is, of course, interchangeable with “ I,” so that we get the first two letters of Jove and an approximation of Jehovah. Papa is parent. Altogether there is good evidence that they are from the same root as some European races, preferably the Celts. But on the top of this comes a whole series of Japanese combinations of letters, Rangi, Muru, Tiki, and so forth, so that many of the place names seem pure Japanese. What are we to make of such a mixture? Is it possible that one Celtic branch, far away in the mists of time, wandered east while their racial brethren wandered west, so that part reached far Corea while the others reached Ireland? Then, after getting a tincture of Japanese terms and word endings, they continued their migration, taking to the seas, and finally subduing the darker races who inhabited the Polynesian Islands, so making their way to New Zealand. This wild imagining would at least cover the observed facts. It is impossible to look at some of the Maori faces without realising that they are of European stock.

I must interpolate a paragraph here to say that I was pleased, after writing the above, to find that in my blind gropings I had come upon the main conclusions which have been put forward with very full knowledge by the well-known authority, Dr. McMillan Brown. He has worked out the very fact which I surmised, that the Maoris are practically of the same stock as Europeans, that they had wandered Japan-wards, and had finally taken to the sea. There are two points of interest which show the date of their exodus was a very ancient one. The first is that they have not the use of the bow. The second is that they have no knowledge of metals. Such knowledge once possessed would never have been lost, so it is safe to say that they left Asia a thousand years (as a minimum) before Christ, for at that date the use of bronze, at any rate, was widespread. What adventures and vicissitudes this remarkable race, so ignorant in some directions and so advanced in others, must have endured during those long centuries. If you look at the wonderful ornaments of their old war canoes, which carry a hundred men, and can traverse the whole Pacific, it seems almost incredible that human patience and ingenuity

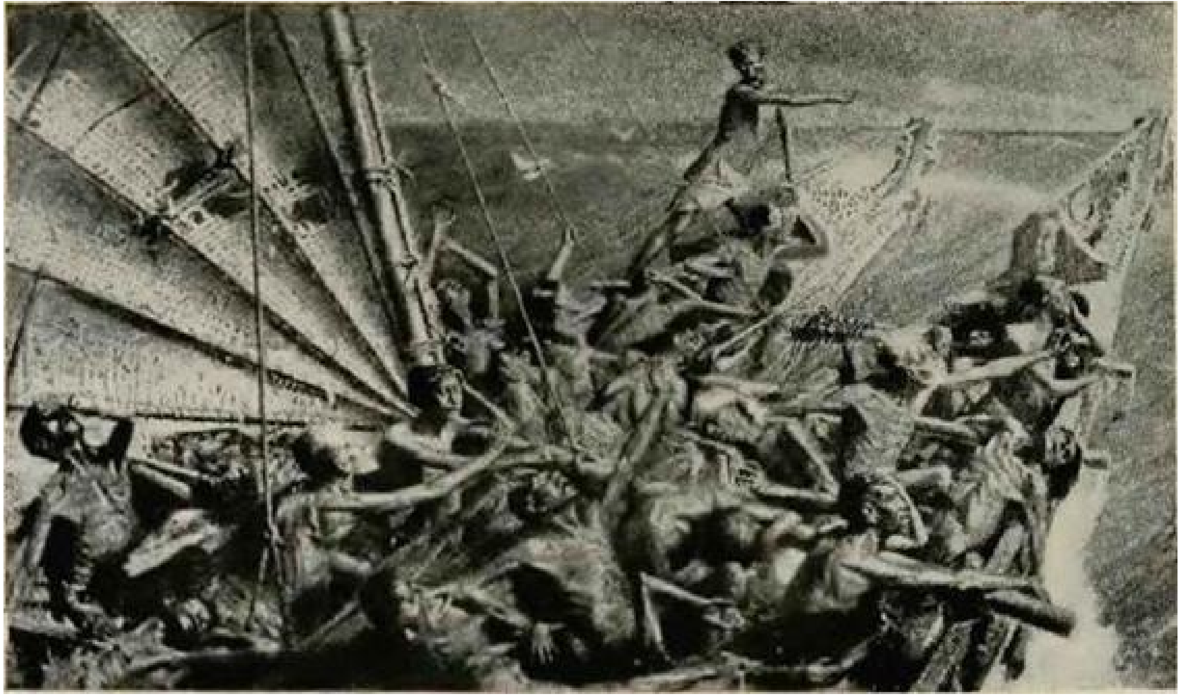

See page 209, THE PEOPLE OF TURl’s CANOE, AFTER A VOYAGE OF GREAT HARDSHIP, AT LAST SIGHT THE SHORES OF NEW ZEALAND.

From a painting in the Auckland Art Gallery by C. F. Goldie and L. J. Steele.

could construct the whole fabric with instruments of stone. They valued them greatly when once they were made, and the actual names of the twenty- two original invading canoes are still recorded.

In the public gallery of Auckland they have a duplicate of one of these enormous canoes. It is 87 feet in length and the thwarts are broad enough to hold three or four men. When it was filled with its hundred warriors, with the chief standing in the centre to give time to the rowers, it must, as it dashed through the waves, have been a truly terrific object. I should think that it represented the supreme achievement of neolithic man. There are a series of wonderful pictures of Maori life in the same gallery by Goldie and Steele. Of these I reproduce, by permission, one which represents the starving crew of one canoe sighting the distant shore. The engraving only gives a faint indication of the effect of the vividly-coloured original.

Reference has been made to the patient industry of the Maori race. A supreme example of this is that every man had his tikki, or image of a little idol made of greenstone, which was hung round his neck. Now, this New Zealand greenstone is one of the hardest objects in nature, andyet it is worn down without metals into these quaint figures. On an average it took ten years to make one, and it was rubbed down from a chunk of stone into an image by the constant friction of a woman’s foot.

It is said that the Tahungas, or priests, have much hereditary knowledge of an occult sort. Their oracles were famous, and I have already quoted an example of their seances. A student of Maori lore told me the following interesting story. He was a student of Maori words, and on one occasion a Maori chief let slip an unusual word, let us say “ bum,” and then seemed confused and refused to answer when the Englishman asked the meaning. The latter took it to a friend, a Tohunga, who seemed much surprised and disturbed, and said it was a word of which a paheka or white man should know nothing. Not to be beaten, my informant took it to an old and wise chief who owed him a return for some favours. This chief was also much exercised in mind when he heard the word, and walked up and down in agitation. Finally he said, “ Friend, we are both Christians. You remember the chapter in the Bible where Jacob wrestled with an angel. Well, this word ‘ buru’ represents that for which they were wrestling.” He would say no more and there it had perforce to be left.

The British Empire may be proud of their treatment of the Maoris. Like the Jews, they object to a census, but their number cannot be more than

50,000 in a population of over a million. There is no question, therefore, of our being constrained to treat them well. Yet they own vast tracts of the best land in the country, and so unquestioned are their rights that when they forbade a railway to pass down the centre of the North Island, the traffic had to go by sea from Auckland until, at last, after many years, it was shown to the chiefs that their financial interests would be greatly aided by letting the railway through. These financial interests are very large, and many Maoris are wealthy men, buying expensive motor cars and other luxuries. Some of the more educated take part in legislative work, and are distinguished for their eloquence. The half-castes make a particularly fine breed, especially in their youth, for they tend as they grow older to revert to the pure Maori type. New Zealand has no national sin upon its conscience as regards, the natives, which is more, I fear, than can be said whole-heartedly for Australia, and even less for Tasmania. Our people never descended to the level of the old Congo, but they have something on their conscience none the less.

On December 18th there was some arrangement by which I should meet the Maoris and see the historic Pa of Kaiopoi. The affair, however, was, I am sorry to say, a fiasco. As we approached the building, which was the village school room, there emerged an old lady — a very old lady — who uttered a series of shrill cries, which I was told meant welcome, though they sounded more like the other thing. I can only trust that my informants were right. Inside was a very fine assemblage of atmospheric air, and of nothing else. The explanation was that there had been a wedding the night before, and that the whole community had been — well, tired* Presently a large man in tweeds of the reach-me-down variety appeared upon the scene, and several furtive figures, including a row of children, materialised in corners of the big empty room. The visitors, who were more numerous than the visited, sat on a long bench and waited developments which refused to develop. My dreams of the dignified and befeathered savage were drifting away. Finally, the large man, with his hands in his pockets, and looking hard at a corner of, the rafters, made a speech of welcome, punctuated by long stops and gaps. He then, at our request, repeated it in M^ori, and the children were asked to give a Maori shout, which they sternly refused to do. I then made a few feeble bleats, uncertain whether to address my remarks to the level of the large man or to that of the row of children. I ended by handing over some books for their library, and we then escaped from this rather depressing scene.

But it was a very different matter with the Pa. I found it intensely interesting. You could still trace quite clearly the main lines of the battle which destroyed it. It lay on about five acres of ground, with deep swamp all round save for one frontage of some hundreds of yards. That was all which really needed defence. The North Island natives, who were of a sterner breed than those of the South, came down under the famous Rauparaha (these Maori names are sad snags in a story) and besieged the place. One can see the saps and follow his tactics, which ended by piling brushwood against the palings — please observe the root “ pa “ in palings — with the result that he carried the place. Massacre Hill stands close by, and so many of the defenders were eaten that their gnawed bones covered the ground within the memory of living men. Such things may have , been done by the father of the elderly gentleman who passes you in his motor car with his race glasses slung across his chest. The siege of Kaiopoi was about 1831. Even on a fine sunlit day I was conscious of that heavy atmosphere within the enclosure which impresses itself upon me when I am on the scene of ancient violence. So frightful an episode within so limited a space, where for months the garrison saw its horrible fate drawing nearer day by day, must surely have left some etheric record even to our blunt senses.

I was indebted to Dr. Thacker, the mayor, for much kind attention whilst in Christchurch. He is a giant man, but a crippled giant, alas, for he still bears the traces of an injury received in a historic football match, which left his and my old University of Edinburgh at the top of the tree in Scotland. He showed me some curious, if ghastly, relics of his practice. One of these was a tumour of the exact size and shape of a boxing glove, thumb and all, which he cut out of the back of a boxer who had lost a glove fight and taken it greatly to heart. Always on many converging lines we come back to the influence of mind over matter.

Another most pleasant friendship which I made in Christchurch was with Sir Joseph Kinsey, who has acted as father to several successive British Arctic expeditions. Scott and Shackleton have both owed much to him, their constant agent, adviser and friend. Scott’s dying hand traced a letter to him, so unselfish and so noble that it alone would put Scott high in the gallery of British worthies. Of all modern men of action Scott seems to me the most lofty. To me he was only an acquaintance, but Kinsey, who knew him well as a friend, and Lady Kinsey, who had all Arctic exploration at her finger ends, were of the same opinion.

Sir Joseph discussed the action of Amundsen in making for the pole. When it was known that Amundsen was heading south instead of pursuing his advertised intentions, Kinsey smelled danger and warned Scott, who, speaking from his own noble loyalty, said, “He would never do so dishonourable a thing. My plans are published and are known to all the world.” However, when he reached the ice, and when Pennell located the “ Fram,” he had to write and admit that Kinsey was right. It was a sad blow, that forestalling, though he took it like the man that he was. None the less, it must have preyed upon the spirits of all his party and weakened their resistance in that cruel return journey. On the other hand Amundsen’s expedition, which was conducted on rather less than a sixth of the cost of the British, was a triumph of organisation, and he had the good luck or deep wisdom to strike a route which was clear of those great blizzards which overwhelmed Scott. The scurvy was surely a slur upon our medical preparations. According to Stefansson, who knows more of the matter than any living man, lime juice is useless, vegetables are of secondary importance, but fresh animal food, be it seal, penguin, or what you will, is the final preventive!

Sir Joseph is a passionate and discriminating collector, and has but one fault in collecting, which is a wide generosity. You have but to visit him often enough and express sufficient interest to absorb all his treasures. Perhaps my protests were half-hearted, but I emerged from his house with a didrachm of Alexander, a tetra- drachm of some Armenian monarch, a sheet of rare Arctic stamps for Denis, a lump of native greenstone, and a small nugget of gold. No wonder when I signed some books for him I entered the date as that of “ The Sacking of Woomeroo,” that being the name of his dwelling The mayor, in the same spirit of hospitality, pressed upon me a huge bone of the extinct Moa, but as I had never failed to impress upon my wife the extreme importance of cutting down our luggage, I could not face the scandal of appearing with this monstrous impedimentum.

Leaving Christchurch in the journalistic uproar to which allusion has been made, our engagements took us on to Dunedin, which is reached by rail in a rather tiring day’s journey. A New Zealand train is excellent while it is running, but it has a way of starting with an epileptic leap, and stopping with a bang, which becomes wearisome after a while. On the other hand this particular journey is beguiled by the fact that the line runs high for two hours round the curve of the hills with the Pacific below, so that a succession of marvellous views opens out before you as you round each spur. There can be few more beautiful lines.

Dunedin was founded in 1848 by a group of Scotsmen, and it is modelled so closely upon Edinburgh that the familiar street names all reappear, and even Portobello has its duplicate outside the town. The climate, also, I should judge to be about the same. The prevailing tone of the community is still Scottish, which should mean that they are sympathetic with my mission, for nowhere is Spiritualism more firmly established now than in Scotland, especially in Glasgow, where a succession of great mediums and of earnest workers have built up a considerable organisation. I soon found that it was so, for nowhere had I more private assurances of support, nor a better public reception, the theatre being filled at each lecture. In the intervals kind friends put their motors at my disposal and I had some splendid drives over the hills, which look down upon the winding estuary at the head of which the town is situated.

At the house of Mr. Reynolds, of Dunedin, I met one of the most powerful clairvoyants and trance mediums whom I have tested. Her name is Mrs. Roberts, and though her worldly circumstances are modest, she has never accepted any money for her wonderful psychic gifts. For this I honour her, but, as I told her, we all sell the gifts which God has given us, and I cannot see why, and within reason, psychic gifts should not also be placed within the reach of the public, instead of being confined to a favoured few. How can the bulk of the people ever get into touch with a good medium if they are debarred from doing so in the ordinary way of business?

Mrs. Roberts is a stout, kindly woman, with a motherly manner, and a sensitive, expressive face. When in touch with my conditions she at once gave the names of several relatives and friends who have passed over, without any slurring or mistakes. She then cried, “ I see an elderly lady here — she is a beautifully high spirit — her name is Selina.” This rather unusual name belonged to my wife’s mother, who died nearly two years ago. Then, suddenly, becoming slightly convulsed, as a medium does when her mechanism is controlled by another, she cried with an indescribable intensity of feeling, “ Thank God! Thank God to get in touch again! Jean! Jean! Give my dear love to Jean! “ Both names, therefore, had been got correctly, that of the mother and the daughter. Is it not an affront to reason to explain away such results by wild theories of telepathy, or by anything save the perfectly plain and obvious fact that spirit communion is indeed true, and that I was really in touch with that dead lady who was, even upon earth, a beautifully high and unselfish spirit. I had a number of other communications through Mrs. Roberts that night, and at a second interview two days later, not one of which erred so far as names were concerned. Among others was one who professed to be Dr. Russell Wallace. I should be honoured, indeed, to think that it was so, but I was unable to hit on anything which would be evidential. I asked him if his further experience had taught him anything more about reincarnation, which he disputed in his lifetime. He answered that he now accepted it, though I am not clear whether he meant for all cases. I thanked him for any spiritual help I had from him. His answer was “ Me! Don’t thank me! You would be surprised if you knew who your real helpers are.” He added, “ By your work I rise. We are co-workers! “ I pray that it be so, for few men have lived for whom I have greater respect; wise and brave, and mellow and good. His biography was a favourite book of mine long before I understood the full significance of Spiritualism, which was to him an evolution of the spirit on parallel lines to that evolution of the body which he did so much to establish.

Now that my work in New Zealand was drawing to a close a very grave problem presented itself to Mr. Smythe and myself, and that was how we were to get back to our families in Australia. A strike had broken out, which at first seemed a small matter, but it was accentuated by the approach of Christmas and the fact that many of the men were rather looking for an excuse for a holiday. Every day things became blacker.

Once before Mr. Smythe had been held up for four months by a similar cause, and, indeed, it has become a very serious consideration for all who visit New Zealand. We made a forced march for the north amid constant rumours that far from reaching Australia we could not even get to the North Island, as the twelve-hour ferry boats were involved in the strike. I had every trust in my luck, or, as I should prefer to say, in my helpers, and we got the Maori on the last ferry trip which she was sure to take. Up to the last moment the firemen wavered, and we had no stewards on board, but none the less, to our inexpressible relief we got off. There was no food on the ship and no one to serve it, so we went into a small hostel at Lyttleton before we started, to see what we could pick up. There was a man seated opposite to me who assumed the air of laboured courtesy and extreme dignity, which is one phase of alcoholism.

“ ‘Scuse me, sir! “ said he, looking at me with a glassy stare, “ but you bear most ‘straordinary resemblance Olver Lodge.”

I said something amiable.

“ Yes, sir—’straordmary! Have you ever seen Olver Lodge, sir? “

“ Yes, I have.”

“ Well, did you perceive resemblance? “

“ Sir Oliver, as I remember him, was a tall man with a grey beard.”

He shook his head at me sadly.

“ No, sir — I heard him at Wellington last week. No beard. A moustache, sir, same as your own.”

“ You’re sure it was Sir Oliver? “

A slow smile came over his face.

“ Blesh my soul — Conan Doyle — that’s the name. Yes, sir, you bear truly remarkable resemblance Conan Doyle.”

I did not say anything further so I daresay he has not discovered yet the true cause of the resemblance.

All the nerve-wracking fears of being held up which we endured at Lyttleton were repeated at Wellington, where we had taken our passages in the little steamer Paloona. In any case we had to wait for a day, which I spent in clearing up my New Zealand affairs while Mr. Smythe interviewed the authorities and paid no less than £141 war tax upon the receipts of our lectures — a heavy impost upon a fortnight’s work. Next morning, with our affairs and papers all in order, we boarded our little craft.

Up to the last moment we had no certainty of starting. Not only was the strike in the air, but it was Christmas Eve, and it was natural enough that the men should prefer their own homes to the stokehole of the Paloona. Agents with offers of increased pay were scouring the docks. Finally our complement was completed, and it was a glad moment when the hawsers were thrown off, and after the usual uncomfortable preliminaries we found ourselves steaming in a sharp wind down the very turbulent waters of Cook’s Strait.

The place is full of Cook’s memory. Everywhere the great man has left his traces. We passed Cook’s Island where the Endeavour actually struck and had to be careened and patched. What a nerve the fellow had! So coolly and deliberately did he do his work that even now his charting holds good, I understand, in many long stretches of coast. Tacking and wearing, he poked and pried into every estuary, naming capes, defining bays, plotting out positions, and yet all the while at the mercy of the winds, with a possible lee shore always before him, with no comrade within hail, and with swarms of cannibals eyeing his little ship from the beach. After I have seen his work I shall feel full of reverence every time I pass that fine statue which adorns the mall side of the great Admiralty building.

And now we are out in the open sea, with Melbourne, Sydney and love in front of our prow. Behind the sun sets in a slur of scarlet above the olive green hills, while the heavy night fog, crawling up the valleys, turns each of them into a glacier. A bright star twinkles above. Below a light shines out from the gloom. Farewell, New Zealand! I shall never see you again, but perhaps some memory of my visit may remain — or not, as God pleases.

Anyhow, my own memory will remain. Every man looks on his own country as God’s own country if it be a free land, but the New Zealander has more reason than most. It is a lovely place, and contains within its moderate limits the agricultural plains of England, the lakes and hills of Scotland, the glacier’s of Switzerland, and the fiords of Norway, with a fine hearty people, who do not treat the British newcomer with ignorant contempt or hostility. There are so many interests and so many openings that it is hard to think that a man will not find a career in New Zealand. Canada, Australia and South Africa seem to me to be closely balanced so far as their attractions for the emigrant goes, but when one considers that New Zealand has neither the winter of Canada, the droughts of Australia, nor the racial problems of Africa, it does surely stand supreme, though it demands, as all of them do, both labour and capital from the newcomer.

CHAPTER X

Christian origins. — Mithraism. — Astronomy. — Exercising boats. — Bad news from home. — Futile strikes. — Labour Party. — The blue wilderness. — Journey to Brisbane. — Warm reception. — Friends and foes. — Psychic experience of Dr. Doyle. — Birds. — Criticism on Melbourne. — Spiritualist Church. — Ceremony. — Sir Matthew Nathan. — Alleged repudiation of Queensland. — Billy tea. — The bee farm. — Domestic service in Australia. — Hon. John Fihilly. — Curious photograph by the state photographer. — The " Orsova."

The voyage back from New Zealand to Melbourne was pleasant and uneventful, though the boat was small and there was a sea rough enough to upset many of the passengers. We were fortunate in our Captain, Doorby, who, I found, was a literary confrere with two books to his credit, one of them a record of the relief ship Morning, in which he had served at the time of Scott's first expedition, the other a little book, " The Handmaiden of the Navy," which gave some of his adventures and experiences in the merchant service during the great war. He had been torpedoed once, and had lost, on another occasion, nearly all his crew with plague, so that he had much that was interesting to talk about. Mr. Blake, of the Strand Magazine, was also on board. A Unitarian Minister, Mr. Hale, was also a valuable companion, and we had much discussion over the origins of Christianity, which was the more interesting to me as I had taken advantage of the voyage to re-read the Acts and Paul's Epistles. There are no documents which can be read so often and yet reveal something new, the more so when you have that occult clue which is needful before Paul can be understood. It is necessary also to know something of Mythra worship and the other philosophies which Paul had learned, and woven into his Christianity. I have stated elsewhere my belief that all expressions about redemption by blood, the blood of the lamb, etc., are founded upon the parallel of the blood of the bull which was shed by the Mythra-worship- pers, and in which they were actually baptised. Enlarging upon this, Mr. Hale pointed out on the authority, if I remember right, of Pfleiderer's " Christian Origins," that in the Mythra service something is placed over the candidate, a hide probably, which is called " putting on Mythra," and corresponds with Paul's expression about " putting on Christ." Paul, with his tremendous energy and earnestness, fixed Christianity upon the world, but I wonder what Peter and those who had actually heard Christ’s words thought about it all. We have had Paul’s views about Christ, but we do not know Christ’s views about Paul. He had been, as we are told by himself, a Jewish Pharisee of the strictest type in his youth at Jerusalem, but was a Roman citizen, had lived long at Tarsus, which was a centre of Mithraism, and was clearly famous for his learning, since Festus twitted him with it. The simple tenets of the carpenter and the fishermen would take strange involved forms in such a brain as that. His epistles are presumably older than the gospels, which may, in their simplicity, represent a protest against his confused theology.

It was an enjoyable voyage in the little Paloona, and rested me after the whirlwind campaign of New Zealand. In large liners one loses in romance what one gains in comfort. On a small ship one feels nearer to Nature, to the water and even to the stars. On clear nights we had magnificent displays of the Southern heaven. I profited by the astronomical knowledge of Mr. Smythe. Here first I was introduced to Alpha Centauri, which is the nearest fixed star, and, therefore, the cobber to the sun. It is true that it is distant years of light travel, and light travels at about 182,000 miles a second, but when one considers that it takes centuries for average starlight to reach us, we may consider Alpha as snuggling close up to us for companionship in the lonely wastes of space. The diamond belt of Orion looks homely enough with the bright solitaire Sirius sparkling beside it, but there are the Magellanic clouds, the scattered wisps torn from the Milky Way, and there is the strange black space called the Coal- sack, where one seems to look right past all created things into a bottomless void. What would not Galileo and all the old untravelled astronomers have given to have one glimpse of this wondrous Southern display?

Captain Doorby, finding that he had time in hand, ran the ship into a small deserted bay upon 225

p the coast, and, after anchoring, ordered out all the boats for the sake of practice. It was very well done, and yet what I saw convinced me that it should be a Board of Trade regulation, if it is not one already, that once, at least, near the beginning of every long voyage, this should be compulsory. It is only when you come to launch them that you really realise which of the davits is rusted up, and which block is tangled, or which boat is without a plug. I was much impressed by this idea as I watched the difficulties which were encountered even in that secluded anchorage.

The end of my journey was uneventful, but my joy at being reunited with my family was clouded by the news of the death of my mother. She was eighty-three years of age, and had for some years been almost totally blind, so that her change was altogether a release, but it was sad to think that we should never see the kind face and gracious presence again in its old material form. Denis summed up our feelings when he cried, “ What a reception Grannie must have had! “ There was never any one who had so broad and sympathetic a heart, a world-mother mourning over everything which was weak or oppressed, and thinking nothing of her own time and comfort in her efforts to help the sufferers. Even when blind and infirm she would plot and plan for the benefit of others, thinking out their needs, and bringing about surprising results by her intervention. For my own psychic work she had, I fear, neither sympathy nor understanding, but she had an innate faith and spirituality which were so natural to her that she could not conceive the needs of others in that direction. She understands now.

Whilst in the Blue Mountains I was forced to reconsider my plans on account of the strike which has paralysed all coastal trade. If I should be able to reach Tasmania I might be unable to return, and it would, indeed, be a tragic situation if my family were ready to start for England in the Nalder a, and I was unable to join them. I felt, therefore, that I was not justified in going to Tasmania, even if I were able, which is very doubtful. It was sad, as it spoiled the absolute completeness of my tour, but on the other hand I felt sure that I should find plenty of work to do on the mainland, without taking so serious a risk.

It is a terrible thing to see this young country, which needs every hour of time and every ounce of energy for its speedy development frittering itself away in these absurd conflicts, which never give any result to compare with the loss. One feels that in the stern contests of nations one will arise which has economic discipline, and that none other could stand against it. If the training of reorganised Germany should take this shape she will conquer and she will deserve to conquer. It is a monstrous abuse that Compulsory Arbitration Courts should be established, as is the case in Australia, and that Unions should either strike against their decisions, or should anticipate their decisions, as in the case of these stewards, by forcing a strike. In such a case I hold that the secretary and every other official of the Union should be prosecuted and heavily fined, if not imprisoned. It is the only way by which the community can be saved from a tyranny which is quite as real as that of any autocrat. What would be said, for example, of a king who cut off the islands of Tasmania and New Zealand from communication with the outer world, deranging the whole Christmas arrangements of countless families who had hoped to reunite? Yet this is what has been done by a handful of stewards with some trivial grievance. A fireman who objects to the cooking can hold up a great vessel. There is nothing but chaos in front of a nation unless it insists upon being master in its own house, and forbids either employed or employer to do that which is for the common scathe. The time seems to be coming when Britons, the world over, will have to fight for liberty against licence just as hard as ever they fought for her against tyranny. This I say with full sympathy for the Labour Party, which I have often been tempted to join, but have always been repelled by their attempt to bully the rest of the State instead of using those means which would certainly ensure their legitimate success, even if it took some years to accomplish. There are many anomalies and injustices, and it is only a people's party which can set them right. Hereditary honours are an injustice, lands owned by feudal or royal gift are an injustice, increased private wealth through the growth of towns is an injustice, coal royalties are an injustice, the expense of the law is a glaring injustice, the support of any single religion by the State is an injustice, our divorce laws are an injustice — with such a list a real honest Labour Party would be a sure winner if it could persuade us all that it would not commit injustices itself, and bolster up labour artificially at the expense of every one else. It is not organised labour which moves me, for it can take care of itself, but it is the indigent governesses with thirty pounds a year, the broken people, the people with tiny pensions, the struggling widows with children — when I think of all these and then of the man who owns a county I feel that there is something deeply, deeply wrong which nothing but some great strong new force can set right.

One finds in the Blue Mountains that opportunity of getting alone with real Nature, which is so healing and soothing a thing. The wild scrub flows up the hillsides to the very grounds of the hotels, and in a very few minutes one may find oneself in the wilderness of ferns and gum trees unchanged from immemorial ages. It is a very real danger to the young or to those who have no sense of direction, for many people have wandered off and never come back alive — in fact, there is a specially enrolled body of searchers who hunt for the missing visitor. I have never in all my travels seen anything more spacious and wonderful than the view from the different sandstone bluffs, looking down into the huge gullies beneath, a thousand feet deep, where the great gum trees look like rows of cabbages. I suppose that in water lies the force which, in the course of ages, has worn down the soft, sandy rock and formed these colossal clefts, but the effects are so enormous that one is inclined to think some great earth convulsion must also have been concerned in their production. Some of the cliffs have a sheer drop of over one thousand feet, which is said to be unequalled in the world.

These mountains are so precipitous and tortuous, presenting such a maze to the explorer, that for many years they were a formidable barrier to the extension of the young Colony. There were only about forty miles of arable land from the coast to the great Hawkesbury River, which winds round the base of the mountains. Then came this rocky labyrinth. At last, in 1812, four brave and persevering men — Blaxland, Evans, Wentworth and Lawson — took the matter in hand, and after many adventures, blazed a trail across, by which all the splendid hinterland was opened up, including the gold fields, which found their centre in the new town of Bathurst. When one reflects that all the gold had to be brought across this wilderness, with unexplored woodlands fringing the road, it is no wonder that a race of bushrangers sprang into existence, and the marvel is that the police should ever have been able to hunt them down. So fresh is all this very vital history in the development of a nation, that one can still see upon the trees the marks of the explorers’ axes, as they endeavoured to find a straight trail among the countless winding gullies. At Mount York, the highest view-point, a monument has been erected to them, at the place from which they got the first glimpse of the promised land beyond.

We had been told that in the tropical weather now prevailing, it was quite vain for us to go to Queensland, for no one would come to listen to lectures. My own belief was, however, that this subject has stirred people very deeply, and that they will suffer any inconvenience to learn about it. Mr. Smythe was of opinion, at first, that my audiences were drawn from those who came from curiosity because they had read my writings, but when he found that the second and the third meetings were as full as the first, he was forced to admit that the credit of success lay with the matter rather than with the man. In any case I reflected that my presence in Brisbane would certainly bring about the usual Press controversy, with a free ventilation of the subject, so we determined to go. Mr. Smythe, for once, did not accompany us, but the very capable lady who assists him, Miss Sternberg, looked after all arrangements.

It was a very wearisome train journey of twenty-eight hours; tropically hot, rather dusty, with a change in the middle, and the usual stuffiness of a sleeper, which was superior to the ordinary American one, but below the British standard. How the Americans, with their nice sense of decency, can stand the awful accommodation their railway companies give them, or at any rate, used to give them, is incomprehensible, but public opinion in all matters asserts itself far less directly in America than in Britain. Australia is half-way between, and, certainly, I have seen abuses there in the management of trains, posts, telegrams and telephones, which would have evoked loud protests at home. I think that there is more initiative at home. For example, when the railway strike threatened to throttle the country, the public rose to the occasion and improvised methods which met the difficulty. I have not heard of anything of the kind in the numerous strikes with which this community is harassed. Any individual action arouses attention. I remember the amusement of the Hon. Agar Wynne when, on arriving late at Melbourne, in the absence of porters, I got a trolley, placed my own luggage on it, and wheeled it to a cab. Yet we thought nothing of that when labour was short in London.

The country north of Sydney is exactly like the Blue Mountains, on a lesser scale — riven ranges of sandstone covered with gum trees. I cannot understand those who say there is nothing worth seeing in Australia, for I know no big city which has glorious scenery so near it as Sydney. After crossing the Queensland border, one comes to the Darling Downs, unsurpassed for cattle and wheat. Our first impressions of the new State were that it was the most naturally rich of any Australian Colony, and the longer we were in it, the more did we realise that this was indeed so. It is so enormous, however, that it is certain, sooner or later, to be divided into a South, Middle, and North, each of which will be a large and flourishing community. We observed from the railway all sorts of new vegetable life, and I was especially interested to notice that our English Yellow Mullein was lining the track, making its way gradually up country.

Even Sydney did not provide a warmer and more personal welcome than that which we both received when we at last reached Brisbane. At Toowoomba, and other stations on the way, small deputations of

Spiritualists had met the train, but at Brisbane the platform was crowded. My wife was covered with flowers, and we were soon made to realise that we had been misinformed in the south, when we were told that the movement was confined to a small circle.

We were tired, but my wife rose splendidly to the occasion. The local paper says : " Carefully concealing all feelings of fatigue and tiredness after the long and wearisome train journey from Sydney, Lady Doyle charmed the large gathering of Spiritualists assembled at the Central Railway Station on Saturday night, to meet her and her husband. In vivacious fashion, Lady Doyle responded to the many enthusiastic greetings, and she was obviously delighted with the floral gifts presented to her on her arrival. To a press representative, Lady Doyle expressed her admiration of the Australian scenery, and she referred enthusiastically to the Darling Downs district and to the Toowoomba Range. During her husband's absence in New Zealand, Lady Doyle and her children spent a holiday in the Blue Mountains (New South Wales), and were delighted with the innumerable gorgeous beauty spots there."

After a short experience, when we were far from comfortable, we found our way to the Bellevue Hotel, where a kindly old Irish proprietress, Mrs. Finegan, gave us greater attention and luxury than we had found anywhere up to then on the Australian continent.

The usual press discussion was in full swing. The more bigoted clergy in Brisbane, as elsewhere, were very vituperative, but so unreasonable and behind their own congregations in knowledge and intelligence, that they must have alienated many who heard them. Father Lane, for example, preaching in the cathedral, declared that the whole subject was " an abomination to the Lord." He does not seem to have asked himself why the Lord gave us these powers if they are an abomination. He also declared that we denied r our moral responsibility to God in this life, a responsibility which must have weighed rather lightly upon Father Lane when he made so false a statement. The Rev. L. H. Jaggers, not to be outdone in absurdity by Father Lane, described all our fellow-mortals of India, China and Japan as " demoniacal races." Dr. Cosh put forward the Presbyterian sentiment that I was Anti-Christ, and a serious menace to the spiritual life of Australia. Really, when I see the want of all truth and charity shown by these gentlemen, it does begin to convince me of the reality of diabolical interference in the affairs of mankind, for I cannot understand why, otherwise, such efforts should be made to obscure, by falsehood and abuse, the great revelation and comfort which God has sent us. The opposition culminated in an open letter from Dr. Cosh in the Mail, demanding that I should define my exact views as to the Trinity, the Atonement, and other such mysteries. I answered by pointing out that all the religious troubles of the past had come from the attempt to give exact definitions of things which were entirely beyond the human power of thought, and that I refused to be led along so dangerous a path. One Baptist clergyman, named Rowe, had the courage to say that he was on my side, but with that exception I fear that I had a solid phalanx against me.

On the other hand, the general public were amazingly friendly. It was the more wonderful as it was tropical weather, even for Brisbane. In that awful heat the great theatre could not hold the people, and they stood in the upper galleries, packed tightly, for an hour and a half without a movement or a murmur. It was a really wonderful sight. Twice the house was packed this way, so (as the Tasmanian venture was now hopeless, owing to the shipping strike) I determined to remain in our very comfortable quarters at the Bellevue Hotel, and give one more lecture, covering fresh ground. The subject opens up so that I am sure I could lecture for a week without repeating myself. On this occasion the house was crowded once more. The theatrical manager said, “ Well, if it was comic opera in the season, it could not have succeeded better! “ I was rather exhausted at the end, for I spoke, as usual, with no chairman, and gave them a full ninety minutes, but it was nearing the end of my work, and the prospect of the quiet time ahead of us helped me on.

I met a kinsman, Dr. A. A. Doyle, who is a distinguished skin specialist, in Brisbane. He knew little of psychic matters, but he had met with a remarkable experience. His son, a splendid young fellow, died at the front. At that moment his father woke to find the young soldier stooping over him, his face quite close. He at once woke his wife and told her that their son, he feared, was dead. But here comes a fine point. He said to the wife, “ Eric has had a return of the acne of the face, for which I treated him years ago. I saw the spots.” The next post brought a letter, written before Eric’s death, asking that some special ointment should be sent, as his acne had returned. This is a very instructive case, as showing that even an abnormal thing is reproduced at first upon the etheric body. But what has a materialist to say to the whole story? He can only evade it, or fall back upon his usual theory, that every one who reports such occurrences is either a fool or a liar.

We had a pleasant Sunday among the birds of Queensland. Mr. Chisholm, an enthusiastic bird- lover, took us round to see two very large aviaries, since the haunt of the wild birds was beyond our reach. Birds in captivity have always saddened me, but here I found them housed in such great structures, with every comfort included, and every natural enemy excluded, that really one could not pity them. One golden pheasant amused us, for he is a very conceited bird when all is well with him, and likes to occupy the very centre of the stage, with the spot light upon him, and a chorus of drab hens admiring him from the rear. We had caught him, however, when he was moulting, and he was so conscious of his bedraggled glories that he dodged about behind a barrel, and scuttled under cover every time we tried to put him out. A fearful thing happened one day, for a careless maid left the door ajar, and in the morning seventy of the inmates were gone. It must have been a cruel blow to Mr. Baldwin, who is devoted to his collection. However, he very wisely left the door open, after securing the remaining birds, and no less than thirty-four of the refugees returned. The fate of the others was probably tragic, for they were far from the mountains which are their home.

Mr. Farmer Whyte, the very progressive editor of the Daily Mail, who is miles ahead of most journalists in psychic knowledge, took us for an interesting drive through the dense woods of One Tree Hill. Here we were courteously met by two of the original owners, one of them an iguana, a great, heavy lizard, which bolted up a tree, and the other a kangaroo, who stood among the brushwood, his ears rotating with emotion, while he gazed upon our halted car. From the summit of the hill one has a wonderful view of the ranges stretching away to the horizon in all directions, while at one’s feet lies the very wide spread city. As nearly every dwelling house is a bungalow, with its own little ground, the Australian cities take up great space, which is nullified by their very excellent tram services. A beautiful river, the Brisbane, rather wider than the Thames, winds through the town, and has sufficient depth to allow ocean steamers to come within cab-drive of the hotels.

About this time I had the usual experience which every visitor to the States or to the Dominions is liable to, in that his own utterances in his letters home get into print, and boomerang back upon him. My own feelings, both to the Australian people and their country, have been so uniformly whole-hearted that I should have thought no mischief could be made, but at the same time, I have always written freely that which I was prepared to stand by. In this case, the extract, from a private letter, removed from all modifying context, came through as follows :

“ Sir Conan Doyle, quoted in the International Psychic Gazette, in referring to his ‘ ups and downs ‘ in Australia, says: ‘ Amid the “downs” is the Press boycott, caused partly by ignorance and want of proportion, partly by moral cowardice and fear of finding out later that they had backed the wrong horse, or had given the wrong horse fair play. They are very backward, and far behind countries like Iceland and Denmark in the knowledge of what has been done in Spiritualism. They are dear folk, these Australians, but, Lord, they want Spirituality, and dynamiting out of their grooves! The Presbyterians actually prayed that I might not reach the country. This is rather near murder, if they thought their rotten prayers would avail. The result was an excellent voyage, but it is the spiritual deadness of this place which gets on my nerves.’ “

This was copied into every paper in Australia, but it was soon recognised that “ this place “ was not Australia, but Melbourne, from which the letter was dated. I have already recorded how I was treated by the leading paper in that city, and my general experience there was faithfully reflected in my remarks. Therefore, I had nothing to withdraw. My more extended experience taught me that the general level of intelligence and of spirituality in the Australasian towns is as high as in the average towns of Great Britain, though none are so far advanced as towns like Manchester or Glasgow, nor are there the same number of professional and educated men who have come forward and given testimony. The thirst for information was great, however, and that proved an open mind, which must now lead to a considerable extension of knowledge within the churches as well as without.

My remarks had been caused by the action of the Argus, but the Age, the other leading Melbourne paper, seemed to think that its honour was also touched, and had a very severe leading article upon my delinquencies, and my alleged views, which was, as usual, a wild travesty of my real ones. It began this article by the assertion that, apparently, I still thought that Australia was inhabited by the aborigines, before I ventured to bring forward such theories. Such a remark’ applied to a subject which has won the assent in varying degrees of every one who has seriously examined it, and which has its foundation resting upon the labours of some of the greatest minds in the world, did not help me to recover my respect for the mentality and breadth of view of the journals of Melbourne. I answered, pointing out that David Syme, the very distinguished founder of the paper, by no means shared this contempt to Spiritualism, as is shown by two long letters included in his published Life.

This attitude, and that of so many other objectors, is absolutely unintelligible to me. They must know that this cult is spreading and that many capable minds have examined and endorsed it. They must know, also, that the views we proclaim, the continuance of happy life and the practical abolition of death are, if true, the grandest advance that the human race has ever made. And yet, so often, instead of saying, “ Well, here is some one who is supposed to know something about the matter. Let us see if this grand claim can possibly be established by evidence and argument,” they break into insults and revilings as if something offensive had been laid before them. This attitude can only arise from the sluggish conservatism of the human brain, which runs easily in certain well-worn grooves, and is horrified by the idea that something may come to cause mental exertion and readjustment.

LAYING FOUNDATION STONE OF SPIRITUALIST CHURCH AT BRISBANE.

See page 214.

I am bound to add that the general public went out of their way to show that their Press did not represent their views. The following passage is typical of many : " The criticism which you have so justly resented is, I am sure, not in keeping with the views of the majority of the Australian people. In my own small sphere many of my friends have been stirred deeply by your theories, and the inspiration in some cases has been so marked that the fact should afford you satisfaction. We are not all spiritually defunct. Many are quite satisfied that you are giving your best for humanity, and believe that there is a tremendous revelation coming to this weary old world."

The Spiritualists of Brisbane, greatly daring, have planned out a church which is to cost £10,000, trusting to those who work with us on the other side to see the enterprise through. The possible fallacy lies in the chance that those on the other side do not desire to see this immense movement become a separate sect, but are m favour of the peaceful penetration of all creeds by our new knowledge. It is on record that early in the movement Senator Talmadge asked two different spirit controls, in different States of the Union, what the ultimate goal of this spiritual outburst might be, and received exactly the same answer from each, namely, that it was .to prove immortality and to unify the Churches. The first half has been done, so far as survival implies immortality, and the second may well come to pass, by giving such a large common platform to each Church that they will learn to disregard the smaller differences.

Be this as it may, one could not but admire the faith and energy of Mr. Reinhold and the others who were determined to have a temple of their own. I laid the foundation stone at three in the afternoon under so tropical a sun that I felt as if the ceremony was going to have its immemorial accompaniment of a human sacrifice and even of a whole-burned offering. The crowd made matters worse, but a friendly bystander with an umbrella saved me from heat apoplexy. I felt the occasion was a solemn one, for it was certainly the first Spiritual Church in the whole of Queensland, and I doubt if we have many anywhere in Australia, for among our apostolic gifts poverty is conspicuous. It has always amazed me how Theosophists and Christian Scientists get their fine halls and libraries, while we, with our zeal and our knowledge, have some bare schoolroom or worse as our only meeting place. It reflects little credit upon the rich people who accept the comforts we bring, but share none of the burdens we bear. There is a kink in their souls.

I spoke at some length, and the people listened with patience in spite of the great heat. It was an occasion when I could, with propriety, lay emphasis upon the restraint and charity with which such a church should be run. The Brisbane paper reports me as follows : “I would emphasise three things. Mind your own business; go on quietly in your own way; you know the truth, and do not need to quarrel with other people. There are many roads to salvation. The second point I would urge is that you should live up to your knowledge. We know for certain that we live on after death, that everything we do in this world influences what comes after; therefore, we can afford to be unselfish and friendly to other religions. Some Spiritualists run down the Bible, whereas it is from cover to cover a spiritual book. I would like to see the Bible read in every Spiritualistic Church with particular attention paid to the passages dealing with occultism. The third point I would emphasise is that you should have nothing to do with fortune-telling of anything of that kind. All fortune-telling is really a feeling out in the dark. If good things are going to happen to you be content to wait for them, and if evil is to come nothing is to be gained by attempting to anticipate it. My sympathies are with the police in their attitude to fortune-tellers, whose black magic is far removed from the services of our mediums in striving to bring comfort to those whose loved ones have gone before. If these three things are lived up to, this church will be a source of great brightness and happiness.”

Our work was pleasantly broken by an invitation to lunch with Sir Matthew Nathan, at Government House. Sir Matthew impresses one as a man of character, and as he is a financial authority he is in a position to help by his advice in restoring the credit of Queensland. The matter in dispute, which has been called repudiation, does not, as it seems to me, deserve so harsh a term, as it is one of those cases where there are two sides to the question, so equally balanced that it is difficult for an outsider to pronounce a judgment. On the one hand the great squatters who hold millions of acres in the State had received the land on considerable leases which charged them with a very low rent — almost a nominal one — on condition of their taking up and developing the country. On the other hand, the Government say these leases were granted under very different circumstances, the lessees have already done very well out of them, the war has made it imperative that the State raise funds, and the assets upon which the funds can be raised are all in the hands of these lessees, who should consent to a revision of their agreements. So stands the quarrel, so far as I could understand it, and the State has actually imposed the increased rates. Hence the cry that they have repudiated their own contract. The result of the squatters’ grievance was that Mr. Theodore, the Premier, was unable to raise money in the London market, and returned home with the alternative of getting a voluntary loan in the Colony, or of raising a compulsory loan from those who had the money. The latter has an ugly sound, and yet the need is great, and if some may be compelled to serve with their bodies I do not see why some may not also be compelled to serve with their purses. The assets of the Colony compare very favourably, I believe, with others, for while these others have sold their lands, the Government of Queensland has still the ownership of the main tracts of the gloriously fertile country.

Therefore, with an issue at 6\ per cent., without tax, one would think that they should have no difficulty in getting any reasonable sum. I was cinemaed in the act of applying for a small share in the issue, but I think the advertisement would have been of more value to the loan, had they captured some one of greater financial stability.

The more one examines this alleged “ repudiation “ the less reason appears in the charge, and as it has assuredly injured Queensland’s credit, it is well that an impartial traveller should touch upon it. The squatters are the richer folk and in a position to influence the public opinion of the world, and in their anxiety to exploit their own grievance they seem to have had little regard for the reputation of their country. It is like a man burning down his house in the hope of roasting some other inmate of whom he disapproves. A conservative paper (the Producer’s Review, January ioth, 1921), says : “ No living man can say how much Queensland has been damaged by the foolish partisan statements that have been uttered and published.” The article proceeds to show in very convincing style, with chapter and verse, that the Government has always been well within its rights, and that a Conservative Government on a previous occasion did the same thing, framing a Bill on identical lines.

On January 12th my kinsman, Dr. Doyle, with his charming wife, took us out into the bush for a billy tea — that is, to drink tea which is prepared as the bushmen prepare it in their tin cans. It was certainly excellent, and we enjoyed the drive and the whole experience, though uninvited guests of the mosquito tribe made things rather lively for us. I prayed that my face would be spared, as I did not wish to turn up at my lecture as if I had been having a round with Dr. Cosh, and I react in a most whole-hearted way to any attentions from an insect. The result was certainly remarkable, be it coincidence or not, for though my hands were like boxing-gloves, and my neck all swollen, there was not a mark upon my face. I fancy that the hardened inhabitants hardly realise what new chums endure after they are bitten by these pests. It means to me not only disfigurement, but often a sleepless night. My wife and the children seem to escape more lightly. I found many objects of interest in the bush — among others a spider’s web so strong that full-sized dragon flies were enmeshed in it. I could not see the creature itself, but it must have been as big as a tarantula. Our host was a large landowner as well as a specialist, and he talked seriously of leaving the country, so embittered was he by the land-policy of the Government. At the same time, the fact that he could sell his estate at a fair price seemed to imply that others took a less grave view of the situation. Many of the richer classes think that Labour is adopting a policy of deliberate petty irritation in order to drive them out of the country, but perhaps they are oversensitive.

So full was our life in Brisbane that there was hardly a day that we had not some memorable experience, even when I had to lecture in the evening. Often we were going fourteen and fifteen hours a day, and a tropical day at that. On January 14th we were taken to see the largest bee-farm in Australia, run by Mr. H. L. Jones. Ever since I consigned Mr. Sherlock Holmes to a bee farm for his old age, I have been supposed to know something of the subject, but really I am so ignorant that when a woman wrote to me and said she would be a suitable housekeeper to the retired detective because she could " segregate the queen," I did not know what she meant. On this occasion I saw the operation and many other wonderful things which make me appreciate Maeterlinck's prose-poem upon the subject. There is little poetry about Mr. Jones however, and he is severely practical. He has numbers of little boxes with a store of bee-food compressed into one end of them. Into each he thrusts a queen with eight attendants to look after her. The food is enough to last two months, so he simply puts on a postage stamp and sends it off to any one in California or South Africa who is starting an apiary. Several hives were opened for our inspection with the precaution of blowing in some smoke to pacify the bees. We were told that this sudden inrush of smoke gives the bees the idea that some great cataclysm has occurred, and their first action is to lay in a store of honey, each of them, as a man might seize provisions in an earthquake so as to be ready for whatever the future might bring. He showed us that the queen, fed with some special food by the workers, can lay twice her own weight of eggs in a day, and that if we could find something similar for hens we could hope for an unbroken stream of eggs. Clever as the bee is it is clearly an instinctive hereditary cleverness, for man has been able to make many improvements in its methods, making artificial comb which is better than the original, in that it has cells for more workers and fewer drones. Altogether it was a wonderful demonstration, which could be viewed with comfort under a veil with one's hands in one's pockets, for though we were assured they would not sting if they knew we would not hurt them, a misunderstanding was possible. One lady spectator seemed to have a sudden ambition to break the standing jump record, and we found that she had received two stings, but Mr. Jones and his assistants covered their hands with the creatures and were quite immune. A half-wild wallaby appeared during our visit, and after some coyness yielded to the fascination which my wife exercises over all animals, and fed out of her hand. We were assured that this had never before occurred in the case of any visitor.

We found in Brisbane, as in every other town, that the question of domestic service, the most important of all questions to a householder, was very acute. Ladies who occupied leading positions in the town assured us that it was impossible to keep maids, and that they were compelled now to give it up in despair, and to do all their own house work with such casual daily assistance as they could get. A pound a week is a common wage for very inefficient service. It is a serious matter and no solution is in sight. English maids are, I am sorry to say, looked upon as the worst of all, for to all the other faults they add constant criticism of their employers, whom they pronounce to be “ no ladies “ because they are forced to do many things which are not done at home. Inefficiency plus snobbishness is a dreadful mixture. Altogether the lot of the Australian lady is not an easy one, and we admired the brave spirit with which they rose above their troubles.

This servant question bears very directly upon the Imperial puzzle of the northern territory. A white man may live and even work there, but a white woman cannot possibly run a household unless domestic labour is plentiful. In that climate it simply means absolute breakdown in a year. Therefore it is a mad policy which at present excludes so rigorously the Chinese, Indians or others who alone can make white households possible. White labour assumes a dog in the manger policy, for it will not, or cannot, do the work itself, and yet it shuts out those who could do it. It is an impossible position and must be changed. How severe and unreasonable are the coloured immigrant laws is shown by the fact that the experienced and popular Commander of the Naldera, Captain Lewellin, was fined at Sydney a large sum of money because three Goa Indians deserted from his ship. There is a great demand for Indian camel drivers in the north, and this no doubt was the reason for the desertion, but what a reductio ad absurdum of the law which comes between the demand and the supply, besides punishing an innocent victim.

As usual a large number of psychic confidences reached us, some of which were very interesting. One lady is a clairaudient, and on the occasion of her mother falling ill she heard the words “ Wednesday — the fifteenth.” Death seemed a matter of hours, and the date far distant, but the patient, to the surprise of the doctors, still lingered. Then came the audible message “ She will tell you where she is going.” The mother had lain for two days helpless and comatose. Suddenly she opened her eyes and said in a clear strong voice, “I have seen the mansions in my father’s house. My husband and children await me there. I could not have imagined anything so exquisitely lovely.” Then she breathed her last, the date being the 15th.

We were entertained to dinner on the last evening by the Hon. John Fihilly, acting Premier of the Colony, and his wife. He is an Irish labour leader with a remarkable resemblance to Dan O’Connell in his younger days. 1 was pleased to see that the toast of the King was given though it was not called for at a private dinner. Fihilly is a member of the Government, and I tackled him upon the question of British emigrants being enticed out by specious promises on the part of Colonial Agents in London, only to find that no work awaited them. Some deplorable cases had come within my own observation, one, an old Lancashire Fusilier, having walked the streets for six months. He assured me that the arrangements were now in perfect order, and that emigrants were held back in the old country until they could be sure that there was a place for them. There are so many out of work in Australia that one feels some sympathy with those labour men who are against fresh arrivals.

And there lies the great problem which we have not, with all our experience, managed to master. On the one side illimitable land calling for work. On the other innumerable workers calling for land. And yet the two cannot be joined. I remember how it jarred me when I saw Edmonton, in Western Canada, filled with out-of-workers while the great land lay uninhabited. The same strange parodox meets one here. It is just the connecting link that is missing, and that link lies in wise prevision. The helpless newcomer can do nothing if he and his family are dumped down upon a hundred acres of gum trees. Put yourself in their position. How can they hope with their feeble hands to clear the ground? All this early work must be done for them by the State, the owner repaying after he has made good. Let the emigrant move straight on to a cleared farm, with a shack-house already prepared, and clear instructions as to the best crops, and how to get them. Then it seems to me that emigration would bring no want of employment in its train. But the State must blaze the trail and the public follow after. Such arrangements may even now exist, but if so they need expansion and improvement, for they do not seem to work.

Before leaving Brisbane my attention was drawn to the fact that the State photographer, when he took the scene of the opening of the loan, had produced to all appearance a psychic effect. The Brisbane papers recorded it as follows : —

"'It is a remarkable result, and I cannot offer any opinion as to what caused it. It is absolutely mystifying.' Such was the declaration made yesterday by the Government photographer, Mr. W. Mobsby, in regard to the unique effect associated with a photograph he took on Thursday last of Sir A. Conan Doyle. Mr. Mobsby, who has been connected with photography since boyhood, explained that he was instructed to take an official photograph of the function at which Sir A. Conan Doyle handed over his subscription to the State Loan organiser. When he arrived, the entrance to the building was thronged by a large crowd, and he had to mount a step-ladder, which was being used by the Daily Mail photographer, in order to get a good view of the proceedings. Mr. Mobsby took only one picture, just at the moment Sir A. Conan Doyle was mounting the steps at the Government Tourist Bureau to meet the Acting Premier, Mr. J. Fihilly. Mr. Mobsby developed the film himself, and was amazed to find that while all the other figures in the picture were distinct the form of Sir A. Conan Doyle appeared enveloped in mist and could only be dimly seen. The photograph was taken on an ordinary film with a No. 3a Kodak, and careful examination does not in any way indicate the cause of the sensational result." I have had so many personal proofs of the intervention of supernormal agencies during the time that I have been engaged upon this task that I am prepared to accept the appearance of this aura as being an assurance of the presence of those great forces for whom I act as a humble interpreter. At the same time, the sceptic is very welcome to explain it as a flawed film and a coincidence.

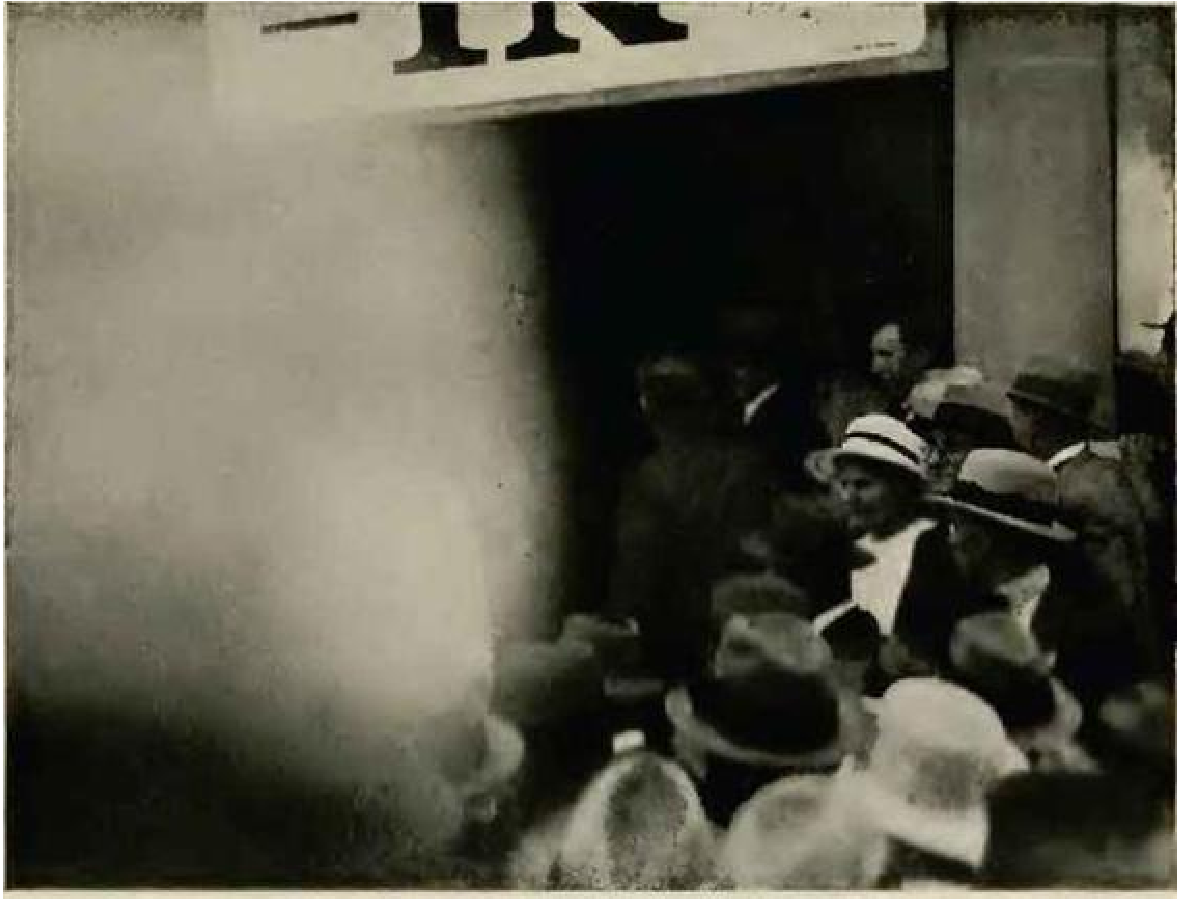

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CURIOUS PHOTOGRAPHIC EFFECT REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT.

Taken by the Official Photographer, Brisbane. "Absolutely mystifying" is his description.

We returned from Brisbane to Sydney in the Orient Liner “ Orsova,” which is a delightful alternative to the stuffy train. The sea has always been a nursing mother to me, and I suppose I have spent a clear two years of my life upon the waves. We had a restful Sunday aboard the boat, disturbed only by the Sunday service, which left its usual effect upon my mind. The Psalms were set to some unhappy tune, very different from the grand Gregorian rhythm, so that with its sudden rise to a higher level it sounded more like the neighing of horses than the singing of mortals. The words must surely offend anyone who considers what it is that he is saying — a mixture of most unmanly wailing and spiteful threats. How such literature has been perpetuated three thousand years, and how it can’ ever have been sacred, is very strange. Altogether from first to last there was nothing, save only the Lord’s Prayer, which could have any spiritual effect. These old observances are like an iron ball tied to the leg of humanity, for ever hampering spiritual progress. If now, after the warning of the great war, we have not the mental energy and the moral courage to get back to realities, we shall deserve what is coming to us.

On January 17th we were back, tired but contented, in the Medlow Bath Hotel in the heart of the Blue Mountains — an establishment which I can heartily recommend to any who desire a change from the summer heats of Sydney.

CHAPTER XI

Medlow Bath. — Jenolan Caves. — Giant skeleton. — Mrs. Foster Turner's mediumship. — A wonderful prophecy. — Final results. — Third sitting with Bailey. — Failure of State Control. — Retrospection. — Melbourne presentation. — Crooks. — Lecture at Perth. — West Australia. — Rabbits, sparrows and sharks.

We recuperated after our Brisbane tour by spending the next week at Medlow Bath, that little earthly paradise, which is the most restful spot we have found in our wanderings. It was built originally by Mr. Mark Foy, a successful draper of Sydney, and he is certainly a man of taste, for he has adorned it with a collection of prints and of paintings — hundreds of each — which would attract attention in any city, but which on a mountain top amid the wildest scenery give one the idea of an Arabian Nights palace. There was a passage some hundreds of yards long, which one has to traverse on the way to each meal, and there was a certain series of French prints, representing events of Byzantine history, which I found it difficult to pass, so that I was often a late comer. A very fair library is among the other attractions of this remarkable place.

Before leaving we spent one long day at the famous Jenolan Caves, which are distant about forty-five miles. As the said miles are very up- and-down, and as the cave exploration involves several hours of climbing, it makes a fairly hard day's work. We started all seven in a motor, as depicted by the wayside photographers, but Baby got sick and had to be left with Jakeman at the half-way house, where we picked her up, quite recovered, on our return. It was as well, for the walk would have been quite beyond her, and yet having once started there is no return, so we should have ended by carrying her through all the subterranean labyrinths. The road is a remarkably good one, and represents a considerable engineering feat. It passes at last through an enormous archway of rock which marks the entrance to the cave formations. These caves are hollowed out of what was once a coral reef in a tropical sea, but is now sixty miles inland with a mountain upon the top of it — such changes this old world has seen. If the world were formed only that man might play his drama upon it, then mankind must be in the very earliest days of his history, for who would build so elaborate a stage if the play were to be so short and insignificant?

The caves are truly prodigious. They were discovered first in the pursuit of some poor devil of a bushranger who must have been hard put to it before he took up his residence in this damp and dreary retreat. A brave man, Wilson, did most of the actual exploring, lowering himself by a thin rope into noisome abysses of unknown depth and charting out the whole of this devil’s warren. It is so vast that many weeks would be needed to go through it, and it is usual at one visit to take only a single sample. On this occasion it was the River Cave, so named because after many wanderings you come on a river about twenty feet across and forty-five feet deep which has to be navigated for some distance in a punt. The stalactite effects, though very wonderful, are not, I think, superior to those which I have seen in Derbyshire, and the caves have none of that historical glamour which is needed in order to link some large natural object to our own comprehension. I can remember in Derbyshire how my imagination and sympathy were stirred by a Roman lady’s brooch which had been found among the rubble. Either a wild beast or a bandit knew best how it got there. Jenolan has few visible links with the past, but

OUR PAPTY EN ROUTE TO THE JENOLAN CAVES, JANUARY 20TH, 1921, IN FRONT OF OLD COyRf JiOUSE IN WHJCH PUSHRANQE^S WERE TR|Ep.

one of them is a tremendous one. It is the complete, though fractured, skeleton of a very large man — seven foot four said the guide, but he may have put it on a little — who was found partly imbedded in the lime. Many ages ago he seems to have fallen through the roof of the cavern, and the bones of a wallaby hard by give some indication that he was hunting at the time, and that his quarry shared his fate. He was of the Black fellow type, with a low-class cranium. It is remarkable the proportion of very tall men who are dug up in ancient tombs. Again and again the bogs of Ireland have yielded skeletons of seven and eight feet. Some years ago a Scythian chief was dug up on the Southern Steppes of Russia who was eight feet six. What a figure of a man with his winged helmet and his battle axe! All over the world one comes upon these giants of old, and one wonders whether they represented some race, further back still, who were all gigantic. The Babylonian tradition in our Bible says: “ And there were giants in those days.” The big primeval kangaroo has grown down to the smaller modern one, the wombat, which was an animal as big as a tapir, is now as small as a badger, the great saurians have become little lizards, and so it would seem not unreasonable to suppose that man may have run to great size at some unexplored period in his evolution.

We all emerged rather exhausted from the bowels of the earth, dazed with the endless succession of strange gypsum formations which we had seen, minarets, thrones, shawls, coronets, some of them so made that one could imagine that the old kobolds had employed their leisure hours in fashioning their freakish outlines. It was a memorable drive home in the evening. Once as a bird flew above my head, the slanting ray of the declining sun struck it and turned it suddenly to a vivid scarlet and green. It was the first of many parrots. Once also a couple of kangaroos bounded across the road, amid wild cries of delight from the children. Once, too, a long snake writhed across and was caught by one of the wheels of the motor. Rabbits, I am sorry to say, abounded. If they would confine themselves to these primeval woods, Australia would be content.

This was the last of our pleasant Australian excursions, and we left Medlow Bath refreshed not only by its charming atmosphere, but by feeling that we had gained new friends. We made our way on January 26th to

Sydney, where all business had to be settled up and preparations made for our homeward voyage.

Whilst in Sydney I had an opportunity of examining several phases of mediumship which will be of interest to the psychic reader. I called upon Mrs. Foster Turner, who is perhaps the greatest all-round medium with the highest general level of any sensitive in Australia. I found a middle-aged lady of commanding and pleasing appearance with a dignified manner and a beautifully modulated voice, which must be invaluable to her in platform work. Her gifts are so many that it must have been difficult for her to know which to cultivate, but she finally settled upon medical diagnosis, in which she has, I understand, done good work. Her practice is considerable, and her help is not despised by some of the leading practitioners. This gift is, as I have explained previously in the case of Mr. Bloomfield, a form of clairvoyance, and Mrs. Foster Turner enjoys all the other phases of that wonderful power, including psychometry, with its application to detective work, the discerning of spirits, and to a very marked degree the gift of prophecy, which she has carried upon certain occasions to a length which I have never known equalled in any reliable record of the past.

Here is an example for which, I am told, a hundred witnesses could be cited. At a meeting at the Little Theatre, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, on a Sunday evening of February, 1914, Mrs. Turner addressed the audience under an inspiration which claimed to be W. T. Stead. He ended his address by saying that in order to prove that he spoke with a power beyond mortal, he would, on the next Sunday, give a prophecy as to the future of the world.

Next Sunday some 900 people assembled, when Mrs. Turner, once more under control, spoke as follows. I quote from notes taken at the time. “ Now, although there is not at present a whisper of a great European war at hand, yet I want to warn you that before this year, 1914, has run its course, Europe will be deluged in blood. Great Britain, our beloved nation, will be drawn into the most awful war the world has ever known. Germany will be the great antagonist, and will draw other nations in her train. Austria will totter to its ruin. Kings and kingdoms will fall. Millions of precious lives will be slaughtered, but Britain will finally triumph and emerge victorious. During the year, also, the Pope of Rome will pass away, and a bomb will be placed in St. Paul’s Church, but will be discovered in time and removed before damage is done.”

Can any prophecy be more accurate or better authenticated than that? The only equally exact prophecy on public events which I can recall is when Emma Hardinge Britten, having been refused permission in 1860 to deliver a lecture on Spiritualism in the Town Hall of Atlanta, declared that, before many years had passed, that very Town Hall would be choked up with the dead and the dying, drawn from the State which persecuted her. This came literally true in the Civil War a few years later, when Sherman's army passed that way.

Mrs. Foster Turner's gift of psychometry is one which will be freely used by the community when we become more civilised and less ignorant. As an example of how it works, some years ago a Melbourne man named Cutler disappeared, and there was a considerable debate as to his fate. His wife, without giving a name, brought Cutler's boot to Mrs. Turner. She placed it near her forehead and at once got en rapport with the missing man. She described how he left his home, how he kissed his wife good-bye, all the succession of his movements during that morning, and finally how he had fallen or jumped over a bridge into the river, where he had been caught under some snag. A search at the place named revealed the dead body. If this case be compared with that of Mr. Foxhall, already quoted, one can clearly see that the same law underlies each. But what an ally for our C.I.D.!

There was one pleasant incident in connection with my visit to Mrs. Foster Turner. Upon my asking her whether she had any psychic impression when she saw me lecturing, she said that I was accompanied on the platform by a man in spirit life, about 70 years of age, grey-bearded, with rugged eyebrows. She searched her mind for a name, and then said, " Alfred Russell Wrallace."

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Doctor Abbott, who was present, confirmed that she had given that name at the time. It will be remembered that Mrs. Roberts, of Dunedin, had also given the name of the great Spiritualistic Scientist as being my coadjutor. There was no possible connection between Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Roberts. Indeed, the intervention of the strike had made it almost impossible for them to communicate, even if they had known each other — which they did not. It was very helpful to me to think that so great a soul was at my side in the endeavour to stimulate the attention of the world.

Two days before our departure we attended the ordinary Sunday service of the Spiritualists at Stanmore Road, which appeared to be most reverently and beautifully conducted. It is indeed pleasant to be present at a religious service which in no way offends one’s taste or one’s reason — which cannot always be said, even of Spiritualistic ones. At the end I was presented with a beautifully illuminated address from the faithful of Sydney, thanking me for what they were pleased to call “ the splendidly successful mission on behalf of Spiritualism in Sydney.” “ You are a specially chosen leader,” it went on, “ endowed with power to command attention from obdurate minds. We rejoice that you are ready to consecrate your life to the spread of our glorious gospel, which contains more proof of the eternal love of God than any other truth yet revealed to man.” So ran this kindly document. It was decorated with Australian emblems, and as there was a laughing jackass in the corner, I was able to raise a smile by suggesting that they had adorned it with the picture of a type of opponent with whom we were very familiar, the more so as some choice specimens had been observed in Sydney. There are some gentle souls in our ranks who refrain from all retort — and morally, they are no doubt the higher — but personally, when I am moved by the malevolence and ignorance of our opponents, I cannot help hitting back at them. It was Mark Twain, I think, who said that, instead of turning the other cheek, he returned the other’s cheek. That is my un- regenerate instinct.

I was able, for the first time, to give a bird’s-eye view of my tour and its final results. I had, in all, addressed twenty-five meetings, averaging 2,000 people in each, or 50,000 people in all. I read aloud a letter from Mr. Carlyle Smythe, who, with his father, had managed the tours of every lecturer of repute who had come to Australia during the past thirty years. Mr. Smythe knewT what success and failure were, and he said : “ For an equal number of lectures, yours has proved the most prosperous tour in my experience. No previous tour has won such consistent success. From the push-off at Adelaide to the great boom in New Zealand and Brisbane, it has been a great dynamic progression of enthusiasm. I have known in my career nothing parallel to it.”

The enemies of our cause were longing for my failure, and had, indeed, in some cases most unscrupulously announced it, so it was necessary that I should give precise details as to this great success, and to the proof which it afforded that the public mind was open to the new revelation. But, after all, the money test was the acid one. I had taken a party of seven people at a time when all expenses were doubled or trebled by the unnatural costs of travel and of living, which could not be made up for by increasing the price of admission. It would seem a miracle that I could clear this great bill of expenses in a country like Australia, where the large towns are few. And yet I was able to show that I had not only done so, after paying large sums in taxation, but that I actually had seven hundred pounds over. This I divided among Spiritual funds in Australia, the bulk of it, five hundred pounds, being devoted to a guarantee of expenses for the next lecturer who should follow me. It seemed to me that such a lecturer, if well chosen, and properly guaranteed against loss, might devote a longer time than I, and visit the smaller towns, from which I had often the most touching appeals. If he were successful, he need not touch the guarantee fund, and so it would remain as a perpetual source of active propaganda. Such was the scheme which I outlined that night, and which was eventually adopted by the Spiritualists of both Australia and New Zealand.

On my last evening at Sydney, I attended a third seance with Charles Bailey, the apport medium. It was not under test conditions, so that it can claim no strict scientific value, and yet the results are worth recording. It had struck 1

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DENIS WITH A BLACK SXAKE AT MEDLOW BATH.

me that a critic might claim that there was phosphorescent matter inside the spectacle case, which seemed to be the only object which Bailey took inside the cabinet, so I insisted on examining it, but found it quite innocent. The usual inconclusive shadowy appearance of luminous vapour was evident almost at once, but never, so far as I could judge, out of reach of the cabinet, which was simply a blanket drawn across the corner of the room. The Hindoo control then announced that an apport would be brought, and asked that water be placed in a tin basin. He (that is, Bailey himself, under alleged control) then emerged, the lights being half up, carrying the basin over his head. On putting it down, we all saw two strange little young tortoises swimming about in it. I say “ strange,” because I have seen none like them. They were about the size of a half-crown, and the head, instead of being close to the shell, was at the end of a thin neck half as long as the body. There were a dozen Australians present, and they all said they had never seen any similar ones. The control claimed that he had just brought them from a tank in Benares. The basin was left on the table, and while the lights were down, the creatures disappeared. It is only fair to say that they could have been removed by hand in the dark, but on examining the table, I was unable to see any of those sloppings of water which might be expected to follow such an operation.

Shortly afterwards there was a great crash in the dark, and a number of coins fell on to the table, and were handed to me by the presiding control as a parting present. They did not, I fear, help me much with my hotel bill, for they were fifty-six Turkish copper pennies, taken “ from a well,” according to our informant. These two apports were all the phenomena, and the medium, who has been working very hard of late, showed every sign of physical collapse at the close.

Apart from the actual production in the seance room, which may be disputed, I should like to confront the honest sceptic with the extraordinary nature of the objects which Bailey produces on these occasions. They cannot be disputed, for hundreds have handled them, collections of them have been photographed, there are cases full at the Stanford University at California, and I am bringing a few samples back to England with me. If the whole transaction is normal, then where does he get them? I had an Indian nest. Does anyone import Indian nests? Does anyone import queer little tortoises with long, thin necks? Is there a depot for Turkish copper coins in Australia? On the previous sitting, he got 100 Chinese ones. Those might be explained, since the Chinaman is not uncommon in Sydney, but surely he exports coins, rather than imports them. Then what about 100 Babylonian tablets, with legible inscriptions in Assyrian, some of them cylindrical, with long histories upon them? Granting that they are Jewish forgeries, how do they get into the country? Bailey’s house was searched once by the police, but nothing was found. Arabic papers, Chinese schoolbooks, mandarins’ buttons, tropical birds — all sorts of odd things arrive. If they are not genuine, where do they come from? The matter is ventilated in papers, and no one comes forward to damn Bailey for ever by proving that he supplied them. It is no use passing the question by. It calls for an answer. If these articles can be got in any normal way, then what is the way? If not, then Bailey has been a most ill-used man, and miracles are of daily occurrence in

Australia. This man should be under the strict, but patient and sympathetic, control of the greatest scientific observers in the world, instead of being allowed to wear himself out by promiscuous seances, given in order to earn a living. 1 magine our scientists expending themselves in the examination of shells, or the classification oi worms, when such a subject as this awaits them. And it cannot await them long. The man dies, and then where are these experiments? But if such scientific investigation be made, it must be thorough and prolonged, directed by those who have real experience of occult matters, otherwise it will wreck itself upon some theological or other snag, as did Colonel de Rochas’ attempt at Grenoble.

The longer one remains in Australia, the more one is struck by the failure of State control. Whenever you test it, in the telephones, the telegraphs and the post, it stands for inefficiency, with no possibility that I. can see of remedy. The train service is better, but still far from good. As to the State ventures in steamboat lines and in banking, I have not enough information to guide me. On the face of it, it is evident that in each case there is no direct responsible master, and that there is no real means of enforcing discipline. I have talked to the heads of large institutions, who have assured me that the conduct of business is becoming almost impossible. When they send an urgent telegram, with a letter confirming it, it is no unusual thing for the letter to arrive first. No complaint produces any redress. The maximum compensation for sums lost in the post is, I am told, two pounds, so that the banks, whose registered letters continually disappear, suffer heavy losses. On the other hand, if they send a messenger with the money, there is a law by which all bullion carried by train has to be declared, and has to pay a commission. Yet the public generally, having no standard of comparison, are so satisfied with the wretched public services, that there is a continued agitation to extend public control, and so ruin the well conducted private concerns. The particular instance which came under my notice was the ferry service of Sydney harbour, which is admirably and cheaply conducted, and yet there is a clamour that it also should be dragged into this morass of slovenly inefficiency. I hope, however, that the tide will soon set the other way. I fear, from what I have seen of the actual working, that it is only under exceptional conditions, and with very rigorous and high-principled direction, that the State control of industries can be carried out. I cannot see that it is a political question, or that the democracy has any interest, save to have the public work done as well and as economically as possible. When the capitalist has a monopoly, and is exacting an undue return, it is another matter.

As I look back at Australia my prayers — if deep good wishes form a prayer — go out to it. Save for that great vacuum upon the north, which a wise Government would strive hard to fill, I see no other external danger which can threaten her people. But internally I am shadowed by the feeling that trouble may be hanging over them, though I am assured that the cool stability of their race will at last pull them through it. There are some dangerous factors there which make their position more precarious than our own, and behind a surface of civilisation there lie possible forces which might make for disruption. As a people they are rather less disciplined than a European nation. There is no large middle or leisured class who would represent moderation. Labour has tried a Labour Government, and finding that politics will not really alter economic facts is now seeking some fresh solution. The land is held in many cases by large proprietors who work great tracts with few hands, so there is not the conservative element which makes the strength of the United States with its six million farmers, each with his stake in the land. Above all, there is no standing military force, and nothing but a small, though very efficient, police force to stand between organised government and some wild attempt of the extremists. There are plenty of soldiers, it is true, and they have been treated with extreme generosity by the State, but they have been reabsorbed into the civil population. If they stand for law and order then all is well. On the other hand, there are the Irish, who are fairly numerous, well organised and disaffected. There is no Imperial question, so far as I can see, save with the Irish, but there is this disquieting internal situation which, with the coming drop of wages, may suddenly become acute. An Australian should be a sober-minded man for he has his difficulties before him. We of the old country should never forget that these difficulties have been partly caused by his splendid participation in the great war, and so strain every nerve to help, both by an enlightened sympathy and by such material means as are possible.

Personally, I have every sympathy with all reasonable and practical efforts to uphold the standard of living in the working classes. At present there is an almost universal opinion among thoughtful and patriotic Australians that the progress of the country is woefully hampered by the constant strikes, which are declared in defiance of all agreements and all arbitration courts. The existence of Labour Governments, or the State control of industries, does not seem to alleviate these evil conditions, but may rather increase them, for in some cases such pressure has been put upon the Government that they have been forced to subsidise the strikers — or at least those sufferers who have come out in sympathy with the original strikers. Such tactics must de-

moralise a country and encourage labour to make claims upon capital which the latter cannot possibly grant, since in many cases the margin of profit is so small and precarious that it would be better for the capitalist to withdraw his money and invest it with no anxieties. It is clear that the tendency is to destroy the very means by which the worker earns his bread, and that the position will become intolerable unless the older, more level-headed men gain control of the unions and keep the ignorant hot-heads in order. It is the young unmarried men without responsibilities who create the situations, and it is the married men with their women and children who suffer. A table of strikes prepared recently by the Man- Chester Guardian shows that more hours were lost in Australia with her five or six million inhabitants than in the United Kingdom with nearly fifty million. Surely this must make the Labour leaders reconsider their tactics. As I write the stewards’ strike, which caused such extended misery, has collapsed, the sole result being a loss of nearly a million pounds in wages to the working classes, and great inconvenience to the public. The shipowners seem now in no hurry to resume the services, and if their delay will make the strikers more thoughtful it is surely to be defended.

On February ist we started from Sydney in our good old “Naldera” upon our homeward voyage, but the work was not yet finished. On reaching Melbourne, where the ship was delayed two days, we found that a Town Hall demonstration had been arranged to give us an address from the Victorian Spiritualists, and wish us farewell. It was very short notice and there was a tram strike which prevented people from getting about, so the hall was not more than half full. None the less, we had a fine chance of getting in touch with our friends, and the proceedings were very hearty. The inscription was encased in Australian wood with a silver kangaroo outside and beautiful illuminations within. It ran as follows :

“ We desire to place on permanent record our intense appreciation of your zealous and self- sacrificing efforts, and our deep gratitude for the great help you have given to the cause to which you have consecrated your life.

The over-flowing meetings addressed by you bear evidence of the unqualified success of your mission, and many thousands bless the day when you determined to enter this great crusade beneath the Southern Cross. ... In all these sentiments we desire to include your loyal and most devoted partner, Lady Doyle, whose self-sacrifice equals or exceeds your own."

Personally, I have never been conscious of any self-sacrifice, but the words about my wife were in no way an over-statement. I spoke in reply for about forty minutes, and gave a synopsis of the state of the faith in other centres, for each Australian State is curiously self-centred and realises very little beyond its own borders. It was good for Melbourne to know that Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and New Zealand were quite as alive and zealous as themselves.

At the end of the function I gave an account of the financial results of my tour and handed over £500 as a guarantee fund for future British lecturers, and £100 to Mr. Britton Harvey to assist his admirable paper, The Harbinger of Light. I had already expended about £100 upon spiritual causes, so that my whole balance came to £700, which is all now invested in the Cause and should bring some good spiritual interest in time to come. We badly need money in order to be able to lay our case more fully before the world.

I have already given the written evidence of Mr. Smythe that my tour was the most successful ever conducted in his time in Australia. To this I may add the financial result recorded above. In view of this it is worth recording that Life, a paper entirely under clerical management, said : " The one thing clear is that Sir Conan Doyle's mission to Australia was a mournful and complete failure, and it has left him in a very exasperated state of mind." This is typical of the perverse and unscrupulous opposition which we have continually to face, which hesitates at no lie in order to try and discredit the movement.

One small incident broke the monotony of the voyage between Adelaide and Fremantle, across the dreaded Bight.

There have been considerable depredations in the coastal passenger trade of Australia, and since the State boats were all laid up by the strike it was to be expected that the crooks would appear upon the big liners. A band of them came on board the Naldera at Adelaide, but their methods were crude, and they were up against a discipline and an organisation against which they were helpless. One ruffian entered a number of cabins and got away with some booty, but was very gallantly arrested by Captain Lewellin himself, after a short hand-to-hand struggle. This fellow was recognised by the detectives at Fremantle and was pronounced to be an old hand. In the general vigilance and search for accomplices which followed, another passenger was judged to be suspicious and he was also carried away by the detectives on a charge of previous forgery. Altogether the crooks came out very badly in their encounter with the Naldera, whose officers deserve some special recognition from the Company for the able way in which the matter was handled.

Although my formal tour was now over, I had quite determined to speak at Perth if it were humanly possible, for I could not consider my work as complete if the capital of one State had been untouched. I therefore sent the message ahead that I would fit in with any arrangements which they might make, be it by day or night, but that the ship would only be in port for a few hours. As matters turned out the Naldera arrived in the early morning and was announced to sail again at 3 p.m., so that the hours were awkward. They took the great theatre, however, for 1 p.m., which alarmed me as I reflected that my audience must either be starving or else in a state of repletion. Everything went splendidly, however. The house was full, and I have never had a more delightfully keen set of people in front of me. Of all my experiences there was none which was more entirely and completely satisfactory, and I hope that it brought a very substantial sum into the local spiritual treasury. There was quite a scene in the street afterwards, and the motor could not start for the crowds who surrounded it and stretched their kind hands and eager faces towards us. It was a wonderful last impression to bear away from Australia.

It is worth recording that upon a clairvoyante being asked upon this occasion whether she saw any one beside me on the platform she at once answered “ an elderly man with very tufted eyebrows.” This was the marked characteristic of the face of Russell Wallace. I was told before I left England that Wallace was my guide. I have already shown that Mrs. Roberts, of Dunedin, gave me a message direct from him to the same effect. Mrs. Foster Turner, in Sydney, said she saw him, described him and gave the name. Three others have described him. Each of these has been quite independent of the others. I think that the most sceptical person must admit that the evidence is rather strong. It is naturally more strong to me since I am personally conscious of his intervention and assistance.

Apart from my spiritual mission, I was very sorry that I could not devote some time to exploring West Australia, which is in some ways the most interesting, as it is the least developed, of the States in the Federation. One or two points which I gathered about it are worth recording, especially its relation to the rabbits and to the sparrows, the only hostile invaders which it has known. Long may they remain so!

The battle between the West Australians and the rabbits was historical and wonderful. After the creatures had become a perfect pest in the East it was hoped that the great central desert would prevent them from ever reaching the West. There was no water for a thousand miles. None the less, the rabbits got across. It was a notable day when the West Australian outrider, loping from west to east, met the pioneer rabbit loping from east to west. Then West Australia made a great effort. She built a rabbit-proof wire screen from north to south for hundreds of miles from sea to sea, with such thoroughness that the northern end projected over a rock which fringed deep water. With such thoroughness, too, did the rabbits reconnoitre this obstacle that their droppings were seen upon the far side of that very rock. There came another day of doom when two rabbits were seen on the wrong side of the wire. Two dragons of the slime would not have alarmed the farmer more. A second line was built, but this also was, as I understand, carried by the attack, which is now consolidating, upon the ground it has won. However, the whole situation has been changed by the discovery elsewhere that the rabbit can be made a paying proposition, so all may end well in this curious story.

A similar fight, with more success, has been made by West Australia against the sparrow, which has proved an unmitigated nuisance elsewhere. The birds are slowly advancing down the line of the Continental Railway and their forward scouts are continually cut off. Captain White, the distinguished ornithologist, has the matter in hand, and received, as I am told, a wire a few weeks ago, he being in Melbourne, to the effect that two sparrows had been observed a thousand miles west of where they had any rights. He set off, or sent off, instantly to this way-side desert station in the hope of destroying them, with what luck I know not. I should be inclined to back the sparrows.

This Captain White is a man of energy and brains, whose name comes up always when one enquires into any question of bird or beast. He has made a remarkable expedition lately to those lonely Everard Ranges, which lie some distance to the north of the desolate Nularbor Plain, through which the Continental Railway passes. It must form one of the most dreadful wastes in the world, for there are a thousand miles of coast line, without one single stream emerging. Afforestation may alter all that. In the Everard Ranges Captain White found untouched savages of the stone age, who had never seen a white man before, and who treated him with absolute courtesy and hospitality. They were a fine race physically, though they lived under such conditions that there was little solid food save slugs, lizards and the like. One can but pray that the Australian Government will take steps to save these poor people from the sad fate which usually follows the contact between the higher and the lower.

From what I heard, West Australian immigrants are better looked after than in the other States. I was told in Perth that nine hundred ex-service men with their families had arrived, and that all had been fitted into places, permanent or temporary, within a fortnight. This is not due to Government, but to the exertions of a peculiar local Society, with the strange title of “ The Ugly Men.” “ Handsome is as handsome does,” and they seem to be great citizens. West Australia calls itself the Cinderella State, for, although it covers a third of the Continent, it is isolated from the great centres of population. It has a very individual life of its own, however, with its gold fields, its shark fisheries, its pearlers, and the great stock-raising plain in the north. Among other remarkable achievements is its great water pipe, which extends for four hundred miles across the desert, and supplies the pressure for the electric machinery at Kalgurli.

By a coincidence, the Narkunda, which is the sister ship of the Naldera, lay alongside the same quay at Fremantle, and it was an impressive sight to see these two great shuttles of Empire lying for a few hours at rest. In their vastness and majesty they made me think of a daring saying of my mother’s, when she exclaimed that if some works of man, such as an ocean-going steamer, were compared with some works of God, such as a hill, man could sustain the comparison. It is the divine spark within us which gives us the creative power, and what may we not be when that is fully developed!

The children were fishing for sharks, with a line warranted to hold eighteen pounds, with the result that Malcolm’s bait, lead, and everything else was carried away. But they were amply repaid by actually seeing the shark, which played about for some time in the turbid water, a brown, ugly, varminty creature, with fine lines of speed in its tapering body. “ It was in Adelaide, daddy, not Fremantle,,, they protest in chorus, and no doubt they are right.

CHAPTER XII

Pleasing letters. — Visit to Candy. — Snake and Flying Fox. — Buddha’s shrine. — The Malaya. — Naval digression. — Indian trader. — Elephanta. — Sea snakes. — Chained to a tombstone. — Berlin’s escape. — Lord Chetwynd. — Lecture in the Red Sea. — Marseilles.

It was on Friday, February nth, that we drew away from the Fremantle wharf, and started forth upon our long, lonely trek for Colombo — a huge stretch of sea, in which it is unusual to see a single sail. As night fell I saw the last twinkling lights of Australia fade away upon our starboard quarter. Well, my job is done. I have nothing to add, nor have I said anything which I would wish withdrawn. My furrow gapes across two young Continents. I feel, deep in my soul, that the seed will fall in due season, and that the reaping will follow the seed. Only the work concerns ourselves — the results lie with those whose instruments we are.

Of the many kindly letters which bade us farewell, and which assured us that our work was not in vain, none was more eloquent and thoughtful than that of Mr. Thomas Ryan, a member of the Federal Legislature. “ Long after you leave us your message will linger. This great truth, which we had long thought of as the plaything of the charlatan and crank, into this you breathed the breath of life, and, as of old, we were forced to say, ‘ We shall think of this again. We shall examine it more fully.’ Give us time — for the present only this, we are sure that this thing was not done in a corner. Let me say in the few moments I am able to snatch from an over-crowded life, that we realise throughout the land how deep and far-reaching were the things of which you spoke to us. We want time, and even more time, to make them part of ourselves. We are glad you have come and raised our thoughts from the market-place to the altar.”

Bishop Leadbeater, of Sydney, one of the most venerable and picturesque figures whom I met in my travels, wrote, “ Now that you are leaving our shores, let me express my conviction that your visit has done great good in stirring up the thought of the people, and, I hope, in convincing many of them of the reality of the other life.” Among very many other letters there was none I valued more than one from the Rev. Jasper Calder, of Auckland. “ Rest assured, Sir Arthur, the plough has gone deep, and the daylight will now reach the soil that has so long been in the darkness of ignorance. I somehow feel as if this is the beginning of new things for us all."

It is a long and weary stretch from Australia to Ceylon, but it was saved from absolute monotony by the weather, which was unusually boisterous for so genial a region. Two days before crossing the line we ran into a north-western monsoon, a rather rare experience, so that the doldrums became quite a lively place. Even our high decks were wet with spindrift and the edge of an occasional comber, and some of the cabins were washed out. A smaller ship would have been taking heavy seas. In all that great stretch of ocean we never saw a sail or a fish, and very few birds. The loneliness of the surface of the sea is surely a very strange fact in nature. One would imagine, if the sea is really so populous as we imagine, that the surface, which is the only fixed point in very deep water, would be the gathering ground and trysting place for all life. Save for the flying fish, there was not a trace in all those thousands of miles.

I suppose that on such a voyage one should rest and do nothing, but how difficult it is to do nothing, and can it be restful to do what is difficult? To me it is almost impossible. I was helped through a weary time by many charming companions on board, particularly the Rev. Henry Howard, reputed to be the best preacher in Australia. Some of his sermons which I read are, indeed, splendid, depending for their effect upon real thought and knowledge, without any theological emotion. He is ignorant of psychic philosophy, though, like so many men who profess themselves hostile to Spiritualism, he is full of good stories which conclusively prove the very thing he denies. However, he has reached full spirituality, which is more important than Spiritualism, and he must be a great influence for good wherever he goes. The rest he will learn later, either upon this side, or the other.

At Colombo I was interested to receive a Westminster Gazette, which contained an article by their special commissioner upon the. Yorkshire fairies. Some correspondent has given the full name of the people concerned, with their address, which means that their little village will be crammed with chars-a-banc, and the peace of their life ruined. It was a rotten thing to do. For the rest, the Westminster inquiries seem to have confirmed Gardner and me in every particular, and brought out the further fact that the girls had never before taken a photo in their life. One of them had, it seems, been for a short time in the employ of a photographer, but as she was only a child, and her duties consisted in running on errands, the fact would hardly qualify her, as Truth suggests, for making faked negatives which could deceive the’ greatest experts in London. There may be some loophole in the direction of thought forms, but otherwise the case is as complete as possible.

We have just returned from a dream journey to Candy. The old capital is in the very centre of the island, and seventy-two miles from Colombo, but, finding that we had one clear night, we all crammed ourselves (my wife, the children and self) into a motor car, and made for it, while Major Wood and Jakeman did the same by train. It was a wonderful experience, a hundred and forty miles of the most lovely coloured cinema reel that God ever released. I carry away the confused but beautiful impression of a good broad red- tinted road, winding amid all shades of green, from the dark foliage of overhanging trees, to the light stretches of the half-grown rice fields. Tea groves, rubber plantations, banana gardens, and everywhere the coconut palms, with their graceful, drooping fronds. Along this great road streamed the people, and their houses lined the way, so that it was seldom that one was out of sight of human life. They were of all types and colours, from the light brown of the real Singalese to the negroid black of the Tamils, but all shared the love of bright tints, and we were delighted by the succession of mauves, purples, crimsons, ambers and greens. Water buffaloes, with the resigned and half-comic air of the London landlady who has seen better days, looked up at us from their mudholes. and jackal-like dogs lay thick on the path, hardly moving to let our motor pass. Once, my lord the elephant came round a corner, with his soft, easy-going stride, and surveyed us with inscrutable little eyes. It was the unchanged East, even as it had always been, save for the neat little police stations and their smart occupants, who represented the gentle, but very efficient, British Raj. It may have been the merit of that Raj, or it may have been the inherent virtue of the people, but in all that journey we were never conscious of an unhappy or of a wicked face. They were very sensitive, speaking faces, too, and it was not hard to read the thoughts within.

As we approached Candy, our road ran through the wonderful Botanical Gardens, unmatched for beauty in the world, though I still give Melbourne pride of place for charm. As we sped down one avenue an elderly keeper in front of us raised his gun and fired into the thick foliage of a high tree. An instant later something fell heavily to the ground. A swarm of crows had risen, so that we had imagined it was one of these, but when we stopped the car a boy came running up with the victim, which was a great bat, or flying fox, with a two-foot span of leathery wing. It had the appealing face of a mouse, and two black, round eyes, as bright as polished shoe buttons. It was wounded, so the boy struck it hard upon the ground, and held it up once more, the dark eyes glazed, and the graceful head bubbling blood from either nostril. “ Horrible! horrible! “ cried poor Denis, and we all echoed it in our hearts. This intrusion of tragedy into that paradise of a garden reminded us of the shadows of life. There is something very intimately moving in the evil fate of the animals. I have seen a man’s hand blown off in warfare, and have not been conscious of the same haunting horror which the pains of animals have caused me.

And here I may give another incident from our Candy excursion. The boys are wild over snakes, and I, since I sat in the front of the motor, was implored to keep a look-out. We were passing through a village, where a large lump of concrete, or stone, was lying by the road. A stick, about five feet long, was resting against it. As we flew past, I saw, to my amazement, the top of the stick bend back a little. I shouted to the driver, and we first halted, and then ran back to the spot. Sure enough, it was a long, yellow snake, basking in this peculiar position. The village was alarmed, and peasants came running, while the boys, wildly excited, tumbled out of the motor. “ Kill it! “ they cried. “ No, no! “ cried the chauffeur. “ There is the voice of the Buddhist,” I thought, so I cried, “ No! no! “ also. The snake, meanwhile, squirmed over the stone, and we saw it lashing about among the bushes. Perhaps we were wrong to spare it, for I fear it was full of venom. However, the villagers remained round the spot, and they had sticks, so perhaps the story was not ended.

Candy, the old capital, is indeed a dream city, and we spent a long, wonderful evening beside the lovely lake, where the lazy tortoises paddled about, and the fireflies gleamed upon the margin. We visited also the old Buddhist temple, where, as in all those places, the atmosphere is ruined by the perpetual demand for small coins. The few mosques which I have visited were not desecrated in this fashion, and it seems to be an unenviable peculiarity of the Buddhists, whose yellow-robed shaven priests have a keen eye for money. Beside the temple, but in ruins, lay the old palace of the native kings.

I wish we could have seen the temple under better conditions, for it is really the chief shrine of the most numerous religion upon earth, serving the Buddhist as the Kaaba serves the Moslem, or St. Peter's the Catholic. It is strange how the mind of man drags high things down to its own wretched level, the priests in each creed being the chief culprits. Buddha under his boh tree was a beautiful example of sweet, unselfish benevolence and spirituality. And the upshot, after two thousand years, is that his followers come to adore a horse's tooth (proclaimed to be Buddha's, and three inches long), at Candy, and to crawl up Adam's Peak, in order to worship at a hole in the ground which is supposed to be his yard-long footstep. It is not more senseless than some Christian observances, but that does not make it less deplorable.

I was very anxious to visit one of the buried cities further inland, and especially to see the ancient Boh tree, which must surely be the doyen of the whole vegetable kingdom, since it is undoubtedly a slip taken from Buddha's original Boh tree, transplanted into Ceylon about two hundred years before Christ. Its history is certain and unbroken. Now, I understand, it is a very doddering old trunk, with withered limbs which are supported by crutches, but may yet hang on for some centuries to come. On the whole, we employed our time very well, but Ceylon will always remain to each of us as an earthly paradise, and I could imagine no greater pleasure than to have a clear month to wander over its beauties. Monsieur Clemenceau was clearly of the same opinion, for he was doing it very thoroughly whilst we were there.

From Colombo to Bombay was a dream of blue skies and blue seas. Half way up the Malabar coast, we saw the old Portuguese settlement of Goa, glimmering white on a distant hillside. Even more interesting to us was a squat battleship making its way up the coast. As we came abreast of it we recognised the Malaya, one of that famous little squadron of Evan Thomas', which staved off the annihilation of Beatty's cruisers upon that day of doom on the Jutland coast. We gazed upon it with the reverence that it deserved. We had, in my opinion, a mighty close shave upon that occasion. If Jellicoe had gambled with the British fleet he might have won a shattering victory, but surely he was wise to play safety with such tremendous interests at stake. There is an account of the action, given by a German officer, at the end of Freeman's book " With the Hercules to Kiel," which shows clearly that the enemy desired Jellicoe to close with them, as giving them their only chance for that torpedo barrage which they had thoroughly practised, and on which they relied to cripple a number of our vessels. In every form of foresight and preparation, the brains seem to have been with them — but that was not the fault of the fighting seamen. Surely an amateur could have foreseen that, in a night action, a star shell is better than a searchlight, that a dropping shell at a high trajectory is far more likely to hit the deck than the side, and that the powder magazine should be cut off from the turret, as, otherwise, a shell crushing the one will explode the other. This last error in construction seems to have been the cause of half our losses, and the Lion herself would have been a victim, but for the self-sacrifice of brave Major Harvey of the Marines. All’s well that ends well, but it was stout hearts, and not clear heads, which pulled us through.

It is all very well to say let bygones be bygones, but we have no guarantee that the old faults are corrected, and certainly no one has been censured. It looks as if the younger officers had no means of bringing their views before those in authority, while the seniors were so occupied with actual administration that they had no time for thinking outside their routine. Take the really monstrous fact that, at the outset of a war of torpedoes and mines, when ships might be expected to sink like kettles with a hole in them, no least provision had been made for saving the crew! Boats were discarded before action, nothing wooden or inflammable was permitted, and the consideration that life-saving apparatus might be non-inflammable does not seem to have presented itself. When I wrote to the Press, pointing this out with all the emphasis of which I was capable — I was ready to face the charge of hysteria in such a cause — I was gravely rebuked by a leading naval authority, and cautioned not to meddle with mysteries of which I knew nothing. None the less, within a week there was a rush order for swimming collars of india rubber. Post hoc non propter, perhaps, but at least it verified the view of the layman. That was in the days when not one harbour had been boomed and netted, 289

t though surely a shark in a bathing pool would be innocuous compared to a submarine in an anchorage. The swimmers could get out, but the ships could not.

But all this comes of seeing the white Malaya, steaming slowly upon deep blue summer seas, with the olive-green coast of Malabar on the horizon behind her.

I had an interesting conversation on psychic matters with Lady Dyer, whose husband was killed in the war. It has been urged that it is singular and unnatural that our friends from the other side so seldom allude to the former occasions on which they have manifested. There is, I think, force in the objection. Lady Dyer had an excellent case to the contrary — and, indeed, they are not rare when one makes inquiry. She was most anxious to clear up some point which was left open between her husband and herself, and for this purpose consulted three mediums in London, Mr. Vout Peters, Mrs. Brittain, and another. In each case she had some success. Finally, she consulted Mrs. Leonard, and her husband, speaking through Feda, under control, began a long conversation by saying, “ I have already spoken to you through three mediums, two women and a man.” Lady Dyer had not given her name upon any occasion, so there was no question of passing on information. I may add that the intimate point at issue was entirely cleared up by the husband, who rejoiced greatly that he had the chance to do so.

Bombay is not an interesting place for the casual visitor, and was in a state of uproar and decoration on account of the visit of the Duke of Connaught. My wife and I did a little shopping, which gave us a glimpse of the patient pertinacity of the Oriental. The sum being 150 rupees, I asked the Indian’s leave to pay by cheque, as money was running low. He consented. When we reached the ship by steam-launch, we found that he, in some strange way, had got there already, and was squatting with the goods outside our cabin door. He looked askance at Lloyd’s Bank, of which he had never heard, but none the less he took the cheque under protest. Next evening he was back at our cabin door, squatting as before, with a sweat-stained cheque in his hand which, he declared, that he was unable to cash. This time I paid in English pound notes, but he looked upon them with considerable suspicion. As our ship was lying a good three miles from the shore, the poor chap had certainly earned his money, for his goods, in the first instance, were both good and cheap.

We have seen the Island of Elephanta, and may the curse of Ernulphus, which comprises all other curses, be upon that old Portuguese Governor who desecrated it, and turned his guns upon the wonderful stone carvings. It reminds me of Abou Simbel in Nubia, and the whole place has an Egyptian flavour. In a vast hollow in the hill, a series of very elaborate bas reliefs have been carved, showing Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the old Hindoo trinity, with all those strange satellites, the bulls, the kites, the dwarfs, the elephant-headed giants with which Hindoo mythology has so grotesquely endowed them. Surely a visitor from some wiser planet, examining our traces, would judge that the human race, though sane in all else, was mad the moment that it touched religion, whether he judged it by such examples as these, or by the wearisome iteration of expressionless Buddhas, the sacred crocodiles and hawk- headed gods of Egypt, the monstrosities of Central America, or the lambs and doves which adorn our own churches. It is only in the Mohammedan faith that such an observer would find nothing which could offend, since all mortal symbolism is there forbidden. And yet if these strange conceptions did indeed help these poor people through their journey of life — and even now they come from far with their offerings — then we should morally be as the Portuguese governor, if we were to say or do that which might leave them prostrate and mutilated in their minds. It was a pleasant break to our long voyage, and we were grateful to our commander, who made everything easy for us. He takes the humane view that a passenger is not merely an article of cargo, to be conveyed from port to port, but that his recreation should, in reason, be considered as well.

Elephanta was a little bit of the old India, but the men who conveyed us there from the launch to the shore in their ancient dhows were of a far greater antiquity. These were Kolis, small, dark men, who held the country before the original Aryan invasion, and may still be plying their boats when India has become Turanian or Slavonic, or whatever its next avatar may be. They seem to have the art of commerce well developed, for they held us up cleverly until they had extracted a rupee each, counting us over and over with great care and assiduity.

At Bombay we took over 200 more travellers.

We had expected that the new-comers, who were mostly Anglo-Indians whose leave had been long overdue, would show signs of strain and climate, but we were agreeably surprised to find that they were a remarkably healthy and alert set of people. This may be due to the fact that it is now the end of the cold weather. Our new companions included many native gentlemen, one of whom, the Rajah of Kapurthala, brought with him his Spanish wife, a regal-looking lady, whose position must be a difficult one. Hearne and Murrell, the cricketers, old playmates and friends, were also among the new-comers. All of them seemed perturbed as to the unrest in India, though some were inclined to think that the worst was past, and that the situation was well in hand. When we think how splendidly India helped us in the war, it would indeed be sad if a serious rift came between us now. One thing I am very sure of, that if Great Britain should ever be forced to separate from India, it is India, and not Britain, which will be the chief sufferer.

We passed over hundreds of miles of absolute calm in the Indian Ocean. There is a wonderful passage in Frank Bullen's " Sea Idylls," in which he describes how, after a long-continued tropical calm, all manner of noxious scum and vague evil shapes come flickering to the surface. Coleridge has done the same idea, for all time, in " The Ancient Mariner," when " the very sea did rot." In our case we saw nothing so dramatic, but the ship passed through one area where there was a great number of what appeared to be sea-snakes, creatures of various hues, from two to ten feet long, festooned or slowly writhing some feet below the surface. I cannot recollect seeing anything of the kind in any museum. These, and a couple of Arab dhows, furnished our only break in a thousand miles. Certainly, as an entertainment the ocean needs cutting.

In the extreme south, like a cloud upon the water, we caught a glimpse of the Island of Socotra, one of the least visited places upon earth, though so near to the main line of commerce. What a base for submarines, should it fall into wrong hands! It has a comic-opera Sultan of its own, with 15,000 subjects, and a subsidy from the British Government of 200 dollars a year, which has been increased lately to 360, presumably on account of the higher cost of living. It is a curious fact that, though it is a great place of hill and plain, seventy miles by eighteen, there is only one wild animal known, namely the civet cat. A traveller, Mr. Jacob, who examined the place, put forward the theory that one of Alexander the Great's ships was wrecked there, the crew remaining, for he found certain Greek vestiges, but what they were I have been unable to find out.

As we approached Aden, we met the China on her way out. Her misadventure some years ago at the Island of Perim, has become one of the legends of the sea. In those days, the discipline aboard P. & O. ships was less firm than at present, and on the occasion of the birthday of one of the leading passengers, the officers of the ship had been invited to the festivity. The result was that, in the middle of dinner, the ship crashed, no great distance from the lighthouse, and, it is said, though this is probably an exaggeration, that the revellers were able to get ashore over the bows without wetting their dress shoes. No harm was done, save that one unlucky rock projected, like a huge spike, through the ship’s bottom, and it cost the company a good half-million before they were able to get her afloat and in service once more. However, there she was, doing her fifteen knots^ and looking so saucy and new that no one would credit such an unsavoury incident in her past.

Early in February I gave a lantern lecture upon psychic phenomena to passengers of both classes. The Red Sea has become quite a favourite stamping ground of mine, but it was much more tolerable now than on that terrible night in August when I discharged arguments and perspiration to a sweltering audience. On this occasion it was a wonderful gathering, a microcosm of the world, with an English peer, an Indian Maharajah’, many native gentlemen, whites of every type from four great countries, and a fringe of stewards, stewardesses, and nondescripts of all sorts, including the ship’s barber, who is one of the most active men on the ship in an intellectual sense. All went well, and if they were not convinced they were deeply interested, which is the first stage. Somewhere there are great forces which are going to carry on this work, and I never address an audience without the feeling that among them there may be some latent Paul or Luther whom my words may call into activity.

I heard an anecdote yesterday which is worth recording. We have a boatswain who is a fine, burly specimen of a British seaman. In one of his short holidays while in mufti, in Norfolk, he had an argument with a Norfolk farmer, a stranger to him, who wound up the discussion by saying: “ My lad, what you need is a little travel to broaden your mind.”

The boatswain does his 70,000 miles a year. It reminded me of the doctor who advised his patient to take a brisk walk every morning before breakfast, and then found out that he was talking to the village postman.

A gentleman connected with the cinema trade told me a curious story within his own experience. Last year a psychic cinema story was shown in Australia, and to advertise it a man was hired who would consent to be chained to a tombstone all night. This was done in Melbourne and Sydney without the person concerned suffering in any way. It was very different in Launceston. The man was found to be nearly mad from terror in the morning, though he was a stout fellow of the dock labourer type. His story was that in the middle of the night he had heard to his horror the sound of dripping water approaching him. On looking up he saw an evil-looking shape with water streaming from him, who stood before him and abused him a long time, frightening him almost to death. The man was so shaken that the cinema company had to send him for a voyage. Of course, it was an unfair test for any one’s nerves, and imagination may have played its part, but it is noticeable that a neighbouring grave contained a man who had been drowned in the Esk many years before. In any case, it makes a true and interesting story, whatever the explanation.

I have said that there was an English peer on board. This was Lord Chetwynd, a man who did much towards winning the war. Now that the storm is over the public knows nothing, and apparently cares little, about the men who brought the ship of State through in safety. Some day we shall get a more exact sense of proportion, but it is all out of focus at present. Lord Chetwynd, in the year 1915, discovered by his own personal experiments how to make an explosive far more effective than the one we were using, which was very unreliable. This he effected by a particular combination and treatment of T.N.T. and ammonia nitrate. Having convinced the authorities by actual demonstration, he was given a free hand, which he used to such effect that within a year he was furnishing the main shell supply of the army. His own installation was at Chilwell, near Nottingham, and it turned out 19,000,000 shells, while six other establishments were erected elsewhere on the same system. Within his own works Lord Chetwynd was so complete an autocrat that it was generally believed that he shot three spies with his own hand. Thinking the rumour a useful one, he encouraged it by creating three dummy graves, which may, perhaps, be visited to this day by pious pro-Germans. It should be added that Lord Chetwynd’s explosive was not only stronger, but cheaper, than that in previous use, so that his labours saved the country some millions of pounds.

It was at Chilwell that ,the huge bombs were filled which were destined for Berlin. There were 100 of them to be carried in twenty-five Handley Page machines. Each bomb was capable of excavating 350 tons at the spot where it fell, and in a trial trip one which was dropped in the central courtyard of a large square building left not a stone standing around it. Berlin was saved by a miracle, which she hardly deserved after the irresponsible glee with which she had hailed the devilish work of her own Zeppelins. The original hundred bombs sent to be charged had the tails removed before being sent, and when they were returned it was found to be such a job finding the right tail for the right bomb, the permutations being endless, that it was quicker and easier to charge another hundred bombs with tails attached. This and other fortuitous matters consumed several weeks. Finally, the bombs were ready and were actually on the machines in England, whence the start was to be made, when the Armistice was declared. Possibly a knowledge of this increased the extreme haste of the German delegates. Personally, I am glad it was so, for we have enough cause for hatred in the world without adding the death of 10,000 German civilians. There is some weight, however, in the contention of those who complain that Germans have devastated Belgium and France, but have never been allowed to experience in their own persons what the horrors of war really are. Still, if Christianity and religion are to be more than mere words, we must be content that Berlin was not laid in ruins at a time when the issue of the war was already decided.

Here we are at Suez once again. It would take Loti or Robert Hichens to describe the wonderful shades peculiar to the outskirts of Egypt. Deep blue sea turns to dark green, which in turn becomes the very purest, clearest emerald as it shallows into a snow-white frill of foam. Thence extends the golden desert with deep honey-coloured shadows, stretching away until it slopes upwards into melon-tinted hills, dry and bare and wrinkled. At one point a few white dwellings with a group of acacias mark the spot which they call Moses Well. They say that a Jew can pick up a living in any country, but when one surveys these terrible wastes one can only imagine that the climate has greatly changed since a whole nomad people were able to cross them.

In the Mediterranean we had a snap of real cold which laid many of us out, myself included. I recall the Lancastrian who complained that he had swallowed a dog fight. The level of our lives had been disturbed for an instant by a feud between the children and one of the passengers who had, probably quite justly, given one of them a box on the ear. In return, they had fixed an abusive document in his cabin which they had ended by the words, “ With our warmest despis- ings,” all signing their names to it. The passenger was sportsman enough to show this document around, or we should not have known of its existence. Strange little souls with their vivid hopes and fears, a parody of our own. I gave baby a daily task and had ordered her to do a map of Australia. I found her weeping in the evening. “

I did the map,” she cried, between her sobs, “ but they all said it was a pig! “ She was shaken to the soul at the slight upon her handiwork.

It was indeed wonderful to find ourselves at Marseilles once more, and, after the usual unpleasant douane formalities, which are greatly ameliorated in France as compared to our own free trade country, to be at temporary rest at the Hotel ‘du Louvre.

A great funeral, that of Frederic Chevillon and his brother, was occupying the attention of the town. Both were public officials and both were killed in the war, their bodies being now exhumed for local honour. A great crowd filed past with many banners, due decorum being observed save that some of the mourners were smoking cigarettes, which 44 was not handsome,” as Mr. Pepys would observe. There was no sign of any religious symbol anywhere. It was a Sunday and yet the people in the procession seemed very badly dressed and generally down-at-heel and slovenly. I think we should have done the thing better in England. The simplicity of the flag- wrapped coffins was however dignified and pleasing. The inscriptions, too, were full of simple patriotism.

I never take a stroll through a French town without appreciating the gulf which lies between us and them. They have the old Roman civilisation, with its ripe mellow traits, which have never touched the Anglo-Saxon, who, on the other hand, has his raw Northern virtues which make life angular but effective. I watched a scene to-day inconceivable under our rule. Four very smart officers, captains or majors, were seated outside a cafe. The place was crowded, but there was room for four more at this table on the sidewalk, so presently that number of negro privates came along and occupied the vacant seats. The officers smiled most good humouredly, and remarks were exchanged between the two parties, which ended in the high falsetto laugh of a negro. These black troops seemed perfectly self-respecting, and I never saw a drunken man, soldier or civilian, during two days.

I have received English letters which announce that I am to repeat my Australian lectures at the Queen’s Hall, from April nth onwards. I seem to be returning with shotted guns and going straight into action. They say that the most dangerous course is to switch suddenly off when you have been working hard. I am little likely to suffer from that.

CHAPTER XIII

The Institut Metaphysique. — Lecture in French. — Wonderful musical improviser. — Camille Flammarion. — Test of materialised hand. — Last ditch of materialism. — Sitting with Mrs. Bisson's medium, Eva. — Round the Aisne battlefields. — A tragic intermezzo. — Anglo-French Rugby match. — Madame Blifaud's clairvoyance.

One long stride took us to Paris, where, under the friendly and comfortable roof of the Hotel du Louvre, we were able at last to unpack our trunks and to steady down after this incessant movement. The first visit which I paid in Paris was to Dr. Geley, head of the Institut Metaphysique, at 89, Avenue Niel. Now that poor Crawford has gone, leaving an imperishable name behind him, Geley promises to be the greatest male practical psychic researcher, and he has advantages of which Crawford could never boast, since the liberality of Monsieur Jean Meyer has placed him at the head of a splendid establishment with laboratory, photographic room, lecture room, seance room and library, all done in the most splendid style. Unless some British patron has the generosity and intelligence to do the same, this installation, with a man like Geley to run it, will take the supremacy in psychic advance from Britain, where it now lies, and transfer it to France. Our nearest approach to something similar depends at present upon the splendid private efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Hewat MacKenzie, in the Psychic College at 59, Holland Park, which deserve the support of everyone who realises the importance of the subject.

I made a faux pas with the Geleys, for I volunteered to give an exhibition of my Australian slides, and they invited a distinguished audience of men of science to see them. Imagine my horror when I found that my box of slides was in the luggage which Major Wood had taken on with him in the "Naldera" to England. They were rushed over by aeroplane, however, in response to my telegram, and so the situation was saved.

The lecture was a private one and was attended by Mr. Charles Richet, Mr. Gabrielle Delanne, and a number of other men of science. Nothing could have gone better, though I fear that my French, which is execrable, must have been a sore trial to my audience. I gave them warning at the beginning by quoting a remark which Bernard Shaw made to me once, that when he spoke French he did not say what he wanted to say, but what he could say. Richet told me afterwards that he was deeply interested by the photographs, and when I noted the wonder and awe with which he treated them — he, the best known physiologist in the world — and compared it with the attitude of the ordinary lay Press, it seemed a good example of the humility of wisdom and the arrogance of ignorance. After my lecture, which covered an hour and a quarter, we were favoured by an extraordinary exhibition from a medium named Aubert. This gentleman has had no musical education whatever, but he sits down in a state of semi-trance and he handles a piano as I, for one, have never heard one handled before. It is a most amazing performance. He sits with his eyes closed while some one calls the alphabet, striking one note when the right letter sounds. In this way he spells out the name of the particular composer whom he will represent. He then dashes off, with tremendous verve and execution, upon a piece which is not a known composition of that author, but is an improvisation after his manner. We had Grieg, Mendelssohn, Berlioz and others in quick succession, each of them masterly and characteristic. His technique seemed to my wife and me to be not inferior to that of Paderewski. Needles can be driven through him as he plays, and sums can be set before him which he will work out without ceasing the wonderful music which appears to flow through him, but quite independently of his own powers or volition. He would certainly cause a sensation in London.

I had the honour next day of meeting Camille Flammarion, the famous astronomer, who is deeply engaged in psychic study, and was so interested in the photos which I showed him that I was compelled to leave them in his hands that he might get copies done. Flammarion is a dear, cordial, homely old gentleman with a beautiful bearded head which would delight a sculptor. He entertained us with psychic stories all lunch time.

u Madame Bisson was there and amused me with her opinion upon psychic researchers, their density, their arrogance, their preposterous theories to account for obvious effects. If she had not been a great pioneer in Science, she might have been a remarkable actress, for it was wonderful how her face took off the various types. Certainly, as described by her, their far-fetched precautions, which irritate the medium and ruin the harmony of the conditions, do appear very ridiculous, and the parrot cry of “ Fraud! “ and “ Fake! “ has been sadly overdone. All are agreed here that spiritualism has a far greater chance in England than in France, because the French temperament is essentially a mocking one, and also because the Catholic Church is in absolute opposition. Three of their bishops, Beauvais, Lisieux and Coutances, helped to burn a great medium, Joan of Arc, six hundred years ago, asserting at the trial the very accusations of necromancy which are asserted to-day. Now they have had to canonise her. One would have hoped that they had learned something from the incident.

Dr. Geley has recently been experimenting with Mr. Franek Kluski, a Polish amateur of weak health, but with great mediumistic powers. These took the form of materialisations. Dr. Geley had prepared a bucket of warm paraffin, and upon the appearance of the materialised figure, which was that of a smallish man, the request was made that the apparition should plunge its hand into the bucket and then withdraw it, so that when it dematerialised a cast of the hand would be left, like a glove of solidified paraffin, so narrow at the wrist that the hands could not have been withdrawn by any possible normal means without breaking the moulds. These hands I was able to inspect, and also the plaster cast which had been taken from the inside of one of them. The latter showed a small hand, not larger than a boy’s, but presenting the characteristics of age, for the skin was loose and formed transverse folds. The materialised figure had also, unasked, left an impression of its own mouth and chin, which was, I think, done for evidential purposes, for a curious wart hung from the lower lip, which would mark the owner among a million. So far as I could learn, however, no identification had actually been effected. The mouth itself was thick-lipped and coarse, and also gave an impression of age.

To show the thoroughness of Dr. Geley’s work, he had foreseen that the only answer which any critic, however exacting, could make to the evidence, was that the paraffin hand had been brought in the medium’s pocket. Therefore he had treated with cholesterin the paraffin in his bucket, and this same cholesterin reappeared in the resulting glove. What can any sceptic have to say to an experiment like that save to ignore it, and drag us back with wearisome iteration to some real or imaginary scandal of the past? The fact is that the position of the materialists could only be sustained so long as there was a general agreement among all the newspapers to regard this subject as a comic proposition. Now that there is a growing tendency towards recognising its overwhelming gravity, the evidence is getting slowly across to the public, and the old attitude of negation and derision has become puerile. I can clearly see, however, that the materialists will fall back upon their second line of trenches, which will be to admit the phenomena, but to put them down to material causes in the unexplored realms of nature with no real connection with human survival. This change of front is now due, but it will fare no better than the old one. Before quitting the subject I should have added that these conclusions of Dr. Geley concerning the paraffin moulds taken from Kluski's materialisation are shared by Charles Richet and Count de Gramont of the Institute of France, who took part in the experiments. How absurd are the efforts of those who were not present to contradict the experiences of men like these.

I was disappointed to hear from Dr. Geley that the experiments in England with the medium Eva had been largely negative, though once or twice the ectoplasmic flow was, as I understand, observed. Dr. Geley put this comparative failure down to the fantastic precautions taken by the committee, which had produced a strained and unnatural atmosphere. It seems to me that if a medium is searched, and has all her clothes changed before entering the seance room, that is ample, but when in addition to this you put her head in a net-bag and restrict her in other ways, you are producing an abnormal self-conscious state of mind which stops that passive mood of receptivity which is essential. Professor Hyslop has left it on record that after a long series of rigid tests with Mrs. Piper he tried one sitting under purely natural conditions, and received more convincing and evidential results than in all the others put together. Surely this should suggest freer methods in our research.

I have just had a sitting with Eva, whom I cannot even say that I have seen, for she was under her cloth cabinet when I arrived and still under it when I left, being in trance the whole time. Professor Jules Courtier of the Sorbonne and a few other men of science were present. Madame Bisson experiments now in the full light of the afternoon. Only the medium is in darkness, but her two hands protrude through the cloth and are controlled by the sitters. There is a flap in the cloth which can be opened to show anything which forms beneath. After sitting about an hour this flap was opened, and Madame Bisson pointed out to me a streak of ectoplasm upon the outside of the medium's bodice. It was about six inches long and as thick as a finger. I was allowed to touch it, and felt it shrink and contract under my hand. It is this substance which can, under good conditions, be poured out in great quantities and can be built up into forms and shapes, first flat and finally rounded, by powers which are beyond our science. We sometimes call it Psychoplasm in England, Richet named it Ectoplasm, Geley calls it Ideoplasm; but call it what you will, Crawford has shown for all time that it is the substance which is at the base of psychic physical phenomena.

Madame Bisson, whose experience after twelve years'iwork is unique, has an interesting theory. She disagrees entirely with Dr. Geley's view, that the shapes are thought forms, and she resents the name ideoplasm, since it represents that view. Her conclusion is that Eva acts the part which a " detector" plays, when it turns the Hertzian waves, which are too short for our observation, into slower ones which can become audible. Thus Eva breaks up certain currents and renders them visible. According to her, what we see is never the thing itself but always the reflection of the thing which exists in another plane and is made visible in ours by Eva's strange material organisation. It was for this reason that the word Miroir appeared in one of the photographs, and excited much adverse criticism. One dimly sees a new explanation of mediumship. The light seems a colourless thing until it passes through a prism and suddenly reveals every colour in the world.

A picture of Madame Bisson's father hung upon the wall, and I at once recognised him as the phantom which appears in the photographs of her famous book, and which formed the culminating point of Eva's mediumship. He has a long and rather striking face which was clearly indicated in the ectoplasmic image. Only on one occasion was this image so developed that it could speak, and then only one word. The word was " Esperez."

We have just returned, my wife, Denis and I, from a round of the Aisne battlefields, paying our respects incidentally to Bossuet at Meaux, Fenelon at Chateau Thierry, and Racine at La Fert6 Millon. It is indeed a frightful cicatrix which lies across the brow of France — a scar which still gapes in many places as an open wound. I could not have believed that the ruins were still so untouched. The land is mostly under cultivation, but the houses are mere shells, and I cannot think where the cultivators live. When you drive for sixty miles and see nothing but ruin on either side of the road, and when you know that the same thing extends from the sea to the Alps, and that in places it is thirty miles broad, it helps one to realise the debt that Germany owes to her victims. If it had been in the Versailles terms that all her members of parliament and journalists should be personally conducted, as we have been, through a sample section, their tone would be more reasonable.

It has been a wonderful panorama. We followed the route of the thousand taxi-cabs which helped to save Europe up to the place where Gallieni's men dismounted and walked straight up against Kliick's rearguard. We saw Belleau Wood, where the 2nd and 46th American divisions made their fine debut and showed Ludendorff that they were not the useless soldiers he had so vainly imagined. Thence we passed all round that great heavy sack of Germans which had formed in June, 1918, with its tip at Dormans and Chateau Thierry. We noted Bligny, sacred to the sacrifices of Carter Campbell's 51st Highlanders, and Braithwaite's 62nd Yorkshire division, who lost between them seven thousand men in these woods. These British episodes seem quite unknown to the French, while the Americans have very properly laid out fine graveyards with their flag flying, and placed engraved tablets of granite where they played their part, so that in time I really think that the average Frenchman will hardly remember that we were in the war at all, while if you were to tell him that in the critical year we took about as many prisoners and guns as all the other nations put together, he would stare at you with amazement. Well, what matter! With a man or a nation it is the duty done for its own sake and the sake of its own conscience and self-respect that really counts. All the rest is swank.

We slept at Rheims. We had stayed at the chief hotel, the Golden Lion, in 1912, when we were en route to take part in the Anglo-German motorcar competition, organised by Prince Henry. We searched round, but not one stone of the hotel was standing. Out of 14,000 houses in the town, only twenty had entirely escaped. As to the Cathedral, either a miracle has been wrought or the German gunners have been extraordinary masters of their craft, for there are acres of absolute ruin up to its very walls, and yet it stands erect with no very vital damage. The same applies to the venerable church of St. Remy. On the whole I am prepared to think that save in one fit of temper upon September 19th, 1914, the guns were never purposely turned upon this venerable building. Hitting the proverbial haystack would be a difficult feat compared to getting home on to this monstrous pile which dominates the town. It is against reason to suppose that both here and at Soissons they could not have left the cathedrals as they left the buildings around them.

Next day, we passed down the Vesle and Aisne, seeing the spot where French fought his brave but barren action on September 13th, 1914, and finally we reached the Chemin des Dames — a good name had the war been fought in the knightly spirit of old, but horribly out of place amid the ferocities with which Germany took all chivalry from warfare. The huge barren countryside, swept with rainstorms and curtained in clouds, looked like some evil landscape out of Vale Owen's revelations. It was sown from end to end with shattered trenches, huge coils of wire and rusted weapons, including thousands of bombs which are still capable of exploding should you tread upon them too heavily. Denis ran wildly about, like a terrier in a barn, and returned loaded with all sorts of trophies, most of which had to be discarded as overweight. He succeeded, however, in bringing away a Prussian helmet and a few other of the more portable of his treasures. We returned by Soissons, which interested me greatly, as I had seen it under war conditions in 1916. Finally we reached Paris after a really wonderful two days in which, owing to Mr. Cook's organisation and his guide, we saw more and understood more, than in a week if left to ourselves. They run similar excursions to Verdun and other points. I only wish we had the time to avail ourselves of them.

A tragic intermezzo here occurred in our Paris experience. I suddenly heard that my brother- in-law, E. W. Hornung, the author of " Raffles " and many another splendid story, was dying at St. Jean de Luz in the Pyrenees. I started off at once, but was only in time to be present at his funeral. Our little family group has been thinned down these last two years until we feel like a company under hot fire with half on the ground. We can but close our ranks the tighter. Hornung lies within three paces of George Gissing, an author for whom both of us had an affection. It is good to think that one of his own race and calling keeps him company in his Pyrennean grave.

Hornung, apart from his literary powers, was one of the wits of our time. I could brighten this dull chronicle if I could insert a page of his sayings. Like Charles Lamb, he could find humour in his own physical disabilities — disabilities which did not prevent him, when over fifty, from volunteering for such service as he could do in Flanders. When pressed to have a medical examination, his answer was, " My body is like a sausage. The less I know of its interior, the easier will be my mind." It was a characteristic mixture of wit and courage.

During our stay in Paris we went to see the Anglo-French Rugby match at Coulombes. The French have not quite got the sporting spirit, and there was some tendency to hoot whenever a decision was given for the English, but the play of their team was most excellent, and England only won by the narrow margin of 10 to 6. I can remember the time when French Rugby was the joke of the sporting world. They are certainly a most adaptive people. The tactics of the game have changed considerably since the days when I was more familiar with it, and it has become less dramatic, since ground is gained more frequently by kicking into touch than by the individual run, or even by the combined movement. But it is still the king of games. It was like the old lists, where the pick of these two knightly nations bore themselves so bravely of old, and it was an object lesson to see Clement, the French back, playing on manfully, with the blood pouring from a gash in the head. Marshal Foch was there, and I have no doubt that he noted the incident with approval.

I had a good look at the famous soldier, who was close behind me. He looks very worn, and sadly in need of a rest. His face and head are larger than his pictures indicate, but it is not a face with any marked feature or character. His eyes, however, are grey, and inexorable. His kepi was drawn down, and I could not see the upper part of the head, but just there lay the ruin of Germany. It must be a very fine brain, for in political, as well as in military matters, his judgment has always been justified.

There is an excellent clairvoyante in Paris, Madame Blifaud, and I look forward, at ^some later date, to a personal proof of her powers, though if it fails I shall not be so absurd as to imagine that that disproves them. The particular case which came immediately under my notice was that of a mother whose son had been killed from an aeroplane, in the war. She had no details of his death. On asking Madame B., the latter replied, “ Yes, he is here, and gives me a vision of his fall. As a proof that it is really he, he depicts the scene, which was amid songs, flags and music.” As this corresponded with no episode of the war, the mother was discouraged and incredulous. Within a short time, however, she received a message from a young officer who had been with her son when the accident occurred. It was on the Armistice day, at Salonica. The young fellow had flown just above the flags, one of the flags got entangled with his rudder, and the end was disaster. But bands, songs and flags all justified the clairvoyante.

Now, at last, our long journey drew to its close. Greatly guarded by the high forces which have, by the goodness of Providence, been deputed to help us, we are back in dear old London once more. When we look back at the 30,000 miles which we have traversed, at the complete absence of illness which spared any one of seven a single day in bed, the excellence of our long voyages, the freedom from all accidents, the undisturbed and entirely successful series of lectures, the financial success won for the cause, the double escape from shipping strikes, and, finally, the several inexplicable instances of supernormal, personal happenings, together with the three-fold revelation of the name of our immediate guide, we should be stocks and stones if we did not realise that we have been the direct instruments of God in a cause upon which He has set His visible seal. There let it rest. If He be with us, who is against us? To give religion a foundation of rock instead of quicksand, to remove the legitimate doubts of earnest minds, to make the invisible forces, with their moral sanctions, a real thing, instead of mere words upon our lips, and, incidentally, to reassure the human race as to the future which awaits it, and to broaden its appreciation of the possibilities of the present life, surely no more glorious message was ever heralded to mankind. And it begins visibly to hearken. The human race is on the very eve of a tremendous revolution of thought, marking a final revulsion from materialism, and it is part of our glorious and assured philosophy, that, though we may not be here to see the final triumph of our labours, we shall, none the less, be as much engaged in the struggle and the victory from the day when we join those who are our comrades in battle upon the further side.

THE END

THE COMING OF THE FAIRIES

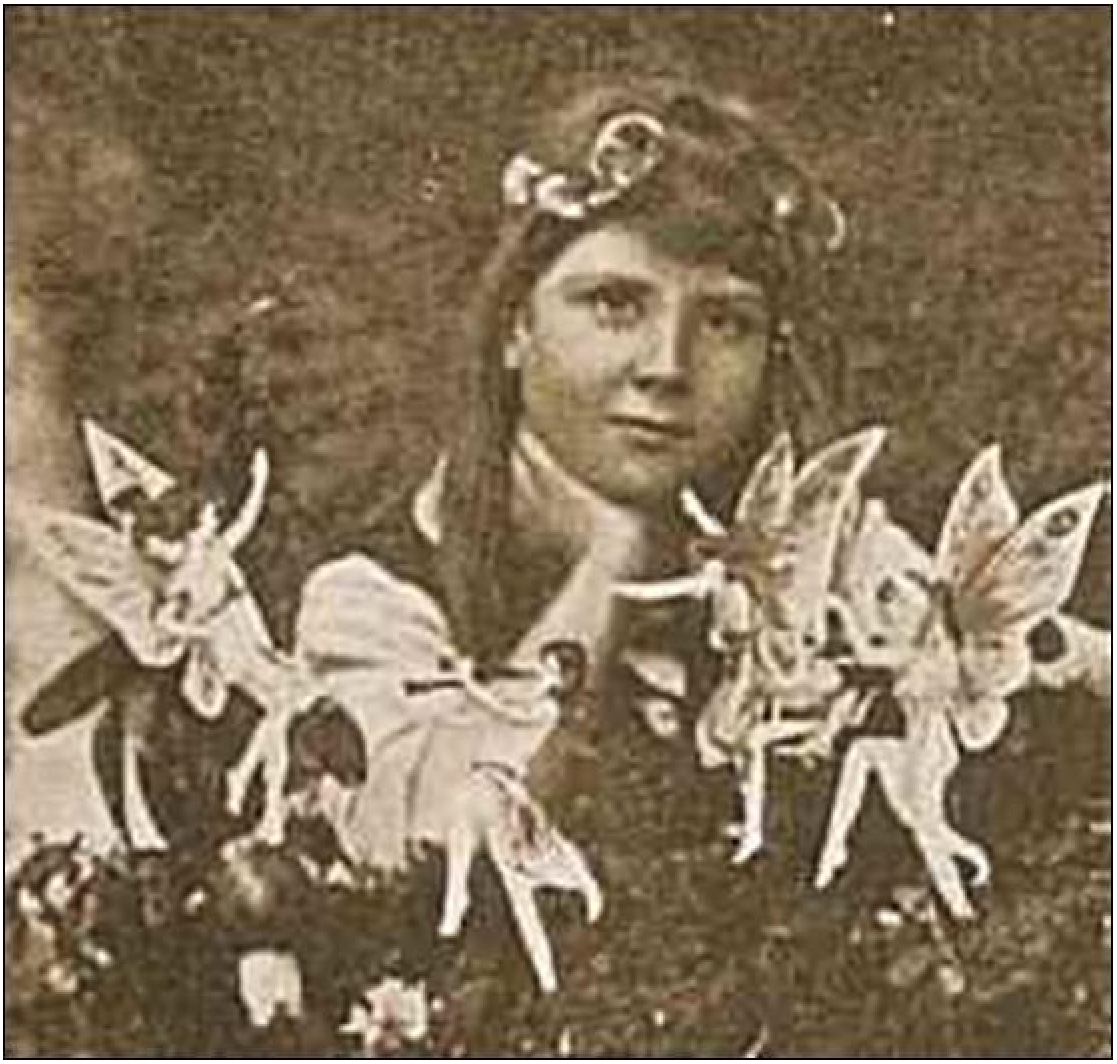

One of the famous pictures Conan Doyle was duped into believing was a genuine photograph of fairies

THE COMING OF THE FAIRIES

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CHAPTER I

HOW THE MATTER AROSE

The series of incidents set forth in this little volume represent either the most elaborate and ingenious hoax every played upon the public, or else they constitute an event in human history which may in the future appear to have been epoch-making in its character. It is hard for the mind to grasp what the ultimate results may be if we have actually proved the existence upon the surface of this planet of a population which may be as numerous as the human race, which pursues its own strange life in its own strange way, and which is only separated from ourselves by some difference of vibrations.

We see objects within the limits which make up our colour spectrum, with infinite vibrations, unused by us, on either side of them. If we could conceive a race of beings which were constructed in material which threw out shorter or longer vibrations, they would be invisible unless we could tune ourselves up or tone them down. It is exactly that power of tuning up and adapting itself to other vibrations which constitutes a clairvoyant, and there is nothing scientifically impossible, so far as I can see, in some people seeing that which is invisible to others. If the objects are indeed there, and if the inventive power of the human brain is turned upon the problem, it is likely that some sort of psychic spectacles, inconceivable to us at the moment, will be invented, and that we shall all be able to adapt ourselves to the new conditions. If high-tension electricity can be converted by a mechanical contrivance into a lower tension, keyed to other uses, then it is hard to see why something analogous might not occur with the vibrations of ether and the waves of light.

This, however, is mere speculation and leads me to the fact that early in May 1920 I heard, in conversation with my friend Mr. Gow, the Editor of *Light*, that alleged photographs of fairies had been taken. He had not actually seen them, but he referred me to Miss Scatcherd, a lady for whose knowledge and judgment I had considerable respect. I got into touch with her and found that she also had not seen the photographs, but she had a friend, Miss Gardner, who had actually done so. On May 13 Miss Scatcherd wrote to me saying that she was getting on the trail, and including an extract from a letter of Miss Gardner, which ran as follows. I am quoting actual documents in this early stage, for I think there are many who would like a complete inside view of all that led up to so remarkable an episode. Alluding to her brother Mr. Gardner, she says:

"You know that Edward is a Theosophist, has been for years, and now he is mostly engaged with lecturing and other work for the Society — and although for years I have regarded him as bathed in error and almost past praying for, I now find a talk with him an inspiring privilege. I am so very thankful that I happened to be in Willesden when his bereavement took place, for it was so wonderful to watch him, and to see how marvellously his faith and beliefs upheld and comforted him. He will probably devote more and more of his time and strength to going about the country lecturing, etc.

"I wish you could see a photo he has. He believes in fairies, pixies, goblins, etc. — children, in many cases, really see them and play with them. He has got into touch with a family in Bradford where the little girl, Elsie, and her cousin, Frances, constantly go into woods and play with the fairies. The father and mother are sceptical and have no sympathy with their nonsense, as they call it, but an aunt, whom Edward has interviewed, is quite sympathetic with the girls. Some little time ago, Elsie said she wanted to photograph them, and begged her father to lend his camera. For long he refused, but at last she managed to get the loan of it and one plate. Off she and Frances went into the woods near a water-fall. Frances ''ticed' them, as they call it, and Elsie stood ready with the camera. Soon the three fairies appeared, and one pixie dancing in Frances' aura. Elsie snapped and hoped for the best. It was a long time before the father would develop the photo, but at last he did, and to his utter amazement the four sweet little figures came out beautifully!

"Edward got the negative and took it to a specialist in photography who would know a fake at once. Sceptical as he was before he tested it, afterwards he offered £100 down for it. He pronounced it absolutely genuine and a perfectly remarkable photograph. Edward has it enlarged and hanging in his hall. He is very interested in it and as soon as possible he is going to Bradford to see the children. What do you think of this? Edward says the fairies are on the same line of evolution as the *winged* insects, etc., etc. I fear I cannot follow all his reasonings, but I knew you would be keenly interested. I wish you could see that photo and another one of the girls playing with the quaintest goblin imaginable!”

This letter filled me with hopes, and I renewed my pursuit of the photographs. I learned that they were two in number and that they had been sent for inspection to Miss Blomfield, a friend of the family. My chase turned, therefore, in that direction, and in reply to a letter of inquiry I received the following answer:

The Myrtles, Beckenham,
June 21, 1920.

DEAR SIR,

I am sending the two fairy pictures; they *are* interesting, are they not?

I am sure my cousin would be pleased for you to see them. But he said (and wrote it to me afterwards) that he did not want them to be used in any way at present. I believe he has plans in regard to them, and the pictures are being copyrighted. I don’t think the copyright will be his. He has not yet finished his investigations. I asked him if I might photograph them myself so as to have a few prints to give to friends interested, but be wrote that be would rather nothing was done at present.

I think my cousin is away from home just now. But his name is Edward L. Gardner, and be is President of one of the branches of the Theosophical Society (Blavatsky Lodge), and he lectures fairly often at their Hall (Mortimer Hall, Mortimer Square, W.). He lectured there a few weeks ago, and showed the fairies on the screen and told what he knew about them.

Yours sincerely,
E. BLOMFIELD.

This letter enclosed the two very remarkable photographs which are reproduced in this volume, that which depicted the dancing goblin, and the other of wood elves in a ring. An explanatory note setting forth the main points of each is appended to the reproductions. I was naturally delighted at the wonderful pictures, and wrote back thanking Miss Blomfield for her courtesy, and suggesting that an inquiry should be set on foot which would satisfy me as to the genuine nature of the photographs. If this were clearly established I hoped that I might be privileged to help Mr. Gardner in giving publicity to the discovery. In reply I had the following letter:

The Myrtles, Beckenham,
June 23, 1920.

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

I am so glad you like the fairies! I should be only too glad to help in any way if I could, but there is so little I can do. Had the photographs been mine (I mean the negatives), I should have been most pleased that anything so lovely in the way of information should have been introduced to the public under such auspices. But it would, as things are, be necessary to ask my cousin. I believe he *wants* people to know, but, as I wrote before, I do not know his plans, and I'm not sure if he is ready.

It has occurred to me since writing to you that it would have been better had I given you his sister's address. She is a most sensible and practical person, much engaged in social work, with which her sympathetic nature and general efficiency make her very successful. She believes the fairy photographs to be quite genuine. Edward is a clever man — and a good one. His evidence on any of the affairs of life would, I am sure, be considered most reliable by all who knew him, both for veracity and sound judgment. I hope these details will not bore you, but I thought perhaps some knowledge of the people who, so to say, "discovered" the photographs would help in taking you *one* step nearer the source. I do not see any opening for fraud or hoax, though at first when I saw the prints I thought there must be some other explanation than the simple one that they were what they seemed. They appeared too good to be true! But every little detail I have since heard has added to my conviction that they are genuine; though I have only what Edward tells me to go upon. He is hoping to obtain more from the same girls.

Yours sincerely,
E. BLOMFIELD.

At about the same time I received a letter from another lady who had some knowledge of the matter. It ran thus: 29 *Croftdown Road, Highgate Road, N.W.,*
June 24, 1920.

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

I am glad to hear that you are interested in the fairies. If they were really taken, as there seems good reason to believe, the event is no less than the discovery of a new world. It may not be out of place to mention that when I examined them with a magnifying glass I noticed, as an artist, that the hands do not appear to be quite the same as ours. Though the little figures look otherwise so human, the hands seemed to me something like this. (There followed a sketch of a sort of fin.) The beard in the little gnome seems to me to be some sort of insect-like appendage, though it would, no doubt, be called a beard by a clairvoyant seeing him. Also it occurs to me that the whiteness of the fairies may be due to their lack of shadow, which may also explain their somewhat artificial-looking flatness.

Yours sincerely,
MAY BOWLEY.

I was now in a stronger position, since I had actually seen the photographs and learned that Mr. Gardner was a solid person with a reputation for sanity and character. I therefore wrote to him stating the links by which I had reached him, and saying how interested I was in the whole matter, and how essential it seemed that the facts should be given to the public, so that free investigation might be possible before it was too late. To this letter I had the following reply:

5 *Craven Road, Harlesden, N.W.* 10.
June 25, 1920.

DEAR SIR,

Your interesting letter of the 22nd has just reached me, and very willingly I will assist you in any way that may be possible.

With regard to the photographs, the story is rather a long one and I have only gathered it by going very carefully. The children who were concerned are very shy and reserved indeed. . . . They are of a mechanic’s family of Yorkshire, and the children are said to have played with fairies and elves in the woods near their village since babyhood. I will not attempt to narrate the story here, however — perhaps we may meet for that — but when I at length obtained a view of the rather poor prints it so impressed me I begged for the actual negatives. These I submitted to two first-class photographic experts, one in London and one in Leeds. The first, who was unfamiliar with such matters, declared the plates to be perfectly genuine and unfaked, but inexplicable! The second, who did know something of the subject and had been instrumental in exposing several “psychic” fakes, was also entirely satisfied. Hence I proceeded.

I am hopeful of getting more photographs, but the immediate difficulty is to arrange for the two girls to be together. They are 16 or 17 years old and beginning to work and are separated by a few miles. It may be we can manage it and thus secure photographs of the other varieties besides those obtained. These nature spirits are of the non-individualised order and I should greatly like to se. cure some of the higher. But two children such as these are, are rare, and I fear now that we are late because almost certainly the inevitable will shortly happen, one of them will “fall in love” and then — hey presto!!

By the way, I am anxious to avoid the money consideration. I may not succeed, but would far rather not introduce it. We are out for Truth, and nothing soils the way so quickly. So far as I am concerned you shall have everything I can properly give you.

Sincerely yours,
(Sgd.) EDW. L. GARDNER.

This letter led to my going to London and seeing Mr. Gardner, whom I found to be quiet, well-balanced, and reserved — not in the least of a wild or visionary type. He showed me beautiful enlargements of these two wonderful pictures, and he gave me much information which is embodied in my subsequent account. Neither he nor I had actually seen the girls, and it was arranged that he should handle the personal side of the matter, while I should examine the results and throw them into literary shape. It was arranged between us that he should visit the village as soon as convenient, and make the acquaintance of everyone concerned. In the meantime, I showed the positives, and sometimes the negatives, to several friends whose opinion upon psychic matters I respected.

Of these Sir Oliver Lodge holds a premier place. I can still see his astonished and interested face as he gazed at the pictures, which I placed before him in the hall of the Athenæum Club. With his usual caution he refused to accept them at their face value, and suggested the theory that the Californian Classical dancers had been taken and their picture superimposed upon a rural British background. I argued that we had certainly traced the pictures to two children of the artisan class, and that such photographic tricks would be entirely beyond them, but I failed to convince him, nor am I sure that even now he is whole-hearted in the matter.

My most earnest critics came from among the spiritualists, to whom a new order of being as remote from spirits as they are from human beings was an unfamiliar idea, and who feared, not unnaturally, that their intrusion would complicate that spiritual controversy which is vital to so many of us. One of these was a gentleman whom I will call Mr. Lancaster, who, by a not unusual paradox, combined considerable psychic powers, including both clairvoyance and clairaudience, with great proficiency in the practice of his very prosaic profession. He had claimed that he had frequently seen these little people with his own eyes, and I, therefore, attached importance to his opinion. This gentleman had a spirit guide (I have no objection to the smile of the sceptic), and to him he referred the question. The answer showed both the strength and the weakness of such psychic inquiries. Writing to me in July 1920, he said:

"*Re Photographs*: The more I think of it the less I like it (I mean the one with the Parisian-coiffed fairies). My own guide says it was taken by a fair man, short, with his hair brushed back; he has a studio with a lot of cameras, some of which are 'turned by a handle.' He did not make it to sell Spiritualists a 'pup,' but did it to please the little girl in the picture who wrote fairy stories which he illustrated in this fashion. He is not a Spiritualist, but would laugh very much if anyone was taken in by it. He does not live near where we were, and the place is all different, i.e. the houses, instead of being in straight lines, are dropped about all over the place. Apparently he was not English. I should think it was either Denmark or Los Angeles by the description, which I give you for what it is worth.

"I should very much like the lens which would take persons in rapid motion with the clarity of the photo in question, it must work at F 4.5 and cost fifty guineas if a penny, and not the sort of lens one would imagine the children in an artisan's household would possess in a hand camera. And yet with the speed with which it was taken the waterfall in the background is blurred sufficiently to justify a one second's exposure at least. What a doubting Thomas! I was told the other day that, in the unlikely event of my ever reaching heaven, I should (*a*) Insist on starting a card file index of the angels, and (*b*) Starting a rifle range to guard against the possibility of invasion from Hell. This being my unfortunate reputation at the hands of the people who claim to know me must discount my criticisms as carping — to a certain extent, at all events.”

These psychic impressions and messages are often as from one who sees in a glass darkly and contain a curious mixture of truth and error. Upon my submitting this message to Mr. Gardner he was able to assure me that the description was, on the whole, a very accurate one of Mr. Snelling and his surroundings, the gentleman who had actually handled the negatives, subjected them to various tests and made enlarged positives. It was, therefore, this intermediate incident, and not the original inception of the affair, which had impressed itself upon Mr. Lancaster’s guide. All this is, of course, quite non-evidential to the ordinary reader, but I am laying all the documents upon the table.

Mr. Lancaster’s opinion had so much weight with us, and we were so impressed by the necessity of sparing no possible pains to get at truth, that we submitted the plates to fresh examination, as detailed in the following letter:

5 *Craven Road, Harlesden, N.W.* 10,
July 12, 1920.

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

Just a line to report progress and acknowledge your kind letters and enclosure from Kodak’s.

A week back, after your reference to Mr. Lancaster’s opinion, I thought I would get a more careful examination of the negatives made than before, though that was searching enough. So I went over to Mr. Snelling’s at Harrow and had a long interview with him, again impressing him with the importance of being utterly certain. I told you, I think, that this Mr. Snelling has had a varied and expert connection of over thirty years with the Autotype Company and Illingworth’s large photographic factory and has himself turned out some beautiful work in natural and artificial studio studies. He recently started for himself at Wealdstone (Harrow) and is doing well. Mr. Snelling’s report on the two negatives is positive and most decisive. He says he is perfectly certain of two things connected with these photos, namely:

1. One exposure only;

2. All the figures of the fairies moved during exposure, which was "instantaneous."

As I put all sorts of pressing questions to him, relating to paper or cardboard figures, and backgrounds and paintings, and all the artifices of the modern studio, he proceeded to demonstrate by showing me other negatives and prints that certainly supported his view. He added that anyone of considerable experience could detect the dark background and double exposure in the negative at once. Movement was as easy, as he pointed out in a crowd of aeroplane photos he had by him. I do not pretend to follow all his points, but I am bound to say he thoroughly convinced me of the above two, which seem to me to dispose of all the objections hitherto advanced when they are taken together! Mr. S. is willing to make any declaration embodying the above and stakes his reputation unhesitatingly on their truth.

I am away from London from Wednesday next till the 28th when I go on to Bingley for one or two days' investigation on the spot. I propose that you have the two negatives, which are carefully packed and can be posted safely, for this fortnight or so. If you would rather not handle them I will send them to Mr. West of Kodak's, or have them taken to him for his opinion, for I think, as you say, it would be worth having, if he has had direct and extensive practical experience.

I am very anxious now to see this right through, as, though I felt pretty sure before, I am more than ever satisfied now after that interview the other day.

Yours sincerely,
EDW. L. GARDNER.

After receiving this message and getting possession of the negatives I took them myself to the Kodak Company's Offices in

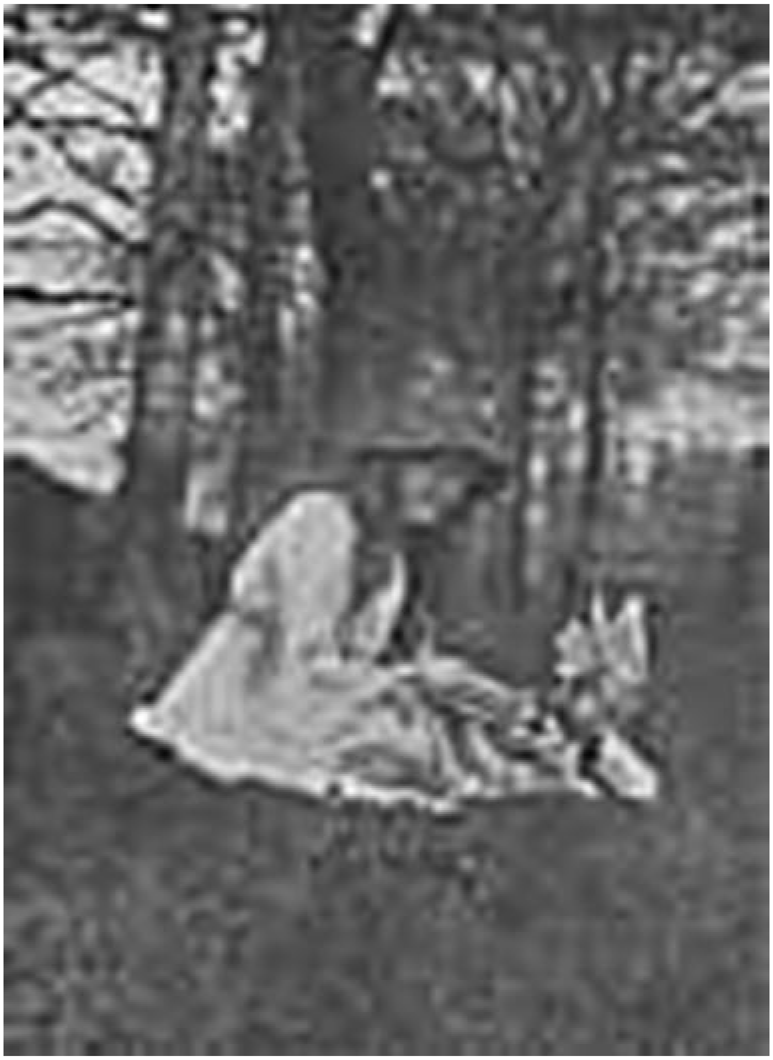

B. ELSIE AND THE GNOME

Photograph taken by Frances. Fairly bright day in September, 1917. The “Midg” camera. Distance, 8 ft . Time, 1/50th sec. The original negative has been tested, enlarged, and analysed in the same exhaustive manner as A. This plate was badly under-exposed. Elsie was playing with the gnome and beckoning it to come on to her knee.

ELSIE AND FRANCES

A snapshot taken by Mr. Wright in June 1917, with the “Midg” camera he had just obtained — his first and only camera.

COTTINGLEY BECK AND GLEN

Sites of photographs are marked A, B, C, D, E, and the cottage with an X.

[paragraph continues] Kingsway, where I saw Mr. West and another expert of the Company. They examined the plates carefully, and neither of them could find any evidence of superposition, or other trick. On the other hand, they were of opinion that if they set to work with all their knowledge and resources they could produce such pictures by natural means, and therefore they would not undertake to say that these were preternatural. This, of course, was quite reasonable if the pictures are judged only as technical productions, but it rather savours of the old discredited anti-spiritualistic argument that because a trained conjurer can produce certain effects under his own conditions, therefore some woman or child who gets similar effects must get them by conjuring. It was clear that at the last it was the character and surroundings of the children upon which the inquiry must turn, rather

than upon the photos themselves. I had already endeavoured to open up human relations with the elder girl by sending her a book, and I had received the following little note in reply from her father: 31 *Main Street, Cottingley, Bingley,*
July 12, 1920.

DEAR SIR,

I hope you will forgive us for not answering your letter sooner and thanking you for the beautiful book you so kindly sent to Elsie. She is delighted with it. I can assure you we do appreciate the honour you have done her. The book came last Saturday morning an hour after we had left for the seaside for our holidays, so we did not receive it until last night. We received a letter from Mr. Gardner at the same time, and he proposes coming to see us at the end of July. Would it be too long to wait until then, when we could explain what we know about it?

Yours very gratefully,
ARTHUR WRIGHT.

It was evident, however, that we must get into more personal touch, and with this object Mr. Gardner went North and interviewed the whole family, making a thorough investigation of the circumstances at the spot. The result of his journey is given in the article which I published in the *Strand Magazine*, which covers all the ground. I will only add the letter he wrote to me after his return from Yorkshire.

5 *Craven Road, Harlesden, N.W.* 10,
July 31, 1920.

MY DEAR CONAN DOYLE,

Yours just to hand, and as I have now had an hour to sort things out I write at once so that you have the enclosed before you at the earliest moment. You must be very pressed, so I put the statement as simply as possible, leaving you to use just what you think fit. Prepared negatives, prints of quarter, half-plate, and enlarged sizes, and lantern slides, I have all here.

Also on Tuesday I shall have my own photographs of the valley scenery including the two spots shown in the fairy prints, and also prints of the two children taken in 1917 with their shoes and stockings off, just as they played in the beck at the rear of their house. I also have a print of Elsie showing her hand.

With regard to the points you raise: 1. I have definite leave and permission to act as regards the use made of these photographs in any way I think best.

Publication may be made of them, the only reserve being that full names and addresses shall be withheld.

2. Copies are ready here for England and U. S. A.

3. . . . The Kodak people and also the Illingworth Co. are unwilling to testify. The former, of course, you know of. Illingworths claim that they could produce, by means of clever studio painting and modelling, a similar negative. Another Company's expert made assertions concerning the construction of the "model" that I found were entirely erroneous directly I saw the real ground! They, however, barred any publication. The net result, besides Snelling's views, is that the photograph *could* be produced by studio work, but there is no evidence *positively* of such work in the negatives. (I might add that Snelling, whom I saw again yesterday evening, scouts the claim that such negatives could be produced. [paragraph continues] He states that he would pick such a one out without hesitation!)

4. My report is enclosed and you are at perfect liberty to use this just as you please.

The father, Mr. Arthur Wright, impressed me favourably. He was perfectly open and free about the whole matter. He explained his position — he simply did not understand the business, but is quite clear and positive that the plate he took out of the Midg camera was the one he put in the same day. His work is that of electrician to an estate in the neighbourhood near. He is clear-headed and very intelligent, and gives one the impression of being open and honest. I learnt the reason of the family's cordial treatment of myself. Mrs. Wright, a few years back, came into touch with theosophical teachings and speaks of these as having done her good. My own connection with the Theosophical Society she knew of and this gave them confidence. Hence the very cordial reception I have met with, which somewhat had puzzled me.

By the way, I think "L. W' guide ran up against innocent little Snelling! He matches the description quite well, as I realised last night. And he did prepare the new negatives from which the prints you have were made, and he has a room full up with weird machines with handles and devices used in photography. . . .

Sincerely yours,
EDW. L. GARDNER.

I trust that the reader will agree that up to this point we had not proceeded with any undue rashness or credulity, and that we had taken all common-sense steps to test the case, and had no alternative, if we were unprejudiced seekers for truth, but to go ahead with it, and place our results before the public, so that others might discover the fallacy which we had failed to find. I must apologize if some of the ground in the *Strand* article which follows has already been covered in this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PUBLISHED ACCOUNT —”STRAND” CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 1920

Should the incidents here narrated, and the photographs attached, hold their own against the criticism which they will excite, it is no exaggeration to say that they will mark an epoch in human thought. I put them and all the evidence before the public for examination and judgment. If I am myself asked whether I consider the case to be absolutely and finally proved, I should answer that in order to remove the last faint shadow of doubt I should wish to see the result repeated before a disinterested witness. At the same time, I recognise the difficulty of such a request, since rare results must be obtained when and how they can. But short of final and absolute proof, I consider, after carefully going into every possible source of error, that a strong *prima-facie* case has been built up. The cry of “fake” is sure to be raised, and will make some impression upon those who have not had the opportunity of knowing the people concerned, or the place. On the photographic side every objection has been considered and adequately met. The pictures stand or fall together. Both are false, or both are true. All the circumstances point to the latter alternative, and yet in a matter involving so tremendous a new departure one needs overpowering evidence before one can say that there is no conceivable loophole for error.

It was about the month of May in this year that I received the information from Miss Felicia Scatcherd, so well known in several departments of human thought, to the effect that two photographs of fairies had been taken in the North of England under circumstances which seemed to put fraud out of the question. The statement would have appealed to me at any time, but I happened at the moment to be collecting material for an article on fairies, now completed, and I had accumulated a surprising number of cases of people who claimed to be able to see these little creatures. The evidence was so complete and detailed, with such good names attached to it, that it was difficult to believe that it was false; but, being by nature of a somewhat sceptical turn, I felt that something closer was needed before I could feel personal conviction and assure myself that these were not thought-forms conjured up by the imagination or expectation of the seers. The rumour of the photographs interested me deeply, therefore, and following the matter up from one lady informant to another, I came at last upon Mr. Edward L. Gardner, who has been ever since my most efficient collaborator, to whom all credit is due. Mr. Gardner, it may be remarked, is a member of the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society, and a well-known lecturer upon occult subjects.

He had not himself at that time mastered the whole case, but all he had he placed freely at my disposal. I had already seen prints of the photographs, but I was relieved to find that he had the actual negatives, and that it was from them, and not from the prints, that two expert photographers, especially Mr. Snelling of 26 The Bridge, Wealdstone, Harrow, had already formed their conclusions in favour of the genuineness of the pictures. Mr. Gardner tells his own story presently, so I will simply say that at that period he had got into direct and friendly touch with the Carpenter family. We are compelled to use a pseudonym and to withhold the exact address, for it is clear that their lives would be much interrupted by correspondence and callers if their identity were too clearly indicated. At the same time there would be, no doubt, no objection to any small committee of inquiry verifying the facts for themselves if this anonymity were respected. For the present, however, we shall simply call them the Carpenter family in the village of Dalesby, West Riding.

Some three years before, according to our information, the daughter and the niece of Mr. Carpenter, the former being sixteen and the other ten years of age, had taken the two photographs — the one in summer, the other in early autumn. The father was quite agnostic in the matter, but as his daughter claimed that she and her cousin when they were together continually saw fairies in the wood and had come to be on familiar and friendly terms with them, he entrusted her with one plate in his camera. The result was the picture of the dancing elves, which considerably amazed the father when he developed the film that evening. The little girl looking across at her playmate, to intimate that the time had come to press the button, is Alice, the niece, while the older girl, who was taken some months later with the quaint gnome, is Iris, the daughter. The story ran that the girls were so excited in the evening that one pressed her way into the small dark-room in which the father was about to develop, and that as she saw the forms of the fairies showing through the solution she cried out to the other girl, who was palpitating outside the door: “Oh, Alice, Alice, the fairies are on the plate — they are on the plate!” It was indeed a triumph for the children, who had been smiled at, as so many children are smiled at by an incredulous world for stating what their own senses have actually recorded.

The father holds a position of trust in connection with some local factory, and the family are well known and respected. That they are cultivated is shown by the fact that Mr. Gardner’s advances towards them were made more easy because Mrs. Carpenter was a reader of theosophical teachings and had gained spiritual good from them. A correspondence had arisen and all their letters were frank and honest, professing some amazement at the stir which the affair seemed likely to produce.

Thus the matter stood after my meeting with Mr. Gardner, but it was clear that this was not enough. We must get closer to the facts. The negatives were taken round to Kodak, Ltd., where two experts were unable to find any flaw, but refused to testify to the genuineness of them, in view of some possible trap. An amateur photographer of experience refused to accept them on the ground of the elaborate and Parisian coiffure of the little ladies. Another photographic company, which it would be cruel to name, declared that the background consisted of theatrical properties, and that therefore the picture was a worthless fake. I leaned heavily upon Mr. Snelling’s wholehearted endorsement, quoted later in this article, and also consoled myself by the broad view that if the local conditions were as reported, which we proposed to test, then it was surely impossible that a little village with an amateur photographer could have the plant and the skill to turn out a fake which could not be detected by the best experts in London.

The matter being in this state, Mr. Gardner volunteered to go up at once and report — an expedition which I should have wished to share had it not been for the pressure of work before my approaching departure for Australia. Mr. Gardner’s report is here appended:

5 *Craven Road, Harlesden, N.W.* 10,
July 29, 1920.

It was early in this year, 1920, that I heard from a friend of photographs of fairies having been successfully taken in the [paragraph continues] North of England. I made some inquiries, and these led to prints being sent to me with the names and address of the children who were said to have taken them. The correspondence that followed seemed so innocent and promising that I begged the loan of the actual negatives — and two quarter-plates came by post a few days after. One was a fairly clear one, the other much underexposed.

The negatives proved to be truly astonishing photographs indeed, for there was no sign of double exposure nor anything other than ordinary straightforward work. I cycled over to Harrow to consult an expert photographer of thirty years’ practical experience whom I knew I could trust for a sound opinion. Without any explanation I passed the plates over and asked what he thought of them. After examining the “fairies” negative carefully, exclamations began: “This is the most extraordinary thing I’ve ever seen!” “Single exposure!” “Figures have moved!” “Why, it’s a genuine photograph! Wherever did it come from?” I need hardly add that enlargements were made and subjected to searching examination — without any modification of opinion. The immediate upshot was that a “positive” was taken from each negative, that the originals might be preserved carefully untouched, and then new negatives were prepared and intensified to serve as better printing mediums. The originals are just as received and in my keeping now. Some good prints and lantern slides were soon prepared.

In May I used the slides, with others, to illustrate a lecture given in the Mortimer Hall, London, and this aroused considerable interest, largely because of these pictures and their story. A week or so later I received a letter from Sir A. Conan Doyle asking for information concerning them, some report, I understood, having reached him from a mutual friend. A meeting with Sir Arthur followed, and the outcome was that I agreed to hasten my proposed personal investigation into the origin of the photographs, and carry this through at once instead of waiting till September, when I should be in the North on other matters.

In consequence, to-day, July 29, I am just back in London from one of the most interesting and surprising excursions that it has ever been my fortune to make!

We had time, before I went, to obtain opinions on the original negatives from other expert photographers, and one or two of these were adverse rather than favourable. Not that any would say positively that the photographs were faked, but two did claim that they could produce the same class of negative by studio work involving painted models, etc., and it was suggested further that the little girl in the first picture was standing behind a table heaped up with fern and moss, that the toad-stool was unnatural, that in the gnome photo the girl’s hand was not her own, that uniform shading was questionable, and so on. All of this had its weight, and though I went North with as little bias one way or the other as possible, I felt quite prepared to find that a personal investigation would disclose some evidence of falsity.

The lengthy journey completed, I reached

ELSIE IN 1920, STANDING NEAR WHERE THE GNOME WAS TAKEN IN 1917

FRANCES IN 1920

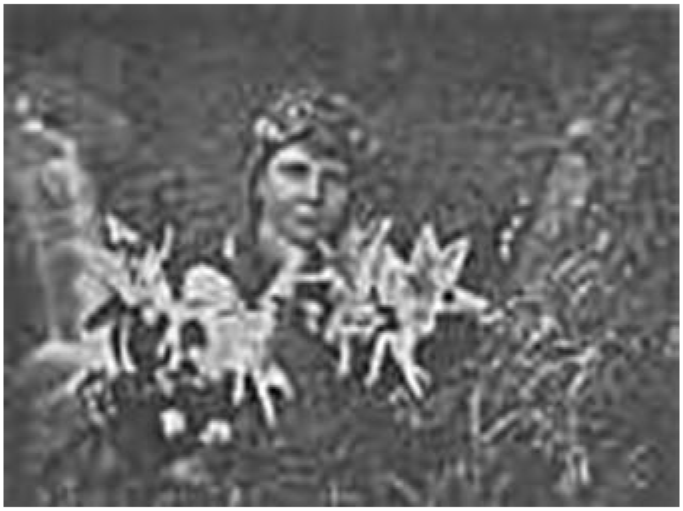

A. FRANCES AND THE FAIRIES

Photograph taken by Elsie. Bright sunny day in July, 1917. The “Midg” camera. Distance, 4 ft. Time, 1/50th sec. The original negative is asserted by expert photographers to bear not the slightest trace of combination work, retouching, or, anything whatever to mark it as other than a perfectly straight single-exposure photograph, taken in the open air under natural conditions. The negative is sufficiently, Indeed. somewhat over-exposed. The waterfall and rocks are about 20 ft. behind Frances, who is standing against the bank of the beck. A fifth fairy may be seen between and behind the two on the right. The colouring of the fairies is described by the girls as being of very pale pink, green, lavender, and mauve, most marked in the wings and fading to almost pure white, in the limbs and drapery. Each fairy has its own special colour.

a quaint, old-world village in Yorkshire, found the house, and was cordially received. Mrs. C. and her daughter I. (the girl as shown playing with the gnome) were both at home to meet me, and Mr. G, the father, came in shortly afterwards.

Several of the objections raised by the professionals were disposed of almost at once, as, a half-hour after reaching the house, I was exploring a charming little valley, directly at the rear, with a stream of water running through, where the children had been accustomed to see and play with the fairies. I found the bank behind which the child, with her shoes and stockings off, is shown as standing; toad-stools exactly as in the photograph were about in plenty, quite as big and hearty-looking. And the girl’s hand? Well, she laughingly made me promise not to say much about it, it is so very long! I stood on the spots shown and easily identified every feature. Then, in course of eliciting all that one could learn about the affair, I gathered the following, which, for the sake of conciseness, I set out below: Camera used: “The Midg” quarter-plate. Plates: Imperial Rapid.

Fairies photo: July 1917. Day brilliantly hot and sunny. About 3 p. m. Distance: 4 feet. Time: 1-50th second.

Gnome photo: September 1917. Day bright, but not as above. About 4 o’clock. Distance: 8 feet. Time: 1-50th second.

I. was sixteen years old; her cousin A. was ten years. Other photographs were attempted but proved partial failures, and plates were not kept.

Colouring: The palest of green, pink, mauve. Much more in the wings than in the bodies, which are very pale to white. The gnome is described as seeming to be in black tights, reddish-brown jersey, and red pointed cap. He was swinging his pipes, holding them in his left hand and was just stepping up on to I.’s knee when A. snapped him.

A., the visiting cousin, went away soon after, and I. says they must be together to “take photographs.” Fortunately they will meet in a few weeks’ time, and they promise me to try to get some more. I. added she would very much like to send me one of a fairy flying.

Mr. C.’s testimony was clear and decisive. His daughter had pleaded to be allowed to use the camera. At first he demurred, but ultimately, after dinner one Saturday, he put just one plate in the Midg and gave it to the girls. They returned in less than an hour and begged him to develop the plate as I. had “taken a photograph.” He did so, with, to him, the bewildering result shown in the print of the fairies!

Mrs. C. says she remembers quite well that the girls were only away from the house a short time before they brought the camera back.

Extraordinary and amazing as these photographs may appear, I am now quite convinced of their entire genuineness, as indeed would everyone else be who had the same evidence of transparent honesty and simplicity that I had. I am adding nothing by way of explanations or theories of my own, though the need for two people, preferably children, is fairly obvious for photography, in order to assist in the strengthening of the etheric bodies. Beyond this I prefer to leave the above statement as a plain, unvarnished narrative of my connection with the incidents.

I need only add that no attempt appears ever to have been made by the family to make these photographs public, and whatever has been done in that direction locally has not been pressed by any of them, nor has there been any money payment in connection with them.

EDWARD L. GARDNER.

I may add as a footnote to Mr. Gardner’s report that the girl informed him in conversation that she had no power of any sort over the actions of the fairies, and that the way to “‘tice them,” as she called it, was to sit passively with her mind quietly turned in that direction; then, when faint stirrings or movements in the distance heralded their presence, to beckon towards them and show that they were welcome. It was Iris who pointed out the pipes of the gnome, which we had both taken as being the markings of the moth-like under-wing. She added that if there was not too much rustling in the wood it was possible to hear the very faint and high sound of the pipes. To the objections of photographers that the fairy figures show quite different shadows to those of the human our answer is that ectoplasm, as the etheric protoplasm has been named, has a faint luminosity of its own, which would largely modify shadows.

To the very clear and, as I think, entirely convincing report of Mr. Gardner's, let me add the exact words which Mr. Snelling, the expert photographer, allows us to use. Mr. Snelling has shown great strength of mind, and rendered signal service to psychic study, by taking a strong line, and putting his professional reputation as an expert upon the scales. He has had a varied connection of over thirty years with the Autotype Company and Illingworth's large photographic factory, and has himself turned out some beautiful work of every kind of natural and artificial studio studies. He laughs at the idea that any expert in England could deceive him with a faked photograph. “These two negatives,” he says, “are entirely genuine, unfaked photographs of single exposure, open-air work, show movement in the fairy figures, and there is no trace whatever of studio work involving card or paper models, dark backgrounds, painted figures, etc. In my opinion, they are both straight untouched pictures.”

A second independent opinion is equally clear as to the genuine character of the photographs, founded upon a large experience of practical photography.

There is our case, fortified by pictures of the places which the unhappy critic has declared to be theatrical properties. How well we know that type of critic in all our, psychic work, though it is not always possible to at once show his absurdity to other people.

I will now make a few comments upon the two pictures, which I have studied long and earnestly with a high-power lens.

One fact of interest is this presence of a double pipe — the very sort which the ancients associated with fauns and naiads — in each picture. But if pipes, why not everything else? Does it not suggest a complete range of utensils and instruments for their own life? Their clothing is substantial enough. It seems to me that with fuller knowledge and with fresh means of vision these people are destined to become just as solid and real as the Eskimos. There is an ornamental rim to the pipe of the elves which shows that the graces of art are not unknown among them. And what joy is in the complete abandon of their little graceful figures as they let themselves go in the dance! They may have their shadows and trials as we have, but at least there is a great gladness manifest in this demonstration of their life.

A second general observation is that the elves are a compound of the human and the butterfly, while the gnome has more of the moth. This may be merely the result of under-exposure of the negative and dullness of the weather. Perhaps the little gnome is really of the same tribe, but represents an elderly male, while the elves are romping young women. Most observers of fairy life have reported, however, that there are separate species, varying very much in size, appearance, and locality — the wood fairy, the water fairy, the fairy of the plains, etc.

Can these be thought-forms? The fact that they are so like our conventional idea of fairies is in favour of the idea. But if they move rapidly, have musical instruments, and so forth, then it is impossible to talk of "thought-forms," a term which suggests something vague and intangible. In a sense we are all thought-forms, since we can only be perceived through the senses, but these little figures would seem to have an objective reality, as we have ourselves, even if their vibrations should prove to be such that it takes either psychic power or a sensitive plate to record them. If they are conventional it may be that fairies have really been seen in every generation, and so some correct description of them has been retained.

There is one point of Mr. Gardner's investigation which should be mentioned. It had come to our knowledge that Iris could draw, and had actually at one time done some designs for a jeweller. This naturally demanded caution, though the girl's own frank nature is, I understand, a sufficient guarantee for those who know her. Mr. Gardner, however, tested her powers of drawing, and found that, while she could do landscapes cleverly, the fairy figures which she had attempted in imitation of those she had seen were entirely uninspired, and bore no possible resemblance to those in the photograph. Another point which may be commended to the careful critic with a strong lens is that the apparent pencilled face at the side of the figure on the right is really only the edge of her hair, and not, as might appear, a drawn profile.

I must confess that after months of thought I am unable to get the true bearings of this event. One or two consequences are obvious. The experiences of children will be taken more seriously. Cameras will be forthcoming. Other well-authenticated cases will come along. These little folk who appear to be our neighbours, with only some small difference of vibration to separate us, will become familiar. The thought of them, even when unseen, will add a charm to every brook and valley and give romantic interest to every country walk. The recognition of their existence will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there is a glamour and a mystery to life. Having discovered this, the world will not find it so difficult to accept that spiritual message supported by physical facts which has already been so convincingly put before it. All this I see, but there may be much more. When Columbus knelt in prayer upon the edge of America, what prophetic eye saw all that a new continent might do to affect the destinies of the world? We also seem to be on the edge of a new continent, separated not by oceans but by subtle and surmountable psychic conditions. I look at the prospect with awe. May those little creatures suffer from the contact and some Las Casas bewail their ruin! If so, it would be an evil day when the world defined their existence. But there is a guiding hand in the affairs of man, and we can but trust and follow.

CHAPTER III

RECEPTION OF THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

Though I was out of England at the time, I was able, even in Australia, to realise that the appearance of the first photographs in the *Strand Magazine* had caused very great interest. The press comments were as a rule cautious but not unsympathetic. The old cry of “Fake! “ was less conspicuous than I had expected, but for some years the press has been slowly widening its views upon psychic matters, and is not so inclined as of old to attribute every new manifestation to fraud. Some of the Yorkshire papers had made elaborate inquiries, and I am told that photographers for a considerable radius from the house were cross-questioned to find if they were accomplices. *Truth*, which is obsessed by the idea that the whole spiritualistic movement and everything connected with it is one huge, senseless conspiracy to deceive, concocted by knaves and accepted by fools, had the usual contemptuous and contemptible articles, which ended by a prayer to, Elsie that she should finish her fun and let the public know how it really was done. The best of the critical attacks was in the *Westminster Gazette*, who sent a special commissioner to unravel the mystery, and published the result on January 12, 1921. By kind permission I reproduce the article:

DO FAIRIES EXIST?

INVESTIGATION IN A YORKSHIRE VALLEY

COTTINGLEY’S MYSTERY

STORY OF THE GIRL WHO TOOK THE SNAPSHOT

The publication of photographs of fairies — or, to be more explicit, one photograph of fairies and another of a gnome — playing round children has aroused considerable interest, not only in Yorkshire, where the beings are said to exist, but throughout the country. The story, mysterious as it was when first told, became even more enigmatical by reason of the fact that Sir A. Conan Doyle made use of fictitious names in his narrative in the *Strand Magazine* in order, as he says, to prevent the lives of the people concerned being interrupted by callers and correspondence. That he has failed to do. I am afraid Sir Conan does not know Yorkshire people, particularly those of the dales, because any attempt to hide identity immediately arouses their suspicions, if it does not go so far as to condemn the writer for his lack of frankness.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his story is accepted with reserve. Each person to whom I spoke of the subject during my brief sojourn in Yorkshire dismissed the matter curtly as being untrue. It has been the principal topic of conversation for weeks, mainly because identity had been discovered.

My mission to Yorkshire was to secure evidence, if possible, which would prove or disprove the claim that fairies existed. I frankly confess that I failed. The particular fairyland is a picturesque little spot off the beaten track, two or three miles from Bingley. Here is a small village called Cottingley, almost hidden in a break in the upland, through which tumbles a tiny stream, known as Cottingley Beck, on its way to the Aire, less than a mile away. The "heroine" of Sir Conan Doyle's story is Miss Elsie Wright, [1] who resides with her parents at 31 Lynwood Terrace. The little stream runs past the back of the house, and the photographs were taken not more than a hundred yards away. When Miss Wright made the acquaintance of the fairies she was accompanied by her cousin, Frances Griffiths, who resides at Dean Road, Scarborough.

One photograph, taken by Miss Wright in the summer of 1917, when she was sixteen, shows her cousin, then a child of ten, with a group of four fairies dancing in the air before her, and in the other, taken some months afterwards, Elsie, seated on the grass, has a quaint gnome dancing beside her.

There are certain facts which stand out clearly and which none of the evidence I was able to obtain could shake. No other people have seen the fairies, though everybody in the little village knew of their alleged existence; when Elsie took the photograph she was unacquainted with the use of a camera, and succeeded at the first attempt; the girls did not invite a third person to see the wonderful visitors, and no attempt was made to make the discovery public.

First I interviewed Mrs. Wright, who, without hesitation, narrated the whole of the circumstances without adding any comment. The girls, she said, would spend the whole of the day in the narrow valley, even taking their lunch with them, though they were within a stone's throw of the house. Elsie was not robust, and did not work during the summer months, so that she could derive as much benefit as possible from playing in the open. She had often talked about seeing the fairies, but her parents considered it was nothing more than childish fancy, and let it pass. Mr. Wright came into possession of a small camera in 1917, and one Saturday afternoon yielded to the persistent entreaties of his daughter and allowed her to take it out. He placed one plate in position, and explained to her how to take a “snap.” The children went away in high glee and returned in less than an hour, requesting Mr. Wright to develop the plate. While this was being done Elsie noticed that the fairies were beginning to show, and exclaimed in an excited tone to her cousin, “Oh, Frances, the fairies are on the plate!” The second photograph was equally successful, and a few prints from each plate were given to friends as curiosities about a year ago. They evidently attracted little notice until one was shown to some of the delegates at a Theosophical Congress in Harrogate last summer.

Mrs. Wright certainly gave me the impression that she had no desire to keep anything back, and answered my questions quite frankly. She told me that Elsie had always been a truthful girl, and there were

ELSIE SEATED ON THE BANK ON WHICH THE FAIRIES WERE DANCING IN 1917 (PHOTO 1920)

THE FALL OF WATER JUST ABOVE THE SITE OF LAST PHOTOGRAPH

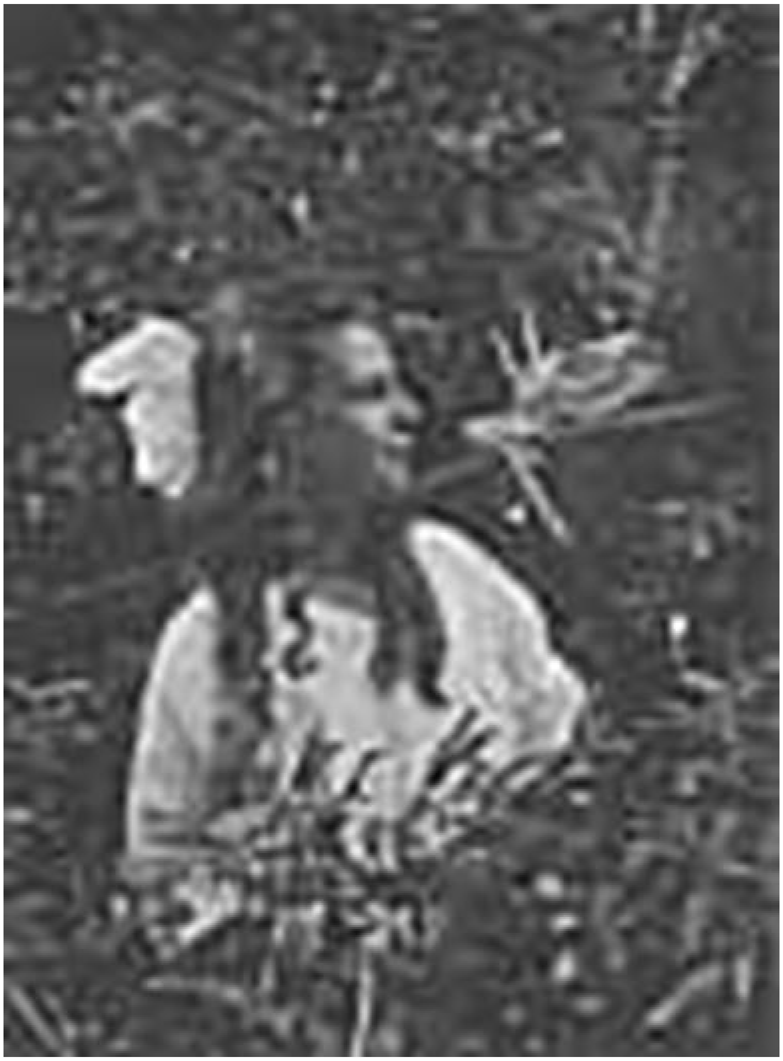

C. FRANCES AND THE LEAPING FAIRY

Photograph taken by Elsie in August, 1920. “Cameo” camera. Distance, 3 ft. Time, 1/50th sec. This negative and the two following (D and E) have been as strictly examined as the earlier ones, and similarly disclose no trace of being other than perfectly genuine photographs. Also they proved to have been taken from the packet given them, each plate having been privately marked unknown to the girls.

neighbours who accepted the story of the fairies simply on the strength of their knowledge of her. I asked about Elsie’s career, and her mother said that after she left school she worked a few months for a photographer in Manningham Lane, Bradford, but did not care for running errands most of the day. The only other work she did there was “spotting.” Neither occupation was likely to teach a fourteen-year-old girl how to “fake” a plate. From there she went to a jeweller’s shop, but her stay there was not prolonged. For many months immediately prior to taking the first photograph she was at home and did not associate with anyone who possessed a camera.

At that time her father knew little of photography, “only what he had picked up by dodging about with the camera,” as he put it, and any suggestion that he had faked the plate must be dismissed.

When he came home from the neighbouring mill, and was told the nature of my errand, he said he was “fed up” with the whole business, and had nothing else to tell. However, he detailed the story I had already heard from his wife, agreeing in every particular, and Elsie’s account, given to me in Bradford, added nothing. Thus I had the information from the three members of the family at different times, and without variation. The parents confessed they had some difficulty in accepting the photographs as genuine and even questioned the girls as to how they faked them. The children persisted in their story, and denied any act of dishonesty. Then they “let it go at that.” Even now their belief in the existence of the fairies is merely an acceptance of the statements of their daughter and her cousin.

I ascertained that Elsie was described by her late schoolmaster as being “dreamy,” and her mother said that anything imaginative appealed to her. As to whether she could have drawn the fairies when she was sixteen I am doubtful. Lately she has taken up water-colour drawing, and her work, which I carefully examined, does not reveal that ability in a marked degree, though she possesses a remarkable knowledge of colour for an untrained artist.

Sir A. Conan Doyle says that at first he was not convinced that the fairies were not thought-forms conjured up by the imagination or expectation of the seers. Mr. E. L. Gardner, a member of the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society, who made an investigation on the spot and also interviewed all the members of the family, records his opinion that the photographs are genuine.

Later in the day I went to Bradford, and at Sharpe's Christmas Card Manufactory saw Miss Wright. She was working in an upper room, and at first refused to see me, sending a message to the effect that she did not desire to be interviewed. A second request was successful, and she appeared at a small counter at the entrance to the works.

She is a tall, slim girl, with a wealth of auburn hair, through which a narrow gold band, circling her head, was entwined.

Like her parents, she just said she had nothing to say about the photographs, and, singularly enough, used the same expression as her father and mother—"I am 'fed up' with the thing."

She gradually became communicative, and told me how she came to take the first photograph.

Asked where the fairies came from, she replied that she did not know.

"Did you see them come?" I asked; and on receiving an affirmative reply, suggested that she must have noticed where they came from.

Miss Wright hesitated, and laughingly answered, "I can't say." She was equally at a loss to explain where they went after dancing near her, and was embarrassed when I pressed for a fuller explanation. Two or three questions went unanswered, and my suggestion that they must have "simply vanished into the air" drew the monosyllabic reply, "Yes." They did not speak to her, she said, nor did she speak to them.

When she had been with her cousin she had often seen them before. They were only kiddies when they first saw them, she remarked, and did not tell anybody.

"But," I went on, "it is natural to expect that a child, seeing fairies for the first time, would tell its mother." Her answer was to repeat that she did not tell anybody. The first occasion on which fairies were seen, it transpired, was in 1915.

In reply to further questions, Miss Wright said she had seen them since, and had photographed them, and the plates were in the possession of Mr. Gardner. Even after several prints of the first lot of fairies had been given to friends, she did not inform anybody that she had seen them again. The fact that nobody else in the village had seen them gave her no surprise. She firmly believed that she and her cousin were the only persons who had been so fortunate, and was equally convinced that nobody else would be. “If anybody else were there,” she said, “the fairies would not come out.”

Further questions put with the object of eliciting a reason for that statement were only answered with smiles and a final significant remark, “You don’t understand.”

Miss Wright still believes in the existence of the fairies, and is looking forward to seeing them again in the coming summer.

The fairies of Cottingley, as they appeared to the two girls, are fine-weather elves, as Miss Wright said they appeared only when it was bright and sunny; never when the weather was dull or wet.

The strangest part of the girl’s story was her statement that in their more recent appearances the fairies were more “transparent” than in 1916 and 1917, when they were “rather hard.” Then she added the qualification, “You see, we were young then.” This she did not amplify, though pressed to do so.

The hitherto obscure village promises to be the scene of many pilgrimages during the coming summer. There is an old saying in Yorkshire: “Ah’ll believe what Ah see,” which is still maintained as a valuable maxim.

The general tone of this article makes it clear that the Commissioner would very naturally have been well pleased to effect a *coup* by showing up the whole concern. He was, however, a fair-minded and intelligent man, and has easily exchanged the rôle of Counsel for the Prosecution to that of a tolerant judge. It will be observed that he brought out no new fact which had not already appeared in my article, save the interesting point that this was absolutely the first photograph which the children had ever taken in their lives. Is it conceivable that under such circumstances they could have produced a picture which was fraudulent and yet defied the examination of so many experts? Granting the honesty of the father, which no one has ever impugned, Elsie could only have done it by cut-out images, which must have been of exquisite beauty, of many different models, fashioned and kept without the knowledge of her parents, and capable of giving the impression of motion when carefully examined by an expert. Surely this is a large order!

In the *Westminster* article it is clear that the writer has not had much acquaintance with psychic research. His surprise that a young girl should not know whence appearances come or whither they go, when they are psychic forms materialising in her own peculiar aura, does not seem reasonable. It is a familiar fact also that psychic phenomena are always more active in warm sunny weather than in damp or cold. Finally, the girl's remark that the shapes were getting more diaphanous was a very suggestive one, for it is with childhood that certain forms of mediumship are associated, and there is always the tendency that, as the child becomes the woman, and as the mind becomes more sophisticated and commonplace, the phase will pass. The refining process can be observed in the second series of pictures, especially in the little figure which is holding out the flower. We fear that it has now completed itself, and that we shall have no more demonstrations of fairy life from this particular source.

One line of attack upon the genuine character of the photographs was the production of a fake, and the argument: "There, you see how good that is, and yet it is an admitted fake. How can you be sure that yours are not so also?" The fallacy of this reasoning lay in the fact that these imitations were done by skilled performers, while the originals were by untrained children. It is a repetition of the stale and rotten argument by which the world has been befooled so long, that because a conjurer under his own conditions can imitate certain effects, therefore the effects themselves never existed.

It must be admitted that some of these attempts were very well done, though none of them passed the scrutiny of Mr. Gardner or myself. The best of them was by a lady photographer connected with the Bradford Institute, Miss Ina Inman, whose production was so good that it caused us for some weeks to regard it with an open mind. There was also a weird but effective arrangement by Judge Docker, of Australia. In the case of Miss Inman's elves, clever as they were, there was nothing of the natural grace and freedom of movement which characterize the wonderful Cottingley fairy group.

Among the more remarkable comments in the press was one from Mr. George A. Wade in the *London Evening News* of December 8, 1920. It told of a curious sequence of events in Yorkshire, and ran as follows:

Are there real fairies in the land to-day? [paragraph continues] The question has been raised by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and there have been submitted photographs which purport to be those of actual 'little people.'

“Experiences which have come within my own knowledge may help to throw a little light on this question as to whether there are real fairies, actual elves and gnomes, yet to be met with in the dales of Yorkshire, where the photographs are asserted to have been taken.

“Whilst spending a day last year with my friend, Mr. Halliwell Sutcliffe, the well-known novelist, who lives in that district, he told me, to my intense surprise, that he personally knew a schoolmaster not far from his home who had again and again insisted that he had seen, talked with, and had played with real fairies in some meadows not far away! The novelist mentioned this to me as an actual curious fact, for which he, himself, had no explanation. But he said that the man was one whose education, personality, and character made him worthy of credence — a man not likely to harbour a delusion or to wish to deceive others. “Whilst in the same district I was informed by a man whom I knew to be thoroughly reliable that a young lady living in Skipton had mentioned to him more than once that she often went up to —— — (a spot in the dales the name of which he gave) to ‘play and dance with the fairies!’ When he expressed astonishment at the statement she repeated it, and averred that it was really true!

“In chatting about the matter with my friend, Mr. William Riley, the author of *Windyridge*, *Netherleigh*, and *Jerry and Ben*, a writer who knows the Yorkshire moors and dales intimately, Mr. Riley asserted that though he had never seen actual fairies there, yet he knew several trustworthy moorland people whose belief in them was unshakable and who persisted against all contradiction that they themselves had many times seen pixies at certain favoured spots in Upper Airedale and Wharfedale.

“When some time later an article of mine anent these things was published in a Yorkshire newspaper, there came a letter from a lady at a distance who stated that the account confirmed a strange experience which she had when on holiday in the same dale up above Skipton.

“She stated that one evening, when walking alone on the higher portion of a slope of the hills, to her intense astonishment she saw in a meadow close below her fairies and sprites playing and dancing in large numbers. She imagined that she must be dreaming, or under some hallucination, so she pinched herself and rubbed her eyes to make sure that she was really awake. Convinced of this, she looked again, and still unmistakably saw the ‘little people.’ She gave a full account of how they played, of the long time she watched them, and how at length they vanished. Without a doubt she was convinced of the truth of her statement.

“What can we make of it all? My own mind is open, but it is difficult to believe that so many persons, unknown to one another, should have conspired to state what is false. It is a remarkable coincidence, if nothing more, that the girls in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s account, the schoolmaster mentioned by Mr. Sutcliffe, the young woman who came from Skipton, and the lady who wrote to the Yorkshire newspaper should all put the spot where the fairies are to be seen almost within a mile or two of one another.

“Are there real fairies to be met with there?”

The most severe attack upon the fairy pictures seems to have been that of Major Hall-Edwards, the famous authority upon radium, in the *Birmingham Weekly Post*. He said:

“Sir Arthur Conan Doyle takes it for granted that these photographs are real photographs of fairies, notwithstanding the fact that no evidence has so far been put forward to show exactly how they were produced. Anyone who has studied the extraordinary effects which have from time to time been obtained by cinema operators must be aware that it is possible, given time and opportunity, to produce by means of faked photographs almost anything that can be imagined. “It is well to point out that the elder of the two girls has been described by her mother as a most imaginative child, who has been in the habit of drawing fairies for years, and who for a time was apprenticed to a firm of photographers. In addition to this she has access to some of the most beautiful dales and valleys, where the imagination of a young person is easily quickened.

“One of the pictures represents the younger child leaning on her elbow upon a bank, while a number of fairies are shown dancing around her. The child does not look at the fairies, but is posing for the photograph in the ordinary way. The reason given for her apparent disinterestedness in the frolicsome elves is that she is used to the fairies, and was merely interested in the camera.

“The picture in question could be ‘faked’ in two ways. Either the little figures of the fairies were stuck upon a cardboard, cut out and placed close to the sitter, when, of course, she would not be able to see them, and the whole photograph produced on a marked plate; or the original photograph, without ‘fairies,’ may have had stuck on it the figures of fairies cut from some publication. This would then be rephotographed, and, if well done, no photographer could swear that the second negative was not the original one.

“Major Hall-Edwards went on to remark that great weight had been placed upon the fact that the fairies in the photograph had transparent wings, but that a tricky photographer could very easily reproduce such an effect.

“‘It is quite possible,’ he observed, ‘to cut off the transparent wings of insects and paste them on a picture of fairies. It is easy to add the transparent wings of large flies and so arrange them that portions of the photograph can be viewed through the wings and thus obtain a very realistic effect.’

“It has been pointed out that although the ‘fairies’ are represented as if they were dancing — in fact they are definitely stated to be dancing — there is no evidence of movement in the photographs. An explanation of this has been given by the photographer herself, who has told us that the movements of the fairies are exceedingly slow and might be compared to the retarded-movement films shown in the cinemas. This proves that the young lady possesses a very considerable knowledge of photography.

“Millions of photographs have been taken by operators of different ages — children and grown-ups — of country scenes and places which, we have been taught, are the habitats of nymphs and elves; yet until the arrival upon the scene of these two wonderful children the image of a fairy has never been produced on a photographic plate. On the evidence I have no hesitation in saying that these photographs could have been ‘faked.’ I criticize the attitude of those who declared there is something supernatural in the circumstances attending the taking of these pictures because, as a medical man, I believe that the inculcation of such absurd ideas into the minds of children will result in later life in manifestations of nervous disorder and mental disturbances. Surely young children can be brought up to appreciate the beauties of Nature without

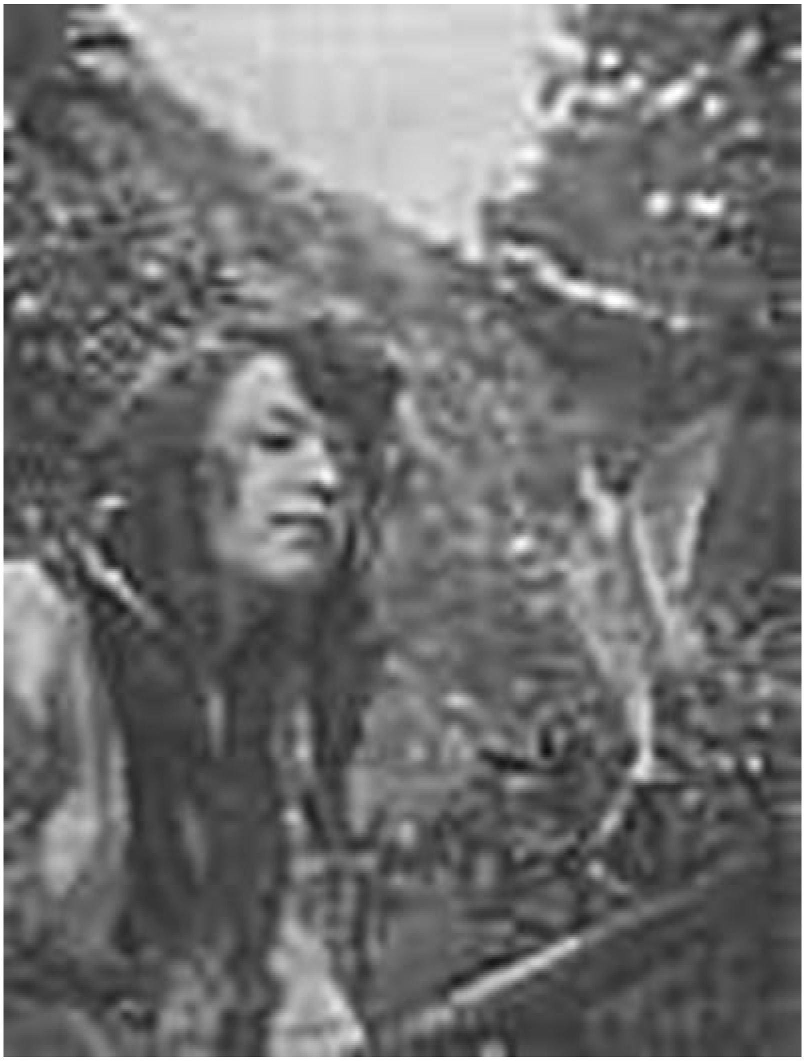

D. FAIRY OFFERING POSY OF HARE-BELLS TO ELSIE

The fairy is standing almost still, poised on the bush leaves. The wings are shot with yellow, and upper part of dress is very pale pink.

E. FAIRIES AND THEIR SUN-BATH

This contains a feature that was quite unknown to the girls. The sheath or cocoon appearing in the midst of the grasses had never been seen by them before, and they had no idea of what it was. Fairy lovers and observers describe it as a magnetic bath, woven very quickly by the fairies, and used after dull weather and in the autumn especially.

their imagination being filled with exaggerated, if picturesque, nonsense and misplaced sentiment.”

To this Mr. Gardner answered:

“Major Hall-Edwards says ‘no evidence has been put forward to show how they were produced.’ The least a would-be critic should do is surely to read the report of the case. Sir A. Conan Doyle is asserted to have taken it ‘for granted that these photographs are real and genuine.’ It would be difficult to misrepresent the case more completely. The negatives and contact prints were submitted to the most searching tests known to photographic science by experts, many of whom were frankly sceptical. They emerged as being unquestionably single-exposure plates and, further, as bearing no evidence whatever in themselves of any trace of the innumerable faking devices known. This did not clear them entirely, for, as I have always remarked in my description of the investigation, it is held possible by employing highly artistic and skilled processes to produce similar negatives. Personally, should very much like to see this attempted seriously. The few that have been done, though very much better than the crude examples Major Hall-Edwards submits, break down hopelessly on simple analysis.

“The case resolved itself at an early stage into the examination of the personal element and the motive for faked work. It was this that occupied us so strenuously, for we fully realised the imperative need of overwhelmingly satisfying proof of personal integrity before accepting the photographs as genuine. This was carried through, and its thoroughness may be estimated by the fact that, notwithstanding the searching nature of the investigation that has followed the publication of the village, names, etc., nothing even modifies my first report. I need hardly point out that the strength of the case lies in its amazing simplicity and the integrity of the family concerned. It is on the photographic plus the personal evidence that the case stands.

“Into part of the criticism advanced by Major Hall-Edwards it will be kinder, perhaps, not to enter. Seriously to suggest that a visit to a cinema show and the use of an apt illustration implies ‘a very considerable knowledge of photography’ is on a par with the supposition that to be employed as an errand girl and help in a shop indicates a high degree of skill in that profession! We are not quite so credulous as that, nor were we able to believe that two children, alone and unaided, could produce in half an hour a faked photograph of the type of ‘Alice and the Fairies.’”

In addition to this criticism by Major Hall-Edwards there came an attack in *John o’ London* from the distinguished writer Mr. Maurice Hewlett, who raises some objections which were answered in Mr. Gardner’s subsequent reply. Mr. Hewlett’s contention was as follows:

“The stage which Sir A. Conan Doyle has reached at present is one of belief in the genuineness of what one may call the Carpenter photographs, which showed the other day to the readers of the *Strand Magazine* two ordinary girls in familiar intercourse with winged beings, as near as can judge, about eighteen inches high. If he believes in the photographs two inferences can be made, so to speak, to stand up: one, that he must believe also in the existence of the beings; two, that a mechanical operation, where human agency has done nothing but prepare a plate, focus an object, press a button, and print a picture, has rendered visible something which is not otherwise visible to the common naked eye. That is really all Sir Arthur has to tell us. He believes the photographs to be genuine. The rest follows. But why does he believe it? Because the young ladies tell him that they are genuine. Alas!

"Sir Arthur cannot, he tells us, go into Yorkshire himself to cross-examine the young ladies, even if he wishes to cross-examine them, which does not appear. However, he sends in his place a friend, Mr. E. L. Gardner, also of hospitable mind, with settled opinions upon theosophy and kindred subjects, but deficient, it would seem, in logical faculty. Mr. Gardner has himself photographed in the place where the young ladies photographed each other, or thereabouts. No winged beings circled about him, and one wonders why Mr. Gardner (*a*) was photographed, (*b*) reproduced the photograph in the *Strand Magazine*.

"The only answer I can find is suggested to me by the appearance of the Virgin and Child to certain shepherds in a peach-orchard at Verona. The shepherds told their parish priest that the Virgin Mary had indeed appeared to them on a moonlit night, had accepted a bowl of milk from them, had then picked a peach from one of the trees and eaten it. The priest visited the spot in their company, and in due course picked up a peach-stone. That settled it. Obviously the Madonna had been really there, for here was the peach-stone to prove it.

"I am driven to the conclusion that Mr. Gardner had himself photographed on a particular spot in order to prove the genuineness of former photographs taken there. The argument would run: The photographs were taken on a certain spot; but I have been myself photographed on that spot; therefore the photographs were genuine. [paragraph continues] There is a fallacy lurking, but it is a hospitable fallacy; and luckily it doesn't very much matter.

"The line to take about a question of the sort is undoubtedly that of least resistance. Which is the harder of belief, the faking of a photograph or the objective existence of winged beings eighteen inches high? Undoubtedly, to a plain man, the latter; but assume the former. If such beings exist, if they are occasionally visible, and if a camera is capable of revealing to all the world what is hidden from most people in it, we are not yet able to say that the Carpenter photographs are photographs of such beings. For we, observe, have not seen such beings. True: but we have all seen photographs of beings in rapid motion-horses racing, greyhounds coursing a hare, men running over a field, and so on. We have seen pictures of these things, and we have seen photographs of them; and the odd thing is that never, never by any chance does the photograph of a running object in the least resemble a picture of it.

"The horse, dog, or main, in fact, in the photograph does not look to be in motion at all. And rightly so, because in the instant of being photographed *it was not in motion*. So infinitely rapid is the action of light on the plate that it is possible to isolate a fraction of time in a rapid flight and to record it. Directly you combine a series of photographs in sequence, and set them moving, you have a semblance of motion exactly like that which you have in a picture.

"Now, the beings circling round a girl's head and shoulders in the Carpenter photograph are in *picture flight,* and not in photographic flight. That is certain. They are in the approved pictorial, or plastic, convention of dancing. They are not well rendered by any means. They are stiff compared with, let us say, the whirling gnomes on the outside wrapper of *Punch*. They have very little of the wild, irresponsible vagary of a butterfly. But they are an attempt to render an aerial dance — pretty enough in a small way. The photographs are too small to enable me to decide whether they are painted on cardboard or modelled in the round; *but the figures are not moving*. "One other point, which may be called a small one — but in a matter of the sort no point is a small one. I regard it as a certainty, as the other plainly is. If the dancing figures had been dancing beings, really there, the child in the photograph would have been looking at them, not at the camera. I know children.

"And knowing children, and knowing that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has legs, I decide that the Miss Carpenters have pulled one of them. Meantime I suggest to him that epochs are born, not made."

To which Mr. Gardner replied in the following issue:

"I could have wished that Mr. Maurice Hewlett's somewhat playful criticism of the genuineness of the photographs of fairies appearing in the

Strand Magazine Christmas number had been more clearly defined. The only serious point raised is the difference between photographic and pictorial representation of motion — Mr. Hewlett maintaining that the latter is in evidence in the photographs. “With regard to the separate photographs of the sites, surely the reason for their inclusion is obvious. Photographic experts had stated that though the two negatives revealed no trace of any faking process (such as double exposure, painted figures on enlargements rephotographed, set-up models in card or other material), still it could not be held to be impossible to obtain the same class of result by very clever studio work. Also, certain points that needed elucidation were the haze above and at the side of the child’s head, and the blurred appearance of the waterfall as compared with the clarity of the figures, etc. An inspection of the spots and photographs of their surroundings was surely the only way to clear up some of these. As a matter of fact, the waterfall proved to be about twenty feet behind the child, and hence out of focus, and some large rocks at the same distance in the rear, at the side of the fall, were found to be the cause of the haziness. The separate photographs, of which only one is published of each place, confirm entirely the genuineness of the sites — not the genuineness of the fairies.

“In commenting on the photography of a moving object, Mr. Hewlett makes the astonishing statement that at the instant of being photographed *it is not in motion* (Mr. H.’s italics). I wonder when it is, and what would happen if a camera was exposed then! Of course the moving object is in motion during exposure, no matter whether the time be a fiftieth or a millionth part of a second, though Mr. Hewlett is by no means the only one to fall into this error. And each of the fairy figures in the negative discloses signs of movement. This was one of the first points determined.

“I admit at once, of course, that this does not meet the criticism that the fairies display much more grace in action than is to be found in the ordinary snapshot of a moving horse or man. But if we are here dealing with fairies whose bodies must be presumed to be of a purely ethereal and plastic nature, and not with skeleton-framed mammals at all, is it such a very illogical mind that accepts the exquisite grace therein found as a natural quality that is never absent? In view of the overwhelming evidence of genuineness now in hand this seems to be the truth.

“With regard to the last query raised — the child looking at the camera instead of at the fairies — Alice was entirely unsophisticated respecting the proper photographic attitude. For her, cameras were much more novel than fairies, and never before had she seen one used so close to her. Strange to us as it may seem, at the moment it interested her the most. Apropos, would a faker, clever enough to produce such a photograph, commit the elementary blunder of not posing his subject?”

Among other interesting and weighty opinions, which were in general agreement with our contentions, was one by Mr. H. A. Staddon of Goodmayes, a gentleman who had made a particular hobby of fakes in photography. His report is too long and too technical for inclusion, but, under the various headings of composition, dress, development, density, lighting, poise, texture, plate, atmosphere, focus, halation, he goes very completely into the evidence, coming to the final conclusion that when tried by all these tests the chances are not less than 80 per cent. in favour of authenticity.

It may be added that in the course of exhibiting these photographs (in the interests of the Theosophical bodies with which Mr. Gardner is connected), it has sometimes occurred that the plates have been enormously magnified upon the screen. In one instance, at Wakefield, the powerful lantern used threw an exceptionally large picture on a huge sheet. The operator, a very intelligent man who had taken a sceptical attitude, was entirely converted to the truth of the photographs, for, as he pointed out, such an enlargement would show the least trace of a scissors irregularity or of any artificial detail, and would make it absurd to suppose that a dummy figure could remain undetected. The lines were always beautifully fine and unbroken.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND SERIES

When Mr. Gardner was in Yorkshire in July, he left a good camera with Elsie, for he learned that her cousin Frances was about to visit her again and that there would be a chance of more photographs. One of our difficulties has been that the associated aura of the two girls is needful. This joining of auras to produce a stronger effect than either can get singly is common enough in psychic matters. We wished to make full use of the combined power of the girls in August. My last words to Mr. Gardner, therefore, before starting for Australia were that I should open no letter more eagerly than that which would tell me the result of our new venture. In my heart I hardly expected success, for three years had passed, and I was well aware that the processes of puberty are often fatal to psychic power. I was surprised, therefore, as well as delighted, when I had his letter at Melbourne, informing me of complete success and enclosing three more wonderful prints, all taken in the fairy glen. Any doubts which had remained in my mind as to honesty were completely overcome, for it was clear that these pictures, specially the one of the fairies in the bush, were altogether beyond the possibility of fake. Even now, however, having a wide experience of transference of pictures in psychic photography and the effect of thought upon ectoplasmic images, I feel that there is a possible alternative explanation in this direction, and I have never quite lost sight of the fact that it is a curious coincidence that so unique an event should have happened in a family some members of which were already inclined to occult study, and might be imagined to have formed thought-pictures of occult appearances. Such suppositions, though not to be entirely dismissed, are, as it seems to me, far-fetched and remote.

Here is the joyous letter which reached me at Melbourne: *September* 6, 1920.

MY DEAR DOYLE,

Greetings and best wishes! Your last words to me before we parted were that you would open my letter with the greatest interest. You will not be disappointed — for the wonderful thing has happened!

I have received from Elsie three more negatives taken a few days back. I need not describe them, for enclosed are the three prints in a separate envelope. The “Flying Fairy” and the “Fairies’ Bower” are the most amazing that any modern eye has ever seen surely! I received these plates on Friday morning last and have since been thinking furiously.

A nice little letter came with them saying how sorry they were (!) that they couldn’t send more, but the weather had been bad (it has been abominably cold), and on only two afternoons had Elsie and Frances been able to visit the glen. (Frances has now returned to Scarborough at the call of school.) All quite simple and straightforward and concluding with the hope that I might be able to spend another day with them at the end of this month.

I went over to Harrow at once, and Snelling without hesitation pronounced the three as bearing the same proofs of genuineness as the first two, declaring further that at any rate the “bower” one was utterly beyond any possibility of faking! While on this point I might add that to-day I have interviewed Illingworth’s people and somewhat to my surprise they endorsed this view. (Now if you have not yet opened the envelope please do so and I will continue . . .)

I am going to Yorkshire on the 23rd inst. to fill some lecture engagements and shall spend a day at C., and of course take photos of these spots and examine and take away any “spoilt” negatives that will serve as useful accompaniments. The bower negative, by the way, the girls simply could not understand at all. They saw the sedate-looking fairy to the right, and without waiting to get in the picture Elsie pushed the camera close up to the tall grasses and took the snap. . . . To this letter I made answer as follows:

Melbourne,
October 21, 1920.

DEAR GARDNER,

My heart was gladdened when out here in far Australia I had your note and the three wonderful prints which are confirmatory of our published results. You and I needed no confirmation, but the whole line of thought will be so novel to the ordinary busy man who has not followed psychic inquiry, that he will need that it be repeated again and yet again before he realises that this new order of life is really established and has to be taken into serious account, just as the pigmies of Central Africa.

I felt guilty when I laid a delay-action mine and left the country, leaving you to face the consequences of the explosion. You knew, however, that it was unavoidable. I rejoice now that you should have this complete shield against those attacks which will very likely take the form of a clamour for further pictures, unaware that such pictures actually exist. The matter does not bear directly upon the more vital question of our own fate and that of those we have lost, which has brought me out here. But anything which extends man’s mental horizon, and proves to him that matter as we have known it is not really the limit of our universe, must have a good effect in breaking down materialism and leading human thought to a broader and more spiritual level.

It almost seems to me that those wise entities who are conducting this campaign from the other side, and using some of us as humble instruments, have recoiled before that sullen stupidity against which Goethe said the gods themselves fight in vain, and have opened up an entirely new line of advance, which will turn that so-called “religious,” and essentially irreligious, position, which has helped to bar our way. They can’t destroy fairies by antediluvian texts, and when once fairies are admitted other psychic phenomena will find a more ready acceptance.

Good-bye, my dear Gardner, I am proud to have been associated with you in this epoch-making incident. We have had continued messages at seances for some time that a visible sign was coming through — and perhaps this was what is meant. The human race does not deserve fresh evidence, since it has not troubled, as a rule, to examine that which already exists. However, our friends beyond are very long-suffering and more charitable than I, for I will confess that my soul is filled with a cold contempt for the muddle-headed indifference and the moral cowardice which I see around me.

Yours sincerely,
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

The next letters from Mr. Gardner told me that in September, immediately after this second series was taken, he had gone north again, and came away more convinced than ever of the honesty of the whole Wright family and of the genuine nature of the photographs. From this letter I take the following extracts:

“My visit to Yorkshire was very profitable. I spent the whole day with the family and took photographs of the new sites, which proved to be in close proximity to the others. I enclose a few prints of these. It was beside the pond shown that the ‘cradle’ or bower photograph was taken. The fairy that is in the air was leaping rather than flying. It had leapt up from the bush below five or six times, Elsie said, and seemed to hover at the top of its spring. It was about the fifth time that it did so that she snapped the shutter. Unfortunately, Frances thought the fairy was leaping on to her face, the action was so vigorous, and tossed her head back. The motion can be detected in the print. The fairy who is looking at Elsie in the other photograph is holding a bunch of fairy hare-bells. I thought this one had ‘bobbed’ hair and was altogether quite in the fashion, her dress is so up-to-date! But Elsie says her hair was close-curled, not bobbed. With regard to the ‘cradle’ Elsie tells me they both saw the fairy on the right and the demure-looking sprite on the left, but not the bower. Or rather, she says there was only a wreath of faint mist in between and she could make nothing of it. We have now succeeded in bringing this print out splendidly, and as I can get certificates from experts giving the opinion that this negative could not possibly be ‘faked’ we seem to be on perfectly safe ground. The exposure times in each case were one-fiftieth of a second, the distance about three to four feet, the camera was the selected ‘Cameo’ that I had sent to Elsie, and the plates were of those that I had sent too.

“The colours of dresses and wings, etc., I have complete, but will post these particulars on when writing at length a little later and have the above more fully written out.” . . .

November 27, 1920.

“The photographs:

“When I was in Yorkshire in September investigating the second series, I took photos of the spots, of course, and the full account of the success. The children only had two brief hours or so of decent sunshine during the whole of that fortnight they were together in August. On the Thursday they took two and on the Saturday one. If it had been normal weather we might have obtained a score or more. Possibly, however, it is better to go slowly — though I propose we take the matter further again in May or June. The camera I had sent was the one used, and also the plates (which had all been marked privately by the Illingworth Co., independently of me). The three new fairy negatives proved to be of these and can be certified so to be by the manager. The Cradle or Bower negative is, as I think I told you, declared to be utterly unfakeable, and I can get statements to this effect. . . .”

In a subsequent fuller account Mr. Gardner says:

“On Thursday afternoon, August 26, a fairly bright and sunny day, fortunately (for the unseasonably cold weather experienced generally could hardly have been worse for the task), a number of photographs were taken, and again on Saturday, August 28. The three reproduced here are the most striking and amazing of the number. I only wish every reader could see the superlatively beautiful enlargements made directly from the actual negatives. The exquisite grace of the flying fairy baffles description — all fairies, indeed, seem to be super-Pavlovas in miniature. The next, of the fairy offering a flower — an etheric harebell — to Iris, is a model of gentle and dignified pose, but it is to the third that I would draw special and detailed attention. Never before, or otherwhere, surely, has a fairy’s bower been photographed!

“The central ethereal cocoon shape, something between a cocoon and an open chrysalis in appearance, lightly suspended amid the grasses, is the bower or cradle. Seated on the upper left-hand edge with wing well displayed is an undraped fairy apparently considering whether it is time to get up. An earlier riser of more mature age is seen on the right possessing abundant hair and wonderful wings. Her slightly denser body can be glimpsed within her fairy dress. Just beyond, still on the right, is the clear-cut head of a mischievous but smiling elf wearing a close-fitting cap. On the extreme left is a demure-looking sprite, with a pair of very diaphanous wings, while just above, rather badly out of focus, however, is another with wings still widely extended, and with outspread arms, apparently just alighting on the grass tops. The face in half profile can just be traced in a very clear and carefully toned print that I have. Altogether, perhaps, this of the bower is the most astonishing and interesting of the more successful photographs, though some may prefer the marvellous grace of the flying figure.

“The comparative lack of definition in this photograph is probably accounted for by the absence of the much denser human element. To introduce us in this way directly to a charming bower of the fairies was quite an unexpected result on the part of the girls, by the way. They saw the somewhat sedate fairy on the right in the long grasses, and, making no attempt this time to get in the picture themselves, Iris put the camera very close up and obtained the snap. It was simply good fortune that the bower was close by. In showing me the negative, [paragraph continues] Iris only remarked it as being a quaint little picture that she could not make out!"

There the matter stands, and nothing has occurred from that time onwards to shake the validity of the photographs. We were naturally desirous of obtaining more, and in August 1921 the girls were brought together once again, and the very best photographic equipment, including a stereoscopic camera and a cinema camera, were placed at their disposal. The Fates, however, were most unkind, and a combination of circumstances stood in the way of success. There was only a fortnight during which Frances could be at Cottingley, and it was a fortnight of almost incessant rain, the long drought breaking at the end of July in Yorkshire. In addition, a small seam of coal had been found in the Fairy Glen, and it had been greatly polluted by human magnetism. These conditions might perhaps have been overcome, but the chief impediment of all was the change in the girls, the one through womanhood and the other through board-school education. There was one development, however, which is worth recording. Although they were unable to materialise the images to such an extent as to catch them upon a plate, the girls had not lost their clairvoyant powers, and were able, as of old, to see the sprites and elves which still abounded in the glen. The sceptic will naturally say that we have only their own word for that, but this is not so. Mr. Gardner had a friend, whom I will call Mr. Sergeant, who held a commission in the Tank Corps in the war, and is an honourable gentleman with neither the will to deceive nor any conceivable object in doing so. This gentleman has long had the enviable gift of clairvoyance in a very high degree, and it occurred to Mr. Gardner that we might use him as a cheek upon the statements of the girls. With great good humour, he sacrificed a week of his scanty holiday — for he is a hard-worked man — in this curious manner. But the results seem to have amply repaid him. I have before me his reports, which are in the form of notes made as he actually watched the phenomena recorded. The weather was, as stated, bad on the whole, though clearing occasionally. Seated with the girls, he saw all that they saw, and more, for his powers proved to be considerably greater. Having distinguished a psychic object, he would point in the direction and ask them for a description, which he always obtained correctly within the limit of their powers. The whole glen, according to his account, was swarming with many forms of elemental life, and he saw not only wood-elves, gnomes, and goblins, but the rarer undines, floating over the stream. I take a long extract from his rather disjointed notes, which may form a separate chapter.

CHAPTER V

OBSERVATIONS OF A CLAIRVOYANT IN THE COTTINGLEY GLEN, AUGUST 1921

Gnomes and Fairies. In the field we saw figures about the size of the gnome. They were making weird faces and grotesque contortions at the group. One in particular took great delight in knocking his knees together. These forms appeared to Elsie singly — one dissolving and another appearing in its place. I, however, saw them in a group with one figure more prominently visible than the rest. Elsie saw also a gnome like the one in the photograph, but not so bright and not coloured. I saw a group of female figures playing a game, somewhat resembling the children’s game of oranges and lemons. They played in a ring; the game resembled the grand chain in the Lancers. One fairy stood in the centre of the ring more or less motionless, while the remainder, who appeared to be decked with flowers and to show colours, not normally their own, danced round her. Some joined hands and made an archway for the others, who moved in and out as in a maze. I noticed that the result of the game appeared to be the forming of a vortex of force which streamed upwards to an apparent distance of four or five feet above the ground. I also noticed that in those parts of the field where the grass was thicker and darker, there appeared to be a correspondingly extra activity among the fairy creatures.

Water Nymph. In the beck itself, near the large rock, at a slight fall in the water, I saw a water sprite. It was an entirely nude female figure with long fair hair, which it appeared to be combing or passing through its fingers. I was not sure whether it had any feet or not. Its form was of a dazzling rosy whiteness, and its face very beautiful. The arms, which were long and graceful, were moved with a wave-like motion. It sometimes appeared to be singing, though no sound was heard. It was in a kind of cave, formed by a projecting piece of rock and some moss. Apparently it had no wings, and it moved with a sinuous, almost snakelike motion, in a semi-horizontal position. Its atmosphere and feeling was quite different from that of the fairies. It showed no consciousness of my presence, and, though I waited with the camera in the hope of taking it, it did not detach itself from the surroundings in which it was in some way merged.

Wood Elves. (Under the old beeches in the wood, Cottingley, August 12, 192l.) Two tiny wood elves came racing over the ground past us as we sat on a fallen tree trunk. Seeing us, they pulled up short about five feet away, and stood regarding us with considerable amusement but no fear. They appeared as if completely covered in a tight-fitting one-piece skin, which shone slightly as if wet. They had hands and feet large and out of proportion to their bodies. Their legs were somewhat thin, ears large and pointed upwards, being almost pear-shaped. There were a large number of these figures racing about the ground. Their noses appeared almost pointed and their mouths wide. No teeth and no structure inside the mouth, not even a tongue, so far as I could see. It was as if the whole were made up of a piece of jelly. Surrounding them, as an etheric double surrounds a physical form, is a greenish light, something like chemical vapour. As Frances came up and sat within a foot of them they withdrew, as if in alarm, a distance of eight feet or so, where they remained apparently regarding us and comparing notes of their impressions. These two live in the roots of a huge beech tree — they disappeared through a crevice into which they walked (as one might walk into a cave) and sank below the ground.

Water Fairy. (August 14, 1921.) By a small waterfall, which threw up a fine spray, was seen poised in the spray a diminutive fairy form of an exceedingly tenuous nature. It appeared to have two main colourings, the upper part of its body and aura being pale violet, the lower portion pale pink. This colouring appeared to penetrate right through aura and denser body, the outline of the latter merging into the former. This creature hung poised, its body curved gracefully backwards, its left arm held high above its head, as if upheld by the vital force in the spray, much as a seagull supports itself against the wind. It was as if lying on its back in a curved position against the flow of the stream. It was human in shape, but did not show any characteristics of sex. It remained motionless in this position for some moments, then flashed out of view. I did not notice any wings.

Fairy, Elves, Gnomes, and Brownie. (Sunday, August 14, 9 p.m. In the field.) Lovely still moonlight evening. The field appears to be densely populated with native spirits of various kinds-a brownie, fairies, elves, and gnomes.

A Brownie. He is rather taller than the normal, say eight inches, dressed entirely in brown with facings of a darker shade, bag.. shaped cap, almost conical, knee breeches, stockings, thin ankles, and large pointed feet — like gnomes' feet. He stands facing us, in no way afraid, perfectly friendly and much interested; he gazes wide-eyed upon us with a curious expression as of dawning intellect. It is as if he were reaching after something just beyond his mental grasp. He looks behind him at a group of fairies who are approaching us and moves to one side as if to make way. His mental attitude is semi-dreamlike, as of a child who would say "I can stand and watch this all day without being tired." He clearly sees much of our auras and is strongly affected by our emanations.

Fairies. Frances sees tiny fairies dancing in a circle, the figures gradually expanding in size till they reached eighteen inches, the ring widening in proportion. Elsie sees a vertical circle of dancing fairies flying slowly round; as each one touched the grass he appeared to perform a few quick steps and then continued his slow motion round the circle. The fairies who are dancing have long skirts, through which their limbs can be seen; viewed astrally the circle is bathed in golden yellow light, with the outer edges of many hues, violet predominating. The movement of the fairies is reminiscent of that of the great wheel at Earl's Court. The fairies float very slowly, remaining motionless as far as bodies and limbs are concerned, until they come round to the ground again. [paragraph continues] There is a tinkling music accompanying all this. It appears to have more of the aspect of a ceremony than a game. Frances sees two fairy figures performing as if on the stage, one with wings, one without. Their bodies shine with the effect of rippling water in the sun. The fairy without wings has bent over backwards like a contortionist till its head touches the ground, while the winged figure bends over it. Frances sees a small Punch-like figure, with a kind of Welsh hat, doing a kind of dancing by striking its heel on the ground and at the same time raising his hat and bowing. Elsie sees a flower fairy, like a carnation in shape, the head appearing where the stalk touches the flower and the green sepals forming a tunic from which the arms protrude, while the petals form a skirt, below which are rather thin legs. It is tripping across the grass. Its colouring is pink like a carnation in a pale, suffused sort of way. (Written by the light of the moon.) I see couples a foot high, female and male, dancing in a slow waltz-like motion in the middle of the field. They appear even to reverse. They are clothed in etheric matter and rather ghost-like in appearance. Their bodies are outlined with grey light and show little detail.

Elsie sees a small imp reminiscent of a monkey, revolving slowly round a stalk to the top of which he was clinging. He has an impish face and is looking our way as if performing for our benefit.

The brownie appears during all this to have taken upon himself the duties of showman. I see what may be described as a fairy fountain about twenty feet ahead. It is caused by an uprush of fairy force from the ground — and spreading fish-tail fashion higher into the air — it is many-hued. This was also seen by Frances.

(Monday, August 15. In the field.) I saw three figures racing from the field into the wood-the same figures previously seen in the wood. When about a distance of ten yards from the wall they leapt over it into the wood and disappeared. Elsie sees in centre of field a very beautiful fairy figure, somewhat resembling a figure of Mercury, without winged sandals, but has fairy wings. Nude, light curly hair, kneeling down in a dark clump of grass, with its attention fixed on something in the ground. It changes its position; first it is sitting back on its heels, and then it is rising to its full kneeling height. Much larger than usual, probably eighteen inches high. It waves its arms over some object on the ground. It has picked up something from the ground (as I think a baby) and holds it to its breast and seems to be praying. Has Greek features and resembles a Greek statue — like a figure out of a Greek tragedy.

(Tuesday, August 16, 10 p.m. In the field.) By the light of a small photographic lamp.

Fairies. Elsie sees a circle of fairies tripping round, hands joined, facing outwards. A figure appears in the centre of the ring, at the same time the fairies faced inwards.

Goblins. A group of goblins came running towards us from the wood to within fifteen feet of us. They differ somewhat from the wood elves, having more the look of gnomes, though they are smaller, being about the size of small brownies.

Fairy. Elsie sees a beautiful fairy quite near; it is nude, with golden hair, and is kneeling in the grass, looking this way with hands on knees, smiling at us. It has a very beautiful face, and is concentrating its gaze on me. This figure came within five feet of us, and, after being described, faded away.

Elf. Elsie sees a kind of elf who seems to be going so fast that it blows his hair back; one can sense the wind round him, yet he is stationary, though he looks to be busily hurrying along.

Goblins. Elsie sees a flight of little mannikins, imp-like in appearance, descending slantwise on to the grass. They form into two lines which cross each other as they come down. One line is coming vertically down, feet touching head, the other comes across them shoulder to shoulder. On reaching the ground they all run off in different directions, all serious, as if intent upon some business. The elves from the wood appear to be chiefly engaged in racing across the field, though no other purpose appears to be served by their speed or presence. Few of them pass near us without pulling up to stare. The elves seem to be the most curious of all the fairy creatures. Frances sees three and calls them goblins.

Fairy. A blue fairy. A fairy with wings and general colouring of sea-blue and pale pink. The wings are webbed and marked in varying colours like those of a butterfly. The form is perfectly modelled and practically nude. A golden star shines in the hair. The fairy is a director, though not apparently with any band for the present.

Fairy Band. There has suddenly arrived in the field a fairy director with a band of fairy people. Their arrival causes a bright radiance to shine in the field, visible to us sixty yards away. She is very autocratic and definite in her orders, holding unquestioned command. They spread themselves out into a gradually widening circle around her, and as they do so, a soft glow spreads out over the grass. They are actually vivifying and stimulating the growth in the field. This is a moving band which arrives in this field swinging high over the tree tops as if from a considerable distance. Inside a space of two minutes the circle has spread to approximately twelve feet wide and is wonderfully radiant with light. Each member of the band is connected to the leader by a thin stream of light. These streams are of different colour, though chiefly yellow, deepening to orange. They meet in the centre, merging in her aura, and there is a constant flow backwards and forwards among them. The form produced by this is something like an inverted fruit dish, with the central fairy as the stem, and the lines of light which flow in a graceful even curve forming the sides of the bowl. This party is in intense activity, as if it had much to do and little time in which to do it. The director is vivified and instructed from within herself, and appears to have her consciousness seated upon a more subtle plane than that upon which she is working.

Fairy. Elsie sees a tall and stately fairy come across the field to a clump of harebells. It is carrying in its arms something which may be a baby fairy, wrapped in gauzy substance. It lays this in the clump of harebells and kneels down as though stroking something, and after a time fades away. We catch impressions of four-footed creatures being ridden by winged figures who are thin and bend over their mounts like jockeys. It is no known animal which they bestride, having a face something like that of a caterpillar.

Amongst this fairy activity which appears all over the field, one glimpses an occasional gnome-like form walking with serious mien across the field, whilst the wood elves and other imp-like forms run about amongst their more seriously employed fairy kind. All three of us keep seeing weird creatures as of elemental essence.

Elsie sees about a dozen fairies moving towards us in a crescent-shaped flight. As they drew near she remarked with ecstasy upon their perfect beauty of form — even while she did so they became as ugly as sin, as if to give the lie to her words. They all leered at her and disappeared. In this episode it may be that one contacts a phase of the antagonism and dislike which so many of the fairy creatures feel for humans at this stage of evolution.

Frances saw seven wee fairies quite near [paragraph continues] — weird little figures-lying face downwards.

(In the Glen, 18th, 2 p.m.) Frances sees a fairy as big as herself, clothed in tights and a garment scalloped round the hips; the whole is tight-fitting and flesh-coloured; she has very large wings which she opens above her head; then she raises her arms from her side up above her head and waves them gracefully in the air. She has a very beautiful face with an expression as if inviting Frances into Fairyland. Her hair is apparently bobbed and her wings are transparent.

Golden Fairy. One specially beautiful one has a body clothed in iridescent shimmering golden light. She has tall wings, each of which is almost divided into upper and lower portions. The lower portion, which is smaller than the upper, appears to be elongated to a point like the wings of certain butterflies. She, too, is moving her arms and fluttering her wings. I can only describe her as a golden wonder. She smiles and clearly sees us. She places her finger on her lips. She remains watching us with smiling countenance in amongst the leaves and branches of the willow. She is not objectively visible on the physical plane. She points with her right hand, moving it in a circle round her feet, and I see a number, perhaps six or seven, cherubs (winged faces); these appear to be held in shape by some invisible will. She has cast a fairy spell over me completely subjugating the mental principle — leaves me staring wild-eyed in amongst the leaves and flowers.

An elf-like creature runs up the slanting branch of the willow from the ground where the fairy stands. He is not a very pleasant visitor — I should describe him as distinctly low class.

CHAPTER VI

INDEPENDENT EVIDENCE FOR FAIRIES

By a curious coincidence, if it be indeed a coincidence, at the moment when the evidence for the actual existence of fairies was brought to my notice, I had just finished an article dealing with the subject, in which I gave particulars of a number of cases where such creatures were said to have been seen, and showed how very strong were the reasons for supposing that some such forms of life exist. I now reproduce this article, and I add to it another chapter containing fresh evidence which reached me after the publication of the photographs in the *Strand Magazine*.

We are accustomed to the idea of amphibious creatures who may dwell unseen and unknown in the depths of the waters, and then some day be spied sunning themselves upon a sandbank, whence they slip into the unseen once more. If such appearances were rare, and if it should so happen that some saw them more clearly than others, then a very pretty controversy would arise, for the sceptics would say, with -every show of reason, “Our experience is that only land creatures live on the land, and we utterly refuse to believe in things which slip in and out of the water; if you will demonstrate them to us we — will begin to consider the question.” Faced by so reasonable an opposition, the others could only mutter that they had seen them with their own eyes, but that they could not command their movements. The sceptics would hold the field.

Something of the sort may exist in our psychic arrangements. One can well imagine that there is a dividing line, like the water edge, this line dependiing upon what we vaguely call a higher rate of vibrations. Taking the vibration theory as a working hypothesis, one could conceive that by raising or lowering the rate the creatures could move from one side to the other of this line of material visibility, as the tortoise moves from the water to the land, returning for refuge to invisibility as the reptile scuttles back to the surf. This, of course, is supposition, but intelligent supposition based on the available evidence is the pioneer of science, and it may be that the actual solution will be found in this direction. I am alluding now, not to spirit return, where seventy years of close observation has given us some sort of certain and definite laws, but rather to those fairy and phantom phenomena which have been endorsed by so many ages, and still even in these material days seem to break into some lives in the most unexpected fashion.

Victorian science would have left the world hard and clean and bare, like a landscape in the moon; but this science is in truth but a little light in the darkness, and outside that limited circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us, throwing themselves continually across our consciousness in such ways that it is difficult to ignore them.

There is much curious evidence of varying

value concerning these borderland forms, which come or go either in fact or imagination — the latter most frequently, no doubt. And yet there remains a residue which, by all human standards, should point to occasional fact. Lest I should be too diffuse, I limit myself in this essay to the fairies, and passing all the age-long tradition, which is so universal and consistent, come down to some modern instances which make one feel that this world is very much more complex than we had imagined, and that there may be upon its surface some very strange neighbours who will open up inconceivable lines of science for our posterity, especially if it should be made easier for them, by sympathy or other help, to emerge from the deep and manifest upon the margin.

Taking a large number of cases which lie before me, there are two points which are common to nearly all of them. One is that children claim to see these creatures far more frequently than adults. This may possibly come from greater sensitiveness of apprehension, or it may depend upon these little entities having less fear of molestation from the children. The other is, that more cases are recorded in which they have been seen in the still, shimmering hours of a very hot day than at any other time. “The action of the sun upon the brain,” says the sceptic. Possibly — and also possibly not. If it were a question of raising the slower vibrations of our surroundings one could imagine that still, silent heat would be the very condition which might favour such a change. What is the mirage of the desert? What is that scene of hills and lakes which a whole caravan can see while it faces in a direction where for a thousand miles of desert there is neither hill nor lake, nor any cloud or moisture to produce refraction? I can ask the question, but I do not venture to give an answer. It is clearly a phenomenon which is not to be confused with the erect or often inverted image which is seen in a land of clouds and of moisture.

If the confidence of children can be gained and they are led to speak freely, it is surprising how many claim to have seen fairies. My younger family consists of two little boys and one small girl, very truthful children, each of whom tells with detail the exact circumstances and appearance of the creature. To each it happened only once, and in each case it was a single little figure, twice in the garden, once in the nursery. Inquiry among friends shows that many children have had the same experience, but they close up at once when met by ridicule and incredulity. Sometimes the shapes are unlike those which they would have gathered from picture-books. “Fairies are like nuts and moss,” says one child in Lady Glenconner’s charming study of family life. My own children differ in the height of the creatures, which may well vary, but in their dress they are certainly not unlike the conventional idea, which, after all, may also be the true one.

There are many people who have a recollection of these experiences of their youth, and try afterwards to explain them away on material grounds which do not seem adequate or reasonable. Thus in his excellent book on folk-lore, the Rev. S. Baring-Gould gives us a personal experience which illustrates

A VIEW OF THE BECK IN 1921

THE TWO GIRLS NEAR THE SPOT WHERE THE LEAPING FAIRY WAS TAKEN IN 1920

several of the points already mentioned. “In the year 1838,” he says, “when I was a small boy of four years old, we were driving to Montpelier on a hot summer day over the long straight road that traverses a pebble-and-rubble-strewn plain, on which grows nothing save a few aromatic herbs. I was sitting on the box with my father when, to my great surprise, I saw legions of dwarfs of about two feet high running along beside the horses; some sat laughing on the pole, some were scrambling up the harness to get on the backs of the horses. I remarked to my father what I saw, when he abruptly stopped the carriage and put me inside beside my mother, where, the conveyance being closed, I was out of the sun. The effect was that, little by little, the host of imps diminished in number till they disappeared altogether.”

Here, certainly, the advocates of sunstroke have a strong, though by no means a final, case. Mr. Baring-Gould's next illustration is a sounder one.

"When my wife was a girl of fifteen," he says, "she was walking down a lane in Yorkshire, between green hedges, when she saw seated in one of the privet hedges a little green man, perfectly well made, who looked at her with his beady black eyes. He was about a foot or fifteen inches high. She was so frightened that she ran home. She remembers that it was a summer day."

A girl of fifteen is old enough to be a good witness, and her flight and the clear detail of her memory point to a real experience. Again we have the suggestion of a hot day.

Baring-Gould has yet a third case. "One day a son of mine," he says, "was sent into the garden to pick pea-pods for the cook to shell for dinner. Presently he rushed into the house as white as chalk to say that while he was thus engaged, and standing between the rows of peas, he saw a little man wearing a red cap, a green jacket, and brown knee-breeches, whose face was old and wan, and who had a grey beard and eyes as black and hard as sloes. He stared so intently at the boy that the latter took to his heels."

Here, again, the pea-pods show that it was summer, and probably in the heat of the day. Once again the detail is very exact and corresponds closely, as I shall presently show, to some independent accounts. Mr. Baring-Gould is inclined to put all these down to the heat conjuring up the familiar pictures of fairy books, but some further evidence may cause the reader to doubt this explanation.

Let us compare with these stories the very direct evidence of Mrs. Violet Tweedale, whose courage in making public the result of her own remarkable psychic faculties should meet with recognition from every student of the subject. Our descendants will hardly realise the difficulty which now exists of getting first-hand evidence with names attached, for they will have outgrown the state when the cry of "fake" and "fraud" and "dupe" is raised at once against any observer, however honourable and moderate, by people who know little or nothing of the subject. Mrs. Tweedale says:

"I had a wonderful little experience some five years ago which proved to me the existence of fairies. One summer afternoon I was walking alone along the avenue of Lupton [paragraph continues] House, Devonshire. It was an absolutely still day — not a leaf moving, and all Nature seemed to sleep in the hot sunshine. A few yards in front of me my eye was attracted by the violent movements of a single long blade-like leaf of a wild iris. This leaf was swinging and bending energetically, while the rest of the plant was motionless. Expecting to see a field-mouse astride it, I stepped very softly up to it. What was my delight to see a tiny green man. He was about five inches long, and was swinging back-downwards. His tiny green feet, which appeared to be green-booted, were crossed over the leaf, and his hands, raised behind his head, also held the blade. I had a vision of a merry little face and something red in the form of a cap on the Lead. For a full minute he remained in view, swinging on the leaf. Then he vanished. Since then I have several times seen a single leaf moving violently while the rest of the plant remained motionless, but I have never again been able to see the cause of the movement."

Here the dress of the fairy, green jacket and red cap, is exactly the same as was described independently by Baring-Gould's son, and again we have the elements of heat and stillness. It may be fairly answered that many artists have drawn the fairies in such a dress, and that the colours may in this way have been impressed upon the minds of both observers. In the bending iris we have something objective, however, which cannot easily be explained away as a cerebral hallucination, and the whole incident seems to me an impressive piece of evidence.

A lady with whom I have corresponded, Mrs. H., who is engaged in organizing work of the most responsible kind, has had an experience which resembles that of Mrs. Tweedale. "My only sight of a fairy," she says, "was in a large wood in West Sussex, about nine years ago. He was a little creature about half a foot high, dressed in leaves. The remarkable thing about his face was that no soul looked through his eyes. He was playing about in long grass and flowers in an open space." Once again summer is indicated. The length and colour of the creature correspond with Mrs. Tweedale's account, while the lack of soul in the eyes may be compared with the "hard" eyes described by young Baring-Gould.

One of the most gifted clairvoyants in England was the late Mr. Turvey, of Bournemouth, whose book, *The Beginnings of Seership*, should be in the library of every student. Mr. Lonsdale, of Bournemouth, is also a well-known sensitive. The latter has given me the following account of an incident which he observed some years ago in the presence of Mr. Turvey.

“I was sitting,” says Mr. Lonsdale, “in his company in his garden at Branksome Park. We sat in a hut which had an open front looking on to the lawn. We had been perfectly quiet for some time, neither talking nor moving, as was often our habit. Suddenly I was conscious of a movement on the edge of the lawn, which on that side went up to a grove of pine trees. Looking closely, I saw several little figures dressed in brown peering through the bushes. They remained quiet for a few minutes and then disappeared. In a few seconds a dozen or more small people, about two feet in height, in bright clothes and with radiant faces, ran on to the lawn, dancing hither and thither. I glanced at Turvey to see if he saw anything, and whispered, ‘Do you see them?’ He nodded. These fairies played about, gradually approaching the hut. One little fellow, bolder than the others, came to a croquet hoop close to the hut and, using the hoop as a horizontal bar, turned round and round it, much to our amusement. Some of the others watched him, while others danced about, not in any set dance, but seemingly moving in sheer joy. This continued for four or five minutes, when suddenly, evidently in response to some signal or warning from those dressed in brown, who had remained at the edge of the lawn, they all ran into the wood. Just then a maid appeared coming from the house with tea. Never was tea so unwelcome, as evidently its appearance was the cause of the disappearance of our little visitors.” Mr. Lonsdale adds, “I have seen fairies several times in the New Forest, but never so clearly as this.” Here also the scene is laid in the heat of a summer day, and the division of the fairies into two different sorts

is remarkably borne out by the general descriptions.

Knowing Mr. Lonsdale as I do to be a responsible, well-balanced, and honourable man, I find such evidence as this very hard to put to one side. Here at least the sunstroke hypothesis is negatived, since both men sat in the shade of the hut and corroborated the observation of the other. On the other hand, each of the men, like Mrs. Tweedale, was supernormal in psychic development, so that it might well happen that the maid, for example, would not have seen the fairies, even if she had arrived earlier upon the scene.

I know a gentleman belonging to one of the learned professions whose career as, let us say, a surgeon would not be helped if this article were to connect him with fairy lore. As a matter of fact, in spite of his solemn avocations and his practical and virile character, he seems to be endowed with that faculty — let us call it the appreciation of higher vibrations — which opens up so wonderful a door to its possessor. He claims, or rather he admits, for he is reticent upon the subject, that he has carried this power of perception on from childhood, and his surprise is not so much at what he sees as at the failure of others to see the same thing. To show that it is not subjective, he tells the story that on one occasion, while traversing a field, he saw a little creature which beckoned eagerly that he should follow. He did so, and presently saw his guide pointing with an air of importance to the ground. There, between the furrows, lay a flint arrow-head which he carried home with him as a souvenir of the adventure.

Another friend of mine who claims to have the power of seeing fairies is Mr. Tom Tyrrell, the famous medium, whose clairvoyance and general psychic, gifts are of the strongest character. I cannot easily forget how one evening in a Yorkshire hotel a storm of raps, sounding very much as if someone were cracking their fingers and thumb, broke out around his head, and how with his coffee-cup in one hand he flapped vigorously with the other to warn off his inopportune visitors. In answer to my question about fairies he says, “Yes, I do see these little pixies or fairies. I have seen them scores of times. But only in the woods and when I do a little fasting. They are a very real presence to me. What are they? I cannot say. I can never get nearer to the beggars than four or five yards. They seem afraid of me, and then scamper off up the trees like squirrels. I dare say if I were to go in the woods oftener I would perhaps gain their confidence more. They are certainly like human beings, only very small, say about twelve or fifteen inches high. I have noticed they are brown in colour, with fairly large heads and standing-up ears, out of proportion to the size of their bodies, and bandy legs. I am speaking of what I see. I have never come across any other clairvoyant who has seen them, though I have read that many do so. Probably they have something to do with Nature processes. The males have very short hair, and the females have rather long, straight hair.”

The idea that these little creatures are occupied in consciously furthering Nature’s projects — very much, I suppose, as the bee carries pollen — is repeated by the learned [paragraph continues] Dr. Vanstone, who combines great knowledge of theory with some considerable experience, though a high development of intellect is, in spite of Swedenborg’s example, a bar to psychic perception. This would show, if it is correct, that we may have to return to the classical conception of something in the nature of naiads and fauns and spirits of the trees and groves. Dr. Vanstone, whose experiences are on the borderland between what is objective and what is sensed without being actually seen, writes to me: “I have been distinctly aware of minute intelligent beings in connection with the evolution of plant forces, particularly in certain localities; for instance, in Ecclesbourne Glen. Pond life yields to me the largest and best sense of fairy life, and not the floral world. I may be only clothing my subjective consciousness with unreal objective imaginations, but they are real to me as sentient, intelligent beings, able to communicate with us in varying distinctness. I am inclined to think that elemental beings are engaged, like factory hands, in facilitating the operation of Nature’s laws.” Another gentleman who claims to have this most remarkable gift is Mr. Tom Charman, who builds for himself a shelter in the New Forest and hunts for fairies as an entomologist would for butterflies. In answer to my inquiries, he tells me that the power of vision came to him in childhood, but left him for many years, varying in proportion with his own nearness to Nature. According to this seer, the creatures are of many sizes, varying from a few inches to several feet. They are male, female, and children. He has not heard them utter sounds, but believes that they do so, of finer quality than we can hear. They are visible by night as well as by day, and show small lights about the same size as glow-worms. They dress in all sorts of ways. Such is Mr. Charman’s account.

It is, of course, easy for us who respond only to the more material vibrations to declare that all these seers are self-deluded, or are the victims of some mental twist. It is difficult for them to defend themselves from such a charge. It is, however, to be urged upon the other side that these numerous testimonies come from people who are very solid and practical and successful in the affairs of life. One is a distinguished writer, another an ophthalmic authority, a third a successful professional man, a fourth a lady engaged on public service, and so on. To waive aside the evidence of such people on the ground that it does not correspond with our own experience is an act of mental arrogance which no wise man will commit.

It is interesting to compare these various contemporary and first-hand accounts of the impressions which all these witnesses have received. I have already pointed out that the higher vibrations which we associate with hot sunshine, and which we actually seem to see in the shimmer of noontide, is associated with many of the episodes. Apart from this it must be admitted that the evidence is on the whole irregular. We have creatures described which range from five inches to two and a half feet. An advocate of the fairies might say that, since the tradition has always been that they procreate as human beings do, we are dealing with them in every stage of growth, which accounts for the varying size. It seems to me, however, that a better case could be made out if it were pleaded that there have always been many different races of fairyland, and that samples of these races may greatly differ from each other, and may inhabit varying spots; so that an observer like Mr. Tyrrell, for example, may always have seen woodland elves, which bear no resemblance to gnomes or goblins. The monkey-like, brown-clad creatures of my professional friend, which were over two feet high, compare very closely with the creatures which little Baring-Gould saw climbing on to the horses. In both cases these taller fairies were reported from flat, plain-like locations; while the little old-man type varies completely from the dancing little feminine elf so beloved by Shakespeare. In the experience of Mr. Turvey and Mr. Lonsdale, two different types engaged in different tasks were actually seen at the same moment, the one being bright-coloured dancing elves, while the other were the brown-coloured attendants who guarded them.

The claim that the fairy rings so often seen in meadow or marshland are caused by the beat of fairy feet is certainly untenable, as they unquestionably come from fungi such as *Agaricus gambosus* or *Marasmius oreades*, which grow from a centre, continually deserting the exhausted ground, and spreading to that which is fresh. In this way a complete circle is formed, which may be quite small or may be of twelve-foot diameter. These circles appear just as often in woods from the same cause, but are smothered over by the decayed leaves among which the fungi grow. But though the fairies most certainly do not produce the rings, it might be asserted, and could not be denied, that the rings once formed, whatever their cause, would offer a very charming course for a circular ring-a-ring dance. Certainly from all time these circles have been associated with the gambols of the little people.

After these modern instances one is inclined to read with a little more gravity the account which our ancestors gave of these creatures; for, however fanciful in parts, it still may have had some core of truth. I say “our ancestors,” but as a matter of fact there are shepherds on the South Downs to this day who will throw a bit of their bread and cheese over their shoulders at dinnertime for the little folks to consume. All over the United Kingdom, and especially in Wales and Ireland, the belief is largely held among those folks who are nearest to Nature. First of all it was always supposed that they lived within the earth. This was natural enough, since a sudden disappearance of a solid body could only be understood in that way. On the whole, their description was not grotesque, and fits easily into its place amid the examples already given. “They were of small stature,” says one Welsh authority, quoted in Mrs. Lewes’s *Stranger than Fiction*, “towards two feet in height, and their horses of the size of hares. Their clothes were generally white, but on certain occasions they have been seen dressed in green. Their gait was lively, and ardent and loving was their glance. . . . They were peaceful and kindly among themselves, diverting in their tricks, and charming in their walk and dancing. “ This mention of horses is somewhat out of the picture, but all the rest seems corroborative of what has already been stated.

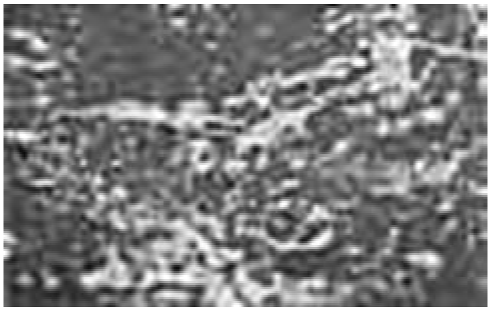

THE PHOTOGRAPH FROM CANADA

One of the best of the ancient accounts is that of the Rev. R. Kirk, who occupied a parish at Monteith, on the edge of the Highlands, and wrote a pamphlet called *The Secret Commonwealth*, about the year 1680. He had very clear and definite ideas about these little creatures, and he was by no means a visionary, but a man of considerable parts, who was chosen afterwards to translate the Bible into Erse. His information about fairies tallies very well with that of the Welshman quoted above. He slips up in imagining that flint arrow-heads are indeed “fairy-bolts,” but otherwise his contentions agree very well with our modern instances. They have tribes and orders, according to this Scottish clergyman. They eat. They converse in a thin, whistling sort of language. They have children, deaths, and burials. They are fond of frolic dancing. They have a regular state and polity, with rulers, laws, quarrels, and even battles. They are irresponsible creatures, not hostile to the human race unless they have reason to be angry, but even inclined to be helpful, since some of them, the brownies, are, by universal tradition, ready to aid in the household work if the family has known how to engage their affection.

An exactly similar account comes from Ireland, though the little folk seem to have imbibed the spirit of the island to the extent of being more mercurial and irascible. There are many cases on record where they are claimed to have shown their power, and to have taken revenge for some slight. In the *Larne Reporter* of March 31, 1866, as quoted in *True Irish Ghost Stories*, there is an account of how a stone which the fairies claimed having been built into a house, the inhabitants were bombarded with stones by invisible assailants by day and night, the missiles hurting no one, but causing great annoyance. These stories of stone-throwing are so common, and present such similar well-attested features in cases coming from every part of the world, that they may be accepted as a recognised preternatural phenomenon, whether it be the fairies or some other form of mischievous psychic force which caused the bombardment. The volume already quoted gives another remarkable case, where a farmer, having built a house upon what was really a fairy right-of-way between two "raths" or fairy mounds, was exposed to such persecution by noises and other disturbances that his family was at last driven out, and had to take refuge in the smaller house which they had previously occupied. This story is narrated by a correspondent from Wexford, who says that he examined the facts himself, examined the deserted house, cross-examined the owner, and satisfied himself that there were two raths in the vicinity, and that the house was in a dead-line between them.

I have particulars of a case in West Sussex which is analogous, and which I have been able to trace to the very lady to whom it happened. This lady desired to make a rock-garden, and for this purpose got some large boulders from a field hard by, which had always been known as the pixie stones, and built them into her new rockery. One summer evening this lady saw a tiny grey woman sitting on one of the boulders. The little creature slipped away when she knew that she had been observed. Several times she appeared upon the stones. Later the people in the village asked if the stones might be moved back to the field, "as," they said, "they are the pixie stones, and if they are removed from their place, misfortunes will happen to the village." The stones were restored.

But supposing that they actually do exist, what *are* these creatures? That is a subject upon which we can speculate only with more or less plausibility. Mr. David Gow, editor of *Light*, and a considerable authority upon psychic matters, had first formed the opinion that they were simply ordinary human spirits, seen, as it were, at the wrong end of a clairvoyant telescope, and therefore very minute. A study of the detailed accounts of their varied experience caused him to alter his view, and to conclude that they are really life forms which have developed along some separate line of evolution, and which for some morphological reason have assumed human shape in the strange way in which Nature reproduces her types like the figures on the mandrake root or the frost ferns upon the window.

In a remarkable book, *A Wanderer in the Spirit Lands*, published in 1896, the author, Mr. Farnese, under inspiration gives an account of many mysteries, including that of fairies. What he says fits in very closely with the facts that have been put forward, and goes beyond them. He says, speaking of elementals: "Some are in appearance like the gnomes and elves who are said to inhabit mountain caverns. Such, too, are the fairies whom men have seen in lonely and secluded places. Some of these beings are of a very low order of life, almost like the higher order of plants, save that they possess independent motion. Others are very lively and full of grotesque, unmeaning tricks. . . . As nations advance and grow more spiritual these lower forms of life die out from the astral plane of that earth's sphere, and succeeding generations begin at first to doubt and then to deny that they ever had any existence. " This is one plausible way of explaining the disappearance of the faun, the dryad, the naiad, and all the creatures which are alluded to with such familiarity in the classics of Greece and Rome.

One may well ask what connection has this fairy-lore with the general scheme of psychic philosophy? The connection is slight and indirect, consisting only in the fact that anything which widens our conceptions of the possible, and shakes us out of our time-rutted lines of thought, helps us to regain our elasticity of mind, and thus to be more open to new philosophies. The fairy question is infinitely small and unimportant compared to the question of our own fate and that of the whole human race. The evidence also is very much less impressive, though, as I trust I have shown, it is not entirely negligible. These creatures are in any case remote from us, and their existence is of little more real importance than that of strange animals or plants. At the same time, the perennial mystery why so many “flowers are born to blush unseen,” and why Nature should be so lavish with gifts which human beings cannot use, would be solved if we understood that there were other orders of being which used the same earth and shared its blessings. It is at the lowest an interesting speculation which gives an added charm to the silence of the woods and the wilderness of the moorland.

CHAPTER VII

SOME SUBSEQUENT CASES

From the foregoing chapter it will be clear that there was a good deal of evidence which cannot easily be brushed aside as to the existence of these little creatures before the discovery of the photographs. These various witnesses have nothing to gain by their testimony, and it is not tainted by any mercenary consideration. The same remark applies to a number of cases which were communicated to me after the appearance of the articles in the *Strand*. One or two were more or less ingenious practical jokes, but from the others I have selected some which appear to be altogether reliable.

The gentleman whom I have already quoted under the name of Lancaster — he who was so doubtful as to the validity of the photographs — is himself a seer. He says: “Personally I should describe fairies as being about 2 feet 6 inches to 3 feet in height, and dressed in duffle brown clothes. The nearest approach I can get to them is to say that they are spiritual monkeys. They have the active brains of monkeys, and their general instinct is to avoid mankind, but they are capable individually of becoming extremely attached to humans — or a human — but at any time they may bite you, like a monkey, and repent immediately afterwards. They have thousands of years of collective experience, call it ‘inherited memory’ if you like, but no reasoning faculties. They are just Peter Pans — children who never grow up.

“I remember asking one of our spirit group bow one could get into touch with the brownies. He replied that when you could go into the woods and call the brown rabbits to you the other brownies will also come to you. Speaking generally, I should imagine that anyone who has had any truck with fairies must have obeyed the scriptural injunction to ‘become as a little child,’ i.e. he or she must be either simple or a Buddha.” This last phrase is a striking one, and it is curiously confirmed by a gentleman named Matthews, writing on January 3, 1921, from San Antonio, Texas. He declared that his three daughters, now married women, could all see fairies before the age of puberty, but never after it. The fairies said to them: “We are not of the human evolution. Very few humans have ever visited us. Only old souls well advanced in evolution or in a state of sex innocence can come to us.” This repeats independently the idea of Mr. Lancaster.

These children seem to have gone into a trance state before they found themselves in the country of the fairies — a country of intelligent beings, very small, 12 to 18 inches high. According to their accounts, they were invited to attend banquets or celebrations, excursions on beautiful lakes, etc. Each child was able to entrance instantly. This they always did when they visited Fairyland, but when the fairies came to them, which was generally in the twilight, they sat in chairs in normal state watching them dance. The father adds: “My own children learned in this way to dance, so that at local entertainments audiences were delighted, though they never knew from what source they learned.”

My correspondent does not say whether there is a marked difference between the European and the American type of fairy. No doubt, if these results are confirmed and followed up, there will be an exact classification in the future. If Bishop Leadbeater’s clairvoyance can be trusted, there is, as will afterwards be shown, a very clear distinction between the elemental life of various countries, as well as many varieties in each particular country.

One remarkable first-hand case of seeing fairies came from the Rev. Arnold J. Holmes. He wrote:

“Being brought up in the Isle of Man one breathed the atmosphere of superstition (if you like to call it), the simple, beautiful faith of the Manx fisher folk, the childlike trust of the Manx girls, who to this day will not forget the bit of wood and coal put ready at the side of the fireplace in case the ‘little people’ call and need a fire. A good husband is the ultimate reward, and neglect in this respect a bad husband or no husband at all. The startling phenomena occurred on my journey home from Peel Town at night to St. Mark’s (where I was Incumbent).

“After passing Sir Hall Caine’s beautiful residence, Greeba Castle, my horse — a spirited one — suddenly stopped dead, and looking ahead I saw amid the obscure light and misty moonbeams what appeared to be a small army of indistinct figures — very small, clad in gossamer garments. They appeared to be perfectly happy, scampering and tripping along the road, having come from the direction of the beautiful sylvan glen of Greeba and St. Trinian’s Roofless Church. The legend is that it has ever been the fairies’ haunt, and when an attempt has been made on two occasions to put a roof on, the fairies have removed all the work during the night, and for a century no further attempts have been made. It has therefore been left to the ‘little people’ who claimed it as their own. “I watched spellbound, my horse half mad with fear. The little happy army then turned in the direction of Witch’s Hill, and mounted a mossy bank; one ‘little man’ of larger stature than the rest, about 14 inches high, stood at attention until all had passed him dancing, singing, with happy abandon, across the Valley fields towards St. John’s Mount.”

The wide distribution of the fairies may be judged by the following extremely interesting narrative from Mrs. Hardy, the wife of a settler in the Maori districts of New Zealand:

“After reading about what others have seen I am encouraged to give you an experience of my own, which happened about five years ago. Will you please excuse my mentioning a few domestic details connected with the story? Our home is built on the top of a ridge. The ground was levelled for some distance to allow for sites for the house, buildings, lawns, etc. The ground on either side slopes steeply down to an orchard on the left, and shrubbery and paddock on the right, bounded by the main road. One evening when it was getting dusk I went into the yard to hang the tea-towels on the clothes-line. As I stepped off the verandah, I heard a sound of soft galloping coming from the direction of the orchard. I thought I must be mistaken, and that the sound came from the road, where the Maoris often gallop their horses. I crossed the yard to get the pegs, and heard the galloping coming nearer. I walked to the clothes-line, and stood under it with my arms uplifted to peg the towel on the line, when I was aware of the galloping close behind me, and suddenly a little figure, riding a tiny pony, rode right under my uplifted arms. I looked round, to see that I was surrounded by eight or ten tiny figures on tiny ponies like dwarf Shetlands. The little figure who came so close to me stood out quite clearly in the light that came from the window, but he had his back to it, and I could not see his face. The faces of the others were quite brown, also the ponies were brown. If they wore clothes they were close-fitting like a child’s jersey suit. They were like tiny dwarfs, or children of about two years of age. I was very startled, and called out, ‘Goodness I what is this?’ I think I must have frightened them, for at the sound of my voice they all rode through the rose trellis across the drive, and down the shrubbery. I heard the soft galloping dying away into the distance, and listened until the sound was gone, then went into the house. My daughter, who has had several psychic experiences, said to me: ‘Mother, how white and startled you look! What have you seen? And who were you speaking to just now in the yard?’ I said, ‘I have seen the fairies ride!’”

The little fairy horses are mentioned by several writers, and yet it must be admitted that their presence makes the whole situation far more complicated and difficult to understand. If horses, why not dogs? And we find ourselves in a whole new world upon the fairy scale. I have convinced myself that there is overwhelming evidence for the fairies, but I have by no means been able to assure myself of these adjuncts.

The following letter from a young lady in [paragraph continues] Canada, daughter of one of the leading citizens of Montreal, and personally known to me, is interesting on account of the enclosed photograph here reproduced. She says:

“The enclosed photograph was taken this summer at Waterville, New Hampshire, with a 2A Brownie camera (portrait lens attached) by Alverda, eleven years old. The father is able, clear-headed, enthusiastic on golf and billiards; the mother on Japanese art; neither interested in psychic matters much. The child has been frail and imaginative, but sweet and incapable of deceit.

“The mother tells me she was with the child when the picture was taken. The mushrooms pleased the little girl, and she knelt down and photographed them. As an indication of their ordinary size, they are *Amainta muscaria*.

“There was no such figure to be seen as appears in the picture.

“There was no double exposure. The picture astonished them when developed. The parents guarantee its honesty, but are mystified. “Do you think shadows, etc., can explain it? I think the line of the right shoulder and arm especially are too decisive to be thus brushed away.”

I rather agree with the writer, but it is a point which each reader can decide for himself upon examination of the photograph. It is certainly very vague after the Yorkshire examples.

New Zealand would appear to be quite a fairy centre, for I have another letter from a lady in those beautiful islands, which is hardly less interesting and definite than the one already quoted. She says:

“I have seen fairies in all parts of New Zealand, but especially in the fern-clad gullies of the North Island. Most of my unfoldment for mediumship was carried out in Auckland, and during that time I spent hours in my garden, and saw the fairies most often in the evening just after sunset. From observation I notice they usually lived or else appeared about the perennial plants. I saw brown fairies and green fairies, and they all had wings of a filmy appearance. I used to talk to them and ask them to make special pet plants and cuttings I put in the garden grow well, and I am sure they did, by the results I got. Since I came to Sydney, I have also seen the green fairies. I tried an experiment last spring. I had some pheasant-eye narcissus growing in the garden. I saw the green fairies about them. I transplanted one of the bulbs to a pot when half-grown, and took it with me when I went away for a short holiday. I asked the fairies to keep it growing. I watched it closely every evening — a green-clad fairy, sometimes two or three of them, would appear on the pot under the plant and whatever they did to it during the night I do not know, but next morning it was very much bigger, and, although transplanted, etc., it flowered three weeks before those in the garden. I am now living at Rochdale, Sydney, with friends both Australians and Spiritualists, and they also have seen the fairies from childhood up. I am sure animals see them. The fairies appear every evening in a little wild corner of the garden we leave for them, and our cat sits and watches them intently, but never attempts to spring at them as he does at other moving objects. If you care to make use of the information contained in this letter, you are welcome to do so."

I had another interesting letter from Mrs. Roberts, of Dunedin, one of the most gifted women in psychic matters whom I met during my Australian wanderings, in which she describes, as the last writer has done, the intimate connection between these elemental forms of life and the flowers, asserting that she has continually seen them tending the plants in her own garden.

From Ireland I received several fairy stories which seemed to be honestly told, even if some margin must be left for errors of observation. One of these seems to link up the fairy kingdom with spiritual communication, for the writer, Miss Winter, of Blarney, in Cork says:

"We received communications from a fairy named Bebel several times, one of them lasting nearly an hour. The communication was as decided and swift as from the most powerful spirit. He told us that he was a Leprechaun (male), but that in a ruined fort near us dwelt the Pixies. Our demesne had been the habitation of Leprechauns always, and they with their Queen Picel, mounted on her gorgeous dragon-fly, found all they required in our grounds.

"He asked most lovingly about my little grandchildren, who visit us frequently, and since then he has been in the habit of communicating with them, when we have yielded the table to them entirely, and just listened to the pure fun he and they were having together. He told them that the fairies find it quite easy to talk to the rabbits, and that they disliked the dogs because they chased them. They have great fun with the hens, on whose backs they ride, but they do not like them because they 'jeer' at them. When he mentioned the old fort, I thought he referred to Blarney Castle, not far away, but on relating the incident to a farmer's daughter, whose family has been in the neighbourhood for a very long time, she informed me that a labourer's cottage at the entrance to our avenue is built on the site of an old fort, information absolutely new to us."

A few more may be added to my list of witnesses, which might be greatly extended. Miss Hall, of Bristol, writes:

"I, too, have seen fairies, but never until now have I dared to mention it for fear of ridicule. It was many years ago. I was quite a child of six or seven years, and then, as now, passionately fond of all flowers, which always seem to me living creatures. I was seated in the middle of a road in some cornfields, playing with a group of poppies, and never shall I forget my utter astonishment at seeing a funny little man playing hide-and-seek among these flowers to amuse me, as I thought. He was quick as a dart. I watched him for quite a long time, then he disappeared. He seemed a merry little fellow, but I cannot ever remember his face. In colour he was a sage-green, his limbs were round and had the appearance of geranium stalks. He did not seem to be clothed, and was about three inches high and slender. I often looked for him again, but without success."

Mr. J. Foot Young, the well-known water diviner, writes:

"Some years ago I was one of a party invited to spend the afternoon on the lovely slopes of Oxeford Hill, in the county of Dorset. The absence of both trees and hedges in this locality enables one to see without obstruction for long distances. I was walking with my companion, who lives in the locality, some little distance from the main party, when to my astonishment I saw a number of what I thought to be very small children, about a score in number, and all dressed in little gaily-coloured short skirts, their legs being bare. Their hands were joined, and all held up, as they merrily danced round in a perfect circle. We stood watching them, when in an instant they all vanished from our sight. My companion told me they were fairies, and that they often came to that particular part to hold their revels. It may be our presence disturbed them." Mrs. Ethel Enid Wilson, of Worthing, writes:

"I quite believe in fairies. Of course, they are really nature spirits. I have often seen them on fine sunny days playing in the sea, and riding on the waves, but no one I have ever been with at the time has been able to see them, excepting once my little nephews and nieces saw them too. They were like little dolls, quite small, with beautiful bright hair, and they were constantly moving and dancing about."

Mrs. Rose, of Southend-on-Sea, told us in a chat on the subject:

"I think I have always seen fairies. I see them constantly here in the shrubbery by the sea. They congregate under the trees and float around about the trees, and gnomes come around to protect them. The gnomes are like little old men, with little green caps, and their clothes are generally neutral green. The fairies themselves are in light draperies. I have also seen them in the conservatory of my house, floating about among the flowers and plants. The fairies appear to be perpetually playing, excepting when they go to rest on the turf or in a tree, and I once saw a group of gnomes standing on each others' shoulders, like gymnasts on the stage. They seemed to be living as much as I am. It is not imagination. I have seen the gnomes arranging a sort of moss bed for the fairies, just like a mother-bird putting her chicks to bed. I don't hear any sounds from the gnomes or fairies, but they always look happy, as if they were having a real good time."

Miss Eva Longbottom, L.R.A.M., A.R.C. M., of Bristol, a charming vocalist, who has been blind from birth, told us in an interview:

"I have seen many fairies with my mind's eyes (that is, clairvoyantly). They are of various kinds, the ones I see. The music fairies are very beautiful. 'Argent' describes them, for they make you think of silver, and they have dulcet silvery voices. They speak and sing, but more in sound than in distinct words — a language of their own. a fairy tongue. Their music is a thing we cannot translate. It exists in itself. I don't think Mendelssohn has truly caught it, but Mr. Coleridge-Taylor's music reminds me of the music I have heard from the fairies themselves; his fairy ballads are very charming.

“Then there are dancing fairies. Their dancing is dainty and full of grace, a sweet old style of dance, without any tangles in it. I am generally alone when I see them, not necessarily in a woodland, but wherever the atmosphere is poetical. They are quite real.

“Another kind is the poem fairies. They are more ethereal, and of a violet shade. If you could imagine Perdita in the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, translated from the stage into a real fairy, you would have a good idea of the poem fairy. She has a very beautiful girlish character. The same might be said of Miranda, but she is more sentimental.

“The colour fairies are also most interesting. If you can imagine each colour transformed into a fairy you may get an idea of what they are like. They are in airy forms and dance and sing in the tone of their colours. I have not seen any brownies, as I do not take so much interest in the domestic side of the fairies’ life.

“When I was young I had it so much impressed on me that fairies were imaginary beings that I would not believe in them, but when I was about fourteen I began to realise them, and now I love them. Perhaps it was the deeper study of the arts that brought them to me. I have felt a sympathetic vibration for them and they have made me feel that we were friends. I have had a great deal of happiness and good fortune in my life, and perhaps I can attribute some of that to the fairies.”

These last examples I owe to Mr. John Lewis, Editor of the *Psychic Gazette*, who collected them. I think I may fairly claim that if all of them be added to those which I have quoted in my original article, and these again be linked up with the Cottingley children and photographs, we are in a position to present our case with some confidence to the public.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THEOSOPHIC VIEW OF FAIRIES

Of all religious and philosophies in Western lands I know none save that ancient teaching now called Theosophy which has any place in it for elemental forms of life. Therefore, since we have established some sort of independent case for their existence, it is well that we should examine carefully what they teach and see how far it fits in with what we have been able to gather or to demonstrate.

There is no one who has a better right to speak upon the point than my co-worker, Mr. E. L. Gardner, since he is both the discoverer of the fairies and a considerable authority upon theosophic teaching. I am glad, therefore, to be able to include some notes from his pen.

“For the most part,” he writes, “amid the busy commercialism of modern times, the fact of their existence has faded to a shadow, and a most delightful and charming field of nature study has too long been veiled. In this twentieth century there is promise of the world stepping out of some of its darker shadows. Maybe it is an indication that we are reaching the silver lining of the clouds when we find ourselves suddenly presented with actual photographs of these enchanting little creatures — relegated long since to the realm of the imaginary and fanciful.

“Now, what *are* the fairies?

“First, it must be clearly understood that all that *can* be photographed must of necessity be physical. Nothing of a subtler order could in the nature of things affect the sensitive plate. So-called spirit photographs, for instance, imply necessarily a certain degree of materialisation before the ‘form’ could come within the range even of the most sensitive of films. But well within our physical octave there are degrees of density that elude ordinary vision. Just as there are many stars in the heavens recorded by the camera that no human eye has ever seen directly, so there is a vast array of living creatures whose bodies are of that rare tenuity and subtlety from our point of view that they lie beyond the range of our normal senses. Many children and sensitives see them, and hence our fairy lore — all founded on actual and now demonstrable fact!

“Fairies use bodies of a density that we should describe, in non-technical language, as of a lighter than gaseous nature, but we should be entirely wrong if we thought them in consequence unsubstantial. In their own way they are as real as we are, and perform functions in connection with plant life of an important and most fascinating character. To hint at one phase — many a reader will have remarked on the lasting freshness and beauty of flowers cut and tended by one person, and, on the other hand, their comparatively short life when in the care of another. The explanation is to be found in the kindly devotion of the one person and the comparative indifference of the other, which emotions affect keenly the nature spirits in whose immediate care the flowers are. [paragraph continues] Their response to love and tenderness is quickly evidenced in their charges.

“Fairies are not born and do not die as we do, though they have their periods of outer activity and retirement. Allied to the *lepidoptera*, or butterfly genus, of our familiar acquaintance rather than to the mammalian line, they partake of certain characteristics that are obvious. There is little or no mentality awake — simply a gladsome, irresponsible joyousness of life that is abundantly in evidence in their enchanting abandon. The diminutive human form, so widely assumed, is doubtless due, at least in a great measure, to the powerful influence of human thought, the strongest creative power in our cycle.

“In the investigations I have pursued in Yorkshire, the New Forest, and Scotland, many fairy lovers and observers have been interviewed and their accounts compared. In most cases I was interested to note that my share in making public the photographs of Cottingley was the worst sort of introduction imaginable. Few fairy lovers have looked with favour on that. Reproaches have been frequent and couched in no measured terms, for the photographs have been resented as an unwarranted intrusion and desecration. Only after earnest assurances as to my own attitude could I get farther and obtain those intimate confidences that I have compared and checked and pieced together and am at liberty to narrate here.

“The function of the nature spirit of woodland, meadow, and garden, indeed in connection with vegetation generally, is to furnish the vital connecting link between the stimulating energy of the sun and the raw material of the form. That growth of a plant which we regard as the customary and inevitable result of associating the three factors of sun, seed, and soil would never take place if the fairy builders were absent. We do not obtain music from an organ by associating the wind, a composer’s score, and the instrument — the vital link supplied by the organist, though he may be unseen, is needed — and similarly the nature spirits are essential to the production of the plant.

“THE FAIRY BODY. — The normal working body of the gnome and fairy is not of human nor of any other definite form, and herein lies the explanation of much that has been puzzling concerning the nature-spirit kingdom generally. They have no clean-cut shape normally, and one can only describe them as small, hazy, and somewhat luminous clouds of colour with a brighter spark-like nucleus. As such they cannot be defined in terms of form any more than one can so describe a tongue of flame. In such a body they fill their office, working *inside* the plant structure. ‘Magnetic’ is the only word that can describe their method. Instantly responsive to stimulus, they appear to be influenced from two directions — the physical outer conditions prevailing and an inner intelligent urge. These two influences determine their working activity. Some, and these are by far the most numerous, work on cell construction and organization, and are comparatively small when assuming the human form, being two to three inches high. Others are concerned exclusively with root development below ground, while others are apparently specialists in colour and ‘paint’ the flowers by means of the streaming motion of their cloud-like bodies. There appears to be little trace of any selective or discriminating work done individually. They all seem actuated by a common influence that affects them continuously, and which strongly suggests the same type of instinctive prompting that marks the bee and ant.

“THE HUMAN FORM. — Though the nature spirit must be regarded as practically irresponsible, living a gladsome, joyous, and delightfully untrammelled life, each member appears to possess at least a temporary definite individuality at times, and to rejoice in it. The diminutive human form — sometimes grotesque, as in the case of brownie and gnome, sometimes beautifully graceful, as in the surface-fairy variety — if conditions allow, is assumed in a flash. For a while it is retained, and it seems clear that the definite and comparatively concrete shape affords pleasure above the ordinary. There is no organization perceptible, as one might perhaps hastily infer. The content of the body still appears homogeneous, though somewhat denser, and the shape of ‘human’ is usually only seen when not at work. The nature spirit so clothed indulges in active movement in skipping and dancing gestures and exhibits a gay abandon suggestive of the keenest delight in the experience. It is evidently ‘time off’ and play for it, though its work seems charming enough. If disturbed or alarmed the change back to the slightly subtler vehicle, the magnetic cloud, is as sudden as the birth. What determines the shape assumed and how the transformation is effected is not clear. One may speculate as to the influence of human thought, individual or in the mass, and quite probably the explanation when found will include this influence as a factor — but I am intent here not on theorizing, but on a narrative of observed happenings. One thing is clear — the nature-spirit form is objective — objective, that is, in the sense in which we apply that term to a stone, a tree, and a human body.

“FAIRY WINGS. — The wings are a feature that one would hardly expect to find in conjunction with arms. In this respect the insect type, with its several limbs and two or more wings, is a nearer model. But there is no articulation and no venation, and moreover the wings are not used for flying. ‘Streaming emanations’ is the only description one can apply. In some varieties, particularly the sylphs, the streamers surround the body, as by a luminous aura sprayed to a feathery mist. I was told that the earlier and more elaborate Red Indian headdresses must have been inspired from this source, so suggestive are they, though the best of them are but poor copies of the originals.

“FOOD. — There is no food taken, as we should regard it. Nourishment, usually abundant and ample for sustenance, is absorbed directly by a rhythmic breathing or pulse. Resource to the magnetic bath on occasion appears to be their only special restorative. The perfume of flowers is delighted in, and, reversely, disagreeable odours repel. This is one of many reasons, besides timidity, why human society is usually avoided, there being little that is inviting in that connection for them, and much that is obnoxious.

“BIRTH, DEATH, AND SEX. — Any estimate of length of life is misleading, because comparison with ourselves cannot be made. There is no real birth nor death, as we understand the terms — simply a gradual emergence from, and a return to, a subtler state of being. This process takes some time, probably years in certain varieties, and their life on the denser level, corresponding to our adult period, may be as long as the average human. There is nothing definite in all this, however, except the fact of the *gradual* emergence and return. There is no sex, as we should regard it, though, so far as I can gather, there is division and sub-division of ‘body’ at a much subtler and earlier level than that usually sensed. This process seems to correspond to the fission and budding of our familiar simple animalcules, with the addition, towards the end of the cycle, of fusion or reassembly into the larger unit.

“SPEECH AND GESTURE. — Below the sylph there appears to be nothing, or very little, in the way of a language of words. Communication is possible by inflexion and gesture, much as the same can be exercised with domestic animals. Indeed, the relation of human with the lower nature spirits seems to be about on a par with that of kittens, puppies, and birds. Yet there is abundant evidence of a tone language among them. Music by pipe and flute is common, though to the human ear of the quaintest character — but whether the instrument or the voice is the real source I cannot yet determine. The higher orders of nature spirits are adding mentality to the emotional development, and speech with them is possible. Their attitude to ordinary humanity is unfriendly rather than well disposed, and often hostile, arising probably from our utter disregard of the amenities. I am beginning to see sense and reason in the ‘burnt-offerings’ of yore. Pollution of the atmosphere is a horror to the sylphs and deeply resented. An ancient saying I had seen somewhere came to mind when discussing the beautiful air-spirits and their work: ‘Agni (Fire) is the mouth of the gods!’ Our sanitary and burial customs are doubtless still capable of improvement! One fairy lover said to me gleefully, ‘Ah, well! you will never be able to get photographs of the sylphs — they know too much for you!’ [paragraph continues] If we can establish friendly relations with them, though, the weather may be ours, if that be desirable!

“CAUSE AND EFFECT. — The dissection and examination of vegetable forms, however exhaustive, is but an analysis of *effects*. No adequate *cause* is therein to be found any more than a dissection of a sculpture will disclose the craftsman. The amazing skill in evidence in the plant kingdom in construction, adaptation, and adornment demand the labour of workman, mechanic, and artist. Their recognition in the nature spirits fills the vague hiatus between the sun’s energy and the material wrought. On our own human side of the line the finding of two pieces of wood nailed together would unmistakably point to a workman of sorts, yet we are accustomed to gaze with wonder and admiration on the exquisitely built forms of a whole kingdom, and murmur ‘evolutionary processes,’ or ‘the hand of God,’ according to our temperament. An agent is necessary on the one side and no less on the other.

“MODE OF WORKING. — The feature that will appeal to every nature lover interested in the vital processes of plant life is the craftsmanship of the nature-spirit agent. An inference, if it be simple enough, often escapes us, though in this case the experiences gathered of our own human labour suggest the analogy vividly. An analogy with a difference, however, for the hidden manner of work of the nature spirit is in most respects the exact opposite in character to our own. In this physical world we labour with hands and tools, and work consistently on exteriors, always indeed handling and applying our material from the outside. Addition, accretion, is our constructive method. We find ourselves made that way, and it is our characteristic mode of approach. The nature spirits operate from the interior, working from a centre outwards. Their aim appears to be to achieve an ever-closer touch with the environment, and to that end the driving urge of their activity is how best to adapt the means to their hand. It is easy to perceive the cause of variety in nature in view of this striving endeavour to organize the vehicle that the nature spirits use, and so gain in endless ways a closer touch. Flower colouring, mimicry, seed protection and distribution, defensive and aggressive measures, all the thousand-and-one devices employed to attain an end, point to an intelligence working through agents who, at their own level, are often in more or less antagonistic relation with each other. Variety and difference is as much in evidence as among humanity, and makes for that diversity of form and custom that we find on our side so fruitful of experience. In the tilling of the soil and the culture of plant life for our own purposes we have worked intimately together — though unconsciously. The efforts of nature spirits working by themselves *without* our assistance produce the wild flowers and berries of our woodlands and meadows, while partnership *with* the human yields a record of cultivated cereal, flower, and fruit, immensely richer.

“PLANT CONSCIOUSNESS. — The relation of the nature spirit to the consciousness functioning through the vegetable kingdom generally is an interesting study too, for the twain appear quite separate. This might perhaps be likened to the role respectively of crew and passenger in a ship.

The slumbering, or at best slowly awakening, consciousness of the plant, makes of it little more than an idle traveller, whereas the nature spirits, alert and active, attend to the upkeep and navigation of the craft, and the voyage through the kingdom means a growth and development for both.

"THE FUTURE. — What might follow an intelligent understanding of the 'little people,' and the establishment of mutual good feeling, opens up a prospect alluring in the extreme. It would be for us a working in the light instead of in darkness. A foretaste of such co-operation may be gathered by noting the effect of a devoted lover of flowers on his or her charges. The nature spirit responds to emotion and appears keenly appreciative of kindly attention and affection. Whether this applies with any force to any but the varieties concerned with flowers and fruits I cannot say, but it certainly does to them, and the intelligent direction of effort in place of empirical incident tempts one's speculation to run riot as to future possibilities. "The awakened self-consciousness of the human kingdom, with a vigorous mentality linked to kindly emotion and physical action, may enable an ages-old debt to be adjusted. We have served the nature-spirit line of evolution consciously not at all, but by understanding the situation we can cooperate together intelligently and helpfully, and the service of both to mutual advantage can take the place of blind experiment and groping self-interest.'!
— E. L. G.

In the literature of Theosophy, I know no one who treats the elemental forces of nature more fully than Bishop Leadbeater, whom I met in my Australian travels, and who impressed me by his venerable appearance, his ascetic habits, and his claims to a remarkable clairvoyancy which has, as he alleges, opened up many of the Arcana. In his book *The Hidden Side of Things* he talks very fully of the fairies of many lands.

Dealing with the little creatures whom so many of my informants have seen tending flowers, the seer says:

The little creatures that look after flowers may be divided into two great classes, though of course there are many varieties of each kind. The first class may properly be called elementals, for, beautiful though they are, they are in reality only thought-forms, and therefore they are not really living creatures at all. Perhaps I should rather say that they are only temporary living creatures, for, though they are very active and busy during their little lives, they have no real evolving, reincarnating life in them, and when they have done their work they just go to pieces and dissolve into the surrounding atmosphere, precisely as our own thought-forms do. They are the thought-forms of the Great Beings, or angels, who are in charge of the evolution of the vegetable kingdom.

"When one of these Great Ones has a new idea connected with one of the kinds of plants or flowers which are under his charge, he often creates a thought-form for the special purpose of carrying out that idea. It usually takes the form either of an etheric model of the flower itself or of a little creature which hangs round the plant or the flower all through the time that the buds are forming, and gradually builds them into the shape and colour of which the angel has thought. But as soon as the plant has fully grown, or the flower has opened, its work is over and its power is exhausted, and, as I have said, it just simply dissolves, because the will to do that piece of work was the only soul that it had.

"But there is quite another kind of little creature which is very frequently seen playing about with flowers, and this time it is a real nature spirit. There are many varieties of these also. One of the commonest forms is, as I have said, something very much like a humming-bird, and it may often be seen buzzing round the flowers much in the same way as a humming-bird or a bee does. These beautiful little creatures will never become human, because they are not in the same line of evolution as we are. The life which is now animating them has come up through grasses and cereals, such as wheat and oats, when it was in the vegetable kingdom, afterwards through ants and bees when it was in the animal kingdom. Now it has reached the level of these tiny nature spirits, and its next stage will be to ensoul some of the beautiful fairies with etheric bodies who live upon the surface of the earth. Later on they will become salamanders, or fire spirits, and later still they will become sylphs, or air spirits, having only astral bodies instead of etheric. Later still they will pass through the different stages of the great kingdom of the angels."

Speaking of the national characteristics of fairies, he says with all the assurance of an actual observer (page 97):

"No contrast could well be more marked than that between the vivacious, rollicking, orange-and-purple or scarlet-and-gold mannikins who dance among the vineyards of Sicily and the almost wistful grey-and-green creatures who move so much more sedately amidst the oaks and furze-covered heaths in Brittany, or the golden-brown 'good people' who haunt the hillsides of Scotland.

“In England the emerald-green kind is probably the commonest, and I have seen it also in the woods in France and Belgium, in far-away Massachusetts, and on the banks of the Niagara River. The vast plains of the Dakotas are inhabited by a black-and-white kind which I have not seen elsewhere, and California rejoices in a lovely white-and-gold species which also appears to be unique.

“In Australia the most frequent type is a very distinctive creature of a wonderful luminous sky-blue colour; but there is a wide diversity between the etheric inhabitants of New South Wales or Victoria and those of tropical Northern Queensland. These latter approximate closely to those of the Dutch Indies. Java seems specially prolific in these graceful creatures, and the kinds most common there are two distinct types, both monochromatic — one indigo blue with faint metallic gleamings, and the other a study in all known shades of yellow — quaint, but wonderfully effective and attractive.

“A striking local variety is gaudily ringed with alternate bars of green and yellow, like a football jersey. This ringed type is possibly a race peculiar to that part of the world, for I saw red and yellow similarly arranged in the Malay Peninsula, and green and white on the other side of the Straits in Sumatra. That huge island also rejoices in the possession of a lovely pale heliotrope tribe which I have seen before only in the hills of Ceylon. Down in New Zealand their speciality is a deep blue shot with silver, while in the South Sea Islands one meets with a silvery-white variety, which coruscates with all the colours of the rainbow, like a figure of mother-of-pearl.

“In India we find all sorts, from the delicate rose-and-pale-green, or pale-blue-and-primrose of the hill-country to the rich medley of gorgeously gleaming colours, almost barbaric in their intensity and profusion, which is characteristic of the plains. In some parts of that marvellous country I have seen the black-and-gold type which is more usually associated with the African desert, and also a species which resembles a statuette made out of a gleaming crimson metal, such as was the orichalcum of the Atlanteans.

“Somewhat akin to this last is a curious variety which looks as though cast out of bronze and burnished; it appears to make its home in the immediate neighbourhood of volcanic disturbances, since the only places in which it has been seen so far are the slopes of Vesuvius and Etna, the interior of Java, the Sandwich Islands, the Yellowstone Park in North America, and a certain part of the North Island of New Zealand. Several indications seem to point to the conclusion that this is a survival of a primitive type, and represents a sort of intermediate stage between the gnome and the fairy.

"In some cases, districts close together are found to be inhabited by quite different classes of nature spirits; for example, as has already been mentioned, the emerald-green elves are common in Belgium, yet a hundred miles away in Holland hardly one of them is to be seen, and their place is taken by a sober-looking dark-purple species."

Very interesting indeed is his account of the Irish fairies. Speaking of a sacred mountain in Ireland, he says:

"A curious fact is that altitude above the sea-level seems to affect their distribution, those who belong to the mountains scarcely ever intermingling with those of the plains. I well remember, when climbing Slieve-namon, one of the traditionally sacred hills of Ireland, noticing the very definite lines of demarcation between the different types. The lower slopes, like the surrounding plains, were alive with the intensely active and mischievous little red-and-black race which swarms all over the south and west of Ireland, being especially attracted to the magnetic centres established nearly two thousand years ago by the magic-working priests of the old Milesian race to ensure and perpetuate their domination over the people by keeping them under the influence of the great illusion. After half an hour's climbing, however, not one of these red-and-black gentry was to be seen, but instead the hill-side was populous with the gentler blue-and-brown type which long ago owed special allegiance to the Tuatha-de-Danaan.

"These also had their zone and their well-defined limits, and no nature spirit of either type ever ventured to trespass upon the space round the summit, sacred to the great green angels who have watched there for more than two thousand years, guarding one of the centres of living force that link the past to the future of that mystic land of Erin. Taller far than the height of man, these giant forms, in colour like the first new leaves of spring, soft, luminous, shimmering, indescribable, look forth over the world with wondrous eyes that shine like stars, full of the peace of those who live in the eternal, waiting with the calm certainty of knowledge until the appointed time shall come. One realises very fully the power and importance of the hidden side of things when one beholds such a spectacle as that."

For fuller information the reader may well be referred to the original, published by the Theosophical Publishing House. The book is a storehouse of knowledge upon all occult matters, and certainly the details concerning the fairies fit in remarkably well with the information from other sources.

I have now laid before the reader the full circumstances in connection with the five successful photographs taken at Cottingley. [paragraph continues] I have added the experience of a clairvoyant officer in the company of the girls upon the third and unsuccessful attempt to get photographs. I have analysed some of the criticism which we have had to meet. I have given the reader the opportunity of judging the evidence for a considerable number of alleged cases, collected before and after the Cottingley incident. Finally, I have placed before him the general theory of the place in creation of such creatures, as defined by the only system of thought which has found room for them. Having read and weighed all this, the investigator is in as strong a position as Mr. Gardner or myself, and each must give his own verdict. I do not myself contend that the proof is as overwhelming as in the case of spiritualistic phenomena. We cannot call upon the brightest brains in the scientific world, the Crookes, the Lodges, or the Lombrosos, for confirmation. But that also may come, and for the present, while more evidence will be welcome, there is enough already available to convince any reasonable man that the matter is not one which can be readily dismissed, but that a case actually exists which up to now has not been shaken in the least degree by any of the criticism directed against it. Far from being resented, such criticism, so long as it is earnest and honest, must be most welcome to those whose only aim is the fearless search for truth.

THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM VOLUME I

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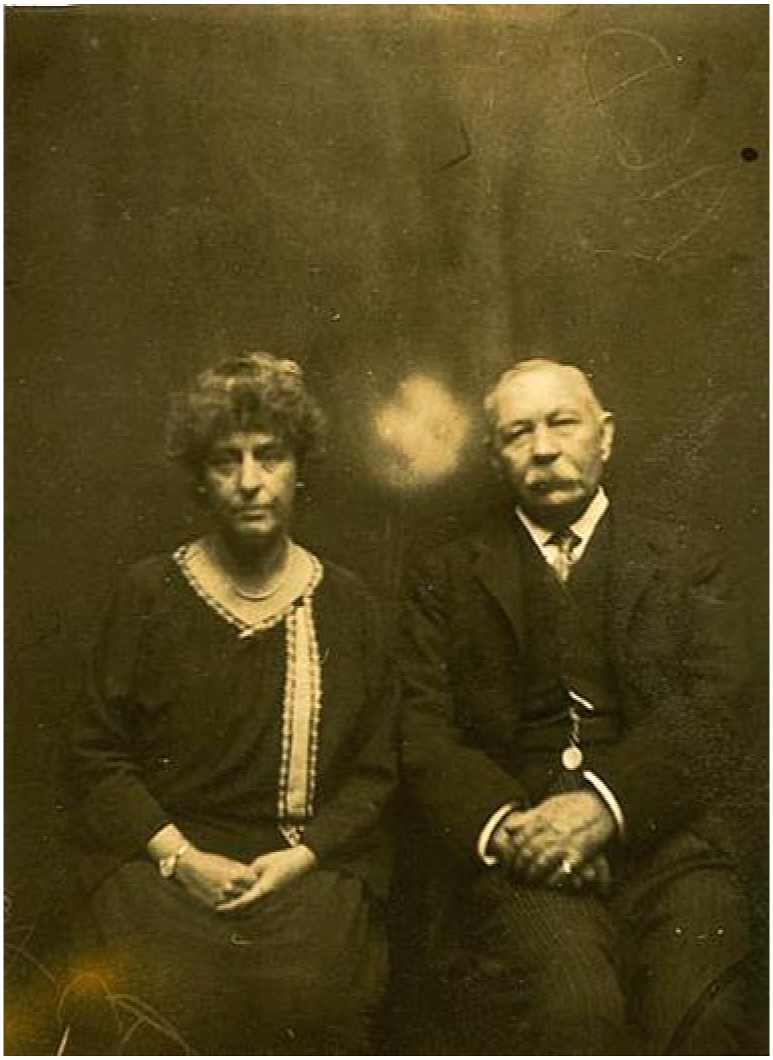

Spirit photograph showing a luminous manifestation between Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle. Taken in the 1920s, when the Conan Doyles were actively involved with the Crewe Circle Spiritualist group.

PREFACE

This work has grown from small disconnected chapters into a narrative which covers in a way the whole history of the Spiritualistic movement. This genesis needs some little explanation. I had written certain studies with no particular ulterior object save to gain myself, and to pass on to others, a clear view of what seemed to me to be important episodes in the modern spiritual development of the human race. These included the chapters on Swedenborg, on Irving, on A. J. Davis, on the Hydesville incident, on the history of the Fox sisters, on the Eddys and on the life of D. D. Home. These were all done before it was suggested to my mind that I had already gone some distance in doing a fuller history of the Spiritualistic movement than had hitherto seen the light-a history which would have the advantage of being written from the inside and with intimate personal knowledge of those factors which are characteristic of this modern development.

It is indeed curious that this movement, which many of us regard as the most important in the history of the world since the Christ episode, has never had a historian from those who were within it, and who had large personal experience of its development. Mr. Frank Podmore brought together a large number of the facts, and, by ignoring those which did not suit his purpose, endeavoured to suggest the worthlessness of most of the rest, especially the physical phenomena, which in his view were mainly the result of fraud. There is a history of Spiritualism by Mr. McCabe which turns everything to fraud, and which is itself a misnomer, since the public would buy a book with such a title under the impression that it was a serious record instead of a travesty. There is also a history by J. Arthur Hill which is written from a strictly psychic research point of view, and is far behind the real provable facts. Then we have “Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years’ Record,” and “Nineteenth Century Miracles,” by that great woman and splendid propagandist, Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, but these deal only with phases, though they are exceedingly valuable. Finally-and best of all-there is “Man’s Survival After Death,” by the Rev. Charles L. Tweedale; but this is rather a very fine connected exposition of the truth of the cult than a deliberate consecutive history. There are general histories of mysticism, like those of Ennemoser and Howitt, but there is no clean-cut, comprehensive story of the successive developments of this world-wide movement. Just before going to press a book has appeared by Campbell-Holms which is a very useful compendium of psychic facts, as its title, “The Facts of Psychic Science and Philosophy,” implies, but here again it cannot claim to be a connected history.

It was clear that such a work needed a great deal of research-far more than I in my crowded life could devote to it. It is true that my time was in any case dedicated to it, but the literature is vast, and there were many aspects of the movement which claimed my attention. Under these circumstances I claimed and obtained the loyal assistance of Mr. W. Leslie Curnow, whose knowledge of the subject and whose industry have proved to be invaluable. He has dug assiduously into that vast quarry; he has separated out the ore from the rubbish, and in every way he has been of the greatest assistance. I had originally expected no more than raw material, but he has occasionally given me the finished article, of which I have gladly availed myself, altering it only to the extent of getting my own personal point of view. I cannot admit too fully the loyal assistance which he has given me, and if I have not conjoined his name with my own upon the title-page it is for reasons which he understands and in which he acquiesces.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE. THE PSYCHIC BOOKSHOP, ABBEY HOUSE, VICTORIA STREET, S.W.

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF SWEDENBORG

It is impossible to give any date for the early appearances of external intelligent power of a higher or lower type impinging upon the affairs of men. Spiritualists are in the habit of taking March 31, 1848, as the beginning of all psychic things, because their own movement dates from that day. There has, however, been no time in the recorded history of the world when we do not find traces of preternatural interference and a tardy recognition of them from humanity. The only difference between these episodes and the modern movement is that the former might be described as a case of stray wanderers from some further sphere, while the latter bears the sign of a purposeful and organized invasion. But as an invasion might well be preceded by the appearance of pioneers who search out the land, so the spirit influx of recent years was heralded by a number of incidents which might well be traced to the Middle Ages or beyond them. Some term must be fixed for a commencement of the narrative, and perhaps no better one can be found than the story of the great Swedish seer, Emanuel Swedenborg, who has some claim to be the father of our new knowledge of supernal matters.

When the first rays of the rising sun of spiritual knowledge fell upon the earth they illuminated the greatest and highest human mind before they shed their light on lesser men. That mountain peak of mentality was this great religious reformer and clairvoyant medium, as little understood by his own followers as ever the Christ has been.

In order fully to understand Swedenborg one would need to have a Swedenborg brain, and that is not met with once in a century. And yet by our power of comparison and our experience of facts of which Swedenborg knew nothing, we can realise some part of his life more clearly than he could himself. The object of this study is not to treat the man as a whole, but to endeavour to place him in the general scheme of psychic unfolding treated in this work, from which his own Church in its narrowness would withhold him.

Swedenborg was a contradiction in some ways to our psychic generalisations, for it has been the habit to say that great intellect stands in the way of personal psychic experience. The clean slate is certainly most apt for the writing of a message. Swedenborg's mind was no clean slate, but was criss-crossed with every kind of exact learning which mankind is capable of acquiring. Never was there such a concentration of information. He was primarily a great mining engineer and authority on metallurgy. He was a military engineer who helped to turn the fortunes of one of the many campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden. He was a great authority upon astronomy and physics, the author of learned works upon the tides and the determination of latitude. He was a zoologist and an anatomist. He was a financier and political economist who anticipated the conclusions of Adam Smith. Finally, he was a profound Biblical student who had sucked in theology with his mother's milk, and lived in the stern Evangelical atmosphere of a Lutheran pastor during the most impressionable years of his life. His psychic development, which occurred when he was fifty-five, in no way interfered with his mental activity, and several of his scientific pamphlets were published after that date.

With such a mind it is natural enough that he should be struck by the evidence for extra-mundane powers which comes in the way of every thoughtful man, but what is not natural is that he should himself be the medium for such powers. There is a sense in which his mentality was actually detrimental and vitiated his results, and there was another in which it was to the highest degree useful. To illustrate this one has to consider the two categories into which his work may be divided.

The first is the theological. This seems to most people outside the chosen flock a useless and perilous side of his work. On the one hand he accepts the Bible as being in a very particular sense the work of God. Upon the other he contends that its true meaning is entirely different from its obvious meaning, and that it is he, and only he, who, by the help of angels, is able to give the true meaning. Such a claim is intolerable. The infallibility of the Pope would be a trifle compared with the infallibility of Swedenborg if such a position were admitted. The Pope is at least only infallible when giving his verdict on points of doctrine ex cathedra with his cardinals around him. Swedenborg's infallibility would be universal and un restricted. Nor do his explanations in the least commend themselves to one's reason. When, in order to get at the true sense of a God-given message, one has to suppose that a horse signifies intellectual truth, an ass signifies scientific truth, a flame signifies improvement, and so on and on through countless symbols, we seem to be in a realm of make-believe which can only be compared with the ciphers which some ingenious critics have detected in the plays of Shakespeare. Not thus does God send His truth into the world. If such a view were accepted the Swedenborgian creed could only be the mother of a thousand heresies, and we should find ourselves back again amid the hair-splittings and the syllogisms of the mediaeval schoolmen. All great and true things are simple and intelligible. Swedenborg's theology is neither simple nor intelligible, and that is its condemnation.

When, however, we get behind his tiresome exegesis of the Scriptures, where everything means something different from what it obviously means, and when we get at some of the general results of his teaching, they are not inharmonious with liberal modern thought or with the teaching which has been received from the Other Side since spiritual communication became open. Thus the general proposition that this world is a laboratory of souls, a forcing-ground where the material refines out the spiritual, is not to be disputed. He rejects the Trinity in its ordinary sense, but rebuilds it in some extraordinary sense which would be equally objectionable to a Unitarian. He admits that every system has its divine purpose and that virtue is not confined to Christianity. He agrees with the Spiritualist teaching in seeking the true meaning of Christ's life in its power as an example, and he rejects atonement and original sin. He sees the root of all evil in selfishness, yet he admits that a healthy egoism, as Hegel called it, is essential. In sexual matters his theories are liberal to the verge of laxity. A Church he considered an absolute necessity, as if no individual could arrange his own dealings with his Creator. Altogether, it is such a jumble of ideas, poured forth at such length in so many great Latin volumes, and expressed in so obscure a style, that every independent interpreter of it would be liable to found a new religion of his own. Not in that direction does the worth of Swedenborg lie.

That worth is really to be found in his psychic powers and in his psychic information which would have been just as valuable had no word of theology ever come from his pen. It is these powers and that information to which we will now turn.

Even as a lad young Swedenborg had visionary moments, but the extremely practical and energetic manhood which followed submerged that more delicate side of his nature. It came occasionally to the surface, however, all through his life, and several instances have been put on record which show that he possessed those powers which are usually called “travelling clairvoyance,” where the soul appears to leave the body, to acquire information at a distance, and to return with news of what is occurring elsewhere. It is a not uncommon attribute of mediums, and can be matched by a thousand examples among Spiritualistic sensitives, but it is rare in people of intellect, and rare also when accompanied by an apparently normal state of the body while the phenomenon is proceeding. Thus, in the oft-quoted example of Gothenburg, where the seer observed and reported on a fire in Stockholm, 300 miles away, with perfect accuracy, he was at a dinner-party with six teen guests, who made valuable witnesses. The story was investigated by no less a person than the philosopher Kant, who was a contemporary.

These occasional incidents were, however, merely the signs of latent powers which came to full fruition quite suddenly in London in April of the year 1744 It may be remarked that though the seer was of a good Swedish family and was elevated to the Swedish nobility, it was none the less in London that his chief books were published, that his illumination was begun and finally that he died and was buried. From the day of his first vision he continued until his death, twenty-seven years later, to be in constant touch with the other world. “The same night the world of spirits, hell and heaven, were convincingly opened to me, where I found many persons of my acquaintance of all conditions. Thereafter the Lord daily opened the eyes of my spirit to see in perfect wakefulness what was going on in the other world, and to converse, broad awake, with angels and spirits.”

In his first vision Swedenborg speaks of “a kind of vapour steaming from the pores of my body. It was a most visible watery vapour and fell downwards to the ground upon the carpet.” This is a close description of that ectoplasm which we have found to be the basis of all physical phenomena. The substance has also been called “ideoplasm,” because it takes on in an instant any shape with which it is impressed by the spirit. In this case it changed, according to his account, into vermin, which was said to be a sign from his Guardians that they disapproved of his diet, and was accompanied by a clairaudient warning that he must be more careful in that respect.

What can the world make of such a narrative? They may say that the man was mad, but his life in the years which followed showed no sign of mental weakness. Or they might say that he lied. But he was a man who was famed for his punctilious veracity. His friend Cuno, a banker of Amsterdam, said of him, “When he gazed upon me with his smiling blue eyes it was as if truth itself was speaking from them.” Was he then self-deluded and honestly mistaken? We have to face the fact that in the main the spiritual observations which he made have been confirmed and extended since his time by innumerable psychic observers. The true verdict is that he was the first and in many ways the greatest of the whole line of mediums, that he was subject to the errors as well as to the privileges which mediumship brings, that only by the study of mediumship can his powers be really understood, and that in endeavouring to separate him from Spiritualism his New Church has shown a complete misapprehension of his gifts, and of their true place in the general scheme of Nature. As a great pioneer of the Spiritual movement his position is both intelligible and glorious. As an isolated figure with incomprehensible powers, there is no place for him in any broad comprehensive scheme of religious thought.

It is interesting to note that he considered his powers to be intimately connected with a system of respiration. Air and ether being all around us, it is as if some men could breathe more ether and less air and so attain a more etheric state. This, no doubt, is a crude and clumsy way of putting it, but some such idea runs through the work of many schools of psychic thought. Laurence Oliphant, who had no obvious connection with Swedenborg, wrote his book “Sympneumata” in order to explain it. The Indian system of Yoga depends upon the same idea. But anyone who has seen an ordinary medium go into trance is aware of the peculiar hissing intakes with which the process begins and the deep expirations with which it ends. A fruitful field of study lies there for the Science of the future. Here, as in other psychic matters, caution is needed. The author has known several cases where tragic results have followed upon an ignorant use of deep-breathing psychic exercises. Spiritual, like electrical power, has its allotted use, but needs some knowledge and caution in handling.

Swedenborg sums up the matter by saying that when he communed with spirits he would for an hour at a time hardly draw a breath, “taking in only enough air to serve as a supply to his thoughts.” Apart from this peculiarity of respiration, Swedenborg was normal during his visions, though he naturally preferred to be secluded at such times. He seems to have been privileged to examine the other world through several of its spheres, and though his theological habit of mind may have tinctured his descriptions, on the other hand the vast range of his material knowledge gave him unusual powers of observation and comparison. Let us see what were the main facts which he brought back from his numerous journeys, and how far they coincide with those which have been obtained since his day by psychic methods.

He found, then, that the other world, to which we all go after death, consisted of a number of different spheres representing various shades of luminosity and happiness, each of us going to that for which our spiritual condition has fitted us. We are judged in automatic fashion, like going to like by some spiritual law, and the result being determined by the total result of our life, so that absolution or a death-bed repentance can be of little avail. He found in these spheres that the scenery and conditions of this world were closely reproduced, and so also was the general framework of society. He found houses in which families lived, temples in which they worshipped, halls in which they assembled for social purposes, palaces in which rulers might dwell.

Death was made easy by the presence of celestial beings who helped the new-comer into his fresh existence. Such new-comers had an immediate period of complete rest. They regained consciousness in a few days of our time.

There were both angels and devils, but they were not of another order to ourselves. They were all human beings who had lived on earth and who were either undeveloped souls, as devils, or highly developed souls, as angels.

We did not change in any way at death. Man lost nothing by death, but was still a man in all respects, though more perfect than when in the body. He took with him not only his powers but also his acquired modes of thought, his beliefs and his prejudices.

All children were received equally, whether baptized or not. They grew up in the other world. Young women mothered them until the real mother came across.

There was no eternal punishment. Those who were in the hells could work their way out if they had the impulse. Those in the heavens were also in no permanent place, but were working their way to something higher.

There was marriage in the form of spiritual union in the next world. It takes a man and a woman to make a complete human unit. Swedenborg, it may be remarked, was never married in life.

There was no detail too small for his observation in the spirit spheres. He speaks of the architecture, the artisans' work, the flowers and fruits, the scribes, the embroidery, the art, the music, the literature, the science, the schools, the museums, the colleges, the libraries and the sports. It may all shock conventional minds, though why harps, crowns and thrones should be tolerated and other less material things denied, it is hard to see.

Those who left this world old, decrepit, diseased, or deformed, renewed their youth, and gradually assumed their full vigour. Married couples continued together if their feelings towards each other were close and sympathetic. If not, the marriage was dissolved. "Two real lovers are not separated by the death of one, since the spirit of the deceased dwells with the spirit of the survivor, and this even to the death of the latter, when they again meet and are reunited, and love each other more tenderly than before."

Such are some gleanings out of the immense store of information which God sent to the world through Swedenborg. Again and again they have been repeated by the mouths and the pens of our own Spiritualistic illuminates. The world has so far disregarded it, and clung to outworn and senseless conceptions. Gradually the new knowledge is making its way, however, and when it has been entirely accepted the true greatness of the mission of Swedenborg will be recognised, while his Biblical exegesis will be forgotten.

The New Church, which was formed in order to sustain the teaching of the Swedish master, has allowed itself to become a backwater instead of keeping its rightful place as the original source of psychic knowledge. When the Spiritualistic movement broke out in 184.8, and when men like Andrew Jackson Davis supported it with philosophic writings and psychic powers which can hardly be distinguished from those of Swedenborg, the New Church would have been well advised to hail this development as being on the lines indicated by their leader. Instead of doing so, they have preferred, for some reason which is difficult to understand, to exaggerate every point of difference and ignore every point of resemblance, until the two bodies have drifted into a position of hostility. In point of fact, every Spiritualist should honour Swedenborg, and his bust should be in every

Spiritualist temple, as being the first and greatest of modern mediums. On the other hand, the New Church should sink any small differences and join heartily in the new movement, contributing their churches and organization to the common cause.

It is difficult on examining Swedenborg's life to discover what are the causes which make his present-day followers look askance at other psychic bodies. What he did then is what they do now. Speaking of Polhem's death the seer says: "He died on Monday and spoke with me on Thursday. I was invited to the funeral. He saw the hearse and saw them let down the coffin into the grave. He conversed with me as it was going on, asking me why they had buried him when he was alive. When the priest pronounced that he would rise again at the Day of judgment he asked why this was, when he had risen already. He wondered that such a belief could obtain, considering that he was even now alive."

This is entirely in accord with the experience of a present-day medium. If Swedenborg was within his rights, then the medium is so also.

Again: "Brahe was beheaded at 10 in the morning and spoke to me at 10 that night. He was with me almost without interruption for several days."

Such instances show that Swedenborg had no more scruples about converse with the dead than the Christ had when He spoke on the mountain with Moses and Elias.

Swedenborg has laid down his own view very clearly, but in considering it one has to remember the time in which he lived and his want of experience of the trend and object of the new revelation. This view was that God, for good and wise purposes, had separated the world of spirits from ours and that communication was not granted except for cogent reasons-among which mere curiosity should not be counted. Every earnest student of the psychic would agree with it, and every earnest Spiritualist is averse from turning the most solemn thing upon earth into a sort of pastime. As to having a cogent reason, our main reason is that in such an age of materialism as Swedenborg can never have imagined, we are endeavouring to prove the existence and supremacy of spirit in so objective a way that it will meet and beat the materialists on their own ground. It would be hard to imagine any reason more cogent than this, and therefore we have every right to claim that if Swedenborg were now living he would have been a leader in our modern psychic movement.

Some of his followers, notably Dr. Garth Wilkinson, have put forward another objection thus: “The danger of man in speaking with spirits is that we are all in association with our likes, and being full of evil these similar spirits, could we face them, would but confirm us in our own state of views.”

To this we can only reply that though it is specious it is proved by experience to be false. Man is not naturally bad. The average human being is good. The mere act of spiritual communication in its solemnity brings out the religious side. Therefore as a rule it is not the evil but the good influence which is encountered, as the beautiful and moral records of seances will show. The author can testify that in nearly forty years of psychic work, during which he has attended innumerable seances in many lands, he has never on any single occasion heard an obscene word or any message which could offend the ears of the most delicate female. Other veteran Spiritualists bring the same testimony. Therefore, while it is undoubtedly true that evil spirits are attracted to an evil circle, in actual practice it is a very rare thing for anyone to be incommoded thereby. When such spirits come the proper procedure is not to repulse them, but rather to reason gently with them and so endeavour to make them realise their own condition and what they should do for self-improvement. This has occurred many times within the author’s personal experience and with the happiest results.

Some little personal account of Swedenborg may fitly end this brief review of his doctrines, which is primarily intended to indicate his position in the general scheme. He must have been a most frugal, practical, hard-working and energetic young man, and a most lovable old one. Life seems to have mellowed him into a very gentle and venerable creature. He was placid, serene, and ever ready for conversation which did not take a psychic turn unless his companions so desired. The material of such conversations was always remarkable, but he was afflicted with a stammer which hindered his enunciation. In person he was tall and spare, with a spiritual face, blue eyes, a wig to his shoulders, dark clothing, knee-breeches, buckles, and a cane.

Swedenborg claimed that a heavy cloud was formed round the earth by the psychic grossness of humanity, and that from time to time there was a judgment and a clearing up, even as the thunderstorm clears the material atmosphere. He saw that the world, even in his day, was drifting into a dangerous position owing to the unreason of the Churches on the one side and the reaction towards absolute want of religion which was caused by it. Modern psychic authorities, notably Vale Owen, have spoken of this ever-accumulating cloud, and there is a very general feeling that the necessary cleansing process will not be long postponed.

A notice of Swedenborg from the Spiritualistic standpoint may be best concluded by an extract from his own diary. He says: “All confirmations in matters pertaining to theology are, as it were, glued fast into the brains, and can with difficulty be removed, and while they remain, genuine truths can find no place.” He was a very great seer, a great pioneer of psychic knowledge, and his weakness lay in those very words which he has written.

The general reader who desires to go further will find Swedenborg’s most characteristic teachings in his “Heaven and Hell,” “The New Jerusalem,” and “Arcana Coelestia.” His life has been admirably done by Garth Wilkinson, Trobridge, and Brayley Hodgetts, the present president of the English Swedenborg Society. In spite of all his theological symbolism, his name must live eternally as the first of all modern men who has given a description of the process of death, and of the world beyond, which is not founded upon the vague ecstatic and impossible visions of the old Churches, but which actually corresponds with the descriptions which we ourselves obtain from those who endeavour to convey back to us some clear idea of their new existence.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD IRVING: THE SHAKERS

The story of Edward Irving and his experience of spiritual manifestations in the years from 1830 to 1833 are of great interest to the psychic student, and help to bridge the gap between Swedenborg on one side and Andrew Jackson Davis on the other. The facts are as follows:

Edward Irving was of that hard-working poorer-class Scottish stock which has produced so many great men. Of the same stock and at the same time and district came Thomas Carlyle. Irving was born in Annan in the year 1792. After a hard, studious youth, he developed into a very singular man. In person he was a giant and a Hercules in strength, his splendid physique being only marred by a bad outward cast of one eye-a defect which, like Byron's lame foot, seemed in some sort to present an analogy to the extremes in his character. His mind, which was virile, broad and courageous, was warped by early training in the narrow school of the Scottish Church, where the hard, crude views of the old Covenanters-an impossible Protestantism which represented a reaction against an impossible Catholicism-still poisoned the human soul. His mental position was strangely contradictory, for while he had inherited this cramped theology he had failed to inherit much which is the very birthright of the poorer Scot. He was opposed to all that was liberal, and even such obvious measures of justice as the Reform Bill of 1832 found in him a determined opponent.

This strange, eccentric, and formidable man had his proper environment in the 17th century, when his prototypes were holding moorland meetings in Gallo way and avoiding, or possibly even attacking with the arms of the flesh, the dragoons of Claverhouse. But, live when he might, he was bound to write his nacre in some fashion on the annals of his time. We read of his strenuous youth in Scotland, of his rivalry with his friend Carlyle in the affections of the clever and vivacious Jane Welsh, of his enormous walks and feats of strength, of his short career as a rather violent school-teacher at Kirkcaldy, of his marriage to the daughter of a minister in that town, and finally of his becoming curate or assistant to the great Dr. Chalmers, who was, at that time, the most famous clergyman in Scotland, and whose administration of his parish in Glasgow is one of the outstanding chapters in the history of the Scottish Church. In this capacity he gained that man-to-man acquaintance with the poorer classes which is the best and most practical of all preparations for the work of life. Without it, indeed, no man is complete.

There was at that time a small Scottish church in Hatton Garden, off Holborn, in London, which had lost its pastor and was in a poor position, both spiritually and financially. The vacancy was offered to Dr. Chalmers's assistant, and after some heart-searchings was accepted by him. Here his sonorous eloquence and his thoroughgoing delivery of the Gospel message began to attract attention, and suddenly the strange Scottish giant became the fashion. The humble street was blocked by carriages on a Sunday morning, and some of the most distinguished men and women in London scrambled for a share of the very scanty accommodation. There is evidence that this extreme popularity did not last, and possibly the preacher's habit of expounding a text for an hour and a half was too much for the English weakling, however acceptable north of the Tweed. Finally a move was made to a larger church in Regent Square which could hold two thousand people, and there were sufficient stalwarts to fill this in decent fashion, though the preacher had ceased to excite the interest of his earlier days. Apart from his oratory, Irving seems to have been a conscientious and hardworking pastor, striving assiduously for the temporal needs of the more humble of his flock, and ever ready at all hours of the day or night to follow the call of duty.

Soon, however, there came a rift between him and the authorities of his Church. The matter in dispute made a very fine basis for a theological quarrel of the type which has done more harm in the world than the smallpox. The question was whether the Christ had in Him the possibility of sin, or whether the Divine portion of His being was a complete and absolute bar to physical temptations. The assessors contended that the association of such ideas as sin and Christ was a blasphemy. The obdurate clergyman, however, replied with some show of reason that unless the Christ had the capacity for sin, and successfully resisted it, His earthly lot was not the same as ours, and His virtues deserved less admiration. The matter was argued out in London with immense seriousness and at intolerable length, with the result that the presbytery declared its unanimous disapproval of the pastor’s views. As, however, his congregation in turn expressed their unqualified approval, he was able to disregard the censure of his official brethren.

But a greater stumbling-block lay ahead, and Irving’s encounter with it has made his name live as all names live which associate themselves with real spiritual issues. It should first be understood that Irving was deeply interested in Biblical prophecy, especially the vague and terrible images of St. John, and the strangely methodical forecasts of Daniel. He brooded much over the years and the days which were fixed as the allotted time before the days of wrath should precede the Second Coming of the Lord. There were others at that time-1830 and onwards-who were deeply immersed in the same sombre speculations. Among these was a wealthy banker named Drummond, who had a large country house at Albury, near Guildford. At this house these Biblical students used to assemble from time to time, discussing and comparing their views with such thoroughness that it was not unusual for their sittings to extend over a week, each day being fully taken up from breakfast to supper. This band was called the “Albury Prophets.” Excited by the political portents which led up to the Reform Bill, they all considered that the foundations of the deep had been loosened. It is hard to imagine what their reaction would have been had they lived to witness the Great War. As it was, they were convinced that the end of all things was at hand, and they looked out eagerly for signs and portents, twisting the vague and sinister words of the prophets into all manner of fantastic interpretations.

Finally, above the monotonous horizon of human happenings there did actually appear a strange manifestation. There had been a legend that the spiritual gifts of earlier days would reassert themselves before the end, and here apparently was the forgotten gift of tongues coming back into the experience of mankind. It had begun in 1830 on the western side of Scotland, where the names of the sensitives, Campbell and MacDonald, spoke of that Celtic blood which has always been more alive to spiritual influences than the heavier Teutonic strain. The Albury Prophets were much exercised in their minds, and an emissary was sent from Mr. Irving’s church to investigate and report. He found that the matter was very real. The people were of good repute, one of them, indeed, a woman whose character could best be described as saintly. The strange tongues in which they both talked broke out at intervals, and the manifestation was accompanied by healing miracles and other signs of power. Clearly it was no fraud or pretence, but a real influx of some strange force which carried one back to apostolic times. The faithful waited eagerly for further developments.

These were not long in coming, and they broke out in Irving's own church. It was in July, 1831, that it was rumoured that certain members of the congregation had been seized in this strange way in their own homes, and discreet exhibitions were held in the vestry and other secluded places. The pastor and his advisers were much puzzled as to whether a more public demonstration should be tolerated. The matter settled itself, however, after the fashion of affairs of the spirit, and in October of the same year the prosaic Church of Scotland service was suddenly interrupted by the strange outcry of the possessed. It came so suddenly and with such vehemence, both at the morning and afternoon service, that a panic set in in the church, and had it not been for their giant pastor thundering out, "Oh, Lord, still the tumult of the people!" a tragedy might have followed. There was also a good deal of hissing and uproar from those who were conservative in their tastes. Altogether the sensation was a considerable one, and the newspapers of the day were filled with it, though their comments were far from respectful or favourable.

The sounds came from both women and men, and consisted in the first instance of unintelligible noises which were either mere gibberish, or some entirely unknown language. "Sudden, doleful, and unintelligible sounds," says one witness. "There was a force and fulness of sound," said another description, "of which the delicate female organs would seem incapable." "It burst forth with an astounding and terrible crash," says a third. Many, however, were greatly impressed by these sounds, and among them was Irving himself. "There is a power in the voice to thrill the heart and overawe the spirit after a manner which I have never felt. There is a march and majesty and sustained grandeur of which I have never heard the like. It is likest to one of the simplest and most ancient chants in the cathedral service in so much that I have been led to think that these chants, which can be traced as high as Ambrose, are recollections of the inspired utterances of the primitive Church."

Soon, moreover, intelligible English words were added to the strange outbursts. These usually consisted of ejaculations and prayers, with no obvious sign of any supernormal character save that they broke out at unseasonable hours and independently of the will of the speaker. In some cases, however, these powers developed until the gifted one was able, while under the influence, to give long harangues, to lay down the law in most dogmatic fashion over points of doctrine, and to issue reproofs which occasionally were turned even in the direction of the longsuffering pastor.

There may have been-in fact, there probably was-a true psychic origin to these phenomena, but they had developed in a soil of narrow bigoted theology, which was bound to bring them to ruin. Even Swedenborg's religious system was too narrow to receive the full undistorted gifts of the spirit, so one can imagine what they became when contracted within the cramped limits of a Scottish church, where every truth must be shorn or twisted until it corresponds with some fantastic text. The new good wine will not go into the old narrow bottles. Had there been a fuller revelation, then doubtless other messages would have been received in other fashions which would have presented the matter in its just proportions, and checked one spiritual gift by others. But there was no development save towards chaos. Some of the teaching received could not be reconciled with orthodoxy, and was therefore obviously of the devil. Some of the sensitives condemned others as heretics. Voice was raised against voice. Worst of all, some of the chief speakers became convinced themselves that their own speeches were diabolical. Their chief reason seems to have been that they did not accord with their own spiritual convictions, which would seem to some of us rather an indication that they were angelic. They entered also upon the slippery path of prophecy, and were abashed when their own prophecies did not materialise.

Some of the statements which came through these sensitives, and which shocked their religious sensibilities, might seem to deserve serious consideration by a more enlightened generation. Thus one of these Bible-worshippers is recorded as saying, concerning the Bible Society, "That it was the curse going through the land, quenching the Spirit of God, by the letter of the Word of God." Right or wrong, such an utterance would seem to be independent of him who uttered it, and it is in close accord with many of the spiritual teachings which we receive to-day. So long as the letter is regarded as sacred, just so long can anything, even pure materialism, be proved from that volume.

One of the chief mouthpieces of the spirit was a certain Robert Baxter-not to be confused with the Baxter who some thirty years later was associated with certain remarkable prophecies. This Robert Baxter seems to have been a solid, earnest, prosaic citizen who viewed the Scriptures much as a lawyer views a legal document, with an exact valuation of every phrase-especially of such phrases as fitted into his own hereditary scheme of religion. He was an honest man with a restless conscience, which continually worried him over the smaller details, while leaving him quite unperturbed as to the broad platform upon which his beliefs were constructed. This man was powerfully affected by the influx of spirit-to use his own phrase, "his mouth was opened in power." According to him, January 14, 1832, was the beginning of those mystical 1,260 days which were to precede the Second Coming and the end of the world. Such a prediction must have been particularly sympathetic to Irving with his millennial dreams. But long before the days were fulfilled Irving was in his grave, and Baxter had forsworn those voices which had, in this instance at least, deceived him.

Baxter has written a pamphlet with the portentous title, "Narrative of Facts, Characterising the Supernatural Manifestations, in Members of Mr. Irving's Congregation, and other Individuals, in England and Scotland, and formerly in the Writer Himself." Spiritual truth could no more come through such a mind than white light could come through a prism, and yet in this account he has to admit the occurrence of many things which seem clearly preternatural, mixed up with much that is questionable, and some things which are demonstrably false. The object of the pamphlet is mainly to forswear his evil and invisible guides, so that he may return to the safe if flattish bosom of the Scottish Church. It is noticeable, however, that a second member of Irving's congregation wrote an answering pamphlet with an even longer title, which showed that Baxter was right so long as he was prompted by the spirit, and wrong in his Satanic inferences. This pamphlet is interesting as containing letters from various people who possessed the gift of tongues, showing that they were earnest-minded folk who were incapable of any conscious deception.

What is an impartial psychic student who is familiar with more modern phases to say to this development? Personally it seems to the author to have been a true psychic influx, blanketed and smothered by a petty sectarian theology of the letter-perfect description for which the Pharisees were reproved. If he may venture his individual opinion, it is that the perfect recipient of spiritual teaching is the earnest man who has worked his way through all the orthodox creeds, and whose mind, eager and receptive, is a blank surface ready to register a new impression exactly as received. He becomes the true child and pupil of other-world teaching, and all other types of Spiritualist appear to be compromises.

This does not alter the fact that personal nobility of character may make the honest compromiser a far higher type than the pure Spiritualist, but it applies only to the actual philosophy. The field of Spiritualism is infinitely broad, and on it every variety of Christian, as well as the Moslem, the Hindu or the Parsee, can dwell in brotherhood. But a mere acceptance of spirit return and communion is not enough. Many savages have that. We need a moral code as well, and whether we regard Christ as a benevolent teacher or as a divine ambassador, His actual ethical teaching in one form or another, even if not coupled with His name, is an essential thing for the upliftment of mankind. But always it must be checked by reason, and acted upon in the spirit and not according to the letter.

This, however, is digression. In the voices of 1831 there are the signs of real psychic power. It is a recognised spiritual law that all psychic manifestations become distorted when seen through the medium of narrow sectarian religion. It is also a law that pompous, inflated persons attract mischievous entities and are the butts of the spirit world, being made game of by the use of large names and by prophecies which make the prophet ridiculous. Such were the guides who descended upon the flock of Mr. Irving, and produced various effects, good or bad, according to the instrument used.

The unity of the Church, which had been shaken by the previous censure of the presbytery, dissolved under this new trial. There was a large secession, and the building was claimed by the trustees. Irving and the stalwarts who were loyal to him wandered forth in search of new premises, and found them in the hall used by Robert Owen, the Socialist, philanthropist, and free-thinker, who was destined twenty years later to be one of the pioneer converts to Spiritualism. Here, in Gray’s Inn Road, Irving rallied the faithful. It cannot be denied that the Church, as he organized it, with its angel, its elders, its deacons, its tongues, and its prophecies, was the best reconstruction of a primitive Christian Church that has ever been made. If Peter or Paul reincarnated in London they would be bewildered, and possibly horrified, by St. Paul’s or by Westminster Cathedral, but they would certainly have been in a perfectly familiar atmosphere in the gathering over which Irving presided. A wise man recognises that God may be approached from innumerable angles. The minds of men and the spirit of the times vary in their reaction to the great central cause, and one can only insist upon a broad charity both in oneself and in others. It was in this that Irving seems to have been wanting. It was always by the standard of that which was a sect among sects that he would measure the universe. There were times when he was vaguely conscious of this, and it may be that those wrestlings with Apollyon, of which he complains, even as Bunyan and the Puritans of old used to comes plain, had a strange explanation. Apollyon was really the Spirit of Truth, and the inward struggle was not between Faith and Sin, but was really between the darkness of inherited dogma, and the light of inherent and instinctive reason, God-given, and rising for ever in revolt against the absurdities of man.

But Irving lived very intensely and the successive crises through which he had passed had broken him down. These contests with argumentative theologians and with recalcitrant members of his flock may seem trivial things to us when viewed far off down the vista of years, but to him, with his eager, earnest, storm-torn soul, they were vital and terrible. To the unfettered mind this sect or that seems a matter of indifference, but to Irving, both from heredity and from education, the Scottish Church was the ark of God, and yet he, its zealous, faithful son, driven by his own conscience, had rushed forth and had found the great gates which contained Salvation slammed and barred behind him. He was a branch cut from the tree, and he withered. It is a true simile, and it is more than a simile, for it became an actual physical fact. This giant in early middle age wilted and shrank. His great frame stooped. His cheeks became hollow and wan. His eyes shone with the baleful fever which was consuming him. And so, working to the very end and with the words, “If I die, I die with the Lord,” upon his lips, his soul passed forth into that clearer and more golden light where the tired brain finds rest and the anxious spirit enters into a peace and assurance which life has never given.

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Apart from this isolated incident of Irving’s Church, there was one other psychic manifestation of those days which led more directly to the Hydesville revelation. This was the outbreak of spiritual phenomena among the Shaker communities in the United States, which has received less attention than it deserves.

These good people seem to have had affiliations on the one side with the Quakers, and, on the other, with the refugees from the Cevennes, who came to England to escape the persecution of Louis XIV. Even in England their harmless lives did not screen them from the persecution of the bigots, and they were forced to emigrate to America about the time of the War of Independence.

There they founded settlements in various parts, living simple cleanly lives upon communistic principles, with sobriety and chastity as their watchword. It is not surprising that as the psychic cloud of other-world power slowly settled upon the earth it should have found its first response from such altruistic communities. In 1837 there were sixty such bodies in existence, and all of them responded in various degrees to the new power. They kept their experiences very strictly to themselves at the time, for as their elders subsequently explained, they would certainly have been all consigned to Bedlam had they told what had actually occurred. Two books, however, "Holy Wisdom" and "The Sacred Roll," which arose from their experiences, appeared afterwards.

The phenomena seem to have begun with the usual warning noises, and to have been followed by the obsession from time to time of nearly all the community. Everyone, man and woman, proved to be open to spirit possession. The invaders only came, however, after asking permission, and at such intervals as did not interfere with the work of the community. The chief visitants were Red Indian spirits, who came collectively as a tribe. "One or two elders might be in the room below, and there would be a knock at the door and the Indians would ask whether they might come in. Permission being given, a whole tribe of Indian spirits would troop into the house, and in a few minutes you would hear 'Whoop!' here and 'Whoop!' there all over the house." The whoops emanated,-of course, from the vocal organs of the Shakers themselves, but while under the Indian control they would talk Indian among themselves, dance Indian dances, and in all ways show that they were really possessed by the Redskin spirits.

One may well ask why should these North American aborigines play so large a part not only in the inception, but in the continuance of this movement? There are few physical mediums in this country, as well as in America, who have not a Red Indian guide, whose photograph has not infrequently been obtained by psychic means, still retaining his scalp-locks and his robes. It is one of the many mysteries which we have still to solve.

We can only say for certain, from our own experience, that such spirits are powerful in producing physical phenomena, but that they never present the higher teaching which comes to us either from European or from Oriental spirits. The physical phenomena are still, however, of very great importance, as calling the attention of sceptics to the matter, and therefore the part assigned to the Indians is a very vital one. Men of the rude open-air type seem in spirit life to be especially associated with the crude manifestations of spirit activity, and it has been repeatedly asserted, though it is hard to say how it could be proved, that their chief organizer was an adventurer who in life was known as Henry Morgan, and died as Governor of Jamaica, a post to which he had been appointed in the time of Charles II. Such unproved assertions are, it must be admitted, of no value in our present state of knowledge, but they should be put on record as further information may in time shed some new light upon them. John King, which is the spirit name of the alleged Henry Morgan, is a very real being, and there are few Spiritualists of experience who have not seen his heavily-bearded face and heard his masterful voice. As to the Indians who are his colleagues or his subordinates, one can but hazard the conjecture that they are children of Nature who are nearer perhaps to the primitive secrets than other more complex races. It may be that their special work is of the nature of an expiation and atonement-an explanation which the author has heard from their lips.

These remarks may well seem a digression from the actual experience of the Shakers, but the difficulties raised in the mind of the inquirer arise largely from the number of new facts, without any order or explanation, which he is forced to encounter. His mind has no possible pigeon-hole into which they can be fitted. Therefore, the author will endeavour in these pages to provide so far as possible from his own experience, or from that of those upon whom he can rely, such sidelights as may make the matter more intelligible, and give at least a hint of those laws which lie behind, and are as binding upon spirits as upon ourselves. Above all, the inquirer must cast away for ever the idea that the discarnate are necessarily wise or powerful entities. They have their individuality and their limitations, even as we have, and these limitations become the more marked when they have to manifest themselves through so foreign a substance as matter.

The Shakers had among them a man of outstanding intelligence named F. W. Evans, who gave a very clear and entertaining account of all this matter, which may be sought by the curious in the NEW YORK DAILY GRAPHIC of November 24, 1874, and has been largely copied into Colonel Olcott's work, "People From the Other World."

Mr. Evans and his associates after the first disturbance, physical and mental, caused by this spirit irruption, settled down to study what it really meant. They came to the conclusion that the matter could be divided into three phases. The first phase was the actual proving to the observer that the thing was real. The second phase was one of instruction, as even the humblest spirit can bring information as to his own experience of after-death conditions. The third phase was called the missionary phase and was the practical application. The Shakers came to the unexpected conclusion that the Indians were there not to teach but to be taught. They proselytized them, therefore, exactly as they would have done in life. A similar experience has occurred since then in very many Spiritualistic circles, where humble and lowly spirits have come to be taught that which they should have learned in this world had true teachers been available. One may well ask why the higher spirits over there do not supply this want? The answer given to the author upon one notable occasion was, "These people are very much nearer to you than to us. You can reach theta where we fail."

It is clear from this that the good Shakers were never in touch with the higher guides-possibly they did not need guidance-and that their visitors were on a low plane. For seven years these visitations continued. When the spirits left they informed their hosts that they were going, but that presently they would return, and that when they did so they would pervade the world and enter the palace as well as the cottage. It was just four years later that the Rochester knockings broke out. When they did so, Elder Evans and another Shaker visited Rochester and saw the Fox sisters. Their arrival was greeted with great enthusiasm from the unseen forces, who proclaimed that this was indeed the work which had been foretold.

One remark of Elder Evans is worth transcribing. When asked, "Don't you think your experience is much the same as that of monks and nuns in the Middle Ages?" he did not answer. "Ours were angelic but these others were diabolical," as would have been said had the situation been reversed, but he replied with fine candour and breadth of mind, "Certainly. That is the proper explanation of them through all the ages. The visions of Saint Theresa were Spiritualistic visions just such as we have frequently had vouchsafed to the members of our society." When further asked whether magic and necromancy did not belong to the same category, he answered, “Yes. That is when Spiritualism is used for selfish ends.” It is clear that there were men living nearly a century ago who were capable of instructing our wise men of to-day.

That very remarkable woman, Mrs. Hardinge Britten, has recorded in her “Modern American Spiritualism” how she came in close contact with the Shaker community, and was shown by them the records, taken at the time, of their spiritual visitation. In them it was stated that the new era was to be inaugurated by an extraordinary discovery of material as well as of spiritual wealth. This is a most remarkable prophecy, as it is a matter of history that the goldfields of California were discovered within a very short time of the psychic outburst. A Swedenborg with his doctrine of correspondences might perhaps contend that the one was complementary to the other.

This episode of the Shaker manifestations is a very distinct link between the Swedenborg pioneer work and the period of Davis and the Fox sisters. We shall now consider the career of the former, which is intimately associated with the rise and progress of the modern psychic movement.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPHET OF THE NEW REVELATION

ANDREW JACKSON DAVIS was one of the most remarkable men of whom we have any exact record. Born in 1826 on the banks of the Hudson, his mother was an uneducated woman, with a visionary turn which was allied to vulgar superstition, while his father was a drunken worker in leather. He has written the details of his own childhood in a curious book, “The Magic Staff,” which brings home to us the primitive and yet forceful life of the American provinces in the first half of last century. The people were rude and uneducated, but their spiritual side was very much alive, and they seem to have been reaching out continually for some new thing. It was in these country districts of New York in the space of a few years that both Mormonism and modern Spiritualism were evolved.

There never could have been a lad with fewer natural advantages than Davis. He was feeble in body and starved in mind. Outside an occasional school primer he could only recall one book that he had ever read up to his sixteenth year. Yet in that poor entity there lurked such spiritual forces that before he was twenty he had written one of the most profound and original books of philosophy ever produced. Could there be a clearer proof that nothing came from himself, and that he was but a conduit pipe through which flowed the knowledge of that vast reservoir which finds such inexplicable outlets? The valour of a Joan of Arc, the sanctity of a Theresa, the wisdom of a Jackson Davis, the supernormal powers of a Daniel Home, all come from the same source.

In his later boyhood, Davis’s latent psychic powers began to develop. Like Joan, he heard voices in the fields-gentle voices which gave him good advice and comfort. Clairvoyance followed this clairaudience. At the time of his mother’s death, he had a striking vision of a lovely home in a land of brightness which he conjectured to be the place to which his mother had gone. His full capacity was tapped, however, by the chance that a travelling showman who exhibited the wonders of mesmerism came to the village and experimented upon Davis, as well as on many other young rustics who desired to experience the sensation. It was soon found that Davis had very remarkable clairvoyant powers.

These were developed not by the peripatetic mesmerist, but by a local tailor named Levingston, who seems to have been a pioneer thinker. He was so intrigued by the wonderful gifts of his subject, that he abandoned his prosperous business and devoted his whole time to working with Davis and to using his clairvoyant powers for the diagnosis of disease. Davis had developed the power, common among psychics, of seeing without the eyes, including things which could not be seen in any case by human vision. At first, the gift was used as a sort of amusement in reading the letters or the watches of the assembled rustics when his eyes were bandaged. In such cases all parts of the body can assume the function of sight, and the reason probably is that the etheric or spiritual body, which possesses the same organs as the physical, is wholly or partially disengaged, and that it registers the impression. Since it might assume any posture, or might turn completely round, one would naturally get vision from any angle, and an explanation is furnished of such cases as the author met in the north of England, where Tom Tyrrell, the famous medium, used to walk round a room, admiring the pictures, with the back of his head turned towards the walls on which they were hung. Whether in such cases the etheric eyes see the picture, or whether they see the etheric duplicate of the picture, is one of the many problems which we leave to our descendants.

Levingston used Davis at first for medical diagnosis. He described how the human body became transparent to his spirit eyes, which seemed to act from the centre of his forehead. Each organ stood out clearly and with a special radiance of its own which was dimmed in case of disease. To the orthodox medical mind, with which the author has much sympathy, such powers are suspect as opening a door for quackery, and yet he is bound to admit that all that was said by Davis has been corroborated within his own experience by Mr. Bloomfield, of Melbourne, who described to him the amazement which he felt when this power came suddenly upon him in the street, and revealed the anatomy of two persons who were walking in front of him. So well attested are such powers that it has been not unusual for medical men to engage clairvoyants as helpers in diagnosis. Hippocrates says, “The affections suffered by the body the soul sees with shut eyes.” Apparently, then, the ancients knew something of such methods. Davis’s ministrations were not confined to those who were in his presence, but hi;

soul or etheric body could be liberated by the magnetic manipulation of his employer, and could be sent forth like a carrier pigeon with the certainty that it would come home again bearing any desired information. Apart from the humanitarian mission on which it was usually engaged it would sometimes roam at will, and he has described in wonderful passages how he would see a translucent earth beneath him, with the great veins of mineral beds shining through like masses of molten metal, each with its own fiery radiance.

It is notable that at this earlier phase of Davis's psychic experience he had no memory when he returned from trance of what his impressions had been. They were registered, however, upon his subconscious mind, and at a later date he recalled them all clearly. For the time he was a source of instruction to others but remained ignorant himself.

Until then his development had been on lines which are not uncommon, and which could be matched within the experience of every psychic student. But then there occurred an episode which was entirely novel and which is described in close detail in the autobiography. Put briefly, the facts were these. On the evening of March 6, 1844, Davis was suddenly possessed by some power which led him to fly from the little town of Poughkeepsie, where he lived, and to hurry off, in a condition of semi-trance, upon a rapid journey. When he regained his clear perceptions he found himself among wild mountains, and there he claims to have met two venerable men with whom he held intimate and elevating communion, the one upon medicine and the other upon morals. All night he was out, and when he inquired his whereabouts next morning he was told that he was in the Catskill Mountains and forty miles from his home. The whole narrative reads like a subjective experience, a dream or a vision, and one would not hesitate to place it as such were it not for the details of his reception and the meal he ate upon his return. It is a possible alternative that the flight into the mountains was a reality and the interviews a dream. He claims that he afterwards identified his two mentors as Galen and Swedenborg, which is interesting as being the first contact with the dead which he had ever recognised. The whole episode seems visionary, and had no direct bearing upon the lad's remarkable future.

He felt higher powers stirring within him, and it was remarked to him that when he was asked profound questions in the mesmeric trance he always replied, "I will answer that in my book." In his nineteenth year he felt that the hour for writing the book had come. The mesmeric influence of Levingston did not, for some reason, seem suited for this, and a Dr. Lyon was chosen as the new mesmerist. Lyon threw up his practice and went with his singular protege to New York, where they presently called upon the Rev. William Fishbough to come and act as amanuensis. The intuitional selection seems to have been justified, for he also at once gave up his work and obeyed the summons. Then, the apparatus being ready, Lyon threw the lad day after day into the magnetic trance, and his utterances were taken down by the faithful secretary. There was no money and no publicity in the matter, and even the most sceptical critic cannot but admit that the occupation and objects of these three men were a wonderful contrast to the money-making material world which surrounded them. They were reaching out to the beyond, and what can man do that is nobler?

It is to be understood that a pipe can carry no more than its own diameter permits. The diameter of Davis was very different from that of Swedenborg. Each got knowledge while in an illuminated state. But Swedenborg was the most learned man in Europe, while Davis was as ignorant a young man as could be found in the State of New York. Swedenborg's revelation was perhaps the greater, though more likely to be tinged by his own brain. The revelation of Davis was incomparably the greater miracle.

Dr. George Bush, Professor of Hebrew in the University of New York, who was one of those present while the trance orations were being taken down, writes:

I can solemnly affirm that I have heard Davis correctly quote the Hebrew language in his lectures, and display a knowledge of geology which would have been astonishing in a person of his age, even if he had devoted years to the study. He has discussed, with the most signal ability, the profoundest questions of historical and biblical archeology, of mythology, of the origin and affinity of language, and the progress of civilization among the different nations of the globe, which would do honour to any scholar of the age, even if in reaching them he had the advantage of access to all the libraries in Christendom. Indeed, if he had acquired all the information he gives forth in these lectures, not in the two years since he left the shoemaker's bench, but in his whole life, with the most assiduous study, no prodigy of intellect of which the world has ever heard would be for a moment compared with him, yet not a single volume or page has he ever read.

Davis has a remarkable pen-picture of himself at that moment. He asks us to take stock of his equipment. “The circumference of his head is unusually small,” says he. “If size is the measure of power, then this youth’s mental capacity is unusually limited. His lungs are weak and unexpanded. He had not dwelt amid refining influences-manners ungentle and awkward. He has not read a book save one. He knows nothing of grammar or the rules of language, nor associated with literary or scientific persons.” Such was the lad of nineteen from whom there now poured a perfect cataract of words and ideas which are open to the criticism not of simplicity, but of being too complex and too shrouded in learned terms, although always with a consistent thread of reason and method beneath them.

It is very well to talk of the subconscious mind, but this has usually been taken as the appearance of ideas which have been received and then submerged. When, for example, the developed Davis could recall what had happened in his trances during his undeveloped days, that was a clear instance of the emerging of the buried impressions. But it seems an abuse of words to talk of the unconscious mind when we are dealing with something which could never by normal means have reached any stratum of the mind, whether conscious or not.

Such was the beginning of Davis’s great psychic revelation which extended eventually over many books and is all covered by the name of the “Harmonica Philosophy.” Of its nature and its place in psychic teaching we shall treat later.

In this phase of his life Davis claims still to have been under the direct influence of the person whom he afterwards identified as Swedenborg-a name quite unfamiliar to him at the time. From time to time he received a clairaudient summons to “go up into the mountain.” This mountain was a hill on the farther bank of the Hudson opposite Poughkeepsie. There on the mountain he claims that he met and spoke with a venerable figure. There seems to have been none of the details of a materialisation, and the incident has no analogy in our psychic experience, save indeed-and one speaks with all reverence-when the Christ also went up into a mountain and communed with the forms of Moses and Elias. There the analogy seems complete.

Davis does not appear to have been at all a religious man in the ordinary conventional sense, although he was drenched with true spiritual power. His views, so far as one can follow them, were very critical as regards Biblical revelation, and, to put it at the lowest, he was no believer in literal interpretation. But he was honest, earnest, unvenal, anxious to get the truth and conscious of his responsibility in spreading it.

For two years the unconscious Davis continued to dictate his book upon the secrets of Nature, while the conscious Davis did a little self-education in New York with occasional restorative visits to Poughkeepsie. He had begun to attract the attention of some serious people, Edgar Allan Poe being one of his visitors. His psychic development went on, and before he reached his twenty-first year he had attained a state when he needed no second person to throw him into trance but could do it for himself. His subconscious memory too was at last opened, and he was able to go over the whole long vista of his experiences. It was at this time that he sat by a dying woman and observed every detail of the soul's departure, a wonderful description of which is given in the first volume of the "Great Harmonia." Although this description has been issued as a separate pamphlet it is not as well known as it should be, and a short epitome of it may interest the reader.

He begins by the consoling reflection that his own soul-flights, which were death in everything save duration, had shown him that the experience was "interesting and delightful," and that those symptoms which appear to be signs of pain are really the unconscious reflexes of the body, and have no significance. He then tells how, having first thrown himself into what he calls the "Superior condition," he thus observed the stages from the spiritual side. "The material eye can only see what is material, and the spiritual what is spiritual," but as everything would seem to have a spiritual counterpart the result is the same. Thus when a spirit comes to us it is not us that it perceives but our etheric bodies, which are, however, duplicates of our real ones.

It was this etheric body which Davis saw emerging from its poor outworn envelope of protoplasm, which finally lay empty upon the bed like the shrivelled chrysalis when the moth is free. The process began by an extreme concentration in the brain, which became more and more luminous as the extremities became darker. It is probable that man never thinks so clearly, or is so intensely conscious, as he becomes after all means of indicating his thoughts have left him. Then the new body begins to emerge, the head disengaging itself first. Soon it has completely freed itself, standing at right-angles to the corpse, with its feet near the head, and with some luminous vital band between which corresponds to the umbilical cord. When the cord snaps a small portion is drawn back into the dead body, and it is this which preserves it from instant putrefaction. As to the etheric body, it takes some little time to adapt itself to its new surroundings, and in this instance it then passed out through the open doors. “I saw her pass through the adjoining room, out of the door and step from the house into the atmosphereÉ. Immediately upon her emergement from the house she was joined by two friendly spirits from the spiritual country, and after tenderly recognising and communing with each other the three, in the most graceful manner, began ascending obliquely through the ethereal envelopment of our globe. They walked so naturally and fraternally together that I could scarcely realise the fact that they trod the air-they seemed to be walking on the side of a glorious but familiar mountain. I continued to gaze upon them until the distance shut them from my view.”

Such is the vision of Death as seen by A. J. Davis-a very different one from that dark horror which has so long obsessed the human imagination. If this be the truth, then we can sympathize with Dr. Hodgson in his exclamation, “I can hardly bear to wait.” But is it true? We can only say that there is a great deal of corroborative evidence.

Many who have been in the cataleptic condition, or who have been so ill that they have sunk into deep coma, have brought back impressions very consistent with Davis’s explanation, though others have returned with their minds completely blank. The author, when at Cincinnati in 1923, was brought into contact with a Mrs. Monk, who had been set down as dead by her doctors, and for an hour or so had experienced a post-mortem existence before some freak of fate restored her to life. She wrote a short account of her experience, in which she had a vivid remembrance of walking out of the room, just as Davis described, and also of the silver thread which continued to unite her living soul to her comatose body. A remarkable case was reported in LIGHT, also (March 25, 1922), in which the five daughters of a dying woman, all of them clairvoyant, watched and reported the process of their mother’s death. There again the description of the process was very analogous to that given, and yet there is sufficient difference in this and other accounts to suggest that the sequence of events is not always regulated by the same laws. Another variation of extreme interest is to be found in a drawing done by a child medium which depicts the soul leaving the body and is described in Mrs. De Morgan’s “From Matter to Spirit” (p. 121). This book, with its weighty preface by the celebrated mathematician Professor De Morgan, is one of the pioneer works of the spiritual movement in Great Britain. When one reflects that it was published in 1863 one's heart grows heavy at the success of those forces of obstruction, reflected so strongly in the Press, which have succeeded for so many years in standing between God's message and the human race.

The prophetic power of Davis can only be got over by the sceptic if he ignores the record. Before 1856 he prophesied in detail the coining of the motor car and of the typewriter. In his book, "The Penetralia," appears the following:

"Question: Will utilitarianism make any discoveries in other locomotive directions?"

"Yes; look out about these days for carriages and travelling saloons on country roads-without horses, without steam, without any visible motive power moving with greater speed and far more safety than at present.

Carriages will be moved by a strange and beautiful and simple admixture of aqueous and atmospheric gases-so easily condensed, so simply ignited, and so imparted by a machine somewhat resembling our engines, as to be entirely concealed and manageable between the forward wheels. These vehicles will prevent many embarrassments now experienced by persons living in thinly populated territories. The first requisite for these land-locomotives will be good roads, upon which with your engine, without your horses, you may travel with great rapidity. These carriages seem to me of uncomplicated construction."

He was next asked:

"Do you perceive any plan by which to expedite the art of writing?"

"Yes; I am almost moved to invent an automatic psychographer-that is, an artificial soul-writer. It may be constructed something like a piano, one brace or scale of keys to represent the elementary sounds; another and lower tier to represent a combination, and still another for a rapid re-combination; so that a person, instead of playing a piece of music, may touch off a sermon or a poem."

So, too, this seer, in reply to a query regarding what was then termed "atmospheric navigation," felt "deeply impressed" that "the necessary mechanism-to transcend the adverse currents of air, so that we may sail as easily and safely and pleasantly as birds-is dependent on a new motive power. This power will come. It will not only move the locomotive on the rail, and the carriage on the country road, but the aerial cars also, which will move through the sky from country to country."

He predicted the coming of Spiritualism in his “Principles of Nature,” published in 1847, where he says:

It is a truth that spirits commune with one another while one is in the body and the other in the higher spheres-and this, too, when the person in the body is unconscious of the influx, and hence cannot be convinced of the fact; and this truth will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration. And the world will hail with delight the ushering-in of that era when the interiors of men will be opened, and the spiritual communion will be established such as is now being enjoyed by the inhabitants of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

In this matter Davis’s teaching was definite, but it must be admitted that in a good deal of his work he is indefinite and that it is hard reading, for it is disfigured by the use of long words, and occasionally he even invents a vocabulary of his own. It was, however, on a very high moral and intellectual level, and might be best described as an up-to-date Christianity with Christ’s ethics applied to modern problems and entirely freed from all trace of dogma. “Documentary Religion,” as Davis called it, was not in his opinion religion at all. That name could only be applied to the personal product of reason and spirituality. Such was the general line of teaching, mixed up with many revelations of Nature, which was laid down in the successive books of the “Harmonial Philosophy” which succeeded “Nature’s Divine Revelations,” and occupied the next few years of his life. Much of the teaching appeared in a strange paper called “The Univercoelum,” and much was spread by lectures in which he laid before the public the results of his revelations.

In his spiritual vision Davis saw an arrangement of the universe which corresponds closely with that which Swedenborg had already noted, and with that afterwards taught by the spirits and accepted by the Spiritualists. He saw a life which resembled that of earth, a life that may be called semi-material, with pleasures and pursuits that would appeal to our natures which had been by no means changed by death. He saw study for the studious, congenial tasks for the energetic, art for the artistic, beauty for the lover of Nature, rest for the weary ones. He saw graduated phases of spiritual life, through which one slowly rose to the sublime and the celestial. He carried his magnificent vision onward beyond the present universe, and saw it dissolve once more into the fire-mist from which it had consolidated, and then consolidate once more to form the stage on which a higher evolution could take place, the highest class here starting as the lowest class there. This process he saw renew itself innumerable times, covering trillions of years, and ever working towards refinement and purification. These spheres he pictured as concentric rings round the world, but as he admits that neither time nor space define themselves clearly in his visions, we need not take their geography in too literal a sense. The object of life was to qualify for advancement in this tremendous scheme, and the best method of human advancement was to get away from sin-not only the sins which are usually recognised, but also those sins of bigotry, narrowness and hardness, which are very especially blemishes not of the ephemeral flesh but of the permanent spirit. For this purpose the return to simple life, simple beliefs, and primitive brotherhood was essential. Money, alcohol, lust, violence and priestcraft-in its narrow sense-were the chief impediments to racial progress.

It must be admitted that Davis, so far as one can follow his life, lived up to his own professions. He was very humble-minded, and yet he was of the stuff that saints are made of. His autobiography extends only to 1857, so that he was little over thirty when he published it, but it gives a very complete and sometimes an involuntary insight into the man. He was very poor, but he was just and charitable. He was very earnest, and yet he was patient in argument and gentle under contradiction. The worst motives were imputed to him, and he records them with a tolerant smile. He gives a full account of his first two marriages, which were as unusual as everything else about him, but which reflect nothing but credit upon him. From the date at which "The Magic Staff" finishes he seems to have carried on the same life of alternate writing and lecturing, winning more and more the ear of the world, until he died in the year 1910 at the age of eighty-four. The last years of his life he spent as keeper of some small book-store in Boston. The fact that his "Harmonial Philosophy" has now passed through some forty editions in the United States is a proof that the seed which he scattered so assiduously has not all fallen upon barren ground.

What is of importance to us is the part played by Davis at the commencement of the spiritual revelation. He began to prepare the ground before that revelation occurred. He was clearly destined to be closely associated with it, for he was aware of the material demonstration at Hydesville upon the very day when it occurred. From his notes there is quoted the sentence, under the vital date of March 31, 1848: "About daylight this morning a warm breathing passed over my face and I heard a voice, tender and strong, saying, ‘Brother, the good work has begun-behold, a living demonstration is born.’ I was left wondering what could be meant by such a message.” It was the beginning of the mighty movement in which he was to act as prophet. His own powers were themselves supernormal upon the mental side, just as the physical signs were upon the material side. Each supplemented the other. He was, up to the limit of his capacity, the soul of the movement, the one brain which had a clear vision of the message which was heralded in so novel and strange a way. No man can take the whole message, for it is infinite, and rises ever higher as we come into contact with higher beings, but Davis interpreted it so well for his day and generation that little can be added even now to his conception.

He had advanced one step beyond Swedenborg, though he had not Swedenborg’s mental equipment with which to marshal his results. Swedenborg had seen a heaven and hell, even as Davis saw it and has described it with fuller detail. Swedenborg did not, however, get a clear vision of the position of the dead and the true nature of the spirit world with the possibility of return as it was revealed to the American seer. This knowledge came slowly to Davis. His strange interviews with what he described as “materialised spirits” were exceptional things, and he drew no common conclusions from them. It was later when he was brought into contact with actual spiritual phenomena that he was able to see the full meaning of them. This contact was not established at Rochester, but rather at Stratford in Connecticut, where Davis was a witness of the Poltergeist phenomena which broke out in the household of a clergyman, Dr. Phelps, in the early months of 1850. A study of these led him to write a pamphlet, “The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse,” expanded afterwards to a book which contains much which the world has not yet mastered. Some of it, in its wise restraint, may also be commended to some Spiritualists. “Spiritualism is useful as a living demonstration of a future existence,” he says. “Spirits have aided me many times, but they do not control either my person or my reason. They can and do perform kindly offices for those on earth. But benefits can only be secured on the condition that we allow them to become our teachers and not our masters-that we accept them as companions, not as gods to be worshipped.” Wise words-and a modern restatement of the vital remark of Saint Paul that the prophet must not be subject to his own gifts.

In order to explain adequately the life of Davis one has to ascend to supernormal conditions. But even then there are alternative explanations. When one considers the following undeniable facts:

1. That he claims to have seen and heard the materialised form of Swedenborg before he knew anything of his teachings.

2. That SOMETHING possessed this ignorant youth, which gave him great knowledge.

3. That this knowledge took the same broad sweeping universal lines which were characteristic of Swedenborg.

4. But that they went one step farther, having added just that knowledge of spirit power which Swedenborg may have attained after his death.

Considering these four points, then, is it not a feasible hypothesis that the power which controlled Davis was actually Swedenborg? It would be well if the estimable but very narrow and limited New Church took such possibilities into account. But whether Davis stood alone, or whether he was the reflection of one greater than himself, the fact remains that he was a miracle man, the inspired, learned, uneducated apostle of the new dispensation. So permanent has been his influence that the well-known artist and critic Mr. E. Wake Cook, in his remarkable book “Retrogression in Art,”* harks back to Davis’s teaching as the one modern influence which could recast the world. Davis left his mark deep upon Spiritualism. “Summerland,” for example, as a name for the modern Paradise, and the whole system of Lyceum schools with their ingenious organization, are of his devising. As Mr. Baseden Butt has remarked, “Even to-day the full and final extent of his influence is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to assess.”

* HUTCHINSON’S, 1924. OCCULT REVIEW, February, 1925.

CHAPTER IV

THE HYDESVILLE EPISODE

We have now traced various disconnected and irregular uprushes of psychic force in the cases which have been set forth, and we come at last to the particular episode which was really on a lower level than those which had gone before, but which occurred within the ken of a practical people who found means to explore it thoroughly and to introduce reason and system into what had been a mere object of aimless wonder. It is true that the circumstances were lowly, the actors humble, the place remote, and the communication sordid, being based on no higher motive than revenge. When, however, in the everyday affairs of this world one wishes to test whether a telegraphic wire is in operation, one notices whether a message comes through, and the high or low nature of that message is quite a secondary consideration. It is said that the first message which actually came through the Transatlantic cable was a commonplace inquiry from the testing engineer. None the less, kings and presidents have used it since. So it is that the humble spirit of the murdered peddler of Hydesville may have opened a gap into which the angels have thronged. There is good and bad and all that is intermediate on the Other Side as on this side of the veil. The company you attract depends upon yourself and your own motives.

Hydesville is a typical little hamlet of New York State, with a primitive population which was, no doubt, half-educated, but was probably, like the rest of those small American centres of life, more detached from prejudice and more receptive of new ideas than any other set of people at that time. This particular village, situated about twenty miles from the rising town of Rochester, consisted of a cluster of wooden houses of a very humble type. It was in one of these, a residence which would certainly not pass the requirements of a British district council surveyor, that there began this development which is already, in the opinion of many, by far the most important thing that America has given to the commonweal of the world. It was inhabited by a decent farmer family of the name of Fox-a name which, by a curious coincidence, has already been registered in religious history as that of the apostle of the Quakers. Besides the father and mother, who were Methodists in religion, there were two children resident in the house at the time when the manifestations reached such a point of intensity that they attracted general attention. These children were the daughters-Margaret, aged fourteen, and Kate, aged eleven. There were several other children out in the world, of whom only one, Leah, who was teaching music in Rochester, need come into this narrative.

The little house had already established a somewhat uncanny reputation. The evidence to this effect was collected and published very shortly after the event, and seems to be as reliable as such evidence can be. In view of the extreme importance of everything which bears upon the matter, some extracts from these depositions must be inserted, but to avoid dislocation of the narrative the evidence upon this point has been relegated to the Appendix. We will therefore pass at once to the time of the tenancy of the Fox family, who took over the house on December 11, 1847. It was not until the next year that the sounds heard by the previous tenants began once more. These sounds consisted of rapping noises. A rap would seem to be the not unnatural sound to be produced by outside visitors when they wished to notify their presence at the door of human life and desired that door to be opened for them. Just such raps (all unknown to these unread farmers) had occurred in England in 1661 at the house of Mr. Mompesson, at Tedworth.* Raps, too, are recorded by Melancthon as having occurred at Oppenheim, in Germany, in 1520, and raps were heard at the Epworth Vicarage in 1716. Here they were once more, and at last they were destined to have the closed door open.

* “Saducismus Triumphatus,” by Rev. Joseph Glanvil.

The noises do not seem to have incommoded the Fox family until the middle of March, 1848. From that date onwards they continually increased in intensity. Sometimes they were a mere knocking; at other times they sounded like the movement of furniture. The children were so alarmed that they refused to sleep apart and were taken into the bedroom of their parents. So vibrant were the sounds that the beds thrilled and shook. Every possible search was made, the husband waiting on one side of the door and the wife on the other, but the rappings still continued. It was soon noticed that daylight was inimical to the phenomena, and this naturally strengthened the idea of trickery, but every possible solution was tested and failed. Finally, upon the night of March 31 there was a very loud and continued outbreak of inexplicable sounds. It was on this night that one of the great points of psychic evolution was reached, for it was then that young Kate Fox challenged the unseen power to repeat the snaps of her fingers. That rude room, with its earnest, expectant, half-clad occupants with eager upturned faces, its circle of candlelight, and its heavy shadows lurking in the corners, might well be made the subject of a great historical painting. Search all the palaces and chancelleries of 1848, and where will you find a chamber which has made its place in history as secure as this little bedroom of a shack?

The child's challenge, though given with flippant words, was instantly answered. Every snap was echoed by a knock. However humble the operator at either end, the spiritual telegraph was at last working, and it was left to the patience and moral earnestness of the human race to determine how high might be the uses to which it was put in the future. Unexplained forces were many in the world, but here was a force claiming to have independent intelligence at the back of it. That was the supreme sign of a new departure.

Mrs. Fox was amazed at this development, and at the further discovery that the force could apparently see as well as hear, for when Kate snapped her fingers without sound the rap still responded. The mother asked a series of questions, the answers to which, given in numerals, showed a greater knowledge of her own affairs than she herself possessed, for the raps insisted that she had had seven children, whereas she protested that she had borne only six, until one who had died early came back to her mind. A neighbour, Mrs. Redfield, was called in, and her amusement was changed to wonder, and finally to awe, as she also listened to correct answers to intimate questions.

The neighbours came flocking in as some rumours of these wonders got about, and the two children were carried off by one of them, while Mrs. Fox went to spend the night at Mrs. Redfield's. In their absence the phenomena went on exactly the same as before, which disposes once for all of those theories of cracking toes and dislocating knees which have been so frequently put forward by people unaware of the true facts.

Having formed a sort of informal committee of investigation, the crowd, in shrewd Yankee fashion, spent a large part of the night of March 31 in playing question and answer with the unseen intelligence. According to its own account he was a spirit; he had been injured in that house; he rapped out the name of a former occupant who had injured him; he was thirty-one years old at the time of death (which was five years before); he had been murdered for money; he had been buried in the cellar ten feet deep. On descending to the cellar, dull, heavy thumps, coming apparently from under the earth, broke out when the investigator stood at the centre. There was no sound at other times. That, then, was the place of burial! It was a neighbour named Duesler who, first of all modern men, called over the alphabet and got answers by raps on the letters. In this way the name of the dead man was obtained-Charles B. Rosma. The idea of connected messages was not developed until four months later, when Isaac Post, a Quaker, of Rochester, was the pioneer. These, in very brief outline, were the events of March 31, which were continued and confirmed upon the succeeding night, when not fewer than a couple of hundred people had assembled round the house. Upon April 2 it was observed that the raps came in the day as well as at night.

Such is a synopsis of the events of the night of March 31, 1848, but as it was the small root out of which sprang so great a tree, and as this whole volume may be said to be a monument to its memory, it would seem fitting that the story should be given in the very words of the two original adult witnesses. Their evidence was taken within four days of the occurrence, and forms part of that admirable piece of psychic research upon the part of the local committee which will be described and commented upon later. Mrs. Fox deposed:

On the night of the first disturbance we all got up, lighted a candle and searched the entire house, the noises continuing during the time, and being heard near the same place. Although not very loud, it produced a jar of the bedsteads and chairs that could be felt when we were in bed. It was a tremulous motion, more than a sudden jar. We could feel the jar when standing on the floor. It continued on this night until we slept. I did not sleep until about twelve o’clock. On March 30th we were disturbed all night. The noises were heard in all parts of the house. My husband stationed himself outside of the door while I stood inside, and the knocks came on the door between us. We heard footsteps in the pantry, and walking downstairs; we could not rest, and I then concluded that the house must be haunted by some unhappy restless spirit. I had often heard of such things, but had never witnessed anything of the kind that I could not account for before.

On Friday night, March 31st, 1848, we concluded to go to bed early and not permit ourselves to be disturbed by the noises, but try and get a night's rest. My husband was here on all these occasions, heard the noises, and helped search. It was very early when we went to bed on this night-hardly dark. I had been so broken of my rest I was almost sick. My husband had not gone to bed when we first heard the noise on this evening. I had just lain down. It commenced as usual. I knew it from all other noises I had ever heard before. The children, who slept in the other bed in the room, heard the rapping, and tried to make similar sounds by snapping their fingers.

My youngest child, Cathie, said: "Mr. Splitfoot, do as I do," clapping her hands. The sound instantly followed her with the same number of raps. When she stopped, the sound ceased for a short time. Then Margaretta said, in sport, "Now, do just as I do. Count one, two, three, four," striking one hand against the other at the same time; and the raps came as before. She was afraid to repeat them. Then Cathie said in her childish simplicity, "Oh, mother, I know what it is. To-morrow is April-fool day, and it's somebody trying to fool us."

I then thought I could put a test that no one in the place could answer. I asked the noise to rap my different children's ages, successively. Instantly, each one of my children's ages was given correctly, pausing between them sufficiently long to individualise them until the seventh, at which a longer pause was made, and then three more emphatic raps were given, corresponding to the age of the little one that died, which was my youngest child.

I then asked: "Is this a human being that answers my questions so correctly?" There was no rap. I asked: "Is it a spirit? If it is, make two raps." Two sounds were given as soon as the request was made. I then said "If it was an injured spirit, make two raps," which were instantly made, causing the house to tremble. I asked: "Were you injured in this house?" The answer was given as before. "Is the person living that injured you?"

Answered by raps in the same manner. I ascertained by the same method that it was a man, aged thirty-one years, that he had been murdered in this house, and his remains were buried in the cellar; that his family consisted of a wife and five children, two sons and three daughters, all living at the time of his death, but that his wife had since died. I asked: "Will you continue to rap if I call my neighbours that they may hear it too?" The raps were loud in the affirmative.

My husband went and called in Mrs. Redfield, our nearest neighbour. She is a very candid woman. The girls were sitting up in bed clinging to each other, and trembling with terror. I think I was as calm as I am now. Mrs. Redfield came immediately (this was about half-past seven), thinking she would have a laugh at the children. But when she saw them pale with fright, and nearly speechless, she was amazed, and believed there was something more serious than she had supposed. I asked a few questions for her, and was answered as before. He told her age exactly. She then called her husband, and the same questions were asked and answered.

Then Mr. Redfield called in Mr. Duesler and wife, and several others. Mr. Duesler then called in Mr. and Mrs. Hyde, also Mr. and Mrs. Jewell. Mr. Duesler asked many questions, and received answers. I then named all the neighbours I could think of, and asked if any of them had injured him, and received no answer. Mr. Duesler then asked questions and received answers. He asked: “Were you murdered?” Raps affirmative. “Can your murderer be brought to justice?” No sound. “Can he be punished by the law?” No answer. He then said: “If your murderer cannot be punished by the law, manifest it by raps,” and the raps were made clearly and distinctly. In the same way, Mr. Duesler ascertained that he was murdered in the east bedroom about five years ago and that the murder was committed by a Mr. on a Tuesday night at twelve o’clock; that he was murdered by having his throat cut with a butcher knife; that the body was taken down to the cellar; that it was not buried until the next night; that it was taken through the buttery, down the stairway, and that it was buried ten feet below the surface of the ground. It was also ascertained that he was murdered for his money, by raps affirmative.

“How much was it-one hundred?” No rap. “Was it two hundred?” etc., and when he mentioned five hundred the raps replied in the affirmative.

Many called in who were fishing in the creek, and all heard the same questions and answers. Many remained in the house all night. I and my children left the house.

My husband remained in the house with Mr. Redfield all night. On the next Saturday the house was filled to overflowing. There were no sounds heard during day, but they commenced again in the evening. It was said that there were over three hundred persons present at the time. On Sunday morning the noises were heard throughout the day by all who came to the house.

On Saturday night, April 1st, they commenced digging in the cellar; they dug until they carne to water, and then gave it up. The noise was not heard on Sunday evening nor during the night. Stephen B. Smith and wife (my daughter Marie), and my son David S. Fox and wife, slept in the room this night.

I have heard nothing since that time until yesterday. In the forenoon of yesterday there were several questions answered in the usual way by rapping. I have heard the noise several times to-day.

I am not a believer in haunted houses or supernatural appearances. I am very sorry that there has been so much excitement about it. It has been a great deal of trouble to us. It was our misfortune to live here at this time; but I am willing and anxious that the truth should be known, and that a true statement should be made. I cannot account for these noises; all that I know is that they have been heard repeatedly, as I have stated. I have heard this rapping again this (Tuesday) morning, April 4. My children also heard it.

I certify that the foregoing statement has been read to me, and that the same is true; and that I should be willing to take my oath that it is so, if necessary."

(SIGNED) MARGARET FOX.

APRIL 11, 1848. STATEMENT BY JOHN D. FOX

I have heard the above statement of my wife, Margaret Fox, read, and hereby certify that the same is true in all its particulars. I heard the same rappings which she has spoken of, in answer to the questions, as stated by her. There have been a great many questions besides those asked, and answered in the same way. Some have been asked a great many times, and they have always received the same answers. There has never been any contradiction whatever.

I do not know of any way to account for those noises, as being caused by any natural means. We have searched every nook and corner in and about the house, at different times, to ascertain, if possible, whether anything or anybody was secreted there that could make the noise, and have not been able to find anything which would or could explain the mystery. It has caused a great deal of trouble and anxiety.

Hundreds have visited the house, so that it is impossible for us to attend to our daily occupations; and I hope that, whether caused by natural or supernatural means, it will be ascertained soon. The digging in the cellar will be resumed as soon as the water settles, and then it can be ascertained whether there are any indications of a body ever having been buried there; and if there are, I shall have no doubt but that it is of supernatural origin.

(SIGNED) JOHN D. FOX.

APRIL 11, 1848

The neighbours had formed themselves into a committee of investigation, which for sanity and efficiency might be a lesson to many subsequent re searchers. They did not begin by imposing their own conditions, but they started without prejudice to record the facts exactly as they found them. Not only did they collect and record the impressions of everyone concerned, but they actually had the evidence in printed form within a month of the occurrence. The author has in vain attempted to get an original copy of the pamphlet, “A Report of the Mysterious Noises heard in the House of Mr. John D. Fox,” published at Canandaigua, New York, but he has been presented with a facsimile of the original, and it is his considered opinion that the fact of human survival and power of communication was definitely proved to any mind capable of weighing evidence from the day of the appearance of that document. 71

The statement made by Mr. Duesler, chief of the committee, gives important testimony to the occurrence of the noises and jars in the absence of the Fox girls from the house, and disposes once and for ever of all suspicion of their complicity in these events. Mrs. Fox, as we have seen, referring to the night of Friday, March 31, said: “I and my children left the house.” Part of Mr. Duesler’s statement reads:

I live within a few rods of the house in which these sounds have been heard. The first I heard anything about them was a week ago last Friday evening (March 31st). Mrs. Redfield came over to my house to get my wife to go over to Mrs. Fox’s. Mrs. R. appeared to be very much agitated. My wife wanted me to go over with them, and I accordingly wentÉ. This was about nine o’clock in the evening. There were some twelve or fourteen persons present when I left them. Some were so frightened that they did not want to go into the room.

I went into the room and sat down on the bed. Mr. Fox asked a question and I heard the rapping, which they had spoken of, distinctly. I felt the bedstead jar when the sounds were produced.

The Hon. Robert Dale Owen,* a member of the United States Congress, and formerly American Minister to Naples, supplies a few additional particulars in his narrative, written after conversations with Mrs. Fox and her daughters, Margaret and Catharine. Describing the night of March 31, 1848, he says (“Footfalls, etc.,” p. 287):

* Author of “Footfalls on the Boundary of Another world” (1860), and “The Debatable Land” (1871).

The parents had had the children’s beds removed into their bedroom, and strictly enjoined them not to talk of noises even if they heard them. But scarcely had the mother seen them safely in bed and was retiring to rest herself when the children cried out, “Here they are again!” The mother chid them, and lay down. Thereupon the noises became louder and more startling. The children sat up in bed. Mrs. Fox called in her husband. The night being windy, it suggested itself to him that it might be the rattling of the sashes. He tried several, shaking them to see if they were loose. Kate, the youngest girl, happened to remark that as often as her father shook a window-sash the noises seemed to reply. Being a lively child, and in a measure accustomed to what was going on, she turned to where the noise was, snapped her fingers, and called out, “Here, old Splitfoot, do as I do.” THE KNOCKING INSTANTLY RESPONDED. That was the very commencement. Who can tell where the end will be?É. Mr. Mompesson, in bed with his little daughter (about Kate’s age) whom the sound seemed chiefly to follow, “observed that it would exactly answer, in drumming, anything that was beaten or called for.” But his curiosity led him no further. Not so Kate Fox. She tried, by silently bringing together her thumb and forefinger, whether she could still obtain a response. Yes! It could see, then, as well as hear! She called her mother. “Only look, mother!” she said, bringing together her finger and thumb as before. And as often as she repeated the noiseless motion, just so often responded the raps.

In the summer of 1848 Mr. David Fox, with the assistance of Mr. Henry Bush, Mr. Lyman Granger, of Rochester, and others, resumed digging in the cellar. At a depth of five feet they found a plank, and further digging disclosed charcoal and quicklime, and finally human hair and bones, which were pronounced by expert medical testimony to belong to a human skeleton. It was not until fifty-six years later that a further discovery was made which proved beyond all doubt that someone had really been buried in the cellar of the Fox house.

This statement appeared in the BOSTON JOURNAL (a non-Spiritualistic paper) of November 23, 1904, and runs as follows:

Rochester, N.Y., Nov. 22nd, 1904: The skeleton of the man supposed to have caused the rappings first heard by the Fox sisters in 1848 has been found in the walls of the house occupied by the sisters, and clears them from the only shadow of doubt held concerning their sincerity in the discovery of spirit communication.

The Fox sisters declared they learned to communicate with the spirit of a man, and that he told them he had been murdered and buried in the cellar. Repeated excavations failed to locate the body and thus give proof positive of their story.

The discovery was made by school-children playing in the cellar of the building in Hydesville known as the "Spook House," where the Fox sisters heard the wonderful rappings. William H. Hyde, a reputable citizen of Clyde, who owns the house, made an investigation and found an almost entire human skeleton between the earth and crumbling cellar walls, undoubtedly that of the wandering peddler who, it was claimed, was murdered in the east room of the house, and whose body was hidden in the cellar.

Mr. Hyde has notified relatives of the Fox sisters, and the notice of the discovery will be sent to the National Order of Spiritualists, many of whom remember having made pilgrimage to the "Spook House," as it is commonly called. The finding of the bones practically corroborates the sworn statement made by Margaret Fox, April 11, 1848.

There was discovered a peddler's tin box as well as the bones, and this box is now preserved at Lilydale, the central country head-quarters of the American Spiritualists, to which also the old Hydesville house has been transported.

These discoveries settle the question for ever and prove conclusively that there was a crime committed in the house, and that this crime was indicated by psychic means. When one examines the result of the two diggings one can reconstruct the circumstances. It is clear that in the first instance the body was buried with quicklime in the centre of the cellar. Later the criminal was alarmed by the fact that this place was too open to suspicion and he had dug up the body, or the main part of it, and reburied it under the wall where it would be more out of the way. The work had been done so hurriedly, however, or in such imperfect light, that some clear traces were left, as has been seen, of the original grave.

Was there independent evidence of such a crime? In order to find it we have to turn to the deposition of Lucretia Pulver, who served as help during the tenancy of Mr. and Mrs. Bell, who occupied the house four years before. She describes how a peddler came to the house and how he stayed the night there with his wares. Her employers told her that she might go home that night.

I wanted to buy some things off the peddler but had no money with me, and he said he would call at our house next morning and sell them to me. I never saw him after this. About three days after this they sent for me to come back. I accordingly came backÉ.

I should think this peddler of whom I have spoken was about thirty years of age. I heard him conversing with Mrs. Bell about his family. Mrs. Bell told me that he was an old acquaintance of theirs-that she had seen him several times before. One evening, about a week after this, Mrs. Bell sent me down to the cellar to shut the outer door. In going across the cellar I fell down near the centre of it. It appeared to be uneven and loose in that part. After I got upstairs, Mrs. Bell asked me what I screamed for and I told her. She laughed at me being frightened, and said it was only where the rats had been at work in the ground. A few days after this, Mr. Bell carried a lot of dirt into the cellar just at night and was at work there some time. Mrs. Bell told me that he was filling up the rat-holes.

A short time after this Mrs. Bell gave me a thimble which she said she had bought of this peddler. About three months after this I visited her and she said the peddler had been there again and she showed me another thimble which she said she had bought from him. She showed me some other things which she said she had bought from him.

It is worth noting that a Mrs. Lape in 1847 had claimed to have actually SEEN an apparition in the house, and that this vision was of a middle-sized man who wore grey pants, a black frock-coat and black cap. Lucretia Pulver deposed that the peddler in life wore a black frock-coat and light-coloured pants.

On the other hand, it is only fair to add that the Mr. Bell who occupied the house at that time was not a man of notorious character, and one would willingly concede that an accusation founded entirely upon psychic evidence would be an unfair and intolerable thing. It is very different, however, when the proofs of a crime have actually been discovered, and the evidence then centres merely upon which tenant was in possession at that particular time. The deposition of Lucretia Pulver assumes vital importance in its bearing upon this matter.

There are one or two points about the case which would bear discussion. One is that a man with so remarkable a name as Charles B. Rosma should never have been traced, considering all the publicity which the case acquired. This would certainly at the time have appeared a formidable objection, but with our fuller knowledge we appreciate how very difficult it is to get names correctly across. A name apparently is a purely conventional thing, and as such very different from an idea. Every practising Spiritualist has received messages which were correct coupled with names which were mistaken. It is possible that the real name was Ross, or possibly Rosmer, and that this error prevented identification. Again, it is curious that he should not have known that his body had been moved from the centre of the cellar to the wall, where it was eventually found. We can only record the fact without attempting to explain it.

Again, granting that the young girls were the mediums and that the power was drawn from them, how came the phenomena when they had actually been removed from the house? To this one can only answer that though the future was to show that the power did actually emanate from these girls, none the less it seemed to have permeated the house and to have been at the disposal of the manifesting power for a time at least when the girls were not present.

The Fox family were seriously troubled by the disturbances-Mrs. Fox’s hair turned white in a week-and as it became apparent that these were associated with the two young daughters, these were sent from home. But in the house of her brother, David Fox, where Margaret went, and in that of her sister Leah, whose married name was Mrs. Fish, at Rochester, where Catharine was staying, the same sounds were heard. Every effort was made to conceal these manifestations from the public, but they soon became known. Mrs. Fish, who was a teacher of music, was unable to continue her profession, and hundreds of people flocked to her house to witness the new marvels. It should be stated that either this power was contagious, or else it was descending upon many individuals independently from some common source. Thus Mrs. Leah Fish, the elder sister, received it, though in a less degree than Kate or Margaret. But it was no longer confined to the Fox family. It was like some psychic cloud descending from on high and showing itself on those persons who were susceptible. Similar sounds were heard in the home of Rev. A. H. Jervis, a Methodist minister, living in Rochester. Strong physical phenomena also began in the family of Deacon Hale, of Greece, a town close to Rochester. A little later Mrs. Sarah A. Tamlin and Mrs. Benedict, of Auburn, developed remarkable mediumship. Mr. Capron, the first historian of the movement, describes Mrs. Tamlin as one of the most reliable mediums he had ever met, and says that though the sounds occurring in her presence were not so loud as those with the Fox family, the messages were equally trustworthy.

It speedily became evident, then, that these unseen forces were no longer attached to any building, but that they had transferred themselves to the girls. In vain the family prayed with their Methodist friends that relief would come. In vain also were exorcisms performed by the clergy of various creeds. Beyond joining with loud raps in the Amens, the unseen presences took no notice of these religious exercises.

The danger of blindly following alleged spirit guidance was clearly shown some months later in the neighbouring town of Rochester, where a man disappeared under suspicious circumstances. An enthusiastic Spiritualist had messages by raps which announced a murder. The canal was dragged and the wife of the missing man was actually ordered to enter the canal, which nearly cost her her life. Some months later the absentee returned, having fled to Canada to avoid a writ for debt. This, as may well be imagined, was a blow to the young cult. The public did not then understand what even now is so little understood, that death causes no change in the human spirit, that mischievous and humorous entities abound, and that the inquirer must use his own instincts and his own common sense at every turn. “Try the spirits that ye may know them.” In the same year, in the same district, the truth of this new philosophy upon the one side, and its limitations and dangers on the other, were most clearly set forth. These dangers are with us still. The silly man, the arrogant inflated man, the cocksure man, is always a safe butt. Every observer has had some trick played upon him. The author has himself had his faith sorely shaken by deception until some compensating proof has come along to assure him that it was only a lesson which he had received, and that it was no more fiendish or even remarkable that disembodied intelligences should be hoaxers than that the same intelligence inside a human body should find amusement in the same foolish way.

The whole course of the movement had now widened and taken a more important turn. It was no longer a murdered man calling for justice. The peddler seemed to have been used as a pioneer, and now that he had found the opening and the method, a myriad of Intelligences were swarming at his back. Isaac Post had instituted the method of spelling by raps, and messages were pouring through. According to these the whole system had been devised by the contrivance of a band of thinkers and inventors upon the spirit plane, foremost among whom was Benjamin Franklin, whose eager mind and electrical knowledge in earth life might well qualify him for such a venture. Whether this claim was true or not, it is a fact that Rosma dropped out of the picture at this stage, and that the intelligent knockings purported to be from the deceased friends of those inquirers who were prepared to take a serious interest in the matter and to gather in reverent mood to receive the messages. That they still lived and still loved was the constant message from the beyond, accompanied by many material tests, which confirmed the wavering faith of the new adherents of the movement. When asked for their methods of working and the laws which governed them, the answers were from the beginning exactly what they are now: that it was a matter concerned with human and spirit magnetism; that some who were richly endowed with this physical property were mediums; that this endowment was not necessarily allied to morality or intelligence; and that the condition of harmony was especially necessary to secure good results. In seventy odd years we have learned very little more; and after all these years the primary law of harmony is invariably broken at the so-called test seances, the members of which imagine that they have disproved the philosophy when they obtain negative or disordered results, whereas they have actually confirmed it.

In one of the early communications the Fox sisters were assured that “these manifestations would not be confined to them, but would go all over the world.” This prophecy was soon in a fair way to be fulfilled, for these new powers and further developments of them, which included the discerning and hearing of spirits and the movement of objects without contact, appeared in many circles which were independent of the Fox family. In an incredibly short space of time the movement, with many eccentricities and phases of fanaticism, had swept over the Northern and Eastern States of the Union, always retaining that solid core of actual tangible fact, which might be occasionally simulated by impostors, but always reasserted itself to the serious investigator who could shake himself free from preconceived prejudice. Disregarding for the moment these wider developments, let us continue the story of the original circles at Rochester.

The spirit messages had urged upon the small band of pioneers a public demonstration of their powers in an open meeting at Rochester-a proposition which was naturally appalling to two shy country girls and to their friends. So incensed were the discarnate Guides by the opposition of their earthly agents that they threatened to suspend the whole movement for a generation, and did actually desert them completely for some weeks. At the end of that time communication was restored and the believers, chastened by this interval of thought, put themselves unreservedly into the hands of the outside forces, promising that they would dare all in the cause. It was no light matter. A few of the clergy, notably the Methodist minister, the Rev. A. H. Jervis, rallied to their aid, but the majority thundered from their pulpits against them, and the snob eagerly joined in the cowardly sport of heretic-baiting. On November 14, 1849, the Spiritualists held their first meeting at the Corinthian Hall, the largest available in Rochester. The audience, to its credit, listened with attention to the exposition of facts from Mr. Capron, of Auburn, the principal speaker. A committee of five representative citizens was then selected to examine into the matter and to report upon the following evening, when the meeting would reassemble. So certain was it that this report would be unfavourable that the ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT is stated to have had its leading article prepared, with the head-line: “Entire Exposure of the Rapping Humbug.” The result, however, caused the editor to hold his hand. The committee reported that the raps were undoubted facts, though the information was not entirely correct, that is, the answers to questions were “not altogether right nor altogether wrong.” They added that these raps came on walls and doors some distance from the girls, causing a sensible vibration. “They entirely failed to find any means by which it could be done.”

This report was received with disapproval by the audience, and a second committee from among the dissentients was formed. This investigation was con ducted in the office of a lawyer. Kate, for some reason, was away, and only Mrs. Fish and Margaret were present. None the less, the sounds continued as before, though a Dr. Langworthy was introduced to test the possibility of ventriloquism. The final report was that “the sounds were heard, and their thorough investigation had conclusively shown them to be produced neither by machinery nor ventriloquism, though what the agent is they were unable to determine."

Again the audience turned down the report of their own committee, and again a deputation was chosen from among the most extreme opponents, one of whom vowed that if he could not find out the trick he would throw himself over the falls of the Genesee River. Their examination was thorough to the length of brutality, and a committee of ladies was associated with it. The latter stripped the frightened girls, who wept bitterly under their afflictions. Their dresses were then tied tightly round their ankles and they were placed upon glass and other insulators. The committee was forced to report, "when they were standing on pillows with a handkerchief tied round the bottom of their dresses, tight to the ankles, we all heard the rapping on the wall and floor distinctly." The committee further testified that their questions, some of them mental, had been answered correctly.

So long as the public looked upon the movement as a sort of joke it was prepared to be tolerantly amused, but when these successive reports put the matter in a more serious light, a wave of blackguardism swept over the town, which reached such a pitch that Mr. Willetts, a gallant Quaker, was compelled at the fourth public meeting to declare that "the mob of ruffians who designed to lynch the girls should do so, if they attempted it, over his dead body." There was a disgraceful riot, the young women were smuggled out by a back door, and reason and justice were for the moment clouded over by force and folly. Then, as now, the minds of the average men of the world were so crammed with the things that do not matter that they had no space for the things that do matter. But Fate is never in a hurry, and the movement went on. Many accepted the findings of the successive committees as being final, and indeed, it is difficult to see how the alleged facts could have been more severely tested. At the same time, this strong, new, fermenting wine began to burst some of the old bottles into which it was poured to the excusable disgust of the public.

The many discreet, serious and religious circles were for a season almost obscured by swollen-headed ranters who imagined themselves to be in touch with every high entity from the Apostles downwards, some even claiming the direct afflatus of the Holy Ghost and emitting messages which were only saved from being blasphemous by their crudity and absurdity. One community of these fanatics, who called themselves the Apostolic Circle of Mountain Cove, particularly distinguished themselves by their extreme claims and furnished good material for the enemies of the new dispensation. The great body of Spiritualists turned away in disapproval from such exaggerations, but were unable to prevent them. Many well-attested supernormal phenomena came to support the failing spirits of those who were distressed by the so excesses of the fanatics. On one occasion, which is particularly convincing and well-reported, two bodies of investigators in separate rooms, at Rochester, on February 20, 1850, received the same message simultaneously from some central force which called itself Benjamin Franklin. This double message was: “There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark and mysterious to you will be laid plain before your sight. Mysteries are going to be revealed. The world will be en lightened.” It must be admitted that, up to now, the prophecy has been only partially fulfilled, and it may at the same time be conceded that, with some startling exceptions, the forecasts of the spirit people have not been remarkable for accuracy, especially where the element of time is concerned.

The question has often been asked: “What was the purpose of so strange a movement at this particular time, granting that it is all that it claims to be?” Governor Tallmadge, a United States senator of repute, was one of the early converts to the new cult, and he has left it upon record that he asked this question upon two separate occasions in two different years from different mediums. The answer in each case was almost identical. The first said: “It is to draw mankind together in harmony, and to convince sceptics of the immortality of the soul.” The second said: “To unite mankind and to convince sceptical minds of the immortality of the soul.” Surely this is no ignoble ambition and does not justify those narrow and bitter attacks from ministers and the less progressive of their flocks from which Spiritualists have up to the present day had to suffer. The first half of the definition is particularly important, for it is possible that one of the ultimate results of this movement will be to unite religion upon a common basis so strong, and, indeed, so self-sufficient, that the quibbles which separate the Churches of to-day will be seen in their true proportions and will be swept away or disregarded. One could even hope that such a movement might spread beyond the bounds of Christianity and throw down some of the barriers which stand between great sections of the human race.

Attempts to expose the phenomena were made from time to time. In February, 1851, Dr. Austin Flint, Dr. Charles A. Lee, and Dr. C. B.

Coventry of the University of Buffalo, published a statement [Capron "Modern Spiritualism, etc.," pp. 310-31.] showing to their own satisfaction that the sounds occurring in the presence of the Fox sisters were caused by the snapping of knee joints. It called forth a characteristic reply in the Press from Mrs. Fish and Margaret Fox, addressed to the three doctors:

As we do not feel willing to rest under the imputation of being impostors, we are very willing to undergo a proper and decent examination, provided we can select three male and three female friends who shall be present on the occasion. We can assure the public that there is no one more anxious than ourselves to discover the origin of these mysterious manifestations. If they can be explained on "anatomical" or "physiological" principles, it is due to the world that the investigation be made, and that the "humbug" be exposed. As there seems to be much interest manifested by the public on that subject, we would suggest that as early an investigation as is convenient would be acceptable to the undersigned.

Ann L. Fish. Margaretta Fox.

The investigation was held, but the results were negative. In an appended note to the doctors' report in the NEW YORK TRIBUNE, the editor (Horace Greeley) observes:

The doctors, as has already appeared in our columns, commenced with the assumption that the origin of the "rapping" sounds MUST be physical, and their primary cause the volition of the ladies aforesaid-in short, that these ladies were "The Rochester impostors." They appear, therefore, in the above statement, as the prosecutors of an impeachment, and ought to have selected other persons as judges and reporters of the trialÉ. It is quite probable that we shall have another version of the matter.

Much testimony in support of the Fox sisters was quickly forthcoming, and the only effect of the professors' "exposure" was to redouble the public interest in the manifestations.

There was also the alleged confession of Mrs. Norman Culver, who deposed, on April 17, 1851, that Catharine Fox had revealed to her the whole secret of how the raps were produced. It was an entire fabrication, and Mr. Capron published a crushing answer, showing that on the date when Catharine Fox was supposed to have made the confession to Mrs. Culver, she was residing at his house seventy miles distant.

Mrs. Fox and her three daughters began public sittings in New York in the spring of 1850, at Barnum's Hotel, and they attracted many curious visitors. The Press was almost unanimous in denunciation of them. A brilliant exception to this was found in Horace Greeley, already quoted, who wrote an appreciative article in his paper under his own initials. A portion of this will be found in the Appendix.

After a return to Rochester, the Fox family made a tour of the Western States, and then paid a second visit to New York, when the same intense public interest was displayed. They had obeyed the spirits' mandate to proclaim these truths to the world, and the new era that had been announced was now ushered in. When one reads the detailed accounts of some of these American sittings, and considers the brain power of the sitters, it is amazing to think that people, blinded by prejudice, should be so credulous as to imagine that it was all the result of deception. At that time was shown moral courage which has been conspicuously lacking since the reactionary forces in science and in religion combined to stifle the new knowledge and to make it dangerous for its professors. Thus in a single sitting in New York in 1850 we find that there were gathered round the table the Rev. Dr. Griswold, Fenimore Cooper the novelist, Bancroft the historian, Rev. Dr. Hawks, Dr. J. W. Francis, Dr. Marcy, Willis the Quaker poet, Bryant the poet, Bigelow of the EVENING POST, and General Lyman. All of these were satisfied as to the facts, and the account winds up "The manners and bearing of the ladies" (I.E. the three Fox sisters) "are such as to create a prepossession in their favour." The world since then has dug up much coal and iron; it has erected great structures and it has invented terrible engines of war, but can we say that it has advanced in spiritual knowledge or reverence for the unseen? Under the guidance of materialism the wrong path has been followed, and it becomes increasingly clear that the people must return or perish.

CHAPTER V

THE CAREER OF THE FOX SISTERS

For the sake of continuity the subsequent history of the Fox sisters will now be given after the events at Hydesville. It is a remarkable, and to Spiritualists a painful, story, but it bears its own lesson and should be faithfully recorded. When men have an honest and whole-hearted aspiration for truth there is no development which can ever leave them abashed or find no place in their scheme.

For some years the two younger sisters, Kate and Margaret, gave seances at New York and other places, successfully meeting every test which was applied to them. Horace Greeley, afterwards a candidate for the United States presidency, was, as already shown, deeply interested in them and convinced of their entire honesty. He is said to have furnished the funds by which the younger girl completed her very imperfect education.

During these years of public mediumship, when the girls were all the rage among those who had no conception of the religious significance of this new revelation, and who concerned themselves with it purely in the hope of worldly advantage, the sisters exposed themselves to the enervating influences of promiscuous seances in a way which no earnest Spiritualist could justify. The dangers of such practices were not then so clearly realised as now, nor had it occurred to people that it is unlikely that high spirits would descend to earth in order to advise as to the state of railway stocks or the issue of love affairs. The ignorance was universal, and there was no wise mentor at the elbow of these poor pioneers to point the higher and the safer path. Worst of all, their jaded energies were renewed by the offer of wine at a time when one at least of them was hardly more than a child. It is said that there was some family predisposition towards alcoholism, but even without such a taint their whole procedure and mode of life were rash to the last degree. Against their moral character there has never been a breath of suspicion, but they had taken a road which leads to degeneration of mind and character, though it was many years before the more serious effects were manifest.

Some idea of the pressure upon the Fox girls at this time may be gathered from Mrs. Hardinge Britten's* description from her own observation. She talks of "pausing on the first floor to hear poor patient Kate Fox, in the midst of a captious, grumbling crowd of investigators, repeating hour after hour the letters of the alphabet, while the no less poor, patient spirits rapped out names, ages and dates to suit all comers." Can one wonder that the girls, with vitality sapped, the beautiful, watchful influence of the mother removed, and harassed by enemies, succumbed to a gradually increasing temptation in the direction of stimulants?

* "Autobiography," p. 40.

A remarkably clear light is thrown upon Margaret at this period in that curious booklet, "The Love Letters of Dr. Elisha Kane." It was in 1852 that Dr. Kane, afterwards the famous Arctic explorer, met Margaret Fox, who was a beautiful and attractive girl. To her Kane wrote those love letters which record one of the most curious courtships in literature. Elisha Kane, as his first name might imply, was a man of Puritan extraction, and Puritans, with their belief that the Bible represents the absolutely final word in spiritual inspiration and that they understand what that last word means, are instinctively antagonistic to a new cult which professes to show that new sources and new interpretations are still available.

He was also a doctor of medicine, and the medical profession is at the same time the most noble and the most cynically incredulous in the world. From the first Kane made up his mind that the young girl was involved in fraud, and formed the theory that her elder sister Leah was, for purposes of gain, exploiting the fraud. The fact that Leah shortly afterwards married a wealthy man named Underhill, a Wall Street insurance magnate, does not appear to have modified Kane's views as to her greed for illicit earnings. The doctor formed a close friendship with Margaret, put her under his own aunt for purposes of education whilst he was away in the Arctic, and finally married her under the curious Gretna Green kind of marriage law which seems to have prevailed at the time. Shortly afterwards he died (in 1857), and the widow, now calling herself Mrs. Fox-Kane, forswore all phenomena for a time, and was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

In these letters Kane continually reproaches Margaret with living in deceit and hypocrisy. We have very few of her letters, so that we do not know how far she defended herself. The compiler of the book, though a non-Spiritualist, says: "Poor girl, with her simplicity, ingenuousness and timidity, she could not, had she been so inclined, have practised the slightest deception with any chance of success.” This testimony is valuable, as the writer was clearly intimately acquainted with everyone concerned. Kane himself, writing to the younger sister Kate, says: “Take my advice and never talk of the spirits either to friends or strangers. You know that with all my intimacy with Maggie after a whole month’s trial I could make nothing of them. Therefore they are a great mystery.”

Considering their close relations, and that Margaret clearly gave Kane every demonstration of her powers, it is inconceivable that a trained medical man would have to admit after a month that he could make nothing of it, if it were indeed a mere cracking of a joint. One can find no evidence for fraud in these letters, but one does find ample proof that these two young girls, Margaret and Kate, had not the least idea of the religious implications involved in these powers, or of the grave responsibilities of mediumship, and that they misused their gift in the direction of giving worldly advice, receiving promiscuous sitters, and answering comic or frivolous questions. If in such circumstances both their powers and their character were to deteriorate, it would not surprise any experienced Spiritualist. They deserved no better, though their age and ignorance furnished an excuse.

To realise their position one has to remember that they were little more than children, poorly educated, and quite ignorant of the philosophy of the subject. When a man like Dr. Kane assured Margaret that it was very wrong, he was only saying what was dinned into her ears from every quarter, including half the pulpits of New York. Probably she had an uneasy feeling that it was wrong, without in the least knowing why, and this may account for the fact that she does not seem to remonstrate with him for his suspicions. Indeed, we may admit that AU FOND Kane was right, and that the proceedings were in some ways unjustifiable. At that time they were very unvenal themselves, and had they used their gift, as D. D. Home used his, with no relation to worldly things, and for the purpose only of proving immortality and consoling the afflicted, then, indeed, they would have been above criticism. He was wrong in doubting their gift, but right in looking askance at some examples of their use of it.

In some ways Kane’s position is hopelessly illogical. He was on most intimate and affectionate terms with the mother and the two girls, although if words have any meaning he thought them to be swindlers living on the credulity of the public. “Kiss Katie for me,” he says, and he continually sends love to the mother. Already, young as they were, he had a glimpse of the alcoholic danger to which they were exposed by late hours and promiscuous company. “Tell Katie to drink no champagne, and do you follow the same advice,” said he. It was sound counsel, and it would have been well for themselves and for the movement if they had both followed it; but again we must remember their inexperienced youth and the constant temptations.

Kane was a curious blend of the hero and the prig. Spirit-rapping, unfortified by any of the religious or scientific sanctions which came later, was a low-down thing, a superstition of the illiterate, and was he, a man of repute, to marry a spirit-rapper? He vacillated over it in an extraordinary way, beginning a letter with claims to be her brother, and ending by reminding her of the warmth of his kisses. “Now that you have given me your heart, I will be a brother to you,” he says. He had a vein of real superstition running through him which was far below the credulity which he ascribed to others. He frequently alludes to the fact that by raising his right hand he had powers of divination and that he had learned it “from a conjurer in the Indies.” Occasionally he is a snob as well as a prig. “At the very dinner-table of the President I thought of you”; and again: “You could never lift yourself up to my thoughts and my objects. I could never bring myself down to yours.” As a matter of fact, the few extracts given from her letters show an intelligent and sympathetic mind. On at least one occasion we find Kane suggesting deceit to her, and she combating the idea.

There are four fixed points which can be established by the letters:

1. That Kane thought in a vague way that there was trickery; 2. That in the years of their close intimacy she never admitted it; 3. That he could not even suggest in what the trickery lay; 4. That she did use her powers in a way which serious Spiritualists would deplore.

She really knew no more of the nature of these forces than those around her did. The editor says: “She had always averred that she never fully believed the rappings to be the work of spirits, but imagined some occult laws of nature were concerned.” This was her attitude later in life, for on her professional card she printed that people must judge the nature of the powers for themselves.

It is natural that those who speak of the danger of mediumship, and especially of physical mediumship, should point to the Fox sisters as an example. But their case must not be exaggerated. In the year 1871, after more than twenty years of this exhausting work, we find them still receiving the enthusiastic support and admiration of many leading men and women of the day. It was only after forty years of public service that adverse conditions were manifested in their lives, and therefore, without in any way glossing over what is evil, we can fairly claim that their record hardly justifies those who allude to mediumship as a soul-destroying profession.

It was in this year 1871 that Kate Fox's visit to England was brought about through the generosity of Mr. Charles F. Livermore, a prominent banker of New York, in gratitude for the consolation he had received from her wonderful powers, and to advance the cause of Spiritualism. He provided for all her needs, and thus removed any necessity for her to give professional sittings. He also arranged for her to be accompanied by a congenial woman companion.

In a letter [THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, 1871, pp. 525-6.] to Mr. Benjamin Coleman, a well-known worker in the Spiritualist movement, Mr. Livermore says:

Miss Fox, taken all in all, is no doubt the most wonderful living medium. Her character is irreproachable and pure. I have received so much through her powers of mediumship during the past ten years which is solacing, instructive and astounding, that I feel greatly indebted to her, and desire to have her taken good care of while absent from her home and friends.

His further remarks have some bearing possibly on the later sad events of her life:

That you may the more thoroughly understand her idiosyncrasies, permit me to explain that she is a sensitive of the highest order and of childlike simplicity; she feels keenly the atmospheres of everyone with whom she is brought in contact, and to that degree that at times she becomes exceedingly nervous and apparently capricious.

For this reason I have advised her not to sit in dark seances, that she may avoid the irritation arising from the suspicion of sceptics, mere curiosity-mongers, and lovers of the marvellous.

The perfection of the manifestations to be obtained through her depends upon her surroundings, and in proportion as she is in rapport or sympathy with you does she seem receptive of spiritual power. The communications through her are very remarkable, and have come to me frequently from my wife (Estelle), in perfect idiomatic French, and sometimes in Spanish and

Italian, whilst she herself is not acquainted with any of these languages. You will understand all this, but these explanations may be necessary for others. As I have said, SHE WILL NOT GIVE SEANCES AS A PROFESSIONAL MEDIUM, but I hope she will do all the good she can in furtherance of the great truth, in a quiet way, while she remains in England.

Mr. Coleman, who had a sitting with her in New York, says that he received one of the most striking evidences of spirit identity that had ever occurred to him in his experience of seventeen years. Mr. Cromwell F. Varley, the electrician who laid the Atlantic cable, in his evidence before the London Dialectical Society in 1869, spoke of interesting electrical experiments he made with this medium.

The visit of Kate Fox to England was evidently regarded as a mission, for we find Mr. Coleman advising her to choose only those sitters who are not afraid to have their names published in confirmation of the facts they have witnessed. This course seems to have been adopted to some extent, for there is preserved a fair amount of testimony to her powers from, among others, Professor William Crookes, Mr. S. C. Hall, Mr. W. H. Harrison (editor of THE SPIRITUALIST), Miss Rosamund Dale Owen (who afterwards married Laurence Oliphant), and the Rev. John Page Hopps.

The new-comer began to hold sittings soon after her arrival. At one of the first of these, on November 24, 1871, a representative of THE TIMES was present, and he published a detailed account of the seance, which was held jointly with D. D. Home, a close friend of the medium. This appeared in an article entitled “Spiritualism and Science,” occupying three and a half columns of leading type. THE TIMES Commissioner speaks of Miss Fox taking him to the door of the room and inviting him to stand by her and to hold her hands, which he did, “when loud thumps seemed to come from the panels, as if done with the fist. These were repeated at our request any number of times.” He mentioned that he tried every test that he could think of, that Miss Fox and Mr. Home gave every opportunity for examination, and that their feet and hands were held.

In the course of a leading article on the above report and the correspondence that came from it, THE TIMES (January 6, 1873) declared that there was no case for scientific inquiry:

Many sensible readers, we fear, will think we owe them an apology for opening our columns to a controversy on such a subject as Spiritualism and thus treating as an open or debatable question what should rather be dismissed at once as either an imposture or a delusion. But even an imposture may call for unmasking, and popular delusions however-absurd, are often too important to be neglected by the wiser portion of mankindÉ. Is there, in reality, anything, as lawyers would say, to go to a jury with? Well, on the one hand, we have abundance of alleged experience which can hardly be called evidence, and a few depositions of a more notable and impressive character. On the other hand, we have many accounts of convicted impostors, and many authentic reports of precisely such disappointments or discoveries as we should be led to expect.

On December 14, 1872, Miss Fox married Mr. H. D. Jencken, a London barrister-at-law, author of “A Compendium of Modern Roman Law,” etc., and honorary general secretary of the Association for the Reform and Codification of the Law of Nations. He was one of the earliest Spiritualists in England.

The SPIRITUALIST, in its account of the ceremony, says that the spirit people took part in the proceedings, for at the wedding breakfast loud raps were heard coming from various parts of the room, and the large table on which stood the wedding-cake was repeatedly raised from the floor.

A contemporary witness states that Mrs. Kate Fox-Jencken (as she came to be known) and her husband were to be met in the early ‘seventies in good social circles in London. Her services were eagerly sought after by investigators.

John Page Hopps describes her at this time as “a small, thin, very intelligent, but rather simpering little woman, with nice, gentle manners and a quiet enjoyment of her experiments which entirely saved her from the slightest touch of self-importance or affectation of mystery.”

Her mediumship consisted chiefly of raps (often of great power), spirit lights, direct writing, and the appearance of materialised hands. Full form materialisations, which had been an occasional feature of her sittings in America, were rare with her in England. On a number of occasions objects in the seance-room were moved by spirit agency, and in some cases brought from another room.

It was about this time that Professor William Crookes conducted his inquiries into the medium’s powers, and issued that whole-hearted report which is dealt with later when Crookes’s early connection with Spiritualism comes to be discussed. These careful observations show that the rappings constituted only a small part of Kate Fox’s psychic powers, and that if they could be adequately explained by normal means they would still leave us amid mysteries. Thus Crookes recounts how, when the only people present besides himself and Miss Fox were his wife and a lady relative “I was holding the medium’s two hands in one of mine, while her feet were resting on my feet. Paper was on the table before us, and my disengaged hand was holding a pencil.

“A luminous hand came down from the upper part of the room, and after hovering near me for a few seconds, took the pencil from my hand, rapidly wrote on a sheet of paper, threw the pencil down, and then rose over our heads, gradually fading into darkness.

Many other observers describe similar phenomena with this medium on various occasions.

A very extraordinary phase of Mrs. Fox-Jensen’s mediumship was the production of luminous substances. In the presence of Mrs. Makdougall Gregory, Mr. W. H. Harrison, the editor of a London newspaper, and others, a hand appeared carrying some phosphorescent material, about four inches square, with which the floor was struck and a sitter’s face touched.* The light proved to be cold. Miss Rosamund Dale Owen, in her account of this phenomenon, describes the objects as “illumined crystals,” and says that she has seen no materialisation which gave so realistic a feeling of spirit nearness as did these graceful lights. The author can also corroborate the fact that these lights are usually cold, as on one occasion, with another medium, such a light settled for some seconds upon his face. Miss Owen also speaks of books and small ornaments being carried about, and a heavy musical box, weighing about twenty-five pounds, being brought from a side-table. A peculiarity of this instrument was that it had been out of order for months and could not be used until the unseen forces repaired it and wound it themselves.

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Vol. VIII, p. 299. LIGHT, 1884, p. 170.

Mrs. Jencken’s mediumship was interwoven in the texture of her daily life. Professor Butlerof says that when he paid a morning social call on her and her husband in company with M. Aksakof he heard raps upon the floor. Spending an evening at the Jenckens’ house, he reports that raps were numerous during tea. Miss Rosamund Dale Owen also refers* to the incident of the medium standing in the street at a shop window with two ladies, when raps joined in the conversation, the pavement vibrating under their feet. The raps are described as having been loud enough to attract the attention of passers by. Mr. Jencken relates many cases of spontaneous phenomena in their home life.

* LIGHT, 1884, p. 39. THE SPIRITUALIST, IV, p. 138, and VII, p. 66. LIGHT, 1882, pp. 439-40.

A volume could be filled with details of the seances of this medium, but with the exception of one further record we must be content with agreeing with the dictum of Professor Butlerof, of the University of St. Petersburg, who, after investigating her powers in London, wrote in THE SPIRITUALIST (February 4, 1876):

From all that I was able to observe in the presence of Mrs. Jencken, I am forced to come to the conclusion that the phenomena peculiar to that medium are of a strongly objective and convincing nature, and they would, I think, be sufficient for the most pronounced but HONEST sceptic to cause him to reject ventriloquism, muscular action, and every such artificial explanation of the phenomena.

Mr. H. D. Jencken died in 1881, and his widow was left with two sons. These children showed wonderful mediumship at a very early age, particulars of which will be found in contemporary records.

Mr. S. C. Hall, a well-known literary man and a.prominent Spiritualist, describes a sitting at his house in Kensington on his birthday, May 9, 1882, at which his deceased wife manifested her presence:

Many interesting and touching messages were conveyed to me by the usual writing of Mrs. Jencken. We were directed to put out the light. Then commenced a series of manifestations such as I have not often seen equalled, and very seldom surpassedÉ. I removed a small handbell from the table and held it in my own hand. I felt a hand take it from me, when it was rung in all parts of the room during at least five minutes. I then placed an accordion under the table, whence it was removed, and at a distance of three or four feet from the table round which we were seated, tunes were played. The accordion was played and the bell was rung in several parts of the room, while two candles were lit on the table. It was not, therefore, what is termed a dark sitting, although occasionally the lights were put out. During all the time Mr. Stack held one of the hands of Mrs. Jencken and I held the other-each frequently saying, “I have Mrs. Jencken’s hand in mine.”

About fifty flowers of heartsease were placed on a sheet of paper before me. I had received some heartsease flowers from a friend in the morning, but the vase that contained them was not in the sitting-room. I sent for it and found it intact. The bouquet had not been in the least disturbed. In what is called “Direct Writing” I found these words written in pencil in a very small hand, on a sheet of paper that lay before me, “I have brought you my token of love.” At a sitting some days previously (when alone with Mrs. Jencken) I had received this message, “On your birthday I will bring you a token of love.”

Mr. Hall adds that he had marked the sheet of paper with his initials, and, as an extra precaution, had torn off one of the corners in such a manner as to ensure recognition.

It is evident that Mr. Hall was greatly impressed by what he had seen. He writes: “I have witnessed and recorded many wonderful manifestations; I doubt if I have seen any more convincing than this; certainly none more refined; none that gave more conclusive evidence that pure and good and holy spirits alone were communicating.” He states that he has consented to become Mrs. Jencken’s “banker,” presumably for funds for the education of her two boys. In view of what afterwards happened to this gifted medium, there is a sad interest in his concluding words:

I feel confidence approaching certainty that, in all respects, she will so act as to increase and not lessen her power as a medium while retaining the friendship and trust of the many who cannot but feel for her a regard in some degree resembling (as arising from the same source) that which the New Church accords to Emanuel Swedenborg, and the Methodists render to John Wesley. Assuredly Spiritualists owe to this lady a huge debt for the glad tidings she was largely the instrument, selected by Providence, to convey to them.

We have given this account in some detail because it shows that the gifts of the medium were at this time of a high and powerful order. A few years earlier, at a seance at her house on December 14, 1873, on the occasion of the first anniversary of her wedding, a spirit message was rapped out: “When shadows fall upon you, think of the brighter side.” It was a prophetic message, for the end of her life was all shadows.

Margaret (Mrs. Fox-Kane) had joined her sister Kate in England in 1876, and they remained together for some years until the very painful incident occurred which has now to be discussed. It would appear that a very bitter quarrel broke out between the elder sister Leah (now Mrs. Underhill) and the two younger ones. It is probable that Leah may have heard that there was now a tendency to alcoholism, and may have interfered with more energy than tact. Some Spiritualists interfered also, and incurred the fury of the two sisters by some suggestion that Kate’s children should be separated from her.

Looking round for some weapon-any weapon-with which they could injure those whom they so bitterly hated, it seems to have occurred to them-or, according to their subsequent statement, to have been suggested to them, with promises of pecuniary reward-that if they injured the whole cult by an admission of fraud they would wound Leah and her associates in their most sensitive part. On the top of alcoholic excitement and the frenzy of hatred there was added religious fanaticism, for Margaret had been lectured by some of the leading spirits of the Church of Rome and persuaded, as Home had been also for a short time, that her own powers were evil. She mentions Cardinal Manning as having influenced her mind in this way, but her statements are not to be taken too seriously. At any rate, all these causes combined and reduced her to a state which was perilously near madness. Before leaving London she had written to the NEW YORK HERALD denouncing the cult, but stating in one sentence that the rappings were “the only part of the phenomena that is worthy of notice.” On reaching New York, where, according to her own subsequent statement, she was to receive a sum of money for the newspaper sensation which she promised to produce, she broke out into absolute raving against her elder sister.

It is a curious psychological study, and equally curious is the mental attitude of the people who could imagine that the assertions of an unbalanced woman, acting not only from motives of hatred but also from-as she herself stated-the hope of pecuniary reward, could upset the critical investigation of a generation of observers.

None the less, we have to face the fact that she did actually produce rappings, or enable raps to be produced, at a subsequent meeting in the New York Academy of Music. This might be discounted upon the grounds that in so large a hall any prearranged sound might be attributed to the medium. More important is the evidence of the reporter of the Herald, who had a previous private performance. He describes it thus:

I heard first a rapping under the floor near my feet, then under the chair in which I was seated, and again under a table on which I was leaning. She led me to the door and I heard the same sound on the other side of it. Then when she sat down on the piano stool the instrument reverberated more loudly and the tap-tap resounded throughout its hollow structure.

This account makes it clear that she had the noises under control, though the reporter must have been more unsophisticated than most pressmen of my acquaintance, if he could believe that sounds varying both in quality and in position all came from some click within the medium's foot. He clearly did not know how the sounds came, and it is the author's opinion that Margaret did not know either. That she really had something which she could exhibit is proved, not only by the experience of the reporter but by that of Mr. Wedgwood, a London Spiritualist, to whom she gave a demonstration before she started for America. It is vain, therefore, to contend that there was no basis at all in Margaret's exposure. What that basis was we must endeavour to define.

The Margaret Fox-Kane sensation was in August and September, 1888-a welcome boon for the enterprising paper which had exploited it. In October Kate came over to join forces with her sister. It should be explained that the real quarrel, so far as is known, was between Kate and Leah, for Leah had endeavoured to get Kate's children taken from her on the grounds that the mother's influence was not for good. Therefore, though Kate did not rave, and though she volunteered no exposures in public or private, she was quite at one with her sister in the general plot to "down" Leah at all costs.

She was the one who caused my arrest last spring (she said) and the bringing of the preposterous charge that I was cruel to my children. I don't know why it is she has always been jealous of Maggie and me; I suppose because we could do things in Spiritualism that she couldn't.

She was present at the Hall of Music meeting on October 21, when Margaret made her repudiation and produced the raps. She was silent on that occasion, but that silence may be taken as a support of the statements to which she listened.

If this were indeed so, and if she spoke as reported to the interviewer, her repentance must have come very rapidly. Upon November 17, less than a month after the famous meeting, she wrote to a lady in London, Mrs. Cottell, who was the tenant of Carlyle's old house, this remarkable letter from New York (LIGHT, 1888, p. 619):

I would have written to you before this but my surprise was so great on my arrival to hear of Maggie's exposure of Spiritualism that I had no heart to write to anyone.

The manager of the affair engaged the Academy of Music, the very largest place of entertainment in New York City; it was filled to overflowing.

They made fifteen hundred dollars clear. I have often wished I had remained with you, and if I had the means I would now return to get out of all this.

I think now I could make money in proving that the knockings are not made with the toes. So many people come to me to ask me about this exposure of Maggie’s that I have to deny myself to them.

They are hard at work to expose the whole thing if they can; but they certainly cannot.

Maggie is giving public exposures in all the large places in America, but I have only seen her once since I arrived.

This letter of Kate’s points to pecuniary temptation as playing a large part in the transaction. Maggie, however, seems to have soon found that there was little money in it, and could see no profit in telling lies for which she was not paid, and which had only proved that the Spiritualistic movement was so firmly established that it was quite unruffled by her treachery. For this or other reasons-let us hope with some final twinges of conscience as to the part she had played-she now admitted that she had been telling falsehoods from the lowest motives. The interview was reported in the New York Press, November 20, 1889, about a year after the onslaught.

“Would to God,” she said, in a voice that trembled with intense excitement, “that I could undo the injustice I did the cause of Spiritualism when, under the strong psychological influence of persons inimical to it, I gave expression to utterances that had no foundation in fact. This retraction and denial has not come about so much from my own sense of what is right as from the silent impulse of the spirits using my organism at the expense of the hostility of the treacherous horde who held out promises of wealth and happiness in return for an attack on Spiritualism, and whose hopeful assurances were so deceitfulÉ.

“Long before I spoke to any person on this matter, I was unceasingly reminded by my spirit control what I should do, and at last I have come to the conclusion that it would be useless for me further to thwart their promptingsÉ.”

“Has there been no mention of a monetary consideration for this statement?”

“Not the smallest; none whatever.”

“Then financial gain is not the end which you are looking to?”

“Indirectly, yes. You know that even a mortal instrument in the hands of the spirit must have the maintenance of life. This I propose to derive from my lectures. Not one cent has passed to me from any person because I adopted this course.”

“What cause led up to your exposure of the spirit rappings?”

“At that time I was in great need of money, and persons-who for the present I prefer not to name-took advantage of the situation; hence the trouble. The excitement, too, helped to upset my mental equilibrium.”

“What was the object of the persons who induced you to make the confession that you and all other mediums traded on the credulity of people?”

“They had several objects in view. Their first and paramount idea was to crush Spiritualism, to make money for themselves, and to get up a great excitement, as that was an element in which they flourish.”

“Was there any truth in the charges you made against Spiritualism?”

“Those charges were false in every particular. I have no hesitation in saying thatÉ.”

“No, my belief in Spiritualism has undergone no change. When I made those dreadful statements I was not responsible for my words. Its genuineness is an incontrovertible fact. Not all the Herrmans that ever breathed can duplicate the wonders that are produced through some mediums. By deftness of fingers and smartness of wits they may produce writing on papers and slates, but even this cannot bear close investigation. Materialisation is beyond their mental calibre to reproduce, and I challenge anyone to make the ‘rap’ under the same conditions which I will. There is not a human being on earth can produce the ‘raps’ in the same way as they are through me.”

“Do you propose to hold seances?”

“No, I will devote myself entirely to platform work, as that will find me a better opportunity to refute the foul slanders uttered by me against Spiritualism.”

“What does your sister Kate say of your present course?”

“She is in complete sympathy with me. She did not approve my course in the pastÉ.”

“Will you have a manager for your lecture tour?” “No, sir. I have a horror of them. They, too, treated me most outrageously. Frank Stechen acted shamefully with me. He made considerable money through his management for me, and left me in Boston without a cent. All I got from him was five hundred and fifty dollars, which was given to me at the beginning of the contract."

To give greater authenticity to the interview, at her suggestion the following open letter was written to which she placed her signature:

128, West Forty-third Street, New York City, NOVEMBER 16, 1889.

TO THE PUBLIC.

The foregoing interview having been read over to me I find nothing contained therein that is not a correct record of my words and truthful expression of my sentiments.

I have not given a detailed account of the ways and means which were devised to bring me under subjection, and so extract from me a declaration that the spiritual phenomena as exemplified through my organism were a fraud. But I shall fully atone for this incompleteness when I get upon the platform.

The exactness of this interview was testified to by the names of a number of witnesses, including J. L. O'Sullivan, who was U.S. Minister to Portugal for twenty-five years. He said, "If ever I heard a woman speak truth, it was then."

So it may have been, but the failure of her lecture-agent to keep her in funds seems to have been the determining factor.

The statement would settle the question if we could take the speaker's words at face value, but unfortunately the author is compelled to agree with Mr. Isaac Funk, an indefatigable and impartial researcher, that Margaret at this period of her life could not be relied upon.

What is a good deal more to the purpose is that Mr. Funk sat with Margaret, that he heard the raps "all round the room" without detecting their origin, and that they spelt out to him a name and address which were correct and entirely beyond the knowledge of the medium. The information given was wrong, but, on the other hand, abnormal power was shown by reading the contents of a letter in Mr. Funk's pocket. Such mixed results are as puzzling as the other larger problem discussed in this chapter.

There is one factor which has been scarcely touched upon in this examination. It is the character and career of Mrs. Fish, afterwards Mrs. Underhill, who as Leah, the elder sister, plays so prominent a part in the matter. We know her chiefly by her book, " The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism" (Knox & Co., New York, 1885). This book was written by a friend, but the facts and documents were provided by Mrs. Underhill, who checked the whole narrative. It is simply and even crudely put together, and the Spiritualist is bound to conclude that the entities with whom the Fox circle were at first in contact were not always of the highest order. Perhaps on another plane, as on this, it is the plebeians and the lowly who carry out spiritual pioneer work in their own rough way and open the path for other and more refined agencies. With this sole criticism, one may say that the book gives a sure impression of candour and good sense, and as a personal narrative of one who was so nearly concerned in these momentous happenings, it is destined to outlive most of our current literature and to be read with close attention and even with reverence by generations unborn. Those humble folk who watched over the new birth-Capron, of Auburn, who first lectured upon it in public; Jervis, the gallant Methodist minister, who cried, “I know it is true, and I will face the frowning world!”; George Willetts, the Quaker; Isaac Post, who called the first spiritual meeting; the gallant band who testified upon the Rochester platform while the rowdies were heating the tar-all of them are destined to live in history. Of Leah it can truly be said that she recognised the religious meaning of the movement far more clearly than her sisters were able to do, and that she set her face against that use of it for purely worldly objects which is a degradation of the celestial. The following passage is of great interest as showing how the Fox family first regarded this visitation, and must impress the reader with the sincerity of the writer:

The general feeling of our familyÉwas strongly adverse to all this strange and uncanny thing. We regarded it as a great misfortune which had fallen upon us; how, whence or why we knew notÉ. We resisted it, struggled against it, and constantly and earnestly prayed for deliverance from it, even while a strange fascination attached to these marvellous manifestations thus forced upon us, against our will, by invisible agencies and agents whom we could neither resist, control nor understand. If our will, earnest desires and prayers could have prevailed or availed, the whole thing would have ended then and there, and the world outside of our little neighbourhood would never have heard more of the Rochester Rappings, or of the unfortunate Fox family.

These words give the impression of sincerity, and altogether Leah stands forth in her book, and in the evidence of the many witnesses quoted, as one who was worthy to play a part in a great movement.

Both Kate Fox Jencken and Margaret Fox-Kane died in the early ‘nineties, and their end was one of sadness and gloom. The problem which they present is put fairly before the reader, avoiding the extremes of the too sensitive Spiritualist who will not face the facts, and the special-pleading sceptics who lay stress upon those parts of the narrative which suit their purpose and omit or minimize everything else. Let us see, at the cost of a break in our narrative, if any sort of explanation can be found which covers the double fact that what these sisters could do was plainly abnormal, and yet that it was, to some extent at least, under their control. It is not a simple problem, but an exceedingly deep one which exhausts, and more than exhausts, the psychic knowledge which is at this date available, and was altogether beyond the reach of the generation in which the Fox sisters were alive.

The simple explanation which was given by the Spiritualists of the time is not to be set aside readily-and least readily by those who know most. It was that a medium who ill-uses her gifts and suffers debasement of moral character through bad habits, becomes accessible to evil influences which may use her for false information or for the defilement of a pure cause. That may be true enough as a CAUSA CAUSANS. But we must look closer to see the actual how and why.

The author is of opinion that the true explanation will be found by coupling all these happenings with the recent investigations of Dr. Crawford upon the means by which physical phenomena are produced. He showed very clearly, as is detailed in a subsequent chapter, that raps (we are dealing at present only with that phase) are caused by a protrusion from the medium’s person of a long rod of a substance having certain properties which distinguish it from all other forms of matter. This substance has been closely examined by the great French physiologist, Dr. Charles Richet, who has named it “ectoplasm.” These rods are invisible to the eye, partly visible to the sensitive plate, and yet conduct energy in such a fashion as to make sounds and strike blows at a distance.

Now, if Margaret produced the raps in the same fashion as Crawford’s medium, we have only to make one or two assumptions which are probable in them selves, and which the science of the future may definitely prove in order to make the case quite clear. The one assumption is that a centre of psychic force is formed in some part of the body from which the ectoplasm rod is protruded. Supposing that centre to be in Margaret’s foot, it would throw a very clear light upon the evidence collected in the Seybert inquiry. In examining Margaret and endeavouring to get raps from her, one of the committee, with the permission of the medium, placed his hand upon her foot. Raps at once followed. The investigator cried: “This is the most wonderful thing of all, Mrs. Kane. I distinctly feel them in your foot. There is not a particle of motion in your foot, but there is an unusual pulsation.”

This experiment by no means bears out the idea of joint dislocation or snapping toes. It is, however, exactly what one could imagine in the case of a centre from which psychic power was projected. This power is in material shape and is drawn from the body of the medium, so that there must be some nexus. This nexus may vary. In the case quoted it was in Margaret’s foot. It was observed by the Buffalo doctors that there was a subtle movement of a medium at the moment of a rap. The observation was correct, though the inference was wrong. The author has himself distinctly seen in the case of an amateur medium a slight general pulsation when a rap was given-a recoil, as it were, after the discharge of force.

Granting that Margaret’s power worked in this way, we have now only to discuss whether ectoplasmic rods can under any circumstances be protruded at will. So far as the author knows, there are no observations which bear directly upon the point. Crawford’s medium seems always to have manifested when in trance, so that the question did not arise. In other physical phenomena there is some reason to think that in their simpler form they are closely connected with the medium, but that as they progress they pass out of her control and are swayed by forces outside herself. Thus the ectoplasm pictures photographed by Madame Bisson and Dr. Schrenck Notzing (as shown in his recent book) may in their first forms be ascribed to the medium’s thoughts or memories taking visible shape in ectoplasm, but as she becomes lost in trance they take the form of figures which in extreme cases are endowed with independent life. If there be a general analogy between the two classes of phenomena, then it is entirely possible that Margaret had some control over the expulsion of ectoplasm which caused the sound, but that when the sound gave forth messages which were beyond her possible knowledge, as in the case instanced by Funk, the power was no longer used by her but by some independent intelligence.

It is to be remembered that no one is more ignorant of how effects are produced than the medium, who is the centre of them. One of the greatest physical mediums in the world told the author once that he had never witnessed a physical phenomenon, as he was himself always in trance when they occurred; the opinion of any one of the sitters would be more valuable than his own. Thus in the case of these Fox sisters, who were mere children when the phenomena began, they knew little of the philosophy of the subject, and Margaret frequently said that she did not understand her own results. If she found that she had herself some power of producing the raps, however obscure the way by which she did it, she would be in a frame of mind when she might well find it impossible to contradict Dr. Kane when he accused her of being concerned in it. Her confession, too, and that of her sister, would to that extent be true, but each would be aware, as they afterwards admitted, that there was a great deal more which could not be explained and which did not emanate from themselves.

There remains, however, one very important point to be discussed-the most important of all to those who accept the religious significance of this movement. It is a most natural argument for those who are unversed in the subject to say, "Are these your fruits? Can a philosophy or religion be good which has such an effect upon those who have had a prominent place in its establishment?" No one can cavil at such an objection, and it calls for a clear answer, which has often been made and yet is in need of repetition.

Let it then be clearly stated that there is no more connection between physical mediumship and morality than there is between a refined ear for music and morality. Both are purely physical gifts. The musician might interpret the most lovely thoughts and excite the highest emotions in others, influencing their thoughts and raising their minds. Yet in himself he might be a drug-taker, a dipsomaniac, or a pervert. On the other hand, he might combine his musical powers with an angelic personal character. There is simply no connection at all between the two things, save that they both have their centre in the same human body.

So it is in physical mediumship. We all, or nearly all, exude a certain substance from our bodies which has very peculiar properties. With most of us, as is shown by Crawford's weighing chairs, the amount is negligible. With one in 100,000 it is considerable. That person is a physical medium. He or she gives forth a raw material which can, we hold, be used by independent external forces. The individual's character has nothing to do with the matter. Such is the result of two generations of observation.

If it were exactly as stated, then, the physical medium's character would be in no way affected by his gift. Unfortunately, that is to understate the case. Under our present unintelligent conditions, the physical medium is subjected to certain moral risks which it takes a strong and well-guarded nature to withstand. The failures of these most useful and devoted people may be likened to those physical injuries, the loss of fingers and hands, incurred by those who have worked with the X-rays before their full properties were comprehended. Means have been taken to overcome these physical dangers after a certain number have become martyrs for science, and the moral dangers will also be met when a tardy reparation will be made to the pioneers who have injured themselves in forcing the gates of knowledge. These dangers lie in the weakening of the will, in the extreme debility after phenomenal sittings, and the temptation to gain temporary relief from alcohol, in the temptation to fraud when the power wanes, and in the mixed and possibly noxious spirit influences which surround a promiscuous circle, drawn together from motives of curiosity rather than of religion. The remedy is to segregate mediums, to give them salaries instead of paying them by results, to regulate the number of their sittings and the character of the sitters, and thus to remove them from influences which overwhelmed the Fox sisters as they have done other of the strongest mediums in the past. On the other hand, there are physical mediums who retain such high motives and work upon such religious lines that they are the salt of the earth. It is the same power which is used by the Buddha and by the Woman of Endor. The objects and methods of its use are what determine the character.

The author has said that there is little connection between physical mediumship and morality. One could imagine the ectoplasmic flow being as brisk from a sinner as from a saint, impinging upon material objects in the same way and producing results which would equally have the good effect of convincing the materialist of forces outside his ken. This does not apply, however, to internal mediumship, taking the form not of phenomena but of teaching and messages, given either by spirit voice, human voice, automatic writing, or any other device. Here the vessel is chosen that it may match what it contains. One could not imagine a small nature giving temporary habitation to a great spirit. One must be a Vale Owen before one gets Vale Owen messages. If a high medium degenerated in character, I should expect to find the messages cease or else share in the degeneration. Hence, too, the messages of a divine spirit such as is periodically sent to cleanse the world, of a mediaeval saint, of Joan of Arc, of Swedenborg, of Andrew Jackson

Davis, or of the humblest automatic writer in London, provided that the impulse is a true one, are really the same thing in various degrees. Each is a genuine breath from beyond, and yet each intermediary tinges with his or her personality the message which comes through. So, as in a glass darkly, we see this wondrous mystery, so vital and yet so undefined. It is its very greatness which prevents it from being defined. We have done a little, but we hand back many a problem to those who march behind us. They may look upon our own most advanced speculation as elementary, and yet may see vistas of thought before them which will stretch to the uttermost bounds of their mental vision.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICA

Having dealt with the history of the Fox family and the problems which that history raises, we shall now return to America and note the first effects of this invasion from another sphere of being.

These effects were not entirely excellent. There were follies on the part of individuals and extravagances on that of communities.

One of these, based on communications received through the mediumship of Mrs. Benedict, was the Apostolic Circle. It was started by a small group of men, strong believers in a second advent, who sought through spirit communications to confirm that belief. They obtained what they proclaimed to be communications from Apostles and prophets of the Bible. In 1849 James L. Scott, a Seventh Day Baptist minister of Brooklyn, joined this circle at Auburn, which now became known as the Apostolic Movement, and its spiritual leader was said to be the Apostle Paul. Scott was joined by the Rev. Thomas Lake Harris, and they established at Mountain Cove the religious community which attracted a strong following, until after some years their dupes became disillusioned and deserted their autocratic leaders.

This man, Thomas Lake Harris, is certainly one of the most curious personalities of whom we have any record, and it is hard to say whether Jekyll or Hyde predominated in his character. He was compounded of extremes, and everything which he did was outstanding for good or for evil. He was originally a Universalist minister, whence he derived the “Rev.” which he long used as a prefix. He broke away from his associates, adopted the teachings of Andrew Jackson Davis, became a fanatical Spiritualist, and finally, as already stated, claimed to be one of the autocratic rulers of the souls and purses of the colonists of Mountain Cove. There came a time, however, when the said colonists concluded that they were quite capable of looking after their own affairs both spiritual and material, so Harris found his vocation gone. He then came to New York and threw himself violently into the Spiritualistic movement, preaching at Dodworth Hall, the headquarters of the cult, and gaining a great and deserved reputation for remarkable eloquence. His megalomania-possibly an obsession-broke out once more, and he made extravagant claims which the sane and sober Spiritualists around him would not tolerate. There was one claim, however, which he could go to some length in making good, and that was inspiration from a very true and high poetic afflatus, though whether inborn or from without it is impossible to say. While at this stage of his career he, or some power through him, produced a series of poems, “A Lyric of the Golden Age,” “The Morning Land,” and others, which do occasionally touch the stars. Piqued by the refusal of the New York Spiritualists to admit his supernal claims, Harris then (1859) went to England, where he gained fame by his eloquence, shown in lectures which consisted of denunciations of his own former colleagues in New York. Each successive step in the man’s life was accompanied by a defilement of the last step from which he had come.

In 1860, in London, Harris’s life suddenly assumes a closer interest to Britons, especially to those who have literary affinities. Harris lectured at Steinway Hall, and while there Lady Oliphant listened to his wild eloquence, and was so affected by it that she brought the American preacher into touch with her son, Laurence Oliphant, one of the most brilliant men of his generation. It is difficult to see where the attraction lay, for the teaching of Harris at this stage had nothing uncommon in its matter, save that he seems to have adopted the Father-God and Mother-Nature idea which was thrown out by Davis. Oliphant placed Harris high as a poet, referring to him as “the greatest poet of the age as yet unknown to fame.” Oliphant was no mean judge, and yet in an age which included Tennyson, Longfellow, Browning, and so many more, the phrase seems extravagant. The end of the whole episode was that, after delays and vacillations, both mother and son surrendered themselves entirely to Harris, and went forth to manual labour in a new colony at Brocton in New York, where they remained in a condition which was virtual slavery save that it was voluntary. Whether such self-abnegation is saintly or idiotic is a question for the angels. It certainly seems idiotic when we learn that Laurence Oliphant had the greatest difficulty in getting leave to marry, and expressed humble gratitude to the tyrant when he was at last allowed to do so. He was set free to report the Franco-German War of 1870, which he did in the brilliant manner that might be expected of him, and then he returned to his servitude once more, one of his duties being to sell strawberries in baskets to the passing trains, while he was arbitrarily separated from his young wife, she being sent to Southern California and he retained at Brocton. It was not until the year 1882, twenty years from his first entanglement, that Oliphant, his mother being then dead, broke these extraordinary bonds, and after a severe struggle, in the course of which Harris took steps to have him incarcerated in an asylum, rejoined his wife, recovered some of his property, and resumed his normal life. He drew the prophet Harris in his book "Masollam," written in his later years, and the result is so characteristic both of Oliphant's brilliant word-painting and of the extraordinary man whom he painted, that the reader will perhaps be glad to refer to it in the Appendix.

Such developments as Harris and others were only excrescences on the main Spiritualistic movement, which generally speaking was sane and progressive. The freaks stood in the way of its acceptance, however, as the communistic or free love sentiments of some of these wild sects were unscrupulously exploited by the opposition as being typical of the whole.

We have seen that though the spiritual manifestations obtained wide public notice through the Fox girls, they were known long before this. To the pre ceding testimony to this effect we may add that of Judge Edmonds, who says:* "It is about five years since the subject first attracted public attention, though we discover now that for the previous ten or twelve years there had been more or less of it in different parts of the country, but it had been kept concealed, either from fear of ridicule or from ignorance of what it was." This explains the surprising number of mediums who began to be heard of immediately after the publicity obtained through the Fox family. It was no new gift they exhibited, it was only that their courageous action in making it widely known made others come forward and confess that they possessed the same power. Also this universal gift of mediumistic faculties now for the first time began to be freely developed. The result was that mediums were heard of in ever-increasing numbers. In April, 1849, manifestations occurred in the family of the Rev. A. H. Jervis, the Methodist minister of Rochester, in that of Mr. Lyman Granger, also of Rochester, and in the home of Deacon Hale, in the neighbouring town of Greece. So, too, six families in the adjoining town of Auburn began to develop mediumship. In none of these cases had the Fox girls any connection with what took place. So these leaders simply blazed the trail along which others followed.

* “Spiritualism,” by John W. Edmonds and George T. Dexter, M.D., New York, 1853, p. 36.

Outstanding features of the next succeeding years were the rapid growth of mediums on every side, and the conversion to a belief in Spiritualism of great public men like Judge Edmonds, ex-Governor Tallmadge, Professor Robert Hare, and Professor Mapes. The public support of such well-known men gave enormous publicity to the subject, while at the same time it increased the virulence of the opposition, which now perceived it had to deal with more than a handful of silly, deluded people. Men such as these could command a hearing in the Press of the day. There was also a change in the character of the spiritual phenomena. In the years 1851-2 Mrs. Hayden and D. D. Home were instrumental in making many converts. We shall have more to say about these mediums in later chapters.

In a communication addressed “To the Public,” published in the NEW YORK COURIER and dated New York, August 1, 1853, Judge Edmonds, a man of high character and clear intellect, gave a convincing account of his own experience. It is a curious thing that the United States, which at that time gave conspicuous evidence of moral courage in its leading citizens, has seemed to fall behind in recent years in this respect, for the author in his recent journeys there found many who were aware of psychic truth and yet shrank in the face of a jeering Press from publishing their convictions.

Judge Edmonds, in the article alluded to, began by detailing the train of events which caused him to form his opinions. It is dwelt upon here in some detail, because it is very important as showing the basis on which a highly educated than received the new teaching:

It was January 1851 that my attention was first called to the subject of “spiritual intercourse.” I was at the time withdrawn from general society; I was labouring under great depression of spirits. I was occupying all my leisure in reading on the subject of death and man’s existence afterward. I had, in the course of my life, read and heard from the pulpit so many contradictory and conflicting doctrines on the subject, that I hardly knew what to believe. I could not, if I would, believe what I did not understand, and was anxiously seeking to know, if, after death, we should again meet with those whom we had loved here, and under what circumstances. I was invited by a friend to witness the “Rochester Knockings.” I complied more to oblige her, and to while away a tedious hour. I thought a good deal on what I witnessed, and I determined to investigate the matter and find out what it was. If it was a deception, or a delusion, I thought that I could detect it. For about four months I devoted at least two evenings in a week and sometimes more to witnessing the phenomena in all its phases. I kept careful records of all I witnessed, and from time to time compared them with each other, to detect inconsistencies and contradictions. I read all I could lay my hands on on the subject, and especially all the professed “exposures of the humbug.” I went from place to place, seeing different mediums, meeting with different parties of persons-often with persons whom I had never seen before, and sometimes where I was myself entirely unknown-sometimes in the dark and sometimes in the light-often with inveterate unbelievers, and more frequently with zealous believers.

In fine, I availed myself of every opportunity that was afforded, thoroughly to sift the matter to the bottom. I was all this time an unbeliever, and tried the patience of believers sorely by my scepticism, my captiousness, and my obdurate refusal to yield my belief. I saw around me some who yielded a ready faith on one or two sittings only; others again, under the same circumstances, avowing a determined unbelief; and some who refused to witness it at all, and yet were confirmed unbelievers. I could not imitate either of these parties, and refused to yield unless upon most irrefragable testimony. At length the evidence came, and in such force that no sane man could withhold his faith.

It will thus be seen that this, the earliest outstanding convert to the new revelation, took the utmost pains before he allowed the evidence to convince him of the validity of the claims of the spirit. General experience shows that a facile acceptance of these claims is very rare among earnest thinkers, and that there is hardly any prominent Spiritualist whose course of study and reflection has not involved a novitiate of many years. This forms a striking contrast to those negative opinions which are founded upon initial prejudice and the biased or scandalous accounts of partisan authors.

Judge Edmonds, in the excellent summary of his position given in the article already quoted-an article which should have converted the whole American people had they been ready for assimilation-proceeds to show the solid basis of his beliefs. He points out that he was never alone when these manifestations occurred, and that he had many witnesses. He also shows the elaborate precautions which he took:

After depending upon my senses, as to these various phases of the phenomenon, I invoked the aid of science, and, with the assistance of an accomplished electrician and his machinery, and eight or ten intelligent, educated, shrewd persons, examined the matter. We pursued our inquiries many days, and established to our satisfaction two things: first, that the sounds were not produced by the agency of any person present or near us; and, second, that they were not forthcoming at our will and pleasure.

He deals faithfully with the alleged “exposures” in newspapers, some of which at long intervals are true indictments of some villain, but which usually are greater deceptions, conscious or unconscious, of the public than the evils which they profess to attack. Thus:

While these things were going on, there appeared in the newspapers various explanations and “exposures of the humbug,” as they were termed. I read them with care, in the expectation of being assisted in my researches, and I could not but smile at once at the rashness and the futility of the explanations. For instance, while certain learned professors in Buffalo were congratulating themselves on having detected it in the toe and knee joints, the manifestations in this city changed to ringing a bell placed under the table. They were like the solution lately given by a learned professor in England, who attributes the tipping of tables to a force in the hands which are laid upon them, overlooking the material fact that tables quite as frequently move when there is no hand upon them.

Having dealt with the objectivity of the phenomena, the judge next touched upon the more important question of their source. He commented upon the fact that he had answers to mental questions and found that his own secret thoughts were revealed, and that purposes which he had privily entertained had been made manifest. He notes also that he had heard the mediums use Greek, Latin, Spanish, and French, when they were ignorant of these languages.

This drives him to the consideration of whether these things may not be explained as the reflection of the mind of some other living human being. These considerations have been exhausted by every inquirer in turn, for Spiritualists do not accept their creed in one bound, but make the journey step by step, with much timid testing of the path. Judge Edmonds’s epitome of his course is but that which many others have followed. He gives the following reasons for negativing this question of other human minds:

Facts were communicated which were unknown then, but afterward found to be true; like this, for instance when I was absent last winter in Central America, my friends in town heard of my whereabouts and of the state of my health seven times; and on my return, by comparing their information with the entries in my journal it was found to be invariably correct. So, in my recent visit to the West my whereabouts and my condition were told to a medium in this city, while I was travelling on the railroad between Cleveland and Toledo. So thoughts have been uttered on subjects not then in my mind, and utterly at variance with my own notions. This has often happened to me and to others, so as fully to establish the fact that it was not our minds that gave birth to or affected the communication.

He then deals with the object of this marvellous development, and he points out its overwhelming religious significance on the general lines with which it is defined in a subsequent chapter of this work. Judge Edmonds's brain was indeed a remarkable one, and his judgment clear, for there is very little which we can add to his statement, and perhaps it has never been so well expressed in so small a compass. As we point to it one can claim that Spiritualism has been consistent from the first, and that the teachers and guides have not mixed their message. It is a strange and an amusing reflection that the arrogant science which endeavoured by its mere word and glare to crush this upstart knowledge in 1850 has been proved to be essentially wrong on its own ground. There are hardly any scientific axioms of that day, the finality of the element, the indivisibility of the atom, the separate origin of species, which have not been controverted, whereas the psychic knowledge which was so derided has steadily held its own, adding fresh facts but never contradicting those which were originally put forward.

Writing of the beneficent effects of this knowledge the judge says:

There is that which comforts the mourner and binds up the broken-hearted; that which smooths the passage to the grave and robs death of its terrors; that which enlightens the atheist and cannot but reform the vicious; that which cheers and encourages the virtuous amid all the trials and vicissitudes of life; and that which demonstrates to man his duty and his destiny, leaving it no longer vague and uncertain.

The matter has never been better summed up than that.

There is, however, one final passage in this remarkable document which causes some sadness. Speaking of the progress which the movement had made within four years in the United States, he says: "There are ten or twelve newspapers and periodicals devoted to the cause and the spiritual library embraces more than one hundred different publications, some of which have already attained a circulation of more than 10,000 copies.

Besides the undistinguished multitude there are many men of high standing and talent ranked among them-doctors, lawyers, and clergymen in great numbers, a Protestant bishop, the learned and reverend president of a college, judges of our higher courts, members of Congress, foreign ambassadors and ex-members of the United States Senate.” In four years the spirit force had done as much as this. How does the matter stand to-day? The “undistinguished multitude” has carried bravely on and the hundred publications have grown into many more, but where are the men of light and leading who point the path? Since the death of Professor Hyslop it is difficult to point to one man of eminence in the United States who is ready to stake his career and reputation upon the issue. Those who would have never feared the tyranny of man have shrank from the cat-calling of the public Press. The printing-machine has succeeded where the rack would have failed. The worldly loss in reputation and in business sustained by Judge Edmonds himself, who had to resign his seat upon the Supreme Court of New York, and by many others who testified to the truth, established a reign of terror which warns the intellectual classes from the subject. So the matter stands at present.

But the Press, for the moment, was well-disposed and Judge Edmonds’s famous summing-up, perhaps the finest and most momentous that any judge has ever delivered, met with respect, if not with concurrence. The NEW YORK COURIER wrote:

The letter from Judge Edmonds, published by us on Saturday, with regard to the so-called spiritual manifestations, coming as it did from an eminent jurist, a man remarkable for his clear common sense in the practical affairs of life, and a gentleman of irreproachable character, arrested the attention of the community, and is regarded by many persons as one of the most remarkable documents of the day.

The New York EVENING MIRROR said:

John W. Edmonds, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for this district, is an able lawyer, an industrious judge and a good citizen. For the last eight years occupying without interruption the highest judicial stations, whatever may be his faults no one can justly accuse him of lack of ability, industry, honesty or fearlessness. No one can doubt his general saneness, or can believe for a moment that the ordinary operations of his mind are not as rapid, accurate and reliable as ever. Both by the practitioners and suitors at his bar he is recognised as the head, in fact and in merit, of the Supreme Court for this District.

The experience of Dr. Robert Hare, Professor of Chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania, is also of interest, because he was one of the first eminent men of science who, setting out to expose the delusion of Spiritualism, became finally a firm believer. It was in 1853 that, in his own words, he "felt called upon, as an act of duty to his fellow creatures, to bring whatever influence he possessed to the attempt to stem the tide of popular madness which, in defiance of reason and science, was fast setting in favour of the gross delusion called Spiritualism." A denunciatory letter of his published in the newspapers of Philadelphia, where he lived, was copied by other newspapers all over the country, and it was made the text of numerous sermons. But, as with Sir William Crookes many years later, the jubilation was premature. Professor Hare, though a strong sceptic, was induced to experiment for himself, and after a period of careful testing he became entirely convinced of the spiritual origin of the manifestations. Like Crookes, he devised apparatus for use with mediums. Mr. S. B. Brittan, editor of THE SPIRITUAL TELEGRAPH, gives the following condensed account of some of Hare's experiments:

First, to satisfy himself that the movements were not the works of mortals, he took brass billiard balls, placed them on zinc plates and placed the hands of the mediums on the balls and, to his very great astonishment the tables moved. He next arranged a table to slide backward and forward, to which attachments were made, causing a disc to revolve containing the alphabet, HIDDEN FROM THE VIEW OF THE MEDIUMS. The letters were variously arranged, out of their regular consecutive order, and the spirit was required to place them consecutively or in their regular places. And behold, it was done! Then followed intelligent sentences which the medium could not see or know the import of till they were told him.

Again he tried another capital test. The long end of a lever was placed on spiral scales with an index attached and the weight marked; the medium's hand rested on the short end of the beam, where it was impossible to give pressure downward, but if pressed it would have a contrary effect and raise the long end; and yet, most astounding, the weight was increased several pounds on the scale.

Professor Hare embodied his careful researches and his views on Spiritualism in an important book published in New York in 1855, entitled

"Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations." In this (p. 55) he sums up the results of his early experiments as follows:

The evidence of the manifestations adduced in the foregoing narrative does not rest upon myself only, since there have been persons present when they were observed, and they have in my presence been repeated essentially under various modifications in many instances not specially alluded to.

The evidence may be contemplated under various phases; first, those in which rappings or other noises have been made which could not be traced to any mortal agency; secondly, those in which sounds were so made as to indicate letters forming grammatical, well-spelt sentences, affording proof that they were under the guidance of some rational being; thirdly, those in which the nature of the communication has been such as to prove that the being causing them must, agreeably to accompanying allegations, be some known acquaintance, friend, or relative of the inquirer.

Again, cases in which movements have been made of ponderable bodies of a nature to produce intellectual communications resembling those obtained, as abovementioned, by sounds.

Although the apparatus by which these various proofs were attained WITH THE GREATEST POSSIBLE PRECAUTION AND PRECISION, modified them as to the manner, essentially all the evidence which I have obtained tending to the conclusions above mentioned, has likewise been substantially obtained by a great number of observers. Many who never sought any spiritual communication and have not been induced to enroll themselves as Spiritualists, will nevertheless not only affirm the existence of the sounds and movements, but also admit their inscrutability.

Mr. James J. Mapes, LL.D., of New York, an agricultural chemist and member of various learned societies, commenced his investigation into Spiritualism in order to rescue, as he said, his friends, who were "running to imbecility" over the new craze. Through the mediumship of Mrs. Cora Hatch, afterwards Mrs. Richmond, he received what are described as marvellous scientific answers to his questions. He ended by becoming a thorough believer, and his wife, who had no artistic talent, became a drawing and painting medium. His daughter had, unknown to him, become a writing medium, and when she spoke to him about this development he asked her to give him an exhibition of her power. She took a pen and rapidly wrote what professed to be a message from Professor Mapes's father. The Professor asked for a proof of identity. His daughter's hand at once wrote: “You may recollect that I gave you, among other books, an Encyclopaedia; look at page 120 of that book, and you will find my name written there, which you have never seen.” The book referred to was stored with others at a warehouse. When Professor Mapes opened the case, which had been undisturbed for twenty-seven years, to his astonishment he found his father’s name written on page 120. It was this incident which first led him to make a serious investigation, for, like his friend Professor Hare, he had up till that time been a strong materialist.

In April, 1854, the Hon. James Shields presented a memorial,* praying for inquiry, to the United States legislature, with thirteen thousand signatures attached, and with the name of Governor Tallmadge at the head of the list. After a frivolous discussion, in which Mr. Shields, who presented the petition, referred to the belief held by the petitioners as due to a delusion arising from defective education or deranged mental faculties, it was formally agreed that the petition should lie upon the table. Mr. E. W. Capron has this comment**:

*See Capron, “Modern Spiritualism,” pp. 359-363.

** “Modern Spiritualism,” p. 375. “Modern Spiritualism,” p. 197.

It is not probable that any of the memorialists expected more favourable treatment than they received. The carpenters and fishermen of the world are the ones to investigate new truths and make Senates and Crowns believe and respect them. It is in vain to look for the reception or respect of new truths by men in high places.

The first regular Spiritualist organization was formed in New York on June 10, 1854. It was entitled the “Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge,” and included among its members such prominent people as Judge Edmonds and Governor Tallmadge, of Wisconsin.

Among the activities of the society was the establishment of a newspaper called The Christian Spiritualist, and the engagement of Miss Kate Fox to hold daily seances, to which the public were admitted free each morning from ten till one o’clock.

Writing in 1855 Capron says:

It would be impossible to state particulars in regard to the spread of Spiritualism in New York up to the present time. It has become diffused throughout the city, and has almost ceased to be a curiosity or a wonder to any. Public meetings are regularly held, and the investigation is constantly going on, but the days of excitement on the subject have passed away, and all parties look upon it as, at least, something more than a mere trick. It is true that religious bigotry denounces it, but without disputing the occurrences, and occasionally a pretended expose’ is made for purposes of speculation; but the fact of spiritual intercourse has become an acknowledged fact in the Empire city.

Perhaps the most significant fact of the period we have been considering was the development of mediumship in prominent people, as, for instance, Judge Edmonds and Professor Hare. The latter writes*:

* “Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations,” p. 54.

Having latterly acquired the powers of a medium in a sufficient degree to interchange ideas with my spirit friends, I am no longer under the necessity of defending media from the charge of falsehood and deception. It is now my own character only that can be in question.

Thus, dismissing the Fox girls from the field altogether, we have the private mediumship of Rev. A. H. Jervis, Deacon Hale, Lyman Granger, Judge Edmonds, Professor Hare, Mrs. Mapes, Miss Mapes, and the public mediumship of Mrs. Tamlin, Mrs. Benedict, Mrs. Hayden, D. D. Home, and dozens of others.

It is not within the scope of this work to deal with the great number of individual cases of mediumship, some of them most dramatic and interesting, which occurred during this first period of demonstration. The reader is referred to Mrs. Hardinge Britten’s two important compilations, “Modern American Spiritualism” and “Nineteenth Century Miracles,” books which will always be a most valuable record of early days. The series of phenomenal cases was so great that Mrs. Britten has counted over five thousand separate instances recorded in the Press in the first few years, which probably represents some hundreds of thousands not so recorded. Religion so-called and Science so-called united for once in an unholy attempt to misrepresent and persecute the new truth and its supporters, while the Press unfortunately found that its interest lay in playing up to the prejudices of the majority of its subscribers. It was easy to do this, for naturally, in so vital and compelling a movement, there were some who became fanatical, some who threw discredit upon their opinions by their actions, and some who took advantage of the general interest to imitate, with more or less success, the real gifts of the spirit. These fraudulent rascals were sometimes mere cold-blooded swindlers, and sometimes seem to have been real mediums whose psychic power had for a time deserted them. There were scandals and exposures, some real and some pretended. These exposures were then, as now, due often to the Spiritualists themselves, who strongly objected to their sacred ceremonies being a screen for the hypocrisies and blasphemies of those villains who, like human hyenas, tried to make a fraudulent living out of the dead. The general result was to take the edge off the first fine enthusiasm, and to set back the acceptance of what was true by an eternal harping on what was false.

The brave report of Professor Hare led to a disgraceful persecution of that venerable savant, who was at that moment, with the exception of Agassiz, the best-known man of science in America. The professors of Harvard-a university which has a most unenviable record in psychic matters-passed a resolution denouncing him and his “insane adherence to a gigantic humbug.” He could not lose his professorial chair at Pennsylvania University because that had been already resigned, but he suffered much in loss of reputation.

The crowning and most absurd instance of scientific intolerance-an intolerance which has always been as violent and unreasonable as that of the mediaeval Church-was shown by the American Scientific Association. This learned body howled down Professor Hare when he attempted to address them, and put it on record that the subject was unworthy of their attention. It was remarked, however, by the Spiritualists, that the same society at the same session held an animated debate as to why cocks crow between twelve and one at night, coming finally to the conclusion that at that particular hour a wave of electricity passes over the earth from north to south, and that the fowls, disturbed out of their slumbers and “being naturally of a crowing disposition,” register the event in this fashion. It had not then been learned-and perhaps it has hardly been learned yet-that a man, or a body of men, may be very wise upon those subjects on which they are experts, and yet show an extraordinary want of common sense when faced with a new proposition which calls for a complete readjustment of ideas. British science and, indeed, science the whole world over, have shown the same intolerance and want of elasticity which marked those early days in America.

These days have been drawn so fully by Mrs. Hardinge Britten, who herself played a large part in them, that those who are interested can always follow them in her pages. Some notes about Mrs. Britten herself may, however, be fitly introduced at this place, for no history of Spiritualism could be complete without an account of this remarkable woman who has been called the female St. Paul of the movement. She was a young Englishwoman who had gone to New York with a theatrical company, and had then, with her mother, remained in America. Being strictly Evangelical she was much repelled by what she considered the unorthodox views of Spiritualists, and fled in horror from her first seance. Later, in 1856, she was again brought into contact with the subject and received proofs which made it impossible for her to doubt its truth. She soon discovered that she was herself a powerful medium, and one of the best attested and most sensational cases in the early history of the movement was that in which she received intimation that the mail steamer PACIFIC had gone down in mid-Atlantic with all souls, and was threatened with prosecution by the owners of the boat for repeating what had been told her by the returning spirit of one of the crew. The information proved to be only too true, and the vessel was never heard of again.

Mrs. Emma Hardinge-who became, by a second marriage, Mrs. Hardinge Britten-threw her whole enthusiastic temperament into the young movement and left a mark upon it which is still visible. She was an ideal propagandist, for she combined every gift. She was a strong medium, an orator, a writer, a well-balanced thinker and a hardy traveller. Year after year she travelled the length and breadth of the United States proclaiming the new doctrine amid much opposition, for she was militant and anti-Christian in the views which she professed to get straight from her spirit guides. As these views were, however, that the morals of the Churches were far too lax and that a higher standard was called for, it is not likely that the Founder of Christianity would have been among her critics. These opinions of Mrs. Hardinge Britten had more to do with the broadly Unitarian view of the official Spiritualist bodies, which still exists, than any other cause.

In 1866 she returned to England, where she worked indefatigably, producing her two great chronicles, “Modern American Spiritualism” and, later, “Nineteenth Century Miracles,” both of which show an amazing amount of research together with a very clear and logical mind. In 1870 she married Dr. Britten, as strong a Spiritualist as herself. The marriage seems to have been an ideally happy one. In 1878 they went together as missionaries for Spiritualism to Australia and New Zealand, and stayed there for several years, founding various churches and societies which the author found still holding their own when he visited the Antipodes forty years later upon the same errand. While in Australia she wrote her “Faiths, Facts and Frauds of Religious History,” a book which still influences many minds. There was at that time undoubtedly a close connection between the free thought movement and the new spirit revelation. The Hon. Robert Stout, Attorney-General of New Zealand, was both President of the Free Thought Association and an ardent Spiritualist. It is more clearly understood now, however, that spirit intercourse and teaching are too wide to be fitted into any system, whether negative or positive, and that it is possible for a Spiritualist to profess any creed so long as he has the essentials of reverence to the unseen and unselfishness to those around him.

Among other monuments of her energy, Mrs. Hardinge Britten founded THE TWO WORLDS of Manchester, which has still as large a circulation as any Spiritualistic paper in the world. She passed onwards in 1899, having left her mark deep upon the religious life of three continents.

This has been a long but necessary digression from the account of the early days of American progress. Those early days were marked by great enthusiasm, much success, and also considerable persecution. All the leaders who had anything to lose lost it. Mrs. Hardinge says:

Judge Edmonds was pointed at in the streets as a crazy Spiritualist. Wealthy merchants were compelled to assert their claims to be considered sane and maintain their commercial rights by the most firm and determined action. Professional men and tradesmen were reduced to the limits of ruin, and a relentless persecution, originated by the Press and maintained by the pulpit, directed the full flow of its evil tides against the cause and its representatives. Many of the houses where circles were being held were disturbed by crowds who would gather together after nightfall and with yells, cries, whistles and occasional breaking of windows try to molest the quiet investigators in their unholy work of “waking the dead,” as one of the papers piously denominated the act of seeking for the “Ministry of Angels.”

Passing the smaller ebb and flow of the movement, the rising of new true mediums, the exposure of occasional false ones, the committees of inquiry (negatived often by the want of perception of the inquirers that a psychic circle depends for success upon the psychic condition of all its members), the development of fresh phenomena and the conversion of new initiates, there are a few outstanding incidents of those early days which should be particularly noted. Prominent among them is the mediumship of D. D. Home, and of the two Davenport boys, which form such important episodes, and attracted public attention to such a degree and for so long a time, that they are treated in separate chapters. There are, however, certain lesser mediumships which call for a shorter notice.

One of these was that of Linton, the blacksmith, a man who was quite illiterate and yet, like A. J. Davis, wrote a remarkable book under alleged spirit control. This book of 530 pages, called “The Healing of the Nations,” is certainly a remarkable production whatever its source, and it is obviously impossible that it could have been normally produced by such an author. It is adorned by a very long preface from the pen of Governor Tallmadge, which shows that the worthy senator was no mean student of antiquity. The case from the point of view of the classics and the early Church has seldom been better stated.

In 1857 Harvard University again made itself notorious by the persecution and expulsion of a student named Fred Willis, for the practice of medium ship. It would almost seem that the spirit of Cotton Mather and the old witch-finders of Salem had descended upon the great Boston seat of learning, for in those early days it was constantly at issue with those unseen forces which no one can hope to conquer. This matter began by an intemperate attempt upon the part of a Professor Eustis to prove that Willis was fraudulent, whereas all the evidence shows clearly that he was a true sensitive, who shrank greatly from any public use of his powers. The matter caused considerable excitement and scandal at the time. This and other cases of hard usage may be cited, but it must nevertheless be acknowledged that the hope of gain on the one hand, and the mental effervescence caused by so terrific a revelation on the other, did at this period lead to a degree of dishonesty in some so-called mediums, and to fanatical excesses and grotesque assertions in others, which held back that immediate success which the more sane and steady Spiritualists expected and deserved.

One curious phase of mediumship which attracted much attention was that of a farmer, Jonathan Koons and his family, living in a wild district of Ohio. The phenomena obtained by the Eddy brothers are discussed at some length in a subsequent chapter, and as those of the Koons family were much on the same lines they need not be treated in detail. The use of musical instruments came largely into the demonstrations of spirit force, and the Koons’s log-house became celebrated through all the adjoining states-so celebrated that it was constantly crowded, although it was situated some seventy miles from the nearest town. It would appear to have been a case of true physical mediumship of a crude quality, as might be expected where a rude uncultured farmer was the physical centre of it. Many investigations were held, but the facts always remained untouched by criticism. Eventually, however, Koons and his family were driven from their home by the persecution of the ignorant people among whom they lived. The rude open-air life of the farmer seems to be particularly adapted to the development of strong physical mediumship. It was in an American farmer's household that it first developed, and Koons in Ohio, the Eddys in Vermont, Foss in Massachusetts, and many others, have shown the same powers.

We may fitly end this short review of the early days in America by an event where spirit intervention proved to be of importance in the world's history. This was the instance of the inspired messages which determined the action of Abraham Lincoln at the supreme moment of the Civil War. The facts are beyond dispute, and are given with the corroborative evidence in Mrs. Maynard's book on Abraham Lincoln. Mrs. Maynard's maiden name was Nettie Colburn, and she was herself the heroine of the story.

The young lady was a powerful trance medium, and she visited Washington in the winter of 1862 in order to see her brother who was in the hospital of the Federal Army. Mrs. Lincoln, the wife of the President, who was interested in Spiritualism, had a sitting with Miss Colburn, was enormously impressed by the result, and sent a carriage next day to bring the medium to see the President. She describes the kindly way in which the great man received her in the parlour of the White House, and mentions the names of those who were present. She sat down, passed into the usual trance, and remembered no more. She continued thus:

For more than an hour I was made to talk to him, and I learned from my friends afterwards that it was upon matters that he seemed fully to understand, while they comprehended very little until that portion was reached that related to the forthcoming Emancipation Proclamation. He was charged with the utmost solemnity and force of manner not to abate the terms of its issue and not to delay its enforcement as a law beyond the opening of the year; and he was assured that it was to be the crowning event of his administration and his life; and that while he was being counselled by strong parties to defer the enforcement of it, hoping to supplant it by other measures and to delay action, he must in no wise heed such counsel, but stand firm to his convictions and fearlessly perform the work and fulfil the mission for which he had been raised up by an overruling Providence. Those present declared that they lost sight of the timid girl in the majesty of the utterance, the strength and force of the language, and the importance of that which was conveyed, and seemed to realise that some strong masculine spirit force was giving speech to almost divine commands.

I shall never forget the scene around me when I regained consciousness. I was standing in front of Mr. Lincoln, and he was sitting back in his chair, with his arms folded upon his breast, looking intently at me. I stepped back, naturally confused at the situation-not remembering at once where I was; and glancing around the group where perfect silence reigned. It took me a moment to remember my whereabouts.

A gentleman present then said in a low tone, “Mr. President, did you notice anything peculiar in the method of address?” Mr. Lincoln raised himself, as if shaking off his spell. He glanced quickly at the full-length portrait of Daniel Webster that hung above the piano, and replied: “Yes, and it is very singular, very!” with a marked emphasis.

Mr. Somes said: “Mr. President, would it be improper for me to inquire whether there has been any pressure brought to bear upon you to defer the enforcement of the Proclamation?” To which the President replied “Under these circumstances that question is perfectly proper, as we are all friends.” (Smiling upon the company). “It is taking all my nerve and strength to withstand such a pressure.” At this point the gentlemen drew around him and spoke together in low tones, Mr. Lincoln saying least of all. At last he turned to me, and laying his hand upon my head, uttered these words in a manner I shall never forget. “My child, you possess a very singular gift, but that it is of God I have no doubt. I thank you for coming here to-night. It is more important than perhaps anyone present can understand. I must leave you all now, but I hope I shall see you again.” He shook me kindly by the hand, bowed to the rest of the company, and was gone. We remained an hour longer, talking with Mrs. Lincoln and her friends, and then returned to Georgetown. Such was my first interview with Abraham Lincoln, and the memory of it is as clear and vivid as the evening on which it occurred.

This was one of the most important instances in the history of Spiritualism, and may also have been one of the most important in the history of the United States, as it not only strengthened the President in taking a step which raised the whole moral tone of the Northern armies and put something of the crusading spirit into the men, but a subsequent message urged Lincoln to visit the camps, which he did with the best effect upon the MORALE of the army. And yet the reader might, I fear, search every history of the great struggle and every life of the President without finding a mention of this vital episode. It is all part of that unfair treatment which Spiritualism has endured so long.

It is impossible that the United States, if it appreciated the truth, would allow the cult which proved its value at the darkest moment of its history to be persecuted and repressed by ignorant policemen and bigoted magistrates in the way which is now so common, or that the Press should continue to make mock of the movement which produced the Joan of Arc of their country.

CHAPTER VII

THE DAWN IN ENGLAND

The early Spiritualists have frequently been compared with the early Christians, and there are indeed many points of resemblance. In one respect, however, the Spiritualists had an advantage. The women of the older dispensation did their part nobly, living as saints and dying as martyrs, but they did not figure as preachers and missionaries. Psychic power and psychic knowledge are, however, as great in one sex as in another, and therefore many of the great pioneers of the spiritual revelation were women. Especially may this be claimed for Emma Hardinge Britten, one whose name will grow more famous as the years roll by. There have, however, been several other women missionaries outstanding, and the most important of these from the British point of view is Mrs. Hayden, who first in the year 1852 brought the new phenomena to these shores. We had of old the Apostles of religious faith. Here at last was an apostle of religious fact.

Mrs. Hayden was a remarkable woman as well as an excellent medium. She was the wife of a respectable New England journalist who accompanied her in her mission, which had been organized by one Stone, who had some experience of her powers in America.

At the time of her visit she was described as being “young, intelligent, and at the same time simple and candid in her manners.” Her British critic added:

She disarmed suspicion by the unaffected artlessness of her address, and many who came to amuse themselves at her expense were shamed into respect and even cordiality by the patience and good temper which she displayed. The impression invariably left by an interview with her was that if, as Mr. Dickens contended, the phenomena developed by her were attributed to art, she herself was the most perfect artist, as far as acting went, that had ever presented herself before the public.

The ignorant British Press treated Mrs. Hayden as a common American adventuress. Her real mental calibre, however, may be judged from the fact that some years later, after her return to the United States, Mrs. Hayden graduated as a doctor of medicine and practised for fifteen years. Dr. James Rodes Buchanan, the famous pioneer in psychometry, speaks of her as "one of the most skilful and successful physicians I have ever known." She was offered a medical professorship in an American college, and was employed by the Globe Insurance Company in protecting the company against losses in insurance on lives. A feature of her success was what Buchanan describes as her psychometric genius. He adds a unique tribute to the effect that her name was almost forgotten at the Board of Health because for years she had not a single death to report.

This sequel, however, was beyond the knowledge of the sceptics of 1852, and they cannot be blamed for insisting that these strange claims of other-world intervention should be tested with the utmost rigour before they could be admitted. No one could contest this critical attitude. But what does seem strange is that a proposition which, if true, would involve such glad tidings as the piercing of the wall of death and a true communion of the saints, should arouse not sober criticism, however exacting, but a storm of insult and abuse, inexcusable at any time, but particularly so when directed against a lady who was a visitor in our midst. Mrs. Hardinge Britten says that Mrs. Hayden no sooner appeared upon the scene than the leaders of the Press, pulpit and college levelled against her a storm of ribaldry, persecution and insult, alike disgraceful to themselves and humiliating to the boasted liberalism and scientific acumen of their age. She added that her gentle womanly spirit must have been deeply pained, and the harmony of mind so essential to the production of good psychological results constantly destroyed, by the cruel and insulting treatment she received at the hands of many of those who came, pretending to be investigators, but in reality burning to thwart her, and laying traps to falsify the truths of which Mrs. Hayden professed to be the instrument. Sensitively alive to the animus of her visitors, she could feel, and often writhed under the crushing force of the antagonism brought to bear upon her, without-at that time-knowing how to repel or resist it.

At the same time, the whole nation was not involved in this irrational hostility, which in a diluted form we still see around us. Brave men arose who were not afraid to imperil their worldly career, or even their reputation for sanity, by championing an unpopular cause with no possible motive save the love of truth and that sense of chivalry which revolted at the persecution of a woman. Dr. Ashburner, one of the Royal physicians, and

Sir Charles Isham, were among those who defended the medium in the public Press.

Mrs. Hayden’s mediumship seems, when judged by modern standards, to have been strictly limited in type. Save for the raps, we hear little of physical phenomena, nor is there any question of lights, materialisations or Direct Voices. In harmonious company, however, the answers as furnished by raps were very accurate and convincing. Like all true mediums, she was sensitive to discord in her surroundings, with the result that the contemptible crew of practical jokers and ill-natured researchers who visited her found her a ready victim. Deceit is repaid by deceit and the fool is answered according to his folly, though the intelligence behind the words seems to care little for the fact that the passive instrument employed may be held accountable for the answer. These pseudo-researchers filled the Press with their humorous accounts of how they had deceived the spirits, when as a fact they had rather deceived themselves. George Henry Lewes, afterwards consort of George Eliot, was one of these cynical investigators. He recounts with glee how he had asked the control in writing: “Is Mrs. Hayden an impostor?” to which the control rapped out: “Yes.” Lewes was dishonest enough to quote this afterwards as being a confession of guilt from Mrs. Hayden. One would rather draw from it the inference that the raps were entirely independent of the medium, and also that questions asked in a spirit of pure frivolity met with no serious reply.

It is, however, by the positives and not by the negatives that such questions must be judged, and the author must here use quotations to a larger extent than is his custom, for in no other way can one bring home how those seeds were first planted in England which are destined to grow to such a goodly height. Allusion has already been made to the testimony of Dr. Ashburner, the famous physician, and it would be well perhaps to add some of his actual words. He says*:

* THE LEADER, March 14, 1853. June 1 and 8, 1853.

Sex ought to have protected her from injury, if you gentlemen of the Press have no regard to the hospitable feelings due to one of your own cloth, for Mrs. Hayden is the wife of a former editor and proprietor of a journal in Boston having a most extensive circulation in New England. I declare to you that Mrs. Hayden is no impostor, and he who has the daring to come to an opposite conclusion must do so at the peril of his character for truth.

Again, in a long letter to THE REASONER, after admitting that he visited the medium in a thoroughly incredulous frame of mind, expecting to witness “the same class of transparent absurdities” he had previously encountered with other so-called mediums, Ashburner writes: “As for Mrs. Hayden, I have so strong a conviction of her perfect honesty that I marvel at anyone who could deliberately accuse her of fraud,” and at the same time he gives detailed accounts of veridical communications he received.

Among the investigators was the celebrated mathematician and philosopher, Professor De Morgan. He gives some account of his experiences and conclusions in his long and masterly preface to his wife’s book, “From Matter to Spirit,” 1863, as follows:

Ten years ago Mrs. Hayden, the well-known American medium, came to my house ALONE. The sitting began immediately after her arrival. Eight or nine persons of all ages, and of all degrees of belief and unbelief in the whole thing being imposture, were present. The raps began in the usual way. They were to my ear clean, clear, faint sounds such as would be said to ring, had they lasted. I likened them at the time to the noise which the ends of knitting-needles would make, if dropped from a small distance upon a marble slab, and instantly checked by a damper of some kind; and subsequent trial showed that my description was tolerably accurateÉ. At a late period in the evening, after nearly three hours of experiment, Mrs. Hayden having risen, and talking at another table while taking refreshment, a child suddenly called out, “Will all the spirits who have been here this evening rap together?” The words were no sooner uttered than a hailstorm of knitting-needles was heard, crowded into certainly less than two seconds; the big needle sounds of the men, and the little ones of the women and children, being clearly distinguishable, but perfectly disorderly in their arrival.

After a remark to the effect that for convenience he intends to speak of the raps as coming from spirits, Professor De Morgan goes on:

On being asked to put a question to the first spirit, I begged that I might be allowed to put my question mentally-that is, without speaking it, or writing it, or pointing it out to myself on an alphabet-and that Mrs. Hayden might hold both arms extended while the answer was in progress. Both demands were instantly granted by a couple of raps. I put the question and desired the answer might be in one word, which I assigned; all mentally.

I then took the printed alphabet, put a book upright before it, and, bending my eyes upon it, proceeded to point to the letters in the usual way. The word “chess” was given by a rap at each letter. I had now a reasonable certainty of the following alternative: either some thought-reading of a character wholly inexplicable, or such superhuman acuteness on the part of Mrs. Hayden that she could detect the letter I wanted by my bearing, though she (seated six feet from the book which hid my alphabet) could see neither my hand nor my eye, nor at what rate I was going through the letters. I was fated to be driven out of the second alternative before the sitting was done.

As the next incident of the sitting, which he goes on to relate, is given with extra details in a letter written ten years earlier to the Rev. W. Heald, we quote this version published in his wife’s “Memoir of Augustus De Morgan” (pp. 221-2):

Presently came MY FATHER (OB., 1816), and after some conversation I went on as follows:

“Do you remember a periodical I have in my head?” “Yes.” “Do you remember the epithets therein applied to yourself?” “Yes.” “Will you give me the initials of them by the card?” “Yes.” I then began pointing to the alphabet, with a book to conceal the card, Mrs. H. being at the opposite side of a round table (large), and a bright lamp between us. I pointed letter by letter till I came to F, which I thought should be the first initial. No rapping. The people round me said, “You have passed it; there was a rapping at the beginning.” I went back and heard the rapping distinctly at C. This puzzled me, but in a moment I saw what it was. The sentence was begun by the rapping agency earlier than I intended. I allowed C to pass, and then got D T F O C, being the initials of the consecutive words which I remembered to have been applied to my father in an old review published in 1817, which no one in the room had ever heard of but myself. C D T F O C was all right, and when I got so far I gave it up, perfectly satisfied that something, or somebody, or some spirit, was reading my thoughts. This and the like went on for nearly three hours, during a great part of which Mrs. H. was busy reading the “Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which she had never seen before, and I assure you she set to it with just as much avidity as you may suppose an American lady would who saw it for the first time, while we were amusing ourselves with the raps in our own way. All this I declare to be literally true. Since that time I have seen it in my house frequently, various persons presenting themselves. The answers are given mostly by the table, on which a hand or two is gently placed, tilting up at the letters. There is much which is confused in the answers, but every now and then comes something which surprises us. I have no theory about it, but in a year or two something curious may turn up. I am, however, satisfied of the reality of the phenomenon. A great many other persons are as cognisant of these phenomena in their own houses as myself. Make what you can of it if you are a philosopher.

When Professor De Morgan says that some spirit was reading his thoughts, he omits to observe that the incident of the first letter was evidence of something that was not in his mind. Also, from Mrs. Hayden's attitude throughout the seance, it is clear that it was her atmosphere rather than her actual conscious personality which was concerned. Some further important evidence from the De Morgans is relegated to the Appendix.

Mrs. Fitzgerald, a well-known figure in the early days of Spiritualism in London, gives, in THE SPIRITUALIST of November 22, 1878, the following very striking experience with Mrs. Hayden:

My first introduction to Spiritualism commenced at the time of the first visit of the well-known medium, Mrs. Hayden, to this country nearly thirty years ago. I was invited to meet her at a party given by a friend in Wimpole Street, London. Having made a pre-engagement for that evening, which I could not avoid, I arrived late, after what appeared an extraordinary scene, of which they were all talking with great animation. My look of blank disappointment was noticed, and Mrs. Hayden, whom I then met for the first time, came most kindly forward, expressed her regrets, and suggested that I should sit at a small table by myself apart from the others, and she would ask the spirits if they would communicate with me. All this appeared so new and surprising I scarcely understood what she was talking about, or what I had to expect. She placed before me a printed alphabet, a pencil, and a piece of paper. Whilst she was in the act of doing this, I felt extraordinarily rappings all over the table, the vibrations from which I could feel on the sole of my foot as it rested against the table's leg. She then directed me to note down each letter at which I heard a distinct rap, and with this short explanation she left me to myself. I pointed as desired-a distinct rap came at the letter E-others followed, and a name that I could not fail to recognise was spelt out. The date of death was given, which I had not before known, and a message added which brought back to my memory the almost last dying words of an old friend-namely, "I shall watch over you."

And then the recollection of the whole scene was brought vividly before me. I confess I was startled and somewhat awed.

I carried the paper upon which all this was written at the dictation of my spirit friend to his former legal adviser, and was assured by him that the dates, etc., were perfectly correct. They could not have been in my mind because I was not aware of them.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Fitzgerald stated that she believed that Mrs. Hayden’s first seance in England was held with Lady Combermere, her son, Major Cotton, and Mr. Henry Thompson, of York.

In the same volume of THE SPIRITUALIST (p. 264) there appears an account of a seance with Mrs. Hayden, taken from the life of Charles Young, the well-known tragedian, written by his son, the Rev. Julian Young:

1853, APRIL 19TH. I went up to London this day for the purpose of consulting my lawyers on a subject of some importance to myself, and having heard much of a Mrs. Hayden, an American lady, as a spiritual medium, I resolved, as I was in town, to discover her whereabouts, and judge of her gifts for myself. Accidentally meeting an old friend, Mr. H., I asked him if he could give me her address. He told me that it was 22, Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square. As he had never been in her company, and had a great wish to see her, and yet was unwilling to pay his guinea for the treat, I offered to frank him, if he would go with me. He did so gladly. Spirit-rapping has been so common since 1853 that I should irritate my reader’s patience by describing the conventional mode of communicating between the living and the dead. Since the above date I have seen very much of spirit-rapping; and though my organs of wonder are largely developed, and I have a weakness for the mystic and supernatural, yet I cannot say that I have ever witnessed any spiritual phenomena which were not explicable on natural grounds, except in the instance I am about to give, in which collusion appeared to be out of the question, the friend who accompanied me never having seen Mrs. Hayden, and she knowing neither his name nor mine. The following dialogue took place between Mrs. H. and myself:

Mrs. H.: Have you, sir, any wish to communicate with the spirit of any departed friend?

J. C. Y.: Yes.

Mrs. H.: Be pleased then to ask your questions in the manner prescribed by the formula, and I dare say you will get satisfactory replies.

J. C. Y.: (Addressing himself to one invisible yet supposed to be present): Tell me the name of the person with whom I wish to communicate.

The letters written down according to the dictation of the taps when put together spelt “George William Young.”

J. C. Y.: On whom are my thoughts now fixed?

A.: Frederick William Young.

J. C. Y.: What is he suffering from?

A.: Tic douloureux.

J. C. Y.: Can you prescribe anything for him?

A.: Powerful mesmerism.

J. C. Y.: Who should be the administrator?

A.: Someone who has strong sympathy with the patient.

J. C. Y.: Should I succeed?

A.: No.

J. C. Y.: Who would?

A.: Joseph Ries. (A gentleman whom my uncle much respected.)

J. C. Y.: Have I lost any friend lately?

A.: Yes.

J. C. Y.: Who is it? (I thinking of a Miss Young, a distant cousin.)

A.: Christiana Lane.

J. C. Y.: Can you tell me where I sleep to-night?

A.: James B.’s, Esq., 9 Clarges Street.

J. C. Y.: Where do I sleep to-morrow?

A.: Colonel Weymouth’s, Upper Grosvenor Street.

I was so astounded by the correctness of the answers I received to my inquiries that I told the gentleman who was with me that I wanted particularly to ask a question to the nature of which I did not wish him to be privy, and that I should be obliged to him if he would go into the adjoining room for a few minutes. On his doing so I resumed my dialogue with Mrs. Hayden.

J. C. Y.: I have induced my friend to withdraw because I did not wish him to know the question I want to put, but I am equally anxious that you should not know it either, and yet, if I understand rightly, no answer can be transmitted to me except through you. What is to be done under these circumstances?

Mrs. H.: Ask your question in such a form that the answer returned shall represent by one word the salient idea in your mind.

J. C. Y.: I will try. Will what I am threatened with take place?

A.: No.

J. C. Y.: That is unsatisfactory. It is easy to say Yes or No, but the value of the affirmation or negation will depend on the conviction I have that you know what I am thinking of. Give me one word which shall show that you have the clue to my thoughts.

A.: Will.

Now, a will by which I had benefited was threatened to be disputed. I wished to know whether the threat would be carried out. The answer I received was correct.

It may be added that Mr. Young had no belief, before or after this seance, in spirit agency, which surely, after such an experience, is no credit to his intelligence or capacity for assimilating fresh knowledge.

The following letter in THE SPIRITUALIST from Mr. John Malcom, of Clifton, Bristol, mentions some well-known sitters. Discussing the question that had been raised as to where the first seance in England was held and who were the witnesses present at it, he says:

I do not remember the date; but calling on my friend Mrs. Crowe, authoress of “The Night Side of Nature,” she invited me to accompany her to a spiritual seance at the house of Mrs. Hayden in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square. She informed me that Mrs. Hayden had just arrived from America to exhibit the phenomena of Spiritualism to people in England who might feel interested in the subject. There were present Mrs. Crowe, Mrs. Milner Gibson, Mr. Colley Grattan (author of “High Ways and Bye Ways”), Mr. Robert Chambers, Dr. Daniels, Dr. Samuel Dickson, and several others whose names I did not hear. Some very remarkable manifestations occurred on that occasion. I afterwards had frequent opportunities of visiting Mrs. Hayden, and, though at first disposed to doubt the genuineness of the phenomena, such convincing evidence was given me of spirit communion that I became a firm believer in the truth of it.

The battle in the British Press raged furiously. In the columns of the London CRITIC, Mr. Henry Spicer (author of “Sights and Sounds”) replied to the critics in HOUSEHOLD WORDS, the LEADER, and the ZOIST. There followed in the same newspaper a lengthy contribution from a

Cambridge clergyman, signing himself “M.A.,” considered to be the Rev. A. W. Hobson, of St. John’s College, Cambridge.

This gentleman’s description is graphic and powerful, but too long for complete transcription. The matter is of some importance, as the writer is, so far as is known, the first English clergyman who had gone into the matter. It is strange, and perhaps characteristic of the age, how little the religious implications appear to have struck the various sitters, and how entirely occupied they were by inquiries as to their grandmother’s second name or the number of their uncles. Even the more earnest seem to have been futile in their questions, and no one shows the least sense of realisation of the real possibilities of such commerce, or that a firm foundation for religious belief could at last be laid. This clergyman did, however, in a purblind way, see that there was a religious side to the matter. He finishes his report with the paragraph:

I will conclude with a few words to the numerous clerical readers of the CRITIC. Being myself a clergyman of the Church of England, I consider that the subject is one in which my brother clergy must, sooner or later, take some interest, however reluctant they may be to have anything to do with it. And my reasons are briefly as follow: If such excitement become general in this country as already exists in America-and what reason have we to suppose that it will not?-then the clergy throughout the kingdom will be appealed to on all sides, will have to give an opinion, and may probably be obliged, by their very duties, to interfere and endeavour to prevent the delusions to which, in many cases, this “mystery” has already led. One of the most sensible and able writers on the subject of these spirit manifestations in America, viz., Adin Ballou, in his work has expressly cautioned his readers not to believe all these spirits communicate, nor allow themselves to give up their former opinions and religious creeds (as so many thousands have done) at the bidding of these rappers. The thing has scarcely begun in England as yet; but already, within the few months since Mr. and Mrs. Hayden arrived in London, it has spread like wild-fire, and I have good reason for saying that the excitement is only commencing. Persons who at first treated the whole affair as a contemptible imposture and humbug, on witnessing these strange things for themselves, become first startled and astonished, then rush blindly into all sorts of mad conclusions-as, for instance, that it is all the work of the devil, or (in the opposite degree) that it is a new revelation from Heaven. I see scores of the most able and intelligent people whom I know utterly and completely mystified by it; and no one knows what to make of it. I am ready to confess, for my own part, that I am equally mystified. That it is not imposture, I feel perfectly and fully convinced. In addition to the tests, etc., above-named, I had a long conversation in private with both Mr. and Mrs. Hayden separately, and everything they said bore the marks of sincerity and good faith. Of course, this is no evidence to other people, but it is to me. If there is any deception, they are as much deceived as any of their dupes.

It was not the clergy but the Free Thinkers who perceived the real meaning of the message, and that they must either fight against this proof of life eternal, or must honestly confess, as so many of us have done since, that their philosophy was shattered, and that they had been beaten on their own ground. These men had called for proofs in transcendent matters, and the more honest and earnest were forced to admit that they had had them. The noblest of them all was Robert Owen, as famous for his humanitarian works as for his sturdy independence in religious matters. This brave and honest man declared publicly that the first rays of this rising sun had struck him and had gilded the drab future which he had pictured. He said:

I have patiently traced the history of these manifestations, investigated the facts connected with them (testified to in innumerable instances by persons of high character), have had fourteen seances with the medium Mrs. Hayden, during which she gave me every opportunity to ascertain if it were possible there could be any deception on her part.

I am not only convinced that there is no deception with truthful media in these proceedings, but that they are destined to effect, at this period, the greatest moral revolution in the character and condition of the human race.

Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten comments on the interest and astonishment created by the conversion of Robert Owen, the influence of whose purely materialistic belief was regarded as exerting an injurious effect on religion. She says that one of England’s most prominent statesmen declared “that Mrs. Hayden deserved a monument, if only for the conversion of Robert Owen.”

Shortly afterwards the famous Dr. Elliotson, who was the president of the Secular Society, was also converted after, like St. Paul, violently assailing the new revelation. He and Dr. Ashburner had been two of the most prominent supporters of mesmerism in the days when even that obvious phenomenon had to fight for its existence, and when every medical man who affirmed it was in danger of being called a quack. It was painful to both of them, therefore, when Dr. Ashburner threw himself into this higher subject with enthusiasm, while his friend was constrained not only to reject but actively to attack it. However, the breach was healed by the complete conversion of Elliotson, and Mrs. Hardinge Britten relates how in his declining years he insisted upon her coming to him, and how she found him a "warm adherent of Spiritualism, a faith which the venerable gentleman cherished as the brightest revelation that had ever been vouchsafed to him, and one which finally smoothed the dark passage to the life beyond, and made his transition a scene of triumphant faith and joyful anticipation."

As might have been expected, it was not long before the rapid growth of table phenomena compelled scientific sceptics to recognise their existence, or at least to take steps to expose the delusion of those who attributed to the movements an external origin. Braid, Carpenter, and Faraday stated publicly that the results obtained were due simply to unconscious muscular action. Faraday devised ingenious apparatus which he considered conclusively proved his assertion. But, like so many other critics, Faraday had had no experience with a good medium, and the well-attested fact of the movement of tables without contact is sufficient to demolish his pretty theories. If one could imagine a layman without a telescope contradicting with jeers and contempt the conclusions of those astronomers who had used telescopes, it would present some analogy to those people who have ventured to criticize psychic matters without having had any personal psychic experience.

The contemporary spirit is no doubt voiced by Sir David Brewster. Speaking of an invitation from Monckton Milnes to meet Mr. Galla, the African traveller, "who assured him that Mrs. Hayden told him the names of persons and places in Africa which nobody but himself knew," Sir David comments, "The world is obviously going mad."

Mrs. Hayden remained in England about a year, returning to America towards the close of 1853. Some day, when these matters have found their true proportion to other events, her visit will be regarded as historical and epoch-making. Two other American mediums were in England during her visit-Mrs. Roberts and Miss Jay-having followed shortly after, but they appear to have had little influence on the movement, and seem to have been very inferior in psychic power.

A contemporary sidelight on those early days is afforded by this extract from an article on Spiritualism in THE YORKSHIREMAN (October 25, 1856), a non-Spiritualist journal:

The English public in general, we believe, are but imperfectly acquainted with the nature of the Spiritualist doctrines, and many of our readers are, doubtless, unprepared to believe that they prevail to any extent in this country. The ordinary phenomena of table-moving, etc., are, it is true, familiar to most of us. Some two or three years ago there was not an evening party which did not essay the performance of a Spiritualist miracleÉ. In those days you were invited to "Tea and Table Moving" as a new excitement, and made to revolve with the family like mad round articles of furniture.

After declaring that Faraday's attack made "the spirits suddenly subside," so that for a time no more was heard of their doings, the journal continues:

We have ample evidence, however, that Spiritualism as a vital and active belief is not confined to the United States, but that it has found favour and acceptance among a considerable class of enthusiasts in our own country.

But the general attitude of the influential Press was much the same then as now-ridicule and denial of the facts, and the view that even if the facts were true, of what use were they? THE TIMES, for instance (a paper which has been very ill-informed and reactionary in psychic matters), in a leading article of a little later date suggests:

It would be something to get one's hat off the peg by an effort of volition, without going to fetch it, or troubling a servant.

If table-power could be made to turn even a coffee-mill, it would be so much gained.

Let our mediums and clairvoyants, instead of finding out what somebody died of fifty years ago, find out what figure the Funds will be at this day three months.

When one reads such comments in a great paper one wonders whether the movement was not really premature, and whether in so base and material an age the idea of outside intervention was not impossible to grasp. Much of this opposition was due, however, to the frivolity of inquirers who had not as yet realised the full significance of these signals from beyond, and used them, as the Yorkshire paper states, as a sort of social recreation and a new excitement for jaded worldlings.

But while in the eyes of the Press the death-blow had been given to a discredited movement, investigation went on quietly in many quarters. People of common sense, as Howitt points out, “were successfully testing those angels, under their own mode of advent, and finding them real,” for, as he well says, public mediums have never done more than inaugurate the movement.”

If one were to judge from the public testimony of the time, Mrs. Hayden’s influence might be considered to have been limited in extent. To the public at large she was only a nine days’ wonder, but she scattered much seed which slowly grew. The fact is, she opened the subject up, and people, mostly in the humbler walks of life, began to experiment and to discover the truth for themselves, though, with a caution born of experience, they kept their discoveries for the most part to themselves. Mrs. Hayden, without doubt, fulfilled her ordained task.

The history of the movement may well be compared to an advancing sea with its successive crests and troughs, each crest gathering more volume than the last. With every trough the spectator has thought that the waves had ended, and then the great new billow gathered. The time between the leaving of Mrs. Hayden in 1853 until the advent of D. D. Home in 1855 represents the first lull in England. Superficial critics thought it was the end. But in a thousand homes throughout the land experiments were being carried on; many who had lost all faith in the things of the spirit, in what was perhaps the deadest and most material age in the world’s history, had begun to examine the evidence and to understand with relief or with awe that the age of faith was passing and that the age of knowledge, which St. Peter has said to be better, was at hand. Devout students of the Scriptures remember the words of their Master: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,” and wondered whether these strange stirrings of outside forces might not be part of that new knowledge which had been promised.

Whilst Mrs. Hayden had thus planted the first seeds in London, a second train of events had brought spiritual phenomena under the notice of the people of Yorkshire.

This was due to a visit of a Mr. David Richmond, an American Shaker, to the town of Keighley, when he called upon Mr. David Weatherhead and interested him in the new development. Table manifestations were obtained and local mediums discovered, so that a flourishing centre was built up which still exists. From Yorkshire the movement spread over Lancashire, and it is an interesting link with the past that Mr. Wolstenholme, of Blackburn, who died in 1925 at a venerable age, was able as a boy to secrete himself under a table at one of these early seances, where he witnessed, though we will hope that he did not aid, the phenomena. A paper, THE YORKSHIRE SPIRITUAL TELEGRAPH, was started at Keighley in 1855, this and other expenses being borne by David Weatherhead, whose name should be honoured as one who was the first to throw his whole heart into the movement. Keighley is still an active centre of psychic work and knowledge.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTINUED PROGRESS IN ENGLAND

Mrs. de Morgan’s account of ten years’ experience of Spiritualism covers the ground from 1853 to 1863. The appearance of this book, with the weighty preface by Professor De Morgan, was one of the first signs that the new movement was spreading upwards as well as among the masses. Then came the work of D. D. Home and of the Davenports, which is detailed elsewhere. The examination of the Dialectical Society began in 1869, which is also dealt with in a later chapter. The year 1870 was the date of the first researches of William Crookes, which he undertook after remarking upon the scandal caused by the refusal of scientific men “to investigate the existence and nature of facts asserted by so many competent and credible witnesses.” In the same periodical, the Quarterly journal of Science, he spoke of this belief being shared by millions, and added: “I wish to ascertain the laws governing the appearance of very remarkable phenomena, which, at the present time, are occurring to an almost incredible extent.”

The story of his research was given in full in 1874, and caused such a tumult among the more fossilized men of science-those who may be said to have had their minds subdued to that at which they worked-that there was some talk of depriving him of his Fellowship of the Royal Society. The storm blew over, but Crookes was startled by its violence, and it was noticeable that for many years, until his position was impregnable, he was very cautious in any public expression of his views. In 1872-73, the Rev. Stainton Moses appeared as a new factor, and his automatic writings raised the subject to a more spiritual plane in the judgment of many. The phenomenal side may attract the curious, but when over-emphasized it is likely to repel the judicious mind.

Public lectures and trance addresses became a feature. Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan, and Mr. J. J. Morse gave eloquent orations, purporting to come from spirit influence, and large gatherings were deeply interested. Mr. Gerald Massey, the well-known poet and writer, and Dr. George Sexton, also delivered public lectures. Altogether, Spiritualism had much publicity given to it.

The establishment of the British National Association of Spiritualists in 1873 gave the movement an impetus, because many well-known public men and women joined it. Among them may be mentioned the Countess of Caithness, Mrs. Makdougall Gregory (widow of Professor Gregory, of Edinburgh), Dr. Stanhope Speer, Dr. Gully, Sir Charles Isham, Dr. Maurice Davies, Mr. H. D. Jencken, Dr. George Sexton, Mrs. Ross Church (Florence Marryat), Mr. Newton Crosland, and Mr. Benjamin Coleman.

Mediumship of a high order in the department of physical phenomena was supplied by Mrs. Jencken (Kate Fox) and Miss Florence Cook. Dr. J. R. Newton, the famous healing medium from America, arrived in 1870, and numbers of extraordinary cures were registered at free treatments. From 1870 Mrs. Everitt's wonderful mediumship exercised, like that of D. D. Home, without charge, convinced many influential people. Herne and Williams, Mrs. Guppy, Eglinton, Slade, Lottie Fowler, and others, secured many converts through their mediumship. In 1872 Hudson's spirit photographs created enormous interest, and in 1875 Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace published his famous book, "On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism."

A good means of tracing the growth of Spiritualism at this period is to examine the statements of worthy contemporary witnesses, especially those qualified by position and experience to give an opinion. But before we glance at the period we are considering, let us look at the situation in 1866, as viewed by Mr. William Howitt in a few paragraphs which are so admirable that the author is constrained to quote thetas verbatim. He says:

The present position of Spiritualism in England, were the Press, with all its influence, omnipotent, would be hopeless. After having taken every possible means to damage and sneer down Spiritualism; after having opened its columns to it, in the hope that its emptiness and folly would be so apparent that its clever enemies would soon be able to knock it on the head by invincible arguments, and then finding that all the advantages of reason and fact were on its side; after having abused and maligned it to no purpose, the whole Press as by one consent, or by one settled plan, has adopted the system of opening its columns and pages to any false or foolish story about it, and hermetically closing them to any explanation, refutation, or defence. It is, in fact, resolved, all other means of killing it having failed, to burke it. To clap a literary pitch-plaster on its mouth, and then let anyone that likes cut its throat if he can.

By this means it hopes to stamp it out like the rinderpestÉ.

If anything could annihilate Spiritualism, its present estimation by the English public, its treatment by the Press and the courts of law, its attempted suppression by all the powers of public intelligence, its hatred by the heroes of the pulpits of all churches and creeds, the simple acceptance of even the public folly and wickedness attributed to it by the Press, its own internal divisions-in a word, its pre-eminent unpopularity would put it out of existence. But does it? On the contrary, it never was more firmly rooted into the mass of advanced minds; its numbers never more rapidly increased; its truths were never more earnestly and eloquently advocated; the enquiries after it never more abundant or more anxious. The soirees in Harley Street have, through the whole time that Press and horsehair wig have been heaping every reproach and every scorn upon it, been crowded to excess by ladies and gentlemen of the middle and higher classes, who have listened in admiration to the eloquent and ever-varied addresses of Emma Hardinge. Meantime, the Davenports, a thousand times denounced as impostors, and exposed impostors, have a thousand times shown that their phenomena remain as unexplainable as ever on any but a spiritual theory.

What means all this? What does it indicate? That Press and pulpit, and magistrate and law courts, have all tried their powers, and have failed. They stand nonplussed before the thing which they themselves have protested is poor and foolish and false and unsubstantial. If it be so poor and foolish and false and unsubstantial, how is it that all their learning, their unscrupulous denunciation, their vast means of attack and their not less means of prevention of fair defence, their command of the ears and the opinions of the multitude-how happens it that all their wit and sarcasm and logic and eloquence cannot touch it? So far from shaking and diminishing it, they do not even ruffle a hair on its head, or a fringe of its robe.

Is it not about time for these combined hosts of the great and wise, the scientific, the learned, the leaders of senates and colleges and courts of law, the eloquent favourites of Parliament, the magnates of the popular Press, furnished with all the intellectual artillery which a great national system of education, and great national system of Church and State and aristocracy, accustomed to proclaim what shall be held to be true and of honourable repute by all honourable men and women-is it not time, I say, that all this great and splendid world of wit and wisdom should begin to suspect that they have something solid to deal with? That there is something vital in what they have treated as a phantom?

I do not say to these great and world-commanding bodies, powers and agencies, open your eyes and see that your efforts are fruitless, and acknowledge your defeat, for probably they never will open their eyes and confess their shame; but I say to the Spiritualists themselves, dark as the day may seem to you, never was it more cheering. Leagued as all the armies of public instructors and directors are against it, never was its bearing more anticipatory of ultimate victory. It has upon it the stamp of all the conquering influences of the age. It has all the legitimatism of history on its head. It is but fighting the battle that every great reform-social or moral or intellectual or religious-has fought and eventually won.

As showing the change that occurred after Mr. Howitt wrote in 1866, we find THE TIMES of December 26, 1872, publishing an article entitled "Spiritualism and Science," occupying three and a half columns, in which the opinion is expressed that now "it is high time competent hands undertook the unravelling of this Gordian Knot," though why the existing hands of Crookes, Wallace or De Morgan were incompetent is not explained.

The writer, speaking of Lord Adare's little book (privately printed) on his experiences with D. D. Home, seems to be impressed by the social status of the various witnesses. Clumsy humour and snobbishness are the characteristics of the article:

A volume now lying before us may serve to show how this folly has spread throughout society. It was lent to us by a disinguished Spiritualist, under the solemn promise that we should not divulge a single name of those concerned. It consists of about 150 pages of reports of seances, and was privately printed by a noble Earl, who has lately passed beyond the House of Lords; beyond also, we trust, the spirit-peopled chairs and tables which in his lifetime he loved, not wisely, but too well. In this book things more marvellous than any we have set down are circumstantially related, in a natural way, just as though they were ordinary, everyday matters of fact. We shall not fatigue the reader by quoting any of the accounts given, and no doubt he will take our word when we say that they range through every species of "manifestation," from prophesyings downwards.

What we more particularly wish to observe is, that the attestation of fifty respectable witnesses is placed before the title-page. Among them are a Dowager Duchess and other ladies of rank, a Captain in the Guards, a nobleman, a Baronet, a Member of Parliament, several officers of our scientific and other corps, a barrister, a merchant, and a doctor. Upper and upper middle-class society is represented in all its grades, and by persons who, to judge by the position they hold and the callings they follow, ought to be possessed of intelligence and ability.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the eminent naturalist, in the course of a letter to THE TIMES (January 4, 1873), describing his visit to a public medium, said:

I consider it no exaggeration to say that the main facts are now as well established and as easily verifiable as any of the more exceptional phenomena of Nature which are not yet reduced to law. They have a most important bearing on the interpretation of history, which is full of narratives of similar facts, and on the nature of life and intellect, on which physical science throws a very feeble and uncertain light; and it is my firm and deliberate belief that every branch of philosophy must suffer till they are honestly and seriously investigated, and dealt with as constituting an essential portion of the phenomena of human nature.

One becomes bemused by ectoplasm and laboratory experiments which lead the thoughts away from the essential. Wallace was one of the few whose great, sweeping, unprejudiced mind saw and accepted the truth in its wonderful completeness from the humble physical proofs of outside power to the highest mental teaching which that power could convey, teaching that far surpasses in beauty and in credibility any which the modern mind has known.

The public acceptance and sustained support of this great scientific man, one of the first brains of his age, were the more important since he had the wit to understand the complete religious revolution which lay at the back of these phenomena. It has been a curious fact that with some exceptions in these days, as of old, the wisdom has been given to the humble and withheld from the learned. Heart and intuition have won to the goal where brain has missed it. One would think that the proposition was a simple one. It may be expressed in a series of questions after the Socratic form: “Have we established connection with the intelligence of those who have died?” THE SPIRITUALIST says: “Yes.” “Have they given us information of the new life in which they find themselves, and of how it has been affected by their earth life?" Again "Yes." "Have they found it correspond to the account given by any religion upon earth?" "No." Then if this be so, is it not clear that the new information is of vital religious import? The humble Spiritualist sees this and adapts his worship to the facts.

Sir William (then Professor) Barrett brought the subject of Spiritualism before the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1876. His paper was entitled "On Some Phenomena associated with Abnormal Conditions of Mind." He had difficulty in obtaining a hearing. The Biological Committee refused to accept the paper and passed it on to the Anthropological Sub-section, who only accepted it on the casting vote of the chairman, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. Colonel Lane Fox helped to overcome the opposition by asking why, as they had discussed ancient witchcraft the previous year, they should not examine modern witchcraft that year. The first part of Professor Barrett's paper dealt with mesmerism, but in the second part he related his experiences of Spiritualistic phenomena, and urged that further scientific examination should be given to the subject. He gave the convincing details of a remarkable experience he had had of raps occurring with a child.*

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Sept. 22, 1876, Vol. IX, pp. 87-88.

In the ensuing discussion Sir William Crookes spoke of the levitations he had witnessed with D. D. Home, and said of levitation: "The evidence in favour of it is stronger than the evidence in favour of almost any natural phenomenon the British Association could investigate." He also made the following remarks concerning his own method of psychic research:

I was asked to investigate when Dr. Slade first came over, and I mentioned my conditions. I have never investigated except under these conditions. It must be at my own house, and my own selection of friends and spectators, under my own conditions, and I may do whatever I like as regards apparatus. I have always tried, where it has been possible, to make the physical apparatus test the things themselves, and have not trusted more than is possible to my own senses. But when it is necessary to trust to my senses, I must entirely dissent from Mr. Barrett, when he says a trained physical inquirer is no match for a professional conjurer. I maintain a physical inquirer is more than a match.

An important contribution to the discussion was made by Lord Rayleigh, the distinguished mathematician, who said:

I think we are much indebted to Professor Barrett for his courage, for it requires some courage to come forward in this matter, and to give us the benefit of his careful experiments. My own interest in the subject dates back two years. I was first attracted to it by reading Mr. Crookes's investigations. Although my opportunities have not been so good as those enjoyed by Professor Barrett, I have seen enough to convince me that those are wrong who wish to prevent investigation by casting ridicule on those who may feel inclined to engage in it.

The next speaker, Mr. Groom Napier, was greeted with laughter when he described verified psychometric descriptions of people from their handwriting enclosed in sealed envelopes, and when he went on to describe spirit lights that he had seen, the uproar forced him to resume his seat. Professor Barrett, in replying to his critics, said:

It certainly shows the immense advance that this subject has made within the last few years, that a paper on the once laughed-at phenomena of so-called Spiritualism should have been admitted into the British Association, and should have been permitted to receive the full discussion it has had to-day.

The London SPECTATOR, in an article entitled "The British Association on Professor Barrett's Paper," opened with the following broad-minded view:

Now that we have before us a full report of Professor Barrett's paper, and of the discussion upon it, we may be permitted to express our hope that the British Association will really take some action on the subject of the paper, in spite of the protests of the party which we may call the party of superstitious incredulity. We say superstitious incredulity because it is really a pure superstition, and nothing else, to assume that we are so fully acquainted with the laws of Nature, that even carefully-examined facts, attested by an experienced observer, ought to be cast aside as utterly unworthy of credit, only because they do not at first sight seem to be in keeping with what is most clearly known already.

Sir William Barrett's views steadily progressed until he accepted the Spiritualistic position in unequivocal terms before his lamented death in 1925. He lived to see the whole world ameliorate its antagonism to such subjects, though little difference perhaps could be observed in the British Association which remained as obscurantist as ever. Such a tendency, however, may not have been an unmixed evil, for, as Sir Oliver Lodge has remarked, if the great pressing material problems had been complicated by psychic issues, it is possible that they would not have been solved. It may be worth remarking that Sir William Barrett in conversation with the author recalled that of the four men who supported him upon that historical and difficult occasion, every one lived to receive the Order of Merit-the greatest honour which their country could bestow. The four were Lord Rayleigh, Crookes, Wallace and Huggins.

It was not to be expected that the rapid growth of Spiritualism would be without its less desirable features. These were of at least two kinds. First the cry of fraudulent mediumship was frequently heard. In the light of our later, fuller knowledge we know that much that bears the appearance of fraud is not necessarily fraud at all. At the same time, the unbounded credulity of a section of Spiritualists undoubtedly provided an easy field for charlatans. In the course of a paper read before the Cambridge University Society for Psychological Investigation in 1879, the President of the Society, Mr. J. A. Campbell, said*:

* THE SPIRITUALIST, April 11, 1879, p. 170.

Since the advent of Mr. Home, the number of media has increased yearly, and so has the folly and the imposture. Every spook has become, in the eyes of fools, a divine angel; and not even every spook, but every rogue, dressed up in a sheet, who has chosen or shall choose to call himself a materialised "spirit." A so-called religion has been founded in which the honour of the most sacred names has been transferred to the ghosts of pickpockets. Of the characters of which divinities, and of the doctrines taught by them, I shall not insult you by speaking; so it ever is when folly and ignorance get into their hands the weapon of an eternal fact, abuse, distortion, crime itself; such were ever the results of children playing with edged tools, but who but an ignoramus would cry, naughty knife? Gradually the movement is clearing itself of such excretions, gradually is it becoming more sober and pure, and strong, and as sensible men and educated men study and pray and work, striving to make good use of their knowledge, will it become more so.

The second feature was the apparent increase of what may be termed anti-Christian, though not antireligious, Spiritualism. This led to William Howitt and other stalwart supporters ceasing their connection with the movement. Powerful articles against this tendency were contributed to the SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE by Howitt and others.

A suggestion of the need for caution and balance is afforded in the remarks of Mr. William Stainton Moses, who said in a paper read before the British National Association of Spiritualists on January 26, 1880*:

* THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW, Vol. II, p. 546.

We are emphatically in need of discipline and education. We have hardly yet settled down after our rapid growth. The child, born just thirty years ago, has increased in stature (if not in wisdom) at a very rapid rate. It has grown so fast that its education has been a little neglected. In the expressive phraseology of its native country, it has been “dragged up” rather promiscuously; and its phenomenal growth has absorbed all other considerations. The time has now come when those who have regarded it as an ugly monster which was born by one of Nature’s freaks only to die an early death, begin to recognise their mistake. The ugly brat means to live; and beneath its ugliness the least sympathetic gaze detects a coherent purpose in its existence. It is the presentation of a principle inherent in man’s nature, a principle which his wisdom has improved away until it is wellnigh eliminated altogether, but which crops out again and again in spite of him-the principle of Spirit as opposed to Matter, of Soul acting and existing independently of the body which enshrines it. Long years of denial of aught but the properties of matter have landed the chief lights of modern science in pure Materialism. To them, therefore, this Spiritualism is a portent and a problem. It is a return to superstition; a survival of savagery; a blot on nineteenth century intelligence. Laughed at, it laughs back; scorned, it gives back scorn for scorn.

In 1881, LIGHT, a high-class weekly Spiritualist newspaper, was begun, and 1882 saw the formation of the Society for Psychical Research. Speaking generally, it may be said that the attitude of organized science during these thirty years was as unreasonable and unscientific as that of Galileo’s cardinals, and that if there had been a Scientific Inquisition, it would have brought its terrors to bear upon the new knowledge. No serious attempt of any sort, up to the formation of the S.P.R. was made to understand or explain a matter which was engaging the attention of millions of minds. Faraday in 1853 put forward the theory that table-moving was caused by muscular pressure, which may be true enough in some cases, but bears no relation to the levitation of tables, and in any case applies only to the one limited class of psychic phenomena. The usual “scientific” objection was that nothing occurred at all, which neglected the testimony of thousands of credible witnesses. Others argued that what did happen was capable of being exposed by a conjurer, and any clumsy imitation such as Maskelyne’s parody of the Davenports was eagerly hailed as an exposure, with no reference to the fact that the whole mental side of the question with its overwhelming evidence was untouched thereby.

The “religious” people, furious at being shaken out of their time-honoured ruts, were ready, like savages, to ascribe any new thing to the devil. Roman Catholics and the Evangelical sects, alike, found themselves for once united in their opposition. That low spirits may be reached, and low, lying messages received, is beyond all doubt, since every class of spirit exists around us, and like attracts like; but the lofty, sustaining and philosophic teaching which comes to every serious and humble-minded inquirer shows that it is Angelism and not Diabolism which is within our reach. Dr. Carpenter put forward some complex theory, but seems to have been in a minority of one in its acceptance or even in its comprehension. The doctors had an explanation founded upon the cracking of joints, which is ludicrous to anyone who has had personal experience of those percussive sounds which vary in range from the tick of a watch to the blow of a sledge-hammer.

Further explanations, either then or later, included the Theosophic doctrine, which admitted the facts but depreciated the spirits, describing them as astral shells with a sort of dreamy half-consciousness, or possibly an attenuated conscience which made them sub-human in their intelligence or morality. Certainly the quality of spirit communion does vary greatly, but the highest is so high that we can hardly imagine that we are in touch with only a fraction of the speaker. As it is asserted, however, that even in this world our subliminal self is far superior to our normal workaday individuality, it would seem only fair that the spirit world should confront us with something less than its full powers.

Another theory postulates the ANIMA MUNDI, a huge reservoir or central bank of intelligence, with a clearing-house in which all inquiries are honoured. The sharp detail which we receive from the Other Side is incompatible with any vague grandiose idea of the sort. Finally, there is the one really formidable alternative, that man has an etheric body with many unknown gifts, among which a power of external manifestation in curious forms may be included. It is to this theory of Cryptesthesia that Richet and others have clung, and up to a point there is an argument in its favour. The author has satisfied himself that there is a preliminary and elementary stage in all psychic work which depends upon the innate and possibly unconscious power of the medium. The reading of concealed script, the production of raps upon demand, the description of scenes at a distance, the remarkable effects of psychometry, the first vibrations of the Direct Voice-each and all of these on different occasions have seemed to emanate from the medium's own power. Then in most cases there would appear an outside intelligence which was able to appropriate that force and use it for its own ends. An illustration might be given in the experiments of Bisson and Schrenck Notzing with Eva, where the ectoplasmic forms were at first undoubtedly reflections of newspaper illustrations, somewhat muddled by their passage through the medium's mind. Yet there came a later and deeper stage where an ectoplasmic form was evolved which was capable of movement and even of speech. Richet's great brain and close power of observation have been largely centred upon the physical phenomena, and he does not seem to have been brought much in contact with those personal mental and spiritual experiences which would probably have modified his views. It is fair to add, however, that those views have continually moved in the direction of the Spiritualistic explanation.

There only remains the hypothesis of complex personality, which may well influence certain cases, though it seems to the author that such cases might be explained equally well by obsession. These instances, however, can only touch the fringe of the subject, and ignore the whole phenomenal aspect, so that the matter need not be taken very seriously. It cannot be too often repeated, however, that the inquirer should exhaust every possible normal explanation to his own complete satisfaction before he adopts the Spiritualistic view. If he has done this his platform is stable-if he has not done it he can never be conscious of its solidity. The author can say truly, that year after year he clung on to every line of defence until he was finally compelled, if he were to preserve any claim to mental honesty, to abandon the materialistic position.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAREER OF D. D. HOME

Daniel Dunglas Home was born in 1833 at Currie, a village near Edinburgh. There was a mystery about his parentage, and it has been both asserted and denied that he was related in some fashion to the family of the Earl of Home. Certainly he was a man who inherited elegance of figure, delicacy of feature, sensitiveness of disposition and luxury in taste, from whatever source he sprang. But for his psychic powers, and for the earnestness which they introduced into his complex character, he might have been taken as the very type of the aristocratic younger son who inherits the tendencies, but not the wealth, of his forbears.

Home went from Scotland to New England, at the age of nine years, with his aunt who had adopted him, a mystery still surrounding his existence. When he was thirteen he began to show signs of the psychic faculties he had inherited, for his mother, who was descended from an old Highland family, had the characteristic second-sight of her race. His mystical trend had shown itself in a conversation with his boy friend, Edwin, about a short story where, as the result of a compact, a lover, after his death, manifested his presence to his lady-love. The two boys pledged themselves that whoever died first would come and show himself to the other. Home removed to another district some hundreds of miles distant, and about a month later, just after going to bed one night, he saw a vision of Edwin and announced to his aunt his death, news of which was received a day or two after. A second vision in 1850 concerned the death of his mother, who with her husband had gone to live in America. The boy was ill in bed at the time, and his mother away on a visit to friends at a distance. One evening he called loudly for help, and when his aunt came she found him in great distress. He said that his mother had died that day at twelve o’clock; that she had appeared to him and told him so. The vision proved to be only too true. Soon loud raps began to disturb the quiet household, and furniture to be moved by invisible agency. His aunt, a woman of a narrow religious type, declared the boy had brought the Devil into her house, and turned him out of doors.

He took refuge with friends, and in the next few years moved among them from town to town. His mediumship had become strongly developed, and at the houses where he stopped he gave frequent seances, sometimes as many as six or seven a day, for the limitations of power and the reactions between physical and psychic were little understood at that time. These proved a great drain on his strength, and he was frequently laid up with illness. People flocked from all directions to witness the marvels which occurred in Home's presence. Among those who investigated with him at this time was the American poet Bryant, who was accompanied by Professor Wells, of Harvard University. In New York he met many distinguished Americans, and three-Professor Hare, Professor Mapes, and Judge Edmonds, of the New York Supreme Court-had sittings with him. All three became, as already stated, convinced Spiritualists.

In these early years the charm of Home's personality, and the deep impression created by his powers, led to his receiving many offers. Professor George Bush invited him to stay with him and study for the Swedenborgian ministry; and Mr. and Mrs. Elmer, a rich and childless couple, who had grown to cherish a great affection for him, offered to adopt him and make him their heir on condition of his changing his name to Elmer.

His remarkable healing powers had excited wonder and, yielding to the persuasion of friends, he began to study for the medical profession. But his general delicate health, coupled with actual lung trouble, forced him to abandon this project and, acting under medical advice, he left New York for England.

He arrived in Liverpool on April 9, 1855, and has been described as a tall, slim youth with a marked elegance of bearing and a fastidious neatness of dress, but with a worn, hectic look upon his very expressive face which told of the ravages of disease. He was blue-eyed and auburn-haired, of a type which is peculiarly liable to the attack of tubercle, and the extreme emaciation of his frame showed how little power remained with him by which he might resist it. An acute physician watching him closely would probably have gauged his life by months rather than years in our humid climate, and of all the marvels which Home wrought, the prolongation of his own life was perhaps not the least. His character had already taken on those emotional and religious traits which distinguished it, and he has recorded how, before landing, he rushed down to his cabin and fell upon his knees in prayer. When one considers the astonishing career which lay before him, and the large part which he played in establishing those physical foundations which differentiate this religious development from any other, it may well be claimed that this visitor was among the most notable missionaries who has ever visited our shores.

His position at that moment was a very singular one. He had hardly a relation in the world. His left lung was partly gone. His income was modest, though sufficient. He had no trade or profession, his education having been interrupted by his illness. In character he was shy, gentle, sentimental, artistic, affectionate, and deeply religious. He had a strong tendency both to Art and the Drama, so that his powers of sculpture were considerable, and as a reciter he proved in later life that he had few living equals. But on the top of all this, and of an unflinching honesty which was so uncompromising that he often offended his own allies, there was one gift so remarkable that it threw everything else into insignificance. This lay in those powers, quite independent of his own volition, coming and going with disconcerting suddenness, but proving to all who would examine the proof, that there was something in this man’s atmosphere which enabled forces outside himself and outside our ordinary apprehension to manifest themselves upon this plane of matter. In other words, he was a medium-the greatest in a physical sense that the modern world has ever seen.

A lesser man might have used his extraordinary powers to found some special sect of which he would have been the undisputed high priest, or to surround himself with a glamour of power and mystery. Certainly most people in his position would have been tempted to use it for the making of money. As to this latter point, let it be said at once that never in the course of the thirty years of his strange ministry did he touch one shilling as payment for his gifts. It is on sure record that as much as two thousand pounds was offered to him by the Union Club in Paris in the year 1857 for a single seance, and that he, a poor man and an invalid, utterly refused it. “I have been sent on a mission,” he said. “That mission is to demonstrate immortality. I have never taken money for it and I never will.” There were certain presents from Royalty which cannot be refused without boorishness: rings, scarf-pins, and the like-tokens of friendship rather than recompense; for before his premature death there were few monarchs in Europe with whom this shy youth from the Liverpool landing-stage was not upon terms of affectionate intimacy. Napoleon the Third provided for his only sister. The Emperor of Russia sponsored his marriage. What novelist would dare to invent such a career?

But there are more subtle temptations than those of wealth. Home's uncompromising honesty was the best safeguard against those. Never for a moment did he lose his humility and his sense of proportion. "I have these powers," he would say; "I shall be happy, up to the limit of my strength, to demonstrate them to you, if you approach me as one gentleman should approach another. I shall be glad if you can throw any further light upon them. I will lend myself to any reasonable experiment. I have no control over them. They use me, but I do not use them. They desert me for months and then come back in redoubled force. I am a passive instrument-no more." Such was his unvarying attitude. He was always the easy, amiable man of the world, with nothing either of the mantle of the prophet or of the skull-cap of the magician. Like most truly great men, there was no touch of pose in his nature. An index of his fine feeling is that when confirmation was needed for his results he would never quote any names unless he was perfectly certain that the owners would not suffer in any way through being associated with an unpopular cult. Sometimes even after they had freely given leave he still withheld the names, lest he should unwittingly injure a friend. When he published his first series of "Incidents in my Life," the SATURDAY REVIEW waxed very sarcastic over the anonymous "evidence of Countess O-, Count B-, Count de K-, Princess de B- and Mrs. S-, who were quoted as having witnessed manifestations. In his second volume, Home, having assured himself of the concurrence of his friends, filled the blanks with the names of the Countess Orsini, Count de Beaumont, Count de Komar, Princess de Beauveau, and the well-known American hostess, Mrs. Henry Senior. His Royal friends he never quoted at all, and yet it is notorious that the Emperor Napoleon, the Empress Eugenie, the Tsar Alexander, the Emperor William the First of Germany, and the Kings of Bavaria and Wurtemberg were all equally convinced by his extraordinary powers. Never once was Home convicted of any deception, either in word or in deed.

On first landing in England he took up his quarters at Cox's Hotel in Jermyn Street, and it is probable that he chose that hostelry because he had learned that through Mrs. Hayden's ministry the proprietor was already sympathetic to the cause. However that may be, Mr. Cox quickly discovered that his young guest was a most remarkable medium, and at his invitation some of the leading minds of the day were asked to consider those phenomena which Home could lay before them. Among others, Lord Brougham came to a seance and brought with him his scientific friend, Sir David Brewster. In full daylight they investigated the phenomena, and in his amazement at what happened Brewster is reported to have said: “This upsets the philosophy of fifty years.” If he had said “fifteen hundred” he would have been within the mark. He described what took place in a letter written to his sister at the time, but published long after.* Those present were Lord Brougham, Sir David Brewster, Mr. Cox and the medium.

* “Home Life of Sir David Brewster,” by Mrs. Gordon (his daughter), 1869.

“We four,” said Brewster, “sat down at a moderately-sized table, the structure of which we were invited to examine. In a short time the table struggled, and a tremulous motion ran up all our arms; at our bidding these motions ceased and returned. The most unaccountable rappings were produced in various parts of the table, and the table actually rose from the ground when no hand was upon it. A larger table was produced, and exhibited similar movements.

“A small hand-bell was laid down with its mouth upon the carpet, and after lying for some time, it actually rang when nothing could have touched it.” He adds that the bell came over to him and placed itself in his hand, and it did the same to Lord Brougham; and concludes “These were the principal experiments. We could give no explanation of them, and could not conjecture how they could be produced by any kind of mechanism.”

The Earl of Dunraven states that he was induced to investigate the phenomena by what Brewster had told him. He describes meeting the latter, who said that the manifestations were quite inexplicable by fraud, or by any physical laws with which we were acquainted. Home sent an account of this sitting in a letter to a friend in America, where it was published with comments. When these were reproduced in the English Press, Brewster became greatly alarmed. It was one thing to hold certain views privately, it was quite another to face the inevitable loss of prestige that would occur in the scientific circles in which he moved. Sir David was not the stuff of which martyrs or pioneers are made. He wrote to the MORNING ADVERTISER, stating that though he had seen several mechanical effects which he could not explain, yet he was satisfied that they could all be produced by human hands and feet. At the time it had, of course, never occurred to him that his letter to his sister, just quoted, would ever see the light.

When the whole correspondence came to be published, the SPECTATOR remarked of Sir David Brewster:

It seems established by the clearest evidence that he felt and expressed, at and immediately after his seances with Mr. Home, a wonder and almost awe, which he afterwards wished to explain away. The hero of science does not acquit himself as one could wish or expect.

We have dwelt a little on this Brewster incident because it was typical of the scientific attitude of the day, and because its effect was to excite a wider public interest in Home and his phenomena, and to bring hundreds of fresh investigators. One may say that scientific men may be divided into three classes: those who have not examined the matter at all (which does not in the least prevent them from giving very violent opinions); those who know that it is true but are afraid to say so; and finally the gallant minority of the Lodges, the Crookes, the Barretts and the Lombrosos, who know it is true and who dare all in saying so.

From Jermyn Street, Home went to stay with the Rymer family in Ealing, where many seances were held. Here he was visited by Lord Lytton, the famous novelist, who, although he received striking evidence, never publicly avowed his belief in the medium’s powers, though his private letters, and indeed his published novels, are evidence of his true feeling. This was the case with scores of well-known men and women. Among his early sitters were Robert Owen the Socialist, T. A. Trollope the author, and Dr. J. Garth Wilkinson the alienist.

In these days, when the facts of psychic phenomena are familiar to all save those who are wilfully ignorant, we can hardly realise the moral courage which was needed by Home in putting forward his powers and upholding them in public. To the average educated Briton in the material Victorian era a man who claimed to be able to produce results which upset Newton’s law of gravity, and which showed invisible mind acting upon visible matter, was prima facie a scoundrel and an impostor. The view of Spiritualism pronounced by Vice-Chancellor Giffard at the conclusion of the Home-Lyon trial was that of the class to which he belonged. He knew nothing of the matter, but took it for granted that anything with such claims must be false. No doubt similar things were reported in far-off lands and ancient books, but that they could occur in prosaic, steady old England, the England of bank-rates and free imports, was too absurd for serious thought. It has been recorded that at this trial Lord Giffard turned to Home's counsel and said: "Do I understand you to state that your client claims that he has been levitated into the air?" Counsel assented, on which the judge turned to the jury and made such a movement as the high priest may have made in ancient days when he rent his garments as a protest against blasphemy. In 1868 there were few of the jury who were sufficiently educated to check the judge's remarks, and it is just in that particular that we have made some progress in the fifty years between. Slow work-but Christianity took more than three hundred years to come into its own.

Take this question of levitation as a test of Home's powers. It is claimed that more than a hundred times in good light before reputable witnesses he floated in the air. Consider the evidence. In 1857, in a chateau near Bordeaux, he was lifted to the ceiling of a lofty room in the presence of Madame Ducos, widow of the Minister of Marine, and of the Count and Countess de Beaumont. In 1860 Robert Bell wrote an article, "Stranger than Fiction," in the CORNHILL. "He rose from his chair," says Bell, "four or five feet from the groundÉ. We saw his figure pass from one side of the window to the other, feet foremost, lying horizontally in the air." Dr. Gully, of Malvern, a well-known medical man, and Robert Chambers, the author and publisher, were the other witnesses. Is it to be supposed that these men were lying confederates, or that they could not tell if a man were floating in the air or pretending to do so? In the same year Home was raised at Mrs. Milner Gibson's house in the presence of Lord and Lady Clarence Paget, the former passing his hands underneath him to assure himself of the fact. A few months later Mr. Wason, a Liverpool solicitor, with seven others, saw the same phenomenon. "Mr. Home," he says, "crossed the table over the heads of the persons sitting around it." He added: "I reached his hand seven feet from the floor, and moved along five or six paces as he floated above me in the air." In 1861 Mrs. Parkes, of Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, tells how she was present with Bulwer Lytton and Mr. Hall when Home in her own drawing-room was raised till his hand was on the top of the door, and then floated horizontally forward. In 1866 Mr. and Mrs. Hall, Lady Dunsany, and Mrs. Senior, in Mr. Hall's house saw Home, his face transfigured and shining, twice rise to the ceiling, leaving a cross marked in pencil upon the second occasion, so as to assure the witnesses that they were not the victims of imagination.

In 1868 Lord Adare, Lord Lindsay, Captain Wynne, and Mr. Smith Barry saw Home levitate upon many occasions. A very minute account has been left by the first three witnesses of the occurrence of December 16* of this year, when at Ashley House Home, in a state of trance, floated out of the bedroom and into the sitting-room window, passing seventy feet above the street. After his arrival in the sitting-room he went back into the bedroom with Lord Adare, and upon the latter remarking that he could not understand how Home could have fitted through the window which was only partially raised, “he told me to stand a little distance off. He then went through the open space head first quite rapidly, his body being nearly horizontal and apparently rigid. He came in again feet foremost.” Such was the account given by Lords Adare and Lindsay. Upon its publication Dr. Carpenter, who earned an unenviable reputation by a perverse opposition to every fact which bore upon this question, wrote exultantly to point out that there had been a third witness who had not been heard from, assuming without the least justification that Captain Wynne’s evidence would be contradictory. He went the length of saying “a single honest sceptic declares that Mr. Home was sitting in his chair all the time “a statement which can only be described as false. Captain Wynne at once wrote corroborating the others and adding: “If you are not to believe the corroborative evidence of three unimpeached witnesses, there would be an end to all justice and courts of law.”

* The almanac shows it to be Sunday the 13th.

To show how hard put to it the critics have been to find some loophole of escape from the obvious, they have made much of the fact that Lord Lindsay, writing some time after the event, declared that it was seen by moonlight; whereas the calendar shows that the moon was not at that time visible. Mr. Andrew Lang remarks: “Even in a fog, however, people in a room can see a man coming in by the window, and go out again, head first, with body rigid.” * It would seem to most of us that if we saw so marvellous a sight we would have little time to spare to determine whether we viewed it by the light of the moon or by that of the street lamps. It must be admitted, however, that Lord Lindsay’s account is clumsily worded-so clumsily that there is some excuse for Mr. Joseph McCabe’s reading of it that the spectators looked not at the object itself and its shadow on the window-sill, but that they stood with their backs to it and viewed the shadow on the wall. When one considers, however, the standing of the three eye-witnesses who have testified to this, one may well ask whether in ancient or modern times any preternatural event has been more clearly proved.

* "Historical Mysteries," p. 236.

So many are the other instances of Home's levitations that a long article might easily be written upon this single phase of his mediumship. Professor Crookes was again and again a witness to the phenomenon, and refers to fifty instances which had come within his knowledge. But is there any fair-minded person who has read the incident here recorded who will not say, with Professor Challis: "Either the facts must be admitted to be such as are reported, or the possibility of certifying facts by human testimony must be given up."

"Are we, then, back in the age of miracles?" cries the reader. There is no miracle. Nothing on this plane is supernatural. What we see now, and what we have read of in ages past, is but the operation of law which has not yet been studied and defined. Already we realise something of its possibilities and of its limitations, which are as exact in their way as those of any purely physical power. We must hold the balance between those who would believe nothing and those who would believe too much. Gradually the mists will clear and we will chart the shadowy coast. When the needle first sprang up at the magnet it was not an infraction of the laws of gravity. It was that there had been the local intervention of another stronger force. Such is the case also when psychic powers act upon the plane of matter. Had Home's faith in this power faltered, or had his circle been unduly disturbed, he would have fallen. When Peter lost faith he sank into the waves. Across the centuries the same cause still produced the same effect. Spiritual power is ever with us if we do not avert our faces, and nothing has been vouchsafed to Judma which is withheld from England.

It is in this respect, as a confirmation of the power of the unseen, and as a final answer to materialism as we now understand it, that Home's public career is of such supreme importance. He was an affirmative witness of the truth of those so-called "miracles" which have been the stumbling-block for so many earnest minds, and are now destined to be the strong solid proof of the accuracy of the original narrative. Millions of doubting souls in the agony of spiritual conflict had cried out for definite proof that all was not empty space around us, that there were powers beyond our grasp, that the ego was not a mere secretion of nervous tissue, and that the dead did really carry on their personal unbroken existence. All this was proved by this greatest of modern missionaries to anyone who could observe or reason. It is easy to poke superficial fun at rising tables and quivering walls, but they were the nearest and most natural objects which could record in material terms that power which was beyond our human ken. A mind which would be unmoved by an inspired sentence was struck into humility and into new paths of research in the presence of even the most homely of these inexplicable phenomena. It is easy to call them puerile, but they effected the purpose for which they were sent by shaking to its foundations the complaisance of those material men of science who were brought into actual contact with them. They are to be regarded not as ends in themselves, but as the elementary means by which the mind should be diverted into new channels of thought. And those channels of thought led straight to the recognition of the survival of the spirit. "You have conveyed incalculable joy and comfort to the hearts of many people," said Bishop Clark, of Rhode Island. "You have made dwelling-places light that were dark before." "Mademoiselle," said Home to the lady who was to be his wife, "I have a mission entrusted to me. It is a great and a holy one." The famous Dr. Elliotson, immortalised by Thackeray under the name of Dr. Goodenough, was one of the leaders of British materialism. He met Home, saw his powers, and was able soon to say that he had lived all his life in darkness and had thought there was nothing in existence but the material, but he now had a firm hope which he trusted he would hold while on earth.

Innumerable instances could be quoted of the spiritual value of Home's work, but it has never been better summed up than in a paragraph from Mrs. Webster, of Florence, who saw much of his ministry. "He is the most marvellous missionary of modern times in the greatest of all causes, and the good that he has done cannot be reckoned. When Mr. Home passes he bestows around him the greatest of all blessings, the certainty of a future life."

Now that the details of his career can be read, it is to the whole wide world that he brings this most vital of all messages. His attitude as to his own mission was expressed in a lecture given in London in Willis's Rooms on February 15, 1866. He said: "I believe in my heart that this power is being spread more and more every day to draw us nearer to God. You ask if it makes us purer? My only answer is that we are but mortals, and as such liable to err; but it does teach that the pure in heart shall see God. It teaches us that He is love, and that there is no death. To the aged it comes as a solace, when the storms of life are nearly over and rest cometh. To the young it speaks of the duty we owe to each other, and that as we sow so shall we reap. To all it teaches resignation. It comes to roll away the clouds of error, and bring the bright morning of a never-ending day."

It is curious to see how his message affected those of his own generation. Reading the account of his life written by his widow-a most convincing document, since she of all living mortals must have known the real man-it would appear that his most utterly whole-hearted support and appreciation came from those aristocrats of France and Russia with whom he was brought into contact. The warm glow of personal admiration and even reverence in their letters is such as can hardly be matched in any biography. In England he had a close circle of ardent supporters, a few of the upper classes, with the Halls, the Howitts, Robert Chambers, Mrs. Milner Gibson, Professor Crookes, and others. But there was a sad lack of courage among those who admitted the facts in private and stood aloof in public. Lord Brougham and Bulwer Lytton were of the type of Nicodemus, the novelist being the worst offender. "Intelligentsia" on the whole came badly out of the matter, and many an Honoured name suffers in the story. Faraday and Tyndall were fantastically unscientific in their methods of prejudging a question first, and offering to examine it afterwards on the condition that their prejudgment was accepted. Sir David Brewster, as already shown, said some honest things, and then in a panic denied that he had said them, forgetting that the evidence was on actual record. Browning wrote a long poem-if such doggerel can be called poetry-to describe an exposure which had never taken place. Carpenter earned an unenviable notoriety as an unscrupulous opponent, while proclaiming some strange Spiritualistic thesis of his own. The secretaries of the Royal Society refused to take a cab-drive in order to see Crookes's demonstration of the physical phenomena, while they pronounced roundly against them.

Lord Giffard inveighed from the Bench against a subject the first elements of which he did not understand.

As to the clergy, such an order might not have existed during the thirty years that this, the most marvellous spiritual outpouring of many centuries, was before the public. One cannot recall the name of one British clergyman who showed any intelligent interest; and when in 1872 a full account of the St. Petersburg seances began to appear in THE TIMES, it was cut short, according to Mr. H. T. Humphreys, “on account of strong remonstrances to Mr. Delane, the editor, by certain of the higher clergy of the Church of England.” Such was the contribution of our official spiritual guides. Dr. Elliotson the Rationalist, was far more alive than they. The rather bitter comment of Mrs. Home is: “The verdict of his own generation was that of the blind and deaf upon the man who could hear and see.”

Home’s charity was among his more beautiful characteristics. Like all true charity it was secret, and only comes out indirectly and by chance. One of his numerous traducers declared that he had allowed a bill for £5o to be sent in to his friend, Mr. Rymer. In self-defence it came out that it was not a bill but a cheque most generously sent by Home to help this friend in a crisis. Considering his constant poverty, fifty pounds probably represented a good part of his bank balance. His widow dwells with pardonable pride upon the many evidences found in his letters after his death. “Now it is an unknown artist for whose brush Home’s generous efforts had found employment; now a distressed worker writes of his sick wife’s life saved by comforts that Home provided; now a mother thanks him for a start in life for her son.

How much time and thought he devoted to helping others when the circumstance of his own life would have led most men to think only of their own needs and cares.”

“Send me a word from the heart that has known so often how to cheer a friend!” cries one of his proteges.

“Shall I ever prove worthy of all the good you have done me?” says another letter.

We find him roaming the battlefields round Paris, often under fire, with his pockets full of cigars for the wounded. A German officer writes affectionately to remind him how he saved him from bleeding to death, and carried him on his own weak back out of the place of danger. Truly Mrs. Browning was a better judge of character than her spouse, and Sir Galahad a better name than Sludge.

At the same time, it would be absurd to depict Home as a man of flawless character. He had the weakness of his temperament, and something feminine in his disposition which showed itself in many ways. The author, while in Australia, came across a correspondence dating from 1856 between

Home and the elder son of the Rymer family. They had travelled together in Italy, and Home had deserted his friend under circumstances which showed inconstancy and ingratitude. It is only fair to add that his health was so broken at the time that he could hardly be called normal. “He had the defects of an emotional character,” said Lord Dunraven, “with vanity highly developed, perhaps wisely to enable him to hold his own against the ridicule that was then poured out on Spiritualism and everything connected with it. He was liable to fits of great depression and to nervous crises difficult to understand, but he was withal of a simple, kindly, humorous, loving disposition that appealed to meÉ. My friendship remained without change or diminution to the end.”

There are few of the varied gifts which we call “mediumistic” and St. Paul “of the spirit” which Home did not possess-indeed, the characteristic of his psychic power was its unusual versatility. We speak usually of a Direct Voice medium, of a trance speaker, of a clairvoyant or of a physical medium, but Home was all four. So far as can be traced, he had little experience of the powers of other mediums, and was not immune from that psychic jealousy which is a common trait of these sensitives. Mrs. Jencken, formerly Miss Kate Fox, was the only other medium with whom he was upon terms of friendship. He bitterly resented any form of deception, and carried this excellent trait rather too far by looking with eyes of suspicion upon all forms of manifestations which did not exactly correspond with his own. This opinion, expressed in an uncompromising manner in his last book, “Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism,” gave natural offence to other mediums who claimed to be as honest as himself. A wider acquaintance with phenomena would have made him more charitable. Thus he protested strongly against any seance being held in the dark, but this is certainly a counsel of perfection, for experiments upon the ectoplasm which is the physical basis of all materialisations show that it is usually affected by light unless the light is tinted red. Home had no large experience of complete materialisations such as were obtained in those days by Miss Florence Cook, or Madame d’Esperance, or in our own time, by Madame Bisson’s medium, and therefore he could dispense with complete darkness in his own ministry. Thus, his opinion was unjust to others. Again, Home declared roundly that matter could not pass through matter, because his own phenomena did not take that form; and yet the evidence that matter can in certain cases be passed through matter seems to be overwhelming. Even birds of rare varieties have been brought into seance rooms under circumstances which seem to preclude fraud, and the experiments of passing wood through wood, as shown before Zollner and the other Leipzig professors, were quite final as set forth in the famous physicist's account in "Transcendental Physics" of his experiences with Slade. Thus, it may count as a small flaw in Home's character that he decried and doubted the powers which he himself did not happen to possess.

Some also might count it as a failing that he carried his message rather to the leaders of society and of life than to the vast toiling masses. It is probable that Home had, in fact, the weakness as well as the graces of the artistic nature and that he was most at ease and happiest in an atmosphere of elegance and refinement, with a personal repulsion from all that was sordid and ill-favoured. If there were no other reason the precarious state of his health unfitted him for any sterner mission, and he was driven by repeated hemorrhages to seek the pleasant and refined life of Italy, Switzerland and the Riviera. But for the prosecution of his mission, as apart from personal self-sacrifice, there can be no doubt that his message carried to the laboratory of a Crookes or to the Court of a Napoleon was more useful than if it were laid before the crowd. The assent of science and of character was needed before the public could gain assurance that such things were true. If it was not fully gained the fault lies assuredly with the hidebound men of science and thinkers of the day, and by no means with Home, who played his part of actual demonstration to perfection, leaving it to other and less gifted men to analyse and to make public that which he had shown them. He did not profess to be a man of science, but he was the raw material of science, willing and anxious that others should learn from him all that he could convey to the world, so that science should itself testify to religion while religion should be buttressed upon science. When Home's message has been fully learned an unbelieving man will not stand convicted of impiety, but of ignorance.

There was something pathetic in Home's efforts to find some creed in which he could satisfy his own gregarious instinct-for he had no claims to be a strong-minded individualist-and at the same time find a niche into which he could fit his own precious packet of assured truth. His pilgrimage vindicates the assertion of some Spiritualists that a man may belong to any creed and carry with him the spiritual knowledge, but it also bears out those who reply that perfect harmony with that spiritual knowledge can only be found, as matters now stand, in a special Spiritualist community. Alas! that it should be so, for it is too big a thing to sink into a sect, however great that sect might become. Home began in his youth as a Wesleyan, but soon left them for the more liberal atmosphere of Congregationalism. In Italy the artistic atmosphere of the Roman Catholic Church, and possibly its record of so many phenomena akin to his own, caused him to become a convert with an intention of joining a monastic Order-an intention which his common sense caused him to abandon. The change of religion was at a period when his psychic powers had deserted him for a year, and his confessor assured him that as they were of evil origin they would certainly never be heard of again now that he was a son of the true Church. None the less, on the very day that the year expired they came back in renewed strength. From that time Home seems to have been only nominally a Catholic, if at all, and after his second marriage-both his marriages were to Russian ladies-he was strongly drawn towards the Greek Church, and it was under their ritual that he was at last laid to rest at St. Germain in 1886. “To another discerning of Spirits” (I Cor. xii. 10) is the short inscription upon that grave, of which the world has not yet heard the last.

If proof were needed of the blamelessness of Home’s life, it could not be better shown than by the fact that his numerous enemies, spying ever for some opening to attack, could get nothing in his whole career upon which to comment save the wholly innocent affair which is known as the Home-Lyon case. Any impartial judge reading the depositions in this case-they are to be found verbatim in the second series of “Incidents in My Life”-would agree that it is not blame but commiseration which was owing to Home. One could desire no higher proof of the nobility of his character than his dealings with this unpleasant freakish woman, who first insisted upon settling a large sum of money upon him, and then, her whim having changed and her expectations of an immediate introduction into high society being disappointed, stuck at nothing in order to get it back again. Had she merely asked for it back there is little doubt that Home’s delicate feelings would have led him to return it, even though he had been put to much trouble and expense over the matter, which had entailed a change of his name to Home-Lyon, to meet the woman’s desire that he should be her adopted son. Her request, however, was so framed that he could not honourably agree to it, as it would have implied an admission that he had done wrong in accepting the gift. If one consults the original letters-which few of those who comment upon the case seem to have done-one finds that Home, S. C. Hall as his representative and Mr. Wilkinson as his solicitor, implored the woman to moderate the unreasonable benevolence which was to change so rapidly into even more unreasonable malevolence. She was absolutely determined that Home should have the money and be her heir. A less mercenary man never lived, and he begged her again and again to think of her relatives, to which she answered that the money was her own to do what she pleased with, and that no relatives were dependent upon it. From the time that he accepted the new situation he acted and wrote as a dutiful son, and it is not uncharitable to suppose that this entirely filial attitude may not have been that which this elderly lady had planned out in her scheming brain. At any rate, she soon tired of her fad and reclaimed her money upon the excuse-a monstrous one to anyone who will read the letters and consider the dates-that spirit messages had caused her to take the action she had done.

The case was tried in the Court of Chancery, and the judge alluded to Mrs. Lyon's "innumerable misstatements on many important particulars-misstatements upon oath so perversely untrue that they have embarrassed the Court to a great degree and quite discredited the plaintiff's testimony." In spite of this caustic comment, and in spite also of elementary justice, the verdict was against Home on the general ground that British law put the burden of disproof upon the defendant in such a case, and complete disproof is impossible when assertion is met by counter-assertion. Lord Giffard might, no doubt, have risen superior to the mere letter of the law had it not been that he was deeply prejudiced against all claims to psychic power, which were from his point of view manifestly absurd and yet were persisted in by the defendant under his nose in his own Court of Chancery. Even Home's worst enemies were forced to admit that the fact that he had retained the money in England and had not lodged it where it would have been beyond recovery proved his honest intentions in this the most unfortunate episode of his life. Of all the men of honour who called him friend, it is not recorded that he lost one through the successful machinations of Mrs. Lyon. Her own motives were perfectly obvious. As all the documents were in order, her only possible way of getting the money back was to charge Home with having extorted it from her by misrepresentation, and she was cunning enough to know what chance a medium-even an amateur unpaid medium-would have in the ignorant and material atmosphere of a mid-Victorian court of law. Alas! that we can omit the “mid-Victorian” and the statement still holds good.

The powers of Home have been attested by so many famous observers, and were shown under such frank conditions, that no reasonable man can possibly doubt them. Crookes’s evidence alone is conclusive.* There is also the remarkable book, reprinted at a recent date, in which Lord Dunraven gives the story of his youthful connection with Home. But apart from these, among those in England who investigated in the first few years and whose public testimony or letters to Home show they were not only convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena, but also of their spiritual origin, may be mentioned the Duchess of Sutherland, Lady Shelley, Lady Gomm, Dr. Robert Chambers, Lady Otway, Miss Catherine Sinclair, Mrs. Milner Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. William Howitt, Mrs. De Burgh, Dr. Gully (of Malvern), Sir Charles Nicholson, Lady Dunsany, Sir Daniel Cooper, Mrs. Adelaide Senior, Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, Mrs. Makdougall Gregory, Mr. Pickersgill, R.A., Mr. E. L. Blanchard, and Mr. Robert Bell.

* “Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism,” and S.P.R. PROCEEDINGS, VI., p. 98.

Others who went so far as to admit that the theory of imposture was insufficient to account for the phenomena were: Mr. Ruskin, Mr. Thackeray (then editor of the CORNHILL MAGAZINE), Mr. John Bright, Lord Dufferin, Sir Edwin Arnold, Mr. Heaphy, Mr. Durham (sculptor), Mr. Nassau Senior, Lord Lyndhurst, Mr. J. Hutchinson (ex-Chairman of the Stock Exchange), and Dr. Lockhart Robertson.

Such were his witnesses and such his works. And yet, when his most useful and unselfish life had come to an end, it must be recorded to the eternal disgrace of our British Press that there was hardly a paper which did not allude to him as an impostor and a charlatan. The time is coming, however, when he will be recognised for what he was, one of the pioneers in the slow and arduous advance of Humanity into that jungle of ignorance which has encompassed it so long.

CHAPTER X

THE DAVENPORT BROTHERS

In order to present a consecutive story the career of D. D. Home has been traced in its entirety. It is necessary now to return to earlier days in America and consider the development of the two Davenports. Home and the Davenports both played an international part, and their history helps to cover the movement both in England and in the States. The Davenports worked upon a far lower level than Home, making a profession of their remarkable gifts, and yet by their crude methods they got their results across to the multitude in a way which a more refined mediumship could not have done. If one considers this whole train of events as having been engineered by a wise but by no means infallible or omnipotent force upon the Other Side, one observes how each occasion is met by the appropriate instrument, and how as one demonstration fails to impress some other one is substituted.

The Davenports have been fortunate in their chroniclers. Two writers have published books* describing the events of their life, and the periodical literature of the time is full of their exploits.

Ira Erastus Davenport and William Henry Davenport were born at Buffalo in the State of New York, the former on September 17, 1839, and the latter on February 1, 1841. Their father, who was descended from the early English settlers in America, occupied a position in the police department of Buffalo. Their mother was born in Kent, England, and went to America when a child. Some indications of psychic gifts were observed in the mother's life. In 184.6 the family were disturbed in the middle of the night by what they described as "raps, thumps, loud noises, snaps, crackling noises." This was two years before the outbreak in the Fox family. But it was the Fox manifestations which, in this case as in so many others, led them to investigate and discover their mediumistic powers.

* "A Biography of the Brothers Davenport." By T. L. Nichols, M.D., London, 1864. "Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. J. B. Ferguson, LL.D." By T. L. Nichols, M.D., London, 1865. "Spiritual Experiences:

Including Seven Months with the Brothers Davenport." By Robert Cooper, London, 1867.

The two Davenport boys and their sister Elizabeth, the youngest of the three, experimented by placing their hands on a table. Loud and violent noises were heard and messages were spelt out. The news leaked abroad, and as with the Fox girls, hundreds of curious and incredulous people flocked to the house. Ira developed automatic writing, and handed to those present messages written with extraordinary rapidity and containing information he could not have known. Levitation quickly followed, and the boy was floated in the air above the heads of those in the room at a distance of nine feet from the floor. Next, the brother and sister were influenced in the same way, and the three children floated high up in the room. Hundreds of respectable citizens of Buffalo are reported to have seen these occurrences. Once when the family was at breakfast the knives, forks, and dishes danced about and the table was raised in the air. At a sitting soon after this a lead pencil was seen to write in broad daylight, with no human contact. Seances were now held regularly, lights began to appear, and musical instruments floated and played above the heads of the company. The Direct Voice and other extraordinary manifestations too numerous to mention followed. Yielding to requests from the communicating intelligences, the brothers started journeying to various places and holding public seances. Among strangers, tests were insisted upon. At first the boys were held by persons selected from those present, but this being found unsatisfactory because it was thought that those holding them were confederates, the plan of tying them with ropes was adopted. To read the list of ingenious tests successively proposed, and put into operation without interfering with the manifestations, shows how almost impossible it is to convince resolute sceptics. As soon as one test succeeded another was proposed, and so on. The professors of Harvard University in 1857 conducted an examination of the boys and their phenomena. Their biographer writes*:

* "A Biography of the Brothers Davenport." By T. L. Nichols, M.D., pp. 87-8.

The professors exercised their ingenuity in proposing tests. Would they submit to be handcuffed? Yes. Would they allow men to hold them? Yes. A dozen propositions were made, accepted, and then rejected by those who made them. If any test was adopted by the brothers, that was reason enough for not trying it. They were supposed to be prepared for that, so some other must be found.

Finally, the professors bought five hundred feet of new rope, bored with holes the cabinet set up in one of their rooms, and trussed the boys in what is described as a brutal manner. All the knots in the rope were tied with linen thread, and one of their number, Professor Pierce, took his place in the cabinet between the two brothers. At once a phantom hand was shown, instruments were rattled and were felt by the professor about his head and face. At every movement he felt for the boys with his hands, only to find them still securely bound. The unseen operators at last released the boys from their bindings, and when the cabinet was opened the ropes were found twisted round the neck of the professor! After all this, the Harvard professors made no report. It is instructive also to read the account of the really ingenious test-apparatus consisting of what may be described as wooden sleeves and trousers, securely fastened, devised by a man named Darling, in Bangor (U.S.A.). Like other tests, it proved incapable of preventing instant manifestations. It is to be remembered that many of these tests were applied at a time when the brothers were mere boys, too young to have learned any elaborate means of deception.

It is not strange to read that the phenomena raised violent opposition almost everywhere, and the brothers were frequently denounced as jugglers and humbugs. It was after ten years of public work in the largest cities and towns in the United States that the Davenport Brothers came to England. They had submitted successfully to every test that human ingenuity could devise, and no one had been able to say how their results were obtained. They had won for themselves a great reputation. Now they had to begin all over again.

The two brothers, Ira and William, at this time were aged twenty-five and twenty-three years respectively. The NEW YORK WORLD thus describes them:

They looked remarkably like each other in almost every particular, both quite handsome with rather long, curly black hair, broad, but not high foreheads, dark keen eyes, heavy eyebrows, moustache and “goatee,” firm-set lips, muscular though well-proportioned frame. They were dressed in black with dress-coats, one wearing a watch-chain.

Dr. Nichols, their biographer, gives this first impression of them:

The young men, with whom I have had but a brief personal acquaintance, and whom I never saw until their arrival in London, appear to me to be in intellect and character above the average of their young countrymen, they are not remarkable for cleverness, though of fair abilities, and Ira has some artistic talentÉ. The young men seem entirely honest, and singularly disinterested and unmercenary-far more anxious to have people satisfied of their integrity and the reality of their manifestations than to make money. They have an ambition, without doubt, which is gratified in their having been selected as the instruments of what they believe will be some great good to mankind.

They were accompanied to England by the Rev. Dr. Ferguson, formerly pastor of a large church at Nashville, Tennessee, at which Abraham Lincoln attended, Mr. D. Palmer, a well-known operatic manager, who acted as secretary, and Mr. William M. Fay, who was also a medium.

Mr. P. B. Randall, in his biography of the Davenports (Boston 1869, published anonymously), points out that their mission to England was “to meet on its own low ground and conquer, by appropriate means, the hard materialism and scepticism of England.” The first step to knowledge, he says, is to be convinced of ignorance, and adds:

If the manifestations given by the aid of the Brothers Davenport can prove to the intellectual and scientific classes that there are forces-and intelligent forces, or powerful intelligences-beyond the range of their philosophies, and that what they consider physical impossibilities are readily accomplished by invisible, and to them unknown, intelligences, a new universe will be open to human thought and investigation.

There is little doubt that the mediums had this effect on many minds.

The manifestations of Mrs. Hayden’s mediumship were quiet and unobtrusive, and while those of D. D. Home were more remarkable, they were confined entirely to exclusive sets of people to whom no fees were charged. Now these two brothers hired public halls and challenged the world at large to come and witness phenomena which passed the bounds of all ordinary belief. It needed no foresight to predict for them a strenuous time of opposition, and so it proved. But they attained the end which the unseen directors undoubtedly had in view. They roused public attention as it had never been roused before in England on this subject. No better testimony in proof of that could be had than that of their strongest opponent, Mr. J. N. Maskelyne, the celebrated conjurer.

He writes*: “Certain it is, England was completely taken aback for a time by the wonders presented by these jugglers.” He further adds:

* “Modern Spiritualism,” p. 65.

The Brothers did more than all other men to familiarize England with the so-called Spiritualism, and before crowded audiences and under varied conditions, they produced really wonderful feats. The hole-and-corner seances of other media, where with darkness or semi-darkness, and a pliant, or frequently a devoted assembly, manifestations are occasionally said to occur, cannot be compared with the Davenport exhibitions in their effect upon the public mind.

Their first seance in London, a private one, was held on September 28, 1864, at the residence in Regent Street of Mr. Dion Boucicault, the famous actor and author, in the presence of leading newspaper men and distinguished men of science. The Press reports of the seance were remarkably full and, for a wonder, fair.

The account in the Morning Post the next day says that the guests were invited to make the most critical examination and to take all needful precautions against fraud or deception, and continues:

The party invited to witness the manifestations last night consisted of some twelve or fourteen individuals, all of whom are admitted to be of considerable distinction in the various professions with which they are connected. The majority have never previously witnessed anything of the kind. All, however, were determined to detect and if possible expose any attempt at deception. The Brothers Davenport are slightly built, gentleman-like in appearance, and about the last persons in the world from whom any great muscular performances might be expected. Mr. Fay is apparently a few years older, and of more robust constitution.

After describing what occurred, the writer goes on:

All that can be asserted is, that the displays to which we have referred took place on the present occasion under conditions and circumstances that preclude the presumption of fraud.

THE TIMES, the DAILY TELEGRAPH, and other newspapers published long and honest reports. We omit quotations from them because the following important statement from Mr. Dion Boucicault, which appeared in the Daily News as well as in many other London journals, covers all the facts. It describes a later seance at Mr. Boucicault’s house on October 11, 1864, at which were present, among others Viscount Bury, M.P., Sir Charles

Wyke, Sir Charles Nicholson, the Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Mr. Robert Chambers, Charles Reade, the novelist, and Captain Inglefield, the Arctic explorer.

SIR,

A seance by the Brothers Davenport and Mr. W. Fay took place in my house yesterday in the presence ofÉ. (here he mentions twenty-four names including all those already quoted)É.

At three o’clock our party was fully assembledÉ. We sent to a neighbouring music-seller for six guitars and two tambourines, so that the implements to be used should not be those with which the operators were familiar.

At half-past three the Davenport Brothers and Mr. Fay arrived, and found that we had altered their arrangements by changing the room which they had previously selected for their manifestations.

The seance then began by an examination of the dress and persons of the Brothers Davenport, and it was certified that no apparatus or other contrivance was concealed on or about their persons. They entered the cabinet, and sat facing each other. Captain Inglefield then, with a new rope provided by ourselves, tied Mr. W. Davenport hand and foot, with his hands behind his back, and then bound him firmly to the seat where he sat. Lord Bury, in like manner, secured Mr. I. Davenport. The knots on these ligatures were then fastened with sealing-wax, and a seal was affixed. A guitar, violin, tambourine, two bells, and a brass trumpet were placed on the floor of the cabinet. The doors were then closed, and a sufficient light was permitted in the room to enable us to see what followed.

I shall omit any detailed account of the babel of sounds which arose in the cabinet, and the violence with which the doors were repeatedly burst open and the instruments expelled; the hands appearing, as usual, at a lozenge-shaped orifice in the centre door of the cabinet. The following incidents seem to us particularly worthy of note:

While Lord Bury was stooping inside the cabinet, the door being open and the two operators seen to be sealed and bound, a detached hand was clearly observed to descend upon him, and he started back, remarking that a hand had struck him. Again, in the full light of the gas chandelier and during an interval in the seance, the doors of the cabinet being open, and while the ligatures of the Brothers Davenport were being examined, a very white, thin, female hand and wrist quivered for several seconds in the air above. This appearance drew a general exclamation from all the party.

Sir Charles Wyke now entered the cabinet and sat between the two young men-his hands being right and left on each, and secured to them. The doors were then closed, and the babel of sounds recommenced. Several hands appeared at the orifice-among them the hand of a child. After a space, Sir Charles returned amongst us and stated that while he held the two brothers, several hands touched his face and pulled his hair; the instruments at his feet crept up, played round his body and over his head-one of them lodging eventually on his shoulders. During the foregoing incidents the hands which appeared were touched and grasped by Captain Inglefield, and he stated that to the touch they were apparently human hands, though they passed away from his grasp.

I omit mentioning other phenomena, an account of which has already been rendered elsewhere.

The next part of the seance was performed in the dark. One of the Messrs. Davenport and Mr. Fay seated themselves amongst us. Two ropes were thrown at their feet, and in two minutes and a half they were tied hand and foot, their hands behind their backs bound tightly to their chairs, and their chairs bound to an adjacent table. While this process was going on, the guitar rose from the table and swung or floated round the room and over the heads of the party, and slightly touching some. Now a phosphoric light shot from side to side over our heads; the laps and hands and shoulders of several were simultaneously touched, struck, or pawed by hands, the guitar meanwhile sailing round the room, now near the ceiling, and then scuffling on the head and shoulders of some luck less Wight. The bells whisked here and there, and a light thrumming was maintained on the violin. The two tambourines seemed to roll hither and thither on the floor, now shaking violently, and now visiting the knees and hands of our circle-all these foregoing actions, audible or tangible, being simultaneous. Mr. Rideout, holding a tambourine, requested it might be plucked from his hand; it was almost instantaneously taken from him. At the same time, Lord Bury made a similar request, and a forcible attempt to pluck a tambourine from his grasp was made which he resisted. Mr. Fay then asked that his coat should be removed. We heard instantly a violent twitch, and here occurred the most remarkable fact. A light was struck before the coat had quite, left Mr. Fay’s person, and it was seen quitting him, plucked off him upwards. It flew up to the chandelier, where it hung for a moment and then fell to the ground. Mr. Fay was seen meanwhile bound hand and foot as before. One of our party now divested himself of his coat, and it was placed on the table. The light was extinguished and this coat was rushed on to Mr. Fay's back with equal rapidity. During the above occurrences in the dark, we placed a sheet of paper under the feet of these two operators, and drew with a pencil an outline around them, to the end that if they moved it might be detected. They of their own accord offered to have their hands filled with flour, or any other similar substance, to prove they made no use of them, but this precaution was deemed unnecessary; we required them, however, to count from one to twelve repeatedly, that their voices constantly heard might certify to us that they were in the places where they were tied. Each of our own party held his neighbour firmly, so that no one could move without two adjacent neighbours being aware of it.

At the termination of this seance, a general conversation took place on the subject of what we had heard and witnessed. Lord Bury suggested that the general opinion seemed to be that we should assure the Brothers Davenport and Mr. W. Fay that after a very stringent trial and strict scrutiny of their proceedings, the gentlemen present could arrive at no other conclusion than that there was no trace of trickery in any form, and certainly there were neither confederates nor machinery, and that all those who had witnessed the results would freely state in the society in which they moved that, so far as their investigations enabled them to form an opinion, the phenomena which had taken place in their presence were not the product of legerdemain. This suggestion was promptly acceded to by all present.

There is a concluding paragraph in which Mr. Dion Boucicault states that he is not a Spiritualist, and at the close of the report his name and the date are affixed.

This wonderfully full and lucid account is given without abbreviation because it supplies the answer to many objections, and because the character of the narrator and the witnesses cannot be questioned. It surely must be accepted as quite final so far as honesty is concerned. All subsequent objections are mere ignorance of the facts.

In October, 1864, the Davenports began to give public seances at the Queen's Concert Rooms, Hanover Square. Committees were appointed from the audience, and every effort made to detect how it was all done, but without avail. These seances, interspersed with private ones, were continued almost nightly until the close of the year. The daily Press was full of accounts of them, and the brothers' names were on everyone's lips. Early in 1865 they toured the English provinces, and in Liverpool, Huddersfield, and Leeds they suffered violence at the hands of excited mobs. At Liverpool, in February, two members of the audience tied their hands so brutally that blood flowed, and Mr. Ferguson cut the rope and released them. The Davenports refused to continue, and the mob rushed the platform and smashed up the cabinet. The same tactics were resorted to at Huddersfield on February 21, and then at Leeds with increased violence, the result of organized opposition. These riots led to the Davenports cancelling any other engagements in England. They next went to Paris, where they received a summons to appear at the Palace of St. Cloud, where the Emperor and Empress and a party of about forty witnessed a seance. While in Paris, Hamilton, the successor of the celebrated conjurer., Robert Houdin, visited them, and in a letter to a Paris newspaper, he said: "The phenomena surpassed my expectations, and the experiments are full of interest for me. I consider it my duty to add they are inexplicable." After a return visit to London, Ireland was visited at the beginning of 1866. In Dublin they had many influential sitters, including the editor of the IRISH TIMES and the Rev. Dr. Tisdal, who publicly proclaimed his belief in the manifestations.

In April of the same year the Davenports went to Hamburg and then to Berlin, but the expected war (which their guides told them would come about) made the trip unremunerative. Theatre managers offered them liberal terms for exhibitions, but, heeding the advice of their ever-present spirit monitor, who said that their manifestations, being supernatural, should be kept above the level of theatrical entertainments, they declined, though much against the wish of their business manager. During their month's stay in Berlin they were visited by members of the Royal family. After three weeks in Hamburg they proceeded to Belgium, where considerable success was attained in Brussels, and all the principal towns. They next went to Russia, arriving in St. Petersburg on December 27, 1866. On January 7, 1867, they gave their first public seance to an audience numbering one thousand. The next seance was at the residence of the French Ambassador to a gathering of about fifty people, including officers of the Imperial Court, and on January q they gave a seance in the Winter Palace to the Emperor and the Imperial family. They afterwards visited Poland and Sweden. On

April 11, 1868, they reappeared in London at the Hanover Square Rooms, and received an enthusiastic welcome from a crowded audience. Mr. Benjamin Coleman, a prominent Spiritualist, who arranged their first public seances in London, writing at this time of their stay of close on four years in Europe, says*:

* SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, 1868, p. 321.

I desire to convey to those of my friends in America who introduced them to me, the assurance of my conviction that the Brothers' mission to Europe has been of great service to Spiritualism; that their public conduct as mediums-in which relation I alone know them-has been steady and unexceptionable.

He adds that he knows no form of mediumship better adapted for a large audience than theirs. After this visit to London the Davenports returned home to America. The brothers visited Australia in 1876, and on August 24 gave their first public seance in Melbourne. William died in Sydney in July, 1877.

Throughout their career the Davenport Brothers excited the deep envy and malice of the conjuring fraternity. Maskelyne, with amazing effrontery, pretended to have exposed them in England. His claims in this direction have been well answered by Dr. George Sexton, a former editor of the SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, who described in public, in the presence of Mr. Maskelyne, how his tricks were done, and comparing them with the results achieved by the Davenports, said: “The two bear about as much resemblance to each other as the productions of the poet Close to the sublime and glorious dramas of the immortal bard of Avon.”* Still the conjurers made more noise in public than the Spiritualists, and with the Press to support them they made the general public believe that the Davenport Brothers had been exposed.

* Address at Cavendish Rooms, London, June 15, 1873.

In announcing the death in America of Ira Davenport in 1911, LIGHT comments on the outpouring of journalistic ignorance for which it furnished the opportunity. The Daily News is quoted as saying of the brothers: “They made the mistake of appearing as sorcerers instead of as honest conjurers. If, like their conqueror, Maskelyne, they had thought of saying, ‘It's so simple,’ the brethren might have achieved not only fortune but respectability.” In reply to this, LIGHT asks why, if they were mere conjurers and not honest believers in their mediumship, did the Davenport

Brothers endure hardships, insults, and injuries, and suffer the indignities that were put upon them, when by renouncing their claims to mediumship they might have been "respectable" and rich?

An inevitable remark on the part of those who are not able to detect trickery is to ask what elevating purpose can be furthered by phenomena such as those observed with the Davenports. The well-known author and sturdy Spiritualist, William Howitt, has given a good answer:

Are these who play tricks and fling about instruments spirits from Heaven? Can God really send such? Yes, God sends them, to teach us this, if nothing more: that He has servants of all grades and tastes ready to do all kinds of work, and He has here sent what you call low and harlequin spirits to a low and very sensual age. Had He sent anything higher it would have gone right over the heads of their audiences. As it is, nine-tenths cannot take in what they see.

It is a sad reflection that the Davenports-probably the greatest mediums of their kind that the world has ever seen-suffered throughout their lives from brutal opposition and even persecution. Many times they were in danger of their lives.

One is forced to think that there could be no clearer evidence of the influence of the dark forces of evil than the prevailing hostility to all spiritual manifestations.

Touching this aspect, Mr. Randall says*:

* "Biography," p. 82.

There seems to be a sort of chronic dislike, almost hatred, in the minds of some persons toward any and everything spiritual. It seems as if it were a vapour floating, in the air-a kind of mental spore flowing through the spaces, and breathed in by the great multitude of humankind, which kindles a rankly poisonous fire in their hearts against all those whose mission it is to bring peace on earth and good will to men. The future men and women of the world will marvel greatly at those now living, when they shall, as they will, read that the Davenports, and all other mediums, were forced to encounter the most inveterate hostility; that they, and the writer among them, were compelled to endure horrors baffling description, for no other offence than trying to convince the multitude that they were not beasts that perish and leave no sign, but immortal, deathless, grave-surviving souls.

Mediums ALONE are capable of DEMONSTRATING the fact of man's continued existence after death; and yet (strange inconsistency of human nature) the very people who persecute these, their truest and best friends, and fairly hound them to premature death or despair, are the very ones who freely lavish all that wealth can give upon those whose office it is merely to GUESS at human immortality.

In discussing the claims of various professional magicians to have exposed or imitated the Davenports, Sir Richard Burton said:

I have spent a great part of my life in Oriental lands, and have seen their many magicians. Lately I have been permitted to see and be present at the performances of Messrs. Anderson and Tolmaque. The latter showed, as they profess, clever conjuring, but they do not even attempt what the Messrs. Davenport and Fay succeed in doing: for instance, the beautiful management of the musical instruments. Finally, I have read and listened to every explanation of the Davenport "tricks" hitherto placed before the English public, and, believe me, if anything would make me take that tremendous jump "from matter to spirit," it is the utter and complete unreason of the reasons by which the "manifestations" are explained.

It is to be remarked that the Davenports themselves, as contrasted with their friends and travelling companions, never claimed any preternatural origin for their results. The reason for this may have been that as an entertainment it was more piquant and less provocative when every member of the audience could form his own solution. Writing to the American conjurer Houdini, Ira Davenport said in his old age, "We never in public affirmed our belief in Spiritualism. That we regarded as no business of the public, nor did we offer our entertainment as the result of sleight-of-hand, or, on the other hand, as Spiritualism. We let our friends and foes settle that as best they could between themselves, but, unfortunately, we were often the victims of their disagreements."

Houdini further claimed that Davenport admitted that his results were normally effected, but Houdini has himself stuffed so many errors of fact into his book, "A Magician Among the Spirits," and has shown such extraordinary bias on the whale question, that his statement carries no weight. The letter which he produces makes no such admission. A further statement quoted as being made by Ira Davenport is demonstrably false. It is that the instruments never left the cabinet. As a matter of fact, The Timer representative was severely struck in the face by a floating guitar, his brow being cut, and on several occasions when a light was struck instruments dropped all over the room. If Houdini has completely misunderstood this latter statement, it is not likely that he is very accurate upon the former (VIDE Appendix).

It may be urged, and has been urged, by Spiritualists as well as by sceptics that such mountebank psychic exhibitions are undignified and unworthy. There are many of us who think so, and yet there are many others who would echo these words of Mr. P. B. Randall:

The fault lies not with the immortals, but in us; for, as is the demand, so is the supply. If we cannot be reached in one way, we must be, and are, reached in another; and the wisdom of the eternal world gives the blind race just as much as it can bear and no more. If we are intellectual babes, we must put up with mental pap till our digestive capacities warrant and demand stronger food; and, if people can best be convinced of immortality by spiritual pranks and antics, the ends resorted to justify the means. The sight of a spectral arm in an audience of three thousand persons will appeal to more hearts, make a deeper impression, and convert more people to a belief in their hereafter, in ten minutes, than a whole regiment of preachers, no matter how eloquent, could in five years.

CHAPTER XI

THE RESEARCHES OF SIR WILLIAM CROOKES (1870-1874)

The research into the phenomena of Spiritualism by Sir William Crookes-or Professor Crookes, as he then was-during the years from 1870 to 1874 is one of the outstanding incidents in the history of the movement. It is notable on account of the high scientific standing of the inquirer, the stern and yet just spirit in which the inquiry was conducted, the extraordinary results, and the uncompromising declaration of faith which followed them. It has been a favourite device of the opponents of the movement to attribute some physical weakness or growing senility to each fresh witness to psychic truth, but none can deny that these researches were carried out by a man at the very zenith of his mental development, and that the famous career which followed was a sufficient proof of his intellectual stability. It is to be remarked that the result was to prove the integrity not only of the medium Florence Cook with whom the more sensational results were obtained, but also that of D. D. Home and of Miss Kate Fox, who were also severely tested.

Sir William Crookes, who was born in 1832 and died in 1919, was pre-eminent in the world of science.

Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1863, he received from this body in 1875 a Royal Gold Medal for his various chemical and physical researches, the Davy Medal in 1888, and the Sir Joseph Copley Medal in 1904. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1897, and was awarded the Order of Merit in 1910. He occupied the position of President at different tunes of the Royal Society, the Chemical Society, the Institution of Electrical Engineers, the British Association, and the Society for Psychical Research. His discovery of the new chemical element which he named "Thallium," his inventions of the radiometer, the spinthariscope, and the "Crookes' tube," only represent a slight part of his great research. He founded in 1859 the CHEMICAL NEWS, which he edited, and in 1864 he became editor of the QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE. In 1880 the

French Academy of Sciences awarded him a gold medal and a prize of 3,000 francs in recognition of his important work.

Crookes confesses that he began his investigations into psychical phenomena believing that the whole matter might prove to be a trick. His scientific brethren held the same view, and were delighted at the course he had adopted. Profound satisfaction was expressed because the subject was to be investigated by a man so thoroughly qualified. They had little doubt that what were considered to be the sham pretensions of Spiritualism would now be exposed. One writer said, “If men like Mr. Crookes grapple with the subjectÉ we shall soon know how much to believe.” Dr. (afterwards Professor) Balfour Stewart, in a communication to Nature, commended the boldness and honesty which had led Mr. Crookes to take this step. Crookes himself took the view that it was the duty of scientists to make such investigation. He writes: “It argues ill for the boasted freedom of opinion among scientific men that they have so long refused to institute a scientific investigation into the existence and nature of facts asserted by so many competent and credible witnesses, and which they are freely invited to examine when and where they please. For my own part, I too much value the pursuit of truth, and the discovery of any new fact in Nature, to avoid inquiry because it appears to clash with prevailing opinions.” In this spirit he began his inquiry.

It should be stated, however, that though Professor Crookes was sternly critical as to the physical phenomena, already he had had acquaintance with the mental phenomena, and would appear to have accepted them. Possibly this sympathetic spiritual attitude may have aided him in obtaining his remarkable results, for it cannot be too often repeated-because it is too often forgotten-that psychic research of the best sort is really “psychic,” and depends upon spiritual conditions. It is not the bumptious self-opinionated man, sitting with a ludicrous want of proportion as a judge upon spiritual matters, who attains results; but it is he who appreciates that the strict use of reason and observation is not incompatible with humility of mind, and that courteous gentleness of demeanour which makes for harmony and sympathy between the inquirer and his subject.

Crookes’s less material inquiries seem to have begun in the summer of 1869. In July of that year he had sittings with the well-known medium, Mrs. Marshall, and in December with another famous medium, J. J. Morse. In July, 1869, D. D. Home who had been giving seances in St. Petersburg, returned to London with a letter of introduction to Crookes from Professor Butlerof.

An interesting fact emerges from a private diary kept by Crookes during his voyage to Spain in December, 1870, with the Eclipse Expedition. Under the date December 31, he writes:*

* “Life of Sir William Crookes.” By E. E. Fournier d’Albe, 1923.

I cannot help reverting in thought to this time last year. Nelly (his wife) and I were then sitting together in communion with dear departed friends, and as twelve o’clock struck they wished us many happy New Years. I feel that they are looking on now, and as space is no obstacle to them, they are, I believe, looking over my dear Nelly at the same time. Over us both I know there is one whom we all-spirits as well as mortals-bow down to as Father and Master, and it is my humble prayer to Him-the Great Good as the mandarin calls Him-that He will continue His merciful protection to Nelly and me and our dear little familyÉ. May He also allow us to continue to receive spiritual communications from my brother who passed over the boundary when in a ship at sea more than three years ago.

He further adds New Year loving greetings to his wife and children, and concludes:

And when the earthly years have ended may we continue to spend still happier ones in the spirit land, glimpses of which I am occasionally getting.

Miss Florence Cook, with whom Crookes undertook his classical series of experiments, was a young girl of fifteen who was asserted to possess strong psychic powers, taking the rare shape of complete materialisation. It would appear to have been a family characteristic, for her sister, Miss Kate Cook, was not less famous. There had been some squabble with an alleged exposure in which a Mr. Volckman had taken sides against Miss Cook, and in her desire for vindication she placed herself entirely under the protection of Mrs. Crookes, declaring that her husband might make any experiments upon her powers under his own conditions, and asking for no reward save that he should clear her character as a medium by giving his exact conclusions to the world. Fortunately, she was dealing with a man of unswerving intellectual honesty. We have had experience in these latter days of mediums giving themselves up in the same unreserved way to scientific investigation and being betrayed by the investigators, who had not the moral courage to admit those results which would have entailed their own public acceptance of the spiritual interpretation.

Professor Crookes published a full account of his methods in the QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE, of which he was then editor. In his house at Mornington Road a small study opened into the chemical laboratory, a door with a curtain separating the two rooms. Miss Cook lay entranced upon a couch in the inner room. In the outer in subdued light sat Crookes, with such other observers as he invited. At the end of a period which varied from twenty minutes to an hour the materialised figure was built up from the ectoplasm of the medium. The existence of this substance and its method of production were unknown at that date, but subsequent research has thrown much light upon it, an account of which has been embodied in the chapter on ectoplasm. The actual effect was that the curtain was opened, and there emerged into the laboratory a female who was usually as different from the medium as two people could be. This apparition, which could move, talk, and act in all ways as an independent entity, is known by the name which she herself claimed as her own, “Katie King.”

The natural explanation of the sceptic is that the two women were really the same woman, and that Katie was a clever impersonation of Florence. The objector could strengthen his case by the observation made not only by Crookes but by Miss Marryat and others, that there were times when Katie was very like Florence.

Herein lies one of the mysteries of materialisation which call for careful consideration rather than sneers. The author, sitting with Miss Besinnet, the famous American medium, has remarked the same thing, the psychic faces beginning when the power was weak by resembling those of the medium, and later becoming utterly unlike. Some speculators have imagined that the etheric form of the medium, her spiritual body, has been liberated by the trance, and is the basis upon which the other manifesting entities build up their own simulacra. However that may be, the fact has to be admitted; and it is paralleled by Direct Voice phenomena, where the voice often resembles that of the medium at first and then takes an entirely different tone, or divides into two voices speaking at the same time.

However, the student has certainly the right to claim that Florence Cook and Katie King were the same individual until convincing evidence is laid before him that this is impossible. Such evidence Professor Crookes is very careful to give.

The points of difference which he observed between Miss Cook and Katie are thus described:

Katie’s height varies; in my house I have seen her six inches taller than Miss Cook. Last night, with bare feet and not tip-toeing, she was four and a half inches taller than Miss Cook. Katie’s neck was bare last night; the skin was perfectly smooth both to touch and sight, whilst on Miss Cook’s neck is a large blister, which under similar circumstances is distinctly visible and rough to the touch. Katie’s ears are unpierced, whilst Miss Cook habitually wears ear-rings. Katie’s complexion is very fair, while that of Miss Cook is very dark. Katie’s fingers are much longer than Miss Cook’s, and her face is also larger. In manners and ways of expression there are also many decided differences.

In a later contribution, he adds:

Having seen so much of Katie lately, when she has been illuminated by the electric light, I am enabled to add to the points of difference between her and her medium which I mentioned in a former article. I have the most absolute certainty that Miss Cook and Katie are two separate individuals so far as their bodies are concerned. Several little marks on Miss Cook’s face are absent on Katie’s. Miss Cook’s hair is so dark a brown as almost to appear black; a lock of Katie’s, which is now before me, and which she allowed me to cut from her luxuriant tresses, having first traced it up to the scalp and satisfied myself that it actually grew there, is a rich golden auburn.

On one evening I timed Katie’s pulse. It beat steadily at 75, whilst Miss Cook’s pulse a little time after was going at its usual rate of 90. On applying my ear to Katie’s chest, I could hear a heart beating rhythmically inside, and pulsating even more steadily than did Miss Cook’s heart when she allowed me to try a similar experiment after the seance. Tested in the same way, Katie’s lungs were found to be sounder than her medium’s, for at the time I tried my experiment Miss Cook was under medical treatment for a severe cough.

Crookes took forty-four photographs of Katie King by the aid of electric light. Writing in THE SPIRITUALIST (1874, p. 270), he describes the methods he adopted:

During the week before Katie took her departure, she gave seances at my house almost nightly, to enable me to photograph her by artificial light. Five complete sets of photographic apparatus were accordingly fitted up for the purpose, consisting of five cameras, one of the whole-plate size, one half-plate, one quarter-plate, and two binocular stereoscopic cameras, which were all brought to bear upon Katie at the same time on each occasion on which she stood for her portrait. Five sensitizing and fixing baths were used, and plenty of plates were cleaned ready for use in advance, so that there might be no hitch or delay during the photographing operations, which were performed by myself, aided by one assistant.

My library was used as a dark cabinet. It has folding doors opening into the laboratory; one of these doors was taken off its hinges, and a curtain suspended in its place to enable Katie to pass in and out easily. Those of our friends who were present were seated in the laboratory facing the curtain, and the cameras were placed a little behind them, ready to photograph Katie when she came outside, and to photograph anything also inside the cabinet, whenever the curtain was withdrawn for the purpose. Each evening there were three or four exposures of plates in the five cameras, giving at least fifteen separate pictures at each seance; some of these were spoilt in the developing, and some in regulating the amount of light. Altogether I have forty-four negatives, some inferior, some indifferent, and some excellent.

Some of these photographs are in the author’s possession, and surely there is no more wonderful impression upon any plate than that which shows Crookes at the height of his manhood, with this angel-for such in truth she was-leaning upon his arm. The word “angel” may seem an exaggeration, but when an other-world spirit submits herself to the discomforts of temporary and artificial existence in order to convey the lesson of survival to a material and worldly generation, there is no more fitting term.

Some controversy has arisen as to whether Crookes ever saw the medium and Katie at the same moment. Crookes says in the course of his report that he frequently followed Katie into the cabinet, “and have sometimes seen her and her medium together, but most generally I have found nobody but the entranced medium lying on the floor, Katie and her white robes having instantaneously disappeared.”

Much more direct testimony, however, is given by Crookes in a letter to the BANNER OF LIGHT (U.S.A.), which is reproduced in THE SPIRITUALIST (London) of July 17, 1874, p. 29. He writes:

In reply to your request, I beg to state that I saw Miss Cook and Katie together at the same moment, by the light of a phosphorus lamp, which was quite sufficient to enable me to see distinctly all I described. The human eye will naturally take in a wide angle, and thus the two figures were included in my field of vision at the same time, but the light being dim, and the two faces being several feet apart, I naturally turned the lamp and my eyes alternately from one to the other, when I desired to bring either Miss Cook's or Katie's face to that portion of my field of view where vision is most distinct. Since the occurrence here referred to took place, Katie and Miss Cook have been seen together by myself and eight other persons, in my own house, illuminated by the full blaze of the electric light. On this occasion Miss Cook's face was not visible, as her head had to be closely bound up in a thick shawl, but I specially satisfied myself that she was there. An attempt to throw the light direct on to her uncovered face, when entranced, was attended with serious consequences.

The camera, too, emphasizes the points of difference between the medium and the form. He says:

One of the most interesting of the pictures is one in which I am standing by the side of Katie; she has her bare foot upon a particular part of the floor. Afterwards I dressed Miss Cook like Katie, placed her and myself in exactly the same position, and we were photographed by the same cameras, placed exactly as in the other experiment, and illuminated by the same light. When these two pictures are placed over each other, the two photographs of myself coincide exactly as regards stature, etc., but Katie is half a head taller than Miss Cook, and looks a big woman in comparison with her. In the breadth of her face, in many of the pictures, she differs essentially in size from her medium, and the photographs show several other points of difference.

Crookes pays a high tribute to the medium, Florence Cook:

The almost daily seances with which Miss Cook has lately favoured me have proved a severe tax upon her strength, and I wish to make the most public acknowledgment of the obligations I am under to her for her readiness to assist me in my experiments. Every test that I have proposed she has at once agreed to submit to with the utmost willingness; she is open and straightforward in speech, and I have never seen anything approaching the slightest symptom of a wish to deceive. Indeed, I do not believe she could carry on a deception if she were to try, and if she did she would certainly be found out very quickly, for such a line of action is altogether foreign to her nature. And to imagine that an innocent schoolgirl of fifteen should be able to conceive and then successfully carry out for three years so gigantic an imposture as this, and in that time should submit to any test which might be imposed upon her, should bear the strictest scrutiny, should be willing to be searched at any time, either before or after a seance, and should meet with even better success in my own house than at that of her parents, knowing that she visited me with the express object of submitting to strict scientific tests-to imagine, I say, the Katie King of the last three years to be the result of imposture, does more violence to one's reason and common sense than to believe her to be what she herself affirms.*

* "Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism."

Granting that a temporary form was built up from the ectoplasm of Florence Cook, and that this form was then occupied and used by an independent being who called herself "Katie King," we are still faced with the question, "Who was Katie King?" To this we can only give the answer which she gave herself, while admitting that we have no proof of it. She declared that she was the daughter of John King, who had long been known among Spiritualists as the presiding spirit at seances held for material phenomena. His personality is discussed later in the chapter upon the Eddy brothers and Mrs. Holmes, to which the reader is referred. Her earth name had been Morgan, and King was rather the general title of a certain class of spirits than an ordinary name. Her life had been spent two hundred years before, in the reign of Charles the Second, in the island of Jamaica. Whether this be true or not, she undoubtedly conformed to the part, and her general conversation was consistent with her account. One of the daughters of Professor Crookes wrote to the author and described her vivid recollection of tales of the Spanish Main told by this kindly spirit to the children of the family. She made herself beloved by all. Mrs. Crookes wrote:

At a seance with Miss Cook in our own house when one of our sons was an infant of three weeks old, Katie King, a materialised spirit, expressed the liveliest interest in him and asked to be allowed to see the baby. The infant was accordingly brought into the seance room and placed in the arms of Katie, who, after holding him in the most natural way for a short time, smilingly gave him back again.

Professor Crookes has left it on record that her beauty and charm were unique in his experience.

The reader may reasonably think that the subdued light which has been alluded to goes far to vitiate the results by preventing exact observation. Professor Crookes has assured us, however, that as the series of seances proceeded toleration was established, and the figure was able to bear a far greater degree of light. This toleration had its limits, however, which were never passed by Professor Crookes, but which were tested to the full in a daring experiment described by Miss Florence Marryat (Mrs. Ross-Church). It should be stated that Professor Crookes was not present at this experience, nor did Miss Marryat ever claim that he was. She mentions, however, the name of Mr. Carter Hall as being one of the company present. Katie had very good-humouredly consented to testing what the effect would be if a full light were turned upon her image:

She took up her station against the drawing-room wall, with her arms extended as if she were crucified. Then three gas-burners were turned on to their full extent in a room about sixteen feet square. The effect upon Katie King was marvellous. She looked like herself for the space of a second only, then she began gradually to melt away. I can compare the dematerialisation of her form to nothing but a wax doll melting before a hot fire. First the features became blurred and indistinct; they seemed to run into each other. The eyes sunk in the sockets, the nose disappeared, the frontal bone fell in. Next the limbs appeared to give way under her, and she sank lower and lower on the carpet, like a crumbling edifice. At last there was nothing but her head left above the ground-then a heap of white drapery only, which disappeared with a whisk, as if a hand had pulled it after her — and we were left staring by the light of three gas-burners at the spot on which Katie King had stood.*

* “There Is No Death,” p. 143.

Miss Marryat adds the interesting detail that at some of these seances Miss Cook’s hair was nailed to the ground, which did not in the least interfere with the subsequent emergence of Katie from the cabinet.

The results obtained in his own home were honestly and fearlessly reported by Professor Crookes in his Journal, and caused the greatest possible commotion in the scientific world. A few of the larger spirits, men like Russel Wallace, Lord Rayleigh, the young and rising physicist William Barrett, Cromwell Varley, and others, had their former views confirmed, or were encouraged to advance upon a new path of knowledge. There was a fiercely intolerant party, however, headed by Carpenter the physiologist, who derided the matter and were ready to impute anything from lunacy to fraud to their illustrious colleague. Organized science carne badly out of the matter. In his published account Crookes gave the letters in which he asked Stokes, the secretary of the Royal Society, to come down and see these things with his own eyes. By his refusal to do so, Stokes placed himself in exactly the same position as those cardinals who would not look at the moons of Jupiter through Galileo's telescope. Material science, when faced with a new problem, showed itself to be just as bigoted as mediaeval theology.

Before quitting the subject of Katie King one should say a few words as to the future of the great medium from whom she had her physical being. Miss Cook became Mrs. Corner, but continued to exhibit her remarkable powers. The author is only aware of one occasion upon which the honesty of her mediumship was called in question, and that was when she was seized by Sir George Sitwell and accused of personating a spirit. The author is of opinion that a materialising medium should always be secured so that she cannot wander around-and this as a protection against herself. It is unlikely that she will move in deep trance, but in the half-trance condition there is nothing to prevent her unconsciously, or semi-consciously, or in obedience to suggestion from the expectations of the circle, wandering out of the cabinet into the room. It is a reflection of our own ignorance that a lifetime of proof should be clouded by a single episode of this nature. It is worthy of remark, however, that upon this occasion the observers agreed that the figure was white, whereas when Mrs. Corner was seized no white was to be seen. An experienced investigator would probably have concluded that this was not a materialisation, but a transfiguration, which means that the ectoplasm, being insufficient to build up a complete figure, has been used to drape the medium so that she herself may carry the simulacrum. Commenting upon such cases, the great German investigator, Dr. Schrenck Notzing, says*:

* "Phenomena of Materialisation" (English Translation).

This (a photograph) is interesting as throwing a light on the genesis of the so-called transfiguration, I.E. Éthe medium takes upon herself the part of the spirit, endeavouring to dramatize the character of the person in question by clothing herself in the materialised fabrics. This transition stage is found in nearly all materialisation mediums. The literature of the subject records a large number of attempts at exposure of mediums thus impersonating "spirits," e.g. that of the medium Bastian by the Crown Prince Rudolph, that of Crookes's medium, Miss Cook, that of Madame d'Esperance, etc. In all these cases the medium was seized, but the fabrics used for masking immediately disappeared, and were not afterwards found.

It would appear, then, that the true reproach in such cases lies with the negligent sitters rather than with the unconscious medium.

The sensational nature of Professor Crookes's experiments with Miss Cook, and the fact, no doubt, that they seemed more vulnerable to attack, have tended to obscure his very positive results with Home and with Miss Fox, which have established the powers of those mediums upon a solid basis. Crookes soon found the usual difficulties which researchers encounter, but he had sense enough to realise that in an entirely new subject one has to adapt oneself to the conditions, and not abandon the study in disgust because the conditions refuse to adapt themselves to our own preconceived ideas. Thus, in speaking of Home, he says:

The experiments I have tried have been very numerous, but owing to our imperfect knowledge of the conditions which favour or oppose the manifestations of this force, to the apparently capricious manner in which it is exerted, and to the fact that Mr. Home himself is subject to unaccountable ebbs and flows of the force, it has but seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose.*

* "Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism," p. 10.

The most marked of these results was the alteration in the weight of objects, which was afterwards so completely confirmed by Dr. Crawford working with the Goligher circle, and also in the course of the "Margery" investigation at Boston. Heavy objects could be made light, and light ones heavy, by the action of some unseen force which appeared to be under the influence of an independent intelligence. The checks by which all possible fraud was eliminated are very fully set out in the record of the experiments, and must convince any unprejudiced reader. Dr. Huggins, the well-known authority on the spectroscope, and Serjeant Cox, the eminent lawyer, together with several other spectators, witnessed the experiments. As already recorded, however, Crookes found it impossible to get some of the official heads of science to give the matter one hour of their attention.

The playing upon musical instruments, especially an accordion, under circumstances when it was impossible to reach the notes, was another of the phenomena which was very thoroughly examined and then certified by Crookes and his distinguished assistants. Granting that the medium has himself the knowledge which would enable him to play the instrument, the author is not prepared to admit that such a phenomenon is an absolute proof of independent intelligence. When once the existence of an etheric body is granted, with limbs which correspond with our own, there is no obvious reason why a partial detachment should not take place, and why the etheric fingers should not be placed upon the keys while the material ones remain upon the medium's lap. The problem resolves itself, then, into the simpler proposition that the medium's brain can command his etheric fingers, and that those fingers can be supplied with sufficient force to press down the keys. Very many psychic phenomena, the reading with blindfolded eyes, the touching of distant objects, and so forth, may, in the opinion of the author, be referred to the etheric body and may be classed rather under a higher and subtler materialism than under Spiritualism. They are in a class quite distinct from those mental phenomena such as evidential messages from the dead, which form the true centre of the spiritual movement. In speaking of Miss Kate Fox, Professor Crookes says: "I have observed many circumstances which appear to show that the will and intelligence of the medium have much to do with the phenomena." He adds that this is not in any conscious or dishonest way, and continues, "I have observed some circumstances which seem conclusively to point to the agency of an outside intelligence not belonging to any human being in the room." * This is the point which the author has attempted to make as expressed by an authority far higher than his own.

* "Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism," p. 95.

The phenomena which were chiefly established in the investigation of Miss Kate Fox were the movement of objects at a distance, and the production of percussive sounds-or raps. The latter covered a great range of sound, "delicate ticks, sharp sounds as from an induction coil in full work, detonations in the air, sharp metallic taps, a crackling like that heard when a frictional machine is at work, sounds like scratching, the twittering as of a bird, etc." All of us who have had experience of these sounds have been compelled to ask ourselves how far they are under the control of the medium. The author has come to the conclusion, as already stated, that up to a point they are under the control of the medium, and that beyond that point they are not. He cannot easily forget the distress and embarrassment of a great North-country medium when in the author’s presence loud raps, sounding like the snapping of fingers, broke out round his head in the coffee-room of a Doncaster hotel. If he had any doubts that raps were independent of the medium they were finally set at rest upon that occasion. As to the objectivity of these noises, Crookes says of Miss Kate Fox:

* “Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism,” p. 86.

It seems only necessary for her to place her hand on any substance for loud thuds to be heard in it, like a triple pulsation, sometimes loud enough to be heard several rooms off. In this manner I have heard them in a living tree-on a sheet of glass-on a stretched iron wire-on a stretched membrane-a tambourine-on the roof of a cab-and on the floor of a theatre. Moreover, actual contact is not always necessary. I have had these sounds proceeding from the floor, walls, etc., when the medium’s hands and feet were held-when she was standing on a chair-when she was suspended in a swing from the ceiling-when she was enclosed in a wire cage-and when she had fallen fainting on a sofa. I have heard them on a glass harmonicon-I have felt them on my own shoulder and under my own hands. I have heard them on a sheet of paper, held between the fingers by a piece of thread passed through one corner. With a full knowledge of the numerous theories which have been started, chiefly in America, to explain these sounds, I have tested them in every way that I could devise, until there has been no escape from the conviction that they were true objective occurrences not produced by trickery or mechanical means.

So finishes the legend of cracking toe joints, dropping apples, and all the other absurd explanations which have been put forward to explain away the facts. It is only fair to say, however, that the painful incidents connected with the latter days of the Fox sisters go some way to justify those who, without knowing the real evidence, have had their attention drawn to that single episode-which is treated elsewhere.

It has sometimes been supposed that Crookes modified or withdrew his opinions upon psychic subjects as expressed in 1874. It may at least be said that the violence of the opposition, and the timidity of those who might have supported him, did alarm him and that he felt his scientific position to be in danger. Without going the length of subterfuge, he did unquestionably shirk the question. He refused to have his articles upon the subject republished, and he would not circulate the wonderful photographs in which the materialised Katie King stood arm-in-arm with himself. He was exceedingly cautious also in defining his position. In a letter quoted by Professor Angelo Brofferio, he says*:

* “Fur den Spiritismus,” Leipzig, 1894, p. 319.

All that I am concerned in is that invisible and intelligent beings exist who say that they are the spirits of dead persons. But proof that they really are the individuals they assume to be, which I require in order to believe it, I have never received, though I am disposed to admit that many of my friends assert that they have actually obtained the desired proofs, and I myself have already frequently been many times on the verge of this conviction.

As he grew older, however, this conviction hardened, or perhaps he became more conscious of the moral responsibilities which such exceptional experiences must entail.

In his presidential address before the British Association at Bristol in 1898, Sir William briefly referred to his earlier researches. He said:

Upon one other interest I have not yet touched-to me the weightiest and farthest-reaching of all. No incident in my scientific career is more widely known than the part I took many years ago in certain psychic researches. Thirty years have passed since I published an account of experiments tending to show that outside our scientific knowledge there exists a Force exercised by intelligence differing from the ordinary intelligence common to mortalsÉ. I have nothing to retract. I adhere to my already published statements. Indeed, I might add much thereto.

Nearly twenty years later his belief was stronger than ever. In the course of an interview, he said*:

* THE INTERNATIONAL PSYCHIC GAZETTE, December, 1917, pp. 61-2.

I have never had any occasion to change my mind on the subject. I am perfectly satisfied with what I have said in earlier days. It is quite true that a connection has been set up between this world and the next.

In reply to the question whether Spiritualism had not killed the old materialism of the scientists, he added:

I think it has. It has at least convinced the great majority of people, who know anything about the subject, of the existence of the next world.

The author has had an opportunity lately, through the courtesy of Mr. Thomas Blyton, of seeing the letter of condolence written by Sir William Crookes on the occasion of the death of Mrs. Corner. It is dated April 24, 1904, and in it he says: “Convey Lady Crookes’s and my own sincerest sympathy to the family in their irreparable loss. We trust that the certain belief that our loved ones, when they have passed over, are still watching over us-a belief which owes so much of its certainty to the mediumship of Mrs. Corner (or Florence Cook, as she will always be in our memory-will strengthen and console those who are left behind.” The daughter in announcing the death said, “She died in deep peace and happiness.”

CHAPTER XII

THE EDDY BROTHERS AND THE HOLMESES

It is difficult within any reasonable compass to follow the rise of various mediums in the United States, and a study of one or two outstanding cases must typify the whole. The years 1874 and 1875 were years of great psychic activity, bringing conviction to some and scandal to others. On the whole the scandal seems to have predominated, but whether rightly or not is a question which may well be debated. The opponents of psychic truth having upon their side the clergy of the various churches, organized science, and the huge inert bulk of material mankind, had the lay Press at their command, with the result that everything that was in its favour was suppressed or contorted, and everything which could tell against it was given the widest publicity. Hence, a constant checking of past episodes and reassessment of old values are necessary. Even at the present day the air is charged with prejudice. If any man of standing at the present instant were to enter a London newspaper office and say that he had detected a medium in fraud, the matter would be seized upon eagerly and broadcast over the country; while if the same man proclaimed that he had beyond all question satisfied himself that the phenomena were true, it is doubtful if he would get a paragraph. The scale is always heavily weighted. In America, where there is practically no Libel Act, and where the Press is often violent and sensational, this state of things was-and possibly is-even more in evidence.

The first outstanding incident was the mediumship of the Eddy brothers, which has probably never been excelled in the matter of materialisation, or, as we may now call them, ectoplasmic forms. The difficulty at that date in accepting such phenomena lay in the fact that they seemed to be regulated by no known law, and to be isolated from all our experiences of Nature. The labours of Geley, Crawford, Madame Bisson, Schrenck Notzing and others have removed this, and have given us, what is at the lowest, a complete scientific hypothesis, sustained by prolonged and careful investigations, so that we can bring some order into the matter. This did not exist in 1874, and we can well sympathize with the doubt of even the most honest and candid minds, when they were asked to believe that two rude farmers, unmannered and uneducated, could produce results which were denied to the rest of the world and utterly inexplicable to science.

The Eddy brothers, Horatio and William, were primitive folk farming a small holding at the hamlet of Chittenden, near Rutland, in the State of Vermont. An observer has described them as “sensitive, distant and curt with strangers, look more like hard-working rough farmers than prophets or priests of a new dispensation, have dark complexions, black hair and eyes, stiff joints, a clumsy carriage, shrink from advances, and make new-comers ill at ease and unwelcome. They are at feud with some of their neighbours and not likedÉ. They are, in fact, under the ban of a public opinion that is not prepared or desirous to study the phenomena as either scientific marvels or revelations from another world.”

The rumours of the strange doings which occurred in the Eddy homestead had got abroad, and raised an excitement similar to that caused by the Koons’s music-room in earlier days. Folk came from all parts to investigate. The Eddys seem to have had ample, if rude, accommodation for their guests, and to have boarded them in a great room with the plaster stripping off the walls and the food as simple as the surroundings. For this board, of course, they charged at a low rate, but they do not seem to have made any profit out of their psychic demonstrations.

A good deal of curiosity had been aroused in Boston and New York by the reports of what was happening, and a New York paper, the Daily Graphic, sent up Colonel Olcott as investigator. Olcott was not at that time identified with any psychic movement-indeed, his mind was prejudiced against it, and he approached his task rather in the spirit of an “exposer.” He was a man of clear brain and outstanding ability, with a high sense of honour. No one can read the very full and intimate details of his own life which are contained in his “Old Diary Leaves” without feeling a respect for the man-loyal to a fault, unselfish, and with that rare moral courage which will follow truth and accept results even when they oppose one’s expectations and desires. He was no mystic dreamer but a very practical man of affairs, and some of his psychic research observations have met with far less attention than they deserve.

Olcott remained for ten weeks in the Vermont atmosphere, which must in itself have been a feat of considerable endurance, with plain fare, hard living and uncongenial hosts. He came away with something very near to personal dislike for his morose entertainers, and at the same time with absolute confidence in their psychic powers. Like every wise investigator, he refuses to give blank certificates of character, and will not answer for occasions upon which he was not present, nor for the future conduct of those whom he is judging. He confines himself to his actual experience, and in fifteen remarkable articles which appeared in the NEW YORK DAILY GRAPHIC in October and November, 1874, he gave his full results and the steps which he had taken to check them. Reading these, it is difficult to suggest any precaution which he had omitted.

His first care was to examine the Eddy history. It was a good but not a spotless record. It cannot be too often insisted upon that the medium is a mere instrument and that the gift has no relation to character. This applies to physical phenomena, but not to mental, for no high teaching could ever come through a low channel. There was nothing wrong in the record of the brothers, but they had once admittedly given a fake mediumistic show, announcing it as such and exposing tricks. This was probably done to raise the wind and also to conciliate their bigoted neighbours, who were incensed against the real phenomena. Whatever the cause or motive, it naturally led Olcott to be very circumspect in his dealings, since it showed an intimate knowledge of tricks.

The ancestry was most interesting, for not only was there an unbroken record of psychic power extending over several generations, but their grand mother four times removed had been burned as a witch-or at least had been sentenced to that fate in the famous Salem trials of 1692. There are many living now who would be just as ready to take this short way with our mediums as ever Cotton Mather was, but police prosecutions are the modern equivalent. The father of the Eddys was unhappily one of those narrow persecuting fanatics. Olcott declares that the children were marked for life by the blows which he gave them in order to discourage what he chose to look upon as diabolical powers. The mother, who was herself strongly psychic, knew how unjustly this “religious” brute was acting, and the homestead must have become a hell upon earth. There was no refuge for the children outside, for the psychic phenomena used to follow them even into the schoolroom, and excite the revilings of the ignorant young barbarians around them. At home, when young Eddy fell into a trance, the father and a neighbour poured boiling water over him and placed a red-hot coal on his head, leaving an indelible scar. The lad fortunately slept on. Is it to be wondered at that after such a childhood the children should have grown into morose and secretive men?

As they grew older the wretched father tried to make some money out of the powers which he had so brutally discouraged, and hired the children out as mediums. No one has ever yet adequately described the sufferings which public mediums used to undergo at the hands of idiotic investigators and cruel sceptics. Olcott testifies that the hands and arms of the sisters as well as the brothers were grooved with the marks of ligatures and scarred with burning sealing wax, while two of the girls had pieces of flesh pinched out by handcuffs. They were ridden on rails, beaten, fired at, stoned and chased while their cabinet was repeatedly broken to pieces. The blood oozed from their finger-nails from the compression of arteries. These were the early days in America, but Great Britain has little to boast of when one recalls the Davenport brothers and the ignorant violence of the Liverpool mob.

The Eddys seem to have covered about the whole range of physical mediumship. Olcott gives the list thus-rappings, movement of objects, painting in oils and water-colours under influence, prophecy, speaking strange tongues, healing, discernment of spirits, levitation, writing of messages, psychometry, clairvoyance, and finally the production of materialised forms. Since St. Paul first enumerated the gifts of the spirit no more comprehensive list has ever been given.

The method of the seances was that the medium should sit in a cabinet at one end of the room, and that his audience should occupy rows of benches in front of him. The inquirer will probably ask why there should be a cabinet at all, and extended experience has shown that it can, as a matter of fact, be dispensed with save in this particular crowning phenomenon of materialisation. Home never used a cabinet, and it is seldom used by our chief British mediums of to-day. There is, however, a very definite reason for its presence. Without being too didactic upon a subject which is still under examination, it may at least be stated, as a working hypothesis with a great deal to recommend it, that the ectoplasmic vapour which solidifies into the plasmic substance from which the forms are constructed can be more easily condensed in a limited space. It has been found, however, that the presence of the medium within that space is not needful. At the greatest materialisation seance which the author has ever attended, where some twenty forms of various ages and sizes appeared in one evening, the medium sat outside the door of the cabinet from which the shapes emerged. Presumably, according to the hypothesis, his ectoplasmic vapour was conducted into the confined space, irrespective of the position of his physical body. This had not been recognised at the date of this investigation, so the cabinet was employed.

It is obvious, however, that the cabinet offered a means for fraud and impersonation, so it had to be carefully examined. It was on the second floor, with one small window. Olcott had the window netted with a mosquito curtain fastened on the outside. The rest of the cabinet was solid wood and unapproachable save by the room in which the spectators were sitting. There seems to have been no possible opening for fraud. Olcott had it examined by an expert, whose certificate is given in the book.

Under these circumstances Olcott related in his newspaper articles, and afterwards in his remarkable book, “People from the Other World,” that he saw in the course of ten weeks no fewer than four hundred apparitions appear out of this cabinet, of all sorts, sizes, sexes and races, clad in the most marvellous garments, babies in arms, Indian warriors, gentlemen in evening dress, a Kurd with a nine-foot lance, squaws who smoked tobacco, ladies in fine costumes. Such was Olcott’s evidence, and there was not a statement he made for which he was not prepared to produce the evidence of a roomful of people. His story was received with incredulity then, and will excite little less incredulity now. Olcott, full of his subject and knowing his own precautions, chafed, as all of us chafe, at the criticism of those who had not been present, and who chose to assume that those who were present were dupes and simpletons. He says: “If one tells them of babies being carried in from the cabinet by women, of young girls with lithe forms, yellow hair and short stature, of old women and men standing in full sight and speaking to us, of half-grown children seen, two at a time, simultaneously with another form, of costumes of different makes, of bald heads, grey hair, black shocky heads of hair, curly hair, of ghosts instantly recognised by friends, and ghosts speaking audibly in a foreign language of which the medium is ignorant-their equanimity is not disturbedÉ. The credulity of some scientific men, too, is boundless-they would rather believe that a baby could lift a mountain without levers, than that a spirit could lift an ounce.”

But apart from the extreme sceptic, whom nothing will convince and who would label the Angel Gabriel at the last day as an optical delusion, there are some very natural objections which an honest novice is bound to make, and an honest believer to answer. What about these costumes? Whence come they? Can we accept a nine-foot lance as being a spiritual object? The answer lies, so far as we understand it, in the amazing properties of ectoplasm. It is the most protean substance, capable of being moulded instantly into any shape, and the moulding power is spirit will, either in or out of the body. Anything may in an instant be fashioned from it if the predominating intelligence so decides. At all such seances there appears to be present one controlling spiritual being who marshals the figures and arranges the whole programme. Sometimes he speaks and openly directs. Sometimes he is silent and manifests only by his actions. As already stated, such controls are very often Red Indians who appear in their spiritual life to have some special affinity with physical phenomena.

William Eddy, the chief medium for these phenomena, does not appear to have suffered in health or strength from that which is usually a most exhausting process. Crookes has testified how Home would “lie in an almost fainting condition on the floor, pale and speechless.” Home, however, was not a rude open air farmer, but a sensitive artistic invalid. Eddy seems to have eaten little, but smoked incessantly. Music and singing were employed at the seances, for it has long been observed that there is a close connection between musical vibrations and psychic results. White light also has been found to prohibit results, and this is now explained from the devastating effects which light has been shown to exert upon ectoplasm. Many colours have been tried in order to prevent total darkness, but if you can trust your medium the latter is the most conducive to results, especially to those results of phosphorescent and flashing lights which are among the most beautiful of the phenomena. If a light is used, red is the colour which is best tolerated. In the Eddy seances there was a subdued illumination from a shaded lamp.

It would be wearisome to the reader to enter into details as to the various types which appeared in these remarkable gatherings. Madame Blavatsky, who was then an unknown woman in New York, had come up to see the sights. At that time she had not yet developed the theosophical line of thought, and was an ardent Spiritualist. Colonel Olcott and she met for the first time in the Vermont farm-house, and there began a friendship which was destined in the future to lead to strange developments. In her honour apparently a whole train of Russian images appeared, who carried on conversations in that language with the lady. The chief apparitions, however, were a giant Indian named Santum and an Indian squaw named Honto, who materialised so completely and so often that the audience may well have been excused if they forgot sometimes that they were dealing with spirits at all. So close was the contact that Olcott measured Honto on a painted scale beside the cabinet door. She was five feet three. On one occasion she exposed her woman's breast and asked a lady present to feel the beating of her heart. Honto was a light-hearted person, fond of dancing, of singing, of smoking, and of exhibiting her wealth of dark hair to the audience. Santum, on the other hand, was a taciturn warrior, six feet three in height. The height of the medium was five feet nine.

It is worth noting that the Indian always wore a powder-horn, which had been actually given him by a visitor to the circle. This was hung up in the cabinet and was donned by him when he materialised. Some of the Eddy spirits could speak and others could not, while the amount of fluency varied greatly. This was in accordance with the author's experience at similar seances. It seems that the returning soul has much to learn when it handles this simulacrum of itself, and that here, as elsewhere, practice goes for much. In speaking, these figures move their lips exactly as human beings would do. It has been shown also that their breath in lime water produces the characteristic reaction of carbon dioxide. Olcott says: "The spirits themselves say that they have to learn the art of self-materialisation, as one would any other art." At first they could only make tangible hands as in the cases of the Davenports, the Foxes, and others. Many mediums never get beyond this stage.

Among the numerous visitors to the Vermont homestead there were naturally some who took up a hostile attitude. None of these, however, seems to have gone into the matter with any thoroughness. The one who attracted most attention was a Dr. Beard, of New York, a medical man, who on the strength of a single sitting contended that the figures were all impersonations by William Eddy himself. No evidence, and only his own individual impression is put forward to sustain this view, and he declared that he could produce all the effects with "three dollars' worth of theatrical properties." Such an opinion might well be honestly formed upon a single performance, especially if it should have been a more or less unsuccessful one. But it becomes perfectly untenable when it is compared with the experiences of those who attended a number of sittings. Thus, Dr. Hodgson, of Stoneham, Mass., together with four other witnesses, signed a document: “We certifyÉthat Santum was out on the platform when another Indian of almost as great a stature came out, and the two passed and re-passed each other as they walked up and down. At the same time a conversation was being carried on between George Dix, Mayflower, old Mr. Morse, and Mrs. Eaton inside the cabinet. We recognised the familiar voice of each.” There are many such testimonies, apart from Olcott, and they put the theory of impersonation quite out of court. It should be added that many of the forms were little children and babies in arms. Olcott measured one child two feet four in height. It should, in fairness, be added that the one thing which clouds the reader occasionally is Olcott’s own hesitation and reservations. He was new to the subject, and every now and then a wave of fear and doubt would pass over his mind, and he would feel that he had committed himself too far and that he must hedge in case, in some inexplicable way, he should be shown to be in the wrong. Thus, he says: “The forms I saw at Chittenden, while apparently defying any other explanation than that they are of super-sensual origin, are still as a scientific fact to be regarded as `not proven.’” Elsewhere he talks about not having “test conditions.”

This expression “test conditions” has become a sort of shibboleth which loses all meaning. Thus, when you say that you have beyond all question or doubt seen your own dead mother’s face before you, the objector replies: “Ah, but was it under test conditions?” The test lies in the phenomenon itself. When one considers that Olcott was permitted for ten weeks to examine the little wooden enclosure which served as cabinet, to occlude the window, to search the medium, to measure and to weigh the ectoplasmic forms, one wonders what else he would demand in order to make assurance complete. The fact is, that while Olcott was writing his account there came the alleged exposure of Mrs. Holmes, and the partial recantation of Mr. Dale Owen, and that this caused him to take these precautions.

It was William Eddy whose mediumship took the form of materialisations. Horatio Eddy gave seances of quite a different character. In his case a sort of cloth screen was fixed up, in front of which he used to sit in good light with one of his audience beside him holding his hand. Behind the screen was placed a guitar and other instruments, which presently began to play, apparently of their own accord, while materialised hands showed themselves over the edge of the screen. The general effect of the performance was much the same as that of the Davenport brothers, but it was more impressive, inasmuch as the medium was in full view, and was under control by a spectator. The hypothesis of modern psychic science, founded upon many experiments, especially those of Dr. Crawford, of Belfast, is that invisible bands of ectoplasm, which are rather conductors of force than forcible in themselves, are evolved from the body of the medium and connect up with the object to be manipulated, where they are used to raise it, or to play it, as the unseen power may desire-that unseen power being, according to the present views of Professor Charles Richet, some extension of the personality of the medium, and according to the more advanced school some independent entity. Of this nothing was known at the time of the Eddys, and the phenomena presented the questionable appearance of a whole series of effects without any cause. As to the reality of the fact, it is impossible to read Olcott's very detailed description without being convinced that there could be no error in that. This movement of objects at a distance from the medium, or TELEKINESIS, to use the modern phrase, is now a rare phenomenon in light, but on one occasion at an amateur circle of experienced Spiritualists the author has seen a large platter-shaped circle of wood in the full light of a candle, rising up on edge and flapping code answers to questions when no one was within six feet of it.

In Horatio Eddy's dark seances, where the complete absence of light gave the psychic power full scope, Olcott has testified that there were mad Indian war dances with the thudding of a dozen feet, and the wild playing of every instrument simultaneously, accompanied by yells and whoops. "As an exbibition of pure brute force," he says, "this Indian dance is probably unsurpassed in the annals of such manifestations." A light turned on would find all the instruments littered about the floor, and Horatio in a deep slumber, without a trace of perspiration, lying unconscious in his chair. Olcott assures us that he and other gentlemen present, whose names he gives, were permitted to sit on the medium, but that within a minute or two all the instruments were playing once again. After such an experiment all further experiences-and there were very many-seem to be beside the point. Short of wholesale and senseless lying on the part of Olcott and the other spectators, there can be no doubt that Horatio Eddy was exercising powers of which science was, and still is, very imperfectly acquainted.

Some of Olcott's experiments were so definite, and are narrated so frankly and so clearly, that they deserve respectful consideration, and antedate the work of many of our modern researchers. For example, he brought from New York a balance which was duly tested as correct with a published certificate to that effect. He then persuaded one of the forms, the squaw Honto, to stand upon it, the actual weights being recorded by a third person, Mr. Pritchard, who was a reputable citizen and disinterested in the matter. Olcott gives his account of the results, and adds the certificate of Pritchard as sworn to before a magistrate. Honto was weighed four times, standing upon the platform so that she could not ease her weight in any way. She was a woman five feet three in height, and might be expected to register about 135 lb. The four results were actually 88, 58, 58, and 65 lb., all on the same evening. This seems to show that her body was a mere simulacrum which could vary in density from minute to minute. It showed also what was clearly brought out afterwards by Crawford, that the whole weight of the simulacrum cannot be derived from the medium. It is inconceivable that Eddy, who weighed 179 lb., was able to give up 88 of them. The whole circle, according to their capacity, which varies greatly, are called upon to contribute, and other elements may in all probability be drawn from the atmosphere. The highest actual loss of weight ever shown by Miss Goligher in the Crawford experiments was 52 lb., but each member of the circle was shown by the dials on the weighing chairs to have contributed some substance to the building of the ectoplasmic formations.

Colonel Olcott also prepared two spring balances and tested the pulling power of the spirit hands, while those of the medium were held by one of the audience. A left hand pulled with a force of forty lb., and the right hand with fifty in a light which was so good that Olcott could clearly see that the right hand was one finger short. He was already familiar with the assertion of the spirit in question that he had been a sailor and had lost a finger in his lifetime. When one reads of such things the complaint of Olcott that his results were not final, and that he had not perfect test conditions, becomes more and more hard to comprehend. He winds up his conclusions, however, with the words: “No matter how many sceptics carne battering against these granitic facts, no matter what array of ‘exposers’ might blow their tin horns and penny trumpets, that Jericho would stand.”

One observation which Olcott made was that these ectoplasmic forms were quick to obey any mental order from a strong-minded sitter, coming and going as they were willed to do. Other observers in various seances have noted the same fact, and it may be taken as one of the fixed points in this baffling problem.

There is one other curious point which probably escaped Olcott's notice. The mediums and the spirits who had been fairly amiable to him during his long visit turned suddenly very acid and repellent. This change seems to have occurred just after the arrival of Madame Blavatsky, with whom Olcott had struck up a close comradeship. Madame was, as stated, an ardent Spiritualist at the time, but it is at least possible that the spirits may have had foresight, and that they sensed danger from this Russian lady. Her theosophical teachings which were put forward in a year or two were to take the shape that, although the phenomena were real, the spirits were empty astral shells, and had no true life of their own. Whatever the true explanation, the change in the spirits was remarkable. "So far from the importance of my labour being recognised and all reasonable facilities afforded, I was kept constantly at a distance, as though I were an enemy instead of an unprejudiced observer."

Colonel Olcott narrates many cases where the sitters have recognised spirits, but too much stress should not be laid upon this, as with a dim light and an emotional condition it is easy for an honest observer to be mistaken. The author has had the opportunity of gazing into the faces of at least a hundred of these images, and he can only recall two cases in which he was absolutely certain in his recognition. In both these cases the faces were self-illuminated, and he had not to depend upon the red lamp. There were two other occasions when, with the red lamp, he was morally certain, but in the vast majority of cases it was possible, if one allowed one's imagination to work, to read anything into the vague moulds which rose before one. It is likely that this occurred in the Eddy circle-indeed, C. C. Massey, a very competent judge, sitting with the Eddys in 1875, complained of the fact. The real miracle consisted not in the recognition but in the presence of the figure at all.

There can be no doubt that the interest aroused by the Press accounts of the Eddy phenomena might have caused a more serious treatment of psychic science, and possibly advanced the cause of truth by a generation. Unhappily, at the very moment when the public attention was strongly drawn to the subject there came the real or imaginary scandal of the Holmeses at Philadelphia, which was vigorously exploited by the materialists, helped by the exaggerated honesty of Robert Dale Owen. The facts were as follows:

Two mediums in Philadelphia, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Holmes, had given a series of seances at which an alleged spirit had continually appeared, which took the name of Katie King, and professed to be the same as that with which Professor Crookes had experimented in London. On the face of it the assertion seemed most doubtful since the original Katie King had clearly stated that her mission was ended. However, apart from the identity of the spirit, there seemed to be good evidence that the phenomenon was genuine and not fraudulent, for it was most fully endorsed by Mr. Dale Owen, General Lippitt, and a number of other observers, who quoted personal experiences which were entirely beyond the reach of imposture.

There was in Philadelphia at the time a Dr. Child, who plays a very ambiguous part in the obscure events which followed. Child had vouched for the genuine character of these phenomena in the most pronounced way. He had gone so far as to state in a pamphlet published in 1874 that the same John and Katie King, whom he had seen in the seance room, had come to him in his own private offices and had there dictated particulars of their earth life which he duly published. Such a statement must raise grave doubts in the mind of any psychic student, for a spirit form can only manifest from a medium, and there is no indication that Child was one. In any case one would imagine that, after such an assertion, Child was the last man in the world who could declare that the seances were fraudulent.

Great public interest had been aroused in the seances by an article by General Lippitt in the Galaxy of December, 1874, and another by Dale Owen in the ATLANTIC MONTHLY of January, 1875. Then suddenly came the crash. It was heralded by a notice from Dale Owen, dated January 5, to the effect that evidence had been laid before him which compelled him to withdraw his previous expressions of confidence in the Holmeses. A similar card was issued by Dr. Child. Writing to Olcott, who after his Eddy investigation was recognised as an authority, Dale Owen said: “I believe they have been latterly playing us false, which may be only supplementing the genuine with the spurious, but it does cast a doubt on last summer’s manifestations, so that I shall probably not use them in my next book on Spiritualism. It is a loss, but you and Mr. Crookes have amply made it up.”

Dale Owen’s position is clear enough, since he was a man of sensitive honour, who was horrified at the idea that he could for one instant have certified an imposture to be a truth. His error seems to have lain in acting upon the first breath of suspicion instead of waiting until the facts were clear. Dr. Child’s position is, however, more questionable, for if the manifestations were indeed fraudulent, how could he possibly have had interviews with the same spirits alone in his own private room?

It was asserted now that a woman, whose name was not given, had been impersonating Katie King at these seances, that she had allowed her photograph to be taken and sold as Katie King, that she could produce the robes and ornaments worn by Katie King at the seances, and that she was prepared to make a full confession. Nothing could appear to be more damning and more complete. It was at this point that Olcott took up the investigation, and he seems to have been quite prepared to find that the general verdict was correct.

His investigation soon revealed some facts, however, which threw fresh lights upon the matter and proved that psychic research in order to be accurate should examine “exposures” with the same critical care that it does phenomena. The name of the person who confessed that she had personated Katie King was revealed as Eliza White. In an account of the matter which she published, without giving the name, she declared that she had been born in 1851, which would make her twenty-three years of age. She had married at fifteen and had one child eight years old. Her husband had died in 1872, and she had to keep herself and child. The Holmeses had come to lodge with her in March, 1874. In May they engaged her to personate a spirit. The cabinet had a false panel at the back through which she could slip, clad in a muslin robe. Mr. Dale Owen was invited to the seances and was completely taken in. All this caused violent twinges of her own conscience which did not prevent her from going to greater lengths and learning to fade away or re-form by the help of black cloths, and finally, of being photographed as Katie King.

One day, according to her account, there came to her performance a man named Leslie, a railroad contractor. This gentleman showed his suspicions, and at a subsequent interview taxed her with her deceit, offering her pecuniary aid if she would confess to it. This she accepted, and then showed Leslie the methods of her impersonation. On December 5, a mock seance was held at which she rehearsed her part as played in the real seances, and this so impressed Dale Owen and also Dr. Child, both of whom were present, that they issued the notices in which they recanted their former belief-a recantation which was a staggering blow to those who had accepted Dale Owen's previous assurances, and who now claimed that he should have made some thorough investigation before issuing such a document. It was the more painful as Dale Owen was seventy-three years of age, and had been one of the most eloquent and painstaking of all the disciples of the new dispensation.

Olcott's first task was to sift the record already given, and to get past the anonymity of the authoress. He soon discovered that she was, as already stated, Mrs. Eliza White, and that, though in Philadelphia, she refused to see him. The Holmeses, on the other hand, acted in a very open manner towards him and offered him every facility for examining their phenomena with such reasonable test conditions as he might desire. An examination of the past life of Eliza White showed that her statement, so far as it concerned her own story, was a tissue of lies. She was very much older than stated-not less than thirty-five-and it was doubtful whether she had ever been married to White at all. For years she had been a vocalist in a travelling show. White was still alive, so there was no question of widowhood. Olcott published the certificate of the Chief of the Police to that effect.

Among other documents put forward by Colonel Olcott was one from a Mr. Allen, Justice of the Peace of New Jersey, given under oath. Eliza White, according to this witness, was "so untruthful that those to whom she spoke never knew when to believe her, and her moral reputation was as bad as bad could be." Judge Allen was able, however, to give some testimony which bore more directly upon the matter under discussion. He deposed that he had visited the Holmeses in Philadelphia, and had assisted Dr. Child to put up the cabinet, that it was solidly constructed, and that there was no possibility of any entrance being effected from behind, as alleged by Mrs. White. Further, that he was at a seance at which Katie King appeared, and that the proceedings had been disturbed by the singing of Mrs. White in another room, so that it was quite impossible that Mrs. White could, as she claimed, have acted an impersonation of the spirit. This being a sworn deposition by a justice of the Peace would seem to be a weighty piece of evidence.

This cabinet seems to have been made in June, for General Lippitt, an excellent witness, described quite another arrangement on the occasion when he experimented. He says that two doors folded backwards, so as to touch each other, and the cabinet was simply the recess between these doors with a board over the top. “The first two or three evenings I made a careful examination, and once with a professional magician, who was perfectly satisfied that there was no chance of any trick.” This was in May, so the two descriptions are not contradictory, save to Eliza White’s claim that she could pass into the cabinet.

In addition to these reasons for caution in forming an opinion, the Holmeses were able to produce letters written to them from Mrs. White in August, 1874, which were quite incompatible with there being any guilty secret between them. On the other hand, one of these letters did relate that efforts had been made to bribe her into a confession that she had been Katie King. Later in the year Mrs. White seems to have assumed a more threatening tone, as is sworn by the Holmeses in a formal affidavit, when she declared that unless they paid a rent which she claimed, there were a number of gentlemen of wealth, including members of the Young Men’s Christian Association, who were ready to pay her a large sum of money, and she need not trouble the Holmeses any more. A thousand dollars was the exact sum which Eliza White was to get if she would consent to admit that she impersonated Katie King. It must surely be conceded that this statement, taken in conjunction with the woman’s record, makes it very essential to demand corroboration for every assertion she might make.

One culminating fact remains. At the very hour that the bogus seance was being held at which Mrs. White was showing how Katie King was impersonated, the Holmeses held a real seance, attended by twenty people, at which the spirit appeared the same as ever. Colonel Olcott collected several affidavits from those who were present on this occasion, and there can be no doubt about the fact. That of Dr. Adolphus Fellger is short, and may be given almost in full. He says under oath that “he has seen the spirit known as Katie King in all perhaps eighty times, is perfectly familiar with her features, and cannot mistake as to the identity of the Katie King who appeared upon the evening of December 5, for while the said spirit scarcely ever appeared of exactly the same height or features two evenings in succession, her voice was always the same, and the expression of her eyes, and the topics of her conversation enabled him to be still more certain of her being the same person.” This Fellger was a well-known and highly respected Philadelphia physician, whose simple word, says Olcott, would outweigh “a score of affidavits of your Eliza Whites.”

It was also clearly shown that Katie King appeared constantly when Mrs. Holmes was at Blissfield and Mrs. White was in Philadelphia, and that Mrs. Holmes had written to Mrs. White describing their successful appearances, which seems a final proof that the latter was not a confederate.

By this time one must admit that Mrs. White's anonymous confession is shot through and through with so many holes that it is in a sinking condition. But there is one part which, it seems to the author, will still float. That is the question of the photograph. It was asserted by the Holmeses in an interview with General Lippitt-whose word is a solid patch in this general quagmire-that Eliza White was hired by Dr. Child to pose in a photograph as Katie King. Child seems to have played a dubious part all through this business, making affirmations at different times which were quite contradictory, and having apparently some pecuniary interest in the matter. One is inclined, therefore, to look seriously into this charge, and to believe that the Holmeses may have been party to the fraud. Granting that the Katie King image was real, they may well have doubted whether it could be photographed, since dim light was necessary for its production. On the other hand, there was clearly a source of revenue if photographs at half a dollar each could be sold to the numerous sitters. Colonel Olcott in his book produces a photograph of Mrs. White alongside of the one which was supposed to be Katie King, and claims that there is no resemblance. It is clear, however, that the photographer would be asked to touch up the negative so as to conceal the resemblance, otherwise the fraud would be obvious. The author has the impression, though not the certainty, that the two faces are the same with just such changes as manipulation would produce. Therefore he thinks that the photograph may well be a fraud, but that this by no means corroborates the rest of Mrs. White's narrative, though it would shake our faith in the character of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes as well as of Dr. Child. But the character of physical mediums has really only an indirect bearing upon the question of the reality of their psychic powers, which should be tested upon their own merits whether the individual be saint or sinner.

Colonel Olcott's wise conclusion was that, as the evidence was so conflicting, he would put it all to one side and test the mediums in his own way with out reference to what was past. This he did in a very convincing way, and it is impossible for anyone who reads his investigation (" People From the Other World," p. 460 and onwards) to deny that he took every possible precaution against fraud. The cabinet was netted at the sides so that no one could enter as Mrs. White claimed to have done. Mrs. Holmes was herself put into a bag which tied round the neck and, as her husband was away, she was confined to her own resources. Under these circumstances numerous heads were formed, some of which were semi-materialised, presenting a somewhat terrible appearance. This may have been done as a test, or it may have been that the long contention had impaired the powers of the medium. The faces were made to appear at a level which the medium could in no case have reached. Dale Owen was present at this demonstration and must have already begun to regret his premature declaration.

Further seances with similar results were then held in Olcott's own rooms, so as to preclude the possibility of some ingenious mechanism under the control of the medium. On one occasion, when the head of John King, the presiding spirit, appeared in the air, Olcott, remembering Eliza White's assertion that these faces were merely ten cent masks, asked and obtained permission to pass his stick all round it, and so satisfied himself that it was not supported. This experiment seems so final that the reader who desires even more evidence may be referred to the book where he will find much. It was perfectly clear that whatever part Eliza White may have played in the photograph, there was not a shadow of a doubt that Mrs. Holmes was a genuine and powerful medium for material phenomena. It should be added that the Katie King head was repeatedly seen by the investigators, though the whole form appears only once to have been materialised. General Lippitt was present at these experiments and associated himself publicly (Banner of LIGHT, February 6, 1875) with Olcott's conclusions.

The author has dwelt at some length upon this case, as it is very typical of the way in which the public has been misled over Spiritualism. The papers are full of an "exposure." It is investigated and is shown to be either quite false or very partially true. This is not reported, and the public is left with the original impression uncorrected. Even now, when one mentions Katie King, one hears some critic say: "Oh, she was shown to be a fraud in Philadelphia," and by a natural confusion of thought this has even been brought as an argument against Crookes's classical experiments. The affair-especially the temporary weakening of Dale Owen-set the cause of Spiritualism back by many years in America.

Mention has been made of John King, the presiding spirit at the Holmes seances. This strange entity would appear to have been the chief controller of all physical phenomena in the early days of the movement, and is still occasionally to be seen and heard. His name is associated with the Koons's music saloon, with the Davenport brothers, with Williams in London, with Mrs. Holmes, and many others. In person when materialised he presents the appearance of a tall, swarthy man with a noble head and a full black beard. His voice is loud and deep, while his rap has a decisive character of its own. He is master of all languages, having been tested in the most out-of-the-way tongues, such as Georgian, and never having been found wanting. This formidable person controls the bands of lesser primitive spirits, Red Indians and others, who assist at such phenomena. He claims that Katie King is his daughter, and that he was himself when in life Henry Morgan, the buccaneer who was pardoned and knighted by Charles II and ended as Governor of Jamaica. If so, he has been a most cruel ruffian and has much to expiate. The author is bound to state, however, that he has in his possession a contemporary picture of Henry Morgan (it will be found in Howard Pyle's "Buccaneers," p. 178), and that if reliable it has no resemblance to John King. All these questions of earthly identity are very obscure.*

* As the author has given a point against the identity of John King with Morgan, it is only fair that he should give one which supports it and comes to him almost first-hand from a reliable source. The daughter of a recent Governor of Jamaica was at a seance in London lately, and was confronted with John King. The King spirit said to her, "You have brought back from Jamaica something which was mine." She said, "What was it?" He answered, "My will." It was a fact, quite unknown to the company, that her father had brought back this document.

Before closing the account of Olcott's experiences at this stage of his evolution, some notice should be taken of the so-called Compton transfiguration case, which shows what deep waters we are in when we attempt psychic research. These particular waters have not been plumbed yet, nor in any way charted. Nothing can be clearer than the facts, or more satisfactory than the evidence. The medium Mrs. Compton was shut up in her small cabinet, and thread passed through the bored holes in her ears and fastened to the back of her chair. Presently a slim white figure emerged from the cabinet. Olcott had a weighing platform provided, and on it the spirit figure stood. Twice it was weighed, the records being 77 lb. and 59 lb. Olcott then, as prearranged, went into the cabinet leaving the figure outside. The medium was gone. The chair was there, but there was no sign of the woman. Olcott then turned back and again weighed the apparition, who this time scaled 52 lb. The spirit then returned into the cabinet from which other figures emerged. Finally, Olcott says:

I went inside with a lamp and found the medium just as I left her at the beginning of the seance, with every thread unbroken and every seal undisturbed! She sat there, with her head leaning against the wall, her flesh as pale and as cold as marble, her eyeballs turned up beneath the lids, her forehead covered with a death-like damp, no breath coming from her lungs and no pulse at her wrist. When every person had examined the threads and seals, I cut the flimsy bonds with a pair of scissors, and, lifting the chair by its back and seat, carried the cataleptic woman out into the open air of the chamber.

She lay thus inanimate for eighteen minutes; life gradually coming back to her body, until respiration and pulse and the temperature of her skin became normalÉ. I then put her upon the scaleÉ. She weighed one hundred and twenty-one pounds!

What are we to make of such a result as that? There were eleven witnesses besides Olcott himself. The facts seem to be beyond dispute. But what are we to deduce from such facts? The author has seen a photograph, taken in the presence of an amateur medium, where every detail of the room has come out but the sitter has vanished. Is the disappearance of the medium in some way analogous to that? If the ectoplasmic figure weighed only 77 lb. and the medium 121 lb., then it is clear that only 44 lb. of her were left when the phantom was out. If 44 lb. were not enough to continue the processes of life, may not her guardians have used their subtle occult chemistry in order to dematerialise her and so save her from all danger until the return of the phantom would enable her to reassemble? It is a strange supposition, but it seems to meet the facts-which cannot be done by mere blank, unreasoning incredulity.

CHAPTER XIII

HENRY SLADE AND DR. MONCK

It is impossible to record the many mediums of various shades of power, and occasionally of honesty, who have demonstrated the effects which outside intelligences can produce when the material conditions are such as to enable them to manifest upon this plane. There are a few, however, who have been so pre-eminent and so involved in public polemics that no history of the movement can disregard them, even if their careers have not been in all ways above suspicion. We shall deal in this chapter with the histories of Slade and Monck, both of whom played a prominent part in their days.

Henry Slade, the celebrated slate-writing medium, had been before the public in America for fifteen years before he arrived in London on July 13, 1876. Colonel H. S. Olcott, a former president of the Theosophical Society, states that he and Madame Blavatsky were responsible for Slade's visit to England. It appears that the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia, desiring to make a scientific investigation of Spiritualism, a committee of professors of the Imperial University of St. Petersburg requested Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky to select out of the best American mediums one whom they could recommend for tests.

They chose Slade, after submitting him to exacting tests for several weeks before a committee of sceptics, who in their report certified that "messages were written inside double slates, sometimes tied and sealed together, while they either lay upon the table in full view of all, or were laid upon the heads of members of the committee, or held flat against the under surface of the table-top, or held in a committeeman's hand without the medium touching it." It was en route to Russia that Slade came to England.

A representative of the London World, who had a sitting with Slade soon after his arrival, thus describes him: "A highly-wrought, nervous temperament, a dreamy, mystical face, regular features, eyes luminous with expression, a rather sad smile, and a certain melancholy grace of manner, were the impressions conveyed by the tall, lithe figure introduced to me as Dr. Slade. He is the sort of man you would pick out of a roomful as an enthusiast." The Seybert Commission Report says, "he is probably six feet in height, with a figure of unusual symmetry," and that "his face would attract notice anywhere for its uncommon beauty," and sums him up as "a noteworthy man in every respect."

Directly after his arrival in London Slade began to give sittings at his lodgings in 8 Upper Bedford Place, Russell Square, and his success was immediate and pronounced. Not only was writing obtained of an evidential nature, under test conditions, with the sitter's own slates, but the levitation of objects and materialised hands were observed in strong sunlight.

The editor of THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, the soberest and most high-class of the Spiritualist periodicals of the time, wrote: "We have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Slade is the most remarkable medium of modern times."

Mr. J. Enmore Jones, a well-known psychic researcher of that day, who afterwards edited THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, said that Slade was taking the place vacated by D. D. Home. His account of his first sitting indicates the business-like method of procedure: "In Mr. Home's case, he refused to take fees, and as a rule the sittings were in the evening in the quiet of domestic life; but in Dr. Slade's case it was any time during the day, in one of the rooms he occupies at a boarding-house. The fee of twenty shillings is charged, and he prefers that only one person be present in the large room he uses. No time is lost; as soon as the visitor sits down the incidents commence, are continued, and in, say, fifteen minutes are ended." Stainton Moses, who was afterwards the first president of the London Spiritualist Alliance, conveys the same idea with regard to Slade. He wrote: "In his presence phenomena occur with a regularity and precision, with an absence of regard for 'conditions,' and with a facility for observation which satisfy my desires entirely. It is impossible to conceive circumstances more favourable to minute investigation than those under which I witnessed the phenomena which occur in his presence with such startling rapidityÉ. There was no hesitation, no tentative experiments. All was short, sharp, and decisive. The invisible operators knew exactly what they were going to do, and did it with promptitude and precision."*

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Vol. IX, p. 2.

Slade's first seance in England was given on July 15, 1876, to Mr. Charles Blackburn, a prominent Spiritualist, and Mr. W. H. Harrison, editor of THE SPIRITUALIST. In strong sunlight the medium and the two sitters occupied three sides of an ordinary table about four feet square. A vacant chair was placed at the fourth side. Slade put a tiny piece of pencil, about the size of a grain of wheat, upon a slate, and held the slate by one corner with one hand under the table flat against the leaf. Writing was heard on the slate, and on examination a short message was found to have been written. While this was taking place the four hands of the sitters and Slade's disengaged hands were clasped in the centre of the table. Mr. Blackburn's chair was moved four or five inches while he was sitting upon it, and no one but himself was touching it. The unoccupied chair at the fourth side of the table once jumped in the air, striking its seat against the under edge of the table. Twice a life-like hand passed in front of Mr. Blackburn while both Slade's hands were under observation. The medium held an accordion under the table, and while his other hand was in clear view on the table "Hone, Sweet Home" was played. Mr. Blackburn then held the accordion in the same way, when the instrument was drawn out strongly and one note sounded. While this occurred Slade's hands were on the table. Finally, the three present raised their hands a foot above the table, and it rose until it touched their hands. At another sitting on the same day a chair rose about four feet, when no one was touching it, and when Slade rested one hand on the top of Miss Blackburn's chair, she and the chair were raised about half a yard from the floor.

Mr. Stainton Moses thus describes an early sitting which he had with Slade:

A midday sun, hot enough to roast one, was pouring into the room; the table was uncovered; the medium sat with the whole of his body in full view; there was no human being present save myself and him. What conditions could be better? The raps were instantaneous and loud, as if made by the clenched fist of a powerful man. The slate-writing occurred under any suggested condition.

It came on a slate held by Dr. Slade and myself; on one held by myself alone in the corner of the table farthest from the medium; on a slate which I had myself brought with me, and which I held myself. The latter writing occupied some time in production, and the grating noise of the pencil in forming each word was distinctly audible. A chair opposite to me was raised some eighteen inches from the floor; my slate was taken out of my hand, and produced at the opposite side of the table, where neither Dr. Slade nor I could reach it; the accordion played all round and about me, while the doctor held it by the lower part, and finally, on a touch from his hand upon the back of my chair, I was levitated, chair and all, some inches.

Mr. Stainton Moses was himself a powerful medium, and this fact doubtless aided the conditions. He adds:

I have seen all these phenomena and many others several times before, but I never saw them occur rapidly and consecutively in broad daylight. The whole seance did not extend over more than half an hour, and no cessation of the phenomena occurred from first to last.*

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Vol. IX, p. 2.

All went well for six weeks, and London was full of curiosity as to the powers of Slade, when there came an awkward interruption.

Early in September, 1876, Professor Ray Lankester with Dr. Donkin had two sittings with Slade, and on the second occasion, seizing the slate, he found writing on it when none was supposed to have taken place. He was entirely without experience in psychic research, or he would have known that it is impossible to say at what moment writing occurs in such seances. Occasionally a whole sheet of writing seems to be precipitated in an instant, while at other times the author has clearly heard the pencil scratching along from line to line. To Ray Lankester, however, it seemed a clear case of fraud, and he wrote a letter to THE TIMES* denouncing Slade, and also prosecuted him for obtaining money under false pretences. Replies to Lankester’s letter and supporting Slade were forthcoming from Dr, Alfred Russel Wallace, Professor Barrett, and others. Dr. Wallace pointed out that Professor Lankester’s account of what happened was so completely unlike what occurred during his own visit to the medium, as well as the recorded experience of Serjeant Cox, Dr. Carter Blake, and many others, that he could only look upon it as a striking example of Dr. Carpenter’s theory of preconceived ideas, He says: “Professor Lankester went with the firm conviction that all he was going to see would be imposture, and he believes he saw imposture accordingly.” Professor Lankester showed his bias when, referring to the paper read before the British Association on September 12 by Professor Barrett, in which he dealt with Spiritualistic phenomena, he said, in his letter to THE TIMES: “The discussions of the British Association have been degraded by the introduction of Spiritualism.”

* September 16, 1876.

Professor Barrett wrote that Slade had a ready reply, based on his ignorance of when the writing did actually occur. He describes a very evidential sitting he had in which the slate rested on the table with his elbow resting on it. One of Slade's hands was held by him, and the fingers of the medium's other hand rested lightly on the surface of the slate. In this way writing occurred on the under surface of the slate. Professor Barrett further speaks of an eminent scientific friend who obtained writing on a clean slate when it was held entirely by him, both of the medium's hands being on the table. Such instances must surely seem absolutely conclusive to the unbiased reader, and it will be clear that if the positive is firmly established, occasional allegations of negative have no bearing upon the general conclusion.

Slade's trial came on at Bow Street Police Court on October t, 1876, before Mr. Flowers, the magistrate. Mr. George Lewis prosecuted and Mr. Munton appeared for the defence. Evidence in favour of the genuineness of Slade's mediumship was given by Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, Serjeant Cox, Dr. George Wyld, and one other, only four witnesses being allowed. The magistrate described the testimony as "overwhelming" as to the evidence for the phenomena, but in giving judgment he excluded everything but the evidence of Lankester and his friend Dr. Donkin, saying that he must base his decision on "inferences to be drawn from the known course of nature." A statement made by Mr. Maskelyne, the well-known conjurer, that the table used by Slade was a trick-table was disproved by the evidence of the workman who made it. This table can now be seen at the offices of the London Spiritualist Alliance, and one marvels at the audacity of a witness who could imperil another man's liberty by so false a statement, which must have powerfully affected the course of the trial. Indeed, in the face of the evidence of Ray Lankester, Donkin, and Maskelyne, it is hard to see how Mr. Flowers could fail to convict, for he would say with truth and reason, "What is before the Court is not what has happened upon other occasions-however convincing these eminent witnesses may be-but what occurred upon this particular occasion, and here we have two witnesses on one side and only the prisoner on the other." The "trick-table" probably settled the matter.

Slade was sentenced, under the Vagrancy Act, to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. An appeal was lodged and he was released on bail. When the appeal came to be heard, the conviction was quashed on a technical point. It may be pointed out that though he escaped on a technical point, namely, that the words "by palmistry or otherwise" which appeared in the statute had been omitted, it must not be assumed that had the technical point failed he might not have escaped on the merits of his case. Slade, whose health had been seriously affected by the strain of the trial, left England for the Continent a day or two later. From the Hague, after a rest of a few months, Slade wrote to Professor Lankester offering to return to London and to give him exhaustive private tests on condition that he could come without molestation. He received no answer to his suggestion, which surely is not that of a guilty man.

An illuminated testimonial to Slade from London Spiritualists in 1877 sets out:

In view of the deplorable termination of Henry Slade's visit to this country, we the undersigned desire to place on record our high opinion of his mediumship, and our reprobation of the treatment he has undergone.

We regard Henry Slade as one of the most valuable Test Mediums now living. The phenomena which occur in his presence are evolved with a rapidity and regularity rarely equalled.

He leaves us not only untarnished in reputation by the late proceedings in our Law Courts, but with a mass of testimony in his favour which could probably have been elicited in no other way.

This is signed by Mr. Alexander Calder (President of the British National Association of Spiritualists) and a number of representative Spiritualists. Unhappily, however, it is the Noes, not the Ayes, which have the ear of the Press, and even now, fifty years later, it would be hard to find a paper enlightened enough to do the man justice.

Spiritualists, however, showed great energy in supporting Slade. Before the trial a Defence Fund was raised, and Spiritualists in America drew up a memorial to the American Minister in London. Between the Bow Street conviction and the hearing of the appeal, a memorial was sent to the Home Secretary protesting against the action of the Government in conducting the prosecution on appeal. Copies of this were sent to all the members of the Legislature, to all the Middlesex magistrates, to various members of the Royal Society, and of other public bodies. Miss Kislingbury, the secretary to the National Association of Spiritualists, forwarded a copy to the Queen.

After giving successful seances at the Hague, Slade went to Berlin in November, 1877, where he created the keenest interest. He was said to know no German, yet messages in German appeared on the slates, and were written in the characters of the fifteenth century. The BERLINER

FREMDENBLATT of November 10, 1877, wrote: “Since the arrival of Mr. Slade at the Kronprinz Hotel the greater portion of the educated world of Berlin has been suffering from an epidemic which we may term a Spiritualistic fever.” Describing his experiences in Berlin, Slade said that he began by fully converting the landlord of the hotel, using the latter’s slates and tables in his own house. The landlord invited the Chief of Police and many prominent citizens of Berlin to witness the manifestations, and they expressed themselves as satisfied. Slade writes: “Samuel Bellachini, Court Conjurer to the Emperor of Germany, had a week’s experience with me free of charge. I gave him from two to three seances a day and one of them at his own house. After his full and complete investigation, he went to a public notary and made oath that the phenomena were genuine and not trickery.”

Bellachini’s declaration on oath, which has been published, bears out this statement. He says that after the minutest investigation he considers any explanation by conjuring to be “absolutely impossible.” The conduct of conjurers seems to have been usually determined by a sort of trade union jealousy, as if the results of the medium were some sort of breach of a monopoly, but this enlightened German, together with Houdin, Kellar, and a few more, have shown a more open mind.

A visit to Denmark followed, and in December began the historic seances with Professor Zollner, at Leipzig. A full account of these will be found in Zollner’s “Transcendental Physics,” which has been translated by Mr. C. C. Massey. Zollner was Professor of Physics and Astronomy in the University of Leipzig, and associated with him in the experiments with Slade were other scientific men, including William Edward Weber, Professor of Physics; Professor Scheibner, a distinguished mathematician; Gustave Theodore Fechner, Professor of Physics and an eminent natural philosopher, who were all, says Professor Zollner, “perfectly convinced of the reality of the observed facts, altogether excluding imposture or “prestidigitation.” The phenomena in question included, among other things, “the production of true knots in an endless string, the rending of Professor Zollner’s bed-screen, the disappearance of a small table and its subsequent descent from the ceiling in FULL LIGHT, in a private house and under the observed conditions, of which the most noticeable is the apparent passivity of Dr. Slade during all these occurrences.”

Certain critics have tried to indicate what they consider insufficient precautions observed in these experiments. Dr. J. Maxwell, the acute French critic, makes an excellent reply to such objections. He points out* that because skilled and conscientious psychic investigators have omitted to indicate explicitly in their reports that every hypothesis of fraud has been studied and dismissed, in the belief that "their implicit affirmation of the reality of the fact appeared sufficient to them," and in order to prevent their reports from being too unwieldy, yet captious critics do not hesitate to condemn them and to suggest possibilities of fraud which are quite inadmissible under the observed conditions.

* "Metapsychical Phenomena" (Translation 1905), p. 405.

Zollner gave a dignified reply to the supposition that he was tricked in these cord-tying experiments: "If, nevertheless, the foundation of this fact, deduced by me on the ground of an enlarged conception of space, should be denied, only one other kind of explanation would remain, arising from a moral code of consideration that at present, it is true, is quite customary. This explanation would consist in the presumption that I myself and the honourable men and citizens of Leipzig, in whose presence several of these cords were sealed, were either common impostors, or were not in possession of our sound senses sufficient to perceive if Mr. Slade himself, before the cords were sealed, had tied them in knots. The discussion, however, of such a hypothesis would no longer belong to the dominion of science, but would fall under the category of social decency."*

* Massey's Zollner, pp. 20-21.

As a sample of the reckless statements of opponents of Spiritualism, it may be mentioned that Mr. Joseph McCabe, who is second only to the American Houdini for wild inaccuracies, speaks of Zollner as "an elderly and purblind professor," whereas he died in 1882, in his forty-eighth year, and his experiments with Slade were carried out in 1877-78, when this distinguished scientist was in the vigour of his intellectual life.

So far have opponents pushed their enmity that it has even been stated that Zollner was deranged, and that his death which occurred some years later was accompanied with cerebral weakness. An inquiry from Dr. Funk set this matter at rest, though it is unfortunately easy to get libels of this sort into circulation and very difficult to get the contradictions. Here is the document:

"Spiritualism. A Popular History from 1847," p. 161.

"The Widow's Mite," p. 276.

Your letter addressed to the Rector of the University, October 20, 1903, received. The Rector of this University was installed here after the death of Zollner, and had no personal acquaintance with him; but information received from Zollner's colleagues states that during his entire studies at the University here, until his death, he was of sound mind; moreover, in the best of health. The cause of his death was a hemorrhage of the brain on the morning of April 25th, 1882, while he was at breakfast with his mother, and from which he died shortly after. It is true that Professor Zollner was an ardent believer in Spiritualism, and as such was in close relations with Slade.

(Dr.) KARL BUCHER, Professor of Statistics and National Economy at the University.

The tremendous power which occasionally manifests itself when the conditions are favourable was shown once in the presence of Zollner, Weber, and Scheibner, all three professors of the University. There was a strong wooden screen on one side of the room:

A violent crack was suddenly heard as in the discharging of a large battery of Leyden jars. On turning with some alarm in the direction of the sound, the before-mentioned screen fell apart in two pieces. The strong wooden screws, half an inch thick, were torn from above and below, without any visible contact of Slade with the screen. The parts broken were at least five feet removed from Slade, who had his back to the screen; but even if he had intended to tear it down by a cleverly devised sideward motion, it would have been necessary to fasten it on the opposite side. As it was, the screen stood quite unattached, and the grain of the wood being parallel to the axis of the cylindrical wooden fastenings, the wrenching asunder could only be accomplished by a force acting longitudinally to the part in question. We were all astonished at this unexpected and violent manifestation of mechanical force, and asked Slade what it all meant; but he only shrugged his shoulders, saying that such phenomena occasionally, though somewhat rarely, occurred in his presence. As he spoke, he placed, while still standing, a piece of slate-pencil on the polished surface of the table, laid over it a slate, purchased and just cleaned by myself, and pressed the five spread fingers of his right hand on the upper surface of the slate, while his left hand rested on the centre of the table. Writing began on the inner surface of the slate, and when Slade turned it up, the following sentence was written in English: "It was not our intention to do harm.

Forgive what has happened." We were the more surprised at the production of the writing under these circumstances, for we particularly observed that both Slade's hands remained quite motionless while the writing was going on.*

* "Transcendental Physics," p. 34, 35.

In his desperate attempt to explain this incident, Mr. McCabe says that no doubt the screen was broken before and fastened together afterwards with thread. There is truly no limit to the credulity of the incredulous.

After a very successful series of seances in St. Petersburg, Slade returned to London for a few days in 1878, and then proceeded to Australia. An interesting account of his work there is to be found in Mr. James Curtis's book, "Rustlings in the Golden City." Then he returned to America. In 1885 he appeared before the Seybert Commission in Philadelphia, and in 1887 again visited England under the name of "Dr. Wilson," though it was well known who he was. Presumably his alias was due to a fear that the old proceedings would be renewed.

At most of his seances, Slade exhibited clairvoyant powers, and materialised hands were a familiar occurrence. In Australia, where psychic conditions are good, he had materialisations. Mr. Curtis says that the medium objected to sitting for this form of manifestation, because it left him weak for a time, and because he preferred to give seances in the light. He consented, however, to try with Mr. Curtis, who thus describes what took place at Ballarat, in Victoria:

Our first test of spirit appearance in the form took place at Lester's Hotel. I placed the table about four or five feet from the west wall of the room. Mr. Slade sat at the end of the table furthest from the wall, whilst I took my position on the north side. The gaslight was toned down, not so much but that any object in the room could be clearly seen. Our hands were placed over one another in a single pile. We sat very still about ten minutes, when I observed something like a little misty cloud between myself and the wall. When my attention was first drawn towards this phenomenon, it was about the size and colour of a gentleman's high-crowned, whitish-grey felt hat. This cloudlike appearance rapidly grew and became transformed, when we saw before us a woman-a lady. The being thus fashioned, and all but perfected, rose from the floor on to the top of the table, where I could most distinctly observe the configuration. The arms and hands were elegantly shaped; the forehead, mouth, nose, cheeks, and beautiful brown hair showed harmoniously, each part in concord with the whole. Only the eyes were veiled because they could not be completely materialised. The feet were encased in white satin shoes. The dress glowed in light, and was the most beautiful I ever beheld, the colour being bright, sheeny silvery grey, or greyish shining white. The whole figure was graceful, and the drapery perfect. The materialised spirit glided and walked about, causing the table to shake, vibrate, jerk and tilt considerably. I could hear, too, the rustling of the dress as the celestial visitant transiently wended from one position or place to another. The spirit form, within two feet of our unmoved hands, still piled up together in a heap, then dissolved, and gradually faded from our vision.

The conditions at this beautiful seance-with the medium’s hands held throughout, and with enough light for visibility-seem satisfactory, provided we grant the honesty of the witness. As the preface contains the supporting testimony of a responsible Australian Government official, who also speaks of Mr. Curtis’s initial extremely sceptical state of mind, we may well do so. At the same seance a quarter of an hour later the figure again appeared:

The apparition then floated in the air and alighted on the table, rapidly glided about, and thrice bent her beautiful figure with graceful bows, each bending deliberate and low, the head coming within six inches of my face. The dress rustled (as silk rustles) with every movement. The face was partially veiled as before. The visibility then became invisible, slowly disappearing like the former materialisation.

Other similar seances are described.

In view of the many elaborate and stringent tests through which he passed successfully, the story of Slade’s “exposure” in America in 1886 is not convincing, but we refer to it for historical reasons, and to show that such incidents are not excluded from our review of the subject. The BOSTON HERALD, February 2, 1886, heads its account, “The celebrated Dr. Slade comes to grief in Weston, West Virginia, writes upon slates which lie upon his knees under the table, and moves tables and chairs with his toes.” Observers in an adjoining room, looking through the crevice under the door saw these feats of agility being performed by the medium, though those present in the room with him were unaware of them. There seems, however, to have been in this as in other cases, occurrences which bore the appearance of fraud, and Spiritualists were among those who denounced him. At a subsequent public performance for “Direct Spirit Writing” in the

Justice Hall, Weston, Mr. E. S. Barrett, described as a “Spiritualist,” came forward and explained how Slade’s imposture had been detected. Slade, who was asked to speak, appeared dumbfounded, and could only say, according to the report, that if his accusers had been deceived he had been equally so, for if the deceit had been done by him, it had been without his consciousness.

Mr. J. Simmons, Slade’s business manager, made a frank statement which seems to point to the operation of ectoplasmic limbs, as years later was proved to be the case with the famous Italian medium, Eusapia Palladino. He says: “I do not doubt that these gentlemen saw what they assert they did; but I am convinced at the same time that Slade is as innocent of what he is accused of as you (the editor) yourself would have been under similar circumstances. But I know that my explanation would have no weight in a court of justice. I myself saw a hand, which I could have sworn to be that of Slade, if it had been possible for his hand to be in that position. While one of his hands lay upon the table and the other held the slate under the corner of the table, a third hand appeared with a clothes-brush (which a moment previously had brushed against me from the knee upwards) in the middle of the opposite edge of the table, which was forty-two inches long.” Slade and his manager were arrested and released on bail, but no further proceedings seem to have been taken against them. Truesdell, also, in his book, “Spiritualism, Bottom Facts,” states that he saw Slade effecting the movement of objects with his foot, and he asks his readers to believe that the medium made to him a full confession of how all his manifestations were produced. If Slade ever really did this, it may probably be accounted for by a burst of ill-timed levity on his part in seeking to fool a certain type of investigator by giving him exactly what he was seeking for. To such instances we may apply the judgment of Professor Zollner on the Lankester incident: “The physical facts observed by us in so astonishing a variety in his presence negatived on every reasonable ground the supposition that he in one solitary case had taken refuge in wilful imposture.” He adds, what was certainly the case in that particular instance, that Slade was the victim of his accuser’s and his judge’s limited knowledge.

At the same time there is ample evidence that Slade degenerated in general character towards the latter part of his life. Promiscuous sittings with a mercenary object, the subsequent exhaustions, and the alcoholic stimulus which affords a temporary relief, all acting upon a most sensitive organization, had a deleterious effect. This weakening of character, with a corresponding loss of health, may have led to a diminution of his psychic powers, and increased the temptation to resort to trickery. Making every allowance for the difficulty of distinguishing what is fraud and what is of crude psychic origin, an unpleasant impression is left upon the mind by the evidence given in the Seybert Commission and by the fact that Spiritualists upon the spot should have condemned his action. Human frailty, however, is one thing and psychic power is another. Those who seek evidence for the latter will find ample in those years when the man and his powers were both at their zenith.

Slade died in 1905 at a Michigan sanatorium to which he had been sent by the American Spiritualists, and the announcement was followed by the customary sort of comment in the London Press. THE STAR, which has an evil tradition in psychic matters, printed a sensational article headed “Spook Swindles,” giving a garbled account of the Lankester prosecution at Bow Street. Referring to this, LIGHT says*:

* 1886, p. 433.

Of course, this whole thing is a hash of ignorance, unfairness and prejudice. We do not care to discuss it or to controvert it. It would be useless to do so for the sake of the unfair, the ignorant, and the prejudiced, and it is not necessary for those who know. Suffice it to say that the STAR only supplies one more instance of the difficulty of getting all the facts before the public; but the prejudiced newspapers have themselves to blame for their ignorance or inaccuracy.

It is the story of the Davenport Brothers and Maskelyne over again.

If Slade’s career is difficult to appraise, and if one is forced to admit that while there was an overpowering preponderance of psychic results, there was also a residuum which left the unpleasant impression that the medium might supplement truth with fraud, the same admission must be made in the case of the medium Monck, who played a considerable part for some years in the ‘seventies. Of all mediums none is more difficult to appraise, for on the one hand many of his results are beyond all dispute, while in a few there seems to be an absolute certainty of dishonesty. In his case, as in Slade’s, there were physical causes which would account for a degeneration of the moral and psychic powers.

Monck was a Nonconformist clergyman, a favourite pupil of the famous Spurgeon. According to his own account, he had been subject from childhood to psychic influences, which increased with his growth. In 1873 he announced his adhesion to Spiritualism and gave an address in the Cavendish Rooms. Shortly afterwards he began to give demonstrations, which appear to have been unpaid and were given in light. In 1875 he made a tour through England and Scotland, his performances exciting much attention and debate, and in 1876 he visited Ireland, where his powers were directed towards healing. Hence he was usually known as "Dr." Monck, a fact which naturally aroused some protest from the medical profession.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, a most competent and honest observer, has given an account of a materialisation seance with Monck which appears to be as critic-proof as such a thing could be. No subsequent suspicion or conviction can ever eliminate such an incontrovertible instance of psychic power. It is to be noted how far the effects were in agreement with the subsequent demonstrations of ectoplasmic outflow in the case of Eva and other modern mediums. Dr. Wallace's companions upon this occasion were Mr. Stainton Moses and Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood. Dr. Wallace writes:

It was a bright summer afternoon, and everything happened in the full light of day. After a little conversation, Monck, who was dressed in the usual clerical black, appeared to go into a trance; then stood up a few feet in front of us, and after a little while pointed to his side, saying, "Look."

We saw there a faint white patch on his coat on the left side. This grew brighter, then seemed to flicker and extend both upwards and downwards, till very gradually it formed a cloudy pillar extending from his shoulder to his feet and close to his body.

Dr. Wallace goes on to describe how the cloudy figure finally assumed the form of a thickly draped woman, who, after a brief space, appeared to be absorbed into the body of the medium.

He adds: "The whole process of the formation of a shrouded figure was seen in full daylight."

Mr. Wedgwood assured him that he had lead even more remarkable manifestations of this kind with Monck, when the medium was in a deep trance, and in full view.

It is quite impossible after such evidence to doubt the powers of the medium at that time. Archdeacon Colley, who had seen similar exhibitions, offered a prize of a thousand pounds to Mr. J. N. Maskelyne, the famous conjurer, if he could duplicate the performance. This challenge was accepted by Mr. Maskelyne, but the evidence showed that the imitation bore no relation to the original. He attempted to gain a decision in the courts, but the verdict was against him.

It is interesting to compare the account given by Russel Wallace and the experience later of a well-known American, Judge Dailey. This gentleman wrote*:

* BANNER OF LIGHT, Dec. 15, 1881.

Glancing at Dr. Monck’s side we observed what looked like an opalescent mass of compact steam emerging from just below his heart on the left side. It increased in volume, rising up and extending downward, the upper portions taking the form of a child’s head, the face being distinguished as that of a little child I had lost some twenty years previously. It only remained in this form for a moment, and then suddenly disappeared, seeming to be instantly absorbed into the Doctor’s side. This remarkable phenomenon was repeated four or five times, in each instance the materialisation being more distinct than the preceding one. This was witnessed by all in the room, with gas burning sufficiently bright for every object in the room to be plainly visible.

It was a phenomenon seldom to be seen, and has enabled all who saw it to vouch for, not only the remarkable power possessed by Dr. Monck as a materialising medium, but as to the wonderful manner in which a spirit draws out.

Surely it is vain after such testimony to deny that Monck had, indeed, great psychic powers.

Apart from materialisations Dr. Monck was a remarkable slate-writing medium. Dr. Russel Wallace in a letter to the SPECTATOR * says that with Monck at a private house in Richmond he cleaned two slates, and after placing a fragment of pencil between them, tied them together tightly with a strong cord, lengthways and crosswise, in a manner that prevented any movement.

* October 7, 1877.

I then laid them flat on the table without losing sight of them for an instant. Dr. Monck placed the fingers of both hands on them, while I and a lady sitting opposite placed our hands on the corners of the slates. From this position our hands were never moved till I untied the slates to ascertain the result.

Monck asked Wallace to name a word to be written on the slate. He chose the word “God” and in answer to a request decided that it should be length ways on the slate. The sound of writing was heard, and when the medium’s hands were withdrawn, Dr. Wallace opened the slates and found on the lower one the word he had asked for and written in the manner requested.

Dr. Wallace says:

The essential features of this experiment are that I myself cleaned and tied up the slates; that I kept my hands on them all the time; that they never went out of my sight for a moment; and that I named the word to be written, and the manner of writing it after they were thus secured and held by me.

Mr. Edward T. Bennett, assistant secretary to the Society for Psychical Research, adds to this account: “I was present on this occasion, and certify that Mr. Wallace’s account of what happened is correct.”

Another good test is described by Mr. W. P. Adshead, of Belper, a well-known investigator, who says of a seance held in Derby on September 18, 1876:

There were eight persons present, three ladies and five gentlemen. A lady whom Dr. Monck had never before seen had a slate passed to her by a sitter, which she examined and found clean. The slate pencil which was on the table a few minutes before we sat down could not be found. An investigator suggested that it would be a good test if a lead pencil were used.

Accordingly a lead pencil was put on the slate, and the lady held both under the table. The sound of writing was instantly heard, and in a few seconds a communication had been written filling one side of the slate. The writing was done in lead, and was very small and neat, and alluded to a strictly private matter.

Here were three tests at once. (1) Writing was obtained without the medium (or any other person but the lady), touching the slate from first to last. (2) It was written with lead pencil at the spontaneous suggestion of another stranger. (3) It gave an important test communication regarding a matter that was strictly private. Dr. Monck did not so much as touch the slate from first to last.

Mr. Adshead also speaks of physical phenomena occurring freely with this medium when his hands were closely confined in an apparatus called the “stocks,” which did not permit movement of even an inch in any direction.

In the year 1876 the Slade trial was going on in London, as already described, and exposures were in the air. In considering the following rather puzzling and certainly suspicious case, one has to remember that when a man who is a public performer, a conjurer or a mesmerist, can pose as having exposed a medium, he wins a valuable public advertisement and attracts to himself all that very numerous section of the community who desire to see such an exposure. It is only fair to bear this in mind in endeavouring to hold the scales fair where there is a conflict of evidence.

In this case the conjurer and mesmerist was one Lodge, and the occasion was a seance held at Huddersfield on November 3, 1876. Mr. Lodge suddenly demanded that the medium be searched. Monck, whether dreading assault or to save himself exposure, ran upstairs and locked himself in his room. He then let himself down from his window and made for the police office, where he lodged a complaint as to his treatment. The door of his bedroom had been forced and his effects searched, with the result that a pair of stuffed gloves was found. Monck asserted that these gloves had been made for a lecture in which he had exposed the difference between conjuring and mediumship. Still, as a Spiritualist paper remarked at the tune:

The phenomena of his mediumship do not rest on his probity at all. If he were the greatest rogue and the most accomplished conjurer rolled into one, it would not account for the manifestations which have been reported of him.

Monck was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and is alleged to have made a confession to Mr. Lodge.

After his release from prison Monck held a number of test sittings with Stainton Moses, at which remarkable phenomena occurred.

LIGHT comments:

Those whose names we have mentioned as testifying to the genuineness of Dr. Monck's mediumship are well-known to the older Spiritualists as keen and scrupulously cautious experimenters, and Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood's name carried much weight, as he was known as a man of science and was brother-in-law of Charles Darwin.

There is an element of doubt about the Huddersfield case, as the accuser was by no means an impartial person, but Sir William Barrett's testimony makes it clear that Monck did sometimes descend to deliberate and cold-blooded trickery. Sir William writes:

I caught the "Dr." in a gross bit of fraud, a piece of white muslin on a wire frame with a black thread attached, being used by the medium to simulate a partially materialised spirit.*

* S.P.R. PROCEEDINGS, Vol. IV., p. 38 (footnote).

Such an exposure, coming from so sure a source, arouses a feeling of disgust which urges one to throw the whole evidence concerning the man into the wastepaper basket. One must, however, be patient and reasonable in such matters. Monck's earlier seances, as has been clearly shown, were in good light, and any such clumsy mechanism was out of the question. We must not argue that because a man once forges, therefore he has never signed an honest cheque in his life. But we must clearly admit that Monck was capable of fraud, that he would take the easier way when things were difficult, and that each of his manifestations should be carefully checked.

CHAPTER XIV

COLLECTIVE INVESTIGATIONS OF SPIRITUALISM

Several committees have at different times sat upon the subject of Spiritualism. Of these the two most important are that of the Dialectical Society in 1869-70, and the Seybert Commission in 1884, the first British and the second American. To these may be added that of the French society, Institut General Psychologique in 1905-8. In spite of the intervals between these various investigations, it will be convenient to treat them in a single chapter as certain remarks in common apply to each of them.

There are obvious difficulties in the way of collective investigations-difficulties which are so grave that they are almost insurmountable. When a Crookes or a Lombroso explores the subject he either sits alone with the medium, or he has with him others whose knowledge of psychic conditions and laws may be helpful in the matter. This is not usually so with these committees. They fail to understand that they are themselves part of the experiment, and that it is possible for them to create such intolerable vibrations, and to surround themselves with so negative an atmosphere, that these outside forces, which are governed by very definite laws, are unable to penetrate it. It is not in vain that the three words “with one accord” are interpolated into the account of the apostolic sitting in the upper room. If a small piece of metal may upset a whole magnetic installation, so a strong adverse psychic current may ruin a psychic circle. It is for this reason, and not on account of any superior credulity, that practising Spiritualists continually get such results as are never attained by mere researchers. This also may be the reason why the one committee upon which Spiritualists were fairly well represented was the one which gained the most positive results. This was the committee which was chosen by the Dialectical Society of London, a committee which began its explorations early in 1869 and presented its report in 1871. If common sense and the ordinary laws of evidence had been followed in the reception of this report, the progress of psychic truth would have been accelerated by fifty years.

Thirty-four gentlemen of standing were appointed upon this committee, the terms of reference being “to investigate the phenomena alleged to be spiritual manifestations.” The majority of the members were certainly in the mood to unmask an imposture, but they encountered a body of evidence which could not be disregarded, and they ended by asserting that “the subject is worthy of more serious attention and careful investigation than it has hitherto received.” This conclusion so amazed the society which they represented that they could not get it to publish the findings, so the committee in a spirited way published them at their own cost, thus giving permanent record to a most interesting investigation.

The members of the committee were drawn from many varied professions and included a doctor of divinity, two physicians, two surgeons, two civil engineers, two fellows of scientific societies, two barristers, and others of repute. Charles Bradlaugh the Rationalist was a member. Professor Huxley and G. H. Lewes, the consort of George Eliot, were invited to co-operate, but both refused, Huxley stating in his reply that “supposing the phenomena to be genuine, they do not interest me”-a dictum which showed that this great and clear-headed man had his limitations.

The six sub-committees sat forty tunes under test conditions, often without the aid of a professional medium, and with a full sense of responsibility they agreed that the following points appeared to have been established

“1. That sounds of a very varied character, apparently proceeding from articles of furniture, the floor and walls of the room-the vibrations accompanying which sounds are often distinctly perceptible to the touch-occur, without being produced by muscular action or mechanical contrivance.

“2. That movements of heavy bodies take place without mechanical contrivance of any kind or adequate exertion of muscular force by the persons present, and frequently without contact or connection with any person.

“3. That these sounds and movements often occur at the times and in the manner asked for by persons present, and, by means of a simple code of signals, answer questions and spell out coherent communications.

“4. That the answers and communications thus obtained are, for the most part, of a commonplace character; but facts are sometimes correctly given which are only known to one of the persons present.

“5. That the circumstances under which the phenomena occur are variable, the most prominent fact being that the presence of certain persons seems necessary to their occurrence, and that of others generally adverse; but this difference does not appear to depend upon any belief or disbelief concerning the phenomena.

“6. That, nevertheless, the occurrence of the phenomena is not ensured by the presence or absence of such persons respectively.”

The report briefly summarizes as follows the oral and written evidence received, which not only testifies to phenomena of the same nature as those witnessed by the sub-committees, but to others of a more varied and extraordinary character:

“1. Thirteen witnesses state that they have seen heavy bodies-in some instances men-rise slowly in the air and remain there for some time without visible or tangible support.

“2. Fourteen witnesses testify to having seen hands or figures, not appertaining to any human being, but lifelike in appearance and mobility, which they have sometimes touched or even grasped, and which they are therefore convinced were not the result of imposture or illusion.

“3. Five witnesses state that they have been touched by some invisible agency on various parts of the body, and often where requested, when the hands of all present were visible.

“4. Thirteen witnesses declare that they have heard musical pieces well played upon instruments not manipulated by any ascertainable agency.

“5. Five witnesses state that they have seen red-hot coals applied to the hands or heads of several persons without producing pain or scorching, and three witnesses state that they have had the same experiment made upon themselves with the like immunity.

“6. Eight witnesses state that they have received precise information through rappings, writings, and in other ways, the accuracy of which was unknown at the time to themselves or to any persons present, and which on subsequent inquiry was found to be correct.

“7. One witness declares that he has received a precise and detailed statement which, nevertheless, proved to be entirely erroneous.

“8. Three witnesses state that they have been present when drawings, both in pencil and colours, were produced in so short a time, and under such conditions as to render human agency impossible.

“9. Six witnesses declare that they have received information of future events, and that in some cases the hour and minute of their occurrence have been accurately foretold, days and even weeks before.”

In addition to the above, evidence was given of trance-speaking, of healing, of automatic writing, of the introduction of flowers and fruits into closed rooms, of voices in the air, of visions in crystals and glasses, and of the elongation of the human body.

The report closes with the following observations:

In presenting their report, your Committee, taking into consideration the high character and great intelligence of many of the witnesses to the more extraordinary facts, the extent to which their testimony is supported by the reports of the sub-committees, and the absence of any proof of imposture or delusion as regards a large portion of the phenomena; and further, having regard to the exceptional character of the phenomena, the large number of persons in every grade of society and over the whole civilised world who are more or less influenced by a belief in their supernatural origin, and to the fact that no philosophical explanation of them has yet been arrived at, deem it incumbent upon them to state their conviction that the subject is worthy of more serious attention and careful investigation than it has hitherto received.

Among those who gave evidence or read papers before the committee were: Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, Mrs. Emma Hardinge, Mr. H. D. Jencken, Mr. Benjamin Coleman, Mr. Cromwell F. Varley, Mr. D. D. Home, and the Master of Lindsay. Correspondence was received from Lord Lytton, Mr. Robert Chambers, Dr. Garth Wilkinson, Mr. William Howitt, M. Camille Flammarion, and others.

The committee was successful in procuring the evidence of believers in the phenomena, but almost wholly failed, as stated in its report, to obtain evidence from those who attributed them to fraud or delusion.

In the records of the evidence of over fifty witnesses, there is voluminous testimony to the existence of the facts from men and women of good standing. One witness* considered that the most remarkable phenomenon brought to light by the labours of the committee was the extraordinary number of eminent men who were shown to be firm believers in the Spiritual hypothesis. And another declared that whatever agencies might be employed in these manifestations, they were not to be explained by referring them to imposture on the one side or hallucination on the other.

* Grattan Geary. E. L. Blanchard.

An interesting sidelight on the growth of the movement is obtained from Mrs. Emma Hardinge's statement that at that time (1869) she knew only two professional mediums in London, though she was acquainted with several non-professional ones. As she herself was a medium she was probably correct in what she said. Mr. Cromwell Varley averred that there were probably not more than a hundred known mediums in the whole kingdom, and he added that very few of those were well developed. We have here conclusive testimony to the great work accomplished in England by D. D. Home, for the bulk of the converts were due to his mediumship. Another medium who played an important part was Mrs. Marshall. Many witnesses spoke of evidential sittings they had attended at her house. Mr. William Howitt, the well-known author, was of opinion that Spiritualism had then received the assent of about twenty millions of people in all countries after personal examination.

What may be called the evidence for the opposition was not at all formidable. Lord Lytton said that in his experience the phenomena were traceable to material influences of whose nature we were ignorant, Dr. Carpenter brought out his pet hobby of "unconscious cerebration." Dr. Kidd thought that the majority were evidently subjective phenomena, and three witnesses, while convinced of the genuineness of the occurrences, ascribed them to Satanic agency. These objections were well answered by Mr. Thomas Shorter, author of "Confessions of a Truth Seeker," and secretary of the Working Men's College, in an admirable review of the report in the SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE.*

* 1872, pp. 3-15.

It is worthy of note that on the publication of this important and well-considered report it was ridiculed by a large part of the London Press. An honourable exception was the SPECTATOR.

THE TIMES reviewer considered it "nothing more than a farrago of impotent conclusions, garnished by a mass of the most monstrous rubbish it has ever been our misfortune to sit in judgment upon."

The MORNING POST said: "The report which has been published is entirely worthless."

The SATURDAY REVIEW hoped that report would involuntarily lead "to discrediting a little further one of the most unequivocally degrading superstitions that have ever found currency among reasonable beings."

The STANDARD made a sound criticism that deserves to be remembered. Objecting to the remark of those who do not believe in Spiritualism, yet say that there may be "something in it," the newspaper sagely observes: "If there is anything whatever in it beyond imposture and imbecility, there is the whole of another world in it."

The DAILY NEWS regarded the report as "an important contribution to the literature of a subject which, some day or other, by the very number of its followers, will demand more extended investigation."

The SPECTATOR, after describing the book as an extremely curious one, added: "Few, however, could read the mass of evidence collected in this volume, showing the firm faith in the reality of the alleged spiritual phenomena possessed by a number of individuals of honourable and upright character, without also agreeing with Mr. Jeffrey's opinion, that the remarkable phenomena witnessed, some of which had not been traced to imposture or delusion, and the gathered testimony of respectable witnesses, 'justify the recommendation of the subject to further cautious investigation.'"

These are but brief extracts from longer notices in a few of the London newspapers-there were many others-and, bad as they are, they none the less indicate a change of attitude on the part of the Press, which had been in the habit of ignoring the subject altogether.

It must be remembered that the report concerned itself only with the phenomenal aspect of Spiritualism, and this, in the opinion of leading Spiritualists, is decidedly the less important side. Only in the report of one sub-committee is it recorded that the general gist of the messages was that physical death was a trivial matter in retrospect, but that for the spirit it was a rebirth into new experiences of existence, that spirit life was in every respect human; that friendly intercourse was as common and pleasurable as in life; that although spirits took great interest in worldly affairs, they had no wish to return to their former state of existence; that communication with earth friends was pleasurable and desired by spirits, being intended as a proof to the former of the continuance of life in spite of bodily dissolution, and that spirits claimed no certain prophetic power. These were the main heads of the information received.

It will be generally recognised in the future that in their day and generation, the Dialectical Society's Committee did excellent work. The great majority of the members were opposed to the psychic claims, but in the face of evidence, with a few exceptions, such as Dr. Edmunds, they yielded to the testimony of their own senses. There were a few examples of intolerance such as Huxley's unhappy dictum, and Charles Bradlaugh's declaration that he would not even examine certain things because they were in the region of the impossible, but on the whole the team work of the sub-committees was excellent.

There appears in the report of the Dialectical Society's Committee a long article by Dr. Edmunds, an opponent to Spiritualism, and to the findings of his colleagues. It is worth reading as typical of a certain class of mind. The worthy doctor, while imagining himself to be impartial, is really so absolutely prejudiced that the conceivable possibility of the phenomena being supernormal never is allowed to enter into his mind. When he sees one with his own eyes his only question is, "How was the trick done?" If he cannot answer the question he does not consider this to be in favour of some other explanation, but simply records that he cannot discover the trick. Thus his evidence, which is perfectly honest as to fact, records that a number of fresh flowers and fruits, still wet, fell upon the table-a phenomenon of apports which was shown many times by Mrs. Guppy. The doctor's only comment is that they must have been taken from the sideboard, although one would have imagined that a large basket of fruit upon the sideboard would have attracted attention, and he does not venture to say that he saw such an object. Again he was shut up with the Davenports in their cabinet and admits that he could make nothing of it, but, of course, it must be a conjuring trick. Then when he finds that mediums who perceive that his mental attitude is hopeless refuse to sit with him again, he sets that down also as an evidence of their guilt. There is a certain type of scientific mind which is quite astute within its own subject and, outside it, is the most foolish and illogical thing upon earth.

It was the misfortune of the Seybert Commission, which we will now discuss, that it was entirely composed of such people, with the exception of one Spiritualist, a Mr. Hazard, who was co-opted by them and who had little chance of influencing their general atmosphere of obstruction. The circumstances in which the Commission was appointed were these. A certain Henry Seybert, a citizen of Philadelphia, had left the sum of sixty thousand dollars for the purpose of founding a Chair of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania with the condition that the said University should appoint a commission to "make a thorough and impartial investigation of all systems of morals, religion, or philosophy which assume to represent the truth, and particularly of modern Spiritualism.” The personnel of the body chosen is immaterial save that all were connected with the University, with Dr. Pepper, the Provost of the University as nominal chairman, Dr. Furness as acting chairman, and Professor Fullerton as secretary. In spite of the fact that the duty of the Commission was to “make a thorough and impartial investigation” of modern Spiritualism, the preliminary report coolly states The Commission is composed of men whose days are already filled with duties which cannot be laid aside, and who are able, therefore, to devote but a small portion of their time to these investigations.

The fact that the members were satisfied to start with this handicap shows how little they understood the nature of the work before them. Their failure, in the circumstances, was inevitable. The proceedings began in March, 1884, and a “preliminary” report, so called, was issued in 1887. This report was, as it proved, the final one, for though it was reissued in 1920 there was no addition save a colourless preface of three paragraphs by a descendant of the former chairman. The gist of this report is that fraud on the one side and credulity on the other make up the whole of Spiritualism, and that there was really nothing serious on which the committee could report. The whole long document is well worth reading by any student of psychic matters. The impression left upon the mind is that the various members of the Commission were in their own limited way honestly endeavouring to get at the facts, but that their minds, like that of Dr. Edmunds, were so formed that when, in spite of their repellent and impossible attitude, some psychic happening did manage to break through their barriers, they would not for an instant consider the possibility that it was genuine, but simply passed it by as if it did not exist. Thus with Mrs. Fox-Kane they did get well-marked raps, and are content with the thousand-times disproved supposition that they came from inside her own body, and they pass without comment the fact that they received from her long messages, written swiftly in script, which could only be read when held to the looking-glass, as it was from right to left. This swiftly-written script contained an abstruse Latin sentence which would appear to be much above the capacity of the medium. All of this was unexplained and ignored.

Again, in reporting upon Mrs. Lord the Commission got the Direct Voice, and also phosphorescent lights after the medium had been searched. We are informed that the medium kept up an "almost continuous clapping of hands," and yet people at a distance from her seem to have been touched. The spirit in which the inquiry is approached may be judged from the remark of the acting chairman to W. M. Keeler, who was said to be a spirit photographer, that he "would not be satisfied with less than a cherub on my head, one on each shoulder, and a full-blown angel on my breast." A Spiritualist would be surprised indeed if an inquirer in so frivolous a mood should be favoured with results. All through runs the fallacy that the medium is producing something as a conjurer does. Never for a moment do they seem to realise that the favour and assent of invisible operators may be essential-operators who may stoop to the humble-minded and shrink away from, or even make game of, the self-sufficient scoffer.

While there were some results which may have been genuine, but which are brushed aside by the report, there were some episodes which must be painful to the Spiritualist, but which none the less must be faced. The Commission exposed obvious fraud in the case of the slate medium, Mrs. Patterson, and it is impossible to deny that the case against Slade is a substantial one. The latter days of this medium were admittedly under a cloud, and the powers which had once been so conspicuous may have been replaced by trickery. Dr. Furness goes the length of asserting that such trickery was actually admitted, but the anecdote as given in the report rather suggests chaff upon the part of the medium. That Dr. Slade should jovially beckon the doctor in from his open window, and should at once in reply to a facetious remark admit that his own whole life had been a swindle, is more than one can easily believe.

There are some aspects in which the Commission-or some members of it-seem to have been disingenuous. Thus, they state at the beginning that they will rest their report upon their own labours and disregard the mass of material already available. In spite of this, they introduce a long and adverse report from their secretary upon the Zollner evidence in favour of Slade. This report is quite incorrect in itself, as is shown in the account of Zollner given in the chapter treating of Slade's experiences in Leipzig. It carefully suppresses the fact that the chief conjurer in Germany, after a considerable investigation, gave a certificate that Slade's phenomena were not trickery. On the other hand, when the testimony of a conjurer is against a spiritual explanation, as in the comments of Kellar, it is given in full, with no knowledge, apparently, that in the case of another medium, Eglinton, this same Kellar had declared the results to be beyond his art.

At the opening of the report the Commission says: “We deemed ourselves fortunate at the outset in having as a counsellor the late Mr. Thomas R. Hazard, a personal friend of Mr. Seybert, and widely known throughout the land as an uncompromising Spiritualist.” Mr. Hazard evidently knew the importance of ensuring the right conditions and the right type of sitters for such an experimental investigation. Describing an interview he had with Mr. Seybert a few days before the latter’s death, when he agreed to act as his representative, Mr. Hazard says he did so only “with the full and distinct understanding that I should be permitted to prescribe the methods to be pursued in the investigation, designate the mediums to be consulted, and reject the attendance of any person or persons whose presence I deemed might conflict with the harmony and good order of the spirit circles.” But this representative of Mr. Seybert seems to have been quietly ignored by the University. After the Commission had been sitting for some time, Mr. Hazard was dissatisfied with some of its members and their methods. We find him writing as follows in the Philadelphia NORTH AMERICAN,[May 18, 1885.] presumably after vainly approaching the University authorities:

Without aiming to detract in the slightest degree from the unblemished moral character that attaches to each and every individual of the Faculty, including the Commission, in public esteem, nor to the high social and literary standing they occupy in society, I must say that through some strange infatuation, obliquity of judgment, or perversity of intellect, the Trustees of the University have placed on the Commission for the investigation of modern Spiritualism, a majority of its members whose education, habit of thought, and prejudices so singularly disqualify them from making a thorough and impartial investigation of the subject which the Trustees of the University are obligated both by contract and in honour to do, that had the object in view been to belittle and bring into discredit, hatred and general contempt the cause that I know the late Henry Seybert held nearest his heart and loved more than all else in the world beside, the Trustees could scarcely have selected more suitable instruments for the object intended from all the denizens of Philadelphia than are the gentlemen who constitute a majority of the Seybert Commission. And this I repeat, not from any causes that affect their moral, social or literary standing in society, but simply because of their prejudices against the cause of Spiritualism.

He further advised the Trustees to remove from the Commission Messrs. Fullerton, Thompson, and Koenig.

Mr. Hazard quoted Professor Fullerton as saying in a lecture before the Harvard University Club on March 3, 1885:

It is possible that the way mediums tell a person's history is by the process of thought-transference, for every person who is thus told of these things goes to a medium thinking of the same points about which the medium talks.

When a man has a cold he hears a buzzing noise in his ears, and an insane person constantly hears sounds which never occur. Perhaps, then, disease of mind or ear, or some strong emotion, may be the cause of a large number of spiritual phenomena.

These words were spoken after the professor had served on the Commission for more than twelve months.

Mr. Hazard also quotes Dr. George A. Koenig's views, published in the PHILADELPHIA PRESS, about a year after his appointment on the Commission:

I must frankly admit that I am prepared to deny the truth of Spiritualism as it is now popularly understood. It is my belief that all of the so-called mediums are humbugs without exception. I have never seen Slade perform any of his tricks, but, from the published descriptions, I have set him down as an impostor, the cleverest one of the lot. I do not think the Commission view with much favour the examination of so-called spirit mediums. The wisest men are apt to be deceived. One man in an hour can invent more tricks than a wise man can solve in a year.

Mr. Hazard learned from what he considered to be a reliable source, that Professor Robert E. Thompson was responsible for this view which appeared in Penn's Monthly of February, 1880.

Even if Spiritualism be all that its champions claim for it, it has no importance for anyone who holds a Christian faith. The consideration and discussion of the subject is tampering with notions and condescending to discussions with which no Christian believer has any business.

We have in these expressions of opinion a means of judging how unsuited these members of the Commission were for making what Mr. Seybert asked for-"a thorough and impartial" investigation of the subject.

An American Spiritualist periodical, the BANNER OF LIGHT, commenting on Mr. Hazard's communication, wrote:

So far as we have information, no notice was taken of Mr. Hazard’s appeal-certainly no action was had, for the members above quoted remain on the Commission to this day, and their names are appended to this preliminary report. Professor Fullerton, in fact, was and now is the secretary; one hundred and twenty of the one hundred and fifty pages of the volume before us are written by him, and exhibit that excessive lack of spiritual perception and knowledge of occult, and we might also say natural laws, which led him to inform an audience of Harvard students that “when a man has a cold he hears a buzzing noise in his ears”; that “an insane person constantly hears sounds which never occur,” and suggest to them that spiritual phenomena may proceed from such causes.

The BANNER OF LIGHT continues:

We consider that the Seybert Commission’s failure to follow the counsel of Mr. Hazard, as it was plainly their duty to do, is the key to the entire failure of all their sub sequent efforts. The paucity of phenomenal results, in any degree approaching what might be looked for, even by a sceptic, which this book records, is certainly remarkable. It is a report of what was not done, rather than that of what was. In the memoranda of proceedings at each session, as given by Professor Fullerton, there is plainly seen a studied effort to give prominence to everything that a superficial mind might deem proof of trickery on the part of the medium, and to conceal all that might be evidence of the truth of his claimsÉ. It is mentioned that when certain members of the Commission were present all phenomena ceased. This substantiates the correctness of Mr. Hazard’s position; and there is no one who has had an experience with mediums, sufficient to render his opinion of any value, who will not endorse it. The spirits knew what elements they had to deal with; they endeavoured to eliminate those that rendered their experiments nugatory; they failed to do this through the ignorance, wilfulness or prejudice of the Commission, and the experiments failed; so the Commission, very “wise in its own conceit,” decided that all was fraud.

LIGHT,* in its notice of the report, says what needs saying as much now as in 1887:

*1887, p. 391.

We notice with some pleasure, though without any marked expectation of what may result from the pursuance of bad methods of investigation, that the Commission pro poses to continue its quest “with minds as sincerely and honestly open as heretofore to conviction.” Since this is so, we presume to offer a few words of advice founded upon large experience. The investigation of these obscure phenomena is beset with difficulty, and any instructions that can be given are derived from a knowledge which is to a great extent empirical. But we know that prolonged and patient experiment with a properly constituted circle is a SINE QUA NON [absolutely essential]. We know that all does not depend on the medium, but that a circle must be formed and varied from time to time experimentally, until the proper constituent elements are secured. What these elements may be we cannot tell the Seybert Commission. They must discover that for themselves. Let them make a study in the literature of Spiritualism of the varied characteristics of mediumship before they proceed to personal experiment. And when they have done this, and perhaps when they have realised how easy it is so to conduct an examination of this nature as to arrive at negative results, they will be in a better position to devote intelligent and patient care to a study which can be profitably conducted in no other way.

There is no doubt that the report of the Seybert Commission set back for the time the cause of psychic truth. Yet the real harm fell upon the learned institution which these gentlemen represented. In these days when ectoplasm, the physical basis of psychic phenomena, has been established beyond a shadow of doubt to all who examine the evidence, it is too late to pretend that there is nothing to be examined. There is now hardly a capital which has not its Psychic Research Society-a final comment upon the inference of the Commission that there was no field for research. If the Seybert Commission had had the effect of Pennsylvania University heading this movement, and living up to the great tradition of Professor Hare, how proud would her final position have been! As Newton associated Cambridge with the law of gravitation, so Pennsylvania might have been linked to a far more important advance of human knowledge. It was left to several European centres of learning to share the honour among them.

The remaining collective investigation is of less importance, since it deals only with a particular medium. This was conducted by the Institut General Psychologique in Paris. It consisted of three series of sittings with the famous Eusapia Palladino in the years 1905, 1906, and 1907, the total number of seances being forty-three. No complete list of the sitters is available, nor was there any proper collective report, the only record being a very imperfect and inconclusive one from the secretary, M. Courtier. The investigators included some very distinguished persons, including Charles Richet, Monsieur and Madame Curie, Messrs. Bergson, Perrin, Professor d'Arsonal of the College de France, who was president of the society, Count de Gramont, Professor Charpentier, and Principal Debierne of the Sorbonne. The actual result could not have been disastrous to the medium, since Professor Richet has recorded his endorsement of the reality of her psychic powers, but the strange superficial tricks of Eusapia are recorded in the subsequent account of her career, and we can well imagine the disconcerting effect which they would have upon those to whom such things were new.

There is included in the report a sort of conversation among the sitters in which they talk the matter over, most of them being in a very nebulous and non-committal frame of mind. It cannot be claimed that any new light was shed upon the medium, or any new argument provided either for the sceptic or for the believer. Dr. Geley, however, who has probably gone as deeply as anyone else into psychic science, claims that "les experiences"-he does not say the report-constitute a valuable contribution to the subject.* He bases this upon the fact that the results chronicled do often strikingly confirm those obtained in his own Institut Metapsychique working with Kluski, Guzik, and other mediums. The differences, he says, are in details and never in essentials. The control of the hands was the same in either case, both the hands being always held. This was easier in the case of the later mediums, especially with Kluski in trance, while Eusapia was usually a very restless individual. There seems to be a halfway condition which was characteristic of Eusapia, and which has been observed by the author in the case of Frau Silbert, Evan Powell, and other mediums, where the person seems normal, and yet is peculiarly susceptible to suggestion or other mental impressions. A suspicion of fraud may very easily be aroused in this condition, for the general desire on the part of the audience that something should occur reacts with great force upon the unreasoning mind of the medium. An amateur who had some psychic power has assured the author that it needs considerable inhibition to keep such impulses in check and to await the real power from outside. In this report we read: "The two hands, feet, and knees of Eusapia being controlled, the table is raised suddenly, all four feet leaving the ground. Eusapia closes her fists and holds them towards the table, which is then completely raised from the floor five times in succession, five raps being also given. It is again completely raised whilst each of Eusapia’s hands is on the head of a sitter. It is raised to a height of one foot from the floor and suspended in the air for seven seconds, while Eusapia kept her hand on the table, and a lighted candle was placed under the table,” and so on, with even more conclusive tests with table and other phenomena.

* “L’Ectoplasmie et la Clairvoyance,” 1924, p. 402.

The timidity of the report was satirized by the great French Spiritualist, Gabriel Delanne. He says:

The reporter keeps saying “it seems” and “it appears,” like a man who is not sure of what he is relating. Those who held forty-three seances, with good eyes and apparatus for verification, ought to have a settled opinion-or, at least, to be able to say, if they regard a certain phenomenon as fraudulent, that at a given seance they had seen the medium in the act of tricking. But there is nothing of the sort. The reader is left in uncertainty-a vague suspicion hovers over everything, though not supported on any serious grounds.

Commenting on this, LIGHT says: *

* 1909, p. 356.

Delanne shows by extracts from the Report itself that some of the experiments succeeded even when the fullest test precautions were taken, such as using lamp-black to discover whether Eusapia really touched the objects moved. Yet the Report deliberately discounts these direct and positive observations by instancing cases occurring AT OTHER TIMES AND PLACES in which Eusapia was SAID or BELIEVED to have unduly influenced the phenomena.

The Courtier Report will prove more and more plainly to be what we have already called it, a “monument of ineptitude,” and the reality of Eusapia’s phenomena cannot be seriously called in question by the meaningless phrases with which it is liberally garnished.

What may be called a collective investigation of a medium, Mrs. Crandon, the wife of a doctor in Boston, was undertaken in the years 1923 to 1925 by a committee chosen by the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN and afterwards by a small committee of Harvard men with Dr. Shapley, the astronomer, at their head. The controversy over these inquiries is still raging, and the matter has been referred to in the chapter which deals with great modern mediums. It may briefly be stated that of the SCIENTIFIC

AMERICAN inquirers the secretary, Mr. Malcolm Bird, and Dr. Hereward Carrington announced their complete conversion.

The others gave no clear decision which involved the humiliating admission that after numerous sittings under their own conditions and in the presence of constant phenomena, they could not tell whether they were being cheated or not. The defect of the committee was that no experienced Spiritualist who was familiar with psychic conditions was upon it. Dr. Prince was very deaf, while Dr. McDougall was in a position where his whole academic career would obviously be endangered by the acceptance of an unpopular explanation. The same remark applies to Dr. Shapley's committee, which was all composed of budding scientists. Without imputing conscious mental dishonesty, there is a subconscious drag to wards the course of safety. Reading the report of these gentlemen with their signed acquiescence at each sitting with the result, and their final verdict of fraud, one cannot discover any normal way in which they have reached their conclusions. On the other hand, the endorsements of the mediumship by folk who had no personal reasons for extreme caution were frequent and enthusiastic. Dr. Mark Richardson of Boston reported that he had sat more than 300 times, and had no doubt at all about the results.

The author has seen numerous photographs of the ectoplasmic flow from "Margery," and has no hesitation, on comparing it with similar photographs taken in Europe, in saying that it is unquestionably genuine, and that the future will justify the medium as against her unreasonable critics.

APPENDIX

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

EVIDENCE OF THE HAUNTING OF THE HYDESVILLE HOUSE BEFORE THE FOX FAMILY OCCUPIED IT

MRS. ANN PULVER certifies:

I was acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Bell (who occupied the house in 1844). I used to call on them frequently. My warping bars were in their chamber, and I used to go there to do my work. One morning when I went there Mrs. Bell told me that she felt very bad; that she had not slept much, if any, the night before. When I asked her what the matter was, she said she didn't know but what it was the fidgets; but she thought she heard somebody walking about from one room to another, and that she had Mr. Bell get up and fasten down all the windows. She said she felt more safe after that. I asked her what she thought it was. She said it might be rats. I heard her speak about hearing noises after that, which she could not account for.

Miss Lucretia Pulver gave testimony:

I lived in this house all one winter, in the family of Mr. Bell. I worked for them part of the time, and part of the time I boarded and went to school. I lived there about three months. During the latter part of the time that I was there I heard this knocking frequently in the bedroom, under the foot of the bed. I heard it a number of nights, as I slept in the bedroom all the time that I staid there. One night I thought I heard a man walking in the buttery. This buttery is near the bedroom, with a stairway between. Miss Aurelia Losey staid with me on that night; she also heard the noise, and we were both much frightened, and got up and fastened down the windows and fastened the door. It sounded as if a person walked through the buttery, down cellar, and part way across the cellar-bottom, and there the noise would cease. There was no one else in the house at this time, except my little brother, who was asleep in the same room with us. This was about twelve o'clock, I should think. We did not go to bed until after eleven, and had not been asleep when we heard the noise. Mr. and Mrs. Bell had gone to Loch Berlin, to be gone until the next day.

Thus it is proved that strange sounds were heard in the house in 1844. Another family named Weekman lived there in 1846-7, and they had a similar experience.

STATEMENT OF MRS. HANNAH WEEKMAN

I have heard about the mysterious noises that have been heard in the house now occupied by Mr. Fox. We used to live in the same house; we lived there about a year and a half and moved from there to the house we now occupy. About a year ago, while we were living there, we heard someone, as we supposed, rapping on the outside door. I had just got into bed, but my husband had not. He went and opened it, and said that there was no one there. He came back, and was about getting into bed when we heard the rapping on the door again. He then went to the door and opened it, and said that he could see no one, although he stepped out a little way. He then came back and got into bed. He was quite angry; he thought ‘twas some of the neighbouring boys trying to disturb us, and said that “They might knock away, but they would not fool him,” or something of that kind. The knocking was heard again, and after a while he got up and went to the door and went out. I told him not to go outdoors, for perhaps somebody wanted to get him out and hurt him. He came back, and said he could see nothing. We heard a good deal of noise during the night; we could hardly tell where it was: it sounded sometimes as if someone was walking in the cellar. But the house was old, and we thought it might be the rattling of loose boards, or something of that kind.

A few nights afterwards, one of our little girls, who slept in the bedroom where the noises are now heard, woke us all up by screaming very loud. My husband and I, and our hired girl, got up immediately to see what was the matter. She sat up in bed, crying and screaming, and it was some time before we could find out what the matter was. She said that something had been moving about, over her head and face-that it was cold, and she did not know what it was. She said that she felt it all over her, but she was most alarmed at feeling it on her face. She was very much frightened. This was between twelve and one o’clock at night. She got up and got into bed with us, and it was a long time before she could go to sleep. It was several days before we could get her to sleep in that room again. She was eight years old at that time.

Nothing else happened to me during the time that we lived there; but my husband told me that one night he heard someone call him by name, somewhere in the house-he did not know where-but could never find out where or what it was that night. I was not at home that night. I was sitting up with a sick person. We did not think the house was haunted at that time.

HANNAH WEEKMAN APRIL 11, 1848.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL WEEKMAN

I am the husband of Hannah Weekman. We used to live in the house now occupied by Mr. Fox, in which they say strange noises are heard. We lived there about a year and a half. One evening, about bedtime, I heard the rapping. I supposed it was someone knocking at the door who wanted to come in. I did not bid him "Come in," as I usually do, but went to the door. I did not find anyone there, but went back, and just as I was getting into bed I heard the rapping again and opened the door quick, but could see no one there. I stepped out a step or two, but could see no one about there. I then went back and got into bed. I thought someone was making game of me. After a few minutes I heard the knocking again, and after waiting a few minutes and still hearing it, I got up and went to the door. This time I went clear out and looked around the house, but could find no one. I then stepped back and shut the door, and held on to the latch, thinking that if there was anyone there I would catch them at it. In a minute or two I heard the rapping again. My hand was on the door, and the knocking appeared to be on the door. I could feel it jar with the raps. I instantly opened the door and sprang out, but there was no one in sight. I then went round the house again, but could find no one, as before. My wife told me I had better not go out of doors, as it might be someone that wanted to hurt me. I did not know what to think of it, it seemed so strange and unaccountable.

He here relates the case of the little girl being frightened, as given above.

One night after this, about midnight, I was awake, and heard my name called. It sounded as if it was on the south side of the room.

I sat up in bed and listened, but did not hear it again. I did not get out of bed, but waited to see if it would be repeated. My wife was not at home that night. I told her of it afterwards, and she said she guessed I had been dreaming. My wife used to be frightened quite often by hearing strange noises in and about the house.

I have heard so much from men in whom I place confidence about these noises that are now heard, that, taken in connection with what I heard, I cannot account for it, unless it is a supernatural appearance. I am willing to make affidavit to the above facts if necessary.

(Signed) MICHAEL WEEKMAN. APRIL 11, 1848.

EXTRACT FROM HORACE, GREELEY’S ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE GIVING HIS OPINION OF THE FOX SISTERS AND THEIR MEDIUMSHIP*

* Capron, “Modern Spiritualism,” pp. 179-181.

THE MYSTERIOUS RAPPINGS

Mrs. Fox and her three daughters left our city yesterday on their return to Rochester, after a stay here of some weeks, during which they have subjected the mysterious influence, by which they seem to be accompanied, to every reasonable test, and to the keen and critical scrutiny of hundreds who have chosen to visit them, or whom they have been invited to visit. The rooms which they occupied at the hotel have been repeatedly searched and scrutinized; they have been taken without an hour’s notice into houses they had never before entered; they have been all unconsciously placed on a glass surface concealed under the carpet in order to interrupt electrical vibrations; they have been disrobed by a committee of ladies appointed without notice, and insisting that neither of them should leave the room until the investigation has been made, etc., etc., yet we believe no one, to this moment, pretends that he has detected either of them in producing or causing the “rappings,” nor do we think any of their contemners has invented a plausible theory to account for the production of these sounds, nor the singular intelligence which (certainly at times) has seemed to be manifest through them.

Some ten or twelve days since they gave up their rooms at the hotel and devoted the remainder of their sojourn here to visiting several families, to which they had been invited by persons interested in the subject, and subjecting the singular influence to a closer, calmer examination than could be given to it at a hotel, and before casual companies of strangers, drawn together by vague curiosity more than rational interest, or predetermined and invincible hostility. Our own dwelling was among those they thus visited; not only submitting to, but courting, the fullest and keenest inquiry with regard to the alleged “manifestations” from the spirit-world, by which they were attended.

We devoted what time we could spare from our duties out of three days to this subject, and it would be the basest cowardice not to say that we are convinced beyond a doubt of their perfect integrity and good faith in the premises. Whatever may be the origin or cause of the “rappings,” the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them. We tested this thoroughly and to our entire satisfaction. Their conduct and bearing is as unlike that of deceivers as possible, and we think no one acquainted with them could believe them at all capable of engaging in so daring, impious, and shameful a juggle as this would be if they caused the sounds. And it is not possible that such a juggle should have been so long perpetrated in public. A juggler performs one feat quickly and hurries on to another; he does not devote weeks after weeks to the same thing over and over, deliberately, in full view of hundreds who sit beside or confronting him in broad daylight, not to enjoy but to detect his trick. A deceiver naturally avoids conversation on the subject of his knavery, but these ladies converse freely and fully with regard to the origin of these "rappings" in their dwellings years ago, the various sensations they caused, the neighbourhood excitement created, the progress of the developments — what they have seen, heard and experienced from first to last. If all were false, they could not fail to have involved themselves ere this in a labyrinth of blasting contradictions, as each separately gives accounts of the most astonishing developments at this or that time. Persons foolish enough so to commit themselves without reserve or caution could not have deferred a thorough self-exposure for a single week.

Of course, a variety of opinions of so strange a matter would naturally be formed by the various persons who have visited them, and we presume that those who have merely run into their room for an hour or so, and listened, among a huddle of strangers, to a medley of questions-not all admitting of very profitable answers-put to certain invisible intelligences, and answered by "rappings," or singular noises on the floor, table, etc., as the alphabet was called over, or otherwise, would naturally go away, perhaps puzzled, probably disgusted, rarely convinced. It is hardly possible that a matter, ostensibly so grave, could be presented under circumstances less favourable to conviction. But of those who have enjoyed proper opportunities for a full investigation, we believe that fully three-fourths are convinced, as we are, that these singular sounds and seeming manifestations are not produced by Mrs. Fox and her daughters, nor by any human being connected with them.

How they are caused, and whence they proceed, are questions which open a much wider field of inquiry, with whose way-marks we do not profess to be familiar. He must be well acquainted with the arcana of the universe, who shall presume dogmatically to decide that these manifestations are natural or supernatural. The ladies say that they are informed that this is but the beginning of a new era, or economy, in which spirits clothed in the flesh are to be more closely palpably connected with those who have put on immortality; that manifestations have already appeared in many other families and destined to be diffused and rendered clearer, until all who will may communicate freely with their friends who have “shuffled off this mortal coil.” Of all this we know nothing, and shall guess nothing. But if we were simply to print (which we shall not) the questions asked and answers we received, during a two-hours’ uninterrupted conference with the “rappers,” we should at once be accused of having done so expressly to sustain the theory which regards these manifestations as the utterances of departed spirits. H. G. NOTE TO CHAPTER VI PEN-PICTURE OF LAKE HARRIS BY LAURENCE OLIPHANT

There was a remarkable alternation of vivacity and deliberation about the movements of Mr. Masollam. His voice seemed pitched in two different keys, the effect of which was, when he changed them, to make one seem a distant echo of the other-a species of ventriloquistic phenomenon which was calculated to impart a sudden and not altogether pleasant shock to the nerves of the listeners. When he talked with what I may term his “near” voice, he was generally rapid and vivacious; when he exchanged it for his “far off” one, he was solemn and impressive. His hair, which had once been raven black, was now streaked with grey, but it was still thick and fell in a massive wave over his ears, and nearly to his shoulders, giving him something of a leonine aspect. His brow was overhanging and bushy, and his eyes were like revolving lights in two dark caverns, so fitfully did they seem to emit flashes and then lose all expression. Like his voice, they too had a near and a far-off expression, which could be adjusted to the required focus like a telescope, growing smaller and smaller as though in an effort to project the sight beyond the limits of natural vision. At such times they would be so entirely devoid of all appreciation of outward objects as to produce almost the impression of blindness, when suddenly the focus would change, the pupils expand, and rays flash from them like lightning from a thundercloud, giving an unexpected and extraordinary brilliancy to a face which seemed promptly to respond to the summons. The general cast of countenance, the upper part of which, were it not for the depth of the eye-sockets, would have been strikingly handsome, was decidedly Semitic; and in repose the general effect was almost statuesque in its calm fixedness. The mouth was partially concealed by a heavy moustache and long iron-grey beard; but the transition from repose to animation revealed an extraordinary flexibility in those muscles which had a moment before appeared so rigid, and the whole character of the countenance was altered as suddenly as the expression of the eye. It would perhaps be prying too much into the secrets of Nature, or, at all events, into the secrets of Mr. Masollam's nature, to inquire whether this lightening and darkening of the countenance was voluntary or not. In a lesser degree it is a common phenomenon with us all: the effect of one class of emotions is, vulgarly speaking, to make a man look black, and of another to make him look bright. The peculiarity of Mr. Masollam was that he could look so much blacker and brighter than most people, and made the change of expression with such extraordinary rapidity and intensity that it seemed a sort of facial legerdemain, and suggested the suspicion that it might be an acquired faculty. There was, moreover, another change which he apparently had the power of working on his countenance, which affects other people involuntarily, and which generally, especially in the case of the fair sex, does so very much against their will. Mr. Masollam had the faculty of looking very much older one hour than he did the next. "There were moments when a careful study of his wrinkles and of his dull, faded-looking eyes would lead you to put him down at eighty if he was a day; and there were others when his flashing glance, expanding nostril, broad, smooth brow and mobile mouth would make a rejuvenating combination that would for a moment convince you that you had been at least five-and-twenty years out in your first estimate. These rapid contrasts were calculated to arrest the attention of the most casual observer, and to produce a sensation which was not altogether pleasant when first one made his acquaintance. It was not exactly mistrust-for both manners were perfectly frank and natural-so much as perplexity. He seemed to be two opposite characters rolled into one, and to be presenting undesigningly a curious moral and physiological problem for solution, which had a disagreeable sort of attractiveness about it, for you almost immediately felt it to be insoluble, and yet it would not let you rest. He might be the best or the worst of men."

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY OF PROFESSOR AND MRS. DE MORGAN

PROFESSOR DE MORGAN says:

I gave an account of all this to a friend who was then alive, a man of ologies and ometers both, who was not at all disposed to think it anything but a clever imposture. “But,” said he, “what you tell me is very singular: I shall go myself to Mrs. Hayden; I shall go alone and not give my name. I don’t think I shall hear anything from anybody, but if I do I shall find out the trick. Depend upon it,

I shall find it out.” He went accordingly, and came to me to report progress. He told me that he had gone a step beyond me, for he had insisted on taking his alphabet behind a large folding screen and asking his questions by the alphabet and a pencil, as well as receiving the answers. No persons except himself and Mrs. Hayden were in the room. The “spirit” who came to him was one whose unfortunate death was fully detailed in the usual way. My friend told me that he was “awestruck,” and had nearly forgotten all his precautions.

The things which I have narrated were the beginning of a long series of experiences, many as remarkable as what I have given; many of a minor character, separately worth little, but jointly of weight when considered in connection with the more decisive proofs of reality. Many of a confirmatory tendency as mere facts, but of a character not sustentive of the gravity and dignity of the spiritual world. The celebrated apparition of Giles Scroggins is a serious personage compared to some which have fallen in my way, and a logical one, too. If these things be spirits, they show that pretenders, coxcombs and liars are to be found on the other side of the grave as well as on this; and what for no? as Meg Dods said.

The whole question may receive such persevering attention as shall worm out the real truth; or it may die away, obtaining only casual notice, until a new outburst of phenomena recalls its history of this clay. But this subsidence does not seem to begin. It is now twelve or thirteen years since the matter began to be everywhere talked about, during which time there have been many announcements of the total extinction of the “spirit-mania.” But in several cases, as in Tom Moore’s fable, the extinguishers have caught fire. Were it the absurdity it is often said to be, it would do much good by calling attention to the “manifestations” of another absurdity, the philosophy of possibilities and impossibilities, the philosophy of the fourth court. Extremes meet, but the “meeting” is often for the purpose of mutual exposure, like that of silly gentlemen in the day of pop-and-paragraph duels. This on the supposition that Spiritualism is all either imposture or delusion; it cannot be more certainly one or the other than is the philosophy opposed to it. I have no acquaintance either with P or Q. But I feel sure that the decided conviction of all who can see both sides of the shield must be, that it is more likely that P has seen a ghost than that Q knows he cannot have seen one. I know that Q says he knows it.

In this connection the following from the Publishers' Circular on the appearance of Mrs. De Morgan's book shows a contemporary estimate of Professor De Morgan's critical faculty:

Mere LITTERATEURS and writers of fiction may be pardoned for a little tendency to the visionary and unreal, but the fact that the well-known author of the standard works on Formal Logic, the Differential Calculus, and the Theory of Probabilities, should figure with his lady in the characters of believers in spirit-rapping and table-turning, will probably take most people by surprise. There is perhaps no contributor to our reviews who is more at home in demolishing a fallacy, or in good-humouredly disposing of an ignorant pretender in science than Mr. De Morgan. His clear, logical, witty and whimsical style is readily traced by literary readers in many a striking article in our critical journals. He is probably the last man whom the sceptical in such mysteries would expect to find on the side of Mr. Home and Mrs. Newton Crosland. Yet we must record the fact that Mr. De Morgan declares himself " perfectly convinced that he has both seen and heard, in a manner which should make unbelief impossible, things called spiritual which cannot be taken by a rational being to be capable of explanation by imposture, coincidence, or mistake."

Let us add to the foregoing Mrs. De Morgan's testimony:

It is now ten years since I began attentively to observe the phenomena of "Spiritualism." My first experience occurred in the presence of Mrs. Hayden from New York. I never heard a word which could shake my strong conviction of Mrs. Hayden's honesty; indeed, the result of our first interview, when my name was quite unknown to her, was sufficient to prove that I was not on that occasion the victim of her imposture, or my own credulity.

After describing the visit to Mrs. Hayden, to whom none of the names of those present was mentioned, she says:

We sat for at least a quarter of an hour and were beginning to apprehend a failure, when a very small throbbing or patting sound was heard, apparently in the centre of the table. Great was our pleasure when Mrs. Hayden, who had before seemed rather anxious, said, “They are coming.” Who were coming? Neither she nor we could tell. As the sounds gathered strength, which they seemed to do with our necessary conviction of their genuineness, whatever might be their origin, Mrs. Hayden said, “There is a spirit who wishes to speak with someone here, but as I do not know the names of the gentlemen and ladies, I must point to each in turn, and, when I come to the right one, beg that the spirit will rap.” This was agreed to by our invisible companion, who rapped in assent. Mrs. Hayden then pointed to each of the party in turn. To my surprise, and even annoyance (for I did not wish this, and many of my friends did), no sounds were heard until she indicated myself, the last in the circle. I was seated at her right hand; she had gone round from the left. I was then directed to point to the letters of a large type alphabet, and I may add that, having no wish to obtain the name of any dear friend or relation, I certainly did not rest, as it has been surmised is often done, on any letter. However, to my astonishment, the not common name of a dear relation who had left this world seventeen years before, and whose surname was that of my father’s, not my husband’s, family was spelt. Then this sentence, “I am happy, and with F. and G.” (names at length). I then received a promise of future communication with all three spirits; the two last had left the world twenty and twelve years before. Other persons present then received communications by rapping; of these some were as singularly truthful and satisfactory as that to myself, while others were false and even mischievous.

Mrs. De Morgan observes that after the seances with Mrs. Hayden she and her friends experimented in private, “and it was found that a number of persons, both in and out of my own family, possessed the faculty of mediumship in a greater or less degree.”

NOTE TO CHAPTER X

WERE THE DAVENPORTS JUGGLERS OR SPIRITUALISTS?

As Mr. Houdini has seemed to question whether the Davenports themselves ever asserted that they were Spiritualists, it may clear the matter up finally to quote the following from a letter written by them in 1868 to the Banner of Light, the leading Spiritualist journal in the United States. Dealing with the report that they were not Spiritualists, they wrote:

It is singular that any individual, sceptic or Spiritualist, could believe such statements after fourteen years of the most bitter persecution and violent opposition, culminating in the riots of Liverpool, Huddersfield, and

Leeds, where our lives were placed in imminent peril by the fury of brutal mobs, our property destroyed, and where we suffered a loss of seventy-five thousand dollars, and all because we would not renounce Spiritualism, and declare ourselves jugglers, when threatened by the mob, and urged to do so. In conclusion, we have only to say that we denounce all such statements as base falsehoods.

END OF VOL. I

THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM VOLUME II

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CHAPTER I

THE CAREER OF EUSAPIA PALLADINO

The mediumship of Eusapia Palladino marks an important stage in the history of psychical research, because she was the first medium for physical phenomena to be examined by a large number of eminent men of science. The chief manifestations that occurred with her were the movement of objects without contact, the levitation of a table and other objects, the levitation of the medium, the appearance of materialised hands and faces, lights, and the playing of musical instruments without human contact. All these phenomena took place, as we have seen, at a much earlier date with the medium D. D. Home, but when Sir William Crookes invited his scientific brethren to come and examine them they declined. Now for the first time these strange facts were the subject of prolonged investigation by men of European reputation. Needless to say, these experimenters were at first sceptical in the highest degree, and so-called “tests” (those often silly precautions which may defeat the very object aimed at) were the order of the day. No medium in the whole world has been more rigidly tested than this one, and since she was able to convince the vast majority of her sitters, it is clear that her mediumship was of no ordinary type. It is little use pointing out that no psychic researcher should be admitted to the seance room without at least some elementary knowledge of the complexities of mediumship and the right conditions for its unfoldment, or without, for instance, an understanding of the basic truth that it is not the medium alone, but the sitters equally, who are factors in the success of the experiment. Not one scientific man in a thousand recognises this, and the fact that Eusapia triumphed in spite of such a tremendous handicap is an eloquent tribute to her powers.

The mediumistic career of this humble, illiterate Neapolitan woman, of surpassing interest as well as of extreme importance in its results, supplies yet another instance of the lowly being used as the instrument to shatter the sophistries of the learned. Eusapia was born on January 21, 1854, and died in 1918. Her mediumship began to manifest itself when she was about fourteen years of age. Her mother died at her birth, and her father when she was twelve years old. At the house of friends with whom she went to stay she was persuaded to sit at a table with others. At the end of ten minutes the table was levitated, the chairs began to dance, the curtains in the room to swell, and glasses and bottles to move about. Each sitter was tested in turn to discover who was responsible for the movements, and in the end it was decided that Eusapia was the medium. She took no interest in the proceedings, and only consented to have further sittings to please her hosts and prevent herself from being sent to a convent. It was not until her twenty-second or twenty-third year that her Spiritualistic education began, and then, according to M. Flammarion, it was directed by an ardent Spiritualist, Signor Damiani.

In connection with this period Eusapia relates a singular incident. At Naples an English lady who had become the wife of Signor Damiani was told at a table seance by a spirit, giving the name of John King, to seek out a woman named Eusapia, the street and the number of the house being specified. He said she was a powerful medium through whom he intended to manifest. Madame Damiani went to the address indicated and found Eusapia Palladino, of whom she had not previously heard. The two women held a seance and John King controlled the medium, whose guide or control he continued ever after to be.

Her first introduction to the European scientific world came through Professor Chiaia, of Naples, who in 1888 published in a journal issued in Rome a letter to Professor Lombroso, detailing his experiences and inviting this celebrated alienist to investigate the medium for himself. It was not until 1891 that Lombroso accepted this invitation, and in February of that year he had two sittings with Eusapia in Naples. He was converted, and wrote: “I am filled with confusion and regret that I combated with so much persistence the possibility of the facts called Spiritualistic.” His conversion led many important scientific men in Europe to investigate, and from now onward Madame Palladino was kept busy for many years with test sittings.

Lombroso’s Naples sittings in 1891 were followed by the Milan Commission in 1892, which included Professor Schiaparelli, Director of the Observatory of Milan; Professor Gerosa, Chair of Physics; Ermacora, Doctor of Natural Philosophy; M. Aksakof, Councillor of State to the Emperor of Russia; Charles du Prel, Doctor of Philosophy in Munich; and Professor Charles Richet, of the University of Paris. Seventeen sittings were held. Then came investigations in Naples in 1893; in Rome, 1893-4; in

Warsaw, and France, in 1894-the latter under the direction of Professor Richet, Sir Oliver Lodge, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and Dr. Ochorowicz; in 1895 at Naples; and in the same year in England, at Cambridge, in the house of Mr. F. W. H. Myers, in the presence of Professor and Mrs. Sidgwick, Sir Oliver Lodge and Dr. Richard Hodgson. They were continued in 1895 in France at the house of Colonel de Rochas; in 1896 at Tremezzo, at Auteuil, and at Choisy Yvrac; in 1897 at Naples, Rome, Paris, Montfort, and Bordeaux; in Paris in November, 1898, in the presence of a scientific committee composed of MM. Flammarion, Charles Richet, A. de Rochas, Victorien Sardou, Jules Claretie, Adolphe Bisson, G. Delanne, G. de Fontenay, and others; also in 1901 at the Minerva Club in Geneva, in the presence of Professors Porro, Morselli, Bozzano, Venzano, Lombroso, Vassalo, and others. There were many other experimental sittings with scientific men, both in Europe and in America.

Professor Chiaia, in his letter to Professor Lombroso already referred to, gave this picturesque description of the phenomena occurring with Eusapia. He invited him to observe a special case which he considers worthy of the serious attention of the mind of a Lombroso, and continues:

The case I allude to is that of an invalid woman who belongs to the humblest class of society. She is nearly thirty years old and very ignorant; her look is neither fascinating nor endowed with the power which modern criminologists call irresistible; but when she wishes, be it by day or by night, she can divert a curious group for an hour or so with the most surprising phenomena. Either bound to a seat or firmly held by the hands of the curious, she attracts to her the articles of furniture which surround her, lifts them up, holds them suspended in the air like Mahomet’s coffin, and makes them come down again with undulatory movements, as if they were obeying her will. She increases their weight or lessens it according to her pleasure. She raps or taps upon the walls, the ceiling, the floor, with fine rhythm and cadence. In response to the requests of the spectators, something like flashes of electricity shoot forth from her body, and envelop her or enwrap the spectators of these marvellous scenes. She draws upon cards that you hold out, everything that you want-figures, signatures, numbers, sentences-by just stretching out her hand toward the indicated place.

If you place in the corner of the room a vessel containing a layer of soft clay, you find after some moments the imprint in it of a small or a large hand, the image of a face (front view or profile) from which a plaster cast can be taken. In this way portraits of a face taken at different angles have been preserved, and those who desire so to do can thus make serious and important studies.

This woman rises in the air, no matter what bands tie her down. She seems to be upon the empty air, as on a couch, contrary to all the laws of gravity; she plays on musical instruments-organs, bells, tambourines-as if they had been touched by her hands or moved by the breath of invisible gnomes. This woman at times can increase her stature by more than four inches.

Professor Lombroso, as we have seen, was interested enough by this graphic account to investigate, with the result that he was converted. The Milan Committee (1892), the next to experiment, say in their report:

It is impossible to count the number of times that a hand appeared and was touched by one of us. Suffice it to say that doubt was no longer possible. It was indeed a living human hand which we saw and touched, while at the same time the bust and arms of the medium remained visible, and her hands were held by those on either side of her.

Many phenomena occurred in the light supplied by two candles and an oil-lamp, and the same occurrences were witnessed in full light when the medium was in trance. Dr. Ochorowicz persuaded Eusapia to visit Warsaw in 1894., and the experiments there were in the presence of men and women eminent in scientific and philosophical circles. The record of these sittings says that partial and complete levitations of the table and many other physical phenomena were obtained. These levitations occurred while both the medium's feet were visible in the light, and when her feet were tied and held by a sitter kneeling under the table.

After the sittings at Professor Richet's house on the Ile Roubaud in 1894, Sir Oliver Lodge in the course of his report to the English Society for Psychical Research said:

However the facts are to be explained, the possibility of the facts I am constrained to admit. There is no further room in my mind for doubt. Any person without invincible prejudice who had had the same experience would have come to the same broad conclusion, viz.: that things hitherto held impossible do actually occur. The result of my experience is to convince me that certain phenomena usually considered abnormal do belong to the order of nature, and, as a corollary from this, that these phenomena ought to be investigated and recorded by persons and societies interested in natural knowledge.*

* JOURNAL, S.P.R., Vol. VI, Nov. 1894., pp. 334, 360.

At the meeting at which Sir Oliver Lodge's report was read, Sir William Crookes drew attention to the resemblance of the phenomena occurring with Eusapia to those that happened in the presence of D. D. Home. Sir Oliver Lodge's report was adversely criticized by Dr. Richard Hodgson, then absent in the United States, and as a consequence Eusapia Palladino and Dr. Hodgson were invited to England, and a series of sittings were held at Cambridge at the house of Mr. F. W. H. Myers in August and September, 1895. These "Cambridge Experiments," as they were called, were for the most part unsuccessful, and it was claimed that the medium was repeatedly detected in fraud. A great deal has been written on both sides in the acute controversy that followed. It is enough to say that competent observers refused to accept this verdict on Eusapia, and that they roundly condemned the methods adopted by the Cambridge group of experimenters.

It is interesting to recall that an American reporter, on the occasion of Eusapia's visit to his country in 1910, bluntly asked the medium if she had ever been caught tricking. Here is Eusapia's frank reply: "Many times I have been told so. You see, it is like this. Some people are at the table who expect tricks-in fact, they want them. I am in a trance. Nothing happens. They get impatient. They think of the tricks-nothing but tricks. They put their mind on the tricks, and-I-and I automatically respond. But it is not often. They merely will me to do them. That is all." This sounds like Eusapia's ingenious adoption of a defence she has heard others make on her behalf. At the same time it has no doubt an element of truth in it, the psychological side of mediumship being little understood.

Two important observations may be made in this connection. First, as Dr. Hereward Carrington pointed out, various experiments conducted with the object of duplicating the phenomena by fraudulent means resulted in complete failure in almost every case. Second, that the Cambridge sitters were apparently entirely ignorant of the existence and operation of what may be called the "ectoplasmic limb," a phenomenon observed in the case of Slade and other mediums. Carrington says: "All the objections Mrs. Sidgwick raises might be met if we could suppose that Eusapia materialises for the time being a third arm, which produces these phenomena, and which recedes into her body at the conclusion of a phenomenon." Now, strange as it may appear, this is just the conclusion to which abundant evidence points. As early as 1894. Sir Oliver Lodge saw what he describes as an “appearance as of extra limbs,” continuous with Eusapia’s body or very close to it. With that assurance which ignorance so often assumes, the editorial comment in the JOURNAL of the Society for Psychical Research, wherein Sir Oliver’s account was printed, says: “It is hardly necessary to remark that the continuity of the ‘spirit’ limbs with the body of the medium is PRIMA FACIE a circumstance strongly suggestive of fraud.”

But later scientific investigators amply confirm Sir Oliver Lodge’s surmise. Professor Bottazzi states:

Another time, later on, the same hand was placed on my right forearm, without squeezing it. On this occasion I not only carried my left hand to the spot, but I looked, so I could see and feel at the same time: I saw a human hand, of natural colour, and I felt with mine the fingers and the back of a lukewarm, nervous, rough hand. THE HAND DISSOLVED, AND (I SAW IT WITH MY EYES) RETREATED AS IF INTO MADAME PALLADINO’S BODY, DESCRIBING A CURVE. I confess that I felt some doubt as to whether Eusapia’s left hand had freed itself from my right hand, to reach my forearm, but at the same instant I was able to prove to myself that the doubt was groundless, because our two hands were still in contact in the ordinary way. If all the observed phenomena of the seven seances were to disappear from my memory, this one I could never forget.

Professor Galeotti, in July, 1907, plainly saw what he called the doubling of the left arm of the medium. He exclaimed: “Look, I see two left arms, identical in appearance! One is on the little table, and it is that which M. Bottazzi touches, and the other seems to come out of her shoulder-to approach her, and touch her, and then return and melt into her body again. This is not an hallucination.” At a seance in July, 1905, at the house of M. Berisso, when Eusapia’s hands were thoroughly controlled and visible to all, Dr. Venzano and others present “distinctly saw a hand and an arm covered by a dark sleeve issue from the front and upper part of the right shoulder of the medium.” Much similar testimony might be given.

Towards a study of the complexities of mediumship, especially with Eusapia, the following case is deserving of serious attention. In a sitting with Professor Morselli, Eusapia had been detected liberating her hand from the professor’s grasp and stretching it out to reach a trumpet which was on the table. She was prevented, however, from doing this. The report then says:

At this moment, while the control was certainly more rigorous than ever, the trumpet was raised from the table and disappeared into the cabinet, passing between the medium and Dr. Morselli. Evidently the medium had attempted to do with her hand what she subsequently did mediumistically. Such a futile and foolish attempt at fraud is inexplicable. There is no doubt about the matter; this time the medium did not touch, and could not touch, the trumpet; and even if she could have touched it she could not have conveyed it into the cabinet, which was behind her back.

It may be mentioned that a corner of the room was curtained off to form what is called a “cabinet” (i.e. an enclosure to gather “power”) and that Eusapia, unlike most other mediums, sat outside it, about a foot distant from the curtains behind her.

The Society for Psychical Research in 1895 had decided that Eusapia’s phenomena were all fraudulent, and would have no more to do with her. But on the Continent of Europe group after group of scientific inquirers, adopting the most rigorous precautions, endorsed Eusapia’s powers. Then in 1908 the Society for Psychical Research decided to investigate this medium once more. It nominated three of its most capable sceptics. One, Mr. W. W. Baggally, a member of the Council, had been investigating psychic phenomena for more than thirty-five years, and during that time-with the exception, perhaps, of a few incidents at a seance with Eusapia a few years before-had never witnessed a single genuine physical phenomenon. “Throughout his investigations he had invariably detected fraud, and nothing but fraud.” Also, he was an expert conjurer. Mr. Everard Feilding, the honorary secretary of the society, had been investigating for some ten years, but “during all that time he had never seen one physical phenomenon which appeared to him to be conclusively proved,” unless, again, perhaps in the case of a seance with Eusapia. Dr. Hereward Carrington, the third of the nominees, though he had attended countless seances, could say, until he sat with Eusapia, “I had never seen one single manifestation of the physical order which I could consider genuine.”

At first blush this record of the three investigators seems like a crushing blow to the assumptions of the Spiritualists. But in the investigation of Eusapia Palladino this trio of sceptics met their Waterloo. The full story of their long and patient research of this medium at Naples will be found in Dr.

Hereward Carrington’s book, “Eusapia Palladino and Her Phenomena” (1909).

As evidence of the careful investigation of scientific investigators on the Continent, we may mention that Professor Morselli noted no fewer than thirty nine distinct types of phenomena occurring with Eusapia Palladino.

The following incidents may be mentioned because they can well be classed under the heading “Foolproof.” Of a seance in Rome in 1894, in the presence of Professor Richet, Dr. Schrenck Notzing, Professor Lombroso, and others, the report says:

Hoping to obtain the movement of an object without contact, we placed a little piece of paper folded in the form of the letter “A” under a glass, and upon a disc of light pasteboard. Not being successful in this, we did not wish to fatigue the medium, and we left the apparatus upon the large table; then we took our places around the little table, after having carefully shut all the doors, the keys of which I begged my guests to put in their pockets, in order that we might not be accused of not having taken all necessary precautions.

The light was extinguished. Soon we heard the glass resound on our table, and having procured a light, we found it in the midst of us, in the same position, upside down, and covering the little piece of paper; only the cardboard disc was wanting. We sought for it in vain. The seance ended. I conducted my guests once more into the antechamber. M. Richet was the first to open the door-well bolted on the inside. What was not his surprise when he perceived near to the threshold of the door, on the other side of it, upon the staircase, the disc that we had sought for so long! He picked it up, and it was identified by all as the card placed under the glass.

A strong objective proof worth recording is the fact that M. de Fontenay photographed various hands appearing over Eusapia’s head, and in one photograph the medium’s hands can be seen to be securely held by the investigators. Reproductions of these photographs are given in the “Annals of Psychical Science” (April, 1908, p. 181 et seq.).

At the sixth and last seance of the series at Genoa with Professor Morselli in 1906-7, an effective test was devised. The medium was tied to the couch with a thick, broad band, of the kind used in asylums to fasten down maniacs, and capable of being tied very tightly without cutting the flesh. Morselli, with experience as an alienist, performed the operation, and also secured the wrists and ankles. After a red electric lamp of ten-candle power had been lighted, the table, which was free from all contact, moved from time to time, small lights were seen and a hand. At one stage the curtains in front of the cabinet opened, giving a view of the medium lying securely bound. “The phenomena,” says an account, “were inexplicable considering that the position rendered movement on her part impossible.”

Here, in conclusion, are two accounts, out of many, of convincing materialisations. The first is related by Dr. Joseph Venzano in the “Annals of Psychical Science” (Vol. VI, p. 164., September, 1907). Light was provided by a candle, enabling the figure of the medium to be seen::

In spite of the dimness of the light I could distinctly see Madame Palladino and my fellow sitters. Suddenly I perceived that behind me was a form, fairly tall, which was leaning its head on my left shoulder and sobbing violently, so that those present could hear the sobs: it kissed me repeatedly. I clearly perceived the outlines of this face, which touched my own, and I felt the very fine and abundant hair in contact with my left cheek, so that I could be quite sure that it was a woman. The table then began to move, and by typtology gave the name of a close family connection who was known to no one present except myself. She had died some time before, and on account of incompatibility of temperament there had been serious disagreements with her. I was so far from expecting this typtological response that I at first thought this was a case of coincidence of name, but while I was mentally forming this reflection I felt a mouth, with warm breath, touch my left ear and whisper, IN A LOW VOICE IN GENOESE DIALECT, a succession of sentences, the murmur of which was audible to the sitters. These sentences were broken by bursts of weeping, and their gist was repeatedly to implore pardon for injuries done to me, with a fullness of detail connected with family affairs which could only be known to the person in question. The phenomenon seemed so real that I felt compelled to reply to the excuses offered me with expressions of affection, and to ask pardon in my turn if any resentment of the wrongs referred to had been excessive. But I had scarcely uttered the first syllables when two hands, with exquisite delicacy, applied themselves to my lips and prevented my continuing. The form then said to me, “Thank you,” embraced me, kissed me, and disappeared.

With other mediums there have been finer materialisations than this one, and in better light, but in this case there was internal, mental evidence of identity.

The last example we shall give occurred in Paris, in 1898, at a sitting at which M. Flammarion was present, when M. Le Bocain addressed a materialised spirit in Arabic, saying: “If it is really thou, Rosalie, who art in the midst of us, pull the hair on the back of my head three times in succession.” About ten minutes later, and when M. Le Bocain had almost completely forgotten his request, he felt his hair pulled three separate times, just as he had desired. He says: “I certify this fact, which, besides, formed for me a most convincing proof of the presence of a familiar spirit close about us.” He adds that it is hardly necessary to say that Eusapia knows no Arabic.

Opponents and a section of psychic researchers contend that the evidence for phenomena occurring at seances is of little value because the usual observers have no knowledge of the resources of conjurers. In New York in 1910 Dr. Hereward Carrington took with him to a seance given by Eusapia, Mr. Howard Thurston, whom he describes as the most noted magician in America. Mr. Thurston who, with his assistant, controlled the hands and feet of the medium in a good light, wrote:

I witnessed in person the table levitations of Madame Eusapia Palladinoand am thoroughly convinced that the phenomena I saw were not due to fraud and were not performed by the aid of her feet, knees, or hands.

He offered to give a thousand dollars to a charitable institution if it could be proved that this medium could not levitate the table without resort to trickery or fraud.

It will be asked what has been the outcome of all the years of investigation conducted with this medium. A number of scientists holding with Sir David Brewster that “Spirit” is the last thing they will give in to have invented ingenious hypotheses to account for the phenomena, of the genuine nature of which they are fully convinced. Colonel de Rochas tried to explain them by what he called “exteriorization of motivity.” M. de Fontenay spoke of a dynamic theory of matter; others believe in “ectenic force” and “collective consciousness,” and the action of the subconscious mind, but those cases, well authenticated, where the operation of an independent intelligence is clearly shown, make these attempted explanations untenable. Various experimenters were forced to adopt the Spiritualist hypothesis as the only one that explained all the facts in a reasonable way. Dr. Venzano says:

In the greater number of the materialised forms perceived by us either by sight, contact, or hearing, we were able to recognise points of resemblance to deceased persons, generally our relatives, unknown to the medium and known only to those present who were concerned with the phenomena.

Dr. Hereward Carrington speaks with no uncertain voice. Regarding Mrs. Sidgwick's opinion that it is useless to speculate whether the phenomena are Spiritualistic in character, or whether they represent "some unknown biological law," until the facts themselves have been established, he says: "I must say that before I obtained my sittings I, too, took Mrs. Sidgwick's view." And he continues: "My own sittings convinced me finally and conclusively that genuine phenomena do occur, and, that being the case, the question of their interpretation naturally looms before me. I think that not only is the Spiritualistic hypothesis justified as a working theory, but it is, in fact, the only one capable of rationally explaining the facts."*

* "Eusapia Palladino and Her Phenomena." By Hereward Carrington Ph.D., pp. 250-1.

The mediumship of Eusapia Palladino, as we said at the outset, was similar to that of others, but she had the advantage of enlisting the attention of men of influence whose published accounts of her phenomena have had a weight not given to the utterances of less well-known people. Lombroso in particular has recorded his convictions in his well-known book, "After Death-What?" (1909). Eusapia was the means of demonstrating the reality of certain facts not accepted by orthodox science. It is easier for the world to deny these facts than to explain them, and that is the course usually adopted.

Those who try to explain away all Eusapia's mediumship by alluding to her superficial habit of playing conscious or unconscious tricks upon the sitters are simply deceiving themselves. That such tricks are played is beyond all question. Lombroso, who entirely endorses the validity of her mediumship, describes the tricks thus:

Many are the crafty tricks she plays, both in the state of trance (unconsciously) and out of it-for example, freeing one of her two hands, held by the controllers, for the sake of moving objects near her; making touches; slowly lifting the legs of the table by means of one of her knees and one of her feet; and feigning to adjust her hair and then slyly pulling out one hair and putting it over the little balance tray of a letter-weigher in order to lower it. She was seen by Faifofer, before her seances, furtively gathering flowers in a garden, that she might feign them to be “apports” by availing herself of the shrouding dark of the room. And yet her deepest grief is when she is accused of trickery during the seances-accused unjustly, too, sometimes, it must be confessed, because we are now sure that phantasmal limbs are superimposed (or added to) her own and act as their substitute, while all the time they were believed to be her own limbs detected in the act of cozening for their owner’s behoof.

In her visit to America, which was late in life when her powers were at a low ebb, she was detected in these obvious tricks and offended her sitters to such an extent that they discarded her, but Howard Thurston, the famous conjurer, narrates that he determined to disregard these things and continued the sitting, with the result that he obtained an undoubted materialisation. Another well-known sitter deposed that at the very moment when he was reproaching her for moving some object with her hand, another object, quite out of her reach, moved across the table. Her case is certainly a peculiar one, for it may be most truthfully said of her that no medium has ever more certainly been proved to have psychic powers, and no medium was ever more certainly a cheat upon occasions. Here, as always, it is the positive result which counts.

Eusapia had a peculiar depression of her parietal bone, due, it is said, to some accident in her childhood. Such physical defects are very often associated with strong mediumship. It is as if the bodily weakness caused what may be described as a dislocation of the soul, so that it is more detached and capable of independent action. Thus Mrs. Piper’s mediumship followed upon two internal operations, Home’s went with the tubercular diathesis, and many other cases might be quoted. Her nature was hysterical, impetuous and wayward, but she possessed some beautiful traits. Lombroso says of her that she had “a singular kindness of heart which leads her to lavish her gains upon the poor, and upon infants in order to relieve their misfortunes, and which impels her to feel boundless pity for the old and the weak, and to be awake at night thinking of them. The same goodness of heart drives her to protect animals that are being maltreated by sharply rebuking their cruel oppressors.” This passage may be commended to the attention of those who think that psychic power savours of the devil.

CHAPTER II

GREAT MEDIUMS FROM 1870 TO 1900: CHARLES H. FOSTER-MADAME D’ESPERANCE-WILLIAM EGLINTON-STAINTON MOSES

There were many notable and some notorious mediums in the period from 1870 to 1900. Of these D. D. Home, Slade, and Monck have already been mentioned. Four others, whose names will live in the history of the movement, are the American, C. H. Foster, Madame d’Esperance, Eglinton, and the Rev. W. Stainton Moses. A short account of each of these will now be given.

Charles H. Foster is fortunate in having a biographer who was such an admirer that he called him “the greatest spiritual medium since Swedenborg.” There is a tendency on the part of writers to exaggerate the claims of the particular sensitive with whom they have been brought in contact. None the less, Mr. George C. Bartlett in his “The Salem Seer” shows that he had close personal acquaintance with Foster, and that he really was a very remarkable medium. His fame was not confined to America, for he travelled widely and visited both Australia and Great Britain. In the latter country he made friends with Bulwer Lytton, visited Knebworth, and became the original of Margrave in “A Strange Story.”

Foster seems to have been a clairvoyant of great power, and had the peculiar gift of being able to bring out the name or initials of the spirit which he described upon his own skin, usually upon his forearm. This phenomenon was so often repeated and so closely examined that there can be no possible doubt as to the fact. What may have been the cause of the fact is another matter. There were many points about Foster’s mediumship which suggested an extended personality, rather than an outside intelligence. It is, for example, frankly incredible that the spirits of the great departed, such as Virgil, Camoens and Cervantes, should have been in attendance upon this unlearned New Englander, and yet we have Bartlett’s authority for the fact, illustrated with many quotations, that he held conversations with such entities, who were ready to quote the context in any stanza which might be selected out of their copious works.

Such evidence of familiarity with literature far beyond the capacity of the medium bears some analogy to those book tests frequently carried out of late years, where a line from any volume in a library is readily quoted. They need not suggest the actual presence of the author of such a volume, but might rather depend upon some undefined power of the loosened etheric self of the medium, or possibly some other entity of the nature of a control who could swiftly gather information in some supernal fashion. Spiritualists have so overpowering a case that they need not claim all psychic phenomena as having necessarily their face value, and the author confesses that he has frequently observed how much that has somewhere, some time, been placed on record in print or writing is conveyed back to us, though by no normal means could such print or writing be consulted at any time by the medium.

Foster's peculiar gift, by which initials were scrawled upon his flesh, had some comic results. Bartlett narrates how a Mr. Adams consulted Foster. "As he was leaving, Mr. Foster told him that in all his experience he had never known one individual to bring so many spiritsthe room being literally packed with them, coming and going. About two o'clock the next morning Mr. Foster called to mesaying: 'George, will you please light the gas? I cannot sleep; the room is still filled with the Adams family, and they seem to me to be writing their names all over me.' And to my astonishment a list of names of the Adams family was displayed upon his body. I counted eleven distinct names; one was written across his forehead, others on his arms, and several on his back." Such anecdotes certainly give a handle to the scoffer, and yet we have much evidence that the sense of humour is intensified rather than dulled upon the Other Side.

The gift of blood-red letters upon Foster's skin would seem to compare closely with the well-known phenomenon of the stigmata appearing upon the hands and feet of devout worshippers. In the one case concentration of the individual's thoughts upon the one subject has had an objective result. In the other, it may be that the concentration from some invisible entity has had a similar effect. We must bear in mind that we are all spirits, whether we be in the body or out, and have the same powers in varying degree.

Foster’s views as to his own profession seem to have been very contradictory, for he frequently declared, like Margaret Fox-Kane and the Davenports, that he would not undertake to say that his phenomena were due to spiritual beings, while, on the other hand, all his sittings were conducted on the clear assumption that they were so. Thus he would minutely describe the appearance of the spirit and give messages by name from it to the surviving relatives. Like D. D. Home, he was exceedingly critical of other mediums, and would not believe in the photographic powers of Mumler, though those powers were as well attested as his own. He seems to have had in an exaggerated degree the volatile spirit of the typical medium, easily influenced for good or ill. His friend, who was clearly a close observer, says of him:

He was extravagantly dual. He was not only Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but he represented half a dozen different Jekylls and Hydes. He was strangely gifted, and on the other hand he was woefully deficient. He was an unbalanced genius, and at times, I should say, insane. He had a heart so large indeed that it took in the world; tears for the afflicted; money for the poor; the chords of his heart were touched by every sigh. At other times his heart shrunk up until it disappeared. He would become pouty, and with the petulance of a child would abuse his best friends. He wore out many of his friends, as an unbreakable horse does its owner. No harness fitted Foster. He was not vicious, but absolutely uncontrollable. He would go his own way, which way was often the wrong way. Like a child he seemed to have no forethought. He seemed to live for to-day, caring nothing for to-morrow. If it were possible, he did exactly as he wished to do, regardless of consequences. He would take no one’s advice, simply because he could not. He seemed impervious to the opinions of others, and apparently yielded to every desire; but after all he did not abuse himself much, as he continued in perfect health until the final breaking up. When asked, “How is your health?” his favourite expression was, “Excellent. I am simply bursting with physical health.” The same dual nature showed itself in his work. Some days he would sit at the table all day, and far into the night, under tremendous mental strain. He would do this day after day, and night after night. Then days and weeks would come when he would do absolutely nothing-turn hundreds of dollars away and disappoint the people, without any apparent reason, save he was in the mood for loafing.

Madame d’Esperance, whose real name was Mrs. Hope, was born in 1849 and her career extended over thirty years, her activities covering the Continent as well as Great Britain. She was first brought to the notice of the general public by T. P. Barkas, a well-known citizen of Newcastle. The medium at that time was a young girl of average middle-class education. When in semi-trance, however, she displayed to a marked degree that gift of wisdom and knowledge which St. Paul places at the head of his spiritual category. Barkas narrates how he prepared long lists of questions which covered every branch of science and that the answers were rapidly written out by the medium, usually in English, but sometimes in German and even in Latin. Mr. Barkas, in summing up these seances, says*:

It will be admitted by all that no one can by normal effort answer in detail critical and obscure questions in many difficult departments of science with which she is entirely unacquainted; it will further be admitted that no one can normally see and draw with minute accuracy in complete darkness; that no one can by any normal power of vision read the contents of closed letters in the dark; that no one who is entirely unacquainted with the German language can write with rapidity and accuracy long communications in German; and yet all these phenomena took place through this medium, and are as well accredited as are many of the ordinary occurrences of daily life.

It must be admitted, however, that until we know the limits of the extended powers produced by a liberation or partial liberation of the etheric body, we cannot safely put down such manifestations to spirit intervention. They showed a remarkable personal psychic individuality and possibly nothing more.

But Madame d’Esperance’s fame as a medium depends upon many gifts which were more undoubtedly Spiritualistic. We have a very full account of these from her own pen, for she wrote a book, called “Shadow Land,” which may rank with A. J. Davis’s “Magic Staff” and Turvey’s “The Beginnings of Seership,” as among the most remarkable psychic autobiographies in our literature. One cannot read it without being impressed by the good feeling and honesty of the writer.

In it she narrates, as other great sensitives have done, how in her early childhood she would play with spirit children who were as real to her as the living. This power of clairvoyance remained with her through life, but the rarer gift of materialisation was added to it. The book already quoted contained photographs of Yolande, a beautiful Arab girl, who was to this medium what Katie King was to Florence Cook. Not unfrequently she was materialised when Madame d’Esperance was seated outside the cabinet in full view of the sitters. The medium thus could see her own strange emanation, so intimate and yet so distinct. The following is her own description:

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* PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW, Vol. I, p. 224.

Her thin draperies allowed the rich olive tint of her neck, shoulders, arms and ankles to be plainly visible. The long black waving hair hung over her shoulders to below her waist and was confined by a small turban-shaped head-dress. Her features were small, straight and piquant; the eyes were dark, large and lively; her every movement was as full of grace as those of a young child, or, as it struck me then when I saw her standing half shyly, half boldly, between the curtains, like a young roe-deer.

In describing her sensations during a seance, Madame d’Esperance speaks of feeling as if spiders’ webs were woven about her face and hands. If a little light penetrated between the curtains of the cabinet she saw a white, misty mass floating about like steam from a locomotive, and out of this was evolved a human form. A feeling of emptiness began as soon as what she calls the spider’s web material was present, with loss of control of her limbs.

The Hon. Alexander Aksakof, of St. Petersburg, a well-known psychical researcher and editor of Psychische Studien, has described in his book, “A Case of Partial Dematerialisation,” an extraordinary seance at which this medium’s body was partly dissolved. Commenting on this, he observes: “The frequently noted fact of the resemblance of the materialised form to that of the medium here finds its natural explanation. As that form is only a duplication of the medium, it is natural that it should have all her features.”

This may, as Aksakof says, be natural, but it is equally natural that it should provoke the ridicule of the sceptic. A larger experience, however, would convince him that the Russian scientist is right. The author has sat at materialising seances where he has seen the duplicates of the medium’s face so clearly before him that he has been ready to denounce the proceedings as fraudulent, but with patience and a greater accumulation of power he has seen later the development of other faces which could by no possible stretch of imagination be turned into the medium’s. In some cases it has seemed to him that the invisible powers (who often produce their effects with little regard for the misconstructions which may arise from them) have used the actual physical face of the unconscious medium and have adorned it with ectoplasmic appendages in order to transform it. In other cases one could believe that the etheric double of the medium has been the basis of the new creation. So it was sometimes with Katie King, who occasionally closely resembled Florence Cook in feature even when she differed utterly in stature and in colouring. On other occasions the materialised figure is absolutely different. The author has observed all three phases of spirit construction in the case of the American medium, Miss Ada Besinnet, whose ectoplasmic figure sometimes took the shape of a muscular and well-developed Indian. The story of Madame d'Esperance corresponds closely with these varieties of power.

Mr. William Oxley, the compiler and publisher of that remarkable work in five volumes entitled "Angelic Revelations," has given an account of twenty-seven roses being produced at a seance by Yolande, the materialised figure, and of the materialisation of a rare plant in flower. Mr. Oxley writes:

I had the plant (IXORA CROCATA) photographed next morning, and afterwards brought it home and placed it in my conservatory under the gardener's care. It lived for three months, when it shrivelled up. I kept the leaves, giving most of them away except the flower and the three top leaves which the gardener cut off when he took charge of the plant.

At a seance on June 28, 1890, in the presence of M. Aksakof and Professor Butlerof, of St. Petersburg, a golden lily, seven feet high, is said to have been materialised. It was kept for a week and during that time six photographs of it were taken, after which it dissolved and disappeared. A photograph of it appears in "Shadow Land" (facing p. 328)

A feminine form, somewhat taller than the medium, and known by the name of Y-Ay-Ali, excited the utmost admiration. Mr. Oxley says: "I have seen many materialised spirit forms, but for perfection of symmetry in figure and beauty of countenance I have seen none like unto that." The figure gave him the plant which had been materialised, and then drew back her veil. She implanted a kiss on his hand and held out her own, which he kissed.

"As she was in the light rays, I had a good view of her face and hands. The countenance was beautiful to gaze upon, and the hands were soft, warm, and perfectly natural, and, but for what followed, I could have thought I held the hand of a permanent embodied lady, so perfectly natural, yet so exquisitely beautiful and pure."

He goes on to relate how she retired to within two feet of the medium in the cabinet, and in sight of all "gradually dematerialised by melting away from the feet upwards, until the head only appeared above the floor, and then this grew less and less until a white spot only remained, which, continuing for a moment or two, disappeared."

At the same seance an infant form materialised and placed three fingers of its tiny hand in Mr. Oxley's. Mr. Oxley afterwards took its hand in his and kissed it. This occurred in August, 1880.

Mr. Oxley records a very interesting experience of high evidential value. While Yolande, the Arab girl, was speaking to a lady sitter, "the top part of her white drapery fell of and revealed her form. I noticed that the form was imperfect, as the bust was undeveloped and the waist uncontracted, which was a test that the form was not a lay figure." He might have added, nor that of the medium.

Writing on "How a Medium Feels During Materialisations," Madame d'Esperance throws some light on the curious sympathy constantly seen to exist between the medium and the spirit form. Describing a seance at which she sat outside the cabinet, she says*:

* MEDIUM AND DAYBREAK, 1893, p. 46.

And now, another small and delicate form appears, with its little arms stretched out. Someone at the far end of the circle rises, approaches it, and they embrace. I hear inarticulate cries, "Anna, oh, Anna, my child, my dear child!" Then another person rises and throws her arms around the spirit; whereupon I hear sobs and exclamations, mingled with benedictions. I feel my body moved from side to side; everything grows dark before my eyes. I feel someone's arms around my shoulders; someone's heart beats against my bosom. I feel that something happens. No one is near me; no one pays the slightest attention to me. Every eye is fixed upon that little figure, white and slender, in the arms of the two women in mourning.

It must be my heart that I hear beating so distinctly, yet, surely, someone's arms are around me; never have I felt an embrace more plainly. I begin to wonder. Who am I? Am I the apparition in white, or am I that which remains seated in the chair? Are those my arms around the neck of the elder woman? Or are those mine which lie before me on my lap? Am I the phantom, and if so, what shall I call the being in the chair?

Surely, my lips are kissed; my cheeks are moist with the tears so plentifully shed by the two women. But how can that be? This feeling of doubt as to one’s own identity is fearful. I wish to extend one of the hands lying in my lap. I cannot do so. I wish to touch someone so as to make perfectly certain whether I am I, or only a dream; whether Anna is I, and if I am, in some sort, lost in her identity.

While the medium is in this state of distracted doubt another little spirit child who had materialised comes and slips her hands into those of Madame d’Esperance.

How happy I am to feel the touch, even of a little child. My doubts, as to who and where I am, are gone. And while I am experiencing all this, the white form of Anna disappears in the cabinet and the two women return to their places, tearful, shaken with emotion, but intensely happy.

It is not surprising to learn that when a sitter at one of Madame d’Esperance’s seances seized the materialised figure, he declared it to be the medium herself. In this connection Aksakof’s views* on the general question are of interest:

* “A Case of Partial Dematerialisation,” p. 181.

One may seize the materialised form, and hold it, and assure himself that he holds nothing except the medium herself, in flesh and bone; and it is not yet a proof of fraud on the medium’s part. In fact, according to our hypothesis, what could happen if we detain the medium’s double by force, when it is materialised to such a degree that nothing but an invisible simulacre of the medium remains in the seat behind the curtain? It is obvious that the simulacre-that small portion, fluid and ethereal-will be immediately absorbed into the already compactly materialised form, which lacks nothing (of being the medium) but that invisible remainder.

M. Aksakof, in the Introduction he has written for Madame d’Esperance’s book, “Shadow Land,” pays a high tribute to her as a woman and as a medium. He says she was as interested as himself in trying to find the truth. She submitted willingly to all the tests he imposed.

One interesting incident in the career of Madame d’Esperance was that she succeeded in reconciling Professor Friese, of Breslau, to Professor Zollner, of Leipzig. The alienation of these two friends had occurred on account of Zollner’s profession of Spiritualism, but the English medium was able to give such proofs to Friese that he no longer contested his friend’s conclusions.

It should be remarked that in the course of Mr. Oxley’s experiments with Madame d’Esperance moulds were taken of the hands and feet of the materialised figures, with wrist and ankle apertures which were too narrow to allow the withdrawal of the limb in any way, save by dematerialisation. In view of the great interest excited by the paraffin moulds taken in 1922 in Paris from the medium Kluski, it is curious to reflect that the same experiment had been successfully carried out, unnoticed save by the psychic Press, by this Manchester student so far back as 1876.

The latter part of Madame d’Esperance’s life, which was spent largely in Scandinavia, was marred by ill health, which was originally induced by the shock that she sustained at the so-called “exposure” when Yolande was seized by some injudicious researcher at Helsingfors in 1893. No one has expressed more clearly than she how much sensitives suffer from the ignorance of the world around them. In the last chapter of her remarkable book she deals with the subject. She concludes: “They who come after me may perchance suffer as I have done through ignorance of God’s laws. Yet the world is wiser than it was, and it may be that they who take up the work in the next generation will not have to fight, as I did, the narrow bigotry and harsh judgments of the ‘unco’ guid’.”

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Each of the mediums treated in this chapter has had one or more books devoted to his or her career. In the case of William Eglinton there is a remarkable volume, “‘Twixt Two Worlds,” by J. S. Farmer, which covers most of his activities.

Eglinton was born at Islington on July 10, 1857, and, after a brief period at school, entered the printing and publishing business of a relative. As a boy he was extremely imaginative, as well as dreamy and sensitive, but, unlike so many other great mediums, he showed in his boyhood no sign of possessing any psychic powers. In 1874, when he was seventeen years of age, Eglinton entered the family circle by means of which his father was investigating the alleged phenomena of Spiritualists. Up to that time the circle had obtained no results, but when the boy joined it the table rose steadily from the floor until the sitters had to stand to keep their hands on it. Questions were answered to the satisfaction of those present. At the next sitting on the following evening, the boy passed into a trance, and evidential communications from his dead mother were received. In a few months his mediumship had developed, and stronger manifestations were forthcoming. His fame as a medium spread, and he received numerous requests for seances, but he resisted all efforts to induce him to become a professional medium. Finally, he had to adopt this course in 1875.

Eglinton thus describes his feelings before entering the seance room for the first time, and the change that came over him:

My manner, previous to doing so, was that of a boy full of fun; but as soon as I found myself in the presence of the "inquirers," a strange and mysterious feeling came over me, which I could not shake off. I sat down at the table, determined that if anything happened I would put a stop to it. Something did happen, but I was powerless to prevent it. The table began to show signs of life and vigour; it suddenly rose off the ground and steadily raised itself in the air, until we had to stand to reach it. This was in full gaslight. It afterwards answered, intelligently, questions which were put to it, and gave a number of test communications to persons present.

The next evening saw us eagerly sitting for further manifestations, and with a larger circle, for the news had got widely spread that we had "seen ghosts and talked to them," together with similar reports.

After we had read the customary prayer, I seemed to be no longer of this earth. A most ecstatic feeling came over me, and I presently passed into a trance. All my friends were novices in the matter, and tried various means to restore me, but without result. At the end of half an hour I returned to consciousness, feeling a strong desire to relapse into the former condition. We had communications which proved conclusively, to my mind, that the spirit of my mother had really returned to us. I then began to realise how mistaken-how utterly empty and unspiritual-had been my past life, and I felt a pleasure indescribable in knowing, beyond a doubt, that those who had passed from earth could return again, and prove the immortality of the soul. In the quietness of our family circlewe enjoyed to the full extent our communion with the departed, and many are the happy hours I have spent in this way.

In two respects his work resembles that of D. D. Home. His seances were usually held in the light, and he always agreed willingly to any proposed tests. A further strong point of similarity was the fact that his results were observed and recorded by many eminent men and by good critical witnesses.

Eglinton, like Home, travelled a great deal, and his mediumship was witnessed in many places. In 1878 he sailed for South Africa. The following year he visited Sweden, Denmark, and Germany. In February, 1880, he went to Cambridge University and held sittings under the auspices of the Psychological Society. In March he journeyed to Holland, thence proceeding to Leipzig, where he gave sittings to Professor Zollner and others connected with the University. Dresden and Prague followed, and in Vienna in April over thirty seances were held which were attended by many members of the aristocracy. In Vienna he was the guest of Baron Hellenbach, the well-known author, who in his book, “Prejudices of Mankind,” has described the phenomena that occurred there. After returning to England, he sailed for America on February 12, 1881, remaining there about three months. In November of the same year he went to India, and after holding numerous seances in Calcutta, returned in April, 1882. In 1883 he again visited Paris, and in 1885 was in Vienna and Paris. He subsequently visited Venice, which he described as “a veritable hotbed of Spiritualism.”

In Paris, in 1885, Eglinton met M. Tissot, the famous artist, who sat with him and subsequently visited him in England. A remarkable materialising seance at which two figures were plainly seen, and one, a lady, was recognised as a relation, has been immortalised by Tissot in a mezzotint entitled “Apparition Medianimique.” This beautiful, artistic production, a copy of which hangs at the offices of the London Spiritualist Alliance, shows the two figures illuminated by spirit lights which they are carrying in their hands. Tissot also executed a portrait etching of the medium, and this is to be found as the frontispiece to Mr. Farmer’s book, “‘Twixt Two Worlds.”

A typical example of his early physical mediumship is described* by Miss Kislingbury and Dr. Carter Blake (Lecturer in Anatomy at Westminster Hospital):

* THE SPIRITUALIST, May 12, 1876, p. 221.

Mr. Eglinton’s coat-sleeves were sewn together behind his back near the wrist with strong white cotton; the tying committee then bound him in his chair, passing the tape round his neck, and placed him close behind the curtain (of the cabinet) facing the company, with his knees and feet in sight. A small round table with various objects upon it was placed before the medium outside the cabinet and in view of the sitters; the little stringed instrument known as the Oxford Chimes was laid inverted across his knees, and a book and a hand-bell were placed upon it. In a few moments the strings were played upon, though no visible hand was touching them, the book, the front of which was turned towards the sitters, opened and shut (this was repeated a great number of times, so that all present saw the experiment unmistakably), and the handbell was rung from within, that is, without being raised from the board. The musical box placed near the curtain, but fully in sight, was stopped and set going, while the lid remained shut. Fingers, and at times a whole hand, were now and then protruded through the curtain. An instant after one of these had appeared, Captain Rolleston was requested to thrust his arm through the curtain and ascertain whether the tying and sewing were as at first. He satisfied himself that they were, and the same testimony was given by another gentleman later on.

This was one of a series of experimental seances held under the auspices of the British National Association of Spiritualists, at their rooms, 38 Great Russell Street, London. Referring to these, THE SPIRITUALIST says*:

* May 12, 1876.

The test manifestations with Mr. Eglinton are of great value, not because other mediums may not obtain equally conclusive results, but because in his case they had been observed and recorded by good critical witnesses whose testimony will carry weight with the public.

At the beginning Eglinton's materialisations were obtained in the moonlight, while all present sat round a table, and there was no cabinet. The medium, too, was usually conscious. He was induced to sit in the dark for manifestations by a friend who had been to a seance with a professional medium. Having thus started he was apparently obliged to continue, but stated that the results obtained were of a less spiritual character. A feature of his materialising seances was the fact that he sat among those present and that his hands were held. Under these conditions full-form materialisation s were seen in light which was sufficient for the recognition of those appearing.

In January, 1877, Eglinton gave a series of nonprofessional seances at the house, off Park Lane, of Mrs. Makdougall Gregory (widow of Professor Gregory, of Edinburgh). They were attended by Sir Patrick and Lady Colquhoun, Lord Borthwick, Lady Jenkinson, Rev. Maurice Davies, D.D., Lady Archibald Campbell, Sir William Fairfax, Lord and Lady Mount-Temple, General Brewster, Sir Garnet and Lady Wolseley, Lord and Lady Avonmore, Professor Blackie, and many others. Mr. W. Harrison (editor of The Spiritualist) describes one of these seances*:

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Feb. 23, 1877, p. 96.

Last Monday evening ten or twelve friends sat round a large circular table, with their hands joined, under which conditions Mr. W. Eglinton, the medium, was held on both sides. There were no other persons in the room than those seated at the table. An expiring fire gave a dim light, permitting only the outlines of objects to be visible. The medium sat at that part of the table which was nearest to the fire, consequently his back was to the light. A form, of the full proportions of a man, rose slowly from the floor to about the level of the edge of the table; it was about a foot behind the right elbow of the medium. The other nearest sitter was Mrs. Wiseman, of Orme Square, Bayswater. This form was covered with white drapery, but no features were visible. As it was close to the fire, it could be seen distinctly by those near it. It was observed by all who were so placed that the edge of the table or intervening sitters did not cut oft the view of the form; thus it was observed by four or five persons altogether, and was not the result of subjective impressions. After rising to the level of the edge of the table, it sank downwards, and was no more seen, having apparently exhausted all the power. Mr. Eglinton was in a strange house and in evening dress. Altogether it was a test manifestation which could not have been produced by artificial means.

One sitting described by Mr. Dawson Rogers showed remarkable features. It was held on February 17, 1885, in the presence of fourteen sitters, under test conditions. Though an inner room was used as a cabinet, Mr. Eglinton did not stay there, but paced about among the sitters, who were arranged in horseshoe formation. A form materialised and passed round the room shaking hands with each one. Then the form approached Mr. Eglinton, who was partially supported from falling by Mr. Rogers, and, taking the medium by the shoulders, dragged him into the cabinet. Mr. Rogers says: “The form was that of a man taller by several inches and older than the medium. He was apparelled in a white flowing robe, and was full of life and animation, and at one time was fully ten feet away from the medium.”

Particular interest attaches to that phase of his mediumship known as Psychography, or slate-writing. With regard to this there is an overwhelming mass of testimony. In view of the wonderful results he obtained it is worthy of note that he sat for over three years without receiving a scratch of writing. It was from the year 1884 that he concentrated his powers on this form of manifestation, which was considered to be most suited to beginners, especially as all the seances were held in the light. Eglinton, in refusing to give a seance for materialisation to a party of inquirers who had had no experience of this phase, wrote giving the following reason for his action: “I hold that a medium is placed in a very responsible position, and that he has a right to satisfy, as far as he possibly can, those who come to him. Now, my experience, which is a varied one, leads me to the conclusion that no sceptic, however well-intentioned or honest, can be convinced by the conditions prevailing at a materialisation seance, and the result is further scepticism on his part, and condemnation of the medium. It is different when there is a harmonious circle of Spiritualists who are advanced enough to witness such phenomena, and with whom I shall always be delighted to sit; but a neophyte must be prepared by other methods. If your friend cares to come to a slate-writing seance I shall be happy to arrange an hour, otherwise I must decline to sit, for the reasons stated above, and which must commend themselves to you as to all thinking Spiritualists.”

In the case of Eglinton, it may be explained that common school slates were used (the sitter being at liberty to bring his own slates), and after being washed, a crumb of slate pencil was placed on the upper surface and the slate placed under the leaf of the table, pressed against it and held by the hand of the medium, whose thumb was visible on the upper surface of the table. Presently the sound of writing was heard, and on the signal of three taps being given, the slate was examined and found to contain a written message. In the same way two slates of the same size were used, bound tightly together with cord, and also what are known as box slates, to which a lock and key are attached. On many occasions writing was obtained on a single slate resting on the upper surface of the table, with the pencil between it and the table.

Mr. Gladstone had a sitting with Eglinton on October 29, 1884, and expressed himself as very interested in what took place. When an account of this sitting appeared in Light it was copied by nearly all the leading papers throughout the country, and the movement gained considerably by this publicity. At the conclusion of the seance Mr. Gladstone is reported as saying: “I have always thought that scientific men run too much in a groove. They do noble work in their own special lines of research, but they are too often indisposed to give any attention to matters which seem to conflict with their established modes of thought. Indeed, they not infrequently attempt to deny that into which they have never inquired, not sufficiently realising the fact that there may possibly be forces in nature of which they know nothing.” Shortly afterwards Mr. Gladstone, while never professing himself to be a Spiritualist, showed his sustained interest in the subject by joining the Society for Psychical Research.

Eglinton did not escape the usual attacks. In June, 1886, Mrs. Sidgwick, wife of Professor Sidgwick, of Cambridge, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, published an article in the JOURNAL of the S.P.R. entitled “Mr. Eglinton,”* in which, after giving other people’s descriptions from over forty seances for slate-writing with this medium, she says: “For myself, I have now no hesitation in attributing the performances to clever conjuring.” She had no personal experience with Eglinton, but based her belief on the impossibility of maintaining continuous observation during the manifestations. In the columns of LIGHT Eglinton invited testimony from sitters who were convinced of the genuineness of his mediumship, and in a later special supplement of the same journal a very large number responded, many of them being members and associates of the S.P.R. Dr. George Herschell, an experienced amateur conjurer of fourteen years’ standing, furnished one of the many convincing replies to Mrs. Sidgwick.

* June, 1886, pp. 282-324. 1886, p. 309.

The Society for Psychical Research also published minute accounts of the results obtained by Mr. S. J. Davey, who professed to obtain by trickery similar and even more wonderful results in slate-writing than those occurring with Eglinton.* Mr. C. C. Massey, barrister, a very competent and experienced observer, and a member of the S.P.R., embodied the views of many others when he wrote to Eglinton in reference to Mrs. Sidgwick’s article:

* S.P.R. PROCEEDINGS, Vol. IV, pp. 416-487.

I quite concur in what you say that she “adduces not one particle of evidence” in support of this most injurious judgment which is opposed to a great body of excellent testimony, only encountered by presumptions contrary, as it seems to me, to common sense and to all experience.

On the whole, Mrs. Sidgwick’s rash attack on the medium had a good effect, because it called forth a volume of more or less expert testimony in favour of the genuineness of the manifestations occurring with him.

Eglinton, like so many other mediums for physical manifestations, had his “exposures.” One of these was in Munich, where he had been engaged to give a series of twelve seances. Ten of these had proved very successful, but at the eleventh a mechanical frog was discovered in the room, and though the medium’s hands were held, he was charged with fraud because the musical instruments, having been secretly blackened, black was afterwards found on him. Three months later a sitter confessed that he had brought the mechanical toy into the room. No explanation of the blackening was forthcoming, but the fact of the medium’s hands being held should have been sufficient refutation.

A fuller knowledge since that time has shown us that physical phenomena depend upon ectoplasm, and that this ectoplasm is reabsorbed into the body of the medium carrying any colouring matter with it. Thus, in the case of Miss Goligher after an experiment with carmine, Dr. Crawford found stains of carmine in various parts of her skin. Thus, both in the case of the mechanical frog and of the lamp-black, it was, as so often happens, the “exposers” who were in the wrong and not the unfortunate medium.

A more serious charge against him was made by Archdeacon Colley, who declared * that at the house of Mr. Owen Harries, where Eglinton was giving a seance, he discovered in the medium’s portmanteau some muslin and a beard, with which portions of drapery and hair cut from alleged materialised figures corresponded. Mrs. Sidgwick, in her article in the S.P.R. journal, reproduced Archdeacon Colley’s charges, and Eglinton, in his general reply to her, contents himself with a flat denial, remarking that he was absent in South Africa when the charges were published and did not see them until years after.

* MEDIUM AND DAYBREAK, 1878, pp. 698, 730. THE SPIRITUALIST, 1879, Vol. XIV, pp. 83, 135. 1886, p. 324.

Discussing this incident, LIGHT in a leading article says that the charges in question were fully investigated by the Council of the British National Association of Spiritualists and dismissed on the ground that the Council could by no means get direct evidence from the accusers. It goes on:

Mrs. Sidgwick has suppressed very material facts in her quotation as printed in the JOURNAL. In the first place the alleged circumstances occurred two years previous to the letter in which the accuser made his charge, during which time he made no public move in the matter, and only did so at all in consequence of personal pique against the Council of the late

B.N.A.S. In the second place, the suppressed portions of the letter quoted by Mrs. Sidgwick bear upon their face the mark of utter worthlessness. We affirm that no one accustomed to examine and weigh evidence in a scientific manner would have accorded to the correspondence the slightest serious attention without the clearest corroborative testimony.

None the less, it must be admitted that when so whole-hearted a Spiritualist as Archdeacon Colley makes so definite a charge, it becomes a grave matter which cannot be lightly dismissed. There is always the possibility that a great medium, finding his powers deserting him-as such powers do-should resort to fraud in order to fill up the gap until they return. Home has narrated how his power was suddenly taken from him for a year and then returned in full plenitude. When a medium lives on his work such a hiatus must be a serious matter and tempt him to fraud. However that may have been in this particular instance, it is certain, as has surely been shown in these pages, that there is a mass of evidence as to the reality of the powers of Eglinton which cannot possibly be shaken. Among other witnesses to his powers is Kellar, the famous conjurer, who admitted, as many other conjurers have done, that psychic phenomena far transcend the powers of the juggler.

There is no writer who has left his mark upon the religious side of Spiritualism so strongly as the Reverend W. Stainton Moses. His inspired writings confirmed what had already been accepted, and defined much which was nebulous. He is generally accepted by Spiritualists as being the best modern exponent of their views. They do not, however, regard him as final or infallible, and in posthumous utterances which bear good evidence of being veridical, he has himself declared that his enlarged experience has modified his views upon certain points. This is the inevitable result of the new life to each of us. These religious views will be treated in the separate chapter which deals with the religion of Spiritualists.

Besides being a religious teacher of an inspired type, Stainton Moses was a strong medium, so that he was one of the few men who could follow the apostolic precept and demonstrate not only by words but also by power. In this short account it is the physical side which we must emphasize.

Stainton Moses was born in Lincolnshire on November 5, 1839, and was educated at Bedford Grammar School and Exeter College, Oxford. He turned his thoughts towards the ministry, and after some years’ service as a curate in the Isle of Man and elsewhere he became a master at University

College School. It is remarkable that in the course of his wanderjahre he visited the monastery of Mount Athos, and spent six months there-a rare experience for an English Protestant. He was assured later that this marked the birth of his psychic career.

Whilst Stainton Moses was a curate he had an opportunity of showing his bravery and sense of duty. A severe epidemic of smallpox broke out in the parish which was without a resident doctor. His biographer says: “Day and night he was in attendance at the bedside of some poor victim who was stricken by the fell disease, and sometimes after he had soothed the sufferer’s dying moments by his ministrations he was compelled to combine the offices of priest and gravedigger and conduct the interment with his own hands.” It is no wonder that when he left he received a strongly worded testimonial from the inhabitants, which may be summed up in the one sentence, “The longer we have known you and the more we have seen of your work, the greater has our regard for you increased.”

It was in 1872 that his attention was drawn to Spiritualism through seances with Williams and Miss Lottie Fowler. Before long he found that he himself possessed the gift of mediumship to a very unusual extent. At the same time he was prompted to make a thorough study of the subject, bringing his strong intellect to bear upon every phase of it. His writings, under the signature of “M.A. Oxon.,” are among the classics of Spiritualism. They include “Spirit Teachings,” “Higher Aspects of Spiritualism,” and other works. Finally, he became editor of Light, and sustained its high traditions for many years. His mediumship steadily progressed until it included almost every physical phenomenon with which we are acquainted.

These results were not obtained until he had passed through a period of preparation. He says:

For a long time I failed in getting the evidence I wanted, and if I had done as most investigators do, I should have abandoned the quest in despair. My state of mind was too positive, and I was forced to take some personal pains before I obtained what I desired. Bit by bit, here a little and there a little, the evidence came, AS MY MIND OPENED TO RECEIVE IT. Some six months were spent in persistent daily efforts to bring home to me proof of the perpetuated existence of human spirits and their power to communicate.

In Stainton Moses’s presence heavy tables rose in the air, and books and letters were brought from one room into another in the light. There is independent testimony to these manifestations from trustworthy witnesses.

The late Serjeant Cox, in his book “What am I?” records the following incident which occurred with Stainton Moses:

On Tuesday, June 2nd, 1813, a personal friend, a gentleman of high social position, a graduate of Oxford, came to my residence in Russell Square, to dress for a dinner party to which we were invited. He had previously exhibited considerable power as a Psychic. Having half an hour to spare we went into the dining-room. It was just six o’clock and, of course, broad daylight. I was opening letters, he was reading The Times. My dining-table is of mahogany, very heavy, old-fashioned, six feet wide, nine feet long. It stands on a Turkey carpet, which much increases the difficulty of moving it. A subsequent trial showed that the united efforts of two strong men standing were required to move it one inch. There was no cloth upon it, and the light fell full under it. No person was in the room but my friend and myself. Suddenly, as we were sitting thus, frequent and loud rappings came upon the table. My friend was then sitting holding the newspaper with both hands, one arm resting on the table, the other on the back of a chair, and turned sidewise from the table so that his legs and feet were not under the table but at the side of it. Presently the solid table quivered as if with an ague fit. Then it swayed to and fro so violently as almost to dislocate the big pillar-like legs, of which there are eight. Then it moved forward about three inches. I looked under it to be sure that it was not touched; but still it moved, and still the blows were loud upon it.

This sudden access of the force at such a time and in such a place, with none present but myself and my friend, and with no thought then of invoking it, caused the utmost astonishment in both of us. My friend said that nothing like it had ever before occurred to him. I then suggested that it would be an invaluable opportunity, with so great a power in action, to make trial of motion without contact, the presence of two persons only, the daylight, the place, the size and weight of the table, making the experiment a crucial one. Accordingly we stood upright, he on one side of the table, I on the other side of it. We stood two feet from it, and held our hands eight inches above it. In one minute it rocked violently. Then it moved over the carpet a distance of seven inches. Then it rose three inches from the floor on the side on which my friend was standing. Then it rose equally on my side. Finally, my friend held his hands four inches over the end of the table, and asked that it would rise and touch his hand three times. It did so; and then, in accordance with the like request, it rose to my hand, held at the other end to the same height above it, and in the same manner.

At Douglas, Isle of Man, during a Sunday in August, 1872, a remarkable exhibition of spirit power was given. The facts related by Stanton Moses are corroborated by Dr. and Mrs. Speer, at whose house the phenomena occurred, and they lasted from breakfast-time until ten o'clock at night. Raps followed the medium wherever he went in the house and even at church he and Dr. and Mrs. Speer heard them while sitting in their pew. On returning from church Stanton Moses found in his bedroom that objects had been moved from the toilet table and laid on the bed in the form of a cross. He went to summon Dr. Speer to witness what had taken place, and on returning to the bedroom discovered that his collar, which he had removed a minute or so before, had in his absence been placed round the head of the improvised cross. He and Dr. Speer locked the door of the bedroom and adjourned to lunch, but during the course of the meal loud raps occurred and the heavy dining-table was moved three or four times. On a further inspection of the bedroom they found that two other articles from the dressing-case had been added to the cross. The room was again locked, and at three subsequent visits fresh objects had been added to the cross. We are told that on the first occasion there was no one in the house who was likely to play a trick, and that afterwards adequate precautions were taken to prevent such a thing from happening.

Mrs. Speer's version of this series of events is as follows:

During the time we were at church, raps were heard by each member of the circle in different parts of the pew in which we were all sitting. On our return Mr. S. M. found on his bed three things removed from his dressing table, and placed in the form of a cross on his bed. He called Dr. S. into his room to see what had taken place during our absence. Dr. S. heard loud raps on the foot board of the bed. He then locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and left the room vacant for a time. We went to dinner, and during our meal the large dining-table, covered with glass, china, etc., repeatedly moved, tilted and rapped; it seemed to be full of life and motion.

Raps accompanied the tune of a hymn our little girl was singing, and intelligent raps followed our conversation. We paid several visits to the locked-up room, and each time found an addition had been made to the cross. Dr. S. kept the key, unlocked the door, and left the room last. At last all was finished. The cross was placed down the centre of the bed; all the dressing things had been used that our friend had in his travelling dressing-case. Each time we went into the room raps occurred. At our last visit it was proposed to leave a piece of paper and pencil on the bed, and when we returned again we found the initials of three friends of Mr. S. M.'s, all dead, and unknown to anyone in the house but himself. The cross was perfectly symmetrical, and had been made in a locked room that no one could enter, and was indeed a startling manifestation of spirit power.

A drawing showing the various toilet articles in their arranged form is given in Arthur Lillie's "Modern Mystics and Modern Magic" (p. 72). Further examples are given in the Appendix.

At his sittings with Dr. and Mrs. Speer many communications were received, giving proofs of the identity of the spirits in the form of names, dates, and places, unknown to the sitters, but afterwards verified.

A band of spirits is said to have been associated with his mediumship. Through them a body of teaching was communicated by means of automatic writing, beginning on March 30, 1873, and continuing to the year 1880. A selection of them is embodied in "Spirit Teachings." In his Introduction to this book Stanton Moses writes:

The subject-matter was always of a pure and elevated character, much of it being of personal application, intended for my own guidance and direction. I may say that throughout the whole of these written communications, extending in unbroken continuity to the year 1880, there is no flippant message, no attempt at jest, no vulgarity or incongruity, no false or misleading statement, so far as I know or could discover; nothing incompatible with the avowed object, again and again repeated, of instruction, enlightenment and guidance by Spirits fitted for the task. Judged as I should wish to be judged myself, they were what they pretended to be. Their words were words of sincerity, and of sober, serious purpose.

A detailed account of the various persons communicating, many of them having renowned names, will be found in Mr. A. W. Tetley's book, "The 'Controls' of Stainton Moses" (1923).

Stainton Moses aided in the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, but resigned from that body in 1886 in disgust at its treatment of the medium William Eglinton. He was the first president of the London Spiritualist Alliance, formed in 1884, a position he retained until his death.

In addition to his books “Spirit Identity” (1879), “Higher Aspects of Spiritualism” (1880), “Psychography” (2nd ed. 1882), and “Spirit Teachings” (1883), he contributed frequently to the Spiritualist Press as well as to the SATURDAY REVIEW, PUNCH, and other high-class journals.

A masterly summary of his mediumship was contributed to the PROCEEDINGS of the Society for Psychical Research by Mr. F. W. H. Myers.* In an obituary notice of him Mr. Myers writes: “I personally regard his life as one of the most noteworthy lives of our generation, and from few men have I heard at first hand facts comparable in importance for me with those which I heard from him.”

* PROCEEDINGS S.P.R., Vol. IX, pp. 245-353. and Vol. XI, pp. 24-113.

The various mediums treated in this chapter may be said to cover the different types of mediumship prevalent during this period, but there were many who were almost as well known as those which have been quoted, Thus Mrs. Marshall brought knowledge to many; Mrs. Guppy showed powers which in some directions have never been surpassed; Mrs. Everitt, an amateur, continued throughout a long life to be a centre of psychic force; and Mrs. Mellon, both in England and in Australia, excelled in materialisation s and in physical phenomena.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

Any full account of the activities of the Psychical Research Society, with its strangely mingled record of usefulness and obstruction, would be out of place in this volume. There are some points, however, which need to be brought out, and some cases which should be discussed. In certain directions the work of the society has been excellent, but from the beginning it made the capital error of assuming a certain supercilious air towards Spiritualism, which had the effect of alienating a number of men who could have been helpful in its councils, and, above all, of offending those mediums without whose willing co-operation the work of the society could not fail to be barren. At the present moment the society possesses an excellent seance room, but the difficulty is to persuade any medium to enter it. This is as it should be, for both the medium and the cause he represents are in danger when misrepresentation and injurious charges are made as lightly as in the past. Psychical research should show some respect for the feelings and opinions of Spiritualists, for it is very certain that without the latter the former would not have existed.

Amid the irritations of what they regard as offensive criticism Spiritualists must not forget that the society has at various times done some excellent work. It has, for example, been the mother of many other societies which are more active than itself. It has also nurtured a number of men both in London and in its American branch who have followed the evidence and have become whole-hearted advocates of the spirit view. Indeed, it is not too much to say that nearly all the bigger men, the men who showed signs of strong mentality apart from this particular subject, adopted the psychic explanation. Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Russel Wallace, Lord Rayleigh, Sir William Barrett, Professor William James, Professor Hyslop, Dr. Richard Hodgson, and Mr. F. W. H. Myers were all in different degrees on the side of the angels.

There had been a previous society of the same nature, the Psychological Society of Great Britain, which was founded in 1875 by Mr. Serjeant Cox.

On the death of this gentleman in 1879 this society dissolved. On January 6, 1882, a meeting was held at the initiative of Sir William Barrett to consider the formation of a new society, and on February 20 it came into being. Professor Henry Sidgwick of Cambridge was elected President, and among the Vice-Presidents was the Rev. W. Stainton Moses. The Council included such representative Spiritualists as Mr. Edmund Dawson Rogers, Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood, Dr. George Wyld, Mr. Alexander Calder, and Mr. Morell Theobald. We shall see in the course of our review of its history how the Society for Psychical Research gradually alienated the sympathies of these members and caused many of them to resign, and how the cleavage thus early begun has gone on widening with the passage of the years.

A manifesto of the society sets out:

It has been widely felt that the present is an opportune time for making an organized and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic.

Professor Sidgwick, in his first presidential address to the society on July 17, 1882, speaking of the need for psychical research, said:

We are all agreed that the present state of things is a scandal to the enlightened age in which we live, that the dispute as to the reality of these marvellous phenomena of which it is quite impossible to exaggerate the scientific importance, if only a tenth part of what has been alleged by generally credible witnesses could be shown to be true-I say it is a scandal that the dispute as to the reality of these phenomena should still be going on, that so many competent witnesses should have declared their belief in them, that so many others should be profoundly interested in having the question determined, and yet that the educated world, as a body, should still be simply in an attitude of incredulity.

The attitude of the society, as thus defined by its first president, was a fair and reasonable one. Answering a criticism to the effect that their intention was to reject as untrustworthy the results of all previous inquiries into psychical phenomena, he said:

I do not presume to suppose that I could produce evidence better in quality than much that has been laid before the world by writers of indubitable scientific repute-men like Mr. Crookes, Mr. Wallace, and the late Professor De Morgan. But it is clear from what I have defined as the aim of the society, however good some of its evidence may be in quality, we require a great deal more of it.

The educated world, he pointed out, was not yet convinced, and thus more evidence must be piled up. He did not add that there was abundant evidence already but that the world had not yet troubled to examine it.

Returning to this aspect at the close of his address he said:

Scientific incredulity has been so long in growing, and has so many and so strong roots, that we shall only kill it, if we are able to kill it at all as regards any of those questions, by burying it alive under a heap of facts. We must keep “pegging away,” as Lincoln said; we must accumulate fact upon fact, and add experiment upon experiment, and, I should say, not wrangle too much with incredulous outsiders about the conclusiveness of any one, but trust to the mass of evidence for conviction. The highest degree of demonstrative force that we can obtain out of any single record of investigation is, of course, limited by the trustworthiness of the investigator. We have done all that we can when the critic has nothing left to allege except that the investigator is in the trick. But when he has nothing else left he will allege that. We must drive the objector into the position of being forced either to admit the phenomena as inexplicable, at least by him, or to accuse the investigators either of lying or cheating or of a blindness or forgetfulness incompatible with any intellectual condition except absolute idiocy.

The early work of the society was devoted to an experimental investigation of thought-transference, a subject which Sir William (then Professor) Barrett had brought before the British Association in 1876. After long and patient research it was considered that thought-transference, or telepathy, as it was named by Mr. F. W. H. Myers, was an established fact. In the domain of mental phenomena much valuable work has been done by the society, and this has been placed on record in a systematic and careful manner in the society’s “Proceedings.” Its researches, too, into what are known as “Cross Correspondences” constitute an important phase of its activities. The investigation of the mediumship of Mrs. Piper was also a notable work, to which we shall refer later.

Where the society has been less fortunate has been in its consideration of what are known as the physical phenomena of Spiritualism. Mr. E. T. Bennett, for twenty years the assistant secretary to the society, thus refers to this aspect:

It is a remarkable thing, we are inclined to say one of the most remarkable things in the history of the society, that this branch of inquiry should have been-it is hardly an exaggeration to say-absolutely barren of result. It may also be said that the result has been barren in proportion to the simplicity of the alleged phenomena. As to the moving of tables and other objects without contact, the production of audible raps, and of visible lights, opinion, even within the society itself, to say nothing of the outside intelligent world, is in the same state of chaos as it was twenty years ago. The question of the movement of tables without contact is exactly in the state in which it was left by the Dialectical Society in the year 1869. Even then, the fact of the movement of a heavy dining-room table, untouched by anyone present, and not in the presence of a professional medium, was attested by a number of well-known men. If it was "a scandal that the dispute as to the reality of these phenomena should still be going on," when Professor Sidgwick gave his first presidential address, how much more of a scandal is it that now, after the lapse of nearly another quarter of a century, "the educated world as a body should still be simply in an attitude of incredulity." In the whole series of volumes issued by the society, there is no light whatever thrown on these simple alleged phenomena of seeing and hearing. With regard to the higher physical phenomena which imply intelligence for their production, such as Direct Writing and Spirit Photography, some investigation has been made, but to a large extent, though not entirely, with negative results.*

* "Twenty Years of Psychical Research," by Edward T. Bennett (1904), pp. 21-2. LIGHT, 1833, p. 54.

These sweeping charges against the society are made by a friendly critic. Let us see how Spiritualists of that time viewed its activities. To start from near the beginning, we find early in 1883, a year after the formation of the society, a correspondent writing to Light asking, "What is the distinction between the Society for Psychical Research and the Central Association of Spiritualists?" and also inquiring whether there was any antagonism between the two bodies. The reply is given in a leading article from which we make this extract. With our retrospect of forty years from that date it has an historic interest:

Spiritualists cannot doubt what the end will be-they cannot doubt that, as time goes on, the Society for Psychical Research will afford as clear and unquestionable proofs of clairvoyance, of spirit-writing, of spiritual appearances, and of the various forms of physical phenomena as they have so successfully afforded of thought-reading. But mean while there is a sharp line of distinction between the Society for Psychical Research and the Central Association of Spiritualists. The Spiritualists have a settled faith-nay, more, a certain knowledge-in regard to facts about which the Society for Psychical Research would not yet profess to have any knowledge whatever. The Society for Psychical Research are busy with phenomena only, seeking evidence of their existence. To them the idea of spirit communion, of sweet converse with dear departed friends-so precious to Spiritualists-has no present interest. We speak of them, of course, as a Society-not of individual members. As a Society they are studying the mere bones and muscles, and have not yet penetrated to the heart and soul.

The editor, continuing, takes a dip into the future, though how distant a future it was destined to prove he could not see:

As a Society, they cannot yet call themselves Spiritualists. As a Society, they will, as their proofs accumulate, in all probability become-first, "Spiritualists without the spirits"-and ultimately very like other Spiritualists, with the added satisfaction that in reaching that position they have made good every step in their path as they went along, and have, by their cautious conduct, induced many noble and clever men and women to tread the same way with them.

In conclusion, the correspondent is assured that there is no antagonism between the two bodies, and that Spiritualists are confident that the Society for Psychical Research is doing a most useful work.

The extract is instructive, showing as it does the kindly feelings entertained by the leading Spiritualist organ towards the new society. The prophecy accompanying it, however, has been far from realised. In an exaggerated striving after what was considered to be an impartial, scientific attitude, a certain little group within the society has continued for many years to maintain a position, if not of hostility to, yet of persistent denial of, the reality of physical manifestations observed with particular mediums. It has mattered not what weight of testimony was forthcoming from trustworthy men whose qualifications and experience made them worthy of credence. As soon as the Society for Psychical Research came to consider such testimony, or, more rarely, to conduct an investigation for themselves, either open charges of fraud were levelled against the mediums or possibilities of how the results might have been obtained by other than supernormal means were suggested. Thus, we have Mrs. Sidgwick, who is one of the worst offenders in this respect, saying of a sitting with Mrs. Jencken (Kate Fox), held in light reported to be sufficient to read print by, when direct writing was obtained on a sheet of paper supplied by the sitters and placed under the table: “We thought that Mrs. Jencken might have written the word with her foot.” Of Henry Slade: “The impression on my mind after about ten seances with Dr. Sladeis that the phenomena are produced by tricks.” Of William Eglinton’s slatewriting: “For myself I have now no hesitation in attributing the performances to clever conjuring.” One lady medium, the daughter of a well-known professor, described to the author how impossible, and indeed how unconsciously insulting, was the attitude of Mrs. Sidgwick on such an occasion.

Many further quotations to the same effect, and about other famous mediums, could be given, as already stated. A paper entitled “Mr. Eglinton,” contributed by Mrs. Sidgwick to the society’s JOURNAL in 1886, caused a storm of angry criticism, and a special supplement of Light was devoted to letters of protest. In an editorial comment coming from Mr. Stainton Moses, this newspaper, which in the past had shown such uniform sympathy with the new body, writes

The Society for Psychical Research have in more than one direction placed themselves in a false position, and when their attention has been drawn to the fact, have allowed judgment to go by default. Indeed, the secret history of “Psychical Research” in England will, when written, prove a very instructive and suggestive narrative. Moreover, we regret to say that (and we say it with a full sense of the gravity of our words), as far as free and full discussion of these matters is concerned, their policy has been an obstructionist one. In these circumstances, therefore, it rests with the Society for Psychical Research itself to decide whether the friction which now unfortunately exists shall be intensified, or whether a MODUS VIVENDI between themselves and the Spiritualistic body shall be established. No official disavowal of Mrs. Sidgwick’s views as being representative of the Society has, however, yet been made. That is assuredly the first step.

The situation here indicated in the fourth year of the existence of this society has continued with little alteration until the present day. We can see it well described by Sir Oliver Lodge,* who says of the society, while of course not agreeing with the dictum: “It has been called a society for the suppression of facts, for the wholesale imputation of imposture, for the discouragement of the sensitive, and for the repudiation of every revelation of the kind which was said to be pressing itself upon humanity from the regions of light and knowledge.”

* “The Survival of Man.” (1909), p. 6.

If this criticism be deemed too severe, it at least indicates the tone of a considerable body of influential opinion regarding the Society for Psychical Research.

One of the earliest public activities of the S.P.R. was the journey to India of their representative, Dr. Richard Hodgson, in order to investigate the alleged miracles which had occurred at Adyar, the headquarters of Madame Blavatsky, who had taken so prominent a part in resuscitating the ancient wisdom of the East and forming it, under the name of Theosophy, into a philosophic system which would be intelligible to and acceptable by the West. This is not the place to discuss the mixed character of that remarkable woman, and it may simply be stated that Dr. Hodgson formed a most adverse opinion of her and her alleged miracles. For a time it seemed that this conclusion was final, but later some reasons were put forward for its reconsideration, the best epitome of which is to be found in Mrs. Besant’s defence.* Mrs. Besant’s chief point is that the witnesses were thoroughly malicious and corrupt, and that much of the evidence was clearly manufactured. The net result is that while this and similar episodes will always cast a shadow over Madame Blavatsky’s record, it cannot be said that the particular case was finally established. In this as in other instances the society’s standard of evidence, when it wishes to prove fraud, is very much more elastic than when it examines some alleged psychic phenomenon.

* “H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of Wisdom.” (Theosophical Publishing House.) LIGHT, 1901, p. 523.

It is more pleasing to turn to the thorough examination of the mediumship of Mrs. Leonora Piper, the celebrated sensitive of Boston, U.S.A., for this ranks amongst the finest of the results achieved by the Society for Psychical Research. It was continued over a period of fifteen years, and the records are voluminous. Among the investigators were such well-known and competent men as Professor William James, of Harvard University, Dr. Richard Hodgson, and Professor Hyslop, of Columbia University. These three were convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena occurring in her presence, and all favoured the Spiritualistic interpretation of them.

The Spiritualists were naturally jubilant at this justification of their claims. Mr. E. Dawson Rogers, President of the London Spiritualist Alliance, at a gathering of that body on October 24, 1901, said:

A little event has occurred during the past few days which it is thought calls for a few words from myself. As many of you know, our friends of the Psychical Research Society-or some of them-have come over to our camp. I do not mean to say they have joined the London Spiritualist Alliance-but I mean that some who laughed and scoffed at us a few years ago now proclaim themselves as adherents to our creed; that is, adherents to the hypothesis or theory that man continues to live after death, and that under certain conditions it is possible for him to communicate with those he has left behind.

Well, now, I have a somewhat painful memory of the early history of the Society for Psychical Research. I was, fortunately or unfortunately, a member of its first Council, as was also our dear departed friend W. Stainton Moses. We sat together and we were sadly distressed by the way in which the Council of the Society for Psychical Research received any suggestion about the possibility of demonstrating the continued existence of man after so-called death. The result was that, being unable to endure it any longer, Mr. Stainton Moses and I resigned our position on the Council. However, time has had its revenges. At that time our friends professed to be anxious to discover the truth, but they hoped, and strongly hoped, that the truth would be that Spiritualism was a fraud.

Happily that time, and that attitude, have passed, and we can now regard the Society for Psychical Research as an excellent friend. It has gone assiduously and sedulously to work, and has proved our case-if it needed proving-up to the hilt. First of all we had our good friend Mr. F. W. H. Myers, whose memory we all cherish, and we do not forget that Mr. Myers stated plainly that he had come to the conclusion that the Spiritualistic hypothesis alone accounted for the phenomena he had himself witnessed. Then there is Dr. Hodgson. You will remember, those of you who have been long acquainted with the subject, how earnestly he pursued all who professed Spiritualism. He was a very Saul persecuting the Christians. Yet he himself, by virtue of his investigations of the phenomena occurring in the presence of Mrs. Leonora Piper, came over to our side, and honestly and fearlessly declared himself a convert to the Spiritualistic hypothesis. And now within the last few days we have had a notable volume by Professor Hyslop, of the Columbia University, New York, and published by the Society for Psychical Research-a book of 650 pages, which shows that he too, a vice-president of the Society for Psychical Research, is convinced that the Spiritualistic hypothesis is the only possible hypothesis to explain the phenomena he has witnessed. They are all coming in, and I am beginning almost to have a hope of our good friend Mr. Podmore.

From our vantage ground of twenty odd years later, we see that this forecast was altogether too optimistic. But the work with Mrs. Piper stands beyond challenge.

Professor James became acquainted with Mrs. Piper in 1885, through hearing of the visit of a relative of his who obtained highly interesting results. Though he was rather sceptical, he determined to investigate for himself. He obtained a number of evidential messages. For instance, his mother-in-law had lost her bank-book, but Dr. Phinuit, Mrs. Piper's control, when asked to help in finding it, told her where it was, and the statement proved to be correct. On another occasion this control said to Professor James: "Your child has a boy named Robert F. as a playfellow in our world." The F.s were cousins of Mrs. James and lived in a distant town. Professor James told his wife that Dr. Phinuit had made a mistake in the sex of the dead child of the F.'s, because he had said it was a boy. But Professor James was wrong; the child was a boy, and the information supplied was correct. Here there could be no question of reading the sitter's conscious mind. Many more examples of veridical communications could be given. Professor James describes Mrs. Piper as an absolutely simple and genuine person, and says of his investigation, "The result is to make me feel as absolutely certain as I am of any personal fact in the world, that she knows things in her trances which she cannot possibly have heard in her waking state."

After Dr. Richard Hodgson's death in 1905, Professor Hyslop obtained through Mrs. Piper a series of evidential communications which convinced him that he was indeed in touch with his friend and fellow-worker. Hodgson, for instance, reminded him of a private medium about whose powers the two men had differed. He said he had visited her, adding, "I found things better than I thought." He spoke of a coloured-water test which he and Hyslop had employed to test a medium five hundred miles distant from Boston, and about which Mrs. Piper could know nothing. There was also the mention of a discussion he had had with Hyslop about cutting down the manuscript of one of Hyslop's books. The sceptic may object that these facts were within the knowledge of Professor Hyslop, from whom Mrs. Piper obtained, them telepathically. But accompanying the communications there were many evidences of personal peculiarities of Dr. Hodgson which Professor Hyslop recognised.

To enable the reader to judge the cogency of some of the evidence given through Mrs. Piper under the Phinuit control, the following case is extracted:*

* PROCEEDINGS of S.P.R., Vol. VI, p. 509. Quoted in M. Sage's "Mrs. Piper and the S.P.R.".

At the 45th English sitting on Dec. 24, 1889, when Messrs. Oliver and Alfred Lodge and Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were the sitters, Phinuit suddenly said:

"Do you know Richard, Rich, Mr. Rich?"

MRS. THOMPSON: "Not well. I knew a Dr. Rich."

PHINUIT: "That's him. He's passed out. He sends kindest regards to his father."

At the 83rd sitting, when Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were again present, Phinuit said all at once: "Here's Dr. Rich!" upon which Dr. Rich proceeds to speak:

DR. RICH: "It is very kind of this gentleman" (i.e. Dr. Phinuit) "to let me speak to you. Mr. Thompson, I want you to give a message to father."

MR. THOMPSON: "I will give it."

DR. RICH: "Thank you a thousand times; it is very good of you. You see, I passed out rather suddenly. Father was very much troubled about it, and he is troubled yet. He hasn't got over it. Tell him I am alive-that I send my love to him. Where are my glasses?" (The medium passes her hands over her eyes.) "I used to wear glasses." (True.)

"I think he has them, and some of my books. There was a little black case I had-I think he has that, too.

I don't want that lost. Sometimes he is bothered about a dizzy feeling in his head-nervous about it-but it is of no consequence."

MR. THOMPSON: "What does your father do?" The medium took up a card and appeared to write on it, and pretended to put a stamp in the corner.

DR. RICH: “He attends to this sort of thing. Mr. Thompson, if you will give this message, I will help you in many ways. I can, and I will.”

Professor Lodge remarks about this incident: “Mr. Rich, senior, is head of Liverpool Post Office. His son, Dr. Rich, was almost a stranger to Mr. Thompson, and quite a stranger to me. The father was much distressed about his son’s death, we find. Mr. Thompson has since been to see him and given him the message. He (Mr. Rich, senior) considers the episode very extraordinary and inexplicable, except by fraud of some kind. The phrase, ‘Thank you a thousand times,’ he asserts to be characteristic, and he admits a recent slight dizziness.” Mr. Rich did not know what his son meant by “a black case.” The only person who could give any information about it was at the time in Germany. But it was reported that Dr. Rich talked constantly about a black case when he was on his death-bed.

M. Sage comments, “No doubt Mr. and Mrs. Thompson knew Dr. Rich, having met him once. But they were quite ignorant of all the details here given. Whence did the medium take them? Not from the influence left on some object, because there was no such object at the sitting.”

Mrs. Piper had several controls at various stages of her long career. The original one was a Dr. Phinuit, who claimed to have been a French doctor, but whose account of his own earth life was contradictory and unsatisfactory. Apart from himself, however, his ministrations were most remarkable, and he convinced very many people that he was actually an intermediary between the living and the dead. Some of the objections to him, however, had force, for though it is quite possible that a prolonged experience of otherworld conditions may take the edge off our earthly recollections, it is hardly conceivable that it could do so to the extent which was implied by the statements of this control. On the other hand, the alternative theory that he was a secondary personality of Mrs. Piper, a single strand, as it were, separated from the complete fabric of her individuality, opens up even greater difficulties, since so much was given which was beyond any possible knowledge on the part of the medium.

In studying these phenomena Dr. Hodgson, who had been among the most severe critics of all transcendental explanations, was gradually forced to accept the spiritual hypothesis as the only one which covered the facts. He found that telepathy from sitter to medium would not do so. He was much impressed by the fact that where the communicating intelligence had been deranged in mind before death, the after messages were obscure and wild. This would be inexplicable if the messages were mere reflections from the memory of the sitter. On the other hand, there were cases, such as that of Hannah Wild, where a message sealed up in lifetime could not be given after death. While admitting the validity of such objections, one can but repeat that we should cling to the positive results and hope that fuller knowledge may give us the key which will explain those which seem negative. How can we realise what the laws are, and what the special difficulties, in such an experiment?

In March, 1892, the Phinuit control was largely superseded by the George Pelham control, and the whole tone of the communications was raised by the change. George Pelham was a young literary man who was killed at the age of thirty-two by a fall from his horse. He had taken an interest in psychic study, and had actually promised Dr. Hodgson that if he should pass away he would endeavour to furnish evidence. It was a promise which he very amply fulfilled, and the present author would wish to express his gratitude, for it was the study of the George Pelham records * which made his mind receptive and sympathetic until final proofs came to him at the time of the Great War.

* Dr. Hodgson's Report. PROCEEDINGS of S.P.R., Vol. XIII, pp. 284-582. M. Sage. "Mrs. Piper and the S.P.R." p. 98.

Pelham preferred to write through Mrs. Piper's hand, and it was no unusual thing for Phinuit to be talking and Pelham to be writing at the same moment. Pelham established his identity by meeting thirty old friends who were unknown to the medium, recognising them all, and addressing each in the tone which he had used in life. Never once did he mistake a stranger for a friend. It is difficult to imagine how continuity of individuality and power of communication-the two essentials of Spiritualism-could be more clearly established than by such a record. It is instructive that the act of communication was very pleasant to Pelham. "I am happy here, and more so since I find I can communicate with you. I pity those people who cannot speak." Sometimes he showed ignorance of the past. M. Sage, commenting upon this, wisely says: "If there is another world, spirits do not go there to ruminate on what has happened in our incomplete life: they go there to be carried away in the vortex of a higher and greater activity. If, therefore, they sometimes forget, it is not astonishing. Nevertheless, they seem to forget less than we do."

It is clear that if Pelham has established his identity, then all that he can tell us of his actual experience of the next world is of the utmost importance. This is where the phenomenal side of Spiritualism gives way to the religious side, for what assurance from the most venerable of teachers, or of writings, can give us the same absolute conviction as a first-hand account from one whom we have known and who is actually leading the life which he describes? This subject is treated more fully elsewhere, and so it must suffice here to say that Pelham's account is, in the main, the same as that which we have so often received, and that it depicts a life of gradual evolution which is a continuation of earth life and presents much the same features, though under a generally more agreeable form. It is not a life of mere pleasure or selfish idleness, but one where all our personal faculties are given a very wide field of action.

In 1898 James Hervey Hyslop, Professor of Logic and Ethics at Columbia University, took the place of Dr. Hodgson as chief experimenter. Starting in the same position of scepticism, he in turn was forced by the same experiences to the same conclusions. It is impossible to read his records, which are given in his various books and also in Vol. XVI of the S.P.R. Proceedings," without feeling that he could not possibly withstand the evidence. His father and many of his relatives returned and held conversations which were far beyond every alternative explanation of secondary personality or of telepathy. He does not beat about the bush in his conversation, but he says: "I have been talking with my father, my brother, my uncles," and everyone who reads his account will be forced to agree with him. How this society can have such evidence in its own "Proceedings," and yet, so far as the majority of its Council is concerned, remain unconverted to the spiritual view, is indeed a mystery. It can only be explained by the fact that there is a certain self-centred and limited-though possibly acute type of mind which receives no impression at all from that which happens to another, and yet is so constituted that it is the very last sort of mind likely to get evidence for itself on account of its effect upon the material on which such evidence depends. In this lies the reason for that which would otherwise be inexplicable.

No memory was too small or too definite for the father Hyslop to bring back to his son. Many of the facts had been forgotten and some never known by the latter. Two bottles upon his writing-desk, his brown penknife, his quill pen, the name of his pony, his black cap-people may describe such things as trivial, but they are essential in establishing personality. He had been a strict member of some small sect. Only in this did he seem to have changed. “Orthodoxy does not matter over here. I should have changed my mind in many things if I had known.”

It is interesting to note that when on his sixteenth interview Professor Hyslop adopted the methods of the Spiritualists, chatting freely and without tests, he obtained more actual corroboration than in all the fifteen sittings in which he had adopted every precaution. The incident confirms the opinion that the less restraint there is at such interviews the more successful are the results, and that the meticulous researcher often ruins his own sitting. Hyslop has left it on record that out of 205 incidents mentioned in these conversations he has been able to verify no fewer than 152.

Perhaps the most interesting and dramatic conversation ever held through Mrs. Piper is that between her two researchers after the death of Richard Hodgson in 1905. Here we have two men of first-class brain-Hodgson and Hyslop — the one “dead,” the other with his full faculties, keeping up a conversation at their accustomed level through the mouth and hand of this semi-educated and entranced woman. It is a wonderful, almost an inconceivable situation, that he who had so long been examining the spirit who used the woman should now actually be the spirit who used the woman, and be examined in turn by his old colleague. The whole episode is worthy of careful study.*

* “The Psychic Riddle.” Funk, p. 58 and onwards.

So, too, is the succeeding message, alleged to be from Stainton Moses. The following passage in it should give thought to many of our more material psychic researchers. The reader can decide for himself whether it is likely to have had its origin in the mind of Mrs. Piper:

This thought we all wish to impress upon you and upon the friends on earth, that there is a difference between the entrance into the Spirit World of those who seek for spiritual unfolding and those who simply seek for scientific knowledge. Dr. Hodgson says that I shall tell you that it was a great error that he kept himself so largely attuned to material life and material things. You will understand he means that he did not move in the realm of the higher or spiritual. He did not view these psychic matters from the standpoint that I did. He sought to base everything mainly on material facts, and did not seek to interpret anything wholly as spiritual. One that comes over as he came over is transplanted from one sphere of life into another like a babe just born. He has been besieged since he is here with messages started from your side. All manner of questions are being carried to him by messengers. This is all in vain: he cannot answer. He repeats that I shall tell you he realises now that he saw only one side of this great question, and that the lesser important.

Some description of this remarkable medium may interest the reader. Mr. A. J. Philpott says of her:

I found her a comely, well-built and healthy-looking woman of middle age, above the medium height, with brownish hair and a rather good-natured and matronly cast of countenance. She looked like a well-to-do woman without any particularly marked characteristics, either intellectual or otherwise. I had rather expected to find a different type of woman, somebody that would show more evidence of nerves; this woman looked as calm and phlegmatic as a German HAUSFRAU. She evidently never had bothered herself with metaphysical or any other kind of questions of a vague or abstract character. Somehow, she reminded me of a nurse I had seen in a hospital at one time-a calm, self-possessed woman.

Like many other great mediums, such as Margaret Fox-Kane, she was very agnostic as to the source of her own powers, which is the more natural in her case since she was always in deep trance, and had only second-hand accounts from which to judge what occurred. She was inclined herself to some crude and superficial telepathic explanation. As in the case of Eusapia Palladino, her mediumship came on after an injury to the head. Her powers seem to have left her as suddenly as they carne. The author met her in New York in 1922, at which time she seemed to have completely lost all her personal gifts, though she still retained her interest in the subject.

The society has devoted an enormous amount of patient work to the consideration of what are known as “cross correspondences.” Many hundreds of pages in the society’s “Proceedings” are given to this subject, which has aroused acute controversy.

It has been suggested that the scheme was originated on the Other Side by F. W. H. Myers as a method of communication that would eliminate that bugbear of so many psychic researchers-telepathy from the living. It is at least a certainty that while he was on earth Myers had considered the project in a simpler form, namely, to get the same word or message through two mediums.

But the cross correspondence of the S.P.R. is in the main of a much more complicated character. In this, one script is not a mere reproduction of statements made in another; the scripts seem rather designed to represent different aspects of the same idea, and often the information in one is explanatory and complementary of that in another.

Miss Alice Johnson, the Research Officer of the S.P.R., was the first to notice this link between the scripts. She cites this simple instance:

In one case, Mrs. Forbes's script, purporting to come from her son Talbot, stated that he must now leave her, since he was looking for a sensitive who wrote automatically, in order that he might obtain corroboration of her own writing.

Mrs. Verrall, on the same day, wrote of a fir tree planted in a garden, and the script was signed with a sword and suspended bugle. The latter was part of the badge of the regiment to which Talbot Forbes had belonged, and Mrs. Forbes had in her garden some fir trees, grown from seed sent to her by her son. These facts were unknown to Mrs. Verrall.

Miss Johnson, who made a close study of the scripts coming through Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Forbes, Mrs. Verrall, Mrs. Willett) Mrs. Piper, and others, thus describes the conclusion to which she came:

The characteristic of these cases-or, at least, some of them-is that we do not get in the writing of one automatist anything like a mechanical verbatim reproduction of phrases in the other. We do not even get the same idea expressed in different ways-as might well result from direct telepathy between them. What we get is a fragmentary utterance in one script, which seems to have no particular point or meaning, and another fragmentary utterance in the other, of an equally pointless character; but when we put the two together, we see that they supplement one another, and that there is apparently one coherent idea underlying both, but only partially expressed in each.

She says* — what is by no means the fact, because hundreds of cases to the contrary can be cited — that:

* S.P.R. Proceedings, Vol. XXI, p. 375.

The weakness of all well-authenticated cases of apparent telepathy from the dead is, of course, that they can generally be explained by telepathy from the living.

And she adds:

In these cross correspondences, however, we find apparently telepathy relating to the present-that is, the corresponding statements are approximately contemporaneous, and to events in the present which, to all intents and purposes, are unknown to any living person, since the meaning and point of her script is often uncomprehended by each automatist until the solution is found through putting the two scripts together. At the same time we have proof of what has occurred in the scripts themselves. Thus it appears that this method is directed towards satisfying our evidential requirements.

The student who will undertake the immense labour of carefully examining these documents-they run into hundreds of printed pages-may perhaps be satisfied by the evidence presented.

But, as a matter of fact, we find that many able and experienced psychic researchers consider it unsatisfactory. Here are a few opinions on the subject.

Richet says:

These are certainly well-marked cases of cryptesthesia, but whether there is cryptesthesia, or lucidity, or telepathy, these do not in any way imply survival of a conscious personality.*

* “Thirty Years of Psychical Research.”

It has to be remembered, however, that Richet is not an impartial controversialist, since an admission of Spirit would contradict all the teachings of his lifetime.

Dr. Joseph Maxwell is of the same school of thought as Richet. He says:

It is impossible to admit the intervention of a spirit. We want proof of facts, and the system of cross correspondences is founded on negative facts and is an unstable foundation. Only positive facts have an intrinsic value, which cross correspondences cannot show, not at present, at any rate.

It may be remarked that Maxwell, like Richet, has now come a long way towards the Spiritualistic position.

We find the matter discussed with fitting gravity in the London Spectator:

Even if such things (i.e. cross correspondences of a complex type) were common, might it not be argued that they would only prove that some conscious being was producing them; that they would scarcely prove that the conscious being was “in the spirit”; that they would certainly not prove that he was the particular dead person that he claimed to be? A cross correspondence is a possible proof of organization, not of identity.

It is true that many able men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. Gerald Balfour accept the evidence from cross correspondences. But if these satisfy only a comparative few, then their object has not been achieved.

Here are a few examples of the simpler kind taken from the S.P.R. "Proceedings." As anything from fifty to a hundred printed pages are devoted to a single one of the more complicated cases, it is difficult adequately to summarize them in a brief space, and it is impossible to exaggerate how wearisome they are to the reader in their entirety.

On March 11, 1907, at one o'clock, Mrs. Piper said in the waking stage:

"Violets."

On the same day at 11 a.m. Mrs. Verrall wrote automatically:

"With violet buds their heads were crowned."

"Violacea? odores." (Violet-coloured scents.) "Violet and olive leaf, purple and hoary." The city of the violet"

On April 8, 1907, the alleged spirit of Myers, through Mrs. Piper, said to Mrs. Sidgwick:

"Do you remember Euripides?Do you remember Spirit and Angel? I gave bothNearly all the words I have written to-day are with reference to messages I am trying to give through Mrs. V."

Mrs. Verrall had, on March 7, in the course of an automatic script, the words "Hercules Furens" and "Euripides." And on March 25 Mrs. Verrall had written:

The Hercules play comes in there and the clue is in the Euripides play, if you could only see it.

This certainly seems beyond coincidence. Again, on April 16, 1907, Mrs. Holland in India produced a script in which came the words "Mors" and "The shadow of death."

On the following day Mrs. Piper uttered the word Tanatos (obviously a mispronunciation of THANATOS-being the Greek word for "death," as Mors is the Latin).

On April 29 Mrs. Verrall wrote a script wholly occupied with the idea of Death, with quotations from Landor, Shakespeare, Virgil, and Horace, all involving the idea of Death.

On April 30 Mrs. Piper, in the waking stage, repeated the word THANATOS three times in close succession.

Here again the theory of coincidence would seem to be far-fetched.

Another cross correspondence concerned with the phrase AVE ROMA IMMORTALIS is a very lengthy one. Mr. Gerald Balfour discussing it * says that the completed idea was a well-known picture in the Vatican.

* S.P.R. PROCEEDINGS, Vol. XXV., p. 54.

Mrs. Verrall's script gave details of the picture unmeaning to herself, but made clear by the phrase five Roma immortalis, which came a few days later in Mrs. Holland's script.

An interesting feature was the apparent understanding by the control of what was being done.

On March 2, when the cross correspondence began, Mrs. Verrall wrote that she would have word sent "through another lady" that would elucidate matters. On March 7, when the cross correspondence ended, Mrs. Holland's contribution was followed by the words: "How could I make it any clearer without giving her the clue?"

Mr. Gerald Balfour considers, with reason, that these two comments show that this cross correspondence was being deliberately brought about.

Sir Oliver Lodge, in commenting on the way the meaning is ingeniously wrapped up in these cross correspondences, says of one of them:

The ingenuity and subtlety and literary allusiveness made the record difficult to read, even when disentangled and presented by the skill of Mr. Piddington.

This criticism, from one who has been convinced of their veridical character, is sufficient indication that cross correspondences are not likely to make anything more than a limited appeal. To the ordinary Spiritualist they seem an exceedingly roundabout method of demonstrating that which can be proved by easier and more convincing methods. If a man were to endeavour to prove the existence of America by picking up driftwood upon the European shores, as Columbus once did, instead of getting into touch with the land or its inhabitants, it would present a rough analogy to such circuitous methods of investigation.

Apart from the cross correspondence scripts, several others have been closely analysed by the S.P.R., the most remarkable and convincing being that which has been named "the Ear of Dionysius." It must be admitted that after the lowly and occasionally sordid atmosphere of physical phenomena these intellectual excursions do lift one into a purer and more rarefied atmosphere. The cross correspondences were too prolonged and complicated to ensure acceptance, and had a painful resemblance to some pedantic parlour game. It is otherwise with the Ear of Dionysius. It necessarily takes on an academic tone, since it is a classical subject, handled presumably by two professors, but it is a very direct and clear attempt to prove survival by showing that none save these particular men could have produced the script, and that certainly it was beyond the knowledge or faculties of the writer.

This writer, who chooses to assume the name of Mrs. Willett, produced in 1910 the phrase "Dionysius's Ear. The Lobe." It chanced that Mrs. Verrall, the wife of a famous classical scholar, was present, and she referred the phrase to her husband. He explained that the name was given to a huge abandoned quarry at Syracuse, which was roughly shaped like a donkey's ear. In this place the unhappy Athenian captives had been confined after that famous defeat which has been immortalised by Thucydides, and it had received its name because its peculiar acoustic properties were said to have enabled Dionysius the Tyrant to overhear the talk of his victims.

Dr. Verrall died shortly afterwards, and in 1914 the script of Mrs. Willett began to contain many references to the Ear of Dionysius. These appeared to emanate from the deceased doctor. For example, one sentence ran: "Do you remember that you did not know, and I complained of your classical ignorance? It concerned a place where slaves were kept and audition belongs-also acoustics. Think of the whispering gallery."

Some of the allusions, such as the foregoing, pointed to Dr. Verrall, while others seemed to be associated with another deceased scholar who had passed on in 1910. This was Professor S. H. Butcher, of Edinburgh. Thus the script said: "Father Cam walking arm-in-arm with the Canongate," i.e. Cambridge with Edinburgh. The whole strange mosaic was described by one control as "a literary association of ideas pointing to the influence of two discarnate minds." This idea was certainly carried out, and no one can read the result carefully without the conviction that it has its origin in something entirely remote from the writer. So recondite were the classical allusions that even the best scholars were occasionally baffled, and one of them declared that no minds with which he was acquainted, save only those of Verrall and Butcher, could have produced the result. After careful examination of the records, Mr. Gerald Balfour declared that he was prepared to accept the reputed as "the real authors of this curious literary puzzle." The unseen communicators seem to have got weary of such roundabout methods and Butcher is represented as saying: "Oh, this old bothersome rubbish is so tiresome!” None the less, the result achieved is one of the most clear-cut and successful of any of the purely intellectual explorations of the S.P.R.

The work of the S.P.R. during recent years has not enhanced its reputation, and it is with reluctance that the author, who is one of the oldest members, is compelled to say so. The central machinery of the society has come into the hands of a circle of men whose one care seems to be not to prove truth but to disprove what seems preternatural. Two great men, Lodge and Barrett, stemmed the tide, but they were outvoted by the obstructionists. Spiritualists, and particularly mediums, look upon the investigators and their methods with aversion. It seems never to have dawned upon these people that the medium is, or should be, inert, and that there may be an intelligent force behind the medium which can only be conciliated and encouraged by gentle sympathy and thoughtful, tactful behaviour.

Eva, the materialising medium, came from France, but the results were meagre, and excessive exaggerated precautions defeated the end in view. The report in which the committee announce their conclusions is a contradictory document, for whereas the casual reader would gather from it that no results-or none worth recording-were obtained, the text is actually illustrated with photographs of ectoplasmic extrusions exactly resembling in miniature those which had been obtained in Paris.

Madame Bisson, who accompanied her protege to London, at great inconvenience to them both, was naturally indignant at such a result, and Dr. Geley published an incisive paper in the, “Proceedings” of the Institut Metapsychique in which he exposed the fallacies of the investigation and the worthlessness of the report. Professors of the Sorbonne may be excused for handling Eva with no regard for psychic law, but the representatives of a scientific psychic body should have shown greater understanding.

The attack upon Mr. Hope, the psychic photographer, was examined by a strong independent committee and was shown to be quite unsound, and even to bear some signs of a conspiracy against the medium. In this ill-considered affair the society was directly implicated, since one of its officers took part in the proceedings, and the result was chronicled in the official JOURNAL. The whole history of this case, and the refusal of the society to face the facts when they were pointed out to them, leave a shadow upon the record of all concerned.

Yet when all is said and done, the world has been the better for the existence of the S.P.R. It has been a clearing-house for psychic ideas, and a half-way house for those who were attracted to the subject and yet dreaded closer contact with so radical a philosophy as Spiritualism. There has been a constant movement among the members from the right of negation to the left of acceptance. The mere fact that a succession of the presidents have been professed Spiritualists is, in itself, a sign that the anti-spiritual element was not too intolerant or intolerable. On the whole, like all human institutions, it is open to both praise and censure. If it has had its dark passages, it has also been illuminated by occasional periods of brightness. It has constantly had to fight against the imputation of being a purely Spiritualistic society, which would have deprived it of that position of judicial impartiality which it claimed, but did not always exercise. The situation was often a difficult one, and the mere fact that the society has held its own for so many years is a proof that there has been some wisdom in its attitude; and we can but hope that the period of sterility and barren negative criticism may be drawing to an end. Meanwhile the Psychic College, an institution founded by the self-sacrificing work of Mr. and Mrs. Hewat McKenzie, has amply shown that a stern regard for truth and for the necessary evidential requirements are not incompatible with a human treatment of mediums, and a generally sympathetic attitude towards the Spiritualistic point of view.

CHAPTER IV

ECTOPLASM

From very early days Spiritualists have contended that there was some physical material basis for the phenomena. A hundred times in early Spiritual literature you will find descriptions of the semi-luminous thick vapour which oozes from the side or the mouth of a medium and is dimly visible in the gloom. They had even gone further and had observed how the vapour in turn solidifies to a plastic substance from which the various structures of the seance room are built up. More exact scientific observation could only confirm what these pioneers had stated.

To take a few examples: Judge Peterson states that in 1877 he saw with the medium W. Lawrence "a fleecy cloud" that seemed to issue from the side of the medium and gradually formed into a solid body.* He also speaks of a figure forming out of "a ball of light." James Curtis saw with Slade in Australia in 1878 a "cloud-like, whitish grey vapour" forming and accumulating, preparatory to the appearance of a fully materialised figure. Alfred Russel Wallace describes seeing with Dr. Monck, first a "white patch," which then gradually formed into a "cloudy pillar." This same expression, "cloudy pillar," is used by Mr. Alfred Smedley of an appearance with the medium Williams, when John King manifested, and he also speaks of it as "a slightly illuminated cloud." Sir William Crookes saw with the medium D. D. Home a "luminous cloud" which condensed into a perfectly formed hand. Mr. E. A. Brackett saw with the medium Helen Berry in the United States in 1885 "a small, white, cloud-like substance" which expanded until it was four or five feet high, "when suddenly from it the full, round, sylphlike form of Bertha stepped forward."** Mr. Edmund Dawson Rogers, in his narrative of a sitting with Eglinton in 1885, speaks of seeing emerging from the medium's side "a dingy, white-looking substance" that swayed and pulsated. Mr. Vincent Turvey, the well-known sensitive of Bournemouth, tells of "red, sticky matter" drawn from the medium. Particular interest attaches to a description given by that wonderful medium for materialisation, Madame d'Esperance, who says: "It seemed that I could feel fine threads being drawn out of the pores of my skin."à This has an important bearing on the researches of Dr. Crawford, and his remarks on "psychic rods" and "spore-like matter." We find, too, in The Spiritualist that while the materialised spirit Katie King was manifesting herself through Miss Florence Cook, "She was connected with the medium by cloudy, faintly luminous threads." ***

* "Essays from the Unseen."

** "Materialised Apparitions," p. 106. "Beginnings of Seership," p. 55. "Shadow Land," p. 229.

*** THE SPIRITUALIST, 1873, p. 83.

As a pendant to these abbreviated references, let us give in detail three experiences of the formation of ectoplasm. One of the sitters in Madame d'Esperance's circle supplies the following description:

First a filmy, cloudy patch of something white is observed on the floor in front of the cabinet. It then gradually expands, visibly extending itself as if it were an animated patch of muslin, lying fold upon fold, on the floor, until extending about two and a half by three feet, and having a depth of a few inches-perhaps six or more Presently it begins to rise slowly in or near the centre, as if a human head were underneath it, while the cloudy film on the floor begins to look more like muslin falling into folds about the portion so mysteriously rising. By the time it has attained two or more feet it looks as if a child were under it, and moving its arms about in all directions, as if manipulating something underneath. It continues rising, sometimes sinking somewhat to rise again higher than before, until it attains a height of about five feet, when its form can be seen as if arranging the folds of drapery about its figure. Presently the arms rise considerably above the head and open outwards through a mass of cloud-like spirit drapery, and Yolande stands before us unveiled, graceful and beautiful, nearly five feet in height, having a turban-like head-dress, from beneath which her long black hair hangs over her shoulders and down her back. The superfluous white, veil-like drapery is wrapped round her for convenience, or thrown down on the carpet, out of the way till required again. All this occupies from ten to fifteen minutes to accomplish.*

* "Shadow Land," by E. d'Esperance (1897), pp. 254-5. "Life and Experience," p. 58.

The second account is by Mr. Edmund Dawson Rogers. He says that at the seance, exclusive of Mr. Eglinton, the medium, there were fourteen persons present, all well known, and that there was sufficient light to enable the writer of the report “clearly to observe everybody and everything in the room,” and when the “form” stood before him he was “distinctly able to note every feature.” Mr. Eglinton in a state of trance paced about the room between the sitters for five minutes, and then —

He began gently to draw from his side and pay out at right angles a dingy, white-looking substance, which fell down at his left side. The mass of white material on the floor increased in breadth, commenced to pulsate and move up and down, also swaying from side to side, the motor power being underneath. The height of this substance increased to about three feet, and shortly afterwards the “form” quickly and quietly grew to its full stature. By a quick movement of his hand Mr. Eglinton drew away the white material which covered the head of the “form” and it fell back over the shoulders and became part of the clothing of the visitor. The connecting link (the white appearance issuing from the side of the medium) was severed or became invisible, and the “form” advanced to Mr. Everitt, shook hands with him, and passed round the circle, treating nearly everyone in the same manner.

This occurred in London in 1885.

The last description is of a seance in Algiers in 1905 with Eva C., then known as Marthe Beraud. Madame X. writes:*

* “Annals of Psychical Science,” Vol. II, p. 305.

Marthe was alone in the cabinet on this occasion. After waiting for about twenty-five minutes Marthe herself opened the curtain to its full extent and then sat down in her chair. Almost immediately — with Marthe in full view of the sitters, her hands, head, and body distinctly visible — we saw a white, diaphanous-looking thing gradually build itself up close to Marthe. It looked first of all like a large cloudy patch near Marthe’s right elbow, and appeared to be attached to her body; it was very mobile, and grew rapidly both upward and downward, finally assuming the somewhat amorphous appearance of a cloudy pillar extending from about two feet above the head of Marthe to her feet. I could distinguish neither hands nor head; what I saw looked like white fleecy clouds of varying brilliancy, which were gradually condensing, concentrating themselves around some-to me invisible-body.

Here we have an account which tallies in a wonderful way with those we have quoted from seances many years previously.

When we examine the descriptions of the appearance of ectoplasm in Spiritualistic circles forty and fifty years ago, and compare them with those in our own day, we see how much richer were the earlier results. Then "unscientific" methods were in vogue, according to the view of many modern psychical researchers. At least, however, the earlier researchers observed one golden rule. They surrounded the medium with an atmosphere of love and sympathy. Discussing the first materialisations that occurred in England, The Spiritualist in a leading article* says:

* 1873. pp. 82-3.

The influence of the spiritual state of the observers finds optical expression at face seances. Worldly and suspicious people get the feebler manifestations; the spirits then have often a pale ghastly look, as usual when the power is weak. [This is a singularly exact description of many of the faces at seances with Eva C.] Spiritual people, in whose presence the medium feels thoroughly happy, see by far the finest manifestations. Although spiritual phenomena are governed by fixed laws, those laws so work in practice that Spiritualism undoubtedly partakes much of the character of a special revelation to special people.

Mr. E. A. Brackett, author of that remarkable book, "Materialised Apparitions," expresses the same truth in another way. His view will, of course, excite derision in so-called scientific circles, but it embodies a deep truth. It is the spirit of his words rather than their literal interpretation that he means to convey:

The key that unlocks the glories of another life is pure affection, simple and confiding as that which prompts the child to throw its arms around its mother's neck. To those who pride themselves upon their intellectual attainments, this may seem to be a surrender of the exercise of what they call the higher faculties. So far from this being the case, I can truly say that until I adopted this course, sincerely and without reservation, I learned nothing about these things. Instead of clouding my reason and judgment, it opened my mind to a clearer and more intelligent perception of what was passing before me. That spirit of gentleness, of loving kindness, which more than anything else crowns with eternal beauty the teachings of the Christ, should find its full expression in our association with these beings.

If anyone should think from this passage that the author was a poor, credulous fool upon whom any fraudulent medium could easily impose, a perusal of his excellent book will quickly prove the contrary.

Moreover, his method worked. He had been struggling with doubt and perplexity, when, on the advice tendered by a materialised spirit, he decided to lay aside all reserve and "greet these forms as dear departed friends who had come from afar and had struggled hard to reach me." The change was instantaneous.

From that moment the forms, which had seemed to lack vitality, became animated with marvellous strength. They sprang forward to greet me; tender arms were clasped around me; forms that had been almost dumb during my investigations now talked freely; faces that had worn more the character of a mask than of real life now glowed with beauty. What claimed to be my nieceoverwhelmed me with demonstrations of regard. Throwing her arms around me, and laying her head upon my shoulder, she looked up and said "Now we can all come so near you."

It is a thousand pities that Eva C. could not have had a chance to display her powers in the loving atmosphere of an old-fashioned Spiritualist seance. It is quite certain that a very different order of materialisations would have been the result. As a proof of this Madame Bisson, in a private family circle with her, secured wonderful results never obtained with the thumb-screw methods of scientific investigators.

The first materialising medium who can be said to have been investigated with scientific care was this girl Eva, or Eva C., as she is usually described, her second name being Carriere. In 1903 she was examined in a series of sittings at the Villa Carmen in Algiers by Professor Charles Richet, and it was his observation of the curious white material which seemed to be extruded from her person which led to his coining the word "ectoplasm." Eva was then in her nineteenth year and at the height of her powers, which were gradually sapped by long years of constrained investigation. Some attempt was made to cast doubt upon Richet's results and to pretend that the materialised figures were in truth some domestic in disguise, but the final answer is that the experiments were carried on behind locked doors, and that similar results have been obtained many times since. It is only poetic justice that Professor Richet should have been subjected to this unfair and annoying criticism, for in his great book, "Thirty Years of Psychical Research," he is most unfair to mediums, believing every tale to their discredit, and acting continually upon the principle that to be accused is the same thing as to be condemned.

In his first reports, published in the “Annals of Psychical Science,” Richet describes at great length the appearance with the medium Eva C. of the materialised form of a man who called himself “Bien Boa.” The professor says that this form possessed all the attributes of life. “It walks, speaks, moves, and breathes like a human being. Its body is resistant, and has a certain muscular strength. It is neither a lay figure nor a doll, nor an image reflected by a mirror; It is as a living being; it is as a living man; and there are reasons for resolutely setting aside every other supposition than one or the other of these two hypotheses: either that of a phantom having the attributes of life; or that of a living person playing the part of a phantom.” * He discusses in detail his reasons for dismissing the possibility of it being a case of impersonation.

* “Annals of Psychical Science,” Vol. II, p. 273.

Describing the disappearance of the form, he writes:

Bien Boa tries, as it seems to me, to come among us, but he has a limping, hesitating gait. I could not say whether he walks or glides. At one moment he reels as though about to fall, limping with one leg, which seems unable to support him (I give my own impression). Then he goes towards the opening of the curtains. Then without, as far as I believe, opening the curtains, he suddenly sinks down, disappears into the ground, and at the same time a sound of “Clac! clac!” is heard like the noise of a body thrown on to the ground.

While this was taking place the medium in the cabinet was plainly seen by another sitter, Gabriel Delanne, editor of the Revue du Spiritisme.

Richet continues:

A very little time afterwards (two, three or four minutes) at the very feet of the General, in the opening of the curtains, we again see the same white ball (his head?) on the ground; it mounts rapidly, quite straight, rises to the height of a man, then suddenly sinks down to the ground, with the same noise, “Clac! clac!” of a body falling on to the ground. The General felt the shock of the limbs, which in falling struck his leg with some violence.

The sudden appearance and disappearance of the figure so much resembled action through a trap-door that next day Richet made a minute examination of the stone-flagged floor, and also of the roof of the coach-house underneath, without finding a trace of any trap-door. To allay absurd rumours of its existence, he afterwards obtained a certificate from the architect.

The interest of these records of the early manifestations is increased from the fact that at this time the medium obtained complete materialisations, while at a later date in Paris these were extremely rare at her seances.

A curious experiment with Bien Boa was in trying to get him to breathe into a flask of baryta water to see if the breath would show carbon dioxide. With difficulty the form did as he was asked, and the liquid showed the expected reaction. During this experiment the forms of the medium and a native girl who sat with her in the cabinet were clearly seen.

Richet records an amusing incident during this experiment. When the baryta water was turned white, the sitters shouted, “Bravo!” at which the form of Bien Boa appeared three times at the opening of the curtain, and bowed, like an actor in a theatre taking a call.

Richet and Delanne took many photographs of Bien Boa, and these Sir Oliver Lodge described as the best of the kind he had seen. A striking feature about them is that an arm of the medium presents a flat appearance, pointing to the process of partial dematerialisation so well observed with another medium, Madame d’Esperance. Richet acutely observes: * “I am not afraid of saying that the emptiness of this sleeve, far from demonstrating the presence of fraud, establishes on the contrary that there was no fraud; also that it seems to speak in favour of a sort of material disaggregation of the medium which she herself was incapable of suspecting.”

* “Annals of Psychical Science,” Vol. II, p. 238.

In his last book, already referred to, Richet publishes for the first time an account of a splendid materialisation he saw at the Villa Carmen.

Almost as soon as the curtains were drawn, they were reopened, and between them appeared the face of a young and beautiful woman with a kind of gilt ribbon or diadem covering her fair hair and the crown of her head. She was laughing heartily and seemed greatly amused; I can still vividly recall her laugh and her pearly teeth. She appeared two or three times showing her head and then hiding it, like a child playing bo-peep.

He was told to bring scissors the next day, when he would be permitted to cut a lock of the hair of this Egyptian queen, as she was termed. He did so.

The Egyptian queen returned, but only showed the crown of her head with very fair and very abundant hair; she was anxious to know if I had brought the scissors.

I then took a handful of her long hair, but I could scarcely distinguish the face that she kept concealed behind the curtain. As I was about to cut a lock high up, a firm hand behind the curtain lowered mine so that I cut only about six inches from the end. As I was rather slow about doing this, she said in a low voice, “Quick! Quick!” and disappeared. I have kept this lock; it is very fine, silky and undyed. Microscopical examination shows it to be real hair; and I am informed that a wig of the same would cost a thousand francs. Marthe’s hair is very dark and she wears her hair rather short.*

* “Thirty Years of Psychical Research,” p. 508.

Reference may be made, in passing, to what Professor Richet calls “ignoble newspaper tales” of an alleged confession of deceit by the medium, and also to the assertion of an Arab coachman in the employ of General Noel, who pretended that he had played the part of the ghost at the Villa Carmen. As regards the latter, the man was never on any occasion admitted into the seance room, while as to the former the medium has herself publicly denied the charge. Richet observes that even if the charge were true, psychic researchers were aware of what value to attach to such revelations, which only showed the instability of mediums.

Richet sums up:

The materialisations given by Marthe Beraud are of the highest importance. They have presented numerous facts illustrating the general processes of materialisations, and have supplied metapsychic science with entirely new and unforeseen data.

This is his final reasoned judgment.

The first prolonged systematic investigation of ectoplasm was undertaken by a French lady, Madame Bisson, the widow of Adolphe Bisson, a well-known public man. It is probable that Madame Bisson will take a place beside her compatriot Madame Curie in the annals of science. Madame Bisson acquired considerable personal influence over Eva, who had after the Algiers experiments been subjected to the usual intolerant persecution. She took her into her care and provided for her in all ways. She then began a series of experiments which lasted for five years, and which gave such solid results that not one, but several, sciences may in the future take their origin from them. In these experiments she associated herself with Dr. Schrenck Notzing, a German savant from Munich, whose name will also be imperishably connected with the original investigation of ectoplasm. Their studies were carried on between 1908 and 1913, and are recorded in her book “Les Phenomenes dits de Materialisation” and in Schrenck Notzing’s “Phenomena of Materialisation,” which has been translated into English.

Their method was to make Eva C. change all her garments under supervision, and to dress her in a gown which had no buttons and was fastened at the back. Only her hands and feet were free. She was then taken into the experimental room, to which she had access at no other time. At one end of this room was a small space shut in by curtains at the back and sides and top, but open in front. This was called the cabinet and the object of it was to concentrate the ectoplasmic vapour.

In describing their joint results the German savant says: “We have very often been able to establish that by an unknown biological process there comes from the body of the medium a material, at first semi-fluid, which possesses some of the properties of a living substance, notably that of the power of change, of movement, and of the assumption of definite forms.” He adds: “One might doubt the truth of these facts if they had not been verified hundreds of times in the course of laborious tests under varied and very strict conditions.” Could there be, so far as this substance is concerned, a more complete vindication of those early Spiritualists who for two generations had borne with patience the ridicule of the world? Schrenck Notzing ends his dignified preface by exhorting his fellow-worker to take heart. “Do not allow yourself to be discouraged in your efforts to open a new domain for science either by foolish attacks, by cowardly calumnies, by the misrepresentation of facts, by the violence of the malevolent, or by any sort of intimidation. Advance always along the path that you have opened, thinking of the words of Faraday, ‘Nothing is too amazing to be true.’”

The results are among the most notable of any series of investigations of which we have record. It was testified by numerous competent witnesses, and confirmed by photographs, that there oozed from the medium’s mouth, ears, nose, eyes, and skin this extraordinary gelatinous material. The pictures are strange and repulsive, but many of Nature’s processes seem so in our eyes. You can see this streaky, viscous stuff hanging like icicles from the chin, dripping down on to the body, and forming a white apron over the front, or projecting in shapeless lumps from the orifices of the face. When touched, or when undue light came upon it, it writhed back into the body as swiftly and stealthily as the tentacles of a hidden octopus. If it was seized and pinched the medium cried aloud. It would protrude through clothes and vanish again, leaving hardly any trace upon them. With the assent of the medium, a small piece was amputated. It dissolved in the box in which it was placed as snow would have done, leaving moisture and some large cells which might have come from a fungus. The microscope also disclosed epithelial cells from the mucous membrane in which the stuff seemed to originate.

The production of this strange ectoplasm is enough in itself to make such experiments revolutionary and epoch-making, but what follows is far stranger, and will answer the question in every reader's mind, "What has all this to do with spirits?" Utterly incredible as it may appear, this substance after forming begins, in the case of some mediums-Eva being one-to curdle into definite shapes, and those shapes are human limbs and human faces, seen at first in two dimensions upon the flat, and then moulding themselves at the edges until they become detached and complete. Very many of the photographs exhibit these strange phantoms, which are often much smaller than life. Some of these faces probably represent thought-forms from the brain of Eva taking visible form, and a clear resemblance has been traced between some of them and pictures which she may have seen and stored in the memory. One, for example, looks like an extremely rakish President Wilson with a moustache, while another resembles a ferocious rendering of M. Poincare. One of them shows the word "Miroir" printed over the head of the medium, which some critics have claimed as showing that she had smuggled in the journal of that name in order to exhibit it, though what the object of such a proceeding could be has not been explained. Her own explanation was that the controlling forces had in some way, possibly by "apport," brought in the legend in order to convey the idea that these faces and figures are not their real selves, but their selves as seen in a mirror.

Even now the reader may see no obvious connection with Spiritualism, but the next stage takes us all the way. When Eva is at her best, and it occurs only at long intervals and at some cost to her own health, there forms a complete figure; this figure is moulded to resemble some deceased person, the cord which binds it to the medium is loosened, a personality which either is or pretends to be that of the dead takes possession of it, and the breath of life is breathed into the image so that it moves and talks and expresses the emotions of the spirit within. The last word of the Bisson record is: "Since these seances, and on numerous occasions, the entire phantom has shown itself, it has come out of the cabinet, has begun to speak, and has reached Mme. Bisson, whom it has embraced on the cheek. The sound of the kiss was audible.” Was there ever a stranger finale of a scientific investigation? It may serve to illustrate how impossible it is for even the cleverest of materialists to find any explanation of such facts which is consistent with his theories. The only one which Mr. Joseph McCabe, in his recent public debate, could put forward was that it was a case of the regurgitation of food! He seemed to be unaware that a close-meshed veil was worn over the medium’s face in some of the experiments, without in the least hampering the flow of the ectoplasm.

These results, though checked in all possible ways, are none the less so amazing that the inquirer had a right to suspend judgment until they were confirmed. But this has now been fully done. Dr. Schrenck Notzing returned to Munich, and there he was fortunate enough to find another medium, a Polish lady, who possessed the faculty of materialisation. With her he conducted a series of experiments which he has recorded in the book, already mentioned. Working with Stanislawa, the Polish medium, and adopting the same strict methods as with Eva, he produced exactly the same results. His book overlaps that of Mme. Bisson, since he gives an account of the Paris experiments, but the most important part is the corroboration furnished by his check experiments in the summer of 1912 in Munich. The various photographs of the ectoplasm, so far as they go, are hardly to be distinguished from those already taken, so that any theory of elaborate fraud upon the part of Eva postulates the same fraud on the part of Stanislawa. Many German observers checked the sittings.

In his thorough Teutonic fashion Schrenck Notzing goes deeper into the matter than Mme. Bisson. He obtained hair from one of the materialised forms and compared it microscopically with hair from Eva (this incident occurred in the French series), showing by several tests that it could not be from the same person. He gave also the chemical result of an examination of a small portion of ectoplasm, which burned to an ash, leaving a smell as of horn. Chloride of sodium (common salt) and phosphate of calcium were amongst the constituents. Finally, he actually obtained a cinematograph record of the ectoplasm pouring from the mouth of the medium. Part of this is reproduced in his book.

It should be explained that though the medium was in a trance during these experiments she was by no means inanimate. A separate personality seemed to possess her, which might be explained as one of her own secondary individualities, or as an actual obsession from outside. This personality was in the habit of alluding with some severity to the medium, telling Mme. Bisson that she needed discipline and had to be kept up to her work. Occasionally this person showed signs of clairvoyance, explaining correctly, for example, what was amiss with an electric fitting when it failed to work. A running accompaniment of groans and protests from Eva's body seems to have been a mere animal outcry apart from intelligence.

These results were corroborated once again by Dr. Gustave Geley, whose name will live for ever in the annals of psychical research. Dr. Geley was a general practitioner at Annecy, where he fulfilled the high promises which had been given by his academic career at Lyons. He was attracted by the dawning science, and was wisely appointed by M. Jean Meyer as head of the Institut Metapsychique. His work and methods will be an example for all time to his followers, and he soon showed that he was not only an ingenious experimenter and a precise observer, but a deep thinking philosopher. His great book, "From the Unconscious to the Conscious," will probably stand the test of time. He was assailed by the usual human mosquitoes who annoy the first pioneers who push through any fresh jungle of thought, but he met them with bravery and good humour. His death was sudden and tragic. He had been to Warsaw, and had obtained some fresh ectoplasmic moulds from the medium Kluski. Unhappily, the aeroplane in which he travelled crashed, and Geley was killed-an irreparable loss to psychic science.

The committee of the Institut Metapsychique, which was recognised by the French Government as being "of public utility," included Professor Charles Richet, Professor Santoliquido, Minister of Public Health, Italy; Count de Gramont, of the Institute of France; Dr. Calmette, Medical Inspector-General; M. Camille Flammarion, M. Jules Roche, ex-Minister of State; Dr. Treissier, Hospital of Lyons; with Dr. Gustave Geley himself as Director. Among those added to the committee at a later date were Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Bozzano, and Professor Leclainche, member of the Institute of France and Inspector-General of Sanitary Services (Agriculture). The Institute is equipped with a good laboratory for psychical research, and has also a library, reading-room, lecture and reception rooms. Particulars of the work carried out are supplied in its magazine, entitled La Revue Metapsychique.

An important side of the work of the Institute has been to invite public men of eminence in science and literature to witness for themselves the psychical investigations that are being carried on. Over a hundred such men have been given first-hand evidence, and in 1923 thirty, including eighteen medical men of distinction, signed and permitted the publication of a statement of their full belief in the genuineness of the manifestations they saw under conditions of rigid control.

Dr. Geley at one time held a series of sittings with Eva, summoning a hundred men of science to witness one or other of them. So strict were his tests that he winds up his account with the words: “I will not merely say that there is no fraud. I will say that there has not been the possibility of fraud.” Again he walked the old path and found the same results, save that the phantasms in his experiments took the form of female faces, sometimes beautiful and, as he assured the author, unknown to him. They may be thought-forms from Eva, for in none of his recorded results did he get the absolute living spirit. There was enough, however, to cause Dr. Geley to say: “What we have seen kills materialism. There is no longer any room for it in the world.” By this he means, of course, the old-fashioned materialism of Victorian days, by which thought was a result of matter. All the new evidence points to matter being the result of thought. It is only when you ask “Whose thought?” that you get upon debatable ground.

Subsequent to his experiments with Eva, Dr. Geley got even more wonderful results with Franek Kluski, a Polish gentleman, with whom the ectoplasmic figures were so solid that he was able to take a mould of their hands in paraffin. These paraffin gloves, which are exhibited in London,* are so small at the wrist-opening that the hand could not possibly have been withdrawn without breaking the brittle mould. It could only have been done by dematerialisation-no other way is possible. These experiments were conducted by Geley, Richet, and Count de Gramont, three most competent men. A fuller discussion of these and other moulds taken from ectoplasmic figures will be found in Chapter XX. They are very important, as being the most permanent and undeniable proofs of such structures that have ever been advanced. No rational criticism of them has ever yet been made.

* Similar gloves are to be seen at the Psychic College, 59 Holland Park, W., or at the Psychic Museum, Abbey House, Victoria Street, Westminster.

Another Polish medium, named Jean Guzik, has been tested at the Paris Institute by Dr. Geley. The manifestations consisted of lights and ectoplasmic hands and faces. Under conditions of the severest control, thirty-four distinguished persons in Paris, most of whom were entirely sceptical, affirmed, after long and minute investigation, their belief in the genuineness of the phenomena observed with this medium. Among them were members of the French Academy, of the Academy of Sciences, of the Academy of Medicine, doctors of medicine and of law, and police experts.

Ectoplasm is a most protean substance, and can manifest itself in many ways and with varying properties. This was demonstrated by Dr. W. J. Crawford, Extra-Mural Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering at Queen's University, Belfast. He conducted an important series of experiments from 1914 to 1920 with the medium Miss Kathleen Goligher. He has furnished an account of them in three books, "The Reality of Psychic Phenomena" (1917), "Experiments in Psychical Science" (1919), and "The Psychic Structures at the Goligher Circle" (1921). Dr. Crawford died in 1920, but he left an imperishable memorial in those three books of original experimental research which have probably done as much to place psychic science on an assured footing as any other works on the subject.

To understand fully the conclusions he arrived at his books must be read, but here we may say briefly that he demonstrated that levitations of the table, raps on the floor of the room, and movements of objects in the seance room were due to the action of "psychic rods," or, as he came to call them in his last book, "psychic structures," emanating from the medium's body. When the table is levitated these "rods" are operated in two ways. If the table is a light one, the rod or structure does not touch the floor, but is "a cantilever firmly fixed to the medium's body at one end, and gripping the under surface or legs of the table with the free or working end." In the case of a heavy table the reaction, instead of being thrown on the medium, is applied to the floor of the room, forming a kind of strut between the under surface of the levitated table and the floor. The medium was placed in a weighing scale, and when the table was levitated an increase in her weight was observed.

Dr. Crawford supplies this interesting hypothesis of the process at work in the formation of ectoplasm at a circle. It is to be understood that by "operators" he means the spirit operators controlling the phenomena:

Operators are acting on the brains of the sitters and thence on their nervous systems. Small particles, it may even be molecules, are driven off the nervous system, out through the bodies of sitters at wrists, hands, fingers, or elsewhere. These small particles, now free, have a considerable amount of latent energy inherent in them, an energy which can react on any human nervous system with which they come into contact. This stream of energized particles flows round the circle, probably partly on the periphery of their bodies. The stream, by gradual augmentation from the sitters, reaches the medium at high degree of “tension,” energizes her, receives increment from her, traverses the circle again, and so on. Finally, when the “tension” is sufficiently great, the circulating process ceases, and the energized particles collect on or are attached to the nervous system of the medium, who has henceforth a reservoir from which to draw. The operators having now a good supply of the right kind of energy at their disposal, viz. nerve energy, can act upon the body of the medium, who is so constituted that gross matter from her body can, by means of the nervous tension applied to it, be actually temporarily detached from its usual position and projected into the seance room.*

* “The Reality of Psychic Phenomena,” p. 243.

This is probably the first attempt at a clear explanation of what occurs at a seance for physical phenomena, and it is possible that it describes with fair accuracy what really takes place. In the following extract Dr. Crawford makes an important comparison between the earlier and later psychic manifestations, and also enunciates a bold comprehensive theory for all psychic phenomena:

I have compared the whitish, cloud-like appearance of the matter in the structure with photographs of materialisation phenomena in all stages obtained with many different mediums all over the world, and the conclusion I have come to is that this material very closely resembles, if it is not identical with, the material used in all such materialisation phenomena. In fact, it is not too much to say that this whitish, translucent, nebulous matter is the basis of all psychic phenomena of the physical order. Without it in some degree no physical phenomena are possible. It is what gives consistence to the structures of all kinds erected by the operators in the seance chamber; it is, when properly manipulated and applied, that which enables the structures to come into contact with the ordinary forms of matter with which we are acquainted, whether such structures are ones similar to those with which I am particularly dealing, or whether they are materialisations of bodily forms like hands or faces. Further, to me it appears likely that this matter will be found eventually to be the basis of the structures apparently erected for the manifestation of that peculiar form of phenomena known as the Direct Voice, while the phenomena known as Spirit Photography appear also to have it as a basis.*

* “The Psychic Structures at the Goligher Circle,” p. 19.

Whilst Crawford was working at his ectoplasmic rods at Belfast, Dr. Geley was checking the results obtained from Eva C. by a fresh series of experiments. He thus summarizes his observations on the phenomena which he observed:

A substance emanates from the body of the medium, it externalises itself, and is amorphous or polymorphous in the first instance. This substance takes various forms, but in general it shows more or less composite organs. We may distinguish: (1) the substance as a substratum of materialisation; (2) its organized development. Its appearance is generally announced by the presence of fluid, white and luminous flakes of a size ranging from that of a pea to that of a five-franc piece, and distributed here and there over the medium’s black dress, principally on the left side. The substance itself emanates from the whole body of the medium, but especially from the natural orifices and the extremities, from the top of the head, from the breasts, and the tips of the fingers. The most usual origin, which is most easily observed, is that from the mouth. The substance occurs in various forms, sometimes as ductile dough, sometimes as a true protoplastic mass, sometimes in the form of numerous thin threads, sometimes as cords of various thicknesses, or in the form of narrow rigid rays, or as a broad band, as a membrane, as a fabric, or as a woven material, with indefinite and irregular outlines. The most curious appearance is presented by a widely expanded membrane, provided with fringes and rucks, and resembling in appearance a net.

The amount of externalised matter varies within wide limits. In some cases it completely envelops the medium as in a mantle. It may have three different colours-white, black, or grey. The white colour is the most frequent, perhaps, because it is the most easily observed. Sometimes the three colours appear simultaneously. The visibility of the substance varies a great deal, and it may slowly increase or decrease in succession. To the touch it gives various impressions. Sometimes it is moist and cold, sometimes viscous and sticky, more rarely dry and hard. The substance is mobile. Sometimes it moves slowly up or down across the medium, on her shoulders, on her breast, or on her knees, with a creeping motion resembling a reptile. Sometimes the movements are sudden and quick. The substance appears and disappears like lightning and is extraordinarily sensitive. The substance is sensitive to light.

We have been able to give only a part of Dr. Geley's masterly analysis and description. This final passage deals with an important aspect:

During the whole time of the materialisation phenomenon the product formed is in obvious physiological and psychical connection with the medium. The physiological connection is sometimes perceptible in the form of a thin cord joining the structure with the medium, which might be compared with the umbilical cord joining the embryo to its parent. Even if this cord is not visible, the physiological rapport is always close. Every impression received through the ectoplasm reacts upon the medium and vice versa. The sensation reflex of the structure coalesces with that of the medium; in a word, everything proves that 'the ectoplasm is the partly externalised medium herself.

If the details of this account: are compared with those given earlier in this chapter, it will be seen at once how numerous are the points of resemblance. Ectoplasm in its fundamentals has ever been the same. After these confirmations it is not scepticism but pure ignorance which denies the existence of this strange material.

Eva C. came to London, as already stated, and held thirty-eight seances under the auspices 'of the Society for Psychical Research, but the report* is a very conflicting and unsatisfactory document. Dr. Schrenck Notzing was able to get yet another medium from whom he was able to demonstrate ectoplasm, the results roughly corresponding with those obtained in Paris. This was a lad of fourteen, Willie S. In the case of Willie S., Dr. Schrenck Notzing showed this new substance to a hundred picked observers, not one of whom was able to deny the evidence of his own senses. Among those who signed an affirmative statement were professors or ex-professors of Jena, Giessen, Heidelberg, Munich, Tubingen, Upsala, Freiburg, Basle, and other universities, together with a number of famous physicians, neurologists, and savants of every sort.

* S.P.R. Proceedings, Vol. XXXII, pp. 209-343.

We can say, then, that there is no doubt of its existence. It cannot, however, be produced to order. It is a delicate operation which may fail. Thus several experimenters, notably a small committee of the Sorbonne, did fail. We have learned that it needs the right men and the right conditions, which conditions are mental and spiritual, rather than chemical. A harmonious atmosphere will help, while a carping, antagonistic one will hinder or totally prevent its appearance. In this it shows its spiritual affinities and that it differs from a purely physical product.

What is it? It takes shape. Who determines the shape? Is it the mind of the entranced medium? Is it the mind of the observers? Is it some independent mind? Among the experimenters we have a material school who urge that we are finding some extraordinary latent property of the normal body, and we have another school, to which the author belongs, who believe that we have come upon a link which may be part of a chain leading to some new order of life. It should be added that there is nothing concerning it which has not been known to the old alchemists of the Middle Ages. This very interesting fact was brought to light by Mr. Foster Damon, of Harvard University, who gave a series of extracts from the works of Vaughan, a philosopher who lived about 1650, where under the name of the "First matter" or of "Mercury" a substance is described, drawn from the body, which has all the characteristics of ectoplasm. Those were the days when, between the Catholic Church on one side and the witch-finders of the Puritans on the other, the ways of the psychic researcher were hard. That is why the chemists of that day disguised their knowledge under fantastic names, and why that knowledge in consequence died out. When one realises that by the Sun they meant the operator, by the Moon the subject, by the Fire the mesmeric force, and by Mercury the resulting ectoplasm, one has the key to some of their secrets.

The author has frequently seen ectoplasm in its vaporous, but only once in its solid, forma That was at a sitting with Eva C. under the charge of Madame Bisson. Upon that occasion this strange variable substance appeared as a streak of material six inches long, not unlike a section of the umbilical cord, embedded in the cloth of the dress in the region of the lower stomach. It was visible in good light, and the author was permitted to squeeze it between his fingers, when it gave the impression of a living substance, thrilling and shrinking under his touch. There was no possibility of deception upon this occasion.

* Save in the many instances when he has seen actual materialised faces or figures.

It is impossible to contemplate the facts known about ectoplasm without seeing their bearing upon psychic photography. The pictures photographed round Eva, with their hazy woolly fringe, are often exactly like the photographs obtained by Mr. Hope and others. The most rational opinion seems to be that ectoplasm once formed can be moulded by the mind, and that this mind may, in the simpler cases, simply be the mind of the unconscious medium. We forget sometimes that we are ourselves spirits, and that a spirit in the body has presumably similar powers to a spirit out of the body. In the more complex cases, and especially in psychic photography, it is abundantly clear that it is not the spirit of the medium which is at work, and that some more powerful and purposeful force has intervened.

Personally, the author is of opinion that several different forms of plasm with different activities will be discovered, the whole forming a separate science of the future which may well be called Plasmology. He believes also that all psychic phenomena external to the medium, including clairvoyance, may be traced to this source. Thus a clairvoyant medium may well be one who emits this or some analogous substance which builds up round him or her a special atmosphere that enables the spirit to manifest to those who have the power of perception. As the aerolite passing into the atmosphere of the earth is for a moment visible between two eternities of invisibility, so it may be that the spirit passing into the psychic atmosphere of the ectoplasmic medium can for a short time indicate its presence. Such speculations are beyond our present proofs, but Tyndall has shown how such exploratory hypotheses may become the spear-heads of truth. The reason why some people see a ghost and some do not may be that some furnish sufficient ectoplasm for a manifestation, and some do not, while the cold chill, the trembling, the subsequent faint, may be due not merely to terror but partly to the sudden drain upon the psychic supplies.

Apart from such speculations, the solid knowledge of ectoplasm, which we have now acquired, gives us at last a firm material basis for psychic research. When spirit descends into matter it needs such a material basis, or it is unable to impress our material senses. As late as 1891 Stainton Moses, foremost psychic of his day, was forced to say, “I know no more about the method or methods by which materialised forms are produced than I did when I first saw them.” Were he living now he could hardly say the same.

This new precise knowledge has been useful in giving us some rational explanation of those rapping sounds which were among the first phenomena to attract attention. It would be premature to say that they can only be produced in one way, but it may at least be stated that the usual method of their production is by the extension of a rod of ectoplasm, which may or may not be visible, and by its percussion on some solid object. It is probable that these rods may be the conveyers of strength rather than strong in themselves, as a small copper wire may carry the electric discharge which will disintegrate a battleship. In one of Crawford’s admirable experiments, finding that the rods were coming from the chest of his medium, he soaked her blouse with liquid carmine, and then asked for raps upon the opposite wall. The wall was found to be studded with spots of red, the ectoplasmic protrusion having carried with it in each case some of the stain through which it passed. In the same way table-tilting, when genuine, would appear to be due to an accumulation of ectoplasm upon the surface, collected from the various sitters and afterwards used by the presiding intelligence. Crawford surmised that the extrusions must often possess suckers or claws at the end, so as to grip or to raise, and the author subsequently collected several photographs of these formations which show clearly a serrated edge at the end that would fulfil such a purpose.

Crawford paid great attention also to the correspondence between the weight of the ectoplasm emitted and the loss of weight in the medium. His experiments seemed to show that everyone is a medium, that everyone loses weight at a materialising seance, and that the chief medium only differs from the others in that she is so constituted that she can put out a larger ectoplasmic flow. If we ask why one human being should differ from another in this respect, we reach that barren controversy why one should have a fine ear for music and another be lost to all melody. We must take these personal attributes as we find them. In Crawford’s experiments it was usual for the medium to lose as much as 10 or 15 lb. in a single sitting-the weight being restored to her immediately the ectoplasm was retracted. On one occasion the enormous loss of 52 lb. was recorded. One would have thought that the scales were false upon this occasion were it not that even greater losses have been registered in the case of other mediums, as has already been recorded in the account of the experiments of Olcott with the Eddys.

There are some other properties of ectoplasmic protrusions which should be noted. Not only is light destructive to them unless they are gradually acclimatized or specially prepared beforehand by the controls, but the effect of a sudden flash is to drive the structure back into the medium with the force of a snapped elastic band. This is by no means a false claim in order to protect the medium from surprise, but it is a very real fact which has been verified by many observers. Any tampering with ectoplasm, unless its fraudulent production is a certainty, is to be deprecated, and the forcible dragging at the trumpet, or at any other object which is supported by the ectoplasmic rod, is nearly as dangerous as the exhibition of a light. The author has in mind one case where an ignorant sitter removed the trumpet, which was floating in front of him, from the circle. It was done silently, but none the less the medium complained of pain and sickness to those around her and was prostrated for some days. Another medium exhibited a bruise from the breast to the shoulder which was caused by the recoil of the hand when some would-be exposer flashed an electric torch. When the ectoplasm flies back to a mucoid surface the result may be severe hemorrhage, several instances of which have come within the author's personal notice. In one case, that of Susanna Harris, in Melbourne, the medium was confined to bed for a week after such an experience.

It is vain in a single chapter of a work which covers a large subject to give any detailed view of a section of that subject which might well have a volume to itself. Our knowledge of this strange, elusive, protean, all-pervading substance is likely to increase from year to year, and it may be prophesied that if the last generation has been occupied with protoplasm, the next will be engrossed with its psychic equivalent, which will, it is to be hoped, retain Charles Richet's name of ectoplasm, though various other words such as "plasm," "teleplasm," and "ideoplasm" are unfortunately already in circulation. Since this chapter was prepared fresh demonstrations of ectoplasm have occurred in various parts of the world, the most noticeable being with "Margery," or Mrs. Crandon, of Boston, whose powers have been fully treated in Mr. Malcolm Bird's volume of that name.

CHAPTER V

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

The first authentic account of the production of what is called a spirit photograph dates from 1861. This result was obtained by William H. Mumler in Boston, U.S.A. In England in 1851 Richard Boursnell is said to have had a similar experience, but no early photograph of this nature has been preserved. The first example in England capable of being verified occurred with the photographer Hudson, in 1872.

Like the rise of modern Spiritualism, this new development was predicted from the Other Side. In 1856 Mr. Thomas Slater, an optician, residing at 136 Euston Road, London, was holding a seance with Lord Brougham and Mr. Robert Owen, when it was rapped out that the time would come when Mr. Slater would take spirit photographs. Mr. Owen remarked that if he were in the spirit world when that time came he would appear on the plate. In 1872, when Mr. Slater was experimenting in spirit photography, he is said to have obtained on a plate the face of Mr. Robert Owen and also that of Lord Brougham.* Alfred Russel Wallace was shown these results by Mr. Slater, and said:

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Nov. 1, 1873. “Miracles and Modern Spiritualism,” 1901, p. 198.

The first of his successes contained two heads by the side of a portrait of his sister. One of these heads is unmistakably the late Lord Brougham’s; the other, much less distinct, is recognised by Mr. Slater as that of Robert Owen, whom he knew intimately up to the time of his death.

After describing other spirit photographs obtained by Mr. Slater, Dr. Wallace goes on:

Now whether these figures are correctly identified or not, is not the essential point. The’ fact that any figures, so clear and unmistakably human in appearance as these, should appear on plates taken in his own private studio by an experienced optician and amateur photographer, who makes all his apparatus himself, and with no one present but the members of his own family, is the real marvel. In one case a second figure appeared on a plate with himself, taken by Mr. Slater when he was absolutely alone, by the simple process of occupying the sitter's chair after uncapping the camera.

Mr. Slater himself showed me all these pictures, and explained the conditions under which they were produced. That they are not impostures is certain, and as the first independent confirmations of what had been previously obtained only through professional photographers, their value is inestimable.

From Mumler in 1861 to William Hope in our own day there have appeared some twenty to thirty recognised mediums for psychic photography, and between them they have produced thousands of those supernormal results which have come to be known as "extras." The best known of these sensitives, in addition to Hope and Mrs. Deane, are Hudson, Parkes, Wyllie, Buguet, Boursnell and Duguid.

Mumler, who was employed as an engraver by a leading firm of jewellers in Boston, was not a Spiritualist, nor a professional photographer. In an idle hour, while trying to take a photograph of himself in a friend's studio, he obtained on the plate the outline of another figure. The method he adopted was to focus an empty chair, and after uncovering the lens, spring into position by the chair and stand until the requisite exposure was made. Upon the back of the photograph Mr. Mumler had written:

This photograph was taken of myself, by myself, on Sunday, when there was not a living soul in the room beside me-so to speak. The form on my right I recognise as my cousin, who passed away about twelve years since.

W. H. MUMLER.

The form is that of a young girl who appears to be sitting in the chair. The chair is distinctly seen through the body and arms, also the table upon which one arm rests. Below the waist, says a contemporary account, the form (which is apparently clothed in a dress with low neck and short sleeves) fades away into a dim mist, which simply clouds over the lower part of the picture. It is interesting to note features in this first spirit photograph which have been repeated many times in those obtained by later operators.

News of what had happened to Mumler quickly became known, and he was besieged with applications for sittings. He at first refused, but at last had to yield, and when further "extras" were obtained and his fame spread, he was compelled finally to give up his business and to devote himself to this new work. As his experiences have been, in the main, those of every psychic photographer who has succeeded him, we may glance briefly at them.

Private sitters of good repute obtained thoroughly evidential and recognisable pictures of friends and relatives, and were perfectly satisfied that the results were genuine. Then came professional photographers who were certain that there must be some trick, and that if they were given the opportunity of testing under their own conditions they would discover how it was done. They came one after another, in some cases with their own plates, camera, and chemicals, but after directing and supervising all the operations, were unable to discover any trickery. Mumler also went to their photographic studios and allowed them to do all the handling and developing of the plates, with the same result. Andrew Jackson Davis, who was at that time the editor and publisher of the HERALD OF PROGRESS in New York, sent a professional photographer, Mr. William Guay, to make a thorough investigation. He reported that after he had been allowed to control the whole of the photographic process, there appeared on the plate a spirit picture. He experimented with this medium on several other occasions, and was convinced of his genuineness.

Another photographer, Mr. Horace Weston, was sent to investigate by Mr. Black, the famous portrait photographer of Boston. When he returned, after having duly obtained a spirit picture, he said he could detect nothing in the operations that differed from those employed in taking an ordinary photograph. Then Black went himself and personally performed all the manipulation of plates and development. As he watched one of the plates developing and saw appearing on it another form besides his own, and finally found it to be that of a man leaning his arm on his shoulder, he exclaimed in his excitement, “My God, is it possible?”

Mumler had more applications for sittings than he could find time for, and appointments were made for weeks ahead. These came from all classes-ministers, doctors, lawyers, judges, mayors, professors, and business men being mentioned as among those particularly interested. A full account of the various evidential results obtained by Mumler will be found in contemporary records.*

* THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, 1862, p. 562; 1863, pp. 34-41.

In 1863 Mumler, like so many other photographic mediums since his day, found on his plates “extras” of living persons. His strongest supporters were unable to accept this new and startling phenomenon, and while holding to their former belief in his powers, were convinced that he had resorted to trickery. Dr. Gardner, in a letter to the BANNER OF LIGHT (Boston, February 20, 1863), referring to this fresh development, writes:

While I am fully of the belief that genuine spirit likenesses have been produced through his mediumship, evidence of deception in two cases, at least, has been furnished me, which is perfectly conclusive. Mr. Mumler, or some person connected with Mrs. Stuart's rooms, has been guilty of deception in palming off as genuine spirit likenesses pictures of a person who is now living in this city.

What made the case even more conclusive to the accusers was the fact that the same "extra" of the living person appeared on two different plates. This "exposure" set the tide of public opinion against him, and in 1868 Mumler departed for New York. Here his business prospered for a time until he was arrested by order of the mayor of New York, at the instance of a newspaper reporter who had received an unrecognised "extra." After a lengthy trial he was discharged without a stain on his character. The evidence of professional photographers who were not Spiritualists was strongly in Mumler's favour.

Mr. Jeremiah Gurney testified:

I have been a photographer for twenty-eight years; I have witnessed Mumler's process, and although I went prepared to scrutinize everything, I could find nothing which savoured of fraud or trickerythe only thing out of the usual routine being the fact that the operator kept his hand on the camera.

Mumler, who died in poverty in 1884, has left an interesting and convincing narrative of his career in his book, "Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography,"* a copy of which is to be seen at the British Museum.

* Boston, 1875. "Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings," etc., 1882, p. 2.

Hudson, who obtained the first spirit photograph in England of which we have objective evidence, is said to have been about sixty years of age at that time (March, 1872). The sitter was Miss Georgiana Houghton, who has fully described the incident. There is abundant testimony to Hudson's work. Mr. Thomas Slater) already quoted, took his own camera and plates, and after minute observation reported that "collusion or trickery was altogether out of the question." Mr. William Howitt, a stranger to the medium, went unannounced and received a recognised “extra” of his two deceased boys. He pronounced the photographs to be “perfect and unmistakable.”

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace secured a good picture of his mother. Describing his visit he says*:

* “Miracles and Modern Spiritualism” (Revised Edition 1901), pp. 196-7.

I sat three times, always choosing my own position. Each time a second figure appeared in the negative with me. The first was a male figure with a short sword, the second a full-length figure, standing apparently a few feet on one side and rather behind me, looking down at me and holding a bunch of flowers. At the third sitting, after placing myself, and after the prepared plate was in the camera, I asked that the figure would come close to me. The third plate exhibited a female figure standing close in front of me, so that the drapery covers the lower part of my body. I saw all the plates developed, and in each case the additional figure started out the moment the developing fluid was poured on, while my portrait did not become visible till, perhaps, twenty seconds later. I recognised none of these figures in the negatives; but the moment I got the proofs, the first glance showed me that the third plate contained an unmistakable portrait of my mother-like her both in features and expression; not such a likeness as a portrait taken during life, but a somewhat pensive, idealised likeness yet still, to me, an unmistakable likeness.

The second portrait, though indistinct, was also recognised by Dr. Wallace as a picture of his mother. The first “extra” of a man was unrecognised.

Mr. J. Traill Taylor, who was then editor of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, testified * that he secured supernormal results with this medium, using his own plates, “and that at no time during the preparation, exposure, or development of the pictures was Mr. Hudson within ten feet of the camera or dark room.” Surely this must be accepted as final.

* BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, August, 1873. HUMAN NATURE, 1875, p. 152.

Mr. F. M. Parkes, living at Grove Road, Bow, in the East End of London, was a natural psychic who had veridical visions from his childhood. He knew nothing of Spiritualism until it was brought to his notice in 1871, and early in the following year he experimented in photography with his friend Mr. Reeves, the proprietor of a dining-room near King’s Cross. He was then in his thirty-ninth year. At first only irregular markings and patches of light appeared on the plates, but after three months a recognised spirit extra was obtained, the sitters being Dr. Sexton and Dr. Clarke, of Edinburgh. Dr. Sexton invited Mr. Bowman, of Glasgow, an experienced photographer, to make a thorough examination of the camera, the dark room and all the appliances in use. This he did, and declared imposition on the part of Parkes to be impossible. For some years this medium took no remuneration for his services. Mr. Stainton Moses, who has devoted a chapter to Mr. Parkes, writes:

On turning over Mr. Parkes’s album, the most striking point is the enormous variety of the designs; the next, perhaps, the utterly unlike character of most of them, and their total dissimilarity to the conventional ghost. Out of 110 that lie before me now, commencing from April 1872, and with some intermissions extending down to present date, there are not two that are alike-scarcely two that bear any similarity to each other. Each design is peculiar to itself, and bears upon the face of it marks of individuality.

He states that a considerable number of the photographs were recognised by the sitters.

M. Ed. Buguet, the French spirit photographer, visited London in June, 1874, and at his studio at 33 Baker Street had many well-known sitters. Mr. Harrison, editor of The Spiritualist, speaks of a test employed by this photographer, namely, cutting off a corner of the glass plate and fitting it to the negative after development. Mr. Stainton Moses describes Buguet as a tall, thin man, with earnest face and clearly-cut features, with an abundance of bushy black hair. During the exposure of a plate he was said to be in partial trance. The psychic results he obtained were of far higher artistic quality and distinctness than those obtained by other mediums. Also a big percentage of the spirit forms were recognised. A curious feature with Buguet was that he obtained a number of portraits of the “double” of sitters, as well as of those living, but not present, with him in the studio. Thus Stainton Moses, while lying in a state of trance in London, had his picture appear on a plate in Paris when Mr. Gledstanes was the sitter.*

* HUMAN NATURE, Vol. IX, p. 97.

In April, 1875, Buguet was arrested and charged by the French Government with producing fraudulent spirit photographs. To save himself he confessed that all his results had been obtained by trickery. He was sentenced to a fine of five hundred francs and imprisonment for one year. At the trial a number of well-known public men maintained their belief in the genuineness of the "extras" they had obtained, in spite of the production of dummy "ghosts" said to have been used by Buguet. The truth of spirit photography does not rest with this medium, but those who are interested enough to read the full account of his arrest and trial* should be able to form their own conclusions. Writing after the trial, Mr. Stainton Moses says: "I not only believe-I KNOW, as surely as I know anything, that some of Budget's pictures were genuine."

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Vols. VI, VII (1875), and HUMAN NATURE, Vol. IX, p. 334.

Coates says, however, that Buguet was a worthless fellow. Certainly the position of a man who can only prove that he is not a rogue by admitting that he made a false confession out of fear is a weak one. The case for psychic photography would be stronger without him. As to his confession, it was extracted from him by a criminal action which the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Toulouse took against the REVUE SPIRITE, when Leymarie, the editor, was tried and condemned. Buguet was told that his one chance was to confess. Thus pressed, he did what so many victims of the Inquisition had done before him, and made a forced confession, which did not save him, however, from twelve months' imprisonment.

Richard Boursnell (1832-1909) occupied a prominent position in the middle period of the history of spirit photography. He was in partnership with a professional photographer in Fleet Street, and is said to have had psychic markings, with occasional hands and faces, on his plates as early as 1851. His partner accused him of not cleaning the plates properly (those were the days of the wet collodion process), and after an angry dispute Boursnell said he would have nothing more to do with that side of the business. It was nearly forty years later before he again got markings, and then extra forms, with his photographs, much to his annoyance, because it meant injury to his business and the destruction of many plates. With great difficulty Mr. W. T. Stead persuaded him to allow him to have sittings. Under his own conditions, Mr. Stead obtained repeatedly what the old photographer called "shadow pictures." At first they were not recognised, but later on several that were thoroughly identified were obtained. Mr. Stead gives particulars of precautions observed in marking plates, etc., but says that he attaches little importance to these, considering that the appearance on the plate of a recognised likeness of an unknown relative of an unknown sitter a test far superior to precautions which any expert conjurer or trick photographer might evade. He says:

Again and again I sent friends to Mr. Boursnell giving him no information as to who they were, or telling him anything as to the identity of the person's deceased friend or relative whose portrait they wished to secure, and time and again when the negative was developed, the portrait would appear in the background, or sometimes in front of the sitter. This occurred so frequently that I am quite convinced of the impossibility of any fraud. One time it was a French editor, who, finding the portrait of his deceased wife appear on the negative when developed, was so transported with delight that he insisted on kissing the photographer, Mr. B., much to the old man's embarrassment. On another occasion it was a Lancashire engineer, himself a photographer, who took marked plates and all possible precautions. He obtained portraits of two of his relatives and another of an eminent personage with whom he had been in close relations. Or again, it was a near neighbour who, going as a total stranger to the studio, obtained the portrait of her deceased daughter.

In 1903 the Spiritualists of London presented this medium with a purse of gold and a testimonial signed by over a hundred representative Spiritualists. On this occasion the walls of the rooms of the Psychological Society in George Street, Portman Square, were hung with three hundred chosen spirit photographs taken by Boursnell.

With regard to Mr. Stead's point about the "recognised likeness," critics declare that the sitter often imagines the likeness, and that at times two sitters have claimed the same "extra" as a relative. In answer to this it may be said that Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, for instance, ought to be the best judge whether the picture was a likeness of his dead mother. Dr. Cushman (of whom we shall speak later) submitted the "extra" of his daughter Agnes to a number of his friends and relations, and all were convinced of the likeness. But irrespective of any certainty about the likeness, there is overwhelming evidence that these supernormal portraits really do occur, and in thousands of cases they have been recognised.

Mr. Edward Wyllie (1848-1911) had genuine mediumistic gifts which were tested by a number of qualified investigators. He was born in Calcutta, his father, Colonel Robert Wyllie, having been military secretary to the Government of India. Wyllie, who served as a captain in the Maori war in

New Zealand, afterwards took up photography there. He went to California in 1886. After a time spots of light began to show on his negatives, and as they increased threatened to destroy his business. He had never heard of spirit photography until a lady sitter suggested this as a possible explanation. Experimenting with her, faces appeared on the plate in the spots of light. Thenceforth these faces came so often with other sitters that he was compelled to give up his usual business and devote himself to spirit photography. But here he encountered fresh trouble. He was accused of obtaining his results by fraud, and this so wounded him that he tried to earn his living in some other way, but he did not succeed, and had to come back to work as a photo-medium, as he was called. On November 27, 1900, the committee of the Pasadena Society for Psychical Research conducted an investigation with him at Los Angeles. The following questions which were asked, and answered by Wyllie, are of historical interest:

Q. Do you advertise or promise to get spirit faces, or something out of the ordinary for your sitters?

A. Not at all. I neither guarantee nor promise anything. I have no control over it. I merely charge for my time and material, as you see stated on the card there against the wall. I charge one dollar for a sitting; and if the first one is not satisfactory, I give a second trial without extra charge.

Q. Do you sometimes fail to get anything extra?

A. Oh, yes, often. Last Saturday, working all afternoon, I gave five sittings and didn’t get a thing.

Q. About what proportion of such failures do you have?

A. I should say, with an ordinary day’s business, they would average three or four failures a day-some days more and some less.

Q. About what proportion of the extra faces that do appear do you estimate are recognised by the sitter or friends?

A. For several months last year I kept a record on this point, and I found that in about two-thirds of the sittings some one or more of the extra faces appearing were recognised. Sometimes there would be only one extra face, and sometimes five or six, or even eight at once, and I couldn’t keep a tally of them, but only of the total number of sittings, as shown by my book account.

Q. When a sitting is made, do you know as a psychic whether there will be any “extras” on the plate or not?

A. Sometimes I see lights about the sitter, and then I feel pretty sure there will be something for him or her; but just what it will be I don't know, any more than you do. I don't know what it is until I see it on the negative after it is developed so I can hold it up to the light.

Q. If the sitter strongly desires some particular discarnate friend to appear on the plate, is he more likely to get that result?

A. No. A wrought-up or tense state of mind or feeling, whether of desire or anxiety or antagonism, makes it more difficult for the spirit forces to use the sitter's magnetism towards producing their manifestations, so it is less likely that anything extra will then come on the plate. An easy, restful, passive condition is most favourable for good results.

Q. Do those who are Spiritualists get better results than disbelievers?

A. No. Some of the best test results I have ever had came when the strongest sceptics were in the chair.

With this committee no "extras" were obtained. An earlier committee of seven in 1899 submitted the medium to strict tests, and four plates out of eight "showed results for which the committee are unable to account." After a minute account of the precautions taken, the report concludes:

As a committee we have no theory, and testify only to "that which we do know." Individually we differ as to probable causes, but unanimously agree concerning the palpable facts. We will give twenty-five dollars to any Los Angeles photographer who by trick or skill will produce similar results under similar conditions.

(Signed)-Julian McCrae, P. C. Campbell, J. W. Mackie, W. N. Slocum, John Henley.

David Duguid (1832-1907), the well-known medium for automatic writing and painting, had the benefit of careful investigation of his spirit photo graphs by Mr. J. Traill Taylor, editor of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, who in the course of a paper read by him before the London and Provincial Photographic Association on March 9, 1893, gave an account of recent test sittings with this medium. He says:

My conditions were exceedingly simple. They were, that I for the nonce would assume them all to be tricksters, and to guard against fraud, should use my own camera and unopened packages of dry plates purchased from dealers of repute, and that I should be excused from allowing a plate to go out of my own hand till after development, unless I felt otherwise disposed; but that, as I was to treat them as under suspicion, so they must treat me, and that every act I performed must be in the presence of two witnesses, nay, that I would set a watch upon my own camera in the guise of a duplicate one of the same focus-in other words, I would use a binocular stereoscopic camera and dictate all the conditions of operation.

After giving details of the procedure adopted, he records the appearance on the plates of extra figures, and continues:

Some were in focus, others not so; some were lighted from the right, while the sitter was so from the leftsome monopolized the major portion of the plate, quite obliterating the material sitters; others were as if an atrociously badly vignetted portrait, or one cut oval out of a photograph by a can-opener, or equally badly clipped out, were held up behind the sitter. But here is the point not one of these figures which came out so strongly in the negative was visible in any form or shape to me during the time of exposure in the camera, and I vouch in the strongest manner for the fact that no one whatever had an opportunity of tampering with any plate anterior to its being placed in the dark slide or immediately preceding development. Pictorially they are vile, but how came they there?

Other well-known sitters have described remarkable evidential results obtained with Duguid.*

* James Coates, “Photographing the Invisible” (1921), and Andrew Glendinning, “The Veil Lifted” (1894).

Mr. Stainton Moses, in the concluding chapter of his valuable series on Spirit Photography, discusses the theory that the extra forms photographed are moulded from ectoplasm (he speaks of it as the “fluidic substance”) by the invisible operators, and makes important comparisons between the results obtained by different photographic mediums.

Mr. John Beattie’s “valuable and conclusive experiments,” as Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace calls them, can only be referred to briefly. Mr. Beattie, of Clifton, Bristol, who was a retired photographer of twenty years’ standing, felt very doubtful about the genuineness of many of the alleged spirit photographs which had been shown to him, and determined to investigate for himself. Without any professional medium, but in the presence of an intimate friend who was a trance sensitive, he and his friend Dr. G. S. Thomson, of Edinburgh, conducted a series of experiments in 1872 and obtained on the plates first patches of light and, later on, entire extra figures. They found that the extra forms and markings showed up on the plate during development much in advance of the sitter a peculiarity often observed by other operators. Mr. Beattie's thorough honesty is vouched for by the editor of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY. Mr. Stainton Moses* and others supply details of the above experiments.

* HUMAN NATURE, Vols. VIII. and IX., 1874-5. HUMAN NATURE, Vol. VIII., 1874, p. 390 ET SEQ.

The LONDON DAILY MAIL in 1908 appointed a Commission to make "an inquiry into the genuineness or otherwise of what are called spirit photographs," but it came to naught. It was composed of three non-Spiritualists, Messrs. R. Child Bayley, F. J. Mortimer, and E. Sanger-Shepherd, and three supporters of spirit photography, Messrs. A. P. Sinnett, E. R. Serocold Skeels, and Robert King. In the course of the report of the latter three they state that they:

I can only agree to report that the Commission has failed to secure proof that spirit photography is possible, not because evidence to that effect is otherwise than very abundant, but by reason of the unfortunate and unpractical attitude adopted by those members of the commission who had no previous experience of the subject.

Particulars of the Commission will be found in LIGHT.* In recent years the history of spirit photography has largely centred round what is known as the Crewe Circle, which is now composed of Mr. William Hope and Mrs. Buxton, both living at Crewe. The Circle was formed about 1905, but did not attract attention until it was discovered by Archdeacon Colley in 1908. Mr. Hope, describing his first experiences, says that while working in a factory near Manchester, he took a photograph one Saturday afternoon of a fellow-workman whom he posed in front of a brick wall. When the plate was developed there was to be seen, in addition to the photograph of his friend, the form of a woman standing by his side, with the brick wall showing through her. The man asked Hope how he had put the other figure there, saying that he recognised it as that of his sister who had been dead some years. Mr. Hope says:

* LIGHT, 1908, p. 526, and 1909, pp. 290, 307, 329.

I knew nothing at all about Spiritualism then. We took the photograph to the works on Monday, and a Spiritualist there said it was what was called a Spirit photograph. He suggested that we should try again on the following Saturday at the same place with the same camera, which we did, and not only the same lady came on the plate again, but a little child with her. I thought this very strange, and it made me more interested, and I went on with my experiments. For a long time Hope destroyed all the negatives on which he obtained spirit pictures, until Archdeacon Colley became acquainted with him and told him he must preserve them.

Archdeacon Colley had his first sitting with the Crewe Circle on March 16, 1908. He brought his own camera (a Lancaster quarter-plate which Mr. Hope still uses), his own diamond-marked plates and dark slides, and developed plates with his own chemicals. All that Mr. Hope did was to press the bulb for the exposure. On one of the plates were two spirit pictures.

Since that early day, Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton have taken thousands of spirit photographs under every imaginable test, and they are proud to be able to say that they have never charged a penny as professional fees, only charging for the actual photographic materials used and for their time.

Mr. M. J. Vearncombe, a professional photographer in Bridgwater, Somerset, had the same disturbing experience as Wyllie, Boursnell, and others in finding unaccountable patches of light appear on his plates, and, like them, he came to take spirit photographs.

In 1920 Mr. Fred Barlow, of Birmingham, a well-known investigator, obtained with this medium extras of faces and written messages, under test conditions, on plates that were not exposed in the camera.* Since that date Mr. Vearncombe has secured many evidential results.

* See LIGHT 1920, p. 190. March 1922, pp. 132-47.

Mrs. Deane's mediumship is of recent date (her first spirit photograph was in June, 1920). She has obtained many recognised "extras" under test conditions, and her work is sometimes equal to the best of her predecessors in this branch. Recently she has achieved two very fine results. Dr. Allerton Cushman, a well-known American scientist and Director of the National Laboratories at Washington, paid an unexpected visit to the British College of Psychic Science at Holland Park in July, 1921, and obtained through Mrs. Deane a beautiful and well-recognised "extra" of his deceased daughter. Full details of this sitting will be found recorded, with photographs, in the JOURNAL of the American Society for Psychical Research. The other result was on November 11, 1922, on the occasion of the Great Silence, on Armistice Day, in Whitehall, when in a photograph of the immense concourse of people gathered in the vicinity of the Cenotaph many spirit faces are discernible, and a number of them were recognised. This was repeated on three successive years.

Modern researches have proved that these psychic results are not obtained, in some instances at least, through the lens of the camera. On many occasions, under test conditions, these supernormal pictures have been secured from an unopened box of plates, held between the hands of the sitter or sitters. Also, when the experiment has been tried of using two cameras, if any “extra” appears, it is found in one camera, not in both. A theory held is that the image is precipitated on the photographic plate, or that a psychic screen is applied to the plate.

The author may perhaps say a few words upon his own personal experience, which has been chiefly with the Crewe Circle and with Mrs. Deane. In the case of the latter there have always been results, but in no case were the “extras” recognised. The author is well aware of Mrs. Deane’s psychic power, which has been conspicuously shown during the long series of experiments held by Mr. Warrick under every possible test condition, and fully reported in PSYCHIC SCIENCE.* His own experiences have, however, never been evidential, and if he relied only upon them he could not speak with any certainty. He used Mrs. Deane’s own plates, and he has a strong feeling that the faces may be precipitated upon them during the days of preparation when she carries the packet upon her person. She is under the impression that she can facilitate her results in this way, but she is probably quite mistaken, for the Cushman case was extempore. It is also on record that a trick was once played upon her at the Psychic College, her own packet being taken away and another substituted. In spite of this “extras” were obtained. She would be well advised, therefore, if she abandoned methods which make her results, however genuine, so vulnerable to attack.

* July, 1925.

It is otherwise with Mr. Hope. On the various occasions when the author has sat with him he has always brought his own plates, has marked them in the dark room, and has handled and developed them himself.

Since writing the above, the author has tested the medium with his own plates, marked and developed by himself. He obtained six psychic results in eight experiments. In nearly every case an “extra” has been obtained, that “extra”-though there has never yet been a clear recognition-has certainly been abnormal in its production. Mr. Hope has endured the usual attacks from ignorance or malice to which every medium is exposed, but he has emerged from them with his honour unblemished.

Some mention should be made of the remarkable results of Mr. Staveley Bulford, a talented psychic student, who has produced most excellent genuine psychic photographs. No one can look over his scrapbook and note the gradual development of his gift from mere blotches of light to very perfect faces without being convinced of the reality of the process.

The subject is still obscure, and all the author's personal experience goes to support the view that in a certain number of cases nothing external is ever built up, but the effect is produced by a sort of ray carrying a picture upon it which can penetrate solids, such as the wall of the dark slide, and imprint its effect upon the plate. The experiment, already cited, where two cameras have been trained simultaneously, with the medium midway between them, appears to be conclusive, since it showed a result on one plate and not on the other. The author has obtained results on plates which never left the dark slide, quite as vivid as any which have been exposed to light. It is probable that if Hope never took the cap off the lens his results would often be the same.

Whatever the eventual explanation, the only hypothesis which at present covers the facts is that of a wise invisible Intelligence, presiding over the operation and working in his own fashion, which shows different results with different circles. So standardized are the methods of each that the author would undertake to tell at a glance which photographer had taken any print submitted to him. Supposing such an Intelligence to have the powers claimed, we can then at once see why every normal photographic law is violated, why shadows and lights no longer agree, and why, in short, a whole series of traps are laid for the ordinary conventional critic. We can understand also, since the picture is simply built up by the Intelligence and shot on to the plate, why we find results which are reproductions of old pictures and photographs, and why it is as possible that the face of a living man may appear on the plate as that of a disembodied spirit. In one instance, quoted by Dr. Henslow, the reproduction of a rare Greek script from the British Museum appeared in one of the plates from Hope, with a slight change in the Greek which showed that it was not a copy.* Here apparently the Intelligence had noted the inscription, had shot it on to the plate, but had made some small slip of memory in the conveyance. This explanation has the disconcerting corollary that the mere fact that we get the psychic photograph of a dead friend is no proof at all that the friend is really present. It is only when that fact is independently asserted in some seance, before or after, that we get something in the nature of proof.

* “Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism,” p. 218. Henslow.

In his experiments with Hope the author has seemed to catch a glimpse of the process by which the objective photographs are built up-so much so that he has been able to arrange a series of slides which exhibit the various stages. The first of these slides-taken with Mr. William Jeffrey, of Glasgow, as a sitter-shows a sort of cocoon of thinly veined, filmy material which we must call ectoplasm, since the various plasms have not yet been subdivided. It is as tenuous as a great soap bubble and has nothing within: This would appear to be the containing envelope within which the process is carried on, force being collected there as in an earthly medium’s cabinet. In the next slide one sees that a face has formed inside the cocoon, and that the cocoon is opening down the centre. Various stages of this opening are seen. Finally, the face looks out with the cocoon festooned back, and forming an arch over the face, and a hanging veil on either side of it. This veil is highly characteristic of Hope’s pictures, and when it is wanting one may argue that there was no objective presence and that the effect is really a psychograph. The veil or mantilla effect in various forms may be traced back through the whole series of previous photographs, and is especially noticeable in one taken by an amateur on the West Coast of Africa, where the dark spirit has thick folds over the head and down to the ground. When similar results are obtained at Crewe and at Lagos, it is only common sense to agree that a common law is at work.

In pointing out the evidence for the psychic cocoon, the author hopes that he has made some small contribution to the better understanding of the mechanism of psychic photography. It is a very true branch of psychic science, as every earnest investigator will discover. We cannot deny, however, that it has been occasionally made the tool of rogues, nor can we confidently assert that, because some results of any medium are genuine, we are therefore justified in accepting without question whatever else may come.

CHAPTER VI

VOICE MEDIUMSHIP AND MOULDS

It is impossible to devote separate chapters to each form of psychic power, as the result would far transcend the limits of this work, but the phenomena of voice production and also of moulds are so clear and evidential that some fuller account of them may not be superfluous.

Many thousands of people can echo the words of job, “And I heard a voice,” meaning a voice coming from someone not living on earth. And they can say this with the assurance of conviction, after a series of exhaustive tests. “The Bible narrative abounds with instances of this phenomenon,* and the psychic records of modern times show that here, as in other supernormal manifestations, what happened at the dawn of the world is happening still.

* See Usborne Moore’s “The Voices” (1913), p. 433. S.P.R. JOURNAL, Vol. III., 1887, p. 131.

Historic instances of voice messages are those of Socrates and Joan of Arc, though it is not clear that in either case the voice was audible to others. It is in the light of the fuller knowledge which has come to us that we may conclude with some probability that the voices they heard were of the same supernormal character as those with which we are acquainted to-day.

Mr. F. W. H. Myers would have us believe that the Daemon of Socrates was “a profounder stratum of the sage himself,” which was communicating with “the superficial or conscious stratum.” And in the same way he would explain the voices which came to Joan. But in saying this he is not explaining anything. What are we to think of the reports that ancient statues spoke? The learned, anonymous author, said to have been Dr. Leonard Marsh, of Vermont University, of that curious book “Apocatastasis; or Progress Backwards,” quotes Nonnus as saying:

Concerning this statue (of Apollo), where it stood, and how it spoke, I have said nothing. It is to be understood, however, that there was a statue at Delphi which emitted an inarticulate voice. For you must know that spirits speak with inarticulate voices because they have no organs by which they can speak articulately.

Dr. Marsh comments on this:

The author seems not to have been well informed in regard to the speaking power of the spirits, since all ancient history declares that their voice was often heard in the air, speaking articulately, and repeating the same words in different places; and this was called, and universally known, by the name of "Vox Divina."

He goes on to say that with the statue mentioned the spirit was evidently experimenting with the perverse material of which it was made (probably stone) to see if he could make it articulate, but could not succeed because the statue had "no larynx or other organs of voice, as modern mediums have." Dr. Marsh in his book set out to show that the Spiritualistic phenomena at that time (1854) were crude and immature in comparison with ancient spirit intercourse. The ancients, he says, spoke of it as a science, and asserted that the knowledge obtained by it was certain and reliable, "in spite of all fraudulent daemons." Granting that the priest was a voice medium, the speaking oracle is easily explained.

It is worth noting that the Voice, which was one of the first forms of mediumship associated with modern Spiritualism, is still prominent, whereas many other aspects of earlier mediumship have become rare. As there are a number of competent investigators who consider that voice phenomena are among the most convincing of psychic manifestations, let us glance at the records.

Jonathan Koons, the Ohio farmer, appears to have been the first of the modern mediums with whom it appeared. In the log-hut already mentioned, called his "Spirit Room," he had in 1852, and for some years after, a number of surprising phenomena, included among which were spirit voices speaking through a tin megaphone or "trumpet." Mr. Charles Partridge, a well-known public man, who was an early investigator, thus describes hearing the spirit known as John King speak at a seance at the Koons's in 1855:

At the close of the seance the spirit of King, as is his custom, took up the trumpet and gave a short lecture through it-SPEAKING AUDIBLY AND DISTINCTLY, presenting the benefits to be derived both in time and eternity from intercourse with spirits, and exhorting us to be discreet and bold in speech, diligent in our investigations, faithful to the responsibilities which those privileges impose, charitable towards those who are in ignorance or error, tempering our zeal with wisdom, etc.

Professor Mapes, the well-known American chemist, said that in the presence of the Davenports he conversed for half an hour with John King, whose voice was loud and distinct. Mr. Robert Cooper, one of the biographers of the Davenport Brothers, often heard King's voice in daylight, and in the moonlight when walking in the street with the Davenports.

At the present day we have come to have some idea of the process through which the voices are produced at a seance. This knowledge, by the way, has been corroborated by communications received from the spirits themselves.

It appears that ectoplasm coming chiefly from the medium, but also in a lesser degree from the sitters, is used by the spirit operators to fashion something resembling a human larynx. This they use in the production of the voice.

In the explanation given to Koons by the spirits they spoke of using a combination of the elements of the spiritual body, and what corresponds to our modern ectoplasm, "a physical aura which emanates from the medium." Compare this with the spirit explanation given through Mrs. Bassett, a well-known English voice medium in the 'seventies: "They say they take the emanations from the medium and other members of the circle, wherewith they make speaking apparatus which they use to talk with."*

* THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE (London), 1872, p. 45.

Mrs. Mary Marshall (died 1875), who was the first English public medium, was the channel for voices coming from John King and others. In London in 1869 Mr. W. H. Harrison, editor of THE SPIRITUALIST, conducted exhaustive tests with her. As the early Spiritualists were supposed to be people who were easily imposed upon, it is interesting to note his careful scrutiny. He says,* speaking of Mrs. Mary Marshall:

* THE SPIRITUALIST (London), Vol. 1, p. 38.

Tables and chairs moved about in daylight, and sometimes rose from the ground, whilst at the dark seances voices were heard, and luminous manifestations seen; all these things purported to come from spirits. I therefore resolved to be a constant visitor at the seances and to stick at the work till I either discovered the assertions to be true, or detected the imposture with sufficient accuracy and certainty to expose it in the presence of witnesses, and to be able to publish the facts with complete sectional drawings of the apparatus used.

The voice calling itself "John King" is backed by an intelligence apparently entirely different in kind from that of Mr. or Mrs. Marshall. However, I privately assumed that Mr. Marshall did the voice, and by attending a few seances found that it was a common thing for Mr. Marshall and John King to speak at the same time, so I was obliged to throw over that theory.

Next I assumed that Mrs. Marshall did it, till one evening I sat next her; she was on my right-hand side, I had hold of her hand and arm, and John King came and talked into my left ear, Mrs. Marshall being perfectly motionless all the time, so over went the other theory. Next, I assumed that a confederate among the visitors to the circle did John King's voice, so had a seance with Mr. and Mrs. Marshall alone; John was there, and talked for an hour.

Lastly, I assumed that a concealed confederate did the voice, so attended two seances where Mrs. Marshall was present among strangers to her, in a strange house, and again John King was as lively as ever.

Finally, on Thursday evening December 30th, 1869, John King came and talked to eleven persons at Mrs. C. Berry's circle, in the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, the medium being Mrs. Perrin.

While Mr. Harrison satisfied himself in this way that no human being present produced the voices, he does not mention-what was the case-that the voices often gave internal proofs of identity such as neither the medium nor a confederate could have supplied. Signor Damiani, a well-known investigator, in his evidence before the London Dialectical Society, declared * that voices that had spoken to him in the presence of unpaid mediums had subsequently conversed with him at private seances with Mrs. Marshall, and had "there exhibited the same peculiarities as to tone, expression, pitch, volume, and pronunciation, as upon the former occasions." These voices also talked with him on matters of so private a nature that no one else could have known of them. At times, too, they foretold events which duly came to pass.

* Report of the London Dialectical Society (1871), p. 201. S.P.R. JOURNAL, Vol. IV, p. 127.

It is natural that those who come in contact for the first time with voice phenomena should suspect ventriloquism as a possible explanation. D. D.

Home, with whom these voices occurred often, was careful to meet this objection. General Boldero, describing the seance when Home visited him at Cupar, Fife, in 1870, writes:

Then voices were heard speaking together in the room, two different persons judging from the intonation. We could not make out the words spoken, as Home persisted in speaking to us all the time. We remonstrated with him for speaking, and he replied, "I spoke purposely that you might be convinced the voices were not due to any ventriloquism on my part, as this is impossible when anyone is speaking in his natural voice." Home's voice was quite unlike that of the voices heard in the air.

The author can corroborate this from his personal experience, having repeatedly heard voices speaking at the same time. Examples are given in the chapter on Some Great Modern Mediums.

Admiral Usborne Moore testifies to hearing three and four spirit voices simultaneously with Mrs. Wriedt, of Detroit. In his book "The Voices" (1913) he quotes the testimony of a well-known writer, Miss Edith K. Harper, formerly private secretary to Mr. W. T. Stead. She writes*:

* "The Voices," pp. 324-5,

After considering a record of about two hundred sittings with Mrs. Etta Wriedt during her three visits to England, of which the notes of the general circles alone would fill a huge volume, were they written IN EXTENSO, I will try to relate, in brief, a few of the most striking experiences my mother and I were privileged to have through Mrs. Wriedt's mediumship. Looking over my notes of her first visit in 1911 the following details stand out as among the principal features of the seances:-

(1) Mrs Wriedt was never entranced, but conversed freely with the sitters, and we have heard her talking to, even arguing with, some spirit person with whose opinions she did not agree. I remember once Mr. Stead shaking with laughter on hearing Mrs. Wriedt suddenly reprimand the late editor of the Progressive Thinker for his attitude towards mediums, and the evident confusion of Mr. Francis, who, after an attempted explanation, dropped the trumpet, and apparently retired discomforted.

(2) Two, three, and even four spirit voices talking simultaneously to different sitters.

(3) Messages given in foreign languages-French, German, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Dutch, Arabic and others-with which the medium was quite unacquainted. A Norwegian lady, well known in the world of

literature and politics, was addressed in Norwegian by a man’s voice, claiming to be her brother, and giving the name P-.

She conversed with him, and seemed overcome with joy at the correct proofs he gave her of his identity. Another time a voice spoke in voluble Spanish, addressing itself definitely to a lady in the circle whom none of the sitters knew to be acquainted with that language; the lady thereupon entered into a fluent conversation in Spanish with the Spirit, to the evident satisfaction of the latter.

Mrs. Mary Hollis (afterwards Mrs. Hollis-Billing) was a remarkable American medium who visited England in 1874, and again in 1880, when a presentation and address were given her in London by representative Spiritualists. A fine account of her varied mediumship is given by Dr. N. B. Wolfe in his book, “Startling Facts in Modern Spiritualism.” Mrs. Hollis was a lady of refinement, and thousands obtained evidence and consolation through her powers. Her two spirit guides, “James Nolan” and an Indian named “Ski,” talked freely in the Direct Voice. At one of her seances, held at Mrs. Makdougall Gregory’s house in Grosvenor Square on January 21, 1880, a clergyman of the Church of England* “had the thread of a conversation taken up by a spirit where it had been broken off seven years before, and he professed himself perfectly satisfied with the genuineness of the voice, which was very peculiar and distinctly audible to those sitting on either side of the clergyman who was addressed.”

* SPIRITUAL NOTES, Vol. I., p. 262, iv.

Mr. Edward C. Randall gives an account of another good American voice medium, Mrs. Emily S. French, in his book “The Dead Have Never Died.” She died in her home in Rochester, New York, on June 24, 1912. Mr. Randall investigated her powers for twenty years, and was convinced that her mediumship was of a very high character.

Mrs. Mercia M. Swain, who died in 1900, was a voice medium through whose instrumentality a Rescue Circle in California was able to reach and do good to unprogressed souls in the beyond. An account of these extraordinary sittings, which were under the control of Mr. Leander Fisher, of Buffalo, New York, and lasted for twenty-five years, from 1875 to 1900, will be found in Admiral Usborne Moore’s book, “Glimpses of the Next State.”

Mrs. Everitt, a very fine non-professional medium, obtained voices in England in 1867 and for many years after. Most of the great physical mediums, especially the materialising mediums, produced voice phenomena. They occurred, for instance, with Eglinton, Spriggs, Husk, Duguid, Herne, Mrs. Guppy, and Florence Cook.

Mrs. Elizabeth Blake, of Ohio, who died in 1920, was one of the most wonderful voice mediums of whom we have any record, and perhaps the most evidential, because in her presence the voices were regularly produced in broad daylight. She was a poor, illiterate woman living in the tiny village of Bradrick on the shore of the Ohio River, on the opposite bank of which was the town of Huntingdon, in West Virginia. She had been a medium since childhood. She was strongly religious and belonged to the Methodist Church, from which, however, like some others, she was expelled on account of her mediumship.

Little has been written about her, the only detailed account being a valuable monograph by Professor Hyslop.* She is said to have been repeatedly tested by “scientists, physicians and others,” and to have submitted willingly to all their tests. As, however, these men were unable to detect any fraud, they did not trouble to give their results to the world. Hyslop had his attention drawn to her by hearing that a well-known American conjurer, of many years’ experience, had become convinced of her genuineness, and in 1906 he travelled to Ohio to investigate her mediumship.

Hyslop’s voluminous report describes evidential communications that occurred.

He makes this not unusual confession of ignorance of ectoplasmic processes in the production of voice phenomena. He says:

The loudness of the sounds in some cases excludes the supposition that the voices are conveyed from the vocal cords to the trumpet. I have heard the sounds twenty feet away, and could have heard them forty or fifty feet away, and Mrs. Blake’s lips did not move.

It still remains to get any clear hypothesis to explain this aspect of the phenomena. Even to say “spirits” would not satisfy the ordinary scientific man. He wants to know the mechanical processes involved, as we explain ordinary speech.

It may be true that spirits are the first cause in the case, but there are steps in the process which intervene between their initiative and the ultimate result. It is that which creates the perplexity more than the supposition that spirits are in some way back of it allthe scientific man cannot see how spirits can institute a mechanical event without the use of a mechanical instrument.

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* PROCEEDINGS of the American S.P.R., Vol. VII (1913), pp. 570-788.

Nor can anyone else, for that matter, but the explanation has been given again and again from the Other Side. Professor Hyslop's want of knowledge of the link existing between the sounds and their source would be less surprising were it not for the fact that the spirits themselves have repeatedly supplied the answer to the questions he raises. Through many mediums they have given almost identical explanations.

Dr. L. V. Guthrie, superintendent of the West Virginia Asylum at Huntingdon, Mrs. Blake's medical adviser, was convinced of her powers. He wrote:*

* OP. CIT., p. 581.

I have had sittings with her in my own office, also on the front porch in the open air, and on one occasion in a carriage as we were driving along the road. She has repeatedly offered to let me have a sitting and use a lamp chimney instead of a tin horn, and I have frequently seen her produce the voices with her hand resting on one end of the horn.

Dr. Guthrie gives the following two cases with Mrs. Blake where the information supplied was not known to the sitters, and could not have been known to the medium.

One of my employees, a young lady, whose brother had joined the army and gone to the Philippines; was anxious to receive some word from him, and had written letters to him repeatedly and addressed them in care of his Company in the Philippines, but could receive no answer. She called on Mrs. Blake and was told by the "spirit" of her mother, who had passed away some several years, that if she would address a letter to this brother at C — she would get an answer. She did so and received a reply from him in two or three days, as he had returned from the Philippines, unknown to any of his family.

The next case is even more striking.

An acquaintance of mine, of prominent family in this end of the State, whose grandfather had been found at the foot of a high bridge with his skull smashed and life extinct, called on Mrs. Blake a few years ago and was not thinking of her grandfather at the time. She was very much surprised to have the "spirit" of her grandfather tell her that he had not fallen off the bridge while intoxicated, as had been presumed at the time, but that he had been murdered by two men who met him in a buggy and had proceeded to sandbag him, relieve him of his valuables, and throw him over the bridge. The “spirit” then proceeded to describe minutely the appearance of the two men who had murdered him, and gave such other information that led to the arrest and conviction of one or both of these individuals.

Numerous sitters with Mrs. Blake noted that while the medium was speaking, spirit voices were heard at the same time, and further, that the same spirits pre served the same personality and the same intonation of voice through a course of years. Hyslop gives details of a case with this medium where the voice communication gave the correct solution for opening a combination lock to a safe, when it was unknown to the sitter.

Among modern voice mediums in England are Mrs. Roberts Johnson, Mrs. Blanche Cooper, John C. Sloan, William Phoenix, the Misses Dunsmore, Evan Powell the Welsh medium, and Mr. Potter.

Mr. H. Dennis Bradley has given a full account of the voice mediumship of George Valiantine, the well-known American medium. Mr. Bradley was able himself to secure voices in his own Home Circle, without any professional medium. It is impossible to exaggerate the services which Mr. Bradley’s devoted and self-sacrificing work has rendered to psychic science. If our whole knowledge depended upon the evidence given in these two books, it would be ample for any reasonable man.*

* “Towards the Stars” and “The Wisdom of the Gods.”

Some few pages may also be devoted to a summary of the very cogent objective evidence which is offered by the casts that have been taken from the bodies of ectoplasmic figures-in other words, of materialised forms. The first who explored this line of research seems to have been William Denton, the author of “Nature’s Secrets,” a book on psychometry, published in 1863. In Boston (U. S. A.) in 1875, working with the medium Mary M. Hardy, he employed methods which closely resemble those used by Richet and Geley in their more recent experiments in Paris. Denton actually gave a public demonstration in Paine Hall, when the cast of a spirit face was said to have been produced in melted paraffin. Other mediums with whom these casts were obtained were Mrs. Firman, Dr. Monck, Miss Fairlamb (afterwards Mrs. Mellon), and William Eglinton. The fact that these results were corroborated by the later Paris sittings is a strong argument for their validity. Mr. William Oxley, of Manchester, describes how on February 5, 1876, a beautiful mould of a lady’s hand was obtained, and how a subsequent mould of the hand of Mrs. Firman the medium was found to be quite different. On this occasion Mrs. Firman was confined in a lace net bag which went over her head and was fastened round the waist, enclosing her hands and arms. This would seem to be final as regards any fraud on the part of the medium, while it is also recorded that the wax mould was warm, which shows that it could not have been brought into the seance room. It is hard to see what further precautions could have been taken to guarantee the result. On a second occasion a mould of the foot as well as of the hand was obtained, the openings of the wrist and ankle being in each case so narrow that the limb could not have been withdrawn. There seems to have been no explanation open save that the hand or foot had dematerialised.

Dr. Monck's results seem also to stand the test of criticism. Oxley experimented with him in Manchester in 1876, and had the same success as with Mrs. Firman. On this occasion different moulds from two separate figures were obtained. Oxley says of these experiences, "The importance and value of these spirit moulds cannot be overestimated, for while the relation of spiritual phenomena to others of doubtful and sceptical turn is valuable only on the ground of credibility, the casts of these hands and feet are permanent and patent facts, and now demand from men of science, artists, and scoffers a solution of the mystery of their production." This demand is still made. A famous conjurer, Houdini, and a great anatomist, Sir Arthur Keith, have both tried their hands, and the results, laboriously produced, have only served to accentuate the unique character of that which they tried to copy.

In the case of Eglinton it has been recorded by Dr. Nichols) the biographer of the Davenports, that evidential casts of hands were obtained, and that one lady present recognised a peculiarity-a slight deformity-characteristic of the hand of her little daughter who had been drowned in South Africa at the age of five years.

Perhaps the most final and convincing of all the moulds was that which was obtained by Epes Sergeant from the medium Mrs. Hardy, already mentioned in connection with Denton's experiments. The conclusions are worth quoting in full. The writer says-

"Our conclusions are:

"1. That the mould of a full-sized perfect hand was produced in a closed box by some unknown power exercising intelligence and manual activity.

“2. That the conditions of the experiment were independent of all reliance on the character and good faith of the medium, though the genuineness of her mediumship has been fully vindicated by the result.

“3. That these conditions were so simple and so stringent as completely to exclude all opportunities for fraud and all contrivances for illusion, so that our realisation of the conclusiveness of the test is perfect.

“4. That the fact, long known to investigators, that evanescent, materialised hands, guided by intelligence and projected from an invisible organism, can be made visible and tangible, receives confirmation from this duplicated test.

“5. That the experiment of the mould, coupled with that of the so-called spirit photograph, gives objective proof of the operation of an intelligent force outside of any visible organism, and offers a fair basis for scientific investigation.

“6. That the inquiry ‘How was that mould produced within that box?’ leads to considerations that must have a most important bearing on the philosophy of the future, as well as on problems of psychology and physiology, and opens new views of the latent powers and high destiny of man.”

Seven reputable witnesses sign the report.

If the reader is not satisfied by such various examples of the validity of these tests by casts and moulds, he should read the conclusions which were reached by that great investigator Geley, at the end of his classical experiments with Kluski, already shortly alluded to.

Dr. Geley carried out with Kluski a number of remarkable experiments in the formation of wax moulds of materialised hands. He has recorded* the results of a series of eleven successful sittings for this purpose. In a dim light the medium’s right hand was held by Professor Richet and his left hand by Count Potocki. A trough containing wax, kept at melting-point by warm water, was placed two feet in front of Kluski, and for the purpose of a test the wax was impregnated (unknown to the medium) with the chemical cholesterin, this to prevent the possibility of substitution. Dr. Geley writes:

* REVUE METAPSYCHIQUE, June, 1921.

The feeble light did not admit of the phenomena being actually seen; we were aware of the moment of dipping, by the sound of splashing in the liquid. The operation involved two or three immersions. The hand that was acting was plunged in the trough, was withdrawn, and, covered with warm paraffin, touched the hands of the controllers of the experiments, and then was plunged again into the wax. After the operation the glove of paraffin, still warm but solidified, was placed against the hand of one of the controllers.

In this way nine moulds were taken: seven of hands, one of a foot, and one of a chin and lips. The wax of which they were composed on being tested gave the characteristic reaction of cholesterin. Dr. Geley shows twenty-three photographs of the moulds and of plaster casts made from them. It may be mentioned that the moulds exhibit the folds of the skin, the nails and the veins, and these markings in nowise resemble those of the medium. Efforts to make similar moulds from the hands of human beings were only partially successful, and the difference from those obtained at the sittings was obvious. Sculptors and moulders of repute have declared that they know of no method of producing wax moulds such as those obtained at the seances with Kluski.

Geley sums up the result thus:*

* "L'Ectoplasmie," etc., p. 278.

"We will now enumerate the proofs which we have given of the authenticity of the moulds of materialised limbs in our experiments in Paris and Warsaw.

"We have shown that quite apart from the control of the medium, whose two hands were held by us, all fraud was impossible.

"1. The theory of fraud by a rubber glove is inadmissible, for such an attempt gives crude and absurd results which can be seen at a glance to be imitations.

"2. It is not possible to produce such gloves of wax by using a rigid mould already prepared. A trial of this shows at once how impossible it is.

"3. The use of a prepared mould in some fusible and soluble substance, covered with a film of paraffin during the seance and then dissolved out in a pail of water, will not fit in with the actual procedure. We had no pail of water.

"4. The theory that a living hand was used (that of the medium or of an assistant) is inadmissible. This could not have been done, for several reasons, one being that gloves thus obtained are thick and solid, while ours are fine and delicate, also that the position of the fingers in our moulds makes it impossible that they could be withdrawn without breaking the glove. Also that the gloves have been compared with the hands of the medium and of the assistants, and that they are not alike. This is shown also by anthropological measurements.

“Finally, there is the hypothesis that the gloves were brought by the medium. This is disproved by the fact that we secretly introduced chemicals into the melted wax, and that these were found in the gloves.

“The report of the expert modellers on the point is categorical and final.”

Nothing is evidence to those who are so filled with prejudice that they have no room for reason, but it is inconceivable that any normally endowed man could read all the above, and doubt the possibility of taking moulds from ectoplasmic figures.

CHAPTER VII

FRENCH, GERMAN, AND ITALIAN SPIRITUALISM

Spiritualism in Trance and the Latin races centres round Allan Kardec, who prefers for it the term Spiritism, and its predominant feature is a belief in reincarnation.

M. Hippolyte Leon Denizard Rivail, who adopted the pseudonym “Allan Kardec,” was born in Lyons in 1804, where his father was a barrister. In 1850, when the American spirit manifestations were exciting attention in Europe, Allan Kardec investigated the subject through the mediumship of two daughters of a friend.

In the communications which were obtained he was informed that “Spirits of a much higher order than those who habitually communicated through the two young mediums, came expressly for him, and would continue to do so, in order to enable him to fulfil an important religious mission.”

He tested this by drawing up a series of questions relating to the problems of human life, and submitting them to the supposed operating intelligences, and by means of raps and writing through the planchette he received the replies upon which he has founded his system of Spiritism.

After two years of these communications he found that his ideas and convictions had become completely changed. He said:

“The instructions thus transmitted constitute an entirely new theory of human life, duty and destiny, that appears to me to be perfectly rational and coherent, admirably lucid and consoling, and intensely interesting.” The idea came to him to publish what he had got, and on submitting this idea to the communicating intelligences, he was told that the teaching had been expressly intended to be given to the world, and that he had a mission confided to him by Providence. They also instructed him to call the work LE LIVRE DES ESPRITS (The Spirits’ Book).

The book thus produced in 1856 had a great success. Over twenty editions have been published, and the “Revised Edition,” issued in 1857, has become the recognised text-book of spiritual philosophy in France. In 1861 he published “The Mediums’ Book”; in 1864, “The Gospel as Explained by Spirits”; in 1865, “Heaven and Hell”; and in 1867, “Genesis.” In addition to the above, which are his main works, he published two short treatises entitled, “What is Spiritism?” and “Spiritism Reduced to its Simplest Expression.”

Miss Anna Blackwell, who has translated Allan Kardec’s works into English, thus describes him:

In person, Allan Kardec was somewhat under middle height. Strongly built, with a large, round, massive head, well-marked features, and clear, grey eyes, he looked more like a German than a Frenchman. Energetic and persevering, but of a temperament that was calm, cautious, and unimaginative almost to coldness, incredulous by nature and by education, a close, logical reasoner, and eminently practical in thought and deed; he was equally free from mysticism and from enthusiasm. Grave, slow of speech, unassuming in manner, yet not without a certain quiet dignity resulting from the earnestness and single-mindedness which were the distinguishing traits of his character; neither courting nor avoiding discussion, but never volunteering any remark upon the subject to which he had devoted his life, he received with affability the innumerable visitors from every part of the world who came to converse with him in regard to the views of which he was the recognised exponent, answering questions and objections, explaining difficulties, and giving information to all serious inquirers, with whom he talked with freedom and animation, his face occasionally lighting up with a genial and pleasant smile, though such was his habitual sobriety of demeanour that he was never known to laugh. Among the thousands by whom he was thus visited were many of high rank in the social, literary, artistic, and scientific worlds. The Emperor Napoleon III, the fact of whose interest in spiritist phenomena was no mystery, sent for him several times, and held long conversations with him at the Tuileries upon the doctrines of “The Spirits’ Book.”

He founded the Society of Psychologie Studies, which met weekly at his house for the purpose of getting communications through writing mediums. He also established LA REVUE SPIRITE, a monthly journal still in existence, which he edited until his death in 1869. Shortly before this he drew up a plan of an organization to carry on his work. It was called “The Joint Stock Company for the Continuation of the Works of Allan Kardec,” with power to buy and sell, receive donations and bequests, and to continue the publication of LA REVUE SPIRITE. After his death his plans were faithfully carried out.

Kardec considered that the words “spiritual,” “spiritualist,” and “spiritualism” already had a definite meaning. Therefore he substituted “spiritism” and “spiritist.”

This Spiritist philosophy is distinguished by its belief that our spiritual progression is effected through a series of incarnations.

Spirits having to pass through many incarnations, it follows that we have all had many existences, and that we shall have others, more or less perfect, either upon this earth or in other worlds.

The incarnation of spirits always takes place in the human race; it would be an error to suppose that the soul or spirit could be incarnated in the body of an animal.

A spirit’s successive corporeal existences are always progressive, and never retrograde; but the rapidity of our progress depends on the efforts we make to arrive at perfection.

The qualities of the soul are those of the spirit incarnated in us; thus, a good man is the incarnation of a good spirit, and a bad man is that of an unpurified spirit.

The soul possessed its own individuality before its incarnation; it preserves that individuality after its separation from the body.

On its re-entrance into the spirit world, the soul again finds there all those whom it has known upon the earth, and all its former existences eventually come back to its memory, with the remembrance of all the good and of all the evil which it has done in them.

The incarnated spirit is under the influence of matter; the man who surmounts this influence, through the elevation and purification of his soul, raises himself nearer to the superior spirits, among whom he will one day be classed. He who allows himself to be ruled by bad passions, and places all his delight in the satisfaction of his gross animal appetites, brings himself nearer to the impure spirits, by giving preponderance to his animal nature.

Incarnated spirits inhabit the different globes of the universe.*

* Introduction to “The Spirits’ Book.”

Kardec conducted his investigations through the communicating intelligences by means of question and answer, and in this way obtained the material for his books. Much information was forthcoming on the subject of reincarnation. To the question “What is the aim of the incarnation of spirits?” the answer was:

It is a necessity imposed on them by God, as the means of attaining perfection. For some of them it is an expiation; for others, a mission. In order to attain perfection, it is necessary for them to undergo all the vicissitudes of corporeal existence. It is the experience acquired by expiation that constitutes its usefulness. Incarnation has also another aim, viz. that of fitting the spirit to perform his share in the work of creation; for which purpose he is made to assume a corporeal apparatus in harmony with the material state of each world into which he is sent, and by means of which he is enabled to accomplish the special work, in connection with that world, which has been appointed to him by the divine ordering. He is thus made to contribute his quota towards the general weal, while achieving his own advancement.

Spiritualists in England have come to no decision with regard to reincarnation. Some believe in it, many do not, and the general attitude may be taken to be that, as the doctrine cannot be proved, it had better be omitted from the active politics of Spiritualism. Miss Anna Blackwell, in explanation of this attitude, suggests that the continental mind being more receptive of theories, has accepted Allan Kardec, while the English mind “usually declines to consider any theory until it has assured itself of the facts assumed by such theory.”

Mr. Thomas Brevior (Shorter), one of the editors of THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, sums up the prevailing view of English Spiritualists of his day. He writes:*

* THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, 1876, p. 35.

When Reincarnation assumes a more scientific aspect, when it can offer a body of demonstrable facts admitting of verification like those of Modern Spiritualism, it will merit ample and careful discussion. Meanwhile, let the architects of speculation amuse themselves if they will by building castles in the air; life is too short, and there is too much to do in this busy world to leave either leisure or inclination to occupy ourselves in demolishing these airy structures, or in showing on what slight foundations they are reared. It is far better to work out those points in which we are agreed than to wrangle over those upon which we appear so hopelessly to differ.

William Howitt, one of the stalwarts of early Spiritualism in England, is still more emphatic in his condemnation of reincarnation. After quoting Emma Hardinge Britten's remark that thousands in the Other World protest, through distinguished mediums, that they have no knowledge or proofs of reincarnation, he says*:

* THE SPIRITUAL MAGAZINE, 1876, p. 57. THE SPIRITUALIST, Vol. VII., 1875, pp. 74-5.

The thing strikes at the root of all faith in the revelations of Spiritualism. If we are brought to doubt the spirits communicating under the most serious guise, under the most serious affirmations, where is Spiritualism itself? If Reincarnation be true, pitiable and repellent as it is, there must have been millions of spirits who, on entering the other world, have sought in vain their kindred, children and friends. Has even a whisper of such a woe ever reached us from the thousands and tens of thousands of communicating spirits? Never. We may, therefore, on this ground alone, pronounce the dogma of Reincarnation false as the hell from which it sprung.

Mr. Howitt, however, in his vehemence, forgets that there may be a time limit before the next incarnation takes place, and that also there may be a voluntary element in the act.

The Hon. Alexander Aksakof, in an interesting article supplies the names of the mediums at Allan Kardec's circle, with an account of them. He also points out that a belief in the idea of reincarnation was strongly held in France at that time, as can be seen from M. Pezzani's work, "The Plurality of Existences," and others. Aksakof writes:

That the propagation of this doctrine by Kardec was a matter of strong predilection is clear; from the beginning Reincarnation has not been presented as an object of study, but as a dogma. To sustain it he has always had recourse to writing mediums, who, it is well known, pass so easily under the psychological influence of preconceived ideas; and Spiritism has engendered such in profusion; whereas through physical mediums the communications are not only more objective, but always contrary to the doctrine of Reincarnation. Kardec adopted the plan of always disparaging this kind of mediumship, alleging as a pretext its moral inferiority. Thus the experimental method is altogether unknown in Spiritism; for twenty years it has not made the slightest intrinsic progress, and it has remained in total ignorance of Anglo-American Spiritualism! The few French physical mediums who developed their powers in spite of Kardec, were never mentioned by him in the “Revue”; they remained almost unknown to Spiritists, and only because their spirits did not support the doctrine of Reincarnation.

Aksakof adds that his remarks do not affect the question of reincarnation in the abstract, but only have to do with its propagation under the name of Spiritism.

D. D. Home, in commenting on Aksakof’s article, has a thrust at a phase of the belief in reincarnation. He says:

* THE SPIRITUALIST, Vol. VII., p. 165.

I meet many who are reincarnationists, and I have had the pleasure of meeting at least twelve who were Marie Antoinette, six or seven Mary Queen of Scots, a whole host of Louis and other kings, about twenty Alexander the Greats, but it remains for me yet to meet a plain John Smith, and I beg of you, if you meet one, to cage him as a curiosity.

Miss Anna Blackwell summarizes the contents of Kardec’s chief books as follows:

“The Spirits’ Book” demonstrates the existence and attributes of the Causal Power, and of the nature of the relation between that Power and the universe, putting us in the track of the Divine operation.

“The Mediums’ Book” describes the various methods of communication between this world and the next.

“Heaven and Hell” vindicates the justice of the Divine government, by explaining the nature of Evil as the result of ignorance, and showing the process by which men shall become enlightened and purified.

“The Gospel as Explained by Spirits” is a comment on the moral precepts of Christ, with an examination of His life and a comparison of its incidents with present manifestations of spirit power.

“Genesis” shows the accordance of the Spiritist philosophy with the discoveries of modern science, and with the general tenor of the Mosaic record, as explained by spirits.

“These works,” she says, “are regarded by the majority of Continental Spiritualists as constituting the basis of the religious philosophy of the future-a philosophy in harmony with the advance of scientific discovery in the various other realms of human knowledge; promulgated by the host of enlightened Spirits acting under the direction of Christ Himself.”

On the whole, it seems to the author that the balance of evidence shows that reincarnation is a fact, but not necessarily a universal one. As to the ignorance of our spirit friends upon the point, it concerns their own future, and if we are not clear as to our future, it is possible that they have the same limitations. When the question is asked, “Where were we before we were born?” we have a definite answer in the system of slow development by incarnation, with long intervals of spirit rest between, while otherwise we have no answer, though we must admit that it is inconceivable that we have been born in time for eternity. Existence afterwards seems to postulate existence before. As to the natural question, “Why, then, do we not remember such existences?” we may point out that such remembrance would enormously complicate our present life, and that such existences may well form a cycle which is all clear to us when we have come to the end of it, when perhaps we may see a whole rosary of lives threaded upon the one personality. The convergence of so many lines of theosophic and Eastern thought upon this one conclusion, and the explanation which it affords in the supplementary doctrine of Karma of the apparent injustice of any single life, are arguments in its favour, and so perhaps are those vague recognitions and memories which are occasionally too definite to be easily explained as atavistic impressions. Certain hypnotic experiments, the most famous of which were by the French investigator, Colonel de Rochas, seemed to afford some definite evidence, the subject when in trance being pushed back for several alleged incarnations, but the farther ones were hard to trace, while the nearer came under the suspicion that they were influenced by the normal knowledge of the medium. It may, at least, be conceded that where some special task has to be completed, or where some fault has to be remedied, the possibility of reincarnation may be one which would be eagerly welcomed by the spirit concerned.

Before turning from the story of French Spiritualism one cannot but remark upon the splendid group of writers who have adorned it. Apart from Allan Kardec, and the scientific work on research lines of Geley, Maxwell, Flammarion, and Richet, there have been pure Spiritists such as Gabriel Delanne, Henri Regnault, and Leon Denis who have made their mark. The last especially would have been deemed a great master of French prose, whatever might have been his theme.

This work, which confines itself to the main stream of psychic history, has hardly space in which it can follow its many meanderings in lesser rivulets over every land upon the globe. Such manifestations were invariably repetitions or close variants of those which have been already described, and it may briefly be stated that the cult is catholic in the fullest sense, for there is no land which is without it. From the Argentine to Iceland the same results have sprung in the same manner from the same causes. Such a history would require a volume in itself. Some special pages should, however, be devoted to Germany.

Though slow to follow the organized movement, for it was not until 1865 that PSYCHE, a Spiritualistic paper, was established in that country, it had above all other lands a tradition of mystic speculation and magical experiment, which might be regarded as a preparation for the definite revelation. Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, van Helmont, and Jacob Boehme are all among the pioneers of the spirit, feeling their way out of matter, however vague the goal they may have reached. Something more definite was attained by Mesmer, who did most of his work in Vienna in the latter part of the eighteenth century. However mistaken in some of his inferences, he was the prime mover in bringing the dissociation of soul and body before the actual senses of mankind, and a native of Strasbourg, M. de Puysegur carried his work one step farther and opened up the wonders of clairvoyance. Jung Stilling and Dr. Justinus Kerner are names which must always be associated with the development of human knowledge along this mist-girt path. The actual announcement of spirit communication was received with mingled interest and scepticism, and it was long before any authoritative voices were raised in its defence. Finally, the matter was brought prominently forward when Slade made his historical visit in 1877. After viewing and testing his performances, he obtained at Leipzig the endorsement of six professors as to their genuine objective character. These were Zollner, Fechner and Scheibner of Leipzig, Weber of Gottingen, Fichte of Stuttgart, and Ulrici of Halle. As these testimonials were reinforced by an affidavit from Bellachini, the chief conjurer of Germany, that there was no possibility of trickery, a considerable effect was produced upon the public mind, which was increased by the subsequent adhesion of two eminent Russians, Aksakof the statesman, and Professor Butlerof of St. Petersburg University. The cult does not appear, however, to have found a congenial soil in that bureaucratic and military land. Save for the name of Carl du Prel, one can recall none other which is associated with the higher phases of the movement.

Baron Carl du Prel, of Munich, began his career as a student of mysticism, and in his first work* he deals not with Spiritualism but rather with the latent powers of man, the phenomena of dream, of trance, and of the hypnotic sleep. In another treatise, however, “A Problem for Conjurers,” he gives a closely reasoned account of the steps which led him to a full belief in the truth of Spiritualism. In this book, while admitting that scientific men and philosophers may not be the best people to detect trickery, he reminds the reader that Bosco, Houdin, Bellachini, and other skilled conjurers have declared those mediums whom they have investigated to be free from imposture. Du Prel was not content, as so many are, to take second-hand evidence, but he had a number of sittings with Eglinton, and later with Eusapia Palladino. He gave particular attention to the phenomenon of psychography (slate writing) and he says of it:

* “Philosophy of Mysticism,” 2 Vols. (1889). Trans. by C. C. Massey.

One thing is clear, that is, that Psychography must be ascribed to a transcendental origin. We shall find (1) that the hypothesis of prepared slates is inadmissible. (2) The place on which the writing is found is quite inaccessible to the hands of the medium. In some cases the double slate is securely locked, leaving only room inside for the tiny morsel of slate pencil. (3) That the writing is actually done at the time. (4) That the medium is not writing. (5) The writing must be actually done with the morsel of slate, or lead pencil. (6) The writing is done by an intelligent being, since the answers are exactly pertinent to the questions. (7) This being can read, write, and understand the language of human beings, frequently such as is unknown to the medium.

(8) It strongly resembles a human being, as well in the degree of its intelligence as in the mistakes sometimes made. These beings are, therefore, although invisible, of human nature or species. It is no use whatever to fight against this proposition. (9) If these beings speak, they do so in human language. If they are asked who they are, they answer that they are beings who have left this world. (10) Where these appearances become partly visible, perhaps only their hands, the hands seen are of human form. (11) When these things become entirely visible, they show the human form and countenance. Spiritualism must be investigated by science. I should look upon myself as a coward if I did not openly express my convictions.

Du Prel emphasizes the fact that his convictions do not rest on results obtained with professional mediums. He states that he knows three private mediums “in whose presence direct writing not only takes place inside double slates, but is done in inaccessible places.”

“In these circumstances,” he says dryly, “the question ‘Medium or Conjurer?’ seems to me to stir up a great deal more dust than it deserves,” a remark some psychical researchers might take to heart.

It is interesting to note that du Prel proclaims the assertion that the messages are only silly and trivial to be entirely unjustified by his experience, while at the same time he asserts that he has found no traces of superhuman intelligence, but of course, before pronouncing upon such a point, one has to determine how a superhuman intelligence could be distinguished and how far it would be intelligible to our brains. Speaking of materialisation, du Prel says:

When these things become entirely visible in the dark room, in which case the medium himself sits among the chain formed by the circle, they show the human form and countenance. It is very easily said that in this case it is the medium himself who is masquerading. But when the medium speaks from his seat; when his neighbours on either side declare that they have hold of his hands, and at the same time I see a figure standing close to me; when this figure illumines his face with the air exhausted glass tube filled with quicksilver, lying on the table-the light produced by shaking which not impeding the phenomena-so that I can see it distinctly, then the collective evidence of the facts I have narrated proves to me the necessity of the existence of a transcendental being, even if thereby all the conclusions I have come to during twenty years of work and study should be thrown overboard. Since, however, on the contrary, my views (as set forth in my “Philosophy of Mysticism “) have taken quite another course and are only further justified by these experiences, I find as little subjective grounds for combating these facts as objective ones.

He adds:

I now have the empirical experience of the existence of such transcendental beings, which I am convinced of by the evidence of my senses of sight, hearing, and feeling, as well as by their own intelligent communications. Under these circumstances, being led by two methods of inquiry to the self-same goal, I must indeed be abandoned of the gods if I did not recognise the fact of the immortality-or rather let us say, since the proofs do not extend farther-the continued existence of man after death.

Carl du Prel died in 1899. His contribution to the subject is probably the greatest yet made by any German. On the other hand, a formidable opponent was found there in Eduard von Hartmann, author of “The

Philosophy of the Unconscious," who wrote a brochure in 1885 called "Spiritism." Commenting upon this performance, C. C. Massey wrote*:

* LIGHT, 1885, p. 404. It should be noted that Charles Carlton Massey, the barrister, and Gerald Massey, the poet, are separate people with nothing in common save that both were Spiritualists.

Now for the first time, a man of commanding intellectual position has dealt fairly by us as an opponent. He has taken the trouble to get up the facts, if not quite thoroughly, at least to an extent that indisputably qualifies him for critical examination. And while formally declining an unreserved acceptance of the evidence, he has come to the conclusion that the existence in the human organism of more forces and capacities than exact science has investigated is sufficiently accredited by historical and contemporary testimony. He even urges research by State-appointed and paid commissions. He repudiates, with all the authority of a philosopher and man of science, the supposition that the facts are a priori incredible or "contrary to the laws of nature." He exposes the irrelevance of "exposures," and blows to the winds the stupid parallel between mediums and conjurers. And if his application of the psychology of somnambulism to the phenomena results, in his view, in "ruling out" spirits altogether, on the other hand it contains information to the public which is highly important for the protection of mediums.

Massey says further that from the standpoint of von Hartmann's philosophy the agency of spirits is inadmissible, and personal immortality is a delusion. "The issue of psychological philosophy is now between his school and that of du Prel and Hellenbach."

Alexander Aksakof replied to von Hartmann in his monthly journal Psychische Studien.

Aksakof points out that Hartmann had no practical experience whatever, that he bestowed insufficient attention to phenomena which did not fit into his mode of explanation, and that there were many phenomena which were quite unknown to him. Hartmann, for instance, did not believe in the objectivity of materialisation phenomena. Aksakof ably sets out with full details a number of cases which decidedly negative Hartmann's conclusions.

Aksakof refers to Baron Lazar Hellenbach, a Spiritualist, as the first philosophical investigator of the phenomena in Germany, and says: "Zollner's ad mission of the reality of the mediumistic phenomena produced in Germany an immense sensation." In many ways it would appear that von Hartmann wrote with an imperfect knowledge of the subject.

Germany has produced few great mediums, unless Frau Anna Rothe can be classed as such. It is possible that this woman resorted to fraud when her psychic powers failed her, but that she had such powers in a high degree is clearly shown by the evidence at the trial after her alleged "exposure" in 1902.

The medium, after being kept in prison for twelve months and three weeks before being brought to trial, was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment and a fine of five hundred marks. At the trial many people of standing gave evidence in her favour, among whom were Herr Stocker, former Court Chaplain, and Judge Sulzers, president of the High Court of Appeal, Zurich. The judge stated on oath that Frau Rothe put him in communication with the spirits of his wife and father, who said things to him which the medium could not possibly have invented, because they dealt with matters unknown to any mortal. He also declared that flowers of the rarest kind were produced out of the air in a room flooded with light. His evidence caused a sensation.

It is clear that the result of the trial was a foregone conclusion. It was a repetition of the position of the magistrate, Mr. Flowers, in the Slade case. The German legal luminary in his preliminary address said:

The Court cannot allow itself to criticize the Spiritistic theory, for it must be acknowledged that science, with the generality of men of culture, declares supernatural manifestations to be impossible.

In the face of that no evidence could have any weight.

Of recent years two names stand out in connection with the subject. The one is Dr. Schrenck Notzing, of Munich, whose fine laboratory work has been already treated in the chapter on Ectoplasm. The other is the famous Dr. Hans Driesch, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Leipzig. He has recently declared that "the actuality of psychical phenomena is doubted to-day only by the incorrigible dogmatist." He made this statement in the course of a lecture at the London University in 1924, afterwards published in The Quest.* He went on to say:

* July, 1924.

These phenomena have had, however, a hard struggle to gain recognition; and the chief reason why they have had to fight so strenuously, is because they utterly refused to dovetail with orthodox psychology and natural science, such as these both were, up to the end of last century, at any rate.

Professor Driesch points out that natural science and psychology have undergone a radical change since the beginning of the present century, and proceeds to show how psychical phenomena link up with “normal” natural sciences. He remarks that if the latter refused to recognise their kinship with the former, it would make no difference to the truth of psychical phenomena. He shows, with various biological illustrations, how the mechanistic theory is overthrown. He expounds his vitalistic theory “to establish a closer contact between the phenomena of normal biology and the physical phenomena in the domain of psychical research.”

Italy has, in some ways, been superior to all other European states in its treatment of Spiritualism-and this in spite of the constant opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, which has most illogically stigmatized as diabolism in others that which it has claimed as a special mark of sanctity in itself. The Acta Sanctorum are one long chronicle of psychic phenomena with levitations, apports, prophecy, and all the other signs of mediumistic power. This Church has, however, always persecuted Spiritualism. Powerful as it is, it will find in time that it has encountered something stronger than itself.

Of modern Italians the great Mazzini was a Spiritualist in days when Spiritualism had hardly formulated itself, and his associate Garibaldi was president of a psychic society. In a letter to a friend in 1849, Mazzini sketched his religio-philosophical system which curiously foreshadowed the more recent Spiritualistic view. He substituted a temporary purgatory for an eternal hell, postulated a bond of union between this world and the next, defined a hierarchy of spiritual beings, and foresaw a continual progression towards supreme perfection.

Italy has been very rich in mediums, but she has been even more fortunate in having men of science who were wise enough to follow facts wherever they might lead. Among these numerous investigators, all of whom were convinced of the reality of psychic phenomena, though it cannot be claimed that all accepted the Spiritualistic view, there are to be found such names as Ermacora, Schiaparelli, Lombroso, Bozzano, Morselli, Chiaia, Pictet, Foa, Porro, Brofferio, Bottazzi, and many others. They have had the advantage of a wonderful subject in Eusapia Palladino, as has already been described, but there have been a succession of other powerful mediums, including such names as Politi, Carancini, Zuccarini, Lucia Sordi, and especially Linda Gazzera. Here as elsewhere, however, the first impulse came from the English-speaking countries. It was the visit of D. D. Home to Florence in 1855, and the subsequent visit of Mrs. Guppy in 1868 which opened the furrow. Signor Damiani was the first great investigator, and it was he who in 1872 discovered the powers of Palladino.

Damiani's mantle fell upon Dr. G. B. Ermacora, who was founder and co-editor with Dr. Finzi of the RIVISTA DI STUDI PSICHICI. He died at Rovigo in his fortieth year at the hand of a homicide-a very great loss to the cause. His adhesion to it, and his enthusiasm, drew in others of equal standing. Thus Porro, in his glowing obituary, wrote:

Lombroso found himself at Milan with three young physicists, entirely devoid of all prejudice, Ermacora, Finzi and Gerosa, with two profound thinkers who had already exhausted the philosophical side of the question, the German du Prel and the Russian Aksakof, with another philosopher of acute mind and vast learning, Brofferio; and lastly, with a great astronomer, Schiaparelli, and with an able physiologist, Richet.

He adds:

It would be difficult to collect a better assortment of learned men giving the necessary guarantees of seriousness, of varied competence, of technical ability in experimenting, of sagacity and prudence in corning to conclusions.

He continues:

While Brofferio, by his weighty book “Per to Spiritismo” (Milan, 1892), demolished one by one the arguments of the opposite side, collecting, co-ordinating, and classifying with incomparable dialectical skill the proofs in favour of his thesis, Ermacora applied to its demonstration all the resources of a robust mind trained to the use of the experimental method; and he took so much pleasure in this new and fertile study, that he entirely abandoned those researches in electricity which had already caused him to be looked upon as a successor to Faraday and Maxwell.

Dr. Ercole Chiaia, who died in 1905, was also an ardent worker and propagandist to whom many distinguished men of European reputation owed their first knowledge of psychical phenomena, among others, Lombroso, Professor Bianchi of the University of Naples, Schiaparelli, Flournoy, Professor Porro of the University of Genoa, and Colonel de Rochas. Lombroso wrote of him:

You are right to honour highly the memory of Ercole Chiaia. In a country where there is such a horror of what is new, it required great courage and a noble soul to become the apostle of theories which have met with ridicule, and to do so with that tenacity, that energy, which always characterized Chiaia. It is to him that many owe-myself among others-the privilege of seeing a new world open out to psychical investigation-and this by the only way which exists to convince men of culture, that is to say, by direct observation.

Sardou, Richet, and Morselli also paid tributes to the work of Chiaia.*

* "Annals of Psychical Science," Vol, II. (1905), pp. 261-262.

Chiaia did an important work in leading Lombroso, the eminent alienist, to investigate the subject. After his first experiments with Eusapia Palladino, in March, 1891, Lombroso wrote:

I am quite ashamed and grieved at having opposed with so much tenacity the possibility of the so-called Spiritistic facts.

At first he only gave his assent to the facts, while still opposed to the theory associated with them. But even this partial admission caused a sensation in Italy and throughout the world. Aksakof wrote to Dr. Chiaia: "Glory to M. Lombroso for his noble words! Glory to you for your devotion!"

Lombroso affords a good example of the conversion of an utter materialist, after a long and careful examination of the facts. In 1900 he wrote to Professor Falcomer:

I am like a little pebble on the beach. As yet I am uncovered, but I feel that each tide draws me a little closer to the sea.

He ended, as we know, by becoming a complete believer, a convinced Spiritualist, and published his celebrated book, "After Death-What?"

Ernesto Bozzano, who was born in Genoa in 1862, has devoted thirty years to psychical research, embodying his conclusions in thirty long monographs. He will be remembered for his incisive criticism* of Mr. Podmore's slighting references to Mr. Stainton Moses. It is entitled, "A Defence of William Stainton Moses." Bozzano, in company with Professors Morselli and Porro, had a long series of experiments with Eusapia Palladino. After consideration of the subjective and objective phenomena, he was led "logically and of necessity" to give full adherence to the Spiritistic hypothesis.

* "Annals of Psychical Science," Vol. I. (1905), pp. 75-129.

Enrico Morselli, Professor of Psychiatry at Genoa, was for many years, as he himself says, a bitter sceptic with regard to the objective reality of psychic phenomena. From 1901 onwards he had thirty sittings with Eusapia Palladino, and became completely convinced of the facts, if not of the spirit theory. He published his observations in a book which Professor Richet describes as "a model of erudition" ("Psicologia e Spiritismo," 2 Vols., Turin, 1908). Lombroso, is a very generous review* of this book, refers to the author's scepticism regarding certain phenomena he observed.

* "Annals of Psychical Science," Vol. VII. (1908), p. 376. Helene Smith, the medium in Flournoy's book, "From India to the Planet Mars."

Yes. Morselli commits the same fault as Flournoy with Miss Smith, of torturing his own strong ingenuity to find not true and not credible the things which he himself declares that he saw, and which really occurred. For instance, during the first few days after the apparition of his own mother, he admitted to me that he had seen her and had quite a conversation in gestures with her, in which she pointed almost with bitterness to his spectacles and his partially bald head, and made him remember how long ago she had left him a fine, bold young man.

When Morselli asked his mother for a proof of identity, she touched his forehead with her hand, seeking for a wart there, but because she first touched the right side and then the left, on which the wart really was, Morselli would not accept this as evidence of his mother's presence. Lombroso, with more experience, points out to him the awkwardness of spirits using the instrumentality of a medium for the first time. The truth was that Morselli had, strangely enough, the utmost repugnance to the appearance of his mother through a medium against his will. Lombroso cannot understand this feeling. He says:

I confess that I not only do not share it, but, on the contrary, when I saw my mother again, I felt one of the most pleasing inward excitements of my life, a pleasure that was almost a spasm, which aroused a sense, not of resentment, but of gratitude to the medium who threw my mother again into my arms after so many years, and this great event caused me to forget, not once, but many times, the humble position of Eusapia, who had done for me, even were it purely automatically, that which no giant in power and thought could ever have done.

Morselli is in much the same position as Professor Richet with regard to psychical research, but, like the latter distinguished scientist, he has been the means of powerfully influencing public opinion to a more enlightened view of the subject.

Morselli speaks strongly about the neglect of science. Writing in 1907, he says:

The question of Spiritism has been discussed for over fifty years; and although no one can at present foresee when it will be settled, all are now agreed in assigning to it great importance among the problems left as a legacy by the nineteenth century to the twentieth. Meanwhile, no one can fail to recognise that Spiritism is a strong current or tendency in contemporary thought. If for many years academic science has depreciated the whole category of facts which Spiritism has, for good or ill, rightly or wrongly, absorbed and assimilated, to form the elements of its doctrinal system, so much the worse for science! And worse still for the scientists who have remained deaf and blind before all the affirmations, not of credulous sectarians, but of serious and worthy observers such as Crookes, Lodge and Richet. I am not ashamed to say that I myself, as far as my modest power went, have contributed to this obstinate scepticism, up to the day on which I was enabled to break the chains in which my absolutist preconceptions had bound my judgment.*

* “Annals of Psychical Science,” Vol. V. (1907), p. 322.

It is to be noted that the majority of the Italian professors, while giving adherence to psychical facts, decline to follow the conclusions of those they call the Spiritists. De Vesme makes this clear when he says:

It is most important to point out that the revival of interest in these questions, which has been displayed by the public in Italy, would not have been produced so easily if the scientific men who have just proclaimed the objective authenticity of these mediumistic phenomena had not been careful to add that the recognition of the facts does not by any means imply the acceptance of the Spiritistic hypothesis.

There was, however, a strong minority who saw the full meaning of the revelation.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME GREAT MODERN MEDIUMS

There is always a certain monotony in writing about physical signs of external intelligence, because they take stereotyped forms limited in their nature. They are amply sufficient for their purpose, which is to demonstrate the presence of invisible powers unknown to material science, but both their methods of production and the results lead to endless reiteration. This manifestation in itself, occurring as it does in every country on the globe, should convince anyone who thinks seriously upon the subject that he is in the presence of fixed laws, and that it is not a sporadic succession of miracles, but a real science which is being developed. It is in their ignorant and arrogant contempt of this fact that opponents have sinned. “ILS NE COMPRENNENT PAS QU’IL Y A RTES LOIS,” wrote Madame Bisson, after some fatuous attempt on the part of the doctors of the Sorbonne to produce ectoplasm under conditions which negatived their own experiment. As will be seen by what has gone before, a great physical medium can produce the Direct Voice apart from his own vocal organs, telekenesis, or movement of objects at a distance, raps, or percussions of ectoplasm, levitations, apports, or the bringing of objects from a distance, materialisations, either of faces, limbs, or of complete figures, trance talkings and writings, writings within closed slates, and luminous phenomena, which take many forms. All of these manifestations the author has many times seen, and as they have been exhibited to him by the leading mediums of his day, he ventures to vary the form of this history by speaking of the more recent sensitives from his own personal knowledge and observation.

It is understood that some cultivate one gift and some another, while those who can exhibit all round forms of power are not usually so proficient in any one as the man or woman who specialises upon it. You have so much psychic power upon which to draw, and you may turn it all into one deep channel or disperse it over several superficial ones. Now and then some wonder-man appears like D. D. Home, who carries with him the whole range of mediumship-but it is rare.

The greatest trance medium with whom the author is acquainted is Mrs. Osborne Leonard. The outstanding merit of her gift is that it is, as a rule, continuous. It is not broken up by long pauses or irrelevant intervals, but it flows on exactly as if the person alleged to be speaking were actually present. The usual procedure is that Mrs. Leonard, a pleasant, gentle, middle-aged, ladylike woman, sinks into slumber, upon which her voice changes entirely, and what comes through purports to be from her little control, Feda. The control talks in rather broken English in a high voice, with many little intimacies and pleasantries which give the impression of a sweet, amiable and intelligent child. She acts as spokesman for the waiting spirit, but the spirit occasionally breaks in also, which leads to sudden changes from the first person singular to the third, such as: “I am here, Father. He says he wants to speak. I am so well and so happy. He says he finds it so wonderful to be able to talk to you” and so on.

At her best, it is a wonderful experience. Upon one occasion the author had received a long series of messages purporting to deal with the future fate of the world, through his wife’s hand and voice in his own Home Circle. When he visited Mrs. Leonard, he said no word of this, nor had he at that time spoken of the matter in any public way. Yet he had hardly sat down and arranged the writing-pad upon which he proposed to take notes of what came through, when his son announced his presence, and spoke with hardly a break for an hour. During this long monologue he showed an intimate knowledge of all that had come through in the Home Circle, and also of small details of family life, utterly foreign to the medium. In the whole interview he made no mistake as to fact, and yet many facts were mentioned. A short section of the less personal part of it may be quoted here as a sample

There is so much false progress of material mechanical kind. That is not progress. If you build a car to go one thousand miles this year, then you build one to go two thousand miles next year. No one is the better for that. We want real progress-to understand the power of mind and spirit and to realise the fact that there is a spirit world.

So much help could be given from our side if only people on the earth would fit themselves to take it, but we cannot force our help on those who are not prepared for it. That is your work, to prepare people for us. Some of them are so hopelessly ignorant, but sow the seed, even if you do not see it coming up.

The clergy are so limited in their ideas and so bound by a system which should be an obsolete one. It is like serving up last week's dinner instead of having a new one. We want fresh spiritual food, not a hash of the old food. We know how wonderful Christ is. We realise His love and His power. He can help both us and you. But He will do so by kindling fresh fires, not by raking always in the old ashes.

That is what we want-the fire of enthusiasm on the two altars of imagination and knowledge. Some people would do away with the imagination, but it is often the gateway to knowledge. The Churches have had the right teaching, but they have not put it to practical use. One must be able to demonstrate one's spiritual knowledge in a practical form. The plane on which you live is a practical one in which you are expected to put your knowledge and belief into action. On our plane knowledge and faith are action-one thinks a thing and at once puts it into practice, but on earth there are so many who say a thing is right, but never do it. The Church teaches, but does not demonstrate its own teaching. The blackboard is useful at times, you know. That is what you need. You should teach, and then demonstrate upon the blackboard. Thus physical phenomena are really most important. There will be some in this upheaval. It is difficult for us to manifest physically now because the greater bulk of collective thought is against and not for us. But when the upheaval comes, people will be shaken out of their pig-headed, ignorant, antagonistic attitude to us, which will immediately open the way to a fuller demonstration than we have hitherto been able to give.

It is like a wall now that we have to batter against, and we lose ninety per cent of our power in the battering and trying to find a weak spot in this wall of ignorance through which we can creep to you. But many of you are chiselling and hammering from your side to let us through. You have not built the wall, and you are helping us to penetrate it. In a little while you will have so weakened it that it will crumble, and instead of creeping through with difficulty we shall all emerge together in a glorious band. That will be the climax-the meeting of spirit and matter.

If the truth of Spiritualism depended upon Mrs. Leonard's powers alone, the case would be an overwhelming one, since she has seen many hundreds of clients and seldom failed to give complete satisfaction. There are, however, many clairvoyants whose powers are little inferior to those of Mrs. Leonard, and who would perhaps equal her if they showed the same restraint in their use. No fee will ever tempt Mrs. Leonard to take more than two clients in the day, and it is to this, no doubt, that the sustained excellence of her results are due.

Among London clairvoyants whom the author has used, Mr. Vout Peters is entitled to a high place. On one occasion a very remarkable piece of evidence came through him, as is narrated elsewhere.* Another excellent medium upon her day is Mrs. Annie Brittain. The author was in the habit of sending mourners to this medium during the wartime, and filed the letters in which they narrated their experience. The result is a very remarkable one. Out of the first hundred cases eighty were quite successful in establishing touch with the object of their inquiry. In some cases the result was overpoweringly evidential, and the amount of comfort given to the inquirers can hardly be exaggerated. The revulsion of feeling when the mourner suddenly finds that death is not silent, but that a still small voice, speaking in very happy accents, can still come back is an overpowering one. One lady wrote that she had fully determined to take her own life, so bleak and empty was existence, but that she left Mrs. Brittain's parlour with renewed hope in her heart. When one hears that such a medium has been dragged up to a police-court, sworn down by ignorant policemen, and condemned by a still more ignorant magistrate, one feels that one is indeed living in the dark ages of the world's history.

* "The New Revelation," p. 53.

Like Mrs. Leonard, Mrs. Brittain has a kindly little child familiar named Belle. In his extensive researches the author has made the acquaintance of many of these little creatures in different parts of the world, finding the same character, the same voice and the same pleasant ways in all. This similarity would in itself show any reasoning being that some general law was at work. Feda, Belle, Iris, Harmony, and many more, prattle in their high falsetto voices, and the world is the better for their presence and ministrations.

Miss McCreadie is another notable London clairvoyante belonging to the older school, and bringing with her an atmosphere of religion which is sometimes wanting. There are many others, but no notice would be complete without an allusion to the remarkable higher teaching which comes from Johannes and the other controls of Mrs. Hester Dowden, the daughter of the famous Shakespearean scholar. A reference should be made also to Captain Bartlett, whose wonderful writings and drawings enabled Mr. Bligh Bond to expose ruins of two chapels at Glastonbury which were so buried that only the clairvoyant sense could have defined their exact position. Readers of “The Gate of Remembrance” will understand the full force of this remarkable episode.

Direct Voice phenomena are different from mere clairvoyance and trance-speaking in that the sounds do not appear to come from the medium but externalise themselves often to a distance of several yards, continue to sound when the mouth is filled with water, and even break into two or three voices simultaneously. On these occasions an aluminium trumpet is used to magnify the voice, and also, as some suppose, to form a small dark chamber in which the actual vocal cords used by the spirit can become materialised. It is an interesting fact, and one which has caused much misgiving to those whose experience is limited, that the first sounds usually resemble the voice of the medium. This very soon passes away and the voice either becomes neutral or may closely resemble that of the deceased. It is possible that the reason of this phenomenon is that the ectoplasm from which the phenomena are produced is drawn from him or her, and carries with it some of his or her peculiarities until such time as the outside force gains command. It is well that the sceptic should be patient and await developments, for I have known an ignorant and self-opinionated investigator take for granted that there was fraud through noting the resemblance of voices, and then wreck the whole seance by foolish horseplay, whereas had he waited his doubts would soon have been resolved.

The author has had the experience with Mrs. Wriedt of hearing the Direct Voice, accompanied by raps on the trumpet, in broad daylight, with the medium seated some yards away. This disposes of the idea that the medium in the dark can change her position. It is not uncommon to have two or three spirit voices speaking or singing at the same moment, which is in turn fatal to the theory of ventriloquism. The trumpet, too, which is often decorated with a small spot of luminous paint, may be seen darting about far out of reach of the medium’s hands. On one occasion at the house of Mr. Dennis Bradley, the author saw the illuminated trumpet whirling round and tapping on the ceiling as a moth might have done. The medium (Valiantine) was afterwards asked to stand upon his chair, and it was found that with the trumpet in his extended arm he was unable to touch the ceiling. This was witnessed by a circle of eight.

Mrs. Wriedt was born in Detroit some fifty years ago, and is perhaps better known in England than any American medium. The reality of her powers may best be judged by a short description of results. On the occasion of a visit to the author's house in the country she sat with the author, his wife, and his secretary, in a well-lighted room. A hymn was sung, and before the first verse was ended a fifth voice of excellent quality joined in and continued to the end. All three observers were ready to depose that Mrs. Wriedt herself was singing all the time. At the evening sitting a succession of friends came through with every possible, sign of their identity. One sitter was approached by her father, recently dead, who began by the hard, dry cough which had appeared in his last illness. He discussed the question of some legacy in a perfectly rational manner. A friend of the author's, a rather irritable Anglo-Indian, manifested, so far as a voice could do so, reproducing exactly the fashion of speech, giving the name, and alluding to facts of his lifetime. Another sitter had a visit from one who claimed to be his grand-aunt. The relationship was denied, but on inquiry at home it was found that he had actually had an aunt of that name who died in his childhood. Telepathy has to be strained very far to cover such cases.

Altogether the author has experimented with at least twenty producers of the Direct Voice, and has been much struck by the difference in the volume of the sound with different mediums. Often it is so faint that it is only with some difficulty that one can distinguish the message. There are few experiences more tensely painful than to strain one's ears and to hear in the darkness the panting, labouring, broken accents beside one, which might mean so much if one could but distinguish them. On the other hand, the author has known what it was to be considerably embarrassed when in the bedroom of a crowded Chicago hotel a voice has broken forth which could only be compared with the roaring of a lion. The medium upon that occasion was a slim young American lad, who could not possibly have produced such a sound with his normal organs. Between these two extremes every gradation of volume and vibration may be encountered.

George Valiantine, who has already been mentioned, would perhaps come second if the author had to make a list of the great Direct Voice mediums with whom he has experimented. He was examined by the committee of the Scientific American and turned down on the excuse that an electric apparatus showed that he left his chair whenever the voice sounded. The instance already given by the author, where the trumpet circled outside the reach of the medium, is proof positive that his results certainly do not depend upon his leaving his chair, and their effect depends not only on how the voice is produced, but even more on what the voice says. Those who have read Dennis Bradley's "Towards the Stars" and his subsequent book narrating the long series of sittings held at Kingston Vale, will realise that no possible explanation will cover Valiantine's mediumship save the plain fact that he has exceptional psychic powers. They vary very much with the conditions, but at their best they stand very high. Like Mrs. Wriedt, he does not go into trance, and yet his condition cannot be called normal. There are semi-trance conditions which await the investigations of the student of the future.

Mr. Valiantine is by profession a manufacturer in a small town in Pennsylvania. He is a quiet, gentle, kindly man, and as he is in the prime of life, a very useful career should still lie before him.

As a materialisation medium, Jonson, of Toledo, who afterwards resided in Los Angeles, stands alone, so far as the author's experience carries him. Possibly his wife's name should be bracketed with his, since they work together. The peculiarity of Jonson's work is that he is in full view of the circle, sitting outside the cabinet, while his wife stands near the cabinet and superintends the proceedings. Anyone who desires a very complete account of a Jonson seance will find it in the author's "Our Second American Adventure," and his mediumship is also treated very thoroughly by Admiral Usborne Moore.* The admiral, who was among the greatest of psychic researchers, sat many times with Jonson, and obtained the co-operation of an ex-chief of the United States Secret Service, who established a watch and found nothing against the medium. When it is remembered that Toledo was at that time a limited town, and that sometimes as many as twenty different personalities manifested in a single sitting, it will be realised that personification presents insuperable difficulties. Upon the occasion of the sitting at which the author was present, a long succession of figures came, one at a time, from a small cabinet. They were old and young, men, women, and children. The light from a red lamp was sufficient to enable a sitter to see the figures clearly but not to distinguish the details of the features. Some of the figures remained out for not less than twenty minutes and conversed freely with the circle, answering all questions put to them. No man can give another a blank cheque for honesty and certify that he not only is honest but always will be. The author can only say that on that particular occasion he was perfectly convinced of the genuine nature of the phenomena, and that he has no reason to doubt it on any other occasion.

* "Glimpses of the Next State," pp. 195, 322.

Jonson is a powerfully built man, and though he is now verging upon old age his psychic powers are still unimpaired. He is the centre of a circle at Pasadena, near Los Angeles, who meet every week to profit by his remarkable powers. The late Professor Larkin, the astronomer, was a habitue of the circle, and assured the author of his complete belief in the honesty of the mediumship.

Materialisation may have been more common in the past than in the present. Those who read such books as Brackett's "Materialised Apparitions," or Miss Marryat's "There Is No Death," would say so. But in these days complete materialisation is very rare. The author was present at an alleged materialisation by one Thompson, in New York, but the proceedings carried no conviction, and the man was shortly afterwards arrested for trickery under circumstances which left no doubt as to his guilt.

There are certain mediums who, without specialising in any particular way, can exhibit a wide range of preternatural manifestations. Of all whom the author has encountered he would give precedence for variety and consistency to Miss Ada Besinnet, of Toledo, in America, and to Evan Powell, formerly of Merthyr Tydvil, in Wales. Both are admirable mediums and kindly, good people who are worthy of the wonderful gifts which have been entrusted to them. In the case of Miss Besinnet the manifestations include the Direct Voice, two or more often sounding at the same time. One masculine control, named Dan, has a remarkable male baritone voice, and anyone who has heard it can certainly never doubt that it is independent of the lady's organism. A female voice occasionally joins with Dan to make a most tuneful duet. Remarkable whistling, in which there seems to be no pause for the intake of breath, is another feature of this mediumship. So also is the production of very brilliant lights. These appear to be small solid luminous objects, for the author had on one occasion the curious experience of having one upon his moustache. Had a large firefly settled there the effect would have been much the same. The Direct Voices of Miss Besinnet when they take the form of messages-as apart from the work of the controls-are not strong and are often hardly audible. The most remarkable, however, of all her powers is the appearance of phantom faces which appear in an illuminated patch in front of the sitter. They would seem to be mere masks, as there is no appearance of depth to them. In most cases they represent dim faces, which occasionally bear a resemblance to that of the medium when the health of the lady or the power of the circle is low. When the conditions are good they are utterly dissimilar. Upon two occasions the author has seen faces to which he could absolutely swear, the one being his mother and the other his nephew, Oscar Hornung, a young officer killed in the war. They were as clear-cut and visible as ever in life. On the other hand, there have been evenings when no clear recognition could be obtained, though among the faces were some which could only be described as angelic in their beauty and purity.*

* Various estimates and experiences of this mediumship will be found in the author's "Our American Adventure," pp. 124-132; Admiral Moore's "Glimpses of the Next State," pp. 226, 312; and finally Mr. Hewat McKenzie's report, PSYCHIC SCIENCE, April, 1922.

On a level with Miss Besinnet is Mr. Evan Powell, with the same variety but not always the same type of powers. Powell's luminous phenomena are equally good. His voice production is better. The author has heard the spirit voices as loud as those of ordinary human talk, and recalls one occasion when three of them were talking simultaneously, one to Lady Cowan, one to Sir James Marchant, and one to Sir Robert McAlpine. Movements of objects are common in the Powell seances, and on one occasion a stand weighing 60 lb. was suspended for some time over the author's head. Evan Powell always insists upon being very securely tied during his seances, which is done, he claims, for his own protection, since he cannot be responsible for his own movements when he is in a trance. This throws an interesting sidelight upon the possible nature of some exposures. There is a good deal of evidence, not only that the medium may unconsciously, or under the influence of suggestion from the audience, put himself into a false position, but that evil forces which are either mischievous or are actively opposed to the good work done by Spiritualism, may obsess the entranced body and cause it to do suspicious things so as to discredit the medium. Some sensible remarks upon this subject, founded upon personal experience, have been made by Professor Haraldur Nielsson, of Iceland, when commenting upon a case where one of the circle committed a perfectly senseless fraud, and a spirit afterwards admitted that it was done by its agency and instigation.* On the whole, Evan Powell may be said to have the widest endowment of spiritual gifts of any medium at present in England. He preaches the doctrines of Spiritualism both in his own person and while under control, and he can in himself exhibit nearly the whole range of phenomena. It is a pity that his business as a coal merchant in Devonshire prevents his constant presence in London.

* PSYCHIC SCIENCE, July, 1925.

Slate-writing mediumship is a remarkable manifestation. It is possessed in a high degree by Mrs. Pruden, of Cincinnati, who has recently visited Great Britain and exhibited her wonderful powers to a number of people. The author has sat with her several times, and has explained the methods in detail. As the passage is a short one and may make the matter clear to the unitiated, it is here transcribed:

It was our good fortune now to come once again into contact with a really great medium in Mrs. Pruden of Cincinnati, who had come to Chicago for my lectures. We had a sitting in the Blackstone Hotel, through the courtesy of her host, Mr. Holmyard, and the results were splendid. She is an elderly, kindly woman with a motherly manner. Her particular gift was slate-writing which I had never examined before.

I had heard that there were trick slates, but she was anxious to use mine and allowed me carefully to examine hers. She makes a dark cabinet by draping the table, and holds the slate under it, while you may hold the other corner of it. Her other hand is free and visible. The slate is double with a little bit of pencil put in between.

After a delay of half an hour the writing began. It was the strangest feeling to hold the slate and to feel the thrill and vibration of the pencil as it worked away inside. We had each written a question on a bit of paper and cast it down, carefully folded, on the ground in the shadow of the drapery, that psychic forces might have correct conditions for their work, which is always interfered with by light.

Presently each of us got an answer to our question upon the slate, and were allowed to pick up our folded papers and see that they had not been opened. The room, I may say, was full of daylight and the medium could not stoop without our seeing it.

I had some business this morning of a partly spiritual, partly material nature with a Dr. Gelbert, a French inventor. I asked in my question if this were wise. The answer on the slate was-”Trust Dr. Gelbert. Kingsley.” I had not mentioned Dr. Gelbert’s name in my question, nor did Mrs. Pruden know anything of the matter.

My wife got a long message from a dear friend, signed with her name. The name was a true signature. Altogether it was a most utterly convincing demonstration. Sharp, clear raps upon the table joined continually in our conversation.*

* “Our American Adventure,” pp. 144-5.

The general method and result is the same as that used by Mr. Pierre Keeler, of the United States. The author has not been able to arrange a sitting with this medium, but a friend who did so had results which put the truth of the phenomena beyond all question. In his case he received answers to questions placed inside sealed envelopes, so that the favourite explanation, that the medium in some way sees the slips of paper, is ruled out. Anyone who has sat with Mrs. Pruden will know, however, that she never stoops, and that the slips of paper lie at the feet of the sitter.

A remarkable form of mediumship is crystal gazing, where the pictures are actually visible to the eye of the sitter. The author has only once encountered this, under the mediumship of a lady from Yorkshire. The pictures were clear-cut and definite, and succeeded each other with an interval of fog. They did not appear to be relevant to any past or future event, but consisted of small views, dim faces, and other subjects of the kind.

Such are a few of the varied forms of spirit power which have been given to us as an antidote to materialism. The highest forms of all are not physical but are to be found in the inspired writings of such men as Davis, Stainton Moses, or Vale Owen. It cannot be too often repeated that the mere fact that a message comes to us in preternatural fashion is no guarantee that it is either high or true. The self-deluded, pompous person, the shallow reasoner, and the deliberate deceiver all exist upon the invisible side of life, and all may get their worthless communications transmitted through uncritical agents. Each must be scanned and weighed, and much must be neglected, while the residue is worthy of our most respectful attention. But even the best can never be final and is often amended, as in the case of Stainton Moses, when he had reached the Other Side. That great teacher admitted through Mrs. Piper that there were points upon which he had been ill-informed.

The mediums mentioned have been chosen as types of their various classes, but there are many others who deserve to be recorded in detail if there were space. The author has sat several times with Sloan and with Phoenix, of Glasgow, both of whom have remarkable powers which cover almost the whole range of the spiritual gifts, and both are, or were, most unworldly men with a saintly disregard of the things of this life. Mrs. Falconer, of Edinburgh, is also a trance medium of considerable power. Of the earlier generation, the author has experienced the mediumship of Husk and of Craddock, both of whom had their strong hours and their weak ones. Mrs. Susanna Harris has also afforded good evidence upon physical lines, as has Mrs. Wagner, of Los Angeles, while among amateurs John Ticknor, of New York, and Mr. Nugent, of Belfast, are in the very first flight of trance mediumship.

In connection with John Ticknor the author may quote an experiment which he made and reported in the "Proceedings" of the American Society for Psychical Research, a body which has been held back in the past by non-conductors almost as much as its parent in England. In this instance the author took a careful record of the pulse-beat when Mr. Ticknor was normal, when he was controlled by Colonel Lee, one of his spirit guides, and when he was under the influence of Black Hawk, a Red Indian control. The respective figures were 82, 100 and 118.

Mrs. Roberts Johnson is another medium who is unequal in her results, but who has at her best a very remarkable power with the Direct Voice. The religious element is wanting at her sittings, and the jocose North Country youths who come through create an atmosphere which amuses the sitters, but which may repel those who approach the subject with feelings of solemnity. The deep Scottish voice of the Glasgow control, David Duguid, a famous medium himself in his lifetime, is beyond all imitation by the throat of a woman, and his remarks are full of dignity and wisdom. The Rev. Dr. Lamond has assured me that Duguid at one of these sittings reminded him of an incident which had occurred between them in life-a sufficient proof of the reality of the individual.

There is no more curious and dramatic phase of psychic phenomenon than the apport. It is so startling that it is difficult to persuade the sceptic as to its possibility, and even the Spiritualist can hardly credit it until examples actually come his way. The author's first introduction to occult knowledge was due largely to the late General Drayson, who at that time-nearly forty years ago-was receiving through an amateur medium a constant succession of apports of the most curious description-Indian lamps, amulets, fresh fruit, and other things. So amazing a phenomenon, and one so easily simulated, was too much for a beginner, and it retarded rather than helped progress. Since then, however, the author has met the editor of a well-known paper who used the same medium after General Drayson's death, and he continued, under rigid conditions, to get similar apports. The author has been forced, therefore, to reconsider his view and to believe that he has underrated both the honesty of the medium and the intelligence of her sitter.

Mr. Bailey, of Melbourne, appears to be a very remarkable apport medium, and the author has no confidence in his alleged exposure at Grenoble. Bailey's own account is that he was the victim of a religious conspiracy, and in view of his long record of success it is more probable than that he should, in some mysterious way, have smuggled a live bird into a seance room in which he knew that he would be stripped and examined. The explanation of the Psychic Researchers, that the bird was concealed in his intestines, is a supreme example of the absurdities which incredulity can produce. The author had one experience of an apport with Bailey which it is surely impossible to explain away. It was thus described.

We then placed Mr. Bailey in the corner of the room, lowered the lights without turning them out, and waited. Almost at once he breathed very heavily, as one in a trance, and soon said something in a foreign tongue which was unintelligible to me. One of our friends, Mr. Cochrane, recognised it as Indian, and at once answered, a few sentences being interchanged. In English the voice then said that he was a Hindoo control who was used to bring apports for the medium, and that he would, he hoped, be able to bring one for us. "Here it is," he said, a moment later, and the medium's hand was extended with something in it. The light was turned full on and we found it was a very perfect bird's nest, beautifully constructed of some very fine fibre mixed with moss. It stood about two inches high and had no sign of any flattening which would have come with concealment. The size would be nearly three inches across. In it lay a small egg, white, with tiny brown speckles. The medium, or rather the Hindoo control acting through the medium, placed the egg on his palm and broke it, some fine albumen squirting out. There was no trace of yolk. "We are not allowed to interfere with life," said he. "If it had been fertilized we could not have taken it.” These words were said before he broke it, so that he was aware of the condition of the egg, which certainly seems remarkable.

“Where did it come from?” I asked. “From India.”

“What bird is it?”

“They call it the Jungle Sparrow.”

The nest remained in my possession and I spent a morning with Mr. Chubb, of the local museum, to ascertain if it was really the nest of such a bird. It seemed too small for an Indian Sparrow, and yet we could not match either nest or egg among the Australian types. Some of Mr. Bailey’s other nests and eggs have been actually identified.

Surely it is a fair argument that while it is conceivable that such birds might be imported and purchased here, it is really an insult to one’s reason to suppose that nests with fresh eggs in them could also be in the market. Therefore, I can only support the far more extended experience and elaborate tests of Dr. MacCarthy of Sydney, and affirm that I believe Mr. Charles Bailey to be upon occasion a true medium, with a very remarkable gift for apports.

It is only right to state that when I returned to London I took one of Bailey’s Assyrian tablets to the British Museum, and that it was pronounced to be a forgery. Upon further inquiry it proved that these forgeries are made by certain Jews in a suburb of Bagdad-and, so far as is known, only there. Therefore the matter is not much farther advanced. To the transporting agency it is at least possible that the forgery, steeped in recent human magnetism, is more capable of being handled than the original taken from a mound. Bailey has produced at least a hundred of these things, and no Custom House officer has deposed how they could have entered the country. On the other hand, Bailey told me clearly that the tablets had been passed by the British Museum, so that I fear I cannot acquit him of tampering with truth-and just there lies the great difficulty of deciding upon his case. But one has always to remember that physical mediumship has no connection one way or the other with personal character, any more than the gift of poetry.*

* “The Wanderings of a Spiritualist,” pp. 103-5. “Annals of Psychical Science,’ Vol. IX.

It is forgotten by those critics who are continually quoting Bailey’s exposure, that immediately before the Grenoble experience he had undergone a long series of tests at Milan, in the course of which the investigators took the extreme and unjustifiable course of watching the medium secretly when in his own bedroom. The committee, which consisted of nine business men and doctors, could find no flaw in seventeen sittings, even when the medium was put in a sack. These sittings lasted from February to April in 1904, and have been fully reported by Professor Marzorati. In view of their success, far too much has been made of the subsequent accusation in France. If the same analysis and scepticism were shown towards “exposures” as towards phenomena, public opinion would be more justly directed.

The phenomenon of apports seems so incomprehensible to our minds, that the author on one occasion asked a spirit control whether he could say anything which would throw a light upon it. The answer was:

“It involves some factors which are beyond your human science and which could not be made clear to you. At the same time you may take as a rough analogy the case of water which is turned into steam. Then this steam, which is invisible, may be conducted elsewhere to be reassembled as visible water.” This is, as stated, an analogy rather than an explanation, but it seems very apt none the less. It should be added, as mentioned in the quotation, that not only Mr. Stanford, of Melbourne, but also Dr. MacCarthy, one of the leading medical men of Sydney, carried out a long series of experiments with Bailey, and were convinced of his genuine powers.

The mediums quoted by no means exhaust the list of those with whom the author has had opportunities of experimenting, and he cannot leave the subject without alluding to the ectoplasm of Eva, which he has held between his fingers, or the brilliant luminosities of Frau Silbert which he has seen shooting like a dazzling crown out of her head. Enough has been said, he hopes, to show that the succession of great mediums is not extinct for anyone who is earnest in his search, and also to assure the reader that these pages are written by one who has spared no pains to gain practical knowledge of that which he studies. As to the charge of credulity which is invariably directed by the unreceptive against anyone who forms a positive opinion upon this subject, the author can solemnly aver that in the course of his long career as an investigator he cannot recall one single case where it was clearly shown that he had been mistaken upon any serious point, or had given a certificate of honesty to a performance which was afterwards clearly proved to be dishonest. A man who is credulous does not take twenty years of reading and experiment before he comes to his fixed conclusions.

No account of physical mediumship would be complete which did not allude to the remarkable results obtained by “Margery,” the name adopted for public purposes by Mrs. Crandon, the beautiful and gifted wife of one of the first surgeons in Boston. This lady showed psychic powers some years ago, and the author was instrumental in calling the attention of the Scientiflc Zmerican Committee to her case. By doing so he most unwillingly exposed her to much trouble and worry, which were borne with extraordinary patience by her husband and herself. It was difficult to say which was the more annoying: Houdini the conjurer, with his preposterous and ignorant theories of fraud, or such “scientific” sitters as Professor McDougall, of Harvard, who, after fifty sittings and signing as many papers at the end of each sitting to endorse the wonders recorded, was still unable to give any definite judgment, and contented himself with vague innuendoes. The matter was not mended by the interposition of Mr. E. J. Dingwall of the London S.P.R., who proclaimed the truth of the mediumship in enthusiastic private letters, but denied his conviction at public meetings. These so-called” experts” cache out of the matter with little credit, but more than two hundred common-sense sitters had wit enough and honesty enough to testify truly as to that which occurred before their eyes. The author may add that he has himself sat with Mrs. Crandon and has satisfied himself, so far as one sitting could do so, as to the truth and range of her powers.

The control in this instance professes to be Walter, the lady’s dead brother, and he exhibits a very marked individuality with a strong sense of humour and considerable command of racy vernacular. The voice production is direct, in a male voice, which seems to operate some few inches in front of the medium’s forehead. The powers have been progressive, their range continually widening, until now they have reached almost the full compass of mediumship. The ringing of electric bells without contact has been done ad nauseam, until one would imagine that no one, save a stone-deaf man or a scientific expert, could have any doubt about it. Movement of objects at a distance, spirit lights, raising of tables, apports, and finally the clear production of ectoplasm in a good red light, have succeeded each other. The patient work of Dr. and Mrs. Crandon will surely be rewarded, and their names will live in the history of psychic science, and so in a very different category will those of their traducers.

Of all forms of mediumship the highest and most valuable, when it can be relied upon, is that which is called automatic writing, since in this, if the form be pure, we seem to have found a direct method of obtaining teaching from the Beyond. Unhappily, it is a method which lends itself very readily to self-deception, since it is certain that the subconscious mind of man has many powers with which we are as yet imperfectly acquainted. It is impossible ever to accept any automatic script whole-heartedly as a hundred per cent statement of truth from the Beyond. The stained glass will still tint the light which passes through it, and our human organism will never be crystal clear. The verity of any particular specimen of such writing must depend not upon mere assertion, but upon corroborative details and the general dissimilarity from the mind of the writer, and similarity to that of the alleged inspirer. When, for example, in the case of the late Oscar Wilde, you get long communications which are not only characteristic of his style, but which contain constant allusions to obscure episodes in his own life and which finally are written in his own handwriting, it must be admitted that the evidence is overpoweringly strong. There is a great outpouring of such scripts at present in all the English-speaking countries. They are good, bad, and indifferent, but the good contain much matter which bears every trace of inspiration. The Christian or the Jew may well ask himself why parts of the Old Testament should admittedly have been written in this fashion, and yet its modern examples be treated with contempt. “And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying,” etc. (2 Chronicles xxi. 12) is one of several allusions which show the ancient use of this particular form of spirit communion.

Of all the examples of recent years there is none which can compare in fullness and dignity with the writings of the Rev. George Vale Owen, whose great script, “The Life Beyond the Veil,” may be as permanent an influence as that of Swedenborg. It is an interesting point, elaborated by Dr. A. J. Wood, that even in most subtle and complex points there is a close resemblance between the work of these two seers, and yet it is certain that Vale Owen is very slightly acquainted with the writings of the great Swedish teacher. George Vale Owen is so outstanding a figure in the history of modern Spiritualism that some short note upon him may not be out of place. He was born in Birmingham in 1869 and was educated at the

Midland Institute and Queen’s College, Birmingham. After curacies at Seaforth, Fairfield, and the low Scotland Road division of Liverpool, where he had a large experience among the poor, he became vicar of Orford, near Warrington, where his energy has been instrumental in erecting a new church. Here he remained for twenty years working in his parish which deeply appreciated his ministrations. Some psychic manifestations came his way, and finally he found himself impelled to exercise his own latent power of inspired writing, the script purporting to come in the first instance from his mother, but being continued by certain high spirits or angels who had come in her train. The whole constitutes an account of life after death, and a body of philosophy and advice from unseen sources, which seems to the author to bear every internal sign of a high origin. The narrative is dignified and lofty, expressed in slightly archaic English which gives it a curious flavour of its own.

Some extracts from this script appeared in various papers, attracting the more notice as being from the pen of a vicar of the Established Church. The manuscript was finally brought to the notice of the late Lord Northcliffe, who was much impressed by it and also by the self-denial of the writer, who refused to take any emuneration for its publication. This followed weekly in Lord Northcliffe’s Sunday paper, the Weekly Dispatch, and nothing has ever occurred which has brought the highest teachings of Spiritualism so directly to the masses. It was shown incidentally that the policy of the Press in the past had been not only ignorant and unjust, but actually mistaken from the low point of view of self-interest, for the circulation of the Dispatch increased greatly during the year that it published the script. Such doings were, however, highly offensive to a very conservative bishop, and Mr. Vale Owen found himself, like all religious reformers, an object of dislike, and suffered veiled persecution from his Church superiors. With this force pushing him, and the pull in front of the whole Spiritualist community, he bravely abandoned his living and cast himself and his family on the mercy of whatever Providence might please to direct, his brave wife entirely sympathizing with him in a step which was no light matter for a couple who were no longer young. After a short lecturing tour in America and another in England, Mr. Vale Owen is at present presiding over a Spiritualist congregation in London, where the magnetism of his presence draws considerable audiences. In an excellent pen-portrait, Mr. David Gow has said of Vale Owen:

The tall, thin figure of the minister, his pale, ascetic face lit by large eyes, luminous with tenderness and humour, his modest bearing, his quiet words charged with the magnetism of sympathy, all these revealed in full measure what manner of man he is. They disclosed a soul of rare devotion kept sane and sweet by a kindly, humorous sense and a practical outlook on the world. He seemed to be charged more with the spirit of Erasmus or of Melanchthon than of the bluff Luther. Perhaps the Church needs no Luthers to-day.

If the author has included this short notice under the head of personal experience, it is because he has been honoured by the close friendship of Mr. Vale Owen for some years, and has been in a position to study and endorse the reality of his psychic powers. The author would add that he has succeeded in getting the independent Direct Voice sitting alone with his wife. The voice was a deep, male one, coming some feet above our heads, and uttering only a short but very audible greeting. It is hoped that with further development consistent results may be obtained. For years the author has, in his own domestic circle, obtained inspired messages through the hand and voice of his wife, which have been of the most lofty and often of the most evidential nature. These are, however, too personal and intimate to be discussed in a general survey of the subject.

CHAPTER IX

SPIRITUALISM AND THE WAR

Many people had never heard of Spiritualism until the period that began in 1914, when into so many homes the Angel of Death entered suddenly. The opponents of Spiritualism have found it convenient to regard this world upheaval as being the chief cause of the widening interest in psychical research. It has been said, too, by these unscrupulous opponents that the author's advocacy of the subject, as well as that of his distinguished friend, Sir Oliver Lodge, was due to the fact that each of them had a son killed in the war, the inference being that grief had lessened their critical faculties and made them believe what in more normal times they would not have believed. The author has many times refuted this clumsy lie, and pointed out the fact that his investigation dates back as far as 1886. Sir Oliver Lodge, for his part, says*

It must not be supposed that my outlook has changed appreciably since the event, and the particular experiences related in the foregoing pages; my conclusion has been gradually forming itself for years, though, undoubtedly, it is based on experience of the same sort of thing. But this event has strengthened and liberated my testimony. It can now be associated with a private experience of my own, instead of with the private experiences of others. So long as one was dependent on evidence connected, even indirectly connected, with the bereavement of others, one had to be reticent and cautious, and in some cases silent. Only by special permission could any portion of the facts be reproduced; and that permission might in important cases be withheld. My own deductions were the same then as they are now, but the facts are now my own.

While it is true that Spiritualism counted its believers in millions before the war, there is no doubt that the subject was not understood by the world at large, and hardly recognised as having an existence. The war changed all that. The deaths occurring in almost every family in the land brought a sudden and concentrated interest in the life after death. People not only asked the question, “If a man die shall he live again?” but they eagerly sought to know if communication was possible with the dear ones they had lost. They sought for “the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still.” Not only did thousands investigate for themselves, but, as in the early history of the movement, the first opening was often made by those who had passed on. The newspaper Press was not able to resist the pressure of public opinion, and much publicity was given to stories of soldiers’ return, and generally to the life after death.

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* "Raymond," p. 374.

In this chapter only brief reference can be made to the different ways in which the spiritual world intermingled with the various phases of the war. The conflict itself was predicted over and over again; dead soldiers showed themselves in their old homes, and also gave warnings of danger to their comrades on the battlefield; they impressed their images on the photographic plate; solitary figures and legendary hosts, not of this world, were seen in the war area; indeed, over the whole scene there was from time to time a strong atmosphere of other-world presence and activity.

If for a moment the author may strike a personal note he would say that, while his own loss had no effect upon his views, the sight of a world which was distraught with sorrow, and which was eagerly asking for help and knowledge, did certainly affect his mind and cause him to understand that these psychic studies, which he had so long pursued, were of immense practical importance and could no longer be regarded as a mere intellectual hobby or fascinating pursuit of a novel research. Evidence of the presence of the dead appeared in his own household, and the relief afforded by posthumous messages taught him how great a solace it would be to a tortured world if it could share in the knowledge which had become clear to himself. It was this realisation which, from early in 1916, caused him and his wife to devote themselves largely to this subject, to lecture upon it in many countries, and to travel to Australia, New Zealand, America, and Canada upon missions of instruction. Indeed, this history of the subject may be said to derive from the same impulse which first caused him to throw himself wholeheartedly into the cause.

This work may well fill a very small space in any general history, but it becomes apposite in a chapter dealing with the war, since it was the atmosphere of war in which it was engendered and grew.

Prophecy is one of the spiritual gifts, and any clear proof of its existence points to psychic powers outside our usual knowledge. In the case of the war, many could, of course, by normal means and the use of their own reason, foresee that the situation in the world had become so top-heavy with militarism that equilibrium could not be sustained. But some of the prophecies appear to be so distinct and detailed that they are beyond the power of mere reason and foresight.*

* Reference to some of these will be found in the following publications; “Prophecies and Omens of the Great War,” by Ralph Shirley, “The War and the Prophets,” by Herbert Thurston, and “War Prophecies,” by F. C. S. Schiller (S.P.R. JOURNAL, June, 1916). “Angelic Revelations,” Vol. V, pp. 170-1.

The general fact of a great world catastrophe, and England’s share in it, is thus spoken of in a spirit communication received by the Oxley Circle in Manchester and published in 1885:

For twice seven years-from the period already noted to you-the influences that are brought to bear against the British Nation will be successful; and after that time comes a fearful contest, a mighty struggle, a terrible bloodshed-according to human modes of expression, a dethronement of kings, an overthrow of Powers, great riot and disturbance; and still greater commotion amongst the masses concerning wealth and its possession. In using these words I speak according to human apprehension.

The most important question is-shall Britain for ever be lost? We see the prophecies of many, and the attitude of many Representatives upon the outer plane, and we see more clearly than many upon the Earth give us credit for, that amongst the latter-named there are those who are lovers of gold more than the interior principle which that gold represents.

Unless at the coming crisis the Great Power intervenes, that is, the Grand Operating Power of which I have spoken before, and in calm dignity flows forth and issues the mandate — Peace, be still! — the prophecy of some, that England shall sink in the depths for ever, will be fulfilled. Like the specific atoms of life who compose the State called England, who must sink for a time in order that they may rise again, even so must the Nation sink, and that to a great depth for a season; because she is immersed in the love of what is false, and has not yet acquired the intelligence that will act as a powerful lever to raise her up to her own dignity. Will she, like a drowning man going down for the third and last time, go down and be lost for ever? Once in the grand whole of the Mighty One, so she must continue an integral part. There is a kindly hand that will be stretched forth to save her, and bear her up from the billows of the self-hood that would otherwise engulf her. With an energy that is irrepressible, that power says-England once, England forever! But not in the same state will that continuance be. She must and will sink the lower, in order that she may rise the higher. The how, why, and in what manner, and by what treatment we shall use to bring about her safety and serenity, I shall speak of further on; but, here I affirm, that in order to save her, England must be drained of her best blood.

For particulars of M. Sonrel's famous prophecy in 1868 of the war of 1870, and his less direct prophecy of that of 1914, readers are referred to Professor Richet's book, "Thirty Years of Psychical Research" (pp. 387-9). The essential part of the latter prophecy is expressed as follows:-

Wait now, waityears pass. It is a vast war. What bloodshed! God! What bloodshed! Oh, France, oh, my country, thou art saved! Thou art on the Rhine!

The prophecy was uttered in 1868, but was not put on record by Dr. Tardieu until April, 1914.

The author has previously referred * to the prophecy given in Sydney, Australia, by the well-known medium, Mrs. Foster Turner, but it will bear repeating. At a Sunday meeting in February, 1914., at the Little Theatre, Castlereagh Street, before an audience of nearly a thousand people, in a trance-address in which Mr. W. T. Stead purported to be the influence, she said, as reported in notes taken on the occasion of her address:

* "The Wanderings of a Spiritualist," (1921), p. 260.

Now, although there is not at present a whisper of a great European War at hand, yet I want to warn you that before this year 1914 has run its course, Europe will be deluged in blood. Great Britain, our beloved nation, will be drawn into the most awful war the world has ever known. Germany will be the great antagonist, and will draw other nations in her train. Austria will totter to its ruin. Kings and kingdoms will fall. Millions of precious lives will be slaughtered, but Britain will finally triumph and emerge victorious.

The date of the ending of the Great War was given correctly in "Private Dowding," by W. T. P. (Major W. Tudor Pole), who calls his book "A Plain Record of the After-Death Experiences of a Soldier killed in Battle." In this book, which was first published in London in 1917, we find (p. 99) a communication which reads:

Messenger: In Europe there will be three great federations of states. These federations will come to birth naturally and without bloodshed, but

Armageddon must first be fought out.

Tom. T. P.: How long will this take?

Messenger: I am not a very high being, and to me are not revealed details of all these wonderful happenings. So far as I am allowed to see, peace will be re-established during 1919, and world-federations will come into being during the following seven years. Although actual fighting may end in 1918, it will take many years to bring poise and peace into actual and permanent being.

In the list of prophecies, that of Mrs. Piper, the famous trance-medium of Boston, U.S.A., deserves a place, though it may be considered by some to have an element of vagueness. It occurred about 1898 at a sitting with Dr. Richard Hodgson, who was so prominently associated with the English and American Societies for Psychical Research.

Never since the days of Melchizedek has the earthly world been so susceptible to the influence of spirit. It will in the next century be astonishingly perceptible to the minds of men. I will also make a statement which you will surely see verified. Before the clear revelation of spirit communication, there will be a terrible war in different parts of the world. This will precede much clear communication. The entire world must be purified and cleansed before mortal man can see, through his spiritual vision, his friends on this side, and it will take just this line of action to bring about a state of perfection. Friend, kindly think on this.*

* Quoted in LIGHT, 1914, p. 349.

Mr. J. G. Piddington, in the “Proceedings” of the Society for Psychical Research,* speaks at length of the war predictions contained in various automatic scripts, particularly in those of Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton. In his summing up he says:

* PROCEEDINGS S.P.R., Vol. XXXIII. (March, 1923).

The scripts in general terms predicted the War; so did many people. Some half-dozen scripts written between July 9 and 21, 1914, predicted that the War was close at hand; so also, and earlier, had Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. The scripts predict that the War will eventually lead to a great improvement in international relations and social conditions; so, too, tens of thousands of ordinary citizens throughout the British Empire believed or hoped that the Great War was, as the phrase went, “a war to end war.”

But this last parallel between the predictions in the scripts and the beliefs or aspirations that declared themselves with such strange ubiquity and intensity when war broke out, is in truth only a superficial parallel; for whereas the wave of idealism that swept over the Empire followed, or at best synchronized with, the beginning of the War, for many years before August, 1914, the scripts had repeatedly combined predictions of a Utopia with predictions of war, and had combined them in such a manner as to imply that the one is to be the outcome of the other. I know of no parallel to that. The writers, the soldiers, the diplomatists, and the politicians who forewarned us of the War, preached its dangers and its horrors, but they did not tell us that this perilous and horrible tragedy would yet prove to be the birth-throes of a happier world. Nor did the propagandists of Hague Conferences and other schemes for allaying international rivalries warn us that a world-war must precede the attainment of their desires. All alike predicted or feared a coming chaos; the scripts alone, so far as I know, spoke a hope for the world in the coming wars, and hailed the approaching chaos as the prelude to a new kosmos.

The predictions of the War in the scripts cannot be separated from the predictions of an eventual Utopia. The scripts do not say, “There will be a war,” stop there, and then start afresh and say, “There will be a Utopia.” They clearly imply that the Utopia will result from the War. Yet it cannot be said that the two component parts of the whole prophecy stand or fall together, because the predictions of war have been fulfilled; but the fulfilment or the failure of the Utopian predictions must eventually influence opinion as to the source of the war predictions. Should the Utopia foreshadowed in the scripts be translated into fact, it would be very difficult to attribute the prediction of it as an outcome of the War to ordinary human prescience, and a strong case would arise for admitting the claim made in the scripts, and for giving the credit of the prediction to discarnate beings. And if the Utopian predictions were held to be the work of discarnate minds, in all probability the predictions of the War, which are so closely bound up with them, would be assigned to the same source.

There are very many other prophecies which have been more or less successful. A perusal of them, however, cannot fail to impress the student with the conviction that the sense of time is the least accurate of spiritual details. Very often where the facts are right the dates are hopelessly at fault.

The most exact of all the prophecies concerning the War seems to have been that of Sophie, a Greek young woman who, having been hypnotized by Dr. Antoniou of Athens, delivered her oracles vocally in a state of trance. The date was June 6, 1914. She not only predicted the Great War and who the parties would be, but gave a great deal of detail such as the neutrality of Italy at the beginning, her subsequent alliance with the Entente, the action of Greece, the place of the final battle on the Vardar, and so forth. It is interesting, however, to note that she made certain errors which tend to show that the position of the Fatalist is not secure, and that there is at least a broad margin which can be affected by human will and energy.*

* REVUE METAPHSYCHIQUE, December, 1925, pp. 380, 390. PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, August, 1919, pp. 190-1.

There is much testimony regarding the occurrence of what may be called spirit intervention during the war. Captain W. E. Newcome has related the following:

It was in September, 1916, that the 2nd Suffolks left Loos to go up into the northern sector of Albert. I accompanied them, and whilst in the front line trenches of that sector I, with others, witnessed one of the most remarkable occurrences of the war.

About the end of October, up to November 5th, we were actually holding that part of the line with very few troops. On November 1st the Germans made a very determined attack, doing their utmost to break through. I had occasion to go down to the reserve line, and during my absence the German attack began.

I hurried back to my company with all speed, and arrived in time to give a helping hand in throwing the enemy back to his own line. He never gained a footing in our trenches. The assault was sharp and short, and we had settled down to watch and wait again for his next attack.

We had not long to wait, for we soon saw Germans again coming over No Man's Land in massed waves; but before they reached our wire a white, spiritual figure of a soldier rose from a shell-hole, or out of the ground about one hundred yards on our left, just in front of our wire and between the first line of Germans and ourselves. The spectral figure then slowly walked along our front for a distance of about one thousand yards. Its outline suggested to my mind that of an old pre-war officer, for it appeared to be in a shell coat, with field-service cap on its head. It looked, first, across at the oncoming Germans, then turned its head away and commenced to walk slowly outside our wire along the sector that we were holding.

Our SOS signal had been answered by our artillery. Shells and bullets were whistling across No Man's Land,but none in anyway impeded the spectre's progress. It steadily marched from the left of us till it got to the extreme right of the sector, then it turned its face right full on to us. It seemed to look up and down our trench, and as each Verey light rose it stood out more prominently.

After a brief survey of us it turned sharply to the right and made a bee-line for the German trenches. The Germans scattered backand no more was seen of them that night.

The Angels of Mons seemed to be the first thought of the men; then some said it looked like Lord Kitchener, and others said its face, when turned full on to us, was not unlike Lord Roberts. I know that it gave me personally a great shock, and for some time it was the talk of the company.

Its appearance can be vouched for by sergeants and men of my section.

In the same article in Pearson's Magazine the story is told of Mr. William M. Speight, who had lost a brother officer, and his best friend, in the Ypres salient in December, 1915, seeing this officer come to his dug-out the same night. The next evening Mr. Speight invited another officer to come to the dugout in order to confirm him should the vision reappear. The dead officer came once more and, after pointing to a spot on the floor of the dug-out, vanished. A hole was dug at the indicated spot, and at a depth of three feet there was discovered a narrow tunnel excavated by the Germans, with fuses and mines timed to explode thirteen hours later. By the discovery of this mine the lives of a number of men were saved.

Mrs. E. A. Cannock, a well-known London clairvoyant, described * at a Spiritualist meeting how a number of deceased soldiers adopted a novel and convincing method of making known their identity. The soldiers (as seen in her clairvoyant vision) advanced in single file up the aisle, led by a young lieutenant. Each man bore on his chest what appeared to be a large placard on which was written his name and the place where he had lived on earth. Mrs. Cannock was able to read these names and descriptions, and they were all identified by various members of the audience. A curious feature was that as each name was recognised the spirit form faded away, thus making way for the one who was following.

* LIGHT, 1919, p. 215.

As a type of other reports of a similar nature we may quote a case of what is described as "Telepathy from the Battle-front." On November 4, 1914, Mrs. Fussey, of Wimbledon, whose son “Tab” was serving in France with the 9th Lancers, was sitting at home when she felt in her arm the sharp sting of a wound. She jumped up and cried out, “How it smarts!” and rubbed the place. Her husband also attended to her arm, but could find no trace of anything wrong with it. Mrs. Fussey continued to suffer pain and exclaimed: “Tab is wounded in the arm. I know it.” The following Monday a letter arrived from Private Fussey, saying that he had been shot in the arm and was in hospital,* The case coincides with the recorded experiences of many psychics who by some unknown law of sympathy have suffered shocks simultaneously with accidents occurring to friends, and sometimes strangers, at a distance.

* LIGHT, 1914, p. 595.

In a number of cases dead soldiers have manifested themselves through psychic photography. One of the most remarkable instances occurred in London on Armistice Day, November 11, 1922, when the medium, Mrs. Deane, in the presence of Miss Estelle Stead, took a photograph of the crowd in Whitehall, in the neighbourhood of the Cenotaph. It was during the Two Minutes Silence, and on the photograph there is to be seen a broad circle of light, in the midst of which are two or three dozen heads, many of them those of soldiers, who were subsequently recognised. These photographs have been repeated on each succeeding year, and though the usual reckless and malicious attacks have been made upon the medium and her work, those who had the best opportunity of checking it have no doubt of the supernormal character of these pictures.

We must content ourselves with one more case as typical of many hundreds of results. Mr. R. S. Hipwood, 174, Cleveland Road, Sunderland, writes*:

* “The Case for Spirit Photography,” by Sir A. Conan Doyle, p. 108. LIGHT, December 20, 1919, p. 407.

We lost our only son in France, August 27, 1918. Being a good amateur photographer I was curious about the photos that had been taken by the Crewe Circle. We took our own plate with us, and I put the plate in the dark slide myself and put my name on it. We exposed two plates in the camera and got a well-recognised photo. Even my nine-year-old grandson could tell who the extra was, without anyone saying anything to him. Having a thorough knowledge of photography, I can vouch for the veracity of the photograph in every particular. I claim the print which I send you to be an ordinary photograph of myself and Mrs. Hipwood, with the extra of my son, R. S. Hipwood, 13th Welsh Regiment, killed in France in the great advance in August, 1918. I tender to our friends at Crewe our unbounded confidence in their work.

Of the many cases recorded of the return of dead soldiers, the following stands out because the particulars were received from two independent sources. It is related by Mr. W. T. Waters, of Tunbridge Wells, who says that he is only a novice in the study of Spiritualism:

In July last I had a sitting with Mr. J. J. Vango, in the course of which the control suddenly told me that there was standing by me a young soldier who was most anxious that I should take a message to his mother and sister who live in this town. I replied that I did not know any soldier near to me who had passed over. However, the lad would not be put off, and as my own friends seemed to stand aside to enable him to speak, I promised to endeavour to carry out his wishes.

At once came an exact description which enabled me instantly to recognise in this soldier lad the son of an acquaintance of my family. He told me certain things by which I was made doubly certain that it was he and no other, and he then gave me his message of comfort and assurance to his mother and sister (his father had died when he was a baby), who, for over two years, had been uncertain as to his fate, as he had been posted as “missing.” He described how he had been badly wounded and captured by the Germans in a retreat, and that he had died about a week afterwards, and he implored me to tell his dear ones that he was often with them, and that the only bar to his complete happiness was the witnessing of his mother’s great grief and his inability to make himself known.

I fully intended to keep my promise, but knowing that the lad’s people favoured the High Church party and would most likely be absolutely sceptical, I was puzzled how to convey the message, as I felt they would only think that my own loss had affected my brain. I ventured to approach his aunt, but what I told her only called forth the remark: “It cannot be,” and I therefore decided to await an opportunity of speaking to his mother direct.

Before this looked-for opportunity came, a young lady of this town, having lost her mother about two years ago, and hearing from my daughter that I was investigating these matters, called to see me, and I lent her my books. One of these books is “Rupert Lives,” with which she was particularly struck, and she eventually arranged a sitting with Miss

McCreadie, through whom she received such convincing testimony that she is now a firm believer. During this sitting, the soldier boy who came to me came to her also. He repeated the same description that I had received, mentioned in addition his name-Charlie-and begged her to give a message to his mother and sister-the selfsame message which I had failed to give. So anxious was he in the matter, that at the close of the sitting he came again and implored her not to fail him.

Now, these events happened at different dates-July and September-the same message exactly being given through different mediums to different persons, and yet people tell us it is all a myth and that mediums simply read our thoughts.

When my friend told me of her experience I at once asked her to go with me to the lad's mother, and I am pleased to state that this double message convinced both his mother and his sister, and that his aunt is almost brought to the truth if not quite.

Sir William Barrett* records this evidential communication which was obtained in Dublin through the ouija board, with Mrs. Travers Smith, the daughter of the late Professor Edward Dowden. Her friend, Miss C, who is mentioned, was the daughter of a medical man. Sir William calls it "The Pearl Tie-pin Case."

* "On The Threshold of the Unseen," p. 184.

Miss C., the sitter, had a cousin an officer with our Army in France, who was killed in battle a month previously to the sitting: this she knew. One day after the name of her cousin had unexpectedly been spelt out on the ouija board, and her name given in answer to her query: "Do you know who I am?" the following message came:

"Tell mother to give my pearl tie-pin to the girl I was going to marry. I think she ought to have it." When asked what was the name and address of the lady both were given; the name spelt out included the full Christian and surname, the latter being a very unusual one and quite unknown to both the sitters. The address given in London was either fictitious or taken down incorrectly, as a letter sent there was returned and the whole message was thought to be fictitious.

Six months later, however, it was discovered that the officer had been engaged, shortly before he left for the Front, to the very lady whose name was given; he had, however, told no one. Neither his cousin nor any of his own family in Ireland were aware of the fact, and had never seen the lady nor heard her name until the War Office sent over the deceased officer’s effects. Then they found that he had put this lady’s name in his will as his next-of-kin, both Christian and surname being precisely the same as given through the automatist; and what is equally remarkable, a pearl tie pin was found in his effects.

Both the ladies have signed a document they sent me, affirming the accuracy of the above statement. The message was recorded at the time, and not written from memory after verification had been obtained. Here there could be no explanation of the facts by subliminal memory, or telepathy or collusion, and the evidence points unmistakably to a telepathic message from the deceased officer.

The Rev. G. Vale Owen describes * the return of George Leaf, one of his Bible Class lads in Orford, Warrington, who joined the R.F.A. and was killed in the Great War.

* “Facts and the Future Life” (1922), pp. 53-4.

Some weeks later his mother was tidying up the hearth in the sitting-room. She was on her knees before the grate when she felt an impulse to turn round and look at the door which opened into the entrance hall. She did so, and saw her son clad in his working clothes, just as he used to come home every evening when he was alive. He took off his coat and hung it upon the door, an old familiar habit of his. Then he turned to her, nodded and smiled, and walked through to the back kitchen where he had been in the habit of washing before sitting down to his evening meal. It was all quite natural and lifelike. She knew that it was her dead boy who had come to show her that he was alive in the spirit land and living a natural life, well, happy and content. Also that smile of love told her that his heart was still with the old folks at home. She is a sensible woman and I did not doubt her story for a moment. As a matter of fact, since his death he had been seen in Orford Church, which he used to attend, and has been seen in various places since.

There are many instances of visions of soldiers coinciding with death. In Rosa Stuart’s “Dreams and Visions of the War” this case is given:

A very touching story was told me by a Bournemouth wife. Her husband, a sergeant in the Devons, went to France on July 25th, 1915. She had received letters regularly from him, all of which were very happy and cheerful, and so she began to be quite reassured in her mind about him, feeling certain that whatsoever danger he had to face he would come safely through.

On the evening of September 25th, 1915, at about ten o’clock, she was sitting on her bed in her room talking to another girl, who was sharing it with her. The light was full on, and neither of them had as yet thought of getting into bed, so deep were they in their chat about the events of the day and the war.

And then suddenly there came a silence. The wife had broken off sharply in the middle of a sentence and sat there staring into space.

For, standing there before her in uniform, was her husband l For two or three minutes she remained there looking at him, and she was struck by the expression of sadness in his eyes. Getting up quickly she advanced to the spot where he was standing, but by the time she had reached it the vision had disappeared.

Though only that morning the wife had had a letter saying her husband was safe and well, she felt sure that the vision foreboded evil. She was right. Soon afterwards she received a letter from the War Office, saying that he had been killed in the Battle of Loos on September 25th, 1915, the very date she had seemed to see him stand beside her bed.

A deeper mystical side of the visions of the Great War centres round the “Angels of Mons.” Mr. Arthur Machen, the well-known London journalist, wrote a story telling how English bowmen from the field of Agincourt intervened during the terrible retreat from Mons. But he stated afterwards that he had invented the incident. But here, as so often before, truth proved fiction to be a fact, or at least facts of a like character were reported by a number of credible witnesses. Mr. Harold Begbie published a little book,” On the Side of the Angels,” giving much evidence, and Mr. Ralph Shirley, editor of the OCCULT REVIEW (London), followed with “The Angel Warriors at Mons,” in which he added to Mr. Begbie’s testimony.

A British officer, replying to Mr. Machen in the London EVENING NEWS (September 14, 1915), mentions that he was fighting at Le Cateau on August 26, 1914, and that his division retired and marched throughout the night of the 26th and during the 27th. He says:

On the night of the 27th I was riding along in the column with two other officers. We had been talking and doing our best to keep from falling asleep on our horses.

As we rode along I became conscious of the fact that, in the fields on both sides of the road along which we were marching, I could see a very large body of horsemen. These horsemen had the appearance of squadrons of cavalry, and they seemed to be riding across the fields and going in the same direction as we were going, and keeping level with us.

The night was not very dark, and I fancied that I could see the squadron of these cavalrymen quite distinctly.

I did not say a word about it at first, but I watched them for about twenty minutes. The other two officers had stopped talking.

At last one of them asked me if I saw anything in the fields. I then told him what I had seen. The third officer then confessed that he, too, had been watching these horsemen for the past twenty minutes.

So convinced were we that they were really cavalry that, at the next halt, one of the officers took a party of men out to reconnoitre, and found no one there. The night then grew darker, and we saw no more.

The same phenomenon was seen by many men in our column. Of course, we were all dog-tired and overtaxed, but it is an extraordinary thing that the same phenomenon should be witnessed by so many people.

I myself am absolutely convinced that I saw these horsemen; and I feel sure that they did not exist only in my imagination. I do not attempt to explain the mystery-I only state facts.

This evidence sounds good, and yet it must be admitted that in the stress and tension of the great retreat men’s minds were not in the best condition to weigh evidence. On the other hand, it is at such times of hardship that the psychic powers of man are usually most alive.

A profound aspect of the World War is involved in the consideration that the war on earth is but one aspect of unseen battles on higher planes where the powers of Good and Evil are engaged. The late Mr. A. P. Sinnett, a prominent Theosophist, deals with this question in an article entitled “Super-Physical Aspects of the War.” *

* THE OCCULT REVIEW, December 1914, p. 346.

We cannot enter into the subject here, except to say that there are evidences from many sources to indicate that what Mr. Sinnett speaks of has a basis of fact.

A considerable number of books, and a very much larger number of manuscripts, record the alleged experiences of those who passed over in the war, which differ, of course, in no way from those who pass over at any other time, but are rendered more dramatic by the historical occasion. The greatest of these books is “Raymond.” Sir Oliver Lodge is so famous a scientist and so profound a thinker that his brave and frank avowal produced a great impression upon the public. The book appeared later in a condensed form, and it is likely to remain for many years a classic of the subject. Other books of the same class, all of them corroborative in their main details, are “The Case of Lester Coltman,” “Claude’s Book,” “Rupert Lives,” “Grenadier Rolf,” “Private Dowding,” and others. All of them depict the sort of after-life existence which is described in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER X

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF SPIRITUALISM

Spiritualism is a system of thought and knowledge which can be reconciled with any religion. The basic facts are the continuity of personality and the power of communication after death. These two basic facts are of as great importance to a Brahmin, a Mohammedan, or a Parsee as to a Christian. Therefore Spiritualism makes a universal appeal. There is only one school of thought to which it is absolutely irreconcilable: that is the school of materialism, which holds the world in its grip at present and is the root cause of all our misfortunes. Therefore the comprehension and acceptance of Spiritualism are essential things for the salvation of mankind, which is otherwise destined to descend lower and lower into a purely utilitarian and selfish view of the universe. The typical materialistic state was prewar Germany, but every other modern state is of the same type if not of the same degree.

It may be asked, why should not the old religions be strong enough to rescue the world from its spiritual degradation? The answer is that they have all been tried and all have failed. The Churches which represent them have themselves become to the last degree formal and worldly and material. They have lost all contact with the living facts of the spirit, and are content to refer everything back to ancient days, and to pay a lip service and an external reverence to an outworn system which has been so tangled up with incredible theologies that the honest mind is nauseated at the thought of it. No class has shown itself so sceptical and incredulous of modern Spiritual manifestations as those very clergy who profess complete belief in similar occurrences in bygone ages, and their utter refusal to accept them now is a measure of the sincerity of their professions. Faith has been abused until it has become impossible to many earnest minds, and there is a call for proof and for knowledge. It is this which Spiritualism supplies. It founds our belief in life after death and in the existence of invisible worlds, not upon ancient tradition or upon vague intuitions, but upon proven facts, so that a science of religion may be built up, and man given a sure pathway amid the quagmire of the creeds.

When one asserts that Spiritualism may be reconciled with any religion, one does not mean that all religions are of the same value, or that the teaching of Spiritualism alone may not be better than Spiritualism mixed with any other creed. Personally, the author thinks that Spiritualism alone supplies all that man needs, but he has found many men of high soul who have been unable to cast off the convictions of a lifetime, and yet have been able to accept the new truth without discarding the old belief. But if a man had Spiritualism alone as his guide, he would not find himself in a position which was opposed to essential Christianity, but rather in one which was explanatory. Both systems preach life after death. Both recognise that the after-life is influenced in its progress and happiness by conduct here. Both profess to believe in the existence of a world of spirits, good and evil, whom the Christian calls angels and devils, and the Spiritualist guides, controls, and undeveloped spirits.

Both believe in the main that the same virtues, unselfishness, kindness, purity, and honesty, are necessary for a high character. Bigotry, however, is looked upon as a serious offence by Spiritualists, while it is commended by most Christian sects. To Spiritualists every path upwards is commendable, and they fully recognise that in all creeds there are sainted, highly developed souls who have received by intuition all that the Spiritualist can give by special knowledge. The mission of the Spiritualist does not lie with these. His mission lies with those who openly declare themselves to be agnostic, or those more dangerous ones who profess some form of creed and yet are either thoughtless or agnostic at heart.

From the author’s point of view the man who has received the full benefit of the new revelation is the man who has earnestly tried the gamut of the creeds and has found them all equally wanting. He then finds himself in a valley of gloom with Death waiting at the end, and nothing but plain, obvious duty as his acting religion. Such a condition produces many fine men of the Stoic breed, but it is not conducive to personal happiness. Then comes the positive proof of independent existence, sometimes suddenly, sometimes by slow conviction. The cloud has gone from the end of his prospect. He is no longer in a valley but upon the ridge beyond, with a vista of successive ridges each more beautiful than the last in front of him. All is brightness where once gloom girt him round. The day of this revelation has become the crowning day of his life.

Looking up at the lofty hierarchy of spiritual beings above him, the Spiritualist realises that one or another great archangel may from time to time visit mankind with some mission of teaching and hope. Even humble Katie King, with her message of immortality given to a great scientist, was an angel from on high. Francis d’Assisi, Joan of Arc, Luther, Mahomet, Bab-ed-Din, and every real religious leader of history are among these evangels. But above all, according to our Western judgment, was Jesus the son of a Jewish artisan, Whom we call “The Christ.” It is not for our mosquito brains to say what degree of divinity was in Him, but we can truly say that He was certainly nearer the Divine than we are, and that His teaching, upon which the world has not yet acted, is the most unselfish, merciful, and beautiful of which we have any cognisance, unless it be that of his fellow saint Buddha, who also was a messenger from God, but whose creed was rather for the Oriental than for the European mind.

When, however, we hark back to the message of our inspired Teacher, we find that there is little relation between His precepts and the dogmas or actions of His present-day disciples. We see also that a great deal of what He taught has obviously been lost, and that to find this lost portion, which was unexpressed in the Gospels, we have to examine the practice of the early Church who were guided by those who had been in immediate touch with Him. Such an examination shows that all which we call Modern Spiritualism seems to have been familiar to the Christ circle, that the gifts of the spirit extolled by St. Paul are exactly those gifts which our mediums exhibit, and that those wonders which brought a conviction of other-world reality to the folk of those days can now be exhibited and should have a similar effect now, when men once again ask for assurance upon this vital matter. This subject is treated at large in other books, and can here be simply summed up by saying that, far from having wandered from orthodoxy, there is good reason to believe that the humble, undogmatic Spiritualist, with his direct spirit message, his communion of saints, and his association with that high teaching which has been called the Holy Ghost, is nearer to primitive Christianity than any other existing sect.

It is quite amazing when we read the early documents of the Church, and especially the writings of the so-called “Fathers,” to find out the psychic knowledge and the psychic practice which were in vogue in those days. The early Christians lived in close and familiar touch with the unseen, and their absolute faith and constancy were founded upon the positive personal knowledge which each of them had acquired. They were aware, not as a speculation but as an absolute fact, that death meant no more than a translation to a wider life, and might more properly be called birth. Therefore they feared it not at all, and regarded it rather as Dr. Hodgson did when he cried, “Oh, I can hardly bear to wait!” Such an attitude did not affect their industry and value in this world, which have been attested even by their enemies. If converts in far-off lands have in these days been shown to deteriorate when they become Christians, it is because the Christianity which they have embraced has lost all the direct compelling power which existed of old.

Apart from the early Fathers, we have evidence of early Christian sentiment in the inscriptions of the Catacombs. An interesting book on early Christian remains in Rome, by the Rev. Spence Jones, Dean of Gloucester, deals in part with these strange and pathetic records. These inscriptions have the advantage over all our documentary evidence that they have certainly not been forged, and that there has been no possibility of interpolation.

Dr. Jones, after having read many hundreds of them, says: “The early Christians speak of the dead as though they were still living. They talk to their dead.” That is the point of view of the present-day Spiritualists-one which the Churches have so long lost. The early Christian graves present a strange contrast to those of the heathen which surround them. The latter always refer to death as a final, terrible and irrevocable thing. “Fuisti Vale” sums up their sentiment. The Christians, on the other hand, dwelt always upon the happy continuance of life. “Agape, thou shalt live for ever,” “Victorina is in peace and in Christ,” “May God refresh thy spirit,” “Mayest thou live in God.” These inscriptions alone are enough to show that a new and infinitely consoling view of death had come to the human race.

The Catacombs, also, it may be remarked, are a proof of the simplicity of early Christianity before it became barnacled over with all sorts of complex definitions and abstractions, which sprang from the Grecian or Byzantine mind, and have caused infinite evil in the world. The one symbol which predominates in the Catacombs is that of the Good Shepherd-the tender idea of a man carrying a poor helpless lamb. One may search the Catacombs of the first centuries, and in all those thousands of devices you will find nothing of a blood sacrifice, nothing of a virgin birth. You will find the Kind Shepherd, the anchor of hope, the palm of the martyr, and the fish which was the pun or rebus upon the name of Jesus. Everything points to a simple religion. Christianity was at its best when it was in the hands of the humblest. It was the rich, the powerful, and the learned who degraded, complicated, and ruined it.

It is not possible, however, to draw any psychic inferences from the inscriptions or drawings in the Catacombs. For these we must turn to the pre-Nicene Fathers, and there we find so many references that a small book which would contain nothing else might easily be compiled. We have, however, to tune-in our thoughts and phrases to theirs in order to get the full meaning. Prophecy, for example, we now call mediumship, and an Angel has become a high spirit or a Guide. Let us take a few typical quotations at random.

Saint Augustine, in his “De cura pro Mortuis,” says: “The spirits of the dead can be sent to the living and can unveil to them the future which they them selves have learned either from other spirits or from angels” (i.e. spiritual guides) “or by divine revelation.” This is pure Spiritualism exactly as we know and define it. Augustine would not have spoken so surely of it and with such an accuracy of definition if he had not been quite familiar with it. There is no hint of its being illicit.

He comes back to the subject in his “The City of God,” where he refers to practices which enable the ethereal body of a person to communicate with the spirits and higher guides and to receive visions. These persons were, of course, mediums-the name simply meaning the intermediate between the carnate and discarnate organism.

Saint Clement of Alexandria makes similar allusions, and so does Saint Jerome in his controversy with Vigilantius the Gaul. This, however, is, of course, at a later date-after the Council of Nicaea.

Hermas, a somewhat shadowy person, who was said to have been a friend of St. Paul’s, and to have been the direct disciple of the Apostles, is credited with being the author of a book “The Pastor.” Whether this authorship is apocryphal or not, the book is certainly written by someone in the early centuries of Christianity, and it therefore represents the ideas which then prevailed. He says: “The spirit does not answer all who question nor any particular person, for the spirit that comes from God does not speak to man when man wills but when God permits. Therefore, when a man who has a spirit from God” (i.e. a control) “comes into an assembly of the faithful, and when prayer has been offered, the spirit fills this man who speaks as God wills.”

This exactly describes our own psychic experience, when seances are properly conducted. We do not invoke spirits, as ignorant critics continually assert, and we do not know what is coming. But we pray-using the “Our Father,” as a rule-and we await events. Then such spirit as is chosen and permitted comes to us and speaks or writes through the medium. Hermas, like Augustine, would not have spoken so accurately had he not had personal experience of the procedure.

Origen has many allusions to psychic knowledge. It is curious to compare the crass ignorance of our present spiritual chiefs with the wisdom of the ancients. Very many quotations could be given, but a short one may be taken from his controversy with Celsus.

Many people have embraced the Christian faith in spite of themselves, their hearts having been suddenly changed by some spirit, either in an apparition or in a dream.

In exactly this way leaders among the materialists, from Dr. Elliotson onwards, have been brought back to a belief in the life to come and its relation to this life by the study of psychic evidence.

It is the earlier Fathers who are the most definite upon this matter, for they were nearer to the great psychic source. Thus Irenams and Tertullian, who lived about the end of the second century, are full of allusions to psychic signs, while Eusebius, writing later, mourns their scarcity and complains that the Church had become unworthy of them.

Irenaeus wrote: “We hear of many brethren in the Church possessing prophetic” (i.e. mediumistic) “gifts, and speaking through the spirit in all kinds of tongues and bringing to light for the general advantage the hidden things of men, and setting forth the mysteries of God.” No passage could better describe the functions of a high-class medium.

When Tertullian had his great controversy with Marcion, he made the Spiritualistic gifts the test of truth between the two parties. He claimed that these were forthcoming in greater profusion upon his own side, and includes among them trance-utterance, prophecy, and revelation of secret things. Thus the things, which are now sneered at or condemned by so many clergymen, were in the year 200 the actual touchstones of Christianity. Tertullian also in his “DE ANIMA” says: “We have to-day among us a sister who has received gifts on the nature of revelations which she undergoes in spirit in the church amid the rites of the Lord’s Day, falling into ecstasy. She converses with angels”-that is, high spirits-”sees and hears mysteries, and reads the hearts of certain people and brings healings to those who ask. ‘Among other things,’ she said, ‘a soul was shown to me in bodily form, and it seemed to be a spirit, but not empty nor a thing of vacuity. On the contrary, it seemed as if it might be touched, soft, lucid, of the colour of air, and of the human form in every detail.’”

One mine of information as to the views of the primitive Christians is to be found in the “Apostolic Constitutions.” It is true that they are not Apostolic, but Whiston, Krabbe and Bunsen are all agreed that at least seven out of the eight books are genuine ante-Nicene documents, probably of the early third century. A study of them reveals some curious facts. Incense and burning lamps were used at their services, so far justifying present-day Catholic practices. On the other hand, bishops and priests were married men. There was an elaborate system of boycott for anyone who transgressed the Church rules. If any clergyman bought a living he was cut off, and so was any man who obtained his ecclesiastical post by worldly patronage. There is no question of a supreme Bishop or Pope. Vegetarianism and total abstinence from wine were both forbidden and punished. This latter amazing law was probably a reaction against some heresy which enjoined both. A clergyman caught in a tavern was suspended. The clergy must eat bloodless meat after the modern Jewish fashion. Fasting was frequent and rigorous-one day a week (Thursday, apparently) and forty days at Lent.

It is, however, in discussing the “gifts,” or varied forms of mediumship, that these ancient documents throw a light upon psychic subjects. Then, as now, mediumship took different forms, the gift of tongues, of healing, of prophecy and the like. Harnack says that in each early Christian Church there were three discreet women, one for healing and two for prophecy. The whole subject is freely discussed in the “Constitutions.”

It appears that those who had gifts became conceited over them, and they are earnestly adjured to remember that a man may have gifts and yet have no great virtue, so that he is really the spiritual inferior of many who have no gifts.

The object of phenomena is shown, as in Modern Spiritualism, to be the conversion of the unbeliever, rather than the entertainment of the orthodox.

They are “not for the advantage of those who perform them, but for the conviction of the unbelievers, that those whom the word did not persuade the power of signs might put to shame, for signs are not for us who believe, but for the unbelievers, both Jews and Gentiles” (Constitutions, Book VIII, Sec. I).

Later the various gifts, which roughly correspond with our different forms of mediumship, are given as follows. “Let not therefore anyone that works signs and wonders judge anyone of the faithful who is not vouchsafed the same. For the gifts of God which are bestowed through Christ are various, and one man receives one gift and another another. For perhaps one has the word of wisdom” (trance-speaking), “and another the word of knowledge” (inspiration), “another discerning of spirits” (clairvoyance), “another foreknowledge of things to come, another the word of teaching” (spirit addresses), “another long-suffering,”-all our mediums need that gift.

One may well ask oneself where, outside the ranks of the Spiritualists, are these gifts or these observances to be found in any of those Churches which profess to be the branches of this early root?

The high spiritual presences are continually recognised. Thus in the “Ordination of the Bishops” we find, “The Holy Ghost being also present, as well as all the holy and ministering spirits.” On the whole, however, I should judge that we have now a far fuller grasp of psychic facts than the authors of the “Constitutions,” and that these documents probably represent a declension from that intimate “Communion of Saints” which existed in the first century. There is reason to believe that psychic power is not a fixed thing, but that it comes in waves, which ebb and flow. At present we are on a rising tide, but we have no assurance that it will last.

It may reasonably be said that, since our knowledge of the events connected with early Church history is very limited, it should be possible to get into touch with some high Intelligence who took part in those events and so supplement our scanty sources of information. This has actually been done in several inspired scripts, and even as the proofs of this book were being corrected there has been an interesting development which must make it clear to all the world how close may be the connection between other-world communication and religion. Two long scripts have recently appeared which have been written by the hand of the semi-conscious medium, Miss Cummins, the writing coming through at the extraordinary pace of 2,000 words per hour. The first purports to be an account of Christ's mission from Philip the Evangelist, and the second is a supplement to the Acts of the Apostles, which claims to be from Cleophas, who supped with the risen Christ at Emmaus. The first of these has now been published,* and the second will soon be available for the public.

* "The Gospel of Philip the Evangelist." (Beddow, 46 Anerley Station Road, S.E.)

So far as the author is aware, no critical examination has been made of the Philip script, but a careful reading of it has convinced him that in dignity and power it is worthy to be that which it claims, and that it explains in a clear, adequate way many points which have puzzled the commentators. The case of the Cleophas script is, however, still more remarkable, and the author is inclined to accept this as the highest intellectual document, and the one with the most evident signs of supernormal origin, in the whole history of the movement. It has been submitted to Dr. Oesterley, Examining Chaplain of the Bishop of London, who is one of the foremost authorities upon Church history and tradition. He has declared that it bears every sign of being from the hand of one who lived in those days, and who was intimately connected with the Apostolic circle. Very many fine points of scholarship are noticed, such as the use of the Hebrew Hanan as the name of the High Priest, whereas he is only known to English-speaking readers by the Greek equivalent Annas. This is one of a great number of corroborations quite beyond the possible powers of any forger. Among other interesting points, Cleophas describes the Pentecost meeting, and declares that the Apostles sat round in a circle, with hands clasped, as the Master had taught them. It would, indeed, be a wonderful thing if the true inner meaning of Christianity, so long lost, should now be uncovered once more by the ridiculed and persecuted cult whose history is here recorded.

These two scripts represent, in the opinion of the author, two of the most cogent proofs of spirit communication which have ever been afforded upon the mental side. It would seem to be impossible to explain them away.

The Spiritualists, both of Great Britain and of other countries, may be divided into those who still remain in their respective Churches, and those who have formed a Church of their own. The latter have in Great Britain some four hundred meeting-places under the general direction of the Spiritualists' National Union. There is great elasticity of dogma, and while most of the Churches are Unitarian, an important minority are on Christian lines. They may be said to be roughly united upon seven central principles. These are:

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Saints and Ministry of Angels.
4. Human survival of physical death.
5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation or retribution for good or evil deeds.
7. Eternal progress open to every soul.

It will be seen that all of these are compatible with ordinary Christianity, with the exception perhaps of the fifth. The Spiritualists look upon Christ's earth life and death as an example rather than a redemption. Every man answers for his own sins, and none can shuffle out of that atonement by an appeal to some vicarious sacrifice. It is not possible for the tyrant or the debauchee, by some spiritual trick of so-called repentance, to escape his just deserts. A true repentance may help him, but he pays his bill all the same. At the same time, God's mercy is greater than man has ever conceived, and every possible alleviatory circumstance of temptation, heredity and environment is given full weight before punishment is meted out. Such in brief is the general position of the Spiritualistic churches.

In another place * the author has pointed out that though psychical research in itself may be quite distinct from religion, the deductions which we may draw from it and the lessons we may learn, "Teach us of the continued life of the soul, of the nature of that life, and of how it is influenced by our conduct here. If this is distinct from religion, I must confess that I do not understand the distinction. To me it IS religion-the very essence of it." The author also spoke of Spiritualism as a great unifying force, the one provable thing connected with every religion, Christian or non-Christian. While its teachings would deeply modify conventional Christianity, the modifications would be rather in the direction of explanation and development than of contradiction. He also referred to the new revelation as absolutely fatal to materialism.

* "The New Revelation," pp. 67-9. JOURNAL, American S.P.R., January, 1923.

In this material age it may be said that, without a belief in man's survival after death, the message of Christianity falls to a great extent on deaf ears.

Dr. McDougall in his presidential address to the American Society for Psychical Research points out the connection between the decay of religion and the spread of materialism. He says:

Unless Psychical Researchcan discover facts incompatible with materialism, materialism will continue to spread. No other power can stop it; revealed religion and metaphysical philosophy are equally helpless before the advancing tide. And if that tide continues to rise and to advance as it is doing now, all the signs point to the view that it will be a destroying tide, that it will sweep away all the hard-won gains of humanity, all the moral traditions built up by the efforts of countless generations for the increase of truth, justice and charity.

It is important, therefore, to endeavour to see to what degree Spiritualism and psychical research tend to induce or to strengthen religious beliefs.

In the first place, we have many testimonies to the conversion of materialists, through Spiritualism, to a belief in a hereafter, as, for instance, Professor Robert Hare and Professor Mapes in America, with Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, Dr. Elliotson, Dr. Sexton, Robert Blatchford, John Ruskin, and Robert Owen in England. Many others might be mentioned.

If Spiritualism were understood properly there should be little question of its harmony with religion. The definition of Spiritualism that is printed in each issue of the London Spiritualist weekly journal Light is as follows:

“A belief in the existence and life of the spirit apart from and independent of the material organism, and in the reality and value of intelligent intercourse between spirits embodied and spirits discarnate.”

Both the beliefs therein expressed are articles of the Christian faith.

If there is one class beyond all others who should be able to talk with authority on the religious tendencies of Spiritualism, it is the clergy. Scores of the more progressive have expressed their views on this subject in no uncertain terms. Let us look at their utterances.

The Rev. H. R. Haweis, M.A., in an address delivered before the London Spiritualist Alliance on April 20, 1900, said he had come there to say that he did not see anything in what he believed to be true Spiritualism in the least degree contrary to what he believed to be true Christianity. Indeed, Spiritualism fitted very nicely into Christianity; it seemed to be a legitimate development, not a contradiction-not an antagonist. The indebtedness of the clergy-if they knew their business-to Spiritualism was really very great. In the first place, Spiritualism had rehabilitated the Bible. It could not for a moment be denied that faith in and reverence for the Bible were dying out, in consequence of the growing doubts of people regarding the miraculous parts of the Bible. Apologists were thrown entirely on the beauty of the Christian doctrine-but they could not swallow the miraculous element in the Old Testament or the New. They were asked to believe in Bible miracles, and at the same time taught that, outside of the Bible records, nothing supernatural ever happened. But now the whole thing had been reversed. People now believed in the Bible because of Spiritualism; they did not believe in Spiritualism because of the Bible. He went on to say that when he began his ministry he tried to get rid of the miracles out of the Bible by explaining them away. But later on he found that he could not explain away the researches of Crookes, Flaimnarion, and Alfred Russel Wallace.

The Rev. Arthur Chambers, formerly vicar of Brockenhurst, Hants, has done valuable work by drawing men’s minds to a consideration of their spiritual life here and their existence hereafter. His book, “Our Life after Death,” has run through over one hundred and twenty editions. In an address on “Spiritualism and the Light it casts on Christian Truth,” he says:

Spiritualism, by its persistent investigation of psychic phenomena, by its openly-proclaimed insistence that intercommunication between the two worlds is a present-day fact, has brought great masses of our fellow beings to realise that “There are more things in heaven and earth” than had been previously “dreamed of in their philosophy,” and have made many of them, as Christian men and women, understand a mighty truth interwoven with religion-a truth fundamental to a right understanding of our place in a great universe-a truth which mankind in all ages has clung to, in spite of the incredulous frowns and disapproval of the teachers of religion. There comes to my mind, in conclusion, the thought of a particular way in which the teachings of Spiritualism have uplifted the religious ideas of the present age. It has helped us to form a truer and grander notion of God and His purpose.

In another fine passage he says:

Yes, Spiritualism has done much, very much, towards the better understanding of those grand basal facts which are inseparable from the Gospel of Jesus. It has helped men and women to see with clearer vision the Great Spirit Father-God, in whom we live, move and have our being, and that vast spirit universe of which we now are, and ever must be, a constituted part. As a Christian Spiritualist, I have one great hope-one great conviction of what will be-viz., that Spiritualism, which has done so much for Christian teaching and for the world at large, in scaring away the bugbear of death, and in helping us better to realise that which a magnificent Christ really taught, will recognise fully what that Christ is in the light of spiritual verities.

Mr. Chambers further added that he had received many hundreds of letters from all parts of the world from writers who expressed the relief and comfort, as well as the fuller trust in God, which had come to them from reading his own book, “Our Life After Death.”

The Rev. F. Fielding-Ould, M.A., vicar of Christ Church, Regent’s Park, London, is another of those who boldly proclaim the good work to be done by Spiritualism. In an address (April 21, 1921) on “The Relation of Spiritualism to Christianity,” he said:

The world needs the teaching of Spiritualism. The number of irreligious people in London to-day is astonishing in the last degree. There are an immense number of people in every class of society (and I am speaking from my own experience) who are totally without any religion whatever. They do not pray, they never attend any church for common worship, in their consciousness and habit of thought death stands at the end. There is nothing beyond but a thick, white mist into which their imagination is sternly forbidden ever to wander. They may call themselves of the Church of England, Roman Catholics, or Jews, but they are like empty bottles in a cellar still marked with the labels of famous vintages.

He adds:

It is no unusual thing for struggling and distressed souls to be HELPED THROUGH SPIRITUALISM. Do we not all know people who had given up all religion and who have been brought back by its means? Agnostics who had lost all hope of God and immortality, to whom religion seemed mere formality and dry bones, and who at last turned upon it and reviled it in all its manifestations. Then Spiritualism came to them like the dawn to a man who has tossed all night fevered and sleepless. At first they were astonished and incredulous, but their attention was arrested, and presently they were touched to the heart. God had come back into their lives and nothing could express their joy and gratitude.

The Rev. Charles Tweedale, vicar of Weston, Yorkshire, a man who has laboured bravely in this cause, refers to the consideration of Spiritualism by the Bishops' Conference held at Lambeth Palace from July 5 to August 7, 1920, and, speaking of modern psychical research, says:*

* LIGHT, October 30, 1920.

While the world at large has been filled with an eager awakening interest, the Church, which claims to be the custodian of religious and spiritual truth, has, strange to say, until quite recently, turned a deaf ear to all modern evidences bearing upon the reality of that spiritual world to which it is the main object of her existence to testify, and even now is only just showing faint signs that she realises how important this matter is becoming for her. A recent sign of the times was the discussion of psychic phenomena at the Lambeth Conference, and the placing by the secretary of my brochure "Present Day Spirit Phenomena and the Churches" in the hands of all the Bishops present, with the Archbishops' consent. Another significant sign of the times is the choice of Sir William Barrett to address the Church Congress on psychical subjects.

The Report of the Proceedings of the Lambeth Conference, already referred to, alludes as follows to psychic research:

It is possible that we may be on the threshold of a new science, which will, by another method of approach, confirm us in the assurance of a world behind and beyond the world we see, and of something within us by which we are in contact with it. We could never presume to set a limit to means which God may use to bring man to the realisation of spiritual life.

Having made this precautionary utterance, the report flies to safety with the added proviso:

But there is nothing in the cult erected on this science which enhances, there is, indeed, much which obscures, the meaning of that other world and our relation to it as unfolded in the Gospel of Christ and the teaching of the Church, and which depreciates the means given to us of attaining and abiding in fellowship with that world.

Under the heading "Spiritualism," the Report says:

While recognising that the results of investigation have encouraged many people to find a spiritual meaning and purpose in human life, and led them to believe in survival after death, grave dangers are seen in the tendency to make a religion of Spiritualism. The practice of Spiritualism as a cult involves the subordination of the intelligence and the will to unknown forces or personalities and, to that extent, an abdication of self-control.

A well-known contributor to LIGHT, who takes the pseudonym of “Gerson,” thus comments on the above:

There is undoubted danger in “the subordination of the intelligence and the will to unknown forces or personalities,” but the practice of spirit communication does not, as the Bishops appear to think, necessarily involve such subordination. Another danger, in their view, is “the tendency to make a religion of Spiritualism.” Light, and those who associate themselves with its attitude, have never felt any inclination to do this. The possibility of spirit communication is simply a fact in Nature, and we do not approve of exalting any fact in Nature into a religion. At the same time a lofty form of religion may be associated with a fact in Nature. The recognition of the beauty and order of the universe does not in itself constitute religion, but in so far as it inspires reverence for the Source of that beauty and order it is a help to the religious spirit.

At the English Church Congress in 1920 the Rev. M. A. Bayfield read a paper on “Psychic Science an Ally of Christianity,” and in the course of it he said:

Many of the clergy regard psychic science with suspicion, and some with positive antagonism and alarm. Under its popular name, Spiritualism, it had even been denounced as anti-Christian. He would endeavour to show that this branch of study was altogether an ally of our faith. Everyone was a Spiritualist who was not a materialist, and Christianity itself was essentially a Spiritualistic religion.

He went on to refer to the service Spiritualism had rendered to Christianity by making possible a belief in the miraculous element in the Gospel.

Dr. Elwood Worcester, in a sermon entitled “The Allies of Religion,” * delivered at St. Stephen’s Church, Philadelphia, on February 25, 1923, spoke of psychical research as the true friend of religion and a spiritual ally of man. He said:

* JOURNAL, American S.P.R., June, 1923, p. 323.

It also illuminates many an important event in the life of the Lord, and it helps us to understand and accept occurrences which otherwise we should reject. I think, particularly, of the phenomena attending the baptism of Jesus, His appearance on the Sea of Galilee, His transfiguration, above all His resurrection appearance to His disciples. Moreover, this is our only real hope of solving the problem of death. From no other source is any new solution of this eternal mystery likely to come to us.

The Rev. G. Vale Owen reminds us that though there are Spiritualists who are distinctly Christian Spiritualists, Spiritualism is not confined to Christianity. There is, for instance, a Jewish Spiritualist Society in London. The Church at first regarded Evolution as an adversary, but finally came to accept it as in accordance with Christian faith. So he concludes that:

Just as the acceptance of Evolution gave to Christianity a broader and more worthy conception of Creation and its Creator, so the acceptance of the great truths for which psychic science stands should turn an agnostic into a believer in God, should make a Jew a better Jew, a Mohammedan a better Mohammedan, a Christian a better Christian, and certainly a happier and more cheerful one.*

* “Facts and the Future Life” (1922), p. 170.

It is clear from the foregoing extracts that many clergymen of the Church of England and other Churches are agreed upon the good influence Spiritualism has upon religion.

There is another important source of information for opinions respecting the religious tendencies of Spiritualism. That is from the spirit world itself. There is a wealth of material to draw from, but we must be content with a few extracts. The first is from that well-known book, “Spirit Teachings,” given through the mediumship of Stainton Moses:

Friend, when others seek from you as to the usefulness of our message, and the benefit which it can confer on those to whom the Father sends it, tell them that it is a gospel which will reveal a God of tenderness and pity and love, instead of a fabled creation of harshness, cruelty and passions.

Tell them that it will lead them to know Intelligences, whose whole life is one of love and mercy and pity and helpful aid to man, combined with adoration of the Supreme.

Or this from the same source:

Man has gradually built around the teachings of Jesus a wall of deduction and speculation and material comment similar to that with which the Pharisee had surrounded the Mosaic law. The tendency has been increasingly to do this in proportion as man has lost sight of the spiritual world. And so it has come to pass that we find hard, cold materialism deduced from teachings which were intended to breathe spirituality and to do away with sensuous ritual.

It is our task to do for Christianity what Jesus did for Judaism. We would take the old forms and spiritualise their meaning, and infuse into them new life. Resurrection rather than abolition is what we desire. We say again that we do not abolish one jot or one tittle of the teaching which the Christ gave to the world. We do but wipe away man's material glosses, and show you the hidden spiritual meaning which he has missed. Our mission is the continuation of that old teaching which man has so strangely altered; its source identical; its course parallel; its end the same.

And this from W. T. Stead's "Letters from Julia":

You have had teaching as to the communion of saints; you say, and sing all manner of things as to the saints above and below being one army of the Living God, but when any one of us on the Other Side tries to make any practical effort to enable you to realise the oneness, and to make you feel that you are encompassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, then there is an outcry. It is against the will of God! It is tampering with demons!

It is conjuring up evil spirits! Oh, my friend, my friend, be not deceived by these specious outcries! Am I a demon? Am I a familiar spirit? Am I doing what is contrary to the will of God when I constantly, constantly try to inspire you with more faith in Him, more love for Him and all His creatures, and, in short, try to bring you nearer and closer to God? You know I do all this. It is my joy and the law of my being.

And, finally, this extract from "Messages from Meslom ".

Any teaching which helps humanity to believe that there is another life and that the soul is strengthened by trials bravely met and weaknesses conquered is good, for it has that much fundamental truth. When, in addition, it reveals a God of love, it is better; and if humanity could comprehend this Divine love, all suffering, even on earth, would cease.

These passages are lofty in tone and certainly tend to draw men's minds to higher things and to the understanding of the deeper purposes of life.

F. W. H. Myers's lost faith in Christianity was restored through Spiritualism. In his book "Fragments of Prose and Poetry," in the chapter entitled "The Final Faith," he says:

I cannot, in any deep sense, contrast my present creed with Christianity. Rather I regard it as a scientific development of the attitude and teaching of Christ.

You ask me what is the moral tendency of all these teachings-the reply is unexpectedly simple and concise. The tendency is, one may say, what it must inevitably be-what the tendency of all vital moral teaching has always been-the earliest, truest tendency of Christianity itself. It is a reassertion-weighed now with new evidence of Christ's own insistence on inwardness, on reality; of His proclamation that the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life, of His summation of all righteousness in sheer love to God and man.

Many writers have spoken of the light thrown on the Bible narrative by modern psychical research, but the finest expression of this view is to be found in F. W. H. Myers's "Human Personality ":

I venture now on a bold saying; for I predict that, in consequence of the new evidence, all reasonable men, a century hence, will believe the Resurrection of Christ, whereas, in default of the new evidence, no reasonable men, a century hence, would have believed it. And especially as to that central claim, of the soul's life manifested after the body's death, it is plain that this can less and less be supported by remote tradition alone; that it must more and more be tested by modern experience and inquiry. Suppose, for instance, that we collect many such histories, recorded on first-hand evidence in our critical age; and suppose that all these narratives break down on analysis; that they can all be traced to hallucination, misdescription, and other persistent sources of error; can we then expect reasonable men to believe that this marvellous phenomenon, always vanishing into nothingness when closely scrutinized in a modern English scene, must yet compel adoring credence when alleged to have occurred in an Oriental country, and in a remote and superstitious age? Had the results (in short) of "Psychical Research" been purely negative, would not Christian evidence-I do not say Christian emotion, but Christian evidence-have received an overwhelming blow?

Many testimonies from eminent public men might be cited. Sir Oliver Lodge writes:

Although it is not by my religious faith that I have been led to my present position, yet everything that I have learned tends to increase my love and reverence for the personality of the central figure in the gospels.

Lady Grey of Fallodon* pays an eloquent tribute to Spiritualism, describing it as something that has vitalised religion and brought comfort to thousands. Speaking of Spiritualists, she says:

* FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, October, 1922.

As a body of workers they are closer to the spirit of the New Testament than many Church folk would be ready to believe. The Church of England should look upon Spiritualism as a valuable ally. It makes a central attack upon Materialism, and it not only identifies the material with the spiritual universe, but it has a store of useful knowledge and advice.

She adds:

I find in it a vitalising current that brings the living breath to old beliefs. The Word that we are wont to associate with Holy Writ is, in essence, identical with the message that is coming to us in these later scripts. Those of us who have the New Revelation at heart, know that Spiritualism gives a modern reading of the Bible, and this is why-if the Churches would but see it-it should be considered religion’s great ally.

These are brave words and true.

Dr. Eugene Crowell* shows that the Roman Catholic Church holds that spiritual manifestations are constantly occurring under the divine authority of the Church; but the Protestant Churches, while professing to believe in the spiritual manifestations occurring with Jesus and His disciples, repudiate all similar happenings at the present day. He says:

* “The Identity of Primitive Christianity and Modern Spiritualism.” (2 Vols., 2nd Edition, New York, 1875.)

Thus the Protestant Church, when approached by the spiritually starved-and millions are in this condition-from the depths of whose natures arises an overpowering demand for spiritual aliment, has nothing to offer-or at best nothing but husks.

Protestantism to-day finds itself pressed between the upper and nether millstones of materialism and Catholicism Each of these powers is bearing upon it with increasing force, and it must assimilate and incorporate within itself one or other of these, or itself be ground to powder. In its present condition it lacks the necessary strength and vitality to resist the action of these forces, and its only hope is in the fresh blood which Spiritualism alone is able to infuse into its exhausted veins. That it is part of the mission of Spiritualism to accomplish this task, I fully believe, and this belief is founded upon the palpable needs of Protestantism, and a clear conception of the adaptability of Spiritualism to the task, and its ability to perform it.

Dr. Crowell declares that the diffusion of knowledge has not made modern men less regardful of questions concerning their spiritual life and future existence, but to-day they demand proof of what was formerly accepted upon faith alone. Theology is unable to furnish this proof, and millions of earnest minds, he says, stand aloof waiting for satisfactory evidence. Spiritualism, he contends, has been sent to furnish this evidence, and from no other source can it be supplied.

Some reference should be made to the views of the Unitarian Spiritualists. Their very able and wholehearted leader is Ernest W. Oaten, Editor of The Two Worlds. Mr. Oaten’s view, which is shared by all save a small body of extremists, is rather a reconstruction than a destruction of the Christian ideal. After a very reverent account of the life of Christ as explained by our psychic knowledge, he continues:

Men tell me I despise Jesus of Nazareth. I will trust His judgment rather than theirs, but I think I know His life more intimately than any Christian can. There is no soul in history that I hold in higher esteem. I hate the false and misleading place in which He has been put by folks who are no more able to understand Him than they are to read Egyptian hieroglyphics, but I love the man. I owe Him much, and He has much to teach the world which the world can never learn until they take Him from the pedestal of worship and idolatry, and walk with Him in the garden.

It may be said that my reading of His life is “naturalistic.” I am content that it should be so. There is nothing more divine than the laws which govern life. The God who laid down such laws made them sufficient for all His purposes and has no need to supersede them.

The God who controls earthly processes is the same as He who controls the processes of spiritual life.*

* “The Relation of Modern Spiritualism to Christianity,” p. 23.

There the matter may be left. This history has endeavoured to show how special material signs have been granted by the invisible rulers of earth to satisfy the demand for material proofs which come from the increasing mentality of man. It has shown also how these material signs have been accompanied by spiritual messages, and how these messages get back to the great primitive religious forces of the world, the central fire of inspiration which has been ashed over by the dead cinders of what once were burning creeds. Man had lost touch with the vast forces which lie around him, and his knowledge and aspirations had become bounded by the pitiful vibrations which make up his spectrum and the trivial octaves which limit his range of hearing. Spiritualism, the greatest movement for 2,000 years, rescues him from this condition, bursts the thin mists which have enshrouded him, and shows him new powers and unlimited vistas which lie beyond and around him, Already the mountain peaks are bright. Soon even in the valleys the sun of truth will shine.

CHAPTER XI

THE AFTER-LIFE AS SEEN BY SPIRITUALISTS

The Spiritualist has one great advantage over those of the older dispensations. When he establishes communication with intelligences upon the Other Side who once inhabited earthly bodies, he naturally questions them eagerly as to their present conditions, and as to the effect which their doings here have had upon their subsequent fate. The answers to the latter query do in the main justify the views already held by most religions, and show that the path of virtue is also the road to ultimate happiness. A definite system is presented, however, for our consideration which greatly elucidates the vague cosmogonies of former ages. This system has been set forth in many books which recount the experience of those who have led the new life. It is to be remembered that these books are not written by professional penmen. On this side is the so-called “automatic” writer who receives the inspiration, on the other is the intelligence which transmits it; but neither may have been gifted by Nature with the least literary power, or have had any previous experience in putting together a narrative. It has also to be borne in mind that whatever comes through is the result of a cumbrous process, which must in most cases be irksome for the composer. If we could imagine an earthly writer who has to use a long-distance telephone instead of a pen, one would have some rough analogy to the difficulties of the operator. And yet in spite of these grave disabilities, the narratives are in many cases clear, dramatic, and intensely interesting. They can hardly fail to be the latter, since the pathway which they describe to-day is that which we shall follow to-morrow.

It has been said that these narratives vary greatly and are contradictory. The author has not found them so. In a long course of reading in which he has perused many volumes of alleged posthumous experiences, and also a great number of scripts obtained privately in families and reserved from the public, he has been struck by their general agreement. Here and there one comes upon some story which bears self-deception written plainly across it, and occasionally there is a lapse into sensationalism, but in the main the descriptions are sober, reasonable, and agree in general type with each other, even when they differ in details. Descriptions of our own life would certainly differ in details, and a critic from Mars who was presented with accounts from a Hindu peasant, an Eskimo hunter, and an Oxford professor, might well refuse to believe that such divergent experiences were to be found upon the same planet. This difficulty does not arise upon the Other Side, and there are, so far as we know, no such extreme contrasts upon the same sphere of life-indeed, it might be said that the characteristic of this present life is the mingling of various types or degrees of experience, while that of the next is a subdivision and separation of the human elements. Heaven there is distinct from hell. In this world at present man might, and sometimes for a short time does, make it a heaven, but there are large tracts of it which are very tolerable imitations of hell, while purgatory may well be called the normal condition.

The conditions upon the Other Side may roughly be divided into three. There are the earth-bound who have exchanged their mortal for their etheric bodies, but are held on or near the surface of this world by the grossness of their nature or by the intensity of their worldly interests. So coarse may be the texture of their other-world form, that they may even bring themselves within the cognisance of those who have no special gift of clairvoyance. In this unhappy wandering class lies the explanation of all those ghosts, spectres, apparitions, and haunted houses which have engaged the attention of mankind at every epoch of history. These people have, so far as we can understand the situation, not even commenced their spiritual life either for good or evil. It is only when the strong earth ties are broken that the new existence begins.

Those who have really begun that existence find themselves in that stratum of life which corresponds to their own spiritual condition. It is the punishment of the cruel, the selfish, the bigoted and the frivolous, that they find themselves in the company of their like, and in worlds the illumination of which, varying from mist to darkness, typifies their own spiritual development. Such an environment is not a permanent one. Those who will not make an upward effort may, however, remain in it an indefinite time, while others who turn an ear to the ministrations of helpful spirits, even of rescue circles upon earth, soon learn to struggle upwards into brighter zones. In the author’s own family communion, he has known what it was to come in contact with these beings from the outer darkness, and to have the satisfaction of receiving

their thanks for having given them a clearer view of their position, its causes and its cure.*

* Dr. Wickland's "Thirty Years among the Dead," and the Appendix to Admiral Usborne Moore's "Glimpses of the Next State," give the fullest account of earth-bound conditions.

Such spirits would seem to be a constant menace to mankind, for if the protective aura of the individual should be in any way defective, they may become parasitic, establishing themselves within it and influencing the actions of their host. It is possible that the science of the future may trace many cases of inexplicable mania, senseless violence, or sudden surrender to bad habits to this cause, and it forms an argument against capital punishment, since the result might be to give enlarged powers of mischief to the criminal. It must be admitted that the subject is still obscure, that it is complicated by the existence of thought forms and memory forms, and that in any case all earth-bound spirits are not necessarily evil. It would appear, for example, that the devoted monks of some venerable Glastonbury might be held to their old haunts by the pure force of their devotion.

If our knowledge of the exact condition of the earth-bound is defective, that of the punitive circles is even more so. There is a somewhat sensational account in Mr. Ward's "Gone West"; there is a more temperate and credible one in the Rev. Vale Owen's "Life Beyond the Veil," and there are corroborative ones in Swedenborg's visions, in Judge Edmonds's "Spiritualism," and in other volumes. Our lack of clear first-hand information is due to the fact that we are not Hamlets, and that we do not get into direct touch with those who live in these lower spheres. We hear of them indirectly through those higher spirits who do missionary work among them, work which seems to be attended with such difficulties and dangers as might surround the man who tried to evangelize the darker races of earth. We read of the descent of high spirits into the lower spheres, of their combats with the forces of evil, of high princes of evil who are formidable in their own realms, and of a whole great cloaca of souls into which the psychic sewage of the world incessantly pours. Everything, however, has to be regarded from the remedial rather than from the penal point of view. These spheres are grey waiting-rooms-hospitals for diseased souls-where the chastening experience is intended to bring the sufferer back to health and to happiness.

Our information is fuller when we turn to the happier regions which seem to be graduated in joy and beauty in accordance with the spiritual development of the inmates. It makes the matter clearer if one puts kindliness and unselfishness for “spiritual development,” for in that direction all soul growth is to be found. It is certainly a matter which is quite apart from intellect, though the union of intellect with spiritual qualities would naturally produce the more perfect being.

The conditions of life in the normal beyond-and it would be a reflection upon the justice and mercy of the Central Intelligence if the normal beyond was not also the happy beyond-are depicted as being extraordinarily joyous. The air, the views, the homes, the surroundings, the occupations, have all been described with great detail, and usually with the comment that no words could do justice to their glorious reality. It may be that there is some degree of parable or analogy in these descriptions, but the author is inclined to take them on their face value, and to believe that “the Summerland,” as Davis has named it, is quite as real and objective to its inmates as our world is to us. It is easy to raise the objection: “Why, then, do we not see it?” But we must realise that an etheric life is expressed in etheric terms, and that just as we, with five material senses, are attuned to the material world, so they with their etheric bodies are attuned to the sights and sounds of an etheric world. The word “ether” is, of course, only used for convenience to express something far more subtle than our atmosphere. We have no proof at all that the ether of the physicist is also the medium of the spirit world. There may be other fine essences which are as much more delicate than ether as ether is when compared with air.

The spiritual heavens, then, would appear to be sublimated and ethereal reproductions of earth and of earth life under higher and better conditions. “As below-so above,” said Paracelsus, and struck the keynote of the Universe as he said it. The body carries on, with its spiritual or intellectual qualities unchanged by the transition from one room of the great universal mansion to the next one. It is unaltered also in form, save that the young and the old tend towards the normal full-grown mature expression. Granting that this is so, we must admit the reasonableness of the deduction that all else must be the same, and that the occupations and general system of life must be such as to afford scope for the particular talents of the individual.

The artist without art or the musician without music would indeed be a tragic figure, and what applies to extreme types may be extended to the whole human race. There is, in fact, a very complex society in which each person finds that work to do which he is best fitted for, and which gives him satisfaction in the doing. Sometimes there is a choice. Thus in "The Case of Lester Coltman" the dead student writes: "For some time after I had passed over I was undecided as to whether music or science would be my work. After much serious thought I determined that music should be my hobby, and my more earnest intent should be directed upon science in every form."

After such a declaration one would naturally wish some details as to what scientific work was done and under what conditions. Lester Coltman is clear upon each point.

The laboratory over which I have control is primarily concerned with the study of the vapours and fluids forming the barrier which, we feel, by dint of profound study and experiment we may be able to pierce. The outcome of this research, we believe, will prove the Open Sesame to the door of communing between earth and these spheres.*

* "Case of Lester Coltman," by Lilian Walbrook, p. 34.   Ibid., pp. 32-3.

Lester Coltman gives a further description of his work and surroundings, which may well be quoted as being typical of many more. He says:

The interest evinced by earth beings as to the character of our homes and the establishments where our work is carried on, is natural, of course, but description is not too easy to convey in earth terms. My state of being will serve as an example from which you may deduce others' modes of life, according to temperament and type of mind.

My work is continued here as it began on earth, in scientific channels, and, in order to pursue my studies, I visit frequently a laboratory possessing extraordinarily complete facilities for the carrying on of experiments. I have a home of my own, delightful in the extreme, complete with library filled with books of reference-historical, scientific, medical-and, in fact, with every type of literature. To us these books are as substantial as those used on earth are to you. I have a music-room containing every mode of sound-expression. I have pictures of rare beauty and furnishings of exquisite design. I am living here alone at present, but friends frequently visit me as I do them in their homes, and if a faint sadness at times takes possession of me, I visit those I loved most on earth.

From my windows undulating country of great beauty is seen, and at a short distance away a house of community exists, where many good souls working in my laboratory live in happy concord. A dear old Chinaman, my chief assistant, of great help in chemical analysis, is director, as it were, of this community. He is an admirable soul, of huge sympathy and endowed with a great philosophy.

Here is another description which deals with this matter*:

* Thought Lectures, from “The Spiritualists’ Reader,” p. 53.

It is very difficult to tell you about work in the spirit world. It is allotted to each one his portion, according to how he has progressed. If a soul has come direct from earth, or any material world, he must then be taught all he has neglected in the former existence, in order to make his character grow to perfection. As he has made those on earth suffer, so he himself suffers. If he has a great talent, that he brings to perfection here; for if you have beautiful music, or any other talent, we have them here much more. Music is one of the great moving forces of our world; but although arts and talents are carried to their fullest, it is the great work of all souls to perfect themselves for the Eternal Life.

There are great schools to teach the spirit children. Besides learning all about the universe and other worlds, about other kingdoms under God’s rule, they are taught lessons of unselfishness and truth and honour. Those who have learned first as spirit-children, if they should come into your world, make the finer characters.

Those who have spent all their material existence in merely physical labours, have to learn everything when they come here. Work is a wonderful life, and those who become teachers of souls learn so much themselves. Literary souls become great orators, and speak and teach in eloquent language. There are books, but of quite a different kind from yours. One who has studied your earth-laws would go into the spirit-school as a teacher of justice. A soldier, when he himself has learned the lessons of truth and honour, will guide and help souls, in any sphere or world, to fight for the right faith in God.

In the author’s Home Circle an intimate spirit spoke of her life in the beyond in answer to the question, “What do you do?”

“Music and children, loving and mothering and lots of other things besides. Far, far more here than on the old grey earth. Nothing in the people round ever jars. That makes everything happier and more complete.”

“Tell us about your dwelling.”

“It is lovely. I never saw any house on earth to compare with it. So many flowers!-a blaze of colour in all directions and they have such wonderful scents, each one different, but all blending so deliciously.”

“Can you see other houses?”

“No, it would spoil the peace if you could. One wants nature only at times. Every home is an oasis, as it were. Beyond is wonderful scenery and other sweet homes full of dear, sweet, bright people full of laughter and joy from the mere fact of living in such wonderful surroundings. Yes, it is beautiful. No earth mind can conceive the light and wonder of it all. The colours are so much daintier, and the whole scheme of the home life is so much more radiant.” Another extract from the author’s Home Circle may, perhaps, be excused, since these messages have been mixed with so much evidential matter that they inspire complete confidence in those who have been in touch with the facts:

“For God’s sake, strike at these people, these dolts who will not believe. The world so needs this know ledge. If I had only known this on earth it would have so altered my life-the sun would have shone on my grey path had I known what lay before me.

“Nothing jars over here. There are no crosscurrents. I am interested in many things, mostly human, the progress of human development, above all the regeneration of the earth-plane. I am one of those who are working for the cause on this side hand-and-glove with you.

“Never fear; the light will be the greater for the darkness you have passed through. It will come very soon, as God wills it. Nothing can stand against that. No powers of darkness can stand for one minute against

His light. All the crowd working against it will be swept away. Lean more on us, for our power to help is very great.

[Where are you?]

“It is so difficult to explain to you the conditions over here. I am where I would most wish to be, that is, with my loved ones, where I can keep in close touch with you all on the earth-plane.

[Have you food?]

“Not in your sense, but much nicer. Such lovely essences and wonderful fruits and other things besides, which you don’t have on earth.

“Much awaits you which will very much surprise you, all beautiful and high, and so sweet and sunny. Life was a preparation for this sphere.

Without that training I could not have been able to enter this glorious, wonderful world. The earth is where we learn our lessons, and this world is our great reward, our true and real home and life-the sunshine after the rain."

The subject is so enormous that it can only be touched upon in general terms in a single chapter. The reader is referred to the wonderful literature which has grown up, hardly noticed by the world, around the subject. Such books as Lodge's "Raymond," Vale Owen's "Life Beyond the Veil," Mrs. Platts's "The Witness," Miss Walbrook's "Case of Lester Coltman," and many other volumes give clear and consistent representations of the life beyond.

In reading the numerous accounts of life in the hereafter, one naturally asks oneself how far they are to be trusted. It is reassuring to find how greatly they are in agreement, which is surely an argument for their truth. It might be contended that this agreement is due to their all being derived, consciously or not, from some common source, but this is an untenable supposition. Many of them come from people who could by no means have learned the views of others, and yet they agree even in small and rather unlikely details. In Australia, for example, the author examined such accounts written by men living in remote places who were honestly amazed at what they had themselves written. One of the most striking cases is that of Mr. Hubert Wales.* This gentleman, who had been, and possibly is, a sceptic, read an account by the author of after-life conditions, and then hunted up a script which he had himself written years before and had been received by him with amused incredulity. He wrote: "After reading your article I was struck, almost startled, by the circumstance that the statements which had purported to be made to me regarding conditions after death coincided-I think almost to the smallest detail-with those you set out as the result of your collation of material obtained from many sources." The remainder of Mr. Wales's conclusions will be found in the Appendix.

* "The New Revelation," p. 146.

Had this philosophy all turned upon the great white throne and perpetual adoration around it, it might be set down as some reflection of that which we have all been taught in our childhood. But it is very different-and surely very much more reasonable. An open field is predicated for the development of all those capacities with which we have been endowed. Orthodoxy has permitted the continued existence of thrones, crowns, harps, and other celestial objects. Is it not more sensible to suppose that if some things can survive, all things can survive, in such form as suits the environment? As we survey all the speculations of mankind, perhaps the Elysian fields of the ancients and the happy hunting-grounds of the Red Indians are nearer the actual facts than any fantastic presentation of heaven and hell which the ecstatic vision of theologians has conjured up.

So workaday and homely a heaven may seem material to many minds, but we must remember that evolution has been very slow upon the physical plane, and it is slow also upon the spiritual one. In our present lowly condition we cannot expect at one bound to pass all intermediate conditions and attain to what is celestial. This will be the work of centuries-possibly of moons. We are not fit yet for a purely spiritual life. But as we ourselves become finer, so will our environment become finer, and we shall evolve from heaven to heaven until the destiny of the human soul is lost in a blaze of glory whither the eye of imagination may not follow.

APPENDIX

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

EVIDENCE OF THE HAUNTING OF THE HYDESVILLE HOUSE BEFORE THE FOX FAMILY OCCUPIED IT

MRS. ANN PULVER certifies:

I was acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Bell (who occupied the house in 1844). I used to call on them frequently. My warping bars were in their chamber, and I used to go there to do my work. One morning when I went there Mrs. Bell told me that she felt very bad; that she had not slept much, if any, the night before. When I asked her what the matter was, she said she didn't know but what it was the fidgets; but she thought she heard somebody walking about from one room to another, and that she had Mr. Bell get up and fasten down all the windows. She said she felt more safe after that. I asked her what she thought it was. She said it might be rats. I heard her speak about hearing noises after that, which she could not account for.

Miss Lucretia Pulver gave testimony:

I lived in this house all one winter, in the family of Mr. Bell. I worked for them part of the time, and part of the time I boarded and went to school. I lived there about three months. During the latter part of the time that I was there I heard this knocking frequently in the bedroom, under the foot of the bed. I heard it a number of nights, as I slept in the bedroom all the time that I staid there. One night I thought I heard a man walking in the buttery. This buttery is near the bedroom, with a stairway between. Miss Aurelia Losey staid with me on that night; she also heard the noise, and we were both much frightened, and got up and fastened down the windows and fastened the door. It sounded as if a person walked through the buttery, down cellar, and part way across the cellar-bottom, and there the noise would cease. There was no one else in the house at this time, except my little brother, who was asleep in the same room with us. This was about twelve o'clock, I should think. We did not go to bed until after eleven, and had not been asleep when we heard the noise. Mr. and Mrs. Bell had gone to Loch Berlin, to be gone until the next day.

Thus it is proved that strange sounds were heard in the house in 1844. Another family named Weekman lived there in 1846-7, and they had a similar experience.

STATEMENT OF MRS. HANNAH WEEKMAN

I have heard about the mysterious noises that have been heard in the house now occupied by Mr. Fox. We used to live in the same house; we lived there about a year and a half and moved from there to the house we now occupy. About a year ago, while we were living there, we heard someone, as we supposed, rapping on the outside door. I had just got into bed, but my husband had not. He went and opened it, and said that there was no one there. He came back, and was about getting into bed when we heard the rapping on the door again. He then went to the door and opened it, and said that he could see no one, although he stepped out a little way. He then came back and got into bed. He was quite angry; he thought ‘twas some of the neighbouring boys trying to disturb us, and said that “They might knock away, but they would not fool him,” or something of that kind. The knocking was heard again, and after a while he got up and went to the door and went out. I told him not to go outdoors, for perhaps somebody wanted to get him out and hurt him. He came back, and said he could see nothing. We heard a good deal of noise during the night; we could hardly tell where it was: it sounded sometimes as if someone was walking in the cellar. But the house was old, and we thought it might be the rattling of loose boards, or something of that kind.

A few nights afterwards, one of our little girls, who slept in the bedroom where the noises are now heard, woke us all up by screaming very loud. My husband and I, and our hired girl, got up immediately to see what was the matter. She sat up in bed, crying and screaming, and it was some time before we could find out what the matter was. She said that something had been moving about, over her head and face-that it was cold, and she did not know what it was. She said that she felt it all over her, but she was most alarmed at feeling it on her face. She was very much frightened. This was between twelve and one o’clock at night. She got up and got into bed with us, and it was a long time before she could go to sleep. It was several days before we could get her to sleep in that room again. She was eight years old at that time.

Nothing else happened to me during the time that we lived there; but my husband told me that one night he heard someone call him by name, somewhere in the house-he did not know where-but could never find out where or what it was that night. I was not at home that night. I was sitting up with a sick person. We did not think the house was haunted at that time.

HANNAH WEEKMAN APRIL 11, 1848.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL WEEKMAN

I am the husband of Hannah Weekman. We used to live in the house now occupied by Mr. Fox, in which they say strange noises are heard. We lived there about a year and a half. One evening, about bedtime, I heard the rapping. I supposed it was someone knocking at the door who wanted to come in. I did not bid him “Come in,” as I usually do, but went to the door. I did not find anyone there, but went back, and just as I was getting into bed I heard the rapping again and opened the door quick, but could see no one there. I stepped out a step or two, but could see no one about there. I then went back and got into bed. I thought someone was making game of me. After a few minutes I heard the knocking again, and after waiting a few minutes and still hearing it, I got up and went to the door. This time I went clear out and looked around the house, but could find no one. I then stepped back and shut the door, and held on to the latch, thinking that if there was anyone there I would catch them at it. In a minute or two I heard the rapping again. My hand was on the door, and the knocking appeared to be on the door. I could feel it jar with the raps. I instantly opened the door and sprang out, but there was no one in sight. I then went round the house again, but could find no one, as before. My wife told me I had better not go out of doors, as it might be someone that wanted to hurt me. I did not know what to think of it, it seemed so strange and unaccountable.

He here relates the case of the little girl being frightened, as given above.

One night after this, about midnight, I was awake, and heard my name called. It sounded as if it was on the south side of the room.

I sat up in bed and listened, but did not hear it again. I did not get out of bed, but waited to see if it would be repeated. My wife was not at home that night. I told her of it afterwards, and she said she guessed I had been dreaming. My wife used to be frightened quite often by hearing strange noises in and about the house.

I have heard so much from men in whom I place confidence about these noises that are now heard, that, taken in connection with what I heard, I cannot account for it, unless it is a supernatural appearance. I am willing to make affidavit to the above facts if necessary.

(Signed) MICHAEL WEEKMAN. APRIL 11, 1848.

EXTRACT FROM HORACE, GREELEY'S ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE GIVING HIS OPINION OF THE FOX SISTERS AND THEIR MEDIUMSHIP*

* Capron, "Modern Spiritualism," pp. 179-181.

THE MYSTERIOUS RAPPINGS

Mrs. Fox and her three daughters left our city yesterday on their return to Rochester, after a stay here of some weeks, during which they have subjected the mysterious influence, by which they seem to be accompanied, to every reasonable test, and to the keen and critical scrutiny of hundreds who have chosen to visit them, or whom they have been invited to visit. The rooms which they occupied at the hotel have been repeatedly searched and scrutinized; they have been taken without an hour's notice into houses they had never before entered; they have been all unconsciously placed on a glass surface concealed under the carpet in order to interrupt electrical vibrations; they have been disrobed by a committee of ladies appointed without notice, and insisting that neither of them should leave the room until the investigation has been made, etc., etc., yet we believe no one, to this moment, pretends that he has detected either of them in producing or causing the "rappings," nor do we think any of their contemners has invented a plausible theory to account for the production of these sounds, nor the singular intelligence which (certainly at times) has seemed to be manifest through them.

Some ten or twelve days since they gave up their rooms at the hotel and devoted the remainder of their sojourn here to visiting several families, to which they had been invited by persons interested in the subject, and subjecting the singular influence to a closer, calmer examination than could be given to it at a hotel, and before casual companies of strangers, drawn together by vague curiosity more than rational interest, or predetermined and invincible hostility. Our own dwelling was among those they thus visited; not only submitting to, but courting, the fullest and keenest inquiry with regard to the alleged "manifestations" from the spirit-world, by which they were attended.

We devoted what time we could spare from our duties out of three days to this subject, and it would be the basest cowardice not to say that we are convinced beyond a doubt of their perfect integrity and good faith in the premises. Whatever may be the origin or cause of the "rappings," the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them. We tested this thoroughly and to our entire satisfaction. Their conduct and bearing is as unlike that of deceivers as possible, and we think no one acquainted with them could believe them at all capable of engaging in so daring, impious, and shameful a juggle as this would be if they caused the sounds. And it is not possible that such a juggle should have been so long perpetrated in public. A juggler performs one feat quickly and hurries on to another; he does not devote weeks after weeks to the same thing over and over, deliberately, in full view of hundreds who sit beside or confronting him in broad daylight, not to enjoy but to detect his trick. A deceiver naturally avoids conversation on the subject of his knavery, but these ladies converse freely and fully with regard to the origin of these "rappings" in their dwellings years ago, the various sensations they caused, the neighbourhood excitement created, the progress of the developments — what they have seen, heard and experienced from first to last. If all were false, they could not fail to have involved themselves ere this in a labyrinth of blasting contradictions, as each separately gives accounts of the most astonishing developments at this or that time. Persons foolish enough so to commit themselves without reserve or caution could not have deferred a thorough self-exposure for a single week.

Of course, a variety of opinions of so strange a matter would naturally be formed by the various persons who have visited them, and we presume that those who have merely run into their room for an hour or so, and listened, among a huddle of strangers, to a medley of questions-not all admitting of very profitable answers-put to certain invisible intelligences, and answered by "rappings," or singular noises on the floor, table, etc., as the alphabet was called over, or otherwise, would naturally go away, perhaps puzzled, probably disgusted, rarely convinced. It is hardly possible that a matter, ostensibly so grave, could be presented under circumstances less favourable to conviction. But of those who have enjoyed proper opportunities for a full investigation, we believe that fully three-fourths are convinced, as we are, that these singular sounds and seeming manifestations are not produced by Mrs. Fox and her daughters, nor by any human being connected with them.

How they are caused, and whence they proceed, are questions which open a much wider field of inquiry, with whose way-marks we do not profess to be familiar. He must be well acquainted with the arcana of the universe, who shall presume dogmatically to decide that these manifestations are natural or supernatural. The ladies say that they are informed that this is but the beginning of a new era, or economy, in which spirits clothed in the flesh are to be more closely palpably connected with those who have put on immortality; that manifestations have already appeared in many other families and destined to be diffused and rendered clearer, until all who will may communicate freely with their friends who have “shuffled off this mortal coil.” Of all this we know nothing, and shall guess nothing. But if we were simply to print (which we shall not) the questions asked and answers we received, during a two-hours’ uninterrupted conference with the “rappers,” we should at once be accused of having done so expressly to sustain the theory which regards these manifestations as the utterances of departed spirits. H. G.

NOTE TO CHAPTER VI

PEN-PICTURE OF LAKE HARRIS BY LAURENCE OLIPHANT

There was a remarkable alternation of vivacity and deliberation about the movements of Mr. Masollam. His voice seemed pitched in two different keys, the effect of which was, when he changed them, to make one seem a distant echo of the other-a species of ventriloquistic phenomenon which was calculated to impart a sudden and not altogether pleasant shock to the nerves of the listeners. When he talked with what I may term his “near” voice, he was generally rapid and vivacious; when he exchanged it for his “far off” one, he was solemn and impressive. His hair, which had once been raven black, was now streaked with grey, but it was still thick and fell in a massive wave over his ears, and nearly to his shoulders, giving him something of a leonine aspect. His brow was overhanging and bushy, and his eyes were like revolving lights in two dark caverns, so fitfully did they seem to emit flashes and then lose all expression. Like his voice, they too had a near and a far-off expression, which could be adjusted to the required focus like a telescope, growing smaller and smaller as though in an effort to project the sight beyond the limits of natural vision. At such times they would be so entirely devoid of all appreciation of outward objects as to produce almost the impression of blindness, when suddenly the focus would change, the pupils expand, and rays flash from them like lightning from a thundercloud, giving an unexpected and extraordinary brilliancy to a face which seemed promptly to respond to the summons. The general cast of countenance, the upper part of which, were it not for the depth of the eye-sockets, would have been strikingly handsome, was decidedly Semitic; and in repose the general effect was almost statuesque in its calm fixedness. The mouth was partially concealed by a heavy moustache and long iron-grey beard; but the transition from repose to animation revealed an extraordinary flexibility in those muscles which had a moment before appeared so rigid, and the whole character of the countenance was altered as suddenly as the expression of the eye. It would perhaps be prying too much into the secrets of Nature, or, at all events, into the secrets of Mr. Masollam's nature, to inquire whether this lightening and darkening of the countenance was voluntary or not. In a lesser degree it is a common phenomenon with us all: the effect of one class of emotions is, vulgarly speaking, to make a man look black, and of another to make him look bright. The peculiarity of Mr. Masollam was that he could look so much blacker and brighter than most people, and made the change of expression with such extraordinary rapidity and intensity that it seemed a sort of facial legerdemain, and suggested the suspicion that it might be an acquired faculty. There was, moreover, another change which he apparently had the power of working on his countenance, which affects other people involuntarily, and which generally, especially in the case of the fair sex, does so very much against their will. Mr. Masollam had the faculty of looking very much older one hour than he did the next. "There were moments when a careful study of his wrinkles and of his dull, faded-looking eyes would lead you to put him down at eighty if he was a day; and there were others when his flashing glance, expanding nostril, broad, smooth brow and mobile mouth would make a rejuvenating combination that would for a moment convince you that you had been at least five-and-twenty years out in your first estimate. These rapid contrasts were calculated to arrest the attention of the most casual observer, and to produce a sensation which was not altogether pleasant when first one made his acquaintance. It was not exactly mistrust-for both manners were perfectly frank and natural-so much as perplexity. He seemed to be two opposite characters rolled into one, and to be presenting undesigningly a curious moral and physiological problem for solution, which had a disagreeable sort of attractiveness about it, for you almost immediately felt it to be insoluble, and yet it would not let you rest. He might be the best or the worst of men."

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY OF PROFESSOR AND MRS. DE MORGAN

PROFESSOR DE MORGAN says:

I gave an account of all this to a friend who was then alive, a man of ologies and ometers both, who was not at all disposed to think it anything but a clever imposture. “But,” said he, “what you tell me is very singular: I shall go myself to Mrs. Hayden; I shall go alone and not give my name. I don’t think I shall hear anything from anybody, but if I do I shall find out the trick. Depend upon it,

I shall find it out.” He went accordingly, and came to me to report progress. He told me that he had gone a step beyond me, for he had insisted on taking his alphabet behind a large folding screen and asking his questions by the alphabet and a pencil, as well as receiving the answers. No persons except himself and Mrs. Hayden were in the room. The “spirit” who came to him was one whose unfortunate death was fully detailed in the usual way. My friend told me that he was “awestruck,” and had nearly forgotten all his precautions.

The things which I have narrated were the beginning of a long series of experiences, many as remarkable as what I have given; many of a minor character, separately worth little, but jointly of weight when considered in connection with the more decisive proofs of reality. Many of a confirmatory tendency as mere facts, but of a character not sustentive of the gravity and dignity of the spiritual world. The celebrated apparition of Giles Scroggins is a serious personage compared to some which have fallen in my way, and a logical one, too. If these things be spirits, they show that pretenders, coxcombs and liars are to be found on the other side of the grave as well as on this; and what for no? as Meg Dods said.

The whole question may receive such persevering attention as shall worm out the real truth; or it may die away, obtaining only casual notice, until a new outburst of phenomena recalls its history of this clay. But this subsidence does not seem to begin. It is now twelve or thirteen years since the matter began to be everywhere talked about, during which time there have been many announcements of the total extinction of the “spirit-mania.” But in several cases, as in Tom Moore’s fable, the extinguishers have caught fire. Were it the absurdity it is often said to be, it would do much good by calling attention to the “manifestations” of another absurdity, the philosophy of possibilities and impossibilities, the philosophy of the fourth court. Extremes meet, but the “meeting” is often for the purpose of mutual exposure, like that of silly gentlemen in the day of pop-and-paragraph duels. This on the supposition that Spiritualism is all either imposture or delusion; it cannot be more certainly one or the other than is the philosophy opposed to it. I have no acquaintance either with P or Q. But I feel sure that the decided conviction of all who can see both sides of the shield must be, that it is more likely that P has seen a ghost than that Q knows he cannot have seen one. I know that Q says he knows it.

In this connection the following from the Publishers' Circular on the appearance of Mrs. De Morgan's book shows a contemporary estimate of Professor De Morgan's critical faculty:

Mere LITTERATEURS and writers of fiction may be pardoned for a little tendency to the visionary and unreal, but the fact that the well-known author of the standard works on Formal Logic, the Differential Calculus, and the Theory of Probabilities, should figure with his lady in the characters of believers in spirit-rapping and table-turning, will probably take most people by surprise. There is perhaps no contributor to our reviews who is more at home in demolishing a fallacy, or in good-humouredly disposing of an ignorant pretender in science than Mr. De Morgan. His clear, logical, witty and whimsical style is readily traced by literary readers in many a striking article in our critical journals. He is probably the last man whom the sceptical in such mysteries would expect to find on the side of Mr. Home and Mrs. Newton Crosland. Yet we must record the fact that Mr. De Morgan declares himself " perfectly convinced that he has both seen and heard, in a manner which should make unbelief impossible, things called spiritual which cannot be taken by a rational being to be capable of explanation by imposture, coincidence, or mistake."

Let us add to the foregoing Mrs. De Morgan's testimony:

It is now ten years since I began attentively to observe the phenomena of "Spiritualism." My first experience occurred in the presence of Mrs. Hayden from New York. I never heard a word which could shake my strong conviction of Mrs. Hayden's honesty; indeed, the result of our first interview, when my name was quite unknown to her, was sufficient to prove that I was not on that occasion the victim of her imposture, or my own credulity.

After describing the visit to Mrs. Hayden, to whom none of the names of those present was mentioned, she says:

We sat for at least a quarter of an hour and were beginning to apprehend a failure, when a very small throbbing or patting sound was heard, apparently in the centre of the table. Great was our pleasure when Mrs. Hayden, who had before seemed rather anxious, said, “They are coming.” Who were coming? Neither she nor we could tell. As the sounds gathered strength, which they seemed to do with our necessary conviction of their genuineness, whatever might be their origin, Mrs. Hayden said, “There is a spirit who wishes to speak with someone here, but as I do not know the names of the gentlemen and ladies, I must point to each in turn, and, when I come to the right one, beg that the spirit will rap.” This was agreed to by our invisible companion, who rapped in assent. Mrs. Hayden then pointed to each of the party in turn. To my surprise, and even annoyance (for I did not wish this, and many of my friends did), no sounds were heard until she indicated myself, the last in the circle. I was seated at her right hand; she had gone round from the left. I was then directed to point to the letters of a large type alphabet, and I may add that, having no wish to obtain the name of any dear friend or relation, I certainly did not rest, as it has been surmised is often done, on any letter. However, to my astonishment, the not common name of a dear relation who had left this world seventeen years before, and whose surname was that of my father’s, not my husband’s, family was spelt. Then this sentence, “I am happy, and with F. and G.” (names at length). I then received a promise of future communication with all three spirits; the two last had left the world twenty and twelve years before. Other persons present then received communications by rapping; of these some were as singularly truthful and satisfactory as that to myself, while others were false and even mischievous.

Mrs. De Morgan observes that after the seances with Mrs. Hayden she and her friends experimented in private, “and it was found that a number of persons, both in and out of my own family, possessed the faculty of mediumship in a greater or less degree.”

NOTE TO CHAPTER X

WERE THE DAVENPORTS JUGGLERS OR SPIRITUALISTS?

As Mr. Houdini has seemed to question whether the Davenports themselves ever asserted that they were Spiritualists, it may clear the matter up finally to quote the following from a letter written by them in 1868 to the Banner of Light, the leading Spiritualist journal in the United States. Dealing with the report that they were not Spiritualists, they wrote:

It is singular that any individual, sceptic or Spiritualist, could believe such statements after fourteen years of the most bitter persecution and violent opposition, culminating in the riots of Liverpool, Huddersfield, and

Leeds, where our lives were placed in imminent peril by the fury of brutal mobs, our property destroyed, and where we suffered a loss of seventy-five thousand dollars, and all because we would not renounce Spiritualism, and declare ourselves jugglers, when threatened by the mob, and urged to do so. In conclusion, we have only to say that we denounce all such statements as base falsehoods.

Volume II NOTE TO CHAPTER II

THE MEDIUMSHIP OF THE REV. W. STAINTON MOSES

DESCRIBING an experience of levitation, Stainton Moses writes:

As I was seated in the corner of ‘he inner room my chair was drawn back into the corner and then raised off the floor about a foot, as I judged, and then allowed to drop to the floor whilst I was carried up in the corner. I described my apparent movement to Dr. and Mrs. S., and took from my pocket a lead pencil with which, when I became stationary, I made a mark on the wall opposite to my chest. This mark is as near as may be six feet from the floor. I do not think my posture was changed, and I was lowered very gently until I found myself in my chair again. My sensation was that of being lighter than the air. No pressure on any part of the body; no unconsciousness or entrancement. From the position of the mark on the wall it is clear that my head must have been close to the ceiling. My voice, Dr. S. told me afterwards, sounded oddly away up in the corner, as if my head were turned from the table, as it was according to my observation and the mark I made. The ascent, of which I was perfectly conscious, was very gradual and steady, not unlike that of being in a lift, but without any perceptible sensation of motion other than that of feeling lighter than the atmosphere. My position, as I have said, was unchanged. I was simply levitated and lowered to my old place.

Of the passage of matter through matter we have this instance related:

On August 28 (1872) seven objects from different rooms were brought into the seance-room; on the 30th, four, and amongst them a little bell from the adjoining dining-room. We always left gas brightly burning in that room and in the hall outside, so that if the doors were opened even for a moment a blaze of light would have been let into the dark room in which we sat. As this never happened, we have full assurance from what Dr. Carpenter considers the best authority, Common Sense, that the doors remained closed. In the dining-room there was a little bell. We heard it commence to ring, and could trace it by its sound as it approached the door which separated us from it. What was our astonishment when we found that in spite of the closed door the sound drew nearer to its! It was evidently within the room in which we sat, for the bell was carried round the room, ringing loudly the whole time. After completing the circuit of the room, it was brought down, passed under the table, coming up close to my elbow. It rang under my very nose, and went round about my head, then passed round the circle, ringing close to the faces of all. It was finally placed upon the table. I do not wish to theorize, but this seems to the to dispose of arguments which would put forward the theory of our being psychologized, or of the object coming down the chimney, as an explanation of this difficult subject.

Dr. Speer thus describes the appearance of a spirit light and a materialised hand on August 10, 1873:

A large globe of light rose from the side of the table opposite to me, and sailed up to the level of our faces, and then vanished. It was followed by several more, all of which rose up from the side opposite to me, and sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left of the medium. At request the next light was placed slowly in the centre of the table. It was apparently as large as a shaddock, and was surrounded with drapery. At this time the medium was entranced, and the controlling spirit informed me that he would endeavour to place the light in the medium’s hand. Failing in this, he said he would knock on the table in front of me. Almost immediately a light came and stood on the table close to me. “You see; now listen-I will knock.” Very slowly the light rose up and struck three distinct blows on the table. “Now I will show you my hand.” A large, very bright light then came up, and inside of it appeared the materialised hand of the spirit. He moved the fingers about close to my face. The appearance was as distinct as can be conceived.

An example of strong physical force is thus recorded by Stainton Moses:

We had ventured on one occasion, contrary to direction, to add to our circle a strange member. Some trivial phenomena occurred, but the usual controlling spirit did not appear. When next we sat, he came, and probably none of us will easily forget the sledge-hammer blows with which he smote the table. The noise was distinctly audible in the room below and gave one the idea that the table would be broken to pieces. In vain we withdrew from the table, hoping to diminish the power. The heavy blows increased in intensity, and the whole room shook with their force. The direst penalties were threatened if we again interfered with the development by bringing in new sitters. We have not ventured to do so again; and I do not think we shall easily be persuaded to risk another similar objurgation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER XI

MR. WALES’s AUTOMATIC WRITING

MR. WALES writes to the author:

I cannot think there was anything in my antecedent reading to account for this coincidence. I had certainly read nothing you had published on the subject, I had purposely avoided “Raymond” and books like it, in order not to vitiate my own results, and the “Proceedings” of the S.P.R. which I had read at that time, do not touch, as you know, upon after-death conditions. At any rate I obtained, at various times, statements (as my contemporary notes show) to the effect that, in this persisting state of existence, they have bodies which, though imperceptible by our senses, are as solid to them as ours to us, that these bodies are based on the general characteristics of our present bodies but beautified; that they have no age, no pain, no rich and poor; that they wear clothes and take nourishment; that they do not sleep (though they spoke of passing occasionally into a semiconscious state which they called “lying asleep”-a condition, it just occurs to me) which seems to correspond roughly with the “hypnoidal” state); that, after a period which is usually shorter than the average lifetime here, they pass to some further state of existence; that people of similar thoughts, tastes, and feelings gravitate together; that married couples do not necessarily reunite, but that the love of man and woman continues and is freed of elements which with us often militate against its perfect realisation; that immediately after death people pass into a semi-conscious rest-state lasting various periods, that they are unable to experience bodily pain, but are susceptible at times to some mental anxiety; that a painful death is “absolutely unknown,” that religious beliefs make no difference whatever in the after-state, and that their life altogether is intensely happy, and no one having ever realised it could wish to return here. I got no reference to “work” by that word, but much to the various interests that were said to occupy them. That is probably only another way of saying the same thing. “Work” with us has come usually to mean “work to live,” and that, I was emphatically informed, was not the case with them-that all the requirements of life were somehow mysteriously “provided.” Neither did I get any reference to a definite “temporary penal state,” but I gathered that people begin there at the point of intellectual and moral development where they leave off here; and since their state of happiness was based mainly upon sympathy, those who came over in a low moral condition failed at first for various lengths of time to have the capacity to appreciate and enjoy it.

THE END

THE EDGE OF THE UNKNOWN

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PREFACE

There is a passage in that charming book *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* which runs as follows: “She was one of these persons who have allowed their lives to be gnawed away because they have fallen in love with an idea several centuries before its appointed appearance in the history of Civilization. She hurled herself against the obstinacy of her time.” We who believe in the psychic revelation, and who appreciate that a perception of these things is of the utmost importance, certainly have hurled ourselves against the obstinacy of our time. Possibly we have allowed some of our lives to be gnawed away in what, for the moment, seemed a vain and thankless quest. Only the future can show whether the sacrifice was worth it. Personally I think that it was. Among the various chords which are struck in this little book there may be some to which the mind of the reader will respond, and which may entice him also in the search for the Holy Grail.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
CROWBOROUGH. 1930.

I

THE RIDDLE OF HOUDINI

Who was the greatest medium-baiter of modern times? Undoubtedly Houdini. Who was the greatest physical medium of modern times? There are some who would be inclined to give the same answer. I do not see how it can ever now be finally and definitely proved, but circumstantial evidence may be very strong, as Thoreau said when he found a trout in the milk jug. I foresee that the subject will be debated for many years to come, so perhaps my opinion, since I knew him well, and always entertained this possibility in my mind, may be of interest. If others add their experience in order to support or disprove my own surmises, then some result may eventually be obtained.

I will first give some of my own personal impressions of Houdini. I will then dwell on some phases of his career which show his singular character, and I will then endeavour to give the argument as to the source of his unique powers.

Let me say, in the first instance, that in a long life which has touched every side of humanity, Houdini is far and away the most curious and intriguing character whom I have ever encountered. I have met better men, and I have certainly met very many worse ones, but I have never met a man who had such strange contrasts in his nature, and whose actions and motives it was more difficult to foresee or to reconcile.

I will first, as is only proper, dwell upon the great good which lay in his nature. He had the essential masculine quality of courage to a supreme degree. Nobody has ever done, and nobody in all human probability will ever do, such reckless feats of daring. His whole life was one long succession of them, and when I say that amongst them was the leaping from one aeroplane to another, with handcuffed hands at the height of three thousand feet, one can form an idea of the extraordinary lengths that he would go. In this, however, as in much more that concerned him, there was a certain psychic element which he was ready to admit freely. He told me that a voice which was independent of his own reason or judgment told him what to do and how to do it. So long as he obeyed the voice he was assured of safety. “It all comes as easy as stepping off a log,” said he to me, “but I have to wait for the voice. You stand there before a jump, swallowing the yellow stuff that every man has in him. Then at last you hear the voice and you jump. Once I jumped on my own and I nearly broke my neck.” This was the nearest admission that I ever had from him that I was right in thinking that there was a psychic element which was essential to every one of his feats.

Apart from his amazing courage, he was remarkable for his cheery urbanity in every-day life. One could not wish a better companion so long as one was with him, though he might do and say the most unexpected things when one was absent. He was, like most Jews, estimable in his family relationships. His love for his dead mother seemed to be the ruling passion of his life, which he expressed on all sorts of public occasions in a way which was, I am sure, sincere, but is strange to our colder Western blood. There were many things in Houdini which were as Oriental as there were in our own Disraeli. He was devoted also to his wife, and with good reason, for she was as devoted to him, but again his intimacy showed itself in unconventional ways. When in his examination before the Senatorial Committee he was hard-pressed by some defender of Spiritualism who impugned his motives in his violent and vindictive campaign against mediums, his answer was to turn to his wife and to say, “I have always been a good boy, have I not?”

Another favourable side of his character was his charity. I have heard, and am quite prepared to believe, that he was the last refuge of the down-and-outer, especially if he belonged to his own profession of showman. This charity extended even beyond the grave, and if he heard of any old magician whose tombstone needed repair he took it upon himself at once to set the matter right. Willie Davenport in Australia, Bosco in Germany, and many others of his profession were the objects of these pious offices. Whatever he did was done upon a large scale. He had many pensioners whom he did not know by sight. One man embraced him in the street, and upon Houdini angrily demanding who the devil he was, he answered, “Why, I am the man whose rent you have paid for the last ten years.” He was devoted to children, though he had none of his own. He was never too busy to give a special free performance for the youngsters. At Edinburgh he was so shocked at the bare feet of the kiddies that he had them all into the theatre, and fitted them then and there with five hundred pairs of boots. He was the greatest publicity agent that ever lived, so that it is not ill-natured to surmise that the local papers had been advised beforehand, and that the advertisement was well worth it. There were other occasions, however, when his charity was less ostentatious. Animals too were loved by him, and he had a peculiar talent for taming them and teaching them tricks. All these ingredients in one impulsive personality surely make up a very lovable man. It is true that his generosity was curiously mixed with frugality, so that even while he was giving away his earnings at a rate which alarmed his wife, he would put an indignant comment in his diary because he had been charged two shillings for the pressing of his clothes.

So much for his virtues — and most of us would be very glad to have as goodly a list. But all he did was extreme, and there was something to be placed in the other scale.

A prevailing feature of his character was a vanity which was so obvious and childish that it became more amusing than offensive. I can remember, for example, that when he introduced his brother to me, he did it by saying, “This is the brother of the great Houdini.” This without any twinkle of humour and in a perfectly natural manner.

This enormous vanity was combined with a passion for publicity which knew no bounds, and which must at all costs be gratified. There was no consideration of any sort which would restrain him if he saw his way to an advertisement. Even when he laid flowers upon the graves of the dead it was in the prearranged presence of the local photographers.

It was this desire to play a constant public part which had a great deal to do with his furious campaign against Spiritualism. He knew that the public took a keen interest in the matter, and that there was unlimited publicity to be had from it. He perpetually offered large sums to any medium who would do this or that, knowing well that even in the unlikely event of the thing being done he could always raise some objection and get out of it. Sometimes his tactics were too obvious to be artistic. In Boston he arrived by prearrangement before a great crowd at the City Hall and walked solemnly up the steps with ten thousand dollars’ worth of stock in his hand, which represented one of his perennial stakes against phenomena. This was in connection with his engagement on a tour of the music-halls. His favourite argument, and that of many of his fellow-conjurers, was this flourishing of dollar-wads. It is obviously absurd, since the money will only be paid if you satisfy the challenger, and since the challenger has to pay the money he naturally never will be satisfied. The classical instance is that of the *Scientific American* magazine, which offered a large sum for any well-attested psychic phenomenon, but on being confronted with the Crandon phenomena, which are perhaps the best attested in the whole annals of psychical research, found reasons for withholding the money. I remember that when I arrived in New York, Houdini offered some huge sum that he could do anything which I had ever seen a medium do. I at once accepted his challenge, and proposed as a test that he should materialise the face of my mother in such a way that others besides myself who had known her in life could recognise it. I heard no more of the matter after that, and yet in England a medium had actually done this. I would have brought my witnesses across the Atlantic had the test been accepted.

I am quite prepared to think that Houdini's campaign against mediums did temporary good so far as false mediums goes, but it was so indiscriminate and accompanied by so much which was intolerant and offensive that it turned away the sympathy and help which Spiritualists, who are anxious for the cleanliness of their own movement, would gladly have given him. The unmasking of false mediums is our urgent duty, but when we are told that, in spite of our own evidence and that of three generations of mankind, there are no real ones we lose interest, for we know that we are speaking to an ignorant man. At the same time, the States, and in a lesser degree our own people, do need stern supervision. I admit that I underrated the corruption in the States. What first brought it home to me was that my friend Mrs. Crandon told me that she had received price lists from some firm which manufactures fraudulent instruments for performing tricks. If such a firm can make a living, there must be some villainy about, and a more judicious Houdini might well find a useful field of activity. It is these hyenas who retard our progress. I have myself had a hand in exposing more than one of them.

There was a particular Hall in Boston which Houdini used for his tirades against the spirits. Some weeks after his campaign a curious and disagreeable phenomenon broke out there. Showers of gravel or of small pebbles fell continually among the audience, and several people suffered minor injuries. A police watch was kept up for some time, and eventually it was shown that a staid employee, whose record was an excellent one, was in the habit, without rhyme or reason, of stealing up to the gallery and throwing these missiles down into the stalls. When tried for the offence he could only say that a senseless but overpowering impulse caused him to do it. Many psychic students would be prepared to consider that the incident would bear the interpretation of a poltergeist on the one side and an obsession on the other.

There was another incident at Boston of a very much more serious kind, and one which bears out my assertion that where there was an advertisement to be gained Houdini was a dangerous man. The remarkable psychic powers of Mrs. Crandon, the famous “Margery,” were at that time under examination by the committee of the *Scientific American*. Various members of this committee had sat many times with the Crandons, and some of them had been completely converted to the psychic explanation, while others, though unable to give any rational explanation of the phenomena, were in different stages of dissent. It would obviously be an enormous feather in Houdini’s cap if he could appear on the scene and at once solve the mystery. What a glorious position to be in! Houdini laid his plans and was so sure of success that before going to Boston he wrote a letter, which I saw, to a mutual friend in London, announcing that he was about to expose her. He would have done it, too, had it not been for an interposition which was miraculous. I think well enough of Houdini to hope that he would have held his hand if he could have realised the ruin and disgrace which his success would have brought upon his victims. As it was, the thought of the tremendous advertisement swallowed up his scruples. All America was watching, and he could not resist the temptation.

He had become familiar in advance with the procedure of the Crandon circle, and with the types of phenomena. It was easy for him to lay his plans. What he failed to take into account was that the presiding spirit, Walter, the dead brother of Mrs. Crandon, was a very real and live entity, who was by no means inclined to allow his innocent sister to be made the laughingstock of the continent. It was the unseen Walter who checkmated the carefully-laid plans of the magician. The account of what occurred I take from the notes which were taken by the circle at the time. The first phenomenon to be tested was the ringing of an electric bell which could only be done by pressing down a flap of wood, well out of the reach of the medium. The room was darkened, but the bell did not ring. Suddenly the angry voice of Walter was heard.

“You have put something to stop the bell ringing, Houdini, you — —” he cried.

Walter has a wealth of strong language and makes no pretence at all to be a very elevated being. They all have their use over there. On this occasion, at least, the use was evident, for when the light was turned up, there was the rubber from the end of a pencil stuck into the angle of the flap in such a way as to make it impossible that it could descend and press the bell. Of course, Houdini professed complete ignorance as to how it got there, but who else had the deft touch to do such a thing in the dark, and why was it only in his presence that such a thing occurred? It is clear that if he could say afterwards, when he had quietly removed the rubber, that his arrival had made all further trickery impossible, he would have scored the first trick in the game.

He should have taken warning and realised that he was up against powers which were too strong for him, and which might prove dangerous if provoked too far. But the letters he had written and boasts he had made cut off his retreat. The second night landed him in a very much worse mess than the first one. He had brought with him an absurd box which was secured in front by no fewer than eight padlocks. One would have thought that it was a gorilla rather than a particularly gentle lady who was about to be confined within. The forces behind Margery showed what they thought of this contraption by bursting the whole front open the moment Margery was fastened into it. This very unexpected development Houdini endeavoured to explain away, but he found it difficult to give a reason why, if the box was so vulnerable, it was worth while to bring it with so much pomp and ceremony, with eight padlocks and many other gadgets, all the way from New York to Boston.

However, much worse was to come. The lady was put into the reconstituted box, her arms protruding through holes on each side Houdini was observed without any apparent reason to pass his hand along the lady’s arm, and so into the box. Presently, after some experiments, the lady’s arms were placed inside and the attempt was to be made to ring the bell-box while only her head projected. Suddenly the terrible Walter intervened.

“Houdini, you —— blackguard!” he thundered. “You have put a rule into the cabinet. You —— ! Remember, Houdini, you won’t live for ever. Some day you’ve got to die.”

The lights were turned on, and, shocking to relate, a two-foot folding rule was found lying in the box. It was a most deadly trick, for, of course, if the bell had rung Houdini would have demanded a search of the cabinet, the rule would have been found, it would, if held between the teeth, have enabled the medium to have reached and pressed down the flap of the bell-box, and all America would have resounded next day with the astuteness of Houdini and the proven villainy of the Crandons. I do not think that even the friends of the latter could have got over the patent facts. It was the most dangerous moment of their career, and only Walter saved them from ruin.

For the moment Houdini was completely overcome, and cowered, as well he might, before the wrath of the unseen. His offence was so obvious that no better excuse occurred to him, when he had rallied his senses, than that the rule had been left there by accident by some subordinate. When one considers, however, that no other tool upon earth, neither a hammer, a chisel, nor a wrench, but only a folding two-foot rule, could have sustained the charge, one realises how hopeless was his position. But one of Houdini’s characteristics was that nothing in this world or the next could permanently abash him. He could not suggest that they were guilty considering that the Crandons had actually asked to have the cabinet examined after she had entered, and Houdini had refused. Yet, incredible as it may seem, he had his advertisement after all, for he flooded America with a pamphlet to say that he had shown that the Crandons were frauds, and that he had in some unspecified way exposed them. Since the cabinet had become a delicate subject his chief accusation was that Mrs. Crandon had in some way rung the bell-box by stretching out her foot. He must have known, though his complaisant audiences did not, that the bell-box was continually rung while some sitter was permitted to hold it in his hands, and even to rise and to walk about with it.

Speaking with a full knowledge, I say that this Boston incident was never an exposure of Margery, but it was a very real exposure of Houdini, and is a most serious blot upon his career.

To account for the phenomena he was prepared to assert that not only the doctor, but that even members of the committee were in senseless collaboration with the medium. The amazing part of the business was that other members of the committee seemed to have been overawed by the masterful conjurer, and even changed their very capable secretary, Mr. Malcolm Bird, at his behest. Mr. Bird, it may be remarked, with a far better brain than Houdini, and with a record of some fifty séances, had by this time been entirely convinced of the truth of the phenomena.

It may seem unkind that I should dwell upon these matters now that Houdini has gone to his account, but what I am writing now I also published during his lifetime. I deal gently with the matter, but I have to remember that its importance far transcends any worldly consideration, and that the honour of the Crandons is still impugned in many minds by the false charges which were not only circulated in print, but were shouted by Houdini from the platforms of a score of music-halls with a violence which browbeat and overbore every protest from the friends of truth. Houdini did not yet realise the gravity of his own actions, or the consequences which they entailed. The Crandons are themselves the most patient and forgiving people in the world, treating the most irritating opposition with a good-humoured and amused tolerance. But there are other forces which are beyond human control, and from that day the shadow lay heavy upon Houdini. His anti-Spiritualist agitation became more and more unreasoning until it bordered upon a mania which could only be explained in some quarters by supposing that he was in the pay of certain clerical fanatics, an accusation which I do not believe. It is true that in order to preserve some show of reason he proclaimed that he wished only to attack dishonest mediums, but as in the same breath he would assert that there were no honest ones, his moderation was more apparent than real. If he had consulted the reports of the National Association of American Spiritualists he would have found that this representative body was far more efficient in exposing those swindlers than he had ever been, for they had the necessary experience by which the true can be separated from the false.

I suppose that at that time Houdini was, from an insurance point of view, so far as bodily health goes, the best life of his age in America. He was in constant training, and he used neither alcohol nor tobacco. Yet all over the land warnings of danger arose. He alluded in public to the matter again and again. In my own home circle I had the message some months before his death, “Houdini is doomed, doomed, doomed!” So seriously did I take this warning that I would have written to him had I the least hope that my words could have any effect. I knew, however, by previous experience, that he always published my letters, even the most private of them, and that it would only give him a fresh pretext for ridiculing that which I regard as a sacred cause.

But as the months passed and fresh warnings came from independent sources, both I and, as I believe, the Crandons, became seriously alarmed for his safety. He was, on one side of his character, so fine a fellow that even those who were attacked in this monstrous way were unwilling that real harm should befall him. But he continued to rave, and the shadow continued to thicken. I have an American friend who writes in the press under the name of Samri Frikell. He is really Fulton Oursler, the distinguished novelist, whose Step-child of the Moon is, in my judgment, one of the best of recent romances. Oursler was an intimate friend of Houdini, and he has allowed me to quote some of his experiences.

“You know him as well as I do,” writes Oursler. “You knew the immense vanity of the man. You know that he loved to be important. My experience with him for the last three months of his life was most peculiar. He would call me on the telephone at seven o’clock in the morning and he would be in a quarrelsome mood. He would talk for an hour telling me how important he was and what a great career he was making. In his voice was a hysterical, almost feminine, note of rebellion, as if his hands were beating against an immutable destiny.

“In all these cases Houdini portrayed to me a clear sense of impending doom. This is not an impression which I have received subsequent to his death. But I commented upon it at the time. I believe that Houdini sensed the coming of his death, but did not know that it meant death. He didn’t know what it meant, but he hated it and his soul screamed out in indignation.”

Some time later he telephoned to the same friend in a way which showed that his surmise had become more definite. “I am marked for death,” said he. “I mean that they are predicting my death in spirit circles all over the country.” At that time he was starting in perfect health upon that tour of the Vaudevilles which was destined to be the last of his career. Within a few weeks he was dead.

The details of that death were in many ways most singular. On October 11th he had a painful but, as everyone thought, an unimportant accident, when during his performance his ankle sustained an injury. The incident was treated quite lightly by the Press, but was regarded more seriously by those who had other sources of information. On October 13th, two days after the accident, the gentleman already quoted had a letter from a medium, Mrs. Wood.

“Three years ago,” said this ill-omened epistle, “the spirit of Dr. Hyslop said, ‘The waters are black for Houdini’, and he foretold that disaster would befall him while performing before an audience in a theatre. Dr. Hyslop now says that the injury is more serious than has been reported, and that Houdini’s days as a magician are over.”

The sad prophecy proved to be only too true, though the injured leg was only the prelude of worse disaster. It seemed indeed to be a sign that the protective mantle which had been around him had for some reason been withdrawn. The ankle continued to pain him, though he managed for some weeks to give his accustomed show. At Montreal a member of the audience rose to protest against the violence with which he raved against Spiritualism, and very particularly against me. Such personal attacks were not to be taken too seriously, for it was part of his perfervid nature that anyone who had experiences which differed from his own was either a dupe or a scoundrel. He bore up with great bravery against the pain from which he must have continually suffered, but in less than a fortnight, while on the stage at Detroit, he completely collapsed, and was carried to that hospital from which he never emerged alive.

There were some remarkable points about his death. It seems that upon Friday, October 22nd, he was lying in his dressing-room, reading his letters. It was about five in the afternoon. He had lectured at McGill University a few days before, and with his usual affability he allowed some of the students to come in and see him. What followed may be taken verbatim from the report of one of these young men.

“‘Houdini,’ he says, ‘was facing us and lying down on a couch at the time reading some mail, his right side nearest us.’ This first-year student engaged Houdini more or less continually in a conversation whilst my friend Mr. Smilovitch continued to sketch Houdini. This student was the first to raise the question of Houdini’s strength. My friend and I were not so much interested in his strength as we were in his mental acuteness, his skill, his beliefs and his personal experiences. Houdini stated that he had extraordinary muscles in his forearms, in his shoulders and in his back, and he asked all of us present to feel them, which we did.

“The first-year McGill student asked Houdini whether it was true that punches in the stomach did not hurt him. Houdini remarked rather unenthusiastically that his stomach could resist much, although he did not speak of it in superlative terms. Thereupon he gave Houdini some very hammer-like blows below the belt, first securing Houdini's permission to strike him. Houdini was reclining at the time with his right side nearest Whitehead, and the said student was more or less bending over him. These blows fell on that part of the stomach to the right of the navel, and were struck on the side nearest us, which was in fact Houdini's right side; I do not remember exactly how many blows were struck. I am certain, however, of at least four very hard and severe body blows, because at the end of the second or third blow I verbally protested against this sudden onslaught on the part of this first-year student, using the words, 'Hey there. You must be crazy, what are you doing?' or words to that effect, but Whitehead continued striking Houdini with all his strength.

"Houdini stopped him suddenly in the midst of a punch, with a gesture that he had had enough. At the time Whitehead was striking Houdini, the latter looked as though he was in extreme pain and winced as each blow was struck.

"Houdini immediately after stated that he had had no opportunity to prepare himself against the blows, as he did not think that Whitehead would strike him as suddenly as he did and with such force, and that he would have been in a better position to prepare for the blows if he had arisen from his couch for this purpose, but the injury to his foot prevented him from getting about rapidly."

There is no doubt that the immediate cause of the death was ruptured appendix, and it was certified as traumatic appendicitis by all three doctors who attended him. It is, however, a very rare complaint, one of the doctors asserting that he had never seen a case before. When one considers how often boxers are struck violent blows in this region, one can understand that it is not usually so vulnerable. From the time that he reached hospital he seems to have known that he was doomed.

Even after death strange things continued to happen which seem to be beyond the range of chance or coincidence. Some little time before Houdini had ordered a very ornate coffin, which he proposed to use in some sensational act. He paid no less than two thousand five hundred dollars for it. The idea was, I believe, to have a glass face to it and to exhibit the magician within it after it was hermetically sealed up, for he had shown in a previous experiment an inexplicable capacity for living without air. He carried this coffin about with him in one of the very numerous crates in which all his apparatus was packed. After his death all his goods were, I am told, sent on to New York. It was found, however, that by some blunder one box had been left behind. On examination this was found to contain the show coffin, which was accordingly used for his burial. At that burial some curious and suggestive words were used by the presiding rabbi, Barnard Drachman. He said: “Houdini possessed a wondrous power that he never Understood, and which he never revealed to anyone in life.” Such an expression coming at so solemn a moment from one who may have been in a special position to know must show that my speculations are not extravagant or fantastic when I deal with the real source of those powers. The rabbi’s speech is to be taken with Houdini’s own remark, when he said to my wife: “There are some of my feats which my own wife does not know the secret of.” A famous Chinese conjurer who saw him perform said, “This is not a trick, it is a gift.” He frequently said that his work would die with him, and he has left no legacy of it so far as can be seen, though it would clearly be a very valuable asset. What can cover all these facts, save that there was some element in his power which was peculiar to himself, and that could only point to a psychic element — in a word, that he was a medium?

In the remarkable ceremony performed beside his coffin by his brother-magicians, the spokesman broke a symbolic wand and said: “The wand is broken. God touched him with a wondrous gift, and our brother used it. Now the wand is broken.” It may indeed have been not mere trickery but a God-given gift which raised Houdini to such a height. And why should he not use it, if it were indeed the gift of God? I see no reason why the medium, like other God-endowed men — the painter, the poet, or the romancer — should not earn money and renown by his gift. Let him hesitate, however, before he makes rash attacks upon those who are using the same gift, and for higher ends.

Other curious points, which may possibly come within the range of coincidence, are connected with the death of Houdini. For example, there was a Mr. Gysel, who had shared in Houdini’s views as to Spiritualism. He wrote thus to my friend:

“MR. FRIKELL,—”Something happened to me in my room on Sunday night, October 24th, 1926, 10.58: Houdini had given me a picture of himself which I had framed and hung on the wall. At the above time and date the picture fell to the ground, breaking the glass. I now know that

Houdini will die. Maybe there is something in these psychic phenomena after all."

To this Mr. "Frikell" adds:

"As I think back on my own experience I am inclined to agree maybe there is indeed something to the psychic phenomena after all."

His admission is the more noteworthy as I remember the day when he was a strong and intelligent opponent. I will now turn to a consideration of the nature of Houdini's powers, and in order to appreciate the argument one has to consider the nature of some of the feats which he did actually perform. A list of these would make a considerable pamphlet, but a few typical ones may be selected. A general outline of his life, too, may not be out of place.

Houdini's real name was Eric Weiss, and he was born in 1874, in the State of Wisconsin, in one of those small towns which seem to be the real centres of American originality. He was the seventh son of a Jewish rabbi, and he has left it on record that his mother did not even know the English language. He has also left it on record that in his early youth he had some connection with mediumship, though of a most doubtful variety. He has not scrupled to confess that he eked out any powers he may have had by the expedient of reading the names upon the graves in the local cemeteries. It was a good deal later than this that he first met a true medium in the shape of Ira Davenport, the only survivor of the famous brothers whose powers amazed all England in the 'sixties, and who, in spite of all the interested claims of Maskelyne and other conjurers, were never exposed, nor even adequately imitated. I have before me as I write a letter from Houdini himself, in which he tells me:

"I was an intimate friend of Ira Erastus Davenport. I can make the positive assertion that the Davenport Brothers never were exposed. I know more about the Davenports than anyone living."

He then adds the very curious and notable sentence:

"I know for a fact that it was not necessary for them to remove their bonds in order to obtain manifestations."

When one considers that these bonds were often handcuffs or twisted copper wire, and that the manifestations occurred in many cases within a few seconds of the closing of the cabinet, this admission by one, who claims that he knows, is of very great importance. We will return to this later, after we have enumerated a few of his results.

He could, and continually did, walk straight out of any prison cell in which he might be confined. They placed him at Washington in the cell in which Guiteau, the murderer of Garfield, had been locked, but he readily emerged. In the letter from which I have already quoted, he says to me:

"I pledge my word of honour that I was never given any assistance, nor was in collusion with anyone."

This was clearly the case, for he performed the feat many times in different places, and was always searched to prove that he had no tools in his possession. Sometimes the grinning warders had hardly got out of the passage before their prisoner was at their heels. It takes some credulity, I think, to say that this was, in the ordinary sense of the word, a trick.

Handcuffs might have been made of jelly, so easily did his limbs pass through them. He was heavily manacled at Scotland Yard, and placed behind a screen from over which a shower of manacles began to fall until he stepped out a free man. These things he could do in an instant. When I was lecturing at the Carnegie Hall in New York, my wife and Houdini walked down some side corridor after the lecture in order to rejoin me. They came to a padlocked door, and my wife was about to turn back. To her amazement, her companion put out his hand and picked off the locked padlock as one picks a plum from a tree. Was that a trick, or are all these talks about sleight of hand what Houdini himself would call "bunk" or "hokum"?

When Houdini was in Holland, he got the local basketmakers to weave a basket round him. Out of this he emerged. He was shut up later in a sealed paper bag and came out, leaving it intact. A block of ice was frozen round his body and he burst his way out. One who has attempted to bring his feats within the range of normal explanations tells us that he did this by "depressing his periphery as a prelude to dynamic expansion" — whatever that may mean. He was also buried six feet deep in California and emerged unhurt, though we are not told by what dynamic expansion the feat was achieved.

In Leeds he was coopered up in a cask by the brewers, but he was soon out. At Krupps' he defied the whole management, who constructed a special set of fetters for his behoof. They had no better luck than the others. He was put into the Siberian convict van at Moscow, but walked straight out of it. On December 2nd, 1906, he leaped from the Old Belle Isle Bridge at Detroit heavily handcuffed, and released himself under icy water, which would paralyse any man’s limbs, On August 26th, 1907, he was thrown into San Francisco Bay with his hands tied behind his back and seventy-five pounds of ball and chain attached to his body. He was none the worse. He escaped from a padlocked United States mail-bag, as many a parcel has done before him. Finally, he was manacled, tied up in a box, and dropped into the East River at New York, but lived to tell the tale.

Whatever may have been the true source of Houdini’s powers — and I am not prepared to be dogmatic upon the point — I am very sure that the explanations of his fellow-conjurers do not always meet the case. Thus we have Mr. Harry Kellock, to whose book I am indebted for much supplementary information, talking persuasively about the magician’s skill with a pick-lock. He had told reporters that his method was to have a small instrument which was concealed by surgeon’s plaster upon the sole of his foot. This would certainly seem to be very useful when he was lowered in a coffin to the bottom of the sea!

Of course, I am aware that Houdini really was a very skilful conjurer. All that could be known in that direction he knew. Thus he confused the public mind by mixing up things which were dimly within their comprehension with things which were beyond anyone’s comprehension. I am aware also that there is a box trick, and that there is a normal handcuff and bag trick. But these are not in the same class with Houdini’s work. I will believe they are when I see one of these other gentlemen thrown in a box off London Bridge. One poor man in America actually believed these explanations, and on the strength of them jumped in a weighted packing-case into a river in the Middle West; and one did so in Germany. They are there yet!

To show the difference between Houdini’s methods and those by which the box trick is done by other conjurers, I will give a description of the latter by one who has all normal tricks at his finger-ends. He says:

“While the air-holes are there for ventilation they are there for another purpose, and that is that the man inside may get a catch or grip of that particular board. The first thing that is done by the man inside is to put his back up against the side next the audience and with his feet force off the board with the air-holes in it. After freeing this board, with a bit of string he lowers this board to the floor. If any obstruction comes in the way in the shape of a nail which he cannot force with his concealed lever and hammer, he cuts the nail with a fine saw. Thus his escape. The ropes are only a blind, as quite sufficient room can be got to get out between ropes. The procedure to close up again is simple. The iron nails are placed back upon the holes from which they were forced and squeezed in and knocked with a leather-covered hammer."

Such is the usual technique as described by an expert. Does anyone believe that all this could be done as I have seen Houdini do it in a little over a minute, or could one imagine it being carried out at the bottom of a river? I contend that Houdini's performance was on an utterly different plane, and that it is an outrage against common sense to think otherwise.

I will now take a single case of Houdini's powers, and of the sort of thing that he would say, in order to show the reader what he is up against if he means to maintain that these tricks had no abnormal element. The description is by my friend, Captain Bartlett, himself a man of many accomplishments, psychic and otherwise. In the course of their conversation he said to his guest:

"'How about your box trick?'

"Instantly his expression changed. The sparkle left his eyes and his face looked drawn and haggard. 'I cannot tell you,' he said, in a low, tense voice. 'I don't know myself, and, what is more, I have always a dread lest I should fail, and then I would not live. I have promised Mrs. Houdini to give up the box trick at the end of the season, for she makes herself ill with anxiety, and for myself I shall be relieved too.'

"He stooped to stroke our cats, and to our amazement they fled from the room with their tails in the air, and for some minutes they dashed wildly up and down stairs, scattering the mats in all directions.

"After this we had an earnest talk on psychic phenomena, and he told me of strange happenings to himself, especially at the grave of his mother, to whom he was deeply attached.

"The trunk-makers of Bristol had made a challenge box from which he was billed to escape that evening. He begged me to be with him, explaining that he liked the support of a sensitive, more especially as he was feeling anxious.

"I willingly agreed, the more especially as he allowed me to bring a very observant friend, a civil engineer of repute.

"The box was made of inch planking, tongued and grooved, with double thickness at the ends. It was nailed herring-bone fashion, three-inch nails, three inches apart. Several auger holes were made at one end to admit air, and the whole thing was carefully and solidly finished. It was, as I have said, a challenge box, yet we thoroughly overhauled it and were satisfied that it contained no tricks.

“Houdini lay down in it, while the challengers climbed to the platform and nailed down the heavy top again, using three-inch nails as before. The box was then tightly roped, three men pulling on the cords. Meanwhile, Houdini inside the box called out that it was very hot, and, putting a finger through an air-hole, waggled it furiously.

“The box was then enclosed by a tent consisting of brass rods covered by a silken canopy.

“In ninety-five seconds Houdini was standing before his audience, breathless, and with his shirt in tatters. The box-makers, after careful examination, in which we joined, declared that both box and roping were intact.

“Now, was Houdini’s statement that he never knew how he got out of the box a mere blind, or did he employ supernormal forces and dematerialise? If I put a beetle in a bottle, hermetically sealed, and that beetle makes its escape, I, being only an ordinary human, and not a magician, can only conclude that either the beetle has broken the laws of matter, or that it possesses secrets that I should call supernormal.”

I would also ask the reader to consider the following account by the late Mr. Hewat Mackenzie, one of the most experienced psychical researchers in the world. In his book, *Spirit Intercourse* (p. 86), he says:

“A small iron tank filled with water was deposited on the stage, and in it Houdini was placed, the water completely covering his body. Over this was placed an iron lid with three hasps and staples, and these were securely locked. The body was then completely dematerialised within this tank in one and a half minutes, while the author stood immediately over it. Without disturbing any of the locks Houdini was transferred from the tank direct to the back of the stage front, dripping with water and attired in the blue jersey-suit in which he entered the tank. From the time that he entered it to the time that he came to the front only one and a half minutes had elapsed.

“While the author stood near the tank during the dematerialisation process a great loss of physical energy was felt by him, such as is usually felt by sitters in materialising séances who have a good stock of vital energy, as in such phenomena a large amount of energy is required.... This startling manifestation of one of Nature’s profoundest miracles was probably regarded by most of the audience as a very clever trick.”

In other words, in Mr. Mackenzie's opinion the audience was successfully bluffed by the commercialisation of psychic power. It is remarkable and most suggestive that in this case, as in the Bristol one already given, Houdini was anxious that some psychic from whom he could draw strength should stand near him.

Can any reasonable man read such an account as this and then dismiss the possibility which I suggest as fantastic? It seems to me that the fantasy lies in refusing its serious consideration.

A point which is worth considering is, that even if we grant that enormous practice and natural advantages might conceivably give a man a facility in one direction which might appear preternatural, these feats of Houdini cover a larger range than could be accounted for by any one aptitude. This consideration becomes stronger still when one sees that his powers really covered the whole field of what we usually associate with physical mediumship in its strongest form, and can be covered so far as I can see by no other explanation whatever.

His friend Mr. Bernard Ernst, a well-known and very level-headed lawyer of New York, told me that on one occasion upon the veranda of his own country house at Long Island, Houdini proposed a séance. When hands were laid upon the table it began to rise up in the air. As Mrs. Houdini was present, Ernst took it for granted at first that the hands or feet were used to produce the effect. On examination, however, in good light he found that this was not so, and that there were no steel rods up the sleeve, which is a fraudulent method occasionally used. The feat appeared to him — and he is himself an experienced conjurer — to be clearly preternatural. Houdini himself rebuked a tendency towards levity upon the part of the company, and treated the matter with great gravity.

Now let us take the case of the séance which he gave to President Roosevelt — a bogus séance according to Houdini. It was on board the *Imperator* in June 1920. It followed the lines of the usual slate phenomenon as practised by many mediums, honest and otherwise. The written question, folded and sealed, is placed between the folding slates, and the answer is found upon one side of the slate when they are opened. Roosevelt wrote the question, "Where was I last Christmas?" folded, sealed in an envelope, and placed it between the slates with his own hand. When the slates were opened a map of the South American journey of Roosevelt was found to be drawn, with the legend "Near the Andes." The President was naturally greatly amazed and Houdini refused to give any explanation, though had it been a mere trick and there was no reason for secrecy, it would have been most natural that he should have explained it to so important a person, in order to show how easily fraudulent mediums can operate.

Long afterwards he did give an explanation, which is so incredible that I would take it as an extreme example of that contempt which Houdini had for the public intelligence, taking it for granted that they would swallow without question anything which he might put before them. To condense a long story which the curious may find on pages 244-6 of Kellock's very readable book, the "explanation" ran thus:

He knew that the President would be aboard and he received advance information about the South American travels from friends on the *Daily Telegraph,* which he made note of in case there should be a séance on board. So far we are on understandable ground. He suggested that such a séance should be held, and had the slates prepared. This also we may pass. He then asked for written questions from the passengers, and himself wrote several, "Where did I spend last Christmas?" which he placed upon the top of the pile. We are still on more or less solid ground, presuming that the passengers were so dense as not to see the change of slates from the one which they examined to the prepared one. But now comes the fatal link in the chain. He claims that, "no telepathy or thought-transference being involved," the President *by pure chance* asked the very question for which these elaborate preparations had been made. People will believe this, and yet accuse Spiritualists of credulity. Can anyone who has the least conception of what is probable or possible accept such an explanation? It is only in psychic and preternatural (not supernatural) regions that such things really do become commonplace.

Again, a friend reports:

"One day a sceptic called upon him. Houdini read the man's hand, prognosticated his future, and pronounced his past from a mere reading of his face, having only been told the day of his birth. This was done with an accuracy and vividness which astonished the subject."

This sounds like possible clairvoyance, but is hardly in the repertoire of the conjurer.

There were many indications that Houdini possessed that psychic sensibility which is the groundwork of mediumship, though it really indicates, in my opinion, an unusual degree of soul power in the subject itself, without necessarily implying any outside assistance. All thought-reading seems to come under this category. On one occasion Pulitzer, the famous proprietor of the *New York World*, had been interested in the telepathic results obtained by Professor Gilbert Murray in England. Houdini dashed in, in his usual impetuous fashion, and claimed that he could duplicate them. A committee assembled in his own house, and put him to the test, they sitting on the ground floor, and he being locked up in a room at the top of the house, with the door guarded. Out of four tests he got three more or less correctly. When asked for an explanation he refused to answer, save to say that it was "scientific trickery." As usual he took it for granted that the Press and public would readily accept his explanation, and experience showed that he was right.

If once the mind is adjusted to the false assumption that psychic powers do not exist, then all reasoning power seems to become atrophied, as is the case in all bigoted religions. As an example it was said, and is said, again and again, "How absurd for Doyle to attribute possible psychic powers to a man who himself denies them!" Is it not perfectly evident that if he did not deny them his occupation would have been gone for ever? What would his brother-magicians have to say to a man who admitted that half his tricks were done by what they would regard as illicit powers? It would be "exit Houdini."

Now, having considered some of Houdini's inexplicable powers, let us turn to his direct relations with Spiritualism.

PART II

In public, as is notorious, he posed as the uncompromising foe of Spiritualism. It is useless to pretend that it was only the fake medium that he was after. We are all out after that scoundrel, and ready to accept any honest help in our search for him. Houdini wrote in the *Christian Register* of July, 1925:

"Tell the people that all I am trying to do is to save them from being tricked in their grief and sorrows, and to persuade them to leave Spiritualism alone and take up some genuine religion."

Thus his attack was a general one upon the whole cult.

But this was not in the least his attitude in private. I suppose that there are few leaders of the movement, and few known mediums, who have not letters of his taking the tone that he was a sympathetic inquirer who needed but a little more to be convinced. His curious mentality caused him to ignore absolutely the experiences of anyone else, but he seemed to be enormously impressed if anything from an outside source came in his own direction. On one occasion he showed me a photograph which he had taken in California. “I believe it to be the only genuine spirit photograph ever taken!” he cried. To my mind, it was a very doubtful one, and one which no sane Spiritualist would have passed for a moment. But, in any case, if his was, as he claimed, genuine, why should he put down all others to fraud? He had another which he showed me with some disgust, but which seemed to me to be capable of a real psychic explanation, however unlikely. The sensitive film had been torn lengthways right down the plate, just as a sharp nail would have done. He assured me that he had put it into the carrier quite intact. It might, of course, have been some singular accident, or it might conceivably have been a sign of the same sort of disapproval, which was a possible explanation of the gravel-throwing in the music-hall of Boston.

His experience with decent mediums was exceedingly limited. He sat several times with Eva during the abortive investigation by the London Psychical Research Society. He wrote to me at the time, saying: “I found it highly interesting.” There was no question of any exposure, and he admitted that he saw ectoplasm both come and go without being able to explain it. I believe that he once — and only once — sat with that great voice medium, Mrs. Wriedt, on which occasion nothing at all occurred, as will happen with all honest mediums, but does not happen with conjurers. There was certainly no talk of any exposure. He never sat with Miss Besinnet, nor with Mrs. Pruden, nor with Jonson of Pasadena, nor with Hope, nor with Mrs. Deane, nor with Evan Powell, nor Phoenix, nor Sloane. He claimed to have exposed P.L.O. Keeler, a medium whom I have heard quoted, but of whom I have no personal experience. Speaking generally, it may be said that his practical experience, save with a class of people whom a decent Spiritualist would neither use nor recommend, was very limited. His theoretical knowledge of the subject was also limited, for though he possessed an excellent library, it was, when I inspected it, neither catalogued nor arranged. I am told that his library was eventually put upon a more satisfactory basis, but I speak of it as I saw it. His book, *A Magician among the Spirits*, is full of errors of fact, and never for a moment did he show any appreciation of the higher religious claims of the movement.

In spite of this very limited basis, he gave the public the impression that his knowledge was profound. To one reporter he said that he had attended ten thousand séances. I pointed out at the time that this would mean one a day for thirty years. His accusations against Spiritualists were equally wild. A man, named Frank Macdowell, committed a peculiarly atrocious murder at Clearwater in Florida. Houdini broadcast the fact that it was due to spirit teaching. Fortunately, a resolute Spiritualist, Mr. Elliot Hammond, went into the matter, and showed clearly that the murderer gave his complete disbelief in life after death to have been at the root of his actions. Spiritualism would have saved him.

I repeat that Houdini's attitude in private was quite different (to) what it was in public. At one time we had him really converted without the slightest intention of causing such a result. It was at Atlantic City, in 1922. He had spoken in a touching manner of his mother, so my wife, who has the great gift of inspired writing — that is, of writing which appears to be quite disconnected from her own mentality — tried if she could get any message for him. It was done at my suggestion, and I well remember that my wife needed much persuasion. We had no sooner assembled in our quiet sitting-room than the power came, and the medium began to write with breathless and extraordinary speed, covering sheet after sheet, which I tore off and threw across to Houdini at the other side of the table. We gathered that it was a moving and impassioned message to her son from the dead mother. He asked a mental question of his mother without speech, and the medium's hand instantly wrote what he admitted to be an answer. Houdini was deeply moved, and there is no question that at the time he entirely accepted it.

When we met him two days later in New York, he said to us: "I have been walking on air ever since." I published the incident in my *American Adventure,* so that he had to explain it away to fit it into his anti-Spiritualistic campaign. The line of criticism which he took was that it could not have been from his mother, since a cross was put upon the top of the paper, and she was a Jewess. If he had cared to inquire we could have shown him that the medium *always* puts a cross on the top of her paper, as being a holy symbol. We consider that such exercises are, in the highest degree, religious. That is a complete answer to the objection.

His second criticism was that the letter was in English. This was plausible, but shows an ignorance of psychic methods. If a medium were in complete trance, it might well be possible to get an unknown tongue through her. Such cases are not very rare; but when the medium is not in trance, but writing by inspiration, it is the flood of thought and of emotion which strikes her, and has to be translated by her in her own vocabulary as best she can. As an illustration, I have notes of a case where two mediums in the same room both got an inspired message at the same moment. They each wrote down the same sense, but the wording was quite different. Thus the second criticism falls to the ground. In any case, one would imagine that he would have nothing but respect and gratitude for one who tried to help him, with no conceivable advantage to herself. No sign of this appears. It is the same queer mental twist which caused him first to take the name of the great Frenchman, and then to write a whole book, *The Unmasking of Houdin*, to prove that he was a fraud.

But there was another very curious and suggestive incident in connection with that sitting at Atlantic City. As Houdini, much moved, rose from the table, he took up the pencil, and, bending to the papers, he said: “I wonder if I could do anything at this!” The pencil moved and he wrote one word. Then he looked up at me and I was amazed, for I saw in his eyes that look, impossible to imitate, which comes to the medium who is under influence. The eyes look at you, and yet you feel that they are not focused upon you. Then I took up the paper. He had written upon it the one word, “Powell.” My friend, Ellis Powell, had just died in England, so the name had a meaning. “Why, Houdini,” I cried, “Saul is among the prophets! You are a medium.” Houdini had a poker-face and gave nothing away as a rule, but he seemed to me to be disconcerted by my remark. He muttered something about knowing a man called “Powell” down in Texas, though he failed to invent any reason why that particular man should come back at that particular moment. Then, gathering up the papers, he hurried from the room. It is probable that at that moment I had surprised the master secret of his life — a secret which even those who were nearest to him had never quite understood. Each fact alone may be capable of explanation, but when a dozen facts all point in the same direction, then surely there is a case to answer.

I have said that the Houdini mentality was the most obscure that I have ever known. Consider this manifestation of it. My wife and I were, as I have shown, endeavouring to help him, with no possible motive save to give him such consolation as we could, since he was always saying that he wished to get in touch with his mother. Such consolation has often been given to others. Even if we suppose, for argument’s sake, that we were mistaken in our views, we were, as he often admits, in dead earnest. Then, as we rose, he wrote down the name Powell, which meant much to me. If it was not written under psychic influence, why should he write anything at all, since no one asked him to do so? He saw the difficulty when he had to explain it away, so in his book he says that it was a “deliberate mystification” upon his part, and that he wrote it entirely of his own volition. Thus by his own showing, while we were honest with him, he was playing what I will charitably describe as a practical joke upon us. Is it any wonder that we look back at the incident with some bitterness? He does not attempt to explain how it was that out of all his friends the name that he wrote was the very one which might well have wished to come through to me. There is a limit to coincidence.

It is a curious fact that neither my wife nor I knew what was in the mother’s letter until I read it in his book. It was written so swiftly that the medium, in her half-unconscious state, could at best only have a very vague idea of its purport, while I never even glanced at it. Now that I read it, it seems to me to be a very beautiful letter, full of love and of longing. As I have explained, the thoughts are given and are largely translated by the medium. Therefore, there are some sentences in which I can recognise my wife’s style of expression, but the greater part of it is far more fervid — one might almost say more Oriental — than anything I have known my wife do. Here is a short extract:

“Oh, my darling, my darling, thank God at last I am through. I’ve tried, oh, so often. Now I am happy. Of course, I want to talk to my boy, my own beloved boy.... My only shadow has been that my beloved one has not known how often I have been with him all the while.... I want him only to know that — that — I have bridged the gulf — that is what I wanted — oh, so much. Now I can rest in peace.”

It was a long and very moving message and bore every internal sign of being genuine. There is no question at all in my mind that Houdini was greatly shaken at the time and for some days afterwards. His objections were all afterthoughts in order to save the situation.

In the account of the matter which Houdini gave, he lays stress upon the fact that Mrs. Houdini had spoken to my wife the night before as to Houdini’s affairs, with many details as to his habits when with his mother. Now if the message had really come from my wife’s subconscious self I think it is certain that some of this information would have come through. I have known this to happen in the case of perfectly honest mediums and for this reason it is better never to tell a medium anything at all before a séance. A blank slate is the best to write upon. In the long message, however, which my wife gave there was no trace at all of the knowledge which she had normally gained, and which could have been used so effectively if anyone had been so wicked as to play a trick. This is, I think, a very clear sign that the message was not subconscious but did really come from the source it claimed. Houdini's objection that the mother made no mention of the fact that it was her own birthday has no relevancy. What are birthdays on the other side? It is the death day which is the real birthday. In her rush of joy and emotion why should she pause to mention such a fact? The method in which Houdini tried to explain away, minimize and contort our attempt at consolation, which was given entirely at his own urgent request and against my wife's desire, has left a deplorable shadow in my mind which made some alteration in my feelings towards him. Conscious as I was of his many excellent and wonderful qualities, such incidents took the edge off my sympathies, and put a strain upon our friendship.

When my friend, the late Miss Scatcherd, was in New York, some years ago, she saw a good deal of Houdini, and got, I fancy, as nearly into his complete confidence as anyone could do. To her, as to me, he showed no animosity to psychic things, but, on the contrary, he was eager to show her the one and only true medium whom he had discovered in America. Miss Scatcherd was not, I gather, much impressed by his find, having known many better ones. She did not fail, however, to point out to him that in admitting the one medium he had really given away his whole case, and agreed that the Spiritualists had a solid foundation for their cult. She then accused him of being a powerful medium himself, for she was a strong sensitive, and all her psychic powers told her that he was the same. She also scolded him in her charming, good-natured way for having behaved shamefully in the "Margery" case, which he did not deny. The climax came, however, when, far out on the Atlantic, she received the following wireless message:

"From a sensitive to a sensitive. Wishing you a pleasant voyage. — Houdini."

A sensitive is a medium, and what is the logic of denouncing all mediums as frauds from the public platforms, and at the same time declaring in a telegram that you are one yourself?

Let us now follow a fresh line of thought. There can be no question at all, to anyone who has really weighed the facts, that Ira Davenport was a true medium. Apart from the evidence of thousands of witnesses, it is self-evident that he could at any time, by announcing himself and his brother as conjurers, and doing his unique performances as tricks, have won fame and fortune. This would seem a dreadful thing to do from the point of view of a good Spiritualist, and the Davenports went to the last possible limit by leaving the source of their powers to the audience to determine. Houdini has endeavoured to take advantage of this and to make out that Ira admitted in his old age that his feats were tricks. To clear away such an idea, I append the following letter, written by Ira in 1868 to The Banner of Light:

"It is singular that any individual, sceptic or Spiritualist, could believe such statements after fourteen years of the most bitter persecution, culminating in the riots of Liverpool, Huddersfield, and Leeds, where our lives were placed in imminent peril by the fury of brutal mobs, our property destroyed, all because we would not renounce Spiritualism and declare ourselves jugglers when threatened by the mob and urged to do so. In conclusion, we denounce all such statements as base falsehoods."

We happen to be particularly well informed about the Davenports, for, apart from long statements from many well-known people who examined them, there are three books by people who knew them well, and who could not possibly have been deceived had they been swindlers. The smaller book, by Orrin Abbott, covers the early days, and the author tells how he was intimate with the brothers when they were little boys, and how at that time he had every opportunity of observing and testing their wonderful powers. These seem, as is often the case with mediums, to have been stronger in childhood than in later life, the power of levitation being one which Abbott witnessed, but which is not recorded of them elsewhere. The second and fullest is Dr. Nicol's biography, while the third and most valuable is found in the *Supramundane Facts* of the Rev. J.B. Ferguson. Ferguson was a man of very high character, with a notable record behind him, and he travelled with the Davenports during their tour in England. He was with them at all hours of the day and night, and he has left it on record that their experiences when in private were quite as wonderful as anything that the public ever saw. It is notable that these well-attested feats included not only the instant freedom from ropes, however carefully fastened and sealed by the spectators, but also, on occasion, the freedom from handcuffs or twisted wire, and the power of opening locked doors. In a word, the Davenport powers were the Houdini powers, save that the latter had physical strength and agility which may have helped him to extend them.

My argument now begins to emerge. If it be true that the Davenports were real mediums (and let the inquirer really read their record before he denies it),[Footnote: It will be found epitomized in my *History of Spiritualism* (Cassell)] and if Houdini produced exactly similar results, which have in each case been inexplicable to their contemporaries, then is it conceivable that they were produced in entirely different ways? If Ira Davenport was a medium, then there is a strong primâ facie case that Houdini was a medium too. Now we come upon some explanation of the cryptic saying of the rabbi by the graveside: “He possessed a wondrous power that he never understood, and which he never revealed to anyone in life.” What could that power be, save what we have called the power of the medium?

A singular incident is narrated by Mrs. Houdini and is incorporated in Mr. Kellock’s biography. Shortly after his marriage, Houdini took his girl wife and his brother to a lonely place, where he halted them upon a bridge at midnight. When the hour came he made them both raise their hands in the air and said to them, “Beatrice, Dash, raise your hands to heaven and swear that both of you will be true to me. Never betray me in any way, so help you God!” I would not put too much stress upon this incident. It may have been the considered act of one who already had some strange and secret knowledge which he foresaw might be used in the future and might be surprised by those around him.

I would not, in probing this difficult problem, pass too lightly over the considered words of the rabbi, that he had a wondrous power and did not himself understand it. This phrase fits very exactly into what has been stated to me by those who were nearest to him in life. “If it was so, he did not know it,” they have answered when I hinted at my conclusions. It seems hard to comprehend, and yet there may be something in this view. He was not a clear thinker, and he had no logical process in his mind. That surely is evident when in the same breath he denies all mediumship and claims to have discovered the greatest medium in America; or when he scoffs at spirit pictures but brings me a very indifferent one which he had taken himself. Imagine that such a man finds himself one minute inside a box; there is an interval of semi-trance during which his mind is filled with a vague feeling of confused effort, and then he finds himself outside the box. There is no obvious intervention of spirits, or of any outside force, but it just happens so. He has the same power in emerging from fetters, but he has no sort of philosophy by which he can explain such things. If we could imagine such a very strange and unlikely state of things as that, it would, at least, have the merit that it would give some sort of honest and rational explanation of a good deal which at present is dark. It is no unusual thing for a medium to fail to understand his own results, but it would certainly seem almost incredible that anyone could have such results for many years and never correlate them with the experience of others. I, as his former friend, would welcome such an explanation if it could be sustained.

But how does the good rabbi know that he did not understand it? Only one man could say with authority, but he has passed away with closed lips, leaving, however, many signs behind for those who have the wit to follow them. There is one thing certain, and that is that the fate of the Davenports must have been a perpetual warning to Houdirii. They had been ruined and hunted off the stage because it was thought that their claim was psychic. If his powers were to be drawn from that source, and if he were to avoid a similar fate, then his first and fundamental law must be that it be camouflaged in every possible way, and that no one at all should know his secret. If this be granted, a great many disconnected points become at once a connected whole. We see what he meant when he said that his own wife did not know how he produced his effects. We understand the voice of which he spoke. We comprehend dimly the unknown power of the rabbi. We can even imagine that a campaign against mediums, fortified by the knowledge that false mediums do exist, would be an excellent smoke-screen, though probably he had never thought out what view the unseen powers might take of suctfa transaction, any more than he calculated upon the interposition of Walter in the case of the conspiracy against the Crandons. I cannot say that all this is certain. I can only say that it covers the facts as I know them.

Of course, I know that he had a trick-box. I know also who constructed it, and the large amount that he paid for it. When I know also that he could do his escapes equally well in any local box, I am not inclined to attach much importance to the matter. He was a very astute man, and what he did he would do thoroughly, but he became too careless in his methods as he found he could do them with impunity.

Houdini is curiously contradictory in his account of the methods of Davenport. In his book *A Magician among the Spirits*, he says:

"Their method of releasing themselves was simple. When one extended his feet the other drew his in, thus securing slack enough in the wrist rope to permit working their hands out of the loops. The second brother was released by reversing the action,"

But, as I have shown, in a letter to me he said:

"I know for a positive fact that it was not essential for them to release the bonds in order to obtain manifestations."

So the previous explanation would seem to have been a fake in order to conceal the real one.

In another letter he says:

"I am afraid I cannot say that all of their work was accomplished by spirits."

The "all" is suggestive. I would be the last to suggest that all of Davenport's or indeed that all of Houdini's work could be due to spirits. For that matter, we have to remember that we are ourselves spirits here and now, and that a man may very well be producing psychic effects without going beyond his own organism. It is in this sense that I suspect the Houdini results as being psychic, and I do not at all insist upon the interposition of outside forces.. The two things are not far apart, however, and very easily slide into each other. There is, I hold, the medium's use of his own power, there is a vague borderland, and there is a wide world beyond where his power is used by forces outside himself. I am convinced, for example, that raps may be produced voluntarily by a medium by a psychic effort, and I am equally convinced that at another stage these same raps may be used for purposes quite beyond his knowledge or control.

Is it possible for a man to be a very powerful medium all his life, to use that power continually, and yet never to realise that the gifts he is using are those which the world calls mediumship? If that be indeed possible, then we have a solution of the Houdini enigma. One who knew him well and worked with him often wrote to me as follows:

"Often he would get a difficult lock. I would stand by the cabinet and hear him say: 'This is beyond me.' After many minutes, when the audience became restless, I would say, 'If there is anything in this belief in Spiritism why don't you call on them to assist you?' And before many minutes had passed Houdini had mastered the lock. He never attributed this to psychic help. He just knew that that particular instrument was the one to open that lock, and so he did all his tricks."

It is only fair to state, however, that this correspondent, who was in a good position to know, would not admit the mediumship. And yet if "that particular instrument" was, as stated, an appeal to spirits, it seems difficult to claim that the result was natural.

I would not limit my hypothesis to the idea that it was only when he met the Davenports that he first developed these strange powers. He seems only to have met Ira in 1909, and he had certainly done many marvellous feats himself before then. But the history and object-lesson of the Davenports must have been well known to him, and have shown him what to avoid.

In putting forward such a view as I have here expressed it is natural that a critic should demand that I should show that similar results to those of Houdini have actually been produced by psychic power. Of this there can be no possible doubt upon the part of anyone who has studied the subject. I have already mentioned the case of the Davenports who were so badly treated by the English mob, and so maligned by Maskelyne and other English conjurers who produced a feeble imitation of their results and called it an exposure. They freed themselves with the greatest ease from metal bands as well as from the tightest ligatures. Such results can only be obtained by the passage of matter through matter — of the wrist for example through the metal — and though such a thing may seem inconceivable to the prosaic scientist of to-day, he would have pronounced wireless or flying to be equally impossible a generation or so in the past. We seem to need no spirit intervention here, but to be within the region of the latent powers of the human organism in peculiarly constituted individuals. There is, I believe, a constructive and a destructive power in thought alone which is akin to that "faith which moves mountains." What sort of a vibration it can be which is shot out from the human brain and separates for a moment the molecules of that solid object towards which it is directed I do not know, but the results are clear and perhaps in the near future the cause may become equally so. From personal observation I have assured myself that mediums in sealed bonds can cast those bonds, walk about the room, and be found later with the sealed bonds as before. If they could get out by a trick I see no way in which they could get back. I am forced, therefore, to predicate the existence of such a dematerialising and reconstructing force, which would amply cover most of the phenomena both of the Davenports and of Houdini. Such a force was demonstrated also in the experiments which were made with Slade by Zöllner and three other German professors, and described by him in his *Transcendental Physics*. In this book many instances, closely observed, of the passage of matter through matter were recorded, accompanied by the interesting observation that the phenomenon was accompanied often by heat and a strong smell of burning.[Footnote: *Transcendental Physics*, by Prof. Zöllner (English translation) p.113] Bellachini, the Court conjurer, deposed that the results he saw were out of the region of conjuring altogether.[Footnote: *Vide* appendix of the above book.] But suppose that Slade had gone round the world doing such things and allowing people to believe that they were tricks, while confusing the public by mixing them up with real tricks, would not his position have been very close to that of Houdini? We come, however, upon a more advanced class of phenomenon when we consider the case of the passage of a human body through a solid obstacle and its reassembly on the other side. If I can show that such cases have upon most unquestionable evidence occurred then I shall have got a possible line upon Houdini's performance. In the April number of *Psychic Science* there is the report by an American lady, Mrs. Hack, of the phenomena at a circle sitting in the Castle Millesimo, which is near Genoa. Mrs. Hack was herself present, as were the well-known Professor Bozzano, and other first-class witnesses. The Marquis Centurione Scotto, the owner of the castle, was one of the company. Suddenly in the midst of the proceedings he vanished from his chair. His friends were horrified. They searched the room and the castle, but he was gone. Finally, after hours of agitation he was found in a deep trance in an outhouse, which was separated by several locked doors from the main building. He was led back; and had no recollection how he had got there. Such in a few words is the gist of a case which was closely observed and fully reported. In it a human body is passed through several solid obstacles and reassembled on the other side. How does this differ from the passage of Houdini's body through wooden planks, brick walls, paper bags, glass tanks, or whatever else was used to confine him?[Footnote: These remarkable experiences are more fully described in Mrs. Hack's *Modern Psychic Mysteries* (Rider).]

In Mr. Campbell Holms' book, *The Facts of Psychic Science*, which is, and will be always, a most exact and valuable book of reference, there are a number of cases given where people have been transported through solid objects. Inexperienced and foolish people may jeer, but they will find it easier to do so than to refute the evidence. For example, upon June 3rd, 1871, Mrs. Guppy was floated from her own house in Highbury, and appeared upon the table of a room at 61 Lambs Conduit Street, where a séance was being held behind locked doors. A document was signed by the eleven sitters to testify to the fact and they had no possible object in perjuring themselves about the matter. Mrs. Guppy said that the last thing she could remember was sitting with her friend Miss Neyland. That lady deposed that Mrs. Guppy had suddenly vanished from her sight. Four of the sitters accompanied Mrs. Guppy home and heard what her friend had to say. It is difficult to find any flaw in such evidence and it would certainly have been conclusive in a court of law had it been a criminal case. But surely such a transposition is more remarkable than any of Houdini's, and had she done similar things in public her reputation would have been similar to his own.

In another case, that of Mr. Henderson, a photographer, quoted by Mr. Campbell Holms and described in the *Spiritual Magazine* of 1874 (p. 22), no less than ten persons saw him vanish from a room, while nine others deposed to his arrival almost instantaneously at a point more than a mile distant. The idea that these nineteen witnesses can be disregarded is surely an impossible one, and yet here again we have evidence of the possibility by psychic means of passing a human body through solid obstacles by a process of dematerialisation and reassembly. I could quote a number of other cases, but the sum of it all is that Houdini's exploits, which are inexplicable in any other way, come into line at once if we compare them with other well-attested examples of psychic power. When one adds this evidence to the various other indications of similar powers which I have assembled here, the case seems to me to be greatly strengthened.

That Houdini's performances were on a different level from those of other magicians is shown by the fact that men who took a pride in fathoming such problems, and who were usually successful, were utterly foiled in their attempts to explain them in any reasonable way. Thus Mr. H. L. Adam, an English journalist who is an expert in such matters, writes to me that he could understand much that was done by Maskelyne and others, but

"I have never been able to discover anything about Houdini's tricks. Why? I have stood quite near him on the stage during the performances of many of his tricks, but it was like looking at a brick wall, so impenetrable were they. I remember on one occasion, while Houdini was waiting at the side of the stage ready for his ‘turn,’ he sat in a chair, threw his head back, closed his eyes, and appeared plunged in the profoundest meditations. A few moments before he had been talking confidentially to me. After the lapse of perhaps ten minutes, he ‘came to’ and continued his conversation with me as though nothing had intervened.”

“Houdini once suggested to me that he should, by way of advertisement, profess to ‘give away’ his handcuff trick, which I was to publish. But it struck me that the volunteered so-called explanation, which included a hidden key, was too feeble to be convincing, and it was never developed. This was the nearest approach he ever came to discussing any of his secrets with me.”

Here again in that trance-like condition before a performance we seem to get a glimpse of some psychic influence.

Houdini continually admitted that there were psychic things which he could not understand. I would say in parenthesis that one may be a strong medium oneself and yet have very small understanding of other people’s phenomena. That was conspicuous in the case of D. D. Home. Here is a Houdini story told by Don Ryan[Footnote: *New York American*, February 11th, 1928.]:

“Houdini had gone in a spiritualist church in Los Angeles, taking a camera-man, who carried a camera concealed. They made themselves inconspicuous till the witching hour at which the ghost was accustomed to walk. The hour came and with it the spirit. The leader of the group was holding conversation with the invisible spirit when the camera was trained on the spot without the knowledge of anybody save Houdini and his photographer.

“The developed plate which Houdini showed me revealed a well-defined transparent human figure draped in white.

“‘I can’t explain it and I don’t know what to think of it,’ said Houdini that day, and I could see that the thing had made a decided impression on him.

“‘It’s no more astonishing than your staying under water for an hour and a half in a lead-lined coffin,’ I told him.

“‘Ah,’ replied Houdini,’ but I know how that is done.’”

The attempts upon the part of his brother-magicians to give some sort of explanation of Houdini’s feats only serve to deepen the mystery. Mr.

Howard Thurston, for whose opinion I have respect, for he seemed to me to be the only American conjurer who had some real accurate knowledge of psychic matters, says that his feats all come within the power of advanced conjuring. I know that feats with the same name do so, but I venture to express the opinion that such feats as Houdini did have never been explained and are in an altogether different class. So too, Mr. Will Goldston, who is well known and respected as an authority on conjuring, has actually described in a book how they are done. Here again he seems to me to be describing the accepted method, which by no means covers Houdini's results. To show the inadequacy of Mr. Goldston's "explanations"[Footnote: *Sunday Express*, November 7th, 1926.] he says in talking of the escape under water, "Without giving away his secrets I may say that he was always practically out of the box before it reached the water." Considering that the screwed and corded box was in full sight of hundreds of spectators as it sank beneath the waves, it is difficult to accept such a solution as this. I admit that I am at a disadvantage when opposed to the technical knowledge of such men as Goldston and Thurston, but on the other hand I have my own technical and expert knowledge of psychic possibilities, and I put up a case for consideration and discussion.

He had, as already stated, a sitting with the medium Eva, and under the stringent and very deterrent conditions imposed by the London Psychical Research Society, which will be found described in their unsatisfactory and self-contradictory report, he did seem to have made acquaintance with ectoplasm in its very humblest form. He says in a letter to me written the next morning (June 22nd, 1920):

"They made Eva drink a cup of coffee and eat some cake (I presume to fill her up with some food-stuff), and after she had been sewn into the tights, and a net over her face, she manifested.

1. "Some froth-like substance, inside of net, 'twas long, about five inches, she said it was elevated, but none of us four watchers saw it 'elevate.'

2. "A white plaster-looking affair over her right eye.

3. "Something that looked like a small face, say four inches in circumference. Was terra-cotta coloured, and Dingwall, who held her hands, had the best look at the 'object.'

4. "Some substance, froth-like, exuding from her nose, and Baggeley and Fielding say it protrudes from her nose, but Dingwall and I are positive that

it was inside of net and was not extending from her nose, as I had the best view from two different places I deliberately took advantage to see just what it was.

5. “Medium asked permission to remove something in her mouth, show her hands empty, and took out what appeared to be a rubberish substance, which she disengaged, showed us plainly, we held the electric torch, all saw it plainly, when presto! it vanished. It was a surprise effect indeed! The séance started at 7.30 and lasted past midnight.

“We went over the notes, and no doubt you will get a full report. I found it highly interesting.”

It will be found from these extracts that when faced with facts his attitude was very different from what his public utterances would lead one to expect.Be his mystery what it may, Houdini was one of the most remarkable men of whom we have any record, and he will live in history with such personalities as Cagliostro, the Chevalier D’Eon, and other strange characters. He had many outstanding qualities, and the world is the poorer for his loss. As matters stand, no one can say positively and finally that his powers were abnormal, but the reader will, I hope, agree with me that there is a case to be answered.

II

THE SHADOWS ON THE SCREEN

There is nothing more wonderful, more incredible, and at the same time, as it seems to me, more certain, than that past events may leave a record upon our surroundings which is capable of making itself felt, heard, or seen for a long time afterwards. I have put the impressions in the order of their frequency, for it is more common to feel the past than to hear it and more common to hear it than to see it. Houses which are haunted by vague noises are more common than those which possess apparitions, and families have been persecuted for years by poltergeists who have never once caught a glimpse of their tormentors.

A sensitive mind is easily affected in any place where there has been recent trouble. A lady of my acquaintance called recently upon the matron of a hospital and found that she was not in her room. “Mrs. Dodson has gone out,” said the nurse. “Has she had bad news?” “Yes, she has just had a wire that her husband is very ill.” How did my friend know that there had been bad news? She felt it by a sinking of her own heart as she entered the room, before the nurse had arrived. “Telepathy!” says the parrot. Well, if telepathy can be stretched to mean that a thought or emotion can not only be flashed from brain to brain, but that it can remain stationary for an hour and then impress itself upon any sensitive who approached it, then I will not quarrel with the word. But if for an hour why not for a year, and if for a year why not for a century? There is a record on the etheric screen so that it may retain indefinitely some intimate and lasting change which marks and can even faintly reproduce the emotion which a human being has endured within it.

I had a friend who lived in a century-old house. His wife, who was sensitive, was continually aware of a distinct push when she came down the stairs, always occurring upon the same step. Afterwards it was discovered that an old lady who had formerly lived in the house received a playful push from some frolicsome child, and lost her balance, falling down the stairs. It is not necessary to believe that some hobgoblin lingered upon that stair continually repeating the fatal action. The probable explanation seems to be that the startled mind of the old woman as she felt herself falling left some permanent effect behind it which could still be discerned in this strange fashion.

But on what could an impression be left? An impression of such a nature becomes a material thing and implies a material nexus, however subtle. So far as we know there are only two things there, the air and the ether. The air is a mobile thing and could not carry a permanent impression. But is the ether a mobile thing? It is pictured as a most delicate medium with vibrating currents flowing in it, but it seems to me that a most tenuous jelly with quivers and thrills would be a closer analogy. We could conceive the whole material universe embedded in and interpenetrated by this subtle material, which would not necessarily change its position since it is too fine for wind or any coarser material to influence it. I feel that I am rushing in where even Lodges fear to tread, but if it should prove to be as I suggest then we should have that permanent screen on which shadows are thrown. The block of ether upon the stairs is the same that it always was, and so conveys the impression from the past.

Invisible air records of this sort would explain many things which are now inexplicable. Men of strong nerve have been known to be terrified in certain localities without being able to give any reason. Some horror of the past, unseen by their eyes, may still have impressed their senses. One does not need to be very psychic to get the same result upon an old battlefield. I am by no means psychic myself, and yet I am conscious, quite apart from imagination, of a curious effect, almost a darkening of the landscape with a marked sense of heaviness, when I am on an old battlefield. I have been particularly conscious of it on the scenes of Hastings and Culloden, two fights where great causes were finally destroyed and where extreme bitterness may well have filled the hearts of the conquered. The shadow still remains. A more familiar example of the same faculty is the gloom which gathers over the mind of even an average person upon entering certain houses. The most rabid agitator need not envy our nobility their stately old castles, for it is happier to spend one’s life in the simplest cottage, uncontaminated by psychic disturbance, than to live in the grandest mansion which still preserves the gloomy taints that hang about rooms once perhaps the scene of cruelty or other vices.

If a sensitive is able to feel some record of a past event, then there is evidence that by an extension of this process one who is still more sensitive would actually see the person who left the impression. That it is the actual person in spirit is in most cases utterly incredible to me. That the victim of some century-old villainy should still in her ancient garments frequent in person the scene of her former martyrdom is, indeed, hard to believe. It is more credible, little as we understand the details, that some thought-form is shed and remains visible, at the spot where great mental agony has been endured. “How” and “why” are questions which will be solved by our descendants. If we could conceive that we have form within form like the skins of an onion, that the outer skin should peel off under the influence of emotion and continue a mechanical existence at that spot while the rest of the organism passed on and never even missed it, such a supposition, farcical as it appears, would match the recorded facts better than anything else I know. Each fresh discarded skin of the onion would be a fresh thought-form, and our track through life would be marked in its more emotional crises by a long trail of such forms. Grotesque as the idea may seem, I can confidently say that the true explanation when it arrives will prove to be not less so.

Let us now take some definite examples where this thought-form of the past has manifested itself. I do not know a better case than that which is recorded by the late Miss Goodrich-Freer, a lady who combined a steady nerve and cool judgment with a temperament which was conservative to the point of incredulity. She slept in a room in Hampton Court Palace which had a record of haunting, and she tells us very clearly what occurred. No unprejudiced person could possibly read the original narrative without being absolutely convinced that the facts were even as stated.

It was a small bedroom without curtains, with one door close by the bed. It is characteristic of the lady that she spent her vigil — she had come in the hope of seeing the apparition — by reading Lord Farrer’s article, “Shall we degrade our standard of value?” In spite of the reading, or possibly on account of it, she fell asleep, and was awakened some hours later by sounds of movement. It was quite dark, and some detaining force seemed to prevent her from reaching for the matches. A question received no reply. Suddenly there appeared a soft point of light in the gloom, which glowed and spread, until it became the figure of a tall, slight woman, moving slowly across the room. She stopped at the farther side and the observer was able to get a clear view of her profile. “Her face was insipidly pretty, that of a woman from thirty to thirty-five years of age, her figure slight, her dress of a dark soft material, having a full skirt and broad sash or waistband tied high up, a crossed or draped kerchief over the shoulders, sleeves which I noticed fitted very tight below the elbow, and hair which was dressed so as not to lie flat on the head.” A second question addressed to this figure produced no effect. She raised her thin white hands, sank upon her knees, buried her face in the palms, and appeared to pray. Then the light went out and the scene was over. The impression left upon the observer’s mind by the action and attitude was that of reproach, and yet of gentle resignation. Her own nerves were so entirely unaffected by the incident that she has left it on record that she spent part of the remainder of the night in reading Myers’ *Drift of Psychical Research*. Such an experience, and it is one of a very numerous class, can hardly be explained rationally upon any spiritual or upon any physical basis. Granting the fact, and there is no sane alternative but to grant it, we cannot conceive that this unfortunate woman has really for a century or more occupied herself in walking across a room in which some great trouble may have befallen her in her earth-life. From her appearance one would judge that she was more sinned against than sinning. Why, then, should any just dispensation condemn her to so strange, monotonous, and useless a fate? If we can conceive, however, that it is some shadow of herself which was detached in old days of trouble, and still lingers, then certainly the matter becomes more clear, if she herself is happy elsewhere. Such a shadow, like most psychic phenomena, might well seem luminous to one who, like Miss Goodrich-Freer, had herself some clairvoyant gifts. If you ask, however, why such a thought-form should only come at certain hours, I am compelled to answer that I do not know.

A similar first-hand example may be drawn from Mrs. Tweedale’s book, *Ghosts I Have Seen*, which, under its popular title, contains a most extraordinary record of actual first-hand psychic experiences. Mrs. Tweedale is an admirable witness, for she, like Miss Goodrich-Freer, is herself clairvoyante, and yet retains a very sane and critical judgment, while her personal reputation and position give us every confidence in her statements. Materialists will never fairly face the obvious alternative that such first-hand accounts either mean that a person of honour has suddenly burst into a perfect orgy of objectless lying, or else that the statements are true. When a clairvoyante can clearly describe her own experiences the book becomes of great value, and I would only name Turvey’s *Beginnings of Seership* among the more recent works as equalling Mrs. Tweedale’s in personal knowledge.

The writer at one time lived in an old house in the West End of London. It was a winter night, and she was lying half asleep when she heard a sound as of the crackling of parchment, and opening her eyes she saw a man seated in a chair in front of the fire. He was dressed in a uniform reminiscent of Nelson’s days, with brass buttons, wore powdered hair with a black bow, and was staring rigidly into the glow, while he held crumpled up in his right hand some sort of document. He was a stately and handsome figure. For some hours he sat there, the fire gleaming, when it spurted up, upon the buckles and buttons of his dress. Finally, in the small hours of the morning he vanished gradually away. Several times later the lady saw the same apparition, and it might well be argued that it was constantly there, but that its perception depended upon the condition of the clairvoyante. Finally some religious exorcism was performed in the room and the vision was not seen again.

This case clearly fits itself into the hypothesis advanced here, of a form-picture being thrown out at a time of emotion. The parchment document suggests a will or some other paper of importance which the officer has prepared or received, but which in either case may have caused him so much mental stress as he brooded over it in front of the fire that he threw this permanent record upon the screen of time. The accompaniment of appropriate sound is very general in such cases. Difficult as my hypothesis may seem, we have to remember that the only conceivable other explanations would be either that the man’s self was there in front of the fire after a century of spirit-life, or that his thoughts in the spirit-world concerning an episode in his earth-life were so constant and vivid that they conjured up a picture in the room. The latter explanation might be accepted for a single episode, but when it is a constant matter, and when one remembers how many other reminiscences of earth-life such a man must have had, it is difficult to consider it seriously.

An experience which comes under the same heading is narrated by Lady Reay in the same enthralling volume. She was sleeping in an ancient dwelling with a somewhat sinister reputation, so we may admit that her mind was prepared to see a ghost. The actual form of the phantom was so definite, and so exactly similar to that seen by independent witnesses at different times in the same room, that it could hardly be a figment of the brain. She was awakened by moaning. The room was in total darkness, but at one side was a circle of light, like that thrown by a magic lantern. This seems to be the psychic illumination, as seen by Miss Goodrich-Freer in the case already quoted. Several clairvoyants who habitually see it describe it as being of a metallic yellow. In this circle of radiance was seen a woman dressed as in the Tudor period, walking round the apartment, throwing herself occasionally against the wall, like a desperate bird in a cage, and moaning terribly. There was no record, so far as I know, as to who this unhappy lady may have been, but she was seen independently before Lady Reay saw her, but without Lady Reay's knowledge, by Captain Eric Streatfield when he was a little boy. I do not understand how one can disregard such testimony as this. Such incredulity may be described as scientific caution, but to those who are really aware of the weight of evidence now existing, it must appear mere obstinacy and obtuseness. When one thinks of the importance of psychic knowledge, and compares it with that of the bending of the light from the Hyades as it passes the sun, one can but marvel at the want of proportion which exalts the physical while it neglects the spiritual.

An adventure which occurred to a friend of mine seems to come under this heading. His family had rented an old country house in which Nell Gwynne had been kept when she was the mistress of Charles II. One evening, as he descended the stairs, he saw cross the hall a figure which was very like a family nurse, whom we will call “Nannie.” He cried out “Nannie!” in surprise and followed her, but could find no trace. Inquiry proved that the servant was not in the house or in the neighbourhood. My friend amused himself by fitting up the house with as many old prints of Nell Gwynne as he could collect. One day his sister visited him, and after inspecting these pictures she exclaimed: “Have you ever observed how like Nell Gwynne is to our Nannie?” There is, of course, a chance of coincidence here, but at least there is a strong suggestion that poor Nell, wearied and miserable, with her heart aching for the bustle of town, cast off some thought-form as a permanent record of her emotion.

In all these cases there has been only one figure thrown upon the screen, but the matter becomes more complex when there is a group. This group consists in many cases of the wronger and the wronged, but as each may have been at the same pitch of emotion at the time of the deed, the theory of thought-forms being shed at such a time is not invalidated — and is, at any rate, more reasonable than to imagine that the guilty murderer and the innocent victim are involved in one common fate, which consists of an endless repetition of the tragedy which they once enacted. Such an idea seems to me a monstrous and unthinkable one.

I would choose as a good example of the composite thought-form one which was recorded some years ago in the *Wide World Magazine*, which I have every reason to believe is founded on fact, though the name given, Grace Dundas, is a pseudonym, and the events occurred twenty years ago. In this very dramatic case a lady with her children occupied a lonely house upon the Cornish coast, and was much disturbed by a ghostly visitor who passed with a heavy tread up the stairs at a certain hour of the night, disappearing into a panel in the landing. The lady had the courage to lie in wait for him, and perceived him to be a small, aged man in a shabby tweed suit, carrying his boots in his hand. He emitted “a sort of yellow luminous light.” This creature ascended at 1 a.m., and emerged again at 4.30, descending the stair with the same audible tread. The lady kept the matter to herself, but a nurse who was brought to tend one of the children came screaming in the middle of the night to say that there was “a dreadful old man” in the house. She had descended to the dining-room to get some water for her patient, and had seen him seated in a chair and taking off his boots. He was seen by his own light, for she had not had time to strike a match. The lady’s brother and her husband both corroborated the phenomena, and the latter went very thoroughly into the matter. He found that under the house was a cellar which opened into a cave, up which the water came at full tide. It was an ideal situation for a smuggler. That night the husband and wife kept watch in the cellar, where they saw a very terrible spectacle. In a light resembling that of the moon they were aware of two elderly men engaged in a terrific struggle. One got the other down and killed him, bundling the body through the door into the cave beyond. He then buried the knife with which the deed was done, though curiously enough this detail was only observed by the husband, who actually unearthed a knife afterwards at the spot. Both witnesses then saw the murderer pass them, and they followed him into the dining-room, where he drank some brandy, though this action was seen by the wife and not the husband. He then took off his boots, exactly as the nurse had already described. With his boots in his hand he ascended the stairs and passed through the panel as he had done so often before, the inference being that on each previous occasion the scene in the cellar had preceded his advent.

Inquiry now showed that many years ago the house had been inhabited by two brothers who amassed considerable wealth by smuggling. They had hoarded their money in partnership, but one of them finally announced his intention of getting married, which involved his drawing his share of the treasure. Soon afterwards this brother disappeared, and it was rumoured that he had gone to sea upon a long voyage. So far as I remember, for I write with only notes of the episode before me, the other brother went mad, and the affair was never cleared up in his lifetime. It should be added that the panel into which the vision disappeared concealed a large cupboard, which might well have been the treasure-house of the establishment. The graphic touch of the boots carried in the hand suggests that there was some housekeeper or other resident who might be disturbed by the sound of the murderer's footsteps.

In this case one can certainly imagine that in so fratricidal a strife there would be a peculiar intensity of emotion on the part of both the actors, which would leave a marked record if anything could do so. That the record was indeed very marked is shown by the fact that the sight was not reserved for people with psychic qualities, like the first two instances here recorded, but that everyone, the husband, the wife, and the nurse all saw the apparition, which must therefore have been particularly solid even after the lapse of so many years. It might, I think, be put forward as a hypothesis supplementary to that of thought-forms thrown off in times of crisis, that the permanency and solidity of the form depend upon the extremity of the emotion.

A second illustration may be drawn from Mrs. Tweedale's reminiscences. I am taking my cases from a limited number of books, for the sake of convenience in reference, but they are typical of very many others. The most absurd of the many absurd charges against Spiritualism is that it has no literature. It has actually a literature with which no other religion could attempt to compare, and it may safely be said that if an assiduous reader were to devour nothing else for fifty years he would be very far from having got to the end of it. Its quality is not on a par with its quantity, but even there I would undertake to name fifty books on the scientific and religious sides of Spiritualism which would outweigh in interest, dignity, and brain-power an equal list from any other philosophy. Yet the public is kept absolutely ignorant of the greater part of these remarkable works, many of which will one day be world-famous. The people who acted and wrote in the Apostolic epoch of the Christian Church little thought how their actions would appear two thousand years later, and certainly the supercilious philosophers and scandalised high priests would have been much astounded to know of the changed values which time has created.

To return, however, to the further illustration, it concerns the doings in a shooting-lodge in Argyllshire, inhabited in 1901 by Major and Mrs. Stewart, the latter being the sister of Mrs. Tweedale. The starting-point of this haunting had been a situation which would form a grim theme for a novelist. An elderly farmer, who was a widower with a grown-up son, married a young girl. His son soon learned to love his stepmother, and the love may have been passionately returned. The result was a struggle in which the son was killed by the father. It is not to be wondered at that so horrible an event should leave a great psychic disturbance behind it, and the lodge was found to be a storm-centre of the unknown forces. The phenomena, which seem to have occurred every night, took the form of loud thuds and crashes, especially in a certain room upon the upper floor, which had probably been a bedroom. Footsteps resounded down the stairs, and upon one occasion the whole terrible fight was enacted in the passage, with all the blows and curses of the infuriated men. The tragedy may well have commenced upstairs, the guilty son have fled to the door, and been overtaken by his father in the hall below. The impressions seem to have been entirely auditory, though a clairvoyant would no doubt have seen the scene even as it occurred. This case closely resembles the last, in that the most furious human passions must have been aroused, so that every condition existed for a permanent psychic record. It should be added that in this latter instance four Pomeranian dogs in the house were reduced to abject terror, showing that there was no hallucination upon the part of the human observers.

In discussing reasons for these and similar phenomena we must not make the mistake of supposing that one single explanation can cover all the range of the facts. To do so would be to court disaster, for someone could at once produce a case which could not be so covered. These instances which have been quoted have all sprung from scenes of emotion, and all represent, as I venture to suggest, mere shadow-forms detached from the real personality. There is another class of case, however, which produces much the same result, since haunting forms are seen, but which differs utterly: in its nature, in that the forms appear to be the actual materialised spirits of the dead held fast by their thoughts and desires to some spot which they have loved upon earth. Such a bondage would probably seem by no means unpleasant to them, and might only mean that in the interval of such duties as they might find awaiting them in a new life they loved to return to the old happy scene of their earth-memories. Thus, Brother John, in *The Gate of Remembrance*, was an entirely good and happy spirit, and no doubt had his duties elsewhere, yet his great love for Glastonbury Abbey brought him down whenever the interests of the old ruins demanded it. All accounts of the wandering of dead misers and others round the scene of their earthly ambitions would probably come in a lower and less happy degree under the same head. One excellent and typical example of what I mean was the case of the old Kent manor-house as detailed by Mr. Dale Owen.

The narrative concerns Ramhurst Manor House, near Leigh, in Kent, and was compiled in 1857. The house was inhabited by the family of a British general, who were much disturbed by noises at night and other happenings. A clairvoyante young lady, who came as a visitor, was able to give them some information, her experience bearing out the rule already stated, that psychic hearing is easier and more common than psychic sight. She could see where the others could only hear. The ghosts who presented themselves were an elderly couple, dressed as in a bygone age, who actually stood upon the threshold to welcome her. After meeting them several times they spoke to her, and this marks a difference from all the shadow-forms already described, none of which show any sign of individual thought and speech. These old people explained that they had once lived in the Manor House, and that their name on earth was Children. They declared that they had idolized their property, that its improvement was the centre of their thoughts, and that they were now grieved to see that it had passed away to strangers. It was a case where total absorption in an earthly thing, however innocent, had become a fatal bar to spiritual advancement — a danger against which we must all earnestly guard. Their voices as they spoke seemed normal to the young lady, while the point lace upon the beautifully-brocaded dress was imprinted in her memory. The living lady of the house was able soon afterwards to confirm the statement of her clairvoyante friend, for she also saw the female vision with the name, “Dame Children,” written above her in letters of phosphoric fire, together with a statement that she was “earth-bound.” For some time diligent inquiry could not find any trace of a family of this unusual name having ever occupied the house, but finally a very old woman was found who in her youth had met an aged man who said that in his boyhood he had helped in the kennels of the Children family. Mr. Dale Owen was so interested in the case that he personally investigated it and cross-examined all the witnesses. On asking the young lady whether the ghost had said anything else of an evidential nature, she remembered that Richard was given as the name of the man, and that the date 1753 was associated with his death. Following up his researches, Mr. Dale Owen discovered some account of the Manor House, which concluded with the words: “Richard Children, Esqre., resided here and died possessed of it in 1753, aged eighty-three years. He was succeeded in it by ... George Children who is the present possessor.”

This narrative must carry conviction with it to any reasonable mind, though I must refer the reader to Dale Owen’s *Footfalls* for the smaller details which mean so much. It suggests that the whole range of hauntings of this nature spring from undue preoccupation and want of spiritual effort. One such case seems to carry more warning than all the sermons that ever were spoken. At the same time, Providence is not cruel, and, as I have said, the bondage which is formed by earth-thoughts need not really be an unhappy one to those who are held by it.

When separated into the mere shadows or thought-forms on one side, and actual earth-bound spirits on the other, it is not difficult to analyse and understand a large proportion of preternatural happenings. The division is admittedly a temporary hypothesis, but it serves to keep some sort of order in a subject which has until recently been a mad chaos of inexplicable effects without rational cause. Cases will still obtrude themselves, however, which disturb the tidiness of the most well-ordered theories, and I do not know a more baffling one than that which is treated by two English school-mistresses, and admirably described in their little book called *An Adventure*.

This adventure, shortly told, consisted in the fact that during a visit to Paris they entered the gardens of Versailles in order to see the Grand Trianon, and that while in those gardens they had a most extraordinary experience, which in the case of one of the ladies was repeated with variations upon the occasion of a second visit. They suddenly appeared to be in the gardens as they were a century before, at the time of the French Revolution, and to see, and in some cases actually speak with, gardeners, messengers, and others who were there in the days of Marie Antoinette. So natural was it all, beginning and ending with normal life, that the ladies hardly understood what had happened to them until they began to compare notes, and realised that some of the buildings and garden arrangements which they had seen had not existed within the memory of man. Both ladies carried away a clear remembrance of dignified officials in grey-green coats and small three-cornered hats, of an intensely still landscape, of trees that looked like tapestry, of cloaked, large-hatted figures, of a running messenger who shouted instructions to them, of a long-waisted, full-skirted lady with a pale-green fichu, of a jaunty young footman, and other quite definite details — all this at four o’clock of a summer afternoon. A second visit by one lady alone, some four months later, produced similar effects, differing in detail but not in general character from the first.

Such an experience is so very unlike the vast majority of psychic cases that one is inclined to push it aside. If one cannot get a document into a pigeon-hole, one is too ready with a waste-paper basket, and it is this human tendency which has retarded our advance in this new science. Anyone who carefully reads the narrative of these ladies, and notices the points of resemblance and also the very interesting points of divergence in their stories, cannot fail to take them seriously. It was not imagination or suggestion or, so far as one can judge, hallucination. But what it was, and why by some strange psychic refraction this mirage of the past should be thrown down upon the present, is an insoluble problem. It must at least teach us that, however much our tiny brains may endeavour to comprehend and classify these extraordinary phenomena, there still remain so many unknown causes and unexplained conditions that for many a long year to come our best efforts can only be regarded as well-meant approximations to the truth.

III

NOTES FROM A STRANGE MAIL-BAG

THE DREAMERS

For many years I have been the recipient of as strange a shower of letters as one could imagine. They come from all sorts of folk who have had all sorts of psychic experiences. They demand sympathy, advice and explanation. The former I can give, but the latter are not always so easy. The handling of this correspondence has added a burden to my already over-weighted days, but it is not work which I can hand to a delegate, since very often fine points of knowledge are involved, and the letters are exceedingly confidential and personal. I am glad to think that I have left few unanswered, but it has been at the expense of much energy and time which might, perhaps, have been better employed in some more general fashion. And yet some good end might be attained if I could use them discreetly in order to ventilate in public the various matters discussed.

If the reader likes to treat the cases as instances of delusion or of peculiar mental aberration that is for his own judgment to decide. I only put forward the letters as being very real facts to those who wrote them. The rest is a matter of individual opinion. From my cabinet of tabulated drawers I take down the one which is labelled “Dreams,” and I pick a few of the contents almost at haphazard.

Here is a very vivid letter from a lady who is herself a musical composer. She dreamed that she was in the presence of a great celestial choir. Her account is an arresting one, and none can doubt that some tremendous impact had been made upon her mind.

“The orchestra was of vast size — something like the seating capacity of the Albert Hall. The conductor and the singers were on my right, but after they started playing I realised that they were all round me, and there was a great bank of strings on my left. They were playing what seemed like the end of a classical symphony and the speed they took it at far exceeded any tempo I’ve heard here. It was like a sea of bows flashing up and down. As I watched them a curious thing happened. It seemed as if the senses of sight and sound merged into one faculty, and that I could *see* the vibrations from those violins. You remember the spray mist which hangs over Niagara Falls. Just such a shimmering haze seemed to float above the players. The other thing that struck me was the ideal beauty of the ensemble. That mighty host of players were like one thought and action. It so far exceeded anything I have heard here as to be almost overpowering. My own sense of perfection could hardly stretch to it. It was marvellous. Of course, my thoughts are continually on music and rehearsals, so that itself would not convey much, but this idea of seeing sound vibrations had never entered my conscious thoughts, and that is the most vivid impression of the dream.”

Though the lady did not know it, the idea of the close connection between colour and sound is one which has frequently come to us in what purported to be descriptions of life in the Beyond. I could very readily find a dozen illustrations of the fact among those posthumous accounts which profess to describe the experiences which await us. The general idea of concerted music is also very familiar. “I play in an orchestra and I enjoy it so much.” Such was a message which I received myself recently from a friend who was fond of music. Lester Coltman the Guardsman, in what is asserted to be his after-death experience, says:

“Orchestration is my great hobby here,” and adds: “For some time after I passed over I was undecided as to whether music or science should be my work. After much serious thought, I determined that music should be my hobby and my more earnest intent should be directed upon science in every form.”

It may be said generally that the evidence of psychic research agrees with the vague Christian tradition that music plays a large part in the higher spheres.

The next letter which I pick up deals with a very much less elevated impression. This is an American writing from San José, California, who dreams names.

“If I can identify the name with some race-horse, I have found that the horse has, nine times out of ten, won the race. I am not interested in horse-racing, and have not been on a track for twenty years.”

The next letter is also about horse-racing, from a retired Captain in Ireland. In his case he claims to get a picture, not a name. He is not a betting man and makes no use of his information, which is just as well for the bookies. Going over his results, I find that he seldom got a winner, but that his horses were invariably placed. It was a curious dumb-crambo system of conveying names, when supplied by vision, but occasionally they came in an audible voice at the moment of waking from sleep. What are we to make of such an experience? Is it imagination followed by coincidence? Or is it of some humble psychic origin? We have to place on the other side the many cases where such dreams have betrayed us. Only last year I had the experience of backing the dream of a friend for the Derby, and being five pounds poorer as a consequence.

The next letter takes us back into the black days of the War. It is from an English lady living in Finland. Her younger brother was killed at the front in one of the final battles in a dawn attack. At that hour the lady went through his whole experience, visualised the battlefield, heard the guns, and saw an elderly and moustached German who threw something — presumably a bomb — which struck her down. Some nights later she had a second equally vivid dream in which a radiant spirit led her along a poplar-lined French road and halted at last at the spot where the dead body of her brother was lying. She declares that she had every reason at the time to think that her brother was at a depot and not in the firing-line. It was after the Armistice that official news was given of his death. This is one of a class of cases which has been so common that no reasonable man can deny them. To explain them is another matter, for even if one accepts the full faith of Spiritualism there is a good deal which is inexplicable.

The next item is from the West of America. The writer has three times during ten years had an extraordinary and very vivid dream which has always been the same. He was in each case commanding the bodyguard of an Oriental Sultan and had to defend a palace attacked by rebels. On each occasion he was killed and found himself after death looking down upon a litter of dead bodies. The country in which these incidents occurred gradually revealed itself to him as being Oman upon the east coast of Arabia, and the dreamer actually opened a correspondence with the Sultan of Muscat, a letter from whom he enclosed to me as a proof of good faith. The Sultan took a lively interest in the matter and was anxious that the dreamer should visit him, but the coming of the War intervened. The American protests that he is still planning to go to Muscat, though one would have thought that it is the one place which he would have carefully avoided. No sequel has yet been reported, though the letter is two years old.

I pick up a letter now which is of a most interesting type. It is from a lady in Chicago. She lay at the point of death with a temperature of 105°. She was insensible but dreaming vividly. She seemed to hear music of unearthly beauty, and to be surrounded by the faces of many loved ones who had passed on. The only sensation was one of delicious languor.

"It was the most vivid and beautiful dream I ever experienced. When I came to myself I thought that if death was like that I should not mind going at any time. Is it then possible for the soul to leave the body for a short while and then to return again?"

My answer was that I had numerous similar cases which seemed to show that it *was* possible, and that such knowledge did indeed remove all fear of death.

The next letter is also from an American lady and is not very dissimilar in its subject. It was not the weakness of disease but it was the emotion produced by music which, in her case, seems to have effected a temporary dissociation between soul and body. The opera was "Manon Lescaut" and Caruso the singer.

"At the grand climax," she writes, "I seemed to float away upward, quite overwhelmed. After the curtain fell I was still away. The live part of me had separated from my body and it was with the greatest difficulty that I forced myself together. With a look of consternation the lady next me observed my condition."

Reduced to common speech all this simply means that the lady was on the point of fainting, and yet it may make us ask ourselves what we mean exactly when we use the phrase.

The dream which duplicates an actual occurrence is hard to explain, but an even tougher problem is presented by the prophetic dream which gives a picture of the future. My next letter is from a man in Liverpool who found himself in his sleep standing by a railway station and looking up a sloping road with another road at right angles at the top. There was a bridge above him, and over the bridge came a tramcar on which was painted some strange place names of which he had never heard. Some months later he visited Wrexham for the first time and there he found the station, the road, the slope, the bridge and the tram, which had Welsh names on the outside. Nothing arose from the incident, and there seemed no possible reason why it should have been shot into the sleeper's mind months beforehand. In the case of this and similar incidents which are both trivial and psychic, one can only suppose that an attempt is made — we cannot say by whom — to awaken the interest of the recipient in spiritual matters by showing him things which are outside the ken of material science. It certainly has such an effect, for the man who has had such an experience is far more open afterwards to psychic knowledge. An alternative explanation would be that in one of those nocturnal rambles which our souls or etheric bodies do seem to take, the dreamer had visited Wrexham — possibly drawn by the fact that he had relatives living there — and that he chanced to carry back some memory of its appearance. The tram might well be running in the early morning.

A second experience by the same gentleman rather supports the latter explanation. He dreamed that he saw a lady friend working at some pink material. On inquiry she said, “Yes, I stayed up late last night making a crêpe de Chine blouse of pink stuff, which I particularly wished to finish.” Since she was late it is probable that his dream saw that which was actually occurring at the moment, and that it was an instance of what has been called “travelling clairvoyance” where the etheric body brings back information — surprisingly trivial information at times — to the unconscious material brain.

The next item is less complex. It comes from Battersea. A Mrs. Arbuthnot dreamed that her life was threatened by a friend whom we will call Mrs. Burton. When she told the dream she was not aware that Mrs. Burton had at that time a maniacal attack in which she imagined she had some deadly grievance against her friend. This would appear to be a clear case of telepathy. I may add that telepathy, which is constantly given as an explanation of other psychic happenings, is, in my opinion, among the less common phenomena, and is by no means so clearly established as some of the physical manifestations.

To return to prophetic dreams: they are occasionally of a very helpful character, as the next example will show. The writer is a Manchester man fresh from Cambridge. During a visit to Switzerland he dreamed that he was in a tropical land, sandy, with a shimmering heat and an intensely blue sky. Suddenly, a huge man appeared before him holding a triangular dagger of peculiar shape, with which he made the motion of striking. He then vanished. Next day the youth explored a disused tunnel.

“I went in and found magnificent icicles hanging from the roof. All at once I saw one very large one. It was triangular and came to a sharp point. I thought of my dream, and recognised the triangular dagger. I stopped, and at that moment the whole thing fell with a crash. It must have weighed at least two hundred pounds and would perhaps have killed me.”

What are we to make of this? Is it not beyond coincidence? And how are we to explain the tropical scene? I would only suggest — but with all reserve — that many of us believe that we have guides or guardian angels. These guides would appear to be often drawn from the Oriental races. Supposing that this youth’s guide was an Egyptian he might, in warning his pupil, have brought back with him some impression of his native land. The student remarked that the dagger was of a shape which was once used in Ancient Egypt. Such an explanation may stand until a better one is found.

A number of these dreams are concerned with objects which have been lost and found again by revelation. There is always the consideration that such finds may have been the result of some subconscious train of thought, as occurs so often in our everyday experience, when the solution of some problem wells suddenly up from the unknown depths of our mentality. But in some cases this would seem to be impossible. Here, for example, is a letter from Bath. The writer was a solicitor in a South African city. He had a client to whose father in early days a grant of land had been made on the outskirts of the city. At the time it was of no value, but as the city spread it became so, but very many years had passed and the grant was lost. One night the client dreamed where it was. Next day, accompanied by a resident who knew the town well, he walked to the place of his dream, identified a certain cottage, had his knock answered by a lady whom he had seen in his sleep, walked through to an outhouse, opened an old box and plucked out the grant which had been stuffed into an envelope tacked to the inside of the lid. It is sad to relate that after all this trouble the grant was not admitted by the new generation of officials. But the story told as it is by the solicitor concerned, seems to be incontrovertible. What are we to make of it? Here, again, we seem to be balanced between the possibilities of the wandering soul and those of external intelligence. In any case, such incidents deserve our best consideration, and our men of Science may well turn their minds from the insects and the stones in order to unravel problems so intimately related to our own nature and fate.

The next letter happens to be from the same quarter and on a similar subject. It tells the tale of a *Muizenberg* lady who lost her box and had successive dreams of it for several months during its various and devious wanderings, until she at last saw it in her sleep reposing upon the shelf of the lost property office, whence she duly reclaimed it next morning. When one reads such an account one feels a certain sense of injury as we survey our own losses, and we wonder why we also should not all have such help. Here we must admit that we are on the edge of the unknown. The wireless message comes sharp and clear when we tune in to the exact vibration. A fraction above or below and it is gone. Here, too, there may be unconscious tuning-in of the receiver. But what is the transmitter? That is the next great problem which faces humanity.

It is clear that to find the right receiver is difficult, otherwise messages would not be sent in so indirect a fashion. The next example illustrates what I mean. A London lady gets a message, or rather a vision, which assures her that an unknown woman, who is embracing two children, is about to "go on her last journey — her last, long, strange journey." The actual message and the name, Mrs. Lorimer, came audibly. On inquiry the dreamer found that there was such a woman, that she had two children, and subsequently that she died. We may well deduce that if the receptive power were a common one the message would certainly have been given more directly and not in a way which was so distant that it might well have miscarried.

I have spoken of the night travels of the etheric body. I come now to a very remarkable example of it — unique, so far as I know, because the return to the material body was slow and clearly remembered. The gentleman who writes to me — a Manchester man — fell asleep before his fire. He woke up still seated in a chair in the early morning and glanced at the clock. It marked 12.15 but — it was not *his* clock.

With amazed eyes he looked along the mantelpiece. Everything was strange. There were two big bronzes of equestrian figures. The mantelpiece itself was of heavy red marble. The fire-irons were of massive brass. He was so petrified that it was a long time before he could bring himself to look round. When at last he cautiously turned his head he found himself in a very large room lined with books. There was a reading-lamp on a long central table, and a man was seated at it. My correspondent was filled with the idea that he had wandered into some stranger's house, so with an effort he rose and addressed the man at the table. Getting no answer he touched him. As the man took no notice and remained very still the writer was speculating whether he was dead, when he suddenly turned the page and went on reading. At this instant the walls of the room seemed to whirl round and my correspondent found himself in his own chair, facing his own clock, and with the time registered as 12.25. He winds up his narrative with the words, “I give you my most solemn word of honour that I have told you what I consider to be the truth.”

Accepting this final statement we have to find a rational explanation. The most rational surely is that the process of travelling clairvoyance and the return from the dream journey were done slowly and consciously, instead of coming in a flash. Had the latter been the case the dreamer would simply have had a vague recollection of some large room with books in it, and it would in no way have differed from a normal dream impression. But, for some reason, the process was carried out slowly and in stages. The etheric body came to conscious life — a life which could be registered on the material brain — while making itself very comfortable in front of the fire of what would appear to have been a Club library with one belated member therein. The insubstantial etheric body was unable to impress the material senses of the reader, but it is possible that if the latter had looked up from his book he might have had a wonderful ghost story to tell for the rest of his life. Then came the belated return, when, like a homing pigeon, the wandering soul shoots swiftly and unerringly back to its body. Should it lose its way, then one more mortal has died in his sleep.

There is some evidence that it is more easy for these dream messages to be conveyed to us by pictures and symbols than by words, though sometimes the picture comes first and then the explanatory message. At the time, early in the War, when there was alarm about the fate of Maurice Hewlett’s son, a lady in Scotland had a clear vision of a man being rescued from a seaplane, and an audible message came, “That is Maurice Hewlett’s son. He is rescued.” This was put on record at the time; a fact which I have tested, for I have before me a document.

“We, the undersigned, declare that the account of this dream was given to us, as written, *before* the announcement of the rescue appeared.”

This is signed by two witnesses. One could hardly wish for a clearer case than this, but it may have been the travelling soul of the dreamer which carried back both the picture and the message. Again, I have an account from a French lady whose husband managed the household affairs in an unsatisfactory way. She saw her dead father, who handed her a large key. This key opened a door which led to a room which was exceedingly untidy, but became all right again when the lady entered. She took the dream to mean that she was to be mistress in her own house, and acted accordingly, with the best results. Here the appearance of the father certainly gives an other-world flavour to the transaction.

Such dreams are useful, but occasionally I read of one which is so useless that one is hard put to it when one tries to weave it into any philosophy. Thus one correspondent dreamed that a child was born to him, which was so discoloured in the body that it would appear to have been scorched. A policeman was mixed up with the dream. Next morning a policeman entered his shop with a summons to a jury for an inquest. The case proved to be that of a poor tramp who had been badly scorched by his straw bed taking fire. Such an incident is not entirely beyond coincidence, and in no case does it seem to have served any purpose.

Sometimes one can see no object in the communication, and yet the psychic evidence is very strong and is calculated to turn the mind of the recipient to spiritual interpretations of life. Thus in the case of a Mrs. Lofty, she writes to say that she lost her son, Grantham Lofty, in a flying mishap.

“One day I felt like ending everything, when it was suggested to me in the most clear way that I should think of my dream.”

It seems that two years before the lady and a friend had both dreamed the same dream on the same night. The dream included a message that James Lofty was dying or dead in No. 7 Ward.

“I wrote out the dream at once and sent it to my sister.”

Immediately after the tragedy occurred, two years after the dream, the lady visited Haslar Hospital, and found that the ward in which her son died was No. 7, and that by some error his name on the hospital books had been entered as James. This certainly is a complex and remarkable case, but it seems to have assured the mother of his continued existence and consoled her in the hour of need.

One very common dream impression which may well be connected with those soul wanderings which come, in my opinion, well within the category of things proven, is the feeling of flying. It often occurs to dreamers, but more to some than to others in proportion as their switch-off is absolute or partial. Thus a dreamer writes from South Carolina.

“One dream comes to me over and over again. At least one thousand times I have dreamed that I was exercising a power of transporting my body through the air in defiance of gravitation. Usually I just lift my feet from the ground and will myself to float in the desired direction without any physical effort. At other times, when I wish to reach a higher level, I work my arms as if they were wings. I seem in my dreams to call the attention of ordinary mortals to what I am doing, but if they possess the power to see it they never make any comment on it."

They would, of course, no more see it than the man in the Club library saw the etheric body which touched him on the shoulder.

Several of these letters — and perhaps the most important — allude to the perceptions which the dreamers carry back of some wonderful land which some of us think is actually the etheric world, suited for etheric life, and which others may try to explain as a glimpse of our own tropics, or as some imaginative scene which has no actual existence. It is as real to the dreamer, as was that clock in the Club library upon which the sleeper read the time, and equally real seem those figures with whom they hold converse.

Here is the sort of thing from a correspondent:

"I have twice in sleep crossed over into the spirit world. The radiance and wonderful beauty of the country was what struck me more than anything. I felt, above all, that this was a land of extraordinary happiness. On the first occasion I met and spoke with my brother. On the second I saw no one, but was deeply impressed by the beauty of the lake and hills among which I found myself. The colours were indeed different from those on earth. They had an exceeding glory."

This matches very closely a large number of other descriptions. I am aware of all the difficulties connected with such a view of the Beyond. We are faced with the obvious reflection that hills and valleys are the result of geological action, of rain and age-long denudation, so that their existence, from our point of view, would seem to imply similar actions in their formation. It is a legitimate and cogent objection. And yet, the positive agreement of a great number of witnesses cannot be easily set aside. Some have thought that this old earth may have its own etheric body, even as its inhabitants have. Certainly, if we are to cut out all effects of earthly elemental action, heaven would become a flat and waterless expanse, which would seem more logical than attractive.

In discussing dream appearances of the other spheres, I may perhaps be permitted to give an experience of my own — though I may quote with all reverence, "Whether in the body or out of it, I know not." I had been told at a séance that I should visit in my sleep some other sphere, upon which I earnestly begged that I might carry back the memory. There followed an eventful night, some of which is quite as clear to me as any adventure I have had upon the earth's surface.

My first impression was that of a row of rather dilapidated stone villas, such as one would see in the suburbs of Edinburgh. They looked well in front but were only half-finished within, though I observed pictures upon the walls — frescoes rather, since they seemed to be part of the wall. There was waste ground around, untidy and weed-covered. I saw no dwellers in these uncomfortable buildings, but I was aware all through that I had a companion at my side, whose face I never saw. This invisibility did not seem to worry me at the time, and I made no attempt to get past it.

Then, with no consciousness of an intervening journey, I was in another place. It was a large hall or assembly place. Once again there were coloured frescoes on the wall, but I carried away no impression of the subjects. There were pillars and an ornamental ceiling. Close to me was standing a man dressed in Elizabethan dress. He had a plum-coloured doublet and trunk hose. We eyed each other and I was so completely myself that I smiled and said, "Well, if you fellows are going to dress like that we poor moderns have no chance." He made no answer, and his face was quite unresponsive. I could recognise the man now if I saw him, ruddy-faced, about thirty-five years of age, short, crisp, black hair and a black moustache, well-built and vigorous. He was sullen and sinister in his expression. I was conscious of someone else approaching with a black Spanish cloak. Then it all disappeared.

I was now in a vehicle of some sort — I have no impression of a horse, but I was more conscious than before of my companion. There was a vague feeling of hurry — we had to be at a certain place by a certain time. The road was broad and curving, with a hill-side upon the left with some ancient ruins built right into it. At the top of the hill we stopped. A wonderful panorama of a city lay before me. It was built upon low hills and it undulated away to the horizon. The sky and atmosphere were grey, but not more so than London on a winter day. I have never seen so great a city. High buildings and towers stretched as far as I could see, but I saw no spires. Then all faded away, and I awoke.

It was a very intense experience and I give the explanation which I received next day from psychic sources for what the reader may think it is worth. It came in reply to questions.

"It was a probationary city. Those pictures were instructive to people in that stage. You did not see your guide because it would have taken from the power. The power was running low, so we had to hurry in the end. You were taken to a grey city because that side of spirit life has always excited your sympathy and curiosity."

Such was my most vivid nocturnal experience.

Dreaming true is the only psychic power which I have hitherto developed outside healing. Before we went to Australia I got the name "Naldern" imprinted on my mind in sleep and wrote it down on waking. We sailed in the "Naldera," though we had intended another ship and had never consciously heard of the former. Again, I have put it on record before the event how I dreamed that the Piave would be the turning-point of the War, many months before the Italians were driven back sixty miles to that position, where they won their decisive victory. In literature I have had little help from dreams. Once I woke with a line ringing in my head. It was, "She walked alone on the Hills of Fate." I wrote a poem called "Victrix" round it, and it marks my highest point, perhaps, on the foothills of Parnassus.

I may conclude these notes by stating my opinion as to the exact nature of dreams, as I have already done in my *New Revelation*. There seem to me to be two forms, and only two: one, the experiences of the released spirit, and the other, the confused action of the lower faculties which remain in the body when the spirit is absent. The former is rare and beautiful, but the memory of it fails us. The latter is common and varied, but usually fantastic or ignoble. By noting what is absent in the lower dreams one can tell what the missing qualities are, and so judge what part of us goes to make up the spirit. Thus in these dreams humour is wanting, since we see things which strike us afterwards as ludicrous, and are not amused. The sense of proportion and of judgment are all gone. In short, the higher is palpably gone, and the lower, the sense of fear, of sensual impression, of self-preservation, are functioning all the more vividly because they are relieved from the higher control.

IV

THE GHOST OF THE MOAT

If anyone craves for adventure, he will find it in psychic work. I have myself encountered many incidents in actual fact which I could hardly beat if I gave free play to my imagination.

Some mention of Dr. and Mrs. Wickland of Los Angeles have occasionally found their way into the Press. He is a deep student of psychic phenomena believing, as I do myself, that a great deal of mania and crime is due to direct obsession, and that a recognition of the fact would be the first necessary step for dealing with it.

She is a medium who is very sensitive to spirit presences, and is ready, with great bravery, to allow them to control her so long as she thinks a good purpose can be served. She is, in my opinion, one of the heroines of the world. Such were the couple, gentle, elderly folk, who drove out with us to see something of rural Sussex.

I took them to the old moated grange of Groombridge, which is mentioned by Evelyn in his Diary. As we stood looking at the lichened brick walls, a door which gave upon the deep moat opened and a woman looked out. Then it closed again. We passed on, and I thought no more of the matter.

As we walked through the meadow which led to the high road Mrs. Wickland kept glancing back. Presently she said:

“There is such a strange old man walking beside us.”

“What is he like?”

“He is old. His face is sunk forward. His back is hunched. He is earth-bound.”

“How is he dressed?”

“He has knee-breeches, a striped vest, and quite a short coat.”

“Whence did he come?”

“He came through that door that opened.”

“Then how did he cross the moat?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t know what he wants, but he is at our heels.”

I took my guests to the old Crown Inn in the village, where we had tea. Mrs. Wickland kept glancing at a chair in the corner beside her.

“He is there.” Presently she began to laugh.

“I did not in the least want that second cup of tea, and the extra slice,” she said, “but he was close to me, and would have taken possession and helped himself if I had not done so.”

We had driven home, and were seated among the roses on my veranda, the Wicklands, my wife, and myself. We were talking of other things when the Seer suddenly gave a start.

“He’s here.”

Then came the amazing moment. Before our eyes she changed in an instant into a heavy-faced, sullen old man, with bent back and loose, senile lips. The whole expression was utterly different. She choked and spluttered in an effort to express the thoughts of the control.

Dr. Wickland, with the quiet assurance of long practice, massaged the throat.

“All right, friend, give yourself time.”

The new-comer shook off his hand angrily.

“Leave me alone. What do you want to touch me for?” he croaked.

From that time the dialogue was as follows, sometimes one and sometimes another asking the questions, and with ocasional gaspings and chokings as interruption.

“Who are you?”

“I am from Groombridge. My name? Well, I don’t feel clear in my mind. Yes, yes, I remember. It is David. And Fletcher. That is it, David Fletcher. Yes, I have been in service there. Horses. Yes, it was the horses I looked to. What year is it? I don’t know. My mind ain’t clear. Is it 1808 or is it 1809? What d’ye say, 1927? Well, well, that’s a good ‘un.”

“Dead, why, I am here talkin’ to you. How can I be dead? I’d be with God if I was dead.” (Suddenly started.) “Look at my hand? Why there are rings on it. They look like my lady’s rings. No, I don’t know how they came to be there.”

“I don’t understand a lot of things. I don’t know who them folk are in the house. They have no call to be there. Me and the others try to put them out.” (“The others,” Dr. Wickland explained, “were probably other earth-bound spirits in the old house.”)

“Yes, master was a good master, but he died, and the others came in. The house was sold. We wasn’t well treated after that. What could I do? No, I couldn’t go away. Where was I to go out in the wide world, and me with a hump on my back? I belonged to the house. I had to do the best I could.”

“What have I done? I don’t rightly understand it. I’ve slept always in the same old corner. It seems a long, long time.”

“Now tell us, David, don’t you remember being very ill?”

“Me ill? No, I was never ill. But I’ll tell you what happened. He pushed me into the water.”

“Into the moat?”

“Yes, into the water.”

“Who was he?”

“It was Sam.” (Many chuckles.) “But I held on to him, I did. He came in the water, too.” (Dr. Wickland remarked that the man was probably drowned on that occasion.)

“Is there no one who loved you among the dead? Was your mother dead?”

“Mother was dead. No one ever loved me, except mother. She loved me, mother did. No one could love me, because I looked queer. They laughed.” (He burst into noisy sobbing.) “Mother loved me. Nobody else. They said it wasn’t right that I wait upon the ladies, and me with a hump.”

“Cheer up, David; we will soon get the hump off you. How came you to follow us?”

“I don’t know. I think I was told. Then I got bread and tea. I have not had tea since I can remember. I would like more. I am always hungry. But what was that wagon? That was the devil’s wagon, I think. I got in, but it went that fast that I was afeared to get out again.” (This was my motor.)

“It’s as well for you that you did not, for we are going to do you good, David. First of all you have got to realise that you are dead. You were drowned that time you fell into the moat.”

“Well I never. That’s a queer idea.”

“Now understand this.” (It is Dr. Wickland, who is talking in cool, gentle, assured tones.) “You can do anything now by the power of thought, if you know how to use it. This hump of yours. Take it off. Take it off, I say. Your back is as straight as mine.” (The bent figure began to straighten up and to sit erect in the chair. Suddenly both hands were thrown forward.)

“Mother, mother.” (His face had become younger, more intelligent and was shining with ecstacy.) “I see her and it’s mother, but she looks younger than I can remember.”

“She will take charge of you now. You have been brought here by higher powers for a purpose — to save you. Do you want to go back to the old house?”

“No, no, I want to go to mother. Oh you good kind people” — the rest was just incoherent gratitude.

And so it was that the earth-bound ostler found his mother at last among the rambler roses of my balcony. Have I not said truly that the actual experiences of the Spiritualist, of which this is one in a hundred, are stranger far than what I should dare to invent?

Is it all a fairy-tale? How about the change in the medium? How about the ostler’s dress so accurately described? How about the cases where the actual names and addresses have been verified by the Wicklands?

It is not a fairy-tale, but it is a new realm of knowledge which the human race has now to explore and to conquer.

V

THE LAW OF THE GHOST

It is safe to say that for some centuries to come the human race will be very actively engaged in defining the laws which regulate psychic affairs, and it is fortunately a line of study which has the peculiar advantage to those who indulge in it that they can pursue it just as well, and probably better, from the other side of the veil. At present there is work lying to hand for a hundred investigators. The innumerable records which exist in various forms, and which are scattered throughout papers, magazines, reports of learned societies, family traditions, etc., are like masses of ore which have been extracted from the ground but are still lying in dumps waiting to be separated into precious ingots on the one side and slag-heap on the other. They have to be examined, collected into classes, reviewed in the light of our ever-increasing psychic knowledge, and an endeavour made to find underlying principles running through this vague collection of matter, so that at last we may touch solid ground by getting hold of some elementary laws. The first thing is that we should have authentic cases so that the foundation of our reasoning may be sound. The second is to compare these authentic cases together and see what common characteristics they possess, shirking nothing and following the facts wherever they lead without any preliminary prejudice. This is, of course, the true scientific fashion, but it is unfortunately one which has been neglected by most scientific men in approaching this new subject which would not fit in with their preconceived ideas. Let us hunt among these fascinating problems for shards and splinters out of which a noble mosaic will one day be constructed, and let us see whether here and there we may not find two or three pieces which fit together, and give some idea of a permanent pattern, even though it be a fantastic one. I will begin by telling three stories which seem to be absolutely authentic, and then we shall endeavour to trace some underlying connection.

For full particulars of the first case the reader is referred to *West Indian Tales*, by Algernon Aspinall, with the explanation that the word “Tales” is not used in the sense of inventions, and that the facts are authentic, as is proved by numerous references in the narrative. These facts relate to the singular series of events which happened in connection with the vault at Christ-church, near the village of Oistin, on the south coast of Barbados. In the old slave days when rum and sugar were the foundations of many a goodly fortune, things were done on a large scale in the West Indies, and this burial vault was a very fine one. It was made of great blocks of coral and cement, partly sunk into the earth, for the graveyard was on an exposed hill, and terrific storms sweep over these latitudes. The entrance was covered by a huge slab of marble. Within, the dimensions of the vault were twelve feet by six and a half. So Cyclopean was the masonry and so remote the site that one would imagine an inmate was almost as secure as a king of Egypt in the heart of his pyramid. A contractor and a gang of skilled workmen would be needed to effect an entrance into so solid a construction. Little did those who erected it imagine that the whole island would be convulsed by the repeated proofs of its insecurity.

In July, 1807, a Mrs. Goddard was buried therein, and her coffin was found undisturbed in February, 1808, when a child named Mary Chase was laid in a leaden casket beside her. For four years the vault was closed, but in July, 1812, it was opened to admit a Miss Dorcas Chase. The horrified workmen found the coffin of the infant standing on its head in a corner. It was supposed that some mischievous and sacrilegious wretch had been guilty of a senseless outrage, so after the coffin was rearranged the great marble slab was once again placed in position, to be opened next month when a Mr. Chase joined the family group within. During the month there seems to have been no disturbance.

In September, 1816, four years having again elapsed, the vault was opened once more to admit an infant, Samuel Arnes Once again all was in horrible confusion, and the coffins littered across one another. The affair was now becoming a scandal and the talk of the whole settlement, the whites putting it down to vandalism and the negroes to ghosts. Once again the vault was closed, and once again, two months later, it was opened to admit Samuel Brewster. Crowds followed the coffin and gathered round the vault when the great slab was pushed aside. In the short interval everything had again been disarranged, the coffins being abominably mishandled. Mrs. Goddard’s coffin, which seems to have been of wood, was broken, but this may have been natural decay. The leaden coffins were scattered at all angles. Once again they were reverently collected, the wooden coffin was tied up, and the vault secured.

Three years later, on July 7th, 1819, Miss Clarke was to be buried in the vault. So great was the public excitement that the governor, Lord Combermere, of Peninsula fame, attended the ceremony with his staff and aides-de-camp. Things were as bad as ever. The wooden coffin was intact, but the others were scattered in all directions. Lord Combermere was so interested that he had the whole structure searched and sounded, but there was no hidden approach or underground passage. It was an insoluble mystery. The coffins were rearranged and the floor carefully sanded so that footsteps would be revealed. The door was cemented up, which seems to have been done on each occasion, but this time the Governor affixed his own particular seal. The British Government had officially entered the lists against the powers of darkness.

It is humiliating to add that the powers of darkness seemed not in the least abashed either by the Governor or by the Empire which he represented. Next year, in April 1820, it was determined that an official inspection should be made without waiting for a fresh interment. Lord Combermere with a formidable official party and a strong ally in the Rev. T. Orderson, rector of the parish, repaired to the vault, where the seals were found intact and all in apparent order.

The cement was then broken and the slab removed by the exertions of ten negroes, who had the utmost difficulty in forcing an entrance. On exposing the interior it was found to the horror and amazement of the party that the difficulty in opening the vault had been caused by the fact that a leaden coffin within, so heavy that several men could hardly move it, had been jammed upside down against the slab. There was great confusion within but no marks upon the sand which covered the floor. So horrified was everyone by this final test that the bodies were now removed, and buried elsewhere. The empty vault remains, and is likely for many centuries to remain, as a refuge for snakes or centipedes, upon the lonely headland which overlooks the Atlantic.

What is one to make of such a story as that? The facts seem to be beyond question. Are there any points which are particularly to be noted from a psychic point of view, in the hope that the germs of law may lie within? One is that the antipathy of those unseen forces was aroused apparently by the *leaden* coffins. When the wooden coffin was alone it was not molested.

Its decay seems to have been natural, and when it was tied up it was not again disturbed. If it ever received any injury it may well have been from the weight of the ponderous leaden coffins which were dashed about around it. That is one possible point. A second and more important one is that all psychic phenomena seem to show that the disembodied have no power of their own, but that it is always derived from the emanations of the living, which we call animal magnetism or other names. Now this vault with its absolutely air-tight walls was particularly adapted for holding in such forces — being an exaggerated form of that cabinet which is used for that very purpose by a genuine medium. If the walls of cloth of a cabinet can contain these emanations and condense them, how much more the solid walls of this vault. To bring in these weighty leaden coffins the space must have been crowded with over-heated negroes, and when the slab was at once hermetically sealed, these effluvia were enclosed and remained behind, furnishing a possible source of that material power which is needful for material effects. These are two points worth noting before we pass on to see if any other such cases may fall into line with this one.

We have not far to seek, for one is quoted in the very book under discussion, with a reference to the *European Magazine* for September, 1815, under the heading “The Curious vault at Stanton in Suffolk.” In the magazine account it says:

On opening the vault some years since, several leaden coffins with wooden cases that had been fixed on biers, were found displaced to the great astonishment of many. The coffins were placed as before, when some time ago, another of the family dying, they were a second time found displaced. Two years after they were found not only all off the biers, but one coffin as heavy as to require eight men to raise it was found on the fourth step that leads into the vault.

There unhappily the information ends. It tallies very closely with the West Indian case so far as it goes, but is far weaker as regards the evidence and the details. I have made inquiry from the present vicar of the parish but have been unable to improve either the one or the other. The statement that the phenomenon occurred twice and the precise information as to the situation of the coffin upon the fourth step of the stairs, seem to remove the story from vague rumour and to show that it was based upon some actual fact.

The next case, however, is fuller and more circumstantial. It comes from the Livonian village of Ahrensburg in the Baltic, and remote as the scene is, the evidence is well attested.

There is a considerable cemetery in the village, which is dotted with small private chapels, each of them with a family burial vault beneath it. The finest of these belonged to a family named Buxhoewden which faced the public high road, and contained certain posts to which the horses of the farmers used to be haltered when the owners were occupied in the town. The first signs of anything peculiar lay in the behaviour of these creatures, which showed such symptoms of terror that they attracted the notice of passers-by. They were covered with sweat, trembled all over, and in three cases actually died from the violence of their emotion. At the same time certain loud but vague sounds were heard to come either from the chapel or from the vault beneath it. These portents were in the early summer of the year 1844.

In July a member of the Buxhoewden family died, and the hearse horses on approaching the cemetery showed the same signs of terror as the others. The service in the chapel was interrupted by hollow groans, which may have been imagined by a congregation who were already predisposed to alarm. What was not imagination, however, was the fact that those who afterwards descended into the vault found the coffins there, which had been in rows, cast into a confused heap upon the wooden floor. These coffins seem to have been of massive oak, very strongly and heavily made. This might have been the work of some enemy to the family, but the doors of the vault had been secured and the locks were intact. There was always the possibility of false keys, however, so the coffins were replaced in their order, and the place very carefully secured.

As the agitation of the horses and the general unrest of the community still continued the chief man of the district, Baron de Guldenstubbe, took up the matter officially, and so the Russian Government found itself involved in the same one-sided contention from which the Governor of Barbados had gained so little satisfaction. With two of his family he made a preliminary examination, and then finding the coffins once again in confusion, he formed a committee of investigation consisting of himself, the local bishop, the Burgermeister, a physician named Luce and four representative citizens.

On entering the vault they again found that the enemy had been at work and that the contents were scattered in all directions. Only three coffins, those of a very saintly grandmother and of two little children, were undisturbed. Attempted robbery was suggested as an explanation, which was the more plausible as an adjoining vault had once been entered, and some gold fringe taken from the coffins. But nothing was now missing nor was there any means of entrance. The committee pursued its research with great care, even to the point of opening some coffins to see if rings and trinkets buried with the owners were still within. It was found that this was so. Workmen were then called in to examine the floor and walls, but no secret entrance could be discovered.

Everything was now closed up once more and the disconsolate committee withdrew, after placing heavy seals upon the door. Before leaving the vault fine ashes were scattered all over the wooden floor, and also over the steps leading down, and the pavement of the chapel. Finally guards were set for three days and nights. It must be admitted that they did things thoroughly in the village of Ahrensburg. At the end of that time the Commission returned in full state with the whole population lining the churchyard rails, eager to hear the result.

The seals were unbroken, the door unopened, but the interior of the vault was in the usual state of chaos. No sign at any point was found upon the ashes and no human feet had entered, but great forces had none the less been at work. The secret powers, reinforced rather than abashed by the recent visit of the Commission, had wrought far greater mischief than before. All the coffins were scattered, save the same three which had been exempt before. Some of the heaviest had been placed upside-down so that the corpse was on its head, and in one instance the lid had burst and the right arm of the inmate, who was a man who had died by his own hand, was protruding and pointing towards the ceiling. Such was the fearsome spectacle which greeted the Commission. They were duly noted in a detailed report and are still to be consulted among the official records of the Island of Oesel, with the names of the witnesses attached. It is also on record that the effect upon the mind of Dr. Luce, who was a man of considerable attainments and a Voltairian in religion, was a complete change of mental outlook, and that revulsion from materialism which any actual contact with the spiritual world, even in its crudest forms, must logically produce.

The result of these gruesome phenomena was that the coffins were removed from the vault and were buried in earth, after which complete tranquillity seems to have descended upon the little village. Not only were there no disturbances to vex the population, but the horses were observed to occupy their old stance without any symptoms of terror. Nothing was left of the whole incident save a memory, but it was a memory which should not be allowed to die, for the facts are really as well attested as facts could be. Apart from the official record, Mr. Dale Owen, who was American minister to Naples and a man of great intelligence, met Miss de Guldenstubbe and her brother in 1859 and took their personal recollections of the whole matter. It is from his work that I have taken the details.

No doubt many other such cases could be recorded, but here at least are three which appear to be authentic and which reproduce the same characteristics. If relics of some strange animal were found in three different localities, the first conclusion among men of science would be that such an animal did exist, and was henceforth to be included among the creatures of earth. The next proceeding would be to compare the relics and to endeavour to reconstruct some image of the new-comer. In the same way these three cases may be said to fairly establish the fact of these curious phenomena which involve the desecration of graves — a fact which, however gruesome, does at least strike at the very roots of that material view of life which has been so fashionable. When we come to compare the cases, however, and to deduce the underlying laws, the psychic student can at best only point to a few possible indications which may be of value.

It has already been stated that one or more living people in a confined space which is afterwards closed up may leave behind them something human and yet invisible, which is sufficiently subtle to be used by forces from the other side as a basis for material phenomena. All movements of solid objects, touched or untouched, in the presence of a medium are to be explained in this fashion, and the force may be expected to be stronger when confined within a limited space. In the case of the Cheriton dug-out, which occupied public attention a couple of years ago, the worker and the boy were busy in a narrow excavation. One or other was mediumistic — that is to say, emitted to an unusual extent this emanation — with the result that the phenomena occurred in the same way, though with less force, when both of them had left the work for their luncheon, as Mr. Jaques, the owner of the property, was able to testify. Let us suppose that in the case of each of these three vaults there was an accumulation of this mysterious, but very certain, power left behind by the coffin-bearers, and possibly reinforced by the committees of inquiry, who would have been very amazed had they been told that they were, in all probability, themselves contributing to the phenomena. There, I think, you have the physical basis which is necessary for every spiritual manifestation, for it cannot too often or too clearly be insisted upon that spirits are not omnipotent and irresponsible forces, but that they are under a rule of law no less strict than our own. One of these laws is that a physical basis is needed for every physical manifestation. We may find in the future some non-human basis, for it is conceivable that some subtle chemical action could be established which would generate this magnetic force just as zinc and acid generate the kindred mystery of electricity. But a physical basis there must be. No ghost was ever self-supporting. He can exist without our help, but he cannot manifest to human eyes without drawing his material from human (or possibly animal) sources. That, as it seems, to me, is one of the basic laws of the new world of science.

There is some evidence, which could be cited in full if it did not lead us down a lengthy side street, that when a life has been cut short before it has reached its God-appointed term, whether the cause be murder or suicide (of accident I speak with less confidence), there remains a store of unused vitality which may, where the circumstances are favourable, work itself off in capricious and irregular ways. This is, I admit, a provisional theory, but it has been forced upon my mind by many considerations. Such a theory would go some way to explain, or at least to throw some dim light upon, the disturbances which from all past time have been associated with scenes of violence and murder. If it could be conceived that the unseen part of a man is divisible into the higher, which passes on as spirit, and the lower which represents animal functions and mere unused vitality, then it is this latter which has not been normally worked off in a life prematurely ended, and which may express itself in strange semi-intelligent fashion afterwards. In dreams one is conscious of some such division, where the higher functions occasionally bring us back touches of the most spiritual; while the lower functions, deprived for the time of judgment, humour and all the spirit qualities, evolve a capricious and grotesque life of their own, which has neither reason nor sense of proportion and yet seems very real to us in our slumbers. It is not a subject upon which one could be dogmatic, but the days are passing when all such cases can be disposed of by being brushed aside and ignored as senseless superstition. Some sort of framework must be formed into which they can be fitted, and with fuller knowledge the fit will be closer.

Finally the question arises: What was the object of such phenomena? We see that the result in at least two cases out of three was that the dead were buried elsewhere. Apparently for some reason the earth burial may have been desired instead of the seclusion of the vault. It would certainly hasten the absolute decomposition of the body, if that should be good from the point of view of the other world. This seems a farfetched supposition and one very much at variance with the belief of those numerous nations who have practised the art of embalming and corpse-preservation, but if this was not the object of the disturbance it must be admitted that it is difficult to see what other result was attained, save a very compelling proof of unseen intelligences and powers. If a speedy decomposition was the object aimed at, then the leaden and heavy oak coffins would check the process, which would be swifter in the more fragile wooden ones. This might conceivably explain the particular violence which seems to have been used towards the more permanent materials. Perhaps, however, we lose time in searching for rational explanations, since there is ample evidence that there can be rowdiness and hooliganism beyond the veil as well as here.

One remark should be made before passing on to another form of ghostly manifestation. It has been said that the basis for physical results lies in the human organism. It is not meant, however, that there is any relation between the small amount often taken from the medium and the great physical results obtained. It is clear that the unseen forces can get great power from a limited supply of this subtle material. In the case carefully observed and noted by Professor Zöllner of Leipzig, a beam of wood which two horses could not have dragged apart was shattered into pieces in the presence of Slade. A friend of mine who was present at a meeting of the Goligher circle saw a table ascend in the air and remain there, although four strong men did all they could to drag it down. It is true that in a sitting of this sort the medium, Miss Goligher, frequently registered a loss of weight amounting to a stone in a séance upon the weighing-dial which Dr. Crawford had erected, but it is clear that the force exerted by the unseen powers was very much greater than this and was due to their own manipulation of the material which her organism had provided. In some of the sittings of D.D. Home, the force was so great that the whole building used to shake as if a heavy train were passing below it.

And here comes one of the mysteries which bear directly upon that definition of spirit law which is so desirable. In spite of the possibility of using vast power there is a clear, and so far as credible records go, an unbroken ordinance that a ghost may not for its own personal ends destroy anything or injure anyone. This may seem in contradiction to the broken coffins, but that may not have been for personal ends, but an accident due to the falling about of the heavy weights. Here is an authentic case in illustration:

A great friend of mine, a Roman Catholic priest, whose word could not be doubted by anyone who knew him, was sent for a rest cure to a lonely house upon the coast which was frequently used by other priests for the same purpose. Save for an old crone and one or two charitable visitors, he was absolutely alone. After a few days he became conscious of strange noises in the house, which at last reached such a point that, to quote his own description, “it sounded at night as if there were a steam-engine snorting and clanking in the room below.” Nothing was visible, but the sounds were incessant and were heard by two visitors as clearly as by the inmate. The priest is himself open more than most men to psychic impressions, and upon that night he had a dream or vision which was so absolutely clear that he determined to act upon it. He descended in the morning and asked the old woman whether there was not an unused room in the basement. She answered that there was. He entered it and found that he had already seen it in his dream — a small dusty, cobwebbed place with some old books of theology heaped in the corners. He walked at once to one of these heaps, picked up a book as in his dream, opened it, took out a sheet of written paper, glanced at it to make sure that it was really as revealed and then carried it into the kitchen, where he stuffed it between the bars of the grate. The paper was a written preparation for confession, made out by some over-conscientious or over-methodical inmate of the house, who had noted down a good many more things than were desirable for public perusal. Presumably he had died shortly afterwards and had been worried by the recollection of this document, which he then took these means to have destroyed. There were no further disturbances of any sort within the house.

Now here is a story which is undoubtedly true and which cannot be met by any of the ingenious explanations of the honest but sceptical Researcher. If the subconscious knowledge of my friend could have told him that the paper was there, it certainly could not have caused the noises which alarmed him. It has to be examined as a fact, as the zoologist already quoted would examine the skin of his rare animal. The unhappy spirit could apparently draw power either from the old housekeeper or, as is more likely, from the young and psychic priest, to shake the very house with vibrations, and yet with all this power he could not destroy a frail sheet of paper, but had to bring its destruction about in this indirect fashion. This seems to be a solid and noteworthy conclusion. All authentic tales where spirits linger, earth-bound because they appear to be worried over earthly things, concealed treasure, lost documents, or other such matters, come into this category, and the question which one naturally asks, “Why can’t they set the matter right for themselves?” is answered by, “They have not the power. It is against the law.”

I believe that all these varied experiences have been sent to us not to amuse us by tales to be told and then forgotten, but as the essential warp and woof of a new spiritual garment which is to be woven for the modern world We live in an age which has long demanded a sign, yet when the sign was sent it was blind to it. I cannot understand the frame of mind of those who view proofs of survival which appear in the Bible as of most vital importance, and yet close their mind to the same thing when they reappear before our very eyes. I believe most of the evidence in the sacred books, where it is not perverted by mistranslation, interposition or forgery, to be perfectly good evidence, but no honest mind could say that judged by human standards of credibility it could, for an instant, compare in its demonstration of the fate which awaits the soul, with the psychic revelations of recent years. In the latter case the witnesses are thousands in number, are men of the highest credibility, and have placed in many cases their personal experiences upon record so that any objection can be lodged. Modern Britain does not disprove but confirms ancient Judea. We are in a more scientific age, however, and we wish to know the how and the why. Such inquiries are no longer, with so great a wealth of material, beyond the scope of our brains. In this article I have endeavoured to indicate two well-marked laws: the one that it is the effluvia of the human organism which furnish the basis of physical manifestations from the unseen; the other, that there is a strict limitation of psychic power which does not prevent noise and subsequent disturbance, but does stand in the way of destruction or personal violence.

This power of producing noise and commotion may, it is true, cause such great misery to those who endure it that it may amount to mental torture. There is the well-known case of Miss Clavion, the famous French actress, who refused the advances of a young Breton suitor. The man died two years later with menaces against Miss Clavion upon his lips. He was as good as his word and proved the wisdom of her rejection by the unmanly persecution to which he subjected her after his death. This took the form of loud cries, which frequently broke out when she was in the company of others, and were so terrible that some of the hearers fainted. In the later stages of her persecution these cries gave place to the sound of a musket going off, which occurred once a day through a particular window of her house. On ninety days running this phenomenon occurred, and was most fully investigated as the cries had also been, by the Parisian police, who placed spies in the street and sought constantly but in vain for any normal explanation. Finally, after two years the persecution stopped, the time having been foretold by the dead man, who declared that he would upset her life for the same period as she had upset his. He had certainly done so, but like all revenge, it was probably a two-edged knife which cut him more deeply than his victim.

A more justifiable persecution, but one which also amounted to torture, is detailed by Mrs. Carter Hall, the authoress, as having come within her personal observation in her youth. In this case a young officer had inflicted the greatest of all injuries upon a beautiful young woman, who afterwards died. The resulting persecution may have come not from her gentle spirit, but from that of someone who loved her and desired to avenge her, but it was of the most atrocious character. Particulars will be found in Mr. Dale Owen’s *Footfalls* — a book so accurate in its cases and so wise in its deductions that it should be a classic upon this subject. The unfortunate officer was attended wherever he went by such noises and disturbances that at last no landlady would let rooms to him, and he was hunted from house to house, a miserable and despairing man, alternately praying for relief and cursing at his unseen enemy. No dog would stay with him, and even his relatives were scared at his company, so that he had to leave his home for fear of driving his mother and sister into an asylum. “It is hard to be so punished,” he said to Mrs. Carter Hall, “but perhaps I have deserved it.” Possibly this admission may have proved to be the dawn of better days.

VI

THE ALLEGED POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS OF KNOWN AUTHORS

OSCAR WILDE — JACK LONDON — LORD NORTHCLIFFE — DICKENS — CONRAD — JEROME

From time to time communications have come through mediums which are alleged to emanate from men who have been famous in literature. These have been set aside by the ordinary critic, who starts with the assumption that the thing is in a general sense absurd, and therefore applies the same judgment with little or no examination to the particular case. Those of us, however, who have found that many psychic claims have actually been made good, may be inclined to look a little more closely into these compositions, and judge how far, from internal evidence, the alleged authorship is possible or absurd. I venture to say that an impartial critic who approached the subject from this angle will be rather surprised at the result.

Let us predicate on the first instance that if the Spiritualist hypothesis is true, and if things are carried out exactly as they say, then one would expect the posthumous work to be inferior to that of the living man. In the first place, he is filtering it through another brain which may often misinterpret or misunderstand. Even a typewriter under my own control, causes me, I find, to lose something of my sureness of touch, and how much more would it be if it were an unstable human machine which I was endeavouring to operate. In the second place, the writer has entered upon a new life with a new set of experiences, and with the tremendous episode of physical dissolution between him and the thoughts of earth. This also may well show itself in his style and diction. The most that we can hope for is something which is strongly reminiscent of the deceased writer. This, of course, might be produced by parody, and we have to ask ourselves how far such a parody is likely or even possible in the case of the particular medium. If that medium has never shown signs of the rare power of parody, if he has had no previous literary experience, and if there are other internal evidences of the author’s identity, then the case becomes a stronger one. In no event could the judgment be absolutely final, but if several instances can be adduced, each of which is cogent, then the collective effect would tend to greatly strengthen the psychic proof of identity.

I would first take the alleged messages of Oscar Wilde, which are certainly very arresting. Wilde's style was so marked, and at its best so remarkably beautiful, that I have never seen any admitted parody which was adequate. Yet there have been several communications alleged to be from the other side which do reproduce those peculiarities in a very marked form. One of these was a play which came through the hand of Mrs. Hester Dowden, and which exhibited both the strength and the weakness of Wilde. Another is to be found in that remarkable narrative, "Both Sides of the Door," where Wilde was alleged to have interfered, in order to save a family who were suffering from a peculiar psychic persecution. Wilde had a particularly fine eye for colour, and a very happy knack of hitting off a tint by an allusion to some natural object. I think that all the "honey-coloured" moons which have floated over recent literature had their origin in one of Wilde's adjectives. In this particular little book Wilde spoke of the Arctic seas as "an ocean of foaming jade." That struck me as a particularly characteristic phrase.

In the present essay, however, we will concentrate our attention upon the volume which has been published by Werner Laurie under the title of *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde*. These also came through the hand of Mrs. Dowden (or Mrs. Travers Smith) and they are dignified by a preface from the father of Psychic Research, Sir William Barrett, who makes the general assertion concerning the script, "It does afford strong primâ facie evidence of survival after the dissolution of body and brain."

The messages, it should be explained, came partly by automatic writing, while in a normal state, and partly by the ouija board. Mrs. Dowden was associated with Mr. Soal in the experiments, she sometimes working alone, and sometimes with his hands upon the ouija board. Here are some of the messages which seem to me to be most characteristic of Wilde's personality and literary style.

"In eternal twilight I move, but I know that in the world there is day and night, seedtime and harvest, and red sunset must follow apple-green dawn. Every year spring throws her green veil over the world and anon the red autumn glory comes to mock the yellow moon. Already the may is creeping like a white mist over land and hedgerow, and year after year the hawthorn bears blood-red fruit after the death of its may."

This is not merely adequate Wilde. It is exquisite Wilde. It is so beautiful that it might be chosen for special inclusion in any anthology of his writings. The adjective "apple-green" for dawn, and the picture of the may "creeping like a white mist" are two high lights in a brilliant passage. Again as in the "foaming jade" we have the quick response to colour. It is not too much to say that the posthumous Wilde in such passages as this is Wilde with an added sparkle.

In the script we find that after this passage Wilde was subjected to a long *questionnaire,* which he answered with great precision. When asked why he came, he answered:

"To let the world know that Oscar Wilde is not dead. His thoughts live on in the hearts of all those who in a gross age can hear the flute voice of beauty calling on the hills, or mark where her white feet brush the dew from the cowslips in the morning. Now the mere memory of the beauty of the world is an exquisite pain. I was always one of those for whom the visible world existed. I worshipped at the shrine of things seen. There was not a blood stripe on a tulip or a curve on a shell, or a tone on the sea, but had for me its meaning and its mystery, and its appeal to the imagination. Others might sip the pale lees of the cup of thought, but for me the red wine of life."

This also is beautiful and rare literary work. If an artist can tell a Rubens by its colouring or a sculptor can assign an ancient statue to Phidias, then I claim that a man with an adequate sense of the rhythm of good prose can ascribe these fine extracts to Wilde and to no one else. His hallmark is stamped upon them for all the world to see, and when it ceases to turn away its head it will see it clearly enough. Immersed in trivialities, it seems to have no leisure at present for the great questions of life and of death.

These two beautiful passages and several others almost as fine, came in a single sitting on June 8th, 1923, and were produced by Mr. Soal writing, while Mrs. Dowden laid her hand upon his. In many forms of mediumship it is to be observed that the blending of two human atmospheres produces finer results than either alone can get.

The cynical humour of Wilde, and a certain mental arrogance which was characteristic, breaks out in these passages.

“Being dead is the most boring experience in life. That is if one excepts being married, or dining with a schoolmaster.”

Again being dissatisfied with one of his own images he writes, “Stop! Stop! This image is insufferable. You write like a successful grocer who, from selling pork, has taken to writing poetry.”

When someone alluded to an occasion when Whistler had scored off him, he wrote, “With James vulgarity always begins at home.”

Again

“I do not wish to burden you with details of my life, which was like a candle that had guttered at the end. I rather wish to make you believe that I was the medium through which beauty filtered, and was distilled like the essence of a rose.”

His literary criticism was acid and unjust, but witty.

“I knew Yeats well — a fantastical mind, but so full of inflated joy in himself that his little cruse of poetry was erupted early in his career — a little drop of beauty which was spread only with infinite pains over the span of many years.”

Now and again there are passages of intense interest to an instructed Spiritualist which give a glimpse of the exact sphere upon which Wilde is moving, and the reasons which retard his progress and subject him to those limitations which draw from him the constant exclamation of “Pity Oscar Wilde!” His pictures of earth are a reminiscence, and his witty cynical chatter is a mere screen. The real bitterness of his experience, a bitterness which might I think have been assuaged by some sympathy and instruction from this side, flashes out in occasional passages which vibrate with his emotion.

“I am a wanderer. Over the whole world I have wandered, looking for eyes by which I may see. At times it is given to me to pierce this strange veil of darkness, and through eyes from which my secret must be for ever hidden, gaze once more on the gracious day.”

This would mean in our language that from time to time he has been able to take control of a medium, and so get into touch with physical things once more. His troubles come from the desire to struggle down rather than up. He has found strangely assorted mediums.

“I have found sight in the most curious places. Through the eyes out of the dusky face of a Tamil girl I have looked on the tea fields of Ceylon, and through the eyes of a wandering Kurd I have seen Ararat.... Once on a pleasure steamer on its way to St. Cloud I saw the green waters of the Seine and the lights of Paris through the vision of a little girl, who clung wondering to her mother and wondered why.”

What rational explanation can be given for such messages save the Spiritualistic one? They are there. Whence come they? Are they the unconscious cerebration of Mr. Soal? But many of them have come when that gentleman was not present, so this explanation is ruled out. Are they then an emanation of Mrs. Dowden? But they have come in full strength and beauty when her hands have not been on the ouija board, but have simply touched those of Mr. Soal. What then is the alternative explanation? I confess that I can see none. Can anyone contend that both Mr. Soal and Mrs. Dowden have a hidden strand in their own personality which enables them on occasion to write like a great deceased writer, and at the same time a want of conscience which permits that subconscious strand to actually claim that it *is* the deceased author? Such an explanation would seem infinitely more unlikely than any transcendental one can do.

The case might be made fairly convincing on the question of style alone. But there is much more in it than that. The actual writing, which was done at a speed which forbids conscious imitation, is often the handwriting of Wilde, and reproduces certain curious little tricks of spacing which were usual with him in life. He alludes freely to all sorts of episodes, many of them little known, which have been shown to be actual facts. He gives criticisms of authors with a sure, but rather unkind touch, where the medium has little or no acquaintance with the writings criticized. He alludes to people whom he has known in life with the utmost facility. In the case of one, Mrs. Chan Toon, the name was so unlikely that it seemed to me that there must be some mistake. As if to resolve my doubts a letter reached me presently from the very lady herself.

To sum up, I do not think that any person who approached this problem with an open mind can doubt that the case for Wilde’s survival and communication is an overpoweringly strong one.

We now turn to a second case, that of Jack London. Here again we are dealing with an author who had such a marked individuality, and such a strong explosive method of expression that any imitation should be readily detected. The collector of the evidence is Edward Payne, who died soon after his task was completed. He was a man of considerable attainments, a close friend of London’s in his lifetime, and not a Spiritualist, so we have the material for a very instructed and unprejudiced opinion. The messages came to him through a lady who has a public career, and therefore desires to remain anonymous. Mr. Payne answers for her bona fides, and assures us she was not a professional medium, that she was a woman of considerable culture, and that she was a convinced materialist, so that no strand of her own nature, so far as can be traced, is concerned in producing messages which are in their very nature the strongest indictment of materialism that could be framed.

The messages assume two forms, the one quite unconvincing, the other most powerful. The former is an attempt at a work of fiction which was an utter failure. The fact that London could not get his story of worldly life across, and yet was most convincing in discussing his own actual condition, is to be understood readily. It is clear that he was attempting the most difficult of all forms of communication, a long, connected narrative with characters and plot, under indirect conditions to which no living author could submit.

If London had relied upon his transmitted fiction alone he would have been deservedly set down as an impostor. But when he comes to draw not others, but himself, he is much more convincing. Apparently he was much worried after death by finding everything entirely different from anything he had expected, though if he and other materialists would deign to listen to the poor despised Spiritualists they would save themselves all such shocks, the effects of which endure often for many years.

Instead of loss of personality he found himself, like Wilde, in a mist or haze — a reflection of his own perplexed mind — with a body and mind as before, the perceptions being more acute than on earth. He quickly was forced to realise that all his teaching had been utterly wrong, that he had done harm by it, and that his immediate task was to get back if he could, and set the matter right. This getting back is no easy task. The right vibration has to be found, and it is far to seek. But London was not a man to be repulsed. He found his vibration and he delivered his message. Here are some of the communications which seem to me to bear the stamp of the man on every line of them.

“I am going to try. Trying is the life of me. Ask Aunt Netta if it is Jack who speaks that.”

“Here I am alive, feeling myself to be myself, yet nothing I say or write can identify me to those who know me best.”

"Death has taught me what earth held from me. My spirit is plunging forward with more vigour than wisdom, as in my earth days. But I know now the way and the life. Oh, I have much, much, that I must undo."

He sends a long, connected communication which is an essay in itself, headed "What Life means to me now." In it he says, "I am a soul — a living Soul. I followed the lost trail of materialism, and sickened in the foul mists of error." The whole composition, which is too long for quotation, is most powerful, and might serve as a warning from the grave, to those millions who so heedlessly tread the very path which led London to his misery.

"My soul, though I knew it not, was dyspeptic with the materialistic fodder I crammed into it.... Death caught me unawares. He snapped me up when my face was not turned his way. I almost regret this. I believe it made my transition the harder.

"I awoke. Dreaming? I was sure of it. I dreamed on and on. I dreamed myself into eternity. I am vague. I was vague to myself. My powers returned. I could think. I hailed my old brain like a returned friend. I fumbled and groped. My earth blindness was on me. It hazed me about. I fought my way through it. I had no goal. I had passed the only goal I had ever admitted. I was on the other side of it. I struggle to seize the correct term. I try vainly to translate the experience into terms of earth which has no utterance for it.

"I died. I am looking at death from the other side — the tame friendly side of him. And Life is indestructible.... I see man face his destiny as I saw him on earth. I see him fall. I see him rise again and go on. He fights his way and when his place is ready here he comes. There are no catastrophes. All is in order.

"I am a stranger to this tongue. I am but learning to speak. What faculty I possessed on earth is disrupted by a condition it was never trained to meet. I shall strive to re-establish it and then I shall speak, and, friends of earth, you shall recognise my voice."

These short strong pregnant sentences are Jack London at his best. As in the case of Wilde, his posthumous work will bear comparison with anything he has done in life.

He has a horror of his old point of view.

"That which was my truth of yesterday, which I hugged to me as the quintessence of my distilled thought, becomes a volatile poison to me here and I must ... distil a new thought out of the fires of my previous experience, and by this thought shall I rise. Renaissance of soul is a labour shot with pains of remembrance, held by fetters of past error which are burst with a sweated toil while the heart strains with its propulsion ... I feel that I have got right with God — I am no longer worshipping myself."

When asked what specific work he was doing, he answered, "I have to direct those lost or bewildered, as I was when I came. I labour to show them the way I would not take."

These last words seem to me to mark the beginning of Jack London's regeneration. He understands that his work is impersonal, unselfish and humble. Before that he had wished to reassert himself on the old earth terms, and the realisation that he could not do so was a bitter one. He kicked hard against the pricks.

"God! I am annihilated!" he cried; "my earth life is stamped out, blotted from time by this passage. I can't puzzle it out. My hand fumbles. Did Death rob me as I passed through his clutch. Did he steal the face of me that those who knew me see me strange, feeble, pitiful. Who or what has cut the tap-root of my power? I am befogged."

The child still cried for its toys and refused to understand that it had left the nursery. But it cries in a voice that is familiar. The man himself never spoke in such a vital strain as does his ghost. He ends at last on the note that he is not to look back and that the future only should concern him. "The messages" he said, "come from Jack London, the damned soul, struggling out of his own hell of materialisation." But there was light ahead. He had but to persevere. "I am a soldier of the eternal march." Who but Jack London would have written those words? He winds up, "What is more important than to let the world know I am busy undoing what mischief I did." Alas, Jack, the world is too busy with its games and its pleasures, too immersed in its wooden creeds and its petrified religions, to give ear to what you have learned. They, like you, will only realise when it is too late.

It may be gathered from the above that I accept Jack London's return as being a genuine one. I can see no other possible conclusion. The message is there, and it is easier to account for it by the return of London's activities to this sphere, than to torture the theory of multiple personality or subconscious activity, until it is twisted to cover a case which is so much beyond its limits.

There is one other writer who has claimed that he has been able to get messages back to us. This is Lord Northcliffe — or Alfred Harmsworth, as the alleged spirit prefers to be called. In life Harmsworth had no distinctive style, but only the pen of the ready writer, so that it is far more difficult to identify him than in such marked cases as Wilde or London. But if he had not style he had character, and this of a very forcible and individual kind. Judged from that angle his return is convincing, though I would not say that it is so conclusive as in the case of the two men of letters. The great journalist claims to have come through many times, and I have myself had experiences in that direction which cannot possibly be explained away. Hannen Swaffer has given his own account of the matter in his forcible narrative "Northcliffe's Return." For the purpose of this essay, however, I will confine myself to a single long article, said to be dictated by Northcliffe, and coming through the hand of a lady living in a small town in New Zealand, and quite ignorant of her control's character, or of his methods of thought and expression.

He also, like the others, most bitterly regrets the want of true guidance which he had found in his lifetime, and the absorption in material things which stunted his spiritual development. At the same time it is easy to see that the spirit which is struggling for expression is really, as I should judge, upon a higher plane than either of those which have been already discussed. Service is his one ideal and that is the sign of progression. He speaks of his powers humbly enough.

"I would probably not have risen above the rank of private yet had it not been for some executive ability. For the will power and the dynamic force necessary to achieve success in my old line of endeavour has helped me considerably here."

His review of his own earth life is interesting and instructive:

"I had a tremendous lot of power in public affairs, and I now see to how much better use I might have put that power. But I could only act according to my light at the time, and as that light was very dim indeed, on matters pertaining to the more real and lasting things of life, I made many mistakes. We do not suffer for our mistakes, except in witnessing the results of past actions, which is suffering enough in many cases, God knows! What I mean is, that this suffering is self-inflicted, and the only escape from it is in honest toil to try and right some of the wrong we have unwittingly done in the past. In this way only can we wipe the slate clean and start life afresh on a higher level."

Now and again he breaks out into that impetuous and loud-spoken anger which was one of his earth characteristics. Here is an example when he talks of our present misleaders of public opinion:

"The colossal ignorance and arrogant pride of so many of those whose privilege it is to help to form public opinion is my especial bugbear at present. If they would not be so smug and self-satisfied about it I could bear it better. But, as things are, I often long to prick the highly-inflated bubble of their unholy conceit with one of my sharp, old-time, vigorous denunciations of humbug."

And again he has a word to say to those who imagine that to commune with those who are gone can in any way be harmful or disagreeable to those who come to us.

"Poor silly, deluded folks! If they only knew what I, and millions like me know of the heart-hunger for those left behind, which exists over here, they would open their minds and hearts, and make their dear ones as welcome in their lives and concerns as they were before death overtook them. They could do it easily, too, if they would only allow themselves to be properly instructed in these matters of great moment to all concerned, by those who know, instead of being content to listen to those shrill, oft-repeated, parrot cries of religious humbugs, who tell of the sin and danger of tampering with these things, whilst knowing nothing whatever of the help and consolation such intercourse can bring to loving, suffering beings on both sides of the veil."

Can anyone imagine that these forceful words, which can be matched in unpublished communications from the same source in England, could have really come from the mind of the lady in far New Zealand.

In theoriginal form of this essay, which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, I devoted some space to considering a continuation of Edwin Drood, which professed to come from Charles Dickens through the hand of one James who was foreman in a printing office in Brattleborough, Vermont. No one who reads it can deny that it is an excellent imitation of the great author's style, but the most unconvincing part was the narrative itself, which was clumsy and improbable. My conclusion was "that the actual inspiration of Dickens is far from being absolutely established." I added, however, "No one with any critical faculty would say that the result was an entirely unworthy one, though if written by the living Dickens it would certainly not have improved his reputation. It reads," I added, "like Dickens gone flat."

There was an extraordinarily interesting sequel to this. Shortly after I had written as above I had a sitting with Florizel von Reuter the celebrated violin virtuoso, and his mother. Their (or rather her) mediumship is of a most convincing nature, as its technique is in itself of abnormal power. She sits with her eyes tightly bandaged, and her hand upon a small pointer which darts very rapidly at the letters of the alphabet, while her son writes down the result. There is no question at all about the bandage being adequate, and she does not turn her face down to the board. The letters too, are so close together that she could not learn to touch them with accuracy. Yet the messages come through with extreme speed. Whatever their value there is no question that they come in preternatural fashion.

Imagine us there, seated, these two at the centre table, my wife and I in the corner of our cottage room. Dickens and Drood had been in my mind, but our visitors had no means of knowing that. Florizel von Reuter had never read *Edwin Drood*. His mother had read it years ago but had a very vague memory as to the book. Suddenly the pointer begins to dart furiously and Florizel reads off each sentence as he notes it down Some of them, I may add, came in looking-glass writing and had to be read backwards. The first was, "Boz is buzzing about." Boz, of course, was the nom-de-plume of Dickens, so I asked if it was he. He eagerly declared that it was. After a short interchange of dialogue I said, "Will you answer some questions?"

"I hope I know enough," was the answer.

"Was that American who finished *Edwin Drood* inspired?"

"Not by me," was the instantaneous and decided answer.

Now von Reuter knew nothing of this matter, and my own opinion was, at the utmost, neutral, so that this positive answer reflected none of our own thoughts.

Then came a further message.

"Wilkie C. did" [or would have done] "better."

There was, I believe, some talk after Dickens' death of Wilkie Collins finishing the book. So far as I know he did nothing in the matter. The von Reuters knew nothing of this.

"Was Edwin Drood dead?"

"No, he was not."

That was certainly my own opinion so I make a present of it to the telepathist.

Then after a pause, the message went on:

“I was sorry to go across before I got him out of his trouble. The poor chap has had a hard time. I don’t know which is better, to solve the mystery in your note-book or let it remain a mystery for ever. If you make good with Conrad I will put you on to Edwin.”

“I shall be honoured, Mr. Dickens.”

“Charles, if you please. We like friends to be friends.” The reader will smile at this. So did I. But facts are facts and I am giving them. I asked:

“Have you a clear recollection of the plot?”

“I have.”

“Who was Datchery?”

“What about the fourth dimension? I prefer to write it all out through you.”

What the fourth dimension has to do with it I cannot imagine. I think it was meant as chaff, since the fourth dimension is what no one can understand.

Now comes the important sentence:

“Edwin is alive and Chris is hiding him.”

This seems to me to be exceedingly important, both from a literary and from a psychic point of view. Some of the best brains in the world have occupied themselves over the problem as to whether Drood was dead, and if not where he could be. Numerous solutions have been suggested, but though I am fairly well posted in the matter this is an entirely new one. Chris is the Rev. Crisparkle, who in the novel is a kindly and energetic, muscular Christian. Certainly if he played the part indicated it is well concealed. But then it was the author’s duty to conceal it well. There are several subtle touches which might point to the truth of it. On re-reading the fragment with this idea in my mind I can say with certainty that up to a point Crisparkle certainly knew nothing about it. He has a soliloquy to that effect, and whatever means are legitimate by which an author may mislead a reader, a false soliloquy is not among them. But after that point in the story there is no reason why Crisparkle may not have surprised Drood’s secret, and helped him. There was a huge cupboard in Crisparkle’s room which is described with a detail which seems unnecessary and exaggerated if nothing is to come from it. There again the artist drew his frontispiece under Dickens' very particular direction, and it contains small vignettes of various scenes. There is one which shows Drood standing in a sort of vault, and someone who has some indications of clerical garb coming in to him with a lantern. Is this not Crisparkle and is it not some corroboration of the spirit message?

We got no more messages at that time. Let us for a moment, however, consider the case. Is it not clear evidence of an intelligence outside ourselves? I do not insist upon Charles Dickens. If anyone says to me, "How can you prove that it was not an Impersonation?" I would admit frankly that I cannot prove it. There is none of that corroboration from style which I get in the case of Wilde and of London. I put it on the broader basis, "Was it not an Intelligence apart from ourselves?" Whence came an ingenious solution of a mystery which involved a character of which neither of the von Reuters knew anything with a solution entirely new to me. I claim that it was a most evidential case of Intelligence outside our own physical bodies.

I may add that on the same evening we had a number of messages in Arabic which none of us could understand. When, however, I sent them to my friend, Major Marriott, who is a competent Arabic scholar, they proved to be quite correct. This reinforces the argument that the Dickens' messages were quite apart from ourselves.

Before I close my comments upon "dead" authors I might mention two other points of contact which had in each case some evidential value. Both were effected through the von Reuters — once in my presence and once in my absence. In the former case the message, delivered as before by the blindfolded lady, purported to be from Joseph Conrad, whom I had not known in life. He said that he had left a book unfinished, that it dealt with the Napoleonic era, and that he would be glad if I would finish it for him, since he knew that I had worked on that epoch. Neither I nor the von Reuters had any idea that such a book existed. We found on inquiry, however, that it was indeed so, and that the book had actually been published a year or two before in its incomplete form. This, of course, lessens the value of the evidence from a psychic research point of view, since we might have heard of the book and forgotten about it, but the fact remains that none of us had any recollection of it.

On another occasion when I was not present the name "Jerome" came through. On being asked whether it was a Christian or a surname the characteristic answer came:

“It is my alpha and omega.”

“I want to speak to Sir Arthur,” came next.

“Did you know him in life?”

“Yes, yes, yes” (very excitedly).

“Would you like to write with my son’s hand?” He assented eagerly.

Florizel von Reuter, who had the gift of automatic writing, then took the pencil. A message came through that Jerome and I had been good friends, but had disagreed upon the subject of Occultism. The message concluded, “Tell him from me that I know now that he was right and I was wrong. We never know our greatest mistakes at the time we make them. Make it clear to him that I am not dead.”

In von Renter’s account of this incident in his remarkable book, *Psychical Experiences of a Musician*, he says:

“I should like to impress upon the reader that neither my mother nor I had the least idea whether Doyle and Jerome had been even superficially acquainted, let alone knowing anything of Jerome’s views upon occult matters.”

The latter cases are certainly not so convincing as the earlier ones, but if you take all the evidence together it adds, I think, a new and little explored region to psychic research.

VII

SOME CURIOUS PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

My experiences with mediums, good, bad and indifferent, are probably as wide as those of any living man. At one time or another I have experimented with Jonson of Los Angeles, whom I look upon as the best materialising medium whom I have known, with Inez Wagner of the same city, a wonderful voice medium, with Mrs. Wickland and with Miss Besinnet of Toledo, who is also of the first psychic quality. I have sat also in America with Mr. John Ticknor, a gifted amateur; with Mrs. Chenoweth, the famous clairvoyante; with Mrs. Wriedt of Detroit and Valiantine, wonderful direct voice exponents; with “Margery” Crandon, the world-famous amateur; with Miss Ridley of Philadelphia; Mrs. Pruden of Cincinnati; Mrs. Rose Miller of Washington; Mrs. Hazel of Winnipeg; the Hamilton circle in the same city, and many others. In Australasia I experimented with Bailey, the apport medium; Mrs. Susanna Harris; Mrs. Roberts of Dunedin, and several more. In South Africa with Mrs. Kimpton, and half a dozen more. In Paris with “Eva” and with Madame Briffaud. In Denmark with Einar Nielson. In Sweden with the remarkable daughter of Judge Dahl.

At home there are few mediums of the last twenty years whom I have not sampled, including Husk and Craddock of the older generation, and Evan Powell (at his best at the top of the list), Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Garrett, Mrs. Barkel, Mrs. Brittain (all four splendid clairvoyantes), Mrs. Roberts Johnson and Mrs. Cooper (both of them overworked voice mediums), and a great many others of lesser note.

I have worked also many times with Hope of Crewe, who in his own line is the greatest medium of all time, and with Mrs. Deane, both of them exponents of psychic photography. These are some of the mediums whose gifts I have explored, and in many cases I have sat as often as a dozen times. Hence, if I have formed conclusions they have been based upon wide experiences. I have always taken copious notes of my cases. Fraud I have discovered, and helped to expose in several cases, but on the whole I should not put it at more than ten per cent — if as much — of the whole.

With so much practical work behind me the reader can imagine my feelings when in a public debate upon the subject with Dr. Haldane of Cambridge my distinguished opponent said, “I once knew a medium.” In my reply I asked him what he would think of me if I contradicted him upon some point of chemistry, and said, “I have once been in a laboratory.”

Apart from the ordinary phenomena of the séance room, my life has not given me much direct psychic experience. I have, so far as I know, no spiritual gifts myself and none of that psychic atmosphere which gives a tinge of romance to so many lives. There have, however, been occasions when without the aid of a medium I have been sensitive to the unknown.

One instance occurred some years ago. It was in my bedroom at Crowborough. I wakened in the night with the clear consciousness that there was someone in the room, and that the presence was not of this world. I was lying with my back to the room, acutely awake, but utterly unable to move. It was physically impossible for me to turn my body and face this visitor. I heard measured steps across the room. I was conscious (without seeing it) that someone was bending over me, and then I heard a voice saying in a loud whisper, “Doyle, I come to tell you that I am sorry.” A minute later my disability disappeared, and I was able to turn, but all was black darkness and perfectly still. My wife had not awakened, and knew nothing of what had passed.

It was no dream, I was perfectly conscious all the time. My visitor gave no name, but I felt that it was a certain individual to whom I had tried to give psychic consolation when he was bereaved. He rejected my advances with some contempt and died himself shortly afterwards. It may well be that he wished to express regret. As to my own paralysis it came, I have no doubt, from the fact that the power for the manifestation had been drawn out of ME. When spirit manifests upon the physical plane it has to draw its matter from a material source, and I was the obvious one. It is the one occasion upon which I have been used as a physical medium, and I am content that it should be the last.

I had a second interesting experience some years ago. There was a church in the neighbourhood which had the reputation of being haunted. There are reasons why it would be wrong for me to indicate it more precisely. The party consisted of my wife and myself, my two sons, my daughter, a friend, and a young London lady who is among our rising poets. It was ten o’clock when we presented ourselves at the door of the church, where we were met by an elderly villager. Swinging a lantern he led the way to the choir end, where we all seated ourselves in the stalls which the ancient monks once occupied. My own very angular throne was that which had been used by many priors, in far-off days when the old church was one of the shrines of England. Opposite me, and dimly lit by the lantern, was the altar, and behind it a blank wall unbroken by any window, but reflecting strange ghostly shadows and illuminations through the high clerestory windows on either side. When the lantern was extinguished and we sat in the darkness watching these strange shifting lights coming and going, the impression was quite ghostly enough, though I have no doubt at all that there was a physical cause, due to some reflection of passing lights in the distance. It was, however, sufficiently weird.

For two hours I had sat in the dark upon my hard seat, and wondered whether cushions were vouchsafed to the priors of old. The lights still came and went behind the altar, but they only flickered over the top of the high expanse which faced us, and all below was very black. And then suddenly, quite suddenly, there came that which no scepticism could explain away. It may have been forty feet from where I sat to the altar, and midway between, or roughly twenty feet from me, there was a dull haze of light, a sort of phosphorescent cloud, a foot or so across, and about a man’s height from the ground. We had been rustling and whispering, but the sudden utter silence showed me that my companions were as tense as I was. The light glimmered down, and hardened into a definite shape — or I should say shapes — since there were two of them. They were two perfectly clear-cut figures in black and white, with a dim luminosity of their own. The colouring and arrangement gave me a general idea of cassocks and surplices. Whether they were facing the altar or facing each other, was more than I could say, but they were not misty figures, but solid objective shapes. For two or three minutes we all gazed at this amazing spectacle. Then my wife said loudly, “Friends, is there anything which we can do to help you?” In an instant they were gone, and we were peering into unbroken darkness with the lights still flickering above.

Personally, I saw no more, but those of our party who sat upon the right, said that they could afterwards see a similar figure, but somewhat taller — a man alone — who stood on the left of the altar. For my own part nothing more occurred, and when midnight tolled forth above our heads, I thought it was time to make for the waiting motor.

Such was our experience. There was no possible room for error. Unquestionably we all saw these figures, and equally unquestionably the figures were not of this world. I was full of curiosity to know more of the matter, and presently my desire was gratified, for there came into my Psychic Bookshop a gentleman, Mr. Munro, who had had a similar experience some years before in the same place. He was possessed, however, of the great gift of clairvoyance, and his adventure was by day light, so that it was far more definite. He was going round the old church when he was suddenly aware of an ancient monk who was walking by his side, and he knew by his own sensations that it was a clairvoyant vision. The man was middle sized, with a keen, aristocratic, hawk-like face. So clear was he that Mr. Munro remembered how the sunlight shone upon the arched bone of his prominent nose. He walked for some time beside Mr. Munro, and he then vanished. What is noticeable is that he was wearing a gown of a peculiar tint of yellow. Some little time afterwards my informant was present at Bernard Shaw's noble play of "Saint Joan." In one act an English monk appears upon the stage. My friend instantly said to his wife, "That is the dress. That is what the dead man wore." Mrs. Munro, who was in the shop at the time, confirmed this. I may say that they had broached the subject before I had told them of our own experience in the old church.

Then again there came yet another light upon the matter. It was, strange to say, in an Australian paper which was sent to me. It gave an account of the old church, and of the ghosts which haunt it. The chief spirit, the one with the masterful face, was, according to this narrative, the head of the community in the time of Henry the Eighth. He had hid some of the treasures of the church to prevent their spoliation, and his spirit was still earth-bound on account of his solicitude over these buried relics. His name was given, and it was stated that he had shown himself to many visitors. If this account be indeed true, then I should think that the spot in front of the altar, where we saw first the light, and then the two draped figures, might very possibly be worth the attention of the explorer.

I joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1893 or 1894 and must now be one of the oldest members. Shortly afterwards I was asked to form one of a small party to inspect a house at Charmouth. It was said to be haunted.

Dr. Scott of Norwood and Mr. Podmore, a determined and very unreasonable opponent of spiritualism, were my companions. The evidence in the case was so voluminous that it took us the whole of our railway journey to master it. It consisted mainly of a record of senseless noises which made the place hardly habitable for the unfortunate family who had it on a lease and could not afford to abandon it.

They proved to be charming people. An elderly mother, a grown-up son and a married daughter.

The house was a rambling place, a couple of centuries old. We sat up for two nights. On the first nothing occurred. On the second Dr. Scott left us, and I sat alone with Mr. Podmore and the young man. We had, of course, taken every precaution to checkmate fraud, put worsted thread across the stairs, and so on.

We had just begun to think that the second night would be as blank as the first and the ladies had already gone to bed when a fearsome noise broke out. It was like someone whacking a table with a heavy stick. The door of the sitting-room was open and the noise reverberated down the passage.

We rushed into the kitchen from which the sound appeared to come, but there was nothing to be seen there, and the threads on the stair were unbroken. The others returned to the sitting-room, but I remained waiting in the dark in the hope that the noise would break out once more. There was, however, no return and we were never able to cast a light upon the mystery. We could only say that what we had heard corroborated, up to a point, what we had read in the account of the disturbances.

There was, however, a curious sequel. Within a year or so the house was burnt down, which may or may not have had a connection with the mischievous sprite who appeared to haunt it. A suggestive thing, however, was that the skeleton of a child about ten years old was dug up in the garden. This I had from relatives of the family who were so plagued.

Some people think that a young life cut short in an unnatural fashion may leave, as it were, a store of unused vitality which may be put to strange uses.

I was never asked by the Society for a report of this case, but Podmore sent one in, ascribing the noises to the young man, though as a matter of fact, he was actually sitting with us in the parlour when the trouble began. Therefore, the explanation given by Podmore was absolutely impossible. I think that if we desire truth we should not only be critical of all psychic assertions, but equally so of all so-called exposures in this subject. I am sorry to say that in some cases the exposure means downright fraud upon the part of the critic.

One other curious experience comes back to my memory. Shortly after the War I had a letter from the widow of a distinguished soldier living at Alton, Hampshire, in which she stated that her life was made miserable by a noisy haunting of her house, which frightened the children and drove away the servants.

I visited her, however, to see what I could do. She had taken it as a furnished house with a lease of some years, and it was impossible for her to leave it.

I found that the lady was, herself, very psychic, and had the power of automatic writing. Through this it was that she received the name of the entity which haunted the house and she assured me that on making inquiries she found, after some time, that a person of that name had actually inhabited the house some sixty years before. On asking him why his spirit should be so restless she received the answer that some papers about which he was anxious were concealed in the rafters of the box-room.

This message had actually just come through and the box-room had not yet been explored. It was a terrible place, thick with dust and piled with all kinds of lumber, and for an hour or more, in my shirt and trousers, I crawled about under the rafters looking for these papers. I observed, however, that at some period, a bell wire had been passed along there, and it was clear to me that the men who fixed the wire would certainly have come upon any concealed packet. I therefore, made my way back to the sitting-room in a shocking state of dust and perspiration and then and there the lady and I held a table-sitting in which I addressed the unseen entity and explained to him that the papers, if they had ever been there, were certainly gone.

I remonstrated with him for the trouble which he had given to the household and I begged him to think no more of his worldly affairs, but to attune his mind to the higher life. When I asked him if he would do so the table spelt D.V.

I am conscious that this is very vague and open to criticism, but the direct sequel of it all was that from that day onwards the trouble entirely ceased, and the lady was able to write and to assure me that the atmosphere of her house had changed to one of deep peace.

Thus my visit to Alton was not entirely in vain.

VIII

DWELLERS ON THE BORDER

[Footnote: An expansion of this general argument is to be found in *The Coming of the Fairies* (Psychic Press, 2 Victoria Street, W.)]

I propose in this essay to discuss the evidence for the existence of elemental forms of life, invisible to the normal eye, which inhabit the same planet as ourselves. It seems to me that our knowledge of the ether vibrations which govern wireless are a great help to us in this connection, and that we can readily understand now what would have been incomprehensible, because there was no existing analogy, a few years ago. Let us suppose that the London centre was the only one known, and that we were in touch with it through our own receiving apparatus. That represents our reaction to the material world and normally we know of no other, just as the wireless recipient would know only London. But we find that by a very small change of vibration or wave-length we get Paris, Berlin, or Constantinople, and London has vanished. Now if we apply that to psychic vibrations the analogy seems to me very close. As Paracelsus said, “Ut infra, ita supra” (As it is below so it is above). A uniformity runs through the scheme of creation. The clairvoyant whose various powers of receptivity enable him to contact different types of extra-corporeal creatures, corresponds to the man who can switch from one centre to another, and he has the same difficulty in getting his results accepted as the owner of a wave-adjustment set would have if all the normal world was confined to one vibration.

To vary the simile, we are accustomed to the idea of amphibious creatures who may dwell unseen and unknown in the depths of the waters, and then some day be spied sunning themselves upon a sandbank, whence they slip into the unseen once more. If such appearances were rare, and if it should so happen that some saw them more clearly than others, then a very pretty controversy would arise, for the sceptics would say with every show of reason, “Our experience is that only land creatures live on the land, and we utterly refuse to believe in things which slip in and out of the water; if you will demonstrate them to us we will begin to consider the question.”

Faced by so reasonable an opposition the others could only mutter that they had seen them with their eyes, but that they could not command their movements. The sceptics would hold the field.

Something of the sort may exist in our psychic arrangements. One can well imagine that there is a dividing line, like the water edge, this line depending upon what we vaguely call a higher rate of vibrations. Taking the vibration theory as a working hypothesis, one could conceive that by raising or lowering them, creatures could move from one side to the other of this line of material visibility, as the tortoise moves from the water to the land, returning for refuge to invisibility as the reptile scuttles back to the surf. This, of course, is supposition, but intelligent supposition based on the available evidence is the pioneer of science, and it may be that the actual solution will be found in this direction. I am alluding, now, not to spirit return, where eighty years of close observation have given us some sort of certain and definite laws, but rather of those fairy and phantom phenomena which have been endorsed by so many ages, and even in these material days seem to break into some lives in the most unexpected fashion. Victorian science would have left the world hard and clean and bare, like a landscape in the moon, but this science is in truth but a little light in the darkness, and outside that limited circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us, throwing themselves continually across our consciousness in such ways that it is difficult to ignore them.

There is much curious evidence of varying value concerning these borderland forms, which come or go either in fact or imagination — the latter most frequently no doubt. And yet there remains a residue which by all human standards should point to occasional facts. I pass in this essay the age-long tradition which is so universal and consistent, and come down to some modern instances which make one feel that this world is very much more complex than we had imagined, and that there may be upon its surface some very strange neighbours who will open up inconceivable lines of science for our posterity, especially if it should be made easier for them, by sympathy or other help, to emerge from the deep and manifest upon the margin.

Taking a large number of cases of fairy lore which lie before me, there are two points which are common to nearly all of them. One is that children claim to see these creatures far more frequently than adults. This may possibly come from greater sensitiveness of apprehension, or it may depend upon these little entities having less fear of molestation from the children. The other is that more cases are recorded in which they have been seen in the still shimmering hours of a very hot day than at any other time. “The action of the sun upon the brain,” the sceptic says. Possibly — and also possibly not. If it were a question of raising the slower vibrations of our surroundings one could imagine that still heat would be the very condition which might favour such a change. What is the mirage of the desert? What is that scene of hills and lakes which a whole caravan can see while it faces in a direction where for a thousand miles of desert there is neither hill nor lake, nor any cloud or moisture to produce refraction? I can ask the question but I do not venture to give an answer. It is clearly a phenomenon which is not to be confused with the erect or often inverted image which is seen in a land of clouds and of moisture.

There are many people who have a recollection of these experiences of their youth and try afterwards to explain them away on material grounds which do not seem adequate or reasonable. Thus in his excellent book on Folklore the Rev. S. Baring-Gould gives us a personal experience which illustrates several of the points already mentioned.

“In the year 1838,” he says, “when I was a small boy, four years old, we were driving to Montpelier on a hot summer day over the long straight road that traverses a pebble and rubble-strewn plain on which grows nothing save a few aromatic herbs. I was sitting on the box with my father when to my great surprise I saw legions of dwarfs of about two feet high running along beside the horses — some sat laughing on the pole, some were scrambling up the harness to get on the backs of the horses. I remarked to my father what I saw, when he abruptly stopped the carriage and put me inside beside my mother, where, the conveyance being closed, I was out of the sun. The effect was that little by little the host of imps diminished in numbers till they disappeared altogether.”

Here certainly the advocates of sunstroke have a strong though by no means a final case. Mr. Baring-Gould’s next illustration is a stronger one.

“When my wife was a girl of fifteen,” he says, “she was walking down a lane in Yorkshire between green hedges, when she saw seated in one of the privet hedges a little green man, perfectly well made, who looked at her with his beady, black eyes. He was about a foot or fifteen inches high. She was so frightened that she ran home. She remembers that it was a summer day."

A girl of fifteen is old enough to be a good witness, and her fright and the clear detail of her memory point to a real experience. Again we have the suggestion of a hot day.

Baring-Gould has yet a third case.

"One day a son of mine," he says, "was sent into the garden to pick pea-pods for the cook to shell for dinner. Presently he rushed into the house as white as chalk to say that while he was thus engaged, and standing between the rows of peas, he saw a little man wearing a red cap, a green jacket, brown knee-breeches, whose face was old and wan, and who had a grey beard and eyes as black and hard as sloes. He stared so intently at the boy that the latter took to his heels."

Here again the pea-pods show that it was summer and probably in the heat of the day. Once again the detail is very exact and corresponds closely, as I shall presently show, to some independent accounts. Mr. Baring-Gould is inclined to put all these down to the heat conjuring up the familiar pictures of fairy-books, but some further evidence may cause the reader to doubt this explanation.

Let us compare with these stories the very direct evidence of Mrs. Violet Tweedale, whose courage in making public the result of her own remarkable psychic faculties should meet with recognition from every student of the subject. Our descendants will hardly realise the difficulty which now exists of getting first-hand evidence with names attached, for they will have outgrown the state when the cry of "fake" and "fraud" and "dupe" is raised at once against any observer, however honourable and moderate, by people who know little or nothing of the subject. Mrs. Tweedale says:

"I had a wonderful little experience some five years ago which proved to me the existence of fairies. One summer afternoon I was walking alone along the avenue of Lupton House, Devonshire. It was an absolutely still day — not a leaf moving, and all nature seemed to sleep in the hot sunshine. A few yards in front of me my eye was attracted by the violent movements of a single long, blade-like leaf of a wild iris. This leaf was swinging and bending energetically while the rest of the plant was motionless. Expecting to see a field mouse astride it I stepped very softly up to it. What was my delight to see a tiny green man. He was about five inches long and was swinging back downwards. His tiny green feet which appeared to be green-booted were crossed over the leaf and his hands, raised behind his head, also held the blade. I had a vision of a merry little face and something red in the form of a cap on the head. For a full minute he remained in view, swinging on the leaf. Then he vanished. Since then I have several times seen a single leaf moving violently while the rest of the plant remained motionless, but I have never again been able to see the cause of the movement."

Here the dress of the fairy, green jacket and red cap, is exactly the same as was described independently by Baring-Gould's son, and again we have the elements of heat and stillness. It may be fairly answered that many artists have drawn the fairies in such a dress, and that the colours may in this way have been impressed upon the minds of both observers. In the bending iris we have something objective, however, which cannot easily be explained away as a cerebral hallucination, and the whole incident seems to me an impressive piece of evidence.

A lady with whom I have corresponded, who is engaged in organizing work of the most responsible kind, has had an experience which resembles that of Mrs. Tweedale.

"My only sight of a fairy," she says, "was in a large wood in West Sussex about nine years ago. He was a little creature about half a foot high dressed in leaves. The remarkable thing about his face was that no soul looked through his eyes. He was playing about in long grass and flowers in an open space."

Once again summer is indicated. The length and colour of the creature correspond with Mrs. Tweedale's account, while the lack of soul in the eyes may be compared with the "hard" eyes described by young Baring-Gould.

One of the most gifted clairvoyants in England was the late Mr. Turvey of Bournemouth, whose book, *The Beginnings of Seership*, should be in the library of every student. Mr. Lonsdale of Bournemouth is also a well-known sensitive. The latter has given me the following account of an incident which he observed some years ago in the presence of Mr. Turvey.

"I was sitting," says Mr. Lonsdale, "in his company in his garden at Branksome Park. We sat in a hut which had an open front looking on to the lawn. We had been perfectly quiet for some time, neither talking nor moving, as was often our habit. Suddenly I was conscious of a movement on the edge of the lawn, which on that side went up to a grove of pine trees.

Looking closely I saw several little figures dressed in brown peering through the bushes. They remained quiet for a few minutes, and then disappeared. In a few seconds a dozen or more small people about two feet in height, in bright clothes and with radiant faces, ran on to the lawn, dancing hither and thither. I glanced at Turvey to see if he saw anything and whispered, ‘Do you see them?’ He nodded. These fairies played about, gradually approaching the hut. One little fellow, bolder than the others, came to a croquet hoop close to the hut, and using the hoop as a horizontal bar, turned round and round it, much to our amusement. Some of the others watched him, while others danced about, not in any set dance, but seemingly moving in sheer joy. This continued for four or five minutes, when suddenly, evidently in response to some signal or warning from those dressed in brown, who had remained at the edge of the wood, they all ran into the wood. Just then a maid appeared coming from the house with tea. Never was tea so unwelcome, as evidently its appearance was the cause of the disappearance of our little visitors.”

Mr. Lonsdale adds, “I have seen fairies several times in the New Forest, but never so clearly as this.” Here also the scene is laid in the heat of a summer day, and the division of the fairies into two different sorts is remarkably borne out by the general descriptions.

Knowing Mr. Lonsdale as I do to be a responsible, well-balanced, and honourable man, I find such evidence as this very hard to put to one side. Here, at least, the sun-stroke hypothesis is negatived since both men sat in the shade of the hut and each corroborated the observation of the other. On the other hand, each of the men, like Mrs. Tweedale, was supernormal in psychic development, so that it might well happen that the maid, for example, would not have seen the fairies even if she had arrived earlier upon the scene.

I know a gentleman belonging to one of the learned professions whose career would not be helped if this article were to connect him with fairy lore. As a matter of fact, in spite of his solemn avocations and his practical and virile character, he seems to be endowed with that faculty — let us call it the appreciation of higher vibrations, which opens up so wonderful a door to its possessor. He claims, or rather he admits — for he is reticent upon the subject — that he has carried this power of perception on from childhood, and his surprise is not so much at what he sees, as at the failure of others to see the same thing. To show that it is not subjective he tells the story that on one occasion while traversing a field he saw a little creature which beckoned eagerly that he should follow. He did so, and presently saw his guide pointing with an air of importance to the ground. There, between the furrows lay a flint arrowhead, which he carried home with him as a souvenir of the adventure.

This gentleman is further distinguished by having that power of attracting animals, even wild animals, which some people have, and it may be that this sympathy is the same quality which helps him in getting into touch with fairies. His account of the latter is extraordinarily interesting.

"I should describe them as being between two and three feet in height," says he, "and dressed in brown clothes. The nearest approach I can get to them is to say that they are 'spiritual monkeys.' Their general instinct is to avoid mankind, but they are capable individually of becoming extremely fond of humans — or of *a* human. They are just Peter Pans, children who have never grown up. Speaking generally I should imagine that anyone who has had any truck with the fairies must have obeyed the scriptural injunction to 'become as a little child ' — i.e. he or she must be either a Buddha or simple."

Another friend of mine who claimed to have the power of seeing fairies is the late Tom Tyrrell, the famous medium, whose clairvoyance and general psychic gifts were of the strongest character. I cannot easily forget how one evening in a Yorkshire hotel a storm of raps, sounding very much as if someone was cracking their finger and thumb, broke out around his head, and how with his coffee-cup in one hand, he flapped vigorously with the other to warn off his inopportune visitors. In answer to my question about fairies, he says:

"Yes, I do see these little pixies or fairies. I have seen them scores of times. But only in the woods and when I do a little fasting. They are a very real presence to me. What are they? I cannot say. I can never get nearer to the beggars than four or five yards. They seem afraid of me, and they scamper off up the trees like squirrels. I dare say if I were to go in the woods oftener I would perhaps gain their confidence more. They are certainly like human beings only very small, say about twelve or fifteen inches high. I have noticed they are brown in colour, with fairly large heads and standing up ears, out of proportion to the size of their bodies, and bandy legs. I am speaking of what I see. I have never come across any other clairvoyant who has seen them, though I have read that many do so.

Probably they have something to do with Nature processes. The males have very short hair, and the females rather long, straight hair."

The idea that these little creatures are occupied in consciously furthering Nature's projects — very much, I suppose, as the bee carries pollen — is repeated by the learned Dr. Vanstone, who combines great knowledge of theory with some considerable experience, though a high development of intellect, is, in spite of Swedenborg's example, a bar to psychic perception. This would show, if it is correct, that we may have to return to the classical conceptions of something in the nature of naiads and fauns and spirits of the trees and groves. Dr. Vanstone, whose experiences are on the borderland between what is objective and what is sensed without being actually seen, writes to me:

"I have been distinctly aware of minute intelligent beings in connection with the evolution of plant forces, particularly in certain localities, for instance in Ecclesbourne Glen. Pond life yields to me the largest and best sense of fairy life, and not the floral world. I may be only clothing my subjective consciousness with unreal objective imaginations, but they are real to me as sentient intelligent beings, able to communicate with us in varying distinctness. I am inclined to think that elemental beings are engaged, like factory hands, in facilitating the operation of Nature's laws."

Another gentleman who claims to have this most remarkable gift is Mr. Tom Charman, in the New Forest, who hunts for fairies as an entomologist would for butterflies. In answer to my inquiries he tells me that the power of vision came to him in childhood, but left him for many years, varying in proportion with his own nearness to nature. According to this seer the creatures are of many sizes, varying from a few inches to several feet. They are male, female, and children. He has not heard them utter sounds but believes that they do so of finer quality than we can hear. They are visible by night as well as by day, and show small lights about the same size as glowworms. They dress in all sorts of ways. Such is Mr. Charman's account.

It is easy, of course, for us who only respond to the more material vibrations, to declare that all these seers are self-deluded or are the victims of some mental twist. It is difficult for them to defend themselves from such a charge. It is, however, to be urged upon the other side that these numerous testimonies come from people who are very solid, practical and successful in the affairs of life. One is a distinguished writer, another an ophthalmic authority, a third a successful professional man, a fourth a lady engaged on public service, and so on. To wave aside the evidence of such people on the ground that it does not correspond with our own experience, is an act of mental arrogance which no wise man will commit.

It is interesting to compare these various contemporary first-hand accounts of the impressions which all these witnesses have received. I have already pointed out that the higher vibration which we associate with hot sunshine, and which we actually seem to see in the shimmer of noontide, is associated with many of the episodes. Apart from this is must be admitted that the evidence is on the whole irregular. We have creatures described which range from five inches to two and a half feet An advocate of the fairies might say that since the tradition has always been that they procreate as human beings do, we are dealing with them in every stage of growth, which accounts for the varying size. It seems to me, however, that a better case could be made out if it were pleaded that there have always been many different races of fairyland, and that samples of these races may greatly differ from each other, and may inhabit varying spots, so that an observer like Mr. Tyrrell for example, may always have seen woodland elves which bear no resemblance to gnomes or goblins. The monkey-like brown-clad creatures of my professional friend, which were over two feet high, compare very closely with the creatures which little Baring-Gould saw climbing on to the horses. In both cases these taller fairies were reported from flat plain-like locations, while the little old man type varies completely from the dancing little feminine elf so beloved by Shakespeare. In the experience of Mr. Turvey and Mr. Lonsdale two different types engaged in different tasks were actually seen at the same moment, the one being bright-coloured dancing elves, while the other were the brown-coloured attendants who guarded over them.

The claim that the fairy rings so often seen in meadow or marshland are caused by the beat of fairy feet is certainly untenable, as they unquestionably come from fungi such as *agaricus gambosus* or *marasmius oveades* which grow from a centre, continually deserting the exhausted ground and spreading to that which is fresh. In this way a complete circle is formed which may be quite small or may be of twelve-foot diameter. These circles appear just as often in woods from the same cause but are smothered over by the decayed leaves among which the fungi grow. But though the fairies most certainly do not produce the rings it might be asserted, and could not be denied, that the rings once formed, whatever their cause, would offer a very charming course for a circular ring-a-ring dance. Certainly from all time these circles have been associated with the gambols of the little people.

After these modern instances one is inclined to read with a little more gravity the accounts which our ancestors gave of these creatures, for however fanciful in parts it still may have had some core of truth. I say “our ancestors,” but as a matter of fact there are shepherds on the South Downs to this day who will throw a bit of their bread and cheese over their shoulders at dinner-time for the little folk to consume. All over the United Kingdom, and especially in Wales and in Ireland, the belief is largely held among those folk who are nearest to nature. First of all it was always supposed that they lived within the earth. This was natural enough since a sudden disappearance of a solid body could only be understood in that way. On the whole their description was not grotesque, and fits easily into its place amid the examples already given.

One of the best of the ancient accounts is that of the Rev. R. Kirk who occupied a parish at Monteith on the edge of the Highlands, and wrote a pamphlet called *The Secret Commonwealth* about the year 1680. He had very clear and definite ideas about these little creatures, and he was by no means a visionary but a man of considerable parts, who was chosen afterwards to translate the Bible into Erse. His information about fairies tallies very well with that already quoted. He slips up in imagining that flint arrowheads are indeed “fairy-bolts,” but otherwise his contentions agree very well with our modern instances. They have tribes and orders, according to this Scotch clergyman. They eat. They converse in a thin whistling sort of language. They have children, deaths and burials. They are fond of frolic-dancing. They have a regular state and polity with rulers, laws, quarrels and even battles. They are irresponsible creatures, not hostile to the human race unless they have reason to be angry, but even inclined to be helpful, since some of them, the Brownies, are by universal tradition, ready to aid in the household work if the family has known how to engage their affection.

An exactly similar account comes from Ireland, though the little folk seem to have imbibed the spirit of the island to the extent of being more mercurial and irascible. There are many cases on record where they are claimed to have shown their power and to have taken revenge for some slight. In the *Larne Reporter* of March 31,1866, as quoted in *True Irish Ghost Stories*, there is an account of how a stone which the fairies claimed having been built into a house, the inhabitants were bombarded with stones by invisible assailants by day and night, the missiles hurting no one but causing great annoyance. These stories of stone-throwing are so common, and present such similar well-attested features in cases coming from every part of the world, that they may be accepted as a recognised preternatural phenomenon, whether it be the fairies or some other form of mischievous psychic force which cause the bombardment. The volume already quoted gives another remarkable case where a farmer having built a house upon what was really a fairy right of way between two "raths" or fairy mounds, was exposed to such persecution by noises and other disturbances that his family was at last driven out and had to take refuge in the smaller house which they had previously occupied. This story is narrated by a correspondent from Wexford, who says that he examined the facts himself, examined the deserted house, cross-examined the owner and satisfied himself that there were two raths in the vicinity and that the house was in a dead-line between them.

I have particulars of a case in West Sussex which is analogous, and which I have been able to trace to the very lady to whom it happened. This lady desired to make a rock garden, and for this purpose got some large boulders from a field hard by, which had always been known as the pixie stones and built them into her new rockery. One summer evening this lady saw a tiny grey woman sitting on one of the boulders. The little creature slipped away when she knew that she had been observed. Several times she appeared upon the stones. Later the people in the village asked if the stones might be moved back to the field, "as," they said, "they are the pixie stones and if they are moved from their place misfortune will happen in the village." The stones were restored.

But supposing that they actually do exist what *are* these creatures? That is a subject upon which we can only speculate with more or less plausibility. Mr. David Gow, Editor of *Light* and a considerable authority upon psychic matters, had first formed the opinion that they were simply ordinary human spirits seen, as it were, at the wrong end of a clairvoyant telescope, and therefore very minute. A study of the detailed accounts of their varied experience caused him to alter his view and to conclude that they are really life forms which have developed along some separate line of evolution, and which for some morphological reason have assumed human shape in the strange way in which Nature reproduces her types like the figures on the mandrake root, or the frost ferns upon the window.

In a remarkable book, *A Wanderer in the Spirit Lands,* published in 1896, the author, Mr. Farnese, under inspiration, gives an account of many mysteries including that of fairies. What he says fits in very clearly with the facts that have been put forward, and goes beyond them. He says, speaking of elementals,

“Some are in appearance like the gnomes and elves who are said to inhabit mountain caverns. Such, too, are the fairies whom men have seen in lonely and secluded places. Some of these beings are of a very low order of life, almost like the higher order of plants, save that they possess independent motion. Others are very lively and full of grotesque unmeaning tricks.... As nations advance these lower forms of life die out from the astral plane of that earth’s sphere and succeeding generations begin at first to doubt and then to deny that they ever had any existence.”

This is one plausible way of explaining the disappearance of the faun, the dryad, the naiad, and all the creatures which are alluded to with such familiarity in the classics of Greece and Rome.

All these evidences as to fairies sink into insignificance compared with the actual photographs which I have published in my Coming of the Fairies. These, in the enlarged edition, cover cases from Yorkshire, Devonshire, Canada and Germany, and show varying sizes as already described. Since its publication I have had an excellent one from Sweden. They are not all supported by the same degree of evidence, but each case is strong and all the cases taken together seem to me to be final, unless we are to reconsider altogether our views as to the nature and power of thought-forms. No criticism has for a moment shaken the truth of the original Cottingley pictures. All fresh evidence has tended to confirm it. I refer readers to the book for the full detail, and for the pictures themselves.

Some final paragraphs may be devoted to other forms of elemental life for which there is some evidence, though I admit that it is on a very different level from that which sustains the fairies. In Mrs. Tweedale’s *Ghosts I have seen,* a book which is far more thrilling than any sensational novel, and which can only be matched by the companion volume, *Phantoms of the Dawn*, will be found several descriptions of fauns, satyrs, and even in one case of a troop of centaurs, which are picturesque and arresting, if not entirely convincing. I know Mrs. Tweedale personally — she is the daughter of one of the famous Chambers brothers of Edinburgh, and I am aware that she is the last woman in the world to exaggerate or trifle with truth. The more remarkable of these elemental stories, however, are given second-hand, so that she cannot be responsible.

There is one curious case which fits into the idea of a satyr-like creature who had by some mischance wandered out of his own vibration and got entangled in matter. I do not venture to say that this is the actual explanation, but I do maintain that the facts appear to be well-attested and that I know no other solution which would fully cover them. They are to be found in a book called *Oddities* published some years ago. It is there shown that on a certain year in the middle of last century, after a slight snow-shower, footprints of cleft goat-like feet which were most carefully observed, measured, and even photographed, were found over a hundred miles of ground in Devonshire. These footsteps had apparently all been made in the one night, and extended right across country over all obstacles, including the Teignmouth estuary, where the marks vanished at one side and re-appeared at the other. They were — I quote from memory — about two inches by one in size. If the facts are correctly given, then an elaborate practical joke carried out by a number of people acting in collusion would be the only alternative to the preternatural one, which I have ventured not to maintain but to suggest as a remote possibility. The case attracted much attention at the time and tracings of the prints are to be found in an old number of the *Illustrated London News*.

One may well ask what connection have fairies and elementals with the essays upon the fate of the human soul which have formed most of this series? The connection is slight and indirect, consisting only in the fact that anything which widens our conceptions of the possible, and shakes us out of our time-rutted lines of thought, helps us to regain our elasticity of mind and thus to be more open to new philosophies. The fairy question is infinitely small and unimportant compared to the question of our own fate and that of the whole human race. The evidence also is very much less impressive though, as I trust I have shown, it is not entirely negligible. These creatures are in any case remote from us and their existence is of little more real importance than that of strange animals or plants. At the same time the perennial mystery, why so many “flowers are born to blush unseen” and why Nature should be so lavish with gifts which human beings cannot use, would be solved if we understood that there were other orders of being which used the same earth and shared its blessings. It is at the lowest an interesting speculation which gives an added charm to the silence of the woods and the wildness of the moorland.

IX

A STRANGE PROPHET

When one finds that a philsophy is obscure, and when one fails after an earnest effort to get it clear, one may usually conclude that the teacher is also obscure and that the subject has not been clearly thought out. For some time I have endeavoured to get an understanding of Thomas Lake Harris, a mystic about whom there has been the utmost difference of opinion ranging from the Messianic to the diabolical. In my search for truth I have read much that he has written and I have carefully perused his *Life and World Work*, by a devoted follower, Mr. Arthur Cuthbert, who claims to have shared some of the same psychic experiences. I have also studied *Sympneumata*, written by Mrs. Laurence Oliphant and edited by her famous husband. Instead of clearing up obscurities this leaves them more obscure than ever. One earnestly wishes that the husband had expounded the matter, since he could write English, instead of the wife with her interminable and involved sentences which average about two to a page. Finally I read the picture of Harris taken by the novelist, Mrs. Oliphant, who was Laurence's aunt, and who takes a very severe view of the American prophet. At the end of it all I find myself in the same perplexity as ever, and have no sure idea whether I am dealing with a megalomaniac ranter endowed with considerable worldly cunning, or with one who really had a breath of the divine afflatus — whether in fact his philosophy was a cloud of words or whether he had an authentic message.

I am consoled in my indecision, and reassured as to my own judgment when I clearly see that the astute Laurence Oliphant, after twelve years of most intimate association, cannot answer for the real character of his associate. His famous pen-drawing of him in *Masollam* pictures a dual personality with two voices and two ranges of vision, and it ends with the words, “He might be the best or the worst of men.” A short sketch of my impressions of this curious man and of his doctrines may be of interest to readers.

Harris was born in Fenny Stratford in Buckinghamshire in 1823, and was five years old when his parents emigrated to the United States, settling in Utica in the north of the State of New York. This region seems to have been to an extraordinary degree the centre of new religions or pseudo-religious impulses from that time onwards. Spiritualism, Mormonism, and, as I believe, Christian Science all had their original springs in this geographical centre. Harris, who was independent of each of these movements, was destined to make a very definite contribution of his own to the general spiritual urge and outreach which was characteristic of the time and place.

His people were narrow Calvinistic Baptists, and at an early age Harris rebelled against their sour doctrines and accepted the wider and more charitable teaching of the Universalists. An officer has told me how upon his inquiring into the religion of a recruit the Sergeant answered, "'E calls 'imself a Christadelphian, but to my mind 'e's little better than a 'eathen." Probably this was the view taken of the Universalists in those days of dogma. It was the nature of Harris to reject all dogmas, until he came to put forward some of his own. He was twenty years of age when he changed his religion, and he has left it on record that his dead mother appeared to him at that time and said, "My dear child, my poor child, you must all remember that God is the father of all men and that all mankind are your brothers."

He seems to have been a most eloquent preacher and soon won a considerable name, but the rather vague tenets of his new creed made him crave for something in the nature of concrete proof. Some chance of this was offered at this period by the use of Spiritualism, and in order to get clearer views upon the subject Harris paid a visit to Andrew Jackson Davis, who after some experiences as a hypnotic subject had finally become an inspired medium. The meeting and intercourse of these two men was certainly a notable event, for in their different ways they were both remarkable characters, and each has a niche of his own in religious history. Harris was twenty-four at the time and Davis twenty, two most singular youths. Davis converted Harris to the idea of spirit intercourse and for some years Harris was an enthusiastic preacher and leader. Davis, however, had some peculiar amatory adventures, depicted in his *Magic Staff*, and Harris, who professed a deeper regard for the marriage vow, was disillusioned and turned as violent an opponent as he had been a friend of the Spiritualistic movement. His attitude seems to have been supremely illogical, for the ill-doings, granting that they exist, of any member of a philosophy cannot alter the facts upon which the philosophy is founded. It would be as reasonable for an inquirer to discard Christianity in order to show disapproval of Judas. The fact remains, however, that Harris was seen no more on Spiritualistic platforms and that his voice was raised against all that he had supported. To anyone who is acquainted with the true tenets of this cult it must be obvious that he had never grasped their meaning and seemed to consider that an artificial hypnotism was essential to mediumship. His objections are mostly founded upon the supposition that one comes in contact with evil spirits. One may find plenty of evil spirits in the flesh, but one chooses one’s company and one finds that it is not difficult to come into contact with the higher ones as well. This great fact Harris ignored and from that moment his life took a turn of its own, and he lost touch with any philosophy which is capable of clear expression, though it influenced strongly a small circle of followers.

He still ministered to a considerable church in New York, the congregation of which, including Horace Greeley, must have been sorely exercised in endeavouring to keep pace with, or to understand, the spiritual gyrations of their pastor. It was called the Independent Christian Church and was still on universalist lines. He narrates that addresses which he delivered there came to him by what Spiritualists now call automatic writing, and that the purpose and ultimate effect of them was the redemption of destitute children — an admission which one would have supposed must modify his condemnation of spirit intercourse. At this period he was one of those who founded a colony called the Mountain Cave Association, which was dissolved after a short and not too honourable existence. It was this first experiment in communal life which no doubt suggested the larger developments to come.

It was at this time, about 1850, that Harris received according to his own account a direct revelation from a majestic angel man who turned his thoughts into a special channel. This tale of the direct apparition occurs in Swedenborg’s first vision, in Smith’s revelation of Mormonism, and in Davis’s account of his experience in the hills near Poughkeepsie. Considering the recent close association with the latter seer, it is not entirely impossible that Harris’s vision may have been subconsciously suggested by what he had heard of the apparition seen by Davis. The first fruits of the new departure were a long poem of 6,000 lines which was completed in the extraordinary time of twenty-seven working hours, scattered over fourteen days. It may be said once for all that Harris in this and many subsequent poems, which were so copious that it is doubtful if any writer has ever composed so much, showed himself to be a true poet of a high order. Lawrence Oliphant put him at the very top, and without being able to go so far as that, I should say that he stood very high. There are times when in his strong simplicity of phrase he reminds one of Blake, and there are times when his high spirituality touches the edge of Shelley. As an example of the former I would take:

“Nine months I lay in a Lady’s womb, She folded me all in her laughing bloom, She hallowed me while I filled and fed From the nectar-wells of her mother-head.”

As to the latter almost any page from his longer poems would illustrate my meaning.

Lyrical speech seems to have been his natural expression, which accounts for a certain rhythm and majesty in his addresses. A lady who knew him at that period wrote of him:

“When in Utica he would come to my sitting-room of an evening and sitting down on a rather high chair — one which allowed him to swing his feet rhythmically, he would compose poetry by the mile — exquisite thoughts, exquisitely worded. My memories of those quiet hours are very beautiful. There was nothing impressive about his person then; he was too thin, really lank, but his eyes were very full of thought and his voice had a rare charm. His poetic utterances were to me like views of sunset and sunrise, which we enjoy internally but which we cannot remember.”

This last sentence seems to me to be very good criticism, well observed and clearly expressed. The reason seems to be that it is all too transcendental and ethereal. When Tennyson discusses the deeper things of life there are constant touches which bring one back to human experience. Harris is off the ground all the time. There is no anchor by which one may attach him to the current life of man. Hence one reads, as the lady says, with admiration for the limpid verse and the lofty thought, and yet at the end there is little which has remained as part of one’s own mental storehouse.

And now the time had come when Harris had to strike out a path of his own into the unknown, and a very vague and difficult path it is for anyone else to indicate — far less to follow. There is an objective side to it and there is a theoretical or dogmatic side. The objective side of this system lay in the assertion that by some system of breathing certain psychic results may be obtained, and the mind elucidated as to things divine. It is to be presupposed that such exercises of the diaphragm or solar plexus — for those are indicated as being physically involved — are concomitant with mental and spiritual efforts, otherwise the matter would be no more a sign of progress than results to be obtained by standing upon one's head. On the other hand, one would suppose that if the mental and spiritual effort had been made the advance would be automatic and independent of physical exertions. However, the theory is as I have stated, and there are found other witnesses, such as Mr. Cuthbert, who assert that they have themselves gone through the early stages of illumination as produced in this fashion. There are said to be seven stages in this advance by breath, each of them to be obtained by long and apparently painful effort. No one save Harris himself had ever attained the seventh, though all his followers, including his successive wives, three in number, were on various rungs of the ladder. The fact that Harris himself was supposed to have passed through the whole seven degrees was the basis for claims which must startle if not convince the general public, since it was seriously stated that the Christ was the only person who had ever done so much. The process, however, seems to have escaped the notice of the apostles, since it is mentioned in no gospel, and Paul, who gave so full a list of the spiritual gifts, has said nothing on the subject.

At the same time it is not to be denied that there is a considerable body of evidence that by a certain control of the breath some exalted mental condition can be obtained. In Swedenborg's case the more shallow his breathing the more spiritual his frame of mind. Cataleptics appear not to breathe at all, and are from time to time buried alive in consequence, but the condition seems to go with remarkable enfranchisement of the spirit. The Hindoos have reduced it to a system and claim similar results. I can remember in Canterbury, New Zealand, meeting some people who practised it, and who assured me that it was not without danger, as the excursion of the soul leaves an empty house behind, which may attract a parasitic tenant. However that may be, Harris's general claim meets with some support, though I know no proof that any high spirituality is necessarily associated with what would rather seem to be a curious physiological experiment. This breathing phenomenon is, so far as I know, the only objective part of Harris's philosophy.

We come, therefore, to its dogmatic side, which consists in the assertion of the dual sex in every-one, including the Creator. Bi-une is the word which covers the philosophy. So far is it pushed that even a name is given to this second personality, so that the Lady Jessa is associated with the Lord Jesus, and Harris himself is closely intertwined with the Lady Lily to the not unnatural confusion of his earthly wives. So high is the Lady Lily that the whole celestial region after death is named Lilistan. This dual internal mating is supposed to do away with the coarser processes of nature and to free mankind from the lustful morass in which he is accused of wallowing, but as Harris had not only wives but also children, it would appear that the higher path was not all-sufficing.

In that most incomprehensible book *Sympneumata*, which might well be translated into English, there is a disquisition upon the bi-une gods of old, in which Isis and Osiris, Hathor and Ra, Bel and Bilit, with many others are duly paired. Considering the practical results of these old systems one would think that their teachings are rather to be avoided than followed. What is to be gained, or how would human life be elevated by our following hermaphroditic divinities? So far as the case is applicable to human beings it has, of course, that amount of obvious truth that a man does reproduce many of the qualities of his mother, and a girl may do the same by the father, and so each sex may manifest its presence in the composite result. There are also anatomical facts which correspond with the psychological unison. But when this is said one cannot see that much remains. The discussion of sex in connection with the Deity seems incongruous and repulsive, nor does Harris ever give any clear reason why such strange dogmas should be given to a world which is already sick of unproved assertions and struggling hard to escape from wild faiths into a region of concrete proof. Had Harris ever really understood Spiritualism he would have realised that this concrete proof for which the whole intellect of the human race is yearning, may well be found in that direction.

There were some other peculiar beliefs in the Harris cosmogony. One was that the planets were inhabited by spirits, some superior and some inferior to those upon earth. There was a reaction between these beings and ourselves. Another was that fairies, or as he preferred to call them, fays, played a very important part in the development of man’s spirit. That such creatures exist and that they play some lowly part in nature is held by many and is supported by evidence which will bear examination, but for the ambitious spiritual role here assigned to them there is no evidence at all, unless we extend the term "fay" to include those higher entities or angels who may reasonably be supposed to have some guiding influence in our lives.

Apart from obscure doctrines there was one side of the Harris system with which many of us would cordially agree. It was that we would do well to get back to the simple life. He founded successive communities for this alleged purpose, and the system adopted was called "The Use." The first colony was assembled in a farm-house at Wassiac in 1861. In 1863 it moved to America, where it centred round a mill and a bank. In the latter institution Mr. Harris, the president, is depicted as spending much of his time. "Here the people come on business together and others would sit down and smoke and talk over their affairs and general politics, while the President himself would be frequently occupying one of the chairs in the midst of them and entering into full sympathy with them in a perfectly natural, ordinary, neighbourly fashion." It is a pleasant picture which Mr. Cuthbert draws, but somehow one wishes it was not a bank.

Just about this time a most amazing thing happened. The prophet had gone with his wife to England for the purpose of securing the publication of some of his works. While there he gave some lectures or sermons at the Steinway Hall. His ornate and rather inflated style of eloquence, which like his poetry is limpid and vaguely beautiful, attracted audiences, among whom was Lady Oliphant, the mother of the famous writer and diplomatist, one of the most rising men in England.

She brought her son to hear the further lectures, and the views of the prophet struck some sympathetic mystic chord in their own bosoms. The idea of the simple community life with its dreamy religious background appealed strongly to natures which were weary of the empty ways of fashion and unsatisfied by the unreasonable dogmas of the churches. They liquidated their business affairs, left their homes and threw in their lot with the American community. This access of fresh strength and money enabled the colonists to move to Brocton near Buffalo, where some large farms were taken and the whole project took on a more ambitious aspect.

Those who wish to see a critical and adverse view of the matter will find it in Mrs. Oliphant's life of her famous nephew. One can well understand that it was galling to the pride of a grand old Scottish family that their finest product should come under the complete sway of what seemed to them to be a very dubious American adventurer. How complete that sway was may be judged from the fact that the next ten or twelve years of Laurence Oliphant’s life were spent in menial agricultural tasks, which included the selling of strawberries at the railway station to the passengers in the trains. There is, we must admit, something of beauty and of sanctity in this utilitarian age, that a man should humble himself for spiritual ends, and yet when one considers the exceptional gifts with which this particular man had been endowed, one doubts whether anything could excuse the diversion of his energies into a channel so useless to the world. Such was the complete subservience of the young Scot that he had with difficulty to get leave of absence from Brocton in order to act as war correspondent in the Franco-German war. Even more incredible, he had to ask leave to marry, and after the marriage was separated for a long time from his wife by orders of the autocratic prophet. It is amazing how any man of spirit could submit to such a position, and no adequate explanation of it has ever been given. It would seem that Harris held a fairly substantial hostage for Oliphant’s behaviour in the fact that a large part of the latter’s fortune was locked up in the Brocton property, which, however, was not held in the name of Harris but in that of the community at large. Oliphant was not the only person of distinction in the little company, for there were several Japanese who had come presumably on his recommendation, as he had made many friends in that nation during his diplomatic visit to their country. One of these Japanese afterwards became Ambassador at London and a second Ambassador at Paris, so that either the personality or the teaching of Harris must have had some very real attraction for intelligent followers.

The prophet, in spite of his seven stages of breathing and the agonies of spirit or of body which those stages represented, seems to have had a very human side in his complex personality. He enjoyed the good things of life, including a cigar and a glass of wine, while the heartiness of his laughter was proverbial. He had an excellent head for commercial affairs and he built a second bank, an hotel, a general store, a railway restaurant, and many other amenities in connection with his colony. Finally, finding a larger and more profitable field available, he started a considerable vineyard at Fountain Grove in the extreme south of California, which no doubt still produces the raisins by which so many private stills mitigate the austerities of Prohibition. One would have a fuller sympathy with these activities if they were not mixed up with strange religious jargon, so that it was actually claimed that the wine from the vineyards contained within it “a divine-natural vital substance.”

In the midst of his worldly work Harris found time to write a great deal both of verse and of prose. Of the former I have already given my opinion. I cannot speak so favourably of the prose. Mr. Cuthbert in his *Life and Work* devotes some seventy pages to quotations from what he calls “this great book,” which was afterwards published as *The New Republic* and God’s Breath in Man. There may be an esoteric meaning to it all which gives it a special value to his followers, but on the face of it to an ordinary critic it would appear to be turgid stuff with no trace of greatness, and with a considerable tendency to both blasphemy and obscenity. I will confess that I am influenced in my judgment of Harris by this work, and that after reading it I cannot doubt that the man who wrote it had at that time an utterly unbalanced mind, and that as a guide he could only lead one to disaster. The man’s life was many-sided, however, and, as I have tried to show, there were other aspects of it and other literary productions which were less open to criticism.

The Laurence Oliphant episode came to an end after some twelve years of subjection. There is no record how the rift began, but both the writer and his mother had gradually become disillusioned. It can hardly be imagined that such writings as those alluded to above could fail to repel educated and sensitive minds. They may have found the worldly and successful prophet a very different person to the spiritual enthusiast who had originally led them into the wilderness. The parting was by no means friendly. Oliphant took legal processes in order to recover some portion of his property, while Harris in return tried to put Oliphant into a lunatic asylum. Eventually some part of the money was recovered, and Oliphant moved away on his curious orbit, winding up at El Harja in Syria, where he spent his latter years. The fact that he allowed his wife to publish *Sympneumata* and that the book is adorned by many scraps of verse which, though unacknowledged by the authoress, are clearly from the pen of Harris, show that in some respects his views about the prophet had not been changed.

There is little more to record of Harris, who dwelt for the most part on his Californian estate, save that in his seventieth year he announced that he had passed his final stage of breathing, and had thus reached what was claimed to be a unique position among mankind. He announced the event in the

Sonoma Democrat, and his statement is more definite than most of the cloud of words which obscure the subject. He wrote:

"For the last two or three years I have been secluded most of the time in my mountain retreat, working to the final solutions of the problems that opened in my discoveries of forty years ago. The final problem that faced me during these years was ... how, without passing through physical disease, shall man practically embody and realise the resurrection. ... The alternative was success or dissolution. Success came as suddenly and pleasantly as when a deep-laden, storm-tossed ship glides over the harbour-bar from the raging outside sea and swings at ease in a landlocked haven. I have passed through December. I am in May-time. ... No more an old man of over seventy but now renewed in more than the physical and mental powers of the early prime, my retirement is at an end. ... I leave the disposition of my honour to the slow but finally just unveilings of coming time. Each hour of my days must be devoted to labour of necessity and beneficence."

These brave words should have been the cry of the centenarian. It was not destined to be. It was not, however, until he had reached the ripe but not extraordinary age of eighty-three that Thomas Lake Harris took leave of his Californian vineyard and journeyed on to Lilistan or whatever other sphere of the coming world he had earned by his strange mixed career. He has certainly left behind him one of the most curious personal and religious problems with which I am acquainted.

X

A LONDON GHOST

For some days the papers had contained accounts of a haunted house within a few hundred yards of Piccadilly Circus, which had aroused the interest of the public.

The allegations, founded on the actual experiences of residents, were, that in the lower room of this building there was a perceptible and evil psychic atmosphere, that raps were heard, that a luminous ray was seen on the stair, and that a figure of an elderly man with an evil face had several times been seen by a young woman who was employed professionally on the premises.

It was to test this matter that a few of us assembled on the night of May 28th, 1924, reaching the house at eleven o’clock. It was in the theatre neighbourhood, and it was a curious change from the streets, which were crowded with the returning pleasure-seekers, to the absolute silence of the sinister old house which stands in a by-street.

Our party consisted of the young woman already quoted, whom I will call the clairvoyante, the secretary of the business, a young Dutch artist who claimed also to have psychic vision, Mr. Horace Leaf, who is a strong medium, a Wimpole Street physician, the Rev. Vale Owen, and myself.

As I had organized the expedition I took it on myself to guard the party against practical jokers. All doors were locked and a piece of twine was tied across the only staircase which led down to the lower room.

In this lower room we assembled, and at 11.30, having grouped ourselves round a table so that we might be in a position to obtain table messages, we turned out the lights. No sound at all reached us from the street, and we sat quietly awaiting events, chatting occasionally among ourselves, as experience has shown that sound vibrations are helpful in psychic phenomena.

At first the darkness had seemed absolute. Gradually, however, we were able to discern a dim light on the stair. It had a spectral effect, but we were all in agreement that it was caused by a reflection from the glass roof of the building, and that it was our own vision, growing gradually used to the conditions, which had caused it to develop.

We were not aware of any particular psychic atmosphere. There were a few distant taps, or cracks, but not more than is usual in an old house in the silence of the night-time.

Our hands were all on the table, which occasionally thrilled and shook, but gave no pronounced movement. We had begun to think that our results might be entirely negative when the clairvoyante on my left whispered in an agitated voice:

“I see him. He is there. He is standing on the stair looking down at us.”

“An elderly man, bearded, with rather slit eyes and a cunning expression,” was her description of the apparition. It was corroborated by the Dutchman. I could see the faint luminosity which marked the line of the stairs, but nothing more.

I do not, however, possess any psychic perceptions. The two seers reported that the man had descended a little, and the clairvoyante showed signs of considerable emotion.

We spoke, begging the unseen figure to approach us and to tell us how we could assist it. A moment later the two seers agreed that it was no longer on the stair.

In a minute the table began to move. It rose and fell in a steady rhythm. My experience of table-sittings, which is a large one, has shown me that undeveloped spirits always make violent and irregular — often circular — movements, and that steady movement is a sign of a deliberate, thoughtful control.

We were reassured, therefore, as regards the nature of our invisible visitant. Having explained the code, the dialogue between us ran thus, the answers coming clear-cut and swift.

“Are you a spirit?”—”Yes”

“A man?”—”Yes.”

“Are you the spirit who has haunted this room?”—”Yes.”

“Have you a reason for haunting it?”—”Yes.”

“Is it money that troubles you?”—”No.”

“Papers?”—”No.”

“Remorse for deeds done?”—”Yes.”

I then explained to the spirit the conditions under which he lived, and the need to turn his thoughts away from worldly matters, which retarded spiritual progress. I begged him to cease to annoy innocent people, and I told him that he could only work out his own salvation by adapting his mind to the new conditions, by being unselfish, and by striving for higher things.

I said that we would pray for him, and Mr. Vale Owen, there and then, offered up a beautiful prayer that this, our unhappy brother, might be eased and helped. I then asked if he had heard and understood.

“Yes,” was the reply.

Had it affected his attitude of mind? Some hesitation, and then “No.” Clearly he was a man of resolute character, not easily to be influenced.

I then said that we would take any message from him, and would like first of all to know his earth name. With that object I gave him the alphabet slowly, asking him to move the table sharply on the right letter. The following letters came out: L-E-N-A-N.

“Is that right?” I asked.—”No,” was the reply.

“Is L E N right?”—”Yes.”

“Should the next letter be I?”—”Yes.”

“Is Lenin the name?”—”Yes.”

“Are you Lenin the Russian leader?”—”Yes.”

All our company protested that this man’s name was not in the minds of anyone. Certainly it was, up to the last moment, unexpected by me.

“Could you spell something in Russian?” was the next question.—”Yes,” was the answer.

Some lingual tests were then given, but I found it hard to follow them, for spelling out with the alphabet is hard work even in one’s own tongue. The Dutch artist addressed the Intelligence in several languages, and received correct “Yes” or “No” answers, which showed comprehension.

“Have you a message for us?” I then asked.

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Then I will give you the alphabet.”

It was slow work, but this was the queer sentence which finally was hammered out:

“Artists must rouse selfish nations.”

I thought that by “artists” he was using a short cut to express the idea of all men of intelligence and imagination.

We asked if this was the whole message, and were told that it was not. As the alphabet procedure was so slow and clumsy, Mr. Horace Leaf suggested that we should put the table aside, sit in a circle, and invite the spirit to control one or other of us.

Both Mr. Leaf and the artist volunteered to be the subjects of the experiment. We rearranged ourselves, therefore, and sang “Lead, kindly light,” for the sake of harmony and vibration.

Suddenly, in the pitch darkness, a strange voice broke in on a low, level, clear tone. It was Mr. Leaf’s own personal guide.

“There is a spirit here who wishes to speak. He is a strong spirit. No, I would not say that he is an evil spirit. His aura is not evil. Yes, he is foreign. I could not say more than that.” The voice died away once more.

Presently we heard gasps and short cries of pain. The spirit was endeavouring to possess Mr. Leaf. It was clearly ignorant of psychic things, and did not know how to set about it. What it really did was to produce violent muscular contractions.

Mr. Owen on one side and the doctor on the other had all they could do to hold his twisting, convulsed arms. Then, with a long sigh, he came back to consciousness. The attempt had been a failure — and a painful one.

We were at a loss now how to proceed, and the table was reintroduced while the Dutchman took my place as questioner. “The spirit is laughing,” said the clairvoyante. She had on other occasions observed this sneering laugh.

There is something slightly evidential here, for she had no recollection of Lenin’s face as it was in life, but it may be recalled that he had a perpetual set contraction of his lips which gave the impression of a broad smile, which was belied by his serious eyes.

From our new attempts we gathered that the rest of the message was an expression of the desire that Russia and Britain should be friends, with the warning that unless they could come to terms they would drift into war, in which Russia would be very strong.

Such was the whole message. Immediately it was given the table turned dead, and we could obtain no further sign of intelligence. The clairvoyante reported the figure as sitting on the stairs for a time and then passing on.

So ended our curious experience in the old house in mid-London. It cannot be said that there was anything objective to which the senses of all of us could testify. On the other hand, it is certain that we were all in earnest, that there was no pressure on the table, that the messages were clear, and that the whole course of events was consistent.

In answer to a question the Intelligence said that he had lived in London and that he had known these premises, though he had never actually lodged there. It may be added that it is a place frequented by foreign artists, with Russians among them, and that Lenin during his stay in London might well have been there.

Mr. Vale Owen’s feeling was that the visitor took it for granted that we were artists also, and that in his message “artists” is in the vocative. If he were mistaken about our vocation it would prove that he was indeed external to ourselves. It was an appeal to us to rouse nations out of their selfishness — an appeal which could hardly come from an evil spirit.

I am not sure of the doctor’s conclusions, but I am convinced that everyone else in the company was convinced that we were in touch with a real entity, with a real message, and it is our hope that, the message being delivered, the ghost of mid-London will be heard of no more.

Deception from the other side is an alternative and possible hypothesis, but we were all impressed by the extreme earnestness of this intelligence, and equally earnest were our own invocations to his honesty.

XI

THE HALF-WAY HOUSE OF MATTER

In his recent work, *Life After Death*, the late Professor Hyslop, who was formerly Professor of Logic at Columbia University and became the chief American authority upon matters psychic, has a sentence which sounds rather intolerant. It runs: “Any man who does not accept the existence of discarnate spirits and the proof of it is either ignorant or a moral coward.” The words are literally true, and yet what removes the sting is that there is really no great reproach up to now in being ignorant. Much of the information is very recent and is contained in works which have not been translated and which are expensive and difficult to get. It is true that we have Crawford’s splendid work at Belfast and Crookes’s researches of fifty years ago, but both of these needed the corroboration and elucidation of the continental observers to bring out their full meaning. I will try in this article to show any man who is capable of adapting his mind to fresh facts that this tremendous issue is no longer a fair subject for debate, but has been definitely settled up to a certain point — a point which gives us a solid basis for the researches of the future. All recent discoveries, whether they be of aviation, wireless telegraphy, or other material novelties, are insignificant beside a development which shows us a new form of matter, with unheard-off properties, lying latent in all probability within each of us. By a strange paradox the searchers after spirit have come to know more about matter, and its extraordinary possibilities, than any materialist has learned.

It should first be stated that the development of psychic phenomena was a gradual one, and that it was some years after the Hydesville outbreak before actual materialisations of spirit were reported. During the ‘sixties and ‘seventies they became more common, lending themselves greatly to fraud, as people had little critical knowledge as yet and darkness was a physical necessity for their production. Apart from the frauds, however, discriminating observers were aware that there was a large residuum of cases which were undoubtedly genuine. In examining and reporting these cases the witnesses averred that certain people, whom they called "materialising mediums," had the strange physical gift that they could put forth from their bodies a viscous, gelatinous substance which appeared to differ from every known form of matter in that it could solidify and be used for material purposes, and yet could be re-absorbed, leaving absolutely no trace even upon the clothes which it had traversed in leaving the body. This substance was actually touched by some enterprising investigators, who reported that it was elastic and appeared to be sensitive, as though it was really an organic extrusion from the medium's body. These views were naturally much ridiculed by scientific men, who disposed of them easily upon anatomical and also on general physical grounds. Later investigation has, however, shown, as I hope to demonstrate in this article, that in this as in others matters the early Spiritualists were the pioneers of truth, and that they had come upon the most singular manifestation of matter with which we have any acquaintance — a form which might almost be called a half-way house to Spirit.

Mme. Alexandre-Bisson, a French lady with a scientific bent, set herself in the year 1909 to study this phenomenon, having as her subject a woman named Eva, who had the power of forming this substance, which Charles Richet, the great French physiologist, has named ectoplasm. She had as collaborator a German doctor, Schrenck-Notzing, who afterwards collected the notes of the sittings and had them published in French with Mme. Bisson's name appended, under the title *Les Phénomènes dits de Materialisation*. A single sentence from the preface gives the gist of the book. He says:

"We have very often been able to establish that, by an unknown biological process, there comes from the body of the medium a material, at first semi-fluid, which possesses some of the properties of a living substance, notably that of the power of change, of movement, and of the assumption of definite forms."

He adds: "One might doubt the truth of these facts if they had not been verified hundreds of times in the course of laborious tests under varied and very strict conditions." Could there be a more complete vindication of those early Spiritualists who for two generations bore with patience the ridicule of the world? Schrenck-Notzing ends his dignified preface by exhorting his fellow-worker to take heart.

"Do not allow yourself to be discouraged in your efforts to open a new domain for science, either by foolish attacks, by cowardly calumnies, by the misrepresentation of facts, by the violence of the malevolent, or by any other sort of intimidation. Advance always along the path that you have opened, thinking of the words of Faraday, ‘Nothing is too amazing to be true’.”

The methods of these wonderful experiments were as follows: All conceivable precautions were taken against fraud. Eva, the medium, seems, so far as one can trace her career, to have been no worse if she was no better than her fellows. A fierce controversy had raged round a previous series of experiments with her conducted in 1906 in Algiers, but Charles Richet and other observers who were present nad found no flaw in them. However, nothing was left to chance. The key of the séance room was kept in Mme. Bisson’s own pocket. Eva was compelled to change into a special dress when in that room, undressing again when she emerged. She submitted to physical examinations at the hands of doctors. The illumination of the room was gradually increased until six strong, red, electric lamps were at work — red being, as in photography, the one bearable colour. Most important of all, a number of cameras, eight in the last period, were directed upon the medium from all angles, and these were operated by flashlight without warning, so that no motion upon her part could be unobserved. Altogether two hundred and one photographs were taken and reprinted in the book. The sittings lasted with intervals for four years, and were witnessed not only by Mme. Bisson and the German doctor, but by a number of scientific observers whose names are given.

The results are, in my opinion, among the most notable of any investigation which has ever been recorded. It was testified by witnesses, and shown by the photographs, that there oozed from the medium’s mucous membranes, and occasionally from her skin, this extraordinary gelatinous material. The pictures are strange and repulsive, but many of Nature’s processes seem so in our eyes. You can see this streaky, viscous stuff hanging like icicles from the chin, dripping down on to the body and forming a white apron, or projecting in shapeless lumps from the orifices of the face. When touched, or when undue light came upon it, it writhed back into the body as swiftly and stealthily as the tentacles of a hidden octopus. If seized and pinched, the medium cried aloud. It would protrude through clothes and vanish again, leaving hardly any trace upon them. With the assent of the medium, a small piece was amputated. It dissolved in the box in which it was placed as snow would have done, leaving moisture and some large cells which might have come from a fungus. The microscope also disclosed epithelial cells from the mucous membrane in which the stuff seemed to originate. It should be explained that the usual Spiritualistic habit of putting the medium into a confined space formed by curtains was followed. This is called the cabinet. She sat therein upon a chair, but her hands always protruded, as an additional safeguard against fraud. The object of the cabinet is that some condensation of material, which we can best describe perhaps as a heavy vapour, is necessary before you get the ectoplasm. The methods call for clearer scientific definition, but in practice it is found that anything which will make an enclosed space and conserve force is of great importance. Those curious, curving draperies which are seen round spirit photographs are the means which the control upon the other side adopts for this end, and I have often observed that the spirit lights at a séance are hooded and flanked by some fine, filmy material for the same reason.

The production of this strange ectoplasm is enough in itself to make such experiments revolutionary and epoch-making, but what follows is far stranger, and will answer the question in every reader’s mind, “What has all this to do with spirits?” You must know, then, utterly incredible as it may appear, that this substance, after forming, begins in the case of some mediums, Eva being one, to curdle into definite shapes, and those shapes are human limbs and human faces, seen at first in two dimensions upon the flat, and then moulding themselves at the edges until they become detached and complete. Very many of the photographs exhibit these strange phantoms, which are often much smaller than life. Some of these faces may represent thought-forms from the brain of Eva taking visible form, and some rough resemblance has been traced between some of them and pictures which she may have seen and stored in the memory. One, for example, looks like an extremely rakish President Wilson with a moustache, while another resembles a ferocious rendering of M. Poincaré. One of them shows the word “Miroir” printed over the head of the medium, which some critics have claimed as showing that she had smuggled in the journal of that name, though what the object of such a proceeding could be has not been explained. Her own explanation was that the controlling forces had in some way, possibly by apport, brought in the word in order to convey the idea that these faces and figures are not their real selves, but their selves as seen in a mirror.

Even now the reader may see no obvious connection with Spiritualism, but the next stage takes us all the way. When Eva is at her best, and it occurs only at long intervals and at some cost to her own health, there forms a complete figure; this figure is moulded to resemble some deceased person, the cord which binds it to the medium is loosened, a personality which either is or pretends to be that of the dead takes possession of it, and the breath of life is breathed into the image so that it moves and talks and expresses the emotions of the spirit within. The last word of the Bisson record is: “Since these séances and on numerous occasions the entire phantom has shown itself, it has come out of the cabinet, has begun to speak, and has reached Mme. Bisson, whom it has embraced on the cheek. The sound of the kiss was audible.” Was there ever a stranger finale of a scientific investigation? It may serve to illustrate how impossible it is for even the cleverest of materialists to find any explanation of such facts which are consistent with his theories, that the only one which Mr. Joseph MacCabe, in his public debate with me, could put forward was that it was a case of the regurgitation of food! He seemed to me unaware that a close-meshed veil was worn over the medium’s face in some of the experiments without in the least hampering the flow of the ectoplasm.

These results, though checked in all possible ways, were none the less so amazing that the inquirer had a right to suspend judgment until they are confirmed. But this has been fully done. Dr. Schrenck-Notzing returned to Munich and there he was fortunate enough to find another medium, a Polish lady, who possessed the faculty of materialisation. With her he conducted a series of experiments which he has recorded in his book, Materialisation-phénomène. Working with Stanislawa, the Polish medium, and adopting the same strict methods as with Eva, he produced exactly the same results. His hook overlaps that of Mme. Bisson, since he gives an account of the Paris experiments, but the most important part is the corroboration furnished by his check experiments in the summer of 1912 in Munich. The various photographs of the ectoplasm so far as they go are hardly to be distinguished from those already taken, so that any theory of elaborate fraud upon the part of Eva postulates the same fraud on the part of Stanislawa. Many German observers checked the sittings. In his thorough Teutonic fashion Schrenck-Notzing goes deeper into the matter than Mme. Bisson. He obtained hair from one of the materialised forms and compared it microscopically with hair from Eva (this incident occurred in the French series), showing by several tests that it could not be from the same person. He gave also the chemical result of an examination of a small portion of ectoplasm, which burned to an ash, leaving a smell as of horn. Chloride of soda (common salt) and phosphate of calcium were amongst the constituents. Finally, he actually obtained a cinematograph record of the ectoplasm pouring from the mouth of the medium. Part of this is reproduced in his book.

It should be explained that though the medium was in a trance during these experiments she was by no means inanimate. A separate personality seemed to possess her, which might be explained as one of her own secondary individualities, or as an actual obsession from outside. This personality was in the habit of alluding with some severity to the medium, telling Mme. Bisson that she needed discipline and had to be kept up to her work. Occasionally this person showed signs of clairvoyance, explaining correctly, for example, what was amiss with an electric fitting when it failed to work. A running accompaniment of groans and protests from Eva’s body seems to have been a mere animal outcry apart from intelligence. One observation of the German scientist is worth noting, as it suggests that great injustice may have been done in the past. He is commenting upon a case where Eva was entirely covered by a fantastic helmeted garment of ectoplasm and stood up from her chair. He says:

“This case is interesting because it throws a light upon the state of so-called transfiguration, which in the sense used by the Spiritualists means that a medium plays the part of the spirit, since he is clad with materialised stuff and seeks to imitate the character of the person concerned. This transition stage is to be found in the career of nearly all materialisation mediums. Literature records a number of exposures of such mediums acting the part of spirits, like the medium Bastian before Grown Prince Rudolph, Crookes’s medium Miss Cook, Mme. Esperance, and others. In all these cases people seized the medium, but the stuff used for the disguise vanished instantly and could not afterwards be traced.”

Spiritualists have been slow in advancing this plea, lest it seem to exonerate real fraud, but this conclusion from a man of science in an independent position should be set on record lest indiscriminate disgrace should fall upon the human hyena with his material muslin and the true medium in trance clad in ectoplasmic drapery.

These separate results of the German and the French investigators would seem final to any reasonable mind, but they are corroborated once again by the shorter research of the late Dr. Geley, of Paris, who held a series of sittings with Eva, summoning a hundred men of science to witness one or other of them. So strict were his tests that he winds up his account in *Physiologie Supernormale* with the words: “I will not merely say that there is no fraud, I will say that there has not been the possibility of fraud.” Again he walked the old path and found the same results, save that the phantasms in his experiments took the form of female faces, sometimes beautiful and, as he assures me, unknown to him. They may be thought-forms from Eva, for in none of his recorded results did he get an absolute living entity. There was enough, however, to cause Dr. Geley to say: “What we have seen kills materialism. There is no longer any room for it in the world.” By this he means, of course, the old-fashioned materialism of Victorian days, by which thought was a result of matter. All the new evidence points to matter being the result of thought. It is only when you ask, “Whose thought?” that you get upon debatable ground. “They had great beauty and a remarkable appearance of life,” says Dr. Geley, though they came as miniatures as well as full size.

Once again, then, Mme. Bisson is corroborated, and we have three separate investigators and two separate mediums giving identical results. Is it not a perfect insanity of incredulity to wave these things aside because they will not fit into our present philosophies? Surely it is evident that the time has come when the philosophies must be expanded to receive them.

Now, having thoroughly got it into our heads that it is possible for a person to evolve very singular stuff with a tendency to form human frames which seem for a time to be tenanted by independent intelligence, let us hark back and apply the knowledge to cases which were proved but not understood before these wonderful experiments. At once the instance of Crookes and Florrie Cook in 1873 springs to the front. In this classic case, as is well known, the celebrated chemist for three years experimented with this young medium, who put herself at his disposal in order to clear herself of a charge of personation made against her. It may well have been an example of transfiguration, as may some other alleged cases which were said to have occurred in later years when she was Mrs. Corner. Crookes exonerated her completely as the result of his research. She was shut up in the dark time and again in his small study. Then, after an hour or so, there would emerge into the adjoining laboratory an entirely different woman, who moved, spoke, and gave her name as Katie King, saying that she was a spirit who had lived in the reign of Charles II, and was now permitted for a brief visit to inhabit the body moulded from Miss Cook, who could be heard, and on certain occasions seen, in the adjoining room. Naturally the obvious criticism was made that this *was* Miss Cook masquerading as a phantom, but the first objection to such a theory was that it makes Professor Crookes out to be either a lunatic or a deliberate liar. No one but a lunatic could be so deceived, and no one but a liar could declare that the new-comer was four and a half inches taller than the medium, had beautiful brown hair, a long tress of which was traced up to the scalp and then severed (Miss Cook was a brunette), and finally that the pulse rate of the two women was entirely different. The whole course of Crookes's life proved that he was neither liar nor lunatic, and so a reasonable man could only believe that this prodigy corroborated by forty photographs was true, but totally unrelated to any other facts of the universe.

But now the matter appears otherwise. Thanks to the recent researchers, we are in a position to enter that darkened room and to reconstruct what is happening to Florrie Cook. She lies with an occasional animal moan upon the sofa. From her there drains the vital ectoplasm, forming a cloud of viscous substance, a pattern, and finally a form. The form disengages, the cord breaks, and Katie King, infusing her spirit into this reconstruction of what was probably a simulacrum of her earthly body, walks forth to spend her strange brief hour upon earth, conversing with Professor Crookes, playing with his children, telling them stories of older days, and finally, with the words, "My mission is finished," leaving them for ever. Her mission was to prove the survival of the spirit to an incredulous generation, and it would indeed have been accomplished had it depended upon the bravery of her witness, and not upon the dense stupidity, prejudice and materialism of the scientific, religious, and journalistic world in which he lived. Now after many days we are slowly understanding the message.

So much for the Crookes episode, and the light which has now been thrown upon it. But there is another famous series of investigations which are also confirmed and illuminated by this new knowledge. These are the very remarkable experiments made by Dr. Crawford, of Belfast, upon the medium Miss Goligher, and described in two successive books, *The Reality of Psychic Phenomena* and *Experiments in Psychic Science*. Miss Goligher, as her portrait indicates, is’a young lady of character and education, sprung from a decent Belfast family — a fact which has not prevented our opponents, in their desperate plight for an explanation, from endeavouring without a shred of evidence to depict her as a systematic fraud. It is a deplorable thing that people with this rare power, who submit themselves unpaid for the research of scientific men, should be assailed in this fashion, for it frightens others away, and makes the whole investigation more difficult.

The main lesson, as it seems to me, to be drawn from the Crawford experiments is that the ectoplasm is a substance which can be used for many purposes by the force which lies behind it. In the former cases it was used to build up moulds of the human figure. In the Belfast experiments this same ectoplasm was used for the making of rods or columns of power, which protruded from the body of the unconscious girl, and produced results such as raps, or the movement of objects, at a distance from her. Such a rod of power might be applied, with a sucker attachment, under a table and lift it up, causing the weight of the table to be added to that of the medium, exactly as if she had produced the effect by a steel bar working as a cantilever and attached to her body. Or it might be placed above the table and hold it down, a loss of weight of thirty, forty, or even fifty pounds being registered upon the weighing chair on which Miss Goligher sat. The medium became a mere residuum, with a third and more of her own substance outside herself, the difference showing itself rather in a refining of the whole body than in a visible loss of substance. One can well believe that under such abnormal circumstances any rough disturbance of the conditions which caused the external third to fly back with unnatural speed to the body would cause physical suffering. I have known a medium have a broad weal from breast to armpit through the sudden elastic recoil of the ectoplasm. Is it a wonder, then, that Spiritualists object to the type of researcher who suddenly flashes a powerful electric torch in the middle of a séance? When this matter is more clearly understood our descendants will, I think, be appalled as well as amused by some of the incidents which have been the outcome of our ignorance.

Dr. Crawford’s experiments have been an explanation and a justification of the ordinary phenomena of the dark séance. No philosophical unprejudiced mind could have failed to see that results which are always of the same type, whether the conditions be produced in Iceland or in Java, must have fixed laws underlying them. Our critics have continually bemused themselves by considering individual cases and failing to take a broad view of the cumulative evidence. Dr. Crawford makes every detail plain. He has even, by staining with moist carmine a cloth in front of the medium, got crimson marks at a distance showing that the column of force as it pushed forward was solid enough to carry some of the staining agent with it. This is a particularly fine and convincing experiment.

This is but a very brief indication of the general line taken by this remarkable research. Once again a sceptic may say, But this is physical power of some unknown type and not an intelligence apart from the sitters. A fuller knowledge, however, shows that at every stage there was a controlling intelligence, advising, directing, and showing its wishes by a code of signals. Whose intelligence was it? “I am quite satisfied in my own mind that the operators are discarnate human beings,” says Dr. Crawford in his very latest work, with all the results before him. I do not see how anyone else is in a position to go behind his own interpretation of the facts which he has himself made clear. He appears to have begun his investigation in the agnostic attitude, which is the ideal starting-point for the truly scientific mind, but he had the courage and adaptability which made him gain positive results instead of that endless round of experiments leading to no conclusion which is typical of so many psychical researchers.

Such, then, is the story of Mme. Bisson, of Dr. Schrenck-Notzing, of Dr. Geley, of Professor Crookes, and of Dr. Crawford. Can it be laughed away? Is it not time, after seventy years of ever-varying proof, that such an attitude be abandoned? But when it is abandoned, and when the conclusions have been accepted, what an eternity of ridicule is waiting for those solemn Panjandrums of Science who have for so long held up their warning hands lest the public should believe the truth!

The story of the Italian Cardinals and Galileo will seem reasonable when compared with the attitude of Victorian science to this invasion of the beyond. Of the theologians I say nothing, for that is another aspect of the matter, and they have only lived up to their own record; but material science, which made mock of mesmerism until for very shame it had to change its name to hypnotism before acknowledging it, has a sad reckoning before it in the case of Spiritualism. The fear is lest the reaction go too far, and in contemplating its colossal blunder we may forget or underrate the thousand additions which it has made to the comfort of the human race.

Be this as it may, who can read the facts here quoted and doubt that in those mists and shadows which hang round this uncharted coast we have at least one solid, clear-cut cape which juts out into the sunshine? Behind, however, lies a hinterland of mystery which successive generations of pioneers will be called upon to explore.

Since this essay was written fresh demonstrations and photographs of ectoplasm have been taken from Mrs. Crandon (Margery) in Boston, from the medium of Dr. Hamilton in Winnipeg, and from Mrs. Henderson of London. If any person can examine all these photographs, taken from such varied subjects, can observe their similarity, and can then doubt that a new field for study has opened up for Science, such a person seems to me to be incapable of receiving a new idea or of forming a sane judgment.

XII

A REMARKABLE MAN

On the early morning of April 9, 1855, the steam packet *Africa*, from Boston, was drawing into Liverpool Docks. Captain Harrison, his responsibility lifted from him, was standing on the bridge, the pilot beside him, while below the passengers had assembled, some bustling about with their smaller articles of luggage, while others lined the decks and peered curiously at the shores of Old England. Most of them showed natural exultation at the successful end of their voyage, but among them was one who seemed to have no pleasant prospects in view. Indeed, his appearance showed that his most probable destiny would make him independent of any earthly career. This was a youth some two and twenty years of age, tall, slim, with a marked elegance of bearing and a fastidious neatness of dress, but with a worn, hectic look upon his very expressive face, which told of the ravages of some wasting disease. Blue-eyed, and with hair of a light auburn tint, he was of the type which is peculiarly open to the attack of tubercle, and the extreme emaciation of his frame showed how little power remained with him by which he might resist it. An acute physician watching him closely would probably have given him six months of life in our humid island. Yet this young man was destined, as many of us think, to be the instrument in making a greater change in English thought than any traveller for centuries — a change only now slowly developing and destined, as I think, to revolutionize for ever our views on the most vital of all subjects. For this was Daniel Dunglas Home, a youth of Scottish birth and extraction, sprung, it is said, from the noble Border family of that name, and the possessor of strange personal powers which make him, with the possible exception of Swedenborg, the most remarkable individual of whom we have any record since the age of the Apostles, some of whose gifts he appeared to inherit. A deep melancholy lay upon his sensitive features as he viewed the land which contained no one whom he could call friend. Tears welled from his eyes, for he was a man of swift emotions and feminine susceptibilities. Then, with a sudden resolution, he disengaged himself from the crowd, rushed down to the cabin, and fell upon his knees in prayer. He has recorded how a spring of hope and comfort bubbled up in his heart, so that no more joyous man set his foot that day upon the Mersey quay, or one more ready to meet the fate which lay before him.

But how strange a fate, and what a singular equipment with which to face this new world of strangers! He had hardly a relation in the world. His left lung was partly gone. His income was modest, though sufficient. He had no trade or profession, his education having been interrupted by his illness. In character he was shy, gentle, sentimental, artistic, affectionate, and deeply religious. He had a strong tendency both to art and the drama, so that his powers of sculpture were considerable, and as a reciter he proved in later life that he had few living equals. But on top of all this, and of an unflinching honesty which was so uncompromising that he often offended his own allies, there was one gift so remarkable that it threw everything else into insignificance. This lay in certain powers, quite independent of his own volition, coming and going with disconcerting suddenness, but proving to all who would examine the proof that there was something in this man’s atmosphere which enabled forces outside himself and outside our ordinary apprehension to manifest themselves upon this plane of matter. In other words, he was a medium — the greatest on the physical side that the modern world has ever seen.

A lesser man might have used his extraordinary powers to found some special sect of which he would have been the undisputed high priest, or to surround himself with a glamour of power and mystery. Certainly most people in his position would have been tempted to use them for the making of money. As to this latter point, let it be said at once that never in the course of the thirty years of his strange ministry did he touch one shilling as payment for his gifts. It is on sure record that as much as two thousand pounds was offered to him by the Union Circle in Paris in the year 1857 for a single séance, and that he, a poor man and an invalid, utterly refused. “I have been sent on a mission,” he said; “that mission is to demonstrate immortality. I have never taken money for it, and I never will.” There were certain presents from Royalty which cannot be refused without boorishness — rings, scarf pins, and the like, tokens of friendship rather than recompense, for before his premature death there were few monarchs in Europe with whom this shy youth from the Liverpool landing-stage was not upon terms of affectionate intimacy. Napoleon the Third provided for his only sister; the Emperor of Russia sponsored his marriage. What novelist would dare to invent such a career?

But there are more subtle temptations than those of wealth. Home’s uncompromising honesty was the best safeguard against those. Never for a moment did he lose his humility and his sense of proportion. “I have these powers,” he would say: “I shall be happy up to the limit of my strength to demonstrate them to you if you approach me as one gentleman should approach another. I shall be glad if you can throw any further light upon them. I will lend myself to any reasonable experiment. I have no control over them — they use me but I do not use them. They desert me for months and then come back in redoubled force. I am a passive instrument — no more.” Such was his unvarying attitude. He was always the easy, amiable man of the world, with nothing either of the mantle of the prophet or of the skullcap of the magician. Like most truly great men, there was no touch of pose in his nature. An index of his fine feeling is that when confirmation was needed for his results he would never quote any names unless he was perfectly certain that the owners would not suffer in any way through being associated with an unpopular cult. Sometimes, even after they had freely given leave, he still withheld the names, lest he should unwittingly injure a friend. When he published his first series of *Incidents in My Life* the *Saturday Review* waxed very sarcastic over the anonymous evidence of Countess O —— , Count B —— , Count de K —— , Princess de B —— , and Mrs. S —— , who were quoted as having witnessed manifestations. In his second volume Home, having assured himself of the concurrence of his friends, filled the blanks with the names of the Countess Orsini, Count de Beaumont, Count de Komar, Princess de Beaurean, and the well-known American hostess, Mrs. Henry Senior. His Royal friends he never quoted at all, and yet it is notorious that the Emperor Napoleon III, the Empress Eugenie, the Czar, the Emperor William I of Germany, and the Kings of Bavaria and Wurtemberg were all equally convinced by his extraordinary powers. Never once was Home convicted of any deception either in word or in deed.

In these days, when the facts of psychic phenomena are familiar to all save those who are wilfully ignorant, we can hardly realise the moral courage which was needed by Home in putting forward his powers and upholding them in public. To the average educated Briton in the material Victorian era, a man who claimed to be able to produce results which upset

Newton's law of gravity, and which showed invisible mind acting upon visible matter, was *prima facie* a scoundrel and an impostor. The view of Spiritualism pronounced by Vice-Chancellor Gifford at the conclusion of the Home-Lyon trial was that of the class to which he belonged.

He knew nothing of the matter, but took it for granted that anything with such claims must be false. No doubt similar things were reported in far-off lands and ancient books, but that they could occur in prosaic, steady old England, the England of bank rates and free imports, was too absurd for serious thought. It has been recorded that at this trial Lord Gifford turned to Home's counsel and said, "Do I understand you to state that your client claims that he has been levitated into the air?" The counsel assented, on which the judge turned to the jury and made such a movement as the high-priest may have made in ancient days when he rent his garments as a protest against blasphemy. In 1867 there were few of the jury who were sufficiently educated to check the judge's remarks, and it is just in that particular that we have made some progress in the fifty years between. Slow work; but Christianity took more than three hundred years to come into its own.

Take this question of levitation as a test of Home's powers. It is claimed that more than a hundred times in good light, before reputable witnesses, he floated in the air. Consider the evidence. In 1857, in a chateau near Bordeaux, he was lifted to the ceiling of a lofty room in the presence of Mme. Ducos, widow of the Minister of Marine, and of the Count and Countess de Beaumont. In 1860 Robert Bell wrote an article, "Stranger than Fiction," in the *Cornhill*. "He rose from his chair," says Bell, "four or five feet from the ground.... We saw his figure pass from one side of the window to the other, feet foremost, lying horizontally in the air." Dr. Gully, of Malvern, a well-known medical man, and Robert Chambers, the author and publisher, were the other witnesses. Is it to be supposed that these men were lying confederates, or that they could not tell if a man were floating in the air or pretending to do so? In the same year Home was raised at Mrs. Milner Gibson's house in the presence of Lord and Lady Clarence Paget — the former passing his hands underneath him to assure himself of the fact. A few months later, Mr. Wason, a Liverpool solicitor, with seven others saw the same phenomenon. "Mr. Home," he says, "crossed the table over the heads of the persons sitting around it." He added: "I reached his hand seven feet from the floor, and moved along five or six paces as he floated above me in the air." In 1861 Mrs. Parkes, of Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, tells how she was present with Bulwer Lytton and Mr. Hall when Home, in her own drawing-room, was raised till his hand was on the top of the door, and then floated horizontally forward. In 1866 Mr. and Mrs. Hall, Lady Dunsany and Mrs. Senior, in Mr. Hall's house, saw Home, his face transfigured and shining, twice rise to the ceiling, leaving a cross marked in pencil upon the second occasion, so as to assure the witnesses that they were not victims of imagination. In 1868 Lord Adare, Lord Lindsay, Captain Wynne, and Mr. Smith Barry saw Home levitate upon many occasions. A very minute account has been left by the first three witnesses of the occurrence of December 16 of this year, when, at Ashley House, Home, in a state of trance, floated out of the bedroom and into the sitting-room window, passing seventy feet above the street. After his arrival in the sitting-room he went back into the bedroom with Lord Adare, and upon the latter remarking that he could not understand how Home could have floated through the window, which was only partially raised, "he told me to stand a little distance off. He then went through the open space head first quite rapidly, his body being nearly horizontal and apparently rigid. He came in again feet foremost." Such was the account given by Lords Adare and Lindsay. Upon its publication, Dr. Carpenter, who earned an unenviable reputation by a perverse opposition to every fact which bore upon this question, wrote exultantly to point out that there had been a third witness who had not been heard from, assuming, without the least justification, that Captain Wynne's evidence would be contradictory. He went the length of saying, "A single honest sceptic declares that Mr. Home was sitting in his chair all the time," a statement which can only be described as false. Captain Wynne at once wrote corroborating the others, and adding, "If you are not to believe the corroborative evidence of *three* unimpeached witnesses, there would be an end to all justice and courts of law." So many are the other instances of Home's levitations that a long article might easily be written upon this single phase of his mediumship. Professor Crookes was again and again a witness to the phenomenon, and refers to fifty instances which had come within his knowledge. But is there any fair-minded person, who has read the little that I have recorded above, who will not say with Professor Challis, "Either the facts must be admitted or the possibility of certifying facts by human testimony must be given up"?

But now a word of explanation. "Are we then back in the age of miracles?" cries the reader. There is no miracle — nothing on this plane is supernatural. What we see now and what we have read of in ages past are but the operation of law which has not yet been studied and defined. Already we realise something of its possibilities and of its limitations, which are as exact in their way as those of any purely physical power. We must hold the balance between those who would believe nothing and those who would believe too much. Gradually the mists will clear and we will chart the shadowy coast. When the needle first sprang up at the magnet it was not an infraction of the laws of gravity. It was that there had been the local intervention of another, stronger force. Such is the case, also, when psychic powers act upon the plane of matter. Had Home's faith in this power faltered, or had his circle been unduly disturbed, he would have fallen. When Peter lost faith he sank into the waves. Across the centuries the same cause still produced the same effect. Spiritual power is ever with us if we do not avert our faces, and nothing has been vouchsafed to Judea which is withheld from England.

It is in this respect, as a confirmation of the power of the unseen, and as a final answer to materialism as we now understand it, that Home's public career is of such supreme importance. He was an affirmative witness of the truth of those so-called "miracles," which have been the stumbling-block for so many earnest minds, and are now destined to be the strong, solid proof of the accuracy of the original narrative. Millions of doubting souls in the agony of spiritual conflict had cried out for definite proof that all was not empty space around us, that there were powers beyond our grasp, that the ego was not a mere secretion of nervous tissue, and that the dead did really carry on this personal, unbroken existence. All this was proved by this greatest of modern missionaries to anyone who could observe and reason. It is easy to poke superficial fun at rising tables and quivering walls, but they were the nearest and most natural objects which could record in material terms that power which was beyond our human ken. A mind which would be unmoved by an inspired sentence was struck into humility and into new paths of research in the presence of even the most homely of these inexplicable phenomena. It is easy to call them puerile, but they effected the purpose for which they were sent by shaking to its foundations the complaisance of those material men of science who were brought into actual contact with them. They are to be regarded not as ends in themselves, but as the elementary means by which the mind should be diverted into new channels of thought. And those channels of thought led straight to the recognition of the survival of the spirit. “You have conveyed incalculable joy and comfort to the hearts of many people,” said Bishop Clark of Rhode Island. “You have made dwelling-places light that were dark before.” “Mademoiselle,” said Home to the lady who was to be his wife, “I have a mission entrusted to me; it is a great and a holy one.” The famous Dr. Elliotson, immortalised by Thackeray under the name of Dr. Goodenough, was one of the leaders of British materialism. He met Home, saw his powers, and was able soon to say that he had lived all his life in darkness and had thought, there was nothing in existence but the material; but he now had a firm hope which he trusted he would hold while on earth. Innumerable instances could be quoted of the spiritual value of his work, but it has never been better summed up than in a paragraph from Mrs. Webster, of Florence, who saw much of his ministry. “He is the most marvellous missionary of modern times, in the greatest of all causes, and the good that he has done cannot be reckoned. Where Mr. Home passes he bestows around him the greatest of all blessings — the certainty of a future life.” Now that the details of his career can be read it is to the whole wide world that he brings this most vital of all messages.

It is curious to see how his message affected those of his own generation. Reading the account of his life written by his widow — a most convincing document, since she, of all living mortals, must have known the real man — it would appear that his most utterly whole-hearted support and appreciation came from those aristocrats of France and Russia with whom he was brought into contact. The warm glow of personal admiration and even reverence in their letters is such as can hardly be matched in any biography. In England he had a close circle of ardent supporters, a few of the upper classes, with the Halls, the Howitts, Robert Chambers, Mrs. Milner Gibson, Professor Crookes, and others. But there was a sad lack of courage among those who admitted the facts in private and stood aloof in public. Lord Brougham and Bulwer Lytton were of the type of Nicodemus, the novelist being the worst offender. The “Intelligentsia” on the whole came badly out of the matter, and many an honoured name suffers in the story. Faraday and Tyndall were fantastically unscientific in their methods of prejudging a question first, and offering to examine it afterwards on the condition that their prejudgment was accepted. Sir David Brewster said some honest things, and then, in a panic, denied that he had said them, forgetting that the evidence was on actual record. Browning wrote a long poem — if such doggerel can be called poetry — to describe an exposure which had never taken place. Carpenter earned an unenviable notoriety as an unscrupulous opponent, while proclaiming some strange spiritualistic thesis of his own. The secretaries of the Royal Society refused to take a cab drive in order to see Crookes' demonstration of the physical phenomena, while they pronounced roundly against them. Lord Gifford inveighed from the Bench against a subject the first elements of which he did not understand. As to the clergy, such an order might not have existed during the thirty years that this, the most marvellous spiritual outpouring of many centuries, was before the public. I cannot recall the name of one British clergyman who showed any intelligent interest, and when in 1872 a full account of the St. Petersburg séances began to appear in *The Times*, it was cut short, according to Mr. H. T. Humphreys, "on account of strong remonstrances to Mr. Delane, the editor, by certain of the higher clergy of the Church of England." Such was the contribution of our official spiritual guides. Dr. Elliotson, the Rationalist, was far more alive than they. The rather bitter comment of Mrs. Home is: "The verdict of his own generation was that of the blind and deaf upon the man who could hear and see."

Home's charity was among his more beautiful characteristics. Like all true charity, it was secret, and only comes out indirectly and by chance. One of his numerous traducers declared that he had allowed a bill for fifty pounds to be sent in to his friend, Mr. Rhymer. In self-defence it came out that it was not a bill, but a cheque most generously sent by Home to help this friend in a crisis. Considering his constant poverty, fifty pounds probably represented a good part of his bank balance. His widow dwells with pardonable pride upon the many evidences found in his letters after his death. "Now it is an unknown artist for whose brush Home's generous efforts had found employment; now a distressed worker writes of his sick wife's life saved by comforts that Home provided; now a mother thanks him for a start in life for her son. How much time and thought he devoted to helping others when the circumstances of his own life would have led most men to think only of their own needs and cares." "Send me a word from the heart that has known so often how to cheer a friend!" cries one of his *protégés*. "Shall I ever prove worthy of all the good you have done me?" says another letter. We find him roaming the battlefields round Paris, often under fire, with his pockets full of cigars for the wounded, A German officer writes affectionately to remind him how he saved him from bleeding to death, and carried him on his own weak back out of the place of danger. Truly Mrs. Browning was a better judge of character than her spouse, and Sir Galahad a better name than Sludge.

There are few of the varied gifts which we call “mediumistic,” and St. Paul “of the spirit,” which Home did not possess — indeed, the characteristic of his psychic power was its unusual versatility. We speak usually of a direct voice medium, of a trance speaker, of a clairvoyant, or of a physical medium, but Home was all four. To take St. Paul’s gifts in their order he had “the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge” when in his trance utterances he described the life beyond. “The gift of healing” was with him, and the account of his curing young De Cardonne of total deafness or of Mme. de Lakine of paralysis is historical. “The operation of great works” was shown in his phenomena when the very building would shake from an unknown power. “Discerning of spirits” was continually with him. There is no note, however, of prophecy or of the gift of tongues. So far as can be traced, he had little experience of the powers of other mediums, and was not immune from that psychic jealousy which is a common trait of these sensitives. Mrs. Jencken, formerly Miss Kate Fox, was the only other medium with whom he was upon terms of friendship. He bitterly resented any form of deception, and carried this excellent trait rather too far by looking with eyes of suspicion upon all forms of manifestation which did not exactly correspond with his own. This opinion, expressed in an uncompromising manner in his last book, *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, gave natural offence to other mediums who claimed to be as honest as himself. A wider acquaintance with phenomena would have made him more charitable. Thus he protested strongly against any séance being held in the dark, but this is certainly a counsel of perfection, for experiments upon the ectoplasm, which is the physical basis of all materialisations, show that it is fatally affected by light unless it is tinted red. Home had no large experience of complete materialisations, such as those obtained in those days by Miss Florrie Cook or Mme. d’Esperance or in our own time by Mme. Bisson’s medium, and therefore he could dispense with complete darkness in his own ministry. Thus his opinion was unjust to others. Again, Home declared roundly that matter could not pass through matter, because his own phenomena did not take that form, and yet the evidence that matter can in certain cases be passed through matter seems to be overwhelming. Even birds of rare varieties have been brought into séance rooms under circumstances which seem to preclude fraud, and the experiments of passing wood through wood as shown before Zöllner and the other Leipzig professors were quite final, as set forth in the famous physicist's account, in *Transcendental Physics* of his experiences with Slade. Thus it may count as a small flaw in Home's character that he decried and doubted the powers which he did not himself happen to possess.

Some also might count it as a failing that he carried his message rather to the leaders of society and of life than to the vast toiling masses. It is probable that Home had, in fact, the weakness as well as the graces of the artistic nature, and that he was most at ease and happiest in an atmosphere of elegance and refinement, with a personal repulsion from all that was sordid and ill-favoured. If there were no other reason, the precarious state of his health unfitted him for any sterner mission, and he was driven by repeated hæmorrhages to seek the pleasant and refined life of Italy, Switzerland, and the Riviera. But for the prosecution of his mission, as apart from personal self-sacrifice, there can be no doubt that his message carried to the laboratory of a Crookes or to the court of a Napoleon was more useful than if it were laid before the crowd. The assent of science and of character was needed before the public could gain assurance that such things were true. If it was not fully gained, the fault lies assuredly with the hide bound men of science and thinkers of the day, and by no means with Home, who played his part of actual demonstration to perfection, leaving it to other and less gifted men to analyse and to make public that which he had shown them. He did not profess to be a man of science, but he was the raw material of science, willing and anxious that others should learn from him all that he could convey to the world, so that science should itself testify to religion, while religion should be buttressed upon science. When Home's message has been fully learned, an unbelieving man will not stand convicted of impiety, but of ignorance.

There was something pathetic in Home's efforts to find some creed in which he could satisfy his own gregarious instinct — for he had no claims to be a strong-minded individualist — and at the same time find a niche into which he could fit his own precious packet of assured truth. His pilgrimage vindicates the assertion of some Spiritualists that a man may belong to any creed and carry with him the spiritual knowledge, but it also bears out those who reply that perfect harmony with that spiritual knowledge can only be found, as matters now stand, in a special Spiritualist community. Alas, that it should be so! For it is too big a thing to sink into a sect, however great that sect might become. Home began in his youth as a Wesleyan, but soon left them for the more liberal atmosphere of Congregationalism. In Italy the artistic atmosphere of the Roman Catholic Church, and possibly its record of so many phenomena, akin to his own, caused him to become a convert with an intention of joining a monastic order — an intention which his common sense caused him to abandon. The change of religion was at a period when his psychic powers had deserted him for a year, and his confessor assured him that as they were of evil origin they would certainly never be heard of again now that he was a son of the true Church. None the less, on the very day that the year expired they came back in renewed strength. From that time Home seems to have been only nominally a Catholic, if at all, and after his second marriage — both his marriages were to Russian ladies — he was strongly drawn towards the Greek Church, and it was under their ritual that he was at last laid to rest at St. Germain in 1886. “To another discerning of spirits” (i Cor. xii. 10) is the short inscription upon that grave, of which the world has not yet heard the last.

If proof were needed of the blamelessness of Home’s life, it could not be better shown than by the fact that his numerous enemies, spying ever for some opening to attack, could get nothing in his whole career upon which to comment save the wholly innocent affair which is known as the Home-Lyon case. Any impartial judge, reading the depositions in this case — they are to be found verbatim in the second series of *Incidents from My Life* — would agree that it is not blame but commiseration which was owing to Home. One could desire no higher proof of the nobility of his character than his dealings with this unpleasant, freakish woman, who first insisted upon settling a large sum of money upon him, and then, her whim having changed, and her expectations of an immediate introduction into high society being disappointed, stuck at nothing in order to get it back again.

Had she merely asked for it back, there is little doubt that Home’s delicate feelings would have led him to return it, even though he had been put to much trouble and expense over the matter, which had entailed a change of his name to Home-Lyon, to meet the woman’s desire that he should be her adopted son. Her request, however, was so framed that he could not honourably agree to it, as it would have implied an admission that he had done wrong in accepting the gift. If one consults the original letters

— which few of those who comment upon the case seem to have done — you find that Home, S.C. Hall as his representative, and Mr. Wilkinson as his solicitor, implored the woman to moderate the unreasonable benevolence which was to change so rapidly into even more unreasonable malevolence. She was absolutely determined that Home should have the money and be her heir. A less mercenary man never lived, and he begged her again and again to think of her relatives, to which she answered that the money was her own to do what she pleased with, and that no relatives were dependent upon it. From the time that he accepted the new situation he acted and wrote as a dutiful son, and it is not uncharitable to suppose that this entirely filial attitude may not have been that which this elderly lady had planned out in her scheming brain. At any rate, she soon tired of her fad and reclaimed her money upon the excuse — a monstrous one to anyone who will read the letters and consider the dates — that spirit messages received through Home had caused her to take the action she had done. The case was tried in the Court of Chancery, and the judge alluded to Mrs. Lyon's "innumerable misstatements on many important particulars — misstatements upon oath so perversely untrue that they have embarrassed the Court to a great degree and quite discredited the plaintiff's testimony." In spite of this caustic comment, and in spite also of elementary justice, the verdict was against Home on the general ground that British law put the burden of disproof upon the defendant in such a case, and complete disproof is impossible when assertion is met by counter-assertion. Even Home's worst enemies were forced to admit that the fact that he had retained the money in England and had not lodged it where it would have been beyond recovery, proved his honest intentions in this the most unfortunate episode of his life. Such, within the compass of a short sketch, was the strange fate of the young man whom we saw land upon the Liverpool pier. He was at that time twenty-two. He died in his fifty-third year. In those thirty years he threw out seed with either hand. Much fell among stones; much was lost on the wayside; but much found a true resting-place, and has put forth a harvest the end of which no living man can see.

XIII

THE RIFT IN THE VEIL

Whether the reader belongs to that majority who are incredulous upon the subject, or to that increasing minority who accept the evidence, he can hardly fail to be interested in the circumstances in which the whole strange psychic movement arose. The student is aware that there was a long preparatory stage which began with Swedenborg and Mesmer, and ended with Andrew Jackson Davis, called the Poughkeepsie seer, who at an early age, without education, wrote or dictated one of the deepest, most comprehensive explanations of the universe, ever framed. Passing these we will begin the narrative with the happenings of Hydesville, and give some account of these less-known developments which followed the new movement, sometimes to its great glory and sometimes to its temporary degradation.

The hamlet of Hydesville, near Rochester, in the State of New York, consisted of a cluster of wooden houses of a very humble type. In one of these, a residence which would hardly pass the requirements of a British district council surveyor, there began this development which will, in my opinion, prove to be far the most important thing which America has given to the common weal of the world. It was inhabited by a decent farmer family of the name of Fox — a name which, by a curious coincidence, has been already registered in religious history as that of the evangel of the Quakers. Beside the father and mother, who were Methodists in religion, there were two children resident in the house at the time when the manifestations reached such a point of intensity that they attracted general attention. These children were the daughters, Margaret, aged fifteen, and Kate, aged twelve.

About the beginning of 1848 many loud noises like sudden blows had been heard both by day and by night in the house, accompanied by a vibration of the furniture. Rats, mice and the hammering of a neighbouring cobbler were all put forward as explanations and each proved equally inadequate. As the spring advanced these sounds became more insistent and more varied in character, and occasionally were accompanied by actual motions of the furniture. It was soon observed that daylight was inimical to the phenomena, and the idea of trickery was thereby suggested, but careful watch by Mr. Fox failed to detect anything of the kind. Finally, on March 31st, there was a very loud and continued outbreak of inexplicable sounds. It was upon this evening that one of the great points in the history of psychic evolution was reached, for it was then that young Kate Fox, having lost all sense of fear in the presence of that which use had made familiar, challenged the unseen power to repeat the snaps of her fingers. This challenge, though given in flippant words, was instantly accepted. Each snap was answered by a knock. However humble the operator at either end, the spiritual telegraph was at last working, and it was left to the patience and moral earnestness of the human race to determine how high might be the uses to which it was put in the future. Unexplained forces were many in the world, but here was a force claiming to have independent intelligence at the back of it. That was the supreme sign of a new departure. “Fancy a new spiritual departure in a frame-house in an American hamlet!” Yes, and fancy a previous one in a camel-driver’s tent in Arabia, and before that the greatest of all in a carpenter’s shop in Judea! Exaltavit humiles! Mrs. Fox was amazed at this development, and at the further discovery that the force could apparently see as well as hear, for when Kate snapped her fingers without sound the rap still responded. The mother asked a series of questions, the answers to which, given in numerals, showed a greater knowledge of her own affairs than she herself possessed, for the raps insisted that she had had seven children, whereas she protested that she had six, until one who had died early came back to her mind. A neighbour, Mrs. Redfield, was called in, and her amusement was changed to wonder, and finally to awe, as she also listened to the correct answers to intimate questions.

The neighbours came flocking in as some rumours of these wonders got about, and the two children were carried off by one of them, while Mrs. Fox went to spend the night at Mrs. Redfield’s. In their absence the phenomena went on exactly the same as before, which disposes once for all of those theories of cracking toes and dislocating knees which have been so frequently put forward by people unaware of the true facts. The happenings of the night were at once recorded and were printed in pamphlet form within three weeks of the event, so that it would be difficult to get more prompt and direct testimony, which was subscribed to by a number of disinterested witnesses.

Having formed a sort of informal committee of investigation, the crowd, in shrewd Yankee fashion, spent a large part of the night of March 3ist in playing question and answer with the unseen intelligence. According to its own account he was a spirit, he had been injured in that house, he rapped out the name of a former occupant who had injured him, he was thirty-one years old at the time of death, which was five years before, he had been murdered for money, he had been buried in the cellar ten feet deep. On descending to the cellar dull, heavy thumps, coming apparently from under the earth, broke out when the investigator stood at the centre. There was no sound at other times. That, then, was the place of burial! It was a neighbour named Duesler who, first of all modern men, called over the alphabet and got answers by raps on the letters. In this way the name of the dead man was obtained — Charles B. Rosma. The idea of connected messages was not developed until four months later, when Isaac Post, a Quaker of Rochester, was the first pioneer. Such, in very brief outline, were the events of March 3ist, which were continued and confirmed upon the succeeding night, when not less than a couple of hundred people had assembled round the house. Upon April 2nd, it was observed that the raps came in the day as well as at night.

Excavations were begun in the cellar, but the spring thaw and a swollen river had flooded the land, and water was struck a foot or so below the surface. When the summer came, a hole was dug by David Fox, the young son, who had come from a distant farm after the disturbances broke out. He was aided by Henry Bush, Lyman Granger of Rochester, and others. His account of what occurred was published in Capron's *Modern Spiritualism*, 1855, and was confirmed personally in conversation with the Hon. Dale Owen, so that the evidence is very clear and direct. They passed a plank five feet down, and below it came on some crockery, charcoal, and quicklime, under which was some human hair, several bones, and part of a human skull. Clearer evidence of murder and its concealment could hardly be asked for. These were corroborative details, for a young girl, Lucretia Pulver, came forward with an account of how a pedlar had called there while she was acting as "help" to Mr. and Mrs. B —— . He had remained for the night, while she, the girl, had been sent away, and was kept away three days. The pedlar had promised to call at her father's house, but he never came. On her return she had heard for the first time the rappings and noises in the house. She observed that the centre of the cellar was soft, which was explained by Mrs. B —— as being due to rat-holes. Afterwards, Mr. B —— carried down some earth and was at work for some time. Shortly afterwards the B —— s left the house and the neighbourhood, but their successors, the Weekmans, were conscious of the same noises which finally culminated under the Fox tenancy. As might be expected, B —— , who was a blacksmith by trade, vigorously denied this accusation and produced many certificates as a proof that he was a man of good character. The spiritual story was also weakened by the fact that the man Rosma could not be traced in Orange Country, New York, whence he professed to have come, and a search for five alleged children was equally fruitless. We know now how difficult it is to get a name through correctly, and I think it very likely that "Ross" may have been the real surname. His non-recognition is less remarkable as he was by profession a wanderer. It must be admitted that the case against B —— needed further corroboration before it could be called substantial. Two great undoubted results did emerge, however, which have never been shaken, that the origin of the raps could by no means be explained, and that they did convey the unknown fact that a human body had been buried in the cellar. This is the vital core of the whole matter, for it touched that which is of eternal interest to all of us, while the question of individual guilt is temporary and incidental.

The danger of blindly following alleged spirit guidance was clearly shown some months later in the neighbouring town of Rochester, where a man disappeared under suspicious circumstances. An enthusiastic Spiritualist had messages by raps which announced a murder. The canal was dragged, and the wife of the missing man was actually ordered to enter the canal, which nearly cost her her life. Some months later the absentee returned, having fled to Canada to avoid a writ for debt. This, as may well be imagined, was a blow to the young cult. The public did not then understand what even now is so little understood, that death causes no change in the human spirit, that mischievous and humorous entities abound, and that the inquirer must use his own instincts and his own common sense at every turn. "Try the spirits that ye may know them." In the same year, in the same district, the truth of this new philosophy upon the one side, and its limitations and dangers on the other, were most clearly set forth. These dangers are with us still. The silly man, the arrogant inflated man, the cocksure man, is always a safe butt. Every observer has had some trick played upon him. I have myself had my faith sorely shaken by deception until some compensating proof has come along to assure me that it was only a lesson which I had received, and that it was no more fiendish or even remarkable that disembodied intelligences should be hoaxers, than that the same intelligence inside a human body should find amusement in the same foolish way.

The first effect of the new dispensation was to bring utter misery and ruin to the Fox family. Within their house there were constant disturbances from the insistent manifestations, while from without they were plagued by sightseers and wonder-mongers, many of whom looked upon the unfortunate people as being concerned in something diabolical. Kate was sent away to Rochester to join her married sister, Mrs. Fish, but her absence appears to have had no effect upon the sounds which continued to disturb the family, who at last abandoned Hydesville altogether, hoping that the manifestations would remain behind. It speedily became evident, however, that the unseen powers were no longer attached to the place, but that they specially associated themselves with the two girls, for they were as insistent in the town as in the hamlet. In vain the family prayed with their Methodist friends that relief should come. In vain also were the exorcisms of the ministers of various creeds. Beyond joining with loud raps in the “Amens,” the unseen presences took no notice of these religious exercises.

The whole course of the movement had now widened and taken a more important turn. It was no longer a murdered man calling for justice. The pedlar seemed to have been used as a pioneer, and now that he had found the opening and the method, a myriad of Intelligences were swarming at his back. Isaac Post had instituted the method of spelling by raps, and messages were pouring through. According to these the whole system had been devised by the contrivance of a band of thinkers and inventors upon the spirit plane, foremost among whom was Benjamin Franklin, whose eager mind and electrical knowledge in earth life might well qualify him for such a venture. Whether this claim was true or not, it is a fact that Rosma dropped out of the picture at this stage, and that the intelligent knockings purported to be from the deceased friends of those inquirers who were prepared to take a serious interest in the matter, and to gather in reverent mood to receive the messages. That they still lived and still loved was the constant message from the beyond, accompanied by many material tests, which confirmed the wavering faith of the new adherents of the movement. When asked for their methods of working and the laws which governed them, the answers were from the beginning exactly what they are now — that it was a matter concerned with human and spirit magnetism, that some who were richly endowed with this physical property were mediums, that this endowment was not necessarily allied to morality or intelligence, and that the condition of harmony was especially necessary to secure good results. In eighty years we have learned very little more — and after all these years the primary law of harmony is invariably broken at the so-called test séances, the members of which imagine that they have disproved the philosophy when they obtain no results, whereas they have actually confirmed it.

In one of the early communications the Fox sisters were assured that “these manifestations would go all over the world.” This prophecy was soon in a fair way to be fulfilled, for these new powers, and further developments of them which included the discerning and hearing of spirits and the movement of objects without contact, appeared in many circles which were independent of the Fox family. In an incredibly short space of time the movement, with many eccentricities and phases of fanaticism, had swept over the Northern and Eastern States of the Union, always retaining that solid core of actual tangible fact, which might be occasionally simulated by impostors but always reasserted itself to the serious investigator who could shake himself free from preconceived prejudice. Disregarding for the moment these wider developments, let us continue the story of the original circles at Rochester.

The spirit messages had urged upon the small band of pioneers a public demonstration of their powers in an open meeting at Rochester — a proposition which was naturally appalling to two shy country girls and to their friends. So incensed were the discarnate Guides by the opposition of their earthly agents, that they threatened to suspend the whole movement for a generation, and did actually desert them completely for some weeks. At the end of that time communication was restored, and the believers, chastened by this interval of thought, put themselves unreservedly into the hands of the outside forces, promising that they would dare all in the cause. It was no light matter. A few of the clergy, notably a Methodist named the Rev. A.H. Jervis, rallied to their aid, but the majority thundered from their pulpits against them, and the mob eagerly joined in the cowardly sport of heretic-baiting. On November 14, 1849, the Spiritualists held their first meeting at the Corinthian Hall, the largest available in Rochester. The audience, to its credit, listened with attention to the exposition of facts from Mr. Capron of Auburn, the principal speaker. A committee of five representative citizens was then selected to examine into the matter and to report upon the following evening, when the meeting would reassemble. So certain was it that this report would be unfavourable that the *Rochester Democrat* is stated to have had its leading article prepared, with the heading: “Entire Exposure of the Rapping Humbug.” The result however, caused the editor to hold his hand. The committee reported that the raps were undoubted facts, though the information was not invariably correct. They added that these raps came on walls and doors some distance from the girls, causing a sensible vibration. “They entirely failed to find any means by which it could be done.”

This report was received with disapproval by the audience and a second committee from among the dissentients was formed. This investigation was conducted in the office of a lawyer. Kate, for some reason, was away, and only Mrs. Fish and Margaret present. None the less, the sounds continued as before, though a Dr. Langworthy was introduced to test the possibility of ventriloquism. The final report was that “the sounds were heard, and their thorough investigation had conclusively shown them to be produced neither by machinery nor ventriloquism, though what the agent is they were unable to determine.”

Again the audience turned down the report of their own committee, and again a deputation was chosen from among the most extreme opponents, one of whom vowed that if he could not find out the trick he would throw himself over the Falls of the Genessee River. Their examination was thorough to the length of brutality, and a committee of ladies were associated with it. The latter stripped the frightened girls, who wept bitterly under their afflictions. Their dresses were then tied tightly round their ankles, and they were placed upon glass and other insulators. The committee was forced to report “when they were standing on pillows with a handkerchief tied round the bottom of their dresses, tight to the ankles, we all heard the rapping on the wall and floor distinctly.” The committee further testified that their questions, some of them mental, had been answered correctly. So long as the public looked upon the movement as a sort of joke it was prepared to be tolerantly amused, but when these successive reports put the matter in a more serious light, a wave of blackguardism swept over the town, which reached such a pitch that Mr. Willetts, a gallant Quaker, was compelled at the fourth public meeting to declare that “the mob of ruffians who designed to lynch the girls should do so, if they attempted it, over his dead body.” There was a disgraceful riot, the young women were smuggled out by a back door, and reason and justice were for the moment clouded over by force and folly. Then, as now, the minds of the average men of the world were so crammed with the things that do not matter that they had no space for the things that do matter. But Fate is never in a hurry and the movement went on. Many accepted the findings of the successive committees as being final, and indeed it is difficult to see how the alleged facts could have been more severely tested. At the same time this strong new fermenting wine began to burst some of the old bottles into which it was poured, to the excusable disgust of the public.

The many discreet, serious, and religious circles were for a season almost obscured by swollen-headed ranters, who imagined themselves to be in touch with every high entity from the Apostles downwards, some even claiming the direct afflatus of the Holy Ghost and emitting messages which were only saved from being blasphemous by their crudity and absurdity. One community of these fanatics, who called themselves the Apostolic Circle of Mountain Cove, particularly distinguished themselves by their extreme claims and furnished good material for the enemies of the new dispensation. The great body of Spiritualists turned away in disapproval from such exaggerations, but were unable to prevent them. Many well-attested supernormal phenomena came to support the failing spirits of those who were distressed by the excesses of the fanatics. On one occasion, which is particularly convincing and well-reported, two bodies of investigators in separate rooms received the same messages simultaneously from some central force which called itself Benjamin Franklin. This double message was: “There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark will be made plain. The world will be enlightened.” It must be admitted that the prophecy has up to now been only partially fulfilled — and it may at the same time be conceded that, with some startling exceptions, the forecasts of the Spirit people have not been remarkable for accuracy, especially where the element of time is concerned.

The question has often been asked: “What was the purpose of so strange a movement at this particular time, granting that it is all that it claims to be?” Governor Tallmadge, a United States Senator of repute, was one of the early converts to the new cult, and he has left it upon record that he asked this question upon two separate occasions in two different years from different mediums. The answer in each case was almost identical. The first said: “It is to draw mankind together in harmony and to convince sceptics of the immortality of the soul.” The second said: “To unite mankind and to convince sceptics of the immortality of the soul.” Surely this is no ignoble ambition and does not justify those narrow and bitter attacks from ministers and the less progressive of their flocks from which Spiritualists have up to the present day had to suffer. The first half of the definition is, I think, particularly important, for I believe that one of the ultimate results of this movement will be to unite Christianity upon a common basis so strong and, indeed, self-sufficient that the quibbles which separate the Churches of to-day will be seen in their true proportion and will be swept away or disregarded. One could even hope that such a movement might spread beyond the bounds of Christianity and throw down some of the barriers which stand between great sections of the human race.

Within two years from the crisis at Hydesville, the Fox sisters, still little more than children, were in New York, in the centre of the huge public discussion which raged round the subject. They stayed as guests for a short time in the house of Horace Greeley, the famous editor of the *New York Tribune*, one of the clearest thinkers in America, and whilst there gave constant exhibitions of their strange powers. Greeley had the courage to imperil the fortunes of his great newspaper by publicly stating that the phenomena which he had tested were undoubtedly genuine. “We devoted what time we could spare from our duties, out of three days, to this subject,” he wrote:

“It would be the basest cowardice not to say that we are convinced beyond a doubt of the ladies’ perfect integrity and good faith. Whatever may be the origin or cause of the rappings, the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them. We tested this thoroughly and to our entire satisfaction. Their conduct and bearing are as unlike that of deceivers as possible.”

So said Horace Greeley, cute Yankee and man of the world, after personal investigation. Against this, what is the worth of the opinion of people who even now talk nonsense about cracking joints and ventriloquism?

What impressed the New Yorkers as much as the actual sounds was the extreme accuracy of the answers and the fact that unspoken questions were replied to as readily as those which were audible. We have records of one particular séance at which there were more famous men assembled than have ever perhaps been present at one demonstration. Among them were Fenimore Cooper, the novelist; Bancroft, the historian; Cullen Bryant and N.P. Willis, poets; Bigelow, Dr. Griswold, with several doctors and clergymen. As befitted such a company the phenomena were mental rather than material, but absolutely convincing. Mrs. Fox and the three daughters were the mediums. It is interesting to note that half an hour elapsed before any sounds were heard. Strong brains charged with prejudice were present and time was needed, even by those remarkable mediums, to harmonize the conditions. Then at last came slight sounds, increasing gradually in volume until they were very clear. Each member of the company in turn asked questions, some mentally, some aloud, and all attested that the correct answers were given by the knockings. The record is too long to give in detail, but some of the information was so exact and so unusual that it was absolutely convincing. It is said that nearly all the guests were converted by this remarkable experience, and that this knowledge coming when their feet were, as the future proved, on the very threshold of death, was of inestimable comfort to Cooper and to Willis.

In the presence of these extraordinary happenings it may be imagined that American science was not silent. It was loud in its mockery and disapproval. At last the flood rising from that small spring at Hydesville had become so great that it would no longer be ignored. The religious exorcisms had failed. Could not science put a stop once for all to this disturbing intrusion? There were two scientists in the United States at that time who had a European reputation. One was Agassiz, the naturalist, the other Robert Hare, the chemist, who invented among other things the oyx-hydrogen blow-pipe. It was Robert Hare who went forth to slay the new delusion. He started in that thoroughly unscientific frame of mind in which science has always approached the question. He felt called upon, he said, “to bring whatever influence he possessed to the attempt to stem the tide of popular madness which, in defiance of reason and science, was fast setting in favour of the gross delusion called Spiritualism.” This can hardly be called an impartial method of approaching an inquiry, and can only be compared with Faraday’s contemporary assertion that in investigating such a matter one should make up one’s mind beforehand what is possible and what is not. Here was a brave and honest man, however. The huge tome which recorded his investigation lies upon my table as I write. It is adorned with pictures of the spring balances, double tables, and other appliances with which he endeavoured to confound these heretics, and was himself confounded. So searching was his investigation that every possible source of error was eliminated. As a result Professor Hare declared after a year that he had been entirely mistaken, and that the claims of the new philosophy not only as to the phenomena, but as to their source and meaning, were absolutely justified. For this he was boycotted and bullied by the American Scientific Association, which seems to have behaved as unwisely as all of our own scientific bodies in its unreasoning opposition to what it did not comprehend. Whilst the report of this eminent scientific man was ignored, great stress was laid upon the absurd report of three unknown medical men of Buffalo, who declared that in their opinion the sounds made by the Fox sisters were caused by the repeated partial dislocations of their knee-joints. How these dislocations answered unspoken questions was not explained.

The persecution endured by Professor Hare was repeated in the case of Judge Edmonds, head of the High Court of New York, who had also approached the movement with a view to exposing it, but who found himself confounded by the appearance of phenomena within his own family circle, and by the development of his own daughter into a medium, possessing in some directions greater powers than the Fox sisters. Like Professor Hare, he proclaimed his conversion in a book, and had to leave the Bench in consequence. Such intolerance was deplorable, and yet there is this excuse for it, that numerous cranks had burst into all sorts of wild theories, and also that the vile race of spurious mediums, or of mediums who eked out real powers by faked phenomena, were beginning to appear and to cause those scandals with which we are too familiar. Unable to distinguish the true from the counterfeit, the public, busy with its own affairs and impatient with the claims of another world, was glad to dismiss the whole subject as one vast delusion.

A word must be said as to the tragic fate of the two younger Fox sisters, a subject which is painful to Spiritualists and yet must be faced. Both fell victims to that dipsomania which was hereditary in the family. Each had made a remarkably good marriage, Margaret becoming the wife of Dr.

Kane, the famous Arctic explorer, while Kate married Mr. Jencken, a member of the English Bar. The latter was very thoroughly tested by Professor Crookes, who was a most severe critic of psychic powers, though opponents of the movement represent him as credulous. Margaret became a Roman Catholic, and high influences were used, according to her own account, to place her in a convent. What with religious excitement and her hereditary weakness she fell in her later years into a pitiable state, in which she alternately denounced Spiritualism, proclaiming herself an impostor, and recanted her statement with the most solemn vows. Personally, I am of opinion that she was by no means free from the suspicion that when psychic power was wanting she supplemented it by fraud. As to her final assertions and denials, I think that Father Thurston may be right when he says that both were in a sense true. Mr. Isaac Funk, the famous lexicographer, says of her in her later years, “For five dollars she would have denied her mother and sworn to anything.”

I have said that such a fate befalling the early mediums is painful to their friends, but it has small bearing upon their faith. A medium is in no sense a teacher or an example, but is a passive instrument for forces outside herself. There have been, and are, many mediums who have been of saintly mould. There have been others who have yielded to some human weakness, very especially to drink. Their powers and their message are to be held distinct from themselves, as a Catholic would hold that a bad priest may celebrate a true sacrament, or a materialist that a foolish operator may transmit a wise telegram. There weaknesses delay the acceptance of the new knowledge. It still stands upon the threshold — but the door is slowly opening.

XIV

A NEW LIGHT ON OLD CRIMES

Psychic science, though still in its infancy, has already reached a point where we can dissect many of those occurrences which were regarded as inexplicable in past ages, and can classify and even explain them — so far as any ultimate explanation of anything is possible. So long as gravity, electricity, magnetism, and so many other great natural forces are inexplicable one must not ask too much of the youngest — though it is also the oldest — of the sciences. But the progress made has been surprising — the more surprising since it has been done by a limited circle of students whose results have hardly reached the world at large, and have been greeted rather with incredulous contempt than with the appreciation which they deserve. So far have we advanced that of the eighty or ninety cases carefully detailed in Dale Owen's *Footfalls*, published in 1859, we find now, seventy years later, that there is hardly one which cannot be classified and understood. It would be interesting, therefore, to survey some of those cases which stand on record in our law courts, and have been variously explained in the past as being either extraordinary coincidences or as interpositions of Providence. The latter phrase may well represent a fact, but people must learn that no such thing has ever been known as an interposition of Providence save through natural law, and that when it has seemed inexplicable and miraculous it is only because the law has not yet been understood. All miracles come under exact law, but the law, like all natural laws, is itself divine and miraculous.

We will endeavour in recounting these cases, which can only be done in the briefest fashion, to work from the simpler to the more complex — from that which may have depended upon the natural but undefined powers of the subconscious self, through all the range of clairvoyance and telepathy, until we come to that which seems beyond all question to be influenced by the spirit of the dead. There is one case, that of Owen Parfitt, of Shepton Mallet, in Somersetshire, which may form a starting-point, since it is really impossible to say whether it was psychic or not; but if it were not, it forms one of the most piquant mysteries which ever came before the British public.

This old fellow was a seaman, a kind of John Silver, who lived in the piratical days of the eighteenth century and finally settled down, upon what were usually considered to have been ill-gotten gains, about the year 1760, occupying a comfortable cottage on the edge of the little Somerset town. His sister kept house for him, but she was herself too infirm to look after the rheumatic old mariner, so a neighbour named Susanna Snook used to come in by the day and help to care for him. It was observed that Parfitt went periodically to Bristol, and that he returned with money, but how he gained it was his secret. He appears to have been a secretive and wicked old creature, with many strange tales of wild doings, some of which related to the West Coast of Africa, and possibly to the slave trade. Eventually his infirmity increased upon him. He could no longer get farther than his garden, and seldom left the great chair in which he was placed every day by the ministering Susanna Snook, just outside the porch of the cottage.

Then one summer morning, June 6, 1768, an extraordinary thing happened. He had been deposited as usual, with a shawl round his shoulders, while the hard-working Susanna darted back to her own cottage near-by. She was away for half an hour. When she returned she found, to her amazement, that the old seaman had disappeared. His sister was wringing her hands in great bewilderment over the shawl, which still remained upon the chair, but as to what became of the old reprobate nothing has ever been learned from that day to this. It should be emphasized that he was practically unable to walk and was far too heavy to be easily carried.

The alarm was at once given, and as the haymaking was in full swing the countryside was full of workers, who were ready to declare that even if he could have walked he could not have escaped their observation upon the roads. A search was started, but it was interrupted by a sudden and severe storm, with thunder and heavy rain. In spite of the weather, there was a general alarm for twenty-four hours, which failed to discover the least trace of the missing man. His unsavoury character, some reminiscences of the Obi men and Voodoo cult of Africa, and the sudden thunderstorm, all combined to assure the people of Somerset that the devil had laid his claws upon the old seaman; nor has any natural explanation since those days set the matter in a more normal light. There were hopes once that this had been attained when, in the year 1813, some human bones were discovered in the garden of a certain Widow Lockyer, who lived within two hundred yards of the old man’s cottage. Susanna Snook was still alive, and gave evidence at the inquiry, but just as it began to appear that perhaps the old man had been coaxed away and murdered, a surgeon from Bristol shut down the whole matter by a positive declaration that the bones were those of a woman. So the affair rests till to-day.

No psychic explanation can be accepted in any case until all reasonable normal solutions have been exhausted. It is possible that those visits to Bristol were connected with blackmail, and that some deeper villain in the background found means to silence that dangerous tongue. But how was it done? It is a freakish, insoluble borderland case, and there we must leave it. The natural question arises: If you have spirit communications why are you unable to get an explanation? The answer is that spirit communication is also governed by inexorable laws, and that you might as well expect an electric current along a broken wire as to get a communication when the conditions have become impossible.

Passing on to a more definite example, let us take the case of the murder of Maria Marten, which was for a long time a favourite subject when treated at village fairs under the name of “The Mystery of the Red Barn.” Maria Marten was murdered in the year 1827 by a young farmer named Corder, who should have married her but failed to do so, preferring to murder her in order to conceal the result of their illicit union. His ingenious method was to announce that he was about to marry the girl, and then at the last hour shot her dead and buried her body. He then disappeared from the neighbourhood, and gave out that he and she were secretly wedded and were living together at some unknown address.

The murder was on May 18, 1827, and for some time the plan was completely successful, the crime being more effectually concealed because Corder had left behind him instructions that the barn should be filled up with stock. The rascal sent home a few letters purporting to be from the Isle of Wight, explaining that Maria and he were living together in great contentment. Some suspicion was aroused by the fact that the postmarks of these letters were all from London, but none the less the matter might have been overlooked had it not been for the unusual action of an obscure natural law which had certainly never been allowed for in Mr. Corder’s calculations.

Mrs. Marten, the girl's mother, dreamed upon three nights running that her daughter had been murdered. This in itself might count for little, since it may have only reflected her vague fears and distrust. The dreams, however, were absolutely definite. She saw in them the red barn, and even the very spot in which the remains had been deposited. The latter detail is of great importance, since it disposes of the idea that the incident could have arisen from the girl having told her mother that she had an assignation there. The dreams occurred in March, 1828, ten months after the crime, but it was the middle of April before the wife was able to persuade her husband to act upon such evidence. At last she broke down his very natural scruples, and permission was given to examine the barn, now cleared of its contents. The woman pointed to the spot and the man dug. A piece of shawl was immediately exposed, and eighteen inches below it the body itself was discovered, the horrified searcher staggering in a frenzy out of the ill-omened barn. The dress, the teeth, and some small details were enough to establish the identification.

The villain was arrested in London, where he had become, by marriage, the proprietor of a girls' school, and was engaged, at the moment of capture, in ticking off the minutes for the correct boiling of the breakfast eggs. He set up an ingenious defence, by which he tried to prove that the girl had committed suicide, but there was no doubt that it was a cold-blooded crime, for he had taken not only pistols, but also a pickaxe into the barn. This was the view which the jury took, and he was duly hanged, confessing his guilt in a half-hearted way before his execution. It is an interesting fact that the London schoolmistress, whom he had trapped into marriage by means of a specious advertisement in which he described himself as a "private gentleman, whose disposition is not to be exceeded," remained devotedly attached to him to the end.

Now here is a case about which there is no possible doubt. The murder was unquestionably discovered by means of the triple dream, for which there could have been no natural explanation. There remain two psychic explanations. The one depends upon telepathy or thought-reading, a phenomenon which, of course, exists, as anyone can prove who experiments with it, but which has been stretched to most unreasonable lengths by those who would prefer any explanation to that which entails disembodied intelligence. It is, of course, within the bounds of remote possibility that the murderer thought of the girl's mother upon three successive nights and also upon the scene of the crime, thus connecting up the vision of one with the brain of the other. If any student thinks this the more probable explanation he is certainly entitled to accept it. On the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence that dreams, and especially early-in-the-morning dreams just before the final waking, do at times convey information which seems to come from other intelligences than our own. Taking all the facts, I am of opinion that the spirit of the dead woman did actually get in touch with the mind of the mother, and impressed upon her the true facts of her unhappy fate. It is to be remembered, however, that even those who advanced telepathy as an explanation of such a case are postulating a power which was utterly unknown to science until this generation, and which itself represents a great extension of our psychic knowledge. We must not allow it, however, to block our way to the further and more important advances which lie beyond it.

For purposes of comparison we will now take another dream case which is perfectly authentic. Upon February 8th, 1840, Edmund Norway, the chief officer of the ship *Orient*, at that time near St. Helena, dreamed a dream between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. in which he saw his brother Nevell, a Cornish gentleman, murdered by two men. His brother was seen to be mounted. One of the assailants caught the horse’s bridle and snapped a pistol twice, but no report was heard. He and his comrade then struck him several blows, and dragged him to the side of the road, where they left him. The road appeared to be a familiar one in Cornwall, but the house, which should have been on the right, came out upon the left in the visual picture. The dream was recorded in writing at the time, and was told to the other officers of the ship.

The murder had actually occurred, and the assassins, two brothers named Lightfoot, were executed on April 13th of that year, at Bodmin. In his confession the elder brother said: “I went to Bodmin on February 8th and met my brother ... my brother knocked Mr. Norway down. He snapped a pistol at him twice, but it did not go off. He then knocked him down with the pistol. It was on the road to Wade-bridge” (the road which had been seen in the dream). “We left the body in the water on the left side of the road coming to Wadebridge. My brother drew the body across the road to the watering.” The evidence made it clear that the murder was committed between the hours of ten and eleven at night. As St. Helena is, roughly, in the same longitude as England, the time of the dream might exactly correspond with that of the crime.

These are the actual facts, and, though they may be explained, they cannot be explained away. It appears that Norway, the sailor, had been thinking of and writing to his landsman brother just before going to his bunk. This might possibly have made the subsequent vision more easy by bringing the two men into *rapport*. There is a considerable body of evidence to prove that during sleep there is some part of us, call it the etheric body, the subconscious self, or what you will, which can detach itself and visit distant scenes, though the cut-off between sleeping and waking is so complete that it is very rarely that the memory of the night's experience is carried through. I could quote many examples within my own experience of this "travelling clairvoyance," as it is called, but one which attracted a good deal of attention at the time, as it was fully described in *The Times*, was that of Sir Rider Haggard's dog, the dead body of which was found through a vision of the night. The same occurs in the stupor of high fever, and I have heard my little son, with a temperature of one hundred and four degrees, make a remark in delirium which showed that he saw clearly what had occurred in the next room. "Naughty Denis, breaking my soldiers!" were the words, and they were absolutely correct. Thus it can easily be conceived that the consciousness of the sailor, drawn to his brother by recent loving thoughts, went swiftly to him in his sleep, and was so shocked to witness his murder that it was able to carry the record through into his normal memory. The case would resolve itself, then, into one which depended upon the normal but unexplored powers of the human organism, and not upon any interposition from the spirit of the murdered man. Had the vision of the latter appeared alone, without the accompanying scene, it would have seemed more probable that it was indeed a post-mortem apparition. For the next illustration we will turn to the records of American crime. In this case, which is absolutely authentic, a man named Mortensen owed a considerable sum of money, three thousand eight hundred dollars, to a company, which was represented by the secretary, Mr. Hay. The transaction occurred in Utah in the year 1901. Mortensen beguiled Hay to his private house late in the evening, and nothing more was heard of the unfortunate man. Mortensen's story was that he paid the money in gold, and that Hay had given him a receipt and had started home with the money, carried in glass jars. When the police visited Mortensen's house in the morning they were accompanied by Hay's father-in-law, an aged Mormon named Sharp, who said: "Where did you last see my son-in-law?"

"Here," answered Mortensen, indicating a spot outside his door.

"If that is the last place you saw him," said Sharp, "then that is where you killed him."

"How do you know he is dead?" asked Mortensen.

"I have had a vision," said Sharp, "and the proof is that within one mile of the spot where you are standing, his dead body will be dug up from the field."

There was snow on the ground at the time, and next morning, December 18th, a neighbour observed some blood-stains upon it not very far from Mortensen's house. They led to a mound shaped like a grave. The neighbour procured a spade, borrowing it from Mortensen himself, and speedily unearthed the body of Hay. There was a bullet wound at the back of his head. His valuables had been untouched, but the receipt which he was known to have carried to Mortensen's house afforded sufficient reason for the murder.

The whole crime seems to have been a very crude and elementary affair, and it is difficult to see how Mortensen could have hoped to save himself, unless, indeed, an immediate flight was in his mind. There could be no adequate defence, and the man was convicted and shot — the law of Utah giving the criminal the choice as to the fashion of his own death. The only interest in the affair is the psychic one, for again old Sharp repeated at the trial that in a vision he had learned the facts. It is not a very clear case, however, and may conceivably have been a bluff upon the part of the old man, who had formed his own opinion as to the character of his son-in-law, and his probable actions. Such a solution would, however, involve a very extraordinary coincidence.

The next case which I would cite is very much more convincing — in fact, it is final in its clear proof of psychic action, though the exact degree may be open to discussion. The facts seem to have been established beyond all possible doubt, though there is some slight confusion about the date. According to the account of Mr. Williams, of Cornwall, the chief actor, it was in the early days of May, 1812, that he thrice in the same night had a remarkable dream. Mr. Williams was a man of affairs, and the superintendent of some great Cornish mines. He was familiar with the lobby of the House of Commons, into which his interests had occasionally led him. It was this lobby which he perceived clearly in his dream. His attention was arrested by a man in a snuff-coloured coat, with metal buttons, who loitered there. Presently there entered a small, brisk man in a blue coat and white waistcoat. As he passed, the first man whipped out a pistol and shot the other through the breast. In his dream Mr. Williams was made aware that the murdered man was Mr. Perceval, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Williams was greatly impressed, and alarmed, by this dream, and he recounted it not only to his wife but also to several friends whom he met at the Godolphin mine next day, asking their advice whether he should go up to London and report the matter. To this they answered very naturally, but unfortunately as the event proved, that it was useless, and would only expose him to derision. On the thirteenth, about ten days after the dream, Mr. Williams narrates how his son, returning, from Truro, rushed into the room crying, “Oh, father, your dream has come true! Mr. Perceval has been shot in the House of Commons.” The deed, as is well known, was committed by a man named Bellingham, who had some imaginary grievance. The dress of the two chief actors, and all the other details, proved to be exactly as foretold.

In an account in *The Times* sixteen years later it was stated that the vision was upon the actual night of the murder, which would reduce the case to ordinary clairvoyance, but the evidence is very strong that it was prophetic as well. Mr. Williams, writing in 1832, four years after *The Times* account, repeated the story once more as it is set forth here. His wife, his friends at the mine, his projected journey to London, and his recollection of his son’s arrival with the news all corroborate his version of the affair. What comment can we make upon such an incident? Explain it we cannot, but at least we can get some light upon it by examining the statements of others who have had both the clairvoyant and the prophetic faculty. One of these was Swedenborg, who exhibited it again and again, but we have no exact account from him as to how his visions came. More to the point are the notes of Mr. Turvey, of Bournemouth, a most remarkable psychic, whose *Beginnings of Seership* is one of the most illuminating books I know. Our ordinary comments must always be explanations from outside, but this gentleman, with his great powers and analytical brain, is able to give us more precious information which comes from within. Mr. Turvey was not only an extraordinary clairvoyant, capable of throwing out his own etheric body at will, and communicating at once to others the information which it brought back, but he again and again saw scenes of the future, which he put upon record and which frequently, if not invariably, were fulfilled. His description of his own sensation is very helpful and destined, I think, to be classical. He says:

“At certain times I see a sort of ribbon moving like the endless belt of a cinema film. In colour it is very pale heliotrope, and seems to vibrate very rapidly. On it are numerous little pictures, some of which appear to be engraved upon the film itself, while others are like pale-blue photographs stuck upon the film. The former refer to past, the latter to future events. The locality is judged by the scenery and climatic heat” (felt by the observer). “The dates are judged by the clearness of the pictures.”

Now, applying this analysis of Mr. Turvey to the far less complete experience of Mr. Williams, we get some glimmer of light. Mr. Williams was of Welsh or Cornish stock, and predisposed to the psychic. In his busy life he could not develop it as Mr. Turvey had done, for the latter, though he was once a famous athlete, had broken in health to an extent which confined him to his chair. Yet at times his true innate powers could assert themselves, and thus he received or perceived one of those cinema visions of which Mr. Turvey speaks. Why it should have been sent him is beyond our ken. Was it to prompt him to go to London, as he so nearly did, and try to turn the stream of fate? Or was it as impersonal as were many of the prophetic visions of Mr. Turvey? One cannot say, but there is a big fact standing up as clear as the Nelson Column, and to turn away one’s eyes, pretend not to see it, and make no attempt to fit it into the general scheme of the universe, is neither science nor common sense. Mr. Turvey has left it upon record that he saw more unpleasant than pleasant things, and Mr. Williams’ experience was in accordance. This might be taken as supporting the idea that the visions are for the purpose of warning and prevention. When one considers that in this instance the picture of the lobby of the House of Commons was presented to one of the very few men in Cornwall who would recognise the place when they saw it, it certainly suggests that the vision did not merely happen, but came for a definite purpose. It is not to be denied that this and many other prophetic cases strengthen the argument of the fatalist, who holds that our Life’s path is marked out for us. On the other hand, the student will find a certain number of cases which give a comforting assurance, that, though the general path may be indicated, there is still a certain play of events which gives room for changes in the issue. I have notes, for example, of one dream or vision in which the subject had a most clear impression of a long series of events, which ended in his going down a coal-mine, the latter experience being particularly vivid. Some months afterwards the whole long episode occurred exactly as depicted, but when they came to the coal-mine the guide said: “I had hoped to take you down the coal-mine, but it is a holiday, and the cage is not working.” In another case a young officer of my acquaintance was warned by a dead comrade that they would meet again upon a certain date. The young man spent the day in his dug-out, and late in the evening was congratulating himself upon having got through, when about 10 p.m. his Company Commander came round and said: “I fear I must ask you to do a rather dirty job. We have to find if there are any of our dead near the German wire. Take a few men and make an examination.” He gave himself up as lost, and his batman, who had heard the story, burst into tears. The young fellow was so convinced of his own impending fate that he left his party safe in No Man’s Land, thinking that there was no use in their being sacrificed also. He went forward alone, made a perfectly successful search, returned in safety, and had no misfortune at all. Such a case must hearten up those who are overburdened by any prophecy or presentiment. It may be that some force — prayer, perhaps — can divert the stream of fate. We shall now turn to some cases which were more clearly ultramundane in their nature, and I would express my obligation to Mr. Harold Furniss, whose care has restored many details in his collection of criminal records. The first which I would choose is the murder of Sergeant Davies in the Highlands in the year 1749. Davies was part of the English garrison left in the north after the suppression of Prince Charlie’s rising, and, like many of his comrades, he alleviated his exile by the excellent sport which the barren country afforded. Upon September 28th in that year he went shooting near Braemar without any attendant. The rancour of the recent war had to some extent died down, and in any case the sergeant, who was a powerful and determined man, feared no opponent. The result showed, however, that he was overbold, as he never returned from his expedition. Search parties were sent out, but months passed and there were still no signs of the missing soldier. Five years passed, and the mystery was still unsolved. At the end of that time, two Highlanders, Duncan Terig and Alex. Bain Mac-donald, were arrested because the fowling-piece and some of the property of the lost man were found in their possession. The case rested mainly, however, upon some evidence which was as strange as any ever heard in a court of law.

A farm labourer named Alex. Macpherson, aged twenty-six, deposed that one night in the summer of 1750 — that is, some nine months after the sergeant's disappearance — he was lying awake in the barn where all the servants slept, when he saw enter a man dressed in blue, who came to his bedside and beckoned him to follow. Outside the door the figure turned and said: "I am Sergeant Davies." The apparition then pointed to a distant moss or swamp, and said: "You will find my bones there. Go and bury them at once, for I can have no peace, nor will I give you any, until my bones are buried, and you may get Donald Farquharson to help you." It then vanished.

Early next day Macpherson, according to his own account, went to the place indicated and, obeying the exact instructions received, he came straight upon the body, still wearing the blue regimental coat of Guise's Horse. Macpherson laid it upon the surface, dragging it out from the slime, but did not bury it. A few nights later the vision appeared to him once more as he lay in the barn, and reproached him with having failed to carry out the instructions given. Macpherson asked: "Who murdered you?"

To this the apparition answered: "Duncan Terig and Alex. Macdonald," and vanished once more. Macpherson next day went to Farquharson and asked him to come and help bury the body, to which the latter agreed. It was accordingly done. No one else was told of the incident save only one friend, John Grewar, who was informed within two days of the burial. This story was certainly open to criticism, as the arrest was in 1754, and the alleged apparition and subsequent burial in 1750, so that one would naturally ask why no information had been given during four years. On the other hand, one could imagine that these Celtic Highlanders were somewhat in the position of Irish peasants in an agrarian outrage. They were bound together against a common enemy, and would not act save under pressure. This pressure arrived when the two suspects were actually arrested, the murdered man's gear was found upon them, and direct inquiry was made from the folk in the neighbourhood. No ill-will was shown to exist between Macpherson and the accused men, nor was any motive alleged for so extraordinary a concoction. On the psychic side there are also some objections. One would have conceived that the sergeant might return, as others seem to have done, in order to identify his murderers, but in this case that was a secondary result, and the main one appears to have been the burial of his own remains. Spirits are not much concerned about their own bodies. In a communication which I saw recently, the deceased alluded to his body as “that thing that I used to go about in.” Still, earthly prejudices die hard, and if Davies, sprung from a decent stock, yearned for a decent burial, it would surely not be an unnatural thing.

There was some corroboration for Macpherson’s weird story. There were female quarters in this barn, and a woman worker, named Isabel Machardie, deposed that on the second occasion of the apparition she saw “something naked come in at the door and go straight to Macpherson’s bed, which frightened her so much that she drew the clothes over her head.” She added that when it appeared it came in a bowing posture, but she could not tell what it was. The next morning she asked Macpherson what it was that had troubled them the night before, and he answered that she might be easy, for it would trouble them no more.

There is a discrepancy here between the blue-coated figure of the first vision and the “something naked” of the second, but the fact remained that the woman claimed to have seem something alarming, and to have alluded to it next day. Macpherson, however, could speak nothing but Gaelic, his evidence being interpreted to the Court. Lockhart, the defending barrister, naturally asked in what tongue the vision spoke, to which Macpherson answered: “In as good Gaelic as ever I heard in Lochaber.” “Pretty good for the ghost of an English sergeant,” said Lockhart, and this facile retort made the Court laugh, and finally brought about the acquittal of the prisoners, in spite of the more material proofs which could not be explained away. Later, both Lockhart and the advocate engaged with him, admitted their belief in the guilt of their clients.

As a matter of fact, Davies had fought at Culloden in April, 1746, and met his end in September, 1749, so that he had been nearly three and a half years in the Highlands, mixing in sport with the gillies, and it is difficult to suppose that he could not muster a few simple sentences of their language.

But apart from that, although our information shows that knowledge has to be acquired by personal effort, and not by miracle, in the after life, still it is to be so acquired, and if Sergeant Davies saw that it was only in a Gael that he would find those rare psychic gifts which would enable him to appear and to communicate (for every spirit manifestation must have a material basis), then it is not inconceivable that he would mastef the means during the ten months or so which elapsed before his reappearance.

Presuming that Macpherson’s story is true, it by no means follows that he was the medium, since any one of the sleepers in the barn might have furnished that nameless atmosphere which provides the correct conditions. In all such cases it is to be remembered that this atmosphere is rare, and that a spirit comes back not as it would or when it would, but as it can. Law, inexorable law, still governs every fresh annexe which we add to our knowledge, and only by defining and recognising its limitations will we gain some dim perception of the conditions of the further life and its relation to the present one. We now pass to a case where the spirit interposition seems to have been as clearly proved as anything could be. It was, it is true, some time ago, but full records are still available. In the year 1632 a yeoman named John Walker lived at the village of Great Lumley, some miles north of Durham. A cousin named Anne Walker kept house for him, and intimacy ensued, with the prospect of the usual results. John Walker greatly feared the scandal, and took diabolical steps to prevent it. He sent the young woman over to the town of Chester-le-Street to the care of one Dame Carr. To this matron Anne Walker confessed everything, adding that Walker had used the ominous phrase “that he would take care both of her and of her child.” One night at Dame Carr’s door there appeared the sinister visage of Mark Sharp, a Blackburn collier, with a specious message which induced the girl to go with him into the dusk. She was never seen again. Walker, upon being appealed to by Dame Carr, said that it was all right, and that it was better in her condition that she should be among strangers. The old lady had her suspicions, but nothing could be done, and the days passed on.

A fortnight later a miller, named James Graham, was grinding corn in his mill at night some miles away. It was after midnight when he descended to the floor of the mill after putting a fresh fill of corn in the hopper. His exact experience, as preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, was as follows:

“The mill door being shut, there stood a woman in the midst of the floor, with her hair hanging down all bloody, with five large wounds on her head. He being much amazed began to bless himself, and at last asked her who she was and what she wanted. She answered, ‘I am the spirit of Anne Walker, who lived with John Walker.... He promised to send me to where I should be well looked to ... and then I should come again and keep his house. I was one night sent away with Mark Sharp, who, upon a certain moor’ (naming the place) ‘slew me with a pick such as men dig coal with and gave me these five wounds, and after threw my body into a coalpit hard by, and hid the pick under a bank, and his shoes and stockings being bloody he endeavoured to wash them, but seeing the blood would not part he hid them there.'"

The spirit ended by ordering the miller to reveal the truth on pain of being haunted. In this case, as in the last, the message was not delivered. The horrified miller was so impressed that he would by no means be alone, but he shirked the delicate task which had been confided to him. In spite of all his precautions, however, he found himself alone one evening, with the result that the vision instantly reappeared, "very fierce and cruel," to use his description, and insisted that he should do as commanded. More obdurate than the Celtic Macpherson, the miller awaited a third summons, which came in so terrific a form in his own garden that his resistance was completely broken down, and so, four days before Christmas, he went to the nearest magistrate and lodged his deposition. Search was at once made, and the vision was justified in all particulars, which, it must be admitted, has not always been the case where information has seemed to come from beyond. The girl's body, the five wounds in the head, the pick, the bloodstained shoes and stockings were all found, and as the body was in a deep coalpit there seemed no normal means by which the miller could possibly have known the nature of the wounds unless he had himself inflicted them, which is hardly consistent either with the known facts, with his appearance as informer, or with the girl's admissions to Dame Carr.

John Walker and Mark Sharp were both arrested and were tried for murder at the Durham Assizes before Judge Davenport. It was shown that the miller was unknown, save by sight, to either prisoner, so that it could not be suggested that he had any personal reason for swearing away their lives by a concocted tale. The trial was an extraordinary one, for there seems to have been a psychic atmosphere such as has never been recorded in a prosaic British court of law. The foreman of the jury, a Mr. Fairbairn, declared in an affidavit that he saw during the trial the "likeness of a child standing upon Walker's shoulder." This might be discounted as being the effect upon an emotional nature of the weird evidence to which he had listened, but it received a singular corroboration from the judge, who wrote afterwards to a fellow-lawyer, Mr. Serjeant Hutton, of Goldsborough, that he himself was aware of a figure such as Fairbairn described, and that during the whole proceedings he was aware of a most uncanny and unusual sensation for which he could by no means account. The verdict was guilty, and the two men were duly executed.

The array of responsible witnesses in this case was remarkable. There was the judge himself, Mr. Fairbairn, with his affidavit, Mr. James Smart, Mr. William Lumley, of Great Lumley, and others. Altogether, it is difficult to see how any case could be better authenticated, and I have no doubt myself that the facts were as stated, and that this single case is enough to convince an unprejudiced mind of the continuance of individuality and of the penetrability of that screen which separates us from the dead.

What comment can psychic science make upon such an episode? In the first place, I would judge that the miller was a powerful medium — that is, he exuded that rare atmosphere which enables a spirit to become visible as the meteorite becomes visible when it passes through the atmosphere of earth. It is, I repeat, a rare quality, and in this case seems to have been unknown to its possessor, though I should expect to find that the miller had many other psychic experiences which took a less public form. This is the reason why the apparition did not appear before the magistrate himself, but could only approach him by messenger. The spirit may have searched some time before she found her medium, just as Sergeant Davies was ten months before he found the Highlander who had those physical qualities which enabled him to communicate. Law and obedience to law run through the whole subject. It is also abundantly evident that the confiding woman who had been treated with such cold-blooded ingratitude and treachery carried over to the other world her natural feelings of indignation and her desire for justice. As a curious detail it is also evident that she recovered her consciousness instantly after death, and was enabled to observe the movements of her assassin. With what organs, one may ask? With what organs do we see clear details in a dream? There is something there besides our material eyes.

A most reasonable objection may be urged as to why many innocent people have suffered death and yet have experienced no super-normal help which might have saved them. Any criminologist could name off-hand a dozen cases where innocent men have gone to the scaffold. Why were they not saved? I have written in vain if I have not by now enabled the reader to answer the question himself. If the physical means are not there, then it is impossible. It may seem unjust, but not more so than the fact that a ship provided with wireless may save its passengers while another is heard of no more. The problem of unmerited suffering is part of that larger problem of the functions of pain and evil, which can only be explained on the supposition that spiritual chastening and elevation come in this fashion, and that this end is so important that the means are trivial in comparison. We must accept this provisional explanation, or we are faced with chaos.

Can these dim forces which we see looming above and around us be turned to the use of man? It would be a degradation to use them for purely material ends, and it would, in my opinion, bring some retribution with it; but, where the interests of Justice are concerned, I am convinced that they could indeed be used to good effect. Here is a case in point.

Two brothers, Eugene and Paul Dupont, lived some fifty years ago in the Rue St. Honoré of Paris. Eugene was a banker, Paul a man of letters. Eugene disappeared. Every conceivable effort was made to trace him, but the police finally gave it up as hopeless. Paul was persevering, however, and in company with a friend, Laporte, he visited Mme. Huerta, a well-known clairvoyante, and asked for her assistance.

We have no record as to how far articles of the missing man were given to the medium, as a bloodhound was started on a trail, but whether it was by psychometry or not, Mme. Huerta, in the mesmerized state, very quickly got in touch with the past of the two brothers, from the dinner where they had last met. She described Eugene, and followed his movements from the hour that he left the restaurant until he vanished into a house which was identified without difficulty by her audience, though she was unable to give the name of the street. She then described how inside the house Eugene Dupont had held a conference with two men whom she described, how he had signed some paper and had received a bundle of bank notes. She then saw him leave the house, she saw the two men follow him, she saw two other men join in the pursuit, and finally she saw the four assault the banker, murder him, and throw the body into the Seine.

Paul was convinced by the narrative, but his comrade, Laporte, regarded it as a fabrication. They had no sooner reached home, however, than they learned that the missing man had been picked out of the river and was exposed at the Morgue. The police, however, were inclined to take the view of suicide, as a good deal of money was in the pockets. Paul Dupont knew better, however. He hunted out the house, he discovered that the occupants did business with his brother’s firm, he found that they held a receipt for two thousand pounds in exchange for notes paid to his brother on the night of the crime, and yet those notes were missing. A letter making an appointment was also discovered.

The two men, a father and son, named Dubuchet, were then arrested, and the missing links were at once discovered. The pocket-book which Eugene Dupont had in his possession on the night of the murder was found in Dubuchet’s bureau. Other evidence was forthcoming, and finally the two villains were found guilty and were condemned to penal servitude for life. The medium was not summoned as a witness, on the ground that she was not conscious at the time of her vision, but her revelations undoubtedly brought about the discovery of the crime.

Now it is clear in this authentic case that the police would have saved themselves much trouble, and come to a swifter conclusion, had they themselves consulted Mme. Huerta in the first instance. And if it is obviously true in this case, why might it not be so in many other cases? It should be possible at every great police-centre to have the call upon the best clairvoyant or other medium that can be got, and to use them freely, for what they are worth. None are infallible. They have their off-days and their failures. No man should ever be convicted upon their evidence. But when it comes to suggesting clues and links, then it might be invaluable. In the case of Mr. Foxwell, the London stockbroker who fell into the Thames some years ago, it is well known that the mode of his death, and the place where his body would be found, were described by Von Bourg, the crystal-gazer, and that it was even as he had said. I venture to say that the mere knowledge that the police had an ally against whom every cunning precaution might prove unavailing would in itself be a strong deterrent to premeditated crime. This is so obvious, that if it had not been for vague scientific and religious prejudices, it would surely have been done long ago. Its adoption may be one of the first practical and material benefits given by psychic science to humanity.

XV

SINGULAR RECORDS OF A CIRCLE

I have recently received a considerable bundle of records from a circle sitting in Uruguay. The sitters consisted of two Englishmen of the best class, whom I will call “Hudson.” They have given me permission to use their real names, but perhaps they hardly realise how considerable the backwash might be from such a publication. A lady friend, Miss Reader, is the medium, and the procedure is by means of a glass and the alphabet in the usual fashion.

The number of real or alleged spirits that came to this circle and their communications have been so clear and direct and present such extraordinary variety that they invite comment. After reading their record, which has been very well taken, I guarded myself by getting each member of the circle to sign a document putting them upon their word of honour that no hoax was intended. The elder Mr. Hudson adds: “The way in which spirits of different character came through, one after the other, and the unexpectedness and spontaneity of the answers with the different styles and phrases would have taxed better imaginations than those possessed by any of the three of us.”

I particularly inquired whether they had any special acquaintance with the English public schools and whether they had done any particular reading as to seventeenth or eighteenth-century life. The answer to the first question was that they had both been Eton boys, but that they knew nothing of any other school, and the answer to the second was that none of them had any particular knowledge of the centuries named.

When I say that among the visitants were two very exuberant public-school boys, four ladies of easy virtue, one old sea captain, one Austrian adventurer who had been murdered, and a number of bucks from the Regency and earlier years, it will be realised that the communications really seemed of unusual nature. They were full of points which might be evidential and I have taken some trouble to follow these up, sometimes with striking success and sometimes with complete failure.

The first visitant who came on December 18th, 1928, and on several subsequent occasions, was one Nicholas, who refused to give his surname. He said he had just died, having been shot in Vienna. He was forty-one years of age, had lived an evil life and was intensely unhappy in the other world. He was born in Baku, had gone to Germany afterwards, as an Austrian he had served in the war, against the Russians, had been taken prisoner and sent to Siberia, had been liberated by the Communists, but had been arrested by the Bolshevists as a spy, not making his escape until 1926. Then he went to Vienna, where he had an intrigue with an English girl who had gone there to study art. In the course of this intrigue he had been shot, presumably by some jealous rival. The story seems to me to hang together fairly well, though there is no means of verifying the statements. It is worth noting that the sitters had some little difficulty as to where Baku might be, and were corrected at once by the visitor.

The next comer was an exceedingly flighty youth who gave the name of Lionel Vereker, but admitted that the surname had not been disclosed. He was a practical joker, and his answers to questions are so full of levity, sometimes witty and sometimes foolish, that it is difficult to know when one is to take him seriously. When his jokes were not appreciated he seems to have got sulky. When pressed as to his surname he said, “I think, in the excitement of dying, I forgot it.” In his more sober moments he said that he had been educated at Dulwich and that he left school in the year 1920. When asked what house he was at there, he replied, “Alleyne’s.” I find on inquiring, that “Alleyne” was actually the founder of Dulwich College, so that this reply was evidential if we accept the assurance of the sitters that they had no knowledge of the matter, which I may say I unreservedly do. Judging by his high spirits he seemed perfectly happy. He gave the impression of being an irresponsible fribble with no great harm in him and no great good. I can well believe that there are impersonations at séances if Lionel was around. I inquired at Dulwich, but the name could not be traced.

The next visitor, December 29th, 1928, was a very interesting personage. This was Harriette Wilson, the famous courtesan of the beginning of last century, who numbered among her lovers both the Duke of Wellington and the Duke of Argyll. She wrote a volume of Memoirs which show that in spite of her profession she was in many ways a woman of fine character. The circle seems to have known that such a person existed and also that she wrote Memoirs, so to that extent the evidence is weakened. She gives, however, some details which have been found on examination to be approximately correct and which could hardly have been known by them. She says, for example, that she died a hundred years ago. She actually left London in 1826, lived in Paris for a short time and then seems to have disappeared. I have often wondered whether she had been poisoned. She had promised to write a second book of "Memoirs," mentioning the names of quite a string of people whom she would inculpate. The spirit says she was thirty-nine when she died. She was, I think thirty-six when she left London. The monologue with her concludes thus:

Q. "Are you happy?" — A. "No."

Q. "Have you others to whom you can talk?" — A. "Yes" (glass moves violently).

Q. "Don't you like them?" — A. "No" (furiously).

Q. "Why?" — A. "I don't find them to my taste."

Q. "Do you know us?" — A. "No, who are you? Interesting?"

Q. "Have you talked to others on this earth?" — A. "Yes. Many."

Q. "Can you materialise?" — A. "No, I wish I could."

Q. "Have you got any particular message?" — A. "No."

So appeared Harriette after a hundred years. She does not seem to have found the peace which some of her kindly actions upon earth deserved.

The message seems to be evidential unless I could suppose that members of the circle in Uruguay had hunted up details which I have had some difficulty in getting in London.

The next visitor was one Catherine Wimpole, who claimed that she had died at the age of twelve, one hundred and sixteen years before — or in 1812. She had lived in Clarges Street. It is remarkable that in nearly every case the communicator, readily and without hesitation gave the names of streets which did exist at that time, and never made any mistake as to the monarch who reigned then. There was nothing of a really evidential character from Catherine Wimpole, and a Spiritualist must feel surprise that one who died as an innocent girl of twelve so long ago had not progressed beyond the somewhat mediocre crowd who assembled round this circle.

The next was a James Kirk, who claimed to have been a gentleman who died of an unknown pest in the year 1749 in London. It would be interesting to know if the City had any such visitation in that year. When asked who was King he at once replied, "George the Second." He said that he lived in a grey twilight and was not happy, having none of the luxury to which he was used. It was his first return to earth and it gave him pleasure. He said that he had been in several spheres, and he asked what London was like now. He said that he had been a theatregoer, that his favourite actress was Mrs. Oldfield and that he had liked her best in "The Country Wife." He died in Duke Street, which is or was out of the Strand. He went often to Court. He named Louis Quatorze as King of France, which of course would not be correct at the time of Kirk's death, but that great monarch would have filled the years of his youth and have left the strongest impression upon his mind, so that the error should not be judged too harshly. He was then asked for a statement as to his own life and he wrote as follows:

"I had a full life. More than my share of entertainment; balls, theatres, and such diversions. I became enamoured many times to no purpose. I was too much like the famous Captain Macheath. (We exclaim at this.) So you also know? I was a friend of the Lady Mary Montague. Perhaps you have not heard her name? (No.) She was a beautiful woman, brilliant in her own circle. I saw the execution of the notorious Jack Sheppard on Tyburn Hill. Did you ever hear of Mrs. Cornelys? (No.) She was the owner of a kind of public ball-room or rooms. She and her daughter became involved in difficulties and eventually disappeared from London, which caused endless idle speculation and gossip. I fought two duels; was, I feared, wounded fatally in the second; but as you perceive, I did not fare too bad. I frequently travelled to Harrogate, Tonbridge and Bath; generally I confess, in quest of the newest aspirant to my name. I enjoyed existence; there was much to occupy one's mind. I was fond, inordinately fond, of dress. Most of every pleasure I doted upon the theatre. I went without fail to the new plays presented."

Now this reads extraordinarily true. The "Beggar's Opera" was all the vogue at the time and Captain Macheath would be a most natural allusion. Mary Montague was, of course, as stated and comes within the dates. Jack Sheppard was executed at Tyburn in 1724. Finally, Madame Cornelys is excellent. How many are there who have heard of her? By a chance note in an old book I found that she was the proprietor at that time of a very popular dancing-place at the corner of Soho Square, and that she went bankrupt. I think that this sequence of correct references is beyond all guess or coincidence and that we may take James Kirk at his face value.

He was fifty-three when he died, so that he was born in 1698. When asked if he would come again he replied that he would be "full glad." His health, he said, was excellent. “The Cocoa Tree” was his favourite resort upon earth, and Mr. Oliver Penberthy of St. James’ his best friend. He was at his best among the fair sex.

The next actor upon this curious stage was one David Overman who claimed to be an Uppingham boy, but whose name is not upon the School lists. There is a mystery in names and possibly some prohibition upon their use in a way which would hurt surviving relations. The evidence of the last comer shows that even when the name of the communicator may be wrong his allusions are quite correct. David Overman was an irresponsible person, very much like Lionel Vereker, for whom he professed great contempt. “A perfect fool” was his description. Overman left school, according to his account, in 1917, did not go to the war, and died at the age of twenty-seven, He seems to have been in a cheerful, frivolous sphere. The dialogue runs:

Q. “Where is Lionel?” — A. “Off on the gay, I expect.”

Q. “Any ladies there?” — A. “Plenty. Too many.”

Q. “Are you restricted?” — A. “Not unreasonably. We can even dance.”

Q. “What clothes?” — A. “Any. I wear a very handsome suit of plus-fours.”

Q. “Did you die in them?” — A. “Yes.”

Q. “Of what?” — A. “Motor accident. Nasty man. Quick car.”

Q. “Instantly killed?” — A. “Yes.”

Q. “Where?” — A. “On the Portsmouth Road between Esher and Kingston.”

It would be interesting to know whether in 1927 or 1928 a youth of twenty-seven answering to this description was killed in the manner indicated. His only other information was that he was attached to “a very natty young woman,” Betty Matthews, on his side of life. Also that he did not go to the University. There is nothing evidential in all this, but the details are plausible and possibly some of them may be corroborated.

The next visitant was Edward Keith of Lincoln, who died in 1870 of small-pox, being sixty-four years of age. He said that he found difficulty in communicating and he soon stopped. There was no means of checking this witness.

We now come to a very gay young lady with the curious name of Norah Sallast. Norah died at the age of nineteen, seventy-eight years ago, which takes her back to the middle of last century.

Q. “Are you happy?” — A. “No.”

Q. “Why?” — A. “Life is so monotonous. I hate it” (violently).

Q. “Is it dark?” — A. “No, light.”

Q. “Have you anyone to talk to?” — A. “Yes. I hate it all. You can do little to help me. I was wrong in my life.”

Q. “And you suffer for it?” — A. “Quite enough.”

Q. “Any prospect of happiness?” — A. “I doubt it.”

Q. “In what way were you wrong?” — A. “Bad (violently). Rotten all through. I could not be thought immoral, as I knew not the meaning of the word.”

She then proceeded to give a sketch of her life which was certainly rather hectic considering that she died at nineteen. She ran away from school with a mysterious man. “He gave me a hell upon earth. I left him and life was a series of meetings and separations — Budapest, Berlin, everywhere — had no money of my own. I was stranded in Sicily and found my way home. I lived in London for five years. I was only thirteen when I ran from school. I spent two days in Bristol and died there.”

This pitiable story hangs together and yet is incapable of proof. Taking it as true it seems a long purgatory for so young a sinner. One could imagine that she, like Harriette Wilson, is held until she has realised that the seeking of excitement is not the object of life. Had the sitters been experienced Spiritualists this would, of course, have been pointed out to her, and a new era have, perhaps, been started.

The next comer was curious, though hard to verify. The name given was Niel Hamilton. He was twelve years old when he was drowned at Cuckfield in Sussex, more than a century ago. He had been pushed into a duck pond, when playing. He said that he was happy, but he gave no reason why he had not progressed further in so long a time.

We now make a big leap backwards and come upon Charles Amor, who died in 1658, at the age of eighty-one. He had lived at Fleet in Hampshire. When asked who was King he answered promptly, “No one. Cromwell.” Which, of course, is correct but might have stumped some of us. He had gone to Germany, his wife had eloped with a German and he had stabbed the man. Possibly this hasty temper may have kept him so long in the purgatorial regions. There was nothing really evidential.

The next comer took us further back still. His name was John Castle, who died in 1613, at the age of ninety-two. He gave James as the name of the King, at which the circle remonstrated, but John Castle proved to be correct.

This seems an important evidential point, for please do not forget that I have the signed word of honour of all concerned that there was no deception. I have always found that a British word of honour is worth more than an oath. He was a learned man, but was asked frivolous questions by the circle, who certainly played down to their visitors and had no idea of the limits of spirit power.

The next was so definite that I had high hopes, but, alas, they came to nothing. The name was Laura Yelverton. She died early in 1928 at Torquay. The Register, however, in that town failed to trace her. She was thirty-one at the time of her death. She claimed that she was born at Chester, went to school in Switzerland, lived for years at Arcachon in the South of France, lost money, returned to England in 1918, was a married woman. In reference to her surroundings she said that, “it is all grey and almost sticky in the atmosphere.” There were many to whom to talk. She, like the last, seems to be in some sort of purgatory. Possibly this account may meet the eye of someone who can corroborate. A note to Crowborough would always find me.

She was immediately succeeded by a man, Mark Lamb, who died in 1725. He, at once, said that George the First was on the throne, which is, of course, correct but might not be answered by everyone. He was seventy-eight when he died and he put his death down to excess in living. He lived in Charles Street, London, and was a man of fashion, going to Court. He disliked the King. “His character I hated vastly.” So I should think — the coarse little boor. Here we have nothing evidential but everything plausible.

He was at once succeeded by Peter Lamb, a carpenter, who died of a poisoned arm at Chatham at the age of fifty in the year 1924. He had nothing to say save that he was unfit to go to the war.

The next spirit seems to have been more intelligent and of a higher grade than any of the others. He gave some prophecies which seem to have been fairly accurate. Then comes the following:

Q. “Is it pleasant where you are?” — A. “Very. I am happy. I have interesting companionship.”

Q. “Do you hope to rise higher?” — A. “I do earnestly.”

Q. “Is there reincarnation?” — A. “Yes” (violently).

Q. “Have you risen higher since you died?” — A. “Yes, twice.”

This is the kind of vital information which we want. As to reincarnation, it is clear at any rate that it is at only long intervals, since in three centuries he had not himself experienced it.

The next visitor gave the name of John. He was a half Spaniard who interlarded his remarks with Spanish words which were, of course, intelligible to the audience. He had been killed some fifty years ago, that would mean about 1879, on some steps in Madrid. It was in a fight with a rival over a woman. He was very unhappy, “I hate my surroundings.” He was English on his mother’s side. Nothing could be done to help him. His case seemed to be a bad one. There was nothing evidential.

There followed a very sprightly young lady named Willette, who claimed to be the girl of that “will of the wisp” Lionel Vereker. She did not like proper people. “Life is quite good here.” She had died in 1928 in England. “What a hole!” she added. She came from Dresden, had red hair and was fond of laughing. She had talked to other people at séances, mentioning two names, Kenneth Gardner and Ruth Cameron. She was bored with Lionel — a cheerful irresponsible person — non-evidential.

The next called himself Peter Morrison, almost certainly using a false name if he exists at all. He had died in 1924 in Birmingham, aged forty-one. He had been in the war as a Lieut.-Commander in the R.N.V.R. He was on the *Warspite*. Educated at Bradfield, born in Nottingham.

This was very disappointing, as inquiry both at Bradfield and at the Admiralty failed to find any Peter Morrison. Always we seemed to break down upon the individual name even when other names were convincingly correct.

It is noticeable how often they use Christian names only, as if they did not desire identification. Thus the next called himself “Robin.” He had been over two hundred years “a gentleman of much leisure and pleasure. I lived in London and Worcester.” Asked if he knew James Kirk, who seemed a kindred soul, he answered, “No, is he a well-known man?” Robin soon departed. The next was also very short. Rose Lonsdale was the name. She had died in early Victorian days, aged sixty-four. Her life was uninteresting. She was always tired. She could speak a little German because she had a German music master. Nothing evidential or instructive.

The next gave the name of James Welby and he made the comprehensive remark, “we live as mortals do.” He had died two centuries before at the age of fifty-two. Died from a severe cold. When asked who was king he said that George the First was on the throne. George I died in 1727, so that would be fairly correct. He lived at Salisbury and was a man of leisure. He was born in Hampshire. His parents bought him a large house in London or he added, “on the outskirts of that noble city. It was just outside of Piccadilly.” Afterwards he travelled in France and married an Irish lady, named Cecilia Abby. When asked the name of his London home he replied, “It had simply the name of Dunton House.” This place I have been unable to identify. He continued, “We went to all entertainments, routs and such frivolous amusements. We were blessed with two daughters, one alas, died of small-pox. The other married George Fountain. My wife died and I then lived in Salisbury, contracted a severe chill and died.” The dialogue then ran:

Q. “Are you happy?” — A. “Extremely.”

Q. “Are your wife and daughter with you?” — A. “Yes.”

Q. “And your other daughter?” — A. “I wish I knew.” (This is interesting.)

He was then asked if he knew Robin and he answered he knew Robert Castle who often called himself Robin. They suggested that Robin lived in London and Worcester, and he replied, “No, this one lived in Cheshire.” He then added that he was happy and that his surroundings were more or less like the earth he knew, but more happy and less troubled.

There is nothing evidential here, but it is very reassuring to us mortals who follow on the trail.

We now come on Richard Merriman who died in 1560 and is, therefore, the oldest spirit of all. Asked who was king at that time, he replied instantly, “Queen.” “Which one?” they asked. “What other, but our Elizabeth?” He died at sea at the age of thirty-five. He caught “the feared disease. Was not able to obtain help of any competence. We had no surgeon aboard.” Nothing further of importance was gathered.

Then came Katie, who refused to give a second name. She died in 1764. When asked who was king, she replied, “George the Second while I lived.” This was quite correct, as George the Third came on in 1760.

The accuracy of these historical dates is really a strong point for the proof of the reality of these visitors.

Q. “How old were you?” — A. “Thirty. A great age for a woman of my kind.”

Q. “Were you a woman of easy virtue?”—”If you care to word it thus.”

Q. “Could you tell us the names of some of your lovers.” — A. “Arthur Grenville, Will Roberts, Laurence Annaly. There are none worth my attention.”

The conversation abruptly broke off. The next witness gave me more trouble than any of the others and some disappointment, since I seemed to be continually on the edge of what would be evidential and yet never could attain it. I was greatly helped by the courtesy of the Secretary of Lloyds’ Shipping Register. The name given was John Coke. He said that he was a sailor and had been drowned eighty years ago in a shipwreck off the Virgin Islands. He asked them to pronounce his name as Cook. When asked if he was happy he said, “Not very. I miss the sea. It meant a lot to a man like me.” Asked if any of his old shipmates were with him, he said, “Yes, two, but not my friends.” “It is very black,” he added. “I like light, I like wind and sea and salt and sun and sails. I think you do not have many sails now.” Buenos Aires was a bleak town in his time. He seemed surprised to learn that it was now a great city. He was English by birth. Born at a village, Bolderstone in Norfolk. (The nearest I could get to that, after long inquiry, was Blunderstone.) He was a mate. His ship sailed from Hull to the West Indies. They were carrying back a cargo of sugar and fruit. The name of the captain was “Molleson.” The name of the ship, *The Mary of Kintyre*, about two thousand tons. He was forty and unmarried.

By search we found that there was a vessel, *The Marion Macintyre*, but the name “Molleson” was not connected with it. There was, however, a vessel named *Mary* with “Morrison” as the master’s name, in 1846. Her subsequent movements could not be traced. The tonnage seemed to be excessive for those days. It has been suggested that “Gorleston” which is a seaside village from which a sailor might well originate, is the right name and Bolderstone a mistake. This, however, seems a little far-fetched. On the whole we must admit that my search has not been successful in identifying John Coke.

Only one other case remains to be examined. It was that of Zoe, a lady of light virtue who claims to have met her death two years ago at Tours. She was stabbed or shot by her lover. I made some inquiries from a friend at Tours, but here again I was unable to verify the facts. Zoe, judging by her dialogue, was an amusing and rather impertinent person. Her remarks took the form of rather broad chaff of the people in the circle. Once again we have to admit there is nothing evidential.

One very curious thing about this series of cases is the number of them who died by violence. Zoe was murdered, John was murdered, Nicholas was executed, Overman died in a motor smash, Coke was drowned. The death of Harriette Wilson, is in my opinion, extremely doubtful. Therefore quite a large proportion of the cases came to their end in an untimely way. Whether this determined their presence in the particular stratum which this circle seems to have tapped is more than we can say. Apparently it was not one stratum alone, since about half of the communicants said that they were happy and the other half miserable, half being in light and the other half in gloom. Though, of course, in this world we do find happy and unhappy people living in close proximity. I give the facts as reported and I give my analysis as far as I have been able to make it, and while there is much which is unsatisfactory, there is a great deal which is plausible and which was entirely outside the knowledge of the circle. It is just possible that this publication may bring some fresh evidence on one point or another, and such evidence would be very welcome to me. When compared with other such records there is enough in common to give us good reason to believe that we are, in some sort of dim fashion, gaining an actual glimpse of the conditions of life in a certain section of the purgatorial world.

The Autobiography

Conan Doyle on the French Front, 1918

MEMORIES AND ADVENTURES

First published in 1924, this autobiography of Conan Doyle blends his memories and adventures with accounts of his many different interests and achievements in life and literature. Conan Doyle views his life primarily from the Spiritualist perspective of his later years, which was also influenced by his ‘Western Wanderings’. The memoir also includes a series of sketches of America and Canada, as well as fascinating accounts of life on the Front in the Great War.

Conan Doyle, close to the time of publication

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PREFACE

I HAVE had a life which, for variety and romance, could, I think, hardly be exceeded. I have known what it was to be a poor man and I have known what it was to be fairly affluent. I have sampled every kind of human experience. I have known many of the most remarkable men of my time. I have had a long literary career after a medical training which gave me the M.D. of Edinburgh. I have tried my hand at very many sports, including boxing, cricket, billiards, motoring, football, aeronautics and skiing, having been the first to introduce the latter for long journeys into Switzerland. I have travelled as Doctor to a whaler for seven months in the Arctic and afterwards in the West Coast of Africa. I have seen something of three wars, the Soudanese, the South African and the German. My life has been dotted with adventures of all kinds. Finally I have been constrained to devote my latter years to telling the world the final result of thirty-six years' study of the occult, and in endeavouring to make it realise the overwhelming importance of the question. In this mission I have already travelled more than 50,000 miles and addressed 300,000 people, besides writing seven books upon the subject. Such is the life which I have told in some detail in my *Memories and Adventures.*

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.
Crowborough, *June,* 1924.

CHAPTER I. EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

Extraction—"H. B." — Four Remarkable Brothers — My Mother's Family Tree — An Unrecognised Genius — My First Knockout — Thackeray — The Fenians — Early Reading — My First Story.

I WAS born on May 22, 1859, at Picardy Place, Edinburgh, so named because in old days a colony of French Huguenots had settled there. At the time of their coming it was a village outside the City walls, but now it is at the end of Queen Street, abutting upon Leith Walk. When last I visited it, it seemed to have degenerated, but at that time the flats were of good repute.

My father was the youngest son of John Doyle, who under the *nom de crayon* of "H. B." made a great reputation in London from about 1825 to 1850. He came from Dublin about the year 1815 and may be said to be the father of polite caricature, for in the old days satire took the brutal shape of making the object grotesque in features and figure. Gilray and Rowlandson had no other idea. My grandfather was a gentleman, drawing gentlemen for gentlemen, and the satire lay in the wit of the picture and not in the misdrawing of faces. This was a new idea, but it has been followed by most caricaturists since and so has become familiar. There were no comic papers in those days, and the weekly cartoon of "H. B." was lithographed and distributed. He exerted, I am told, quite an influence upon politics, and was on terms of intimacy with many of the leading men of the day. I can remember him in his old age, a very handsome and dignified man with features of the strong Anglo-Irish, Duke of Wellington stamp. He died in 1868.

My grandfather was left a widower with a numerous family, of which four boys and one girl survived. Each of the boys made a name for himself, for all inherited the artistic powers of their father. The elder, James Doyle, wrote "The Chronicles of England," illustrated with coloured pictures by himself — examples of colour-printing which beat any subsequent work that I have ever seen. He also spent thirteen years in doing "The Official Baronage of England," a wonderful monument of industry and learning. Another brother was Henry Doyle, a great judge of old paintings, and in later years the manager of the National Gallery in Dublin, where he earned his C.B. The third son was Richard Doyle, whose whimsical humour made him famous in “Punch,” the cover of which with its dancing elves is still so familiar an object. Finally came Charles Doyle, my father.

The Doyle family seem to have been fairly well-to-do, thanks to my grandfather’s talents. They lived in London in Cambridge Terrace. A sketch of their family life is given in “Dicky Doyle’s Diary.” They lived up to their income, however, and it became necessary to find places for the boys. When my father was only nineteen a seat was offered him in the Government Office of Works in Edinburgh, whither he went. There he spent his working life, and thus it came about that I, an Irishman by extraction, was born in the Scottish capital.

The Doyles, Anglo-Norman in origin, were strong Roman Catholics. The original Doyle, or D’Oil, was a cadet-branch of the Staffordshire Doyles, which has produced Sir Francis Hastings Doyle and many other distinguished men. This cadet shared in the invasion of Ireland and was granted estates in County Wexford, where a great clan rose of dependants, illegitimate children and others, all taking the feudal lord’s name, just as the de Burghs founded the clan of Burke. We can only claim to be the main stem by virtue of community of character and appearance with the English Doyles and the unbroken use of the same crest and coat-of-arms.

My forbears, like most old Irish families in the south, kept to the old faith at the Reformation and fell victims to the penal laws in consequence. These became so crushing upon landed gentry that my great-grandfather was driven from his estate and became a silk-mercer in Dublin, where “H. B.” was born. This family record was curiously confirmed by Monsignor Barry Doyle, destined, I think, for the highest honours of the Roman Church, who traces back to the younger brother of my great-grandfather.

I trust the reader will indulge me in my excursion into these family matters, which are of vital interest to the family, but must be tedious to the outsider. As I am on the subject, I wish to say a word upon my mother’s family, the more so as she was great on archaeology, and had, with the help of Sir Arthur Vicars, Ulster King of Arms, and himself a relative, worked out her descent for more than five hundred years, and so composed a family tree which lies before me as I write and on which many of the great ones of the earth have roosted.

Her father was a young doctor of Trinity College, William Foley, who died young and left his family in comparative poverty. He had married one

Katherine Pack, whose death-bed — or rather the white waxen thing which lay upon that bed — is the very earliest recollection of my life. Her near relative — uncle, I think — was Sir Denis Pack, who led the Scottish brigade at Waterloo. The Packs were a fighting family, as was but right since they were descended in a straight line from a major in Cromwell's army who settled in Ireland. One of them, Anthony Pack, had part of his head carried off at the same battle, so I fear it is part of our family tradition that we lose our heads in action. His brain was covered over by a silver plate and he lived for many years, subject only to very bad fits of temper, which some of us have had with less excuse.

But the real romance of the family lies in the fact that about the middle of the seventeenth century the Reverend Richard Pack, who was head of Kilkenny College, married Mary Percy, who was heir to the Irish branch of the Percys of Northumberland. By this alliance we all connect up (and I have every generation by name, as marked out by my dear mother) with that illustrious line up to three separate marriages with the Plantagenets. One has, therefore, some strange strains in one's blood which are noble in origin and, one can but hope, are noble in tendency.

But all this romance of ancestry did not interfere with the fact that when Katherine Pack, the Irish gentlewoman, came in her widowhood to Edinburgh, she was very poor. I have never been clear why it was Edinburgh for which she made. Having taken a flat she let it be known that a paying-guest would be welcome. Just at this time, 1850 or thereabouts, Charles Doyle was sent from London with a recommendation to the priests that they should guard his young morals and budding faith. How could they do this better than by finding him quarters with a wellborn and orthodox widow? Thus it came about that two separate lines of Irish wanderers came together under one roof.

I have a little bundle of my father's letters written in those days, full of appreciation of the kindness which he met with and full, also, of interesting observations on that Scottish society, rough, hard-drinking and kindly, into which he had been precipitated at a dangerously early age, especially for one with his artistic temperament. He had some fine religious instincts, but his environment was a difficult one. In the household was a bright-eyed, very intelligent younger daughter, Mary, who presently went off to France and returned as a very cultivated young woman. The romance is easily understood, and so Charles Doyle in the year 1855 married Mary Foley, my mother, the young couple still residing with my grandmother.

Their means were limited, for his salary as a Civil Servant was not more than about £240. This he supplemented by his drawings. Thus matters remained for practically all his life, for he was quite unambitious and no great promotion ever came his way. His painting was done spasmodically and the family did not always reap the benefit, for Edinburgh is full of water-colours which he had given away. It is one of my unfulfilled schemes to collect as many as possible and to have a Charles Doyle exhibition in London, for the critics would be surprised to find what a great and original artist he was — far the greatest, in my opinion, of the family. His brush was concerned not only with fairies and delicate themes of the kind, but with wild and fearsome subjects, so that his work had a very peculiar style of its own, mitigated by great natural humour. He was more terrible than Blake and less morbid than Wiertz. His originality is best shown by the fact that one hardly knows with whom to compare him. In prosaic Scotland, however, he excited wonder rather than admiration, and he was only known in the larger world of London by pen and ink book-illustrations which were not his best mode of expression. The prosaic outcome was that including all his earnings my mother could never have averaged more than £300 a year on which to educate a large family. We lived in the hardy and bracing atmosphere of poverty and we each in turn did our best to help those who were younger than ourselves. My noble sister Annette, who died just as the sunshine of better days came into our lives, went out at a very early age as a governess to Portugal and sent all her salary home. My younger sisters, Lottie and Connie, both did the same thing; and I helped as I could. But it was still my dear mother who bore the long, sordid strain. Often I said to her, “When you are old, Mammie, you shall have a velvet dress and gold glasses and sit in comfort by the fire.” Thank God, it so came to pass. My father, I fear, was of little help to her, for his thoughts were always in the clouds and he had no appreciation of the realities of life. The world, not the family, gets the fruits of genius.

Of my boyhood I need say little, save that it was Spartan at home and more Spartan at the Edinburgh school where a tawse-brandishing schoolmaster of the old type made our young lives miserable. From the age of seven to nine I suffered under this pock-marked, one-eyed rascal who might have stepped from the pages of Dickens. In the evenings, home and books were my sole consolation, save for week-end holidays. My comrades were rough boys and I became a rough boy, too. If there is any truth in the idea of reincarnation — a point on which my mind is still open — I think some earlier experience of mine must have been as a stark fighter, for it came out strongly in youth, when I rejoiced in battle. We lived for some time in a *cul de sac* street with a very vivid life of its own and a fierce feud between the small boys who dwelt on either side of it. Finally it was fought out between two champions, I representing the poorer boys who lived in flats and my opponent the richer boys who lived in the opposite villas. We fought in the garden of one of the said villas and had an excellent contest of many rounds, not being strong enough to weaken each other. When I got home after the battle, my mother cried, “Oh, Arthur, what a dreadful eye you have got! “To which I replied, “You just go across and look at Eddie Tulloch’s eye!”

I met a well-deserved setback on one occasion when I stood forward to fight a bootmaker’s boy, who had come into our preserve upon an errand. He had a green baize bag in his hand which contained a heavy boot, and this he swung against my skull with a force which knocked me pretty well senseless. It was a useful lesson. I will say for myself, however, that though I was pugnacious I was never so to those weaker than myself and that some of my escapades were in the defence of such. As I will show in my chapter on Sport, I carried on my tastes into a later period of my life.

One or two little pictures stand out which may be worth recording. When my grandfather’s grand London friends passed through Edinburgh they used, to our occasional embarrassment, to call at the little flat “to see how Charles is getting on.” In my earliest childhood such a one came, tall, white-haired and affable. I was so young that it seems like a faint dream, and yet it pleases me to think that I have sat on Thackeray’s knee. He greatly admired my dear little mother with her grey Irish eyes and her vivacious Celtic ways — indeed, no one met her without being captivated by her.

Once, too, I got a glimpse of history. It was in 1866, if my dates are right, that some well-to-do Irish relatives asked us over for a few weeks, and we passed that time in a great house in King’s County. I spent much of it with the horses and dogs, and became friendly with the young groom. The stables opened on to a country road by an arched gate with a loft over it. One morning, being in the yard, I saw the young groom rush into the yard with every sign of fear and hastily shut and bar the doors. He then climbed into the loft, beckoning to me to come with him. From the loft window we saw a gang of rough men, twenty or so, slouching along the road. When they came opposite to the gate they stopped and looking up shook their fists and cursed at us. The groom answered back most volubly. Afterwards I understood that these men were a party of Fenians, and that I had had a glimpse of one of the periodical troubles which poor old Ireland has endured. Perhaps now, at last, they may be drawing to an end.

During these first ten years I was a rapid reader, so rapid that some small library with which we dealt gave my mother notice that books would not be changed more than twice a day. My tastes were boylike enough, for Mayne Reid was my favourite author, and his “Scalp Hunters “my favourite book. I wrote a little book and illustrated it myself in early days. There was a man in it and there was a tiger who amalgamated shortly after they met. I remarked to my mother with precocious wisdom that it was easy to get people into scrapes, but not so easy to get them out again, which is surely the experience of every writer of adventures.

CHAPTER II. UNDER THE JESUITS

The Preparatory School — The Mistakes of Education — Spartan Schooling — Corporal Punishment — Well-known School Fellows — Gloomy Forecasts — Poetry — London Matriculation — German School — A Happy Year — The Jesuits — Strange Arrival in Paris.

I WAS in my tenth year when I was sent to Hoddep, which is the preparatory school for Stonyhurst, the big Roman Catholic public school in Lancashire.

It was a long journey for a little boy who had never been away from home before, and I felt very lonesome and wept bitterly upon the way, but in due time I arrived safely at Preston, which was then the nearest station, and with many other small boys and our black-robed Jesuit guardians we drove some twelve miles to the school. Hodder is about a mile from Stonyhurst, and as all the boys there are youngsters under twelve, it forms a very useful institution, breaking a lad into school ways before he mixes with the big fellows.

I had two years at Hodder. The year was not broken up by the frequent holidays which illuminate the present educational period. Save for six weeks each summer, one never left the school. On the whole, those first two years were happy years. I could hold my own both in brain and in strength with my comrades. I was fortunate enough to get under the care of a kindly principal, one Father Cassidy, who was more human than Jesuits usually are. I have always kept a warm remembrance of this man and of his gentle ways to the little boys — young rascals many of us — who were committed to his care. I remember the Franco-German War breaking out at this period, and how it made a ripple even in our secluded backwater.

From Hodder I passed on to Stonyhurst, that grand mediaeval dwelling-house which was left some hundred and fifty years ago to the Jesuits, who brought over their whole teaching staff from some college in Holland in order to carry it on as a public school. The general curriculum, like the building, was mediaeval but sound. I understand it has been modernized since. There were seven classes — elements, figures, rudiments, grammar, syntax, poetry and rhetoric — and you were allotted a year for each, or seven in all — a course with which I faithfully complied, two having already been completed at Hodder. It was the usual public school routine of Euclid, algebra and the classics, taught in the usual way, which is calculated to leave a lasting abhorrence of these subjects. To give boys a little slab of Virgil or Homer with no general idea as to what it is all about or what the classical age was like, is surely an absurd way of treating the subject. I am sure that an intelligent boy could learn more by reading a good translation of Homer for a week than by a year's study of the original as it is usually carried out. It was no worse at Stonyhurst than at any other school, and it can only be excused on the plea that any exercise, however stupid in itself, forms a sort of mental dumbbell by which one can improve one's mind. It is, I think, a thoroughly false theory. I can say with truth that my Latin and Greek, which cost me so many weary hours, have been little use to me in life, and that my mathematics have been no use at all. On the other hand, some things which I picked up almost by accident, the art of reading aloud, learned when my mother was knitting, or the reading of French books, learned by spelling out the captions of the Jules Verne illustrations, have been of the greatest possible service. My classical education left me with a horror of the classics, and I was astonished to find how fascinating they were when I read them in a reasonable manner in later years.

Year by year, then, I see myself climbing those seven weary steps and passing through as many stages of my boyhood. I do not know if the Jesuit system of education is good or not; I would need to have tried another system as well before I could answer that. On the whole it was justified by results, for I think it turned out as decent a set of young fellows as any other school would do. In spite of a large infusion of foreigners and some disaffected Irish, we were a patriotic crowd, and our little pulse beat time with the heart of the nation. I am told that the average of V.C.'s and D.S.O.'s now held by old Stonyhurst boys is very high as compared with other schools. The Jesuit teachers have no trust in human nature, and perhaps they are justified. We were never allowed for an instant to be alone with each other, and I think that the immorality which is rife in public schools was at a minimum in consequence. In our games and our walks the priests always took part, and a master perambulated the dormitories at night. Such a system may weaken self-respect and self-help, but it at least minimizes temptation and scandal.

The life was Spartan, and yet we had all that was needed. Dry bread and hot well-watered milk was our frugal breakfast. There was a “joint “and twice a week a pudding for dinner. Then there was an odd snack called “bread and beer “in the afternoon, a bit of dry bread and the most extraordinary drink, which was brown but had no other characteristic of beer. Finally, there was hot milk again, bread, butter, and often potatoes for supper. We were all very healthy on this *régime,* with fish, on Fridays. Everything in every way was plain to the verge of austerity, save that we dwelt in a beautiful building, dined in a marble-floored hall with minstrels’ gallery, prayed in a lovely church, and generally lived in very choice surroundings so far as vision and not comfort was concerned.

Corporal punishment was severe, and I can speak with feeling as I think few, if any, boys of my time endured more of it. It was of a peculiar nature, imported also, I fancy, from Holland. The instrument was a piece of india-rubber of the size and shape of a thick boot sole. This was called a “Tolley “ — why, no one has explained, unless it is a Latin pun on what we had to bear. One blow of this instrument, delivered with intent, would cause the palm of the hand to swell up and change colour. When I say that the usual punishment of the larger boys was nine on each hand, and that nine on one hand was the absolute minimum, it will be understood that it was a severe ordeal, and that the sufferer could not, as a rule, turn the handle of the door to get out of the room in which he had suffered. To take twice nine upon a cold day was about the extremity of human endurance. I think, however, that it was good for us in the end, for it was a point of honour with many of us not to show that we were hurt, and that is one of the best trainings for a hard life. If I was more beaten than others it was not that I was in any way vicious, but it was that I had a nature which responded eagerly to affectionate kindness (which I never received), but which rebelled against threats and took a perverted pride in showing that it would not be cowed by violence. I went out of my way to do really mischievous and outrageous things simply to show that my spirit was unbroken. An appeal to my better nature and not to my fears would have found an answer at once. I deserved all I got for what I did, but I did it because I was mishandled.

I do not remember any one who attained particular distinction among my school-fellows, save Bernard Partridge of “Punch,” whom I recollect as a very quiet, gentle boy. Father Thurston, who was destined to be one of my opponents in psychic matters so many years later, was in the class above me. There was a young novice, too, with whom I hardly came in contact, but whose handsome and spiritual appearance I well remember. He was Bernard Vaughan, afterwards the famous preacher. Save for one schoolfellow, James Ryan — a remarkable boy who grew into a remarkable man — I carried away no lasting friendship from Stonyhurst.

It was only in the latest stage of my Stonyhurst development that I realised that I had some literary streak in me which was not common to all. It came to me as quite a surprise, and even more perhaps to my masters, who had taken a rather hopeless view of my future prospects. One master, when I told him that I thought of being a civil engineer, remarked, “Well, Doyle, you may be an engineer, but I don’t think you will ever be a civil one.” Another assured me that I would never do any good in the world, and perhaps from his point of view his prophecy has been justified. The particular incident, however, which brought my latent powers to the surface depended upon the fact that in the second highest class, which I reached in 1874, it was incumbent to write poetry (so called) on any theme given. This was done as a dreary unnatural task by most boys. Very comical their wooings of the muses used to be. For one saturated as I really was with affection for verse, it was a labour of love, and I produced verses which were poor enough in themselves but seemed miracles to those who had no urge in that direction. The particular theme was the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites and my effort from —

“Like pallid daisies in a grassy wood, So round the sward the tents of Israel stood” ; through —

“There was no time for thought and none for fear, For Egypt’s horse already pressed their rear”; down to the climax —

“One horrid cry! The tragedy was o’er, And Pharaoh with his army seen no more,” — was workmanlike though wooden and conventional. Anyhow, it marked what Mr. Stead used to call a signpost, and I realised myself a little. In the last year I edited the College magazine and wrote a good deal of indifferent verse. I also went up for the Matriculation examination of London University, a good all-round test which winds up the Stonyhurst curriculum, and I surprised every one by taking honours, so after all I emerged from Stonyhurst at the age of sixteen with more credit than seemed probable from my rather questionable record.

Early in my career there, an offer had been made to my mother that my school fees would be remitted if I were dedicated to the Church. She refused this, so both the Church and I had an escape. When I think, however, of her small income and great struggle to keep up appearances and make both ends meet, it was a fine example of her independence of character, for it meant paying out some £50 a year which might have been avoided by a word of assent.

I had yet another year with the Jesuits, for it was determined that I was still too young to begin any professional studies, and that I should go to Germany and learn German. I was despatched, therefore, to Feldkirch, which is a Jesuit school in the Vorarlberg province of Austria, to which many better-class German boys are sent. Here the conditions were much more humane and I met with far more human kindness than at Stonyhurst, with the immediate result that I ceased to be a resentful young rebel and became a pillar of law and order.

I began badly, however, for on the first night of my arrival I was kept awake by a boy snoring loudly in the dormitory. I stood it as long as I could, but at last I was driven to action. Curious wooden compasses called *“bett-scheere,* or “bed-scissors,” were stuck into each side of the narrow beds. One of these I plucked out, walked down the dormitory, and, having spotted the offender, proceeded to poke him with my stick. He awoke and was considerably amazed to see in the dim light a large youth whom he had never seen before — I arrived after hours — assaulting him with a club. I was still engaged in stirring him up when I felt a touch on my shoulder and was confronted by the master, who ordered me back to bed. Next morning I got a lecture on free-and-easy English ways, and taking the law into my own hands. But this start was really my worst lapse and I did well in the future.

It was a happy year on the whole. I made less progress with German than I should, for there were about twenty English and Irish boys who naturally baulked the wishes of their parents by herding together. There was no cricket, but there was tobogganning and fair football, and a weird game — football on stilts. Then there were the lovely mountains round us, with an occasional walk among them. The food was better than at Stonyhurst and we had the pleasant German light beer instead of the horrible swipes of Stonyhurst. One unlooked-for accomplishment I acquired, for the boy who played the big brass bass instrument in the fine school band had not returned, and, as a well-grown lad was needed, I was at once enlisted in the service. I played in public — good music, too, “Lohengrin,” and

“Tannhaüser,” — within a week or two of my first lesson, but they pressed me on for the occasion and the Bombardon, as it was called, only comes in on a measured rhythm with an occasional run, which sounds like a hippopotamus doing a step-dance. So big was the instrument that I remember the other bandsmen putting my sheets and blankets inside it and my surprise when I could not get out a note. It was in the summer of 1876 that I left Feldkirch, and I have always had a pleasant memory of the Austrian Jesuits and of the old school.

Indeed I have a kindly feeling towards all Jesuits, far as I have strayed from their paths. I see now both their limitations and their virtues. They have been slandered in some things, for during eight years of constant contact I cannot remember that they were less truthful than their fellows, or more casuistical than their neighbours. They were keen, clean-minded earnest men, so far as I knew them, with a few black sheep among them, but not many, for the process of selection was careful and long. In all ways, save in their theology, they were admirable, though this same theology made them hard and inhuman upon the surface, which is indeed the general effect of Catholicism in its more extreme forms. The convert is lost to the family. Their hard, narrow outlook gives the Jesuits driving power, as is noticeable in the Puritans and all hard, narrow creeds. They are devoted and fearless and have again and again, both in Canada, in South America and in China, been the vanguard of civilization to their own grievous hurt. They are the old guard of the Roman Church. But the tragedy is that they, who would gladly give their lives for the old faith, have in effect helped to ruin it, for it is they, according to Father Tyrrell and the modernists, who have been at the back of all those extreme doctrines of papal infallibility and Immaculate Conception, with a general all-round tightening of dogma, which have made it so difficult for the man with scientific desire for truth or with intellectual self-respect to keep within the Church. For some years Sir Charles Mivart, the last of Catholic Scientists, tried to do the impossible, and then he also had to leave go his hold, so that there is not, so far as I know, one single man of outstanding fame in science or in general thought who is a practising Catholic. This is the work of the extremists and is deplored by many of the moderates and fiercely condemned by the modernists. It depends also upon the inner Italian directorate who give the orders. Nothing can exceed the uncompromising bigotry of the Jesuit theology, or their apparent ignorance of how it shocks the modern conscience. I remember that when, as a grown lad, I heard Father Murphy, a great fierce Irish priest, declare that there was sure damnation for every one outside the Church, I looked upon him with horror, and to that moment I trace the first rift which has grown into such a chasm between me and those who were my guides.

On my way back to England I stopped at Paris. Through all my life up to this point there had been an unseen grand-uncle, named Michael Conan, to whom I must now devote a paragraph. He came into the family from the fact that my father’s father (“H. B.”) had married a Miss Conan. Michael Conan, her brother, had been editor of “The Art Journal “and was a man of distinction, an intellectual Irishman of the type which originally founded the Sinn Fein movement. He was as keen on heraldry and genealogy as my mother, and he traced his descent in some circuitous way from the Dukes of Brittany, who were all Conans; indeed Arthur Conan was the ill-fated young Duke whose eyes were put out, according to Shakespeare, by King John. This uncle was my godfather, and hence my name Arthur Conan.

He lived in Paris and had expressed a wish that his grand-nephew and godson, with whom he had corresponded, should call *en passant.* I ran my money affairs so closely, after a rather lively supper at Strasburg, that when I reached Paris I had just twopence in my pocket. As I could not well drive up and ask my uncle to pay the cab I left my trunk at the station and set forth on foot. I reached the river, walked along it, came to the foot of the Champs Elysées, saw the Arc de Triomphe in the distance, and then, knowing that the Avenue Wagram, where my uncle lived, was near there, I tramped it on a hot August day and finally found him. I remember that I was exhausted with the heat and the walking, and that when at the last gasp I saw a man buy a drink of what seemed to be porter by handing a penny to a man who had a long tin on his back, I therefore halted the man and spent one of my pennies on a duplicate drink. It proved to be liquorice and water, but it revived me when I badly needed it, and it could not be said that I arrived penniless at my uncle’s, for I actually had a penny.

So, for some penurious weeks, I was in Paris with this dear old volcanic Irishman, who spent the summer day in his shirt-sleeves, with a little dicky-bird of a wife waiting upon him. I am built rather on his lines of body and mind than on any of the Doyles. We made a true friendship, and then I returned to my home conscious that real life was about to begin.

CHAPTER III. RECOLLECTIONS OF A STUDENT

Edinburgh University — A Sad Disappointment — Original of Professor Challenger — Of Sherlock Holmes — Deductions — Sheffield. — Ruyton — Birmingham — Literary Aspirations — First Accepted Story — My Father's Death — Mental Position — Spiritual Yearnings — An Awkward Business.

WHEN I returned to Edinburgh, with little to show, either mental or spiritual, for my pleasant school year in Germany, I found that the family affairs were still as straitened as ever. No promotion had come to my father, and two younger children, Innes, my only brother, and Ida, had arrived to add to the calls upon my mother. Another sister, Julia, followed shortly afterwards. But Annette, the eldest sister, had already gone out to Portugal to earn and send home a fair salary, while Lottie and Connie were about to do the same. My mother had adopted the device of sharing a large house, which may have eased her in some ways, but was disastrous in others.

Perhaps it was good for me that the times were hard, for I was wild, full-blooded, and a trifle reckless, but the situation called for energy and application, so that one was bound to try to meet it. My mother had been so splendid that we could not fail her. It had been determined that I should be a doctor, chiefly, I think, because Edinburgh was so famous a centre for medical learning. It meant another long effort for my mother, but she was very brave and ambitious where her children were concerned, and I was not only to have a medical education, but to take the University degree, which was a larger matter than a mere licence to practise. When I returned from Germany I found that there was a long list of bursaries and scholarships open for competition. I had a month in which to brush up my classics and then I went in for these, and was informed a week later that I had won the Grierson bursary of £40 for two years. Great were the rejoicings and all shadows seemed to be lifting. But on calling to get the money I was informed that there had been a clerical error, and that this particular bursary was only open to arts students. As there was a long list of prizes I naturally supposed that I would get the next highest, which was available for medicals. The official pulled a long face and said: “Unfortunately the candidate to whom it was allotted has already drawn the money.” It was manifest robbery, and yet I, who had won the prize and needed it so badly, never received it, and was eventually put off with a solatium of £7, which had accumulated from some fund. It was a bitter disappointment and, of course, I had a legal case, but what can a penniless student do, and what sort of college career would he have if he began it by suing his University for money? I was advised to accept the situation, and there seemed no prospect of accepting anything else.

So now behold me, a tall strongly-framed but half-formed young man, fairly entered upon my five years’ course of medical study. It can be done with diligence in four years, but there came, as I shall show, a glorious interruption which held me back for one year. I entered as a student in October 1876, and I emerged as a Bachelor of Medicine in August 1881. Between these two points lies one long weary grind at botany, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and a whole list of compulsory subjects, many of which have a very indirect bearing upon the art of curing. The whole system of teaching, as I look back upon it, seems far too oblique and not nearly practical enough for the purpose in view. And yet Edinburgh is, I believe, more practical than most other colleges. It is practical, too, in its preparation for life, since there is none of the atmosphere of an enlarged public school, as is the case in English Universities, but the student lives a free man in his own rooms with no restrictions of any sort. It ruins some and makes strong men of many. In my own case, of course, this did not apply, since my family lived in the town, and I worked from my own home.

There was no attempt at friendship, or even acquaintance, between professors and students at Edinburgh. It was a strictly business arrangement by which you paid, for example, four guineas for Anatomy lectures and received the winter course in exchange, never seeing your professor save behind his desk and never under any circumstances exchanging a word with him. They were remarkable men, however, some of these professors, and we managed to know them pretty well without any personal acquaintance. There was kindly Crum Brown, the chemist, who sheltered himself carefully before exploding some mixture, which usually failed to ignite, so that the loud “Boom! “uttered by the class was the only resulting sound. Brown would emerge from his retreat with a “Really, gentlemen!” of remonstrance, and go on without allusion to the abortive experiment. There was Wyville Thomson, the zoologist, fresh from his *Challenger* expedition, and Balfour, with the face and manner of John Knox, a hard rugged old man, who harried the students in their exams, and was in consequence harried by them for the rest of the year. There was Turner, a fine anatomist, but a self-educated man, as was betrayed when he used to "take and put this structure on the handle of this scalpel." The most human trait that I can recall of Turner was that upon one occasion the sacred quadrangle was invaded by snowballing roughs. His class, of whom I was one, heard the sounds of battle and fidgeted in their seats, on which the Professor said: "I think, gentlemen, your presence may be more useful outside than here," on which we flocked out with a whoop, and soon had the quadrangle clear. Most vividly of all, however, there stands out in my memory the squat figure of Professor Rutherford with his Assyrian beard, his prodigious voice, his enormous chest and his singular manner. He fascinated and awed us. I have endeavoured to reproduce some of his peculiarities in the fictitious character of Professor Challenger. He would sometimes start his lecture before he reached the classroom, so that we would hear a booming voice saying: "There are valves in the veins," or some other information, when the desk was still empty. He was, I fear, a rather ruthless vivisector, and though I have always recognised that a minimum of painless vivisection is necessary, and far more justifiable than the eating of meat as a food, I am glad that the law was made more stringent so as to restrain such men as he. "Ach, these Jarman Frags!" he would exclaim in his curious accent, as he tore some poor amphibian to pieces. I wrote a students' song which is still sung, I understand, in which a curious article is picked up on the Portobello beach and each Professor in turn claims it for his department. Rutherford's verse ran:

Said Rutherford with a smile, *"It's a mass of solid bile, And I myself obtained it, what is more, By a stringent cholagogue From a vivisected dog, And I lost it on the Portobello Shore."* If the song is indeed still sung it may be of interest to the present generation to know that I was the author.

But the most notable of the characters whom I met was one Joseph Bell, surgeon at the Edinburgh Infirmary. Bell was a very remarkable man in body and mind. He was thin, wiry, dark, with a high-nosed acute face, penetrating grey eyes, angular shoulders, and a jerky way of walking. His voice was high and discordant. He was a very skilful surgeon, but his strong point was diagnosis, not only of disease, but of occupation and character.

For some reason which I have never understood he singled me out from the drove of students who frequented his wards and made me his outpatient clerk, which meant that I had to array his outpatients, make simple notes of their cases, and then show them in, one by one, to the large room in which Bell sat in state surrounded by his dressers and students. Then I had ample chance of studying his methods and of noticing that he often learned more of the patient by a few quick glances than I had done by my questions. Occasionally the results were very dramatic, though there were times when he blundered. In one of his best cases he said to a civilian patient: "Well, my man, you've served in the army."

"Aye, sir."

"Not long discharged?"

"No, sir."

"A Highland regiment?"

"Aye, sir."

"A non-com officer?"

"Aye, sir."

"Stationed at Barbados?"

"Aye, sir."

"You see, gentlemen," he would explain, "the man was a respectful man but did not remove his hat. They do not in the army, but he would have learned civilian ways had he been long discharged. He has an air of authority and he is obviously Scottish. As to Barbados, his complaint is elephantiasis, which is West Indian and not British." To his audience of Watsons it all seemed very miraculous until it was explained, and then it became simple enough. It is no wonder that after the study of such a character I used and amplified his methods when in later life I tried to build up a scientific detective who solved cases on his own merits and not through the folly of the criminal. Bell took a keen interest in these detective tales and even made suggestions which were not, I am bound to say, very practical. I kept in touch with him for many years and he used to come upon my platform to support me when I contested Edinburgh in 1901.

When I took over his out-patient work he warned me that a knowledge of Scottish idioms was necessary, and I, with the confidence of youth, declared that I had got it. The sequel was amusing. On one of the first days an old man came who, in response to my question, declared that he had a "bealin' in his oxter.” This fairly beat me, much to Bell’s amusement. It seems that the words really mean an abscess in the armpit.

Speaking generally of my University career I may say that though I took my fences in my stride and balked at none of them, still I won no distinction in the race. I was always one of the ruck, neither lingering nor gaining — a 60 per cent, man at examinations. There were, however, some reasons for this which I will now state.

It was clearly very needful that I should help financially as quickly as possible, even if my help only took the humble form of providing for my own keep. Therefore I endeavoured almost from the first to compress the classes for a year into half a year, and so to have some months in which to earn a little money as a medical assistant, who would dispense and do odd jobs for a doctor. When I first set forth to do this my services were so obviously worth nothing that I had to put that valuation upon them. Even then it might have been a hard bargain for the doctor, for I might have proved like the youth in “Pickwick “who had a rooted idea that oxalic acid was Epsom salts. However, I had horse sense enough to save myself and my employer from any absolute catastrophe. My first venture, in the early summer of ‘78, was with a Dr. Richardson, running a low-class practice in the poorer quarters of Sheffield. I did my best, and I dare say he was patient, but at the end of three weeks we parted by mutual consent. I went on to London, where I renewed my advertisements in the medical papers, and found a refuge for some weeks with my Doyle relatives, then living at Clifton Gardens, Maida Yale. I fear that I was too Bohemian for them and they too conventional for me. However, they were kind to me, and I roamed about London for some time with pockets so empty that there was little chance of idleness breeding its usual mischief. I remember that there were signs of trouble in the East and that the recruiting sergeants, who were very busy in Trafalgar Square, took my measure in a moment and were very insistent that I should take the shilling. There was a time when I was quite disposed to do so, but my mother’s plans held me back. I may say that late in the same year I did volunteer as a dresser for the English ambulances sent to Turkey for the Russian War, and was on the Red Cross list, but the collapse of the Turks prevented my going out.

Soon, however, there came an answer to my advertisement: “Third year’s student, desiring experience rather than remuneration, offers his services, &c., &c.” It was from a Dr. Elliot living in a townlet in Shropshire which rejoiced in the extraordinary name of “Ruyton-of-the-eleven-towns.” It was not big enough to make one town, far less eleven. There for four months I helped in a country practice. It was a very quiet existence and I had a good deal of time to myself under very pleasant circumstances, so that I really trace some little mental progress to that period, for I read and thought without interruption. My medical duties were of a routine nature save on a few occasions. One of them still stands out in my memory, for it was the first time in my life that I ever had to test my own nerve in a great sudden emergency. The doctor was out when there came a half-crazed messenger to say that in some rejoicings at a neighbouring great house they had exploded an old cannon which had promptly burst and grievously injured one of the bystanders. No doctor was available, so I was the last resource. On arriving there I found a man in bed with a lump of iron sticking out of the side of his head. I tried not to show the alarm which I felt, and I did the obvious thing by pulling out the iron. I could see the clean white bone, so I could assure them that the brain had not been injured. I then pulled the gash together, staunched the bleeding, and finally bound it up, so that when the doctor did at last arrive he had little to add. This incident gave me confidence and, what is more important still, gave others confidence. On the whole I had a happy time at Ruyton, and have a pleasing memory of Dr. Elliot and his wife.

After a winter’s work at the University my next assistantship was a real money-making proposition to the extent of some two pounds a month. This was with Dr. Hoare, a well-known Birmingham doctor, who had a five-horse City practice, and every working doctor, before the days of motors, would realise that this meant going from morning to night. He earned some three thousand a year, which takes some doing, when it is collected from 3s. 6*d* visits and Is. 6*d* bottles of medicine, among the very poorest classes of Aston. Hoare was a fine fellow, stout, square, red-faced, bushy-whiskered and dark-eyed. His wife was also a very kindly and gifted woman, and my position in the house was soon rather that of a son than of an assistant. The work, however, was hard and incessant, and the pay very small. I had long lists of prescriptions to make up every day, for we dispensed our own medicine, and one hundred bottles of an evening were not unknown. On the whole I made few mistakes, though I have been known to send out ointment and pill boxes with elaborate directions on the lid and nothing inside. I had my own visiting list, also, the poorest or the most convalescent, and I saw a great deal, for better or worse, of very low life. Twice I returned to this Birmingham practice and always my relations with the family became closer. At my second visit my knowledge had greatly extended and I did midwifery cases, and the more severe cases in general practice as well as all the dispensing. I had no time to spend any money and it was as well, for every shilling was needed at home.

It was in this year that I first learned that shillings might be earned in other ways than by filling phials. Some friend remarked to me that my letters were very vivid and surely I could write some things to sell. I may say that the general aspiration towards literature was tremendously strong upon me, and that my mind was reaching out in what seemed an aimless way in all sorts of directions. I used to be allowed twopence for my lunch, that being the price of a mutton pie, but near the pie shop was a second-hand book shop with a barrel full of old books and the legend “Your choice for 2d.” stuck above it. Often the price of my luncheon used to be spent on some sample out of this barrel, and I have within reach of my arm as I write these lines, copies of Gordon’s Tacitus, Temple’s works, Pope’s Homer, Addison’s Spectator and Swift’s works, which all came out of the twopenny box. Any one observing my actions and tastes would have said that so strong a spring would certainly overflow, but for my own part I never dreamed I could myself produce decent prose, and the remark of my friend, who was by no means given to flattery, took me greatly by surprise. I sat down, however, and wrote a little adventure story which I called “The Mystery of the Sassassa Valley.” To my great joy and surprise it was accepted by “Chambers’ Journal,” and I received three guineas. It mattered not that other attempts failed. I had done it once and I cheered myself by the thought that I could do it again. It was years before I touched “Chambers’ “again, but in 1879 I had a story, “The American’s Tale,” in “London Society,” for which also I got a small cheque. But the idea of real success was still far from my mind.

During all this time our family affairs had taken no turn for the better, and had it not been for my excursions and for the work of my sisters we could hardly have carried on. My father’s health had utterly broken, he had to retire to that Convalescent Home in which the last years of his life were spent, and I, aged twenty, found myself practically the head of a large and struggling family. My father’s life was full of the tragedy of unfulfilled powers and of undeveloped gifts. He had his weaknesses, as all of us have ours, but he had also some very remarkable and outstanding virtues. A tall man, long-bearded, and elegant, he had a charm of manner and a courtesy of bearing which I have seldom seen equalled. His wit was quick and playful. He possessed, also, a remarkable delicacy of mind which would give him moral courage enough to rise and leave any company which talked in a manner which was coarse. When he passed away a few years later I am sure that Charles Doyle had no enemy in the world, and that those who knew him best sympathized most with the hard fate which had thrown him, a man of sensitive genius, into an environment which neither his age nor his nature was fitted to face. He was unworldly and unpractical and his family suffered for it, but even his faults were in some ways the result of his developed spirituality. He lived and died a fervent son of the Roman Catholic faith. My mother, however, who had never been a very devoted daughter of that great institution, became less so as life progressed, and finally found her chief consolation in the Anglican fold.

This brings me to my own spiritual unfolding, if such it may be called, during those years of constant struggle. I have already in my account of the Jesuits shown how, even as a boy, all that was sanest and most generous in my nature rose up against a narrow theology and an uncharitable outlook upon the other great religions of the world. In the Catholic Church to doubt anything is to doubt everything, for since it is a vital axiom that doubt is a mortal sin when once it has, unbidden and unappeasable, come upon you, everything is loosened and you look upon the whole wonderful interdependent scheme with other and more critical eyes. Thus viewed there was much to attract — its traditions, its unbroken and solemn ritual, the beauty and truth of many of its observances, its poetical appeal to the emotions, the sensual charm of music, light and incense, its power as an instrument of law and order. For the guidance of an unthinking and uneducated world it could in many ways hardly be surpassed, as has been shown in Paraguay, and in the former Ireland where, outside agrarian trouble, crime was hardly known. All this I could clearly see, but if I may claim any outstanding characteristic in my life, it is that I have never paltered or compromised with religious matters, that I have always weighed them very seriously, and that there was something in me which made it absolutely impossible, even when my most immediate interests were concerned, to say anything about them save that which I, in the depth of my being, really believed to be true. Judging it thus by all the new knowledge which came to me both from my reading and from my studies, I found that the foundations not only of Roman Catholicism but of the whole Christian faith, as presented to me in nineteenth century theology, were so weak that my mind could not build upon them. It is to be remembered that these were the years when Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill were our chief philosophers, and that even the man in the street felt the strong sweeping current of their thought, while to the young student, eager and impressionable, it was overwhelming. I know now that their negative attitude was even more mistaken, and very much more dangerous, than the positive positions which they attacked with such destructive criticism. A gap had opened between our fathers and ourselves so suddenly and completely that when a Gladstone wrote to uphold the Gadarene swine, or the six days of Creation, the youngest student rightly tittered over his arguments, and it did not need a Huxley to demolish them. I can see now very clearly how deplorable it is that manifest absurdities should be allowed to continue without even a footnote to soften them in the sacred text, because it has the effect that what is indeed sacred becomes overlaid, and one can easily be persuaded that what is false in parts can have no solid binding force. There are no worse enemies of true religion than those who clamour against all revision or modification of that strange mass of superbly good and questionable matter which we lump all together into a single volume as if there were the same value to all of it. It is not solid gold, but gold in clay, and if this be understood the earnest seeker will not cast it aside when he comes upon the clay, but will value the gold the more in that he has himself separated it.

It was, then, all Christianity, and not Roman Catholicism alone, which had alienated my mind and driven me to an agnosticism, which never for an instant degenerated into atheism, for I had a very keen perception of the wonderful poise of the universe and the tremendous power of conception and sustenance which it implied. I was reverent in all my doubts and never ceased to think upon the matter, but the more I thought the more confirmed became my non-conformity. In a broad sense I was a Unitarian, save that I regarded the Bible with more criticism than Unitarians usually show. This negative position was so firm that it seemed to me to be a terminus; whereas it proved only a junction on the road of life where I was destined to change from the old well-worn line on to a new one. Every materialist, as I can now clearly see, is a case of arrested development. He has cleared his ruins, but has not begun to build that which would shelter him. As to psychic knowledge, I knew, it only by the account of exposures in the police courts and the usual wild and malicious statements in the public press. Years were to pass before I understood that in that direction might be found the positive proofs which I constantly asserted were the only conditions upon which I could resume any sort of allegiance to the unseen. I must have definite demonstration, for if it were to be a matter of faith then I might as well go back to the faith of my fathers. “Never will I accept anything which cannot be proved to me. The evils of religion have all come from accepting things which cannot be proved.” So I said at the time and I have been true to my resolve.

I would not give the impression that my life was gloomy or morbidly thoughtful because it chanced that I had some extra cares and some worrying thoughts. I had an eager nature which missed nothing in the way of fun which could be gathered, and I had a great capacity for enjoyment. I read much. I played games all I could. I danced, and I sampled the drama whenever I had a sixpence to carry me to the gallery. On one occasion I got into a row which might have been serious. I was waiting on the gallery steps with a great line of people, the shut door still facing us. There were half a dozen soldiers in the crowd and one of these squeezed a girl up against the wall in such a way that she began to scream. As I was near them I asked the man to be more gentle, on which he dug his elbow with all his force into my ribs. He turned on me as he did so, and I hit him with both hands in the face. He bored into me and pushed me up into the angle of the door, but I had a grip of him and he could not hit me, though he tried to kick me in cowardly fashion with his knee. Several of his comrades threatened me, and one hit me on the head with his cane, cracking my hat. At this moment luckily the door opened and the rush of the crowd carried the soldiers on, one sympathetic corporal saying, “Take your breath, sir! Take your breath! “I threw my man through the open door and came home, for it was clearly asking for trouble if I remained. It was a good escape from an awkward business.

And now I come to the first real outstanding adventure in my life, which is worthy of a fresh chapter and of a more elaborate treatment.

CHAPTER IV. WHALING IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN

The Hope — John Gray — Boxing — The Terrible Mate — Our Criminal — First Sight of a Woman — A Hurricane — Dangers of the Fishing — Three Dips in the Arctic — The Idlers' Boat — Whale Taking — Glamour of the Arctic — Effect of Voyage.

IT was in the *Hope,* under the command of the well-known whaler, John Gray, that I paid a seven months' visit to the Arctic Seas in the year 1880. I went in the capacity of surgeon, but as I was only twenty years of age when I started, and as my knowledge of medicine was that of an average third year's student, I have often thought that it was as well that there was no very serious call upon my services.

It came about in this way. One raw afternoon in Edinburgh, whilst I was sitting reading hard for one of those examinations which blight the life of a medical student, there entered to me one Currie, a fellow-student with whom I had some slight acquaintance. The monstrous question which he asked drove all thought of my studies out of my head.

"Would you care," said he, "to start next week for a whaling cruise? You'll be surgeon, two pound ten a month and three shillings a ton oil money."

"How do you know I'll get the berth? "was my natural question.

"Because I have it myself. I find at this last moment that I can't go, and I want to get a man to take my place."

"How about an Arctic kit?"

"You can have mine."

In an instant the thing was settled, and within a few minutes the current of my life had been deflected into a new channel.

In little more than a week I was in Peterhead, and busily engaged, with the help of the steward, in packing away my scanty belongings in the locker beneath my bunk on the good ship *Hope.*

I speedily found that the chief duty of the surgeon was to be the companion of the captain, who is cut off by the etiquette of the trade from anything but very brief and technical talks with his other officers. I should have found it intolerable if the captain had been a bad fellow, but John Gray of the *Hope* was a really splendid man, a grand seaman and a serious-minded Scot, so that he and I formed a comradeship which was never marred during our long *tête-à-tête*. I see him now, his ruddy face, his grizzled hair and beard, his very light blue eyes always looking into far spaces, and his erect muscular figure. Taciturn, sardonic, stern on occasion, but always a good just man at bottom.

There was one curious thing about the manning of the *Hope*. The man who signed on as first mate was a little, decrepit, broken fellow, absolutely incapable of performing the duties. The cook's assistant, on the other hand, was a giant of a man, red-bearded, bronzed, with huge limbs, and a voice of thunder. But the moment that the ship cleared the harbour the little, decrepit mate disappeared into the cook's galley, and acted as scullery-boy for the voyage, while the mighty scullery-boy walked aft and became chief mate. The fact was, that the one had the certificate, but was past sailoring, while the other could neither read nor write, but was as fine a seaman as ever lived; so, by an agreement to which everybody concerned was party, they swapped their berths when they were at sea.

Colin McLean, with his six foot of stature, his erect, stalwart figure, and his fierce, red beard, pouring out from between the flaps of his sealing-cap, was an officer by natural selection, which is a higher title than that of a Board of Trade certificate. His only fault was that he was a very hot-blooded man, and that a little would excite him to a frenzy. I have a vivid recollection of an evening which I spent in dragging him off the steward, who had imprudently made. some criticism upon his way of attacking a whale which had escaped. Both men had had some rum, which had made the one argumentative and the other violent, and as we were all three seated in a space of about seven by four, it took some hard work to prevent bloodshed. Every now and then, just as I thought all danger was past, the steward would begin again with his fatuous, “No offence, Colin, but all I says is that if you had been a bit quicker on the fush—” I don't know how often this sentence was begun, but never once was it ended; for at the word “fush “Colin always seized him by the throat, and! Colin round the waist, and we struggled until we were all panting and exhausted. Then when the steward had recovered a little breath he would start that miserable sentence once more, and the “fush “would be the signal for another encounter. I really believe that if I had not been there the mate would have hurt him, for he was quite the angriest man that I have ever seen.

There were fifty men upon our whaler, of whom half were Scotchmen and half Shetlanders, whom we picked up at Lerwick as we passed. The Shetlanders were the steadier and more tractable, quiet, decent, and soft-spoken; while the Scotch seamen were more likely to give trouble, but also more virile and of stronger character. The officers and harpooners were all Scotch, but as ordinary seamen, and especially as boatmen, the Shetlanders were as good as could be wished.

There was only one man on board who belonged neither to Scotland nor to Shetland, and he was the mystery of the ship. He was a tall, swarthy, dark-eyed man, with blue-black hair and beard, singularly handsome features, and a curious, reckless sling of his shoulders when he walked. It was rumoured that he came from the south of England, and that he had fled thence to avoid the law. He made friends with no one, and spoke very seldom, but he was one of the smartest seamen in the ship. I could believe from his appearance that his temper was Satanic, and that the crime for which he was hiding may have been a bloody one. Only once he gave us a glimpse of his hidden fires. The cook — a very burly, powerful man — the little mate was only assistant — had a private store of rum, and treated himself so liberally to it that for three successive days the dinner of the crew was ruined. On the third day our silent outlaw approached the cook with a brass saucepan in his hand. He said nothing, but he struck the man such a frightful blow that his head flew through the bottom and the sides of the pan were left dangling round his neck. The half-drunken, half-stunned cook talked of fighting, but he was soon made to feel that the sympathy of the ship was against him, so he reeled back, grumbling, to his duties while the avenger relapsed into his usual moody indifference. We heard no further complaints of the cooking.

I have spoken of the steward, and as I look back at that long voyage, during which for seven months we never set foot on land, the kindly open face of Jack Lamb comes back to me. He had a beautiful and sympathetic tenor voice, and many an hour have I listened to it with its accompaniment of rattling plates and jingling knives, as he cleaned up the dishes in his pantry. He had a great memory for pathetic and sentimental songs, and it is only when you have not seen a woman’s face for six months that you realise what sentiment means. When Jack trilled out “Her bright smile haunts me still," or "Wait for me at Heaven's Gate, sweet Belle Mahone," he filled us all with a vague sweet discontent which comes back to me now as I think of it. To appreciate a woman one has to be out of sight of one for six months. I can well remember that as we rounded the north of Scotland on our return we dipped our flag to the lighthouse, being only some hundreds of yards from the shore. A figure emerged to answer our salute, and the excited whisper ran through the ship, "It's a wumman! "The captain was on the bridge with his telescope. I had the binoculars in the bows. Every one was staring. She was well over fifty, short skirts and sea boots — but she was a "wumman."

"Anything in a mutch! "the sailors used to say, and I was of the same way of thinking.

However, all this has come before its time. It was, I find by my log, on February 28 at 2 p in that we sailed from Peterhead, amid a great crowd and uproar. The decks were as clean as a yacht, and it was very unlike my idea of a whaler. We ran straight into bad weather and the glass went down at one time to 28.375, which is the lowest reading I can remember in all my ocean wanderings. We just got into Lerwick Harbour before the full force of the hurricane broke, which was so great that lying at anchor with bare poles and partly screened we were blown over to an acute angle. If it had taken us a few hours earlier we should certainly have lost our boats — and the boats are the life of a whaler. It was March 11 before the weather moderated enough to let us get on, and by that time there were twenty whalers in the bay, so that our setting forth was quite an occasion. That night and for a day longer the *Hope* had to take refuge in the lee of one of the outlying islands. I got ashore and wandered among peat bogs, meeting strange, barbarous, kindly people who knew nothing of the world. I was led back to the ship by a wild, long-haired girl holding a torch, for the peat holes make it dangerous at night — I can see her now, her tangled black hair, her bare legs, madder-stained petticoat, and wild features under the glare of the torch. I spoke to one old man there who asked me the news. I said, "The Tay bridge is down," which was then a fairly stale item. He said, "Eh, have they built a brig over the Tay? "After that I felt inclined to tell him about the Indian Mutiny.

What surprised me most in the Arctic regions was the rapidity with which you reach them. I had never realised that they lie at our very doors. I think that we were only four days out from Shetland when we were among the drift ice. I awoke one morning to hear the bump, bump of the floating pieces against the side of the ship, and I went on deck to see the whole sea covered with them to the horizon. They were none of them large, but they lay so thick that a man might travel far by springing from one to the other. Their dazzling whiteness made the sea seem bluer by contrast, and with a blue sky above, and that glorious Arctic air in one's nostrils, it was a morning to remember. Once on one of the swaying, rocking pieces we saw a huge seal, sleek, sleepy, and imperturbable, looking up with the utmost assurance at the ship, as if it knew that the close time had still three weeks to run. Further on we saw on the ice the long human-like prints of a bear. All this with the snowdrops of Scotland still fresh in our glasses in the cabin.

I have spoken about the close time, and I may explain that, by an agreement between the Norwegian and British Governments, the subjects of both nations are forbidden to kill a seal before April 3. The reason for this is that the breeding season is in March, and if the mothers should be killed before the young are able to take care of themselves, the race would soon become extinct. For breeding purposes the seals all come together at a variable spot, which is evidently prearranged among them, and as this place can be anywhere within many hundreds of square miles of floating ice, it is no easy matter for the fisher to find it. The means by which he sets about it are simple but ingenious. As the ship makes its way through the loose ice-streams, a school of seals is observed travelling through the water. Their direction is carefully taken by compass and marked upon the chart. An hour afterwards perhaps another school is seen. This is also marked. When these bearings have been taken several times, the various lines upon the chart are prolonged until they intersect. At this point, or near it, it is likely that the main pack of the seals will be found.

When you do come upon it, it is a wonderful sight. I suppose it is the largest assembly of creatures upon the face of the world — and this upon the open icefields hundreds of miles from the Greenland coast. Somewhere between 71 deg and 75 deg is the rendezvous, and the longitude is even vaguer; but the seals have no difficulty in finding the address. From the crow's nest at the top of the main-mast, one can see no end of them. On the furthest visible ice one can still see that sprinkling of pepper grains. And the young lie everywhere also, snow-white slugs, with a little black nose and large dark eyes. Their half-human cries fill the air; and when you are sitting in the cabin of a ship which is in the heart of the seal-pack, you would think you were next door to a monstrous nursery.

The *Hope* was one of the first to find the seal-pack that year, but before the day came when hunting was allowed, we had a succession of strong gales, followed by a severe roll, which tilted the floating ice and launched the young seals prematurely into the water. And so, when the law at last allowed us to begin work, Nature had left us with very little work to do. However, at dawn upon the third, the ship's company took to the ice, and began to gather in its murderous harvest. It is brutal work, though not more brutal than that which goes on to supply every dinner-table in the country. And yet those glaring crimson pools upon the dazzling white of the icefields, under the peaceful silence of a blue Arctic sky, did seem a horrible intrusion. But an inexorable demand creates an inexorable supply, and the seals, by their death, help to give a living to the long line of seamen, dockers, tanners, curers, triers, chandlers, leather merchants, and oil-sellers, who stand between this annual butchery on the one hand, and the exquisite, with his soft leather boots, or the savant, using a delicate oil for his philosophical instruments, upon the other.

I have cause to remember that first day of sealing on account of the adventures which befell me. I have said that a strong swell had arisen, and as this was dashing the floating ice together the captain thought it dangerous for an inexperienced man to venture upon it. And so, just as I was clambering over the bulwarks with the rest, he ordered me back and told me to remain on board. My remonstrances were useless, and at last, in the blackest of tempers, I seated myself upon the top of the bulwarks, with my feet dangling over the outer side, and there I nursed my wrath, swinging up and down with the roll of the ship. It chanced, however, that I was really seated upon a thin sheet of ice which had formed upon the wood, and so when the swell threw her over to a particularly acute angle, I shot off and vanished into the sea between two ice-blocks. As I rose, I clawed on to one of these, and soon scrambled on board again. The accident brought about what I wished, however, for the captain remarked that as I was bound to fall into the ocean in any case, I might just as well be on the ice as on the ship. I justified his original caution by falling in twice again during the day, and I finished it ignominiously by having to take to my bed while all my clothes were drying in the engine-room. I was consoled for my misfortunes by finding that they amused the captain to such an extent that they drove the ill-success of our sealing out of his head, and I had to answer to the name of “the great northern diver “for a long time thereafter. I had a narrow escape once through stepping backwards over the edge of a piece of floating ice while I was engaged in skinning a seal. I had wandered away from the others, and no one saw my misfortune. The face of the ice was so even that I had no purchase by which to pull myself up, and my body was rapidly becoming numb in the freezing water. At last, however, I caught hold of the hind flipper of the dead seal, and there was a kind of nightmare tug-of-war, the question being whether I should pull the seal off or pull myself on. At last, however, I got my knee over the edge and rolled on to it. I remember that my clothes were as hard as a suit of armour by the time I reached the ship, and that I had to thaw my crackling garments before I could change them.

This April sealing is directed against the mothers and young. Then, in May, the sealer goes further north, and about latitude 77 deg or 78 deg he comes upon the old male seals, who are by no means such easy victims. They are wary creatures, and it takes good long-range shooting to bag them. Then, in June, the sealing is over, and the ship bears away further north still, until in the 79th or 80th degree she is in the best Greenland whaling latitudes. There we stayed for three months or so, with very varying fortunes, for though we pursued many whales, only four were slain.

There are eight boats on board a whaler, but it is usual to send out only seven, for it takes six men to man each, so that when seven are out no one is left on board save the so-called “idlers “who have not signed to do seaman’s work at all. It happened, however, that aboard the *Hope* the idlers were rather a hefty crowd, so we volunteered to man the odd boat, and we made it, in our own estimation at least, one of the most efficient, both in sealing and in whaling. The steward, the second engineer, the donkey-engine man, and I were the oars, with a red-headed Highlander for harpooner and the handsome outlaw to steer. Our tally of seals was high, and in whaling we were once the lancing and once the harpooning boat, so our record was good. So congenial was the work to me that Captain Gray was good enough to offer to make me harpooner as well as surgeon, with the double pay, if I would come with him on a second voyage. It is well that I refused, for the life is dangerously fascinating.

It is exciting work pulling on to a whale. Your own back is turned to him, and all you know about him is what you read upon the face of the boat-steerer. He is staring out over your head, watching the creature as it swims slowly through the water, raising his hand now and again as a signal to stop rowing when he sees that the eye is coming round, and then resuming the stealthy approach when the whale is end on. There are so many floating pieces of ice, that as long as the oars are quiet the boat alone will not cause the creature to dive. So you creep slowly up, and at last you are so near that the boat-steerer knows that you can get there before the creature has time to dive — for it takes some little time to get that huge body into motion. You see a sudden gleam in his eyes, and a flush in his cheeks, and it's “Give way, boys! Give way, all! Hard! “Click goes the trigger of the big harpoon gun, and the foam flies from your oars. Six strokes, perhaps, and then with a dull greasy squelch the bows run upon something soft, and you and your oars are sent flying in every direction. But little you care for that, for as you touched the whale you have heard the crash of the gun, and know that the harpoon has been fired point-blank into the huge, lead-coloured curve of its side. The creature sinks like a stone, the bows of the boat splash down into the water again, but there is the little red Jack flying from the centre thwart to show that you are fast, and there is the line whizzing swiftly under the seats and over the bows between your outstretched feet.

And this is the great element of danger — for it is rarely indeed that the whale has spirit enough to turn upon its enemies. The line is very carefully coiled by a special man named the line-coiler, and it is warranted not to kink. If it should happen to do so, however, and if the loop catches the limbs of any one of the boat's crew, that man goes to his death so rapidly that his comrades hardly know that he has gone. It is a waste of fish to cut the line, for the victim is already hundreds of fathoms deep.

“Haud your hand, mon,” cried the harpooner, as a seaman raised his knife on such an occasion. “The fush will be a fine thing for the widdey.” It sounds callous, but there was philosophy at the base of it.

This is the harpooning, and that boat has no more to do. But the lancing, when the weary fish is killed with the cold steel, is a more exciting because it is a more prolonged experience. You may be for half an hour so near to the creature that you can lay your hand upon its slimy side. The whale appears to have but little sensibility to pain, for it never winces when the long lances are passed through its body. But its instinct urges it to get its tail to work on the boats, and yours urges you to keep poling and boat-hooking along its side, so as to retain your safe position near its shoulder. Even there, however, we found on one occasion that we were not quite out of danger's way, for the creature in its flurry raised its huge side-flapper and poised it over the boat. One flap would have sent us to the bottom of the sea, and I can never forget how, as we pushed our way from under, each of us held one hand up to stave off that great, threatening fin — as if any strength of ours could have availed if the whale had meant it to descend. But it was spent with loss of blood, and instead of coming down the fin rolled over the other way, and we knew that it was dead. Who would swap that moment for any other triumph that sport can give?

The peculiar other-world feeling of the Arctic regions - — a feeling so singular that if you have once been there the thought of it haunts you all your life — is due largely to the perpetual daylight. Night seems more orange-tinted and subdued than day, but there is no great difference. Some captains have been known to turn their hours right round out of caprice, with breakfast at night and supper at ten in the morning. There are your twenty-four hours, and you may carve them as you like. After a month or two the eyes grow weary of the eternal light, and you appreciate what a soothing thing our darkness is. I can remember as we came abreast of Iceland, on our return, catching our first glimpse of a star, and being unable to take my eyes from it, it seemed such a dainty little twinkling thing. Half the beauties of Nature are lost through over-familiarity.

Your sense of loneliness also heightens the effect of the Arctic Seas. When we were in whaling latitudes it is probable that, with the exception of our consort, there was no vessel within 800 miles of us. For seven long months no letter and no news came to us from the southern world. We had left in exciting times. The Afghan campaign had been undertaken, and war seemed imminent with Russia. We returned opposite the mouth of the Baltic without any means of knowing whether some cruiser might not treat us as we had treated the whales. When we met a fishing-boat at the north of Shetland our first inquiry was as to peace or war. Great events had happened during those seven months: the defeat of Maiwand and the famous march of Roberts from Cabul to Candahar. But it was all haze to us; and, to this day, I have never been able to get that particular bit of military history straightened out in my own mind.

The perpetual light, the glare of the white ice, the deep blue of the water, these are the things which one remembers most clearly, and the dry, crisp, exhilarating air, which makes mere life the keenest of pleasures. And then there are the innumerable sea-birds, whose call is for ever ringing in your ears — the gulls, the fulmars, the snow-birds, the burgomasters, the looms, and the rotjes. These fill the air, and below, the waters are for ever giving you a peep of some strange new creature. The commercial whale may not often come your way, but his less valuable brethren abound on every side. The finner shows his 90 feet of worthless tallow, with the absolute conviction that no whaler would condescend to lower a boat for him. The misshapen hunchback whale, the ghost-like white whale, the narwhal, with his unicorn horn, the queer-looking bottle-nose, the huge, sluggish, Greenland shark, and the terrible killing grampus, the most formidable of all the monsters of the deep, — these are the creatures who own those unsailed seas. On the ice are the seals, the saddle-backs, the ground seals and the huge bladdernoses, 12 feet from nose to tail, with the power of blowing up a great blood-red football upon their noses when they are angry, which they usually are. Occasionally one sees a white Arctic fox upon the ice, and everywhere are the bears. The floes in the neighbourhood of the sealing-ground are all criss-crossed with their tracks — poor harmless creatures, with the lurch and roll of a deep-sea mariner. It is for the sake of the seals that they come out over those hundreds of miles of ice; and they have a very ingenious method of catching them, for they will choose a big icefield with just one blow-hole for seals in the middle of it. Here the bear will squat, with its powerful forearms crooked round the hole. Then, when the seal’s head pops up, the great paws snap together, and Bruin has got his luncheon. We used occasionally to burn some of the cook’s refuse in the engine-room fires, and the smell would, in a few hours, bring up every bear for many miles to leeward of us.

Though twenty or thirty whales have been taken in a single year in the Greenland seas, it is probable that the great slaughter of last century has diminished their number until there are not more than a few hundreds in existence. I mean, of course, of the right whale, for the others, as I have said, abound. It is difficult to compute the numbers of a species which comes and goes over great tracts of water and among huge icefields, but the fact that the same whale is often pursued by the same whaler upon successive trips shows how limited their number must be. There was one, I remember, which was conspicuous through having a huge wart, the size and shape of a beehive, upon one of the flukes of its tail. “I’ve been after that fellow three times,” said the captain, as we dropped our boats. “He got away in ‘71. In ‘74 we had him fast, but the harpoon drew. In ‘76 a fog saved him. It’s odds that we have him now I “I fancied that the betting lay rather the other way myself, and so it proved, for that warty tail is still thrashing the Arctic seas for all that I know to the contrary.

I shall never forget my own first sight of a right whale. It had been seen by the look-out on the other side of a small icefield, but had sunk as we all rushed on deck. For ten minutes we awaited its reappearance, and I had taken my eyes from the place, when a general gasp of astonishment made me glance up, and there was the whale *in the air.* Its tail was curved just as a trout’s is in jumping, and every bit of its glistening lead-coloured body was clear of the water. It was little wonder that I should be astonished, for the captain, after thirty voyages, had never seen such a sight. On catching it we discovered that it was very thickly covered with a red, crab-like parasite, about the size of a shilling, and we conjectured that it was the irritation of these creatures which had driven it wild. If a man had short, nailless flippers, and a prosperous family of fleas upon his back, he would appreciate the situation.

Apart from sport, there is a glamour about those circum-polar regions which must affect everyone who has penetrated to them. My heart goes out to that old, grey-headed whaling captain who, having been left for an instant when at death’s door, staggered off in his night gear, and was found by nurses far from his house and still, as he mumbled, “pushing to the norrard.” So an Arctic fox, which a friend of mine endeavoured to tame, escaped, and was caught many months afterwards in a gamekeeper’s trap in Caithness. It was also pushing norrard, though who can say by what strange compass it took its bearings? It is a region of purity, of white ice and of blue water, with no human dwelling within a thousand miles to sully the freshness of the breeze which blows across the icefields. And then it is a region of romance also. You stand on the very brink of the unknown, and every duck that you shoot bears pebbles in its gizzard which come from a land which the maps know not. It was a strange and fascinating chapter of my life.

I went on board the whaler a big, straggling youth, I came off it a powerful, well-grown man. I have no doubt that my physical health during my whole life has been affected by that splendid air, and that the inexhaustible store of energy which I have enjoyed is to some extent drawn from the same source. It was mental and spiritual stagnation, or even worse, for there is a coarsening effect in so circumscribed a life with comrades who were fine, brave fellows, but naturally rough and wild. However I had my health to show for it, and also more money than I had ever possessed before. I was still boyish in many ways, and I remember that I concealed gold pieces in every pocket of every garment, that my mother might have the excitement of hunting for them. It added some fifty pounds to her small exchequer.

Now I had a straight run in to my final examination, which I passed with fair but not notable distinction at the end of the winter session of 1881. I was now a Bachelor of Medicine and a Master of Surgery, fairly launched upon my professional career.

CHAPTER V. THE VOYAGE TO WEST AFRICA

The Mayuniba — Fearful Weather — An Escape — Hanno's Voyage — Atlantis — A Land of Death — Blackwater Fever — Strange Fish — Missionaries — Danger of Luxury — A Foolish Swim — The Ship on Fire — England once more.

IT had always been my intention to take a voyage as ship's surgeon when I had taken my degree, as I could in this way see something of the world, and at the same time earn a little of the money which I so badly needed if I were ever to start in practice for myself. When a man is in the very early twenties he will not be taken seriously as a practitioner, and though I looked old for my age, it was clear that I had to fill in my time in some other way. My plans were all exceedingly fluid, and I was ready to join the Army, Navy, Indian Service or anything which offered an opening. I had no reason to think that I would find a billet upon a passenger ship and had nearly forgotten that I had my name down, when I suddenly received a telegram telling me to come to Liverpool and to take medical charge of the African Steam Navigation Company's *Mayumba,* bound for the West Coast. In a week I was there, and on October 22, 1881, we started on our voyage.

The *Mayumba* was a trim little steamer of about 4,000 tons — a giant after my experience in the 200-ton whaler. She was built for commerce, carrying mixed cargoes to the coast and coming back with palm oil in puncheons, palm nuts in bulk, ivory and other tropical products. What with whale oil and palm oil there certainly seemed to be something greasy about my horoscope. There was room for twenty or thirty passengers, and it was for their behoof that I was paid some £12 a month.

It was well that we were seaworthy, for we put out in a violent gale, which became so bad as we emerged from the Mersey that we were forced into Holyhead for the night. Next day, in vile and thick weather, with a strong sea running, we made our way down the Irish Sea. I shall always believe that I may have saved the ship from disaster, for as I was standing near the officer of the watch I suddenly caught sight of a lighthouse standing out in a rift in the fog. It was on the port side and I could not imagine how any lighthouse could be on the port side of a ship which was, as I knew, well down on the Irish coast. I hate to be an alarmist, so I simply touched the mate's sleeve, pointed to the dim outline of the lighthouse, and said: "Is that all right? "He fairly jumped as his eye lit upon it and he gave a yell to the men at the wheel and rang a violent signal to the engine-room. The lighthouse, if I remember right, was the Tuskar, and we were heading right into a rocky promontory which was concealed by the rain and fog.

I have been lucky in my captains, for Captain Gordon Wallace was one of the best, and we have kept in touch during the later years. Our passengers were mostly for Madeira, but there were some pleasant ladies bound for the Coast, and some unpleasant negro traders whose manners and bearing were objectionable, but who were patrons of the line and must, therefore, be tolerated. Some of these palm oil chiefs and traders have incomes of many thousands a year, but as they have no cultivated tastes they can only spend their money on drink, debauchery and senseless extravagance. One of them, I remember, had a choice selection of the demi-monde of Liverpool to see him off.

The storms followed us all the way down the Channel and across the Bay, which is normal, I suppose, at such a time of year. Everyone was seasick, so as doctor T had some work to do. However, before we reached Madeira we ran into fine weather and all our troubles were soon forgotten. One never realises the comfort of a dry deck until one has been ankle-deep for a week. I missed the sea-boots and rough-and-ready dress of the whaler, for when one is in blue serge and gilt buttons one does not care to take a ducking. Just as we thought, however, that we were all right a worse gale than ever broke over us, the wind luckily being behind us, so that it helped us on our way. With jib, trysail and main staysail, which was as much as we could stand, we lurched and staggered, swept every now and then by the big Atlantic combers, which were phosphorescent at night, so that flames of liquid fire came coursing down the decks. Very glad we were when after a week of storm we saw the rugged peaks of Porto Sancto, an outlier of Madeira, and finally came to anchor in Funchal Bay. It was dark when we reached our moorings and it was good to see the lights of the town, and the great dark loom of the hills behind it. A lunar rainbow spanned the whole scene, a rare phenomenon which I have never seen before or since.

Teneriffe was our next stopping-place, Santa Cruz being the port of call. In those days it did a great trade in cochineal, which was derived from an insect cultivated on the cacti. When dried they furnished the dye, and a packet of the creatures averaged £350 at that time, but now I suppose that the German aniline dyes have killed the trade as completely as whaling has been killed by the mineral. A day later we were at Las Palmas, capital of Grand Canary, whence, looking back, we had a fine view of the famous Teneriffe Peak some 60 miles away. Leaving Las Palmas we were in the delightful region of the northeast trade-winds, the most glorious part of the ocean, seldom rough, yet always lively, with foam-capped seas and a clear sky. Day by day it grew hotter, however, and when we lost the Trades, and sighted the Isle de Los off the Sierra Leone coast, I began to realise what the Tropics meant. When you feel your napkin at meals to be an intolerable thing, and when you find that it leaves a wet weal across your white duck trousers, then you know that you really have arrived.

On November 9 we reached Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, our first port of call upon the African Main — a lovely spot but a place of death. Here our ladies left us, and indeed it was sad to see them go, for female lives are even shorter than male upon the coast. I speak of the days of malaria and blackwater fever, before Ronald Ross and others had done their great work of healing and prevention. It was a truly dreadful place in the early eighties, and the despair which reigned in the hearts of the white people made them take liberties with alcohol which they would not have dared to take in a healthier place. A year’s residence seemed to be about the limit of human endurance. I remember meeting one healthy-looking resident who told me that he had been there three years. When I congratulated him he shook his head. “I am a doomed man. I have advanced Bright’s disease,” said he. One wondered whether the colonies were really worth the price we had to pay.

From Sierra Leone we steamed to Monrovia, which is the capital of the negro republic of Liberia, which, as the name implies, was founded mainly by escaped slaves. So far as I could see it was orderly enough, though all small communities which take themselves seriously have a comic aspect. Thus at the time of the Franco-German War, Liberia is said to have sent out its single Customs boat, which represented its official Navy, and stopped the British mail-ship in order to send word to Europe that it did not intend to interfere in the matter.

It is a very monotonous view, for whether it is the Ivory Coast or the Gold Coast, or the Liberian shore, it always presents the same features — burning sunshine, a long swell breaking into a white line of surf, a margin of golden sand, and then the low green bush, with an occasional palm tree rising above it. If you have seen a mile, you have seen a thousand. As I write now, these ports at which we stopped, Grand Bassam, Cape Palmas, Accra, Cape Coast Castle, all form the same picture in my mind. One incident only I can remember. At some small village, the name of which I have forgotten, there came off a tall young Welshman in a state of furious excitement; his niggers had mutinied and he was in fear of his life. “There they are waiting for me! “he cried, and pointed to a dusky group upon the distant beach. We offered to take him on, but he could not leave his property, so all we could do was to promise to send a gunboat up from Cape Coast Castle. I have often wondered how such people got on after the German menace compelled us to draw in all our outlying fleets.

This coast is dotted at night with native fires, some of them of great extent, arising no doubt from their habit of burning the grass. It is interesting that in Hanno’s account of his journey down the coast — the only piece of Carthaginian literature which has reached us — he talks also of the fires which he saw at night. As he speaks of gorillas it is probable that he got as far as the Gaboon, or south of the Line. He saw great volcanic activity, and the remains of it is still visible at Fernando Po, which is almost all volcanic. In Hanno’s time, however, the hills were actually spouting fire and the country was a sea of flame, so that he dare not set foot on shore. I have wondered sometimes whether the last cataclysm at Atlantis may not have been much later than we think. The account of Plato puts it at about 9000 B.C., but it may well have been a gradual thing and the last spasm have been that of which Hanno saw the traces. All this activity which he described is exactly opposite the spot where the old continent was supposed to have been.

Our ships have rough-and-ready ways as they jog down the coast. Once we moved on while a hundred native visitors were still on board. It was funny to see them dive off and make for their canoes. One of them had a tall hat, an umbrella, and a large coloured picture of the Saviour — all of which he had bought at the trading booths which the men rig up in the forecastle. These impedimenta did not prevent him from swimming to his boat. At another minor port, since we were pressed for time, we simply threw our consignment of barrel staves overboard, knowing that soon or late they would wash up on the beach, though how the real owner could make good his claim to them I do not know. Occasionally the native scores in this game. Some years ago, before Dahomey was annexed by the French, the captain took the oil casks on board at Whydah by means of a long rope and a donkey engine, an ingenious way of avoiding the surf, which came to a sudden stop when a company of the famous Amazons appeared and threatened to fire upon the ship if they did not pay their dues to the surf boats in the ordinary fashion.

I had myself to pay my dues to the climate, for on November 18 I find an eloquent gap in my diary. We had reached Lagos, and there, rolling in a greasy swell off that huge lagoon, the germ or the mosquito or whatever it was reached me and I was down with a very sharp fever. I remember staggering to my bunk and then all was blotted out. As I was myself doctor there was no one to look after me and I lay for several days fighting it out with Death in a very small ring and without a second. It speaks well for my constitution that I came out a victor. I remember no psychic experience, no vision, no fears, nothing save a nightmare fog from which I emerged as weak as a child. It must have been a close call, and I had scarcely sat up before I heard that another victim who got it at the same time was dead.

A week later found me, convalescent and full of energy once more, up the Bonny River, which certainly never got its name from the Scotch adjective, for it is in all ways hateful with its brown smelling stream and its mango swamps. The natives were all absolute savages, offering up human sacrifices to sharks and crocodiles. The captain had heard the screams of the victims and seen them dragged down to the water’s edge, while on another occasion he had seen the protruding skull of a man who had been buried in an ant-heap. It is all very well to make game of the missionaries, but how could such people ever be improved if it were not for the labours of devoted men?

We called at Fernando Po, and later at Victoria, a lovely little settlement upon the Main, with the huge peak of the Cameroons rising behind it. A dear homely Scotch lassie was playing the part of missionary there, and if she did not evangelize she at least civilised, which is more important. It lies in a beautiful bay studded with islands and well wooded all round. For some reason the whole style of the scenery changes completely here, and it is the more welcome after the thousand miles of monotony to the north. All this land went, for some reason, to Germany later, and has now reverted to the French, who are not, as a rule, good Colonial neighbours. I went ashore at Victoria, and I cannot forget my thrill when what I thought was a good-sized blue bird passed me and I found that it was a butterfly.

To reach Old Calabar we had to steam for 60 miles up the Old Calabar River, the channel lying so near the shore that we brushed the trees on one side. I lay in wait with my rifle, but though I saw the swirl of several alligators none emerged. Old Calabar seemed the largest and most prosperous place we had visited, but here also the hand of death was over all, and it was “eat, drink, and be merry “for the old and unsatisfactory reason. Here again we met one of these young lady pioneers of civilization. Civilization is the better, but it is a stern and dreadful call which summons a woman to such a work.

Getting a canoe, I ascended the river for several miles to a place called Creektown. Dark and terrible mangrove swamps lay on either side with gloomy shades where nothing that is not horrible could exist. It is indeed a foul place. Once in an isolated tree, standing in a flood, I saw an evil-looking snake, worm-coloured and about 3 feet long. I shot him and saw him drift down stream. I learned later in life to give up killing animals, but I confess that I have no particular compunctions about that one. Creektown is in native territory, and the King sent down a peremptory order that we should report ourselves to him, but as it sounded ominous and might mean a long delay we got our paddles out and were soon back in British waters.

I had a curious experience one morning. A large ribbon-shaped fish, about 3 or 4 feet long, came up and swam upon the surface near the ship. Having my gun handy, I shot it. I don’t think five seconds could have elapsed before another larger and thicker fish — a big catfish, I should say — darted up from the depths, seized the wounded fish by the middle, and dragged it down. So murderous is the food-search, and so keen the watch in Nature! I saw something similar in the mixed tank of an aquarium once, where a fish stunned himself by swimming against the glass front, and was instantly seized and devoured by his neighbour. A strange fish to which I was introduced at Calabar was the electrical torpedo fish. It is handed to you in an earthenware saucer — a quiet little drab creature about 5 inches long — and you are asked to tickle its back. Then you learn exactly how high you can jump.

The death-like impression of Africa grew upon me. One felt that the white man with his present diet and habits was an intruder who was never meant to be there, and that the great sullen brown continent killed him as one crushes nits. I find in my diary:

“Oh Africa, where are the charms That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in Old England on alms Than be rich in that terrible place.”

The life aboard ship, however, was an easy and, in some ways, a luxurious one — too luxurious for a young man who had his way to make in the world. Premature comfort is a deadly enervating thing. I remember considering my own future — I stood upon the poop with a raging thunderstorm around me — and seeing very clearly that one or two more such voyages would sap my simple habits and make me unfit for the hard struggle which any sort of success would need. The idea of success in literature had never crossed my mind. It was still of medicine only that I thought, but I knew by my Birmingham experience how long and rough a path it was for those who had no influence and could not afford to buy. Then and there I vowed that I would wander no more, and that was surely one of the turning-points of my life. A “Wander-Jahr “is good, but two “Wander-Jahre “may mean damnation — and it is hard to stop. I find that on the same day of fruitful meditation I swore off alcohol for the rest of the voyage. I drank quite freely at this period of my life, having a head and a constitution which made me fairly immune, but my reason told me that the unbounded cocktails of West Africa were a danger, and with an effort I cut them out. There is a certain subtle pleasure in abstinence, and it is only socially that it is difficult. If we were all abstainers as a matter of course, like the real Mahomedans, none of us would ever miss it.

I did a mad thing at Cape Coast Castle, for, in a spirit either of bravado or pure folly, I swam round the ship — or at least for some length along her and back again. I suppose it was the consideration that black folk go freely into the water which induced me to do it. For some reason white folk do not share the same immunity. As I was drying myself on deck I saw the triangular back fin of a shark rise to the surface. Several times in my life I have done utterly reckless things with so little motive that I have found it difficult to explain them to myself afterwards. This was one of them.

The most intelligent and well-read man whom I met on the Coast was a negro, the American Consul at Monrovia. He came on with us as a passenger. My starved literary side was eager for good talk, and it was wonderful to sit in deck discussing Bancroft and Motley, and then suddenly realise that you were talking to one who had possibly been a slave himself, and was certainly the son of slaves. He had thought a good deal about African travel. “The only way to explore Africa is to go without arms and with few servants. You would not like it in England if a body of men came armed to the teeth and marched through your land. The Africans are quite as sensitive.” It was the method of Livingstone as against the method of Stanley. The former takes the braver and better man.

This negro gentleman did me good, for a man’s brain is an organ for the formation of his own thoughts and also for the digestion of other people’s, and it needs fresh fodder. We had, of course, books aboard the ship, but neither many nor good. I cannot trace that I made any mental or spiritual advancement during the voyage, but I added one more experience to my chaplet, and I suppose it all goes to some ultimate result in character or personality. I was a strong full-blooded young man, full of the joy of life, with nothing of what Oliver Wendell Holmes calls “pathological piety and tuberculous virtues.” I was a man among men. I walked ever among pitfalls and I thank all ministering angels that I came through, while I have a softened heart for those who did not.

Our voyage home — oil-gathering from port to port on the same but reversed route — was uneventful until the very last stride, when just as we were past Madeira the ship took fire. Whether it was the combustion of coal dust has never been determined, but certainly the fire broke out in the bunkers, and as there was only a wooden partition between these bunkers and a cargo of oil, we were in deadly danger. For the first day we took it lightly, as a mere smoulder, and for a second and third day we were content to seal the gratings as far as possible, to play down on it with the hose, and to shift the coal away from the oil. On the fourth morning, however, things took a sudden turn for the worse. I copy from my log book:

“January 9. I was awakened early in the morning by the purser, Tom King, poking his head in at my door and informing me that the ship was in a blaze, and that all hands had been called and were working down below. I got my clothes on, but when I came on deck nothing was to be seen of it save thick volumes of smoke from the bunker ventilators, and a lurid glow down below. I offered to go down, but there seemed to be as many working as could be fitted in. I was then asked to call the passengers. I waked each in turn, and they all faced the situation very bravely and coolly. One, a

Swiss, sat up in his bunk, rubbed his eyes, and in answer to my remark: ‘The ship is on fire! ‘said: ‘I have often been on ships that were on fire.’

‘Splendide mendax’ — but a good spirit! All day we fought the flames, and the iron side of the ship was red-hot at one point. Boats were prepared and provisioned and no doubt at the worst we could row or sail them to Lisbon, where my dear sisters would be considerably surprised if their big brother walked in. However, we are getting the better of it, and by evening those ominous pillars of smoke were down to mere wisps. So ends an ugly business!”

On January 14 we were in Liverpool once more, and West Africa was but one more of the cinema reels of memory. It is, I am told, very much improved now in all things. My old friend and cricket companion, Sir Fred. Guggisberg, is Governor at Accra and has asked me to see the old ground under very different auspices. I wish I could, but the sands still run and there is much to be done.

CHAPTER VI. MY FIRST EXPERIENCES IN PRACTICE

A Strange Character — His Honeymoon — His Bristol Practice — Telegram from Plymouth — Six Amusing Weeks — A Deep Plot — My Southsea Venture — Furnishing on the Cheap — The Plot Explodes.

I HAVE now come to the temporary end of my voyages, which were to be renewed in years to come, and I have reached the time when, under very curious circumstances, I endeavoured to establish myself in medical practice. In a book written some years afterwards called “The Stark Munro Letters,” I drew in very close detail the events of the next few years, and there the curious reader will find them more clearly and fully set out than would be to scale in these pages. I would only remark, should any reader reconstruct me or my career from that book, that there are some few incidents there which are imaginary, and that, especially, the whole incident of the case of a lunatic and of Lord Saltire in Chapter IV occurred to a friend and not to myself. Otherwise the whole history of my association with the man whom I called Cullingworth, his extraordinary character, our parting and the way in which I was left to what seemed certain ruin, were all as depicted. I will here simply give the essentials of the story, and retain the fictitious name.

In my last year of study at Edinburgh I formed a friendship with this remarkable student. He came of a famous medical family, his father having been a great authority upon zymotic disease. He came also of a famous athletic stock, and was a great Rugby forward himself, though rather handicapped by the Berserk fury with which he would play. He was up to international form, and his younger brother was reckoned by good judges to be about the best forward who ever donned the rose-embroidered jersey of England.

Cullingworth was as strong mentally as physically. In person he was about 5 ft. 9 in in height, perfectly built, with a bulldog jaw, bloodshot deep-set eyes, overhanging brows, and yellowish hair as stiff as wire, which spurted up above his brows. He was a man born for trouble and adventure, unconventional in his designs and formidable in his powers of execution — a man of action with a big but incalculable brain guiding the action. He died in early middle age, and I understand that an autopsy revealed some cerebral abnormality, so that there was no doubt a pathological element in his strange explosive character. For some reason he took a fancy to me, and appeared to attach an undue importance to my advice.

When I met him first he had just indulged in one of his wild escapades, which ended usually in a fight or in a transitory appearance in a police court, but on this occasion was more serious and permanent. He had run off with a charming young lady and married her, she being a ward in Chancery and under age. However, the deed was done and all the lawyers in the world could not undo it, though they might punish the culprit. He told me how he and the lady had gone over a Bradshaw with the intention that when they came on a station of which neither of them had ever heard, they would make for that place and spend their honeymoon there. They came therefore upon some awful name, Clodpole-in-the-Marsh or something of the kind, and there they sojourned in the village inn. Cullingworth stained his yellow hair black, but the stain took in some places and not in others, so that he looked as if he had escaped from Barnum’s show. What Clodpole-in-the-Marsh could have thought of such an extraordinary couple I cannot imagine, and it is probably the one occasion on which it ever buzzed. I cannot think of any surer way of getting publicity than that which Cullingworth took to avoid detection. In London they would have been perfectly unobserved. I remember that for years Cullingworth’s hair presented curious iridescent tints which were the remains of his disguise.

He brought his bride safely to Edinburgh, where they hired a flat and lived in it without furnishing it save for the absolutely needful. I have dined with them there on an apple dumpling, seated on a pile of thick volumes as there was no chair. We introduced them to a few friends, did what we could for the lonely lady, and finally they drifted off, and for a time we heard no more.

Just before I started for Africa I got a long telegram from Cullingworth imploring me to go to Bristol as he needed my advice. I was in Birmingham and I set forth at once. When I reached Bristol he conducted me to a fine mansion, and there poured out his tale of Woe. He had started in great style, hoping to rally the remains of his father’s patients, but his money had run out, he was dunned by his tradespeople, there were no patients, and what was he to do? We had a joyous riotous time for two days, for there was an exuberant atmosphere about the man which rose above all trouble. The only advice I could give was that he should make a composition with his creditors. I heard afterwards that he assembled them, addressed them in a long and emotional speech, reduced them almost to tears with his picture of the struggles of a deserving young man, and finally got a unanimous vote of confidence from them with full consent that he should pay at his own leisure. It was the sort of thing that he would do, and tell the story afterwards with a bull’s roar of laughter which could be heard down the street.

When I had been back a couple of months from Africa, I received another telegram — he always telegraphed and never wrote — which ran in some such way as this: “Started here last June. Colossal success. Come down by next train if possible. Plenty of room for you. Splendid opening.” The telegram was stamped Plymouth. A second even more explosive telegram upbraided me for delay and guaranteed me £300 the first year. This looked like business, so off I went.

The events of the next six weeks, in the late spring and early summer of 1882, were more fitted for some rollicking novel than for the sober pages of a veracious chronicle. The conditions which I found at Plymouth were incredible. In a short time this man, half genius and half quack, had founded a practice worth several thousand pounds of ready money in the year. “Free consultations but pay for your medicine,” was his slogan, and as he charged a good price for the latter it worked out all the same in the end. The mere words “Free Consultations “attracted crowds. He used drugs in a heroic and indiscriminate manner which produced dramatic results but at an unjustifiable risk. I remember one instance where dropsy had disappeared before a severe dose of croton oil in a way that set all the gossips talking. People flocked into the town from 20 and 30 miles round, and not only his waiting-rooms, but his stairs and his passages, were crammed. His behaviour to them was extraordinary. He roared and shouted, scolded them, joked them, pushed them about, and pursued them sometimes into the street, or addressed them collectively from the landing. A morning with him when the practice was in full blast was as funny as any pantomime and I was exhausted with laughter. He had a well-worn volume on Medical Jurisprudence which he pretended was the Bible, and he swore old women on it that they would drink no more tea. I have no doubt he did a great deal of good, for there was reason and knowledge behind all that he did, but his manner of doing it was unorthodox in the extreme. His wife made up the prescriptions at a pigeon-hole at the end of a passage, and received the price which was marked on the label carried down by the patient. Every evening Cullingworth walked back to his great residential house upon the Hoe, bearing his bag of silver, his coat flying, his hat on the back of his head, and his great fangs grinning up at every doctor whose disgusted face showed at a window.

Cullingworth had rigged me up a room, furnished with one table and two chairs, in which I could take surgical or other cases which he did not care to handle. I fear that my professional manners were very unexciting after his more flamboyant efforts, which I could not imitate even if I would. I had, however, a steady dribble of patients, and it looked as if I might build something up. I went up country once, and operated upon an old fellow’s nose which had contracted cancer through his holding the bowl of a short clay pipe immediately beneath it. I left him with an aristocratic, not to say supercilious organ, which was the wonder of the village, and might have been the foundation of my fame.

But there were other influences at work, and the threads of fate were shooting out at strange unexpected angles. My mother had greatly resented my association with Cullingworth. Her family pride had been aroused, and justly as I can now see, though my wanderings had left me rather too Bohemian and careless upon points of etiquette. But I liked Cullingworth and even now I can’t help liking him — and I admired his strong qualities and enjoyed his company and the extraordinary situations which arose from any association with him. This resistance upon my part, and my defence of my friend, annoyed my mother the more, and she wrote me several letters of remonstrance which certainly dealt rather faithfully with his character as it appeared to her. I was careless of my papers and these letters were read both by Cullingworth and his wife. I do them no injustice in saying this, for they finally admitted it. Apparently he imagined — he was a man of strange suspicions and secret plottings — that I was a party to such sentiments, whereas they were actually called forth by my defence of him. His manner changed, and more than once I caught his fierce grey eyes looking furtively at me with a strange sullen expression, so much so that I asked him what was the matter. He was actually scheming my ruin, which would be nothing financially, since I had nothing to lose, but would be much both to my mother and me if it touched my honour.

One day he came to me and told me that he thought my presence complicated his practice and that we had better part. I agreed in all good humour, assuring him that I had not come to hurt him and that I was very grateful for what he had done, even if it came to nothing. He then strongly advised me to go into practice myself. I replied that I had no capital. He answered that he would see to that, that he would allow me a pound a week until I got my feet under me, and that I could repay it at leisure. I thanked him warmly, and after looking at Tavistock I finally decided that Portsmouth would be a good place, the only reason being that I knew the conditions at Plymouth, and Portsmouth seemed analogous. I boarded an Irish steamer, therefore, and about July of 1882 I started off by sea, with one small trunk containing all my earthly possessions, to start practice in a town in which I knew no single soul. My cash balance was under £10, and I knew not only that I had to meet all present expenses upon this, but that I had to furnish a house upon it. On the other hand the weekly pound should easily cover all personal needs, and I had the devil-may-care optimism of youth as to the future.

When I arrived at Portsmouth I went into lodgings for a week. On the very first night, with that curious faculty for running into dramatic situations which has always been with me, I became involved in a street fight with a rough who was beating (or rather kicking) a woman. It was a strange start, and after I began my practice one of the first people to whom I opened my door was this very rascal. I don’t suppose he recognised me, but I could have sworn to him. I emerged from the fray without much damage, and was very glad to escape some serious scandal. It was the second time that I had got knocked about in defence of beauty in distress.

I spent a week in marking down the unoccupied houses, and finally settled at £40 a year into Bush Villa, which a kindly landlord has now called Doyle House. I was terrified lest the agent should ask for a deposit, but the name of my C.B. uncle as reference turned the scale in my favour. Having secured the empty house and its key, I went down to a sale in Portsea and for about £4 secured quite a lot of second-hand — possibly tenth-hand — furniture. It met my needs and enabled me to make one room possible for patients with three chairs, a table and a central patch of carpet. I had a bed of sorts and a mattress upstairs. I fixed up the plate which I had brought from Plymouth, bought a red lamp on tick, and fairly settled down in receipt of custom. When all was done I had a couple of pounds in hand. Servants, of course, were out of the question, so I polished my own plate every morning, brushed down my front, and kept the house reasonably clean. I found that I could live quite easily and well on less than a shilling a day, so I could hold out for a long period.

I had at this time contributed several stories to “London Society,” a magazine now defunct, but then flourishing under the editorship of a Mr. Hogg. In the April, 1882, number I had a story, now happily forgotten, called “Bones,” while in the preceding Christmas number I had another, “The Gully of Bluemansdyke,” both of them feeble echoes of Bret Harte. These, with the stories already mentioned, made up my whole output at this time. I explained to Mr. Hogg how I was situated, and wrote for him a new tale for his Christmas number entitled “My Friend the Murderer.” Hogg behaved very well and sent me £10, which I laid by for my first quarter’s rent. I was not so pleased with him when, years later, he claimed the full copyright of all these immature stories, and published them in a volume with my name attached. Have a care, young authors, have a care, or your worst enemy will be your early self!

It was as well that I had that £10, for Cullingworth, having learned that I was fairly committed, with my lease signed, now hurled his thunderbolt, which he thought would crush me. It was a curt letter — not a telegram for a wonder — in which he admitted that my letters had been read, expressed surprise that such a correspondence should have gone on while I was under his roof, and declared that he could have nothing more to do with me. He had, of course, no real grievance, but I am quite willing to admit that he honestly thought he had. But his method of revenge was a strange example of the schemings of a morbid mind.

For a moment I was staggered. But my boats were burned and I must go forward. I sent back a derisive reply to Cullingworth, and put him out of my head for ever — indeed, I heard of him no more until some five years later I read the news of his premature death. He was a remarkable man and narrowly escaped being a great one. I fear that he lived up to his great income and left his wife but poorly off.

CHAPTER VII. MY START AT SOUTHSEA

A Strange Life — Arrival of my Brother — I Buy up a Shop — Cheap Servants — Queer Patients — Dangers of Medical Practice — Income Tax Joke — My Marriage — Tragedy in my House — A New Phase.

WHAT with cleaning up, answering the bell, doing my modest shopping, which was measured in pennies rather than shillings, and perfecting my simple household arrangements, the time did not hang heavily upon my hands. It is a wonderful thing to have a house of your own for the first time, however humble it may be. I lavished all my care upon the front room to make it possible for patients. The back room was furnished with my trunk and a stool. Inside the trunk was my larder, and the top of it was my dining-room table. There was gas laid on, and I rigged a projection from the wall by which I could sling a pan over the gas jet. In this way I cooked bacon with great ease, and became expert in getting a wonderful lot of slices from a pound. Bread, bacon and tea, with an occasional saveloy — what could man ask for more? It is (or was) perfectly easy to live well upon a shilling a day.

I had obtained a fair consignment of drugs on tick from a wholesale house and these also were ranged round the sides of the back room. From the very beginning a few stray patients of the poorest class, some of them desirous of novelty, some disgruntled with their own doctors, the greater part owing bills and ashamed to face their creditor, came to consult me and consume a bottle of my medicine. I could pay for my food by the drugs I sold. It was as well, for I had no other way of paying for it, and I had sworn not to touch the ten golden pieces which represented my rent. There have been times when I could not buy a postage stamp and my letters have had to wait, but the ten golden coins still remained intact.

It was a busy thoroughfare, with a church on one side of my house and an hotel on the other. The days passed pleasantly enough, for it was a lovely warm autumn, and I sat in the window of my consulting-room screened by the rather dingy curtain which I had put up, and watched the passing crowd or read my book, for I had spent part of my scanty funds on making myself a member of a circulating library. In spite of my sparse food, or more probably on account of it, I was extraordinarily fit and well, so that at night when all hope of patients was gone for that day I would lock up my house and walk many miles to work off my energy. With its imperial associations it is a glorious place and even now if I had to live in a town outside London it is surely to Southsea, the residential quarter of Portsmouth, that I would turn. The history of the past carries on into the history of to-day, the new torpedo-boat flies past the old *Victory* with the same white ensign flying from each, and the old Elizabethan culverins and sakers can still be seen in the same walk which brings you to the huge artillery of the forts. There is a great glamour there to any one with the historic sense — a sense which I drank in with my mother's milk.

It had never entered my head yet that literature might give me a career, or anything beyond a little casual pocket money, but already it was a deciding factor in my life, for I could not have held on, and must have either starved or given in but for the few pounds which Mr. Hogg sent me, for they enabled all other smaller sums to be spent in nourishment. I have wondered sometimes as I look back that I did not contract scurvy, for most of my food was potted, and I had no means of cooking vegetables. However, I felt no grievance at the time nor any particular perception that my mode of life was unusual, nor indeed any particular anxiety about the future. At that age everything seems an adventure — and there was always the novel pleasure of the house.

Once I had a moment of weakness during which I answered an advertisement which asked for a doctor to attend coolies in the tea gardens of the Terai. I spent a few unsettled days waiting for an answer, but none came and I settled down once more to my waiting and hoping. I had one avenue of success open of which I could not avail myself. My Catholic relatives had sent me introductions to the Bishop and I was assured that there was no Catholic doctor in the town. My mind, however, was so perfectly clear and I had so entirely broken away from the old faith that I could not possibly use it for material ends. I therefore burned the letter of introduction.

As the weeks passed and I had no one with whom to talk I began to think wistfully of the home circle at Edinburgh, and to wonder why, with my eight-roomed house, one or more of them should not come to keep me company. The girls were already governessing or preparing to do so, but there was my little brother Innes. It would relieve my mother and yet help me if he could join me. So it was arranged, and one happy evening the little knicker-bockered fellow, just ten years old, joined me as my comrade. No man could have had a merrier and brighter one. In a few weeks we had settled down to a routine life, I having found a good day-school for him. The soldiers of Portsmouth were already a great joy to him, and his future career was marked out by his natural tastes, for he was a born leader and administrator. Little did I foresee that he would win distinction in the greatest of all wars, and die in the prime of his manhood — but not before he knew that complete victory had been attained. Even then our thoughts were very military, and I remember how we waited together outside the office of the local paper that we might learn the result of the bombardment of Alexandria.

Turning over some old papers after these pages were written I came upon a letter written in straggling schoolboy script by my little brother to his mother at home which may throw an independent light upon those curious days. It is dated August 16, 1882. He says:

“The patients are crowding in. We have made three bob this week. We have vaxenated a baby and got hold of a man with consumption, and to-day a gipsy’s cart came up to the door selling baskets and chairs so we determined not to let the man ring as long as he liked. After he had rung two or three times Arthur yelled out at the pitch of his voice, Go a way but the man rang again so I went down to the door and pulled open the letter box and cried out go a way. The man began to swear at me and say that he wanted to see Arthur. All this time Arthur thought that the door was open and was yelling Shut that door. Then I came upstairs and told Arthur what the man had said so Arthur went down and opened the door and we found out that the gipsy’s child had measles.... After all we got sixpence out of them and that is all ways something.”

I remember the incident well, and certainly my sudden change of tone from the indignant householder, who is worried by a tramp, to my best bedside manner in the hopes of a fee, must have been very amusing. My recollection is, however, that it was the Gipsy who got sixpence out of us.

For some time Innes and I lived entirely alone, doing the household tasks between us, and going long walks in the evening to keep ourselves fit. Then I had a brain-wave and I put an advertisement in the evening paper that a ground floor was to let in exchange for services. I had numerous applicants in reply, and out of them I chose two elderly women who claimed to be sisters — a claim which they afterwards failed to make good. When once they were installed we became quite a civilised household and things began to look better. There were complex quarrels, however, and one of the women left. The other soon afterwards followed suit. As the first woman had seemed to me to be the most efficient, I followed her up and found that she had started a small shop. Her rent was weekly, so that was easily settled, but she talked gloomily about her stock. “I will buy everything in your shop,” I said in a large way. It cost me exactly seventeen and sixpence, and I was loaded up for many months with matches, cakes of blacking and other merchandise. From then onwards our meals were cooked for us, and we became in all ways normal.

Month followed month and I picked up a patient here and a patient there until the nucleus of a little practice had been formed. Sometimes it was an accident, sometimes an emergency case, sometimes a newcomer to the town or one who had quarrelled with his doctor. I mixed with people so far as I could, for I learned that a brass plate alone will never attract, and people must see the human being who lies in wait behind it. Some of my tradespeople gave me their custom in return for mine, and mine was so small that I was likely to have the best of the bargain. There was a grocer who developed epileptic fits, which meant butter and tea to us. Poor fellow, he could never have realised the mixed feelings with which I received the news of a fresh outbreak. Then there was a very tall, horse-faced old lady with an extraordinary dignity of bearing. She would sit framed in the window of her little house, like the picture of a *grande dame* of the old régime. But every now and again she went on a wild burst, in the course of which she would skim plates out of the window at the passers-by. I was the only one who had influence over her at such times, for she was a haughty, autocratic old person. Once she showed an inclination to skim a plate at me also, but I quelled her by assuming a gloomy dignity as portentous as her own. She had some art treasures which she heaped upon me when she was what we will politely call “ill,” but claimed back again the moment she was well. Once when she had been particularly troublesome I retained a fine lava jug, in spite of her protests, and I have got it yet.

It is well that medical practice has its humorous side, for it has much to depress one. Most men never use their reasoning power at all on the religious side, but if they did they would find it difficult sometimes to reconcile the sights which a physician sees with the idea of a merciful providence. If one loses the explanation that this life is a spiritual chastening for another, and thinks that death ends all, and that this is our one experience, then it is impossible to sustain the goodness or the omnipotence of God. So I felt at the time, and it made me a Materialist, but now I know well that I was judging a story on the strength of one chapter.

Let me give an example. I was called in by a poor woman to see her daughter. As I entered the humble sitting-room there was a small cot at one side, and by the gesture of the mother I understood that the sufferer was there. I picked up a candle and walking over I stooped over the little bed, expecting to see a child. What I really saw was a pair of brown sullen eyes, full of loathing and pain, which looked up in resentment to mine. I could not tell how old the creature was. Long thin limbs were twisted and coiled in the tiny couch. The face was sane but malignant. “What is it? “I asked in dismay when we were out of hearing. “It’s a girl,” sobbed the mother. “She’s nineteen. Oh! if God would only take her! “What a life for both! And how hard to face such facts and accept any of the commonplace explanations of existence! —

Medical life is full of dangers and pitfalls, and luck must always play its part in a man’s career. Many a good man has been ruined by pure bad luck. On one occasion I was called in to a lady who was suffering from what appeared to be dyspepsia of a rather severe type. There was absolutely nothing to indicate anything more serious. I therefore reassured the family, spoke lightly of the illness, and walked home to make up a bismuth mixture for her, calling on one or two other cases on the way. When I got home I found a messenger waiting to say that the lady was dead. This is the sort of thing which may happen to any man at any time. It did not hurt me, for I was too lowly to be hurt. You can’t ruin a practice when there is no practice. The woman really had a gastric ulcer, for which there is no diagnosis; it was eating its way into the lining of her stomach, it pierced an artery after I saw her, and she bled to death. Nothing could have saved her, and I think her relatives came to understand this.

I made £154 the first year, and £250 the second, rising slowly to £300, which in eight years I never passed, so far as the medical practice went. In the first year the Income Tax paper arrived and I filled it up to show that I was not liable. They returned the paper with “Most unsatisfactory “scrawled across it. I wrote “I entirely agree “under the words, and returned it once more. For this little bit of cheek I was had up before the assessors, and duly appeared with my ledger under my arm. They could make nothing, however, out of me or my ledger, and we parted with mutual laughter and compliments.

In the year 1885 my brother left me to go to a public school in Yorkshire. Shortly afterwards I was married. A lady named Mrs. Hawkins, a widow of a Gloucestershire family, had come to Southsea with her son and daughter, the latter a very gentle and amiable girl. I was brought into contact with them through the illness of the son, which was of a sudden and violent nature, arising from cerebral meningitis. As the mother was very awkwardly situated in lodgings, I volunteered to furnish an extra bedroom in my house and give the poor lad, who was in the utmost danger, my personal attention. His case was a mortal one, and in spite of all I could do he passed away a few days later. Such a death under my own roof naturally involved me in a good deal of anxiety and trouble — indeed, if I had not had the foresight to ask a medical friend to see him with me on the day before he passed away, I should have been in a difficult position. The funeral was from my house. The family were naturally grieved at the worry to which they had quite innocently exposed me, and so our relations became intimate and sympathetic, which ended in the daughter consenting to share my fortunes. We were married on August 6, 1885, and no man could have had a more gentle and amiable life's companion. Our union was marred by the sad ailment which came after a very few years to cast its shadow over our lives, but it comforts me to think that during the time when we were together there was no single occasion when our affection was disturbed by any serious breach or division, the credit of which lies entirely with her own quiet philosophy, which enabled her to bear with smiling patience not only her own sad illness, which lasted so long, but all those other vicissitudes which life brings with it. I rejoice to think that though she married a penniless doctor, she was spared long enough to fully appreciate the pleasure and the material comforts which worldly success was able to bring us. She had some small income of her own which enabled me to expand my simple housekeeping in a way which gave her from the first the decencies, if not the luxuries, of life.

In many ways my marriage marked a turning-point in my life. A bachelor, especially one who had been a wanderer like myself, drifts easily into Bohemian habits, and I was no exception. I cannot look back upon those years with any spiritual satisfaction, for I was still in the valley of darkness. I had ceased to butt my head incessantly against what seemed to be an impenetrable wall, and I had resigned myself to ignorance upon that which is the most momentous question in life — for a voyage is bleak indeed if one has no conception to what port one is bound. I had laid aside the old charts as useless, and had quite despaired of ever finding a new one which would enable me to steer an intelligible course, save towards that mist which was all that my pilots, Huxley, Mill, Spencer and others, could see ahead of us. My mental attitude is correctly portrayed in “The Stark Munro Letters.” A dim light of dawn was to come to me soon in an uncertain fitful way which was destined in time to spread and grow brighter.

Up to now the main interest of my life lay in my medical career. But with the more regular life and the greater sense of responsibility, coupled with the natural development of brain-power, the literary side of me began slowly to spread until it was destined to push the other entirely aside. Thus a new phase had begun, part medical, part literary, and part philosophical, which I shall deal with in another chapter.

CHAPTER VIII. MY FIRST LITERARY SUCCESS

New Outlook — Cornhill Dinner — James Payn—”A Study in Scarlet” — Genesis of Holmes — Micah Clarke — Disappointments — Andrew Lang — Oscar Wilde — His Criticism of Himself—”The White Company.”

DURING the years before my marriage I had from time to time written short stories which were good enough to be marketable at very small prices — £4 on an average — but not good enough to reproduce. They are scattered about amid the pages of “London Society,”

“All the Year Round,”

“Temple Bar,”

“The Boy’s Own Paper,” and other journals. There let them lie. They served their purpose in relieving me a little of that financial burden which always pressed upon me. I can hardly have earned more than £10 or £15 a year from this source, so that the idea of making a living by it never occurred to me. But though I was not putting out I was taking in. I still have notebooks full of all sorts of knowledge which I acquired during that time. It is a great mistake to start putting out cargo when you have hardly stowed any on board. My own slow methods and natural limitations made me escape this danger.

After my marriage, however, my brain seems to have quickened and both my imagination and my range of expression were greatly improved. Most of the short stories which appeared eventually in my “Captain of the Polestar “were written in those years from 1885 to 1890. Some of them are perhaps as good honest work as any that I have done. What gave me great pleasure and for the first time made me realise that I was ceasing to be a hack writer and was getting into good company was when James Payn accepted my short story “Habakuk Jephson’s Statement” for “Cornhill.” I had a reverence for this splendid magazine with its traditions from Thackeray to Stevenson and the thought that I had won my way into it pleased me even more than the cheque for £30, which came duly to hand. It was, of course, anonymous, — such was the law of the magazine — which protects the author from abuse as well as prevents his winning fame. One paper began its review by the phrase "'Cornhill 'opens its new number with a story which would have made Thackeray turn in his grave." A dear old gentleman who knew me hurried across the road to show me the paper with these cheering words. Another, more gracious, said, "'Cornhill 'begins the New Year with an exceedingly powerful story in which we seem to trace the hand of the author of 'The New Arabian Nights '." It was great praise, but something less warm, which came straight to my own address, would have pleased me better.

I soon had two other stories in the "Cornhill "—"John Huxford's Hiatus" and "The Ring of Thoth." I also penetrated the stout Scottish barrier of "Black-Wood "with a story, "The Physiologist's Wife," which was written when I was under the influence of Henry James. But I was still in the days of very small things — so small that when a paper sent me a woodcut and offered me four guineas if I would write a story to correspond I was not too proud to accept. It was a very bad woodcut and I think that the story corresponded all right. I remember writing a New Zealand story, though why I should have written about a place of which I knew nothing I cannot imagine. Some New Zealand critic pointed out that I had given the exact bearings of the farm mentioned as 90 miles to the east or west of the town of Nelson, and that in that case it was situated 20 miles out on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. These little things will happen. There are times when accuracy is necessary and others where the idea is everything and the place quite immaterial.

It was about a year after my marriage that I realised that I could go on doing short 6tories for ever and never make headway. What is necessary is that your name should be on the back of a volume. Only so do you assert your individuality, and get the full credit or discredit of your achievement. I had for some time from 1884 onwards been engaged upon a sensational book of adventure which I had called "The Firm of Girdlestone," which represented my first attempt at a connected narrative. Save for occasional patches it is a worthless book, and, like the first book of everyone else, unless he is a great original genius, it was too reminiscent of the work of others. I could see it then, and could see it even more clearly later. When I sent it to publishers and they scorned it I quite acquiesced in their decision and finally let it settle, after its periodical flights to town, a dishevelled mass of manuscript at the back of a drawer.

I felt now that I was capable of something fresher and crisper and more workmanlike. Gaboriau had rather attracted me by the neat dovetailing of his plots, and Poe's masterful detective, M. Dupin, had from boyhood been one of my heroes. But could I bring an addition of my own? I thought of my old teacher Joe Bell, of his eagle face, of his curious ways, of his eerie trick of spotting details. If he were a detective he would surely reduce this fascinating but unorganized business to something nearer to an exact science. I would try if I could get this effect. It was surely possible in real life, so why should I not make it plausible in fiction? It is all very well to say that a man is clever, but the reader wants to see examples of it — such examples as Bell gave us every day in the wards. The idea amused me. What should I call the fellow? I still possess the leaf of a notebook with various alternative names. One rebelled against the elementary art which gives some inkling of character in the name, and creates Mr. Sharps or Mr. Ferrets. First it was Sherringford Holmes; then it was Sherlock Holmes. He could not tell his own exploits, so he must have a commonplace comrade as a foil — an educated man of action who could both join in the exploits and narrate them. A drab, quiet name for this unostentatious man. Watson would do. And so I had my puppets and wrote my "Study in Scarlet."

I knew that the book was as good as I could make it, and I had high hopes. When "Girdlestone "used to come circling back with the precision of a homing pigeon, I was grieved but not surprised, for I acquiesced in the decision. But when my little Holmes book began also to do the circular tour I was hurt, for I knew that it deserved a better fate. James Payn applauded but found it both too short and too long, which was true enough. Arrowsmith received it in May, 1886, and returned it unread in July. Two or three others sniffed and turned away. Finally, as Ward, Lock & Co made a speciality of cheap and often sensational literature, I sent it to them.

"Dear Sir," they said,—" We have read your story and are pleased with it. We could not publish it this year as the market is flooded at present with cheap fiction, but if you do not object to its being held over till next year, we will give you £25 for the copyright.

"Yours faithfully, "Ward, Lock & Co."

"*Oct.* 30, 1886."

It was not a very tempting offer, and even I, poor as I was, hesitated to accept it. It was not merely the small sum offered, but it was the long delay, for this book might open a road for me. I was heart-sick, however, at repeated disappointments, and I felt that perhaps it was true wisdom to make sure of publicity, however late. Therefore I accepted, and the book became “Beeton’s Xmas Annual “of 1887. I never at any time received another penny for it.

Having a long wait in front of me before this book could appear, and feeling large thoughts rise within me, I now determined to test my powers to the full, and I chose a historical novel for this end, because it seemed to me the one way of combining a certain amount of literary dignity with those scenes of action and adventure which were natural to my young and ardent mind. I had always felt great sympathy for the Puritans, who, after all, whatever their little peculiarities, did represent political liberty and earnestness in religion. They had usually been caricatured in fiction and art. Even Scott had not drawn them as they were. Macaulay, who was always one of my chief inspirations, had alone made them comprehensible — the sombre fighters, with their Bibles and their broadswords. There is a great passage of his — I cannot quote it verbally — in which he says that after the Restoration if ever you saw a carter more intelligent than his fellows, or a peasant who tilled his land better, you would be likely to find that it was an old pikeman of Cromwell’s. This, then, was my inspiration in “Micah Clarke,” where I fairly let myself go upon the broad highway of adventure. I was well up in history, but I spent some months over details and then wrote the book very rapidly. There are bits of it, the picture of the Puritan household, and the sketch of Judge Jeffreys, which I have never bettered. When it was finished early in 1888 my hopes ran high and out it went on its travels.

But, alas! although my Holmes booklet was out, and had attracted some little favourable comment, the door still seemed to be barred. James Payn had first peep, and he began his letter of rejection with the sentence “How can you, can you, waste your time and your wits writing historical novels! “This was depressing after a year of work. Then came Bentley’s verdict: “It lacks in our opinion the one great necessary point for fiction, i.e. interest; and this being the case we do not think it could ever become popular with libraries and the general public.” Then Blackwood had its say: “There are imperfections which would militate against success. The chances of the book proving a popular success do not seem to be strong enough to warrant us in publishing it.” There were others even more depressing. I was on the point of putting the worn manuscript into hospital with its mangled brother

“Girdlestone “when as a last resource I sent it to Longmans, whose reader, Andrew Lang, liked it and advised its acceptance. It was to “Andrew of the brindled hair,” as Stevenson called him, that I owe my first real opening, and I have never forgotten it. The book duly appeared in February, 1889, and though it was not a boom book it had extraordinarily good reviews, including one special one all to itself by Mr. Protheroe in the “Nineteenth Century,” and it has sold without intermission from that day to this. It was the first solid corner-stone laid for some sort of literary reputation.

British literature had a considerable vogue in the United States at this time for the simple reason that there was no copyright and they had not to pay for it. It was hard on British authors, but far harder on American ones, since they were exposed to this devastating competition. Like all national sins it brought its own punishment not only to American authors, who were guiltless, but to the publishers themselves, for what belongs to everyone belongs practically to no one, and they could not bring out a decent edition without being at once undersold. I have seen some of my early American editions which might have been printed on the paper that shopmen use for parcels. One good result, however, from my point of view was that a British author, if he had anything in him, soon won recognition over there, and afterwards, when the Copy- right Act was passed, he had his audience all ready for him. My Holmes book had met with some American success and presently I learned that an agent of Lippincott’s was in London and that he wished to see me, to arrange for a book. Needless to say that I gave my patients a rest for a day and eagerly kept the appointment.

Once only before had I touched the edge of literary society. That was when “Cornhill “was turned into a fully illustrated journal, an experiment which failed for it was quickly abandoned. The change was celebrated by a dinner at the Ship, at Greenwich, to which I was invited on the strength of my short contributions. All the authors and artists were there, and I remember the reverence with which I approached James Payn, who was to me the warden of the sacred gate. I was among the first arrivals, and was greeted by Mr. Smith, the head of the firm, who introduced me to Payn. I loved much of his work and waited in awe for the first weighty remark which should fall from his lips. It was that there was a crack in the window and he wondered how the devil it had got there. Let me add, however, that my future experience was to show that there was no wittier or more delightful companion in the world. I sat next to Anstey that night, who had just made a most deserved hit with his “Vice Versa,” and I was introduced to other celebrities, so that I came back walking on air.

Now for the second time I was in London on literary business. Stoddart, the American, proved to be an excellent fellow, and had two others to dinner. They were Gill, a very entertaining Irish M.P., and Oscar Wilde, who was already famous as the champion of aestheticism. It was indeed a golden evening for me. Wilde to my surprise had read “Micah Clarke “and was enthusiastic about it, so that I did not feel a complete outsider. His conversation left an indelible impression upon my mind. He towered above us all, and yet had the art of seeming to be interested in all that we could say. He had delicacy of feeling and tact, for the monologue man, however, clever, can never be a gentleman at heart. He took as well as gave, but what he gave was unique. He had a curious precision of statement, a delicate flavour of humour, and a trick of small gestures to illustrate his meaning, which were peculiar to himself. The effect cannot be reproduced, but I remember how in discussing the wars of the future he said: “A chemist on each side will approach the frontier with a bottle “ — his upraised hand and precise face conjuring up a vivid and grotesque picture. His anecdotes, too, were happy and curious. We were discussing the cynical maxim that the good fortune of our friends made us discontented. “The devil,” said Wilde, “was once crossing the Libyan Desert, and he came upon a spot where a number of small fiends were tormenting a holy hermit. The sainted man easily shook off their evil suggestions. The devil watched their failure and then he stepped forward to give them a lesson. What you do is too crude,’ said he. ‘Permit me for one moment.’ With that he whispered to the holy man, ‘Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria.’ A scowl of malignant jealousy at once clouded the serene face of the hermit. ‘That,’ said the devil to his imps, ‘is the sort of thing which I should recommend ‘.”

The result of the evening was that both Wilde and I promised to write books for “Lippincott’s Magazine “ — Wilde’s contribution was “The Picture of Dorian Grey,” a book which is surely upon a high moral plane, while I wrote “The Sign of Four,” in which Holmes made his second appearance. I should add that never in Wilde’s conversation did I observe one trace of coarseness of thought, nor could one at that time associate him with such an idea. Only once again did I see him, many years afterwards, and then he gave me the impression of being mad. He asked me, I remember, if had seen some play of his which was running. I answered that

I had not. He said: “Ah, you must go. It is wonderful. It is genius I “All this with the gravest face. Nothing could have been more different from his early gentlemanly instincts. I thought at the time, and still think, that the monstrous development which ruined him was pathological, and that a hospital rather than a police court was the place for its consideration.

When his little book came out I wrote to say what I thought of it. His letter is worth reproducing, as showing the true Wilde. I omit the early part in which he comments on my own work in too generous terms.

“Between me and life there is a mist of words always. I throw probability out of the window for the sake of a phrase, and the chance of an epigram makes me desert truth. Still I do aim at making a work of art, and I am really delighted that you think my treatment subtle and artistically good. The newspapers seem to me to be written by the prurient for the Philistine. I cannot understand how they can treat ‘Dorian Grey ‘as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect, and it still seems to me that the moral is too obvious.”

Encouraged by the kind reception which “Micah Clarke “had received from the critics, I now determined upon an even bolder and more ambitious flight. It seemed to me that the days of Edward III constituted the greatest epoch in English History — an epoch when both the French and the Scottish kings were prisoners in London. This result had been brought about mainly by the powers of a body of men who were renowned through Europe but who had never been drawn in British literature, for though Scott treated in his inimitable way the English archer, it was as an outlaw rather than as a soldier that he drew him. I had some views of my own, too, about the Middle Ages which I was anxious to set forth. I was familiar with Froissart and Chaucer and I was aware that the famous knights of old were by no means the athletic heroes of Scott, but were often of a very different type. Hence came my two books “The White Company,” written in 1889, and “Sir Nigel,” written fourteen years later. Of the two I consider the latter the better book, but I have no hesitation in saying that the two of them taken together did thoroughly achieve my purpose, that they made an accurate picture of that great age, and that as a single piece of work they form the most complete, satisfying and ambitious thing that I have ever done. All things find their level, but I believe that if I had never touched Holmes, who has tended to obscure my higher work, my position in literature would at the present moment be a more commanding one. The work needed much research and I have still got my notebooks full of all sorts of lore. I cultivate a simple style and avoid long words so far as possible, and it may be that this surface of ease has sometimes caused the reader to underrate the amount of real research which lies in all my historical novels. It is not a matter which troubles me, however, for I have always felt that justice is done in the end, and that the real merit of any work is never permanently lost.

I remember that as I wrote the last words of “The White Company “I felt a wave of exultation and with a cry of “That’s done it!” I hurled my inky pen across the room, where it left a black smudge upon the duck’s-egg wall-paper. I knew in my heart that the book would live and that it would illuminate our national traditions. Now that it has passed through fifty editions I suppose I may say with all modesty that my forecast has proved to be correct. This was the last book which I wrote in my days of doctoring at Southsea, and marks an epoch in my life, so I can now hark back to some other phases of my last years at Bush Villa before I broke away into a new existence. I will only add that “The White Company “was accepted by “Cornhill,” in spite of James Payn’s opinion of historical novels, and that I fulfilled another ambition by having a serial in that famous magazine.

A new phase of medical experience came to me about this time, for I suddenly found myself a unit in the British Army. The operations in the East had drained the Medical Service, and it had therefore been determined that local civilian doctors should be enrolled for temporary duty of some hours a day. The terms were a guinea a day, and a number of us were tempted to volunteer where there were only a few vacancies. When I was called before the Board of Selection a savage-looking old army doctor who presided barked out, “And you, sir — what are you prepared to do? “To which I answered, “Anything.” It seems that the others had all been making bargains and reservations, so my wholehearted reply won the job.

It brought me into closer contact with the savage-looking medico, who proved to be Sir Anthony Home, V.C. — an honour which he had won in the Indian Mutiny. He was in supreme charge, and as he was as fierce in speech and in act as in appearance, everyone was terrified of him. On one occasion I had told the orderly to draw a man’s tooth, knowing that he was a very much more skilful dentist than I. I was on my way home when I was overtaken by an excited soldier who told me that Sergeant Jones was being court-martialled and would certainly lose his stripes because he had done a minor operation. I hurried back and on entering the room found Sir Anthony glaring at the unhappy man, while several other orderlies stood round awaiting their own turn. Sir Anthony’s glare was transferred to me when I said that whatever the Sergeant had done was by my express order. He grunted, banged the book he was holding, and broke up the meeting. He seemed a most disagreeable old man, and yet when I was married shortly afterwards he sent me a most charming message wishing me good fortune. Up to then I had never had anything from him save a scowl from his thick eyebrows, so I was most agreeably surprised. Soon afterwards the pressure ceased and we civilians were all dismissed.

CHAPTER IX. PULLING UP THE ANCHOR

Psychic Studies — Experiments in Telepathy — My First Séances — A Curious Test — General Drayson — Opinion on Theosophy — A. P. Sinnett — W. T. Stead — Journey to Berlin — Koch's Treatment — Brutality of Bergmann — Malcolm Morris — Literary Society — Political Work — Arthur Balfour — Our Departure.

IT was in these years after my marriage and before leaving Southsea that I planted the first seeds of those psychic studies which were destined to revolutionize my views and to absorb finally all the energies of my life. I had at that time the usual contempt which the young educated man feels towards the whole subject which has been covered by the clumsy name of Spiritualism. I had read of mediums being convicted of fraud, I had heard of phenomena which were opposed to every known scientific law, and I had deplored the simplicity and credulity which could deceive good, earnest people into believing that such bogus happenings were signs of intelligence outside our own existence. Educated as I had been during my most plastic years in the school of medical materialism, and soaked in the negative views of all my great teachers, I had no room in my brain for theories which cut right across every fixed conclusion that I had formed. I was wrong and my great teachers were wrong, but still I hold that they wrought well and that their Victorian agnosticism was in the interests of the human race, for it shook the old iron-clad unreasoning Evangelical position which was so universal before their days. For all rebuilding a site must be cleared. There were two separate Victorian movements towards change, the one an attempt to improve the old building and make it good enough to carry on — as shown in the Oxford and High Church development, the other a knocking down of ruins which could only end in some fresh erection springing up. As I have shown, my own position was that of a respectful materialist who entirely admitted a great central intelligent cause, without being able to distinguish what that cause was, or why it should work in so mysterious and terrible a way in bringing its designs to fulfilment.

From my point of view the mind (and so far as I could see the soul, which was the total effect of all the hereditary or personal functionings of the mind) was an emanation from the brain and entirely physical in its nature. I saw, as a medical man, how a spicule of bone or a tumour pressing on the brain would cause what seemed an alteration in the soul. I saw also how drugs or alcohol would turn on fleeting phases of virtue or vice. The physical argument seemed an overpowering one. It had never struck me that the current of events might really flow in the opposite direction, and that the higher faculties could only manifest themselves imperfectly through an imperfect instrument. The broken fiddle is silent and yet the musician is the same as ever.

The first thing which steadied me and made me reconsider my position was the question of telepathy, which was already being discussed by William Barrett and others, even before the appearance of Myers' monumental work on "Human Personality " — the first book which devoted to these psychic subjects the deep study and sustained brain power which they demand! It may, in my opinion, take a permanent place in human literature like the "Novum Organum "or "The Descent of Man "or any other great root-book which has marked a date in human thought. Having read some of the evidence I began to experiment in thought transference, and I found a fellow-researcher in Mr. Ball, a well-known architect in the town. Again and again, sitting behind him, I have drawn diagrams, and he in turn has made approximately the same figure. I showed beyond any doubt whatever that I could convey my thought without words.

But if I could verify such conclusions up to six feet I could not well doubt them when they gave me the evidence that the same results could be obtained at a distance. With an appropriate subject, and some undefined sympathy between the two individuals, it was independent of space. So the evidence seemed to show. I had always sworn by science and by the need of fearless following wherever truth might lie. It was clear now that my position had been too rigid. I had compared the thought-excretion of the brain to the bile-excretion of the liver. Clearly this was untenable. If thought could go a thousand miles and produce a perceptible effect then it differed entirely not only in degree but in kind from any purely physical material. That seemed certain, and it must involve some modification of my old views.

About this time (1886) the family of a General whom I attended professionally became interested in table turning and asked me to come and check their results. They sat round a dining-room table which after a time, their hands being upon it, began to sway and finally got sufficient motion to tap with one leg. They then asked questions and received answers, more or less wise and more or less to the point. They were got by the tedious process of reciting the alphabet and writing down the letter which the tap indicated. It seemed to me that we were collectively pushing the table, and that our own wills were concerned in bringing down the leg at the right moment. I was interested but very sceptical. Some of these messages were not vague platitudes but were definite and from dead friends of the family, which naturally impressed them greatly, though it had not the same effect upon me, since I did not know them. I have the old records before me as I write. “Don’t tell the girls when you see them, but they will talk about me. Kiss my baby for me. I watch her always. Francie.” This was the style of message, mixed up with a good many platitudes. We held twenty or more of such meetings, but I never received anything evidential to my own address, and I was very critical as to the whole proceedings.

None the less there was a problem to be solved and I went on with its solution, reading the pros and the cons, and asking advice from those who had experience, especially from General Drayson, a very distinguished thinker and a pioneer of psychic knowledge, who lived at that time at Southsea. I had known Drayson first as an astronomer, for he had worked out a revolutionary idea by which there is a fatal mistake in our present idea as to the circle which is described in the heavens by the prolonged axis of the earth. It is really a wider circle round a different centre, and this correction enables us to explain several things now inexplicable, and to make astronomy a more exact science, with certain very important reactions upon geology and the recurrent glacial epochs, the exact date of which could be fixed. His views impressed me much at the time, and several books upholding them have appeared since his death, notably “Draysoniana” by Admiral de Horsey. If he makes good, as I think he will, Drayson will make a great permanent name. His opinion therefore was not negligible upon any subject, and when he told me his views and experiences on Spiritualism I could not fail to be impressed, though my own philosophy was far too solid to be easily destroyed. I was too poor to employ professional mediums, and to work on such subjects without a medium is as if one worked at astronomy without a telescope. Once only an old man with some reputed psychic power came for a small fee and gave us a demonstration. He went into a loud-breathing trance to the alarm of his audience, and then gave each of us a test. Mine was certainly a very remarkable one, for it was “Do not read Leigh Hunt’s book.” I was hesitating at the time whether I should read his “Comic Dramatists of the Restoration “or not, for on the one hand it is literature and on the other the treatment repelled me. This then was a very final and excellent test so far as telepathy went, but I would not fully grant that it was more. I was so impressed, however, that I wrote an account of it to “Light,” the psychic weekly paper, and so in the year 1887 I actually put myself on public record as a student of these matters. That was thirty-seven years ago, as I write, so I am a very senior student now. From that time onwards I read and thought a great deal, though it was not until the later phase of my life that I realised whither all this was tending. This question I will treat in a final section by itself, so that those to whom it is of less interest can avoid it.

I was deeply interested and attracted for a year or two by Theosophy, because while Spiritualism seemed at that time to be chaos so far as philosophy went, Theosophy presented a very well thought-out and reasonable scheme, parts of which, notably reincarnation and Kharma, seemed to offer an explanation for some of the anomalies of life. I read Sinnett’s “Occult World “and afterwards with even greater admiration I read his fine exposition of Theosophy in “Esoteric Buddhism,” a most notable book. I also met him, for he was an old friend of General Drayson’s, and I was impressed by his conversation. Shortly afterwards, however, there appeared Dr. Hodgson’s report upon his investigation into Madame Blavatsky’s proceedings at Adyar, which shook my confidence very much. It is true that Mrs. Besant has since then published a powerful defence which tends to show that Hodgson may have been deceived, but the subsequent book, “A Priestess of Isis,” which contains many of her own letters, leaves an unpleasant impression, and Sinnett’s posthumous work seems to show that he also had lost confidence. On the other hand, Colonel Olcott shows that the woman undoubtedly had real psychic powers, whatever their source. As to Spiritualism, it seems to have only interested her in its lower phenomenal aspect. Her books show extraordinary erudition and capacity for hard work, even if they represent the transfer of other people’s conclusions, as they frequently do. It would be unjust, however, to condemn the old wisdom simply because it was introduced by this extraordinary and volcanic person. We have also had in our branch of the occult many dishonest mediums, but we have hastened to unveil them where we could do so, and Theosophy will be in a stronger position when it shakes off Madame Blavatsky altogether. In any case it could never have met my needs for I ask for severe proof, and if I have to go back to unquestioning faith I should find myself in the fold from which I wandered.

My life had been a pleasant one with my steadily-increasing literary success, my practice, which was enough to keep me pleasantly occupied, and my sport, which I treat in a later chapter. Suddenly, however, there came a development which shook me out of my rut, and caused an absolute change in my life and plans. One daughter, Mary, had been born to us, our household was a happy one, and as I have never had personal ambitions, since the simple things of life have always been the most pleasant to me, it is possible that I should have remained in Southsea permanently but for this new episode in my life. It arose when in 1890 Koch announced that he had discovered a sure cure for consumption and that he would demonstrate it upon a certain date in Berlin.

A great urge came upon me suddenly that I should go to Berlin and see him do so. I could give no clear reason for this, but it was an irresistible impulse and I at once determined to go. Had I been a well-known doctor or a specialist in consumption it would have been more intelligible, but I had, as a matter of fact, no great interest in the more recent developments of my own profession, and a very strong belief that much of the so-called progress was illusory. However, at a few hours' notice I packed up a bag and started off alone upon this curious adventure. I had had an interchange of letters with Mr. W. T. Stead over some matter and I called upon him at the "Review of Reviews "office as I passed through London to ask him if he could give me an introduction to Koch or to Dr. Bergmann, who was to give the demonstration. Mr. Stead was very amiable to this big unknown provincial doctor, and he gave me a letter for the British Ambassador — Sir Edward Malet, if I remember right — and for Mr. Lowe, "The Times "correspondent. He also asked me to do a character sketch of Koch for him, adding that he would have Count Mattei as a feature of his magazine this month and Koch the next. I said, "Then you will have the greatest man of science and the greatest quack in Europe following each other." Stead glared at me angrily, for it seems that the Mattei treatment with its blue electricity and the rest of it was at that moment his particular fad. However, we parted amiably and all through his life we kept in distant touch, though we came into sharp collision at the time of the Boer war. He was a brave and honest man, and if he was impulsive at times it was only the sudden outflame of that fire which made him the great force for good that he was. In psychic knowledge he was a generation before his time, though his mode of expressing it may sometimes have been injudicious.

I went on to Berlin that night and found myself in the Continental express with a very handsome and courteous London physician bound upon the same errand as myself. We passed most of the night talking and I learned that his name was Malcolm Morris and that he also had been a provincial doctor, but that he had come to London and had made a considerable hit as a skin specialist in Harley Street. It was the beginning of a friendship which endured.

Having arrived at Berlin the great thing was to be present at Bergmann's demonstration, which was to be next day at twelve. I went to our Ambassador, was kept long waiting, had a chilly reception and was dismissed without help or consolation. Then I tried "The Times "correspondent, but he could not help me either. He and his amiable wife showed me every courtesy and invited me to dinner that night. Tickets were simply not to be had and neither money nor interest could procure them. I conceived the wild idea of getting one from Koch himself and made my way to his house. While there I had the curious experience of seeing his mail arrive — a large sack full of letters, which was emptied out on the floor of the hall, and exhibited every sort of stamp in Europe. It was a sign of all the sad broken lives and wearied hearts which were turning in hope to Berlin. Koch remained a veiled prophet, however, and would see neither me nor any one else. I was fairly at my wits' ends and could not imagine how I could attain my end.

Next day I went down to the great building where the address was to be given and managed by bribing the porter to get into the outer Hall. The huge audience was assembling in a room beyond. I tried further bribing that I might be slipped in, but the official became abusive. People streamed past me, but I was always the waiter at the gate. Finally every one had gone in and then a group of men came bustling across, Bergmann, bearded and formidable, in the van, with a tail of house surgeons and satellites behind him. I threw myself across his path. "I have come a thousand miles," said I. "May I not come in? "He halted and glared at me through his spectacles. "Perhaps you would like to take my place," he roared, working himself up into that strange folly of excitement which seems so strange in the heavy

German nature. “That is the only place left. Yes, yes, take my place by all means. My classes are filled with Englishmen already.” He fairly spat out the word “Englishmen “and I learned afterwards that some recent quarrel with Morel MacKenzie over the illness of the Emperor Frederick had greatly incensed him. I am glad to say that I kept my temper and my polite manner, which is always the best shield when one is met by brutal rudeness. “Not at all,” I said. “I would not intrude, if there was really no room.” He glared at me again, all beard and spectacles, and rushed on with his court all grinning at the snub which the presumptuous Englishman had received. One of them lingered, however — a kindly American. “That was bad behaviour,” said he. “See here! If you meet me at four this afternoon I will show you my full notes of the lecture, and I know the cases he is about to show, so we can see them together to-morrow.” Then he followed on.

So it came about that I attained my end after all, but in a roundabout way. I studied the lecture and the cases, and I had the temerity to disagree with every one and to come to the conclusion that the whole thing was experimental and premature. A wave of madness had seized the world and from all parts, notably from England, poor afflicted people were rushing to Berlin for a cure, some of them in such advanced stages of disease that they died in the train. I felt so sure of my ground and so strongly about it that I wrote a letter of warning to “The Daily Telegraph,” and I rather think that this letter was the very first which appeared upon the side of doubt and caution. I need not say that the event proved the truth of my forecast.

Two days later I was back in Southsea, but I came back a changed man. I had spread my wings and had felt something of the powers within me. Especially I had been influenced by a long talk with Malcolm Morris, in which he assured me that I was wasting my life in the provinces and had too small a field for my activities. He insisted that I should leave general practice and go to London. I answered that I was by no means sure of my literary success as yet, and that I could not so easily abandon the medical career which had cost my mother such sacrifices and myself so many years of study. He asked me if there was any special branch of the profession on which I could concentrate so as to get away from general practice. I said that of late years I had been interested in eye work and had amused myself by correcting refractions and ordering glasses in the Portsmouth Eye Hospital under Mr. Vernon Ford. “Well,” said Morris, “why not specialise upon the eye? Go to Vienna, put in six months’ work, come back and start in London. Thus you will have a nice clean life with plenty of leisure for your literature.” I came home with this great suggestion buzzing in my head and as my wife was quite willing and Mary, my little girl, was old enough now to be left with her grandmother, there seemed to be no obstacle in the way. There were no difficulties about disposing of the practice, for it was so small and so purely personal that it could not be sold to another and simply had to dissolve.

The Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society gave me a God-speed banquet. I have many pleasant and some comic reminiscences of this Society, of which I had been secretary for several years. We kept the sacred flame burning in the old city with our weekly papers and discussions during the long winters. It was there I learned to face an audience, which proved to be of the first importance for my life’s work. I was naturally of a very nervous, backward, self-distrustful disposition in such things and I have been told that the signal that I was about to join in the discussion was that the whole long bench on which I sat, with every one on it, used to shake with my emotion. But once up I learned to speak out, to conceal my trepidations, and to choose my phrases. I gave three papers, one on the Arctic seas, one on Carlyle and one on Gibbon. The former gave me a quite unmerited reputation as a sportsman, for I borrowed from a local taxidermist every bird and beast that he possessed which could conceivably find its way into the Arctic Circle. These I piled upon the lecture table, and the audience, concluding that I had shot them all, looked upon me with great respect. Next morning they were back with the taxidermist once more. We had some weird people and incidents at these debates. I remember one very learned discussion on fossils and the age of the strata, which was ended by a cadaverous major-general of the Evangelical persuasion who rose and said in a hollow voice that all this speculation was vain, and indeed incomprehensible, since we knew on an authority which could not possibly be questioned that the world was made exactly five thousand eight hundred and ninety years ago. This put the lid on the debate and we all crept home to bed.

My political work also caused me to learn to speak. I was what was called a Liberal-Unionist, that is, a man whose general position was Liberal, but who could not see his way to support Gladstone’s Irish Policy. Perhaps we were wrong. However, that was my view at the time. I had a dreadful first experience of platform speaking on a large scale, for at a huge meeting at the Amphitheatre the candidate, Sir William Crossman, was delayed, and to prevent a fiasco I was pushed on at a moment's notice to face an audience of 3,000 people. It was one of the tight corners of my life. I hardly knew myself what I said, but the Irish part of me came to my aid and supplied me with a torrent of more or less incoherent words and similes which roused the audience greatly, though it read to me afterwards more like a comic stump speech than a serious political effort. But it was what they wanted and they were mostly on their feet before I finished. I was amazed when I read it next day, and especially the last crowning sentence, which was: "England and Ireland are wedded together with the sapphire wedding ring of the sea, and what God has placed together let no man pluck asunder." It was not very good logic, but whether it was eloquence or rhodomontade I could not even now determine.

I was acting Secretary when Mr. Balfour came down to address a great meeting, and, as such, when the Hall was full, I waited on the curb outside to receive him. Presently his carriage drove up and out he stepped, tall, thin and aristocratic. There were two notorious partisans of the other side waiting for him and I warned them not to make trouble. However, the moment Balfour appeared one of them opened a huge mouth with the intention of emitting a howl of execration. But it never got out, for I clapped my hand pretty forcibly over the orifice while I held him by the neck with the other hand. His companion hit me on the head with a 6tick, and was promptly knocked down by one of my companions. Meanwhile Balfour got safely in, and we two secretaries followed, rather dishevelled after our adventure. I met Lord Balfour several times in after life but I never told him how I once had my hat smashed in his defence.

What with the Literary Society and the politicians I left a gap behind me in Portsmouth and so did my wife, who was universally popular for her amiable and generous character. It was a wrench to us to leave so many good friends. However, towards the end of 1890 the die was cast, and we closed the door of Bush Villa behind us for the last time. I had days of privation there, and days of growing success during the eight long years that I had spent in Portsmouth. Now it was with a sense of wonderful freedom and exhilarating adventure that we set forth upon the next phase of our lives.

CHAPTER X. THE GREAT BREAK

Vienna — A Specialist in Wimpole Street — The Great Decision — Norwood—" The Refugees " — Reported Death of Holmes — Psychic Research Society — Literary Circles in London — Henry Irving — A Great Blow—"Brigadier Gerard" — Davos — American Lecture Tour — Answer to Prayer.

WE set forth upon a bitter winter day at the close of 1890 with every chance of being snowed up on our long trek. We got through all right, however, and found ourselves in Vienna, arriving on a deadly cold night, with deep snow under foot and a cutting blizzard in the air. As we looked from the station the electric lights threw out the shining silver drift of snow-flakes against the absolute darkness of the sky. It was a gloomy, ominous reception, but half an hour afterwards when we were in the warm cosy crowded tobacco-laden restaurant attached to our hotel we took a more cheerful view of our surroundings.

We found a modest *pension* which was within our means, and we put in a very pleasant four months, during which I attended eye lectures at the Krankenhaus, but could certainly have learned far more in London, for even if one has a fair knowledge of conversational German it is very different from following accurately a rapid lecture filled with technical terms. No doubt "has studied in Vienna" sounds well in a specialist's record, but it is usually taken for granted that he has exhausted his own country before going abroad, which was by no means the case with me. Therefore, so far as eye work goes, my winter was wasted, nor can I trace any particular spiritual or intellectual advance. On the other hand I saw a little of gay Viennese society. I received kind and welcome hospitality from Brinsley Richards, "The Times "correspondent, and his wife, and I had some excellent skating. I also wrote one short book, "The Doings of Raffles Haw," not a very notable achievement, by which I was able to pay my current expenses without encroaching on the very few hundred pounds which were absolutely all that I had in the world. This money was invested on the advice of a friend, and as it was almost all lost — like so much more that I have earned — it is just as well that I was never driven back upon it.

With the spring my work at Vienna had finished, if it can be said to have ever begun, and we returned via Paris, putting in a few days there with Landolt, who was the most famous French oculist of his time. It was great to find ourselves back in London once more with the feeling that we were now on the real field of battle, where we must conquer or perish, for our boats were burned behind us. It is easy now to look back and think that the issue was clear, but it was by no means so at the time, for I had earned little, though my reputation was growing. It was only my own inward conviction of the permanent merits of “The White Company,” still appearing month by month in “Cornhill,” which sustained my confidence. I had come through so much in the early days at Southsea that nothing could alarm me personally, but I had a wife and child now, and the stern simplicity of life which was possible and even pleasant in early days was now no longer to be thought of.

We took rooms in Montague Place, and I went forth to search for some place where I could put up my plate as an oculist. I was aware that many of the big men do not find time to work out refractions, which in some cases of astigmatism take a long time to adjust when done by retinoscopy. I was capable in this work and liked it, so I hoped that some of it might drift my way. But to get it, it was clearly necessary that I should live among the big men so that the patient could be easily referred to me. I searched the doctors’ quarters and at last found suitable accommodation at 2 Devonshire Place, which is at the top of Wimpole Street and close to the classical Harley Street. There for £120 a year I got the use of a front room with part use of a waiting-room. I was soon to find that they were both waiting-rooms, and now I know that it was better so.

Every morning I walked from the lodgings at Montague Place, reached my consulting-room at ten and sat there until three or four, with never a ring to disturb my serenity. Could better conditions for reflection and work be found? It was ideal, and so long as I was thoroughly unsuccessful in my professional venture there was every chance of improvement in my literary prospects Therefore when I returned to the lodgings at tea-time I bore my little sheaves with me, the first-fruits of a considerable harvest.

A number of monthly magazines were coming out at that time, notable among which was “The Strand,” then as now under the editorship of Greenhough Smith. Considering these various journals with their disconnected stories it had struck me that a single character running through a series, if it only engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine. On the other hand, it had long seemed to me that the ordinary serial might be an impediment rather than a help to a magazine, since, sooner or later, one missed one number and afterwards it had lost all interest. Clearly the ideal compromise was a character which carried through, and yet instalments which were each complete in themselves, so that the purchaser was always sure that he could relish the whole contents of the magazine. I believe that I was the first to realise this and “The Strand Magazine “the first to put it into practice.

Looking round for my central character I felt that Sherlock Holmes, whom I had already handled in two little books, would easily lend himself to a succession of short stories. These I began in the long hours of waiting in my consulting-room. Greenhough Smith liked them from the first, and encouraged me to go ahead with them. My literary affairs had been taken up by that king of agents, A. P. Watt, who relieved me of all the hateful bargaining, and handled things so well that any immediate anxiety for money soon disappeared. It was as well, for not one single patient had ever crossed the threshold of my room.

I was now once more at a crossroads of my life, and Providence, which I recognise at every step, made me realise it in a very energetic and unpleasant way. I was starting off for my usual trudge one morning from our lodgings when icy shivers passed over me, and I only got back in time to avoid a total collapse. It was a virulent attack of influenza, at a time when influenza was in its deadly prime. Only three years before my dear sister Annette, after spending her whole life on the family needs, had died of it at Lisbon at the very moment when my success would have enabled me to recall her from her long servitude. Now it was my turn, and I very nearly followed her. I can remember no pain or extreme discomfort, and no psychic experiences, but for a week I was in great danger, and then found myself as weak as a child and as emotional, but with a mind as clear as crystal. It was then, as I surveyed my own life, that I saw how foolish I was to waste my literary earnings in keeping up an oculist’s room in Wimpole Street, and I determined with a wild rush of joy to cut the painter and to trust for ever to my power of writing. I remember in my delight taking the handkerchief which lay upon the coverlet in my enfeebled hand, and tossing it up to the ceiling in my exultation.

I should at last be my own master. No longer would I have to conform to professional dress or try to please any one else. I would be free to live how I liked and where I liked. It was one of the great moments of exultation of my life. The date was in August, 1891.

Presently I was about, hobbling on a stick and reflecting that if I lived to be eighty I knew already exactly how it would feel. I haunted house-agents, got lists of suburban villas, and spent some weeks, as my strength returned, in searching for a new home. Finally I found a suitable house, modest but comfortable, isolated and yet one of a row. It was 12 Tennison Road, South Norwood. There we settled down, and there I made my first effort to live entirely by my pen. It soon became evident that I had been playing the game well within my powers and that I should have no difficulty in providing a sufficient income. It seemed as if I had settled into a life which might be continuous, and I little foresaw that an unexpected blow was about to fall upon us, and that we were not at the end, but really at the beginning, of our wanderings.

I could not know this, however, and I settled down with a stout heart to do some literary work worthy of the name. The difficulty of the Holmes work was that every story really needed as clear-cut and original a plot as a longish book would do. One cannot without effort spin plots at such a rate. They are apt to become thin or to break. I was determined, now that I had no longer the excuse of absolute pecuniary pressure, never again to write anything which was not as good as I could possibly make it, and therefore I would not write a Holmes story without a worthy plot and without a problem which interested my own mind, for that is the first requisite before you can interest any one else. If I have been able to sustain this character for a long time and if the public find, as they will find, that the last story is as good as the first, it is entirely due to the fact that I never, or hardly ever, forced a story. Some have thought there was a falling off in the stories, and the criticism was neatly expressed by a Cornish boatman who said to me, “I think, sir, when Holmes fell over that cliff, he may not have killed himself, but all the same he was never quite the same man afterwards.” I think, however, that if the reader began the series backwards, so that he brought a fresh mind to the last stories, he would agree with me that, though the general average may not be conspicuously high, still the last one is as good as the first.

I was weary, however, of inventing plots and I set myself now to do some work which would certainly be less remunerative but would be more ambitious from a literary point of view. I had long been attracted by the epoch of Louis XIV and by those Huguenots who were the French equivalents of our Puritans. I had a good knowledge of the memoirs of that date, and many notes already prepared, so that it did not take me long to write “The Refugees.” It has stood the acid test of time very well, so I may say that it was a success. Soon after its appearance it was translated into French, and my dear old mother, herself a great French scholar, had the joy when she visited Fontainebleau to hear the official guide tell the drove of tourists that if they really wanted to know about the Court of the great monarch, they would find the clearest and most accurate account in an Englishman’s book, “The Refugees.” I expect the guide would have been considerably astonished had he then and there been kissed by an elderly English lady, but it was an experience which he must have narrowly missed. I used in this book, also, a great deal which was drawn from Parkman, that great but neglected historian, who was in my opinion the greatest serious writer that America has produced.

There was an amusing episode connected with “The Refugees,” when it was read aloud in some strict Irish convent, the innocent Reverend Mother having mistaken my name and imagined that I was a canon, and therefore of course a holy man. I am told that the reading was a tremendous success and that the good sisters rejoiced that the mistake was not found out until the story was completed. My first name has several times led to mistakes, as when, at a big dinner at Chicago, I was asked to say Grace, as being the only ecclesiastic present. I remember that at the same dinner one of the speakers remarked that it was a most sinister fact that though I was a doctor no *living* patient of mine had ever yet been seen.

During this Norwood interval, I was certainly working hard, for besides “The Refugees” I wrote “The Great Shadow,” a booklet which I should put near the front of my work for merit, and two other little books on a very inferior plane—” The Parasite “and “Beyond the City.” The latter was of a domestic type unusual for me. It was pirated in New York just before the New Copyright Act came into force, and the rascal publisher thinking that a portrait — any sort of portrait — of the author would look well upon the cover, and being quite ignorant of my identity, put a very pretty and over-dressed young woman as my presentment. I still preserve a copy of this most flattering representation. All these books had some decent success, though none of it was remarkable. It was still the Sherlock Holmes stories for which the public clamoured, and these from time to time I endeavoured to supply. At last, after I had done two series of them I saw that I was in danger of having my hand forced, and of being entirely identified with what I regarded as a lower stratum of literary achievement. Therefore as a sign of my resolution I determined to end the life of my hero. The idea was in my mind when I went with my wife for a short holiday in Switzerland, in the course of which we saw there the wonderful falls of Reichenbach, a terrible place, and one that I thought would make a worthy tomb for poor Sherlock, even if I buried my banking account along with him. So there I laid him, fully determined that he should stay there — as indeed for some years he did. I was amazed at the concern expressed by the public. They say that a man is never properly appreciated until he is dead, and the general protest against my summary execution of Holmes taught me how many and how numerous were his friends. “You Brute “was the beginning of the letter of remonstrance which one lady sent me, and I expect she spoke for others besides herself. I heard of many who wept. I fear I was utterly callous myself, and only glad to have a chance of opening out into new fields of imagination, for the temptation of high prices made it difficult to get one’s thoughts away from Holmes.

That Sherlock Holmes was anything but mythical to many is shown by the fact that I have had many letters addressed to him with requests that I forward them. Watson has also had a number of letters in which he has been asked for the address or for the autograph of his more brilliant confrère. A press-cutting agency wrote to Watson asking whether Holmes would not wish to subscribe. When Holmes retired several elderly ladies were ready to keep house for him and one sought to ingratiate herself by assuring me that she knew all about bee-keeping and could “segregate the queen.” I had considerable offers also for Holmes if he would examine and solve various family mysteries. Once the offer — from Poland — was that I should myself go, and my reward was practically left to my own judgment. I had judgment enough, however, to avoid it altogether.

I have often been asked whether I had myself the qualities which I depicted, or whether I was merely the Watson that I look. Of course I am well aware that it is one thing to grapple with a practical problem and quite another thing when you are allowed to solve it under your own conditions. I have no delusions about that. At the same time a man cannot spin a character out of his own inner consciousness and make it really life-like unless he has some possibilities of that character within him — which is a dangerous admission for one who has drawn so many villains as I. In my poem “The Inner Room,” describing our multiplex personality, I say:

“There are others who are sitting, Grim as doom, In the dim ill-boding shadow Of my room. Darkling figures, stern or quaint, Now a savage, now a saint, Showing fitfully and faint In the gloom.”

Among those figures there may perhaps be an astute detective also, but I find that in real life in order to find him I have to inhibit all the others and get into a mood when there is no one in the room but he. Then I get results and have several times solved problems by Holmes’ methods after the police have been baffled. Yet I must admit that in ordinary life I am by no means observant and that I have to throw myself into an artificial frame of mind before I can weigh evidence and anticipate the sequence of events.

CHAPTER XI. SIDELIGHTS ON SHERLOCK HOLMES

“The Speckled Band” — Barrie’s Parody on Holmes — Holmes on the Films — Methods of Construction — Problems — Curious Letters — Some Personal Cases — Strange Happenings.

I MAY as well interrupt my narrative here in order to say what may interest my readers about my most notorious character.

The impression that Holmes was a real person of flesh and blood may have been intensified by his frequent appearance upon the stage. After the withdrawal of my dramatization of “Rodney Stone “from a theatre upon which I held a six months’ lease, I determined to play a bold and energetic game, for an empty theatre spells ruin. When I saw the course that things were taking I shut myself up and devoted my whole mind to making a sensational Sherlock Holmes drama. I wrote it in a week and called it “The Speckled Band “after the short story of that name. I do not think that I exaggerate if I say that within a fortnight of the one play shutting down I had a company working upon the rehearsals of a second one, which had been written in the interval. It was a considerable success. Lyn Harding, as the half epileptic and wholly formidable Doctor Grimesby Rylott, was most masterful, while Saintsbury as Sherlock Holmes was also very good. Before the end of the run I had cleared off all that I had lost upon the other play, and I had created a permanent property of some value. It became a stock piece and is even now touring the country. We had a fine rock boa to play the title-role, a snake which was the pride of my heart, so one can imagine my disgust when I saw that one critic ended his disparaging review by the words “The crisis of the play was produced by the appearance of a palpably artificial serpent.” I was inclined to offer him a goodly sum if he would undertake to go to bed with it. We had several snakes at different times, but they were none of them born actors and they were all inclined either to hang down from the hole in the wall like inanimate bell-pulls, or else to turn back through the hole and get even with the stage carpenter who pinched their tails in order to make them more lively. Finally we used artificial snakes, and every one, including the stage carpenter, agreed that it was more satisfactory.

This was the second Sherlock Holmes play. I should have spoken about the first, which was produced very much earlier, in fact at the time of the African war. It was written and most wonderfully acted by William Gillette, the famous American. Since he used my characters and to some extent my plots, he naturally gave me a share in the undertaking, which proved to be very successful. “May I marry Holmes?” was one cable which I received from him when in the throes of composition. “You may marry or murder or do what you like with him,” was my heartless reply. I was charmed both with the play, the acting and the pecuniary result. I think that every man with a drop of artistic blood in his veins would agree that the latter consideration, though very welcome when it does arrive, is still the last of which he thinks.

Sir James Barrie paid his respects to Sherlock Holmes in a rollicking parody. It was really a gay gesture of resignation over the failure which we had encountered with a comic opera for which he undertook to write the libretto. I collaborated with him on this, but in spite of our joint efforts, the piece fell flat. Whereupon Barrie sent me a parody on Holmes, written on the fly leaves of one of his books. It ran thus: —

The Adventure of the Two Collaborators In bringing to a close the adventures of my friend Sherlock Holmes I am perforce reminded that he never, save on the occasion which, as you will now hear, brought his singular career to an end, consented to act in any mystery which was concerned with persons who made a livelihood by their pen. “I am not particular about the people I mix among for business purposes,” he would say, “but at literary characters I draw the line.”

We were in our rooms in Baker Street one evening. I was (I remember) by the centre table writing out “The Adventure of the Man without a Cork Leg “(which had so puzzled the Royal Society and all the other scientific bodies of Europe), and Holmes was amusing himself with a little revolver practice. It was his custom of a summer evening to fire round my head, just shaving my face, until he had made a photograph of me on the opposite wall, and it is a slight proof of his skill that many of these portraits in pistol shots are considered admirable likenesses.

I happened to look out of the window, and perceiving two gentlemen advancing rapidly along Baker Street asked him who they were. He immediately lit his pipe, and, twisting himself on a chair into the figure 8, replied:

“They are two collaborators in comic opera, and their play has not been a triumph.”

I sprang from my chair to the ceiling in amazement, and he then explained:

“My dear Watson, they are obviously men who follow some low calling. That much even you should be able to read in their faces. Those little pieces of blue paper which they fling angrily from them are Durrant’s Press Notices. Of these they have obviously hundreds about their person (see how their pockets bulge). They would not dance on them if they were pleasant reading.”

I again sprang to the ceiling (which is much dented), and shouted: “Amazing! but they may be mere authors.”

“No,” said Holmes, “for mere authors only get one press notice a week. Only criminals, dramatists and actors get them by the hundred.”

“Then they may be actors.”

“No, actors would come in a carriage.”

“Can you tell me anything else about them?”

“A great deal. From the mud on the boots of the tall one I perceive that he comes from South Norwood. The other is as obviously a Scotch author.”

“How can you tell that?”

“He is carrying in his pocket a book called (I clearly see) ‘Auld Licht Something.’ Would any one but the author be likely to carry about a book with such a title?”

I had to confess that this was improbable.

It was now evident that the two men (if such they can be called) were seeking our lodgings. I have said (often) that my friend Holmes seldom gave way to emotion of any kind, but he now turned livid with passion. Presently this gave place to a strange look of triumph.

“Watson,” he said, “that big fellow has for years taken the credit for my most remarkable doings, but at last I have him — at last!”

Up I went to the ceiling, and when I returned the strangers were in the room.

“I perceive, gentlemen,” said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, “that you are at present afflicted by an extraordinary novelty.”

The handsomer of our visitors asked in amazement how he knew this, but the big one only scowled.

“You forget that you wear a ring on your fourth finger,” replied Mr. Holmes calmly.

I was about to jump to the ceiling when the big brute interposed.

“That Tommy-rot is all very well for the public, Holmes,” said he, “but you can drop it before me. And, Watson, if you go up to the ceiling again I shall make you stay there.”

Here I observed a curious phenomenon. My friend Sherlock Holmes *shrank.* He became small before my eyes. I looked longingly at the ceiling, but dared not.

“Let us cut the first four pages,” said the big man, “and proceed to business. I want to know why—”

“Allow me,” said Mr. Holmes, with some of his old courage. “You want to know why the public does not go to your opera.”

“Exactly,” said the other ironically, “as you perceive by my shirt stud.” He added more gravely, “And as you can only find out in one way I must insist on your witnessing an entire performance of the piece.”

It was an anxious moment for me. I shuddered, for I knew that if Holmes went I should have to go with him. But my friend had a heart of gold. “Never,” he cried fiercely, “I will do anything for you save that.”

“Your continued existence depends on it,” said the big man menacingly.

“I would rather melt into air,” replied Holmes, proudly taking another chair. “But I can tell you why the public don’t go to your piece without sitting the thing out myself.”

“Why?”

“Because,” replied Holmes calmly, “they prefer to stay away.”

A dead silence followed that extraordinary remark. For a moment the two intruders gazed with awe upon the man who had unravelled their mystery so wonderfully. Then drawing their knives —

Holmes grew less and less, until nothing was left save a ring of smoke which slowly circled to the ceiling.

The last words of great men are often noteworthy. These were the last words of Sherlock Holmes: “Fool, fool! I have kept you in luxury for years. By my help you have ridden extensively in cabs, where no author was ever seen before. *Henceforth you will ride in buses!*”

The brute sunk into a chair aghast.

The other author did not turn a hair.

To A. Conan Doyle, from his friend J. M. Barrie.

This parody, the best of all the numerous parodies, may be taken as an example not only of the author's wit but of his debonair courage, for it was written immediately after our joint failure which at the moment was a bitter thought for both of us. There is indeed nothing more miserable than a theatrical failure, for you feel how many others who have backed you have been affected by it. It was, I am glad to say, my only experience of it, and I have no doubt that Barrie could say the same.

Before I leave the subject of the many impersonations of Holmes I may say that all of them, and all the drawings, are very unlike my own original idea of the man. I saw him as very tall—" over 6 feet, but so excessively lean that he seemed considerably taller," said "A Study in Scarlet." He had, as I imagined him, a thin razor-like face, with a great hawks-bill of a nose, and two small eyes, set close I together on either side of it. Such was my conception. It chanced, however, that poor Sidney Paget who, before his premature death, drew all the original pictures, had a younger brother whose name, I think, I was Walter, who served him as a model. The handsome Walter took the place of the more powerful but uglier Sherlock, and perhaps from the point of view of my lady readers it was as well. The stage has I followed the type set up by the pictures.

Films of course were unknown when the stories appeared, and when these rights were finally discussed and a small sum offered for them by a French Company it seemed treasure trove and I was very glad to accept. Afterwards I had to buy them back again at exactly ten times what I had received, so the deal was a disastrous one. But now they have been done; by the Stoll Company with Eille Norwood as Holmes, and it was worth all the expense to get so fine a production. Norwood has since played the part on the; stage and won the approbation of the London public. | He has that rare quality which can only be described as glamour, which compels you to watch an actor eagerly even when he is doing nothing. He has the brooding eye which excites expectation and he has also a quite unrivalled power of disguise. My only criticism of the films is that they introduce telephones, motor cars and other luxuries of which the Victorian Holmes never dreamed.

People have often asked me whether I knew the end of a Holmes story before I started it. Of course I do. One could not possibly steer a course if one did not know one’s destination. The first thing is to get your idea. Having got that key idea one’s next task is to conceal it and lay emphasis upon everything which can make for a different explanation. Holmes, however, can see all the fallacies of the alternatives, and arrives more or less dramatically at the true solution by steps which he can describe and justify. He shows his powers by what the South Americans now call “Sherlockholmitos,” which means clever little deductions, which often have nothing to do with the matter in hand, but impress the reader with a general sense of power. The same effect is gained by his offhand allusion to other cases. Heaven knows how many titles I have thrown about in a casual way, and how many readers have begged me to satisfy their curiosity as to “Rigoletto and his abominable wife,” “The Adventure of the Tired Captain,” or “The Curious Experience of the Patterson Family in the Island of Uffa.” Once or twice, as in “The Adventure of the Second Stain,” which in my judgment is one of the neatest of the stories, I did actually use the title years before I wrote a story to correspond.

There are some questions concerned with particular stories which turn up periodically from every quarter of the globe. In “The Adventure of the Priory School “Holmes remarks in his offhand way that by looking at a bicycle track on a damp moor one can say which way it was heading. I had so many remonstrances upon this point, varying from pity to anger, that I took out my bicycle and tried. I had imagined that the observations of the way in which the track of the hind wheel overlaid the track of the front one when the machine was not running dead straight would show the direction. I found that my correspondents were right and I was wrong, for this would be the same whichever way the cycle was moving. On the other hand the real solution was much simpler, for on an undulating moor the wheels make a much deeper impression uphill and a more shallow one downhill, so Holmes was justified of his wisdom after all.

Sometimes I have got upon dangerous ground where I have taken risks through my own want of knowledge of the correct atmosphere. I have, for example, never been a racing man, and yet I ventured to write “Silver Blaze,” in which the mystery depends upon the laws of training and racing. The story is all right, and Holmes may have been at the top of his form, but my ignorance cries aloud to heaven. I read an excellent and very damaging criticism of the story in some sporting paper, written clearly by a man who *did* know, in which he explained the exact penalties which would have come upon every one concerned if they had acted as I described. Half would have been in jail and the other half warned off the turf for ever. However, I have never been nervous about details, and one must be masterful sometimes. When an alarmed Editor wrote to me once: “There is no second line of rails at that point,” I answered, “I make one.” On the other hand, there are cases where accuracy is essential.

I do not wish to be ungrateful to Holmes, who has been a good friend to me in many ways. If I have sometimes been inclined to weary of him it is because his character admits of no light or shade. He is a calculating machine, and anything you add to that simply weakens the effect. Thus the variety of the stories must depend upon the romance and compact handling of the plots. I would say a word for Watson also, who in the course of seven volumes never shows one gleam of humour or makes one single joke. To make a real character one must sacrifice everything to consistency and remember Goldsmith’s criticism of Johnson that “he would make the little fishes talk like whales.”

I do not think that I ever realised what a living actual personality Holmes had become to the more guileless readers, until I heard of the very pleasing story of the char-à-banc of French schoolboys who, when asked what they wanted to see first in London, replied unanimously that they wanted to see Mr. Holmes’ lodgings in Baker Street. Many have asked me which house it is, but that is a point which for excellent reasons I will not decide.

There are certain Sherlock Holmes stories, apocryphal I need not say, which go round and round the press and turn up at fixed intervals with the regularity of a comet.

One is the story of the cabman who is supposed to have taken me to an hotel in Paris. “Dr. Doyle,” he cried, gazing at me fixedly, “I perceive from your appearance that you have been recently at Constantinople. I have reason to think also that you have been at Buda, and I perceive some indication that you were not far from Milan.”

“Wonderful. Five francs for the secret of how you did it?”

“I looked at the labels pasted on your trunk,” said the astute cabby.

Another perennial is of the woman who is said to have consulted Sherlock. “I am greatly puzzled, sir. In one week I have lost a motor horn, a brush, a box of golf balls, a dictionary and a bootjack. Can you explain it?”

“Nothing simpler, madame,” said Sherlock. “It is clear that your neighbour keeps a goat.”

There was a third about how Sherlock entered heaven, and by virtue of his power of observation at once greeted Adam, but the point is perhaps too anatomical for further discussion.

I suppose that every author receives a good many curious letters. Certainly I have done so. Quite a number of these have been from Russia. When they have been in the vernacular I have been compelled to take them as read, but when they have been in English they have been among the most curious in my collection.

There was one young lady who began all her epistles with the words "Good Lord." Another had a large amount of guile underlying her simplicity. Writing from Warsaw, she stated that she had been bedridden for two years, and that my novels had been her only, etc., etc. So touched was I by this flattering statement that I at once prepared an autographed parcel of them to complete the fair invalid's collection. By good luck, however, I met a brother author on the same day to whom I recounted the touching incident. With a cynical smile, he drew an identical letter from his pocket.

His novels had also been for two years her only, etc., etc. I do not know how many more the lady had written to; but if, as I imagine, her correspondence had extended to several countries, she must have amassed a rather interesting library.

The young Russian's habit of addressing me as "Good Lord "had an even stranger parallel at home which links it up with the subject of this article. Shortly after I received a knighthood, I had a bill from a tradesman which was quite correct and businesslike in every detail save that it was made out to Sir Sherlock Holmes. I hope that I can stand a joke as well as my neighbours, but this particular piece of humour seemed rather misapplied and I wrote sharply upon the subject.

In response to my letter there arrived at my hotel a very repentant clerk, who expressed his sorrow at the incident, but kept on repeating the phrase, "I assure you, sir, that it was bona fide."

"What do you mean by bona fide?" I asked.

"Well, sir," he replied, "my mates in the shop told me that you had been knighted, and that when a man was knighted he changed his name, and that you had taken that one."

I need not say that my annoyance vanished, and that I laughed as heartily as his pals were probably doing round the corner.

A few of the problems which have come my way have been very similar to some which I had invented for the exhibition of the reasoning of Mr. Holmes. I might perhaps quote one in which that gentleman’s method of thought was copied with complete success. The case was as follows: A gentleman had disappeared. He had drawn a bank balance of £40 which was known to be on him. It was feared that he had been murdered for the sake of the money. He had last been heard of stopping at a large hotel in London, having come from the country that day. In the evening he went to a music-hall performance, came out of it about ten o’clock, returned to his hotel, changed his evening clothes, which were found in his room next day, and disappeared utterly. No one saw him leave the hotel, but a man occupying a neighbouring room declared that he had heard him moving during the night. A week had elapsed at the time that I was consulted, but the police had discovered nothing. Where was the man?

These were the whole of the facts as communicated to me by his relatives in the country. Endeavouring to see the matter through the eyes of Mr. Holmes, I answered by return mail that he was evidently either in Glasgow or in Edinburgh. It proved later that he had, as a fact, gone to Edinburgh, though in the week that had passed he had moved to another part of Scotland.

There I should leave the matter, for, as Dr. Watson has often shown, a solution explained is a mystery spoiled. At this stage the reader can lay down the book and show how simple it all is by working out the problem for himself. He has all the data which were ever given to me. For the sake of those, however, who have no turn for such conundrums, I will try to indicate the links which make the chain. The one advantage which I possessed was that I was familiar with the routine of London hotels — though I fancy it differs little from that of hotels elsewhere.

The first thing was to look at the facts and separate what was certain from what was conjecture. It was *all* certain except the statement of the person who heard the missing man in the night. How could he tell such a sound from any other sound in a large hotel? That point could be disregarded, if it traversed the general conclusions.

The first clear deduction was that the man had meant to disappear. Why else should he draw all his money? He had got out of the hotel during the night. But there is a night porter in all hotels, and it is impossible to get out without his knowledge when the door is once shut. The door is shut after the theatre-goers return — say at twelve o’clock. Therefore, the man left the hotel before twelve o’clock. He had come from the music-hall at ten, had changed his clothes, and had departed with his bag. No one had seen him do so. The inference is that he had done it at the moment when the hall was full of the returning guests, which is from eleven to eleven-thirty. After that hour, even if the door were still open, there are few people coming and going so that he with his bag would certainly have been seen.

Having got so far upon firm ground, we now ask ourselves why a man who desires to hide himself should go out at such an hour. If he intended to conceal himself in London he need never have gone to the hotel at all. Clearly then he was going to catch a train | which would carry him away. But a man who is deposited by a train in any provincial station during the j night is likely to be noticed, and he might be sure that when the alarm was raised and his description given, some guard or porter would remember him j Therefore, his destination would be some large town which he would reach as a terminus where all his fellow; passengers would disembark and where he would lose himself in the crowd. When one turns up the time table and sees that the great Scotch expresses bound for Edinburgh and Glasgow start about midnight, the goal is reached. As for his dress-suit, the fact that he abandoned it proved that he intended to adopt a line of life where there were no social amenities. This deduction also proved to be correct.

I quote such a case in order to show that the general lines of reasoning advocated by Holmes have a real practical application to life. In another case, where a girl had become engaged to a young foreigner who suddenly disappeared, I was able, by a similar process of deduction, to show her very clearly both whither he had gone and how unworthy he was of her affections.

On the other hand, these semi-scientific methods are occasionally laboured and slow as compared with the results of the rough-and-ready, practical man. Lest I should seem to have been throwing bouquets either to myself or to Mr. Holmes, let me state that on the occasion of a burglary of the village inn, within a stone-throw of my house, the village constable, with no theories at all, had seized the culprit while I had got no further than that he was a left-handed man with nails in his boots.

The unusual or dramatic effects which lead to the invocation of Mr. Holmes in fiction are, of course, great aids to him in reaching a conclusion. It is the case where there is nothing to get hold of which is the deadly one. I heard of such a one in America which would certainly have presented a formidable problem. A gentleman of blameless life starting off for a Sunday evening walk with his family, suddenly observed that he had forgotten something. He went back into the house, the door of which was still open, and he left his people waiting for him outside. He never reappeared, and from that day to this there has been no clue as to what befell him. This was certainly one of the strangest cases of which I have ever heard in real life.

Another very singular case came within my own observation. It was sent to me by an eminent London publisher. This gentleman had in his employment a head of department whose name we shall take as Musgrave. He was a hard-working person, with no special feature in his character. Mr. Musgrave died, and several years after his death a letter was received addressed to him, in the care of his employers. It bore the postmark of a tourist resort in the west of Canada, and had the note "Conflfilms" upon the outside of the envelope, with the words "Report Sy" in one corner.

The publishers naturally opened the envelope as they had no note of the dead man's relatives. Inside were two blank sheets of paper. The letter, I may add, was registered. The publisher, being unable to make anything of this, sent it on to me, and I submitted the blank sheets to every possible chemical and heat test, with no result whatever. Beyond the fact that the writing appeared to be that of a woman there is nothing to add to this account. The matter was, and remains, an insoluble mystery. How the correspondent could have something so secret to say to Mr. Musgrave and yet not be aware that this person had been dead for several years is very hard to understand — or why blank sheets should be so carefully registered through the mail. I may add that I did not trust the sheets to my own chemical tests, but had the best expert advice Without getting any result. Considered as a case it was a failure — and a very tantalising one.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes has always been a fair mark for practical jokers, and I have had numerous bogus cases of various degrees of ingenuity, marked cards, mysterious warnings, cypher messages, and other curious communications. It is astonishing the amount of trouble which some people will take with no object save a mystification. Upon one occasion, as I was entering the hall to take part in an amateur billiard competition, I was handed by the attendant a small packet which had been left for me. Upon opening it I found a piece of ordinary green chalk such as is used in billiards. I was amused by the incident, and I put the chalk into my waistcoat pocket and used it during the game. Afterward, I continued to use it until one day, some months later, as I rubbed the tip of my cue the face of the chalk crumbled in, and I found it was hollow. From the recess thus exposed I drew out a small slip of paper with the words “From Arsene Lupin to Sherlock Holmes.”

Imagine the state of mind of the joker who took such trouble to accomplish such a result.

One of the mysteries submitted to Mr. Holmes was rather upon the psychic plane and therefore beyond his powers. The facts as alleged are most remarkable, though I have no proof of their truth save that the lady wrote earnestly and gave both her name and address. The person, whom we will call Mrs. Seagrave, had been given a curious second-hand ring, snake-shaped, and dull gold. This she took from her finger at night. One night she slept with it on and had a fearsome dream in which she seemed to be pushing off some furious creature which fastened its teeth into her arm. On awakening, the pain in the arm continued, and next day the imprint of a double set of teeth appeared upon the arm, with one tooth of the lower jaw missing. The marks were in the shape of blue-black bruises which had not broken the skin.

“I do not know,” says my correspondent, “what made me think the ring had anything to do with the matter, but I took a dislike to the thing and did not wear it for some months, when, being on a visit, I took to wearing it again.” To make a long story short, the same thing happened, and the lady settled the matter forever by dropping her ring into the hottest corner of the kitchen range. This curious story, which I believe to be genuine, may not be as supernatural as it seems. It is well known that in some subjects a strong mental impression does produce a physical effect. Thus a very vivid nightmare dream with the impression of a bite might conceivably produce the mark of a bite. Such cases are well attested in medical annals. The second incident would, of course, arise by unconscious suggestion from the first. None the less, it is a very interesting little problem, whether psychic or material.

Buried treasures are naturally among the problems which have come to Mr. Holmes. One genuine case was accompanied by a diagram here reproduced. It refers to an Indiaman which was wrecked upon the South

African coast in the year 1782. If I were a younger man, I should be seriously inclined to go personally and look into the matter.

The ship contained a remarkable treasure, including, I believe, the old crown regalia of Delhi. It is surmised that they buried these near the coast, and that this chart is a note of the spot. Each Indiaman in those days had its own semaphore code, and it is conjectured that the three marks upon the left are signals from a three-armed semaphore. Some record of their meaning might perhaps even now be found in the old papers of the India Office. The circle upon the right gives the compass bearings. The larger semi-circle may be the curved edge of a reef or of a rock. The figures above are the indications how to reach the X which marks the treasure. Possibly they may give the bearings as 186 feet from the 4 upon the semi-circle. The scene of the wreck is a lonely part of the country, but I shall be surprised if sooner or later, some one does not seriously set to work to solve the mystery — indeed at the present moment (1923) there is a small company working to that end.

I must now apologise for this digressive chapter and return to the orderly sequence of my career.

CHAPTER XII. NORWOOD AND SWITZERLAND

Psychic Leanings — Young Writers — Story of Waterloo — A Cruel Blow — American Lecturing in 1894 — Major Pond — First Lecture — Anti-British Wave — A Prophecy.

THE chief event of our Norwood life was the birth of my son Kingsley, who lived to play a man’s part in the Great War, and who died shortly after its conclusion. My own life was so busy that I had little time for religious development, but my thoughts still ran much upon psychic matters, and it was at this time that I joined the Psychical Research Society, of which I am now one of the senior members. I had few psychic experiences myself, and my material philosophy, as expressed in the “Stark Munro Letters,” which were written just at the end of the Norwood period, was so strong that it did not easily crumble. Yet as year by year I read the wonderful literature of psychic science and experience, I became more and more impressed by the strength of the Spiritualist position and by the levity and want of all dignity and accurate knowledge which characterized the attitude of its opponents. The religious side of the matter had not yet struck me, but I felt more and more that the case for the phenomena vouched for by such men as Sir William Crookes, Barrett, Russell Wallace, Victor Hugo and Zôllner was so strong that I could see no answer to their exact record of observations. “It is incredible but it is true,” said Crookes, and the aphorism seemed to exactly express my dawning convictions. I had a weekly impulse from the psychic paper, “Light,” which has, I maintain, dining its long career and up to the present day, presented as much brain to the square inch as any journal published in these islands.

My pleasant recollection of those days from 1880 to 1893 lay in my first introduction, as a more or less rising author, to the literary life of London. It is extraordinary to remember that at that time there was a general jeremiad in the London press about the extinction of English literature, and the assumed fact that there were no rising authors to take the place of those who were gone. The real fact is that there was a most amazing crop, all coming up simultaneously, presenting perhaps no Dickens or Thackeray, but none the less so numerous and many sided and with so high an average of achievement that I think they would match for varied excellence any similar harvest in our literary history. It was during the years roughly from 1888 to 1893 that Rudyard Kipling, James Stephen Phillips, Watson, Grant Allen, Wells, Barrie, Bernard Shaw, H. A. Jones, Pinero, Marie Corelli, Stanley Weyman, Anthony Hope, Hall Caine, and a whole list of others were winning their spurs. Many of these men I met in the full flush of their youth and their powers. Of some of them I will speak more fully later. As to the old school they were certainly somewhat of a declension, and the newcomers found no very serious opposition in gaining a hearing. Wilkie Collins, Trollope, George Eliot and Charles Reade had passed. I have always been a very great admirer of the last, who was really a great innovator as well as a most dramatic writer, for it was he who first introduced realism and founded his stories upon carefully arranged documents. He was the literary father of Zola. George Eliot has never appealed to me much, for I like my effects in a less leisurely fashion; but Trollope also I consider to be a very original writer, though I fancy he traces his ancestry through Jane Austen. No writer is ever absolutely original. He always joins at some point on to that old tree of which he is a branch.

Of the literary men whom I met at that time my most vivid recollections are of the group who centred round the new magazine, “The Idler,” which had been started by Jerome K. Jerome, who had deservedly shot into fame with his splendidly humorous “Three Men in a Boat.” It has all the exuberance and joy of life which youth brings with it, and even now if I have ever time to be at all sad, which is seldom enough, I can laugh away the shadows when I open that book. Jerome is a man who, like most humorists, has a very serious side to his character, as all who have seen “The Third Floor Back “will acknowledge, but he was inclined to be hotheaded and intolerant in political matters, from pure earnestness of purpose, which alienated some of his friends. He was associated in the editorship of “The Idler “with Robert Barr, a volcanic Anglo or rather Scot-American, with a violent manner, a wealth of strong adjectives, and one of the kindest of natures underneath it all. He was one of the best raconteurs I have ever known, and as a writer I have always felt that he did not quite come into his own. George Burgin, like some quaint gentle character from Dickens, was the sub-editor, and Barrie, Zangwill, and many other rising men were among the contributors who met periodically at dinner. I was not unfaithful to "The Strand," but there were some contributions which they did not need, and with these I established my connection with "The Idler." It was at this time and in this way that I met James Barrie, of whom I shall have more to say when I come to that chapter which treats of some eminent and interesting men whom I have known.

Two isolated facts stand out in my memory during that time at Norwood. One was that there seemed to be an imminent danger of war with France and that I applied for the Mediterranean war-correspondentship of the "Central News," guessing that the chief centre of activity and interest would be in that quarter. I got the appointment and was all ready to start, but fortunately the crisis passed. The second was my first venture in the drama. I had written a short story called "A Straggler of '15," which had seemed to me to be a moving picture of an old soldier and his ways. My own eyes were moist as I wrote it and that is the surest way to moisten those of others. I now turned this into a one-act play, and, greatly daring, I sent it to Henry Irving, of whose genius I had been a fervent admirer ever since those Edinburgh days when I had paid my sixpence for the gallery night after night to see him in "Hamlet "and "The Lyons Mail." To my great delight I had a pleasing note from Bram Stoker, the great man's secretary, offering me £100 for the copyright. It was a good bargain for him, for it is not too much to say that Corporal Gregory Brewster became one of his stock parts and it had the enormous advantage that the older he got the more naturally he played it. The house laughed and sobbed, exactly as I had done when I wrote it. Several critics went out of their way to explain that the merit lay entirely with the great actor and had nothing to do with the indifferent play, but as a matter of fact the last time I saw it acted it was by a real corporal from a military camp, in the humble setting of a village hall and it had exactly the same effect upon the audience which Irving produced at the Lyceum. So perhaps there was something in the writing after all, and certainly every stage effect was indicated in the manuscript. I would add that with his characteristic largeness in money matters Irving always sent me a guinea for each performance in spite of his purchase of the copyright. Henry Irving the son carried on the part and played it, in my opinion, better than the father. I can well remember the flush of pleasure on his face when I uttered the word "better "and how he seized my hand. I have no doubt it was trying for his great powers to be continually belittled by their measurement with those of his giant father, to whom he bore so remarkable a physical resemblance. His premature death was a great loss to the stage, as was that of his brother Lawrence, drowned with his wife in the great Canadian river of the same name as himself.

I now come to the great misfortune which darkened and deflected our lives. I have said that my wife and I had taken a tour in Switzerland. I do not know whether she had overtaxed herself in this excursion, or whether we encountered microbes in some inn bedroom, but the fact remains that within a few weeks of our return she complained of pain in her side and cough. I had no suspicion of anything serious, but sent for the nearest good physician. To my surprise and alarm he told me when he descended from the bedroom that the lungs were very gravely affected, that there was every sign of rapid consumption and that he thought the case a most serious one with little hope, considering her record and family history, of a permanent cure. With two children, aged four and one, and a wife who was in such deadly danger, the situation was a difficult one. I confirmed the diagnosis by having Sir Douglas Powell down to see her, and I then set all my energy to work to save the situation. The home was abandoned, the newly bought furniture was sold, and we made for Davos in the High Alps where there seemed the best chance of killing this accursed microbe which was rapidly eating out her vitals.

And we succeeded. When I think that the attack was one of what is called "galloping consumption," and that the doctors did not give more than a few months, and yet that we postponed the fatal issue from 1893 to 1906, I think it is proof that the successive measures were wise. The invalid's life was happy too, for it was necessarily spent in glorious scenery. It was seldom marred by pain, and it was sustained by that optimism which is peculiar to the disease, and which came naturally to her quietly contented nature.

As there were no particular social distractions at Davos, and as our life was bounded by the snow and fir which girt us in, I was able to devote myself to doing a good deal of work and also to taking up with some energy the winter sports for which the place is famous. Whilst there I began the Brigadier Gerard series of stories, founded largely upon that great book, "The Memoirs of General Marbot." This entailed a great deal of research into Napoleonic days, and my military detail was, I think, very accurate — so much so that I had a warm letter of appreciation from Archibald Forbes, the famous war correspondent, who was himself a great Napoleonic and military student. Before the end of the winter we were assured that the ravages of the disease had been checked. I dared not return to England, however, for fear of a relapse, so with the summer we moved on to Maloja, another health resort at the end of the Engadine valley, and there we endeavoured to hold all we had won — which, with occasional relapses, we succeeded in doing.

My sister Lottie, free at last from the work which she had so bravely done, had now joined us. Connie, the younger sister, had come back from Portugal earlier, and had joined us at Norwood, where she had met and eventually married E. W. Hornung the novelist. Of Hornung I will speak later. In the meantime Lottie's presence and the improvement of the invalid, which was so marked that no sudden crisis was thought at all possible, gave me renewed liberty of action. Before the catastrophe occurred I had given some lectures on literature at home, and the work with its movement and bustle was not distasteful to me. Now I was strongly pressed to go to America on the same errand, and in the late autumn of 1894 I set out on this new adventure.

My brother Innes, he who had shared my first days in Southsea, had since passed through Richmond Public School, and afterwards the Woolwich Academy, so that he was now just emerging as a subaltern. As I needed some companion, and as I thought that the change would do him good, I asked him to come with me to the States. We crossed on the ill-fated German liner *Elbe*, which a very short time afterwards was sunk after collision with a collier in the North Sea. Already I observed evidence of that irrational hatred of the British which in the course of twenty years was to lead to so terrific a result involving the destruction of the German Empire. I remember that on some fête day on board, the saloon was thickly decorated with German and American flags without one single British one, though a fair proportion of the passengers were British. Innes and I then and there drew a Union Jack and stuck it up aloft, where its isolation drew attention to our grievance.

Major Pond was my impresario in America, and a quaint character he was. He seemed the very personification of his country, huge, loose limbed, straggling, with a goat's beard and a nasal voice. He had fought in the Civil War and been mixed up with every historical American event of his lifetime.

He was a good, kind fellow and we formed a friendship which was never broken. He met us in the docks, and carried us off to a little hotel beside the Aldine Club, a small literary club, in which we had our meals.

I have treated America and my impression of that amazing and perplexing country in later pages of these memoirs, when I visited it under more detached conditions. At present it was all hard work with little time for general observations. Pond had fixed me up a pretty hard schedule, but on the other hand I had bargained to get back to Davos in time to spend Christmas with my wife, so that there was a limit to my servitude. My first reading was given in a fashionable Baptist Church, which was the usual launching slip for Pond's new lecturers. We had walked from the retiring-room and were just coming in sight of the audience when I felt something tickle my ear. I put up my hand and found that my collar was undone, my tie had fallen off, and my stud, the first cause of all the trouble, had disappeared. Standing there, on the edge of the platform, Pond dragged out his own stud. I replaced everything, and sailed on quite as I should be, while Pond retired to refit. It is strange, and possibly more than coincidence, how often one is prevented at the last moment from making some foolish appearance in public.

The readings went very well and the audience was generous in applause. I have my own theory of reading, which is that it should be entirely disassociated from acting and should be made as natural and also as audible as possible. Such a presentment is, I am sure, the less tiring for an audience. Indeed I read to them exactly as in my boyhood I used to read to my mother. I gave extracts from recent British authors, including some work of my own, and as I mixed up the grave and the gay I was able to keep them mildly entertained for an hour. Some papers maintained that I could not read at all, but I think that what they really meant was that I did not act at all. Others seemed to endorse my method. Anyhow I had an excellent first reception and Pond told me that he lay smiling all night after it. He had no difficulty afterwards in booking as many engagements as he could fit into the time. I visited every town of any size between Boston in the north and Washington in the south, while Chicago and Milwaukee marked my western limit.

Sometimes I found that it took me all my time to fit in the engagements, however fast I might travel. Once, for example, I lectured at Daly's Theatre in New York at a matinee, at Princetown College the same evening, some

100 miles away, and at Philadelphia next afternoon. It was no wonder that I got very tired — the more so as the exuberant hospitality in those pre-prohibition days was enough in itself to take the energies out of the visitor. It was all done in kindness, but it was dangerous for a man who had his work to do. I had one little break when I paid a pleasant visit to Rudyard Kipling, of which I shall speak later. Bar those few days I was going hard all the time, and it is no wonder that I was so tired out that I kept to my bunk most of the way from New York to Liverpool.

My memories are the confused ones of a weary man. I recall one amusing incident when as I bustled on to the stage at Daly’s Theatre I tripped over the wooden sill of the stage door, with the result that I came cantering down the sloping stage towards the audience, shedding books and papers on my way. There was much laughter and a general desire for an encore.

Our visit was marred by one of those waves of anti-British feeling which sweep occasionally over the States, and which emanate from their own early history, every grievance being exaggerated and inflamed by the constant hostility of Irish pressmen and politicians. It all seems very absurd and contemptible to the travelling Briton, because he is aware how entirely one-sided it is, and how welcome, for example, is the American flag in every British public display. This was not known by the home-staying American, and probably he imagined that his own country was treated as rudely by us as ours by his. The Dunraven yacht race had given additional acerbity to this chronic ill-feeling, and it was very active at the time of our visit. I remember that a banquet was given to us at a club at Detroit at which the wine flowed freely, and which ended by a speech by one of our hosts in which he bitterly attacked the British Empire. My brother and I, with one or two Canadians who were present, were naturally much affronted, but we made every allowance for the lateness of the evening. I asked leave, however, to reply to the speech, and some of those who were present have assured me that they have never forgotten what I said. In the course of my remarks I said: “You Americans have lived up to now within your own palings, and know nothing of the real world outside. But now your land is filled up, and you will be compelled to mix more with the other nations. When you do so you will find that there is only one which can at all understand your ways and your aspirations, or will have the least sympathy. That is the mother country which you are now so fond of insulting. She is an Empire, and you will soon be an Empire also, and only then will you understand each other, and you will realise that you have only one real friend in the world.” It was only two or three years later that there came the Cuban war, the episode of Manilla Bay where the British Commander joined up with the Americans against the Germans, and several other incidents which proved the truth of my remarks.

A writer of average income is bound to lose pecuniarily upon a lecture tour, even in America, unless he prolongs it very much and works very hard indeed.

By losing I do not mean that he is actually out of pocket, but that he could have earned far more if he had never gone outside his own study. In my own case I found after our joint expenses were paid that there was about £1,000 over. The disposal of this money furnished a curious example of the power of prayer, which, as Mr. S. S. McClure has already narrated it, I have no delicacy in telling. He tells how he was endeavouring to run his magazine, how he was down to his last farthing, how he dropped on his knees on the office floor to pray for help, and how on the same day an Englishman who was a mere acquaintance walked into the office, and said: “McClure, I believe in you and in the future of your magazine,” and put down £1,000 on the table. A critic might perhaps observe that under such circumstances to sell 1,000 shares at face value was rather hard upon the ignorant and trusting buyer. For a long time I could clearly see the workings of Providence as directed towards Sam McClure, but could not quite get their perspective as regards myself, but I am bound to admit that in the long run, after many vicissitudes, the deal was justified both ways, and I was finally able to 6ell my holding twenty years later at a reasonable advance. The immediate result, however, was that I returned to Davos with all my American earnings locked up, and with no actual visible result of my venture.

The Davos season was in full blast when I returned, and my wife was holding her own well. It was at this time, in the early months of 1895, that I developed ski-running in Switzerland as described in my chapter on Sport. We lingered late at Davos, so late that I was able to lay out a golf course, which was hampered in its start by the curious trick the cows had of chewing up the red flags. From Davos we finally moved to Caux, over the lake of Geneva, where for some months I worked steadily at my writing. With the autumn I visited England, leaving the ladies at Caux, and it was then that events occurred which turned our road of life to a new angle.

CHAPTER XIII. EGYPT IN 1896

Life in Egypt — Accident — The Men who made Egypt — Up the Nile — The Salt Lakes — Adventure in the Desert — The Coptic Monastery — Colonel Lewis — A Surprise.

THE wretched microbe which had so completely disorganized our lives, and which had produced all the sufferings so patiently borne, now seemed to be latent, and it was hoped that if we spent a winter in Egypt the cure might be complete. During this short visit to England, whither I had to rush every now and again in order to adjust my affairs, I met Grant Allen at luncheon, and he told me that he had also suffered from consumption and that he had found his salvation in the soil and air of Hindhead in Surrey. It was quite a new idea to me that we might actually live with impunity in England once more, and it was a pleasant thought after resigning oneself to a life which was unnatural to both of us at foreign health resorts. I acted very promptly, for I rushed down to Hindhead, bought an admirable plot of ground, put the architectural work into the hands of my old friend and fellow psychic researcher Mr. Ball of Southsea, and saw the builder chosen and everything in train before leaving England in the autumn of 1895. If Egypt was a success, we should have a roof of our own to which to return. The thought of it brought renewed hope to the sufferer.

I then set forth, picked up my wife and my sister Lottie at Caux and took them on by easy stages through Italy, stopping a few days at Rome, and so to Brindisi, where we picked up a boat for Egypt. Once at Cairo we took up our quarters at the Mena Hotel, in the very shadow of the Pyramids, and there we settled down for the winter. I was still doing the Brigadier Gerard stories at the time, which required a good deal of historical research, but I had brought my materials with me, and all I lacked was the energy, which I found it most difficult to find in that enervating land.

On the whole it was a pleasant winter and led up to a most unforeseen climax. I ascended the Great Pyramid once, and was certainly never tempted to do so again, and was content to watch the struggles of the endless drove of tourists who attempted that uncomfortable and useless feat. There was golf of sorts and there was riding. I was still an immature horseman, but I felt that only practice would help me, so I set forth upon weird steeds provided by the livery stables opposite. As a rule they erred on the side of dulness, but I have a very vivid recollection of one which restored the average. If my right eyelid drops somewhat over my eye it is not the result of philosophic brooding, but it is the doing of a black devil of a horse with a varminty head, slab-sided ribs and restless ears. I disliked the look of the beast, and the moment I threw my leg over him he dashed off as if it were a race. Away we went across the desert, I with one foot in the stirrup, holding on as best I might. It is possible I could have kept on until he was weary, but he came suddenly on cultivated land and his forelegs sank in a moment over his fetlocks. The sudden stop threw me over his head, but I held on to the bridle, and he, pawing about with his front hoofs, struck me over the eye, and made a deep star-shaped wound which covered me with blood. I led him back and a pretty sight I presented as I appeared before the crowded verandah! Five stitches were needed, but I was thankful, for very easily I might have lost my sight.

My wife was well enough now to join in society, while my sister was just at an age to enjoy it, so that we saw a little of the very jovial life of Cairo, though the fact that Mena is some 7 miles out, on the most monotonous road in the world, saved us from any excess. It was always a task to get in and out, so that only a great temptation would draw us. I joined in male society, however, a good deal and learned to know many of those great men who were shaping the new destinies of Egypt. I sketched some of them at the time in two paragraphs which may be quoted.

“There is a broad and comfortable sofa in the hall of the Turf Club, and if you sit there about luncheon time you will see a fair sprinkling of Anglo-Egyptians, men who have helped to make, and are still helping to make, the history of our times. You have a view of the street from where you are, and perhaps in the brilliant sunshine a carriage flies past with two running syces before it and an English coachman upon the box. Within, one catches a glimpse of a strong florid face with a close-cropped soldierly grey moustache, the expression good-humoured and inscrutable. This is Lord Cromer, whom Egypt has changed from a major of gunners to a peer of the realm, while he in turn has changed it from a province of the East to one of the West. One has but to look at him to read the secret of his success as a diplomatist. His clear head, his brave heart, his physical health, and his nerves of iron are all impressed upon you even in that momentary glance at his carriage. And that lounging ennuyé attitude is characteristic also — most characteristic at this moment, when few men in the world can have more pressing responsibility upon their shoulders. It is what one could expect from the man who at the most critical moment of recent Egyptian history is commonly reported to have brought diplomatic interviews to an abrupt conclusion with the explanation that the time had come for his daily lawn-tennis engagement. It is no wonder that so strong a representative should win the confidence of his own countrymen, but he has made as deep an impression upon the native mind, which finds it difficult under this veiled Protectorate of ours to estimate the comparative strength of individuals. ‘Suppose Khedive tell Lord Cromer go, Lord Cromer go? ‘asked my donkey-boy, and so put his chocolate finger upon the central point of the whole situation.

“But this is a digression from the Turf Club, where you are seated upon a settee in the hall and watching the Englishmen who have done so much to regenerate Egypt. Of all the singular experiences of this most venerable land, surely this rebuilding at the hands of a little group of bustling, clear-headed Anglo-Saxons is the most extraordinary. There are Garstin and Wilcocks, the great water captains who have coaxed the Nile to right and to left, until the time seems to be coming when none of its waters will ever reach the Mediterranean at all. There is Kitchener, tall and straight, a grim silent soldier, with a weal of a Dervish bullet upon his face. There you may see Rogers, who stamped out the cholera, Scott, who reformed the law, Palmer, who relieved the over-taxed fellaheen, Hooker, who exterminated the locusts, Wingate, who knows more than any European of the currents of feeling in the Soudan — the same Wingate who reached his arm out a thousand miles and plucked Slatin out of Khartoum. And beside him the small man with the yellow-brown moustache and the cheery, ruddy face is Slatin himself, whose one wish in the world now is to have the Khalifa at his sword-point — that Khalifa at whose heels he had to run for so many weary years.”

Shortly after the opening of the New Year of 1896 we went in one of Cook’s boats up the river, getting as far as the outposts of civilization at Wady Haifa. The banks in the upper reaches were not too safe, as raiders on camels came down at times, but on the water one was secure from all the chances of Fate. At the same time I thought that the managers of these tours took undue risks, and when I found myself on one occasion on the rock of

Abousir with a drove of helpless tourists, male and female, nothing whatever between us and the tribesmen, and a river between us and the nearest troops, I could not but think what an appalling situation would arise if a little troop of these far-riding camel men were to appear. We had four negro soldiers as an escort, who would be helpless before any normal raiding party. It was the strong impression which I there received which gave me the idea of taking a group of people of different types and working out what the effect of so horrible an experience would be upon each. This became "The Tragedy of the Korosko," published in America as "A Desert Drama "and afterwards dramatized with variations as "The Fires of Fate." All went well as a matter of fact, but I thought then, and experienced British officers agreed with me, that it was unjustifiable. As the whole frontier force was longing for an excuse to advance, I am not sure that they would not have welcomed it if the Dervishes had risen to the ground bait which every week in the same place was laid in front of them.

I do not know how many temples we explored during that tour, but they seemed to me endless, some dating back to the mists of antiquity and some as recent as Cleopatra and the Roman period. The majestic continuity of Egyptian History seems to be its most remarkable feature. You examine the tombs of the First Dynasty at Abydos and there you see carved deep in the stone the sacred hawk, the goose, the plover, the signs of Horus and Osiris, of Upper and Lower Egypt. These were carved long before the Pyramids were built and can hardly be less ancient than 4000 b c. Then you inspect a temple built by the Ptolemies, after the date of Alexander the Great, and there you see the same old symbols cut in the same old way. There is nothing like this in the world. The Roman and the British Empires are mushrooms in comparison. Judged by Egyptian standards the days of Alfred the Great would be next door to our own, and our customs, symbols and way of thinking the same. The race seems to have petrified, and how they could do so without being destroyed by some more virile nation is hard to understand.

Their arts seem to have been high but their reasoning power in many ways contemptible. The recent discovery of the King's tomb near Thebes — I write in 1924 — shows how wonderful were their decorations and the amenities of their lives. But consider the tomb itself. What a degraded intelligence does it not show! The idea that the body, the old outworn greatcoat which was once wrapped round the soul, should at any cost be preserved is the last word in materialism. And the hundred baskets of provisions to feed the soul upon its journey! I can never believe that a people with such ideas could be other than emasculated in their minds — the fate of every nation which comes under the rule of a priesthood.

It had been suggested that I should go out to the Salt Lakes in the Desert some 50 miles from Cairo, and see the old Coptic Monastery there. Those ancient monasteries, the abode alternately of saints and perverts — we saw specimens of each — have always aroused my keen interest, dating as they do to very early days of Christianity. Indeed, their date is often unknown, but everything betokens great age and the spirit which founded them seems to have been that of the hermits who in the third and fourth centuries swarmed in these wildernesses.

Leaving my wife at Mena, I went with Colonel Lewis of the Egyptian army, an excellent companion and guide. On arriving at a wayside station, we found a most amazing vehicle awaiting us, a sort of circus coach, all gilding and frippery. It proved to be the coach of State which had been prepared for Napoleon III on the chance that he would come to open the Suez Canal. It was surely a good bit of work, for here it was still strong and fit, but absurdly out of place in the majestic simplicity of the Libyan Desert.

Into this we got and set forth, the only guide being wheel-marks across the sand which in some of the harder places were almost invisible. The great sand waste rolled in yellow billows all around us, and far behind us the line of green trees marked the course of the Nile. Once a black dot appeared which, as it grew nearer, proved to be some sort of Oriental on foot. As he came up to us he opened a blackened mouth, pointed to it, and cried, “Moya! Moya!” which means water. We had none and could only point encouragingly to the green belt behind us, on which with a curse he staggered upon his way.

A surprising adventure befell us, for the heavens suddenly clouded over and rain began to fall, an almost unknown thing in those parts. We lumbered on, however, with our two horses, while Colonel Lewis, who was keen on getting fit, ran behind. I remember saying to him that in my wildest dreams I never thought that I should drive across the Libyan Desert in an Emperor’s coach with a full colonel as carriage dog. Presently in the fading light the horses slowed down, the Nubian driver descended, and began alternately scanning the ground and making gestures of despair. We realised then that he had lost the tracks and therefore that we had no notion where we were, though we had strong reasons to believe that we were to the south of the route. The difficulty was to know which was north and which south. It was an awkward business since we had no food or water and could see no end to our troubles. The further we moved the deeper we should be involved. Night had closed in, and I was looking up at the drifting scud above us when in the chink of two clouds I saw for an instant a cluster of stars, and made sure that they were the four wheels of Charles's Wain. I am no astronomer, but I reasoned that this constellation would lie to the north of us, and so it proved, for when we headed that way, examining the ground every hundred yards or so with matches, we came across the track once more.

Our adventures, however, were not over, and it was all like a queer dream. We had great difficulty in keeping the track in the darkness, and the absurd coach lumbered and creaked while we walked with lanterns ahead of it. Suddenly to our joy we saw a bright light in the gloom. We quickened our pace, and came presently to a tent with a florid-bearded man seated outside it beside a little table where he was drawing by the light of a lamp. The rain had cleared now, but the sky was still overcast. In answer to our hail this man rather gruffly told us that he was a German surveyor at work in the desert. He motioned with his hand when we told him whither we were bound, and said it was close by. After leaving him we wandered on, and losing the tracks we were again very badly bushed. It seemed an hour or two before to our joy we saw a light ahead and prepared for a night's rest at the halfway house, which was our immediate destination. But when we reached the light what we saw was a florid bearded man sitting outside a small tent with a lamp upon a table. We had moved in a circle. Fresh explanations — and this time we really did keep to the track and reached a big deserted wooden hut, where we put up the horses, ate some cold food, and tumbled, very tired, into two of the bunks which lined it.

The morrow made amends for all. It broke cold and clear and I have seldom felt a greater sense of exhilaration than when I awoke and walking out before dressing saw the whole endless desert stretching away on every side of me, yellow sand and black rock, to the blue shimmering horizon. We harnessed up and within a few hours came on the Natron Lake, a great salt lake, with a few scattered houses at one end where the workers dry out and prepare the salt. A couple of miles off was the lonely monastery which we had come to see — less lonely now, but before the salt works were established one of the most inaccessible places one could imagine. It consisted of a huge outer wall, which seemed to be made of hardened clay. It had no doors or windows save one little opening which could be easily defended against the prowling Arabs, but I fear the garrison would not be very stout-hearted, for it was said to be the fear of military service which caused many of the monks to discover that they had a vocation. On being admitted I was conscious that we were not too welcome, though the military title of my companion commanded respect. We were shown round the inner courtyard, where there were palm trees and a garden, and then round the scattered houses within the wall. Near the latter there was, I remember, a barrel full of some substance which seemed to me, both by look and feel, to be rounded pieces of some light stone, and I asked if it were to hurl down at the Arabs if they attacked the door. It proved to be the store of bread for the Monastery. We were treated to wine, which was sweet tent wine, which is still used, I believe, in the Holy Communion, showing how straight our customs come from the East. The Abbot seemed to me to be a decent man, but he complained of illness and was gratified when I overhauled him thoroughly, percussed his chest, and promised to send him out some medicine from Cairo. I did so, but whether it ever reached my remote patient I never learned. Some of the brothers, however, looked debauched, and there was a general air of nothing-to-do, which may have been deceptive but which certainly impressed me that day. As I looked from the walls and saw the desert on all sides, unbroken save for one blue corner of the salt lake, it was strange to consider that this was all which these men would ever see of the world, and to contrast their fate with my own busy and varied existence. There was a library, but the books were scattered on the floor, all of them old and some no doubt rare. Since the discovery of the “Codex Sinaiticus” I presume that all these old Coptic libraries have been examined by scholars, but it certainly seemed to me that there might be some valuable stuff in that untidy heap.

Next evening Colonel Lewis and I were back in Cairo. We heard no news upon the way, and we had reached the Turf Club and were in the cloak room washing our hands before dinner when some man came in and said:

“Why, Lewis, how is it you are not with your brigade?”

“My brigade!”

“Have you been away?”

“Yes, at the Natron Lakes.”

“Good Heavens! Have you heard nothing?”

“No.”

“Why, man, war is declared. We are advancing on Dongola. The whole army is concentrating on the frontier, and you are in command of an advanced brigade.”

“Good God! “Lewis’s soap splashed into the water, and I wonder he did not fall plump on the floor. Thus it was that we learned of the next adventure which was opening up before both us and the British Empire.

CHAPTER XIV. ON THE EDGE OF A STORM

The Storm Centre — To the Frontier — Assouan — Excited Officers — With the Press Men — A Long Camel Ride — Night Marches — Haifa — Gwynne of the "Morning Post " — Anley — A Sudden Voyage — Apricots and Rousseau.

IT is impossible to be near great historical events and not to desire to take part in them, or at the least to observe them. Egypt had suddenly become the storm centre of the world, and chance had placed me there at that moment. Clearly I could not remain in Cairo, but must get up by hook or by crook to the frontier. It was March and the weather would soon be too warm for my wife, but she was good enough to say that she would wait with my sister until April if I would promise to return by then. At that time the general idea was that some great event would at once occur, though looking back one can see that that was hardly possible. Anyhow I had a great urge to go South.

There was only one way to do it. The big morning papers had their men already upon the spot. But it was less likely that the evening papers were provided. I cabled to the "Westminster Gazette "asking to be made their honorary correspondent *pro tem.* I had a cable back assenting. Armed with this I approached the proper authority, and so within a day or two I was duly appointed and everything was in order.

I had to make my own way up and I had to get together some sort of kit. The latter was done hurriedly and was of fearsome quality. I bought a huge revolver of Italian make with a hundred cartridges, an ugly unreliable weapon. I bought also a water bottle, which was made of new resinous wood and gave a most horrible flavour of turpentine to everything put into it. It was like drinking varnish, but before I got back there were times when I was ready to drink varnish or anything else that was damp.

With a light khaki coat, riding breeches, a small valise, and the usual Christmas tree hung round me, I started off from Cairo by train to Assiout, where a small river boat was waiting. It was filled with officers going to the front, and we had a pleasant few days journeying to Assouan together. There were, I remember, several junior officers who have since made names in the world, Maxwell (now General Sir John Maxwell) and Hickman, who also rose to the top. There was a young cavalry lieutenant also, one Smythe, who seemed to me to be too gentle and quiet for such rough work as lay ahead. The next time I heard of him was when he was gazetted for the Victoria Cross. In soldiering there is nothing more deceptive than appearances. Your fierce, truculent man may always have a yellow streak where the gentle student has a core of steel. There lay one of the many mistakes which the Germans made later in judging those “unwarlike islanders “the British.

The great question at the opening of the campaign was whether the native fellah troops would stand. The five negro battalions were as good as could be, but the record of the eight or nine Egyptian ones was not reassuring. The Arab of the Soudan is a desperate fanatic who rushes to death with the frenzy of a madman, and longs for close quarters where he can bury his spear in the body of his foeman, even though he carries several bullets in him before he reaches him. Would the Egyptians stand such onslaughts as these? It was thought improbable that they would, and so British battalions, the Connaughts, the Staffords and others, were brought up to stiffen their battle line. One great advantage the native soldiers had — and without it their case would have been hopeless — and that was that their officers were among the picked men of the British Army. Kitchener would have none but the unmarried, for it was to be a wholehearted and if need be a desperate service, and, as the pay and life were good, he could accept or reject as he chose, so that his leaders were splendid. It was curious to see their fair faces and flaxen moustaches under the red tarbooshes, as they marched at the side of their men.

The relations between these officers and their men were paternal. If an officer of black troops came to Cairo he would go back with a pillow case stuffed with candies for his men. The Egyptians were more inscrutable, less sporting and less lovable, but none the less their officers were very loyal to them, and bitterly resented the distrust shown by the rest of the army. One British officer at some early battle seized the enemy’s flag and cried: “Well, the English shall not have this anyhow.” It is this spirit, whether in Egypt or in India, which makes the British officer an ideal leader of native troops. Even at the great Indian Mutiny they would not hear a word against their men until they were murdered by them.

At Assouan we were held up for a week, and no one was allowed to go further. We were already well within the radius of the Arab raiders, for in the last year they had struck even further north. The desert is like the sea, for if you have the camels, which correspond to the ships, your blow may fall anywhere and your attack is not suspected until the moment that you appear. The crowd of British officers who were waiting seemed little worried by any such possibility and were as unconcerned as if it was a Cook's tour and not a particularly dangerous expedition — so dangerous that of the last army which went South, that of Hicks Pasha, hardly one single man was ever seen again. Only once did I see them really excited. I had returned to the hotel which was the general head-quarters, and as I entered the hall I saw a crowd of them all clustering round the notice board to read a telegram which had just been suspended. They were on the toes of their spurred boots, with their necks outstretched and every sign of quivering and eager interest. "Ah," thought I, "at last we have got through the hide of these impenetrable men. I suppose the Khalifa is coming down, horse, foot, and artillery, and that we are on the eve of battle." I pushed my way in, and thrust my head among all the bobbing sun-helmets. It was the account of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat-race.

I was struck by the splendid zeal of every one. It was an inspiration. Hickman had been full of combative plans all the way on the boat. When we arrived there was a message for him to go down to Keneh and buy camels. Here was a drop down for a man all on fire for action. "It is quite right," said he, when I condoled with him. "The force must have camels. I am the man to buy them. We all work for one end." Self-abnegation of this sort is general. The British officer at his best is really a splendid fellow, a large edition of the public schoolboy, with his cheery slang overlying a serious purpose which he would usually die rather than admit. I heard of three of them at rail-end, all doing essential work and all with a degree of fever on them which might well have excused them from work altogether. Every evening each of them dropped a dollar into a hat, they then all took their temperatures and the highest got the pool.

Assouan is at the foot of the Cataract, which extends for some 30 miles, and everything has to be transhipped and taken on a narrow toy railway to be reloaded on fresh steamers at Shellal. It was a huge task and I remember sympathizing with Captain Morgan, who with fatigue parties of Egyptians and chain gangs of convicts was pushing the stuff through. Morgan had sold me a horse once and was shy of me in consequence, but he soon saw that I bore no grudge. *Caveat emptor!* I already saw in him those qualities of organization which made him a real factor both in the Boer and in the European war. He has just died (1923) a general and full of honours. I remember seeing the 7th Egyptians after a long gruelling desert march working at those stores until they were so played out that it took four of them to raise a sixty-pound biscuit box.

The big pressmen had now arrived—” Where the carcass is there shall the eagles, etc.” — and I had luckily made friends with them, so it was determined that we should all go on together. There were five of us who started out, led by Knight of the “Falcon,” representing “The Times,” and looking not unlike a falcon himself. He was a great man, tall and muscular, a famous yachtsman and treasure-seeker, traveller, fighter and scholar. He had just left the French in Madagascar. Next came Scudamore of the “Daily News,” small, Celtic, mercurial, full of wit and go. He was a great purchaser of camels, which were of course all paid for by the paper, so that when Robinson, the editor of the “Daily News,” heard of the Boer war his first comment was, “Well, thank God, there are no camels in South Africa.” It was a study in Eastern ways to see Scudamore buying camels, and I learned from him how it is done. An Arab leads up the absurd-looking creature. You look depreciatingly at the beast — and you cannot take a better model than the creature’s own expression as it looks at you. You ask how much is wanted for it. The owner says £16. You then give a shriek of derision, sweep your arm across as if to wave him and his camel out of your sight for ever, and turning with a whisk you set off rapidly in the other direction. How far you go depends upon the price asked. If it is really very high, you may not get back for your dinner. But as a rule a hundred yards or so meet the case, and you shape your course so as to reach the camel and its owner. You stop in front of them and look at them with a disinterested and surprised look to intimate that you wonder that they should still be loitering there. The Arab asks how much you will give. You answer £8. Then it is his turn to scream, whisk round, and do his hundred yards, his absurd chattel with its horn-pipey legs trotting along behind him. But he returns to say that he will take fourteen, and off you go again with a howl and a wave. So the bargaining goes on, the circles continually shortening, until you have settled upon the middle price.

But it is only when you have bought your camel that the troubles begin. It is the strangest and most deceptive animal in the world. Its appearance is so staid and respectable that you cannot give it credit for the black villany that lurks within. It approaches you with a mildly interested and superior expression, like a patrician lady in a Sunday school. You feel that a pair of glasses at the end of a fan is the one thing lacking. Then it puts its lips gently forward, with a far-away look in its eyes, and you have just time to say, “The pretty dear is going to kiss me,” when two rows of frightful green teeth clash in front of you, and you give such a backward jump as you could never have hoped at your age to accomplish. When once the veil is dropped, anything more demoniacal than the face of a camel cannot be conceived. No kindness and no length of ownership seem to make them friendly. And yet you must make allowances for a creature which can carry 600 lb for 20 miles a day, and ask for no water and little food at the end of it.

This, however, is digression. The other pressmen were Beaman of the “Standard,” fresh from Constantinople, and almost an Eastern in his ways, and Julian Corbett, representing the “Pall Mall,” a gentle and amiable man who was destined later to be the naval historian of the Great War. Like myself he was an amateur among professionals, and had to return within a given date to Cairo.

As it was clear that nothing important could take place instantly, we determined to do part of the journey by road. A force of cavalry was going up, and we were ordered to join them and use them as an escort, but we thought we would be happier on our own, and so we managed to lose the Egyptians. There was some risk in our lonely journey along the right bank of the river with our left flank quite unprotected, but on the other hand the dust of a great body of horsemen would be insufferable. Therefore we set forth one evening, mounted upon our camels, with baggage camels in attendance, and quite a retinue of servants. In four or five days we reached Korosko, where we got boats which took us to the frontier at Wady Haifa, while the camels and servants came on by land.

I shall never forget those days, or rather those nights, for we rose at two in the morning and our longest march was before or during the dawn. I am still haunted by that purple velvet sky, by those enormous and innumerable stars, by the half-moon which moved slowly above us, while our camels with their noiseless tread seemed to bear us without effort through a wonderful dream world. Scudamore had a beautiful rolling baritone voice, and I can still hear it in my memory as it rose and fell in the still desert air. It was a wonderful vision, an intermezzo in real life, broken only once by my performing the unusual feat of falling off a camel. I have taken many tosses off horses, but this was a new experience. You have no proper saddle, but are seated upon a curved leather tray, so that when my brute suddenly threw himself down on his fore-knees — he had seen some green stuff on the path — I shot head foremost down his neck. It was like coming down a hose pipe in some acrobatic performance, and I reached the ground rather surprised but otherwise none the worse.

One or two pictures rise in mind. One was of some strange aquatic lizard — not a crocodile — lying on a sand bank. I cracked off my Italian revolver, which was more likely to hurt me than the lizard, and I saw the strange beast writhe into the stream. Once again, as I settled my couch at night, I saw a slug-like creature, with horned projections, the length about 18 inches, which moved away and disappeared. It was a death adder — the sort perhaps which took Cleopatra to her fathers. Then again we went into a ruined hut to see if we could sleep there. In the dim light of our candle we saw a creature which I thought was a mouse rush round and round the floor, close to the wall. Then suddenly to my amazement it ran right up the wall and down again on to the floor. It was a huge spider, which now stood waving its fore-legs at us. To my horror Scudamore sprang into the air, and came down upon it, squashing it into a square foot of filth. This was the real tarantula, a dangerous creature, and common enough in such places.

Yet another picture comes very clearly back to me. For some reason we had not started in the night, and the early dawn found us still resting in our small camp in a grove of palm trees near the path which led along the bank of the Nile. I awoke, and, lying in my blankets, I saw an amazing man riding along this path. He was a Negroid Nubian, a huge, fierce, hollow-cheeked creature, with many silver ornaments upon him. A long rifle projected over his back and a sword hung from his side. A more sinister barbaric figure one could not imagine, and he was exactly the type of those Mahdi raiders against whom we had been warned. I never like to be an alarmist, especially among men who had seen much of war or danger, so I said nothing, but I managed to stir one of my companions, who sighted the newcomer with a muttered “My God! “The man rode past us and on northwards, never glancing at our grove. I have no doubt that he was really one of our own native tribesmen, for we had some in our pay; but had he been the other thing our fate would have been sealed. I wrote a short story, “The Three Correspondents,” which was suggested by the incident.

A strange wooden-faced Turkish soldier, Yussuf Bey, in the Egyptian service, commanding the troops at Korosko, had us up in audience, gave us long pink glasses of raspberry vinegar, and finally saw us on board the boat which in a day or two deposited us on the busy river-bank of Wady Haifa, where the same military bustle prevailed as we had left behind us at Assouan.

Haifa lies also at the base of a cataract, and again all the stuff had to be transhipped and sent on 30 miles by a little track to Sarras. I walked the first day to the small station where the track began, and I saw a tall officer in a white jacket and red tarboosh, who with a single orderly was superintending the work and watching the stores pass into the trucks. He turned a fierce red face upon me, and I saw that it was Kitchener himself, the Commander of the whole army. It was characteristic of the man that he did not leave such vital things to chance, or to the assurance of some subordinate, but that he made sure so far as he could with his own eyes that he really had the tools for the job that lay before him. Learning who I was — we had met once before on the racecourse at Cairo — he asked me to dinner in his tent that night, when he discussed the coming campaign with great frankness. I remember that his chief-of-staff — Drage, I think, was the name — sat beside me and was so completely played out that he fell asleep between every course. I remember also the amused smile with which Kitchener regarded him. You had to go all out when you served such a master.

One new acquaintance whom I made in those days was Herbert Gwynne, a newly-fledged war correspondent, acting, if I remember right, for the “Chronicle.” I saw that he had much in him. When I heard of him next he was Reuter’s man in the Boer War, and not very long afterwards he had become editor of the “Morning Post,” where he now is. Those days in Haifa were the beginning of a friendship of thirty years, none the less real because we are both too busy to meet. One of the joys of the hereafter is, I think, that we have time to cultivate our friends.

I was friendly also with a very small but gallant officer, one Anley, who had just joined the Egyptian Army. His career was beginning and I foresaw that he would rise, but should have been very surprised had I known how we should meet again. I was standing in the ranks by the roadside as a private of Volunteers in the Great War when a red-tabbed, brass-hatted general passed. He looked along our ranks, his gaze fastened on me, and lo, it was Anley. Surprised out of all military etiquette, he smiled and nodded. What is a private in the ranks to do when a general smiles and nods? He can’t formally stand to attention or salute. I fear that what I did was to close and then open my left eye. That was how I learned that my Egyptian captain was now a war brigadier.

We pushed on to Sarras and had a glimpse of the actual outpost of civilization, all sandbags and barbed wire, for there was a Mahdi post at no distance up the river. It was wonderful to look south and to see distant peaks said to be in Dongola, with nothing but savagery and murder lying between. There was a whiff of real war in the little fortress but no sign of any actual advance.

Indeed, I had the assurance of Kitchener himself that there was no use my waiting and that nothing could possibly happen until the camels were collected — many thousands of them. I contributed my own beast to the army’s need since I had no further use for it, and Corbett and I prepared to take our leave. We were warned that our only course was to be on the look out and take a flying jump on to any empty cargo boat which was going down stream. This we did one morning, carrying our scanty belongings. Once on board we learned that there was no food and that the boat did not stop for several days. The rope had not been cast off, so I rushed to the only shop available, a Greek store of a type which springs up like mushrooms on the track of an army. They were sold out save for tinned apricots, of which I bought several tins. I rushed back and scrambled on board as the boat cast off. We managed to get some Arab bread from the boatmen, and that with the apricots served us all the way. I never wish to see a tinned apricot so long as I live. I associate their cloying sweetness with Rousseau’s “Confessions,” a French edition of which came somehow into my hands and was my only reading till I saw Assouan once more. Rousseau also I never wish to read again.

So that was the end of our frontier adventure. We had been on the edge of war but not in it. It was disappointing, but it was late in April before I reached Cairo, and the heat was already becoming too much for an invalid. A week later we were in London, and I remember that, as I sat as a guest at the Royal Academy Banquet on May 1 of that year, I saw upon my wrists the ragged little ulcers where the poisonous jiggers which had burrowed into my skin while I lay upon the banks of the Nile were hatching out their eggs under the august roof of Burlington House.

CHAPTER XV. AN INTERLUDE OF PEACE

Hindhead—”Rodney Stone”—”A Duet” — A Haunted House — A Curious Society — Preternatural Powers — The Little Doctor — The Shadow of Africa.

WHEN we returned to England I found that the house in which we hoped that the cure would be completed was not yet ready. It was a considerable mansion planned upon a large scale, so that it was not surprising that it had taken some time to build. We were compelled to take a furnished house at Haslemere until the early months of 1897, when we moved up to Moorlands, a boarding house on Hindhead close to the site of my building. There we spent some happy and busy months until the house was ready in the summer. I had taken up riding, and though I was never a great horseman I was able from that time onwards to get a good deal of health and pleasure out of it, for in that woody, heathy country there are beautiful rides in every direction, and the hunting, in which I joined, was at least picturesque. About June we moved into the new house, which I called Undershaw — a new word, I think, and yet one which described it exactly in good Anglo-Saxon, since it stood under a hanging grove of trees.

I have said little, during these years spent in the quest of health, concerning my literary production. The chief book which I had written since “The Refugees “was a study of the Regency with its bucks and prizefighters. I had always a weakness for the old fighting men and for the lore of the prize-ring, and I indulged it in this novel. At the time boxing had not gained the popular vogue which I have been told that this very book first initiated, and I can never forget the surprise of Sir George Newnes when he found out what the new serial was about. “Why that subject of all subjects upon earth? “he cried. However, I think that the readers of “The Strand “found that I had not chosen badly, and the book is one which has held a permanent place as a picture of those wild old days. I wrote a considerable number of short tales during those years, and finally in 1898 a domestic study, “A Duet,” which was an attempt at quite a different form of literature — a picture in still life, as it were. It was partly imaginative and partly founded upon early experiences of my own and of friends. It led, I remember, to a public bickering with a man who has done good work as a critic, Dr. Robertson Nicoll. He took exception to some passage in the book, which he had every right to do. But he wrote at that time for six or seven papers, under different names, so that it appeared as if a number of critics were all condemning me when it was really only one. I thought I had a grievance, and said so with such vehemence that he stated that he did not know whether to answer me in print or in the law courts. However, it all blew over and we became very good friends. Another book of those days was “Uncle Bernac,” which I never felt to be satisfactory, though I venture to claim that the two chapters which portray Napoleon give a clearer picture of him than many a long book has done, which is natural enough, since they are themselves the quintessence of a score of books.

So much for my work. I had everything in those few years to make a man contented, save only the constant illness of my partner. And yet my soul was often troubled within me. I felt that I was born for something else, and yet I was not clear what that something might be. My mind felt out continually into the various religions of the world. I could no more get into the old ones, as commonly received, than a man could get into his boy’s suit. I still argued on materialist lines. I subscribed to the Rationalist Association and read all their literature carefully, but it was entirely destructive and one cannot permanently live on that alone. Besides, I was sure enough of psychic phenomena to be aware that there was a range of experience there which was entirely beyond any rational explanation, and that therefore a system which ignored a great body of facts, and was incompatible with them, was necessarily an imperfect system. On the other hand, convinced as I was of these abnormal happenings, and that intelligence, high or low, lay behind them, I by no means understood their bearing. I still confused the knocking at the door with the friend outside, or the ringing of the bell with the telephone message. Sometimes I had the peace of despair, when one felt that one could never possibly arrive at any conclusions save negative ones, and then again some fresh impulse of the soul would start one upon a new quest. In every direction I reached out, but never yet with any absolute satisfaction. I should have been relieved from all my troubles could I have given heartfelt adhesion to any form of orthodoxy — but my reason always barred the way.

During all the Egyptian and other periods of our exile I had never ceased to take the psychic subject very seriously, to read eagerly all that I could get, and from time to time to organize séances which gave indifferent but not entirely negative results, though we had no particular medium to help us. The philosophy of the subject began slowly to unfold, and it was gradually made more feasible, not only that life carried on, enclosed in some more tenuous envelope, but that the conditions which it encountered in the beyond were not unlike those which it had known here. So far I had got along the road, but the overwhelming and vital importance of it all had not yet been borne in upon me.

Now and then I had a psychic experience somewhat outside the general run of such events. One of these occurred when I was at Norwood in 1892 or 1893. I was asked by the Society of Psychic Research whether I would join a small committee to sit in and report upon a haunted house at Charmouth in Dorchester. I went down accordingly together with a Dr. Scott and Mr. Podmore, a man whose name was associated with such investigations. I remember that it took us the whole railway journey from Paddington to read up the evidence as to the senseless noises which had made life unendurable for the occupants, who were tied by a lease and could not get away. We sat up there two nights. On the first nothing occurred. On the second Dr. Scott left us and I sat up with Mr. Podmore. We had, of course, taken every precaution to checkmate fraud, putting worsted threads across the stairs, and so on.

In the middle of the night a fearsome uproar broke out. It was like some one belabouring a resounding table with a heavy cudgel. It was not an accidental creaking of wood, or anything of that sort, but a deafening row. We had all doors open, so we rushed at once into the kitchen, from which the sound had surely come. There was nothing there — doors were all locked, windows barred, and threads unbroken. Podmore took away the light and pretended that we had both returned to our sitting-room, going off with the young master of the house, while I waited in the dark in the hope of a return of the disturbance. None came — or ever did come. What occasioned it we never knew. It was of the same character as all the other disturbances we had read about, but shorter in time. But there was a sequel to the story. Some years later the house was burned down, which may or may not have a bearing upon the sprite which seemed to haunt it, but a more suggestive thing is that the skeleton of a child about ten years old was dug up in the garden. This I give on the authority of a relation of the family who were so plagued. The suggestion was that the child had been done to death there long ago, and that the subsequent phenomena of which we had one small sample were in some way a sequence to this tragedy. There is a theory that a young life cut short in sudden and unnatural fashion may leave, as it were, a store of unused vitality which may be put to strange uses. The unknown and the marvellous press upon us from all sides. They loom above us and around us in undefined and fluctuating shapes, some dark, some shimmering, but all warning us of the limitations of what we call matter, and of the need for spirituality if we are to keep in touch with the true inner facts of life.

I was never asked for a report of this case, but Podmore sent one in, attributing the noises to the young man, though as a fact he was actually sitting with us in the parlour when the tumult broke out. A confederate was possible, though we had taken every step to bar it, but the explanation given was absolutely impossible. I learned from this, what I have often confirmed since, that while we should be most critical of all psychic assertions, if we are to get at the truth, we should be equally critical of all negatives and especially of so-called “exposures “in this subject. Again and again I have probed them and found them to depend upon prejudice or upon an imperfect acquaintance with psychic law.

This brings me to another curious experience which occurred about this time, probably in 1898. There was a small doctor dwelling near me, small in stature, and also, I fear, in practice, whom I will call Brown. He was a student of the occult, and my curiosity was aroused by learning that he had one room in his house which no one entered except himself, as it was reserved for mystic and philosophic purposes. Finding that I was interested in such subjects, Dr. Brown suggested one day that I should join a secret society of esoteric students. The invitation had been led up to by a good deal of preparatory inquiry. The dialogue between us ran somewhat thus:

“What shall I get from it?”

“In time, you will get powers.”

“What sort of powers?”

“They are powers which people would call supernatural. They are perfectly natural, but they are got by knowledge of deeper forces of nature.”

“If they are good, why should not every one know them?”

“They would be capable of great abuse in the wrong hands.”

“How can you prevent their getting into wrong hands?”

“By carefully examining our initiates.”

“Should I be examined?”

“Certainly.”

“By whom?”

“The people would be in London.”

“Should I have to present myself?”

“No, no, they would do it without your knowledge.”

“And after that?”

“You would then have to study.”

“Study what?”

“You would have to learn by heart a considerable mass of material. That would be the first thing.”

“If this material is in print, why does it not become public property?”

“It is not in print. It is in manuscript. Each manuscript is carefully numbered and trusted to the honour of a passed initiate. We have never had a case of one going wrong.”

“Well,” said I, “it is very interesting and you can go ahead with the next step, whatever it may be.”

Some little time later — it may have been a week — I awoke in the very early morning with a most extraordinary sensation. It was not a nightmare or any prank of a dream. It was quite different from that, for it persisted after I was wide awake. I can only describe it by saying that I was tingling all over. It was not painful, but it was queer and disagreeable, as a mild electric shock would be. I thought at once of the little doctor.

In a few days I had a visit from him. “You have been examined and you have passed,” said he with a smile. “Now you must say definitely whether you will go on with it. You can’t take it up and drop it. It is serious, and you must leave it alone or go forward with a whole heart.”

It began to dawn upon me that it really was serious, so serious that there seemed no possible space for it in my very crowded and pre-occupied life. I said as much, and he took it in very good part. “Very well,” said he, “we won’t talk of it any more unless you change your mind.”

There was a sequel to the story. A month or two later, on a pouring wet day, the little doctor called, bringing with him another medical man whose name was familiar to me in connection with exploration and tropical service. They sat together beside my study fire and talked. One could not but observe that the famous and much-travelled man was very deferential to the little country surgeon, who was the younger of the two.

“He is one of my initiates,” said the latter to me. “You know,” he continued, turning to his companion, “Doyle nearly joined us once.” The other looked at me with great interest and then at once plunged into a conversation with his mentor as to the wonders he had seen and, as I understood, actually done. I listened amazed. It sounded like the talk of two lunatics. One phrase stuck in my memory.

“When first you took me up with you,” said he, “and we were hovering over the town I used to live in, in Central Africa, I was able for the first time to see the islands out in the lake. I always knew they were there, but they were too far off to be seen from the shore. Was it not extraordinary that I should first see them when I was living in England?”

“Yes,” said Brown, smoking his pipe and staring into the fire. “We had some fun in those days. Do you remember how you laughed when we made the little steamboat and it ran along the upper edge of the clouds?”

There were other remarks as wild. “A conspiracy to impress a simpleton,” says the sceptic. Well, we can leave it at that if the sceptic so wills, but I remain under the impression that I brushed against something strange, and something which I am not sorry that I avoided. It was not Spiritualism and it was not Theosophy, but rather the acquisition of powers latent in the human organization, after the alleged fashion of the old gnostics or of some modern fakirs in India, though some doubtless would spell fakirs with an “e.” One thing I am very sure of, and that is that morals and ethics have to keep pace with knowledge, or all is lost. The Maori cannibals had psychic knowledge and power, but were man-eaters none the less. Christian ethics can *never* lose its place whatever expansion our psychic faculties may enjoy. But Christian theology can and will.

To return to the little doctor, I came across him again, as psychic as ever, in Portland, Oregon, in 1923. From what I learned I should judge that the powers of the Society to which he belonged included that of loosening their own etheric bodies, in summoning the etheric bodies of others (mine, for example) and in making thought images (the steamboat) in the way that we are assured is possible by will-power. But their line of philosophy or development is beyond me. I believe they represent a branch of the Rosicrucians.

All seemed placid at this time. My wife was holding her own in winter as well as in summer. The two children, Mary and Kingsley, were passing through the various sweet phases of human development, and brought great happiness into our lives. The country was lovely. My life was filled with alternate work and sport. As with me so with the nation. They were years of prosperity and success. But the shadow of South Africa was falling upon England, and before it passed my personal fortunes, as well as so many more, were destined to be involved in it. I had a deep respect for the Boers and some fear of their skill at arms, their inaccessible situation, and their sturdy Teutonic tenacity. I foresaw that they would be a most dangerous enemy, and I watched with horror the drift of events which from the time of the ill-judged Jameson Raid never ceased to lead to open war. It was almost a relief when at last it came and we could clearly see the magnitude of our task. And yet few people understood it at the time. On the very eve of war I took the chair at a dinner to Lord Wolseley at the Authors' Club and he declared that we could send two divisions to Africa. The papers next day were all much exercised as to whether such a force was either possible to collect or necessary to send. What would they have thought had they been told that a quarter of a million men, a large proportion of them cavalry, would be needed before victory could be won. The early Boer victories surprised no one who knew something of South African history, and they made it clear to every man in England that it was not a wine glass but a rifle which one must grasp if the health of the Empire was to be honoured.

CHAPTER XVI. THE START FOR SOUTH AFRICA

The Black Week — Volunteering — The Langman Hospital — The Voyage — Bloemfontein — Sir Claude de Crespigny — The Epidemic — Advance to the Water Works.

FROM December 10 to 17, 1899, was the black week for England. In that week General Gatacre lost a battle at Stormberg, Lord Methuen lost one at Magersfontein and General Buller lost one at Colenso. The three together would not have made more than a minor action in the great war to come, but at the time it seemed portentous. There were ominous stirrings on the Continent also and rumours of a coalition. It was lucky for us that the German fleet was not yet in being and that our own was able to keep the ring, or we should soon have had some Lafayette in South Africa with perhaps a Yorktown to follow. However, it was bad enough as it was, but the nation as usual rose splendidly to the occasion, and every one hastened to do what they could. Hence it was that I found myself early one morning at Hounslow — if I remember right — standing in a long queue of men who were waiting to enlist in the Middlesex Yeomanry. I had one or two friends in the regiment and hence my choice.

The Colonel, a grizzled soldier, sat behind a deal table in an orderly room and dealt swiftly with the applicants. He had no idea who I was, but seeing a man of forty before him he intimated that I surely did not intend to go into the ranks. I said that I was prepared to take a commission. He asked if I could ride and shoot. I said that I could do both in moderation. He asked if I had had military experience. I said that I had led an adventurous life and seen a little of military operations in the Soudan, which was stretching it about as far as it would go. Two white lies are permitted to a gentleman, to screen a woman, or to get into a fight when the fight is a rightful one. So I trust I may be forgiven.

However the Colonel would only put me on his waiting list, took my name, still without recognising me, and passed on to the next case. I departed somewhat crestfallen and unsettled, not knowing whether I had heard the last of the matter or not. Almost immediately afterwards, however, I received an offer which took me out in a capacity which was less sporting but probably in my case and at my age a good deal more useful. This came from my friend John Langman, whose son Archie I had known well in Davos days. Langman was sending out a hospital of fifty beds at his own expense to Africa, and had already chosen his staff of surgeons but not his personnel. Archie Langman was to go with the Hospital as general manager. Langman's idea was that I should help him to choose the personnel, that I should be a supplementary medico, and that I should exercise a general supervision over the whole in an unofficial capacity. To all this I agreed and spent a week at his house at Stanhope Terrace choosing from many candidates those who seemed the most likely. On the whole they proved to be a worthy choice. There were many things to be done, and in the middle of them I received a note re-opening the question of the Yeomanry, but by this time I was entirely committed to the Langman Hospital.

When we were complete we were quite a good little unit, but our weakness was unfortunately at the head. Dr. O'Callaghan had been a personal friend of Langman's and had thus got the senior billet, but he was in truth an excellent gynaecologist, which is a branch of the profession for which there seemed to be no immediate demand. He was a man too who had led a sedentary life and was not adapted, with all the will in the world, for the trying experience which lay before us. He realised this himself and returned to England after a short experience of South African conditions. We were compelled to have one military chief, as a bond with the War Office, and this proved to be one Major Drury, a most amusing Irishman who might have come right out of Lever. To leave the service and to "marry a rich widow with a cough "was, he said, the height of his ambition. He was a very pleasant companion in civil life, but when it came to duties which needed tact and routine he was rather too Celtic in his methods, and this led to friction and occasional rows in which I had to sustain the point of view of Mr. Langman. I have no doubt he thought me an insubordinate dog, and I thought him — well, he has passed away now, and I remember him best as a very amusing companion.

Under O'Callaghan and Drury were two really splendid younger surgeons, Charles Gibbs and Scharlieb, the latter the son of the well-known lady doctor. They were as good as they could be. Then we had our ward-masters, cooks, stewards, storekeepers, and finally some fifteen to twenty orderlies. Altogether we numbered just fifty men, and were splendidly fitted out by the generosity of Mr. Langman.

A month or two passed before we could get away, and I remember one amusing incident which occurred during that time. I had spent a good deal of thought over the problem how best to attack men who lay concealed behind cover. My conclusions were that it was useless to fire at them direct, since, if they knew their business, very little of them would be vulnerable. On the other hand, if one could turn a rifle into a portable howitzer and drop a bullet with any sort of rough general accuracy within a given area, then it seemed to me that life would hardly be possible within that area. If, for example, the position was 20,000 square yards in size, and 20,000 rifles were dropping bullets upon it, each square yard would sooner or later be searched and your mark would be a whole prostrate or crouching body. What I was really evolving, though I could not know it, was the machine gun barrage of dropping or vertical fire as practised in the Great War. My principles were absolutely right and have not even yet received their full application. I wrote an article to “The Times “explaining my views, but so far as I know it had no results.

Meanwhile I was practising how to turn a rifle into a howitzer. I fastened a large needle at the end of a thread to the back sight. When the gun pointed straight up in the air the needle swung down across the stock and I marked the spot. Then the idea was to tilt the gun slowly forward, marking advances of 200, 400 and so on in the range, so that you had a dial marked on the stock and could always by letting the needle fall across the correct mark on the dial drop the bullet within a certain distance.

But the crux was to discover the exact ranges. To do this I went down to Frensham Pond and, standing among the reeds and tilting the gun very slightly forward, I pulled the trigger. The bullet very nearly fell upon my own head. I could not locate it, but I heard quite a loud thud. But what amazed me, and still amazes me, was the time it took. I counted fifty seconds on my watch between the discharge and the fall. I don’t wonder if the reader is incredulous. I feel incredulous also, but such is the fact as I recorded it.

My idea was to mark the bullet splashes on the calm water of the lake, but though I fired and fired at various angles not a splash could I see. Finally a little man who may have been an artist broke in upon my solitude.

“Do you want to know where those bullets were going?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Then I can tell you, sir, for they have been dropping all round *me.*”

I felt that unless my howitzer was to claim its first victim on the spot I had better stop. It was clear that the light bullet with so heavy a charge went so high into the atmosphere that one lost all command over it. Twice the weight and half the charge would have served my purpose better. Then came other calls and I could never work it out, but I am very sure that with a little care in detail I could have got a converging fire which would have cleared any kopje in South Africa.

As I was convinced that the idea was both practical and much needed I communicated full particulars to the War Office. Here is the letter I had in reply.

War Office, *Feb.* 16, 1900.

Sir, —

With reference to your letter concerning an appliance for adapting rifles to high angle fire I am directed by the Secretary of State for War to inform you that he will not trouble you in the matter.

I am, Sir, Your Obedient Servant, (Signature illegible), Director General of Ordnance.

Thus, whether my invention was nonsense or whether it was, as I believe, radical and epoch-making, I was given no chance to explain or to illustrate it. As I remarked in “The Times:”

“No wonder that we find the latest inventions in the hands of our enemies rather than ourselves if those who try to improve our weapons meet with such encouragement as I have done.” Our traditions were carried on in the Great War, for Pomeroy, the inventor of the inflammable bullet which brought down the Zeppelins, was about to return to New Zealand in despair, and it was, as I am assured, private and not official bullets which first showed how valuable was his discovery and forced a belated acceptance by the War Office.

At last our time drew near. My wife had gone to Naples, where it was hoped that the warmer climate would complete her cure. My affairs were all settled up. I was to go as an unpaid man, and I contributed my butler Cleeve, a good intelligent man for the general use, paying him myself. In this way I retained my independence and could return when I felt that the time had come — which, as events turned out, proved to be very valuable to me.

We were reviewed by the old Duke of Cambridge in some drill-hall in London. There befell me on this occasion one of those quaint happenings which seem to me to have been more common in my life than in that of most other men. We were drawn up in our new khaki uniforms, and wearing our tropical helmets, for the Royal Duke’s inspection. If we had been asked to form fours we should have broken down completely, but luckily we were placed in double line and so we remained. I was standing in front on the right flank. With my eyes fixed rigidly before me I was still able out of the corner of them to be aware that the old Duke, with his suite, was coming across to begin at my end. Presently he halted in front of me, and stood motionless. I remained quite rigid, looking past him. He continued to stand, so near me that I could hear and almost feel his puffy breath. “What on earth! “I wondered, but I gave no sign. At last he spoke. “What is this? “he asked. Then louder, “What is this? “and finally, in a sort of ecstasy, “What *is* it? “I never moved an eyelash, but one of a group of journalists upon my right went into hysterical but subdued laughter. There was whispering among the suite, something was explained, and the funny old man passed on. But did ever Lever in his maddest moment represent that his hero on the first day of wearing uniform should have such an experience with the ex-Commander-in-Chief of the British army and the uncle of the Queen?

It seems that what was worrying the dear old gentleman — he was about eighty at the time — was that my tunic buttons had no mark upon them, a thing which he had never seen in Her Majesty’s Army. Even a crown or a star would do, but no mark at all completely upset him, for he was a great stickler for correct military clothing. So, of course, was King Edward. A friend of mine at a ball in India (royalty being present) was swooped down upon by a very agitated aide-decamp who began: “His Royal Highness desires me to say...” and went on to point out some defect in his dress kit. My friend answered: “I will mention the matter to my tailor,” which was, I think, an admirable way of quietly putting the matter into its true perspective.

On this occasion we officers all filed up to be presented and the old Duke made amends by blurting out some very kindly things, for it seems that he greatly approved of my wooden soldier attitude, in spite of my reprehensible buttons. He had a day of agitations, for on the top of the buttons one of the curtains of the hotel took fire during our luncheon at Claridge’s, and there was great excitement for a few moments. He made, I remember, an extremely indiscreet speech in which he said: “They turned me off because they said I was too old, but old as I am I wouldn’t have been such a fool as to—” and then he strung off a number of things which Lord Wolseley, his successor, was supposed to have done. The press was merciful and did not report.

We sailed on February 28, 1900, from Tilbury, in the chartered transport *Oriental,* carrying with us a mixed lot of drafts, and picking up the Royal Scots Militia at Queenstown, where a noisy Irishwoman threw a white towel on board, crying, “You may be afther finding it useful.” The Scots were a rather rough crowd with a number of territorial magnates, Lord Henry Scott, Lord Tewkesbury, Lord Newport, Lord Brackley and others among their officers. Colonel Garstin of the Middlesex was in general command of the whole of us. The monotony of the three weeks’ voyage was broken only by a cricket match at the Cape de Verdes, by a lecture on the war which I delivered on deck under a tropical moon to all hands, and to an enteric inoculation, which was voluntary but should have been compulsory, for even as it was it saved many lives, and I am not sure that my own was not among them. The Great War has shown for ever how effective this treatment is. We lost more from enteric than from the bullet in South Africa, and it is sad to think that nearly all could have been saved had Almroth Wright’s discovery been properly appreciated. His brother was on board, I remember — an officer of Sappers — and took the virus particularly badly, though all of us were quite bad enough, for the right dose had not yet been accurately determined.

On the evening of March 21 we reached Capetown and found the bay full of shipping. There were fifty large steamers at anchor — mostly empty. Some of us had a run ashore, but we had some trouble getting on board again, for there was a big swell and the little tug dare not come quite alongside. We had to jump therefore from the paddle-box as the roll favoured us, landing on a hanging ladder, where a quarter-master seized us. To some people such a feat is easy, while others evidently regarded it with horror, and I wondered that we escaped from having some tragedy. The only real mishap was a strange one. A row of soldier faces was looking down on us over the bulwarks, when I saw the grin upon one of them change to a look of horrible agony and he gave a wild scream. He still remained standing, but several men ran towards him, and then he disappeared. Only afterwards did I learn that a huge iron bar had in some way fallen upon his foot, pinning him to the place. He fainted as they disengaged him, and was carried below with his bones crushed.

I spent next day ashore, with the Mount Nelson Hotel as my head-quarters. It was full of a strange medley of wounded officers, adventuresses and cosmopolitans. Kitchener came down and cleared it out shortly afterwards, for the syrens were interfering with his fighting men. The general war news was very good. Paardeburg had been fought, Lord Roberts had made his way to Bloemfontein and Kimberley had been relieved by French, whose immediate return to head off Cronje was one of the inspired incidents of the war. It was a consolation to find that Boers really could be captured in large numbers, for their long run of successes while the conditions were in their favour was getting badly upon the public nerves and a legendary sort of atmosphere was beginning to build up around them.

Some money had been given me for charitable purposes when I was in London, so I went down to the camp of the Boer prisoners to see if I could spend some of it. It was a racecourse, pent in with barbed wire, and they were certainly a shaggy, dirty, unkempt crowd but with the bearing of free men. There were a few cruel or brutal faces, some of them half caste, but most were good honest fellows and the general effect was formidable. There were some who were maned like lions. I afterwards went into the tents of the sick Boers. Several were sitting sullenly round and one was raving in delirium, saying something in his frenzy which set all the others laughing in a mirthless way. One man sat in a corner with a proud dark face and brooding eagle eyes. He bowed with grave courtesy when I put down some money for cigarettes. A Huguenot, or I am mistaken.

We had been waiting for orders and now we suddenly left Capetown on March 26, reaching East London on the 28th. There we disembarked, and I was surprised to find Leo Trevor, of amateur theatrical fame, acting as transport officer. In spite of his efforts (I hope it was not through them) our hospital stuff was divided between two trains, and when we reached Bloemfontein after days of travel we found that the other half had wandered off and was engulfed in the general chaos. There were nights of that journey which I shall never forget — the great train roaring through the darkness, the fires beside the line, the dark groups silhouetted against the flames, the shouts of “Who are you? “and the crash of voices as our mates cried back, “The Camerons,” for this famous regiment was our companion. Wonderful is the atmosphere of war. When the millennium comes the world will gain much, but it will lose its greatest thrill.

It is a strange wild place, the veldt, with its vast green plains and peculiar flat-topped hills, relics of some extraordinary geological episode. It is poor pasture — a sheep to two acres — so it must always be sparsely inhabited. Little white farms, each with its eucalyptus grove and its dam, were scattered over it. When we crossed the Free State border by a makeshift bridge, beside the ruins of the old one, we noticed that many of these little houses were flying the white flag. Every one seemed very good-humoured, burghers and soldiers alike, but the guerilla war afterwards altered all that.

It was April 2, and 5 a in when we at last reached the capital of the Free State, and were dumped down outside the town in a great green expanse covered with all sorts of encampments and animals. There was said to be a large force of Boers close to the town, and they had cut up one of our columns a few days before at Sanna’s Post. Some troops were moving out, so I, with Gwynne whom I had known in Egypt, and that great sportsman Claude de Crespigny, set forth to see what we could, an artilleryman lending me his led horse. There was nothing doing, however, for it was Brother Boer’s way never to come when you wanted him and always when you didn’t. Save for good company, I got nothing out of a long hot day.

Good company is always one of the solaces of a campaign. I ran across many old friends, some soldiers, some medicos, some journalists. Knight of the “Falcon “had, alas, been hit in an early battle and was in hospital. Julian Ralph, a veteran American correspondent, Bennett Burleigh the rugged old war horse, queer little Melton Prior who looked like the prim headmaster of a conventional school, dark-eyed Donohue of the “Chronicle,” Paterson the Australian, of Snowy River fame, they were a wonderful set of men. I had little time to enjoy their society, however, for among the miles of loaded trucks which lay at the endless sidings I had to my great joy discovered the missing half of our equipment and guided a fatigue party down to it. All day we laboured and before evening our beds were up and our hospital ready for duty. Two days later wagons of sick and wounded began to disgorge at our doors and the real work had begun.

We had been given the cricket field as our camp and the fine pavilion as our chief ward. Others were soon erected, for we had plenty of tents — one each for our own use and a marquee for the mess. We were ready for any moderate strain, but that which was put upon us was altogether beyond our strength and for a month we had a rather awful time. The first intimation of trouble came to me in a simple and dramatic way. We had a bath in the pavilion and I had gone up to it and turned the tap, but not a drop of water appeared, though it had been running freely the night before. This small incident was the first intimation that the Boers had cut the water supply of the town, which caused us to fall back upon the old wells, which in turn gave rise to an outbreak of enteric which cost us 5,000 lives. The one great blot in Lord Roberts' otherwise splendid handling of the campaign was, in my opinion, that he did not buzz out at once with every man he could raise, and relieve the water works, which were only 20 miles away. Instead of this he waited for his army to recuperate, and so exposed them to the epidemic. However, it is always easy to be wise after the event.

The outbreak was a terrible one. It was softened down for public consumption and the press messages were heavily censored, but we lived in the midst of death — and death in its vilest, filthiest form. Our accommodation was for fifty patients, but 120 were precipitated upon us, and the floor was littered between the beds with sick and often dying men. Our linen and utensils were never calculated for such a number, and as the nature of the disease causes constant pollution, and this pollution of the most dangerous character and with the vilest effluvia, one can imagine how dreadful was the situation. The worst surgical ward after a battle would be a clean place compared to that pavilion. At one end was a stage with the scene set for "H.M.S. Pinafore." This was turned into latrines for those who could stagger so far. The rest did the best they could, and we did the best we could in turn. But a Verestschagin would have found a subject in that awful ward, with the rows of emaciated men, and the silly childish stage looking down upon it all. In the very worst of it two nursing sisters appeared among us, and never shall I forget what angels of light they appeared, or how they nursed those poor boys, swaddling them like babies and meeting every want with gentle courage. Thank God, they both came through safe.

Four weeks may seem a short time in comfort, but it is a very long one under conditions such as those, amid horrible sights and sounds and smells, while a haze of flies spreads over everything, covering your food and trying to force themselves into your mouth — every one of them a focus of disease. It was bad enough when we had a full staff, but soon the men began to wilt under the strain. They were nearly all from the Lancashire cotton mills, little, ill-nourished fellows but with a great spirit. Of the fifteen twelve contracted the disease and added to the labours of the survivors. Three died. Fortunately we of the staff were able to keep going, and we were reinforced by a Dr. Schwartz of Capetown. The pressure was great, but we were helped by the thought that the greater the work the more we proved the necessity of our presence in Africa. Above all, our labours were lightened by the splendid stuff that we had for patients. It was really glorious to see the steady patience with which they bore their sufferings. The British soldier may grouse in days of peace, but I never heard a murmur when he was faced with this loathsome death.

Our hospital was no worse off than the others, and as there were many of them the general condition of the town was very bad. Coffins were out of the question, and the men were lowered in their brown blankets into shallow graves at the average rate of sixty a day. A sickening smell came from the stricken town. Once when I had ridden out to get an hour or two of change, and was at least 6 miles from the town the wind changed and the smell was all around me. You could smell Bloemfontein long before you could see it. Even now if I felt that low deathly smell, compounded of disease and disinfectants my heart would sink within me.

At last there came the turn. The army had moved on. Hospitals up the line absorbed some of the cases. Above all the water works had been retaken, and with hardly any resistance. I went out with the force which was to retake it, and slept for the night in a thin coat under a wagon, an experience which left me colder than I can ever remember being in my life — a cold which was not only on the surface, but like some solid thing within you. Next morning there was every prospect of a battle, for we had been shelled the night before and it looked as if the position would be held, so Ian Hamilton, who commanded, made a careful advance. However, there was no resistance, and save for some figures watching us from distant hills there was no sign of the enemy. He had slipped away in the night.

In the advance we passed over the Drift at Sanna’s Post where the disaster had occurred some weeks before. The poor artillery horses were still lying in heaps where they had been shot down, and the place was covered with every kind of litter — putties, cholera belts, haversacks, and broken helmets. There were great numbers of Boer cartridge papers which were all marked “Split Bullets. Manufactured for the Use of the British

Government, London.” What the meaning of this was, or where they came from, I cannot imagine, for certainly our fellows had always the solid Lee-Metford bullet, as I can swear after inspecting many a belt. It sounded like some ingenious trick to excuse atrocities, and yet on the whole the Boer was a fair and good-humoured fighter until near the close of the war.

The move of Hamilton’s was really the beginning of the great advance, and having cleared the water works he turned north and became the right wing of the army. On his left was Tucker’s 7th Division, then Kelly Kenny’s 6th Division, Pole-Carew’s 1st Division, including the Guards, and finally a great horde of mounted infantry, including the Yeomanry, the Colonial and the Irregular Corps. This was the great line which set forth early in May to sweep up from Bloemfontein to Pretoria. Things had become more quiet at the hospital and presently Archie Langman and I found a chance to get away and to join the army at the first stage of its advance. I wrote our experience out while it was still fresh in my mind, and the reader will forgive me if I reproduce some of this, as it is likely to be more vivid and more detailed than the blurred impression now left in my memory after more than twenty years.

CHAPTER XVII. DAYS WITH THE ARMY

Pole-Carew — Tucker — Snipers — The Looted Farm — Taking of Brandfort — Artillery Engagement — Advance of the Guards — The Wounded Scout — The Dead Australian — Return.

STAND in the pass at Karee, and look north in the clear fresh morning air! Before you lies a great plain, dull green, with white farmhouses scattered here and there. One great donga slashes it across. Distant hills bound it on all sides, and at the base of those in front, dimly seen, are a line of houses and a steeple. This is Brandfort, 10 miles off, and we are advancing to attack it.

The troops are moving forward, line after line of red face and khaki, with rumbling columns of guns. Two men sit their horses beside us on a knoll, and stare with their glasses at the distant houses. Gallant figures both of them; the one spruce, debonair, well-groomed, with laughing eyes and upward-curved moustache, a suggestion of schoolboy mischief about his handsome face; the other, grim, fierce, all nose and eyebrow, white scales of sun-dried skin hanging from his brick-red face. The first is Pole-Carew, General of Division; the second is Brigadier Stephenson. We are finding our men, and these are among them.

Here is another man worth noting. You could not help noting him if you tried. A burly, broad-shouldered man, with full, square, black beard over his chest, his arm in a sling, his bearing a medieval knight-errant. It is Crabbe, of the Grenadier Guards. He reins his horse for an instant while his Guardsmen stream past him.

“I’ve had my share — four bullets already. Hope I won’t get another to-day.”

“You should be in hospital.”

“Ah, there I must venture to disagree with you.” He rides on with his men.

Look at the young officers of the Guards, the dandies of Mayfair. No carpet soldiers, these, but men who have spent six months upon the veldt, and fought from Belmont to Bloemfontein. Their walk is dainty, their putties are well rolled — there is still the suggestion of the West End.

If you look with your glasses on the left you may see movement on the farthest skyline. That is Hutton’s Mounted Infantry, some thousands of them, to turn the flank of any resistance. As far as you can see to the right is Tucker’s Division. Beyond that again are Ian Hamilton’s Mounted Infantry and French’s Cavalry. The whole front is a good 30 miles, and 35,000 men go to the making of it.

Now we advance over the great plain, the infantry in extended order, a single company covering half a mile. Look at the scouts and the flankers — we should not have advanced like that six months ago. It is not our additional numbers so much as our new war craft which makes us formidable. The big donga is only 2,000 yards off now, so we halt and have a good look at it. Guns are unlimbered — just as well to be ready. Pole-Carew rides up like a schoolboy on a holiday.

“Who’s seen old Tucker?” I hear him say, with his glasses to his eyes. He had sent a message to the scouts. “There now, look at that aide of mine. He has galloped along the donga to see if any Boers are in it. What right had he to do that? When I ask him he will say that he thought I was there.... Halloa, you, sir, why don’t you come back straight?”

“I did, sir.”

“You didn’t. You rode along that donga.”

“I thought you were there, sir.”

“Don’t add lying to your other vices.”

The aide came grinning back. “I was fired at, but I dare not tell the old man.”

Rap! Rap! Rap! Rifles in front. Every one pricks up his ears. Is it the transient sniper or the first shot of a battle? The shots come from the farmhouse yonder. The 83rd Field Battery begin to fidget about their guns. The officer walks up and down and stares at the farmhouse. From either side two men pull out lines of string and give long, monotonous cries. They are the range-finders. A gunner on the limber is deep in a sixpenny magazine, absorbed, his chin on his hand.

“Our scouts are past the house,” says an officer.

“That’s all right,” says the major.

The battery limbers up and the whole force advances to the farmhouse. Off-saddle and a halt for luncheon.

Halloa! Here are new and sinister developments. A Tommy drives a smart buggy and pair out of the yard, looted for the use of the army. The farm is prize of war, for have they not fired at our troops? They could not help the firing, poor souls, but still this sniping must be discouraged. We are taking off our gloves at last over this war. But the details are not pretty.

A frightened girl runs out.

“Is it right that they kill fowls? “Alas! the question is hardly worth debating, for the fowls are dead. Erect and indignant, the girl drives in her three young turkeys. Men stare at her curiously, but she and her birds are not molested.

Here is something worse. A fat white pig all smothered in blood runs past. A soldier meets it, his bayonet at the charge. He lunges and lunges again, and the pig screams horribly. I had rather see a man killed. Some are up in the loft throwing down the forage. Others root up the vegetables. One drinks milk out of a strange vessel, amid the laughter of his comrades. It is a grotesque and medieval scene.

The General rides up, but he has no consolation for the women. “The farm has brought it upon itself.” He rides away again.

A parson rides up. “I can’t imagine why they don’t burn it,” says he.

A little Dutch boy stares with large, wondering grey eyes. He will tell all this to his grandchildren when we are in our graves.

“War is a terrible thing,” says the mother, in Dutch. The Tommies, with curious eyes, cluster round the doors and windows, staring in at the family. There is no individual rudeness.

One Kaffir enters the room. “A Kaffir! “cries the girl, with blazing eyes.

“Yes, a Kaffir,” says he defiantly — but he left.

“They won’t burn the house, will they? “cries the mother.

“No, no,” we answer; “they will not burn the house.”

We advance again after lunch, the houses and steeple much nearer.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Cannon at last!

But it is far away, over at Tucker’s side. There are little white puffs on the distant green hills. Those are shells bursting. If you look through your glasses you will see — eight miles off — a British battery in action. Sometimes a cloud of dust rises over it. That is a Boer shell which has knocked up the dust. No Boers can be seen from here.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

It becomes monotonous. “Old Tucker is getting it hot! “Bother old Tucker, let us push on to Brandfort.

On again over the great plain, the firing dying away on the right. We have had a gun knocked off its wheels and twelve men hit over there. But now Hutton's turning movement is complete, and they close in on the left of Brandfort. A pom-pom quacks like some horrid bird among the hills. Our horse artillery are banging away. White spurts of shrapnel rise along the ridge. The leading infantry bend their backs and quicken their pace. We gallop to the front, but the resistance has collapsed. The mounted men are riding forward and the guns are silent. Long, sunlit hills stretch peacefully before us.

I ride through the infantry again. "The bloody blister on my toe has bust."

"This blasted water-bottle! "Every second man has a pipe between his parched lips.

The town is to the right, and two miles of plain intervene. On the plain a horseman is rounding up some mares and foals. I recognise him as I pass — Burdett-Coutts — a well-known figure in society. Mr. Maxwell of the "Morning Post "suggests that we ride to the town and chance it. "Our men are sure to be there." No sign of them across the plain, but we will try. He outrides me, but courteously waits, and we enter the town together. Yes, it's all right; there's a Rimington Scout in the main street — a group of them, in fact.

A young Boer, new caught, stands among the horsemen. He is discomposed — not much. A strong, rather coarse face; well-dressed; might appear, as he stands, in an English hunting-field as a young yeoman farmer.

"Comes of being fond of the ladies," said the Australian sergeant.

"Wanted to get her out of the town," said the Boer.

Another was brought up. "I'd have got off in a minute," says he.

"You'd have got off as it was if you had the pluck of a louse," says his captor. The conversation languished after that.

In came the Staff, galloping grandly. The town is ours.

A red-headed Irish-American is taken on the kopje. "What the hell is that to you?" he says to every question. He is haled away to gaol — a foul-mouthed blackguard.

We find the landlady of our small hotel in tears — her husband in gaol, because a rifle has been found. We try to get him out, and succeed. He charges us 4s for half a bottle of beer, and we wonder whether we cannot get him back into gaol again.

“The house is not my own. I find great burly men everywhere,” he cries, with tears in his eyes. His bar is fitted with pornographic pictures to amuse our simple farmer friends — not the first or the second sign which I have seen that pastoral life and a Puritan creed do not mean a high public morality.

We sit on the step and smoke in the moonlight.

There comes a drunken inhabitant down the main street. A dingy Tommy stands on guard in front.

“Halt! Who goes there?”

“A friend.”

“Give the countersign!”

“I’m a free-born Englishman!”

“Give the countersign!”

“I’m a freeborn—” With a rattle the sentry’s rifle came to his shoulder and the moon glinted on his bayonet.

“Hi, stop! “cries a senior Correspondent. “You Juggins, you’ll be shot! Don’t fire, sentry!”

Tommy raised his rifle reluctantly and advanced to the man. “What shall I do with him, sir? “he asked the Correspondent.

“Oh, what you like! “He vanished out of history.

I talk politics with Free Staters. The best opening is to begin, in an inquiring tone, “Why did you people declare war upon us? “They have got into such an injured-innocence state that it comes quite as a shock to them when they are reminded that they were the attackers. By this Socratic method one attains some interesting results. It is evident that they all thought they could win easily, and that they are very bitter now against the Transvaal. They are mortally sick of the war; but, for that matter, so are most of the British officers. It has seemed to me sometimes that it would be more judicious, and even more honourable, if some of the latter were less open about the extent to which they are “fed-up.” It cannot be inspiriting for their men. At the same time there would be a mutiny in the Army if any conditions short of absolute surrender were accepted — and in spite of their talk, if a free pass were given to-day, I am convinced that very few officers would return until the job was done.

Our railway engineers are great. The train was in Brandfort next day, in spite of broken bridges, smashed culverts, twisted metals, every sort of wrecking. So now we are ready for another 20 miles Pretoriawards. The Vet River is our goal this time, and off we go with the early morning.

Another great green plain, with dotted farms and the huge khaki column slowly spreading across it. The day was hot, and 10 miles out the Guards had about enough. Stragglers lay thick among the grass, but the companies kept their double line formation, and plodded steadily along. Ten miles sounds very little, but try it in the dust of a column on a hot day, with a rifle over your shoulder, a hundred rounds of ammunition, a blanket, a canteen, an empty water-bottle, and a dry tongue.

A grey-bearded padre limped bravely beside his men.

“No, no,” says he, when offered my horse. “I must not spoil my record.”

The men are silent on the march; no band, no singing.

Grim and sullen, the column flows across the veldt. Officers and men are short in their tempers.

“Why don’t you,” etc., etc., bleats a subaltern.

“Because I never can hear what you say,” says the corporal.

They halt for a midday rest, and it seems to me, as I move among them, that there is too much nagging on the part of the officers. We have paid too much attention to the German military methods. Our true model should have been the American, for it is what was evolved by the Anglo-Celtic race in the greatest experience of war which the Anglo-Celtic race has ever had.

On we go again over that great plain. Is there anything waiting for us down yonder where the low kopjes lie? The Boers have always held rivers. They held the Modder. They held the Tugela. Will they hold the Vet? Halloa, what’s this?

A startled man in a night-cap on a dapple-grey horse. He gesticulates. “Fifty of them — hot corner — lost my helmet.” We catch bits of his talk. But what’s that on the dapple-grey’s side? The horse is shot through the body. He grazes quietly with black streaks running down the reeking hair.

“A West Australian, sir. They shot turble bad, for we were within 50 yards before they loosed off.”

“Which kopje?”

“That one over yonder.”

We ride forward, and pass through the open ranks of the Guards’ skirmishers. Behind us the two huge naval guns are coming majestically up, drawn by their thirty oxen, like great hock-bottles on wheels. In front a battery has unlimbered. We ride up to the side of it. Away in front lies a small, slate-roofed farm beside the kopje. The Mounted Infantry have coalesced into one body and are moving towards us. “Here’s the circus. There is going to be a battle,” was an infantry phrase in the American War. Our circus was coming in, and perhaps the other would follow.

The battery (84th R.F.A.) settles down to its work.

Bang! I saw the shell burst on a hillside far away. “3,500,” says somebody. Bang! “3,250,” says the voice. Bang! “3,300.” A puff shoots up from the distant grey roof as if their chimney were on fire. “Got him that time!”

The game seems to us rather one-sided, but who is that shooting in the distance?

“Wheeeeee “ — what a hungry whine, and then a dull muffled “Ooof! “Up goes half a cartload of earth about 100 yards ahead of the battery. The gunners take as much notice as if it were a potato.

“Wheeeeeee — ooof! “Fifty yards in front this time.

“Bang! Bang!” go the crisp English guns.

“Wheeeeee — ooof! “Fifty yards behind the battery. They’ll get it next time as sure as fate. Gunners go on unconcernedly. “Wheeeeee — ooof! “Right between the guns, by George! Two guns invisible for the dust. Good heavens, how many of our gunners are left? Dust settles, and they are all bending and straining and pulling the same as ever.

Another shell and another, and then a variety, for there comes a shell which breaks high up in the air — wheeeeee — tang — with a musical, resonant note, like the snapping of a huge banjo-string, and a quarter of an acre of ground spurted into little dust-clouds under the shrapnel. The gunners take no interest in it. Percussion or shrapnel, fire what you will, you must knock the gun off its wheels or the man off his pins before you settle the R.F.A.

But every shell is bursting true, and it is mere luck that half the battery are not down. Once only did I see a man throw back his head a few inches as a shell burst before him. The others might have been parts of an automatic machine. But the officer decided to shift the guns — and they are shifted. They trot away for half a mile to the right and come into action again.

The lonely hero is the man to be admired. It is easy to be collectively brave. A man with any sense of proportion feels himself to be such a mite in the presence of the making of history that his own individual welfare seems for the moment too insignificant to think of. The unit is lost in the mass. But now we find ourselves alone on the plain with the battery away to the right.

The nerves of the novice are strung up by the sound of the shells, but there is something of exhilaration in the feeling also.

There is a fence about 200 yards off, and to this we tether our horses, and we walk up and down trying with our glasses to spot where the Boer guns are. We have suspicions, but nothing more. Our gunners may know, but we do not feel confident about it. Surely the stealthy lurking gun is worth six guns which stand bravely forth in the open. These farmers have taught our riflemen their business, and they bid fair to alter the artillery systems of the world as well. Our guns and theirs are like a fight between a blind man and one who can see.

An artillery colonel is wandering loose, and we talk. He has no job of his own, so he comes, like the coachman on a holiday, to watch some other man's guns at work. A. shell falls some distance short of us.

"The next one," says the colonel, "will go over our heads. Come and stand over here." I do so, with many mental reservations. Wheeeeeeee —

"Here it comes! "says the colonel. "Here I go! "think I. It burst on our level, but 40 yards to the right. I secure a piece as a souvenir.

"Shall we wait for another?" I began to be sorry that I met the colonel.

But a new sensation breaks upon us. Looking back we see that two monster naval guns are coming into action not fifty yards from our tethered horses, which stand in a dead line before their huge muzzles. We only just got them clear in time. Bang! the father of all the bangs this time, and a pillar of white smoke with a black heart to it on the farther hill. I can see some riders, like ants, going across it — Boers on the trek. Our men take the huge brass cartridge-case out of the gun.

"Can I have that?"

"Certainly," says the lieutenant.

I tie it on to my saddle, and feel apologetic towards my long-suffering horse. The great gun roars and roars and the malignant spouts of smoke rise on the farthest hill.

A line of infantry in very open order comes past the great guns, and I advance a little way with them. They are Scots Guards. The first line goes forward, the second is halted and lying down.

"That's right! Show where you are! "cries the second line, derisively. I seem to have missed the point, but the young officer in the first line is very angry.

"Hold your tongues! "he shouts, with his red face looking over his shoulder. "Too many orders. No one gives orders but me." His men lie down. The sun is sinking low, and it is evident that the contemplated infantry assault will not come off. One of the great naval shells passes high over our heads. It is the sound of a distant train in a tunnel.

A man canters past with a stretcher over his shoulder. His bay horse lollops along, but the stretcher makes him look very top-heavy. He passes the guns and the infantry, and rides on along the edge of a maize field. He is half a mile out now, heading for the kopje. Every instant I expect to see him drop from his horse. Then he vanishes in a dip of the ground.

After a time the stretcher appears again.

This time two men are carrying it, and the horseman rides beside. I have bandages in my pocket, so I ride forward also.

"Has a surgeon seen him?"

"No, sir." They lay the man down. There is a handkerchief over his face.

"Where is it?"

"His stomach and his arm." I pull up his shirt, and there is the Mauser bullet lying obvious under the skin. It has gone round instead of penetrating. A slit with a pen-knife would extract it, but that had better be left for chloroform and the field hospital. Nice clean wound in the arm.

"You will do very well. What is your name?"

"Private Smith, sir. New Zealander." I mention my name and the Langman Hospital at Bloemfontein.

"I've read your books," says he, and is carried onwards.

There has been a lull in the firing and the sun is very low. Then after a long interval comes a last Boer shell. It is an obvious insult, aimed at nothing, a derisive good-night and good-bye. The two naval guns put up their long necks and both roared together. It was the last word of the Empire — the mighty angry voice calling over the veldt. The red rim had sunk and all was purple and crimson, with the white moon high in the west. What had happened? Who had won? Were other columns engaged? No one knew anything or seemed to care. But late at night as I lay under the stars I saw on the left front signal flashes from over the river, and I knew that Hutton was there.

So it proved, for in the morning it was over the camp in an instant that the enemy had gone. But the troops were early afoot. Long before dawn came the weird, muffled tapping of the drums and the crackling of sticks as the camp-kettles were heated for breakfast. Then with the first light we saw a strange sight. A monstrous blister was rising slowly from the veldt. It was the balloon being inflated — our answer to the lurking guns. We would throw away no chances now, but play every card in our hand — another lesson which the war has driven into our proud hearts. The army moved on, with the absurd windbag flapping over the heads of the column. We climbed the kopjes where the enemy had crouched, and saw the litter of empty Mauser cases and the sangars so cunningly built. Among the stones lay a packet of the venomous-looking green cartridges still unfired. They talk of poison, but I doubt it. Verdigris would be an antiseptic rather than a poison in a wound. It is more likely that it is some decomposition of the wax in which the bullets are dipped. Brother Boer is not a Bushman after all. He is a tough, stubborn fighter, who plays a close game, but does not cheat.

We say good-bye to the army, for our duty lies behind us and theirs in front. For them the bullets, for us the microbes, and both for the honour of the flag. Scattered trails of wagons, ambulance carts, private buggies, impedimenta of all kinds, radiate out from the army. It is a bad drift, and it will be nightfall before they are all over. We pass the last of them, and it seems strange to emerge from that great concourse and see the 20 miles of broad, lonely plain which lies between us and Brandfort. We shall look rather foolish if any Boer horsemen are hanging about the skirts of the army.

We passed the battlefield of last night, and stopped to examine the holes made by the shells. Three had fallen within 10 yards, but the ant-heaps round had not been struck, showing how harmless the most severe shellfire must be to prostrate infantry. From the marks in the clay the shells were large ones — forty-pounders, in all probability. In a little heap lay the complete kit of a Guardsman — his canteen, water-bottle, cup, even his putties. He had stripped for action with a vengeance. Poor devil, how uncomfortable he must be to-day!

A Kaffir on horseback is rounding up horses on the plain. He gallops towards us — a picturesque, black figure on his shaggy Basuto mount. He waves his hand excitedly towards the east.

“Englishman there — on veldt — hurt — Dutchman shoot him.” He delivers his message clearly enough.

“Is he alive? “He nods.

“When did you see him? “He points to the sun and then farther east. About two hours ago apparently.

“Can you take us there? “We buy him for *2s.*, and all canter off together.

Our road is through maize fields and then out on to the veldt. By Jove, what’s that? There *is* a single black motionless figure in the middle of that clearing. We gallop up and spring from our horses. A short, muscular, dark man is lying there with a yellow, waxen face, and a blood-clot over his mouth. A handsome man, black-haired, black moustached, his expression serene — No. 410 New South Wales Mounted Infantry — shot, overlooked and abandoned. There are evident signs that he was not alive when the Kaffir saw him. Rifle and horse are gone. His watch lies in front of him, dial upwards, run down at one in the morning. Poor chap, he had counted the hours until he could see them no longer.

We examine him for injuries. Obviously he had bled to death. There is a horrible wound in his stomach. His arm is shot through. Beside him lies his water-bottle — a little water still in it, so he was not tortured by thirst. And there is a singular point. On the water-bottle is balanced a red chess pawn. Has he died playing with it? It looks like it. Where are the other chessmen? We find them in a haversack out of his reach. A singular trooper this, who carries chessmen on a campaign. Or is it loot from a farmhouse? I shrewdly suspect it.

We collect the poor little effects of No. 410 — a bandolier, a stylographic pen, a silk handkerchief, a clasp-knife, a Waterbury watch, £2 6s. *6d* in a frayed purse. Then we lift him, our hands sticky with his blood, and get him over my saddle — horrible to see how the flies swarm instantly on to the saddle-flaps. His head hangs down on one side and his heels on the other. We lead the horse, and when from time to time he gives a horrid dive we clutch at his ankles. Thank Heaven, he never fell. It is two miles to the road, and there we lay our burden under a telegraph post. A convoy is coming up, and we can ask them to give him a decent burial. No. 410 holds one rigid arm and clenched fist in the air. We lower it, but up it springs, menacing, aggressive. I put his mantle over him; but still, as we look back, we see the projection of that raised arm. So he met his end — somebody’s boy. Fair fight, open air, and a great cause — I know no better death.

A long, long ride on tired horses over an endless plain. Here and there mounted Kaffirs circle and swoop. I have an idea that a few mounted police might be well employed in our rear. How do we know what these Kaffirs may do among lonely farms held by women and children? Very certain I am that it is not their own horses which they are rounding up so eagerly.

Ten miles have passed, and we leave the track to water our horses at the dam. A black mare hard-by is rolling and kicking. Curious that she should be so playful. We look again, and she lies very quiet. One more has gone to poison the air of the veldt. We sit by the dam and smoke. Down the track there comes a Colonial corps of cavalry — a famous corps, as we see when our glasses show us the colour of the cockades. Good heavens, will we never have sense beaten into us? How many disasters and humiliations must we endure before we learn how to soldier? The regiment passes without a vanguard, without scouts, without flankers, in an enemy’s country intersected by dongas. Oh, for a Napoleon who might meet such a regiment, tear the epaulettes of the colonel from his shoulders, Stellenbosch him instantly without appeal or argument. Only such a man with such powers can ever thoroughly reorganize our army.

Another six miles over the great plain. Here is a small convoy, with an escort of militia, only a mile or two out from Brandfort. They are heading wrong, so we set them right. The captain in charge is excited.

“There are Boers on that hill! “The hill is only half a mile or so away on our left; so we find the subject interesting. “Kaffirs! “we suggest.

“No, no, mounted men with bandoliers and rifles. Why, there they are now.” We see moving figures, but again suggest Kaffirs. It ends by our both departing unconvinced. We thought the young officer jumpy over his first convoy, but we owe him an apology, for next morning we learned that the Mounted Infantry had been out all night chasing the very men whom we had seen. It is likely that the accidental presence of the convoy saved us from a somewhat longer journey than we had intended.

A day at Brandfort, a night in an open truck, and we were back at the Café Enterique, Boulevard des Microbes, which is our town address.

CHAPTER XVIII. FINAL EXPERIENCES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Military Jealousies — Football — Cracked Ribs — A Mutiny — De Wet — A Historian under Difficulties — Pretoria — Lord Roberts — With the Boers — Memorable Operation — Altercation.

MILITARY men are more full of jealousies and more prone to divide into cliques than any set of men whom I have met. South Africa was rent with their quarrels, and one heard on every side of how General This was daggers drawn with General That. But the great cleavage of all was between the Roberts men and the Buller men. The former were certainly very bitter against the reliever of Ladysmith, and the comments about the difference between his evening telegrams and those of next morning were painful to hear. I had, however, less sympathy, as Buller was a coarse-fibred man, though a brave soldier. Several authentic anecdotes pointed to this want of perception. When, for example, he entered Ladysmith the defenders saved up a few cakes and other luxuries for the day of their release. These they laid before Buller at the welcoming lunch. “I thought you were a starving city,” said he, looking round at them. This story I heard from several men who claimed to speak with knowledge as well as bitterness. It would have been sad had Buller’s long meritorious, hard-fighting career gone down in clouds, but it cannot be denied that in the French, or I think in any other service, he could not have survived Colenso. The strange speech which he made at a London luncheon after the war proved, I think, that his mind had lost something of its grip of realities. Roberts, as usual, played the noblest possible part in this unhappy controversy. “I shall handle Buller with all possible tenderness,” he said to one of his Staff, and he lived up to his words.

I found the hospital on my return to be in a very improved condition. I fell ill myself, however, though it was not serious enough to incapacitate me. I still think that if I had not been inoculated I should at that time have had enteric, and there was surely something insidious in my system, for it was a good ten years before my digestion had recovered its tone. My condition was not improved by a severe bruising of the ribs caused by a foul in one of the inter-hospital football matches which we had organized in order to take the minds of the men from their incessant work. Charles Gibbs strapped me up with plaster, as in a corset, but I was getting too old for rough handling which I could have smiled at in my youth.

One quaint memory of those days rises before me.

There was a sharp quarrel between Drury, our Military C.O. representing routine discipline, and our cooks and servants representing civilian ideas of liberty. It was mishandled and had reached such a point when I returned from the army that the men were on absolute strike, the work was disorganized and the patients were suffering. Drury was breathing fire and fury, which only made the men more obdurate. It really looked as if there might be a considerable scandal, and I felt that it was just such a case as Mr. Langman would have wished me to handle. I asked leave of Major Drury, therefore, that I might take the matter up, and he was, I fancy, very glad that I should, for he was at the end of his resources, and a public exposure of a disorganized unit means also a discredited Commander. I therefore sat behind the long mess table, and had the six ringleaders before me, all standing in a line with sullen mutiny in their faces. I talked to them gently and quietly, saying that I was in some sense responsible for them, since several of them had been enlisted by me. I sympathized with them in all they had gone through, and said that all our nerves had been a little overstrained, but that Duty and Discipline must rise above our bodily weakness. No doubt their superiors also had been strained and some allowance must be made on both sides. I then took a graver tone. “This matter is just going forward for court martial and I have intervened at the last instant. You clearly understand your own position. You have disobeyed orders on active service in the presence of the enemy. There is only one punishment possible for such an offence. It is death.” Six pairs of eyes stared wildly in front of me. Having produced my effect I went into their grievances, promised that they should be considered, and demanded an apology to Major Drury as the condition for doing anything further. They were six chastened men who filed out of the marquee, the apology was forthcoming, and there were no more troubles in the camp.

An anxiety came to us about this time from a very unexpected cause, for Archie Langman, who had been my good comrade in my visit to the army, went off again, trekking up country with the Imperial Yeomanry and ran right into the arms of De Wet, who had just raided the line and won a small victory at a place called Roodeval. The famous guerilla leader was stern but just, and he treated the hospital men with consideration, so that Archie returned none the worse for his adventure. But there was a bad day or two for me between our learning of his capture and of his release.

The army had got forward with little fighting, and Pretoria was in our hands. It seemed to all of us that the campaign was over and that only cleaning-up remained to be done. I began to consider my own return to Europe, and there were two potent influences which drew me, apart from the fact that the medical pressure no longer existed. The first was that I had during all this time continued to write the History of the War, drawing my material very often from the eye-witnesses to these events. But there was a good deal which could only be got at the centre, and therefore if my book was to be ready before that of my rivals it was necessary for me to be on the spot. The second was that a political crisis and a general election were coming on, and it was on the cards that I might be a candidate. I could not, however, leave Africa until I had seen Pretoria, so, with some difficulty, I obtained leave and was off on the much-broken and precarious railway on June 22.

That journey was certainly the strangest railway journey of my life. From minute to minute one never knew what would happen. I was in the good company of Major Hanbury Williams, Lord Milner’s Secretary, who allowed me to share his special carriage, and we had with us a little alert man named Amery, then unknown to fame, but now deservedly in the seats of the mighty. There were others but I have forgotten them. When the train stopped in the middle of the veldt, which it continually did, one never knew whether it was for five minutes or for five hours, as did actually occur, and as it went on again without warning one had to sit tight. We met a down train with its windows shattered and heard that twenty folk had been injured in a Boer ambuscade. Every hour we expected to be attacked. Once during one of our long halts we saw a horseman come cantering over the great green expanse. We got out to see and interview him. He was a tall, slab-sided fellow, unarmed, but with a rakish debonair look to him. He said he was a loyal British farmer, but I had no doubt in my own mind that he was a Boer scout who wanted to see what our train was carrying. He sat easy in his saddle for some little time, chatting with us, and then suddenly wheeled his grey horse round and galloped away. Some way further down the line we saw a farm burning, and a fringe of our irregulars riding round it. I was told that it was one of De Wet’s farms and that it was a punishment for cutting the line. The whole scene might have been the middle ages — say a company of Moss troopers on a raid over the English border.

When we came to the place of the Roodeval disaster, where our Derbyshire militia had been sadly cut up by De Wet, the train had to stop, for the line was under repair, and we were able to go over the ground. The place was littered with shells for the heavy guns taken from some looted train. Then there were acres covered with charred or partly charred letters, blowing about in the wind, for De Wet had burned the mail bags — one of his less sportsmanlike actions. Napoleon went one better, however, on a certain occasion when he published an Intercepted British mail, which led to a British reprisal of the same sort, not at all conducive to the peace of families. I picked up one letter which fluttered up to me, and I read in rough handwriting, “I hope you have killed all them Boers by now,” with many x (kisses) underneath. Among other things were some of the band instruments, across which De Wet had driven his heavy wagons.

It gave me a strange thrill when I looked out early one morning at a deserted platform and saw the word Pretoria printed upon a board. Here we were at last at the very centre of all things. The Transvaal Hotel was open and for several days it was my head-quarters while I examined men and things. One of my first tasks was to see Lord Roberts, who desired to interview me on account of some sensational articles by Burdett-Coutts which had appeared in the London Press upon the state of the hospitals. Of course that state had in many cases, possibly in all, been awful, but the reason lay in the terrible and sudden emergency. Every one had done his best to meet it and had met it to a surprising degree, but cases of hardship were numerous all the same. This I explained to Lord Roberts — and also to the Royal Commission in London. As an unpaid independent volunteer my words may have had more weight than those of some far greater authority who was personally involved. I can see Roberts now as he sat behind a small desk in his room. His face looked red and engorged, but that was due no doubt to his life in the sun. He was urbane and alert, reminding me at once of our former meeting in London. His light blue eyes were full of intelligence and kindness, but they had the watery look of age. Indeed, I can hardly remember in all military history a case where a man over seventy had been called out from retirement to conduct so arduous a campaign, and it was his conception of the fine flank march to Paardeburg which had actually beaten the Boers, however long they might keep up appearances of resistance. We had a short vivid talk and I never saw him again until he came to my own house at Hindhead to inspect my rifle range in 1902.

Of Lord Kitchener I saw nothing at Pretoria, but on one occasion a big man on a huge bay horse went past me at a hand gallop on the veldt, and as he passed he waved his hand, and I knew it was the famous soldier. He had been under a cloud since Paardeburg, and indeed it is hard to see how his tactics can be justified, since he attacked the Boers and lost some 2,000 men, when they were headed off and were bound to surrender in any case. There may be reasons unknown to a civilian, but I have heard soldiers speak warmly about it, for some of the attackers were mounted troops who had to gallop to the edge of the donga, and could do nothing when they got there. Colonel Hannay actually registered some protest before obeying the orders in which he and many of his men met their death. However, it was to Kitchener that all men turned now when the organization of the lines of communication was the vital point, and that rather than actual battle was his forte. I have been told by some who have been in action with him that he became nervously restless and impatient in a fight, while Roberts, on the other hand, became cooler and more quiet the greater the danger grew. In organization, however, Kitchener was inhuman in his cool accuracy. “Regret to report great dynamite explosion. Forty Kaffirs killed,” was the report of one officer. “Do you need more dynamite? “was the answering telegram from Lord Kitchener.

There was a bench outside my hotel on which a group of old bearded burghers used to smoke their pipes every day. I went down and sat among them with my Boer pipe filled with the best Magaliesburg. I said nothing, so soon they began to make advances, speaking excellent English in rough guttural fashion. Botha was not far from the town, and it was notorious that spies took him out the news every night. These old fellows were clearly a collecting station, so I thought it would be useful to give them something to ponder. After conversational remarks one of them said: “Tell us, Mister, when are we to have peace? “They were under the impression that the whole British nation was longing for peace, and it was this which encouraged the resistance. “Oh,” said I, “I hope not for a long time yet.”

They all looked at each other, and then the spokesman said: “Why do you say that, Mister?”

“Well, it’s this way,” said I. “This country, you see, is going to be a British Colony. It would be very awkward for us to have a Colony which was full of dangerous men. We couldn’t kill them then, could we? They would be fellow-citizens and under the law’s protection, the same as we. Our only chance is to kill them now, and that’s what we will do if we have the time.” The old fellows all grunted and puffed furiously at their pipes, but they could find no answer. Possibly some version of the matter may have reached the point I was aiming at.

Our longest excursion from Pretoria was to Waterval, whither Bennett Burleigh took me in his Cape cart. Once we got quite close to a Boer patrol, about a dozen horsemen. Burleigh could not believe that they were actually the enemy until I pointed out that several of the horses were white, which was hardly ever known in our service. He then examined them with his glass, and found I was right. They were clearly on some quest of their own, for they took no notice of us, though they could easily have cut us oft. Our drive took us to the great prison camp where so many British and Colonial soldiers had a humiliating experience. The prisoners had only got free a week or two before, and the whole place, many acres in size, was covered with every sort of souvenir. I contented myself with a Boer carbine which had been broken by a British prisoner, a band triangle, a half-knitted sock, the knitting needles being made from the barbed wire, and a set of leg fetters from the camp gaol. A tunnel had been bored just before the general delivery by some captive Hussars. It was a wonderful work, considering that it was done chiefly with spoons, and it had just been finished when relief came. I descended into it, and was photographed by Burleigh as I emerged. I daresay many of my friends have copies of it still, with my inscription: “Getting out of a hole, like the British Empire.”

I spent a day in Johannesburg, walking its deserted streets and seeing its great mines now dead or at least in suspended animation. I descended one of the deep mines, the Robinson, but as the hoisting machinery was out of order, and we had to walk in darkness down hundreds (it seemed thousands) of slippery wooden steps, with buckets, which did the draining, clanking past one’s ear, it was certainly an over-rated amusement. We got the usual tips as to which mines were going to boom — on all of which I acted, and all of which proved to be wrong.

On July 4, after an uneventful journey, which proved in itself that our grip was tightening upon the country, I found myself back in the Langman Hospital again. Times were quiet there, though another of our poor orderlies had just died of erysipelas, which had broken out in the wards — not traumatic erysipelas, but a variety which came without apparent cause. I mention the fact because enteric had been so universal that there really seemed no other disease, and this was the only appearance of any other ailment. If the army had all been inoculated, this would, I think, have been absolutely the healthiest war on record. Of surgical cases we had few, but I remember one operation which is perhaps rather technical for discussion and yet stands out very clearly in my memory. It was performed upon the Dutch military attaché with the Boers, who was picked up wounded and paralyzed after some engagement. A shrapnel bullet had broken one of his cervical vertebrae, the bone pressed on the nerves, and they had ceased to function. Watson Cheyne of London was the operator. He had cut down on the bone with a free incision and was endeavouring with a strong forceps to raise the broken arch of bone, when an amazing thing happened. Out of the great crimson cleft there rose a column of clear water 2 feet high, feathering at the top like a little palm tree, which gradually dwindled until it was only a few inches long, and finally disappeared. I had, I confess, no idea what it was, and I think many of the assembled surgeons were as taken aback as I was. The mystery was explained by Charles Gibbs, my mentor in such matters, who said that the cerebrospinal fluid, which is usually a mere moistening round the cord, had been greatly stimulated and increased by the pressure of the broken bone. It had finally distended the whole sheath. The forceps had punctured a small hole in the sheath and then the fluid had been pressed through and shot into the air as I had seen it. Perhaps the release was too sudden, for the patient died shortly after he was removed from the table.

Charles Gibbs is still in practice, and senior surgeon of Charing Cross Hospital, but he will forgive me if I remind him that his pupil did once score over him. One of my enteric patients was obviously dying and kept murmuring that he would like some solid food.

Of course the first law in treating enteric is, or was, that diet must be fluid, as the intestine is ulcerated and puncture of it means death by peritonitis. I said to Gibbs: “Do you consider that this man is sure to die?”

“He is certainly as bad as he can be,” said Gibbs. “Well then,” said I, “I propose to give him a solid meal.” Gibbs shook his head and was shocked. “It is a great responsibility you take.”

“What’s the odds,” I asked, “if he has to die anyhow?”

“Well, it’s just the difference whether you kill him or the disease does.”

“Well, I’ll take the chance,” said I — and I did so. A year or so later I was attending a public meeting at Edinburgh when the following letter, which I copy from my book of curiosities was handed up to me.

128, Royal Road, Kennington Park, London, S.E.
October 1, 1900.

Sir, —

As one who was under your care at Bloemfontein in “Langman’s Hospital “I hope you will forgive me in taking the liberty of wishing you success at Edinburgh. I am actuated in this not only by political principles but by the fact that I (and others) owe my life to your kindness and care. You may not remember me, Sir, but I can assure you the remembrance of you is written in my mind and can never be removed. Again wishing you success and hoping you will pardon this liberty, I remain, Sir, Yours obediently, (Pte.) M. Hanlon, C.I.V.

M. Hanlon was my enteric patient and he had never looked back from the day he had that square meal. But I don’t say it was an example for the family practitioner to copy.

On July 11 I went on board the *Briton* at Capetown and we sailed for England once more. I called upon Sir Alfred Milner before I left, and found him a very much older man than when only a few years before I had met him on the eve of his African experience. His hair was grizzled and his shoulders bowed, but his brave heart was as steadfast as ever, nor did it ever fail until his hard and thankless task was done. He made one error, I think, when he desired to keep South Africa under martial law when the war was over, but who could have done better, or as well, under the intolerable conditions which he had to face?

It was a remarkable passenger list on the *Briton,* and a very joyous voyage. The Duke of Norfolk and his brother Lord Edward Talbot were two of the most cheery people on the ship. It was a weird sight to see the senior Baron of England and a lumpy Hollander sitting face to face on a spar, and slashing each other with bladders to see which could knock off the other.

Blood told, if I remember right. Then there was Sir John Willoughby, of Jameson Raid fame, Lady Sarah Wilson from Mafeking, the Duke of Marlborough, Lady Arthur Grosvenor, the Hon. Ivor Guest and many famous soldiers. Especially was I fortunate in my friendship with Fletcher Robinson and with Nevinson, which was cemented by this closer association. Only one cloud marred the serenity of that golden voyage. There was a foreign officer on board, whose name I will not mention, who had been with the Boers and who talked with great indiscretion as to his experiences and opinions. He stated in my presence that the British had habitually used Dum-Dum bullets, on which I lost my temper and told him he was a liar. I must say that he behaved very well, for after thinking it over he saw that he was in the wrong and he sent down my friend Robinson to my cabin with a query as to whether I would accept an apology. I answered that I would not, since it was the army, and not me, which had been insulted. In an hour Robinson reappeared with the following letter, which ended what might have been a serious incident.

Dear Sir, —

Allow me to tell you that I regret lively what I said about expanding bullets — which I said but after hear saying evidence I request you to let everybody know that I strongly wish on the contrary that I desire to be on best terms with every Englishman and beg you for that to be my interpreter.

Yours very truly.

The first days of August saw me in London once more, and soon all that strange episode — the green expanse of the veldt, the flat-topped hills, the enteric wards — had become the vision of a dream.

CHAPTER XIX. AN APPEAL TO THE WORLD’S OPINION

Misrepresentation — Sudden Resolve — Reginald Smith — A Week’s Hard Work—”The Cause and Conduct of the War” — Translations — German Letter — Complete Success — Surplus.

ONE of the most pleasing and complete episodes in my life was connected with the pamphlet which I wrote upon the methods and objects of our soldiers in South Africa. It was an attempt to stem the extraordinary outbreak of defamation which had broken out in every country — or nearly every country, in Europe, and which had attained such a height that it really seemed that on this absolutely fictitious basis might be built up a powerful political combination which would involve us in a serious war.

I can well remember the inception of my enterprise! The date was January 7, 1902. The day was a Tuesday. Sir Henry Thompson was holding that evening one of those charming “octave “dinners at which it was my occasional privilege to attend, and I was going up to town from Hindhead to keep the engagement. Sitting alone in a carriage I read the foreign correspondence of “The Times.” In a single column there were accounts of meetings in all parts of Europe — notably one of some hundreds of Rhineland clergymen — protesting against our brutalities to our enemies. There followed a whole column of extracts from foreign papers, with grotesque descriptions of our barbarities. To any one who knew the easygoing British soldier or the character of his leaders the thing was unspeakably absurd; and yet, as I laid down the paper and thought the matter over, I could not but admit that these Continental people were acting under a generous and unselfish motive which was much to their credit. How could they help believing those things, and, believing them was it not their duty by meeting, by article, by any means, to denounce them? Could we accuse them of being credulous? Would we not be equally so if all our accounts of any transaction came from one side, and were supported by such journalists and, above all, such artists as lent their pens and pencils, whether venally or not, to the Boer cause? Of course we would. And whose fault was it that our side of the question was not equally laid before the jury of the civilised world? Perhaps we were too proud, perhaps we were too negligent — but the fact was obvious that judgment was being given against us by default. How *could* they know our case? Where could they find it? If I were asked what document they could consult, what could I answer? Blue-books and State papers are not for the multitude. There were books like Fitz-Patrick's "Transvaal from Within "or E. T. Cook's "Rights and Wrongs "; but these were expensive volumes, and not readily translated. Nowhere could be found a statement which covered the whole ground in a simple fashion. Why didn't some Briton draw it up? And then like a bullet through my head, came the thought, "Why don't you draw it up yourself?"

The next instant I was on fire with the idea. Seldom in my life have I been so conscious of a direct imperative call which drove every other thought from the mind. If I were a humble advocate, it was all the better, since I could have no axe to grind. I was fairly well posted in the facts already, as I had written an interim history of the war. I had seen something of the campaign, and possessed many documents which bore upon the matter. My plans widened every instant. I would raise money from the public and by the sale of the book at home. With this I would translate it into every language.

These translations should be given away wholesale. Every professor, every clergyman, every journalist, every politician, should have one put under his nose in his own language. In future, if they traduced us, they could no longer plead ignorance that there was another side to the question. Before I reached London all my programme was sketched out in my head. There was no item of it, I may add, which was not eventually carried through.

Fortune was my friend. I have said that I was dining that night with Sir Henry Thompson. My neighbour at dinner was a gentleman whose name I had not caught. My mind being full of the one idea, my talk soon came round to it, and instead of my neighbour being bored, my remarks were received with a courteous and sympathetic attention which caused me to make even greater demands upon his patience. Having listened from the soup to the savoury (often has my conscience rebuked me since), he ended by asking me mildly how I proposed to raise the money for these wide-reaching schemes. I answered that I would appeal to the public. He asked me how much would suffice. I answered that I could make a start with £1,000 He remarked that it would take much more than that. “However,” he added, “if £1,000 would go any way towards it, I have no doubt that sum could be got for you.”

“From whom?” I asked. He gave me his name and address and said: “I have no doubt that if you carry out the scheme on the lines you suggest, I could get the money. When you have done your work, come to me, and we will see how it is best to proceed.” I promised to do so, and thanked him for his encouragement. Sir Eric Barrington of the Foreign Office was the name of this fairy godfather.

This was my first stroke of good luck. A second came next morning. I had occasion to call upon the publishing house of Smith, Elder & Co., over some other business, and during the interview I told Mr. Reginald Smith the plan that I had formed. Without a moment’s hesitation he placed the whole machinery of his worldwide business at my disposal, without payment of any kind. From that moment he became my partner in the enterprise, and I found his counsel at every stage of as great help to me as the publishing services which he so generously rendered. Not only did he save heavy costs to the fund, but he arranged easily and successfully those complex foreign transactions which the scheme entailed.

That morning I called at the War Office and was referred by them to the Intelligence Department, where every information which they possessed was freely put at my disposal. I then wrote to “The Times “explaining what I was trying to do, and asking those who sympathized with my object to lend me their aid. Never was an appeal more generously or rapidly answered. My morning post on the day after brought me 127 letters, nearly all of which contained sums drawn from every class of the community, varying from the £50 of Lord Rosebery to the half-crown of the widow of a private soldier. Most of the remittances were accompanied by letters which showed that, however they might pretend in public to disregard it, the attitude of the foreign critics had really left a deep and bitter feeling in the hearts of our people.

It was on January 9 that I was able to begin my task. On the 17th I had finished it. When the amount of matter is considered, and the number of researches and verifications which it entailed, I need not say that I had been absorbed in the work, and devoted, I dare say, sixteen hours a day to its accomplishment. So far as possible I kept my individual opinions in the background, and made a more effective case by marshalling the statements of eye-witnesses, many of them Boers, on the various questions of farm-burnings, outrages, concentration camps, and other contentious subjects. I made the comments as simple and as short as I could, while as to the accuracy of my facts, I may say that, save as to the exact number of farmhouses burned, I have never heard of one which has been seriously questioned. It was a glad day for me when I was able to lay down my pen with the feeling that my statement was as full and as effective as it was in me to make it.

Meanwhile the subscriptions had still come steadily in, until nearly £1,000 more had been banked by the time that the booklet was finished. The greater number of contributions were in small sums from people who could ill afford it. One notable feature was the number of governesses and others residing abroad whose lives had been embittered by their inability to answer the slanders which were daily uttered in their presence. Many of these sent their small donations. A second pleasing feature was the number of foreigners resident in England who supported my scheme, in the hope that it would aid their own people to form a juster view. From Norwegians alone I received nearly £50 with this object. If Britain’s own children too often betrayed her at a crisis of her fate, she found at least warm friends among the strangers within her gates. Another point worth noting was that a disproportionate sum was from clergymen, which was explained by several of them as due to the fact that since the war began they had been pestered by anti-national literature, and took this means of protesting against it.

The proofs having been printed, I sent them to my Foreign Office friend as I had promised, and presently received an invitation to see him. He expressed his approval of the work, and handed me a banknote for £500, at the same time explaining that the money did not come from him. I asked if I might acknowledge it as from an anonymous donor—” The donor would not object,” said my friend. So I was able to head my list with “A Loyal Briton,” who contributed £500. I daresay the Secret Service knew best whence the money came.

By this time the banking account had risen to some two thousand pounds, and we were in a position to put our foreign translations in hand. The British edition had in the meantime been published, the distribution being placed in the hands of Messrs. Newnes, who gave the enterprise whole-hearted aid. The book was retailed at sixpence, but as it was our desire that the sale should be pushed it was sold to the trade at about threepence. The result was to leave the main profit of the enterprise in the hands of the retailer. The sale of the pamphlet was very large — in fact, I should imagine that it approached a record in the time. Some 250,000 copies were sold in Great Britain very quickly, and about 300,000 within a couple of months. This great sale enabled us to add considerably to the fund by the accumulation of the small rebate which had been reserved upon each copy. Our financial position was very strong, therefore, in dealing with the foreign translations.

The French edition was prepared by Professor Sumichrast of Harvard University, who was a French-Canadian by birth. This gentleman patriotically refused to take any payment for his work, which was admirably done. It was published without difficulty by Galignani, and several thousands were given away where they would do most good, in France, Belgium, and Switzerland. Twenty thousand copies of this edition were printed.

The German edition was a more difficult matter. No German publisher would undertake it, and the only courtesy which we met with in that country was from Baron von Tauchnitz, who included the volume in his well-known English library. Our advances were met with coldness, and occasionally with insult. Here, for example, is a copy of an extreme specimen of the kind of letter received.

January, 1902.

Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., —

Gent, — Doyle’s book makes the impression as if it was ordered or influenced by the English Jingo party.

Now, you know, this English war party (as well as the English officers and soldiers in Transvaal) are contempted by the whole civilised world as coward scoundrels and vile brutes who murder women and children.

It would be for me, as an importer of English literature to Germany, Austria and Russia, in the highest degree imprudent to do anything that could awake the suspicion I was in connection with so despised a party.

I have shown your letter to several persons. Nobody was inclined to take up the matter.

There is a mixture of venom and smugness about this epistle which gives it a high place in my collection. In spite of rebuffs, however, I found an Anglo-German publishing house in Berlin to undertake the work, and with the assistance of Herr Curt von Musgrave, who gave me an excellent translation, I was able to work off more than one very large edition, which had a perceptible effect in modifying the tone of that portion of the German press which was open to reason. Altogether 20,000 copies were distributed in the Fatherland and German-speaking Austria.

I remember one whimsical incident at this time. Somewhat tired, after the book was in the press, I went down to Seaford for a rest. While there, a message reached me that a Pan-German officer of Landwehr had come over to London, and desired to see me. I wired that I could not come up, but that I should be happy to see him if he came down. Down he came accordingly, a fine, upstanding, soldierly man, speaking excellent English. The German proofs had passed through his hands, and he was much distressed by the way in which I had spoken of the hostility which his countrymen had shown us, and its effect upon our feelings towards them. We sat all day and argued the question out. His great point, as a Pan-German, was that some day both Germany and Britain would have to fight Russia — Britain for India, and Germany perhaps for the Baltic Provinces. Therefore they should keep in close touch with each other. I assured him that at the time the feeling in this country was much more bitter against Germany than against Russia. He doubted it. I suggested as a test that he should try the question upon any ‘bus driver in London as a fair index of popular opinion. He was very anxious that I should modify certain paragraphs, and I was equally determined not to do so, as I was convinced they were true. Finally, when he left me on his return to London he said, “Well, I have come 800 miles to see you, and I ask you now as a final request that in the translation you will allow the one word ‘Leider’ (‘Alas’) to be put at the opening of that paragraph.” I was perfectly ready to agree to this. So he got one word in exchange for 1,600 miles of travel, and I think it was a very sporting venture.

One charming incident connected with this German translation was that a small group of Swiss (and in no country had we such warm-hearted friends as among the minority in Switzerland) were so keen upon the cause that they had a translation and an edition of their own, with large print and maps. It was published independently at Zurich, Dr. Angst, the British Consul in that town, helping to organize it. Amongst other good friends who worked hard for the truth, and exposed themselves to much obloquy in doing so, were Professor Naville, the eminent Egyptologist of Geneva, and

Monsieur Talichet, the well-known editor of the “Bibliothèque Universelle “of Lausanne, who sacrificed the circulation of his old-established magazine in upholding our cause.

So much for the French and German editions. The American and Canadian had arranged themselves. There remained the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hungarian, and Russian, all of which were rapidly prepared and circulated without a hitch, save that in the case of the Russian, which was published at Odessa, the Censor suppressed it at the last instant. We were successful, however, in getting his veto removed. In each of these countries several thousands of the booklet were given away. In every case we found a larger sale for these foreign editions than we expected, arising no doubt from the eagerness of English residents abroad to make their neighbours understand our position.

The Dutch edition was a stumbling-block. This gallant little nation felt a most natural sympathy for their kinsfolk in arms against us, and honestly believed that they had been very badly used. We should certainly have felt the same. The result was that we were entirely unable to find either publisher or distributer. The greater the opposition the more obvious was the need for the book, so Mr. Reginald Smith arranged that a large edition should be printed here, and sent direct to all leaders of Dutch opinion. I believe that out of some 5,000 copies not more than twenty were sent back to us.

The Norwegian edition also presented some difficulties which were overcome by the assistance of Mr. Thomassen of the “Verdensgang.” This gentleman’s paper was entirely opposed to us, but in the interests of fair play he helped me to get my book before the public. I hope that some relaxation in his attitude towards us in his paper may have been due to a fuller comprehension of our case, and a realisation of the fact that a nation does not make great sacrifices extending over years for an ignoble cause. One other incident in connection with the Norwegian edition is pleasant for me to recall. I had prefaced each Continental version with a special foreword, designed to arrest the attention of the particular people whom I was addressing. In this case, when the book was going to press in Christiania, the preface had not arrived from the translator (the accomplished Madame Brockmann), and as she lived a hundred miles off, with all the passes blocked by a phenomenal snow-storm, it looked as if it must be omitted. Finally, however, my short address to the Scandinavian people was heliographed across from snow-peak to snow-peak, and so found its way to the book.

There was one other language into which the book needed to be translated, and that was the Welsh, for the vernacular press of the Principality was almost entirely pro-Boer, and the Welsh people had the most distorted information as to the cause for which their fellow-countrymen fought so bravely in the field. The translation was done by Mr. W. Evans, and some 10,000 copies were printed for distribution through the agency of the Cardiff “Western Mail.” This finished our labours. Our total output was 300,000 of the British edition, about 50,000 in Canada and the United States, 20,000 in Germany, 20,000 in France, 5,000 in Holland, 10,000 in Wales, 8,000 in Hungary, 5,000 in Norway and Sweden, 3,500 in Portugal, 10,000 in Spain, 5,000 in Italy, and 5,000 in Russia. There were editions in Tamil and Kanarese, the numbers of which I do not know. In all, I have seen twenty different presentments of my little book. The total sum at our disposal amounted to about £5,000, of which, speaking roughly, half came from subscriptions and the other half was earned by the book itself.

It was not long before we had the most gratifying evidence of the success of these efforts. There was a rapid and marked change in the tone of the whole Continental press, which may have been a coincidence, but was certainly a pleasing one. In the case of many important organs of public opinion there could, however, be no question of coincidence, as the arguments advanced in the booklet and the facts quoted were cited in their leading articles as having modified their former anti-British views. This was the case with the “Tagblatt “of Vienna, whose London representative, Dr. Maurice Ernst, helped me in every way to approach the Austrian public. So it was also with the “National Zeitung” in Berlin, the “Indépendance Belge” in Brussels, and many others. In the greater number of cases, however, it was unreasonable to suppose that a journal would publicly eat its own words, and the best result for which we could hope was that which we often attained, an altered and less acrimonious tone.

Mr. Reginald Smith and I now found ourselves in the very pleasant position of having accomplished our work so far as we could do it, and yet of having in hand a considerable sum of money. What were we to do with it? To return it to subscribers was impossible, and indeed at least half of it would have to be returned to ourselves since it had been earned by the sale of the book. I felt that the subscribers had given me a free hand with the money, to use it to the best of my judgment for national aims.

Our first expense was in immediate connection with the object in view, for we endeavoured to supplement the effect of the booklet by circulating a large number of an excellent Austrian work, “Recht und Unrecht im Burenkrieg,” by Dr. Ferdinand Hirz. Six hundred of these were distributed where they might do most good.

Our next move was to purchase half a dozen very handsome gold cigarette cases. On the back of each was engraved, “From Friends in England to a Friend of England.” These were distributed to a few of those who had stood most staunchly by us. One went to the eminent French publicist, Monsieur Yves Guyot, a second to Monsieur Talichet of Lausanne, a third to Mr. Sumichrast, and a fourth to Professor Naville. By a happy coincidence the latter gentleman happened to be in this country at the time, and I had the pleasure of slipping the small souvenir into his hand as he put on his overcoat in the hall of the Athenaeum Club. I have seldom seen anyone look more surprised.

There remained a considerable sum, and Mr. Reginald Smith shared my opinion that we should find some permanent use for it, and that this use should bring benefit to natives of South Africa. We therefore forwarded £1,000 to Edinburgh University, to be so invested as to give a return of £40 a year, which should be devoted to the South African student who acquitted himself with most distinction. There are many Afrikander students at Edinburgh, and we imagined that we had hit upon a pleasing common interest for Boer and for Briton; but I confess that I was rather amazed when at the end of the first year I received a letter from a student expressing his confidence that he would win the bursary, and adding that there could be no question as to his eligibility, as he was a full-blooded Zulu.

The fund, however, was by no means exhausted, and we were able to make contributions to the Civilian Rifleman’s movement, to the Union Jack Club, to the Indian famine, to the Japanese nursing, to the Irish old soldiers’ institute, to the fund for distressed Boers, and to many other deserving objects. These donations varied from fifty guineas to ten. Finally we were left with a residuum which amounted to £309 O.S. 4*d.* Mr. Reginald Smith and I sat in solemn conclave over this sum, and discussed how it might best be used for the needs of the Empire. The fourpence presented no difficulty, for we worked it off upon the crossing sweeper outside, who had helped to relieve Delhi. Nine pounds went in tobacco for the Chelsea veterans at Christmas. There remained the good round sum of £300. We bethought us of the saying that the safety of the Empire might depend upon a single shot from a twelve-inch gun, and we devoted the whole amount to a magnificent cup, to be shot for by the various ships of the Channel Squadron, the winner to hold it for a single year. The stand of the cup was from the oak timbers of the *Victory,* and the trophy itself was a splendid one in solid silver gilt. By the kind and judicious co-operation of Admiral Sir Percy Scott, the Inspector of Target Practice, through whose hands the trophy passed to the Senior Admiral afloat, Sir Arthur Wilson, V.C., in command of the Channel Squadron, all difficulties were overcome and the cup was shot for that year, and has since produced, I am told, great emulation among the various crews. Our one condition was that it should not be retained in the mess-room, but should be put out on the deck where the winning bluejackets could continually see it. I learn that the “Exmouth “came into Plymouth Harbour with the cup on the top of her fore turret.

The one abiding impression left upon my mind by the whole episode is that our Government does not use publicity enough in stating and defending its own case. If a private individual could by spending £3,000 and putting in a month’s work make a marked impression upon the public opinion of the world, what could be done by a really rich and intelligent organization? But the first requisite is that you should honestly have a just cause to state. Who is there outside England who really knows the repeated and honest efforts made by us to settle the eternal Irish question and hold the scales fair between rival Irishmen? We certainly do, as a great Frenchman said, “defend ourselves very badly.” If we let cases go by default how can we imagine that the verdict can be in our favour?

CHAPTER XX. MY POLITICAL ADVENTURES

Central Edinburgh — A Knock-out — The Border Burghs — Tariff Reform — Heckling — Interpolations — Defeat — Reflections.

I HAVE twice stood for Parliament, though if anyone were to ask me my real reasons for doing so I should find it difficult to give them an intelligible answer. It certainly was from no burning desire to join that august assembly, for in each case I deliberately contested seats which every expert considered to be impossible, and though on one occasion I very nearly proved the experts to be wrong, my action is none the less a sign that I had no great wish to be at the head of the poll, for other and easier seats had been offered me. In the case of Central Edinburgh, for which I stood in the 1900 election, there may have been some sentimental call, for it was the section of the city where I was educated and where much of my boyhood was spent. It was said to be the premier Radical stronghold of Scotland, and to carry it would be a fine exploit, for though I was a good deal of a Radical myself in many ways, I knew that it would be a national disgrace and possibly an imperial disaster if we did not carry the Boer War to complete success, and that was the real issue before the electors.

I believe that Providence one way or another gets a man’s full powers out of him, but that it is essential that the man himself should co-operate to the extent of putting himself in the way of achievement. Give yourself the chance always. If it is so fated, you will win through. If your path lies elsewhere, then you have got your sign through your failure. But do not put yourself in the position later in life of looking back and saying, “Perhaps I might have had a career there had I tried.” Deep in my bones I felt that I was on earth for some big purpose, and it was only by trying that I could tell that the purpose was not political, though I could never imagine myself as fettered to a party or as thinking that all virtues lay with one set of men.

My political work was not wasted. I stood in the two most heckling constituencies in Scotland, and through that odious and much-abused custom I gained a coolness on the platform and a disregard for interruption and clamour, which have stood me in good stead since. Indeed, I hold that it was to fashion me more perfectly for my ultimate work that I was twice passed through this furnace. I remember that once at Hawick my soldier brother came to see how I was getting on, and was struck by the effect which I had upon my audience. “It would be strange, Arthur,” said he, “if your real career should prove to be political and not literary.”

“It will be neither. It will be religious,” said I. Then we looked at each other in surprise and both burst out laughing. The answer seemed quite absurd and pointless, for no remote possibility of such a thing suggested itself. It was a curious example of that unconscious power of prophecy which is latent within us.

I had hardly landed from South Africa when I flung myself into the Edinburgh contest. Mr. Cranston, later Sir Robert Cranston, a well-known citizen, was my chairman. When I arrived a small meeting was held, and I, a weary man, listened while it was gravely debated, with much weighing of pros and cons, what my view was to be on each of the vital questions. Finally it was all settled to their satisfaction and written down, preparatory to forming the election address. I had listened with some amusement, and when it was all over I said: “Gentlemen, may I ask who is going to honour these promises that you are making?”

“Why, you, of course,” said they. “Then I think it would be better if I made them,” said I, and, crumpling up their document, I picked up a pen and wrote out my own views and my own address. It was well received and would have won the election against enormous odds — some thousands of votes at the last trial — were it not for a very unexpected intervention.

Those who remember the election will bear me out that it was an exciting affair. My opponent was a Mr. Brown, a member of Nelson’s publishing firm, which had large works in the constituency. I was fresh from the scene of war and overflowing with zeal to help the army, so I spared myself in no way. I spoke from barrels in the street or any other pedestal I could find, holding many wayside meetings besides my big meetings in the evening, which were always crowded and uproarious. There was nothing which I could have done and did not do. My opponent was not formidable, but I had against me an overwhelming party machine with its registered lists, and record of unbroken victory. It was no light matter to change the vote of a Scotsman, and many of them would as soon think of changing their religion. One serious mischance occurred. I was determined to do and say nothing which I did not heartily mean, and this united Ireland, North and South, for the first time in history. The Irish vote was considerable, so that this was important. The South quarrelled with me because, though I favoured some devolution, I was not yet converted to Home Rule. The North was angry because I was in favour of a Catholic University for Dublin. So I had no votes from Ireland. When I went down to hold a meeting in a hall in the Cowgate, which is the Irish quarter, I was told that it had been arranged to break my platform up. This seems to have been true, but fortunately I got on good human terms with my audience, and indeed moved some of them to tears, by telling them of the meeting between the two battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at Ladysmith. So it happened that when a sinister-looking figure, a local horse-slaughterer, appeared on the edge of the stage, he was received in silence. He moved slowly across and said something about free speech. I felt that if I or my people were violent there would be a riot, so I simply said: “Trot along, sonny, trot along! “He did trot along and disappeared on the other side of the stage. After the transit of this sinister star, and my temporary eclipse, all went well to the end.

As the day of the election approached, it became more and more evident that I was getting dangerous, but I was knocked out — fortunately for myself, as I now discern — by a curious interference. There was an Evangelical fanatic named Plimmer living at Dunfermline who thought it his special mission in life to keep Roman Catholic candidates out of Parliament. Therefore at the eleventh hour, the very night before the voting, the whole district was placarded with big sheets to say that I was a Roman Catholic, that I had been educated by Jesuits, and in fact that my whole candidature was an attack upon Kirk and Covenant and Lesser Catechism and everything dear to the Scottish heart. It was very cleverly done, and of course this fanatic alone could not have paid the expenses, though I cannot believe that Mr. Brown knew anything of the matter. My unhappy supporters saw crowds of workmen reading these absurd placards and calling out, “I’ve done with him! “As it was I very narrowly missed the seat, being only beaten by a few hundred votes. The question of an appeal came along, but the thing was so clever that it really was difficult to handle, since it was true enough that I had been educated by Jesuits and yet absurdly untrue that this education influenced my present frame of mind. Therefore we had to leave it alone.

Looking back, I am inclined to look upon Mr. Plimmer as one of the great benefactors of my life. He altered the points at the last moment and prevented me from being shunted on to a side-line which would perhaps have taken me to a dead end. I could never have been a party man, and there seems no place under our system for anyone else. At the moment I was a little sore, and I wrote a letter to the “Scotsman “which defined my religious position as it was then, and caused, I believe, no little comment. I had the following letter from Sir John Boraston, who was the party organizer. The first sentence refers to the possibility of lodging a legal protest.

6 Great George Street, Westminster, London, S.W.

October 18, 1900.

Dear Dr. Doyle, —

Probably your Edinburgh advisers are right, but it is undoubtedly a misfortune that the perpetrators of attacks such as that which was made upon you should be allowed to go unpunished.

Your fight was indeed a phenomenal one, and you have the consolation of knowing that if you did not actually win a seat for yourself, you did materially contribute to the Liberal Unionist victories in two other Edinburgh constituencies — this is generally admitted.

I am sure you will feel that your first entry into active political life promises a full measure of success at no distant date, and I hope I may see you again before long to talk matters over.

Yours very truly, (Sgd.) John Boraston.

I had no further urge to try political adventures, but when the Tariff Reform election of 1905 came round I felt that I should make some sacrifice for the faith that was in me. Mr. “Tommy “Shaw, as he was called — now Lord Shaw — was one of the most energetic Radicals in Scotland, and was reputed to be most firmly established in his seat, which was called “The Border Burghs,” consisting of the small towns of Hawick, Galashiels and Selkirk, all of them engaged in the woollen trade, and all of them hard hit by German competition. It seemed to me that if there was a good field anywhere for Mr. Joseph Chamberlain’s views on a protective tariff it should be there, where an open market had caused such distress and loss. My reasoning was sound enough, but I had not reckoned upon the innate conservatism of the Scottish character, which cannot readjust its general principles to meet the particular case — a noble trait, but occasionally an unpractical one. Party politics are not a divine law, but simply a means to an end, which must adjust itself as the end varies.

This time I really expended a good deal of work as well as money upon the attempt, for if you stand for others besides yourself you have no choice but to work up to the last pound of steam. I might have added my neck to the other things which I risked, for in an endeavour to get into comradeship with the people I joined in what is known as the “common-riding “at Hawick, where a general holiday is proclaimed while the bounds of the common are ridden over and defined. Part of the proceedings was that each mounted man had to gallop full-split down the high road over a measured course of half a mile or so, the burghers lining the way and helping one by waving sticks and umbrellas. I was mounted on a hunter which I had never seen before, and which was full of spirit. Fortunately this monstrous road performance came off late in the afternoon, and I had taken some of the spirit out of him by our ride round the common. I do not profess to be a great horseman, and I certainly nearly made the acquaintance of the Hawick turnpike. Sooner or later some one will be killed at that game, and horses must be lamed every year. Afterwards an interminable ballad was recited with a sort of jingling chorus to which all who are near the reciter keep time with their feet. As it would seem unsympathetic not to join in, I also kept time with the rhythm, and was amused and amazed when I got back to London to see in the papers that I had danced a hornpipe in public before the electors. Altogether I had no desire to face another Hawick common-riding.

The trouble in dealing with a three-town constituency, each town very jealous of the others, is that whatever you do has to be done thrice or you give offence. I was therefore heartily sick of the preparation and only too pleased when the actual election came off. I thought then, and I think now, that a sliding tariff, if only as an instrument for bargaining, would be altogether to our interest in this country, and would possibly cause some of our rivals to cease closing their markets to us, while they freely use the open market which we present. I still think that Chamberlain’s whole scheme was an admirable one, and that it was defeated by a campaign of misrepresentation and actual lying, in which Chinese labour and dear food played a chief part. I stood among the ruins of a dismantled factory in the Border Burghs and I showed how it had been destroyed by German competition, and how while we let their goods in free they were levying taxes on ours and spending the money so gained upon warships with which we might some day have to reckon. The answer to my arguments consisted largely of coloured cartoons of Chinamen working in chains in the mines of the Transvaal, and other nonsense of the sort. I worked very hard-, so hard that on the last night of the election I addressed meetings in each of the three towns, which, as they are separated by many miles of hilly roads, is a feat never done, I understand, before or since. However, it was of no avail and I was beaten, though I believe I am right in saying that the party showed a less decrease of votes than in any constituency in Scotland. The thing which annoyed me most about the election was that my opponent, Tommy Shaw, only appeared once, so far as I remember, in the constituency, and did everything by deputy, so that I found myself like a boxer who is punching his rival's second instead of himself all the time. I had the melancholy satisfaction of noting that the Radical chairman who was so engrossed in the wrongs of Chinamen in the Transvaal went into liquidation within a few months, giving as his reason the pressure of foreign competition in the woollen trade.

It is a vile business this electioneering, though no doubt it is chastening in its effects. They say that mud-baths are healthy and purifying, and I can compare it to nothing else. This applies particularly, I think, to Scotland, where the art of heckling has been carried to extremes. This asking of questions was an excellent thing so long as it was honest in its desire to know the candidate's opinion upon a public measure. But the honest questions are the exception and the unfortunate man is baited by all sorts of senseless trick questions from mischievous and irresponsible persons, which are designed to annoy him and make him seem foolish or ignorant. Some reform is badly needed in this matter. Often, after a speech of an hour, I had an hour of questions, one more absurd than another. The press records will show, I hope, that I held my own, for I knew my subject well, and by this time I had had a good schooling on the platform. Sometimes I countered heavily. I remember one robust individual coming down with a carefully prepared question which he shouted from the back of the hall. I had been speaking of retaliation in commercial tariffs, and his question was: "Mister Candidate, how do you reconcile retaliation with the Sermon on the Mount?" I answered: "We cannot in life always reach the highest ideals. Have *you* sold all and given to the poor? "The man was locally famous as having done nothing of the sort, and there was a howl of delight at my answer which fairly drove him out of the hall.

There is a peculiar dry Scottish wit which is very effective when you get it on your side. I remember one solemn person who had a loaf on the end of a pole which he protruded towards me, as if it were a death’s-head, from the side box of the theatre in which I spoke. The implication was, I suppose, that I would raise the price of bread. It was difficult to ignore the thing and yet puzzling how to meet it, but one of my people in broad Doric cried: “Tak’ it hame and eat it! “which quite spoilt the effect. Usually these interpolations are delivered in a dreamy impersonal sort of voice. When, in talking of the Transvaal War, I said with some passion, “Who is going to pay for this war?” a seedy-looking person standing against the side wall said, “I’m no’ carin’! “which made both me and the audience laugh. Again I remember my speech being quite interrupted by a joke which was lost upon me. I had spoken of the self-respect and decent attire of American factory hands. “Gang and look at Broon’s,” said the dreamy voice. I have never yet learned whether Brown’s factory was famous for tidiness or the reverse, but the remark convulsed the audience.

The Radicals used to attend my meetings in great numbers, so that really, I think, they were often hostile audiences which I addressed. Since their own candidate held hardly any meetings I was the only fun to be had. Before the meeting the packed house would indulge in cries and counter-cries with rival songs and slogans, so that as I approached the building it sounded like feeding-time at the Zoo. My heart often sank within me as I listened to the uproar, and I would ask myself what on earth I meant by placing myself in such a position. Once on the platform, however, my fighting blood warmed up, and I did not quail before any clamour. It was all a great education for the future, though I did not realise it at the time, but followed blindly where some strange inward instinct led me on. What tired me most was the personal liberties taken by vulgar people, which is a very different thing from poor people, whom I usually find to be very delicate in their feelings. I take a liberty with no man, and there is something in me which rises up in anger if any man takes a liberty with me. A candidate cannot say all he thinks on this matter, or his party may suffer. I was always on my guard lest I should give offence in this way, and I well remember how on one occasion I stood during a three days’ campaign a good many indignities with exemplary patience. I was on edge, however, and, as luck would have it, at the very last moment, as I stood on the platform waiting for the London train, one of my own people, an exuberant young bounder, came up with a loud familiar greeting and squeezed my right hand until my signet ring nearly cut me. It opened the sluice and out came a torrent of whaler language which I had hoped that I had long ago forgotten. The blast seemed to blow him bodily across the platform, and formed a strange farewell to my supporters.

Thus ended my career in politics. I could say with my friend Kendrick Bangs: “The electors have returned me — to the bosom of my family.” A very pleasant constituency it is. I had now thoroughly explored that path, and had assured myself that my life’s journey did not he along it. And yet I was deeply convinced that public service was waiting for me somewhere. One likes to feel that one has some small practical influence upon the affairs of one’s time, but I encourage myself by the thought that though I have not been a public man, yet my utterances in several pamphlets and numerous letters in the Press may have had more weight with the public since I was disassociated from any political interest which could sway my judgment.

CHAPTER XXI. THE YEARS BETWEEN THE WARS

“History of the War “ — Sir Oliver Lodge — Military Arguments—” Sir Nigel “ — The Edalji Case — Crowborough — The Oscar Slater Case.

WHEN I returned from South Africa, I found that my wife had improved in health during her stay at Naples, and we were able to settle down once more at Hindhead, where, what with work, cricket, and hunting, I had some pleasant years. A few pressing tasks were awaiting me, however. Besides the barren contest at Edinburgh I had done a history of the war, but the war still continued, and I had to modify it and keep it up to date in successive editions, until in 1902 it took final shape. I called it “The Great Boer War,” not because I thought the war “great “in the scale of history, but to distinguish it from the smaller Boer War of 1881. It had the good fortune to please both friend and foe, for there was an article from one of the Boer leaders in “Cornhill “commending its impartial tone. It has been published now by Nelson in a cheap edition, and shows every sign of being the permanent record of the campaign. No less than £27,000 was spent upon an Official History, but I cannot find that there was anything in it which I had not already chronicled, save for those minute details of various forces which clog a narrative. I asked the chief official historian whether my book had been of use to him, and he very handsomely answered that it had been the spine round which he built.

This history, which is a large-sized book, is not to be confused with the pamphlet “The Cause and Conduct of the War in South Africa,” which was a small concise defence of the British position. The inception and result of this I have already described. I have no doubt that it was to the latter that my knighthood, and my appointment as Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey, both of which occurred in 1902, were due.

I remember that on going down to Buckingham Palace to receive the accolade, I found that all who were waiting for various honours were herded into funny little pens, according to their style and degree, there to await their turn. It chanced that Prof. Oliver Lodge, who was knighted on the same morning, was penned with me, and we plunged at once into psychic talk, which made me forget where I was, or what I was there for. Lodge was really more advanced and certain in his views than I was at that time, but I was quite sure about the truth of the phenomena, and only doubtful whether some alternative explanation might be found for a discarnate intelligence as the force at the back of them. This possibility I weighed for years before the evidence forced me to the Spiritist conclusion. But when, among the cloud of lies with which we are constantly girt, I read that Lodge and I were converted to our present views by the death of our respective sons, my mind goes back very clearly to that exchange of thought in 1902. At that time we had both studied the subject for many years.

Among the many congratulations which I had on my knighthood there were few which I valued more highly than that of my old comrade, H. A. Gwynne, who knew so much about South African affairs. He was good enough to say: “I look upon your work during this terrible South African business as quite equal to that of a successful general.” This may well be the exaggeration of friendship, but it is at least pleasing to know that those who were in a position to judge did not look upon me as a mere busybody who butts in without due cause.

There is one incident at this period which comes back to my memory, and seems very whimsical. I had taken a course of muscular development with Mr. Sandow, the strong man, and in that way had formed an acquaintance with him. In the winter of 1901 Mr. Sandow had a laudable desire to do something for the British wounded, and with that idea he announced a competition at the Albert Hall. He was himself to show feats of strength and then there was to be a muster of strong men who should exhibit their proportions and receive prizes. There were to be three prizes, a golden statue about two feet high, a silver replica, and a bronze.

Sandow asked Lawes the sculptor and myself to be the two judges, he being referee.

It proved to be a very big event. The Albert Hall was crowded. There were eighty competitors, each of whom had to stand on a pedestal, arrayed only in a leopard’s skin. Lawes and I put them up ten at a time, chose one here and one there, and so gradually reduced the number until we only had six left. Then it became excessively difficult, for they were all perfectly developed athletes. Finally the matter was simplified by three extra prizes, and then we got down to the three winners, but had still to name their order, which was all-important since the value of the three prizes was so very different. The three men were all wonderful specimens, but one was a little clumsy and another a little short, so we gave the valuable gold statue to the middle one, whose name was Murray, and who came from Lancashire. The vast audience was very patient during our long judgment, and showed that it was in general agreement. After the meeting Sandow had invited the prize-winners, the judges and a chosen company to a late supper, which was very sumptuous, with champagne flowing freely. When we had finished it was early in the morning. As I left the place of banquet I saw in front of me the winning athlete going forth into the London night with the big golden statue under his arm. I had seen that he was a very simple countryman, unused to London ways, so I overtook him and asked him what his plans were. He confided to me that he had no money, but he had a return ticket to Bolton or Blackburn, and his idea was to walk the streets until a train started for the North. It seemed to me a monstrous thing to allow him to wander about with his treasure at the mercy of any murderous gang, so I suggested that he should come back with me to Morley's Hotel, where I was residing. We could not get a cab, and it seemed to me more grotesque than anything of Stevenson's London imaginings, that I should be wandering round at three in the morning in the company of a stranger who bore a great golden statue of a nude figure in his arms. When at last we reached the hotel I told the night porter to get him a room, saying at the same time, "Mind you are civil to him, for he has just been declared to be the strongest man in England." This went round the hotel, and I found that in the morning he held quite a reception, all the maids and waiters paying homage while he lay in bed with his statue beside him. He asked my advice as to selling it, for it was of considerable value and seemed a white elephant to a poor man. I told him he should open a gymnasium in his native town and have the statue exhibited as an advertisement. This he did, and I believe he has been very successful.

A post-African task was the building up of rifle clubs, for I was enormously impressed by the power of the rifle as shown in the recent war. A soldier was no longer a specialised creature, but every brave man who could hold a rifle-barrel straight was a dangerous man. I founded the Undershaw Club, which was the father of many others, and which was inspected by Lord Roberts, Mr. Seeley and other great men. Within a year or two England was dotted with village clubs, though I fear that few of them still hold their own.

I was so struck by the factors in modern warfare and I had thought so much about them in Africa that I wrote about them with some freedom and possibly even with some bitterness, so that I speedily found myself involved in hot controversy with Colonel Lonsdale Hale, “The Times “expert, and also with Colonel Maude, a well-known military writer. Perhaps as a civilian I should have expressed my views in a more subdued way, but my feelings had been aroused by the conviction that the lives of our men, and even the honour of our country, had been jeopardized by the conservatism of the military and that it would so happen again unless more modern views prevailed. I continued to advance my theories for the next ten years, and I have no doubt, when I judge them by the experience of the Great War, that in the main I was right. The points which I made were roughly as follows:

That the rifle (or machine-gun, which is a modified rifle) is the supreme arbiter in war, and that therefore everything must be sacrificed to concentrate upon that.

That the only place for swords, lances and all the frippery of the past was a museum. Bayonets also are very questionable.

That cavalry could not divide their allegiance between rifle and sword since entirely different ground and tactics are needed for each, the swordsman looking for level sward, the rifleman looking for cover. Therefore all cavalry should at once become Mounted Rifles.

That the very heaviest guns of our fortresses or battleships would be transported by road and used in the field in our next campaign.

That field guns must take cover exactly as riflemen do.

That the Yeomanry, a very expensive force, should be turned into a Cyclist organization.

In view of the fine work done by the Yeomanry, especially in the Eastern deserts, I should reconsider the last item, and the bayonet question is debatable, but all the rest will stand. I stressed the fact also that the period of military training is placed too high, and that an excellent army could be rapidly vamped up if you had the right men. This also was proved by the war.

I remember a debate which I attended as to the proper arms and use of cavalry. The cavalry were there in force, all manner of gallant fellows, moustached and debonair, inclined to glare at those who would disarm them. Sir Taubman-Goldie was in the chair. Three of us, all civilians, upheld the unpopular view that they should lose all their glory and become sombre but deadly riflemen. It is curious now to record that the three men were Erskine Childers, Lionel Amery and myself. Childers was shot at dawn as a traitor to Ireland as well as to Britain, Amery became First Lord of the Admiralty, and I write this memoir. I remember Amery's amusing comparison when he twitted the cavalry with wishing to retain the *arme blanche* simply because their Continental antagonists would have it. “If you fight a rhinoceros,” he said, “you don't want to tie a horn on your nose.” It is an interesting commentary upon this discussion that on one morning during the war there were duels between two separate squadrons of British and German cavalry. The first two squadrons, who were Lancers, rode through each others' ranks twice with loss on either side and no conclusive result. In the second case German Lancers charged British Hussars, who dismounted, used their carbines, and simply annihilated the small force which attacked them.

When my immediate preoccupations after the war had been got rid of, I settled down to attempt some literary work upon a larger and more ambitious scale than the Sherlock Holmes or Brigadier Gerard stories which had occupied so much of my time. The result was “Sir Nigel,” in which I reverted to the spacious days of the “White Company,” and used some of the same characters. “Sir Nigel “represents in my opinion my high-water mark in literature, and though that mark may be on sand, still an author knows its comparative position to the others. It received no particular recognition from critics or public, which was, I admit, a disappointment to me. In England versatility is looked upon with distrust. You may write ballad tunes or you may write grand opera, but it cannot be admitted that the same man may be master of the whole musical range and do either with equal success.

In 1906 my wife passed away after the long illness which she had borne with such exemplary patience. Her end was painless and serene. The long fight had ended at last in defeat, but at least we had held the vital fort for thirteen years after every expert had said that it was untenable. For some time after these days of darkness I was unable to settle to work, until the Edalji case came suddenly to turn my energies into an entirely unexpected channel.

It was in the year 1907 that this notorious case took up much of my time, but it was not wasted, as it ended, after much labour, in partially rectifying a very serious miscarriage of justice. The facts of the case are a little complex and became more so as the matter proceeded. George Edalji was a young law student, son of the Reverend S. Edalji, the Parsee Vicar of the parish of Great Wyrley, who had married an English lady. How the Vicar came to be a Parsee, or how a Parsee came to be the Vicar, I have no idea. Perhaps some Catholic-minded patron wished to demonstrate the universality of the Anglican Church. The experiment will not, I hope, be repeated, for though the Vicar was an amiable and devoted man, the appearance of a coloured clergyman with a half-caste son in a rude, unrefined parish was bound to cause some regrettable situation.

But no one could have foreseen how serious that situation would become. The family became the butt of certain malicious wags in the neighbourhood and were bombarded with anonymous letters, some of them of the most monstrous description. There was worse, however, to come. A horrible epidemic of horsemaiming had broken out, proceeding evidently from some blood-lusting lunatic of Sadie propensities. These outrages continued for a long time, and the local police were naturally much criticized for doing nothing. It would have been as well had they continued to do nothing, for they ended by arresting George Edalji for the crime, the main evidence being that there were signs that the writer of the anonymous letters knew something about the crimes, and that it was thought that young Edalji had written the anonymous letters which had plagued his family so long. The evidence was incredibly weak, and yet the police, all pulling together and twisting all things to their end, managed to get a conviction at the Stafford Quarter Sessions in 1903. The prisoner was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

There were some murmurs among discerning people at the time, and Mr. Voules, of "Truth," has an honourable record for having kept some sort of agitation going, but nothing practical was done until the unhappy youth had already served three years of his sentence. It was late in 1906 that I chanced to pick up an obscure paper called "The Umpire," and my eye caught an article which was a statement of his case, made by himself. As I read, the unmistakable accent of truth forced itself upon my attention and I realised that I was in the presence of an appalling tragedy, and that I was called upon to do what I could to set it right. I got other papers on the case, studied the original trial, went up to Staffordshire and saw the family, went over the scene of the crimes and finally wrote a series of articles on the case, which began in the “Daily Telegraph “of January 12, 1907. As I bargained that they should be non-copyright they were largely transferred to other papers, sold for a penny at street-curbs and generally had a very wide circulation, so that England soon rang with the wrongs of George Edalji.

These wrongs would have been almost comic had they not had so tragic an upshot. If the whole land had been raked, I do not think that it would have been possible to find a man who was so unlikely, and indeed so incapable, of committing such actions. He was of irreproachable character. Nothing in his life had ever been urged against him. His old schoolmaster with years of experience testified to his mild and tractable disposition. He had served his time with a Birmingham solicitor, who gave him the highest references. He had never shown traits of cruelty. He was so devoted to his work that he had won the highest honours in the legal classes, and he had already at the age of twenty-seven written a book upon Railway Law. Finally he was a total abstainer, and so blind that he was unable to recognise any one at the distance of six yards. It was clear that the inherent improbability of such a man committing a long succession of bloody and brutal crimes was so great that it could only be met by the suggestion of insanity. There had never, however, been any indication even of eccentricity in George Edalji. On the contrary, his statements of defence were measured and rational, and he had come through a series of experiences which might well have unhinged a weaker intellect.

The original theory at the trial had been that Edalji had committed the particular mutilations with which he was charged some time in the evening. This line of attack broke down completely, and he was able to advance a certain *alibi.* In the middle of the case, therefore, the police prosecution shifted its ground and advanced the new theory that it was done in the early hours of the morning. George Edalji, as it happened, slept in the same room as his father, the parish vicar. The latter is a light sleeper and is accustomed, as many people are, to assure privacy by turning the key of his room. He swore that George never left the room during the night. This may not constitute an absolute *alibi* in the eye of the law, but it is difficult to imagine anything nearer to one unless a sentinel had been placed outside the door all night. It is so near an *alibi* that nothing but the most cogent considerations could shake it, but far from there being any such considerations, the case was such a thing of threads and patches that one cannot imagine how any sane jury could have accepted it, even though the defence was weakly conducted. So bad was this defence that in the whole trial no mention, so far as I could ascertain, was ever made of the fact that the man was practically blind, save in good light, while between his house and the place where the mutilation was committed lay the full readth of the London and North-Western Railway, an expanse of rails, wires and other obstacles, with hedges to be forced on either side, so that I, a strong and active man, in broad daylight found it a hard matter to pass.

What aroused my indignation and gave me the driving force to carry the thing through was the utter helplessness of this forlorn little group of people, the coloured clergyman in his strange position, the brave blue-eyed, grey-haired wife, the young daughter, baited by brutal boors and having the police, who should have been their natural protectors, adopting from the beginning a harsh tone towards them and accusing them, beyond all sense and reason, of being the cause of their own troubles and of persecuting and maligning themselves. Such an exhibition, sustained, I am sorry to say, by Lord Gladstone and all the forces of the Home Office, would have been incredible had I not actually examined the facts.

The articles caused a storm of indignation through the country. “Truth,” Sir George Lewis and other forces joined in the good work. A committee was formed by the Government to examine and report. It consisted of Sir Arthur Wilson, the Hon. John Lloyd Wharton and Sir Albert de Rutzen. Their finding, which came to hand in June, was a compromise document, for though they were severe upon the condemnation of Edalji and saw no evidence which associated him with the crime, they still clung to the theory that he had written the anonymous letters, that he had therefore been himself contributory to the miscarriage of justice, and that for this reason all compensation for his long period of suffering should be denied him.

It was a wretched decision, and the Law Society at the prompting of Sir George Lewis showed what they thought of it by at once readmitting Edalji to the roll of solicitors with leave to practise, which they would never have done had they thought him capable of dishonourable conduct. But the result stands. To this day this unfortunate man, whose humble family has paid many hundreds of pounds in expenses, has never been able to get one shilling of compensation for the wrong done. It is a blot upon the record of English Justice, and even now it should be wiped out. It is to be remembered that the man was never tried for writing the letters — a charge which could not have been sustained — so that as the matter stands he has got no redress for three years of admitted false imprisonment, on the score that he did something else for which he has never been tried. What a travesty of Justice! The “Daily Telegraph “got up a subscription for him which ran to some £300. The first use that he made of the money was to repay an old aunt who had advanced the funds for his defence. He came to my wedding reception, and there was no guest whom I was prouder to see.

So far, my work had been satisfactory. Where I caused myself great trouble was that in my local exploration at Wyrley I had come across what seemed to me a very direct clue as to both the writer, or rather writers, of the letters, and also of the identity of the mutilator — though the latter word may also have been in the plural. I became interested, the more so as the facts were very complex and I had to do with people who were insane as well as criminal. I have several letters threatening my life in the same writing as those which assailed the Edaljis — a fact which did not appear to shake in the least the Home Office conviction that George Edalji had written them all. Mentally I began to class the Home Office officials as insane also. The sad fact is that officialdom in England stands solid together, and that when you are forced to attack it you need not expect justice, but rather that you are up against an unavowed Trade Union the members of which are not going to act the blackleg to each other, and which subordinates the public interest to a false idea of loyalty. What confronts you is a determination to admit nothing which inculpates another official, and as to the idea of punishing another official for offences which have caused misery to helpless victims, it never comes within their horizon. Even now, after the lapse of so many years, I can hardly think with patience of the handling of this case.

The mistake that I made, so far as my own interests were concerned, was that having got on the track of the miscreant I let the police and the Home Office know my results before they were absolutely completed. There was a strong *primé facie* case, but it needed the goodwill and co-operation of the authorities to ram it home. That co-operation was wanting, which was intelligible, in the case of the local police, since it traversed their previous convictions and conclusions, but was inexcusable in the Home Office. The law officers of the Crown upheld their view that there was not a *primâ facie* case, but I fear that consciously or unconsciously the same trade union principle was at work. Let me briefly state the case that the public may judge. I will call the suspect “X.” I was able to show:

That “X “had shown a peculiar knife or horse-lancet to some one and had stated that this knife did the crimes. I had this knife in my possession.

That this knife or a similar knife must have been used in *some* of the crimes, as shown by the shallow incision.

That “X “had been trained in the slaughter-yard and the cattle-ship, and was accustomed to brutal treatment of animals.

That he had a clear record both of anonymous letters and of destructive propensities.

That his writing and that of his brother exactly fitted into the two writings of the anonymous letters. In this I had strong independent evidence.

That he had shown signs of periodical insanity, and that his household and bedroom were such that he could leave unseen at any hour of the night.

There were very many corroborative evidences, but those were the main ones, coupled with the fact that when “X “was away for some years the letters and outrages stopped, but began again when he returned. On the other hand, when Edalji was put in prison the outrages went on the same as before.

It will hardly be believed that after I had laid these facts before the Home Office they managed to present the House of Commons with the official legal opinion that there was not a *primâ facie* case, while a high official of the Government said to me: “I see no more evidence against these two brothers than against myself and my brother.” The points I mention are taken from the paper I laid before the law officers of the Crown, which lies before me as I write, so the facts are exactly as stated.

I had one letter in sorrow and also in anger from the Staffordshire police complaining that I should be libelling this poor young man whose identity could easily be established.

I do not know what has become of “X “or how often he has been convicted since, but on the last occasion of which I have notes the magistrate said in condemning him to six months’ imprisonment with hard labour: “His character was extremely bad, he having been convicted of arson, of stealing on three occasions and of damage. On his own confession he had committed a deliberate and cruel theft from his aged mother and it was impossible to overlook the seriousness of the case.” So much for the inoffensive youth whom I had libelled! But what about Edalji’s three years of gaol?

On September 18, 1907, I married Miss Jean Leckie, the younger daughter of a Blackheath family whom I had known for years, and who was a dear friend of my mother and sister. There are some things which one feels too intimately to be able to express, and I can only say that the years have passed without one shadow coming to mar even for a moment the sunshine of my Indian summer which now deepens to a golden autumn. She and my three younger children with the kindly sympathy of my two elder ones have made my home an ideally happy one.

My wife’s people had a house at Crowborough, and there they had gone to reside. As they were very attached I thought it would be a happy arrangement not to separate them, so I bought a house close by, named “Windlesham.” As I paid for it by a sum of money which I recovered after I had been unjustly defrauded of it, my friends suggested “Swindlesham “as a more appropriate name. Thus it came about that in 1907 I left Undershaw, Hindhead, after ten years’ residence, and moved myself and my belongings to the highlands of Sussex, where I still dwell in the few months of settled life which give me a rest between my wanderings.

Very soon after my marriage, having just got clear of the Edalji case, I became entangled in that of Oscar Slater. The one was in a way the cause of the other, for since I was generally given credit for having got Edalji out of his troubles, it was hoped by those who believed that Slater’s condemnation was a miscarriage of justice that I might be able to do the same for him. I went into the matter most reluctantly, but when I glanced at the facts, I saw that it was an even worse case than the Edalji one, and that this unhappy man had in all probability no more to do with the murder for which he had been condemned than I had. I am convinced that when on being convicted he cried out to the judge that he never knew that such a woman as the murdered woman existed he was speaking the literal truth.

In one respect the Oscar Slater case was not so serious as the Edalji one, because Slater was not a very desirable member of society. He had never, so far as is known, been in trouble as a criminal, but he was a gambler and adventurer of uncertain morals and dubious ways — a German Jew by extraction, living under an alias. Edalji, on the other hand, was a blameless youth. But in another aspect Slater’s case was worse than that of Edalji, since the charge was murder. He was very nearly hanged, and finally the life sentence was actually carried out, so that the wrong was never righted and at the present moment the unfortunate man is in gaol. It is a dreadful blot upon the administration of justice in Scotland, and such judicial crimes are not, I am convinced, done with impunity even to the most humble. Somehow — somewhere, there comes a national punishment in return.

The case was roughly this: an elderly woman, Miss Gilchrist, was done to death most brutally in her flat, while her servant-maid, Helen Lambie, was absent for ten minutes on an errand. Her head was beaten to pieces by some hard instrument. The neighbours were alarmed by the noise, and one of them, together with the maid, actually saw the murderer, a young man, leave the flat and pass him at the door. The police description at the time was by no means in agreement with Slater's appearance. Robbery did not appear to be the motive of the crime, for nothing was missing unless it was a single diamond brooch. On the other hand, a box of papers had been broken into and left in disorder. The date was December 21, 1908.

And now comes the great fact which is admitted by all, and which makes the whole case wildly improbable if not utterly impossible. It was thought that a diamond brooch had been taken. It was found out that a diamond brooch had also been pawned by the Bohemian Slater, who had started for America. Was it not clear that he was the murderer? New York was warned. Slater was arrested and in due time was returned to Glasgow. Then came the fiasco. It was found beyond all doubt that the brooch in question had been in Slater's possession for years, and that it had nothing to do with Miss Gilchrist at all.

This should have been the end of the case. It was too preposterous to suppose that out of all the folk in Glasgow the police had arrested the right man by pure chance — for that was what it amounted to. But the public had lost its head, and so had the police. If the case had completely gone to pieces surely it could be reconstructed in some fresh form. Slater was poor and friendless. He had lived with a woman, which shocked Scotch morality. As one writer boldly said in the press: "Even if he did not do it, he deserved to be condemned, anyhow." A case was made up in the most absurd manner. A half-crown card of tools was found in his box with the sort of tools which are found on such cards. The frail hammer was evidently the instrument which had beaten in the woman's skull. The handle might have been cleaned. Then surely there had been blood on it. The police description was already amended so as to be nearer to Slater. He, a sallow, dark-haired Jew, was picked out by witnesses from among a group of fair Scotsmen. Some one had been seen waiting in the street for some nights before. This some one was variously described by many witnesses. Some descriptions would fit Slater, some were his very opposite. The people who saw the murderer leave thought it might be Slater, but were not sure. The chief witness, Adams, was very short-sighted and had not his glasses. A clear *alibi* was proved by Slater, but as his mistress and his servant girl were the witnesses, it was not allowed. Whom could he produce save the inmates of his house? No attempt was ever made to show that Slater had any connection with Miss Gilchrist, or with the maid, Lambie, and as Slater was really a stranger in Glasgow, it was impossible to see how he could have known anything about this retired old maid. But he was not too well defended, while Mr. Ure, the Advocate-General of Scotland, prosecuting for the State, thundered away in a most violent speech in which several statements were made, uncorrected by Judge Guthrie, which were very inexact, and which must have powerfully swayed the jury. Finally, the Crown got a conviction by nine votes to six (five "not proven ") — which, of course, would have meant a new trial in England, and the wretched foreigner was condemned to death. The scaffold was actually erected, and it was only two mornings before his execution that the order came which prevented a judicial murder. As it was, the man became a convict — and is one still.

It is an atrocious story, and as I read it and realised the wickedness of it all, I was moved to do all I could for the man. I was aided by the opinion of Sir Herbert Stephen, who read the evidence and declared that there was not even a *primâ facie* case against the man. I, therefore, started a newspaper agitation and wrote a small book with an account of the whole matter. The consciences of some people responded, and finally we got up sufficient pressure to induce the Government to appoint a Commissioner, Sheriff Miller, to examine the case. It was all to no purpose, and the examination was a farce. The terms of reference were so narrow that the conduct of the police was entirely excluded, which was really the very thing at issue, since we held that where their original evidence failed them, they had strained many points in trying to build up a case and to obtain a verdict. It was also decided that evidence should not be on oath. The result was that there was no result, nor could there be with such limitations. None the less, some fresh evidence was put forward which further weakened the already very weak case for the prosecution. For example, at the trial it had been stated that Slater, on reaching Liverpool from Glasgow, had gone to a Liverpool hotel under a false name, as if he were trying to throw the police off his track. It was shown that this was not true, and that he had signed the register with his own Glasgow name. I say his Glasgow name, for he had several pseudonyms in the course of his not too reputable career, and, as a fact, he took his actual passage under a false name, showing that he intended to make a clear start in America. He was, according to his own account, pursued by some woman — probably his lawful wife — and this covering of tracks was to escape this huntress. The fact that he used his own name at the hotel showed that the new name was for American rather than for British use, and that he had no fear of Glasgow pursuit.

We could do no more, and there the matter rested. There was a very ugly aftermath of the case, which consisted of what appeared to be persecution of Mr. Trench, a detective who had given evidence at the inquiry which told in favour of our view. A charge was shortly afterwards made against both him and a solicitor, Mr. Cook, who had been conspicuous upon Slater’s side, which might well have ruined them both. As it was, it caused them great anxiety and expense. There had been a most unpleasant political flavour to the whole proceedings; but on this occasion the case came before a Conservative Judge, Mr. Scott Dickson, who declared that it should never have been brought into court, and dismissed it forthwith with contempt. It is a curious circumstance that as I write, in 1924, Judge Guthrie, Cook, Trench, Helen Lambie, Miller and others have all passed on. But Slater still remains, eating out his heart at Peterhead.

One strange psychic fact should be mentioned which was brought to my notice by an eminent English K.C. There was a Spiritualist circle which used to meet at Falkirk, and shortly after the trial messages were received by it which purported to come from the murdered woman. She was asked what the weapon was which had slain her. She answered that it was an iron box-opener. Now I had pondered over the nature of certain wounds in the woman’s face, which consisted of two cuts with a little bridge of unbroken skin between. They might have been caused by the claw end of a hammer, but on the other hand, one of the woman’s eyes had been pushed back into her brain, which could hardly have been done by a hammer, which would have burst the eyeball first. I could think of no instrument which would meet the case. But the box-opener would exactly do so, for it has a forked end which would make the double wound, and it is also straight so that it might very well penetrate to the brain, driving the eye in front of it. The reader will reasonably ask why did not the Spiritualists ask the name of the criminal. I believe that they did and received a reply, but I do not think that such evidence could or should ever be used or published.

It could only be useful as the starting point of an inquiry.

There was one intervention during those years to which I look back with satisfaction, and that was my protest against the King's Oath before the Coronation of King Edward. The Oath was actually changed, and though my protest may have had no effect upon that historic fact, it was none the less the first letter in "The Times "upon the subject.

It ran thus:

Sir, —

Surely Colonel Sandys and the members of the Protestant Reformation Society should, looking at the matter simply from their own point of view, recognise that the surest way to strengthen any creed is, as the whole history of the world has proved, to persecute it. And it is mere juggling with words to attempt to show that it is anything other than persecution to hold up the Roman Catholic faith to obloquy in the Coronation Oath, while every other creed, Christian or non-Christian, is left unassailed. Is it not a shocking thing that, while Roman Catholic chapels throughout the whole Empire are still draped in black for a deceased Monarch, his successor should be compelled by law to insult the most intimate convictions of these same mourners?

And is it not a most narrow and foolish policy, unworthy of this tolerant age, that a young King should be forced to offend the feelings of great numbers of Irishmen, Canadians and other subjects? I feel sure that, apart from Catholics, the great majority of broad-minded thinkers of any or of no denomination in this country are of opinion that the outcry of fanatics should be disregarded, and that all creeds should receive the same courteous and respectful treatment so long as their adherents are members of the common Empire. To bring these medieval rancours to an end would indeed be an auspicious opening of a new reign.

Yours faithfully, Arthur Conan Doyle.

CHAPTER XXII. THE YEARS BETWEEN THE WARS

Constantinople — A Strange Creature — The Night of Power — Dorando — Dramatic Adventures — Psychic Experience — The Congo Agitation — Olympic Games — Divorce Reform — Speculation.

YEARS of peaceful work followed my marriage, broken only by two journeys to the Mediterranean, in the course of which we explored some out-of-the-way portions of Greece, and visited Egypt, where I found hardly one single man left of all the good fellows whom I had once known. In the course of our travels we visited Constantinople, looking at the great guns in the forts on the Dardanelles, with little thought of all the British lives which were to be sacrificed upon those low, dark, heather-clad hills which slope down to the Northern shore. In Constantinople we attended the weekly selamlik of Abdul Hamid, and saw him with his dyed beard and the ladies of his harem as they passed down to their devotions. It was an incredible sight to Western eyes to see the crowd of officers and officials, many of them fat and short of wind, who ran like dogs behind his carriage in the hope that they might catch the Imperial eye. It was Ramadan, and the old Sultan sent me a message that he had read my books and that he would gladly have seen me had it not been the Holy month. He interviewed me through his Chamberlain and presented me with the Order of the Medjedie, and, what was more pleasing to me, he gave the Order of the Chevekat to my wife. As this is the Order of Compassion, and as my wife ever since she set foot in Constantinople had been endeavouring to feed the horde of starving dogs who roamed the streets, no gift could have been more appropriate.

We were admitted secretly and by very special favour into the great Mosque of Sophia during the sacred festival which is known as the Night of Power. It was a most marvellous spectacle as from the upper circle of pillared arches we looked down upon 60,000 lighted lamps and 12,000 worshippers, who made, as they rose and fell in their devotions, a sound like the wash of the sea. The priests in their high pulpits were screaming like seagulls, and fanaticism was in the air. It was at this moment that I saw a woman — I will not call her a lady — young and flighty, seat herself jauntily on the edge of the stone parapet, and look down at the 12,000 men who were facing us. No unbeliever should be tolerated there, and a woman was the abomination of abominations. I heard a low deep growl and saw fierce bearded faces looking up. It only needed one fiery spirit to head the rush and we should have been massacred — with the poor consolation that some of us at least had really asked for it. However, she was pulled down, and we made our way as quickly and as quietly as possible out of a side door. It was time, I think.

One curious incident of our journey stands out in my memory. We were steaming past Ægina on a lovely day with calm water around us. The captain, a courteous Italian, had allowed us to go upon the bridge, and we — my wife and I — were looking down into the transparent depths when we both clearly saw a creature which has never, so far as I know, been described by Science. It was exactly like a young ichthyosaurus, about 4 feet long, with thin neck and tail, and four marked side-flippers. The ship had passed it before we could call any other observer. I was interested to notice that Admiral Anstruther in the “Evening News “some years later described, and drew, an exactly similar creature which he had seen under water off the Irish coast. This old world has got some surprises for us yet.

Here and there, as I look back at those long and happy years, some particular episode flashes vividly into my memory. I do not often do journalistic work — why should one poach upon the preserves of others? — but on the occasion of the Olympic Games of 1908 I was tempted, chiefly by the offer of an excellent seat, to do the Marathon Race for the “Daily Mail.” It was certainly a wonderful experience, for it will be known to history as the Dorando Race. Perhaps a few short paragraphs from my description may even now recapture the thrill of it. The huge crowd — some 50,000 people — were all watching the entrance to the stadium, the dark gap through which the leader must appear. Then —

“At last he came. But how different from the exultant victor whom we expected! Out of the dark archway there staggered a little man, with red running-drawers, a tiny boy-like creature. He reeled as he entered and faced the roar of the applause. Then he feebly turned to the left and wearily trotted round the track. Friends and encouragers were pressing round him.

"Suddenly the whole group stopped. There were wild gesticulations. Men stooped and rose again. Good heavens! He has fainted; is it possible that even at this last moment the prize may slip through his fingers? Every eye slides round to that dark archway. No second man has yet appeared. Then a great sigh of relief goes up. I do not think in all that great assembly any man would have wished victory to be torn at the last instant from this plucky little Italian. He has won it. He should have it.

"Thank God, he is on his feet again — the little red legs going incoherently, but drumming hard, driven by a supreme will within. There is a groan as he falls once more and a cheer as he staggers to his feet. It is horrible, and yet fascinating, this struggle between a set purpose and an utterly exhausted frame. Again, for a hundred yards, he ran in the same furious and yet uncertain gait. Then again he collapsed, kind hands saving him from a heavy fall.

"He was within a few yards of my seat. Amid stooping figures and grasping hands I caught a glimpse of the haggard, yellow face, the glazed, expressionless eyes, the lank black hair streaked across the brow. Surely he is done now. He cannot rise again.

"From under the archway has darted the second runner, Hayes, Stars and Stripes on his breast, going gallantly, well within his strength. There is only twenty yards to do if the Italian can do it. He staggered up, no trace of intelligence upon his set face, and again the red legs broke into their strange automatic amble.

"Will he fall again? No, he sways, he balances, and then he is through the tape and into a score of friendly arms. He has gone to the extreme of human endurance. No Roman of the prime ever bore himself better than Dorando of the Olympic of 1908. The great breed is not yet extinct."

Of course the prize went to the American, as his rival had been helped, but the sympathy of the crowd, and I am sure of every sporting American present, went out to the little Italian. I not only wrote Dorando up, but I started a subscription for him in the "Daily Mail," which realised over £300 — a fortune in his Italian village — so that he was able to start a baker's shop, which he could not have done on an Olympic medal. My wife made the presentation in English, which he could not understand; he answered in Italian, which we could not understand; but I think we really did understand each other all the same.

There is no denying that the American team were very unpopular in London, though the unpopularity was not national, for the stadium was thick with American flags. Everyone admitted that they were a splendid lot of athletes, but they were not wisely handled and I saw with my own eyes that they did things which would not have been tolerated if done by an English team in New York. However, there may well have been some want of tact on both sides, and causes at work of which the public knew nothing. When I consider the Dunraven Yacht race, and then these Olympic Games, I am by no means assured that sport has that international effect for good which some people have claimed for it. I wonder whether any of the old Grecian wars had their real origin in the awards at Olympia. I may add that we had a dozen or so of the American boys down to "Windlesham," where we had a very pleasant day together. I found them all excellent fellows. I put up a billiard Olympic prize, and one of them bore it off with him. The whole incident was very pleasant.

My work for a few years after my marriage ran largely in the direction of drama, and if it was not lucrative it at least provided us with a good deal of amusement and excitement. In the case of one venture this excitement became a little too poignant, though all ended well in the end. I had dramatized "Rodney Stone "under the name of "The House of Temperley," with all the ring scenes and prize fights included, and treated in the most realistic fashion. We had an excellent boxing instructor who took one of the smaller parts and who not only fought himself but trained the others to a remarkable degree of skill. So realistic was it that when on the first night the bully, Berks, after a long encounter, went down with a crash from a fine raking uppercut, there was an involuntary groan from the whole house, which meant as clearly as could be, "There now, you have killed a man for our amusement." It was really incredibly well done and I could never have believed that such scenes could be so cleverly faked, though it was not always done with impunity, for Rex Davies, who played Gloucester Dick, assured me that he lost a tooth and broke both a finger and a rib during his engagement. The play itself was unequal, but was so very novel and sensational in its best scenes that it should have been a considerable success. I found no manager who would take the risk, and I had myself to take the Adelphi Theatre for a six months' lease, at a rent which with the Company worked out at about £600 a week. As on the top of this the production cost about £2,000, it will be seen that I was plunging rather deep.

And luck did not favour us. The furore for boxing had not yet set in. Ladies were afraid to come, and imagined it would be a brutal spectacle. Those who did come were exhilarated beyond measure, but the prejudice still weighed heavily against us. Then there came one of those theatrical slumps when everything goes wrong, and finally King Edward died and that killed it outright. It was a very serious situation. I still had the theatre upon my hands. I might sublet it, or I might not. If I did not, the expense was simply ruinous.

It was under these circumstances that, as I have already said, I wrote and rehearsed “The Speckled Band “in record time, and so saved the situation. The real fault of this play was that in trying to give Holmes a worthy antagonist I overdid it and produced a more interesting personality in the villain. The terrible ending was also against it. However, it was a considerable success and saved a difficult — almost a desperate — situation.

Yet another theatrical venture was my “Fires of Fate,” some of which is certainly the best dramatic work that I have ever done. It was unlucky, as it was produced in a very hot summer. I carried it at my own expense through the two impossible holiday months, but when Lewis Waller, who played the hero, returned from a provincial tour to London, he was keen on some new play and my “Fires “were never really burned out. I fancy sometimes that they might even now flame up again if given a chance. I stage managed most of this play myself, and with curious results. There are certain dramatic conventionalities which can only be broken through by one who is not himself an actor. There was a scene where a number of helpless tourists, men and women, were brutally ill-treated by Arabs. The brutality in rehearsal was conventional. I made the Arabs get imitation whips and cudgels and really savage the poor travellers. The effect was novel and appalling. There was a young Welsh officer in the front of the stalls who was a friend of my brother’s. He held both the V.C. and the D.S.O. So stirred was he by the sight that he could hardly be restrained from clambering on to the stage in order to help the unhappy tourists. The end of that act, when the drove of bleeding captives are led away and you hear the monotonous song of the Arabs as they march, and you see Lewis Waller, who has been left for dead, struggle up on his elbow and signal across the

Nile for assistance, was one which brought the whole house to its feet. Such moments to a dramatist give a thrill of personal satisfaction such as the most successful novelist never can feel. There is no more subtle pleasure if you are really satisfied with your work than to sit in the shadow of a box and watch not the play but the audience.

I had one other dramatic venture, “Brigadier Gerard,” which also was mildly successful. In fact, I have never known failure on the stage save in the case of the unfortunate “Jane Annie.” Lewis Waller played the Brigadier and a splendid dashing Hussar he made. It was a glorious performance. I remember that in this play also I ran up against the conventionalities of the stage. I had a group of Hussar officers, the remnants of the regiment which had gone through Napoleon’s last campaign. When it came to the dress rehearsal, I found them, to my horror, dressed up in brand new uniforms of chestnut and silver. “Good heavens! “I cried. “This is not a comic opera!”

“What do you want done? “asked Waller. “Why,” said I, “these men are warriors, not ballet dancers. They have been out in all weathers day and night for months. Every scrap of truth goes out of the play if they appear like that.” The uniforms had cost over a hundred pounds, but I covered them with mud and dust and tore holes in them. The result was that, with begrimed faces, I got a band of real Napoleonic soldiers. Waller himself insisted on retaining his grease paint and his nice new clothes, but I am sure every man in the audience, if not every woman, would have liked him better as I had made the others. Poor Willie Waller! There was some strange and wonderful blood in his veins. He was a glorious fellow, and his premature death a great blow to our stage. What virility! What a face and figure! They called him the “Flappers’ idol,” and it reflects credit on the flapper, for where could she find a less sickly and more manly type? He caught his fatal illness in serving the soldiers. One of his greatest possessions was his voice. He came down to “Windlesham “once, and as he was reciting in the music-room that wonderful resonant voice chanced to catch the exact note which corresponded to the curve of all the glass lampshades on the walls. They all started thrilling as a wine-glass does when it is touched. I could quite believe after that, that matter could be disintegrated by sound if the sound were strong enough. I am not clear what blood ran in Waller’s veins, Hebrew or Basque or both. I only know that it went to make a very wonderful man. His intense feeling about everything that he did was one of his characteristics and no doubt a cause of his success. It did not carry him far in golf, however. I remember hearing him as he approached the last tee mutter, “God, give me *one* good drive.” I fear, however, that the betting was against it.

In 1910 a fresh task opened up before me. It arose from my being deeply moved by reading some of the evidence concerning the evil rule, not of Belgium, but of the King of the Belgians in the Congo. I examined this evidence carefully before I accepted it, and I assured myself that it was supported by five British Consuls and by Lord Cromer, as well as by travellers of many races, Belgian, French, American, Swedish and others. An attempt has been made since to minimize the facts and to pretend that Roger Casement had been at the back of the agitation for sinister purposes of his own. This contention is quite untenable and the evidence for the atrocities is overwhelming and from very many sources, the Belgians themselves being among the best witnesses. I put in some two years working with Mr. Morel and occasionally lecturing in the country upon this question, and it was certainly the efforts of the Congo Association which we represented, that eventually brought the question to the notice of that noble man King Albert which meant setting it right so that the colony is now, so far as I know, very well managed. Casement, whom I shall always regard as a fine man afflicted with mania, has met his tragic end, and Morel’s views upon the war have destroyed the feelings which I had for him, but I shall always maintain that they both did noble work in championing the wrongs of those unhappy and helpless negroes. My own book “The Crime of the Congo,” which was translated into all European languages, had also, I hope, some influence towards that end.

In the early summer of 1912 I had a telegram from Lord Northcliffe which let me in for about as much trouble as any communication which I have ever received. It was to the effect that Britain must regain her place among the athletic nations which had been temporarily eclipsed by the Olympic Games at Stockholm, and that I was the one man in Great Britain who could rally round me the various discordant forces which had to be united and used. This was very complimentary, but it was Lord Northcliffe’s sole contribution to the matter for a very long time, and I was left to my own devices entirely in carrying out a complex task. So badly co-ordinated were Northcliffe’s papers that I had some of them actually attacking me while I was working on their chief’s suggestion.

When I examined I found chaos. On the one hand was the British Olympic Committee, a most sound and respectable body, under Lord Desborough. In some way they had lost touch with press and public and were generally in disfavour, though really they had done their best. On the other hand was “The Times,” which had worked itself into a fury about the misdeeds of the Committee, and had set a tone which poisoned the whole press against them. Lord Northcliffe would have nothing to do with anything which emanated from the Committee; the Committee defied Lord Northcliffe. It was clear that this had to be cleared up as a preliminary, and the matter took enough diplomacy to have settled the Balkan question. I called upon the Committee and suggested that an independent body be formed on which they could be represented. To this they agreed. I then called on “The Times “and said: “You are no longer dealing with the old Olympic Committee, but with a new body. Do you agree to this? “Yes, that was all in order. I may have omitted the trifling fact that the new body did not yet exist. I then asked Mr. Studd, the famous cricketer of old and head of the Polytechnic to help me to form the new body. We soon had a very effective one, including several leading athletes and Lord Forster, now Governor-General of Australia. I served, of course, on the Committee, and soon we were in touch with every one and all promised to go smoothly.

But presently a huge mistake was made. I don’t wish to represent myself as the fount of all wisdom, and no doubt I make as many slips as my fellows, but that particular one would never have been made had I been present, but I was called away and was out of the country at that crucial Committee meeting. It had been already determined that an appeal to the public over all our names should be issued. The amount had not been discussed, but in my own mind I had thought that £10,000 would suffice. I was horrified, therefore, when I returned from my holiday to find that they had appealed for £100,000. The sum was absurd, and at once brought upon us from all sides the charge of developing professionalism. My position was very difficult. If I protested now it would go far to ruin the appeal. After all it might succeed. I could only fall into line with the others and do my best for the sake of the cause to defend a policy which I looked upon as mistaken. We actually collected about £7,000, and finally, as we found that the general feeling was either hostile or apathetic, we handed over this sum to the Olympic Committee. Then came the war, and so in any case our labour was in vain, for the Games were to be in Berlin in 1916. We were all playing another game by then. This matter was spread over a year of my life and was the most barren thing that I ever touched, for nothing came of it, and I cannot trace that I ever received one word of thanks from any human being. I was on my guard against Northcliffe telegrams after that.

I remember one curious episode about that time. I was staying in a Northumberland Avenue Hotel, and I walked out at night in pensive mood, strolling down the Embankment and watching the great dark river with the gleam of the lights upon it. Suddenly a man passed me, walking very rapidly and muttering in an incoherent way. He gave me an impression of desperation and I quickened my pace and followed him. With a rush he sprang up on the parapet and seemed to be about to throw himself into the river. I was just in time to catch his knees and to pull him down. He struggled hard to get up, but I put my arm through his and led him across the road. There I reasoned with him and examined into the cause of his troubles. He had had some domestic quarrel, I believe, but his main worry was his business, which was that of a baker. He seemed a respectable man and the case seemed genuine, so I calmed him down, gave him such immediate help as I could, and made him promise to return home and to keep in touch with me afterwards.

When the excitement of the incident was over, I had grave doubts as to whether I had not been the victim of a clever swindler. I was considerably relieved, therefore, to get a letter a few days later, giving name and address, and obviously genuine. I lost sight of the case after that.

Another matter which preoccupied me much in the years before the war, and preoccupies me still, is the Reform of our Divorce Laws. I was president of the Reform Union for ten years and have only just vacated the position in order to make room for a far more efficient successor in Lord Birkenhead. I am quite alive to all the arguments of our opponents, and quite understand that laxity in the marriage tie is an evil, but I cannot understand why England should lag behind every other Protestant country in the world, and even behind Scotland, so that unions which are obviously disgusting and degrading are maintained in this country while they can be dissolved in our Colonies or abroad. As to morality I cannot, I fear, admit that our morality here is in the least better than in Scandinavia, Holland or Germany, where they have more rational laws. I think that in some States in America they have pushed Divorce to an extreme, but even in America I should say that married happiness and morality generally are quite as high as with us. The House of Lords has shown itself to be more liberal in this matter than the Commons, possibly because the latter have a fear of organized Church influence in their constituencies. It is one of several questions which makes me not sorry to see Labour, with its larger outlook, in power for a time in this country. Our marriage laws, our land laws, the cheapening of justice and many other things have long called out for reform, and if the old parties will not do it then we must seek some new one which will.

During these long and happy years, when the smooth current of our national life was quietly sliding toward Niagara, I did not lose my interest in psychic matters, but I cannot say that I increased my grasp of the religious or spiritual side of the subject. I read, however, and investigated whenever the chance arose. A gentleman had arranged a series of physical séances in a large studio in North London, and I attended them, the mediums being Cecil Husk and Craddock. They left a very mixed impression upon my mind, for in some cases, I was filled with suspicion and in others I was quite sure that the result was genuine. The possibility that a genuine medium may be unscrupulous and that when these very elusive forces fail to act he may simulate them is one which greatly complicates the whole subject, but one can only concentrate upon what one is sure is true and try to draw conclusions from that. I remember that many sheeted ghosts walked about in the dim light of a red lamp on these occasions, and that some of them came close to me, within a foot of my face, and illuminated their features by the light of a phosphorescent slate held below them. One splendid Arab, whom the medium called Abdullah, came in this fashion. He had a face like an idealised W. G. Grace, swarthy, black-bearded and dignified, rather larger than human. I was looking hard at this strange being, its nose a few inches from my own, and was wondering whether it could be some very clever bust of wax, when in an instant the mouth opened and a terrific yell was emitted. I nearly jumped out of my chair. I saw clearly the gleaming teeth and the red tongue. It certainly seemed that he had read my thought and had taken this very effective way of answering it.

Some of the excitements of my life during these and the subsequent years were due to financial entanglements which arose from a certain speculative element in my own nature, depending rather upon the love of adventure than upon any hope of gain. If when I earned money I had dug a hole in the garden and buried it there I should be a much richer man to-day. I can hardly blame the punter on the racecourse when I remember the outside chances which I have taken in the past in every possible form of speculation. But I have the advantage over the mere gambler in this, that every pound of my money went to develop something or other and lined the pocket of the working man, who, by the way, when he grumbles over the profits of the Capitalist never even alludes to his losses. If a balance sheet were struck it would be interesting to see what, if any, is the exact margin of profit.

It is true that sometimes I have indulged in a pure gamble but never for any sum which would hurt me. I have painful memories of a guano island off South Africa on which our treasure seekers were not even allowed to land, though every bird’s nest was rumoured to contain a diamond. The Spanish galleon in the bay of Tobermory also took treasure rather than gave it, and the return for my shares was a lump of glass and a rusted bar. That was more than ever I had from certain spots in Kalgurli and Coolgardie and other alleged goldbearers, which have nearly all been gold consumers so far as I am concerned. I fear some of those mines were like that legendary one where the manager, getting a cable which ordered him to start crushing, replied, “I have nothing to crush until you return samples.”

I have played my involuntary part also in the development of the Rand and Rhodesia, from those early and unsophisticated days when I misread the quotation and meaning to invest £60 was faced next morning with a bill for £900. Occasionally it is true that I backed a winner, but as a rule I must confess that I was not judicious in my selections.

But it was at home that I expended myself most freely. I saw the enormous possibilities of Kent coal, which even now are not fully understood; but I did not sufficiently weigh the impossibilities, which are that an enterprise can be successful which is wildly financed and extravagantly handled. I and many others lost our money sinking the shafts which may bring fortunes to our successors. I even descended 1,000 feet through the chalk to see with my own eyes that the coal was *in situ.* It seems to have had the appearance and every other quality of coal save that it was incombustible, and when a dinner was held by the shareholders which was to be cooked by local coal, it was necessary to send out and buy something which would burn. There were, however, lower strata which were more sensitive to heat. Besides Kent Coal I lost very heavily in running a manufacturing plant in Birmingham, into which I was led by those successive stages in which you are continually trying to save what you have already invested until the situation becomes so serious that you drop it in terror. We turned from bicycles to munitions during the war, and actually worked hard the whole four years, with a hundred artisans making needful war material, without ever declaring a penny of dividend. This, I should think, must be a record, and at least no one could call us profiteers. The firm was eventually killed dead by the successive strikes of the moulders and the miners. It is amazing how one set of workmen will ruin another set without apparently any remonstrance from the sufferers. Another bad egg was a sculpture machine for architectural work, which really had great possibilities, but we could not get the orders. I was chairman of this company, and it cost me two years of hard work and anxiety, ending up by my paying the balance out of my own pocket, so that we might wind up in an honourable way. It was a dismal experience with many side adventures attached to it, which would make a sensational novel.

Such are some of the vicissitudes which cannot be disregarded in a retrospect of life, for they form a very integral and absorbing part of it. I have had my ill luck and I have had my good. Amid the latter I count the fact that I have been for twenty-one years a director of Raphael Tuck & Co., without the least cloud to darken the long and pleasant memory. I have also been for many years chairman of Besson’s famous brass instrument firm. I think a man should know all sides of life, and he has missed a very essential side if he has not played his part in commerce. In investments, too, I would not imply that I have always been unfortunate. My speculative adventures are over, and I can at least say that unless the British Empire goes down I shall be able to retain enough for our modest needs.

CHAPTER XXIII. SOME NOTABLE PEOPLE

President Roosevelt — Lord Balfour — Mr. Asquith — Lord Haldane — George Meredith — Rudyard Kipling — James Barrie — Henry Irving — Bernard Shaw — R. L. S. — Grant Allen — James Payn — Henry Thompson — Royalty.

WHEN I have chanced during my life to come in contact with notable people, I have often made some short record at the time of what they said and how they impressed me. It is difficult, however, to use these notes for publication when you happen to have been a guest, and it can only be done, I think, by using one's judgment and never consciously harming one's host. If every one were altogether silent upon such occasions the most pleasing side of great contemporaries would never be chronicled, for the statesman in slippers is a very much more human and lovable person than the politician on the platform.

Among the great men that I have known President Roosevelt occupied a prominent place. He was not a big, nor, so far as one could see, a powerful man, but he had tremendous dynamic force and an iron will which may account for his reputation as an athlete. He had all the simplicity of real greatness, speaking his mind with great frankness and in the clearest possible English. He had in him a great deal of the boy, a mischievous, adventurous, high-spirited boy, with a deep, strong, thoughtful manhood in the background. We were present, my wife and I, at the Guildhall when he made his memorable speech about Egypt, in which he informed a gathering, which contained the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and many of our Cabinet, that we should either rule more strictly or clear out altogether. It was, of course, a most unwarrantable intrusion into our affairs, but it was a calculated indiscretion, and very welcome, I believe, to those who were dealing with Egypt. As he made his way through the dense crowd afterwards he passed me and said with a grin: "I say, I let them have it that time, didn't I? "There was the mischievous boy coming out.

He had a quick blunt wit which showed itself often in his metaphors. He spoke to me, I remember, of some one who had a nine guinea-pig-power brain. One of his entourage told me how the President had been awakened once to address some prairie folk at a wayside station. “They have come sixty miles to see you,” said his secretary. “They would have come a hundred to see a cat with two heads,” said the ruffled President.

I met him once at a small luncheon party at the invitation of Lord Lee, who had soldiered with him in Cuba. He was extremely talkative — in fact, I can hardly remember anyone else saying anything. Thinking it over afterwards I concluded that two ideas were running through his mind, and every now and then coming to the surface. They were formidable ideas, and may have been some temporary wave of feeling, but they were certainly in his thoughts. The one was that there would be another civil war in the States. The second, that if you had the farmer class on your side they presented the best military material. From this I gathered that it was not a geographical but an economic struggle that was in his mind. *Absit omen,* but great men are often pessimists, and the Duke of Wellington was deeply convinced that Britain could not long survive his death.

When Roosevelt was shot I sent him a cable to express that sympathy which every Englishman felt. I have his answer before me, written only a day or so after the event:

Mercy Hospital, Chicago, *October* 19, 1912.

Dear Mr. Doyle, —

Many thanks for your kind message of sympathy. As you know, a bullet wound is rather a serious thing, but all conditions seem to be favourable, and I hope in a few days we will all be relieved from anxiety.

Sincerely yours, Theodore Roosevelt.

It is typewritten, but signed by his own hand. I do not think that a more brave and detached letter was ever written by a sufferer.

Roosevelt was a very loud hearty man, with a peculiar wild-beast toothy grin, and an explosive habit of slapping his hand down for emphasis. I jotted down a few of his *obiter dicta* after our conversation. He had no good word for Henry James. “He is not a whole man. All that subtlety is really decadence.” He was very virile, not to say heroic in his views. “A man should guard particularly against being led from his duty, especially a dangerous duty, by his women. I guess a woman would have had a bad time if she had tried to lead Leonidas from the pass.” Of the German Emperor he said that he was jealous of the King’s dog at the King’s funeral because he attracted the more notice. Altogether he was one of the raciest talkers I have ever met.

Among the occasional great ones of earth whom I have met there is hardly anyone who stands out more clearly than Arthur Balfour, with his willowy figure, his gentle intellectual face, and, as I read it, his soul of steel. I should think that of all men of our day he was the last who would be turned from any path which he had deliberately taken, but, on the other hand, he was capable of standing a most unconscionable time at the place where paths divide, for his mind was so subtle and active that he would always see the two sides of every question and waver between them. He could never have been a pioneer.

The occasion of our first meeting was a most ridiculous one. Old Lord Burnham, the first of his line, had invited me down to his country house at Beaconsfield — a wonderful house which had been built originally by Waller, the Royalist poet. Burke had lived close by, and the dagger which, in a melodramatic moment, he threw upon the floor of the house, in order to show the dangers of French Republican propaganda, is still on exhibition. I can remember the party well, though nearly all of them are now on the farther side. I see Lady Dorothy Nevill with her mittened hands and her prim pussy-cat manner, retailing gossip about Disraeli’s flirtations. Sir Henry James walks under the trees with bended head, talking to the rising barrister who is destined as Lord Reading to be Viceroy of India. Lady Cleveland, mother of Lord Rosebery, is listening with her old face wreathed in smiles to Lady Dorothy’s scandal. Young Harry Irving looks unutterably bored as Lord Burnham explains golf to him, bending his head over to get a glimpse of the ball round the curve of his goodly waistcoat. Mr. Asquith stands smiling beside them. As one looks back they seem all to have been shadows in a world of shadow.

Lord Burnham’s hobby was Turkish baths, and he had an excellent one in the front of the house, the drying room being the first door on the right as one entered, and being a simple sitting-room as far as appearance went. With his usual kind hospitality Lord Burnham had urged me to try his bath, and having done so I was placed, arrayed in a long towel, and with another towel screwed round my head, in the drying room. Presently the door opened, and entered Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister of England. He knew nothing of the house or its ways, and I can remember the amazement with which he gazed at me. Lord Burnham following at his heels introduced me, and I raised the towel on my head. There were no explanations, and I felt that he went away with the impression that this was my usual costume.

I did not see him after that week-end — he kept his room, I remember, until midday on the Sunday — until some years later when, after heavy domestic loss, I was endeavouring to collect myself again in a little inn near Dunbar. He heard of my presence, and in his kindness sent a car over from Whittingehame, only a few miles away, with a request that I should come over for a couple of days. There was present his brother, Gerald Balfour, a man with a beautifully refined face and manner, not unlike that of Andrew Lang. His wife is the famous Lady Betty Balfour, the daughter of Lord Lytton. When one thinks of that group of inter-allied families — the Balfours, Cecils, Sedgwicks, and Lyttons — it seems a sort of nerve ganglion of British life. There was also Lady Frances Balfour, who was a daughter of the Duke of Argyle, and not unlike him, as I can remember him. Her husband was Arthur Balfour's brother, an architect and antiquary, while another brother was Colonel of the London Scottish. Finally, there was Miss Alice Balfour, a very sweet and gently intellectual person, who was my actual hostess.

I found Arthur Balfour in great spirits because he had just won a golf medal at North Berwick. He seemed as pleased as any schoolboy, and his sister told me that no political success ever gave him the keen pleasure which he had from his golf victory. He was an average player, orthodox in style, and about 10 or 12 in handicap. He proved to be a charming host, for he was a good listener, seeming to be really eager to hear your opinion, laughed heartily at small provocation, and talked always very frankly and modestly of himself. After my long solitude I was more loquacious, I remember, than is my way, but he bore it with good humour.

Every night — or at least on the Sunday night — the whole staff of the large rambling establishment, maids and grooms, some twenty in all, came in for prayers, which were read by the head of the house. It was fine to hear groom and statesman praying humbly together that they be forgiven the sins of the day, and merging all earthly distinctions in the presence of that which is above us all.

He was very interesting when he spoke of the outrage which the Russian fleet had committed when, on their way to Japan, they opened fire at the British trawlers on the Dogger Bank. It was curious to hear his gentle voice and to note his listless impersonal manner while he spoke in this fashion: "I was very angry, really very angry about that affair. If our fleet had been at home I should have been inclined to have stopped them in the Straits. Of course, one would not do that unless one had overpowering force, so as to avoid bloodshed and save the Russian face. Their Ambassador called that morning and gave complete assurances, or really I should have had to do something. He got himself into trouble with his own Government, who felt that he had given away their case."

I asked him how Cabinet Councils were worked. He said that they voted upon points and went by majorities, unless it was a vital thing, when of course the dissenters must resign.

I observed in his character a very great horror of cowardice. Nothing seemed to arouse such scorn in him. He grew quite red, I remember, as he spoke of Lord George Sackville, and recalled that though he had been broken and should have been shot at the Battle of Minden in 1759, he was none the less Minister of War during the American campaign. He was also, as I reminded him, a most debauched man; and the murder of his mistress, Miss Reay, the actress, by her true lover, the clergyman Hackman, was one of the *causes célèbres* of that century.

I shall always carry away the memory of that visit — a bright gleam in a dark passage of life. I see very clearly the old house, the huge broken tree outside, inside which a State conspiracy was once hatched, the fine library with its wealth of French memoirs, and above all the remarkable man who stood for so much in the life of the country. I was not at that time so convinced of the primary importance of psychic things as I became later, and I regret it, as this would have been my one opportunity to explore a knowledge which at that time was certainly greater than my own. Years later, when the fight was heavy upon me, and when I was almost alone in the polemical arena, I wrote to Mr. Balfour, and charged him with sharing all my convictions and yet leaving me to defend them single-handed. His answer was: "Surely my opinions upon this subject are already sufficiently well known," which is surely an admission that I was right in my description of them, and yet was not much of a prop to me in my time of need.

I cast my mind back to other statesmen whom I have known, and Mr. Asquith's kindly personality comes into my memory. I remember playing a round of golf with him once — and a very bad player he was — but his conversation as we went round was plus four. He was a naturally sweet-natured man, but under that gentleness there lay judgment and firmness, as was shown at the great crisis of history. He never said too much, but what he did say he lived up to. In conducting us safely through those first two years of war he did that for which he has never had sufficient credit, and the more light we have had since, the more clear it has been that Lord Kitchener and he were really doing all that men could do, in munition work and all other ways. Because he had the solid Yorkshire stolidity, more nervous and excitable people thought that he did not take the war sufficiently seriously, while the constant lies about the pro-German tendencies of his wife increased the evil impression. We owe him a reparation which is second only to that which is due to Lord Haldane.

And that is indeed a heavy one. If one man could be named who was absolutely indispensable to victory it was Haldane. He it was who built up the whole splendid weapon which flashed so swiftly from its sheath, and which Germany was so amazed to find directed at its breast as it rushed forward upon its furious course. He could not work miracles; he could not introduce conscription when a candidate with such a programme would have been chased from the hustings; he could not prepare the public mind in some dramatic way which would have precipitated the very crash which there was still some chance of avoiding. But all we had he gave us — the eight divisions which saved France, the Territorials who carried on the good work until the new armies were ready, and the Officers' Training Corps, which strengthened us where we should have been fatally weak. There has never been so foolish and ungrateful a clamour as that which has been raised against Haldane. I remember that when he took the chair for me in the first war lecture which I gave in London there were cries of "Traitor! "from people, chiefly women, among the audience. I had never seen Haldane before, and have never seen him since, so I have no personal bias in the matter, but I am proud that it was in my first volume of the "History of the War," published in 1915, that I first put forward the unpopular view which will now be more fully accepted.

With George Meredith I had several interesting connections. I have the greatest possible admiration for him at his best, while his worst is such a handicap that I think it will drag four-fifths of his work to oblivion. If his own generation finds him hard to understand, what will our descendants make of him? He will be a cult among a few — a precious few in every sense. And yet I fully recognise that his was the most active original brain and the most clever pen of any man, novelist or otherwise, of my time. Knowing this well, it is strange that I can see so limited a future for him.

His subtle and intricate mind seemed unable to realise the position of the plain outsiders who represent the world. He could not see how his stained-glass might be less effective than the plain transparent substance as a medium for vision. The first requisite is to be intelligible. The second is to be interesting. The third is to be clever. Meredith enormously filled the third, but he was unequal upon the other two. Hence he will never, in spite of the glories of “Richard Feverel “be on an equality with Dickens or Thackeray, who filled all three. He had simply no idea how his words would strike a less complex mind. I remember that once in the presence of Barrie, Quiller-Couch and myself, he read out a poem which he had inscribed “To the British Working-Man “in the “Westminster Gazette.” I don’t know what the British working-man made of it, but I am sure that we three were greatly puzzled as to what it was about.

I had written some articles on his work, which had been one of my youthful cults, and that led to his inviting me to see him at his villa at Box Hill — the first of several such visits. There had been a good deal in the papers about his health, so that I was surprised when, as I opened the garden gate, a slight but robust gentleman in a grey suit and a red tie swung out of the hall door and came singing loudly down the path. I suppose he was getting on to seventy at the time but he looked younger, and his artistic face was good to the eye. Greeting me he pointed to a long steep hill behind the house and said: “I have just been up to the top for a walk.” I looked at the sharp slope and said: “You must be in good trim to do it.” He looked angry and said: “That would be a proper compliment to pay to an octogenarian.” I was a little nettled by his touchiness, so I answered: “I understood that I was talking to an invalid.” It really seemed as if my visit would terminate at the garden gate, but presently he relented, and we soon became quite friendly.

He had in his youth been a judge of wine, and had still a reverence for a good vintage, but unfortunately some nervous complaint from which he suffered had caused the doctors to prohibit it absolutely. When lunch came round he asked me with a very earnest air whether I could undertake to drink a whole bottle of Burgundy. I answered that I saw no insuperable difficulty. A dusty old bottle was tenderly carried up, which I disposed of, Meredith taking a friendly interest in its dispatch. “The fact is,” said he, “I love my wine, and my little cellar was laid down with care and judgment, so that when some guest comes and drinks a glass and wastes the rest of the bottle it goes to my heart. It really did me good to see you enjoy that one." I need not say that I intimated that I was always prepared to oblige.

His conversation was extraordinarily vivid and dramatic, uttered in a most vehement tone. It may have been artificial, and it may have been acting, but it was very arresting and entertaining. The talk got upon Napoleon's Marshals, and you would have thought that he knew them intimately, and he did Murat's indignation at being told to charge *au bout*, as if he ever charged any other way, in a fashion which would have brought down the house. Every now and then he brought out a Meredithian sentence which sounded comic when applied to domestic matters. When the jelly swayed about as the maid put it on the table he said: "The jelly, Mary, is as treacherous as the Trojan Horse." He laughed when I told him how my groom, enlisted as a waiter for some special dinner, said, "Huddup, there," to the jelly under similar circumstances.

After lunch we walked up a steep path to the little chalet or summerhouse where he used to write. He wished to read me a novel which he had begun twenty years before, but which he had not had the heart to go on with. I liked it greatly — and we roared with laughter at his description of an old sea-dog who turned up the collar of his coat when he went into action as if the bullets were rain. He said that my hearty enjoyment encouraged him to go on with it, and it has since appeared as the "Amazing Marriage," but whether I really had anything to do with it I do not know. I should be proud to think so.

The nervous complaint from which he suffered caused him to fall down occasionally. As we walked up the narrow path to the chalet I heard him fall behind me, but judged from the sound that it was a mere slither and could not have hurt him. Therefore I walked on as if I had heard nothing. He was a fiercely proud old man, and my instincts told me that his humiliation in being helped up would be far greater than any relief I could give him. It was certainly a nice point to decide.

George Meredith's religious convictions were very difficult to decide. He certainly had no glimmering so far as I could see of any psychic element in life, and I should imagine that on the whole he shared the opinions of his friend, John Morley, which were completely negative. And yet I remember his assuring me that prayer was a very necessary thing, and that one should never abandon prayer. "Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is granted," says the Aphorist in "Richard Feverel." How far these positions can be harmonized I do not know. I suppose that one may say that God is unknown, and yet rear a mental temple to the unknown God.

Rudyard Kipling I know far less than I should, considering how deeply I admire his writings, and that we live in the same county; but we are both absorbed in work, and both much away from home, which may explain it. I can well remember how eagerly I bought his first book, “Plain Tales,” in the old Southsea days, when buying a book was a rare strain upon my exchequer. I read it with delight, and realised not only that a new force had arisen in literature, but that a new method of story writing had appeared which was very different from my own adherence to the careful plot artfully developed. This was go-as-you-please take-it-or-leave-it work, which glowed suddenly up into an incandescent phrase or paragraph, which was the more effective for its sudden advent. In form his stories were crude, and yet in effect — which, after all, is everything — they were superb. It showed me that methods could not be stereotyped, and that there was a more excellent way, even if it were beyond my reach. I loved the “Barrack Room Ballads “also, and such poems as “The Bolivar,”

“East and West,” and above all the badly named “Envoi “became part of my very self. I always read the last one aloud to my little circle before we start on any fresh expedition, because it contains the very essence of travel, romance, and high adventure.

I saw Kipling most nearly in his very early days when he lived at Brattleboro’, a little village in Vermont, in a chivalrous desire to keep his newly married wife in touch with her own circle. In 1894, as I have recorded, there was a good deal of tail-twisting going on in the States, and Kipling pulled a few feathers out of the Eagle’s tail in retaliation, which caused many screams of protest, for the American was far more sensitive to such things than the case-hardened Briton. I say “was,” for I think as a nation with an increased assurance of their own worth and strength they are now more careless of criticism. The result at the time was to add oil to flames, and I, as a passionate believer in Anglo-American union, wrote to Kipling to remonstrate. He received my protest very good-humouredly, and it led to my visit to his country home. As a matter of fact, the concern shown in America, when the poet lay at death’s door a few years later, showed that the rancour was not very deep. Perhaps he was better known at that time in America than in England, for I remember sitting beside a busman in London, who bowed his red face to my ear and said: “Beg your pardon, sir, but ‘oo is this ‘ere Kilpin?”

I had two great days in Vermont, and have a grateful remembrance of Mrs. Kipling’s hospitality. The poet read me “McAndrew’s Hymn,” which he had just done, and surprised me by his dramatic power which enabled him to sustain the Glasgow accent throughout, so that the angular Scottish greaser simply walked the room. I had brought up my golf clubs and gave him lessons in a field while the New England rustics watched us from afar, wondering what on earth we were at, for golf was unknown in America at that time. We parted good friends, and the visit was an oasis in my rather dreary pilgrimage as a lecturer.

My glimpses of Kipling since then have been few and scattered, but I had the pleasure several times of meeting his old father, a most delightful and lovable person, who told a story quite as well as his famous son. As the mother was also a very remarkable woman, it is no wonder that he carried such a cargo.

James Barrie is one of my oldest literary friends, and I knew him within a year or two of the time when we both came to London. He had just written his “Window in Thrums,” and I, like all the world, acclaimed it. When I was lecturing in Scotland in 1893 he invited me to Kirriemuir, when I stayed some days with his family — splendid types of the folk who have made Scotland great. His father was a fine fellow, but his mother was wonderful with a head and a heart — rare combinations — which made me class her with my own mother. Kirriemuir could by no means understand Barrie’s success, and looked upon their great son as an inexplicable phenomenon. They were acutely aware, however, that tourists were arriving from all parts to see the place on account of Barrie’s books. “I suppose you have read them,” I said to the wife of the local hotel man. “Aye, I’ve read them, and steep, steep, weary work it was,” said she. She had some theory that it was a four-horse coach which her good man was running, and not the books at all which accounted for the boom.

Great as are Barrie’s plays — and some of them I think are very great — I wish he had never written a Une for the theatre. The glamour of it and the — to him — easy success have diverted from literature the man with the purest style of his age. Plays are always ephemeral, however good, and are limited to a few, but Barrie’s unborn books might have been an eternal and a universal asset of British literature. He has the chaste clarity which is the great style, which has been debased by a generation of wretched critics who have always confused what is clear with what is shallow, and what is turbid with what is profound. If a man's thought is precise, his rendering of it is precise, and muddy thoughts make obscure paragraphs. If I had to make my choice among modern stylists, I should pick Barrie for the lighter forms of expression and our British Winston Churchill for the more classical.

Barrie's great play — one of the finest in the language — is of course "The Admirable Crichton." I shall always hope that I had a hand in the fashioning of it. I say this not in complaint but in satisfaction, for we all drop seeds into each other, and seldom know whence they come. We were walking together on the Heath at Kirriemuir when I said: "I had a quaint thought in the night, Barrie. It was that a king was visiting India and was wrecked on the way on some island far from the track of ships. Only he and one rather handy sailor were saved. They settled down to spend their lives together. Of course the result would be that the sailor would become the king and the king the subject." We chuckled over the idea, and when Crichton appeared, I seemed to see the fine plant which had grown from the tiny seed.

Barrie and I had one unfortunate venture together, in which I may say that the misfortune was chiefly mine, since I had really nothing to do with the matter, and yet shared all the trouble. However, I should have shared the honour and profit in case of success, so that I have no right to grumble. The facts were that Barrie had promised Mr. D'Oyley Carte that he would provide the libretto of a light opera for the Savoy. This was in the Gilbert days, when such a libretto was judged by a very high standard. It was an extraordinary commission for him to accept, and I have never yet been able to understand why he did so, unless, like Alexander, he wanted fresh worlds to conquer. On this occasion, however, he met with a disastrous repulse, and the opera, "Jane Annie," to which I alluded in an early chapter, was one of the few failures in his brilliant career.

I was brought into the matter because Barrie's health failed on account of some family bereavement. I had an urgent telegram from him at Aldburgh, and going there I found him very worried because he had bound himself by this contract, and he felt in his present state unable to go forward with it. There were to be two acts, and he had written the first one, and had the rough scenario of the second, with the complete sequence of events — if one may call it a sequence. Would I come in with him and help him to complete it as part author? Of course I was very happy to serve him in any way. My heart sank, however, when, after giving the promise, I examined the work. The only literary gift which Barrie has not got is the sense of poetic rhythm, and the instinct for what is permissible in verse. Ideas and wit were there in abundance. But the plot itself was not strong, though the dialogue and the situations also were occasionally excellent. I did my best and wrote the lyrics for the second act, and much of the dialogue, but it had to take the predestined shape. The result was not good. However, the actual comradeship of production was very amusing and interesting, and our failure was mainly painful to us because it let down the producer and the caste. We were well abused by the critics, but Barrie took it all in the bravest spirit.

I find, in looking over my papers, a belated statement of account from Barrie which is good reading.

Our association was never so closely renewed, but through all my changing life I have had a respect and affection for Barrie which were, I hope, mutual. How I collaborated with him at cricket as well as at work is told in my chapter on Sport.

Henry Irving is one of the other great men whom I have met at close quarters, for his acting of Gregory Brewster brought us in contact. When he was producing “Coriolanus “he came down to Hindhead and used to drop in of an evening. He was fond of a glass of port — indeed, he was one of the four great men who were stated (probably untruly) by the Hon. G. Russell to drink a bottle each night — being the only trait which these great men had in common. The others, I remember, were Tennyson, Gladstone and Moses Montefiori, and the last I believe was really true. Like all bad habits, it overtook the sinner at last, and he was cut off at the age of 116.

Irving had a curious dry wit which was occasionally sardonic and ill-natured. I can well believe that his rehearsals were often the occasion for heart-burnings among the men and tears among the ladies. The unexpectedness of his remarks took one aback. I remember when my friend Hamilton sat up with me into the “wee sma’ hours “with the famous man, he became rather didactic on the subject of the Deity or the Universe or some other tremendous topic, which he treated very solemnly, and at great length. Irving sat with his intense eyes riveted upon the speaker’s face, which encouraged Hamilton to go on and on. When at last he had finished, Irving remarked: “*What* a low comedian you would have made! “He wound up his visit by giving me his copy of “Coriolanus “with all his notes and stage directions — a very precious relic.

Many visions of old times rise before my eyes as I write, but my book would lose all proportion should I dwell upon them. I see Henley, the formidable cripple, a red-bearded, loud-voiced buccaneer of a man who could only crawl, for his back appeared to be broken. He was a great poet and critic who seemed to belong to the roaring days of Marlowe of the mighty line and the pothouse fray. I see Haggard too, first as the young spruce diplomatist, later as the worn and bearded man with strange vague tendencies to mysticism. Shaw, too, I see with the pleasant silky voice and the biting phrase. It was strange that all the mild vegetables which formed his diet made him more pugnacious and, I must add, more uncharitable than the carnivorous man, so that I have known no literary man who was more ruthless to other people’s feelings. And yet to meet him was always to like him. He could not resist a bitter jest or the perverted pleasure of taking up an unpopular attitude. As an example I remember Henry Irving telling me that when Shaw was invited to his father’s funeral he wrote in reply: “If I were at Westminster Henry Irving would turn in his grave, just as Shakespeare would turn in his grave were Henry Irving at Stratford.” I may not have it verbally exact, but that was near enough. It was the kind of outrageous thing that he would say. And yet one can forgive him all when one reads the glorious dialogue of some of his plays. He seems subhuman in emotion and superhuman in intellect.

Shaw was always a thorn in Irving’s side, and was usually the one jarring note among the chorus of praise which greeted each fresh production. At a first night at the Lyceum — those wonderful first nights which have never been equalled — the lanky Irishman with his greenish face, his red beard, and his sardonic expression must have been like the death’s-head at the banquet to Irving. Irving ascribed this animosity to Shaw’s pique because his plays were not accepted, but in this I am sure that he did an injustice. It was simply that contrary twist in the man which makes him delight in opposing whatever anyone else approved. There is nothing constructive in him, and he is bound to be in perpetual opposition. No one for example was stronger for peace and for non-militarism than he, and I remember that when I took the chair at a meeting at Hindhead to back up the Tsar’s peace proposals at The Hague, I thought to myself as I spied Shaw in a corner of the room: “Well, this time at any rate he must be in sympathy.” But far from being so he sprang to his feet and put forward a number of ingenious reasons why these proposals for peace would be disastrous. Do what you could he was always against you.

Perhaps it is no bad thing to have the other point of view continually stated, and the British stand that sort of thing better than other nations. Had Shaw said in America what he said in England about the war whilst it was in progress he would have been in personal danger. There were times, however, when his queer contrary impulses became perfectly brutal in their working. One was at the time of the *Titanic* disaster, when he deliberately wrote a letter at a time when the wounds were raw, overwhelming every one concerned with bitter criticism. I was moved to write a remonstrance, and we had a sharp debate in public, which did not in any way modify our kindly personal relations. I can recall a smaller but even more unjustifiable example of his sour nature when he was staying at Hindhead. A garden-party had been got up for some charity, and it included the woodland scenes of “As You Like It,” which were done by amateurs, and very well done too. Shaw with no provocation wrote a whole column of abuse in the local paper, spattering all the actors and their performance with ridicule, and covering them with confusion, though indeed they had nothing to be ashamed of. One mentions these things as characteristic of one side of the man, and as a proof, I fear, that the adoption by the world of a vegetarian diet will not bring unkind thoughts or actions to an end. But with it all Shaw is a genial creature to meet, and I am prepared to believe that there is a human kindly side to his nature though it has not been presented to the public. It took a good man to write “Saint Joan.”

Wells, too, I have known long, and indeed I must have often entered the draper’s shop in which he was employed at Southsea, for the proprietor was a patient of mine. Wells is one of the great fruits which popular education has given us, since he came, as he is proud to state, from the heart of the people. His democratic frankness and complete absence of class feeling are occasionally embarrassing. I remember his asking me once if I had played cricket at Liphook. I said that I had. He said: “Did you notice an old fellow who acts as professional and ground-keeper?” I said that I had. “That was my father,” said Wells. I was too much surprised to answer, and could only congratulate myself that I had made no unpleasant comments before I knew the identity of the old man.

I have always had my doubts as to those elaborate forecasts of the future in which Wells indulges. He has, it is true, made a couple of good shots which have already materialised in the tanks and in the machine which would deliver news in our own houses. But he has never shown any perception of the true meaning of the psychic, and for want of it his history of the world, elaborate and remarkable as it was, seemed to me to be a body without a soul. However, this also may be given him, and it will make his equipment complete. I remember discussing the matter with him, when George Gissing, Hornung, he and I foregathered in Rome early in this century, but apparently my words had no effect.

Willie Hornung, my brother-in-law, is another of my vivid memories. He was a Dr. Johnson without the learning but with a finer wit. No one could say a neater thing, and his writings, good as they are, never adequately represented the powers of the man, nor the quickness of his brain. These things depend upon the time and the fashion, and go flat in the telling, but I remember how, when I showed him the record of some one who claimed to have done 100 yards under ten seconds, he said: “It is a sprinter’s error.” Golf he could not abide, for he said it was “unsportsmanlike to hit a sitting ball.” His criticism upon my Sherlock Holmes was: “Though he might be more humble, there is no police like Holmes.” I think I may claim that his famous character Raffles was a kind of inversion of Sherlock Holmes, Bunny playing Watson. He admits as much in his kindly dedication. I think there are few finer examples of short-story writing in our language than these, though I confess I think they are rather dangerous in their suggestion. I told him so before he put pen to paper, and the result has, I fear, borne me out. You must not make the criminal a hero.

Jerome, too, is an old friend. He is an adventurous soul, and at one time started a four-in-hand. I remember sitting on the top of it, and when one of the leaders turned right round and took a good look at the driver I thought it was time to get down. Maxwell also is an old friend. He is, of course, the son of Miss Braddon, who married a publisher of that name. I respect him for doing a man’s work in the war when, though he was fifty years of age, and had led a sedentary life, he volunteered for a fighting battalion, a credit which he shares with A. E. W. Mason. Maxwell’s work has always greatly appealed to me, and I have long looked upon him as the greatest novelist that we possess.

I never met Robert Louis Stevenson in the flesh, though I owe so much to him in the literary spirit. Never can I forget the delight with which I read those early stories of his in the “Cornhill,” before I knew the name of the author. I still think that “The Pavilion on the Links “is one of the great short stories of the world, though there were alterations in the final form which were all for the worse, and showed prudery upon the part of the publishers. Stevenson’s last year at Edinburgh University must have just about coincided with my first one, and Barrie must also have been in that grey old nest of learning about the year 1876. Strange to think that I probably brushed elbows with both of them in the crowded portal.

From his far-away home in Samoa he seemed to keep a quick eye upon literary matters in England, and I had most encouraging letters from him in 1893 and 1894. “O frolic fellow-spookist “was his curious term of personal salutation in one of these, which showed that he shared my interest in psychic research but did not take it very seriously. I cannot guess how at that time he had detected it, though I was aware that he had himself in early days acted as secretary to a psychic research or rather to a spiritualist society in Edinburgh, which studied the remarkable mediumship of Duguid. His letters to me consisted of kind appreciation of my work. “I have a great talent for compliment,” he said, “accompanied by a hateful, even a diabolic, frankness.” He had been retailing some of my Sherlock Holmes yarns to his native servants — I should not have thought that he needed to draw upon anyone else — and he complained to me in a comical letter of the difficulty of telling a story when you had to halt every moment to explain what a railway was, what an engineer was, and so forth. He got the story across in spite of all difficulties, and, said he, “If you could have seen the bright feverish eyes of Simite you would have tasted glory.” But he explained that the natives took everything literally, and that there was no such thing as an imaginary story for them. “I, who write this, have had the indiscretion to perpetuate a trifling piece of fiction, ‘The Bottle Imp.’ Parties who come up to visit my mansion, after having admired the ceiling by Vanderputty and the tapestry by Gobbling, manifest towards the end a certain uneasiness which proves them to be fellows of an infinite delicacy. They may be seen to shrug a brown shoulder, to roll up a speaking eye, and at last the secret bursts from them: ‘Where is the bottle? ‘“In another letter he said that as I had written of my first book in the “Idler “he also would do so. “I could not hold back where the white plume of Conan Doyle waved in front of me.”

So, at least, I may boast that it is to me that the world owes the little personal sketch about “Treasure Island “which appeared in that year. I cannot forget the shock that it was to me when driving down the Strand in a hansom cab in 1896 I saw upon a yellow evening poster “Death of Stevenson.” Something seemed to have passed out of my world.

I was asked by his executors to finish the novel “St. Ives,” which he had left three-quarters completed, but I did not feel equal to the task. It was done, however, and, I understand, very well done, by Quiller-Couch. It is a desperately difficult thing to carry on another man’s story, and must be a more or less mechanical effort. I had one experience of it when my neighbour at Hindhead, Grant Allen, was on his death-bed. He was much worried because there were two numbers of his serial, “Hilda Wade,” which was running in “The Strand “magazine, still uncompleted. It was a pleasure for me to do them for him, and so relieve his mind, but it was difficult collar work, and I expect they were pretty bad. Some time afterwards a stranger, who evidently confused Allen and me, wrote to say that his wife had given him a baby girl, and that in honour of me he was calling her Hilda Wade. He was really nearer the truth than appeared at first sight.

I well remember that death-bed of Grant Allen’s. He was an agnostic of a type which came very near atheism, though in his private life an amiable and benevolent man. Believing what he did, the approach of death must have offered rather a bleak prospect, and as he had paroxysms of extreme pain the poor fellow seemed very miserable. I had often argued the case with him, I from a Theistic and he from a negative point of view, but I did not intrude my opinions or disturb his mind at that solemn moment. Death-bed changes, though some clergy may rejoice in them, are really vain things. His brain, however, was as clear as ever, and his mind was occupied with all manner of strange knowledge, which he imparted in the intervals of his pain, in the curious high nasal voice which was characteristic. I can see him now, his knees drawn up to ease internal pain, and his long thin nose and reddish-grey goatee protruding over the sheet, while he creaked out: “Byzantine art, my dear Doyle, was of three periods, the middle one roughly coinciding with the actual fall of the Roman Empire. The characteristics of the first period—” and so on, until he would give a cry, clasp his hands across his stomach, and wait till the pain passed before resuming his lecture. His dear little wife nursed him devotedly, and mitigated the gloom of those moments which can be made the very happiest in life if one understands what lies before one. One thinks, as a contrast, of Dr. Hodgson’s impatient cry, “I can hardly wait for death!”

Grant Allen’s strong opinions in print, and a certain pleasure he took in defending outside positions, gave quite a false view of his character, which was gentle and benignant. I remember his coming to a fancy dress ball which we gave in the character of a Cardinal, and in that guise all the quiet dignity of the man seemed to come out and you realised how much our commonplace modern dress disguises the real man. He used to tell with great amusement how a couple, who afterwards became close friends, came first to call, and how as they waited on the doorstep the wife said to the husband: “Remember, John, if he openly blasphemes, I leave the room.” He had, I remember, very human relations with the maids who took a keen interest in their employer’s scientific experiments. On one occasion these were connected with spiders, and the maid rushed into the drawing-room and cried: “Oh, sir, Araminta has got a wasp.” Araminta was the name given to the big spider which he was observing at the time.

Grant Allen had no actual call to write fiction, but his brain was agile enough to make some sort of job of anything to which it turned. On the other hand, as a popular scientist he stood alone, or shared the honour with Samuel Laing. His only real success in fiction was the excellent short story “John Creedy,” where he combined science with fiction, with remarkable results.

At the time when I and so many others turned to letters there was certainly a wonderful vacancy for the new-comer. The giants of old had all departed. Thackeray, Dickens, Charles Reade and Trollope were memories. There was no great figure remaining save Hardy rising. The novelist was Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who was just beginning her career with “Robert Elsmere,” the first of that series of novels which will illuminate the later Victorian era more clearly than any historian ever can do. I think it was Hodgkin who said, when he read “Count Robert of Paris “: “Here have I been studying Byzantium all my life, and I never understood it until this blessed Scotch lawyer came along.” That is the special prerogative of imagination. Trollope and Mrs. Ward have the whole Victorian civilization dissected and preserved.

Then there were Meredith, unintelligible to most, and Walter Besant. There was Wilkie Collins, too, with his fine stories of mystery, and finally there was James Payn.

Payn was much greater than his books. The latter Were usually rather mechanical, but to get at the real man one has to read such articles as his “Literary Reminiscences,” and especially his “Backwater of Life.”

He had all that humorous view which Nature seems to give as a compensation to those whose strength is weak. Had Payn written only essays he would have rivalled Charles Lamb. I knew him best in his latter days, when he was crippled with illness, and his poor fingers so twisted with rheumatic arthritis that they seemed hardly human. He was intensely pessimistic as to his own fate. “Don’t make any mistake, Doyle, death is a horrible thing — horrible! I suffer the agonies of the damned I “But five minutes later he would have his audience roaring with laughter, and his own high treble laugh would be the loudest of all.

His own ailments were frequently a source of mirth. I remember how he described the breaking of a bloodvessel in Bournemouth and how they carried him home on a litter. He was dimly conscious of the fir-woods through which he passed. “I thought it was my funeral, and that they had done me well in the matter of plumes.” When he told a story he was so carried away by his sense of humour that he could hardly get the end out, and he finished up in a kind of scream. An American had called upon him at some late hour and had discoursed upon Assyrian tablets. “I thought they were something to eat,” he screamed. He was an excellent whist player, and the Baldwin Club used to send three members to his house on certain days so that the old fellow should not go without his game. This game was very scientific. He would tell with delight how he asked some novice: “Do you play the penultimate? “To which the novice answered: “No — but my brother plays the American organ.”

Many of my generation of authors had reason to love him, for he was a human and kindly critic. His writing however, was really dreadful. It was of him that the story was told than an author handed one of his letters to a chemist for a test. The chemist retired for a time and then returned with a bottle and demanded half a crown. Better luck attended the man who received an illegible letter from a railway director. He used it as a free pass upon the line. Payn used to joke about his own writing, but it was a very real trouble when one could not make out whether he had accepted or rejected one’s story. There was one letter in which I could only read the words “infringement of copyright.” He was very funny when he described the work of the robust younger school. “I have received a story from—” he said, “5,000 words, mostly damns.”

I knew Sir Henry Thompson, the famous surgeon, very well, and was frequently honoured by an invitation to his famous octave dinners, at which eight carefully chosen male guests were always the company. They always seemed to me to be the most wonderful exhibitions of unselfishness, for Thompson was not allowed any alcohol, or anything save the most simple viands. Possibly, however, like Meredith and the bottle of burgundy, he enjoyed some reflex pleasure from the enjoyment of others. He had been a wonderful *viveur* and judge of what was what, and I fear that I disappointed him, for I was much more interested in the conversation than the food, and it used to annoy me when some argument was interrupted in order to tell us that it was not ordinary ham but a Westphalian wild boar that we were eating and that it had been boiled in wine for precisely the right time prescribed by the best authorities. But it was part of his wonderful unselfish hospitality to make his guests realise exactly what it was that was set before them. I have never heard more interesting talk than at these male gatherings, for it is notorious that though ladies greatly improve the appearance of a feast they usually detract from the quality of the talk. Few men are ever absolutely natural when there are women in the room.

There was one special dinner, I fancy it was the hundredth of the series, which was particularly interesting as the Prince of Wales, now George V, was one of the eight, and gave us a most interesting account of the voyage round the world from which he had just returned. Of the rest of the company I can only recall Sir Henry Stanley, the traveller, and Sir Crichton Browne. Twenty years later I met the King when he visited a trade exhibition, and I attended as one of the directors of Tuck’s famous postcard firm. He at once said: “Why, I have not seen you since that pleasant dinner when you sat next to me at Sir Henry Thompson’s.” It seemed to me to be a remarkable example of the royal gift of memory.

I have not often occupied a chair among the seats of the mighty. My life has been too busy and too preoccupied to allow me to stray far from my beaten path. The mention of the Prince, however, reminds me of the one occasion when I was privileged to entertain — or to attempt to entertain — the present Queen. It was at a small dinner to which I was invited by the courtesy of Lord Middleton whose charming wife, once Madeleine Stanley daughter of Lady Helier, I could remember since her girlhood. Upon this occasion the Prince and Princess came in after dinner, the latter sitting alone at one end of the room with a second chair beside her own, which was occupied successively by the various gentlemen who were to be introduced to her. I was led up in due course, made my bow, and sat down at her request. I confess that I found it heavy going at first, for I had heard somewhere that Royalty has to make the first remark, and had it been the other way there was such a gulf between us that I should not have known where to begin. However she was very pleasant and gracious and began asking me some questions about my works which brought me on to very easy ground. Indeed, I became so interested in our talk that I was quite disappointed when Mr. John Morley was led up, and I realised that it was time for me to vacate the chair.

There was another amusing incident on that eventful evening. I had been asked to take in Lady Curzon, whose husband, then Viceroy of India, had been unable to attend. The first couple had passed in and there was a moment's hesitation as to who should go next, but Lady Curzon and I were nearest the door, so possibly with some little encouragement from the lady we filed through. I thought nothing of the incident but some great authority upon these matters came to me afterwards in great excitement. "Do you know," he said, "that you have established a precedent and solved one of the most difficult and debatable matters of etiquette that has ever caused ill-feeling in British Society?"

"The Lord Chancellor and the College of Heralds should be much obliged to you, for you have given them a definite lead. There has never been so vexed a question as to whether a Vice-reine when she is away from the country where she represents royalty shall take precedence over a Duchess. There was a Duchess in the room, but you by your decided action have settled the matter for ever." So who shall say that I have done nothing in my life?

Of the distinguished lights of the law whom I have met from time to time I think that Sir Henry Hawkins — then become Lord Bampton — made the most definite impression. I met him at a week-end gathering at Cliveden, when Mr. Astor was our host. On the first night at dinner, before the party had shaken down into mutual acquaintance, the ex-judge, very old and as bald as an ostrich egg, was seated opposite, and was wreathed with smiles as he made himself agreeable to his neighbour. His appearance was so jovial that I remarked to the lady upon my left: "It is curious to notice the appearance of our *vis-à-vis* and to contrast it with his reputation," alluding to his sinister record as an inexorable judge. She seemed rather puzzled by my remark, so I added: "Of course you know who he is."

"Yes," said she, "his name is Conan Doyle and he writes novels." I was hardly middle-aged at the time and at my best physically, so that I was amused at her mistake, which arose from some confusion in the list of guests. I put my dinner card up against her wine-glass, so after that we got to know each other.

Hawkins was a most extraordinary man, and so capricious that one never knew whether one was dealing with Jekyll or with Hyde. It was certainly Hyde when he took eleven hours summing up in the Penge case, and did all a man could do to have all four of the prisoners condemned to death. Sir Edward Clarke was so incensed at his behaviour on this occasion that he gave notice when Hawkins retired from the bench that if there were the usual complimentary ceremonies he would protest. So they were dropped.

I might, on the other hand, illustrate the Jekyll side of him by a story which he told me with his own lips.

A prisoner had a pet mouse. One day the brute of a warder deliberately trod upon it. The prisoner caught up his dinner knife and dashed at the warder, who only just escaped, the knife stabbing the door as it closed behind him. Hawkins as judge wanted to get the man off, but the attempt at murder was obvious and the law equally clear. What was he to do? In his charge to the jury he said: "If a man tries to kill another in a way which is on the face of it absurd, it becomes a foolish rather than a criminal act. If, for example, a man in London discharged a pistol to hurt a man in Edinburgh, we could only laugh at such an offence. So also when a man stabs an iron-plated door while another man is at the other side of it we cannot take it seriously." The jury, who were probably only too glad to follow such a lead, brought in a verdict of "Not guilty."

Another distinguished man of the law who left a very clear impression upon my mind was Sir Francis Jeune, afterwards Lord St. Helier. I attended several of Lady Jeune's famous luncheon parties, which were quite one of the outstanding institutions of London, like Gladstone's breakfasts in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I am indebted to this lady for very many kind actions. Her husband always impressed me with his gentle wisdom and with his cultivated taste. He told me that if every copy of Horace were destroyed he thought that he could reconstruct most of it from memory. He presided over the Divorce Courts, and I remember upon one occasion I said to him: “You must have a very low opinion of human nature, Sir Francis, since the worst side of it is for ever presented towards you.”

“On the contrary,” said he very earnestly, “my experience in the Divorce Courts has greatly raised my opinion of humanity. There is so much chivalrous self-sacrifice, and so much disposition upon the part of every one to make the best of a bad business that it is extremely edifying.” This view seemed to me to be worth recording.

CHAPTER XXIV. SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF SPORT

Racing — Shooting — A Fish Story — Boxing — Past and Present — Carpentier and France — The Reno Fight — Football — Golf with the Sirdar — Billiards — Cricket — W. G. Grace — Queer Experiences — Tragic Matches — Humiliation — Success in Holland — Barrie's Team — A Precedent — Motor Accidents — Prince Henry Tour — Aviation — The Balloon and the Aeroplane — Ski — Over a Precipice — Rifle Shooting.

IT is here — before we approach what Maxwell has called "The Great Interruption " — that I may perhaps break my narrative in order to interpolate a chapter upon the general subject of my experiences of sport, which have taken up an appreciable part of my life, added greatly to its pleasure, and which can be better treated as a whole than recounted seriatim. It may best be fitted in at this spot as my sporting life one way and another may be said to have reached its modest zenith about that time.

As one grows old one looks back at one's career in sport as a thing completed. Yet I have at least held on to it as long as I could, for I played a hard match of Association football at forty-four, and I played cricket for ten years more. I have never specialised, and have therefore been a second-rater in all things. I have made up for it by being an all-rounder, and have had, I dare say, as much fun out of sport as many an adept. It would be odd if a man could try as many games as I for so many years without having some interesting experiences or forming a few opinions which would bear recording and discussion.

And first of all let me "damn the sins I have no mind to "by recording what most of my friends will regard as limitation. I never could look upon flat-racing as a true sport. Sport is what a man does, not what a horse does. Skill and judgment are shown, no doubt, by the professional jockeys, but I think it may be argued that in nine cases out of ten the best horse wins, and would have equally won, could his head be kept straight, had there been a dummy on his back.

But making every allowance, on the one side, for what human qualities may be called forth, and for any improvement of the breed of horses (though I am told that the same pains in other directions would produce infinitely more fruitful and generally useful results), and putting on the other side the demoralisation from betting, the rascality among some bookmakers, and the collection of undesirable characters brought together by a race meeting, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the harm greatly outweighs the good from a broadly national point of view. Yet I recognise, of course, that it is an amusement which lies so deeply in human nature — the oldest, perhaps, of all amusements which have come down to us — that it must have its place in our system until the time may come when it will be gradually modified, developing, perhaps, some purifying change, as prize-fighting did when it turned to contests with the gloves.

I have purposely said “flat-racing,” because I think a stronger case, though not, perhaps, an entirely sound one, could be made out for steeplechasing. Eliminate the mob and the money, and then, surely, among feats of human skill and hardihood there are not many to match that of the winner of a really stiff point-to-point, while the man who rides at the huge barriers of the Grand National has a heart for anything. As in the old days of the ring, it is not the men nor the sport, but it is the followers who cast a shadow on the business. Go down to Waterloo and meet any returning race train, if you doubt it.

If I have alienated half my readers by my critical attitude to the Turf, I shall probably offend the other half by stating that I cannot persuade myself that we are justified in taking life as a pleasure. To shoot for the pot must be right, since man must feed, and to kill creatures which live upon others (the hunting of foxes, for example) must also be right, since to slay one is to save many; but the rearing of birds in order to kill them, and the shooting of such sensitive and inoffensive animals as hares and deer, cannot, I think, be justified. I must admit that I shot a good deal before I came to this conclusion. Perhaps the fact, while it prevents my assuming any airs of virtue, will give my opinion greater weight, since good shooting is still within my reach, and I know nothing more exhilarating than to wait on the borders of an autumn-tinted wood, to hear the crackling advance of beaters, to mark the sudden whirr and the yell of “Mark over,” and then, over the topmost branches, to see a noble cock pheasant whizzing down wind at a pace which pitches him a 100 yards behind you when you have dropped him. But when your moment of exultation is over, and you note what a beautiful creature he is and how one instant of your pleasure has wrecked him, you feel that you had better think no longer if you mean to slip two more cartridges into your gun and stand by for another. Worse still is it when you hear the child-like wail of the wounded hare. I should think that there are few sportsmen who have not felt a disgust at their own handiwork when they have heard it. So, too, when you see the pheasant fly on with his legs showing beneath him as sign that he is hard hit. He drops into the thick woods and is lost to sight. Perhaps it is as well for your peace of mind that he should be lost to thought also.

Of course, one is met always by the perfectly valid argument that the creatures would not live at all if it were not for the purposes of sport, and that it is presumably better from their point of view that they should eventually meet a violent death than that they should never have existed. No doubt this is true. But there is another side of the question as to the effect of the sport upon ourselves — whether it does not blunt our own better feelings, harden our sympathies, brutalise our natures. A coward can do it as well as a brave man; a weakling can do it as well as a strong man. There is no ultimate good from it. Have we a moral right then, to kill creatures for amusement? I know many of the best and most kind-hearted men who do it, but still I feel that in a more advanced age it will no longer be possible.

And yet I am aware of my own inconsistency when I say I am in sympathy with fishing, and would gladly have a little if I knew where to get it. And yet, is it wholly inconsistent? Is a cold-blooded creature of low organization like a fish to be regarded in the same way as the hare which cries out in front of the beagles, or the deer which may carry the rifle bullet away in its side? If there is any cruelty it is surely of a much less degree. Besides, is it not the sweet solitude of Nature, the romantic quest, rather than the actual capture which appeals to the fisherman? One thinks of the stories of trout and salmon which have taken another fly within a few minutes of having broken away from a former one, and one feels that their sense of pain must be very different from our own.

I once had the best of an exchange of fishing stories, which does not sound like a testimonial to my veracity. It was in a Birmingham inn, and a commercial traveller was boasting of his successes. I ventured to back the weight of the last three fish which I had been concerned in catching against any day's take of his lifetime. He closed with the bet and quoted some large haul, 100 lbs or more. “Now, sir,” he asked triumphantly, “what was the weight of your three fish?”

“Just over 200 tons,” I answered.

“Whales?”

“Yes, three Greenland whales.”

“I give you best,” he cried; but whether as a fisherman, or as a teller of fish stories, I am not sure. As a matter of fact, I had only returned that year from the Arctic seas, and the three fish in question were, in truth, the last which I had helped to catch.

My experiences during my Arctic voyage both with whales and bears I have already touched upon, so I will not refer to them again, though it was the greatest period of sport which has ever come my way.

I have always been keen upon the noble old English sport of boxing, and, though of no particular class myself, I suppose I might describe my form as that of a fair average amateur. I should have been a better man had I taught less and learned more, but after my first tuition I had few chances of professional teaching. However, I have done a good deal of mixed boxing among many different types of men, and had as much pleasure from it as from any form of sport. It stood me in good stead aboard the whaler. On the very first evening I had a strenuous bout with the steward, who was an excellent sportsman. I heard him afterwards, through the partition of the cabin, declare that I was “the best sur-r-r-geon we’ve had, Colin — he’s blacked my ee.” It struck me as a singular test of my medical ability, but I daresay it did no harm.

I remember when I was a medical practitioner going down to examine a man’s life for insurance in a little Sussex village. He was the gentleman farmer of the place, and a most sporting and jovial soul. It was a Saturday, and I enjoyed his hospitality that evening, staying over till Monday. After breakfast it chanced that several neighbours dropped in, one of whom, an athletic young farmer, was fond of the gloves. Conversation soon brought out the fact that I had a weakness in the same direction. The result was obvious. Two pairs of gloves were hunted from some cupboard, and in a few minutes we were hard at it, playing light at first and letting out as we warmed. It was soon clear that there was no room inside a house for two heavy-weights, so we adjourned to the front lawn. The main road ran across the end of it, with a low wall of just the right height to allow the village to rest its elbows on it and enjoy the spectacle. We fought several very brisk rounds, with no particular advantage either way, but the contest always stands out in my memory for its queer surroundings and the old English picture in which it was set. It is one of several curious bye-battles in my career. I recollect another where another man and I, returning from a ball at five of a summer morning, went into his room and fought in our dress clothes several very vigorous rounds as a wind-up to the evening's exercise.

They say that every form of knowledge comes useful sooner or later. Certainly my own experience in boxing and my very large acquaintance with the history of the prize-ring found their scope when I wrote "Rodney Stone." No one but a fighting man would ever, I think, quite understand or appreciate some of the detail. A friend of mine read the scene where Boy Jim fights Berks to a prize-fighter as he lay in what proved to be his last illness. The man listened with growing animation until the reader came to the point where the second advises Boy Jim, in technical jargon, how to get at his awkward antagonist. "That's it! By God, he's got him! "shouted the man in the bed. It was an incident which gave me pleasure when I heard it.

I have never concealed my opinion that the old prize-ring was an excellent thing from a national point of view — exactly as glove-fighting is now. Better that our sports should be a little too rough than that we should run a risk of effeminacy. But the ring outlasted its time. It was ruined by the villainous mobs who cared nothing for the chivalry of sport or the traditions of British fair play as compared with the money gain which the contest might bring. Their blackguardism drove out the good men — the men who really did uphold the ancient standards, and so the whole institution passed into rottenness and decay. But now the glove contests carried on under the discipline of the National Sporting or other clubs perpetuate the noble old sport without a possibility of the more evil elements creeping into it once more. An exhibition of; hardihood without brutality, of good-humoured courage without savagery, of skill without trickery, is, I think, the very highest which sport can give. People may smile at the mittens, but a twenty-round contest with four-ounce gloves is quite as punishing an ordeal as one could wish to endure. There is as little room for a coward as in the rougher days of old, and the standard of endurance is probably as high as in the average prize-fight.

One wonders how our champions of to-day would have fared at the hands of the heroes of the past. I know something of this end of the question, for I have seen nearly all the great boxers of my time, from J. L. Sullivan down to Tommy Burns, Carpentier, Bombardier Wells, Beckett and that little miracle Jimmy Wilde. But how about the other end — the men of old? Wonderful Jem Mace was the only link between them. On the one hand, he was supreme in the ‘sixties as a knuckle-fighter; on the other, he gave the great impetus to glove-fighting in America, and more especially in Australia, which has brought over such champions as Frank Slavin and Fitz-simmons, who, through Mace’s teaching, derive straight from the classic line of British boxers. He of all men might have drawn a just comparison between the old and the new. But even his skill and experience might be at fault, for it is notorious that many of the greatest fighters under the old régime were poor hands with the mittens. Men could bang poor Tom Sayers all round the ring with the gloves, who would not have dared to get over the ropes had he been without them. I have seen Mace box, and even when over sixty it is wonderful how straight was his left, how quick his feet, and how impregnable his guard.

After the Great War, one can see that those of us who worked for the revival of boxing wrought better than we knew, for at the supreme test of all time — the test which has settled the history of the future — it has played a marked part. I do not mean that a man used his fists in the war, but I mean — and every experienced instructor will, I am sure, endorse it — that the combative spirit and aggressive quickness gave us the attacking fire and helped especially in bayonet work. But it was to our allies of France that the chief advantage came. I believe that Carpentier, the boxer, did more to win the war for France than any other man save the actual generals or politicians. The public proof that a Frenchman could be at the very head of his class, as Ledoux was also at a lighter weight, gives a physical self-respect to a nation which tinges the spirit of every single member of it. It was a great day for France when English sports, boxing, Rugby football and others came across to them, and when a young man’s ideal ceased to be amatory adventure with an occasional duel. England has taught Europe much, but nothing of more value than this.

To return to my own small experiences of the game, I might have had one very notable one, for I was asked to referee the great contest when the champions of the white and black races fought for what may prove to be almost the last time.

My first intimation was a cable followed by the following letter: —

New York, *December* 9, 1909.

My dear Sir, —

I hope you will pardon the liberty I took as a stranger in cabling to you asking if you would act at the championship battle between Jeffries and Johnson. The fact is that when the articles were signed recently your name was suggested for referee, and Tex Rickard, promoter of the fight, was greatly interested, as were many others. I believe it will interest you to know that the opinion was unanimous that you would do admirably in the position. In a voting contest several persons sent in your name as their choice. Believe me among sporting men of the best class in America you have many strong admirers; your splendid stories of the ring, and your avowed admiration for the great sport of boxing have made you thousands of friends.

It was because of this extremely friendly feeling for you in America that I took the liberty of cabling to you. I thank you for your reply.

It would indeed rejoice the hearts of the men in this country if you were at the ring side when the great negro fighter meets the white man Jeffries for the world's championship.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

Irving Jefferson Lewis, Managing Editor *New York Morning Telegraph.*

I was much inclined to accept this honourable invitation, though my friends pictured me as winding up with a revolver at one ear and a razor at the other. However, the distance and my engagements presented a final bar.

If boxing is the finest single man sport, I think that Rugby football is the best collective one. Strength, courage, speed and resource are great qualities to include in a single game. I have always wished that it had come more my way in life, but my football was ruined, as many a man's is, by the fact that at my old school they played a hybrid game peculiar to the place, with excellent points of its own, but unfitting the youngster for any other. All these local freak games, wall games, Winchester games, and so on are national misfortunes, for while our youths are wasting their energies upon them — those precious early energies which make the instinctive players — the young South African or New Zealander is brought up on the real universal Rugby, and so comes over to pluck a few more laurel leaves out of our depleted wreath. In Australia I have seen in Victoria a hybrid, though excellent game of their own, but they have had the sense in other parts to fall into line, and are already taking the same high position which they hold in other branches of sport. I hope that our headmasters will follow the same course.

In spite of my wretched training I played for a short time as a forward in the Edinburgh University team, but my want of knowledge of the game was too heavy a handicap. Afterwards I took to Association, and played first goal and then back for Portsmouth, when that famous club was an amateur organization. Even then we could put a very fair team in the field, and were runners-up for the County Cup the last season that I played. In the same season I was invited to play for the county. I was always too slow, however, to be a really good back, though I was a long and safe kick. After a long hiatus I took up football again-in South Africa and organized a series of inter-hospital matches in Bloemfontein which helped to take our minds away from enteric. My old love treated me very scurvily, however, for I received a foul from a man’s knee which buckled two of my ribs and brought my games to a close. I have played occasionally since, but there is no doubt that as a man grows older a brisk charge shakes him up as it never did before. Let him turn to golf, and be thankful that there is still one splendid game which can never desert him. There may be objections to the “Royal and Ancient “ — but a game which takes four miles of country for the playing must always have a majesty of its own.

Personally I was an enthusiastic, but a very inefficient golfer — a ten at my best, and at my worst outside the pale of all decent handicaps. But surely it is a great testimony to the qualities of a game when a man can be both enthusiastic and inefficient. It is a proof at least that a man plays for the game’s sake and not for personal kudos. Golf is the coquette of games. It always lures one on and always evades one. Ten years ago I thought I had nearly got it. I hope so to-day. But my scoring cards will show, I fear, that the coquette has not yet been caught. The elderly lover cannot hope to win her smile.

I used in my early golfing days to practise on the very rudimentary links in front of the Mena Hotel, just under the Pyramids. It was a weird course, where, if you sliced your ball, you might find it bunkered in the grave of some Rameses or Thothmes of old. It was here, I believe, that the cynical stranger, after watching my energetic but ineffectual game, remarked that he had always understood that there was a special tax for excavating in Egypt. I have a pleasant recollection of Egyptian golf in a match played with the late Sirdar, then head of the Intelligence Department. When my ball was teed I observed that his negro caddie pointed two fingers at it and spat, which meant, as I was given to understand, that he cursed it for the rest of the game. Certainly I got into every hazard in the course, though I must admit that I have accomplished that when there was no Central African curse upon me. Those were the days before the reconquest of the Soudan, and I was told by Colonel Wingate — as he then was — that his spies coming down from Omdurman not infrequently delivered their messages to him while carrying his golf clubs, to avoid the attention of the Calipha's spies, who abounded in Cairo. On this occasion the Sirdar beat me well, but with a Christian caddie I turned the tables on him at Dunbar, and now we have signed articles to play off the rubber at Khartoum, no cursing allowed. When that first match was played we should as soon have thought of arranging to play golf in the moon.

Every now and then I give up the game in disgust at my own incompetence, but only to be lured on once more. Hunting in an old desk I came upon an obituary which I had written for my game at some moment of special depression. It ran, "Sacred to the memory of my golf. It was never strong, being permanently afflicted with a deformed stance and an undeveloped swing. After long weakness cheerfully borne it finally succumbed, and was buried in the eighteenth hole, regretted by numerous caddies." However it is out and about once more, none the worse for this premature interment.

There is said to be a considerable analogy between golf and billiards, so much so that success in the one generally leads to success in the other. Personally, I have not found it so, for though I may claim, I suppose, to be above the average amateur at billiards, I am probably below him in golf. I have never quite attained the three-figure break, but I have so often topped the eighty, and even the ninety, that I have lived in constant hope. My friend, the late General Drayson, who was a great authority on the game, used to recommend that every player should ascertain what he called his "decimal," by which he meant how many innings it took him, whether scoring or not, to make 100. The number, of course, varies with the luck of the balls and the mood of the player; but, taken over a dozen or twenty games, it gives a fair average idea of the player's form, and a man by himself can in this way test his own powers. If, for example, a player could, on an average, score 100 in twenty innings then his average would be five, which is very fair amateur form. If a man finds his “decimal “rise as high as ten over a sequence of games, he may be sure that he can hold his own against most players that he is likely to meet. I daresay my own decimal when I was in practice would be from six to eight.

I was never good enough for the big matches, and though I once went in for the Amateur championship it was not out of any illusions about my game, but because I was specially asked to do so, as it was advisable to strengthen the undoubted amateur element in the contest. By the luck of a bye, and by beating a player who was about my own form, I got into the third round, when I ran across Mr. Evans, who eventually reached the final with my scalp as well as several others at his girdle. I made 650 against his 1,000, which, as I was not helped by a bad fall from a motor bike a few days before, was as much as I could expect. Forty-two off the red was my best effort. Surely billiards is the king of all indoor games, and should have some writer who would do for it in prose what John Nyren did for cricket. I have never seen any worthy appreciation of its infinite varieties from the forcing losing hazard which goes roaring into a top pocket with a clash upon the rail, to the feather stroke so delicate that it is only the quiver of reflected light upon the object ball which shows that it has indeed been struck. Greatest of all is the ball heavily loaded with side which drifts down the long cushion and then is sucked against every apparent law into the pocket as though it were the centre of a whirlpool. Mr. E. V. Lucas is one who could do it with discernment.

I have one funny recollection of billiards, when I wandered into some small hotel in a South-Coast watering place, and for want of something to do played the marker. He was a pompous person in a frock coat with a very good opinion of his own game, which was really ruined by a habit he had of jerking. I won the match, which was not difficult to do, and then I thought it a kindness to point out to the man how he could improve his game. He took this badly, however, and hinted that he allowed gentlemen who played him to get the better of him. This in turn annoyed me, so I said: “Look here. I will come in after dinner and you can show all you can do, and you shall have a sovereign if you win.” After dinner his game was worse than ever, while I had amazing luck and made the 100 in about three shots. As I put on my coat and was leaving the room the queer little fellow sidled up to me and said: “I beg pardon, sir, but is your name Roberts? “My earliest recollection of cricket is not a particularly pleasant one. When I was a very small boy at a preparatory school I was one of a group of admirers who stood around watching a young cricketer who had just made his name hitting big hits off the school bowlers. One of the big hits landed on my knee-cap and the cricketer in his own famous arms carried me off to the school infirmary. The name, Tom Emmett, lingers in my memory, though it was some years before I appreciated exactly what he stood for in the game. I think, like most boys, I would rather have been knocked down by a first-class cricketer than picked up by a second-rater.

That was the beginning of my acquaintance with a game which has on the whole given me more pleasure during my life than any other branch of sport. I have ended by being its victim, for a fast bowler some years ago happened to hit me twice in the same place under my left knee, which has left a permanent weakness. I have had as long an innings as one could reasonably expect, and carry many pleasant friendships and recollections away with me.

I was a keen cricketer as a boy, but in my student days was too occupied to touch it. Then I took it up again, but my progress was interrupted by work and travel. I had some cause, therefore, to hold on to the game as I had lost so much of it in my youth. Finally, I fulfilled a secret ambition by getting into the fringe of first-class cricket, though rather, perhaps, through the good nature of others than my own merits. However, I can truly say that in the last season when I played some first-class cricket, including matches against Kent, Derbyshire, and the London County, I had an average of thirty-two for those games, so I may claim to have earned my place. I was more useful, however, in an amateur team, for I was a fairly steady and reliable bowler, and I could generally earn my place in that department, while with the M.C.C. the professional talent is usually so strong that the amateur who fails in batting and is not a particularly good field has no chance of atoning with the ball. Yet even with the M.C.C. I have occasionally had a gleam of success. Such a one came some years ago, when the team presented me with a little silver hat for getting three consecutive clean-bowled wickets against the Gentlemen of Warwick. One of my victims explained his downfall by assuring me that he had it thoroughly in his head that I was a left-handed bowler, and when the ball came from my right hand he was too bewildered to stop it. The reason is not so good as that of an artist who, when I had bowled him out, exclaimed:

“Who can play against a man who bowls in a crude pink shirt against an olive-green background?”

A bowler has many days when everything is against him, when a hard, smooth wicket takes all the spin and devil out of him, when he goes all round and over the wicket, when lofted balls refuse to come to hand, or, if they do come, refuse to stay. But, on the other hand, he has his recompense with many a stroke of good fortune. It was in such a moment that I had the good luck to get the wicket of W. G. Grace, the greatest of all cricketers.

W. G. had his speedy revenge. There was nothing more childlike and bland than that slow, tossed-up bowling of his, and nothing more subtle and treacherous. He was always on the wicket or about it, never sent down a really loose ball, worked continually a few inches from the leg, and had a perfect command of length. It was the latter quality which was my downfall. I had made some thirty or forty, and began to relax in the deep respect with which I faced the Doctor’s deliveries. I had driven him for four, and jumped out at him again the next ball. Seeing my intention, as a good bowler does, he dropped his ball a foot or two shorter. I reached it with difficulty, but again I scored four. By this time I was very pleased with myself, and could see no reason why every one of these delightful slows should not mean a four to me. Out I danced to reach the next one on the half volley. It was tossed a little higher up in the air, which gave the delusion that it was coming right up to the bat, but as a matter of fact it pitched well short of my reach, broke sharply across and Lilley, the wicket-keeper, had my bails off in a twinkling. One feels rather cheap when one walks from the middle of the pitch to the pavilion, longing to kick oneself for one’s own foolishness all the way. I have only once felt smaller, and that was when I was bowled by A. P. Lucas, by the most singular ball that I have ever received. He propelled it like a quoit into the air to a height of at least 30 feet, and it fell straight and true on to the top of the bails. I have often wondered what a good batsman would have made of that ball. To play it one would have needed to turn the blade of the bat straight up, and could hardly fail to give a chance. I tried to cut it off my stumps, with the result that I knocked down my wicket and broke my bat, while the ball fell in the midst of this general chaos. I spent the rest of the day wondering gloomily what I ought to have done — and I am wondering yet.

I have had two unusual experiences upon Lord’s ground. One was that I got a century in the very first match that I played there. It was an unimportant game, it is true, but still the surprising fact remained. It was a heavy day, and my bat, still encrusted with the classic mud, hangs as a treasured relic in my hall. The other was less pleasant and even more surprising. I was playing for the Club against Kent, and faced for the first time Bradley, who was that year one of the fastest bowlers in England. His first delivery I hardly saw, and it landed with a terrific thud upon my thigh. A little occasional pain is one of the chances of cricket, and one takes it as cheerfully as one can, but on this occasion it suddenly became sharp to an unbearable degree. I clapped my hand to the spot, and found to my amazement that I was on fire. The ball had landed straight on a small tin vesta box in my trousers pocket, had splintered the box, and set the matches ablaze. It did not take me long to turn out my pocket and scatter the burning vestas over the grass. I should have thought this incident unique, but Alec Hearne, to whom I told it, assured me that he had seen more than one accident of the kind. W. G. was greatly amused. “Couldn’t get you out — had to set you on fire! “he cried, in the high voice which seemed so queer from so big a body.

There are certain matches which stand out in one’s memory for their peculiar surroundings. One was a match played against Cape de Verde at that island on the way to South Africa. There is an Atlantic telegraph station there with a large staff, and they turn out an excellent eleven. I understand that they played each transport as it passed, and that they had defeated all, including the Guards. We made up a very fair team, however, under the captaincy of Lord Henry Scott, and after a hard fight we defeated the islanders. I don’t know how many of our eleven left their bones in South Africa; three at least — Blasson, Douglas Forbes (who made our top score), and young Maxwell Craig never returned. I remember one even more tragic match in which I played for the Incogniti against Aldershot Division a few months before the African War. The regiments quartered there were those which afterwards saw the hardest service. Major Ray, who made the top score, was killed at Magersfontein. Young Stanley, who went in first with me, met his death in the Yeomanry. Taking the two teams right through, I am sure that half the men were killed or wounded within two years. How little we could have foreseen it that sunny summer day!

It is dangerous when an old cricketer begins to reminisce, because so much comes back to his mind. He has but to smell the hot rubber of a bat handle to be flooded with memories. They are not always glorious. I remember three ladies coming to see me play against one of the Bedford schools. The boys politely applauded as I approached the wicket. A very small boy lobbed up the first ball which I played at. It went up into the air, and was caught at point by the very smallest boy I have ever seen in decent cricket. It seemed to me about a mile as I walked back from the wicket to the pavilion. I don’t think those three ladies ever recovered their confidence in my cricketing powers.

As a set-off to this confession of failure let me add a small instance of success, where by “taking thought “I saved a minor international match. It was at the Hague in 1892, and the game was a wandering British team against Holland. The Dutch were an excellent sporting lot, and had one remarkable bowler in Posthuma, a left-hander, who had so huge a break with his slow ball that it was not uncommon for him to pitch the ball right outside the matting on which we played and yet bring it on to the wicket. We won our various local matches without much difficulty, but we were aware that we should have a stiff fight with United Holland, the more so as Dutch hospitality was almost as dangerous to our play as Dutch cricket.

So it proved, and we were in the position that with four wickets in hand they had only fifteen runs to make with two batsmen well set. I had not bowled during the tour, for as we were a scratch team, mostly from the schoolmaster class, we did not know each other’s capacity. Seeing, however, that things were getting desperate, I went the length of asking our skipper to give me a chance.

I had observed that the batsmen had been very well taught by their English professional, and that they all played in most orthodox fashion with a perfectly straight bat. That was why I thought I might get them out. I brought every fielder round to the off, for I felt that they would not think it correct to pull, and I tossed up good length balls about a foot on the off side. It came off exactly as I expected. The pro had not told them what to do with that particular sort of tosh, and the four men were all caught for as many runs by mid-off or cover. The team in their exultation proceeded to carry me into the pavilion, but whether it was my sixteen stone or the heat of the weather, they tired of the job midway and let me down with a crash which shook the breath out of me — so Holland was avenged. I played against them again when they came to England, and made sixty-seven, but got no wickets, for they had mastered the off-side theory.

Some of my quaintest cricket reminiscences are in connection with J. M. Barrie’s team — the “Allah-Akbarries,” or “Lord help us “as we were called. We played in the old style, caring little about the game and a good deal about a jolly time and pleasant scenery. Broadway, the country home of Mr. Navarro and his wife, formerly Mary Anderson, the famous actress, was one of our favourite haunts, and for several years in succession we played the Artists there. Bernard Partridge, Barrie, A. E. W. Mason, Abbey the Academician, Blomfield the architect, Marriott Watson, Charles Whibley, and others of note took part, and there were many whimsical happenings, which were good fun if they were not good cricket. I thought all record of our games had faded from human ken, but lately a controversy was raised over Mr. Armstrong, the Australian captain, bowling the same man from opposite ends on consecutive overs. This led to the following paragraph in a Birmingham paper, which, I may say, entirely exaggerates my powers but is otherwise correct.

“Barbie and Armstrong.

“I am not surprised that in the matter of Mr. Armstrong’s conduct in bowling two consecutive overs from different ends, no reference has been made to the important precedent which on a similar occasion Sir James Barrie failed to establish (writes a correspondent of the “Nation “). The occasion was his captaincy (at Broadway, in Worcestershire) of an eleven of writers against a strong team of alleged artists. The circumstances were these. One side had compiled seventy-two runs, chiefly, if not wholly, contributed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

“The sun-worshippers had thereupon responded with an equal number of runs for the loss of all but their last wicket. The ninth wicket had fallen to the last ball of Sir Arthur’s over, the other eight having succumbed to the same performer, then in his prime. Actuated, apparently, by the belief that Sir Arthur was the only bowler of his side capable of taking or reaching a wicket, even in Worcestershire, Sir James thereupon put him on at the opposite end.

“Before, however, he could take a practice ball, a shout was heard from the artists’ pavilion, and the nine unengaged players were seen issuing from it to contest our captain’s decision. After an exciting contest, it was ultimately given in their favour, with the result that the first ball of the new bowler was hit for two, assisted by overthrows, and the innings and match were won by the artists.”

Of Barrie’s team I remember that it was printed at the bottom of our cards that the practice ground was in the “National Observer “Office. Mr. Abbey, the famous artist, usually captained against Barrie, and it was part of the agreement that each should have a full pitch to leg just to start his score. I remember my horror when by mistake I bowled a straight first ball to Abbey, and so broke the unwritten law as well as the wicket. Abbey knew nothing of the game, but Barrie was no novice. He bowled an insidious left-hand good length ball coming from leg which was always likely to get a wicket.

Talking of bowling, I have twice performed the rare feat of getting all ten wickets. Once it was against a London Club, and once I ran through the side of a Dragoon Regiment at Norwich. My best performance at Lords was seven wickets for fifty-one against Cambridgeshire in 1904.

Of fencing my experience has been limited, and yet I have seen enough to realise what a splendid toughening exercise it is. I nearly had an ugly mishap when practising it. I had visited a medical man in Southsea who was an expert with the foils, and at his invitation had a bout with him. I had put on the mask and glove, but was loath to have the trouble of fastening on the heavy chest plastron. He insisted, however, and his insistence saved me from an awkward wound, for, coming in heavily upon a thrust, his foil broke a few inches from the end, and the sharp point thus created went deeply into the pad which covered me. I learned a lesson that day.

On the whole, considering the amount of varied sport which I have done, I have come off very well as regards bodily injury. One finger broken at football, two at cricket (one after the other in the same season), the disablement of my knee — that almost exhausts it. Though a heavy man and quite an indifferent rider, I have never hurt myself in a fair selection of falls in the hunting field and elsewhere. Once, as I have narrated, when I was down, the horse kicked me over the eye with his forefoot, but I got off with a rather ragged wound, though it might have been very much more serious.

Indeed, when it comes to escapes, I have had more than my share of luck. One of the worst was in a motor accident, when the machine, which weighed over a ton, ran up a high bank, threw me out on a gravel drive below, and then, turning over, fell upon the top of me. The steering wheel projected slightly from the rest, and thus broke the impact and undoubtedly saved my life, but it gave way under the strain, and the weight of the car settled across my spine just below the neck, pinning my face down on the gravel, and pressing with such terrific force as to make it impossible to utter a sound. I felt the weight getting heavier moment by moment, and wondered how long my vertebrae could stand it. However, they did so long enough to enable a crowd to collect and the car to be levered off me. I should think there are few who can say that they have held up a ton weight across their spine and lived unparalyzed to talk about it. It is an acrobatic feat which I have no desire to repeat.

There is plenty of sport in driving one's own motor and meeting the hundred and one unexpected roadside adventures and difficulties which are continually arising. These were greater a few years ago, when motors were themselves less solidly and accurately constructed, drivers were less skilled, and frightened horses were more in evidence. No invention of modern civilization has done so much for developing a man's power of resource and judgment as the motor. To meet and overcome a sudden emergency is the best of human training, and if a man is his own driver and mechanician on a fairly long journey he can hardly fail to have some experience of it.

I well remember in the early days of motoring going up to Birmingham to take delivery of my new 12 horsepower Wolseley. I had invested in the sort of peaked yachting cap which was considered the correct badge of the motorist in those days, but as I paced the platform of New Street Station a woman removed any conceit I might have over my headgear, by asking me peremptorily how the trains ran to Walsall. She took me for one of the officials. I got the car safely home, and no doubt it was a good car as things went at that time, but the secret of safe brakes had not yet been discovered, and my pair used to break as if they were glass. More than once I have known what it is to steer a car when it is flying backwards under no control down a winding hill. Looking back at those days it seems to me that I was under the car nearly as much as on the top of it, for every repair had to be done from below. There were few accidents from smashing my differential, seizing my engines, and stripping my gears, which I have not endured. It was a chain-driven machine, and I can well remember one absurd incident when the chain jumped the cogs and fell off. We were on a long slope of 3 miles and ran on with the engine turned off quite unconscious of what had occurred. When we reached level ground the car naturally stopped, and we got out, opened the bonnet, tested the electricity, and were utterly puzzled as to what was amiss, when a yokel in a cart arrived waving our motive power over his head. He had picked it up on the road.

Our descendants will never realise the terror of the horses at this innovation, nor the absurd scenes which it caused. On one occasion I was motoring down a narrow lane in Norfolk, with my mother in the open tonneau. Coming round a curve we came upon two carts, one behind the other. The leading horse, which had apparently never seen a motor before, propped his forelegs out, his ears shot forward, his eyes stared rigidly and then in a moment he whirled round, ran up the bank, and tried to escape behind his comrade. This he could have done but for the cart, which he also dragged up the bank. Horse and cart fell sideways on the other horse and cart, and there was such a mixture that you could not disentangle it. The carts were full of turnips and these formed a top dressing over the interlaced shafts and the struggling horses. I sprang out and was trying to help the enraged farmer to get something right end up, when I glanced at my own car which was almost involved in the pile. There was my dear old mother sitting calmly knitting in the midst of all the chaos. It was really like something in a dream.

My most remarkable motor car experience was when I drove my own 16 horse-power Dietrich-Lorraine in the International Road Competition organized by Prince Henry of Prussia in 1911. This affair is discussed later, when I come to the preludes of war. I came away from it with sinister forebodings. The impression left on my mind by the whole incident is shown by the fact that one of the first things I did when I got to London was to recommend a firm of which I am director to remove a large sum which it had lying in Berlin. I have no doubt that it would have continued to lie there and that we might have lost it. As to the contest itself it ended in a British victory, which was owing to the staunch way in which we helped each other when in difficulties, while the Germans were more a crowd of individuals than a team. Their cars were excellent and so was their driving. My own little car did very well and only dropped marks at Sutton Bank in Yorkshire, that terrible hill, one in three at one point, with a hair-pin bend. When we finally panted out our strength I put my light-weight chauffeur to the wheel, ran round, and fairly boosted her up from behind, but we were fined so many marks for my leaving the driving wheel. Not to get up would have meant three times the forfeit, so my tactics were well justified.

No doubt the coming science of aviation will develop the same qualities as motor driving to an even higher degree. It is a form of sport in which I have only aspirations and little experience. I had one balloon ascent in which we covered some 25 miles and ascended 6,000 feet, which was so delightful an expedition that I have always been eager for another and a longer one. A man has a natural trepidation the first time he leaves the ground, but I remember that, as I stood by the basket with the gas-bag swinging about above me and the assistants clinging to the ropes, some one pointed out an elderly gentleman and said: “That is the famous Mr. So-and-So, the aeronaut.” I saw a venerable person and I asked how many ascents he had made. “About a thousand,” was the answer. No eloquence or reasoning could have convinced me so completely that I might get into the basket with a cheerful mind, though I will admit that for the first minute or so one feels very strange, and keeps an uncommonly tight grip of the side-ropes. This soon passes, however, and one is lost in the wonder of the prospect and the glorious feeling of freedom and detachment. As in a ship, it is the moment of nearing land once more which is the moment of danger — or, at least, of discomfort; but beyond a bump or two, we came to rest very quietly in the heart of a Kentish hop-field.

I had one aeroplane excursion in rather early days, but the experience was not entirely a pleasant one. Machines were under-engined in those days and very much at the mercy of the wind. We went up at Hendon — May 25, 1911, the date — but the machine was a heavy bi-plane, and though it went down wind like a swallow it was more serious when we turned and found, looking down, that the objects below us were stationary or even inclined to drift backwards. However, we got back to the field at last, and I think the pilot was as relieved as I. What impressed me most was the terrible racket of the propeller, comparing so unfavourably with the delicious calm of the balloon journey.

There is one form of sport in which I have, I think, been able to do some practical good, for I can claim to have been the first to introduce skis into the Grisons division of Switzerland, or at least to demonstrate their practical utility as a means of getting across in winter from one valley to another. It was in 1894 that I read Nansen’s account of his crossing of Greenland, and thus became interested in the subject of ski-ing. It chanced that I was compelled to spend that winter in the Davos valley, and I spoke about the matter to Tobias Branger, a sporting tradesman in the village, who in turn interested his brother. We sent for skis from Norway, and for some weeks afforded innocent amusement to a large number of people who watched our awkward movements and complex tumbles. The Brangers made much better progress than I. At the end of a month or so we felt that we were getting more expert, and determined to climb the Jacobshorn, a considerable hill just opposite the Davos Hotel. We had to carry our unwieldy skis upon our backs until we had passed the fir trees which line its slopes, but once in the open we made splendid progress, and had the satisfaction of seeing the flags in the village dipped in our honour when we reached the summit. But it was only in returning that we got the full flavour of ski-ing. In ascending you shuffle up by long zigzags, the only advantage of your footgear being that it is carrying you over snow which would engulf you without it. But coming back you simply turn your long toes and let yourself go, gliding delightfully over the gentle slopes, flying down the steeper ones, taking an occasional cropper, but getting as near to flying as any earth-bound man can. In that glorious air it is a delightful experience.

Encouraged by our success with the Jacobshorn, we determined to show the utility of our accomplishment by opening up communications with Arosa, which lies in a parallel valley and can only be reached in winter by a very long and roundabout railway journey. To do this we had to cross a high pass, and then drop down on the other side. It was a most interesting journey, and we felt all the pride of pioneers as we arrived in Arosa.

I have no doubt that what we did would seem absurdly simple to Norwegians or others who were apt at the game, but we had to find things out for ourselves and it was sometimes rather terrifying. The sun had not yet softened the snow on one sharp slope across which we had to go, and we had to stamp with our skis in order to get any foothold. On our left the snow slope ended in a chasm from which a blue smoke or fog rose in the morning air. I hardly dared look in that direction, but from the corner of my eye I saw the vapour of the abyss. I stamped along and the two gallant Switzers got on my left, so that if I slipped the shock would come upon them. We had no rope by which we could link up. We got across all right and perhaps we exaggerated the danger, but it was not a pleasant experience.

Then I remember that we came to an absolute precipice, up which no doubt the path zig-zags in summer. It was not of course perpendicular, but it seemed little removed from it, and it had just slope enough to hold the snow. It looked impassable, but the Brangers had picked up a lot in some way of their own. They took off their skis, fastened them together with a thong, and on this toboggan they sat, pushing themselves over the edge, and going down amid a tremendous spray of flying snow. When they had reached safety they beckoned to me to follow. I had done as they did, and was sitting on my ski preparatory to launching myself when a fearsome thing happened, for my ski shot from under me, flew down the slope, and vanished in huge bounds among the snow mounds beyond. It was a nasty moment, and the poor Brangers stood looking up at me some hundreds of feet below me in a dismal state of mind. However, there was no possible choice as to what to do, so I did it. I let myself go over the edge, and came squattering down, with legs and arms extended to check the momentum. A minute later I was rolling covered with snow at the feet of my guides, and my skis were found some hundreds of yards away, so no harm was done after all.

I remember that when we signed the hotel register Tobias Branger filled up the space after my name, in which the new arrival had to describe his profession, by the word “Sportesmann,” which I took as a compliment. It was at any rate more pleasant than the German description of my golf clubs, which went astray on the railway and turned up at last with the official description of “Kinderspieler” (child’s toys) attached to them. To return to the skis they are no doubt in very general use, but I think I am right in saying that these and other excursions of ours first demonstrated their possibilities to the people of the country and have certainly sent a good many thousands of pounds since then into Switzerland. If my rather rambling career in sport has been of any practical value to any one, it is probably in this matter, and also, perhaps, in the opening up of miniature rifle-ranges in 1901, when the idea was young in this country, and when my Hindhead range was the pioneer and the model for many others.

A pleasing souvenir of my work on Rifle Clubs is to be found in the Conan Doyle Cup, which was presented by my friend Sir John Langman, and is still shot for every year at Bisley by civilian teams.

On the whole as I look back there is no regret in my mind for the time that I have devoted to sport. It gives health and strength, but above all it gives a certain balance of mind without which a man is not complete. To give and to take, to accept success modestly and defeat bravely, to fight against odds, to stick to one’s point, to give credit to your enemy and value your friend — these are some of the lessons which true sport should impart.

CHAPTER XXV. TO THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS IN 1914

Baseball — Parkman — Ticonderoga — Prairie Towns — Procession of Ceres — Relics of the Past — A Moose — Prospects for Emigrants — Jasper Park — The Great Divide — Algonquin Park.

IN 1914, with little perception of how near we were to the greatest event of the world's history, we accepted an invitation from the Canadian Government to inspect the National Reserve at Jasper Park in the Northern Rockies. The Grand Trunk Railway (Canadian) made matters easy for us by generously undertaking to pass us over their system and to place a private car at our disposal. This proved to be a gloriously comfortable and compact little home consisting of a parlour, a dining-room and a bedroom. It belonged to Mr. Chamberlin, the president of the line, who allowed us the use of it. Full of anticipation we started off in May upon our long and pleasant journey. Our first point was New York, where we hoped to put in a week of sight-seeing, since my wife had never been to America. Then we were to go North and meet our kind hosts of Canada. At the Plaza Hotel of New York we found ourselves in pleasant quarters for a hectic week. Here are a few impressions.

We went to see a baseball game at New York — a first-class match, as we should say — or "some ball," as a native expert described it. I looked on it all with the critical but sympathetic eyes of an experienced though decrepit cricketer. The men were fine fellows, harder looking than most of our professionals — indeed they train continually, and some of the teams had even before the days of prohibition to practise complete abstinence, which is said to show its good results not so much in physical fitness as in the mental quickness which is very essential in the game. The catching seemed to me extraordinarily good, especially the judging of the long catches by the "bleachers," as the outfields who are far from any shade are called. The throwing in is also remarkably hard and accurate, and, if applied to cricket, would astonish some of our batsmen. The men earn anything from £1,000 to £1,500 in the season. This money question is a weak point of the game, as it is among our own Soccer clubs, since it means that the largest purse has the best team, and there is no necessary relation between the player and the place he plays for. Thus we looked upon New York defeating the Philadelphia Athletics, but there was no more reason to suppose that New York had actually produced one team than that Philadelphia had produced the other. For this reason the smaller matches, such as are played between local teams or colleges, seem to me to be more exciting, as they do represent something definite.

The pitcher is the man who commands the highest salary and has mastered the hardest part of the game. His pace is remarkable, far faster, I should say, than any bowling; but of course it is a throw, and as such would not be possible in the cricket field. I had one uneasy moment when I was asked in Canada to take the bat and open a baseball game. The pitcher, fortunately was merciful, and the ball came swift but true. I steadied myself by trying to imagine that it was a bat which I held in my grasp and that this was a full toss, which asked to be hit over the ropes. Fortunately, I got it fairly in the middle and it went on its appointed way, whizzing past the ear of a photographer, who expected me to pat it. I should not care to have to duplicate the performance — nor would the photographer.

I took the opportunity when I was in New York to inspect the two famous prisons, The Tombs and Sing Sing. The Tombs is in the very heart of the city, and a gloomy, ill-boding place it is when seen from without. Within it is equally dismal. I walked round in a somewhat shamefaced way, for it makes you feel so when you encounter human suffering which you cannot relieve. Warders and prisoners seemed however to be cheerful enough, and there was an off-hand way of doing things which seemed strange after our rigid methods. A Chinese prisoner, for example, was standing at the bottom of the lift, and I heard the warder shout through the tube, “Have you got room for another Chink in number three?” I had a talk with one strange Englishman who was barred in like a wild beast. He spoke of the various prisons, of which he had a wide acquaintance, exactly as if they were hotels which he was recommending or condemning. “Toronto is a very poor show. The food is bad. I hope I may never see Toronto Gaol again. Detroit is better. I had quite a pleasant time in Detroit.” And so on. He spoke and looked like a gentleman, but I could quite imagine, in spite of his genial manner, that he was a dangerous crook. When I left him he said: “Well, bye-bye! Sorry you have to go! We can’t all be out and about, can we?”

In the same week I went to Sing Sing, the State Penitentiary, which is some twenty miles from the city on the banks of the Hudson. It is an ancient building, dating from the middle of last century, and it certainly should be condemned by a rich and prosperous community. By a strange coincidence the convicts were having one of their few treats in the year that day, and I was able to see them all assembled together in the great hall, listening to a music-hall troupe from New York. Poor devils, all the forced, vulgar gaiety of the songs and the antics of half-clad women must have provoked a terrible reaction in their minds! Many of them had, I observed, abnormalities of cranium or of features which made it clear that they were not wholly responsible for their actions. There was a good sprinkling of coloured men among them. Here and there I noticed an intelligent and even a good face. One wondered how they got there.

I was locked up afterwards in one of the cells — seven feet by four — and I was also placed in the electrocution chair, a very ordinary, stout, cane-bottomed seat, with a good many sinister wires dangling round it. I had a long talk with the Governor, who seemed in himself to be a humane man, but terribly hampered by the awful building which he had to administer.

One morning of early June “my Lady Sunshine “and I — (if I may be allowed to quote the charmingly appropriate name which the New York Press had given to my wife) left New York for Parkman Land, which I had long wished to explore. We were glad to get away as we had been considerably harassed by the ubiquitous and energetic American reporter.

This individual is really, in nine cases out of ten, a very good fellow, and if you will treat him with decent civility he will make the best of you with the public. It is absurd for travellers to be rude to him, as is too often the attitude of the wandering Briton. The man is under orders from his paper, and if he returns without results it is not a compliment upon his delicacy which will await him. He is out to see you and describe you, and if he finds you an ill-tempered, cantankerous curmudgeon, he very naturally says so and turns out some excellent spicy reading at your expense. The indignant Briton imagines that this is done in revenge. The reporter would not be human if it did not amuse him to do it, but it very often represents the exact impression which the vituperative traveller has made upon the pressman, himself as often as not an overworked and highly-strung man.

Reminiscences of interviews are occasionally amusing. I can remember that on my previous visit I was approached one night by an interviewer in a very marked state of intoxication. He was so drunk that I wondered what in the world he would make of his subject, and I bought his paper next day to see. To my amusement I found that I had made the worst possible impression upon him. He had found no good in me at all. He may even have attributed to me his own weakness, like the Scotch toper who said: “Sandy drank that hard that by the end of the evening I couldn’t see him.”

To return to Parkman Land. I am surprised to find how few Americans and fewer Canadians there are who appreciate that great historian at his true worth. I wonder whether any man of letters has ever devoted himself to a task with such whole-hearted devotion as Parkman. He knew the old bloody frontier as Scott knew the border marches. He was soaked in New England tradition. He prepared himself for writing about Indians by living for months in their wigwams.

He was intimate with old French life, and he spent some time in a religious house that he might catch something of the spirit which played so great a part in the early history of Canada. On the top of all this he had the well-balanced, unprejudiced mind of the great chronicler, and he cultivated a style which was equally removed from insipidity and from affectation. As to his industry and resolution, they are shown by the fact that he completed his volumes after he had been stricken by blindness. It is hard to name any historian who has such an equipment as this. From his “Pioneers of the New World “to his “Conspiracy of Pontiac “I have read his twelve volumes twice over, and put some small reflection of them into my “Refugees.”

We explored not only the beautiful tragic Lake George, but also its great neighbour Lake Champlain, almost as full of historical reminiscence. Upon this, level with the head of the smaller lake, stood Ticonderoga, the chief seat of the French Canadian power. Some five miles separate it from Lake George, up which the British came buzzing whenever they were strong enough to do so. Once in front of the palisades of Ticonderoga, they met with heavy defeat, and yet once again, by the valour of the newly-enrolled Black Watch, they swept the place off the map. I wonder if Stevenson had actually been there before he wrote his eerie haunting ballad — the second finest of the sort, in my opinion, in our literature. It is more than likely, since he spent some time in the neighbouring Adirondacks. Pious hands were restoring the old fort of Ticonderoga, much of which has been uncovered. All day we skirted Lake Champlain, into which the old French explorer first found his way, and where he made the dreadful mistake of mixing in Indian warfare, which brought the whole blood-thirsty vendetta of the five nations upon the young French settlements. Up at the head of the lake we saw Plattsburg, where the Americans gained a victory in the war of 1812. The sight of these battlefields, whether they mark British or American successes, always fills me with horror. If the war of 1776 was, as I hold, a glorious mistake, that of 1812 was a senseless blunder. Had neither occurred, the whole of North America would now be one magnificent undivided country, pursuing its own independent destiny, and yet united in such unblemished ties of blood and memory to the old country that each could lean at all times upon the other. It is best for Britishers, no doubt, that we should never lean upon anything bigger than ourselves. But I see no glory in these struggles, and little wisdom in the statesmen who waged them. Among them they split the race from base to summit, and who has been the gainer? Not Britain, who was alienated from so many of her very best children. Not America, who lost Canada and had on her hands a civil war which a United Empire could have avoided. Ah well, there is a controlling force somewhere, and the highest wisdom is to believe that all things are ordered for the best.

About evening we crossed the Canadian frontier, the Richelieu River, down which the old Iroquois scalping parties used to creep, gleaming coldly in the twilight. There is nothing to show where you have crossed that border. There is the same sort of country, the same cultivation, the same plain wooden houses. Nothing was changed save that suddenly I saw a little old ensign flying on a gable, and it gives you a thrill when you have not seen it for a time.

It is not until one has reached the Prairie country that the traveller meets with new conditions and new problems. He traverses Ontario with its prosperous mixed farms and its fruit-growing villages, but the general effect is the same as in Eastern America. Then comes the enormous stretch of the Great Lakes, those wonderful inland seas, with great ocean-going steamers. We saw the newly built *Noronic*, destined altogether for passenger traffic, and worthy to compare, both in internal fittings and outward appearance, with many an Atlantic liner. The Indians looked in amazement at La Salle’s little vessel. I wondered what La Salle and his men would think of the *Noronic!* For two days in great comfort we voyaged over the inland waters. They lay peaceful for our passage, but we heard grim stories of winter gusts and of ships which were never heard of more. It is not surprising that there should be accidents, for the number of vessels is extraordinary, and being constructed with the one idea of carrying the maximum of cargo, they appeared to be not very stable. I am speaking now of the whale-back freight carriers and not of the fine passenger service, which could not be beaten.

I have said that the number of vessels is extraordinary. I have been told that the tonnage passing through Saulte Ste. Marie, where the lakes join, is greater than that of any port in the world. All the supplies and manufactures for the West move one way, while the corn of the great prairie, and the ores from the Lake Superior copper and iron mines move the other. In the Fall there comes the triumphant procession of the harvest. Surely in more poetic days banners might have waved and cymbals clashed, and priests of Ceres sung their hymns in the vanguard, as this flotilla of mercy moved majestically over the face of the waters to the aid of hungry Europe. However, we have cut out the frills, to use the vernacular, though life would be none the worse could we tinge it a little with the iridescence of romance.

We stopped at Sault Ste. Marie, the neck of the hour-glass between the two great lakes of Huron and Superior. There were several things there which are worthy of record. The lakes are of a different level, and the lock which avoids the dangerous rapids is on an enormous scale; but, beside it, unnoticed save by those who know where to look and what to look for, there is a little stone-lined cutting no larger than an uncovered drain — it is the detour by which for centuries the voyageurs, trappers, and explorers moved their canoes round the Sault or fall on their journey to the great solitudes beyond. Close by it is one of the old Hudson Bay log forts, with its fireproof roof, its loop-holed walls, and every other device for Indian fighting. Very small and mean these things look by the side of the great locks and the huge steamers within them. But where would locks and steamers have been had these others not taken their lives in their hands to clear the way?

The twin cities of Fort William and Port Arthur, at the head of Lake Superior, form the most growing community of Canada. They call them twin cities, but I expect, like their Siamese predecessors, they will grow into one. Already the suburbs join each other, though proximity does not always lead to amalgamation or even to cordiality, as in the adjacent towns of St. Paul and Minneapolis. When the little American boy was asked in Sunday school who persecuted Saint Paul, he “guessed it was Minneapolis.” But in the case of Fort William and Port Arthur they are so evidently interdependent that it is difficult to believe that they will fail to coalesce; when they do, I am of opinion that they may grow to be a Canadian Chicago, and possibly become the greatest city in the country. All lines converge there, as does all the lake traffic, and everything from East to West must pass through it. If I were a rich man and wished to become richer, I should assuredly buy land in the twin cities. Though they lie in the very centre of the broadest portion of the continent, the water communications are so wonderful that an ocean-going steamer from Liverpool or Glasgow can now unload at their quays.

The grain elevators of Fort William are really majestic erections, and with a little change of their construction might be aesthetic as well. Even now the huge cylinders into which they are divided look at a little distance not unlike the columns of Luxor. This branch of human ingenuity has been pushed at Fort William to its extreme. The last word has been said there upon every question covering the handling of grain. By some process, which is far beyond my unmechanical brain, the stuff is even divided automatically according to its quality, and there are special hospital elevators where damaged grain can be worked up into a more perfect article.

By the way, it was here, while lying at a steamship wharf on the very edge of the city, that I first made the acquaintance of one of the original inhabitants of Canada. A cleared plain stretched from the ship to a wood some hundreds of yards off. As I stood upon deck I saw what I imagined to be a horse wander out of the wood and begin to graze in the clearing. The creature seemed ewe-necked beyond all possibility, and looking closer I saw to my surprise that it was a wild hornless moose. Could anything be more characteristic of the present condition of Canada — the great mechanical developments of Fort William within gunshot of me on one side, and this shy wanderer of the wilderness on the other? In a few years the dweller in the great city will read of my experience with the same mixture of incredulity and surprise with which we read the occasional correspondent’s whose grandfather shot a woodcock in Maida Vale.

The true division between the East and West of Canada is not the Great Lakes, which are so valuable as a waterway, but lies in the 500 miles of country between the Lakes and Winnipeg. It is barren, but beautiful, covered with forest which is not large enough to be of value as lumber. It is a country of rolling plains covered with low trees with rivers in the valleys.

The soil is poor. It is really a problem what to do with this belt, which is small according to Canadian distance, but is none the less broader than the distance between London and Edinburgh. Unless minerals are found in it, I should think that it will be to Canada what the Highlands of Scotland are to Britain — a region set apart for sport because it has no other economic use. The singular thing about this barren tree-land is that it quite suddenly changes to the fertile prairie at a point to the east of Winnipeg. I presume that there is some geological reason, but it was strange to see the fertile plain run up to the barren woods with as clear a division as there is between the sea and the shore.

And now one reached the west of Winnipeg and on that prairie which means so much both to Canada and to the world. It was wonderfully impressive to travel swiftly all day from the early summer dawn to the latest evening light, and to see always the same little clusters of houses, always the same distant farms, always the same huge expanse stretching to the distant skyline, mottled with cattle, or green with the half-grown crops. You think these people are lonely. What about the people beyond them and beyond them again, each family in its rude barracks in the midst of the 160 actes which form the minimum farm? No doubt they are lonely, and yet there are alleviations. When men or women are working on their own property and seeing their fortune growing, they have pleasant thoughts to bear them company. It is the women, I am told, who feel it most, and who go prairie-mad. Now they have rigged telephone circles which connect up small groups of farms and enable the women to relieve their lives by a little friendly gossip, when the whole district thrills to the news that Mrs. Jones has been in the cars to Winnipeg and bought a new bonnet. At the worst the loneliness of the prairie can never, one would think, have the soul-killing effect of loneliness in a town. “There is always the wind on the heath, brother.” Besides, the wireless has now arrived, and that is the best friend of the lonely man.

Land is not so easily picked up by the emigrant as in the old days, when 160 acres beside the railroad were given away free. There was still in 1914 free land to be had, but it was in the back country. However, this back country of to-day is always liable to be opened up by the branch railway lines to-morrow. On the whole, however, it seems to be more economical, if the emigrant has the money, to buy a partially developed well-situated farm than to take up a virgin homestead. That is what the American emigrants do who have been pouring into the country, and they know best the value of such farms, having usually come from exactly similar ones just across the border, the only difference being that they can get ten acres in Canada for the price of one in Minnesota or Iowa. They hasten to take out their papers of naturalisation, and make, it is said, most excellent and contented citizens. Their energy and industry are remarkable. A body of them had reached the land which they proposed to buy about the time that we were in the West; they had come over the border with their wagons, their horses, and their ploughs. Being taken to the spot by the land agent, the leader of the party tested the soil, cast a rapid glance over the general prairie, and then cried: "I guess this will do, boys. Get off the ploughs."

The agent who was present told me that they had broken an acre of the prairie before they slept that night. These men were German Lutherans from Minnesota, and they settled in the neighbourhood of Scott. The gains on the farms are very considerable. It is not unusual for a man to pay every expense which he has incurred, including the price of the land, within the first two years. After that, with decent luck, he should be a prosperous man, able to bring up a family in ease and comfort. If he be British, and desires to return to the Old Country, it should not be difficult for him to save enough in ten or twelve years to make himself, after selling his farm, more or less independent for life. That is, as it seems to me, an important consideration for many people who hesitate to break all the old ties and feel that they are leaving their motherland for ever.

So much about farms and farming. I cannot see how one can write about this western part and avoid the subject which is written in green and gold from sky to sky. There is nothing else. Nowhere is there any sign of yesterday — not a cairn, not a monument. Life has passed here, but has left no footstep behind. But stay, the one thing which the old life still leaves is just this one thing — footsteps. Look at them in the little narrow black paths which converge to the water — little dark ruts which wind and twist. Those are the buffalo runs of old. Gone are the Cree and Blackfoot hunters who shot them down. Gone, too, the fur-traders who bought the skins. Chief Factor MacTavish, who entered into the great Company's service as a boy, spent his life in slow promotion from Fort This to Fort That, and made a decent Presbyterian woman of some Indian squaw, finally saw with horror in his old age that the world was crowding his wild beasts out of their pastures. Gone are the great herds upon which both Indian hunter and fur-trader were parasitical. Indian, trader and buffalo all have passed, and here on the great plains are these narrow runways as the last remaining sign of a vanished world.

Edmonton is the capital of the western side of the prairie, even as Winnipeg of the eastern. I do not suppose the average Briton has the least conception of the amenities of Winnipeg. He would probably be surprised to hear that the Fort Garry Hotel there is nearly as modern and luxurious as any hotel in Northumberland Avenue. There were no such luxuries in 1914 in Edmonton. The town was in a strangely half-formed condition, rude and raw, but with a great atmosphere of energy, bustle, and future greatness. With its railway connections and waterways it is bound to be a large city. At the time of our visit the streets were full of out-of-works, great husky men, some of them of magnificent physique, who found themselves at a loss, on account of cessations in railroad construction. They told me that they would soon be reabsorbed, but meantime the situation was the rudest object-lesson in economics that I have ever witnessed. Here were these splendid men, ready and willing to work. Here was a new country calling in every direction for labour. How come the two things to be even temporarily disconnected? There could be but one word. It was want of capital. And why was the capital wanting? Why was the work of the railroads held up? Because the money market was tight in London — London which finds, according to the most recent figures, *73* per cent, of all the moneys with which Canada is developed. Such was the state of things. What will amend it? How can capital be made to flow into the best channels? By encouragement and security and the hope of good returns. I never heard of any system of socialism which did not seem to defeat the very object which it had at heart. And yet it was surely deplorable that the men should be there, and that the work should be there, and that none could command the link which would unite them.

A line of low distant hills broke the interminable plain which has extended with hardly a rising for 1,500 miles. Above them was, here and there, a peak of snow. Shades of Mayne Reid, they were the Rockies — my old familiar Rockies! Have I been here before? What an absurd question, when I lived here for about ten years of my life in all the hours of dreamland. What deeds have I not done among Redskins and trappers and grizzlies within their wilds! And here they were at last glimmering bright in the rising morning sun. At least, I have seen my dream mountains. Most boys never do.

Jasper Park is one of the great national playgrounds and health resorts which the Canadian Government with great wisdom has laid out for the benefit of the citizens. When Canada has filled up and carries a large population, she will bless the foresight of the administrators who took possession of broad tracts of the most picturesque land and put them for ever out of the power of the speculative dealer. The National Park at Banff has for twenty years been a Mecca for tourists. That at Algonquin gives a great pleasure-ground to those who cannot extend their travels beyond Eastern Canada. But this new Jasper Park is the latest and the wildest of all these reserves. Some years ago it was absolute wilderness, and much of it impenetrable. Now, through the energy of Colonel Rogers, trails have been cut through it in various directions, and a great number of adventurous trips into country which is practically unknown can be carried out with ease and comfort. The packer plays the part of a dragoman in the East, arranging the whole expedition, food, cooking, and everything else on inclusive terms; and once in the hands of a first-class Rocky Mountain packer, a man of the standing of Fred Stephens or the Otto Brothers, the traveller can rely upon a square deal and the companionship of one whom he will find to be a most excellent comrade. There is no shooting in the park — it is a preserve for all wild animals — but there is excellent fishing, and everywhere there are the most wonderful excursions, where you sleep at night under the stars upon the balsamic fir branches which the packer gathers for your couch. I could not imagine an experience which would be more likely to give a freshet of vitality when the stream runs thin. For a week we lived the life of simplicity and nature.

The park is not as full of wild creatures as it will be after a few years of preservation. The Indians who lived in this part rounded up everything that they could before moving to their reservation. But even now, the bear lumbers through the brushwood, the eagle soars above the lake, the timber wolf still skulks in the night, and the deer graze in the valleys. Above, near the snow-line, the wild goat is not uncommon, while at a lower altitude are found the mountain sheep. On the last day of our visit the rare cinnamon bear exposed his yellow coat upon a clearing within a few hundred yards of the village. I saw his clumsy good-humoured head looking at me from over a dead trunk, and I thanked the kindly Canadian law which has given him a place of sanctuary. What a bloodthirsty baboon man must appear to the lower animals! If any superhuman demon treated us exactly as we treat the pheasants, we should begin to reconsider our views as to what is sport.

The porcupine is another creature which abounded in the woods. I did not see any, but a friend described an encounter between one and his dog. The creature's quills are detachable when he wishes to be nasty, and at the end of the fight it was not easy to say which was the dog and which the porcupine.

Life in Jasper interested me as an experience of the first stage of a raw Canadian town. It will certainly grow into a considerable place, but at that time, bar Colonel Rogers' house and the station, there were only log-huts and small wooden dwellings. Christianity was apostolic in its simplicity and in its freedom from strife — though one has to go back remarkably early in apostolic times to find those characteristics. Two churches were being built, the pastor in each case acting also as head mason and carpenter. One, the corner-stone of which I had the honour of laying, was to be used in turn by several Nonconformist bodies. To the ceremony came the Anglican parson, grimy from his labours on the opposition building, and prayed for the well-being of his rival. The whole function, with its simplicity and earnestness, carried out by a group of ill-clad men standing bareheaded in a drizzle of rain, seemed to me to have in it the essence of religion. As I ventured to remark to them, Kikuyu and Jasper can give some lessons to London.

We made a day's excursion by rail to the Tête Jaune Cache, which is across the British Columbian border and marks the watershed between East and West. Here we saw the Fraser, already a formidable river, rushing down to the Pacific. At the head of the pass stands the village of the railway workers, exactly like one of the mining townships of Bret Harte, save that the bad man is never allowed to be too 'bad. There is a worse man in a red serge coat and a Stetson hat, who is told off by the State to look after him, and does his duty in such fashion that the most fire-eating desperado from across the border falls into the line of law. But apart from the gunman, this village presented exactly the same queer cabins, strange signs, and gambling-rooms which the great American master has made so familiar to us.

And now we were homeward bound! Back through Edmonton, back through Winnipeg, back through that young giant, Fort William — but not back across the Great Lakes. Instead of that transit we took train, by the courtesy of the Canadian Pacific, round the northern shore of Superior, a beautiful wooded desolate country, which, without minerals, offers little prospect for the future. Some 200 miles north of it, the Grand Trunk, that enterprising pioneer of empire, has opened up another line which extends for a thousand miles, and should develop a new corn and lumber district. Canada is like an expanding flower; wherever you look you see some fresh petal unrolling.

We spent three days at Algonquin Park. This place is within easy distance of Montreal or Ottawa, and should become a resort of British fishermen and lovers of nature. After all, it is little more than a week from London, and many a river in Finland takes nearly as long to reach. There is good hotel accommodation, and out of the thousand odd lakes in this enormous natural preserve one can find all sorts of fishing, though the best is naturally the most remote. I had no particular luck myself, but my wife caught an eight-pound trout, which Mr. Bartlett, the courteous superintendent of the park, mounted, so as to confound all doubters. Deer abound in the park, and the black bear is not uncommon, while wolves can often be heard howling in the night-time.

What will be the destiny of Canada? Some people talk as if it were in doubt. Personally, I have none upon the point. Canada will remain exactly as she is for two more generations. At the end of that time there must be reconsideration of the subject, especially on the part of Great Britain, who will find herself with a child as large as herself under the same roof.

I see no argument for the union of Canada with the United States. There is excellent feeling between the two countries, but they could no more join at this period of their history than a great oak could combine with a well-rooted pine to make one tree. The roots of each are far too deep. It is impossible.

Then there is the alternative of Canada becoming an independent nation. That is not so impossible as a union with the States, but it is in the last degree improbable. Why should Canada wish her independence? She has it now in every essential. But her first need is the capital and the population which will develop her enormous territory and resources. This capital she now receives from the Mother-Country to the extent in 1914 of 73 per cent., the United States finding 14 per cent., and Canada herself the remaining 13. Her dependence upon the Mother-Country for emigrants, though not so great as her financial dependence, is still the greatest from any single source. Besides all this, she has the vast insurance policy, which is called the British Navy, presented to her for nothing — though honour demands some premium from her in the future — and she has the British diplomatic service for her use unpaid. Altogether, looking at it from the material side, Canada's interests lie deeply in the present arrangement. But there is a higher and more unselfish view which works even more strongly in the same direction. Many of the most representative Canadians are descendants of those United Empire Loyalists who in 1782 gave up everything and emigrated from the United States in order to remain under the flag. Their imperialism is as warm or warmer than our own. And everywhere there is a consciousness of the glory of the empire, its magnificent future, and the wonderful possibilities of these great nations all growing up under the same flag with the same language and destinies. This sentiment joins with material advantages, and will prevent Canada from having any aspiration towards independence.

Yes, it will remain exactly as it is for the remainder of this century. At the end of that time her population and resources will probably considerably exceed those of the Mother Land, and problems will arise which our children's children may have some difficulty in solving. As to the French-Canadian, he will always be a conservative force — let him call himself what he will. His occasional weakness for flying the French flag is not to be resented, but is rather a pathetic and sentimental tribute to a lost cause, like that which adorns every year the pedestal of Charles at Whitehall.

I had some presentiment of coming trouble during the time we were in Canada, though I never imagined that we were so close to the edge of a world-war. One incident which struck me forcibly was the arrival at Vancouver of a ship full of Sikhs who demanded to be admitted to Canada. This demand was resisted on account of the immigration laws. The whole incident seemed to me to be so grotesque — for why should sun-loving Hindoos force themselves upon Canada — that I was convinced some larger purpose lay behind it. That purpose was, as we can now see, to promote discord among the races under the British flag. There can be no doubt that it was German money that chartered that ship.

I had several opportunities of addressing large and influential Canadian audiences, and I never failed to insist upon the sound state of the home population. The Canadians judge us too often by our ne'er-do-weels and remittance men, who are the sample Englishmen who come before them. In defence even of these samples it should be stated that they bulked very large in the first Canadian Division. I told the Canadians of our magnificent Boy Scout movement, and also of the movement of old soldiers to form a national guard. “A country where both the old and the young can start new, unselfish, patriotic movements is a live country,” I said, “and if we are tested we will prove just as good as ever our fathers were.” I did not dream how near the test would be, how hard it would press, or how gloriously it would be met.

And now I turn to the war, the physical climax of my life as it must be of the life of every living man and woman. Each was caught as a separate chip and swept into that fearsome whirlpool, where we all gyrated for four years, some sinking for ever, some washed up all twisted and bent, and all of us showing in our souls and bodies some mark of the terrible forces which had controlled us so long. I will show presently how the war reacted upon me, and also if one may speak without presumption, how in a minute way I in turn reacted upon the war.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE EVE OF WAR

The Prologue of Armageddon — The ‘Prince Henry ‘Race — Bernhardi —”England and the Next War “—” Danger “ — General Sir H. Wilson — The Channel Tunnel — Naval Defects — Rubber Collars — Mines — Willie Redmond.

FOR a long time I never seriously believed in the German menace. Frequently I found myself alone, in a company of educated Englishmen, in my opinion that it was non-existent — or at worst greatly exaggerated. This conclusion was formed on two grounds. The first was, that I knew it to be impossible that we could attack Germany save in the face of monstrous provocation. By the conditions of our government, even if those in high places desired to do such a thing, it was utterly impracticable, for a foreign war could not be successfully carried on by Great Britain unless the overwhelming majority of the people approved of it. Our foreign, like our home, politics are governed by the vote of the proletariat. It would be impossible to wage an aggressive war against any Power if the public were not convinced of its justice and necessity. For this reason we could not attack Germany. On the other hand, it seemed to be equally unthinkable that Germany should attack us. One failed to see what she could possibly hope to gain by such a proceeding. She had enemies already upon her eastern and western frontiers, and it was surely unlikely that she would go out of her way to pick a quarrel with the powerful British Empire. If she made war and lost it, her commerce would be set back and her rising colonial empire destroyed. If she won it, it was difficult to see where she could hope for the spoils. We could not give her greater facilities for trade than she had already. We could not give her habitable white colonies, for she would find it impossible to take possession of them in the face of the opposition of the inhabitants. An indemnity she could never force from us. Some coaling stations and possibly some tropical colonies, of which latter she already possessed abundance, were the most that she could hope for. Would such a prize as that be worth the risk attending such a war? To me it seemed that there could be only one answer to such a question.

I am still of the same opinion. But unhappily the affairs of nations are not always regulated by reason, and occasionally a country may be afflicted by a madness which sets all calculations at defiance. Then, again, I had looked upon the matter too much as between Great Britain and Germany. I had not sufficiently considered the chance of our being drawn in against our will in order to safeguard Belgium, or in order to stop the annihilation of France. It was so perfectly clear that Britain by her treaty obligations, and by all that is human and honourable, would fight if Belgium were invaded, that one could not conceive Germany taking such a step with any other expectation. And yet what we could not conceive is exactly what happened, for it is clear that the delusions as to our degeneration in character had really persuaded the Germans that the big cowardly fellow would stand by with folded arms and see his little friend knocked about by the bully. The whole idea showed an extraordinary ignorance of the British psychology, but absurd as it was, it was none the less the determining influence at the critical moment of the world's history. The influence of the lie is one of the strangest problems of life — that which is not continually influences that which is. Within one generation imagination and misrepresentation have destroyed the Boer republics and Imperial Germany.

One of my most remarkable pre-war experiences, which influenced my mind deeply, was my participation in the amateur motor race called the Prince Henry Competition. It was rather a reliability test than a race, for the car had to go some 150 miles a day on an average at its own pace, but marks were taken off for all involuntary stoppages, breakdowns, accidents, etc. Each owner had to drive his own car, and I had entered my little 16 horse-power landaulette. There were about forty British cars and fifty German, so that the procession was a very considerable one. Starting from Homburg, the watering-place, our route ran through North Germany, then by steamer to Southampton, up to Edinburgh and back to London by devious ways.

The competition had been planned in Germany, and there can be no doubt in looking back that a political purpose underlay it. The idea was to create a false entente by means of sport, which would react upon the very serious political development in the wind, namely, the occupation of Agadir on the south-west coast of Morocco, which occurred on our second day out. As Prince Henry, who organized and took part in the competition, was also head of the German Navy, it is of course obvious that he knew that the

Panther was going to Agadir, and that there was a direct connection between the two events, in each of which he was a leading actor. It was a clumsy bit of stage management and could not possibly have been effective.

The peculiarity of the tour was that each car had an officer of the army or navy of the other nation as a passenger, to check the marks. Thus my wife and I had the enforced company for nearly three weeks of Count Carmer, Rittmeister of Breslau Cuirassiers, who began by being stiff and inhuman, but speedily thawed and became a very good fellow. The arrangements were very peculiar. Some British paper — the "Mail "if I remember right — had stated that the Competition was really a device to pass a number of German officers through Great Britain in order to spy out the land. I think there may have been some truth in this, as our good Count when we reached London went off to a hotel down in the East End, which seemed a curious thing for a wealthy Junker to do. This criticism seems to have annoyed the Kaiser, and he said — or so it was reported — that none but junior officers should go as observers. I should think that ours was the senior of the lot, and the others were mostly captains and lieutenants. On the other hand, the British Government, out of compliment to Prince Henry, had appointed the very best men available as observers. If there had been a sudden crisis over Agadir, and Germany had impounded us all, it would have been a national disaster and would have made a difference in a European war. Speaking from an imperfect memory, I can recall that we had General Grierson, Charles Munro, Rawlinson, I think, Captain — now General — Swinton of Tanks fame, Delme Ratcliffe, Colonel — now General — Holman, Major — now General — Thwaites, and many other notables both of the Army and Navy.

From the first relations were strained. There was natural annoyance when these senior officers found that their opposite numbers were youngsters of no experience. Then, again, at Cologne and Munster I understand that the German military did not show the proper courtesies, and certainly the hospitality which the whole party received until we reached England was negligible. The Germans themselves must have felt ashamed of the difference. Personally the competitors were not a bad set of fellows, though there were some bounders among them. We were not all above criticism ourselves.

Of the Competition itself little need be said, as I have treated the sporting side of it elsewhere. Some of the Germans seemed to me to be a little mad, for they seemed consumed by the idea that it was a race, whereas it mattered nothing who was at the head of the procession or who at the tail, so long as you did the allotted distance in the allotted time. I saw a German bound into his car after some stoppage: "How many ahead? Three Englishmen! Forwards! Forwards! "he cried. They barged into each other, dashed furiously round corners, and altogether behaved in a wild fashion, while our sedate old fellows pursued their course in a humdrum fashion and saved their marks. There were, however, some good fellows among the Germans. I have not forgotten how one of them, anonymously, used to place flowers in my wife's corner every morning.

But as an attempt at an entente it was a great failure. The British officer who was compelled to spend weeks with a car-load of Germans was not expansive and refused to be digested. Some of the Germans, too, became disagreeable. I saw a large German car — they were all Benz and Mercédès, generally 70-80 horse-power — edge a little British car right off the road on to the grass track beside it. The driver of the British car was a pretty useful middle-weight boxer, but he kept his temper or there might have been trouble. There was very little love lost on either side, though I, as one of the few German-speaking competitors, did my very best to bring about a more cordial atmosphere. But war was in the air. Both sides spoke of it. Several of the British officers were either of the Intelligence branch, or had special German experience, and they were unanimous about it. My attempts towards peace were rejected. "The only thing I want to do with these people is to fight them," said Colonel Holman. "Same here," said the officer with him. It was a deep antagonism on either side. They were not only sure of the war, but of the date. "It will be on the first pretext after the Kiel Canal is widened." The Kiel Canal was finished in June, 1914, and war came in August, so that they were not far wrong. There was some little German chaff on the subject. "Wouldn't you like one of these little islands?" I heard a German say as we steamed out past Heligoland and the Frisian Belt.

It was this experience which first made me take the threat of war seriously, but I could have persuaded myself that I was misled, had it not been that I read soon afterwards Bernhardi's book "Germany and the Next War." I studied it carefully and I put my impression of it into print in an article called "England and the Next War," which appeared in the "Fortnightly Review "in the summer of 1913. It lies before me now, as I write, and it is interesting to see how, as I projected my mind and my imagination over the possibilities of the future, I read much aright and some little wrong.

I began by epitomizing Bernhardi's whole argument, and showing that, however we might disagree with it, we were bound to take it seriously, since he was undoubtedly a leader of a certain class of thought in his own country — that very military class which was now predominant. I demurred at his assumption that the German Army in equal numbers must overcome the French. "It is possible," I remarked, "that even so high an authority as General Bernhardi has not entirely appreciated how Germany has been the teacher of the world in military matters and how thoroughly her pupils have responded to that teaching. That attention to detail, perfection of arrangement for mobilization, and careful preparation which have won German victories in the past may now be turned against her, and she may find that others can equal her in her own virtues." I then examined Bernhardi's alleged grievances against Great Britain, and showed how baseless they were, and how little they could hope to gain by victory. I quoted one poisonous sentence: "Even English attempts at a *rapprochement* must not blind us to the real situation. We may at most use them to delay the necessary and inevitable war until we may fairly imagine that we have some prospect of success."

"This last sentence," I remarked, "must come home to some of us who have worked in the past for a better feeling between the two countries."

I then gave an epitome of Bernhardi's plan of campaign as outlined in charming frankness in his volume, and I sketched out how far we were in a position to meet it and what were the joints in our armour. My general conclusions may be given as follows: —

That invasion was not a serious danger and that the thought of it should not deflect our plans.

That if invasion becomes impossible then any force like the Territorials unless it is prepared to go abroad becomes useless.

That we should not have conscription save as a very last resource, since it is against the traditions of our people.

That our real danger lay in the submarine and in the airship, which could not be affected by blockade.

In discussing the submarine I said: "What exact effect a swarm of submarines, lying off the mouth of the Channel and the Irish Sea, would produce upon the victualling of these islands is a problem which is beyond my conjecture. Other ships besides the British would be likely to be destroyed, and international complications would probably follow. I cannot imagine that such a fleet would entirely, or even to a very large extent, cut off our supplies. But it is certain that they would have the effect of considerably raising the price of whatever did reach us. Therefore, we should suffer privation, though not necessarily such privation as would compel us to make terms. From the beginning of the war every home source would naturally be encouraged, and it is possible that before our external supplies were seriously decreased, our internal ones might be well on the way to make up the deficiency."

This did, I think, roughly outline the actual course of events.

That the submarines would affect military operations should we send a force to France or Belgium.

That therefore the Channel Tunnel was a vital necessity.

That all unnecessary expenses should be at once cut down, so that British credit should stand at its highest when the strain came.

These are only the general conclusions. The article attracted some attention, but I do not suppose that it had any actual influence upon the course of events. To reinforce it I wrote an imaginary episode called "Danger "in the "Strand Magazine," to show how even a small Power might possibly bring us to our knees by the submarine. It was singularly prophetic, for not only did it outline the actual situation as it finally developed, but it contained many details, the zig-zagging of the merchant ships, the use of submarine guns, the lying for the night on sandy bottoms, and so forth — exactly as they occurred. The article was sent round in proof to a number of high naval officers, mostly retired, for their opinions. I am afraid that the printed results, which I will not be so cruel as to quote, showed that it was as well they *were* retired, since they had no sense of the possibilities of the naval warfare of the future.

One result of my "Fortnightly "article was that General Henry Wilson, late Chief of the Staff College as he then was, desired to see me to cross-question me, and a meeting was arranged at the house of Colonel Sackville-West, Major Swinton being also present. There, after luncheon, General Wilson machine-gunned me with questions for about an hour. He was fierce and explosive in his manner, and looked upon me, no doubt, as one of those pestilential laymen who insist upon talking of things they don't understand.

As I could give reasons for my beliefs, I refused to be squashed, and when the interview was over I went straight down to the Athenaeum Club and wrote it all down from memory. It makes such curious reading that I give it exactly as I reported it that day, in dialogue, with one or two comments from Colonel Sackville-West. After saying with some asperity that I had made many statements which I could not substantiate, and so might give the public far too optimistic a view of the position, he said: “Why do you say that we would never pay an indemnity to Germany?”

A. C. D. It is a matter of individual opinion. I go upon history and upon the spirit of our people.

Gen. W. Had not France equal spirit in 1870? How is it that they paid an indemnity?

A. C. D. Because Germany was sitting on the top of them, and she had to pay to get from under.

Gen. W. Why may she not sit on the top of us?

A. C. D. Because we live on an island and she cannot occupy us in the same way.

Colonel S.-W. I believe a little pressure on London would cause us to pay an indemnity.

A. C. D. The man who suggested it would get hanged.

Colonel S.-W. They would hang the man who made the war.

A. C. D. No, they would back him but hang the traitor.

Gen. W. You say that they would gain nothing by war. What about the carrying trade of the world?

A. C. D. The carrying trade depends on economic questions and upon geographical situation. For example, the Norwegians, who have no fleet, are one of the principal carriers.

Gen. W. At least they could starve us out if they held the seas.

A. C. D. Well, that is where my tunnel would come in; but of course I am entirely with you as to the need of holding the seas.

Gen. W. Well, now, you admit that we must go to the help of France?

A. C. D. Certainly.

Gen. W. But what can six divisions do?

A. C. D. Well, my point is that six divisions with a tunnel are better than six divisions without a tunnel.

Colonel S.-W. If we have a tunnel we must have a force worth sending to send through it.

A. C. D. If you are going to couple the tunnel with compulsory service, you will get neither one nor the other.

Gen. W. I think, so far as submarines go, that the British patrols would make it a very desperate service. Some desperate man might get his boat through.

A. C. D. Some desperate man might command a flotilla and get it through.

Gen. W. Many things seem possible theoretically which cannot be done in practice, but no doubt there is a danger there. In your view the Territorials are simply a support for the fighting Army?

A. C. D. Yes.

Gen. W. But they are too untrained to go into action.

A. C. D. They would be reserves and have time to train.

Gen. W. Your idea of troops coming back in case of a raid through the tunnel is impossible. You could not withdraw troops in that way from their positions.

A. C. D. Well, with all respect, I do not believe either in a raid or in an invasion.

Gen. W. A war with Germany would be short and sharp — seven months would see it finished.

A. C. D. You mean, no doubt, the continental part. I could imagine the naval part lasting ten years.

Colonel S.-W. If your fleet was crushed, you would have to give in.

A. C. D. A fleet can never be annihilated as an army is. There always remain scattered forces which can go on fighting. I don’t think we need give in because the fleet is crushed.

Gen. W. You don’t suppose that the Englishman is a better soldier by nature than the Frenchman or the German?

A. C. D. At least he is a volunteer.

Gen. W. How would that affect the matter?

A. C. D. I think he would rally better if he were beaten. There would be no end to his resistance, like the North in the American War.

Gen. W. Don’t you think, if war were declared with Germany, that the public, fearing an invasion, would clamour against any regular troops going abroad at all?

A. C. D. I think the public would leave it to the War Office. In the South African War they allowed our troops to go 6,000 miles away, and yet there was a danger of a European coalition.

Colonel S.-W. But our Navy was supreme then.

A. C. D. Not against a coalition.

Gen. W. When Cervera's fleet got loose, the Americans would not allow their troops to embark.

Colonel S.-W. Even the Pacific coast was terrified.

A. C. D. Well, surely that is the *reductio ad absurdum.*

Colonel S.-W. Still, the fact remains.

Gen. W. If we could send fifteen divisions we could stop a war.

A. C. D. But that means compulsory service.

Gen. W. Why not?

A. C. D. Because I am convinced that you could not get it. I have twice stood for Parliament, and I am sure no candidate would have a chance on such a platform.

Gen. W. Our descendants will say, "Well, you saw the danger, and yet you made no effort."

A. C. D. Well, we have doubled our estimates. Surely that is an effort and must represent power somewhere.

We parted quite good friends, but the General's evident desire to rope me in as a compulsory-service man was vain. I venture to think that Lord Roberts' efforts in that direction were a great mistake, and that if he had devoted the same great energy to the line of least resistance, which was the Territorial force, we could have had half a million in the ranks when war broke out.

From the time that I was convinced by my experiences at the Prince Henry race and by carefully reading German literature that a war was really brewing, I naturally began to speculate as to the methods of attack and of defence. I have an occasional power of premonition, psychic rather than intellectual, which exercises itself beyond my own control, and which when it really comes is never mistaken. The danger seems to be that my own prejudice or reasonings may interfere with it. On this occasion I saw as clearly as possible what the course of a naval war between England and Germany would be. I had no doubt at all that our greatest danger — a desperately real one — was that they would use their submarines in order to sink our food ships, and that we might be starved into submission. Even if we won every fleet action, this unseen enemy would surely bring us to our knees. It all worked out in exact detail in my mind — so much so that

Admiral Capelle mentioned my name afterwards in the Reichstag, and said that only I had accurately seen the economic form which the war would assume. This was perhaps true, so far as the economic side went, but Sir Percy Scott had spoken with far more authority than I on the growing power of the submarines in warfare.

I was made very uneasy by this line of thought, and all the more so because I asked several naval officers for some reassurance and could get none. One of them, I remember, said that it was all right because we should put a boom across the Channel, which seemed to me like saying that you could keep eels from going down a river by laying a plank across it. Among others I spoke to Captain Beatty, as he then was, whom I met at a weekend party at Knole, and though he could give me no reassurance about submarines he impressed me by his vivid and alert personality, and I felt that a Navy with such men in command was safe enough where fighting was concerned. It could not, however, fill the platter if there was no loaf to place upon it. I pondered the matter, and could only see three palliatives, and no cure.

The first was to encourage home growth by a bonus or by a tariff. But here our accursed party politics barred the way, as I had learned only too clearly after spending a thousand pounds in fighting the Hawick Burghs in order to get some form of agricultural protection.

The second was to meet submarines by submarine food-carriers. I think that this may prove the final solution, but the ships were not yet planned, far less launched.

The third and most obvious was the Channel Tunnel, or tunnels for preference. I had supported this scheme for years, and felt that as a nation we had made fools of ourselves over it, exactly as we did over the Suez Canal. If we were an island the size of the Wight such timidity would be intelligible, but the idea of a great country being invaded through a bole in the ground twenty-seven miles long seemed to me the most fantastic possible, while the practical use of the tunnel both for trade and for tourists was obvious. But now I saw that far more serious issues were at stake, for if we were held up by submarines, and if France was either neutral or our ally, we could land all the Eastern portion of our supplies, which is not inconsiderable, at Marseilles and so run them safely to London without breaking bulk. When I put this forward in the press some military critic said: “But if the submarines could hold up the Channel they could hold up the Mediterranean also.” This did not seem a good argument, because Germany was the possible enemy and it had no port in the Mediterranean, while the radius of submarine action at that time was not great enough to allow them to come so far. So strongly did I feel about the need for a Channel Tunnel in view of the coming war that I remember writing three memoranda and sending one to the Army, one to the Navy, and one to the Council of Imperial Defence. Of course I got no satisfaction of any kind, but Captain — now General — Swinton, who was acting as secretary to the latter body, told me that he had read my paper and that it had “set him furiously thinking.” I wrote to Lord Northcliffe also, without avail. I felt as if, like Solomon Eagle, I could go through London with a burning brazier on my head, if I could only get people to understand the need of the tunnel. The whole discussion had taken the utterly impossible and useless turn towards compulsory service, and the things which were practical and vital were being missed.

I spoke in public about the tunnel when I could, and on one occasion, just a year before the war, I raised a discussion in “The Times,” Mr. Ronald McNeill giving me an opening by declaring in the House that the project was a crazy one. There was also about that time a meeting in the City at the Cannon Street Hotel, where a very influential body of men supported the scheme. My speech, as reported next day in “The Times “in a very condensed form, ran thus:

“Sir A. Conan Doyle said there were possibilities in a future war that rendered it a matter of vital national importance that the tunnel should be constructed without delay. The danger was that we were getting five-sixths of our food supplies from abroad, and submarine craft were developing remarkable qualities which were not generally realised. They were able to avoid a blockade squadron, and to pass under a patrol line of torpedo-boats without their existence being even suspected. If they were sent to the line of our commerce and told to sink a ship, they would torpedo that ship for a certainty. What would be the condition of our food supplies if there were twenty-five hostile submarines off the Kent coast and twenty-five in the Irish Channel? The price of food would reach an almost prohibitive figure. The Military Correspondent of ‘The Times ‘was a great opponent of the Channel Tunnel and was always running it down and mocking at it. But the other day he wrote an article on the Mediterranean, and, forgetting the Channel Tunnel, he said: ‘We must remember that more than half the food supply of this country now comes from the Mediterranean.’ If it came through the Mediterranean, and if it got to Marseilles and we had the Channel Tunnel, it was only a matter of management to get it through to London.”

The Military Correspondent of “The Times,” who was presumably Colonel Repington, had an article next day deriding the scheme, and making light of my picture of submarines in the Channel. Well, we have lived to see them, and I wish my argument had proved less sound. Colonel Repington has proved himself so clearsighted an observer and commentator in the last war that he can be forgiven if, for once, he was on the wrong side; but if the Channel Tunnel had been put in hand at once after that meeting and rushed to completion, I wonder if it would be an exaggeration to say that a hundred million pounds would have been saved, while what it would have meant in evacuating wounded and in communications in stormy weather could not be represented in words. Imagine the convenience and saving of time and labour when munitions could be started at Woolwich and landed at Amiens without a break.

It has been argued that if the tunnel had been built the first swoop of the Germans would have brought them to the end of it and it would have been destroyed. But this will not bear examination, for it is based on the idea that we should have left the end unprotected. It would as a matter of fact have been the most natural fortress in the world, the strongest and the strangest, for it would be the only fortress where you could increase or withdraw your garrison at will, and introduce any supplies at any time you might desire. A very few forts and trenches on those convenient chalk slopes with their wide, smooth fields of fire, would hold the tunnel. In stretching their right wing as far as Amiens the Germans were very nearly cut off, and it was by a very great effort that Von Kluck saved it. If instead of Amiens he had reached Calais with sufficient forces for a siege he would have been unable to get away. An argument based upon the supposition that we should leave the mouth of the tunnel in Picardy as unprotected as the mouth of a coal mine in Kent is surely an unsound one. Now, in 1924, they are talking of building the tunnel. I wonder what our descendants will think of the whole business — probably what we think of the men who opposed the Suez Canal.

It is a most singular thing that our Navy, with so many practical and clever men in it, with a genius like Winston Churchill at the head, and another genius like Lord Fisher in continual touch, did not realise, until faced with actual results, some of the most important and surely most obvious points in connection with naval warfare. It came, I suppose, from the iron bonds of tradition, and that there were so many things to supervise, but the fact remains that a perfectly overwhelming case could be made out against the higher brain department of our senior service. A war with Germany was anticipated, and, as the public imagined, was prepared for, but save for the ship-building programme, which left us a narrow margin of safety, and for the concentration of our distant squadrons into British waters and the elimination of many useless craft which consumed good crews, what evidence is there of foresight? It was known, for example, that Scapa Flow and Cromarty were the two possible anchorages of the Fleet in a long-distance blockade, and yet no attempt had been made to mount guns or to net the entrances, so that for months there was a possibility of a shattering disaster; and Jellicoe, with the prudence which always distinguished him, had to put to sea every night lest his fleet should present a sitter to a torpedo attack. We showed intelligence in sticking always to the heavier guns, but our mines were wretchedly inefficient, our range-finders were very inferior, and our shells proved to have less penetrating and explosive force.

But the worst thing of all was the utter want of imagination shown in picturing the conditions of modern naval warfare, which must surely be done before just preparation can be made. It was clear that the effect of armour protection on one side, and of the mine and the torpedo on the other, would mean that if the ship floated there would be little loss of life, but that she was very likely to sink, in which case the whole crew would go. Therefore provision must be made for the saving of every one on board. The authorities, however, seem to have completely underrated the dangers of the mine and torpedo, and centred their attention upon the surface naval action, where boats, being inflammable, would be a danger and where in any case they would probably be shot to pieces before the end of the fight. The pre-war idea was to throw the boats and every other wooden object overboard before the action began.

The very first day of naval warfare showed the importance of the mine, as on August 5 the Germans laid a minefield outside the mouth of the Thames which nearly blew up their own returning Ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, and did actually cause the destruction of one of our light vessels, the *Amphion.* It was clear that one of the great dangers of the sea lay in this direction, and it soon became equally clear that nothing had been done to think out some defence. Foresight would have anticipated this situation and would have set the brains of the younger naval officers at work devising some remedy. As a matter of fact the real solution had been roughly indicated by Colonel Repington in “Blackwood’s Magazine “some four years before, in which he spoke of a device called “the otter “used by poachers for gathering up lines, and suggested that something of the sort would gather up the lines to which mines are attached. After three years of war, and very many preventable losses, including the great battleship *Audacious,* the splendid auxiliary cruiser *Laurentic* with six millions in gold on board, and many other fine vessels, the cure was found in the paravane, which was an adaptation of “the otter.” After its adoption ships could cruise over a minefield with little fear of injury, and our squadrons were no longer confined to the narrow lanes which had been swept clear.

I was from the beginning greatly impressed by this danger, and I wrote early in the war both to the papers and the Admiralty, but my device was crude and clumsy compared to what was actually done. My idea was something like a huge trident or toasting fork which could be hauled up on the bows when the waters were safe, but could be pushed forward and dip down in front when there was danger, so as to explode any mine before the ship could actually reach it. Such an apparatus would be better than nothing, but still I quite admit that it was an inadequate solution of the problem. But at least it was an attempt — and no other attempt was visible for years afterwards.

But the particular instance of mines was a small consideration beside the huge permanent incredible fact that while it was clear that a battleship could suddenly go down like a kettle with a hole in it, dragging a thousand men down with it, there was no provision by which the lives of these men could be saved. It was really unbelievable until there came the terrible example when the three cruisers, *Rogue, Aboukir,* and *Cressy,* were all put down in a single day. A young German lieutenant with twenty men had caused us more loss than we suffered at Trafalgar. To learn how the helpless men had nowhere to turn, and how they clung on to floating petrol tins as their only safety, should have been terrible reading to those whose want of foresight had brought about such a situation. It was a dreadful object-lesson, and there seemed no reason why it should not be often repeated. I had already commented in the press upon the situation which would arise in a general action, with ships sinking all round and no boats. I suggested that it might be possible to drop the boats before battle and to have them in tow of a steam launch which could bring them up if needed. Of course I saw all the difficulties and dangers of such a course, but if one took the word of the sailors that the boats were a danger on board then I could think of no other way of working it. When I wrote about it, several naval critics, notably Commander Jane, rapped me hard over the knuckles, and deplored the intrusion of landsmen into matters of which they knew nothing. But when this great catastrophe occurred, I realised that the protection must be individual rather than collective, and that one must ventilate the thing in public with such warmth that the authorities would be compelled to do something. If wooden boats were impossible, what about indiarubber collars which would at least hold the poor fellows above the waves until some help could reach them? I opened an agitation in several papers, notably the “Daily Mail” and the “Daily Chronicle,” and within a very few days — either *post hoc* or *propter hoc* — there was a rush order for a quarter of a million collars which could be blown out by the men themselves, and which were henceforth to be part of their vital equipment. The “Hampshire Telegraph,” the best informed of naval papers, said:

“The Navy has to thank Sir Conan Doyle for the new life-saving apparatus the Admiralty are supplying. Some weeks ago he asked if it was not possible to manufacture a simple and easily inflatable life-belt, and, thanks to the enterprise of a rubber-manufacturing firm, a swimming collar is now being supplied to the men of the fleet in the North Sea as fast as they can be turned out. The apparatus is exceedingly simple. It is made of rubber, enclosed in a stout web casing, and weighs complete under three ounces. It can be carried in the pocket and can be inflated in position round a man’s neck in about ten seconds. Its effect is to keep the man’s head above water indefinitely. There is little doubt that this swimming collar will result in the saving of many lives, and the Admiralty are to be congratulated upon the promptitude with which they have adopted the suggestion of Sir Conan Doyle.”

I was by no means satisfied with this, however; for, however useful in calm water on a summer day, it was clear that men would soon perish by exhaustion in a rough winter sea, and the collars would only prolong their agony. If wooden boats took up too much room and were inflammable, how about indiarubber collapsible boats? I wrote in the “Daily Mail “:

"We can spare and replace the ships. We cannot spare the men. They *must* be saved, and this is how to save them. There is nothing so urgent as this. We can view all future disasters with equanimity if the ship's company has only a fair chance for its life." Of course one recognised that there were some situations where nothing would avail. The *Formidable* was a case in point, which was torpedoed near Plymouth on January 1, 1915. Captain Miller, of the Brixham trawler which rescued seventy men, said to the "Daily Mail "representative that I was doing a national work in my efforts to get better life-saving appliances for the men of the Navy. He remarked that in calm weather collapsible boats would be of use, but they could not possibly have lived in the seas which were breaking over the *Formidable*'s whaler. The weather here was exceptional, and one cannot hope to provide for every case.

The final result of the agitation was the provision of collars, of safety waistcoats, and (as I believe) of a better supply of boats. I need hardly say that I never received a word of acknowledgment or thanks from the Admiralty. One is not likely to be thanked by a Government department for supplementing its work. But it may be that some poor seaman struggling in the water sent me his good wish, and those are the thanks that I desired. There was nothing in the war which moved me more than the thought of the helpless plight of these gallant men who were sacrificed when they could so easily have been saved.

Like every man with Irish blood in his veins, I was deeply moved by the tragedy of Ireland during the war — her fine start, the want of tact with which it was met, her sad relapse, and finally her failure to rise to the great world crisis.

A letter which I value very much is one which I received from Major William Redmond just before his lamented death. What an abyss of evil Ireland would have been saved from had the spirit of this letter been the inspiration upon which she acted!

18.12.16.

Dear Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, —

It was very good of you to write to me and I value very much the expression of your opinion. There are a great many Irishmen to-day who feel that out of this War we should try and build up a new Ireland. The trouble is men are so timid about meeting each other half-way. It would be a fine memorial to the men who have died so splendidly, if we could over their graves build up a bridge between the North and South. I have been thinking a lot about this lately in France — no one could help doing so when one finds that the two sections from Ireland are actually *side* by *side* holding the trenches! No words — not even your own — could do justice to the splendid action of the new Irish soldiers. They never have flinched. They never give trouble, and they are steady and sober. Had poor Kettle lived he would have given the world a wonderful account of things out there. I saw a good deal of Kettle, and we had many talks of the Unity we both hoped would come out of the War. I have been an extreme Nationalist all my life, and if others as extreme, perhaps, on the other side will only come half-way, then I believe, impossible as it may seem, we should be able to hit upon a plan to satisfy the Irish sentiment and the Imperial sentiment at one and the same time. I am sure you can do very much, as you already have done, in this direction. I am going back for Christmas with the men I have become attached very deeply to during the last two years.

“With many thanks for your letter,
Yours very truly, William Redmond.
Major.

If this letter, even now, were posted up by the Free State and Northern Governments at every cross-roads of Ireland the spirit of Willie Redmond might heal the wounds of the unhappy country.

CHAPTER XXVII. A REMEMBRANCE OF THE DARK YEARS

Nightmares of the Morning — The Civilian Reserve — The Volunteers — Domestic Life in War Time — German Prisoners — Cipher to our Prisoners — Sir John French — Empress Eugenie — Miracle Town — Armour — Our Tragedy.

I CAN never forget, and our descendants can never imagine, the strange effect upon the mind which was produced by seeing the whole European fabric drifting to the edge of the chasm with absolute uncertainty as to what would happen when it toppled over. Military surprises, starvation, revolution, bankruptcy — no one knew what so unprecedented an episode would produce. It was all so evidently preventable, and yet it was so madly impossible to prevent it, for the Prussians had stuck their monkey-wrench into the machinery and it would no longer work. As a rule one has wild dreams and wakes to sanity, but on those mornings I left sanity when I woke and found myself in a world of nightmare dreams.

On August 4, when war seemed assured, I had a note from Mr. Goldsmith, a plumber in the village: “There is a feeling in Crowborough that something should be done.” This made me laugh at first, but presently I thought more seriously of it. After all, Crowborough was one of a thousand villages, and we might be planning and acting for all. Therefore I had notices rapidly printed. I distributed them and put them at road corners, and the same evening (August 4) we held a village meeting and started the Volunteers, a force which soon grew to 200,000 men.

The old Volunteers had become extinct when the Territorials had been organised some ten or twelve years before. But this new force which I conceived was to be a universal one, where every citizen, young and old, should be trained to arms — a great stockpot into which the nation could dip and draw its needs. We named ourselves the Civilian Reserve. No one, I reflected, could be the worse in such days for being able to drill and to shoot, or for being assembled in organized units. Government was too preoccupied to do anything, and we must show initiative for ourselves.

After I had propounded my scheme, I signed the roll myself, and 120 men did the same. Those were the first men in the Volunteer Force. Next evening we assembled at the drill-hall, found out who could drill us, chose our non-commissioned officers and set to work to form ourselves into an efficient company. Gillette, my American actor friend, had got stranded in England, and he was an interested spectator on this occasion. For the time being I took command.

I had notified the War Office what we had done and asked for official sanction. We were careful not to stand in the way of recruiting and determined to admit none who could reasonably join up at once. When the plan began to work I wrote a description of our methods to “The Times.” As a consequence I received requests for our rules and methods from 1,200 towns and villages. My secretary and I worked all day getting these off, and in many cases the inquiries led to the formation of similar companies.

For about a fortnight all went well. We drilled every day, though we had no weapons. At the end of that time there came a peremptory order from the War Office: “All unauthorized bodies to be at once disbanded.” Unquestioning and cheerful obedience is the first law in time of war. The company was on parade. I read out the telegram and then said: “Right turn! Dismiss! “With this laconic order the Civilian Reserve dissolved for ever.

But it had a speedy and glorious resurrection. There was a central body in London with some remote connection with the old Volunteer Force. Lord Desborough was chairman of this, and there could not have been a better man. The Government put the formation of a Volunteer Force into the charge of this committee, to which I was elected. Mr. Percy Harris was the secretary and showed great energy. I wrote to all the 1,200 applicants referring them to this new centre, and we, the Crowborough body, now became the Crowborough Company of the Sixth Royal Sussex Volunteer Regiment. That we were the first company in the country was shown by the “Volunteer Gazette “when a prize was awarded for this distinction. Under its new shape Captain St. Quintin, who had been a soldier, became our leader, and Mr. Gresson and Mr. Druce, both of them famous cricketers, our lieutenants. Goldsmith was one of the sergeants, and I remained a full private for four years of war, and an extra half-year before we were demobilized. Our ranks fluctuated, for as the age limit of service gradually rose we passed many men into the regular Army, but we filled up with new recruits, and we were always about a hundred strong. Our drill and discipline were excellent, and when we received our rifles and bayonets we soon learned to use them, nor were our marching powers contemptible when one remembers that many of the men were in the fifties and even in the sixties. It was quite usual for us to march from Crowborough to Frant, with our rifles and equipment, to drill for a long hour in a heavy marshy field, and then to march back, singing all the way. It would be a good 14 miles, apart from the drill.

I have very pleasant recollections of that long period of service. I learned to know my neighbours who stood in the same ranks, and I hope that they also learned to know me as they could not otherwise. We had frequent camps, field days and inspections. On one occasion 8,000 of us were assembled, and I am bound to say that I have never seen a finer body of men, though they were rather of the police-constable than of the purely military type. The spirit was excellent, and I am sure that if we had had our chance we should have done well in action. But it was hard to know how to get the chance save in case of invasion. We were the remaining pivots of national life, and could only be spared for short periods or chaos would follow. But a week or two in case of invasion was well within our powers, and such a chance would have been eagerly hailed. No doubt our presence enabled the Government to strip the country of regular troops far more than they would have dared otherwise to do. Twice, as Repington’s “Memoirs “show, there was a question of embodying us for active service, but in each case the emergency passed.

I found the life of a private soldier a delightful one. To be led and not to lead was most restful, and so long as one’s thoughts were bounded by the polishing of one’s buttons and buckles, or the cleansing of one’s rifle, one was quietly happy. In that long period I shared every phase of my companions’ life. I have stood in the queue with my pannikin to get a welcome drink of beer, and I have slept in a bell-tent on a summer night with a Sussex yokel blissfully snoring upon each of my shoulders. Sometimes amusing situations arose. I remember a new adjutant arriving and reviewing us. When he got opposite to me in his inspection, his eyes were caught by my South African medal. “You have seen service, my man,” said he. “Yes, sir,” I answered. He was a little cocky fellow who might well have been my son so far as age went. When he had passed down the line, he said to our C.O., St. Quintin: “Who is that big fellow on the right of the rear rank? “‘That’s Sherlock Holmes,” said C.O. “Good Lord! “said the adjutant, “I hope he does not mind my ‘My manning ‘him!’ “He just loves it,” said St. Quintin, which showed that he knew me.

The other big factor which covered the whole period of the war, and some time after it, was my writing the History of the European campaign, which I published volume by volume under the name of “The British Campaign in France and Flanders.” My information was particularly good, for I had organized a very extensive correspondence with the generals, who were by no means anxious for self-advertisement, but were, on the other hand, very keen that the deeds of their particular troops should have full justice done them. In this way I was able to be the first to describe in print the full battle-line with all the divisions, and even brigades in their correct places from Mons onwards to the last fight before the Armistice. When I think what a fuss was made in the old days when any Correspondent got the account of a single Colonial battle before his comrades, it is amazing to me that hardly a single paper ever commented, in reviewing these six successive volumes, upon the fact that I was really the only public source of supply of accurate and detailed information. I can only suppose that they could not believe it to be true. I had no help but only hindrance from the War Office, and everything I got was by means which were equally open to anyone else who took the trouble to organize them. Of course, I was bowdlerized and blue-pencilled by censors, but still the fact remains that a dozen great battle-lines were first charted by me. I have since read the official account so far as it has gone, and find little to change in my own, though the German and French records are now available to broaden the picture. For the moment war literature is out of fashion, and my war history, which reflects all the passion and pain of those hard days, has never come into its own. I would reckon it the greatest and most undeserved literary disappointment of my life if I did not know that the end is not yet and that it may mirror those great times to those who are to come.

For the rest I had a great deal of literary propaganda work to do. Once it was the “To Arms! “pamphlet written in conjunction with Mr. Smith, soon to become Lord Birkenhead. Once again it was an appeal for our ill-used prisoners. Sometimes Norway, sometimes South America, always the United States, needed treatment. As to my special missions, those I treat in separate chapters.

There are many small but very important details of domestic life during the war which have never been properly described, and could indeed best be described by a woman, for they were usually an invasion of her department. Our descendants will never realise how we were all registered and docketed and rationed, so that the State could give the least to and take the most from each of us. One had food-cards for practically everything, and the card only entitled you to get your meagre portion if it was to be had. Often it wasn’t. I have been at a great lunch with half the grandees of the land, and the Prime Minister to speak. The fare was Irish stew and rice-pudding.

What could man ask for more, but it will need another war to bring it round again. There was a pleasing uncertainty about all meals. There was always a sense of adventure and a wonder whether you would really get something. It all made for appetite. Then there were the darkened windows, the sharp knocking of the police if the blind emitted any light, the vexatious summons for very small offences, the pulling down of every blind on the railway trains. At night one never knew what evil bird was flying overhead or what foul egg would be dropped. Once, as we sat in the theatre at Eastbourne, the whirr of a Zeppelin was heard above us. Half the audience slipped out, the lights were put out, and the play was finished with candles on the stage. When I was lecturing in London the same thing happened, and I finished my lecture in the dark.

Every one found themselves doing strange things. I was not only a private in the Volunteers, but I was a signaller and I was for a time number one of a machine gun. My wife started a home for Belgian refugees in Crowborough. My son was a soldier, first, last, and all the time. My daughter Mary gave herself up altogether to public work, making shells at Vickers’ and afterwards serving in a canteen. If I may quote a passage from my history: “Grotesque combinations resulted from the eagerness of all classes to lend a hand. An observer has described how a peer and a prize-fighter worked on the same bench at Woolwich, while titled ladies and young girls from cultured homes earned sixteen shillings a week at Erith and boasted in the morning of the number of shell-cases which they had turned, and finished in their hours of night-shift. Truly it had become a national war. Of all its memories none will be stranger than those of the peaceful middle-aged civilians who were seen eagerly reading books of elementary drill in order to prepare themselves to meet the most famous soldiers in Europe, or of the schoolgirls and matrons who donned blue blouses and by their united work surpassed the output of the great death factories of Essen.”

Every house had its vegetable garden and every poor man his allotment, that we might at the worst exist until we could win our peace. The want of sugar and the limitation of tea were the worst privations. My wife, greatly helped by a faithful servant, Jakeman, did wonders in saving food, and we always lived well within our legal rations. This did not save us once from a police raid, because some tea, sent us as a present from India, had arrived. We had already distributed a good deal of it, however, to our less fortunate neighbours, so we came well out of the matter.

I have one singular memory in having to guard German prisoners at work. The Volunteers had a turn at this work, and we spent the night at Lewes Prison. In the early morning, dark and misty, we were mustered, and five prisoners handed over to each of us. Mine worked on a farm some 4 miles from the town, and thither I had to march them, walking behind them with my rifle on my shoulder. When I had reached the lonely country road, I thought I would get into human touch with these poor slouching wretches, who were still in their stained grey uniforms, and wearing their service caps with the bright red bands which formed a wonderful advertisement of the excellence of German dyes. I halted them, drew them up, and asked them their nationality. Three were from Wurtemburg and two from Prussia. I asked the Wurtemburgers how long they had been prisoners. They said, “Fourteen months.”

“Then,” said I, “you were taken by the Canadians at Ypres upon such and such a date.” They were considerably astonished, since I was simply a second-line Tommy from their point of view. Of course, I had the details of the war very clearly in my mind, and I knew that our one big haul of Wurtemburgers had been on that occasion. To this day they must wonder how I knew. I shall not forget that day, for I stood for eight hours leaning on a rifle, amid drizzling rain, while in a little gap of the mist I watched those men loading carts with manure. I can answer for it that they were excellent workers, and they seemed civil, tractable fellows as well.

It was in 1915 that I managed to establish a secret correspondence with the British prisoners at Magdeburg. It was not very difficult to do, and I dare say others managed it as well as I, but it had the effect of cheering them by a little authentic news, for at that time they were only permitted to see German newspapers. It came about in this way. A dear friend of my wife’s, Miss Lily Loder Symonds, had a brother, Captain Willie Loder Symonds, of the Wiltshires, who had been wounded and taken in the stand of the 7th Brigade on the evening before Le Cateau. He was an ingenious fellow and had written home a letter which passed the German censor, because it seemed to consist in the description of a farm, but when read carefully it was clear that it was the conditions of himself and his comrades which he was discussing. It seemed to me that if a man used such an artifice he would be prepared for a similar one in a letter from home. I took one of my books, therefore, and beginning with the third chapter — I guessed the censor would examine the first — I put little needle-pricks under the various printed letters until I had spelled out all the news. I then sent the book and also a letter. In the letter I said that the book was, I feared, rather slow in the opening, but that from Chapter III onwards he might find it more interesting. That was as plain as I dared to make it. Loder Symonds missed the allusion altogether, but by good luck he showed the letter to Captain the Hon. Rupert Keppel, of the Guards, who had been taken at Landrecies. He smelled a rat, borrowed the book, and found my cipher. A message came back to his father, Lord Albemarle, to the effect that he hoped Conan Doyle would send some more books. This was sent on to me, and of course showed me that it was all right. From that time onwards every month or two I pricked off my bulletin, and a long job it was. Finally, I learned that the British papers were allowed for the prisoners, so that my budget was superfluous. However, for a year or two I think it was some solace to them, for I always made it as optimistic as truth would allow — or perhaps a little more so, just to get the average right.

I had some dealings with General French, but only one interview with him. No one can help feeling a deep respect for the soldier who relieved Kimberley and headed off Cronje, or for the man who bore the first hard thrust of the German spear.

My only interview with the General was at the Horse Guards, when he talked very clearly about the military position, though most of what he said as to the changes which modern tactics and heavy guns had caused was rather self-evident. “Your problem always is how to pass the wire and the machine guns. There is no way round. What is the good of talking of invading Austria from the south? You will find the same wire and the same machine guns. We may as well face it in Flanders as anywhere else.” This talk was shortly after Loos, when he had returned from the Army and was at the head of Home Defence. “If you want any point looked up for your history, mind you let me know and I will see that it is done.” This sounded very nice to me, who was in a perpetual state of wanting to know; but as a matter of fact I took it as a mere empty phrase, and so it proved when a week or two later I put it to the test. It was a simple question, but I never got any clear answer.

One pleasing incident occurred in 1917, when a Hull steam trawler which had been named after me, under the able handling of Skipper Addy and Lieutenant McCabe of the Naval Reserve, had an action with a heavily armed modern submarine, the fight lasting for some hours. The *Conan Doyle* was acting as flagship of a little group of trawlers, and though their guns were popguns compared with that of the German, they so peppered him that he was either sunk or took flight — anyhow, he vanished under the water. The little boat sent me its ship's bell as a souvenir of the exploit, and I sent some small remembrances in exchange. It was a fine exploit, and I was proud to be connected with it, even in so remote a way.

I have in my war chapters expressed my admiration for General Haig. On one occasion I called upon Lady Haig, when she was administering some private hospital at Farnborough. It was, so far as I could understand, one wing of the Empress Eugenie's house, and the Empress invited me to lunch. There were present also Prince Victor Napoleon and his wife, who was, I think, a daughter of my old aversion, Leopold, King of the Belgians and Overlord of the Congo. The Empress interested me deeply — a historical relic whom one would expect to study in old pictures and memoirs, yet there she was moving and talking before me. If Helen launched a thousand ships, Eugenie, by all accounts, did far more. Indeed, if the first German War was really from her inspiration, as Zola insists, she was at the root of all modern history. In spite of her great age, her face and figure preserved the lines of elegance and breed, the features clearly cut, the head set proudly upon the long neck. I glanced into her sitting-room as I passed the open door and noticed that she was engaged upon an enormous jig-saw puzzle, a thousand pieces if there were one. Children's toys engaged the mind which once played with Empires. There is surely something fatal in that Spanish blood with its narrow fanatical religion and its masterful intolerance, magnificent but mediaeval like the Church which inspires it.

She talked very freely with me and in the most interesting manner. It was surprising to see how fresh her mind was, and what curious information she had at her command. She told me, for example, that tetanus in France depended very much upon what soil had got into the wound, while that in turn depended upon what manures had been used for the soil — thus the percentage of tetanus cases would be quite different in a vine-growing district and in one where ordinary crops were cultivated. She spoke seriously about the war, but was confident as to the ultimate result. This graceful, withered flower in its strange setting was one of the outstanding memories of those days.

All sorts of queer odd jobs came to me as to many others in the war. I was, of course, prepared always to do absolutely anything which was suggested, though the suggestions were sometimes not very reasonable. One must not argue, but simply put one's whole weight, for what it is worth, into the scrum. Once I was directed to go up to Scotland and write up the great new munition works at Gretna, as the public needed reassurance upon the point. Pearson, the younger brother of Lord Cowdray, had built them, and they certainly deserved the name of "Miracle Town," which I gave them in my article. The great difficulty always was to give our own people what they wanted and yet not to give the Germans that which they wanted also. Winston Churchill's remarkable memoirs — the best, in my opinion, of all the war books — have shown how heavily this pressed in high quarters. His volume is certainly a wonderful vindication of his term of office, and it was a loss to the country when he left it.

Churchill was very open to ideas and sympathetic to those who were trying for some ideal. I had pondered much over armour for the troops, and he commented on it in an inspiring letter, in which he said that the bullet-proof man and the torpedo-proof ship were our two great objects. I worked a good deal upon the question of shields, and wrote several articles about it in "The Times "and other papers, but the forces against us were strong. When I saw Mr. Montague on the subject at the Ministry of Munitions, he said: "Sir Arthur, there is no use your arguing here, for there is no one in the building who does not know that you are right. The whole difficulty lies in making the soldiers accept your views."

One has, of course, to be reasonable on the point, and to admit that there is a limit to what a man can carry, and that greater weight means slower movement, and therefore longer exposure. That is fully granted. But when the helmet in actual practice was found so useful, why should it not be supplemented by steel shoulder-guards, since the helmet might actually guide the bullets down on to the shoulders? And why not a plastron over the heart? The vital points in a man's anatomy are not really so numerous. If many a life was saved by a buckle or a cigarette-case, why should such protection not be systematized? And why in trench warfare should not strong breastplates be kept for the temporary use of any troops in the front line? I experimented with my own service rifle upon steel plates, and I was surprised to find how easy it was at twenty paces to turn a bullet. I am convinced that very many lives would have been saved had my views been adopted, and that the men in the hour of danger would have been only too glad to carry that part of their equipment.

The Tank, however, was a device which carried the armour and the men also, so that it was an extension of these ideas. We can never be grateful enough to the men who thought out the Tank, for I have no doubt at all that this product of British brains and British labour won the war, which would otherwise have ended in a peace of mutual exhaustion. Churchill, D'Eyncourt, Tritton, Swinton and Bertie Stern, — these were in sober fact, divide the credit as you may, the men who played a very essential part in bringing down the giant.

Our household suffered terribly in the war. The first to fall was my wife's brother Malcolm Leckie, of the Army Medical Service, whose gallantry was so conspicuous that he was awarded a posthumous D.S.O. While he was actually dying himself, with shrapnel in his chest, he had the wounded to his bedside and bandaged them. Then came the turn of Miss Loder Symonds, who lived with us and was a beloved member of the family. Three of her brothers were killed and the fourth wounded. Finally, on an evil day for us, she also passed on. Then two brave nephews, Alec Forbes and Oscar Hornung, went down with bullets through the brain. My gallant brother-in-law, Major Oldham, was killed by a sniper during his first days in the trenches. And then finally, just as all seemed over, I had a double blow. First it was my Kingsley, my only son by the first marriage, one of the grandest boys in body and soul that ever a father was blessed with. He had started the war as a private, worked up to an acting captaincy in the 1st Hampshires, and been very badly wounded on the Somme. It was pneumonia which slew him in London, and the same cursed plague carried off my soldier brother Innes, he who had shared my humble strivings at Southsea so many years ago. A career lay before him, for he was only forty and already Adjutant-General of a corps, with the Legion of Honour, and a great record of service. But he was called and he went like the hero he was. "You do not complain at all, sir," said the orderly. "I am a soldier," said the dying General. Thank God that I have since found that the gates are not shut, but only ajar, if one does show earnestness in the quest. Of all these that I have mentioned, there is but one from whom I have been unable to obtain clear proof of posthumous existence.

CHAPTER XXVIII. EXPERIENCES ON THE BRITISH FRONT

Lord Newton — How I got out — Sir W. Robertson — The Destroyer — First Experience of Trenches — Ceremony at Bethune — Mother — The Ypres Salient — Ypres — The Hull Territorial — General Sir Douglas Haig — Artillery Duel — Kingsley — Major Wood — Paris.

I HAD naturally wished to get out to the British front and to see things for myself. And yet I had scruples also, for when soldiers are doing a difficult job mere spectators and joy-riders are out of place. I felt what a perfect nuisance they must be, and hesitated to join them. On the other hand, I had surely more claims than most, since I was not only compiling a history of the campaign, but was continually writing in the press upon military subjects. I made up my mind, therefore, that I was justified in going, but I had as yet no opportunity.

However, it came along in a very strange way. It was in the early summer of 1916 that I had a note from Lord Newton, saying that he wished to see me at the Foreign Office. I could not conceive what he wanted to see me about, but of course I went. Lord Newton seemed to be doing general utility work which involved the interests of our prisoners in Germany, as well as press arrangements, missions, etc. The former alone would be enough for anyone, and he was exposed to severe criticism for not being sufficiently zealous in the cause. “Newton, the Teuton,” sang the prisoners, a parody on “Gilbert, the Filbert,” one of the idiotic popular songs of pre-war days. However, I am convinced that he really did his very best, and that his policy was wise, for if it came to an interchange of revenge and barbarity between Germany and us, there was only one in it. There is no use starting a game in which you are bound to be beaten. Winston Churchill had tried it in the case of the submarine officers, with the result that thirty of our own picked officers had endured much in their prisons and the policy had to be reconsidered.

Lord Newton is a wit and has a humorous face which covers a good deal of solid capacity. He plunged instantly into the business on hand.

“It is the Italian army,” said he. “They want a bit of limelight. We propose to send several fellows on short missions to write them up. Your name has been mentioned and approved. Will you go?”

I never thought more quickly in my life than on that occasion. I had no plan when I entered the room, since I was ignorant of the proposition, but I saw my opening in a flash.

“No,” said I.

Lord Newton looked surprised.

“Why not? “he asked.

“Because I should be in a false position,” I answered. “I have nothing to compare them with. I have not even seen the British front yet. How absurd it would be for me to approve or to condemn when they could reasonably ask me what I knew about the matter!”

“Would you go if that were set right?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Then I don’t think there will be an insuperable difficulty.”

“Well, if you can arrange that, I am entirely at your disposal.”

“By the way,” said he, “if you go to the front, and especially to the Italian front, a uniform will be essential. What have you a right to wear?”

“I am a private in the Volunteers.”

He laughed.

“I think you would be shot at sight by both armies,” said he. “You would be looked upon as a rare specimen. I don’t think that would do.”

I had a happy thought.

“I am a deputy-lieutenant of Surrey,” said I. “I have the right to wear a uniform when with troops.”

“Excellent! “he cried. “Nothing could be better. Well, you will hear from me presently.”

I went straight off to my tailor, who rigged me up in a wondrous khaki garb which was something between that of a Colonel’ and a Brigadier, with silver roses instead of stars or crowns upon the shoulder-straps. As I had the right to wear several medals, including the South African, the general effect was all right, but I always felt a mighty impostor, though it was certainly very comfortable and convenient. I was still a rare specimen, and quite a number of officers of three nations made inquiry about my silver roses. A deputy-lieutenant may not be much in England, but when translated into French — my French anyhow — it has an awe-inspiring effect, and I was looked upon by them as an inscrutable but very big person with a uniform all of his own.

It was in May when I had my meeting with Lord Newton, and towards the end of the month I received a pass which would take me to the British lines. I remember the solicitude of my family, who seemed to think that I was going on active service. To quiet their kindly anxieties I said: “My dears, I shall be held in the extreme rear, and I shall be lucky if ever I see a shell burst on the far horizon.” The sequel showed that my estimate was nearly as mistaken as theirs.

I had had some correspondence with General Robertson, and had dedicated my History of the war to him, so much was I impressed with the splendid work he had done behind the line in the early days, when Cowans and he had as much strain and anxiety from their position in the wings as any of those who were in the limelight of the stage. He was, as it happened, going over to France, and he sent me a note to ask whether I would like to share his private compartment on the train and then use his destroyer instead of the ordinary steamer. Of course I was delighted. General Robertson is a sturdy, soldierly, compact man, with a bull-dog face, and looks as if he might be obstinate and even sullen if crossed. Such men are splendid if they keep their qualities for the enemy, but possibly dangerous if they use them on their associates. Certainly Robertson had a great deal of fighting to do at home as well as abroad, and was in the latter days of the war in constant conflict with the authorities, and with an open feud against the Prime Minister, but it is hard to say who was right. Perhaps, if it were not for the pressure which Robertson, Repington and others exercised, it would have been more difficult to raise those last few hundred thousand men who saved us in 1918. Like so many big men, his appearance was most deceptive, and though he looked every inch the soldier, there was nothing to show that great capacity for handling a large business, which would surely have put him at the head of any commercial concern in the country. There was a Cromwellian touch in him which peeped out in occasional religious allusions. He was very engrossed in papers and figures, and I hardly had a word with him between London and Newhaven.

We went straight on to the destroyer and she cast off her moorings within a few minutes. The Channel crossing was a great experience for me, and I stood on the bridge all the time looking about for traces of war — which were not numerous. Just under the bridge stood a sturdy seaman in pea jacket and flapped cap, an intent, crouching, formidable figure, with his hand on the crank of a quick-firing gun. He never relaxed, and for the whole hour, as we tore across, his head, and occasionally his gun, was slowly traversing from right to left. The captain, a young lieutenant whose name I have forgotten, told me what hellish work it was in the winter, though perhaps “hellish “is not the *mot juste* for that bitterly cold vigil. His ship was called the *Zulu.* Shortly afterwards it was blown up, as was its consort the *Nubian,* but as two of the halves were still serviceable, they stuck them together and made one very good ship, the *Zubian.* You can’t beat the British dockyard any more than you can the British Navy which it mothers. That evening we ran through some twenty miles of Northern France, and wound up at the usual guest-house, where I met several travelling Russians. Colonel Wilson, a dark, quiet, affable man, who had the thorny job of looking after the press, and Brig.-General Charteris, a pleasant, breezy, fresh-complexioned soldier, head of the British Intelligence Department, joined us at dinner. Everything was quite comfortable, but at the same time properly plain and simple. There is nothing more hateful than luxury behind a battle-line. Next day I had a wonderful twelve hours in contact with the soldiers all the time, and I will take some account of it from the notes I made at the time, but now I can expand them and give names more freely.

The crowning impression which I carried away from that wonderful day was the enormous imperturbable confidence of the Army and its extraordinary efficiency in organization, administration, material, and personnel. I met in one day a sample of many types, an army commander, a corps commander, two divisional commanders, staff officers of many grades, and, above all, I met repeatedly the two very great men whom Britain has produced, the private soldier and the regimental officer. Everywhere and on every face one read the same spirit of cheerful bravery. Even the half-mad cranks whose absurd consciences prevented them from barring the way to the devil seemed to me to be turning into men under the prevailing influence. I saw a batch of them, neurotic and largely bespectacled, but working with a will by the roadside. There was no foolish bravado, no underrating of a dour opponent, but a quick, alert, confident attention to the job in hand which was an inspiration to the observer.

“Get out of the car. Don’t let it stay here. It may be hit.” These words from a staff officer gave you the first idea that things were going to happen.

Up to then you might have been driving through the black country in the Walsall district with the population of Aldershot let loose upon its dingy roads. “Put on this shrapnel helmet. That hat of yours would infuriate the Boche” — this was an unkind allusion to my uniform. “Take this gas mask. You won’t need it, but it is a standing order. Now come on!”

We crossed a meadow and entered a trench. Here and there it came to the surface again where there was dead ground. At one such point an old church stood, with an unexploded shell sticking out of the wall. A century hence folk may journey to see that shell. Then on again through an endless cutting. It was slippery clay below. I had no nails in my boots, an iron pot on my head, and the sun above me. I remember that walk. The telephone wires ran down the side. Here and there large thistles and other plants grew from the clay walls, so immobile had been our lines. Occasionally there were patches of untidiness. “Shells,” said the officer laconically. There was a racket of guns before us and behind, especially behind, but danger seemed remote with all these Bairnsfather groups of cheerful Tommies at work around us. I passed one group of grimy, tattered boys. A glance at their shoulders showed me that they were of a public-school battalion, the 20th Royal Fusiliers. “I thought you fellows were all officers now,” I remarked. “No, sir, we like it better so.”

“Well, it will be a great memory for you. We are all in your debt.”

They saluted, and we squeezed past them. They had the fresh brown faces of boy cricketers. But their comrades were men of a different type, with hard, strong, rugged features, and the eyes of men who have seen strange sights. These were veterans, men of Moris, and their young pals of the public schools had something to live up to.

Up to this we only had two clay walls to look at. But now our interminable and tropical walk was lightened by the sight of a British aeroplane sailing overhead. Numerous shrapnel bursts were all around it, but she floated on serenely, a thing of delicate beauty against the blue background. Now another passed — and yet another. All the morning we/Saw them circling and swooping, and never a sign of a Boche. They told me it was nearly always so — that we held the air, and that the Boche intruder, save at early morning, was a rare bird. “We have never met a British aeroplane which was not ready to fight,” said a captured German aviator. There was a fine, stern courtesy between the airmen on either side, each dropping notes into the other’s aerodromes to tell the fate of missing officers. Had the whole war been fought by the Germans as their airmen conducted it (I do not speak, of course, of the Zeppelin murderers), a peace would eventually have been more easily arranged.

And now we were there — in what was surely the most wonderful spot in the world — the front firing trench, the outer breakwater which held back the German tide. How strange that this monstrous oscillation of giant forces, setting in from east to west, should find their equilibrium across this particular meadow of Flanders. “How far?” I asked. “One hundred and eighty yards,” said my guide. “Pop! “remarked a third person just in front. “A sniper,” said my guide; “take a look through the periscope.” I did so. There was some rusty wire before me, then a field sloping slightly upwards with knee-deep grass, and ragged dock and fennel and nettles, then rusty wire again, and a red line of broken earth. There was not a sign of movement, but sharp eyes were always watching us, even as these crouching soldiers around me were watching them. There were dead Germans in the grass before us. You need not see them to know that they were there. A wounded soldier sat in a corner nursing his leg. Here and there men popped out like rabbits from dug-outs and mine-shafts. Others sat on the fire-step or leaned smoking against the clay wall. Who would dream, who looked at their bold, careless faces, that this was a front line, and that at any moment it was possible that a grey wave might submerge them? With all their careless bearing, I noticed that every man had his gas mask and his rifle within easy reach.

A mile of front trenches and then we were on our way back down that weary walk. Then I was whisked off upon a ten-mile drive. There was a pause for lunch at Corps Head-quarters, and after it we were taken to a medal presentation in the market square of Bethune. Generals Munro, Haking, and Landon, famous fighting soldiers all three, were the British representatives. Munro, with a ruddy face, all brain above, all bulldog below; Haking, pale, distinguished, intellectual; Landon, a pleasant genial country squire. An elderly French General stood beside them. British infantry kept the ground. In front were about fifty Frenchmen in civil dress of every grade of life, workmen and gentlemen, in a double rank. They were all so wounded that they were back in civil life, but today they were to have some solace for their wounds. They leaned heavily on sticks, their bodies twisted and maimed, but their faces were shining with pride and joy. The French General drew his sword and addressed them. One caught words like “honneur” and “patrie.” They leaned forward on their crutches, hanging on every syllable which came hissing and rasping from under that heavy white moustache. Then the medals were pinned on. One poor lad was terribly wounded and needed two sticks. A little girl ran out with some flowers. He leaned forward and tried to kiss her, but the crutches slipped and he nearly fell upon her. It was a pitiful but beautiful little scene.

Next the British candidates marched up one by one for their medals, hale, hearty men, brown and fit. There was a smart young officer of Scottish Rifles; and then a selection of Worcesters, Welsh Fusiliers and Scots Fusiliers, with one funny little Highlander, a tiny figure with a soup-bowl helmet, a grinning boy’s face beneath it, and a bedraggled uniform. “Many acts of great bravery “ — such was the record for which he was decorated. Even the French wounded smiled at his quaint appearance, as they did at another Briton who had acquired the chewing-gum habit, and came up for his medal as if he had been called suddenly in the middle of his dinner, which he was still endeavouring to bolt. Then came the end, with the National Anthem. The British battalion formed fours and went past. To me that was the most impressive sight of any. They were the Queen’s West Surreys, a veteran battalion of the great Ypres battle. What grand fellows! As the order came, “Eyes right,” and all those fierce, dark faces flashed round at us I felt the might of the British infantry, the intense individuality which is not incompatible with the highest discipline. Much they had endured, but a great spirit shone from their faces. I confess that as I looked at those brave English lads, and thought of what we owed to them and to their like who have passed on, I felt more emotional than befits a Briton in foreign parts. How many of them are left alive to-day 1

Now the ceremony was ended, and once again we set out for the front. It was to an artillery observation post just opposite the Loos Salient that we were bound. In an hour I found myself, together with a razor-keen young artillery observer and an excellent old sportsman of a Russian prince, jammed into a very small space, and staring through a slit at the German lines. In front of us lay a vast plain, scarred and slashed, with bare places at intervals, such as you see where gravel pits break a green common. Not a sign of life or movement, save some wheeling crows. And yet down there, within a mile or so, was the population of a city. Far away a single train was puffing at the back of the German lines. We were here on a definite errand. Away to the right, nearly three miles off, was a small red house, dim to the eye but clear in the glasses, suspected as a German post. It was to go up this afternoon. The gun was some distance away, but I heard the telephone directions. "'Mother 'will soon do her in," remarked the gunner boy cheerfully. "Mother "was the name of the gun. "Give her five six three four," he cried through the 'phone. "Mother "uttered a horrible bellow from somewhere on our right. An enormous spout of smoke rose ten seconds later from near the house. "A little short," said our gunner. "Two and a half minutes left," added a little small voice, which represented another observer at a different angle. "Raise her seven five," said our boy encouragingly. "Mother "roared more angrily than ever. "How will that do? "she seemed to say. "One and a half right," said our invisible gossip. I wondered how the folk in the house were feeling as the shells crept ever nearer. "Gun laid, sir," said the telephone. "Fire! "I was looking through my glass. A flash of fire on the house, a huge pillar of dust and smoke — then it settled, and an unbroken field was there. The German post had gone up. "It's a dear little gun," said the officer boy. "And her shells are reliable," remarked a senior behind us. "They vary with different calibres, but 'Mother 'never goes wrong." The German line was very quiet. "Pourquoi ne repondent-ils pas? "asked the Russian prince. "Yes, they are quiet to-day," answered the senior. "But we get it in the neck sometimes." We were all led off to be introduced to "Mother," who sat, squat and black, amid twenty of her grimy children who waited upon her and fed her. A dainty eater was "Mother," and nothing served her but the best and plenty of it. But she was an important and as the war progressed it became more and more evident that in spite of that upstart family of quick-firers it was really the only big, heavy, well-established gun which could flatten out a road to the Rhine.

I had the great joy that night of seeing my brother Innes, who had been promoted to Colonel, and was acting as Assistant Adjutant-General of the 24th Division, the Head-quarters of which were at Bailleul, where I dined at mess and occupied a small lodging in the town, which was about six miles from the front. One more experience wound up that wonderful day. That night we took a car after dark and drove north, and ever north, until at a late hour we halted and climbed a hill in the darkness. Below was a wonderful sight. Down on the flats, in a huge semicircle, lights were rising and falling. They were very brilliant, going up for a few seconds and then dying down. Sometimes a dozen were in the air at one time. There were the dull thuds of explosions and an occasional rat-tat-tat. I have seen nothing like it, but the nearest comparison would be an enormous ten-mile railway station in full swing at night, with signals winking, lamps waving, engines hissing and carriages bumping. It was a terrible place, a place which will live as long as military history is written, for it was the Ypres Salient. What a salient too! A huge curve, as outlined by the lights, needing only a little more to be an encirclement. Something caught the rope as it closed, and that something was the British soldier. But it was a perilous place by day and by night. Never shall I forget the impression of ceaseless, malignant activity which was borne in upon me by the white, winking lights, the red sudden flares, and the horrible thudding noises in that place of death beneath me.

In old days we had a great name as organizers. Then came a long period when we deliberately adopted a policy of individuality and “go as you please.” Now once again in our sore need we had called on all our power of administration and direction. And it had not deserted us. We still had it in a supreme degree. Even in peace time we have shown it in that vast, well-oiled, swift-running noiseless machine called the British Navy. But our powers had risen with the need of them. The expansion of the Navy was a miracle, the management of the transport a greater one, the formation of the new Army the greatest of all time. To get the men was the least of the difficulties. To put them in the field, with everything down to the lid of the last field saucepan in its place, that was the marvel. The tools of the gunners and of the sappers, to say nothing of the knowledge of how to use them, were in themselves a huge problem. But it had all been met and mastered. So don’t let us talk too much about the muddling of the War Office. It has become just a little ridiculous.

I was the guest at Head-quarters of a divisional General, Capper, brother of the heroic leader of the 7th Division, who might truly be called one of the two fathers of the British flying force, for it was he, with Templer, who laid the first foundations from which so great an organization has arisen. My morning was spent in visiting two fighting brigadiers, Mitford and Jelf, cheery weather-beaten soldiers, respectful, as all our soldiers are, of the prowess of the Hun, but serenely confident that we could beat him. In company with one of them I ascended a hill, the reverse slope of which was swarming with cheerful infantry in every stage of *déshabille*, for they were cleaning up after the trenches. Once over the slope we advanced with some care, and finally reached a certain spot from which we looked down upon the German line. It was an observation post, about 1,000 yards from the

German trenches, with our own trenches between us. We could see the two lines, sometimes only a few yards, as it seemed, apart, extending for miles on either side. The sinister silence and solitude were strangely dramatic. Such vast crowds of men, such intensity of feeling, and yet only that open rolling country-side, with never a movement in its whole expanse.

In the afternoon my brother drove me to the Square at Ypres. It was the city of a dream, this modern Pompeii, destroyed, deserted and desecrated, but with a sad, proud dignity which made you involuntarily lower your voice as you passed through the ruined streets. It was a more considerable place than I had imagined, with many traces of ancient grandeur. No words can describe the absolute splintered wreck that the Huns had made of it. The effect of some of the shells had been grotesque. One boiler-plated water tower, a thing 40 or 50 feet high, was actually standing on its head like a great metal top. There was not a living soul in the place save a few pickets of soldiers, and a number of cats which had become fierce and dangerous. Now and then a shell still fell, but the Huns probably knew that the devastation was already complete.

We stood in the lonely grass-grown Square, once the busy centre of the town, and we marvelled at the beauty of the smashed cathedral and the tottering Cloth Hall beside it. Surely at their best they could not have looked more wonderful. If they were preserved even so, and if a heaven-inspired artist were to model a statue of Belgium in front, Belgium with one hand pointing to the treaty by which Prussia guaranteed her safety and the other to the sacrilege behind her, it would make the most impressive group in the world. It was an evil day for Belgium when her frontier was violated, but it was a worse one for Germany. I venture to prophesy that it will be regarded by history as the greatest military as well as political error that has ever been made. Had the great guns that destroyed Liège made their first breach at Verdun, what chance was there for Paris? Those few weeks of warning and preparation saved France, and left Germany like a weary and furious bull, tethered fast in the place of trespass and waiting for the inevitable pole-axe.

We were glad to get out of the place, for the gloom of it lay as heavy upon our hearts as the shrapnel helmets did upon our heads. Both were lightened as we sped back past empty and shattered villas to where, just behind the danger line, the normal life of rural Flanders was carrying on as usual. A merry sight helped to cheer us, for scudding down wind above our heads came a Boche aeroplane, with two British at her tail barking away with their machine guns, like two swift terriers after a cat. They shot rat-tat-tatting across the sky until we lost sight of them in the heat haze over the German line.

The afternoon saw us on the Sharpenburg, from which many a million will gaze in days to come, for from no other point can so much be seen. It was a spot forbid, but a special permit took us up, and the sentry on duty, having satisfied himself of our bona-fides, proceeded to tell us tales of the war in a pure Hull dialect which might have been Chinese for all that I could understand. That he was a “Terrier “and had nine children were the only facts I could lay hold of. But I wished to be silent and to think — even, perhaps, to pray. Here, just below my feet, were the spots which our dear lads, three of them my own kith, had sanctified with their blood. Here, fighting for the freedom of the world, they cheerily gave their all. On that sloping meadow to the left of the row of houses on the opposite ridge the London Scottish fought to the death on that grim November morning when the Bavarians reeled back from their shot-torn line. That plain away on the other side of Ypres was the place where the three grand Canadian brigades, first of all men, stood up to the damnable gases of the Hun. Down yonder was Hill 60, that blood-soaked kopje.

The ridge over the fields was held by the cavalry against two army corps, and there where the sun struck the red roof among the trees I could just see Gheluvelt, a name for ever to be associated with Haig and the most vital battle of the war. As I turned away I was faced by my Hull Territorial, who still said incomprehensible things. I looked at him with other eyes. He had fought on yonder plain. He had slain Huns, and he had nine children. Could any one better epitomize the duties of a good citizen in days like these? I could have found it in my heart to salute him had I not known that it would have shocked him and made him unhappy.

Next day, it was June 1, I left my brother’s kindly care. I had fears for him, for he was much overworked and worried as Adjutant-Generals of busy divisions are likely to be. However, he was never one to admit it or to pity himself, and he begged me to carry the cheeriest report back to his wife. It was a great pleasure to me that so many officers took me aside to say how efficient he was, and how popular. He would not have wished me to say it were he alive, but I can leave it on record now.

Yesterday had been, full, but the next day was not less so, for I had been asked (or ordered) to lunch at the General Head-quarters at Montreuil, the funny old town on a hill which I had learned to know well in days of peace. As we drove down a winding drive I saw two officers walking towards us. The younger of them stooped and beat the ground with his stick, from which we gathered that we were to go slow and raise no dust. We rightly conjectured that so curt an order could only come from the Chief's own aide. We saluted as we passed and carried away an impression of a heavy moustache and of abstracted blue eyes.

I had a very much more definite impression when he came back presently, and we were all shown into the dining-room. I should certainly put Douglas Haig, as I saw him that day, among the handsomest men I have ever known. He was not tall, but he was upright and well proportioned with every sign of strength and activity. But his face was remarkable for beauty and power. His eyes were very full and expressive, devoid of the fierceness of Kitchener and yet with quite as much determination. But the long powerful jaw was the feature which spoke particularly of that never-to-be-beaten quality which saved the army when the line was broken in the first Ypres battle and was destined to save it again in April, 1918, when he gave out his "back to the wall "order of the day.

He was courteous but not talkative at lunch. After lunch he took me into a side room where he showed me the line of the divisions on the map, saying that I could remember but should not take notes, which was rather maddening. Then we had a long talk over the coffee, but there were several present and nothing intimate was said. He must be worried to death with casual visitors, but still I suppose he need not invite all of them to Head-quarters. He had, I thought, a truly British distrust of foreigners. "He is the worst foreigner I have met yet," he said, speaking of some Italian General. His kind heart was shown when I said that my son was in the line. He gave a curt order, and then nodded and smiled. "You'll see him to-morrow," said he.

I naturally heard a good deal about our Generalissimo, besides what I actually saw. I think that he had some of the traits of Wellington, though since the war he has concerned himself with the fortunes of his comrades-in-arms a great deal more than the Iron Duke seems ever to have troubled himself to do. But in other things the parallel is close. Haig is not a game-playing man, though fond of horse exercise. Neither was the Duke. Both were abstemious with wine and tobacco. Both were reserved, reticent and had no magnetic connection with those under them. Neither Haig nor the Duke were human figures to the soldiers, nor were they often if ever seen by them, and yet in each case there was the same confidence in their judgment. Haig was a very serious man, he seldom joked and did not meet a joke half way, so that his mess was the dullest in France. I have known a staff officer apply for an exchange so weary was he of this oppressive atmosphere. All this could equally have been said of the Duke. But these are trivialities compared to the great main fact that each brought rare qualities to the service of their country at critical moments of the world's history. There was only one other man who might have filled Haig's place, and that man was the conqueror of Palestine.

Extraordinary are the contrasts of war. Within three hours of leaving the quiet atmosphere of the Head-quarters Château I was present at what in any other war would have been looked upon as a brisk engagement. As it was it would certainly figure in one of our desiccated reports as an activity of the artillery. The noise as we struck the line at this new point showed that the matter was serious, and indeed we had chosen the spot because it had been the storm centre of the last week. The method of approach chosen by our experienced guide was in itself a tribute to the gravity of the affair. As one comes from the settled order of Flanders into the actual scene of war, the first sign of it is one of the stationary, sausage-shaped balloons, a chain of which marks the ring in which the great wrestlers are locked. We passed under this, ascended a hill, and found ourselves in a garden where for a year no feet save those of wanderers like ourselves had stood. There was a wild, confused luxuriance of growth more beautiful to my eye than anything which the care of man can produce. One old shell-hole of vast diameter had filled itself with forget-me-nots, and appeared as a graceful basin of light blue flowers, held up as an atonement to Heaven for the brutalities of man. Through the tangled bushes we crept, then across a yard—" Please stoop and run as you pass this point " — and finally to a small opening in a wall, whence the battle lay not so much before as beside us. For a moment we had a front seat at the great world-drama, God's own problem play, working surely to its magnificent end. One felt a sort of shame to crouch here in comfort, a useless spectator, while brave men down yonder were facing that pelting shower of iron.

There was a large field on our left rear, and the German gunners had the idea that there was a concealed battery therein. They were systematically searching for it. A great shell exploded in the top corner, but got nothing more solid than a few tons of clay. You could read the mind of Gunner Fritz. “Try the lower corner! “said he, and up went the earth-cloud once again. “Perhaps it’s hid about the middle. I’ll try.” Earth again, and nothing more. “I believe I was right the first time after all,” said hopeful Fritz. So another shell came into the top corner. The field was full of pits as a Gruyère cheese, but Fritz got nothing by his perseverance. Perhaps there never was a battery there at all. One effect he obviously did attain. He made several other British batteries exceedingly angry. “Stop that tickling, Fritz! “was the burden of their cry. Where they were we could no more see than Fritz could, but their constant work was very clear along the German line. We appeared to be using more shrapnel and the Germans more high explosives, but that may have been just the chance of the day. The Vimy Ridge was on our right, and before us was the old French position, with the Labyrinth of terrible memories and the long hill of Lorette. When, the year before last, the French, in a three weeks’ battle, fought their way up that hill, it was an exhibition of sustained courage which even their military annals can seldom have beaten.

Next day we travelled through Acheux and hit the British line once more to the east of that place. Our official chauffeur had had his instructions, and so had other people, with the result that as we swung into the broad main street of a village — Mailly, I think, was the name — there was a tall young officer standing with his back turned. He swung round at the noise of the car, and it was my boy Kingsley with his usual jolly grin upon his weather-stained features. The long arm of G.H.Q. had stretched out and plucked him out of a trench, and there he was. We had an hour’s talk in a field, for there was nowhere else to go. He was hard and well and told me that all was nearly ready for a big push at the very part of the line where his battalion, the 1st Hampshires, was stationed. This was the first intimation of the great Somme battle, on the first day of which every officer of the Hampshires without exception was killed or wounded. I learned afterwards that before the battle for ten nights running Kingsley crept out to the German wire and stuck up crosses where he found the wire uncut, which were brown towards the enemy and white towards the British, as a guide to the gunners. He lay on his face sometimes with the machine guns firing just above him. For this service Colonel Palk thanked him warmly and said he should certainly have a decoration, but Palk and both majors were killed and no recommendations went forward. Two shrapnel bullets in the neck were all Kingsley got out of the battle, and two months on his back in a hospital. However, he was not a medal hunter and I never heard him complain, nor would he wear his wound badges until he was compelled.

An hour later I met another member of my household, for my Secretary, Major Wood of the 5th Sussex Territorials, was Town Major of Beauquesne, where I found him at the convenient hour of lunch. He had done nearly two years of hard active service, which was pretty good for a civilian of fifty, and had led his company at Festubert and other engagements. He was now using his excellent powers of organization and administration in making Beauquesne a well-ordered village, as later he made Doullens a well-ordered town. I expect that the British administration will remain as a wonderful legend of sanitation and cleanliness in many of these French towns of the North-East.

After inspecting Major Wood’s work I went on to Amiens with him and he packed me into the train to Paris, the first part of my task thoroughly done so far as time would permit. I came away with a deep sense of the difficult task which lay before the Army, but with an equally deep one of the ability of those men to do all that soldiers can be called upon to perform. But I saw no end to the war.

I had two days in Paris — a very dead and alive Paris, such a Paris as has seldom or never been seen before, with darkened streets and the shops nearly all closed. I stayed at the Hotel Crillon, where were a few Russian and British officers. It was extraordinary the difference which the public made between the two. A British officer was disregarded, while a Russian General — I took a walk with one — was looked upon with an adulation which was quite comic. Men came up and made a low obeisance before him. And yet it was our Army, our purse, our factories, above all our Navy, which were saving the situation both for France and Russia, to whom we were bound by no alliance. There was certainly not much sign of appreciation or gratitude. It is a very singular thing how the whole world alternately leans upon and depreciates the British Empire.

CHAPTER XXIX. EXPERIENCES ON THE ITALIAN FRONT

The Polite Front — Udine — Under Fire — Carnic Alps — Italia Irredenta — Trentino — The Voice of the Holy Roman Empire.

TWO days later I found myself, after an uneventful journey, at Padua on my way to the Italian front. The Italian front seemed to have politely come back to meet me, for I was awakened in the night by a tremendous dropping of bombs, with the rattle of anti-aircraft guns. I thought I was as safe in bed as anywhere, and so it proved. Little damage was done, but Padua and the other Italian cities were having a bad time, and it was a one-sided arrangement, since the Italians can do nothing without injuring their own kith and kin across the border. This dropping of explosives on the chance of hitting one soldier among fifty victims was surely the most monstrous development of the whole war, and was altogether German in its origin. If international law cannot now stamp it out, the next war will send the people flying to the caves and calling upon the mountains to cover them, even as was foretold.

I arrived at last at Udine, the capital of the Friulian Province, where were the Italian Head-quarters — a funny little town with a huge mound in the centre, which looked too big to be artificial, but was said to have been thrown up by Attila. My recommendation was to the British Mission, which was headed by Brig.- General Delme-Radcliffe, who received me with hospitality, a bluff, short-spoken and masterful British soldier. The Mission owned a white house on the edge of the town. On the second floor under a window which proved to be that of my bedroom there was a long dark smear upon the whitewashed wall. “That’s the stomach of a baker,” said the soldier-servant with a grin. I thought it was a joke on his part, but it was literally true, for a bomb a few days before had blown the man to bits as he passed the house, and had plastered bits of him on the stonework. The ceiling of my bedroom was full of holes from that or some other explosion.

There was some tendency at this time to cavil at the Italians and to wonder why they did not make more impression upon the Austrians. As a matter of fact they were faced by the same barbed wire and machine-gun problem which had held up every one else. I soon saw, when I was allowed next morning to get to the front, that the conditions were very like those of Flanders in a more genial climate and in all ways less aggravated. I had been handed over to the Italian Intelligence people, who were represented by a charmingly affable nobleman, Colonel the Marquis Barbariche, and Colonel Claricetti. These two introduced me at once to General Porro, chief of the Staff, a brown, wrinkled, walnut-faced warrior, who showed me some plans and did what he could to be helpful.

It was about a seven miles drive from Udine before we reached the nearest point of the trenches. From a mound an extraordinary view could be got of the Austrian position, the general curve of both Unes being marked, as in Flanders, by the sausage balloons which float behind them. The Isonzo, which had been so bravely carried by the Italians, lay in front of me, a clear blue river, as broad as the Thames at Hampton Court. In a hollow to my left were the roofs of Gorizia, the town which the Italians were endeavouring to take. A long desolate ridge, the Carso, extended to the south of the town, and stretched down nearly to the sea. The crest was held by the Austrians, and the Italian trenches had been pushed within 50 yards of them. A lively bombardment was going on from either side, but so far as the infantry went there was none of that constant malignant petty warfare with which we were familiar in Flanders. I was anxious to see the Italian trenches, in order to compare them with our British methods, but save for the support and communication trenches I was courteously but firmly warned off.

Having got this general view of the position, I was anxious in the afternoon to visit Monfalcone, which is the small dockyard captured from the Austrians on the Adriatic. My kind Italian officer guides did not recommend the trip, as it was part of their great hospitality to shield their guest from any part of that danger which they were always ready to incur themselves. The only road to Monfalcone ran close to the Austrian position at the village of Ronchi, and afterwards kept parallel to it for some miles. I was told that it was only on odd days that the Austrian guns were active in this particular section, so determined to trust to luck that this might not be one of them. It proved, however, to be one of the worst on record, and we were not destined to see the dockyard to which we started.

The civilian cuts a ridiculous figure when he enlarges upon small adventures which may come his way — adventures which the soldier endures in silence as part of his everyday life. On this occasion, however, the episode was all our own, and had a sporting flavour in it which made it dramatic. I know now the feeling of tense expectation with which the driven grouse whirrs onwards towards the butt. I have been behind the butt before now, and it is only poetic justice that I should see the matter from the other point of view. As we approached Ronchi we could see shrapnel breaking over the road in front of us, but we had not yet realised that it was precisely for vehicles that the Austrians were waiting, and that they had the range marked down to a yard. We went down the road all out at a steady 50 miles an hour. The village was near, and it seemed that we had got past the place of danger. We had, in fact, just reached it. At this moment there was a noise as if the whole four tyres had gone simultaneously, a most terrific bang in our very ears, merging into a second sound like a reverberating blow upon an enormous gong. As I glanced up I saw three clouds immediately above my head, two of them white and the other of a rusty red. The air was full of flying metal, and the road, as we were told afterwards by an observer, was all churned up by it. The metal base of one of the shells was found plumb in the middle of the road just where our motor had been. It was our pace that saved us. The motor was an open one, and the three shells burst, according to one of my Italian companions, who was himself an artillery officer, about 10 metres above our heads. They threw forward, however, and we travelling at so great a pace, shot from under. Before they could get in another we had swung round the curve and under the lee of a house. The good Colonel wrung my hand in silence. They were both distressed, these good soldiers, under the impression that they had led me into danger. As a matter of fact it was I who owed them an apology, since they had enough risks in the way of business without taking others in order to gratify the whim of a visitor.

Our difficulties were by no means over. We found an ambulance lorry and a little group of infantry huddled under the same shelter, with the expression of people who had been caught in the rain. The road beyond was under heavy fire as well as that by which we had come. Had the Ostro-Boches dropped a high explosive upon us they would have had a good mixed bag. But apparently they were only out for fancy shooting and disdained a sitter. Presently there came a lull and the lorry moved on, but we soon heard a burst of firing which showed that they were after it. My companions had decided that it was out of the question for us to finish our excursion. We waited for some time, therefore, and were able finally to make our retreat on foot, being joined later by the car. So ended my visit to Monfalcone, the place I did not reach. I hear that two 10,000-ton steamers were left on the stocks there by the Austrians, but were disabled before they retired. Their cabin basins and other fittings were adorning the Italian dug-outs.

My second day was devoted to a view of the Italian mountain warfare in the Carnic Alps. Besides the two great fronts, one of defence (Trentino) and one of offence (Isonzo), there were very many smaller valleys which had to be guarded. The total frontier line is over 400 miles, and it had all to be held against raids if not invasions. It was a most picturesque business. Far up in the Roccolana Valley I found the Alpini outposts, backed by artillery which had been brought into the most wonderful positions. They had taken 8-inch guns where a tourist could hardly take his knapsack. Neither side could ever make serious progress, but there were continual duels, gun against gun, or Alpini against Jaeger. In a little wayside house was the brigade Head-quarters, and here I was entertained to lunch. It was a scene that I shall remember. They drank to England. I raised my glass to *Italia irredenta* — might it soon be redenta. They all sprang to their feet and the circle of dark faces flashed into flame. They keep their souls and emotions, these people. I trust that ours may not become atrophied by self-suppression.

The last day spent on the Italian front was in the Trentino. From Verona a motor drive of about twenty-five miles takes one up the valley of the Adige, and past a place of evil augury for the Austrians, the field of Rivoli. Finally, after a long drive of winding gradients, always beside the Adige, we reached Ala, where we interviewed the Commander of the sector, a man who has done splendid work during the recent fighting. “By all means you can see my front. But no motor car, please. It draws fire, and others may be hit besides you.” We proceeded on foot, therefore, along a valley which branched at the end into two passes. In both very active fighting had been going on, and as we came up the guns were baying merrily, waking up most extraordinary echoes in the hills. It was difficult to believe that it was not thunder. There was one terrible voice that broke out from time to time in the mountains — the angry voice of the Holy Roman Empire. When it came all other sounds died down into nothing. It was — so I was told — the master gun, the vast 42-centimetre giant which brought down the pride of Liège and Namur. The Austrians had brought one or more from Innsbruck. The Italians assure me, however, as we have ourselves discovered, that in trench work beyond a certain point the size of the guns makes little matter.

We passed a burst dug-out by the roadside where a tragedy had occurred recently, for eight medical officers were killed in it by a single shell. There was no particular danger in the valley, however, and the aimed fire was all going across us to the fighting lines in the two passes above us. That to the right, the Valley of Buello, has seen some of the worst of the fighting. These two passes form the Italian left wing which has held firm all through. So has the right wing. It is only the centre which has been pushed in by the concentrated fire.

When we arrived at the spot where the two valleys forked we were halted, and were not permitted to advance to the front trenches which lay upon the crests above us. There were about 1,000 yards between the adversaries. I have seen types of some of the Bosnian and Croatian prisoners, men of poor physique and intelligence, but the Italians speak with chivalrous praise of the bravery of the Hungarians and of the Austrian Jaeger. Some of their proceedings disgusted them, however, and especially the fact that they used Russian prisoners to dig trenches under fire. There is no doubt of this, as some of the men were recaptured and were sent on to join their comrades in France. On the whole, however, it may be said that in the Austro-Italian war there was nothing which corresponded with the extreme bitterness of our Western conflict. The presence or absence of the Hun makes all the difference.

It was a moment of depression at the Trentino front, as there had been a set back. I may flatter myself when I think that even one solitary figure in a British uniform striding about among them was good at that particular time to their eyes. They read of allies, but they never saw any. If they had, we might have been spared the subsequent disaster at Caporetto. Certainly I was heartily welcomed there, and surrounded all the time by great mobs of soldiers, who imagined, I suppose, that I was some one of importance.

That night found me back at Verona, and next morning I was on my way to Paris with sheaves of notes about the Italian soldiers which would, I hoped, make the British public more sympathetic towards them. I was told afterwards by the Foreign Office that my mission had been an unmixed success.

I have one other association with the Italian front which I may include here. It is embalmed in the Annals of the Psychic Research Society. I have several times in my life awakened from sleep with some strong impressions of knowledge gained still lingering in my brain. In one case, for example, I got the strange name Nalderu so vividly that I wrote it down between two stretches of insensibility and found it on the outside of my cheque book next morning. A month later I started for Australia in the *S. S. Nalderu* of which I had then never heard. In this particular Italian instance I got the word Piave, absolutely ringing in my head. I knew it as a river some 70 miles to the rear of the Italian front and quite unconnected with the war. None the less the impression was so strong that I wrote the incident down and had it signed by two witnesses. Months passed and the Italian battle line was rolled back to the Piave, which became a familiar word. Some said it would go back further. I was sure it would not. I argued that if the abnormal forces, whatever they may be, had taken such pains to impress the matter upon me, it must needs be good news which they were conveying, since I had needed cheering at the time. Therefore I felt sure that some great victory and the turning point of the war would come on the Piave. So sure was I that I wrote to my friend Mr. Lacon Watson, who was on the Italian front, and the incident got into the Italian press. It could have nothing but a good effect upon their morale. Finally it is a matter of history how completely my impression was justified, and how the most shattering victory of the whole war was gained at that very spot.

There is the fact, amply proved by documents and beyond all possible coincidence. As to the explanation some may say that our own subconscious self has power of foresight. If so it is a singularly dead instinct, seldom or never used. Others may say that our “dead “can see further than we, and try when we are asleep and in spiritual touch with us, to give us knowledge and consolation. The latter is my own solution of the mystery.

CHAPTER XXX. EXPERIENCES ON THE FRENCH FRONT

A Dreadful Reception — Robert Donald — Clemenceau — Soissons Cathedral — The Commandant's Cane — The Extreme Outpost — Adonis — General Henneque — Cyrano in the Argonne — Tir Rapide — French Canadian — Wound Stripes.

WHEN I got back to Paris I had a dreadful reception, for as I dismounted from the railway car a British military policeman in his flat red cap stepped up to me and saluted.

“This is bad news, sir,” said he. “What is it? “I gasped. “Lord Kitchener, sir. Drowned!”

“Good God!” I cried.

“Yes, sir.” Suddenly the machine turned for a moment into a human being. “Too much talking in this war,” he said, and then in a moment was his stiff formal self again, and bustled off in search of deserters.

Kitchener dead! The words were like clods falling on my heart. One could not imagine him dead, that centre of energy and vitality. With a heavy spirit I drove back to my old quarters at the Hotel Crillon, fuller than ever of red-epauletted, sword-clanking Russians. I could have cursed them, for it was in visiting their rotten, crumbling country that our hero had met his end.

At the hotel I met by appointment Mr. Robert Donald, editor of the “Daily Chronicle,” which paper had been publishing my articles. Donald, a fine, solid Scot, had the advantage of talking good French and being in thorough touch with French conditions. With him I called upon M. Clemenceau, who had not at that time played any conspicuous part in the war, save as a violent critic. He lived modestly in a small house which showed that he had not used his power in the State and in journalism to any unfair personal advantage. He entered, a swarthy, wrinkled, white-haired man, with the face of a crabbed bulldog, and a cloth cap upon his head. He reminded me of old Jim Mace the bruiser, as I remember him in his final phase. His eyes looked angry, and he had a truculent, mischievous smile. I was not impressed by the judgment he showed in our conversation, if a squirt on one side and Niagara on the other can be called conversation. He was railing loudly at the English rate of exchange between the franc and the pound, which seemed to me very like kicking against the barometer. Mr. Donald, who is a real authority upon finance, asked him whether France was taking the rouble at its face value; but the roaring voice, like a strong gramophone with a blunt needle, submerged all argument. Against Joffre he roared his reproaches, and intimated that he had some one else up his sleeve who could very soon bring the war to an end. A volcano of a man, dangerous sometimes to his friends, and sometimes to his foes. Let me acknowledge that I did not at the time recognise that he would ever be the opposite number to Lloyd George, and that the pair would lead us to victory.

Donald had arranged that he and I should visit the French lines in the Argonne, which was as near as we could get to Verdun, where the battle was at its height. There were a few days to spare, however, and in the meantime I got a chance of going to the Soissons front, along with Leo Maxse, editor of the “National Review,” and a M. Chevillon, who had written an excellent book on British co-operation in the war. Maxse, a dark little man, all nerves and ginger, might well plume himself that he was one of those who had foreseen the war and most loudly demanded preparation. Chevillon was a grey-bearded, father-of-a-family type, and could speak English, which promoted our closer acquaintance, as my French is adventurous but not always successful. A captain of French Intelligence, a small, silent man, took the fourth place in the car.

When our posterity hear that it was easy to run out from Paris to the line, to spend a full day on the line, and to be back again in Paris for dinner, it will make them appreciate how close a thing was the war. We passed in the first instance the Woods of Villars Cotteret, where the Guards had turned upon the German van on September 1, 1914. Eighty Guardsmen were buried in the village cemetery, among them a nephew of Maxse’s, to whose tomb we now made pious pilgrimage. Among the trees on either side of the road I noticed other graves of soldiers, buried where they had fallen.

Soissons proved to be a considerable wreck, though it was far from being an Ypres. But the cathedral would, and will, make many a patriotic Frenchman weep. These savages cannot keep their hands off a beautiful church. Here, absolutely unchanged through the ages, was the spot where

St. Louis had dedicated himself to the Crusade. Every stone of it was holy. And now the lovely old stained-glass strewed the floor, and the roof lay in a huge heap across the central aisle. A dog was climbing over it as we entered. No wonder the French fought well. Such sights would drive the mildest man to desperation. The abbé, a good priest, with a large humorous face, took us over his shattered domain. When I pointed out the desecration of the dog he shrugged his shoulders and said: “What matter? It will have to be reconsecrated, anyhow.” He connived at my gathering up some splinters of the rich old stained-glass as souvenirs for my wife. He was full of reminiscences of the German occupation of the place. One of his personal anecdotes was indeed marvellous.

It was that a lady in the local ambulance had vowed to kiss the first French soldier who re-entered the town. She did so, and it proved to be her husband. The abbé was a good, kind, truthful man — but he had a humorous face.

A walk down a ruined street brought one to the opening of the trenches. There were marks upon the walls of the German occupation, “Berlin-Paris,” with an arrow of direction, adorning one corner. At another the 76th Regiment had commemorated the fact that they were there in 1870 and again in 1914. If the Soissons folk are wise, they will keep these inscriptions as reminders to the rising generation. I could imagine, however, that their inclination will be to whitewash, fumigate, and forget.

A sudden turn among some broken walls took one into the communication trench. Our guide was a Commandant of the Staff, a tall, thin man with hard, grey eyes and a severe face. It was the more severe towards us, as I gathered that he had been deluded into the belief that only about one out of six of our soldiers went to the trenches. For the moment he was not friends with the English. As we went along, however, we gradually got on better terms, we discovered a twinkle in the hard, grey eyes, and the day ended with an exchange of walking-sticks between him and me and a renewal of the Entente. May my cane grow into a marshal’s baton!

A charming young artillery subaltern was our guide in that maze of trenches, and we walked and walked and walked, with a brisk exchange of compliments between the “75’s “of the French and the “77’s “of the Germans going on high over our heads. The trenches were boarded at the sides, and had a more permanent look than those of Flanders. Presently we met a fine, brown-faced, upstanding boy, as keen as a razor, who commanded this particular section. A little farther on a helmeted captain of infantry, who was an expert sniper, joined our little party. Now we were at the very front trench. I had expected to see primeval men, bearded and shaggy. But the “Poilus “have disappeared. The men around me were clean and dapper to a remarkable degree. I gathered, however, that they had their internal difficulties. On one board I read an old inscription: “He is a Boche, but he is the inseparable companion of a French soldier.” Above was a rude drawing of a louse.

I was led to a cunning loop-hole, and had a glimpse through it of a little framed picture of French countryside. There were fields, a road, a sloping hill beyond with trees. Quite close, about 30 or 40 yards away, was a low, red-tiled house. “They are there,” said our guide. “That is their outpost. We can hear them cough.” Only the guns were coughing that morning, so we heard nothing; but it was certainly wonderful to be so near to the enemy and yet in such peace. I suppose wondering visitors from Berlin were brought up also to hear the French cough. Modern warfare has certainly some extraordinary sides.

Then we were shown all the devices which a year of experience had suggested to the quick brains of our Allies. Every form of bomb, catapult, and trench mortar was ready to hand. Every method of cross-fire had been thought out to an exact degree. There was something, however, about the disposition of a machine gun which disturbed the Commandant. He called for the officer of the gun. His thin lips got thinner and his grey eyes more austere as we waited. Presently there emerged an extraordinarily handsome youth, dark as a Spaniard, from some rabbit hole. He faced the Commandant bravely, and answered back with respect but firmness. “Pourquoi? “asked the Commandant, and yet again “Pourquoi?” Adonis had an answer for everything. Both sides appealed to the big captain of snipers, who was clearly embarrassed. He stood on one leg and scratched his chin. Finally the Commandant turned away angrily in the midst of one of Adonis’ voluble sentences. His face showed that the matter was not ended. War is taken very seriously in the French Army, and any sort of professional mistake is very quickly punished. Many officers of high rank had been broken by the French during the war. There was no more forgiveness for the beaten General than there was in the days of the Republic when the delegate of the National Convention, with a patent portable guillotine, used to drop in at Head-quarters to support a more vigorous offensive.

It had come on to rain heavily, and we were forced to take refuge in the dug-out of the sniper. Eight of us sat in the deep gloom huddled closely together. The Commandant was still harping upon that ill-placed machine gun. He could not get over it. My imperfect ear for French could not follow all his complaints, but some defence of the offender brought forth a “Jamais! Jamais! Jamais! “which was rapped out as if it came from the gun itself. There were eight of us in an underground burrow, and some were smoking. Better a deluge than such an atmosphere as that. But if there was a thing upon earth which the French officer shied at it was rain and mud. The reason is that he was extraordinarily natty in his person. His charming blue uniform, his facings, his brown gaiters, boots and belts were always just as smart as paint. He was the dandy of the European War. I noticed officers in the trenches with their trousers carefully pressed.

The rain had now stopped, and we climbed from our burrow. Again we were led down that endless line of communication trench, again we stumbled through the ruins, again we emerged into the street where our cars were awaiting us. Above our heads the sharp artillery duel was going merrily forward. The French were firing three or four to one, which had been my experience at every point I had touched upon the Allied front. Thanks to the extraordinary zeal of the French workers, especially of the French women, and to the clever adoption of machinery by their engineers, their supplies were abundant.

Our next expedition carried us to Chalons, where the Huns of old met disaster. From Chalons we drove some twenty miles to St. Menehould, and learned that the trenches were about ten miles north. On this expedition there were Donald and I with an extraordinary Spaniard, half Don Quixote, half Gipsy troubadour, flat hatted and clad in brown corduroy, with a single arm, having, as we heard, lost the other in some broil. As he spoke no tongue but his own we were never on terms with him.

The front at the sector which we struck was under the control of General Henneque of the 10th Division. A fine soldier this, and Heaven help Germany if he and his division had invaded it, for he was, as one could see at a glance, a man of iron who had been goaded to fierceness by all that his beloved country had endured. He was a man of middle size, swarthy, hawk-like, very abrupt in his movements, with two steel-grey eyes, which were the most searching that mine have ever met. His hospitality and courtesy to us were beyond all bounds, but there is another side to him, and it is one which it were wiser not to provoke. In person he took us to his lines, passing through the usual shot-torn villages behind them. Where the road dipped down into the great forest there was one particular spot which was visible to the German artillery observers. The General mentioned it at the time, but his remark seemed to have no personal interest. We understood it better on our return in the evening.

We then found ourselves in the depths of the woods — primeval woods of oak and beech in the deep clay soil that the great oak loves. There had been rain, and the forest paths were ankle deep in mire. Everywhere, to right and left, soldiers' faces, hard and rough from a year of open air, gazed up at us from their burrows in the ground. Presently an alert, blue-clad figure stood in the path to greet us. It was the Colonel of the sector. He was ridiculously like Cyrano de Bergerac as depicted by the late M. Coquelin, save that his nose was of more moderate proportion. The ruddy colouring, the bristling, feline, full-ended moustache, the solidity of pose, the backward tilt of the head, the general suggestion of the bantam cock, were all there facing us as he stood amid the leaves in the sunlight. Gauntlets and a long rapier — nothing else was wanting. Something had amused Cyrano. His moustache quivered with suppressed mirth and his blue eyes were demurely gleaming. Then the joke came out. He had spotted a German working-party, his guns had concentrated on it, and afterwards he had seen the stretchers go forward. A grim joke, it may seem. But the French saw this war from a different angle to us. If we had had the Boche sitting on our heads for two years, and were not quite sure whether we could ever get him off again, we should get Cyrano's point of view.

We passed in a little procession among the French soldiers, and viewed their multifarious arrangements. For them we were a little break in a monotonous life, and they formed up in lines as we passed. My own British uniform and the civilian dresses of my two companions interested them. As the General passed these groups, who formed themselves up in perhaps a more familiar manner than would have been usual in the British service, he glanced kindly at them with those singular eyes of his, and once or twice addressed them as "Mes enfants." One might conceive that all was "go as you please "among the French. So it was as long as you went in the right way. When you strayed from it you knew it. As we passed a group of men standing on a low ridge which overlooked us there was a sudden stop. I gazed round. The General’s face was steel and cement. The eyes were cold and yet fiery, sunlight upon icicles. Something had happened. Cyrano had sprung to his side. His reddish moustache had shot forward beyond his nose, and it bristled out like that of an angry cat. Both were looking up at the group above us. One wretched man detached himself from his comrades and sidled down the slope. No skipper and mate of a Yankee blood boat could have looked more ferociously at a mutineer. And yet it was all over some minor breach of discipline which was summarily disposed of by two days of confinement. Then in an instant the faces relaxed, there was a general buzz of relief, and we were back at “Mes enfants” again.

Trenches are trenches, and the main speciality of those in the Argonne were that they were nearer to the enemy. In fact, there were places where they interlocked, and where the advanced posts lay cheek by jowl with a good steel plate to cover both cheek and jowl. We were brought to a sap-head where the Germans were at the other side of a narrow forest road. Had I leaned forward with extended hand and a Boche done the same we could have touched. I looked across, but saw only a tangle of wire and sticks. Even whispering was not permitted in those forward posts.

When we emerged from these hushed places of danger Cyrano took us all to his dug-out, which was a tasty little cottage carved from the side of a hill and faced with logs. He did the honours of the humble cabin with the air of a seigneur in his château. There was little furniture, but from some broken mansion he had extracted an iron fire-back, which adorned his grate. It was a fine, mediaeval bit of work, with Venus, in her traditional costume, in the centre of it. It seemed the last touch in the picture of the gallant virile Cyrano. I only met him this once, nor shall I ever see him again, yet he stands a thing complete within my memory. Always in the cinema of memory he will walk the leafy paths of the Argonne, his fierce eyes searching for the Boche workers, his red moustache bristling over their annihilation. He seems a figure out of the past of France.

That night we dined with yet another type of the French soldier, General Antoine, who commanded the corps of which my friend had one division. Each of these French generals had a striking individuality of his own which I wish I could fix upon paper. Their only common point was that each seemed to be a rare good soldier. The Corps General was Athos with a touch of d’Artagnan. He was well over 6 feet high, bluff, jovial, with huge, upcurling moustache, and a voice that would rally a regiment. It was a grand figure, which should have been done by Van Dyck, with lace collar, hand on sword, and arm akimbo. Jovial and laughing was he, but a stern and hard soldier was lurking behind the smiles. His name has appeared in history, and so has Humbert's, who ruled all the army of which the other corps is a unit. Humbert was a Lord Robert's figure, small, wiry, quick-stepping, all steel and elastic, with a short, upturned moustache, which one could imagine as crackling with electricity in moments of excitement like a cat's fur. What he does or says is quick, abrupt, and to the point. He fires his remarks like pistol shots at this man or that. Once to my horror he fixed me with his hard little eyes and demanded; "Sherlock Holmes, est-ce qu'il est un soldat dans l'armée Anglaise? "The whole table waited in an awful hush. "Mais, mon general," I stammered, "il est trop vieux pour service." There was general laughter, and I felt that I had scrambled out of an awkward place.

And talking of awkward places, I had forgotten about that spot upon the road whence the Boche observer could see our motor-cars. He had actually laid a gun upon it, the rascal, and waited all the long day for our return. No sooner did we appear upon the slope than a shrapnel shell burst above us, but somewhat behind me, as well as to the left. Had it been straight the second car would have got it, and there might have been a vacancy in one of the chief editorial chairs in London. The General shouted to the driver to speed up, and we were soon safe from the German gunners. One got perfectly immune to noises in these scenes, for the guns which surrounded you made louder crashes than any shell which burst about you. It is only when you actually saw the cloud over you that your thoughts came back to yourself, and that you realised that in this wonderful drama you might be a useless super, but none the less you were on the stage and not in the stalls.

Next morning we were down in the front trenches again at another portion of the line. Far away on our right, from a spot named the Observatory, we could see the extreme left of the Verdun position and shells bursting on the Fille Morte. To the north of us was a broad expanse of sunny France, nestling villages, scattered châteaux, rustic churches, and all as inaccessible as if it were the moon. It was a terrible thing this German bar — a thing unthinkable to Britons. To stand on the edge of Yorkshire and look into Lancashire feeling that it was in other hands, that our fellow-countrymen were suffering there and waiting, waiting for help, and that we could not, after two years, come a yard nearer to them — would it not break our hearts? Could I wonder that there was no smile upon the grim faces of those Frenchmen! But when the bar was broken, when the line swept forward, when French bayonets gleamed on those uplands and French flags broke from those village spires — ah, what a day that was! Men died that day from the pure delirious joy of it.

Yet another type of French General took us round this morning! He, too, was a man apart, an unforgettable man. Conceive a man with a large, broad, good-humoured face, and two placid, dark, seal's eyes which gazed gently into yours. He was young, and had pink cheeks and a soft voice. Such was one of the most redoubtable fighters of France, this General of Division Dupont. His former Staff officers told me something of the man. He was a philosopher, a fatalist, impervious to fear, a dreamer of distant dreams amid the most furious bombardment. The weight of the French assault upon the terrible Labyrinth fell at one time upon the brigade which he then commanded. He led them day after day gathering up Germans with the detached air of the man of science who is hunting for specimens. In whatever shell-hole he might chance to lunch he had his cloth spread and decorated with wild flowers plucked from the edge. I wrote of him at the time: "If Fate be kind to him, he will go far." As a matter of fact, before the end of the war he was one of the most influential members of the General Staff, so my prophetic power was amply vindicated.

From the Observatory we saw the destruction of a German trench. There had been signs of work upon it, so it was decided to close it down. It was a very visible brown streak a thousand yards away. The word was passed back to the "75's "in the rear. There was a "tir rapide "over our heads. My word, the man who stands fast under a "tir rapide," be he Boche, French or British, is a man of mettle! The mere passage of the shells was awe-inspiring, at first like the screaming of a wintry wind, and then thickening into the howling of a pack of wolves. The trench was a line of terrific explosions. Then the dust settled down and all was still. Where were the ants who had made the nest? Were they buried beneath it? Or had they got from under? No one could say.

There was one little gun which fascinated me, and I stood for some time watching it. Its three gunners, enormous helmeted men, evidently loved it, and touched it with a swift but tender touch in every movement. When it was fired it ran up an inclined plane to take off the recoil, rushing up and then turning and rattling down again upon the gunners who were used to its ways. The first time it did it, I was standing behind it, and I don’t know which jumped quickest — the gun or I.

French officers above a certain rank develop and show their own individuality. In the lower grades the conditions of service enforce a certain uniformity. The British officer is a British gentleman first, and an officer afterwards. The Frenchman is an officer first, though none the less the gentleman stands behind it. One very strange type we met, however, in these Argonne Woods. He was a French-Canadian who had been a French soldier, had founded a homestead in far Alberta, and had now come back of his own will, though a naturalised Briton, to the old flag. He spoke English of a kind, the quality and quantity being equally extraordinary. It poured from him and was, so far as it was intelligible, of the woolly Western variety. His views on the Germans were the most emphatic we had met. “These Godam sons of “ — well, let us say “Canines!” he would shriek, shaking his fist at the woods to the north of him. A good man was our compatriot, for he had a very recent Legion of Honour pinned upon his breast. He had been put with a few men on Hill 285, a sort of volcano stuffed with mines, and was told to telephone when he needed relief. He refused to telephone, and remained there for three weeks. “We sit like one rabbit in his hall,” he explained. He had only one grievance — there were many wild boars in the forest, but the infantry were too busy to get them. “The Godam Artillaree he get the wild pig! “Out of his pocket he pulled a picture of a frame house with snow round it, and a lady with two children on the stoep. It was his homestead at Trochu, seventy miles north of Calgary.

It was the evening of the third day that we turned our faces towards Paris once more. It was my last view of the French. The roar of their guns went far with me upon my way. I wrote at the time: “Soldiers of France, farewell! In your own phrase, I salute you! Many have seen you who had more knowledge by which to judge your manifold virtues, many also who had more skill to draw you as you are, but never one, I am sure, who admired you more than I. Great was the French soldier, under Louis the Sim-King, great too under Napoleon, but never was he greater than to-day.”

But in spite of all their bravery only two things saved France, her field guns and the intervention of England. Surely she should have a reckoning with her pre-war military authorities. Imagine unwarlike Britain, protected by the sea, and yet having a high standard of musketry, heavy guns with every division, and khaki uniforms, while warlike France, under the very shadow of Germany, had poor musketry, primeval uniforms and no heavy guns. As to her early views of strategy they were lamentable. Every British critic, above all Lord Kitchener, knew that the attack would swing round through Belgium. France concentrated all her preparation upon the Eastern frontier. It was clear also that the weaker power should be on the defensive and so bring her enemy by heavier losses down to her own weight. France attacked and broke herself in an impossible venture. There should have been a heavy reckoning against some one. The fate of England as well as of France was imperilled by the false estimates of the French General Staff.

One small visible result of my journey was the establishment of wound stripes upon the uniforms of the British. I had been struck by this very human touch among the French, which gave a man some credit and therefore some consolation for his sufferings. I represented the matter when I came back. Lest I seem to claim more than is true, I append General Robertson’s letter. The second sentence refers to that campaign for the use of armour which I had prosecuted so long, and with some success as regards helmets, though there the credit was mostly due to Dr. Saleeby, among civilians. The letter runs thus:

War Office, *August* 14, 1916.

Many thanks for sending me a copy of your little book. I will certainly see what can be done in regard to armour. You will remember that I took your previous tip as regards badges for wounded men.

Yours very truly, W. R. Robertson.

CHAPTER XXXI. BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

Lloyd George — My Second Excursion — The Farthest German Point — Sir Joseph Cook — Night before the Day of Judgment — The Final Battle — On a Tank — Horrible Sight — Speech to Australians — The Magic Carpet.

I FIND in my diary that the Prime Minister, Mr.

Lloyd George, invited me to breakfast in April 1917. Some third person was, I understand, to have been present, but he did not arrive, so that I found myself alone in the classic dining-room of No. 10, Downing Street, while my host was finishing his toilet. Presently he appeared, clad in a grey suit, smart and smiling, with no sign at all that he bore the weight of the great European War upon his shoulders. Nothing could have been more affable or democratic, for there was no servant present, and he poured out the tea, while I, from a side table, brought the bacon and eggs for both. He had certainly the Celtic power of making one absolutely at one's ease, for there was no trace at all of pomp or ceremony — just a pleasant, smiling, grey-haired but very virile gentleman, with twinkling eyes and a roguish smile. No doubt there are other aspects, but that is how he presented himself that morning.

He began by talking about the great loss which the country had sustained in Lord Kitchener's death, speaking of him in a very kindly and human way. At the same time he was of opinion that long tropical service and the habit of always talking down to subordinates had had some effect upon his mind and character. He was a strange mixture of rather morose inactivity and sudden flashes of prevision which amounted to genius. He was the only man who had clearly foreseen the length of the war, and but for Turkey, Bulgaria, and other complications he probably overstated it at three years. There were times when he became so dictatorial as to be almost unbearable, and he had to be reminded at a Cabinet Council by Lloyd George himself that he was in the presence of twenty men who were his peers, and that he could not refuse them information or act above their heads. I confess that it struck me as very natural that a big man with vital knowledge in his brain should hesitate in a world crisis to confide it to twenty men, and probably twenty wives, each of whom was a possible leak. In spite of his genius Kitchener was not accessible to new ideas. He could not see clearly why such enormous munitions were necessary. He opposed tanks. He was against the Irish and Welsh separate divisions. He refused the special flags which the ladies had worked for these divisions. He was as remote from sentiment as a steam hammer, and yet he was dealing with humans who can be influenced by sentiment. He obstructed in many things, particularly in the Dardanelles. On the other hand, his steps in organizing the new armies were splendid, though he had attempted — vainly — to do away with the Territorials, another example of his blindness to the practical force of sentiment. Miss Asquith had said of him, “If he is not a great man he is a great poster,” and certainly no one else could have moved the nation to such a degree, though the long series of provocations from the Germans had made us very receptive and combative.

Lloyd George was justly proud of the splendid work of the Welsh Division at the front. He had been to Mametz Wood, the taking of which had been such a bloody, and also such a glorious, business. He listened with interest to an account which I was able to give him of some incidents in that fight, and said that it was a beautiful story. He had arranged for a Welsh painter to do the scene of the battle.

He was interested to hear how I had worked upon my history, and remarked that it was probably better done from direct human documents than from filed papers. He asked me whether I had met many of the divisional Generals, and on my saying that I had, he asked me if any had struck me as outstanding among their fellows. I said I thought they were a fine level lot, but that in soldiering it was impossible to say by mere talk or appearance who was the big man at a pinch. He agreed. He seemed to have a particular feeling towards General Tom Bridges, of the 19th Division, and shortly afterwards I noticed that he was chosen for the American mission.

I talked to him about my views as to the use of armour, and found him very keen upon it. He is an excellent listener, and seems honestly interested in what you say. He said he had no doubt that in the problem of armour lay the future of warfare, but how to carry it was the crux. He said that the soldiers always obstructed the idea — which was my experience also — with a few notable exceptions. I mentioned General Watts of the 7th

Division as being interested in armour, and he agreed and seemed to know all about Watts who, though a “dug-out,” was one of the finds of the war.

He was much excited about the revolution in Russia, news of which had only just come through. The Guards had turned, and that meant that all had turned. The Tsar was good but weak. The general character and probable fate of the Tsarina were not unlike those of Marie Antoinette — in fact, the whole course of events was very analogous to the French Revolution. “Then it will last some years and end in a Napoleon,” said I. He agreed. The revolt, he said, was in no sense pro-German. The whole affair had been Byzantine, and reminded one of the old histories.

As I left he came back to armour, and said that he was about to see some one on that very subject. When I was in the hall it struck me that a few definite facts which I had in my head would be useful in such an interview, so, to the surprise of the butler, I sat down on the hall chair and wrote out on a scrap of paper a few headings which I asked him to give the Prime Minister. I don’t know if they were of any use. I came away reassured, and feeling that a vigorous virile hand was at the helm.

I had not expected to see any more actual operations of the war, but early in September 1918 I had an intimation from the Australian Government that I might visit their section of the line. Little did I think that this would lead to my seeing the crowning battle of the war. It was on September 26 that we actually started, the party consisting of Sir Joseph Cook, Naval Minister of the Australian Commonwealth, Commander Latham, his aide-de-camp, who in civil life is a rising barrister of Melbourne, and Mr. Berry, soon to be Sir William Berry, proprietor of the “Sunday Times.” We crossed in a gale of wind, with a destroyer sheeted in foam on either side of the leave boat, each of us being obliged to wear life-belts. Several American newspaper men were on board, one of them an old friend, Bok, of the “Ladies’ Home Journal.” It was too late to continue our journey when we got across, so we stayed at an inn that night, and were off to the Australian line at an early hour in the morning, our way lying through Abbeville and Amiens. The latter place was nearly deserted and very badly knocked about, far more so than I had expected.

The enemy had, as we knew, been within seven miles of Amiens — it was the Australian line which held the town safe, and the Allied cause from desperate peril if not ruin. It did not surprise us, therefore, that we soon came upon signs of fighting. A little grove was shown us as the absolute farthest ripple of the advanced German wave. A little farther on was the sheltered town of Villers Brettoneux, with piles of empty cartridge cases at every corner to show where snipers or machine guns had lurked. A little farther on a truly monstrous gun — the largest I have ever seen — lay near the road, broken into three pieces. It was bigger to my eyes than the largest on our battleships, and had been brought up and mounted by the Germans just before the tide had turned, which was on July 5. In their retreat they had been compelled to blow it up. A party of British Guardsmen were standing round it examining it, and I exchanged a few words with them. Then we ran on through ground which was intensely interesting to me, as it was the scene of Gough’s retreat, and I had just been carefully studying it at home. There was the Somme on our left, a very placid, slow-moving stream, and across it the higher ground where our III Corps had been held up on the historical August 8, the day which made Ludendorff realise, as he himself states, that the war was lost. On the plain over which we were moving the Australian and Canadian Divisions had swept, with the tanks leading the British line, as Boadicea’s chariots did of old. Though I had not been over the ground before, I had visualised it so clearly in making notes about the battle that I could name every hamlet and locate every shattered church tower. Presently a hill rose on the left, which I knew to be Mount St. Quentin, the taking of which by the Australians was one of the feats of the war. It had been defended by picked troops, including some of the Prussian Guards, but they were mostly taken or killed, though a flanking attack by the British Yeomanry Division had something to do with the result.

The old walled town of Peronne, sacred for ever to Sir Walter, Quentin Durward, and the archers of the Scots Guards, lay before us, almost if not quite surrounded by the river, the canal, and broad moats. It seemed an impossible place to take, which is of course the greatest possible trap in modern warfare, since something occurring fifty miles away may place troops behind you and cut you off. Here our long drive finished, and we were handed over to the care of Colonel Bennett, commanding the camp, a tall, bluff warrior who, if he had doffed his khaki and got into a velvet tunic, would have been the exact image of the veteran warrior in Scott’s novel. He was indeed a veteran, having fought, if I remember right, not only in South Africa, but even in the Australian Suakim contingent.

A little wooden hut was put at our disposal, and there we slept, Sir Joseph Cook and I, with a small partition between us. I was bitterly cold, and so I can tell was he, for I could hear him tossing about just as I did for warmth. We had neither of us made the discovery that you may pile all the clothes you like on the top of you, but so long as there is only one layer of canvas beneath you, you are likely to be cold. We don't usually realise that the mattress is also part of the bedclothes. We both got little sleep that night.

Next morning, September 28, we were off betimes, for we had much to see, the old town for one thing, which I vowed I would visit again in time of peace. We descended Mount St. Quentin and saw ample evidence of the grim struggle that had occurred there. There were many rude graves, some of them with strange inscriptions. One of them, I was told, read: "Here lies a German who met two diggers." The Australian Tommy was of course universally known as a digger. They make a rough, valiant, sporting but rude-handed crew. They went through the prisoners for loot, and even the officers were ransacked. Colonel Bennett told me that a Colonel of the Germans was impudent when he came into his presence, so Bennett said: "Mend your manners, or I will hand you over to the diggers! "They were waiting outside the tent for just such a chance. One German had an iron cross which was snatched from him by an Australian. The German shaped up to the man in excellent form and knocked him down. The other Australians were delighted, gave him back his cross, and made him quite a hero. I expect the looter had been an unpopular man.

The younger Australian officers were all promoted from the ranks, and many of them had their own ideas about English grammar. Bennett told me that he tried to get the reports better written. One subaltern had reported: "As I came round the traverse I met a Bosch and we both reached for our guns, but he lost his block and I got him." Bennett returned this for emendation. It came back: "As I came round the traverse I met a German, and we both drew our automatic pistols, but he lost his presence of mind and I shot him." I think I like the first style best.

I lunched that day at the Head-quarters of Sir John Monash, an excellent soldier who had done really splendid work, especially since the advance began. Indeed, it was his own action on July 5 which turned the tide of retreat. He showed that the long line of fighting Jews which began with Joshua still carries on. One of the Australian Divisional Generals, Rosenthal, was also a Jew, and the Head-quarters Staff was full of eagle-nosed, black-haired warriors. It spoke well for them and well also for the perfect equality of the Australian system, which would have the best man at the top, be he who he might. My brother was acting as Assistant Adjutant-General to General Butler with the III British Corps on the left of the Australians, and they had kindly wired for him, so that I had the joy of having him next me at lunch, and he invited me to join the Head-quarters mess of his corps for dinner.

It was a wonderful experience that dinner. The great advance was to be next morning, when it was hoped that the Hindenburg Line, which was practically the frontier of Germany, would be carried. There were only six who dined in that little farm-house messroom: Butler himself with hard composed face, his head of sappers, head of gunners, my brother, the first and second Staff officers, a little group of harassed and weary men. Yet there was no word of the huge drama upon the edge of which we were standing. Every now and then a telephone tinkled in the next room, a Staff officer rose, there were a few short words, a nod, and the incident was closed. It was a wonderful example of quiet self-control. I said to my brother, when we were alone: “Don’t you think I am out of the picture at such a moment talking about such frivolous things?”

“For God’s sake keep on at it,” he said. “It is just what they need. Give their brains something new.” So I tried to do so and we had a memorable evening.

I shall never forget the drive back of 10 miles in a pitch-dark night, with not a gleam anywhere save that far aloft two little gold points glimmered now and again, like the far-off headlights of a motor transferred suddenly to the heavens. These were British aeroplanes, so lit to distinguish them from the German marauders. The whole Eastern horizon was yellow-red with gunfire, and the distant roar of the artillery preparation was like the Atlantic surge upon a rock-bound coast. Along the road no lights were permitted, and several times out of the black a still blacker gloom framed itself into some motor-lorry with which only our cries saved a collision. It was wonderful and awesome, the eve of the day of judgment when Germany’s last solid defence was to be smashed, and she was to be left open to that vengeance which she had so long provoked.

We were awakened early, part of our party getting away to some point which they imagined would be more adventurous than that to which we seniors should be invited, though in the sequel it hardly proved so. They saw much, however, and one of them described to me how one of the first and saddest sights was that of eighteen splendid young Americans lying dead and lonely by the roadside, caught in some unlucky shell burst. Mr. Cook, Commander Latham, and I had been placed under the charge of Captain Plunket, a twice-wounded Australian officer, who helped us much during the varied adventures of our exciting day.

The general programme of attack was already in our minds. Two American divisions, the 27th and 30th, one from New York, the other from the South, were to rush the front line. The Australian divisions were then to pass over or through them and carry the battle-front forward. Already, as we arrived on the battlefield, the glad news came back that the Americans had done their part, and that the Australians had just been unleashed. Also that the Germans were standing to it like men.

As our car threaded the crowded street between the ruins of Templeux we met the wounded coming back, covered cars with nothing visible save protruding boots, and a constant stream of pedestrians, some limping, some with bandaged arms and faces, some supported by Red Cross men, a few-in pain, most of them smiling grimly behind their cigarettes. Amid them came the first clump of prisoners, fifty or more, pitiable enough, and yet I could not pity them, the weary, shuffling, hang-dog creatures, with no touch of nobility in their features or their bearing.

The village was full of Americans and Australians, extraordinarily like each other in type. One could well have lingered, for it was all of great interest, but there were even greater interests ahead, so we turned up a hill, left our car, which had reached its limit, and proceeded on foot. The road took us through a farm, where a British anti-aircraft battery stood ready for action. Then we found open plain, and went forward, amid old trenches and rusty wire, in the direction of the battle.

We had now passed the heavy gun positions, and were among the field guns, so that the noise was deafening. A British howitzer battery was hard at work, and we stopped to chat with the Major. His crews had been at it for six hours, but were in great good humour, and chuckled mightily when the blast of one of their guns nearly drove in our ear-drums, we having got rather too far forward. The effect was that of a ringing box on the exposed ear — with which valediction we left our grinning British gunners and pushed on to the east, under a screaming canopy of our own shells. The wild, empty waste of moor was broken by a single shallow quarry or gravel-pit, in which we could see some movement. In it we found an advanced dressing station, with about a hundred American and Australian gunners and orderlies. There were dug-outs in the sides of this flat excavation, and it had been an American battalion Head-quarters up to a few hours before. We were now about 1,000 yards from the Hindenburg Line, and I learned with emotion that this spot was the Egg Redoubt, one of those advanced outposts of General Gough's army which suffered so tragic and glorious a fate in that great military epic of March 21 — one of the grandest in the whole war. The fact that we were now actually standing in the Egg Redoubt showed me, as nothing else could have done, how completely the ground had been recovered, and how the day of retribution was at hand.

We were standing near the eastward lip of the excavation, and looking over it, when it was first brought to our attention that it took two to make a battle. Up to now we had seen only one. Now two shells burst in quick succession 40 yards in front of us, and a spray of earth went into the air. "Whizz-bangs," remarked our soldier-guide casually. Personally, I felt less keenly interested in their name than in the fact that they were there at all.

We thought we had done pretty well to get within 1,000 yards of the famous line, but now came a crowning bit of good fortune, for an Australian gunner captain, a mere lad, but a soldier from his hawk's eyes to his active feet, volunteered to rush us forward to some coign of vantage known to himself. So it was Eastward Ho! once more, still over a dull, barren plain sloping gently upwards, with little sign of life. Here and there was the quick fluff of a bursting shell, but at a comfortable distance. Suddenly ahead of us a definite object broke the skyline. It was a Tank, upon which the crew were working with spanners and levers, for its comrades were now far ahead, and it would fain follow. This, it seems, was the grandstand which our young gunner had selected. On to the top of it we clambered — and there, at our very feet, and less than 500 yards away, was the rift which had been torn a few hours before in the Hindenburg Line. On the dun slope beyond it, under our very eyes, was even now being fought a part of that great fight where at last the children of light were beating down into the earth the forces of darkness. It was there. We could see it. And yet how little there was to see 1

The ridge was passed, and the ground sloped down, as dark and heathy as Hindhead. In front of us lay a village. It was Bellicourt. The Hindenburg position ran through it. It lay quiet enough, and with the unaided eye one could see rusty red fields of wire in front of it. But the wire had availed nothing, nor had the trench that lurked behind it, for beyond it, beside the village of Nauroy, there was a long white line, clouds of pale steam-like vapour spouting up against a dark, rain-sodden sky. “The Boche smoke barrage,” said our guide. “They are going to counter-attack.” Only this, the long, white, swirling cloud upon the dark plain told of the strife in front of us. With my glasses I saw what looked like Tanks, but whether wrecked or in action I could not say. There was the battle — the greatest of battles — but nowhere could I see a moving figure. It is true that all the noises of the pit seemed to rise from that lonely landscape, but noise was always with us, go where we would.

The Australians were ahead where that line of smoke marked their progress. In the sloping fields, which at that point emerged out of the moor, the victorious Americans, who had done their part, were crouching. It was an assured victory upon which we gazed, achieved so rapidly that we were ourselves standing far forward in ground which had been won that day. The wounded had been brought in, and I saw no corpses. On the left the fight was very severe, and the Germans, who had been hidden in their huge dug-outs, were doing their usual trick of emerging and cutting off the attack. So much we gathered afterwards, but for the moment it was the panorama before us which was engrossing all our thoughts.

Suddenly the German guns woke up. I can but pray that it was not our group which drew their fire upon the half-mended tank. Shell after shell fell in its direction, all of them short, but creeping forward with each salvo. It was time for us to go. If any man says that without a call of duty he likes being under aimed shell-fire, he is not a man whose word I would trust. Some of the shells burst with a rusty-red out-flame, and we were told that they were gas shells. I may say that before we were admitted on to the battle-field at all, we were ushered one by one into a room where some devil’s pipkin was bubbling in the corner, and were taught to use our gas-masks by the simple expedient of telling us that if we failed to acquire the art then and there a very painful alternative was awaiting us.

We made our way back, with no indecent haste, but certainly without loitering, across the plain, the shells always getting rather nearer, until we came to the excavation. Here we had a welcome rest, for our good gunner took us into his cubby-hole of a dug-out, which would at least stop shrapnel, and we shared his tea and dried beef, a true Australian soldier’s meal.

The German fire was now rather heavy, and our expert host explained that this meant that he had recovered from the shock of the attack, had reorganized his guns, and was generally his merry self once more. From where we sat we could see heavy shells bursting far to our rear, and there was an atmosphere of explosion all round us, which might have seemed alarming had it not been for the general chatty afternoon-tea appearance of all these veteran soldiers with whom it was our privilege to find ourselves. A group of sulky-looking German prisoners sat in a corner, while a lank and freckled Australian soldier, with his knee sticking out of a rent in his trousers, was walking about with four watches dangling from his hand, endeavouring vainly to sell them. Far be it from me to assert that he did not bring the watches from Sydney and choose this moment for doing a deal in them, but they were heavy old Teutonic time-pieces, and the prisoners seemed to take a rather personal interest in them.

As we started on our homeward track we came, first, upon the British battery which seemed to be limbering up with some idea of advancing, and so lost its chance of administering a box on our other ear. Farther still we met our friends of the air guns, and stopped again to exchange a few impressions. They had nothing to fire at, and seemed bored to tears, for the red, white and blue machines were in full command of the sky. Soon we found our motor waiting in the lee of a ruined house, and began to thread our way back through the wonderfully picturesque streams of men — American, Australian, British, and German — who were strung along the road.

And then occurred a very horrible incident. One knew, of course, that one could not wander about a battle-field and not find oneself sooner or later involved in some tragedy, but we were now out of range of any but heavy guns, and their shots were spasmodic. We had halted the car for an instant to gather up two German helmets which Commander Latham had seen on the roadside, when there was a very heavy burst close ahead round a curve in the village street. A geyser of red brick-dust flew up into the air. An instant later our car rounded the corner. None of us will forget what we saw. There was a tangle of mutilated horses, their necks rising and sinking. Beside them a man with his hand blown off was staggering away, the blood gushing from his upturned sleeve. He was moving round and holding the arm raised and hanging, as a dog holds an injured foot. Beside the horses lay a shattered man, drenched crimson from head to foot, with two great glazed eyes looking upwards through a mask of blood. Two comrades were at hand to help, and we could only go upon our way with the ghastly picture stamped for ever upon our memory. The image of that dead driver might well haunt one in one's dreams.

Once through Templeux and on the main road for Peronne things became less exciting, and we drew up to see a column of 900 prisoners pass us. Each side of the causeway was lined by Australians, with their keen, clear-cut, falcon faces, and between lurched these heavy-jawed, beetle-browed, uncouth louts, new caught and staring round with bewildered eyes at their debonair captors. I saw none of that relief at getting out of it which I have read of; nor did I see any signs of fear, but the prevailing impression was an ox-like stolidity and dullness. It was a herd of beasts, not a procession of men. It was indeed farcical to think that these uniformed bumpkins represented the great military nation, while the gallant figures who lined the road belonged to the race which they had despised as being unwarlike. Time and Fate between them have a pretty sense of humour. One of them caught my eye as he passed and roared out in guttural English, "The old Jairman is out!" It was the only words I heard them speak. French cavalry troopers, stern, dignified, and martial, rode at either end of the bedraggled procession.

They were great soldiers, these Australians. I think they would admit it themselves, but a spectator is bound to confirm it. There was a reckless dare-devilry, combined with a spice of cunning, which gave them a place of their own in the Imperial ranks. They had a great advantage too, in having a permanent organization, the same five divisions always in the same corps, under the same chief. It doubled their military value — and the same applied equally, of course, to the Canadians. None the less, they should not undervalue their British comrades or lose their sense of proportion. I had a chance of addressing some 1,200 of them on our return that evening, and while telling them all that I thought of their splendid deeds, I ventured to remind them that 72 per cent of the men engaged and 76 per cent of the casualties were Englishmen of England.

I think that now, in these after-war days, the whole world needs to be reminded of this fact as well as the Australians did. There has been, it seems to me, a systematic depreciation of what the glorious English, apart from the British, soldiers did. England is too big to be provincial, and smaller minds sometimes take advantage of it. At the time some of the

Australian papers slanged me for having given this speech to their soldiers, but I felt that it needed saying, and several of their officers thanked me warmly, saying that as they never saw anything save their own front, they were all of them losing their sense of proportion. I shall not easily forget that speech, I standing on a mound in the rain, the Australian soldiers with cloaks swathed round them like brigands, and half a dozen aeroplanes, returning from the battle, circling overhead, evidently curious as to what was going on. It seems to me now like some extraordinary dream.

Such was my scamper to the Australian front. It was as if some huge hand had lifted me from my study table, placed me where I could see what I was writing about, and then within four days laid me down once more before the familiar table, with one more wonderful experience added to my record.

And then at last came the blessed day of Armistice. I was in a staid London hotel at eleven o’clock in the morning, most prim of all the hours of the day, when a lady, well-dressed and conventional, came through the turning doors, waltzed slowly round the hall with a flag in either hand, and departed without saying a word. It was the first sign that things were happening. I rushed out into the streets, and of course the news was everywhere at once. I walked down to Buckingham Palace and saw the crowds assembling there, singing and cheering. A slim, young girl had got elevated on to some high vehicle, and was leading and conducting the singing as if she was some angel in tweeds just dropped from a cloud. In the dense crowd I saw an open motor stop with four middle-aged men, one of them a hard-faced civilian, the others officers. I saw this civilian hack at the neck of a whisky bottle and drink it raw. I wish the crowd had lynched him. It was the moment for prayer, and this beast was a blot on the landscape. On the whole the people were very good and orderly. Later more exuberant elements got loose. They say that it was when the Australian wounded met the War Office flappers that the foundations of solid old London got loosened. But we have little to be ashamed of, and if ever folk rejoiced we surely had the right to do so. We did not see the new troubles ahead of us, but at least these old ones were behind. And we had gained an immense reassurance. Britain had not weakened. She was still the Britain of old.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE PSYCHIC QUEST

I HAVE not obtruded the psychic question upon the reader, though it has grown in importance with the years, and has now come to absorb the whole energy of my life. I cannot, however, close these scattered memories of my adventures in thought and action without some reference, however incomplete to that which has been far the most important thing in my life. It is the thing for which every preceding phase, my gradual religious development, my books, which gave me an introduction to the public, my modest fortune, which enables me to devote myself to unlucrative work, my platform work, which helps me to convey the message, and my physical strength, which is still sufficient to stand arduous tours and to fill the largest halls for an hour and a half with my voice, have each and all been an unconscious preparation. For thirty years I have trained myself exactly for the role without the least inward suspicion of whither I was tending.

I cannot in the limited space of a chapter go into very lengthy detail or complete argument upon the subject. It is the more unnecessary since I have already in my psychic volumes outlined very clearly how I arrived at my present knowledge. Of these volumes the first and second, called respectively “The New Revelation “and “The Vital Message,” show how gradual evidence was given me of the continuation of life, and how thorough and long were my studies before I was at last beaten out of my material agnostic position and forced to admit the validity of the proofs.

In the days of universal sorrow and loss, when the voice of Rachel was heard throughout the land, it was borne in upon me that the knowledge which had come to me thus was not for my own consolation alone, but that God had placed me in a very special position for conveying it to that world which needed it so badly.

I found in the movement many men who saw the truth as clearly as I did; but such was the clamour of the “religious,” who were opposing that which is the very essence of living religion, of the “scientific,” who broke the first laws of Science by pronouncing upon a thing which they had not examined, and of the Press, who held up every real or imaginary rascality as being typical of a movement which they had never understood, that the true men were abashed and shrank from the public exposition of their views. It was to combat this that I began a campaign in 1916 which can only finish when all is finished.

One grand help I had. My wife had always been averse from my psychic studies, deeming the subject to be uncanny and dangerous. Her own experiences soon convinced her to the contrary, for her brother, who was killed at Mons, came back to us in a very convincing way. From that instant she threw herself with all the whole-hearted energy of her generous nature into the work which lay before us.

A devoted mother, she was forced often to leave her children; a lover of home, she was compelled to quit it for many months at a time; distrustful of the sea, she joyfully shared my voyages. We have now travelled a good 50,000 miles upon our quest. We have spoken face to face with a quarter of a million of people. Her social qualities, her clear sanity, her ardent charity, and her gracious presence upon the platforms all united with her private counsel and sympathy, have been such an aid to me that they have toned my work into a joy. The presence of our dear children upon our journeys has also lightened them for both of us.

I began our public expositions of the subject by three years of intermittent lecturing in this country, during which period I visited nearly every town of importance, many of them twice and thrice. Everywhere I found attentive audiences, critical, as they should be, but open to conviction. I roused antagonism only in those who had not heard me, and there were demonstrations outside the doors, but never in the halls. I cannot remember a single interruption during that long series of addresses. It was interesting to notice how I was upheld, for though I was frequently very weary before the address, and though my war lectures had often been attended by palpitation of the heart, I was never once conscious of any fatigue during or after a lecture upon psychic subjects.

On August 13, 1920, we started for Australia. In proportion to her population she had lost almost as heavily as we during the war, and I felt that my seed would fall upon fruitful ground. I have written all details of this episode in my “Wanderings of a Spiritualist,” in which the reader will find among other things some evidences of that preternatural help which went with us in our journeys. I addressed large audiences in all the big towns of Australia and New Zealand. An unfortunate shipping strike prevented me from reaching Tasmania, but otherwise the venture was an unalloyed success. Contrary to expectation I was able to pay all the expenses of our large party (we were seven) and to leave a balance behind me to help the successor whom I might choose.

At the end of March, 1921, we were back in Paris again, where, greatly daring, I lectured in French upon psychic subjects. Our stay at home was not a very long one, for urgent invitations had come from America, where the Spiritual movement had fallen into a somewhat languishing state. On April 1, 1922 our whole party started for the States. What happened to us I have recorded in "Our American Adventure." Suffice it to say that the trip was very successful, and that from Boston to Washington, and from New York to Chicago, I spoke in all the larger cities and brought about a great revival of interest in the subject. We were back in England at the beginning of July 1922.

I was by no means satisfied about America, however, as we had not touched the great West, the land of the future. Therefore we set forth again in March 1923, getting back in August. Our adventures, which were remarkable upon the psychic side, are recorded in "Our Second American Adventure." When I returned from that journey I had travelled 55,000 miles in three years, and spoken to quarter of a million of people. I am still unsatisfied, however, for the Southern States of the Union have not been touched, and it is possible that we may yet make a journey in that direction.

I have placed on record our experiences, and no doubt they have little interest at the moment for the general public, but the day will come, and that speedily, when people will understand that this proposition for which we are now fighting is far the most important thing for two thousand years in the history of the world, and when the efforts of the pioneers will have a very real interest to all who have sufficient intelligence to follow the progress of human thought.

I am only one of many working for the cause, but I hope that I may claim that I brought into it a combative and aggressive spirit which it lacked before, and which has now so forced it upon public attention that one can hardly pick up a paper without reading some comment upon it. If some of these papers are hopelessly ignorant and prejudiced, it is not a bad thing for the cause. If you have a bad case, constant publicity is a misfortune, but if you have a good one, its goodness will always assert itself, however much it may be misrepresented.

Many Spiritualists have taken the view that since we know these comforting and wonderful things, and since the world chooses not to examine the evidence, we may be content with our own happy assurance. This seems to me an immoral view.

If God has sent a great new message of exceeding joy down to earth, then it is for us, to whom it has been clearly revealed, to pass it on at any cost of time, money and labour. It is not given to us for selfish enjoyment, but for general consolation. If the sick man turns from the physician, then it cannot be helped, but at least the healing draught should be offered.

The greater the difficulty in breaking down the wall of apathy, ignorance and materialism, the more is it a challenge to our manhood to attack and ever attack in the same bulldog spirit with which Foch faced the German lines.

I trust that the record of my previous life will assure the reader that I have within my limitations preserved a sane and balanced judgment, since I have never hitherto been extreme in my views, and since what I have said has so often been endorsed by the actual course of events. But never have I said anything with the same certainty of conviction with which I now say that this new knowledge is going to sweep the earth and to revolutionize human views upon every topic save only on fundamental morality, which is a fixed thing.

All modern inventions and discoveries will sink into insignificance beside those psychic facts which will force themselves within a few years upon the universal human mind.

The subject has been obscured by the introduction of all sorts of side issues, some of interest but not vital, others quite irrelevant. There is a class of investigator who loves to wander round in a circle, and to drag you with him if you are weak enough to accept such guidance. He trips continually over his own brains, and can never persuade himself that the simple and obvious explanation is also the true one. His intellect becomes a positive curse to him, for he uses it to avoid the straight road and to fashion out some strange devious path which lands him at last in a quagmire, whilst the direct and honest mind has kept firmly to the highway of knowledge. When I meet men of this type, and then come in contact with the lowly congregations of religious Spiritualists, I think always of Christ’s words when He thanked God that He had revealed these things to babes and withheld them from the wise and the prudent. I think also of a dictum of Baron Reichenbach: “There is a scientific incredulity which exceeds in stupidity the obtuseness of the clodhopper.”

But what I say in no way applies to the reasonable researcher whose experiences are real stepping-stones leading to his fixed conclusion. There must to every man be this novitiate in knowledge. The matter is too serious to be taken without due intellectual conviction.

It must not be imagined that I entirely deny the existence of fraud. But it is far less common than is supposed, and as for its being universal, which is the theory of the conjurers and some other critics, such an opinion is beyond reason or argument. In an experience with mediums which has been excelled by very few living men, and which has embraced three continents, I have not encountered fraud more than three or four times.

There is conscious and unconscious fraud, and it is the existence of the latter which complicates the question so badly. Conscious fraud usually arises from a temporary failure of real psychic power, and a consequent attempt to replace it by an imitation. Unconscious fraud comes in that curious half-way state which I have called the “half-trance condition “when the medium seems normal, and yet is actually hardly responsible for his actions.

At such a time the process by which his personality leaves his body seems to have set in, and his higher qualities have already passed, so that he can apparently no longer inhibit the promptings received from the suggestion of those around him, or from his own unchecked desires. Thus one will find mediums doing stupid and obvious things which expose them to the charge of cheating. Then if the observer disregards these and waits, the true psychic phenomena of unmistakable character will follow as he sinks more deeply into trance.

This was, I gather, noticeable in the case of Eusapia Paladino, but I have seen it with several others. In those cases where a medium has left the cabinet, and is found wandering about among the sitters, as has happened with Mrs. Corner, with Madame d’Esperance, and with Craddock — all of them mediums who have given many proofs of their real powers — I am convinced that the very natural supposition that they are fraudulent is really quite a mistaken one.

When, on the other hand, it is found that the medium has introduced false drapery or accessories, which has sometimes occurred, we are in the presence of the most odious and blasphemous crime which a human being can commit.

People ask me, not unnaturally, what is it which makes me so perfectly certain that this thing is true. That I am perfectly certain is surely demonstrated by the mere fact that I have abandoned my congenial and lucrative work, left my home for long periods at a time, and subjected myself to all sorts of inconveniences, losses, and even insults, in order to get the facts home to the people.

To give all my reasons would be to write a book rather than a chapter, but I may say briefly that there is no physical sense which I possess which has not been separately assured, and that there is no conceivable method by which a spirit could show its presence which I have not on many occasions experienced. In the presence of Miss Besinnet as medium and of several witnesses I have seen my mother and my nephew, young Oscar Hornung, as plainly as ever I saw them in life — so plainly that I could almost have counted the wrinkles of the one and the freckles of the other.

In the darkness the face of my mother shone up, peaceful, happy, slightly inclined to one side, the eyes closed. My wife upon my right and the lady upon my left both saw it as clearly as I did. The lady had not known my mother in life but she said, “How wonderfully like she is to her son,” which will show how clear was the detail of the features.

On another occasion my son came back to me. Six persons heard his conversation with me, and signed a paper afterwards to that effect. It was in his voice and concerned itself with what was unknown to the medium, who was bound and breathing deeply in his chair. If the evidence of six persons of standing and honour may not be taken, then how can any human fact be established?

My brother, General Doyle, came back with the same medium, but on another occasion. He discussed the health of his widow. She was a Danish lady, and he wanted her to use a masseur in Copenhagen. He gave the name. I made inquiries and found that such a man did exist. Whence came this knowledge? Who was it who took so close an interest in the health of this lady? If it was not her dead husband then who was it?

All fine-drawn theories of the subconscious go to pieces before the plain statement of the intelligence, “I am a spirit. I am Innés. I am your brother.”

I have clasped materialised hands.

I have held long conversations with the direct voice.

I have smelt the peculiar ozone-like smell of ectoplasm.

I have listened to prophecies which were quickly fulfilled.

I have seen the “dead “glimmer up upon a photographic plate which no hand but mine had touched.

I have received through the hand of my own wife, notebooks full of information which was utterly beyond her ken.

I have seen heavy articles swimming in the air, untouched by human hand, and obeying directions given to unseen operators.

I have seen spirits walk round the room in fair light and join in the talk of the company.

I have known an untrained woman possessed by an artist spirit, and rapidly produce a picture now hanging in my drawing-room which few living painters could have bettered.

I have read books which might have come from great thinkers and scholars, and which were actually written by unlettered men who acted as the medium of the unseen intelligence, so superior to his own. I have recognised the style of a dead writer which no parodist could have copied, and which was written in his own handwriting.

I have heard singing beyond earthly power, and whistling done with no pause for the intake of breath.

I have seen objects from a distance projected into a room with closed doors and windows.

If a man could see, hear, and feel all this, and yet remain unconvinced of unseen intelligent forces around him, he would have good cause to doubt his own sanity. Why should he heed the chatter of irresponsible journalists, or the head-shaking of inexperienced men of science, when he has himself had so many proofs? They are babies in this matter, and should be sitting at his feet.

It is not, however, a question to be argued in a detached and impersonal way, as if one were talking of the Baconian theory or the existence of Atlantis. It is intimate, personal, and vital to the last degree.

A closed mind means an earthbound soul, and that in turn means future darkness and misery. If you know what is coming, you can avoid it. If you do not, you run grave risk. Some Jeremiah or Savonarola is needed who will shriek this into the ears of the world. A new conception of sin is needed. The mere carnal frailties of humanity, the weaknesses of the body, are not to be lightly condoned, but are not the serious part of the human reckoning. It is the fixed condition of mind, narrowness, bigotry, materialism — in a word, the sins not of the body, but of the spirit, which are the real permanent things, and condemn the individual to the lower spheres until he has learnt his lesson.

We know this from our rescue circles when these poor souls come back to bewail their errors and to learn those truths which they might have learnt here, had their minds not been closed by apathy or prejudice.

The radical mistake which science has made in investigating the subject is that it has never troubled to grasp the fact that it is not the medium who is producing the phenomena. It has always treated him as if he were a conjurer, and said, “Do this or do that,” failing to understand that little or nothing comes *from* him, but all or nearly all comes *through* him. I say “nearly “all, for I believe that some simple phenomena, such as the rap, can within limits be produced by the medium’s own will.

It is this false view of science which has prevented sceptics from realising that a gentle and receptive state of mind on the part of sitters and an easy natural atmosphere for the medium are absolutely essential in order to produce harmony with the outside forces.

If in the greatest of all séances, that of the upper room on the day of Pentecost, an aggressive sceptic had insisted upon test conditions of his own foolish devising, where would the rushing wind and the tongues of fire have been? “All with one accord,” says the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, and that is the essential condition. I have sat with saintly people, and I too have felt the rushing wind, seen the flickering tongues and heard the great voice, but how could such results come where harmony did not reign?

That is the radical mistake which science has made. Men know well that even in her own coarse, material work the presence of a scrap of metal may upset the whole balance of a great magnetic installation, and yet they will not take the word of those who are in a position to speak from experience that a psychic condition may upset a psychic experiment.

But indeed when we speak of science in this connection it is a confusion of thought. The fact that a man is a great zoologist like Lankester, or a great physicist like Tyndall or Faraday, does not give his opinion any weight in a subject which is outside his own specialty. There is many an unknown Smith and Jones whose twenty years of practical work have put him in a far stronger position than that of these intolerant scientists; while as to the real Spiritualist leaders, men of many experiences and much reading and thought, it is they who are the real scientific experts who are in a position to teach the world. One does not lose one’s judgment when one becomes a Spiritualist. One is as much a researcher as ever, but one understands better what it is that one is studying and how to study it.

This controversy with bumptious and ignorant people is a mere passing thing which matters nothing. The real controversy, which does matter very much, is with the Continental school who study ectoplasm and other semi-material manifestations, but who have not got the length of seeing independent spirit behind them. Richet, Schrenck-Notzing and other great investigators are still in this midway position, and Flammarion is little more advanced. Richet goes the length of admitting that he has assured himself by personal observation of the materialised form that it can walk and talk and leave moulds of its hands. So far he has gone. And yet even now he clings to the idea that these phenomena may be the externalisation of some latent powers of the human body and mind.

Such an explanation seems to me to be the desperate defence of the last trench by one of those old-time materialists, who say with Brewster: “Spirit is the last thing which we will concede,” adding as their reason “it upsets the work of fifty years.” It is hard when a man has taught all his life that the brain governs spirit to have to learn after all that it may be spirit which acts independently of the human brain. But it is their super-materialism which is the real difficulty with which we now have to contend.

And what is the end of it all?

I have no idea. How could those who first noted the electric twitching of muscles foresee the Atlantic cable or the arc lamp? Our information is that some great shock is coming shortly to the human race which will finally break down its apathy, and which will be accompanied by such psychic signs that the survivors will be unable any longer to deny the truths which we preach.

The real meaning of our movement will then be seen, for it will become apparent that we have accustomed the public mind to such ideas, and provided a body of definite teaching, both scientific and religious, to which they can turn for guidance.

As to the prophecy of disaster, I admit that we have to be on our guard. Even the Christ circle was woefully deceived, and declared confidently that the world would not survive their own generation. Various creeds, too, have made vain predictions of the end of the world.

I am keenly aware of all this, and also of the difficulty in reckoning time when seen from the other side. But, making every allowance for this, the information upon the point has been so detailed, and has reached me from so many entirely independent sources, that I have been forced to take it seriously, and to think that some great watershed of human experience may be passed within a few years — the greatest, we are told, that our long-suffering race has yet encountered.

People who have not gone into the subject may well ask, “But what do you get out of it? How are you the better? “We can only answer that all life has changed to us since this definite knowledge has come. No longer are we shut in by death. We are out of the valley and up on the ridge, with vast clear vistas before us.

Why should we fear a death which we know for certain is the doorway to unutterable happiness?

Why should we fear our dear ones’ death if we can be so near to them afterwards?

Am I not far nearer to my son than if he were alive and serving in that Army Medical Service which would have taken him to the ends of the earth? There is never a month, often never a week, that I do not commune with him. Is it not evident that such facts as these change the whole aspect of life, and turn the grey mist of dissolution into a rosy dawn?

You may say that we have already all these assurances in the Christian revelation. It is true, and that is why we are not anti-Christian so long as Christianity is the teaching of humble Christ and not of his arrogant representatives.

Every form of Christianity is represented in our ranks, often by clergymen of the various denominations. But there is nothing precise in the definitions of the other world as given in the holy writings. The information we have depicts a heaven of congenial work and of congenial play, with every mental and physical activity of life carried on to a higher plane — a heaven of art, of science, of intellect, of organization, of combat with evil, of home circles, of flowers, of wide travel, of sports, of the mating of souls, of complete harmony. This is what our “dead “friends describe.

On the other hand, we hear from them, and sometimes directly, of the hells, which are temporary spheres of purification. We hear of the mists, the darkness, the aimless wanderings, the mental confusion, the remorse.

"Our condition is horrible," wrote one of them to me recently at a séance. These things are real and vivid and provable to us. That is why we are an enormous force for the resuscitation of true religion, and why the clergy take a heavy responsibility when they oppose us.

The final result upon scientific thought is unthinkable, save that the sources of all force would be traced rather to spiritual than to material causes.

In religion one can perhaps see a little more clearly. Theology and dogma would disappear.

People would realise that such questions as the number of persons in God, or the process of Christ's birth, have no bearing at all upon the development of man's spirit, which is the sole object of life.

All religions would be equal, for all alike produce gentle, unselfish souls who are God's elect. Christian, Jew, Buddhist, and Mohammedan would shed their distinctive doctrines, follow their own high teachers on a common path of morality, and forget all that antagonism which has made religion a curse rather than a blessing to the world.

We shall be in close touch with other-world forces, and knowledge will supersede that faith which has in the past planted a dozen different signposts to point in as many different directions.

Such will be the future, so far as I can dimly see it, and all this will spring from the seed which now we tend and water amid the cold blasts of a hostile world.

Do not let it be thought that I claim any special leadership in this movement. I do what I can, but many others have done what they could — many humble workers who have endured loss and insult, but who will come to be recognised as the modern Apostles. For my part, I can only claim that I have been an instrument so fashioned that I have had some particular advantages in getting this teaching across to the people.

That is the work which will occupy, either by voice or pen, the remainder of my life. What immediate shape it will take I cannot say. Human plans are vain things, and it is better for the tool to lie passive until the great hand moves it once more.

THE END

All Saints Church, Minstead — Conan Doyle’s final resting place

The grave of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle